

The IASC and the global humanitarian coordination architecture: How can NGOs engage?

WHY COORDINATE?

Humanitarian coordination seeks to improve the effectiveness of humanitarian response by ensuring greater **predictability, accountability and partnership**.

Coordination in humanitarian contexts is vital at local, national, regional and global levels, and involving:

- Assessing situations and needs;
- Agreeing common priorities;
- Fills gaps, prevents duplication and targets those most in need;
- Developing common strategies to address issues such as negotiating access;
- Mobilizing funding and other resources;
- Clarifying consistent public messaging; and
- Monitoring progress.

To learn more about the humanitarian coordination architecture — visit www.buildingabetterresponse.org to access their online, in-depth and freely accessible course.



WHO ARE THE KEY ACTORS AT THE GLOBAL LEVEL?

The key actors include:

- **The Emergency Relief coordinator**
- **The Inter-Agency Standing Committee**
- **The Global Clusters**

1. Emergency Relief coordinator (ERC): The ERC chairs the Inter Agency Standing Committee. The ERC is the head of OCHA, and as such is responsible for the oversight of all emergencies requiring United Nations humanitarian assistance. **The ERC acts as the focal point for governmental, intergovernmental, and non-governmental relief activities.**

2. Inter-Agency Standing Committee (IASC): The IASC is an inter-agency forum for coordination, policy development and decision-making involving both UN and non-UN humanitarian partners. Established in 1992 following the [UN General Assembly Resolution 46/182](#), under the leadership of the ERC, the IASC:

- Develops humanitarian policies;
- Agrees on a clear division of responsibility for various aspects of humanitarian assistance;
- Identifies and addresses gaps;
- Advocates for effective application of humanitarian principles;
- Discusses and resolves disputes on system wide humanitarian issues;
- Designates Humanitarian Coordinators and recommends coordination arrangements.

The IASC includes a range of bodies, notably the IASC Principals (the heads of the IASC agencies) and a range of additional bodies:

- **IASC Working Group:** Comprised of senior managers of IASC agencies, meeting three times per year to formulate policy and guidance in line with strategic decisions made by the IASC Principals.
- **Emergency Directors' Group (EDG):** The EDG focus on operational issues of concern, undertaking missions to humanitarian contexts, advising the IASC on observations and recommendations.
- **The Task Teams:** Specific Task Teams are created to address specific priority issues identified by the IASC Working Group such as humanitarian financing; protection; and strengthening the humanitarian/development nexus.
- **Reference Groups:** The Reference Groups serve primarily as 'communities of practice' supporting the implementation of IASC strategies and policies on specific issues such as Principled Humanitarian Action; Risk, early warning and preparedness, and meeting humanitarian challenges in urban areas.

[Click to access the IASC structure and full list of current Task Teams and Reference Groups](#)

The members of the IASC include UN operational agencies:

- UNDP
- UNICEF
- UNHCR
- WFP
- FAO
- WHO
- UN-HABITAT
- OCHA
- IOM

There is a standing invitation to the ICRC, IFRC, OHCHR, UNFPA, the Special Rapporteur on the Human Rights of IDPs and the World Bank. NGO consortia including ICVA, InterAction and SCHR are invited to attend on a permanent basis.

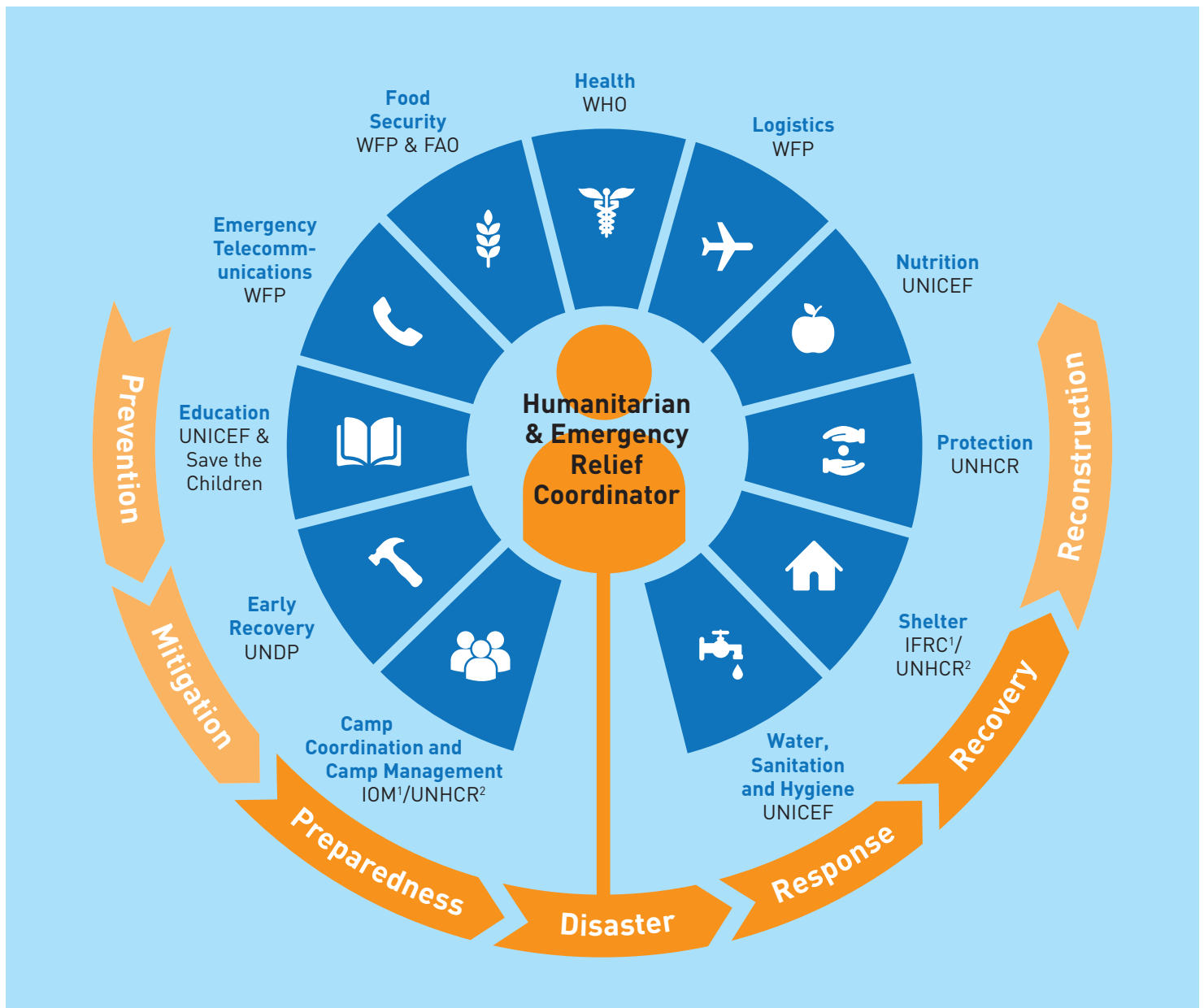
3. The Global Clusters: Clusters are groups of humanitarian organizations, both UN and non-UN, active in each of the main sectors of humanitarian action, e.g. water, health and logistics.

The global clusters are designated by the IASC and have clear responsibilities for coordination.

Globally, there are **11 clusters** operating at global levels — and, when activated by the ERC, at the national level in support of a humanitarian response.

At the global level, clusters aim to ensure clear and effective **leadership; predictability** and **accountability** through:

- Setting standards and policies aligned with best practice;
- Building response capacity;
- Providing operational support to country clusters.



HOW HAS THE HUMANITARIAN COORDINATION SYSTEM EVOLVED?

- The humanitarian coordination architecture has evolved over several decades — and will continue to do so. The UN General Assembly Resolution 46/182 of 1991, resulted in significant developments leading to the humanitarian coordination structure it currently stands — including the development of the IASC.
- Since resolution 46/182, the humanitarian system has undergone a number of reforms, including:

- **The Humanitarian Reform in 2005:** A process initiated by the ERC and the IASC to improve the effectiveness of humanitarian response through greater **predictability, accountability, responsibility and partnership**. The Cluster approach was one of these new elements.

- **The Transformative Agenda in 2012:** Learning from weaknesses in responses to the earthquake in Haiti and the floods in Pakistan, the IASC Principals decided to review the approach to humanitarian response. Analysing lessons, the IASC Principals agreed to a set of actions, titled the '**Transformative Agenda (TA)**' to improve the way in which the humanitarian community responds to emergencies. The TA focused on improving the timeliness and effectiveness of the collective response through strengthening:

- stronger **leadership**,
- more effective **coordination** structures, and
- **improved accountability** for performance and to affected people.

Following the agreement of the TA in December 2011, the Principals agreed on a series of 'TA Protocols', which set the parameters for improved collective action in humanitarian emergencies. Read more about these [here](#).

- **The New Way of Working (NWOW):** As one of the key outcomes from the 2016 World Humanitarian Summit, it aims to implement a new way of working that meets people's immediate humanitarian needs while at the same time reducing risk and vulnerability.

The NWOW has three distinct focus areas: **collective outcomes; comparative advantage;** and **multi-year timeframes**, aiming to better align humanitarian and development goals.

Read more about the NWOW [here](#).

HOW CAN NGOS ENGAGE AT THE GLOBAL LEVEL?

NGOs are part of the IASC community. Therefore, NGOs have a responsibility to contribute to and influence the system.

Promoting NGO engagement in the global coordination mechanisms increases diversity and ensures local actors — who are most often the first responders — have a voice in globally relevant discussions.

NGOs can engage in global level coordination mechanisms through various channels:

- Into the IASC through **NGO consortia (ICVA; SCHR and InterAction):** Each NGO consortia has two seats allocated to NGOs in the IASC Working Group and Emergency Directors' Group. NGOs can become members of consortia and have increased access to information and policy developments, in addition to using the consortia to amplify key messages.
- NGOs also have direct **access to the various IASC Task Teams and Reference Groups**. Aside from bringing specific expertise to the relevant issue, there is rarely defined criteria for NGOs to join the Task Teams and Reference Groups.
- NGOs can engage **directly with global clusters**.

To learn more about the coordination mechanisms, additional informative sites include:

www.humanitarianresponse.info
www.interagencystandingcommittee.org

LEARN MORE: Visit www.icvanetwork.org for the webinar, video, further information and references.

JOIN ICVA: Contribute to Working Groups, Task Teams and Humanitarian Coordination Policy Development.