

Leadership in Humanitarian Action:

HANDBOOK FOR HUMANITARIAN COORDINATORS





Front cover: OCHA/Muayad Khdear

Photo: A girl crosses an area of land affected by flooding. Large areas of the region have become inaccessible, further increasing displacement and impacting livelihoods. Somali Region, Ethiopia. 07 May 2023

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Preface by the Emergency Relief Coordinator

HOW TO USE THIS HANDBOOK 6

What is the purpose of this Handbook?	6
Who is the Handbook for?	6
How can the Handbook be used?	6
How is the Handbook organized?	6
Explanation of terms	6

Chapter A: Why Humanitarian Leadership Matters

INTRODUCTION TO UN LEADERSHIP IN HUMANITARIAN SETTINGS 8

Background	8
Primary Leadership Responsibilities of the Humanitarian Coordinator	9
Towards the 2030 Agenda	10

NORMATIVE FRAMEWORK FOR HUMANITARIAN ACTION AND LEADERSHIP 11

United Nations General Assembly Resolution 46/182	11
Humanitarian Principles	14
International Law	15
Core Humanitarian Standard and Sphere Standards	18

COORDINATING ACROSS THE HUMANITARIAN ARCHITECTURE 19

Global Humanitarian Leadership	19
Host Government and Regional Organizations	22
NGOs, CSOs, and the Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement	22
The Private Sector	24

HUMANITARIAN LEADERSHIP ARRANGEMENTS 26

Designated Leadership Arrangements	26
Accountability and Performance Management	26

COMPETENCIES FOR EFFECTIVE HUMANITARIAN LEADERSHIP 27

UN Leadership Model	28
Principles of Partnership	30

PUTTING PEOPLE FIRST 32

The Centrality of Protection	34
Advocating on Protection	36
Protection from Sexual Exploitation and Abuse	38

Accountability to Affected People	41
Community Engagement Coordination	42
Implementing Collective Accountability	43
Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women and Girls	47
Prioritizing the Prevention of GBV	48
Meeting the Diversity of Needs	48
The Impact of Climate Change	52

Chapter B: Coordinating Humanitarian Action at Country Level

ESTABLISHING HUMANITARIAN COORDINATION MECHANISMS 55

Setting up an Effective Country-Level Humanitarian Coordination Architecture	56
The Humanitarian Country Team	58
Clusters and Cluster Lead Agencies	59
Inter-cluster/Sector Coordination	62
NGO Coordination	63
Cash Coordination	64
Humanitarian, Development and Peace Collaboration (HDPC)	65
UN Integration	66
Refugee Response Coordination	67
Migrant Response Coordination	68

NEGOTIATING AND FACILITATING HUMANITARIAN ACCESS 70

What is Humanitarian Access?	70
Bureaucratic and Administrative Impediments	71
Humanitarian Civil-Military Coordination	71
Armed or Military Escorts for Humanitarian Convoys	72
Humanitarian Diplomacy	74
Negotiation Analysis and Strategy	75
Sanctions and Counter terrorism Measures	75

IMPLEMENTING THE HUMANITARIAN PROGRAMME CYCLE 77

Elements of the Humanitarian Programme Cycle	77
Coordinated Needs Assessments and Joint Analysis	78
Humanitarian Response Analysis and Planning	80
Monitoring	81

MANAGING THE EMERGENCY RESPONSE (TOOLS AND SERVICES) 82

Emergency Declarations 82
Emergency Surge Teams 83
INSARAG - International Search and Rescue Advisory Group 84
Single Expert Surge Capacity 85
Emergency Logistics and Airport Efficiency 86

ESTABLISHING SYSTEMS FOR INFORMATION MANAGEMENT 87

Information Management Working Group 87
Common Operational Data sets 87
Data Responsibility 88
IM Platforms and Services 88

MOBILIZING FINANCING AND PARTNERSHIPS 89

Resource Mobilization and Advocacy 91
Reporting Financial Support and Pipelines 92

COMMUNICATING EFFECTIVELY 93

Developing an External Communications Strategy 93
Working with the Media 95
Social Media Advocacy 96

WORKING TOWARDS SUSTAINABILITY 97

Localizing the Response 98
Developing Durable Solutions for Refugees and Internally Displaced Persons 99

Chapter C: Coordinating Preparedness and Disaster Risk Reduction

ENHANCING EMERGENCY PREPAREDNESS 104

Emergency Response Preparedness Approach . 104
Index for Risk Management (INFORM) 106
Anticipatory Action 106
Elements of Anticipatory Action 107
Partnerships in Anticipatory Action 108
Anticipatory Financing 108
Links with the ERP 109

INTEGRATING DISASTER RISK REDUCTION 109

Scaling up DRR in Humanitarian Action. 110

Chapter D: Responding to a Health Crisis in a Humanitarian Setting

Background 114
Leadership structures for responding to infectious diseases 114

List of Acronyms

ACRONYMS 116

Resources

GUIDANCE, REFERENCES AND SUPPORTING SERVICES 118

Preface by the Emergency Relief Coordinator

Humanitarian Coordinators are the lynchpins of the in-country humanitarian response.

You are the face of the humanitarian response, and essential interface with host Governments, affected communities, and humanitarian partners.

It is a role of great responsibility, and one that calls for many qualities: leadership, organizational acumen, determination, compassion and humanity. More than anything, it requires exceptional communication, networking and negotiating skills, and the ability to navigate diverse interests and intricate political landscapes, all while staunchly upholding the humanitarian principles.

But in an increasingly fragmented, challenging and complex world defined by perpetual conflict, climate change, inequality, rising needs and persistent underfunding, the HC role also requires innovation. It calls for boldness to explore novel approaches. It means developing closer relationships with the communities we serve, listening with humility, and empowering people to deliver the response they need. And it requires

reaching across mandates to collaborate with development, peace and other partners to achieve comprehensive results.

I know your role is far from easy. But it is one of unquestionable value that makes a genuine difference to the lives of millions of people. And it is one for which you were chosen because you exemplify the experience, skills and ability to discharge it with distinction. You have the humanitarian community's full trust and support as you do so.

This Handbook is your reference manual – one that puts everything you need at your fingertips as you navigate complex environments and put your expertise into action.

I hope it serves you as well as you serve the world.

Martin Griffiths

Emergency Relief Coordinator and Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs

HOW TO USE THIS HANDBOOK

What is the purpose of this Handbook?

The Handbook outlines the roles and responsibilities of the UN Resident Coordinator (RC), whether designated as a Humanitarian Coordinator (HC) or not, and those of the HC in leading and coordinating inter-agency humanitarian action in support of the host Government and local actors. It also summarizes the skills, competencies and qualities required to lead an effective humanitarian response.

The Handbook is a guide to the normative framework for humanitarian action and the operational approaches, coordination structures, and available tools and services that facilitate the mobilization of humanitarian assistance.

It is not a prescriptive guide. The approaches to humanitarian action (and levels of priority) will differ according to the context and the type of emergency.

Who is the Handbook for?

The Handbook is designed to directly support the work of senior humanitarian leadership in carrying out their leadership functions. It is also a reference for the wider humanitarian community working with or supporting the leadership in country operations.

How can the Handbook be used?

It can be used as a reference to support decision-making in a range of humanitarian crises; help identify the international humanitarian technical expertise available before and at the onset of an emergency; facilitate partnerships among humanitarian organizations, national Governments and local actors; and plan and better prepare for humanitarian response. The Handbook is also a useful reference for all elements of humanitarian coordination and leadership roles, with easy access to guidance and references for further reading.

How is the Handbook organized?

There are four substantive chapters:

- **Chapter A** examines the normative aspects of humanitarian action: UN General Assembly (GA) resolutions, humanitarian principles, international law, leadership arrangements and mandatory responsibilities.
- **Chapter B** focuses on operational aspects: country-level coordination mechanisms, the humanitarian programme cycle and specific areas of work.
- **Chapter C** details approaches to strengthening national readiness and addressing the underlying drivers of risk.
- **Chapter D** highlights response to a health crisis in a humanitarian setting, including leadership structures.

The Handbook also contains a supplementary booklet: a quick reference guide for the RC and/or HC on her/his humanitarian coordination role, whether designated or not, in an escalating or sudden-onset emergency, outlining the actions to take and events to anticipate. Each section contains details of additional information and, where relevant, supporting services and tools. The annex provides a more comprehensive list of resources (organized thematically), with website links to help the user find further information.

Explanation of terms

The terms 'Humanitarian Coordinator' and 'leadership' are used throughout the Handbook to refer to the RC's role when called on to carry out humanitarian functions, as per relevant UN GA resolutions, including 46/182, whether or not designated as a HC. Any significant distinctions between these roles are highlighted where necessary.



Domayo, Far North Cameroon, 2023.
Photo: OCHA/Liz Loh Taylor

Why Humanitarian Leadership Matters

INTRODUCTION TO UN LEADERSHIP IN HUMANITARIAN SETTINGS

Background

Humanitarian needs are growing at an unprecedented level due to the impact of climate change, emerging or protracted conflicts and the spread of infectious diseases. This is compounded by an ever-growing number of challenges to deliver aid and protection services, which makes the role of humanitarian organizations and particularly that of HCs even more critical.

HCs are ultimately accountable to the people affected by crises. In doing so, they are responsible for ensuring that organizations work together to prepare for emergencies and to support the host Government in responding to crises or emerging humanitarian situations.

Mandate for humanitarian leadership

UN GA resolution 46/182 sets out the basis of the UN Secretary-General's leadership role in ensuring "preparation for, as well as rapid and coherent response to, natural disasters and other emergencies." To this end, the GA resolution established the position of the Emergency Relief Coordinator (ERC) to work closely with the UN Secretary-General, in cooperation with the relevant organizations and entities dealing with humanitarian assistance. The Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) was established in 1991 initially as the Department for

Humanitarian Affairs as part of the UN Secretariat to support the ERC in this role.

Recognizing the positive role of sustainable development in mitigating drivers of conflicts, disaster risks, humanitarian crises and complex emergencies, the GA also reiterated in resolution 71/243 that a comprehensive whole-of-system response, including greater cooperation and complementarity among development, disaster risk reduction, humanitarian action and sustaining peace, is fundamental to efficiently and effectively addressing needs and attaining the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

As representative of the UN Secretary-General, the RC, whether or not designated as a HC, plays a critical role at the country level, facilitating inter-agency preparedness efforts, coordinating humanitarian response,¹ and promoting links between humanitarian and development planning and programming. The ERC and OCHA support them in carrying out their humanitarian role.

GA resolution 46/182 says: "In contexts where international humanitarian assistance is required, and a separate Humanitarian Coordinator is not designated and when there is no lead agency, [the Resident Coordinator] leads and coordinates the response efforts of United Nations and relevant humanitarian

¹ In refugee situations, UNHCR is mandated to lead the refugee response.

actors, in accordance with General Assembly resolution 46/182 and related resolutions, facilitating linkages between humanitarian and development programming for enhanced and sustainable impact.”

Where required, the ERC may choose to designate a HC to represent her/him. As outlined in the [HC Terms of Reference](#):

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

Primary Leadership Responsibilities of the Humanitarian Coordinator

The [RC Job Description](#) adopted on 1 January 2019 includes detailed humanitarian responsibilities of the RC, whether or not designated as a HC, as leader of the UN Country Team (UNCT) and/or the Humanitarian Country Team (HCT), with system-wide accountability on the ground.

Coordination

Humanitarian leadership entails improving strategic coordination among relevant organizations involved in humanitarian action and actively facilitating cooperation among them, recognizing that coordination is a collective endeavour. This role must be carried out with full accountability to the affected people, in respect of the mandates and authority of all relevant organizations and, importantly, of the host Government. A humanitarian leader supports the State to help

ensure that humanitarian actors responding to a crisis work together to achieve shared strategic objectives and deliver assistance in a principled, effective and complementary manner. The various categories of humanitarian actors include crisis-affected people themselves; civil-society organizations (CSOs), such as community-based and voluntary organizations, faith-based organizations, and local/national and international NGOs; the national and foreign private sector; national and foreign militaries; the Red Cross/Red Crescent Movement (International Federation of the Red Cross, International Committee of the Red Cross, National Societies); UN entities; humanitarian and development donors; in-country diplomatic corps; international and regional organizations (including financial institutions); and intergovernmental forums.

Especially in conflict situations in which the State is a party to the conflict, humanitarian action may – in line with the principles of neutrality and independence – need to be carried out with limited or no Government involvement. This helps build trust and acceptance among the parties, communities and beneficiaries, which are critical for enabling humanitarian access.

Protection

The work of a humanitarian leader is guided by and has a key role in promoting respect for international humanitarian law (IHL), international human rights law (IHRL), international refugee law (IRL), and the humanitarian principles of humanity, neutrality, impartiality and independence. Humanitarian action is premised on the fact that along with having their basic needs met, affected people often also need protection from violence, abuse, coercion and deprivation. Protection is enshrined in the principle of humanity and is a prime objective of humanitarian action. The Inter-Agency Standing Committee (IASC) Principals define protection as the protection of the rights of individuals under IHL, IHRL and IRL, and it underpins all aspects of humanitarian prepared-

ness and response. The HC's role is critical for ensuring that the common goal of securing better protection outcomes for crisis-affected people remains central to humanitarian decision-making and response strategies.

Duty of Care

As well as delivering on programmatic mandates, it is important to ensure that humanitarian actors remain physically and psychologically safe. A humanitarian leader needs to establish an appropriate balance between carrying out essential work in high-risk environments, while at the same time preserving the safety and security of personnel. The UN's High-Level Committee on Management defines Duty of Care as

"a non-waivable duty on the part of the Organization to mitigate or otherwise address foreseeable risks that may harm or injure its personnel and their eligible family members."

The HC plays an important role in ensuring a coherent approach at the country level regarding Duty of Care for UN and humanitarian personnel. Duty of Care risks primarily comprise occupational security risks (e.g. due to an armed conflict), health risks, including risks to mental health (e.g. due to exposure to contagious diseases, prolonged exposure to high-stress situations, instances of violence, harassment or discrimination) and safety risks (e.g. working in substandard facilities).

Towards the 2030 Agenda

The 2030 Agenda and the SDGs, adopted in 2015, set out a new ambition: to not just meet people's needs, but to reduce risk, vulnerability and overall levels of need. They provide a common framework for humanitarian and development

actors based on a vision of a future in which no one is left behind.

Against this backdrop, the UN Secretary-General, eight UN Principals, the World Bank and the International Organization for Migration (IOM) endorsed a Commitment to Action during the 2016 World Humanitarian Summit. In it, they agreed to seek to meet people's immediate humanitarian needs while at the same time reducing risk and vulnerability. This entails working towards collective outcomes, across silos and over multiple years, based on the comparative advantage of a diverse range of actors inside and outside the UN system. As many protracted crises are caused and sustained by conflict and violence, it is important to also include peace actors where possible.

Much progress has been made in recent years in terms of policy and guidance to ensure connectivity between humanitarian, development and other frameworks – notably the revised UN Sustainable Development Cooperation Framework.

> See p.110 for details on this.

In acute conflict situations, the scope for collaboration might be limited by the need to abide by the principles of neutrality, independence and impartiality to safeguard access to people in need. Whatever the context, collaboration must take place in a manner that neither undermines adherence to humanitarian principles nor exposes affected populations or humanitarian workers to greater risks. Humanitarian, development and peace actors should develop the right level of collaboration for the context.

NORMATIVE FRAMEWORK FOR HUMANITARIAN ACTION AND LEADERSHIP

The normative framework comprises UN resolutions and policies, international laws and treaties (including humanitarian law), and accepted principles and standards. It sets out the structure and role of humanitarian leadership, and it guides in-country interactions during crises, providing support and a mandate for a principled humanitarian response.

United Nations General Assembly Resolution 46/182

UN GA resolution 46/182 sets out the framework for the coordination and delivery of UN-led international humanitarian assistance under the leadership of the UN Secretary-General. This resolution continues to guide the work of the humanitarian system today. It established the ERC position; the UN Department of Humanitarian Affairs, which in 1998 became OCHA; the IASC; the Central Emergency Revolving Fund, which in 2005 became the Central Emergency Response Fund (CERF); and the Consolidated Appeals Process, which in 2013 was replaced by the Humanitarian Programme Cycle (HPC).

> See p.19 for more details on the Humanitarian Architecture.

These mechanisms have all been subsequently refined and expanded, and they continue to form key cornerstones of the current humanitarian system.

Resolution 46/182 also set out the guiding principles for humanitarian assistance, including that humanitarian action must be provided in accordance with humanitarian principles.

> See p.14 for details on Humanitarian Principles.

These guiding principles address the relationship and interaction between State sovereignty and principled humanitarian action, including the primary responsibility of each State to assist and protect people affected by humanitarian emergencies on its territory and, when called upon, to facilitate humanitarian organizations in providing humanitarian assistance for which access to affected people is essential.

Since the adoption of resolution 46/182, subsequent humanitarian resolutions of the GA, the

Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC) and the Security Council have continued strengthening the international normative framework, providing guidance and mandates on humanitarian action and coordination for addressing challenges that have emerged from increasing humanitarian needs and the changing operating environment. These themes include humanitarian access, the protection of civilians, internal displacement, accountability to affected people, humanitarian civil-military coordination, and the safety and security of humanitarian personnel.

Regarding refugees and migrants, the Compact on Refugees, and the Compact for Safe, Orderly and Regular Migration, which the GA adopted in 2018, set out the international framework for international support for managing refugee movements and large-scale migration flows.

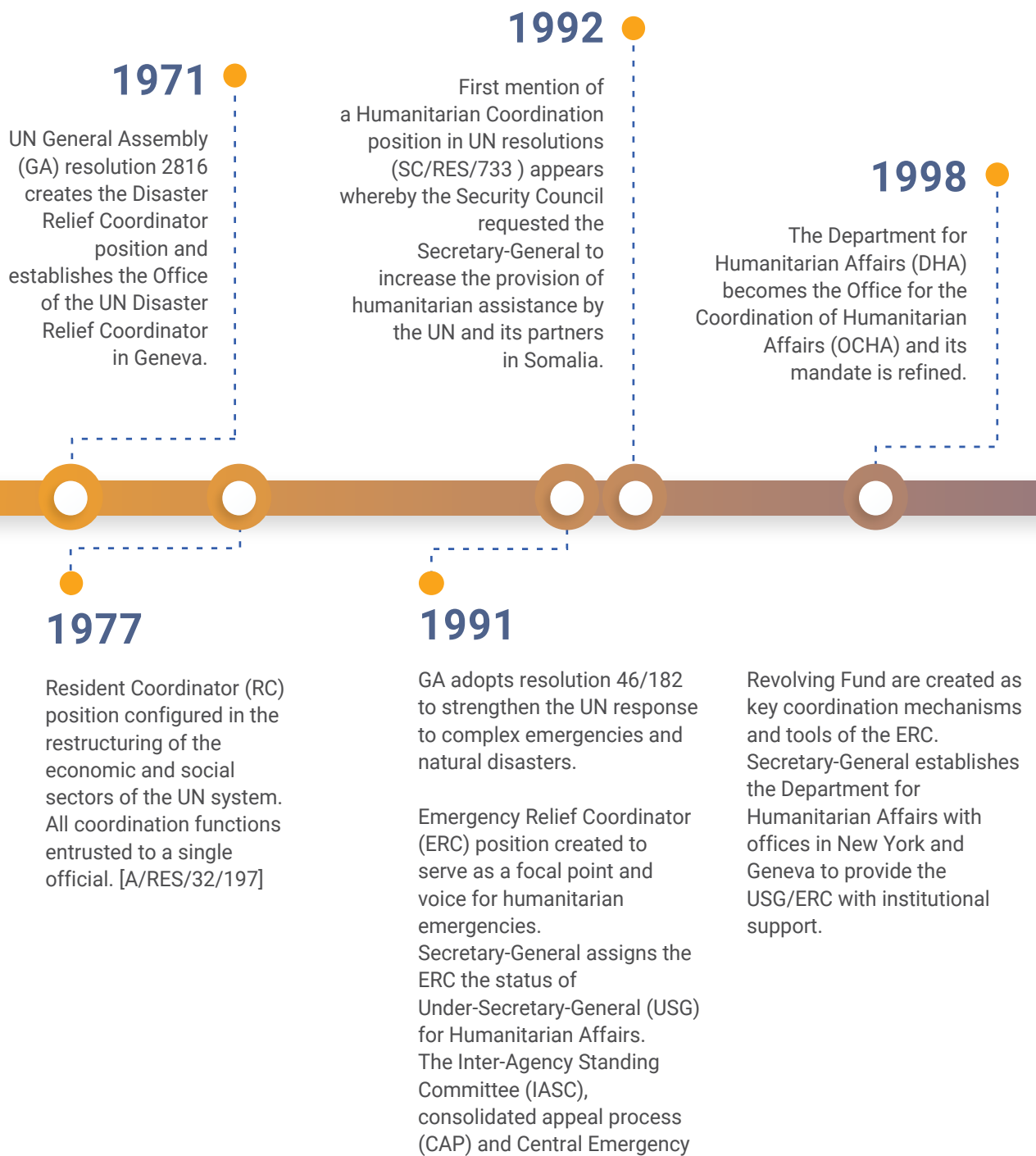
> See p.67 and p.68 for details on this.

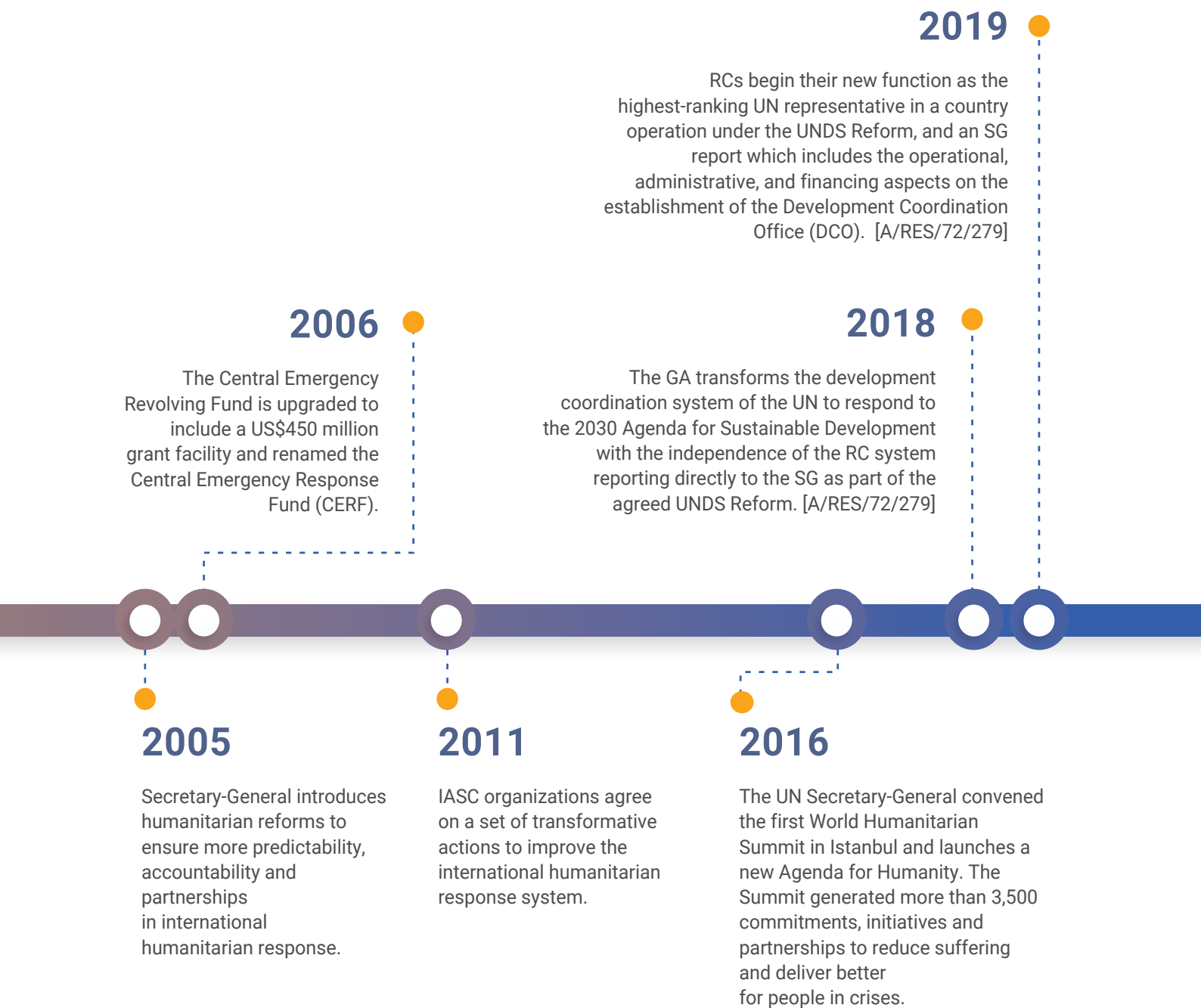
All decisions taken in the GA and ECOSOC are equally binding on both the UN Secretariat and the UN funds and programmes that are accountable to these principal organs. These resolutions are not legally binding on Member States, but it has been common practice for them to adopt resolutions on humanitarian issues by consensus, giving them more prominence and weight.

HCs can refer to the humanitarian resolutions and key policy decisions of the GA and ECOSOC for in-country interactions to help Governments, humanitarian organizations and other relevant parties strengthen their understanding of and support for a more principled, accountable and effective humanitarian response. In some operating contexts, humanitarian resolutions are essential in providing the normative basis, political support and legislative mandate for certain humanitarian activities, and in legitimizing and facilitating the roles and responsibilities of the HC and international humanitarian organizations. The leadership should engage with OCHA's in-country representatives or its regional offices for further support on normative frameworks in relation to carrying out their humanitarian mandate.

A Brief History

Key Milestones in strengthening the coordination of UN-led humanitarian assistance





Humanitarian Principles

As established in resolution 46/182 and reaffirmed in subsequent resolutions, humanitarian action must be provided in accordance with the humanitarian principles of humanity, neutrality, impartiality and independence (the latter added in GA resolution 58/114 in 2003), which are central to establishing and maintaining access to affected people.

To reinforce the principle of independence within the UN system, HCs can rely on Article 100, Chapter XV of the UN Charter² to remind UN personnel that they “shall not seek or receive instructions

from any government or from any other authority external to the Organization” and that Member States should not “seek to influence them in the discharge of their responsibilities.”

In addition, IHL entitles impartial humanitarian organizations to offer their services to the parties to an armed conflict for the benefit of people who are not fighting. (Such offers are not considered interference in domestic affairs and do not affect the legal status of armed groups.) Once consent to humanitarian services is obtained from the territorial State, IHL also requires that all parties to the conflict allow and facilitate the rapid and

² www.un.org/en/sections/un-charter/chapter-xv/index.html



Humanity

Human suffering must be alleviated wherever it occurs. The goal of humanitarian action is to protect life and health while ensuring respect for human beings.



Impartiality

Humanitarian action must be carried out on the basis of needs alone, making no distinctions on the basis of nationality, race, gender, religious belief, class or political opinions.



Neutrality

Humanitarian actors must not take sides in hostilities or engage in controversies of a political, racial, religious or ideological nature.



Independence

Humanitarian action must be autonomous from the political, economic, military or other objectives that any actor may hold that compromises the ability to act in accordance with the core principles.

unimpeded passage of humanitarian relief for civilians in need, which is impartial in character and conducted without adverse distinction.³

International Law

Three main bodies of international law guide humanitarian action: IHRL, IHL and IRL, as reflected in treaty and customary law. These are complemented by regional treaties, such as the African Union Convention for the Protection and Assistance of Internally Displaced Persons in Africa (Kampala Convention). Other documents, such as the Guiding Principles on Internal Displacement (1998), provide useful restatement and summary of the various legal obligations and have been incorporated into the domestic legislation of some States.

When referring to international law, it is important to note that not all States are party to the relevant treaties of IHRL, IHL and IRL.⁴ However, some fundamental rules are considered customary and are thus binding independently of treaty participation.

International human rights law

IHRL applies in times of peace and in situations of violence, including armed conflict, as human rights are fundamental to every human being. IHRL lays down obligations that States are bound to respect. A State may restrict or suspend a limited set of rights during a serious public emergency (referred to as 'derogation'), but certain human rights – such as the prohibition of torture and fair trial rights – are non-derogable, meaning they cannot be limited or suspended in any way, at any time, for any reason, even during an armed conflict. In addition, de facto authorities or non-State armed groups that exercise Government-like functions and control over territory are increasingly expected to respect international human rights norms and standards when their

conduct affects the human rights of individuals under their control.⁵

At the core of IHRL is the International Bill of Human Rights, which consists of three elements: the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR) with its two Optional Protocols, and the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ICESCR) with its Optional Protocol. Under the ICESCR, each State party to the Covenant recognizes the right to an adequate standard of living, including adequate food, clothing and housing, and has committed to take steps to ensure minimum essential levels of these rights to the maximum of its available resources, including those available from the international community through international cooperation and assistance. This includes ensuring that populations are not deprived of essential foodstuffs, essential primary health care, or basic shelter and housing. The right to life and the prohibition of inhuman treatment under the ICCPR have also been interpreted as including a requirement to accept offers of external humanitarian assistance. In resolutions 43/131 (1988) and 45/100 (1990), the GA affirmed that "the abandonment of the victims of natural disasters and similar emergency situations without humanitarian assistance constitutes a threat to human life and an offence to human dignity." The Convention against Torture, the Convention on the Rights of the Child and its Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on the involvement of children in armed conflict are also widely ratified and can be particularly relevant in humanitarian crises.

International humanitarian law

IHL aims to limit the effects of armed conflict by protecting people who are not or no longer fighting (civilians, wounded and sick fighters,

³ https://ihl-databases.icrc.org/customary-ihl/eng/docs/v1_rul_rule55

⁴ The following indicate who is party to what: for IHRL see <https://indicators.ohchr.org/>; for IHL see <https://ihl-databases.icrc.org/applic/ihl/ihl.nsf/vwTreatiesByCountry.xsp>; for the Refugee Convention and Protocol see www.unhcr.org/en-us/protection/basic/3b73b0d63/states-parties-1951-convention-its-1967-protocol.html

⁵ For more substantive guidance see: UNSDG Guidance Note on Human Rights for Resident Coordinators and UN Country Teams (<https://unsdg.un.org/resources/unsdg-guidance-note-human-rights-resident-coordinators-and-un-country-teams>)

prisoners of war).⁶ IHL strikes a balance between the competing considerations of humanity and military necessity.

When carrying out humanitarian operations in situations of violence, it is important to determine whether the violence amounts to an armed conflict in order to know whether IHL applies. An international armed conflict exists when two or more States resort to armed force against each other, even if one of the parties denies the existence of a state of war. A non-international armed conflict exists when one or more non-State armed groups are fighting, either between themselves or against State armed forces, and the following two cumulative criteria are met:

1. the non-State armed group must possess organized armed forces that are under a certain command structure and have the capacity to sustain military operations, and
2. the hostilities must meet a minimum threshold of intensity.

In a non-international armed conflict, IHL binds both the State and non-State parties to the conflict. Determining the existence of an armed conflict requires a thorough assessment of the facts on the ground and some legal expertise. Moreover, the decision to communicate publicly about the existence of an armed conflict and its implications under IHL may entail political considerations and some coordination with other parts of the UN.

The principal rules of IHL are found in the four Geneva Conventions of 1949 (applicable in international armed conflict except for common article 3), Additional Protocol I of 1977 (applicable in international armed conflict) and Additional Protocol II of 1977 (applicable in non-international armed conflict). As stated above, it is important to note that not all States are party to all treaties.

Many of the fundamental rules in these treaties (e.g. on humane treatment, fair trial rights, offers of humanitarian services, the protection of civilians in the conduct of hostilities) are considered part of customary international law⁷ and applicable in both types of armed conflict. However, some differences remain between the rules applicable in international and non-international armed conflict.

IHL contains specific rules that govern the parties' conduct of hostilities with a view to sparing civilians and civilian objects, such as the rules of distinction, proportionality, and precautions in and against the effects of attack. Medical personnel, transport and facilities are afforded special protection requiring certain precautions before they might be lawfully harmed in an attack. IHL allows offers of impartial humanitarian services for people who are not or no longer fighting, and it regulates the passage of humanitarian relief. It also requires the freedom of movement of humanitarian personnel, and the protection of humanitarian personnel and assets against attack, harassment, misappropriation, looting and other forms of interference.⁸

⁶ For an overview, see: www.icrc.org/en/doc/assets/files/other/what_is_ihl.pdf

⁷ All States are party to the four Geneva Conventions. Customary international law consists of rules that come from "a general practice accepted as law" and exists independent of treaty law. For more details see: <https://www.icrc.org/en/war-and-law/treaties-customary-law>

⁸ See OCHA fact sheet: www.unocha.org/sites/unocha/files/Fact-Sheet_Humanitarian_Relief_Operations%20-%20January%202019.pdf and Oxford Guidance on the Law relating to Humanitarian Relief Operations in Situations of Armed Conflict: www.unocha.org/sites/unocha/files/dms/Documents/Oxford%20Guidance%20pdf.pdf

INTERNAL DISPLACEMENT

The Guiding Principles on Internal Displacement (1998) set out various legal protections derived from IHRL and IHL to provide a framework for the protection of and assistance to internally displaced persons (IDPs) who have had to flee, particularly as a result of or in order to avoid the effects of armed conflict, situations of generalized violence, violations of human rights, or natural or human-made disasters, and who have not crossed an internationally recognized State border.⁹

In addition to their fundamental human rights, in situations of armed conflict civilians enjoy safeguards that are specifically related to internal displacement.

These include the right to seek safety in another part of the country; freedom of movement, including the right to move freely in and out of camps or settlements; the right to leave their country and to seek asylum in another country; the right to satisfactory conditions of shelter, hygiene, health, safety and nutrition; and respect for property rights relating to possessions left behind.

- > For further guidance see: Handbook for the Protection of Internally Displaced Persons and the OCHA fact sheet on internal displacement in situations of armed conflict.

International refugee law

IRL protects refugees and asylum-seekers who are no longer protected by their own country, are outside their country of origin, and are at risk of or victims of persecution and other forms of serious

harm in their country of origin. IRL provides specific rights and standards of treatment for their stay in the country of asylum. The specific legal regime protecting refugees' rights is referred to as 'international refugee protection'. The rationale behind the need for this regime lies in the fact that asylum-seekers and refugees lack the protection of their country and are therefore in a unique predicament, which calls for additional safeguards. The 1951 Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees and its 1967 Protocol¹⁰ provide a universal code for the treatment of refugees and include core principles of protection, such as non-discrimination and non-refoulement.¹¹

Complementing the above-mentioned bodies of international law, the Conventions Relating to the Status of Stateless Persons (1954) and on the Reduction of Statelessness (1961) are the key international conventions addressing statelessness.¹² The 1954 Convention provides the legal definition of a stateless person as someone who is "not recognized as a national by any state under the operation of its law." It establishes minimum standards of treatment for stateless people, such as rights to education, employment and housing, and it guarantees them a right to identity, travel documents and administrative assistance.

The 1961 Convention aims to prevent statelessness and reduce it over time, for instance by establishing that children are to acquire the nationality of the country in which they are born if they do not acquire any other nationality, and setting out safeguards to prevent statelessness due to the loss or renunciation of nationality and State succession.

⁹ While the Guiding Principles are not legally binding, they have gained significant authority and are recognized by the GA as an important framework for the protection of IDPs. Many States have incorporated them into domestic law.

¹⁰ The 1951 Convention and its Protocol place a treaty obligation on States that have signed the Convention to cooperate with UNHCR regarding the key cornerstones of refugee protection.

¹¹ Non-refoulement is a fundamental principle of international law that forbids a country receiving asylum-seekers from returning them to a country in which they would likely be in danger of persecution.

¹² For further information see: www.unhcr.org/en-us/un-conventions-on-statelessness.html

Core Humanitarian Standard and Sphere Standards

The Core Humanitarian Standard on Quality and Accountability (CHS) sets out nine commitments that organizations and individuals involved in humanitarian response implement to improve the quality and effectiveness of the assistance they provide. It outlines the policies, processes, procedures and practices that an organization needs in order to deliver quality assistance, while at the same time being accountable to communities and crisis-affected people.

The Sphere Movement was started in 1997 by a group of humanitarian professionals aiming to improve the quality of humanitarian work during disaster response. With this goal in mind, they framed a Humanitarian Charter and identified a

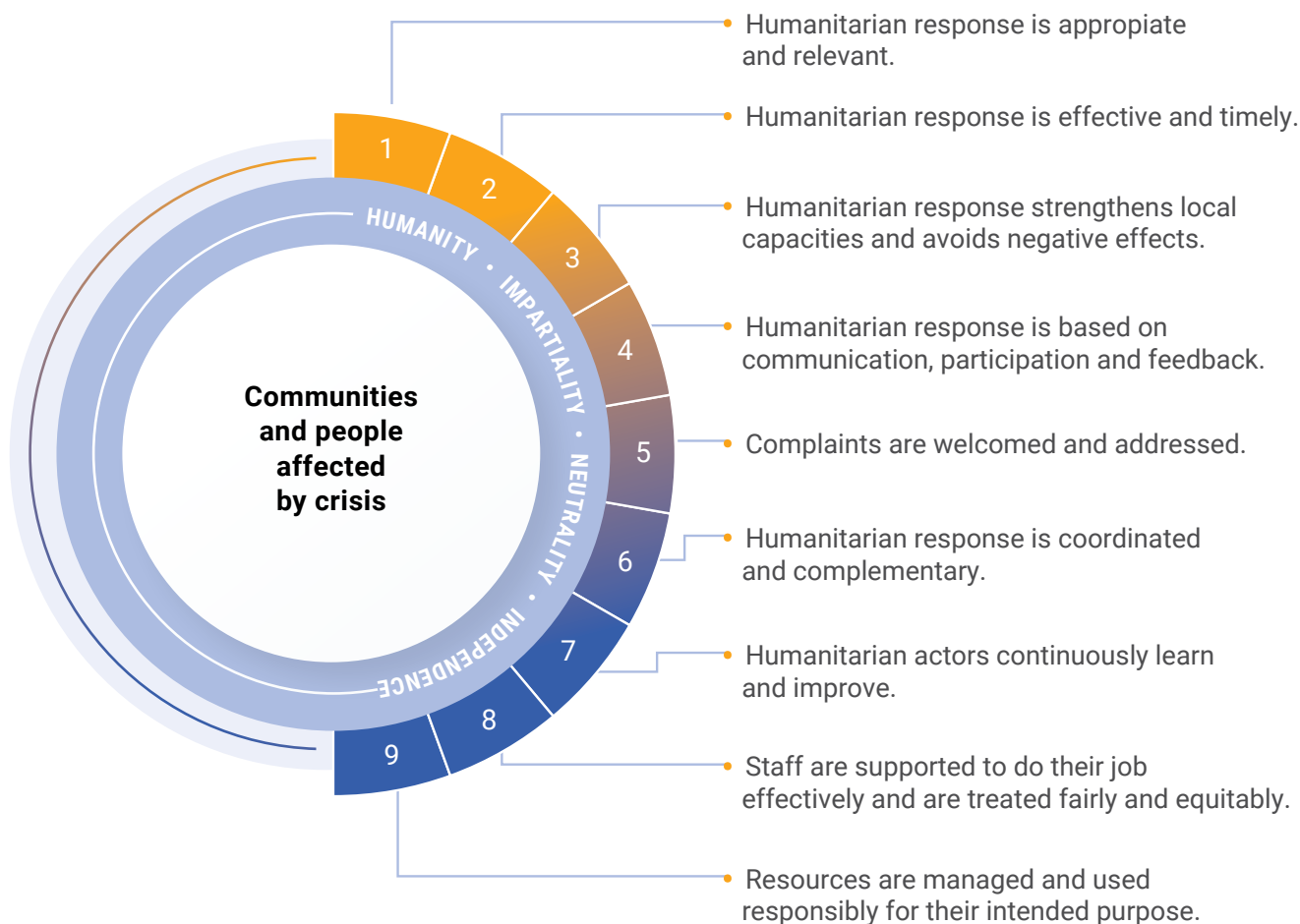
set of humanitarian standards to be applied in humanitarian response.

The Sphere standards have become a primary reference tool for national and international NGOs, volunteers, UN agencies, Governments, donors, the private sector and many others. Today, Sphere is a worldwide community that brings together and empowers practitioners to improve the quality and accountability of humanitarian assistance. Sphere’s flagship publication, the Sphere Handbook, is one of the most widely known and internationally recognized sets of common principles and universal minimum standards in humanitarian response.

More information:

- Sphere project: www.sphereproject.org
- Core Humanitarian Standard: www.corehumanitarianstandard.org

Core Humanitarian Standards



COORDINATING ACROSS THE HUMANITARIAN ARCHITECTURE

The humanitarian architecture comprises a wide variety of organizations working at (and across) different levels: international, national and sub-national. The HC plays an important role within this framework by bringing together and facilitating cooperation among the various stakeholders, including the affected population, national Governments, NGOs, UN entities and other actors.

Global Humanitarian Leadership

To strengthen collective international efforts to provide humanitarian assistance, Member States came together in 1991 and established the IASC and the position of the ERC, as Chair of the IASC. Through GA resolution 46/182, the IASC became the global inter-agency forum for coordination, policy development and decision-making for key UN and non-UN humanitarian partners, including the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement, national and international NGOs, NGO consortiums and the World Bank.

The ERC is supported by OCHA and also serves as the Under-Secretary-General (USG) for Humanitarian Affairs (i.e. the head of OCHA). The ERC is appointed by the UN Secretary-General to serve as her/his principal adviser on humanitarian issues, and to lead, coordinate and facilitate humanitarian responses to all emergencies requiring humanitarian assistance. S/he also acts as the central focal point with Governments and intergovernmental and non-governmental organizations for humanitarian assistance, chairs the IASC, and maintains close contact with and provides support to HCs.

OCHA is part of the UN Secretariat. OCHA supports the ERC at the global level and HCs at the field level by working with them to coordinate timely, principled and effective humanitarian action. OCHA's support role includes, but is not limited to, helping HCs advocate for the rights of people in need, developing humanitarian policy and analysis, managing humanitarian information systems, and administering humanitarian financing mecha-

nisms such as the Country-Based Pooled Funds (CBPFs) and CERF. OCHA typically supports HCs through a country office and, in the case of RCs with no humanitarian designation, through its regional offices and in some cases through a Humanitarian Advisory Team (HAT) in country.

In refugee contexts, UNHCR is mandated to lead the refugee response, including carrying out sectoral inter-agency coordination, contingency planning, response and resource mobilization, and finding durable solutions. In contexts involving refugees and IDPs, the Joint UNHCR-OCHA Note on Mixed Situations – Coordination in Practice details the division of responsibilities between UNHCR Representatives and RCs and HCs.

> See p.67 for details.

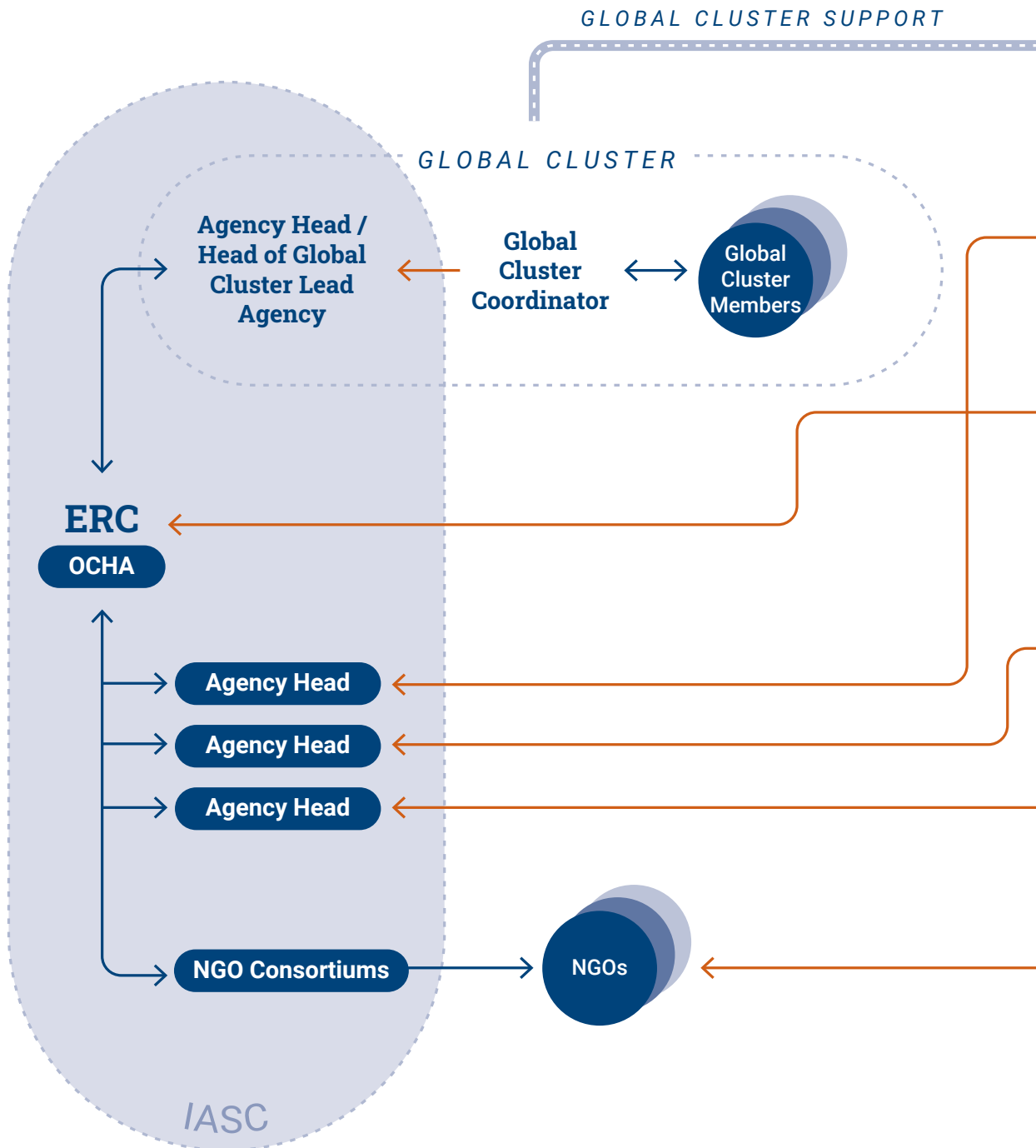
IASC subsidiary bodies

The IASC is supported by subsidiary bodies – groups of decision makers and experts who inform and carry out the priorities set by the IASC. These groups include the Deputies Group, which drives progress on key strategic issues tasked by the IASC Principals, and serves as a critical platform for strategic dialogue and decisions on issues and processes that require senior leadership; the IASC Operational Policy and Advocacy Group, which drives the IASC's strategic work; the Emergency Directors Group (EDG), which advises the IASC on operational issues of strategic concern, and mobilizes agency and global cluster resources to address strategic and operational challenges and gaps in support of HCs; and the IASC Task Forces, which drive collective action and provide response-wide guidance, tools and technical support for specific areas of humanitarian response as tasked, which may be of particular relevance to HCs.

For more information on the IASC's working methods and structures see: https://interagency-standingcommittee.org/system/files/iasc_structure-and-work-ing-method_2019-2020_web.pdf

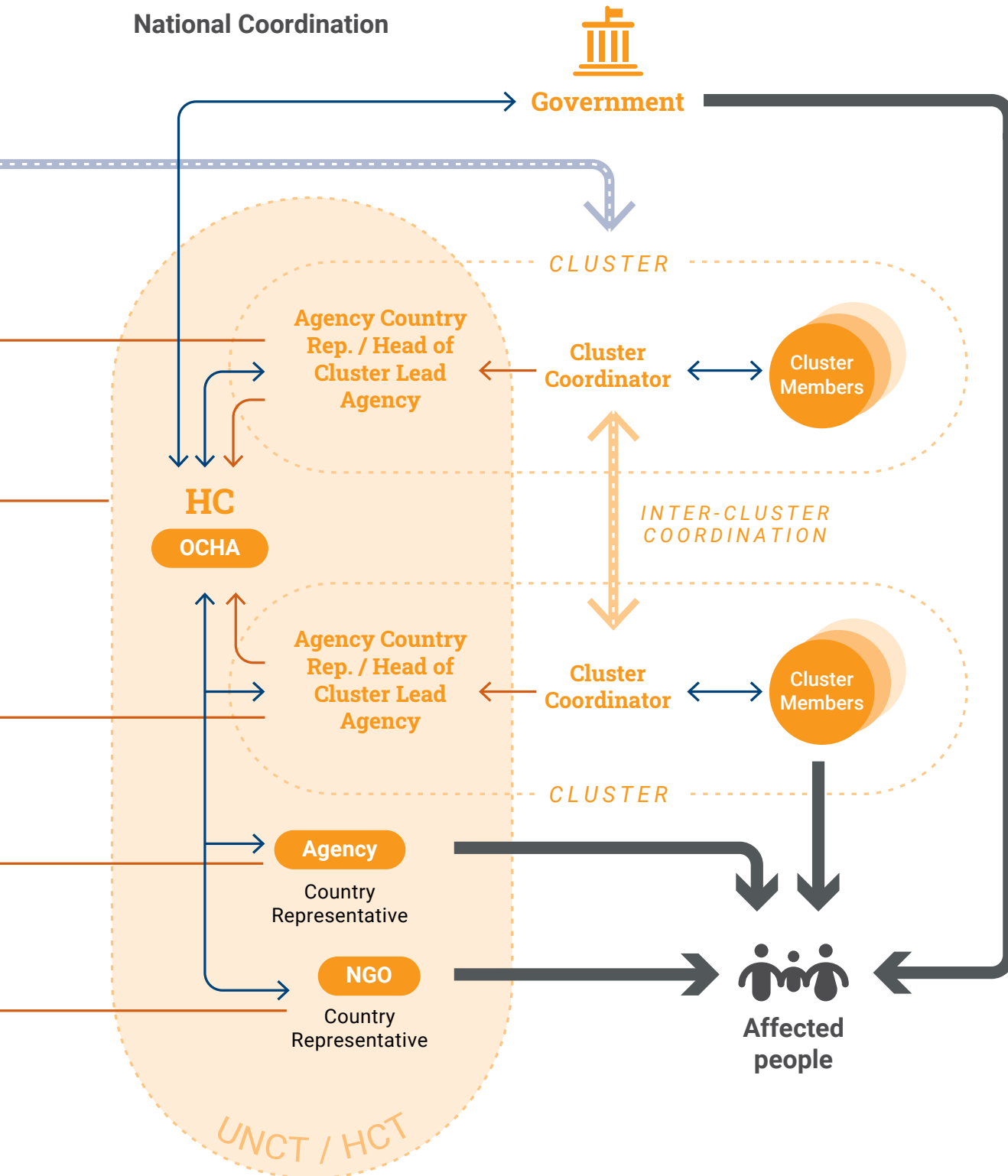
IASC Humanitarian Leadership Structure

Global Coordination





National Coordination



Host Government and Regional Organizations

Host Government

At the country level, the State has the primary responsibility to assist and protect all people affected by an emergency within its territory, including by initiating, organizing, coordinating and implementing the humanitarian response. If the affected State is unable or unwilling to fulfil its international obligations, the RC, whether or not designated as a HC, and the HC should strive to ensure that people in need receive the required assistance and protection, while respecting the State's sovereignty. S/he should do so by advocating with the State to fulfil its obligations and by offering international assistance as appropriate.

When international humanitarian assistance is required, it should be provided with the affected country's consent – in principle, based on an appeal by the affected country. The HC leads and coordinates the international response at the country level, ensuring that it adheres to humanitarian principles, and that international responders respect and support the State's central role. States whose populations need humanitarian assistance are called on to facilitate the work of humanitarian organizations in implementing humanitarian assistance. Where relevant, the HC also advocates with the State for access (commonly referred to as 'humanitarian space') so that humanitarian actors can reach affected people to ensure those in need receive the required assistance and protection.

In situations of armed conflict, the State and parties to armed conflict are required to allow and facilitate the safe, timely and unhindered access of impartial humanitarian organizations to deliver humanitarian assistance and protection to people in need. Where parties to armed conflict other than the State (e.g. non-State armed groups) are in de facto control of territory, they bear the primary obligation to meet the basic needs of the population under their control. Given her/his

ultimate accountability to the affected population, the HC should advocate with these parties regarding respect for IHRL and IHL and remind them of their obligations towards affected populations (including refugees, migrants, IDPs and host communities).

Regional organizations and intergovernmental forums

Regional organizations (such as the African Union, the Association of Southeast Asian Nations, the Commonwealth of Independent States, and the Community of Latin American and Caribbean States, among many others) are increasingly engaging in humanitarian action, mobilizing their membership to support Member States affected by humanitarian crises. In 2015, the UN GA called for strengthening cooperation between the UN and regional and subregional organizations to benefit from their respective comparative advantages.

Many intergovernmental organizations are active in both emergency preparedness and response, helping Member States to improve the effectiveness of humanitarian action through strategic partnerships and joint planning, sharing good practice and fostering common understanding. Cooperation between the UN and these regional organizations has strengthened support among neighbouring countries and promoted subregional collaboration – especially in response preparedness – through coordination, training, dissemination of information, standardization of tools and discussion of common themes. Some regional mechanisms also include mutual aid tools and coordination forums.

NGOs, CSOs, and the Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement

NGOs

In many humanitarian contexts, NGOs deliver the bulk of international humanitarian assistance. They are often well established through strong partnerships with local organizations and

communities, including in locations where the UN and international organizations have limited or no presence. As such, NGOs are central to humanitarian preparedness and response, and valuable allies to the leadership in ensuring humanitarian action is coordinated and effective in reaching people most in need. NGOs must be treated as equal partners with UN agencies or international organizations and be involved in all aspects of the response, including strategic decision-making. Humanitarian NGOs are important members of HCTs, and it is the HC's role to facilitate and support their work as part of broader inter-agency efforts.

> See p.63 for details on country-level coordination mechanisms for NGOs.

When NGOs' work is restricted, particularly by Government policies, NGOs will often call on the support of the in-country leadership in advocating for an operating environment that is conducive for principled NGO action. There is a direct link between NGOs' ability to operate in a principled manner and the effectiveness of a humanitarian response. Restrictions on NGO action should be treated as a serious concern.

Ensuring continued and proactive engagement with NGOs is central to broader coordination efforts. In most situations, NGOs will organize themselves into NGO networks/forums, which also provide an effective mechanism to engage broader, collective perspectives. RCs, with or without the designation of a humanitarian role, and HCs should engage with NGO forums, and they may choose to also directly engage a diverse group of representative NGO leaders, including women leaders and those representing particular at-risk populations, to benefit from their analysis and perspectives on humanitarian issues.

Some large INGOs continue to directly deliver relief items and services, but the majority are increasingly supported by their local and national partners, who are instrumental in ensuring last-mile delivery. In recent years, there has been increased recognition of the central role of local and national NGOs and CSOs in supporting crisis-affected communities. A range of efforts, broadly termed 'localization', are under way to ensure that the expertise and critical role of local and national NGOs is more central to the planning and implementation of humanitarian operations, and that local and national NGOs have better access to resources and take greater leadership roles in decision-making processes. The leadership should be aware of the importance of supporting women-led NGOs and NGOs working with groups at risk of being left behind (such as organizations of persons with disabilities and marginalized communities) to take greater roles in decision-making on humanitarian matters.

> See p.98 for details on localizing the humanitarian response.

There are many global consortiums that act as umbrella agencies providing a range of support to their NGO members, including the three IASC standing invitees – the International Council of Voluntary Agencies (ICVA), InterAction and the Steering Committee for Humanitarian Response – as well as a range of newer networks that have developed in response to the emerging localization agenda in recent years, including the NEAR Network¹³ and the Charter for Change.¹⁴ ICVA and InterAction provide ongoing programmes of support to national-level NGO forums.

CSOs and local leadership

A wide range of CSOs are engaged in providing humanitarian assistance to communities in need. This voluntary, community-driven nature means CSOs can often be large and influential organizations. They have a role in ensuring the representation of and accountability to affected populations.

13 www.near.ngo/who-we-are

14 <https://charter4change.org/>

CSOs engage community workers and volunteers and established or emerging leaders within the populations they support, including women's rights leaders or representatives of women-led organizations that provide specialized services to women and girls. These can be important points of contact for humanitarian actors.

Different forms of local leadership should be recognized and considered, particularly the roles of village, camp or community leaders. These leaders may already be key stakeholders in coordination with the Government or other actors and will therefore be vital to the management of a humanitarian response within their communities. In many situations, communities themselves may be the only responders.

Faith leaders and faith-based organizations also play an important and increasingly recognized role. For example, experience from work in Ebola-affected countries has shown that faith leaders can play a key role in the response to and recovery from health emergencies. In recent years, many international faith-based networks or confederations have worked extensively on their own approaches to localization to further embed their efforts in their local networks, predominantly working with local CSOs.

When visiting humanitarian settings throughout the country, the HC should aim to meet, wherever possible, local leaders and discuss with the key humanitarian actors how they are ensuring their perspectives are included in strategic or operational decision-making.

Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement

The International Red Cross and Red Crescent (ICRC) Movement is the world's largest humanitarian network, comprising nearly 100 million members, volunteers and supporters in 192 National Societies. The Movement comprises three core components: National Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies (National Societies), the International Federation of Red Cross and Red

Crescent Societies (IFRC), and the International Committee of the Red Cross.

The Movement works in accordance with the fundamental principles of humanity, impartiality, neutrality, independence, voluntary service, unity and universality.

National Societies occupy a unique position as auxiliaries to public authorities in their respective countries. They provide disaster relief, support health and social programmes, and promote IHL and humanitarian values. They work alongside national and local public authorities in disaster situations, and they are often the first points of contact for Governments seeking additional support from IFRC (in natural disasters) and ICRC (in situations of armed conflict).

IFRC interacts with Governments directly through the National Societies, coordinating and directing assistance in natural disasters. IFRC and National Societies also engage in preparedness and development activities, including disaster preparedness, emergency health, disaster law, water and sanitation, and humanitarian diplomacy. As such, they are important members of the HCT.

Based on its mandate under the 1949 Geneva Conventions, ICRC deals directly with Governments. In situations of armed conflict and violence, ICRC may coordinate the activities of other components of the Movement. IFRC and ICRC are standing invitees to the IASC. The HC should seek to engage with the Movement across all phases of a humanitarian response, including at strategic levels (inviting them to and ensuring their engagement with the HCT). For more information see: www.ifrc.org/en/who-we-are/the-movement

The Private Sector

The humanitarian community is increasingly engaging with the private sector to strengthen emergency preparedness and response. The presence of private companies and networks on the ground, their local expertise and access to resources, and their ability to swiftly adapt and innovate make

them key stakeholders in supporting localized humanitarian action. This is particularly important given the growing complexity of the world's emergencies and the increase in humanitarian need, which require the coordinated action of a wide range of stakeholders.

In addition to mobilizing resources (financial and non-financial), private sector engagement entails integrating business networks – such as the OCHA-UNDP Connecting Business initiative (CBI) networks, UN Global Compact local networks, and chambers of commerce – into humanitarian coordination systems to fully leverage their expertise in support of a range of activities, including aid delivery, humanitarian advocacy and information management. In some countries, the private sector may have a seat in the HCT. Engaging the private sector can also help to strengthen humanitarian-development collaboration and disaster

risk reduction, as demonstrated by the Private Sector Alliance for Disaster Resilient Societies.¹⁵ However, engaging with the private sector can involve potential reputational risks. For this reason, it is critical that due diligence is conducted on companies before engaging with them. UN agencies, NGOs and Governments generally have focal points for private sector partnerships and due diligence processes.¹⁶

Cooperation between UN agencies and the business sector is framed by the Principles of the UN Global Compact,¹⁷ which sets out a principled-based approach to doing business. This requires companies to operate in ways that, at a minimum, meet fundamental responsibilities in the areas of human rights, labour, environment and anti-corruption.

15 www.preventionweb.net/arise/about/

16 This process should take into account the UN Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights: www.ohchr.org/Documents/Publications/GuidingPrinciplesBusinessHR_EN.pdf, endorsed by the Human Rights Council in June 2011.

17 www.unglobalcompact.org/

HUMANITARIAN LEADERSHIP ARRANGEMENTS

Where the scope and scale of a crisis requires it, the ERC is responsible for designating a HC, following consultation with the IASC. In most cases, the RC will take on the role, but in some circumstances a stand-alone HC, a UN agency, an NGO representative or a Regional or Deputy HC may be designated to coordinate the humanitarian response.

Designated Leadership Arrangements

Normative framework for HC designations

The practice of designating HCs dates to the early 1990s and is grounded in normative UN documents developed in consultation with the IASC. GA resolution 46/182 from 1991 refers to

“the Resident Coordinator [who] should normally coordinate the humanitarian assistance of the United Nations system at country level.”

The first specific mention of a humanitarian coordination position in UN resolutions appears in Security Council resolution 733 from 1992, whereby the Security Council requested the UN Secretary-General to increase the provision of humanitarian assistance by the UN and its partners in Somalia

“in liaison with the other international humanitarian organizations and to this end to appoint a coordinator to oversee the effective delivery of this assistance.”

After the appointment of the first HC in 1992, the designation of HC positions in response to humanitarian emergencies quickly evolved into standard practice. By 1994, the IASC had codified the basic parameters of the designation process, including the ERC’s competence to take the final decision and make use of the roster of experienced humanitarian managers (now called the HC Pool). Since then, the process has remained largely unchanged, although efforts to diversify the HC

Pool’s membership continue, with specific focus on geographic representation and gender balance.

Designating leadership positions

Where the impacts of a humanitarian crisis require the designation of a HC, and where the RC in place has the right profile to serve as HC, the ERC, following consultations with the IASC, will confirm his/her designation. In a limited number of situations where the RC is not considered to have the necessary humanitarian profile, the ERC may, following consultations with the IASC, choose to appoint a HC outside the RC system. In instances where one operational UN agency or NGO is providing most of the humanitarian assistance, the ERC may consider designating that agency or an NGO representative as HC, acting under the authority of and reporting to the ERC.

In situations where there is a need to designate regional coordinators for crises that go beyond national borders, the ERC may consider assigning such functions to a Regional HC working with RCs and/or HCs in several countries.

The ERC, in consultation with the IASC, may also choose to designate a Deputy HC (DHC) to support the HC in carrying out humanitarian coordination functions, either across the country or for a specific geographical area, particularly in situations where multiple or large-scale crises require dedicated coordination capacity.

Accountability and Performance Management

HCs are ultimately accountable to all people in need. Effective inter-agency mechanisms for accountability to affected people (AAP) should be established to ensure this is duly recognized and remains central to their humanitarian leadership

> See p.44 for details on AAP.

In-country humanitarian leadership is also accountable to the ERC for ensuring that the de-

livery of international humanitarian assistance and protection meets affected people's needs and is delivered according to the mandates of all relevant humanitarian organizations. This equally applies to all RCs when they are performing humanitarian functions, irrespective of whether they are designated as a HC.¹⁸

If international humanitarian assistance is required and a separate HC position is not established, the RC is accountable to the ERC for the performance of humanitarian coordination functions. In fulfilling this function, the RC is supported

by OCHA, usually through the regional office or, in some cases, an in-country HAT.

The ERC also assesses the performance of RCs and HCs in proactively preparing for crises. Since the effectiveness of emergency response operations depends heavily on the quality of prior preparedness efforts, the leadership skills of the RC or the HC in coordinating preparedness activities of either the UNCT or HCT members and relevant humanitarian actors are critical, and they may be assessed by the ERC regardless of whether a humanitarian emergency unfolds.

COMPETENCIES FOR EFFECTIVE HUMANITARIAN LEADERSHIP

Humanitarian leaders work in fluid situations with a wide range of different actors, some of whom may be hostile or ambivalent to humanitarian efforts, or unaware of their importance. As a result, successful humanitarian leaders generally exhibit an unusually broad range of leadership qualities and demonstrate a strong values base.

With this in mind, the IASC agreed a series of competencies that are critical for humanitarian coordination and leadership. These go beyond normal planning-and-operating procedures to define the higher-level competencies required in situations of rapid change, uncertainty and complexity.

Leadership

Formulating Strategies, Applying Humanitarian Principles and Norms: Demonstrates a broad-based understanding of the growing complexities of humanitarian issues and activities. Creates a strategic vision of shared goals based on humanitarian principles and norms and ensures broad acceptance of it. Develops a road map that enhances humanitarian action.

Deciding and Initiating Action: Makes prompt, clear decisions that may involve tough choices or considered risks. Takes responsibility

for actions, projects and people. Takes initiative, acts with confidence and works under own direction. Initiates and generates activity. Provides others with clear direction. Modifies decisions, when necessary, in light of new information.

Managing Relationships

Relating and Networking: Establishes good relationships with stakeholders and staff. Builds wide and effective networks of contacts inside and outside the organization. Relates well to people at all levels. Manages conflict. Makes effective use of political processes to influence and persuade others.

Fostering Humanitarian Teamwork: Builds and maintains humanitarian partnerships. Is committed to working in partnership with the HCT. Promotes a climate of teamwork and harmony and facilitates a team approach. Pursues the efficient use of common resources and common goals. Shares information and supports others. Ensures the full participation of team members in common endeavours. Encourages clear, open and respectful dialogue.

¹⁸ This does not supersede the RC's accountability to the UN Secretary-General.

Influencing and Representing

Advocacy and Negotiation: Can effectively influence or persuade others of a course of action. Is an effective advocate of humanitarian principles on behalf of the humanitarian community. Is able and prepared to adopt a number of ways to negotiate to gain support and influence diverse parties, with the aim of securing improvements for humanitarian access and provision of assistance, and to ensure protection of the affected population.

Presenting and Communicating Information: Speaks clearly and fluently. Expresses opinions, information and key points of an argument clearly. Makes presentations and undertakes public speaking with skill and confidence. Identifies information needs of a target audience or population and works systematically to address the needs. Projects credibility.

Managing Complexity

Analysing Complexity: Analyses numerical data, verbal data and all other sources of information. Breaks information into component parts, patterns and relationships. Probes for further information or greater understanding of a problem. Makes rational judgements from the available information and analysis. Produces workable solutions to a range of problems. Demonstrates an understanding of how one issue may be a part of the larger humanitarian system.

Planning and Organizing: Sets clearly defined objectives. Plans activities and projects well in advance and takes account of possible changing circumstances. Manages time effectively. Identifies and organizes resources needed to accomplish tasks. Monitors performance against deadlines and milestones.

Adapting and Coping

Coping with Pressure and Setbacks: Works productively in a high-pressure environment. Keeps emotions under control during difficult situations. Balances the demands of work and personal life. Maintains a positive outlook at work. Handles criticism well and learns from it.

Adapting and Responding to Change: Adapts to changing circumstances. Accepts new ideas and change initiatives. Adapts interpersonal style to suit different people or situations. Shows respect and sensitivity towards cultural and religious differences. Deals with ambiguity, making positive use of the opportunities it presents.

UN Leadership Model

The UN Leadership Model, developed under the auspices of the UN Development Group, provides a useful reference for RCs/HCs.¹⁹ In line with the UN System Leadership Framework,²⁰ effective humanitarian leadership comprises eight essential defining characteristics:

- It is principled, defending the organization's values, norms and standards.
- It is norm based in that it is grounded in UN norms and standards – beginning with the UN Charter itself.
- It is inclusive of all personnel and stakeholders, irrespective of age, gender, sexual orientation, nationality, ethnicity, language, religion, disability, grade, contractual status and other personal characteristics.
- It is accountable, both mutually within the system and to beneficiaries and the public beyond. This means that even as personnel ensure accountability from others, they equally accept their own accountability, striving for 360° of mutual accountability.

¹⁹ <https://unsdg.un.org/resources/united-nations-leadership-model>

²⁰ www.unssc.org/sites/unssc.org/files/un_system_leadership_framework.pdf

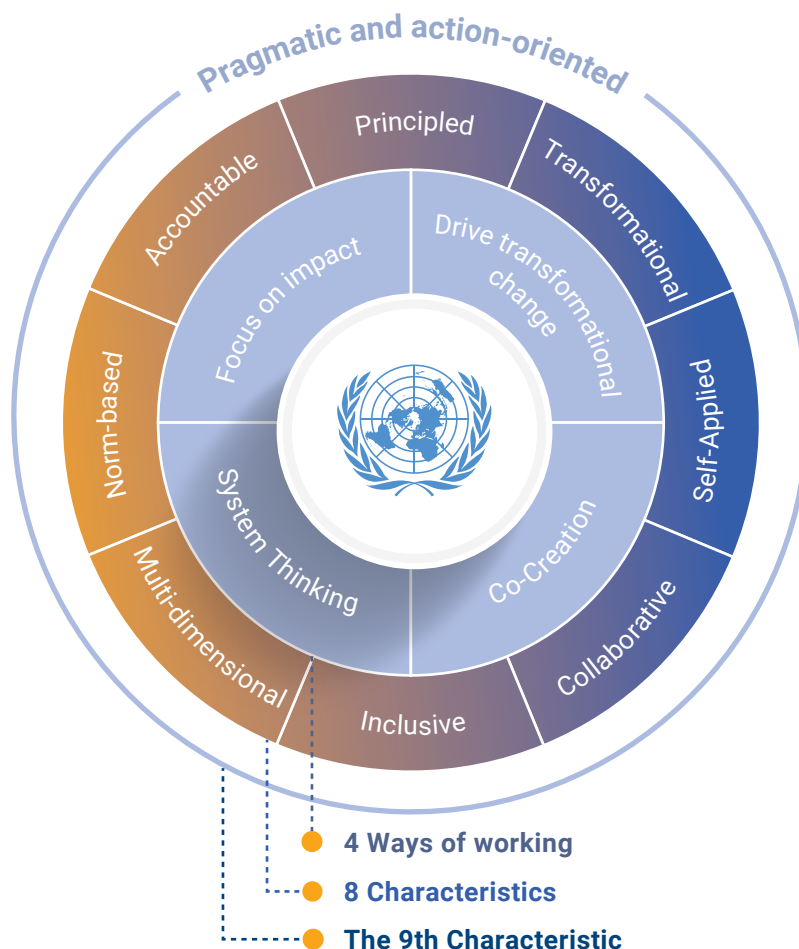
- It is multidimensional, integrated and engaged across pillars and functions. It is now seen as axiomatic that the three pillars of the UN Charter (peace and security, human rights and development) are interdependent, and that all UN functions, whether humanitarian, political, security or other, have an impact on one another.
- It is transformational, of ourselves and of those we serve, heavily reinforced by attitudinal and behavioural adjustments, by development of leadership capabilities, and by strong vision and leadership for change.
- It is collaborative, within and beyond the UN and the humanitarian system.
- It is self-applied, i.e. modelled in own behaviour – seeking to inspire, not to command. This means that in interactions within offic-

es, teams and agencies, the leader is fully respectful of all colleagues at all levels, is gender-sensitive, promotes and celebrates diversity as a strength, fosters teamwork, empowers staff, recognizes and rewards merit, and operates with integrity, transparency and fairness.

To this, the UN Secretary-General added a ninth characteristic:

- It is pragmatic and action oriented, taking principled and practical action to deliver on mandates, balancing administrative and operational risks, and erring on the side of action to prevent and address human suffering.

United Nations Leadership Model



To complement the UN System Leadership Framework, the UN Sustainable Development Group has developed an RC Leadership Profile,²¹ which articulates who leadership should be and how they should behave and do their work – based on the values of inclusion, integrity, humility and humanity. As well as improving the effectiveness of the humanitarian response, strong leadership is critical for enhancing the performance of the wider international humanitarian system – mobilizing partners and leveraging the strengths of operational actors, while at the same time paying attention to risks and weaknesses that need to be addressed. As outlined in the UN System Leadership Framework, driving this type of transformational change requires a willingness to reflect, and to help the system learn and constantly innovate. To achieve results at scale, humanitarian leaders are expected to drive transformational change both within and outside their organizations to influence the behaviour of the systems with which they interact.

In addition to the defining characteristics of effective UN leadership, there are specific qualities and skills that are particularly important for the HC role.

Humanitarian Coordinators – five measures of success

1. Whether designated as HC or not, clear appreciation of the independent and impartial role of the HC fully consistent with UN GA resolution 46/182, answering directly to the UN Secretary-General and guided by the USG/ERC.
2. Diplomatic and representational skills that will enable constructive and robust relationships with the affected community, the national sovereign Governments,

non-State parties, donors or development partners.

3. Knowledge of and empathy with fundamental rights and needs, and with the international legal and constitutional frameworks that underpin global humanitarian action and interventions, e.g. the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and its Covenants, the Geneva Conventions, and the Children and Women's Conventions.
4. Intimate knowledge of the country-specific coordinated humanitarian assistance programme, for which the HC has direct responsibility, close rapport with the leadership of participating UN and NGO entities, both in country and at HQs, and intimate knowledge of individual mandates of these entities.
5. Advanced levels of personal commitment, interpersonal skills of a high order, relevant knowledge and experience, and a reservoir of fortitude and energy.

Principles of Partnership

Partnerships are the foundation of collaborative humanitarian action. The Principles of Partnership, adopted at the Global Humanitarian Platform (GHP) in 2017, provide a useful template for dealing with the complexities of coordinating a diverse set of humanitarian actors. The principles provide a framework for all actors in the humanitarian response – including Governments, UN agencies, NGOs, the private sector and affected populations – for engaging on a more equal, constructive and transparent basis.

The GHP provides some practical tips on how humanitarian organizations can implement the Principles of Partnership – many of which are pertinent to the role of HCs.

²¹ <https://unsdg.un.org/resources/resident-coordinator-leadership-profile>

Principles of Partnership



Equality

Equality requires mutual respect between members of the partnership irrespective of size and power. The participants must respect each other's mandates, obligations and independence and recognize each other's constraints and commitments. Mutual respect must not preclude organisations from engaging in constructive dissent.



Transparency

Transparency is achieved through dialogue (on equal footing), with an emphasis on early consultations and early sharing of information. Communications and transparency, including financial transparency, increase the level of trust among organizations.



Result-orientated approach

Effective humanitarian action must be reality-based and action-oriented. This requires result-oriented coordination based on effective capabilities and concrete operational capacities.



Responsibility

Humanitarian organizations have an ethical obligation to each other to accomplish their tasks responsibly, with integrity and in a relevant and appropriate way. They must make sure they commit to activities only when they have the means, competencies, skills, and capacity to deliver on their commitments. Decisive and robust prevention of abuses committed by humanitarians must also be a constant effort.



Complementarity

The diversity of the humanitarian community is an asset if we build on our comparative advantages and complement each other's contributions. Local capacity is one of the main assets to enhance and on which to build. Whenever possible, humanitarian organizations should strive to make it an integral part in emergency response. Language and cultural barriers must be overcome.

PUTTING PEOPLE FIRST

Placing people at the heart of humanitarian action is critical for supporting principled action, ensuring access for all to assistance and protection, addressing violations and enhancing accountability. In leading and coordinating humanitarian action, the HC is responsible for ensuring that protection and accountability are at the forefront of humanitarian response and preparedness.

HCs also play a critical role in ensuring that the fundamental tenets of humanitarian action are factored into wider programming – both in humanitarian response and preparedness efforts.

Key roles of the HC

Centrality of Protection

- Promote and facilitate implementation of the IASC Protection Policy (2016) as part of a collective approach to ensure that humanitarian action is focused on protection outcomes (i.e. reducing protection risks to crisis-affected people).
- Prioritize protection risks requiring collective HCT action, which is evidence based and grounded in consultation with affected people and comprehensive inter-sectoral analysis.
- Promote respect for human rights, refugee law and IHL by all parties, including non-State actors, coordinating the advocacy efforts of relevant organizations, and using private diplomacy and/or public advocacy as appropriate.
- Ensure all necessary efforts are made to secure sufficient funding to the protection response.
- Lead the development, implementation and monitoring of a HCT protection strategy, when needed.
- Lead and coordinate high-level humanitarian advocacy efforts to secure better

protection outcomes for crisis-affected populations, and ensure regular engagement with the wider HCT/UNCT to ensure complementary advocacy activities and messaging, as appropriate.

- Lead negotiations with parties to conflict, including non-State actors, to ensure humanitarian access to affected populations and access to services for people in need; preserve humanitarian space; and enhance respect for international law, humanitarian principles and core protection principles.

Prioritizing Protection from Sexual Exploitation and Abuse (PSEA)

- Ensure that a collective PSEA strategy is developed, which includes safe and accessible inter-agency community-based complaint mechanisms, agreements for information-sharing, and victim services.
- Ensure that PSEA is integrated into coordination structures across humanitarian, development, peace and political operations.
- Ensure that a quality, victim-centred assistance mechanism is operational.
- As a priority of the UN Secretary-General, ensure PSEA is raised upfront in all discussions as early as possible with all partners at all forums.
- Create an environment in which the prohibitions on sexual exploitation and abuse are known and understood, and in which personnel are aware of their obligation to adhere to required standards of behaviour.

Accountability to Affected People (AAP)

- Ensure compliance with IASC commitments on AAP (2017 and 2022).
- Initiate and guide a HCT to implement collective and response-wide AAP action and planning that coordinates and inte-

grates community engagement and feedback into response analysis, planning, implementation and monitoring – which, in turn, informs decision-making and adaptive programming.

- Ensure financial and human resourcing for community engagement and collective complaint and feedback mechanisms, including for sensitive complaints, such as sexual exploitation and abuse.
- Work with the HCT and other relevant stakeholders, including host government and development partners on participatory processes for communities to influence decisions, including monitoring, evaluating, verifying and learning from humanitarian response operations. These should inform future actions.

Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women and Girls

- Ensure compliance with the principles, priorities and field-level roles and responsibilities set out in the IASC Gender Policy.
- Facilitate access to and engagement in humanitarian decision-making for women, women leaders and women's organizations.
- Ensure that a robust, intersectional gender analysis is incorporated in HCT strategies, humanitarian situational analyses and humanitarian needs overviews utilized in the planning and monitoring of humanitarian response plans, and that it informs decision-making and programming.
- Ensure that adequate senior gender expertise is appointed to inform the strategic and operational aspects of the planning and implementation of the humanitarian response.
- Ensure quality funding to women's organizations, particularly women-led organizations, and set funding benchmarks

through the appeals process and pooled funds, including the CBPFs, in line with localization principles and commitments.

- Ensure that gender-based violence (GBV) prevention and response, including the provision of life-saving GBV services, is prioritized for funding and resources in humanitarian response.
- Ensure the inclusion of GBV risk-mitigation efforts in all sectors, as laid out in the IASC Guidelines for Integrating Gender-Based Violence Interventions in Humanitarian Action.
- Ensure IASC GBV guidelines are implemented across all sectors to mitigate risks and ensure the application of 'do no harm' principles.
- Advocate with Government officials and other relevant actors on preventing and responding to GBV.

Addressing the Diversity of Needs

- Humanitarian emergencies impact women, girls, boys and men differently, with women, persons with disabilities, Indigenous persons, persons with diverse gender identity and sexual orientation, older persons, and adolescent girls often having additional, specific and intersecting vulnerabilities and protection concerns. In light of this, ensure that the humanitarian response effectively identifies and responds to the diversity of needs, capabilities and priorities of all people affected, taking into account their gender, ethnicity, disability, age, mental health and other factors throughout the HPC.

Disability Inclusion

- Ensure application of the IASC Guidelines on the Inclusion of Persons with Disabilities in Humanitarian Action and the associated Guidance on Strengthen

ing Disability Inclusion in Humanitarian Response Plans.

- Nominate a disability focal point and engage with local organizations of persons with disabilities.
- Adopt a twin-track approach, mainstreaming disability in all programmes, while providing targeted support where needed.
- Report on annual achievements, as set out in the UN Disability Inclusion Strategy.

Age

- Ensure data disaggregation by sex, age and disability.
- Ensure attention is given to the needs of each age group, including by tackling age and disability discrimination.
- Support NGOs, State welfare departments and health-care providers to make services and distributions inclusive and accessible to all age groups.
- Ensure meaningful and safe engagement with and consultation of people from across all age groups and diversities, across all sectors and phases of the HPC, including by engaging with youth and girl-led organizations, and by operationalizing the Humanitarian Inclusion Standards for Older People and People with Disabilities.

Mental Health and Psychosocial Support (MHPSS)

- Advocate for MHPSS to be included as a cross-cutting issue in the humanitarian response, including in the cluster response and HPC processes.
- Support the creation and work of a cross-cutting country-level MHPSS Technical Working Group in your country.

- Encourage donor agencies and donor Governments to include MHPSS in funding envelopes under health, protection, education and nutrition, and in multi-donor trust funds.

Environment and Climate Change

- Advocate for environmental risk screening as a standard practice in humanitarian programming.
- Ensure that capacity and expertise to conduct environmental impact assessments are mapped.
- Advocate for recovery strategies that are environmentally friendly and risk informed, and that lead to sustainable solutions.
- Advocate for closer collaboration between in-country development and humanitarian actors on environmental and climate-related issues.

The Centrality of Protection

Identifying and reducing protection risks to affected people must be understood as a central goal of humanitarian action and a collective responsibility of the entire humanitarian system (i.e. beyond the actions of the Protection Cluster).

IASC DEFINITION OF PROTECTION

The concept of protection encompasses *“all activities aimed at ensuring full respect for the rights of the individual in accordance with the letter and the spirit of the relevant bodies of law – i.e. human rights law, international humanitarian law and refugee law. Human rights and humanitarian organizations must conduct these activities in an impartial manner (not on the basis of race, national or ethnic origin, language or gender).”*²²

22 IASC Policy Paper, Protection of Internally Displaced Persons, 1999, p.4, <https://interagencystandingcommittee.org/focal-points/iasc-policy-paper-protection-internally-displaced-persons-1999>

IASC protection policy

As set out in the IASC Policy on Protection in Humanitarian Action, collective action to protect people in a manner that prevents and responds to violations of IHRL and IHL is imperative for the UN and humanitarian system-wide core responsibility. Given the multifaceted nature of protection threats and the complex contexts in which they arise, complementary coordinated actions across the different parts of the humanitarian architecture are required, as well as collaboration and engagement with the affected people and a range of stakeholders beyond the humanitarian response.

Independent Review of the Implementation of the IASC Protection Policy

Five years after the adoption of the IASC Protection Policy, the IASC Principals commissioned an independent review to assess its implementation. Published in May 2022, the review found that protection remains fragmented and poorly understood, and it lacks political support within the humanitarian sector and beyond. It reflects that the focus on protection solely as a technical activity has undermined a strategic and collective approach to reducing protection risks. The review calls for reorienting humanitarian action towards reducing risks and supporting people's safety and security. It underlines the critical role of HCs' engagement with State and non-State actors to reduce protection risks. It recognizes the need to better support HCs and HCT representatives with political backing, practical support and analysis to empower them to carry out this function of their terms of reference. It also calls for a stronger accountability framework to hold senior leadership to account for their performance in this regard.

Centrality Of Protection

In their Statement on the Centrality of Protection in 2013 and the IASC Policy on Protection in Humanitarian Action in 2016, the IASC Principals affirmed that all humanitarian actors have a responsibility to place protection at the centre of humanitarian action. The policy emphasizes the importance of leadership on protection by the HC and HCT, and it recommends the process for its implementation at the country level, outlining steps for humanitarian actors to engage collectively to achieve meaningful protection outcomes that reduce the risks people experience in humanitarian crises. The policy complements other initiatives in support of protection, including IASC commitments related to PSEA, Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment, AAP, and Inclusion of Persons with Disabilities.

Similarly, the UN Secretary-General's Call to Action for Human Rights calls for individual and collective responsibility across the UN system to consider human rights in all decision-making, operations and institutional commitments. It highlights the need to prevent human rights violations and respond promptly and effectively when such violations occur; leverage the broad range of UN mandates, channels and capacities to respond; and ensure leadership and other senior officials in country are supported by UN headquarters when needed.

Protection principles

The Sphere Humanitarian Charter outlines four Protection Principles²³ that apply to all humanitarian actors and to all stages of humanitarian action – from preparedness to response and recovery. These principles are particularly pertinent to the role of UN RCs and HCs in promoting the application of common minimum technical protection standards by humanitarian organizations across the response.

Principle 1: Enhance the safety, dignity and rights of people, and avoid exposing them to further harm

Humanitarian actors take steps to reduce the overall risks and vulnerability of people, including to the potentially negative effects of humanitarian programmes.

Principle 2: Ensure people's access to impartial assistance according to need and without discrimination

Humanitarian actors identify obstacles to accessing assistance and take steps to ensure it is provided in proportion to need and without discrimination.

Principle 3: Assist people to recover from the physical and psychological effects of threatened or actual violence, coercion or deliberate deprivation

Humanitarian actors provide immediate and sustained support to those harmed by violations, including referral to additional services as appropriate.

Principle 4: Help people claim their rights

Humanitarian actors help affected communities claim their rights through information and documentation, and they support efforts to strengthen respect for rights.

The role of the HC

The HC has the 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. Supported by the HCT, the HC leads this work in country, ensuring that based on a comprehensive multisectoral protection risk analysis informed by affected people, protection priorities are identified and addressed in strategic humanitarian planning and decision-making, including leading and coordinating the development of a HCT Protection Strategy when needed.

The HC is responsible for fostering collaboration among humanitarian actors, and for harnessing the HCT's diverse mandates and expertise towards shared protection outcomes. Together with the HCT/UNCT, the RC/HC is also responsible for facilitating and coordinating collaboration and engagement with a diverse range of non-humanitarian actors (e.g. development and peace operations) in addressing protection threats. The HC's leadership is indispensable in promoting respect for human rights, refugee law and IHL by all parties, including non-State actors, through private/public advocacy, as appropriate, and by coordinating the advocacy efforts of relevant organizations. In addition, the HC is responsible for endeavouring to ensure sufficient funds are allocated to protection preparedness, responses and priorities.

Advocating on Protection

Persuasive advocacy can be an effective tool to encourage the relevant authorities to better fulfil their protection-related obligations and responsibilities under international law. In accordance with the IASC Policy on Protection in Humanitarian Action, and the IASC Principals' Statement on the Centrality of Protection, all humanitarian ad-

23 <https://handbook.spherestandards.org/en/sphere/#ch004>

vocacy efforts should contribute to action that enhances the protection of affected people and ensures that the rights of affected people and the obligations of duty bearers under international law are understood, respected, protected and fulfilled.

The role of the HC

The HC is responsible for leading and coordinating the high-level advocacy efforts of relevant organizations in country to address protection concerns and secure better protection outcomes for crisis-affected populations. This includes bilateral quiet or private engagement and/or public advocacy, as appropriate, to promote compliance with IHL, refugee law and human rights law; to raise awareness of the specific vulnerabilities and needs of affected people, including IDPs; and, as part of negotiations with relevant parties, including non-State actors, to secure free, timely, safe and unimpeded humanitarian access.

At the same time, the HC needs to strike a balance between the possible impact of engaging in public advocacy to address protection risks and violations, and the potential consequences for continued access to affected people. The HCT must therefore consider and agree on how best to leverage the different roles and capacities of different entities, and on how to use regional and global actors and processes to ensure that advocacy takes place to support the achievement of protection outcomes, and to prevent and address violations of international law.

In recognition of the collective responsibility of all humanitarian actors to contribute to protection outcomes, the HC is expected to foster collaboration among HCT members to undertake joint and complementary advocacy actions to address protection concerns where appropriate/feasible, based on a comprehensive and shared analysis of

the protection situation provided by the Protection Cluster and other sources. This is to ensure that the HCT speaks with one voice on core protection priorities (often articulated in a HCT Protection Strategy) while agencies continue dedicated advocacy on mandate-specific issues. Together with the HCT, the HC is responsible for facilitating and coordinating engagement and advocacy with a diverse range of humanitarian and non-humanitarian actors in addressing protection concerns (including development and peace operations).

Wide-ranging strategic partnerships are essential to mitigate multifaceted protection risks for affected people; the HC should encourage the engagement of a combination of local, national, regional and international actors to be determined by context in order to maximize capacities and influence, and to mitigate risks.

What Are Protection Outcomes?

A response or activity is considered to have a protection outcome when the actual and potential risk – including violations of IHRL and IHL – to affected people is prevented, reduced, mitigated or ended. The reduction of actual and potential risks occurs when threats and vulnerability are minimized, and at the same time the capacity of affected people is enhanced – or the capacity and willingness of national authorities to meet their human rights obligations is enhanced. Protection outcomes are the result of changes in behaviour, attitudes, policies, knowledge and practices on the part of relevant stakeholders, including national authorities. Examples of protection outcomes include:

Resources

- [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
- Centrality of Protection – [Peer-2-Peer Support website](#)
- Contributing to and engaging systematically with protection and human rights monitoring mechanisms can inform analysis, programming and advocacy messages. These include protection monitoring conducted by the Protection Cluster, the monitoring and reporting mechanism on grave violations committed against children ([MRM – SCR 1612](#)), monitoring, analysis and reporting arrangements on conflict-related sexual violence ([MARA – SCR 1960](#)), displacement tracking matrices, and human rights monitoring and fact-finding missions by the UN Human Rights Office (OHCHR).
- The annual report of the Secretary-General on the Protection of Civilians (PoC) in Armed Conflict to the Security Council, associated side events during PoC Week, briefings to the Security Council's informal Expert Group on PoC, and the aide memoire for the consideration of issues pertaining to PoC are important tools to outline key issues and priorities.
- At headquarters level, various actors can mobilize support, staffing and funding, and engage in supportive advocacy. These actors include the ERC, the High Commissioner for Human Rights, the High Commissioner for Refugees, the IASC Principals, the EDG and Operational Policy and Advocacy Group, the UN Human Rights Mechanisms (including the treaty bodies and special procedures) and the Global Protection Cluster.
- The inter-agency Protection Standby Capacity Project, also known as ProCap, can deploy senior protection advisers to support the HC – for example, to help with the development and implementation of a HCT Protection Strategy.
- [Global Protection Cluster Provisional Guidance on HCT Protection Strategies](#)
- [Global Protection Cluster HCT Strategies Review 2020](#)

Protection from Sexual Exploitation and Abuse

Sexual exploitation means any actual or attempted abuse of a position of vulnerability, differential power or trust for sexual purposes, including, but not limited to, profiting monetarily, socially or politically from the sexual exploitation of another.

Sexual abuse means actual or threatened physical intrusion of a sexual nature, whether by force or under unequal or coercive conditions.

Conduct of humanitarian personnel

Sexual exploitation and abuse (SEA) is a form of sexual misconduct perpetrated against a member of the affected population by national or international aid workers, including those working for the host State, NGOs or anyone affiliated with the UN-wide system, including UN staff or related personnel or non-UN forces acting under a Security Council mandate. Acts of sexual abuse or exploitation of the affected population are always serious misconduct and grounds for immediate termination of contract and potential criminal prosecution under national law. In addition, when the perpetrator is a State actor and has acted as an agent of the State or with its consent or acquiescence, some of these acts may amount to violations of international law, including international human rights, humanitarian and criminal law.

During an emergency, the lack of physical security and access to basic services can make local populations dependent on humanitarian personnel for life-saving assistance. Limited participation in decision-making and failure to consult and involve local populations add to the imbalance in power dynamics. Because of this, sexual relationships between international/national humanitarian personnel and the local population can constitute sexual exploitation, as per the revised IASC Six Core Principles Relating to SEA (see resources).

There are no exceptions to the prohibition of sexual activity with children. Sexual activity with people under age 18 is prohibited, regardless of the legal or cultural age of majority or age of consent

locally. Mistaken belief in the child's age does not constitute a defence.

UN staff members and related personnel are obliged to report concerns or suspicions of SEA in line with internal reporting procedures and/or agreed inter-agency referral pathways, as endorsed by the RC/HC and the UNCT/HCT. Anonymous complaints and complaints where the institutional affiliation of the alleged perpetrator is unidentified or unknown should be treated as seriously as complaints where the identity is known.

Addressing SEA requires the efforts of all personnel. It is the ultimate responsibility of heads of office, PSEA focal points, human resources departments and designated programme personnel to ensure that all humanitarian responses take adequate and appropriate steps to mitigate risks of SEA. As articulated in the IASC Principals' Statement on PSEA and reinforced in the 2018 IASC Plan to Accelerate PSEA at the country level,

el, HCs will report regularly to the ERC on PSEA, and the HC annual meeting will have PSEA as a standing agenda item.

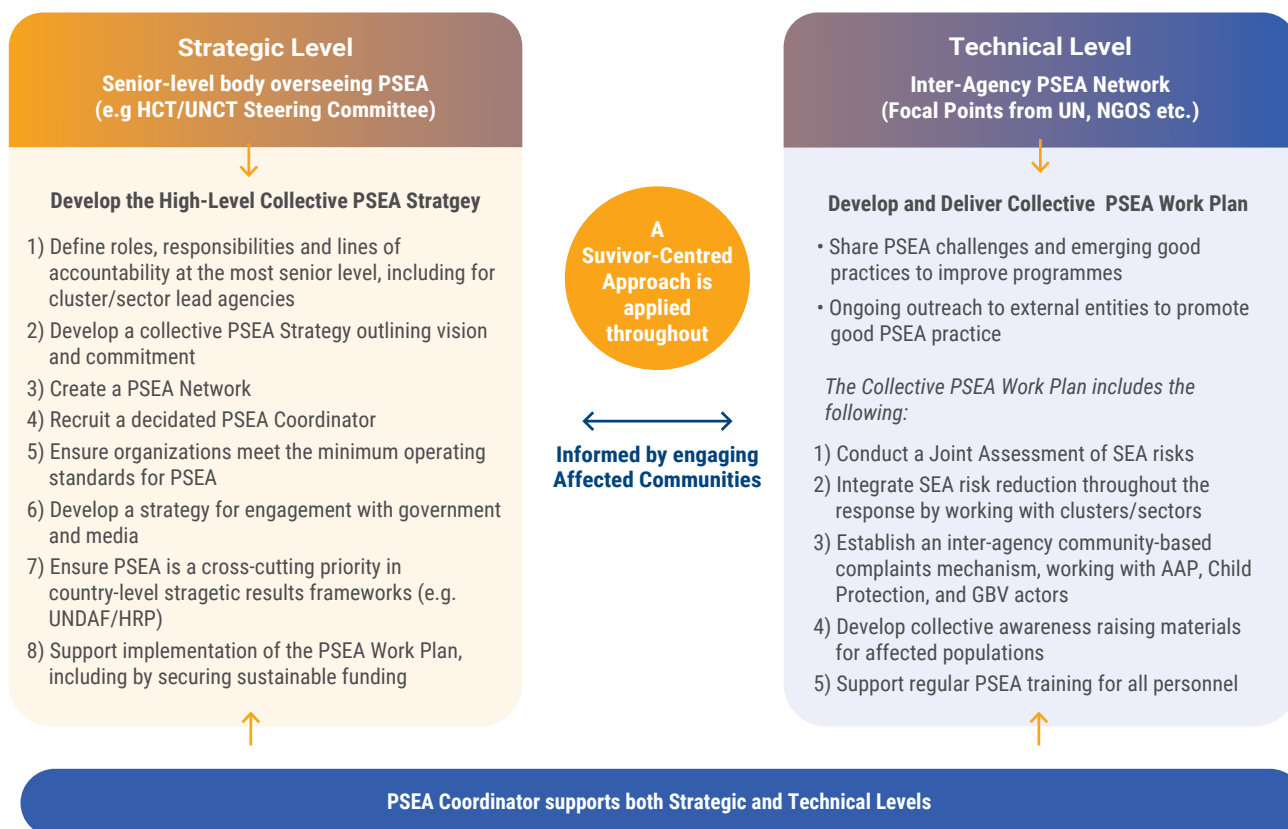
Coordinating PSEA

Under the standard responsibilities on PSEA of the UN RC, UNCT, HC and HCT, each country should already have a PSEA structure in place (see figure below). This includes an inter-agency PSEA Network, a PSEA Coordinator, and a PSEA strategy and associated workplan. The UNCT/HCT acts as a Steering Committee for the PSEA Network.

The HC and HCT are accountable for delivering on collective PSEA commitments in country. Specific responsibilities for PSEA are articulated in the Management and Accountability Framework of the UN Development and Resident Coordinator System, and in the 2015 Principals' Statement on PSEA.

In-Country PSEA Programme

Overall responsibility for collective PSEA: Senior-most UN Leadership (RC/HC)



How these responsibilities are carried out may be different during an emergency. For instance, the coordination bodies that the RC/HC oversees will change when the cluster system comes into play. The influx of new actors and the pressures to deliver quickly may lead to increased risk of SEA. At the outset of the emergency, an SEA risk assessment should be conducted, and prevention-and-mitigation measures identified and implemented. Referral pathways and complaint mechanisms will need to be adapted to take account of the new operating context. Incoming responders should be made aware of standards of conduct. RCs and HCs are encouraged to recruit a full-time PSEA Coordinator to advise and support their leadership role.

HCs have a particular coordination role, leading and coordinating the response efforts of the UN and relevant humanitarian actors, including NGOs and Red Cross/Red Crescent counterparts. The HC and HCT have the responsibility to operationalize IASC guidance in support of the IASC Vision and Strategy: Protection from Sexual Exploitation and Harassment 2022–26 commitments in country operations. The IASC Plan for Accelerating PSEA in humanitarian response includes a country-level framework, which HCs may use to ensure that a comprehensive strategy with its annual workplan is effectively implemented. The HC also facilitates links between humanitarian and development programming, including the integration of the UNCT and/or the HCT's work with UN peacekeeping or political missions. The HC is therefore uniquely positioned to facilitate strategic information-sharing on the prevention of and response to SEA across the full range of development, humanitarian and mission contexts, ensuring that PSEA is raised upfront in all discussions as early as possible, with all partners at all forums.

Emphasis should be placed on a victim-/survivor-centred approach that places the rights, wishes, needs, safety, dignity and well-being of the victim/survivor at the centre of all prevention

and response measures concerning SEA. Also, place emphasis on outreach to local communities and authorities to ensure awareness-raising and to establish, with the participation of the local population, context-appropriate reporting/community-based complaints mechanisms, and ensure the availability of appropriate holistic services for victims/survivors.

The role of the HC

The HC provides the overall direction, reviews progress, addresses barriers, engages stakeholders, and provides the support and resources needed to implement PSEA effectively. These activities may be supported by a dedicated PSEA Coordinator, reporting directly to the HC.

In addition, at the onset of an emergency, the RC, whether or not designated as a HC, must ensure that existing in-country PSEA systems are sufficiently robust and adapted for the emergency context. As the lead coordinator, it is the RC's responsibility to drive home the message that SEA and inaction on allegations by the UN are not tolerated, and to ensure that all entities, sectors and heads of office within the humanitarian response take appropriate measures to prevent SEA and are accountable for their responsibility to respond diligently to allegations.

Specific responsibilities:

- At the onset of an emergency, ensure PSEA is raised upfront in all discussions as early as possible with all partners and at all forums.
- Advocate that humanitarian staff and partners comply with the Secretary General's Bulletin on Special Measures for PSEA as well as the IASC Six Core Principles.
- Ensure that a collective PSEA action plan is developed and report progress through the annual IASC mapping exercise.

- Appoint and empower a dedicated PSEA Coordinator to lead a PSEA network at country level.
- Promote a victim-centered approach at all stages of the SEA response.
- Ensure PSEA is integrated in the humanitarian response plan or equivalent and cluster/sector response strategies.
- Ensure that the HCT has a strategy to provide assistance and support to victims/survivors of SEA, in line with the victim-centered approach.
- Promote a speak-up culture and a safe, diverse and inclusive work environment.

Resources

- [Secretary-General's Bulletin on Special measures for protection from sexual exploitation and sexual abuse, 2003](#)
- [IASC Six Core Principles Relating to Sexual Exploitation and Abuse, 2019](#)
- [IASC Vision and Strategy PSEAH 2022-2026](#)
- [IASC Principals' Statement on Protection Against Sexual Exploitation and Abuse, 2015](#)
- [Management and Accountability Framework of the UN Development and Resident Coordinator System](#)
- [The IASC PSEA microsite](#) contains useful resources, including a global PSEA dashboard.
- [IASC Vision and Strategy PSEAH 2022-26](#)
- [IASC Plan for Accelerating PSEA in Humanitarian Response at Country Level \(2018\)](#)
- [The Management and Accountability Framework of the UN Development and Resident Coordinator System](#)
- [IASC Principals' Statement on Protection Against Sexual Exploitation and Abuse, 2015](#)
- [Victim/Survivor Centered Approach Definition and Principals](#)

Accountability to Affected People

AAP's primary aim is to ensure that humanitarian response is informed by and accountable to the needs and preferences of affected communities. This entails informing and listening to communities, sustaining collective complaints-and-feedback mechanisms, building partnerships with local actors, community leaders and CSOs, promoting affected people's representation in decision-making. It also includes acting on feedback to guide programme adaptation and 'course correction' to ensure that humanitarians are held to account.

Collective approaches, especially those that are localized, are critical in terms of overall accountability, inclusion, effectiveness and quality programming within the response. For HCs, AAP is critical to understanding the overall needs and preferences of affected people across the response, identifying where gaps exist and guiding the prioritization of response-wide actions that address their needs, concerns, views and feedback.

Different response operations use different terms for activities associated with AAP, including Communicating with Communities, Communications and Community Engagement, Community Engagement, Risk Communication and Community Engagement and Accountability, and Communications for Development.

Collective commitments to AAP

System-wide and response-wide accountability are essential to meeting organizational and collective commitments, as outlined by the IASC commitments on AAP (2017 and 2021). These are underpinned by the Core Humanitarian Standard on Quality and Accountability and the IASC Commitments on AAP and PSEA (2017), the Grand

Bargain Participation Revolution Workstream,²⁴ and other core guidance, commitments and policy.

The IASC Commitments²⁵ on AAP and PSEA (2017) include:

1. **Leadership:** Ensure a predictable approach to elevating community information into response analysis, planning, implementation, monitoring and evaluation, and learning.
2. **Participation and partnerships:** Ensure agency mechanisms identify and maintain equitable partnerships with local actors that enable people – including those of different sex, age and disability status and other relevant factors – to have unimpeded and equal access to accountability mechanisms to drive decisions that affect their own lives, well-being, dignity and protection.
3. **Information, communication and action:** Ensure the coordination of agency-specific community engagement mechanisms, including those that address SEA allegations, are integrated into programming, feed into collective approaches, inform and listen to communities, and result in action that is communicated back.
4. **Results:** Ensure that overall response performance measurement is built into planning processes, including the measurement of quality and accountability at the collective level, e.g. by applying the Core Humanitarian Standard on Quality and Accountability.

The role of the HC

- In meeting these commitments – including the HCT commitment to collective accountability, as mandated in the IASC HCT Terms of Reference – response operations are expected to strengthen the coordina

tion and harmonization of accountability and community engagement. In practice, this means the HC should ensure that a collective AAP action plan or strategy is in place and functional, tied to coordination structures, programming cycles and funding mechanisms. The IASC Collective AAP Framework (draft, possible to be endorsed in October 2023) sets out steps for developing joint approaches and mechanisms, which can then be used to adapt the response accordingly.

Community Engagement Coordination

The HCT, the Inter-Cluster Coordination Group (ICCG) and other relevant coordination groups must ensure that international humanitarian action in support of national capacities is people driven and accountable – as mandated in the HCT Terms of Reference. This could involve ensuring that the functions of the Community Engagement/ AAP Working Group are properly linked to the in-country coordination architecture and is a conduit for community voices and feedback to be part of decision-making processes. This group would take a lead in informing ICCG or other relevant structures in delivering and reporting on the country-level action plan to operationalize the AAP. The responsibility may be assigned directly to an alternative body, such as the ICCG; however, where a coordination function exists at a technical level, cohesion should be ensured AAP mechanisms, whatever form they take, should harness and coordinate the complementarity of approaches to PSEA, protection, disability inclusion, gender, age and other cross-cutting issues.

²⁴ A participation revolution: include people receiving aid in making the decisions which affect their lives | IASC (interagencystandingcommittee.org)

²⁵ <https://interagencystandingcommittee.org/iasc-revised-aap-commitments-2017-including-guidance-note-and-resource-list>

Implementing Collective Accountability

A Collective AAP action plan or strategy provides the structure for contextualizing and operationalizing AAP commitments and standards into appropriate response-wide activities, enabling humanitarian actors to hear and act on the voices of people in a coordinated manner – including for managing and referring sensitive complaints, such as SEA allegations

A Collective AAP action plan or strategy is not designed to inform individual agency or programme accountability approaches; rather, it provides the basis for working collaboratively and delivering response-wide AAP.

- Outcome 1: Coordinated needs assessment and analysis reflects all affected community groups' information needs and communication preferences.
- Outcome 2: Humanitarian response planning includes affected peoples' voices.
- Outcome 3: Funding and resources are in place to ensure a coordinated approach to collective AAP, including information provision, community feedback systems and participation.
- Outcome 4: Response implementation is coordinated and driven by informed community participation and feedback systems and is monitored and adjusted as needed.
- Outcome 5: Evaluation and review of collective AAP actions and outcomes is coordinated, participatory and transparent to inform learning.

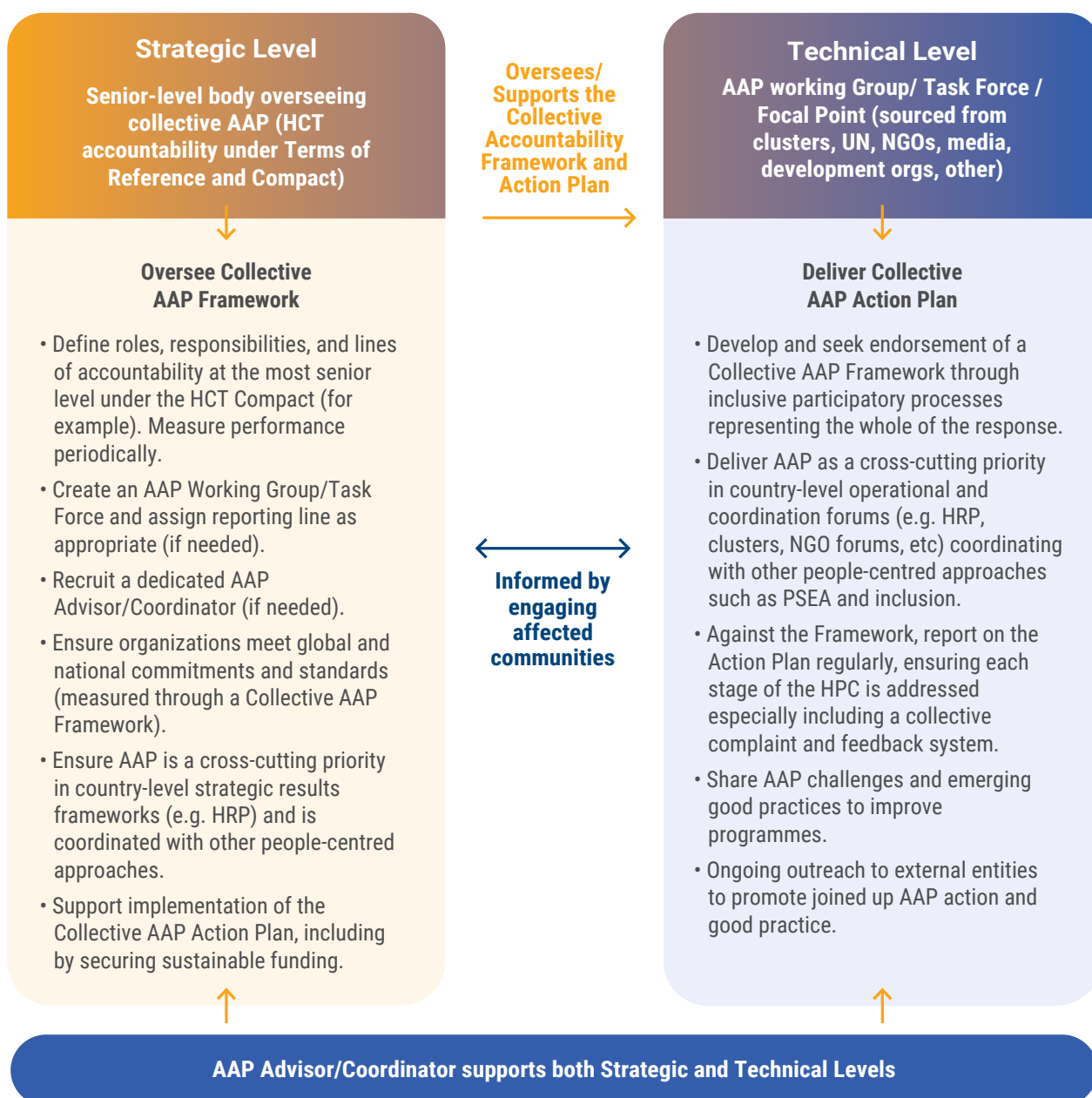
Resources

- April 2022 IASC Principals statement on AAP <https://interagencystandingcommittee.org/accountability-and-inclusion/statement-principals-inter-agency-standing-committee-iasc-accountability-affected-people>
- The Accountability in Action Snapshot <https://reliefweb.int/report/world/putting-people-first-accountability-action-snapshot-august-2023>
- OCHA on Message: AAP <https://reliefweb.int/report/world/ocha-message-accountability-affected-people>
- The IASC Task Force 2 on AAP provides response-wide guidance, tools and technical support through the following:
 - Collective AAP Framework - the building blocks for leaders to ensure accountable and inclusive collective responses.
 - [Global IASC Accountability and Inclusion Portal](#) – an accessible repository of accountability and inclusion tools, guidance, policies, standards and advice.

The diagram below provides an overview of the in-country structure for implementing the Collective AAP Framework and Action Plan.

In-Country Collective Accountably to Affected People (AAP)

**Overall responsibility for in-country AAP:
Senior-most UN leadership (RC/HC)**



THE FLAGSHIP INITIATIVE AT A GLANCE

October 2023

THE INITIATIVE

As the demand for humanitarian assistance increases and available funding falls short, there is a pressing need to transform the coordination, delivery and financing of humanitarian action. This change also is necessary to better support and empower affected people, enhance their self-reliance, and strengthen their resilience to future shocks. To that end, the ERC launched the Flagship Initiative in 2023, a three-year project aimed at exploring innovative approaches that put affected people at the center of humanitarian action by having their priorities drive programming decisions. Innovative approaches and change will be determined at country-level and led by Humanitarian Coordinators (HCs) in a select number of countries.



For international humanitarian assistance to have the greatest impact for the greatest number of people in the years ahead, the priorities of affected communities must drive response efforts, and local actors must be supported and empowered to deliver the response wherever possible. To achieve this, a bold new way to coordinate, deliver and finance humanitarian action is needed.”

—Martin Griffiths, Emergency Relief Coordinator (ERC)

HCs are empowered to develop and implement context-specific approaches with the following objectives:

- strengthen subnational presence to ensure proximity to and sustained participatory engagement with affected people, enabling a better understanding of their priorities and needs;
- establish a coordination and response structure to deliver what affected people have identified as their priorities;
- ensure the capacities and participation of affected people are central in humanitarian response; and
- contribute to solutions that strengthen community resilience, reduce risks and vulnerabilities, and improve access to basic services and livelihoods, based on affected people’s priorities.

OPERATIONS

The ERC has selected four countries for initial implementation of the Flagship Initiative: Colombia, Niger, the Philippines and South Sudan. The selection of these countries was based on consultations with HCs, OCHA Country Offices and other partners. Within each country, implementation will focus on specific regions, with the potential to expand to the entire country over time.



GUARDRAILS

HCs in the countries have been given the freedom to re-imagine humanitarian coordination and response. No existing humanitarian coordination models or humanitarian programme cycle processes need to be followed. Approaches will be driven by the context and affected people’s priorities so they will differ from each other. They must fully comply with humanitarian principles, international law, recognized programme standards, and codes of conduct. This includes adherence to the Secretary-General’s Bulletin on Special Measures for PSEA, the centrality of protection, and respect for the principles of non-discrimination and ‘do no harm’. HCs are specifically asked to consider the perspectives and needs of women, the youth and other vulnerable groups. These guidelines are intentionally light to allow HCs to redefine the way forward.



Progress will only come by applying innovative ideas and learning from successes and failures. We need the space and conditions to try something new, even if it fails, in order to reorient the system to make it self-sustaining and to focus outward, on affected people, moving away from the current system which is focused inward, on us.”

—OCHA Head of Office

MILESTONES

The Flagship Initiative is being implemented for an initial three years, from 2023-2025. The first year is dedicated to conceptualizing approaches and setting up enablers for innovation that will be implemented later that same year. By the end of 2025, the aim is to identify innovative response and coordination approaches in the four countries that may be replicable in other contexts, based on the good practices and learning collected from the implementation of the Flagship Initiative.

2023

- Q1** • Selection of four operations; start of engagement with the humanitarian community to explain the purpose and objectives of the Flagship Initiative.
- Development of initial internal roadmaps, outlining the direction, geographic focus, key milestones, and resource requirements for each context.
- Q2** • Establishment of a concept for the monitoring, evaluation and learning approach.
- OCHA Heads of Office retreat to identify resources requirements and HQ support
- Q3** • Subnational presence strengthened for participatory community engagement throughout the initiative. HPC simplification measures considered.
- Q4** • Learning-focused evaluation begins, including biannual surveys of affected people, to allow for course corrections and the identification and scale-up of successful practices.

2024

- Global learning event to review practices and findings compiled continuously on achieving people-centered coordination and response approaches.
- Ongoing innovation and adaptation of humanitarian action.
- People-focused country response plans developed (to feed into the 2025 GH0).

2025

- Implementation of successful, new approaches becomes the standard practice in the selected countries. Identification of innovative response and coordination approaches for replication in other contexts.
- Final evaluation report issued.

THE FLIP

The current humanitarian response system primarily measures success on the inclusion of responders and addressing their coordination, information, and operational needs, rather than on the inclusion and participation of affected people and communities. A fundamental reorientation of the system is needed, flipping it from a supply- to demand-driven system. This requires closer proximity to communities, genuine and unfiltered listening and understanding of affected people's priorities, identification of organizations capable of meeting those priorities, and coordination structures focused on delivering solutions in concert with other local or national actors. In other words, programming must be driven by participatory engagement and the priorities expressed by affected people, instead of being driven by agency mandates or donor priorities validated through aggregated needs-assessments. Additionally, predictable and unearmarked, multi-year humanitarian funding and coherence between humanitarian and development funding streams are needed to reduce risks and vulnerabilities, while strengthening resilience and local capacity.

LEARNING

A key element of the Flagship Initiative is learning by documenting approaches and identifying good practice and lessons learned. Learning will occur at four levels: within each operation to track progress and adapt approaches; across the four operations to provide peer support and foster inspiration; beyond the four operations to collect, identify and share practices and innovations; and system-wide to share results on the Flagship Initiative with the broader humanitarian community, including donors. Setbacks and challenges are expected and will be part of the iterative and consultative learning process, which will inform the ongoing implementation of the Flagship Initiative.

Using an external evaluation team composed of international and national experts, a learning-focused evaluation will be carried out for the duration of the Flagship Initiative. The evaluation framework allows for the baseline and objectives to be revised as understandings change and improve. The evaluation team will consult affected people twice a year through community-level, focus group discussions; provide insights to allow for real-time adjustments to approaches; and identify any successful approaches for replication and scaling. The team will rely on data collected through context-specific response monitoring, which will also form the core of delivery and quality assurance tracking throughout the adaptation process.

Periodic reports will be produced to inform global learning events, and existing innovative approaches from across the humanitarian community will be collected to inspire and inform the Flagship countries.

For more information, contact: ochapolicy@un.org

Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women and Girls

Women and girls, persons with disabilities, Indigenous persons, persons with diverse gender identity and sexual orientation, older persons and adolescent girls are disproportionately affected by humanitarian emergencies, and they have additional specific and intersecting vulnerabilities and protection concerns. This is due to pre-existing gender inequalities and differences in power, privilege and opportunity, which can be further compounded in times of crisis, lead to discrimination and exploitation, and impact an individual's access to humanitarian, recovery and development assistance, and their access to human rights.

Compared to their male counterparts, women and girls are – and have historically been – disproportionately affected by crises. This manifests, for example, in lower life expectancy, maternal mortality, higher exposure to loss of livelihoods, higher risks of exposure to GBV, and threats to many aspects of their health and well-being, especially in contexts where there is a breakdown of law and order and a disruption of social networks. The impacts of crises on women and girls are further exacerbated by their restricted opportunities to influence humanitarian action.

Distinct impacts of crises on men and boys include risks of being recruited into national armies and State and non-State armed groups, and being affected as fatalities of armed conflict as combatants, survivors and perpetrators of violence, including sexual violence and other forms of GBV.

Gender equality and the empowerment of women and girls (GEEWG) are fundamental human rights and humanitarian imperatives. This principle is enshrined in international humanitarian, human rights and refugee law, and in UN Security Council resolutions on Women, Peace and Security²⁶. It is also reflected in recent global agreements,

such as those from the 2016 World Humanitarian Summit, the Sendai Disaster Risk Reduction Framework (2015), the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development (2015), the Call to Action on Protection from Gender-Based Violence in Emergencies and its new road map (2021–2025), and the New York Declaration on Refugees and Migrants (2016).

These global agreements and resolutions have identified emerging themes that have implications for GEEWG in humanitarian action. These include the humanitarian-development-peace nexus, new financing mechanisms and localization (i.e. allocating resources and decision-making to local actors, including women's rights organizations). They also reinforce critical gender equality concerns, such as the need to:

- Adopt and implement measures to eradicate GBV and violence against women and girls.
- Recognize women's capacities as well as vulnerabilities.
- While continuing to push for women's full and meaningful participation, extend the focus to their transformative leadership in humanitarian action and peacebuilding.
- Ensure that notions encompass a broad spectrum of gender identity and sexual orientation.
- Strengthen women's economic empowerment (which will also help to speed up recovery and increase communities' resilience).
- Address the disproportionate care burden on women, which increased during the COVID-19 pandemic and global food insecurity crisis, and which has knock-on effects on women's and girls' education and livelihoods. Address the gendered access barriers to humanitarian assistance, and enable equal access to all humanitarian services and humanitarian decision-making.

²⁶ In particular, UN Security Council resolutions 1325 (2000), 1820 (2009), 1888 (2009), 1889 (2010), 1960 (2011), 2106 (2013), 2122 (2013), 2242 (2015) and 2467 (2019).

Prioritizing the Prevention of GBV

In line with the priorities of the Call to Action on Prevention of GBV in Emergencies, these root causes should be tackled by addressing individual attitudes and behaviours, and the power structures that perpetuate violence, and by promoting localization and adequate funding to humanitarian partners, particularly women-led organizations, to provide the necessary protection and support to survivors, while also promoting their agency and empowerment.

In her/his capacity to lead and coordinate the response efforts of the UN and humanitarian partners, the HC is responsible for ensuring that all initiatives of relevant humanitarian actors respond to, mitigate and prevent GBV from the onset of emergencies.

The IASC Guidelines for Integrating Gender-Based Violence Interventions in Humanitarian Action outline the specific methods, tools and recommendations for humanitarian actors and communities affected by armed conflict, natural disasters and other humanitarian emergencies to coordinate, plan, implement, monitor and evaluate essential actions for the prevention and mitigation of GBV across all sectors of humanitarian response.

In addition, the GBV Accountability Framework provides a guide for humanitarian actors, including humanitarian leaders and HCTs, on the steps they can take to combat GBV within their mandates. By taking on the actions in the Framework, the humanitarian system as a whole can ensure that every humanitarian response, from the onset of a crisis, provides safe and comprehensive life-saving services for GBV survivors and mitigates the risks of GBV.

Resources

- [IASC Guidelines on Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women and Girls in Humanitarian Action](#)
- [IASC Gender Handbook for Humanitarian Action](#)

- [IASC Reference Group on Gender and Humanitarian Action](#)
- [IASC Guidelines for Integrating GBV Interventions in Humanitarian Action, 2015](#)
- [The Inter-Agency Minimum Standards for Gender-Based Violence in Emergencies Programming](#)
- [UN System-Wide Policy on Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women and Girls](#)
- [Inter-Agency Humanitarian Evaluation on Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women and Girls, 2020](#)
- [IASC Gender with Age Marker](#)
- [IASC Policy on Protection in Humanitarian Action, 2016](#)
- [IASC Statement by the IASC Principles on Protection From Sexual Exploitation and Abuse, 2015](#)
- [IASC Guidelines to implement the Minimum Operating Standards for PSEA by UN and non-UN personnel, 2013](#)
- [IASC Vision and Strategy: Protection from Sexual Exploitation and Abuse and Sexual Harassment \(PSEAH\) 2022–2026.pdf \(inter-agencystandingcommittee.org\)](#)
- [IASC Guidelines for Integrating Gender-Based Violence Interventions in Humanitarian Action](#)
- [GBV Accountability Framework](#)
- [IASC Gender Handbook for Humanitarian Action](#)
- [IASC Statement by the IASC Principles on Protection From Sexual Exploitation and Abuse, 2015](#)
- [IASC Guidelines to implement the Minimum Operating Standards for PSEA by UN and non-UN personnel, 2013](#)
- [Call to Action on Protection from GBV in Emergencies](#)

Meeting the Diversity of Needs

Conflicts, disasters and other humanitarian emergencies impact women, girls, men and boys differently depending on factors such as their gender, age, disability, marital status, caste, ethnic and religious affiliations, migration status, and socioeconomic and cultural backgrounds. These factors interact to determine the capacities, vul-

nerabilities and capabilities of women, girls, men and boys, which result in different risks and needs. Crises can exacerbate existing vulnerabilities and create new ones. Physical, social, environmental and political factors may result in the exclusion and marginalization of some affected groups, or parts thereof.

As part of wider AAP and inclusion efforts, programmes need to proactively engage these groups to identify and address their unique needs and vulnerabilities to ensure that no one is left behind in the response. The HPC – particularly the Humanitarian Needs Overviews and Humanitarian Response Plans (HNO/HRP) – must reflect these diversities. These must also be explicitly integrated into the work of all clusters and inter-cluster coordination.

> For details on clusters and cluster coordination see p.59 and p.62; for the HPC see p.77.

In addressing the diversity of needs, the provision of services (health, food, shelter, etc.) must take into account accessibility (the ease with which all people can safely reach, understand and use services) and acceptability (the extent to which people consider the services to be appropriate, e.g. whether they respect social/cultural norms, including those of minorities, and are sensitive to gender, age and disability requirements). To achieve this, people in all their diversities must be included meaningfully in preliminary consultations and in assessments. It may also require overcoming barriers related to the discrimination of traditionally marginalized groups.

Disability inclusion

Persons with disabilities²⁷ include women, men, boys and girls who have long-term sensory, physical, psychosocial, intellectual or other impairments that, in interaction with various barriers, prevent them from participating in or having access to humanitarian programmes, services

or protection. About 15 per cent of the world's population suffers from a disability (approximately 38 per cent of whom are older persons and 10 per cent are children).

Persons with disabilities are not a homogeneous group; they are diverse in their experience, in the ways that attitudinal, physical and communication barriers impede their participation and inclusion in humanitarian action, and in their identity, including their age, gender, ethnicity, location and race. Due to the intersectionality of these factors, persons with disabilities face greater marginalization and discrimination. For example, during humanitarian crises, children with disabilities are at higher risk of abuse and neglect. Women with disabilities in crises are disproportionately affected due to numerous barriers that prevent their full and effective participation and engagement in the response, and because policymakers and humanitarian practitioners may not understand the intersections between gender and disability, often leading to an experience of exclusion and increased vulnerability including to different forms of GBV.

Disability inclusion is achieved when persons with disabilities meaningfully participate in all their diversity, when their rights are promoted and when disability-related concerns are addressed – in compliance with the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD).²⁸ Article 11 of the CRPD specifically requires State parties, in accordance with their obligations under international law, to take all necessary measures to ensure the protection and safety of persons with disabilities in situations of risk, including armed conflicts, humanitarian emergencies and natural hazards.

Disability inclusion in the UN is based on a human rights approach, which builds on the concept of 'social inclusion', defined as

²⁷In line with a people-centred approach, it is recommended to use the term 'persons with disabilities' not 'disabled', 'persons with special needs' or other denominations.

²⁸ United Nations Disability Inclusion Strategy website and UNDIS, annex I. Key concepts and definitions

“the process by which efforts are made to ensure equal opportunities so that everyone, regardless of their background, can achieve their full potential in life. Such efforts include policies and actions that promote equal access to (public) services and enable citizens’ participation in the decision-making processes that affect their lives.”²⁹

Persons with disabilities should not be seen as helpless victims or aid beneficiaries, but as agents of change. Making information documents accessible furthermore benefits not only persons with disabilities but also other members of the society (e.g. illiterate or older persons).

To ensure that persons with disabilities can exercise their human rights and fundamental freedoms on an equal basis with others,³⁰ reasonable accommodation requires individuals and institutions to modify their procedures or services where this is necessary and appropriate and does not impose a disproportionate or undue burden.

Age

Under the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC), a child is any person under age 18. Different actors use different categorizations for youth, but the most common definition is any person between age 15 and 24. In many humanitarian contexts, adolescents, youth and children constitute close to 70 per cent of the affected population, and certain age groups face particular and additional risks. This includes adolescent girls’ increased risks of exposure to certain types of GBV, such as child and forced marriage, SEA and harmful traditional practices, as well as higher risks of un-schooling.

Older persons, intersecting with their gender and other factors, face additional barriers, such as movement restrictions due to disabilities or health issues. This hinders their participation and

increases their vulnerability, including to violence. The UN defines ‘older persons’³¹ as any person age 60 and over, while recognizing the diversity of needs and capacities within this group.

Working with and for children, young people or older persons is not just about serving an underserved population; they must participate in planning, implementation, monitoring and evaluation. This is not only to make programmes more sustainable and relevant, but because participation is a basic right in itself, including for children, as described in the UNCRC.

It is important to recognize the impact of humanitarian emergencies on people of different age groups and to ensure an ‘age-wide’ lens in humanitarian action. Data collection should be fully disaggregated by sex, age and disability. Programmes should invest in tackling age discrimination, and support NGOs, State welfare departments and health-care providers to make services and distributions inclusive and accessible to all age groups. The engagement and inclusion of youth-led and particularly girl-led CSOs should be promoted. Particular attention should be given to the needs of each age group, e.g. children are protected from violence, exploitation and abuse; they have access to education, basic health, WASH and nutrition services; and they receive opportunities to have their voices heard.

Mental health and psychosocial support

The experience of an emergency and its effects, including displacement, loss of livelihood and the experience of violence, including GBV, can significantly impact a person’s mental health and psychosocial well-being. It can also have immediate as well as long-term and sometimes life-threatening consequences for individuals, families and communities. In conflict-affected areas, one person in five lives with some form of mental condition, from mild depression and

²⁹ UN Department of Economic and Social Affairs, Social Inclusion. www.un.org/development/desa/socialperspectiveondevelopment/issues/social-integration.html.

³⁰ CRPD, article 2.

³¹ In line with a people-centred approach, it is recommended to use the term ‘older persons’ not ‘elderly people’.

anxiety to psychosis. During emergencies, the risks of exposure to GBV increases, particularly for women and girls. Survivors of GBV can experience a range of mental health impacts, including post-traumatic stress disorder, depression, anxiety and self-harm. GBV survivors may also face stigma and rejection from their community and family. To mitigate these effects, it is crucial to prioritize the provision of comprehensive, survivor-centred, multisectoral services, including medical, psychosocial, legal and socioeconomic reintegration support.

Mental Health and Psychosocial Support (MHPSS) is a critical aspect of all humanitarian emergencies and must play a role in all preparedness, response and recovery operations. As a cross-cutting issue, MHPSS is relevant across a wide range of clusters, particularly the camp coordination and camp management, education, health, nutrition, and protection clusters.

In many humanitarian contexts, an MHPSS Working Group (MHPSS WG) serves as a platform or forum where agencies providing MHPSS programmes can meet to discuss technical programming issues related to the humanitarian response. The Co-Chairs of the global IASC Reference Group on MHPSS in Emergency Settings (see resources section) can provide details of MHPSS WGs in specific countries. MHPSS surge capacity may also be made available in certain contexts.

It is also important to ensure that agencies establish programmes to protect and promote the mental health and well-being of national and international humanitarian staff and volunteers, many of whom work in demanding or stressful environments.

The role of the HC

The HC should ensure that humanitarian action considers the diversity of needs and ensures that no one is left behind. Throughout the planning and delivery of

humanitarian action, the HC should take into account gender, disability, age and other diversities, as well as the mental health of the affected population (commonly referred to as 'cross-cutting issues'). Issues related to protection and assistance should be identified and addressed. Consideration should be given to conducting vulnerability analyses or profiling the affected population in order to identify the most marginalized and at-risk people to understand why they are at risk or in need, and to better inform preparedness, response and recovery. Failure to analyse and address the different impacts of an emergency on segments of the population and their differing needs increases the chance of doing harm and exacerbating inequalities – diminishing the appropriateness and effectiveness of humanitarian action.

As Chair of the HCT, the HC is well positioned to advocate for concerns with national authorities and across the range of actors involved in the humanitarian response, and to promote intersectional gender analysis that considers different segments of the population and ensures that the risks and needs they face are incorporated into and inform wider programming.

More specifically, the HC's role is to:

- Advocate for robust intersectional gender analysis, and the integration of cross-cutting issues in humanitarian preparedness and response and in the HPC (specific guidance now exists to facilitate inclusion in HNOs/HRPs – see resources).
- Support the creation and work of relevant cross-cutting country-level technical working groups.
- Remind all clusters of the need to include people in all their diversities in their respective programmes, and ask for issues

related to needs and responses to be raised at ICCG meetings.

- Encourage donor agencies and donor Governments to account for people in all their diversities in funding envelopes under health, protection, education and nutrition, and in multi-donor trust funds (which usually direct funding through clusters at the country level).

Further guidance on protocols, standard operating procedures and other reading material are in the Key Operational IASC Guidance. For further support, HCs can contact the IASC secretariat at: iasccorrespondence@un.org

Resources

Disability Inclusion

- [IASC Guidelines on Inclusion of Persons with Disabilities in Humanitarian Action](#)
- [Guidance on strengthening disability inclusion in Humanitarian Response Plans](#)
- [UN Disability Inclusion Strategy](#)
- [Humanitarian inclusion standards for older persons and persons with disabilities](#)

Age

- [Minimum Standards for Child Protection In Humanitarian Action \(CPMS\) - 2019 edition](#)
- [IASC advocacy paper: Humanitarian Action and Older Persons - an essential brief for humanitarian actors](#)

Mental Health and Psychosocial Support

- [IASC Handbook, Mental Health and Psychosocial Support Coordination](#)
- [IASC Minimum Service Package Mental Health and Psychosocial Support](#)
- [IASC Guidelines on Mental Health and Psychosocial Support in Emergency Settings](#)

- [IASC Common Monitoring and Evaluation Framework for Mental Health and Psychosocial Support Programmes in Emergency Settings](#)

The Impact of Climate Change

Climate change is a humanitarian crisis. Its impacts contribute to the increased frequency and intensity of hydrometeorological hazards, but when such hazards interact with vulnerability, humanitarian emergencies manifest. The countries and communities that have historically contributed the least to global carbon emissions are disproportionately affected. Over the past 50 years, extreme weather events, such as floods, droughts, heatwaves and wildfires, have increased fivefold, causing 70 times more damages. The Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change Sixth Assessment Report³² finds that losses and damages will become increasingly difficult to avoid, while being strongly concentrated among the poorest, vulnerable populations.

Climate change is also a threat multiplier, exacerbating and compounding vulnerabilities in places where humanitarian actors are already overstretched. Disasters linked to climate change interact with other factors driving humanitarian requirements, affecting various aspects of well-being, such as food security, water security, health care, nutrition, vital services, shelter, employment and political stability. The most significant effects occur in areas where recurring or overlapping disasters hinder communities from recovering between successive shocks. If not addressed, the climate crisis will result in humanitarian needs of an unparalleled magnitude.

This calls for increased attention to build a humanitarian system fit for addressing climate-related emergencies. It is an opportunity for HCs to collectively design country-specific, tailor-made solutions to address the humanitarian dimensions of climate change.

32 Sixth Assessment Report – Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change

The role of the HC

- HCs have a unique role to bring together development, humanitarian and climate actors in the country and discuss inter-linkages among their workstreams. As global challenges such as climate change require multi-stakeholder and multisectoral approaches to taking climate action, both in mitigation and adaptation, HCs can play a key interlocutor role to promote collective action.
- Countries where HCs are based usually have the United Nations Sustainable Development Cooperation Framework (UNSDCF) from the development side, the HRP from the humanitarian side and National Adaptation Plans from the climate side. Similarly, there may also be National Disaster Risk Reduction Plans and Strategies. HCs will have a role to ensure that climate analysis is part of the UNSDCF and HRP and shares a common understanding at the strategic level.
- HCs have a role in resource mobilization for climate action through high-level engagement with donor Governments and international financial institutions (IFIs). As climate financing is distributed across multiple sectors, HCs can also help to ensure strategic coherence among development, climate and humanitarian actors. HCs can provide support to coordinate funding to design transformative adaptation packages.
- HCs can play advocacy roles through key messaging on climate change-related humanitarian needs and call for climate action. They can also use the power of social media to amplify the voices of affected communities and influence policymakers.
 - > See p.104 for more details on coordinating preparedness and disaster risk reduction.

Key support

- National disaster management agencies, hydrometeorological services and/or Government ministries with responsibilities for environmental matters all play a key role in preparing for and responding to the environmental dimensions of disasters and conflicts. It is vital to map these actors, and to establish relationships and promote collaboration with and among them. It is also important to develop an understanding of existing capacities and resources for environmental risk mapping and environmental impact assessments.
- The Joint Environment Unit (JEU)³³ can provide technical advice, guidance and tools for the integration of environmental and climate considerations in humanitarian programming and planning.
- After an emergency, the JEU can rapidly deploy environmental/technical expertise (within 48 hours) at no cost to the affected country. Experts can be dispatched either on stand-alone environmental emergency response missions coordinated by the JEU or as part of United Nations Disaster Assessment and Coordination (UNDAC) teams. These experts can perform rapid environmental assessments to identify risks and mitigation solutions.

Resources

- Guidance on how to request [emergency response services from the JEU](#)
- Resources and online training modules on environmental issues and emergencies: [Environmental Emergencies Centre](#)
- Guidance on how to integrate environmental and climate considerations in broader humanitarian action (including by clusters): [EHA Connect](#)
- [IPCC Sixth Assessment Synthesis Report, Summary for Policymakers](#)
- [OCHA Policy Brief on Climate](#)

33 The United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP)/Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) Joint Environment Unit, also known as the UNEP/OCHA Joint Environment Unit, is housed within OCHA's Emergency Services Branch in Geneva.



Bulo Burte , Somalia, 2023.
Photo: OCHA/Tobin Jones

Coordinating Humanitarian Action at Country Level

ESTABLISHING HUMANITARIAN COORDINATION MECHANISMS

With the increasing impacts of climate change compounding existing risks and fragility globally, it is a priority for HCs to ensure that appropriate humanitarian coordination mechanisms are planned as part of ongoing preparedness efforts. Effective preparedness means that when an international response is required, these mechanisms can be stood up quickly. This will involve adapting existing structures to the specific needs of the humanitarian response and, where necessary, setting up new structures if gaps in coordination and response exist. Humanitarian coordination mechanisms should be conceived and maintained in a way that supports and complements national preparedness and response led by the Government.

Key roles of the HC

In-country Humanitarian Architecture

- As part of preparedness efforts, and in consultation with all relevant actors, examine the emergency response coordination mechanisms in place (international and national), determine functionality, identify any sectoral or intersectoral coordination gaps that need to be addressed and ensure complementarity to Government coordination structures.
- Establish the appropriate humanitarian architecture (HCT, clusters/sectors, inter-cluster/sector coordination group and

subsidiary bodies) for effective response at the national and subnational levels.

- Engage and maintain dialogue with national and local authorities and all relevant humanitarian actors, including international and local/national NGOs, on the role of humanitarian coordination to support national response.
- Lead consultations on the development of a comprehensive and inclusive needs-based strategy for the humanitarian response. This could be articulated through a funding appeal (a HRP or a Flash Appeal).
- Lead and coordinate inter-agency advocacy and fundraising efforts.

NGO Coordination

- Ensure the profiles and contacts of key CSOs and national NGOs who may respond to a humanitarian situation are available and updated as a preparedness measure.
- Open direct dialogue with relevant NGO coordination forums, ensuring to include local/national and international NGOs, as well as women's rights organizations and organizations of persons with disabilities.
- Include representatives from NGOs (local/national and international) in the HCT or other strategic bodies, where appropriate.

Cash Coordination

- Ensure that cash coordination mechanisms are well resourced, representative of all clusters/sectors and promote activities in line with the overall priorities of the response.
- Support the use of cash and voucher assistance (CVA) as part of the response, encouraging collaborative approaches. Where feasible and appropriate, consider CVA as a default response option, spurred by the commitments made by Governments, donors and humanitarian actors as part of the Grand Bargain, and the potential link with national social protection mechanisms to reinvigorate local economies and anticipatory financing mechanisms.

Community Engagement

- Ensure community engagement is coordinated through formal architecture and supports delivering on an agreed Collective Accountability Framework.
- Ensure a mechanism is in place to support PSEA.
- Support complementary approaches to protection, disability inclusion, gender, age, mental health and other cross-cutting issues.

Setting up an Effective Country-Level Humanitarian Coordination Architecture

In consultation with national authorities and humanitarian actors, and considering the context, available resources, and existing capacities and mechanisms, the HC is responsible for determining the most adequate and efficient coordination

‘architecture’. Its purpose is to ensure that all actors³⁴ responding to the emergency work together to achieve shared strategic objectives, and that humanitarian programmes are designed and delivered in a principled, effective and complementary manner. Effective coordination helps to avoid a chaotic and fragmented response.

The types of coordination mechanisms established, their duration and their location (national, subnational) depend on the scale and complexity of the response as well as the type of crisis. At the start of a crisis, it is important for the HC to highlight the importance of emergency responders’ engagement in coordination mechanisms, not only to ensure the quality and efficiency of the overall response, but also in terms of the value added of information-sharing and joint planning to their own programmatic work.

Established coordination structures should be light and focused on how humanitarian actors collectively meet the priority needs of affected people, without duplication or gaps.

As far as possible, the coordination architecture for international responders builds on, plugs into and complements existing national- and local-level mechanisms, avoiding creating separate or parallel structures.³⁵ Contextual and flexible approaches will allow for the adaptation of coordination structures over time, including an increased role for local and national actors³⁶ and/or development partners as the situation moves from emergency to recovery.

> For details on localizing the response, see p.98.

As the humanitarian architecture is being established, it is essential that the HC maintains dialogue with national counterparts and ensures they support the international mechanisms for the preparedness for and response to humanitarian

34 It is critical for the HC to understand the mandates of actors involved in the response (community-based organizations, faith-based organizations, national and foreign militaries, local/national and international NGOs, the national and foreign private sector, the Red Cross/Red Crescent Movement [IFRC, ICRC, National Societies], UN entities, and neighbouring and other States) and their adherence to humanitarian principles. Although each actor has different mandates, accountabilities and cultures, the HC must strive to ensure coordination among them.

35 In conflict situations in which the State is a party to the conflict, humanitarian coordination may need to happen with limited State involvement to ensure that affected people have access to humanitarian protection and assistance, independent of whether the State controls the territory on which they reside.

36 www.icvanetwork.org/uploads/2021/07/IASC-Guidance-on-Strengthening-Participation-Representation-and-Leadership-of-Local-and-National-Actors-in-IASC-Humanitarian-Coordination-Mechanisms_1.pdf

emergencies, and that they understand how international roles and responsibilities complement national efforts. Transparency is essential for maintaining effective coordination and collaboration with national counterparts leading the response efforts.

Typically, the humanitarian architecture includes one, some or all of the following:³⁷

- **HCT:** Chaired by the HC. The HCT is responsible for the strategic coordination of humanitarian preparedness, response and advocacy efforts.
- **Clusters or Government-led sectors:** Comprises operational UN agencies/NGOs, the Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement, and often Government and technical entities. These bodies are responsible for coordinating service delivery and identifying gaps around designated sectoral priorities.
- **Inter-Cluster or Inter-Sector Coordination Group (ICCG/ISCG):** Chaired by OCHA. The ICCG/ISCG comprises sector/cluster coordinators and ensures coordination among these entities for coherent response. The ICCG/ISCG supports the HCT by highlighting key operational concerns.³⁸
- **Information Management Working Group (IMWG):** Comprises OCHA, sector/cluster coordinators, and agency and occasionally Government IM officers. The group's role is to build on existing in-country information systems and support the coordination and harmonization of all humanitarian partners' IM activities. The IMWG supports efforts to achieve consensus on authoritative common data sets disaggregated by sex and age, administrative boundaries and operational areas.

In addition to the HCT, ICCG/ISCG and clusters, the HC, with the HCT, may establish other coordination groups to support, for example, needs

assessment and analysis, CVA, humanitarian access, humanitarian civil-military coordination, risk management, and the establishment of OCHA-managed CBPFs, among others.

In setting up humanitarian coordination in a new emergency, the HC should endeavour to ensure that all UNCT/HCT members have a solid understanding of the rationale for establishing humanitarian coordination and the steps being taken to put it in place, ensuring common messaging on this issue is followed.³⁹

Reviewing the coordination architecture and transitioning after an emergency

The humanitarian coordination architecture in any given country is adjustable. The HC is accountable, together with the HCT, for ensuring that what was established at one point in time is, in fact, still the optimal configuration for the context and, above all, meets the coordination and response needs.

IASC guidance requires that the HC/HCT conducts an annual review of the coordination architecture, where the humanitarian leadership in country reflects upon and, if necessary, adjusts the mechanisms in place. This can entail deactivating clusters, adjusting subnational coordination or setting up new entities, as necessary. OCHA's role is to support the HC/HCT in this process.

The HC should impress upon the HCT, cluster lead agencies (CLA), clusters and OCHA the need to have pragmatic transition plans in place, which include the transfer of any coordination responsibilities to a national counterpart.

37 In refugee situations or mixed situations involving IDPs and refugees, UNHCR plays an integral role in the humanitarian architecture – see p.19.

38 See ICCG Standard Terms of Reference: www.humanitarianresponse.info/sites/www.humanitarianresponse.info/files/documents/files/iccg_tor_23mar2016.pdf

39 In many cases, UNCT members may be unfamiliar with humanitarian principles and coordination mechanisms. To avoid mixed messaging coming from UNCT/HCT members, the HC, with OCHA's support, should ensure the leadership team is well briefed on this issue and that key messages are in place to answer questions from national counterparts, donors, NGO partners and staff members.

The Humanitarian Country Team

A HCT is set up at the outset of a humanitarian crisis to bring together operationally relevant actors in a humanitarian response. This will include the country directors (or equivalent) of relevant UN agencies, NGOs (national and international) and the Red Cross/Red Crescent Movement.

The HCT is chaired by the HC (and in some cases the RC where a HC has not been designated), and it is the highest-level international humanitarian body in the country. It is primarily responsible for strategic decision-making, and to facilitate the centrality of protection and adequate, efficient and needs-based response and preparedness. The HCT's membership is governed by the IASC Standard Terms of Reference.⁴⁰ The HC should ensure that the size of the HCT is limited to allow for effective decision-making, with the main criteria being operational relevance.

The UNCT and HCT coexist; they do not replace each other. The RC, RC/HC or HC is responsible for ensuring complementarity between the two entities. The HC may also decide to set up a separate forum to facilitate information-sharing with the broader humanitarian community or with donors.

Following its initiation, the HCT's immediate decisions will address urgent operational humanitarian matters. The HC and HCT will need to decide quickly on which additional coordination structures and expertise, if any, are required to support the response (e.g. through sector-based coordination mechanisms such as clusters – see below).

OCHA supports the HC to make sure that an appropriate architecture is put in place, in line with the IASC's guidance and procedures. As secretariat to the HCT, OCHA also supports the HC in his/her coordination function, ensuring that effective links are made with other coordination bodies, such as the ICCG/ISCG.

HCT CHECKLIST FOR HCs:

- At the outset, ensure HCT members understand the rationale for shifting to a humanitarian response and what this entails in terms of the pace of response, new coordination mechanisms, expertise and adherence to humanitarian principles. To facilitate this shift, seek OCHA's support to draft key messages for the HCT.
- Clearly outline the HCT's role and Terms of Reference, and members' responsibility to contribute to the HCT and to pursue collective outcomes.
- Ensure national and international NGO representation in the HCT by supporting NGOs to implement transparent selection processes.
- Ensure national NGO HCT members are supported to assume their leadership role.
- Ensure Government authorities are supportive of the HCT's set-up and the related humanitarian coordination architecture.
- Ensure the HCT develops an annual workplan that addresses the centrality of protection and has been committed to by HCT members.
- Establish a separate forum for regular engagement with donors to ensure they are kept informed of the response and can share their views and concerns.

⁴⁰ https://interagencystandingcommittee.org/system/files/hct_tors.pdf

Resources

- [Standard Terms of Reference for HCTs](#)
- [IASC Guidance for HCTs](#)
- [IASC Guidance on Strengthening Participation, Representation and Leadership of Local and National Actors in IASC Humanitarian Coordination Mechanisms](#)

Clusters and Cluster Lead Agencies

Clusters⁴¹

Clusters bring together UN and non-UN partners actively involved in relief efforts. The clusters' primary function is to coordinate the delivery of assistance among the various actors working in specific sectors (e.g. health, food, nutrition) while ensuring adherence to the centrality of protection. At the request of the HC/HCT, one or more of these sectoral groups may be formally activated as clusters by the IASC when a context analysis deems that (i) response and coordination gaps exist in a particular sector due to a sharp deterioration or significant change in the humanitarian situation, or (ii) existing national response or coordination capacity is unable to meet needs. Cluster activation should be considered if the IASC activation criteria are met.⁴² OCHA's role is to support the HC through the cluster activation process.

Clusters are activated in consultation with the Government and the HCT, and they require the endorsement of the IASC EDG. Clusters can also be established at the subnational level depending on the nature and scope of the emergency and the needs of the response.⁴³

Each cluster is chaired by a Cluster Coordinator who is appointed by the CLA. The Cluster Coordinator's role is to promote an effective and coherent response by operational actors in a given sector. S/he provides leadership and works on

behalf of the cluster as a whole, facilitating all cluster activities, and developing and maintaining a strategic vision and operational response plan. S/he also ensures coordination with other clusters in relation to inter-cluster activities and cross-cutting issues.⁴⁴

Clusters are intended to be temporary structures in support of national sectoral coordination. Any international coordination support and responsibilities should eventually be transferred to national counterparts as soon as capacity permits, thus ensuring cluster transition and deactivation.

Cluster Lead Agencies

Each cluster is led by a CLA responsible for running and staffing the cluster. The CLA is an agency/organization that formally commits to take on a leadership role within a particular sector or area of activity. CLAs/clusters are also the primary entry points for collaboration with line (sectoral) ministries, and HCs' first point of call for any issues relating to their sectoral area.

The CLA serves as the Provider of Last Resort, i.e. it commits to do the utmost to ensure an adequate and appropriate response. This means calling on all relevant humanitarian partners to address critical gaps in the response, and if this fails, committing to filling the gap itself (or advocate for resources or access to do so). All clusters have six core functions – standardized actions against which they must deliver and monitor performance annually (e.g. supporting service delivery, informing HC/HCT strategic decision-making, planning and implementing cluster strategies).⁴⁵

41 Note that in some contexts the use of the term 'cluster' may be undesirable; the term 'sector' is used instead.

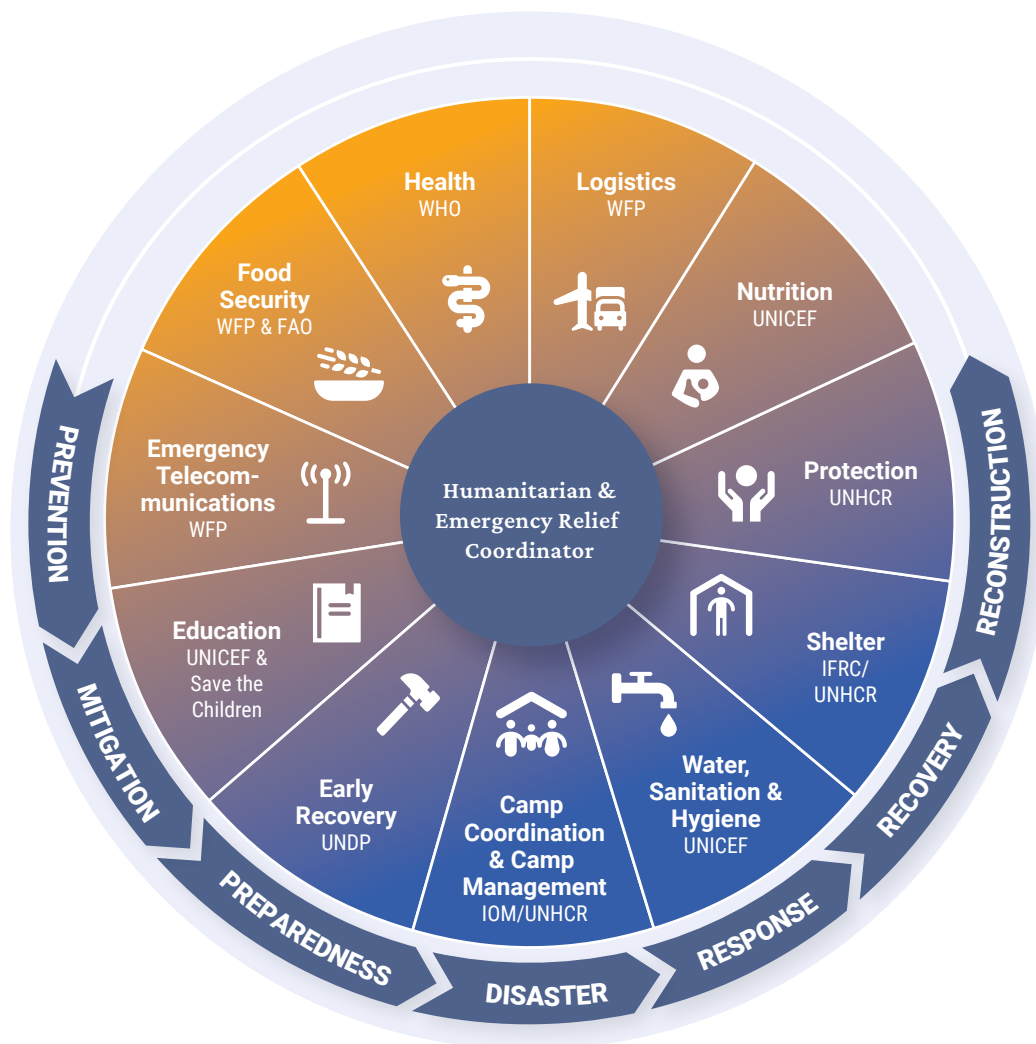
42 See p.10 IASC Cluster Coordination Reference Module. <https://interagencystandingcommittee.org/system/files/2020-11/Reference%20Module%20for%20Cluster%20Coordination%20at%20Country%20Level%20%28revised%20July%202015%29.pdf>

43 Where subnational/area-specific clusters are established, the national-level cluster normally focuses on policy issues and strategic planning, while localized clusters are tasked with local planning and implementation.

44 The CLA also appoints a Cluster Information Management Officer to work with the Cluster Coordinator to support intra-cluster coordination and, in collaboration with OCHA and through the Information Management Working Group, to contribute to inter-cluster coordination (see p.62 for more information on this).

45 The six core functions are described in the IASC Reference Module for Cluster Coordination at the Country Level.

Humanitarian Cluster System



The selection of CLAs ideally mirrors global arrangements). In rare instances this is not possible, and other organizations may be in a better position to lead⁴⁶ based on their coordination-and-response capacity, operational presence and ability to scale up. The HC should encourage all clusters to have an NGO Co-Chair to enhance coordination, wherever feasible.

Heads of CLAs are accountable to the HC and ERC for their cluster's performance, and for en-

sureing that sectoral coordination mechanisms are established and properly supported. In this regard, it is essential for the HC to hold CLAs accountable for the functioning of their clusters, including ensuring that adequate staffing is in place (Coordinator and IM Officer) to deliver effective results. Possible actions include:

- Setting up regular joint meetings with CLAs and their Cluster Coordinator to review and discuss challenges and progress for each sector.

⁴⁶ UNHCR is the CLA for the Global Protection Cluster. However, in disaster situations or complex emergencies without significant displacement, the three protection-mandated agencies (UNHCR, UNICEF and OHCHR) will consult and, under the HC's overall leadership, agree which of them will assume the role of CLA for protection. In the case of service clusters (logistics, emergency telecommunications), the global CLA usually takes on the role of CLA at country level because service clusters require technical expertise that other agencies may not possess.

- Requesting OCHA to organize a briefing together with CLAs and Coordinators on the key findings from the annual Cluster Coordination performance monitoring exercise and ICCG Performance Review.

Where country-level actions are not proving fruitful, the HC may also request to brief the EDG on key challenges, including CLA accountabilities. A direct discussion with the EDG Chair (Director

of OCHA's Operations and Advocacy Division) is another means to ensure HQ-level engagement on the issue.

Regarding CLAs' participation in the HCT, heads of CLA agencies not only represent their agency but also the cluster itself, and they are expected to bring a broader operational perspective to the table.

CLA CHECKLIST FOR HCs:

- Remind CLAs that they are expected to represent their cluster as well as their agency.
- Actively promote the shared leadership of clusters with NGOs, local and national actors, wherever possible, with clear roles and responsibilities.
- Promote a field-centric approach by advocating for coordination at the subnational level, strengthening capacity where needed.
- Encourage CLAs to invite their Cluster Coordinator to participate in HCT meetings where relevant to the agenda.
- Impress on CLAs that they are responsible for the performance of their cluster, full staffing of coordinator and IM positions, and annual cluster performance monitoring.
- In cases where a CLA is not adequately carrying out its responsibilities, consult the Country Director/representative of the agency/organization concerned to avoid the need to propose alternative arrangements.
- Highlight the need to maintain flexible and contextually relevant coordination; remind CLAs that the HCT is required to perform an annual Coordination Architecture Review.
- Advocate for all clusters to develop transition plans that also include the transfer of capacities to national counterparts to eventually assume all coordination responsibilities.
- Conduct regular field missions with CLAs to jointly assess the quality of the response, and to ensure a shared and informed perspective on contextual realities, response priorities and capacities at the operational level.

Resources

- [IASC Reference Module for Cluster Coordination at Country Level](#)
- [Cluster Lead Agencies Joint Letter on Dual Responsibility](#)
- [IASC Operational Guidance on Designating Sector/Cluster Leads in Major New Emergencies](#)
- [IASC Operational Guidance: Generic Terms of Reference for Cluster Coordinators at Country Level](#)
- [IASC Operational Guidance for Cluster Lead Agencies on Working with National Authorities](#)

Inter-cluster/Sector Coordination

When two or more clusters are activated (or where sectors but not clusters are in place), the HC and HCT are responsible for establishing an ICCG/ISCG.⁴⁷ The ICCG brings together all active clusters (or sectors) to collaborate on the operational response: closing delivery gaps, eliminating duplication and ensuring an impartial, people-centred approach.

This is done by reaching a shared understanding of needs, informed by a robust protection and gender analysis, and agreeing on a joint strategy. The ICCG plays a critical role in developing the HRP⁴⁸ and informing the HC/HCT of key strategic concerns requiring resolution at the leadership level. At the same time, the HCT guides the ICCG's priorities, offering strategic direction to enable coherence in operational response, and it tasks the ICCG as required.

The ICCG is accountable to the HC and reports to the HCT through OCHA, which chairs the ICCG. Specific working and advisory groups on cross-cutting, inter-cluster/thematic issues (such as AAP, etc.) can be established directly under (and report to) the ICCG or the HCT.⁴⁹

The ICCG provides operational direction and support to subnational coordination groups, and it plays a necessary role in tracking and monitoring the response. Based on the context and specific coordination needs of the response, the ICCG may be replicated at the subnational level and/or for a specific geographic area.

ICCG CHECKLIST FOR HCs:

- Reinforce the link with the ICCG by attending ICCG meetings on an ad hoc basis.
- Remind ICCG members that they are expected to bring relevant strategic concerns to the HCT, based on their shared analysis.
- Encourage cluster coordinators to attend the HCT where the agenda is relevant to their cluster/sector.
- Convey the need for clusters and the ICCG to reinforce local capacities as part of their work with national counterparts.
- Hold an annual HCT-ICCG retreat/meeting to strengthen coordination and collaboration.
- Encourage the ICCG to perform the annual ICCG Performance Review Monitoring exercise.
- Encourage clusters to perform their annual Cluster Coordination Performance Monitoring exercise.

⁴⁷ For ease of reference here, the term 'ICCG' will be used and denotes both inter-cluster and inter-sector working groups.

⁴⁸ See p.79 for details on the HRP.

⁴⁹ Chairs/Co-Chairs of such bodies are active members of the ICCG or HCT, respectively.

Resources

- [The standard ICCG Terms of Reference](#)

NGO Coordination

Local, national and international NGOs deliver a significant part of humanitarian assistance, and they are integral partners in ensuring that humanitarian action is coordinated and effective in reaching people most in need.

- > For more details on the role of NGOs, see p.22.

NGOs primarily coordinate their operational planning with other stakeholders through the clusters, sectors or other existing working groups. The HC can help to ensure clusters proactively include NGOs and support their participation, including through the use of local languages, if needed, and ensuring they are adequately represented in HRP and other planning and fundraising documents. The HC should encourage all clusters to have an NGO Co-Chair to enhance the coordination and contextualization of the response.

At a response-wide level, NGO networks or forums play an important role in supporting and coordinating the work of NGOs. NGO forums are voluntary groupings of local, national or international NGOs, or a combination of these. In protracted settings, or where disasters are recurrent, NGO forums often become well established over years or even decades, and they establish independent relationships with Governments, donors and other partners. In other settings, forums may emerge, scale up or down, or disband, depending on the requirements of NGOs working in the response.

NGO forums provide their members with a range of support, including coordination, collective advocacy, partnership-building, capacity-strengthening and strategic representation. This diversity in size, representation and focus means it is vital to invest in effective engagement with NGO forums. In most cases, they are supported by a small secretariat team and led by an elected governing body or steering committee. It is important for the HC to have a good understanding of the membership and representative scope of the major NGO fo-

ums, and to consider them strategic allies in the overall coordination architecture. In preparedness settings, it is important to establish a list of key CSOs and NGOs working in different response sectors and geographic regions to allow for rapid coordination during an emergency.

The role of the HC

Wherever possible, the HC should encourage that NGO forums – adequately representing local/national and international NGOs, either jointly or separately – are represented in the HCT, alongside individual NGOs, so that collective NGO positions or perspectives inform the priorities of the overall response. It is important to note that no UN agency, including OCHA, has responsibility for NGO coordination. Therefore, there is no substitute for direct and sustained engagement with NGOs – both from the HC and through the HCT.

The HC should champion and advocate for the importance of NGO coordination with the host Government and donors. NGO forums are often informal groups without legal registration, and they face associated risks due to Government actions that may restrict the space for NGOs to assemble freely and establish suitable governance-and-accountability mechanisms, and to ensure inclusive membership/participation of the local and national NGOs.

To function effectively, NGO forums require adequate resourcing. This may be provided in part by their members, but it often requires additional support from donors. Advocacy by the HC can prove invaluable in this regard.

Resources

- The global consortiums International Council of Voluntary Agencies (ICVA) and InterAction provide ongoing support to national-level NGO forums. They can be a valuable resource for NGOs and the HC if support or advice is needed.
- ICVA maintains a [website with resources for NGO forums](#), which may also be a useful reference for the HC on specific topics.

Cash Coordination

The use of CVA is growing across humanitarian contexts, offering a response modality that can provide significant benefits and help meet basic needs, supplement household incomes, reinvigorate local markets, promote financial inclusion, protect livelihoods and help local economies to recover. Particularly when it is provided with minimum restrictions, cash can put decision-making in the hands of the recipients and offer connections to longer-term development assistance via social protection linkages.

The IASC Cash Coordination Model was approved in March 2022 by the IASC Principals. It places accountability for cash coordination with the ICCG/ISCG. Where CVA constitutes, or has the potential to constitute, a proportion of the response, the HC and HCT may establish a dedicated Cash Working Group (CWG) as a subgroup of the ICCG/ISCG.

The CWG aims to effectively coordinate the delivery of CVA by multiple actors across the response to maximize resources, avoid duplications, address unmet needs, increase effectiveness and enable programmatic coherence. It is also responsible for systematically integrating CVA, particularly multipurpose cash transfers, into humanitarian response and preparedness plans – wherever feasible and appropriate – to ensure coherence and avoid duplication of efforts.

In IASC settings,⁵⁰ leadership of the CWG should be systematically shared between at least two Co-Chairs – including one ‘non-programmatic’

Co-Chair. In all IASC settings where OCHA has an office, OCHA is responsible for providing the non-programmatic Co-Chair(s) for these groups. The programmatic Co-Chair(s) should be elected through a transparent process, and they should include local and national leadership wherever possible.

Cash coordination should prioritize the participation, inclusion and representation of all actors in the response – a principle enshrined in the cash coordination model. CWGs may comprise representatives of clusters/sectors, national and international NGOs, the Red Cross/Red Crescent Movement, UN agencies, national and subnational authorities, donors and financial service providers, where appropriate.

Cash coordination activities – supporting sectoral and multipurpose cash assistance – must be in line with the overall intersectoral operational priorities of the response (as set by the ICCG or ISCG). Given CVA’s inherent benefits and its potential to link to longer-term development, it is important to establish a common understanding of the feasibility and appropriateness of using CVA in general, and multipurpose cash in particular; the potential to link humanitarian CVA with national social-protection mechanisms while leaving no one behind; and the use of CVA as part of anticipatory financing mechanisms.

The IASC-endorsed cash coordination model is built on the principle of localization, enabling more inclusive coordination with greater participation of national and local actors, and helping to ensure that decisions regarding cash interventions are made closer and with greater accountability to the crisis-affected population. Efforts to ensure a collaborative and coherent approach should be encouraged to better assist affected populations in a principled and dignified manner. This should be done in a way that improves complementarities, synergies and accountabilities among response actors. Additionally, a range of technical mea-

50 When clusters are activated and an international humanitarian response system is established.

asures may also support greater coherence in the implementation of the cash response, such as developing a minimum expenditure basket, collaborating around the use of financial service providers and harmonizing transfer rates, among others.

The role of the HC

The HC should promote a common understanding of the feasibility of different response options as part of strategic planning processes, including advocating for the consideration of CVA as a default response option alongside in-kind items and services, where feasible and appropriate. Where appropriate, the HC should also advocate for stronger links between humanitarian cash actors and national social-protection mechanisms by leading efforts to coordinate with development actors (including the World Bank) and national Governments around a common vision, objective(s) and workplan. This includes promoting the consideration of CVA as part of anticipatory financing mechanisms, where feasible and appropriate. The HC should ensure that cash coordination mechanisms are well resourced, represent all sectors and promote activities in line with the overall priorities of the response.

Resources

- [IASC Cash Coordination Model](#)
- Grand Bargain workstream [position paper on linking humanitarian cash and social protection](#)

Humanitarian, Development and Peace Collaboration (HDPC)

HCs have a leadership role in initiating, coordinating and facilitating collaboration between humanitarian, development and, where relevant and appropriate, peace actors.

HDPC is highly context specific. There is no ‘one size fits all’ approach, though there are basic tenets to the collaboration that can be applied in most, if not all, countries with a HRP. Collaboration between humanitarian, development and peace actors should be viewed in the context of existing mandates and be based on the complementarities and synergies among humanitarian, development and peace action. The extent of HDPC will also depend on the type and severity of the emergency; in situations of acute armed conflict, where saving lives and protection are the overriding immediate priorities, opportunities for humanitarian-development collaboration and its links to peace may be more limited.

Under the HC’s leadership, the general framework for strengthened HDPC encourages actors to define a set of common priorities based on a shared understanding of needs and vulnerabilities. These priorities should guide coherent humanitarian and development collaboration, underpinned by flexible and multi-year financing objectives. An example is strengthened humanitarian-development collaboration approaches in support of durable solutions, in line with the UN Secretary-General’s Action Agenda on Internal Displacement.⁵¹ Additionally, development donors and IFIs should be encouraged to scale up financing during times of crisis and in challenging contexts to complement humanitarian action and address underlying drivers.

As part of global efforts to better leverage humanitarian, development and peace resources, the UN established the Joint Steering Committee to Advance Humanitarian and Development Collaboration (JSC). Since its creation in 2017, and following a light review in 2021, the JSC has been reinstated as a UN internal mechanism that aims to address institutional and systemic barriers that hinder HDP collaboration, and incentivize and support more effective HDP collaboration at the country level.

51 www.un.org/en/content/action-agenda-on-internal-displacement/

The JSC is co-chaired at the Assistant Secretary-General level on a rotational basis by OCHA, DCO and PBSO as the three entities mandated to support the DSRSG/ RC/HC, as well as UNDP. OCHA and DCO serve as the secretariat to the JSC. The JSC reports to the UNSDG as well as the Executive Committee of the Secretary-General. Some of the JSC's immediate priorities are to delve into strategic issues and systemic bottlenecks in support of (and informed by) country-level priorities. Additionally, the Development Assistance Committee of the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development has recommendations on the Humanitarian-Development-Peace Nexus (linked below) that provide a policy framework for engaging with key donors on this.

Key Roles of the HC

- Ensure, where relevant, consistency between the common strategic framework and other frameworks, including the UN-SDCF (if separate) and the HRP.
- Promote, as appropriate, harmonization of the underlying analytical and planning processes.
- Ensure coordinated HCT engagement in integrated assessment-and-planning processes to support comprehensive analysis, including appropriate attention to humanitarian concerns, and to develop the business case for integration. Decisions on integration arrangements need to be based on a careful analysis of the situation on the ground, including their risks, costs and benefits for effective humanitarian coordination and humanitarian activities.

Resources

- [UNSDG | UN Policy on Integrated Assessment and Planning](#)
- [The Joint Steering Committee](#)

UN Integration

Integration is the bringing together of UN entities across pillars to enhance the individual and collective impact of the UN response, concentrating on those activities required for sustaining peace. The 2023 UN Integrated Assessment and Planning policy establishes the minimum requirements for the conduct of assessments and planning where an integrated UN presence (i.e. a country team and a multidimensional peacekeeping operation or field-based special political mission) is in place or is being considered, regardless of whether this presence is structurally integrated. The policy focuses on UN activities aimed at sustaining peace, as identified in each particular context and in line with respective mandates. UN activities in areas other than sustaining peace fall outside the scope of the policy.

During the integrated assessment-and-planning process, a country-specific business case will guide decisions on the level and depth of integration (e.g. related to structural, programmatic and funding arrangements) required among the different entities in specific areas. It is crucial that at a minimum, all entities and organizations share a common analysis and agree on a set of common strategic objectives to prevent, reduce and resolve violent conflict and sustain peace.

In all cases, integration arrangements should support joint analysis, coordination, complementarity and coherence among humanitarian, peace and security, development and human rights actors. While humanitarian action can support sustaining peace, its main purpose remains to address life-saving needs and alleviate suffering. Accordingly, most humanitarian action is likely to remain distinct so as not to challenge the ability of UN and broader humanitarian actors to deliver

according to the humanitarian principles. However, humanitarian activities related to the protection of civilians, durable solutions to internal displacement and early recovery may be included in the UN integrated strategic approach based on a joint analysis of context, risks, costs and benefits elaborated in the business case.

The integrated approach and integration arrangements should allow for UN and broader humanitarian actors to deliver according to humanitarian principles and facilitate effective humanitarian coordination with all humanitarian actors.

Refugee Response Coordination

As set out in GA resolutions, UNHCR is mandated to lead the refugee response, including carrying out sectoral inter-agency coordination, contingency planning, response and resource mobilization, and finding durable solutions. As such, it is the lead agency accountable for refugee protection and seeking solutions within the UN system, and for engaging a wider array of stakeholders. Importantly, UNHCR also has a supervisory role: it is the UN entity accountable for ensuring States' adherence to internationally accepted standards vis-à-vis refugees and stateless people, and for strengthening States' protection capacities.

Refugee responses are protection focused and multisectoral, geared to allow refugees to exercise their legal rights deriving from international refugee law. Being outside their home country means that refugees often face increased difficulty in meeting basic needs, leading to increased levels of vulnerability.

Within a country context, the UNHCR Representative speaks for the High Commissioner on matters pertaining to UNHCR's mandate and carries out the coordination responsibilities. In situations involving large refugee movements, the Representative coordinates UN and NGO partners in articulating a Refugee Response Plan,

which serves as an advocacy and joint resource mobilization tool.

Global Compact on Refugees

In 2016, the world began to look afresh at refugee responses and agreed in the New York Declaration⁵² to adopt more comprehensive approaches that engaged a broader array of stakeholders. The subsequent implementation of the Comprehensive Refugee Response Framework – now embedded in the Global Compact on Refugees (GCR)⁵³ – also informs UNHCR's coordination accountabilities. The GCR recognizes the importance of national ownership and the need to employ a multi-stakeholder and partnership approach in which UNHCR, consistent with its mandate, plays a supportive and catalytic role. It provides a blueprint for Governments, international organizations and other stakeholders to ensure that host communities get the support they need and that refugees can lead productive lives.

In line with the GCR, UNHCR is committed to work with RCs, HCs and UNCTs/HCTs to advance national development priorities and ensure no one is left behind. This collaborative work includes encouraging development actors to intervene on behalf of refugees and in support of host communities, and to work with States to include refugees in national development plans.

Coordination arrangements

When a complex emergency takes place and a UNHCR-led refugee response is under way or imminent, UNHCR leads refugee response planning in a manner coherent with the overall humanitarian response led by the HC. This is set out in the 2014 Joint UNHCR-OCHA Note on Mixed Situations – Coordination in Practice,⁵⁴ reconfirmed by the ERC and the UNHCR High Commissioner on 5 June 2018. It provides a detailed overview of the division of responsibilities between the UNHCR Representative and the HC in these situations.

52 www.unhcr.org/584689257.pdf

53 www.unhcr.org/the-global-compact-on-refugees.html

54 www.humanitarianresponse.info/sites/www.humanitarianresponse.info/files/documents/files/joint_unhcr_-_ocha_note_on_mixed_situations.pdf

Extract from the Joint UNHCR-OCHA Note on Mixed Situations – Coordination in Practice

Leadership

The Humanitarian Coordinator, through leadership of humanitarian coordination in complex emergencies and disasters, facilitates the following collective outputs:

- Shared situational analysis
- Common vision and strategic plan for the humanitarian response
- Common advocacy messages
- System-wide resource mobilization and allocation of pooled funds

The UNHCR Representative leads the provision of international protection, humanitarian assistance and durable solutions for refugees (including in complex emergencies involving refugees) and is responsible and accountable for contributing, as a member of the HCT, to the delivery of the IASC collective outputs listed above. S/he shall also:

- Share a situational analysis of the refugee situation.
- Ensure a common vision and strategic refugee response plan, coherent with other humanitarian and development strategies and programming.
- Exercise the High Commissioner's supervisory responsibility and advocate for the protection of and assistance and solutions for refugees.

Refugee response plans

UNHCR leads the development and implementation of and resource mobilization for inter-agency refugee response plans (country specific) and/or regional refugee response plans (to respond to a significant refugee influx into several countries). These response plans are a coordination tool that establishes a common strategy and provides the host Government and donors with an overview of the inter-agency response, including the re-

source requirements. In the contexts of HRPs, a dedicated refugee response chapter is included.

Comprehensive response framework

As requested by the host country, UNHCR supports Governments to establish and support national, regional and international arrangements for the application of the comprehensive refugee response framework. These frameworks should engage a broad range of stakeholders, as envisaged by the GCR, and will be context specific.

As recognized in the GCR, population movements are not necessarily homogeneous and may be of a composite character. Some may be large movements involving refugees and others on the move; other situations may involve refugees and IDPs. In certain situations, external forced displacement may result from sudden-onset natural disasters and environmental degradation.

In mixed situations involving refugees and IDPs, as defined by the UNHCR-OCHA Joint Note, the HCT is responsible for developing a common strategic response plan to address issues around internal displacement, ensuring alignment and complementarity with response plans coordinated by UNHCR.

> See p.99 for details on developing durable solutions for refugees and IDPs.

Resources

- [Updated Refugee Coordination Guidance Note](#), April 2019
- Joint [UNHCR-OCHA Note on Mixed Situations – Coordination in Practice](#), 2014
- [Refugee Response Plans](#)

Migrant Response Coordination

Whether they are living in, transiting through or returning from a crisis-affected country, migrants are among the most vulnerable people during conflicts and natural disasters. Furthermore, crises prompting large-scale population movements can create conditions that require life-saving humanitarian assistance. However, the current

humanitarian coordination system, largely framed around the IASC cluster system and the Refugee Coordination Model, does not systematically account for migrants' needs, including when in mixed settings with IDPs, asylum-seekers and refugees. In 2016, the United Nations Summit for Refugees and Migrants was convened to discuss a more robust international response to large population movements. It resulted in the New York Declaration for Refugees and Migrants, and it set in motion the development of two compacts: the Global Compact for Safe, Orderly and Regular Migration, which reiterated the need for enhanced cooperation on international migration in all its dimensions,⁵⁵ and the GCR.

> See p.67 for details on Refugee Response Coordination.

Migrants are identified as a population of humanitarian concern in an increasing number of HNOs/HRPs, refugee response plans, refugee and migrant response plans, and other types of inter-agency strategic planning processes.⁵⁶ However, the humanitarian coordination approach specific to those crises has been largely addressed through ad hoc structures coordinated at the country or regional level.

In line with a growing number of precedents, effective responses are based on the needs and concerns (as opposed to the status) of migrants and other affected populations, the capacity of Governments to respond and the operational context. Migrants' needs should be mainstreamed into existing humanitarian coordination frameworks before considering alternative arrangements. As a last resort, dedicated coordination mechanisms can be established by using a migrant response platform model to ensure an effective and holistic response to meet migrants' protection and assistance needs.

These platforms cover the specific needs of migrants and people of concern who are not accounted for in existing in-country coordination mechanisms. In mixed settings involving migrants, IOM and UNHCR coordinate with other UN agencies and stakeholders to ensure that assistance is complementary with broader humanitarian response operations, as outlined in the [IOM/UNHCR Framework of Engagement](#), which both organizations signed on 30 June 2022.

55 With a view to supporting the implementation of the Global Compact for Safe, Orderly and Regular Migration, the UN established a Network on Migration to ensure effective, timely and coordinated system-wide support to Member States. In carrying out its mandate, the Network will prioritize the rights and well-being of migrants and their communities of destination, origin and transit. IOM serves as the coordinator and secretariat of the Network, which, as of May 2023, includes 43 regional- and country-level coordination platforms established under the leadership of HCs.

56 As of 2023, 17 of the 41 inter-agency response plans (41 per cent) included in the Global Humanitarian Overview included references to migrants as populations of humanitarian concern. However, gaps remain not only in recording the number of migrants affected by crises but also in the analysis of their needs.

NEGOTIATING AND FACILITATING HUMANITARIAN ACCESS

Humanitarian access is critical for establishing operations, assessing needs, monitoring assistance, moving goods and personnel to where they are needed, and enabling affected people to benefit from assistance and access basic services.

Facilitating and coordinating efforts to establish and maintain safe, timely and unimpeded access is central to the mandate of HCs.

Key roles of the HC

- Promote and facilitate a strategic and coordinated approach to access.
- Ensure that access constraints are identified and monitored, and actions are taken to address them.
- Advocate for safe, timely and unhindered humanitarian access with all parties, including non-State armed groups and de facto authorities.
- Regularly engage on issues related to bureaucratic and administrative impediments.
- Present the issue of access as linked to a population's humanitarian needs rather than to a particular territory.
- Make it clear to all parties that access negotiations do not confer legitimacy or recognition of control over a population or territory.
- Establish high-level dialogue with the Government, military actors, civil society and others relevant to the specific context (natural disaster or conflict).
- Ensure coherence among humanitarian actors on the use of military assets and engagement with parties to conflict.

What is Humanitarian Access?

Humanitarian access refers to humanitarian actors' ability to reach crisis-affected people, as well as the affected population's ability to access humanitarian assistance and services. Rapid and unimpeded access is a fundamental prerequisite for effective humanitarian action. An understanding of the international legal framework (including IHL, IHRL and UN GA resolution 46/182) is critical for framing the access conversation.

> For details on IHL and IHRL see p.15.

The HC is responsible for leading the development of a strategic and coordinated approach to access. Joint reflection and common strategies are critical. The HC may decide to establish dedicated coordination structures to support the analysis and assessment of humanitarian access. When relevant and/or requested by the HCT, this could include a Humanitarian Access Working Group.

The HC has a key role in building a coherent evidence-based narrative on access, built on quantitative and qualitative analysis and systematic monitoring of access constraints. Encouraging HCT members to report on access constraints (including bureaucratic impediments) is critical in this regard. The HC is also responsible for advocating for safe, timely and unhindered humanitarian access with all parties (including non-State armed groups). This involves engaging in high-level humanitarian advocacy and negotiations and humanitarian diplomacy, and promoting compliance with and respect for humanitarian principles and relevant international law.

Resources

- OCHA Minimum Package of Services on Humanitarian Access (available on request at OCHA Country or Regional offices)
- [OCHA on Message: Humanitarian Access](#)

Bureaucratic and Administrative Impediments

Bureaucratic and administrative impediments refer to administrative practices and policies that affect humanitarian organizations' ability to reach people in need in a timely and unfettered manner. These may be intentionally restrictive (such as restrictions on the import of aid equipment or security equipment required for the response) or unintentionally burdensome (such as onerous donor funding application-and-reporting processes, or cumbersome administrative procedures to approve or register organizations). Humanitarian action can be impeded by the administrative practices adopted by donors, host Governments and non-State armed groups controlling territory where people in need reside, and by partnership agreements between UN or INGO donors and local NGOs.

NGOs tend to be disproportionately affected by bureaucratic and administrative impediments. Foreign NGO workers are often subject to residency, labour and other requirements of the host State. The lack of privileges and immunities means that INGOs often need to comply with more stringent administrative requirements to operate legally and safely.

In many countries, CSOs are regulated by domestic legislation and operate within a national legal framework. Ideally, these frameworks help streamline bureaucratic and administrative processes. However, in some contexts they have the opposite effect, at times contrary to international law and humanitarian principles. Common impediments include convoluted or opaque processes for NGO registration, withholding or delaying visa approvals for international staff, or restrictions on the movement of relief items into and within the country. The need for some form of travel authorization to conduct work in specific areas is a common means of limiting the provision of assistance and accurate needs assessments by NGOs. In some cases, these also affect UN and ICRC operations.

The role of the HC

The HC should be prepared to speak out and lead collective action to counter the imposition of bureaucratic and administrative impediments by the Government, donors and non-State actors. This could involve regular discussions in the HCT on developing a common understanding of the range, nature and impact of bureaucratic and administrative impediments, and an associated action plan to address them. To be effective, these efforts should engage with and learn from the NGO community, particularly by engaging NGO forums, to ensure efforts are informed by current operational realities. The HC should ensure partners' coordinated and systematic reporting of bureaucratic and administrative impediments through Humanitarian Access Working Groups. Where efforts at the national level may not be sufficient to resolve such impediments, the HC could request support from the ERC and IASC Principals for high-level advocacy to resolve the impediments and facilitate effective humanitarian response.

Resources

- [Under the IASC Operational Policy and Advocacy Group](#), Task Force 3 on preserving humanitarian space leads a Bureaucratic and Administrative Impediments Working Group. It provides learning, resources and guidance for the humanitarian community, including HCTs.
- [Centre of Competence on Humanitarian Negotiation Field Manual on Frontline Humanitarian Negotiation, November 2019](#)

Humanitarian Civil-Military Coordination

Humanitarian Civil-Military Coordination (UN-CMCoord) is the essential dialogue and interaction between civilian and military or armed actors in humanitarian emergencies. Through systematic engagement, UN-CMCoord aims to promote

humanitarian principles, avoid competition for resources, minimize inconsistency and, where appropriate, pursue common humanitarian goals.

UN-CMCoord can be applied across all contexts, from natural disasters to conflicts and complex emergencies, including migration crises and pandemic response, and in preparation for the potential effects of climate change. Conflicts and complex emergencies have become increasingly protracted and require sustained and substantive dialogue with parties to conflict. Many of these emergencies are characterized by persistent failures to protect civilians, multiple constraints to humanitarian access, and the need to engage with a myriad of armed actors with different profiles and motivations.

UN-CMCoord can support HCs in many ways:

- Establishing and sustaining dialogue with armed actors (including State, non-State and State-aligned actors).
- Facilitating humanitarian access and access negotiations.
- Advocating for the protection of civilians.
- Providing guidance on the appropriate use of armed escorts.
- Establishing and maintaining humanitarian notification systems.⁵⁷
- Influencing combatant behaviour and upholding IHRL and IHL obligations.
- Analysing non-State armed groups to support improved access.
- Providing guidance on operating in counter-terrorism environments.
- Providing guidance on the appropriate use of foreign and domestic military and peacekeeping assets to support humanitarian operations.
- Facilitating military capacities to address the effects of climate change and climate change planning, in accordance with the UN-CMCoord framework.
- Facilitating pandemic planning and response, in accordance with the UN-CMCoord framework.

The role of the HC

The HC may be the primary interlocutor with the most senior levels of national militaries, armed elements and other parties to conflict, and/or the senior leadership of domestic and bilateral military support in natural disasters. The HC is responsible for providing direction across the HCT on engaging with military and armed actors. This involves ensuring coherence across a wide range of issues, including, but not limited to, the use of armed escorts; negotiating humanitarian access with armed actors; ensuring positive protection outcomes; influencing the behaviour of armed actors (reminding them of their obligations to IHL) in an effort to prevent the deliberate targeting of health facilities, schools and other protected sites; and the appropriate use of military assets to fill an identified gap in the humanitarian response.

Armed or Military Escorts for Humanitarian Convoys

As a rule, humanitarian organizations, including those of the UN, should not use armed escorts. However, there may be exceptional circumstances in which the use of armed escorts is necessary as a last resort to enable immediate humanitarian action and address critical life-saving needs. Before deciding on such exceptions, the humanitarian community must consider the immediate and longer-term consequences. Before opting to use armed escorts, all possible alternatives should be considered. 'Last resort' is when no other option is available to facilitate access and the timely delivery of humanitarian assistance to meet critical humanitarian needs.

Using armed escorts may carry serious risks for humanitarian organizations and affected populations both in the immediate and longer term.

⁵⁷ Voluntary systems to share the geographic coordinates of aid operations (humanitarian missions as well as permanent and temporary humanitarian sites) with military forces as a means of reducing humanitarian casualties and protecting humanitarian missions in areas of active hostilities.

“The resort to armed escorts comes with certain risks: If armed escorts consist of military actors that are party to a conflict, they can draw attack from other parties, thus exposing humanitarians and their beneficiaries to harm. The use of armed escorts, whether military or civilian, can also undermine perceptions of humanitarians’ neutrality and independence, in turn jeopardizing community acceptance and staff security, and hindering access to civilians in need. Therefore, armed escorts should only be used in exceptional circumstances as a last resort, and consequences and alternatives should always be considered first.”

– UN Secretary-General’s Report on the Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict, para. 85.

A robust context analysis and actor-mapping identifying the access and security risks of using armed escorts is an important tool in identifying such risks.

Depending on the nature of the humanitarian organization, escorts are used as a last resort to help mitigate the risks associated with humanitarian movements, such as armed attacks. These are authorized at the discretion of the specific humanitarian organization (if non-UN) and where the HC and HCTs (for humanitarian organizations) are encouraged to forge a common position for the humanitarian community. The Designated Official decides exclusively for UN staff and assets. However, it should be noted that UN use of armed escorts will likely impact the non-UN actors that do not use escorts, including most NGOs. Military escorts may include UN forces conducting peace operations (governed by Security Council decisions), other international forces, State forces, non-State groups or State-aligned groups.

The deployment of armed escorts is subject to the principle of last resort. The IASC Non-Binding Guidelines on the Use of Armed Escorts for Hu-

manitarian Convoys provides guidance to HCs and HCTs in navigating the decision-making process for the humanitarian community. UN agencies’ use of armed escorts will require a security risk assessment/security risk management process⁵⁸ that considers, but is not limited to, the following criteria:

- **Sovereignty:** National authorities or the local controlling authority are unwilling or unable to provide a secure environment.
- **Need:** The level of humanitarian need is such that the lack of humanitarian assistance would lead to unacceptable human suffering.
- **Safety:** Armed or military escorts can provide the credible deterrent needed to enhance the safety of humanitarian personnel and the capacity to provide assistance without compromising the security of beneficiaries and other local populations.
- **Sustainability:** The use of armed or military escorts does not compromise the longer-term capacity of humanitarian organizations to fulfil their mandate safely and effectively.
- **Time-bound:** The use of armed escorts should be limited in time, and an exit strategy should be planned from the onset.

Humanitarian and military vehicles should remain distinctly separate. Other than the vehicles, weapons and personnel providing the escorts, the convoys should remain exclusively humanitarian. It is important to bear in mind that non-UN organizations have their own rules and decision-making processes for the use of armed or military escorts for humanitarian convoys. NGOs are never bound by the UN’s security framework. Some NGOs will have subscribed to the Saving Lives Together Framework.

Deployed UN humanitarian civil-military coordination officers (see below) can act as an intermediary between the humanitarian community and the military when requests for military or armed escorts are considered.

58 This includes a Programme Criticality Assessment – see p.85 for details on this.

Resources

- OCHA's Civil-Military Coordination Service (CMCS) is the designated UN focal point for UN-CMCoord, supporting field operations as well as regional and global activities. CMCS deploys UN-CMCoord capacity to address needs in sudden-onset emergencies as well as in complex and protracted crises. CMCS also supports the channelling of requests for foreign military assets.
- The global resource website for humanitarian civil-military coordination – <https://dialoguing.org>
- [Guidelines on the Use of Foreign Military and Civil Defence Assets in Disaster Relief – Oslo Guidelines](#)
- [Civil-Military Guidelines and Reference for Complex Emergencies](#)
- [IASC Non-binding Guidelines on the Use of Armed Escorts for Humanitarian Convoys, Feb 2013](#)
- [UN-CMCoord Field Handbook, v 2.0](#)
- [UN-CMCoord Guide for the Military, v 2.0](#)
- [Recommended Practices for Effective Humanitarian Civil-Military Coordination of Foreign Military Assets \(FMA\) in Natural and Man-Made Disasters](#)
- [OCHA on Message: Civil-Military Coordination](#)
- The [UN-CMCoord training programme](#) equips humanitarian, civil and military actors with the knowledge and skills to effectively and appropriately interact in humanitarian contexts.
- [Working Paper - Operational Guidance for Humanitarian Notification Systems](#)
- [Humanitarian Notification System SOPs](#)
- [The UN Programme Criticality Framework](#)
- [Guidelines on Humanitarian Negotiations with Armed Groups \(2006\)](#)
- [OCHA's Frequently Asked Questions on Armed Escorts](#)
- [Saving Lives Together Framework](#)

Humanitarian Diplomacy

Humanitarian diplomacy is the use of high-level engagement to influence the parties to armed conflicts and their sponsors to pursue humanitarian objectives. It requires nurturing relationships at the highest level to pursue the realization of humanitarian goals.

Humanitarian diplomacy can be used for different purposes:

- To negotiate access and help mobilize influence over actors that are impeding humanitarian access, including State actors and non-State armed groups.
- To raise protection issues or respond to global humanitarian issues.
- To help find solutions to prevent, mitigate or roll back humanitarian need.

Humanitarian diplomacy differs from but is supported by public and private advocacy. Humanitarian diplomacy relates primarily to private and confidential political engagement to seek agreements on humanitarian issues, while advocacy is a coordinated strategy to influence decisions. Public or private advocacy could be mobilized as an instrument in support of humanitarian diplomacy efforts.

Humanitarian diplomacy and humanitarian negotiations are interdependent. Humanitarian diplomacy is a broader instrument under which humanitarian negotiations fall. Effective humanitarian diplomacy on access requires the use of humanitarian negotiations; likewise, humanitarian negotiations on access greatly benefit from the use of humanitarian diplomacy, increasing their chances of success. Both can be undertaken simultaneously by different stakeholders at different levels.

The Humanitarian Negotiations Unit (HNU) sits within OCHA. It provides on-demand support to HCs on the conduct of humanitarian diplomacy, including through assisting with conflict and political analysis, operational support and advisory support.

Negotiation Analysis and Strategy

OCHA's mandate (UN GA resolution 46/182) provides legal basis and includes negotiations among the tools to facilitate access. Before initiating negotiations, it is important to understand the operational context and conflict dynamics, and to map key stakeholders and their motivations. Higher-level negotiations that seek longer-term engagement should first focus on building trust among the negotiation teams. Negotiators should frame the conversation away from incentives not to create a transactional relationship and clearly communicate red lines. OCHA's HNU can provide analytical and advisory support remotely and in country, as required.

The practitioner's manual on Humanitarian Negotiations with Armed Groups provides a nine-step generic framework that can be applied to humanitarian negotiations.

It is important to be aware that while negotiations can help facilitate humanitarian access, they can also have unintended or unanticipated consequences for humanitarian organizations:

- Negotiating with armed groups can generate or reinforce a perception among other armed groups, the population, the host Government and/or other States that the humanitarian organization is biased or lacking impartiality.
- Entering into negotiations with an armed group can also have potentially serious consequences for the security of the negotiators themselves, their colleagues, other humanitarian organizations and the populations they serve.
- Host-country Governments, other States, regional organizations and third parties external to the humanitarian negotiations may attempt to exert pressure on or sanction the humanitarian organization in order to limit or cease their contact with armed groups, or they may attempt to influence the negotiations in pursuit of political objectives. Host-country Governments may see the negotiations as legitimizing particular armed groups (especially when these are labelled as terrorist groups), or as recognizing, de facto, their territorial control.

Resources

- [Guidelines on Humanitarian Negotiations with Armed Groups, United Nations, 2006.](#)

Sanctions and Counterterrorism Measures

The implementation of sanctions and counter-terrorism measures targeting local actors by the host State, donors or other States can have an important impact on humanitarian operations and access. Sanctions regimes may prohibit or require authorization ('licences') for certain humanitarian activities, or for the export of items and services necessary to humanitarian operations (which often entails lengthy, cumbersome and complex procedures). Humanitarian organizations and private partners may incur heavy penalties in case of aid diversion to sanctioned entities. As a result, private sector organizations (including banks) may be reluctant to provide services in support of humanitarian operations in countries affected by sanctions. Donors and, in some instances, host States have adopted a zero-tolerance policy on aid diversion to sanctioned groups and individuals (including through funding cuts, no-contact policies with certain groups, requests for information on beneficiaries, beneficiary vetting or prohibitions on implementing programmes in certain areas).

In some countries, there have been disinformation campaigns presenting humanitarian operations as a potential source of support to 'terrorist groups'. Humanitarian organizations have been expelled, and staff have been intimidated, arrested and even prosecuted upon accusations of support to terrorism, based on the mere fact that they provided assistance in areas beyond Government control. In several countries, counter-terrorism laws criminalize interactions with groups considered 'terrorist', potentially including humanitarian organizations' engagement to negotiate access.

Sanctions and counter-terrorism measures have also reinforced the risk of the politicization of humanitarian assistance. Some States have asked humanitarian organizations to speak out

on the socioeconomic impact of sanctions to discredit sanctions as a political tool; donors and counter-terrorism actors have pushed for humanitarian activities to be designed or presented as counter-terrorism activities or redress for victims of terrorism; and donors and sanctions actors have considered humanitarian organizations as information providers for sanctions implementation. Such practices generate a perception that humanitarian action is not neutral and impartial but serves a political agenda. This can have repercussions on acceptance, the safety and security of staff in the field, and the ability to access all people in need.

The adoption of a transverse humanitarian carve-out across UN sanctions regimes by the Security Council (resolution 2664) and similar provisions in domestic sanctions regimes are important steps. However, the overall humanitarian exemptions framework remains complex, piecemeal and subject to interpretation, and it fails to remedy all legal risks for humanitarian organizations as well as banks and companies involved in the assistance-delivery chain.

In some contexts, these measures have resulted in major delays or even the cancellation of programmes; restricted key humanitarian activities (e.g. the impartial provision of medical care, engagement with sanctioned groups for humanitarian purposes or protection activities for detainees); prevented access to areas where sanctioned groups have influence; or restricted access to local vendors, contractors and implementing partners. Humanitarian staff have also faced intimidation, threats and other forms of

violence following accusations of supporting sanctioned groups.

The role of the HC

HCs have a key role in ensuring documentation on how sanctions and counter-terrorism measures affect the operations of humanitarian organizations in the HCT, and in sharing this information with OCHA HQ to inform potential advocacy for remedial measures. HCs also have a responsibility to advocate with relevant interlocutors – host Governments and/or donors and other Member States – to ensure that sanctions and counter-terrorism measures do not prevent timely humanitarian access and impartial, needs-based humanitarian assistance. HCs are encouraged to seek support, advice and guidance from OCHA HQ on these sensitive matters.

HCs also have a responsibility to ensure that all actors within the UN system and the humanitarian community take precautions to maintain a clear distinction between humanitarian action on the one hand, and counter-terrorism objectives or activities, or any other political agenda or mandates, on the other.

Resources

- [IASC Guidance to Humanitarian Coordinators - Impact of Sanctions and Counterterrorism Measures on Humanitarian Operations](#)

IMPLEMENTING THE HUMANITARIAN PROGRAMME CYCLE

The Humanitarian Programme Cycle (HPC) is an operational framework developed by the IASC. It sets out the sequences of actions to take to prepare for, manage, deliver and monitor collective humanitarian responses. It details the processes for developing the evidence base, brings key actors together to determine a collective response, and ensures that programmes adapt to changing circumstances and respond to affected populations' needs. Essentially, it helps HCs to answer four basic questions: Who needs what and when? Where are they? How is this best done? Who will do it?

Key roles of the HC

- Kick off the HPC process, providing a clear vision for needs assessment/analysis and response planning, including based on lessons learned from the previous year.
- Oversee robust needs assessment and analysis that clearly defines the scope and severity of the emergency and lays the groundwork for a strong response plan.
- Lead the development of a principled, strategic and focused HRP, which is people centred, evidence based, credible, highly prioritized, and as local as possible and international as necessary.
- Set clear boundaries for the humanitarian response, and spearhead strong engagement between humanitarian and development partners to ensure complementarity between the HRP and development activities.
- Promote a people-centred approach to the HPC that is grounded in extensive community engagement, and responsive and accountable to feedback from crisis-affected people.
- Ensure a quality and inclusive humanitarian response that protects against SEA, promotes the centrality of protec-

tion and considers the unique needs of women, men, girls and boys, people with disabilities, older persons, LGBTQI+ and other groups.

- Oversee the development of a strong monitoring framework, and highlight any critical issues that emerge and/or course corrections that need to be made during the response.
- Highlight the capacity required from agencies, clusters/sectors and organizations to assess and respond to the crisis, and raise any shortfalls.
- Lead engagement with relevant authorities and partners to support the timely release of needs assessment/analysis and response documents.

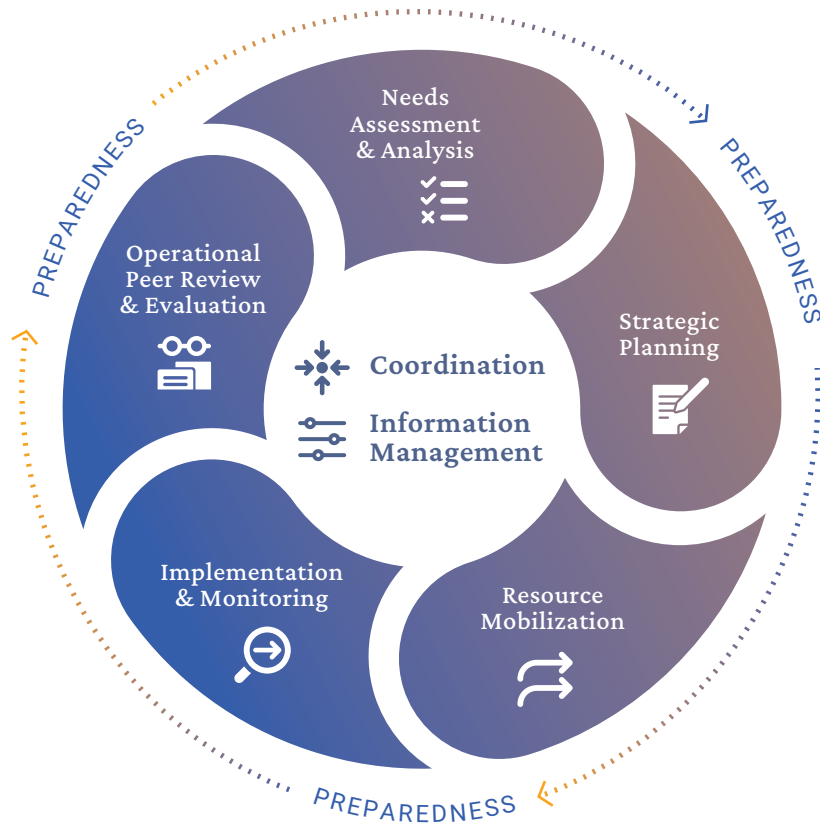
Elements of the Humanitarian Programme Cycle

The HPC consists of five steps, each of which logically builds on the previous and leads to the next (see figure on the next page). Successful implementation of the HPC depends on comprehensive emergency preparedness, effective coordination with national/local authorities and humanitarian actors, and systematic information management.

In 2019, the HPC templates and guidance were revised in line with consolidated best practice and commitments made at the World Humanitarian Summit and Grand Bargain. They reflect the complexity of the environments in which humanitarian practitioners work, and the depth of analysis that is required and expected.

The enhanced HPC approach emphasizes the importance of a people-centred, inter-sectoral analysis of the humanitarian consequences of a crisis and the associated response, helping programmes to arrive at a prioritized and evidence-based plan.

Humanitarian Programme Cycle



Resources

- [Step by Step Guide – 2021 Humanitarian Programme Cycle](#)
- [Knowledge Management Platform and repository for HPC guidance and templates](#)

Coordinated Needs Assessments and Joint Analysis

A needs analysis provides the evidence base and foundation for the HPC. The analysis should always be based on a desk review of existing secondary data, from which a quick situation analysis can be derived, as well as an understanding of the information gaps that exist. A decision can then be taken on whether and how additional data needs should proceed.

Sudden-onset disasters

In sudden-onset disasters and contexts that may lead to an IASC Scale-Up activation,⁵⁹ a Multi-Cluster/Sector Initial Rapid Assessment (or alternative rapid assessment based on coordinated assessments) is implemented. This consists of a situation analysis within the first 72 hours, followed by a multisector assessment and report within the first two weeks. This inter-agency approach enables actors to reach, from the outset, a common understanding of the situation and its likely evolution. Based on the assessment's findings, humanitarian actors can develop a joint plan (including a Flash Appeal), mobilize resources and monitor the situation. The results of the rapid assessment also inform and support the design of subsequent needs assessments and analysis, which are often more detailed and operational in focus.

⁵⁹ See p.81 for details on this.

The situation analysis provides an initial assessment of the scope and severity of an emergency, and an initial understanding of the required response. Based on a review of secondary information by the HCT (led by the HC), it draws on baseline information gathered during the preparedness phase and initial information from affected populations, national authorities, CSOs, other implementers and clusters/sectors. This is the first step towards setting overall objectives for the response plan that takes shape during the first 30 days of a large sudden-onset emergency. It also enables the IASC Principals to take key decisions relating to scale, leadership and required capacities. It is instrumental in initiating a collective and coordinated process of assessment and decision-making, recognizing that local ownership and national engagement from the start are crucial to the quality of the response.

Protracted or slow-onset crises

In protracted or slow-onset crises, which characterize most humanitarian situations, needs assessments and analysis are anchored within the Humanitarian Needs Overview (HNO). The IASC Operational Guidance on Coordinated Assessments outlines the agreed approaches and protocols that inform a coordinated assessment approach. It recommends that the HC establishes coordination mechanisms for cross-cluster/sector needs assessment and analysis, such as an Assessment and Analysis Working Group (AAWG).

Once a secondary data review has been conducted, the AAWG, in collaboration with the ICCG and with guidance from the HCT, will decide whether a joint needs assessment (such as a multisectoral needs assessment) is required, or whether har-

monized in-depth sectoral assessments better serve the information requirements.

Using the Joint Intersectoral Analysis Framework (JIAF),⁶⁰ the data and information from assessments can be used to answer key questions about the humanitarian conditions, namely which geographical areas and population groups are most affected or at risk as a result of the crisis; who and how many people need humanitarian assistance, and at what level of severity; what are the immediate and underlying structural causes; and how are the needs expected to evolve. This analysis in the HNO will then inform planning for the most likely scenario in the HRP.

The analysis should link as well as contribute to the in-depth and integrated analysis of protection risks, violations and harms that informs humanitarian action and response – as set out in the IASC Policy on Protection in Humanitarian Action⁶¹ – as well as ensure proper and integrated analysis of impacts on more vulnerable segments of the population, based on (at the very least) factors related to age, gender, disability and other diversities.⁶²

Humanitarian analysis should also inform Common Country Assessments (CCA).⁶³ This helps build an evidence base for humanitarian-development collaboration, highlighting critical areas that require longer-term development interventions to reduce humanitarian needs, risks and vulnerability. HNOs as well as other needs-and-vulnerability assessments and analyses are useful inputs into the CCA. Conversely, they can also benefit from recent CCAs and, where available, multi-stakeholder, multidimensional risk analysis to help incorporate risk drivers in needs assessment and analysis. Granular information on people's vulnerabilities,

60 The JIAF is a set of protocols, methods and tools used to classify the severity of humanitarian conditions (including humanitarian needs) resulting from a shock event or ongoing crisis; identify the main drivers and underlying factors; and provide actionable insights for decision-making. It is the analysis framework that underpins the HNO.

61 See p.34 for details on the IASC Protection Policy.

62 See p.48 for details on addressing the diversity of needs.

63 The CCA is the UN system's independent, impartial and collective assessment (i.e. a description of a country situation) and analysis (i.e. a description of causes and their implications) of a country situation for its internal use in developing the Cooperation Framework. It examines progress, gaps, opportunities and bottlenecks vis-à-vis a country's commitment to achieving the 2030 Agenda, UN norms and standards, and the principles of the UN Charter, including as reflected in the Cooperation Framework's Guiding Principles

risks and humanitarian needs can enrich broader social, institutional, economic and political analyses conducted by development actors.

Resources

- [IASC Operational Guidance on Coordinated Assessments](#)
- [Joint Intersectoral Analysis Framework](#)
- [UNSDCF Guidance](#)

Humanitarian Response Analysis and Planning

Based on the assessment of humanitarian needs and the situation analysis, partners then collaborate to develop a response plan. Depending on the context, this will result in one of the following products:

- In a protracted crisis, or one that requires a response for 12 months or longer, a HRP is developed, which covers January to December.
- In some instances where humanitarian needs are likely to continue, a Multi-Year Humanitarian Strategy (MYHS) can be developed to promote a more effective humanitarian response. An MYHS is accompanied by an annual humanitarian analysis (HNO), operational plans (HRP) and monitoring plans.
- In a sudden-onset disaster, where there is a rapid deterioration in the humanitarian situation, a Flash Appeal may be launched within 72 hours. This covers a period of up to six months. In situations where the needs are expected to require sustained assistance, the Flash Appeal can be followed by a full HRP. This may be a new HRP or a revision of a pre-existing HRP.

The HRP is primarily a management tool for the HC and HCT. It can also be used to articulate and communicate the scope and scale of the crisis and response (to donors and the public) and, as such, it can act as a resource mobilization tool. The HRP articulates the HCT's common vision for in-country humanitarian action, the strategy for

achieving that vision, and the actions to take to implement the strategy, as well as agreement on the monitoring of the collective response. Contributions against the HRP (and Flash Appeal) are recorded and tracked by the Financial Tracking Service (FTS).

> See p.92 for details on resource mobilization and the FTS.

OCHA facilitates the HRP's development in consultation and close collaboration with the HCT, ICCG and relevant humanitarian partners. The elaboration of a HRP is directly linked to the analysis undertaken through the HNO. All people in need identified in the HNO should be considered from the outset of the planning process, given that their needs are humanitarian by definition and their severity has been ascertained by the analysis in the HNO.⁶⁴ Based on the type and severity of needs identified in the HNO, a response analysis is used to review the appropriateness, relevance and feasibility of different interventions and response modalities – such as cash, voucher and in-kind assistance.

The HRP must document how community engagement informed the response and will inform potential future adjustments, ensuring AAP at the centre of humanitarian planning. The HRP documents a coherent results chain, with the strategic objectives reflecting the improvements to people's lives that the HRP intends to achieve. The HRP must document other planning frameworks – development, Government, peacebuilding – and outline how the HRP complements these plans. For example, links with collective outcomes as part of humanitarian-development collaboration – and, where appropriate, collaboration with peace actors – are also made explicit if they exist. Where possible, complementary strategies are identified and referenced in the HRP and other strategic plans, such as the UNSDCF, integrated strategic frameworks, and Government national plans, including national disaster risk reduction (DRR) strategies, and national climate change

⁶⁴ A needs analysis should include causes and driving factors, severity, magnitude, trends and projections, as well as people's own prioritization of their needs (as identified through AAP initiatives). See the HPC 2021 Response Analysis and Prioritization Guide for more details on this (see resources).

and/or the relevant strategic plans of financial institutions and bilateral donors. Some countries, often under national leadership, have articulated a set of collective outcomes to measurably reduce risk and vulnerability in areas such as food security and nutrition, health, basic social services, and durable solutions to internal displacement, among others. These are then referenced and linked to appropriate strategies in the HRP and equivalent development plans.

The HPC in refugee situations

In humanitarian refugee crises, UNHCR leads the development and implementation of and resource mobilization for inter-agency refugee response plans.

Refugees are included in HNOs, and in the contexts of HRPs a dedicated refugee response chapter is included in the HPC templates. UNHCR is responsible for providing the chapter information. The same applies for other emergency humanitarian appeals, such as Flash Appeals.

Resources

- [Flash Appeal guidance and templates](#)
- Humanitarian Response Plan – [overview](#) and [template](#)
- [Response Analysis and Prioritization Guide for the HRP](#)

- [UN Sustainable Development Cooperation Framework guidance](#)

Monitoring

Monitoring is ongoing throughout the HPC. It is used to track the evolution of the situation and needs, the implementation of the humanitarian response and the effectiveness of aid delivery. Monitoring activities also include the financial tracking of contributions performed by FTS in close cooperation with partners. It also considers the diversity of the affected population and their perspectives on the response. The enhanced HPC places increased emphasis on monitoring to ensure that the response remains appropriate to evolving needs and to track progress against agreed outcomes. Based on the results of the monitoring process, humanitarian partners are advised to revisit planning assumptions and adapt the response accordingly. To fulfil this function, monitoring should:

- Start from a clear idea of what to monitor and why.
- Aim for as 'real time' as possible, rather than occasional one-shot events or documents.
- Cover the full scope, from needs to results.
- Support analysis that will enable decision-making.
- Define the monitoring framework based on objectives to be met, critical indicators to measure and the capacity to do so.

MANAGING THE EMERGENCY RESPONSE (TOOLS AND SERVICES)

In leading and coordinating the emergency response, the HC can call on a wide range of tools and services for additional support, many provided through OCHA. It is important to ensure that, where possible, international assistance complements and works alongside national response mechanisms.

Key roles of the HC

- In the event of a sudden-onset crisis or a rapid deterioration in humanitarian conditions, lead an initial assessment of the humanitarian situation in consultation with the HCT.
- Liaise with OCHA and the ERC to help determine whether the initial assessment warrants a Scale-Up activation.
- If required, request additional humanitarian capacity through OCHA, both for coordination and specialist technical support.
- In consultation with OCHA, determine the Terms of Reference for international responders.
- Where appropriate, ensure that incoming international responders support or complement national/local response capacities and mechanisms.
- In the event of a disaster, contact the relevant national authority to determine any damage to infrastructure that might affect the delivery of relief assets or assistance.

Emergency Declarations

Scale-Up Protocols

An IASC Scale-Up activation is a system-wide mobilization in response to a sudden-onset and/or rapidly deteriorating humanitarian situation in a given country, including at the subnational

level, where the capacity to lead, coordinate and deliver humanitarian assistance does not match the scale, complexity and urgency of the crisis. This exceptional measure is applied only for a time-bound period of up to six months. Only in very limited circumstances is an additional three-month extension considered.

The procedure activates mechanisms and tools to:

- Ensure that the IASC system delivers effectively in support of national authorities and existing capacities, and monitors its own performance.
- Ensure that adequate capacities and tools are in place for empowered leadership and coordination of the humanitarian system.
- Engage IASC member organizations and global CLAs in establishing the required systems and mobilizing the necessary resources to contribute to the response, as per their respective mandates.

The Scale-Up activation is issued by the ERC, in consultation with the HC, the EDG and IASC Principals. Where the HC function is not yet designated, the UN RC shall convene a HCT and submit a report in consultation with relevant operational in-country IASC partners, based on an analysis of the following criteria: scale, complexity, urgency, capacity and risk of failure to deliver at scale to affected populations. In the case of an infectious-disease event, the IASC Level 3 activation procedure for infectious-disease events applies.⁶⁵

A Scale-Up activation indicates the scale at which the humanitarian system needs to step up its efforts and activate internal procedures to better respond to the crisis. It does not indicate a ranking of the severity of the crisis, or that the crisis should, at this stage, be prioritized for funding by the international community.

A Scale-Up activation is primarily a mechanism for emergency response. That said, humanitarian

65 Humanitarian System-Wide Scale-Up Activation | IASC (interagencystandingcommittee.org)

and development partners can use other mechanisms to invest in preparedness, operational readiness, early warning and early action to limit the number of emergency situations in which a Scale-Up activation would be required

Resources

- [Protocol 1: Humanitarian System-Wide Scale-Up Activation – definition and procedures](#)
- [Protocol 2: ‘Empowered Leadership’ in Humanitarian System-Wide Scale-Up Activation](#)
- [Frequently asked questions on the Humanitarian System-Wide Scale-Up Activation](#)
- [Scale-Up Activation timeline – infographic](#)
- [IASC System-Wide Scale-Up Protocols – adapted for the COVID-19 pandemic, 2020](#)
- [IASC Humanitarian System-Wide Activation Protocol for the Control of Infectious Disease Events, 2019](#)

Emergency Surge Teams

If additional humanitarian capacity is required, OCHA can mobilize a number of mechanisms (internal and external) to provide immediate and longer-term assistance. These include coordination and specialist surge capacity from regional offices, HQs and other country offices, an UNDAC team, the Stand-By Partnership Programme, the Protection and Gender Standby Capacity Projects, and environmental and private sector experts. The OCHA country and regional office will initiate procedures to mobilize these resources through OCHA’s Operations and Advocacy Division in New York and its Response Support Branch in Geneva.

UN Disaster Assessment and Coordination

The UNDAC system is a roster of disaster managers and humanitarian aid professionals from Governments, regional organizations, UN agencies and CLAs. Depending on needs, the teams comprise 3 to 30 experts (or more if needed) and can support any phase of the HPC. UNDAC deploys with operational partners who provide support for logistics, communications, base camps, mapping and GIS capacities.

UNDAC is managed by OCHA in Geneva and from its regional offices. It deploys teams in the immediate response phase (the first four weeks) in support of the UN system and the affected State. In emergency situations, an UNDAC team is mobilized and deployed within 48 hours of a request. Unlike other emergency surge mechanisms, UNDAC embeds thematic experts from a wide range of different organizations (many from Member States). Their ability to work with the affected Government’s response mechanisms ensures effective coordination between national civil protection authorities and the incoming international responders. The UNDAC teams are self-sufficient in terms of staffing, funds and equipment to be fully operational during the first phase of response. The team includes personnel from partner organizations specialized in logistics, mapping, assessment and analysis to enhance its effectiveness. These partners, such as MapAction, IMPACT/REACH, Atlas Logistics and the International Humanitarian Partnership, work together in dedicated operational cells of the On-Site Operations Coordination Centre (OSOCC), such as an Assessment & Analysis cell, IM cell, and the Urban Search and Rescue (USAR) coordination cell. OCHA deploys these teams (at no cost) following a request from the HC.

UNDAC teams can also be deployed in advance of a crisis to be pre-positioned or, as part of preparedness, to evaluate and strengthen national response preparedness, including national policies and legislation, and support capacity-building activities and training for emergency management. The HC determines the Terms of Reference for an UNDAC mission. These should focus on strengthening or complementing local response coordination capacities in any of the following areas (for up to 30 days):

- The coordination of the international response through an Emergency Operation Centre or OSOCC.
- Technical support for UN-CMCoord, environmental risk analysis, security, etc.

- Assessments and analyses (e.g. humanitarian needs, environmental issues, infrastructure damage).
- IM and reporting.
- Operational coordination for urban search-and-rescue activities through the International Search and Rescue Advisory Group (INSARAG) managed by OCHA's Emergency Response Section.
- Logistical support, such as base camps and telecommunications.

Resources

- [UNDAC website](#)
- [UNDAC field handbook](#)
- [OSOCC Guidelines](#)

INSARAG - International Search and Rescue Advisory Group

USAR comprises trained experts who provide search-and-rescue assistance in an emergency, such as an earthquake or structural collapse. USAR teams that deploy internationally generally comprise expert personnel, specialized equipment and search dogs.

The teams can be operational within 24 to 48 hours of a disaster. They are offered and received bilaterally and/or with coordination support from OCHA-managed INSARAG. The advantage of working with INSARAG to receive international USAR teams is that their precise capacities and capabilities are specified through an INSARAG External Classification (IEC) system, and the teams work according to internationally agreed standards and modalities for effective response.

Training in the INSARAG Guidelines and Methodology (www.insarag.org/methodology/insarag-guidelines/) provides technical expertise in international USAR response according to the following phases: preparedness, mobilization, operations, demobilization and post-mission.

INSARAG training is designed so that in an emergency, USAR teams share internationally accepted procedures and systems for sustained

cooperation. In addition to engagement with the INSARAG Guidelines, INSARAG member countries with USAR teams deploying internationally are encouraged to apply for IEC. The IEC is an independent peer review of international INSARAG-endorsed USAR teams. The IEC classifies teams as Light, Medium or Heavy to ensure that only qualified and appropriate USAR resources are deployed in an emergency.

There are 62 teams classified globally (www.insarag.org/iec/iec/). They can respond bilaterally at a moment's notice to augment national life-saving efforts.

INSARAG classifies USAR teams into the following three categories:

1. Light USAR teams have the operational capability to assist with surface search-and-rescue following a disaster. These teams are not normally recommended for international deployment.
2. Medium USAR teams have the operational capability to conduct technical search-and-rescue operations in structural-collapse incidents, and they are required to be able to search for trapped people. International Medium USAR teams travelling to an affected country should be operational in the affected country within 32 hours of when the disaster is posted on the Virtual OSOCC. A Medium team must be adequately staffed to allow for 24-hour operations at one site for up to seven days.
3. Heavy USAR teams have the operational capability for difficult and technical search-and-rescue operations. They are required to be able to search for trapped people and use canine and technical systems. They are also required to provide international assistance in disasters resulting in the collapse of multiple structures, typically in urban settings, when national response capacity has either been overwhelmed or does not have the required capability. International Heavy USAR teams travelling to

an affected country should be operational in the affected country within 48 hours of when the disaster is posted on the Virtual OSOCC. A Heavy team must be adequately resourced to allow for 24-hour operations at two separate sites for up to 10 days.

A Government seeking assistance in activating international USAR teams through INSARAG can do so through a pre-identified INSARAG National Focal Point or directly through the INSARAG secretariat at insarag@un.org

Countries interested in joining the INSARAG network or participating in INSARAG or Usar Coordination Cell training can contact the INSARAG secretariat in Geneva, Switzerland, at insarag@un.org, and the 24-hour duty officer phone at +41 (0)22 917 1600.

Capacity for Disaster Reduction Initiative (CADRI)

CADRI is an inter-agency mechanism that provides technical support and tools to develop national capacities for DRR, including preparedness for emergency response. Typically, support is provided in three phases: DRR capacity assessment, the development of a national plan of action, and support in implementing the plan.

HCs request CADRI support directly via the CADRI website: www.cadri.net/our-approach/request-our-support

Single Expert Surge Capacity

Stand-By Partnership Programme (SBPP)

OCHA can deploy experts to support the field leadership through surge capacity rosters or standby partnership arrangements, but only if the deployment is humanitarian focused and placed under OCHA supervision. SBPP deployments usually range from three to six months and commonly include expertise in humanitarian coordination, IM, access negotiations and civil-military coordination. SBPP also deploys expertise in community engagement, cash coordination, public communication, managing environmental emergencies,

logistics, needs assessments and protection. HCs signal to OCHA (through its regional office, HAT or HQ) the support required (at no cost).

UNEP/OCHA Joint Environment Unit

In the event of industrial accidents, fires, chemical spills and other types of environmental emergencies, the HC (and/or the State) may request assistance from the JEU, which can provide technical expertise and advice and, in specific circumstances, mobile equipment for on-site sampling and analysis. Experts can be deployed within 24 to 48 hours (at no cost).

Inter-agency Protection and Gender Standby Capacity Projects (ProCap/GenCap)

ProCap and GenCap are collaborative initiatives aimed at addressing gender equality and inequality issues and critical protection risks in humanitarian responses.

ProCap aims to bolster the humanitarian system's capacity to collectively and effectively address protection concerns; safeguard the rights and preserve the dignity of affected populations in emergencies and crisis settings; address protection concerns; and safeguard the rights and preserve the dignity of affected populations in emergencies and crisis settings.

GenCap focuses on enhancing the capacity for gender equality programming by strengthening the understanding and integration of gender equality considerations throughout humanitarian action, ensuring that the unique needs and vulnerabilities of women, men, girls and boys are recognized and catered to.

Together, ProCap and GenCap play a vital role in promoting inclusivity, equality and safety in humanitarian operations worldwide. ProCap deploys senior protection advisers for up to three years to support leadership and strengthen inter-agency protection capacity to operationalize the centrality of protection. Areas of work include the provision of strategic and technical advice, capacity-strengthening initiatives, and advocacy

support that places protection at the centre of humanitarian action. Senior protection advisers also promote synergies with development and peace actors, especially in protracted displacement contexts, and adopt localized approaches.

GenCap deploys senior gender advisers for up to three years to strengthen inter-agency leadership and capacity for delivering on commitments to GEEWG in humanitarian action. Areas of work include assisting in developing strategic guidance, providing technical assistance, ensuring improved gender analysis and capacities for enhanced gender equality programming, and activities to strengthen the skills and accountabilities that place GEEWG at the centre of humanitarian operations.

ProCap and GenCap engage in a diverse set of crises: sudden-onset emergencies, protracted situations and transitional contexts. HCs can request ProCap and GenCap support directly from the project (procapgenicap@un.org). All costs are charged to the projects, apart from the expenses for office space and internal travel while on mission.

Emergency Logistics and Airport Efficiency

Prior to a significant weather event, such as a cyclone, OCHA and, in case of absence of presence, the OCHA regional office, the HAT or the UN RC's office should monitor the situation and contact the Civil Aviation Authority to determine if there are any contingency plans for closing the airport and, if so, when it is likely to reopen. Likewise, after an earthquake, contacts should be established with the relevant national authority to determine the damage to infrastructure and any effects on the operational capacity of airports and other ports of entry.

The sudden influx of relief goods during an emergency is often problematic if national authorities continue to apply normal customs clearance procedures. This may take considerable time and

delay the response, especially when sensitive or restricted goods are involved. It is therefore important to encourage Governments, especially those of disaster-prone Member States, to develop and disseminate clear operational guidance in advance, and to expedite the clearance of all types of emergency relief goods (e.g. telecommunications equipment, medicines and medical equipment). Setting up a one-stop shop at major customs entry points to speed up the clearance of life-saving equipment has often proven effective

Programme Criticality Assessment (PCA)

The [Programme Criticality \(PC\) Framework](#) is a common UN system policy for decision-making on acceptable risk. It establishes guiding principles and a systematic structured approach to ensure that activities involving UN personnel can be balanced against security risks. PCAs are mandatory in contexts of high or very high risk.⁶⁶ In principle, this is undertaken jointly by all UN stakeholders, under the RC's leadership. A PCA can also be used to inform business-continuity planning in contexts without high security risk, as happened during the COVID-19 pandemic.

The UN RC has overall responsibility for ensuring PCAs are completed, in place, in line with the PC Framework and kept up to date. In a deteriorating situation, where the programmatic conditions have changed significantly, the UN RC should consider a full revision or a light review of a current/valid PCA. Where an integrated UN presence is in place and a peacekeeping or special political mission is deployed alongside a UNCT and/or HCT, the Special Representative of the Secretary-General (SRSG)/Head of Mission has the final accountability. In those settings, upon finalization of a PCA, the SRSG/Head of Mission or UN RC (as applicable) and the Designated Official should submit the results to the PC Steering Group through the Programme Criticality secretariat.

⁶⁶ The PC Framework is implemented as a mandatory policy of the Organization in environments of high or very high security risk.

ESTABLISHING SYSTEMS FOR INFORMATION MANAGEMENT

IM is an essential component of any humanitarian response, enabling and facilitating shared analysis and decision-making. A clear and simple IM strategy ensures that the right information is provided to the right people at the right time, and that all relevant actors are working with the same or complementary information and baseline data.

Information Management Working Group

OCHA is responsible for convening an Information Management Working Group (IMWG) to support the work of the HC and HCT in delivering humanitarian assistance. The IMWG serves as a forum for strategic and technical discussions and collaboration on IM issues relating to humanitarian response and preparedness, as set out by the IASC Operational Guidance on responsibilities of cluster/sector leads and OCHA in Information Management (2008). The HC is responsible for ensuring that the HCT establishes and maintains close links with the ICCG and the IMWG to ensure they work together to support the HPC.

Each IMWG is context-specific and must develop its own Terms of Reference in collaboration with all its members. IMWGs normally focus on data standards; inter-cluster information products and services; the coordination of information for assessments and analysis; and the development and/or dissemination of common operational data sets (CODs), indicators (see more below), web platforms and information-sharing protocols.

Working group membership is defined at the country level and largely comprises IM officers from clusters/sectors and other areas of programming. Membership can also be encouraged among IASC members with operations in country. Government representatives and civil-society groups, such as national NGOs, can be encouraged to participate, depending on the agreed Terms of Reference.

The IMWG supports the ICCG with guidance on all IM-related issues, and the IMWG Chair is an ICCG member. The HC should ensure meaningful collaboration between the ICCG and IMWG, with

clear guidance stipulating the need for IMWG representation in all ICCG forums.

The HC is ultimately responsible for ensuring effective functioning of the IMWG, and for enabling a collaborative approach between the IM officers of CLAs, and between the IMWG and ICCG, HCT and other relevant working groups to support the operation with effective and timely situational analysis.

Common Operational Data sets

CODs support the work of humanitarian actors across multiple sectors. They are authoritative reference data sets used by all actors in a humanitarian response to ensure consistency, and to simplify the discovery and exchange of key data.

Core CODs provide essential demographic and location data. They are critical for information and data products, and for effective coordination. They are the first data sets used when responding to a humanitarian situation. They form the basis of effective risk analysis, needs assessments, decision-making and reporting on all aspects of the response. Core CODs are required in all disaster-prone countries as a preparedness measure. The IMWG is responsible for working with relevant governmental entities to define, develop, maintain and endorse core and other CODs.

The HC has overall responsibility for ensuring, through the IMWG or another mechanism, that CODs are maintained according to the COD guidance and technical support package (see resources below), including final endorsement of CODs. The HCT and ICCG ensure that member organizations provide the necessary resources and support for the management of CODs. Members should be made aware of the core CODs and the list of other CODs that have been endorsed by the IMWG and the HC. The ICCG should also be part of the endorsement process (or at least made aware of it).

Resources

- [IASC Operational Guidance on responsibilities of cluster/sector leads and OCHA in Information Management \(2008\)](#)
- [Generic IMWG Terms of Reference](#)
- [OCHA IM Toolbox](#)

Data Responsibility

Data responsibility in humanitarian action is the safe, ethical and effective management of personal and non-personal data for operational response. It is a critical issue for the humanitarian system to address, as the stakes are high.

New technologies and data can enable more informed and transparent decision-making, more efficient humanitarian response, and increased trust among humanitarian actors and with the people they seek to serve. However, as organizations manage increasingly large volumes of data, they also face more complex challenges and risks. The disclosure of sensitive data in humanitarian response can lead to already vulnerable people and communities being further harmed or exploited, for example by exposing their location or identifying a key vulnerability, which in turn might lead to loss of trust between affected people, humanitarian organizations and stakeholders. To 'do no harm', humanitarians must be able to navigate the technical and ethical issues involved when working with data.

In recent years, principles, policies and strategies for the responsible management of data in humanitarian action have been developed. These include system-wide guidance, such as the IASC Operational Guidance on Data Responsibility (2023), as well as global strategies and policies to guide data management within the UN system, such as the Secretary-General's Roadmap for Digital Cooperation and Data Strategy. However, in practice, the implementation of data responsibility is often inconsistent within and across humanitarian response contexts. For this reason, it requires collective action that extends across all levels of the humanitarian system, and it is an essential consideration for HCs and HCTs.

The IASC Operational Guidance should serve as the primary reference for implementing data responsibility in humanitarian action. HCs and HCTs play a particularly important role in fostering action for data responsibility at the system-wide level through the HCT, ICCG/ISCG and IMWG. This includes, for example, establishing response-wide information-sharing protocols and data sharing agreements to support a common approach to how, when, with whom and for how long different types of data are shared in a given response. It also includes improving coordination and decision-making processes related to data responsibility to help humanitarians prioritize and tackle this issue together.

Resources

- [IASC Operational Guidance on Data Responsibility in Humanitarian Action](#)
- [ICRC's Handbook on Data Protection in Humanitarian Action](#)
- [Secretary-General's Roadmap for Digital Cooperation and Secretary-General's Data Strategy](#)
- [OCHA's Centre for Humanitarian Data offers guidance and support on data responsibility](#)

IM Platforms and Services

The HC is responsible for ensuring that IM platforms are established and used to support humanitarian coordination and the HPC. OCHA manages the following web platforms for this purpose:

- [Humanitarian Action](#) Provides a comprehensive overview of the humanitarian landscape by merging two platforms – the former stand-alone Humanitarian Insight and the Global Humanitarian Overview. Humanitarian Action serves as the publication platform for planning, monitoring and tracking financial data managed in HPC.tools and FTS. It allows users to benefit from 'static' global trend analysis together with dynamic data updated throughout the year as country teams update their needs analysis and response plans.
- [ReliefWeb](#) An information service for global humanitarian practitioners.

- [Virtual OSOCC](#) A platform for information exchange and the coordination of international assistance in the early phase after major disasters (used by UNDAC teams).
- [INFORM](#) A forum for developing shared, quantitative analysis relevant to humanitarian crises and disasters.
- [HDX - Humanitarian Data Exchange](#) An open platform for sharing data related to a humanitarian response.
- [CBPF Business intelligence portal](#) OCHA's grant management system.
- [H.id - Humanitarian ID](#) A single sign-in for many humanitarian response-related platforms.
- [HPC.tools](#) Information services provided by OCHA that enable the humanitarian community to manage information around the HPC. The following platforms are used for these purposes:
- [Response Planning and Monitoring Module \(RPM\)](#) manages the framework for each tracked

HRP. This is where humanitarian profile data is stored at national and cluster levels, as well as the objectives, indicators and targets that make up the results framework. The RPM includes a monitoring component, allowing the submission of data on people reached with aid and other progress against objective and activity indicators.

- [HPC Projects Module](#) facilitates the appeal-costing process by allowing project owners to submit project proposals for vetting by clusters and for inclusion in HRPs. Projects can be linked to the caseloads and results frameworks established in the RPM.
- [Financial Tracking Service](#) tracks, curates and publishes authoritative humanitarian financing data, with a focus on internationally coordinated appeals and response plans.

MOBILIZING FINANCING AND PARTNERSHIPS

The HC plays an important role in leading system-wide resource mobilization efforts for the humanitarian response. This entails building strong partnerships with donors, remaining abreast of humanitarian funding, and being familiar with the various funding mechanisms and resource mobilization efforts of humanitarian actors in country.

Key roles of the HC

HRP Resource Mobilization and Advocacy

- Keep an overview of funding requirements, unmet needs and the impact of insufficient funding.
- Collect intelligence, with support from the HCT and humanitarian partners, on donor priorities and funding mechanisms (to inform fundraising and advocacy efforts).
- Profile the CBPF (if present) as the primary funding mechanism, and as a flexible

financing instrument to advance HC/HCT priorities with a unique positioning to advance localization.

- Mobilize resources from donors, both locally and in capitals, in close consultation with OCHA and the HCT.
- Based on needs identified in the HNO, trigger humanitarian funding mechanisms according to the scope and type of emergency.

Central Emergency Response Fund

- Lead the development of CERF funding applications (in consultation with the HCT and clusters) for submission to the ERC.
- In the event of a sudden-onset crisis or a significant deterioration in an existing emergency, consider requesting a CERF Rapid Response grant to provide seed money for life-saving humanitarian activi

ties. In case of credible forecasts or early warnings of a new or deteriorating crisis, also consider requesting CERF support for early action. In either case, contact the CERF secretariat as early as possible. If the country is selected by the ERC for an allocation from CERF's Underfunded Emergencies window, lead the HCT, clusters and other humanitarian partners in developing a CERF submission.

- In countries with CERF-supported anticipatory action frameworks, oversee the development of related pre-agreed CERF proposals.
- For all CERF requests, ensure that CERF funds are strategically prioritized for greatest impact, while ensuring complementarity with other available funding, especially CBPFs.
- Lead on reporting and learning related to CERF allocations following implementation, including as it relates to CERF's strategic added value to the humanitarian response.
- Refer to CERF guidance for HCs for further details on the HC's role in CERF allocations.⁶⁷

Country-Based Pooled Fund⁶⁸

- Lead processes at the country level for establishing/closing a CBPF in agreement with the ERC.
- As custodian of the CBPF (on behalf of the ERC), determine the Fund's strategic positioning and value added within the humanitarian financing context, and ensure it delivers on its key objectives. The HC's 'vision paper' sets out key areas where the Fund can have a catalytic impact and innovate and improve the response. Determine the strategy for each specific allocation from the Fund, in conjunction with OCHA and partners. The HC's 'stra-

tegic statement' is the starting point for each allocation, setting out its overarching intent and providing a framework for other specifications to be elaborated.

- Approve the CBPF Operational Manual, including accountability mechanisms and the risk management framework for the CBPF, and ensure these are properly implemented in line with the CBPFs Global Guidelines.
- In cases of suspected misconduct by an implementing partner, initiate communication with the partner, including the application of any appropriate conservative measures. The HC is also responsible for sharing information on suspected fraud cases with relevant in-country stakeholders (donors, UN agencies, Advisory Board), as specified in the Guidance Note on Communicating with In-Country Stakeholders.
- Convene and chair in-country Advisory Board meetings (donors, UN agencies and NGOs).
- Ensure that the Advisory Board and strategic and technical review committee(s) function in accordance with the guidelines outlined in the CBPFs Guidelines.
- Make final decisions on projects recommended for funding, approve projects, sign agreements with implementing partners (UN agencies and NGOs) and initiate disbursements.
- Lead efforts to assess the strategic impact of each allocation, in accordance with the allocation strategy.
- Lead country-level resource mobilization for the Fund supported by the Advisory Board and OCHA country office, and in coordination with relevant OCHA entities at HQ.
- Ensure complementary use of CBPF funding with other funding sources, including CERF.

⁶⁷ https://cerf.un.org/sites/default/files/resources/cerf_monitoring-guidance_en.pdf

⁶⁸ Note that the expectations here also apply to country envelopes of Regional Humanitarian Funds, which are guided by the same principles as CBPFs.

- Approve annual reports prepared by OCHA, with appropriate key messages about the Fund’s achievements and strategic value.

Resource Mobilization and Advocacy

Funding for humanitarian aid has increased in recent years, but it has not kept up with the increase in requests. HRPs are only 60 per cent funded each year, on average, with wide disparities across them. The individual actions of the HC’s advocacy and resource mobilization can make a significant difference in ensuring a well-funded HRP and CBPF.

Where a HRP or a Flash Appeal has been agreed, this and the HNO can serve as the basis for fundraising and advocacy. In some circumstances, the host country may prefer a Government appeal. If so, it is important to ensure figures are coherent with those from the HCT.

Appeal mechanisms

- Flash Appeal: for acute needs for up to six months
- HRP: for protracted emergencies

Funding instruments

- CERF Rapid Response window: for immediate, life-saving humanitarian response to new situations, or the rapid and significant deterioration of existing ones.
- CERF Underfunded Emergencies window (if the country is selected by the ERC): for underfunded humanitarian response priorities.
- CBPFs (if established).
- Emergency Cash Grants for immediate needs (usually do not exceed US\$100,000).
- CERF loan element: considered when a UN agency has received an official donor commitment but there is a delay in the transfer of funds.

HRP and CBPF resource mobilization strategies should be adapted for the different types of donors. Major donors are often keen on ‘burden sharing’ and broadening the donor base. Engaging with emerging donors and/or non-traditional donors requires a careful and sequenced approach – gaining their confidence and persuading them of the mutual benefits of contributing to humanitarian funding. HCs should be flexible and consider the different options, including non-financial partnerships or donor visibility opportunities. Where possible, the HC should aim for targeted and tailored resource mobilization, with a preference for unearmarked or softly earmarked funding. The HC should also carefully consider how to balance the financing requirements of the humanitarian response with funding that will continue to be required for longer-term development and peace interventions, which will ultimately facilitate the transition out of crises.

Key fundraising activities include regular meetings with diplomatic missions and donors, updates demonstrating the impact of funding and/or underfunding, visits to donor capitals, and pledging conferences organized by OCHA headquarters (with carefully selected co-hosts). A number of pledging conferences are organized annually for specific crises or particular thematic areas.

Donor engagement and funding priorities

In some countries, donors may ask to join HCT meetings; in other cases, the HC may decide to set up a separate HCT forum to facilitate information-sharing with donors. The HC office should maintain communication channels with the local embassies of donor countries as well as with OCHA headquarters, which supports system-wide resource mobilization, particularly through its Partnerships and Resource Mobilization Branch.

It is important to have a solid understanding of individual donor priorities and funding or financing for the country/crisis in question. Analysis of donors can include information on funding trends, bilateral contributions, budgetary processes and limitations, and areas of donor interest

or policy. Knowledge of donors' positions on multi-year planning, humanitarian-development collaboration and sector priorities will enable more informed advocacy. An understanding of donor policies and priorities is key to soliciting humanitarian funding that is complementary to development aid.

An understanding of donor policies also contributes to effective resource mobilization. The HC should be familiar with the Grand Bargain commitments,⁶⁹ discussions at the IASC and the discourse among the Good Humanitarian Donorship group. With recent efforts to improve anticipatory action, the HC can explore any anticipatory financing that may be available nationally, regionally or globally, including through CBPFs and CERF. Sharing key updates with OCHA will enable system-wide resource mobilization by the ERC, the Deputy ERC and OCHA's leadership. The External Relations and Partnerships Section – part of OCHA's Partnerships and Resource Mobilization Branch – is particularly important in this regard.

Partnerships with the private sector

The humanitarian community has formed many innovative partnerships with the private sector, leveraging its local and industry expertise to strengthen emergency preparedness and response. This has become more important as the number of crisis-affected people continues to increase. Partnerships with private sector organizations may be in the form of financial contributions or in-kind support, often linked to their presence in a given country. Support often increases after a sudden-onset emergency, particularly a natural disaster. Private sector engagement in humanitarian settings is often coordinated through structures such as the Connecting Business initiative,⁷⁰ the UN Global Compact⁷¹ and, in some countries, private sector participation in the HCT or clusters.

The HC should be familiar with UN guidelines on cooperation with the private sector and ensure due diligence is conducted before partnerships are agreed. UN agencies, NGOs and Governments generally have focal points for private sector partnerships and respective due diligence processes.

Reporting Financial Support and Pipelines

To have an accurate picture of funding gaps – both in terms of amounts and sectoral deficiencies – donor intelligence on funding pipelines is critical. HCs should therefore encourage donors to report their financial support to the OCHA-managed FTS. This is important not only for informing requests for headquarters support for fundraising and advocacy, but also for improving transparency and accountability.

FTS is a centralized source of curated, continuously updated, downloadable data and information on humanitarian funding flows. Government donors, UN-administered funds, UN agencies, NGOs and other humanitarian actors and partners exchange data and information with FTS in order to provide visibility of their financial contributions to humanitarian activities; a timely and continuously updated picture of funding flows between donors (Government and private) and operational humanitarian actors (UN agencies, the Red Cross, /Red Crescent Movement, NGOs and CSOs); and timely monitoring of funding progress against HRP and appeal requirements. To ensure that UN agencies and NGOs are reliably reporting on their pipeline status, the HC can call on support from the FTS team in OCHA Geneva and Istanbul, OCHA country and regional offices, and the OCHA Donor Visibility Unit.

Resources

- [The CBPF Business Intelligence Portal](#) provides data on donor contributions and allocations
- [Policy Instruction on OCHA CBPFs](#)
- [Operational Handbook for CBPFs](#), October 2017

69 <https://interagencystandingcommittee.org/grand-bargain>

70 <https://www.connectingbusiness.org/>

71 <https://unglobalcompact.org/library/5869>

- [A Casement Lecture: Towards a Better System for Humanitarian Financing](#)
- [CERF website](#)
- [The CERF Handbook](#)
- [CERF Guidance for Humanitarian/Resident Coordinators](#)
- [Financial Tracking Service \(FTS\)](#)
- [Global Humanitarian Overview Monthly Updates](#)

COMMUNICATING EFFECTIVELY

Effective public communication is essential for results-driven advocacy and joint action, especially in times of crisis. Public perception of the credibility of the humanitarian response is key to success. As an advocate for the collective humanitarian response and a voice for people in need, the HC is responsible for ensuring that a coherent and effective communications strategy is in place.

Key roles of the HC

Act as chief humanitarian advocate and spokesperson for the emergency response:

- Identify key audiences and communicate with them in a tailored fashion.
- Brief national and international media regularly – both on and off record.
- Issue statements on key humanitarian issues, such as protection and IHL.

Be a digital advocate for the humanitarian response:

- Engage in social media, in accordance with UN guidance.
- Share aid agencies' content to help reach broader audiences.
- Build public trust by being transparent about what a HC does and how the system works.

Ensure effective inter-agency communication:

- Oversee coordinated inter-agency communication in support of clear HCT joint key messages.

- Ensure agencies have plans in place to communicate in a crisis, including reputational crises.

Developing an External Communications Strategy

The HC is responsible for ensuring that priority issues and goals are clearly articulated and realistic. S/he should assume leadership and ownership of the messaging, acting as the chief spokesperson. The HC is often supported by a public information team (such as the Communications and Advocacy Working Group, usually chaired by OCHA and under the auspices of HCT) that is tasked with developing a strategic communications plan, including reputation management and agreed common messages.

In a sudden-onset emergency, a public information task team should be established within 24 hours, in consultation with the HCT. The team is responsible for developing a succinct crisis communications plan covering the initial phase of the emergency and identifying who speaks to the media, ideally based on a pre-existing contingency plan. If communication capacity is limited, the HC can request surge capacity from OCHA.

The HC clears key messages and Q&As on the crisis drafted by the public information team based on HCT inputs. Typically, OCHA will facilitate the process, either through the country/regional office or the Public Information Officer (PIO). The HC plays a key role in helping to expedite the process.

In consultation with the HCT, the HC needs to regularly assess the HCT's policies and posture

in light of the changing situation. Key advocacy messages need to be revised accordingly and targeted to different constituencies (e.g. the local population, international media, donors, host Government). The public information team should have direct and regular access to the HC for necessary clearance.

It is important to ensure that affected people and local counterparts are fully informed about the status of the response. This allows them to inform the response, propose adjustments, anticipate events and manage expectations.

Developing key messages

Key messages help the HCT to speak with a unified voice in highlighting urgent needs and operational asks, and to create shared situational awareness. The messages should articulate how humanitarian partners can assist and acknowledge local capacities; advocate for resources to respond; reiterate humanitarian principles; and tackle controversial issues. Messaging should not be a compendium of HCT members' organizational mandates, but context specific, strategic, results oriented and prioritized in accordance with humanitarian needs and response.

Key messages articulate the official position of the HC and the HCT. They are a valuable advocacy tool when communicating with external partners, such as the media, donors, regional entities, CSOs and the host Government. They typically include Q&As and 'if-asked' guidance on difficult or controversial issues, including reputational challenges. Messages must be short and written in plain, everyday language without any jargon, abbreviations or acronyms.

Key messages are developed for new emergencies, major changes in existing emergencies or when strategic communication is necessary. The HC decides whether the situation merits key messages and signs them off. These

messages should be endorsed by the other heads of agencies in country. The HC can include OCHA

and other agency headquarters in these consultations, if warranted.

UN Communications Group (UNCG)

The UNCG is a common communications platform for the UN system. It aims to strengthen inter-agency cooperation on public information and communications, and to increase the media profile of UN activities at the national level. In an emergency, the group follows the Standard Operating Procedures for the UN system – 'How to communicate in a crisis'.

A UNCG exists in most countries where there is a UNCT. In some contexts, the United Nations Information Centre (UNIC), where present, plays a supporting role as the UNCG secretariat. With its knowledge of the local media and other key constituencies, and its ability to address partners in their own language, the UNIC helps to enhance the work of the UNCG.

UNCGs develop and implement crisis communications strategies for the UN. In a disaster, OCHA works with the UNCG/UNIC to implement the HCT External Communications Strategy and amplify the HC-approved HCT Key Messages (see above).

It is important to remember that the HC represents the humanitarian community at large. NGOs and the Red Cross/Red Crescent Movement are not represented in the UNCG; if HCs rely on the UNCG for communications support, they should ensure that links are established with non-UN humanitarian entities.

HCT Communication Working Group

In a humanitarian crisis context, NGOs and the Red Cross/Red Crescent Movement are an integral and essential element of the response and a key constituency of the HCT. OCHA includes these organizations in all coordination forums, including for communication and public advocacy. This is typically done through a Communication Working Group that reports to the HCT. The group's aim is to support awareness-raising on the humanitarian situation and needs, and the mobilization

of resources to respond. OCHA usually chairs the working group, respecting the mandates of individual organizations. Outputs include joint key messages, press conferences, press releases and statements, social and digital media plans and media visits to affected areas.

Working with the Media

The HC is encouraged to engage regularly with the national and international media – both on and off record – to give interviews and hold press conferences around a significant newsworthy event (positive or negative), or to announce new initiatives or changes in the response posture. Inviting the media to accompany field missions is an effective way to highlight the work of humanitarian organizations and amplify the voices of affected people and local responders.

Whenever possible, the HC should hold press conferences and briefings together with national authorities and humanitarian partners, give high-level interviews to explain and promote the actions of the HCT, and advocate for people in need. If the HC cannot attend, s/he should designate a spokesperson, e.g. a member of the HCT, or an experienced PIO or staff member with local-language skills and communication experience. When appropriate, spokespersons from humanitarian INGOs and NGOs and the Red Cross/Red Crescent Movement, as well as civil-military coordination officers and other specialized staff, should be included.

In sudden-onset emergencies, initial public lines should be available within a few hours. These can be very short, but they are critical to acknowledge that the UN system is actively monitoring developments and stands ready to support as required. It is important not to allow an information vacuum to be filled with misinformation in the first hours of an emergency.

The HC is also responsible for issuing regular press releases and/or official statements. In consultation with the HCT, s/he should agree on the

HCT's position, key advocacy messages, basic reference data/figures and sources.

Developing a relationship with the media

- A press release or a HC statement is useful for putting information and positions on record. In a fast-moving emergency where many reporters are on site, a press conference may be appropriate to allow for questions and elaborations.
- In an evolving emergency, daily press briefings for a limited period will help reduce requests for individual interviews.
- In addition to formal interviews and press conferences, consider off-record press briefings to provide background information.
- Before engaging with the press, make sure to have the latest information, key messages, Q&As, data and maps at hand.
- Be prepared for constant scrutiny of every action you take, and ensure the public information team closely monitors local and national media, including social media.
- Include senior PIOs in discussions and decision-making on the humanitarian response. Do not let communication become an afterthought.
- Using field staff, especially national staff, can be a good way of reaching out to the public. Ensure they are kept fully informed on evolving messaging, and actively seek their advice on local perceptions of the messaging.
- Identify two spokespersons for immediate response, preferably one English/ French speaker and one local-language speaker.
- Do not overlook national and local media, especially radio and social media. They are important for conveying messages directly to the population.

Do's and don'ts when talking to the media

- Agree the ground rules in advance: on or off record, the topics, and how the interview will be used.
- Stick to the facts; do not speculate and do not allow yourself to be led.
- Show empathy with people in need.
- Avoid UN jargon.
- If you cannot answer a question, explain why, e.g. it is outside of your mandate. If you do not have the facts, offer to revert later with the information.
- Reiterate that all actions are geared towards assisting affected populations.
- Do not leave an information vacuum.

UN media platforms

HCs can also use a variety of UN media platforms to communicate information:

- Noon Briefing of the Office of the Spokesperson of the Secretary-General. This gives high profile to a crisis. It requires inputs from the field by 11.00 a.m. New York time. HCs are frequent guests at the daily Noon Briefing, either in person or by video link.
- Media briefings on Tuesday and Friday mornings in Geneva. HCs and HCT members regularly brief the UN-accredited press corps directly through video link or phone. Briefings are made available as audio files and TV packages to broadcasters worldwide.
- UN News Centre (www.un.org/news). This provides news coverage of UN developments. It is updated throughout the day and synthesized into a daily print product called UN Daily News.

Social Media Advocacy

The HC has an important role in building the UN's reputation in the country as a highly trusted source of humanitarian news and information. Using social media is an effective way to demonstrate that the UN is open, responsive and accountable. Social media's interactive nature is valuable for operational response, helping to inform better decisions and communicate with crisis-affected communities. As well as highlighting the plight of affected people, social media platforms can showcase the humanitarian community's achievements and amplify people's own stories.

The HC's office has a wide range of social media platforms available to promote its message. It is important to follow the UN social media guidelines and to consult with the HCT to avoid unwanted consequences for operations or relations with the Government and key partners.

Resources

- [OCHA Brand Portal](#)
- [Standard Operating Procedures for the UN system](#) – How to communicate in a crisis.
- [Step-by-step guidance on how to be a Digital Advocate](#)
- [United Nations Secretariat guidelines for the personal use of social media \(2019\)](#)
- The Essential Guidebook for Senior Leaders of the UN Secretariat contains [useful guidance on leveraging social media \(p. 154\)](#)
- [OCHA Editorial Style Guide \(Third Edition, 2015\)](#)
- [United Nations Editorial Manual Online](#)

WORKING TOWARDS SUSTAINABILITY

The immediate priority in any emergency is to address urgent humanitarian needs. However, the coordination of the international response should, where possible, build on and complement existing national and local capacities, and be coordinated with development and peacebuilding efforts. This allows for more collaborative approaches to reducing needs, risks and vulnerability, responding to protracted crises, and managing transition processes with national authorities and development partners. In practice, this means working in collaboration with development and peace actors, promoting a more localized response and striving for durable solutions.

Key roles of the HC

- Humanitarian-Development-Peace Collaboration
- Determine, in consultation with the Government and key stakeholders from all three pillars, if there is an interest in working collaboratively to address the underlying drivers of risk and need, and, if so, whether it is an opportune time to do so.
- Ensure decisive leadership and strong capacity to support a process of identifying joint priorities/collective outcomes.
- Support and advocate for shared analysis among humanitarian, development and, where relevant, peace actors to create a shared understanding of priority needs, risks and vulnerabilities (e.g. through the HNO/CCA) to define priority areas.
- Ensure that collective outcomes are unpacked and translated into planning and programming to achieve these outcomes over a three-to five-year period.
- In consultation with the Government, key implementing agencies/organizations and bilateral donors, lead the development of a financing overview to outline the most

appropriate funding for programmes and activities for specific collective outcomes.

- Lead on the development of a collective monitoring and evaluation process that, as far as possible, builds on existing arrangements.
- Lead on engagement with IFIs during a crisis to encourage sustained support towards areas of high vulnerability and in support of collective outcomes.

Localizing the response

- Ensure representation in the HCT of local and national NGOs, particularly women-led organizations (WLOs), based on a transparent and inclusive selection process led by the national NGO constituency.
- Encourage local and national NGOs, particularly WLOs, to participate in cluster and working group meetings, and ensure cluster leads and working group chairs take responsibility for including NGO perspectives in cluster meetings and processes.
- Advocate for support from donors and partners to develop programmes to strengthen the institutional and operational capacities of local and national NGOs, based on needs determined by NGOs themselves.
- Promote the visibility and participation of local and national NGOs in the humanitarian response as well as their access to funding.
- Promote regular discussion of humanitarian principles and standards between national and international actors to help create shared understanding.
- Encourage UN agencies and INGOs to engage in partnership with local and national NGOs based on mutual respect and the Principles of Partnership, not simply as implementing partners.

- Support the important coordination and advocacy work of local and national NGO networks, and advocate for donor resources to support these networks.
- Use CBPFs as a key vehicle for advancing localization to make principled humanitarian action “as local as possible and as international as necessary.”

Durable solutions for IDPs

- Lead the development of strategies for durable solutions in consultation with national authorities.
- Foster humanitarian-development-peace collaboration to implement durable solutions strategies.
- Work with the HCT, ICCG and clusters (including the protection, shelter and camp management clusters) to ensure that IDPs’ concerns are adequately reflected and addressed in cross-cluster coordination.

Localizing the Response

Localizing humanitarian response is a process of accountability, planning, resourcing and partnership strengthening that aims to ensure humanitarian action is led and implemented as locally as possible (by local actors, including volunteer organizations and CSOs), and is supported by complementary international actors only where necessary. The focus of the HC and other humanitarian stakeholders should primarily be on supporting local and national systems to ensure that assistance reaches those populations most in need, working wherever possible with local partners, including communities themselves, civil society, NGOs, Red Cross/Red Crescent National Societies and other domestic organizations. In countries that have an effective disaster management authority and established preparedness-and-response systems, this sup-

port function may be limited to specific technical or sectoral engagement.

However, humanitarian operations often take place in contexts of instability and insecurity, or where national or local authorities may be a party to conflict, have implemented policies that restrict needs and rights-based approaches, or do not have effective mechanisms in place. Supporting local organizations can be more difficult in these settings, where humanitarian actors need to demonstrate their independence, impartiality and neutrality to retain their credibility, maintain access and deliver assistance. This calls for a more contextual and balanced approach.

In contexts where the Government is a party to conflict, the international humanitarian system is often mandated to operate. However, in all cases, local and national actors still play an important role. The HC will need to carefully consider the relationship of this system with the Government, de facto authorities, non-State groups and other local actors. Situations of conflict, intercommunal violence, displacement and fragility require conflict-sensitive analysis of the roles of various local, national and international actors. It is both possible and necessary for international and national actors to collaborate in these contexts. For all actors, an approach based on the recognition of and adherence to humanitarian principles is fundamental to enabling the humanitarian system to function effectively in meeting priority needs.

The humanitarian community often views localization in terms of how the international humanitarian response can capitalize on the added value of national and local organizations in increasing the reach and effectiveness of humanitarian action. This includes support in establishing access and presence in insecure environments; providing contextual awareness and analysis of complex situations; and understanding affected people’s needs and how best to meet them.

Since the 2016 World Humanitarian Summit and the Grand Bargain, there has been a strong focus

on localizing funding, particularly commitments by donors, including UN agencies and INGOs, to channel funding as directly as possible to local and national actors, both governmental and non-governmental. Challenges around upholding these commitments and ensuring that more direct funding flows to national and local actors continue to be discussed at global and national levels.

Localizing humanitarian action should also be about strengthening international investment in local organizations, and establishing more equal, principled partnerships⁷² between international and local actors based on mutual respect. The HC's continued advocacy and support for this is important for ensuring progress on localization, and for maintaining strong relationships with and between national and international humanitarian stakeholders.

HCs are encouraged to genuinely include national and local NGOs and Red Cross/Red Crescent National Societies in key coordination mechanisms, including the HCT. Engaging a diverse range of NGOs in strategic discussions can help ensure that the subtleties of the context and national considerations are taken into account by the leadership of humanitarian operations. This approach is embedded in the IASC standard HCT Terms of Reference. Membership of the HCT should be complementary to international membership, with transparent criteria based on operational relevance and demonstrated evidence of delivering principled humanitarian assistance in operational contexts. Representation should be selected by local and national NGOs themselves through existing networks or collective processes, with support from OCHA or the HC office if required.

The HC and HCT are also expected to encourage national NGOs to actively participate in the cluster system, and to ensure cluster coordinators meaningfully include national NGOs in cluster meetings, planning sessions and humanitarian operations. Similarly, CLAs should be encouraged

to support and mentor national NGO actors to take on co-coordinator roles alongside international cluster coordinators.

Ensuring local representation at the operational level (clusters) and the strategic level (HCT) is a minimum requirement for localizing humanitarian operations. Active participation and deeper engagement can be encouraged by holding HCT and cluster meetings in the local language (or using interpretation services) and translating all key documents, but also ensuring that meetings are organized at times and in locations that are easily accessible by local and national actors who may face additional impediments.

Resources:

- [IASC Guidance on Strengthening Participation, Representation and Leadership of Local and National Actors in IASC Humanitarian Coordination Mechanisms](#)
- [Grand Bargain Guidance Notes on Localization](#)
- [Technical Guidance: Gender and the Localization Agenda](#)

Developing Durable Solutions for Refugees and Internally Displaced Persons

Durable solutions for refugees

Once refugee status has been determined and immediate protection needs are addressed, refugees may need support to find a long-term, durable solution. UNHCR, the lead agency for refugee response and coordination, promotes three durable solutions for refugees as part of its core mandate: voluntary repatriation, local integration and resettlement.

There is no hierarchy of durable solutions. The best chances for success are usually offered through an integrated approach that combines all three solutions and is implemented in close cooperation with countries of origin, host States, humanitarian and development actors, and the

72 See p.29 for details on the Principles of Partnership.

refugees themselves. Enabling refugees to become self-reliant pending the realization of an appropriate long-term solution is an important first step towards achieving any of the three durable solutions. Working towards solutions can also reduce the need for irregular onward movements.

In light of the increasing volume of global forced displacement, there is a need to think beyond traditionally available solutions, as stipulated by the GCR. In addition to the 1,400 pledges made by States and stakeholders, the Global Refugee Forum saw the launch of several initiatives envisioned by the GCR. Designed to build States' capacity, foster collaboration with a diverse range of stakeholders and include refugees as agents of change, each initiative focuses on a specific area where greater burden-and-responsibility sharing is needed to develop better solutions for refugees. They include:

- [Asylum Capacity Support Group \(ACSG\)](#)
- [Three-Year Strategy on Resettlement and Complementary Pathways](#)
- [Global Academic Interdisciplinary Network \(GAIN\)](#)

Complementary pathways

Complementary pathways are safe and regulated avenues that complement refugee resettlement, and by which refugees may be admitted into a country and have their international protection needs met while they are able to support themselves to potentially reach a sustainable and lasting solution. The pathways not only offer refugees alternatives to resorting to irregular means and dangerous onward movement, but they can also facilitate the acquisition and retention of skills that can help refugees attain a sustainable solution in the future.

Complementary pathways are not meant to substitute the protection afforded to refugees under the international protection regime, including through resettlement; they complement it and serve as an important expression of global solidarity and

international cooperation, and a contribution to more equitable responsibility-sharing.

Complementary pathways for admission may include one or a combination of the following:

- Humanitarian admission programmes, which provide people who need international protection with effective protection in a third country.
- Community sponsorship of refugees, which allows individuals, groups of individuals, or organizations to directly engage in refugee admission efforts by providing financial, emotional, social and/or settlement support to help newly arrived refugees integrate in a third country.
- Humanitarian visas, which are often used to admit people who need international protection in a third country, where they are given the opportunity to formally apply for asylum.
- Family reunification for family members, including those for extended family members.
- Labour mobility schemes, by which a person may enter or stay in another country through safe and regulated avenues for employment purposes, with the right to either permanent or temporary residence.
- Education programmes, including private and community- or institution-based scholarships, traineeships and apprenticeship programmes.
- Other safe and regulated avenues distinct from those mentioned above may be used to admit refugees into third countries.

A particular feature of complementary pathways is that refugees can access them directly, making use of publicly available information and existing administrative mechanisms, thus securing their own solutions. This is already happening without the help of humanitarian actors. Each year, refugees and people eligible for international protection use existing avenues that are not designed with refugees in mind to move across borders. However, others who could be eligible to do the same are sometimes prevented by legal, administrative and practical barriers.

Complementary pathways should be part of a progressive approach to solutions, with ongoing protection and continuous advancement towards greater enjoyment of legal, civil, political, economic, cultural and social rights for refugees benefiting from possible opportunities in third countries.

Resources:

- [New York Declaration for Refugees and Migrants of 19 September 2016 and its annexed Comprehensive Refugee Response Framework \(CRRF\)](#)
- [Global Compact on Refugees](#)
- [UNHCR, Complementary Pathways](#)
- [UNHCR, Complementary Pathways for Admission to Third Countries – Key Considerations, April 2019](#)

Humanitarian Response to Internal Displacement

The USG/ERC has a GA-mandated central role in coordinating the assistance to and protection of affected populations, including IDPs,⁷³ which the UN Secretary-General also highlighted in his 1997 UN Reform. To exercise this mandate, HCs have the responsibility and accountability for the assistance to and protection of IDPs at country level. This entails working closely with the HCT, the ICCG, clusters and local governments to ensure that IDPs' concerns are adequately reflected and addressed at the strategic level and in inter-cluster coordination.

The UN Guiding Principles on Internal Displacement are the main reference point outlining IDPs' rights and Government obligations towards them. They are a set of 30 principles reflecting IHL, IHRL and refugee law and how they apply to IDPs. They are an important tool for ensuring that IDPs' needs and rights are taken into account by Governments and humanitarian and development actors across all stages of displacement.

“Persons or groups of persons who have been forced or obliged to flee or to leave their homes or places of habitual residence, in particular as a result of or in order to avoid the effects of armed conflict, situations of generalized violence, violations of human rights or natural or human-made disasters, and who have not crossed an internationally recognized State border.”

(Definition of Internally Displaced Persons as per the UN Guiding Principles on Internal Displacement)

Durable Solutions for IDPs

In the past, responsibilities for durable solutions for IDPs were mostly assumed by the HC, the HCT and the clusters. However, in line with the UN Secretary-General's [2022 Action Agenda on Internal Displacement](#), there is concerted effort to go beyond treating internal displacement as just a humanitarian problem and to recognize it as a priority for development, peace and climate action. There is particular emphasis on ensuring a strengthened development approach to displacement solutions, in line with the promise to “Leave No One Behind” in achieving the SDGs.

To embed a more joined-up and development-oriented approach, the UN Secretary-General's Action Agenda specifically designated UN RCs as the UN's lead on solutions at the country level. In that role they are to proactively engage with national and local authorities to advocate for durable solutions, ensure solutions are reflected as a shared priority in UNSDCFs and HRPs, and work with authorities to put a dedicated and costed solutions strategy in place. In settings where a UN Peacekeeping Operation or Special Political Mission is deployed, the UN RC also works closely with the head of the mission to ensure that solutions are reflected in each mission's political engagements and other mandated activities.

73 A/RES/76/167 and its predecessor resolutions

Meanwhile, HCs must work with the HCT, the clusters and relevant local authorities to ensure that efforts to lay the groundwork for solutions are prioritized from the earliest days of a response. This includes advocating for greater investments in programmes and services that facilitate solutions, such as supporting IDPs to recover civil documentation, promoting access to education and livelihoods, ensuring access to health care, and working towards access to adequate housing and land.

The [IASC Framework for Durable Solutions to IDPs](#) remains the overarching guidance document informing approaches for durable solutions, which is defined as follows:

“A durable solution is achieved when IDPs no longer have any specific assistance and protection needs that are linked to their displacement and can enjoy their human rights without discrimination on account of their displacement; it can be achieved through: return, local integration, settlement elsewhere in the country.”

It also provides eight criteria that may be used to measure to what extent a durable solution has been achieved: (a) safety and security, (b) adequate standard of living, (c) access to livelihoods, (d) restoration of housing, land and property, (e) access to documentation, (f) family reunification, (g) participation in public affairs and (h) access to effective remedies and justice.

Resources

- [Secretary General’s Action Agenda on Internal Displacement \(2022\)](#)
 - [The Joint UNHCR-OCHA Note on Coordination in Mixed Situations: Coordination in Practice \(2014\)](#) provides guidance for coordination in situations where a HC has been appointed and a UNHCR-led refugee operation is also under way.
 - The OCHA-UNHCR [Summary Conclusions on Protection and Internal Displacement \(2014\)](#) detail the HC’s responsibilities on IDPs as well as OCHA’s role in supporting the HC.
 - Policy on [UNHCR’s Engagement in Situations of Internal Displacement \(2019\)](#).
 - The [Special Rapporteur on the Human Rights of IDPs](#) can provide advice to Governments and HCTs/UNCTs on country and thematic issues related to internal displacement.
 - [ProCap](#) can support the definition of strategies on internal displacement, including for developing durable solutions.
- [OCHA on Message: Internal Displacement](#)
 - [IASC Framework for Durable Solutions for Internally Displaced Persons](#)
 - [Handbook for the Protection of Internally Displaced Persons](#)
 - [Durable Solutions – Preliminary Operational Guide](#)
 - [Durable Solutions in Practice](#)
 - [UN Guiding Principles on Internal Displacement](#)



Bay Region, Somalia.
Photo: OCHA/Giles Clarke

Coordinating Preparedness and Disaster Risk Reduction

ENHANCING EMERGENCY PREPAREDNESS

Being prepared to respond quickly, appropriately and effectively to an emergency is a core responsibility of humanitarian leadership. In-country leadership plays a key role in coordinating inter-agency readiness to respond to potential crises in support of national preparedness efforts. The ultimate aim is to anticipate – not wait for – humanitarian crises.

Key roles of the HC

- Provide strategic leadership on emergency preparedness across all relevant agencies.
- Ensure agency heads are committed to providing staff and resources to support the processes for preparedness and anticipatory humanitarian action.
- Ensure the Emergency Response Preparedness (ERP) approach is participatory from the outset, and that its application is practical, flexible and adapted to the context and available capacities.
- Lead country teams (UNCT/HCT) in identifying gaps in preparedness.
- For country teams with limited capacity, prioritize which actions they will implement with their existing resources, and

communicate gaps to regional and global levels for additional follow-up and support.

- Ensure risk analysis and monitoring are key to dynamic and responsive preparedness and anticipatory approaches.

Emergency Response Preparedness Approach

The IASC adopted the ERP approach in 2015 as the agreed method to ensure readiness to respond to potential crises that require coordinated action from the humanitarian community in support of national responses. The aim is to increase the speed, volume, predictability and effectiveness of aid delivered after the onset of a crisis.

The ERP provides an internationally agreed framework that allows country teams to analyse and monitor risks, take actions to enhance preparedness, and flag gaps in capacity to the regional and global levels so that the right support can be mobilized. Heightened readiness will increase the volume and speed of aid in the crucial first weeks of an emergency. It can also increase the value for money of humanitarian action by ensuring that scarce resources are directed towards the most urgent needs and reach people in time.

At the global level, IASC members have endorsed the ERP and are committed to being adequately prepared to respond to emergencies. This accountability covers their specific agency roles and their cluster lead roles, where these exist.

In countries where IASC humanitarian coordination structures are in place, the HC, working with the HCT and country-level clusters/sectors, should lead the ERP process. S/he is also responsible for ensuring that the response-readiness efforts of relevant organizations are inclusive and coordinated.

In countries where IASC humanitarian coordination structures are not in place, the HC or UN RC should work with the UNCT and national authorities to implement the ERP. The HC or UN RC should encourage the input and participation of IFRC and NGOs, including women's and youth-led organizations active in country, to ensure that their humanitarian capacities and expertise are recognized and that they can contribute fully. In-country coordination mechanisms may need to be expanded for this purpose.

In refugee situations, UNHCR, in accordance with its responsibilities, will lead the refugee preparedness and response in close coordination with WHO, the UN RC/HC and UNCT/HCT, Governments and other actors. In countries covered by refugee and migrant response plans, the existing inter-agency platform will continue. The Joint UNHCR-OCHA Note on Mixed Settings⁷⁴ remains applicable, as it lays out the respective roles and responsibilities of the UN RC and/or UN RC/HC and the UNHCR Representative, as well as the practical interaction of the IASC's and UNHCR's refugee coordination arrangements, to ensure that coordination is streamlined, complementary and mutually reinforcing.

> See p. 89 for more on Refugee Response and Mixed Settings.

The ERP in practice

The ERP approach is designed to ensure that the humanitarian community in each country has a shared and up-to-date understanding of risks, and a joint plan for enhancing preparedness. The ERP approach is intended to be:

- **Realistic.** It must consider existing capacities and constraints.
- **Practical.** It should focus on needs and operational capacity: what we have, how to bridge gaps and how to reach people with assistance.
- **Flexible.** Country teams should prioritize preparedness actions considering the risks they face and the capacity and resources available to them.
- **Coordinated.** All cluster/sector responses should be in alignment and complementary with existing national policies.⁷⁵
- **Localized.** Closely linked to existing local capacities and resources.⁷⁶

The ERP approach has four main components:

1. Risk analysis and monitoring
2. Identifying and prioritizing humanitarian interventions
3. Review of existing response capacities
4. Filling identified preparedness gaps by using the Minimum and Advanced Preparedness Actions — a set of activities that every country team should review and implement, where needed, to implement the required level of response readiness.

As the ERP approach was designed with a focus on outcomes rather than process, its implementation will differ in each country. The approach is implemented when the following are achieved:

- Risk analysis is conducted and the risks identified are monitored regularly.
- Key actions to enhance preparedness/response readiness are identified, and prioritized actions are implemented.

⁷⁴ Joint UNHCR-OCHA Note on Mixed Settings, UNHCR/OCHA, 24 April 2014.

⁷⁵ Including health policies on the COVID-19 response.

⁷⁶ Taking into consideration limited movement and interaction given the nature of the COVID-19 pandemic.

- Gaps that cannot be addressed through in-country capacity are communicated to the regional and global levels.

The role of national Governments in the ERP

The responsibility to be ready to respond to humanitarian emergencies rests primarily with national Governments. The ERP is intended to complement national preparedness efforts and guide the work of humanitarian organizations to respond when national capacity is lacking. National institutions and local organizations, including women's groups, should be included in the ERP process as much as possible.

Links with the Humanitarian Programme Cycle and Humanitarian-Development Collaboration

The ERP approach is an important component of the HPC. The analysis and monitoring of risks should be part of the inter-agency HNO and related response plans. That said, the ERP approach is first and foremost an operational tool to ensure that country teams have concrete systems in place to respond to needs quickly as they arise.

> See p.77 for details on the Humanitarian Programme Cycle.

Humanitarian response readiness provides a key operational link between humanitarian and development partners at the country level. This link is twofold: faster and more effective response reduces human suffering, protects hard-won development gains and enhances resilience; and the ERP focuses on risk and provides an important platform for humanitarian and development partners to engage in the analysis not only of the humanitarian response readiness requirements, but also the long-term prevention-and-mitigation activities for addressing the identified risks. In countries that do not have a HRP, the ERP approach is one of the main platforms for enhancing collaboration with development actors.

Resources

- [Interim ERP Guidance, 2020](#)
- [ERP Guidelines, 2015](#)

Index for Risk Management (INFORM)

[INFORM](#) is a global, open-source risk assessment tool for humanitarian crises and disasters. It is a collaboration of partners led by the IASC Reference Group on Risk, Early Warning and Preparedness, and the European Commission. INFORM develops methodologies and tools for use at the global level and supports their application at the subnational level. The INFORM model is based on risk concepts published in scientific literature, and it envisages three dimensions of risk: hazards and exposure, vulnerability and lack of coping capacity.

INFORM has developed a suite of quantitative, analytical products to support decision-making at different stages of the disaster management cycle – specifically prevention, preparedness and response.

- The INFORM Risk Index helps to analyse the generalized risk of a crisis based on structural conditions.
- The INFORM Severity Index objectively measures and compares the severity of humanitarian crises and disasters globally. It can help develop a shared understanding of crisis severity and ensure all affected people get the help they need.
- INFORM Climate Change includes climate and socioeconomic projections. The results are intended to inform policy choices across climate mitigation, climate adaptation, DRR, sustainable development and humanitarian assistance.

Anticipatory Action

Anticipatory action means acting ahead of predicted shocks to mitigate acute humanitarian impacts before they fully unfold. This works best when all core elements are pre-agreed: activities, triggers and decision-making rules based on forecasts and financing.

Data can facilitate the decision to trigger the release of pre-arranged finance for pre-agreed interventions that mitigate the impact of such

shocks before they happen. By taking this anticipatory approach – using evidence of risk instead of evidence of suffering – we can better protect and save more lives, make the money go farther and protect hard-won development gains. Above all, an anticipatory approach is more dignified.

Anticipatory action is taken ahead of a high-risk and high-probability shock, and before humanitarian needs manifest themselves, to mitigate the predicted humanitarian impact. An anticipatory action framework combines three components:

- Robust forecasting embedded in a clear decision-making process (the model).
- Pre-agreed action plans that can fundamentally alter the trajectory of the crisis (the delivery).
- Pre-arranged finance (the money).

When the selected forecast exceeds an agreed threshold – e.g. a given probability or indicator of severity – the default decision will be to release pre-arranged finance for the implementation of pre-agreed actions to minimize delay and mitigate the impact of the predicted shock.

Key roles of The HC

- Facilitate and coordinate collective anticipatory action (multi-stakeholder, cross-sectoral). Support is available from the OCHA country and/or regional office or headquarters. Pre-arranged financing may be secured from humanitarian pooled funds.
- Ensure the coordination of anticipatory action programmes by different actors, e.g. by forming an Anticipatory Action Working Group that reports to you and is co-chaired by any of its members.
- Ensure a common, structured approach to risk-based humanitarian action for a timelier, more effective and efficient humanitarian response. Layer various tools at your disposal (DRR, ERP, anticipatory action, early action and response). Where

possible, work with the Government and IFIs to apply the anticipatory approach through the national social safety net programmes.

- Take advantage of the anticipatory approach to incentivize quality programming, e.g. in the areas of AAP, collective targeting, cash coordination and protection mainstreaming.

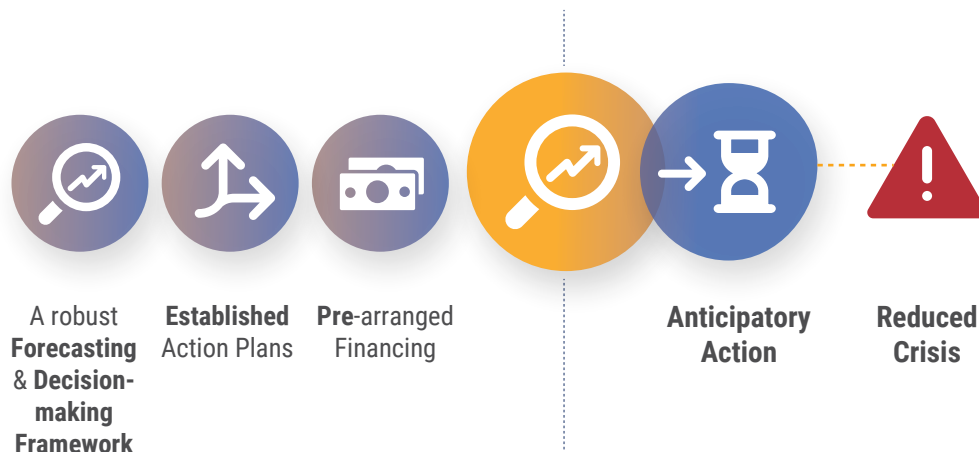
Elements of Anticipatory Action

Anticipatory action works best if the activities (the actions), triggers and decision-making rules based on forecasts (the model) are pre-agreed to guarantee the fast release of pre-arranged financing (the money). By using early warning systems and scientific advances in predicting disasters, anticipatory action utilizes the window of opportunity between the moment of prediction and the arrival of a forecasted shock to trigger interventions that prevent or mitigate imminent humanitarian impacts. This calls for more humanitarian action linked to risk and vulnerability instead of a singular focus on needs and suffering.

By getting ahead of looming crises, assistance is timelier, more cost-effective and better quality. This not only saves lives and reduces loss of livelihoods but also preserves hard-won development gains. Going forward, the IASC will work to integrate core dimensions of anticipatory action into the HPC.

Anticipatory action mitigates the humanitarian impacts for people who can be reached before a shock. However, it may not prevent a crisis entirely, as a storm, flood or drought will still occur. Anticipatory action currently works best for climate-related disasters and diseases.

What does anticipatory action look like?



Partnerships in Anticipatory Action

IASC partners are already building anticipatory action initiatives in more than 60 countries. This currently includes the Red Cross and Red Crescent societies, international and national NGOs, and the UN. These efforts are often small scale and agency and sector specific, but collective anticipatory action is gaining traction to achieve greater scale and more intersectoral coverage. Leadership is required to encourage more joint planning, targeting and financing.

Resources

- [OCHA Anticipatory Action](#)
- [Anticipation Hub](#), a multi-partner resource page

Anticipatory Financing

Several pooled funding mechanisms fund anticipatory action: the Disaster Relief Emergency Fund (DREF), which can be accessed by Red Cross and Red Crescent societies; the Start Financing Facility, which can be accessed by NGOs that are members of the Start Network; and CERF for UN agencies and their implementing partners.

The CBPFs also promote anticipatory approaches, and some UN agencies, such as FAO and WFP, have dedicated internal funding mechanisms for anticipatory action. Other UN and non-UN organizations fund individual anticipatory action projects through bilateral donor contributions.

In addition, other funding sources are increasingly looking to act in an anticipatory way. This includes development finance (e.g. the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank Early Response Facility) and other humanitarian funds (Education Cannot Wait), but also market-based instruments (African Risk Capacity's anticipatory insurance policies).

- Anticipatory action works best if triggers, actions and finance are pre-agreed.
- Anticipatory finance is pre-arranged money to be released before the peak impact(s) of a hazard known to be imminent in order to reduce those impacts. It can significantly speed up action once triggered, and it may serve to kick-start fundraising and advocacy for a coming or escalating crisis.
- Advocate for coordinated and pre-arranged anticipatory finance to be complemented with other funding tools at your disposal. Securing UN anticipatory finance may help leverage other funding, including from non-UN humanitarian pooled funds (e.g. DREF or Start Fund) or agencies' internal funds for anticipatory action.
- Anticipatory finance may help coordinate the layering of different contingency funding, including DRR, climate finance or the World Bank's Early Response Window.

Resources

- [OCHA Anticipatory Action](#)
- [Overview - CERF Anticipatory Action](#), OCHA, 2021
- [Global Guidelines - Country-Based Pooled Funds](#), OCHA, 2022
- [CERF Guidance for Humanitarian/Resident Coordinators](#), OCHA, 2022

Links with the ERP

The ERP approach and anticipatory action are very much two sides of the same coin. In simple terms, the ERP's primary focus is identifying the most appropriate response activities for a crisis

and ensuring that operational readiness is in place to implement these activities. Anticipatory action uses pre-agreed actions building on the ERP, pre-agreed forecasts and pre-arranged financing to mitigate the humanitarian impacts of an imminent, forecastable yet out-of-the-ordinary shock.

At the country level, the process for developing response readiness and anticipatory action is similar and complementary. Anticipatory action is being included as a standard element of the ERP approach – this has been welcomed by partners and through independent research.

INTEGRATING DISASTER RISK REDUCTION

Disasters related to natural or human-made hazards are increasing in frequency and intensity, many of them exacerbated by climate change. DRR aims to protect the livelihoods and assets of communities and individuals from the impact of such hazards. The HC is responsible for working with Governments – in collaboration with humanitarian and development actors – to limit the negative impacts of these events by addressing the underlying drivers of risk and building the capacity of people exposed to these hazards to anticipate, adapt and recover.

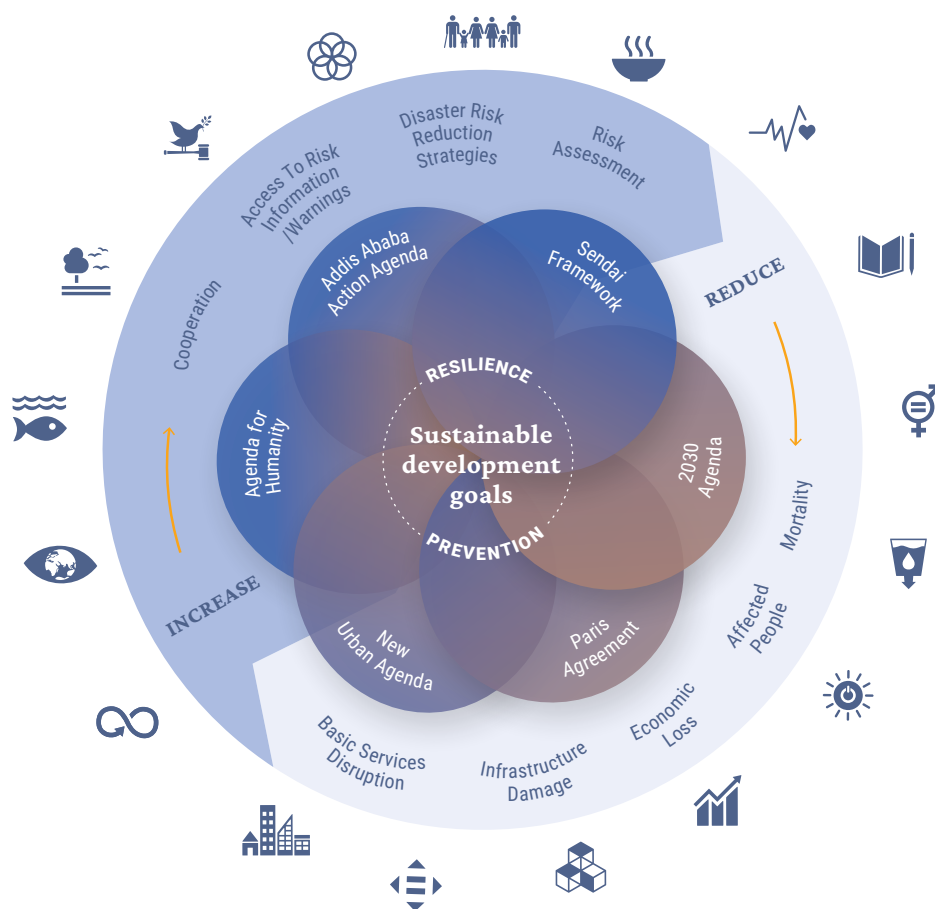
Key roles of the RC and HC

- Ensure country team cross-sectoral support to national Governments and local authorities for the development of national and local DRR strategies.
- Ensure that the HRP is risk informed, e.g. by including DRR experts in planning discussions and adopting DRR as a standing item on country team and cluster meeting agendas.
- Facilitate a multi-stakeholder, multidimensional risk analysis to explicitly incorpo-

rate risk drivers in needs assessments and analysis.

- Identify opportunities to strengthen humanitarian-development collaboration through DRR, particularly in protracted crises. This includes advocating for the systematic inclusion of DRR targets and indicators in collective outcomes and multi-year humanitarian strategies and relevant annual HRPs.
- Ensure that the evidence base for the Common Country Analysis includes information on climate and disaster risks – including related analysis in HNOs and Humanitarian or Refugee Response Plans, Multi-Sectoral Needs Assessments and Post-Disaster and Post-Conflict Needs Assessments.
- Lead the development of a risk-informed UNSDCF that includes information on climate and disaster risks.
- In collaboration with the country team, map and address gaps in the implementation capacity for disaster risk programming, including by drawing on the wider UN system and regional capacities, and revisiting country team configuration.

Risk-informed Sustainable Development



The Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction 2015–2030 (Sendai Framework) provides a global road map towards a resilient, sustainable future, setting out the case for risk-informed development. It marks a clear shift in focus from disaster response towards integrated and anticipatory disaster risk management. Sendai Framework Priority Action 4 specifically advocates for “enhancing disaster preparedness for effective response and to ‘Build Back Better’ in recovery, rehabilitation and reconstruction” and to “facilitate the link between relief, rehabilitation and development.” Similarly, the UN Secretary-General’s Prevention Agenda highlights the need to “support the development and implementation of national DRR plans that address growing challenges of climate change, environmental degradation, urbanization and population growth.”

Scaling up DRR in Humanitarian Action

Strong leadership from the HC is critical for scaling up DRR and resilience in humanitarian action. The growing focus on humanitarian-development-peace collaboration provides new opportunities to reduce existing and emerging disaster risks. Building resilience to shocks and hazards – including through early warning and anticipatory action, social safety nets, resilient livelihoods, targeted action for women and girls, and forecast-based financing – can be an efficient and cost-effective way of placing countries in crisis on a path to prevention and sustainability.

The UN Office for Disaster Risk Reduction (UNDRR), in collaboration with humanitarian partners and in partnership with OCHA, has developed guidance on scaling up DRR in humanitarian action in the form of a practical checklist. The

recommendations below are an excerpt, highlighting concrete actions relevant to the HC, framed around the stages of the HPC:

> See p.77 for details on the Humanitarian Programme Cycle.

Needs Assessment and Analysis

- Guiding a country team analysis of risk drivers in multisectoral Post-Disaster Needs Assessments.
- Facilitating a multi-stakeholder, multidimensional risk analysis to explicitly incorporate risk drivers in needs assessments and analysis (for use as an advocacy tool for support and funding, and to influence programme decision-making).
- Facilitating the pooling of data from across humanitarian and development sources to inform joint analysis, planning and programming.

Strategic Planning

- Advocating for and leading the development of a risk-informed HRP, which is linked to the ERP approach, where analysis and monitoring of risks are part of the HNO and response planning. This could involve, for example, including DRR experts in planning discussions and adopting DRR as a standing item on country team and cluster meeting agendas.
- Ensuring that the HRP targets the most at-risk populations in hazard-prone areas, particularly those who are impacted by recurring disasters/protracted crises, and those who may be left furthest behind.
- Promoting the inclusion of stakeholders outside the humanitarian system in the development of the HRP to ensure resilience and recovery actions are embedded in national/local systems. Where there is already strong Government engagement

in DRR, the HRP should reinforce these strategies and activities.

- Identifying opportunities for strengthening humanitarian and development collaboration through DRR, particularly in protracted crises, including advocating for the systematic inclusion of DRR targets and indicators in collective outcomes and multi-year humanitarian strategies and relevant action plans. Preparing for risk-informed recovery and 'Building Back Better', including through ensuring the HRP lays the foundation for recovery and reduces future vulnerability.

Resource Mobilization

- Working with the UNCT/HCT to compile and communicate the DRR evidence base for potential funding opportunities. This includes the use of IM products, such as analyses of damage and losses, to incentivize investment in DRR and early action. It also includes storytelling, using the voices of the affected communities to showcase the impact.
- Promoting the inclusion of DRR in humanitarian IM processes, platforms and products, such as situation reports, humanitarian dashboards and 3W/9W matrices, situation reports and other relevant public updates.⁷⁷ This ensures that these tools reflect projections for multi-year planning periods and promote the integration of data on disaster losses into humanitarian analysis and recovery planning.

Response Monitoring

- Ensuring that DRR-related targets and indicators are articulated and monitored in the HRP, in multi-year strategies or in frameworks for collective outcomes. This can include reduction in disaster-related

⁷⁷ 3W matrices describe Who does What and Where. In many countries, 9Ws reflect actions across the peace, humanitarian and development communities. OCHA provides a useful overview of types of assessments and documents.

deaths, disaster-affected populations, population movement data, etc.

- Ensuring that reviews and evaluations consider the success of programmes on the basis of the extent to which risk has been reduced and considered in programming. Documentation processes, including after-action reviews, are good for capturing lessons and promoting ongoing learning at the country level.

Resources

- UNDRR is the focal point within the UN system for DRR and resilience-building. Through its regional offices, UNDRR works with UN RCs, UN RC/HCs and HCs, and UNCTs/HCTs to strengthen policy coherence, improve data collection and analysis for better decision-making, build DRR capacity and leverage advocacy opportunities. For a full overview of UNDRR's support to HCs and UNCTs, see the [UNDRR Briefing Pack for RCs \(UNDRR 2020\)](#), including contact information for UNDRR regional offices.
- [Scaling up disaster risk reduction in humanitarian action: Recommendations for the Humanitarian Programme Cycle](#) (UNDRR, October 2020)
- [Integrating Disaster Risk Reduction and Climate Change Adaptation in the UN Sustainable Development Cooperation Framework: Guidance Note on Using Climate and Disaster Risk Management to Help Build Resilient Societies](#) (UNDRR 2020)
- [Words into Action Guidelines: Developing National DRR Strategies](#) (UNDRR 2019)
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- [Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction 2015-2030](#)
- [United Nations Plan of Action on DRR for Resilience](#) (2016)
- [UNDRR Global Education and Training Institute](#)
- UNDRR manages the world's only DRR knowledge platform, [PreventionWeb](#)
- [CADRI Partnership](#): Capacity for Disaster Reduction Initiative is an inter-agency partnership providing support to RCs and UNCTs for in-country development of national DRR capacities.
- [Global Assessment Report 2019](#)
- [International Recovery Platform](#)



Bay Region, Somalia.
Photo: OCHA/Giles Clarke

Responding to a Health Crisis in a Humanitarian Setting

Background

In addition to major humanitarian crises driven by natural disasters or conflicts, infectious-disease events, including outbreaks, can trigger a humanitarian system-wide Scale-Up activation

> See p.81 for more details on emergency declarations.

Responding to a health crisis in complex humanitarian settings brings distinct challenges for humanitarian actors, as evidenced from previous responses to major health events. The IASC's guidance and policy for humanitarian action and leadership includes agreed protocols for health emergencies – notably for the Ebola response and the COVID-19 pandemic.

Following the response to the Ebola outbreak of 2014–2016 in West Africa, the IASC developed standard operating procedures for infectious hazards to ensure that appropriate measures are in place to respond to future outbreaks. These reflect the critical link between IASC mechanisms and WHO responsibilities under international health regulations (IHR). The assessment of infectious-disease events, and the consultation and decision-making processes on activation and deactivation criteria and procedures are outlined in the IASC Protocol for the Control of Infectious Disease Events (2019).

In summary, the designation of a Scale-Up response to an infectious-disease event is issued by the ERC, in close collaboration with the WHO

Director-General, and in consultation with the IASC Principals and, potentially, the principals of other relevant entities.

The Scale-Up is based on an analysis of the IASC's five criteria (scale, complexity, urgency, capacity and risk of failure to deliver at scale to affected populations) adapted to meet IHR criteria, and WHO's formal risk assessment of the event.

As stated in the Protocols of 2019 for all public health events assessed as high or very high risk at regional or global levels, and/or when WHO declares an internal corporate emergency, the WHO Director-General will notify the UN Secretary-General and the ERC through a memo issued within 48 hours of completion of the assessment. This will include details of the situation analysis, risk level at the country/regional/global levels, initial country-level response and coordination efforts (including IASC engagement), and a WHO assessment of the need to discuss a system-wide Scale-Up response.

Leadership structures for responding to infectious diseases

WHO will provide the UN Secretary-General and the ERC with a draft statement of public health strategic priorities, a proposed response structure and the major activities required to control the infectious event. This initial recommendation will be the basis for guiding further discussions and decisions by the HCT, EDG and IASC Principals.

The IASC Principals will decide on the most appropriate leadership model at the country, regional and HQ levels to support national authorities, taking into consideration pre-established resources (e.g. the HC Pool, the WHO Incident Managers Roster).

As soon as possible, but no later than 12 hours after receiving it, the ERC will share the draft statement of the public health strategic priorities and proposed response structure with the HCT and the HC – or with the UNCT via the UN RC if there is no designated HC.

Based on the specificity and technical implications of the infectious disease, the IASC will also decide on:

- The overall in-country mechanism to ensure coordination and links across the humanitarian system in alignment with national structures and processes, and the roles and responsibilities of each agency at country, regional and global levels.
- The activation of clusters in response to the specific infectious hazard and the necessary control measures, as well as humanitarian needs.
- The composition of surge capacity deployments (based on the nature of the infectious hazard, the response required and existing capacity at country level) and its interface with national coordination structures.
- The period during which the measures triggered by the Scale-Up activation should be in place (up to six months).
- Other specific arrangements, including appropriate staff safety, security, protective measures, medical assistance and, in extreme cases, medical evacuation, including of responders.

Resources:

- [IASC resources for COVID-19](#)
- [IASC COVID-19 resources relating to accountability and inclusion](#)

List of Acronyms

ACRONYMS

AAP	Accountability to Affected People	GEEWG	Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women and Girls
AAWG	Anticipatory Action Working Group	GHP	Global Humanitarian Platform
CADRI	Capacity for Disaster Reduction Initiative	HAT	Humanitarian Advisory Team
CBPFs	Country-Based Pooled Funds	HC	Humanitarian Coordinator
CCA	Common Country Assessment	HCT	Humanitarian Country Team
CERF	Central Emergency Response Fund	HDPC	Humanitarian, Development and Peace Collaboration
CHS	Core Humanitarian Standard on Quality and Accountability	HNO	Humanitarian Needs Overview
CLA	Cluster Lead Agency	HNU	Humanitarian Negotiations Unit
CMCS	Civil-Military Coordination Service	HPC	Humanitarian Programme Cycle
COD	Common Operational Data sets	HRP	Humanitarian Response Plan
CRPD	Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities	IASC	Inter-Agency Standing Committee
CSO	Civil Society Organization	ICCG	Inter-Cluster Coordination Group
CVA	Cash and Voucher Assistance	ICCPR	International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights
CWG	Cash Working Group	ICESCR	International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights
DHC	Deputy Humanitarian Coordinator	ICRC	International Committee of the Red Cross
DREF	Disaster Relief Emergency Fund	ICVA	International Council of Voluntary Agencies
DRHC	Deputy Regional Humanitarian Coordinator	IDP	Internally Displaced Person
DRR	Disaster Risk Reduction	IEC	INSARAG External Classification
ECOSOC	Economic and Social Council	IFI	International Financial Institution
EDG	Emergency Directors Group	IFRC	International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies
ERC	Emergency Relief Coordinator	IHL	International Humanitarian Law
ERP	Emergency Response Preparedness	IHR	International Health Regulations
FTS	Financial Tracking Service	IHRL	International Human Rights Law
GBV	Gender-Based Violence	IM	Information Management
GCR	Global Compact on Refugees		

IMO	Information Management Officer	SRSG	Special Representative of the Secretary-General
IMU	Information Management Unit	UNCG	United Nations Communications Group
IMWG	Information Management Working Group	UN-CMCoord	UN Civil-Military Coordination
INGO	International Non-Governmental Organization	UNCRC	United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child
INFORM	Index for Risk Management	UNCT	United Nations Country Team
INSARAG	International Search and Rescue Advisory Group	UNDAC	United Nations Disaster Assessment and Coordination
IOM	International Organization for Migration	UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
IRL	International Refugee Law	UNDRR	United Nations Office for Disaster Risk Reduction
ISCG	Inter-Sector Coordination Group	UNEP	United Nations Environment Programme
JEU	Joint Environment Unit	UNGA	United Nations General Assembly
JSC	Joint Steering Committee to Advance Humanitarian and Development Collaboration	UNHCR	United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees
LGBTI	Lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and intersex	UNIC	United Nations Information Centre
MHPSS	Mental Health and Psychosocial Support	UNSDCF	United Nations Sustainable Development Cooperation Framework
MYHS	Multi-Year Humanitarian Strategy	USG	Under-Secretary-General
NGO	Non-Governmental Organization	USR	Urban Search and Rescue
OCHA	Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs	WHO	World Health Organization
OHCHR	Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights	WLO	Women-led Organizations
OSOCC	On-Site Operations Coordination Centre		
PCA	Programme Criticality Assessment		
PIO	Public Information Officer		
PoC	Protection of Civilians		
PSEA	Protection from Sexual Exploitation and Abuse		
RC	Resident Coordinator		
RPM	Response Planning and Monitoring Module		
SBPP	Stand-By Partnership Programme		
SDG	Sustainable Development Goals		
SEA	Sexual Exploitation and Abuse		

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