



Guidance Note for GBV AoR Coordinators:

Transition and Deactivation of Clusters, Safeguarding GBV Coordination



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Purpose

This guidance note supports GBV Area of Responsibility (AoR) Coordinators in navigating the transition and deactivation of humanitarian clusters. It outlines key risks, responsibilities, and practical steps to ensure continuity, visibility, and sustainability of GBV coordination, programming, and advocacy.

Cluster Transitioning and Deactivation: Implications for GBV Coordination

Clusters are timebound sectoral coordination mechanisms activated by the Inter-Agency Standing Committee (IASC) when a government's capacity to coordinate a humanitarian response is limited or constrained. The IASC outlines formal criteria for cluster activation and deactivation in its policy framework, which also provides guidance on transitioning clusters towards deactivation in a principled, strategic, and sustainable manner. For detailed guidance, refer to the [IASC Guidance on Cluster Transition and Deactivation](#).

Deactivation refers to the official closure of a formally activated cluster. However, deactivation should not be viewed as an abrupt end but rather as a carefully planned process that considers the long-term coordination needs of affected populations. Cluster lead agencies are encouraged to begin planning for sustainable coordination approaches from the outset of an emergency. This includes identifying opportunities for integrating coordination functions into existing national or local structures, often led by the government or relevant development actors.

Cluster transition, therefore, is the process of gradually transferring core cluster functions—such as coordination, information management, and technical support—to national actors, government institutions, or development mechanisms. This may also include the gradual phase-out of some functions altogether. All Cluster and Area of Responsibility (AoR) Coordinators are expected to lead inter-agency transition planning efforts, in collaboration with government bodies, local actors, and civil society. Transition plans should be inclusive, realistic, and detail the triggers or criteria for deactivation, handover, or long-term coordination. For more information, consult the [Cluster Transition & Deactivation guidance](#).

Implications of Cluster Transition and Deactivation on GBV Coordination

The deactivation of the cluster system brings significant implications for the coordination of gender-based violence (GBV) prevention and response. The structure of GBV coordination is likely to shift depending on the humanitarian context, political environment, level of government ownership, and the capacity and influence of Women-Led Organizations (WLOs) and civil society. The transition process must be context-specific and responsive to both the risks and opportunities within each setting.

1. Protection and Ownership of Existing Data

One of the critical considerations in the transition process is the protection and future ownership of data—particularly that generated through the GBV Information Management System (GBVIMS). Key questions will emerge regarding who will manage this data going forward and whether there is an expectation or pressure to transfer sensitive databases to national authorities. In such cases, the confidentiality and safety of GBV survivors must remain paramount. Any decisions about data ownership and use must be guided by existing Data Sharing Protocols, with careful consultation among all signatories to ensure adherence to survivor-centered and ethical data management principles.

2. Civil Society-Government Relations

In some contexts, trust between civil society—including WLOs and GBV service providers—and national authorities may be limited or fraught. This can be particularly sensitive in settings where the government has been accused of perpetrating conflict-related sexual violence (CRSV) or where civil society has faced repression. In such situations, transition planning must navigate these political dynamics carefully, ensuring that WLOs and civil society actors are not marginalized or excluded from future coordination structures.

3. Loss of Access to Humanitarian Funding

With the deactivation of clusters comes a reduction or cessation of emergency humanitarian funding mechanisms such as the Central Emergency Response Fund (CERF), flash appeals, and country-based pooled funds. This creates a significant funding gap for GBV programming, which may not be immediately covered by development or stabilization funding sources. The impact of such a funding cliff can be severe, potentially leading to the collapse of GBV services and threatening the sustainability of WLOs. For example, in Iraq, although the government was willing to continue GBV programming, disparities in salary scales and operational models led to a breakdown in service delivery. Transition plans must therefore include a phased and realistic timeline to sustain GBV services beyond the humanitarian phase to avoid creating new protection risks.

4. Loss of Expertise and Capacity

A poorly managed transition can result in the loss of technical expertise and institutional memory built during the humanitarian response. Specialized roles, such as GBVIMS coordinators, case management specialists, and information management officers, are often among the first to exit due to the phasing out of funding or absence of national counterparts. In many countries, there is also limited local capacity to take on these highly specialized functions, and global support is often required. Preserving expertise during the transition—through mentorship, training, and secondments—should be a priority.

5. Disruption of Services

The risk of service disruption is high during the transition phase, especially if referral pathways, service mapping, capacity building initiatives, and development of technical guidance are not actively maintained. The absence of clear coordination mechanisms can lead to fragmented service delivery, reduced accountability, and weakened support for survivors. Proactive measures must be taken to ensure continuity and reliability of essential GBV services during this critical period.

6. Reduced Visibility for GBV Issues

The deactivation of the GBV AoR or GBV sub-cluster may also result in diminished visibility of GBV concerns within broader humanitarian or development coordination structures. Without a dedicated platform, there is a risk that advocacy, technical guidance, and monitoring efforts related to GBV will be deprioritized or lost. Transition plans must therefore include strategies to ensure continued advocacy for GBV within new coordination mechanisms or through stand-alone bodies where appropriate.

3. Key Responsibilities of GBV AoR Coordinators

- Lead GBV-specific transition planning within broader inter-cluster processes.
- Advocate for GBV visibility, protection, and service continuity throughout transition.
- Engage national authorities, WLOs, and local partners from the outset.
- Ensure GBV data, services, and expertise are not lost in the process.
- Coordinate with development actors to identify long-term GBV funding and support.

A. Protection and Ownership of GBV Data

- **Action:** Clarify future ownership and management of GBVIMS data early.
- **Action:** Uphold confidentiality, survivor-centered principles, and avoid data transfer to state actors without clear safeguards.
- Where trust is low, explore third-party or regional custodianship.
- Facilitate multi-stakeholder review of existing Data Sharing Protocols.

D. Loss of Expertise and Capacity

- **Action:** Identify key roles (e.g., GBVIMS Focal Points) at risk of loss.
- **Action:** Promote secondment, mentorship, or transitional contracts to retain technical expertise.
- Highlight national capacity gaps in inter-agency plans.
- Advocate for regional surge or technical standby support.

B. Civil Society and Government Dynamics

- **Action:** Ensure WLOs and GBV actors are included in decision-making, not just consulted.
- **Action:** Maintain neutrality and protection-centered approaches in politically sensitive contexts.
- Use anonymous feedback channels for CSOs/WLOs if risks are high.
- Advocate for safe civil society spaces in new coordination structures.

E. Reduced Visibility of GBV Issues

- **Action:** Ensure GBV is integrated in post-transition coordination and M&E frameworks.
- **Action:** Secure commitment for a designated GBV focal point in any new structure.
- Advocate for inclusion in the Protection Sector or national platforms.
- Track and report GBV indicators in residual humanitarian or early recovery plans.

C. Loss of Humanitarian Funding

- **Action:** Map potential funding gaps and advocate for bridge funding.
- **Action:** Link GBV programming to development, stabilization, and peacebuilding frameworks.
- Prepare partners for reduced CBPF/CERF access.
- Document funding priorities in final HRP and transition planning documents.

F. Risk of Service Disruption

- **Action:** Update referral pathways and ensure their continued dissemination.
- **Action:** Establish contingency service plans with partners.
- Ensure services mapping is accessible and maintained.
- Communicate upcoming changes clearly to communities.

4. Coordination Options Post-Deactivation

Depending on context, possible post-deactivation arrangements include:

OPTION	POSITIVE	CHALLENGE
1. Government to chair the working group.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Ensure sustainability and continuity of GBV programming There's a greater likelihood of demonstrating strong political will to address GBV. This can translate to improved policy formulation and implementation, as well as greater accountability for progress. Government leadership can facilitate improved data collection and analysis on GBV prevalence and trends. This evidence-based approach can inform more targeted and effective interventions. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Requires buy in on the value of coordination; appreciation on the role of civil society, especially WLOs Can require additional personnel so as to be dedicated to leading coordination. Can result in the government talking 'at' stakeholders, rather than working with them. Can result in manipulating of GBV agenda and hijacking it for political advancement Increased bureaucracy and slower decision-making processes Limited Civil Society Participation.
2. Government and National NGO (ideally WLO) co-chair the working group.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Enhanced Trust and Credibility. Encourages broader participation and representation, particularly from marginalized groups and women leaders, leading to more inclusive and effective GBV interventions. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Independence and ability to criticize government policies may be compromised due to their partnership in the co-chairing arrangement.
3. National NGO (ideally WLO) chair the working group.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> continuity of ways of working with existing / remaining members. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Can result in parallel processes if not connected to the government.
4. International NGO to chair the working group.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Can allow for more time for securing buy-in by the government for maintaining GBV coordination structure. Can provide more time to support capacity building initiatives of government and/or locally led GBV programmes including service delivery. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Will require eventual ownership of the working group by the government and/or local NGO / WLO.
5. Absorption of the working group into government ministry.		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Not recommended GBV will likely become mainstreamed and focus / attention to the issue will be lost.
6. Dissolvement of the working group. No formal coordination structure to remain.		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Not recommended Loss of gains made via GBV AoR Sub-Cluster

Note: Advocacy is critical, but final decisions may rest with government or inter-agency consensus. Plan for less-preferred scenarios.

5. Transition Planning Checklist for GBV AoR Coordinators

ACTIONS TO TAKE TO ENSURE SMOOTH TRANSITION OF GBV COORDINATION FROM CLUSTER TO NON-CLUSTER SYSTEM			
	Preparing and Planning for Deactivation	During Deactivation Period	After Deactivation Deadline
Service Delivery			
Ensure government and national led service providers are prioritized for capacity development initiatives (<i>linked to maintaining high quality service provision</i>)	X	X	X
Ensure services providers are included, participate and have a meaningful role in GBV coordination meetings (<i>linked to valuing coordination</i>)	X	X	X
Develop / strengthen existing SOPs with government and locally led responders that are endorsed by the government and embedded in government policies and guiding documents.		X	
Develop transition plan for any GBV response services that are led by government and possibly international actors	X	X	
Strategic Decision Making			
Ensure GBV prevention, response and risk mitigation is included in government preparedness plans.	X	X	
Meaningful inclusion of government and WLOs in GBV AoR work-plans and strategies.	X	X	
Create space and forums for regular interactions between government and WLOs.	X	X	
Strategies and Funding			
Create space for WLO and government stakeholders to meet with and develop their own direct relationship with donors.	X	X	
Cost out and include GBV transition planning in fundraising plans and proposals.	X	X	
Explore opportunities for costs linked to GBV response services to be included in government budgets, look to explore cost sharing options, and connect with financial institutions like the World Bank and IMF to ensure they prioritize supporting the government with such costs.	X	X	
Information Management Systems			
Ensure GBVIMS (or similar system) is secure – data encryption and ownership is known and clear.	X		
Establish an information repository from the outset, ensuring it is up to date. Review all documents for confidential information before	X	X	

uploading (i.e. some documents may include names of WLOs / CBOs that may put them at risk by the new government).			
If and where feasible, plan for transitioning GBVIMS (or similar GBV data system) to the government IM system (typically sitting with the Ministry of Health) to ensure you have adequate time, funds and expertise for this.	X	X	
Ensure you have an offline version of IM repository in case of access issues in the future.	X	X	
Establish data sharing agreements that comply with the GBVIMS Information Sharing Protocol (ISP).	X	X	
Provide guidance on data security, survivor confidentiality, and ethical use of data.		X	
Develop guidance packages and resource kits tailored to the new coordination lead.	X	X	
National Capacity and Contingency Planning			
Ensure a strong NGO forum – ensure WLOs who are members of the GBV SC are part of National NGO Forum (if such exists)	X	X	
Establish Co-Coordination of GBV AoR with a WLO as early as possible, this may mean providing additional resources for this.	X		
Establish Co-Coordination of GBV AoR with relevant Government Ministry as early as possible.	X	X	
Advocacy			
Advocate for recognition of the value of WLOs in humanitarian response, GBV and beyond.	X	X	X
Advocate for resourcing of WLOs (not just projects) so that operational and security costs are covered.	X	X	X
Advocate to donors on the need to continue funding GBV prevention and response initiatives beyond the transition.	X	X	X

7. Tools & Resources

- [GBV AoR Field Handbook](#)
- [GBVIMS Data Sharing Protocol Guidance](#)
- [IASC Cluster Transition and Deactivation Guidance](#)
- [Humanitarian-Development-Peace Nexus and GBV](#)

