

Guidance from Global Shelter Cluster

Coordinated life-saving shelter and settlements interventions

Well-planned, coordinated and effectively implemented, immediate shelter and settlements support saves lives in a crisis situation. In addition to providing protection from the elements, adequate shelter is necessary to promote health and well-being, support family and community life, and provide dignity, safety and security whilst facilitating access to education and livelihoods. Assisting crisis-affected people with shelter is the foundation for rebuilding or re-establishing their homes, which contributes to reducing further displacement. Shelter assistance can support both individual and collective solutions through a combination of in-kind or cash and voucher assistance, complemented by technical assistance.

In response to disasters and conflicts, shelter and settlement actors engage in several types of interventions to meet the multiple needs of affected populations. These activities are life-saving during crises, ensuring adequate shelter that protect against the elements, preventing health risks, and promoting safety and habitable living conditions. Interventions include, but are not limited to:

1. **Provision of shelter materials** to aid emergency shelter construction or immediate repairs, inclusive of material, financial, and technical support to ensure adequate and safe use of materials. May include individual or kitted materials such as tarpaulins, roofing, framing or cladding materials, rope, sealing-off kits, shelter kits, toolkits.
2. **Construction and/or provision of emergency shelters** in situ or displacement sites, inclusive of material, financial and technical support to ensure safety and protection from the elements. This can include tents, shelter kits, or basic construction materials in support of the repair of buildings serving as emergency or transitional shelters (including collective & transit centers).
3. **Provision and distribution of essential household and personal items** for affected people and host families including in individual or collective sites. This can include clothing, bedding, fuel, stoves, kitchen sets, extreme weather support.
4. **Provision of winterization support** which can include distribution of core winterization items such as fuel, thermal blankets, tarpaulins, or upgrading shelters with insulation materials, waterproofing, and heating systems.
5. **Emergency infrastructure works.** These can include rubble removal or other debris and immediate hazards and emergency rehabilitation of community infrastructure. These can also involve restoring connections to social, commercial, healthcare, and other essential services.
6. **Support immediate access to accommodation in collective sites** including site planning, installation of shelters (multi-family tents, containers, or other types of emergency shelter), or repurposing of buildings for accommodation (set up of sleeping areas, kitchen/eating facilities, weather-proofing, installing doors and windows for safety and security, winterization).
7. **Set up of emergency shelter sites** which can include site, developing or repairing critical infrastructure to ensure access to basic services, and installing emergency shelters—such as Rubb halls, communal tents, or family tents—in collective settings such as planned and informal camps.
8. **Rental assistance and short-term hosting support** which include financial contributions to rent accommodation or land, utility bills and critical repairs.
9. **Repairs and retrofitting of** individual shelter/housing, collective shelter, and unfinished, unsafe or substandard buildings inclusive of material, financial and technical support.
10. **Provision of technical assistance** which includes support to households with provision of technical advice for safe installation and use of emergency shelter, shelter reinforcement.

How coordination enables and enhances life-saving support

Humanitarian coordination saves lives by ensuring aid efforts are swift, efficient, non-duplicative, and responsive to urgent needs. It goes beyond logistics, focusing on reducing suffering and delivering aid effectively. The cluster approach evaluation showed that coordination improved coverage in some response areas (Steets et al., 2010, Cluster Approach evaluation 2)¹. Over the past two decades, progress in coordination and financial tools like CERF has led to faster, more efficient aid delivery.²

1. **Avoid duplication and gaps in assistance:** Without coordination, multiple organizations may concentrate on the same area while others remain underserved. Coordination helps distribute resources efficiently, ensuring all affected people receive aid.
2. **Faster response in emergencies:** A well-coordinated system enables quicker deployment of life-saving assistance like food, water, shelter, and medical care. Agencies can work together using existing frameworks, reducing delays in decision-making.
3. **Effective use of limited resources:** Humanitarian responses often operate with limited funding and supplies. Coordination ensures these resources are used where they are most needed, maximizing impact.
4. **Improved access to affected populations:** Coordination helps in negotiating humanitarian access in conflict zones or areas with restricted movement. A collective voice often has more influence in securing safe passage for aid.
5. **Accountability and transparency:** Coordination fosters accountability in the use of funds and resources. Ensures aid is delivered impartially, based on needs rather than external influences.
6. **Timely response and exit strategies:** Coordination helps deliver aid within set timeframes and includes clear exit plans to prevent prolonged dependency.
7. **Effective response through a common strategy and sectorial standards:** Coordination enables partners to align their strategic approach and priorities while agreeing on sectorial standards to ensure a coherent and complementary response, minimizing overlaps and discrepancies.

¹ [Coordination to Save Lives: History and Emerging Challenges](#)

² "Looking back over the past two decades, it is clear that there has been great progress since the adoption of the [General Assembly resolution 46/182](#). More lives are being saved, more quickly and efficiently, because of humanitarian coordination and new financial instruments like the CERF"

Other references to life-saving:

[Sphere 2018](#) Timely shelter and settlement support can save lives in the initial stages of a crisis. In addition to providing protection from weather, shelter is necessary to promote health, support family and community life, and provide dignity, security and access to livelihoods.

[CERF Life-saving Criteria](#) In 2007, CERF has developed the Life-Saving Criteria as a guidance document for use at country level by Resident and Humanitarian Coordinators (RC/HCs) and UN or Humanitarian Country Teams (UNCTs/HCTs) for the development of applications for CERF funding. A revised version was developed through an inter-agency, inter-cluster collaborative process in 2009, and approved by the Emergency Relief Coordinator (ERC) in 2010. While the General Assembly's mandate for CERF has not changed, the humanitarian landscape in which CERF operates has evolved, necessitating an update of the Life-Saving Criteria. In developing the updated Life-Saving Criteria, in 2019 and 2020, CERF initiated a broad process of consultations with UN agencies, the Global Cluster Coordinators and the CERF Advisory Group. The new version reiterates CERF's mandate and considers associated policy frameworks and operational contexts. The ERC approved the updated Life-Saving Criteria on 22 October 2020.

[UNHCR](#) A shelter is not just bricks and mortar, or a tent, but a means to protect those uprooted. In emergencies, it is fundamental to provide shelter as part of the life-saving responsibilities and mandate of humanitarian actors, so that forcibly displaced people can enjoy a secure and healthy living environment that protects them from weather conditions, and offer them privacy, dignity, comfort, and emotional security.