

GSC Strategic Advisory Group meeting - Meeting notes

Date – 30 January 2025

Participants: Impact Initiatives (Giulia Montisci), Australian Red Cross (Leeanne Marshall), CARE International (Step Haiselden), CRS (Jamie Richardson and Eva Suarez), Habitat for Humanity International (Mario Flores), InterAction (Mohamed Hilmi and Juli King), IOM (Carolina Cordero-Scales), NRC (Amelia Rule), UNHCR (Francesca Coloni), IFRC (Ela Serdaroglu), GSC (Seki Hirano, Pablo Medina, Caroline Dewast, Alexandre Koclejda, Mamen Sancha), Mahamat Alhadi, WoS SC coordinator.

Excused or Absent: Danish Refugee Council (Chiara Jasna Vaccaro)

Agenda (tentative, only the underlined points were covered during the meeting):

1. Country-level updates (30 mins)

- Syria: Mahamat Alhadi – Whole of Syria Snr Shelter Cluster Coordinator

- Gaza and Goma updates

2. Impact of USAID Stop Work Order / Contingency planning

3. DCG

4. Announcements.

5. Follow up from SAG retreat

6. Private sector engagement - CRS (10 mins)

7. GCCG retreat update

8. Policy updates

Action points:

Action Point	Who	Deadline
Palo and Seki to organize a DCG extraordinary meeting	Pablo and Seki	The first week of February
SAG to start to work on a support document for partners to justify shelter activities under life-saving component mentioned in the waiver	SAG members	As soon as possible
GST ST to prepare a survey and circulate it with the country cluster coordinators to gather information on the impact of the USAID freeze in the response and its coordination	GSC ST	As soon as possible

1. Country-level updates (30 mins)

- Syria: Mahamat Alhadi – Whole of Syria Snr Shelter Cluster Coordinator

The Shelter Cluster Coordinator for Whole of Syria provided an update on the new coordination architecture and ongoing response efforts. He highlighted the discussions around the expected shift in coordination from different hubs, in Syria, Turkiye and Iraq, to Syria only, requiring adjustments in engagement with local and international partners. Additionally, a new UN-led coordination mechanism has introduced three thematic areas: poverty reduction, reducing inequality, and promoting peaceful and inclusive societies, which will shape future donor engagement and strategic planning. The evolving coordination landscape presents both opportunities and challenges, particularly in ensuring alignment among various actors and adapting to the new reporting and operational structures.

Since Assad's regime collapsed, about 270,000 refugees have returned from abroad, and some 600,000 IDPs have also gone home, according to the UN refugee agency (UNHCR). Regarding shelter needs, Syria continues to experience significant demand for housing solutions due to ongoing conflict, economic hardship, and large-scale infrastructure damage. The response plan targets 200,000 individuals, requiring \$28 million for shelter assistance and \$76–78 million for non-food items (NFIs). So far, the Shelter Cluster has reached 54% of its shelter target but only 11% of the NFI needs, emphasizing the gap in essential supplies for displaced populations. UNHCR is projecting up to 1.1 million Syrians from abroad and up to 2 million IDPs to return in 2025. Returnees often face different shelter needs than internally displaced persons (IDPs); while IDPs primarily require emergency shelter and NFIs, returnees frequently need more sustainable housing solutions, repairs, and access to services to reintegrate into their communities. Addressing these varying needs remains a priority for humanitarian actors.

To strengthen the response, there is an urgent need for capacity building and reinforcement of the coordination team. Increased collaboration with local authorities, additional technical expertise, and improved data collection are essential to ensuring effective planning and resource distribution. The influx of new partners, particularly from Gaziantep, necessitates stronger subnational coordination to avoid duplication and improve efficiency. The support of global partners, such as the Global Shelter Cluster, will be instrumental in enhancing strategic planning and technical guidance. Additionally, training for field staff and local coordinators will help address the complexities of shelter interventions and improve overall response effectiveness.

- Gaza updates

Humanitarian access: since the ceasefire (Jan 19), coordination with Israeli authorities for humanitarian missions is no longer required (except for the buffer zones)

- 375.000 people returned to North Gaza (OCHA)
- 60.000 containers and 200.000 tents in the ceasefire agreement, but not clear who will provide those
- [CEASEFIRE Phase 1: Shelter and NFI strategic recommendations](#)
- [Response and pipeline latest update](#)
- [Emergency assistance packages description and specs](#)

- Goma update

- M23 Takeover & Displacement: M23 has taken control of Goma. Internally displaced persons (IDPs) in North Kivu have been forced to leave IDP sites, which may be dismantled. No population impact estimates are available.
- Conflict Monitoring & Response: South Kivu is being monitored, with no reports of conflict spreading. The SC team is relocating staff to Kinshasa, but no shelter or NFI response is ongoing.
- Infrastructure & Security Issues: Internet and electricity issues persist, exacerbating violence and looting. Water supply is also disrupted. A contingency plan covers Zambia, Rwanda, Uganda, Burundi, and Tanzania.
- Funding & Humanitarian Aid: A \$17 million CERF allocation has been announced for shelter, WASH, health, protection, and food security, but implementation remains unclear. 70% of partners' funding comes from BHA.

2. Impact of USAID Stop Work Order / Contingency planning

US has been the strongest humanitarian donor in the past (providing 50% of the total humanitarian funding last year), followed by far from the EU (10%). The gap will not be possible to cover by the other donors easily, indeed important donors as Sweden were already reducing their contributions for 2025. There is a need to look for other ways of funding. Private sector engagement to be explored.

There was a strong shared concern about the USAID Stop Work Order and its potential impact on the shelter response and its coordination. There was a high consensus on the need to agree on the shelter activities that fall under the category of life-saving mentioned in the waiver, and if coordination activities could also go there.

Strong concern was shared about the exclusion of DEI (diversity, equity and inclusion) and climate change components from the waiver and declared intention of not continuing with those areas of work by the US government.

It was discussed the need to collect from countries information to know better the impact and to be able to prepare the GSC advocacy messaging on this.