



FAQ:

The cluster process
and the International
Federation's
shelter cluster
commitment



The International Federation's Global Agenda (2006–2010)

Over the next two years, the collective focus of the Federation will be on achieving the following goals and priorities:

Our goals

Goal 1: Reduce the number of deaths, injuries and impact from disasters.

Goal 2: Reduce the number of deaths, illnesses and impact from diseases and public health emergencies.

Goal 3: Increase local community, civil society and Red Cross Red Crescent capacity to address the most urgent situations of vulnerability.

Goal 4: Promote respect for diversity and human dignity, and reduce intolerance, discrimination and social exclusion.

Our priorities

Improving our local, regional and international capacity to respond to disasters and public health emergencies.

Scaling up our actions with vulnerable communities in health promotion, disease prevention and disaster risk reduction.

Increasing significantly our HIV/AIDS programming and advocacy.

Renewing our advocacy on priority humanitarian issues, especially fighting intolerance, stigma and discrimination, and promoting disaster risk reduction.

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FAQ: The cluster process and the International Federation's shelter cluster commitment

Introduction

This booklet contains a number of frequently asked questions about the International Federation's shelter cluster commitment and the implications on National Societies and the Federation Secretariat.

A summary of the Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) between the International Federation and UN OCHA formally defining this commitment can be found on the final page of this booklet. The full MoU and related guidance documents and other links can be found on FedNet.ifrc.org. Further information on the cluster approach can be found on www.humanitarianreform.org

This FAQ is also available on FedNet.ifrc.org. Please inform the Shelter Department of the International Federation's Geneva Secretariat if you require additional clarification so that the FAQ can be updated accordingly.

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Origins of the cluster process

1 **Question: What is the cluster process?**

Answer: The Humanitarian Response Review was commissioned by the UN Emergency Relief Coordinator from a team of consultants including a representative of the Red Cross Red Crescent Movement. The establishment of sector-based “clusters” of leading relief agencies to improve preparedness, predictability and coordination in sectors where there were perceived gaps in disaster response capacity or quality was one of four recommendations. (See the IASC Guidance Note on the Use of the Cluster Approach).

2 **Question: Who has developed the cluster process?**

Answer: The Inter Agency Standing Committee (IASC) Working Group, including representatives of the International Federation and ICRC, has overseen the development of the cluster process.

The International Federation's commitment to the cluster process

3 **Question: What is the role of the International Federation in the cluster process?**

Answer: The International Federation is active in the areas of health, water and sanitation, shelter, recovery, logistics, telecommunications and protection. The cluster process provides opportunities for the International Federation to inform preparedness and response in these sectors through engaging at global and country level with UN agencies, international and national NGOs, and other humanitarian actors. In accordance with the decision of the General Assembly at Seoul in 2005, the International Federation has a Memorandum of Understanding with UN OCHA. This states that the International Federation will assume a coordination role for

emergency shelter in specific emergency operations within an agreed coordination system in the aftermath of natural disasters.

4 Question: What is the commitment of the International Federation to UN OCHA under the Memorandum of Understanding?

Answer: The International Federation has made a commitment to: a) supporting enhanced preparedness in emergency shelter at a global level; b) scaling up the operational capacity of the International Federation in emergency shelter; and c) coordinating the provision of emergency shelter assistance at country level after natural disasters.

5 Question: Why is the International Federation a “convener” of the emergency shelter cluster and not a “lead agency”?

Answer: In accordance with the IASC Guidance Note on the Use of the Cluster Approach, the definition of “Lead Agency” includes conditions which are not in accordance with the terms of the Memorandum of Understanding. In practice, the term “convener” also reflects the role of the International Federation Shelter Coordination Team in facilitating inter-agency collaboration by the cluster partners to address shelter-related issues in the emergency response.

6 Question: Is the International Federation committed to being a “provider of last resort”?

Answer: No. The Memorandum of Understanding states that neither the International Federation nor the National Societies shall be held responsible for meeting the emergency shelter needs of affected persons when these are not being met by other agencies. The International Federation will, insofar as adequate resources are made available, ensure adequate needs assessment, project design, budgeting, and fundraising. It will advocate for and do 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.

7 Question: Is the International Federation accountable to the UN system in undertaking the coordination of emergency shelter?

Answer: No. The Memorandum of Understanding states that the International Federation agrees to regularly keep the office of the UN Emergency Relief Coordinator (ERC) and the UN Humanitarian Coordinator or Resident Coordinator informed on the progress of the activities. In practice, this has involved the International Federation participating in meetings of cluster leads/convenors, and contributing to the regular situation reports.

8 Question: Is the International Federation committed to undertaking the coordination of emergency shelter in all responses to natural disasters?

Answer: No. The Memorandum of Understanding states that when the Federation determines that it is not able to play this role it will inform the UN Emergency Relief Coordinator immediately to allow for swift alternative action. However, there is an expectation that as global shelter cluster convener and having developed the required coordination systems and resources the International Federation will typically convene the shelter cluster at country level - unless the interagency contingency planning process involving appropriate International Federation representation has identified another agency. The trained capacity to undertake this coordination role is deployed by the International Federation using globally managed technical and financial resources and hence is not dependent on the capacity of the country representations or the host National Society.

9 Question: Are all National Societies expected to undertake the coordination of emergency shelter in natural disasters?

Answer: No. This will be subject to the mandate of each National Society, their capacity and interest, and the constitutional mandate of the International Federation Secretariat to coordinate the membership in the event of international emergencies. The International Federation has developed

a standardised Shelter Coordination Team (SCT), similar to a FACT, which can be deployed to meet the shelter coordination commitment of the Federation. This team comprises individuals from National Societies from a global roster of cluster-trained personnel with dedicated support from the Geneva Secretariat.

10 Question: Are all Country and Regional Representations expected to undertake the coordination of emergency shelter in natural disasters?

Answer: No. In an emergency, Country or Regional Representations will be required to focus on coordinating the overall response in support of the Operating National Society. A Shelter Coordination Team (SCT) can be deployed to provide the required, trained capacity to undertake this role. The Coordinator will report to the International Federation representative in country to ensure consistent oversight of all International Federation responsibilities. The technical reporting line is to the Geneva Secretariat Shelter Department which can provide dedicated support and direct additional resources as required.

11 Question: How will the International Federation's emergency shelter coordination activities be funded?

Answer: The Memorandum of Understanding recognizes the unique nature of the International Federation and respect for the Principles of the Red Cross Red Crescent Movement, notably the Principle of Independence. The International Federation will seek financial support for its responsibilities under the terms of the Memorandum of Understanding independent of the UN appeal and funding process. This need for independent financial support is reflected as a component within the Global Shelter Programme launched by the International Federation which includes the funding of Shelter Coordination Teams and all required administrative and logistical support.

Emergency shelter in situations of armed conflict

12 Question: Which agency is responsible for coordinating emergency shelter in armed conflicts?

Answer: UNHCR or another cluster agency as appropriate.

13 Question: Which agency is responsible for coordinating emergency shelter in response to natural disasters occurring in an area affected by armed conflict?

Answer: If ICRC is the lead for the Movement in the area in which the natural disaster has occurred, coordination of emergency shelter will be undertaken by UNHCR or another cluster agency as appropriate. The role of the International Federation in coordinating emergency shelter is subject to the Seville Agreement and Supplementary Measures.

14 Question: What is the role of ICRC in the cluster process?

Answer: As stated in the IASC Guidance Note on the Use of the Cluster Approach the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) has stated that its position on the cluster approach is the following: "Among the components of the Movement, the ICRC is not taking part in the cluster approach. Nevertheless, coordination between the ICRC and the UN will continue to the extent necessary to achieve efficient operational complementarity and a strengthened response for people affected by armed conflict and other situations of violence."

Transitional and permanent shelter

15 Question: Will the International Federation only undertake emergency shelter operations, and not transitional or permanent housing?

Answer: No. International Federation emergency, transitional or permanent shelter operations will be subject to the mandates and interests of National Societies, the availability of resources and the interests of host Governments.

16 Question: Which agency will coordinate transitional or permanent housing?

Answer: The International Federation will actively seek to handover responsibility for coordinating the transitional and permanent shelter phases to other appropriate agencies, thus limiting the duration of the International Federation's coordination commitment. UN Habitat has been identified as the focal agency within the Shelter Cluster for post-emergency housing issues. The International Federation is currently discussing formalising the handover of coordination responsibilities from the International Federation to UN Habitat after the emergency shelter phase.

Camp management, water and sanitation, and logistics

17 Question: Is the International Federation responsible for coordinating camp management?

Answer: No. UNHCR (in armed conflicts) and IOM (in natural disasters) are the two global leads for the Camp Management and Camp Coordination.

18 *Question: How are the issues of water and sanitation and logistics, as well as shelter in camp situations, addressed by the shelter cluster?*

Answer: At the global level, the Shelter, Water Sanitation and Hygiene Promotion (WASH), Camp Management and Camp Coordination (CCCM) and Logistics clusters are actively working at common activities on overlapping issues. In response situations, the respective cluster leads and OCHA as cluster coordinator should establish appropriate mechanisms to address such issues.

Global emergency shelter preparedness

19 *Question: How is the International Federation addressing the issue of improved preparedness and response at the global level?*

Answer: The International Federation is co-chair of the global interagency Shelter Cluster with UNHCR. The Shelter Cluster works collaboratively on activities to address preparedness issues as prioritised by the country level clusters (see www.humanitarianreform.org for details). The Shelter Cluster can also be convened at the global level during a major emergency to address issues including the mobilisation of additional resources or shelter agencies as required.

20 *Question: What is the formal relationship between the International Federation and UNHCR as co-chairs of the Shelter Cluster?*

Answer: A Letter of Understanding has been agreed to clarify the separate and shared responsibilities of the two agencies regarding the Shelter Cluster at the global level.

21 Question: How can interested National Societies and Delegations contribute to the global Shelter Cluster?

Answer: Contributions can be made via the Shelter Department within the Secretariat in Geneva which co-chairs the global Shelter Cluster on behalf of the International Federation. National Society representatives are also welcome to attend the global or regional Shelter Cluster meetings.

Country level emergency shelter preparedness

22 Question: How is improved emergency shelter preparedness to be advanced at country level?

Answer: The aim is for country level preparedness and contingency planning to address gaps and to identify roles and responsibilities, including the role of emergency shelter coordination. IASC representatives and UN Country Offices are already contacting leading agencies including the Red Cross Red Crescent (both National Societies and Delegations) in a number of countries to advance such contingency plans.

23 Question: Who leads country level shelter cluster contingency planning?

Answer: Subject to its mandate, the National Society should lead this process with the support of the International Federation Secretariat. This is a new role, and will require additional resources. The International Federation Secretariat can assist in securing these resources. Note that any such National Society capacity does not have to coordinate shelter in an emergency. Additional capacity in the form of a Shelter Coordination Team can be deployed by the International Federation to undertake this role in collaboration with the contingency planning lead.

Activation of the cluster process

24 Question: How is the cluster process activated after disaster?

Answer: According to the IASC Guidance Note on the Use of the Cluster Approach, in the event of a sudden major new emergency requiring a multi-sectoral response with the participation of a wide range of international humanitarian actors, the cluster approach should be used from the start in planning and organizing the international response. The Humanitarian Coordinator (or the Resident Coordinator in countries where a Humanitarian Coordinator has not yet been appointed at the beginning of the emergency) should consult all relevant partners both within and outside of the UN system at the country level and make proposals regarding the designation of any new cluster/sector leads, if possible within the first 24 hours. Following consultation with the Humanitarian Coordinator or Resident Coordinator, the Emergency Relief Coordinator should consult global cluster leads and other lead agencies at the global level on the designation of country-level cluster leads for the emergency in question. This should include consideration of the need for the cluster approach, and the specific sectors that require this additional support.

25 Question: What is the role of the International Federation Shelter Coordination Team (SCT)?

Answer: This is outlined in the IASC Guidance Note on the Use of the Cluster Approach, section 7. Responsibilities of sector/cluster leads at the country level, and the Terms of Reference for Sector Leads at the Country Level (Annex 1 of the Guidance Note). Standard Terms of Reference for the SCT personnel have been developed. See shelter page of FedNet for details.

Shelter Coordination Team (SCT) development, deployment and support

26 Question: How does the International Federation meet its commitment to coordinating shelter in emergencies?

Answer: To provide the required facilitation to and support of the emergency shelter agencies, the International Federation deploys a Shelter Coordination Team (SCT) typically comprising a Coordinator, Technical Advisor and an Information Manager. A Shelter Recovery Advisor is increasingly a member of the standard team, and Environmental Advisors and Mapping Assistants can also be included as required. The role of SCT Liaison Officer has also been established, to be undertaken by a representative of the Host National Society and funded using global resources. A coordination tool kit has been developed as an additional resource, and where possible the SCT includes individuals who have undertaken this role before for the International Federation to provide the shelter cluster participants with the required “best practice” to date.

27 Question: Can only Red Cross Red Crescent personnel be part of emergency Shelter Coordination Teams?

Answer: No, although it is preferred that the Coordinator as leader of the team has a Movement background to ensure appropriate representation on behalf of the International Federation. To date, the Shelter Coordination Teams the International Federation have deployed have included personnel from National Societies, the Secretariat, former International Federation personnel on short-term contracts, and other individuals with experience of the cluster process. The International Federation has also reached agreements with a number of cluster partners including NGOs and UN agencies to make available appropriate personnel. This will promote a more inclusive interagency team reflecting the interagency composition of the cluster itself.

28 ***Question: Who does the International Federation Shelter Coordination Team (SCT) report to?***

Answer: The SCT Coordinator reports to the International Federation representative in country, and all other members of the SCT report to the Coordinator. This ensures accountability for security and representational issues, and the arrangement of required logistical and administrative support. The technical reporting line is to the Geneva Secretariat Shelter Department which can provide dedicated support and direct additional resources as required.

29 ***Question: Does the deployment of a Shelter Coordination Team require the use of financial and other resources that could be used to support emergency operations?***

Answer: No. The Shelter Coordination Team and all required administrative and logistical support is separately funded at global level through the annual appeal process.

30 ***Question: Is there a danger that the cluster process will duplicate Governmental coordination mechanisms in a response?***

Answer: Yes. Based on experience to date, the International Federation is supportive of a more considered response to ensuring the required coordination mechanisms are adequate. This could involve the provision of tailored support, perhaps through the deployment of key technical advisors or systems as required, at the request of the Government, rather than the activation of the full cluster approach.

31 ***Question: How is the International Federation supporting the development and deployment of emergency shelter coordination teams?***

Answer: Shelter coordination trainings have been developed and delivered by the International Federation in conjunction with UNHCR and cluster partners. National Societies have supported the training of nominated personnel and their deployment. A shelter coordination “toolkit” has been

developed by the International Federation and is regularly updated to incorporate evolving best practice. The Shelter Department within the Secretariat in Geneva can provide technical support as required on training, tools and during deployment. A dedicated Shelter Coordination Team Officer position is being established in Geneva.

Concerns, expectations and opportunities

32 *Question: Is there a risk of confusion between the role of the International Federation as an operational shelter agency and the shelter coordination role?*

Answer: Yes. Where the cluster process is activated, and there is a need for shelter assistance, the International Federation will have two separate roles: one as an operational shelter agency, and one as the shelter coordinator. The coordination role will be undertaken by a Shelter Coordination Team specifically deployed for this task. The International Federation as an operational shelter agency will also participate through separate representatives in the emergency shelter cluster process as one of several agencies within the cluster. For other emergency shelter cluster participants, it is essential that the International Federation Shelter Coordination Team is viewed as a neutral and impartial facilitator and custodian of the cluster process equitably on behalf of all cluster participants, clearly separate from the emergency shelter operations of the International Federation.

33 *Question: Will the role of emergency shelter coordinator generate expectations that the International Federation will be a major operational agency in emergency shelter?*

Answer: Yes, but the shelter commitment of the International Federation includes the scaling up of capacity in emergency shelter. The Global Shelter Programme is a framework for meeting this objective over time.

34 Question: *What opportunities does the International Federation's leading role in the preparedness and coordination of emergency shelter through the cluster process provide?*

Answer: As one of the leading global providers of emergency shelter assistance, the International Federation can draw upon its global scale, presence and experience to ensure that shelter preparedness reflects the breadth of issues and contexts. As a membership organisation, the International Federation can promote wider involvement of non-Governmental and local organisations in the cluster process to make it more representative. As the coordinator of the immediate post-disaster shelter phase, the International Federation can ensure that locally-appropriate shelter assistance is provided from the outset, adequately reflecting longer-term housing needs so that “recovery is considered from day one”.

Memorandum of Understanding between the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies and UNOCHA – *Summary*

At the General Assembly in Seoul in 2005 the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies decided “to take up a leadership role in the provision of emergency shelter in natural disasters, on the basis of the conditions established by the Governing Board and an agreement to be negotiated by the Secretary General and to be ratified by the Governing Board”.

This agreement, in the form of a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) between the International Federation and UNOCHA, has been signed by the International Federation’s Secretary General and the Emergency Relief Coordinator on behalf of UNOCHA, and ratified by the Governing Board of the International Federation.

Key commitments by the International Federation as defined by the MoU in support of the Inter Agency Standing Commission efforts to strengthen humanitarian response include:

- Supporting enhanced preparedness in emergency shelter at a global level.
- Scaling up the operational capacity of the International Federation in emergency shelter.
- Coordinating the provision of emergency shelter assistance at country level after natural disaster.

The International Federation will advocate for an adequate and appropriate response subject to the capacities and resources of the humanitarian community rather than acting as a “provider of last resort”.

The MoU recognizes the unique nature of the International Federation and respect for the Principles of the Red Cross Red Crescent Movement, notably the Principle of Independence. In this regard, the International Federation will seek financial support for its responsibilities under the terms of the MoU through its existing appeal mechanisms and in particular a dedicated Global Shelter Programme.

The Fundamental Principles of the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement

Humanity

The International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement, born of a desire to bring assistance without discrimination to the wounded on the battlefield, endeavours, in its international and national capacity, to prevent and alleviate human suffering wherever it may be found. Its purpose is to protect life and health and to ensure respect for the human being. It promotes mutual understanding, friendship, cooperation and lasting peace amongst all peoples.

Impartiality

It makes no discrimination as to nationality, race, religious beliefs, class or political opinions. It endeavours to relieve the suffering of individuals, being guided solely by their needs, and to give priority to the most urgent cases of distress.

Neutrality

In order to enjoy the confidence of all, the Movement may not take sides in hostilities or engage at any time in controversies of a political, racial, religious or ideological nature.

Independence

The Movement is independent. The National Societies, while auxiliaries in the humanitarian services of their governments and subject to the laws of their respective countries, must always maintain their autonomy so that they may be able at all times to act in accordance with the principles of the Movement.

Voluntary service

It is a voluntary relief movement not prompted in any manner by desire for gain.

Unity

There can be only one Red Cross or Red Crescent Society in any one country. It must be open to all. It must carry on its humanitarian work throughout its territory.

Universality

The International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement, in which all societies have equal status and share equal responsibilities and duties in helping each other, is worldwide.



The International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies promotes the humanitarian activities of National Societies among vulnerable people.

By coordinating international disaster relief and encouraging development support it seeks to prevent and alleviate human suffering.

The International Federation, the National Societies and the International Committee of the Red Cross together constitute the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement.