

Recommendations for interagency coordination following the US funding withdrawal

In this extremely difficult funding environment, it is clear that the interagency coordination system will have to undergo a major contraction – far above and beyond the “efficiencies” and “prioritization” conversations that were already underway prior to the US Executive Order. There are proposals to deactivate the humanitarian coordination system altogether in some contexts, while scaling back significantly in others.

On 26 February, the Emergency Relief Coordinator sent a message to all HCs asking HCTs to consider how to simplify coordination structures at national and sub-national levels. The message from the ERC did not define what this should look like, but noted that it should be “as light and as local as possible.” This document aims to support these HCT discussions by outlining some recommendations from NRC’s perspective.

1. **Consider how the US funding withdrawal affects coordination needs.** Coordination arrangements should reflect the volume of partners/programs requiring coordination: if the US funding withdrawal has led to far fewer partners/programs in a sector or location, having standalone coordination capacities for that area may be less necessary. NRC fully supports the ERC’s appeal for coordination that is “as light and as local as possible,” and believes that in many contexts, multi-sector coordination at sub-national level could offer a useful complement or alternative to sectorized coordination at national level (see more on this in point 3). NRC also notes that there may be differences between operational coordination needs and strategic/leadership needs – even if many clusters deactivate, for example, there may still be a need for an empowered HC and an active HCT to continue advocacy and high-level engagement efforts.
2. **Consider how to redistribute remaining coordination capacities.** In NRC’s view, the independence of cluster coordinators should be preserved wherever possible and double hatting should be avoided at national level unless absolutely necessary. NRC also recognizes that coordination is a specific skillset, and it cannot be assumed that program colleagues will always be well-suited to do this. With this in mind, the following options could be considered:
 - a. **From global level, redistribute remaining UN and NGO coordination capacities across prioritized contexts.** If a UN agency or NGO is able to maintain an independent (i.e. not double hatted) coordinator position in a particular context, the other coordinator could potentially be shifted elsewhere – with the aim of having a single, independent coordinator (either UN or NGO) in all priority contexts. National clusters that have more or less resources than they believe are needed for their context are encouraged to reach out to their global cluster.
 - b. **Merge cluster capacities at national level.** Where there is a close relationship between two clusters (e.g. health and nutrition, or nutrition and FSL), these could share a coordinator. Meetings could be merged where possible, or continue to be held separately if needed.
 - c. **Promote leadership by national NGOs.** National and local leadership of clusters is long overdue already. Now more than ever, this could be actively promoted and pursued.

In doing so, however, it will be important to ensure the NGOs are given space to truly engage independently – if their primary funding comes from the Cluster Lead Agency, they may feel less comfortable pushing back when needed.

- d. **Pool information management capacities.** This might work particularly well where multiple clusters are coordinated by the same agency, but could also be managed independently.
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3. **Simplify and consolidate sub-national coordination.** In the current funding environment, we simply cannot afford to have clusters replicated at all sub-national levels. This is not only about resourcing for the coordination positions (recognizing that many sub-national coordinators are double hatted); it is also about the time it takes for partners to attend a multitude of parallel meetings.
 - a. Concretely, NRC encourages simplifying and consolidating sub-national coordination, defaulting to multi-sector, area-based coordination wherever possible (led either by OCHA or whichever actor is best-placed). While some sector-specific coordination may still be needed at state/governorate/provincial level where there are a multitude of partners, this should again preferably be consolidated to the greatest extent possible (e.g. by relevant clusters and AORs meeting together).
 4. **Consolidate operational presence.** One of the challenges with current coordination practices is that there are simply too many organizations with which to coordinate. UN agencies, large NGOs, and donors alike should be more intentional in concentrating their footprint and resourcing – namely, by delivering the full range of their relevant programming in an area, rather than dispersing their sectoral responses across different locations. While project-funded organizations may have less flexibility to make immediate changes to where their programs are located, they could either ask their donors for flexibility on this or work to further consolidate their presence when submitting new proposals.

As of 04 March, it is not yet clear if and how global clusters or IASC entities will be involved in validating the coordination proposals put forward by HCTs. While NRC supports the ERC's decision to ask HCTs to outline their suggestions, we also believe that there will be a need for a global level review of these proposals to ensure coherence across operations – e.g. to ensure one operation isn't left with high coordination needs but zero coordination resources while another is fully staffed, and to ensure certain sectors are not consistently deprioritized. NRC will advocate for this from Geneva.

To conclude, NRC is conscious that many of our operations, and those of our peers, are facing severe cuts – cuts that mean lifesaving programs will be put on indefinite hold. While this paper focuses on how to manage the US funding withdrawal as it relates to coordination, we believe it is vital to direct the maximum resources to operational response. Even with these incredibly difficult circumstances though, and perhaps all the more because of them, we also continue to believe that effective coordination is needed to make sure that assistance and protection reaches where it is needed most. Our responsibility is to identify how we can deliver the essential elements of coordination with the least resources possible.