

Post-transition planning

Part 2: Considerations for Responding to HCT Discussion Questions

On 10 June 2025, NRC shared a series of suggested HCT discussion questions to support planning for transitions of the interagency humanitarian system at country level. Where a decision has been made to transition or deactivate the interagency humanitarian system, humanitarians can expect the eventual deactivation of clusters, ceasing of HNRPs, deactivation of HCTs, and de-hatting of HCs. Mechanisms like OCHA-led pooled funds may also be stood down. In most countries, UN agencies will continue to be guided by the UN Sustainable Development Cooperation Framework and will coordinate via the UNCT. Maintaining inclusive space for NGOs, including local and national NGOs, requires more deliberate planning.

This document offers considerations for NRC representatives (and other interested actors) in responding to the suggested HCT discussion questions, and focuses on planning for:

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A. Operational Response

- 1) *What type of operational response will remain needed following the transition? Are there areas with severe needs that will continue to require humanitarian assistance and protection? Will the response take on a more solutions or longer-term recovery orientation?*
 - a) *Do response organizations currently have funding to sustain this type of programming? Where and for how long?*
 - b) *Do national or local actors have capacity and willingness to take over these response needs? Are there any specific parts of the response that will require continued engagement by international actors?*

Considerations

- As suggested in the first question, the HCT may wish to take stock of the current response needs in the country – e.g. where and how many people are in areas categorized as having severe needs (4/5) and if/where there are displaced populations that need support for solutions.
- Alongside the assessment of needs, the HCT (potentially in collaboration with the UNCT) should consider the willingness and capacity of different national and local actors to respond. This could be government line ministries, local and city governments, private sector actors, as well as local civil society. Discussions could also assess the readiness of other types of international actors, e.g. development and peacebuilding, to play a stronger role.

- Building on the above, the HCT (again potentially in collaboration with the UNCT and relevant national/local actors) should consider the different possible response modalities going forward – e.g. to what extent can remaining needs be met by supporting the inclusion and integration of affected persons into local systems and services? Are there any specific actions or interventions needed to support this integration (e.g. access to documentation)? Are there populations or locations where people may face exclusion and have needs that will continue to require individual support?
- Where there is a need for continued engagement by international actors, HCT discussions should also include a realistic assessment of resourcing. While current project grants may outlive the transition timeline, it is likely that humanitarian funding may decrease in the mid to longer term. This awareness should be built into HCT operational planning.

A note on NRC operations

- While not the focus of this document, it will be important for the NRC Country Office (CO) to also reflect on how its own operational engagement may need to adapt to an accelerated transition context. The CO presence review tool can be used to support this internal analysis. It includes questions on targeting, locations, structural barriers, presence of other actors, and financial health to determine the best continuing type of presence for NRC, and whether transforming the response type (e.g. direct, indirect, or hybrid implementation, or shift in geographic priorities), scaling up, scaling down to light footprint operations, or exit are advisable.

B. Coordination structures

2) What, if any, operational coordination (e.g. sectoral coordination and/or multi-sector area-level coordination) will remain needed following the transition? Which parts of the operational response defined above would this coordination serve?

a) Should/could existing coordination structures (e.g. for development, solutions, or NGO coordination) serve these functions? Are they inclusive of all relevant actors (including NGOs)?

Considerations:

- Three primary objectives may need to be considered:
 1. Coordination of any continuing humanitarian response.
 2. Preparedness and response for any new emergencies.
 3. Links to (or integration with) coordination of solutions or longer-term recovery activities.
- Any remaining/new coordination structures should reflect the future operational orientation, as determined by the answers to question 1 above – e.g. whether shifting to government-led response to remaining humanitarian needs, or toward solutions or longer-term recovery efforts.
- Coordination arrangements should reflect the *need* for coordination. If the number of actors or scale of response for a specific sector or area will significantly reduce, having

standalone coordination capacities in that sector or area may no longer be necessary. If some coordination remains needed but the numbers of partners have reduced, actors could also shift from having sectorized clusters to light, multi-sector coordination at the area level. Coordination also does not necessarily need to be formalized – partners working in an area can continue to informally meet to coordinate their work.

- In most cases, post-transition coordination structures do not need to (and most likely, shouldn't) resemble the clusters. Eventual structures and leadership may also look quite different from sector to sector. A useful starting point is to consider what coordination *functions* need to continue.¹ Partners could also consider a light standby coordination arrangement that could be activated as needing, rather than a full time standing structure.
- In considering options, it may be helpful to reflect on the following:
 - i) What coordination services are needed to support NRC's (and other NGOs') own response and to ensure that NRC's response is coherent with and contributing to a wider approach – e.g., knowing where other actors are responding, advocacy on policy or legal reforms, or agreement on technical standards – determining what is essential, and what are 'nice-to-haves'.
 - ii) Where these coordination functions would best sit, for NRC – they may not all continue to be held in the same place or at the same tempo. E.g., regular meetings with sectoral actors to exchange information could be of value, but advocacy on policy reform may be taken forward by a few specialized actors.
 - iii) What does NRC need the UN for, and what could be done via formal or informal coordination between NGOs and/or in direct coordination with government.
- For some sectors, integration of coordination functions into development coordination bodies might be considered. The UN's own development coordination (e.g. the UN Country Team and the UNSDCF mechanisms) is not inclusive of NGOs. Other development sectoral bodies are often country-specific, with specific remits and limited civil society participation.² In this case, it is important to understand their existing membership, remit, and ways of working – to be able to determine not only how they may pragmatically take on humanitarian coordination functions, but also how NGO inclusion can be ensured.

Examples

In Iraq, governorate-level coordination after humanitarian transition expanded to cover humanitarian-development-peace issues. These groups were chaired by local authorities, co-chaired by an international actor, with the UN Mission taking on secretariat functions, open to national and international actors.

In Nepal, for some sectors sub-national coordination bodies are activated in an emergency, led by local authorities and including all response actors, especially local actors. A national body meets quarterly to review preparedness, with membership of government departments, UN and key NNGO and INGOs. While this is mandated in national disaster management protocols, sustained efforts have been needed to maintain the structures and the knowledge and buy-in of all actors.

¹ IASC, *Guidance on Cluster Transition and Deactivation*, 2024 'Chapter 4 – Planning for transition' helps break down a process for Cluster (Co)-Coordinators to identify necessary coordination functions to continue.

² For example, led by government with participation of International Financial Institutions (IFIs) and UN.

For clusters, some examples of different ideas for transition can be found in an annex to the IASC guidance – although with varying implementation success.

3) *If the HCT will be deactivated, where should strategic decision-making take place on responses to residual needs?*

a) *How can we ensure NGOs (including local/national NGOs) have a voice in this? How will the structure link to any future operational coordination mechanisms? How will it link to the government?*

Considerations:

- It is worth noting that this may be of greater concern for NGOs than for UN agencies, for whom strategic coordination will continue via the UNCT. NGOs sitting on the HCT may thus have to push hard if they feel the need for the continuation of some type of inclusive strategic decision-making body.
- If new emergencies are anticipated (e.g. high risk of disaster, or resurgence of conflict), maintaining a strategic coordination body that periodically meets to review preparedness plans, and can rapidly convene, take decisions, and link with government in an emergency, may be prudent.
- NGOs may need to consider:
 - (i) If NGO forums can provide a representative function, and any format changes that would be needed for them to be sustainable and to facilitate civil society linkages.
 - (ii) If large INGOs – such as NRC – can access some UN-led spaces that are not open to all civil society actors, they would need to consider the advocacy or representation responsibilities they may have.
- NGOs can also consider proposing that the question of the future of the HCT be deferred - In past transitions, HCTs have typically remained for at least some time after clusters were deactivated. There is therefore precedent to maintain a body if needed, at list in the mid term. Few, if any, examples exist of simultaneous deactivation of all IASC structures, and there is little guidance on planning HCT transition.³

C. Coordination leadership

4) *Are national actors, especially government, willing and able to take on response coordination leadership in line with humanitarian principles? If not, how will this be taken into account for post-transition structures and processes?*

Considerations

- In past transitions, retaining international leadership for some coordination functions (e.g. for specific protection issues) or in specific locations (e.g. hard-to-reach or non-government-controlled areas) has been considered.

³ See considerations for adapting HCTs in [OCHA, UNDP, DOCO, *Lessons Learned and Good Practice Tool: Adapting coordination mechanisms to support national transitions*, 2012](#), pages 15-17

- If government counterparts are *unwilling* to take on response leadership, introducing co-chairing or ‘coordination support’ functions may help sustain coordination.

5) *If authorities are anticipated to take over any coordination leadership, what is needed to embed this within government structures and processes? E.g. in staff ToRs, department budgets, and capacities or ongoing support.*

Considerations

- Experience from past transitions suggests that embedding coordination functions within department functions, staff ToRs, and budgets can be key to ensuring sustainability. However, these can take considerable time to negotiate and finalise – even when government counterparts are willing and motivated.
- Bridging arrangements for coordination could be considered – e.g. a UN agency or NGO co-chairing for a set time before fully handing over.
- ‘Coordination support’ roles to government leads – a UN agency or NGO providing co-chairing, secretariat, or technical support (such as information management) – has been highlighted as key to the success in sustaining coordination after past transitions. This, of course, requires some level of ongoing funding and commitment. It may change over time (e.g., scale down after an initial handover period).

Examples

The Philippines and Nepal provide good examples of emergency coordination being integrated into national disaster management legal frameworks and protocols, after cluster deactivation. Government leadership of sectoral and sub-national coordination mechanisms is supported by international actors, with civil society participation. Maintenance of preparedness is mandated. Sub-national coordination may be standing, or activated when a disaster occurs.

6) *If local/national NGOs, international NGOs, or UN agencies will take on coordination leadership roles, or coordination support roles, what funding and/or resourcing will this require to be sustainable? How can this be supported?*

Considerations:

- The design of any coordination body and the activities it will carry out should be realistic to the future capacities likely to be available for coordinators. A simpler structure, that has clear leadership but does not require funding for dedicated coordinators, may be more sustainable than a more resource-heavy body.
- Discussions with donors on any needed funding should ideally take place sooner rather than later. Coordination structures may need a plan for how they will be continued if funding ceases.
- Coordination requires a specific skillset, and it shouldn’t be assumed that program staff will always be well-suited to do this. Capacity development for coordination skills may need to be built into transition plans and anticipated for future staff turnover.

- NRC and other INGOs should reflect on how they can support in mentoring or transferring capacity to local actors to support them to assume coordination leadership roles, such as putting in place a gradual handover plan for any leadership roles currently held by NRC.

D. Collective planning and fundraising

7) *Should needs monitoring, with the ability to flag any arising severe needs, continue? If so, how could this be managed going forward?*

Considerations

- As a starting point, consider what *collective* monitoring may still be needed, for where (e.g., specific geographic areas with continued high severity needs or protection risks) – and what (collective) decisions this will realistically inform.
- Consider different options for how needs monitoring could be conducted – e.g., individual organizations sharing their analysis, rather than conducting a collective needs assessment – and how this will be managed and its findings (or flags) actioned.
- If it is decided that collective needs monitoring should continue, consider how to make this light, manageable, and how it will be resourced. E.g., rather than a full multi-sector needs assessment, conducting a light assessment and analysis with a substantially slimmed-down scope, looking only at critical indicators contributing to morbidity and excess mortality. Outsourcing a light needs analysis could be an option, if multi-year funding is available to contract this. Alternatively, individual organizations could volunteer their assessment resources and analysis capacity.

8) *Will collective fundraising and/or strategic response planning continue to be needed? If so, what could this look like?*

Considerations

- There is currently no formal planning modality that bridges HRPs and UN Sustainable Development Cooperation Frameworks. However, country operations could still develop a joint planning, fundraising, or advocacy tool. The lack of a framework for this is recognized as a gap at global level.
- The ability to produce any kind of collective response plan – even a very light version – and use this for fundraising, will depend on the coordination structures (e.g., if a strategic decision-making body is maintained) and capacities available to compile contributions.
- It may be worth considering priorities in need of collective engagement (e.g., any areas with severe needs that need collective attention), and what individual organizations can achieve.
- Even if there will not be a formal UN product, NGOs could work together to produce an annual overview of needs (even without costing), using data from any needs analysis that is maintained.

9) *If OCHA-managed pooled funds close, what avenues could there be to support L/NNGOs to access funding?*

Considerations

- If any NGO-led crisis response funds are already active, NGOs could advocate for donors to continue to support the fund to maintain or increase support to L/NNGOs.
- If any INGOs or NNGOs are well suited to set up partnership facilities or intermediary funding mechanisms, they could explore whether any donors would be willing to support such a mechanism for a time-bound period. If not, NGOs could consider whether there is appetite for joint advocacy toward donors to support this.
- The HCT could review whether any development financing actors (including through government ministries) are already funding L/NNGOs. If so, they may wish to consider how this could be coordinated with any future collective planning efforts that will be put in place.
- NRC and other INGOs should consider if and how to support L/NNGOs to strengthen the institutional capacity needed to directly access funding, including through domestic sources if/where possible.
- NRC's report "[Out of the Ordinary](#): New approaches to financing NGO-led crisis response mechanisms" provides examples of NRC- and other NGO-led mechanisms that have been successful in supporting L/NNGO funding access.

E. Protection, access, and diplomacy

10) *If the HC will be de-hatted (i.e. reverted to an RC), who will take on any future diplomacy or advocacy relating to remaining humanitarian issues, including as it relates to protection, access, or civic space?*⁴

11) *Are there any specific protection issues (e.g., risks for specific groups in specific locations, or advocacy on specific issues) that must be taken into special consideration in a) planning for transition of protection coordination? and b) overall transition planning, requiring risk analysis and mitigation actions?*⁵

12) *Are there any hard-to-reach areas or access issues that may need special consideration for how coordinated response is continued and led? Will any engagement or collective advocacy on humanitarian access need to continue? Who would lead this?*

13) *Are there any other specific issues that will require continued diplomacy or advocacy? (E.g., relating to resolutions to displacement, civil documentation, HLP rights.) Who will be responsible for this?*

⁴ The role of RCs in humanitarian settings: paragraph 39 of UNGA 46/182 states that: "The Resident Coordinator should also normally coordinate the humanitarian assistance of the United Nations system at the country level. He/she should facilitate the preparedness of the United Nations system and assist in a speedy transition from relief to development. He/she should promote the use of all locally or regionally available relief capacities. The Resident Coordinator should chair an emergency operations group of field representatives and experts from the system."

⁵ For more information, NRC and the Global Protection Cluster recently published a practice note on promoting continuity of protection in humanitarian coordination transitions, available [here](#).

Considerations:

- It may be helpful for NRC and other NGOs to consider:
 - What the priority collective issues are likely to continue to be – for example, access in hard-to-reach areas, specific protection issues, or needed policy changes to support solutions.
 - What NGOs could realistically collectively achieve towards these issues (and how), and what UN contribution may still be needed.
- If there are specific protection issues identified that must be taken into consideration, it may also be necessary to consider how collective protection monitoring related to these issues – with the ability to flag any concerns – might be continued and would could lead on this.
- For protection coordination, there are examples from past transitions of international actors retaining leadership – particularly in conflict or post-conflict contexts where protection risks for specific groups, or specific policy issues, continued.⁶ Many actors felt it was important to maintain a neutral and safe space to discuss residual protection issues and responses.
- NB: the IASC guidance on transition states that both response-level and cluster transition plans should incorporate a risk analysis and mitigation measures – including for protection risks. It also contains considerations for the Centrality of Protection in transition planning.⁷

Interagency resources on transitions

- The [IASC Guidance on Cluster Transition and Deactivation, 2024](#) contains:
 - **For HCs/HCTs** – [key considerations](#), and a [checklist](#), for overall transition planning.
 - **For clusters and Cluster Lead Agencies** – [guidance for clusters](#), [templates](#), and [examples](#) of different models of past cluster transition.
- Considerations for **adapting HCTs** and **sub-national coordination** can be found in [OCHA, UNDP, DOCO, Lessons Learned and Good Practice Tool: Adapting coordination mechanisms to support national transitions, 2012](#).
- **For protection considerations** see: [Global Protection Cluster and NRC, Practice Note: Continuity of Protection in Humanitarian Coordination Transitions, 2025](#)

⁶ See, for example, the [Iraq Protection Platform](#), established during the transition of the Iraq Protection Cluster.

⁷ See [IASC Guidance '1.3 Centrality of Protection' and 'A.3 Conducting risk analysis'](#); the [IASC Checklist for HCs and HCTs](#), and [Example template for risk analysis](#).