

Guidance Note

Responsible Exit of Humanitarian Partners from Collective Sites

Introduction

As of 2025, the humanitarian architecture in Ukraine has undergone significant realignment to reflect evolving operational priorities and constrained financial resources. This shift coincides with major reductions in funding, notably the freeze of humanitarian funding by the Government of the United States and others.

Within this context, humanitarian partners, especially in the West and the Centre of Ukraine, have begun scaling down or reprioritizing their operations. While some organizations have already suspended activities, others are preparing to exit from collective sites (CSs) in response to shifting displacement patterns and revised strategic priorities under the 2025 Humanitarian Needs and Response Plan.

To mitigate the impact on internally displaced persons (IDPs) – many of whom have vulnerable profiles such as older people and people with disabilities – and uphold the integrity of the response, **humanitarian exit out of CSs must be planned, coordinated, and protection-sensitive**. This guidance note, developed **jointly with West-Centre Hub Lead Partners within the CCCM Area-Based Approach (ABA)**, outlines **core principles, procedures, and roles for responsible exit from CSs, ensuring continuity of services and dignity for affected populations**. While the guidance is framed mainly within the operational context of the West and Centre, the principles and procedures can be applied and contextualized for collective sites country wide.

In some cases, the exit of humanitarian partners may result in the closure of collective sites. In such instances, partners should refer to the guidance on "Facilitating Solutions in Collective Sites," which outlines essential steps to ensure safe, dignified, and sustainable **site closure and transitions**.

Definition and Objective of Responsible Exit out of CSs

A responsible exit is a **planned, coordinated, and protection-informed withdrawal of a humanitarian actor from its support role in a collective site**. It aims to:

- Minimize service disruption and safeguard community structures.
- Preserve the rights, dignity, and protection of displaced persons.
- Ensure the handover or continuation of essential functions.
- Support transitions toward longer-term and sustainable solutions.

Responsible exits of humanitarian actors may occur under a variety of operational and contextual circumstances, including:

- Withdrawal or non-renewal of funding
- Shift in strategic or geographic priorities
- Transition of site management to government authorities
- Integration of residents into host communities
- Site closure or consolidation under government-led frameworks

These scenarios require **tailored exit approaches but must consistently uphold protection standards and minimize disruption to residents.**

Core Principles

Responsible exit must be:

- **People-Centered:** Prioritize the dignity, protection, and rights of residents. Engage communities meaningfully, ensuring their needs and perspectives guide decision-making.
- **Planned and Phased:** Avoid abrupt or ad hoc departures. Establish a clear, feasible timeline that includes transitional measures and promotes service continuity, ideally through authorities / local service providers.
- **Coordinated:** Align with CCCM Cluster strategies and engage relevant clusters, authorities, and site-level actors to ensure coherence and accountability.
- **Transparent:** Share timely information with stakeholders - including residents, site managers and authorities – to build trust and reduce uncertainty.
- **Do-No-Harm-Oriented:** Prevent service gaps, protection risks, or forced relocations. Anticipate and mitigate potential negative impacts.

Preconditions for Exit: Determining the Right Moment

In advance of ending support for a collective site, partners should ensure the following conditions are in place:

- **Essential services are sustained:** Services must be transitioned to capable actors – ideally government / local service providers – or responsibly phased out with contingency plans.
- **Protection risks are accounted for:** Vulnerable populations remain connected to support systems – or are connected with them if not already - with referral pathways maintained and risks mitigated.
- **Residents are informed and engaged:** Communities must be adequately notified and consulted in advance, especially when humanitarian exit is linked to closure or relocation.

- **Local authorities are involved:** Coordination with site managers and local authorities is essential; with clear and formalized agreements on responsibility transfer.
- **CCCM Cluster is consulted:** Exit strategies by partners must be reviewed and endorsed by the Cluster to ensure alignment and integration with broader coordination efforts.

Defining Roles and Responsibilities

Successful exits require clarity on roles between humanitarian partners, local authorities, and coordination mechanisms. In particular:

- **Partners** who plan to end their humanitarian programming support in a particular collective site are responsible for initiating the exit process, conducting internal reviews, communicating with residents, and ensuring a safe transition to local authorities or other responsible actors, depending on opportunities.

Local authorities or other partners are key stakeholders in taking over governance, site management, or service provision, depending on their capacity. They are also responsible for establishing uninterrupted communication with IDPs and ensuring their continuous access to essential services.

- The **CCCM Cluster** facilitates coordination, supports technical advice, mediates between partners, and ensures that exits are integrated into area-wide strategies. The CCCM Cluster also conducts advocacy with recovery and development actors who may be able to provide additional support to local authorities and site managers in a more sustainable manner, upon the exit of humanitarian partners.

Exit Planning Process

Phase	Actions
Initiation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Notify the CCCM Cluster of intent to exit the CSs (minimum 4–6 weeks in advance). - Conduct internal analysis: reasons, funding, staffing, and timeline. - Identify planned exit sites and assess overlap with other actors.
Assessment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Review site services and gaps. - Conduct protection and vulnerability assessments. - Analyze resident intentions and access to sustainable solutions. - Identify alternative actors or referral mechanisms.
Coordination	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Engage CCCM Cluster, Shelter/Protection/Health clusters, and oblast/local administrations. - Plan site visits and inter-agency coordination meetings if needed. - Identify actors for potential handover and define responsibilities.
Communication	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Develop accessible messaging tailored to the site population. - Provide clear explanations of timeline, reasons for exit, and next steps. - Maintain and monitor two-way communication mechanisms (e.g., complaint boxes, community meetings).

Transition / Handover	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Engage local authorities or designated CCCM/Protection partners as key stakeholders in taking over governance, site management, or service provision, depending on their capacity and mandate. - Ensure capacity-building where needed. - Organize initial coordination meetings with local authorities to outline the scope of the transition, clarify roles and responsibilities, and agree on timelines. - Identify focal points within the authorities for each service area (e.g., site management, protection, WASH) to ensure continuity of communication.
Exit & Monitoring	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Finalize documentation (handover notes, service maps, contact lists). - If feasible, conduct a light post-exit monitoring or engage local partners to flag emerging risks. - Submit updates to CCCM Cluster and relevant coordination forums.

Documentation and Knowledge Sharing

To ensure accountability, institutional learning, and operational continuity, partners are strongly encouraged to document and share key information with the CCCM Cluster and relevant stakeholders prior to exit. This may include:

- Updated site profiles and basic population data
- Resident intention data (e.g., intention surveys, IDP profiling, vulnerability profiles)
- Service mapping and gap analysis
- Handover notes, follow-up actions, or recommendations
- Monitoring reports or evaluations
- List of on-site partners and focal points
- Tools and templates used: survey forms, SOPs, messages to residents
- Case studies: success stories and challenges, with key lessons learned

This documentation enables future planning, facilitates partner coordination, and supports evidence-based decision-making.

Risk Mitigation Measures

Prior to exit, partners are recommended to:

- Identify and flag vulnerable individuals or groups at risk of being left behind or losing access to services
- Ensure continuation or referral of essential services – flag to the Protection partner at area level (e.g., health, legal aid, GBV response, MHPSS)
- Maintain accurate, timely information about the exit to avoid misinformation and distress among residents.
- Escalate any unresolved protection concerns to the relevant sectors or the CCCM Cluster.

CCCM Cluster Role in Exit

- Convening coordination meetings to support planning and alignment
- Mediating handovers between partners, local authorities, and service actors
- Providing site-specific analysis and technical guidance
- Escalating critical issues or unresolved risks to higher coordination platforms
- Ensuring that exits are integrated into broader area-based response strategies

The Cluster remains available to provide tailored support and ensure that exits uphold the principles of protection, coordination, and sustainability.

Annex: Exit Checklist for Partners

1. Exit Preparation

- Notify CCCM Cluster of intent to exit (at least 4–6 weeks in advance)
- Conduct internal review (funding, program scope, staffing)
- Coordinate with local authorities and oblast administrations
- Review site-specific service mapping and identify gaps
- Conduct a protection risk assessment
- Update community focal points and governance structures

2. Communication & Coordination

- Inform site residents with clear, adapted messaging
- Share exit timeline, reasons, and post-exit options
- Ensure community feedback and complaints channels remain functional
- Coordinate with other actors on potential handover

3. Handover

- Transfer documentation (site data, assessments, referrals)
- Conduct joint field visits or coordination meetings
- Deliver any capacity-strengthening sessions for local actors
- Remove branding/logos only after coordination with CCCM Cluster
- Submit final update/report to CCCM Cluster (optional)