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The preliminary response plan replaces the concept of a **flash appeal**. It is issued **five to seven days** after a large-scale sudden onset crisis or the declaration of a L3 crisis for a protracted or slow onset crisis. Its primary aim is to establish an **initial planning framework** for response operations and to present **initial funding requirements** – early enough in the response to affect programming and funding decisions.

A preliminary response plan is the second strategic planning deliverable produced after a sudden onset crisis or L3 declaration. It expands on the information in the strategic statement (day 3) by elaborating on what must be done and how much it will cost through elemental inter-sectoral/cluster planning. It serves as the foundation for the more detailed strategic response plan (day 30).

For non-L3 crises, there is neither a list of the types of emergencies nor a set of thresholds which would trigger the preparation of a preliminary response plan. The key condition is that the crisis goes beyond the ability of the government and any one agency to respond adequately. Government permission is not required as per General Assembly resolution 46/182, although it should be consulted in the plan's formulation.

The preliminary response plan presents:

- a refined list of strategic objectives;
- the scope of the emergency;
- international response efforts and its link to government actions;
- coordination architecture of the response, showing how organizations, agencies and donors will cooperate with national authorities to achieve the response's objectives;
- preliminary gaps in coverage or capacity that need to be filled;
- cluster/sector activities and costs;
- a first estimate of the overall funding requirements.

The preliminary response plan is designed to improve inter-agency response planning and fundraising in the first few days of a crisis. It is in line with the IASC Transformative Agenda and forms part of the humanitarian programme cycle. The ultimate goal is to achieve more evidence-based, strategic and prioritized humanitarian action.

This guidance and the accompanying template have been developed to assist the Humanitarian Coordinator (HC) and Humanitarian Country Team (HCT) in preparing a preliminary response plan. The guidance should be applied flexibly based on the circumstances of each crisis.

## KEY THINGS TO KNOW<sup>1</sup>

### Rationale

The preliminary response plan provides further clarity and detail on the course of the international humanitarian response which is initially elaborated in the strategic statement. It communicates preliminary coordination requirements and cluster funding requirements, and ties initial programme planning to the objectives outlined in the strategic statement. It is a management tool to help the humanitarian community do a better job – to focus its energy and to ensure that organizations are working toward the same objectives for carrying out the collective response. For L3 crisis, a preliminary response plan is a requirement.

Since the preliminary response plan presents the initial funding requirements per cluster, it supports inter-agency resource mobilization. Donors rely on the preliminary response plan for estimating the scale, severity, nature and urgency of a disaster. Some donors can access emergency funding reserves only, or more easily and quickly, if this plan is launched. The plan also preempts individual agencies' appeals, thus avoiding systemic fragmentation and uncoordinated response efforts.

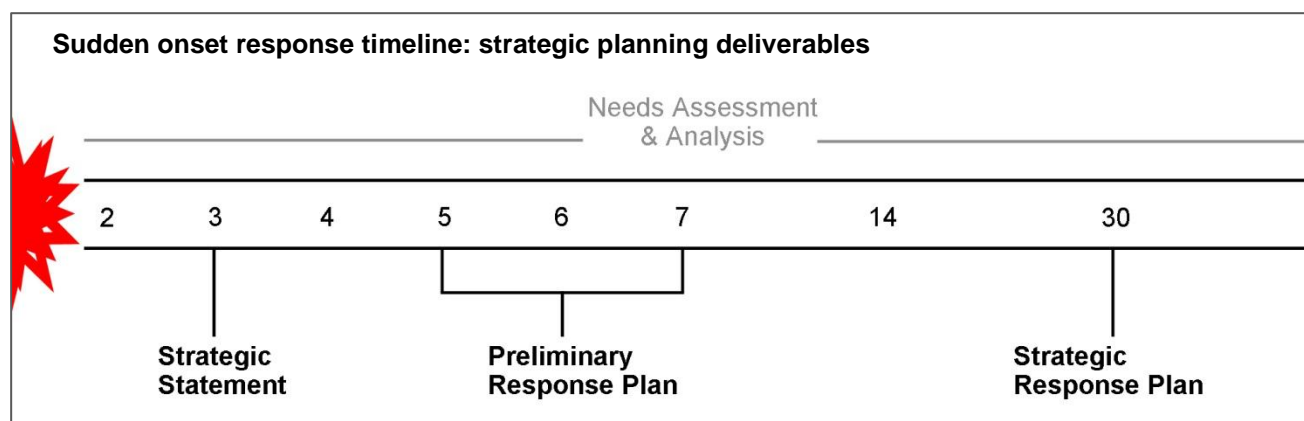
#### Strategic planning tools

1. *Strategic statement (day 3)*: Sets the direction of the response.
2. *Preliminary response plan (days 5-7)*: Establishes the funding requirements, outlines the preliminary cluster plans, and details the coordination arrangements.
3. *Strategic response plan (day 30)*: Provides a detailed country strategy and cluster response plans – with strategic objectives, indicators, targets and activities – which serve as the basis for response monitoring.

### Template, length and duration

The template contains a comprehensive set of headings to structure the document, but not all parts need to be drafted for every crisis and additional headings may be required depending on the context. The preliminary response plan does not include indicators (usually attached to the strategic objectives); these are elaborated in the strategic response plan. The HC and HCT should exercise judgment in determining which headings are relevant and which additional topics need to be included based on the context.

A completed preliminary response plan is no more than 10-15 pages. The duration of the plan is usually until day 30, when a more detailed strategic response plan is issued.



<sup>1</sup> The term “cluster” refers to sectoral coordination that uses the ‘cluster approach’ introduced after 2005 as part of an effort to reform humanitarian response. However, the references to “cluster” in this guidance should be understood to refer to the range of sectoral coordination mechanisms that are in place in humanitarian response operations.

## Audience

The preliminary response plan is published online, serving as a public planning document for the HCT. For this reason, it must be kept concise and readable by an informed public. The audience of the plan includes humanitarian organisations in and out the country, national and local authorities, Member States and donors, and the general public. The Emergency Directors and IASC Principals use the preliminary response plan as the basis for public information, advocacy and resource mobilization initiatives with a broad range of stakeholders.

## Deadline and timeline

A preliminary response plan is issued between five and seven days after a sudden onset crisis or the declaration of a L3 emergency for a protracted or slow onset crisis. It is important to issue the plan by day seven in order to provide donors with the estimated funding needs to be able to make early allocation decisions. To assist with the rapid preparation of the plan, particularly if preparedness actions have not been undertaken, some suggested steps are presented in the proposed timeline below:

Timeline: Preliminary response plan – milestones	Day						
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
<i>Government of affected country consulted</i>							
<i>Preparation and finalization of the situation analysis</i>							
<i>Preparation and finalization of the strategic statement</i>							
<b>Preliminary response planning begins</b> - roles and responsibilities assigned <sup>2</sup>							
HCT reviews objectives (from strategic statement) and scope of response							
Plan narrative drafted based on HCT decisions							
Narrative circulated to HCT for validation							
Clusters meet to determine key activities, map capacity, assign roles and responsibilities, and set project selection criteria							
Drafting of cluster narrative/objectives and validation by cluster							
Clusters prepare, upload, revise projects on OPS, if applicable							
Project peer review, if applicable							
HCT and clusters review preliminary response plan; comments consolidated							
RC/HC clearance							
Finalisation /formatting and dissemination of plan							

After its finalization, the preliminary response plan is usually launched at a local and/or global event with Member States and donors. For more information on launch planning and preparations, please contact the CHAP Section (xxx).

## Revisions

The contents of the preliminary response plan are further expanded and detailed in the strategic response plan that follows. Therefore, it is not recommended to revise this preliminary document, but to focus on the preparation of the strategic response plan. However, if there are significant changes to the humanitarian situation that drastically alter the direction of response operations, the HC and HCT may decide to revise the preliminary response plan or to issue a press release or statement in the interim, announcing the changes before the strategic response plan is issued. In terms of funding requirements, the HC and HCT must decide

<sup>2</sup> RC/HC assigns one organization to lead and coordinate the response in each priority sector, and a focal point responsibility for developing the plan if OCHA is not present.

how increases in requirements will be managed in the period between the preliminary and strategic response plans (about 25 days); options include allowing incremental increases by organization/cluster daily/regularly or setting specific points in the calendar when increases can be made or waiting for the strategic response plan. Update funding requirements will be reflected on the [Financial Tracking Service](#) (FTS).

## Roles and responsibilities

Successful response planning depends on effective coordination, information management and data analysis, and proper process management. The sections below clarify how the HC, HCT, OCHA and cluster coordinators can manage that process. Headquarters back-stopping is provided throughout.

<b>HC/HCT</b>	The HC provides leadership to the planning process and together with the HCT, reviews the direction of the response (included in the strategic statement) and oversees the production, content and quality of the preliminary response plan. The HC/HCT should ensure the plan is prepared in consultation with the government.
<b>Cluster Coordinator<sup>3</sup></b> (with support of cluster partners)	Participates in the process for developing the plan, including engaging cluster partners and other humanitarian actors on its development; drafts cluster activities in line with the strategic objectives; develops criteria for the preparation of projects and reviews them against these; keeps a complete and up-to-date 'who does what where (when)' (3 or 4Ws) database to better identify coverage, gaps and overlap.
<b>OCHA<sup>4</sup></b>	Supports the planning process by setting a timetable, collecting data, coordinating the establishment of an agreed set of planning figures, preparing/compiling a draft plan, and facilitating the process of the plan's finalization. Also keeps a complete and up-to-date 'who does what where (when)' (3 or 4Ws) database and conveys funding information from donors or agencies to FTS <sup>5</sup> .

## PLANNING PROCESS AND DATA

### Preparedness

Ideally, preparedness actions are undertaken in advance of a crisis, putting in place key components of the response. Preparedness makes it possible to respond faster, more appropriately and efficiently, and to take decisions on the basis of more reliable information. If a contingency response plan exists, it is usually in the same format as a preliminary response plan and can be updated to take into account the specificities of the crisis. Preparedness actions usually include the establishment of standard operating procedures to guide responders in their initial emergency response, allocating roles and responsibilities, prioritizing needs and immediate critical interventions, and establishing coordination arrangements. These actions allow the preliminary response plan be prepared quickly, potentially reducing the timeframe for the development of the plan (see page 3). In the absence of preparedness, the HC and HCT will likely need support from headquarters for data collection and analysis, information management, and the drafting of the plan.

### Situation analysis, strategic statement, and other data sources

The preliminary response plan draws on information contained in the situation analysis (day 2) and the strategic statement (day 3). The [situation analysis](#) outlines the immediate impact, preliminary magnitude (people in need) and the emerging needs, while the statement provides an analytical overview of the crisis and the direction of the response. Both are used as the basis of the preliminary response plan, and can be

<sup>3</sup> Please see [Guidance: Role of Cluster Coordinators in the Consolidated Appeal Process](#), dated September 2011.

<sup>4</sup> If not present, the Resident Coordinator's office, surge deployments, or an agency in-country undertake this work.

<sup>5</sup> FTS receives funding information from agencies' and donors' headquarters as standard practice, but field information is usually necessary to complement information communicated through the usual reporting mechanisms.

supplemented with other reports or evidence based on secondary data, reasonable inference, and remote sensing to provide information on the context and emerging humanitarian needs, necessary to design the response strategy.

## Consultation process

The consultation process for the preliminary response plan is streamlined, quick and light in order to present the initial planning framework and funding requirements in the early days of a disaster. A more robust and exhaustive process will be followed for the development of the strategic response plan. There is no “one size fits all” approach to the type of planning process required. Each country’s steps, methods and timeline must be based on the crisis, actors and coordination structures in that country. To be meaningful, there needs to be commitment and ownership of the process, with roles and responsibilities and timelines clearly defined and broadly circulated.

At a minimum, the HC calls a meeting of the HCT (or if not present, a group representing all relevant humanitarian partners) to reconfirm the direction of the response and the strategic objectives, based on the strategic statement, and to provide clusters with guidance on the development of their plans and (if applicable) projects. Clusters meet to discuss their priority activities, and if projects are being developed, to agree on selection criteria and a peer review process (with project planning subsequently undertaken). The cluster plans and funding requirements are compiled into the preliminary response plan, which is circulated electronically to the HCT and clusters for validation of content and endorsement.

While the key decisions are made by the HC, supported by the HCT, it is recommended that a dedicated team manage the process and undertake the practical actions needed to prepare a preliminary response plan on time (i.e. reviewing early needs assessment or secondary data, collecting inputs, preparing a draft/compiling the plan). If present, an inter-cluster coordination group supports these efforts.

While there is insufficient time for broad and extensive consultation during the first few days of the emergency, the process must strive to be inclusive in order to best determine response priorities, coverage and gaps. Outreach to non-governmental organizations (NGOs), protection and cross-cutting issues’ groups is particularly important. If there is a UN political or peacekeeping mission, relevant mission personnel should be invited to participate in the planning process. To the extent possible, national authorities are in the lead and their capacity strengthened, and the views of affected population are included in the formulation of the plan.<sup>6</sup>

## DRAFTING THE PLAN

A preliminary response plan shapes and guides what the collective response operation is, what it does (and will not do), and why it does it, with a focus on the future. As it is impossible to do everything that needs to be done, it requires exclusion of various possible actions, and prioritization of some actions among the selected ones. When drafting the plan, it is important to ensure that it reflects protection and other cross-cutting issues relevant to the context; is gender-aware; and contributes to building resilience. The plan should set the scope or boundaries of the response, which can be geographic, demographic, sectoral, temporal, or other measures to draw the line between what the HCT must achieve (which is included in the plan) and what is secondary. More detailed guidance is included in the annotated template accompanying this guidance. The sections below present more detailed information on preparing strategic objectives and cluster activities.

### Drafting Tips:

- \* Avoid using complicated language or UN jargon.
- \* Present a compelling case for the direction chosen.
- \* Ensure that the conclusions of the consultation process, particularly with affected people, are represented in the plan.

<sup>6</sup> Elements of accountable practice have been promoted through various guidelines, codes of conduct, standards and tools of each individual agency, as well as through the IASC’s five commitments to accountability to affected populations (see <http://www.humanitarianinfo.org/iasc/>). These should be used to guide the humanitarian system in placing affected people at the center of response operations.

## Strategic objectives

The strategic statement contains three to five strategic objectives (no indicators); these are reviewed and reconfirmed/revised through the preliminary response planning process. A strategic objective is a higher-level, medium-term result or change that the humanitarian community needs to achieve over a certain period to move closer to its goal. It focuses planning and programming. It is usually inter-cluster by nature, though it can be cluster-specific if the problem being addressed rises to the level of a strategic priority.

Each strategic objective must be specific enough to help focus the response, and clear and compelling to affect programming. It is not, however, so specific that it resembles an activity. A strategic objective is comprehensive, addressing a broader aim in terms of scope, while at the same time remaining precise. It is achievable and focused at the outcome level (rather than output). Developing the right strategic objectives is no easy task. Some writing tips and examples of well-formulated strategic objectives are included below for reference.

- **Tip:** A well-formulated objective summarizes the planned result of the humanitarian community's actions and the beneficiary population that will benefit from the result. In other words, it focuses on an improvement in the conditions of the people in need. It does not describe how it will be achieved, as this is illustrated by the indicators included in the strategic response plan.
- **Tip:** Poorly-formulated objectives are usually too abstract or express broad 'mission' statements, like "prepare and respond to emergencies in time". Of course humanitarian actors will try to save the lives of the most vulnerable and prepare and respond to emergencies. The point of an objective is to apply a general mission to the specific context in order to demonstrate the intended result.
- **Well-formulated examples:** (i) Mortality and morbidity rates among the displaced men, women, boys and girls are reduced to sub-emergency levels; (ii) Basic social infrastructure, in compliance with the minimum SPHERE standard, functions for returnees and host communities living in post-conflict settings in Regions x, y, z; (iii) Prevalence of severe food insecurity declines to the pre-disaster level<sup>7</sup>; (iv) Male and female pastoralists and farmers in critical flood-affected areas restore their livelihoods and resilience.

## Cluster activities

The cluster plans have been streamlined to include a brief narrative, key priority activities, and estimated funding requirements per cluster. This was done to allow each cluster to quickly develop an elemental planning framework in the early days of a crisis, linking its planning to the country strategy and strategic objectives. To prepare the plan, each cluster convenes its partners and other relevant actors to determine what activities it needs to do to fulfil the strategic objectives, using the situation analysis, rapid assessments, and other data sources to determine the emerging needs. During this meeting, the cluster also agrees on a division of labor and if projects are being developed, on criteria for their selection and the peer-review process. Clusters may choose to prepare cluster objectives linked to the strategic objectives, if considered useful. The agreed activities and (if applicable) project selection criteria, are circulated electronically to cluster partners for validation before being compiled into the preliminary response plan.

Cluster plans should include those key, core activities (no more than 10) to achieve the objectives, adequately representing the cluster's plan and costs; a comprehensive list of all planned activities is not required. Activities must relate to and be justified by the context and needs. They should be restricted by the scope of the response and caseload (number and type of beneficiaries) agreed by the HCT. Activities can be both "life-saving" as well as in support of response operations. They can be designed with resilience in mind, to enable communities to resist future shocks and reduce aid dependence (e.g. building infrastructure or supporting livelihoods). Activities should adhere to the principles of "do no harm", "build back better", promote environmental sustainability, and focus on the most vulnerable. They must also respond to the distinct needs of women, girls, boys and men or justify its focus on one group.

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<sup>7</sup> Depending on the context, pre-disaster levels may not be appropriate.



## DETERMINING FUNDING REQUIREMENTS

The preliminary response plan includes initial, crude funding requirements per cluster to provide a “price tag” for international response efforts. This can be derived through coordinated project planning, by budgeting cluster activities based on a standard or estimated beneficiary/unit cost, or another method devised in country. Project and activity-based budgeting are summarized below for reference. The funding requirements should reflect all planned humanitarian action linked to the strategic objectives. The government's funding requirements for its part in humanitarian response are not included in the plan.

**Regardless of the method chosen, the total funding requirements must be realistic, taking into account the absorption and implementation capacity of responders and the crisis itself (access, security, etc). Inflated funding requirements weaken the credibility of the plan and response.**

### Coordinated project planning

Project planning does not start by soliciting proposals; it must not be influenced by organizations' fundraising concerns. Instead, cluster members draft projects to cover the cluster's planned activities effectively, with an efficient division of labour (no gaps or duplication), and in line with strategic objectives. Projects are a reflection of each cluster member's part in the cluster plan. They should be feasible for the proposing organization (capacity, duration, expertise, and access) and reasonably budgeted, and **can have any start or end date within the timeframe of the planning period.**

The preliminary response plan will likely follow a more streamlined, lighter project development process, which will differ from the more robust eight step approach suggested for **strategic response plans**. Project drafting, peer review, publication, and revision are all handled through the **Online Planning/Project System**. At the minimum, each cluster/sector develops and reviews the projects using its established peer-review method and selection criteria. The peer-reviewed projects are then reviewed by the HC and agency headquarters; review periods are compressed to ensure that the plan is issued within the 5-7 day period but projects are revisited and reviewed during the strategic response planning process that follows. Approved projects are published electronically on FTS, where funding received against the projects is tracked.

#### Project development tips

- The project description should be minimal - including only activities, locations, number of beneficiaries, and costs. Detailed information is not needed.
- Projects should normally not be small, splintered and many in number; the information is easier to handle if projects are more aggregated and encompassing.
- NGOs may list their own proposals directly, or can be represented in “umbrella” proposals by UN agencies; whatever the arrangement, the cluster should avoid double-counting (i.e. listing a funding request both as a direct proposal by the NGO and as part of a larger UN project).
- Organizations should use the **Gender Marker**, a tool that codes, on a scale of 2 to 0, whether a humanitarian project is designed to ensure women/girls and men/boys will benefit equally from it or that it will advance gender equality in another way.

### Estimated or standard cost per unit/beneficiary

In DRC and Afghanistan, the HCT derives the total funding requirements by costing cluster activities, instead of undertaking coordinated project planning. In this method, each cluster budgets its activities by assigning an approximate average unit/beneficiary cost to each planned activity using judgment, reason and experience (for example previous project proposals), with the calculation method included in the cluster plan for transparency and credibility. Usually, direct implementation costs for goods or service, staffing and indirect/overhead costs are calculated in the per beneficiary/unit cost, but there are several factors also to consider, including the phase of the crisis, the number of type of beneficiaries, procurement source, distribution channels, logistical and security issues, and so forth. This beneficiary/unit cost is then multiplied by the target people or quantity for that action to reach a total cost per planned activity (and, by compiling these, for the cluster overall).

Responsibility for implementation is not specified in advance, but each cluster keeps an internal overview of who's doing what where (and when) to ensure sufficient coordination within the cluster and to provide donors with

information about potential grant recipients, if asked. Consultations at the headquarters level are underway to determine the applicability of this approach to other contexts and the need for more detailed guidance.

## NEXT STEPS

Given the compressed timeline, the preliminary response plan is not circulated for headquarters review before its finalization. Headquarters staff are encouraged to contribute to the process through their field staff. Following the finalization of the preliminary response plan, it is published on the country website and sent to the CHAP Section in OCHA-Geneva for circulation among IASC partners and for posting on the relevant headquarters websites.

The next step in the response planning process is the development of a strategic response plan.