

Reference Group on Principled Humanitarian Action Terms of Reference

Updated April 2017

1. Background/Expected Results

Background – Principled Humanitarian Action

- The Reference Group on Principled Humanitarian Action (RG PHA) was requested by the IASC Working Group (WG) to implement relevant elements of the IASC Work plan 2016-2017¹. The work of the RG PHA is primarily related to WG Workplan Priority 1 – *Effective response to Emergencies and Protracted Crises* – although the group may support other IASC priorities as relevant, in particular with regard to humanitarian financing.
- The Reference Group carries forward a number of work streams from the 2014-2015 workplan of the former IASC Task Team on Principled Humanitarian Action (TT PHA).
- As a Reference Group, its activities are not confined to the IASC Work Plan and the group acts as a platform for exchange of dialogue, policy and guidance development and advocacy for principled humanitarian action issues.

Expected Results

- To help create an environment in which humanitarian actors can better access and respond to people in need, the IASC will promote adherence to, and the effective operationalization of, humanitarian principles in humanitarian operations and policies.

Tasks

- Contribute to a better understanding of the humanitarian principles (HPs) and support to their application at field level.
- Gather and share evidence of the impact of CT measures on principled humanitarian action amongst IASC members, and develop of a common template for CT and exemption clauses in donor contracts.
- Develop shared messaging regarding the intersection of Preventing/Countering Violent Extremism approaches and principled humanitarian action, including a 2 page information note.
- Develop a briefing paper on the impact of attacks on humanitarian action on principled humanitarian action and access of civilians to basic services
- Provide inputs and share information as required to other IASC bodies
- Act as platform for exchange of dialogue, policy and guidance development and advocacy with regards to principled humanitarian action.
- For more detail, see the RG work plan 2017.

2. Working Methods

Structure

- The Reference Group will have three core work streams/priorities to enable it to meet its objectives and deliver on its tasks. These are: (priority 1) Humanitarian access is facilitated by improved awareness, application and integration of humanitarian principles at field level. (priority 2)

¹ https://interagencystandingcommittee.org/system/files/iasc_workplan_2016-7.pdf

Counterterrorism (CT) and Preventing/Countering Violent Extremism (P/CVE) agendas remain clearly distinct from PHA, and better take into account the need to minimize impact on PHA (priority 3) Improved protection of humanitarian action in accordance with International Humanitarian Law (IHL).

Chairs/Co-chairs

- The Principled Humanitarian Action Reference Group will have two Co-chairs. One from OCHA and one from NRC. This will support continuity, including of tasks carried over from the previous Task Team on PHA. Co-chairs will be re-elected every two years. Chairing arrangements will be reviewed in December 2018.
- The Co-chair responsibilities area as follows:
 - Convene regular meetings with members of the Reference Group.
 - Facilitate discussion and work plan development within the Reference Group.
 - Facilitate the flow of communication with and from the IASC Secretariat.
 - Elevate the work of the Reference Group to the IASC Working Group and/or IASC Principals where necessary.
 - Represent the Reference Group externally (e.g. to the wider IASC).
 - Facilitate strategic coherence and complementarity within the Reference Group workplan.
 - Liaise with the sponsors of the IASC Reference Group on a regular basis, ensuring they are aware and promote (where needed) the work of the Reference Group.
- The organisations responsible for leading the priority work streams (see above) are as follows: NRC and IOM (priority 1); NRC and OCHA (priority 2), ACF (priority 3).

Secretariat

- NRC and OCHA will provide support to the Reference Group, including:
 - supporting discussions, drafting and agreement of the work plan;
 - maintaining an email distribution list of participants;
 - convening meetings of the Reference Group, including drafting the agenda and minutes
 - liaison with the IASC Secretariat, as needed

Participation

- Participation is open to interested humanitarian organisations, bringing together NGOs, UN, IOM, the Red Cross/Red Crescent Movement, and other international organisations together on an equal footing.
- Participants are expected to actively contribute to the work of the Reference Group and take on responsibilities to advance the Group's work. Participants represent their organisations and, where applicable, ensure that their WG or EDG representatives or Principals are regularly briefed on the Reference Group's work and progress.
- Experts, donors, and/or governments may be invited as observers to provide technical input or to discuss certain relevant issues, when needed. Operational NGOs are encouraged to participate actively.

Meeting schedule and frequency

- The Reference Group convenes regular meetings by teleconference with meeting spaces arranged by NRC or OCHA in Geneva. The Group will meet monthly. Frequency of meetings will be reviewed in May 2017. The Reference Group also convenes an annual planning retreat. Ad-hoc meetings related to particular workstreams are arranged by the leads of those workstreams as needed.

Decision-Making

- Decision making is based on consensus. If consensus is not achievable, then a decision is taken on the basis of the voting majority. Agreement on accuracy of minutes, wording of documents etc. will be on a 'no objections' basis, with every effort made to ensure Reference Group members have adequate time to respond.

3. Reporting

Reporting to the WG

- In line with the IASC ToR (2014), the IASC WG will also establish and monitor Reference Groups, which are communities of practice, which function to ensure implementation of IASC norms and policies.²
- It should be noted that Reference Groups are "communities of practice" loosely defined as platforms for dialogue, policy and guidance development and advocacy. They are not required to report to the Working Group– they might be asked for updates but there are no formal requirements. Reference Groups are also not time bound, and do not have sponsors.
- The Reference Group will provide progress updates to the Working Group upon request in writing.

Monitoring implementation

- The Reference Group Co-Chairs are responsible for monitoring implementation of the Reference Group's objectives and work plan, with the support of the IASC Secretariat. Workstream leads will be accountable for delivering the outputs identified in their individual workplans.

² https://interagencystandingcommittee.org/system/files/legacy_files/IASC%20TOR%20-%2011Feb2014.pdf