

## The Cluster Approach

### Overview

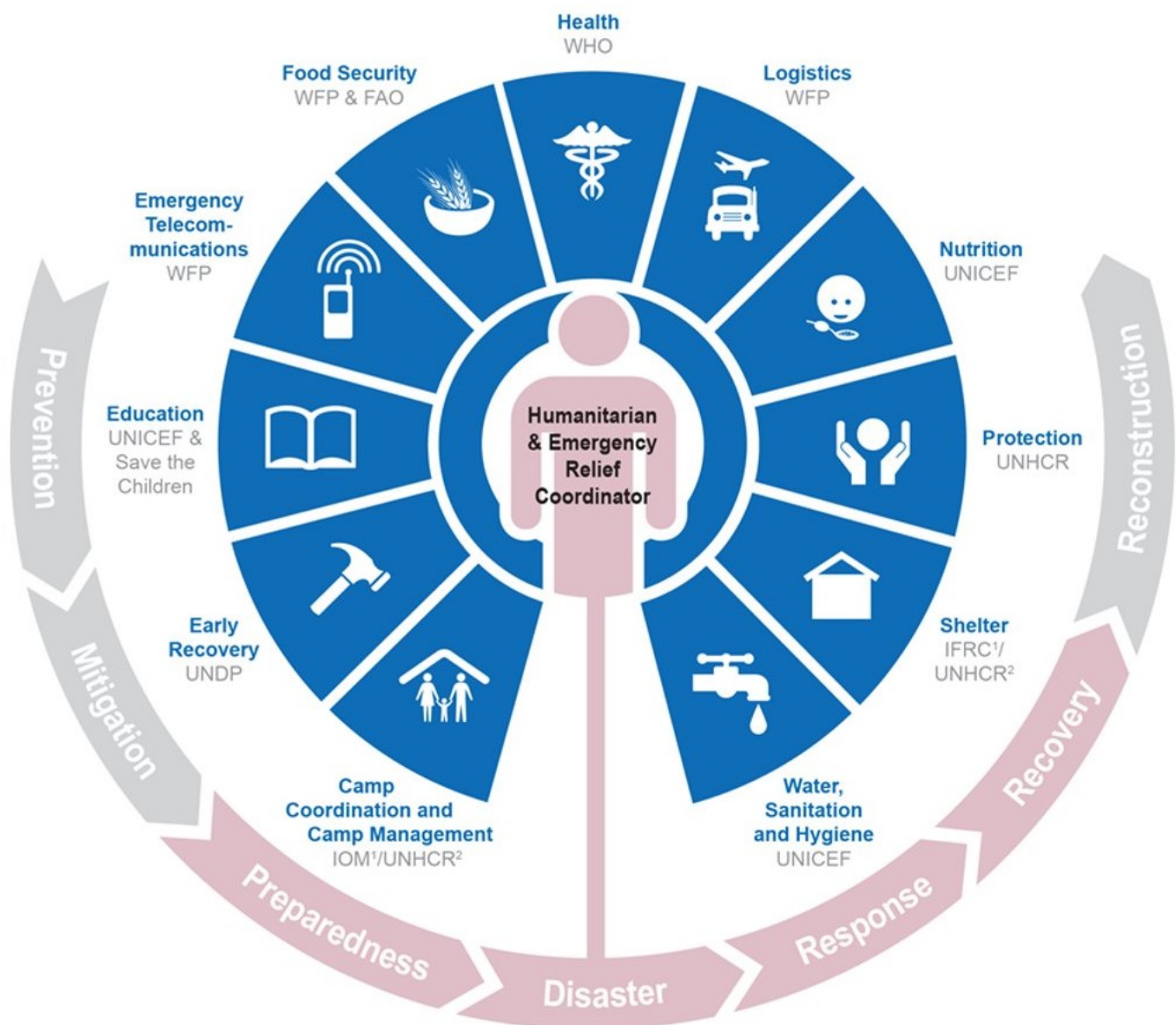
In order to ensure that humanitarian response to an emergency is provided in an effective and targeted manner, coordination is necessary. Good coordination results in less gaps and overlaps in the assistance delivered by humanitarian organizations.

The Cluster Approach was adopted by the Inter-Agency Standing Committee (IASC) in 2005. The approach aims to strengthen system-wide preparedness and technical capacity to respond to humanitarian emergencies by ensuring that predictable leadership leads to predictable and effective humanitarian response.

There are eleven IASC designated clusters at the global level, each one led or co-led by the designated UN and/or non-UN organization. Cluster activation at the country level is determined by the Humanitarian Coordinator in close coordination with the Humanitarian Country Team (HCT) and in consultation with the Government.

At the **global level**, clusters are responsible for strengthening system-wide preparedness and providing technical capacity to respond to humanitarian emergencies within their respective sectors.

At the **country level**, clusters ensure that the activities of partners are coordinated and harmonized. To the extent possible, clusters mirror national response structures, use terminology that is close or identical to that of the national sectors, and are co-chaired by government representatives. Where required, country-level clusters can be established at the onset of a disaster and may or may not remain following the initial phases of response based on in-country assessment of continued need.



## Key Points

- The IASC Cluster Approach emphasizes partnerships between humanitarian organizations, identifying lead agencies and dividing work within various sectors of assistance according to each partner's organizational mandate.
- Clusters are groups of humanitarian organizations, both UN and non-UN, organized by main sectors of humanitarian action, e.g. shelter, camp coordination and camp management, health and logistics. They are designated by the Inter-Agency Standing Committee (IASC) and have clear responsibilities for coordination.

## Key Considerations

### Clusters vs. Sectors

At the country level, the term cluster or sector can be used depending on the context. Clusters are sectoral coordination groups composed of humanitarian actors engaged in a response. The term "Cluster" is usually used when formal activation has been achieved.

IASC clusters are formally activated when existing coordination mechanisms cannot effectively respond to the scale of need or complexity of the situation. A formally activated cluster has specific characteristics and accountabilities. It is accountable to the

Humanitarian Coordinator (HC), through the Cluster Lead Agency, as well as to national authorities and to people affected by the crisis. IASC clusters are a temporary coordination solution and efforts should be made as soon as possible to hand over coordination to the relevant authorities.

In cases where existing, government-led mechanisms are able to respond to the emergency, coordination mechanisms report to the designated government bodies and the lifespan of emergency coordination is defined by the government. International humanitarian support can be provided to augment national capacity, drawing on the principles of the cluster approach. In these situations the term "sectors" is sometimes used. In cases where political situations do not allow for the activation of certain clusters, the term "sector" is also sometimes used.

*For more information, please see the IASC Reference Module for Cluster Coordination at the country level document in the tools and reference section below.*

## Relevance to IOM's Emergency Operations

### The Cluster Approach and its relevance to IOM

Since the 2005 Humanitarian Reform Review, IOM has played a substantial role in the Cluster Approach, contributing to improving the effectiveness of humanitarian response and ensuring greater predictability, accountability and partnership.

#### *IOM's role at the global level*

##### **Camp Coordination and Camp Management (CCCM)**

At the global level, IOM and UNHCR co-lead the CCCM Cluster for natural disasters and conflict-induced displacement respectively. The global cluster works in close partnership with actors, including national authorities, in the field to develop standards, policies and tools to support the implementation of an effective and targeted CCCM response to emergencies. As Global cluster co-lead, IOM also provides training, technical support and surge capacity to start up or improve CCCM response at the field level.

##### **Shelter Cluster**

IOM has extensive experience in implementing emergency shelter programmes in response to crisis. Drawing on this expertise, IOM supports the Global Shelter Cluster to improve cluster services to enable the efficient implementation of Shelter Cluster response at the field level. IOM's support to the Shelter Cluster at the global level includes: providing trainings on Shelter Cluster activities and providing technical support to cluster partners.

#### *IOM's role at the country level*

##### **IOM as Cluster Lead:**

The selection of Cluster Lead Agencies ideally mirrors global arrangements; but this is not always possible and sometimes other organizations are in a better position to lead. The Resident Coordinator / Humanitarian Coordinator, in consultation with the United Nations Country Team (UNCT) / Humanitarian Country Team (HCT), selects Cluster Lead Agencies based on agencies' coordination and response capacity, operational presence, and ability to scale up.

At the country level, there are six core functions of a cluster, these are:

1. To support service delivery by:

- Providing a platform that ensures service delivery is driven by the Humanitarian Response Plan and strategic priorities.
- Developing mechanisms to eliminate duplication of service delivery.

2. To inform the HC/HCT's strategic decision-making by:

- Preparing needs assessments and analysis of gaps (across and within clusters, using information management tools as needed) to inform the setting of priorities.
- Identifying and finding solutions for gaps, obstacles, duplication and cross-cutting issues.

- Formulating priorities on the basis of analysis.

3. To plan and implement cluster strategies by:

- Developing sectoral plans, objectives and indicators that directly support realization of the overall response's strategic objectives.
- Applying and adhering to common standards and guidelines.
- Clarifying funding requirements, helping to set priorities, and agreeing cluster contributions to the HC's overall humanitarian funding proposals.

4. To monitor and evaluate performance by:

- Monitoring and reporting on activities and needs.
- Measuring progress against the cluster strategy and agreed results.
- Recommending corrective action where necessary.

5. To build national capacity in preparedness and contingency planning.

6. To support robust advocacy by:

- Identifying concerns, and contributing key information and messages to HC and HCT messaging and action.
- Undertaking advocacy on behalf of the cluster, cluster members, and affected people.

In addition to supporting the six core functions of the cluster, the designated Cluster Lead Agency is the Provider of Last Resort. This means that, where necessary, and depending on access, security and availability of funding, the cluster lead as Provider of Last Resort must be ready to ensure the provision of services required to fulfill crucial gaps identified by the cluster and reflected in the HC-led Humanitarian Response Plan.

*See the Cluster Coordination Reference Module available in the tools and reference section for more details.*

In response to natural disasters, where IOM has demonstrated capacity to carry out the role as CCCM Cluster lead, IOM often assumes the role as Cluster Lead Agency at the country level.

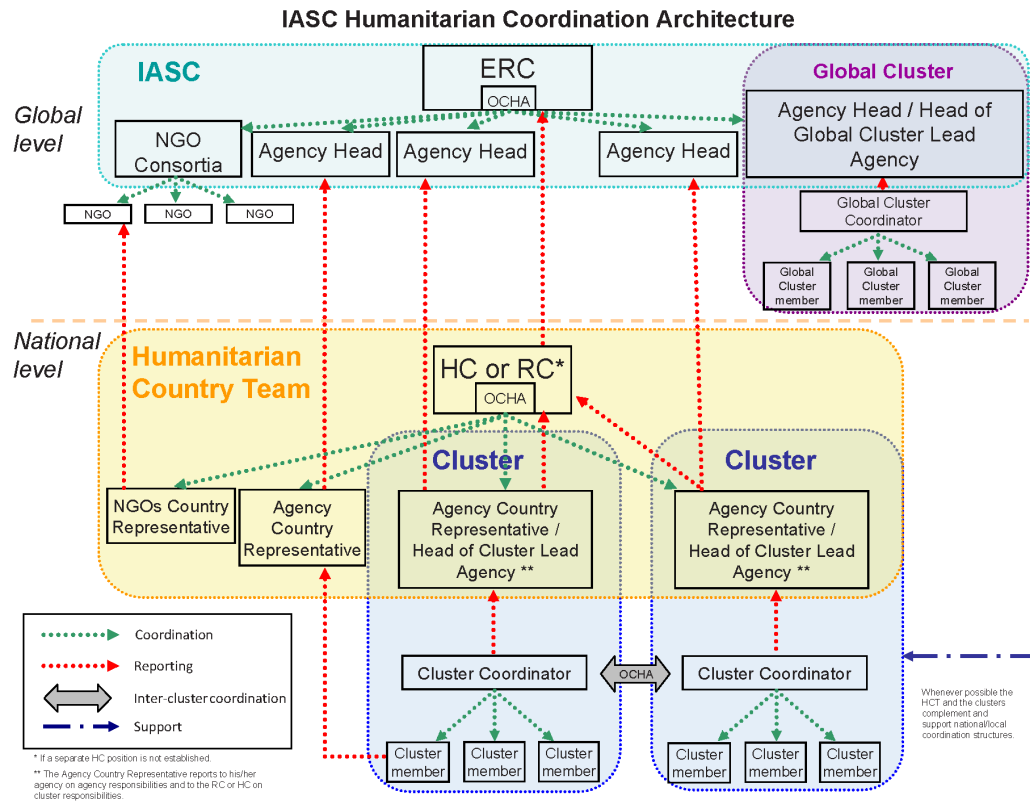
If IOM has demonstrated capacity, IOM can also assume the role of cluster lead/ co-lead for the Shelter Cluster and the CCCM cluster in conflict-induced IDP situations.

#### **IOM as an active operational partner within a cluster:**

IOM's engagement in various cluster responses at the country level depends on the needs, capacity and strategy of the IOM Country Office. IOM can engage as an operational partner in any cluster based at the discretion of the Country Office. In the past, IOM has often been an operational partner in clusters including, but not limited to: Health, Logistics, Protection, Water, Sanitation and Hygiene (WASH) and Early Recovery.

## Coordination

See the [Humanitarian Coordination Structure entry](#) for more information.



## Links

- [IASC Guidance Cluster Coordination](#)
- [Humanitarian System-Wide Scale-Up Activation](#)
- [IASC Guidance Note: Advancing the HDPN Approach through IASC Global Clusters](#)

## References and Tools

- [IASC Guidance Cluster Coordination at Country Level 2015](#)

## Other Entries in this Topic

- [Camp Coordination and Camp Management \(CCCM\)](#)

## Contacts

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For more information about the CCCM Cluster contact: [globalcccm@iom.int](mailto:globalcccm@iom.int).

For more information about the Shelter Cluster contact: [ShelterSupport@iom.int](mailto:ShelterSupport@iom.int).

The DOE RTS in the region can also provide guidance on this topic.

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