

Co-Chairing Arrangements in Country-level Shelter Clusters

Under the Inter-agency Standing Committee (IASC) Transformative Agenda, Cluster Lead Agencies were encouraged to consider developing a clearly defined, agreed, and supported sharing of cluster leadership with NGOs wherever feasible. NGOs' involvement in the staffing of the Shelter Cluster can ensure that cluster teams are able to manage and support the roll out of various components of the [Shelter Cluster Strategy](#). Good practices from the Cluster approach demonstrate that leadership with NGOs results in more efficient coordination, while co-leadership by two UN agencies limits Shelter Cluster partners' sense of ownership of Cluster activities. In order to ensure the most effective and efficient use of Shelter Cluster team partnerships, it is important to establish good relationships between cluster lead agency and cluster co-chair and to mutually agree on what resources (human and financial) the agencies will contribute to their relationship. In recent years, partners have contributed the following roles to country-level Shelter Clusters:

- Deputy or co-coordinators
- Subnational Shelter Cluster Coordinators
- Technical Coordinators
- Information Management Officers
- Assessment Officers
- Settlement Planning Officers
- Technical Coordinators
- Cash Advisors
- Liaison Officers

Beyond seconding staff, partners have also provided budgets to support the activities of country-level Shelter Clusters and have also created an enabling environment for humanitarian response by advocating for the Shelter Cluster at HCT level. Examples of support activities include but are not limited to:

- Assessments
- Trainings or other form of capacity building
- Consultancies

An MoU should be established between the Cluster Lead Agency and the Co-chair Agency to agree on the modalities and the length of this cooperation. A co-chair should be nominated transparently by other cluster members and commit to fulfil the responsibilities of the role.

Case Studies

Cross Border Operations in Syria

Cluster Lead Agency: UNHCR

Co-chair: Care International

When: 2019-present

Concept: *Transparent Call for Applications*

Due to the limited staffing situation of the Shelter Cluster in 2019 (1 coordinator and 1 associate), and given the multiple displacements that took place in NW Syria throughout the year, the Shelter Cluster did not have enough staff to manage the cluster's 75 partners, pool fund allocations, camp infrastructure improvements, shelter standards, and other daily activities. The Shelter Cluster launched a process for partners to apply as co-chair of the Shelter Cluster, providing CVs of candidates who could regularly liaise with the members, provide additional technical follow-up on the cluster's activities, and advise the Shelter Cluster partners. Care International was selected as the partner providing a dedicated deputy coordinator and additional information management staff in 2020.



Iraq

Cluster Lead Agency: UNHCR

Co-chairs: NRC, IOM

When: 2014-2019

Concept: *Multiple agencies can support the Shelter Cluster in providing dedicated coordination capacity in different hubs of the response.*

When the Shelter Cluster in Iraq was activated, it was agreed that dedicated subnational coordination mechanisms were needed to facilitate the shelter coordination in the many geographic locations of the response. The Shelter Cluster's terms of reference established that UNHCR would lead the Shelter Cluster with two co-chair agencies: NRC and IOM. UNHCR therefore provided a senior shelter cluster coordinator at national level, a subnational shelter cluster coordination officer in the Kurdistan region, an information management officer, and a liaison officer. IOM provided a subnational shelter cluster coordinator in the Centre and South and an information management assistant. NRC provided the co-chair/co-coordinator role.



Ukraine

Cluster Lead Agency: UNHCR

Co-chair: People in Need

When: 2015-2019

Concept: *Donors are critical in enabling NGOs to participate in leadership*

Sometimes, NGOs may have certain advantages in access and coverage of the response that would make it particularly well placed to be the co-chair of the Shelter Cluster. While NGOs such as the Norwegian Refugee Council and Care International may have had more experience as co-chair in conflict and natural disaster contexts, sometimes it is necessary to look at other NGOs' comparative advantages in a context. Given People in Need's coverage of the response in both Government Controlled and Non-Government Controlled Areas of Ukraine, the NGO was selected as a co-chair. In order to provide staffing, a tri-lateral MoU was signed between UNHCR, People in Need, and ECHO. ECHO funded People in Need to hire two staff and support activities to carry out subnational cluster functions in Eastern Ukraine. While the first grant enabled People in Need to focus on coordination of winterization, referrals, and repairs, the last grant focused on capacity building of local authorities in coordination. This partnership was critical to ensuring a time-bound and decentralized shelter coordination mechanism.

Evaluation of the Global Shelter Cluster Strategy 2013-2017

Cluster Coordination Performance Monitoring from various country-level Clusters

Concept: *Two or more UN agencies in the leadership can limit other partners' sense of ownership of the cluster's activities and can create confusion in delivery of response.*

In 2018, the Global Shelter Cluster team hired an independent evaluator of the Shelter Cluster. One of the key findings was that co-leadership of the Shelter Cluster by two UN agencies, "in all but the rarest of circumstances,



brings little added value and all agree should be avoided wherever possible." The evaluation cited frustration from partners and cluster teams on the additional time and energy that had to be spent in such situations to clarify roles and accountabilities. This often hampers and slows the effectiveness of the shelter response. Co-led country clusters often have several characteristics: lack of clear and coherent strategy for the shelter response, lack of data on response and needs, lack of dedicated staffing, lack of clarity on the roles of team members, and lack of time to monitor the strategy's implementation, resulting in failure and flexibility to respond to rapidly changing events and contexts.

The UN Standby Partnership

Country-level Shelter Clusters have worked with the Standby Partnership to hire people through NGO partners to fill critical technical roles on their cluster teams. The Standby Partnership is a network of partners which provide support to UN agencies through secondments of personnel. This is not really a co-chairing arrangement, but it is mentioned here as another way to increase the capacity of the cluster coordination team. Through the Standby Partnership, country-level Shelter Clusters have been able to hire cash advisors, settlement planning officers, energy experts, information management officers, and other technical profiles for a task-oriented and time bound deployment. Prior to the end of the deployment, the Shelter Cluster team and partners should consider what are the longer-term needs for this staffing role and seek an exit strategy for its dependency on gratis personnel.

Agencies providing staffing to the Shelter Cluster

In addition to the staff provided from the Global Shelter Cluster Lead Agencies, UNHCR and IFRC, the following agencies have contributed staff to country-level Shelter Clusters in 2020-21:

IOM, UNICEF, NRC, NORCAP, REACH, ACTED, CANADEM, Canadian Red Cross, Care International, Global Communities, Habitat for Humanity, Mercy Corps, Madagascar Red Cross, Swedish Civil Contingencies Agency (MSB), Netherlands Red Cross, Nepal Red Cross Society, Samaritan's Purse, UNOPS, and the Zimbabwe Red Cross Society.