

GSC Strategic Advisory Group (SAG)

Meeting Notes – 27/03/2025

Date: 27 March 2025

Participants: Impact Initiatives (Giulia Montisci), CARE International (Step Haiselden), DRC (Chiara Jasna Vaccaro), InterAction (Juli King), UNHCR (Francesca Coloni, Rama Nimri), Australian Red Cross (Leeanne Marshall), IFRC (Ela Serdaroglu), IOM (Carolina Cordero-Scales), CRS (Eva Maria Suarez Castro), Habitat for Humanity (Mario Flores), GSC (Seki Hirano, Caroline Dewast, Mamen Sancha, Pablo Medina, Christopher Johnson)

Agenda:

Time	#	Agenda item
	1	Update on Cluster Architecture Reform Process <ul style="list-style-type: none">- ERC-led humanitarian reset and timeline for proposals- GSC involvement in 4-week consultation process
	2	Summary of Working Group Topics from OPAG co-chairs meeting <ul style="list-style-type: none">- WG1: Localization, AAP, multi-sectoral coordination- WG3: Simplification, double-hatting, shared resources
	3	SAG Reflections on Risks and Opportunities for the Shelter Cluster <ul style="list-style-type: none">- Risks to technical leadership and cluster identity- Opportunities to elevate settlements approach and ABC
	4	Discussion on SAG Engagement & Next Steps <ul style="list-style-type: none">- Mapping key implications per WG theme- Continued input via shared document and group calls
	5	Farewell to Chiara and Julia

Summary of action points:

- GSC Support Team will reorganize the shared SAG input document according to the four categories above.
- SAG members encouraged to provide targeted feedback on opportunities/risks for the Shelter Cluster in each area.
- A mini-SAG may be formed to shape Shelter Cluster's formal inputs into the reform process—contact Seki if interested.
- SAG affirmed the importance of continuing support to country-level clusters, even during uncertainty.

1. Update on Cluster Architecture Reform (ERC-led):

The Emergency Relief Coordinator has launched a reform process to streamline and simplify the cluster system, coordinated by the OPAG co-chairs.

Four working groups were formed to explore changes around: (1) community engagement & localization; (2) operational support vs. process; (3) simplification (e.g., merging, double-hatting); and (4) transitions and solutions.

Seki and Pablo participated on behalf of GSC in the initial discussions and highlighted that this is an open window for influence.

2. Summary of Working Group Topics from OPAG co-chairs meeting

1. Community Preferences, Multi-sectoral Impact, and Local Actors

Clusters are already very inclusive coordination structures (50–60% local/national actors on average).

Group discussion emphasized the need for stronger, streamlined feedback mechanisms (e.g., a single AAP system).

Diverging views emerged on where clusters should operate: national-level for standards vs. subnational-level for localized, area-based approaches.

SAG highlighted the Shelter Cluster's comparative advantage in settlements and area-based coordination, positioning it as a valuable contributor to durable solutions and local leadership efforts.

2. Refocusing the Cluster System on Operational Support

Participants agreed that clusters must pivot toward operational, field-level support, especially at the subnational level.

Recognition that area-based coordination naturally increases at more local levels.

Strong call to review and reduce burdensome processes (e.g., HPC, CCPM), which currently distract from real-time support.

3. Opportunities to Simplify the Cluster System

Growing acceptance that double-hatting and mergers will become more common due to funding constraints.

Discussions emphasized preserving technical expertise and cluster independence, regardless of setup (dedicated, double-hatted, co-funded).

Shared resources were proposed across clusters: IM, PSEA, AAP, training and environment.

A shift from the term “merging” to “joining” clusters was preferred language-wise.

4. How will cluster coordination effectively contribute to solutions across crises (including refugee coordination model) and transition contexts

Transitions and handovers must be clearer, with predictable activation/deactivation criteria.

UNHCR committed to provide an overview of the commonalities and differences between refugee coordination and cluster models is planned (UNHCR to lead).

Emphasis on maintaining coordination in protracted and evolving crises, with flexibility to adapt to context-specific models.

3. & 4. SAG reflections on risks and opportunities for the Shelter Cluster and Discussion on SAG engagement & next steps

SAG members expressed their interest to contribute to this process planned for the month of April. They agreed on contributing through the shared document "[Clusters reset discussions log](#)" where four additional topics have been created for SAG members to continue inputting about the four areas of discussion presented by the OPAG co-chairs.

SAG Mini-Group on Architecture Reform:

- GSC will convene a small group within the SAG to strategize and engage with the ongoing reform process and its potential impact on the shelter sector.
- SAG members interested in participating should contact Seki.

Strategic Framing:

- SAG suggested mapping the implications of each of the four working groups' recommendations in terms of risks/opportunities for shelter coordination.
- Shelter Cluster will continue pushing forward its comparative strengths, especially in the Settlements Approach, area-based coordination, and technical capacity at global and country levels.

5. Farewell to Chiara and Julia

Given the fact this was the last meeting for Chiara and Giulia as a SAG members, the GSC SAG members wanted to take the opportunity to thank both their instrumental collaboration in the GSC processes and their commitment to the sector. Multiple SAG members echoed this and mentioned that they will be thoroughly missed. Chiara and Julia were thanked for their long-standing, passionate contributions to the Shelter Cluster and SAG.