

# Setting Assessment Objectives

## Why clear objectives are essential

Clear objectives are the foundation for effective and meaningful assessment exercise, by having clear objectives, the following benefits are achieved:

### 1. Clarity and focus

They help define the purpose and scope of the assessment effort, ensuring that data collection efforts are targeted and relevant. Clear objectives enable the team to collect only the necessary information, avoiding the collection of irrelevant or redundant data.

### 2. Ensuring Consensus

The objective ensures that all stakeholders involved in the assessment are on the same page, with a shared understanding of the purpose and desired outcomes. This alignment facilitates effective data collection, analysis, and interpretation, leading to more informed decision-making and targeted humanitarian interventions.

### 3. Guiding methodology

They shape the development of an [analytical framework](#), [data analysis plan](#), and [methodology](#), including the scope, methods to be used, geographical and population coverage, and sampling approach. By aligning the methodology with the objectives, the team can ensure that the collected data will directly contribute to addressing the objectives and answering key research questions.

### 4. Efficient resource allocation

They optimize resource allocation by focusing data collection efforts on relevant areas and topics. By identifying the specific information needed, resources such as time, staff, and funds can be allocated more efficiently, and unnecessary data collection is avoided.

### 5. Better use of data

The purpose of any data collection exercise is in its use. Well-defined objectives maximize the usefulness of collected data. By aligning data collection with the objectives, the collected information becomes more actionable and valuable for decision-making processes. Clear objectives enable stakeholders to utilize the data effectively, leading to informed decision-making and evidence-based interventions.



## Questions for setting clear objectives

When developing clear objectives, start with the problem and identify a problem statement before proceeding to formulating objectives. It is important to work step-by-step through the following questions, using the previous answers to address the next question.

1. What **problem(s)** are you facing?
2. **How will information help** you address that problem?
3. What **type of information** will help you address that problem?
4. What is the **purpose** of the assessment or monitoring exercise? Specifically:
  - a. What would you like to **achieve**?
  - b. **How** will the information be **used**?
  - c. **Who** will we use the information?
  - d. **How will our approach change** with this information?
5. Therefore, **what is the question**?
6. Do you currently **have the right data** to answer your question?
7. What **information gaps** exist to make informed programmatic or other decisions?
8. What will you **measure**?
9. Who are the **population of interest**?
10. What **types of programmes, delivery options, and targeting and/or prioritization** is the country team considering?
11. Are there any **ethical considerations**?

### Bring key stakeholders together for a shared vision



#### Tip

Answering the above questions **together with relevant stakeholders**, such as the multi-functional team, partners, and displaced and stateless persons **ensures a common understanding of the purpose and use** of an assessment and monitoring exercise.

## Writing great objectives

The following example highlights ways to improve assessment objectives for clarity and specificity:

### **Poor objective: To understand refugee vulnerability**

*This objective lacks specificity and fails to specify what the refugees are vulnerable to. It doesn't provide a clear focus or purpose for the assessment, making it challenging to determine the desired results or actions based on the assessment findings.*

### **Better objective: To understand refugees' vulnerability to meet basic needs**

*This objective improves upon the previous one by adding specificity and clarifying that the vulnerability relates to meeting basic needs. However, it still lacks a clear connection to actionable outcomes or the purpose of the assessment. It focuses on understanding vulnerability but does not explain how this understanding will be used or what it aims to achieve.*

### **Great objective: To enable the profiling of characteristics related to refugees' vulnerability to meet their basic needs to inform the development of eligibility criteria.**

*This objective addresses the shortcomings of the previous ones by incorporating a clear purpose and actionable outcome. It highlights the need to profile specific characteristics related to refugee vulnerability, specifying that it relates to meeting basic needs. By doing so, it establishes a direct link between the assessment findings and the practical application of those findings in designing targeted and effective assistance programs for refugees.*

By using this best objective, the assessment informs a comprehensive understanding of the specific vulnerabilities refugees face in meeting their basic needs. The development of the analytical framework and corresponding analysis plan, including indicators and questions, will be easier, as the purpose of each indicator can be checked against this objective.

Having clarity on objectives makes subsequent steps of the assessment process significantly easier, such as **developing the analytical framework**, **selecting indicators and questions**, and determining the **methodology**. Once they are defined, the objectives should serve as a reference tool for each corresponding step in the assessment process, from developing the methodology to the analysis and reporting.

## Bringing stakeholders together in the development of objectives

It is important to set objectives as a multifunctional team that includes senior management, programme, protection, sectoral and thematic experts, and information management colleagues, to ensure that the objectives are corresponding to information needs and will feed decision making. This collaborative approach promotes a shared understanding and ownership of the assessment objectives.

Furthermore, it is beneficial to engage partners in this process. By involving external organizations and collaborating with them, we can avoid duplication of efforts and leverage their capacities and expertise. Whenever possible, joint objective-setting with partners is encouraged to foster coordination, enhance efficiency, and maximize the resources available for the assessment.

## Combining multiple objectives

Assessment exercises often have the potential to address multiple objectives concurrently, which can enhance an understanding of a situation and reduce the need for multiple data collection exercises. One example is combining understanding basic needs and vulnerabilities with results monitoring. It is important to ask key questions when considering the feasibility of combining these objectives within a single exercise, such as:

- 1. Population Coverage and Sampling:** Do the objectives require the same population coverage and sampling approach? Assess whether the assessment exercise can effectively capture data from the population of interest and if the sampling approach aligns with each objective.
- 2. Methodological Alignment:** Are the methods to be utilized in the assessment exercise compatible with the multiple objectives? Evaluate whether the chosen methods, such as household surveys, key informant interviews, or focus groups, can address the specific requirements of each objective, and provide representative data for both assisted and non-assisted populations if needed.

For additional information please see the [Combining assessment and monitoring exercises: Key considerations](#).

## A SMART Framework for Objectives

The SMART framework provides a useful structure for developing clear objectives. Ensure that objectives are:

- **Specific:** Clearly define the intended outcome of the data collection exercise. Identify the precise information needed to address the research questions and support decision-making.

- **Measurable:** Establish indicators and criteria to assess progress and success. Determine the metrics that will be used to evaluate whether the objectives have been achieved.
- **Achievable:** Set realistic objectives considering the available resources, time, and capacity. Objectives should be within reach and feasible to accomplish.
- **Relevant:** Align objectives with the needs of stakeholders and the intended use of the data. Ensure that the objectives are directly relevant to the challenges or issues being addressed.
- **Time-bound:** Define a timeframe for achieving the objectives. Establish deadlines or milestones to monitor progress and ensure timely completion of the exercise.

## Example objectives

The following examples are from assessment exercises carried out by UNHCR with partners.

Context	Example objectives
<p>UNHCR-WFP Joint Assessment Mission (JAM) Mozambique</p>	<p>The <b>overall objective</b> of the JAM is to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Collect up-to-date information on</b> the refugee food security, nutrition and livelihoods situation and related indicators,</li> <li>• also considering a <b>comparison with the host communities</b></li> <li>• <b>Provide strategic directions</b> for both agencies' programming.</li> <li>• The findings of the JAM will highlight the refugees' capacities to meet their basic needs, their livelihoods and self-reliance opportunities and challenges as well as any related protection concerns faced in the settlement.</li> <li>• This will support the country team <b>to evaluate if the current assistance meets the contextual needs and respond to unaddressed needs.</b></li> <li>• To realize this, the JAM findings will feed into the development of a <b>Joint Plan of Action (JPA)</b> by UNHCR and WFP to ensure that effective programming is developed based on the recommendations and key findings.</li> </ul>
<p>Vulnerability Assessment of Syrian Refugees (VASyR) in Lebanon</p>	<p>The <b>key objectives</b> of the VASyR are:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. To provide a <b>multisectoral overview/update of the vulnerability situation</b> of Syrian refugees in Lebanon through an annual household survey. This assessment offers an understanding of the economic situation, food security, coping strategies, shelter living conditions, access to services, the situation of women and children, and more. The information <b>feeds into the situational analysis</b> of the LCRP and informs the planning processes of local government agencies, donor countries,</li> </ol>

	<p>and NGOs.</p> <p>2. To enhance targeting for the provision of assistance. The VASyR is <b>used to build or revise targeting models</b>, like the targeting formula to predict socio-economic vulnerability, which in turn are used for targeting for cash and food assistance. The results of the VASyR also inform other targeting approaches, for instance on protection risks or shelter vulnerability, and identify the most vulnerable areas.</p> <p>3. To contribute to the LCRP Monitoring and Evaluation (M&amp;E) framework. The VASyR results are <b>used to measure whether sector objectives (outcomes) have been achieved</b>. The VASyR is also used in the formulas to calculate LCRP impact indicators (e.g. protection risks).</p> <p>4. Provide an <b>overview of the additional needs</b> of Syrian refugees impacted by the ongoing crisis. VASyR 2021 aims to provide insights on how Syrian refugees have been impacted by the overlapping crises affecting Lebanon.</p>
<p>UNHCR-WFP Joint PDM and Needs Assessment in Rwanda</p>	<p>The main objective of the joint PDM is to collect primary data to <b>meet the corporate monitoring requirements</b> while providing an <b>update on vulnerability and humanitarian needs</b> among refugees living in the six camps. Specifically, the joint assessment aimed to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Ensure corporate continuity in <b>monitoring food security outcomes and basic needs</b>, the <b>impacts of COVID-19, income and livelihoods</b>;</li> <li>• Inform <b>programmatic decisions</b> and the <b>development of a joint targeting approach</b> for WFP and UNHCR.</li> </ul> <p>The JPDM covers multidimensional vulnerabilities and needs including a wide array of thematic areas such as food security, coping strategies, household expenditure, protection, livelihoods, asset ownership, water, sanitation and hygiene and demographics among others.</p>