

Evaluation of the Global Shelter Cluster 2018-22 Strategy

30 June 2022

Acknowledgements

This Evaluation was commissioned by the Global Shelter Cluster in 2021, and called for an external evaluator to provide an independent, objective perspective as well as technical expertise.

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Acronyms

ABA	Area-Based Approach
APP	Application
BHA	Bureau of Humanitarian Assistance (USAID)
CCCM	Global Camp Coordination and Camp Management Cluster
CCPM	Cluster Coordination Performance Monitoring
CENDEP	Centre for Development and Emergency Practice, Oxford Brookes University
CLAs	Co-Lead Agencies
COVID-19	Coronavirus Disease 2019
CRS	Catholic Relief Services
DTM	Displacement Tracking Matrix
ECHO	Directorate-General European Civil Protection and Humanitarian Aid Operations
ECOP	Environmental Community of Practice
FCDO	Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office (of the United Kingdom)
FTS	Financial Tracking Service
GBV	Gender-Based Violence
GCCG	Global Cluster Coordination Group
GFP	Global Focal Point
GHRP	Global Humanitarian Response Plan
GSC	Global Shelter Cluster
GWC	Global WASH Cluster
HCT	Humanitarian Country Team
HLP	Housing, Land and Property
HPC	Humanitarian Programme Cycle
HRP	Humanitarian Response Plan
HRRP	Housing Recovery and Reconstruction Platform (Nepal)
IASC	Inter-Agency Standing Committee
IATI	International Aid Transparency Initiative
IEC	Information, Education and Communication
IFRC	International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies
IM	Information Management
IMAS	Information Management and Assessment
JIAF	Joint Inter-sectoral Analysis Framework
JIAG	Joint Inter-sectoral Analysis Group
NFI	Non-Food Item
NGO	Non-Governmental Organisation
OCHA	United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs
PDRF	Philippines Disaster Resilience Foundation
SAG	Strategic Advisory Group
SSCA	Sustainable Supply Chain Alliance
UN	United Nations
UN Habitat	United Nations Human Settlement Programme
UNHCR	United Nations Refugee Agency
USAID	United States Agency for International Development
USD	United States Dollar
WASH	Water, Sanitation and Hygiene
WG	Working Group

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Background

The Global Shelter Cluster (GSC)¹ was established in 2005 as part of the global cluster system, driven by the United Nations humanitarian reform agenda and guided by the Inter-Agency Standing Committee (IASC). The GSC co-lead agencies (CLAs) are:

- United Nations Refugee Agency (UNHCR) for conflict-driven displacement; and
- International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies (IFRC) for natural disasters.

The GSC Strategic Advisory Group (SAG) developed the first GSC 5-year strategy for 2013-2017, and following a comprehensive review of its achievements, initiated a consultation process to develop its current Strategy for the period 2018-2022.²

As the Strategy is nearing the end of its lifespan, the GSC commissioned an evaluation “to assess progress in its implementation, identify achievements and possible gap areas, make recommendations for the last year of implementation and inform the development of the next GSC Strategy.”

The evaluation was conducted by a small team of independent consultants, focussing primarily on global-level performance and results, although implementation at country level was also considered to the extent possible. The process involved a review of nearly 300 documents and over 40 Key Informant Interviews over several months.

About this evaluation report

This evaluation report is structured around the main evaluation criteria from the Terms of Reference.

- **Part 1: Relevance and Efficiency.** This section considers the appropriateness of the Strategy for meeting its intended purpose, its usefulness to different stakeholders from local to global level, and their level of engagement with it. It also discusses the ways in which the Strategy was developed, how it was used to both attract and allocate resources, and the monitoring and reporting processes that were put in place to measure its overall success.

Overview of the GSC Strategy 2018-2022

Vision: A World Where Everyone Feels at Home.

Mission: The Global Shelter Cluster collectively supports crisis-affected people to live in safe, dignified and appropriate shelter and settlements.

Strategic Areas:

- Area 1: Coordination. Coordination contributes to a localised, predictable, effective and timely response.
- Area 2: Advocacy. Increased recognition of shelter and settlements in humanitarian response and recovery.
- Area 3: Evidence-based response. Shelter response informed by evidence, best practice and learning.
- Area 4: Capacity. Shelter sector capacity to address ongoing and emerging challenges.

¹ Note that in this executive summary and the body of the report, the GSC refers to the entity at the global level, rather than the broader cluster of shelter actors operating at country-level or the shelter sector.

² Hereafter referred to as “the Strategy” or the “GSC Strategy”.

- **Part 2: Effectiveness and Impact.** This section considers the extent to which each of the 4 Strategic Areas achieved their intended purpose and targets. It addresses the extent of achievement, main challenges or barriers, as well as any major changes (positive or negative, intended or unintended).
- **Part 3: Conclusion and Recommendations.** This section draws some overall conclusions about the achievements and challenges of delivery against the Strategic Areas and also considers the extent to which the GSC Strategy was fit-for purpose. It proposes a set of overarching recommendations for the GSC strategic development process in the short, medium and longer term, including a recommended approach for the next strategy.

In addition to the report itself, there is also a set of **Annexes to the report**, which includes:

- A set of detailed recommendations for each of the four GSC Strategic Areas;
- A review of the implementation of the recommendations from the previous strategy evaluation;
- Data and materials used in the preparation of the evaluation report; and
- Terms of Reference for this evaluation.

Select detailed recommendations from the annex mentioned above, and related to Part 2 of the report, are presented in the appropriate sections of the executive summary below.

Key findings

Relevance and efficiency

Strengths

The main strength of the GSC Strategy was its ability to coherently package and reflect the interests of a wide range of stakeholders, which ensured its ongoing relevance throughout its lifespan. This was in part due to the highly consultative process put in place for its development. At global level, the Strategy played a central role in guiding the work of the CLAs and GSC Support Team. At country level, it also provided an overall compass for the cluster's work in some contexts.

The GSC Strategy was found to have remained relevant to the changing humanitarian landscape, most significantly during the COVID-19 pandemic; in particular, there were opportunities to strengthen the linkages between shelter and health, and GSC partners were able to adapt their approaches and continue to provide effective shelter interventions. The GSC was also pro-active in providing COVID-19 guidance to support shelter and settlements work at country level, and in transferring activities online to continue capacity building efforts.

The GSC Strategy was found to be useful for attracting and aligning global funding. In 2021, the funding situation for the GSC significantly improved with contributions from USAID Bureau of Humanitarian Assistance (BHA) and Directorate-General for European Civil Protection and Humanitarian Aid Operations (ECHO). Although, the full impact of this was yet to be realised at the time of this evaluation. There were significant efforts to measure the relevance, implementation and resourcing of the strategy, including the consistent tracking of a number of key strategic indicators, supported by annual surveys and other feedback mechanisms.

Challenges

Despite its ongoing relevance, there were inconsistent views among stakeholders about the purpose

and usefulness of the GSC Strategy. Several gaps were identified including: a lack of guidance to address the growing trend towards working group coordination away from formal activations of the cluster at country level; and a lack of prioritisation within and between the Strategic Areas and pillars. In particular, there was felt to be a need to prioritise support for coordination at country level.

Lack of funding was the single greatest challenge for implementation. There were major financial shortfalls within the GSC and across the sector in 2019 and 2020, compounded by the COVID-19 pandemic. The prioritisation of limited resources was also a challenge, with constraints on flexibility from donors and partner agencies, as well as a lack of strategic prioritisation within the strategy itself. Some of the Strategy outputs and indicators were overly ambitious against available resources and difficult to measure. Funding proved to be especially difficult to track, pointing to the need for greater consistency in monitoring and making better use of external monitoring tools.

Effectiveness and impact

Strategic Area 1 Coordination

Achievements

Country clusters generally felt well supported by the GSC Support Team and a wide range of tools and guidance were produced to support country-level coordination efforts and to promote an area-based approach (ABA). There were also some success stories for localisation of country shelter clusters where international surge support was not required. For example, for disasters in Indonesia and Vanuatu and evidence of strengthened collaboration between the CLAs.

Challenges

Overall, there was a drop-in support from the GSC to the country level, due to resource limitations and in part, to travel restrictions posed by COVID-19. There were some reports of gaps in coordination and a lack of timely deployments. Stakeholders were not always aware of the type of support available, though a brochure of services was recently created to improve this. Despite the volume of global tools and guidance, some were in need of updating and translation, and/or lacked consistent use. Despite some progress, efforts towards ABA and localisation were hindered by lack of common understanding (especially across clusters and agencies) and mixed views about its relevance in different contexts, with a need for further guidance on issues such as the co-chairing of clusters with local organisations or host governments. Additionally, the Strategy did not provide adequate guidance on some emerging coordination issues, such as the loss of the Early Recovery Cluster, and the increasing trend towards sector coordination rather than formal cluster activation.

Select Recommendations

Some of the key recommendations include:

- Improving current systems for tracking and monitoring progress and resourcing across the cluster;
- Updating key documents such as the Coordination Toolkit, the Companion, and the IMAS toolkit, including availability in other languages. Roll-out of updated tools is crucial also;
- Developing further field-ready guidance on issues such as on localisation, sector coordination and transition to recovery, as well as developing a common inter-cluster understanding of ABA and other inter-sectoral issues; and
- Prioritise ensuring effective, timely, and predictable coordination at the field level, including through enhanced localised capacity and surge support.

Strategic Area 2: Advocacy

Achievements

The GSC was found to have a positive reputation and high visibility on the global stage. The CLA's have contributed to this visibility. The Strategy has been used for the development of some country-level advocacy plans; and, the commencement of the Global Focal Point for Advocacy and Communications has given a significant boost to both global and country-level advocacy efforts. There has also been positive progress for engagement in key shelter approaches, most prominently in cash programming and, to a lesser extent, in settlement approaches in urban areas.

Challenges

One of the major intended outcomes of advocacy efforts was to improve engagement with donors and partners and to increase overall funding. This has proven especially challenging and despite significant efforts, there were ongoing frustrations with funding levels and a lack of donor flexibility and prioritisation of resources for shelter and settlements. Despite the increased focus on urban assistance, the impact of the GSC and shelter sector overall, has felt to be limited. Some stakeholders felt the number and complexity of advocacy messages promoted by the GSC, including in the strategy itself, diluted its impact.

Select Recommendations

Some of the key recommendations include:

- Recruiting a Global Focal Point for Grant Management, Donor Engagement and Resource Mobilisation. Develop a resource mobilisation plan with the emphasis on filling critical funding gaps and reinvigorating donor engagement, including through the Donor Consultation Group;
- Providing further guidance for country level on advocacy positions, the development of country-level strategies and capacity building; and
- Working collaboratively with other clusters to attract more funding for core coordination and other common issues; and, increasing engagement with other key humanitarian and development organisations.

Strategic Area 3: Evidence-based response

Achievements

The importance of evidence-based response was recognised by stakeholders, with recognition that the GSC has made significant efforts to support evidence-based decision-making through use of Information Management. This included the dissemination of the Information Management and Assessment (IMAS) toolkit, and guidance for the development of country-level IM strategies. There was also a proliferation of evidence-based guidance and other products such as IEC materials and case studies on a wide range of topics, including the highly-regarded Shelter Projects publication, supported by the organisations engaged through various Working Groups and the Global Focal Point for Research. The development of a research strategy was a welcome advancement towards a more strategic approach, and the annual 'Shelter Week', regional workshops and other events were felt to be important for knowledge sharing.

Challenges

Despite the impressive array of guidance and resources, there is still a need for improved

systematisation of knowledge management to support ease of access to the most current and relevant information and tools. Key among these measures, is the need to improve the organisation and quality control of the GSC website, which has good functionality but is not consistently maintained. Stakeholders highlighted a number of gaps in evidence-gathering on particular topics (such as recovery, greening and NFIs), as well as inconsistent capturing of lessons learned and application of evidence-based approaches during shelter responses. There were also felt to be gaps in demonstrating the linkages between shelter and other sectors, despite that being a priority, and delays in the development of a global shelter vulnerability classification system.

Select Recommendations

Some of the key recommendations include:

- Developing closer alignment between research and country-level needs and capacities, and ensuring good practices are integrated into key tools and guidance documents to improve implementation; and
- Improving the accessibility and relevance of information available through improved knowledge management, including streamlining and quality assurance of the GSC website.

Strategic Area 4: Capacity

Achievements

Efforts of the GSC Support Team to support local capacity building and skill development were highly regarded, including the work of Global Focal Points and the wide range of training, guidance and other materials to support different aspects of shelter and settlements work. In particular, there was felt to be good progress in developing capacities at country level on housing, land and property (HLP), cash and market-based approaches, which may have been partially driven by their prominent inclusion in the GSC Strategy. The flagship publication of the State of Humanitarian Shelter and Settlements “Beyond the Better Shed: Prioritising People” in 2018 was also recognised as an important step towards greater preparedness and awareness of future trends and challenges.

Challenges

There have been a number of barriers standing in the way of fully realising the commitment to local capacity-building. Among the most prominent include: inadequate funding to support the continuation of staff positions; persistent gender imbalance at country level (although notable improvements at global level); a lack of career progression opportunities and high staff turnover; and, challenges accessing key resources and training in languages other than English. Gaps in Information Management capacities were especially highlighted, with a number of challenges in identifying suitable profiles and up-skilling existing staff. Preparedness was also cited as a significant gap, with patchy progress towards readiness at country level and need for improved resourcing for contingency planning.

Select Recommendations

Some of the key recommendations include:

- Conducting a review of country-level staffing capacities to identify ways of improving staff retention, skills and diversity; supported by relevant training and talent pools particularly, to fill key gaps such as in information management;
- Conduct a State of Humanitarian Shelter and Settlements stock-take, to review the continued relevance of the previous research findings, identify future trends and inform the development of the next strategy; and

- Ensure that all key guidance documents and support are field-focused and supported with necessary country roll out plans and training.

Cross-cutting issues

Achievements

Across the areas of protection, gender, disability inclusion and environment there has been significant progress in a number of respects. At global level, the protection agenda has been integrated throughout other work on HLP, gender-based violence (GBV), inclusion and access to safe and dignified shelter. There have been significant resources developed on GBV, information exchange through the Community of Practice, as well as important global monitoring work undertaken by the Global Focal Point for GBV. The Working Group on Inclusion of Persons with Disabilities has also made important progress in updating key guidance and conducting a baseline assessment to better understand the barriers to inclusion in the field. The environment agenda, and green response in particular, has clearly been a focus of attention by both the GSC and the CLAs, with significant support from partners through Environment Community of Practice. In 2021, this work received a significant boost with dedicated ECHO funding and the appointment of a Global Focal Point for Environment.

Challenges

From a strategic perspective, it is notable that cross-cutting issues do not feature particularly strongly in the GSC Strategy narrative and indicators, although at global level in particular, there has been significant progress. At country level, the picture is decidedly more mixed, with some stakeholders finding protection, gender and disability inclusion issues being addressed at only minimal levels in some contexts, with a slow uptake of available guidance and resources and a need to position shelter more centrally within the protection agenda. There were also challenges in taking forward the environment agenda at country level, despite the general awareness of its importance, with barriers including knowledge gaps, resource constraints and a lack of prioritisation at the local level.

Conclusions and recommendations

Overall conclusions about the current GSC Strategy

The GSC 2018-2022 Strategy was the right one for the time and was an important step towards formalisation of GSC ambitions. Partners, donors, and other stakeholders were able to see themselves somewhere in the Strategy, yet in trying to be all things to all people, the lack of prioritisation and ambiguity of purpose reduced its utility. As such, it is too wide-ranging to be a powerful and focused advocacy tool, and not detailed or “field ready” enough as an operational tool to drive action on the ground. That said, overall, the Strategy has been a useful framework over the past 5 years, and it has remained remarkably relevant and salient against the needs of the GSC and shelter sector, even as the world has changed.

Recommendations going forward

The following recommendations are made in the light of ongoing resource constraints facing the GSC, as well as the continuing relevance of the existing strategy, and the future opportunities to provide leadership within the cluster system to refocus efforts on strengthening core coordination functions at

country level.

Rather than a full re-development of the strategy for 2023 onward, this evaluation recommends:

- A. Undertaking a light-touch review around a few key areas in the very short term:** This involves extending the term of the current strategy and identifying the most critical implementation gaps for prioritisation, including through a review. Such gaps may include developing an interim knowledge management strategy to enable greater access to key tools and guidance, including translations into other languages, and developing further guidance for coordination in situations where the cluster is not formally activated;
- B. Fill the most crucial gaps over the next 1-3 years:** This includes the development of a longer-term knowledge management strategy, continuing key aspects of the policy and research agenda, and streamlining and strengthening the monitoring and reporting system using existing mechanisms for tracking key indicators and resources at country and global levels; and
- C. For the next strategy, lead transformation towards greater alignment of global cluster strategies, and adopt a “strategic framework” approach:** Prior to the development of the next strategy, work with other clusters to agree on a common timeframe and basis for all cluster strategies, using common definitions and placing country-level clusters at the centre. For the next strategy, adopt a Strategic Framework approach through an inclusive consultation process, which enables the development of different strategic tools tailored for the needs of specific stakeholder groups at global and country level, ensuring it is available in different languages and widely accessible.

INTRODUCTION

Background and context

About the
Global Shelter
Cluster

The Global Shelter Cluster (GSC), created in 2005, is co-led by the United Nations Refugee Agency (UNHCR) and the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies (IFRC) – the former, for conflict-driven displacement and the latter, for natural disasters. From 2005 until 2013, the GSC did not have a formalised strategy, and was generally characterised as a less formalised organisation. It was guided by principles set out by the Inter-Agency Standing Committee (IASC)³ defining the roles and responsibilities of the cluster at global and country levels, as well as expertise in the sector and capacity of its co-lead agencies (CLAs).

In its Annual Meeting in November 2012, the GSC approved its first ever formalised strategy, which fit the GSC's three aims for 2013-2017 onto a single page.⁴ Though lacking an implementation plan, monitoring tools, or an overarching strategy to accomplish or prioritise its aims, the evaluation of that first strategy noted “an overwhelming support for the relevance of the content of the strategy and a strong sense that it responded to issues that needed addressing at the time [..and] remained relevant today.”⁵

Looking back from today, the initial GSC strategy was an important step forward in organisational maturity that specified its aims and provided a uniting vision to guide its partners and its work. The GSC commissioned its first ever global review⁶ to look at that initial strategy and to inform the development of its next and even more formalised approach.

On the basis of that review, following significant consultations, and under the guidance of the Strategic Advisory Group (SAG), the GSC endorsed its current Strategy for the period 2018-2022.⁷

About the GSC
Strategy 2018-
2022

The one-page Strategy has a featured aim: strengthened shelter and settlements responses that build resilient communities. It also offers a vision and mission in the longer narrative:

- Vision: A World Where Everyone Feels at Home.
- Mission: The Global Shelter Cluster collectively supports crisis-affected people to live in safe, dignified and appropriate shelter and settlements.

The Strategy includes four Strategic Areas:

- Area 1: Coordination. Coordination contributes to a localised, predictable, effective and timely response;

³ See for example, DOC250. More recent documentation, such as DOC251 is also relevant.

⁴ DOC239

⁵ DOC041

⁶ The previous evaluation states this, noting that IFRC had commissioned studies on its role as Shelter Cluster CLA (DOC041).

⁷ Hereafter referred to as “the Strategy” or the “GSC Strategy”.

- Area 2: Advocacy. Increased recognition of shelter and settlements in humanitarian response and recovery;
- Area 3: Evidence-based response. Shelter response informed by evidence, best practice and learning; and
- Area 4: Capacity. Shelter sector capacity to address ongoing and emerging challenges.

The Strategy is actually composed of three different documents: a four-page executive summary, which include a one-page infographic of the Strategy itself; a detailed 28-page narrative of the summary; and a 16-page set of three annexes (on Outputs, Indicators, and Budget).⁸

Purpose of this evaluation

The GSC commissioned this evaluation “to evaluate [the Strategy], to assess progress in its implementation, identify achievements and possible gap areas, make recommendations for the last year of implementation and inform the development of the next GSC Strategy.”⁹

The GSC Strategic Advisory Group (SAG) will use the evaluation to disseminate achievements and address possible shortcomings and gaps in the implementation of the current Strategy. The GSC partners will use it to inform the development of a new strategy. GSC co-lead agencies and partner agencies will use it for internal advocacy with senior management for increased recognition and support to the shelter sector. Donors are key stakeholders in the GSC Strategy process, so their preferences and priorities are considered, as applicable, and they may use the evaluation to justify continued or additional support. Other global clusters will use it as a reference and to identify possible areas of joint action. OCHA will use it for information and advocacy purposes as relevant.

Methodology

This evaluation was conducted between 25 November 2021 and 20 May 2022. The period of analysis was 2018-2022, though documents and other evidence were exceptionally taken from beyond this timeframe as needed.

The primary unit of analysis was the GSC as a whole, including the GSC Support Team, Working Groups (WGs), SAG, and Country-level Clusters, as well as the broader partnership, especially insofar as partners that carried out roles in the aforementioned GSC entities.

The scope focused primarily on global level performance and results, although impact at the country level of global policies, systems, and practices were also considered. Country-level performance was not feasible to capture in a comprehensive way, though some evidence is provided by the GSC’s own analysis as well as through documentation and other material from the country level.

⁸ DOC222; DOC223; and DOC224 respectively.

⁹ See Annex 10 for the Terms of Reference for this evaluation.

The evaluation Terms of Reference ambitiously sought to cover both the performance of the Strategy and performance *against* the Strategy.¹⁰ Findings and recommendations therefore cover both of these, with acknowledgement that full coverage was not possible in all cases.

The evaluation was governed and steered by an evaluation management team of the GSC Coordinators and Deputy Coordinators. The GSC Support Team, and the SAG, were also important interlocutors throughout the process.

Evaluation process

The evaluation process involved a number of steps described below.

Development of evaluation framework

During an inception phase, an evaluation framework aligned to the evaluation Terms of Reference was developed and agreed upon with the evaluation management team. This framework helped not only to structure the evaluation questions and approaches (for example, guiding questions for interviews), but also the narrative of this report. An inception report that detailed the proposed evaluation methodology, timeline, and framework, as well as risks and mitigation strategies, was also provided during this phase.

Key informant interviews

Interviews and focus group discussions were held with more than 40 individuals.¹¹ These individuals were identified by the evaluation team and in collaboration with the GSC Support Team and evaluation management team. Interviews were not only used for substantive data gathering, but also informed document collection, pointing the evaluation team towards missing or upcoming pieces of evidence.

Document collection and review

The bulk of data collection consisted of a detailed review of more than 200 documents produced by the GSC, its partners, and other entities.¹² Selection of documentation followed guidance from the evaluation management team and GSC Support Team, key informants, as well as a snowball approach. In addition to the more than 200 documents reviewed, a larger number of documents, web-pages, and other text-based sources of evidence were screened for inclusion, but set aside due to resource constraints. The focus was on identifying and analysing the most useful documentation.

Evaluation survey of global stakeholders

The evaluation included a short and open-ended online survey addressing some of the core questions of the evaluation. The GSC Support Team helped the evaluation team disseminate the survey to stakeholders at the global, regional and country levels, as well as reminder notices. The survey was conducted between 17 March and 1 April 2022. Unfortunately, the survey only yielded 15 total responses. However, because the questions were highly open-ended, the survey still provided useful qualitative insights and comments from a range of stakeholders, acting in a way like supplemental key-informant interviews conducted through writing. Nevertheless, the resulting information

¹⁰ See Annex 10 for the Terms of Reference for this evaluation.

¹¹ See Annex 4 for a complete list of persons interviewed.

¹² See Annex 3 for a complete list of reviewed documents.

from this line of evidence was not as extensive as anticipated.

Data analysis

Data from all lines of evidence were summarised, analysed, and coded against the evaluation framework using qualitative analytical software (Dedoose). This allowed for dynamic and robust manipulation of the data to enable efficient and comprehensive triangulation and validation of findings. The evaluation team also benefited from using this system for identifying gaps against the evaluation framework, and filling those gaps through ad-hoc consultations with the GSC Support Team.

Constraints and limitations

This evaluation faced a number of significant constraints. As mentioned above, the Terms of Reference were ambitious against the resources provided, seeking to evaluate not only the Strategy itself, but also GSC performance against that Strategy. The latter was challenging due to mixed availability of evidence, including through the GSC's own monitoring systems.

Availability of evidence more broadly is noted throughout the report as presenting some limitations. Much of the evidence of country-level performance, for example, was provided only through anecdotal or ad-hoc insights as the evaluation team did not have the resources to conduct a comprehensive review of all country-level clusters. Some key data sources, such as annual reporting for 2021, were only received in draft form and quite late in the evaluation process.

Working in the age of COVID-19 also presented challenges for everyone involved in the evaluation – including the evaluation team but also key informants and stakeholders to the GSC. Online survey fatigue in this context may have contributed to the low number of responses to the survey, which in turn affected the evidence available for analysis.

The evaluation was also impacted by global events as team members and key stakeholders were deployed to the crisis in Ukraine. Part of the evaluation team needed to be replaced part-way through the process. Although this did not impact the quality of the work, as the team was reconstituted with qualified professionals, the transaction cost of those replacement members being brought up to speed further stretched already thin resources.

Together, these limitations presented a real challenge for the evaluation team. However, the resulting analysis is nevertheless based on extensive research and findings are informed by multiple lines of evidence, validated through periodic discussion of interim results.

A note about referencing in this report

Every effort has been made to include references to documents and sources used to support the findings and conclusions. These include some data that was generated by the evaluation process including:

- Survey questionnaire of global stakeholders (Annex 9);
- Collation of reporting and monitoring against strategy indicators and annual achievements (Annex 5);

- List of GSC resources developed since 2018 (Annex 7);
- Review of previous strategy evaluation recommendations (Annex 2); and
- A collated analysis of every SAG meeting minutes from throughout the strategic period (DOC219).

References to documents collected during the evaluation process are referred to by their evaluation document number. The list of documents is provided in Annex 1.

There are no references to individual Key Informant Interviews to prevent the attribution of comments to individuals and protect confidentiality. Where possible, the general number or type of stakeholders have been noted in the narrative, but due to the small number of interviews conducted, this was not always possible.

PART 1: RELEVANCE AND EFFICIENCY

This section considers the appropriateness of the Strategy for meeting its intended purpose, its usefulness to different stakeholders from local to global level, and their level of engagement with it. It also discusses the ways in which the Strategy was developed, how it was used to both attract and allocate resources, and the monitoring and reporting processes that were put in place to measure its overall success.

Development of the Strategy

Consultation
process was
broad and
inclusive

The process for developing the GSC Strategy 2018-2022 was very closely tied to the evaluation of the previous GSC Strategy 2013-2017. The GSC team even engaged the same consultant to support the Strategy's development, alongside a Strategy Working Group.¹³ To develop the current Strategy, the previous evaluation recommended including feedback from country level, government, and partners, and the development of a feedback mechanism to show how their inputs were taken into account.¹⁴

Overall, the process for developing the GSC Strategy 2018-2022 could be considered inclusive, with input sought from all levels and from a wide range of stakeholders. This included individual consultations by the consultant, including with partner agencies, consultants and academics; and discussions as part of meetings at global, regional and country level, both face to face and online.¹⁵

Process needed
greater
transparency

Although the main drafters largely comprised a small group of SAG members and a consultant, this seemed to be a reflection of the general level of interest and availability of others, rather than a flawed process as such. Greater transparency would have been assured through a feedback/accountability mechanism to capture how different inputs were included/excluded and the rationale behind those decisions.

¹³ Key Informant Interviews.

¹⁴ DOC041

¹⁵ Key Informant Interviews; and DOC219.

No formal inter-cluster strategic planning

At the broader inter-cluster level, there was no formal process for inter-cluster engagement on strategy development. However, it was noted that the GSC did reach out to other clusters to seek inputs, in particular the CCCM, WASH and Protection clusters; although, the extent of their input was not clear.¹⁶ The draft strategy was also discussed and shared in a meeting of the GCCG.¹⁷

Overall relevance of the Strategy

Relevance to different stakeholders

Strategic areas were “timeless” and comprehensive

Overall, stakeholders were satisfied with the Strategy and found that the four Strategic Areas were a brief and neat way of summing up the different roles of the GSC.¹⁸ In this sense, the Strategy remained relevant throughout its lifespan and essentially remains “timeless” in that regard.

Stakeholders reported almost no gaps in the Strategy in terms of content, and indeed this was by design. As detailed above, the process of developing the Strategy was highly inclusive, and allowed the full range of stakeholders to have inputs. The GSC also aimed to align the Strategy to priorities of its stakeholders, in particular donors, to support resource mobilisation efforts.

Different needs/uses for the Strategy

The degree to which different stakeholders used/engaged with the Strategy varied greatly. In general, it was most relevant at the global level: for donors, the SAG, and for the GSC Support Team. It was used to inform work plans and to support advocacy. It was not very effective for resource mobilisation, though having a “home” in the Strategy for funding that became available was helpful. CLAs and partner agencies at the global level sometimes found it quite useful as an anchor for a particular proposal or bit of programming; but, there was not always buy-in from their leadership. Other clusters used the Strategy in a minimal way and much like the GSC, used other cluster strategies to inform the development of their own in a high-level way.

At the country level, the Strategy was somewhat relevant as an overall compass and to push integration of certain issues in country-level strategies. However, its use was highly context specific and it was not possible within the scope of this evaluation to seek feedback from the wide range of local organisations.

Lack of clarity of purpose

Stakeholders from country to global level felt confused as to what and for whom the Strategy was intended. Its intended use at country level, for example, was not clear to country clusters. One of the cited uses of the GSC Strategy was to align country strategies, however guidance documentation for the development of those strategies makes no reference to the global level framework. Even as GSC senior management agreed one purpose was to “nudge” the country level to think about certain things, they noted that the most likely way country coordinators would be aware of the Strategy

¹⁶ Key Informant Interviews.

¹⁷ Key Informant Interviews.

¹⁸ Key Informant Interviews and DOC220.

would be their participation in the Annual Cluster Coordination meeting. At the same time, at the global level, the Strategy was not clearly designed for or appropriate to advocate on the basis of, or define clear priorities. This confusion of purpose hurts overall relevance.

Relevance to the changing humanitarian context

Content remained relevant to shelter programming

The Strategy remained largely relevant throughout the strategic period, and should remain so ; in part, because the Strategy had such a broad input and attempted to capture as much as possible. Annual meetings of the GSC throughout the strategic period, including consultations with its partners and country-level counterparts, meant that tools, methods, and practices were regularly laid out against the realities of the field. Working Groups also regularly updated tools and guidance through extensive consultation processes with the field.¹⁹ This helped ensure that the global level was never fully disconnected from the changing humanitarian landscape, even if priorities shifted over time.

At the global level, efforts to adapt to complexities around climate change, non-traditional actors such as the private sector and diaspora groups, and to adapt to the dissolution of the Early Recovery Cluster (discussed further below), show an attempt to both shape and react to a changing humanitarian landscape.²⁰

Gaps for “non-cluster” coordination settings

Key informants noted a growing reluctance to activate the formal cluster system at country level, creating more contexts where a “sector”, rather than cluster, is being coordinated by the relevant agencies. This situation presents a number of challenges and has been raised by the SAG as a priority for consideration.²¹ The chief issue, not unique to the GSC, is that it is not entirely clear to whom the cluster is — or should be — accountable (i.e., affected populations or governments), and what the roles and responsibilities are in these contexts. This is one of the few substantive gaps in the Strategy and creates a lack of clarity around its relevance in these contexts.²²

Need for greater focus on core business

Another weakness of the Strategy was the lack of clear focus or prioritisation amongst the Strategic Areas and pillars. While there were some mixed views about priorities, the most common and strongest view in this area was the need for greater focus on the core business of supporting effective coordination of implementation at country level.

A more robust process led by the SAG for prioritising content may have helped to sharpen the focus of the Strategy and make the effective use of limited resources.

¹⁹ DOC056

²⁰ DOC219; DOC024; and DOC054 shows adaptation to urban displacement.

²¹ DOC219

²² The Strategy narrative offers only a single line: “In countries where clusters have not been officially activated – but in which other sector coordination mechanisms exist – the GSC can provide support following requests from the in-country lead agency for shelter, settlement or NFIs.” (DOC223).

Box: The impact of COVID-19

The impact of COVID-19 on humanitarian response and the GSC

The COVID-19 pandemic significantly impacted global humanitarian response. The pandemic deepened ongoing crises around the world, exacerbating existing inequalities and disproportionately affecting those who already faced vulnerabilities. It had, and continues to have, serious cascading effects on access to basic services and living conditions, food security, violence, including gender-based violence (GBV), and discrimination.²³

COVID-19 had a significant impact on the work of the GSC. Operational challenges facing the GSC and shelter/NFI sectors included: increased costs and delayed transportation, reduced availability and increased costs for non-food items (NFIs) and construction and market supplies,²⁴ challenges around staffing, general delays and surge deployments. Some stakeholders estimated that COVID-19 tripled their operating costs.²⁵ Sudden and total lockdowns (of people and goods) also highlighted the importance of localised capacity, as well as the use of local materials and markets for shelter programming. The GSC had planned a mid-term review of its 2018-22 Strategy, but this was abandoned due to stretched resources in the COVID-19 context.

The pandemic had a significant impact on capacity building at all levels of the GSC. Stakeholders generally felt that field deployments and face-to-face training were more effective than remote support for building localised coordination, IM, and technical capacity. However, the pandemic necessitated the GSC to switch to online support, communication, and trainings. Field missions were significantly reduced and GSC trainings were put on hold.²⁶

Shelter is critical to the COVID-19 response

The link between shelter and health was emphasised by the Global Humanitarian Response Plan (GHRP) for COVID-19. Camps and shelters pose increasing health risks due to overcrowding and poor services and living conditions. These risks can be reduced by providing shelter upgrades, temporary shelter (tents etc.), and materials for families to extend their shelter to accommodate for isolation requirements. Further, shelter interventions can prevent transmission; provide safe spaces for testing, quarantine, and isolation;²⁷ and contribute to the protection of vulnerable populations, including women, children, and the forcibly displaced. Despite these linkages, little to no funding for shelter was received through this appeal, suggesting that greater advocacy efforts may have been needed to build the case for supporting shelter responses and demonstrating its relevance.²⁸

The GSC Strategy remained relevant as it responded to COVID-19

²³ DOC225

²⁴ DOC053

²⁵ DOC053

²⁶ The residential component of the Humanitarian Shelter Coordination Trainings (HSCT) did not take place in 2020 due to the COVID-19 pandemic, and those that had already completed the on-line component were to complete the residential component upon the lifting of COVID-19 restrictions. The UNHCR Inter-Agency Coordination Learning Programme (IACLP), launched in 2019, did not take place in 2020 due to COVID-19. It was however, modified and relaunched to be online, with 40 anticipated participants in 2021.

²⁷ Although, health care facilities are not necessarily reported as shelter interventions (DOC053).

²⁸ DOC053

The Strategy remained largely relevant as the GSC and its partners adapted well to the COVID-19 crisis. The Strategy was so broad in its design, it remained relevant as work on the links between shelter and health began as a COVID-19-specific endeavour, and then expanded to a broader cross-sector understanding, which fit well under the strategic objective of placing shelter vis-à-vis other sectors.²⁹ Inter-cluster coordination was seen as essential during COVID-19, which was also highlighted as a sub-pillar in the Strategy; however, that work faced challenges as staff capacity reeled across clusters and the understanding of shelter's importance was not ubiquitous.³⁰

The GSC developed COVID-19 resources and guidance, with many GSC advocacy initiatives also including specific messages around the shelter response and the COVID-19 pandemic, including the importance of clean/safe shelter to minimise transmission. This work included:

- A COVID-19 Library and COVID-19-specific web-page, translated in 10 languages from 11 countries;
- Key messages and guidance at country level – for example, continued programming while maintaining social distancing (IEC materials) or advocating for the impact of shelter programming on COVID-19.³¹ Although it didn't receive funding through the GHRP, the GSC was successful in ensuring shelter was represented in that important global document;³²
- InterAction also produced a series of infographics and posters, which explain well the impact of Shelter on different aspects of people's lives including: health, mental health, livelihoods, hazard risks, and social cohesion;³³ and
- GSC Coordination workshop to review and revise methodologies, tools, and practices, included sessions on COVID-19 and the Shelter Response.

Shelter interventions helped mitigate the spread of COVID-19 through NFI distribution and construction site safety protocols, providing adequate shelter (thermal comfort/ventilation, as well as space to separate/isolate), settlements and basic facilities (including health emergency infrastructure).³⁴ The GSC and its partners provided COVID-specific shelter and NFI assistance to 2.2 million people.³⁵

The GSC was successful in finding new ways to bring its programming online. Moving to a remote support model unlocked some country-level surge support (including across CLAs, which can sometimes pose a challenge). The GSC also shifted to hosting its annual meetings, normally a one-week affair, into an online series over the course of one month.³⁶ That approach to GSC meetings and workshops helped reach a broader audience and allowed greater participation and engagement.³⁷ The SAG was also able to adjust its approaches to carry forward its business.³⁸

²⁹ DOC032

³⁰ DOC053

³¹ DOC181; DOC217; and DOC219.

³² DOC053; and DOC214.

³³ DOC252.

³⁴ DOC053

³⁵ DOC056

³⁶ DOC053

³⁷ DOC049

³⁸ DOC219

Resourcing the Strategy

Lack of funding remains the biggest challenge

The lack of resources was the single most significant barrier to delivering on the GSC Strategy and remains a critical issue for the sector more broadly, at both global and country levels.³⁹

In 2018, the GSC faced a major setback following the withdrawal of ECHO funding from most clusters, leading to major resource shortfalls in 2019 and 2020. This, coupled with the financial and other constraints caused by the COVID-19 pandemic (see [Box](#) above), placed severe restrictions on the overall capacities of the GSC and country-level clusters and certainly had a negative impact on achievements against the Strategy.

No prioritisation of scarce resources

This situation did not result in the allocation of available resources to the most urgent and important needs of the GSC. In particular, nearly all stakeholders spoke to the tension between ambitions in the Strategy and not having enough resources to cover even the most basic work of the cluster. There were several factors that contributed to the lack of prioritisation of resources for the Strategy, including that:

- Many donors and partners had their own pre-determined priorities, which were not necessarily aligned with those of the GSC;
- Donors placed conditions on funding that made it difficult for the GSC to flexibly re-allocate resources to where they were most needed (for example, funding designated for global use only, or limited to specific activities); and
- Even if donors were interested in supporting the greatest needs of the GSC, the Strategy itself offers no prioritisation between the different Strategic areas, pillars and activities.

Strategy somewhat useful for attracting resources

The Strategy was found to be a useful tool for attracting resources in some respects. Its highly inclusive approach ensured that any and all funding made available, could find a home somewhere in the Strategy. It could reasonably be argued that “but for” the GSC Strategy, it would have been more challenging to engage with donors and partners.

More recently, the funding situation for the GSC has somewhat improved, with significant grants from USAID Bureau of Humanitarian Assistance (BHA) and Directorate-General for European Civil Protection and Humanitarian Aid Operations (ECHO).

BHA grant was aligned with strategic priorities

The BHA grant, channelled through the IFRC, comprises USD 2 million over two years (2021-2022). It requires an equivalent co-contribution from other agencies (CLAs and other members, mainly in the form of staff) and is specifically intended to help the GSC deliver against all the Strategic areas of the GSC Strategy. It directs much of the funding to GSC partners, managed through a call for proposals and a selection committee to determine how the allocations should be made. The process could be considered fair and transparent, with information shared prominently through the GSC website, with some 83 proposals submitted from 23 agencies.⁴⁰

³⁹ Key Informant Interviews; DOC076; DOC218; and DOC043.

⁴⁰ DOC01-09; and DOC253.

A majority of the funding has been allocated to GSC Support Team positions, including roving positions for coordination and IM, and Global Focal Points (GFPs) for housing, land and property (HLP), advocacy and research. Other funds have been channelled into activities of the different Working Groups as well as supporting flagship publications such as Shelter Projects⁴¹ and the translation of other key resources. However, there were limitations on the extent to which the funds could be used at country level with a donor preference for global support.

ECHO grant was an opportunistic boost to resources

The ECHO contribution of EUR 650,000, channelled through UNHCR for 2021-2023, with an additional 30% equivalent of co-funding from IFRC, UNHCR and implementing partners, is targeted specifically towards “a greener and climate-smart humanitarian shelter and settlement response”.⁴² This is a significant contribution towards what many stakeholders consider a secondary priority area for the GSC, compared to, for example, filling gaps in coordination and addressing the emergency shelter needs of crisis-affected people. To address this perception, the GSC could undertake further work to promote consideration of environmental sustainability as part of the ‘do no harm’, protection and good coordination agendas.

Given the overall funding position of the GSC, it was prudent of the GSC to pursue it. Again, partner agencies were invited to submit proposals, and it enabled the further expansion of support available through the GSC Support Team in a transparent manner.

Full impact of the BHA and ECHO grants yet to be assessed

Together, these two grants have provided a much-needed boost to the capacities of the GSC Support Team, and also enabled some resources to trickle down to country level.⁴³ However, as they came late in the lifespan of the Strategy, their impact is yet to be fully reflected in the evidence available for this evaluation, although as discussed below, tracking the overall funding within the GSC and the wider sector remains problematic.

Measuring the Strategy

The GSC Strategy is supported by three annexes: an Outputs table, an Indicators table, and a Budget table.⁴⁴ Although there are some inconsistencies and areas of overlap between them, these provide greater insight into the ambitions and scope of work underpinning the Strategy and establishes a framework for monitoring achievements.

Outputs table aspirational and hard to measure

The Outputs table is a matrix of activities at global, country and agency-levels against each of the Strategic Areas and sub-pillars. Some of these activities are very broad in scope and challenging to measure (for example “Demonstrate the value of area-based approaches as part of preparedness”). Others are far more specific (for example, the recruitment of certain positions, or hosting particular workshops). While useful for gaining a greater understanding of the intentions behind the Strategy, this table could

⁴¹ DOC254

⁴² DOC010

⁴³ DOC006; DOC001-009; DOC011; DOC012; DOC013; DOC014; DOC015; and DOC003.

⁴⁴ DOC224

be considered aspirational rather than directive, given the GSC is a coordination mechanism and not an operational organisation. It falls somewhere between an implementation plan and list of potential activities.

While there was a monitoring tool against this set of outputs developed in 2019, at least for the global level, there is no evidence of its use and rather seems to have been a one-off exercise.⁴⁵ Nevertheless, the outputs table was useful for this evaluation, to understand how aspects of the Strategy might have been operationalised and to what extent that was done.

Indicators table
limited in scope
and imprecisely
monitored

The main monitoring tool of the Strategy are the indicators, which establish baselines and targets for 2020 and 2022. There are only three indicators per Strategic Area, leaving many aspects of the Strategy unaddressed. These also range from the very specific (for example, the number of hours to deploy cluster coordinators), to the very broad (for example, the percentage of people assisted vs targeted for shelter). Some are also double-barrelled.

The indicator measurements lack consistency and precision, although it is noted that qualitative reporting, primarily through annual and mid-year achievement reports, is in place and improving. The information in some reports seems somewhat ad-hoc and disorganised, but that also reflects the overlapping content of the Strategy itself.

This evaluation has compiled the available quantitative results from the GSC monitoring system; however, it should be noted that data against the indicators was only available commencing mid-2020 (see Annex 5).

Funding
especially
difficult to track

The figures presented in the budget table are not intended to cover all resources required to deliver the Strategy, but rather the “minimum to maintain global shelter cluster capacity and make progress in some key cluster related issues.”⁴⁶ It is useful for understanding the expected areas where external funding is required, however tracking and monitoring the financial resources for the GSC and the sector is more problematic. The GSC does not have its own financial information readily and publicly available, and reports only project by project, or on its major grants. There is no clear picture of how much of the 16m USD set out in the budget for the Strategy was actually spent or raised.

There is clearly a lot of work that goes into gathering and reporting sectoral figures for shelter. The data sources, however, are at times ambiguous, and the figures can be out of date, or use an incomplete set of tools that likely duplicate inter-sectoral and inter-agency mechanisms. The result is mixed quality data that key stakeholders are hesitant to trust, and unnecessarily heavy reporting burdens.

Need to make
better use of
external

There are real concerns about duplication and unnecessarily burdensome reporting modalities. Stakeholders of course bemoan reporting burdens, and in some cases these complaints may be justified. The GSC has its own propriety reporting requirements,

⁴⁵ This document, referred to as an “on-line strategy monitoring tool” is linked on the Strategic Working Group web page (DOC241).

⁴⁶ DOC224

monitoring tools such as Factsheets and Annual Surveys, that may duplicate financial reporting systems – like OCHA’s Financial Tracking System or even country appeals. Many agencies also report to common mechanisms like International Aid Transparency Initiative (IATI), but the GSC does not clearly make use of or streamline against these tools.

For performance monitoring, the GSC should be lauded for consistently tracking indicators against its Strategy, and for conducting annual surveys and other feedback mechanisms to feed into learning and performance. Yet, the GSC does not take full advantage of the existing requirement for all country-level clusters — Cluster Coordination Performance Monitoring (CCPM)⁴⁷ — to understand performance at the country level. Not aggregating, analysing, and presenting this data is a huge missed opportunity that undermines the common tool and potentially creates unnecessary reporting burdens (see [Evidence-Based response](#) below for more on this issue).

PART 2: EFFECTIVENESS AND IMPACT

This section considers the extent to which each of the four Strategic Areas of the Strategy achieved their intended purpose and targets. It addresses the extent of achievement, main challenges or barriers, as well as any major changes (positive or negative, intended or unintended).

Strategic Area 1: Coordination

This strategic area is composed of four pillars:

- 1.1 Predictable, timely, effective support and services for Shelter Clusters;
- 1.2 Strengthening area-based coordination and promoting settlement approaches;
- 1.3 Facilitating transition to recovery coordination;
- 1.4 Effective inter-cluster coordination and joint response planning; and
- 1.5 Better linkages between clusters and Humanitarian Country Teams (HCTs); address issue of lack of cluster activation at global level, reviewing inter-cluster coordination mechanisms and Humanitarian Response Plan (HRP) processes.

Achievements against targets ⁴⁸	
Indicator	Status
% of stakeholders who are satisfied with the performance of the Shelter Cluster disaggregated by country level and global	Achieved (91% average, 90% target)
Average time (hours) in which a trained and experienced coordinator is deployed to newly activated country-level	Achieved (<72 hours, against the same target)

⁴⁷ See DOC255 and DOC256

⁴⁸ See Annex 5 for full dataset of achievements against Strategy indicators.

clusters	
% of country-level clusters that undertake a cluster performance review with partners and implement the action plan recommendations at least once per year	Not achieved (35% in 2021 draft report, average of 36%, against target of 80%)

1.1 Predictable, timely, effective support and services

This pillar addresses predictable, timely, effective support and services for Shelter Clusters, including support for country level; expanding pool of capable coordinators and supporting tools; and strengthening information management (IM).

Country clusters feel well serviced despite drop-in field support time

Overall and anecdotally, country clusters feel well supported by the GSC Support Team, within the limitations of available resources. This is despite the challenges faced by the GSC Support Team to maintain the same level of deployments during COVID-19.

From 2018 to 2021, the GSC Support Team provided between 2,408 and 1,949 total days of support per year to the Shelter Cluster.⁴⁹ There was a noticeable dip in the number of days in total, and specifically provided in support to the field (remote or missions), in 2019 and 2020 due to resourcing. The GSC tried to provide some predictability around this issue by reporting and anticipating this trend in its 2019 Annual Achievements report.⁵⁰

However, in 2021 the total number of days increased again, but the days provided in field support were at their lowest for the strategic period: 810 days of remote support and 28 days of mission, for a total of 838 out of 2,227 days reported in total (37%).⁵¹ This is almost entirely due to a drop in the field missions, which is understandable given COVID-19, but field missions were not replaced with additional remote support, and instead more time as a percentage went to Global/Regional Support. That shift in percentage is likely a reflection of new GFPs being brought on, as well as advancement on several key global initiatives. The actual number of days provided in field support was also the lowest in 2021, though it isn't clear what impact the reduced support had on field operations.

At least one stakeholder noted that a cluster focus on deployment supporting country clusters would also better support the localisation and capacity building agenda, as having staff on the ground meant building trust and having time and space to really build capacity.

GSC produces guidance and tools supporting the field,

Stakeholders also appreciated the wide range of tools and guidance developed to support their work, although there was some feeling that GSC products did

⁴⁹ Data taken from the GSC Support Team dashboard and annual achievement reports. For more information, see Annex 5.

⁵⁰ DOC051

⁵¹ All data taken from the *draft* 2021 Annual Achievements Report (DOC226). This data may be obscuring field-oriented work at the regional level, as it is grouped with global days of support.

but need updating	not always focus enough on being field-ready and field-relevant. Key coordination tools need updating and translation into a wider range of languages, ensuring they reflect most recent research, tools and approaches. ⁵² For example, the Coordination Toolkit and Companion have not been updated since 2018 and do not include concrete guidance on localisation. The GSC indicated that this update was in progress, but also that there were not enough dedicated resources to complete the work against other priorities.
NFIs not prioritised in the Strategy	Despite reports that the distribution of NFIs is one of the most common activities of shelter cluster partners, there is very little acknowledgement of it in the Strategy. The Outputs table includes only one reference to ensure the role of shelter clusters on NFIs is clear, communicated and disseminated at country level and within partner agencies. The NFI Working Group has been working to develop resources and trainings on this issue, more recently in relation to environmental issues and greening the response, some of which are noted in the section on environment below.
Stakeholders not always clear on what is on offer, but signs of improvement	Some country-level stakeholders spoke of being unclear about what services and support could be provided by the GSC. This was also reflected in the evaluation of the previous strategy. A recently developed GSC Surge and Support Services Brochure is a positive development to address this issue, though it was only developed recently, and so its impact may take time to see. ⁵³ The GSC should ensure this document is well-highlighted through key knowledge management tools aimed at country level staff, is translated as appropriate, and has an appropriate dissemination approach (see more on Capitalisation under Evidence-based Response below).
Some reports of gaps in coordination and lack of timely deployments	Some stakeholders indicated that there are still major resourcing struggles to ensure even minimal coordination structures at field level (coordinator, IM, and technical capacity). Some expressed concern that recent disasters did not see timely deployment of cluster coordination and there were also reports of insufficient IM capacity at the field level, primarily due to resource constraints. Apart from the reported indicator showing a trained and experienced coordination is deployed to newly active country-level clusters within 72 hours, there is limited data on which country-level clusters/sectors have a critical mass of capacity, and which do not. ⁵⁴ Where these gaps in core services exist, they should be filled, although this was noted by some as the responsibility of the individual country operations after the immediate activation period.
Efforts are underway to strengthen IM	The GSC undertook meaningful efforts to support IM at country level, most critically through the creation of the Information Management and Assessment (IMAS) Toolkit that complements the Coordination Toolkit. While development

⁵² DOC257; DOC061; and DOC120.

⁵³ DOC240; this document was developed following a request from the SAG in 2021 (DOC219).

⁵⁴ That indicator is also not clearly evidenced. UNHCR report that internal staffing gap analysis is undertaken on a quarterly basis for UNHCR-led clusters. However, the evaluation team did not see underlying data or analysis that showed the GSC was systematically tracking this, or whether it was impacted by COVID-19 for example, apart from the means of verification listed in the Strategy Annex (DOC224).

of this tool was significant, stakeholders questioned whether it was being used. Through most of the strategic period, IM approaches and capacities have not significantly evolved, and in some cases may have actually slipped backward; such as for evaluation, which is no longer an IFRC requirement for country clusters.

An IM review being undertaken at the time of writing seeks to resolve this, looking across IM in the field, broader inter-cluster initiatives, as well as knowledge management. This is an important and welcome development, which will no doubt find many of the same issues this evaluation has, and can hopefully provide recommendations to solve them.

More findings on IM are included in the sections on [Evidence-based response](#) and [Capacity](#) below.

1.2 Localised and area-based

This pillar addresses strengthening area-based approaches (ABA) including more localised and gender-sensitive coordination capacity, advancing sub-national and area-based coordination.

ABA profiled but lacks a common understanding

The GSC has made substantial efforts to make area-based approaches a visible priority at the global level, including through engagement and funding from two key donors.⁵⁵ It was noted by one stakeholder that Working Group participation on this issue is strong, and that over 50 organisations participated in the development of further guidance. Despite progress in advancing a clearer understanding, there are still meaningful differences in definition and understanding of what an area-based approach is across clusters and broader stakeholders, which may have benefited from greater inter-cluster collaboration.

Camp and non-camp settings create further complications

Operationalising an area-based approach is further complicated when looking at differences between camp and non-camp (or non-camp-like) settings. The GSC's ability to advance on this issue, much like the issue itself, depends heavily on the broader humanitarian landscape; including inter-cluster cooperation on the ground, which has not been felt to be functioning effectively.

Some examples, but ABA not fully operational or prioritised in the field

At the country level, the picture is mixed. The country-cluster coordinators interviewed by the Research GFP did not mention ABA as a priority area, and there were some at country level who questioned the feasibility of moving forward on this issue when covering basic needs is still a struggle: "Despite being an important approach, [...] don't see how we could really go in this direction, if it would be really useful." ⁵⁶

Some stakeholders felt there was a lack of clear guidance or a clear pathway on how to actually operationalise an area-based approach in the field.⁵⁷ Others

⁵⁵ See for example, DOC006.

⁵⁶ Key Informant Interviews

⁵⁷ This was also raised in the SAG, see DOC219.

raised a concern that an area-based approach might mean funding only large agencies that can work across multiple sectors, even when some smaller agencies might be very good at specific things. This could impact the diversity of organisations within the sector, which in turn is important for localisation.

There were reported to have been a few examples of specific projects and initiatives by partners, with one stakeholder noting that nine organisations had showcased programs that implement some aspects of ABA in 2022. However, overall, it appears this is not being taken forward as a priority at country level.

Some successes in localisation, with concerns about links to global systems

The GSC has undertaken a number of valuable initiatives to further localisation of coordination, through local preparedness and capacity building to reduce the need for international deployments for cluster activation and to empower local decision-making.⁵⁸ Clear success stories include Indonesia and Vanuatu, where such efforts resulted in emergency responses being coordinated without the need for surge support. In Indonesia, the government was also very clear about the support they did and did not want from the global level, based on their local capacities.⁵⁹

Conversely, some stakeholders also believe that too much localisation can result in the opposite problem: exclusion of international participation and becoming a parallel system without adequate communication and linkages to global systems and support functions.

Localised coordination yet to be achieved

For the most part, there was felt to be slow advancement in the localisation agenda, largely due to resource constraints. This has hampered the predictability of coordination, especially for countries that are vulnerable to recurrent environmental hazards, “we're still struggling with the clusters ability to maintain technical capacity, whether it be national links, or international surge, to respond.”⁶⁰

Need for guidance on co-leadership

Efforts to localise country-level clusters could be enhanced by promoting (where feasible) local organisations to co-chair, and by mapping the percentage of funding that goes to local organisations. The study done by UNHCR on localising clusters can serve as a guide.⁶¹

While recognising this is not always appropriate or possible in some settings such as conflict situations, there are also important trends regarding co-leadership models with government. For example, as seen in Fiji, the Philippines, Indonesia or Bahamas. Guidance for country-level actors would be beneficial here, as currently, the only guidance provided by the GSC on co-hosting arrangements is regarding co-chairing between UN and NGO actors.⁶²

⁵⁸ See for example, initiatives mentioned in DOC051.

⁵⁹ Key Informant Interviews.

⁶⁰ Key Informant Interviews

⁶¹ As noted by the SAG (DOC219).

⁶² DOC063

Gender inclusion improving, but gaps at country level

There are signs that the GSC is making important inroads towards greater gender parity in team composition. At the global level, there is near-equal representation of genders, which also includes a number of GFPs provided by agencies other than the co-leads.⁶³

Annual GSC coordination workshops and meetings include increasingly broad groups of governments, academic and non-traditional institutional actors. Regional shelter forums have also decentralised the reach out of the GSC and facilitate local participation.

At country level, numbers have been difficult to ascertain, but there are some pieces of evidence on gender worth considering:

- A capacity-building initiative on women in reconstruction was undertaken in Indonesia;
- One stakeholder reported that gender-balance between cluster coordinators at country level is yet to be achieved;
- Another felt that gender equity had been on the GSC agenda a long time but has still not been realised and risks being overshadowed by other issues; and
- Another Key Informant felt that success in achieving gender balance was also a reflection of the level of diversity within the co-lead agencies.⁶⁴

Within shelter programming, while a description of gender disaggregation is included in the 4/5W “The Basics” document,⁶⁵ there is a need to ensure it is included as a standard requirement for all clusters.

Cluster performance is not well-understood due to poor monitoring and lack of evaluations

At the global level, annual surveys give a reasonably good indication of partners’ overall satisfaction with the GSC and country-clusters (which is quite high), there is not good monitoring of cluster performance at the country level.

In particular, the discontinuing of mandatory annual evaluations by all (or at least IFRC-led) clusters, is a notable development which was also raised by the previous evaluation, but never addressed.⁶⁶ While some stakeholders mentioned that these had been useful for capturing lessons and learning in the past, it is not entirely clear how commonly used they were, and the gap was not highlighted as a major and highly impactful shortcoming by all, though an unfortunate loss.

The majority of clusters and sectors do not conduct annual monitoring, in spite of there being a standardised tool available in multiple languages, and which is based on an inter-cluster tool (the CCPM). Part of the issue here may also be

⁶³ The cluster support team is reported as 52% men and 48% women in the draft 2021 Annual Achievements Report (DOC226). That is by far the highest percentage of women reported over the strategic period.

⁶⁴ Key Informant Interviews.

⁶⁵ DOC073

⁶⁶ DOC041

that the GSC at the global level does not do much with the data collected at country level, in terms of feeding back to partners and other stakeholders who contribute. Linking CCPM indicators to the GSC strategy and feeding back synthesised and analysed data from the field would increase value of the efforts to conduct the CCPM at country level, and likely encourage those efforts.

1.3 Transition to recovery

Despite resource challenges, this is a priority at country level

The Strategy calls for greater efforts by the GSC to play a “pivotal and catalytic role in bringing humanitarian and development actors together to find solution to support more effective post-crisis shelter and transition recovery”. Given the challenges of covering even the most basic emergency assistance, supporting the transition to recovery is felt to be a difficult issue to address operationally. While it is recognised that most populations of concern are in need for a very long time and largely take charge of their own shelter recovery, resource constraints can place longer term support out of reach for many partners. That said, unlike some of the other areas of ambition (such as ABA), country-level stakeholders recognise the need to take up this issue as a priority and have raised it as such with the GFP for Research.

Inter-cluster dialogue has not advanced much

Limited progress in this area was exacerbated by the deactivation of the Early Recovery cluster in 2019 at global and country levels. Inter-cluster cooperation was challenged by this development, and it was reported that key early recovery areas of focus were split across the different clusters (with the GSC acquiring the complex areas of energy and rubble removal), some without the necessary capacity to fully address them.⁶⁷

Development linkages still weak

There was no clear evidence on progress in terms of coordination and dialogue with key recovery and development stakeholders. There are a few standout examples, such as Nepal with the transition to the Housing Recovery and Reconstruction Platform (HRRP) coordination modality, which could also be meaningful for lesson-learning. The SAG requested some case studies on this issue, but these were not readily available.⁶⁸

Some progress on self-recovery and in working groups

The GSC made some progress on promoting self-recovery, particularly with the Promoting Safer Building Working Group (WG) transitioning to focus on this issue.⁶⁹ That WG spearheaded partnerships between academic and humanitarian agencies to develop tools that could inform the selection of better housing in the field. The Shelter Projects WG and their flagship publication (including its *Shelter Essentials* and regional thematic products) also provide a valuable knowledge base for stakeholders to understand this self-recovery.⁷⁰ Some of the efforts in this area have helped partners shift thinking and discussions beyond emergency shelter.

⁶⁷ DOC219

⁶⁸ DOC219

⁶⁹ This working group recently merged with the Recovery Community of Practice.

⁷⁰ DOC254

Fundamental questions point to gaps in operational clarity

Still, many stakeholders are sceptical both in principle and for pragmatic reasons. Some question the validity of this priority when it's out of humanitarian shelter and settlement programming. Others question the feasibility when multiple government agencies may be involved and the GSC may not have the technical capacity to carry this forward properly. Some of these concerns speak to a continued gap in understanding (and having clear guidance) on what it really means concretely for the GSC and its partners to promote transition to recovery, towards reconstruction, and what is beyond their scope.

1.4 Integrated response

This area covers inter-cluster coordination both in the field and at global level, including issues around the trend for clusters to be excluded from decision-making.

Positive efforts to engage with other clusters

The GSC was found to have made significant efforts to reach out to other clusters and be inter-sectoral. Other clusters are regular participants at annual GSC meetings and GSC coordinators regularly engage inter-cluster forums such as at the IASC GCCG, the HPC Steering Group, JIAG, and Geneva Based Cash WG.⁷¹ More specific initiatives with clusters have also been undertaken, such as the tri-cluster approach of fortnightly meetings between the UNHCR-led clusters (protection, CCCM and shelter), which has led the development of common positions, as well as dialogue with the Health cluster through the Shelter and Health initiative and contribution to the global COVID-19 crisis.⁷² There is also some evidence of interlinkages happening in the field between Shelter and WASH clusters, including around the area-based approach.

Inter-cluster dialogue still lacking in a number of key areas

Nevertheless, overall dialogue has not been especially productive. Even those clusters most closely aligned with the GSC, such as the CCCM cluster, have disagreements around mandate and on some technical issues. There are also shortcomings and missed opportunities addressing issues that are really multi-sectoral in nature, such as the humanitarian-peace-development nexus and area-based approaches. Cross fertilisation between cluster WGs or areas of work (for example, on HLP and Cash) to harmonise definitions and approaches would be of benefit to the GSC and the humanitarian community as a whole. A good example of this type of work from just before the strategic period, was the joint advocacy document from Shelter and WASH on cash.⁷³

Furthermore, there is no clear evidence that the issue of the increasing trend towards the non-activation of the cluster system in emergencies has been addressed at the global inter-cluster level.

Need for greater clarity in roles and alignment of strategies

Certainly, there are still gaps in clarity around the roles and responsibilities in sectoral coordination contexts. One particular barrier is the lack of alignment between the different cluster strategies and strategic cycles and no IASC

⁷¹ As regularly reported in Annual Achievements Reports. See for example, DOC058.

⁷² DOC053

⁷³ DOC227

mechanism or requirement to bring clusters together on strategy development or strategic orientation. While this is not the responsibility of the GSC, there could be important leadership by the GSC in this regard (see [Recommendations](#) below).

Strategic Area 2: Advocacy

This Strategic Area aims to increase recognition of shelter and settlement in humanitarian response and recovery. This includes the four pillars of:

- 2.1 Importance of shelter and settlement: Strengthened understanding of shelter and settlement's critical multi-sector impact;
- 2.2 Engagement: Increased donor and agency engagement and support for shelter and settlements sector;
- 2.3 Response funding: Critical funding and response gaps are monitored, communicated and supported; and
- 2.4 Influencing: Engaging others: appropriate urban assistance, cash and markets-based programming, area-based approaches.

Achievements against targets ⁷⁴	
Indicator	Status
% of the total humanitarian funding received that is allocated to the Shelter Sector, disaggregated by region and crisis type	Not achieved (3% average, 4.2% in most recent report, against target of 5.7%)
# of advocacy statements / positions established and regularly updated	Achieved (most recent report of 5 against target of 5 for 2020/21; average of 3)
% of people assisted vs people targeted, disaggregated by region and crisis type	Not achieved (average of 43%, most recently 61% against target of 70%)

GSC has a good international reputation, high visibility

2.1 Importance of shelter and settlement

Despite the failure to meet all three targets for the indicators under this Strategic Area, the GSC could be regarded overall as successfully punching above its weight in terms of external recognition. The recent advocacy and communications review found that the "GSC is well known within the humanitarian sector and the GSC team counts with an excellent reputation among the shelter and settlements practitioners."⁷⁵ A number of external Key Informants also highlighted the improved visibility of the GSC and the communication skills of the global co-leads and deputies during international meetings, events and other fora, including on issues relating to COVID-19 (see [Box](#)

⁷⁴ See Annex 5 for full dataset of achievements against Strategy indicators.

⁷⁵ DOC117

above).

Multi-sectoral
impact of
shelter needs
further
strengthening

However, there is a need to further strengthen the position of shelter as foundational for achieving protection and demonstrate its relevance to other sector priorities.⁷⁶ The recent review of GSC advocacy and communications also noted that “there was an overall feeling that the shelter practitioners are doing a great job at “talking to themselves”, but that external communications and advocacy needed improvement.⁷⁷ This includes engagement with other clusters to agree on common issues and approaches for greater impact.

Complex and
numerous
advocacy
messages losing
impact

Some stakeholders felt the GSC was engaged in too many advocacy issues, which complicated and watered down the overall impact of GSC messaging. Some Key Informants noted challenges in advocating on issues where there were no established common positions within the co-lead agencies, WGs and Communities of Practice (for example on area-based approaches). The lag between the analysis of key data and releasing it in a public form, coupled with the complexity of the messages themselves, is reducing the relevance and impact of advocacy efforts.⁷⁸

Perception of
lack of buy-in
from co-lead
agencies

Some stakeholders felt that advocacy efforts on shelter and settlements were also undermined by a lack of buy-in from the co-lead agencies through communications by the leadership and in organisational strategic plans. Although, there is evidence of some level of co-lead agency engagement.

IFRC has
integrated GSC
work and the
Strategy into its
annual planning

In the case of the IFRC, while there is no reference to shelter or the GSC in IFRC’s overarching strategic document (Strategy 2030),⁷⁹ the IFRC Plan and Budget 2021-2025 includes a target of 50 National Societies having shelter and urban strategies in place.⁸⁰ The IFRC’s Global Plans for 2021 and 2022 make specific reference to the IFRC role as GSC co-lead, programming is integrated throughout many of the priority areas.⁸¹ The IFRC Global Plan 2022 includes a number of specific targets and commitments on shelter programming and country-level cluster coordination. There is even a reference to supporting the GSC Strategy itself and a commitment to its implementation. The importance of shelter and cash is also included in the IFRC Americas Regional Plan 2021 and Europe Regional Plan 2021, although there is no mention of clusters.⁸²

In the case of UNHCR, the evidence of strategic prioritisation is less clear, though the role of co-lead is promoted through the organisation’s shelter and internal displacement website pages, as well as the Policy on UNHCR’s Engagement in Situations of Internal Displacement 2019.⁸³ The UNHCR Emergency Handbook also

⁷⁶ Key Informant Interviews.

⁷⁷ DOC117

⁷⁸ DOC117

⁷⁹ DOC245

⁸⁰ DOC242

⁸¹ DOC243; and DOC244.

⁸² DOC246; and DOC4247.

⁸³ See for example DOC258; and DOC259.

includes the GSC contact details and Coordination Toolkit.⁸⁴

2.2 Engagement with donors and partners

GSC Strategy positively impacting country-level advocacy/plans

Encouragingly, the GSC Strategy has been used to align some country-level cluster plans, particularly around advocacy, with several country clusters reporting that it has influenced their decision to engage in certain issues such as protection, gender and environment.⁸⁵ This is an important indication of the overall relevance and effectiveness of the GSC Strategy in providing direction beyond the global level.

GFP for Advocacy and Communications has made a positive impact

Towards the end of the Strategy timeframe, two major outputs at global level were achieved during the period of this Strategy: the recruitment of a GFP for Advocacy and Communications and development of the GSC Advocacy and Communications Strategic Action Plan (also a recommendation of the previous Strategic Plan evaluation).

At country level, apart from the achievements mentioned above, there still seems to be a general lack of knowledge about how to “do” effective advocacy on shelter, and a need to translate the many advocacy/briefing/guidance documents to support the development of local advocacy plans. The GFP for Advocacy and Communications has started to address this, including through the development of necessary guidance, tools and approval processes.⁸⁶

Some of the self-reported advocacy achievements of the GFP include:

- Environmental advocacy plan created, including a communication plan for World Habitat Day;
- Creation of a WG on communication and advocacy for the Syria Cross-border operation;
- Twitter account created and social media strategy adopted for the Afghanistan cluster; and
- Increased requests for support for the organisation of events and sharing of information.⁸⁷

Initiatives and resources were also developed to facilitate advocacy on a number of key issues including settlement approaches, cash, urban responses and the environment.

Advocacy challenged by competing priorities at country level

The Factsheets are one of the key means of communicating country-level progress, gaps and challenges to partners and donors. There were 26 country-level factsheets submitted to GSC, and several additional country-level monitoring tools have also been developed, such as in Burkina Faso and Syria.

However, Key Informants also noted challenges in getting traction on shelter issues at the national and local level:

⁸⁴ DOC260

⁸⁵ DOC220

⁸⁶ Key Informant Interviews.

⁸⁷ Above from: DOC118.

- Some felt that shelter lagged behind other priorities, such as food security and health, in the eyes of governments and donors during emergencies;
- In protracted crises, some felt visibility of shelter needs was losing ground to a focus on livelihood support;
- In large scale recovery contexts, development partners such as the World Bank were believed to hold greater sway over governments, requiring more intensive engagement to ensure that key messages and data around shelter and settlements were not overlooked; and
- Some stakeholders felt that global advocacy messages were at odds with priorities on the ground, particularly when there were insufficient resources available to meet even the most basic shelter needs.⁸⁸

2.3 Response funding

One of the main objectives of the GSC advocacy efforts, as reflected in the Strategy, was to increase the funding available for shelter and settlements with the ultimate aim of addressing gaps and improving the overall coverage of shelter services to people in need. The percentage of total humanitarian funding for shelter and settlements declined significantly to 1.7% in mid-2021 but rose to 4.2% in 2021. The overall average remains below target at 3% (for a target of 5.7% by 2022). The average percentage of people assisted vs people targeted has remained well below the 2022 target of 70%, most recently 61% in 2021.⁸⁹

Efforts were made to better engage donors, but with limited success on funding

During the lifespan of the Strategy, there is evidence of significant efforts by the GSC to broaden the donor base, which go some way towards achieving the recommendations from the previous strategy evaluation. These initiatives include:

- A mapping of potential donors by the SAG and approaches made by the different partner agencies;⁹⁰
- Efforts to engage with the private sector, for example the Philippines Disaster Resilience Foundation (PDRF) and Airbnb;⁹¹
- Establishment of a Donor Consultation Group (although, it was reported not to have been very active for a number of years);⁹² and
- At least one country cluster coordinator noted that specific advocacy efforts of the GSC Support Team at global level for a forgotten disaster had been helpful in raising additional resources.⁹³

Overall, these efforts did not result in major funding outcomes. Feedback from donors reinforced this, with one noting that concerns about the capacities of partners could result in a further downward spiral of donor support. Some questioned whether the GSC was averse to presenting major gaps in financing, choosing instead to over-inflate beneficiary and other response numbers, and thereby “undermine the need for resources in the sector.” On the other hand, there was some frustration within the

⁸⁸ Key Informant Interviews.

⁸⁹ See Annex 5.

⁹⁰ DOC219

⁹¹ DOC006

⁹² DOC261 and Key Informant Interviews.

⁹³ Key Informant Interviews.

GSC and its partners that donors were not forthcoming about their priorities and future plans, making it difficult to appropriately pitch their case for funding.⁹⁴

Challenges
engaging with,
and within,
donors

Several Key Informants noted that success in fundraising also depends on the presence of shelter focal points within donor agencies. Where they do exist, the focal points need to play a more effective role in advocating for the prioritisation of shelter within their own organisations.⁹⁵

Mixed results of
country-level
donor
engagement

Country-level efforts to engage donors also had mixed results and depended very much on the context and the geopolitical situation. Some country clusters managed to hold regular donor meetings which were felt to be useful, but there were also contexts where donors were not physically present and/or actively engaged. One country cluster coordinator noted that in some cases “it is a waste of time to do a lot of donor advocacy about shelter because they are not open to it”.⁹⁶

2.4 Influencing

There are three major themes covered by the engagement and advocacy work under this pillar: appropriate urban assistance; cash and markets-based programming; and area-based approaches.

Many resources
developed on
cash

On cash and markets-based programming, the GSC Coordination Toolkit notes that over 70 documents are included on the Shelter & Cash Working Group pages and selects six of particular relevance, all dated between 2015-2017. Specifically for advocacy purposes, it appears the seminal documents are the 2016 Cash & Markets Position Paper and the 2017 Global WASH and Shelter Cluster Joint Advocacy Paper, ‘Increasing Sectoral Cash Transfer & Market Based Programming Capacity’.⁹⁷ In 2018, the Shelter Cluster produced a set of 16 case studies on shelter and cash.⁹⁸ In April 2020, the GSC published a report on ‘Humanitarian Rental Market Interventions: A Review of Best Practices’, which includes Tips Sheets and reports from a number of different country contexts.⁹⁹ Other documents comprise guidance or other more technical research reports, many produced during the lifespan of the GSC Strategy, and some in development (discussed further under [Capacity](#) below).

Evidence of
growing capacity
in urban shelter

For urban assistance, GSC Meeting minutes list this as one of the top five issues to be addressed.¹⁰⁰ The GSC reported that it placed a big focus on improving coordination in urban areas in the 2019 Achievements Report, which was largely led by the Shelter Cluster’s Settlement Approaches in Urban Areas WG that developed case studies on area-based approaches.¹⁰¹ Indeed, the webpage for the Working Group on

⁹⁴ Above, Key Informant Interviews.

⁹⁵ Key Informant Interviews.

⁹⁶ Key Informant Interviews.

⁹⁷ DOC227

⁹⁸ DOC228

⁹⁹ DOC261

¹⁰⁰ DOC049

¹⁰¹ DOC051

Settlements Approaches in Urban Areas includes a number of resources on the Settlements Approach including a Guidance Note developed in December 2020, as well as a series of reports from national and regional consultations.

Responding to trends but still a small player in urban settings

There is also evidence of responding to global trends, through the development of capacities and knowledge-sharing in urban shelter and advocating for a ‘people in place’ approach for conflict situations in urban areas.¹⁰² It was noted by at least one stakeholder that some governments try to avoid humanitarian interventions in urban spaces, so there is a real need to be more active in these spaces, particularly during conflict. Moreover, the influence of country shelter clusters in post-crisis urban settings was felt to be very small when compared to the funding and leverage of bigger development institutions such as the World Bank. In some contexts, such as Lebanon, there were felt to be strong local partners, such as Lebanese Red Cross, which are well resourced and connected on the ground, making them more effective in urban areas than international partners, reinforcing the benefits of localisation.¹⁰³

Strategic Area 3: Evidence-based response

This strategic area comprises three pillars:

- 3.1 Evidence available & used: to inform planning, coordination and decision-making;
- 3.2 Evidence gaps filled: Key shelter and settlement evidence gaps filled; and
- 3.3 Capitalisation: Knowledge Management systems in place to capitalise on lessons learned as well as best practice in order to bring about change in sector policy and practice.

Across each of these sub-pillars, there are real limitations in the evidence available to determine achievement. Although the indicators from the Strategy show all targets being met, these miss some essential parts of the strategic area. This makes the analysis more heavily reliant on qualitative and anecdotal data than would be ideal. A tool to monitor this area existed according to SAG minutes but was not made available for this evaluation.¹⁰⁴ The forthcoming GSC IM Review should help fill some, if not all, of these gaps.

Achievements against targets ¹⁰⁵	
Indicator	Status
% of cluster partners reporting that response strategies are “appropriate” based upon the existing evidence	Achieved (75% average, 74% in most recent reporting, against target of 75%)
Summary of shelter lessons learned is	Achieved (14 average, 29 most

¹⁰² DOC054

¹⁰³ Key Informant Interviews.

¹⁰⁴ DOC219

¹⁰⁵ See Annex 5 for full dataset of achievements against Strategy indicators.

regularly collected and disseminated	recently reported, against target of 5)
% of shelter cluster coordinators and partners reporting that they have access and use evidence, learning and best practice	Achieved (95% average, 91% most recently reported, against target of 80%)

3.1 Evidence available and used

Stakeholders value and prioritise evidence

Many stakeholders regard having an evidence-based response as central to the GSC's core business, appreciating that it has a prominent place in the Strategy. Some noted that this core function competes against many other priorities.¹⁰⁶

GSC made efforts to support IM and evidence-based decision-making in the field

The GSC created some important tools to support the field in this area: the Information Management and Assessment (IMAS) Toolkit is an impressive set of guidance and good practice that helps with "building the bridge between coordination and information management in order to make informed decisions."¹⁰⁷ There is also 4-5 W guidance, and a helpful short document giving a very high-level overview of IM.¹⁰⁸

Although the GSC undertook efforts to disseminate the IMAS toolkit widely upon release, there are questions about how much it is actually used, and how familiar stakeholders are with it. Looking at the document itself, some of the links, such as those for job descriptions for IMOs, are behind a UNHCR login wall, while others in the high-level overview are broken, which affects its useability and credibility.

Good guidance for country-level IM strategies

The GSC produced extensive guidance for developing IM strategies at country level.¹⁰⁹ The country-level IM strategy reviewed for this evaluation was extremely robust and well-aligned to the GSC Strategy in terms of gap filling, feedback loops to inform programming, and good practices in secondary and inter-agency data review.¹¹⁰

Tools are used and country-level strategies are evidence-based, some influenced by the GSC Strategy

Global surveys show that most respondents use at least one tool in the very long list of GSC tools provided, with usage being on average much higher by cluster coordination staff in the field.¹¹¹ Most country-level respondents report that their strategies are appropriate and evidence based, although the most recent data does suggest a downturn in this regard.¹¹² Respondents to the survey for this evaluation noted that the Strategy helped them align at country level on evidence-based advocacy.¹¹³

¹⁰⁶ DOC047

¹⁰⁷ DOC120

¹⁰⁸ DOC071 and DOC073.

¹⁰⁹ DOC121

¹¹⁰ DOC072

¹¹¹ DOC042

¹¹² DOC042 and DOC218.

¹¹³ DOC220

Good support for assessments, but still lack consistency

The GSC had GFPs for assessments in the past. In positive development, a full-time position has been funded for the first time. There are some good examples of quality assessment and analysis highlighted by reporting,¹¹⁴ but it is unclear how systematically implemented these are. Key Informants indicated that while overall data availability in the field has been steadily improving over recent years, evidence is highly variable across contexts, and dependent mostly on the resources available in any given response. Some stakeholders raised serious shortcomings in evidence and data, for example, not having consistent shelter assessments across all country-level clusters.

Usefulness of inter-agency assessment tools remains unclear

The evaluation was not able to determine regular contribution or use of inter-agency assessment tools, though this is sometimes highlighted in a general way in annual reporting.¹¹⁵ Inter-agency and multi-sectoral sources of evidence, such as the IOM Displacement Tracking Matrix (DTM), were cited as important sources of evidence by stakeholders, and while not specifically cited, the Multi-Sector Needs Assessments facilitated by REACH are commonly used. Stakeholders also noted that some inter-agency tools can be insufficient for the shelter sector's purpose and can create headaches. For example, the recently developed Joint Inter-sectoral Analysis Framework (JIAF) was meant to provide standardised ways to calculate severity, but stakeholders complained of a big disconnect between the framework and what is actually available in the field.

Lack of information sharing and standardised assessment methodology

Challenges in evidence availability can stem from partners being unwilling (due to competition for resources) or unable (due to capacity) to share information, and to assessments being geographically directed by donors to less important areas. A lack of consistency in assessment methods and indicators is also a challenge, reducing opportunities for standardisation (e.g., quality assurance), automation, and comparison across contexts. Having globally agreed approaches could mitigate this issue substantially.

Challenges measuring outcomes and impact, especially for self-recovery

A general challenge cited for evidence-based decision making was that “we look at what can be measured, and not necessarily what should be measured.”¹¹⁶ In Shelter, as in other sectors, a lot of recovery is done by the affected population itself, and there are often gaps in knowing whether people are building back better and determining which interventions would best support them. This is partly because it is easier to measure outputs or activities than outcomes or impact.

Conflicts between quality and timeliness of data products

Pragmatism can also be a challenge. The GSC IM strategy guidance and the example reviewed for this evaluation are quite complex and robust, which although valuable, may not be feasible in all contexts.¹¹⁷ Stakeholders noted the

¹¹⁴ For example, the Syria and Venezuela responses noted in the 2019 Annual Achievements Report (DOC051) or Syria and Sudan in the 2020 report (DOC056); the very good impact evaluation for Yemen (DOC080); the assessment for Northern Syria (DOC132); and the REACH evaluation in Niger (DOC133).

¹¹⁵ DOC226

¹¹⁶ Key Informant Interviews

¹¹⁷ DOC121; and DOC072.

tension between producing high quality data, and getting it out on time, suggesting that the GSC can sometimes be late with good data, even with REACH assessments (which were generally well-regarded).

Lessons learned through good practice not always fully captured

The effectiveness of lesson learning through examples of good practices, both from the field and at global level, is mixed. For example, there were fewer best practices and examples from IFRC feeding into the IMAS toolkit than would have been ideal. There are also questions about the extent to which country-level practices can be fully captured for lesson-learning. Many good examples of case studies from the country level are used in documentation, but the lack of contact information for follow up, presents a potential barrier to their use.¹¹⁸ Sometimes coordination teams may not have time to develop good handovers or capture lessons.

The GSC has been prolific in guidance on a range of topics

3.2 Filling evidence gaps

There is a plethora of guidance and other documentation produced at the global level, for example: from the Diaspora WG,¹¹⁹ HLP guidance and library,¹²⁰ Cash Champions Review¹²¹ in addition to other previous work on Cash,¹²² and the Shelter Compendium – a huge collection of Information Education and Communication (IEC) materials.¹²³ Country-level examples also abound,¹²⁴ and there are some that show very positive linkages to other clusters, localisation, good use of cash and mainstreaming of HLP.¹²⁵ WGs also close the loop by integrating lessons from the field: The Construction Standards WG specifically updated standards based on field input¹²⁶ and the NFI WG conducted a survey to collect practices and inform priorities for a training curriculum, although the funding was not available to put it in place.¹²⁷

There are still calls for greater investment in research and improvement of quality

That said, some stakeholders are quite critical of the GSC on evidence, saying there was a need to invest more in research and data gathering across all outputs of the GSC, that it was difficult to understand coverage, and that knowledge products do not always result in changes on the ground. Others note the time limitations that can constrain good engagement: “There are so many good case studies and lessons learned documents – maybe it’s becoming too much, there is never any time to read them, or to attend webinars.”¹²⁸

GFP for Research

The research priorities highlighted by the GSC were: evidence for the wider

¹¹⁸ DOC018

¹¹⁹ DOC006

¹²⁰ DOC086; DOC219; DOC056; and resources available through DOC262.

¹²¹ DOC016

¹²² DOC017

¹²³ DOC056; DOC027; and DOC119.

¹²⁴ DOC078 ; DOC025 ; DOC029; and DOC020.

¹²⁵ DOC084; and DOC020.

¹²⁶ DOC056

¹²⁷ DOC270

¹²⁸ Key Informant Interviews

progressing toward a more strategic approach

impact of shelter programmes, especially on health, and how cash and markets programming influence shelter outcomes. These priorities triggered the need for a Research GFP in discussions in the SAG.¹²⁹ The GFP for Research developed a research strategy to achieve the objectives of this strategic area,¹³⁰ and has also been canvassing cluster coordinators in the field to better understand their priorities and how they use research. The approach to fill these gaps will be to facilitate partnerships with organisations, making secondary data more accessible or finding funding for new research, with the GFP supporting new research where appropriate.

Several stakeholders hailed this strategic and efficient approach to research as a welcome break from the past. That said, because the Strategy is nearly four years old and extremely broad, not all research activities are fully covered by the Strategy, and the research work does not cover everything in the Strategy. There may be a need to check alignment to ensure good prioritisation.

Knowledge and evidence around NFIs is comparatively limited

While NFI assistance makes up the majority of GSC partner responses, at least in terms of numbers of people targeted (funding information is not clear), information about it is far more limited than, for example, the robust database of Shelter Projects.¹³¹ Stakeholders did not mention it and there was no specific data or feedback available on initiatives like the NFI Common Pipeline implemented by IOM, for example, which may impact shelter and NFI responses.

Another crucial evidence gap identified for shelter in the previous evaluation is the need to demonstrate its critical importance to other sectors, although there is substantial work underway to address this. The Cash WG looking at linkages between shelter and broader cash assistance;¹³² and other useful research and opinion pieces include: the State of Humanitarian Shelter and Settlements report;¹³³ InterAction's More Than Four Walls and a Roof; and work carried out by the Centre for Development and Emergency Practice (CENDEP) of Oxford Brookes University in collaboration with CARE International UK, CRATerre, Habitat for Humanity and CRS on the broader impacts of shelter assistance.¹³⁴

Work on a vulnerability classification system is important but lagging

At the global level, there is also still no vulnerability classification system for shelter (also now known as 'Shelter Severity Classification'). A WG has been set up for this purpose, and its web page says, "There is currently no agreed-upon methodology to classify the nature and severity of vulnerability in the shelter sector".¹³⁵ While no small undertaking, this would be a powerful tool for

¹²⁹ DOC219

¹³⁰ DOC219

¹³¹ DOC254

¹³² DOC019

¹³³ DOC229

¹³⁴ DOC006

¹³⁵ As the Working Group on Shelter Vulnerability Classification website says, "There is currently no agreed upon methodology to classify the nature and severity of vulnerability in the shelter sector." (DOC263).

operations and for fundraising. Some pointed to this work being revitalised by the BHA grant and newly funded GFP for assessments. In the past 12 months, this is reported to include five working group meetings and development work, including the design of the analytical framework, the severity phase definitions and the prototype of the calculation models, which is currently being piloted in North West Syria. However, the WG website shows no meetings since 2019 and requires updating.¹³⁶ Senior GSC leadership indicated that further work would be done over the coming five years, but sufficient resources and prioritisation are needed to match the scale and importance of this undertaking.

Mixed bag of other research gaps identified by stakeholders

Other gaps mentioned by stakeholders included: additional documentation to support cash implementation at country level;¹³⁷ self-recovery and the longer-term and wider impact of shelter;¹³⁸ guidance on transition to recovery; and practical guidance on greening (though the latter was only raised at global level). Special arrangements — such as shelter for labour — are also not well captured or understood, nor is the role of remittances.¹³⁹ There is also evidence that data isn't being used for early warning and preparedness, nor contingency planning, which means the GSC can be late to respond to crises that it has the data to anticipate.

Concerns about limited impact of research in operations

Some stakeholders expressed concern about the extent to which guidance and research actually influence country-level operations, and that it may be pushed from the top down, rather than responding to needs from the field. They spoke to the need for a deeper layer of research beyond the general studies, as well as strengthening the link between improvements in knowledge with improved implementation.

Shelter Projects and Shelter Compendium highlighted as valuable for learning

The Shelter Projects publication was highlighted by a number of stakeholders as a valuable repository of information for learning and consolidating good practice (although, one stakeholder saw it more as a propaganda tool to highlight successes, which can hide the reality of grossly under-met needs). The Shelter Compendium is also an impressive collation of existing information that should support consistent and efficient response.¹⁴⁰

Quality and usefulness of coordination workshops, the annual meeting and other events are well

Annual GSC Coordination Workshops, which form the first part of the annual “Shelter Week” are an opportunity to review and revise methodologies, tools, and practices together with country-level clusters.¹⁴¹ Regional workshops also offer good opportunities for learning.¹⁴² The 2020 GSC meeting gave country clusters an hour each to present their cluster, which offered much more

¹³⁶ DOC263; it was only approved by the SAG in 2018 (DOC058).

¹³⁷ DOC220

¹³⁸ DOC220; Note that the WG Promoting Safer Building Standards shifted in 2019 to focus on supporting safer recovery (DOC219).

¹³⁹ DOC043

¹⁴⁰ DOC027; and DOC119.

¹⁴¹ For example, DOC056; and DOC162.

¹⁴² DOC161

regarded

information than the normal “marketplace” format.¹⁴³ GSC annual meetings and workshops are inclusive and, following a general trend of a growing number of participants, reached significantly more people in 2020 having gone online due to COVID-19. These meetings are also overwhelmingly reviewed positively by participants as being relevant and useful.¹⁴⁴ Discussions and outputs from the events are transparently presented and in the case of the 2021 Annual Meeting, put together in a very impressive interactive format.¹⁴⁵ The usage of such a resource against the time it took to put together is not readily available.

Capacity of users can affect evidence use and generation

The generation and effective use of evidence is also impacted by capacities at country level, in particular, of coordinators and IM staff. This is discussed further in the section on [Capacity](#) below.¹⁴⁶

Knowledge management is an area of concern to stakeholders

3.3 Capitalisation of the knowledge base

Knowledge management remains a challenge for the GSC, despite notable efforts in this area. The 2018 GSC meeting asked participants which areas of the Strategy would require most attention to achieve, and capitalisation received the highest score, more than double the other sub-pillars within Strategic Area 4.¹⁴⁷ The previous evaluation called for a knowledge management strategy and Learning and Knowledge Management GFP. These were taken up in the Annex of the Strategy, but there is no evidence of follow-up, most likely due to resource constraints.

Outreach, more than products, may be the issue

Senior management in the GSC acknowledged that information is not always accessible to partners, and some stakeholders suggested that the GSC should focus more on the outreach aspects of global learning, rather than gathering lessons. Another GSC stakeholder noted that knowledge management capacity was “not there yet”, despite having a number of IM staff. In some cases, it is difficult to know whether there are real gaps in information, or delays in keeping the website up to date.

GSC website has good functionality and a lot of information but not well structured or maintained

Although there is some recognition that the chief knowledge management tool for the GSC — the website — has come a long way, there is a lot of frustration amongst stakeholders. While functionally and technically sound (it was noted that a major upgrade was being carried out during this evaluation), and containing an enormous amount of useful information, it is not well organised or maintained. As perhaps the most important tool of the GSC to enable access to evidence, this has real and significant consequences — not only on this strategic area, but also on fundraising, advocacy, and general outward facing image. One stakeholder put it bluntly, saying the website as it stands is “a recipe for disaster.”

¹⁴³ DOC049

¹⁴⁴ As reported in Annual Achievement Reports; and for example, DOC264.

¹⁴⁵ [DOC26](#)

¹⁴⁶ DOC220

¹⁴⁷ DOC044

Some specific website quality control issues need addressing

A number of specific quality control issues were observed:

- Poor document tagging and lack of prioritisation of key pieces of information;
- Response/country pages are extremely variable in their quality and completeness, and some are just empty placeholders;¹⁴⁸
- Some general, global pages include misdirecting links and confusing pathways, for example:
 - o The page for Factsheets has a matrix of different countries/regions with links to mostly out of date Factsheets (obscuring newer ones that often exist) and geographical area pages;
 - o The list of countries/regions is incomplete, and connects users to confusing geographic groups, rather than response pages; and
 - o A page on IEC material¹⁴⁹ is empty and offers no hint of the very useful resource actually available.¹⁵⁰

The decentralised approach to web maintenance needs more robust oversight

It is worth reiterating, there is a large volume of useful information and a number of extremely well-managed response pages. Maintenance and design of any given page is seemingly up to the relevant country cluster or WG, which they sometimes do exceptionally well. That flexibility is a strength of the system, but it is also a risk. The central issue here is around content moderation and organisation, as well as the need for a general clean-up of legacy content.

Monitoring usage and functionality of the website improving

The most useful aspects of the current monitoring data on the website indicate how prominent it is (number of visitors) and give a sense of scale to understand how much effort would be needed to quality assure content (number of documents/new pages) in terms of metadata and accessibility (as opposed to substance).

Qualitative reporting has remained pretty consistent in terms of highlighting “regular updates and improvements” and the Application. Migration to a new version of Drupal, a web platform, is also highlighted in 2020,¹⁵¹ and according to stakeholders, did present some technical challenges more recently. The document explaining the purpose of the website focuses mostly on functionality features, rather than its role as a knowledge and learning management tool, which is just one bullet point at the end.¹⁵²

The effectiveness of the GSC “app” is yet to

The launch of the GSC application (app) was celebrated in the 2018 GSC annual meeting, with the objective of creating two way-communications with partners

¹⁴⁸ DOC076

¹⁴⁹ DOC265

¹⁵⁰ DOC266 (a database of reviewed IEC materials).

¹⁵¹ DOC056

¹⁵² DOC077

be determined.

and affected populations, and to enable factsheet integration.¹⁵³ Although, there is no clear explanation as to what the added value of this being an app, versus a website is. There is no evidence as to whether the ambition above of having two-way communication has been achieved.

Strategic Area 4: Capacity

This Strategic area comprises the following pillars:

- 4.1 Skills: Increased and localised shelter response capacity;
- 4.2 Preparedness: Country workshops and HLP;
- 4.3 Utilising cash and markets: Shelter responders apply cash and markets modalities appropriately; and
- 4.4 Future of shelter and settlement: Analysis of sector future response needs and capacity.

Achievements against targets ¹⁵⁴	
Indicator	Status
% of cluster coordination team members who feel prepared/have access to tools to address ongoing and emerging challenges	Achieved (79% average, 90% in latest report, against 80% target)
# of people trained in key cluster coordination roles during the reporting period	Not achieved (55 average, 21 in most recent report, against target of 80) ¹⁵⁵
# of people trained in coordination trainings who are deployed in deputy/ junior coordination roles to country-level clusters during the reporting period	Achieved (5 average, 12 in most recent report, against target of 10)

4.1 Skills

Strong emphasis and effort to further local capacity building

Stakeholders were generally positive about the greater emphasis given to local capacity building in the GSC Strategy and it was identified as critical for strengthening the performance of the GSC overall.

The GSC Support Team was recognised as making significant efforts to build capacity at country level through the development of guidance materials, trainings, information exchange and individual outreach support (some specific examples given on preparedness and HLP, discussed further below). However, the impacts of COVID-

¹⁵³ DOC043

¹⁵⁴ See Annex 5 for full dataset of achievements against Strategy indicators.

¹⁵⁵ This is heavily influenced by trainings being cancelled due to COVID-19.

19 posed some particular challenges (see [Box](#) above). Efficiency and accessibility of capacity building opportunities was improved through the decision to move Shelter Week from October to May/June, given that October is the busiest time for country clusters. Further, positive decisions were made to increase participation of governments, local organisations and national NGOs.¹⁵⁶

Progress
constrained by a
lack of
resources and
staff turnover

While the capacities of the GSC Support Team were felt to be increasing (including through support from GFPs and WGs), the trickle down of this capacity to country level was not as evident. This was largely attributed to a lack of resources for country level, which severely constrained the implementation of capacity building plans overall: “There is pressure to build capacity at every level, even below country level, but the resources are not there to do it.”¹⁵⁷

Another barrier to capacity building was the high level of staff turnover at the local level, resulting in a continued pattern of losing and rebuilding skills and knowledge, without raising the overall capacity. Stakeholders partly attributed this to the limited opportunities for career progression for coordinators and IM staff within country cluster teams. Smaller local partner agencies were also struggling to retain trained staff beyond the life of specific program funding, in the absence of adequate overhead support.¹⁵⁸

Further efforts
are required to
develop training
programs and
useful
coordination
tools and
materials

The GSC Satisfaction Survey 2020 asked shelter cluster coordination team members if they felt sufficiently prepared to address ongoing and emerging challenges, and whether they needed more tools:

- Of coordination team members, 63% felt fully prepared, which did not meet the 2020 GSC target of 70%.¹⁵⁹
- However, a further 35% felt somewhat prepared but stated they require more tools; suggesting that further efforts to develop useful and practical tools for coordination personnel may be required; and
- Many noted the need for additional and online trainings.¹⁶⁰

Stakeholders also noted the need for on-site coordination training and tools to be more closely aligned with field use: “we could and should be doing much more to have field-ready resources.”¹⁶¹

IM capacity a
huge gap at
country level

Surveys and stakeholder interviews all pointed to a lack of IM capacity at country level. There are several dimensions to this issue.

Challenges with
the IM staff

Firstly, partner agencies are struggling to find the ‘right’ IM people, with calls for a common talent pool of trained and experienced IM personnel (like that for

¹⁵⁶ DOC219

¹⁵⁷ Key Informant Interviews.

¹⁵⁸ Key Informant Interviews, DOC056; DOC058; DOC059; and DOC219.

¹⁵⁹ Evidence-Based Response Indicator 4.1: % of shelter cluster coordination team members who feel prepared/have access to tools to address ongoing and emerging challenges Target 2020: 70%.

¹⁶⁰ Reported in DOC042

¹⁶¹ Key Informant Interviews; DOC047; and DOC218.

profile

coordination).

At the same time, it should be acknowledged that there are high demands of people in IM roles, which in some cases, may extend beyond a “normal” technical profile. Stakeholders held expectations that people in IM roles:

- Should be able to “push the tools and technology of data analysis to the next level”, using best practice industry standards;
- Should have skills beyond technical data analysis to identify and present information useful for decision-making and improving shelter operations on the ground; and
- Should have good leadership and coordination skills to support engagement with partner agencies, improve information sharing within and between country cluster teams, and to support inter-cluster IM systems.¹⁶²

One solution may be to disentangle the more technical profiles that seek to raise the sophistication of evidence tools, from the more analytical and softer-skillset needed at the country level to carry out the cluster IM role. Additional findings in this area are anticipated in the forthcoming GSC IM Review.

Challenges with
IM capacity of
coordinators

Secondly, and partly in response to these high expectations, stakeholders identified a need to supplement IM capacities through other roles in country cluster teams; in particular, coordinators. The willingness of country cluster coordinators to engage with IM was a concern of some, but the larger issue was felt to be the varied skills among coordinators to analyse and use evidence effectively, and to support their IM staff. Some felt that IM should be viewed as an essential skill set for all personnel across the humanitarian sector. A sentiment echoed in a 2020 satisfaction survey, where improved trainings on IM for all cluster personnel were highlighted as a way for GSC to further invest in capacity building, and to better support the field use of data in decision-making.¹⁶³

Time challenges
for effective IM

Stakeholders also noted time constraints as a barrier to collecting and using data. One stakeholder spoke to the issue of having data available, but not having the time or capacity to analyse it and ensure the right people have it on hand when making decisions. Of the few respondents to the global survey who reported not sufficiently accessing and using data, time and the need for more training were cited issues.¹⁶⁴

Resources and
support need to
be provided in
languages other
than English

The Strategy outputs table identifies the need for translating GSC guidance, tools and other key materials into more languages.¹⁶⁵ The GSC website has some documents available in French, Arabic and/or Spanish. However, the majority are only available in English. It was noted that a framework agreement for translations would be helpful in this regard. Barriers also exist for people wishing to access support, rosters, and trainings in languages other than English.¹⁶⁶

¹⁶² Key Informant Interviews.

¹⁶³ Key Informant Interviews; and DOC042.

¹⁶⁴ DOC042

¹⁶⁵ DOC224

¹⁶⁶ Key Informant Interviews; and DOC218.

It was also noted that language requirements for coordinators can differ, with some positions “required” to speak other languages, such as French or Spanish, but it is only “desirable” in others (such as Arabic in the Middle East). Some local or smaller organisations sometimes struggled to deploy people where dual language was a requirement.¹⁶⁷

Stakeholders have also identified a number of key capacity issues, which may be relevant to future planning processes including:

- Better strategic prioritisation to address critical gaps in core capacities of the GSC, in particular, greater allocation of funding to support operational coordination;
- Greater training and support to better enable cluster coordinators to effectively advocate, and where necessary, push back against government decisions in favour of a more robust and principled stance to facilitate better delivery of shelter to affected communities;¹⁶⁸ and
- Conducting a review to determine the skills and capacities likely to be most needed across the sector going forward, as part of a longer-term approach.¹⁶⁹

4.2 Preparedness and HLP

Low visibility
and funding for
country-level
preparedness

Despite being an essential function of the GSC,¹⁷⁰ response preparedness has relatively low visibility in the Strategy and the outcomes/activities are limited to conducting country-level workshops.

Some preparedness work, through workshops and the preparation of contingency plans, including at sub-national level (for example in Nepal) has been taking place, however funding constraints were felt to have limited the overall impact of this work. Moreover, as mentioned above in evidence-based response, there is a need to use data more effectively to better anticipate and improve readiness for crises. Many stakeholders felt preparedness and contingency needed greater attention in the next strategy.¹⁷¹

Good progress
on HLP at the
country level

Conversely there has been greater attention and success in developing HLP capacity within the sector. Based on feedback from stakeholders:

- GFPs/Roving HLP Advisors have been providing good support to country level with stakeholders appreciating the regular and helpful contact;
- Some country cluster advocacy strategies have been updated to include HLP issues;
- HLP networks are developing at country level as some country clusters are connecting with other groups working on HLP issues, in some cases leading

¹⁶⁷ Key Informant Interviews.

¹⁶⁸ Key Informant Interviews.

¹⁶⁹ DOC220

¹⁷⁰ See the role of global clusters in preparedness in, for example, the 2015 IASC Reference Module (DOC248).

¹⁷¹ Key Informant Interviews.

- to funding support; and
- Capacities are improving on due diligence and security of tenure issues, as well as partners working on mapping and preparing country HLP profiles.¹⁷²

Calls to expands
HLP work
beyond
emergencies

Despite this progress, some stakeholders felt that HLP requires sustained attention. In particular, to extend the focus beyond emergencies and “shelter” with a view to addressing the critical links with longer term “housing” and to tackle the underlying issues that lead to insecurity of tenure. It was felt this would make a big contribution to overall preparedness, to ensure these issues do not prevent coordination delivery, and provide better protection for people on the ground.¹⁷³

Progress on
promoting cash
in shelter sector

4.3 Utilising cash and markets

The GSC has been responding to the increased focus on cash across the humanitarian sector. The GSC position paper on cash and markets, published in 2016, recognises the positive role of direct cash payments to support communities impacted by crisis and promotes its more systematic use as a response tool for the shelter sector.¹⁷⁴

In pursuit of this, the GSC has conducted initiatives at global and regional level, including:

- Development of global capacity and methodology in cash for shelter response (similar to the way in which REACH designed and conducted shelter assessments in country);¹⁷⁵
- A Technical Meeting hosted by the GSC and GWC on Multipurpose Cash Transfer and Market Support to review progress on how to achieve quality outcomes and prepare messaging to donors;¹⁷⁶
- A MENA regional forum in 2019 addressing cash-based interventions, including a presentation of the video from the GBV WG on “Shelter/NFI/Cash Distributions how can we do better”,¹⁷⁷
- Research on Market for Timber Poles and Bamboo in Mozambique;¹⁷⁸
- Rental Guidance Report and several Tip Sheets (GSC with support of CashCap),¹⁷⁹ which complements the IFRC Step-by-step guide for rental assistance;¹⁸⁰ and
- Introduction of Cash Champions (2017-2018) including Catholic Relief

¹⁷² Key Informant Interviews.

¹⁷³ Key Informant Interviews.

¹⁷⁴ DOC017

¹⁷⁵ DOC051

¹⁷⁶ DOC051

¹⁷⁷ DOC169; DOC161; and DOC051.

¹⁷⁸ DOC126

¹⁷⁹ DOC056; and DOC051.

¹⁸⁰ DOC249

Greater uptake on cash at country level, possibly nudged by the GSC Strategy

At country level, there is evidence of increased interest and engagement in using cash, for example through participation in country-level cash working groups (which were developing guidance and conducting market monitoring), and the inclusion of cash as an issue in country cluster advocacy strategies. The Philippines cluster provided cash training to cluster partners with support from the global level;¹⁸² and, country-level research and guidance on cash and HLP was developed in Yemen and Republic of Congo.¹⁸³

Encouragingly, it was suggested that the progression on cash may have been nudged along because of its prominent inclusion in the GSC Strategy.¹⁸⁴

Donors also encouraging greater use of cash

Greater use of cash was also cited as high among the priorities of some donors. ECHO, for example, promotes cash-based humanitarian assistance as a priority, having released a cash-based assistance policy with the aim to increase the use of cash-based assistance for shelter, and in particular for rental assistance.¹⁸⁵

There has also been a policy shift at FCDO regarding cash for shelter, where initially conditional cash was met with some reluctance. However, when evidence was used to demonstrate that some of the biggest expenditures for affected communities was rent, it was more readily accepted.¹⁸⁶

Main barriers for cash – lack of knowledge, over complexity, and lack of inter-cluster coordination

Despite the positive progress, some persistent barriers were identified that may require further attention:

- Some stakeholders identified the need to “demystify” the use of cash at field level and overcome some of the continuing knowledge gaps in conducting market assessments.¹⁸⁷
- In some instances, market assessments were felt to be “overcomplicated”, and they are not completed in time to be useful or accessible — suggesting there were wasted resources spent on conducting them.¹⁸⁸
- At the inter-cluster level stakeholders still reported having issues with coordination on cash, felt to be driven largely by agency dynamics. Despite frequent discussion, there was little progress on this issue within the Global Cluster Coordination Group (GCCG).¹⁸⁹ However, more recently in March 2022, the IASC endorsed the Outcomes and Recommendations from the cash coordination caucus, a collaboration under the auspices of the Grand Bargain, which proposed a new model for international cash coordination architecture,

¹⁸¹ DOC016

¹⁸² Key Informant Interviews.

¹⁸³ DOC129; and DOC020.

¹⁸⁴ Key Informant Interviews.

¹⁸⁵ Key Informant Interviews.

¹⁸⁶ Key Informant Interviews.

¹⁸⁷ Key Informant Interviews.

¹⁸⁸ Key Informant Interviews.

¹⁸⁹ Key Informant Interviews.

as well as some key principles and governance/leadership/functions for cash coordination.¹⁹⁰

New guidance on markets could make a positive contribution.

It is noted that in 2022 there is activity being undertaken by the Shelter, Cash and Markets CoP on an overarching Market Based Programming for Shelter guidance document, which could have positive implications if adequately rolled-out with resources for training.

Flagship report a good start, but work needs to continue

4.4 Analysing the future of shelter and settlement

The main outcome for this pillar, as described in the Strategy, was the publication of the State of Humanitarian Shelter and Settlements “Beyond the Better Shed: Prioritising People” in 2018.¹⁹¹ Later SAG meetings identified the need for a second iteration, which has not yet been undertaken.

This report was a collaboration of many agencies and individuals with the aim “to raise the profile and provide a better understanding of the humanitarian shelter and settlements sector.” The report was intended for use by humanitarian policy makers, donors, governments, academics and senior managers of humanitarian agencies and institutions, “to better prepare for and meet the shelter and settlement needs of populations affected by humanitarian crises.” The report covers a wide range of themes ranging from trends in coordination, to operational challenges, to the development of standards and IM.

The extent to which this report has been used to conduct a deep analysis of the role of the shelter sector and cluster coordination is unclear, but throughout this report, there are numerous references to research and discussions facilitated by the GSC which also reflect efforts to anticipate and adapt to future needs of the sector.

Cross-cutting issues

Cross-cutting issues: mainstreamed or siloed?

Cross cutting issues lack adequate visibility in the GSC Strategy

The GSC Strategy narrative includes cross-cutting issues as part of ‘Good Shelter programming’ and to some extent the cross-cutting issues have been integrated through the various Strategic Areas in the Outputs/Actions/Indicators in the Strategy Annexes.¹⁹² However, this is not especially robust and overall the GSC Strategy leaves an impression that while issues of protection, gender, disability inclusion and environment are important as buzzwords in the Strategy, they are outside of the main areas of focus. Indeed, at least one stakeholder who was involved in the development process felt they were added more as an “afterthought”.

Fortunately, this has not been reflected in the actual work outputs against these

¹⁹⁰ DOC271

¹⁹¹ DOC229

¹⁹² DOC224

issues, which, as discussed below, have been significant. So, it is mainly a matter of ensuring greater visibility.

Protection

Protection included, but not prominent, in the Strategy

The narrative of the GSC Strategy identifies protection mainstreaming and integration as key components of good shelter and settlement programming. This includes:

- Working with the Protection Cluster at country level and the promotion of meaningful access, safety and dignity by shelter cluster partners; and
- Dissemination and use of the GPC Protection Mainstreaming Toolkit and the UN Secretary General's Special Measures for Protection from Sexual Exploitation and Abuse: A New Approach.

Protection is integral to the work on HLP, which is included prominently in the GSC Strategy as part of preparedness work and addressed above under Capacity. Protection is also reflected in considerations of gender-based violence (GBV) and disability, as discussed further below. So, to this extent, protection could be considered to have been addressed in Strategy, but not prominently in its own right.

Views were mixed as to whether promotion and implementation of protection was being undertaken successfully at country level:

- Some felt that protection issues are very specific to each country context and/or that it is not possible or appropriate to insist that partner agencies address them in every circumstance;
- Some felt they were only being addressed to a minimal level and/or to the extent that it was a requirement as part of the HRP; and
- Others felt that good progress had been made and reported positive collaboration with the Protection Cluster in addressing protection issues as they arose.¹⁹³

Need to position shelter more centrally in protection issues

One of the key challenges, identified by several Key Informants at both global and country levels, is around the need to better position shelter at the centre of the protection discussion. Safe and secure shelter (specifically “adequate housing”) is a human right and is paramount for enabling people to fully enjoy a wide range of other human rights. The GSC has not always been successful in clearly articulating and measuring these links.¹⁹⁴

Gender

Gender is considered in two contexts in the GSC Strategy:

- Firstly, regarding gender-sensitive country coordination and ensuring gender balance within staffing structures at different levels, as discussed in the [Coordination](#) section above; and
- Secondly, as part of protection mainstreaming, concerning the prevention, mitigation, and safe response to GBV in shelter and settlements programming.

¹⁹³ Key Informant Interviews.

¹⁹⁴ Key Informant Interviews.

Gender and GBV not prominent in the Strategy, but significant work has been done

As a protection issue, gender and GBV are only addressed in the introductory narrative of the Strategy but are entirely absent from the Annexes.¹⁹⁵ Nevertheless, there is evidence that gender and GBV are seen as important issue and significant time and resources have been dedicated to further knowledge and capacity in this area, in particular through the GBV GFP, who conducted a review of the inclusion of GBV in the shelter sections of Humanitarian Needs Overviews and Humanitarian Response Plans in 2020, and prepared recommendations, guidance for inclusion, and a guidance on a GBV risk reduction matrix.

A GBV in Shelter Programming Working Group was established, which has since transitioned to a Community of Practice on Gender, Diversity and Inclusion.¹⁹⁶

Numerous materials were developed and/or promoted through the GSC including:

- GBV Constant Companion;¹⁹⁷
- Video on Responding to Disclosure of a GBV Incident;¹⁹⁸
- Distribution shelter materials NFI & Cash — Guidance to reduce the risk of Gender-Based Violence;¹⁹⁹
- Post distribution monitoring for shelter and NFI programming — Guidance to inclusive programming;²⁰⁰
- Site planning — Guidance to reduce the Risk of Gender-Based Violence;²⁰¹
- What Works for Women's Land and Property Rights?;²⁰²
- Women & Land in the Muslim World: Pathways to increase access to land for the realisation of development, peace and human rights;²⁰³ and
- Video on “Shelter/NFI/Cash Distributions: how can we do better” presented to the first MENA Shelter and Settlements Forum in 2019.²⁰⁴

One survey respondent felt there had been increased support from global to country level on issues around GBV. Another country level Shelter Cluster reported active engagement with the Protection Cluster on GBV issues and actively working with their partner agencies on it.²⁰⁵ The GSC grant proposal to BHA included the issue of people trafficking, and in particular, of women and children, as a donor requirement to ensure compliance with international law on the Trafficking of Persons.²⁰⁶

¹⁹⁵ DOC224

¹⁹⁶ Most information can be found on the deactivated [GBV in Shelter Programming Working Group webpage](#) (DOC267). There is another page on the GSC website on Gender and Diversity Community of Practice, but the page is not populated.

¹⁹⁷ DOC230

¹⁹⁸ DOC231

¹⁹⁹ DOC026

²⁰⁰ DOC232

²⁰¹ DOC233

²⁰² DOC234

²⁰³ DOC235

²⁰⁴ DOC236

²⁰⁵ Key Informant Interviews.

²⁰⁶ DOC004

Included more prominently in the Strategy, tools developed but not always a priority in the field

Disability Inclusion

The inclusion of people with disabilities is a prominent component of Strategic Area 4 on Capacity, specifically for increasing and localising shelter response capacity. While no Outcomes/Actions in the GSC Strategy Annex²⁰⁷ were assigned to country or agency levels, at the global level these included:

- Test and review current disability inclusion tools (including capacity development workshops);
- Support to country-level participants to take part in Working Groups;
- Development and piloting of updated GSC tools (including All Under One Roof),²⁰⁸ standards, training modules; and
- Support the deployment of inclusive shelter experts, as required.

A Working Group on Inclusion of Persons with Disabilities was established to understand the reality of disability inclusion in shelter and settlements programming and address some of the actions/outcomes in the strategy, such as tool review and development. This resulted in the update of the All Under One Roof guidance in 2022 following a baseline assessment to “investigate the realities of mainstreaming inclusion of persons with disabilities and their care-givers across the shelter and settlement sector, get a baseline of current practices, and understand the challenges or barriers to inclusive programming.”²⁰⁹ Many meetings of the GSC included discussion or updates on the topic of inclusion of persons with disabilities in shelter programming.²¹⁰ However, few Key Informants directly referred to disability during their interviews, suggesting it is not always considered a high priority.²¹¹

Environment

Regarded as a key issue

The GSC Strategy narrative includes a brief description of this cross-cutting issue, which includes advocacy, training and support on environment-sensitive shelter and settlements programming.²¹²

There was a degree of cynicism from some Key Informants as to whether the inclusion of the environment agenda was donor-led and had the potential to detract from other key priorities. Others however, felt the GSC Strategy did not place a strong enough emphasis on the environment and/or believed it should be a greater priority at country level.²¹³ In the Strategy Annex, there are no Outcomes/Actions assigned for country and local level, and only two Outcomes/Actions on Environment at the global level:

- The establishment of an Environment Community of Practice (ECOP); and
- The recruitment of a full time Environment GFP by IFRC.²¹⁴

²⁰⁷ DOC224

²⁰⁸ DOC237

²⁰⁹ DOC238

²¹⁰ DOC033; SAG and GSC Meeting Minutes.

²¹¹ Key Informant Interviews.

²¹² DOC223

²¹³ Key Informant Interviews.

²¹⁴ DOC224

Establishment
of an ECoP

An ECoP was established prior to the current GSC Strategy and is reported to have “been very active and produced recommendations to country-level clusters and the global cluster on issues related to greening the response and reducing the environmental impact of shelter intervention” as well as presentations on greening the response at the 2018 and 2019 GSC annual meetings and 2020 Virtual Coordination Workshop and the Humanitarian Practice Network in 2019, 2020 and 2022. The ECoP also co-commissioned two studies:

- A study on Environmental Mainstreaming in Humanitarian Interventions from the London School of Economics and Political Science published in 2020, commissioned jointly with the UNEP/OCHA Joint Environment Unit (JEU) published in 2020; and
- A study on cash and the environment in 2018 co-commissioned with the UN Environment/OCHA Joint Unit and the London School of Economics and Political Science.²¹⁵

The ECoP web page²¹⁶ also lists numerous publications on a wide range of shelter/environment issues, many of which have been undertaken on a voluntary basis by organisations and individuals, representing significant interest and interaction on this topic.

Recent
appointment of
a GFP

A GFP for Environment, based at UNHCR, and a Senior Environment Advisor, based at IFRC, have only just been recruited at the start of this evaluation, thus the full impact of these positions is yet to be realised.²¹⁷

Numerous
collaborative
activities across
the sector

Other activities around greening involving the Shelter Cluster (directly or indirectly through its lead agencies) were also reported during the lifespan of the Strategy including:

- The Joint Initiative for Sustainable Humanitarian Packaging Waste Management coordinated by USAID;
- The Nexus Environmental Assessment Tool (NEAT+);
- Life-cycle Analysis for Humanitarian Shelter (supported by BRE);
- Sustainable Supply Chain Alliance Project;
- Environmental Focus of Humanitarian Logistics;
- IASC Informal Working Group on Greening;
- UNHCR Clean Energy Challenge;
- The Climate and Environment Charter for Humanitarian Organisations; and
- Steering Committee (including UNHCR and IFRC) of the “Sustainable Tarpaulin” project, which is part of the Sustainable Supply Chain Alliance (SSCA), hosted by ICRC.²¹⁸

ECHO grant
provided

In July 2021 the GSC’s environment agenda received a significant boost with the awarding of a substantial grant from DG ECHO of EUR 650,000 for 24 months, which

²¹⁵ Above para DOC268, also noted in DOC010.

²¹⁶ DOC269.

²¹⁷ DOC219

²¹⁸ Above noted in DOC010.

significant inject of resources	includes 30% co-funding from lead agencies and partners, bringing the total to just under EUR 1m, entitled “Mobilising collective efforts towards a greener and climate smart humanitarian shelter and settlements response”.²¹⁹ This work centres around two main components: - Collaboration at global level with other clusters (including Logistics, WASH, Education and Health) to improve the specifications of the most common in-kind humanitarian items used by the shelter sector and others, to improve their “green” specifications, without compromising quality. - Supporting country-level shelter clusters to implement climate smart operations, including local procurement, greener specifications, waste minimisation and use of cash.²²⁰
Challenges include knowledge gaps and lack of prioritisation at country level	At country level, some Key Informants reported challenges in taking the agenda forward including: - A general knowledge gap on greening; - Resource constraints, including an example of work done to conduct environmental impact assessments, but no resources to implement the recommendations; and - A reluctance by local agencies and governments to prioritise environment and green responses in resource constrained contexts.²²¹
Call for greater focus on climate change	However, in some contexts (such as the Sahel and Nepal) environmental impacts and climate change are regarded as important and it is included in country level cluster plans/strategies and for resource mobilisation. In this regard, some stakeholders identified the specific need to reference climate change in the next strategy.²²²

PART 3: CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Biggest wins and greatest challenges

The GSC set itself an **ambitious set of objectives** with its Strategy 2018-2022. There were some very significant hurdles in the early stages of the Strategy timeframe, including the **loss of ECHO funding** in 2018-2019 and then the **onset of the COVID-19 pandemic**. However, there were also opportunities leading to **strengthened collaboration between the co-lead agencies** and demonstrating the relevance of the GSC and the shelter sector to some of the most pressing humanitarian issues, including protection, health and the environment. The **positive profile and reputation of the GSC** on the international stage was no doubt strengthened over the past five years and remains strong overall.

²¹⁹ DOC010

²²⁰ DOC010

²²¹ Key Informant Interviews.

²²² Key Informant Interviews.

The GSC could be considered **prolific in the development of global tools, research and guidance** on a wide range of shelter and settlement issues. In particular, through the activities of **Working Groups and collaborations with partner agencies**. The GSC was also able to expand its offerings of support to country clusters through the **appointment of Global Focal Points** on critical areas such as advocacy, research, environment and HLP, and these roles were found to have made an important difference in building capacity and furthering engagement of partners at country level. **Global meetings, workshops and training** were also well received and adapted well to the challenges of the COVID-19.

There was **difficulty gaining traction on issues such as localisation, area-based approaches and preparedness**. This was in part due to resource constraints and a lack of interest from donors, but also the need for “field-ready” tools and support, as well as critical staffing and capacity issues at country level. Additionally, the **Strategy did not provide adequate guidance** on some emerging coordination issues, such as the **loss of the Early Recovery Cluster**, and the increasing trend towards **sector coordination** rather than formal cluster activation.

While there was **progress developing systems for knowledge management and monitoring**, most notably the indicators for the Strategy, there is still a need to improve the quality of and access to information, particularly, through **improvements to the website**. There were also **significant gaps to be addressed in how data is captured, analysed and used**, and important work still to be done on addressing the **vulnerability classification system**, as a major contribution to the humanitarian system.

The overriding challenge has been the **inability to significantly expand the donor base and funding across the sector**. As a result, one of the most critical indicators of success — **the coverage of shelter needs vs targets** — **has not improved** over recent years, spiking at 61% in 2020 but with an average of just 37% over a three-year period (well below the baseline of 57%).²²³ This requires a **critical re-think about how to position the GSC in the broader humanitarian landscape** (as envisaged by the work on the State of Humanitarian Shelter and Settlements), and how it can engage effectively with other global clusters and influential partners to reverse this concerning trend.

Was it the right strategy for the moment?

The GSC 2018-2022 **Strategy was the right one for the time** and may continue to be serviceable in the medium-term while a more strategic approach to strategy-making can be pursued.

This Strategy was an **important step towards formalisation of GSC ambitions**, building on the light-touch, one-page strategy that existed previously. In doing so, it sought to be inclusive of partners priorities, ambitious in scope, and brought further clarity around activities and measurements to operationalise these ambitions.

Partners, donors, and other stakeholders were able to see themselves somewhere in the Strategy, and there was **space for any relevant activity or funding** to find a home amongst the Strategy’s sprawling branches.

Yet, in trying to be all things to all people, the **lack of prioritisation and ambiguity of purpose**

²²³ See Annex 5.

reduced its utility. In particular, as a means for attracting funds to support core functions and for driving change at country level. Further, its ambitions came right as the GSC faced huge funding challenges and the difficult COVID-19 context.

Part of the Strategy points to concrete work that should be carried out by the GSC Support Team (for example, providing resources and support to country-level clusters), and other components point to issues that need to be addressed across the sector and beyond. As such, it is **too wide-ranging to be a powerful and focused advocacy tool, and not detailed or “field ready” enough as an operational tool** to drive action on the ground. Ultimately, this dichotomy creates **challenges for effective monitoring and accountability**, including against the GSC’s core functions.

That said, overall, the **Strategy has been a useful framework over the past five years**, and it has **remained remarkably relevant** and salient against the needs of the GSC and shelter sector, even as the world has changed.

Looking ahead

Overarching recommendations

The next GSC Strategy should seek to build on the strengths of the current one. In lieu of a full re-development of the strategy for 2023 onward, this evaluation recommends (with each of these described further below):

- A. Undertaking a light-touch review around a few key areas in the very short-term;
- B. Shoring up gaps in implementing the current Strategy over the next 1–3 years; and
- C. For the next strategy, leading transformation towards greater alignment of global cluster strategies, and adopting a “strategic framework” approach.

In addition to these overarching recommendations, which are particularly geared towards the GSC Support Team (though, additional resources from the SAG, WGs, CLAs, and other partners may be needed), more specific and particular recommendations are provided for consideration in Annex 1.

Rationale

These recommendations are made in light of the **resource constraints** facing the GSC, including serious resource gaps faced during the strategic period (in 2019 and 2020), and the very real costs involved in undertaking a full redesign of the Strategy. This approach also acknowledges that the **current Strategy is quite solid in terms of content**. It is not problematic, outdated, or riddled with substantive gaps, even if it does not achieve everything that it could, nor elaborate on some select areas quite enough.

An inclusive Strategy development process, as was undertaken previously and which would be recommended again, is likely to yield much of the same content as the current Strategy, albeit potentially reframed to be as useful as possible to the different stakeholders it seeks to engage.

The GSC has an **opportunity to provide leadership within the cluster system** by working with other clusters to better harmonise the approach to strategic development and to refocus and strengthen common core functions of clusters at country and global level. This would not only enhance the basis for coordination across clusters, but it will also help to reposition the GSC and the role of shelter as

central to the realisation of other sectoral outcomes; most notably, in protection, WASH, health, and CCCM.

The risk of pursuing this course of action is relatively low. Even if other clusters are unwilling or unable to engage, the outcome will still lead to the development of a clearer strategy, which emphasises and prioritises the core business of the GSC, with a timeline aligned to at least some of the most critically relevant clusters.

Further, a **framework approach** to the next strategy **will provide a coherent, stable and focused foundation** which will remain relevant even beyond a five-year timeframe. This should reflect the core priority to strengthen coordination at country level, in line with other clusters. Such an approach will ultimately be more sustainable than starting with a blank slate every five years.

From this, **more modular, time-bound and purpose/stakeholder-specific tools and products can be developed** under the umbrella of that framework. This process should ensure there are tools to highlight *real* and *specific* short- to medium-term priorities for the GSC and the sector. Keeping these priorities to a relatively low number, with a specific tool defining them with a relatively short timeframe (for example, 2 years), will help stakeholders know where actual priorities lie.

Further details for these broad recommendations are included below.

A. Light touch review for the final 6 months of the current Strategy

1. Against both the detailed outputs/actions annex of the Strategy, as well as key implementation gaps noted below, and in consultation with partners and other stakeholders, **identify the most critical gaps in implementing the Strategy.**
2. **Review the strategic approach to knowledge management**, creating a full mapping of needs and key tools (including guidance, position papers, etc.), and an interim strategy to make the website and essential tools more accessible to stakeholders.²²⁴
3. Review the status of **contexts of sectoral coordination** (non-cluster activations), consider its inclusion as part of the GSC strategic area on coordination, supported by the development of clear guidance for relevant country-level stakeholders.
4. **Formally extend the current Strategy timeframe**, aligning the proceeding strategy to other clusters (more on this in the section below on the next strategy). In this extension supplement any gaps in the Strategy itself, such as highlighting protection and addressing the aforementioned sectoral coordination issue.

B. Fill the most crucial gaps in implementation over the coming 1-3 years

5. **Develop and implement a specific strategy for knowledge management** with a focus on maintenance and quality assuring content for the website, having a clear purpose, audience, and dissemination plan for various tools, etc.
6. Continue pursuit of key aspects of the **research and advocacy agenda** under the leadership of the GFPs, including a global vulnerability classification system, further tools clarifying and operationalising priority concepts (for example, localisation, area-based approach, and shelter

²²⁴ The ongoing IM Review at may at least partly address this. See also Annex 7 for an initial mapping conducted as part of this evaluation.

impact on broader humanitarian outcomes).

7. For the GSC, shelter sector and country-level clusters, undertake efforts to streamline and reinforce (i.e., through capacity building and direct support) **monitoring and reporting** focusing on existing mechanisms (CCPM, financial reporting through appeals and FTS) and a small set of clearly defined core indicators. Follow good practice of feeding back analysis to show purpose and value of reporting. For the GSC Support Team itself, consider establishing a unified budgeting approach to track resources against services offered and products delivered, should indicators on the latter be maintained.

C. For the next strategy: inter-cluster alignment and a strategic framework approach

8. Prior to the development of the next strategy, work with other clusters to agree on a **common timeframe and basis for strategies**, placing common IASC definitions for the global²²⁵ and country²²⁶ level clusters at the centre and being clearly prioritised. Whether achieved across all, some, or no other clusters, pursue this as the basis of the GSC strategy and align timing to most common timeframe.²²⁷
9. Ensure development of the next strategy is inclusive to the views of partners and other stakeholders, including from field level, in line with what was previously undertaken and the overall recommendation to pursue an inter-cluster and framework approach. Where possible, develop a feedback/accountability mechanism to capture how different inputs were considered and/or taken on board.
10. Rather than having a single document that attempts to be operational at the field level, effective for advocacy, establishing normative priorities etc., conceptualise the approach as a **strategic framework**. At the heart, would be the aforementioned document, which has a common core of coordination across all clusters.
11. The strategic framework could then be complemented by a whole range of **different strategic tools under an overarching framework**, each with a clear purpose and appropriate plan for utilising the tool. For example, if it is meant to guide, inspire, or nudge at the field-level, ensure appropriate dissemination channels, translation into relevant languages, and integration into key documents, and indicate those elements of the global strategy that should be adopted at country level.

²²⁵ See the functions of the global clusters as presented in DOC250.

²²⁶ See 6+1 core functions of country-level clusters, presented in for example DOC251.

²²⁷ For example, beginning in 2025 or 2026. See Annex 6 for a mapping of cluster strategy timelines.