

Office for the Coordination  
of Humanitarian Affairs

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**A.**  
**THE**  
**INTERNATIONAL**  
**EMERGENCY**  
**ENVIRONMENT**



**United  
Nations**

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# A. THE INTERNATIONAL EMERGENCY ENVIRONMENT

Before deploying on a UNDAC mission, it is essential to understand fundamental aspects of international emergency response, including its underlying principles and the role of the UNDAC concept within the broader framework. This chapter offers a broad overview of international humanitarian assistance during disasters, humanitarian response mechanisms and coordination structures, and the key stakeholders involved.

## A.1 Introduction

A sudden-onset emergency situation is often characterised by overwhelming needs, competing priorities, destroyed or damaged communication and transportation infrastructure, a rapid influx of providers of humanitarian assistance coupled with an outburst of mutual aid from local communities, as well as overwhelmed and highly stressed officials from governmental and non-governmental institutions. Given this view of an emergency, an image of chaos quickly springs to mind.

The opposing view would be one of coordinated activities and structures that bring order to the chaos. At its best, coordination contributes to humane, neutral, impartial, timely and relevant assistance, increased management effectiveness, a shared vision of the best possible outcomes from a given situation, a seamless approach to service delivery and donor confidence resulting in sufficient resources to achieve the desired outcomes, i.e., the least possible amount of human suffering and material damage, seamless recovery and a rapid return to normal living conditions and the ongoing progress of development.

There are some fundamental tenets that define the framework of international emergency response and influence coordination of humanitarian assistance. This chapter provides UNDAC members with an introduction to principles, authorities,

frameworks and the general context which govern international humanitarian response.

### A.1.1 Tenets of international emergency response

International emergency response is humanitarian assistance to a crisis-affected population that seeks, as its primary purpose, to save lives and alleviate suffering. Humanitarian assistance is deeply rooted in history and culture, from ethno-religious beginnings and post-war interventions to the 'modern' era of humanitarianism. Considered as the desire to lend assistance to others, humanitarian action is as old as humanity itself.

The UN was established on 24 October 1945 by 51 countries committed to preserving peace through international cooperation and collective security. Today, nearly every nation in the world belongs to the UN and membership totals 193 countries. When States become members of the United Nations, they agree to accept the obligations of the UN Charter, an international treaty that sets out basic principles of international relations. According to the Charter, the UN has four purposes: to maintain international peace and security; to develop friendly relations among nations; to cooperate in solving international problems and in promoting respect for human rights; and to be a centre for harmonising the actions of nations. The UN Charter, Article 1.3, mentions humanitarian assistance, in particular, where it defines that one of the UN's purposes is "to achieve international co-operation in solving international problems of an economic, social, cultural, or humanitarian character, and in promoting and encouraging respect for human rights and for fundamental freedoms for all without distinction as to race, sex, language, or religion".

In **December 1991**, the UN General Assembly (GA) adopted the ground-breaking [Resolution 46/182](#) "**Strengthening of the coordination of emergency**

**humanitarian assistance of the United Nations”**, which is the foundation of the international humanitarian system as we know it today. It laid down the key principles for humanitarian action as well as the ‘architecture’ of international humanitarian assistance. Along with the humanitarian principles set forth in the Geneva Conventions and other international legal frameworks, GA Resolution 46/182 continues to shape how humanitarian work is conducted and organised.

GA Resolution 46/182 agreed on **guiding principles for the Member States and the UN and the establishment of coordination mechanisms**. The Resolution determined the following:

- Humanitarian assistance must be provided in accordance with **basic humanitarian principles** that provide the fundamental foundations for humanitarian action. Humanitarian principles are central to establishing and maintaining access to affected populations whether in the context of a sudden-onset disaster, an armed conflict, or a protracted humanitarian crisis that occurs in a context where there is a total or considerable breakdown of authority resulting from civil conflict and/or foreign aggression.

Promoting compliance with humanitarian principles in humanitarian response is an essential element of effective humanitarian coordination.

- **Humanity** – Human suffering must be addressed wherever it is found. The purpose of humanitarian action is to protect life and health and ensure respect for human beings.
- **Impartiality** – Humanitarian action must be carried out on the basis of need alone, giving priority to the most urgent cases of distress and making no distinctions on the basis of nationality, race, gender, religious belief, class or political opinions.
- **Neutrality** – Humanitarian actors must not take sides in hostilities or engage in controversies of political, racial, religious or ideological nature.
- **Independence** – Humanitarian action must be autonomous from the political, economic, military or other objectives that any actor may hold with regard to areas where humanitarian action is being implemented.

- The **sovereignty, territorial integrity and national unity** of countries must be respected, and international assistance can only be provided with the consent of the affected country. The UN Charter, Article 1.3 (see quotation above), describes the overarching UN mandate for humanitarian coordination. Another fundamental principle is, however, defined in the UN Charter, Article 2, which states that no international organisation or country can intervene in another country without consent. The national Government is the absolute authority within the borders of its own territory. As such, the responsibility and authority to assist and meet the needs of a society lies with its own Government. A Government can ask or welcome assistance from other States or organisations, but assistance cannot be forced upon them unless a majority of the members of the UN Security Council can agree that the matter is of such importance that humanitarian assistance must be imposed. To deploy to another country without being requested and without being welcomed or in other ways invited, can, regardless of intentions, be considered an act of force similar to an invasion and will be considered a violation of international conventions. Consequently, all international assistance is conducted in support of national authorities and upon request, irrespective of the desire of international organisations to respond immediately.
- The **affected country has the primary lead role** in the initiation, organisation, coordination and implementation of humanitarian assistance within its territory. For most disasters caused by natural and anthropogenic hazards, the affected State is a willing and legitimate partner and does request (or ‘welcome’) international assistance. In more complex emergencies, however, the legitimacy and territory of the State may be in violent dispute. In some situations, a legitimate Government may not exist and, even if it does, it may have limited authority and capability. This situation makes adherence to the above principles problematic in complex emergencies. In these cases, the commitment to the victims may supersede the commitment to the State. More likely, however, coordination efforts will need to acknowledge the legitimacy of competing authorities and humanitarian advocacy will become a strong focus. Thus, one may need

to develop and maintain effective relationships not only with the State but also with the antagonists, political opposition and in some situations, non-state actors.

- At the same time, sovereign States are called upon to facilitate the implementation of humanitarian assistance by intergovernmental and non-governmental organisations, particularly when capacity is lacking.
- The UN play a central and singular role in providing leadership and coordinating the efforts of the international community in support of the affected countries.

In line with these principles, no international organisation has the authority to tell another organisation what to do. The UN is an organisation of Member States that works through consensus. It is not a world government, and it does not make laws. It does, however, provide the means to help resolve international conflicts and formulate policies on matters affecting the whole world. Within the UN, all Member States, regardless of size, political views or social systems, have a voice and a vote in this process. As a result, **several UN bodies**, i.e., departments and offices of the UN Secretariat, specialised agencies, funds and programmes, **have been given a mandate to provide or coordinate international assistance** within their field but without any authority to command, direct or order. This is a privilege that remains with State authorities only.

Aligned with humanitarian principles, the **'do no harm' principle**, rooted in medical ethics, underscores the obligation of humanitarian organisations to strive to minimise the harm they may inadvertently cause through their presence in providing assistance. This requires vigilance to prevent aid provision and assistance from reinforcing nepotism, corruption, or negative power structures, or from becoming entangled in the dynamics of a context, which may create dependency or diminish the state's responsibility for social welfare through job creation, tax income, and other means. Such unintended negative consequences may be wide-ranging and extremely complex. To minimise potential longer-term harm, humanitarian organisations should provide assistance in ways that support recovery and long-term development while

prioritising localization, community engagement, and accountability.

## A.1.2 Recent developments

The **World Humanitarian Summit (WHS)**, held in Istanbul in May 2016, was an important moment for the global humanitarian agenda, aimed at fundamentally reforming the humanitarian aid community to react more effectively to today's many crises. It generated a global momentum and political determination to do more for people worldwide and resulted in global change initiatives, which have shaped the humanitarian system moving forward. The WHS resulted in about 1,500 commitments from 400 UN Member States and other organisations. One of the Summit's main achievements was **'The Grand Bargain'**, a set of 51 'commitments' to enhance the efficiency, effectiveness, and accountability of the humanitarian system, with a renewed focus on serving affected populations more directly. Major global change initiatives alongside the 'Grand Bargain' were the 'Agenda for Humanity' and the 'Humanitarian-Development-Peace' Collaboration (the HDP Nexus).

**'The Grand Bargain 2.0'** was endorsed in June 2021, with a redefined focus on greater transparency, the use of cash-based programming, quality funding and localisation (more support and funding tools for local and national responders). While considerable strides have been made in fulfilling several commitments since 2016, substantial challenges still exist. **'The Grand Bargain 3.0'** started in 2023 and centres on enhancing funding mechanisms, empowering local entities, and integrating affected communities into decision-making processes.

Following these updates, there has been a notable escalation in humanitarian needs, driven and exacerbated by emerging crises, conflicts, the impacts of climate change, as well as public health emergencies such as the Covid-19 pandemic. A fragmented and fiercely competitive geopolitical scenario worsens these challenges, undermining collaborative global endeavours to tackle them. Simultaneously, the existing system is strained due to limitations in available resources. It is anticipated that the operating environment will grow more complex over the coming decade.

In line with this, **OCHA's Strategic Plan 2023-2026 'Transforming Humanitarian Coordination'** outlines six transformational priorities to address the challenges of this rapidly changing landscape:

- A coherent humanitarian response that is people centred, context specific, contributes to community resilience and promotes concrete protection outcomes.
- Systematic and predictable leadership on access.
- Durable solutions to protracted internal displacement.
- Humanitarian response that is inclusive and leaves no one behind.
- Catalytic humanitarian financing that delivers impact in people's lives.
- Strategic analysis of risks and trends to adapt to an evolving landscape.

These priorities address the most critical areas where transformation is needed, adaptation is possible and OCHA has a key leadership role.

In 2023, OCHA further launched the **Flagship Initiative** which represents a radical shift in humanitarian coordination and response. It aims to deliver solutions and build resilience by ensuring the priorities of crisis-affected communities drive humanitarian assistance. The initiative seeks to systematically engage communities in decision-making, empower local partners, and put community priorities – and not sectors – at the heart of humanitarian programming, while creating the space for a more holistic, community-driven, and sustainable humanitarian system, one that is ready to face a new reality of increasingly complex challenges.

The Flagship Initiative stems from the need to reshape humanitarian response as we know it. Humanitarian emergencies are more frequent, complex, and protracted, but the operating environment is becoming more resource-constrained, uncertain, and complex. At the same time, the current standardised approach to coordination and response often does not give sufficient space to empowering local actors, systems, and people, and this in turn does not foster the long-term resilience of crisis-affected communities nor help communities move beyond dependence on humanitarian assistance.

And yet, in times of increased humanitarian need and reduced humanitarian resources, resilient communities, better prepared to overcome crises, will be essential to sustaining humanitarian response in the future.

Therefore, at the heart of the Flagship Initiative lies systematic and participatory community engagement, alongside area-based, decentralised humanitarian coordination, empowerment of local initiatives, direct funding, and rethinking planning and programming - as illustrated in **Figure A.1**.

Colombia, Niger, the Philippines, and South Sudan were chosen to pilot this initiative.

## A.2 Humanitarian response mechanisms

In all disasters requiring international assistance, a range of organisations or entities will provide relief. These range from national and local authorities, through UN agencies, to international and national response organisations. Again, [GA Resolution 46/182](#) provides the basic architecture for the international humanitarian system. In addition to the above-mentioned principles, the resolution established the following entities:

**Figure A.1: The Approach of the Flagship Initiative**



- The position of an **Emergency Relief Coordinator (ERC)**, at Under-Secretary-General (USG) level, to coordinate and facilitate humanitarian assistance.
- The **Inter-Agency Standing Committee (IASC)** as the primary mechanism to coordinate the assistance of UN and non-UN humanitarian partners. Under the leadership of the ERC, the IASC develops humanitarian policies, agrees on a clear division of responsibility for the various aspects of humanitarian assistance, identifies and addresses gaps in response and advocates for effective application of humanitarian principles.
- The establishment of the **consolidated appeal process (today's Humanitarian Response Plans) and the Central Emergency Response Fund (CERF)** which could disburse swiftly up to \$450 million per year for sudden-onset emergencies, rapidly deteriorating situations and protracted crises that fail to attract sufficient resources (while today, CERF has a funding target of \$1 billion per year).
- The establishment of the **Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA)**, called the **Department of Humanitarian Affairs (DHA)** until 1998, with offices in Geneva and New York to provide institutional support to the ERC/USG.

The following sections provide an overview of the primary actors involved in coordination of international emergency response.

## A.2.1 The Government

As per [GA Resolution 46/182](#), the Government of a disaster-affected country bears the primary responsibility for humanitarian assistance and coordination. Structures that allow Governments to manage, prevent and respond to disasters have become increasingly sophisticated and are founded typically upon a civil protection approach with operations using an incident management system. Most countries have a National Disaster/Emergency Management Authority or Civil Protection Agency to oversee and coordinate risk analysis, preparedness and response, but capacities and capabilities of these agencies may vary.

A general framework for coordination within the Government at the capital level is headed by a Minister/Secretary of State and supported by disaster/emergency management resources. The disaster management structure will typically include all the different sectors of humanitarian activity like health, water, sanitation, education, agriculture/food security, infrastructure and logistics, security, etc., headed by relevant ministry officials. The structures are further reflected at provincial, district, municipal and village levels with the relevant heads of office in these areas.

At the regional level, the affected Government could reach out to inter-governmental bodies to provide assistance and support. In some regions, there are established humanitarian assistance and coordination mechanisms that are rapidly deployable and work with Member States to coordinate relief supplies, military asset deployment and assessment teams, e.g., the European Union (EU), the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN), and the Caribbean Disaster Emergency Management Agency (CDEMA). Response teams of these regional intergovernmental organisations are increasingly becoming a first point of call due to their proximity and membership of the affected Government. See also **Chapter G.13** for regional approaches to coordination.

## A.2.2 The Emergency Relief Coordinator (ERC) and OCHA

The Emergency Relief Coordinator (ERC) oversees all emergencies requiring humanitarian assistance, coordinating and facilitating the UN system's response to emergencies that demand a coordinated response. As the most senior UN staff for humanitarian crises, the ERC advises the Secretary-General, mobilises and coordinates international collective efforts to meet the humanitarian needs of people in emergencies in a coherent and timely manner, and ensures the coordinated assistance and protection of internally displaced persons. Additionally, the ERC facilitates, including through negotiation if needed, access by the operational organisations to emergency areas for the rapid provision of emergency assistance by obtaining the consent of all parties concerned. The ERC also acts as the central point for governmental, intergovernmental, and non-governmental relief activities. The ERC is supported by OCHA and also serves as the Under-Secretary-General (USG) for Humanitarian Affairs (i.e., the head of OCHA).

OCHA is part of the United Nations Secretariat and is responsible for bringing humanitarian actors together to ensure a coherent response to emergencies. OCHA also ensures there is a framework within which each actor can contribute to the overall response effort, one that places people at the centre and ensures full respect for the rights of all individuals through inclusive strategies in protection and gender equality (see also **Chapter G.2**). OCHA has various resources and tools to support humanitarian action worldwide, of which the UNDAC team is one. Consequently, UNDAC teams deployed in sudden-onset disasters work towards the same overarching mission objectives as OCHA.

The OCHA mandate stems from [General Assembly resolution 46/182 of December 1991](#), which, in its annex, states: "The leadership role of the Secretary-General is critical and must be strengthened to ensure better preparation for, as well as rapid and coherent response to, natural disasters and other emergencies." To this end, it also establishes the

ERC, who works with the Secretary General and the Inter-Agency Standing Committee (IASC), in leading, coordinating and facilitating humanitarian assistance.

OCHA's mission is to coordinate the global emergency response to save lives and protect people in humanitarian crises and to advocate for effective and principled humanitarian action by all, for all. It operates through a network of offices in the field which support Member States and Humanitarian Country Teams (HCT) and facilitates the work of operational agencies that deliver humanitarian assistance to populations and communities in need.

OCHA's activities are focused around five core functions:

- **Coordination** – OCHA coordinates humanitarian response to expand the reach of humanitarian action, improve prioritisation and reduce duplication, ensuring that assistance and protection reach the people who need it most. Through critical situational and gender-responsive analysis, OCHA provides a comprehensive picture of overall needs and helps a diverse set of actors achieve a common understanding of the humanitarian context and a collective plan for the response.
- **Advocacy** – OCHA raises awareness of forgotten crises. Promotes respect for international humanitarian law (IHL), brings the voices of crisis-affected people to the forefront and helps people obtain access to humanitarian assistance.
- **Policy** – OCHA helps set the agenda for humanitarian sector reform and effectiveness in response and promotes the normative framework for international humanitarian action.
- **Humanitarian financing** – OCHA mobilises financing mechanisms to ensure that humanitarian needs are met, and coordination mechanisms are promoted.
- **Information Management** – OCHA provides information management services to the humanitarian community to inform a rapid, effective and principled response.



### A.2.3 The Inter-Agency Standing Committee (IASC)

An important function of the ERC is to lead the IASC which is the primary mechanism for inter-agency coordination relating to humanitarian assistance.

It is a unique inter-agency forum for coordination, policy development and decision-making involving the key UN and non-UN humanitarian partners. The IASC was established in June 1992 by [GA Resolution 46/182](#) and is thus the longest-standing and highest-level humanitarian coordination forum.

The IASC Principals meet to address urgent operational issues that require system-wide collaboration. In addition to coordinating emergency response efforts (including deciding on whether to activate emergency system-wide procedures, “Scale-Up”), the IASC convenes to coordinate critical advocacy efforts in support of operations (including on access negotiations, protection of civilians, and resource mobilisation), and leads system-wide efforts in the formulation of humanitarian policies.

The IASC has the following objectives:

- To develop and agree on system-wide humanitarian policies.
- To allocate responsibilities among agencies in humanitarian programmes.
- To develop and agree on a common ethical framework for all humanitarian activities.
- To advocate for common humanitarian principles to parties outside the IASC.
- To identify areas where gaps in mandates or lack of operational capacity exist.
- To resolve disputes or disagreement about and between humanitarian agencies on system-wide humanitarian issues.

The IASC is composed of heads or designated representatives of UN operational agencies and a number of standing invitees from outside the UN system. In practice, no distinction is made between ‘Members’ and ‘Standing Invitees’ and the number of participating agencies has expanded since the inception of the IASC in 1992 (to 18 organisations/bodies as of November 2023).

In fact, the strength and added value of the IASC lies in its broad membership, bringing together UN agencies, international organisations, the Red Cross/Red Crescent Movement and non-governmental organisation (NGO) networks.

### A.2.4 The UN Resident Coordinator (RC) and the Humanitarian Coordinator (HC)

Depending on the country’s context, different leadership functions and coordination structures are operational to deliver on the mandates and functions of the UN system. The same individual may perform different functions, ‘wear different hats’, supported by different coordination mechanisms for decision-making, along with offices and departments offering advisory and substantive support in executing these functions.

The **UN Country Team (UNCT)** is the main mechanism in-country for inter-agency coordination, coherence and decision-making. The UNCT exists in 130 countries, covering all of the 162 countries where there are United Nations programmes. The UNCT includes all the UN entities working on sustainable development, emergency, recovery and transition in programme countries - regardless of if they have a physical presence or not. The UN Sustainable Development Cooperation Framework (UNSDCF), agreed with the Government, is the most important instrument for the planning and implementation of UN development activities in each country. The UN Cooperation Framework is the point of departure in defining the activities and composition of each UNCT and the specific focus of respective country programmes of each agency.

The UNCT is led by the **UN Resident Coordinator (RC)**, who is the representative of the UN Secretary-General in a given country and the highest-ranking representative of the United Nations Development System (UNDS) at the country level (see **Figure A.2**). The roles and responsibilities of the RC and UNCT members are outlined in the [Management and Accountability Framework](#).

In case of an emergency and/or where an existing humanitarian situation worsens in scale or

complexity, the Emergency Relief Coordinator (ERC) may appoint a **Humanitarian Coordinator (HC)**. The functions of an HC are separate from an RC, but these positions are often combined in one person – the RC/HC. In a limited number of situations where the Resident Coordinator is not considered to have the necessary humanitarian profile, the Emergency Relief Coordinator may, following consultations with the IASC, choose to appoint a separate person as HC.

The HC is accountable to the ERC and has overall responsibility for ensuring that humanitarian response efforts are well organised. The HC leads the **Humanitarian Country Team (HCT)** which is a strategic and operational decision-making forum for humanitarian coordination in a country. Contrary to the UNCT which is for UN entities only, the HCT is composed of representatives from NGOs and the Red Cross/Red Crescent movement in addition to UN agencies (see **Figure A.2** and **Section A.3.1** below for more information on the HCT).

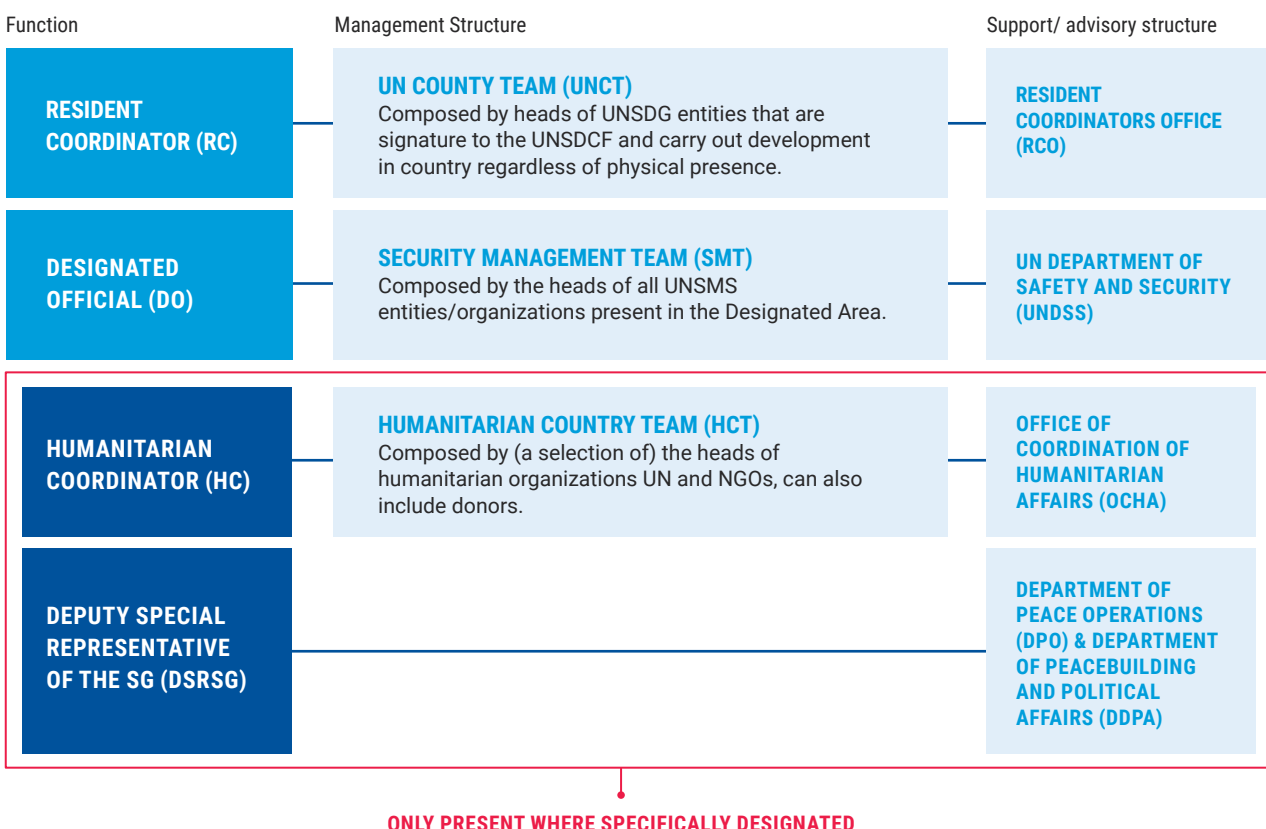
As part of preparedness efforts, the RC(/HC) and the UNCT coordinate disaster preparedness and mitigation activities, monitor and provide early warning of potential emergency situations, and lead

contingency planning. The HC function and the HCT may phase out once the emergency subsides or may continue focussing on preparedness in countries that are regularly struck by hazards, while the UNCT is maintained in all cases.

In contexts where integrated peacekeeping or special political missions are deployed, the RC also fulfils the function as the **Deputy Special Representative of the Secretary General (DSRSG)**, see **Figure A.2**. As DSRSG, they contribute to the formulation of the integrated strategic framework with the peacekeeping and/or political missions, and facilitate the complementarity of the UNCT's work with UN peacekeeping or political missions to fully contribute to prevention, building resilience, sustaining peace and to transition planning and management.

As the highest-level official, the RC normally also performs the function of the **Designated Official (DO)**, see Figure 2. The DO is accountable for the safety and security of all individuals covered by the UN Security Management System (UNSM) in a specific area, called the Designated Area. The DO is supported by the Security Management Team and UNDSS.

**Figure A.2: The multiple functions across one individual – RC, HC, DO and DSRSG**



## A.3 Humanitarian coordination

In collaboration with national authorities and humanitarian actors, and considering the context, available resources, and existing capacities and mechanisms, the RC is responsible for determining the most adequate and efficient coordination ‘architecture’. The aim is to ensure that (i) all stakeholders involved in the emergency response collaborate towards shared, strategic objectives, and (ii) humanitarian initiatives are devised and implemented in a principled, efficient, and complementary manner. Effective coordination is vital to prevent a disorganised and fragmented response. Understanding the mandates of various actors engaged in the response—such as community-based organisations, faith-based organisations, national and foreign military forces, local and international NGOs, the private sector, the Red Cross/Red Crescent Movement, UN entities, and neighbouring states—is crucial for the RC. Despite their diverse mandates, accountabilities, and cultures, the RC must strive for coordination among them.

The types, duration, and locations (national or sub-national) of coordination mechanisms depend on the scale and complexity of the crisis. Emphasising the value added by coordination is important to ensure buy-in. Overall, coordination structures should be light and streamlined to improve how humanitarian actors collectively meet the priority needs of affected people, without duplication or gaps. The coordination framework for international responders should complement existing national and local mechanisms rather than creating separate structures. Flexible approaches allow for adaptation over time, potentially increasing the involvement of local actors, national authorities, or development partners as the situation transitions from emergency to recovery.

Dialogue with national counterparts is essential for establishing the humanitarian architecture, ensuring their support for international preparedness and response mechanisms, and clarifying how

international roles complement national efforts. Transparency is crucial for maintaining effective coordination and collaboration with national counterparts leading response efforts.

The humanitarian architecture typically includes one or more of the following components:

- **Humanitarian Country Team (HCT):** chaired by the RC, responsible for strategically coordinating the international response and preparedness.
- **Clusters or Government-led sectors:** comprising operational UN agencies/NGOs, the Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement, and often government actors, responsible for coordinating service delivery and identifying gaps in designated sectoral priorities.
- **Inter-Cluster or Inter-Sector Coordination Group (ICCG/ISCG):** comprising sector/cluster coordinators, ensuring coordination among sectors for a coherent response and supporting the HCT by addressing key operational concerns.
- **Information Management Working Group (IMWG):** comprising OCHA, sector/cluster, agency, and occasionally government IM officers, tasked with harmonising IM activities and achieving consensus on common data sets.

Additionally, alongside the HCT, ICCG/ISCG, and clusters (that will be described in more detail below), the RC, in collaboration with the HCT, may establish other coordination groups to support activities such as IM, needs assessment and analysis, cash and voucher assistance (CVA), risk management, administration of country-based pooled funds (CBPFs), humanitarian access, and humanitarian civil-military coordination.

In initiating humanitarian coordination in a new emergency, it is crucial that all UNCT/HCT members understand the rationale behind it and the steps being taken to establish it, ensuring consistent messaging on the issue. Likewise, incoming UNDAC teams need to understand that they collaborate with different counterparts of the HCT or distinct UNCT-specific bodies like the Emergency Response Preparedness Working Group.

### A.3.1 The Humanitarian Country Team (HCT)

A Humanitarian Country Team (HCT) is established in all countries where a Humanitarian Coordinator (HC) position exists. In countries without an HC, the HCT is formed in response to humanitarian crises, significant deterioration in chronic vulnerability, or sudden-onset emergencies, bringing together relevant actors in humanitarian response. Additionally, the HCT may be convened for preparedness activities if no other suitable coordination mechanism exists. The decision to establish an HCT in countries without an HC position is made by the Resident Coordinator (RC) in consultation with operational agencies and the Emergency Relief Coordinator (ERC).

Chaired by the HC, the HCT serves as the highest-level international humanitarian body in the country, functioning as a strategic and operational decision-making and oversight forum. Comprising a select group of country directors from relevant UN agencies, NGOs, and the Red Cross/Red Crescent movement, the HCT has broader membership compared to the UN Country Team (UNCT), which includes only UN agencies, see **Figure A.3** below. Organisations designated as Cluster Leads should represent their respective clusters and organisations within the HCT.

The HCT is primarily responsible for strategic decision-making, such as agreeing on common strategic issues related to humanitarian action and providing guidance to the Inter-Cluster Coordination Group, clusters, and other established structures. It should be a forum which mirror-images the IASC at the country level. However, it may not only consist of the standard IASC member organisations but should also bring together representation from other organisations that undertake humanitarian action in-country and commit to participate in

coordination arrangements. Some HCTs have also decided to include representatives of key assisting Governments and/or donors in their membership or as observers. The size of the HCT should be limited, however, to allow for effective decision-making, with the main criteria being operational relevance. The HCT's membership is governed by the [IASC Standard Terms of Reference](#).

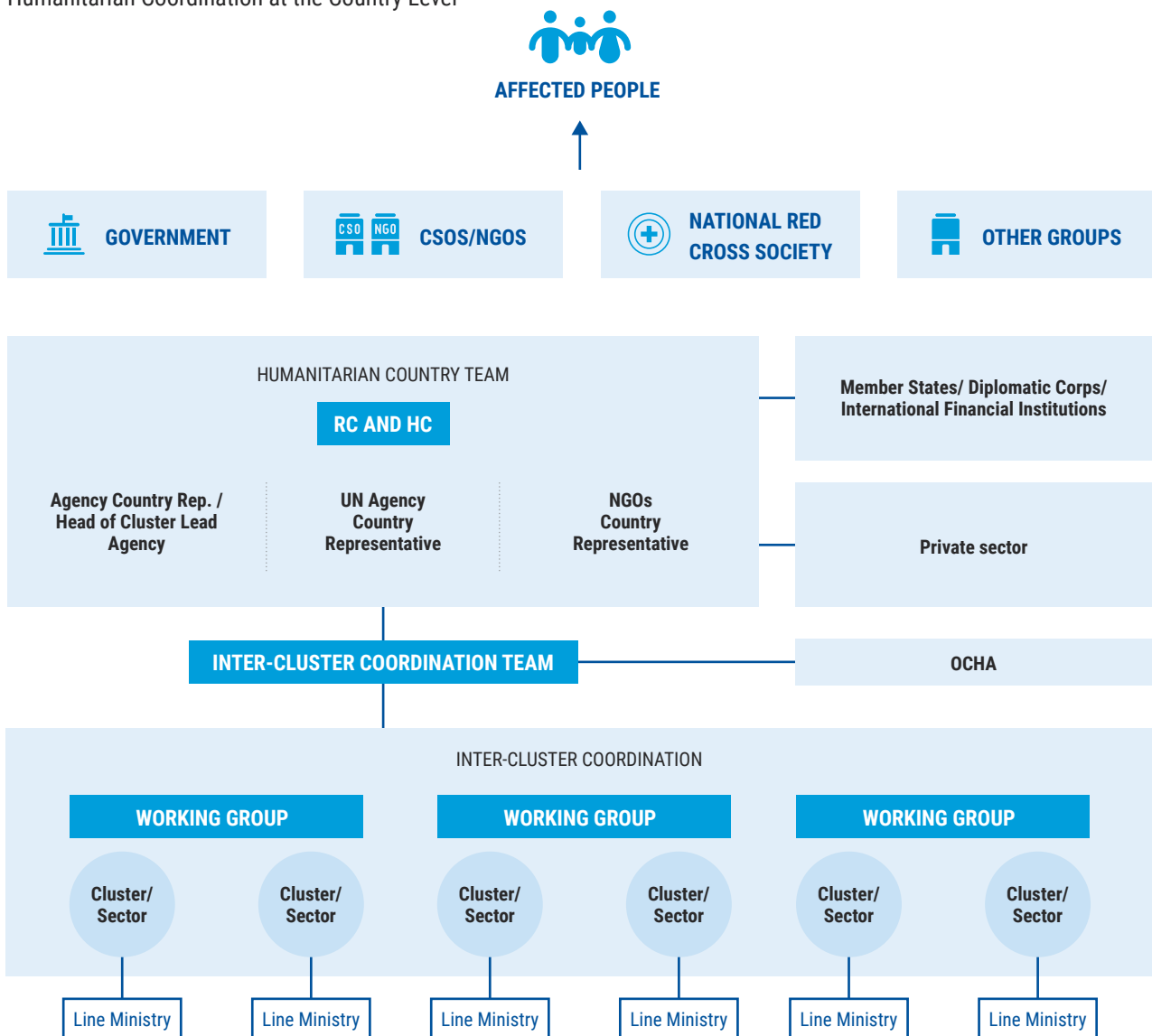
The HCT's objective is to provide strategic direction for a collective inter-agency humanitarian response, i.e., to ensure that the activities of participating organisations are coordinated, and that humanitarian action in-country is principled, timely, efficient and effective, and contributes to longer-term recovery. Upon its establishment, the HCT promptly addresses pressing operational humanitarian issues. The HC and HCT must swiftly determine the necessity for additional coordination structures and expertise to support the response, potentially through sector-specific coordination mechanisms such as clusters (detailed below).

OCHA supports the HC in establishing an appropriate coordination framework consistent with the guidelines and procedures of the IASC. As the secretariat to the HCT, OCHA further aids the HC in fulfilling their coordination role by facilitating effective connections with other coordination entities, including the Inter-Cluster Coordination Group (ICCG) or the Inter-Sector Coordination Group (ISCG).

It is important to note that the UNCT and HCT operate concurrently and serve distinct purposes without replacing each other. It falls under the responsibility of the RC, RC/HC, or HC to ensure synergy between these entities. Additionally, the HC may choose to establish a separate platform to facilitate information exchange either with the broader humanitarian community or with donors.

**Figure A.3: Humanitarian Coordination Structure**

Humanitarian Coordination at the Country Level



### A.3.2 Humanitarian coordination structures and the Cluster Approach

The needs of a disaster-affected population are commonly identified by sectors of humanitarian response, e.g., health, food, shelter, etc. Such sectors have been historically recognized as a common modality of organising disaster response and organisations (e.g., government agencies, NGOs, UN agencies) have traditionally specialised themselves in working in one or more sectors.

Generic structures for coordinating humanitarian operations exist. However, whether they are applicable is dependent on the affected Government's wishes, the particular needs of the situation, available resources and what is culturally, contextually and politically pertinent. In situations where a resourceful and effective governmental structure for disaster response exists, incoming international organisations should adopt a model that supports this. Nevertheless, in situations where the coordination needs overwhelm national capacities, additional structures may be required for the international response.

In 2005, a major reform of humanitarian coordination, known as the Humanitarian Reform Agenda, introduced a number of new elements to enhance predictability, accountability, partnership, and leadership, including the Cluster Approach. Clusters are groups of humanitarian organisations, both UN and non-UN, working in each of the main sectors of humanitarian action. The aim of the Cluster Approach is to strengthen system-wide preparedness and technical capacity to respond, and to provide leadership and accountability. Global Cluster Leads are designated by the IASC in eleven sectors of humanitarian activity, with clear responsibilities for coordination and ensuring a sufficient level of preparedness within their cluster.

The Global Cluster Leads provide the following types of support to strengthen field response:

- Technical surge capacity.
- Trained experts to lead cluster coordination at the field level.
- Increased stockpiles, some pre-positioned within regions.
- Standardised technical tools, including for information management.
- Agreement on common methods and formats for needs assessments, monitoring and benchmarking.
- Best practices and lessons learned from field-tests.

The Cluster Approach also provides a structure which can facilitate partnerships with host Governments, local authorities and local civil society.

**Figure A.4: Global Clusters and their Cluster Leads**



At the country level, cluster leadership should be assigned to the organisation best suited for the role, which may not necessarily be a UN agency or the Global Cluster Lead agency. Clusters are typically 'activated' in response to a new large-scale emergency, significant deterioration in an existing humanitarian situation, or the emergence of coordination gaps. Activation of clusters is based on specific needs, meaning that not all clusters need to be activated depending on the circumstances. The decision to activate clusters is made as part of the international emergency response, following analysis of humanitarian needs and coordination capacity by the HCT and in consultation with national partners. The RC/HC recommends cluster activation only when there is an identified need that is not being adequately addressed.

### A.3.3 The Inter-Cluster Coordination Group

The Inter-Cluster Coordination Group is chaired by OCHA and brings together all clusters active in a given country to collaborate on operational response.

The group focuses on closing delivery gaps, eliminating duplication, and ensuring an impartial, people-centric response. This is done by reaching a shared understanding of needs, informed by a robust protection and gender analysis, and agreeing on a joint strategy to meet the needs. The Inter-Cluster Coordination Group both facilitates communication and serves as a conduit for cross-cutting technical and strategic issues from the clusters to the humanitarian country team and vice versa.

When two or more clusters are activated, the RC/HC and HCT are responsible for establishing an inter-cluster (or inter-sector) coordination group (ICCG). The ICCG is composed of each cluster's coordinator (and co-coordinator, if applicable). OCHA is responsible for the functioning, including secretariat, and chairing of the ICCG. In cases where clusters are not officially activated, coordination may take place within sectors, usually co-led by UN agencies and government line ministries.

### A.3.4 Field-level coordination structures

The key objective of international humanitarian action is to support national efforts in meeting the needs of a disaster-affected population. It is important to remember that when governments request international humanitarian support to respond to disasters, national legal systems are the main regulatory frameworks for all response, relief and recovery activities.

To activate one or more clusters, the RC/HC agrees with the HCT which should be activated based on contingency plans or the type and scale of the emergency, and with a clear rationale that takes into account national capacity and needs. The selection of a Cluster Lead Agency (CLA) ideally

mirrors the global-level arrangements, but this is not always possible and, in some cases, other organisations may be better placed to take the lead. Upon agreement within the HCT, the RC/HC sends a letter to the ERC outlining the recommended cluster arrangements. The ERC transmits the proposal to IASC Principals and Global Cluster Leads for approval within 24 hours and informs the RC/HC accordingly.

Any decision on **cluster activation** should be taken in consultation with the affected Government who should, as far as possible, co-chair the clusters at different levels, from capital to field locations.

**At the strategic level, inter-cluster coordination** takes place within the HCT under the leadership of the HC. The HCT comprises the CLAs (at Country Representative/Director level) and selected operational partners involved in the response, and it is within the framework of this strategic decision-making forum that the overall humanitarian response operation is guided and led.

**The designated CLA** leads and manages the cluster. Where possible, it does so in co-leadership with Government bodies and NGOs. At country level, heads of Cluster Lead Agencies are accountable to the HC for:

- Ensuring that coordination mechanisms are established and properly supported.
- Serving as a first point of call for the Government and the HC.
- Acting as a provider of last resort in their respective sector.

The RC/HC will lead the international humanitarian response in consultation with national authorities and the HCT. While the style of leadership exercised is consultative, in the first three months of a large-scale emergency crisis the RC/HC will need to exercise considerable judgement to enable swift decision-making. This decision-making ability will be supported through enhanced accountability to the ERC, who will require more regular briefings from the HC during this period. The RC/HC will be accountable to the ERC for the management of an effective and well-prioritised response.

In certain large-scale emergencies, the RC/HC will be empowered to lead the response to the crisis for an initial period of three months. Speed in decision-making is essential. To be effective, the RC/HC must be empowered to make timely decisions in strategic key areas, such as setting of overall priorities, allocating resources, monitoring performance and dealing with underperformance.

**At a programmatic level, inter-cluster coordination** generally takes place within the framework of an Inter-Cluster Coordination Group (ICCG) or Inter-Sector Coordination Group, formed by cluster coordinators from each cluster. The cluster coordinator for each individual cluster provides leadership and works on behalf of the cluster, facilitating coordination at an operational level within the cluster, while maintaining a strategic vision and developing an operational response plan. They also ensure coordination with other clusters in relation to inter-cluster activities and quality response issues. The cluster coordinators are responsible for ensuring that cluster-specific concerns and challenges that cannot be solved within the cluster are raised and properly discussed at the HCT, and that ensuring strategic decisions are shared and acted upon at operational level.

**Cluster members** should adhere to the **minimum commitments** that set out what all local, national or international organisations undertake to contribute. They include:

- A common commitment to humanitarian principles and the Principles of Partnership.
- Commitment to mainstream protection in programme delivery.
- Readiness to participate in actions that specifically improve accountability to affected populations.
- Understand duties and responsibilities associated with membership of a cluster and commit to consistently engage in the cluster's collective work as well as cluster's plan and activities.
- Commitment to ensure optimal use of resources and sharing information on organisational resources.

- Commitment to mainstream key programmatic cross-cutting issues.
- Willingness to take on leadership responsibilities as needed and as capacity and mandates allow.
- Contribute to developing and disseminating advocacy and messaging for relevant audiences.
- Ensure that the cluster provides interpretation so that all cluster partners are able to participate.

OCHA/UNDAC provides guidance and support to the HC and HCT and facilitates inter-cluster coordination. OCHA/UNDAC also helps ensure coordination between clusters at all phases of the response, including needs assessments, joint planning, and monitoring and evaluation.

Even if coordination of international humanitarian response is not hierarchical, the generic humanitarian coordination model may be depicted by the illustration on the following page.

However, whilst one may strive to accomplish a given structure, in reality, it often has to be adapted to situational needs. Given the special nature of international relief, the particulars of the disaster-affected country, the policy of donor Governments, and a multitude of other factors, there is no set answer to how disaster relief may be coordinated. Every disaster has its own dynamics and, thus, its own solutions to coordination.

The **key objective of the Cluster Approach** is to ensure a coordinated approach with agreed leadership of international assistance in support of the Government lead role. This approach is not the only humanitarian coordination solution. In some cases, the Cluster Approach may coexist with other, non-cluster coordination solutions – whether national or international – or an alternative sectoral approach may be preferable. An indiscriminate application of all clusters, in every emergency, at every location/level, may waste resources and reduce opportunities for Governments to exercise their primary responsibility to provide humanitarian assistance to people in need. Coordination should have a clear objective and be result- and action-driven, rather than process-driven. See also **Chapter G.6** for more information on inter-cluster coordination.



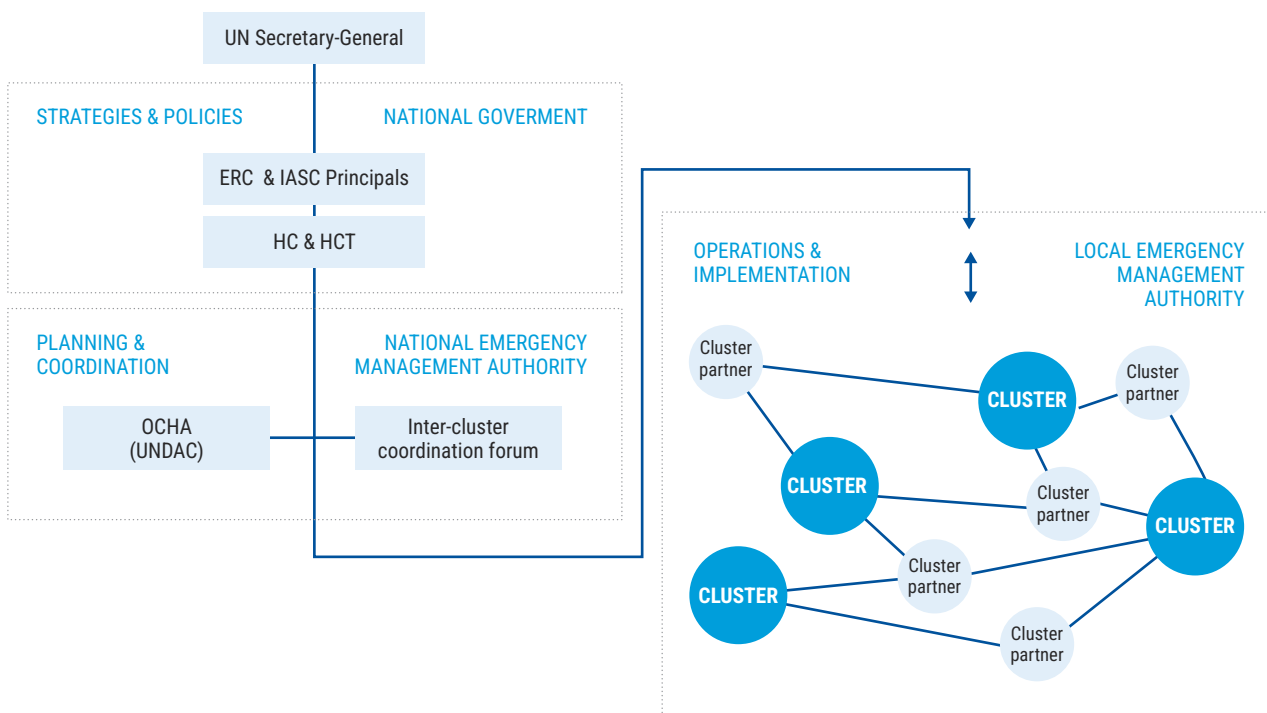
## Area-based coordination

Area-based coordination (refer to **Section A.1.2**) brings coordination and decision making closer to affected communities and prioritises genuine community engagement and centres coordination and action around the needs and priorities of affected populations. It involves organising coordination efforts at the subnational level while ensuring active participation and input from local communities. This approach emphasises collaborative decision-making processes with affected communities and involves a wide range of stakeholders beyond traditional clusters and sectors.

Below are ten evolving observations on area-based coordination from the Flagship Initiative (see also **Section A.1.2**):

- Area-based coordination needs to be organised around **genuine community engagement and people's priorities**. Area-based coordination encompasses, not only deploying staff to the subnational level, but ensuring that coordination is based around listening to communities and acting upon their priorities. Area-based coordination and programming will not be effective unless it is underpinned by communities' priorities.
- The area-based approach should ensure that **community engagement** is carried out **in a coordinated and collaborative manner**. With area-based coordination platforms, actors should coordinate how, when and with whom consultations take place, share results and analyse relevant information from such engagements and make decisions upon them. There must be a collaborative mindset of all actors on the ground beyond mandates, clusters and sectors.
- **Coordination and decision-making** (including planning and program design) should be **decentralised and take place at sub-national levels, in close collaboration with communities**. Subnational coordination platforms should be empowered to discuss and design holistic programs around people's priorities – which might diverge from the usual siloed cluster planning and convene a broad spectrum of actors around this.
- Area-based planning should be **outcome oriented**, outlining the humanitarian contribution towards identified priorities. Priorities will often be forward looking, with solutions that may at times fall outside of the humanitarian mandate. However, area-based coordination offers a platform for best-placed actors to collectively work towards that outcome, while clearly pinpointing how humanitarian programming supports those ambitions.
- **Promoting the co-creation and integration of local assets, resources, and people's capacities** in humanitarian action is fundamental. Considering communities as active drivers/champions/promoters of change includes building on their existing and potential capacities, as well as their initiatives, livelihoods, and assets.
- Give **greater prominence to local coordination, rethinking the role of different levels of the humanitarian architecture**. With empowered subnational coordination platforms to develop planning and coordinate actors around community priorities. Clusters and the HCT should shift their work towards providing strategic guidance for alignment with global strategy and focusing on policy and advocacy work at the national level.
- **Foster coordination with development and peacebuilding actors**. Area-based coordination should help better articulate with development and peace actors around community priorities, pull them into communities where they are needed, and involve them in the design of solutions. A successful area-based approach, will offer more granularity and better targeting, including for development efforts.
- Area-based coordination must also **facilitate relations with local state institutions**, encouraging them to listen to their communities, ensuring that they are part of the solutions in community plans, and reaffirming their responsibility towards communities. The Flagship could help boost the social contract between members of the communities, but also between communities and the Government.
- **Promoting bonds between area-based coordination and funding**. Implementing area-based, integrated and multi-year plans requires funding allocated directly to area-based holistic plans. Having financial incentives to push for integrated action - including development resources - would bring about the desired change, while also making funds more accessible to local/national organisations.

**Figure A.5: Generic humanitarian coordination model**



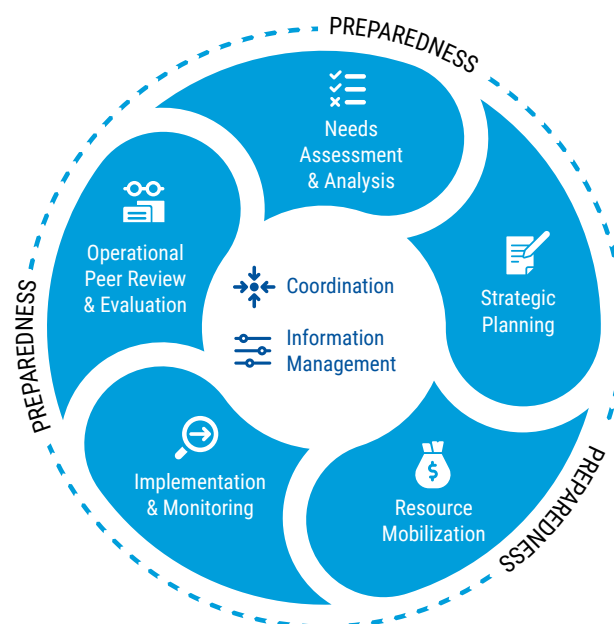
- The **decentralisation of staff** must be done in line with duty of care, including with a gender sensitive lens. Moving staff to subnational levels, including national staff, must be done with care and caution, to not expose colleagues to risks. Furthermore, to arrive at women's and girls' unfiltered priorities, it is important to not only ensure that staff is trained and equipped to handle those engagements, but equally to take gender-parity into consideration. Staff at the subnational level should be specifically dedicated to these efforts and should receive training on how to engage with communities (and their different groups such as women, children, youth), and develop community plans.

### A.3.5 Humanitarian Programme Cycle (HPC)

The IASC has agreed that international humanitarian response is delivered following the concept of the Humanitarian Programme Cycle (HPC), which is a coordinated series of actions undertaken to help prepare for, manage and deliver humanitarian response. It is based on a six-step process (analysis, planning, resource mobilisation, implementation, monitoring & evaluation and reporting), coordinated in a seamless manner, with one step logically building on the previous and leading to the next. It was introduced as a coordinated series of actions to prepare for, manage and deliver an effective humanitarian response. Successful implementation of the humanitarian programme cycle is dependent on effective emergency preparedness, effective

monitoring & evaluation and reporting), coordinated in a seamless manner, with one step logically building on the previous and leading to the next. It was introduced as a coordinated series of actions to prepare for, manage and deliver an effective humanitarian response. Successful implementation of the humanitarian programme cycle is dependent on effective emergency preparedness, effective

**Figure A.6: Overview of the HPC**



coordination with national and local authorities and humanitarian actors, and information management.

The activities of an UNDAC team, generally deployed for the first three weeks following a disaster, will focus on kickstarting the HPC and support mostly the Needs Assessment and Analysis element of the HPC, thus also Strategic (Response) Planning, Resource Mobilization and Implementation.

If executed effectively, the HPC will achieve:

- Stronger emphasis on inter-sectoral analysis and prioritisation of the needs of affected people.
- Improved targeting of the most vulnerable.
- Consideration of the most appropriate and feasible response modalities.
- Increased funding for humanitarian priorities.
- Greater accountability of humanitarian actors and donors for collective results.

Successful implementation of the HPC is dependent on effective emergency preparedness, effective coordination with national/local authorities and humanitarian actors, and effective information management.

Key documents produced by Humanitarian Country Teams as part of the HPC include the Global Humanitarian Overview (GHO), Humanitarian Needs Overviews (HNOs), Humanitarian Response Plans (HRPs), flash appeals, and periodic monitoring reports. More details on the HPC can be found at <https://kmp.hpc.tools/about/>.

### A.3.6 Flash Appeals, Humanitarian Response Plans (HRPs) and humanitarian funding

**Humanitarian Response Plans (HRPs) are** required for any humanitarian crisis demanding the collaboration of multiple agencies and are prepared by Humanitarian Country Teams (HCTs) based on a **Humanitarian Needs Overview (HNO)**. Sometimes, they are presented as a single document known as a **Humanitarian Needs and Response Plan (HNRP)**. In sudden-onset emergencies, a **Flash Appeal** is

issued, which is a condensed version of the same plan. Both HRP and Flash Appeal serve as an inter-agency/sector humanitarian overview of priority needs and, ultimately, as response strategy and fundraising tools.

HRPs/Flash Appeals serve as a joint strategic response plan, offering a snapshot of the current overall situation, an overall intersectoral strategy, and sector/cluster-specific response plans and budgets over a defined period. HRPs/Flash Appeals are subject to updates as needed to reflect significant changes in the needs of affected people or the overall situation. Additionally, a request for funding from the Central Emergency Response Fund (CERF) is made concurrently, with its requirements included in the overall needs of the HRP/Flash Appeal.

A unified strategic approach, formalised within an HRP or Flash Appeal, is vital for an effective response that leverages the strengths of each organisation involved. Joint strategic planning and budgeting bring aid organisations together to jointly plan, coordinate, implement, and monitor their response to both natural-hazard related disasters and complex emergencies. This approach facilitates cohesive fundraising efforts, avoiding competition among organisations for funding.

While HRPs/Flash Appeals present the humanitarian strategy, humanitarian funds come from a range of sources. OCHA manages the following **three main funding tools**: i.e. the Emergency Cash Grant, the Central Emergency Response Fund (CERF), and the Country-Based Pooled Funds (CBPFs).

- **Emergency Cash Grant** - A small grant facility (requests cannot exceed US\$100,000) to kick start humanitarian relief and coordination, for procurement and/or transport of relief items. The RC/HC makes a recommendation for funding to OCHA HQ and, if approved, funds can be disbursed within a few days.
- **Central Emergency Response Fund (CERF)** - Open only to UN agencies (not NGOs) to promote early action and response to reduce loss of life, enhance response to time-critical requirements and strengthen core elements of humanitarian response in underfunded crises (see also **Section A.3.4.**).

- » CERF funded projects must be based on (initial) needs assessments and comply with CERF life-saving criteria, activities that:
  - » Within a short time span, remedy, mitigate or avert direct loss of life, physical harm or threats to a population.
  - » Common humanitarian services necessary to enable life-saving activities, such as logistics and support services.
  - » A CERF request will be developed by the RC/HC's office with OCHA support (country office or regional office) for the CERF Secretariat in New York. If there is no OCHA field presence, UNDAC teams may need to support the CERF request for rapid response submissions, supported by the regional office.
- **Country-Based Pooled Funds (CBPFs)** – These are multi-donor humanitarian funds for protracted crises established by the Emergency Relief Coordinator (ERC), managed by OCHA at country level under RC/HC leadership. Funds are allocated to partners by the RC/HC through an in-country consultative process (mainly to NGOs), to support both strategic response priorities aligned with the HPC and response to sudden-onset emergencies.

Details on Humanitarian response planning and humanitarian financing can be found in **Subchapter G.8**.

## A.4 Stakeholders in international disaster response

UNDAC teams will work with a wide variety of stakeholders during a response. While the specific organisations and structures will vary, the general roles and responsibilities of the stakeholders are fairly consistent. Familiarity with the major actors will enable UNDAC teams to work together with them in an effective manner. The following sections give an overview of the most important stakeholders and bodies in international emergency response.

### A.4.1 Civil society and Government

Among the most significant stakeholders are the Government, the affected populations and the civil society. The first responders in any emergency are disaster-affected people and their Governments. Before any international or, in most instances, national response mechanisms kick in, it is people affected by the disaster or conflict, their neighbours and local civil society that are the first on the scene. In the first hours, they use whatever resources are available to them to carry out activities such as search and rescue, providing shelter, distributing food and water, etc. Often this response is supplemented through community-based organisations and networks, including religious groups, unions and even local businesses.

### A.4.2 The International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement

The International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement is the world's largest humanitarian network, comprising around 80 million members, volunteers and supporters.

Structurally, the Movement is comprised of three core components:

- 191 national Red Cross and Red Crescent societies.
- The International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies (IFRC).
- The International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC).

Together, these components operate worldwide with a mission to prevent and alleviate human suffering wherever it may be found, to protect life and health, and to ensure respect for the human being, particularly in times of armed conflict and other emergencies.

191 countries in the world have a national Red Cross or Red Crescent society. Those are neither governmental institutions nor wholly separate non-governmental organisations (NGOs). They occupy a unique place as auxiliaries to the public authorities in their countries. The 'auxiliary role' is

a technical term to express the unique partnership a national society has with its Government in providing public humanitarian services. Although national societies work alongside Governments and public authorities, they are independent and their work is not controlled or directed by the national Government. Each Government should recognize its national society as a legal entity and allow it to operate according to the fundamental principles of the Red Cross/Red Crescent Movement. National societies provide disaster relief, support health and social programmes, and promote humanitarian values. Together, those 191 national Red Cross and Red Crescent societies form the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies (IFRC).

During emergencies, the national Red Cross or Red Crescent society in the affected country would normally play an important role (because of their auxiliary function, they can start responding immediately by supplementing or substituting public humanitarian services as pre-agreed in each country). Local Red Cross/Red Crescent societies usually have a large network of volunteers all over the country which are trained in first aid etc. but also in data collection. They will usually be the first actors to respond alongside the communities.

It is important to distinguish between the IFRC and the ICRC.

- **IFRC** – The International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies (IFRC) is the world's largest humanitarian network. Founded in 1919, the IFRC comprises 191 national Red Cross and Red Crescent societies, a secretariat in Geneva and numerous delegations strategically located to support its activities. The IFRC works with national societies in responding to catastrophes around the world and coordinates and directs international assistance following natural and man-made disasters in non-conflict situations. Its relief operations are combined with development work, including disaster preparedness programmes, health and care activities, and the promotion of humanitarian values.
- **ICRC** – The International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) operates in conflict areas. Its mandate stems essentially from the Geneva

Conventions of 1949. It is an independent and neutral organisation whose mission is to help people affected by conflict and armed violence, and promote the laws that protect victims of war. It is based in Geneva and employs over 21,000 people in more than 100 countries. The ICRC is the custodian of the Geneva Conventions and their additional Protocols, which constitute the primary part of International Humanitarian Law and cover the treatment of wounded and sick military personnel, prisoners of war and civilian populations in internal and international conflicts. During situations of conflict, the ICRC is responsible for directing and coordinating the Red Cross/Red Crescent Movement's international relief activities. It also promotes International Humanitarian Law and draws attention to universal humanitarian principles. The ICRC only responds to disasters if they occur in a conflict zone.

Both the IFRC and the ICRC are standing invitees (not members, for reasons of independence) of the IASC. The IFRC is the convener of the Global Shelter Cluster in natural-hazard related emergencies, while UNHCR takes the lead in conflict situations.

### A.4.3 UN agencies

A number of specialised UN agencies are important in international emergency response.

- **The United Nations Development Programme (UNDP)** – UNDP focuses on the development-related aspects of disasters and aims to mainstream disaster risk reduction into national development strategies. It does this through provision of technical assistance and capacity-development to strengthen disaster risk management and establish mechanisms to support post-disaster recovery. UNDP seeks to ensure that disaster risk reduction considerations are factored into national and regional development programmes and that countries use the recovery process following disasters as a window of opportunity to mitigate future risks and vulnerabilities. UNDP has a representation in most developing countries of the world. UNDP chairs the Global Cluster for Early Recovery ([GCER](#)).
- **The United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR)** – The majority of UNHCR's

programmes begin as a result of a specific type of emergency, i.e., a sudden influx of refugees. UNHCR provides protection to persons of concern and ensures that the necessary assistance reaches them. In terms of material assistance, UNHCR's goal is the survival of refugees through ensuring adequate basic and supplementary food supplies, health care, shelter, water and sanitary facilities, clothing, and essential community services. Much of this assistance is channelled through its implementing partners, i.e., the Government of the asylum country and NGOs. Even if UNHCR's mandate defines a 'refugee' as a person displaced from his or her native country, the organisation also does extensive work with Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs), i.e., people who have had to leave their homes following a disaster or conflict, but still reside inside their native country. However, this distinction in their mandate often requires a special request from high level UN bodies or affected Governments before UNHCR can participate fully in a humanitarian operation inside an affected country. UNHCR is the global lead for the Global Protection Cluster and co-chairs the Global Shelter Cluster together with IFRC. The Global Camp Coordination and Camp Management (CCCM) Cluster is co-led by the International Organization for Migration (IOM) for natural-hazard related disasters and UNHCR in conflict situations.

- **The United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF)** – UNICEF works towards improving the lives and wellbeing of children and their families. Together with partners, they work in over 190 countries and territories to the benefit of all children, everywhere, focusing special efforts on reaching the most vulnerable and excluded. UNICEF's emergency aid activities target health and immunisation, water, sanitation and hygiene (WASH), trauma counselling, family reunification, education, and child soldiers. UNICEF is the global lead for the WASH and Nutrition Clusters and co-lead for the Education Cluster together with Save the Children. UNICEF is also the designated focal point agency for Child Protection within the Global Protection Cluster.
- **World Food Programme (WFP)** – In an emergency and depending on need, WFP may: provide advice and assistance to the Government, other

concerned agencies and local authorities in assessing possible requirements for emergency food aid, and in planning and managing appropriate interventions; provide food aid to meet emergency needs, subject to the availability of resources and the assessed need for international food aid; and help to mobilise and ensure coordination in the planning and delivery of food assistance from all sources, and any necessary logistics support and other complementary inputs. Although WFP provides substantial quantities of food and is the source for almost all multilateral food aid, the majority of international food aid is provided bilaterally, i.e., directly from donor to affected state or party. WFP ensures the co-ordination and orderly scheduling of food aid shipments from all sources; seeks ways to expedite deliveries; mobilises and provides logistic support; and advocates appropriate policies and procedures for the use of food aid. WFP also assists donors, upon request, to procure, transport and/or monitor the distribution of certain bilateral food aid consignments.

WFP is the global lead of the Emergency Telecommunications (ETC) and Logistics Clusters and co-leads the Food Security Cluster (FSC) together with the UN Food and Agricultural Organization (FAO).

- **World Health Organization (WHO)** – The WHO is the UN specialised agency for health matters and works in disasters to ensure that health needs are properly assessed and monitored; to provide coordination between national and international health partners; to mobilise national and international expertise and/or supplies to meet specific health threats; and to identify critical gaps in the public health aspects of response that need rapid filling, either by the combined effort of all stakeholders or by WHO itself as provider of last resort. WHO is the global lead for the Health Cluster and the custodian of the Emergency Medical Team (EMT) coordination concept which is an important part of emergency response. See **Section G.10.2** for more on EMT coordination.
- **International Organization for Migration (IOM)** – IOM joined the UN system in 2016 and is the leading intergovernmental organisation in the field of migration, working closely with Governmental, intergovernmental and non-governmental

partners. IOM helps ensure the orderly and humane management of migration, promotes international cooperation on migration issues, assists in the search for practical solutions to migration problems and provides humanitarian assistance to migrants in need, including refugees and internally displaced people.

The Global Camp Coordination and Camp Management (CCCM) Cluster is co-led by the International Organization for Migration (IOM) for natural-hazard related disasters and UNHCR for conflict situations. IOM also actively participates in the Logistics, Early Recovery, Health, Emergency Shelter and Protection Clusters.

- **The UN Population Fund (UNFPA)** - UNFPA works closely with Governments, UN agencies and other partners to ensure that reproductive health is integrated into emergency response. UNFPA provides hygiene, obstetric and family planning supplies, trained personnel and other support to vulnerable populations, and works to ensure the needs of women and young people are served through both the emergency and the reconstruction phases. UNFPA can play an important role in collecting data during emergencies as it collaborates with national statistical organisations in developing and middle-income countries, facilitating the collection, analysis, dissemination and use of reliable data and information.

#### A.4.4 Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs)

In the context of disaster management, an NGO is an organisation that works - in any capacity - in relief assistance. NGOs can be divided into two main categories, namely the international NGOs, i.e., those operating globally or across multiple countries, and local NGOs, i.e., those primarily operating within their own country or region where a disaster strikes.

NGOs are, in principle, autonomous and relatively independent of Governments and are financed by private individuals or groups as well as Governments. NGOs are receiving more and more funding from Governments (usually their own) or international organisations, e.g., the European Union. It is important to note that many of the world's largest

NGOs have budgets and resources exceeding that of many UN agencies. NGOs are often implementing partners of UN agencies in emergency response.

The NGO community has always been important in the humanitarian world. They work in all areas of the humanitarian field and provide the greatest international capacity to implement relief on the ground. NGOs tend to specialise in one or two fields, or to target their efforts towards one vulnerable population group. They usually have skilled staff, rapid deployment capacity (if they are not already in the area), operational flexibility, and resources that might not otherwise be available in an emergency.

The number of national NGOs may also be high. These can be essential partners in disaster response because they are known locally and they themselves know the area, the culture, the population, etc. In many cases, they work together with international NGOs, the UN and/or others, sometimes as implementing partners.

#### A.4.5 International Governmental Organizations (IGOs)

By definition, an IGO is an organisation of sovereign states created with a shared purpose and established by a founding document such as a charter or treaty giving them a mandate. In emergencies, it is quite common to meet IGOs composed of member states from a particular world region. The Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN), the European Union (EU), and Southern African Development Community (SADC) are typical examples of IGOs. They are also referred to as International Organizations or Intergovernmental Organizations.

There are numerous IGOs in the world with various purposes, systems and mandates. Several of them have a humanitarian profile as part of their purpose and do considerable work with regards to disaster response. How they work in disasters is often dependent on their mandate and policies. For example, both the EU and ASEAN have specialised teams that may deploy rapidly to emergencies to assess and/or coordinate their response, while an organisation such as the International Monetary Fund (IMF) may provide emergency assistance to help

member countries with urgent balance of payments financing needs in the wake of natural-hazard related disasters or armed conflicts. A commonality for IGOs is that, in most cases, they work in cooperation with Governments, whereas NGOs are often privately created and may seek independence from Governments.

#### A.4.6 Military forces

Generally, military forces are associated with protecting/defending sovereignty or as an instrument for aggression between states. Over the last decades, however, the role of military forces has expanded beyond this to include tasks related to and/or in support of humanitarian action. Military forces have become active players in international emergency response and Governments will continue to rely upon rapidly deployable military capability for support in humanitarian operations. Regardless of country, militaries are often organised in similar ways and often share many common aspects, whether they are army, navy, air force or marine/amphibious forces. Militaries are organised in a clear hierarchical structure with clear lines of command, control and communication.

However, in some contexts, military forces may, by their nature and regardless of purpose, be perceived as parties to, or instigators of, armed conflict. This is especially the case when they have a dual purpose in an emergency, e.g., when deployed for peacekeeping or peace-enforcing purposes while also having a mandate to participate in relief operations, or when the humanitarian crisis comes as a consequence of an armed conflict and the military forces party to that conflict are the ones providing security. In such contexts and if appropriate measures are not taken, upholding the humanitarian principles may become difficult if military forces are used haphazardly in humanitarian operations.

Humanitarian Civil-Military Coordination (UN-CM-Coord) is, and will always be, a subset of broader humanitarian coordination. UN-CMCoord is the essential dialogue and interaction between civilians and military actors in humanitarian emergencies that is necessary to protect and promote humanitarian principles, avoid competition, minimise

inconsistency and, when appropriate, pursue common goals. There are several internationally agreed guidelines on the use of military forces in humanitarian operations and civil-military interaction. Experience has shown that in all major emergencies, some level of civil-military coordination is required and that failure to establish effective and appropriate civil-military relations may have severe consequences both in current operations and in the latter stages of the emergency. See **Section G.10.3** on Humanitarian Civil-Military Coordination.

#### A.4.7 Private sector

Humanitarian agencies have witnessed the increasing and active involvement of private sector actors, be they multinational companies or small businesses, in playing critical roles before, during, and after emergencies. The private sector is often among the first to respond during emergencies, and their engagement extends beyond the response phase.

To effectively engage with the private sector, it is helpful to recognize the diversity within this sector, encompassing:

- Multinational companies with global and regional operations,
- Large national companies,
- Micro, small and medium-sized enterprises (MSMEs),
- Business networks such as local chambers of commerce, business associations, trade federations, and alliances.

The private sector contributes to disaster response through various ways and approaches. Businesses prioritise the safety of their employees and families, securing their facilities and operations for immediate restoration to deliver critical goods and services needed by their customers and the wider community. Private sector actors also support disaster response through financial donations and in-kind contributions, coordinating with government partners and humanitarian organisations. In critical industries like telecommunications, mobile network companies are enlisted to deploy equipment and provide technical assistance to restore connectivity in affected areas.



While the importance of coordinating with the private sector in humanitarian efforts may be evident, such collaboration is not always effectively realised. Response coordination structures and mechanisms tend to either focus on private sector engagement as a fundraising activity or exclude private sector actors entirely. This may result in missed opportunities to gather and exchange information on the specific needs, capabilities, and contributions of the private sector during an emergency.

Engagement with the private sector can be done in several ways and can range from understanding the private sector actors who are involved in the response, ensuring that information on private sector needs and activities are included in assessments and reports, up to activating existing agreements with technical experts from companies to support cluster activities and deploying private sector focal points during emergencies.

As part of OCHA's approach to engaging with the private sector, the joint OCHA-UNDP Connecting Business initiative (CBI) supports operational engagement with local businesses through its global community of regional and national private sector networks. CBI Member Networks are local business federations that are ready, willing and able to engage in disaster preparedness, response, and recovery in partnership with the UNDAC and other international organisations. CBI currently has 16 member networks (14 national and 2 regional) representing more than 700,000 businesses around the world. To learn more about CBI, visit <https://www.connectingbusiness.org/>. Almost all CBI networks actively engage with their respective national disaster management agencies, with some networks having formal roles in their disaster management agencies and humanitarian country teams.

CBI's Secretariat is available to support UNDAC teams in connecting with CBI Member Networks and/or reaching out to local private sector actors during UNDAC missions. To request assistance,

please email [connectingbusiness@un.org](mailto:connectingbusiness@un.org). See more in **Subchapter G.7** on private sector engagement.

### A.4.8 Ad-hoc and improvised humanitarian groups

As humanitarian events become more visible to the global population through mass media and social networks, there are an increasing number of 'good samaritans' keen to be engaged in providing humanitarian relief. These range from spontaneously formed small groups to more sophisticated technocrats. They are typically passionate, willing to help and may be able to mobilise their own funds to operate; but they are rarely equipped with knowledge of standards or coordination systems and may be short-lived in their operations. While assistance is always needed and welcomed, there have been instances where such groups have caused harm by creating dependence, duplicating efforts by international systems thus wasting resources, and potentially violating humanitarian and other fundamental principles.

### A.4.9 Diaspora

Perhaps the least understood, overlooked and yet often resourceful group of people who may be increasingly involved in humanitarian assistance is the diaspora. The diaspora population is potentially a significant resource to tap into as they may have a wealth of knowledge of the culture, language and social nuances, as well as financial resources to support humanitarian assistance. They often lack knowledge and understanding of the international humanitarian response system, hence their absence in coordination mechanisms; but they can often be targeted for key communication messages and coordination through host country government and media channels.