



International Federation  
of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies

**Key points on the  
The Humanitarian Reform  
and the IFRC Shelter Commitment**



This document captures the key points related to the Humanitarian Reform and the IFRC Shelter Commitment. It is a summary of the content guide of the distance learning course “The Humanitarian Reform and the IFRC Shelter Commitment”.

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## **Module 1: Humanitarian Reform and the Inter Agency Standing Committee (IASC)**

### **Key Points**

- The Inter-Agency Standing Committee (IASC) gathers the international humanitarian community. The three systems of the international humanitarian community are:
  1. The non-governmental organizations (NGOs),
  2. The Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement, and
  3. The intergovernmental organizations such as the United Nations (UN) agencies and the International Organization for Migration (IOM).
- The Humanitarian Response Review (2005) put forward a series of recommendations for the humanitarian community. These were considered by the IASC who determined how they should be implemented in a process that became known as the Humanitarian Reform. The Humanitarian Reform has been adopted as “the way we work” by the IASC. The Humanitarian Reform is described as having a foundation and three pillars:
  - The foundation is **enhanced partnership**: no single organisation can respond to major crises, they have to be addressed in partnership.
  - establishing **more predictable humanitarian finances** by focusing on the Central Emergency Response Fund (CERF) to be a more rapid response to crises:
  - developing **more predictable humanitarian responses** through the development of the cluster approach.
  - **strengthening humanitarian coordination** by strengthening the pool of Humanitarian and Resident Coordinators..
- The **Cluster Approach** brings together groups of organisations and other stakeholders to strengthen the effectiveness of humanitarian response in a specific response gap area identified by the reform process.



## **Module 2: The Cluster Approach**

### **Key Points**

- **Clusters** are sectoral groups aiming to strengthen the effectiveness of humanitarian response, particularly by building partnerships; to ensure predictability and accountability by clarifying the division of labour among organisations and better defining their roles and responsibilities.
- The **cluster approach aims** to strengthen overall response capacity as well as the effectiveness of the response in five key ways:
  1. By ensuring **sufficient global capacity** is built up and maintained in all the main sectors/areas of response and is able to provide a timely and effective responses in new crises.
  2. By ensuring **predictable leadership** in all the main sectors/areas of response. Cluster leads are responsible for ensuring response capacity is in place and to act as the “provider of last resort”.
  3. By working in **partnership** towards agreed common humanitarian objectives, particularly between the UN agencies, the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement, international organisations and NGOs.
  4. By strengthening **accountability** for building up a more predictable and effective response capacity in line with IASC agreements.
  5. By improving **strategic field-level coordination and prioritization** in specific sectors/areas of response by placing responsibility for leadership and coordination of these issues with the competent operational agency.
- **Global cluster leads** had been designated for: agriculture; camp coordination camp management; early recovery; education; shelter and Non Food Items (NFIs); emergency telecommunications; health; logistics; nutrition; protection; and water, sanitation and hygiene (WASH).
- The clusters at country level do not necessarily need to mirror the ones at global level, different clusters could be activated and with different leads according to needs and capacities.
- Clusters are expected to coordinate effectively the international actors with national and local authorities, and with local organisations and NGOs, etc. They ensure that appropriate needs assessments and analysis, emergency preparedness, planning and strategy development are undertaken as necessary. They also ensure the application of agreed standards. Clusters are established at the country level by a decision of the Humanitarian Country Team which will also identify agencies to lead those clusters. Ideally these decisions are taken as a part of a preparedness activity rather than immediately following a disaster.



## SUMMARY OF CLUSTER LEADS AT THE GLOBAL LEVEL

| Cluster   | Lead Agency                                 |
|---|---|
| Food Security   | WFP / FAO                                   |
| Camp Coordination/Management:   |   |
| IDPs (from conflict):   | UNHCR                                       |
| Disaster situations:  | IOM   |
| Early Recovery  | UNDP  |
| Education   | UNICEF / Save The Children - United Kingdom |
| Shelter:  |   |
| IDPs (from conflict)  | UNHCR                                       |
| Disaster situations   | IFRC (Convener) <sup>1</sup>                |
| Emergency Telecommunications  | WFP   |
| Health  | WHO   |
| Logistics   | WFP   |
| Nutrition   | UNICEF                                      |
| Protection:   |   |
| IDPs (from conflict)  | UNHCR                                       |
| Disasters/civilians affected by conflict (other than IDPs) <sup>2</sup> | UNHCR/OHCHR/UNICEF                          |
| Water, Sanitation and Hygiene   | UNICEF                                      |

<sup>1</sup> IFRC has made a commitment to provide leadership to the broader humanitarian community in Emergency Shelter in disaster situations, to consolidate best practice, map capacity and gaps, and lead coordinated response. IFRC has committed to being a 'convener' rather than a 'cluster lead'. In an MOU between IFRC and OCHA it was agreed that IFRC would not accept accountability obligations beyond those defined in its Constitutions and own policies and that its responsibilities would leave no room for open-ended or unlimited obligations. It has therefore not committed to being 'provider of last resort' nor is it accountable to any part of the UN system.

<sup>2</sup> UNHCR is the lead of the global Protection Cluster. However, at the country level in disaster situations or in complex emergencies without significant displacement, the three core protection-mandated agencies (UNHCR, UNICEF and OHCHR) will consult closely and, under the overall leadership of the HC/RC, agree which of the three will assume the role of Lead for protection.



## **Module 3 IFRC's Shelter commitment and the Shelter Cluster**

### **Key Points**

- The Shelter Cluster is co-chaired by UNHCR and IFRC with UNHCR leading the response to conflict generated IDPs and IFRC convening in natural disaster situations. IFRC does **not** lead when ICRC takes a lead role for the Red Cross Red Crescent Movement. There are some 24 main partners in the global level Shelter Cluster. UN-HABITAT takes a major role in the Cluster to develop early recovery approaches to shelter needs.
- IFRC has signed a Memorandum of Understanding with the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Assistance (OCHA) on the Federation's role in leading the Cluster. In that MoU it was agreed that IFRC would take this "leading" role subject to adherence to the Fundamental Principles of the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement, to upholding the Principle of Independence in respect of extra funding, to not accepting accountability obligations beyond those defined in its Constitution, and that there is no room for "open ended" or unlimited obligations.
- To ensure these commitments the IFRC has defined its role as a *convener* of the Shelter Cluster rather than a *lead agency* and made clear that it cannot accept accountability obligations beyond those defined in its Constitution and policies. The IFRC does its utmost to ensure an adequate and appropriate response as far as the network's capacities, resources, as well as the access and security situation allow. IFRC will not be held accountable to the UN Emergency Relief Coordinator or country-level humanitarian coordinators. Nor will it be the "provider of last resort". The IFRC acts under its own mandate and remains accountable to its own governance and membership, while continuing to play a positive and constructive role within the overall system.



## **Module 4: How IFRC is meeting its shelter commitment**

### **Key Points**

- To respond to its shelter commitment, IFRC established a Shelter Department in 2006 that builds on a long history of shelter response through National Societies. The Federation is one of the largest providers of emergency shelter amongst humanitarian actors. The Global Shelter Programme strengthens the capacities, resources and approaches of the IFRC and its membership to the provision of shelter before, during and after disaster.
- The Global Shelter Cluster has established a series of thematic reference groups that aim to explore thematic issues on behalf of the wider cluster group and to provide recommendations to the cluster leads and wider cluster group on potential cluster project activities. The specific themes covered are training, information management, transition phase coordination, contingency planning and preparedness, technical issues, and the involvement of built environment professionals in the cluster.
- The IASC has agreed that the cluster approach should be a field-driven process but should recognise that States have primary responsibility for meeting the assistance and protection needs of people affected by natural disasters. The role of IFRC as convenor of the Shelter Cluster is to support and complement these national efforts to meet the humanitarian needs of affected populations.
- IFRC recognises that as a pre-requisite to convening the shelter cluster at a national level, a broad, inclusive **humanitarian country team** should be established to take the decisions required for the formation of national level clusters. The most senior IFRC Representative in the country should participate in these meetings. However flexibility is required in determining response structures, the sectors or clusters to be included and leadership arrangements. These decisions should recognise local government structures and existing capacities.
- IFRC provides a Shelter Coordination Team (SCT) to manage the national level Shelter Cluster. These teams typically comprise a Coordinator, Technical Coordinator and an Information Manager. They may also include a Shelter Recovery Advisor, Environmental Advisors, Mapping Assistants and a SCT Liaison Officer between the cluster and the Host National Society. The Shelter Coordinator team (SCT) aims to provide leadership in emergency and crisis preparedness, response and recovery; work in partnership to provide a coordinated shelter response; ensure evidence-based actions, gap-filling and sound coordination; and enhance accountability, predictability and effectiveness of shelter actions.
- The Red Cross or Red Crescent National Society should do its utmost to participate in relevant clusters where a disaster response is taking place. It also has a fundamental role to play in preparedness and contingency planning both with the Government and the Humanitarian Country Team. It is therefore important that the National Society and, where relevant, the Federation Representation, participate actively in this planning process with the humanitarian country teams and the government. However, it is a Federation responsibility, not the national society's, to take on the Cluster leadership/convening role following a natural disaster.



### **Further Reading / References:**

- Humanitarian Reform Website: [www.humanitarianreform.org](http://www.humanitarianreform.org) / [www.oneresponse.info](http://www.oneresponse.info)
- IASC Website: [www.humanitarianinfo.org/iasc/](http://www.humanitarianinfo.org/iasc/)
- Shelter Cluster Website (under construction): [www.sheltercluster.org](http://www.sheltercluster.org)