



## Describe

Descriptive analysis is the same as reporting and is what is usually done in the very first hours and days of a sudden-onset disaster, when we report on what data we have and try to structure it as well as possible. This includes summarizing what is known about situations, people, places or objects. It identifies what is valid or worth noting about who, what, when, where, and how. The data should be organized in a way that is easy to comprehend and recall. The key here is to summarize the data and compare the results. How comparisons are structured depends on the context, but it is good practice to compare impact across geographic locations or humanitarian sectors, using visuals, maps and other infographics if possible. Comparisons with pre-crisis data are also vital to highlight changes, and/or longstanding issues that have been exacerbated by the impact of the disaster.

## Explain

Explanatory analysis probes the reason or immediate causes of a situation, explaining why a situation has developed in the way described. At this level, as an analyst, do not just organize and report interesting information, but use argumentation to provide context for the facts and observations. This sort of reasoning should be included in reports to explain why a situation has developed as it has. It is about providing context to the results and pointing out possible causes for a particular problem. When analysing emergencies, where time is of the essence, there will almost never be conclusive evidence for a cause and effect. Plausible explanations may, however, be found if we dig deeper and look for root causes in pre-crisis secondary data or lessons learned from past events.

## Interpret

Interpretive analysis gives meaning to the initial findings, identifies priorities and tells the audience what is most important and why it is important. This implies going beyond just explaining the information but also reaching a conclusion. Of all the information available, what is important and why must be explained. Asking the question 'what does it mean?', interpretation examines the significance of a problem or topic of interest as it relates to decision-makers' interests, using logic to interpret and make judgments about the situation.

Interpreting information involves using all information available to make sure that it is a plausible interpretation and not just an opinion. At this stage in the analysis process, it is imperative to bring in peers, colleagues and partners to

discuss the findings and agree on what they mean (see section 1.4.3 Shared analysis). Decision-makers' willingness to accept an interpretation is closely connected to their ability to see its plausibility and the level of expert agreement. An interpretation is not a fact but a theory. Often, the best an analyst can hope for with their explanations is not that others will say; 'yes, that is obviously right,' but rather; 'yes, I can see why it might be possible and reasonable to think as you do'. An analyst needs to decide what possible interpretation best accounts for what they think is the most important and most interesting to notice about the findings given the context.

## Anticipate

Anticipatory analysis involves comparing the pre-crisis situation to the present situation and trying to consider how the situation will evolve over time based on different types and levels of response and other potential developments. This is the final step in the analysis process where potential scenarios are developed and we ask 'what if? What will happen if decision-makers do not pay attention now? What will happen if the situation goes unaddressed?'

As an analyst, you should always look to the future, asking what might happen next and proactively anticipate what course a situation may take. This is generally based on lessons learned from previous emergencies, the analyst's experience, knowledge and strategies for modelling evidence and developing possible outcomes for a given initial situation. Anticipatory analysis may also lead to contingency planning, especially if the developments envisaged are dependent on certain assumptions about what may happen next, e.g., an upcoming monsoon season or other climatic event that occurs annually and may exacerbate the humanitarian needs.

Analysts should be proactive in engaging key stakeholders in anticipatory analysis, prompting discussion by asking questions like 'what will the situation look like in 6 months', or 'what will happen with a displaced population if heavy rainfall should occur'. Questions like this can be very useful and will help programme planning.