



How field based protection clusters and sub-clusters work together: Q&A

1. Principles and responsibilities

1.1. What are the principles guiding the working relationship between the protection cluster and the sub-clusters?

- Adherence to the Partnership Principles of equality, transparency, result-oriented approach, responsibility and complementarity.
- Respecting the Humanitarian Principles of humanity, neutrality, impartiality and operational independence.
- Respect for the diversity of mandates, approaches, expectations and modus operandi among actors contributing to protection outcomes.
- Participation and dialogue to share information in a transparent, effective and timely manner, respecting the principles of confidentiality and protection of victims, witnesses, and sources of information, to coordinate action and address outstanding challenges.
- Promotion of consensus decision-making and speaking in unison, or at least in a coordinated manner, as the Protection Cluster.
- Commitment to ensure that protection activities undertaken are planned, implemented and reviewed in accordance with applicable international laws, norms and standards.¹
- All collaboration should happen according to the Cluster Coordination Reference Module.

1.2. What are the accountabilities and responsibilities of the protection cluster lead agency towards the sub-clusters and vice-versa (reporting requirements, obligation to consult, seek advice, including IM)?

- Sub-cluster coordinators: collaborate on all HPC processes in particular submission of regular reports as required to fulfil response monitoring obligations; input into protection advocacy (including but not limited to advocacy on adequate inclusion of protection issues in HPC processes); collaboration on protection analysis, mainstreaming, provision of protection advice and support to the HCT.
- Protection cluster coordinator: facilitate the development of a comprehensive protection strategy that acts as a guide to programming of humanitarian action, ensuring the centrality of protection; provide the overall coordination for protection (i.e. between the sub-clusters and the other areas of work); ensure full and adequate representation of all protection issues of sub-clusters in relevant fora, advocacy and processes. The protection cluster coordinator is responsible for facilitating decision-making within the protection cluster on the basis of full and/or adequate consultation and using consensus as per the principles outlined above. This includes for example the

¹ All principles from the *Diagnostic Tool and Guidance on the Interaction between field Protection Clusters and UN Missions*, Global Protection Cluster, Draft - July 2013, plus the Principles of Partnership.



Global Protection Cluster

development of agreed protection policy positions. This process can be facilitated by a Strategic Advisory Group (SAG).

- Both: timely and transparent sharing of information between all components of the protection cluster and third parties, such as OCHA, the HCT and missions.

1.3. Are the functions and responsibilities of sub-clusters equivalent to those of cluster lead agencies, including Provider of Last Resort?

- Yes. Cluster guidance is captured in several IASC documents rather than being set out in one comprehensive document, however in several places the AoRs and their obligations are mentioned. Most recently the *IASC Introduction to Humanitarian Action - A Brief Guide for Resident Coordinators* stipulates that the AoR lead agencies have equivalent responsibilities to cluster lead agencies, and should engage alongside the protection cluster in all inter-cluster processes. The *IASC Handbook for RCs and HCs on Emergency Preparedness and Response (2010)* highlights that the functions and responsibilities of AoR lead agencies are identical to those of Cluster Lead Agencies, including the responsibility of Provider of Last Resort. Each AoR lead agency is also responsible for mainstreaming issues pertaining to its AoR into the work of all clusters, as appropriate.

2. Humanitarian Programme Cycle processes and joint programming

2.1. **HCT protection strategy**: How can the protection cluster and sub-clusters work together to ensure the HCT adopts a comprehensive protection strategy, that acts as a guide to programming of humanitarian action, ensuring the centrality of protection?

- As a team, the protection cluster coordinators and the sub-cluster coordinators should work together to ensure a strong country protection strategy is developed with buy-in and commitment by the HCT.
- All sub-cluster coordinators should brief and instruct their lead agency representative to advocate for protection as required within the HCT and ensure implementation of the agreed strategy.
- In their relations with affected populations, other humanitarian actors, government and non-state actors, the protection cluster and sub-cluster coordinators should promote the key elements of the agreed protection strategy and respect for applicable law.
- The HCT protection strategy provides a frame for programming, including HRP and pooled funds.

2.2. **Humanitarian Programme Cycle (HPC)**: How can the protection cluster and sub-clusters work together on the HRP, pooled funds criteria and other key processes?

- Joint identification of needs and priorities. The **Humanitarian Needs Overview (HNO)** should thoroughly explore the main protection themes and the interlinkages of protection issues affecting specific vulnerable groups. The HNO should come across as a comprehensive analysis, giving adequate visibility to all the sub-clusters. An effective solution to achieve this aim is to have separate paragraphs for all sub-clusters.
- **Humanitarian Response Plan (HRP)**: Since the sub-clusters are required to identify the priority issues and raise funds for the response in their sector (funding does not flow



Global Protection Cluster

down through the protection cluster to sub-clusters), the sub-clusters' response should be described in a **distinct section of appealing documents**, within the chapter on protection and in a manner which is consistent with and reinforcing of the other content of this chapter. This would allow to strengthen the accountability to both donors and affected populations.

- A list of **protection indicators** has been compiled jointly by the Protection Cluster and the AoRs at the global level and can be found in the [Humanitarian Indicator Registry](#).
- SMART² indicators should be developed jointly within the protection cluster and sub-clusters, reflecting the activities which have been prioritized to be implemented. Each cluster and sub-cluster is responsible to develop the indicators which are relevant to their work, if further work is required to combine the indicators, this will be done jointly with the coordinators to ensure it reflects the collective interest.
- The recommended modality for distribution of **pooled funds** among the protection cluster and sub-clusters is that the protection cluster coordinator should facilitate a committee including all sub-cluster coordinators, where the distribution is decided in a transparent fashion and according to clearly agreed criteria developed at the country level (e.g. according to HRP priorities, geographical relevance, appropriate budget). Decisions should be taken by consensus as per the principles outline above. Appealing organisations/partners should step down from the panel whilst their submission is reviewed in order to avoid conflicts of interest. The actual allocation of funds must be determined by the prioritized needs/activities by the cluster and sub-clusters.
- It is recommended to carry out **concerted advocacy** by all the protection cluster/sub-cluster lead agencies with OCHA, the HCT, donors and other influencers/decision-makers; in case of blockage escalate to the HCT and, if necessary, Global Protection Cluster and AoRs.

2.3. **Cluster strategy:** How can the protection cluster and sub-clusters work together to ensure a comprehensive protection cluster response, based on a sound and evidence-based programme?

- A facilitated process by the protection cluster coordinator should bring the planning within the sub-clusters and other areas of protection together to form an overall plan agreed across the cluster.
- Consider adopting a common work plan where protection can contribute to the targets of the sub-clusters and vice versa (i.e. capacity building, including on broader protection and specific protection issues).
- Hold a regular coordinators meeting – protection cluster and its sub-clusters – to touch base on common issues that need to be addressed or brought to the attention of the HC/HCT.

3. Activation, transitioning and deactivation process

² SMART stands for specific, measurable, attainable, relevant and trackable.



Global Protection Cluster

- 3.1. While the activation process of the cluster system and clusters at country level is clear; what is the process of activating the sub-clusters?
- Activation of the protection cluster means activation of all aspects of protection, and this may or may not require the activation of sub-clusters. The activation of the protection cluster cannot be a partial activation, i.e. when the protection cluster is activated, no single protection issue can be excluded.
 - Where a sub-cluster is not activated, the corresponding issue will be addressed by the broader protection cluster, which then also takes on provider of last resort responsibility. Where a sub-cluster is required, the lead agency responsibility is to ensure that one is established, with appropriate leadership. The global level AoR is then responsible for supporting the field level sub-cluster.
 - Sub-clusters do not have to meet independently of the protection cluster - meeting and other arrangements should be as efficient as possible, requiring the minimum amount of time commitment from partners.
- 3.2. What should happen in a situation where either the protection cluster or sub-cluster(s) is/are not working according to functions and responsibilities?
- Ideally bilateral discussions between coordinators should identify and resolve challenges in a constructive fashion, drawing on the global level protection cluster and AoRs for advice and support as necessary.
 - Failing this, the issue should be raised with the relevant lead agency in country.
 - As a last resort, outstanding issues should be raised with the HC.
- 3.3. If there is no protection cluster at sub-national level, what is the recommended approach for establishing a child protection/GBV/HLP/mine action sub-cluster?
- In consultation with the protection cluster at national level, the sub-clusters at sub-national level must be established according to needs. The fact that there is no protection cluster at sub-national level does not impede the establishment of sub-clusters according to real needs and responsibilities.
 - Sub-clusters at sub-national level report to their sub-cluster at national level, unless other arrangements are agreed in country.
- 3.4. Does the deactivation of the protection cluster imply the deactivation of all sub-clusters or is the latter a separate process?
- Yes, the deactivation of the protection cluster means deactivation of all aspects of protection.
- 3.5. When should the sub-clusters be coordinated as part of protection cluster instead of separate sub-clusters?
- The decision on which approach is most suitable to the context will be based on the following main questions:



Global Protection Cluster

Actors	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• How many sub-cluster actors are active in the humanitarian response?• Are the sub-cluster actors the same as those working on wider protection responses?
Technical issues	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Is there sufficient time for discussing technical aspects of the sub-cluster needs and responses in the protection cluster alone?• If not, would a separate group enable these discussions to occur?• Do sub-cluster related issues require a separate space to guarantee safety around sensitive issues?
Government counterparts	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Are the government counterparts for the sub-cluster and for wider protection the same or are they different?

4. Representation and participation

4.1. Can the protection cluster coordinator represent the sub-clusters?

- In whatever way the protection cluster is represented, it is essential that it comes across as a cohesive whole. Consideration should be given to ensuring that in the eyes of external actors such as other clusters, the protection cluster is seen as a credible, consistent actor.
- The Protection Cluster coordinator should be fully enabled to represent all protection issues, therefore the sub-cluster coordinators should support the protection cluster coordinator as necessary.
- The protection cluster can be represented by any one or any combination of the following: the protection cluster coordinator, the cluster lead agency, the co-lead agency, the sub-cluster coordinators, the cluster lead agencies of sub-clusters and/or the co-lead agencies of sub-clusters. Members of the protection cluster or sub-clusters may also, on agreement, represent the cluster.
- Representation of the cluster should be agreed between the protection cluster coordinator and the sub-cluster coordinators by consensus. The protection cluster coordinator or cluster lead agency is not able to bar sub-cluster coordinators from attending meetings or representing the cluster.
- Representation will likely need to be adapted according to context, objective, occasion and the level of confidence and knowledge in different technical areas required. At regular meetings such as Inter-Cluster coordination meetings and HCT meetings (where coordinators are invited to these) consistency may be an important consideration. Overall, sub-cluster lead agencies have the equivalent responsibilities to cluster lead agencies and should engage alongside the protection cluster in all inter-cluster processes.³
- For meetings such as these (ICC and HCT) which help to steer the response it may be best for the coordinators of the cluster and the sub-clusters to participate as a team, since this will:

³ IASC Introduction to Humanitarian Action - A Brief Guide for Resident Coordinators (October 2015).



Global Protection Cluster

- limit the requirement for additional pre- and post-meeting briefings;
- ensure that all aspects of protection are fully considered in decision-making;
- ensure that discussions are underpinned by the relevant technical expertise;
- enable the lead agencies of the sub-clusters to fulfil their responsibilities to ensure an adequate response for their sector.

5. Joint coordination functions

5.1. When should a common situation and response monitoring framework with the protection cluster be preferred, rather than separate sub-clusters one? And similarly, for assessment, advocacy and capacity building?

- As far as possible the information management tools being used across each of the sub-clusters and the protection cluster should be integrated or harmonised to ensure efficiency; sensitive matters should be adequately addressed, for example confidential information should only be shared according to agreed protocols. This will also reduce the burden on members who report activities to the protection cluster and/or different sub-clusters.
- As far as possible, assessment, advocacy and capacity building should be integrated or at least harmonized to use synergies and avoid duplications or inconsistencies.
- Examples of separate monitoring frameworks would be the Security Council Reporting obligations (MRM).

5.2. Should protection mainstreaming be carried out jointly?

- Yes, joint protection mainstreaming is recommended when it leads to efficient use of synergies and avoids duplication.
- The different mainstreaming efforts should be framed on an overarching protection analysis, thereby sharing expertise, achieve efficiencies, divide labour and get a more complete protection response.
- Protection mainstreaming should also be done in close collaboration with work streams on accountability to affected people.



Good practice: tips developed by current coordinators on effective ways of working

- Focus on results and highlight that the end result is more important than individual cluster positions. A holistic protection approach will achieve better outcomes for all vulnerable populations.
- The sub-clusters should be a standing item on the protection cluster meeting agenda, allowing for regular updates to the wider group.
- Where possible, sub-cluster meetings should be held prior to protection cluster meetings so that updates from the last sub-cluster meeting can be shared directly at the protection cluster meeting.
- The protection cluster coordinator should attend the meetings of the sub-clusters as far as possible in order to ensure that they are aware of all on-going discussions and can better make linkages between the sub-clusters as well as wider protection group.
- Equally, sub-cluster coordinators should strive to be part of the cluster leadership, participate in protection cluster meetings and ensure that the protection cluster is regularly updated on the discussions held in the sub-clusters.
- Where possible, keep governance arrangements lean and agile, consider time-bound working groups to address specific issues; avoid over complication.
- Avoid overrepresentation for the protection cluster in relevant fora where this may dominate the group or give an impression of disconnect within the cluster.
- Fully dedicated coordinators for the protection cluster and sub-clusters and information management officers allow for a most productive collaboration. Adequate Information Management capacity is also an enabling factor.
- Protection cluster lead and sub-cluster coordinators should be trained on both broader protection and sub-cluster protection issues and have a good understanding of IASC documents.
- Strong soft skills, team spirit and humour in coordination staff will guarantee better coordination.