

IASC Key Considerations for HCs and HCTs on Cluster Transition and Deactivation

Groundwork for a successful transition starts well before the transition phase begins and a decision to exit is taken. Transition itself is a process, requiring consultation, agreement, and commitment from stakeholders, and time and planning to implement. Early in the life cycle of an operation, the HCT should prepare a response-wide transition strategy to ensure a coherent process, consistent communication, and clarity on steps and decisions to be taken, by whom and by when for the broader humanitarian community. The strategy should be underpinned by contextual and protection¹ analyses, which are regularly and jointly monitored, and should include benchmarks to determine when the transition should begin. The strategy must also consider different possible scenarios for humanitarian coordination – including clusters – depending on changes to the context and operation. Furthermore, IASC policy specifically requires “plans to deactivate and transition clusters [to] be prepared as soon as possible after activation”². This note outlines the key considerations for the HC when overseeing the transition and deactivation of clusters.

HC role

- As part of the overall transition planning process, ensure CLA Country Representatives oversee the development and annual updating of cluster transition strategies, including risk analyses, information management plans and the building of national capacity.
- Carry out an annual review of coordination (see box below).
- When the benchmarks are met, lead consultations with affected people, the HCT, CLAs, and national authorities on cluster deactivation. Recommend to the ERC³ the deactivation of one or more clusters and outline the handover plans.
- Advocate with CLAs and donors for sufficient resource (funding, staffing) to transition responsibly.

Definitions

- Cluster transition refers to the process (and potentially the activities) by which transfer of leadership and accountabilities are planned and implemented or cluster functions are phased out, leading to deactivation.
- Cluster deactivation is the closure of a formally activated cluster by the IASC if the following criteria are met: the humanitarian needs are greatly reduced and/or national mechanisms are able to fill coordination gaps and meet (residual) needs in a manner than respects humanitarian principles.

Coordination Architecture Review: IASC policy requires the HC and HCT to carry out an annual coordination review to assess whether clusters should continue as they are, be expanded, be streamlined or transition with a plan and benchmarks for deactivation. The review should be carried out after 3 months in sudden onset crises and annually in protracted crises.

Key considerations

Risk and protection analyses should be conducted to inform transition planning. These should identify risks (including protection risks), assess their acceptability, and determine mitigation measures required during and after the transition.

Learning and practice from previous cluster transitions points to the following five key considerations:

1. The participation of all sectors of society, from people at the community level, as well as in local and national institutions, is the key to success.
2. Sufficient time must be given for transition. Phased handover and progressive disengagement of clusters is recommended, to facilitate responsible transition.
3. Transition timelines and end-points vary depending on the characteristics of each sector, the humanitarian needs, and national capacities to assume critical cluster functions. For some clusters, coordination responsibilities⁴ may be handed over to national actors. For others, coordination functions may be integrated into other mechanisms such as durable solutions coordination or may cease if no longer needed. It may be necessary to retain international leadership for coordination of specific critical (usually, protection) issues, if the context requires.
4. The lack of national capacity is a potential obstacle to progress if it is not addressed, starting at the earliest stages. Capacity-building of local and national actors is a gradual process with many dimensions. In some contexts, national authorities may be able but unwilling to take on coordination responsibilities or support humanitarian response to be in line with humanitarian principles.
5. Early in the response, it is critical to define and collectively agree on what is (or is not) humanitarian action and to work with national authorities and development actors on joint priorities and collective outcomes. If possible, humanitarian needs should be integrated into social services networks and development frameworks.

Support

At the country level, the OCHA Country Office supports the HC on all aspects of transition planning and implementation. The HCT (including CLAs), inter-cluster coordination group, clusters, and information management working group contribute information/data and provide advice. In some contexts, a dedicated advisory team is established to undertake the practical actions needed to prepare for transition and exit. At the global level, the Emergency Directors Group, Global CLAs, OCHA headquarters, and Global Clusters /AoRs are available to provide support and advice.

Guidance

- [IASC Reference Module for Cluster Coordination at Country Level \(2015\)](#)
- [OCHA Country Office and HQ Cluster Activation and Deactivation Checklist \(2022\)](#)
- [IASC Operational Guidance on Data Responsibility in Humanitarian Action \(2023\)](#)

¹ This should identify critical protection issues that might be exacerbated by, or result from, changes to the coordination of international humanitarian response. Mitigating measures should be identified and taken. Evolution of risks should be monitored to ensure risk level remains acceptable, and adjustments to transition approaches made as needed. See IASC, *Policy on Protection in Humanitarian Action*, 2016.

² See IASC Reference Module for Cluster Coordination at Country Level (2015)

³ As of December 2021, with agreement from the IASC Principals, the ERC delegated this responsibility to the IASC Emergency Directors Group.

⁴ This includes preparedness.