

OCHA on Message: Inter-Agency Standing Committee



What is the Inter-Agency Standing Committee?

Created by the United Nations General Assembly, through its resolution 46/182 in 1991, the Inter-Agency Standing Committee, or IASC, is the longest-standing and highest-level humanitarian coordination forum of the United Nations system. It brings together 19 principals of United Nations and non-United Nations entities, including the Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement and non-governmental organizations to ensure coherence of preparedness and response efforts, formulate policy, and agree on priorities for strengthened humanitarian action.

The IASC facilitates the leadership role of the United Nations Secretary-General by meeting regularly to ensure better preparation for, as well as rapid and coherent response to humanitarian crises. It is chaired by the United Nations Emergency Relief Coordinator (ERC).

What are the priorities of the IASC?

Every two years, and as required, the IASC agrees on priorities that strengthen the effectiveness and efficiency of collective humanitarian action, specifically to save lives and reduce suffering. In May 2018, the IASC agreed on the Five Strategic Priorities listed in the figure to the right:

IASC STRATEGIC PRIORITIES 2019–2020

-  Enhanced operational response
-  Enhanced accountability and inclusion
-  Greater impact of collective advocacy
-  Improved humanitarian-development collaboration
-  Improved humanitarian resourcing

What is the structure of the IASC?

Coordination in the IASC takes place at various levels. The IASC carries out its role through four distinct structures: (a) **The IASC principals are the executive heads of the organizations that form the IASC. They meet twice a year or as needed to make strategic, operational and policy decisions that have implications for humanitarian action. The IASC principals are supported by subsidiary bodies established to support the implementation of their decisions and IASC priorities, namely:**

(b) The **Deputies Forum** is an informal platform for dialogue and information sharing on strategic issues of common interest. The forum is composed of representatives at the level

of the Assistant Secretary-General and is chaired by the Deputy ERC.

(c) The Emergency Directors of the various United Nations and non-United Nations entities convene as the **Emergency Directors Group** and focus on current crises and what is required to meet the urgent operational needs on the ground. The group is chaired by OCHA's Director of Operations.

(d) The **Operational Policy and Advocacy Group** drives the normative and strategic policy work of the IASC, including on system-wide policy matters with a direct bearing on humanitarian operations. It comprises representatives at the level of Emergency Director or Policy Director. Co-chaired by members of the IASC, the group is supported by five timebound **Results** responsible for delivering agreed normative

outputs under each of the five IASC Strategic Priorities.

In addition, the IASC structures also include entities associated with it. Currently, the Inter-Agency Humanitarian Evaluations Steering Group, the Global Cluster Coordination Group and the Humanitarian Programme Cycle Steering Group are associated with the IASC. These groups interact with different IASC bodies.

The work of the IASC is supported by the **IASC secretariat**, whose primary purpose is to support IASC principals in their deliberations, ensuring that their decisions are acted upon. The secretariat also supports the IASC in setting its agenda, as well as contributes to the substantive aspects of the IASC's work, including building synergies among the various IASC structures.

“The IASC’s success is rooted in its ability to convene beyond the United Nations, effectively facilitating connections, mobilizing support internally and externally, collectively and individually, and in creating credible and ‘safe space’ for open dialogue.”

- Mark Lowcock,
Under-Secretary-
General for
Humanitarian Affairs
and Emergency Relief
Coordinator,
September 2018

What is the role of OCHA?

The ERC chairs the IASC, with responsibility for convening the IASC principals’ meetings and setting the agenda in consultation with IASC organizations. The Deputy

ERC maintains a close link between the IASC and the Deputies Forum as OCHA’s principal on the IASC and the Chair of the Deputies Forum. OCHA’s Director of Operations co-chairs the

Emergency Directors Group. OCHA also chairs or is represented in the various Results Groups and hosts the IASC secretariat in Geneva and New York.

What does OCHA say?

1. The IASC is the primary mechanism for inter-agency coordination, policy development and decision-making on humanitarian issues at global, regional and country levels. At the country level, the Humanitarian Country Teams comprise IASC members and other humanitarian organizations that provide humanitarian assistance and protection at national and subnational levels.

2. The IASC plays a key role in monitoring and strengthening humanitarian operations, preventing gaps and duplications in humanitarian response. Inter-agency humanitarian evaluations and feedback mechanisms help to improve the quality of assistance.

3. Important decisions made by the ERC, such as the designation of humanitarian leadership and

coordination structures or the activation of system-wide response, are made in consultation with the IASC principals.

4. Trust between IASC organizations is key to the success of the humanitarian enterprise. The IASC is committed to the Principles of Partnership, which aim to create humanitarian space where all actors engage on a more equal and transparent setting.

Major achievements of the IASC

- After the 2004 Indian Ocean tsunami, the IASC launched reform measures focused on coordination, leadership, humanitarian financing and partnership. Capacities at the global level to respond to emergencies have been reinforced, but challenges remain.
- Following the Haiti earthquake and Pakistan floods in 2010, the IASC embarked on the Transformative Agenda, which set the parameters for improved collective response to major humanitarian crises.
- In 2018, the IASC agreed on a comprehensive strategy to combat sexual exploitation, abuse and harassment, with the objective to foster a speak-up culture, improve protection and assistance to victims and survivors, and strengthen accountability.
- That same year, the IASC also agreed on Scale-Up Protocols for system-wide mobilization in response to a sudden onset and/or rapidly deteriorating humanitarian situation in a given country, including at the subnational level, where capacity to lead, coordinate and deliver humanitarian assistance does not match the scale, complexity or urgency of the crisis.

Contact:

Mervat Shelbaya,
Head, IASC secretariat,
iasccorrespondence@un.org

February 2019

To find out more

- Visit the IASC website for more information, to learn about IASC member organizations and standing invitees, and for key policy and guidance documents:
<https://interagencystandingcommittee.org/>