













Francophone Shelter Network

Intention Note on an inter-agency initiative

Version # 2 - June 2024

Humanitarian organizations active in the shelter sector, CRAterre, CRS, IFRC, IOM, UNHCR, and supported by the <u>Global Shelter Cluster</u>, are pooling their efforts under this inter-agency initiative to establish the **Francophone Shelter Network**.

The objective of this network is to enhance the capacity of the shelter sector to plan and deliver humanitarian and reconstruction programs in Francophone countries, through knowledge-sharing, cooperative actions, and research.

Why is shelter assistance crucial?

Losing one's home is devastating. And shelter assistance is the foundation of humanitarian response. It is critically important as it provides immediate protection following a crisis, particularly safeguarding the health, security and dignity of those affected.

Shelter - and its environment, also plays a vital role in restoring the psychological, social and physical components of life, as well as in rebuilding livelihoods. Shelter assistance is foundational for resuming activities and long-term reconstruction of family and community life.

Climate change, growing inequalities, escalating conflicts and the increasing frequency and intensity of natural disasters are creating more complex and prolonged crises, leading to a constant rise in displaced populations. In 2023, more than 110 million people worldwide were forced to leave their homes, displaced within or outside their countries¹, with 92 million requiring shelter assistance².

In this context, all shelter sector stakeholders, guided by humanitarian principles and the right to decent housing, have collectively provided shelter assistance to over 20 million people with funding of 1.3 billion USD, which is vastly insufficient to meet all needs.

Scope of shelter assistance needs in the Francophone countries

Not all crises are funded equally. Indeed, too many humanitarian crises receive little global attention. This is particularly true for crises affecting the Francophone world³, especially Francophone Africa, which year after year produces relentless statistics: seven of the ten lowest-ranked countries in the world in terms of Human Development Index are part of it⁴.

There have never been as many internal displacements within Francophone countries as there are today, with more than 11 million internally displaced people estimated at the end of 2023 due to armed conflicts, intercommunal violence and sudden disasters:

- In the **Sahel region** alone, Burkina Faso, Chad, Mali, Mauritania and Niger, more than 4.2 million people are estimated to have fled their homes in 2023⁵.
- In the Lake Chad Basin, Cameroon, Chad and Niger host over 3 million internally displaced or refugee persons affected by poverty, violence and recent floods⁶.

¹ Mid-Year 2023 Trends Report | UNHCR

² Global Shelter Cluster Achievements Report 2023

³ The Francophone world here refers to all the countries which use French as an official and/or vehicular language, and spread across all continents.

⁴ https://worldpopulationreview.com/country-rankings/hdi-by-country

⁵ www.unrefugees.org/emergencies/sahel-crisis/

⁶ Lake Chad Basin: Humanitarian Snapshot (as of 18 December 2023) - Nigeria | ReliefWeb















- In the **Democratic Republic of Congo**, armed violence has caused nearly 7 million people to be displaced, the majority in need of aid⁷.
- Madagascar, Burundi and the Central African Republic are among the poorest and most fragile
 countries in the world, where recurring crises have so exacerbated the vulnerabilities of
 populations that humanitarian aid alone will not be enough to ensure their well-being.
- In **Haiti**, humanitarian needs are growing as the number of people displaced by gang violence reaches nearly 500,000.

Yet, Francophone countries host some of the **least publicized**⁸, **most neglected**⁹ and **poorly funded** humanitarian crises in the world¹⁰, with shelter sector actors consequently having fewer operational¹¹ and coordination¹² **capacities** than elsewhere.

Thus, the creation of this Francophone Shelter Network fulfils an aspiration to federate French-speaking shelter practitioners, whether humanitarian, developmental, political or academic, in a collaborative effort towards greater visibility and funding to enhance the capacity of the shelter sector, through knowledge-sharing, cooperative actions, and research.

Proposed interventions within this initiative

1

Knowledge-sharing

- Invest in exchanges between French-speaking shelter practitioners and in training which remain essentials in the capacity building strategy. Continue, starting in early 2025, the online and free French-language **exchange and training workshops** based on two series of webinars held in November 2022 and February 2024, which gathered up to 178 simultaneous participants¹³. These workshops aim to provide basic knowledge, raise awareness, promote tools and working methods, and increase the visibility of inspiring initiatives and promising local practices. They target frontline French-speaking shelter practitioners, often the most isolated and least likely to participate in global/regional forums, yet they are ultimately responsible for the quality of the programs.
- Identify, translate into French, and share online training and existing lessons learned from interventions to improve current and future practices (including case studies from Shelter Projects publications¹⁴).
- Actively engage the Francophone Shelter Network during national, regional and global events, including the World Urban Forum, the World Bank Global Affordable Housing Conference, Shelter Cluster meetings at global (Shelter Week in Geneva), regional (UK Shelter Forum, Africa Shelter Forum) and national levels, Humanitarian Networks and Partnerships

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⁷ DRC: nearly 7 million displaced by violence, the vast majority need help | UN News (un.org)

⁸ Breaking the Silence: The 10 Most Underrated Humanitarian Crises of 2023 - CARE

⁹ The world's most neglected displacement crises in 2022 - NRC

¹⁰ The <u>Global Shelter Cluster: 2022 Achievements Report</u> indicates that among the 10 least funded responses from the shelter sector, six are from French-speaking countries: Madagascar, Cameroon, Chad, Mali, CAR and Niger.

¹¹ An evaluation report on UNHCR's shelter programs in West and Central Africa, covering the period 2017-2021, indicates that 92% of shelter assistance is limited to the purchase and distribution of plastic sheeting. EVO/2023/05 West and Central Africa Regional Shelter and Settlement Evaluation (unhcr.org)

¹² In 2023, of the 9 Shelter Clusters activated in French-speaking countries, 7 of them do not have Coordinators at the national level, and the regional coordinators also cover most of the time the operational response of their organization.

¹³ https://sheltercluster.org/community-practice/reseau-habitat-durgence-francophone

¹⁴ shelterprojects.org















Week (HNPW in Geneva) and other relevant events to highlight the challenges of the shelter sector in the Francophone countries and the activities of the network.

- Based on the online exchange and training workshops and on the format of regional Shelter Forums, organize in 2025 the first edition of the Francophone Shelter Forum in French and in-person to bring together shelter practitioners operating in Francophone countries to share knowledge and experiences. As part of the localization agenda, this Forum will encourage the presence and active participation of local organizations.
- Identify the academic and professional training courses for careers in architecture, construction, and the environment that exist in Francophone countries, and understand how these training courses prepare the next generation of builders, particularly in Francophone Africa. Suggest to the institutions offering these training courses that they include topics on emergency shelter and incorporate elements of reflection from the Global Shelter Cluster (such as climate change, promotion of local constructive cultures, urban displacements, transition from emergency to durable solution, etc.).

2 Cooperative actions

- Formally structure the Francophone Shelter network around a **Community of Practice**¹⁵ to forge strategic and operational links, pool synergies, skills and best practices among French-speaking practitioners to promote the emergence of local initiatives and also to develop advocacy common grounds to address funding gaps, technical shortcomings, and recurrent recruitment challenges of qualified personnel.
- Provide French-language documents and digital resources in a shared knowledge repository. This digital platform for knowledge exchange, hosted by the Global Shelter Cluster, shares field experiences and promising practices, and provides tools for project cycle management.

3 Research

- Characteristics of the Shelter sector operating in the Francophone countries in terms of strengths, weaknesses, available assets, and learning needs to develop a capacity-building strategy for French-speaking shelter practitioners.
- Map existing actors involved in the Shelter sector, at different levels of skills, interest and influence in Francophone countries to developing strategic, operational and financial partnerships (by forging links with scientific and cultural governmental entities, international organizations, local NGOs, technical cooperation agencies, private associations and companies, donors, public development banks, academic milieu, professional training actors, etc.).

¹⁵ https://sheltercluster.org/community-practice/reseau-habitat-durgence-francophone















Conclusion. With this intention note, which will be expanded over time both to reflect the positions of a broader range of actors and to formulate more detailed recommendations, we express our commitment to pooling our efforts to federate the multiple actors and competencies within this *Francophone Shelter Network*.

Together, we aim to make funding and delivery of shelter assistance in the Francophone countries more effective and to better prepare for crises, to better prevent disasters, and to sustainably respond to prolonged displacement situations.

As signatories of the *Grand Bargain* committing to a localization agenda, we encourage humanitarian responses that provide increased support for the responsibility and capacities of local and national actors, and the participation of affected communities.

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