What is the Inter-Agency Standing Committee?

The Inter-Agency Standing Committee (IASC) brings together international organizations working to provide humanitarian assistance to people in need as a result of natural disasters, conflict-related emergencies, global food crises and pandemics. By coordinating activities, members improve overall service delivery, share resources, pool analysis and disseminate best practices. Participants use the forum to agree on system-wide policies to achieve a better overall response, while respecting organizations' individual mandates.

Established by UN General Assembly resolution 46/182 in 1991, the IASC is the only decision-making group that includes UN agencies, the World Bank, the International Organization for Migration and other humanitarian organizations, such as the International Committee of the Red Cross, the International Federation of the Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies and non-governmental organizations. In other words, the IASC includes many of the largest humanitarian organizations that account for the majority of humanitarian assistance distributed worldwide. Organizations take part in the IASC as members from the UN family, or standing invitees (mostly non-UN organizations).
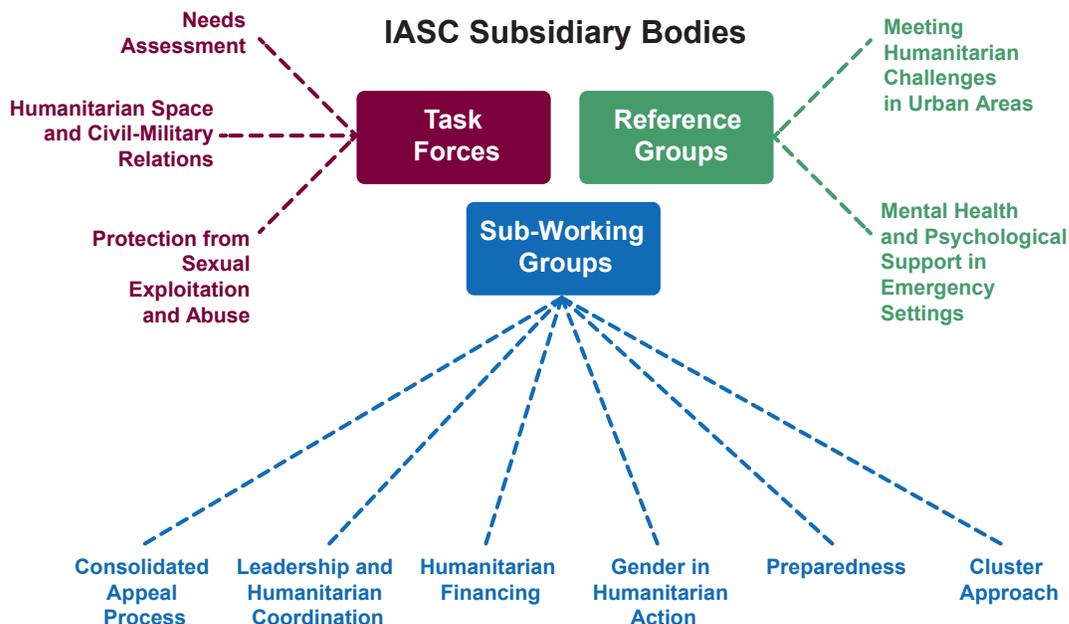
What are the IASC's priorities?

Every year, the IASC agrees on a set of priorities. In 2011 and 2012, these priorities focus on strengthening the international humanitarian response systems in five key areas: leadership and coordination; accountability for performance; accountability to affected people; building national capacity for preparedness; and advocacy and communications.

What is the IASC's structure?

Coordination in the IASC takes place at different levels. The IASC Principals are the heads of the organizations that form the IASC, while the IASC Working Group brings together the emergency directors or other directors of the IASC organizations. In addition, representatives from the humanitarian community in Geneva and New York meet informally to share information on current emergencies and to discuss new developments, such as the use of new technologies in humanitarian response.

What are IASC Subsidiary Bodies?

IASC Subsidiary Bodies assist the IASC Principals or the IASC Working Group by working on specific policy questions and other tasks. Subsidiary Bodies may be sub-working groups, task forces or reference groups, bringing together the technical expertise of the IASC organizations. The guidance, tools and handbooks originating from these groups are known as "IASC products". The Subsidiary Bodies regularly consult with staff working in humanitarian situations to ensure their experiences are reflected in IASC guidance.

IASC Subsidiary Bodies

- Needs Assessment
- Humanitarian Space and Civil-Military Relations
- Protection from Sexual Exploitation and Abuse

Task Forces

Reference Groups

- Meeting Humanitarian Challenges in Urban Areas
- Mental Health and Psychological Support in Emergency Settings

Sub-Working Groups

- Consolidated Appeal Process
- Leadership and Humanitarian Coordination
- Humanitarian Financing
- Gender in Humanitarian Action
- Preparedness
- Cluster Approach

OCHA on Message is a reference product that enables staff to communicate OCHA's position on key issues. For more information contact the Reporting Unit at ochareporting@un.org.

What is OCHA's role?

The Emergency Relief Coordinator chairs the IASC. He/she convenes the IASC Principals meetings and sets the agenda in consultation with IASC organizations. The Director of OCHA's Geneva office chairs the IASC Working Group. OCHA also co-chairs several of the IASC Subsidiary Bodies. The IASC Secretariat, hosted by OCHA in Geneva and New York, facilitates inter-agency consultations, and services the IASC Principals and Working Group. It also monitors the work of the IASC Subsidiary Bodies and the implementation of the IASC's decisions.

Some of the IASC's major achievements

Over the past 20 years, the IASC has developed a comprehensive body of policies, producing 100 IASC products in different languages to guide the humanitarian community's work. Examples include *Growing the Sheltering Tree – Protecting Rights through Humanitarian Action*, *Mental Health and Psychosocial Support in Emergency Settings*, the *IASC Handbook for Resident Coordinators and Humanitarian Coordinators on Emergency Preparedness and Response*, and the *IASC Gender Handbook for Humanitarian Action*. Given the IASC's inclusive participation, these products reflect broad consensus within the humanitarian community and guide the work of many UN and non-UN humanitarian organizations.

In 2006, following the Humanitarian Response Review, the IASC agreed on a division of labour to ensure a predictable and accountable international response to humanitarian emergencies by defining roles and responsibilities within different sectors, known as the 'cluster approach'. Since then, in sudden-onset disasters and protracted emergencies, the cluster approach has been implemented in 31 countries with Humanitarian Coordinators and in 12 countries with UN Resident Coordinators.

The IASC has also served as a powerful tool for common advocacy on particular emergencies and on topics such as the humanitarian consequences of climate change.

What does OCHA say?

- The IASC is the primary forum for inter-agency coordination, policy development and decision-making on humanitarian issues at the global, regional and country levels. At the country level, the Humanitarian Country Teams are composed of IASC members resident in the country and other humanitarian organizations.

- The IASC plays a key role in preventing gaps and duplications in humanitarian response, with real-time evaluations and feedback mechanisms to improve the quality of assistance.

- Important decisions made by the Emergency Relief Coordinator, such as the designation of Humanitarian Coordinators or the activation of clusters, are made in consultation with the IASC.

- Trust between IASC organizations is key to the success of the humanitarian enterprise.

Contact
IASC Secretariat
iasccorrespondence@
un.org

To find out more

- Visit www.humanitarianinfo.org/IASC

- See the Reference Guide on normative developments on the coordination of humanitarian assistance in the General Assembly, the Economic and Social Council, and the Security Council since the adoption of General Assembly resolution 46/182: http://www.unocha.org/about-us/publications/other

- To see all General Assembly resolutions, visit www.un.org/en/documents/index.shtml