

## Guidance

# CLUSTER TRANSITION AND DEACTIVATION

IASC Global Cluster Coordination Group

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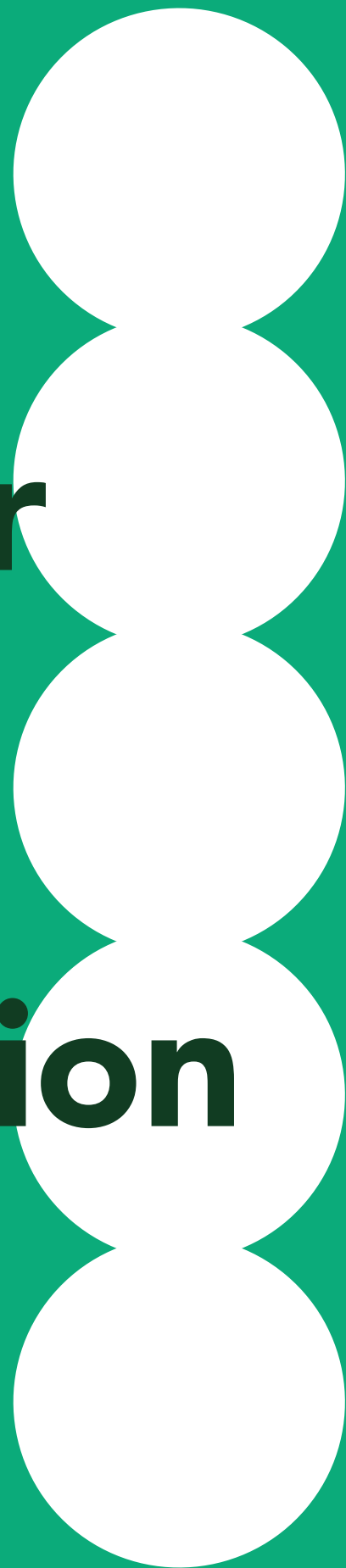
October 2024

Endorsed by IASC Operational Policy and Advocacy Group (OPAG)

# IASC Guidance on Cluster Transition and Deactivation

For Country-Level Clusters  
and Cluster Lead Agencies

October 2024





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# Introduction

## 1.1 Rationale

Clusters are temporary coordination structures, which may be activated by the [Inter-Agency Standing Committee](#) (IASC) when government capacity to coordinate a humanitarian response is limited or constrained. IASC policy<sup>1</sup> sets out the formal criteria for cluster activation and deactivation, and outlines requirements and principles for cluster transition leading to deactivation. Cluster deactivation is the closure of a formally activated cluster. Cluster transition is the process of either the transfer of a cluster's core functions to other structures or the phasing-out of the functions, leading to deactivation.

This document provides operational guidance for the transition and deactivation of clusters. It builds on existing IASC policy, and **should be read alongside the guidance for cluster deactivation in the [IASC Reference Module on Cluster Coordination at Country Level \(2015\)](#)**. It also draws on past guidance for coordination transition, and on recommendations and lessons-learned<sup>2</sup> from past cluster transition and deactivation experiences.<sup>3</sup>

## 1.2 Scope

This guidance is intended to support **clusters** and the **Cluster Lead Agency** (CLA) at country level to implement successful transition and deactivation of clusters, at a time and in a manner that is appropriate to the context. It is relevant to transition planning after sudden-onset emergencies and in protracted crises. In a sudden-onset emergency, the actions outlined might be condensed, so the transition process is suitable for the context. The guidance is written to support a common transition approach, complementing any cluster-specific guidance and tools.

Where a cluster has joint CLAs, the guidance can be used to inform discussions on a transition process that is agreed and followed by both entities. The guidance can also be read and followed by **Cluster Co-ordinating Partner** organizations, with their support to cluster leadership extending to supporting transition and deactivation. The designated CLA, however, has specific accountabilities and responsibilities for cluster leadership and therefore deactivation, and these are reflected in the guidance. The guidance is written to support the processes of transitioning and deactivating [clusters that have been formally activated by the IASC](#). The content may also be useful to support the transition of other coordination mechanisms.

It is important to note from the outset that there is **no set way for a cluster to transition. Transition itself is a process, requiring consultation, agreement, and commitment buy-in from stakeholders, and time and planning to implement. Clusters and CLAs are encouraged to use this guidance and examples to develop and advocate for transition and deactivation options that make the most sense to the country context.**

**LIMITATION:** This document guides the transition of humanitarian coordination provided by clusters. It does not cover transition or phase-out of humanitarian operations. This guidance is for clusters and CLAs. IASC, *Checklist for HCs and HCTs on Cluster Transition and Deactivation* and *Key Considerations for HCs and HCTs on Cluster Transition and Deactivation* (2024).

**Note:** The terms 'cluster', 'CLA', and 'Cluster Coordinator' are used throughout to be concise, but the guidance equally applies to **Areas of Responsibility (AoR)**, **AoR designated lead agencies**, and **AoR Coordinators** in their area of responsibility within the Protection Cluster, who undertake deactivation and transition processes in consultation with each other and their membership.

**Note:** Throughout this guidance, there are actions specified as the responsibility of the Cluster Coordinator, in accordance with their function. Other members of the coordination team should also be fully engaged throughout to ensure an inclusive process. See Roles and Responsibilities: [3.4 Cluster Coordinator](#).

**The guidance builds on and should be read alongside the guidance for cluster deactivation in the [IASC Reference Module for Cluster Coordination at Country Level \(2015\)](#). Important definitions and key guidance from this are highlighted throughout.**

1. IASC, *Reference Module for Cluster Coordination at Country Level*, 2015
2. Including: IASC, *Operational Guidance for Cluster Adaptation [draft]*, September 2011; Global Education Cluster "Transition Study and Case Studies" 2-15; Global Nutrition Cluster, *Strengthening Nutrition Humanitarian Action Phase 2: Supporting Humanitarian Cluster/Sector Coordination Transition, Synthesis Review*, July 2016; GCCG, "Summary Note to the EDG: Learning from the Transition in Iraq", 11 May 2023; GCCG, "Note to the EDG: Learning from the Cluster Transition in Iraq", 24 February 2023; OCHA, UNDP, DOCO, *Lessons Learned and Good Practice Tool: Adapting coordination mechanisms to support national transitions*, 2012
3. The guidance was initially developed by UNICEF following recommendations made by the *Evaluation of the UNICEF Role as Cluster Lead (Co-Lead) Agency (CLARE II)* (2-22). Its development was informed by consultations with members of the Global Cluster Coordination Group (GCCG) and with practitioners and representatives from UN agencies, international NGOs, and national NGOs at global and country level. The guidance was then adapted and adopted by the GCCG.

## 1.3 Centrality of Protection

The [IASC Policy on Protection in Humanitarian Action](#)<sup>4</sup> states that accountability for a system-wide protection analysis, monitoring, and evaluation of progress towards collective protection outcomes sits with the HC and HCT. This accountability remains throughout the cluster transition and deactivation process, supported by the CLAs and clusters.

As outlined in the *IASC Checklist for HCs and HCTs on Cluster Transition and Deactivation and Key Considerations for RC/HCs and HCTs on Cluster Transition and Deactivation (2024)*, the HC and HCT should ensure overall transition planning is underpinned by a protection analysis. This protection analysis<sup>5</sup> should identify critical protection issues that might be exacerbated by, or result from, changes to the coordination of international humanitarian response<sup>6</sup>. Mitigating measures<sup>7</sup> should be identified and taken. Evolution of risks should be regularly and jointly monitored<sup>8</sup> to ensure risk level remains acceptable, and adjustments to transition approaches made as needed.

Protection issues and humanitarian principles must be considered during transition planning at cluster level too. Clusters should likewise (and the HC will advocate for them to) conduct a risk analysis incorporating protection risks to inform their transition planning, with associated mitigation measures and a monitoring plan. This includes seeking the views of, and accountability to, the affected people<sup>9</sup>.

This guidance includes the following additional protection related considerations:

Transition plans should maintain flexibility, especially in environments with specific protection concerns. See [4.1.1 When to put a transition plan in place](#).

Consult cluster members and ensure any specific protection issues are considered when identifying future coordination needs and what coordination functions need to be transitioned.

See [4.2 Actions - 2. Identify future coordination needs, and what coordination functions need to be transitioned](#).

Ensure to take protection considerations into account when identifying who can take over coordination functions. Consider humanitarian principles and any specific protection concerns.

See [4.2 Actions - 4. Identify who can take over coordination functions](#) and [5.3 Principles and considerations](#).

National actors, especially government, must be both willing and able to take on response coordination leadership and to support humanitarian response to be in line with humanitarian principles. See [5.2 Options for coordination handover and leadership](#).

It may be necessary to retain international leadership for coordination of specific critical (usually protection) issues if the context requires. See [4.1.2 Time needed for transition](#) and [5.2 Options for coordination handover and leadership](#).

The transition process might have to be paused or revised if certain risks (e.g. protection risks) cannot be mitigated. See [4.2 Actions - 5. Developing a cluster transition plan](#).

4 IASC, *Policy on Protection in Humanitarian Action*, 2016

5 See [4.1.6 Beyond coordination: humanitarian operation considerations](#), [4.2 Actions](#), and [A.3 Conducting risk analysis](#). See also [Annex C - Example template for Risk Analysis](#).

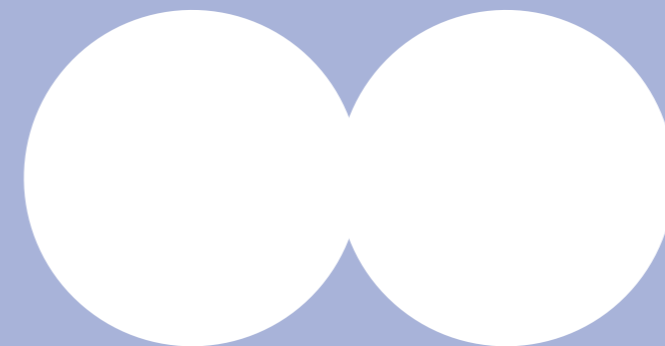
6 For example, some population groups or geographic areas might experience more pronounced risks, such as exclusion or discrimination or lack of humanitarian access. Any issues should be included in the risk assessment for transition and considered in the handover and leadership of continuing coordination functions. See [4.1.6 Beyond coordination: humanitarian operation considerations](#) and [4.2 Actions](#).

7 See [4.2 Actions - 5. Developing a cluster transition plan](#), [5.3 Principles and considerations](#), and [A.3 Conducting risk analysis](#).

8 See [4.2 Actions - 5. Developing a cluster transition plan](#), [A.3 Conducting risk analysis](#), and [Annex B - Example Template for a Transition Strategy](#).

9 For more on accountability to affected people (AAP) see [4.1.3 The importance of consultation](#), [5.3 Principles and considerations](#), and [A.4 Planning communication](#). See also [Annex B - Example Template for a Transition Strategy](#) and [Annex D - Example template for Communication Planning](#).

# Deactivation Decision- Making and Context



# 2

This chapter explains the **Inter-Agency Standing Committee (IASC) cluster deactivation criteria and processes, and formal processes of decision-making on cluster deactivation. It also outlines overall response transition planning, and the consideration of the wider country coordination landscape during this process.**

## 2.1 Definitions of transition and deactivation

The following IASC definitions are used throughout this guidance:

**Cluster deactivation** is the closure of a formally activated cluster. Deactivation includes the transfer of core functions from clusters that have international leadership and accountability to other structures, including those that are led nationally or development focused<sup>10</sup>. Functions may be transferred to existing or pre-crisis coordination and response structures, or new ones.

**Cluster transition** refers to the process (and potentially the activities) by which transfer of leadership and accountabilities is planned and implemented, leading to deactivation. A plan is required to map phases of the transition, set transition or deactivation benchmarks for each phase, and schedule activities to meet them.<sup>11</sup>

## 2.2 Cluster deactivation criteria

Clusters are temporary coordination structures, which may be activated by the IASC when government capacity to coordinate a humanitarian response is limited or constrained. There are two IASC criteria for **cluster activation**: *“response and coordination gaps exist due to a sharp deterioration or significant change in humanitarian situation”* and *“existing national response or coordination capacity is unable to meet needs in a manner that respects humanitarian principles”*<sup>12</sup>.

IASC guidance states that **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>13</sup>

See [A.1 Setting Deactivation and Transition Benchmarks](#) or how specific deactivation pre-conditions and transition benchmarks informing these criteria can be set. Note that **conditions for deactivation may not be met by all clusters simultaneously, and clusters do not all have to be deactivated at the same time**<sup>14</sup>.

## 2.3 Responsibility for decision-making

There are formal processes for activating and deactivating IASC clusters. Recommendations on activation or deactivation are made by the HC at country level, with approval and endorsement made by the IASC at global level. The exact steps are detailed in the [IASC Reference Module for Cluster Coordination at Country Level \(2015\)](#)<sup>15</sup>.

10. Deactivation can transfer leadership and accountabilities to other internationally supported mechanisms.  
 11. IASC, *Reference Module for Cluster Coordination at Country Level*, 2015, p.37  
 12. IASC, *Reference Module for Cluster Coordination at Country Level*, 2015, p.10  
 13. IASC, *Reference Module for Cluster Coordination at Country Level*, 2015, p.37  
 14. For example, the Logistics and Emergency Telecommunications Clusters have established deactivation criteria, and often are deactivated earlier in a response than other clusters.  
 15. In addition to the IASC Reference Module, further details are elaborated by OCHA in cluster activation and deactivation checklists, which are periodically updated (latest version at the time of writing: March 2022).

At country level, discussions on cluster **deactivation are initiated and led by the HC**. This is done in consultation with the HCT and Cluster Lead Agencies (CLAs), with the support of OCHA – and in close collaboration with the government, wherever possible. Decisions on whether or not a cluster is deactivated are taken by the IASC. Cluster Coordinators should advise the CLAs and HCT (and, the CLAs should ensure to consult the Cluster Coordinator along with other members of the cluster coordination team, and cluster members) on the likelihood that the criteria for cluster deactivation may be in place, progressing on transition plans and toward transition benchmarks to inform this decision-making. Global Clusters/AoRs can also advise on this process<sup>16</sup>.

## 2.4 Reviews of the cluster coordination architecture

According to IASC policy, decisions on cluster deactivation should follow an in-country review of the cluster coordination architecture. These reviews should determine if the cluster architecture needs to be adjusted, and if clusters should continue or be deactivated<sup>17</sup>. The comprehensiveness and length of each review

will depend on the context, but reviews should:

1. Be initiated by the HC/HCT and supported by OCHA;
2. Involve CLAs, cluster partners and national counterparts;
3. Keep Global Clusters informed [and actively engaged];
4. Be guided and informed by [defined] principles.<sup>18</sup>

A humanitarian coordination architecture review may recommend that clusters should transition. Where clusters already have transition plans in place, such a review might assess whether cluster-specific transition benchmarks and deactivation criteria have been met. IASC policy sets out that a humanitarian coordination architecture review should be conducted annually in a protracted crisis (within three months in a sudden onset emergency)<sup>19</sup>, although this is not always the case at country level. However, cluster deactivation recommendations should be based on this review and whether the two core deactivation criteria are met.

The timeline and responsibility for a review may differ between a sudden-onset emergency and a protracted crisis:

Context	Timing of coordination review	Implications
<b>1. Sudden-onset emergency</b>	<b>“Within three months.</b> Review the cluster coordination architecture to ensure it is fit for purpose. [This might be through an Operational Peer Review] <sup>20</sup>	The HC/HCT should ensure that clusters have developed an outline of a transition or de-activation strategy at 90 days after activation.
<b>2. Protracted crises</b>	<b>Annually.</b> Review the cluster coordination architecture to ensure it is fit for purpose. Do this more often if strategic response plans are revised to reflect changes in the humanitarian context. Where possible, review before the start of new strategic planning cycles.	The HC reports annually to the ERC on review results, the rationale for structures, and any plans for transition or de-activation. Previous versions of the transition/de-activation plans are updated based on the annual review. <sup>21</sup>

16. IASC, *Reference Module for Cluster Coordination at Country Level*, 2015, p.37-8, p.40. Defined principles are: 1. Be initiated and led by the HC, in consultation with the HCT, wherever possible in collaboration with national authorities and supported by OCHA; 2. Based on assessment of national capacity; 3. Take account of the context; 4. Guided by early recovery and resilience-building objectives.  
 17. Note that clusters do not need to all be deactivated at the same time. Some clusters may meet their benchmarks or criteria for deactivation earlier than others.  
 18. IASC, *Reference Module for Cluster Coordination at Country Level*, 2015, p.40

19. IASC, *Reference Module for Cluster Coordination at Country Level*, 2015  
 20. In a sudden-onset emergency when there has been a Humanitarian System-Wide Scale-Up Activation, an Operational Peer Review (OPR) is initiated no later than five months after activation. An OPR is carried out by an external senior team of humanitarian practitioners to assess and make recommendations in four key areas, including use of appropriate coordination mechanisms. These recommendations are then actioned by the HCT. See <https://www.deliveraidbetter.org/mission-category/operational-peer-review/> For Level 3 emergencies, OPR should be conducted within 90 days of the L3 declaration.  
 21. IASC, *Reference Module for Cluster Coordination at Country Level*, 2015, p.39

## 2.5 Overall response transition planning

Ordinarily, the HCT will agree on an **overarching transition plan**. This will articulate how the cluster coordination architecture and the HCT itself will adapt to changes in context. It can also reflect any anticipated changes in the overall humanitarian operation. CLAs will contribute to this in the HCT. Clusters should be invited to contribute to this through individual cluster and inter-cluster analysis. Global Clusters should support this process and should be actively engaged with by the Cluster Coordinator and CLA Representative.

Overall transition planning for a humanitarian response might have defined objectives specific to the context – including either or both shifting the leadership of humanitarian response back to the government and/or to other local and national actors or shifting the focus of interagency coordination towards a more durable solutions/recovery-focused orientation. These objectives should be taken into consideration in the planning of individual cluster transitions.

## 2.6 The wider coordination landscape

Where the cluster system is activated for coordination of a humanitarian response, there will be other coordination structures that predate and/or will last beyond the clusters. These might include: Government-led **development-oriented sector coordination** for some sectors, with international and national actors (development actors, donors, UN agencies, and international financial institutions) supporting the government to achieve development goals. Internal coordination of the UN development system's support in a country through **UNSDCF Results Groups** and the UN Country Team (UNCT), composed of UN agencies and sometimes government or other actors. Other mechanisms such as **durable solutions, Humanitarian-Development-Peace (HDP) collaboration (nexus), or other recovery-oriented coordination**, might also be established. In some countries, coordination of a **refugee response**<sup>22</sup> may also be ongoing.

**UNSDCF** – The UN Sustainable Development Cooperation Framework is an agreement between the UN and host government that provides strategic direction for development activities by all UN entities at country level. Developed by the UN Country Team (UNCT) and the host government, it guides the UNCT programme cycle and the UN's collective response to help countries address national priorities towards meeting the Sustainable Development Goals. Its preparation begins with a Common Country Analysis (**CCA**) by the UN, which provides a collective assessment and analysis of the country's situation. Its implementation is coordinated through **Results Groups**, established by the RC and UNCT, with membership of UN entities. Involvement of government and external partners, and alignment with existing coordination structures (e.g., sector working groups, clusters) are determined by the RC and UNCT<sup>23</sup>.

**Transition in Mixed Situations** – Where populations of humanitarian concern include refugees, IDPs, and other affected groups, the *Joint UNHCR-OCHA Note on Mixed Situations: Coordination in Practice* provides guidance on how the leadership and coordination mechanisms should function in practice. This includes the respective accountabilities, roles, and responsibilities of the Humanitarian Coordinator and UNHCR Representative in contributing to the IASC agreed strategic outputs of coordination. For transition or deactivation, the related guidance for each coordination system applies. If a deactivating IASC Cluster has identified the need for continued coordination, and an ongoing Refugee Coordination Model exists in the same setting, the refugee coordination structures can be engaged to explore adaptation, in accordance with the OCHA-UNHCR Joint Note. Where both IASC Clusters and the RCM are activated, there is a possibility that both the cluster and refugee coordination systems could transition at the same time and would need to coordinate their respective transitions.

The CLA should advise the Cluster Coordinator on any appropriate interaction with these mechanisms from the point of activation of the cluster, and particularly during cluster transition planning. The Cluster Coordinator should familiarise themselves with relevant sectoral development structures. Collaboration with development and recovery structures should be encouraged through work of the cluster at all stages toward Humanitarian-Development-Peace (**HDP**) collaboration (**Nexus**) objectives and collective outcomes.

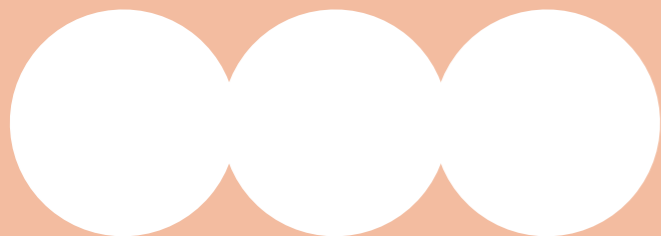
22. Led by UNHCR, through the Refugee Coordination Model.

23. UN Sustainable Development Group, *United Nations Sustainable Development Cooperation Framework*, 2019

24. See UNHCR and OCHA, *Joint Note on Mixed Situations: Coordination in Practice*, 2014



# Responsibilities in Deactivation and Transition Processes



# 3

Note that this document is designed for CLAs and clusters, to provide guidance on the aspects of cluster transition and deactivation decision-making that they are accountable or responsible for implementing or advising on. Responsibilities of the HC and HCT are further elaborated in a separate document.

## 3.1 IASC

The Inter-Agency Standing Committee approves the formal activation and deactivation of IASC clusters, after recommendations are made by the RC/HC.

[See 2. Deactivation decision-making and context.](#)

## 3.2 HC and HCT

According to IASC policy, the HC, to whom CLAs are accountable for the cluster functions, has responsibility for initiating and leading discussion on cluster deactivation at country level – making recommendations to the IASC – in consultation with the HCT and CLAs and government, with the support of OCHA. Under the leadership of the HC, the HCT may also agree on an overarching transition plan, articulating how the cluster coordination architecture and the HCT itself, and potentially overall humanitarian operations, will adapt to changes in context. [See 2. Deactivation decision-making and context.](#)

## 3.3 Cluster Lead Agency

Accountability for individual cluster transition sits with the CLA, within their overall accountability function for the cluster. The following are responsibilities of a CLA in contribution to deactivation decision-making and for cluster transition. Some will be carried out by the CLA Representative and others delegated to programmatic or other staff.<sup>25</sup>

### ✔ Engage proactively in deactivation decision-making. [See 2. Deactivation decision-making and context](#)

- If annual coordination reviews are not conducted, regularly review appropriateness of the cluster;

- Proactively consult the Cluster Coordinator and other coordination team members, and cluster members, on transition and deactivation decisions;
- Engage proactively with the HC and HCT on transition and deactivation on behalf of the cluster and its members and contribute to annual Coordination Architecture Reviews.

### ✔ Ensure robust transition processes are followed and monitored. [See 4.2 Actions](#)

- Ensure clusters develop realistic and viable plans<sup>26</sup>, with benchmarks, for transition and deactivation;
- Ensure accountabilities and responsibilities of the CLAs and counterparts are clearly defined during transition<sup>27</sup>;
- Clearly assign responsibilities internally within the CLA to support transition, for both the Representative and programmatic or other staff;
- Ensure sufficient resourcing and staffing for the cluster during transition;

25. These responsibilities are derived from IASC and CLA policies: IASC, *Reference Module for Cluster Coordination at Country Level*, 2015; IASC, *Generic Terms of Reference for Sector / Cluster at the Country Level*, 2011; UNICEF, *Cluster Coordination Guidance for Country Offices*, 2015; UNICEF, *Core Commitments for Children in Humanitarian Action*, 2020; UNICEF, *The Emergency Procedures*, 2021; UNICEF, *Handbook in L1, L2 and L3 Emergencies*, 2021; UNICEF, *Procedure on Humanitarian, Development and Peace Nexus*, 2022; GCCG, *Country-Level Cluster Terms and Definitions*, 2023

26. For some clusters such as Logistics and the Emergency Telecommunications Cluster, this should include the use of existing sectoral assessment tools to ensure fact-based decision-making.

27. During a transition process, the line of accountability for core cluster functions and responsibilities (such as Provider of Last Resort) must be clearly articulated. While a cluster is formally activated, accountability remains with the CLA. Transition plans should outline how accountabilities will shift to Government or to other crisis-coordination mechanisms. (IASC, *Reference Module for Cluster Coordination at Country Level*, 2015)

- Periodically review progress on cluster transition plan implementation, with support from the Global Cluster/AoR, and against the transition monitoring plan, with consideration of risk monitoring results including protection risks [See: Developing a cluster transition plan.](#)

✔ **Lead strategic engagement before and during the transition process, in support of transition.**

[See 4. Planning for transition](#) and [5. Humanitarian coordination after cluster deactivation](#)

- Facilitate engagement and planning with government authorities;
- Establish and support links between the cluster and any relevant development actors and coordination bodies, consistent with commitments to the Humanitarian-Development Nexus;
- Advocate with relevant counterparts on ensuring continued optimal coordination;
- Ensure necessary capacity-strengthening support is provided to any entity taking over coordination functions;
- Define any role for the CLA after deactivation of the cluster including how coordination support may be continued;
- Ensure cluster transition plans include appropriate consideration for future emergency preparedness, linking this with any sectoral efforts to support emergency preparedness capacity.

✔ **Actively engage with the Global Cluster/AoR to support cluster Coordination Architecture Reviews and transition planning**

Any Cluster Co-Coordinating Partner organization/s should be involved throughout, inputting to transition decision-making through its leadership of the cluster and participation in the HCT, and guiding transition planning.

### 3.4 Cluster Coordinator

**Cluster transition:** The Cluster Coordinator should facilitate the planning and implementation of cluster transition<sup>28</sup>. Other members of the coordination team – such as Cluster Co-Coordinators,

information management officers, and sub-national coordinators – should be fully engaged throughout to ensure an inclusive process.

Transition planning should be done with the CLA, in consultation with cluster members, together with any government or state institution counterparts, advised by the Strategic Advisory Group, with support of the Global Cluster/AoR.

**Deactivation decision-making:** The Cluster Coordinator/s should **advise the CLA and HCT** on the likelihood that the criteria for cluster deactivation may be met and on progress toward transition plans and benchmarks to inform decision-making.

### 3.5 Global Cluster

The Global Cluster/AoR should be kept informed of, and be actively engaged to support, transition and deactivation planning by both the CLA Representative and Cluster Coordinator. The Global Cluster can support Cluster Coordinators and CLAs in the process of planning transition and can also support HCT processes of deactivation decision-making and transition planning.

Global Clusters should work with the Global Cluster Coordination Group and country-level clusters to:

- Support the Coordination Architecture Reviews conducted by HCTs on an annual basis;
- Guide and support all aspects of transition planning, including providing advice on deactivation decision-making, transition processes, and design of any continued coordination after cluster deactivation;
- Guide and support development of IM and knowledge management transition plans;
- Consider conducting country-level support visits prior to transition, as required and requested.

<sup>28</sup> In line with the responsibilities of their function. See IASC, *Operational Guidance - Generic Terms of Reference for Cluster Coordinators at the Country Level*, 2010

# Planning for Transition

# 4



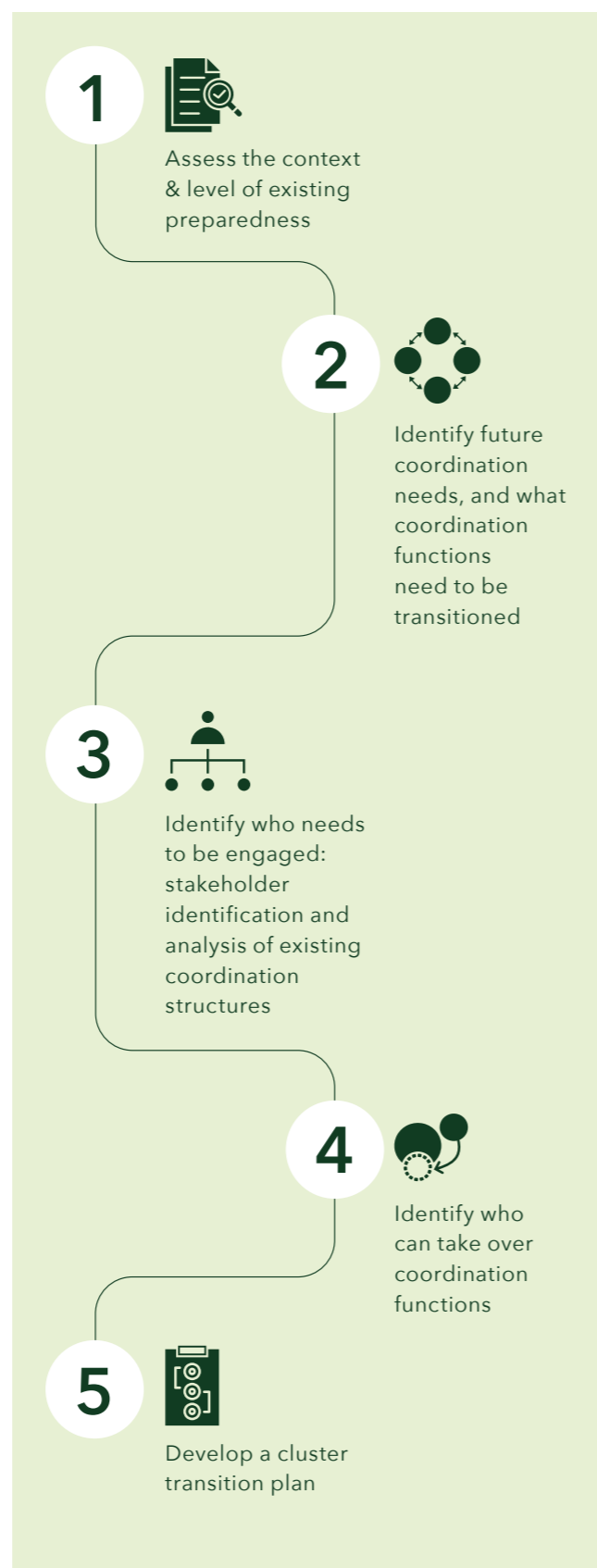
This chapter is designed to assist a cluster and CLA to plan and implement cluster transition.

The process of transition planning is broken down into five steps. These steps are designed to be broadly relevant to all transition scenarios. The sequence, time, and level of detail needed for each step depends on the context and the structure of the cluster.

The most important part of transition planning is the process: ensuring consultation, agreement, and commitment from stakeholders and flexibility to adjust the timing and transition approach if needed. Appropriate input should be sought from affected people.

This chapter includes:

- **Overview:** guidance on timing, facilitating factors, and considerations relating to humanitarian operations
- **Actions:** five steps and associated actions to assess the context for transition and develop a transition plan
- **It is accompanied by:**
  - **Annex A** – Additional guidance on transition actions
  - **Annex B** – Example Transition Strategy template
  - **Annex C** – Example Risk Analysis template
  - **Annex D** – Example template for communication planning



## 4.1 OVERVIEW

### 4.1.1 When to put a transition plan in place

Ideally, **transition planning should start soon after a cluster is activated** – as clusters are temporary coordination structures.

Note that cluster deactivation is part of a transition toward recovery, and transition plans should keep in mind this objective<sup>29</sup>.

A transition strategy might initially be light and be developed and updated over time. The development of a transition plan for a cluster does not require an HCT request. Plans should be developed with any relevant government and development actors.

In a sudden-onset emergency, especially in response to a disaster, clusters may only be activated for a short period of time and transition planning will need to start very soon after activation. In other contexts, it is unrealistic for clusters to deactivate soon after activation. In some protracted crises, transition plans might be gradually developed and implemented over several years. Within the same context, some clusters may be able to develop full transition plans earlier than others.

Having a transition plan in place doesn't mean that a cluster will be deactivated soon. Cluster deactivation should only happen when the IASC deactivation criteria are met and may be part of a wider shift in the context toward durable solutions and recovery. A **phased transition approach** allows **gradual progress toward a long-term goal of deactivation**.

Transition plans should maintain **flexibility** – especially in complex environments and those with specific **protection concerns**. Flexibility might be needed in the timeline of transition steps, or even in considering which coordination functions are handed over to which entities if the context changes. Transition plans must include robust **risk analysis** and **monitoring** of transition benchmarks and context, and these should be reviewed periodically to monitor progress and ensure transition plans remain appropriate.

#### Minimum requirements from the point of cluster activation:

- ✓ Appropriate actions are taken from the point of activation to enable later transition, including:
  - When possible, the cluster is established building on existing national sectoral coordination structures;
  - Participation and leadership of local and national actors, including women civil society representatives and leaders, is promoted (including co-leading or co-coordinating the cluster when possible);
  - Capacity strengthening of local and national actors is conducted by the CLA and cluster, including strengthening of coordination capacities of national systems to manage emergencies;
  - Relationship-building and linkages are actively pursued [See 4.1.5 Facilitating factors for transition](#).
- ✓ Discussion of cluster transition is included in cluster strategic planning processes.
- ✓ A transition section is included in the cluster strategy.
- ✓ A transition strategy with benchmarks is developed as soon as it is contextually appropriate to do so.
- ✓ Transition plans are reviewed periodically, e.g., in the cluster's annual strategic planning process.
- ✓ These requirements are monitored e.g., through Cluster Coordination Performance Monitoring (CCPM).

**Mindset is important: understanding the cluster as temporary helps to promote a vision for its transition.**

<sup>29</sup> See IASC, *Reference Module for Cluster Coordination at Country Level*, 2015 p.48, and [4.1.5 Facilitating factors for transition](#)

## 4.1.2 Time needed for transition

The actions for transition are broadly the same whether the context is a sudden onset emergency or a protracted crisis. However, the **time needed for transition** and the **level of detail of the steps** depend greatly on contextual factors, including:

- The scale and complexity of humanitarian crisis.
- What coordination functions need to continue, if any, after the cluster's deactivation.
- The relationship with, and capacities of, any entities who will take over any coordination functions.

Transition can take a short number of months (for example, in a sudden onset emergency where the Government takes coordination leadership) or multiple years (for example, in a protracted crisis in a complex governance system). Preparation work is key: experience demonstrates that rushed transitions are less likely to result in sustainable continuing coordination.

The time needed to develop and implement a transition plan may also vary between clusters in a response. When deactivated, some clusters phase out completely (such as Logistics and Emergency Telecommunications, which also tend to deactivate earlier in a response than other clusters). Other clusters will usually hand over at least some coordination functions, even if other functions are phased out. The ease and time needed to identify counterparts that might take over leadership of coordination functions, and their readiness and willingness to do so, may vary between clusters. For some clusters, this will be a single government line ministry (such as Education). For others multiple state institutions or civil society actors may be involved, or in some cases international leadership may be continued (such as for a Protection Cluster where there are specific continuing protection issues). Changes or differences in the sectoral response context may also affect the time needed to plan and implement transition for a cluster, as well as requiring flexibility in its implementation.

## 4.1.3 The importance of consultation

Consultation is a vital part of planning a cluster transition and designing any coordination that will continue. It is important to ensure both the process and accompanying mechanisms are **designed according to the coordination needs of those involved** in leading and implementing response, and to ensure capacities and buy-in to these mechanisms once the cluster deactivates.

Transition planning should start with a stakeholder mapping, across the humanitarian-development-peace spectrum and appropriate consultation then planned with identified stakeholders, including affected people. Consultation can take different forms, e.g., workshop participation, bilateral meetings, feedback on strategies, review of ToRs, or focus group discussions. **Consultation processes, including opportunity for feedback, should be included in transition workplans.**

Design of consultation processes must support meaningful participation and inputs from **local and national actors**. See the [Inter-Agency Toolkit on Localisation in Humanitarian Coordination](#) for more guidance on this. Appropriate inputs of affected people to transition planning must be sought, with appropriate communication explaining any implications of changes in coordination structures. [See A.4 Planning communication.](#)

## 4.1.4 Phased adaptation

It is important to remember that **transition is a process**: ideally, the handover or phase-out of cluster functions is gradual. Any entities taking over coordination functions should ideally assume responsibility for coordination leadership in phases (and in line with humanitarian principles), with functions handed over once the capacity to implement them is in place. The coordination functions carried out by the cluster will therefore reduce in phases. **Attention must be paid to sub-national as well as national coordination.** If needed, short- or long-term coordination support from the CLA or Cluster Co-Coordinating Partner may be offered after cluster deactivation. [See 5.5 Continuing coordination support after deactivation.](#)

## 4.1.5 Facilitating factors for transition

This chapter outlines factors that create an enabling environment for active transition planning. These factors can both help facilitate transition and can be **appropriate first steps towards transition especially early in a response.**

Both relationships and the mutual understanding of responsibilities are important for transition and may also enable the strengthening of capacities and willingness of actors, including non-humanitarian actors, to assume responsibilities and activities after cluster deactivation. Linkages such as the below can change and progress over time. They will be contextual and must be appropriate to considerations of humanitarian principles.

### Establish links with government counterparts:

Appropriate links between a cluster and government or state institutions should be put in place at national and local level from the point of activation, as suitable to the context and the individual cluster and respecting humanitarian principles. Appropriate engagement may vary between clusters: some (such as Education) have single line ministries, others may need to engage with more than one state institution, and for some (such as Protection) the appropriateness of government engagement may be limited by protection concerns. The type of engagement with counterparts might change over time, for example moving from bilateral meetings to government cluster co-leadership. It is good practice to ensure sector technical approaches align with national standards and development objectives when possible. CLA should facilitate Cluster Coordinator access to government counterparts.

### Establish links with development coordination bodies:

Development coordination bodies may take responsibility for any continuing coordination functions, especially for preparedness planning. There can be both coordination and programmatic benefits to engagement with development actors. Simple methods of engagement include key sectoral development actors participating in cluster meetings, and the Cluster Coordinator participating in development-oriented coordination. These linkages should be facilitated by the CLA.

**Establish links with durable solutions coordination bodies:** Where recovery or durable solutions coordination structures exists, engagement of the cluster with these will likely have both coordination transition and programmatic benefits. Linkages may be facilitated through inter-cluster mechanisms and should be supported by the CLA as needed.

### Utilizing work toward HDP Collaboration (Nexus):

Humanitarian-Development, or Humanitarian-Development-Peace (HDP) collaboration (Nexus), is an important common approach. It is defined as a collective effort by humanitarian, development and, where relevant and appropriate, peace actors to reduce people's needs, risks and vulnerabilities by addressing their root causes<sup>30</sup>. Starting to work on HDP Nexus objectives is not a point of transition: by definition, this work occurs to collectively address humanitarian needs, not because of reduced necessity of humanitarian response. However, work by a cluster towards HDP Nexus objectives might help facilitate future cluster transition. E.g., through:

- Relationship-building between clusters and sectoral development actors and mechanisms;
- Enhanced interaction with government authority coordination of emergency and disaster risk management;
- Participating in joint analysis and joined-up planning and monitoring (such as, supporting alignment and complementarity between the HNO and CCA and HRP and UNSDCF)<sup>31</sup>.

**See:** [IASC, Guidance Note on Advancing the HDP Nexus Approach Through IASC Global Clusters, 2023](#) and [IASC, Light Guidance on Collective Outcomes: Planning and implementing the HDP nexus in contexts of protracted crisis, 2020](#)

30. See: [IASC, Advisory Note on Advancing the HDP Nexus Approach Through IASC Global Clusters, 2023,](#)

31. [Humanitarian Needs Overview, Humanitarian Response Plan, Common Country Analysis, and UN Sustainable Development Cooperation Framework. See GCCG, Advisory Note, 2023 for a checklist for Cluster Coordinators to explore.](#)

**Promote localization:** Efforts by a cluster to empower and engage with local and national actors, whether state institutions or civil society, are important to support operational implementation and to promote local and national actor participation in and leadership of coordination before and after cluster deactivation. This is in line with the IASC's commitment to the [Principles of Partnership](#). See [A.2 Promoting localization](#) and [5.6 Civil society inclusion](#).

**Encourage mutual understanding within the CLA:** Mutual understanding between programmatic and cluster coordination staff of their respective responsibilities is important for the CLA to be able to facilitate a successful cluster transition. This includes programmatic staff understanding the cluster's functions, and the benefits of coordination participation for cluster members, to be able to support transition and any continuation of coordination functions.

**Encourage mutual understanding between joint CLAs:** This guidance can be used to help joint CLAs, where this arrangement is in place, agree a transition process that will be followed. Agreements on transition and any complementary roles and responsibilities can be included in the CLA Memorandum of Understanding.

### 4.1.6 Beyond coordination: humanitarian operation considerations

This document specifically guides the transition of humanitarian coordination provided by clusters. It does not cover transition or phase-out of humanitarian operations. Coordination transition and operational transition are different processes and should not be conflated.

However, the transition and deactivation of a cluster is likely to take place in the context of humanitarian operational scale-down<sup>32</sup>. Clusters may therefore be supporting partners who are engaged in operational transition while implementing

cluster coordination transition. At the same time, some humanitarian response will be continuing after cluster deactivation: transition of the IASC cluster coordination system does not imply that there is no longer humanitarian need, or that all humanitarian programming is ending.

Planning of a coordination transition must consider the operational situation, with the cluster ensuring any necessary coordination functions for continued humanitarian response are in place after cluster deactivation, as well as implementing any necessary support to current or future operational scale-down.

Example ways in which this can be reflected in transition planning include:

- Conducting analysis of remaining humanitarian needs and putting in place response mapping as part of cluster transition activities just before deactivation.
- Analysing whether there are any specific groups that face risks of exclusion from operational response after cluster deactivation, and putting in place residual mechanisms to coordinate the support and monitoring of their needs.
- Considering the implications of the transition of a humanitarian response vis-à-vis introduction of other coordination mechanisms (e.g., durable solutions coordination).
- Capacity-strengthening on technical or thematic areas with civil society and state institutions to prepare for eventual operational scale-down, in order to support continued, well-coordinated, protection-sensitive, quality responses.

Ensuring necessary inter-agency guidance, protocols, and/or systems for partners are updated and in place for continued programming and any future exit after cluster deactivation. **If substantial operational scale-down is occurring at the same time as cluster transition and deactivation, it is important to ensure very clear communication with all stakeholders on the distinct operational and coordination implications and actions that need to be taken.**

## Actions



## 4.2 ACTIONS

The below five steps are designed to be **broadly relevant to all transition scenarios**, although the **sequence, time, and level of detail needed** for each step depends on the context and the structure of the cluster. Some steps might be moved through quickly and lightly, especially in a sudden onset emergency. The actions listed under the five steps are suggestions, and do not need to be implemented consecutively or even individually.

Much of this work can be folded into regular cluster coordination responsibilities. Some steps and actions can be done at the same time. For example, a workshop with cluster members and counterparts could be used to identify future coordination and preparedness needs, conduct a risk analysis, identify stakeholders that need to be involved in transition, identify handover or phase-out options and draft transition benchmarks. The Global Cluster/AoR can provide support and resources throughout transition planning. A written transition strategy should be drafted, but it should be remembered that the most important part of transition planning is the **process**: ensuring **consultation, agreement, and commitment** from stakeholders.

See [3. Responsibilities in deactivation and transition processes](#) are with the CLA (the Representative or delegated programme staff), Cluster Coordinator (and coordination team), and Global Cluster/AoR. Additional guidance can be found in the annexes.

Protection issues and humanitarian principles must be considered during transition planning (at a cluster and overall response level). Some population groups or geographical areas might experience more pronounced risks, such as exclusion or discrimination or a lack of humanitarian access. Any issues should be included in the feasibility/risk assessment for transition and considered in the handover and leadership of continuing coordination functions.

<sup>32</sup>. Note that one of the two IASC cluster deactivation criteria is the improvement of the humanitarian situation and reduction of associated humanitarian response.

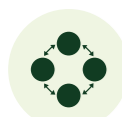


## 1. Assess the context & level of existing preparedness

A basic analysis is a first step in transition planning. This can be updated in more detail with input from or jointly with cluster members, relevant development actors, and the entity taking over coordination functions.

### SUGGESTED ACTIONS

<b>Contextual analysis of continued humanitarian need and response</b>	<p>Identify what response will continue, which actors will be involved<sup>33</sup></p> <p>This analysis can be relatively straightforward, using existing sectoral data and context analysis. It should be forward-looking. If the future context is less clear (e.g., soon after cluster activation) this step might be based on scenario planning. Analysis should be updated frequently when working toward deactivation.</p>
<b>Analyse emergency preparedness arrangements</b>	<p>Analyse the risk of future emergencies (use existing inter-agency or CLA analysis). Identify if there are national sectoral preparedness plans in place including any coordination-and-response structures for future emergencies, or if these need to be put in place or strengthened. <b>CLA programme staff should support, linking to any systems-strengthening efforts.</b></p>



## 2. Identify future coordination needs, and what coordination functions need to be transitioned<sup>34</sup>

Not all cluster functions need to be transitioned. Assess the most relevant functions needed after the cluster deactivates.

### SUGGESTED ACTIONS

<b>Map current cluster activities and functions, based on the 6+1 cluster core functions</b>	<p>Think about what the cluster does, not how it does it. It is the coordination function that is important. For example: the cluster provides stakeholders with information about which actors are working where and identifies gaps in humanitarian response. In this scenario, the function to hand over is information sharing (although of course tools such as 4W may eventually be adapted and handed over to enable this). Include sub-national as well as national functions, and of Technical Working Groups.</p>
<b>Identify what coordination functions are needed after cluster deactivation</b>	<p>Identify:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Coordination functions that need to be continued or adapted and continued;</li> <li>2. Functions that can be phased out;</li> <li>3. Any new functions which might be needed to support any continued response, and for sectoral preparedness.</li> </ol>
<b>Be sure to consult cluster members</b>	<p>As their operations – and coordination needs – will continue beyond the lifespan of the cluster. This must include IM functions.</p> <p>Ensure any specific protection issues are considered.</p>

33. Note that the CLA's accountability for core cluster functions (including for being Provider of Last Resort) ends when a cluster is deactivated: "During a transition process, the line of accountability for core cluster functions and responsibilities (such as Provider of Last Resort) must be clearly articulated. While a cluster is formally activated, accountability remains with the CLA. Transition plans should outline how accountabilities will shift to Government or to other crisis-coordination mechanisms." (IASC, *Reference Module for Cluster Coordination at Country Level*, 2015)

34. Note that for the Logistics and Emergency Telecommunications Clusters, distinction usually needs to be made between the plan for the transition of the services provided by the cluster (usually, reverting to market service provision) and identifying any gap, and an appropriate mechanism, for continuation of coordination among humanitarian actors on common issues and for future preparedness.



## 3. Identify who needs to be engaged: stakeholder identification and analysis of existing coordination structures

Given the potential number of stakeholders, it may be helpful to identify which actors are relevant to which phase of the transition, and whether stakeholders always need to participate in discussions, sometimes participate in discussions, or they just need to be informed that discussions are happening. Care should be taken to **ensure a process that is appropriately transparent and inclusive with local and national actors at the centre.**

### SUGGESTED ACTIONS

<b>Identify stakeholders who will be engaged in transition planning, and what phase they are engaged in.</b>	<p>Stakeholders might include: national and local government or state institution counterparts, cluster members (especially local and national actors), cluster Strategic Advisory Group (SAG), national and international development actors, humanitarian donors, development donors, other clusters, other coordination mechanisms (e.g., for durable solutions) at national and subnational level, and affected communities.</p>
<b>Analyse other coordination structures relating to the sector</b>	<p>Identify what other sectoral structures exist that are relevant to the cluster transition (e.g., development-oriented government-led sector coordination, or in mixed situations, refugee coordination platforms<sup>35</sup>). Assess their mandates, responsibilities, and limitations, who leads them and who participates. Identify if their strategic priorities could be expanded to emergency coordination. Ensure a coherent link to <b>UNSDCF</b> objectives and coordination structures.</p>



## 4. Identify who can take over coordination functions

After undertaking the previous analysis steps, the Cluster Coordinator together with the CLA should be able to identify if there is an existing body that would be suitable to take over any cluster functions to be continued. Ensure to take protection considerations into account.

### SUGGESTED ACTIONS

<b>Identify an entity/entities that is competent and willing to assume leadership and accountability for coordination functions identified</b>	<p><a href="#">See 5. Humanitarian coordination after cluster deactivation</a></p> <p>It is important to remember that successful transition requires the buy-in and capacities of both the identified counterpart and the participating members of the response. <b>Identification of a counterpart should be done with the CLA (senior management and technical staff) and relevant government bodies. Cluster members and the SAG should be consulted before the confirmation of any handover.</b> Consider humanitarian principles, and any specific protection concerns. Not all capacities need to be handed over to a single actor if this is not desirable. A phased handover, with the entity co-leading or gradually assuming responsibilities and the cluster phasing out is preferable.</p>
<b>Conduct a capacity assessment</b>	<p>Assess the capacity of the identified entity/entities to assume responsibility. This should include if they: have the structure including budget, resources, and staffing needed; have necessary technical and coordination capacity; are willing (and have formally accepted) to take responsibility and accountability for the coordination functions identified. This work might be a one-off 'assessment' or might involve information-gathering over a longer period of time to understand capacities and constraints.</p>

35. For more details on shared accountability see: UNHCR and OCHA, *Joint Note on Mixed Situations*, and the textbox on Transition in Mixed Situations in [2.6 The wider coordination landscape](#)



## 5. Developing a cluster transition plan

Once there is an agreed entity to transition coordination functions to (or it is agreed that cluster functions will be phased out), planning of transition can begin. Remember, clusters do not need to transition to one single actor. It might be more relevant to transition functions to different actors depending on the best interests of affected communities.

### KEY PRINCIPLES

- ✔ **Transition takes time and resources.**
- ✔ **Risk analysis, including of protection risks, should be conducted, followed by regular risk monitoring.**
- ✔ **Transition should be monitored against agreed benchmarks and course-corrected as needed.**
- ✔ **Handover should be phased.**
- ✔ **Roles and responsibilities during transition and transfer of accountabilities should be clear.**
- ✔ **Coordination after transition must support humanitarian response to be in line with humanitarian principles.**

### SUGGESTED ACTIONS

#### ASSESS THE CONTEXT

**Conduct a risk analysis for the transition and deactivation** [See A.3 Conducting risk analysis](#)  
[See Annex C – Example risk analysis template](#)

The risk analysis (including of protection risks) should include mitigation measures to be taken, which should be included in the transition workplan. The transition process might have to be paused or revised if certain risks (e.g., protection risks) cannot be mitigated.

**Set benchmarks for transition** [See A.1 Setting benchmarks](#)

Sector level benchmarks should be established that will indicate if the context is suitable for deactivation, and to set measurable goals for the transition process. Agree how the benchmarks are measured, who is responsible and when monitoring is done.

#### CREATE A ROADMAP

**Define any coordination activities to be continued after cluster deactivation**

Building on (or returning to) the initial step determining what coordination functions will continue, define what the activities to deliver these will be – jointly with the body taking over. These might need redesigning, and reducing, from cluster activities. Consider using the CCPM to capture feedback from and identify useful activities for cluster members.

**Identify specific steps for transition, develop a workplan with timelines**

Draft a step-by-step workplan, with activities, responsibilities, and any resources required (e.g., human, technical support, funding). The workplan can be updated regularly depending on the progress of earlier steps. Build in flexibility to change course and timeline if needed.

### Develop a monitoring plan

A monitoring plan must be developed that includes transition benchmarks, risks, and monitoring of the context. Agree when transition plans will be reviewed (e.g., as part of annual cluster strategic planning) to ensure progress is on track and plans are still suitable. Agree on who is responsible for this monitoring; how often; and how changes will be incorporated in transition plans or timeline.

### Plan how to communicate about cluster transition and deactivation

[See A.4 Planning communication](#)  
[See Annex D Example template for communication planning](#)

Communication is critical to any transition strategy, to ensure all actors have a common understanding and expectations of the transition process. Each cluster should consider how to communicate about its transition approach, aligned to (or part of) the HCT transition communication strategy if there is one in place.

### Plan IM and assessment transition

[See A.6 Planning IM and assessment transition](#)

Assess IM and assessment functions of the cluster, and identify if any functions will continue to be needed and if they can be adapted and handed over (to either the body taking over other coordination functions or an alternative host) or will be phased out. Plan appropriate file and data handover or archiving, with due consideration to data responsibility as per IASC policy on [Data Responsibility in Humanitarian Action](#).

### ENSURE SENIOR LEVEL SUPPORT

#### Define the roles and responsibilities and accountabilities of the CLA and national counterparts during transition

Define clear internal responsibilities for the CLA and the Cluster Coordinator and any other cluster coordination team members in their engagement with transition counterpart/s. Define responsibilities and accountabilities of the CLA and counterparts (new coordination leads) during transition. It is important that accountability for coordination functions remains clear during handover from the CLA to the new coordination lead.

#### Engage with, and receive support from, the Global Cluster/AoR

[See 3. Responsibilities in deactivation and transition Processes](#)

Actively engage with the Global Cluster/AoR throughout, to keep them informed and for support and guidance to be made available to the Cluster Coordinator and CLA. Support from the Global Clusters to the HCT for overall transition planning is recommended as good practice.

#### Define CLA strategic and policy-level engagement needed to support the transition

Policy and advocacy engagement by the CLAs on transition and deactivation will likely be required. This might be with government, humanitarian or development donors, or with development actors. Cluster transition is likely to be occurring at the same time as operational scale-down, and clusters might require support to differentiate discussions around operational and coordination implications.

**Maintain resources and staffing needed for the transition process** Cluster staff and resourcing are needed throughout the transition period. Ideally, existing Cluster Coordinator and IM staff should be retained, to benefit from institutional memory and relationships. In some circumstances, capacity may need to be increased if transition activities intensify in the lead-up to deactivation. Engagement of donors in transition planning is important to encourage continuation of operational support. CLAs and Cluster Co-Coordinating Partners can consider maintaining commitments beyond deactivation if needed to increase potential for success.

SUPPORT THE CAPACITY OF THE NEW COORDINATION BODY

**Develop a capacity-strengthening plan if an entity is taking over coordination functions** Develop a capacity strengthening plan based on the capacity assessment. This plan might be implemented over a long period of time. This should be developed with CLA input. Consider integrating this with the CLA workstreams under the UNSDCF.

**Advocate for sufficient support structures and resources for any coordination body taking over coordination functions** Agree on a ToR for the coordination body taking over the coordination functions. Advocate for budget allocation and dedicated staff capacity for both coordination and IM functions. Promote management buy-in to the coordination objectives. Plan for sustainability e.g., how structure maintains capacity when staff change. Note that introducing new roles to government or another organization takes time to institutionalize, especially for departments with annual budget planning cycles. Transition timelines must consider this. Ensuring long-term resourcing and commitment is key to success.

**Include forward-looking analysis and strategy as part of the handover** Consider developing an initial strategy or plan with the coordination body taking over coordination functions as part of a handover of activities. For example: drafting an initial workplan; conducting basic needs analysis and mapping for continued response; updating preparedness plans [See A.5 Undertaking preparedness planning](#). Include these actions in transition benchmarks. If the cluster will deactivate ahead of other clusters and future HNOs and HRP will still be developed, ensure clarity on whether and how the sector is represented in inter-sectoral processes, and who is responsible for this.

PLAN WITH CLUSTER MEMBERS FOR AFTER CLUSTER DEACTIVATION

Even if a new or existing coordination body takes over some coordination functions, not all functions and activities of the cluster will be continued.

**Technical guidance** Identify if additional or adapted technical guidance might be required after cluster deactivation and agree and draft updates with cluster members. For example, the drafting of technical guidance on programme exit, or updating of SOPs on agreed common minimum standards after cluster deactivation.

**Identify actions to support local and national NGOs to prepare for after cluster deactivation** [See A.2 Promoting localization](#)

Pay extra attention to the needs of local and national organizations in any transition process. Work with local and national NGO cluster members to identify actions to support operational implementation or coordination engagement after the cluster deactivates. This will ideally build on existing cluster localization efforts, and include representatives from organisations representing perspectives that promote gender equality and disability inclusion

SHARE LESSONS LEARNED

**Share lessons learned and recommendations from cluster coordination and transition experiences**

Reflect on and share lessons learned and recommendations from the cluster coordination experience, to support continuing humanitarian coordination or coordination of future emergency response.  
Share documentation of lessons learned for cluster transition with the Global Cluster/AoR, for use in other response contexts.



# Humanitarian Coordination after Cluster Deactivation



# 5

This chapter can be used by a cluster and by CLA programmatic staff who are supporting transition planning. It provides guidance on how to adapt existing coordination structures or establish new coordination bodies to take over any humanitarian coordination functions that are identified to continue.

It covers:

- Options for coordination handover and leadership.
- Principles and considerations.
- Practical factors to help design a sustainable coordination structure.
- Continuing coordination support.
- Engagement with other coordination mechanisms.
- 'Merging' of clusters.

The guidance should be applied as relevant to the context, to support the implementation of continuing coordination arrangements that are efficient and suitable for the coordination needs.

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#### **Considering durable solutions coordination architectures:**

While this guidance looks at a transition of a single cluster/AoR, in some cases entire cluster systems might be succeeded by other continuing structures e.g., of durable solutions coordination. These may impact options for how some clusters, or some cluster functions, can be transitioned. For clusters handing over functions to sector coordination mechanisms, suitable interaction with any continuing durable solutions coordination should be considered.

[See 5.7 Engagement with other coordination mechanisms.](#)

## 5.1 Coordination objectives

Two primary humanitarian coordination objectives need to be considered after cluster deactivation:

- **Coordination of any continuing humanitarian response** (and any recovery activities coordinated by the cluster): appropriate coordination of remaining humanitarian response, with appropriate participation of response actors.
- **Preparedness for emergency response:** capacity to lead preparedness for any new emergency, and to lead the coordination of sectoral response if a new emergency occurs, with participation of all necessary response actors.

**Coordination arrangements for preparedness will need to be flexible:** During a preparedness phase the responsibilities may be light, with participation of core actors. If a new emergency occurs, a structure may need to expand at national or sub-national level, shifting back to humanitarian coordination, with participation of all necessary response actors.

## 5.2 Options for coordination handover and leadership

There are three options for the handover of coordination functions:

1. Cluster functions are merged into existing coordination mechanisms. Responsibilities of the existing group expand (e.g., a government-led development sectoral group expands to include emergency preparedness);
2. Clusters are modified into new structures or new structures are established (e.g., a new sector working group);
3. Coordination functions fully cease.

Remember:

- **Some cluster functions might stop.**
- **Not all cluster functions need to transition to one entity: a combination of options could be implemented if this is the most suitable arrangement for sector and context.**
- **Continuing coordination should not be a direct replica of the cluster. Structures and activities should be designed according to coordination needs. They should be realistic to the capacities of the entity taking over leadership.**

There are broadly four options (non-exhaustive) for leadership and responsibility for continuing coordination:

1. Hand over to government leadership;
2. Continue with identified UN or NGO partners convening coordination<sup>36</sup>;
3. Integrate into UNSDCF or other UN-led coordination e.g., durable solutions coordination, or the Refugee Coordination Model in line with provisions of the Note on Mixed Situations.
4. No handover, and coordination function ceases.

Co-ordination arrangements, or coordination support arrangements, can be put in place if needed.

**Government leadership:** When clusters deactivate, humanitarian coordination leadership should be handed over to **government wherever appropriate and possible**. Clusters are a temporary coordination mechanism, activated when **national capacity** to coordinate humanitarian response is limited or constrained, and national authorities have primary responsibility for response to disasters and other emergencies that occur in their territory<sup>37</sup>. When a government body does take leadership, **coordination support** from UN or NGO actors

36. Such as, the agency that used to fulfill the CLA role, or other identified actor(s). Note that in this case, the cluster responsibilities and accountabilities no longer apply after deactivation. See IASC, *Reference Module for Cluster Coordination at Country Level*, 2015 p.39

37. IASC, *Reference Module for Cluster Coordination at Country Level*, 2015

(national, or international) can be important in the short- or long-term to sustain coordination functions and preparedness. See [5.5 Continuing coordination support after deactivation](#).

**Alternative or additional leadership:** However, in some circumstances government bodies may not be willing or able to coordinate continued response or be able to do so in line with humanitarian principles<sup>38</sup>. There might be specific protection concerns for handover of some coordination activities or for certain geographic areas or population groups. There might be specific interest of NGOs to maintain or establish national civil society sectoral coordination. In some cases, integration of some functions with other coordination structures (e.g., for durable solutions) might be sought. **International leadership can be maintained, or civil society leadership encouraged, for all or part of the coordination functions to continue if necessary.** For example, UN agencies and key NGOs coordinating monitoring and advocacy on specific issues. Or a Protection Cluster “re-grouping in a different form but still under international leadership”<sup>39</sup>. If so, accountabilities (and limitations), responsibilities, and links with any existing sector coordination must be made clear in the new structure.

Information on the different leadership, accountabilities, and responsibilities of the IASC cluster approach and emergency sectoral coordination can be found in the IASC Reference Module for Cluster Coordination at Country Level (2015).<sup>40</sup>

## 5.3 Principles and considerations

The following principles and considerations must be taken into account when adapting or designing mechanisms, and mitigation measures put into place if needed:

- **Humanitarian principles** – Does the new structure support response coordination to be in line with humanitarian principles? **This is a fundamental requirement of coordination of humanitarian organizations.**
- **Accountability to affected people** – How will this be promoted in the new structure, and during transition?

- **Protection** – How and by whom will the residual protection risks be covered under the new coordination structure? Are there specific protection issues for any population groups of concern that impact their access to assistance? How can sectoral protection risks be best taken in account, and who is responsible? How will necessary protection principles and prioritization be upheld in the new coordination structure?
- **Mainstreaming of cross-cutting issues** – “International partners can advise Government on mainstreaming. International partners have a duty to respect internationally agreed principles”.<sup>41</sup>
- **Civil society participation (localization)** – How will the new structure support appropriate engagement of local and national civil society actors (including women, youth, and disability inclusion actors)? What activities during the transition process can support this?
- **Decentralization** – Will the structure have any local or sub-national engagement? How can local actors be supported to engage with a national structure, where appropriate?

38. These form part of the IASC cluster deactivation criteria and should be considered when deciding on deactivation.

39. IASC, *Draft transition guidance*, 2011, p.2

40. See IASC, *Reference Module for Cluster Coordination at Country Level* (2015) Annex 1: IASC clusters and government-led sectors: roles and responsibilities, and the below table on p.7 outlining a comparison of coordination leadership in emergency sectoral coordination and IASC cluster approaches

Coordination mechanism	Emergency phase	Recovery phase
Government coordination capacity is adequate and not constrained	Government provides leadership. International partners may reinforce the Government’s coordination capacity.	Government leadership continues. Humanitarian coordination structures may transition to recovery and to development structures. International actors withdraw or support recovery and help to prepare for future crises.
Government coordination capacity is limited or constrained	Clusters are activated where needed. Where appropriate and possible, co-leadership with Government bodies and NGO partners is strongly encouraged.	Clusters are de-activated or devolve to national emergency or recovery and development coordination structures, where appropriate and possible. Government coordination is strengthened, where appropriate and possible.

41. IASC, *Reference Module for Cluster Coordination at Country Level*, 2015

## 5.4 Designing a successful coordination structure for residual humanitarian needs and preparedness

- **Define scope:** What coordination activities will the mechanism conduct? Who leads it, who participates, who supports? What are their roles and responsibilities? What accountabilities does the lead entity have?
- **Put in place structures, resources, and support:** What resources and capacities for coordination already exist? What needs to be put in place or strengthened, and how? Ensure a ToR, staffing, budget allocation, sufficient technical capacities (coordination skills, technical sectoral knowledge, IM as needed) are in place, and buy-in of management. Plan how the structure will be sustainable and cope with staff turnover e.g., to maintain capacity-building and technical knowledge. Agree if the mechanism will still access any technical support from the Global Cluster/AoR, and how.
- **Ensure preparedness and capacities for future emergencies:** Is an emergency preparedness plan in place? Consider updating this as part of transition handover. Include capacity-development activities as needed. This might be implemented as part of systems-strengthening efforts by the CLA [**support of CLA needed**].
- **Transfer technical resources and knowledge:** Plan handover or adaptation of any necessary technical guidance, SOPs, IM and assessment responsibilities, data, and knowledge. Communicate good practices and learnings about coordination of emergency response in the context, based on the cluster experience. Consider defining an initial workplan for the structure as part of phased handover.

### FACTORS FOR COORDINATION STRUCTURE SUCCESS:

- ✓ **A coordination structure should be both consistent and sustainable. Predictability and consistency helps to sustain engagement of stakeholders, maintain accountability, and to deliver on its coordination activities.**
- ✓ **Coordination is more likely to be sustainable when integrated into existing structures and/or its leadership falls clearly under an entity's existing responsibilities, rather than being standalone, especially if newly set up.**
- ✓ **Buy-in of the entity leading the coordination structure and of its participants is essential.**
- ✓ **Roles and responsibilities are clearly defined, well-communicated, and understood by all stakeholders.**
- ✓ **Accountabilities are clearly defined - what the leadership is accountable for, and who they are accountable to.**
- ✓ **Activities the structure will conduct are clearly defined and agreed, are suitable for continued response, and are within the capacities of the entity leading the coordination structure to deliver.**
- ✓ **Coordination leadership is institutionalized in an organization, not reliant on individuals (e.g., if a staff member leaves, the function is handed over).**
- ✓ **Structures should link with, or contribute to, overarching strategy e.g., national government strategy, UNSDCF.**

## 5.5 Continuing coordination support after deactivation

A **CLA** may continue to support sector coordination after cluster deactivation<sup>42</sup>. This support might result from the agency's mandate and preparedness commitments to the host government, UNSDCF commitments, an institutional commitment (and internal accountability) to support humanitarian coordination and national capacity, or the agency's sectoral priorities. A **Cluster Co- Coordinating Partner, or another NGO** may also continue to support sectoral coordination (promotion of L/NGOs to provide coordination support is to be encouraged). Note, however, that if coordination support is given to government, ultimate leadership and accountability for sectoral response sits with the government body<sup>43</sup>.

Examples of practical coordination support include providing staff time to support coordination or IM activities, technical or material support, and capacity-strengthening. They should be complemented by active participation under the new leadership. Coordination support commitments might be temporary (e.g., continuing the contract of a coordination staff member for six months after cluster deactivation to support a new coordination mechanism). Or they might be long-term (e.g., providing secretariat support for a coordination group, delivering annual trainings, or providing technical support to keep preparedness plans updated).

### GOOD PRACTICES FOR CONTINUED COORDINATION SUPPORT INCLUDE:

- ✓ **Inclusion of the function in the agency's own strategy.**
- ✓ **Allocation of staff time and resources to fulfil the coordination support activities undertaken.**
- ✓ **Staff having the appropriate knowledge and skills to be able to support humanitarian coordination and preparedness, including engaging with local/national NGOs.**
- ✓ **Coordination support responsibilities included in staff ToRs and performance objectives, and line managers understand the requirements of their staff member performing a coordination support role.**

42. For example, for UNICEF, as outlined in *Core Commitments for Children in Humanitarian Action*, 2020, p.25 "Commitment 2.1.2 Coordination: Support the leadership and coordination of humanitarian response, along with national and local stakeholders, and in compliance with humanitarian principles... Where clusters are not activated, UNICEF is accountable for its respective sectors to support coordination mechanisms"

43. See: IASC, *Reference Module for Cluster Coordination at Country Level*, - Annex I: IASC clusters and government-led sectors: roles and responsibilities, 2015, p. 43

## 5.6 Civil society inclusion in coordination

Coordination structures taking over humanitarian coordination functions must have appropriate mechanisms for engaging NGOs and other local and national civil society actors. This includes in coordination of continued humanitarian response, where appropriate in preparedness, and inclusion in coordination of future emergency response.

- ✔ **Ensure to consult cluster members when designing coordination structures to ensure they are suitable for civil society coordination needs. Consider also including NGO coordination forums in consultation processes.**
- ✔ **Consider coordination leadership and support arrangements at national and sub-national level, particularly by other local and national civil society actors, utilizing their capacities and technical expertise (this can be in complement to leadership by national or local authorities).**
- ✔ **Consider the role of and funding for civil society actors in preparedness: in contributing to plans, and maintaining awareness of preparedness and emergency coordination structures for efficient scale-up of new response.**

If coordination bodies are development-oriented with mainly government, UN, and development members, **consider:**

- ✔ **Allocation of a number of seats to L/ NNGO and INGO representatives. Agree how these representatives might link with other NGO actors, for example through participation in NGO coordination forums.**
- ✔ **Periodic meetings with a wide group of civil society actors.**

- ✔ **Any role of the (former) CLA in facilitating links with civil society actors, especially L/NNGOs.**
- ✔ **Ensure preparedness plans include plans for how emergency coordination would be structured, and how civil society actors can actively lead and meaningfully participate in future emergency coordination structures.**

Note that for some clusters, private sector or academia engagement in continuing coordination can be beneficial.

## 5.7 Engagement with other coordination mechanisms

Other coordination mechanisms might continue in the country after cluster deactivation, such as durable solutions coordination structures, or other clusters if cluster deactivation is staggered. Further, sectoral coordination mechanisms may need to still interact with each other to avoid creation of sectoral silos for response coordination.

Considerations to take into account when designing coordination structures include:

- How will the coordination body and remaining clusters or inter-cluster mechanisms interact?
- Do sectoral coordination mechanisms need to continue to interact with each other? Who is responsible, and how will this occur?
- Are any cluster functions or outputs directly used by durable solutions coordination mechanisms or actors? If so, should these be integrated into the durable solutions coordination mechanisms?
- How can durable solutions coordination and actors continue to benefit from sectoral technical expertise? Who is responsible for this, and how will this happen?

The CLA should guide any appropriate integration with the UNSDCF and the UN's Common Country Analysis (CCA) that contributes to this, as part of the transition planning process. For this, and considerations on mixed situations where refugees are present in the same geographic area as IDPs and other affected populations, [See 2.6 The Wider coordination landscape.](#)

## 5.8 'Merging' of clusters

Merging, or 'subsuming' clusters is not recommended as a transition option. Maintaining sectoral focus and expertise is important for both coordination of remaining humanitarian response and for effective preparedness planning.

In some countries, responsibility for a sector might sit across more than one government ministry. For example, a Ministry of Health and a Ministry of Agriculture may both have departments focused on Nutrition. In this circumstance, a structure taking over coordination functions from the Nutrition Cluster would likely need to incorporate both ministerial bodies, maintaining humanitarian response in the sector to be as effective as possible and in line with technical standards.

If clusters are already merged, either as joint cluster with one CLA or as a working group under another cluster, then transition planning must include sufficient focus for each technical sector. Different transition plans will likely be needed for each technical area and should be supported by the respective CLA or organization leading the working group.

# ANNEXES

## ANNEX A – Additional Guidance on Transition Actions

This annex provides further guidance on the following transition actions outlined in [4.2 Actions](#) to be used as a reference when relevant during transition planning. This guidance is for individual cluster transition planning, which may need to align with HC/HCT transition strategies on the same topics.

- [A.1 Setting deactivation and transition benchmarks](#)
- [A.2 Promoting localization in transition planning](#)
- [A.3 Conducting a risk analysis for transition](#)
- [A.4 Planning communication on cluster transition](#)
- [A.5 Undertaking preparedness planning](#)
- [A.6 Planning IM, assessment, and knowledge management system transition](#)

### A.1 Setting benchmarks

A decision to deactivate a cluster should be made (by the IASC, informed by the recommendations of the HC/HCT) based on assessment of the two IASC criteria for cluster deactivation<sup>44</sup> [See 2. Deactivation decision-making and context](#). However, **more specific benchmarks or pre-conditions can be developed for an individual cluster, to assess suitability of deactivation** (informing HC/HCT coordination reviews and assessment of the IASC deactivation criteria) and to **monitor progress on transition**. This might include:

- **Pre-conditions for deactivation**, contributing to the main two criteria on deactivation.
- **Transition benchmarks**, used to indicate transition steps towards deactivation.

Examples of **transition benchmarks** for a cluster include:

- Technical benchmarks relating to scale and severity of humanitarian need.
- Structures and resourcing for any coordination body taking over coordination functions.
- Managerial and technical capacities and willingness to lead continuing coordination.
- Preparedness measures put in place or planned.
- Progress on localization efforts identified as important for transition.
- Reduction of risks or implementation of mitigation actions identified in the risk analysis.
- Relevant development or government / state institution actors are engaged in cluster coordination.
- Note: If reduction in humanitarian funding is included as a benchmark, this must be transparently communicated.

<sup>44</sup> Cluster deactivation may be considered when "at least one of the two conditions that led to its activation is no longer present, 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." IASC, *Reference Module for Cluster Coordination at Country Level*, 2015, p.37



Benchmarks should be measurable, and a monitoring plan for them put in place as part of a cluster transition plan. Allowance should be made for adjustment of the plan or timeline if benchmarks are not met. Interim benchmarks can be set, defining positive steps toward transition, for example, local and national actors (e.g., government or L/NNGOs) leading national or sub-national cluster coordination.

In some contexts, there might be **pre-conditions for cluster deactivation**, potentially outside the control of the stakeholders involved in cluster transition (e.g., lifting of martial law and resumption of civilian government, or resumption of government control over territory). These examples would likely apply to more than one cluster, but they are important to reflect as they link to the need for adherence to humanitarian principles and accountability throughout the process.

Defining 'readiness' for transition is challenging, and there may not be universal agreement on this. However, agreeing benchmarks – and their measurement – in consultation with relevant stakeholders, including cluster members (and, advocating for their use to inform HC/HCT decision-making on deactivation) should help with buy-in on decision-making. Communicating well on an ongoing basis on transition benchmark progress is also critical, particularly with local and national actors and affected people.

## A.2 Promoting localization

Recognising and strengthening national and local systems and capacities should be a strong focus of the cluster's transition workplan, both for the continuation of delivery of quality humanitarian response after cluster deactivation, and to support future preparedness. This is in line with the IASC's commitment to the [Principles of Partnership](#).

Examples of efforts to support local and national actors before and during transition include:

- Specific consultation with local and national actors<sup>45</sup> on which coordination functions are needed after deactivation, and promotion of their participation throughout the planning of the transition.
- Promoting participation, representation and strategic leadership in the cluster, to strengthen coordination leadership capacities in line with IASC guidelines.<sup>46</sup>
- Provision for appropriate leadership of local and national actors in any coordination body taking over coordination functions, and appropriate inclusion national and local NGOs and other civil society actors in these mechanisms.
- Promoting funding access e.g., promoting direct linkages with donors.
- Institutional and technical capacity-strengthening to support local and national actors' continued operational implementation after cluster deactivation.
- Supporting advocacy skills and connections e.g., through inclusion in strategic roles in the cluster (such as SAG membership or co-ordination at national or sub-national level).

See: [Inter-Agency Toolkit on Localisation in Humanitarian Coordination](#)<sup>47</sup> for guidance on coordination considerations.

45. Consultations with local and national actors not only are important to ensure their own perspectives and coordination needs are considered, but can also help support inclusion of perspectives of affected people. Participation of organizations such as women-led organizations and organizations of persons with disabilities can help promote this.

46. IASC, *Guidance on Strengthening Participation, Representation and Leadership of Local and National Actors*, 2021

47. Global Child Protection AoR, Global Education Cluster, Global WASH Cluster, Global Nutrition Cluster, Save the Children, Street Child, *Inter-Agency Toolkit on Localisation in Humanitarian Coordination*, 2022

## A.3 Conducting risk analysis

An **analysis of any risks of cluster transition and deactivation** should be conducted as part of the cluster's transition planning. The risk analysis should be straightforward, and operational. It should identify specific risks of transition and deactivation (particularly to affected people), the likelihood of the risk occurring, and the potential impact. It must include any **protection risks** specific to the sector that might be exacerbated by, or result from, changes in the coordination of the sectoral humanitarian response. It should identify mitigating measures that could be taken and specify how the monitoring of risks will be done. Finally, it should **identify if risk level is acceptable**, and if transition should be moved forward. If the level of risk is not deemed acceptable, the timeline or model for transition should be revisited. *See Annex C - Example risk analysis template.*

- ✔ **Mitigation activities should be included in the cluster's transition workplan, and in the workplan of any entity continuing coordination functions.**
- ✔ **Risks, and their reduction through mitigation activities, should be included in transition benchmarks, as relevant.**
- ✔ **Risks should be monitored (include in the transition monitoring plan, and identify who is responsible for monitoring, and how) and the risk analysis updated as needed.**

Identified risks should be communicated well to any bodies taking over any coordination functions and should be transparently communicated to cluster members during the transition, and to affected people as appropriate. Consider how to gather inputs from, or conduct analysis jointly with, key stakeholders including any relevant development and government actors and any bodies taking over coordination functions, to ensure common understanding and planning against the risks identified.

If the context has factors that might change (e.g., humanitarian needs, political climate, conflict dynamics) consider conducting **scenario planning** to inform both the risk analysis and the transition plan. This should identify possible context scenarios, likelihood, consequences, and any changed planning assumptions for transition. This is particularly relevant for responses that initiate transition planning shortly after clusters are activated.

Please note that this analysis is meant to identify risks in the process of transition, which is different from the type of risk analysis that might be conducted to inform emergency preparedness planning in a response.

## A.4 Planning communication

Good communication on transition is critical to its success. This helps stakeholders' understanding and supports their buy-in to both the transition process and to any subsequent coordination mechanism. An HCT overall transition strategy should have a communication component – or be accompanied by a communication strategy – to ensure consistency of messaging to government and partners (local, national, and international), and affected people. Each cluster should consider how to communicate about its transition approach, aligned to the HCT transition communication strategy if there is one in place. *See Annex D - Example template for communication planning.*

Considerations when planning communication include:

- ✔ **Messaging to government and other actors should be clear and consistent from all levels, in public and private.**
- ✔ **Transparency of communication helps avoid rumour creation.**
- ✔ **If there is a change in transition strategy because of change in circumstances, this must be clearly explained.**
- ✔ **Acknowledge that transition might be difficult, and that there may be negative outcomes of a transition process, and communicate what is being done to mitigate risks and negative outcomes.**

- ✔ **Ensure communication is two-way, and that feedback can be given.**
- ✔ **Acknowledge work and efforts of partners through the cluster system to date.**
- ✔ **Ensure stakeholders, especially local/national NGOs and government counterparts, understand the cluster system and implications of transition, so they can fully participate in transition planning (don't presume knowledge).**
- ✔ **Plan appropriate communication with affected communities, with particular attention to ensuring that information being shared on coordination transition is not confused as operational change.**

Good communication has a two-fold benefit. First, to ensure that **all stakeholders understand the next steps**, so they can make the best choices for their organization going forward and they can adjust to a new coordination structure. Second, to **maintain the [Principles of Partnership](#)** during and after transition, especially the principle of transparency, mitigating against negative relationships forming between decision-makers, especially CLAs, and other operational actors.

Times of major structural change can be confusing and uncertain. Transition processes can be difficult. There may not be universal buy-in to cluster deactivation. Acknowledging concerns, and addressing them where possible, are important. There may be negative outcomes of cluster deactivation for cluster members, such as reducing the benefit and support they get from participating in the cluster system. Some resistance from stakeholders, including cluster members and government counterparts, can be a natural reaction to significant system changes such as cluster deactivation.

The benefits of the cluster system, and therefore impacts of transition, are usually different for UN organizations, L/NGOs and other civil society actors, INGOs, and local and national government and state institutions. Cluster members will likely have valid concerns about deactivation of individual clusters or of system structures including the role of OCHA and the HCT. Concerns might be wide-ranging, from changes to information-sharing about response, to concerns about joint humanitarian access negotiation, to organizations becoming concerned about their access to donors and funding, and broader concerns about the maintenance of humanitarian principles in future coordination.

Consider mapping these concerns as part of a consultation process with cluster members. Concerns can be addressed through cluster communications or shared with the inter-cluster, CLA or HCT if this is a more appropriate forum.

Decisions on cluster deactivation are ultimately made by the HC, in consultation with the HCT. Acknowledging that an HCT has limited membership, CLAs should encourage a more open forum to discuss implications of transition that is inclusive of a larger group of NGOs and donors. The periodic engagement of cluster partners with the CLA senior management (Representative) and the representative of the CCP can help support communication.

## A.5 Undertaking preparedness planning

Preparedness for response to any future emergencies should be integral to cluster transition planning. The capacity to lead **preparedness planning for, and coordination of, sectoral response if a new emergency occurs** is one of the two primary objectives of continuing coordination after cluster deactivation [See 5.1 Coordination objectives](#). Preparedness for future emergencies is vital to reduce the likelihood that the cluster will need to be reactivated.

The risk and type of potential future emergency, and the extent of preparedness focus in cluster transition, will depend on the context. Where a cluster has been activated for disaster response, the risk of future disasters might be high, with high willingness of government counterparts to plan with national and international actors for future emergencies. Where a cluster has been activated in a

conflict context, analysis of potential future emergencies may be politically sensitive if this includes conflict risk, and a more discreet process of preparedness analysis and planning may be more suitable.

Any emergency preparedness planning should be in line with any existing government disaster management framework and respective sectoral policies (provided humanitarian principles are considered). A CLA may already support preparedness efforts and CLA and UNCT existing work should be used to guide cluster engagement.

**Steps can be taken to put in place or strengthen preparedness as part of the transition process and workplan, to support a designated coordination body to take this forward after cluster deactivation<sup>48</sup>. A CLA may lead on some or all this transition work, as part of their existing commitments for government support.**

These might include the following:

- ✔ **Firstly to:**
  - Determine risks (using existing CLA or inter-agency risk analyses, if available);
  - Understand existing sectoral preparedness arrangements and responsibilities.
- ✔ **If needed, determine how coordination of any future sector emergency response will be conducted**
  - If needed, identify the entity/entities responsible for leading and supporting coordination;
  - Consider any triggers needed for activation of coordination functions;
  - Share any suitable lessons learned from cluster coordination to inform future coordination efforts.
- ✔ **Determine how preparedness will be maintained or strengthened after deactivation:**
  - Define responsibilities (and workplan, if needed) of the coordination body;
  - Define any continued support role for the CLA or other national/international actors;
  - Advocate for funding for preparedness activities and/or include in resources planning for after transition;
  - Define civil society engagement in planning or inclusion in scaled-up coordination during response.
- ✔ **Agree preparedness-related activities to be undertaken as part of the cluster transition process, such as:**
  - Support update to sectoral preparedness plans;
  - Support capacity-strengthening for preparedness.
- ✔ **Ensure to communicate with all relevant stakeholders on preparedness-related activities**
- ✔ **Include preparedness arrangements in transition benchmarks (e.g., updated sectoral Emergency Preparedness Plan in place, sufficient coordination capacities to lead coordination of future response)**

<sup>48</sup> Existing Cluster and AoR resources on emergency preparedness planning may be used to support these efforts. See: *Preparedness Toolkit for Education Clusters and Child Protection Working Groups*, May 2023 available at: <https://educationcluster.box.com/s/g9nk84xni76rdybsmuiswaf9v7ho4pni> and the Global Nutrition Cluster's *Emergency Response Preparedness Toolkit* available at: <https://www.nutritioncluster.net/emergency-response-preparedness-erp> See also UNICEF, *Guidance on Risk-Informed Programming*, 2018

## A.6 Planning IM and assessment transition

A plan for the transition (or phase-out) of the Information Management (IM) and assessment functions performed by the cluster must be developed, including a plan for knowledge management. This should be a specific plan, either as a dedicated component or in complement to the main cluster transition plan.

After cluster deactivation, demand or need for data and IM is likely to change, and few coordination structures will have the capacity to engage on IM and assessment in the same way as the clusters: IM transition is likely to involve either adaptation or phase-out of functions. It can be supported by efforts to streamline IM functions from earlier in a response.

The IM transition plan should reflect the cluster's IM tools and products, data collection and handling processes<sup>49</sup>, information sharing protocols, and documentation and archiving.

The Global Cluster/AoR IM team should be consulted to advise on data responsibility, archiving of cluster data and products<sup>50</sup>, suitable IM functions to be transferred in the context, and processes of this transfer.

Similar steps should be followed to develop an IM transition plan as for the main cluster transition strategy:

1. [Context assessment (likely, this will already be covered in the main cluster analysis)];
2. Identify future IM needs, and if any cluster functions need to be transitioned and/or phased out;
3. Identify which stakeholders need to be engaged in IM transition and planning, and whether other structures exist relevant to IM implementation and transition;
4. Identify which body/bodies can take over any IM functions that need to be continued;
5. Develop a plan for the adaptation and transition, or phase-out, of IM functions.

The following should be considered:

- ✔ **Consider who will continue to use the data and information, for what, when, and how?**
- ✔ **Define specific functions that will continue (methods of data collection, analysis and outputs may need to change).**
- ✔ **Some IM activities may be stopped when the cluster deactivates: these should be responsibly phased out.**
- ✔ **Understand the current processes and systems of the actor taking over any IM functions, their willingness to take on new functions, and their realistic capacities - and design the handover accordingly.**
- ✔ **Aim to maximise sustainability, and minimize introduction of new or costly systems.**

- Rather than just directly handing over processes and tools used by the cluster, continuation of IM functions is more likely to be sustainable if they are adapted to be in line with systems already used by the receiving body<sup>51</sup> - this can be supported by earlier interoperability (e.g., having common standards for data collection and management).

49. And data inventory, data management, data handling, storage, retention, access protocols.

50. Consider also continuation of document hosting on ReliefWeb, which may be discussed at inter-cluster level or with OCHA.

51. Transition from closed and proprietary software to open ones by leveraging integration technologies like APIs. This facilitates the sharing of data and information wherever feasible.

- Ensure any tools (hardware and software) needed are already used and have guaranteed long-term funding, or are free, to ensure sustainability.
- Consider engaging local and national actors to enhance capacity.
- Advocate for sufficient allocation of funding and resources to sustain IM functions.

- ✔ **Assess capacities of the staff and organization taking over IM functions, and any resources, staffing, training or capacity-strengthening needed.**
- ✔ **Define responsibilities of the CLA during the transition.**
- ✔ **Ensure good communication of the transition plan with all stakeholders, particularly to organizations used to relying on the cluster's data and analysis to inform their own programming or strategic planning.**

Additional considerations include to:

- **Consult end-users as well as the entity taking over IM functions, on functions needed for continued operational implementation and/or preparedness planning:**
  - Identify and consult stakeholders, to ensure any IM or assessment functions vital for continued operational implementation or preparedness planning are maintained.
  - Ensure the design of IM and assessment activities that will continue is appropriate and accessible for both end-users and the capacities of the entity taking them over.
  - Consider the functions that the cluster IM and assessment work performs, and if these need to be continued, not necessarily the individual processes and products. For example, asking if: *"after the cluster deactivates, will there still be a need to collect and share information on which organizations are implementing which type of interventions, and where?"*. If the decision is that this information is still needed, then the most appropriate way to do this can be designed - rather than starting with trying to hand over the cluster's full 4W reporting process and products.
- **Consider different options for handover, and integration with existing systems:** The responsibility for IM and assessment functions could be handed over to different bodies, or in a different timeline (before or after), than other coordination functions. For example, a CLA might continue technical assessments under their own strategic priorities while conducting systems-strengthening to enhance government capacity to eventually take these over. If this occurs, the CLA should continue to share data and analysis to inform remaining actors' planning processes. Any transfer of functions to government should consider existing national emergency monitoring systems, with integration or institutionalization of the responsibilities aimed for, to maximise sustainability. The possibility of integration with government systems will depend on the context and should take into account humanitarian principles and protection considerations (e.g., IM systems for humanitarian response may be run in parallel when the government is a party to conflict). Suitable options should be determined based on the context, needs for data and analysis, and capacities.
- **Consider different capacity-strengthening options:** methods can include trainings, joint work for a set period of time, or other methods such as secondment of IM staff into the coordination body taking over IM activities before the longer-term systems-strengthening conducted by the CLA enables the hand over all functions.
- **Archive data and files, and make data and cluster documents available for any future use, in line with any data protection and information sharing protocols already in place:**
  - Clusters often have access to a lot of data, which can easily be lost if a transfer is not well-planned. Ensure data that might be needed for future analysis is stored in a location that can still be accessed, and that its potential users know what data exists, and how to use it.



- The same applies to other knowledge managed by a cluster. For example, technical guidance or SOPs can be maintained or adapted to be more recovery- or preparedness-focused, and should be made available to operational actors after cluster deactivation if needed.
  - Key documents should be shared with the Global Cluster/AoR for archiving.
- **Ensure policies on data protection and responsibility underpin plans for data handover and future collection and handling of humanitarian data, including the IASC [Guidance on Data Responsibility in Humanitarian Action](#).**
- **Ensure Information Sharing Protocols (ISP) and Data Protection Protocols (DPP) are respected: plans for IM transition must respect existing provisions in any data policies.**
- A response-level ISP might be updated at inter-cluster level as part of an overall transition process, to which a cluster IM team should contribute.
  - Where clusters/AoRs have specific ISP and DPP for sector activities, such as case management, these should ideally contain instruction on what happens on deactivation. They should be respected during the transition process and updated for partner use after deactivation if needed. Good communication to cluster members on this should be ensured. Contact the Global Cluster/AoR for support as needed.
- **Support effective utilization and maintenance of systems by the receiving body by providing documentation of IM processes and tools (i.e., standard operating procedures, methodologies, and any customized tools)<sup>52</sup>.**

## **ANNEX B - Example Transition Strategy template**

See separate document

## **ANNEX C - Example Risk Analysis template**

See separate document

## **ANNEX D - Example template for communication planning**

See separate document

## **ANNEX E - Examples of cluster transitions**

See separate document

<sup>52</sup>. This should include clear and comprehensive metadata standards, definitions, and documentation that detail the structure, meaning, and relationships of metadata used in the IM system.

