

## The humanitarian reset: what's at stake, and what we're doing about it

As many of you know, in March the ERC initiated a “humanitarian reset” to identify measures to contract, refocus, and improve the efficiency of interagency humanitarian responses in view of the funding crisis. This reset has the potential to lead to dramatic changes for the humanitarian system globally and for responses at country level. NRC is working to inform and influence the reset process and wanted to take a moment to summarize the likely impacts of some of these developments and how we are engaging.

- **“Accelerated transitions” (i.e. deactivations) of country-level humanitarian systems.** The Emergency Directors Group (EDG) has proposed an accelerated transition of the humanitarian system in eight countries: Cameroon, Colombia, Eritrea, Iraq, Libya, Nigeria, Pakistan, Zimbabwe. This will likely involve the deactivation of the clusters, “de-hatting” the Humanitarian Coordinator (HC; reverting them back to Resident Coordinator), deactivation of the Humanitarian Country Team (HCT), and the discontinuation of the Humanitarian Needs and Response Plan (HNRP) process that underpins collective planning and fundraising. Each country is likely to have a slightly different timeline for deactivation.
  - NRC’s view: Given the funding crisis we face, the system has no choice but to downsize. In doing so, however, we should be aware that for countries where coordination systems are deactivated, there will be less humanitarian leadership, less visibility for the crisis, less humanitarian funding, greater reliance on government and development actors, reduced ability to identify and scale up to new needs, and a limited coordination framework for NGOs. This may carry particular risks for neglected crises, which could become even more invisible and under-resourced. There will be a need for stepped up engagement with development-oriented actors in these settings.
  - What we’re doing: Over past weeks, NRC worked to try to ensure that the deactivation decisions were carefully targeted – advocating to maintain the interagency system where it is needed and to withdraw only where the needs are lower and/or the environment is conducive for handover. For the IASC Emergency Directors’ Group (EDG) discussions on this, we promoted a criteria-based approach to decision-making – focused on response and coordination needs, but also including attention to protection issues and contextual factors like sanctions regimes and territorial control issues that would impact the ability of other actors to step in. Now that the deactivation list has been finalized, we will be working through our NRC Country Offices and with other NGO peers to help facilitate as smooth a transition as possible. We have already developed and shared a practice note on how to ensure continuity of protection following deactivation – available [here](#).
- **Country-level reprioritization of resources.** At the end of February, the ERC asked each Humanitarian Coordinator (HC) to work with the HCT to reprioritize their HNRP, focusing on the areas with the most severe needs (level 4 and 5 if using the HNRP intersectoral severity assessments) and activities categorized as lifesaving (i.e. under Strategic Objective [SO] 1 of the HNRP) or protection focused (i.e. under SO2).
  - NRC’s view: With nearly half the funding pulled out of humanitarian responses, reprioritization is an unfortunate necessity: we need to make sure the remaining resources reach the people whose needs are most life-threatening. Unless there is a

collective realignment, guided by the reprioritized HNRPs, then some locations and sectors that were more heavily dependent on US funding will be disproportionately affected by the cuts. But equally, unless the reprioritization process is approached carefully, there is also a risk that certain sectors could be excluded or that response modalities revert back to “truck-and-chuck” approaches that are less cost effective, sustainable, and not necessarily based on the preferences or needs of communities.

- What we’re doing: In February and March, we worked to shape the reprioritization criteria (e.g. to ensure protection was also recognized as a priority) and to support troubleshooting at country level. We also advocated with OCHA for the global clusters have the chance to review the reprioritized national plans to ensure the approaches they set out make sense within and across operations. The plans are now gradually being made available on humanitarianaction.info (unfortunately without prior review from global clusters). Going forward, we will continue troubleshooting issues with the reprioritized plans. Recognizing the need for urgent action to avoid leaving serious gaps, we will proactively work to encourage future decisions about funding and presence to be guided by the reprioritized plans – to ensure we are collectively focused on meeting the most severe needs, in a manner that is sustainable and promotes solutions.
- **Future of the Humanitarian Programme Cycle (the HPC, i.e. HNRP process)**. The HNRP is the tool that helps us understand protection and assistance needs, develop a shared response strategy, and fundraise within and across operations. While it serves an important purpose, there was recognition even before the current funding crisis that the process had become much too heavy. Given that coordination and information management capacities are acutely affected by the funding cuts, conversations about more radical changes to the HNRP process have now been expedited.
  - NRC’s view: Major reform of the HNRP is long overdue, and we are encouraged to see new space for this discussion. At the same time, some aspects of the HNRP process are important and useful, both for the overall system and for individual organizations, including NRC. This includes, for example, having a comparable understanding of need within and across crises to allow for effective targeting and equitable resourcing. Unless these useful elements are understood and protected, the future HNRP could inadvertently cut pieces that are helpful to operations while retaining heavy, compliance-focused dimensions that can be an impediment to operational focus.
  - What we’re doing: Together with NGO peers, NRC is working to understand which aspects of the HNRP process are most useful for different actors within the humanitarian system. We will then use this to inform our engagements in the Humanitarian Programme Cycle Steering Group, which will be discussing the future of the HNRP process in June.
- **Country-level coordination downsizing**. When the ERC sent his reprioritization request to HCs in February, he also asked them to consider if/how country-level coordination could be downsized. Limited guidance was offered on how to do this, beyond making it as light and local as possible.
  - NRC’s view: NRC has long supported making coordination lighter. We believe that coordination structures should be based on *coordination* needs (not response needs), and that given the reduced resources, we need to look for efficiencies

wherever possible while still preserving the space for critical technical discussions where necessary.

- What we're doing: Over the past two months we have offered recommendations globally and at country-level on how coordination downsizing could be approached, focusing on flexible, modular options that respond to local coordination needs. As the next section will describe further, we are now discussing these issues with a more-forward looking lens at global level, while continuing to troubleshoot issues that are emerging relating to structures at country level.
- **Future of humanitarian coordination.** Following his directive to the HCs, the ERC also tasked the IASC OPAG (Operational Policy and Advocacy Group) Co-Chairs with looking at the future of the interagency coordination system. This process may result in major changes to our current coordination structures, including shifting to greater use of area-based coordination, simplifying the form and functions of clusters, and better integrating coordination for refugees, IDPs, and other crisis-affected populations. Recommendations will be made by the OPAG Co-Chairs by the end of May, and we expect decisions to be taken at the IASC Principals meeting in June.
  - NRC's view: As noted above, NRC is in favor of a lighter, more operationally focused coordination architecture and we are pleased to see greater willingness for change in the UN system than there has been in the past. These future structures will define how we work together going forward. Given the magnitude of humanitarian needs and the number of actors responding, retaining some type of functioning coordination remains essential. But we also need to ensure that the future system does not solidify existing power imbalances or cost inefficiencies, or create even more fractured and parallel coordination structures.
  - What we're doing: NRC is actively engaging in the process being led by the OPAG Co-Chairs and is pushing for future coordination to be more operational, less process-focused, and more efficient for those who participate. We are drawing on past internal reflections on area-based coordination and alternative coordination structures including considering where and how NGO-led coordination could be better utilized.
- **Refugee response downsizing.** While not explicitly part of the ERC's humanitarian reset, major changes can be expected for refugee responses. As of mid-April, UNHCR has not shared much on their thinking on this, beyond that they plan to add a fundraising-focused cover note to Refugee Response Plans to help indicate the costs of funding cuts and the value of maintaining funding. We know they are also already in the process of making cuts to their own operations.
  - NRC's view: NRC believes that it is critical that there be a clear, criteria-based approach to downsizing assistance in refugee responses. We recognize that these criteria may be different than those used in non-refugee responses, but a criteria-based approach is nevertheless needed to ensure we are meeting the most severe needs across operations. We also need to consider coherence between refugee and non-refugee responses.
  - What we're doing: Together with peers, NRC is working to raise these issues with UNHCR – first to emphasize that there is a need for an interagency approach to this (given that this is not just a question of UNHCR's own operations but also affects the decision-making of NGOs and donors), second to get agreement that a criteria-based approach is needed, and third, to then agree what those criteria should be.