

STRATEGIC PLANNING

CLUSTER TRANSITION PLANNING

This section looks at:

- What cluster transition and deactivation are
- Thinking early for future CCCM Cluster transition
- Actively planning CCCM Cluster transition and deactivation

WHAT ARE CLUSTER TRANSITION AND DEACTIVATION?

CLUSTER ACTIVATION

When thinking about cluster transition and deactivation it is useful to keep in mind the reasons why clusters are activated in the first place: Clusters are created when existing coordination mechanisms are overwhelmed or

constrained in their ability to respond to identified needs in line with humanitarian principles.

The criteria for cluster activation are met when:

1. Response and coordination gaps exist due to a sharp deterioration or significant change in the humanitarian situation.
2. Existing national response or coordination capacity is unable to meet needs in a manner that respects humanitarian principles, due to the scale of need, number of actors involved, need for a more complex multi-sectoral approach, or other constraints on the ability to respond or apply humanitarian principles.

Coordination Mechanism	Emergency phase	Recovery phase
Government coordination capacity is adequate and not constrained	Government provides leadership. International partners may reinforce the Government's coordination capacity.	Government leadership continues. Humanitarian coordination structures may transition to recovery and to development structures. International actors withdraw or support recovery and help to prepare for future crises.
Government coordination capacity is limited or constrained	Clusters are activated where needed. Where appropriate and possible, co-leadership with Government bodies and NGO partners is strongly encouraged.	Clusters are de-activated or devolve to national emergency or recovery and development coordination structures, where appropriate and possible. Government coordination is strengthened, where appropriate and possible. ¹

CLUSTER TRANSITION & DEACTIVATION

Clusters are timebound. They are activated when there are gaps in coordination and humanitarian response, and national response and coordination capacities cannot meet these needs. Clusters should therefore be deactivated when that gap no longer exists... Wherever possible, Clusters should transition to emergency or recovery coordination structures that are led or supported nationally.

¹ IASC (2015) IASC Reference Module on Cluster Coordination at the Country Level

What are transition and deactivation?

Cluster deactivation is the closure of a formally activated cluster. This includes transferring core functions from clusters, which have international leadership and accountability, to other structures e.g. nationally-led or development-focused. Cluster functions can be transferred to existing or pre-crisis structures, or new ones.

Cluster transition is the process – planning and implementation – of transferring cluster leadership and accountabilities, leading to deactivation.²

When should clusters be deactivated?

The de-activation of formally activated clusters may be considered when at least one of the conditions that led to its activation is no longer present, i.e.:

1. The humanitarian situation improves, significantly reducing humanitarian needs and consequently reducing associated response and coordination gaps.
2. National structures acquire sufficient capacity to coordinate and meet residual humanitarian need in line with humanitarian principles.

What triggers deactivation?

Cluster transition and deactivation processes are initiated and led by the Humanitarian Coordinator (HC), in consultation with the Humanitarian Country Team (HCT), in collaboration with national authorities where possible, supported by OCHA. This may be initiated following an annual review of the coordination architecture by the HC/HCT. The decision to start the deactivation process is taken by the HC in consultation with the HCT and the national authorities.

A **coordination architecture review** can be carried out in-country, or requests can be made to the IASC Peer2-Peer Support Project, or the Global Cluster Coordination Group to conduct the review. The review assesses whether the coordination structures continue to be appropriate in light of changes in the humanitarian context and determines whether they should (i) continue as they are, (ii) be expanded, (iii) be streamlined, or (iv) transition with a plan and benchmarks for deactivation.³

A decision to transition and deactivate clusters might apply to all clusters in a humanitarian response, or it might apply to some only, while others continue, depending on the response situation. **Principles of deactivation**

² IASC (2015) IASC Reference Module on Cluster Coordination at the Country Level

³ IASC (2015) IASC Reference Module on Cluster Coordination at the Country Level

Four principles should guide and inform transition and de-activation processes.

1. **They are initiated and led by the HC, in consultation with the HCT, wherever possible in close collaboration with national authorities and supported by OCHA.** CLAs, cluster partners and national counterparts should also be involved in drafting and agreeing the review and its recommendations and preparing transition or de-activation plans.
2. **They are based on assessment of national capacity**, including:
 - The presence, structure and resources of relevant response and coordination mechanisms. Where clusters are able to hand over to national counterparts, transition will be easier and probably faster.
 - De-activation can also be induced by a Government declaration that an emergency is over, shifting the focus to recovery and development coordination structures.
 - The functions of some clusters (for example, protection or WASH) are likely to be transferred to a variety of national structures. Service clusters (ETC, Logistics) may first transition to facilitating access to commercial or national services, prior to phasing out.
 - Not all clusters must be de-activated at the same time; the timing of de-activation is related to ongoing needs and the presence or absence of national structures competent to manage the functions in question.
3. **They take account of the context**, including the scale of residual or continued humanitarian needs, and the ability of successor mechanisms to respond in line with humanitarian principles.
 - De-activation in sudden onset crises may be more rapid than in complex or protracted emergencies.
 - Probability of recurring or new disasters (and costs of closure and subsequent re-establishment) may outweigh benefits of de-activation, especially if investments have been made in capacity-building and preparedness.
4. **They are guided by early recovery and resilience-building objectives.** Integrating early recovery objectives in transition and de-activation plans ensures humanitarian actors consider sustainability of their response, take steps to build national and local capacity, emphasize preparedness, support long-term recovery and development objectives.
 - Where feasible, clusters should share cluster leadership with national actors, and work with national counterparts to build capacity to assume coordination roles in humanitarian preparedness and response as well as recovery and development. Care should be taken to avoid transferring leadership before capacity is in place.

IASC Reference Module on Cluster Coordination at the Country Level, 2015

THINKING EARLY FOR FUTURE CCCM CLUSTER TRANSITION

Just as the ultimate goal of CCCM is that families no longer need humanitarian and CCCM support, the end goal of the CCCM Cluster – an emergency coordination mechanism – is that its coordination functions are either no longer needed or are handed over. Given that at some point all CCCM Clusters will be deactivated, it is good practice to consider longer-term planning for CCCM coordination from as early in the response as is feasible in the context, in:

- Strategic planning processes
- The coordination structure of the Cluster

Depending on the response context, it may or may not be possible or appropriate to identify a future transition plan (to work towards eventual cluster deactivation) early on. However, it is usually possible to **build relationships and conduct activities that create conditions which later transition plans can be built on.**

CREATING CONDITIONS FOR TRANSITION

If future transition options are clear

In some responses, the future transition option can be clearly identified early on. For example, there might be a government counterpart who takes on a coordination and leadership role in relation to CCCM response – and eventual handover of coordination functions can be anticipated. In this case, the following can be considered:

- ✓ Including the government counterpart in coordination structures, for example through establishing co-leadership with the government body at national or sub-national level, and supporting government participation in and leadership of both regular coordination processes and strategic planning processes
- ✓ Identifying any capacity-building needs of government counterpart staff on coordination functions and other relevant topics, and including this in cluster strategic planning and annual workplans
- ✓ Strong localization focus of the Cluster in coordination functions, including engaging local and national NGOs as sub-national and national Co-Coordinating Partners, supporting their coordination capacity and understanding of coordination systems through trainings, as well as promoting local and national partners as operational actors including through supporting technical capacity and access to funding.

If future transition options are not clear

Sometimes it is not possible or appropriate to identify future transition options earlier in a response, especially if government co-leadership of the Cluster is not feasible, or yet feasible. However, it still pays off to think long term, and to start to build longer-term thinking into ongoing humanitarian response. You might wish to consider how to lay the foundations for future discussions on transition, while maintaining flexibility to adapt to future changes in the context and coordination needs. For example:

- ✓ Consider which actors might be engaged in any future transition discussions.
- ✓ Proactively establish good working relationships between the Cluster coordination team and relevant authorities at national and sub-national level. The most appropriate forms of engagement can differ between contexts and might change over time. For example, bilateral engagement and briefings to authorities, aiming for later participation in cluster coordination meetings.
- ✓ Identify ways the Cluster can support a good understanding of coordination functions, humanitarian principles, and other relevant knowledge among these actors, to enable any future engagement on transition. This might also support current CCCM coordination engagement.
- ✓ Strong localization focus, supporting local and national actor contribution to coordination and operations.

Encouraging a sense of ownership among stakeholders early in a process usually gives better results, as does planning for handover with the organization and staff that will take on the work.

PLANNING CLUSTER TRANSITION AND DEACTIVATION

Remember: cluster transition is the **process** of working towards deactivation of cluster coordination mechanism.

The **processes of transition** might take a long time, and include:

- Development of a plan for what deactivation looks like
- Development of a plan for the transition process itself
- Implementation of the transition – i.e. the steps needed to hand over or stop coordination functions

DEACTIVATION OPTIONS

Coordination of the humanitarian CCCM response is intrinsically linked to the operational CCCM response – with the CCCM coordination structure designed based on the needs of the operational response, as well as the coordination architecture that the CCCM coordination mechanism sits within.

Deactivation of a CCCM Cluster could entail **handover** of responsibilities to another actor (e.g. government body takes on CCCM coordination responsibilities) or sometimes could be a full **exit** of CCCM coordination if it is no longer required (i.e. there are no longer CCCM needs and no CCCM humanitarian response that needs coordination support e.g. all sites are closed), but with preparedness coordination capacity being retained, most likely by the responsible government body. The most appropriate options will depend on your context.

For example:

- Some CCCM response continues, and CCCM coordination functions handed over to a government body.

- Some CCCM response continues, and CCCM coordination functions are transitioned to a sectoral coordination system or adapted coordination mechanism on a smaller scale or with focus on preparedness and contingency planning.
- Phase-out of CCCM response (e.g. if all sites are closed) and exit of the CCCM coordination function.

If the decision is taken for the CCCM Cluster to deactivate and the coordination function to be stopped not handed over, then future preparedness planning must be taken into consideration as part of the planning process – IASC Cluster Core Function 5.

WHEN SHOULD A CCCM CLUSTER TRANSITION / DEACTIVATE?

If the context allows (see above), you might have been able to work from early on to identify a future transition option for the Cluster and to start to build relationships and structures to later enable this.

The decision to transition and deactivate clusters, and the timeline, is ultimately made by the HC with the HCT in consultation with the government/national authorities, after a coordination review. CCCM Clusters and CLAs might be asked to establish benchmarks as part of a coordination review, to inform the decision of when Cluster transition should start. You should also set benchmarks and timelines as part of the transition process.

Benchmarks to consider for CCCM Cluster transition will be specific to your context, but might include:

- Scale and severity of CCCM needs and progress towards durable or transitional solutions
- Scale of continuing CCCM need
- Geographic coverage of CCCM response
- Capacity and willingness of national / government actors, or an alternative coordination setup, to coordinate remaining CCCM response

Cluster deactivation or transition should always be primarily driven by the needs of the affected population and the potential impact on them. Lack of funding, political challenges, security, and/or the capacity of the CLA are not reasons to deactivate a cluster if there is still need for CCCM response and coordination that cannot be met by national structures. Likewise, CCCM Cluster deactivation does not mean that funding is no longer required for a CCCM response.

WHAT NEEDS TO BE TRANSITIONED: THE SIX CORE FUNCTIONS OF A CLUSTER

The global Inter-Agency Standing Committee (IASC) guidance on cluster transition encourages thinking about transition through the framework of the IASC core functions of a cluster. There are **“6 + 1” core functions of clusters**. Listed in more detail in the [Toolkit Section 1.2 Coordination – Core Functions of a CCCM Cluster](#) and the IASC Reference Module for Cluster Coordination (2015) in brief they are:

1. To support service delivery
 2. To inform the HC’s strategic decision-making
 3. To plan and implement cluster strategies
 4. To monitor and evaluate performance
 5. To build national capacity in preparedness and contingency planning
 6. To support robust advocacy
- And, to promote and strengthen accountability to affected populations.

A useful first step of a transition process is to map out the current work of the Cluster against the 6+1 core functions. This can then be used as the basis of the transition plan, to what will be to identify what will happen for each Cluster activity and responsibility – to be handed over, adapted, or phased out.

Two aspects of coordination should be considered:

- A suitable coordination mechanism for the coordination of any continued CCCM response
- Preparedness for the coordination of any future crisis and any associated CCCM response

The fifth core function of clusters – to build national capacity in preparedness and contingency planning – is a critical one to support successful transition of a cluster. This might include supporting development or inclusion of CCCM in national authorities’ contingency planning, and supporting establishment or strengthening of structures that can be activated to coordinate emergency CCCM response if needed.

STEPS FOR PLANNING CLUSTER TRANSITION & DEACTIVATION

When preparing transition and deactivation plans, a cluster should:

1. Map preparedness arrangements, and response and coordination needs (based on the IASC six cluster functions)
2. Identify Government and other coordination-and-response mechanisms that are competent to assume leadership and accountability for the cluster’s functions. Responsibilities and accountabilities may pass to a range of officials or institutions and not all need to be transferred at the same time
3. Assess the capacity of these mechanisms to assume responsibility
4. Determine what must be done over what period to build capacity, during the transition or to enable de-activation
5. Define how CLAs and national counterparts are accountable for cluster functions during transition and de-activation, and take steps to ensure accountability is preserved.
6. Set benchmarks to indicate phased transitions towards de-activation
7. Propose a timetable for transition or de-activation
8. Propose a timetable for additional cluster reviews as appropriate
9. Decide how preparedness will be maintained or strengthened after de-activation and define any continued role for the CLA

IASC Reference Module for Cluster Coordination at Country Level, 2015

DESIGNING DEACTIVATION OPTIONS & TRANSITION PROCESSES

The best plan for CCCM Cluster deactivation (handover or exit) and the right approach for transitioning to it will be unique to each response. **Cluster transition is the process of working towards deactivation.**

Ideally, a transition should have a **phased approach**: downscaling Cluster activities and responsibilities through either gradually stopping workstreams or gradually handing them over, while also identifying and delivering any needed capacity-building, advocacy, or communication.

You might wish to develop a transition strategy in multiple parts: a first strategy to identify deactivation options, then updated to outline a full transition and deactivation plan.

When identifying deactivation options, and designing the transition approach and activities, consider:

CCCM response and its coordination requirements

- ✓ What CCCM response will continue? What activities will continue or be adapted?
- ✓ Which actors will continue to deliver CCCM interventions, and where?
- ✓ Future funding for CCCM interventions: what is available, what needs to be advocated for, and how?
- ✓ What scale of CCCM coordination is needed to support continued CCCM response. Which coordination functions must be continued, and which can be stopped? Try to be objective! It can be difficult to decide to stop workstreams that your team has put a lot of effort into, or to decide that a full Cluster setup is no longer needed.

- ✓ Consider capacities and limitations of actors who might take over coordination functions, including: staffing, time of personnel, technical expertise, financial resources, willingness, organizational mandate, and alignment with organizational goals and existing work
- ✓ Is any capacity-building needed to ensure the actors and staff who will take over coordination functions are prepared to do so?
 - Consider on-the-job mentoring and secondments as well as training
 - Consider different types of capacities needed – technical CCCM and IM skills, ‘soft’ (coordination) skills, and institutional capacity to support coordination
- ✓ What future resources might be needed for CCCM coordination (financial, staffing commitments), and from where? Are fundraising or advocacy needed as transition activities?
- ✓ What other coordination structures will continue, or will be set up, and how are CCCM actors and CCCM coordination expected to interact with these?
- ✓ Are other stakeholders that will engage with CCCM coordination informed of the process and supportive of the revised coordination structure? Have they been able to give inputs?
- ✓ What communication or advocacy is needed to support either an exit or a successful handover?
- ✓ If HNO/HRP processes will continue after the deactivation of a CCCM Cluster, and there is continued need to fundraise for a CCCM response, clarify with the HC together with the CLA and OCHA whether and how CCCM requirements will be reflected, and who is responsible for these inputs Accountabilities and technical support
- ✓ If future CCCM training or technical guidance might be needed, who is responsible and do they have sufficient capacities and resources to deliver on these?
- ✓ Accountability: who will be accountable for what, in a new structure?
- ✓ How emergency preparedness will be maintained, including any role for the CLA/s

Support for you

- ✓ The Global CCCM Cluster can offer advice, inputs, and technical support!

STAKEHOLDERS & CONSULTATION

As with developing any strategy, consultation with stakeholders is vital to develop an informed and sustainable transition and deactivation plan. Different stakeholders will require different levels of consultation, likely over a period of time to allow for revisions. For example, a transition should be planned by the Cluster coordination team and CLA together with CCCM partners; donors might be consulted and asked to input at specific points in the process. While the timelines and final decisions of deactivation are likely to be taken at a high level, operational CCCM partners must be central to the process of design of the Cluster’s transition approach: defining what coordination is needed to support continued CCCM response.

As well as CCCM partners, the CLA and co-chair organization, interested stakeholders might include:

- Government counterparts
- Donors
- Global CCCM Cluster!
- Other clusters and inter-agency coordination e.g. OCHA
- NGO forum or NGO representatives, if NGOs will continue delivering CCCM response or are major service providers in sites managed by CCCM partners
- Development or durable solutions actors with an interest in the long-term planning for sites CCCM responds in (e.g. actors working on returns, camp transition, or settlement planning)

TRANSITION OF IM & KNOWLEDGE MANAGEMENT

- ✓ Discuss archiving with the global CCCM Cluster IM team, including if websites will remain online.

- ✓ Ensure all public documents published by the Cluster are uploaded and available online (e.g. technical guidance, reports, IM products, datasets, etc.).
- ✓ Facilitate transfer of tools and technical knowledge to actors taking over CCCM coordination.
- ✓ Ensure the actors and staff taking over IM functions have the equipment, resources, and skills to be able to carry out the tasks. Work with these bodies to address any gaps, e.g. conducting trainings or advocating for financial resources.

PHILIPPINES: TYPHOON HAIYAN, 2014 – CLUSTER TRANSITION TO NATIONAL LEADERSHIP

The CCCM Cluster was established under the leadership of the Department of Social Welfare and Development (DSWD) with IOM as co-lead agency. Following displacement after Typhoon Haiyan, CCCM actors responded in evacuation centres, spontaneous settlements, and transitional sites, supported data collection and population tracking, and supported government coordination of the CCCM response.

The transition strategy for the Typhoon Haiyan response planned the continuation of the Cluster but under governmental leadership at national and local level. The transition approach focused on strengthening capacity of Local Government Units to assume a leadership role in CCCM response and coordination, complemented by capacity-building for DSWD at national level. A continued role in disaster preparedness was anticipated for IOM after handover, with IOM planning to maintain capacity to conduct CCCM trainings as needed and to support the government to re-establish evacuation centre capacities. Benchmarks for CCCM Cluster transition centred on reduction of need for CCCM response, including closure of evacuation facilities and relocation of IDPs to transitional shelters. DSWD continues to lead a CCCM cluster under the Government of the Philippines' national framework for disaster management.

IRAQ: ISIL RESPONSE, 2022 – CLUSTER DEACTIVATION

The CCCM Cluster was activated in 2014 in response to mass internal displacement from the conflict with ISIL. CCCM actors responded in formal camps, informal sites, and in urban areas supporting returns. Following large-scale returns, the HC and HCT initiated a first review of the cluster system in 2019. At this time, 67 camps were still open, managed by UN, NGOs, and government, and the first CCCM Cluster transition strategy anticipated the handover of CCCM coordination to the government body responsible for humanitarian assistance. A durable solutions coordination structure was established in Iraq in 2020 at both national and sub-national levels.

By the time of a second coordination review in early 2022, 26 camps remained open (all supported by either UNHCR or IOM, the CLA and co-chair agencies, in cooperation with the government), NGO and UN CCCM actors responding in informal sites were working towards exit strategies, and the urban CCCM response had ended. The final CCCM Cluster transition approach was to split the functions of the Cluster, to be absorbed by continuing CCCM humanitarian actors interacting with continuing coordination structures (the durable solutions architecture, and the HCT). For camp response, UNHCR and IOM internalized the relevant functions of the Cluster (IM, strategic planning, advocacy, future preparedness planning, etc.) within their ongoing CCCM response and engagement with the government. For informal sites response, CCCM partners pivoted to engaging directly with the continuing durable solutions coordination mechanism at sub-national level. The CCCM Cluster was deactivated at the end of 2022.

Related Resources

Title	Type	Language	Date
IASC Draft Guidance on the Adaption of Clusters in Transition	Guidance	English	2011
IASC Reference Module for Cluster Coordination at Country Level – see Toolkit Section 1.2 Core Functions of a CCCM Cluster			
CCCM Cluster Transition Strategy, Iraq	Example	English	2022
CCCM Cluster Transition Strategy, Philippines	Example	English	2014

References & further reading:

- Global Health Cluster (2020) [Health Cluster Guide, A Practical Handbook](#)
- Global Education Cluster (2018) [Education Cluster Guide to Developing Education Cluster Strategies](#)