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# The Nexus Environment Assessment Tool (NEAT+)

## Frequently Asked Questions

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### 1 The importance of environmental protection in displacement settings

Good environmental management, the preservation of natural resources and preventing environmental degradation are integral aspects to ensure the safety, wellbeing and acceptance of forcibly displaced persons.

The sustainable and shared use of scarce natural resources such as wood or water can foster the relationship and co-existence with host communities. Preventing deforestation and protecting soil coverage can minimize the formation of gullies and ravines and reduces the risk for landslides and other disasters posing a danger to communities and livelihood sources. Sustainable management and protection of soils, water sources and vegetation can significantly improve livelihood opportunities and self-reliance. An intact and sustainably managed vegetation can also provide animal feed, building materials and energy to communities. It can also help to prevent the need of households, especially women and children, to walk longer distances away from the safety of their settlements putting them at risk for gender-based violence.

## 2 What is an environmental assessment?

Identifying risks for environmental degradation and outlining and prioritizing required mitigation responses might only be expedient and effective after a thorough and holistic situational analysis. Environmental screenings and assessments can provide a systematic approach for such an analysis.

In an environmental screening or assessment, the risk of degradation and pollution of the environment is systematically and comprehensively identified, evaluated, and ranked according to its severity. Based on this analysis, mitigation or elimination measures to tackle those threads are then formulated.

In humanitarian settings and displacement contexts, conducting voluntary environmental assessments is mainly limited to environmental screenings or rapid environmental assessments (REA). The differentiation to mandatory Environmental Impact Assessments (EIA) requested by authorities is described below (see chapter 4).

## 3 The Nexus Environment Assessment Tool (NEAT+)

### Tool description

The [Nexus Environment Assessment Tool \(NEAT+\)](#) is an interactive and user-friendly tool to conduct environmental screenings in humanitarian contexts. It was developed by both humanitarian and environmental actors. NEAT+ is available for free, can be used by non-experts, does not require in-depth environmental knowledge and applying it only takes a limited expenditure of time. [Guidance documents and video tutorials](#) are provided by the custodian of NEAT+, the UN Environment/OCHA Joint Unit (Joint Environment Unit, JEU).

Specific NEAT+ versions exist for both rural and urban contexts. NEAT+ is available as an online tool for urban context or in Excel and KoboToolbox versions for rural context. NEAT+ is ideally used prior to the implementation of a project. A periodic application is, however, also conceivable after an implementation, in order to check for potential environmental improvements. NEAT+ can be applied for various types of implementations, not just when opening a new settlement for forcibly displaced persons.

Launched in 2018, NEAT+ has continuously received revision and improvements, such as the transformation into an additional online web application. A roadmap has been agreed in September 2024 by various humanitarian actors – including NGOs, representatives of the Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement, UN agencies and donors – to further improve NEAT+ in 2025. This roadmap foresees to address content and IT-related improvements, to enhance the capacity building and sharing of information around the use of NEAT+, and to advocate for the NEAT+ usage in order to contribute to a greening of humanitarian assistance.

### Content of NEAT+

In NEAT+, a first sensitivity analysis provides a generic overview of site-specific environmental concerns. Additional modules on WASH, Shelter / NFI, Food Security and Livelihood can provide sector-specific guidance on mainstreaming environmental impacts into the proposed response interventions. Depending on donor requirements, NEAT+ might also be used to generate content for project proposals, and to meet donors' environmental requirements, such as [DG ECHO's minimum environmental requirements and recommendations](#).

## Expertise required

The advantages of NEAT+ is that everybody can use it, without the need for expert knowledge, that assessments can be completed swiftly, and that it is available for free both as online and offline version. An application by non-experts is facilitated as questionnaire answers are pre-defined, and users can simply pick the most suitable one. The rating of priorities and severity happens automatically in the background of the tool. NEAT+ questionnaires come with guidance and explanations for each question, which empowers non-expert users to identify and select adequate answers.

Naturally, this simplification also comes with limitations. Due to the predefinition of questions and answers, NEAT+ might not be able to fully capture the particularities of an analysed context. Proposed actions may seem generic and may not consider available detailed and context-adapted information. Compared to NEAT+, an assessment by an expert would provide context-adapted and tailor-made inputs and the chances of thematic blind spots are likely smaller.

Nevertheless, especially for non-expert staff, NEAT+ can give a good and fast overview on potential environmental concerns. There is an increasing trend in the humanitarian sector that the use of NEAT+ is endorsed and specifically requested whenever appropriate.

## 4 Differentiation: NEAT+ versus environmental impact assessments

Rapid environmental assessments or environmental screenings such as NEAT+ are often confused with EIAs. An EIA is commonly part of a national regulatory framework and entails a standardized process for the detailed analysis of environmental impacts of a planned implementation. EIAs are part of the planning and approval process of a project. Depending on size, location, and type of a project, the conduct of an EIA is compulsory according to national legislation. The review and approval of the EIA is commonly conducted by the national environmental agency, including the examination of defined mitigation, elimination, monitoring or compensation measures based on the EIA results.

In humanitarian settings, governments often do not enforce the conduct of an EIA due to the urgent and life-saving nature of humanitarian aid. Despite the fact that type and magnitude of humanitarian interventions would meet the criteria defining the need to conduct an EIA. If an EIA is enforced, conducting it requires particular and country-specific expertise related to national environmental legislation, and this capacity is likely not available within humanitarian actors. Furthermore, depending on local legislation, the conduct of an EIA might be limited to accredited or certified individuals or companies.

In comparison to the compulsory nature of EIA, applying NEAT+ is a voluntary measure and not linked to legislative obligations.

## 5 Frequently asked questions (FAQ) for NEAT+

### a) What is NEAT+?

NEAT+ is a site-specific, rapid, and effective project-level environmental assessment tool developed specifically for humanitarian contexts. It is an open-source, free-of-charge tool that systematically combines environmental data with site-specific and activity-based questions and helps humanitarian actors automatically identify and analyse risks for environmental



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pollution and degradation. This allows the users and organizations to understand environmental sensitivities, mitigate risks, and find opportunities to collaborate on greening humanitarian response interventions.

#### **b) I am not an Environmental Expert – can I use NEAT+?**

Anybody can use NEAT+. There is no need for preliminary expertise in the field of environment. NEAT+ is a simple and user-friendly tool. Relevant guidance material is provided within the tool, and additional manuals and videos are available on the [NEAT+ webpage](#).

However, NEAT+ users are ideally still trained on the tool, in order to make full usage of all its applications.

#### **c) Does the use of NEAT+ require teamwork?**

NEAT+ can be used and completed by a single person. However, especially for a non-expert usage, it can also be expedient to gather a small number of colleagues – ideally with different backgrounds and expertise – and that NEAT+ assessments are conducted jointly. In addition, affected communities and relevant authorities should be consulted for their opinion and perspective. Selected inputs and obtained results can then be discussed amongst the small team and/or together with affected communities and relevant authorities and verified during field visits if situations allow it.

Engaging with displacement affected communities for NEAT+ assessment is of paramount importance. Such engagement can take different forms from consulting on communities 'perception of climate change and environmental degradation impacts on their lives and livelihoods', which may reveal shifts in priorities and dynamics over time, to a comprehensive collaborative participation from the design of additional screening questions to the validation and prioritization of NEAT+ results

Natural resources management, environmental protection and climate change will systematically offer opportunities for discussions and engagement on humanitarian project design.

#### **d) Why should I use NEAT+?**

NEAT+ can help to identify risks for environmental degradation and pollution in humanitarian settings. These risks can negatively affect the safety and well-being of affected communities and forcibly displaced.

When applying NEAT+, its systematic methodologies ensure that risks are not missed, and that they are appropriately prioritized.

NEAT+ provides insights on how to mitigate the identified risks, which can shape the planning and implementation of interventions.

NEAT+ results can also contribute to broader contextual and situational assessments and be used as an advocacy tool for the mobilization of funds.

#### **e) What kind of data do I need to use NEAT+?**

The usage of NEAT+ does not require detailed or comprehensive data sets. Maps and available environmental and project-related data are helpful, however.

In general, a good understanding of the context, the location and the foreseen intervention is sufficient. NEAT+ guides the user through the questionnaires and provides information and clarifications in order to support the selection of suitable answers.

**f) Is NEAT+ mainly intended to be used in longer-term recovery interventions?**

NEAT+ can be used at any point in time, from the onset of emergencies to protracted contexts.

Preferably, NEAT+ is used at the earliest stage of the project cycle, which allows room to address potential negative environmental impacts or environmental opportunities. However, it can also contribute to defining longer-term development projects.

Depending on the phase, the focus of applying NEAT+ may change. In emergencies, NEAT+ might be used after the implementation of life-saving measures to assess the suitability of potential sites for new settlements. In protracted contexts, NEAT+ can help to identify environmental degradation and pollution, which have been neglected during earlier phases. During ongoing interventions, NEAT+ can also highlight how to improve environmental sustainability of current programs.

**g) Can NEAT+ be used in rural contexts only?**

No, specific NEAT+ versions exist for both rural and urban contexts. Depending on the location of the humanitarian response project either version can be used.

In the upcoming revision of NEAT+, the rural and urban version of NEAT+ will be merged, and context-specific questions will be generated based on the inputs of the user.

**h) Is NEAT+ only suitable for context of sub-Saharan Africa?**

No, the particularities of locations (climate, vegetation, type of settlements, level of infrastructure and services etc.) can be adjusted in NEAT+.

NEAT+ can be both applied in low- and middle-income countries as well as in high-income countries. For high-income countries, national and country-specific screening tools and procedures may exist, and NEAT+ might be less appropriate due to its global focus.

**i) Can I use NEAT+ only via KoboToolbox?**

No, NEAT+ can be either used via (1) KoboToolbox, (2) a downloadable Excel file or (3) an online application. For camp settings, the use of the Excel file is recommended.

The use of the KoboToolbox is not a necessity, as NEAT+ does not need to be filled out in the field. Questions and topics can be consulted prior to field trips, and collected information during field trips can be inserted into NEAT+ once personnel is back in the office. If need be, print outs of the NEAT+ questions can be taken to the field, or the offline NEAT+ Excel file can be used.

The use of the KoboToolbox is also not necessary as usually one person (or one team together) fills out the NEAT+ questionnaires. There is no need for large surveys with various enumerators.

**j) What if the KoboToolbox does not work on my mobile phone?**

See question above: NEAT+ does not necessarily need to be used with the KoboToolbox.

For camp settings, it is even recommended to use the NEAT+ Excel file. The specificities of urban contexts can be covered in the online NEAT+ application.

### **k) How long does it take to use NEAT+?**

Using NEAT+ is quite fast. Filling in the questionnaires and going through the results and recommendations can take half a day: the sensitivity module will normally take 50 minutes; sectoral modules depending on the project intervention can take from 20 minutes to 2 hours. However, potential community engagement as well as prioritization and contextualization of results may extend the time required. We usually advise to consider a minimum of 5 days and a maximum of 2 weeks for conducting and finalizing a NEAT+ assessment.

If you are first time user, it might take a little more time to use NEAT+ but once you are familiar with the tool, it will be quicker. If field personnel is well informed about the context and the field reality, there is no need for preliminary information collection prior to the tool usage.

Keep in mind that you will need some time to review the results generated by the tool as well, and that NEAT+ assessment is only a first step in ensuring the greening of humanitarian responses.

### **l) I am a WASH, Shelter, Food Security or Livelihood officer – why should I use NEAT+?**

Apart from a generic first module, which provides a sensitivity analysis, there are additional and more detailed NEAT+ modules specifically designed for WASH, Shelter and Food Security.

The use of the different NEAT+ modules can be complementary to more sector-specific tools linked to environment, climate and disaster, such as the [UNHCR Shelter Sustainability Assessment Tool](#) or the [UNHCR Greenhouse Gas Emission Calculator](#).

If you are involved in WASH, Shelter, Food Security or Livelihood, you can use NEAT+ to assess environmental impacts of your project intervention, make risk-informed decisions related to project site, design, and materials etc. and timely address any environmental risk associated with your project intervention.

The WASH module covers the following aspects/interventions:

- water supply, including collection, extraction, distribution, network operation and maintenance and trucking;
- sanitation, including latrines, showers and drainage network;
- solid waste management;
- infrastructure construction;
- hygiene promotion.

The Shelter module covers:

- shelter siting, design, materials and construction;
- roads and access;
- the provision of household items;
- energy.



The Food Security module covers the following:

- direct food assistance;
- livelihood;
- agriculture;
- irrigation and water management.

**m) Some donors require environmental screenings when submitting a proposal. Is NEAT+ accepted by all donors?**

The usage of NEAT+ is endorsed by a wide range of donors, such as [ECHO \(European Civil Protection and Humanitarian Aid Operations\)](#), which have helped to fund the development of NEAT+. To inquire the acceptance of NEAT+ by a particular donor, it is best to directly raise this subject to them.

**n) How can I get support or attend trainings on NEAT+?**

Guidance and tutorials are available online, such as on the webpage of [NEAT+](#) or of the [Réseau Environnement Humanitaire](#) (in French and English).

NRC has developed a list of NEAT+ trainers available for collaboration with interested partners, as below:

- **What's included:** 46 trainers in 16 countries are available to deliver NEAT+ training face-to-face or online (travel and accommodation and any other training costs not included)
- **Languages available:** English, French, Arabic, Spanish, German, Pashto, Dari, Urdu, Nepali
- **Audience:** humanitarian professionals
- **Geography:** global (see list of trainers for details)
- For details of the trainers, please contact NRC [Julie.gassien@nrc.no](mailto:Julie.gassien@nrc.no). Please also advise NRC when the service has been used.

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