

Elements and Criteria to Consider in Decision-making for Cluster Capacities at Country-level within the Current Context

EMOPS (GCCS), April 2025

Document developed to support COs in decision-making in the current context of reduced funding and humanitarian reset process, including cluster reform.

The content is not intended to replace the current CO Guide for CLA accountabilities and will be reviewed once the cluster reform is completed.

Criteria for staffing decisions – Coordination Capacity

KEY ASPECTS FOR CONSIDERATION – *until June 2025 pending a system-wide decision*

- ❖ **If there are changes proposed** that might lead to changes in UNICEF's global cluster coordination commitments and accountabilities (including transferring to another entity) at the national or sub-national level, **please consult EMOPS GCCS team as soon as possible** as per the [Inter-Agency Prioritisation Note – March 2025](#).
- ❖ **Simplification** of architecture or double-hatting **should not compromise the neutrality, impartiality, and quality of coordination**, particularly in complex and politically sensitive crises. Further details are provided in [UNICEF's Country Office guide on CLA Accountabilities and Humanitarian Coordination](#).
- ❖ **Typology of crisis – certain crisis by their nature will entail higher demands on and need for dedicated support for certain clusters**, requiring greater engagement with other structures, both in terms of time and scope, *e.g., public health epidemics, huge malnutrition burden, conflicts and displacement*.
- ❖ Programme and Coordination teams need to **support each other** for engaging with relevant entities and donors, **respecting each other's roles and autonomy**. The Coordinator represents the sector and does not advocate for specific organizations.
- ❖ In contexts where clusters will be **de-activated**, plan for ensuring a successful handover of coordination responsibilities towards national authorities and/or development groups. UNICEF Coordination and Program teams should work on a **sectoral transition plan with a clear timeline** for ensuring an effective transition.
- ❖ There are **pros and cons for dedicated or double-hatting capacity**. These are summarized in slides 2-3, with potential mitigation factors.

RECOMMENDED CAPACITY BY CONTEXT

	HNRP/Cluster activated contexts (mostly L2 and L3 emergencies) ¹	HNRP/Partially activated contexts (not all clusters activated) ¹	Other HAC / early warning contexts with no HNRP	Sectors in non- HAC contexts
National level	- Dedicated coordinator highly recommended	- Dedicated capacity is highly recommended for the activated clusters - Evaluate pros/cons of capacity options for the non-activated clusters/sectors.	- Double-hatting in support of existing emergency coordination structures	- UNICEF Programs support national capacities and systems
Subnational level	- Double-hatting from programs - Co-leadership / co-coordination by local actors recommended	- Double-hatting or focal points from programs determined according to coordination architecture demands	- Focal point from programs (or double hatting if required)	
EMOPS / GCCS support	- Ensured through remote and in-country support through deployable capacities: RRTs or Help-Desks (including capacity strengthening and thematic specialists)		- Available, in synergy with PG	- Ad-hoc requests, otherwise led by PG

Dedicated Coordination Capacity

KEY ASPECTS FOR CONSIDERATION

- ❖ Whether national or international staff, coordinators should have the **seniority to represent the sectors** with relevant line ministries/entities, donors, intersectoral bodies, partners and management.
- ❖ **In politically sensitive contexts** where governments are constrained or party to a conflict to lead , **dedicated capacity is advised**.
- ❖ **Typology of crisis** – certain crisis by their nature will entail higher demands on and need for dedicated support for certain clusters, requiring greater engagement with other structures, both in terms of time and scope.

PROS (+)

- + Meets **minimum requirements** of the agency's **IASC accountabilities** – *this is often key in high-profile contexts / system-wide activations.*
- + Provides **perceived independence** from UNICEF programming – *this is often key to the functioning and strategic leadership of a cluster, and critical in contexts where the authorities are party to a conflict.*
- + Allows for recruiting **specific profiles** with **coordination skillsets** – *while programming skills are required for coordination, the skillsets necessary for coordination are typically spread across different sections in a CO.*
- + Provides the 'seed' capacity to **maximize the sector capacities** – *shared leadership within the cluster/sector should be highlighted and encouraged in line with the strategic plan focus on civil society strengthening.*
- + Allows for 'piggybacking' or collaboration on certain HAC elements – needs analysis, partner mapping, strategic planning – with the potential to reduce workloads on program staff and improve HAC/HNRP quality and coherence.

CONS (-)

- An additional position with associated costs, with significant but typically *unmeasurable* contributions to Country Program outcomes.
- When not properly resourced/selected (e.g., consultants, UNVs, SBPs lacking expertise), this can:
 - Become a **reputational risk** in terms of inputs to HPC processes
 - Lead to high staff turnover and a lack of consistency
 - *Both can have negative knock-on impacts on sectoral partner / donor relationships*

Short-term cost-saving solutions:

- A dedicated **co-coordinator** – potentially via cluster partner or Ministry counterpart – coupled with a double-hatting coordinator – *ideal where national sector capacity is strong*
- Combine with any sectoral coordination support committed to within the CPD – *ideal where sectoral climate risk programs or Local Education Group might be underway*

Double Hatting Coordination Capacity

KEY ASPECTS FOR CONSIDERATION

- ❖ Double hatting staff (at national and sub-national levels) **need the required skills, time and resources to perform coordination functions** up to standards. ToRs and PERs needs to reflect coordination responsibilities. They should be encouraged and supported to complete available core learning.
- ❖ Double-hatting staff should **have at least 50% of their reporting time dedicated to coordination and monitored, especially during emergency peaks** – they should be responsible for developing and implementing a sectoral coordination workplan and engaging in interagency processes.
- ❖ **Triple-hatting should be strongly avoided.**
- ❖ **Dual reporting/ supervision line** to Program and Emergency sections should be established, maintaining a communication line with management as CLA lead.

PROS (+)

- + *Potential* for cost-effectiveness and improved integration in terms of needs analysis, partner mapping and strategic planning – *notably if the program has a broad focus, or where national authorities / sector capacity is strong.*
- + Enhances information sharing between Program and Emergency Sections (dual supervision)
- + Enhances information sharing between Program/Section and Cluster, and complementarities/alignments between the HAC/HNRP.

CONS (-)

- May require **use of different tools and processes** for admin, tracking, and analyses – *a challenge to implement with two distinct but overlapping groups of partners with potentially different foci.*
- Program and Cluster responsibilities **will often have the same peaks** – *i.e., when a shock strikes.*
 - Risk of de-prioritization of highly-visible cluster functions, affecting CLA accountability.
 - Reduces capacity to engage in/benefit from inter-sectoral discussions.
 - Dual supervision under high pressure can be a challenge.
- **A perceived lack of independence / neutrality**
 - Conflict of interest when it comes to fund cluster/ sector partners, regardless of whether this is the case or not. *This can be more sensitive in resource scarce contexts.*

Short-term mitigating factors:

- **Co-coordination/Shared leadership** – an organization(s) may be able to dedicate personnel as co-coordinator or take the lead on specific workstreams where they have capacity – *this will be key for any fund-mobilization or strategic planning or prioritization exercises.*

Criteria for Staffing Decisions – Information Management Capacity

KEY ASPECTS FOR CONSIDERATION

- **Typology of crisis** : Dedicated IM capacity remains crucial during emergencies, as it allows for shared resources focused on cluster functions and partner support.
- **Response capacity at cluster level** : In emergencies with high number of service providers, the lack of dedicated IM can impact the delivery of critical IM products or activities, such as cluster-based monitoring and reporting systems, leading to a significant reputational risk for the Cluster Lead Agency (CLA).
- **Data collection and analysis**: Due to current funding cut, clusters will have less opportunities for primary data collection (MSNA, DTM). Therefore, it is essential to have dedicated capacity for primary data collection at cluster level to inform humanitarian response plans and generate evidence for advocacy products.
- **Interagency engagements**: Cluster functions require engagement in interagency and inter-sectoral discussions, such as the JIAF during the HPC process. Limited capacity at cluster level with non-dedicated staff will impact our ability to contribute in these forums and advocate for the well-being of children.
- **Impact on coordination functions**: Double-hatting staff can lead to a de-prioritization of highly-visible cluster functions that various stakeholders depend on. Measures will be needed to ensure the highly-visible coordination accountabilities are given equal weight.

Organizational Structure – Country IM capacity

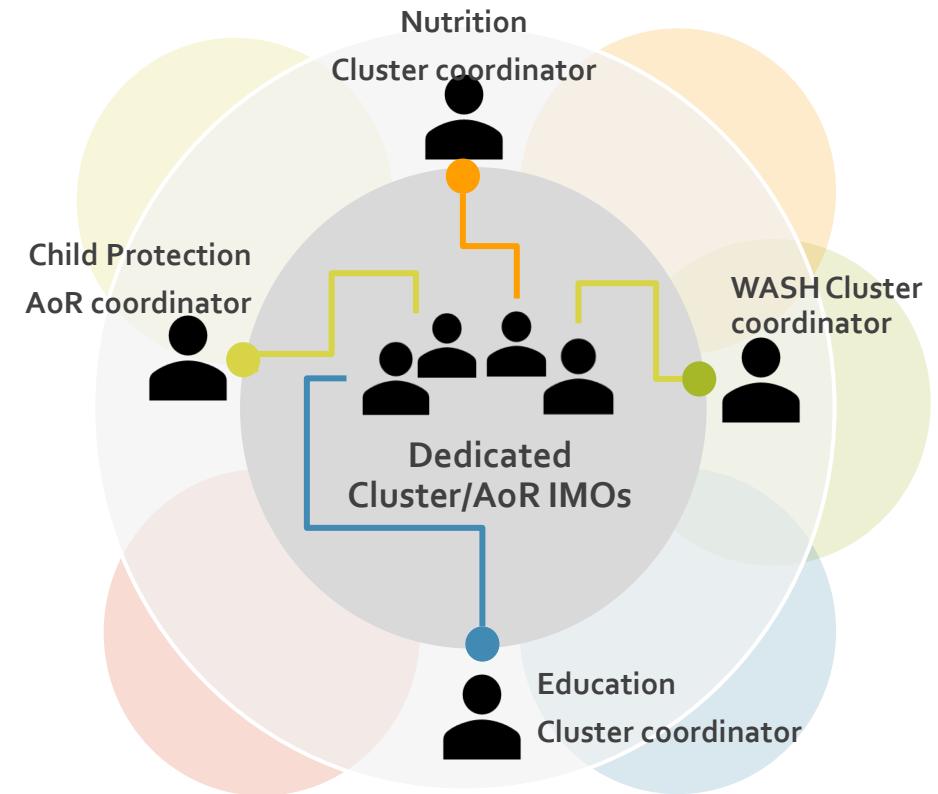
Dedicated support – P3/NOC, P2/NOB levels

PROS (+)

- + Required in cluster activated context /L2-3 emergencies to ensure dedicated capacity for cluster functions and partner support.
- + Leads to faster data processing, higher-quality outputs, and timely reporting.
- + Enhances coordination functions effectively by providing the right capacities to meet cluster needs.
- + Allows more capacity for comprehensive sectoral analysis and high-quality IM products.
- + Facilitates in-country initiatives including capacity-building and sectoral needs assessment.
- + Enables contributions to intersectoral discussions at country level (e.g.; JIAF, MSNA).

CONS (-)

- Implies financial costs that do not align with the current funding cut.
- Not sustainable for protracted crises.
- Positions are often filled by SBP lacking sectoral expertise or TAs, which increases the risks of high staff turnover.



Organizational Structure - Country IM capacity

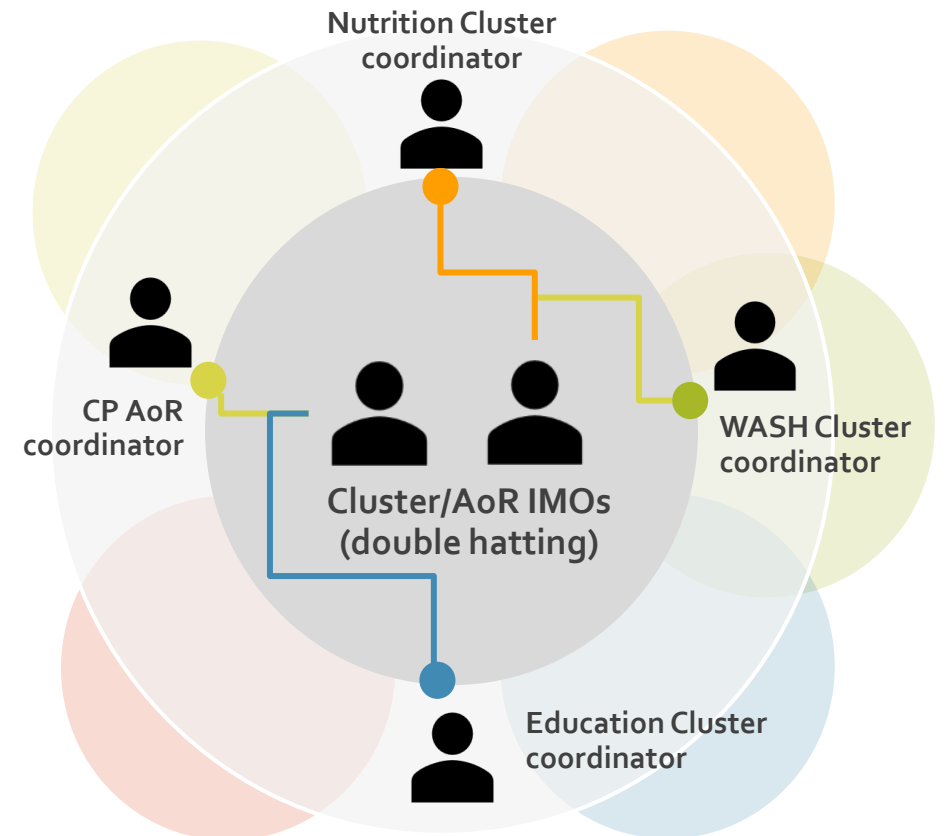
Cluster IMO double-hatting between clusters => IM reporting to relevant coordinators

PROS (+)

- + Ideal for emergencies, providing shared capacity dedicated to cluster functions and partner support.
- + Expands sector knowledge, improving the versatility and the quality of cross-sectoral analysis.
- + Facilitates contributions to intersectoral discussions at the country level.
- + Streamlines and harmonizes data collection within and among clusters.
- + Optimizes human resources, especially in contexts with limited funding, by sharing IMOs across clusters.
- + Ensures the IM equally reports to both coordinators.

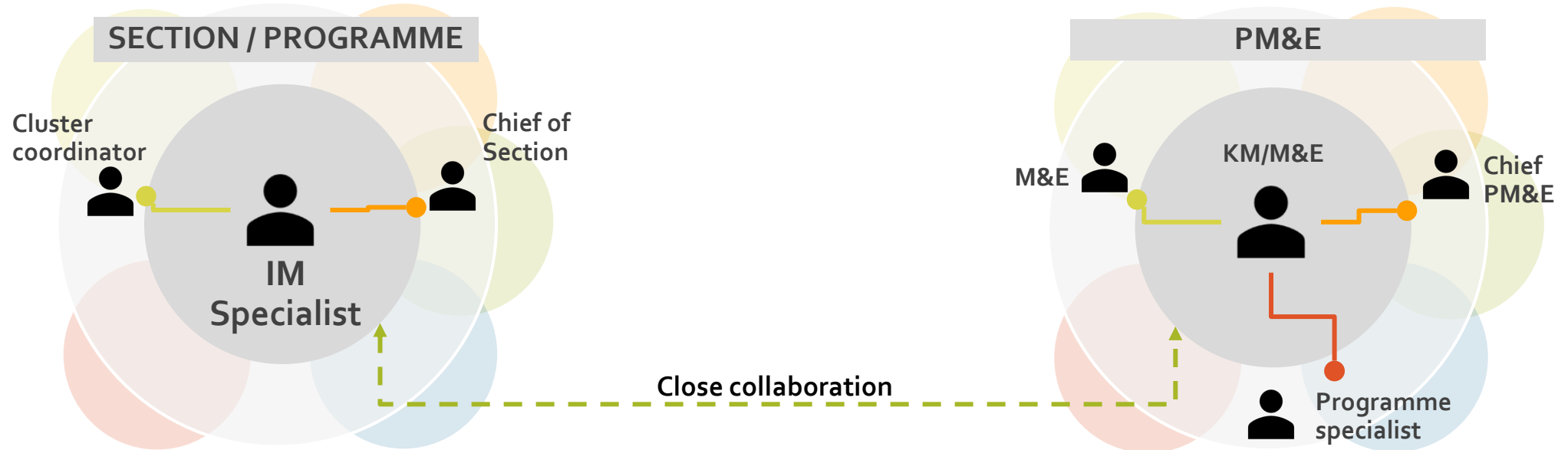
CONS (-)

- Workload distribution within clusters can be challenging if is not well-balanced.
- Critical workload during key phases in the HPC and in response to new 'shocks'.
- Additional time allocated to multiple cluster meetings, reducing availability for core IM functions.



Organizational Structure - Country IM capacity

IM Section (double-hatting) => Reporting to the Chief of Section and Cluster Coordinator



PROS (+)

- + Ideal for sections with specific data requirements.
- + Potential for cost-effective and improved data management and integration.
- + Allows sector-specific IM expertise and career growth.
- + Enables dual supervision, with the IM equally reporting to two supervisors.
- + Enhances information sharing between Programme/Section and Cluster, reducing data gaps and ensuring alignment with frameworks.
- + Facilitates collaboration with PM&E with regular inputs from both for UNICEF reports, ensuring the complementarity between Cluster-based reporting mechanisms and UNICEF's programmatic reporting tools/ mechanisms.

CONS (-)

- Risk of de-prioritization of highly-visible cluster functions, affecting CLA accountability.
- May complicate data collection for cluster partners if programmatic interests dominate.
- Reduces capacity to engage in inter-sectoral discussions (e.g.; JIAF).
- Dual supervision can be challenging if workload distribution is not well-balanced, coupled with high pressure from reporting/line managers.
- Not recommended in L2-L3 emergencies that require dedicated IM capacity.

Organizational Structure - Country IM capacity

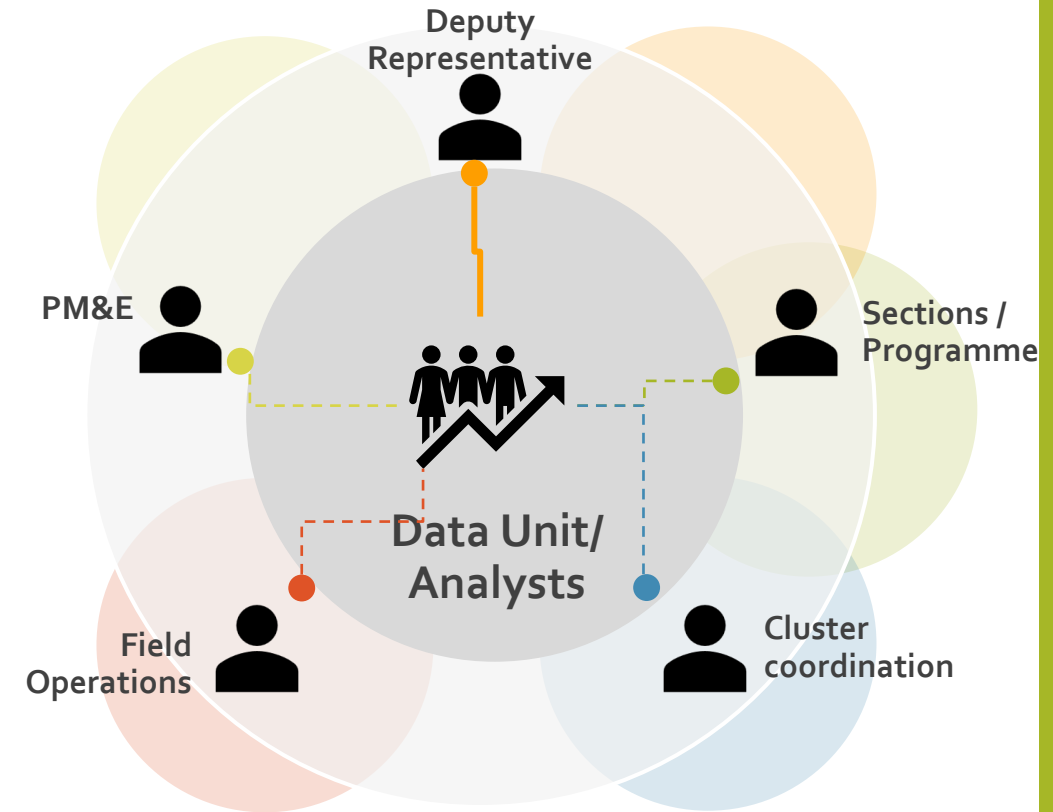
Data analysts => Head of Unit (HoU) leading the team and reporting to senior management

PROS (+)

- + Ideal when the country office is demanding on data analysis, providing the SMT with balanced and comparable evidence across sections and clusters.
- + Serves a centralized hub, providing access to diverse expertise (analysts, GIS, Data managers, etc.) and facilitates collaboration with PM&E.
- + Enhances the ability to engage in inter-sectoral discussions (e.g.; JIAF, MSNA).
- + Streamlines data collection and analysis for both cluster and programme partners.
- + Facilitates collaboration with PM&E with regular inputs for UNICEF reports, while ensuring the complementarity between Cluster-based reporting mechanisms and UNICEF programmatic reporting tools and mechanisms.
- + Ensures direct supervision by senior management, helping to follow up on key priorities.

CONS (-)

- Risk of de-prioritization of highly-visible cluster functions and affecting CLA accountability.
- Potentially complicates data collection for cluster partners if programmatic interests dominate.
- Requires sector specific capacities for certain sector-specific systems or services (e.g.; nutrition)
- Implies additional costs for the setup of the unit and a mindset shift.





For further information or guidance, please contact the EMOPS - Global Cluster Coordination Section team

