

Humanitarian Coordination Structure

Overview

The foundations of the current international humanitarian coordination architecture were laid by [General Assembly Resolution 46/182 of December 1991](#). The [Humanitarian Reform of 2005](#) introduced a number of new elements to enhance predictability, accountability, and partnership. The Cluster Approach was one of these new elements.

At the country level, the Humanitarian Country Team chaired by the Humanitarian Coordinator (HC), is the decision-making forum composed of operationally relevant humanitarian organizations (both UN and non-UN) and focusing on common strategic and policy issues related to humanitarian response in country. In addition to the HCT, several other complementary coordination mechanisms exist and are further explained in this entry.

Key Considerations

National Level Coordination

The Humanitarian Country Team (HCT) is the main decision-making forum for humanitarian matters at the country level. The HCT aims to provide common strategic and policy guidance for the overall humanitarian response. The responsibilities of the HCT include setting common objectives, priorities, developing overall strategic plans and activating resource mobilization mechanisms. Moreover the HCT also works to promote adherence by humanitarian actors, with humanitarian principles, principles of partnership, IASC guidelines and other strategies adopted by the HCT.

The HCT is chaired by the HC, or in the absence of an HC, by the United Nations Resident Coordinator (RC). The HCT is composed of organizations that undertake humanitarian action in the country and commit to participating within the coordination arrangements (this includes all agencies that assume a cluster coordination role in a given context). HCT membership can include UN Agencies, including IOM, NGOs and, subject to their individual mandates, components of the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement. The main criterion for membership in the HCT is operational relevance. Members are represented at the highest level (country representative or equivalent).

Where the HCT is activated, IOM should ensure that it is a member of the forum. The Chief of Mission should represent IOM in the HCT. In cases where the COM has limited humanitarian response experience, the team leader of the Rapid Response Team (RRT), if relevant, can sit as the IOM representative, if so designated.

Inter-Cluster Working/Coordination Group

The name of this forum may vary depending on the context but its main purpose is to create a space for cluster leads to share information and discuss crosscutting issues. Meetings of this group are usually chaired by OCHA. Where this platform exists and where IOM is acting as a cluster lead agency, IOM should be a member of this group. The IOM Cluster Coordinator(s) should be present at these meetings.

Cluster Meetings

Each cluster convenes separate meetings to discuss operational issues related to their specific sector. Depending on the nature of the crisis, cluster meetings can be held at different levels (e.g. national level or sub-national level). IOM should be present at all cluster meetings that relate to IOM's programming both planned and ongoing. IOM staff with the relevant technical expertise should attend these meetings (e.g. WASH programme managers should attend the national level meetings and WASH officers based in locations where sub-national meetings are occurring should represent IOM.) In some instances, sector specific coordination structures may be chaired by line ministries.

Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs)

Some useful distinctions:

Humanitarian Coordinator (HC) vs. Resident Coordinator (RC)

The HC supports coordination of humanitarian operations among all international actors, including both UN and non-UN. The RC supports the coordination of development operations among UN actors only. In the majority of contexts, these two functions are handled by one person. However, there may be situations where they are handled by separate individuals, or where a stand-alone Deputy Humanitarian Coordinator is appointed.

Humanitarian Country Team (HCT) vs. United Nations Country Team (UNCT)

Whereas the UNCT includes the Heads of all UN agencies plus IOM, the HCT generally comprises heads of the UN's humanitarian agencies, IOM, as well as operational non-UN humanitarian actors (i.e. NGOs and the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement). In some instances the HCT may also include representatives of the donor community. The UNCT focuses on the UN's support for national development programmes, while the HCT addresses strategic issues of the wider humanitarian community. The main criteria for inclusion in the HCT is operational relevance.

Note: Like the HC and RC functions, the UNCT and HCT coexist; they do not replace each other. The RC or HC is responsible for ensuring complementarity between the two entities.

HCT vs. Clusters HCT

This coordination body provides strategic and policy guidance to the overall response effort, whereas country-level clusters implement the strategy by coordinating operational response efforts in their respective areas of expertise. Cluster lead agencies are members of the HCT (represented by the Country Representative of the cluster lead agency and not the person assuming the role of cluster coordinator).

Links

- [Who does what? Coordination architecture in the cluster approach](#)
- [IASC Standard Terms of Reference for Humanitarian Country Teams, February 2017](#)
- [IASC Reference Module for Cluster Coordination at Country Level](#)
- [Humanitarian System-Wide Scale-Up Activation](#)

Other Entries in this Topic

- [Humanitarian Programme Cycle \(HPC\)](#)
- [Pre-Crisis Coordination Structure](#)
- [Inter-Agency Standing Committee \(IASC\)](#)

Contacts

For more guidance on this matter please contact the DOE RTS in the region.

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