

Key messages from the
Global Shelter Cluster Urban Settlements Approach Working Group
to the April 2018 IASC EDG/WG meeting

Most of the forcibly displaced live outside of camps, residing in towns and cities - with the global average estimated to be around 60 percent. This is higher in the MENA region, with an estimated 80-90 percent of displaced living in towns and cities¹.

The current humanitarian architecture, structured around the clusters/sectors has enabled coordinated humanitarian response at national levels. However, this structure **presents shortcomings when responding to urban crises**, characterized by the existence of complex, interdependent systems and high levels of diversity and density of actors, among other challenges.

Through numerous global processes, such as the IASC Strategy on Meeting Humanitarian Challenges in Urban Areas (MHCUA) and most recently the New Urban Agenda (2016), **the humanitarian sector has committed to offer more appropriate humanitarian assistance in urban contexts**. To best achieve this, we believe it is essential that humanitarian actors (agencies and clusters) at each level of operation (global, national and agency) continue to develop strategies that create synergies with sub-national authorities civil society and other interest groups whenever possible. Furthermore, through recent crisis, we are learning the essential nature of **linking humanitarian action to the long-term visions** of local governments and the development agenda.

To this end, the Global Shelter Cluster Urban Settlements Approach Working Group, co-chaired by IMPACT Initiatives, InterAction and Catholic Relief Services (CRS) was activated in mid-2017. The Working Group was created to promote and support more effective response in urban areas through a multi-sectoral, area based approach in humanitarian action (with a focus, although not exclusively, in urban contexts). This working group is gaining strong momentum with 40 agencies proactively engaged across sectors, including cluster lead colleagues from CCCM, gFSC, WASH and Early Recovery.

With the disactivation of the IASC Reference Group (MHCUA) in early 2018, this Working Group continues to gain further consensus from Working Group members and Clusters to **act as a key platform to promote and apply an Area Based Approach to crises in urban contexts**. Characterised as *geographically targeted, participatory and multi-sectoral*, whilst *building on existing governance structures and service delivery mechanisms*, area based approaches can better promote the welfare of all residents, regardless of their origin. This aligns with the IASC's call in 2010 for a "*paradigm shift in humanitarian assistance in urban areas, based on a community-based - rather than - an individual beneficiary approach*".

To date, the Urban Settlements Approach WG has achieved the following:

- Developed a **terminology paper** to clarify Settlement/Area Based Approaches, which has brought multi-sector actors together and served to gain engagement across sectors.
 - Championed this way of working into the **SPHERE standard revision (2018)**.
 - Created a **Compendium of Urban Settlement Case Studies**, which draws existing practice and shares diverse lessons and benefits of this approach.
- And:
- The Working Group has gained broad support from humanitarian actors to **pilot this approach in an identified urban crisis**.

In the coming years, the Working Group is prioritising:

- The development of **best practice guidance in urban responses**.
- **Creating training modules and guidance on area based coordination** to be implemented through cluster coordinators and implementing partners.

¹ [World Bank – Cities of Refuge in the Middle East](#)

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- **Continuing to pilot and commission independent evaluations** on area based approaches and coordination.
- Host events to further **strengthen collaboration in urban crisis between Humanitarians, development actors and host cities.**

Humanitarian actors must increase effective dialogue and consultation at both global and regional levels to support appropriate urban response, building on the current momentum and work achieved to date. Supporting the work of this Urban Settlements Approach Working Group can:

- Provide an enhanced framework to **promote joint leadership** and break down silos within the humanitarian architecture.
- Strengthen synergies with the host governments through **co-convening planning, coordination and programming activities** with counterpart municipal or city level authorities.
- Support the operationalisation of the New Way of Working and contribute to the **Humanitarian-development-peace nexus.**

Furthermore, to respond more effectively to urban crises, the **humanitarian sector must proactively engage with diverse actors in urban contexts.** The WG will continue to engage with additional actors and entities, building upon synergies as they exist.

Recommendations:

This note recommends the **IASC:**

- **Support the Urban Settlements WG**, in partnership with other clusters and implementing partners, **as a key resource to continue developing guidance, case studies and operational pilots** to support urban response. By doing so, the IASC will ensure its capacity to support better response in urban contexts.
- Encourage **additional humanitarian agencies and clusters to engage** in WG discussions, activities and pilots and to **consider promoting the activities of the WG at the inter-cluster level.**
- *Please note:* The Working Group does not advocate for a replacement of the current cluster system, but rather to strengthen the collaboration among members/clusters at global and field levels.

The GSC Urban Settlements WG reference page is available at:

<https://www.sheltercluster.org/working-group/settlements-approaches-urban-areas-wg>