



Shelter Cluster NWSW Cameroon

ShelterCluster.org

Coordinating Humanitarian Shelter

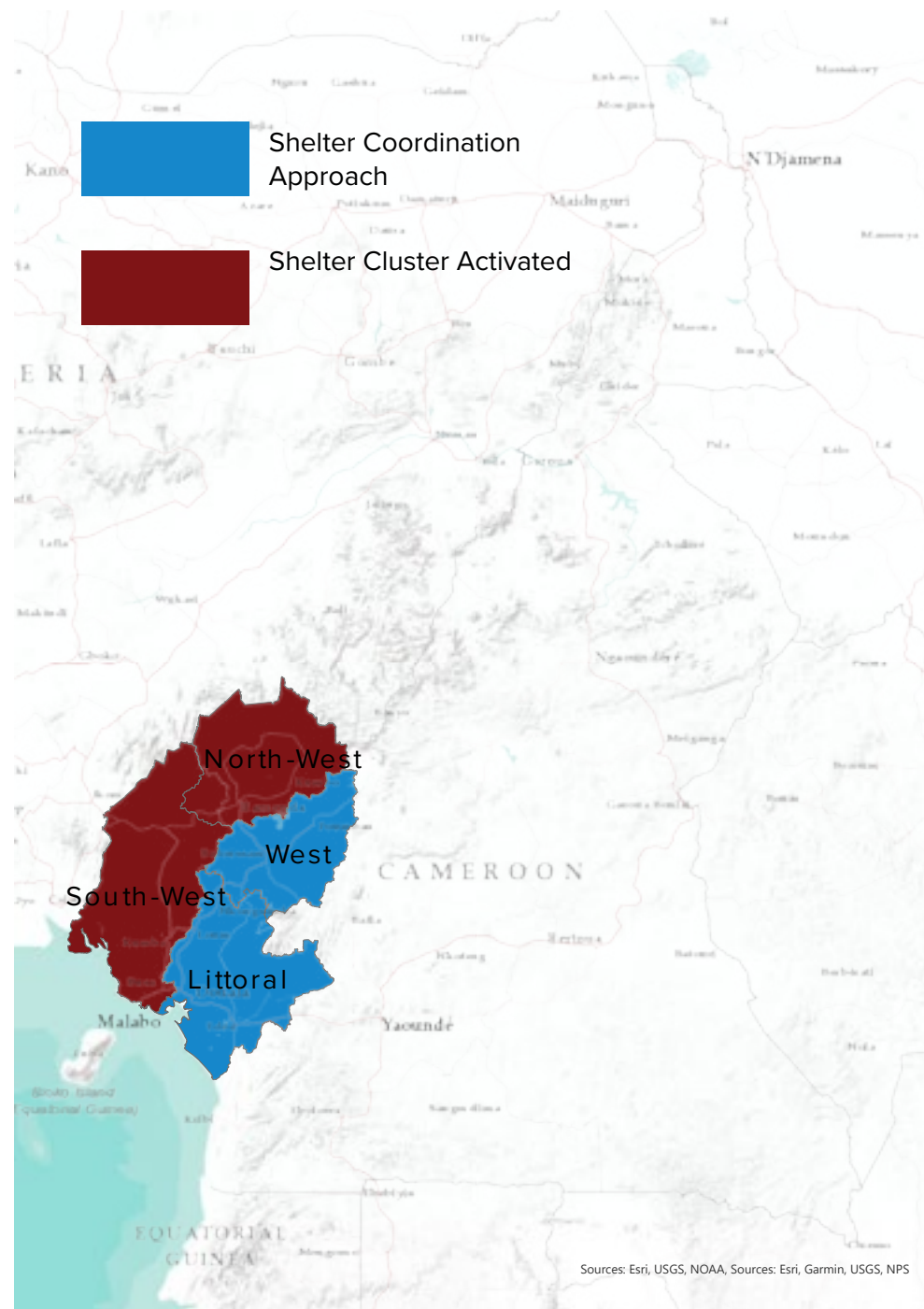


Introduction of the Shelter Coordination Approach in the West and Littoral Regions

Background and Context

The Shelter Cluster has been activated in Cameroon's Northwest and Southwest regions since October 2018. Hundreds of thousands of people at that time were said to be displaced due to ongoing civil war between Cameroon Defence Forces and Non-State Armed Groups. While hundreds of thousands were displaced within the Northwest and Southwest Regions, tens of thousands were displaced to the West and Littoral Regions. At the time of the activation of the two regions in the Northwest and Southwest Regions, the Global Shelter Cluster recommended, "Littoral & West should be covered by the (SWNW) cluster since it concerns the same population and situation is linked to the SWNW crises and to ensure related interventions are properly coordinated and harmonised. Hence both regions should not be covered by Yaoundé, amongst other since the access is easier, many agencies might want to focus their interventions there, widening the already strong feeling of discrimination of the two anglophone regions."

Since the time of the Cluster's activation, the Cluster has not been able to establish any coordination services in the regions of the West and Littoral until June of 2023 through two dedicated workshops in each region. The delay in putting these services into place has been caused in part by the severity of the needs within the Northwest and Southwest regions and the need to prioritize the response in these regions, the COVID19 pandemic which slowed a number of in-person meetings, and also capacity of the cluster to introduce these services. The workshops sought to get feedback from partners based in the two regions about the shelter conditions of internally displaced persons, inform them about the shelter coordination approach, and introduce them to the tools that are designed to support the implementation of Shelter and NFI interventions in response to the crisis in the Northwest and Southwest regions.



Attendance

The workshop in Douala was held on the 1st and 2nd June and was attended by sixteen (16) people from fifteen (15) organizations, and the workshop in Bafoussam was held on the 8th and 9th of June and had twenty-two (22) people from eighteen (18) organizations. Of the organizations in attendance between the two regions, only five organizations already have or have had Shelter and NFI interventions ongoing in the Northwest and Southwest regions. These organizations include UNHCR, IOM, SHUMAS, NRC, and Plan International. Many of the other organizations in attendance are locally based non-governmental organizations who have engaged in such sectors such as protection, education, and health.

Part of this inability of organizations to cover the four regions stems from the poor funding situation of Cameroon in the humanitarian sector. In 2023, the [Norwegian Refugee Council published its annual report of the most underfunded crises](#), of which Cameroon is now ranked the eighth most neglected crisis. While it has fallen from being the third most neglected crisis, its ranking does not indicate a positive change in terms of its funding situation but rather that higher profile emergencies such as Burkina Faso, the Democratic Republic of Congo, and Sudan have experienced a more intense aggravation of the needs. Within Cameroon, donors have prioritized interventions in the Northwest and Southwest. Amongst partners who submitted projects in the Humanitarian Response Plan for 2023, Shelter Cluster partners have advocated for funding to meet the needs of approximately 18,000 people in the West and Littoral Regions. This represents 6% of the Shelter Cluster's response plan for the Northwest and Southwest crisis for 2023.

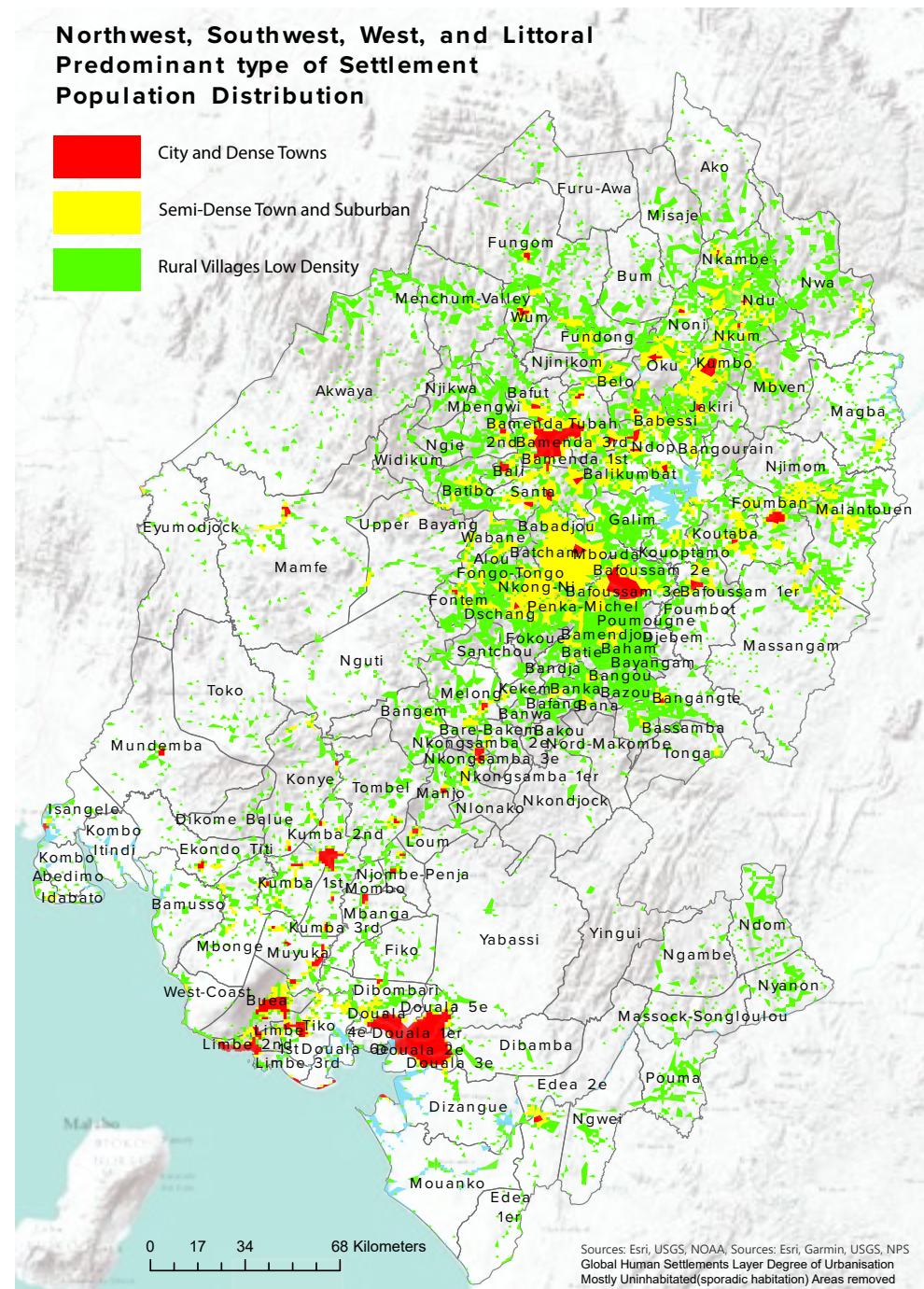
The remainder of the partners in attendance in the meeting were mostly unfamiliar with Shelter programming and how it differed from interventions such as provision of a safe space in response to an incidence of gender-based violence. The workshop was a good opportunity to introduce partners to Shelter programming, the Shelter Sphere Standards, and how Shelter is part of a more holistic multi-sectoral response. Given that many of these partners don't have funding, they do not have immediate capacity to respond to the needs.



IDP Settlement Patterns

According to the OCHA Multi-sector Needs Assessment conducted in August 2022, there are 114,111 internally displaced people (IDPs) in the West Region and 79,954 IDPs in the Littoral Region. A comprehensive household assessment in December 2021 in the West Region found that the majority of IDPs were from Bui Division (21%), Mezam Division (19%), Lebiam (13%), Donga Mantung (10%), and Boyo Division (8%). Mifi and Menoua Divisions were the divisions of the most displacement of these IDPs. In addition to the relative peace and security that these IDPs can find in the West and Littoral Regions (cited by 94% of surveyed IDPs), those IDPs who had intentions to stay (18%) cited having better educational (66%) and financial (56%) opportunities, better shelter (48%), and wanting to be close to family and friends (46%) as reasons for staying in the West Region.

Shelter Cluster partners remarked that many of the IDPs had arrived to the West and Littoral Region principally at the beginning of the crisis to escape the impacts of the crisis, but maybe had settled in areas that were not correspondent with their skill sets with available livelihood opportunities. This resulted in secondary or tertiary movements motivated by employment opportunities rather than the crisis. In the Littoral Region, partners had remarked that IDPs who came from an agricultural background in the Southwest Region including Kupé-Manengumba Division (Nguti, Bangen, and Tombel Subdivisions) primarily settled in rural areas. In the Littoral, Nkam Division is the most representative of low density rural areas. Parts of Mounjo Division (represented in the map from Manjo, Nkongsamba, and Melong) also have rural areas. IDPs who had practiced commercial trade prior to the crisis from Wum (Menchum Division) preferred to settle in larger towns and cities where there would be more employment opportunities. In the West Region, partners agreed that education, cultural similarity, and the geographic proximity with their area of origin were motivating factors for settling in locations. For example, IDPs coming from Lebiale (Wabane, Alou) had similar



local dialects to those in Babadjou and Santa and therefore were often to stay with hosts in Babadjou and Santa. Njimom provides easy access for persons displaced from IDPs from Mbve and Jakiri, so many IDPs could often engage on go and see visits to check the situation in their area of origin. Ndobbo village in Douala 4 also is close to access Limbe and Buea in the Southwest Region. Partners expressed their surprise that the population of IDPs in the August 2022 MSNA reported a high number of IDPs in Massangam Subdivision. It could be perhaps explained by the presence of a bilingual primary school. Shelter Cluster partners also reflected that there were quite a number of IDPs who had settled in Fouban Subdivision and that potentially the OCHA MSNA did not adequately reflect that higher concentration of IDPs. Partners in the Littoral Region suggested that the MSNA was perhaps inappropriately timed, as the school year causes an increase in the number of people who the community may consider IDPs, as those who don't have functional schools in the Northwest and Southwest come to schools in the West and Littoral regions.

Many of the shelter challenges within the West and Littoral are as a result of challenges associated with urbanization and dense population. Affordability of housing is a key need of the IDP population with many not able to afford it and therefore being forced to settle for sub-standard accommodation which exposes them to protection risks (gender-based violence in the case of overcrowding) or eviction (tenure security) due to the poor conditions in these houses exacerbated by over use. Many of these inadequate accommodation areas are found in informal settlements and areas that the authorities have declared as no build zones. This requires that Shelter Cluster partners to adhere to “do no harm” principles of shelter programming and assure that their interventions seek to improve their beneficiaries current shelter conditions. During the workshop, much time was spent to explain that an acceptable cash for rent intervention should not just be a sharing of cash to cover the cost of rent, but to also support IDPs to have minimum habitable and secure enough accommodation.



The village of Ndobbo in Douala 4, where many structures have been built along the road, despite building regulations stating that the building should be at least 5 m away from the road side. Buildings like these are often at risk of demolition.

Urban growth patterns have also put pressure on the cities and towns where IDPs seek accommodation, therefore indicating the high number of needs in the area of urban planning and development. The West and Littoral Regions are areas where Humanitarian-Development Nexus approaches could be employed.

Shelter Needs of Victims of Gender Based Violence

A frequent confusion that has been noted on previous Humanitarian Coordination Forums attended by the Shelter Cluster Coordinator and the Co-Chair has been that of what is a shelter intervention and what is a safe space. The workshop clarified that while actors could assist protection partners in putting into place a safe space, the safe space didn't promote or enable to be temporarily accommodated independently and therefore its main purpose is response to gender-based violence. A time that a victim of gender-based violence can reside in a safe space is often limited to a maximum of 2 weeks, which means that it is not an appropriate duration to declare that a person has secured a shelter solution. The Safe Space is also not providing the person with secure enough independent tenure and cannot be used as a step towards shelter durable solutions.

Partners reported their concern that referral pathways for shelter were not reaching the right person in these cases. One partner reported that she had shared a referral for shelter for a victim forced to leave a safe space to a UNHCR external relations person in Yaoundé. This referral never reached the Shelter Cluster team for the Northwest and Southwest. In the end, the victim was forced to return to her area of origin in Bamenda and it is not sure how her protection needs were met. Other partners reported some confusion with the GBV referral pathways and how it could help them find appropriate shelter service providers. The Shelter Cluster Coordinator and the Co-Chair used the occasion to remind partners that the Shelter Cluster should receive such referrals when it comes to victims having the need for shelter should they not have any alternative accommodation upon their exit from the safe space. The coordinators would take the referral and match it to the cluster partner who could have the programming to support that need. Of course each partner would have to verify the humanitarian shelter need and respond accordingly.

Le secteur logement/abris et les espaces surs



Safe Space

Temporary location where women and girls at risk of or victims of gender-based violence can stay for a limited time period (Maximum 15 days)
Locations temporaires où les femmes et filles à risque ou victimes de VBG peuvent sentir sécurisées (si utilisé en tant qu'accommodation d'urgence maximum 15 jours)

Provision of temporary shelter/housing – (Minimum 3 months) in line with standards

Right to Adequate Housing in Humanitarian contexts
Droit à un Logement décent en Contextes Humanitaires

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Cash-Based Interventions

The West and Littoral Regions seem to be mostly appropriate regions to be implementing cash programming. Markets are readily available throughout the two regions and the regions' stability make the interventions much easier than that of the context of the Northwest and Southwest. Nevertheless, cash-based programming has some major short-comings in the two regions.

Partners in both workshops mentioned that IDPs in some sense had become dependent on cash interventions and that some saw the cash based interventions as an economic supplement. In both workshops, partners cited examples of beneficiaries of such programs travelling to the location of the distribution in order to benefit from the assistance. Partners noted that they had found several beneficiaries receiving such assistance several times. Partners who had monitored such interventions also raised the concern that IDPs could not name the organizations who provided them the cash and did not know why they had received the amount of cash that they did. This highlights several areas where the humanitarian community could improve on the implementation of this modality:

- 1. Operational Coordination of Cash Interventions:** Amongst the Clusters for the Northwest and Southwest crisis, only Shelter and Food Security Clusters report tracking the modality of intervention.¹ The Cash Working Group has also not communicated to Clusters how they can share their sectoral cash and voucher interventions to improve overall coordination of cash implementation in the four regions. The Cash Working Group's tool for reporting multipurpose cash interventions is not able to report on any information disaggregated at a subdivision level (Admin 3). Therefore, there is no operational coordination for cash-based interventions for the entire Northwest and Southwest response. This then makes it difficult for organizations to compare beneficiary lists and prevent duplication of assistance.
- 2. Need for greater Accountability to Affected Populations:** Humanitarian interventions also serve as interventions that provide human contact to the marginalized and seek to support the affected population in responding to their specific needs and slowly building their resilience on the pathway to durable solutions. Human contact can provide both psychosocial support and protection to those impacted. The fact that beneficiaries don't know which organizations provided them assistance and the reasons that they received assistance does not help the beneficiary to have their needs met but conversely makes them dependent on the humanitarian assistance.
- 3. Cash not being a silver bullet for all needs:** While cash assistance can ease the burden of procurement, transportation, and delivery of physical items, it is not a response to the entirety of humanitarian needs in the region. Affected populations often need support with the installation of community infrastructure, training on livelihoods activities, preparation of land tenure and identity documents, technical assistance for construction to improve housing, and improved urban planning. Organizations should be careful to not just transfer cash amounts through MTN, Western Union, and other service providers without ensuring that these interventions are complicated with other appropriate support services that cannot be as easily monetized.
- 4. Monitoring of Outcomes for Cash Interventions:** Within the Shelter sector, the Shelter Cluster has put in place a [tool for post distribution monitoring of interventions](#). More Shelter Cluster partners need to get into the habit of using this tool to not only report on the output of their interventions but on the outcome. By better reporting on the outcome level, it will be easier to measure whether the severity of a household's

shelter needs are improved and whether there are yet outstanding needs. In the area of multipurpose cash, all partners should be using a post distribution monitoring tool that is accountable to all the Clusters that compose the Intercluster. This would enable a reflection of what needs that cash is actually meeting or not and facilitate referral pathways for the Clusters to enable a response to those needs that are still outstanding.

5. Ensuring that cash distributed for shelter purposes is contributing to the goal of improved shelter: In this line, it was emphasized in both workshops that given the many needs for affordability of shelter, partners should be careful to not just give cash to beneficiaries to cover their existing rental needs. This could result in IDPs staying in overcrowded shelter, being at risk of eviction, and exposure to the elements. Following the review of the Sphere Standards, it was emphasized to Shelter partners that cash for rent is not just cash, it should:

- Ensure a minimum of 3.5m² per person
- Ensure that there are no openings in roofs and walls, that windows provide appropriate ventilation and that doors are lockable
- Ensure adequate privacy especially during the night in rooms that are designed for sleeping
- Enable functional living space for cooking, sleeping, storing food and water and living
- Ensure security of tenure for the duration of the project
- Ensure that the settlement is not in an area considered a “no-build zone” therefore increasing the risk of the IDPS to be victims of natural disaster or demolition

6. Importance of Housing Market Survey: The Shelter coordination team clarified that the situation in the West and Littoral was not considered a new emergency and that all partners needed to take time to put in place a proper housing market survey in order to ensure that they understood the average cost of standard humanitarian accommodation and sub-standard ones. Tools such as the [household needs assessment](#) could support partners in this exercise. Understanding the rental market also supports in preparedness in case of new IDP influxes so that partners would be able to quickly accommodate IDPs in appropriate and adequate shelters.



Some of the challenges for meeting the needs within the West and Littoral Regions are also related with overall development issues. While any of the NEXUS structures in Cameroon are yet to be established within the Northwest and Southwest Regions, the interconnectedness of humanitarian and development approaches was quite apparent. The Shelter Cluster Coordinator spent time in both workshops to talk about the differences between humanitarian interventions and durable solutions, and that the moment that the criteria for durable solutions were met returnees or IDPs would not require humanitarian assistance. During the Workshop in the Littoral, partners looked at some of the maps from the [Spatial Profile that had been conducted by UN HABITAT in Douala](#). This highlighted the needs in terms of urban planning and also longer-term development that Douala would need especially as host to refugees and IDPs.

While not present for either workshop in either Littoral or West Regions, it was discovered that UN HABITAT is working on a project to address tenure security, housing, sanitation, and land issues in areas where IDPs have settled throughout the Northwest and Southwest Regions. The name of the ongoing project is *“Tirer parti de la participation communautaire à la gouvernance locale pour une prévention et une résolution efficace des conflits dans les régions du Littoral et de L’Ouest affectées par la crise du Nord-Ouest et Sud-Ouest au Cameroun”*. According to a [baseline study conducted at the end of 2022](#), only 2.8% of IDPs and 26.6% of host community members have accommodation that doesn’t present any risks in terms of security, health, or have presence of infestation. The project is seeking to do implementation in select quarters of Douala, Bafoussam, Loum, Dshang, and Babadjou where IDPs have been detected to be residing. The Shelter Cluster’s response in the West or Littoral could contribute to the indicator *“Les personnes déplacées, en particulier les femmes et les enfants, ont accès à des conditions de logement décentes et les relations locataires/propriétaires s’améliorent grâce à un meilleur accompagnement de la municipalité.”* It is recommended that the Shelter Cluster attempt to find out the contacts of the responsible focal points for this project in the West and Littoral.

In addition to the goals of improved housing and security of tenure, the collaboration with UNHABITAT could have another benefit for the Shelter Cluster in the area of collaboration with the government. Within the Northwest and Southwest Regions, the government is not yet members of the cluster, while within the West and Littoral Regions due to the fact that it is a hosting zone for IDPs, the government should start playing a greater role in the shelter response. Given that this project is also focusing on working on some of the housing regulations that will provide greater access to adequate accommodation, it would be great to start facilitating a NEXUS collaboration within these two regions.

Next Steps

Following the introduction of the Shelter Coordination approach in the West and Littoral Regions and to provide the continued uniformity with the activated clusters in the Northwest and Southwest regions, the Shelter Cluster requested two partners to volunteer their offices to create satellite spaces for the monthly meeting. Starting from June, Rhema Care will host the monthly meeting for partners based in the West, and Lodge an IDP for partners based in the Littoral (at least until a new UNHCR office can be opened expected by the third quarter of 2023). This will enable all partners based in Northwest, Southwest, West, and Littoral to ensure that they are all on the same page for responding to Shelter and NFI needs in one forum.

The following recommendations are made from the last two weeks in the West and Littoral Regions:

1. Update Shelter Cluster Strategy to include West and Littoral Regions.
2. Ask the HLP AoR for a French translation for the [rental agreement document](#) to use for French-speaking Landlords in the West and Littoral.
3. Continue to work with the GBV AoR on the referral pathways, and ensure that accommodation needs of GBV victims are appropriately referred to the Shelter Cluster team so that it can reach the appropriate partners.
4. Ensure that cash interventions are implemented with the proper Shelter Cluster coordination tools. Mention to OCHA and the Cash Working Group the gaps that are still existing in implementation of cash programming in the West and Littoral regions.
5. Partners wanting to use any of the Shelter Coordination tools in the West or Littoral to reach out to the Shelter Coordination Team for any additional support and training as needed.
6. Find the contacts of the UNHABITAT focal points for the West and Littoral Regions to improve NEXUS collaboration.
7. Work with UNHABITAT also on the relationship with the government to address some of the housing challenges within the two regions.