

INTER-AGENCY STANDING COMMITTEE
TRANSFORMATIVE AGENDA REFERENCE DOCUMENT

3. Concept Paper on the Inter-Agency Rapid Response Mechanism (IARRM)

This series of reference documents has been produced by the IASC Working Group and serves as guidance on implementing the Transformative Agenda in Level 3 emergencies

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The IASC Principals have highlighted the need to improve both the number and quality of staff available for deployment to humanitarian emergencies. In the context of the IASC Transformative Agenda, they stressed that there must be sufficient capacity amongst operational humanitarian agencies to rapidly deploy the immediate components necessary to address the inter-agency coordination functions required for a streamlined and effective response to a system-wide Level 3 (L3) emergency. This will include a core team to support the coordination of the emergency response to be deployed on a ‘no regrets’¹ basis for up to three months. The ‘team’ represents a coherent group of agency personnel working within agreed structures to either augment or fill the established core coordination functions required for an effective response. This includes senior OCHA staff to support the Humanitarian Coordinator (HC) and Humanitarian Country Team (HCT), including on information management and analysis), Cluster Coordinators and information management specialists, NGO leadership to ensure linkages with existing civil society coordination and to support meaningful representation in NGO coordination bodies, and needs assessment capacities.

The inter-agency rapid response mechanism (IARRM) is aimed at ensuring that all agencies have the requisite capacity on standby in accordance with their individual cluster lead and other coordination responsibilities, and that they are able to deploy this effectively and in a timely manner. It will consist of a composite of the individual rapid response capacities of agencies, rather than constituting a stand-alone integrated team. It will flow from and build on any existing contingency plans, and will also take into account context-specific considerations, such as security management concerns. Further, and depending on the priorities established by the HC/HCT and possible changes in the coordination architecture at the country level, the IARRM will augment or support existing in-country coordination structures. The activation of the IARRM will always take into account existing capacities on the ground, and relevant agencies will systematically provide information on both existing capacity and planned/effected deployments under the IARRM to inform the ad hoc IASC Principals meeting which will convene within 48 hours of a large-scale sudden-onset emergency.

Deployments through the IARRM mechanism will serve to ensure a coordinated and coherent response to a system-wide activation in an ‘L3 emergency’. Immediate priority will be given to facilitating a joint rapid assessment, definition of an initial strategic plan within 5 days and issuance of a Flash Appeal within 7-10 days of the crisis onset. In addition to these initial

¹ Meaning that agencies commit to deploying senior and experienced staff to fulfil the agreed core coordination functions immediately, without waiting for more precise details on exact needs and response plans, and decide at a later date to withdraw surplus staff as relevant.

outputs, the IARRM deployments work alongside UNDAC deployments in the case of natural disasters, as necessary.

Inter-agency training will be expanded to support the development of these rapid response capacities, based on the strengths of existing programmes, to enhance knowledge of the various roles, mandates and modus operandi among humanitarian actors. Joint training exercises will also seek to build the trust and confidence required for effective inter-agency engagement at the outset of an emergency response.

In summary, the IARRM will provide for:

- The deployment of a core team to provide additional and immediate support for sectoral coordination capacity (Cluster Coordinator deployments);
- Deployment of the necessary, scaled-up capacity from OCHA to support coordination and the HC/HCT; and
- Laying the ground for undertaking joint needs assessment, information management and the development of the initial strategic plan and elaboration of the Flash Appeal. This will lead to the revision of the Flash Appeal within the first 30 days.

I Process and composition

The IARRM will be triggered on the determination of the need for an L3 emergency response by the IASC Principals with the aim to fill key coordination needs within the first 72 hours, subject to security and/or logistics constraints. Deployments to constitute this core team will be on the basis of a ‘no regrets’ approach, whereby the imperative will be to deploy the staff as rapidly as possible, making necessary adjustments based on an assessment of the response within the following 30 days. The default response will be to deploy senior qualified OCHA core functions and senior qualified ‘L3 capable’ coordinators for all clusters and requisite support staff (e.g. information management), where the agencies determine that this capacity is not already in place. The duration of these deployments will be in line with individual agencies’ practices for up to three months, while ensuring that the rotation of staff is managed in a manner that ensures the continuity of the necessary coordination responsibilities and support throughout the duration of the L3 response.

The activation of the IARRM will not necessarily trigger the rapid response mechanisms of individual agencies for programmatic or operational delivery, but all agencies agree to immediately put these on alert. Agencies will have varying areas of responsibility depending on the specific nature of the emergency and capacities at the country level, including as Cluster Coordinators, needs assessment personnel, information management experts, etc. Agencies retain their individual discretion to declare L3 activation for their programmatic mandates at any time before or after the system-wide declaration.

In anticipation of the possibility of security and/or logistics constraints, contingencies may need to be developed, allowing for more integrated cluster approaches. In addition, during the 72 hour deployment period, it may become clear that a given cluster will not be activated in response to a particular emergency. In this case, the Cluster Coordinators will support assessment and strengthening of appropriate coordination mechanisms.

The core coordination functions to be filled and/or augmented in an L3 response will include:

- Coordination support: Sufficient numbers of senior OCHA staff to provide dedicated coordination support to the office of the HC

- Cluster support: 'L3 capable' senior Cluster Coordinators of all clusters to work together to support immediate delivery in the first 72 hours, and corresponding support staff
- Service provision: 'L3 capable' senior coordinators for logistics and other common humanitarian services (e.g. UNHAS) as well as emergency telecommunications support
- NGO leadership: 'L3 capable' senior NGO personnel to mobilize civil society and develop mechanisms for meaningful representation or contribution of I/LNGOs in inter-agency coordination fora
- Sub-national support: Coordination support capacity from global clusters and/or partners in country, their NGO partners and/or OCHA for the establishment of up to 5 major sub-national hub/sub-office(s), depending on the scale of the crisis and affected area.
- Needs assessment: In line with MIRA or other agreed joint rapid assessment mechanism, needs assessment capacity in support of the development of the initial strategic plan and preparation of the Flash Appeal and its revision, as required.
- Information management: Dedicated support for humanitarian information management within OCHA to support the HC/HCT and within clusters. This could include the deployment of a Humanitarian Information Centre led by OCHA, with agency participation as necessary.

II Funding and planning

Agencies will rely on individual internal arrangements to resource their inputs to the IARRM.

In accordance with agreed guidelines to issue a Flash Appeal within 7-10 days of an L3 emergency, the staff deployed under the IARRM will support and facilitate the MIRA and the initial strategic plan that will serve as the basis to develop the Flash Appeal, and subsequently to revise it within 30 days.

III Joint training

An inter-agency training is proposed for the core team to be deployed in an emergency response, building on existing training models. The training is to be targeted for a total of 15 to 20 staff drawn from individual 'L3 capable' rosters of IASC organizations, in line with the key deployments listed above. The inter-agency training will be a combination of classroom and simulation exercises. The objective of the training is to enhance the collective response capacity of IASC members, deepen awareness of agency mandates and operational procedures, and to create a culture of trust and common purpose. OCHA will assume the lead on developing the training programme and mobilizing funds to support this initiative.