

# IASC Checklist for HCs and HCTs on Cluster Transition and Deactivation

## Criteria

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.<sup>1</sup>

The **formal processes** for IASC cluster deactivation are described in the [IASC Reference Module for Cluster Coordination at Country Level, 2015](#), and are further elaborated in a cluster activation and deactivation checklist.<sup>2</sup>

## Definitions

**Cluster Deactivation** is the closure of a formally activated cluster. Deactivation includes the transfer of core [coordination] functions from clusters [to national actors].

**Cluster Transition** refers to 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 transition phases, set transition or deactivation benchmarks for each phase, and schedule activities to meet them.<sup>1</sup>

## The HC and HCT should:

- ✔ **Recognise the cluster coordination architecture as a temporary coordination structure.** The cluster system is activated when existing coordination mechanisms are “*overwhelmed or constrained in their ability to respond to identified needs in line with humanitarian principles*”<sup>3</sup>. Transition should be kept in mind from its start, supporting gradual capacity transfer back to national actors. To facilitate eventual transition, ensure coordination of the international humanitarian response:
  - Builds on and complements existing national and local capacities, where possible
  - Is coordinated with development and peacebuilding efforts<sup>4</sup>.
- ✔ **Conduct a Coordination Architecture Review annually**<sup>5</sup>. This should review any changes in the humanitarian context, and progress toward transition benchmarks against IASC deactivation criteria. It should determine if any adjustments to the humanitarian coordination architecture are needed, including if clusters should continue or should be deactivated after adequate measures are taken to ensure a smooth transition, and if a humanitarian funding appeal is still required. HCTs may wish to consider conducting the review before the start of a new Humanitarian Programme Cycle.
- ✔ **Advocate for all clusters to have appropriate transition plans in place, from as early in the response as feasible.**
  - The HC should advocate with the CLAs for all clusters to develop transition plans<sup>6</sup>.
  - CLAs are responsible for ensuring that the clusters they lead develop realistic and viable plans, with benchmarks, for transition and deactivation. A cluster transition strategy might initially be light and be updated over time<sup>7</sup>.
- ✔ **Develop a response-level transition plan**, articulating how the full humanitarian coordination architecture including the HCT itself will be adjusted following changes in context.<sup>8</sup> This may also reflect changes to the overall humanitarian operation. CLAs and clusters should contribute cluster and inter-cluster analysis. Global Clusters/AoRs can support. This should:
  - Provide for any continuing coordination of any remaining humanitarian response, and maintaining preparedness capacity.
  - Identify capacity-transfer or capacity-strengthening needed to facilitate handover to national actors.
  - Be based on robust contextual and protection analysis.
  - Incorporate a risk analysis (including protection risks) and mitigation measures to ensure a responsible transition.
  - Be developed collectively, defining activities, roles and responsibilities, milestones, and timelines.
  - Include benchmarks, and the provision for the transition plan to be monitored and updated.
  - Maintain flexibility, especially in complex environments and those with specific protection concerns.
  - Include a communication strategy, to support consistency of messaging and aiming for all actors to have a common understanding and expectations of the transition process.
  - Promote inclusion and meaningful participation of local and national civil society actors in coordination.
  - Consider options for financing and resource mobilization to support affected communities still in need, and whether these are best addressed by humanitarian, durable solutions, or development funding.

<sup>1</sup> IASC, [Reference Module for Cluster Coordination at Country Level, 2015](#)

<sup>2</sup> OCHA, [Country Office and HQ Cluster Activation and Deactivation Checklist, 15 March 2022](#)

<sup>3</sup> IASC, [Reference Module for Cluster Coordination at Country Level, 2015](#), p.7 “Mechanisms are “overwhelmed” when current structures can no longer manage due to the scale of need, number of actors involved, adoption of a more complex multi-sectoral approach is necessary. A Government is ‘constrained’ when it is unable or unwilling to act (for example, because it is itself party to a conflict).”

<sup>4</sup> In line with obligations of the HC and HCT to work collaboratively towards joint priorities and collective outcomes. “This allows for more collaborative approaches to reducing needs, risks and vulnerability, responding to protracted crises, and managing transition processes with national authorities and development partners.” [IASC, Leadership in Humanitarian Action: Handbook for Humanitarian Coordinators, 2024](#), p.97

<sup>5</sup> For guidance see [IASC Reference Module for Cluster Coordination at Country Level, 2015](#), p.35-40, and [IASC, Leadership in Humanitarian Action: Handbook for Humanitarian Coordinators, 2024](#), p.57.

<sup>6</sup> [IASC, Leadership in Humanitarian Action: Handbook for Humanitarian Coordinators, 2024](#), p.61. Note in emergency settings, the HC/HCT should ensure clusters develop a transition strategy outline by 90 days after activation ([IASC Reference Module for Cluster Coordination at Country Level, 2015](#), p.39)

<sup>7</sup> See IASC, [Guidance on Cluster Transition and Deactivation for Country-level Clusters and Cluster Lead Agencies, 2024](#)

<sup>8</sup> “The HCT may be disestablished in the transition phase, if and when other coordination mechanisms are considered more effective and appropriate. The decision to disestablish the HCT is taken by the HC or, in the absence of a HC position, the RC, in consultation with the HCT and the ERC.” [IASC, Standard Terms of Reference for Humanitarian Country Teams, 2017](#), p.2

## CHECKLIST FOR HCS AND HCTS ON CLUSTER TRANSITION AND DEACTIVATION

### The HC and HCT should:

- ✓ **Ensure that all transition plans identify an appropriate and sustainable plan for coordination handover, centred on the transfer of capacities to national actors.** Transition end points may vary: For some clusters, coordination responsibilities will be handed over to national actors<sup>9</sup>. Some coordination functions may be integrated into other mechanisms such as durable solutions coordination or other national strategies. Some coordination functions may cease if no longer needed. It can be possible to retain international leadership for coordination of specific critical (usually, protection) issues, if context requires.
- ✓ **Ensure humanitarian principles and the centrality of protection are upheld.**
  - At response-level, overall transition planning should be underpinned by a protection analysis<sup>10</sup>.
  - Advocate for clusters to conduct a risk analysis incorporating protection risks to inform their transition planning.
  - Consider whether national actors, especially government, are *willing* as well as *able* to take on response coordination leadership and to support humanitarian response to be in line with humanitarian principles<sup>11</sup>.
- ✓ **Lead on a responsible transition.**
  - Recommend phased handover and progressive disengagement of clusters, to facilitate responsible transition.
  - Promote data responsibility to be upheld during and after transition<sup>12</sup>.
  - Promote a consultative approach to transition planning, with the meaningful participation of local and national actors and appropriate inputs from affected people.
  - Advocate with CLAs and donors for sufficient resource allocation – for staffing, and transition activities – to support clusters to transition responsibly.

Two coordination objectives after cluster deactivation should inform transition planning:

Coordination of any remaining humanitarian response, with appropriate participation of response actors. Define any needs and protection risks that continue to be *humanitarian*, and any better addressed by *durable solutions* or *development mechanisms*.

Preparedness: define accountabilities and responsibilities for preparedness planning, and for the coordination of sectoral and overall response with participation of all response actors if a new emergency occurs. See [IASC, Guidance on Emergency Response Preparedness, 2015](#)

Responsibilities in transition processes	
<b>IASC</b>	The Emergency Relief Coordinator (ERC) delegated the responsibility for activation and deactivation decision-making to the IASC Emergency Directors Group (EDG) <sup>13</sup> . The HC communicates recommendations to the EDG Chair, who shares them with EDG members. They conduct consultations if needed, and the EDG Chair communicates their decisions to the HC.
<b>HC and HCT</b>	The HC, to whom CLAs are accountable for cluster functions, is responsible for initiating and leading discussion on cluster deactivation at country level – in collaboration with the government, in consultation with the HCT and CLAs, with support of OCHA – then making recommendations to the IASC EDG. Once IASC approved, the HC should communicate on the arrangements agreed. Under the HC's leadership, the HCT should agree an overall transition plan, articulating how the humanitarian coordination architecture, and potentially humanitarian operations, will adapt to changes in context.
<b>Cluster Lead Agency</b>	Accountability for individual cluster transition sits with the CLA. Responsibilities include to: engage proactively in decision-making; ensure robust transition processes are followed and monitored (including to ensure: that clusters have realistic and viable transition plans in place, and sufficient resourcing and staffing of the cluster during transition); lead strategic engagement before and during transition; actively engage with Global Clusters to support humanitarian Coordination Architecture Reviews and transition planning.
<b>Cluster Coordinator</b>	The Cluster Coordinator should facilitate cluster transition planning and implementation, with other members of the cluster coordination team fully engaged throughout <sup>14</sup> . This should be done in consultation with cluster members, with any government or state institution counterparts, advised by the cluster's Strategic Advisory Group, and with support of the CLA and Global Cluster/AoR.
<b>Global Cluster</b>	The Global Cluster/AoR should be actively engaged to support transition planning by the CLA Representative and Cluster Coordinator. The Global Clusters can also support HCT processes of deactivation decision-making and transition planning at national and global level.

<sup>9</sup> When a national actor such as a government body takes coordination leadership, experience from past cluster deactivations shows that continuing *coordination support* from UN or NGO actors (national, or international) can be important in the short- or long-term to sustain coordination functions and preparedness. For dual-mandate UN agencies, support to sectoral coordination may continue as part of development support. See [IASC, Guidance on Cluster Transition and Deactivation, 2024](#)

<sup>10</sup> In line with the responsibility of the HC and HCT to uphold the centrality of protection. 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](#)

<sup>11</sup> Consider the conditions under which the IASC cluster system was activated, where existing coordination mechanisms are "overwhelmed or constrained in their ability to respond to identified needs in line with humanitarian principles" ([IASC Reference Module for Cluster Coordination at Country Level, 2015](#)). Constraints may continue even when humanitarian needs are reduced, such as the government being party to a conflict.

<sup>12</sup> In line with [IASC, Operational Guidance on Data Responsibility in Humanitarian Action, 2023](#).

<sup>13</sup> As of December 2021. See [OCHA, Country Office and HQ Cluster Activation and Deactivation Checklist, 15 March 2022](#) for more detail on processes

<sup>14</sup> In line with the responsibilities of the Cluster Coordinator function. The coordination team varies by context; may include the Co-Coordinator, Information Management staff, and Sub-National Coordinators.