

INTER-AGENCY STANDING COMMITTEE
REFERENCE DOCUMENT

Humanitarian System-Wide Scale-Up Activation

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

This reference document serves as guidance on implementing the Scale-Up Activation

13 November 2018

[Based on existing IASC Protocols and documentation, these Q & A provide common messages for use at both HQ and in the field regarding the IASC Scale-Up Activation.]

Q1: What is an IASC Humanitarian System-Wide Scale-Up activation?

A1: A Scale-Up activation is a **system-wide mobilization in response to a sudden-onset, or significantly deteriorating, humanitarian crisis, where the capacity to lead, coordinate and deliver assistance and protection does not match the scale, complexity and urgency of the crisis.** The procedure activates agreed IASC mechanisms and tools to ensure that the system delivers at speed and effectively in support of national authorities and in situ capacity, and closely monitors the performance of the response. It ensures that the adequate capacities and tools for enhanced leadership, coordination and response of the humanitarian system to respond to the crisis. The procedure also engages IASC member organisations to ensure that they implement the required systems and mobilize the necessary resources to contribute to the response as per their respective mandates.

Q1a: What is the difference between Scale-Up and the previous L3 system?

A1a: The Scale-Up activation replaces the previous L3 system by seeking to reinforce focused collective and time-bound emergency procedures¹. Scale-Up activation is time-bound (limited to 6 months) and can only be extended once (for an additional 3 months in exceptional circumstances). The IASC Protocols developed to support humanitarian system-wide emergency response activation, such as empowered leadership of the Humanitarian Coordinator, remain relevant and have been updated and aligned with the Scale-Up activation protocols. Peer reviews and evaluations seek to strengthen the accountability of the system to respond in a timely and effective manner in response to a sudden-onset crisis or a rapidly deteriorating humanitarian situation.

Q2: When and Why is a Scale-Up activated?

A2: In response to a sudden-onset and/or significant deterioration of a humanitarian crisis, a Scale-Up activation may be designated after the Emergency Relief Coordinator (ERC) – in consultation with the IASC Principals – has determined 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. Thus, a humanitarian system-wide mobilization is required. The Scale-Up activation is based upon an analysis of five criteria: scale, complexity, urgency, capacity and risk of failure to deliver effectively

¹ A separate system is currently being considered to address the needs in large-scale protracted humanitarian crisis that require a sustained system-wide response.

and at scale to affected populations, in any type of humanitarian emergency². Wherever possible, the IASC endeavours to limit the number of emergency situations in which Scale-up activation would be required by prioritizing preparedness activities and taking timely collective action in response to early warnings about the possible deterioration of a given situation.

Scale-Up activation is implemented when there is a need to **rapidly ramp up the response effort so that it is fit for purpose**, i.e., ensure that the appropriate leadership and coordination mechanisms to deliver assistance and facilitate protection efforts are established as the scale, complexity and urgency of a crisis develop. It is intended as a short-term injection of additional capacity to meet urgent humanitarian needs on the ground. It does not determine the severity of the crisis itself.

The Scale-Up activation commits IASC members to the procedures in the agreed protocols. It does not, however, prejudge or affect the ability of IASC organisations to decide on activation of their respective emergency tools.

Q3: How long does a Scale-Up activation last?

A3: **A Scale-Up activation lasts for up to six months.** During this period, IASC member organisations commit to prioritize the response and ensure speed and timeliness in putting in place the required systems and capacities and mobilize the necessary resources to contribute to an effective response as per their mandated areas, cluster lead agency responsibilities and commitments made in the “Statement of Key Strategic Priorities”. This scale-up may include implementing longer-term funding, staffing, cluster coordination and leadership arrangements, to allow transition from a Scale-Up response into a regular operational response. Extensions will be considered only in exceptional circumstances and for a maximum of an additional three months.

Q4: What happens at the end of Scale-Up?

A4: When required capacities are in place to enable a sustained response, a transition from a Scale-Up activation begins. To determine the effectiveness of the Scale-Up activation, the response should be measured against specific benchmarks, e.g. number and location of surged staff, establishment of empowered leadership, effective national and subnational coordination, and expected response outputs compared to humanitarian needs. If the response is not fit for purpose at the end of the activation period of up to six months, the Scale-Up activation may be exceptionally extended for an additional three months. If there are factors affecting the response that the Scale-Up activation cannot address, transition from Scale-Up may commence. The IASC Principals and leadership on the ground should provide clear messaging regarding the expiry of the Scale-Up activation and a transition strategy as soon as possible.

Q4a: Should a Scale-Up activation remain until the crisis is over?

A4a: No. The aim of the time-limited Scale-Up activation is to ensure that the IASC’s response is sufficiently comprehensive and delivers results at scale to address humanitarian needs due to a sudden onset crisis or a significant deterioration in a humanitarian situation. Resolving crises that have their roots in a complex set of political and other factors is beyond the remit of the IASC.

² In emergencies, which involve refugees, the UNHCR representative has the mandate to prepare for, lead and coordinate the refugee and, where applicable, returning refugee responses. The *Joint UNHCR-OCHA Note on Mixed Situations: Coordination in Practice* clarifies leadership and coordination arrangements in the situation where a Humanitarian Coordinator has been appointed, and a UNHCR-led refugee operation is also underway. For health emergencies due to an infectious disease event, the International Health Regulations (2005) will be the relevant reference framework with WHO as the guardian of the regime for the control of the international spread of disease. If system-wide IASC humanitarian response is required, the relevant IASC activation procedures for infectious disease events will apply.

Q5: Does Scale-Up activation suggest weakness of local capacity?

A5: No. A Scale-Up activation is not contingent on the assessment of national capacity. It indicates the scale at which the humanitarian system needs to step up its efforts and internal procedures to better respond to the crisis in support of *in situ* efforts.

Q6: Should national authorities be informed about a Scale-Up activation?

A6: Yes. Upon a Scale-Up activation, the ERC will notify the national authorities at the highest level. While a Scale-Up activation is an internal IASC designation intended to augment operational capacity to effectively meet the needs on the ground, it is critical for the RC/HC to communicate to national authorities the measures that the humanitarian system is taking, and to explain the impact of the activation in support of national and in situ capacity. Scale-Up activation should not be used for publicity purposes such as fund-raising or media campaigns.

Q7: Does the Scale-Up activation classify or rank the severity of the crisis?

A7: No. A Scale-Up activation does not measure, rank or classify the severity of the crisis. Instead, it indicates that the capacity of humanitarian agencies to lead, coordinate and deliver assistance and protection does not match the scale, complexity and urgency of a crisis, and that this needs to be addressed as a priority.

Q8: Does the end of a Scale-Up activation mean that the crisis no longer requires international attention?

A8: No. In the aftermath of sudden-onset disasters or a rapidly deteriorating humanitarian situation, international support may continue to be required for response, recovery and rebuilding efforts long after a Scale-Up activation has expired. A Scale-Up activation should not exacerbate inequities between crises. In protracted crises, international support may still be required to sustain an effective response and advocate with those with influence to bring an end to the crisis.

Q9: Should Scale-Up activation receive a higher funding priority than other responses?

A9: No. A Scale-Up activation does not imply an assessment of the severity of the crisis. Scale-Up activation may help to raise funds, but it should not exacerbate inequities between crises and/or mean that other crises should not receive less funding or attention. Humanitarian action should be funded on the basis of the humanitarian needs identified in the humanitarian needs overview and appeal documents and/or other needs and severity analyses.

Q10: How does a Scale-Up activation relate to protracted emergencies?

A10: In the aftermath of sudden-onset emergencies or a rapidly deteriorating humanitarian situation, international support may be required for response, recovery and rebuilding beyond the activation period of up to six months of a Scale-Up activation. However, Scale-Up should not be extended indefinitely, other measures should be considered to respond to large-scale, ongoing crises.

The Inter-Agency Standing Committee (IASC) is a unique inter-agency forum for coordination, policy development and decision-making involving the key UN and non-UN humanitarian partners. The IASC was established in June 1992 in response to United Nations General Assembly Resolution [46/182](#) on the strengthening of humanitarian assistance.