

## WHAT DOES THE IASC HUMANITARIAN SYSTEM-WIDE LEVEL 3 EMERGENCY RESPONSE MEAN IN PRACTICE?

Agreeing a common understanding of the L3 Response.



### Q1: What is an IASC Humanitarian System-Wide Emergency Response ('Level 3/L3 Response')?

A1: Declaration of an IASC Humanitarian System-Wide Emergency Response ('Level 3/L3' Response) activates a system-wide mobilization of capacity (**leadership, staffing and funding**) to enable accelerated and scaled-up delivery of assistance and protection to people in need, including by:

- 1) Setting up **enhanced leadership and coordination** capacities of the humanitarian system; and
- 2) Engaging IASC member organizations to ensure that they **put in place the right systems and urgently mobilize resources to contribute to the response** as per their mandate/focus areas.

### Q2: When and Why is a L3 Response activated?

A2: A L3 Response is activated when a humanitarian situation **suddenly and significantly changes** and, following an analysis of five criteria - scale, complexity, urgency, capacity, and reputational risk - it is clear that the **capacity to lead, coordinate and deliver humanitarian assistance and protection on the ground does not match the scale, complexity and urgency of the crisis**. Wherever possible, the IASC endeavours to avoid the need to activate a L3 Response by taking early action in response to early warnings about the possible deterioration of a given situation.

Note: The IASC L3 mechanism is about the need to rapidly *ramp-up the response effort so that it is fit-for-purpose* – i.e. has the appropriate leadership, and coordination mechanism to deliver assistance and facilitate protection as the scale, complexity and urgency of a crisis develops. It is intended as a short term injection of additional capacity. It does not determine the severity of the *crisis itself* or relate to any political circumstances.

### Q3: How long does a L3 Response last?

A3: **The initial L3 Response activation period should not exceed three months**. During this period, IASC member organisations should put in place the required capacities – i.e. longer-term funding, staffing and leadership arrangements – to allow transition from a L3 Response. Practice to date has seen L3 Responses in complex and protracted crisis settings – Syria, South Sudan, CAR and Iraq – extended well beyond the initial three-month period due to the prolonged nature of these *crises*. This needs to change. In the future, L3 Response extensions will be considered only in exceptional circumstances and for a maximum additional period of nine months (bringing the maximum total duration of a L3 Response to one year). However, individual agencies may internally extend L3 status, depending on the nature and duration of the emergency.

#### Q3a: How do you determine readiness to transition from a L3 Response?

A3a: **A transition from a L3 response is initiated once the required capacities are in place to enable response**. This should be measured against a 'Transition Strategy' which highlights key indicators – such as number, calibre and location of surged staff, establishment of empowered leadership at HCT, activation of coordination systems – to determine whether the response remains reliant on the L3 response. If the response is not yet fit-for-purpose at the end of the initial three-month activation, consideration should be given as to whether the L3 mechanism is appropriate for addressing the shortcomings, or whether there are other underlying factors which the L3 mechanism cannot address. Where it is felt that the L3 mechanism can address the shortcomings, the L3 Response may be extended for a further three months. Where factors which the L3 mechanism cannot address (e.g. inability to negotiate access with non-state armed groups) are beyond the response, transition from the L3 Response may commence, accompanied by clear messaging regarding the reasons for the limitations of the response.

#### Q3b: Should a L3 Response remain active until the crisis has ended/abated?

A3b: No. The aim of the L3 Response is to ensure that the IASC *response* is sufficiently comprehensive. **Resolving crises which have their roots in a complex set of political and other factors is beyond the remit of the IASC.**

### Q4: Does the deactivation of a L3 Response mean that the crisis no longer requires international attention?

A4: No. In protracted crises, after a L3 Response is deactivated **international support will still be required** to: sustain an effective response; and advocate with those with influence to bring an end to the crisis. Likewise, in the aftermath of sudden-onset natural disasters, **international support will continue to be required** for response, recovery and rebuilding long after a L3 Response is deactivated. The purpose of the L3 is not to raise funds even,

*Based on existing IASC Protocols and documentation, this Q&A provides common messages for use at both HQ and in the field regarding the activation, scope and standing-down of IASC L3 Responses.*

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though it may help to attract resources. An L3 Response declaration should not exacerbate inequities between crises.

**Q5: Should L3 Responses receive higher funding priority than other responses?**

A5: No. Although the activation of a L3 Response may help to raise funds, it should not exacerbate inequities between crises and/or mean that other crises do not receive funding or attention. However, we need to recognise that some Member States may still prioritise funding for L3 crises. All humanitarian response activities should be funded on the basis of the needs identified in the relevant appeal documents.