



CHAPTER 5

COVERAGE AND INCLUSION

DEFINITION

Who does humanitarian action reach and how does this relate to humanitarian need, including protection?

Coverage means exploring which members and groups within the affected population have been reached through humanitarian action, and how this relates to humanitarian need, including protection, in terms of focusing on those most affected by crisis. Inclusion means humanitarian action without discrimination (e.g. on the basis of nationality, race or ethnicity, gender, religious belief, class, disability, sexual identity and orientation), while also addressing the specific and diverse needs of different groups/individuals.¹⁹

KEY MESSAGES

- Evaluate breadth of coverage by identifying which groups and individuals have and have not been reached through humanitarian action, and why. Evaluate if and how access has been negotiated, and whether the scale of humanitarian action is proportionate to need.
- Evaluating depth of coverage – or inclusion – means assessing if humanitarian action has reached people affected by crisis without discrimination, if barriers faced by marginalised groups have been removed and if their specific needs have been met.
- Coverage and inclusion is a key criterion for evaluating if humanitarian action is needs-based and therefore impartial.

¹⁹ This simplifies ALNAP's 2006 definition, clearly specifying protection as well as other humanitarian needs. Inclusion is added and we elaborate on what this means.

EXPLANATION OF DEFINITION, AND HOW TO USE THIS CRITERION

EXPLANATION OF THE DEFINITION

Evaluate coverage by determining who has and has not been supported by humanitarian action, and why. On what basis were decisions made? And how does this relate to humanitarian need, taking into account protection as well as other needs such as shelter, food, water and health services? This is sometimes referred to as proportionality – is the scale of humanitarian action or assistance proportionate to need? This evaluates breadth of coverage.

Coverage can be assessed at different levels:

- a. At *global and regional levels*, have international resources for humanitarian assistance been allocated according to need and proportionate to the scale of humanitarian crises across countries/regions? This may be an important question in evaluations commissioned by donor organisations, and in regional or multi-country evaluations. The availability and allocation of funding is likely to be a key determinant of coverage.
- b. At *national level*, have both international and national resources been allocated based on needs within a country, and at an appropriate scale? This may be an important question when evaluating a humanitarian actor working nationwide.
- c. At *local level*, who has and has not been supported by humanitarian action, and how does this relate to need? This may be an important evaluation question for all humanitarian actors, including those working only with certain communities or in particular parts of a country, such as local civil society actors do.

Inclusion considers whether marginalised and vulnerable groups have been reached. Were efforts made to identify and remove barriers to humanitarian assistance faced by such groups (Barbelet and Wake, 2020)? Were certain groups overlooked (e.g. older people or those living in remote locations) and/or discriminated against (e.g. women; particular ethnic groups; those of a certain sexual orientation, religious belief or class; or those living with disability)? This evaluates depth of coverage.

Early in the evaluation process, identify key factors that drive discrimination and inequality within the population affected by crisis and the context. This shows which marginalised groups to focus on when evaluating inclusion and exclusion, and it avoids a more mechanistic and often superficial approach whereby evaluators aim to cover every potential marginalised group.

Pay attention to how factors of marginalisation intersect to create inequality and discrimination. This intersectional lens helps you avoid seeing marginalised groups in

discrete silos.²⁰ Be alert to how drivers of marginalisation intersect with the dynamics of the crisis. For example, displaced men of a certain age from ethnic groups associated with one party to a conflict may be automatically denied refuge in IDP camps by the authorities associated with another party to the conflict.

Also evaluate if humanitarian action has been adapted to the diverse and specific needs of different groups and individuals. This might require tailored programmes or activities, for example for people living with disability. And it means evaluating whether all groups and individuals, including those most marginalised, have been able to influence the design and direction of the humanitarian response. Engage with power dynamics and underlying barriers to inclusion for the most marginalised to evaluate if access to assistance and protection has been equitable (Lough et al, 2022). For example, has humanitarian action been informed by an understanding of underlying inequality, such as gender inequality? To what extent has humanitarian action addressed the outcomes or underlying causes of inequality, especially in protracted crises (Pinnington, 2023)?

WHEN TO SELECT COVERAGE AND INCLUSION

This criterion is important for many (most) evaluations of humanitarian action because it explores the extent to which action has been needs-based and implemented on an adequate scale. Paying attention to the needs of different groups, ask who has been prioritised and why, and who has been excluded and why. This criterion is particularly important when resources for humanitarian action are constrained. It is an opportunity to investigate how severity of needs has been understood, to guide targeting according to the most urgent cases of distress.

It may be useful, too, to evaluate organisational duty of care to staff. Explore not only if duty of care has been addressed adequately, but also what this means for coverage in practice. Has a trade-off been made between managing staff security and reaching populations affected by crisis in highly insecure areas? How was that trade-off managed and were creative solutions found?

HOW COVERAGE AND INCLUSION RELATES TO OTHER CRITERIA

Coverage and inclusion relates closely to effectiveness in understanding outcomes and achievements across different groups with diverse needs. Although sometimes absorbed under the effectiveness criterion, separating out coverage and inclusion encourages greater attention to decision-making on programme design and targeting, and the extent to which marginalised groups have been included or overlooked. This criterion also relates to relevance, informing how evaluation methods and data analysis should be disaggregated by groups that have been affected in different ways by the humanitarian crisis.

²⁰ See UN Women (2022) on how to put this concept into practice.

SHIFTING THE LENS: POWER AND POSITIONALITY

Consider how power dynamics, identities and histories influence who is reached by humanitarian action, who is excluded, and why. In areas affected by conflict, examine if assistance has primarily flowed through government or majority-group networks, leaving ethnic or religious minorities underserved due to historical marginalisation. These dynamics can affect whose exclusion is rendered invisible.

Biases and assumptions can also shape the way coverage and inclusion is evaluated. For instance, if you rely solely on official lists of recipients of humanitarian support, your evaluation may miss entire populations who are undocumented or unable to access formal registration systems.

METHODOLOGICAL IMPLICATIONS

Key consideration A

Evaluating geographic coverage between countries affected by crisis (to analyse if the scale of humanitarian action was proportionate to need in each case) requires understanding political and geostrategic interests that may influence resource allocation.

Methodological implications for commissioners

Find ways to encourage demand for such evaluation, as this can be sensitive territory.
Ensure the evaluation team has the appropriate skills in political economy analysis, plus diplomatic communication skills.

Methodological implications for evaluators

Ensure analysis is evidence-based, as far as possible, paying attention to comparative levels of humanitarian assistance in relation to need.
Review how humanitarian needs assessments and response plans were conducted, evaluating if they were truly needs-based, or if there was appropriation or adjustment to meet political needs and interests.

Key consideration B

It is important to evaluate key aspects of decision-making early in the response, to understand if humanitarian action was designed to be needs-oriented and inclusive from the outset, recognising systemic barriers to inclusion for certain groups.

Methodological implications for commissioners

Specify in the terms of reference (TOR) which policies and/or frameworks the organisation follows on needs-based humanitarian action and inclusion; use these as reference points for the evaluation.

Methodological implications for evaluators

Pay attention to the quality of needs assessments, whether marginalised groups were adequately identified, and the extent to which needs assessments informed the design of humanitarian action.

Evaluate targeting approaches, especially where resources are limited in relation to overall need.

Key consideration C

Evaluating inclusion means addressing inclusion bias (supporting those who don't need it) and exclusion bias (excluding those in need) in access to humanitarian services and overall participation in the response.

Methodological implications for commissioners

Ensure the evaluation team has the skills and knowledge to understand the root causes of marginalisation and underlying power dynamics, and that they can apply an intersectional lens.

Ensure the evaluation team reviews how humanitarian needs have been assessed, and whether geographical areas and particular groups have been excluded, and why.

Methodological implications for evaluators

Consider the barriers different groups face when trying to access humanitarian action, drawing on the knowledge and expertise of non-humanitarians who understand power dynamics and patterns of social exclusion and discrimination.

Evaluate if humanitarian action addresses outcomes of marginalisation and inequality and/or engages with underlying causes. To what extent has exclusion been tracked during the response and acted upon?

Key consideration D

Humanitarian space and operational access (including how access has been negotiated) affect coverage, especially geographical coverage in conflict-related emergencies.

Methodological implications for commissioners

Consider how access and humanitarian space can be evaluated best given the sensitivity of these issues (e.g. part of an internal lesson-learning exercise versus an evaluation in the public domain).

Methodological implications for evaluators

Consider access, how it has been negotiated, and other factors affecting humanitarian space from the perspective of humanitarian actors on the ground and at a higher level, e.g. UN level.

EVALUATION EXAMPLE

Evaluation of the coverage and quality of UNICEF's humanitarian response in complex humanitarian emergencies

Background

This corporate evaluation assesses the coverage and quality of UNICEF's humanitarian response in complex emergencies, based on a sample of countries. It identifies internal and external enabling factors and challenges, including UNICEF fulfilling its child protection mandate and role. The evaluation captures good practice and innovation to improve humanitarian action.

How the evaluation addresses coverage and inclusion

The evaluation explores UNICEF's own programme approaches to gain principled access and improve coverage, its partnership strategies, and how it has influenced others, e.g. duty bearers. It explores access negotiations and humanitarian principles.

Inclusion is approached from the perspective of 'achieving coverage with equity'. The evaluation examines if and how data has been disaggregated, including and beyond age and sex, and the extent to which vulnerability analyses have been carried out. It also explores trade-offs between achieving coverage at scale and equity, and the contributory factors to this, usually funding. The evaluation notes that, almost by definition, it is most expensive to deliver humanitarian assistance to those furthest behind and hardest to reach.

- Due to sensitivities about access negotiations and to mitigate risk, published material is decontextualised and country case study reports remain internal.
- Because of the focus on data collection from vulnerable groups, data collection tools were reviewed and approved by an external board to ensure protocols were in place, e.g. safeguards to protect the rights of vulnerable subjects.
- As well as exploring how UNICEF understands exclusion factors, the evaluation explores whether this has been integrated into its humanitarian response, for example focusing on vulnerable groups. The evaluation highlights community feedback on this topic.
- The evaluation explores whether UNICEF's data collection, disaggregation and reporting have been adequate to track coverage over time.

Source: UNICEF (2019).

HUMANITARIAN PRINCIPLES AND COVERAGE AND INCLUSION

This criterion maps directly onto the humanitarian principle of impartiality. It is impossible to make an evaluative judgement about the impartiality of humanitarian action without looking at coverage and inclusion. This criterion also relates to the humanitarian principle of humanity – addressing suffering wherever it is found. This speaks to the scale of humanitarian action and whether it is proportionate to need.

Example evaluation question:

What approaches and partnership strategies has the organisation employed to gain principled access (i.e. access guided by humanitarian principles) to people affected by crisis in order to improve coverage and inclusion, and with what success?ⁱ

ⁱ This draws on an evaluation question from UNICEF (2019). 'Principled access' means access that has been negotiated by the respective humanitarian actor(s), guided by humanitarian principles.