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A strategic statement sets the direction for an inter-agency coordinated humanitarian response to a large-scale and/or L3 crisis. It is the first document produced in the strategic planning process, released **three days** after the start of a sudden onset crisis, or the declaration of a L3 crisis for a protracted or slow onset crisis. To be effective and useful, the statement must be issued within the three-day timeframe.

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 statement. 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 the government should be consulted in the formulation of the statement and the subsequent preliminary and strategic response plans.

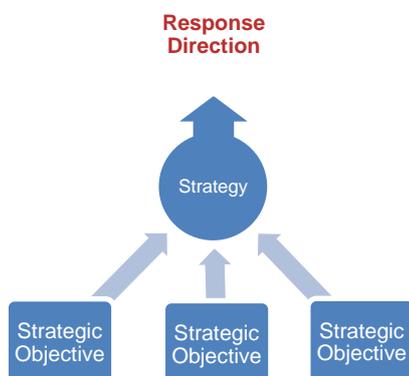
The **purpose** of the strategic statement is to:

- (i) summarize the context (drawing on the situation analysis);
- (ii) establish the strategic objectives to focus the response;
- (iii) lists considerations that will condition the ability of the response to meet humanitarian needs effectively; and
- (iv) provide an overview of the scale of the emergency and the nature of the response required.

In slow-onset or complex political crises, a strategic statement consolidates and sharpens earlier decisions and communications.

The strategic statement is designed to improve the response planning process 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 approach, which seeks to strengthen the sequencing and inter-connectedness of needs assessment and analysis, strategic planning, resource mobilization, implementation, monitoring and evaluation. 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 strategic statement. The guidance should be applied flexibly based on the circumstances of each crisis.



KEY THINGS TO KNOW

Rationale

The strategic statement sets the course of the international humanitarian response for a crisis that is beyond the capacity of the government or any single agency to respond. 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 goals for carrying out the collective response.

The strategic statement is primarily a strategy-setting document. It also provides a snapshot of the scale, severity, complexity and urgency of the disaster. It can also be used in support of advocacy, but it is not meant for resource mobilization or to serve as the basis for performance or response monitoring. For L3 crisis, preparing a strategic statement is a requirement.

Roles and responsibilities

The HC provides leadership to the strategy-setting process and, together with the HCT, determines the direction of the response and oversees the production, content and quality of the statement, drawing on the information presented in the situation analysis. Clusters/sectors provide information. National authorities are consulted. OCHA (or if not present, the Resident Coordinator's office or surge deployments) supports these efforts by setting a timetable, collecting data, preparing a draft statement, and facilitating the process of the statement's finalization. Headquarters back-stopping is provided throughout.

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 (refined) objectives, indicators, and activities – serving as the basis for monitoring the collective response.

Template

The strategic statement template consists of four headings: (i) situation overview; (ii) humanitarian context; (iii) strategic objectives; and (iv) response considerations. It does not include funding requirements or indicators (usually attached to the strategic objectives); these are elaborated in the preliminary response plan and strategic response plan respectively (see timeline below). 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 statement must be no more than two to four pages in length.

Audience

The statement is published online and therefore serves as the first public planning document for the HCT. For this reason, it must be kept concise and readable by an informed public. The audience of the statement includes humanitarian organisations in and out the country, national and local authorities, Member States and donors, emergency responders and rapid response mechanisms, such as UNDAC. The Emergency Directors and IASC Principals use the statement in support of their decision-making.

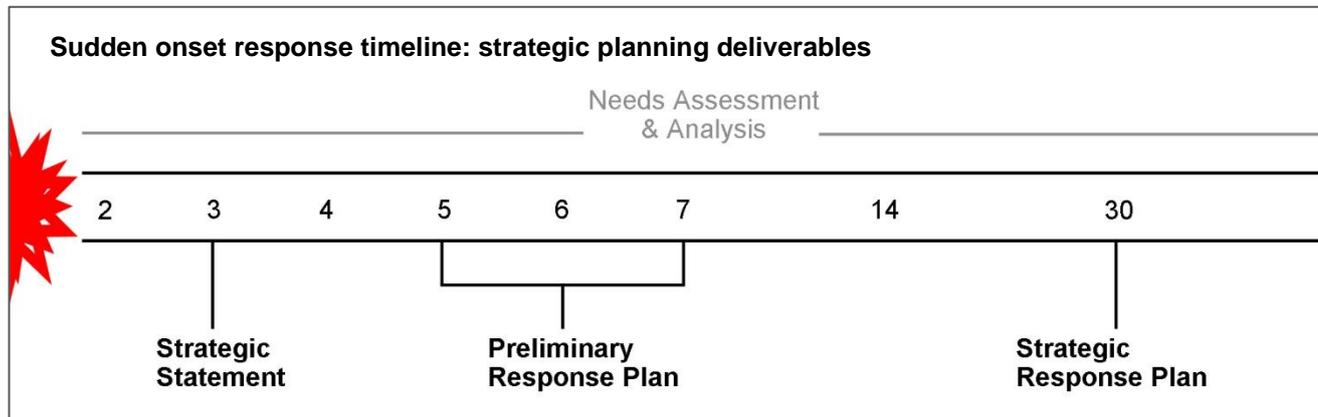
Deadline and timeframe

A statement is prepared three days after the start of a sudden onset crisis or the declaration of a L3 crisis for a protracted or slow onset crisis. The duration of the statement is adaptable to the operational requirements, with a three to six month timeframe recommended.

Revisions

The contents of a statement are further expanded and detailed in the preliminary response plan (days 5-7) and strategic response plan (day 30) that follow. Therefore, it is not recommended to revise the statement, but to focus on the preparation (and if needed, subsequent revision) of the preliminary or strategic response plans. 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 statement, perhaps issuing the revised statement as part of an upcoming (or revised) strategic response plan.



PREPARING THE GROUND

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 used to inform the strategic statement, and standard operating procedures guide responders in their initial emergency response, allocating roles and responsibilities, identifying the initial steps of a response, and prioritizing needs and immediate critical interventions. These preparedness actions allow the statement to be prepared quickly. 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 statement.

Situation analysis and other data

The quality of the statement is as good as the understanding and analysis of the context. The context is critical to the design of the strategy. Much of this analysis depends on preparedness activities done in advance of crisis.

The **situation analysis** forms the basis of the contextual analysis. The situation analysis is released on day 2 of the crisis, and outlines the immediate impact, preliminary magnitude (people in need) and the emerging needs. The situation analysis can be supplemented by other reports or evidence based on secondary data, reasonable inference, and remote sensing to provide a robust analysis of the crisis and the humanitarian needs. The situation analysis and other data sources are used to prepare the statement, particularly in establishing the direction of response operations.

A (streamlined) review process

While there is insufficient time for broad and extensive consultation during the first few days of the emergency, at a minimum, the HC calls a meeting of the HCT to agree on the direction of the response (among various possible courses of action), to confirm the strategic objectives, to validate the contextual analysis, and to finalize the statement. A draft of the statement is circulated in advance of the meeting. 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 statement.

It is recommended that a dedicated team manage the process and undertake the practical actions needed to prepare a statement by day 3. Ultimate responsibility for producing a high quality statement by the deadline rests with the HC.

Despite the time constraints, outreach to non-governmental organizations (NGOs) should be undertaken to better inform the statement given their contextual expertise, knowledge, and reach, which are critical in defining the direction of the response. If there is a NGO consortium present in country, it should be invited to participate in the HCT meeting, along with key national and international operational NGOs. Collaboration with protection and cross-

cutting issues' groups and donors is promoted. Where there is a UN political or peacekeeping mission, relevant mission personnel are invited to participate, as required.

The consultation process for the statement is streamlined, quick and light. On the other hand, the development of the strategic response plan (issued at day 30) will need to follow a more robust and exhaustive process, at both national and subnational levels.

DRAFTING THE STATEMENT

Brevity, clarity and analysis

A good strategic statement is brief, concise and analytical. It is no longer than two to four pages. It is written in a style that reflects the medium to long-term objectives, not the short-term activities. A statement based on immediate priorities, activities and needs provides more specific information, but this will become outdated quickly requiring frequent revisions to the document in order to be relevant. It is therefore recommended to prepare the statement with a longer-term perspective in mind, providing an analytical overview instead of detailed 'situation report' of the first days of the crisis. In other words, broad or nonspecific language is used to sketch a general (but analytical) description of the crisis which is robust yet flexible enough to be relevant as the response evolves.

Tips on developing an effective strategic statement

* A strategic statement serves a purpose. It should be written with that in mind, and maintained by humanitarian organizations and cluster/sectors to guide future planning and programming.

* It is not meant to be a strategic plan or detailed 'situation report'. Therefore it should be concise, brief and analytical.

* Despite time constraints, consult partners to the extent possible to ensure buy-in and ownership.

Above all, the statement provides a clear image of what the international humanitarian community will do, presenting a shared vision or direction for the response, supported by analysis of the needs. It outlines the magnitude of the crisis; is gender-aware; and reflects protection and other cross-cutting issues relevant to the context. The statement should be based on an approach that focuses on strengthening the resilience of communities and households, aiming to reduce chronic vulnerability.

Strategic objectives

In order to focus the response, the statement contains three to five strategic objectives; indicators are not included in the statement. 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 achieving its goal. It focuses planning and programming. It is usually inter-cluster by nature, though it can be cluster-specific if the problem being address 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 and cluster activities which are 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 level¹; (iv) Male and female pastoralists and farmers in critical flood-affected areas restore their livelihoods and resilience.

NEXT STEPS

Following the finalization of the strategic statement, 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 strategic statement is not circulated for headquarters review/approval before its finalization.

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

¹ Depending on the context, pre-disaster levels may not be appropriate.