

Severity Index User Guide

OCTOBER 2020

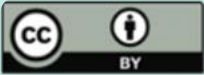
INFORM
SEVERITY

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INFORM is a collaboration of the Inter-Agency Standing Committee and the European Commission. This report is produced by the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs on behalf of all INFORM Partners. The Joint Research Centre of the European Commission is the scientific and technical lead of INFORM.

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For more information see <https://drmkc.jrc.ec.europa.eu/inform-index>



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INFORM Severity Index - at a glance

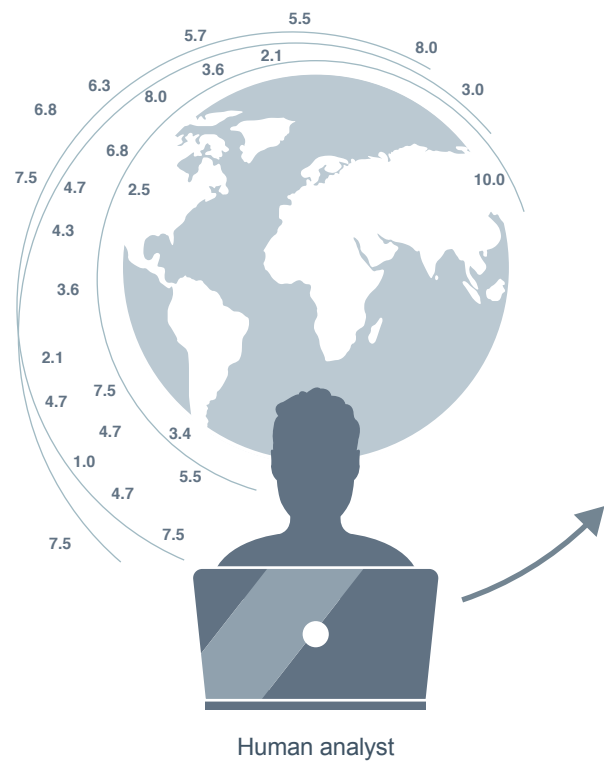
INFORM is a multi-stakeholder forum for developing shared, quantitative analysis relevant to humanitarian crises and disasters. The INFORM Severity Index provides decision-makers with a consistent and reliable summary of information about the severity of humanitarian crises globally.

OBJECTIVES AND PROCESS

The INFORM Severity Index summarises a wide range of already existing, quantitative information about crisis severity and presents it in a format that can be used more easily in decision-making.

It aggregates information from a range of credible, publicly available sources, such as UN agencies, governments and other multilateral organisations. Human analysts collect the data and enter it into the Index.

It is intended to lead to a shared and objective understanding of crisis severity that can support decisions on the allocation of resources and ensure all people affected by crises receive appropriate assistance.



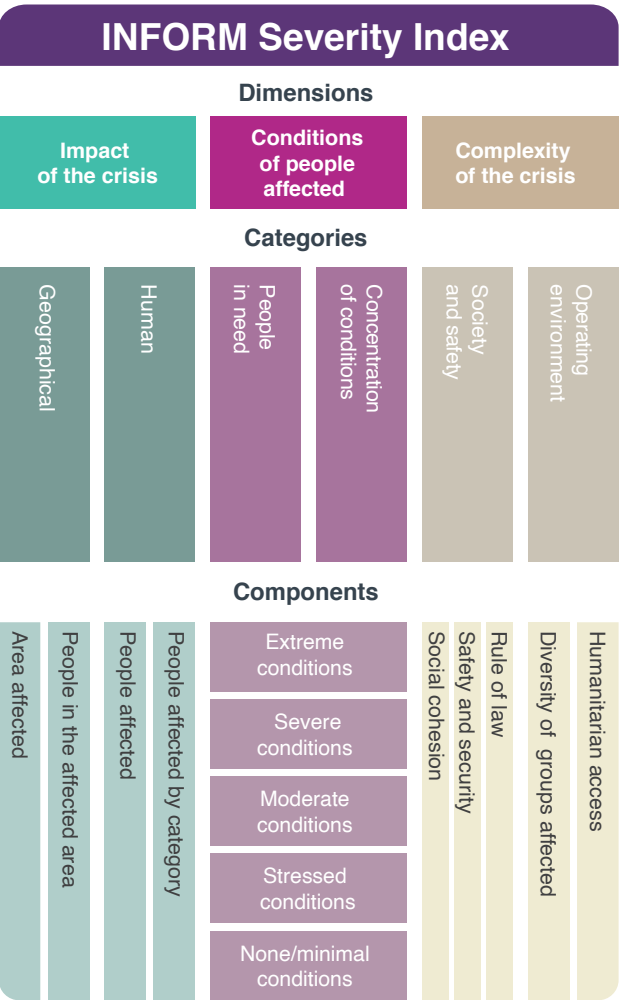
ANALYTICAL FRAMEWORK AND METHODOLOGY

The INFORM Severity Index is a composite indicator that measures the severity of humanitarian crises against a common scale.

The analytical framework describes how the Index is constructed. Indicators are collected to populate the analytical framework for every crisis and these indicators are used to calculate the Index.

The Index covers:

- The impact of the crisis itself, in terms of the scope of its geographical, human and physical effects;
- The conditions and status of the people affected, including information about the distribution of severity (i.e. the number of people in each category of severity within a crisis);
- The complexity of the crisis, in terms of factors that affect its mitigation or resolution.



RESULTS AND INTERPRETATION

The results are provided by crisis. Each crisis is categorised on a five-level scale from very low to very high severity.

It is also possible to access the values for different levels of the analytical framework, to better understand the main drivers of a crisis. All the underlying data, metadata and methodology are publicly available.

The Index is updated every month and can be used for trend analysis.

	INFORM Severity Index	INFORM Severity Index Category	INFORM Severity Index Category
Complex crisis in Afghanistan	4.5	5	Very High
Mutiple crises in Bangladesh	2.7	3	Medium
Rohingya refugee crisis	2.7	3	Medium
Cyclone Amphan Bangladesh	2.2	3	Medium
Rohingya Regional Crisis	3.3	4	High
Conflict in Burkina Faso	3.5	4	High

Complex crisis in Afghanistan	
INFORM Severity Index	4.5
INFORM Severity Index Category	5
INFORM Severity Index Category	Very High
Impact of the crisis	4.9
Geographical	4.8
Human	5.0
Conditions of affected people	4.5
People in need	5.0
Conditions of people affected	4.0
Complexity of the crisis	4.2
Society and safety	3.9
Operating environment	4.5

USING THE SEVERITY INDEX

The INFORM Severity Index can be used to support decisions that require an understanding of the severity of crises globally or to understand changes in crisis severity over time.

It should not be used for decisions about the operational response to a specific crisis. Crisis-specific information like needs assessments and appeals should be used to support these decisions.

The INFORM Severity Index is only one source of information that can support decisions about humanitarian crises. It should typically be complemented by risk, early warning and capacity information.



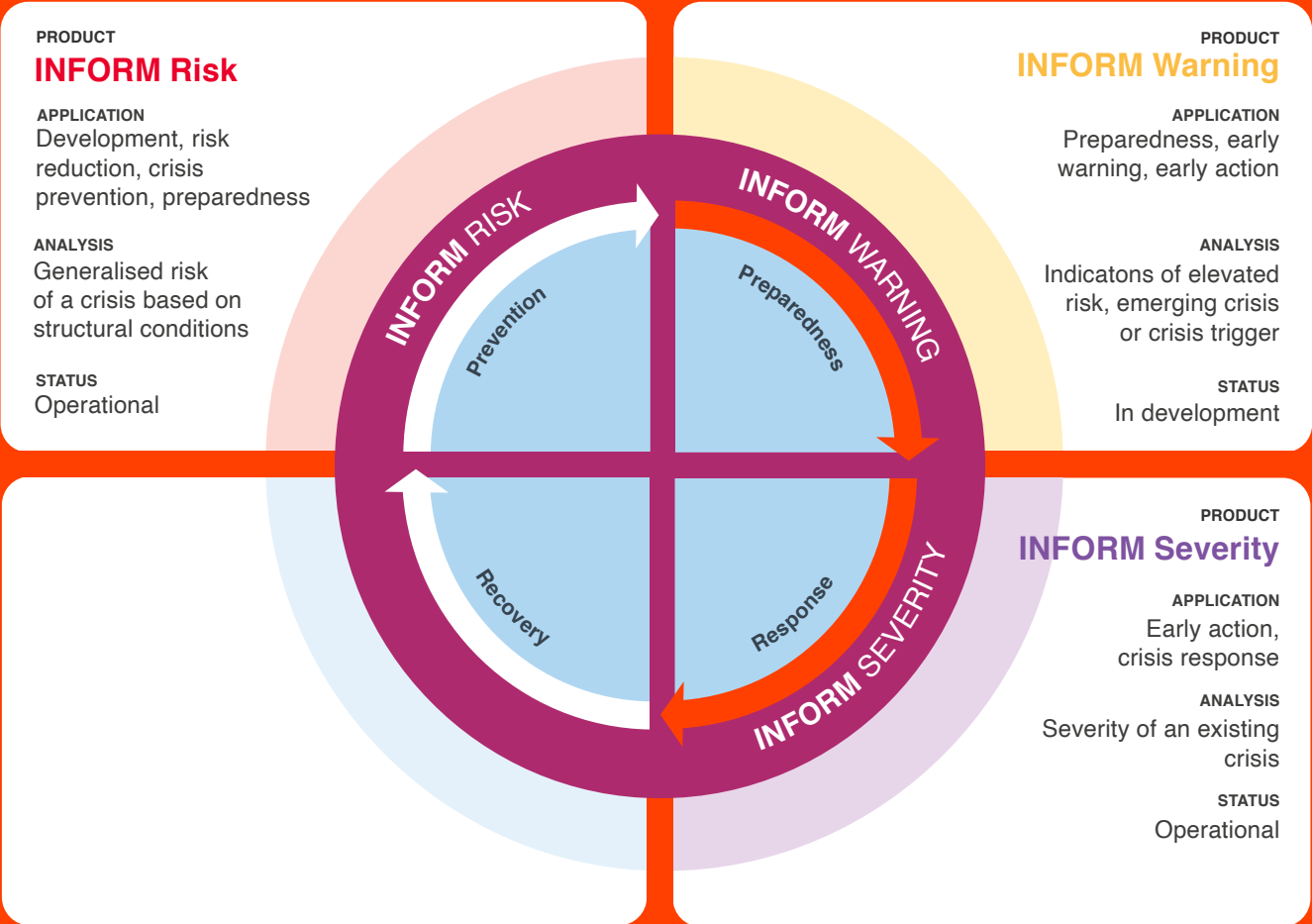
NOTE: The results shown here are for explanation purposes only and as such are incomplete and not up to date.

About INFORM

INFORM is a multi-stakeholder forum for developing shared, quantitative analysis relevant to humanitarian crises and disasters. INFORM includes organisations from across the multilateral system, including the humanitarian and development sector, donors, and technical partners. The Joint Research Center of European Commission is the scientific and technical lead for INFORM.

INFORM is developing a suite of quantitative, analytical products to support decision-making on humanitarian crises and disasters. These help make decisions at different stages of the disaster management cycle, specifically prevention, preparedness and response. INFORM develops methodologies and tools for use at the global level and also supports their application at subnational level.

INFORM Products



About the Severity Index

What is the INFORM Severity Index?

The INFORM Severity Index is an improved way to analyse the severity of humanitarian crises globally. It is a sensitive, regularly updated and easily interpreted model for measuring crisis severity that aims to assist decision-makers and contribute to improved effectiveness and coordination in humanitarian action.

Existing methods of measuring crisis severity at global level are not widely or consistently adopted and face a number of technical challenges. The primary advantage of the INFORM Severity Index is that it allows measurement of severity against an objective, common scale, which can be applied to all crises.

Specifically, the INFORM Severity Index is a composite indicator that summarises a wide range of already existing, quantitative information about crisis severity and presents it in a format that can be used more easily in decision-making.

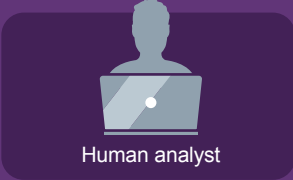
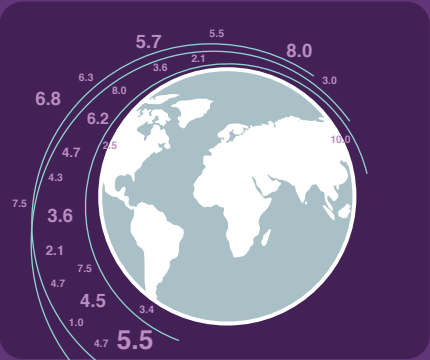
Why do we need a Severity Index?

Management of humanitarian crises is increasingly based on quantitative information about their severity. Increased and better use of this information has the potential to make humanitarian assistance more effective, efficient and principled. In recent years, rapid progress has been made in the collection of information about humanitarian crises and in the coordination of analytical processes.

Despite this, decision-makers still often struggle to identify accurate, relevant, timely and comparable information about crisis severity and to incorporate it into their decision-making processes, which are increasingly complex and systematic. This is especially the case at global level, where there is a need to incorporate information from multiple sources, collected according to different conceptual frameworks and processes, and from different crises and countries.

The INFORM Severity Index seeks to contribute to improved management of humanitarian crises by providing decision-makers with a consistent and reliable summary of information about the severity of humanitarian crises that is applicable globally.

Crisis level data



Analytical framework



INFORM Severity Index

CRISIS 1	Very high
CRISIS 2	Very high
CRISIS 3	High
CRISIS 4	High
CRISIS 5	Medium
CRISIS 6	Medium
CRISIS 7	Low

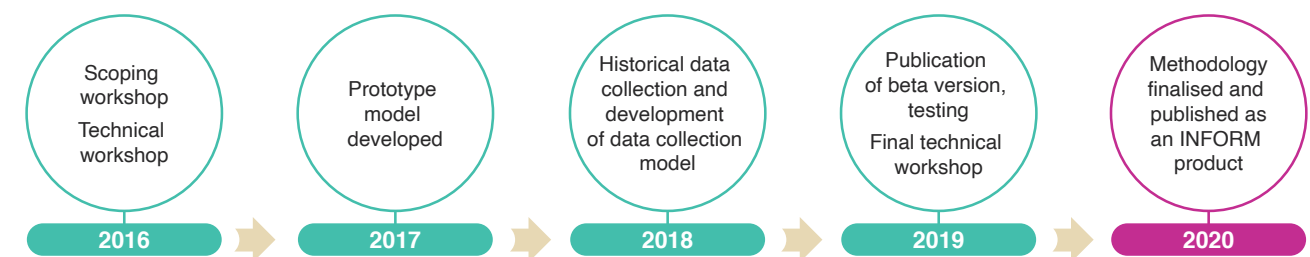
Development process

The development of the INFORM Severity Index was initiated and guided by the INFORM initiative

- a multistakeholder partnership of humanitarian and development organisations, donors and technical partners
- together with other interested organisations.

The process was modelled on the one used to develop the INFORM Risk Index. This involves convening partners to jointly analyse use cases, objectives, principles and features, followed by an iterative programme of technical development and testing.

The technical development of the INFORM Severity Index has been led by a technical working group. In the implementation phase, the European Commission Joint Research Centre is responsible for the methodology. ACAPS is responsible for the data collection and analysis. OCHA is the overall coordinator of INFORM.



The development process included:

1. A review of existing tools
2. An initial scoping workshop in April 2016 and resulting concept paper
3. A further technical workshop in December 2016, followed by work to develop a prototype method during 2017
4. In early 2018, extended testing and adjustment of the prototype model using historical data collected for a sub-set of 26 crises
5. Publication of a beta version monthly during 2019 and the first half of 2020
6. Finalisation of the methodology and data collection process based on the results of the beta version and user-feedback.

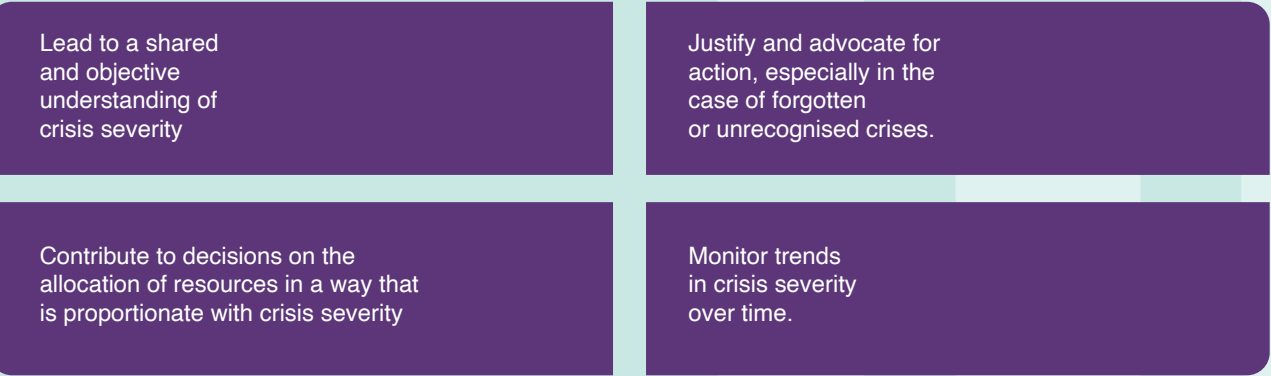
The methodology and data collection process for the INFORM Severity Index will continue to be refined. In particular, it is intended that the results of any system-wide initiatives that result in improvements in the way crisis severity is conceptualised and/or severity information is collected will ultimately be reflected in the Index. The Index is not intended to supersede any such initiatives, rather to incorporate their results.

The development of the INFORM Severity Index has been supported financially by the European Commission and the UK Foreign, Commonwealth, and Development Office (FCDO), as well as in-kind by all INFORM partners and other contributors.

Objectives

The overall objective of the INFORM Severity Index is to measure the severity of humanitarian crises globally (i.e. between rather than within crises) and on an ongoing, up-to-date and regular basis. It seeks to communicate the current status of crises in a systematic, objective and understandable way.

In its use - in combination with other sources of information - the INFORM Severity Index is intended to:



Concepts and guiding principles

In the development of the INFORM Severity Index, existing and published concepts have been drawn on as far as possible. The definition of concepts is not intended to be a contribution to broader debates, rather it is necessary for practical purposes in the development of the methodology for measuring crisis severity.

Humanitarian crisis

For the purposes of the INFORM Severity Index, a humanitarian crisis is defined as: **“An event or series of events which represents a critical threat to the health, safety, security or wellbeing of a community or other large group of people, usually over a wide area”**. This includes crises arising from both man-made and natural hazards.

Severity

As noted in ACAPS⁷ review, the purpose of the concept of severity is to condense, in one scale, elements that influence judgments on priority – elements that are conceptually different, or arrive from separate information sources.

For the purposes of the INFORM Severity Index, we define severity as **“a measure of the outcomes generated by the impact of a crisis, which can be exacerbated by the complexity of the operational environment”**.

In developing the INFORM Severity Index, the following principles were applied. The Index should:

- Cover all types of humanitarian crisis, be regularly updated and sustainable, be dynamic to reflect recent changes in severity, and be easily integrated into the decision-making mechanisms of relevant actors.
- Be ‘open source’ regarding source data and results, with the methodology published and clearly communicated, including its possible limitations.
- Measure crisis severity from first principles (i.e. the effect of crises on people) and not organised around humanitarian sectors or other response architecture.
- Where possible, include information about the distribution of severity (i.e the number and or proportion of affected people in each category of severity within a crisis).
- Result in a categorisation (i.e. low, medium, high...) of crises.

1 ACAPS, US Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, DFID, European Commission Joint Research Centre, IDMC, Karolinska Institute, OCHA.
2 Toward the development of a global severity index (ACAPS) - <https://goo.gl/XwxrGN>
3 INFORM Technical Workshop on Crisis Severity, 21-22 April 2016: <https://goo.gl/9etAVr>
4 INFORM Technical Workshop on Crisis Severity, 5-7 December 2016: <https://goo.gl/jWDmbs>
5 Measuring the severity of humanitarian crises globally: concept paper - <https://goo.gl/Dxlrxo>
6 Measuring the Severity of Humanitarian Crises Summary paper - INFORM technical working group on crisis severity. Version 1: June 2017 - <https://goo.gl/ghBkjw>

7 ACAPS ‘Severity measures in humanitarian needs assessments’ August 2016 <https://goo.gl/EYt8Wg>

Methodology

The INFORM Severity Index is a **composite indicator**⁸ designed to measure the severity of humanitarian crises globally, against a common scale. It aggregates data from various sources to categorise all crises into five levels of severity.

An overview of the methodology of the INFORM Severity Index is provided below. A full description of the methodology has been published⁹ and agreed by INFORM partners. The methodology is completely open and all the underlying data, metadata and calculations are publicly available.

Analytical framework

The term ‘analytical framework’ describes the way the INFORM Severity Index is constructed in a conceptual sense. The analytical framework is constructed through an iterative process with INFORM Partners and other experts to define concepts, select the components and identify indicators. Of course any analytical framework is a simplified and subjective view of reality.

The analytical framework is a hierarchical structure, which - at its highest level - describes the overall severity of a humanitarian crisis at a specific point in time. At the next level, it includes three dimensions that describe:

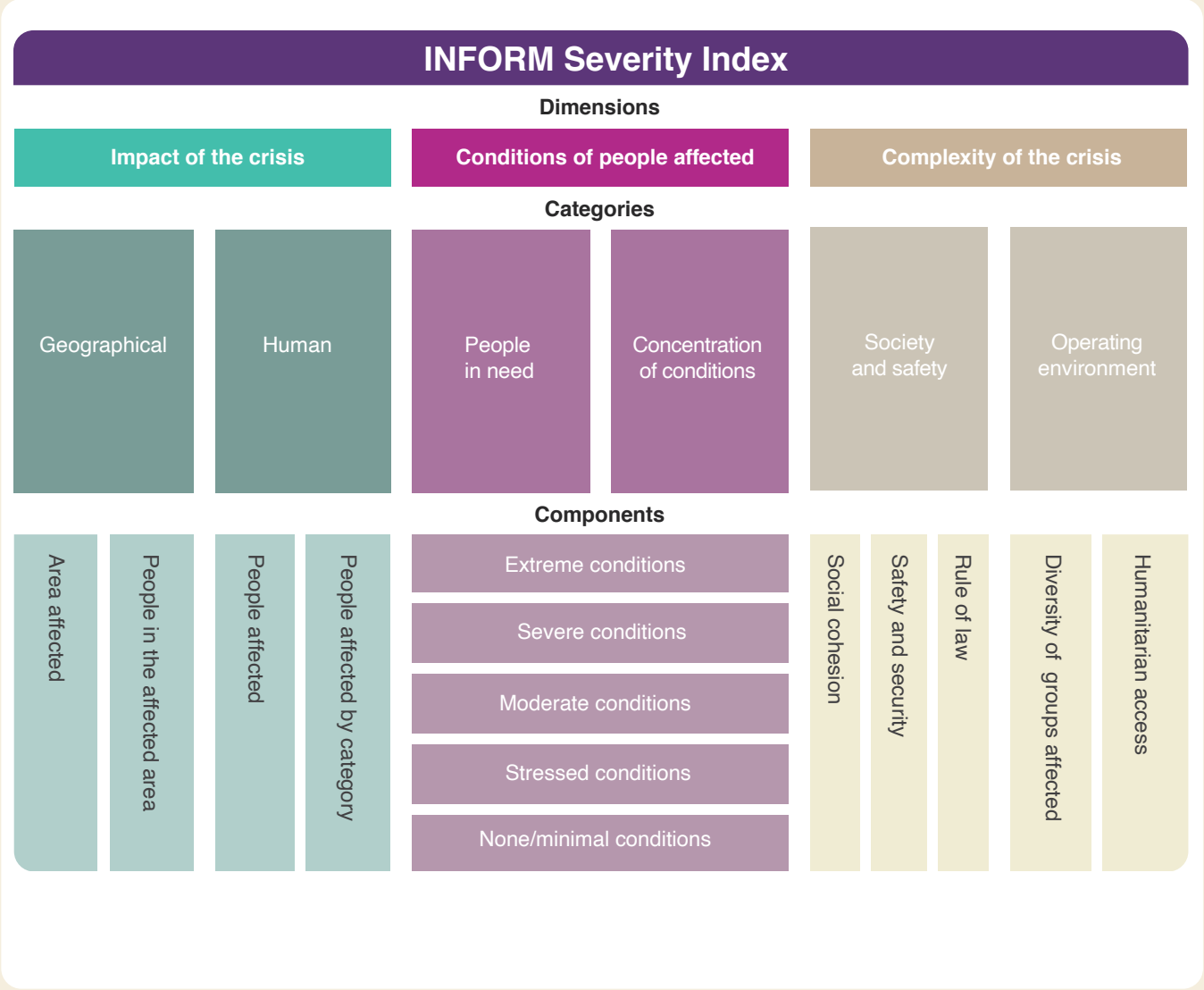
1. The **impact of the crisis** itself, in terms of the scope of its geographical and human effects;
2. The **conditions of people affected**, including information about the number of people in need and conditions of people living in the affected area
3. The **complexity of the crisis**, in terms of factors that affect its mitigation or resolution.

Each dimension is further broken down into categories and components, which are chosen to capture the concept of the dimension and are created from one or more indicators.

Exclusions from the analytical framework

‘*Pre-existing vulnerability*’ is not included in the analytical framework because it does not measure the current status of a crisis and should already be de facto included in any assessment of the conditions of affected people. In addition, its inclusion can make the output of the Index more difficult to interpret, since the concepts of severity and vulnerability are mixed. Other tools are available that can tell us about risk and vulnerability (i.e. INFORM Risk Index) and can be used in conjunction with the INFORM Severity Index.

‘*Capacity*’ for response is not included in the analytical framework, since it does not directly affect the severity of a crisis in real time. Furthermore, there is no universal concept of capacity to respond, since it depends on the actor/s responding. The Index is intended to be used, where applicable, with an additional capacity measure that is individual to the responding entity and tailored to their own circumstances and decision-making processes.



⁸ According to the OECD, a composite indicator “is formed when individual indicators are compiled into a single index, on the basis of an underlying model of the multi-dimensional concept that is being measured.”

⁹ Poljansek, K., Disperati, P., Vernaccini, L. (2020) INFORM Severity Methodology. European Commission Joint Research Centre.

Measuring conditions of people affected

Most components in the Impact and Complexity dimensions of the INFORM Severity Index are measured by comparable indicators. This means that comparable information is available across crises because it is either: 1) directly measurable in common units (e.g. area affected); or 2) from globally available indicators (e.g. the Ethnic Fractionalisation Index or GINI).

Information about the Conditions of people affected is not consistently or systematically available between crises. The number of people in need is often provided, but the method for breaking down that value into different levels of severity (e.g. moderate, severe) can vary. Different frameworks are used to measure severity in different contexts and the quality and level of detail of the information varies considerably.

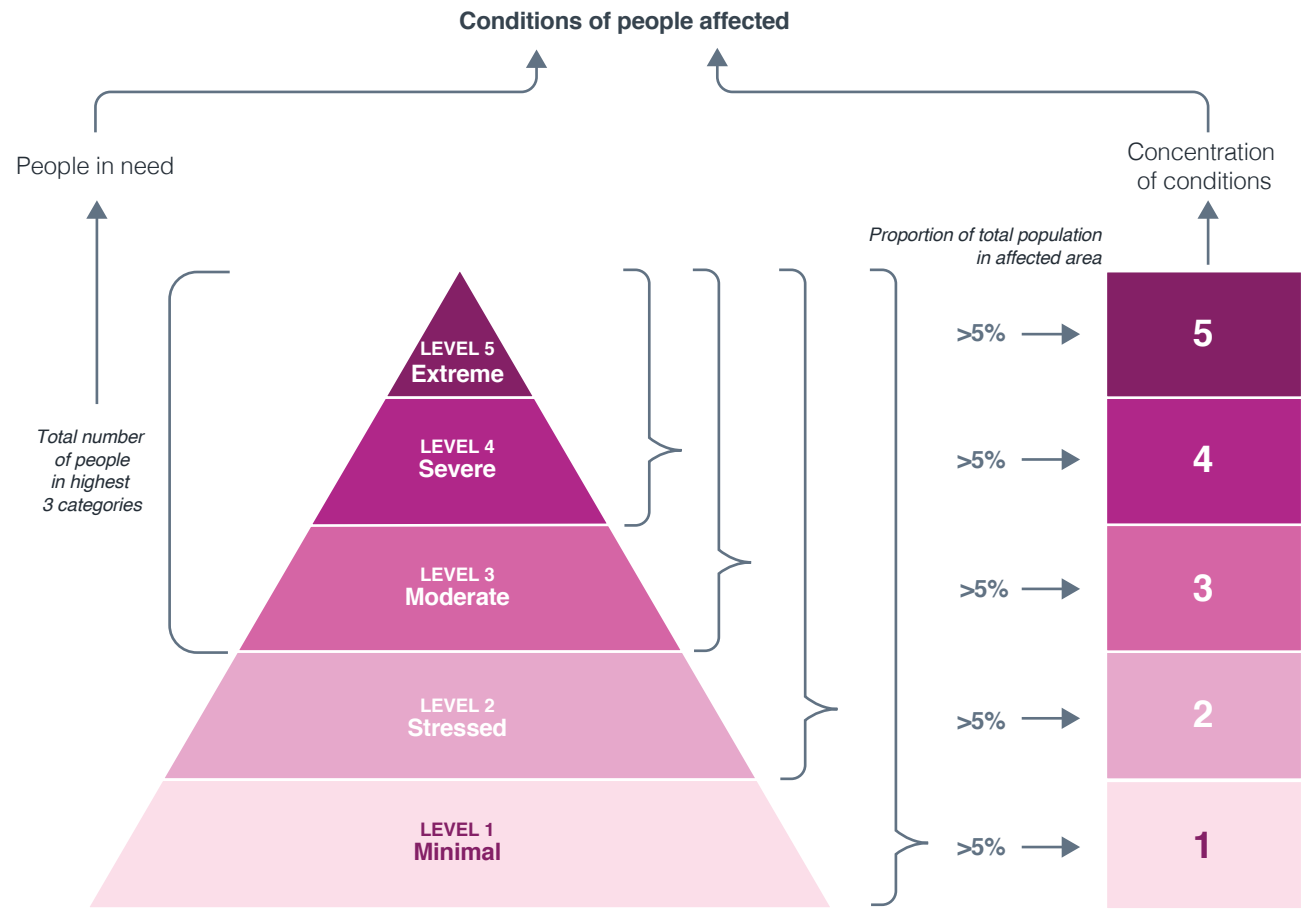
At the core of the INFORM Severity Index, is a process for mapping different reported severity categorisations to one common, five-level scale and allowing the use of additional information to make judgements about the distribution of severity in an affected population, where none is provided.

All people living in the crisis-affected area are included at Level 1 or higher. All people affected by the crisis are included at Level 2 or higher. People with identified humanitarian needs are included in Levels 3–5, depending on the severity of their reported needs.

Levels of conditions of people affected used in the INFORM Severity Index.

LEVEL 5	Extreme humanitarian conditions: People are facing extreme shortages or availability and accessibility problems in regards to basic services. Widely accepted fact that deaths have been reported due to the humanitarian situation, widespread mortality. People face a complete lack of food and/or other basic needs and starvation, death, and destitution are evident; and acute malnutrition is widely reported. They may face grave human rights violations.
LEVEL 4	Severe humanitarian conditions: People are facing significant shortages and/or significant availability and accessibility problems in regards to basic services. People face severe food consumption gaps and have started to deplete their assets or already face an extreme loss of assets. This may result in very high levels of acute malnutrition and excess mortality. Presence of irreversible harm and heightened mortality as well as widespread grave violations of human rights.
LEVEL 3	Moderate humanitarian conditions: People are facing shortages and/or availability and accessibility problems in regards to basic services but they are not life-threatening. Significant food consumption gaps are visible or people are marginally able to meet minimum food needs only with irreversible coping strategies. As a result of shortages and disruption of services, may face potentially life-threatening consequences if not provided assistance. People may also facing malnutrition. There may be physical and mental harm in populations resulting in a loss of dignity.
LEVEL 2	Stressed humanitarian conditions: People are facing some shortages or/and some availability and accessibility problems in regards to basic services. People have some food gaps and food consumption is reduced but adequate are able to meet minimum food needs by applying coping strategies. There are strains on livelihoods. Needs are more increased but are still not life-threatening. There may exist localized/targeted incidents of violence and/or human rights violations.
LEVEL 1	None/Minor humanitarian conditions: People are facing none or minor shortages or/and accessibility problems regarding basic services. People are able to meet food and other basic needs without having to apply to irreversible coping strategies. There may be some needs but are not life-threatening.

Formulation of conditions of people affected dimension



- The Conditions of people affected dimension consists of two components.
- Firstly, the number of *people in need*, which is based on the absolute number of people in the highest three categories of severity.
 - Secondly, the *concentration of conditions*, which is based on the proportion of the population in the affected area that faces the severest conditions of the crisis.

The approach of the INFORM Severity Index is to bring together the best information currently available about severity in a way that is comparable across crises. The

quality of the Index relies on the quality of primary severity information and on the broader frameworks and processes for collecting it and reporting it. It is simply a way to aggregate this information as it currently exists and cannot be a replacement for it. A number of initiatives are underway to improve the quality and comparability of primary severity information. These improvements will ultimately be reflected in the Index.

Calculating the level of severity

The three dimensions of the INFORM Severity Index are in a mutually consequential relationship. The impact of an event generates different conditions for affected people, in a context that can make it more or less complex to provide assistance to them. This is represented by the formula:

Severity = Impact of the crisis x Conditions of people affected + Complexity of the crisis

A weighting is applied at the dimension level as follows. The overall severity is therefore most sensitive to the conditions of affected people.

Severity = 70% of Geometric Mean of Impact of the crisis 33% Conditions of people affected 66% + 30% Complexity of the crisis

The dimension values are generated by aggregation of indicators into components, components into categories and categories into dimensions (i.e. from the lowest to highest levels of the analytical framework). A number of aggregation methods (min, max, geometric mean, arithmetic mean) are used.

All the indicators used in the INFORM Severity Index are a value between 0-5. These values are derived from the raw data through pre-processing, which includes:

- Imputation of missing values
- Transformation into non-dimensional scales
- Re-scaling or categorisation into range 0-5

Indicators often have a relative and absolute component. This is intended to recognise that the relative size of a crisis in comparison to the size of the country (or the number of people in need relative to the total number in an affected area) is an important consideration in assessing severity.

Criteria for inclusion of crises in the Index

A crisis is included in the INFORM Severity Index when **both** of the following criteria - which apply to all types of crisis - are met:

- The number of people affected is at least 30,000 OR at least 1% of the population of the country
- The number of people in need is at least 10,000 people

Some crises may be included in the results but the final severity value is not calculated due to lack of data for parts of the Index. The severity value is only calculated when all three dimensions are present.

A crisis phases out of the Index when no updates have been made to the monitored sources for 3 months.

Data sources, data collection and updates

The INFORM Severity Index aggregates information from a range of credible, publicly available sources, such as UN agencies, governments and other multilateral organisations. The country’s Humanitarian Needs Overview (HNO) is used if one is available and other sector-specific sources are monitored. The results spreadsheet contains metadata, showing the sources and dates of all included figures, as well as key assessments or judgements made in their inclusion.

Human analysts (at ACAPS) monitor sources of information for each crisis on an ongoing basis. This includes:

- Changes in the humanitarian situation
- New data/information about humanitarian situation available
- Contextual, economic, or political information that affects the humanitarian situation
- Uncertainty/ambiguity about an event or piece of information
- Significant information gaps.

Latest information is included in the Index at the end of each month. There is no defined update cycle for the indicators. This largely depends on the availability of new data about the actual humanitarian situation, which can vary according to the availability of resources to conduct assessments, the assessment cycle and access to affected people. Indicators are updated as soon as more up-to-date or more reliable information is available. Each monthly release therefore represents a snapshot of the most up-to-date and reliable information about the crisis at that moment.

Reliability Index

Due to the dynamic and chaotic nature of humanitarian emergencies and the lack of a globally systematic approach to data collection, imperfect information is necessarily used in the INFORM Severity Index. Expert judgement is involved in deciding what data to include. A reliability estimate is provided for each crisis.

The Reliability Index is intended to increase transparency about the quality of data used and highlight situations where the most recent data may not accurately reflect the current humanitarian situation.

The Reliability Index assigns a 5-point scale score (very low, low, medium, high, very high), based on the following criteria:

Data reliability

An assessment of the soundness of the data collection methodology, of the type of source or sources, and of the confidence level of estimations or assumptions made

Information gaps

The total number of original indicators missing

Recentness of the data

The number of days from the date of the indicators and the date of the INFORM Severity release

Interpreting the INFORM Severity Index

Results

Scope of use

The INFORM Severity Index can be used to support decisions that require an understanding of the severity of crises globally and to understand changes in crisis severity over time. It should not be used for decisions about the operational response to a specific crisis. Refer to funding appeals and other sources.

Crises and countries

The INFORM Severity Index is calculated at **crisis level**. Each crisis is named. The name reflects the main driver of the crisis and its location.

A country can be affected by **multiple crises**. The breakdown of crises in a country is a result of how crises are reported by operational organisations. **Complex crises** affect the whole country.

A **regional crisis** has the same driver but affects more than one country. The severity of a regional crisis reflects all the countries affected.

A single Index value at **country level** is provided separately. This combines all crisis data from all crises affecting a country.

International displacement affects the severity of the crisis at the source of the displacement (Impact) and the current location of people displaced (Conditions of affected people).

A crisis is included when **both** of the following criteria are met:

- 1) The number of people affected is at least 30,000 or at least 1% of the population of the country;
- 2) The number of people in need is at least 10,000 people.

Understanding the results

All results are provided on a **scale of 0-5**, where 5 represents the highest severity. Darker colours represent higher values and higher severity.

The INFORM Severity Index is calculated by combining the values for the three dimensions: 1) Impact of the crisis; 2) Conditions of people affected; 3) Complexity of the crisis. Severity = Geometric Mean (70%) of Impact (33%) and Conditions of Affected People (66%) + Complexity (30%). The overall severity is therefore most sensitive to the Conditions of Affected People.

The Index is presented as a value and **5-level categorisation** - numeric (1-5) and descriptive (very low to very high). The category is calculated by rounding up the value (e.g. 3.1 = 4, 3.9 = 4).

A **trend** in the Index is provided. It compares an average of the latest 3 months with the average of the previous 3 months. There are three possible trends - increasing, stable, decreasing. More information about how to interpret trends is provided in the User Guide.

We advise you to primarily use the category for decision-making. The Index value can provide further information about trends in a specific crisis and help interpretation of the results. Be cautious interpreting values close to a category boundary (e.g. 2.9 vs. 3.1). Note that all crises included in the Index involve people that require humanitarian assistance.

A **reliability** estimate is provided for each crisis. This is a 5-level categorisation and is based on the following: data reliability, information gaps, recentness of the data.

The results of each **dimension and category** are also provided. These can be used to understand the relative contribution of each dimension to the Severity Index. The dimension values are calculated by combining the components. For further information, refer to the analytical framework and methodology.

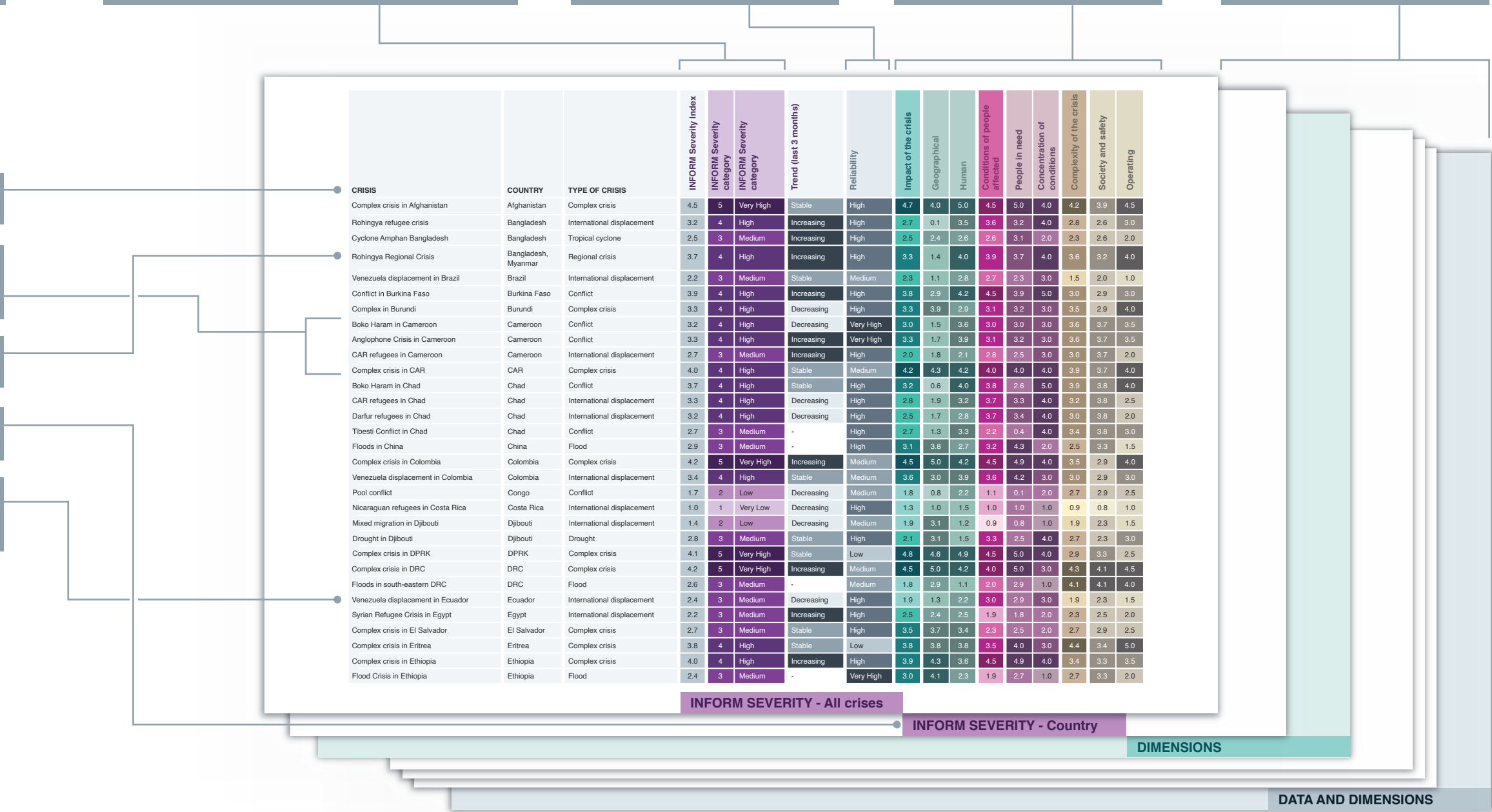
Organisation of the results

The results of the INFORM Severity Index are organised at different levels. In the main results, you can see the overall INFORM Severity Index value and category as the values for each dimension and category.

This is always a number between 0 and 5.

If you want further details of each dimension, you can access all the **category** and **component** values, as well as see the **indicators**.

You can also access all the **underlying data** used in the Index and **metadata**, which will give you extra information such as the source, data and any analyst notes.



Trend analysis using the INFORM Severity Index

Real and apparent trends

The INFORM Severity Index is updated monthly and can therefore be used to monitor trends in the severity of crises globally. However, trends must be interpreted with caution, since changes in the Index have different groups of possible drivers:

- 1. The change represents a real change in the crisis situation (i.e. the situation on the ground changes and this is reflected in changes to one or more data sources).
- 2. The change represents an improved understanding of the crisis (i.e. the situation on the ground did not change but better sources of data or a clearer interpretation of them became available).
- 3. Artefacts created by the update cycle of indicators in the Index. Each monthly update of the Index is a snapshot of the latest data at that time. Different indicators are updated on different cycles, and sometimes irregularly. Furthermore, different indicators have different levels of significance in the Index. These features can create small changes in the Index from month to month that have no real significance.

The drivers of changes in the index will therefore also be different in different contexts - for example a new, sudden-onset emergency versus a protracted, complex one. This impacts the type and speed of real changes, as well as the quality, reliability and consistency of reporting.

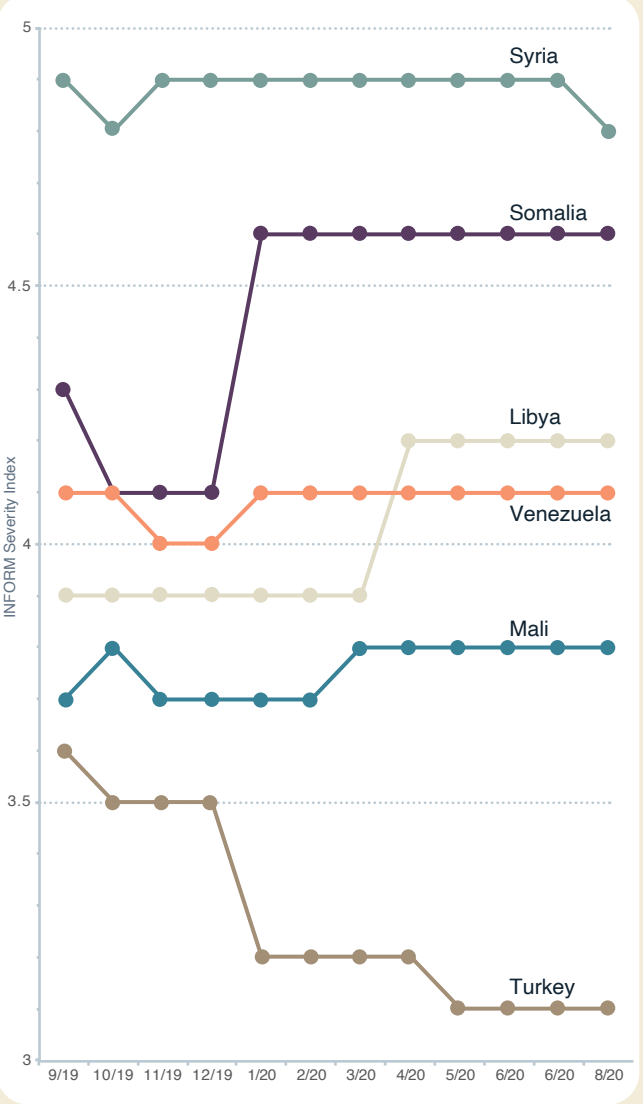
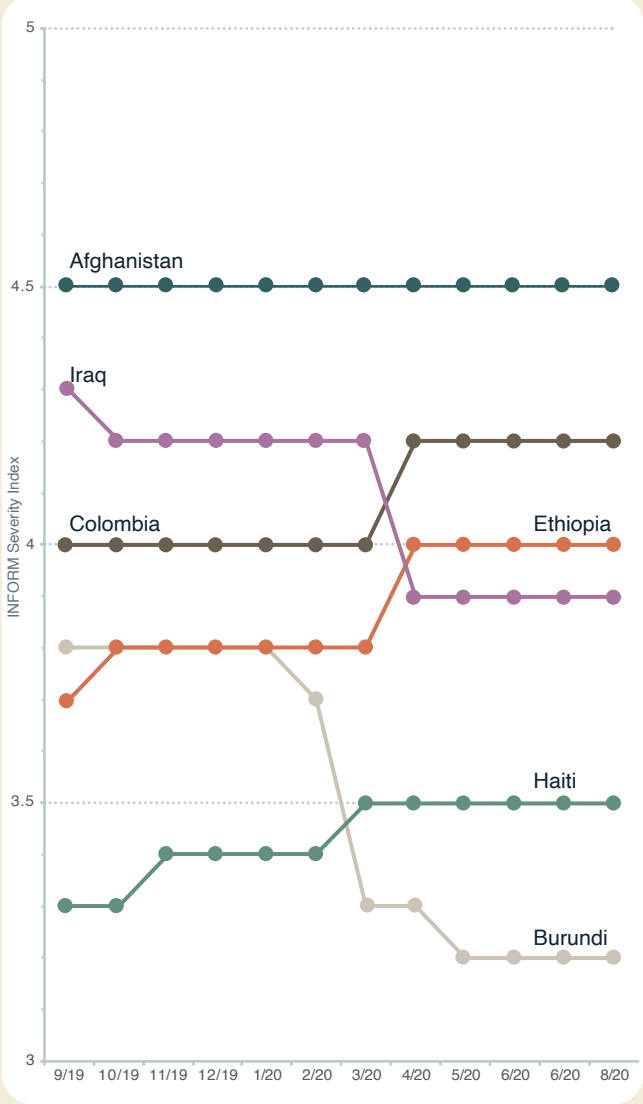
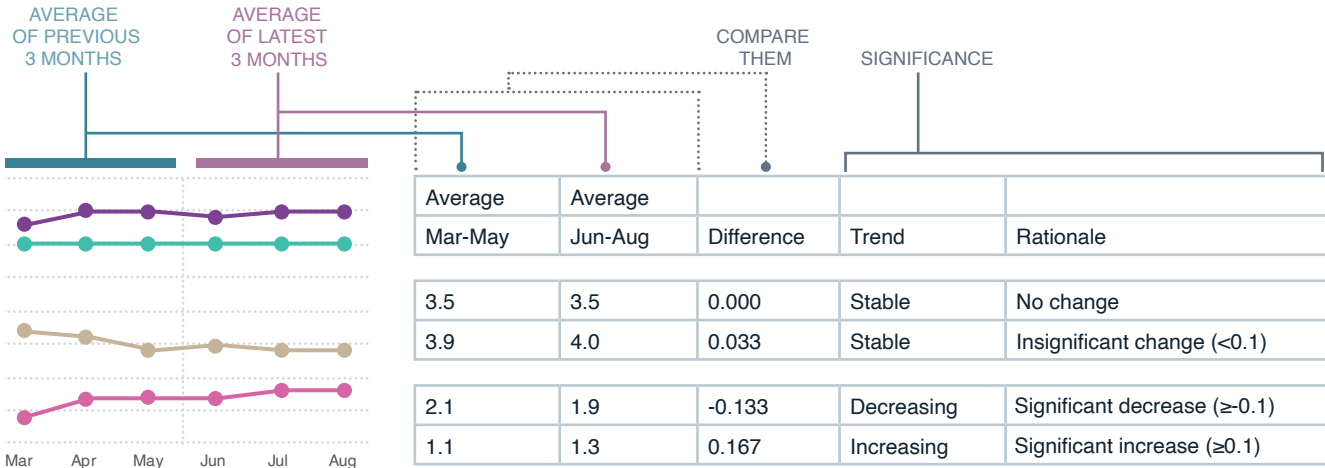
Therefore, it is important to interpret trends in the Index according to the following principles:

- 1. Significance – a change from one month to the next is not necessarily a significant change. A longer timeframe – recommended 3 months – should be used.
- 2. Timing – a change in a particular month does not necessarily represent an event that took place in that month. It could represent a change that took place previously and is reflected in data that is updated that month.
- 3. Cause – It is important to try to understand the cause of any change. This can be done by examining the detailed results and data in the Index and combining it with other sources of information about real events.

Approach to determining trends

INFORM makes available all previous results of the INFORM Severity Index for trend analysis. Each month, a 3-month trend is also provided with the main results. This shows whether the Index value (and therefore severity) has increased, remained stable, or decreased.

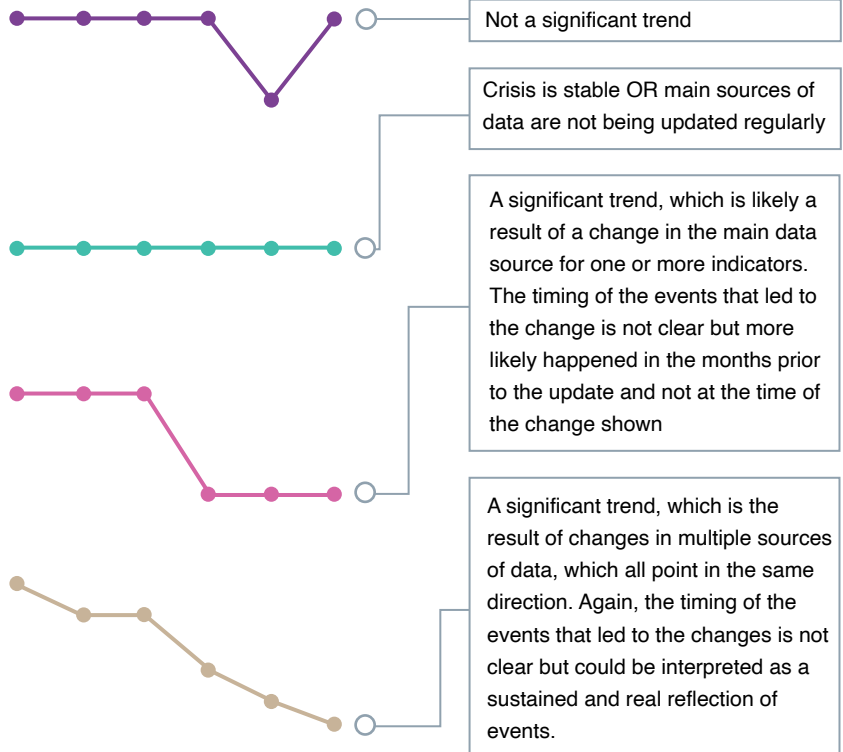
The 3-month trend is calculated by comparing the average Index value of the latest 3 months with the average Index value of the 3 months previous (i.e. latest 4-6 months). Therefore, a total of 6 months of data is used to calculate the trend. A trend is considered significant (i.e. increasing or decreasing) if there is at least 0.1 difference between the values.



Considerations when interpreting trends

The above charts show a trends for a small selection of countries over 12 months from mid 2019 to mid 2020. The trends displayed here offer a number of examples for considerations to be taken into account when interpreting trends.

A number of patterns can be seen in the trend data, which could be interpreted in different ways. This highlights the need to apply the principles of significance, timing and cause to interpreting trends. Always supplement your analysis with additional information about the real crisis situation, including actual events that could precipitate changes of data used in the Index. Also be aware of the reporting cycle and changes in the process for collecting primary data that is used in the Index.



Using the INFORM Severity Index

Scope of use

All actors involved in providing humanitarian assistance make strategic and operational decisions about when, where and how to respond. An improved and widely shared understanding of crisis severity can contribute to better decisions that lead to better outcomes for affected people. The primary advantage of the INFORM Severity Index is that it allows measurement of severity on a common scale.

The INFORM Severity Index can therefore be used to support decisions that require an understanding of the severity of crises globally. For example, to determine strategic priorities or to understand if globally deployed assets and resources are strategically aligned with crisis severity. The INFORM Severity Index can also be used to understand changes in crisis severity over time.

The INFORM Severity Index should not be used for decisions about the operational response to a specific crisis. All crises are different, with different levels and types of need and different response strategies and costs. Crisis-specific information should be used to support these decisions. The INFORM Severity Index does not replace, and in fact relies heavily on, this information.

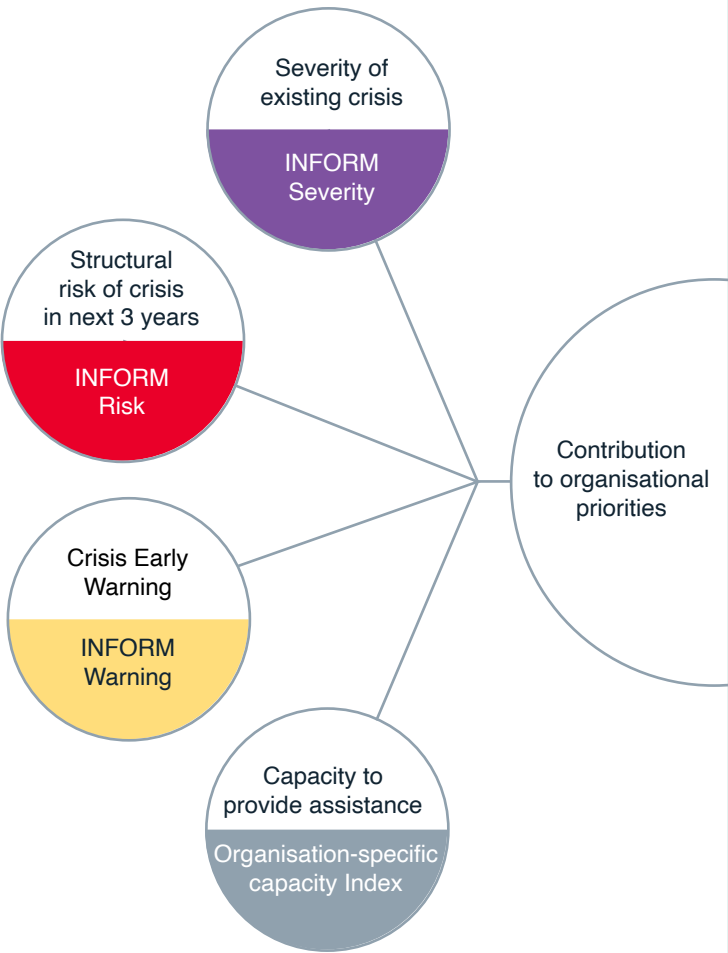
For example, you should use the Index to check that your organisation is allocating sufficient priority to a particular crisis, but not to decide on the type or value of humanitarian assistance provided. For this, additional information from needs assessments, appeal and project documents, or other operational sources, should be used.

The overall categorisation of a crisis as low or medium severity does not mean there are not people that require humanitarian assistance. Simply that there are fewer than in a high or very high severity crisis. The Index is not designed to direct resources to only high and very high severity crises. It is intended to ensure that all crises receive attention that is objectively commensurate with their severity.

Combining the Index with other information

The INFORM Severity Index is only one source of information that can support decisions about humanitarian crises. It should not be used alone and would typically be complemented by other sources, such as crisis-specific information like coordinated or agency/sector-specific assessments and appeals.

It can also be complemented by risk, early warning and capacity information. For example, the INFORM Risk Index and INFORM Warning (in development), or other public or organisation-specific products.



Limitations and risks

Humanitarian crises are by definition extremely complex and therefore any attempt to model them is a simplification of reality. Limitations come from the methodology for aggregating the data and from the source data itself. Two issues warrant special attention.

Precision

Firstly, results presented with a high level of precision could be perceived to be more accurate than they are. Therefore, the INFORM Severity Index results in a categorisation of crises - all crises fall into one of five categories. The Index value can provide further information about trends in a specific crisis and help interpretation of the results. Be cautious interpreting values close to a category boundary (e.g. 2.9 vs. 3.1).

Crises affect people differently

Secondly, in any crisis there will be a range of conditions experienced by the affected people. Some individuals will be severely affected and require assistance, even in a crisis that is not assessed as highly severe overall. The Index therefore attempts to provide information about the distribution of severity within a crisis. All crises involve people that require assistance.

A contribution to decision-making

Risks associated with measuring crisis severity also come from the way the results are described and used. Results need to be used in conjunction with other information and are only one input into the decision-making process. The INFORM Severity Index brings together a lot of information to help decision-makers. However, the results should not be automatically translated into priorities.

Different actors will make different decisions

Furthermore, different actors will have different views of severity based on their capacity, mandate, focus etc. or their additional analysis. Therefore, the results are designed to be a shared baseline that can inform decision-making processes, and to which other information (e.g. covering capacity, mandate, focus) can be added. They are not intended to provide an assessment that is universally accepted and used by all actors without adaptation or adjustment.

Data quality and judgement

The INFORM Severity Index essentially aggregates information from a range of sources to allow measurement of severity on a common scale. Each crisis has different types and quality of data available. Judgements must be made in what data to use and the comparability of indicators between crises. This may result in unintended bias or errors. The INFORM Severity Index results or source data should not be considered to be more accurate or to replace individual indicators for specific crises. Users are advised to consult the original sources for the most up-to-date data.

Reliance on primary data

The INFORM Severity Index is wholly reliant on primary data generated in crises through various methods. It is not a mechanism for collecting or generating primary data and cannot improve it. Therefore the INFORM Severity Index is only as good as - and certainly not a replacement for - this primary data, which must continue to be improved in terms of quality and standardisation.

INFORM is a collaboration of the Inter-Agency Standing Committee and the European Commission. The Joint Research Centre of the European Commission is the scientific and technical lead of INFORM. This report is based on the data available at <https://drmkc.jrc.ec.europa.eu/inform-index>.

This report is produced by the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs on behalf of all INFORM Partners.

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