

THE NEED

2.1 Emergencies: Larger and mostly conflict-driven

The past three years have seen the international humanitarian system responding to fewer emergencies, mostly ‘complex’ (conflict-related) in nature, and with larger human caseloads. This contrasts with the prior study, which reported an increase in the number of emergency responses in 2009–2010 compared to 2007–2008 (ALNAP, 2012).

At the same time, significantly greater numbers of people were targeted for assistance (a 44% average increase from 2009–2010, and a 78% increase from 2007–2008), and the price tags for the responses have risen accordingly. Chronically vulnerable and unstable areas such as CAR, Mali and South Sudan, whose populations were already receiving humanitarian assistance, experienced new outbreaks of violence leading to further displacement and magnified needs.

Needs tend to accumulate as new complex emergencies are added to the caseload more quickly than older ones drop off. The absence of political and development solutions to the underlying causes has led to the majority of humanitarian resources being directed towards chronic complex emergencies. Of the 58 countries that received humanitarian assistance in 2014, 49 (84%) had received it every year for the last five years and 40 countries (69 per cent) were on their tenth straight year of receiving humanitarian aid.

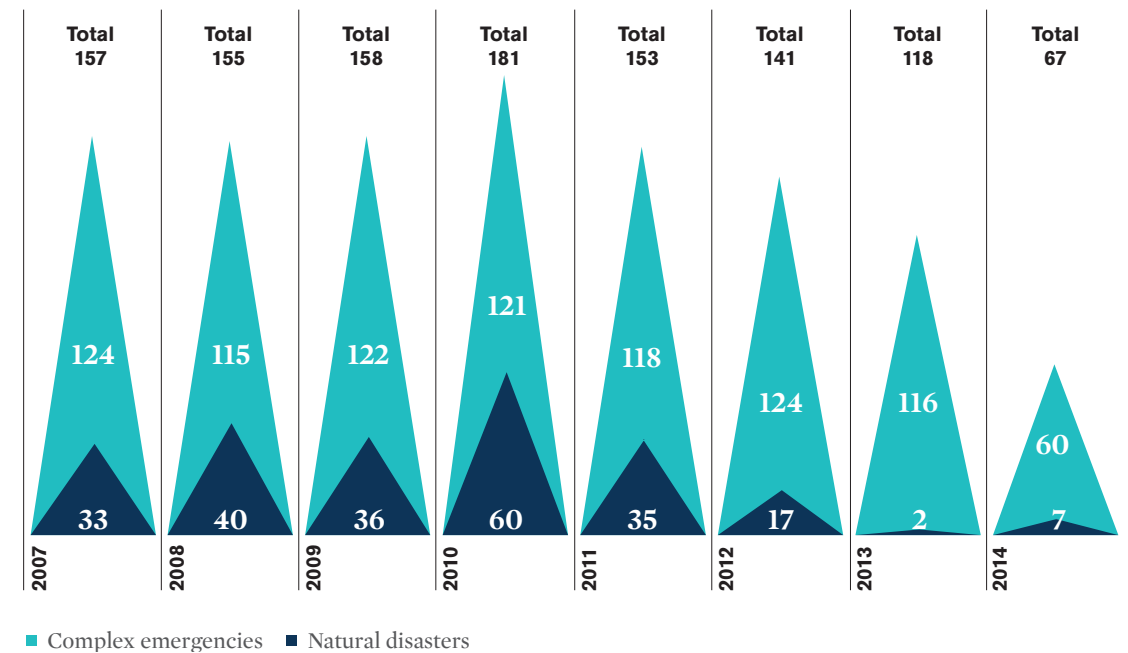
2.2 The problem of measuring and defining needs

The system has not developed a standard formula for calculating the number of people in need, typically a subset of ‘people affected’ by an emergency (some of whom can cope without outside assistance). In the past, most humanitarian appeals were based not on the number of people in need but rather on the total number of targeted beneficiaries of different projects planned by agencies. More recently, humanitarian actors have used consensus numbers derived from a variety of data sources. This makes global analysis difficult.

Good data is typically in short supply in humanitarian emergencies, particularly in volatile and hard-to-access settings or where baseline surveys have not been carried out. Further challenges include distinguishing between humanitarian needs caused by conflict and those caused by underlying poverty, and counting displaced people who may move frequently. Complicating matters further, the numbers may carry political weight.

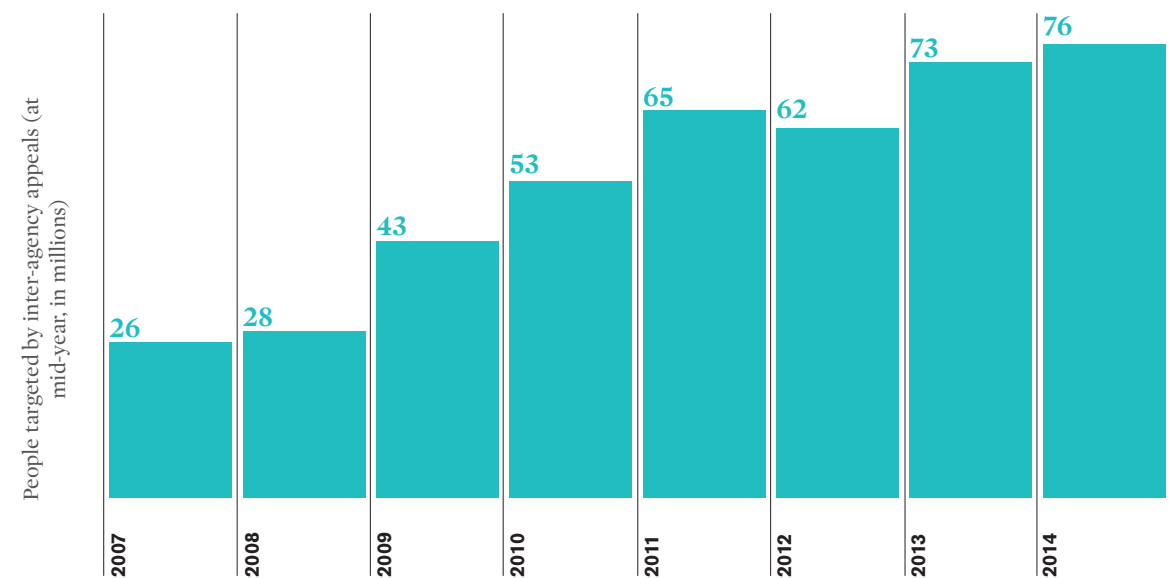
Some global reports have consolidated need numbers in opaque and inconsistent ways, adding to the confusion. The lack of solid data on people in need remains a major obstacle to understanding the success or failure of a humanitarian response.

International humanitarian emergency responses, 2007–2014



Source: FTS (11 January 2015).

Targeted recipients of aid



Source: OCHA, 2013(f) World Humanitarian Data and Trends.