

## Can multisectoral needs assessments be done online?

Evaluating the HESPER-Web, a web-based version of a commonly-used humanitarian tool.

### A potential alternative approach to needs assessment

Needs assessment is a critical phase of humanitarian response, typically done through face-to-face interviews. This project showed that using a self-administrative web version of the Humanitarian Emergency Settings Perceived Needs Scale (HESPER) to assess needs in humanitarian contexts gave the same results as interviews.

The HESPER Web was easy to use, less time consuming than the interviews, and provides a new possibility for humanitarian organizations and for researchers to collect data on perceived needs when internet is available. It should be considered as a tool valid for producing humanitarian needs overviews.



*Example of study context where needs assessment is essential. Photo: K Hugelius*

## Background

Needs assessment is a critical stage in humanitarian response. The HESPER scale is a multisectoral tool that consists of 26 items, covering all eleven clusters. Today, many people in all parts of the world use the internet, even in emergencies. Web-based methods to collect data often are cheaper, faster and can reach people who are hard to reach on foot. This project aimed to develop and evaluate a self-administered version of the HESPER scale, called HESPER Web.

## How the research was conducted

The original HESPER scale and HESPER Web were compared and the feasibility of using HESPER Web was evaluated in three separate settings. The first evaluation was conducted in Sweden, among 85 asylum seekers, the second in Dadaab refugee camp in Kenya, with 350 participants, and the third assessed needs among 242 people following multiple natural disasters in Fiji.

## Key findings

- The evaluations showed that the same needs were reported when asked in an interview (original HESPER) as when using HESPER Web.
- HESPER Web was experienced by humanitarian practitioners as easy and safe to use, and less time consuming than the original HESPER interview.
- HESPER Web can be used in different contexts, such as conflicts or natural disasters, and to conduct remote needs assessments or research studies.
- The number and type of perceived needs differed between different humanitarian settings, demonstrating that needs assessment is important in every humanitarian emergency. Psychosocial needs in humanitarian contexts should not be underestimated.

## Implications for humanitarian practitioners and policymakers

HESPER Web offers a reliable and feasible tool for assessment of needs in situations where web-based surveys are considered as practical and suitable. It also offers new possibilities for conducting remote assessments and research studies that include humanitarian populations that are rarely included in such evaluations, such as people with no fixed address, or in remote areas where physical access is impossible or limited.

While the sample for the studies were somewhat limited, there are no known risks to utilising HESPER-Web in humanitarian settings, especially where standard interviews are not possible, as long as data protection is ensured.

Both humanitarian actors and researchers could benefit from having access to a reliable online tool to assess perceived needs in the immediate aftermath of a sudden onset disaster or emergency. The HESPER Web should be considered as a tool valid for producing humanitarian needs overviews.

## Recommendations for future research

Studies on perceived obstacles to accommodate perceived needs are necessary, to further understand perceived needs among humanitarian populations. Additional research on the use, benefits, and limitations of using HESPER Web from the perspective of humanitarian professionals is also needed, to inform implementation.

## About the study team

This project was conducted by researchers from Örebro university in Örebro, Sweden, Brighton and Sussex Medical School, Brighton, UK and International Leadership University in Nairobi, Kenya, under the lead of Dr Karin Hugelius, Örebro university.

The UN Refugee Agency (UNHCR) in Kenya supported the field test in Kenya and the Fiji Red Cross supported the field test in Fiji.

The World Health Organization (WHO) in Geneva has supported the project and own all legal rights to the HESPER Web.

## Keywords

Needs assessment, internet-based methods, humanitarian emergencies, disasters, psychosocial needs.

## Articles and further reading

Articles are available on the study page on the Elrha website. Forthcoming publications will also be added here:

<https://www.elrha.org/project/humanitarian-emergency-settings-perceived-needs-scale-hesper-sw/>



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