

Section 8

Inter-Cluster Coordination

3.1 HO Inter-Cluster Coordination

Under the IASC Transformative Agenda, the IASC Principals agreed that efforts will be made to improve overall inter-cluster coordination. Inter-cluster coordination is critical³⁴ to achieving common objectives, avoiding duplication and prioritising areas of need. Inter-cluster coordination takes place at the national and sub-national level, to coordinate the implementation of the response through each step of the humanitarian programme cycle.

The HC and HCT (comprised of Heads of Agencies) provide overall strategic direction to the humanitarian community in support of the national response. The RC/HC and HCT, supported by OCHA, determine the shape and functions of inter-cluster coordination during a crisis.

Guided by the HCT, the inter-cluster coordination platform, chaired by OCHA and comprised of Cluster Coordinators, enables clusters to work together to advance the delivery of assistance to affected people effectively and efficiently. It does this by encouraging synergies between sectors, ensuring roles and responsibilities are clearly defined, closing potential gaps and eliminating duplication. Inter-cluster coordination plays a critical role in facilitating the development of the Humanitarian Response Plan and assures a coherent and coordinated approach to planning and operationalizing the shared strategic objectives.³⁵

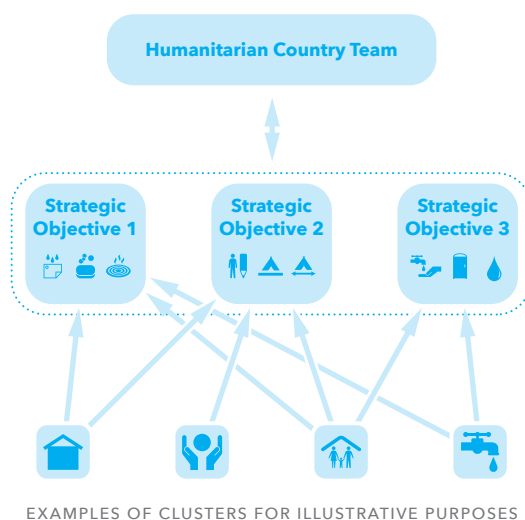
Delivering an effective response and achieving the strategic objectives requires continuous two-way communication between the HCT and clusters, with the inter-cluster coordination forum serving as a critical link, ensuring the HCT is advised of operational developments impacting the overall response and that clusters receive overall strategic guidance from the HCT. OCHA supports this communication and facilitates inter-cluster coordination by chairing and providing direct support, facilitation and secretariat services, as determined by the RC/HC and HCT. Participation of the Chair of the inter-cluster coordination forum, sequencing of cluster, inter-cluster and HCT meetings, and sharing of notes between the HCT and inter-cluster coordination forum, are key practical steps that can be implemented.

The diagram below conceptualises how these different linkages are made.

Humanitarian Country Team
Provides strategic direction through the articulation of strategic objectives and operational support to their achievement. CLAs ensure an inter-sectoral analysis informs HCT decision-making.

Strategic Objectives (SOs)
Determined by the HCT, relevant clusters group together to develop multi-sectoral strategies in achievement of the SO and coordinate to implement and monitor their achievement.

Inter-cluster
Clusters work together throughout the components of the HPC to achieve the humanitarian priorities as set by the SOs. Focusing on key operational issues which impact on an effective and efficient response; clusters highlight issues which require strategic support.



Definition and purpose

Roles and responsibilities

34 For the purposes of this section, clusters and sectors are equally relevant but the term inter-cluster coordination will be used throughout.

35 The strategic objective itself and the humanitarian context will determine which sectors are needed for its achievement.

Coordination of inter-cluster response and operational issues

OCHA's role and responsibilities for inter-cluster coordination

Inter-cluster coordination supports clusters to work together to facilitate the delivery of the Humanitarian Response Plan's strategic objectives in the most efficient and effective way.³⁶ This coordination among clusters also helps in the identification of core advocacy concerns emerging from the operational response and the identification of resource gaps impacting operational delivery. Some strategic objectives may require contributions from all clusters and others a more limited group and should be determined through inter-cluster discussions with all clusters. Smaller groups of clusters, potentially supported by members of the HCT, may come together to discuss specific strategies for and periodically for monitoring of their achievement, although all clusters and the HCT need to be aware of progress and challenges to ensure the appropriate overall linkages as necessary. Illustrative examples of what this can mean in practice can be found at Annex IV.

OCHA provides capacity at an appropriate level to support and lead inter-cluster coordination, as determined by the HC/HCT. Working closely with CLAs, OCHA:

- Supports and facilitates inter-cluster coordination in relation to the HCT, the Humanitarian Response Plan, and across all clusters, and will support inter-cluster coordination forums or mechanisms as requested by the HC/HCT.
- Ensures that all clusters and other relevant national and international operational actors are fully involved in strategic planning, implementation and other key issues that arise during inter-cluster coordination working groups.
- Assists clusters to deliver components of the humanitarian programme cycle. (Examples include coordinated multi-sectoral needs assessments, analysis and recommendations for prioritization, and the Humanitarian Response Plan (see
- Facilitates and supports inter-cluster coordination to plan and implement strategic objectives.
- Assists HC/HCT to define and put in place appropriate coordination mechanisms at all levels, including decentralized coordination via sub-national clusters or sectors in zones of operational importance.
- Supports protection main-streaming efforts at the inter-cluster level in close collaboration with the Protection Cluster.
- Helps clusters (as needed) to provide a needs-based, impartial response that analyses and takes into account the different needs of women, men, girls and boys, and the specific vulnerabilities and capacities of affected people (with respect to gender and age, for example).
- Supports efforts to ensure that protection, accountability to affected populations and early recovery inform all steps of the humanitarian programme cycle.
- Informs the HC/HCT of operational progress and any issues that may require their input, advocacy or other support.

³⁶ The modalities for inter cluster coordination should be flexible. In the case of the protection cluster, the AoRs (or 'sub-clusters') may need to liaise directly with other clusters and to engage directly in inter-cluster fora alongside the protection cluster, and arrangements for doing so should be agreed at country level in consultation with the protection cluster lead agency.

- Assists clusters to identify and develop advocacy issues and initiatives on strategic and operational questions; brings them to the attention of the HC/HCT.
- Supports the HC/HCT and clusters in facilitating cluster coordination monitoring, including: (i) cluster performance monitoring; and (ii) regular reviews by the HCT of the architecture of cluster coordination (see section 10, Cluster Coordination Monitoring).
- Supports efforts to define common standards, tools and services (including service clusters), to create a conducive strategic and operational environment for clusters.
- Supports linkages between humanitarian and development coordination mechanisms, minimising duplication and maximising synergies.
- Provides inter-cluster information management tools and coordination as needed.
- Works with the HCT and clusters to facilitate pooled/common humanitarian funding allocations.