

11. WASH Sector Coordination

WASH sector coordination is an essential activity in all refugee settings to ensure there is a united and common approach to providing WASH services to the refugee population. Refugee WASH sector coordination includes ensuring that there is a common WASH strategy; harmonized assessment of WASH needs; avoidance of gaps and duplication; definition and application of appropriate technical standards; joint mobilisation and allocation of resources; building of capacity; monitoring of performance; combined advocacy efforts; joint information sharing; joint preparedness and contingency planning; and to ensure there is capture and application of lessons learned and sector best practice.

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Introduction

The importance of effective WASH sector coordination in refugee settings

1. WASH sector coordination is an essential activity in all refugee settings to ensure there is a united and common approach to providing WASH services to the refugee population including a common WASH strategy, a coordinated and harmonized assessment of WASH needs, avoidance of gaps and duplication, definition and application of appropriate technical standards, common mobilisation and prioritisation of resources, building of capacity, monitoring of sector performance, joint advocacy, sharing of information, and a common long term vision. In addition, the refugee WASH Sector lead is responsible for ensuring there are clear common inter-sectoral strategies and information sharing between WASH and the Health, Shelter, Education, Livelihoods, Protection, Nutrition, Site Planning and Community Services Sectors.
2. UNHCR is ultimately responsible for ensuring there is effective WASH sector coordination in all refugee settings. In 2013, UNHCR has defined the Refugee Coordination Model (RCM) which outlines UNHCR's role and responsibilities in refugee operations and mixed displacement situations and has been built on UNHCR's best practices from the field in particular interaction with the Cluster system. A clear explanation of UNHCR's refugee response coordination model in mixed settings and the

interface with broader humanitarian coordination structures and the IASC cluster system can be found in the briefing document in the [references](#) section. In the context of a complex emergency where the cluster mechanism has been activated and refugees are a part of a much larger response then UNHCR will undertake coordination of the WASH activities in the refugee settings and will ensure that the refugee situation is represented at the wider coordination meetings.

WASH sector coordination implementation arrangements

3. Appropriate refugee WASH Sector coordination arrangements will depend on the scale, phasing, and anticipated duration of the refugee situation. Other factors to consider include government, UN and NGO response capacity and the presence and effectiveness of existing coordination mechanisms, including committees or temporary ministries run by the refugees themselves. Whatever the structure adopted, it must be flexible enough to suit all stages of the response e.g. expanding during intensive relief activities and scaling back during post emergency and protracted phases.
4. A key element of the UNHCR Refugee Coordination Model is that sector coordination, whenever possible, should be led by Government line ministries and/or (co)chaired by UNHCR and/or (co)chaired by one of UNHCR partners through a standby-arrangement. Under International Human Rights, Humanitarian, and Refugee law, it is the primary responsibility of the state to provide

assistance to refugees affected by disaster or armed conflict. In all cases, efforts must be undertaken to ensure that refugee WASH sector coordination is set up and chaired by the national government with strong support from UNHCR. If this is not possible UNHCR should co-chair with the government and(or) a partner organisation, or in some cases may need to chair alone. If refugee WASH coordination mechanisms already exist then the UNHCR must ensure that coordination is supported, reinforced and functioning effectively - avoiding creating parallel coordination structures.

5. During large emergencies a decision may be taken by UNHCR Senior Management to mobilize arrangements for rapid refugee WASH sector coordination which includes a dedicated refugee WASH sector coordination focal point, Information Manager, and resources for coordination either within UNHCR or a partner organisation. If standby arrangements are not activated, UNHCR Senior Management must ensure that effective coordination of the refugee WASH response is taking place at the national, sub-national and site levels. Depending on the coordination arrangements, the refugee WASH sector coordination focal point may be hosted at either UNHCR, or within national government authorities (if a co-leadership arrangement of sector coordination is established).
6. In large refugee responses WASH sector coordination is likely to be required at three levels:

- i) **National Level** i.e. primarily high-level strategic decision making, technical working groups and liaison.
- ii) **Sub-National Level** i.e. if a host country has several borders it is typical to have coordination at the sub-national level for coordination of planning and response activities within the regions.
- iii) **Site Level** e.g. at refugee camp level – sector coordination is generally undertaken at site level in collaboration with other service sectors and refugee committees.

During smaller responses, coordination may only be required at the site level.



Figure 12-1 Sector Coordination Meeting

The importance of seeking expert professional advice

7. Effective WASH coordination, in complex refugee settings requires a skilled and experienced refugee WASH sector coordination focal point. Every refugee context is

different and approaches that have worked well in one setting may not work well in another (e.g. complex emergencies vs. classical refugee emergencies, urban vs rural, camp-based vs non-camp based). The success of WASH Coordination and Information Management roles typically not only depend upon the skills and experience of the individuals but also upon their personality types in particular their leadership, communication and negotiation skills, in addition to being accessible and bringing out the best in diverse groups of individuals and organisations. In all settings, it is essential to seek professionals who are familiar with coordination and information management mechanisms in difficult conditions.

Priority actions

An immediate response

8. Refugee WASH sector coordination is an essential activity that must be mobilised and reinforced at the immediate onset of any refugee emergency. The provision of basic coordination activities (for example establishing a regular time and place for WASH organisations to meet and share information) is better than delayed provision of improved systems. Costly mistakes that are hard to rectify can be made if attention and resources are not given to coordination from the start. A harmonized assessment of the WASH needs and gaps at the start of the refugee emergency is often a big test of the efficiency and effectiveness of the WASH coordination arrangements.

Common analysis of needs and gaps

9. Harmonized WASH assessments are an essential activity in every refugee setting to identify the locations of the most affected sections of the population, their coping mechanisms, and the most urgent WASH interventions that are required. Coordination is essential to ensure that where possible WASH agencies use harmonized WASH data collection tools, indicators and common operational datasets (common population names, population sizes, administrative boundaries). Use of harmonized tools and approaches means that a common analysis of WASH needs and gaps can be developed through sharing of assessment information and analysis resources (see [chapter 9](#) for more information on WASH assessments).

Establishment of a common sector response plan/strategy

10. Common refugee WASH sector response plans and strategies at the national, sub-national and site level are essential so that WASH actors are able to implement WASH activities with a common approach up to the same levels of service provision. The refugee WASH plan/strategy should not only consider defining the common approach to WASH service provision (water, sanitation, hygiene, solid waste, disease vector control) but also common approaches to ensuring value for money, appropriate technology selection, cost-effectiveness, sustainability, safety and security, consultation and participation, equability of service, universal

access, working with national service providers and regulatory authorities.

Establishment of agreed common indicators, standards and approaches

11. Where possible, refugee WASH actors should agree and use common WASH indicators and standards for the refugee WASH response. At a minimum the UNHCR core WASH standards should be used to routinely monitor WASH needs and WASH sector progress in all refugee settings. If the UNHCR WASH Monitoring System has been rolled out ensure that data is uploaded monthly to the TWINE website (<http://twine.unhcr.org/>) see [section 10.7](#).
12. Where possible, refugee WASH coordination structures should also take time to review existing WASH standards (national WASH standards and UNHCR WASH standards) and adopt, or if necessary adapt, existing standards for the refugee emergency response.
13. Harmonizing of agreed indicators, standards amongst refugee WASH actors means that needs assessment or monitoring data can be compared, contrasted, and compiled into a single database for shared analysis. Use of common indicators and operational datasets (common population sizes, population names, administrative boundaries) allows WASH data to be readily compared, contrasted and combined to get an overview of the whole sector's response.

Establishment of a programme of refugee WASH coordination meetings

14. Coordination meetings at the national, sub-national and site levels are essential for communicating information, but they frequently produce limited outcomes. It is essential that the refugee WASH sector lead ensures effective and efficient coordination meetings are taking place that are productive and do not waste the time of the participants. The quality of these meetings will significantly affect engagement and attendance of WASH actors in future meetings and possible the overall effectiveness of the refugee WASH sector response. The box on the following page contains a list of recommendations to ensure that refugee WASH sector coordination meetings are productive.

Creation of Technical Working Groups (TWGs)

15. Technical, working, or sub-groups are useful in producing technical guidelines, analysing problems, resolving concerns, and formalising principles and responsibilities. Consensus is more easily achieved within a smaller group. To establish a TWG, a focal point should be elected with responsibility for establishing the group, defining the terms of reference, and feeding back on their activities and recommendations, either to the Advisory Group, or the refugee WASH sector as a whole.
16. A TWG's life-span should be determined by its purpose and deliverables. Once the purpose and deliverables have been achieved it is better to dissolve the group rather

Box: Guidance for WASH coordination meetings

Before the meeting

1. If appropriate, ensure (or advocate strongly) for government chairing or co-chairing of refugee WASH sector coordination meetings, particularly in the early response.
2. Ensure that there is a clear agenda that is circulated well in advance. Ensure the agenda is approved by the Advisory Committee.
3. Ensure there is sufficient information for participants to know what they need to do to prepare in advance (especially those that are making presentations).
4. Ensure WASH actors have been contacted to facilitate different parts of the meeting in order to change presentation style and demonstrate open collaboration.
5. Ensure that there is a suitable venue for meeting that is comfortable and facilitates productivity and sharing of information. Consider whether venues are appropriate e.g. many INGOs are uncomfortable or have security restrictions imposed on attending meetings within UN compounds or in expensive hotels used mainly by expatriates. Consider rotating the meeting among WASH Sector members' offices.
6. Ensure that all the required resources (projectors, extension cables, whiteboards, maps, reports, refreshments) are prepared.
7. Ensure attendance of key decision makers – encourage their involvement in meetings through maintaining regular, personal contact. The better the relationships with WASH actors the better the coordination.
8. Only call a coordination meeting when it is absolutely necessary and review the meeting frequency frequently with the Advisory Committee.

During the meeting

1. Ensure that the meeting starts promptly and finishes on-time. Try to keep the timings to those in the published agenda without limiting time for discussion.
2. Allow time for all members to introduce themselves and provide a short (two minute) agency update. Allow actors enough time to feel engaged in the meeting (break the ice) – but do not allow actors to talk endlessly. Detailed agency updates should be shared via other means (e.g. written updates and 3W, 4W).
3. Ensure that the objective of the meeting is understood and achieved. As the meeting progresses, compile a clear summary of short, medium and long term action points (WHO, WHAT, WHERE, WHEN, HOW). At the end of the meeting summarize the action points focusing on what needs to be done before the following meeting.
4. Share and discuss the latest 4W Matrix. Update the 4W matrix based on WASH agency resources. Allocate additional resources if available.
5. Share and discuss the short, medium and long-term thematic strategies.
6. If lengthy topics for discussion arise, consider the option of tackling them within a separate Technical Working Group or the Advisory Group.

After the meeting

1. Ensure that all presentation materials from the meeting are uploaded onto the WASH sector coordination website (where available).
2. Ensure that the meeting minutes of meetings are circulated within three days and invite comments and corrections.
3. Follow up with key decision makers that couldn't attend the meeting. Ensure they have a written or verbal update of the meeting's outcomes.
4. Follow up with key action points and ensure prompt feedback on decisions taken.
5. Update the revised contact information on the WASH sector coordination website.

For more guidance refer to the WASH Cluster Coordinator Handbook (2009)

than have many smaller groups that continue to meet without clear objectives. Membership of TWG's should be through voluntary self-selection, although special expertise may be required. They may be drawn from within or outside the WASH Sector, e.g. government, academic, professional institutions, civil society organisations, or private sector organisations.

Establishment of common reporting

17. Reporting on the refugee WASH sector's needs, progress and gaps is essential so that stakeholders inside and outside of the sector are aware of WASH service coverage, resource availability, and implementation progress towards defined targets. In many cases, common reporting is vital to mobilize additional resources and raise awareness of key problems (particularly lack of funding). In every refugee setting the WASH Sector lead must ensure that they have the capacity to collate, analyse and report on collective progress and outcomes. Regardless of whether they are bilaterally funded or funded by UNHCR, all WASH agencies working in refugee settings must report their activities to the refugee WASH sector coordination focal point. The principle sector communication tools are.

- i) 4W matrices and maps.
- ii) WASH updates, sitreps and bulletins.
- iii) WASH plans/strategies.
- iv) Internet based coordination platform.
- v) WASH monitoring system (<http://twine.unhcr.org/>)

Use of 4W (Who, What, Where, When) matrices and maps

18. 4W matrices clearly show who is working where in the refugee WASH sector, what they are doing, how many beneficiaries they are targeting and when certain WASH activities are planned to start and finish. Often the clearest way to present the data contained in 4W matrices is graphically in the form of a thematic map (also known as choropleth or heat maps). In general, it is recommended that a single map is produced for each of the core WASH activities (i.e. distribution of hygiene kits, water access, toilet coverage). Maps can be produced to show a snapshot in time e.g. what has been completed in the last reporting period and what is planned for the next reporting period. These 4W maps allow refugee WASH actors to obtain a very clear picture of where WASH interventions have recently been carried out in addition to gaps and duplications.

19. The ability to produce maps is an essential coordination activity in large refugee emergencies. Information Management staff with skills in using mapping software should be considered as core function within the sector.

Preparation of WASH sector updates / sitreps / bulletins

20. Refugee WASH sector updates, sitreps and bulletins provide a snapshot of the current WASH situation faced by the refugee population including an overview of WASH implementation priorities, collective progress, results, gaps and constraints. These may be

prepared as a stand alone documents or may feed into multi-sectorial sitreps. The 4W database should be used to provide an update of the total impact of the refugee WASH response to date (e.g. the total number of hygiene kits distributed, the total litres of water supplied, the total number of toilets constructed etc.) in addition to the current gaps (e.g. the total number of families who have not received hygiene kits, the total refugee population without water supply or excreta management assistance). Refugee WASH sector updates, sitreps and bulletins are useful in that they allow anyone to quickly access information concerning the current quantitative status of WASH needs, progress and gaps. However they often fail to provide a detailed qualitative analysis of the situation or the short, medium and long term refugee WASH strategies.

Common WASH plans and strategies

21. UNHCR and WASH actors should ensure that coordination efforts lead to the creation of common refugee WASH strategy documents and operational plans at the national, sub-national and site levels. The strategies and action plans should contain up-to-date and relevant data concerning the refugee WASH situation in addition to short, medium and long-term strategies for water supply, excreta management, solid waste management, hygiene promotion and disease vector control, in addition to the fourteen (14) core UNHCR WASH philosophies and principles. The operational plans should clearly describe the ongoing WASH

activities in terms of WHO, WHAT, WHERE, WHEN and HOW. They should also include an overview of the resources available and the additional resources that are required (including a tentative budget – particularly for large ticket items).

22. The refugee WASH strategies/plans should be shared among the WASH actors and should be seen as living documents that are kept up to date with the latest information concerning the conditions within the refugee settings. All of the latest monitoring information from water quality testing, sanitary surveys, waste surveys, baseline surveys, focus group discussions, rapid household surveys and KAP surveys should be included in the annexes and the WASH sectoral strategies developed should be based on a solid interpretation of the WASH data that is collected.

Establishment of a common internet platform and sharing of information

23. An important aspect of Information Management is the ability to rapidly share different types of information with the refugee WASH community. It is essential that the refugee WASH sector not only has an active physical presence but also continues to interact through a virtual presence. In every refugee setting WASH information should be closely integrated with UNHCR's Inter-agency Information Sharing Portal (<http://data.unhcr.org/>). In addition, refugee WASH coordination structures should consider establishing additional web based coordination mechanisms for

social communication, information updates, news, contact lists, and WASH tools and reports. In the first few weeks of a refugee emergency this can be as simple as a DropBox account but within the first month this should be a fully functioning coordination platform (e.g. customized Wordpress or Drupal 7 Distro).

Practical Guidance for WASH Sector Coordination

Establishment of an Advisory Group

24. In large refugee emergencies a Refugee WASH Advisory Group should be established to ensure that there is an element of democratic and transparent decision making on behalf WASH actors. The Advisory Group is able to share some of the coordination workload in particular the responsibility for decision making. An Advisory Group is essential to be able to demonstrate that critical or influential decisions have been made by a group of persons rather than a single individual. The steering or Advisory Group size should generally be managed to ensure the balance between the need for rapid decision making and effective management, and the need for broad participation. The group should aim to represent all major stakeholders including national WASH actors and sub-national WASH sector leads.

The importance of dedicated WASH coordination personnel and resources

25. In large refugee emergencies WASH sector coordination may be required at the national, sub-national and site level. It must be

clearly understood that WASH Sector Coordination is not free and UNHCR senior management must ensure that resources are immediately available to make sector coordination work from the start of the refugee emergency through the allocation of resources for dedicated WASH coordination staff and Information Managers, coordination website hosting, tools, computers and mapping facilities. In most settings it is virtually impossible for a UNHCR WASH Officer to manage both sector coordination and their UNHCR responsibilities.

26. The role of the refugee WASH sector coordination focal point is to facilitate a well-coordinated and effective humanitarian response to a refugee situation. At all times the refugee WASH sector coordination focal point should act in the best interest of the refugees and the WASH sector as a whole rather than his or her own organisation.

Coordinated sector preparedness and contingency planning

27. Refugee WASH sector coordination arrangements should not only be active in ensuring collaboration in the short and medium term but should also ensure that proper arrangements are in place for sector contingency planning. UNHCR and WASH actors should ensure that country level and site level refugee WASH contingency plans are prepared in conjunction with multi-sectorial plans that include an analysis of historical and probable WASH needs, probable scenarios, likely impacts, WASH stockpiling and stand-by arrangements,

coordination arrangements, and links to early warning systems.

28. Part of the preparedness activities include ensuring that there is consensus over common interagency WASH rapid and comprehensive assessment tools and approaches in addition to common emergency response implementation methods, approaches and standards. Efforts undertaken during the preparedness phase can dramatically improve the quality and effectiveness of any future WASH responses.

Capture and application of lessons learned and sector best practice

29. Refugee WASH sector coordination mechanisms should strive to continuously evaluate their performance in terms of:
- i) **Response speed.** The extent to which WASH activities were able to scale up within agreed timeframes.
 - ii) **Relevance.** The extent to which WASH activities are meeting the priority needs of the target groups.
 - iii) **Effectiveness.** The extent to which WASH activities achieved the desired overall objectives.
 - iv) **Efficiency.** An analysis of whether it was possible to achieve the same outputs using less resources.
 - v) **Impact.** An analysis of positive and negative changes directly or indirectly produced by the WASH activities.
 - vi) **Sustainability.** An analysis of whether WASH activities are likely to continue to function

with reduced funding or technical support.

In all refugee settings, lessons learned should be used to not only inform local refugee WASH sector policy change but also to feed into learning at a global level.

Monitoring of the quality of WASH sector coordination

30. UNHCR Senior Management has the overall responsibility for monitoring the quality of WASH sector coordination that is taking place. In all refugee settings, the UNHCR Country Programme and refugee WASH sector members must undertake a transparent and participative self-review of the quality of the WASH sector's performance in particularly the WASH coordination every six months based on feedback from local WASH actors. UNHCR should change the WASH sector coordination structure if more than 50% of WASH actors find the performance to be below average.