

IASC Scale Up Activation

28 January 2018

Key points

- A system-wide scale-up activation automatically triggers mechanisms and responses that UNHCR has undertaken to support. These include the deployment of cluster coordinators and information management support, and development of a budgeted inter-agency response plan.
- It is a priority to deliver humanitarian support to IDPs and affected populations in a sudden onset or significantly deteriorating humanitarian crises requiring a system-wide scale-up activation. Empowered leadership and effective coordination help to achieve this priority.
- The decision to activate a system-wide scale-up is a high level priority statement as much as a practical response mechanism. It will (and should) generate attention. Agencies will be scrutinized on how well they deliver their response.
- Be proactive and share information about the emergency with bureaux and support divisions.
- Inform HQ which clusters should be activated and why.
- Actively participate in HCT discussions.
- Assess your office's capacity and identify resource and staffing gaps that will impede or prevent delivery of assistance; request support from HQ to fill gaps.

1. Overview

This entry provides guidance on humanitarian system-wide scale-up activation, related inter-agency processes and actions, and their implications for UNHCR. It should be read in conjunction with the most recent version of the IASC's [Humanitarian Programme Cycle](#). The entry is based on IASC's 'Protocol 1. Humanitarian System-Wide Scale-Up Activation: Definition and Procedures' (November 2018), which replaces the 2012 Transformative Agenda Protocol on L-3 definition and

procedures.

IASC scale-up activation is a system-wide mobilization in response to a sudden onset or rapidly deteriorating humanitarian situation in a given country, including at subnational level, where the capacity to lead, coordinate and deliver humanitarian assistance does not match the scale, complexity and urgency of the crisis. It is an element of the Transformative Agenda (TA), which aims to strengthen leadership, coordination, and accountability in inter-agency responses to major humanitarian emergencies.

A scale-up declaration activates mechanisms and tools which:

- Ensure that the IASC system delivers effective support both to national authorities and existing capacities, and monitors its own performance.
- Ensure that adequate capacities and tools for empowered leadership and coordination of the humanitarian system are in place.
- Engage IASC member organisations and Global Cluster Lead Agencies to put in place the systems and resources required to contribute to the response in line with their mandates.

Activation is for a time-bound period of up to six months, and is appropriate only in cases where the gravity of the humanitarian situation justifies the mobilization of system-wide capacities and resources, beyond standard levels, to respond to critical humanitarian needs on the ground. In exceptional situations a single additional three-month extension can be considered. During the activation, sufficient capacity should be created to sustain the level of response. The procedure mandates the Humanitarian Country Team (HCT) to develop benchmarks, appropriate for the context, followed by a transition plan and post-activation accompanying measures. Though UN system-wide scale-up declarations and agency-specific emergency level declarations are often linked in practice, they have separate procedures.

Note. Refugee emergency responses (and where applicable emergency responses for returning refugees) are led and coordinated by UNHCR and guided by the [Refugee Coordination Model](#) (RCM). The scale-up protocol does not apply to such situations.

2. Relevance for emergency operations

In December 2011, the IASC Principals agreed to the Transformative Agenda (TA). This set of actions was designed to improve the humanitarian response model while reaffirming that the [cluster approach](#) is the most appropriate coordination model for non-refugee inter-agency humanitarian responses. Since then, as part of this initiative, the Principals have approved or continued to update protocols that set parameters for the TA, strengthen leadership, increase stakeholder accountability, and improve coordination.

UNHCR is committed to successful implementation of the TA. It will continue to contribute to its evolution, implementation, and tools, as well as monitor its implementation.

3. Main guidance

The Emergency Relief Coordinator (ERC) declares a scale-up activation based on five criteria:

- Scale.
- Urgency.
- Complexity.
- Capacity.
- Risk of failure to deliver effectively and at scale to affected populations.

Within 24 hours of the event, or recognizing that the humanitarian situation has deteriorated dramatically, the ERC receives an initial assessment of the situation, including data on affected populations. The information is provided by the Humanitarian Country Team (HCT) in the affected country, under the leadership of the Humanitarian Coordinator (HC), or a Resident Coordinator (RC) if the former is not yet designated. The IASC secretariat should share the assessment with the Emergency Directors Group (EDG) and Global Cluster Coordinators.

Within 24 hours of receiving the initial assessment, the IASC Emergency Directors Group (EDG), composed of representatives from each agency, convenes to discuss the event. It considers the context, the response, capacity, expected gaps, lessons learned from past emergencies, and advocacy priorities, and agrees recommendations. These cover leadership and coordination arrangements, including cluster activation for the IASC Principals' consideration. The Global Cluster Coordinators should be consulted on proposed coordination arrangements, where relevant.

Following receipt of the EDG recommendations, the ERC contacts national authorities at the highest level to brief them on the measures being considered to bolster operational capacity. The ERC informs the UN Secretary-General (S-G) and the lead UN Secretariat Department (Department of Peace-Keeping Operations or Department of Political Affairs as applicable), as well as the chair of the UN Sustainable Development Group (UNSDG) and the UN Operations and Crisis Centre (UNOCC), that a scale-up activation is under consideration.

Within 48 hours of the crisis, the ERC convenes the IASC Principals to jointly review the initial assessment and present recommendations on a 'no objections' basis. The Principals discuss whether the initial assessment warrants a scale-up activation. The ERC, as Chair of the IASC, makes the final decision. If it is agreed to declare a scale-up activation, the Principals also discuss (1) the most appropriate leadership model, (2) the most appropriate coordination arrangements, (3) common advocacy priorities for the humanitarian system and common messages, and (4) other context-specific arrangements.

The ERC announces the activation via e-mail to all IASC Principals. The ERC also issues a note for the attention of the Secretary-General (including the UNOCC Director), and a note to the HCT via the RC/HC. The ERC contacts national authorities at the highest level to explain the decision and its implications, including additional support that will be provided to national and in situ capacity. All messages from the ERC include information on geographic coverage, the length of the activation (up to six months), and leadership and coordination arrangements (including the appointment of a HC, cluster activation, and designated in-country cluster leads).

The activation automatically triggers:

- Immediate establishment of a HCT. The current RC is re-hatted as HC pending a decision on the most appropriate leadership model.
- Activation of the 'empowered leadership' model.

Within 72 hours of the onset of the crisis:

- A HC is designated and deployed for up to six months, to lead coordination of the overall humanitarian response, exercising empowered leadership in line with the IASC protocol.
- A Central Emergency Response Fund (CERF) and Country-Based Pooled Fund (CBPF), if available in country, are announced. Allocations are issued by the ERC (by the HC in the case of CBPFs) on a 'no regrets' basis, in support of priorities identified in the strategic statement.

Within 72 hours of the scale-up activation:

- The ERC activates clusters for priority sectors, after consulting the IASC Principals on the basis of a request from the RC/HC in consultation with the HCT.
- The IASC Principals, after consulting the Global Cluster Lead Agencies, immediately deploy appropriate coordination capacity, including qualified cluster coordinators and information managers (as required).
- The RC/HC issues a 'Statement of Key Strategic Priorities', to establish shared messaging and advocacy from headquarters level down, and for press releases.
- A multi-cluster or -sector Initial Rapid Assessment (or alternative rapid assessment) is implemented based on coordinated assessments. The initial Situation Analysis is followed by a multisector assessment and report within the first two weeks.

Within 5 days of the scale-up activation:

- A Flash Appeal is developed, supported by the Situation Analysis. It contains a top-line analysis of the scope and severity of the crisis, sets out priority actions, and lists financial requirements.

Within 4 weeks of the scale-up activation:

- The Flash Appeal is revised. If a longer response is required (beyond the initial activation period of six months), the HCT develops or updates the Humanitarian Needs Overview (HNO). The HNO consolidates and analyses information on the needs, vulnerabilities and capacities of the affected population, and develops or updates a Humanitarian Response Plan (HRP). The HRP sets out the strategy chosen to respond to the assessed needs, and is the basis for implementing and monitoring the overall response.

Within 5 months of the scale-up activation:

- An Operational Peer Review (OPR) takes place.

Within 9-12 months of a Scale-Up activation:

- An Inter-Agency Humanitarian Evaluation (IAHE) is conducted, in accordance with IAHE

terms of reference.

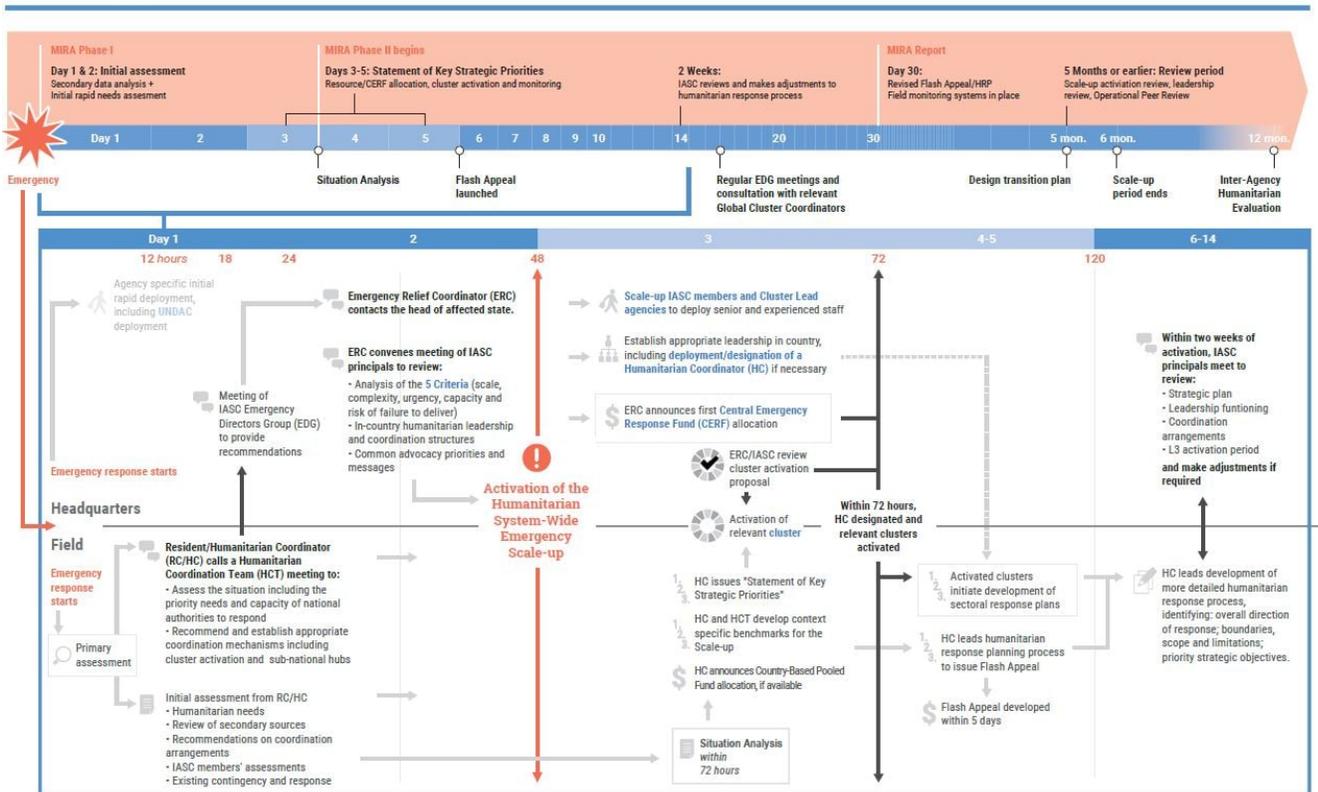
End of the scale-up

The scale-up activation automatically expires after a maximum period of six months. The IASC Emergency Directors (EDG) meet towards the end of the activation period to review the situation.

The EDG may, in exceptional circumstances and before the scale-up activation expires, recommend to the ERC that the scale-up activation should be extended for an additional three months (to a total maximum duration of nine months). Exceptional circumstances might include a further deterioration of the situation, based on an OPR recommendation.

Scale-up Activation Timeline

IASC Inter-Agency Standing Committee



UNHCR's role and accountabilities

When a decision to declare a system-wide scale-up activation is considered, UNHCR will actively contribute to the initial assessment of the UN Country Team (UNCT) or Humanitarian Country Team (HCT), because the decisions taken will affect UNHCR's involvement later in the process. If the crisis involves refugees, UNHCR will lead discussion of refugee aspects. Scale-up activation is not applicable to such situations.

In its internal communications with HQ, the UNHCR office will:

- Communicate the outcomes of UNCT/HCT discussions to the Director of the concerned bureau and to DESS, focusing especially on the five criteria on which the decision to declare is based.
- As cluster lead agency, share with the Directors of the regional Bureau and DESS its assessment with respect to:
 - (1) UNHCR's in-country capacity (cluster coordinators, information management, needs assessment officers, etc.).
 - (2) Which clusters should be activated (if they are not already operational).
 - (3) Available stocks of core relief items (CRIs), and staff readiness.

(4) The RC's ability to lead a scale-up mobilisation as HC.

- Brief the Bureau Director and DESS Director in preparation for the Principals' review of leadership and coordination (within 72 hours of the event).

In addition, if a system-wide scale-up is activated, the office will:

- Mobilize internal response capacity and prepare to receive additional staff for clusters deployed under the Inter Agency Rapid Response Mechanism (IARRM).
- In consultation with the bureau, prepare to receive other support staff.
- Make sure that personnel (particularly cluster coordinators and information management focal points) are aware of their roles and the time-bound outputs they need to deliver under the system-wide scale-up procedure. These include: an emergency response plan; a strategic response plan; cluster response plans; and CERF submissions and allocations.

Considerations for UNHCR's engagement at country level

IDP situations

During a system-wide scale-up activation, all or some of the three clusters that UNHCR co-leads at global level (Protection, Shelter, and [Camp Coordination and Camp Management](#) (CCCM)) may be activated at country level. This decision is made by the ERC, in consultation with the IASC Principals, based on recommendations by the RC or HC.

At country level, the UNHCR office should be involved in discussions of cluster activation and should keep the bureau, DESS, DIP, DPSM and other relevant HQ entities informed.

Once clusters are activated, UNHCR must be ready to lead the clusters for which it is responsible for. It should provide dedicated staff for coordination and information management (IM). For both functions, it may need to have dedicated personnel at national and local level.

Mixed refugee and IDP situations

If a new emergency also affects refugee populations, UNHCR should lead discussion of refugee aspects of the crisis and determine the coordination arrangements for an effective response (in accordance with the [Refugee Coordination Model](#) and the **Joint UNHCR-OCHA Note on Mixed Situations - Coordination in Practice**). Field operations should keep Headquarters (the DESS and Partnership and Coordination Service) closely informed.

Post emergency phase

If factors affect the response that the scale-up activation cannot address, a transition from scale-up may commence. The IASC Principals and leadership on the ground should provide clear messaging on both the expiry of the scale-up activation and the transition strategy as soon as possible. The transition plan should include (at a minimum):

- A statement indicating how the chosen leadership model will affect arrangements at the end of the period, and how the transition will be managed.
- A strategy for continuing core coordination functions, in support of national and local coordination efforts (where applicable and relevant).
- A statement indicating how reporting lines, roles and responsibilities will be defined at the end of the period of application.
- An outline of measures that will contribute to efforts to reach solutions. This should indicate how the humanitarian response will bridge with longer term recovery and national development priorities.

Annexes

[Protocol 1 IASC, Humanitarian System-Wide Scale-UP Activation - Definition and Procedures](#)

[Protocol 2 IASC, 'Empowered Leadership' in a Humanitarian System-Wide Scale-Up Activation](#)

[IASC, Humanitarian System-Wide Scale-Up Activation – Frequently Asked Questions](#)

[UNHCR-OCHA, Note on Mixed Situations. Coordination in Practice](#)

4. Links

[IASC web-site](#)

5. Main contacts

UNHCR Division for Emergency Security and Supply (DESS). At: hqemhand@unhcr.org