

STANDARD TERMS OF REFERENCE FOR INTER-CLUSTER (SECTOR) COORDINATION GROUPS

1. INTRODUCTION

This standard Terms of Reference (ToR) for humanitarian inter-cluster coordination groups (ICCG)¹ in the field defines the purpose and outlines the roles and responsibilities of the national level ICCG and sub-national coordination groups which work on an inter-cluster/sector or inter-agency basis², including the expected contributions of cluster and inter-cluster coordinators. Inter-cluster coordination groups in the field should use the ToR as a basis for developing a work plan adapted to the context and with prioritised activities.

The ToR builds on the *IASC Reference Module for Cluster Coordination (2015)*, in particular the sections on cluster and inter-cluster coordination. It also draws on lessons learned and best practice from over ten years of the cluster approach in humanitarian contexts. The ToR should be used in conjunction with Standard ToR for Humanitarian Country Teams (HCT)³.

2. PURPOSE

The ICCG at the national level provides a platform for clusters/sectors to work together to jointly deliver an effective and efficient humanitarian response which results in meaningful protection outcomes in line with the *IASC Policy on Protection*⁴. They do so by reaching a shared understanding of needs, informed by a robust protection and gender analysis, and agreeing on a joint strategy to meet the needs. Their activities include joint analysis and planning, agreeing on prioritisation of interventions, geographic areas and vulnerable groups, modalities of response⁵, and avoiding gaps and duplications in service delivery.

The ICCG provides operational direction and support to sub-national coordination groups. It plays a critical role in tracking and monitoring the response, compiling updates from sub-national coordination groups and transmitting clear messages to the HC and HCT on operational matters for advocacy purposes and decision-points. In addition to protection⁶ and gender, inter-cluster coordination groups are responsible for ensuring other cross-sectoral issues, such as age and diversity, environment, and early recovery are addressed throughout the response. Finally, the ICCG commits to ensuring an appropriate and context-specific alignment between humanitarian and development action which works towards greater coherence and effectiveness in all contexts and towards collective outcomes where appropriate.

¹ Inter-cluster groups may also be referred to as inter-sector groups.

² Sub-national coordination groups that function on an inter-cluster/sector basis and are concerned with the operational response in a given area should typically report to the ICCG. Sub-national coordination groups, including AHCTs, composed of senior personnel and heads of agencies, that have a strategic decision-making role and may be led by a Deputy Humanitarian Coordinator, should typically report to the HCT.

³ The EDG released a generic HCT Terms of Reference May 2017. They are being piloted for one year before being approved. https://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/iasc_tor_for_hcts_final_0.pdf

⁴ See the [IASC Protection Policy](#) for further guidance on the responsibilities of all humanitarian actors in making protection central to humanitarian action.

⁵ Including cash transfer, in-kind, service delivery or a combination thereof.

⁶ Ensuring protection issues are addressed in the operational response implicitly includes the key issues of the protection sub-clusters of Child Protection, Gender Based Violence, Housing Land and Property and Mine Action.

3. ESTABLISHMENT AND DISESTABLISHMENT

The HC and the HCT are responsible for establishing the ICCG and determine the priorities for the group. Typically, the ICCG is established in all countries with either activated clusters⁷ or sectors in place and is a coordination mechanism for international humanitarian actors. Wherever feasible, the ICCG should have appropriate linkages⁸ with national authorities that are operating in an equivalent role for coordinating across sectors within the national administrative structures⁹.

The ICCG is accountable to the HC and reports to the HCT through OCHA. The HCT should provide guidance to the ICCG, tasking it, as required, to support delivery of the response. HCT Compacts can be used to further articulate context-specific priorities around the HCT-ICCG relationship¹⁰.

The decision to disestablish the ICCG and deactivate clusters is taken by the HC and HCT, following a review of the cluster coordination architecture. As with clusters, the ICCG and sub-national coordination groups should develop plans in the earliest feasible stages of the response, to transition and transfer inter-sectoral coordination functions to the appropriate national entity (or entities) ensuring full respect for humanitarian principles.

4. COMPOSITION

The cluster coordinators (and co-coordinators¹¹) and the OCHA Head or Deputy Head of Office are the core members of the ICCG. On behalf of the HC, OCHA chairs the ICCG, facilitating the overall functioning of the group and providing the secretariat function.

The coordinators of the protection sub-clusters¹² are members, and are expected to coordinate their participation with the protection cluster coordinator. The coordinator of the Information Management Working Group (IMWG), the early recovery advisor¹³ and the gender advisor are members. The coordinators of sub-groups and technical working groups set up by the ICCG to work on specific areas of work such as access, needs assessments, AAP/community engagement, cash, gender and durable solutions, are also members.

It is also highly recommended that ICCGs include representatives of INGO and national NGO forums in order to strengthen the link with operational actors and, in the case of national NGOs, to enhance the role of local actors in coordination.

The context will dictate which additional actors participate in the ICCG on a regular or *ad hoc* basis. As required, the ICCG may consider additional participants, including civil/military advisors, specialized advisors on thematic issues, representatives of development coordination and development actors

⁷ Clusters should be activated in accordance with the procedures described in Section 2 on Cluster Activation of the IASC Reference Module for Cluster Coordination at Country level (2015)

⁸ In contexts where a decision has been taken by the HC and HCT to begin transitioning out of humanitarian coordination, it is appropriate for the ICCG to engage with an equivalent national body/platform which brings together line ministries on humanitarian issues.

⁹ For example, a national disaster management agency may play an equivalent cross-sectoral coordination role

¹⁰ This could include how the ICCG can contribute to the four mandatory responsibilities of the HCT on accountability to affected people (AAP), protection from sexual exploitation and abuse (PSEA), sexual and gender-based violence (SGBV) and on making protection central to humanitarian action.

¹¹ The terms co-facilitator or co-chair are sometimes also used depending on the cluster and context.

¹² Protection sub-clusters are: Child Protection, GBV, Housing Land and Property, and Mine Action.

¹³ The Early Recovery Advisor does not replace the Early Recovery Cluster Coordinator. In the absence of an advisor, the ICCG should engage with the early recovery network to ensure early recovery is mainstreamed in all the clusters

(when addressing humanitarian development nexus issues) and emergency programme managers of key agencies and other operational staff, particularly when advising the HCT on operational issues.

5. ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES

In addition to IASC policy and protocols, the work of the ICCG and sub-national coordination groups is guided by international humanitarian and human rights law, and the humanitarian principles of humanity, neutrality, impartiality and independence. The ICCG's role at the national level is to support effective delivery of the humanitarian response across all clusters. The ICCG works with the HCT to ensure protection is central to humanitarian action, including by supporting the development of a HCT protection strategy and coordinating relevant operational elements of such a strategy.

The ICCG may establish sub-groups to address specific cross-sectoral technical and operational issues. These groups should report to the ICCG on a regular basis. In addition, some clusters may convene separately to work on multi-sector and joint programming. OCHA should engage in these sub-groups, serving as a link back to the ICCG. In addition, a link should be maintained between the work agenda of the ICCG at the national level and sub-national level coordination.

The ICCG's responsibilities include:

Supporting service delivery across clusters/sectors

- Informing, advising and alerting the HCT of operational priorities and response gaps. This includes regularly updating the HC/HCT on critical strategic issues that require their attention and action¹⁴.
- Taking action or advising the HCT on action required on issues impacting the effective delivery of the response across clusters including in relation to funding, access, logistics, civil-military coordination or coverage.
- Maximising resources, minimising duplication and enhancing complementarities between clusters.
- Identifying and facilitating the coordination of multi-sectoral or joint programming such as multi-sectoral or multi-purpose cash transfer programmes and ensuring strategic and streamlined cash coordination throughout the response. Where inter-sector response mechanisms are in place, such as joint rapid response mechanisms, the ICCG may support and oversee these.
- Supporting sub-national level coordination groups to facilitate effective humanitarian response, including taking joint action at the national level¹⁵.
- Identifying options to ensure national and local actors are facilitated to participate in coordination mechanisms and supported, where appropriate, to lead coordination¹⁶.

Supporting analysis, planning and monitoring across clusters/sectors

- In consultation with the HCT, jointly analysing and monitoring risks; prioritizing, implementing, and regularly reviewing Minimum and Advanced Preparedness Actions (MPAs and APAs) as part of the *IASC Emergency Response Preparedness Approach*, as well as undertaking contingency planning as required.

¹⁴ This could be achieved, for example, by the group drafting a short update on the critical strategic issues and actions required for the HCT.

¹⁵ Including by providing remote or surging technical and/or coordination support from national level or addressing at a national level any logistical, funding, access or advocacy issues required to facilitate a response in the field.

¹⁶ ICCG should have oversight responsibility to ensure good practices or approaches to bring more national and local actors into coordination.

- Conducting joint needs assessments as required, particularly in response to sudden onset events. Coordinating needs assessments, including assessment planning and analysis across clusters.¹⁷
- Undertaking joint analysis and monitoring to identify needs, risks, threats, vulnerabilities and capacities from a multi-sectorial perspective.¹⁸ This includes validating joint analysis products such as the HNO.
- Carrying out cross-sectoral response analysis that considers the use of and informs decisions on cash and in-kind assistance or joint programming interventions.
- Reaching agreement on joint strategic objectives and the draft humanitarian response plan to be recommended to the HCT¹⁹.
- Recommending adaptations and changes to the response based on a continuous gap analysis and monitoring, including of information and feedback gathered through on-going community engagement.
- Elaborating funding requests and contributing to allocation papers (CERF/Country-Based Pooled Funds) in a collaborative manner, based on agreed priorities across sectors.
- Enabling and working in coordination with the IMWG to establish the information management capacities, tools and approaches required to support operational response.²⁰
- Where appropriate and the context allows, develop joint humanitarian development analysis and joined-up planning and programming, including the development of collective outcomes.

Integrating cross-sectoral issues into response

- Integrating gender, age and diversity characteristics of the affected populations into the response across clusters, including through the use of sex and age-disaggregated data²¹.
- Mainstreaming protection across all clusters in the implementation of the response²² and ensuring protection is integral to and informs all operational decision-making and HCT updates²³.
- Integrating early action, preparedness and early recovery across all clusters as part of efforts to foster resilience in a crisis or post-crisis context.
- Retaining oversight responsibility for common service platforms and supporting community engagement across clusters to ensure the views of affected people inform decision-making.

Advocacy

- Identifying core advocacy concerns such as humanitarian access, preventing and addressing violations of international law or durable solutions for displacement and requesting the HCT to advocate or provide strategic directions on these issues accordingly.

6. MODUS OPERANDI

¹⁷ This includes regularly reviewing the Survey of Surveys to identify gaps and duplications.

¹⁸ ICCGs/HCTs should consider establishing inter-agency technical sub-groups to support inter-sectoral analysis, also drawing on local knowledge and expertise

¹⁹ Some strategic objectives (e.g. nutrition) will require only relevant clusters/sectors to convene separately on technical and operational issues. The ICCG should be updated on a regular basis on this work.

²⁰ This includes working with the IMWG to endorse and implement a plan for managing 'common operational datasets'.

²¹ These should influence and be part of the critical strategic issues and updates for the HCT, the substantive support to sub-national level and all analysis, planning and monitoring work.

²² See Protection Mainstreaming Toolkit for more details on roles and responsibilities and support tools: <http://www.globalprotectioncluster.org/en/areas-of-responsibility/protection-mainstreaming.html>

²³ See the [IASC Protection Policy](#)

The functioning of the ICCG is governed by the *Principles of Partnership*²⁴. It should be chaired in a consensual and facilitative manner. The group should be geared toward collectively delivering on its identified priorities. The meetings are strategic in purpose, focused on clear objectives, action-oriented and produce realistic decisions with clear and agreed follow up. All members should commit the time and resources necessary to ensure that the group is able to effectively meet its objectives including by providing inputs and sharing information necessary for the effective functioning of the group.

7. SUB-NATIONAL COORDINATION

The HC and HCT decides on the sub-national coordination structures²⁵ taking into account the priority areas and the scale of the response, the number of operational partners and their geographical presence. The HC/HCT should also agree on the level of the delegation of authority to sub-national coordination structures as well as the specific roles and responsibilities of the group. Groups should develop a light work plan with prioritised activities. Sub-national coordination structures should be reviewed on an annual basis (more regularly in sudden onset emergencies) as part of an annual architecture review.

Purpose

The role of sub-national coordination is to help operational agencies work collaboratively together to meet needs and achieve outcomes in a designated geographic area. Proximity to areas of operation ensures that actors are supported through more detailed operational coordination, and that decisions of the national ICCG and HCT can be translated into action at the operational level. Protection is central to all aspects of a sub-national coordination group's work in accordance with the IASC Protection Policy. The group is responsible for bringing together relevant actors to ensure that there are no gaps or duplications in responding to the needs of affected people. The links between sub-national and national coordination bodies is critical: national level coordinators should ensure they support sub-national coordination groups to deliver the response, including through consistent communication with and frequent visits to the field, while sub-national coordinators are responsible for tracking the response and raising critical issues to the national level, and ultimately to the HCT for decision-making.

Composition

At the sub-national level, inter-cluster/sector groups' membership will depend on the clusters/sectors established in the area. National level clusters may nominate dedicated coordinators if there are a large number of operational partners within the cluster in the geographic area. Alternatively, the national level cluster could identify cluster focal points or have cluster lead agencies represent their sector and ensure linkages with national platforms.

Area humanitarian teams and other area-based coordination groups are normally composed of the most senior agency representatives from the operational partners in the area. Composition should be open to the key actors – UN, INGOs, Red Cross/Red Crescent movement and national NGOs – while maintaining a size conducive to effective decision-making and action. Sub-national ICCGs should engage with local government counterparts as appropriate.

²⁴ See ICVA's background and rationale on the Principles of Partnership.

²⁵ This could include using existing coordination structures whether national/local led and/or development focused.

In contexts with few operational actors on the ground and/or where operational actors are dispersed over a wide area, the HCT may decide on a focal point system, nominating a focal point agency/senior humanitarian official for specific geographic areas.

Responsibilities of coordination at the sub-national level include:

- Providing a platform to support a response to meet the needs of affected people, including through identifying and taking action on gaps and duplications in the response.
- Providing a platform for operationalizing the shared strategic objectives of the humanitarian response plan.
- Identifying and coordinating multi-sectoral or joint programming in a specific area or for a specific population group.
- Planning for, and responding to new and localized emergencies, including through conducting joint needs assessments and activating rapid response mechanisms, as required.
- Mainstreaming protection, gender and other cross-sectoral issues in all aspects of humanitarian action in the geographic area, including identifying key protection concerns which may require action at the national level.
- Identifying and acting on impediments to service delivery (such as access) and raising issues as required for additional support.
- Conducting sub-national/area-based planning and monitoring, as required, and inputting into national level planning processes.
- Undertaking relevant preparedness actions and contingency planning when appropriate.
- Providing a consolidated voice and representation to local Government, particularly when the number of agencies becomes voluminous.