

Terms of Reference

THE HUMANITARIAN COORDINATOR

January 2024

Terms of Reference for the Humanitarian Coordinator*

I. ROLE AND RESPONSIBILITIES

While the affected State has the primary role in the initiation, organisation, coordination, and implementation of humanitarian assistance within its territory,¹ in situations where a Humanitarian Coordinator (HC) is designated s/he is responsible for leading and coordinating humanitarian action² of relevant organisations³ in country with a view to ensuring that it is accountable to the affected population, principled, timely, effective, efficient, and contributes to longer-term recovery. The overall objective is to alleviate human suffering and protect the lives, livelihoods and dignity of populations in need.⁴

The leadership and coordination role of the HC entails building consensus among relevant organisations involved in humanitarian action and actively facilitating cooperation among them, recognising that the ownership of coordination rests with all relevant organisations. This role must be carried out in full respect of the mandates and authority of relevant organisations.

The HC is guided by international humanitarian and human rights law, and by the humanitarian principles of humanity, neutrality, impartiality, and independence.

In discharging his/her responsibilities as outlined in these terms of reference (ToR), the HC will do so in full respect and compliance with the United Nations Values and Behaviours Framework. The Framework comprises four values: Inclusion, Integrity, Humility and Humanity. These values include five behaviours: Connect & Collaborate, Analyse and Plan, Deliver Results with Positive Impact, Learn and Develop, and Adapt and Innovate.⁵

The HC represents the Emergency Relief Coordinator (ERC) in country.

* Original version endorsed by the 73rd IASC Working Group meeting on 31 March 2009. With an updated ToR endorsed by the IASC Emergency Directors Group (EDG) in January 2024.

¹ Refer to UN General Assembly resolution 46/182 of 19 December 1991.

² This includes humanitarian assistance and protection activities in the response preparedness and response phases in either disasters or complex emergencies. With the exception of refugee situations, where UNHCR leads and coordinates the provision of international protection, humanitarian assistance, and durable solutions refugees.

³ These include UN Country Team members, as well as non-governmental organisations (NGOs), civil society organisations and components of the Red Cross/Red Crescent movement that commit to participate in coordination arrangements. In case of sudden-onset disasters, relevant organisations involved in humanitarian action may also include other international actors such as bilateral, military and private sector responders. Relations among organisations involved in humanitarian action are governed by the Principles of Partnership, endorsed by the Global Humanitarian Platform in July 2007.

⁴ As set out in General Assembly resolutions, UNHCR is mandated to lead the refugee response, including carrying out sectoral inter-agency coordination, contingency planning, response and resource mobilisation and finding durable solutions. In refugee contexts, UNHCR is mandated to lead the refugee response through the Refugee Coordination Model, including carrying out sectoral inter-agency coordination, contingency planning, response and resource mobilisation, and finding durable solutions. In contexts involving refugees and internally displaced persons (IDPs), the 2014 'Joint UNHCR-OCHA Note: Mixed situations – Coordination in Practice' details the division of responsibilities between UNHCR Representatives and Resident Coordinators and HCs.

⁵ Refer to the [UN Values and Behaviours Framework](#).

If the HC is not also the UN Resident Coordinator (RC), s/he works in close collaboration with the RC, with a view to ensuring that humanitarian action is linked to, and consistent with, recovery and development activities led by the RC, and that the division of labour with respect to response preparedness is clear.

If the HC is not also the UN Designated Official for Security (DO), s/he works in close collaboration with the DO within the United Nations Security Management Team, with a view to achieving the United Nations Security Management System's goal of enabling the safest and most efficient conduct of the programmes, activities, and operations of the United Nations system.

When part of an integrated UN presence, the HC ensures consistency between the common strategic framework, humanitarian plans⁶, where relevant, and promotes, as appropriate, harmonisation of the underlying analytical and planning processes.⁷

Response

The HC, whenever possible in support of and in coordination with national and local authorities:

- Ensures that response efforts are inclusive and coordinated, by regularly convening and leading the Humanitarian Country Team (HCT).⁸
- Ensures that a common strategic vision for humanitarian action in country is articulated, by leading and coordinating its development.
- Ensures that a common strategic plan for realising this vision (for example, Humanitarian Response Plan or equivalent) is articulated, based on evidence, analysis of protection risks and documented needs.
- Ensures the common strategic humanitarian plan addresses key accountabilities and integrates cross-cutting issues (for example, age, gender, disability, diversity, human rights, centrality of protection, Protection from Sexual Exploitation and Abuse (PSEA), and the environment) and, where appropriate, activities in support of the Humanitarian Development and Peace Nexus, by leading and coordinating its development.
- Develops and implements a collective PSEA country level action plan to mitigate and respond to risks of Sexual Exploitation and Abuse (SEA), in consultation with heads of UN agencies, funds, and programmes represented in the HCT.⁹
- Context allowing, ensures that there is an efficient, coherent and effective division of labour among relevant local and international organisations for implementing the strategic plan by securing an agreement on the establishment of the humanitarian coordination architecture, including the possible activation of the cluster system and the designation of cluster leads¹⁰; and leads a coordination architecture review to ensure that coordination structures remain appropriate and relevant to the changing context.

⁶ Response plans such as Humanitarian Response Plans, Refugee Response Plans and Flash Appeals.

⁷ See the Decision of the Secretary-General No. 2008/24 of 26 June 2008.

⁸ The HCT includes, in addition to UN Country Team members, NGOs and the components of the Red Cross/Red Crescent movement who commit to participate in coordination arrangements. See HCT ToR https://interagencystandingcommittee.org/system/files/hct_tors.pdf endorsed in 2017.

⁹ See IASC Plan for Accelerating PSEA in Humanitarian Response at country level from 2019 and IASC Principals Statement on PSEA from 2015.

¹⁰ See the IASC Guidance Note on Using the Cluster Approach to Strengthen Humanitarian Response from 2006.

- Ensures that in geographically mixed settings, where IDPs and refugees are both present, a mutual agreement is reached together with the UNHCR Representative on the coordination architecture in accordance with the 'Joint UNHCR-OCHA Note: Mixed situations – Coordination in Practice'.¹¹
- Expends all necessary efforts to ensure that the strategic plan is implemented in a principled, timely, effective, and efficient manner, by holding cluster leads accountable for the performance of the functions outlined in the IASC Guidance Note,⁶ and by establishing mechanisms for inter-cluster coordination, needs assessment, monitoring and evaluation and accountability.
- Expends all necessary efforts to secure better protection outcomes for crisis-affected populations and ensure that the strategic plan is funded sufficiently and in a timely manner, by promoting and locally leading inclusive resource mobilisation efforts (e.g., Humanitarian Response Plan, Flash Appeal), overseeing the Central Emergency Response Fund grant applications, and managing country-based pooled funds, where they exist.
- Expends all necessary efforts to obtain free, timely, safe and unimpeded access by humanitarian organisations to populations in need, where appropriate, by leading and/or promoting negotiations with relevant parties, including non-state actors.
- Promotes the respect of international humanitarian and human rights law by all parties, including non-state actors, by fostering collective accountability for protection, coordinating the advocacy efforts of relevant organisations and using private and/or public advocacy, as appropriate.
- Expends all necessary efforts to ensure that Member States, regional organisations, UN entities (including integrated UN presence), civil society, the private sector, the media and other relevant actors take humanitarian concerns into due account, by coordinating the advocacy efforts of relevant organisations and using private and/or public advocacy, as appropriate.
- Expends all necessary efforts to ensure that humanitarian action contributes to the early and long-term recovery of affected populations, by cooperating closely with actors responsible for planning and implementing recovery efforts, durable solutions for displaced populations, and development activities.

Response Preparedness

The HC, whenever possible in support of and in coordination with national and local authorities:

- Coordinates with national and local authorities/actors on their ability and willingness to work with international organisations.
- Ensures that the response preparedness efforts of relevant organisations are inclusive and coordinated, by regularly convening and leading the HCT.
- Leads efforts to ensure an appropriate level of inter-agency emergency response preparedness is in place and contingency plans are developed and updated, as required. This includes identifying coordination structures, risk analysis and monitoring, prioritisation of humanitarian interventions, capacity review, and addressing preparedness gaps.

¹¹ 2014 'Joint UNHCR-OCHA Note: Mixed situations – Coordination in Practice'.

- Advocates on response capacity gaps and requirements in the event of a humanitarian response. Ensures that HCT members do the same with their relevant agencies.
- Expend all necessary efforts to ensure that the preparedness efforts envisaged in the contingency plan are implemented, by holding cluster leads and agencies accountable for the performance of the functions outlined in the IASC Guidance Note.¹²

II. ACCOUNTABILITY

The HC is ultimately accountable to the populations in need. In line with the IASC statement on Accountability to Affected People (AAP), HCs will ensure AAP is central to principled humanitarian action and prioritise the implementation of AAP within the HCT, clusters (sectors) and individual agencies.¹³ With overall responsibility to coordinate country-level humanitarian action that aims to save lives, alleviate human suffering, and protect the lives, dignity, and livelihoods of populations in need, the HC ensures that protection outcomes are central to humanitarian action.¹⁴

The HC reports directly to the ERC. S/he should agree with the ERC at the beginning of each reporting year on a compact spelling out agreed objectives and planned outcomes, and what each can expect from the other.

If the HC also performs other roles, such as RC, DO, Deputy Special Representative of the Secretary-General, or country representative of a UN agency, s/he reports to the ERC for the performance of the functions outlined in this ToR, and to other senior UN officials for the performance of the other roles, as outlined in the respective ToRs.¹⁵

The performance of the HC is appraised annually by the ERC against the objectives set forth in the compact.

¹² See the Inter-Agency Contingency Planning Guidelines for Humanitarian Assistance, endorsed by the IASC Working Group in November 2007.

¹³ See IASC statement on Accountability to Affected People in Humanitarian Action endorsed by the IASC principles in April 2022.

¹⁴ IASC Policy on Protection in Humanitarian Action, October 2016; IASC Principals' Statement on the Centrality of Protection, 2013; UN Secretary-General, The Highest Aspiration: A Call to Action for Human Rights, 2020.

¹⁵ For the RC role, see the UN Resident Coordinator Generic Job Description, endorsed in September 2022; for the DO role, see UN Department of Safety and Security, Guidelines for Designated Officials, 7 March 2008, and Inter-Organizational Security Measures: Framework for Accountability for the United Nations Security Management System, endorsed by the UN General Assembly on 29 March 2007; for the DSRSG role, see the Note of Guidance on Integrated Missions issued by the UN Secretary-General on 17 January 2006; for the role of country representative of a UN agency, please refer to the concerned agency for the Terms of Reference.

III. SUPPORT

In discharging his/her responsibilities as outlined in this ToR, the HC is usually supported at country level by an OCHA Country Office or Humanitarian Advisory Team (HAT). The Head of the OCHA Country Office or HAT is the senior advisor to the HC and HCT/UNCT on humanitarian coordination issues.¹⁶

The entry point for OCHA headquarters support to the HC is the Director of the Operations and Advocacy Division. The Humanitarian Leadership Strengthening Section provides dedicated support to HCs in fulfilling their function.

¹⁶ See OCHA's Policy Instruction "The Relationship between Humanitarian Coordinators and Heads of OCHA Field Offices", October 2023.