

Section 3

Cluster Functions

Under the IASC Transformative Agenda, the IASC Principals recognized that the application of the cluster approach has become overly process-driven and, in some situations, perceived to potentially undermine rather than enable delivery.¹⁷ They “agreed there is a need to restate and return to the original purpose of clusters, refocusing them on strategic and operational gaps analysis, planning, assessment and results”.¹⁸

The **six core functions** of a cluster at country level are:

1. To support service delivery by:
 - Providing a platform that ensures service delivery is driven by the Humanitarian Response Plan and strategic priorities.
 - Developing mechanisms to eliminate duplication of service delivery.
2. To inform the HC/HCT’s strategic decision-making by:
 - Preparing needs assessments and analysis of gaps (across and within clusters, using information management tools as needed) to inform the setting of priorities.
 - Identifying and finding solutions for (emerging) gaps, obstacles, duplication and cross-cutting issues.
 - Formulating priorities on the basis of analysis.
3. To plan and implement cluster strategies by:
 - Developing sectoral plans, objectives and indicators that directly support realization of the overall response’s strategic objectives.
 - Applying and adhering to common standards and guidelines.
 - Clarifying funding requirements, helping to set priorities, and agreeing cluster contributions to the HC’s overall humanitarian funding proposals.
4. To monitor and evaluate performance by:
 - Monitoring and reporting on activities and needs.
 - Measuring progress against the cluster strategy and agreed results.
 - Recommending corrective action where necessary.
5. To build national capacity in preparedness and contingency planning (see Section 4).
6. To support robust advocacy by:
 - Identifying concerns, and contributing key information and messages to HC and HCT messaging and action.
 - Undertaking advocacy on behalf of the cluster, cluster members, and affected people.

Detailed ToRs are available for the responsibilities and accountability of HCs, HCTs, CLAs and Cluster Coordinators.

In addition to supporting the six core functions of the cluster, the designated Cluster Lead Agency is the **Provider of Last Resort (POLR)**. This means that, where necessary, and depending on access, security and availability of funding, the cluster lead, as POLR, must be ready to ensure the provision of services required to fulfil crucial gaps identified by the cluster and reflected in the HC-led Humanitarian Response Plan.

¹⁷ IASC, *Guidance Note on Using the Cluster Approach to Strengthen Humanitarian Response*, November 2006. The initial aim of the cluster approach was, at global level, to strengthen system-wide preparedness and technical capacity to respond to humanitarian emergencies, and provide clear leadership and accountability in the main areas of humanitarian response. At country level, it aims to strengthen partnerships, and the predictability and accountability of international humanitarian action, by improving prioritization and clearly defining the roles and responsibilities of humanitarian organizations.

¹⁸ Recommendation 26, IASC, *Transformative Agenda: Chapeau and Compendium of Actions*, January 2012.

Refocusing clusters

Focusing on the core functions

Provider of Last Resort