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International humanitarian aid management within the Global Shelter Cluster 2019-2023 - selected baselines and results

Zarządzanie międzynarodową pomocą humanitarną w ramach Global Shelter Cluster w latach 2019-2023 – wybrane podstawy i rezultaty

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Abstract. The subject of this article is the selected baselines and results of the management of international humanitarian aid within the Global Shelter Cluster (GSC). The article adopts the research objective of explaining the specialisation and effects of the GSC's activities in the system of international humanitarian aid for the period 2019-2023. The research gap addressed in the article is the development of international humanitarian aid implemented through the GSC in 2019-2023. The research problem is as follows: What were the selected bases and outcomes of international humanitarian aid provided through the GSC from 2019 to 2023? A hypothesis was formulated that the functioning of the GSC was based on developed cooperation and inter-agency coordination, which allowed reaching an increasing number of people affected by humanitarian crises, with significant differences in the funding of activities across countries. For the purposes of the article, research methods were used in the form of analysis of existing data (desk research), analysis of documents published by entities managing GSC activities, and a case study for the GSC as a cluster of international humanitarian aid in the UN institutional system.

The article shows that the functioning of the GSC is part of the implementation of the cluster approach in the international humanitarian system. The activities of the GSC were based on expanding the partner base and coordinating humanitarian assistance with UNHCR and IFRC. A distinction was made between Shelter Interventions (SI) and Non-Food Items Interventions (NFI). An increasing number of people affected by humanitarian crises were reached, while the funding gap for humanitarian operations in the GSC between 2019 and 2023 was reduced.

Keywords: coordination, GSC, international humanitarian aid, UN, management

Abstrakt. Przedmiotem artykułu są wybrane podstawy i rezultaty zarządzania międzynarodową pomocą humanitarną w ramach Global Shelter Cluster (GSC). W artykule przyjęto cel badawczy w postaci wyjaśnienia specjalizacji oraz efektów działań GSC w systemie międzynarodowej pomocy humanitarnej w latach 2019-2023. Niszą badawczą poruszoną w artykule jest rozwój międzynarodowej pomocy humanitarnej realizowanej za pośrednictwem GSC w latach 2019-2023. Problem badawczy brzmi następująco: Jakie były wybrane podstawy i rezultaty międzynarodowej pomocy humanitarnej świadczonej w ramach mechanizmów GSC w latach 2019-2023? Sformułowano hipotezę, zgodnie z którą funkcjonowanie GSC opierało się na rozwiniętej współpracy oraz koordynacji międzyagencyjnej, która pozwoliła na docieranie do coraz większej liczby osób poszkodowanych wskutek kryzysów humanitarnych, przy istotnym zróżnicowaniu finansowania działań w poszczególnych krajach. Na potrzeby artykułu wykorzystano metody badawcze w postaci analizy danych zastanych (desk research), analizy dokumentów opublikowanych przez podmioty zarządzające działaniami w ramach GSC oraz studium przypadku (case study) dla GSC jako klastra międzynarodowej pomocy humanitarnej w systemie instytucjonalnym ONZ. W artykule wykazano, że funkcjonowanie GSC wpisuje się w realizację podejścia klastrowego w systemie międzynarodowej pomocy humanitarnej. Działalność GSC opierała się na rozbudowywaniu bazy partnerów i koordynowaniu pomocy humanitarnej przy udziale UNHCR i IFRC. Rozróżniano operacje typu Shelter Interventions (SI) oraz Non-Food Items Interventions (NFI). Docierano do coraz większej liczby osób poszkodowanych wskutek kryzysów humanitarnych, zmniejszając jednocześnie lukę w finansowaniu operacji humanitarnych w GSC w latach 2019-2023.

Słowa kluczowe: koordynacja, GSC, międzynarodowa pomoc humanitarna, ONZ, zarządzanie

Introduction. Identification of a research gap

This article focuses on selected baselines and results of the management of international humanitarian aid within the Global Shelter Cluster (GSC). The issues are part of the popularisation of the so-called cluster approach in the delivery of international humanitarian aid when dealing with crises caused by armed conflict or natural disasters. The considerations are a kind of continuation of the previous articles, which dealt with selected baselines and results of the activities of the international community in two other humanitarian clusters, i.e. the Global Logistics Cluster (Landmann, Ślusarczyk, 2022) and the Emergency Telecommunications Cluster (Landmann, Zamiar, 2023).

The matter of the Global Shelter Cluster (GSC) has not yet been the subject of a case study in the Polish-language literature. Brief analyses or often single mentions of the GSC have been part of broader studies in the context of the international humanitarian system, in particular when describing the development of the cluster approach. This included both studies prepared by organisations and agencies coordinating GSC activities (IFRC, OCHA, 2015; Sanderson, Sharma, 2018), the World Bank (Jha et al., 2010), as well as authors researching strategies and solutions implemented in individual countries affected by humanitarian crises (Alshawwreh, 2020; Lines et al., 2022; Sanderson et al., 2014).

In a recent paper, Jennifer Ward George (2023) discussed the institutional underpinnings and reviewed documents and best practices for managing the GSC. Thomas Bamforth (2017), on the other hand, analysed the structure of the international humanitarian shelter and housing system in the aftermath of natural

disasters. Fiona Kelling (2020) presented the multiple impacts of the development of these centres on populations affected by humanitarian crises in recent decades. There are also studies in the academic literature on the dilemmas, challenges and lessons learned by the international community in developing humanitarian shelter more generally, often before the formal sanctioning of GSC structures (Burnell, Sanderson, 2011; Davis, 2011; Sanderson, Burnell, 2013; Saunders, 2004).

It is worth noting that the article deliberately omits terminological issues related to humanitarian shelter as a basis for analysing more specific concepts within GSC governance. This is due to the fact that the main related concepts have been discussed in numerous works (Brogden, Kennedy, 2020; George et al., 2023; Opdyke et al., 2021).

This article aims to fill the research gap related to the discussion of the achievements of the international community in the management of humanitarian aid in recent years, keeping in mind the interesting perspective of 2019-2023. Despite the numerous publications on different aspects of humanitarian assistance in the shelter cluster, there is no comprehensive analysis that takes into account the most recent results demonstrating the effectiveness of coordination mechanisms and, as a result, international cooperation at the GSC level, especially for the benefit of populations affected by humanitarian crises.

The article adopts the research objective of explaining the specialisation and effects of the GSC's activities in the system of international humanitarian aid for the period of 2019-2023.

The research problem is as follows: What were the selected bases and outcomes of international humanitarian aid provided through the GSC from 2019 to 2023?

A hypothesis adopted in the article is to recognize that the functioning of the GSC was based on developed cooperation and inter-agency coordination, which allowed reaching an increasing number of people affected by humanitarian crises, with significant differences in the funding of activities across countries.

The article is based on such research methods as analysis of existing data (desk research) (George, 2023; IFRC, OCHA, 2015; UNHCR, 2023), analysis of documents published by entities managing GSC activities (GSC, 2012; GSC, 2018; GSC, 2020; GSC, 2021; GSC, 2022; GSC, 2023; GSC, 2024a; GSC, 2024b), and a case study for the GSC as a cluster of international humanitarian aid in the UN institutional system (George, 2023; Landmann, Ślusarczyk, 2022; Landmann, Zamiar, 2023).

Fundamentals of the Global Shelter Cluster

The Global Shelter Cluster (GSC) is an Inter-Agency Standing Committee (IASC) coordination mechanism that assists people affected by natural disasters and internally displaced by armed conflict to secure their livelihoods in safe, dignified and

properly prepared shelter. The IASC was established in 1992 in response to United Nations General Assembly Resolution 46/182 of 19 December 1991, which called upon Member States to strengthen coordination mechanisms for the provision of international humanitarian assistance in emergency situations. At the IASC level, inter-agency decisions are made in response to complex decision-making situations in the management of humanitarian crises (Saez et al., 2021).

At the same time, the GSC functions as one of a dozen international humanitarian aid clusters in the UN institutional system. The aim of the cluster approach is to shape the standards and frameworks for international humanitarian assistance and to create the resources and capacities needed to provide operational support to humanitarian organisations (Korowajczyk-Sujkowska, 2016). The cluster approach expresses the need for sectorisation (specialisation) of international humanitarian assistance, taking into account the leadership functions of the various UN agencies (Clarke, Campbell, 2016). In the current system, there are the following clusters and their corresponding organisations and coordinating agencies:

- Food Security - World Food Programme (WFP) and Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO);
- Health - World Health Organization (WHO);
- Logistics - WFP;
- Nutrition - The United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF);
- Protection - The Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR);
- Shelter - The International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies (IFRC) and UNHCR;
- Water, Sanitation and Hygiene - UNICEF;
- Camp Coordination and Management Camp - International Organisation for Migration (IOM) and UNHCR;
- Early Recovery - United Nations Development Programme (UNDP);
- Education - UNICEF and Save the Children;
- Emergency Telecommunication - WFP (Paper, Keshvari, 2023).

The GSC has been operating since 2005 as a concrete support mechanism and inter-organisational space, bringing together organisations and humanitarian actors interested in providing safe shelter as part of a rapid response to a humanitarian crisis. The cluster is responsible for the construction and distribution of temporary shelters, the provision of the necessary building materials and, at a later stage - and as far as possible on the ground - helping the affected population to rebuild their homes and public buildings. The activities are classified as so-called Shelter Interventions (SI), also known as Shelter Operations (SO), Shelter Activities (SA) or Emergency Shelter (Zwęglinski, Stefańska, 2021).

The second main objective and type of assistance is the distribution of non-food assistance, classified as non-food items (NFIs). These are necessities such as various shelter items (tents, tarpaulins, building materials), household items (e.g. bedding, blankets, sleeping mats, mosquito nets, kitchen utensils), tools and repair kits, personal hygiene items, clothing and lighting items (Rohwerder, 2014). The scientific literature (Korowajczyk-Sujkowska, 2016) indicates that the activities implemented within the GSC are closely coordinated with parallel efforts implemented in humanitarian clusters such as Camp Coordination and Camp Management and Early Recovery.

The management of international humanitarian assistance under the GSC in the years under review was part of the Strategy 2018-2022 (GSC, 2018), with 2023 as an interim year for the development of a new strategic option for 2024-2028 (GSC, 2024a). The strategic mission of the GSC was chosen to collectively support people affected by crises to live in safe, dignified and adequate shelter and settlements. In addition to the IFRC and UNHCR, key agencies and organisations involved in the planning and implementation of the GSC are Agence d'Aide à la Coopération Technique et au Développement (ACTED), CARE International, Catholic Relief Services, Danish Refugee Council, Habitat for Humanity, Save the Children, Australian Red Cross, InterAction, Norwegian Refugee Council and the International Organisation for Migration (IOM). The GSC Strategy 2018-2022 was based on four pillars, namely:

- coordination (to prepare an effective and responsible response to humanitarian crises);
- advocacy (to shape support in the international community for humanitarian shelter and settlements);
- evidence-based response (to shape responses to crises by using resources, best practices and lessons learned from resolving previous crises);
- capacity (with a view to developing the GSC's capacity to address both current and future challenges in humanitarian management) (GSC, 2018).

The implementation of the above objectives was accompanied by a focus on several leading functions of international humanitarian assistance delivery and management within the GSC. These included:

- people-centred humanitarian response;
- localising humanitarian response;
- capacity building to improve the quality;
- preparedness;
- prioritising the most vulnerable;
- quality and scale;
- mainstreaming cross-cutting issues;
- recovery coordination;

- supporting self-recovery;
- area-based coordination and settlement programming (GSC, 2018).

Shelter management within the GSC framework is based on the corresponding extended entity structure shown in Figure 1.

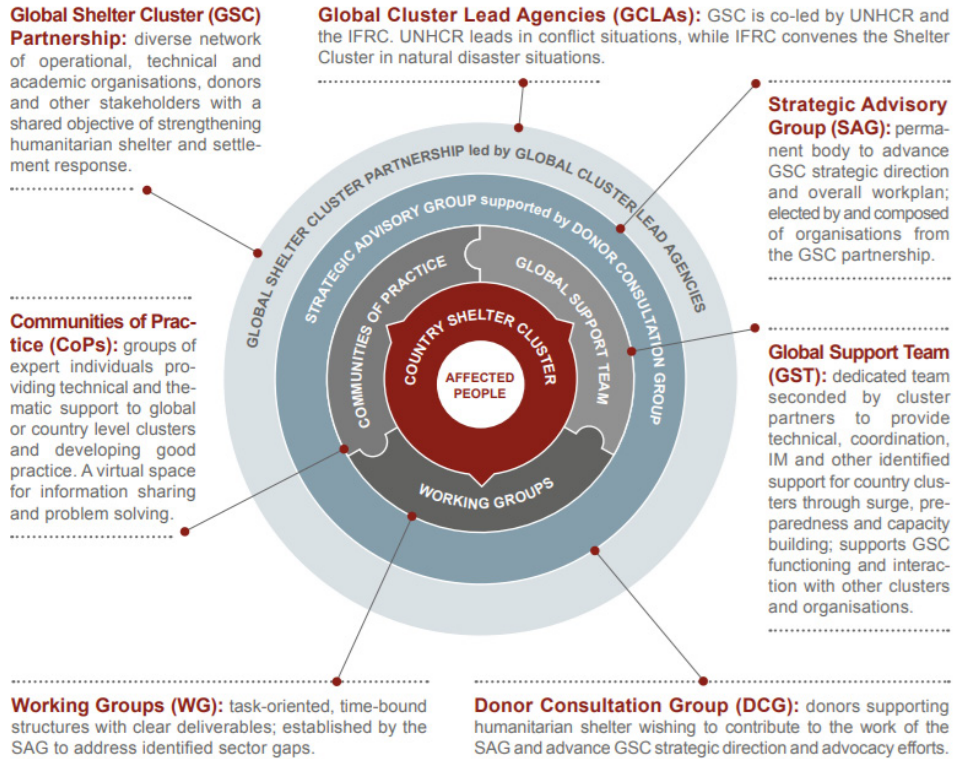


Fig. 1: GSC entity structure for 2019-2023

Source: GSC, 2018

Figure 1 illustrates the complexity of actor-object linkages that characterise the GSC structure. The GSC Partnership is a network of organisations and donors and all stakeholders involved in the development of forces and resources within the cluster to strengthen humanitarian protection and respond to the needs of affected civilians. The Global Cluster Lead Agencies (GCLAs) is a leadership structure that takes into account the different specialisations of UNHCR and IFRC - for crises caused by armed conflict and natural disasters respectively. In addition, the GSC structure includes the Strategic Advisory Group (SAG) as a permanent body for the development and implementation of strategic directions and the overall work plan for responding to humanitarian crises.

Another entity is the Global Support Team (GST), which acts as a team delegated by the cluster partners to ensure support to the country clusters and to ensure an appropriate level of cooperation and coordination with other organisations and clusters in the management of international humanitarian assistance. The GSC also relies on the activities of the Donor Consultation Group (DCG), which brings together donors supporting the GSC. The last two links of the cluster described are the Working Groups (WGs) and the Communities of Practice (CoPs). The former are task-oriented, time-bound structures with clear deliverables established by the SAGs to address identified sectoral gaps. CoPs, on the other hand, are groups of experts that provide technical and thematic support to clusters at global or national level, develop good practices and provide a space for information exchange and problem solving through electronic tools (GSC, 2018).

The deployment of personnel and resources within the GSC is based on a process of planning and assessing temporary shelters in response to a specific humanitarian crisis. This allows the humanitarian community to understand the needs of the affected population and to identify priorities and possible gaps in the GSC's operations (GSC, 2012). Once operational at the national level, the GSC is responsible for coordinating shelter and NFI delivery activities in collaboration with cluster partners, other clusters and national authorities to effectively assist affected populations in crisis. The coordination of a humanitarian operation in the GSC requires the appointment of a full-time coordination officer and a full-time information management officer in the humanitarian operation. Other coordination positions, such as an information manager, a technical coordinator or sub-national coordinators, are usually also required. In addition to post-crisis operations, the GSC promotes disaster risk reduction measures through the appropriate design and construction of settlements and shelters for the population, as well as risk analysis for housing and land maintenance (UNHCR, 2023).

The implementation of the GSC's intentions involves the division of activities into two basic phases. The first is the preparedness/pre-crisis phase, while the second is the post-emergency phase. Prior to the launch of GSC activities, objectives such as understanding the humanitarian needs of the population and the possibility of establishing humanitarian shelters in the country and region, familiarising the teams with the specifics of the GSC activities themselves, and the initial identification of GSC partners, including in particular governments and local actors, with the necessary contacts are established. Once the GSC activities have been initiated, the first task is to form a cluster coordination team, depending on the UNHCR or IFRC leadership. The next step is to define the terms of reference of the national shelter cluster, in co-leadership with government agencies and NGO partners. An important step remains the establishment of the Strategic Advisory Group (SAG)

as a team of experts responsible for developing and adapting the GSC's strategic framework, priorities and work plan in the context of a specific humanitarian crisis. This will be accompanied by the development of an appropriate information management framework under conditions of harmonisation of information sharing systems among the partners involved in the GSC (UNHCR, 2023).

In the post-emergency phase, UNHCR and IFRC update the GSC strategy and develop more detailed methodologies and tools for humanitarian crises, working closely with other actors in this cluster. The objective of the post-emergency phase is to ensure an efficient, harmonised and effective response to humanitarian crises and to support the efforts of the international community and host countries to mobilise resources. It also aims to identify appropriate technical approaches and solutions based on best practice, needs and delivery capacity. The performance of the GSC is measured against a number of key criteria. These include supporting service delivery, informing strategic decision-making, planning and implementing strategies, monitoring and evaluating performance, or building national capacity for crisis preparedness and planning. Equally important criteria include supporting strong advocacy and planning for accountability to those affected by a humanitarian crisis (UNHCR, 2023).

Selected results of international humanitarian aid management in the GSC

The basis for maintaining the international community's willingness to effectively manage international humanitarian aid in the GSC is the maintenance of a network of partners participating in cluster activities (Fig. 2).

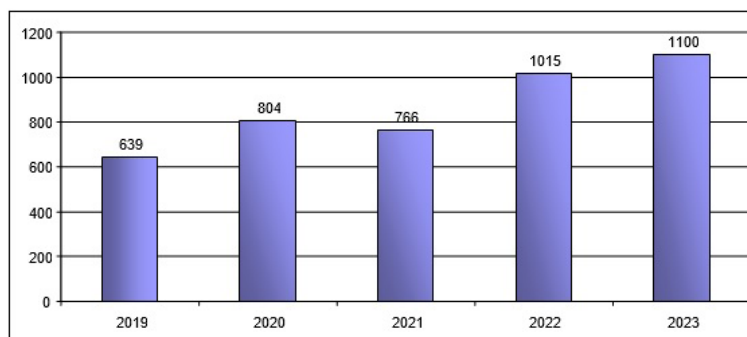


Fig. 2. Number of partners participating in GSC humanitarian operations between 2019 and 2023

Source: GSC, 2020; GSC, 2021; GSC, 2022; GSC, 2023; GSC, 2024b

The trend of an increasing number of partners participating in GSC activities is evident from the data in Figure 2. Between 2019 and 2023, there was a growth rate of 72.14% - an increase from 639 to 1,100 actors. The number of partners involved in responding to humanitarian crises within the GSC grew steadily throughout the period, except for a brief dip in 2020-2021. The cluster management assessed that 2023 was a special year in the context of shaping the new strategy to be finalised in 2024. The development of the largest network of partners corresponded to the strengthening of the capacity to respond to humanitarian needs in different parts of the world (GSC, 2024b).

It is worth noting how the number of humanitarian operations implemented by the GSC through active country clusters in response to humanitarian crises has changed over the years studied (Fig. 3).

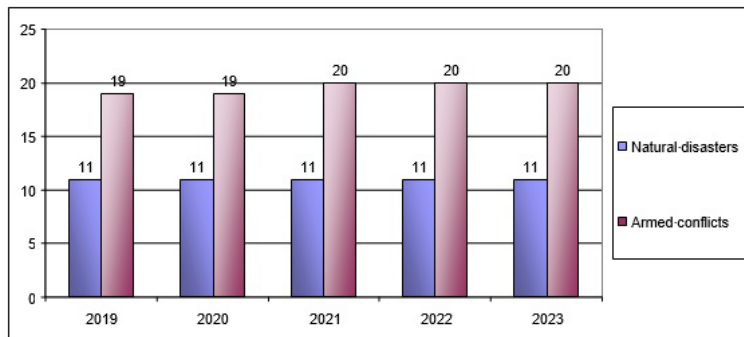


Fig. 3: Number of humanitarian operations carried out under the GSC between 2019 and 2023 - broken down by main type of operation

Source: GSC, 2020; GSC, 2021; GSC, 2022; GSC, 2023; GSC, 2024b

The data in Figure 3 show that in 2019-2020, the management of humanitarian aid through the GSC involved 30 operations, while in 2021-2023 it involved 31 operations. The lack of significant differences can be explained by the fact that the implementation period of each operation was generally spread over several years, which was particularly the case for operations in situations of armed conflict. In each of the years analysed, operations of a similar type accounted for almost two thirds of all operations carried out under the GSC. This suggests a higher workload for UNHCR compared to IFCR in the management of GSC activities.

Figure 4 shows the number of humanitarian operations under the GSC by world region.

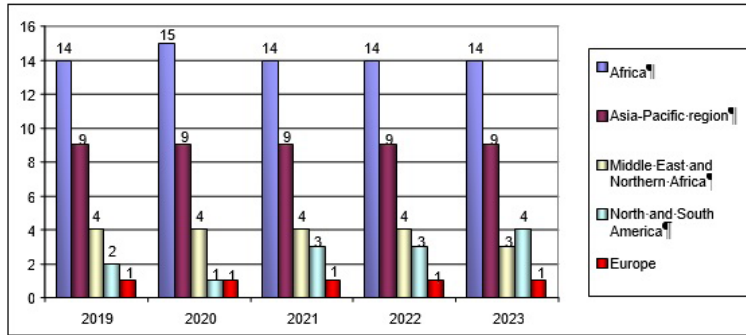


Fig. 4. Number of GSC humanitarian aid operations from 2019 to 2023 - by world region

Source: GSC, 2020; GSC, 2021; GSC, 2022; GSC, 2023; GSC, 2024b

The data collected in Figure 4 show that Africa remained the region most affected by humanitarian crises in each successive year, which influenced the direction of engagement of humanitarian actors within the GSC. Operations in African countries, excluding the MENA region, accounted for between 45% and 50% of all humanitarian operations. Operations in the Asia-Pacific region came second, with a share of between 29% and 30%. The Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region accounted for more than one in ten humanitarian operations. The Americas were slightly less involved, with Ukraine being the only European country on the list.

The number of people assisted by the GSC changed significantly over the years studied (Fig. 5).

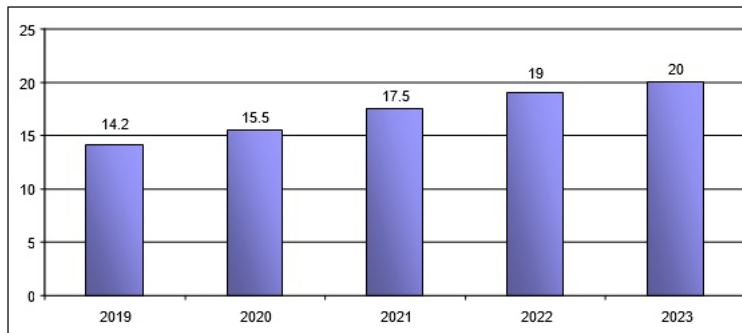


Fig. 5: Number of people benefiting from humanitarian aid under the GSC from 2019 to 2023 (estimates, in millions)*.

Source: GSC, 2020; GSC, 2021; GSC, 2022; GSC, 2023; GSC, 2024b

* - to avoid overlap, data based on the highest number of beneficiaries for either NFI or shelter (SI) per country (if no total figure has been provided for the number of people reached)

The data presented in Figure 5 shows that the growth rate of the number of people receiving humanitarian aid through the GSC was 40.84% (from 14.2 million in 2019 to over 20 million in 2023). Moreover, the distribution of humanitarian aid covered more and more people each year, indicating a systematic increase in humanitarian needs worldwide.

Humanitarian aid in the GSC was distributed through two types of operations, namely Shelter Interventions (SI) and Non-Food Items Interventions (NFI), as shown in Table 1.

Table 1. Number of people assisted by GSC humanitarian aid - comparison for 2019 and 2023 by selected countries (in thousands).

COUNTRY	2019		2023	
	SI*	NFI**	SI	NFI
Syria	900	2900	1400	2400
Ukraine	12	22	1000	2300
Yemen	786	1200	2000	1800
Afghanistan	209	575	484	1100
Ethiopia	125	1500	1500	2300
Democratic Republic of the Congo	243	1200	953	1800
Sudan	9	343	950	1400
Palestine	2	1,6	250	1700
Myanmar	48	ND	603	1100
Somalia	179	436	1100	1100
Burkina Faso	105	215	421	614
Nigeria	357	344	1500	1700
South Sudan	442	864	583	1100
Venezuela	14	25	142	134
Iraq	122	347	ND	ND

Source: GSC, 2020; GSC, 2021; GSC, 2022; GSC, 2023; GSC, 2024b

* SI - Shelter Interventions

* NFI - Non-Food Items Interventions

According to the data in Table 1, Syria remained the country with the highest number of beneficiaries of humanitarian aid distributed through the GSC - this was particularly true for NFI-type assistance. At the same time, the number of SI beneficiaries increased significantly (from 900,000 to 1.4 million), while the number of NFI beneficiaries decreased from 2.9 million to 2.4 million. Moreover, both

types of humanitarian operations were particularly common in countries such as Yemen, Afghanistan, Ethiopia and the Democratic Republic of Congo. However, the dynamic nature of the changing threats and humanitarian needs in these countries makes it difficult to establish lasting routines in this area. This is well illustrated by the example of Ukraine, where 12,000 people benefited from SI and 22,000 from NFI in 2019, while the scale of the armed conflict with the Russian Federation increased these figures to 1.0 million and 2.3 million respectively in 2023.

The level of funding for the implementation of humanitarian operations in the GSC also varied over the years studied (Table 2).

Table 2. Amount of funding for humanitarian operations under the GSC for 2019-2023 by selected countries (USD million)

COUNTRY	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023	TOTAL
Syria	153	367	320	107	520	1467
Ukraine	9	0,5	3	432	525	969.5
Yemen	25	72	87	51	250	485
Afghanistan	32	35	59	112	188	426
Ethiopia	16	35	86	117	125	379
Democratic Republic of the Congo	7	26	75	77	134	319
Sudan	4	15	16	15	212	262
Palestine	4	8	16	12	209	249
Myanmar	5	6	5	19	124	159
Somalia	9	18	12	21	85	145
Burkina Faso	16	12	16	10	69	123
Nigeria	8	7	7	35	57	114
South Sudan	24	9	12	14	35	94
Venezuela	9	2	7	7	54	79
Iraq	58	8	5	7	-	78

Source: GSC, 2020; GSC, 2021; GSC, 2022; GSC, 2023; GSC, 2024b

According to the data in Table 2, the particularly high demand for humanitarian aid in Syria corresponded to the amount of funding for GSC activities implemented in the country (almost USD 1.5 billion). Syria ranks first in terms of funding raised in 2019-2021, while it ranks fourth and second in 2022 and 2023, respectively. Other countries with humanitarian funding approaching or exceeding \$250 million include Ukraine (969.5), Yemen (485), Afghanistan (426), Ethiopia (379), the Democratic Republic of the Congo (319), Sudan (262) and Palestine

(249). It is important to note the particular increase in the value of funding for humanitarian operations in Ukraine as a result of the armed conflict with the Russian Federation. While funding for GSC operations in the country closed at \$12.5 million in 2019-2021, it exceeded \$957 million in 2022-2023 alone. This illustrates the difficulty of forecasting the cluster's funding needs in advance, even more so in regions that were previously at low risk of major humanitarian crises. A similar phenomenon also limits the effectiveness of the management of humanitarian operations, with the risk of widening the funding gap for such operations. The size of such a gap between 2019 and 2023 is shown in Figure 6.

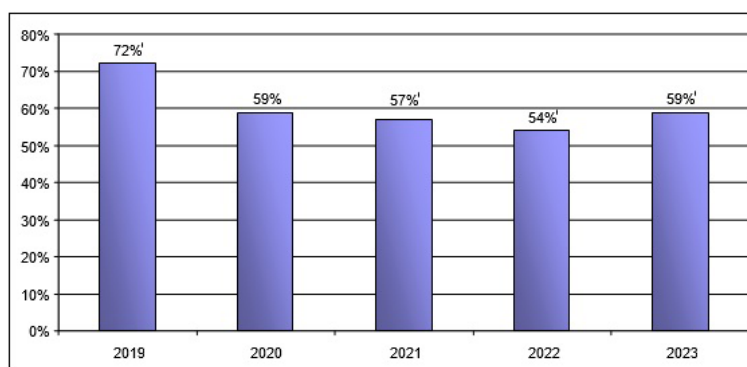


Fig. 6. Funding gap in GSC humanitarian operations 2019-2023 (in %)

Source: GSC, 2020; GSC, 2021; GSC, 2022; GSC, 2023; GSC, 2024b

The data in Figure 6 show that GSC contributors to humanitarian operations have managed to significantly reduce the funding gap for operations between 2019 and 2023. The funding gap steadily decreased from 72% to 54% between 2019 and 2022, only to increase to 59% in 2023. However, it continues to indicate a significant mismatch between actual funding needs and the income generated to fund humanitarian operations.

Moreover, the size of the gap varied considerably between countries (Table 3).

Table 3. GSC humanitarian operations funding gap 2019-2023 - by selected countries (%)

COUNTRY	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023
Syria	72	36	38	80	35
Ukraine	67	98	88	9	44
Yemen	89	69	58	77	34
Afghanistan	34	71	46	70	48
Ethiopia	80	65	38	16	50

cd. tab. 3

Democratic Republic of the Congo	96	62	54	46	96
Sudan	84	48	82	82	44
Palestine	72	21	5	81	26
Myanmar	79	73	87	63	38
Somalia	86	64	80	64	53
Burkina Faso	43	61	73	81	31
Nigeria	87	90	89	42	54
South Sudan	20	75	65	59	80
Venezuela	0	96	85	87	15
Iraq	22	81	87	85	-

Source: GSC, 2020; GSC, 2021; GSC, 2022; GSC, 2023; GSC, 2024b

According to the data in Table 3, the size of the funding gap for humanitarian operations under the GSC has taken on varying values across countries. It has additionally undergone dynamic changes over time in the example of many countries. This is well illustrated by the example of Ukraine, where the gap ranged from 9% to 98%, indicating in the first case that the majority of humanitarian needs were met, while in the second case that the majority of those in need of shelter or non-food items could not be covered. A similar phenomenon was reported for countries such as Venezuela (gap between 0% and 96%), Palestine (gap between 5% and 81%), Iraq (gap between 22% and 87%) or Ethiopia (gap between 16% and 80%). There was not a single country in the presented comparison in which the value of the analysed indicator systematically decreased. This illustrates the continued difficulty in meeting the needs of populations affected by humanitarian crises in terms of shelter and access to non-food items between 2019 and 2023. This illustrates the continued difficulty in meeting the needs of populations affected by humanitarian crises in terms of access to shelter and non-food items between 2019 and 2023.

The presented research findings are innovative since they allow a practical application of the cluster approach in delivering international humanitarian aid during and after the Covid-19 pandemic. The analysis enables the identification of humanitarian operations in terms of Shelter Interventions (SI) and Non-Food Items Interventions (NFI), as well as the outcomes of humanitarian operations in various regions and countries worldwide. The article also encourages further discussions on the financing of international humanitarian aid within the cluster approach. The practical contribution of the article includes highlighting the need to intensify the reduction of the funding gap for humanitarian operations in the GSC.

Conclusions

On the basis of the arguments presented, the following final conclusions can be drawn:

The governance of international humanitarian assistance under the GSC conforms to the rules and modalities characteristic of the cluster approach, which is widespread in the UN institutional system. It also has a strategic dimension, as reflected in the implementation of the GSC Strategy 2018-2022.

The improvement of the GSC's operations in 2019-2023 required the inclusion in this cluster of more partners involved in humanitarian operations in general. This request was successfully met, while the importance of the GSC became somewhat more apparent when dealing with crises caused by armed conflicts rather than natural disasters.

During the years under review, there was an increased need for humanitarian funding under the GSC, as evidenced by a number of lead recipient countries. This corresponded to an increase in the risks posed by the two main causes of humanitarian crises, i.e. armed conflicts and natural disasters.

The increase in the value of humanitarian funding provided through the GSC has been accompanied by a reduction in the global humanitarian funding gap, although this pattern has not been consisted for many individual countries. On this basis, it is important to recognise that there are significant disparities in the extent to which the humanitarian needs of civilians are being met in different countries.

Reducing the funding gap for humanitarian operations within the GSC seems to be one of the basic assumptions for the development of the sector also after 2023, especially in the area of advocacy, i.e. for the interest of more organisations and actors to participate in the cluster.

On the basis of the arguments presented, the hypothesis was confirmed that the functioning of the GSC in the years under study was based on a developed cooperation and inter-agency coordination, which made it possible to reach an increasing number of people affected by humanitarian crises, with significant differences in the funding of activities between countries. The development of GSC activities required the formation of national shelter clusters, with the identification of appropriate mechanisms for coordination, information sharing and aid delivery. The years 2019-2023 were characterised by an increase in the number of people successfully reached by SI and NFI humanitarian interventions. However, despite improved outcomes, there was still a large funding gap for similar assistance through the GSC. In this context, the implementation of a new policy option for 2024-2028 represents an opportunity to respond to the increasing challenges in the operation of this cluster. The basis of the arguments presented, the hypothesis that the functioning of the GSC was based in the years under study on developed cooperation and inter-agency coordination, which allowed reaching an increasing number of people

affected by humanitarian crises, with significant variations in funding of activities across countries, was confirmed. The development of GSC activities required the shaping of national shelter clusters, with the identification of appropriate mechanisms for coordination, information sharing and aid delivery. The years 2019-2023 were marked by increasing numbers of people successfully delivered through SI and NFI humanitarian operations. However, despite improved achievements, there was still a large funding gap for similar assistance through the GSC. The implementation of a new policy option for 2024-2028 represents an opportunity under these conditions in response to increasing challenges in the operation of this cluster.

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