IASC GUIDANCE ON CLUSTER TRANSITION AND DEACTIVATION
FOR COUNTRY-LEVEL CLUSTERS AND CLUSTER LEAD AGENCIES

This summary is intended to support clusters and Cluster Lead Agencies (CLAs) at country level to implement successful transition and deactivation of clusters, at a time and in a way that is appropriate to the context.

The guidance builds on and should be read alongside the guidance for cluster deactivation in the IASC Reference Module for Cluster Coordination at Country Level (2015).

Deactivation decision-making

DEFINITIONS

Cluster Deactivation

The closure of a formally activated cluster. Deactivation includes the transfer of core functions from clusters that have international leadership and accountability to other structures, including those that are led nationally or development focused.

Reference:
IASC, *Reference Module for Cluster Coordination at Country Level*, 2015, p.37

Cluster Transition

The process (and potentially the activities) by which transfer of leadership and accountabilities is planned and implemented [or cluster functions are phased out], leading to deactivation. A plan is required to map phases of the transition, set transition or deactivation benchmarks for each phase, and schedule activities to meet them.

CRITERIA

IASC guidance states that cluster deactivation can be considered when at least one condition for activation is no longer met, i.e,:

1 The humanitarian situation improves, significantly reducing humanitarian needs and consequently reducing associated response and coordination gaps

2 National structures acquire sufficient capacity to coordinate and meet residual humanitarian needs in line with humanitarian principles.

Responsibilities in deactivation and transition processes

Inter-Agency Standing Committee (IASC)
Approves the formal activation and deactivation of IASC clusters.

Cluster Lead Agency (CLA)
Accountable for individual cluster transition. CLA responsibilities include to: engage proactively in deactivation decision-making, ensure robust cluster transition processes are followed and monitored, lead strategic engagement before and during transition, and ensure Global Clusters are actively engaged with.

Global Cluster/AoR
Should support the CLA and cluster coordination team in transition planning, and can also support HCT decision-making processes around deactivation.

Cluster Coordinator
Leads the cluster coordination team in facilitating cluster transition planning and implementation through a consultative process, advised by the Strategic Advisory Group, with CLA and Global Cluster support. Should advise the CLA and HCT on progress toward transition and meeting deactivation criteria.

**Humanitarian Coordinator (HC) & Humanitarian Country Team (HCT)**
The HC initiates discussion on cluster deactivation, and in consultation with the HCT and CLAs and government, with the support of OCHA, makes recommendations to the IASC. Decisions on deactivation should follow a cluster Coordination Architecture Review. Under the HC's leadership, the HCT may agree an overall transition plan for the cluster coordination architecture.

Planning for cluster transition

Ideally, **transition planning should start at cluster activation** – as clusters are temporary coordination structures. Transition itself is a process, requiring consultation, agreement, and commitment buy-in from stakeholders.

A cluster transition process should:
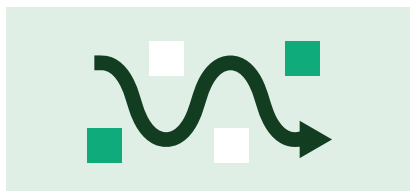
PHASED PROCESS
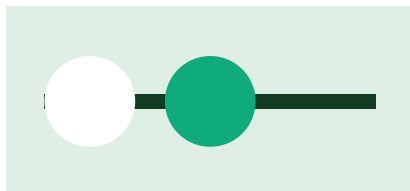
Be **phased**, allowing gradual progress toward deactivation.

FLEXIBILITY

Maintain **flexibility**, especially in complex environments and those with specific protection concerns.

BENCHMARKS

Include **benchmarks** for transition steps toward deactivation, robust risk analysis (including protection risks), and monitoring to ensure transition plans remain appropriate for the context.

SUFFICIENT TIME

Allow **sufficient time** for transition, according to the context, with sufficient resources allocated.

ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES

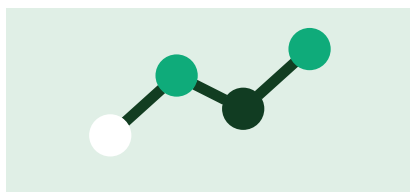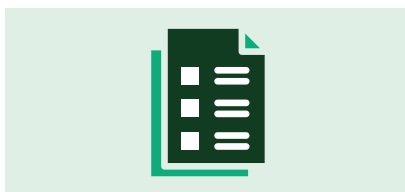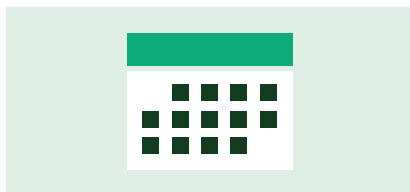Define clear **roles and responsibilities** during transition and for transfer of accountabilities.

COMMUNICATION

Involve clear, transparent **communication** to stakeholders on transition plans and deactivation decisions.

CONSULTATION

Be centred on **consultation** with stakeholders, with meaningful participation and inputs from local and national actors, and with appropriate inputs of affected people sought.

MINIMUM REQUIREMENTS FROM THE POINT OF CLUSTER ACTIVATION

✓ Appropriate actions are taken to enable later transition, including: strengthening of existing national systems; promotion of participation and leadership of local and national actors; creation of linkages with government and development actors, including through Humanitarian-Development-Peace Nexus collaboration.

✓ Discussion of cluster transition is included in cluster strategic planning processes

✓ A transition section is included in the cluster strategy

✓ A transition strategy with benchmarks is developed as soon as it is contextually appropriate to do so

✓ Transition plans are reviewed periodically, e.g., in the cluster's annual strategic planning process

✓ These requirements are monitored e.g., through Cluster Coordination Performance Monitoring

Actions to plan a cluster transition

1 Assess the context & level of existing preparedness

2 Identify future coordination needs, and what coordination functions need to be transitioned

3 Identify who needs to be engaged: stakeholder identification and analysis of existing coordination structures

4 Identify who can take over coordination functions

5 Develop a cluster transition plan

Humanitarian coordination after cluster deactivation

Two primary humanitarian coordination objectives need to be considered after cluster deactivation:

1 **Coordination of any continuing humanitarian response**

Appropriate coordination of remaining humanitarian response, with appropriate participation of response actors

2 **Preparedness for emergency response**

Capacity to lead preparedness for any new emergency, and to lead the coordination of sectoral response if a new emergency occurs, with participation of all necessary response actors

Handover

There are three options for the handover of coordination functions:

1. Cluster functions are merged into existing coordination mechanisms;
2. Clusters are modified into new structures, or new structures are established;
3. Coordination functions fully cease [i.e., some functions stop, or the cluster is fully phased out]

Considerations and principles

Coordination after transition must support humanitarian response to be in line with humanitarian principles, and any residual protection risks must be considered during transition planning. Local and national civil society actors must be appropriately engaged.

Leadership and support

Humanitarian coordination leadership should be handed over to government wherever appropriate and possible. Alternative or additional leadership by international actors can be maintained, or local and national civil society actor leadership encouraged, for all or part of the coordination functions to continue if necessary. Continued coordination support from UN or local, national, or international NGOs can be important to sustain coordination and preparedness. The CLA may continue to support sector coordination after cluster deactivation.

Wider coordination considerations

Other coordination systems – such as government-led development coordination for some sectors, coordination of the UN development system's support under the UNSDCF, or a shift towards durable solutions and recovery – may influence transition options for clusters and should be considered in transition planning.