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THE STATE OF THE HUMANITARIAN SYSTEM

2022 EDITION

ALNAP is a global network of humanitarian organisations, including UN agencies, members of the Red Cross/Red Crescent Movement, NGOs, donors, academics, networks and consultants dedicated to learning how to improve the response to humanitarian crises.

sohs.alnap.org

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online at: alnap.org/help-library/2022-sohs-biblio**

BOXES, TABLES AND FIGURES

ACRONYMS

AAP accountability to affected populations

ALNAP Active Learning Network for Accountability and Performance

CATI computer-assisted telephone interviewing

CBPF country-based pooled funds

COVID-19 novel coronavirus 2019

CRRF Comprehensive Refugee Response Framework

CRW Crisis Response Window

CVA cash and voucher assistance

DAC Development Assistance Committee of the OECD

DG-ECHO Directorate-General for European Civil Protection and Humanitarian Aid Operations

DRC Democratic Republic of the Congo

DRR disaster risk reduction

FAO Food and Agriculture Organization

FCV Fragility, Conflict and Violence

FGD focus group discussions

FTS Financial Tracking Service

GBV gender-based violence

GCR Global Compact on Refugees

GHRP Global Humanitarian Response Plan

GRF Global Refugee Forum

H2H humanitarian to humanitarian

HCT Humanitarian Country Team

HNO Humanitarian Needs Overview

HDP humanitarian–development–peace

IAHE Inter-Agency Humanitarian Evaluation

IASC Inter-Agency Standing Committee

ICRC International Committee of the Red Cross

IDA International Development Association

IDPs internally displaced people

IFRC International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies

IHA international humanitarian assistance

IRC International Rescue Committee

JIAF Joint Intersectoral Analysis Framework

KII key informant interview

LCRP Lebanon Crisis Response Plan 2021

LGBTQI lesbian, gay, bisexual, trans, queer, intersex

LMICs low- and middle-income countries

LNA local and national actor

MSF Médecins Sans Frontières

NFI non-food item

NGO non-governmental organisation

ODA official development assistance

OECD Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development

PPE personal protective equipment

PSEAH prevention of sexual exploitation, abuse and harassment

SCHR Steering Committee for Humanitarian Response

SEA sexual exploitation and abuse

SGBV	sexual and gender-based violence	**UNICEF**	United Nations Children's Fund
SMS	Short Message Service	**USAID**	United States Agency for International Development
SOHS	*The State of the Humanitarian System* (report)	**WFP**	World Food Programme
		WHO	World Health Organization
UN OCHA	United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs	**WHR**	Window for Host Communities and Refugees
UN	United Nations	**WHS**	World Humanitarian Summit
UNHCR	United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees	**WVI**	World Vision International

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

A READER'S GUIDE TO THIS REPORT

Over the past four years, humanitarian action has been challenged and stress-tested in both new and familiar ways. Fundamental questions are resurfacing about what the humanitarian system is for, what its place is in the wider social fabric, and how well it is performing. The findings in this 2022 edition of *The State of the Humanitarian System* (SOHS) report have been organised around these core questions, with three fundamental ones framing the report: What is the system? What is it achieving? How is it working?

As we spoke to aid recipients and aid practitioners during our 18-month research period, we heard a clear demand to examine the state of the humanitarian system against the central expectations that people have of it – not only against the criteria and technical areas by which it tends to measure itself. Based on this feedback, we have adopted a different structure for this report – one that allows us to broaden the issues explored and the framework we use to explore them.

The 12 chapters in this edition of the SOHS each present evidence in order to answer a key question about the state of the system. The report begins with an overview of the changing global context between 2018 and 2021 and is interspersed with six 'Focus on' sections, five of which examine the system's performance against a specific global challenge and one that highlights wider networks of support for people affected by crisis. In the conclusion we look back at the system's progress over the five editions of the SOHS, and look ahead at its fitness for the future.

While adapting the framing for this 2022 SOHS, we have maintained the rigorous research methods and analytical framework used in previous editions. This allows us to track changes in the system over the past 15 years.* Our methodology – and how we have continued to upgrade it – are set out in the introduction and the annex. In the conclusion, we also summarise progress over time against the DAC criteria.

Readers of this report come from many different professional, personal, organisational and geographic backgrounds and will be looking for information on a broad range of important, cross-cutting issues. Many of these – for example, locally led action – will have their own dedicated chapter, but they may also be discussed elsewhere in the report. **To help you find the information you need, we have developed a quick user guide that highlights key topics.** It is not a comprehensive index of all topic areas and their individual mentions, rather it signposts to substantive discussions on select issues. **Key findings from across the report can also be found in the separate executive summary.**

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*   2007 was the beginning of the first SOHS study period covered in the 2010 pilot report.

With each edition, the SOHS report evolves thanks to the engagement of people across the system – from crisis-affected populations to practitioners and policymakers. In the heat of cascading crises and urgent response, it can often be difficult to step back and take the long view. We hope that the 2022 edition of the SOHS gives you both the evidence and the opportunity to reflect on the state of the system now and how it has changed over the past 15 years, enabling informed action as the system seeks to address future challenges.

Topics	Where to find them
Crises and threats	
Climate change	> Chapter 1: Global trends and crises > Chapter 7: Does the system cause harm? > Is the system fit for the future?
Conflict	> Chapter 1: Global trends and crises > Chapter 7: Does the system cause harm? > Chapter 11: Does the system uphold its principles? > Is the system fit for the future?
COVID-19	> Chapter 1: Global trends and crises > Focus on: COVID-19
Displacement	> Chapter 1: Global trends and crises > Focus on: Forced displacement
Food security and famine	> Chapter 1: Global trends and crises > Chapter 3: Is there enough aid? > Focus on: Hunger > Is the system fit for the future?
Protracted crises	> Chapter 3: Is there enough aid? > Focus on: Resilience in protracted crises > Chapter 12: Does the system connect with longer-term priorities?
Organisation, culture and values	
Coordination	> Chapter 9: Does the international system enable local action? > Chapter 10: Does the system use resources efficiently? > Chapter 12: Does the system connect with longer-term priorities?
Diversity, equity and inclusion	> Chapter 2: What is the shape and size of the humanitarian system? > Chapter 4: Does humanitarian support reach the right people? > Chapter 5: Do humanitarians provide the right kind of support? > Chapter 8: Does the system treat people with dignity?

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Organisation, culture and values	
Humanitarian principles	> Chapter 11: Does the system uphold its principles? > Focus on: Active conflict
Leadership	> Chapter 2: What is the shape and size of the humanitarian system? > Chapter 11: Does the system uphold its principles?
Resources and modalities	
Anticipatory/ early action	> Chapter 6: Does humanitarian action work? > Is the system fit for the future?
Cash programming	> Chapter 5: Do humanitarians provide the right kind of support? > Chapter 6: Does humanitarian action work? > Chapter 8: Does the system treat people with dignity? > Chapter 10: Does the system use resources efficiently?
Humanitarian financing	> Chapter 2: What is the shape and size of the humanitarian system? > Chapter 6: Does humanitarian action work? > Chapter 9: Does the international system enable local action? > Chapter 10: Does the system use resources efficiently?
Needs and needs assessment	> Chapter 3: Is there enough aid? > Chapter 4: Does humanitarian support reach the right people? > Chapter 5: Do humanitarians provide the right kind of support? > Chapter 8: Does the system treat people with dignity?
Technology and innovation	> Chapter 7: Does the system cause harm? > Chapter 10: Does the system use resources efficiently? > Is the system fit for the future?
Sectors	
Early recovery	> Chapter 3: Is there enough aid? > Focus on: Resilience in protracted crises > Chapter 12: Does the system connect with longer-term priorities?
Education	> Chapter 6: Does humanitarian action work?
Food and nutrition	> Chapter 1: Global trends and crises > Chapter 3: Is there enough aid? > Focus on: Hunger > Is the system fit for the future?

Topics	Where to find them
Sectors	
Health	> Chapter 1: Global trends and crises > Focus on: COVID-19
Logistics	> Chapter 6: Does humanitarian action work? > Chapter 10: Does the system use resources efficiently?
Protection	> Focus on: COVID-19 > Chapter 6: Does humanitarian action work?
Shelter	> Chapter 6: Does humanitarian action work?
WASH	> Chapter 6: Does humanitarian action work?
Relationships and partnerships	
Decolonisation	> Chapter 1: Global trends and crises > Chapter 2: What is the shape and size of the humanitarian system? > Chapter 9: Does the international system enable local action?
Localisation	> Focus on: Support beyond the system > Chapter 9: Does the international system enable local action? > Chapter 10: Does the system use resources efficiently?
Humanitarian–development–peace nexus	> Focus on: Resilience in protracted crises > Chapter 12: Does the system connect with longer-term priorities?
Survivor/community-led crisis response	> Focus on: Support beyond the system > Chapter 9: Does the international system enable local action?
Risks and impediments	
Access	> Chapter 4: Does humanitarian support reach the right people? > Chapter 11: Does the system uphold its principles? > Focus on: COVID-19 > Focus on: Active conflict
Aid diversion	> Chapter 4: Does humanitarian support reach the right people? > Chapter 7: Does the system cause harm? > Chapter 10: Does the system use resources efficiently?

Topics	Where to find them
Risks and impediments	
Aid worker security	> Chapter 4: Does humanitarian support reach the right people? > Chapter 9: Does the internaitonal system enable local action? > Chapter 11: Does the system uphold its principles? > Focus on: Active conflict
Accountability and inclusion	
Age	> Chapter 4: Does humanitarian support reach the right people? > Chapter 5: Do humanitarians provide the right kind of support? > Chapter 8: Does the system treat people with dignity?
Communication, feedback and accountability	> Chapter 4: Does humanitarian support reach the right people? > Chapter 5: Do humanitarians provide the right kind of support? > Chapter 7: Does the system cause harm? > Chapter 8: Does the system treat people with dignity?
Disability	> Chapter 4: Does humanitarian support reach the right people? > Chapter 5: Do humanitarians provide the right kind of support?
Gender and sex	> Chapter 4: Does humanitarian support reach the right people? > Chapter 5: Do humanitarians provide the right kind of support? > Chapter 8: Does the system treat people with dignity?
LGBTQI	> Chapter 4: Does humanitarian support reach the right people? > Chapter 5: Do humanitarians provide the right kind of support?
Sexual exploitation and abuse (SEA)	> Chapter 7: Does the system cause harm? > Chapter 8: Does the system treat people with dignity?

INTRODUCTION

Introduction

Humanitarian action provides a lifeline to people during some of the hardest moments of their lives. And for those who have experienced the worst that conflict and disaster can inflict, it can provide a flickering reminder of humanity. People can die even in the most effective humanitarian responses, including those who risk their lives to deliver them. For many others, humanitarian assistance becomes a mainstay, shaping their lives and opportunities over decades. With such high stakes, humanitarians have an obligation to learn and improve. This applies equally to the largest international agencies and the smallest local civil society actors.

ALNAP's *The State of the Humanitarian System* report (SOHS) supports this learning by monitoring changes in the shape and size and performance of the international humanitarian system. The SOHS is a unique, independent longitudinal study that gathers and synthesises evidence to form a picture of the system and assess how well it meets the needs of people affected by crises. There have been four previous editions of the report, beginning with a pilot study in 2010. This fifth edition covers the period from January 2018 to December 2021 inclusive.

The last edition of the SOHS, published at the start of 2018, charted a three-year period during which the humanitarian system made a set of high-profile commitments to change; the World Humanitarian Summit and Grand Bargain on humanitarian financing followed a suite of global summits on climate change, disaster risk reduction and sustainable development. In the four years covered by this 2022 edition of the SOHS, these high-level intentions were stress-tested against the realities of implementation as they faced both the constraints of the humanitarian system and the challenges of turbulent crises – not least those stemming from the COVID-19 pandemic.

Objectives and approach

This report explores how organisations managed to deliver against the promise of humanitarian action during this period. We aim to answer the following questions, focusing on the evidence in the study period and drawing on previous editions of the SOHS to take a long view:
- **What was the context and need for humanitarian action?**
- **What was the size and shape of the humanitarian system?**
- **How has the humanitarian system performed?**

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These objectives are consistent with previous editions of the SOHS, which allows us to make comparisons over time. Our approach, however, has evolved in three important ways:

1. **Looking outside the formal system:** The international humanitarian system is just one of many sources of support for people and communities in crisis. This report seeks to better recognise this wider array of resources, dedicating a section to them in the SOHS for the first time ('Focus on: Support beyond the system' section). Chapter 9 also addresses the effectiveness of the international humanitarian system in supporting local and nationally led action

2. **Deepening the participation of affected people in SOHS research:** In assessing humanitarian action, the SOHS has always relied on interviews and focus group discussions with recipients of assistance. This time, for the first time, we consulted aid recipients on the design of the research itself, asking people in three different response contexts what should be included in the SOHS assessment. On the basis of *their* views, we adjusted our preliminary research questions and data collection plans, which led to greater emphasis in this edition on their priority issues: targeting, corruption, do no harm and accountability to affected populations.

3. **Presenting analysis in a policy- and practice-relevant format:** Previous editions of the SOHS have been organised around the evaluation criteria set out by the Development Assistance Committee of the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD DAC) (see Box A). These criteria provide a useful framework but a narrow perspective on humanitarian performance. Some stakeholders for the SOHS report, such as local NGOs and affected communities, suggested that the system was assessing itself on its own terms, while others, such as headquarters-based humanitarians, felt the criteria did not fully capture the issues that were most pressing for them. In response to this feedback and in line with other humanitarian evaluations – which remain a key source of evidence for the SOHS – we present this edition's findings as answers to a core set of policy and practical questions. A longitudinal overview of system performance against the DAC criteria is also provided in the conclusion of the report.

Scope and method

Definitions

Humanitarian action is the principled provision of assistance and protection in order to save lives, prevent and reduce suffering and preserve people's dignity in crises arising from armed conflict, hazards and other causes.[1] Humanitarian action is international when these activities involve resources (financial, technical or in-kind) provided by sources in one country to respond to a crisis in another. International humanitarian action excludes responses that are fully resourced within the country experiencing the crisis, which fall within the domain of domestic crisis management.

The SOHS study team adopts a working definition of the international humanitarian system as:

> *The network of interconnected institutional and operational entities through which humanitarian action is undertaken when local and national resources are, on their own, insufficient to meet the needs of a population in crisis.*

These entities are operationally or financially related to each other and share common overarching goals, norms and principles. The international humanitarian system is international in the sense that it is cross-border, and humanitarian in the sense that at least one actor involved in its funding or delivery self-identifies with the goals, norms and principles of humanitarianism. These entities may be funded by governments as well as private individuals, and include national and international NGOs conducting humanitarian activities; UN humanitarian agencies; the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement; host government agencies and authorities; regional intergovernmental agencies; multilateral agencies; government aid agencies; and other offices that provide humanitarian funding and coordination.

Figure 1: Inside and outside the international humanitarian system – the entities involved in humanitarian action

The international humanitarian system is comprised of entities that accept international funding and identify with humanitarian norms or principles. They operate in a wider context of other sources of support for crisis-affected people.

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Development actors

Survivors and community-led response groups

Peace actors

Local philanthropist

The International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement

Government agencies

Other donors

Local and national NGOs

UN humanitarian agencies

Donors

Trusts

Affected communities

Diaspora groups

Host communities

National Disaster Management Authorities (NDMAs)

Governments

Militaries and civil defence groups

International NGOs

Host governments

Humanitarian arms of regional intergovernmental organisations

Academics

Faith groups

Private-sector entities

Civil society groups

Media

Entities comprising the international humanitarian system, for which humanitarian aid provision is their primary mandate

Entities that play a critical role in humanitarian response but humanitarian action is not their core function

Source: ALNAP.

Note: The size of the circles in this visualisation are not to scale and are therefore not representative of each entity's role or importance in the system.

Research components and methods

Findings are drawn from 10 research components, using a combination of primary data collection and secondary data synthesis. Data collection across the components was integrated using a shared research framework, which can be found in Annex 3.

Primary data collection and analysis	
Country-level research	Focus group discussions (FGDs) and key informant interviews (KIIs), along with gathering relevant context-specific documentation and observations, were conducted in Bangladesh (Cox's Bazar), Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC), Ethiopia, Lebanon, Venezuela and Yemen.
Country studies on localisation	Two country-level studies, commissioned by ALNAP, on localisation in Turkey and Somalia, featuring surveys and in-depth interviews with local and international actors.
Aid recipient survey	A survey of 5,487 aid recipients in six crisis contexts, using SMS and computer-assisted telephone interviewing (CATI) to elicit their assessment of humanitarian performance.
Practitioner and host government survey	A global web-based survey, with 436 completed responses, to elicit the perceptions of humanitarian practitioners and host-government representatives on humanitarian performance.
Key informant interviews	Interviews with humanitarian practitioners and thought leaders to assess performance, identify important trends and address key evidence gaps.
Organisational mapping and analysis	Data collected from individual organisations and through desk-based review to estimate the number of humanitarian staff and organisations worldwide.
Thematic research	Two original studies, commissioned by ALNAP, to assess the state of evidence on mortality in humanitarian settings and to understand the impact of innovation funding.

Synthesis of secondary data	
Evaluation synthesis	A synthesis of findings from humanitarian evaluations published between 2018 and 2022 in the ALNAP HELP library. Over 500 humanitarian evaluations were assessed for inclusion with over 130 evaluations chosen for more in-depth analysis.
Financial analysis	ALNAP worked with experts in humanitarian financing to analyse data and produce statistics on humanitarian financing.
Literature review	ALNAP reviewed over 250 research reports and academic work published within the study period on a set of 15 themes related to humanitarian policy and practice.

Using approaches common to mixed method studies,[2] the SOHS study team identified general trends and findings through a consideration of frequency, quality and triangulation across research components. To rigorously synthesise such a large volume of variable data, the research components shared a coding framework and the analysis process used iterative hypothesis testing. Emerging data was shared and gaps identified in routine meetings with the component leads – enabling hypotheses to be developed and tested, and further data collection to be targeted to confirm or disconfirm these. The full methodology for each component and the synthesis is in Annex 3.

Report limitations and pervasive data gaps

Identifying general trends and findings for so many humanitarian responses over a four-year period is inherently challenging, particularly given the fact that no sample can truly be considered 'representative' of the entirety of such a vast system. And even when using a shared indicator framework, it is difficult to avoid the problem of data comparability that is common to mixed method approaches.[3]

The foreword to the 2010 SOHS pilot study notes that, 'Almost as important as what the report says, is what it does not say'.[4] Persistent and pervasive data gaps continue to limit this report's ability to provide clear, definitive assessments on key performance issues – such as how many people humanitarian assistance reaches, whether humanitarian action saves lives and protects people, and how cost-effective responses are. For this edition of the report ALNAP went to new lengths to locate or generate this data, but it is clear that addressing these gaps requires system-wide resources and effort beyond what can be achieved for a single research project – even one as long running and large in scope as the SOHS.

There have been repeated calls for the humanitarian system to improve its evidence base, in each edition of the SOHS and by many others the system.[5] The stretch on limited humanitarian funding described in this report is likely to mean a continued deprioritisation of knowledge production, monitoring and evaluation and data quality and accessibility. This is at the system's own peril. Better evidence could not only guide more effective improvements to performance, but also help to demonstrate the system's value in the context of global economic strains and rising costs of crises.

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2   Mieke Heyvaert, Bea Maes and Patrick Onghena, 'Mixed methods research synthesis: Definition, framework, and potential', *Quality & Quantity* 47, no. 2 (February 2013): 659–76 www.alnap.org/help-library/mixed-methods-research-synthesis-definition-framework-and-potential; Robert K. Yin, *Case Study Research: Design and Methods*, 5th ed. (New York: SAGE Publications, 2013). www.alnap.org/help-library/case-study-research-design-and-methods.

3   Heyvaert, Maes and Onghena, 'Mixed Methods Research Synthesis'. www.alnap.org/help-library/mixed-methods-research-synthesis-definition-framework-and-potential.

4   ALNAP, *The State of the Humanitarian System: Assessing Performance and Progress* (London: ALNAP, 2010), 5. www.alnap.org/help-library/the-state-of-the-humanitarian-system-assessing-performance-and-progress-alnap-pilot.

5   e.g., Fred Carden, Teresa Hanley and Anna Paterson, *From Knowing to Doing: Evidence Use in the Humanitarian Sector* (London: ELRHA, 2021). www.alnap.org/help-library/from-knowing-to-doing.

Report structure

The report begins with a framing chapter, which looks at how the context for humanitarian action has changed over the period studied. The analysis of the system's changing shape and performance is then presented in three parts:

Part 1: What is the system?
Describes the size, shape and resources of the humanitarian system, and gives an overview of support available to crisis-affected people outside this system. It examines the financial resources available for meeting humanitarian need over the study period, and whether these were sufficient.

Part 2: What is it achieving?
Assesses the humanitarian system on how it is meeting a core set of expectations for its performance: whether it reaches the 'right' people, whether it offers the right forms of support, whether it works and whether it inadvertently causes harm.

Part 3: How is it working?
Summarises the evidence on how the system is improving its ways of working, including its relationships with others. It covers how humanitarian actors treat crisis-affected people, how internationals relate to local actors, how the system connects with development and peace actors, how it upholds humanitarian principles, and how well it uses resources.

A series of **focus studies** are included throughout the report. These look at major global challenges to the humanitarian system – including conflict, hunger, protracted crises, forced displacement and links to wider crisis support – and summarise how the system has responded. The studies draw on evidence from across the report, additional research and original country case studies conducted for the SOHS by local researchers.

The **conclusion** summarises changes in the system's performance against the OECD DAC criteria and how this has shifted since previous reports. It draws out implications from the report's findings for the system's ability to meet future crises and challenges.

Box A: The SOHS performance criteria, adapted for use from the OECD-DAC criteria used in humanitarian settings (ALNAP/Beck, 2006)

- **Sufficiency:*** The degree to which the resources available to the international humanitarian system are sufficient to cover humanitarian needs.

- **Coverage:** The degree to which action by the international humanitarian system reaches all people in need.

- **Relevance and appropriateness:** The degree to which the assistance and protection that the international humanitarian system provides addresses the most important needs of recipients (as judged both by humanitarian professionals and by crisis-affected people themselves).

- **Accountability and participation:*** The degree to which actors within the international humanitarian system can be held to account by crisis-affected people, and the degree to which crisis-affected people are able to influence decisions related to assistance and protection.

- **Effectiveness:** The degree to which humanitarian operations meet their stated objectives, in a timely manner and at an acceptable level of quality.

- **Efficiency:** The degree to which humanitarian outputs are produced for the lowest possible amount of inputs.

- **Coherence:** The degree to which actors in the international humanitarian system act in compliance with humanitarian principles and IHL, and the degree to which they are able to influence states and non-state armed groups to respect humanitarian principles and conform to IHL.

- **Complementarity:*** The degree to which the international humanitarian system recognises and supports the capacities of national and local actors, in particular governments and civil society organisations.

- **Connectedness:** The degree to which the international humanitarian system articulates with development, resilience, risk reduction and peacebuilding.

- **Impact:** The degree to which humanitarian action produces (intentionally or unintentionally) positive longer-term outcomes for the people and societies receiving support.

Criteria are underlined to reflect that they are original DAC evaluation criteria included in the ALNAP guidance.[6] Criteria listed with an * are issues traditionally assessed under other DAC criteria which, for the purposes of the SOHS, we have pulled out to examine in more detail.

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6   Tony Beck, Evaluating humanitarian action using the OECD-DAC criteria: An ALNAP guide for humanitarian agencies (London: ALNAP/ODI, 2006). www.alnap.org/help-library/evaluating-humanitarian-action-using-the-oecd-dac-criteria.

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Chapter 1: Global trends and crises

The past four years have been a period of significant global turbulence. As UN Secretary-General António Guterres grimly summarised:

> 'Our world has never been more threatened. Or more divided. We face the greatest cascade of crises in our lifetimes. The COVID-19 pandemic has super-sized glaring inequalities. The climate crisis is pummelling the planet. Upheaval from Afghanistan to Ethiopia to Yemen and beyond has thwarted peace. A surge of mistrust and misinformation is polarizing people and paralyzing societies.'[7]

This turbulence has increased the demand for humanitarian action and re-emphasised the importance of international assistance. At the same time, major social and political shifts have forced a reappraisal of the relevance, purpose and identity of the models and institutions that provide it.

Crises

COVID-19

The COVID-19 pandemic drastically altered the scale and geography of humanitarian need, and the capacity of economies to support populations at home and abroad. It challenged old models of response and catalysed new ones.

By the end of 2021, an estimated 5.4 million people were reported to have died after contracting COVID-19, and the number of people infected had reached 300 million.[8] After factoring in unreported deaths and the indirect effects on societies and health systems, overall excess mortality was in fact much higher, with approximately 14.9 million people dying between January 2020 and December 2021.[9]

7   UN Secretary-General's Address to the 76th Session of the UN General Assembly (New York: United Nations, 2021). www.alnap.org/help-library/secretary-general%E2%80%99s-address-to-the-76th-session-of-the-un-general-assembly.

8   WHO, Weekly Epidemiological Update on COVID-19, 28 December 2021 (World Health Organization, 2021). www.alnap.org/help-library/weekly-epidemiological-update-on-covid-19-28-december-2021.

9   WHO, Global Excess Deaths Associated with COVID-19, January 2020 – December 2021 (World Health Organization, 2022). www.alnap.org/help-library/global-excess-deaths-associated-with-covid-19-january-2020-december-2021.

Initially, the pandemic appeared to invert assumptions of where crises happen:[10] 75% of reported deaths were in Europe and the Americas, and just 3% in Africa. Infection and direct mortality rates were three times higher in high-income countries,[11] and wealthy countries prioritised their own populations for vaccines and response. Yet more recent excess mortality data tells a different story – that deaths in high-income countries represented less than one-sixth of the global death toll, the brunt of which – nearly 53% – was estimated to be borne by lower-middle-income countries.[12]

The social and economic shockwaves of the pandemic were felt sharply across the world, in all areas of life – from education to health to domestic violence. Gains in poverty reduction were reversed, with an estimated 97 million people falling below the extreme poverty line.[13] Although Western governments increased their financial contributions to address the humanitarian impacts of the pandemic, it placed pressure on support to other crises. As the fiscal fall-out reverberates and is compounded by the war in Ukraine, the future impacts on international aid may be long-lasting.

Climate and disaster

While the pandemic spread, existing risks and threats did not abate. The planet continued to heat up – the seven years between 2015 and 2021 were the warmest on record, and average temperatures in 2021 were 1.2°C higher than in the pre-industrial period.[14] As temperatures and sea levels rose, the volatility and number of extreme weather-related disasters increased: the 2022 IPCC report found strong evidence that climate change is contributing to humanitarian crises – including driving increases in displacement, food insecurity and malnutrition.[15] Weather-related disasters overlapped with other risks to deepen

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10   Another study found that fragile states were less affected: Yuqi Duan et al., 'State fragility and the coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) pandemic: An ecologic analysis of data from 146 countries', *Global Health Journal* 5, no. 1 (2021): 18–23. www.alnap.org/help-library/state-fragility-and-the-coronavirus-disease-2019-covid-19-pandemic-an-ecologic-analysis.

11   Ariel Karlinsky and Dmitry Kobak, 'The World Mortality Dataset: Tracking excess mortality across countries during the COVID-19 pandemic', preprint (*Epidemiology*, 2021). www.alnap.org/help-library/the-world-mortality-dataset-tracking-excess-mortality-across-countries-during-the-covid.

12   WHO, *Global Excess Deaths*. www.alnap.org/help-library/global-excess-deaths-associated-with-covid-19-january-2020-december-2021.

13   Carolina Sánchez-Páramo et al., 'COVID-19 leaves a legacy of rising poverty and widening inequality' (Blog), World Bank, 7 October 2021. www.alnap.org/help-library/covid-19-leaves-a-legacy-of-rising-poverty-and-widening-inequality.

14   IPCC, *Summary for Policymakers – Climate Change 2021: The Physical Science Basis. Contribution of Working Group I to the Sixth Assessment Report of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change* (Cambridge, UK/New York, US: Cambridge University Press, 2021). https://www.alnap.org/help-library/summary-for-policymakers-climate-change-2021-the-physical-science-basis-contribution-of.

15   IPCC, *Summary for Policymakers – Climate Change 2022 Impacts, Adaptation and Vulnerability Working Group II Contribution to the Sixth Assessment Report of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change* (Cambridge UK: Cambridge University Press, 2022). www.alnap.org/help-library/summary-for-policymakers-climate-change-2022-impacts-adaptation-and-vulnerability.

complex emergencies, and were yet another shock for people affected by COVID-19. By September 2020, 51.6 million people globally were recorded as being directly affected by an overlap of floods, droughts or storms and the pandemic.[16]

Figure 2: Global frequency of climate-related disasters, 2017–2021

The total number of climate-related disasters has increased year on year since 2018. The majority of reported disasters over the last four years were related to flooding.
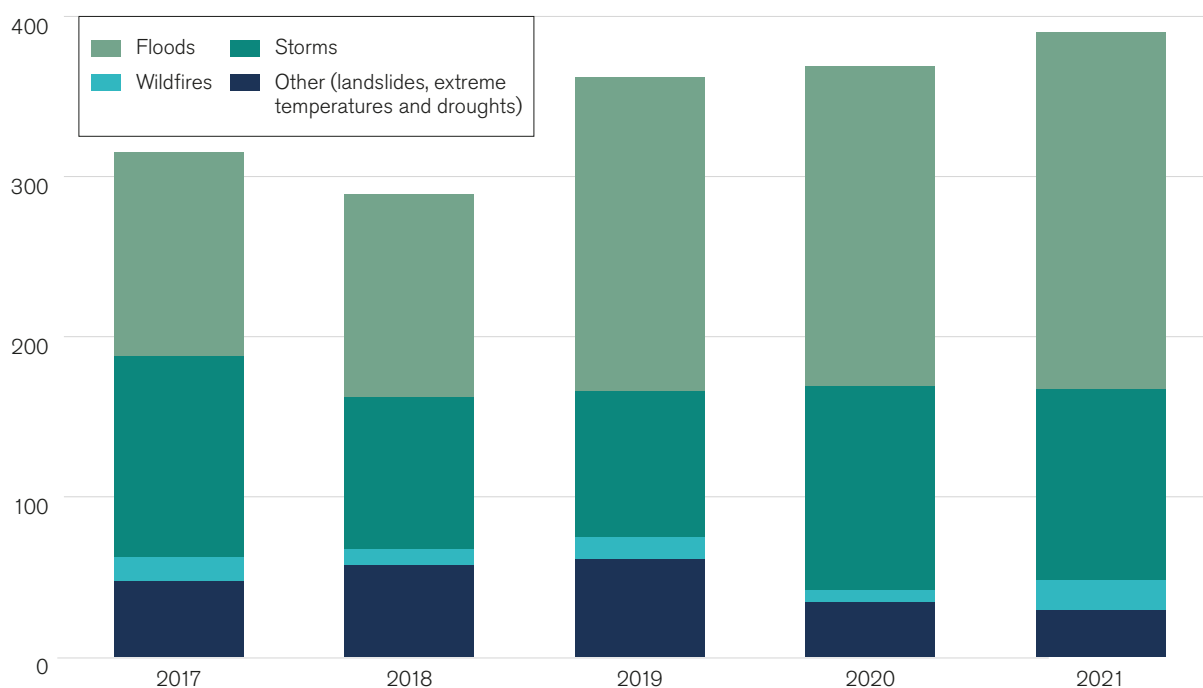
Source: EM-DAT, CRED / UCLouvain, Brussels, Belgium.

Conflicts

Protracted conflict continued to dominate the humanitarian caseload, driving up hunger and creating difficult operating contexts as the system faced the dual pressures of stretched resources and threats to humanitarian space. By the end of the study period, conflict in Syria had entered its second decade and in Yemen, its seventh year. These were the two largest humanitarian crises,[17] but episodic and chronic violence continued in other contexts, including DRC, Iraq, Sudan and the Sahel. In 2020 and 2021, despite calls by the UN Secretary-General for a global COVID-19 ceasefire,

16   Dan Walton and Maarten van Aalst, *Climate-Related Extreme Weather Events and COVID-19: A First Look at the Number of People Affected by Intersecting Disasters* (Geneva: IFRC, 2020). www.alnap.org/help-library/climate-related-extreme-weather-events-and-covid-19-a-first-look-at-the-number-of.

17   At least in terms of the size of country/regional humanitarian appeals.

two major new conflict escalations – in northern Ethiopia and Myanmar – pushed millions more civilians into humanitarian crisis. In Afghanistan, over 20 years of Western military intervention ended abruptly with the withdrawal of US troops. The speed at which the Taliban subsequently seized power shocked the world and left large parts of the population – particularly women and girls – deprived of rights, basic services and livelihoods.

While the regional and global implications of events in Ethiopia and Afghanistan left international leaders reconsidering old geopolitical assumptions, this was soon eclipsed by the Russian invasion of Ukraine in February 2022. Although the war in Ukraine was outside the period of study for this edition of the SOHS, it casts a shadow over all our findings in ways that are yet to be fully understood. In the months since it began, the conflict has created large-scale humanitarian needs, prompted a pivot in attention by Western donors away from other regions and crises, and begun a new reckoning with international norms about war.

Displacement

Even before the war in Ukraine, which caused a new spike in the number of people forced to flee their homes, displacement was already at its highest ever level , driven by both conflict and disasters. The vast majority of people were displaced within their own countries, rather than crossing borders; by the end of 2021, there were an estimated 53.2 internally displaced people (IDPs) and 27.1 million refugees.[18] While disasters remained the predominant cause of internal displacement, in 2021 conflict-induced internal displacement reached its highest level in a decade.

The rise in number of refugees had slowed before the crisis in Ukraine, due in part to the border restrictions imposed during the COVID-19 pandemic. But it did not stop, with new displacement outpacing durable solutions. By far the largest population displacement during the study period was from Venezuela, which saw 4.1 million people flee the deepening crisis and made Colombia the second-largest host country after Turkey.

Developing countries still hosted an estimated 85% of refugees. Meanwhile, many high-income countries continued to find ways to shirk their responsibilities. The Ukraine war may have since altered policies and attitudes – but primarily for refugees fleeing that particular crisis. At the start of the study period, global leaders agreed to a Global Compact on Refugees to improve the sharing of responsibility. And yet soon after, borders in Europe and North America closed, exacerbated by the COVID-19 crisis,[19] and the world witnessed a paucity from Afghanistan, and even the political 'weaponisation' of displaced populations on the Belarusian border.[20]

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18   This is the UNHCR (2022) Global Trends. Forced Displacement in 2021. www.unhcr.org/62a9d1494/global-trends-report-2021.

19   Glyn Taylor et al., *Joint Evaluation of the Protection of the Rights of Refugees during the COVID-19 Pandemic* (Geneva: UNHCR, 2022). www.alnap.org/help-library/joint-evaluation-of-the-protection-of-the-rights-of-refugees-during-the-covid-19.

20   Mark Galeotti, 'How Migrants Got Weaponized. The EU Set the Stage for Belarus's Cynical Ploy', *Foreign Affairs*, 2 December 2021. www.alnap.org/help-library/how-migrants-got-weaponized-the-eu-set-the-stage-for-belarus%E2%80%99s-cynical-ploy.

Figure 3: Number of people forcibly displaced, 2011–2021

The number of people living in forced displacement has grown every year since 2011, reaching 89.3 million in 2021. In that year, an estimated 53.2 million people were displaced in their own countries and 27.1 million were refugees.
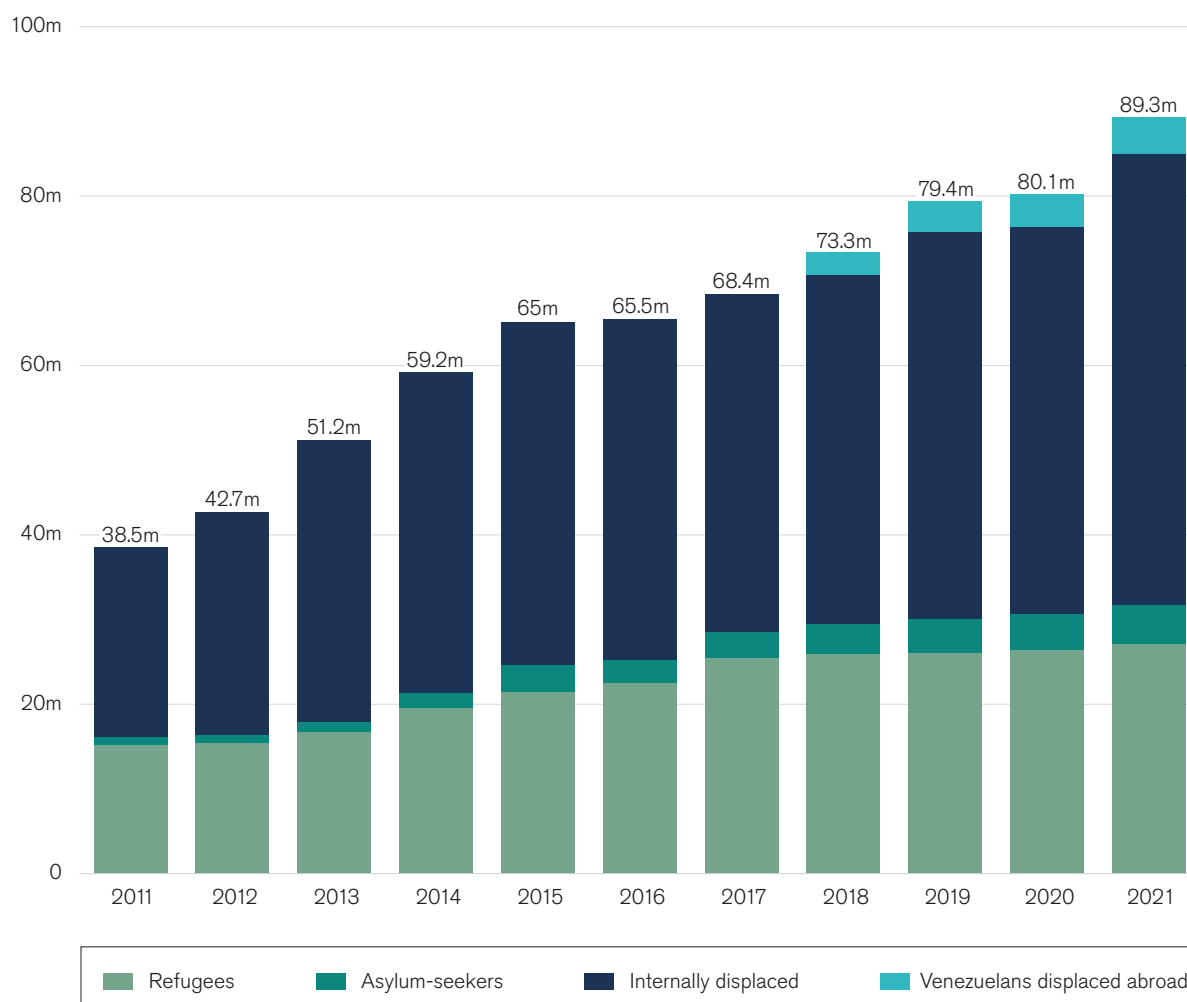
Source: UNHCR Global Trends, June 2022. Notes: The refugee category combines both refugees under the responsibility of UNHCR and UNRWA.

Notes: 'Venezuelans displaced abroad' refers to persons of Venezuelan origin who are likely to be in need of international protection under the criteria contained in the Cartagena Declaration, but who have not applied for asylum in the country in which they are at present.

Complex and widespread needs

Combined, this 'cascade of crises' resulted in growing humanitarian needs. As populations faced compounding threats, government capacity or political will dwindled and long-term development investments proved elusive in many fragile contexts, the number of people requiring the last resort of international humanitarian aid continued to increase. According to the UN Humanitarian Needs Overview (HNO), the number of people in need of humanitarian assistance rose by 70% in the four years between 2018 and 2021 – from 122 million people to 218 million. Of course, as we explore in Chapter 3, these can only be imperfect estimates of need:

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the needs the humanitarian system 'sees' is coloured by how, where and at what it is looking. Nonetheless, the extreme deprivation experienced by each of these millions of individuals and families cannot be underestimated and the pressure this puts on the international response is very real.

Geopolitics

Multilateralism

Geopolitical shifts both intensified these crises and rendered theinternational 'community' more impotent to prevent and respond effectively. Throughout the research for this report – in interviews with frontline workers and top diplomats and in published literature – two themes came up again and again: the decline of multilateralism and the shrinking of civil society space.

The Russian invasion of Ukraine undoubtedly created a major new rift in international relations, but divisions between Russia, China and the West were already playing out in crises around the world, from Syria to Myanmar, paralysing the UN Security Council and compromising concerted global action on climate change. If COVID-19 and the climate crisis were the litmus tests of global solidarity and unity over this period, the results were not good. Both demanded concerted global action to find responses and solutions to global problems, yet in both cases, national self-interest largely prevailed. No unified global leadership emerged to tackle the pandemic and the 'catastrophic moral failure' of wealthy countries to equitably share COVID-19 vaccines was one that, according to the head of the World Health Organization (WHO), was set to be 'paid with lives and livelihoods in the world poorest countries'.[21] When it came to climate change, many saw a similar lack of global solidarity in the absence of hard agreements by rich high-emitting countries to take financial liability for loss and damage in the poorer countries bearing the brunt of rising temperatures, sea levels and disasters.[22]

Civic space

At the same time, autocracy and 'strongman' politics were on the rise in many countries.[23] Our sources across the world felt that there had been a palpable shift in the extent to which national governments were emboldened to flout the human rights of their citizens and reject the norms of humanitarian action. Tracking by the Varieties of Democracy Institute found that 'dictatorships

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21   WHO, 'WHO Director-General's Opening Remarks at 148th Session of the Executive Board', 2021. www.alnap.org/help-library/who-director-general%E2%80%99s-opening-remarks-at-148th-session-of-the-executive-board.

22   See, e.g., Saleemul Huq, 'Why COP26 Failed to Address Loss and Damage from Climate Change', *OECD Development Matters*, 25 January 2022. www.alnap.org/help-library/why-cop26-failed-to-address-loss-and-damage-from-climate-change.

23   S Gideon Rachman, *The Age of the Strongman: How the Cult of the Leader Threatens Democracy Around the World* (Vintage Publishing, 2022).

were on the rise and harbour 70% of the world's population'[24] and that, globally, levels of democracy and freedom of expression were deteriorating.[25] Democratic backsliding appeared to both be virus-affected and to go viral. The COVID-19 pandemic provided cover for civil rights violations and restrictions in many countries.[26] Meanwhile it seemed that 'assertive governments' were learning from one another in their tactics and positions against humanitarian norms.[27] The rise in attacks and deliberate blocks on aid, detailed in Chapter 4, are in many cases testament to this.

Misinformation bolstered social polarisation and the populist agendas of many autocratic regimes – and social media continued to hasten the pace and reach of this. Governments were found to be increasingly using misinformation to manipulate opinion at home and abroad, and polarisation rose to 'toxic' levels in 40 countries, contributing to the empowerment of anti-pluralist leaders.[28] A combination of government surveillance and technology firms' models of 'surveillance capitalism'[29] has affected both the incidence of humanitarian crises and the acceptance of international humanitarian efforts. Studies and testimonies have made the link between Facebook's algorithms, which reward and promote extreme content, and ethno-political conflicts in Cameroon,[30] Ethiopia and Myanmar, where social media was used as a tool 'for command and control, intelligence, denunciation of traitors, and attacks against adversaries'.[31] Social media also became a means of spreading distrust and misinformation about international humanitarian actors, making it more difficult and dangerous for them to operate.

24   Vanessa A Boese et al., *Autocratization Changing Nature? Democracy Report 2022* (University of Gothenburg: V-Dem Institute, 2022). www.alnap.org/help-library/autocratization-changing-nature-democracy-report-2022.

25   According to the definitions elaborated and measured by the Varieties of Democracy (V-Dem) Institute at the University of Gothenburg. Boese et al., *Democracy Report 2022*. www.alnap.org/help-library/autocratization-changing-nature-democracy-report-2022.

26   According to Alizada et al. (2021), 'Most democracies acted responsibly but 9 democracies register major and 23 moderate violations of international norms; 55 autocratic regimes engaged in major or moderate violations and 2/3 of all countries imposed restrictions on the media' (Nazifa Alizada et al., *Autocratization Turns Viral: Democracy Report 2021* (University of Gothenburg, V-Dem Institute, 2021). www.alnap.org/help-library/autocratization-turns-viral-democracy-report-2021.

27   Global key informant interview.

28   Boese et al., *Democracy Report 2022*. www.alnap.org/help-library/autocratization-changing-nature-democracy-report-2022.

29   Shoshana Zuboff, *The Age of Surveillance Capitalism: The Fight for a Human Future at the New Frontier of Power* (London: PublicAffairs, 2019). www.alnap.org/help-library/the-age-of-surveillance-capitalism-the-fight-for-a-human-future-at-the-new-frontier-of .

30   Jane Esberg, 'What the Facebook whistleblower reveals about social media and conflict', International Crisis Group, 18 November 2021. www.alnap.org/help-library/what-the-facebook-whistleblower-reveals-about-social-media-and-conflict.

31   Stein Tønnesson, Min Zaw Oo and Ne Lynn Aung, 'Pretending to be states: The use of Facebook by armed groups in Myanmar', *Journal of Contemporary Asia* 52, no. 2 (2021): 200–225. www.alnap.org/help-library/pretending-to-be-states-the-use-of-facebook-by-armed-groups-in-myanmar.

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According to Civicus, the global civil society alliance, even while the last decade has seen sustained crackdown on and constriction of civil society space, so it has also seen the rise of new forms of civil society action. From Extinction Rebellion to Black Lives Matter movements to protests in Myanmar, Malawi and Hong Kong, new generations of activists are mobilising new forms of mass action and resistance.[32] As the 'Focus on: Support beyond the system' section explores, new networks and new forms of community-based action arose as a result of the pandemic, with community support stepping in to meet people's needs.

Humanitarianism

> **If the last SOHS covered a period of big summits and global agreements, this SOHS covers the period in which those words were put to the test.**

If the last SOHS covered a period of big summits and global agreements, this SOHS covers the period in which those words were put to the test. In a burst of multilateralism between 2015 and 2018, global leaders signed a suite of agreements intended to reduce deprivation, disasters and displacement and boost the international community's ability to work together to address them. These included the Paris Agreement on Climate Change, the Sustainable Development Goals, the Sendai Framework on Disaster Risk Reduction and, most crucial to the humanitarian system, the Global Compacts on Refugees and Migrants, the World Humanitarian Summit (WHS) and the Grand Bargain on humanitarian financing. Yet, despite calls from affected populations, governments and civil society, wholesale change did not materialise. As the system turned to implement these commitments, it invested significantly and made progress in some areas, while neglecting other reforms or finding them much harder to realise than expected, prompting some to wonder 'Did anyone actually read what they're signing up to?'.[33] In the absence of strong monitoring systems for the WHS, progress was mainly assessed by self-reporting of activities against commitments rather than outcomes achieved.[34]

But the world did not stand still as signatories attempted to deliver on their commitments: external events catalysed calls for the system to change more profoundly and quickly. Reignited discussions of racism and colonialism prompted critical questions about the roots, function and working models of Western-led humanitarian action. As Chapter 2 explores, these challenged the system to address power imbalances and discrimination within and between organisations and in relationships with crisis-affected populations.

32   Andrew Firmin, Inés Pousadela and Mandeep Tiwana, *State of Civil Society Report* (Johannesburg: CIVICUS, 2021). www.alnap.org/help-library/2021-state-of-civil-society-report.

33   Jessica Alexander, 'Renewing the Grand Bargain, Part 2: Old Goals, a New Path', The New Humanitarian, 11 June 2021. www.alnap.org/help-library/renewing-the-grand-bargain-part-2-old-goals-a-new-path.

34   ALNAP, *The State of the Humanitarian System 2018* (London: ALNAP, 2018). www.alnap.org/help-library/the-state-of-the-humanitarian-system-sohs-2018-full-report.

Crisis-affected people[35] articulated their own expectations of what crisis support should look like, asking for more assistance in maintaining or improving livelihoods, education and other aspects of their lives beyond short-term survival. New attention to improving the 'nexus' between humanitarian, development and peace support sought to address this, but in the absence of other investments, humanitarians continued to be called on to provide basic services and address chronic vulnerabilities – balancing this against immediate life-saving response. Agencies were also challenged to reconcile resources and mandates with a greater demand for services like cash and protection that crossed agencies and sectors. This was part of a set of wider changes in expectations of the humanitarian system, which have been accumulating over the past decade, raising questions about the scope and focus of the humanitarian ambition.

The decision by the Nobel Committee to award its 2020 Peace Prize to one of the largest humanitarian agencies, the World Food Programme, was an important, albeit brief, affirmation of the moral necessity of humanitarian aid and principled humanitarian action. This was a high-point for humanitarian public relations in a period where the system struggled to tell the best story about itself, or to adjust its traditional narrative, which increasingly came under attack for being tone-deaf in its victimisation of crisis-affected communities.[36] In the course of our research, many people suggested that renewed questions about the place of humanitarianism were resulting in heightened confusion within the international humanitarian community, and antagonism towards it. As one policy expert put it, this was 'missing the point about international solidarity, solidarity between people and helping each other being a fundamental part of the humanitarian endeavour'. Another explained that, while questions are important, it is more imperative than ever to have clarity on the essential purpose of humanitarian action as part of a social contract for a fair, global society: 'It is part of the social contract. And the social contract is breaking. I am very worried about it.'

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35   According to interviews for this study.

36   New York Times Editorial Board, 'Foreign Aid Is Having a Reckoning', *New York Times*, 13 February 2021. www.alnap.org/help-library/foreign-aid-is-having-a-reckoning.

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Focus on: COVID-19

The COVID-19 pandemic was a crisis unlike any other the humanitarian system had faced before, in scale, nature and global spread. It challenged humanitarians to respond to the direct health impacts of the virus, and to the secondary effects of restrictions – all while donors struggled domestically with the disease and its economic repercussions. The pandemic prompted UN appeals for a record number of countries in 2020, including several high-income countries, and it further blurred the lines between emergency aid and social safety nets.

If, as the previous edition of the SOHS suggested, the 2014–2016 Ebola Outbreak was the benchmark for an 'atypical' crisis that confounded standard public health and humanitarian responses, the COVID-19 Pandemic exceeded this in a way that few in the system predicted. While the 'cacophony' of 'never again'[37] lessons from Ebola were well synthesised by 2016, collective reflections on the system's response to the COVID-19 pandemic are still emerging.[38] These lessons are likely to be mixed as the progress of the virus and the policy responses to it played out so differently across the world – and as one leader put it, we need to think about 'COVID-19 responses in the plural, because there hasn't been a global response'.

> **We need to think about 'COVID-19 responses in the plural, because there hasn't been a global response'.**

Rapid response and flexibility

Despite post-Ebola warnings that the next pandemic was 'a matter of when, not if,'[39] COVID-19 caught the world unprepared. In many Western countries, governments failed to apply the principles of early detection and robust response at the onset of the pandemic, partly because the virus was new and partly because divided political and public health opinion led to a 'wait-and-see' approach. The result was high rates of transmission, which then prompted stringent lockdowns. The humanitarian community braced itself for catastrophic levels of transmission in overcrowded and sanitation-poor crisis settings across the world, but in many contexts

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37   IRC, *The Ebola Lessons Reader* (New York: International Rescue Committee, 2016). www.alnap.org/help-library/the-ebola-lessons-reader.

38   Taylor et al., *Rights of Refugees*. www.alnap.org/help-library/joint-evaluation-of-the-protection-of-the-rights-of-refugees-during-the-covid-19.

39   Jeremy Konyndyk, 'Struggling with Scale: Ebola's lessons for the next pandemic', Centre for Global Development, 2019. www.alnap.org/help-library/struggling-with-scale-ebola%E2%80%99s-lessons-for-the-next-pandemic-0.

this did not appear to materialise.[40] Experts put this this down to factors including younger populations and unreliable reporting of caseloads: the effects of COVID-19 on crisis-affected populations remain largely anecdotal, as many of these situations were already data-poor and became more so as data collection by government and international actors halted.[41]

In the places where it was already operational, the humanitarian system's model of tight coordination and quick appeals mobilisation – often criticised for their top-down rigidity – worked in its favour. Inter-Agency Standing Committee (IASC) guidance and protocols were swiftly produced and actioned, and large-scale logistics operations launched. The first-ever agreement was signed between the IASC and the COVAX facility to secure vaccines for vulnerable and marginalised communities in humanitarian contexts. As one global leader put it, guidance was 'properly internalised by the humanitarian eco-system and the result of that has been that the damage that COVID-19 could have caused has been greatly reduced… The humanitarian eco-system has set rather a good example'.

Evaluations suggest that it was easier to implement COVID-19 programming in contexts which had previously been affected by disasters, due to existing emergency response protocols.[42] In interviews, donor representatives suggested that there was a missed opportunity for the WHO-led response to involve and learn more from this. The post-Ebola intentions for WHO and the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (UN OCHA) to work more closely together in major health crises were not deployed and two separate appeals processes were launched, instead of a unified call for support.

Donors responded to immediate humanitarian needs with additional funds and a new degree of flexibility. Although new funding was initially directed to large UN agencies and not rapidly disbursed to partners, NGO representatives told us that collective calls for adaptable funding were largely met with a 'strong willingness to pivot existing funding' and a 'common sense' approach to the best use of committed funds. This has been held up as evidence that flexible financing can work, but there was scepticism that it has translated into a lasting disruption of business as usual.

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40   Several studies found that the officially reported rates of COVID-19 transmission, critical illness and death were much higher in high-income than low-income countries. One study found that COVID-19 was three times as prevalent in high income countries than other countries (Karlinsky and Kobak, 'The World Mortality Dataset') www.alnap.org/help-library/the-world-mortality-dataset-tracking-excess-mortality-across-countries-during-the-covid. However, as Chapter 1 explains, subsequent excess mortality analysis by WHO showed the toll on lower-middle-income countries to be much greater (WHO, 'Global excess deaths). www.alnap.org/help-library/global-excess-deaths-associated-with-covid-19-january-2020-december-2021.

41   Many countries – including Venezuela, Mali, South Sudan and Yemen, Myanmar, Afghanistan and Mozambique – had missing data or low positive test rates, an indicator that the pandemic may not be under control in the country.

42   ALNAP (forthcoming).

Access and presence

While the system was responsive, the politics and practicalities of humanitarian access were a stumbling block. Where access constraints were already high, the health response was prevented from reaching vulnerable communities. In Syria, for example, government-imposed impediments and aid diversion saw medical supplies blocked from areas outside state control. According to one source, a combination of UN reluctance to upset Damascus and obstructions to the cold chain prevented WHO from applying for the 'humanitarian buffer' – GAVI's 5% reserve of COVID-19 vaccines meant for people in conflict zones or humanitarian settings who cannot be reached by government vaccination campaigns.[43] Elsewhere, there was evidence that COVID-19 restrictions were being used as a pretext to stymie wider aid efforts: in Yemen, interviewees for this study reported multiple incidents of agencies being forced to close programmes unpopular with the authorities in the name of redirecting resources to the COVID-19 response.

As international travel was restricted and many agencies withdrew international staff at the start of the pandemic, the system was compelled to look more to local capacity. One INGO leader noted the sacrifices made by national staff, observing that the pandemic had prompted 'the realisation that it's really the national staff that are running things and should be running things'. A study conducted over the course of 2020 revealed an attitudinal shift from asking 'if' to asking 'how' to localise; but it also showed that, overall, there was little evidence of a transformational shift in power towards local actors as a result of the pandemic.[44] The focus was on increasing remote management and decision-making, more than on local leadership. Relationships between international and national staff were also sometimes strained – evaluations found that shifting functions and increased workloads during the pandemic may have led to a rise in miscommunication.

As international staff withdrew and national staff reduced their interactions with communities, the limits of remote programming began to show. The digital divide, where some communities or individuals lacked internet and mobile communication access, affected the assessment and coverage of needs. Lockdown measures brought with them a surge in protection cases, including violence against women and girls, which absent aid workers could not effectively monitor or address. Given what we'd learned from the Ebola Outbreak, protection should have been a central and essential element of the pandemic response, but evaluation evidence found this lesson went unheeded.[45] Although remote education programmes proved fairly successful, school closures exposed children

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43   Natasha Hall, *Rescuing Aid in Syria* (Washington DC: Center for Strategic and International Studies, 2022), 13. www.alnap.org/help-library/rescuing-aid-in-syria.

44   Véronique Barbelet, John Bryant and Alexandra Spencer, *Local Humanitarian Action during COVID-19: Findings from a Diary Study* (London: HPG/ODI, 2021). www.alnap.org/help-library/local-humanitarian-action-during-covid-19-findings-from-a-diary-study.

45   ALNAP (forthcoming).

to harm and left them out of the sight and reach of support programmes.[46] Cut off from sustained interaction with communities, agencies lost community trust and acceptance, especially as misinformation proliferated.

Social safety nets

COVID-19 restrictions generated immediate and lasting economic shocks that had a far worse effect on many vulnerable people than the disease itself. One humanitarian leader noted that it was a 'mistake' to think of the pandemic as a medical problem, as it was in the Global North: 'It became a socioeconomic meltdown in the south… it devastated the socioeconomic lifeline of vulnerable people, and we didn't really realise that until later.' In Venezuela, the lockdown coincided with hyperinflation, which had already rendered a third of the population food insecure by the start of 2020, causing a major rise in malnutrition in the course of the year.[47]

The shockwaves of the pandemic increased the humanitarian caseload[48] as fragile development gains were reversed, and people tipped from economic precarity into humanitarian need. With limited financial resilience and means of recovery, the incomes of the world's poorest were the worst hit.[49] Social protection systems were extremely variable in their ability to meet widening and deepening needs – for example, the system in Pakistan held up well,[50] while Uganda struggled.[51] In many countries, humanitarian agencies linked their cash programming to national social protection schemes to better reach the most vulnerable, forging new connections and generating new lessons about shock-responsive programming (see Chapter 12). But this gave rise to concerns about whether sustained national safety nets and basic services would be able to support these people in the longer term. Even factoring in debt relief,[52] developing countries faced an economic 'long COVID' that, without proactive development investments, may contribute to greater vulnerability to shocks and a new and chronic humanitarian caseload.

46   ALNAP (forthcoming).

47   WFP, 'Venezuela Food Security Assessment' (Rome: WFP, 2019). www.alnap.org/help-library/venezuela-food-security-assessment.

48   The number of countries with UN-coordinated appeals rose from 36 to 55 in 2020 and the number of people estimated to be in need rose by from 224.9 million to 243.8 million.

49   Sánchez-Páramo et al., 'COVID-19 leaves a legacy'. www.alnap.org/help-library/covid-19-leaves-a-legacy-of-rising-poverty-and-widening-inequality.

50   Sania Nishtar, 'Tackling Poverty amidst COVID-19: How Pakistan's Emergency Cash Programme Averted an Economic Catastrophe', *Policy in Focus* 19, no. 1 (Special Issue, 2021), 37. www.alnap.org/help-library/tackling-poverty-amidst-covid-19-how-pakistan%E2%80%99s-emergency-cash-programme-averted-an.

51   Valentina Barca, 'Social Protection and COVID-19: The Emerging Story of What Worked Where… and What It All Means for Future Crises' (Blog), *FP2P*, 29 September 2021. www.alnap.org/help-library/social-protection-and-covid-19-%E2%80%93-the-emerging-story-of-what-worked-where%E2%80%A6-and-what-it.

52   For example, the G20 launched the Debt Service Suspension Initiative (DSSI) to provide short-term liquidity support for low-income countries; World Bank, 'Low-Income Country Debt Rises to Record $860 Billion in 2020' (Press Release) World Bank, 2021. www.alnap.org/help-library/low-income-country-debt-rises-to-record-860-billion-in-2020.

Bangladesh case study:
COVID-19 in Cox's Bazar

Author: Local researcher, Bangladesh
Name withheld to protect the author's identity

Almost a million Rohingya refugees have been living in the dense tangle of 34 camps in Bangladesh's Cox's Bazar since 2017. An average of 40,000 people pack each square kilometre,[53] living with temporary shelters and infrastructure due to the host government's policy of encampment and its refusal to grant longer-term status to refugees. In these conditions, public health experts predicted that COVID-19 could spread quickly and with catastrophic consequences. In March 2020, models predicted that up to 1 in 200 Rohingya refugees in the camps could die from COVID-19 unless appropriate measures were taken.[54]

Initial response

In the first instance, the Bangladeshi authorities acted quickly. On 25 March 2021, the Refugee Relief and Repatriation Commissioner ordered the shutdown of all 34 Rohingya camps, limiting humanitarian access and restricting services to emergency food, health assistance and medicine. Gatherings were banned, and schools and women-friendly spaces closed.[55] Only essential workers were allowed access to the camps and had to travel in authorised vehicles that were inspected at check-posts for paperwork, social distancing and mask usage.

The public health response was slower to mobilise. In the first six months of the pandemic, there was little hospital capacity, no specific testing centre for refugees[56] and limited provision of personal protective equipment (PPE) for health workers.[57] But within the camps the anticipated health crisis did not materialise. By the end of 2021, according to WHO, 3,250 COVID-19 cases and 34 deaths had been reported. As one

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53   Mohammad Mainul Islam and MD Yeasir Yunus, 'Rohingya refugees at high risk of COVID-19 in Bangladesh', *Lancet Global Health* 8, no. 8 (August 2020): e993–94.www.alnap.org/help-library/rohingya-refugees-at-high-risk-of-covid-19-in-bangladesh.

54   Shaun Truelove et al., 'The potential impact of COVID-19 in refugee camps in Bangladesh and beyond: A modeling study', *PLOS Medicine* 17, no. 6 (16 June 2020): e1003144. www.alnap.org/help-library/the-potential-impact-of-covid-19-in-refugee-camps-in-bangladesh-and-beyond-a-modeling.

55   Human Rights Watch, 'Bangladesh: COVID-19 aid limits imperil Rohingya', *Human Rights Watch*, 28 April 2020. www.alnap.org/help-library/bangladesh-covid-19-aid-limits-imperil-rohingya.

56   Rajon Banik et al., 'COVID-19 pandemic and Rohingya Refugees in Bangladesh: What are the major concerns?', *Global Public Health* 15, no. 10 (2 October 2020): 1578–81. www.alnap.org/help-library/covid-19-pandemic-and-rohingya-refugees-in-bangladesh-what-are-the-major-concerns.

57   MSF, 'Five Challenges in Bangladesh amid Coronavirus COVID-19', Médecins Sans Frontières, 2020. www.alnap.org/help-library/five-challenges-in-bangladesh-amid-coronavirus-covid-19.

humanitarian worker put it, 'none of us know exactly how and why COVID-19 went through the camp quite as quick as it did and with very few fatalities'.

Despite inconclusive evidence as to why infection rates remained low,[58] there is a sense that the humanitarian system performed well in the face of direct threats to health. One health coordinator in Cox's Bazar noted that specialised facilities were set up with capacity for a large number of patients: 'I think that the humanitarian system did rise to the challenge to some extent of the COVID-19 response.'

Immediate and longer-term humanitarian consequences

The system has been less able to mitigate or address the impacts of shutdowns and the shift to pandemic response and away from other assistance and protection needs. In the words of one INGO aid worker, 'Once COVID-19 hit, all of our gains were reversed and worse'. One UN representative explained how refugees' fears of contracting the virus in healthcare facilities, combined with the strain on essential services, resulted in an increase in preventable non-COVID-19 deaths. Later in the response, healthcare facilities found themselves in high demand: as other services were closed down, people came to them with different concerns, including protection issues, which resulted in 'some overcrowding, some dissatisfaction with health services'.

The impacts of the disruption went much wider. At the start of the pandemic, INGO and UN staff presence in humanitarian settings diminished, as aid workers chose not to return to duty stations, self-evacuated, were evacuated by their organisations, or got stuck outside Bangladesh when international borders closed. Several agencies found themselves operating with their heads of office in other countries. Strict isolation and quarantine protocols were implemented for NGO and UN staff and in-person activities were cancelled, including assessments, awareness sessions and community consultations. Many organisations saw their facilities shut down or appropriated for use as isolation centres. Funding was reallocated to COVID-19 prevention and response; proposals had to be rewritten and programmes stalled. One UN agency explained how a long-awaited shelter programme was placed on indefinite hold. Government officials ordered the postponement or closure of activities deemed non-essential, including protection. Income-generating and cash-based activities were restricted.[59]

With the reduced humanitarian presence in the camps, security and protection threats increased significantly, with refugees reporting kidnappings, murders, extortion, rape, drug dealing and routine violence

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58   Some observers attributed this to differing immune responses, others to the effectiveness of domestic public health measures.

59   Mohammed Masudur Rahman, Sarah Baird and Jennifer Seager, 'COVID-19's Impact on Rohingya and Bangladeshi Adolescents in Cox's Bazar' (Blog), UNHCR, 21 December 2020. www.alnap.org/help-library/covid-19%E2%80%99s-impact-on-rohingya-and-bangladeshi-adolescents-in-cox%E2%80%99s-bazar.

by criminal gangs. One focus group participant told our researchers that 'safety and security conditions in Bangladesh are worse than in Myanmar'. An aid worker summed up the prevalent sense of fear: 'We also know that armed groups run rampant. Gender-based violence is a huge issue. The camp, the humanitarians leave at three o'clock, and then it sort of becomes, from what people have told me, very scary and dark. And I think that the safeguarding and protection is a huge, huge gap in the response'.

> "
>
> **'Safeguarding and protection is a huge, huge gap in the response'.**

Providing protection services remotely was a difficult task that became even more challenging when further shutdowns were imposed. In a May 2021 meeting of UN agencies, the Office of The Refugee Relief and Repatriation and the Bangladeshi authorities, it was decided that protection (in addition to education) was a non-critical activity despite the rise in protection threats, including gender-based violence. 'Last year, we could provide both remote and in-person support,' said one gender-based violence specialis, 'but this year, it was just fully restricted. We could not provide any kind of in-person case management support to the survivors, so it's telephone only.' As the global evaluation of refugee rights during the COVID-19 pandemic confirmed, this deprioritisation of protection had severe consequences for affected people.[60] As one focus group participant explained, 'domestic violence has become more common, and since NGOs activities have decreased during COVID-19, gender-based violence cases can be seen immensely'.

While government shutdowns are widely felt to have helped contain the spread of the virus in the camps, many humanitarians are concerned that they have been used to further restrict humanitarian space, with immediate and longer-term impacts on education, security and protection, and on refugees' faith in the humanitarian system. 'The Rohingya don't have any reason to trust anyone,' said one expert. 'I've seen them lose trust in the international justice process, in the Bangladesh government, and humanitarian actors, and in each other.' That trust was further fractured by the absence of humanitarian workers during the pandemic, and according to many aid workers, it will be difficult to win back.

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60 Taylor et al., *Rights of Refugees*. www.alnap.org/help-library/joint-evaluation-of-the-protection-of-the-rights-of-refugees-during-the-covid-19.

1

PART 1: WHAT IS THE SYSTEM?

Chapter 2: What is the shape and size of the humanitarian system?

IN BRIEF: By any measure, the humanitarian system has grown. Financially it is larger than ever, reaching an estimated $31.3 billion in 2021 – almost double what it was a decade before. However, the volume of funding plateaued over the study period, as some donors compensated for the contribution cuts made by others. The number of humanitarian agencies has also increased, by 10% over a decade, driven by growth in national and local NGOs. There are also more humanitarian staff working in crisis contexts – an estimated 40% rise since 2013.

Despite this growth – and intentions to diversify – the system remains financially concentrated. Almost half of international humanitarian assistance continued to come from just five donors, and by 2021 around a third came from the US alone. Nearly half of funds allocated to organisations went to three UN agencies – the World Food Programme (WFP), UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) and UNICEF. Annual fluctuations aside, this picture has changed little over the past decade, and the COVID-19 response appeared to reinforce this. Funds are of course passed on to implementing partners, but there is still a lack of data on how funding flows through the system from donor to ultimate recipient.

National staff make up over 90% of the humanitarian workforce in emergency settings. But despite being the bedrock of humanitarian response, national staff still face a pay and power gap between them and their international colleagues, both in-country and headquartered. Staff who are nationals of countries affected by humanitarian crises are often under-represented in leadership positions, particularly at international headquarters and board level. This is part of a wider set of diversity, equity and inclusion issues. The Black Lives Matter movement prompted new calls for the system to address these problems and raised questions about racism in the sector. In response, agencies have launched initiatives and announced commitments.

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Since its inception, *The State of the Humanitarian System* report has chosen a broad working definition of the humanitarian system – one that recognises the complexity and fluidity within it, and its connections with others. As set out in the introduction to this report, this definition of the system comprises entities that are operationally or financially related to each other and/or share common overarching goals, norms and principles.

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Acknowledging the imperfection of any definition, it uses this one both to set parameters for assessing performance, and to chart shifts in the boundaries and shape of the system.

As we have seen in Chapter 1, the past four years have seen mounting pressures to redefine and reconfigure the humanitarian system. The COVID-19 pandemic – a public health and an economic crisis – brought new questions about where humanitarian action begins and ends, and who should fund it, as have the worsening effects of climate change. There were also challenges to the Western dominance of the humanitarian system and renewed attention to the decolonisation of aid. At the same time, a default to a well-established business model for channelling resources in large-scale crises served to reinforce the status quo.

This chapter gives an overview of the configuration of the humanitarian system, looking at sources of funding, the shape of the humanitarian delivery system and the make-up of the humanitarian workforce. Recognising the critical importance of the entities and networks at the peripheries of this internationally funded system, the 'Focus on: Support beyond the system' section examines the shape and role of the wider sources of support for crisis-affected people. Chapter 9 examines whether any progress on localisation is changing the system.

What's the overall financial size of the system?

> **International humanitarian assistance has nearly doubled over the past decade.**

There has been a huge growth in international humanitarian financing. In real terms, international humanitarian assistance has nearly doubled over the past decade; at an estimated $31.3 billion in 2021, funding is larger than ever before. However, the rate of growth has decreased. After steady and significant growth following the onset of the Syria crisis in 2012, funding plateaued in the three years between 2018 and 2020, rising only slightly in 2021 – by 2.5% compared to the average 10% annual growth between 2012 and 2018. It appears that the response to the COVID-19 pandemic offset falls in funding elsewhere, so that the overall total increased only marginally. While the volume from public donors grew by only $0.1 billion over the study period, the volume from private donors – trusts, foundations and individual giving to humanitarian agencies[1] – increased by $0.7 billion.

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1   See methodology in Annex 3 for a full explanation of the private funding dataset compiled by Development Initiatives from which this analysis is derived.

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Figure 4: Total international humanitarian assistance, 2012–2021

Total funding for international humanitarian assistance in 2021 was nearly double what it had been a decade before, but funding largely plateaued over the four years between 2018 and 2021.
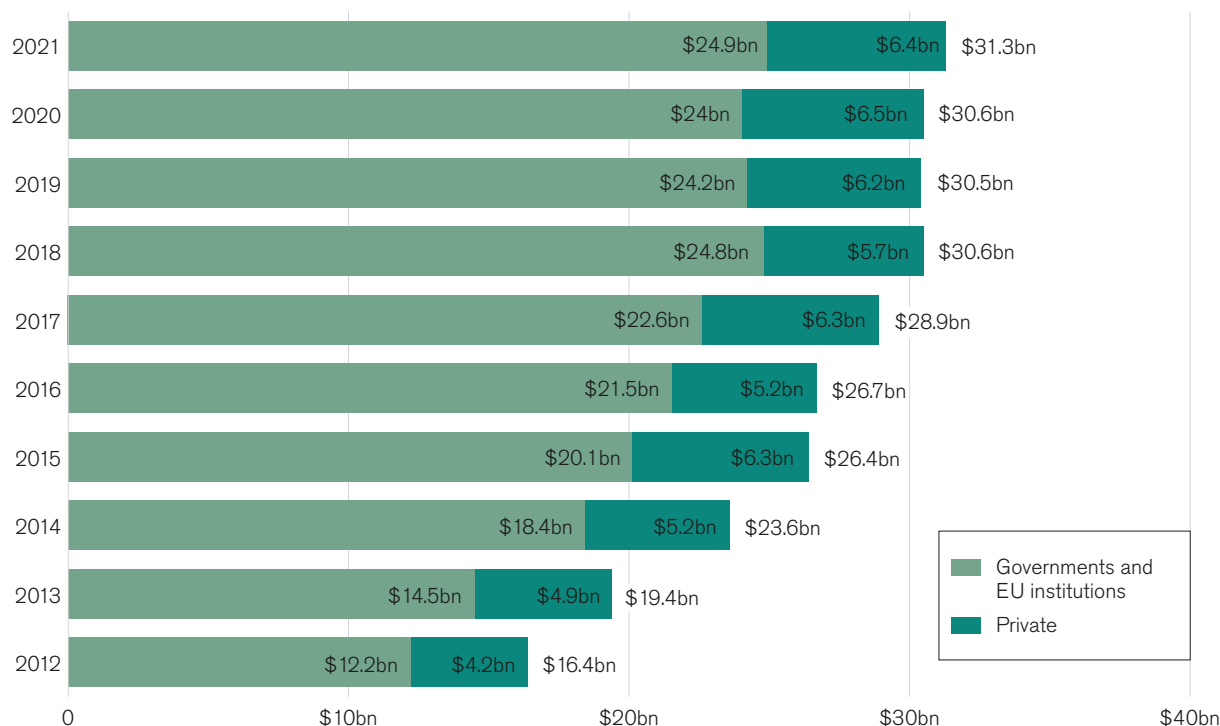
Source: Development Initiatives (DI) based on Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) Development Assistance Committee (DAC), UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) Financial Tracking Service, UN Central Emergency Response Fund (CERF) and DI's unique dataset for private contributions.

Notes: Figures for 2021 are preliminary estimates. Data on private funding is not consistently available for all organisations across all years. Data is in constant 2020 prices.

By the end of 2021, the COVID-19 response had waned, and the fiscal shocks of the pandemic reverberated in donor economies (only to be worsened in 2022 by the economic impact of war in Ukraine). These financial constraints, combined with marginal increases in humanitarian aid over the past four years, prompt questions about whether the system can continue to grow to meet new and compounded consequences of crises (which we explore in Chapter 1 and the 'Is the system fit for the future?' section). The Ukraine response has shown that funding can still be responsive to high-profile spikes in humanitarian need, but what effect this will have on funding to other crises remains to be seen.

Funding from government donors

Consistent with previous periods, around 80% of international humanitarian funding comes from public funds. The bulk of this continued to come from a handful of government donors – in each year from 2018 to 2021, at least 50% of total funding came from the five largest annual donors. The US remained the largest donor and was the only major donor to increase its

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funding every year over the study period. Its share of total humanitarian aid provision also rose: in 2021, nearly a third of humanitarian aid came from the US. By contrast, rises in funding from the UK, which saw it become the second-largest donor in 2019, were reversed in 2020 following the decision to suspend its 0.7% aid commitment.[2] The 39% reduction in UK humanitarian assistance meant that it provided almost $1 billion dollars less funding globally in 2021 than in 2018.

There was also volatility among the smaller of the top donors. After two years of decline, Japan doubled its humanitarian aid in 2021, making it one of the five largest donors, while year-on-year reductions in funding from the United Arab Emirates (UAE) saw it fall out of this group. The combined decrease in reported assistance[3] from Saudi Arabia and UAE over the period – a 62% reduction – runs counter to the hopes of growth from this region reported in previous SOHS editions.

Figure 5: Proportions of total international humanitarian assistance provided by the five largest donors and all other donors, 2018–2021

Since 2018 at least half of all international humanitarian funding has come from just five donors each year. Around a third of total funds came from the US in 2021.
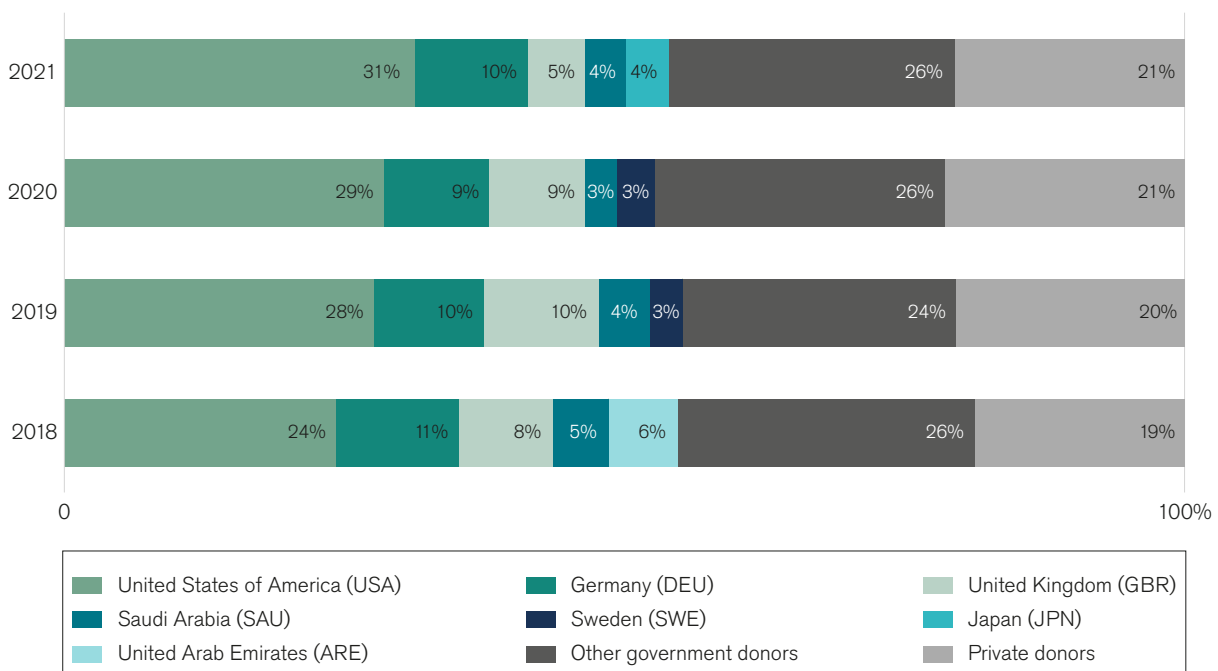
Source: Development Initiatives based on Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) Development Assistance Committee (DAC), UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) Financial Tracking Service, UN Central Emergency Response Fund (CERF) and their unique dataset for private contributions.

2   The commitment to provide a volume of ODA equivalent to 0.7% of GDP was reduced to 0.5%.

3   Note that historically Gulf donors have tended to be less consistent and comprehensive in their reporting to OCHA Financial Tracking Service (FTS), so the apparent changes in funding may partly also reflect changes in reporting.

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Figure 6: International humanitarian assistance provided by largest donor countries, 2018–2021

Funding levels from the largest donor countries showed major changes between 2018 and 2021. As US contributions grew year on year, the UK's declined sharply. 'Smaller' donors also experienced shifts over the study period, with Japan's contributions rising sharply in 2021 and the UAE seeing a steady decline.
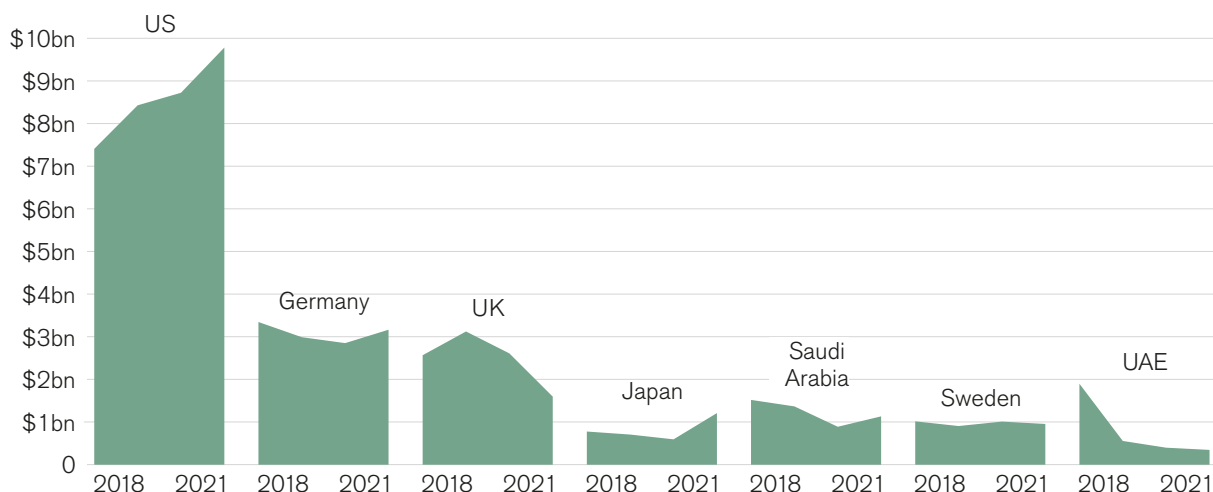
Source: Development Initiatives based on Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) Development Assistance Committee (DAC), UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) Financial Tracking Service and UN Central Emergency Response Fund (CERF).

Notes: Figures for 2021 are preliminary estimates. Data is in constant 2020 prices.

Funding from private sources

As Figure 5 shows, the estimated volume of funding to the system from private sources has grown since the start of the study period – from $5.7 billion in 2018 to $6.4 billion in 2021. However, this has not been steady growth: as private funding responded to changes in high-profile crises, levels have varied between years and the provisional 2021 total is similar to that seen in 2015. Private funding peaked in 2020, suggesting a high level of mobilisation in response to the COVID-19 pandemic, particularly from foundations and the private sector, whose contributions more than doubled from the previous year – while that from individual giving shrank slightly.

The vast majority of private funding to humanitarian organisations continued to come from individuals, even though this share reduced slightly when the pandemic hit. Individual giving continued to be an essential and flexible part of their income for some NGOs, including Médecins Sans Frontières (MSF), for which it largely enabled independence from government funding. Several INGO representatives interviewed for this edition of the SOHS noted their surprise that individual giving had continued at similar levels given the impact of the pandemic on household budgets. It is likely that future reports will show a new peak in individual giving prompted by the war in Ukraine.

Figure 7: Proportion of international humanitarian assistance provided by private sector and private donations, 2018–2020

In 2020, international humanitarian assistance from private donors reached a record $6.5 billion. Contributions from individuals continue to account for the vast majority of this private funding. But while individual giving fell in 2020, contributions from philanthropic foundations and companies both grew.
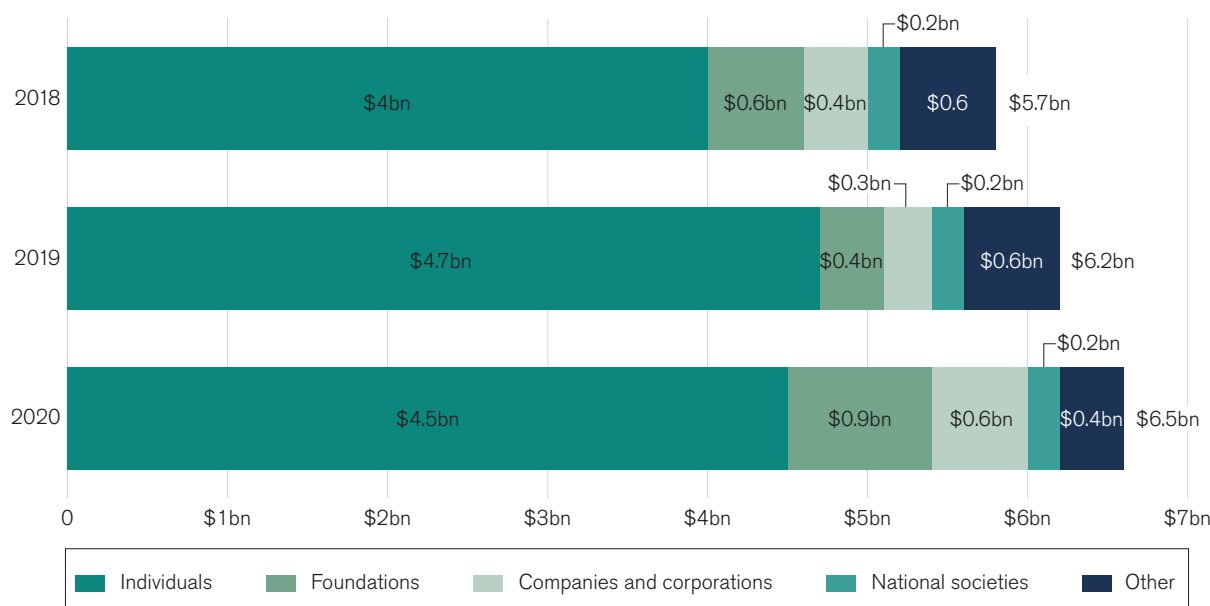
Source: Development Initiatives, Global Humanitarian Assistance (GHA).

The COVID-19 pandemic appeared to trigger an increase in resources from the private sector, which doubled from $0.3 billion in 2019 to $0.6 billion in 2020. As the 'Focus on: Support beyond the system' section explores, the international and domestic private sector also provides an important source of support to crisis-affected populations, outside of the resources it channels through the humanitarian system. International humanitarian agencies continued to seek to improve their partnerships with the private sector, to mobilise financial, in-kind and technical support. OCHA's Connecting Business Initiative, launched in 2016 to integrate the private sector into disaster response, worked with 17 national private sector networks in 2020, reaching approximately 15.5 million people.[4] Several agencies adopted new or revised existing private sector engagement strategies, including WFP, the UN Environment Programme and the Food and Agricultural Organization (FAO). Some donors, such as the Finland Ministry for Foreign Affairs and the United States Agency for International Development (USAID), have also sought to improve their private sector

4   OCHA, 'Connecting Business Initiative', n.d. www.alnap.org/help-library/connecting-business-initiative.

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engagement policies.[5] However, some relationships with the private sector raised ethical concerns, as the high-profile data protection issues explored in Chapter 7 highlight.[6]

What's the shape of the humanitarian delivery system?

Numbers of humanitarian organisations

Although a relatively small number of agencies comprise the first-line recipients of international humanitarian financing, they are part of a much larger system of operational agencies that either make up the 'long tail' of direct recipients or receive funds further down the transaction chain.

According to figures collated by Humanitarian Outcomes, there were an estimated 5,000 organisations in the humanitarian system in 2021, roughly 10% higher than estimates a decade ago. This is due to a marked growth in the number of of international NGOs (INGOs) and local and national NGOs (L/NNGOs), which have increased by around a fifth and a third respectively (though at least in the case of L/NNGOs this may be more a reflection of improvements in data gathering than actual growth). While the largest humanitarian agencies are a well-established part of the international system, many smaller ones – particularly L/NNGOs – come and go as crisis situations escalate and subside, along with the funding and international partnerships that they bring. This is especially true in the case of large-scale sudden-onset emergencies, such as the 2021 Haiti earthquake, 2013 Typhoon Haiyan and Ebola in West Africa (2014–2016).

5   Roger Zetter et al., *Evaluation on Forced Displacement and Finnish Development Policy* (Helsinki: Ministry for Foreign Affairs of Finland, 2019). www.alnap.org/help-library/evaluation-on-forced-displacement-and-finnish-development-policy.

6   Nathaniel Raymond, Laura Waker McDonald and Rahul Chandran, 'Opinion: The WFP and Palantir controversy should be a wake-up call for humanitarian community', *Devex*, 14 February 2019. www.alnap.org/help-library/opinion-the-wfp-and-palantir-controversy-should-be-a-wake-up-call-for-humanitarian; Zara Rahman, 'The UN's refugee data shame', *The New Humanitarian*, 21 June 2021. www.alnap.org/help-library/the-un%E2%80%99s-refugee-data-shame.

Figure 8: Estimated number of humanitarian organisations, 2021

The estimated number of humanitarian organisations has increased by 10% over the past decade. The majority are L/NNGOs, although the apparent rise might be due to better data availability.

RCRC
(National Societies + ICRC and IFRC)
194

INGOs ~930	L/NNGOs ~3,900	

UN agencies
11

Source: Humanitarian Outcomes, Global Database of Humanitarian Organisations (GDHO).

Notes: See methodology in Annex 3. L/NNGOs/INGO figures for 2012 may be higher as 19% of a total 4,400 NGOs in the GDHO database were not categorised.

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Figure 9: Channels of delivery of international humanitarian assistance from public donors, 2012–2021

Over the past decade, close to 60% of funding from government donors went to UN agencies (multi-lateral organisations) and 20% went to NGOs. Compared to other government donors, OECD DAC member governments have a more consistent preference for channelling their aid in this way.
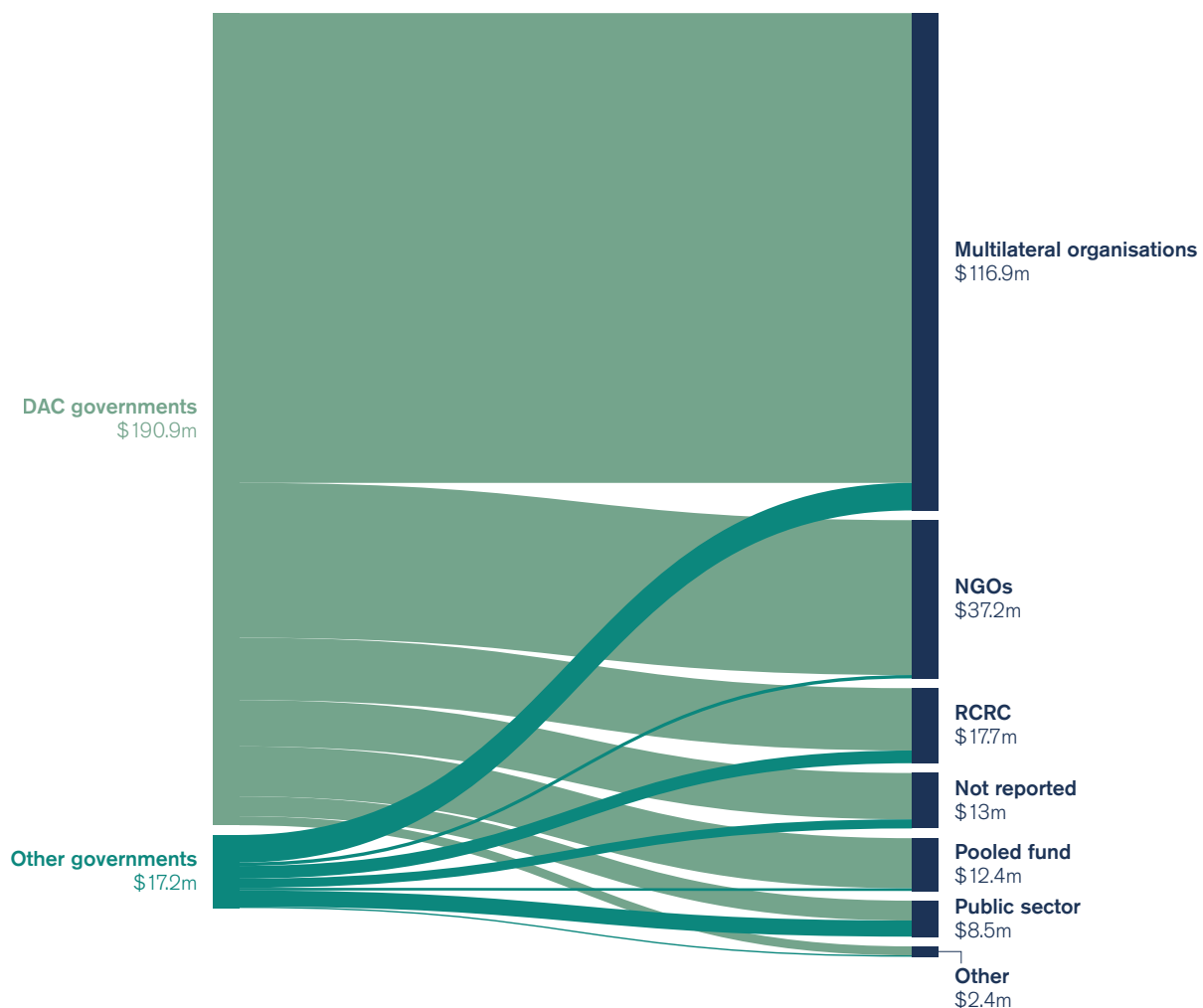
Source: Development Initiatives based on UN OCHA FTS data.

Notes: Data is in constant 2020 prices and values have been rounded up to the nearest hundred. Figures include first level recipient data from government sources (DAC and other governments) and EU institutions as reported on FTS. 'Pooled fund' refers to funding to CERF, CBPFs and other pooled funds. 'Public sector' refers to funding to national governments and inter-governmental organisations. The following categories of: Academia/think/research, Foundations, Other, Private individual/organisation, Private organization/foundation, Private sector corporations and Undefined have been merged under 'Other'. RCRC is the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement.

While the number and diversity of NGOs has grown over the past decade, the bulk of humanitarian aid continues to flow – in the first instance – through UN agencies. On average, between 2012 and 2021, 56% of public humanitarian assistance went to UN organisations, compared to 18% via NGOs and 9% through the Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement. Although there have been some annual fluctuations, this funding model appears to be firmly established.

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This is certainly the case for the funding from OECD DAC donors, which provide over 90% of reported humanitarian aid from governments.[7] However, funding from government donors outside the DAC group does not appear to follow the same pattern. Instead, these donors showed significant year-on-year variation in how they channel their funds, largely driven by irregular funding behaviour and reporting among Gulf states. Compared to their DAC counterparts, other government donors gave to a smaller selection of recipients, a smaller and declining share to UN agencies (36% on average over the decade) and a greater and increasing share to national governments and inter-governmental organisations (22%). As noted, this runs counter to previous hopes that Gulf donors might plug the international system's financing gap. While their contributions to pooled funds did spike in 2021, this was specifically due to donations from the UAE and Saudi Arabia to the Yemen Famine Relief Fund.[8]

Of course, these patterns only show where funding was channelled in the first place; there is currently no systematic tracking of how money travels down the transaction chain to reach crisis-affected people. Clearly, however, there was significant pass-through, from UN agencies to NGO partners, and from INGOs to local and national NGOs, as Chapter 9 explores. UN agencies in particular are themselves donors as much as implementers, and gatekeepers as much as recipient organisations.

Over the past four years, almost half (47%) of humanitarian aid reported to the Financial Tracking Service (FTS) was initially absorbed by just three UN agencies: WFP, UNHCR and UNICEF. Of these, WFP was the largest, receiving 28% of funding compared to UNHCR's 12% and UNICEF's 7%.[9] While the shares of these three agencies stayed fairly stable over the four years, there was a little more variation among the group of top-20 recipients over the period – though the UN agencies and ICRC consistently featured in this group, their share of the total fluctuated year on year. Among NGOs, the Norwegian Refugee Council was consistently the largest, with Save the Children, Catholic Relief Services and the Danish Refugee Council featuring in the top 20 every year.

7   Aggregate funding from OECD DAC donors accounted for 92% of all international humanitarian funding from public donors reported to the FTS over the 10 years (2012–2021).

8   A total contribution of $405 million which accounted for almost all contributions from non-DAC donors to pooled funds in 2021 and over a quarter of all contributions from those donor governments overall.

9   Figures are derived from OCHA's FTS, which does not capture all funds from private individuals – a more significant form of fundraising for UNICEF and UNHCR than WFP. Therefore, these proportions may look slightly different if the full scale of these private funds were factored in.

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Figure 10: Concentration of funding received by agencies from institutional donors, 2018–2021

Nearly half of humanitarian aid each year goes to just three organisations: WFP, UNHCR and UNICEF. Around 80% is received by only 20 organisations, but these are not the same every year.
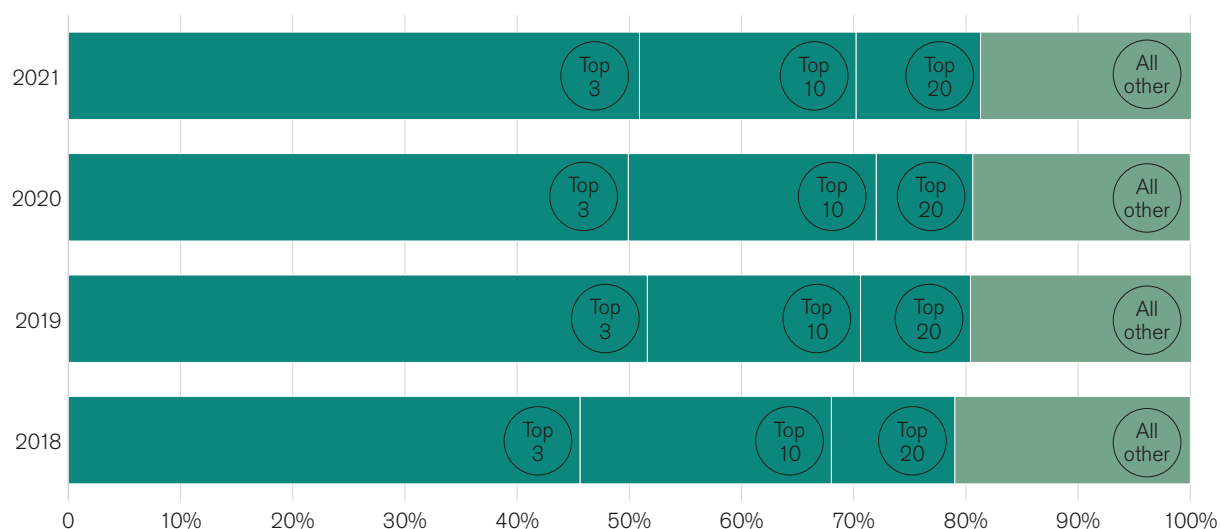
Source: Development Initiatives based on UN OCHA FTS.

Notes: Figures are based on shares of net organisation-allocable funding. This includes all funding that has been newly received by all organisation minus the funding each organisation in turn provides to partners in the same year. Data is in constant 2020 prices.

The COVID-19 pandemic prompted a slight increase in the share of funding absorbed by the 20 largest agencies, with the Coalition for Epidemic Preparedness Innovations and the Global Alliance on Vaccines and Immunization featuring in the group for the first time. However, as donors favoured agencies that were able to deliver at scale, the top-three UN agencies also absorbed a greater than usual share of COVID-specific funding.

The figures for how much funding agencies received from institutional donors do not map neatly onto how much they spent on operations. Humanitarian organisations' expenditure comes from a combination of direct and indirect funds from institutional donors and private individuals, and they may also dip into reserves to scale up or maintain delivery in periods of funding uncertainty. Based on available budget figures, the estimated humanitarian expenditure reported by operational organisations grew by an average of 16% despite the minimal increases in funding reported by international donors over the study period; however, these estimates should be treated with caution given they may not fully capture all sources of organisational income and there may be time-lags in reporting.[10]

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10   Reporting to the FTS does not fully capture all funding to organisations from private funds, indirect funding and sub-grants, and core funding to multi-mandate organisations, which may end up being used for humanitarian expenditure.

The expenditures of the largest humanitarian organisations increased by a far greater degree than the rest. Between 2017 and 2020, UN agencies saw a growth in expenditure of 24% in real terms, and IFRC and ICRC, of 17%. Expenditure by the five largest INGOs grew by 22%, compared to the average decrease of 4% among all NGOs. The same five international NGOs remained the largest in the humanitarian INGO landscape. Together, MSF, the International Rescue Committee (IRC), the Norwegian Refugee Council (NRC), Save the Children International and World Vision International (WVI) accounted for just over a quarter of total NGO expenditure[11] in 2020, a share which grew by 4% since the last SOHS. Notably, two NGOs (MSF and WVI) do not feature in the largest recipients of institutional humanitarian aid, given that their income largely comes from private individuals.

At the other end of the spectrum some L/NNGOs may have seen a bigger rise in their spend, which was much more in line with the growth of their larger international counterparts. For the roughly 100 L/NNGOs (across 26 countries) for which data is available, overall programming budgets grew on average by 28% over the period – an average that masks considerable variation between organisations. This suggests an important feature of localisation: that despite poor progress towards commitments on channelling funding to local and national organisations 'as directly as possible', they received much more indirectly and via other channels as the system relied heavily on them for delivery in places where internationals found it too dangerous or difficult to operate,[12] particularly in the COVID-19 era of remote programming.

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11   Given that large NGOs often subgrant to smaller partners, some double counting is inevitable when summing expenditures across NGOs. However, this means that the market share of the largest INGOs is even larger than it appears here.

12   See, example.g., Emma O'Leary, *Principles Under Pressure: The Impact of Counterterrorism Measures and Preventing/Countering Violent Extremism On Principled Humanitarian Action* (Oslo: Norwegian Refugee Council, 2018) www.alnap.org/help-library/principles-under-pressure-the-impact-of-counterterrorism-measures-and; see also the published findings of Humanitarian Outcomes' research programmes, SAVE www.humanitarianoutcomes.org/projects/save#:~:text=About%20SAVE,both%20quantitative%20and%20qualitative%20methods. and CORE www.humanitarianoutcomes.org/projects/core.

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Figure 11: Humanitarian expenditure by organisation type, 2018–2020

UN agencies accounted for the majority of humanitarian expenditure, and this grew significantly between 2018 and 2020. Expenditure by the five largest NGOs grew marginally, while that of all other NGOs declined.

Source: Humanitarian Outcomes, Global Database of Humanitarian Organisations.

Note: Values have been rounded up.

Table A: Humanitarian expenditures, 2018–2020, compared with 2017

	UN agencies*	% change (prior yr)	Top 5 INGOs**	% change (prior yr)	All NGOs (est.)	% change (prior yr)	ICRC and IFRC
2018	$ 15.3 billion	-4%	$ 3.9 billion		$ 15.9 billion		$ 1.6 billion
2019	$ 19.0 billion	24%	$ 4.5 billion	16%	$ 17.0 billion	7%	$ 1.8 billion
2020	$ 21.0 billion	11%	$ 4.5 billion	0%	$ 17.0 billion	0%	$ 2.1 billion
2017 (prior SOHS period)	$ 16.0 billion		$ 3.5 billion		$ 16.8 billion		$ 1.7 billion
% change 2017–2020	31%		29%		1%		24%

*   FAO, IOM, Habitat, OCHA, UNDP, UNFPA, UNICEF, UNHCR, UNRWA, WFP, WHO.

** MSF, IRC, NRC, SCI, WVI.

Source: Humanitarian Outcomes, Global Database of Humanitarian Organisations.

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Size and distribution of the humanitarian workforce in humanitarian settings

Figure 12: In-country humanitarian personnel, by organisation type, 2010–2020

> *The number of humanitarian staff working in crisis-affected countries has more than doubled over the past decade according to SOHS estimates. Since 2015, NGO staff have accounted for a growing majority of this in-country workforce.*

Number of in-country staff (in thousands)

Legend:
- NGOs
- Red Cross/ Crescent Movement**
- UN
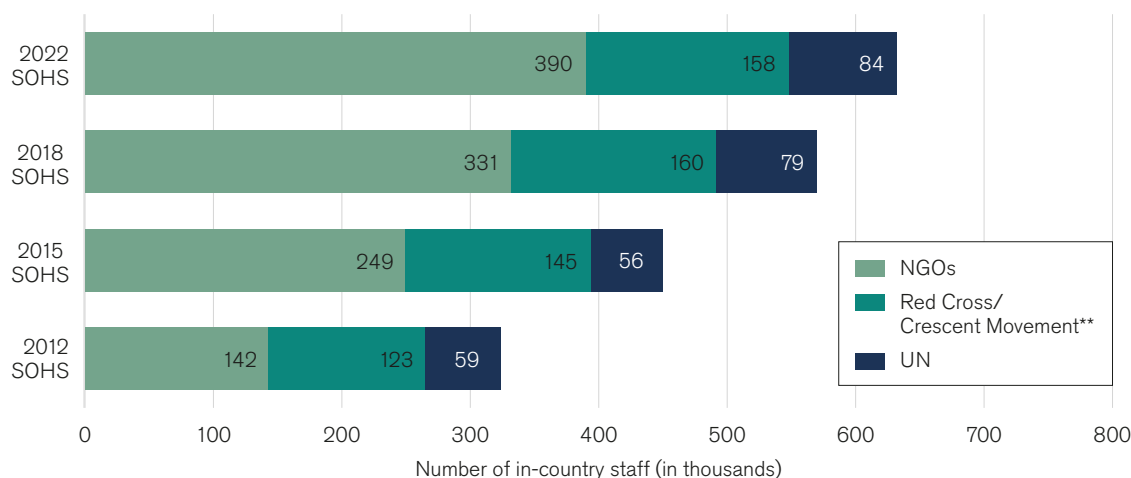
Source: Humanitarian Outcomes, Global Database of Humanitarian Organisations.

Notes: The corresponding years for the above estimates are: 2010 (SOHS 2012); 2013 (SOHS 2015); 2017 (SOHS 2018); and 2020 (SOHS 2022). The estimates published in the SOHS Report 2012 (for 2010) differ from these above, due to changes in methodology of estimating humanitarian personnel in multi-mandated organisations and increased availability of data in later years. Figures for Red Cross/Red Crescent comprise combined employees of ICRC, IFRC and National Societies in middle- and low-income countries. The first figure for Red Cross Movement staff, is from 2012 rather than 2010, as it is the first year for which adequate data is available. Values have been rounded up.

The estimated number of humanitarian staff working in emergency contexts rose by 11% since the last study period, and by 40% since 2013 estimates.[13] This stands to reason given the growth in humanitarian funding over the period, the rising scale of needs and the number of countries with a coordinated international humanitarian response. While increases in frontline staff numbers bring more operational capacity, they also present challenges, including more exposure to risk – such as attacks on aid workers – and the need for greater investments in management and training to ensure quality and safeguarding standards.

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13   The methodology (see Annex 3) provides an estimate of staffing in emergency settings rather than global staff including in regional hubs and headquarters. Additional research conducted for this edition of the SOHS into a small sample of UN agencies and INGOs, suggested that this field workforce makes up the bulk of humanitarian personnel. It also suggested that UN agencies are much more top-heavy than INGOs, having on average double the proportion of their staff in HQ as opposed to working at the country level (12% for UN agencies as opposed to 6% for INGOs in our sample). This would be explained in part by the more coordination-oriented role that UN agencies play in humanitarian response.

Since 2013, both NGO and UN field staff numbers have increased by over 50% – the estimated number of NGO field staff grew by approximately 57% between 2013 and 2020, compared to a 50% rise in the number of UN staff. But the four-year period studied is notable in two ways: first, the number of UN staff rose much less than NGO staff – a 6% increase for UN agencies compared to 18% for NGOs; and second, the overall rise in staff numbers was not commensurate with the rise in agencies' income or expenditure. There is no conclusive evidence to explain these trends, but they may in part be due to factors observed in the research for this report – the constraints on access that curb the presence of large numbers of international staff, pass-through to partner organisations and an increase in cash programming, which is less staff-intensive.[14]

Figure 13: In-country humanitarian personnel, national and international staff, 2020

More than 630,000 humanitarian staff were estimated to be working in countries with humanitarian crises in 2020. Over 90% of these staff were nationals of the countries they were working in.
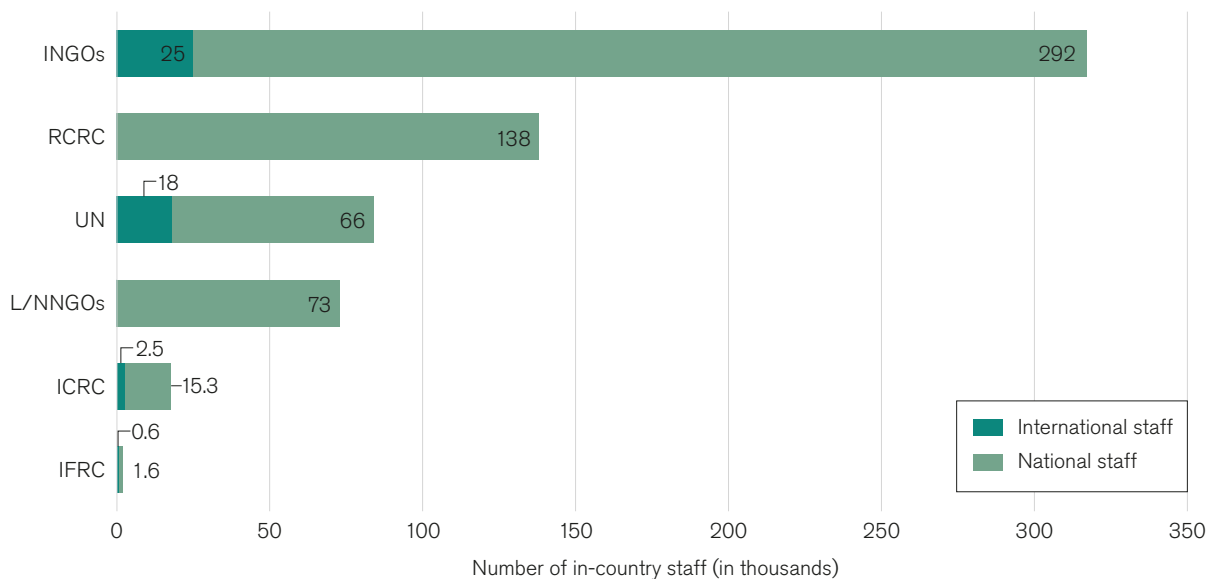
Source: Humanitarian Outcomes, Global Database of Humanitarian Organisations.

Notes: Estimate for National NGO (NNGO) staff is based on the estimate of 1585 national and local NGOs working within the humanitarian system in 2020, compiled from OCHA 3Ws data pulled from humanitarianresponse.info.

14   According to the FTS, COVID-19 funding included roughly $100 million of cash assistance.

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National staff make up over

90%

of the estimated humanitarian workforce in emergency settings.

National staff make up over 90% of the estimated humanitarian workforce in emergency settings. In 2020, nearly 93% of humanitarian field staff were nationals of the country they were working in. Although this high proportion is somewhat driven by the estimated staffing numbers of national NGOs and national societies of the Red Cross and Red Crescent, the overwhelming majority of international organisations' in-country staff are also national.[15] While national staff are the bedrock of the humanitarian response, they are – as the next section shows – extremely under-represented in the leadership of the international system, both in-country and at headquarters.

Pay

Aid worker salaries vary significantly depending on the type of organisation they work for. Comprehensive global pay scales are not publicly available, nor are the benchmarks and considerations behind these, but data for a small sample of agencies and countries collated by Humanitarian Outcomes for this edition of the SOHS[16] suggests that, on average, UN staff were paid more than double their INGO peers, and staff of international organisations as a whole were paid on average more than six times the salary of L/NNGO staffers. The differences appear even starker when seen at a country level – in South Sudan, for example, the average mid-range salary for L/NNGO staff was in the region of $11,300, compared to $30,600 for INGO staff and $91,600 for UN staff. At an equivalent level in Bangladesh, L/NNGO staffers from our sample organisations earned on average $10,800, compared to $16,500 for INGOs and $93,600 for UN staff. Although international organisations need to consider pay parity across their global operations, the impact of these pay differentials are very real for local job markets, perceptions of aid workers and staff retention in local organisations.

The pay gap between local and international staff has been previously documented within organisations in the wider international aid system. A 2016 study of 200 humanitarian and development organisations working in six countries found that local staff were paid around four times less than their international colleagues who had a similar level of responsibility and experience.[17] While these findings were prior to the period studied in this research, and do not uniquely include humanitarian contexts, they do reflect long-standing concerns within the sector around how to balance fair pay with labour market considerations and efficient use of funds. In 2015, the CHS Alliance joined a global alliance on Fairness in Aid Remuneration

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15   According to the figures in this table, nearly 79% of UN staff were nationals; 92% of INGO staff; 73% of IFRC staff; and 86% of ICRC staff.

16   See methodology in Annex 3.

17   Stuart Carr and Ishbel McWha-Hermann, 'Mind the Gap in Local and International Aid Workers', *The Conversation*, 18 April 2016. This study surveyed 1,300 staff working in around 200 organisations in India, China, Malawi, Uganda, Solomon Islands and Papua New Guinea. www.alnap.org/help-library/mind-the-gap-in-local-and-international-aid-workers%E2%80%99-salaries.

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('Project Fair'), established to explore and address this complex issue through, among others, a set of principles and standards for fair reward. A 2020 review of implementation across 13 INGO members of Project Fair found varied levels of organisational commitment and practical measures to improve fairness, with the COVID-19 pandemic and the Black Lives Matter movement prompting some renewed attention.

Diversity, equity and inclusion

The murder of George Floyd in 2020 sparked a surge in awareness of systemic racism in all areas of public life. For the humanitarian system, this catalysed a new level of debate about power and diversity, connecting to the ongoing push for localisation and giving new vigour to previously marginalised discussions about decolonisation. In his annual Nelson Mandela lecture in August 2020, the UN Secretary-General said: 'The creation of the United Nations was based on a new global consensus around equality and human dignity. And a wave of decolonisation swept the world. But let's not fool ourselves. The legacy of colonialism still reverberates'.[18]

While these discussions raise a much wider set of challenges to the legitimacy of the Western-led humanitarian endeavour,[19] there are also specific questions about the profile of its staffing and leadership. Like the #AidToo shockwaves reported in the last SOHS, questions about the culture and identity of the system gave a vocabulary, framing and urgency to long-standing misgivings harboured by many aid workers. What had been a side-lined critique suddenly became a headline governance and operational issue. As one advocate noted, the very recognition of racism was a step forward: 'I do feel like we're travelling in the right direction because of organisations thinking, understanding that they have a problem, right? Some time ago, I think a lot of people would be like "but we're the good guys, right?".' Heads of humanitarian organisations stated their personal commitment to diversity, equity and inclusion, moving these from tick boxes to 'part of our DNA'.[20]

It is not clear whether these commitments have resulted in real shifts in the staffing, leadership and workplace culture of humanitarian organisations – policy statements often did not include targets, baseline data was poor and new information hard to obtain. When The New Humanitarian surveyed 21 international organisations about

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18   António Guterres, 'Address by the UN Secretary-General at the 18th Nelson Mandela Annual Lecture 2020', Nelson Mandela Foundation, New York, 18 July 2020. www.nelsonmandela.org/news/entry/annual-lecture-2020-secretary-general-guterress-full-speech.

19   There are multiple dimensions and interpretations of decolonisation. It includes meaningful localisation – which recognises the power and capability of locally led action and divests power and resources to it. We focus specifically on this in Chapter 9.

20   New Humanitarian, 'Aid Agency Actions on Racial Injustice Inadequate, Aid Workers Say', 13 October 2021. www.alnap.org/help-library/aid-agency-actions-on-racial-injustice-inadequate-aid-workers-say.

diversity in 2020, only nine responded.[21] Original research conducted by Humanitarian Outcomes for this edition of the SOHS encountered similar difficulties in gathering information, suggesting that many agencies are not collecting information or are reluctant to share what they find (while several organisations were quick to provide sensitive data, there was not enough to form a representative sample).[22] Organisations also define diversity differently, encompassing various combinations of racial diversity and gender parity as well as sexual identity and class, which makes clarity and comparisons difficult.

Staffing

Many major INGOs have put in place policies, strategies and training programmes to increase the diversity of their staff and address the systemic issues hindering recruitment, retention and respect in the workplace. Staff interviewed for this edition of the SOHS gave examples of a range of recently launched initiatives, including nominating diversity champions, putting in place 'reverse mentoring' schemes, widening outreach for internship schemes and undertaking large-scale consultations. Some reported proactive changes to hiring practices in order to meet their new targets. Others mentioned addressing the structural prejudices that are baked into the reliance on unpaid or poorly paid internship schemes, noting that 'operating off the back of some level of free labour from hungry graduate students' prevented a diverse workforce from stepping onto the humanitarian career ladder.

What these agency-specific initiatives amount to and whether these efforts result in a change in the profile of the humanitarian workforce may become clearer in coming years – if agencies are able to share more data on this. However, what is clear is that there is a high degree of scepticism about the system's capacity to change. In a Bond survey of British development INGOs, only 11% of respondents strongly agreed that organisations were committed to diversity, equity and inclusion, and that high levels of racism still prevented People of Colour from joining and progressing in the sector.[23] Similarly, two-thirds of respondents to a survey by The New Humanitarian felt that the response to demands for greater racial justice was inadequate, and 85% said that actions had not resulted in changes in personal experience in the workplace. In the same survey, 13% said that they had considered leaving their job in the previous year due to discrimination.

21   *New Humanitarian*, 'Aid agency actions'. Seven organisations did not respond to the questionnaire, two declined to respond and three shared statements instead of responding to questions. www.alnap.org/help-library/aid-agency-actions-on-racial-injustice-inadequate-aid-workers-say.

22   See methodology in Annex 3.

23   Lena Bheroo, Pontso Mafethe and Leila Billing, *Racism, Power and Truth: Experiences of People of Colour in Development* (London: Bond, 2021). www.alnap.org/help-library/racism-power-and-truth-experiences-of-people-of-colour-in-development.

Leadership

The sector appeared to be doing better on the representation of women in senior positions. In the sample of UN agencies and INGOs that provided information, an analysis by Humanitarian Outcomes showed that 49% of the highest-paid jobs in UN agencies were held by women, and 61% in INGOs. Our review of publicly available information also suggests that the boards of major INGOs are moving towards parity in gender representation (44% of board members were women). However, others felt that this should not be grounds for complacency: as one humanitarian leader noted, 'if that doesn't happen at the very top, what do you expect to happen further down? Go to New York and look on the wall of the Secretary-Generals. We have, what is it, 80 years of male Secretary-Generals?'

When it comes to leadership positions for people from countries receiving humanitarian aid, progress appears to be more limited. This is supported by the findings of a recent survey of 15 prominent international NGOs by the Center for Global Development,[24] which found fewer than 20% of board members were from countries eligible to receive official development aid. It concluded that 'currently, even superficial representation is rare. Only 2% of board members we assessed reported having any lived experience in a refugee or humanitarian context. Of the 2%, none represent populations currently experiencing crisis'. One inquiry, by Foreign Policy, specifically criticised UN OCHA for the lack of diversity in its senior ranks. It noted that the majority of senior staff are recruited from the countries that fund it, rather than the regions and countries in which it operates. As well as its head role being de facto reserved for British candidates, the analysis identified a glass ceiling for other senior roles: 'Members of the African country blocs account for 23% of overall posts [at OCHA] but they are largely invisible in the agency's top ranks at UN headquarters. The Asian, Latin American, and Eastern European blocs fared even worse, accounting for only 16%, 4%, and 3% of OCHA staff, respectively'.[25] In response, Martin Griffiths, the newly appointed Emergency Relief Coordinator, noted the tough questions that the agency was starting to ask itself, and the improvements it needed to make, recognising that 'It's going to be a generational change… adapting to the fact that the world shouldn't be run by the North, that OCHA shouldn't be run by someone like me'.[26]

> **It's going to be a generational change… adapting to the fact that the world shouldn't be run by the North.**

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24 Rose Worden and Patrick Saez, Shifting power in humanitarian nonprofits: A review of 15 NGO governing boards (Washington DC: Center for Global Development, 2021), 5. www.alnap.org/help-library/shifting-power-in-humanitarian-nonprofits-a-review-of-15-ngo-governing-boards.

25 Colum Lynch, 'The UN has a diversity problem', Foreign Policy, 16 October 2020. www.alnap.org/help-library/the-un-has-a-diversity-problem.

26 Martin Griffiths interviewed by Heba Aly, 'Rethinking Humanitarianism' (Podcast), The New Humanitarian, 26 January 2022. www.alnap.org/help-library/rethinking-humanitarianism-an-interview-with-the-un%E2%80%99s-humanitarian-chief.

While agencies employ a large number of national staff, it appears that only a minority make it to country director level, let alone to HQ leadership positions. Among the small sample of UN agencies and INGOs that responded to Humanitarian Outcomes' questionnaire for this edition of the SOHS, an average of less than 20% of country director posts were occupied by national staff. One respondent to our global survey of aid practitioners expressed their frustration with this disparity: 'I'm not sure why there is this dependence on internationals to lead humanitarian interventions – so many excellent national staff could do so much better'. Organisational policy and practice on national leadership varies widely: while some UN agencies have a tradition of rotating international staff into their country representative posts, some INGOs have a policy of recruiting country directors from the countries they work in, and others intentionally avoid recruiting national directors where this would put them or the organisation's operations at risk.

Figure 14: Humanitarian expenditure by organisation type, 2020

The top-three UN agencies (WFP, UNHCR and UNICEF) and the top-10 INGOs together accounted for more than half of all humanitarian expenditure in 2020.
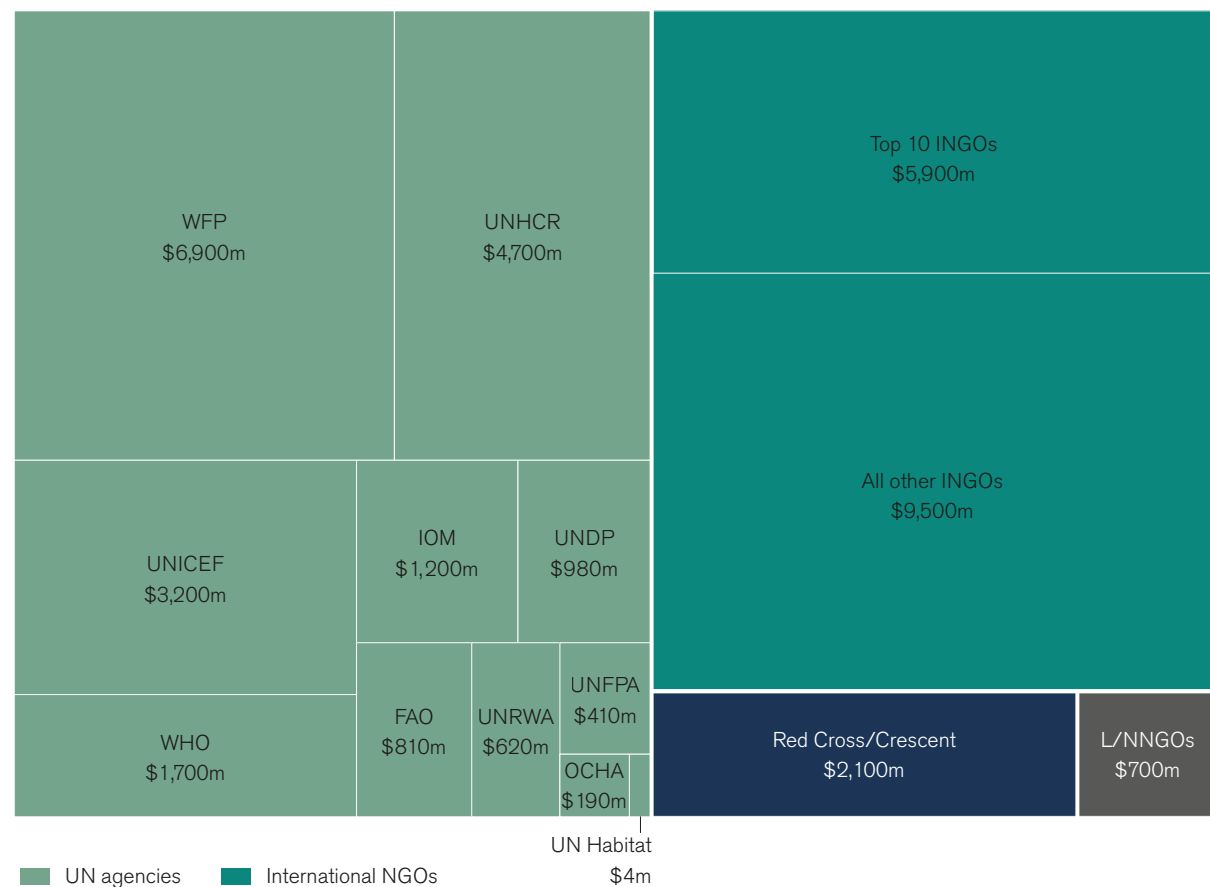
- WFP $6,900m
- UNHCR $4,700m
- UNICEF $3,200m
- IOM $1,200m
- UNDP $980m
- WHO $1,700m
- FAO $810m
- UNRWA $620m
- UNFPA $410m
- OCHA $190m
- UN Habitat $4m
- Top 10 INGOs $5,900m
- All other INGOs $9,500m
- Red Cross/Crescent $2,100m
- L/NNGOs $700m

UN agencies   International NGOs

Source: Humanitarian Outcomes, Global Database of Humanitarian Organisations (GDHO).

Notes: See methodology in Annex 3. Values have been rounded up.

Figure 15: In-country humanitarian staff by organisation type, 2020

Nearly half of humanitarian staff in countries with humanitarian crises were working for international NGOs according to estimates in 2020.
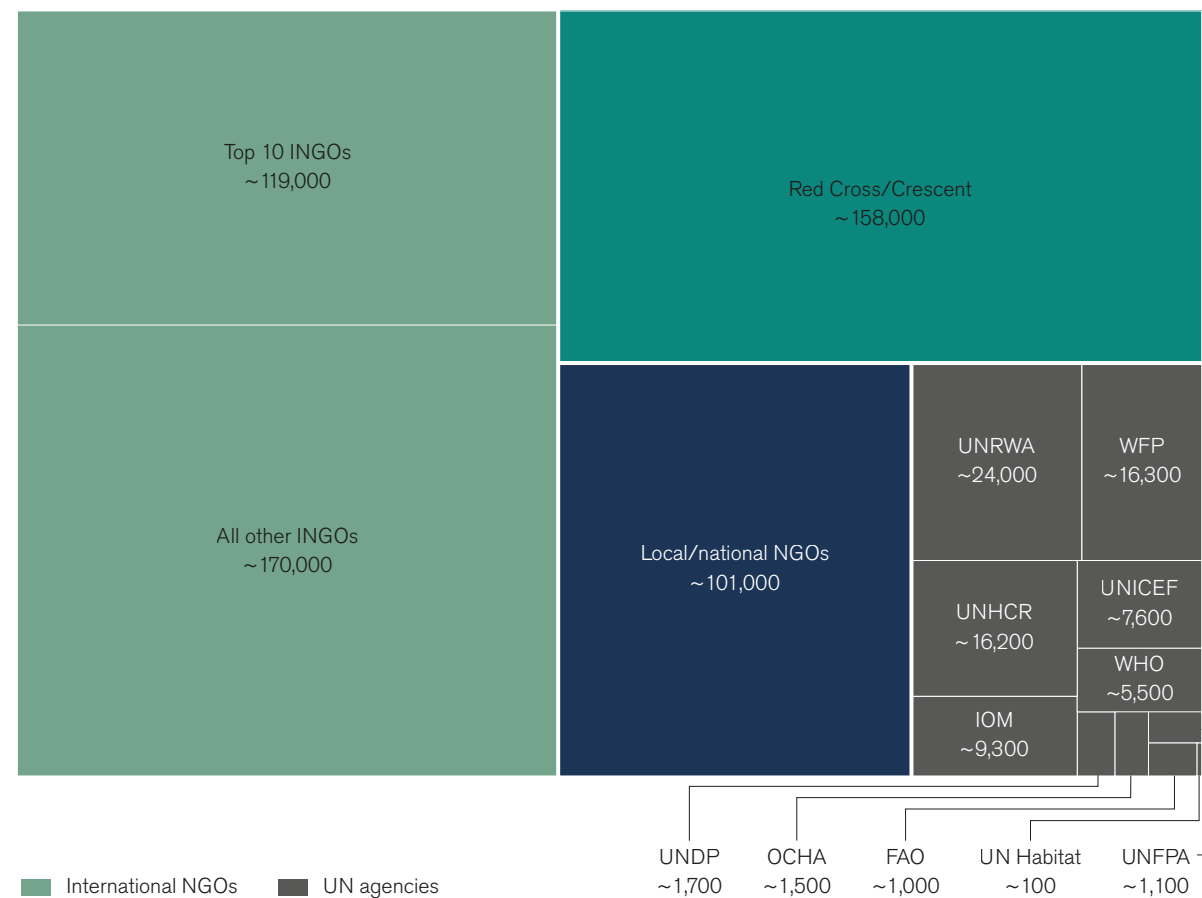
- Top 10 INGOs ~119,000
- All other INGOs ~170,000
- Red Cross/Crescent ~158,000
- Local/national NGOs ~101,000
- UNRWA ~24,000
- WFP ~16,300
- UNHCR ~16,200
- UNICEF ~7,600
- WHO ~5,500
- IOM ~9,300
- UNDP ~1,700
- OCHA ~1,500
- FAO ~1,000
- UN Habitat ~100
- UNFPA ~1,100

International NGOs   UN agencies

Source: Humanitarian Outcomes, Global Database of Humanitarian Organisations (GDHO).

Notes: Estimated numbers of staff, rounded to the nearest thousand. See methodology in Annex 3. Red Cross/Crescent figure combines staff (employees) of ICRC, IFRC and National Societies in middle- and low-income countries. Values have been rounded up.

Figure 16: International humanitarian assistance received, by agency type, 2021

Most funding goes to UN agencies in the first instance. In 2021, they received two-thirds of direct international contributions to humanitarian assistance.
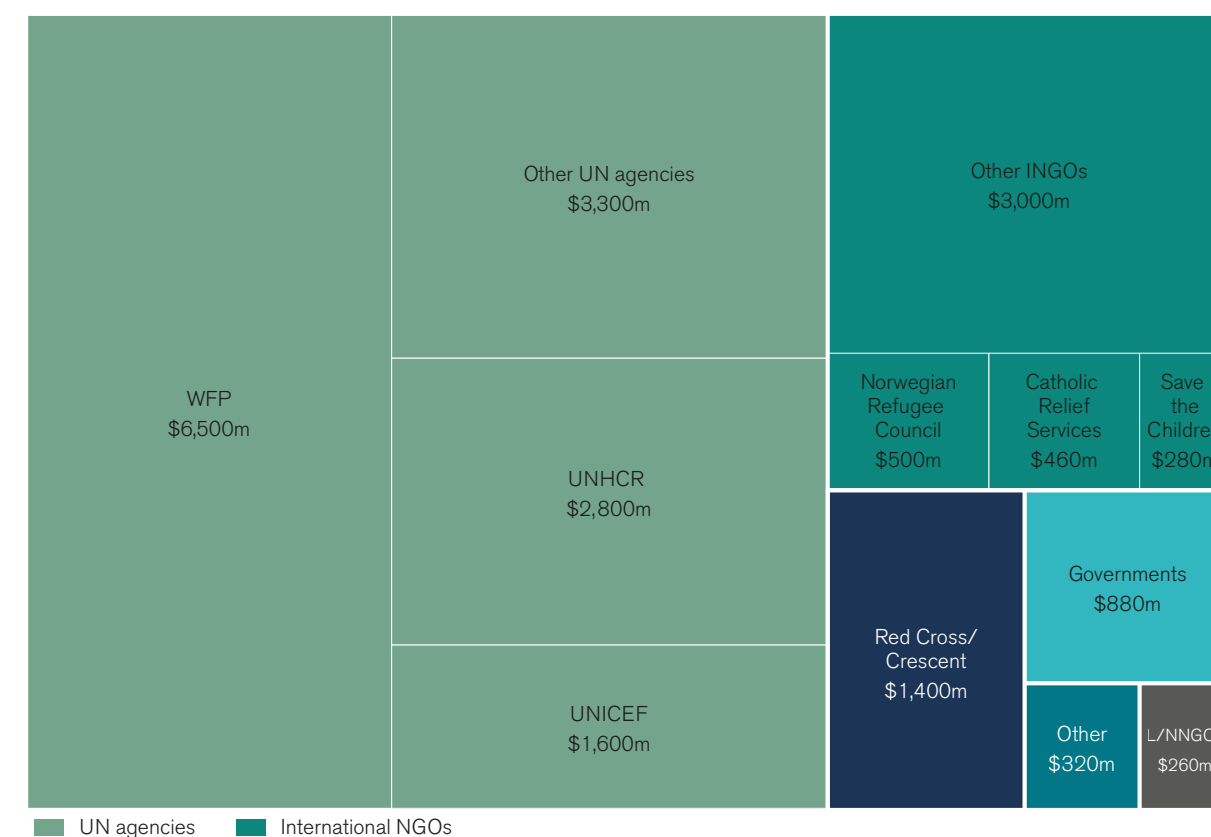
- WFP $6,500m
- UNHCR $2,800m
- UNICEF $1,600m
- Other UN agencies $3,300m
- Other INGOs $3,000m
- Norwegian Refugee Council $500m
- Catholic Relief Services $460m
- Save the Children $280m
- Red Cross/Crescent $1,400m
- Governments $880m
- Other $320m
- L/NNGOs $260m

UN agencies   International NGOs

Source: Development Initiatives based on UN OCHA FTS.

Notes: Figures are based on shares of net organisation-allocable funding. This includes all funding that has been newly received by all organisation minus the funding each organisation in turn provides in the same year. Data is in constant 2020 prices and values have been rounded up.

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Focus on: Support beyond the system

Focusing on the international humanitarian system to understand how people survive and recover from a crisis is akin to viewing a large landscape through a pin-sized hole. From capital cities to villages, the survivors of crisis draw on a wide range of overlapping resource flows and support networks. These forms of support are poorly linked to, understood or even acknowledged by humanitarian actors, partly because of their informality and complexity, but also due to lack of time and motivation in the humanitarian system to understand the contexts in which it operates.[27] Some staff in local and national NGOs appear aware of the challenge. As one employee in Somalia put it, 'Now we are living in a cave. Its name is [the] humanitarian system. But if you go out of that, no one knows what we are speaking about. Are we building on and empowering those informal solutions that already exist? For sure we need to improve.'

> **We are living in a cave. Its name is [the] humanitarian system.**

Even if the system were to consistently consider other resource flows and forms of support for crisis-affected people, the implications for humanitarian decision-making are not clear-cut. Localisation advocates maintain that international organisations need to take account of local and national forms of support in order to better complement them and move to a less Western-dominated model of aid.[28] Others emphasise effectiveness: knowing where international humanitarian funding complements other support can help target it to achieve more impact.[29] Critics, meanwhile, point to alternative resource flows as evidence that humanitarian aid in its current form is redundant, or does more harm than good.[30]

Fully assessing the extent, nature and value of these wider support networks is both unfeasible and outside the scope of this report. Instead, this chapter highlights some key modes of support that comprise the 'system outside the system'. We first review the scale of formal

27   Barnaby Willitts-King, John Bryant and Alexandra Spencer, *Valuing Local Resources in Humanitarian Crises* (London: HPG/ODI, 2019). www.alnap.org/help-library/valuing-local-resources-in-humanitarian-crises.

28   Arbie Baguios, 'Localisation Re-imagined' (Essay Series), *ALNAP*, 2021–22. www.alnap.org/localisation-re-imagined-localising-the-sector-vs-supporting-local-solutions.

29   Willitts-King, Bryant and Spencer, *Valuing Local Resources*. www.alnap.org/help-library/valuing-local-resources-in-humanitarian-crises.

30   New York Times Editorial Board, 'Foreign Aid Is Having a Reckoning'. www.alnap.org/help-library/foreign-aid-is-having-a-reckoning.

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humanitarian support compared to other resource flows in countries receiving international humanitarian assistance. We then look at five examples of support for people affected by crisis from outside the international humanitarian system: survivor/community-led crisis response (sclr[31]), religious organisations, the private sector, diasporas, and crisis financing from development banks.[32] These are an illustrative selection of important types of support where evidence has emerged during the study period, rather than a comprehensive picture of all resource flows. Notably, given the evidence gaps, this chapter does not examine state support to their populations during emergencies.

IHA as a proportion of resource flows to countries in crisis

Globally, international humanitarian assistance (IHA) accounts for a very small proportion of the volume of resources that flow to crisis-affected countries. At the start of the study period, IHA amounted to 1.7% of resource flows to the top 20 countries receiving humanitarian assistance.[33] However, there is much wider variation in relative amounts of IHA to other funding sources by country and over time. For some countries, humanitarian aid comprises a very small proportion of total resources, while in others it is an important lifeline. For example, relative to other key sources, IHA accounted for 46% of resource flows to Yemen in 2019, compared with 1.3% in Bangladesh. Over the study period, IHA became increasingly important to countries such as Yemen and Venezuela, where remittances remained fairly low and government revenue dropped.[34]

31   'sclr' tends to be kept lower-case when used as an acronym, reflecting its informal and community-based nature.

32   At the household level, the primary evidence on non-IHA support accessed by people affected by crisis comes from a multi-country study by ODI's Humanitarian Policy Group and qualitative examples from aid recipients in the focus group discussions carried out for this edition of the SOHS.

33   Angus Urquhart and Luminita Tuchel, *Global Humanitarian Assistance Report 2018* (Bristol: Development Initiatives, 2018). www.alnap.org/help-library/global-humanitarian-assistance-report-2018; Also cited in Willitts-King, Bryant and Spencer, 'Valuing Local Resources'. www.alnap.org/help-library/valuing-local-resources-in-humanitarian-crises.

34   In data compiled by Development Initiatives for the SOHS, government revenues in Venezuela fell significantly over the study period. However, since this data is not disaggregated by grant/non-grant, we have not included it here.

Figure 17: Size of humanitarian financial flows compared to other significant financial flows in case-study countries, 2018–2021

The proportion of humanitarian aid compared to other financial flows varies greatly among the case study countries in this SOHS (Bangladesh, DRC, Ethiopia, Lebanon, Yemen and Venezuela). In some, non-grant government revenue and remittances are considerably larger than international humanitarian aid.

Bangladesh

$29.9bn $16.4bn $0.6bn $4.6bn
$29.3bn $18.9bn $0.7bn $4.8bn
$31.4bn $21.7bn $0.6bn $5.9bn

Democratic Republic of the Congo

$4.6bn $1.2bn $1.7bn $0.6bn $2.1bn
$4.8bn $1.1bn $2bn $0.9bn $2.2bn
$4.2bn $1bn $1bn $0.9bn $2.6bn

Ethiopia

$10.3bn $0.4bn $0.7bn $4.5bn
$10.6bn $0.5bn $0.8bn $4.2bn
$10.1bn $0.4bn $0.8bn $4.7bn

Lebanon

$19.3bn $0.5bn $11.7bn $0.6bn $0.97bn
$17.8bn $0.5bn $12.2bn $0.6bn $0.87bn
$3.8bn $0.5bn $7bn $0.5bn $1bn

Yemen

$1.3bn $0.014bn $3bn $5.2bn
$1.4bn $0.07bn $2.5bn $1.4bn
$1.2bn $0.065bn $1.7bn $1bn

2018   2019   2020

Legend:
- Non-Grant Government Revenue
- Peacekeeping Financing
- Remittances
- ODA towards Humanitarian Aid
- ODA excluding Humanitarian Aid

Sources: Development Initiatives based on: International Monetary Fund (IMF) Regional Economic Outlook (Sub-Saharan Africa; Middle East & Central Asia), World Economic Outlook (WEO) (October 2021 & April 2022) and Bangladesh: 2021 Article IV Consultation (March 2022) data for non-grant government revenues; Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), Creditor Reporting System (CRS) (Downloaded: 19 May 2022) data for ODA; KNOMAD/World Bank (2022) data for remittances; and UN Budget Performance documents from the UN Digital Library on financing for peacekeeping activities.

Notes: See methodology in Annex 3. Data is in current prices and has been rounded up.

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The resource flows that go to countries experiencing a humanitarian crisis are not of course the same as the flows that go to the people affected by crises. For example, figures for non-grant revenues represent an estimate of government income – which will not be spent primarily on addressing the impacts of crises for the most marginalised groups. Similarly, non-humanitarian official development assistance (ODA) can be used to support investments in national infrastructure programmes that may not directly benefit the populations most likely to need support in a crisis. And, despite high remittance levels to countries like Uganda and Lebanon, it is unclear how much of this goes to refugees – the majority of those in humanitarian need – as opposed to middle-income households.[35] For these reasons, even if it reflects a small percentage of overall resources flowing into a country, IHA may still be a critical lifeline for marginalised populations.

Looking at resource flows at a household, rather than national, level may provide a better sense of what support is accessed by crisis-affected people. But while this offers valuable insights, findings are highly localised and difficult to quantify. One study found that trying to assess the monetary value of support was challenging and failed to capture what people perceived to be of real value and relevance for them.[36] Putting a financial figure on this net of informal support is impossible but failing to recognise it risks only valuing what can be counted.

35   Willitts-King, Bryant and Spencer, 'Valuing Local Resources', 12–13. www.alnap.org/help-library/valuing-local-resources-in-humanitarian-crises.

36   Willitts-King, Bryant and Spencer. (Ibid). www.alnap.org/help-library/valuing-local-resources-in-humanitarian-crises.

Figure 18: Insights from entities who also play a role in humanitarian response

Quotes from crisis affected populations and aid practitioners illustrate the importance of crisis response actors whose primary purpose is not humanitarian action.

"I feel proud to say that Yemeni people are well-known for their cooperation and mercy…I can say that the first aid I get are from relatives and neighbours."
Aid recipient, focus group discussion, Yemen.

"We try to deal with it on our own if the aid doesn't meet our needs. For example, if the NGOs fail to repair a toilet, we somehow buy some bamboo with our own money and repair it."
Aid recipient, focus group discussion, Bangladesh.

"When we first arrived here, the local community was extremely supportive, even allowing us to stay in their homes. Now that they've become like us in terms of financial capability, how can they possibly help us?"
Aid recipient, focus group discussion, Bangladesh.

"Humanitarian actors have been working not only with official structures but also at community level, for example, with women and youth groups. We have been working on fighting inequality with women associations and have been identifying those most in need with the support of IDP/refugee committees."
Aid practitioner, interview, Ethiopia.

"At the beginning, many of the political leaders, and affluent people rushed to the site with humanitarian assistance and provided support."
Key informant interview, Bangladesh.

"Once someone came to our homes and gave the majority of stores over L£400,000 and never announced his name."
Aid recipient, focus group discussion in Lebanon.

"Everyone who has someone abroad, whether Syrian or Lebanese, lives majorly through remittances. For example, during the holy month of Ramadan, there are capable expatriates of Syrian origin in Europe who contribute to the slaughter and distribution of sheep by sending $20 to each house."
Aid recipient, focus group discussion in Lebanon.

"Our relatives who live abroad gave us so many things to distribute…food, clothes, sanitary pads, cookware and mats. They said that NGOs could take a long time to provide assistance, therefore, we should immediately distribute these."
Aid recipient, focus group discussion in Bangladesh.

"Yes, we work very well together…especially when we have problems with children separated from their families. These partners help us as transporters. There are others who even lack food. We provide for them by asking big traders for help."
Local government, interview, DRC.

Circle diagram labels: Development actors; Peace actors; Local philanthropist; Survivors and community-led response groups; The International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement; Government agencies; Other donors; Local and national NGOs; UN humanitarian agencies; Donors; Trusts; Affected communities; Host communities; Diaspora groups; Militaries and civil defence groups; International NGOs; National Disaster Management Authorities (NDMAs); Host governments; Governments; Humanitarian arms of regional intergovernmental organisations; Civil society groups; Academics; Faith groups; Private-sector entities; Media.

Legend: Entities comprising the international humanitarian system, for which humanitarian aid provision is their primary mandate. Entities that play a critical role in humanitarian response but humanitarian action is not their core function.

Source: ALNAP and The Research People.

Notes: The size of the circles in this visualisation are not to scale and are therefore not representative of each entity's role or importance in the system.

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How well does the system engage with other forms of crisis support?

Survivor/citizen/community-led support

Whether it is a neighbour offering a place to sleep, a friend loaning money, or a relative sharing food, crisis-affected people and the communities around them are often their own first responders. Alternatively called 'survivor/citizen/community-led crisis response' or 'mutual/autonomous aid', these are efforts to respond to humanitarian need that are 'led and managed specifically by survivors and communities from crisis-affected populations themselves.'[37] Sclr has overlaps with locally led humanitarian assistance and participatory humanitarian action, but is unique in that it includes efforts that are not part of an institutionalised humanitarian programme or supported by official humanitarian funding.

Trying to get a global picture of sclr inevitably reveals a patchwork of diverse, often context-specific stories. In Bangladesh and Yemen, aid recipients explained that, before coming into contact with a humanitarian agency, they did as much as possible themselves to repair shelter and other infrastructure, with the help of neighbours and friends. Community members were the first responders in the earthquake-hit southern region of Haiti, where international presence was limited; and when the Ethiopian government limited access for international agencies, communities provided shelter to hundreds of thousands of displaced people from Tigray.[38] In Vanuatu, the response to Tropical Cyclone Harold in April 2020 was primarily community-led, through disaster committees and the National Council of Chiefs.[39] After the Izmir earthquake in October 2020, Turkish civil society actors mobilised substantial donations from private citizens and the private sector to support community-led disaster response.

The COVID-19 pandemic made some agencies pay greater attention to community capacity, as they found themselves relying on it to maintain services. Around the globe, people commonly portrayed as 'beneficiaries' or 'victims' took leading roles in providing public health messaging, enrolling neighbours in mobile money systems, delivering food and non-food items (NFIs), and supporting the delivery of basic health

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> **Around the globe, people commonly portrayed as 'beneficiaries' or 'victims' took leading roles in providing public health messaging, enrolling neighbours in mobile money systems, delivering food and non-food items, and supporting the delivery of basic health services.**

37   Justin Corbett, Nils Carstensen, and Simona Di Vicenz, *Survivor and community led crisis response: Practical experience and learning*, HPN Network Paper no. 84 (London: HPN/ODI, 2021). www.alnap.org/help-library/survivor-and-community-led-crisis-response-practical-experience-and-learning.

38   Interviews with key informants globally and in Ethiopia.

39   Véronique Barbelet, Gemma Davies, Josie Flint, and Eleanor Davey, *Interrogating the evidence base on humanitarian localisation: A literature study* (London: ODI, 2021). www.alnap.org/help-library/interrogating-the-evidence-base-on-humanitarian-localisation-a-literature-study.

services.[40] The pandemic provided momentum to ongoing attempts to capture and reflect sclr efforts through databases[41] and studies.[42]

But outside the pandemic, with the possible exception of the Red Cross and Red Crescent movement's volunteer network, humanitarian agencies were slow to routinely recognise, much less actively support, sclr. For instance, local and international staff involved in the 2021 Haiti earthquake response reported a lack of engagement by international actors with local people and networks, including missed opportunities on preparedness planning, despite this being a key lesson from the 2010 earthquake response.

A small number of international agencies intentionally invested in addressing this – for example, in 2018 the Start Network supported the creation of four 'grassroots' innovation labs in Bangladesh, Jordan, Kenya and the Philippines, providing small grants and training to crisis-affected people.[43] The Local to Global Protection network continued to document and share examples from its partners' work on sclr, which included support to L/NNGOs in Haiti to undertake participatory projects in which community members co-managed funds.[44]

But the lack of deeper efforts to take account of and support sclr has been disappointing to advocates within the system, not only because it reflects a failure to uphold commitments to be more local, complementary and participatory, but also because of the wider recognition that, as one study noted, this 'is not a radical request: rather, it is a common-sense invitation to become part of an inspiring and long-overdue process of promoting and strengthening proven ways of working that support the remarkable humanity, capacity, initiative and collective compassion of people in crisis.'[45]

40   Nils Carstensen, Mandeep Mudhar and Freja Schurmann Munksgaard, '"Let communities do their work": The role of mutual aid and self-help groups in the Covid-19 pandemic response', *Disasters* 45, no. S1 (2021). www.alnap.org/help-library/let-communities-do-their-work%E2%80%99-the-role-of-community-mutual-aid-and-self-help-groups-in; Baron, CARE and UN Women, *Latin America and the Caribbean Rapid Gender Analysis for COVID-19* (Geneva/New York: CARE and UN Women, 2020). www.alnap.org/help-library/latin-america-and-the-caribbean-rapid-gender-analysis-for-covid-19; ALNAP COVID-19 lessons paper, forthcoming.

41   HPG, 'COVID-19: Tracking local humanitarian action and complementary partnerships', HPG/ODI, n.d; Geneva Centre of Humanitarian Studies, 'COVID-19 humanitarian platform', n.d. https://covid19-tracking-local-humanitarian-action.odi.digital.

42   Corbett, Carstensen and Di Vicenz, *Survivor and Community Led Crisis Response*. www.alnap.org/help-library/survivor-and-community-led-crisis-response-practical-experience-and-learning; also efforts to document locally-led humanitarian action have included sclr, see for example: Barbelet, Bryant and Spencer, 'Local Humanitarian Action during COVID-19' www.alnap.org/help-library/local-humanitarian-action-during-covid-19-findings-from-a-diary-study; ALNAP COVID-19 lessons paper, forthcoming.

43   Lillie Rosen, 'Reflecting on two years of community-driven innovation with the Depp Labs' (Blog), *Start Network*, 2 August 2019. www.alnap.org/help-library/reflecting-on-two-years-of-community-driven-innovation-with-the-depp-labs.

44   Charlotte Greene et al., 'Learning from survivor- and community-led response in Haiti', *Humanitarian Exchange* 79, 50–56. www.alnap.org/help-library/localisation-and-local-humanitarian-action-learning-from-survivor-and-community-led.

45   Corbett, Carstensen and Di Vicenz, *Survivor and Community Led Crisis Response*. www.alnap.org/help-library/survivor-and-community-led-crisis-response-practical-experience-and-learning.

Religious organisations

The international humanitarian system has had mixed experiences with supporting and connecting to religious organisations. Faith-based international NGOs have long worked with local networks and religious leaders to provide a timely response and to connect with communities.[46] For example, Caritas Myanmar worked with diocesan networks to create a COVID-19 preparedness and response plan, supported by long-standing INGO partner funding. These connections helped the system reach hard-to-access populations: Pastoral Social Caritas Bolivia provided prisoners with food and hygiene supplies during the pandemic when most organisations were denied access.[47] Secular agencies also applied lessons from the West Africa Ebola response by more consciously engaging religious and traditional actors during recent Ebola outbreaks and the COVID-19 pandemic.[48]

Religious actors have also been important from a funding perspective: interviews indicate that individual donations from Christian and Muslim religious communities in high-income countries remained surprisingly strong during the pandemic, helping several faith-based INGOs to maintain their operations in the face of cuts to institutional donor funding. Zakat and Islamic social financing were an increasingly important resource for humanitarian efforts both inside and outside the system throughout this period. Zakat was estimated to be worth between $550 billion and $600 billion in 2019, with estimates of the portion of this that went to some form of humanitarian assistance ranging between 23% and 57%.[49] In recent years international organisations explored how to harness some of this potential – organisations including Islamic Relief and IFRC have been working with different forms of Islamic social funding, and UNHCR has sought to solicit zakat donations, with over $23.6 million received for its Refugee Zakat Fund in 2021, which targeted over 687,000 refugees or displaced people in 13 countries.[50]

Several barriers remain to effective system-wide engagement with local faith actors, including limited religious literacy among many humanitarian actors and concerns that faith-based actors may discriminate against some

46   Olivia Wilkinson et al., *Bridge Builders: Strengthening the Role of Local Faith Actors in Humanitarian Response in South Sudan* (Islamic Relief, Joint Learning Initiative on Faith and Local Communities, RedR UK, Tearfund, Tearfund Belgium, University of Leeds, 2020). www.alnap.org/help-library/bridge-builders-strengthening-the-role-of-local-faith-actors-in-humanitarian-response.

47   Caritas Internationalis, *Localisation in Covid-19: Experience of Caritas national organisations with humanitarian funding, partnerships and coordination in the Covid-19 pandemic* (2021). www.alnap.org/help-library/localisation-in-covid19-experience-of-caritas-national-organisations-with-humanitarian.

48   Wilkinson et al., *Bridge Builders*. www.alnap.org/help-library/bridge-builders-strengthening-the-role-of-local-faith-actors-in-humanitarian-response.

49   Willitts-King, Bryant and Spencer, *Valuing Local Resources*. www.alnap.org/help-library/valuing-local-resources-in-humanitarian-crises.

50   UNHCR Refugee Zakat Fund, *Islamic Philanthropy Annual Report 2022* (Geneva: UNHCR, 2022). www.alnap.org/help-library/islamic-philanthropy-annual-report-2022.

crisis-affected populations.[51] Concerns go both ways: often, there is little incentive for local faith-based organisations to work with cumbersome aid agencies and structures. Counter-terrorism laws also affected the ability of humanitarian actors to engage with some religious groups, with several INGO interviewees reporting difficulties in passing funding to Muslim organisations.

The private sector

In addition to the contributions to IHA outlined in Chapter 2, private sector actors – particularly domestic businesses in crisis-affected countries – provide other forms of support outside the humanitarian system. While this support can be significant, its full scale is difficult to estimate. There are no organisations or platforms that track or enable reporting of these resource flows, and if there were, they would be challenged to gather data from the thousands of small to mid-size domestic private sector actors on efforts ranging from supporting governments' logistics capacity, to local corner stalls providing free meals. The influencing power of the private sector can also be very effective but is similarly diverse and difficult to monitor.[52]

The COVID-19 pandemic shed some light on the importance of local private sector actors. A global survey of humanitarian actors found increased mobilisation of local private sectors during the pandemic compared to previous responses in most of the study countries.[53] They provided resources, including PPE, and supported food and cash provision, sometimes in collaboration with humanitarian actors and sometimes independently.[54] In the Philippines, for example, local NGOs and government coordinated with the private sector to deliver PPE and health messaging without international humanitarian funding, and in Vanuatu, the Vanuatu Business Resilience Council was critical in the initial response to Cyclone Harold when the pandemic made it difficult for international humanitarian actors to gain access.[55]

While there were new efforts to engage with the private sector over the study period, there is little evidence that international humanitarians are engaging with the private sector beyond as a potential funding source. Almost half (45%) of humanitarian aid practitioners in the SOHS survey rated their current relationship with the private sector as poor and

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51   Tara R. Gingerich et al., *Local Humanitarian Leadership and Religious Literacy: Engaging with Religion, Faith, and Faith Actors* (Oxfam and Harvard Divinity School, 2017). www.alnap.org/help-library/local-humanitarian-leadership-and-religious-literacy-engaging-with-religion-faith-and.

52   Global key informant interviews.

53   DA Global, *Is Aid Really Changing? What the COVID-19 Response Tells Us about Localisation, Decolonisation and the Humanitarian System* (London: British Red Cross, 2021). www.alnap.org/help-library/is-aid-really-changing-what-the-covid-19-response-tells-us-about-localisation.

54   DA Global, *Is Aid Really Changing?* www.alnap.org/help-library/is-aid-really-changing-what-the-covid-19-response-tells-us-about-localisation.

55   Global key informant interviews.

> **Development actors have also noted that 'a knowledge gap remains concerning which approaches and instruments are effective in engaging the private sector in fragile and conflict-affected setting countries.'**

were ambivalent about future engagement. Many humanitarians see the potential value of more strategic partnerships, but the incentives driving private sector actors remain poorly understood in the humanitarian space, leading to ongoing concerns about ethics or resource competition.[56] This is not limited to the humanitarian space: despite private sector mobilisation being more of a core aspect of development assistance, key development actors have also noted that 'a knowledge gap remains concerning which approaches and instruments are effective in engaging the private sector in fragile and conflict-affected setting countries'.[57]

Diasporas

People who no longer live in their country of origin are an important source of support for their families and former co-nationals affected by crisis. One of the most significant ways diaspora networks contribute to crisis response and recovery is by sending money to their contacts in crisis-affected countries. Other forms of diaspora support include skills sharing, advocacy, political engagement and volunteering.[58]

In 2021, remittances to low- and middle-income countries (LMICs) were estimated at $605 billion, over 10 times higher than the total amount of IHA, and a nearly 15% increase from 2018.[59] While remittances to LMICs were expected to fall significantly in 2020 due to the economic impacts of COVID-19, they instead increased by a smaller rate that year (0.8%), and rebounded with an 8.6% increase in 2021, akin to pre-pandemic growth rates.[60] While these remittances include transfers to people in a wide range of circumstances, studies suggest that substantial amounts do pass to people in some crisis-affected countries.[61] For example, in 2020, the $7 billion of remittances accounted for the

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56   Global key informant interviews.

57   World Bank Group, *The International Finance Corporation's Engagement in Fragile and Conflict-Affected Situations: Results and Lessons* (Washington DC: World Bank Group, 2019), 9. www.alnap.org/help-library/the-international-finance-corporation%E2%80%99s-engagement-in-fragile-and-conflict-affected.

58   Shabaka, *Diaspora Engagement in Times of Crisis* (Brussels: EUDiF, International Centre for Migration Policy Development, 2021) www.alnap.org/help-library/diaspora-engagement-in-times-of-crisis; Jeeyon Kim et al., *"I Could Not Sleep While They Were Hungry": Investigating the Role of Social Networks in Yemen's Humanitarian Crisis* (Portland OR: Mercy Corps, 2021). www.alnap.org/help-library/%E2%80%9Ci-could-not-sleep-while-they-were-hungry%E2%80%9D-investigating-the-role-of-social-networks-in.

59   Knomad, 'A war in a pandemic: Implications of the Ukraine crisis and COVID-19 on Global Governance of Migration and Remittance Flows', Migration and Development Brief no. 36 (Washington DC: World Bank Group, 2022). www.alnap.org/help-library/a-war-in-a-pandemic-implications-of-the-ukraine-crisis-and-covid-19-on-global.

60   Knomad, 'A war in a pandemic'. www.alnap.org/help-library/a-war-in-a-pandemic-implications-of-the-ukraine-crisis-and-covid-19-on-global.

61   Amy Keith et al., *The Future of Financial Assistance: An Outlook to 2030* (Oxford/London: CALP Network and IARAN, 2019). www.alnap.org/help-library/future-of-financial-assistance-report; Willitts-King, Bryant and Spencer, *Valuing Local Resources*. www.alnap.org/help-library/valuing-local-resources-in-humanitarian-crises. Official remittance figures likely underestimate the actual total value. Accurately estimating remittance volumes is challenged by lack of personal transfer information, inability to capture remittances in the form of physical money brought across borders, and lack of central bank reporting from several receiving countries.

largest financial flow into Lebanon, despite a decrease of over 40% between 2019 and 2020.[62] Concurrently, there is recognition that remittances are not a substitute for humanitarian assistance, as they are typically available to individuals who are better off, and who can access money transfer mechanisms in urban areas.[63]

Figure 19: Estimates of remittance flows to low- and middle-income countries, 2018–2021

Remittance flows to low- and middle-income countries have increased by nearly 15% since 2018, to an estimated $605 billion in 2021. This is 10 times higher than the total amount of international humanitarian assistance.

$527bn $553bn $558bn $605bn

2018   2019   2020   2021
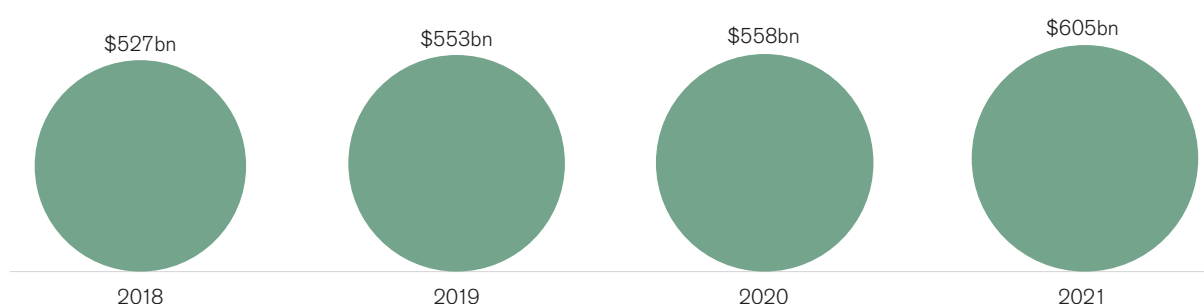
Source: KNOMAD/World Bank staff; IMF Balance of Payments Statistics.

Notes: 2021 remittance figures are estimates. All figures are based on current US$.

Outside of remittances, diaspora communities relied heavily on social media to connect with crisis-affected people in their countries of origin. For example, WhatsApp groups have been used to assess needs,[64] the Syrian diaspora used online crowdfunding to support underground hospitals[65] and the Somali diaspora used social media platform Somali Faces to provide funds to implementers via local bank accounts and fund managers.[66]

Humanitarians have attempted to better engage with diaspora groups at different levels. For example, USAID sought to connect diaspora communities to humanitarian responses through national cluster systems, engaging them in funding efforts for specific crises – a televised collaboration for Haiti is one recent example – and working with networks

62   Bangladesh and Lebanon remittances are in 2020 constant prices.

63   Willitts-King, Bryant and Spencer, *Valuing Local Resources*. www.alnap.org/help-library/valuing-local-resources-in-humanitarian-crises.

64   Shabaka, *Diaspora Engagement in Times of Crisis*. www.alnap.org/help-library/diaspora-engagement-in-times-of-crisis.

65   Samuel Hall, *Creating Opportunities to Work with Diasporas In Humanitarian Settings* (Copenhagen: Diaspora Emergency Action and Coordination, 2018). www.alnap.org/help-library/creating-opportunities-to-work-with-diaspora-in-humanitarian-settings.

66   Hall, *Creating Opportunities*. www.alnap.org/help-library/creating-opportunities-to-work-with-diaspora-in-humanitarian-settings.

across response, risk reduction and resilience initiatives.[67] Elsewhere, however, humanitarian agencies' attempts at coordination with diasporas have been limited – in part due to difficulties identifying representative actors among diaspora groups and a lack of trust in international aid institutions among diaspora groups based on fears of racism and power asymmetries.[68]

Development crisis finance

With increasing understanding of the threats that crises pose to development gains, the World Bank has deepened its engagement in crisis-affected contexts in recent years. But, while the scale of funding the Bank can potentially bring to bear is significant compared to IHA, the impacts of these investments and their potential for future crisis response remained unclear.

At the start of the study period, the World Bank launched its five-year Fragility, Conflict and Violence (FCV) strategy. As noted by one interviewee at the World Bank, the development context is not 'stable anymore… [it's] constantly in crisis because this is what is happening… we are basically driven to adapt to the extreme challenges'. As a result, the Bank has made crisis preparedness and prevention a policy priority of the International Development Association (IDA), its fund for the world's poorest countries, and has developed new mechanisms to address specific needs, such as the Crisis Response Window (CRW) Early Response Financing allocation, and the IDA window for Host Communities and Refugees (WHR).

While these shifts have led to some engagement with and funding of humanitarian agencies, the World Bank's approach in crises remains firmly centred on resilience and shock-proofing development assets, rather than changing or competing with the humanitarian funding landscape. The idea that 'the Bank is entering the humanitarian space and becoming a humanitarian donor' was described by one expert as an 'oversimplification' that reflected misunderstandings of how the Bank operates and where its added value lies. From the perspective of its shareholders, many of whom are government donors to humanitarian agencies, it would be inefficient for the Bank to provide direct funding to the same agencies for similar purposes. Instead, the World Bank continues to work primarily with governments as its key partners, only providing direct financing to humanitarian agencies on rare occasions where the context precludes partnership with the state. Under IDA19, for example, there were only a handful of direct partnerships (with the ICRC in Somalia and South Sudan, and UN agencies in Yemen).

67   Global key informant interview.

68   Shabaka, *Diaspora Engagement in Times of Crisis.* www.alnap.org/help-library/diaspora-engagement-in-times-of-crisis.

Bank staff noted that the World Bank would never be able to replace existing humanitarian funding models due to its slower pace of operation, country-led model and development mandate, but would instead look to find ways to complement these. Structural differences and divides would remain but this does not rule out a layered approach, whereby the World Bank could complement the approaches of UN humanitarian agencies. This complementarity is key to the humanitarian–development–peace nexus approach, but as Chapter 12 explores, the World Bank has not yet played a substantial role in coordination to advance this.

Chapter 3: Is there enough aid?

IN BRIEF: The humanitarian funding gap has grown since the start of the study period. Over the past decade, aid levels have not kept up with the near quadrupling of the financial requirements set out in humanitarian appeals as these sought to reach more people in more crises. While the COVID-19 pandemic drove a $39.3 billion peak in appeals requirements in 2020, funding rose modestly, meaning the appeals were little more than half-funded – a record low. The effects were unevenly felt and the gap between the best and the worst funded appeals has widened. Protracted crises continued to place a major strain on the system, accounting for the majority of requirements, but also seeing their lowest levels of funding.

Despite commitments to 'deepen and broaden' the resource base, there has been little progress in mobilising new sources of finance at the necessary scale. Shortfalls were felt by crisis-affected people in the reduced quality and quantity of support: more aid recipients felt that aid was insufficient than in the previous study period. Tellingly, though, people were more positive about sufficiency when they felt that agencies had made good efforts to engage with them.

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In 2021, appeals requirements reached $38.4 billion – nearly four times the $10.5 billion in 2012.

In 2012, the SOHS asked, 'Does the system have adequate resources to do the job?' It concluded 'the answer, unfortunately, is still no'.[69] A decade on, as Chapter 2 shows, humanitarian financing had roughly doubled,[70] yet the answer to this question remains the same: humanitarian response is often held back by insufficient funds. While this is not the only constraint and – as the Ukraine crisis shows – sufficient absorption capacity and access are essential, the rise in donor spending did not keep pace with the rise in demand for humanitarian support.

This increased demand is not as simple as a raw rise in the number of new crisis situations around the world or the number of people affected by them. It is also a combination of cumulative needs, a growing system, and shifts in the scope of and expectations for humanitarian response. The result is a global humanitarian ask, in the form of UN-coordinated appeals, that reached record highs over the past four years, but which also saw in 2020 a record low in the level of funding against needs. This prompted renewed questions about how the system should frame its scope of action; how it defines needs and calculates costs; whether it can operate more efficiently within its means; and, of course, where it can find more resources.

69   ALNAP, *The State of the Humanitarian System 2012* (London: ALNAP, 2012). www.alnap.org/help-library/the-state-of-the-humanitarian-system-2012-edition.

70   International humanitarian assistance from government donors doubled, from $14 billion in 2012 to $28 billion in 2021.

These questions were central to discussions and commitments in the study period. They were the reason why the former Secretary-General set up the High-Level Panel on Humanitarian Financing, whose 2016 report on addressing the humanitarian financing gap[71] informed the creation of the Grand Bargain process. However, subsequent efforts have focused on the quality rather than quantity of aid. Despite pockets of initiatives, the humanitarian financing gap remained largely unaddressed over the study period.

This chapter charts the levels of humanitarian resources against identified financial needs over the past four years. It examines the sufficiency of funding globally, by technical sector and in specific emergencies, as well as over time in protracted crises. Critically, it explores what is known about the impacts of shortfalls for humanitarian response.

Are there enough funds globally?

Rising requirements

UN-coordinated appeals – including humanitarian response plans, flash appeals and refugee response plans – represent the system's collective estimate of needs and costs. While they do not involve all agencies,[72] they are the most comprehensive indicator of the humanitarian financing required, and how funding measures up against this. As the humanitarian system grows (see Chapter 2), so does the level of need it recognises and seeks to respond to: in 2012, 617 agencies participated in the appeals process;[73] by 2021, this had more than doubled to 1,245.[74]

In 2021, appeals requirements reached $38.4 billion – nearly four times the $10.5 billion in 2012. Over the previous four years, the collective financial ask rose steadily, before COVID-related requirements drove a dramatic peak of $39.3 billion in 2020, which included a $9.5 billion global humanitarian response plan (GHRP) for the COVID-19 pandemic. This was not matched by the relatively modest increase in funding and the level of requirements met in 2020 reached a record low.[75] By 2021 levels had shown some improvement but were still well below the 60% average over the rest of the decade.

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71   High-Level Panel on Humanitarian Financing, *Too Important to Fail: Addressing the Humanitarian Financing Gap*, Report to the Secretary-General (New York: United Nations, 2016). www.alnap.org/help-library/too-important-to-fail-%E2%80%93-addressing-the-humanitarian-financing-gap.

72   Notably, ICRC, IFRC and MSF chose to remain outside the appeals process, and many local and national NGOs are also not directly linked into the appeals process.

73   These figures refer to agencies participating in the Consolidated Appeals Processes and Flash Appeals in 2012 and in Humanitarian Response Plans and Flash Appeals in 2021.

74   However, while the number of participating organisations increased, the share of those agencies receiving funding within response plans decreased from 51% in 2012 to 42% in 2021.

75   Excluding the $3.8 billion in funding to the GHRP, funding to appeals was lower in 2020 than in 2019 ($16.3 billion vs $19.4 billion, respectively).

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Figure 20: Requirements and funding, UN-coordinated appeals, 2012–2021

The amount of funding required by UN humanitarian appeals nearly quadrupled over the past decade. In 2020 the appeals reached the highest level of requirements but the lowest level of funding.
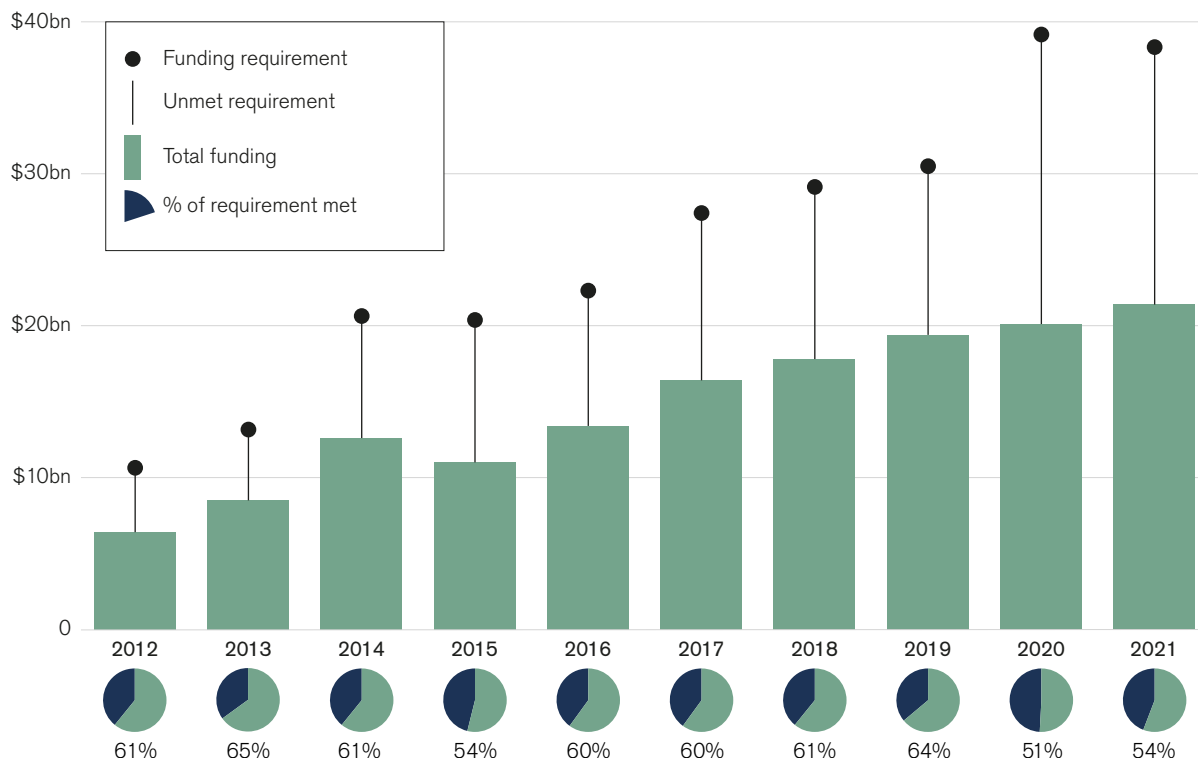
Source: Development Initiatives based on UN OCHA FTS, Syria 3RP Dashboards and UNHCR data. Data from 2012 onwards includes all regional response plans tracked by UNHCR's refugee funding tracker and all response plans tracked by FTS, including HRPs, flash appeals and other plans outside of OCHA's Global Humanitarian Overview. Data is in current prices and was last updated on on 22 June 2022. Funding data for the Syria Regional Refugee and Resilience Plan was taken from 3RP funding dashboards for 2018–2020 and FTS for 2021, given no end-of-year funding dashboard was available for 2021 at the time of analysis. There is potential double-counting for appeal requirements and funding in HRP countries that are also country components of RRPs. However, the possible extent of this is not big enough to change global UN-coordinated funding trends.

Notes: These figures include all UN-coordinated appeals covered under the Global Humanitarian Overview (regional response plans, refugee response plans, flash appeals and humanitarian response plans).

> There were
> # 48
> appeals by 2021 – more than double the number a decade ago.

Financial requirements grew as appeals sought to reach more people in more crises. Prior to the pandemic, in 2019, there were 36 UN-coordinated response plans for specific countries or crises. In 2020, the COVID-19 response pushed this up to 56 – including the GHRP, which in turn covered 63 countries. The number of humanitarian response plans fell slightly in 2021, but continued COVID-related needs and the launch of new appeals (including for Northern Ethiopia and Afghanistan) meant that there were 48 appeals by 2021 – more than double the number a decade ago.[76]

76   In 2012, there were 21 UN Consolidated Appeal Plans; Oliver Buston and Kerry Smith, *Global Humanitarian Assistance Report 2013* (Bristol: Development Initiatives, 2013). www.alnap.org/help-library/global-humanitarian-assistance-report-2013.

In the five years between 2017 and 2021, the number of people the system aimed to reach through humanitarian response plans rose by over two-thirds. The number of people targeted in appeals had already been increasing annually, but when the pandemic hit in 2020, the total in the humanitarian response plans alone jumped to 141 million in 2020 – a 43% rise. However, the peak did not subside; needs continued to rise into 2021, with 143 million people targeted for humanitarian aid. By the time the 2022 Global Humanitarian Overview was published in December 2021, the crisis in Afghanistan had prompted another significant increase in the number of people targeted in the humanitarian response plans, to 154 million. This was two months before the Russian invasion of Ukraine.

Figure 21: Number of people in need, 2018–2021

The estimated number of people in humanitarian need peaked in 2020. That year, UN appeals reported nearly 440 million people in need and aimed to assist just over 60% of them.

- People targeted for assistance
- People in need

97.9m	117.4m	264.2m	174m
135.8m	166.5m	439.2m	255.1m
2018	**2019**	**2020**	**2021**
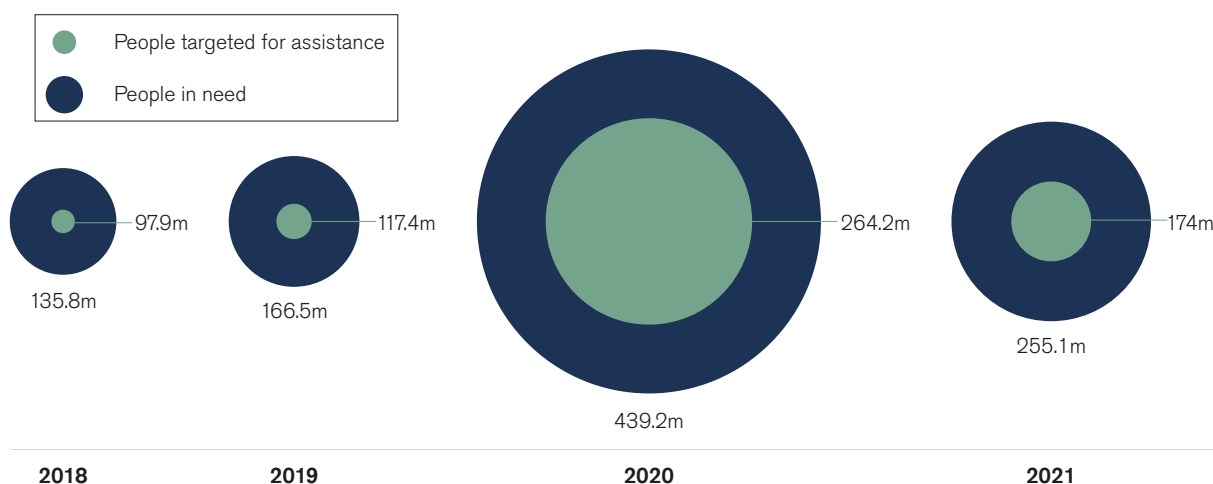
Source: OCHA Global Humanitarian Needs Overview, 2018–2021.

Notes: These figures include all UN-coordinated appeals covered under the GHO, including refugee response plans, flash appeals as well as humanitarian response plans.

The price tag for humanitarian response reflects not just the number of crisis-affected people, but also how expensive it is to respond to their needs, as we explore further in Chapter 10. Taking the long view, the average funds required per person targeted actually appears to have decreased over the past decade. In 2012, the SOHS reported an average of $220 required per targeted person in appeals, compared to $178 per person in the 2021 appeals. These figures have to be treated with caution, not only because they mask great variation between contexts, but also because the methods for estimating the numbers of people have changed over the past 10 years.[77] Bearing this in mind, these figures do counter

77   As Chapter 5 explores, the methods for arriving at the number of people targeted vary significantly between appeals and, despite efforts to increase standardisation, do not bear rigorous comparison.

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the common perception that humanitarian response is becoming more expensive. It is likely that the COVID-19 pandemic had a mixed effect on how expensive different programmes were in 2020 and 2021, pushing up the costs of procurement as the prices of basic goods rose yet lowering the cost of provision in some contexts as international staff stayed away. Access challenges may also be having an impact on cost: in terms of requirements per person, the three most expensive crises by far in 2021 – Libya, Iraq and Syria – were all situations of active conflict, where access to affected populations was extremely constrained.

Figure 22: Requirements and funding per targeted person in UN-coordinated appeals, 2017–2021

Although the number of people targeted for aid in humanitarian appeals grew each year since 2017, the average funding required and received per person appears to be much lower in 2021 compared to 2017. These figures should be treated with caution due to differing contexts and changes in estimation methods.

Source: Development Initiatives based on HPC API for data on people in need and targeted and UN OCHA FTS for funding data.

Notes: For reasons of data consistency over the period, data only includes HRPs and not other types of UN-coordinated appeals.

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Deepening shortfall

As the mismatch between expectations and available funds grew, some donors questioned the shortfall. Response plans are an imperfect aggregate of what agencies estimate they need to respond to – oversight of which is held by the agencies with the biggest financial stake.[78] There have long been concerns that a combination of underfunding and funding competition creates considerable pressures to ask for more. In the last study period, the High-Level Panel on Humanitarian Financing addressed concerns about 'appeal inflation'.[79] Yet research has also suggested the reverse: in some cases, pressures to present a tightly prioritised appeal with an acceptable price tag for donors have led to agencies under-presenting, rather than over-estimating, needs.[80] Over the past decade, there have been multiple iterative measures to address appeals scepticism, from separating the needs overview from the response plans, to testing new costing models and standardising presentation. Donor representatives recognised progress in improving the reliability and comparability of appeals, including under the Grand Bargain work on needs and the new Joint Intersectoral Assessment Framework, but as one put it: 'I think we would recognise the efforts that have gone into that, but also the fact that we are nowhere near there yet'.

The more the gap between appeals requirements and funding increases, the more it exposes the 'relative fragility'[81] of a system reliant on the discretionary support of a small number of donors. Five years after the High-Level Panel on Humanitarian Financing called for a 'deepening and broadening of the resource base', a progress review concluded that 'there has been a disappointing lack of progress on widening the resource base of the existing humanitarian system'.[82] Despite high hopes for the potential of innovative financing models in the last study period, this has not translated into anything of significant dollar value. Impact bonds and other models have not yet proved suitable to finance humanitarian needs at scale. While Islamic Social Financing remains important to many communities and agencies, it is not the funding solution for the system; in the words of one interviewee, 'There's no pot of gold'. INGOs did, however, report being positively surprised by the generosity of the general public in maintaining and increasing their giving even while facing economic uncertainty

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78   Jeremy Konyndyk, *Rethinking the Humanitarian Business Model* Center for Global Development (Washington DC: Center for Global Development, 2018). www.alnap.org/help-library/rethinking-the-humanitarian-business-model.

79   High-Level Panel on Humanitarian Financing, *Too Important to Fail*. www.alnap.org/help-library/too-important-to-fail-%E2%80%93-addressing-the-humanitarian-financing-gap.

80   Sophia Swithern, *Underfunded Appeals: Understanding the Consequences, Improving the System* (Stockholm: Expert Group for Aid Studies, 2018). www.alnap.org/help-library/underfunded-appeals-understanding-the-consequences-improving-the-system.

81   Key informant interview.

82   Barnaby Willits-King et al., *Reducing the Humanitarian Financing Gap: Review of Progress since the Report of the High-Level Panel on Humanitarian Financing* (London: HPG/ODI, 2021). www.alnap.org/help-library/reducing-the-humanitarian-financing-gap-review-of-progress-since-the-report-of-the-high.

themselves. Even before the Ukraine war, one INGO leader described the positive reaction to the COVID-19 and Afghanistan appeals: 'People have been concerned about domestic issues, whether it's Brexit or food prices, but for them to think about what it looks like in South Sudan, or Yemen, or Somalia, and contribute money, it's been incredible'.

What does the funding gap mean for different emergencies?

Variation between countries

The global funding shortfall was not evenly distributed between crises. As previous editions of the SOHS have found, there remains a significant gap between the best- and worst-funded appeals – and that gap appears to have widened over the past four years. In 2018, there was an 86 percentage point gap between the least- and the best-funded appeals;[83] in 2021, there was a 172 percentage point coverage gap: the COVID-19 Nepal response plan was 9% funded, putting programming feasibility in question, while the Afghanistan flash appeal was 181% funded, raising questions around absorption capacity. Although these were outliers, they were part of a wider picture of funding polarisation: between 2016 and 2018, 8% of appeals were less than a quarter funded and 13% were over 75% funded. Between 2020 and 2021, 19% were less than a quarter funded and 17% were over 75% funded.[84]

Although the GHRP was only 40% funded and the response to country-specific COVID-19 plans was highly variable, evaluations found that there was a good level of funding for the primary health impacts of the disease – both new, direct funding and funding redirected from elsewhere. Redirected funding came in particular from programmes that had to be suspended due to COVID-19. However, it appears that this may have been at the cost of meeting pre-existing needs[85] and addressing the pandemic's secondary impacts. For example, a Disasters Emergency Committee (DEC) review of the COVID-19 response in Afghanistan reported concern among local populations that the lack of medicines for other diseases was a more pressing issue for them.[86] This was echoed by a multi-country review by War Child Holland: '"If COVID, then why not…

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83   In 2018, the best funded HRP was Iraq, at 98% funded, and the worst was Haiti, at 12%.

84   These figures were at time of analysis in June 2022 and may change as financial reporting to OCHA FTS is updated.

85   Ted Freeman, Andrea Lee Esser and Paola Vela, *Interim Report: System-Wide Evaluation of the UNDS Response to COVID-19 March 2022* (New York: United Nations Development System, 2022). www.alnap.org/help-library/interim-report-system-wide-evaluation-of-the-unds-response-to-covid-19; UNHCR, 'COVID-19 Evaluative Evidence Brief #1. Evaluation Service October 2021' (Geneva: UNHCR, 2021) www.alnap.org/help-library/covid-19-evaluative-evidence-brief-1-evaluation-service-october-2021.

86   Laurent Saillard and Humayun Iqbal, *DEC –CVA Real Time Response Review: Afghanistan* (Groupe URD and Disasters Emergency Committee, 2021). www.alnap.org/help-library/dec-coronavirus-appeal-real-time-response-review-afghanistan-country-report.

(malaria/malnutrition/etc)?" is a very legitimate question in communities plagued by other needs. Even more so considering how preventive measures worsened very fragile situations. Many staff also struggle with this question. Obviously, this question is relevant not only for War Child, but to the whole international community'.[87]

Concentration of funds

Global requirements and funding are concentrated in a handful of major emergencies – the five largest appeals accounted for 46% of all requirements, and nearly 40% of all funding to appeals. This concentration extends beyond appeals themselves.

> **'Over the past decade 42% of humanitarian funding went to just five countries while 10% of all funding was shared across 117 countries.'**

Yemen and Syria were the two largest recipients throughout the study period, receiving between a third and a fifth, respectively, of all humanitarian assistance each year.

The COVID-19 pandemic diluted this funding concentration. The share and volumes of funding received by the largest recipients fell, as the number of countries requiring assistance dramatically rose; 34 more countries were in receipt of humanitarian aid in 2020 than in 2019, including serval high-income countries.[88]

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87   Silvia Ferretti and Niaz Murtaza, *War Child Holland COVID-19 Response: Multi-Country Real Time Review* (Amsterdam: War Child Holland, 2020). www.alnap.org/help-library/war-child-holland-covid-19-response-multi-country-real-time-review-0.

88   The largest of these were countries hosting large numbers of refugees (Greece, Panama and Chile). For most other high-income countries in receipt of small volumes of funding as reported to FTS, the data does not indicate whether this funding was intended for use in those countries or to be directed elsewhere.

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Figure 23: Requirements and funding by individual UN-coordinated appeals, 2021

2021 saw high variation in appeals between countries, both in the amount required and in the percentage of funds received. For example, Nepal was among the smaller appeals in 2021 but was only 9% funded.
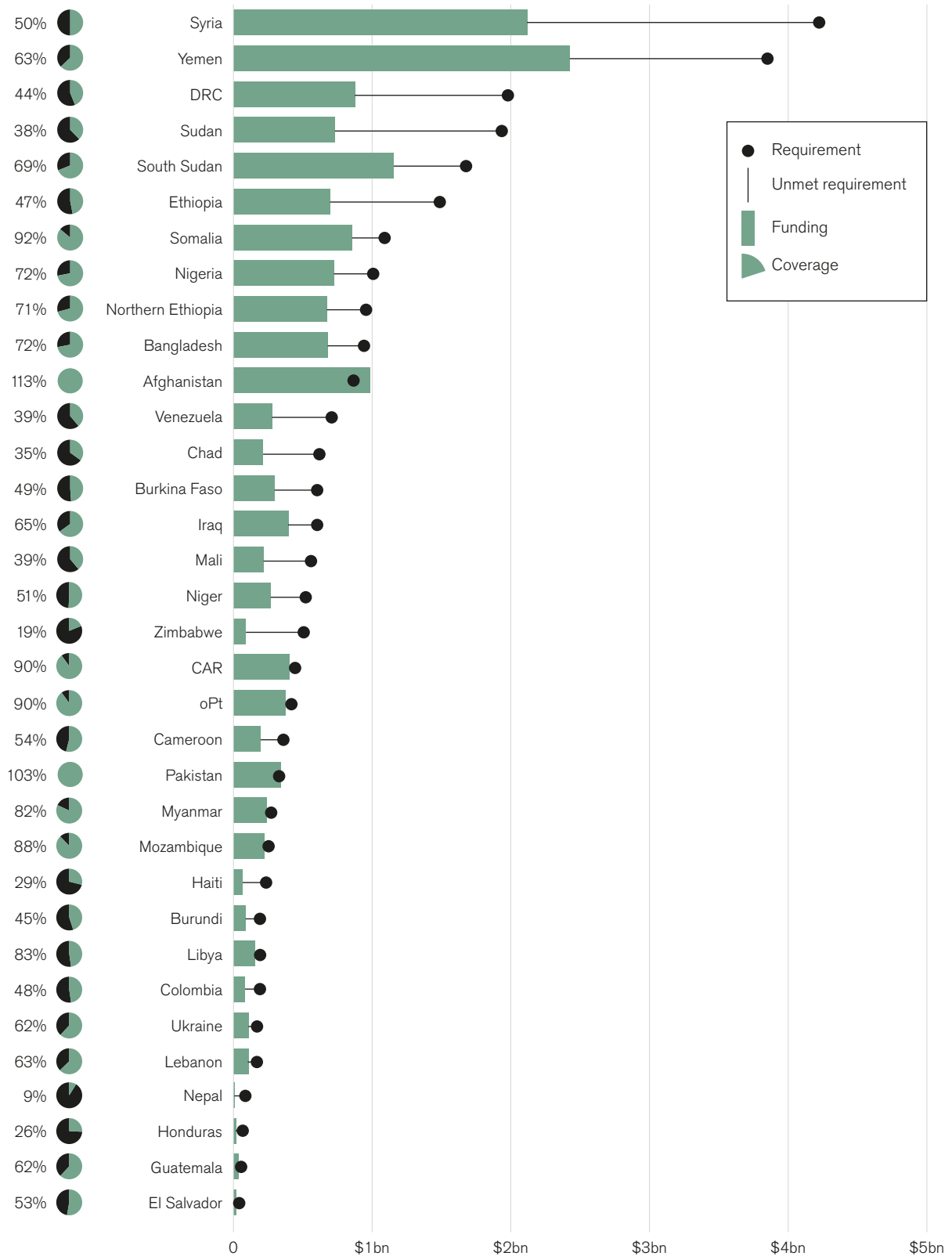
Source: Development Initiatives based on UN OCHA FTS.

Notes: CAR is Central African Republic. DRC is Democratic Republic of the Congo oPt is occupied Palestinian territories. Data is in current prices and was downloaded on 24 May 2022.

Figure 24: Share of international humanitarian assistance to top five recipient countries

A small number of countries have accounted for nearly half the share of international humanitarian assistance allocations over the past decade. The COVID-19 reponse in 2020 dliuted this concentration, as more funds went to a larger number of countries.
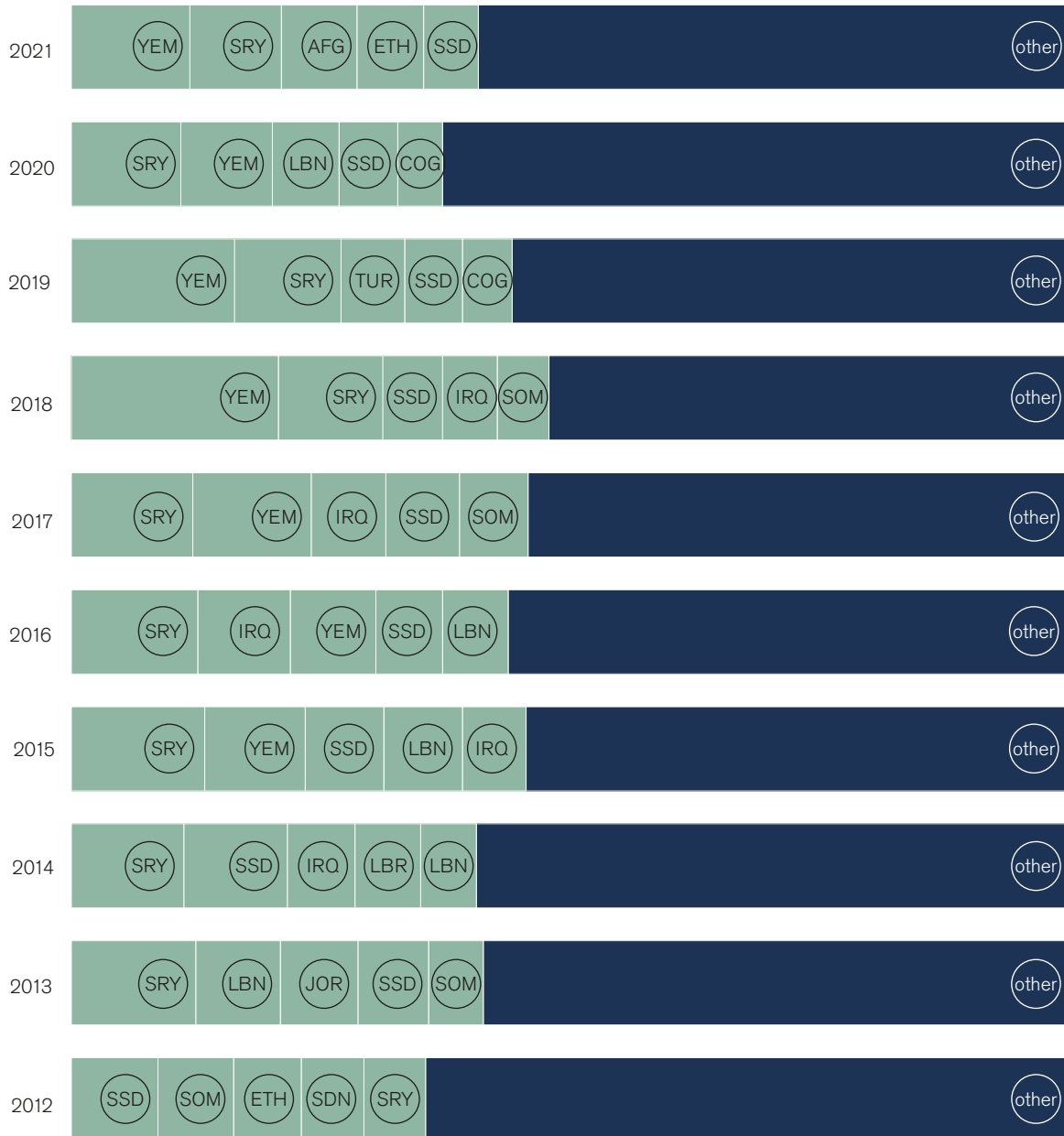
AFG Afghanistan	**JOR** Jordan	**SSD** South Sudan
COG Democratic Republic Congo	**LBN** Lebanon	**SOM** Somalia
ETH Ethiopia	**LBR** Liberia	**SRY** Syrian Arab Republic
IRQ Iraq	**SDN** Sudan	**TUR** Turkey
		YEM Yemen

Source: UN OCHA's FTS financial flows API.

Notes: Underlying data is in constant 2020 prices. Proportions are of total country-allocable humanitarian assistance (flows reported to FTS with a recipient country).

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Protracted crises

The vast majority of humanitarian requirements are for protracted crises. Of the 30 humanitarian response plans in 2021, 12 were for countries that had had consecutive appeals for at least 10 years and their combined financial ask represented over 70% of total HRP requirements that year.[89] All of the seven largest HRPs were in this group, and – with the exception of Somalia – all saw their requirements grow over the decade. Requirements for DRC grew by 150%, for Yemen, by 550% and for Syria, over 1110%.[90]

There was little consistency in how well-funded these appeals were against their requirements. Total levels peaked in 2019, before falling as the pandemic response drew funds towards newer crises. But there was significant variation between countries: in 2021, funding against requirements for three countries (Afghanistan, Central African Republic and the Occupied Palestinian Territories) was the highest in a decade, while for four countries (Chad, DRC, Niger and Sudan) funding was at its lowest. Sustaining responses to protracted crises, with growing needs and no end in sight, continues to place major pressure on the system. As Chapter 12 explores, this has been a major driver behind the quest for a nexus approach to bring long-term development resources to bear on chronic needs, but given that so many are in highly constrained settings, this shift has so far proven elusive.

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89   According to the FTS (data accessed 14 March 2022), the requirements of the 30 HRPs totalled $25.5 billion, excluding flash appeals, regional response appeals and other appeals. .

90   Twelve countries have had consecutive appeals for all 10 years (2012–2021): Afghanistan, Central African Republic, Chad, DRC, Mali, Niger, Somalia, South Sudan, Sudan, Syria, Yemen and the Occupied Palestinian Territories.

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Figure 25: Levels of met and unmet for countries with 10 consecutive years of appeals, 2012–2021

Twelve countries have had humanitarian appeals every year from 2012 to 2021, with the total requirement more than doubling over the period for these protracted crises. While the amount of funding to these has grown, the proportion of requirements met has been volatile.
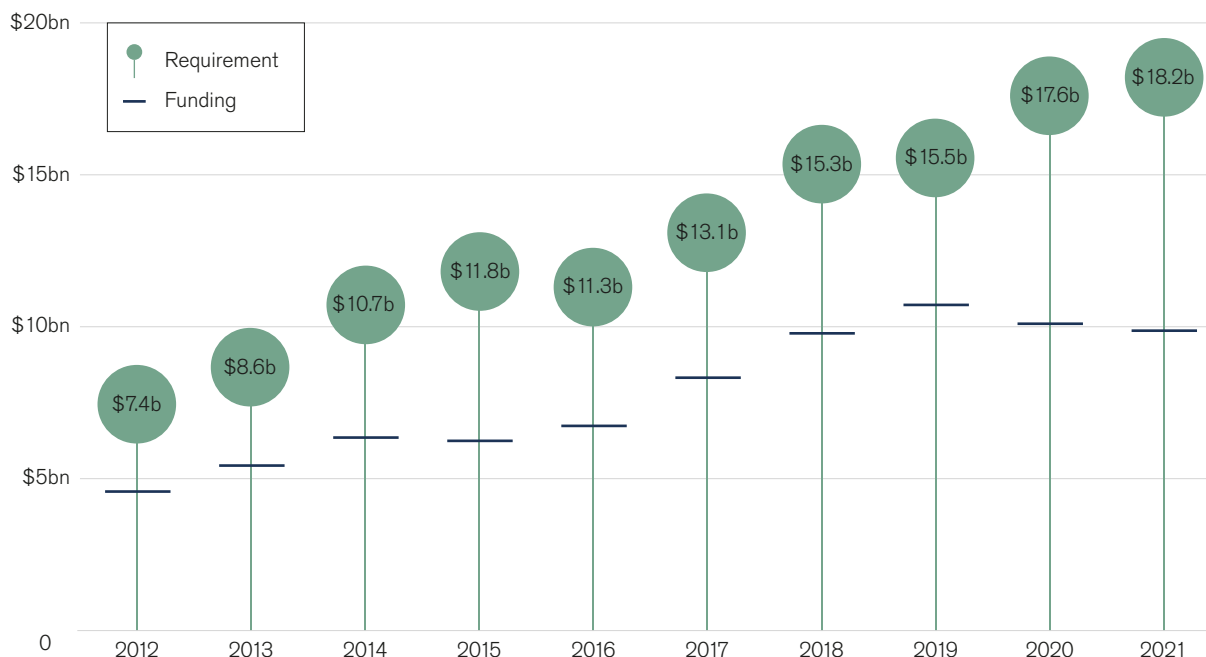
Source: Development Initiatives based on UNOCHA FTS.

Notes: Data is in current prices. Included in the figure are 12 countries that have had consecutive appeals for all 10 years of 2012–2021: Afghanistan, CAR, Chad, DRC, Mali, Niger, Somalia, South Sudan, Sudan, Syria, Yemen, and oPt.

Are some sectors better funded than others?

The food security sector continues to dominate both humanitarian requirements and funding, as it has over the study period and indeed the past decade. By 2021, its $11.1 billion requirements accounted for 40% of the total needs for all the technical sectors combined in country-specific appeals.[91] The dramatic rise in requirements in 2021 – up 33% from the previous year – was driven by a deterioration of food security in several countries; for example requirements for food support tripled in Ethiopia and increased by a third in Syria.[92] Reporting was also a factor: 2021 figures included Yemen's food security requirements – the largest in the world –

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91   Excluding multi-sector and unspecified.

92   The Ethiopia response saw an increase in sectoral requirements from $406 million in 2020 to $1.3 billion in 2021, and in Syria there was an increase in sectoral requirements from $1.2 billion in 2020 to $1.6 billion in 2021.

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whereas this data was not available in 2020.[93] If Yemen's requirements had been factored into 2020 figures, there may have been a steeper observable rise in food security needs as the COVID-19 pandemic hit.

Levels of funding against food security requirements recovered from a low of 49% in 2020 to 53% in 2021, but still remained below pre-pandemic levels. The onset of the pandemic in 2020 also caused requirements for the health sector to increase by 62%, prompting a sharp rise in funding, but once again this fell short – even at peak funding in 2020, nearly two-thirds of requirements were unmet.

As the system struggled to meet the requirements of priority 'life-saving' sectors, early recovery – consistently the smallest sector – saw funding shrink in 2021 to its lowest levels over the study period, receiving just 17% of what it requested. Funding for education also fell after an increase in 2020. However, funding for the protection sector, which had long been the subject of concern, rose steadily over the period as recognition of growing needs increased. At $1.4 billion, 2021 saw the highest volume of protection funding to date – but little change in the proportion of needs met, as requirements appeared to nearly double from the previous year.

While sector-specific reporting provides a useful overview of the balance of the humanitarian effort, it is arguably at odds with the desire to move to a holistic understanding of need that reduces the competition between sectors (see Chapter 5). It also fails to capture the levels of funding to cross-cutting interventions. This has been a perennial problem for protection, which as a sector is undeniably underfunded, but where interventions mainstreamed in other sectors are hard to track. Shortfalls in funding to support gender equity have also been raised repeatedly, but are hard to quantify as interventions cut across sectors – a visibility issue that perpetuates underfunding.[94] A recent Inter-Agency Humanitarian Evaluation (IAHE) found that there was inadequate funding for gender expertise due to an 'implicit assumption among some programming staff that GEEWG [gender equality and empowerment of women and girls] considerations can be addressed without resources, including funding for expertise'.[95, 96]

> **At $1.4 billion, 2021 saw the highest volume of protection funding to date – but little change in the proportion of needs met, as requirements appeared to nearly double from the previous year.**

93   Yemen food security requirements (the world's largest in 2021, at $1.7 billion) are included in the 2021 total, but not in the total for 2020 due to there being no sector breakdown on FTS for this HRP. Had Yemen's sector requirements in 2020 been recorded at a similar level to those in 2019/2021, the observed jump in food security requirements for 2021 may have been far more muted (from roughly $10.5 billion in 2020 to $11.1 billion in 2021), with a more noticeable jump over the previous year (from $8.3 billion in 2019 to as much as $10.5 billion in 2020). This points to steeply rising food security needs due to COVID-19 in 2020, which continued to rise in 2021.

94   Courtenay Cabot Venton and Toscane Clarey, *Funding for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women and Girls in Humanitarian Programming* (New York: UN Women and UNFPA, 2020). www.alnap.org/help-library/funding-for-gender-equality-and-the-empowerment-of-women-and-girls-in-humanitarian-4.

95   Mariangela Bizzarri et al., *Inter-Agency Humanitarian Evaluation on Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women and Girls* (New York: OCHA, 2020), 15. www.alnap.org/help-library/inter-agency-humanitarian-evaluation-on-gender-equality-and-the-empowerment-of-women.

96   Another evaluation found that the underfunding of gender-based violence response and prevention and gender equality had negative impacts on specific and overall programme performance (UNFPA, *Evaluation of UNFPA Support to Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment (2012–2020)* (New York: UNFPA, 2021), 11). www.alnap.org/help-library/evaluation-of-unfpa-support-to-gender-equality-and-womens-empowerment-2012-2020.

Figure 26: Requirements and funding by sector, 2018–2021

Food security is by far the largest humanitarian sector, accounting for 40% of all sector requirements in 2021. The Health sector saw an obvious peak in 2020 as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic; and protection, WASH and education have steadily increased year on year since 2018.
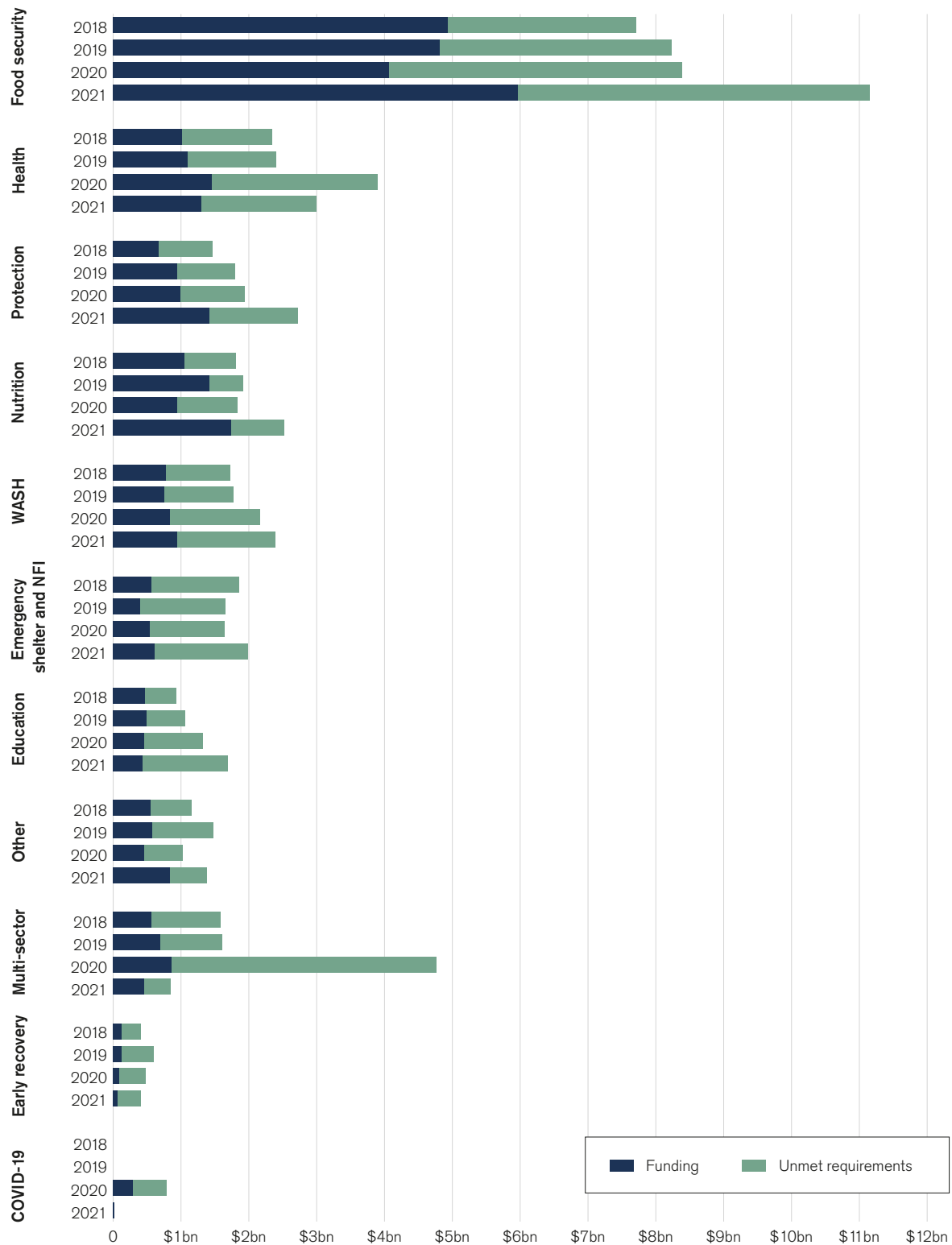
Source: Development Initiatives (Global Humanitarian Assistance – GHA), based on UN OCHA FTS API.

Notes: See methodology in Annex 3 for more details. Other sectors includes CSS, Logistics, CCM, Agriculture, Emergency Telecommunications, and Other. There are no recorded requirements for Unspecified sectors. Data is in current prices. Technical sectors are aligned to FTS' global clusters based on DI mapping. Totals therefore do not match FTS overview figures. Figures include Humanitarian response plans, flash appeals and other response plans but not Refugee Response Plans, for which comparable sector data is not available for the full period.

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> Aid recipients identified 'not enough aid' as the biggest barrier to receiving support – with a third of survey respondents saying that this was the greatest problem.

What are the impacts of funding shortfalls?

Views of affected people

In 2021, 39% of survey respondents said that they were satisfied with the amount of aid they received, compared to 43% in the previous study period.[97] This decline reflects the trend in funding against appeals, both globally and in most of the survey countries.[98] Aid recipients identified 'not enough aid' as the biggest barrier to receiving support – with a third of survey respondents saying that this was the greatest problem. Notably, these are the views of those who received some support; the surveys did not include communities that missed out altogether.

It is also important to remember that recipients' views of sufficiency are based on the level of support that comes out of the system, not the amount of funding that goes into it. Multiple obstacles stand in the way of providing levels of support commensurate with the severity of need, including transaction costs,[99] organisations' absorption capacity and access. For example, in Tigray, Ethiopia, where access was blocked, just 8% of survey respondents reported that they were satisfied with the amount of aid they received, compared to 39% and 53% respectively in Oromia and Somali regions.

Global averages masked significant differences between countries and population groups. Overall, refugees were 60% less likely than other groups to express satisfaction with the amount of aid they received.[100] This was particularly striking in Lebanon, where refugees were 70% less likely than other groups to answer positively – a response that may be attributable to the protracted nature of their displacement, volatility in the support they received and the lack of alternative livelihood options for coping in the face of rapid inflation. Interestingly, in all countries surveyed women were more likely to be positive than men about the amount they received – on average 30% more likely to answer yes. This was a new finding; in the previous period, men and women tended to answer the same. The extent to which this response is a result of deliberate efforts by humanitarian agencies, or of social norms about gratitude and expectations, is hard to know.

There was a clear link between how well humanitarians engaged with aid recipients and how satisfied those recipients were with the amount of aid they received. People who felt that they were consulted were 150% more likely to feel that they received enough aid than those

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97   The same proportions answered 'partially' in both study periods: 39% in 2021 and 43% in 2018.

98   With the exception of Ethiopia, all of the survey countries saw a decline in funding against appeals over the study period.

99   Blessing Mutsaka et al., *Real-Time Review of DEC's Response to Cyclone Idai* (London: DEC and Key Aid Consulting, 2019), 5. www.alnap.org/help-library/real-time-review-of-decs-response-to-cyclone-idai.

100   'Other groups' include both non-displaced and internally displaced people.

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People who felt that they were consulted were

150%

more likely to feel that they received enough aid than those who said that they weren't consulted.

who said that they weren't consulted, and people who felt that that they had an opportunity for feedback were 110% more likely compared to those who felt that there were no avenues for feedback. Those who thought that aid workers communicated well with them were 90% more likely to say that they received sufficient aid. This supports the argument that communicating with people is fundamental to increasing trust and satisfaction. It also suggests that engaging with recipients does make a difference in aligning delivery with expectations, or vice versa. Equally, the causation might run the other way; the findings could suggest that the humanitarian system is better at engaging with people in better funded settings.

Impacts on aid provision

Understanding the implications of underfunding remains a major challenge. Outcome monitoring is generally inconsistent, evaluations measure what was done rather than what wasn't, and monitoring capacity is often one of the first things to go where funds are tight.[101] Uncertainty about when and where shortfalls will hit also makes it hard to track impacts, as organisations make incremental changes to budgets and programme pipelines. Indeed, while over a third (38%) of humanitarian practitioners in our survey said that insufficient funding was the biggest financing problem, a quarter (25%) said that unpredictable funding posed the greatest challenge.

The UK's 2021–2022 aid budget cuts are a case in point. The overall ODA reduction – which included a cut of more than 25% to humanitarian aid – was rushed through, and a National Audit Office (NAO) report found that the Foreign, Commonwealth & Development Office (FCDO) 'did not complete a thorough review of the impact on outcomes'.[102] There was also no consultation process to understand the potential impacts as 'FCDO ministers made the decision that its country offices should not formally discuss planned reductions in budgets with delivery partners. This approach meant that local teams were not able to draw on relevant data and expertise from delivery partners to inform their decision'.[103] A lack of transparency and communication was found to undermine both quality and scrutiny of decisions, and created significant uncertainty for partners. Evidence of the effects of the cuts has so far been partial and case specific.[104] In Syria, for example, where UK funds were cut by more

101   Swithern, *Underfunded Appeals*. www.alnap.org/help-library/underfunded-appeals-understanding-the-consequences-improving-the-system.

102   NAO, *Managing Reductions in Official Development Assistance Spending – Foreign, Commonwealth & Development Office: Report by the Comptroller and Auditor General* (London: NAO, 2022), 5. www.alnap.org/help-library/managing-reductions-in-official-development-assistance-spending.

103   NAO, *Managing Reductions in ODA*, 7. www.alnap.org/help-library/managing-reductions-in-official-development-assistance-spending.

104   Juliet Conway, 'The impact of the UK aid cuts on NGOs', Bond, 15 March 2022. www.alnap.org/help-library/the-impact-of-the-uk-aid-cuts-on-ngos.

than two-thirds,[105] funding was discontinued to UNWRA's support to Palestinian refugees, creating significant gaps including in health and education.[106] IRC reported a 40% to 50% reduction in its humanitarian funding, including cutting a protection monitoring programme in Syria which 'will lead to less evidence for programmatic interventions aimed at helping these groups'.[107]

Evidence on the impacts of other funding shortfalls reveals the difficult choices agencies have had to make, either to reduce areas of operation or targeted groups, or to compromise on the quantity or quality of assistance. For WFP – one of the better funded agencies in a relatively well-funded sector – underfunding forced a decision to procure food with less nutritional value, and to cut supplementary nutritional programming in order to preserve general food distribution.[108] In DRC protection actors shifted their activities away from service provision and towards community sensitisation[109] – again maintaining the numbers of people reached but providing them with a less substantial response. Others took a more optimistic view, with one NGO leader noting that, although it fell short of requirements, increased funding due to the COVID-19 crisis still allowed the system to do more than ever before: 'I'm always telling my teams let's pull up our socks, so when at the end of the year you see how we could serve so many more people in an ethical way, that really motivates staff which is important and it also helps us understand our potential'.

105 According to official figures from National Audit Office, UK ODA to Bangladesh was reduced from £190 million to £73 million, to Myanmar from £92 million to £52 million, to South Sudan from £135 million to £68 million, to Syria from £154 million to £48 million, and to Yemen from £221 million to £82 million (NAO, *Managing Reductions in ODA*).

106 NAO, *Managing Reductions in ODA*, 48. www.alnap.org/help-library/managing-reductions-in-official-development-assistance-spending.

107 William Worley, 'UK aid cuts increase the risk of atrocities: IRC', *Devex*, 13 January 2022. www.alnap.org/help-library/uk-aid-cuts-increase-the-risk-of-atricities-irc.

108 Montserrat Saboya et al., *Evaluation of the Nutrition Components of the Algeria PRRO 200301. January 2013 – December 2017* (Rome: World Food Programme, 2018), 59. www.alnap.org/help-library/algeria-prro-200301-evaluation-of-the-nutrition-components.

109 Key informant interview with aid worker in DRC.

2

PART 2: WHAT IS IT ACHIEVING?

Chapter 4: Does humanitarian support reach the right people?

IN BRIEF: Humanitarian aid is expected to reach as many people as possible and to prioritise reaching those most in need. Making sure that the 'right' people receive aid was a top priority for the recipients we consulted. While the system is larger than ever, its ability to comprehensively and equitably get support to all those most in need remained compromised. In 2021, under the response plans and appeals where figures on reach were available, the system reached an estimated 46% of the people it identified to be in need and 69% of those it targeted for assistance.[1]

The COVID-19 pandemic altered the picture of reach, bringing a new scale of coverage while also creating new gaps. But many pre-pandemic challenges also persisted. Geographically remote populations were missed, government-imposed impediments and counter-terrorism measures prevented aid getting to certain areas, and insecurity – including a 54% rise in the number of aid workers attacked – hampered access.

Within the communities that humanitarians did reach, people were highly concerned about the fairness of decisions about who should receive aid. Only 36% of aid recipients surveyed thought that aid went to those who needed it most. Governments and local gatekeepers often sought to influence recipient lists, and a lack of trust in selection criteria was exacerbated by humanitarian agencies' poor communication. Aid diversion is a high risk in the delivery of aid and, although strong anti-corruption measures were in place, it remained a top concern for communities.

Efforts to ensure equitable reach to the most marginalised community members had a limited focus on LGBTQI[2] people, but did result in more attention to the needs of women, older people and people with disabilities. However, the system has little data on how well it is doing against these reinforced frameworks and there were many examples of good intentions not standing up under pressure.

Only
36%
of aid recipients surveyed thought that aid went to those who needed it most.

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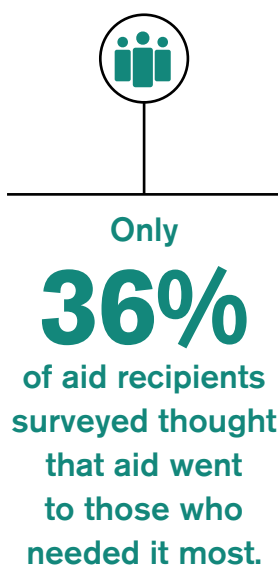
1   See footnote 6.

2   LGBTQI includes people who identify as lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer or intersex, as defined in Danielle Roth, Alexandra Blackwell, Mark Canavera and Kathryn Falb, *Cycles of Displacement: Understanding Violence, Discrimination, and Exclusion of LGBTQI People in Humanitarian Contexts* (International Rescue Committee: New York, 2021). www.alnap.org/help-library/cycles-of-displacement-understanding-violence-discrimination-and-exclusion-of-lgbtqi; www.rescue.org/sites/default/files/document/5961/irccyclesofdisplacementfinaljune2021.pdf.

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At the heart of the humanitarian endeavour is the principle that aid should be directed according to need – that it should reach the 'right' people. Humanitarian action is expected to both prioritise those in the greatest need and respond to as many people in need as possible – in other words, provide both equitable and comprehensive coverage. However, determining and prioritising who is most in need in a given crisis is far from straightforward. It is bound to be an approximate and contested process; as well as being technically difficult, it is also often perceived as deeply political.

When the system collectively assesses the reach of its aid, it often focuses on top-line numbers of people reached by programmes and proportions of target populations met – rather than whether these were the *right* people and populations. Not only are these statistics on 'reach' often questionable estimates, but they can also distract from important questions picked up in more detailed vulnerability assessments and mapping. Target-driven incentives may privilege the easier to reach majority over the hardest to reach minority. Headline figures also tell us little about whether the 'right' aid reached the 'right' people. As the last edition of the SOHS noted, 'the issue of coverage is difficult to assess because, almost by definition, humanitarian actors know much less about the areas where they are not present than about the areas where they are. They know even less about areas that they have not noticed as requiring assistance'.[3] As one humanitarian leader put it, the 'metric of success' for humanitarian coverage should not be the 60% of the target population who were accessed but how the system responded to the 15% to 20% in the hardest to access places.[4]

This matters deeply – not only for agencies, donors and their taxpayers, but also for affected people. In focus groups in Yemen, DRC and Venezuela,[5] aid recipients said that needs-based aid allocation should be a top priority in how the SOHS assesses the performance of the system. Their concerns centred on how people were selected to receive aid, and the extent to which corruption and aid diversion stopped aid from reaching those for whom it was intended.

Although the system is larger than ever before, with more aid workers spending more money to assist more people in more crises, this is still falling short of the growing scale of identified needs. At the same

Aid recipients said that needs-based aid allocation should be a top priority in how the SOHS assesses the performance of the system.

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3   ALNAP, *The State of the Humanitarian System 2018*, ALNAP Study (London: ALNAP, 2018). www.alnap.org/help-library/the-state-of-the-humanitarian-system-sohs-2018-full-report.

4   Charles Petrie speaking at OCHA's 2021 Global Humanitarian Policy Forum, 'Where to from here? Humanitarian action between rising needs and distant solutions', 9 December 2021. www.alnap.org/help-library/charles-petrie-speaking-at-the-2021-global-humanitarian-policy-forum-from-checkpoints.

5   In the inception phase of the SOHS, local research teams held a series of focus group discussions across these three countries to understand aid recipients' priority issues for the SOHS to focus on.

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time, many factors are converging to make it more difficult to ensure comprehensive and equitable coverage for many crisis-affected people, not least restrictions imposed by both national authorities and international governments, including counter-terrorism measures and sanctions regimes.

This chapter examines the evidence on overall reach and explores the three most salient challenges identified in the research: access to affected populations, inclusion of marginalised groups and aid diversion or corruption.

What is the global picture of reach?

Estimating need and reach

Under the UN-coordinated Humanitarian Needs Overview (HNO), the system estimates how many people are in humanitarian need and how many of these it will target for assistance. Over the course of the year, OCHA also compiles and updates data on the number of people that the response expects it was able to reach.[6] This data is not available for all responses, but under those plans and appeals where it is available, the system reached an estimated 106 million people – 46% of those identified to be in need under these responses, and 69% of those they targeted for assistance. The OCHA-compiled global figures masked significant differences between countries. In the best case, Afghanistan, where the Taliban takeover brought an increase in need, access and funding levels, the system reported 95% reach of people in need. At the other end of the spectrum, in Burundi, low levels of funding meant that under 16% were reached. This mixed picture of coverage echoes the split in aid workers' perceptions of their ability to reach people in need – 42% thought that the system did a good or excellent job of this, while 58% thought it poor or fair.[7]

The system reached an estimated 106 million people –

46%

of those identified to be in need under these responses, and 69% of those they targeted for assistance.

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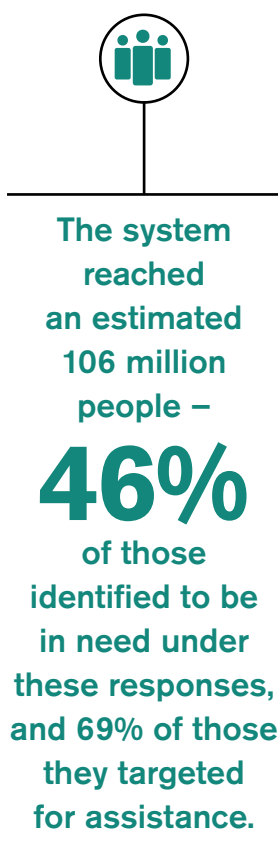
6   These figures cover those HRPs, flash appeals and other UN-coordinated appeals for which data is available on the number of people targeted and the number of people expected to be reached, as reported on OCHA's Humanitarian Insights database (www.alnap.org/help-library/global-humanitarian-overview-2021 – data downloaded August 2022). The data therefore differs from that used in chapters 3 and 10 which refer either to global estimates of need and people targeted for assistance, or – for reasons of data comparability – only those included under the HRPs.

7   In answer to the question 'How well do you think your sector (or system as a whole) performed in your setting in reaching all people in need', 33.4% rated it 'Good' and 8.2% 'Excellent'.

Figure 27: Number of people in need targeted and reached in UN-coordinated appeals, 2021

According to 2021 Humanitarian Response Plans, the largest populations in need were in Ethiopia, Yemen, DRC and Afghanistan. However, there was considerable variation in the proportion of people in need that the system aimed to assist, as well as the number of people it estimated it could reach.
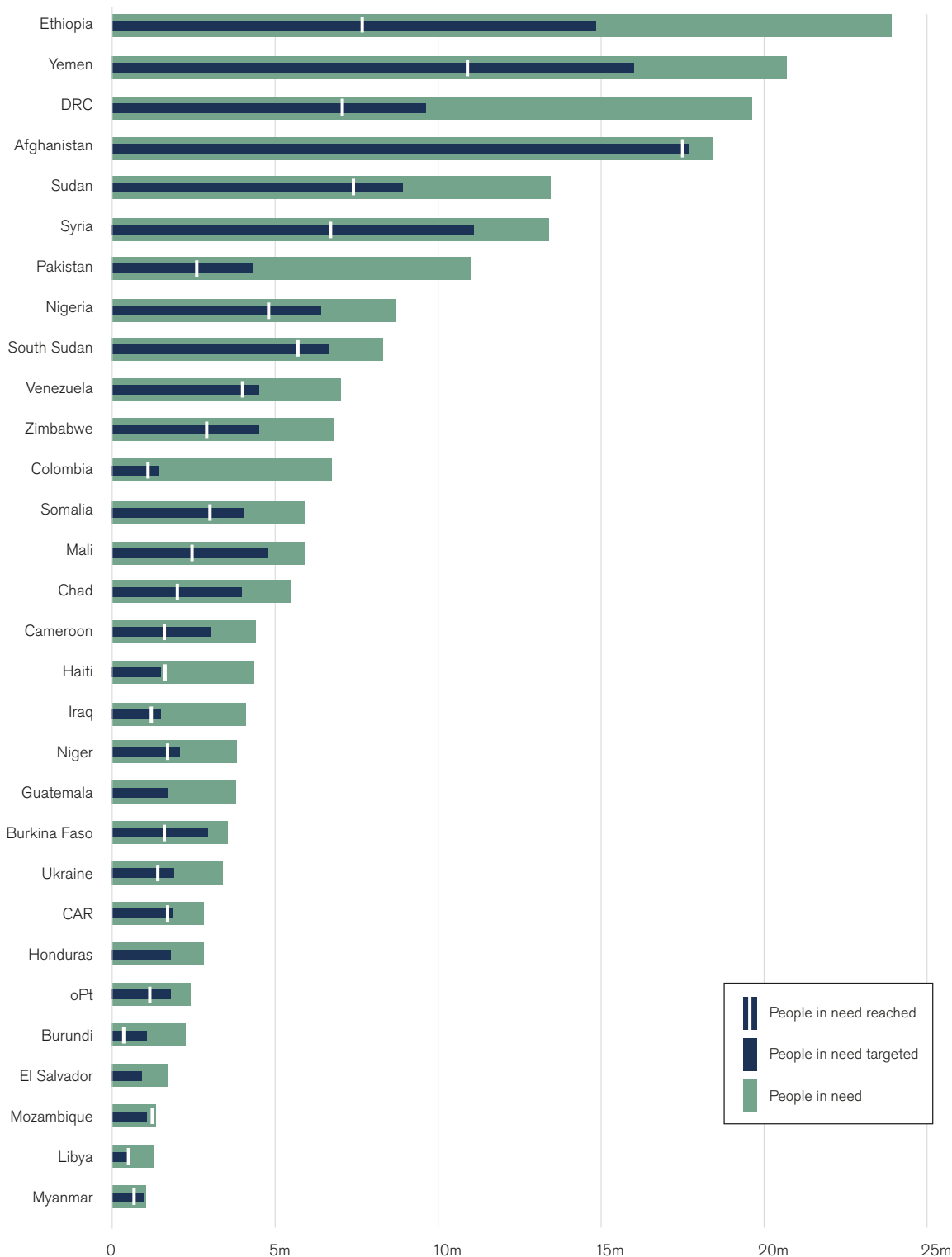
Source: Development Initiatives based on UNOCHA HPC API.

Notes: Expected reached data for El Salvador, Honduras, and Guatemala is not final, and is not shown. Comprehensive data only available for Humanitarian Response Plans. Figure excludes Flash Appeals, Regional Refugee Response Plans, and Other appeals. CAR is Central African Republic; DRC is Democratic Republic of Congo; oPt is occupied Palestinian territory.

> **The quality and clarity of the methods for arriving at numbers of people in need, targeted and reached varies between countries and sectors.**

These figures are of course only the system's own estimates of its reach. As Chapter 3 has explored, the flaws behind appeals data are well known. The quality and clarity of the methods for arriving at numbers of people in need, targeted and reached varies between countries and sectors. Agencies each have their own methods and incentives for calculating how many people benefitted from their programmes, and measuring the number of people reached by, for example, cash payments is much easier than estimating the population reached by a water system. These estimates of reach are in any case a crude indicator of success – a study of aid in Syria reported that, in the COVID-19 response, the UN 'deemed some facilities were reached with aid even when the aid delivered amounted to only a couple of disposable hospital gowns and shoe covers', citing one donor's complaint that the system has a very low bar for what counts as coverage and 'tends to bury the quality of the response in number of tons'.[8]

Evaluations during the study period raised concerns around a lack of methodological consistency across the inputs which were aggregated into the HNOs,[9] with some agencies and sectors making more sophisticated attempts than others to distinguish between the severity of needs.[10] There was an ongoing lack of transparency in how clusters and agencies derived their target population from the total population in need, with one evaluation of the response in north-east Nigeria reporting frustration that a cluster lead agency was 'not clearly voicing the actual needs, nor adequately advocating for appropriate levels of funding'.[11] A multi-country evaluation queried how target populations were calculated, detailed and revised, noting that 'estimates of people in need lack accuracy and they mostly fail to differentiate between different levels of vulnerability. The imbalance between humanitarian demand and supply, donor priorities and efficiency measures all reinforce an approach that prioritizes coverage over equity and quality'.[12]

The system has been working to address these concerns and institute improvements. Pressure on the UN-coordinated appeals process to standardise, prioritise and clarify the data behind growing demand has

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8   Hall, *Rescuing Aid in Syria*. www.alnap.org/help-library/rescuing-aid-in-syria.

9   A 2019 inter-agency evaluation of the Ethiopia drought response noted that quality had improved since the introduction of the HNO, but assessments were still falling short of minimum standards (Julia Steets et al., *Inter-Agency Humanitarian Evaluation of the Drought Response in Ethiopia 2015–2018* (IASC, 2019), 35). www.alnap.org/help-library/inter-agency-humanitarian-evaluation-of-the-drought-response-in-ethiopia.

10   Featherstone et al. (2019) cites the 2019 Afghanistan appeal as a good example of a multi-layered approach to differentiating levels of severity and distinguishing from chronic needs (Andy Featherstone, *Evaluation of the Coverage and Quality of the UNICEF Humanitarian Response in Complex Humanitarian Emergencies* (New York: UNICEF, 2019), 51). www.alnap.org/help-library/evaluation-of-the-coverage-and-quality-of-the-unicef-humanitarian-response-in-complex.

11   Nick Maunder et al., *Evaluation of WFP's Corporate Emergency Response in Northeast Nigeria (2016–2018)* (Rome: WFP, 2019), 38. www.alnap.org/help-library/evaluation-of-wfps-corporate-emergency-response-in-northeast-nigeria-2016-2018.

12   Featherstone et al., *Coverage and Quality*, 16. www.alnap.org/help-library/evaluation-of-the-coverage-and-quality-of-the-unicef-humanitarian-response-in-complex.

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resulted in refinements. Compared to the first generation of HNOs in 2014, and the consolidated appeals documents that preceded them, the latest iterations distinguish the wider population in need from the group that agencies aim to target, present their analysis in a common format and include a more transparent explanation of the methodology. Since 2020, this includes the use of the Joint Intersectoral Analysis Framework, as explored in Chapter 5, which has led to improvements in the HNOs of most of the countries where they have been piloted.

Drawing up recipient lists

When aid recipients were asked what they wanted this edition of the SOHS to cover, targeting was one of their top concerns. They had limited trust in the criteria and decision-making, and concerns about both the cultural premises that underpin selection and how the system thinks about both comprehensive and equitable coverage. Only 36% of aid recipients surveyed thought that aid went to those who needed it most.[13]

The basic humanitarian practice of selecting individual households remained problematic in many contexts, stigmatising individuals and disrupting the social fabric. In Somalia, for example, programme objectives based on single household units ran counter to communities' sharing culture, which 'allows assistance to reach non-beneficiaries, both supporting the community, but also building relationships and acting as a kind of "safety net" for when they might be in need in future'.[14] In Turkey, recipients expressed a preference for targeting a wider group of refugees with cash payments, even if it meant that they would receive smaller sums, on the basis that 'at least this would be equal'.[15] An evaluation of a resilience programme in Sudan that delegated beneficiary selection to Village Development Committees found that they had a perception of social equity based on balancing support to different tribal components in the community, which was at odds with the programme's vulnerability-based criteria.[16]

Pressures on the response also resulted in the arbitrary application of selection criteria, resulting in decisions that were even more socially divisive. In DRC, for example, where the sheer size and geographic spread

> **"**
>
> The basic humanitarian practice of selecting individual households remained problematic in many contexts, stigmatising individuals and disrupting the social fabric.

13   In the SOHS survey of affected populations, when asked if they thought aid went to those who needed it most, 36% of respondent answered 'Yes', and 45% answered 'Partially'.

14   C. Mike Daniels, Georgina Anderson and Badra Yusuf Ali, *Evaluation of the 2017 Somalia Humanitarian Cash-Based Response* (Oxford/Rome: CALP and WFP, 2018), 33. www.alnap.org/help-library/evaluation-of-the-2017-somalia-humanitarian-cash-based-response.

15   WFP, *WFP Evidence Summary Cash-Based Transfers Lessons from Evaluations* (Rome: WFP, 2021), 5. www.alnap.org/help-library/wfp-evidence-summary-cash-based-transfers-lessons-from-evaluations.

16   FAO, *Final Evaluation of the Joint Resilience Project in Kassala* (Rome: FAO, 2018), 16. www.alnap.org/help-library/final-evaluation-of-the-joint-resilience-project-in-kassala.

of populations in need outstrip available resources,[17] one aid worker explained how 'when everyone is in the same situation, establishing selection criteria becomes impossible and this puts assessors in a bind – sometimes they're forced to suspend identification when the number is reached'. One evaluation following Cyclone Idai in Mozambique found that only 36% of the people surveyed thought that aid went to those who needed it most. This was attributed to the extreme community pressure on the local chiefs tasked with targeting distributions in the immediate wake of the disaster, and the lack of awareness of selection criteria.

Poor engagement with affected communities was repeatedly found to undermine perceptions of fair targeting, fuelling mistrust of humanitarian agencies and the exclusion of people unaware of their entitlements. One system-wide global synthesis of cash programming lessons found widespread confusion about who had been targeted and why. In Syria, poor communication of complex eligibility criteria left space for social media rumours to spread, fuelling widespread suspicion of targeting choices.[18] As Chapter 8 explores, there are documented instances of both good[19] and poor practice in engaging communities in design and decision-making, but it is widely understood that the system as a whole has a long way to go.

Transparency and engagement were all the more important in the light of evidence of external influences on selection lists by state authorities and other interest groups. In some cases – particularly around cash and social protection – disagreements between aid agencies and governments arise from genuine tensions between the desire to reach the most people, or the most vulnerable people. Elsewhere it is a more worrying form of control. A global WFP evaluation, for example, found multiple instances of government interference including reviewing humanitarian agencies' lists and providing alternative lists.[20] In Syria, there is evidence of intelligence officials vetting names,[21] while aid workers in Yemen interviewed for this study reported a number of influences on who is selected to receive aid – including the terms of access negotiations with local sheiks and local council demands to approve recipient lists. At a local level – including

17   Global Affairs Canada, *Evaluation of International Assistance Programming in the Democratic Republic of Congo 2012–13 to 2018–19* (Global Affairs Canada, 2020), 9. www.alnap.org/help-library/evaluation-of-international-assistance-programming-in-the-democratic-republic-of-congo.

18   WFP, WFP *Evidence Summary Cash-Based Transfers Lessons from Evaluations* (Rome: WFP), 5. www.alnap.org/help-library/wfp-evidence-summary-cash-based-transfers-lessons-from-evaluations.

19   See, e.g., Key Aid Consulting, *British Red Cross Final Evaluation: Nepal Earthquake Recovery Programme* (British Red Cross, 2018), 2. www.alnap.org/help-library/british-red-cross-final-evaluation-nepal-earthquake-recovery-programme.

20   Julia Steets, et al., *Evaluation of WFP Policies on Humanitarian Principles and Access in Humanitarian Contexts* (Rome: WFP, 2018), 63. www.alnap.org/help-library/evaluation-of-wfp-policies-on-humanitarian-principles-and-access-in-humanitarian-0.

21   Hall– (2022) reports that, 'In early 2019, SARC employees admitted to denying World Food Programme (WFP) food baskets to beneficiaries. If the intelligence branch wrote the word "security" next to a beneficiary's name, the family had to visit a security branch before being eligible for aid' (*Rescuing Aid in Syria, 37*). www.alnap.org/help-library/rescuing-aid-in-syria.

in Somalia, Afghanistan and Mozambique – authorities and community leaders often act as gatekeepers to selection lists, and can introduce both intentional biases and 'arbitrary prioritisation',[22] necessitating community validation and triangulation.[23] One focus group participant in Yemen told our researchers that 'dealings must take place directly between the organization and the beneficiary without referring to the community leaders who are the cause of our suffering and deprivation of aid'.

How well is aid reaching 'hard-to reach' populations?

Remote locations

A lack of physical access affects the picture of needs as well as the reach of aid. Insecurity, logistics, assertive authorities and COVID-related restrictions on movement all prevented assessments from taking place in many contexts. While overviews of need could be extrapolated from remote methods and secondary or proxy information, there were concerns – for example in Borno State in Nigeria – that these can be misleading, failing to give a good enough picture of the situation in these areas or of the highly vulnerable groups within them.[24] During the pandemic, aid workers in Bangladesh described the reliance on remote methods in lieu of participatory needs assessments and voiced concerns of bias towards the better educated and the exclusion of those without a phone.

Populations in remote locations often find themselves under-served as the humanitarian effort centres on well-worn routes. Agencies still often tended to cluster together near 'well-tarmacked roads', creating geographic coverage gaps, as previous editions of the SOHS have noted.[25] This can be due to a combination of logistical difficulties and preferential pathways – agencies identifying needs in the places where they are already active and donors funding programmes in places with established response capacity. In Somalia, there were concerns that poor coordination and a tendency to focus on locations close to existing interventions meant limited support

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22   Thirty-six per cent thought that aid reached those who needed it most. Evidence from FGDs and secondary data indicate that this was due to the fact that distributions were mainly managed by local chiefs.

23   Jock Baker et al., *Inter-Agency Humanitarian Evaluation of the Response to Cyclone Idai in Mozambique* (New York: OCHA, 2020), 39. www.alnap.org/help-library/inter-agency-humanitarian-evaluation-of-the-response-to-cyclone-idai-in-mozambique; Glyn Taylor, Corinna Kreidler and Paul Harvey, *Global Cash Evaluation* (Oslo: Norwegian Refugee Council, 2019), 58. www.alnap.org/help-library/nrc-global-cash-evaluation; Daniels, Anderson and Yusuf Ali, *2017 Somalia Response*, 16. www.alnap.org/help-library/evaluation-of-the-2017-somalia-humanitarian-cash-based-response.

24   Maunder et al., *Corporate Emergency Response*. www.alnap.org/help-library/evaluation-of-wfps-corporate-emergency-response-in-northeast-nigeria-2016-2018.

25   ALNAP, *The State of the Humanitarian System 2015* (London: ALNAP, 2015), 8. www.alnap.org/help-library/the-state-of-the-humanitarian-system-report-2015.

to more remote areas.[26] In the Cyclone Idai response in Mozambique and Malawi, activities were concentrated in more accessible and established response locations, while some severely affected areas that required the use of airlifts or boats were far less served.[27] In DRC, aid workers told us how poor roads and infrastructure make reaching remote populations extremely difficult and expensive, leading agencies to concentrate their resources where they can reach the most people.

Insecure settings

In highly insecure and politically constrained settings, threats to humanitarian space remained a major barrier to reaching populations. As Chapter 11 explores, there is a widespread sense that humanitarian space is shrinking,[28] and that agencies' risk tolerance or capacity to influence access is not adequately rising to this challenge.

Attacks on aid workers

Attacks on humanitarian workers continued to rise. In the four years between 2017 and 2020, there was a 54% rise in the number of aid workers attacked – in total, over the period, 947 attacks were recorded, with 1,688 aid workers known to be victims.[29] Targeted violence against humanitarians increased in several contexts. These included Syria, where cases more than doubled, in Tigray, Ethiopia, where aid became a deliberate target, and in South Sudan, where despite the formal end to the war in 2018 rising tensions and the departure of peacekeeping forces fed into a spreading threat 'in an atmosphere of increased lawlessness and opportunistic violent crime'.[30] The only notable decline was in Afghanistan, where the establishment of Taliban control meant that large areas of the country were no longer violently contested; for the first time in the 20-year conflict, it was no longer among the five most violent contexts for aid workers.

Threats to humanitarian space remained a major barrier to reaching populations, with a 54% rise in aid worker attacks over the study period

26   Daniels, Anderson and Yusuf Ali, *2017 Somalia Response*, 14–15. www.alnap.org/help-library/evaluation-of-the-2017-somalia-humanitarian-cash-based-response.

27   Mutsaka et al., *Real-Time Review*, 22. www.alnap.org/help-library/real-time-review-of-decs-response-to-cyclone-idai.

28   Of the aid workers who responded to our survey, 45% felt that humanitarian space had declined and 24% that it had stayed the same. Only 30% felt it had improved.

29   Aid Worker Security Database (see methodology in Annex 3).

30   Abby Stoddard et al., *Aid Worker Security Report 2021: Crime Risks and Responses in Humanitarian Operations* (Humanitarian Outcomes, 2021). www.alnap.org/help-library/aid-worker-security-report-2021-crime-risks-and-responses-in-humanitarian-operations.

Figure 28: Victims of attacks on aid workers, 2015–2020

The number of attacks on aid workers has risen year on year between 2015 and 2020, as did the number of victims. While the number of people killed has declined in recent years, the number of humanitarian workers kidnapped has nearly doubled – and people wounded, more than doubled – since 2017.
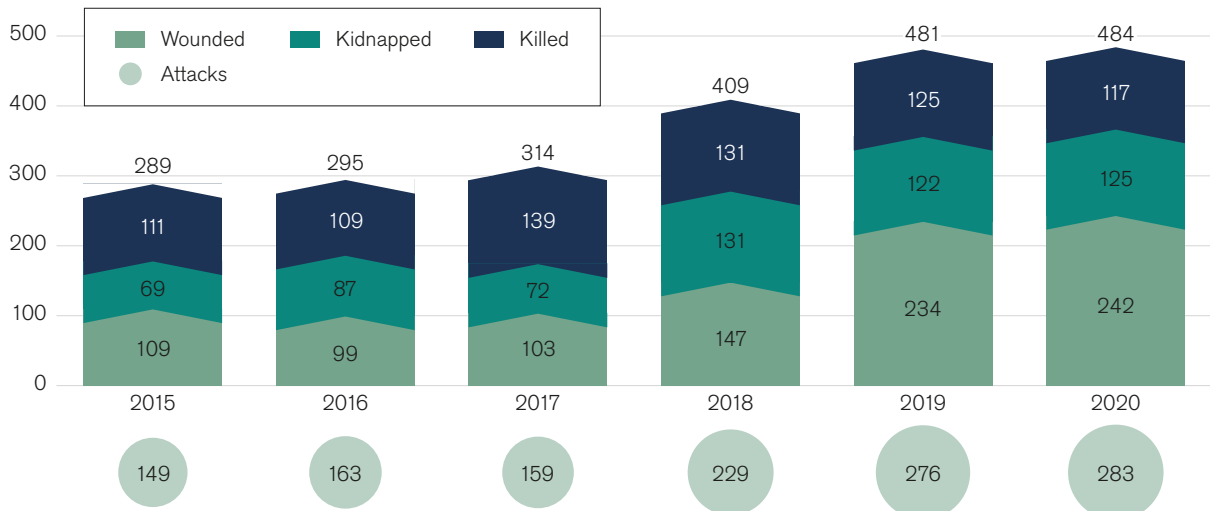
Source: Aid Worker Security Database.

The increase in the number of attacks is not just the result of growth in the humanitarian system. While there are more aid workers in crisis contexts, as Chapter 2 explains, the rate of incidents has clearly risen: in 2020 there were 73 attacks recorded per 100,000 aid workers – a 38% rise on the 2017 rate.[31] Over the last decade there has also been a seven-fold increase in aid worker victims of shelling and airstrikes.[32] This violence affects national and local staff disproportionately. While the number and rate of direct attacks on international staff fell over the period, they rose for their national and local counterparts as the system relied on them to deliver in highly constrained and violent contexts. This appears to be an ongoing trend predating the mass withdrawal of international staff at the start of the COVID-19 pandemic. It is also part of a wider phenomenon of risk transfer to local and national NGOs (L/NNGOs), as we discuss in Chapter 9. This has an evident chilling effect on efforts to reach populations – as one staff member of a L/NNGO in Venezuela told us, 'Our teams' safety is first since we can't send them as cannon fodder even when there are people in that community who need what organisations like ours do'.

> **While the number and rate of direct attacks on international staff fell over the period, they rose for their national and local counterparts.**

31   Analysis by Humanitarian Outcomes, see methodology in Annex 3.

32   Analysis by Humanitarian Outcomes based on AWSD (Aid Worker Security Database). www.humanitarianoutcomes.org/projects/aid-worker-security-database-awsd.

Figure 29: National and international victims of attacks on aid workers, 2015–2020

The number of reported victims of attacks on aid workers has grown every year from 2015 to 2020. The majority of these victims – 95% in 2020 – were national staff.
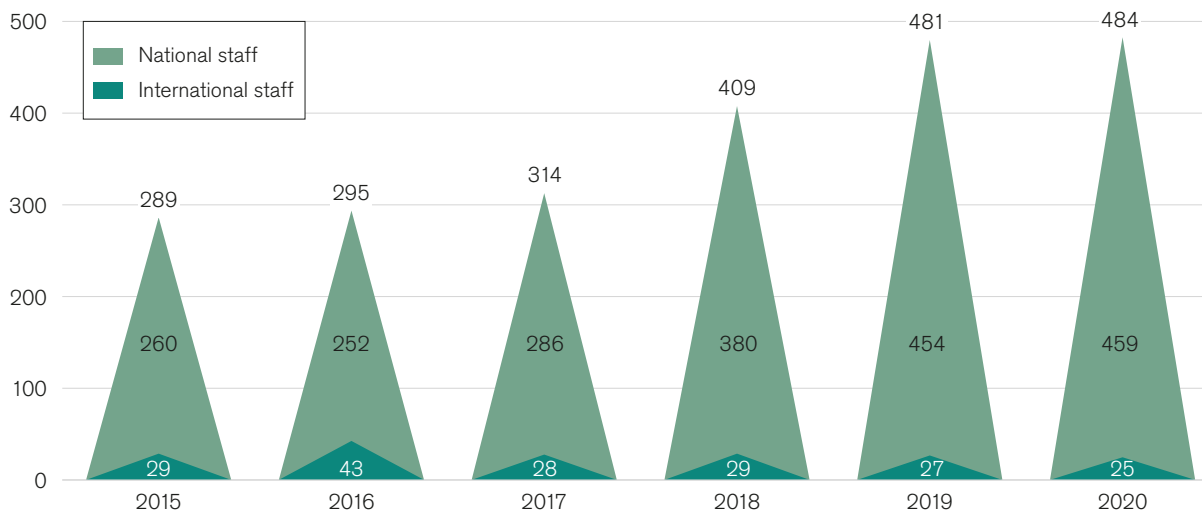
Source: Aid Worker Security Database.

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Figure 30: Victims of attacks on aid workers by country, 2015–2022

The cases of targeted violence against humanitarians increased sharply in Syria, DRC, South Sudan, Ethiopia and Mali – and declined notably in Afghanistan – between the 2018 and the 2022 SOHS study periods.

2018–2020

2015–2017
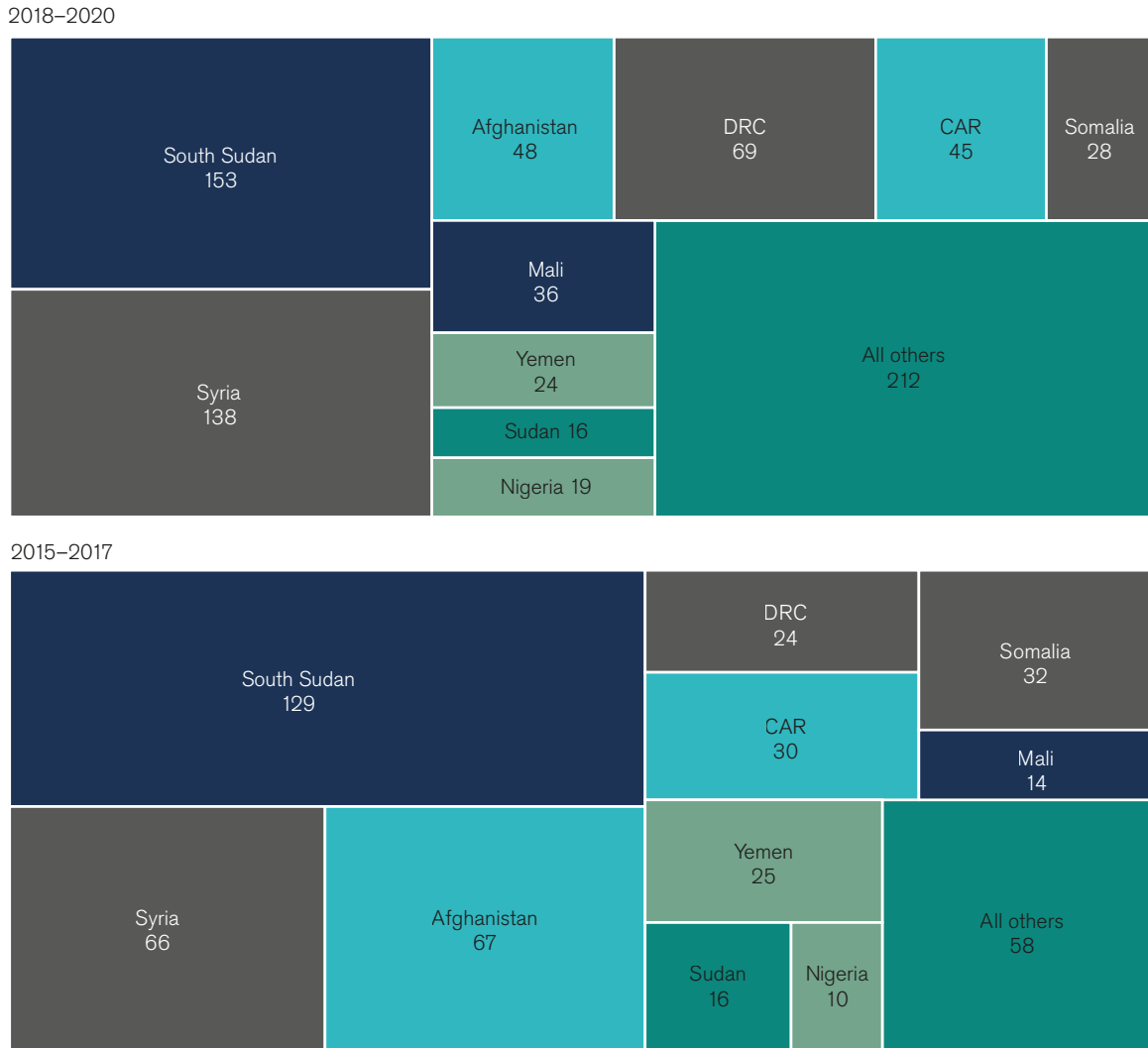
Source: Aid Worker Security Database.

In many conflict-affected countries, there was a recurrent pattern of populations living under the control of non-state actors being less well-served by humanitarian aid. There are a number of reasons for this, including state-imposed restrictions, donors' counter-terrorism conditions and the inability to negotiate safe access in active conflict. Before the 2022 Russian invasion, international humanitarian agencies in eastern Ukraine were able to meet some basic needs in areas not under government control, via local partners, but this was extremely limited.[33] In Yemen,

33   Ecorys Polska, *Evaluation of Canadian International Assistance Programming in Ukraine 2009–2018* (Global Affairs Canada, 2019), 21. www.alnap.org/help-library/evaluation-of-canadian-international-assistance-programming-in-ukraine-20092010-to.

access to Houthi-controlled areas remained extremely compromised, with organisations required both to obtain an official permit from the government, and to negotiate access with local groups and influential leaders. Syria has seen a marked decline in access to areas outside government control since 2019, with Russia and China using their vetoes at the UN Security Council to close three out of the four original UN-mandated border crossings serving north-western Syria, and uncertainty over the last remaining one.[34]

Bureaucratic impediments, sanctions and counter-terrorism measures

Despite the increase in attacks, many aid workers (28% of SOHS survey respondents, the majority of them international staff) felt that bureaucratic obstacles or political interference were a far larger obstacle to accessing populations in need. This was twice the number of respondents who cited insecurity or attacks on aid workers. Although OCHA deems bureaucratic impediments to be a 'lower order' access constraint than logistical barriers, their impact on aid operations has been debilitating, including in Syria[35] and Yemen. Bureaucratic tactics designed 'to make it a headache for you to be there' include denying or delaying entry visas, procrastinating on memorandums of understanding, holding back travel permits, adding new layers of approval and changing operating requirements. These daily preoccupations for frontline aid workers are starting to rise up the system's collective agenda.

The effects of government delays and interference play out not only in the ability to access populations to deliver support, but also in who gets counted as being in need in the first place. Instances were reported of governments or de facto authorities objecting to the results of needs assessments, forcing amendments to the data, and delaying or preventing publication.[36] In an IAHE of the 2019 drought response in Ethiopia, interviewees said that the number of people identified as being in need was influenced in both directions, 'either inflated – to draw more resources to an area – or deflated – to paint a more favourable picture of an area and to uphold a narrative of economic success'.[37] In extreme cases, such as government-controlled areas in Syria, analysts and practitioners concluded that independent needs assessments and monitoring are 'virtually impossible'.[38]

> **Despite the increase in attacks, many aid workers (28% of SOHS survey respondents, the majority of them international staff) felt that bureaucratic obstacles or political interference were a far larger obstacle to accessing populations in need.**

34   Hall, *Rescuing Aid in Syria*. www.alnap.org/help-library/rescuing-aid-in-syria.

35   Steets et al. (2018) refer to OCHA's access severity constraints methodology (*Evaluation of WFP Policies*). www.alnap.org/help-library/evaluation-of-wfp-policies-on-humanitarian-principles-and-access-in-humanitarian-0.

36   Steets et al., *Evaluation of WFP Policies*, 62–63; SOHS field interviews in Yemen. www.alnap.org/help-library/evaluation-of-wfp-policies-on-humanitarian-principles-and-access-in-humanitarian-0.

37   Steets et al., *Drought Response in Ethiopia*, 36–83. www.alnap.org/help-library/inter-agency-humanitarian-evaluation-of-the-drought-response-in-ethiopia.

38   Hall, *Rescuing Aid in Syria*. www.alnap.org/help-library/rescuing-aid-in-syria.
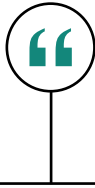
> **The effect of sanctions and counter-terrorism measures on humanitarians' ability to reach people in need was a growing concern for aid workers.**

The effect of sanctions and counter-terrorism measures on humanitarians' ability to reach people in need was a growing concern for aid workers. A 2021 survey by VOICE found that 42% of respondents said that these measures affected decisions relating to their programming in the field, by preventing them from carrying out certain humanitarian programmes and activities, or by impeding access to areas where needs are acute.[39] In Somalia, counter-terrorism laws mean that people in al-Shabaab-controlled areas – constituting about 70% of the country – have long received only a fraction of what goes to those in government-controlled areas.[40] The same is true of Islamic State-controlled areas in Syria and is even observable within specific IDP camps. According to Médecins Sans Frontières (MSF), IS families in al-Hol were excluded from the support afforded to the rest of the camp: 'There was no health screening. Water provision is terrible. The 12,000 children there have no access to any kind of mental health services, toys, education. They can literally see – across the fence – that the other children have safe spaces and playgrounds… So, it's active discrimination against that population who have been tagged as terrorists or ISIS people'.[41]

Counter-terrorism measures also have a wider 'chilling effect'[42] on humanitarian agencies' appetite for risk: regulations are complicated and unclear and there are high risks associated with violating indistinctly defined 'indirect support' clauses, so humanitarians tend to err on the side of caution. In Syria, fears of financial or criminal liability have reportedly led aid workers to avoid some areas of acute need in the north-west of the country.[43] In a 2019 report, the UN Secretary-General noted the 'uncertainty and anxiety among humanitarian organisations and their staff regarding the threat of prosecution or other sanctions for carrying out their work'.[44] Agencies also tended to adopt a 'don't ask, don't tell' attitude, which perpetuated the lack of clarity.[45] Others have noted a 'chain reaction' of effects of suspending or reducing aid, including a loss of local

39   Gillian McCarthy, *Adding to The Evidence the Impacts of Sanctions and Restrictive Measures on Humanitarian Action* (VOICE, 2021). www.alnap.org/help-library/adding-to-the-evidence-the-impact-of-sanctions-and-restrictive-measures-on-humanitarian.

40   Michiel Hofman, 'I'm a humanitarian. Don't prosecute me for doing my job', *The New Humanitarian*, 12 November 2019; O'Leary, Principles Under Pressure. www.alnap.org/help-library/i%E2%80%99m-a-humanitarian-don%E2%80%99t-prosecute-me-for-doing-my-job.

41   MSF informant cited in Vittoria Elliott and Ben Parker, 'Balancing act: Anti-terror efforts and humanitarian principles', *The New Humanitarian*, 26 November 2019. www.alnap.org/help-library/balancing-act-anti-terror-efforts-and-humanitarian-principles.

42   Alice Debarre, *Safeguarding Humanitarian Action in Sanctions Regimes* (Policy Brief) (New York: International Peace Institute, 2019). www.alnap.org/help-library/safeguarding-humanitarian-action-in-sanctions-regimes.

43   Hall, *Rescuing Aid in Syria*. www.alnap.org/help-library/rescuing-aid-in-syria.

44   David McKeever, 'International humanitarian law and counterterrorism: Fundamental values, conflicting obligations', *International and Comparative Law Quarterly* 69, no. 1 (January 2020): 43–78. www.alnap.org/help-library/nternational-humanitarian-law-and-counter-terrorism-fundamental-values-conflicting.

45   O'Leary, *Principles Under Pressure*. www.alnap.org/help-library/principles-under-pressure-the-impact-of-counterterrorism-measures-and.

acceptance, heightening security risks and further impeding access.[46]
An NGO report on counter-terrorism suggested that agencies had
developed strategies to deal with regulations over time, but that the
chilling effect remained strong.[47]

Humanitarians did however note the significant time and effort invested
in securing humanitarian exemptions to sanctions to enable operations
in Afghanistan and Yemen, and some suggested that there was new
understanding and engagement on the part of some donors, including
the Biden-Harris Administration in the US. The agreement of Security
Council Resolution 2615 in December 2021 was an important moment
for the Afghanistan response: after months of negotiation, it provided
a humanitarian exemption to the international sanctions regime. As one
advocacy leader put it, 'It's a tough nut to crack, but they're trying to figure
it out. So that's one major area where we've seen some forward progress,
albeit in small amounts, but I think they're there. Their hearts and minds
are in the right place'.

How well is the system reaching marginalised groups?

There has been a notable increase in system-wide attention to the sections
of society most commonly understood by the humanitarian system to be
socially marginalised – women, people with disabilities and older people,
as well as emerging awareness of LGBTQI people. In the four years since
the last edition of the SOHS identified ongoing gaps in reaching these
groups, there has been significant investment in commitments, frameworks
and tools to ensure that these people are better 'seen' and included in
programming, as Chapter 5 details. These efforts are filtering through into
more concerted representation and differentiation in needs assessments.
There have been multi-country pilots of gender analysis tools,[48] Age and
Disability Inclusion Needs Assessments among the Rohingya population[49]
and the mobilisation of local civil society disability organisations in Vanuatu
to join needs assessment teams in the wake of Tropical Cyclone Harold in

46   Lindsay Hamsik and Lissette Almanza, *Detrimental Impacts: How Counter-Terror Measures Impede Humanitarian Action* (Washington DC: InterAction, 2021). www.alnap.org/help-library/detrimental-impacts-how-counter-terror-measures-impede-humanitarian-action.

47   O'Leary, *Principles Under Pressure*. www.alnap.org/help-library/principles-under-pressure-the-impact-of-counterterrorism-measures-and.

48   See Women's Refugee Commission, *Piloting the IASC Guidelines on Inclusion of Persons with Disabilities in Humanitarian Action: Disability Inclusion in Gender-Based Violence Programming in Jordan, Sri Lanka, and Uganda* (Women's Refugee Commission, 2019). www.alnap.org/help-library/piloting-the-iasc-guidelines-on-inclusion-of-persons-with-disabilities-in-0.

49   REACH, *Age and Disability Inclusion Needs Assessment: Rohingya Refugee Response* (REACH, 2021). www.alnap.org/help-library/piloting-the-iasc-guidelines-on-inclusion-of-persons-with-disabilities-in-0.

> 'Fifteen per cent of the world's population has a disability, and we have had these statistics for decades. These are not niche needs. So why hasn't the humanitarian field learned to accommodate them?'

April 2020.[50] Multiple analytical studies examined the specific – and often disproportionate – impacts of COVID-19 on different social groups.[51]

However, concerns remained about the system's capacity to register the needs of all sections of society. The majority of respondents to our survey of aid practitioners remained less than positive about the system's consideration of gender, age and disability.[52] As Chapter 5 explains, there are fundamental concerns about preconceptions about 'vulnerable groups' which, taking women and older people alone, would constitute the significant majority of any affected population. Although there is growing awareness of the importance of a more nuanced and intersectional approach,[53] default assumptions about needs profiles persist longer than justified by the initial response phase.[54]

When it comes to translating needs assessments into reach, progress appeared to be more limited and inconsistent. Intentions and guidance did not routinely stand up against programming pressures. At the start of the war in Ukraine, wheelchair users reported futile searches for support and assistance with evacuation, only to be told by a prominent agency, 'Oh, we don't help people with disabilities'. These are not niche needs. According to one activist, '2.7 million Ukrainians have a documented disability; the real number is likely much higher. Fifteen per cent of the world's population has a disability, and we have had these statistics for decades. These are not niche needs. So why hasn't the humanitarian field learned to accommodate them?'[55]

50   S. Bula, E. Morgan, and T. Thomson, 'Pacific People with Disability Shaping the Agenda for Inclusive Humanitarian Action' (London: HPN/ODI, 2020). www.alnap.org/help-library/pacific-people-with-disability-shaping-the-agenda-for-inclusive-humanitarian-action.

51   See, e.g., Tal Rafaeli and Geraldine Hutchinson, *The Secondary Impacts of COVID-19 on Women and Girls in Sub-Saharan Africa* (K4D, 2020). www.alnap.org/help-library/the-secondary-impacts-of-covid-19-on-women-and-girls-in-sub-saharan-africa; Kasey Ochiltree and Iulia Andreea Toma, *Gender Analysis of The Impact of Recent Humanitarian Crises on Women, Men, Girls, And Boys In Puntland State In Somalia* (Oxford: Oxfam, 2021). www.alnap.org/help-library/gender-analysis-of-the-impact-of-recent-humanitarian-crises-on-women-men-girls-and-boys; Samuel Hall, *The Impact of COVID-19 on Older Persons in Afghanistan* (Help Age International, 2020). www.alnap.org/help-library/the-impact-of-covid-19-on-older-persons-in-afghanistan-analytical-brief; Innovation to Inclusion, *Impact of COVID-19 on the Lives of People with Disabilities: Insights and Stories from Bangladesh and Kenya* (Leonard Cheshire Disability, 2020). www.alnap.org/help-library/impact-of-covid-19-on-the-lives-of-people-with-disabilities-insights-and-stories-from.

52   According to our survey results, 43% thought it 'Fair' and 17% 'Poor'.

53   See, e.g., Catherine Jones et al., *Applying an Inclusive and Equitable Approach to Anticipatory Action* (Rome: FAO, 2020). www.alnap.org/help-library/applying-an-inclusive-and-equitable-approach-to-anticipatory-action; Valentina Shafina and Pauline Thivillier, *Inclusive Client Responsiveness: Focus on People with Disabilities and Older People* (New York: IRC, 2021). www.alnap.org/help-library/inclusive-client-responsiveness-focus-on-people-with-disabilities-and-older-people.

54   Sophie Van Eetvelt, 'What does the evidence say? A literature review of the evidence on including people with disabilities and older people in humanitarian response', *Humanitarian Exchange* 78, no. 7 (October 2020). www.alnap.org/help-library/what-does-the-evidence-say-a-literature-review-of-the-evidence-on-including-people-with.

55   Anna Landre, 'The disabled Ukrainians doing what the UN can't (or won't)' (Blog), *From Poverty to Power*, 9 March 2022. www.alnap.org/help-library/the-disabled-ukranians-doing-what-the-un-can%E2%80%99t-or-won%E2%80%99t.

In Yemen and DRC, interviewees suggested that ensuring equitable reach to marginalised groups was a secondary consideration after the primary exigencies of the emergency had been met – that, in situations of extreme need or intense conflict, the focus reverted to what to deliver, rather than how to ensure reach and access. Performance was found to be variable even within multi-country initiatives: one programme demonstrated concerted efforts and success in reaching 'the most vulnerable… and not the easiest to reach' in the Philippines, but more mixed results in Nigeria and Pakistan, where time pressures were cited as a barrier to ensuring equity. Other people we spoke to pointed to prioritisation dilemmas between widespread acute needs and considering specific groups. As one aid worker in DRC put it, 'There's a lot of attention to disabilities, which is very important. But… you need to choose, is attention to disability a priority for me? On paper, yes of course. But the reality is that you can barely keep people alive, and so everything else becomes a luxury in certain contexts'. As Chapter 5 details, the lack of tailored design also makes it more difficult for marginalised groups to access support even where it is meant to be available to them.

Much of the evidence around the system's ability to reach marginalisedgroups is still anecdotal. There has been progress in producing gender-disaggregated data, but disability, age, LGBTQI identity, and other demographic data remains limited in programmes and clusters. Monitoring data is not sufficiently granular, making it is hard enough to know whose needs are being met,[56] let alone whose aren't. As one evaluation noted, 'the vision for equity was also compromised by partial or limited disaggregation of data', as without it agencies and clusters cannot know who is reached by interventions 'or understand the extent to which equity targets are addressed and met'.[57] Given the stigmatisation that makes identifying as LGBTQI risky in some contexts, it can be challenging to even assess needs under such categorisations. Indeed, over this study period, same-sex relationships have been illegal in several

56   Robina Shaheen, Hannah Wichterich and Deepak Sardiwal, *Final Evaluation Report of Norwegian Church Aid's Emergency Preparedness and Response Programme in South Sudan* (Action Against Hunger and Norwegian Church Aid, 2018). www.alnap.org/help-library/final-evaluation-report-of-norwegian-church-aids-emergency-preparedness-and-response; Bizzarri et al., Evaluation on Gender Equality; Nyasha Tirivayi et al., *Evaluation of the School Meals Programme in Malawi with Financial Support from United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) 2016 to 2018: Volume I* (Rome: WFP, 2019). www.alnap.org/help-library/malawi-school-meals-programme-2016-2018-an-evaluation; Phuong Pham et al., *DEPP Evaluation Summative Phase Report* (Action Against Hunger, CDAC Network, Start Network, DFID, 2018). www.alnap.org/help-library/depp-evaluation-summative-phase-report; Florence Tercier Holst-Roness et al., *Evaluation of UNHCR Prevention of, and Response to, SGBV in Brazil Focusing on the Population of Concern from Venezuela (2017–2018)* (Geneva: UNHCR, 2019). www.alnap.org/help-library/evaluation-of-unhcr-prevention-of-and-response-to-sgbv-in-brazil-focusing-on-the; Taylor, Kreidler and Harvey, *Global Cash Evaluation*. www.alnap.org/help-library/nrc-global-cash-evaluation; DFAT, *Performance of Australian Aid 2017–2018* (Canberra: Australian Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade, 2019). www.alnap.org/help-library/dfats-annual-performance-report-of-australian-aid-for-2017-18.

57   UNICEF, *Global Evaluation of UNICEF Water, Sanitation and Hygiene Programming in Protracted Crises, 2014–2019* (New York: UNICEF, 2021), 7. www.alnap.org/help-library/global-evaluation-of-unicef-wash-programming-in-protracted-crises-2014-2019.

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countries experiencing large-scale humanitarian crises.[58] Identification challenges aside, there are critiques that humanitarian actors do not adequately consider the existence of LGBTQI needs in their planning.[59] Another review noted an absence of clear evidence on the positive impacts or outcomes for people with disability and older people resulting from inclusive humanitarian response, and very little critical assessment of the use and effectiveness of existing inclusive approaches. There was also a notable lack of evidence on the costing of inclusion and of cost–benefit analyses to support agencies in making difficult decisions about who to prioritise and reach with overstretched resources.[60]

Is aid being diverted from people in need?

Aid diversion is a fact of life in the highly compromised settings in which humanitarians operate. Reaching affected populations involves pay-offs, trade-offs and leakages, which can have a real effect on whether the right people are reached with the support they require. Research on corruption indicates how it permeates the programme cycle – from needs assessments and targeting to design costing, contracting decisions to the delivery and monitoring of assistance. This is a reputationally, ethically and practically thorny issue that is rarely covered in evaluations and assessments of the system, but one that aid workers recognise as a live issue. When asked how significant a problem it was in the country where they worked, nearly three-quarters said it was a moderate or high concern.[61] For affected communities, diversion was a major concern that clearly affected how they rated the aid endeavour – focus groups told us that it should be a priority issue for the SOHS and over a fifth (22%) of aid recipients responding to our survey said it was the biggest problem.[62] As one participant in Yemen explained, 'The aid provided in Yemen is estimated to be equal to billions of dollars, but it went all in vain and the situation is getting worse. There is a huge corruption here, but we do not know who is responsible for this corruption. We heard that there was a ferry full of food aid, the aid expired, and no one benefited. We do not know who is responsible and everyone is blaming each other'.

> **For affected communities, diversion was a major concern that clearly affected how they rated the aid endeavour.**

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58   Nicolas Salazar Godoy, *Sexual Orientation and Gender Identity in Contexts Affected by Fragility, Conflict, and Violence: Discussion Paper* (Washington DC: World Bank Group, 2020). www.alnap.org/help-library/sexual-orientation-and-gender-identity-in-contexts-affected-by-fragility-conflict-and.

59   Roth et al., *Cycles of Displacement*. www.alnap.org/help-library/cycles-of-displacement-understanding-violence-discrimination-and-exclusion-of-lgbtqi; and M. Daigle, 'How Humanitarians should consider LGBT+ issues in their work' (London: ODI, 2021). www.alnap.org/help-library/how-humanitarians-should-consider-lgbt-issues-in-their-work.

60   Van Eetvelt et al., 'What does the evidence say?'. www.alnap.org/help-library/what-does-the-evidence-say-a-literature-review-of-the-evidence-on-including-people-with.

61   44% said it was 'Moderate' and 29% 'High'.

62   Overall, this made it the second largest concern for aid recipients, after 'Not enough aid' (34%).

There are no estimates of the global impacts or costs of aid diversion, but context-specific studies, including the refugee response in Lebanon[63] and in the Puntland region of Somalia,[64] show how public institutions, humanitarian agencies, local organisations and community representatives can all be implicated in different ways. In Syria, there was evidence of food items being systematically diverted to feed the military, while the government's imposition of an unfavourable official exchange rate on aid agencies meant that, in 2020, an estimated 50% of funding was reportedly funnelled to the Syrian Central Bank.[65] Interviewees in DRC, Venezuela and Yemen all suggested there was widespread and systemic diversion of aid. This involved both state and non-state armed groups directly appropriating aid for electioneering or profiteering and bribing or 'taxing' aid agencies in exchange for access or protection. In all three contexts, interviewees also noted instances of corruption during aid distribution, from falsification or favouritism on distribution lists to intercepting cash at the point of distribution and charging recipients for aid. In the Rohingya camps in Bangladesh, the authorities created the 'majhi system,' appointing individuals within the camps to act as an interface between the refugees and aid providers. Concerns among humanitarian workers about the lack of representativeness and abuse of power by the majhis were echoed in focus group discussions with refugees, who said that 'NGO workers didn't take anything from us in exchange for service they provide but majhis do; when the majhis collect the list of households for NGOs distribution, they collect 20 Bangladeshi taka per household, They do it because they don't get any salary.'

Donors and aid agencies have policies and mechanisms to address corruption. Interviews with aid agencies at headquarters and in country suggested that additional checks and balances and investigation mechanisms were in place to prevent or address the most egregious forms of corruption, and that this was contributing to an increase in reported incidents. For some agencies this was part of a wider re-evaluation of organisational risk and compliance approaches, with one NGO noting how this involved addressing issues around organisational culture alongside top-down, zero-tolerance policies, including co-designing training with local staff and partners to reflect culturally specific perceptions and definitions of corruption. As one INGO leader explained: 'We've tightened up on our own internal investigation measures, we've even

63   Soha BouChabke and Gloria Haddad, 'Ineffectiveness, poor coordination, and corruption in humanitarian aid: The Syrian refugee crisis in Lebanon', *International Journal of Voluntary and Nonprofit Organizations* 32, no. 4 (2021): 894–909. www.alnap.org/help-library/ineffectiveness-poor-coordination-and-corruption-in-humanitarian-aid-the-syrian-refugee.

64   Abdinur Abdirisak Sofe, 'Assessment of corruption in the humanitarian assistance in Puntland State of Somalia', *Journal of Financial Crime* 27, no. 1 (2020): 104–18. www.alnap.org/help-library/assessment-of-corruption-in-the-humanitarian-assistance-in-puntland-state-of-somalia.

65   Natasha Hall, Karam Shaar and Munqeth Othman Agha, 'How the Assad Regime systematically diverts tens of millions in aid', *Center for Strategic and International Studies*, 20 October 2021. www.alnap.org/help-library/how-the-assad-regime-systematically-diverts-tens-of-millions-in-aid.

now got an ex-policeman on our books just to make sure that we're really tight on the way that we do business'. Corruption is part of the equation when it comes to providing urgent assistance in some of the most constrained and lawless parts of the world, and over the period, agencies became more rigorous and open about this fact (but remained wary of the reputational risks involved).

Box B: Corruption in rapid response programming in DRC

In DRC, a multi-million dollar corruption scandal exposed the scale and endemic nature of the problem and the inadequacies of existing systems to address it. The corruption came to light in late 2018 after Congolese business owners were caught trying to bribe Mercy Corps staff with bags of cash. An internal investigation found that, while Mercy Corps had been affected for up to a year, similar schemes had likely been in operation for over a decade, affecting multiple NGOs in the UNICEF-administered Rapid Response to Population Movement (RRMP) programme. The organised corruption exploited reduced checks and tracing in the advance financing for rapid response, and involved community leaders reporting exaggerated numbers of affected people to NGOs. Local business owners would then buy ID cards from hundreds of people who had not been affected by the crisis and bribe corrupt aid workers to falsely register them for support. Cash payments for the false beneficiaries would then be collected and shared between the business owners and local leaders.

An investigation published in 2020 by *The New Humanitarian* estimated that around $6 million may have been lost to multiple aid organisations over two years, with approximately $639,000 lost in the space of a few months in 2018 by Mercy Crops and its partners.[66] Analysts suggested that, while the rapid response mechanism was particularly vulnerable to fraud, it was symptomatic of a wider issue in contexts habituated to decades of humanitarian aid – that there were interests who knew how to 'game the system'.

While Mercy Corps undertook a thorough internal investigation and UNICEF launched an audit of RRMP partner NGOs in DRC, *The New Humanitarian* suggested that several other potentially implicated organisations had not taken the same measures. At the time of its investigation, there had been no prosecutions in relation to the fraud, and although Mercy Corps terminated the employment of implicated staff, it had not shared their details with other NGOs for fear of violating Congolese labour law.

66   Philip Kleinfeld, 'EXCLUSIVE: Congo aid scam triggers sector-wide alarm', *The New Humanitarian*, 11 June 2020. www.alnap.org/help-library/exclusive-congo-aid-scam-triggers-sector-wide-alarm.

In response to the allegations, the UN Humanitarian Coordinator in DRC outlined a set of anti-fraud measures including enhanced triangulation of information, analysis of targeting data by external teams and more rigorous audit, oversight and monitoring by senior managers.[67] A joint Anti-Fraud Task Force was established, which commissioned an operational review of corruption exposure following the RRMP scandal. Among its findings were that, despite recent improvements, there was a persistent reluctance to share information on corruption incidents between aid organisations, let alone collectively address them. The review also suggested a link between the relevance of a programme and exposure to the risk of corruption and exploitation – in other words, if a programme is not seen as relevant by the host community, there will be greater motivation for corruption.[68]

67   OCHA, 'Statement by the Humanitarian Coordinator in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, David McLachlan-Karr', *The New Humanitarian* , 12 June 2020. www.alnap.org/help-library/ statement-by-the-humanitarian-coordinator-in-the-democratic-republic-of-the-congo-david.

68   Nicole Henze, François Grünewald, Sharanjeet Parmar, *Operational Review of Exposure to Corrupt Practices in Humanitarian Aid Implementation Mechanisms in the DRC* (London: DIFID, 2020). www.alnap.org/help-library/operational-review-of-exposure-to-corrupt-practices-in-humanitarian-aid-implementation.

Focus on: Forced displacement

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Increases and changes in refugee populations

As we have seen in Chapter 1, the world's refugee population has continued to grow, from an estimated 25.4 million people in 2017 to 27.1 million in 2021. But rates of displacement slowed over these four years compared to the previous period, with COVID-19 restricting movement and fewer people fleeing from Syria, Myanmar and South Sudan. Those who had already fled remained without long-term solutions: many Syrians entered their tenth year of displacement, and Rohingya refugees faced a fifth year living in temporary shelter. Since the previous edition of the SOHS charted the European migration 'crisis' and the subsequent 2016 deal between the European Union and Turkey, the situation continued to change character: although large numbers of refugees and migrants remained in Greece, pockets of acute need in Europe became mobile and fragmented.[69] The war in Ukraine has radically altered this picture. In the first six months of 2022, over 5.2 million people from Ukraine had fled across Europe,[70] creating one of the largest refugee populations in the world.

Globally, the COVID-19 pandemic limited cross-border movement and affected refugees directly and indirectly. Initial fears of major outbreaks in congested camps were largely not realised, and most host countries included refugees and people seeking asylum in their national vaccination plans. However, given that 85% of refugees were hosted in developing countries,[71] they were affected by the global inequity in vaccine distribution. Already living in precarious conditions, many were highly vulnerable to the economic impacts of the pandemic – hit hard by inflation shocks and losing livelihoods and accommodation.[72] The effects were also felt in camps: in Bangladesh,

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69 This includes the situation on the border of Belarus and Poland, where thousands of refugees were 'held hostage by a political stalemate' (Pascale Moreau in UNHCR, 'UNHCR Urges States to End Stalemate at Belarus-EU Border and Avoid Further Loss of Life' (News), UNHCR, 22 October 2021. www.alnap.org/help-library/ineffectiveness-poor-coordination-and-corruption-in-humanitarian-aid-the-syrian-refugee.

70 UNHCR, 'Ukraine Situation: Flash Update #18', 24 June 2022. www.alnap.org/help-library/ukraine-situation-flash-update-18.

71 UNHCR, 'Refugee Data Finder', 2021. www.alnap.org/help-library/refugee-data-finder.

72 Danish Refugee Council, *Global COVID-19 Response: Final Report May-December 2020* (Copenhagen: Danish Refugee Council, 2021), 5. See evidence from Jordan, Iraq, Nigeria, Niger and Lebanon. www.alnap.org/help-library/global-covid-19-response-danish-refugee-council.

lockdown measures exacerbated already high levels of gender-based violence in refugee households, while restrictions imposed in the name of COVID-19 control have curtailed basic services and cut off access to safe spaces.[73]

New global agreements

In December 2018, the UN General Assembly affirmed the Global Compact on Refugees (GCR). Marking the end of a two-year process and building on the 2016 New York Declaration for Refugees and Migrants and the Comprehensive Refugee Response Framework[74] (CRRF), the GCR aimed to transform how the international community and host governments work together towards more equitable and predictable responsibility-sharing.[75]

To build momentum for implementation, the first four-yearly Global Refugee Forum (GRF) was held in 2019, organised by UNHCR and six states.[76] The conference saw 1,400 pledges made, but as a non-binding framework it will be difficult to ensure that these are honoured and compel non-engaged actors to abide by the GCR's principles. Initial progress reports in 2021[77] suggested that, while the GCR had had positive effects, it had not been transformative for the global refugee response.

Global uptake of the GCR was uneven, with major refugee-hosting countries showing very different levels of engagement. Uganda, then host to the world's third-largest refugee population, was an early adopter of the CRRF, integrating its principles into national development strategies. In Bangladesh, by contrast, the GCR was absent in national frameworks as the government does not recognise the Rohingya population as refugees and allows only temporary support, with a view to repatriation to Myanmar. Donor countries, prioritising migration management, tended to focus on their international, rather than domestic, GCR responsibilities, and so risked undermining it by being 'constructive abroad but obstructive at home',[78] including through hostile policies and moves to outsource asylum

> **Donor countries, prioritising migration management, tended to focus on their international, rather than domestic, GCR responsibilities, and so risked undermining it by being 'constructive abroad but obstructive at home'.**

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73   Laurence Gerhardt, *GBV trends among Rohingya refugees in Cox's Bazar* (London/Dhaka: IRC, 2021). www.alnap.org/help-library/gbv-trends-among-rohingya-refugees-in-cox%E2%80%99s-bazar.

74   The CRRF, an annex to the New York Declaration, was piloted between 2015 and 2017 in 15 countries/regional situations that experienced large-scale movements of refugees and protracted refugee situations.

75   To this end it has four objectives: (1) ease the pressure on host countries; (2) enhance refugee self-reliance; (3) expand access to third-country solutions; and (4) support conditions in countries of origin for return in safety and dignity.

76   The Forum was co-hosted by UNHCR and Switzerland, and co-convened by Costa Rica, Ethiopia, Germany, Pakistan and Turkey.

77   In 2021 UNHCR produced its first monitoring report against the GCR indicator framework, complemented by a progress stock-take produced by IRC, NRC and DRC.

78   Catherine Osborn and Patrick Wall, *The Global Compact on Refugees Three Years On: Navigating Barriers and Maximising Incentives in Support of Refugees and Host Countries* (Copenhagen/New York/Oslo: DRC, IRC, NRC, 2021). www.alnap.org/help-library/the-global-compact-on-refugees-three-years-on-navigating-barriers-and-maximising. This was a critique on the signing of the GCR – that its model of responsibility sharing was seen as a simple quid pro quo between donors and host governments of 'you host, we fund'.

processes to other countries. This has a dual negative effect: limiting the protection space within these countries' borders and weakening support for protection norms overseas.

The responsibility-sharing model of the GCR involved commitment to a new level of sustained, equitable and predictable funding. However, this remained at the discretion of donors.[79] Financial pledges at the 2019 GRF amounted to an estimated $2 billion,[80] but it is unclear how much of this was new, additional funding or restated commitments.[81] It is also unclear how much has been disbursed.[82] There has, however, been a clear increase in engagement from the World Bank Group in refugee financing: the 2016 introduction of a funding window for refugees was followed by a commitment to investment of $2.2 billion, including a $1 billion sub-window to address COVID-19 impacts. [83] The composition of the instrument recognised the importance of sustained political and financial engagement to enable longer-term opportunities for refugees and their hosts.

The GCR is framed around the accepted durable solutions – local integration, resettlement to a third country or safe return – yet the reality for many refugees remained protracted existence in temporary conditions.[84] There have been some promising commitments on local integration, with host countries making over 280 pledges on laws and policy. An evaluation of the 15 contexts which were applying the CRRF found that progress had been made at the policy level – albeit 'tempered' in implementation.[85] On resettlement, a three-year strategy developed under the auspices of the GCR aimed to see 70,000 refugees resettled through UNHCR alone. However, the COVID-19 pandemic meant the suspension of resettlement for several months, making 2020 the lowest resettlement year in almost two decades.[86] The rate of refugees returning to their home countries also fell in 2020, largely due to the pandemic, beginning to increase

79   According to Yoon and Smith (2021), , options for mandatory contributions were reportedly ruled out in the GCR negotiations (Priscilla Yoon and Eric Smith, *Toward Equitable and Predictable Responsibility Sharing: An Analysis of State Pledges at the Global Refugee Forum* (InterAction, 2021). www.alnap.org/help-library/toward-equitable-and-predictable-responsibility-sharing-an-analysis-of-state-pledges-at).

80   UNHCR, *Outcomes of The Global Refugee Forum 2019* (Geneva: UNHCR, 2020). www.alnap.org/help-library/outcomes-of-the-global-refugee-forum-2019.

81   Yoon and Smith, *Equitable and Predictable*. www.alnap.org/help-library/toward-equitable-and-predictable-responsibility-sharing-an-analysis-of-state-pledges-at.

82   There is currently no comprehensive tracking of humanitarian, development and private financial flows for refugee situations. OECD is collaborating with UNHCR to develop this refugee financing tracking capability.

83   See IDA.

84   Lewis Sida and Ed Schenkenberg, *Synthesis of Rohingya Response Evaluations of IOM, UNICEF and UNHCR* (Geneva: UNHCR, IOM, UNICEF, 2019), 18. www.alnap.org/system/files/content/resource/files/main/Bangladesh%2520synthesis%2520Report%2520final%25202019.pdf.

85   UNHCR, *Two Year Progress Assessment of the CRRF Approach, September 2016 – September 2018* (Geneva: UNHCR, 2018), 13. www.alnap.org/help-library/two-year-progress-assessment-of-the-crrf-approach.

86   According to Osborn and Wall (Three Years On, 2021, www.alnap.org/help-library/two-year-progress-assessment-of-the-crrf-approach), just 22,770 people were resettled in 2020.

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again in the first half of 2021. But safe and dignified repatriation remained unfeasible for most refugees, even if it was the preference of host states, and humanitarian organisations feared that the global durable solutions discussion could be skewed by political interests in favour of rapid return, which may be inappropriate, unsafe and involuntary.[87, 88]

Humanitarian performance

Compared to other aid recipients, refugees were generally less satisfied with the relevance and volume of aid they received. According to our survey, refugees were 30% less likely than other aid recipients to fully agree that aid addressed their priority needs and 60% less likely to express satisfaction with the amount of aid they received. They were, however, more positive than other aid recipients about having their views heard: overall, refugees were 40% more likely to say that they had been consulted and 210% more likely to say that they had had opportunities to provide feedback. These findings reflect the system's limitations in protracted and often politically constrained settings; agencies are able to establish the longer-term presence and basic mechanisms for engaging with refugees, but they often lack the adaptive latitude or financing to meet their complex needs over time.

This fits with evidence that the humanitarian system tends to be more effective at meeting the immediate material life-saving needs of refugees, but less able to meet their longer-term needs. In response to the Rohingya refugee crisis, for example, the system performed well against basic life-saving metrics, particularly given the scale and rapidity of the refugee influx and the risk-prone location of the crisis:[89] mortality was kept below emergency thresholds for most of the first year and morbidity and malnutrition declined.[90] However, in Bangladesh and in other contexts, efforts to address the effects of protracted displacement were constrained by agency mandates, the national policy environment and limited options for meaningful durable solutions, in particular return to Myanmar. Even so, aid workers felt there was scope for improvement and that the humanitarian community could advocate more strongly for long-term solutions.

> **Agencies are able to establish the longer-term presence and basic mechanisms for engaging with refugees, but they often lack the adaptive latitude or financing to meet their complex needs over time.**

87   Danida, *Evaluation of the Regional Development and Protection Programme in Lebanon, Jordan and Iraq 2014–2017* (Copenhagen: Danish Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2018), 48. www.alnap.org/help-library/evaluation-of-the-regional-development-and-protection-programme-in-lebanon-jordan-and.

88   Taylor, Glyn, G. Gilbert, S. Hidalgo, M. Korthals Altes, B. Lewis, C. Robinson, E. Sandri, V. Stoianova and J. Ward (2022), COVID-19 Global Evaluation Coalition, "Joint Evaluation of the Protection of the Rights of Refugees during the COVID-19 Pandemic", UNHCR, Geneva, www.alnap.org/help-library/joint-evaluation-of-the-protection-of-the-rights-of-refugees-during-the-covid-19.

89   Sida and Schenkenberg, *Rohingya Response Evaluations*. www.alnap.org/system/files/content/resource/files/main/Bangladesh%2520synthesis%2520Report%2520final%25202019.pdf; Christian Aid, 'Accountability Assessment Rohingya Response Bangladesh' (London: Christian Aid, 2018). www.alnap.org/help-library/accountability-assessment-rohingya-response-bangladesh.

90   Sida and Schenkenberg, *Rohingya Response Evaluations*. www.alnap.org/system/files/content/resource/files/main/Bangladesh%2520synthesis%2520Report%2520final%25202019.pdf

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Balancing support for refugees and host communities has been a challenge. In many contexts, refugees are hosted in already marginalised and deprived areas, and assisting the local population is important for both actual and perceived fairness. However, as discussed in Chapter 4, proportion-based targets for assisting refugees and locals have risked diverting funds from the most vulnerable and masking the complexity and diversity of both refugee and host community needs.[91] It can also mean that certain groups are missed. In Lebanon, for example, donor requirements and government-led proportional targets for supporting Syrian refugees and host populations meant that the needs of large numbers of Iraqi and Palestinian refugees were often overlooked.[92] Policies on host community inclusion have however played an important role in promoting social cohesion and addressing the acute needs of local populations. This is evident in programming in Tanzania and Uganda, and in some COVID-19 response programming in Bangladesh.[93] But social cohesion effects can be hard to measure and sustain as tensions can be both deep-seated and volatile, especially when countries face additional economic and social shocks.[94]

Despite the IASC commitment to the centrality of protection nearly a decade ago, evaluations have noted less success with regard to protection relative to other areas of refugee assistance.[95, 96] There are external barriers to success, including restrictive policy environments. UNHCR has been able to win small mitigating gains in the face of protection threats to Rohingya refugees,[97] but the scope for wider influence remains limited. Even for forms of protection that are possible and available,

91   UNHCR, *Evaluation of UNHCR's Country Operation, Afghanistan* (Geneva: UNHCR, 2020). www.alnap.org/help-library/unhcr-afghanistan-country-evaluation-report-2020.

92   Danida, *Regional Development and Protection*. www.alnap.org/help-library/evaluation-of-the-regional-development-and-protection-programme-in-lebanon-jordan-and.

93   UNICEF, *Evaluation of UNICEF's Work to Link Humanitarian and Development Programming* (New York: UNICEF, 2021), 59. www.alnap.org/help-library/evaluation-of-unicefs-work-to-link-humanitarian-and-development-programming.

94   Antoine Mansour and Jean Dib Haj, *Final Evaluation Report Lebanon Host Communities Support Project (LHSP) 2015–2017* (New York: UNDP, 2018). www.alnap.org/help-library/mid-term-evaluation-of-the-lebanese-host-communities-support-project; Julia Betts et al., *Evaluation of the WFP Regional Response to the Syrian Crisis (2015–2018)* (Rome: WFP, 2018). www.alnap.org/help-library/evaluation-of-the-wfp-regional-response-to-the-syrian-crisis-2015-2018.

95   Julian Murray, *Evaluation of the European Union's Humanitarian Response to the Refugee Crisis in Turkey* (European Commission, 2019). www.alnap.org/help-library/evaluation-of-the-european-union%E2%80%99s-humanitarian-response-to-the-refugee-crisis-in; Ed Schenkenberg van Mierop, Karin Wendt and Sahjabin Kabir, *Independent Evaluation of the Aktion Deutschland Hilft e.V. (ADH) Joint Appeal to Rohingya Myanmar Bangladesh* (Geneva: HERE, 2019). www.alnap.org/help-library/independent-evaluation-of-the-aktion-deutschland-hilft-ev-adh-joint-appeal-to-%E2%80%9Crohingya.

96   Jane Cocking et al., *Independent Review of the Implementation of the IASC Protection Policy* (London: HPG/ODI, 2022). www.alnap.org/help-library/%E2%80%98independent-review-of-the-implementation-of-the-iasc-protection-policy.

97   For example the inclusion of protection principles in its memorandum of understanding with the government over the relocation of refugees to the island of Bhasan Char and preventing several thousand people from being moved.

refugees' status-related fears can inhibit impact: one examination of low uptake of referrals relating to sexual and gender-based violence found that, alongside other stigmas and concerns, reluctance to approach officials or to breach travel restrictions for fear of deportation was a factor for those with unclear or precarious residency status.[98] The needs of displaced LGBTQI people and their associated protection risks are generally not adequately taken into account or served by the humanitarian system.[99]

Confusion and fragmentation within the humanitarian system have also stymied effectiveness. This is a global problem,[100] and one which recurs in multiple country evaluations. In Djibouti, there was a notable lack of clarity and unity between agencies on priorities, approaches and roles for identifying and addressing protection concerns.[101] In Bangladesh, evaluations of the initial phase of the Rohingya response found that the government ban on UNHCR registrations, combined with the lack of protection leadership from other responders, meant that 'the initial response lacked a protection framework as its main lens'.[102] Four years on from the start of the current crisis, field interviewees reported that protection was still 'side-lined' and the complicated coordination structure made advocacy and information sharing particularly challenging. Effectiveness has not been improved by the implication of some humanitarian agencies in protection-related concerns, namely the 2021 revelation that refugees' personal data had been shared with the Myanmar authorities.[103]

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98   Teresa Hanley, Katie Ogwang and Caitlin Procter, *Evaluation of UNHCR Prevention and Response to SGBV in the Refugee Population in Lebanon (2016–2018)* (Geneva: UNHCR, 2018). www.alnap.org/help-library/evaluation-of-unhcr-prevention-and-response-to-sgbv-in-the-refugee-population-in.

99   Roth et al., *Cycles of Displacement*. www.alnap.org/help-library/cycles-of-displacement-understanding-violence-discrimination-and-exclusion-of-lgbtqi.

100   Cocking et al., *IASC Protection Policy*. www.alnap.org/help-library/%E2%80%98independent-review-of-the-implementation-of-the-iasc-protection-policy.

101   Sida and Schenkenberg, *Rohingya Response Evaluations*. www.alnap.org/system/files/content/resource/files/main/Bangladesh%2520synthesis%2520Report%2520final%25202019.pdf.

102   Sida and Schenkenberg, 13. www.alnap.org/system/files/content/resource/files/main/Bangladesh%2520synthesis%2520Report%2520final%25202019.pdf.

103   Human Rights Watch, 'UN shared Rohingya data without informed consent' (News), Human Rights Watch, 15 June 2021. www.alnap.org/help-library/un-shared-rohingya-data-without-informed-consent-bangladesh-provided-myanmar.

Lebanon case study:
Protracted refugee populations
in a worsening host country situation

Author: Local researcher, Lebanon
Name withheld to protect the author's identity

Lebanon continued to host the largest number of refugees relative to the size of its population, including an estimated 1.5 million Syrians and more than 250,000 Palestinians.[104] The country also faced political volatility and a major port explosion in Beirut in 2020. Severe economic decline, exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic, is estimated to have pushed over 55% of the population below the poverty line.[105] Between 2019 and 2021, food prices increased by 400%.

A more precarious situation for refugees

As the Syrian refugee crisis moves into its tenth year, the affected population and the agencies that assist them highlighted three persistent challenges. First, lack of legal status: in 2015, the government instructed UNHCR to stop registering Syrian refugees,[106] leaving a third of the current population with no legal status and without freedom of movement or the right to work. Those with legal status had to renew their documents regularly but registration rates declined, exacerbated by COVID-19 closures and financial barriers.[107] This contributes to the second challenge: a lack of access to income and food. With 90% of Syrian refugee households living in extreme poverty, the majority resorted to negative coping strategies: 90% reported taking on debt, primarily to buy food, while others reported begging and not sending children to school. Third, poverty combined with a privatised and overstretched health system meant that refugees were unable to access and pay for basic healthcare.[108]

104   UNHCR, *UNHCR Lebanon: Fact Sheet, September 2021* (Geneva: UNHCR, September 2021). www.alnap.org/help-library/unhcr-lebanon-fact-sheet-september-2021.

105   Nalia. Ahmed et al., 'Vaccinating refugees: Lessons from the inclusive Lebanon Vaccine Roll-Out Experience', World Bank, 18 June 2021. www.alnap.org/help-library/vaccinating-refugees-lessons-from-the-inclusive-lebanon-vaccine-roll-out-experience.

106   UNHCR, 'Refugee Data Finder'. www.alnap.org/help-library/refugee-data-finder.

107   UNHCR, *Protection Monitoring Findings: Lebanon 1st Quarter 2021* (Geneva: UNHCR, 2021). www.alnap.org/help-library/protection-monitoring-findings-lebanon-1st-quarter-2021.

108   The UNHCR protection monitoring report (2021, www.alnap.org/help-library/protection-monitoring-findings-lebanon-1st-quarter-2021) states that '1 in 5 refugees (20%) are now forgoing needed healthcare and medicine due to a lack of resources (compared to 15% in the previous quarter)'.

Greater pressure on the humanitarian response

The financial data supports what both affected populations and delivery agencies reported: that needs were outstripping the supply of support. The 2021 Lebanon Crisis Response Plan (LCRP) targeted more than double the number of people for basic assistance between 2019 and 2022, but its budget increased only minimally,[109, 110] despite rising fuel and commodity prices increasing the cost of project implementation, and a six-fold rise in the cost of the Survival Minimum Expenditure Basket). Funds have not met more than 54% of initial annual requirements since 2013.

Cash and voucher programmes were an established core of humanitarian assistance in Lebanon (in 2021, $165.8 million was provided via cash assistance programmes).[111] But the financial crisis in Lebanon required agencies to think twice about how they provided cash: in 2020, only half of cash-assisted severely vulnerable households reported being able to meet their minimum needs. Cash transfers shifted from the plummeting Lebanese pound[112, 113] towards 'dollarisation' of transfers,[114] and following humanitarian agencies' advocacy, the transfer value of the main cash programme was doubled in late 2021.[115] Yet there were also concerns about the negative consequences of these measures.[116] Amid fears of further fuelling community tensions, some agencies chose to maintain wide coverage rather than increase payments to those most in need. The economic decline worsened community tensions, leading to a distrust of aid targeting decisions, and a prevalent sense that vulnerable Lebanese had been neglected by the international system.[117] As a result, refugees reported feeling scared and humiliated when they went to receive assistance and withdraw cash payments.

109   LCRP budget requirement for basic assistance in 2019 was $477 million and $530 million in 2022, despite a doubling in people targeted over this period and a 557% increase in price of the Survival Minimum Expenditure Basket since October 2019, according to LCRP 2022. See: Government of Lebanon and United Nations, *Lebanon Crisis Response Plan 2022–2023* (Government of Lebanon, 2022, www.alnap.org/help-library/lebanon-crisis-response-plan-2022-2023).

110   With $352 million carried over from 2020 to 2021.

111   The largest of which is multi-purpose cash assistance, which targeted 294,000 households, of which 239,000 were Syrian.

112   Nick Newsom, 'Aid millions wasted in Lebanese currency collapse', *The New Humanitarian*, 24 March 2021. www.alnap.org/help-library/aid-millions-wasted-in-lebanese-currency-collapse.

113   WFP, *Lebanon: Inter-Agency – Q3 2021 Basic Assistance Dashboard* (Geneva: UNHCR, 2021). www.alnap.org/help-library/lebanon-inter-agency-q3-2021-basic-assistance-dashboard.

114   WFP, *Lebanon: Inter-Agency.* www.alnap.org/help-library/lebanon-inter-agency-q3-2021-basic-assistance-dashboard.

115   Ibid. www.alnap.org/help-library/lebanon-inter-agency-q3-2021-basic-assistance-dashboard.

116   Ibid. www.alnap.org/help-library/lebanon-inter-agency-q3-2021-basic-assistance-dashboard.

117   UNHCR and UNDP, *Regional Refugee & Resilience Plan (3RP) Regional Strategic Overview 2021–2022* (Geneva/New York: UNHCR and UNDP, 2020). www.alnap.org/help-library/regional-refugee-resilience-plan-3rp-regional-strategic-overview-2021-2022.

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A whole-of-society approach

The GCR advocates a 'whole-of-society approach', whereby refugees are integrated into host communities and are able to access the same benefits from development investments, while humanitarian assistance supports existing services to meet acute needs. Lebanon is heralded as an example of this approach, and development actors interviewed for this study praised its 'inclusive approach' to working with Syrian refugees since the beginning of the crisis.

However, there was a prevalent concern that focusing on the 'whole of society' leaves those most vulnerable behind as funds are spent on systemic improvements to Lebanon's infrastructure, rather than projects targeted at refugees. For example, interviewees working in the water, sanitation and hygiene (WASH) sector described how resources and funds had been diverted away from simple and effective projects that would adequately support those most in need. Instead, funding was being spent on large-scale projects without attention to the policy environment, infrastructure or resources that would enable them to benefit the most vulnerable. At the same time, for refugees, funding gaps and restrictions on long-term programming mean that meaningful resilience building remains unrealised. As one INGO worker put it: 'There's been lots of discussions about the nexus with development in the humanitarian sphere. We've had a lot of such discussions in Lebanon, but can we really talk about moving to durable solutions for refugees given the current context in Lebanon? The context has been very difficult.'

> "
>
> **New displacements due to conflict and violence were the highest in a decade.**

Box C: Internal displacement
Barbara Essig, IDMC

At the end of 2021, an estimated 59.1 million people[118] were internally displaced – the highest figure to date and more than double the number 10 years ago. As seen in Chapter 1, after remaining relatively stable between 2015 and 2018, IDP numbers increased significantly, with 17.8 million more in 2021 than in 2018.[119]

While disasters continue to displace more people than conflict and violence – 23.6 million compared to 14.4 million respectively in 2021 – and with many people forced to flee more than once, 2021 saw above-average displacement triggered by conflict and violence. While disaster displacement fluctuates due to the cyclical nature of many natural hazards, new displacements due to conflict and violence were the highest in a decade. More than 80% of all conflict displacements in 2021 took place in sub-Saharan Africa,

118   IDMC, *Global Report on Internal Displacement 2021* (Geneva: Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre (IDMC), 2021). www.alnap.org/help-library/global-report-on-internal-displacement-2021.

119   IDMC, *Internal Displacement 2019*. www.alnap.org/help-library/global-report-on-internal-displacement.

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with displacements in Ethiopia alone accounting for 5.1 million, the highest number for a single country since data has been available.

Climate change can be an additional aggravating factor and risk multiplier for displacement, increasing the intensity and frequency of extreme weather events[120] and causing slow-onset effects such as temperature- and sea-level rise and desertification, which interact with other political or socioeconomic drivers. As a result, multiple risk factors are converging; in 2020, 95% of all new internal displacement triggered by conflict and violence was in countries vulnerable or highly vulnerable to climate change.[121]

The protracted nature of many existing IDP situations, with people being uprooted for years or even decades, means that internal displacement is not just a humanitarian issue. It affects the displaced population and host community alike, and touches on all areas of life, including housing and livelihoods, healthcare and education and security and personal safety.[122] In the absence of strategic long-term investments to address the risks and vulnerabilities of displacement and find long-term solutions, recurrent humanitarian costs continued to grow. For 2021 alone, the Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre (IDMC) estimates that the global cost of internal displacement stood at almost $1 billion.[123]

After being largely absent from both the GCR and the GCM, internal displacement has regained political and policy visibility through the work of the UN Secretary-General's High-Level Panel on Internal Displacement. In the face of steadily rising IDP numbers, the Secretary-General tasked the Panel with finding 'innovative and concrete solutions for IDPs and tangible solutions on the ground'. The panel's final report, released in September 2021, stresses the need for an effective nexus approach that brings together the

In 2020,

95%

of all new internal displacement triggered by conflict and violence was in countries vulnerable or highly vulnerable to climate change.

120 IPCC (2021) *Summary for Policymakers – Climate Change 2021: The Physical Science Basis* (Cambridge, UK/New York, US: Cambridge University Press, 2021). www.alnap.org/help-library/summary-for-policymakers-climate-change-2021-the-physical-science-basis-contribution-of.

121 Classification according to the Notre Dame GAIN Index, calculation and additional details in: IDMC, *Global Report on Internal Displacement* (Geneva: Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre, 2021). www.alnap.org/help-library/global-report-on-internal-displacement-2021.

122 For a sample case study on the impacts of displacement see: IDMC, *Impacts of Displacement: Displaced by Violence, Jos, Nigeria* (Geneva: Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre, 2021, www.alnap.org/help-library/impacts-of-displacement-displaced-by-violence-jos-nigeria); and IDMC, *Impacts of Displacement: Drought Displacement in Gode Woreda, Ethiopia* (Geneva: Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre, 2021, www.alnap.org/help-library/impacts-of-displacement-drought-displacement-in-gode-woreda-ethiopia).

123 This figure represents the average cost of providing each internally displaced person with support for housing, education, health and security, and their loss of income. For each metric, the average costs and losses per person are assessed for a year of displacement. The impact on livelihoods is based on World Bank data, while the impact on all other areas is based on UNOCHA's Humanitarian Response Plans and Humanitarian Needs Overviews. For detailed methodology, see: Christelle Cazabat and Marco Tucci, *The Ripple Effect: Economic Impacts of Internal Displacement – Unveiling the Cost of Internal Displacement* (Geneva: Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre, 2019, www.alnap.org/help-library/the-ripple-effect-economic-impacts-of-internal-displacement-unveiling-the-cost-of).

humanitarian and development communities, but also peacebuilding, climate change and disaster risk reduction experts.[124] How this will be implemented – including through the UN Secretary-General's Action Agenda on Internal Displacement and the newly appointed Special Adviser on Solutions to Internal Displacement – remains to be seen. Explicitly tasking Resident Coordinators (RCs) with leading the UN system's durable solutions efforts does, however, have the potential to bridge persistent gaps in the nexus approach and UN coordination – provided RCs receive adequate (financial) resources. The review of the IASC's response to internal displacement, expected to be concluded by the end of 2022, might also include important guidance on how to make humanitarian action more effective for IDPs.

124   UN Secretary-General's High-Level Panel on Internal Displacement (online, 2021). www.alnap.org/help-library/un-secretary-general%E2%80%99s-high-level-panel-on-internal-displacement.

Chapter 5: Do humanitarians provide the right kind of support?

IN BRIEF: What humanitarians provide is still often misaligned with what people actually most need. While the proportion of aid recipients who felt that aid met their priority needs declined, aid workers continued to believe that providing relevant aid is the system's strongest area of performance. There has been a renewed focus on inter-sectoral needs assessments and on tailoring aid, which has led to more good practice, but there is evidence that the system still relies on stereotypes about who marginalised people are and what support they require.

There is a clear correlation between how well-consulted people are and how relevant they feel aid is. Improvements in assessments have helped to challenge the sectorised, supply-driven view of people's needs, but humanitarians still have problems incorporating communities' opinions and voices into programme design. While the COVID-19 response was adapted well to meet new health needs, it also distanced and diverted aid workers from hearing and responding to people's other priorities.

The rise of cash continued apace, surpassing expectations with an estimated 30% increase in funding of cash and voucher assistance between 2018 and 2021, driven in part by the COVID-19 pandemic. While cash assistance offers people considerable choice to set their own priorities, practitioners and recipients agree that it is neither always appropriate nor inherently aligned to what people need and can suffer the same consultation deficits as other forms of aid.

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The measure of humanitarian success rests not just on whether people received support, but also whether they received what they actually needed.[125] The last edition of the SOHS found that aid was generally felt to be relevant in the initial stages of a crisis, but that cases of irrelevant aid were rife. Refugees in Bangladesh have since reported selling on non-food

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125   Chianca (2008) and Sagmeister (2016) argue that if a project is not relevant to people, it cannot be judged successful. See: Thomaz Chianca, 'The OECD/DAC criteria for international development evaluations: An assessment and ideas for improvement', *Journal of MultiDisciplinary Evaluation* 5, no. 9 (2008). www.alnap.org/help-library/the-oecddac-criteria-for-international-development-evaluations-an-assessment-and-ideas; Elias Sagmeister, 'Assessing the relevance of development assistance: Current practice and suggestions for a better way forward', GPPi, 25 February 2016. www.alnap.org/help-library/assessing-the-relevance-of-development-assistance-current-practice-and-suggestions-for. See also: Sophia Swithern, *Background Paper – ALNAP 32nd Annual Meeting: More Relevant? 10 Ways to Approach What People Really Need* (London: ANLAP/ODI, 2019). https://www.alnap.org/help-library/background-paper-alnap-32nd-annual-meeting-more-relevant-10-ways-to-approach-what.

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items in order to buy what they really need, while Palestinians have favoured crowdsourced support over humanitarian agencies because it fitted better with their priorities.[126] Irrelevant or inappropriate aid can be worse than no aid at all, as it can heighten exclusion, erode trust and waste scarce resources.

Whether the humanitarian response aligns with what people most need is most commonly evaluated under the DAC criterion of 'relevance and appropriateness' – two closely interrelated concepts that cover whether a response addresses priorities, and how well it is tailored to the needs and profiles of those receiving it. As ALNAP studies have shown,[127] this has not tended to be well-measured: where need is widespread, most interventions can somehow pass as relevant, and – more worryingly – relevance tends to be judged from the perspective of the provider, rather than the recipient. When aid recipients are asked, it can be hard to disentangle views about the quantity or technical quality of what they received from the basic question of whether they got the type of support they most needed. As we saw in our focus groups and surveys, when people are asked whether aid addressed their priority needs, their answers often tell us as much about sufficiency as about relevance.

It is clear, however, that the relevance of humanitarian aid is deeply linked to two sets of systemic issues: first, the power balance between aid providers and aid recipients; and second the supply-driven business model of humanitarian aid. Events of the past four years have influenced both. Conversations around decolonising aid have given a new framing for old challenges around 'imposed aid'[128] and paternalistic assumptions about what others need. At the same time, the COVID-19 pandemic has had a mixed effect on the supply-driven model, both limiting the repertoire of response and forcing a wider understanding of the differential effects of the crisis across society.

This chapter examines the evidence on how well the humanitarian system has performed in providing aid that fits with what affected people most need. It looks at this from the perspective of those people, as well as assessing practices and shifts in the system that have enabled or hindered success. Beginning with an overview of performance, it goes on to examine how well humanitarians understand people's priority needs and how well they match their responses to them. The themes and findings

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126   Ground Truth Solutions, *Bulletin: Rohingya Needs and Services* (Ground Truth Solutions, 2019) www.alnap.org/help-library/rohingya-bulletin-needs-and-services-round-three; and Dalia Hatuqa, 'Why some Palestinians are shunning foreign aid', *The New Humanitarian*, 14 May 2019, www.alnap.org/help-library/why-some-palestinians-are-shunning-foreign-aid cited in Swithern, *More Relevant?*. www.alnap.org/help-library/background-paper-alnap-32nd-annual-meeting-more-relevant-10-ways-to-approach-what.

127   In October 2019, ALNAP dedicated its annual meeting to exploring the question of relevance, building on issues identified in the 2018 edition of the SOHS. See: Swithern, *More Relevant?*. www.alnap.org/help-library/background-paper-alnap-32nd-annual-meeting-more-relevant-10-ways-to-approach-what.

128   It is now more than 25 years since Barbara Harrell-Bond coined this phrase in her critique on the top-down provision of humanitarian aid in Uganda. See: Barbara E. Harrell-Bond, *Imposing Aid: Emergency Assistance to Refugees* (Oxford University Press, 1986). www.alnap.org/help-library/imposing-aid-emergency-assistance-to-refugees.

of this chapter link closely to those of sufficiency, dignity and participation, which are explored in Chapters 3 and 8. It is also closely linked to questions of coverage, as aid that is not tailored to different groups can exclude them.

Does humanitarian assistance address people's priority needs?

Recipients' rating of relevance has declined since the last edition of the SOHS. When asked if aid addressed their most important needs at the time, over 34% of affected people who responded to our survey replied 'Yes' and nearly 45% replied 'Partially'.[129] Although there were variations between contexts, it was striking that, overall, women were 20% more likely to answer yes than men. The reasons for this response are unclear, but it could be seen as a challenge to other findings that the system is still failing to adequately consider women's needs. Refugees were 30% less likely than other groups to fully agree that aid addressed their most important needs. This is in keeping with findings about a constrained humanitarian offer in dynamic and protracted refugee settings explored in the 'Focus on: Forced displacement' section.

The humanitarian system continues to have a positive view of the relevance of its aid. Nearly 60% of aid practitioners believed that they were 'Excellent' or 'Good' at addressing people's priority needs – a slight increase since the last SOHS[130] – and still the area of performance on which they rated themselves most highly. Evaluations also tended to conclude that humanitarian programmes were relevant. This may because they interpret relevance broadly[131] and because, where needs are widespread, everything is seen as relevant. It may also be because the system is judging itself on its own terms, given that it is still not routine practice in evaluations to directly and systematically ask recipients whether the aid they received was relevant and appropriate. Our review found more examples of relevance being judged in terms of alignment with pre-set priorities and strategies than with the expressed views of affected communities. In the few evaluations that asked people whether the programme met their priority needs, feedback was broadly positive but also identified mismatches. For example, in the Cyclone Idai response in Mozambique 67% of households felt that assistance was in line with what they most needed, but there were notable gaps, including clothing: 'Some girls said that, if they had to choose between going hungry or wearing dirty clothes, they would prefer to go hungry.'[132]

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129   39% of respondents to the survey of aid recipients for the 2018 SOHS answered 'Yes' and 48% answered 'Partially'.

130   In the survey for the 2018 SOHS, 58% of aid practitioners rated performance as 'Good' or 'Excellent' in this area.

131   Evaluations measure relevance according to a very broad mix of indicators – whether the programme addressed assessed needs, whether it aligned with the stated priorities of the host government, the donor or the agency, or whether it was appreciated by recipients.

132   Baker et al., *Response to Cyclone Idai,* 32. www.alnap.org/help-library/inter-agency-humanitarian-evaluation-of-the-response-to-cyclone-idai-in-mozambique.

How well do humanitarian agencies understand people's priorities?

Listening to affected people

There is a clear relationship between how well people feel they are consulted and how well they think aid matches what they most need. Our survey of aid recipients found that those who said that they were consulted *before* assistance was given were more than twice as likely to say that they felt it addressed their priority needs than those who said they weren't consulted. Similarly, those who felt that they had had the chance to voice their opinions during the course of a programme were 80% more likely to feel positive about the relevance of what they received. This link between participation and relevance also appears to increase over time. An Inter-Agency Humanitarian Evaluation (IAHE) of the 2015–2018 Ethiopia drought response found that the level of consultation made minimal difference to whether people felt that aid was relevant in the initial stages, but that in the long term it was crucial: 'People who had been consulted about their needs and priorities were almost four times as likely as those who had not been consulted to find the assistance very useful in the longer-term.'[133]

It has been a decade since the Time to Listen project[134] spelled out this obvious correlation, but as we see in Chapter 8, the humanitarian system is still far from realising the 'participation revolution' to which it has committed. The majority of aid recipients and humanitarian practitioners interviewed in our field studies felt that humanitarian needs assessments largely failed to consult communities sufficiently or effectively. One multi-country evaluation expressed this engagement deficit in stark terms: 'There is a lack of understanding at the field level as how to routinely engage with communities to ensure programme relevance and quality.'[135] There are also external barriers to listening to what people want. Lack of physical proximity to affected communities is a recurrent problem for many international agencies, exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic and access constraints. In the words of one aid worker involved in the northern Ethiopia conflict response: 'You need to talk to the people to understand what's needed to make sure whatever aid you take is meaningfully used – but then you can't talk to the people. So, you take what you think is needed. No-one's to blame, but humanitarian response without continuous discussion and participation of the affected community will have limitations. Not being able to live close enough to the affected community really hampers our usefulness.'

> **People who were consulted *before* being provided assistance were twice as likely to say it addressed their priority needs.**

133   Steets et al., *Drought Response in Ethiopia*, 38. www.alnap.org/help-library/inter-agency-humanitarian-evaluation-of-the-drought-response-in-ethiopia.

134   Mary B. Anderson, Dayna Brown and Isabella Jean, *Time to Listen: Hearing People on the Receiving End of International Aid* (Cambridge MA: CDA Collaborative Learning Projects, 2012). www.alnap.org/help-library/time-to-listen-hearing-people-on-the-receiving-end-of-international-aid.

135   Featherstone et al., Coverage and Quality. www.alnap.org/help-library/evaluation-of-the-coverage-and-quality-of-the-unicef-humanitarian-response-in-complex.

Assessing and analysing needs

There have been system-wide improvements in the way needs are analysed, to better reflect people's cross-cutting and inter-connected priorities. The Joint Intersectoral Analysis Framework (JIAF) represents important progress in this regard. The JIAF is the culmination of work by a group of donors, implementing agencies and specialist partners to develop a common framework for shared intersectoral analysis of needs.[136] Designed to provide a more multi-dimensional and complex analysis, the JIAF has informed Humanitarian Needs Overviews (HNOs) in 24 of the 27 countries in which it has been piloted since 2020 and has been credited with contributing to a marked improvement in these HNOs, including more explicit differentiation of the needs and capacities of vulnerable groups. According to a 2021 review of needs assessment progress under the Grand Bargain, there is 'growing buy-in to the JIAF and the wider concept of joint intersectoral analysis – something that wasn't a given in 2016'.[137] The framework has been subject to rigorous review to learn from its application to date, improve the methodology and make it more user-friendly.

Aid workers' wider verdict on needs assessments was mixed. Our survey of aid practitioners found that 48% thought that needs assessments were 'Good' and 39% thought they were 'Fair' (only 7% rated them 'Poor' and less than 6% 'Excellent'). Some found needs assessments to be very good in certain regions, others found them to be systemically biased. Our field research revealed widespread and ongoing concerns about the quality, frequency and consistency of needs assessments and analysis in all of the case study countries. One aid worker in Bangladesh concluded from their experience that 'taking the time to do proper assessments is an incredibly rare thing to do in a humanitarian setting, certainly not in any super meaningful way.'

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136 Steets et al., *Drought Response in Ethiopia*, 35. www.alnap.org/help-library/inter-agency-humanitarian-evaluation-of-the-drought-response-in-ethiopia.

137 Victoria Metcalfe-Hough et al., *The Grand Bargain at Five Years: An Independent Review* (London: HPG/ODI, 2021). www.alnap.org/help-library/the-grand-bargain-at-five-years-an-independent-review.

There are many reasons why assessments and analysis continue to fall short. A range of evaluations suggested that inconsistent quality was due to a range of factors, from poor methodologies and analytical rigour to time and political pressures.[138] Many interviewees in our field research pointed to the exigencies of the funding model as a major constraint. Some cited the short time frames for developing the funding proposals that determine programme direction, followed by short-term funding that does not include time or resourcing for deeper assessments. L/NNGOs in Lebanon expressed frustration that 'there is no needs assessment and there is no work on it. They work according to the request of the donor and work to fulfil this request.' This was echoed in DRC, where practitioners reported duplication and irrelevance: 'If we had taken into account the real needs of the population, we would not have ended up with four organizations in the same field, if you go up a little bit, you will see people under tarpaulins with holes in them… we did not take into account the needs, but we did take into account what we told the donor.'

There is little system-wide or conclusive evidence on how – and how well – agencies actually use the information they derive from needs assessments in their programming decisions and design. Drawing on evaluations and field studies, the record appears mixed. Evaluations

138 Baker et al., *Response to Cyclone Idai*. www.alnap.org/help-library/inter-agency-humanitarian-evaluation-of-the-response-to-cyclone-idai-in-mozambique; Steets et al., *Drought Response in Ethiopia.* www.alnap.org/help-library/inter-agency-humanitarian-evaluation-of-the-drought-response-in-ethiopia; Stephen Lister, *Ethiopia: An Evaluation of WFP's Portfolio (2012–2017)* (Rome: WFP, 2019). www.alnap.org/help-library/ethiopia-an-evaluation-of-wfps-portfolio-2012-2017; David Sanderson, Dipankar Patnaik and Kira Osborne, *Nepal Earthquakes Appeal Meta-Synthesis* (Disasters Emergency Committee, 2019). www.alnap.org/help-library/nepal-earthquakes-appeal-meta-synthesis; Murray, *Response to the Refugee Crisis in Turkey.* www.alnap.org/help-library/evaluation-of-the-european-union%E2%80%99s-humanitarian-response-to-the-refugee-crisis-in; Maunder et al., *Corporate Emergency Response.* www.alnap.org/help-library/evaluation-of-wfps-corporate-emergency-response-in-northeast-nigeria-2016-2018; ADE, *Evaluation of the European Union's Humanitarian Response to the Rohingya Refugee Crisis in Myanmar and Bangladesh, 2017–2019 (Volume I)* (Brussels: European Commission, 2021). www.alnap.org/help-library/evaluation-of-the-european-union%E2%80%99s-humanitarian-response-to-the-rohingya-refugee-crisis; Steets et al., *Evaluation of WFP Policies.* https://www.alnap.org/help-library/evaluation-of-wfp-policies-on-humanitarian-principles-and-access-in-humanitarian-0.

across the study period refer to information being both considered[139] and disregarded[140] in planning processes. One donor multi-country evaluation found that the vast majority of its project and programme-level designs 'clearly applied the findings of needs assessments produced'.[141] Aid workers in Bangladesh and Lebanon also gave positive examples of needs-based research which informed the development of tailored interventions. However, other evaluations noted a concerning gap

139   ADE, *Response to the Rohingya Refugee Crisis*. www.alnap.org/help-library/evaluation-of-the-european-union%E2%80%99s-humanitarian-response-to-the-rohingya-refugee-crisis; Julia Betts, Petra Mikkolainen and Judith Freidman, *Adapting for Change: Country Strategy Approach in Fragile Contexts* (Ministry for Foreign Affairs of Finland, 2020). www.alnap.org/help-library/adapting-for-change-%E2%80%93-country-strategy-approach-in-fragile-contexts; Gökçe Baykal, *Final Evaluation of the Project: Strengthening the Resilience of Syrian Women and Girls and Host Communities in Turkey* (Geneva: International Labour Organization, 2020). www.alnap.org/help-library/strengthening-the-resilience-of-syrian-women-and-girls-and-host-communities-in-turkey; Brian Majewski et al., *Decentralised Evaluation: WFP's General Food Assistance to Syrian Refugees in Jordan 2015 to Mid-2018* (Rome: WFP, 2018). www.alnap.org/help-library/decentralised-evaluation-wfps-general-food-assistance-to-syrian-refugees-in-jordan-2015; Shaheen, Wichterich and Sardiwal, *Norwegian Church Aid*. www.alnap.org/help-library/final-evaluation-report-of-norwegian-church-aids-emergency-preparedness-and-response; Chloé Maillard, Kukuh Setyawan and Hélène Juillard, *Real-Time Evaluation of Sulawesi Indonesia Earthquake and Tsunami* (Islamic Relief Worldwide, 2019). www.alnap.org/help-library/real-time-evaluation-of-sulawesi-indonesia-earthquake-and-tsunami; UNFPA, *Evaluation of the UNFPA Response to the Syria Crisis (2011–2018)*, Volume 1, www.alnap.org/help-library/evaluation-of-the-unfpa-response-to-the-syria-crisis-2011-2018-volume-1; Koichiro Watanabe, *Reinforcing Institutional Capacity for Treatment of Acute Malnutrition, Prevention of Malnutrition and National Sensitization for Nutrition Security in Western Area District, Sierra Leone* (Action Against Hunger, 2018). www.alnap.org/help-library/reinforcing-institutional-capacity-for-treatment-of-acute-malnutrition-prevention-of-0; Paula Sansom, Helen Leidecker and Wolfgang Gressmann, *Disasters Emergency Committee (DEC) Evaluation of Phases 1 and 2 of the East Africa Crisis Appeal, Somalia 2017* (Islamic Relief Worldwide, 2018). www.alnap.org/help-library/disasters-emergency-committee-dec-evaluation-of-phases-1-and-2-of-the-east-africa; Key Aid Consulting, *British Red Cross Final Evaluation: Nepal Earthquake Recovery Programme* (British Red Cross, 2018). www.alnap.org/help-library/british-red-cross-final-evaluation-nepal-earthquake-recovery-programme.

140   Key Aid Consulting, *British Red Cross Final Evaluation*. www.alnap.org/help-library/british-red-cross-final-evaluation-nepal-earthquake-recovery-programme; Shaheen, Wichterich and Sardiwal, *Norwegian Church Aid*. www.alnap.org/help-library/final-evaluation-report-of-norwegian-church-aids-emergency-preparedness-and-response; Erik Bryld et al., *Blind Sides and Soft Spots: An Evaluation of Norway's Aid Engagement in South Sudan* (Norad, 2020). www.alnap.org/help-library/blind-sides-and-soft-spots-%E2%80%93-an-evaluation-of-norway%E2%80%99s-aid-engagement-in-south-sudan; Maunder et al., *Corporate Emergency Response*. www.alnap.org/help-library/evaluation-of-wfps-corporate-emergency-response-in-northeast-nigeria-2016-2018; Bernard Broughton and Amra Lee, *Evaluation of Protection in Australia's Disaster Responses in the Pacific* (Canberra: Australian Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade, 2019). www.alnap.org/help-library/evaluation-of-protection-in-australia%E2%80%99s-disaster-responses-in-the-pacific; François Grünewald and Paula Farias, *Cholera in Time of War: Evaluation of the MSF-OCBA Cholera Response in Yemen* (MSF, 2018). www.alnap.org/help-library/cholera-in-time-of-war-evaluation-of-the-msf-ocba-cholera-response-in-yemen; UNFPA, 'Evaluation of UNFPA Support to the Prevention of, Response to and Elimination of Gender-Based Violence and Harmful Practices (2012–2017) Volume 1.' (UNFPA, 2018). www.alnap.org/help-library/evaluation-of-unfpa-support-to-the-prevention-of-response-to-and-elimination-of-gender; A. Pittman et al., 'Getting to Zero: Good Practices from Synthesis of UNFPA Country Programme Evaluations' (New York: UNFPA, 2019). www.alnap.org/help-library/getting-to-zero-good-practices-from-synthesis-of-unfpa-country-programme-evaluations; J. Baker et al., 'Evaluation of the European Union's Humanitarian Interventions in India and Nepal, 2013–2017' (Brussels: European Commission ECHO, 2018). www.alnap.org/help-library/evaluation-of-the-european-union%E2%80%99s-humanitarian-interventions-in-india-and-nepal-2013; Taylor, Kreidler and Harvey, *Global Cash Evaluation*. www.alnap.org/help-library/nrc-global-cash-evaluation.

141   Betts, Mikkolainen and Freidman, *Adapting for Change*, 58. www.alnap.org/help-library/adapting-for-change-%E2%80%93-country-strategy-approach-in-fragile-contexts.

between the collection of information and its analysis and use.[142] These concerns about the disconnect between assessments and interventions were articulated by one aid recipient in DRC, who told our researchers: 'The others come and ask only what you have eaten in the last seven days, but then they are not going to give anything that gathers what they have asked you in their questions, I wonder why they come and ask us these questions.' This gap is due to operational constraints – including insufficient time, resources or skills to conduct meaningful analysis of the data collected and government restrictions that limit programming options. Other sources raise the problem of scope and function – the risk of mission creep, the need for prioritisation and the impossibility of programming that is relevant to everyone's stated needs, as well the conflict of 'expertise' between what humanitarian actors believe to be right for people[143] and what people want for themselves, a question that is closely linked to colonialist and paternalist attitudes.

However decisions are made, affected people are rarely involved,[144] as Chapter 8 explores. There were particular concerns about the involvement of marginalised groups. As one inter-agency evaluation on gender equality noted, engagement tended to stop at the needs assessment stage: 'The voices and needs of youth and marginalized groups (for example, LGBTI people, persons with disabilities, the elderly and specific ethnic groups, among others) are still largely absent from decision-making on humanitarian response, even as there have been improvements in consulting these groups in needs assessment exercises.'[145]

How well are humanitarians providing support that fits people's priority needs?

Limiting environments

The gap between the kind of support people need and the type of aid they receive is not only due to the shortcomings of the humanitarian system; what's offered or provided is often limited by the operating environment. In active conflicts and highly constrained environments, such as Syria, Venezuela and northern Ethiopia, blockades, directives and other impediments are preventing delivery of certain provisions such as medicines, telecommunications and water systems. In several refugee contexts, host government policy limits the scope of programmes for

142   Key Aid Consulting, *British Red Cross Final Evaluation*, 59. www.alnap.org/help-library/british-red-cross-final-evaluation-nepal-earthquake-recovery-programme; Bryld et al., *Blind Sides and Soft Spots*, 70. www.alnap.org/help-library/blind-sides-and-soft-spots-%E2%80%93-an-evaluation-of-norway%E2%80%99s-aid-engagement-in-south-sudan.

143   One aid worker in DRC was clear on this: 'Be careful not to confuse them, there are many beneficiaries who do not know their real needs.'

144   Sophia Swithern, *More Relevant: 5 Calls to Action* (London: ANLAP, 2020). www.alnap.org/help-library/more-relevant-5-calls-for-action.

145   Bizzarri et al., *Evaluation on Gender Equality*, 12. www.alnap.org/help-library/inter-agency-humanitarian-evaluation-on-gender-equality-and-the-empowerment-of-women.

refugees, while pre-set stipulations about inclusion of host communities can result in programmes that do not match demand. In Lebanon, for example, one programme for Syrian refugees and their Lebanese hosts encountered serious difficulties in attracting and retaining Lebanese participants as the programme was not aligned with their needs, preferences or economic incentives.[146]

Evidence on how the COVID-19 pandemic has affected relevance is still emerging. On the whole, evaluations have found that, while the health response was largely relevant and appropriate, there were larger questions about whether this skewed the response away from people's pre-existing or ongoing needs. As this report details in the 'Focus on: COVID-19' section, in many contexts it was the socioeconomic and protection impacts of the pandemic that posed the foremost threats to people, rather than the virus itself – and the initial prioritisation on health interventions was at the cost of responding to these. In some countries, the pandemic was used by authorities as a pretext for limiting programmes deemed undesirable.[147] In Bangladesh, local aid workers interviewed for the SOHS reported limitations on their work with women and girls: 'They [the authorities] say, "That's not priority emergency work right now." So, you can't do it based on COVID. Even if the COVID-19 numbers are falling in the camp significantly.'

Elsewhere, the pandemic response highlighted existing problems around providing what people actually need. In Syria it showed up the supply-driven nature of the highly compromised aid effort. For example, cross-line aid from Damascus to the north-east was often sent irrespective of needs and then stolen en route; health workers ended up with incomplete healthcare kits when what they really needed was kits for non-communicable disease. There were also cases of intensive care unit (ICU) beds being sent 'to a hospital with no plans to create an ICU, and incubators to a hospital in Tabqa without informing the NGO managing the maternity ward.'[148]

146 H. Audi et al., 'Lebanon, Livelihoods and Resilience Activities (2016–2019): Evaluation' (Rome: WFP, 2019). www.alnap.org/help-library/lebanon-livelihoods-and-resilience-activities-2016-2019-evaluation.

147 Taylor et al., *Rights of Refugees*. Taylor, Glyn, G. Gilbert, S. Hidalgo, M. Korthals Altes, B. Lewis, C. Robinson, E. Sandri, V. Stoianova and J. Ward (2022), COVID-19 Global Evaluation Coalition, "Joint Evaluation of the Protection of the Rights of Refugees during the COVID-19 Pandemic", UNHCR, Geneva. www.alnap.org/help-library/joint-evaluation-of-the-protection-of-the-rights-of-refugees-during-the-covid-19.

148 Hall, *Rescuing Aid in Syria*, 12. www.alnap.org/help-library/rescuing-aid-in-syria.

Enabling choice through cash

Where the authorities and markets permit it, cash and voucher assistance (CVA) can give people greater scope to meet their priority needs in the way they deem most appropriate. The last edition of the SOHS heralded the 'disruptive potential' of CVA and reported that both aid workers and recipients were positive about how cash in particular afforded people more dignity and choice. As cash programming continued to scale up, so did evidence about its positive effects.

Cash challenges the old supply-driven, sector-siloed model of provision and offers aid in a form that can be tailored to need.[149] As the UN Emergency Relief Coordinator put it: 'The more that cash becomes central to the delivery of systems, the more a la carte we will be able to get.'[150] From Central America to Somalia and Syrian refugee camps, people said they preferred cash as it was more dignified, allowed them to prioritise and plan for the future, invest in economic opportunities and adapt to climate change.[151] In Yemen, people told us that the flexibility of cash-based assistance allowed families to meet self-identified needs and avoid negative coping strategies. One focus group participant explained: 'Cash aid in particular has a big effect on the Yemeni people. It helps mitigate the pressure on the family and avoid committing mistakes for the sake of getting money.'

149 J. Jodar et al., 'The State of the World's Cash 2020 – Executive summary', 2020. www.alnap.org/help-library/the-state-of-the-world%E2%80%99s-cash-2020.

150 M. Griffiths, 'Rethinking Humanitarianism: An Interview with the UN's Humanitarian Chief Podacast', The New Humanitarian, 2022. www.alnap.org/help-library/rethinking-humanitarianism-an-interview-with-the-un%E2%80%99s-humanitarian-chief.

151 WFP, 'WFP Evidence Summary Cash-Based Transfers Lessons from Evaluations' (Rome: WFP, 2021). www.alnap.org/help-library/wfp-evidence-summary-cash-based-transfers-lessons-from-evaluations.

Figure 31: Funding for humanitarian cash and voucher assistance, 2018–2021

The amount of international humanitarian funding spent on cash and voucher assistance continued to grow. Preliminary data for 2021 – likely to be an underestimate – suggests it reached at least $6.7 billion, 80% of which went to recipients in the form of cash or voucher transfers.

- Total programming costs
- Transfer value

$6.5bn $6.7bn

$5.6bn

$5.1bn $5.3bn

$4.7bn $4.3bn

$3.6bn

2018   2019   2020   2021
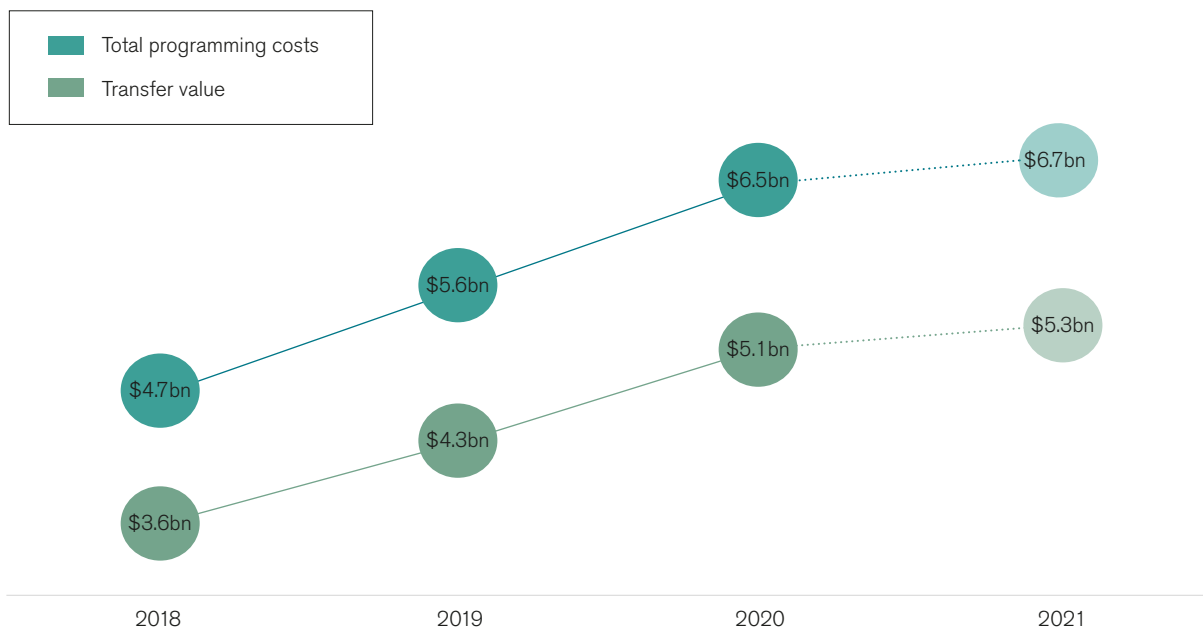
Source: Development Initiatives based on data collected with the help of the Cash Learning Partnership (CALP Network) from implementing partners and on UN OCHA FTS data.

Notes: RCRC is the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement. Data for 2021 is preliminary as data for some organisations has not yet been provided or is based on estimations. Double counting of CVA programmes that are sub-granted from one implementing partner to another is avoided where data on this is available. Programming costs are estimates for organisations that provided only the amount transferred to aid recipients. Data is not available for all included organisations across all years. Data is in current prices.

Figure 32: Cash and voucher assistance as a proportion of total international humanitarian assistance, 2018–2021

The proportion of cash and voucher assistance has remained at around a fifth of international humanitarian assistance since 2019.

2018   2019   2020   2021

14%   18%   20%   19%

- % of cash and voucher assistance out of total international humanitarian assistance
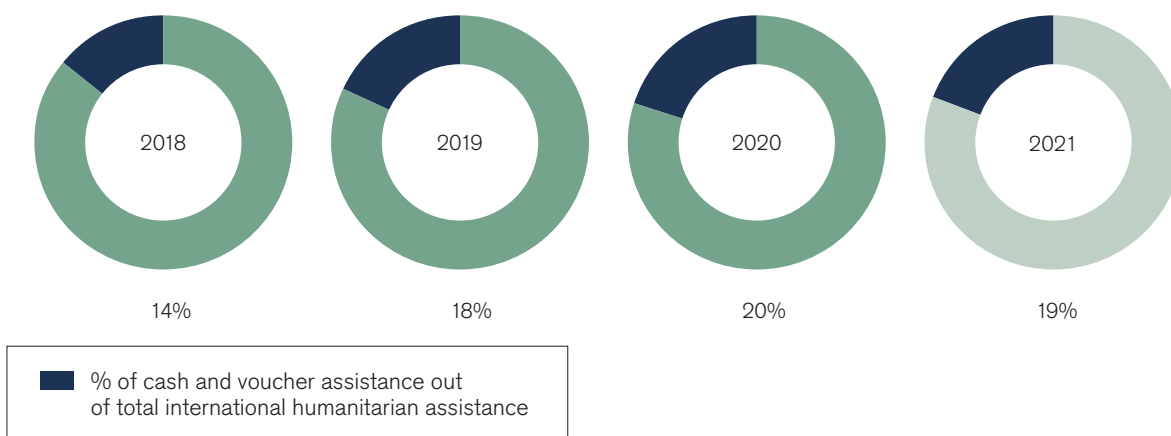
Source: Development Initiatives (DI) based on data collected with the help of the Cash Learning Partnership (CALP Network) from implementing partners and on OECD DAC, UN CERF, UN OCHA FTS data and DI's unique dataset of private humanitarian funding. IHA is international humanitarian assistance. The percentage in this figure is an approximate estimate calculated by taking the total global value of humanitarian CVA overall programming costs that is part of the total international humanitarian response and divide it be total IHA provided by public and private donors. 2021 data is preliminary with data submissions from a few organisations still outstanding.

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Box D: Growth in cash and voucher assistance

Five years on from the Grand Bargain commitment to increase the routine use of cash, the system seems to have surpassed expectations. Many large organisations have shifted to a 'cash first' policy for food and other programmes and all Grand Bargain signatories – large and small – reported using cash in some form.[152] Including all associated programming costs, the global volume of funding spent on humanitarian CVA reached an estimated $6.7 billion in 2021, an increase of 44% from 2018.

An estimated $5.3 billion of this was transferred to recipients in 2021 – increasing by half (50%) since 2018. Consistent with previous years, the vast majority of these transfers were in the form of cash (71%) rather than vouchers (29%). The proportion of programme funding transferred to recipients has been incrementally rising over the period – from 77% in 2018 to 80% in 2021, suggesting some degree of efficiencies and economies of scale as CVA programming grows.

However, as the 2021 figures are based on preliminary data from implementing agencies, some of whom have yet to report, it is likely that the actual volumes of CVA spending will be higher. Based on previous years' data, it is likely that the final total for 2021 may exceed $7.1 billion for programme costs and $5.7 billion in transfer value to recipients.

The COVID-19 pandemic was a driver for the increases between 2019 and 2020, reflecting a wider increase in cash-based social protection (see also Chapter 12). It is likely that the response to the war in Ukraine will drive a further rise in 2022 – the requirements for multi-purpose cash under the Ukraine 2022 Flash Appeal alone stood at $600 million, meaning that total reported requirements for CVA globally had (at time of writing) nearly tripled since 2021.

Despite Grand Bargain agreements to improve reporting, it is still hard to get timely, comprehensive and granular data on the scale of CVA and the transfer values involved; the estimates provided in the SOHS still rely on self-reporting by key humanitarian agencies. This data gap means that it is not possible to comprehensively trace through the system how much of the total reported international humanitarian assistance is implemented as cash. Estimates suggest that it represents approximately a fifth of international humanitarian assistance – a proportion which appears to have peaked in 2020.

It is well understood that cash is not a programming option everywhere and is subject to internationally and domestically imposed constraints on its use. Cash assistance is impeded by international sanctions and counter-terror regulations, as well as by domestic restrictions and banking closures. In Ethiopia, there are examples of recipients selling aid to

152   Metcalfe-Hough et al., *Grand Bargain at Five*. www.alnap.org/help-library/the-grand-bargain-at-five-years-an-independent-review.

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obtain cash, but the closure of banks has prevented agencies from using cash as part of the response. In Bangladesh, community consultations with Rohingya refugees have shown a strong preference for partial cash assistance instead of in-kind distributions, but government policies forbid cash transfers to them,[153] with efforts limited to a voucher-based system in collaboration with the local private sector.

Even where cash was permitted, it was not always felt to be the most relevant and appropriate modality for all. A global evidence synthesis found that, in Sierra Leone, north-eastern Nigeria and Zimbabwe, people cited concerns about safety, misuse and logistics – elsewhere, there are clear limits to what can be bought on the market.[154] In the Syria refugee response, a blend of restricted vouchers, unrestricted cash and in-kind aid helped to address people's preferences.[155] In Lebanon, in a context of major economic decline, people had mixed feelings about cash – some noted that moving away from cash left gaps in their ability to meet basic needs, while others were grateful for in-kind assistance as it insulated them from the effects of rapid inflation.

Where CVA is the best option, evidence suggests that there is still room for improvement. Cash-based programming may not be inherently aligned to what people need, and cash experts and advocates acknowledge that it suffers from the same consultation and communication deficits as other forms of aid. Ground Truth Solution's 'cash barometer'[156] research across three countries found that most recipients did not know why they were receiving cash, or for how long, and were confused by poorly coordinated interventions that saw them receive multiple transfers for the same or different purposes. Evaluations of cash responses also concluded there was a need for regular engagement with recipients, combined with a holistic understanding of context and needs.[157]

Tailoring aid for different groups

Humanitarian actors recognise that they must do better at ensuring that aid is relevant to the needs of the most marginalised people and provided in ways that are appropriate for them. The last edition of the SOHS found limited progress in tailoring aid for women and girls, but persistent gaps with regard to older people and people with disabilities, and made little mention of tailoring to the needs of LGBTQI individuals.

153   ADE, *Rohingya Refugee Crisis*. www.alnap.org/help-library/evaluation-of-the-european-union%E2%80%99s-humanitarian-response-to-the-rohingya-refugee-crisis.

154   WFP, 'WFP Evidence Summary Cash-Based Transfers Lessons from Evaluations', 5. www.alnap.org/help-library/wfp-evidence-summary-cash-based-transfers-lessons-from-evaluations.

155   Majewski et al., *Decentralised Evaluation*. www.alnap.org/help-library/decentralised-evaluation-wfps-general-food-assistance-to-syrian-refugees-in-jordan-2015.

156   Ground Truth Solutions, 'Projects – Cash Barometer', 2020. www.alnap.org/help-library/projects-cash-barometer.

157   WFP, 'WFP Evidence Summary Cash-Based Transfers Lessons from Evaluations'. www.alnap.org/help-library/wfp-evidence-summary-cash-based-transfers-lessons-from-evaluations.

Since then, there has been a notable investment in turning general commitments to inclusion into clear and practical guidelines and frameworks. In the past three years, as discussed in Chapter 4, the UN has created a Disability Strategy, the IASC has published guidance on inclusion of persons with disabilities[158] and updated the Gender with Age Marker,[159] and UN Women has published a Gender Accountability Framework.[160] Individual donors, UN agencies and INGOs have developed their own gender, age and disability frameworks,[161] and a number of guidance notes were produced to support the COVID-19 response.[162] With inclusion prominently on organisations' radar, there are now many examples of positively tailored programmes for marginalised groups: in the Philippines, inclusive early warning kits were tailored to people with intellectual and communication disabilities.[163] In the Venezuela refugee response, shelters and food aid were tailored to the priorities and preferences of displaced Warao communities.[164]

Although organisations now have a clear 'business case' and frameworks for adapting their offer to socially excluded groups, this has yet to be systematically translated into programme design. A clear gap remains between strong corporate gender and disability policies and operational realities. Across the system, good practice is fragmented and inconsistent. There were assumptions that standard programming or nominal tailoring would automatically result in access for all, without a proper exploration of what was required for different groups in a given context. Even where more sophisticated assessments are conducted, this does not always translate into programming – as an evaluation of a programme in Afghanistan found: 'PWDs [people with disabilities] revealed that once they are selected, they do not always get assistance

158   IASC, 'Guidelines on Inclusion of Persons with Disabilities in Humanitarian Action' (Geneva: IASC, 2019). https://www.alnap.org/help-library/piloting-the-iasc-guidelines-on-inclusion-of-persons-with-disabilities-in-0.

159   IASC, 'The IASC Gender with Age Marker', GAM, 2021. www.alnap.org/help-library/gender-with-age-marker-improving-humanitarian-effectiveness.

160   UN Women, 'Gender Accountability Framework Report 2020' (IASC GRG, 2020). www.alnap.org/help-library/gender-accountability-framework-report-2020.

161   See Shafina and Thivillier, *Inclusive Client Responsiveness*. www.alnap.org/help-library/inclusive-client-responsiveness-focus-on-people-with-disabilities-and-older-people; A. Lange, G. Mitra, and G. Wood, 'Guidance on Strengthening Disability Inclusion in Humanitarian Response Plans' (UK Aid, 2021). www.alnap.org/help-library/strengthening-disability-inclusion-on-hrps; UNHCR, 'Working with Older Persons in Forced Displacement' (Geneva: UNHCR, 2021). www.alnap.org/help-library/working-with-older-persons-in-forced-displacement-0; Jones et al., *Inclusive and Equitable Approach*. www.alnap.org/help-library/applying-an-inclusive-and-equitable-approach-to-anticipatory-action.

162   IASC, 'Interim Guidance. Gender Alert for COVID-19 Outbreak' (Geneva: IASC, 2020); Syria Protection Cluster, 'A Disability-Inclusive COVID-19 Response', Brief guidance note (Turkey: Syria Protection Cluster, 2020). www.alnap.org/help-library/interim-guidance-gender-alert-for-covid-19-outbreak.

163   M. Turnbull, L. Morinière, and A.T. De la Poterie, 'Start Fund: Evaluation of Crisis Anticipation' (Start Network, 2020). www.alnap.org/help-library/start-fund-crisis-anticipation-evaluation-2016-2019.

164   Holst-Roness et al., *SGBV in Brazil* (Geneva: UNHCR, 2019). www.alnap.org/help-library/evaluation-of-unhcr-prevention-of-and-response-to-sgbv-in-brazil-focusing-on-the.

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tailored to their disability… it had been down to them and their family members to adapt their shelter solutions to their needs.'[165] Basic efforts, such as providing sanitary towels for women in hygiene kits or making buildings wheelchair accessible, are still cited as progress and remain far more common than comprehensive and consultative analysis and action. In some cases, even the basics were missing – such as accessible and separate latrines[166] or mobile money distributions that considered the technological access and literacy limitations of the vulnerable groups they purported to prioritise.[167] In some contexts, the pressures of the COVID-19 response have reversed improvements in relevance: in Lebanon, menstrual hygiene management was deprioritised in favour of other basic needs including food and shelter.[168] Meanwhile the requirements of some groups, such as LGBTQI people, have rarely been taken into account in programming. As one International Rescue Committee report noted: 'LGBTQI persons report experiencing negative attitudes, harassment, threats, and blame within traditional service structures, such as health facilities and social services. In order to effectively prevent these experiences, humanitarian agencies must make an investment in their personnel and practices.'[169]

There were also concerns that guidelines on inclusion fed into a 'cookie-cutter' approach – rudimentary identity-based assumptions about people's vulnerabilities and needs. For example, evaluations found a tendency to see women as a social group without other characteristics, separate from and in resource competition with men. This lack of rigour in gender analysis could lead not only to poor targeting and inappropriate activities, but also to a harmful and socially divisive approach.[170] For example, an evaluation of the World Food Programme's response in north-eastern Nigeria found a 'corporate drive to implement a disability and age inclusive approach', but a lack of sophisticated social analysis and effort 'to determine and address the specific food and nutrition needs of the elderly and persons with disabilities'.[171] The increased

165   A. Koclejda, G. Roux-Fouillet, and N. Carlevaro, 'Afghanistan Shelter Evaluation Report' (Norwegian Refugee Council (NRC), 2019). www.alnap.org/help-library/afghan-shelter-evaluation-report.

166   D. Stone and K. Chowdhury, 'Christian Aid's Rohingya Crisis Response in Bangladesh' (Christian Aid, 2019). www.alnap.org/help-library/christian-aid%E2%80%99s-rohingya-crisis-response-in-bangladesh.

167   P. Breard, 'Evidence Summary on COVID-19 and Food Security' (United Nations Evaluation Group (UNEG), 2021). www.alnap.org/help-library/evidence-summary-on-covid-19-and-food-security.

168   IASC, 'The Impact of COVID-19 on Women and Girls' (Slides, online, 2020). www.alnap.org/help-library/the-impact-of-covid-19-on-women-and-girls.

169   Roth et al., *Cycles of Displacement*. www.alnap.org/help-library/cycles-of-displacement-understanding-violence-discrimination-and-exclusion-of-lgbtqi.

170   FAO, 'Evaluation of FAO's Work on Gender' (Rome: FAO, 2019). www.alnap.org/help-library/evaluation-of-fao%E2%80%99s-work-on-gender.

171   Maunder et al., *Corporate Emergency Response*. www.alnap.org/help-library/evaluation-of-wfps-corporate-emergency-response-in-northeast-nigeria-2016-2018.

prominence of the Black Lives Matter movement and the decolonising aid discourse have prompted some agencies – including Islamic Relief and CAFOD – to challenge identity-based stereotyping and develop organisational approaches to intersectionality. However, there is little evidence so far to show whether this recent progress in thinking[172] has taken root in programming. Analysis suggests that organisations have struggled to translate this into practice because 'intersectionality in some ways invites complexity, whereas operationalisation necessarily requires simplification'.[173]

Simplistic ideas of social groups also meant seeing only their vulnerabilities, rather than their abilities and active agency. According to the IAHE evaluation on gender equality, women were consulted on what humanitarians deemed 'women's issues', rather than on 'their own strengths, resilience and capacities'.[174] An extensive survey by HelpAge International revealed similar false assumptions about older people's behaviours, situations and contributions to their societies.[175] In the Syrian refugee response, a UNDP evaluation found programmes that were undermined by assumptions and omissions about women's vulnerabilities and capacities: livelihoods programmes failed to factor in women seeking work outside the home and 'weak or lack of gender-disaggregated data on livelihoods and gender-sensitive analysis in livelihoods programming contributed to suboptimal responses'.[176] In Bangladesh, aid workers were surprised by what girls found relevant – they had distributed menstrual hygiene kits with the aim of boosting school attendance, when what actually made the difference was plastic sandals so the girls could wade through floodwaters to get to school.

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172   See inter alia H. Slim, 'Impartiality and Intersectionality', Humanitarian Low & Policy (blog), 2018. www.alnap.org/help-library/impartiality-and-intersectionality; Véronique Barbelet and Caitlin Wake, *Inclusion and Exclusion in Humanitarian Action: The State of Play* (London: HPG/ODI, 2020). www.alnap.org/help-library/inclusion-and-exclusion-in-humanitarian-action-the-state-of-play-0; M. Turcanu and Y. Ngunzi Kahashi, 'Disability Inclusion in Humanitarian Action. SADI – CAFOD's Safe, Accessible, Dignified and Inclusive Approach', Disability Inclusion in Humanitarian Action, October 2020. www.alnap.org/help-library/disability-inclusion-in-humanitarian-action-sadi-%E2%80%93-cafod%E2%80%99s-safe-accessible-dignified; Shafina and Thivillier, *Inclusive Client Responsiveness*. www.alnap.org/help-library/inclusive-client-responsiveness-focus-on-people-with-disabilities-and-older-people.

173   Barbelet and Wake, *Inclusion and Exclusion*, 28. www.alnap.org/help-library/inclusion-and-exclusion-in-humanitarian-action-the-state-of-play-0.

174   Bizzarri et al., *Evaluation on Gender Equality*. www.alnap.org/help-library/inter-agency-humanitarian-evaluation-on-gender-equality-and-the-empowerment-of-women.

175   V. McGivern and K. Bluestone, 'If Not Now, When? Keeping Promises to Older People Affected by Humanitarian Crises' (HelpAge International, 2020). www.alnap.org/help-library/if-not-now-when-keeping-promises-to-older-people-affected-by-humanitarian-crises.

176   UNDP, 'Evaluation of UNDP Support to the Syrian Refugee Crisis Response and Promoting an Integrated Resilience Approach' (New York: UNDP, 2021). www.alnap.org/help-library/evaluation-of-undp-support-to-the-syrian-refugee-crisis-response-and-promoting-an.

A familiar mix of reasons are given for these shortcomings.[177] Within organisations, time pressures are a common refrain, especially in the initial stages of an emergency.[178] Other evidence points to a lack of knowledge among operational staff, a shortage of specialised gender and disability experts to support them,[179] and an overload of guidance generated at HQ level and poorly adapted to country context. Funding constraints are also a factor. Interviewees in all the field study locations noted that shortages placed limitations on their scope to tailor the offer to people's priorities. A meta-evaluation on food security and COVID-19 also found that, in north-eastern Nigeria, cost-cutting imperatives meant that rice was substituted with cheaper sorghum and millet, which recipients then sold to buy more usable alternatives.[180] There is also a wider issue of the extent to which the system invests in monitoring outcomes for affected people rather than programme outputs – with few incentives to be accountable for relevance, the sector continues to lack an understanding of how their aid matches different people's priorities, and to learn from this.

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177 UNDP, 'Evaluation of UNDP Support to Conflict-Affected Countries' (New York: UNDP, 2021) www.alnap.org/help-library/evaluation-of-undp-support-to-conflict-affected-countries; FAO, 'Synthesis of Findings and Lessons Learnt from the Strategic Objective Evaluations' (Rome: FAO, 2019). https://www.alnap.org/help-library/synthesis-of-findings-and-lessons-learnt-from-the-strategic-objective-evaluations; FAO, 'Evaluation of the Emergency Prevention System (EMPRES) Programme in Food Chain Crises' (Rome: FAO, 2018). www.alnap.org/help-library/evaluation-of-the-emergency-prevention-system-empres-programme-in-food-chain-crises; Murray, *Response to the Refugee Crisis in Turkey*. www.alnap.org/help-library/evaluation-of-the-european-union%E2%80%99s-humanitarian-response-to-the-refugee-crisis-in; FAO, 'Evaluation of FAO's Work on Gender.' www.alnap.org/help-library/evaluation-of-fao%E2%80%99s-work-on-gender; Nick Maunder et al., *Somalia: An Evaluation of WFP's Portfolio (2012–2017)* (Rome: WFP, 2018). www.alnap.org/help-library/somalia-an-evaluation-of-wfps-portfolio-2012-2017; Betts et al., *WFP Regional Response*. www.alnap.org/help-library/evaluation-of-the-wfp-regional-response-to-the-syrian-crisis-2015-2018; Bizzarri et al., *Evaluation on Gender Equality*. www.alnap.org/help-library/inter-agency-humanitarian-evaluation-on-gender-equality-and-the-empowerment-of-women; UNICEF, *Humanitarian and Development Programming*. www.alnap.org/help-library/evaluation-of-unicefs-work-to-link-humanitarian-and-development-programming.

178 Broughton and Lee, 'Evaluation of Protection in Australia's Disaster Responses in the Pacific' www.alnap.org/help-library/evaluation-of-protection-in-australia%E2%80%99s-disaster-responses-in-the-pacific; FAO, 'Evaluation of the Emergency Prevention System (EMPRES) Programme in Food Chain Crises.' www.alnap.org/help-library/evaluation-of-the-emergency-prevention-system-empres-programme-in-food-chain-crises; Bizzarri et al., *Evaluation on Gender Equality*. www.alnap.org/help-library/inter-agency-humanitarian-evaluation-on-gender-equality-and-the-empowerment-of-women.

179 Murray, *Response to the Refugee Crisis in Turkey*. www.alnap.org/help-library/evaluation-of-the-european-union%E2%80%99s-humanitarian-response-to-the-refugee-crisis-in; Steets et al., *Drought Response in Ethiopia*. www.alnap.org/help-library/inter-agency-humanitarian-evaluation-of-the-drought-response-in-ethiopia; FAO, 'Evaluation of FAO's Work on Gender.' www.alnap.org/help-library/evaluation-of-fao%E2%80%99s-work-on-gender; T Hanley and et al., 'Evaluation of WFP's Capacity to Respond to Emergencies. Evaluation Report Vol I.' (Rome: WFP, 2019). www.alnap.org/help-library/evaluation-of-wfps-capacity-to-respond-to-emergencies; Broughton and Lee, 'Evaluation of Protection in Australia's Disaster Responses in the Pacific.' www.alnap.org/help-library/evaluation-of-protection-in-australia%E2%80%99s-disaster-responses-in-the-pacific.

180 Breard, 'Evidence Summary on COVID-19 and Food Security'. www.alnap.org/help-library/evidence-summary-on-covid-19-and-food-security.

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When the COVID-19 pandemic hit, agencies and donors were quick to adapt existing programmes to the new realities of remote working and public health requirements – but this was not the same as adapting to people's priorities.

Does humanitarian action adapt to people's changing priority needs?

Although protracted crises are the norm rather than the exception, the humanitarian system still struggles to stay relevant as crises persist and evolve, and as people's expectations and priorities shift. When the COVID-19 pandemic hit, agencies and donors were quick to adapt existing programmes to the new realities of remote working and public health requirements[181] – but this was not the same as adapting to people's priorities. As Chapter 8 details, where agencies did adapt their programmes on the basis of new feedback or evidence from communities, it was more a matter of course-correction than any wholesale rethinking of programme focus and approach. Aid workers in Bangladesh described a series of iterative 'fixes' during the COVID-19 pandemic, complementing a food voucher with a 'porter' system to bring food to homebound refugees, a system which was designed and refined based on extensive community feedback. But as one humanitarian leader put it: 'I've never seen a case where the team comes at some point during operation to say we had agreed to do A and B, but now that we've heard that what the people want in fact is D… we're going to shift and divert to deliver that'.

Focus groups in Yemen, DRC and Bangladesh all echoed the findings of the last SOHS – namely that relevance diminishes as a crisis progresses beyond the initial emergency phase. People expressed gratitude for short-term support but concern and frustration about more sustainable options. In the words of one participant in Yemen: 'In 2015 and 2016 we were really in need [of this aid]. But now what we are really in need is economic empowerment. That is to say, "Don't give me a fish. But teach me how to fish."' Given the purpose of and limits to humanitarian aid, the onus is arguably on other forms of support to adapt to support economic empowerment and long-term options – indeed, this underpins the case for the renewed focus on strengthening the humanitarian–development–peace nexus, as we explore in Chapter 12.

The scope of humanitarian action to adapt in protracted crises is limited not only by its central mission, but also by competing priorities, constrained resources and political impediments. However, some field interviewees suggested that, even within these recognised constraints, humanitarian agencies could do more to push beyond immediate needs. As one aid worker in Bangladesh noted:

"

'We need to have to be able to have a longer-term perspective and we need to be able to help people to incorporate things into their life that isn't just food and shelter and water. And, you know, there really isn't a lot of thinking going on about how to do that. That's a really sad aspect of us being appropriate and relevant for the Rohingya.'

181   ALNAP, COVID-19 lessons paper, forthcoming.

Focus on: Resilience in protracted crises

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Over the past decade, the rise in protracted crises and renewed attention to the links between humanitarian, development and peace efforts has accompanied, and in some cases driven, resilience programming in the humanitarian system. Since 2012, repeated SOHS reports have noted an increase in the concept of 'resilience' in humanitarian action – that is, the provision of support that enables people and communities to transition to longer-term stability and better withstand future shocks. While for some this encompasses a necessary expansion of the remit and ambition of the humanitarian system, there remains a strong view that recovery and resilience objectives are best addressed through development programmes, paid for by development budgets.

The debate over whether resilience belongs in the humanitarian portfolio, and lack of consensus on what the objectives of resilience programming should be, has meant that there has been little practical progress in delivering effective resilience programming,[182] despite increasing requests for this type of support from crisis-affected people in protracted and refugee responses.[183] The 2018 SOHS reported more funding for resilience and an increase in agency strategies and units dedicated to supporting communities to face future shocks, but there has been little movement since. Recovery and resilience were linked increasingly to the humanitarian–development–peace (HDP) 'nexus' implementation in recent years, yet as Chapter 12 shows, it is not clear that this link has either helped or hindered progress in achieving better long-term outcomes for crisis-affected communities. At the same time, in some contexts, such as Lebanon, the term 'resilience' is becoming increasingly unpopular, as it is taken to imply that crisis-affected people have somehow failed to be resilient, or that the solution to crises is simply for communities to become stronger.[184]

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182   With some notable exceptions, including WFP's three-pronged approach (3PA), which includes integrated context analysis, seasonal livelihood programming and community based participatory programming.

183   While a request for support for livelihoods, education and other support for longer-term recovery was a finding in the 2018 SOHS KIIs and focus group discussions with affected people in some settings, it was mentioned with more frequency and emphasised more by community participants in the 2022 FGDs in DRC, Lebanon and Yemen.

184   Key informant interviews in Lebanon.

Sufficiency of efforts not matching scale of ambition

'Life-saving' sectors and activities still take precedence over early and longer-term recovery and resilience efforts, and many humanitarian practitioners interviewed for the SOHS country studies did not view recovery and resilience as a core part of their work. Whereas in the past, humanitarians referred to politicisation and lack of independence as reasons not to engage in resilience and recovery, this has shifted in recent years to a concern with the limited resources available to address immediate needs and a desire not to 'divert' humanitarian funds. As we have seen in Chapter 3, early recovery activities were only 17% funded in 2021, and other mechanisms to support harmonised humanitarian resilience activities, such as the Humanitarian and Disaster Resilience Plan in Ethiopia, were significantly underfunded. A key cause for this lack of funding is the perception among donors that early recovery is mainstreamed across other sectors, yet the amount dedicated to it in other sectors is typically low and often delayed.[185]

The lack of sufficient recovery and resilience support is reflected in data from aid recipients, who say that aid tends to only address their immediate needs and provides short-lasting benefits. While there have been slight improvements since 2017, overall, a majority of aid recipients interviewed by Ground Truth Solutions said in multiple responses that the support they received did not make them more self-reliant or enable them to live without aid in the future.[186]

185 Murray, F. Pedersen, and S. Ziesche, 'Evaluation of the Global Cluster for Early Recovery' (New York: UNDP, 2018). www.alnap.org/help-library/evaluation-of-the-global-cluster-for-early-recovery; FAO, 'Evaluation of the Emergency Prevention System (EMPRES) Programme in Food Chain Crises' (Rome: FAO, 2018). www.alnap.org/help-library/evaluation-of-the-emergency-prevention-system-empres-programme-in-food-chain-crises; Key Aid Consulting, 'Impact Analysis of Aid in Haiti – 10 Years On' (Swiss Solidarity, 2020). www.alnap.org/help-library/impact-analysis-of-aid-in-haiti-10-years-on; Baker et al., *Response to Cyclone Idai.* https://www.alnap.org/help-library/inter-agency-humanitarian-evaluation-of-the-response-to-cyclone-idai-in-mozambique.

186   Ground Truth Solutions, 'Data', Gound Truth Solutions, n.d. www.alnap.org/help-library/data.

Mixed and medium-term effectiveness

Some agencies made progress in adopting more comprehensive definitions of resilience but found it difficult to translate these into concrete outputs and activities. Resilience activities were wide-ranging, from cash-based assistance to weather information systems and livelihoods training. In focus group discussions with aid recipients, some described being able to use multi-purpose cash to address a combination of short- and longer-term priorities, seeing this form of support as ideal for supporting their recovery. As one focus group participant in DRC told us:

> **'I received assistance from WFP, and it was good because I am still happy with this assistance. From this assistance, I used half for food and [with] the other half I bought a sewing machine and now it helps me to have something [for income] and my children eat.'**

Local and national actors are typically more comfortable with the types of activities that support resilience and often saw the international system's focus on 'life-saving' support as compartmentalised and overly rigid. Programmes with greater local leadership, or survivor/community-led responses (sclr), therefore tended to feature more holistic activities that addressed short- and medium-term needs simultaneously.[187]

The complexity and breadth of resilience makes it difficult to evaluate the success of these efforts, but there was in this SOHS study period stronger evidence of recovery and resilience activities not only achieving their objectives but also helping communities and households withstand shocks or become more self-reliant in the medium to longer term. One study utilising three-year panel data and control groups in Pakistan found that livelihood training and shelter support provided as part of a humanitarian programme resulted in 'a higher likelihood for villagers to own livestock and face fewer shelter damages in areas affected by extreme weather events' a year later.[188] Other evaluations found that recovery and resilience activities improved households' economic standing, reduced negative coping mechanisms, and 'helped [participants] have a sense of normalcy, meaningful and rewarding engagement in life and economic activity'.[189]

187   Corbett, Carstensen and Di Vicenz, *Survivor and Community Led Crisis Response*. www.alnap.org/help-library/survivor-and-community-led-crisis-response-practical-experience-and-learning.

188   A. Avdeenko and M. Frolich, 'Impacts of Increasing Community Resilience through Humanitarian Aid in Pakistan' (New Delhi: International Initiative for Impact Evaluation (3ie), 2019), 5. www.alnap.org/help-library/impacts-of-increasing-community-resilience-through-humanitarian-aid-in-pakistan.

189   N. Freij, 'Creating Job Opportunities for Young Adults in Kurdistan' (Action Against Hunger, 2018). www.alnap.org/help-library/impacts-of-increasing-community-resilience-through-humanitarian-aid-in-pakistan.

The outcomes of most humanitarian resilience programmes have, however, remained short-lived, raising questions about how effectively they contribute to recovery and resilience.[190] The effectiveness of livelihood interventions appears to be particularly limited in refugee contexts due to challenges including legal restrictions on refugee employment and access to work permits[191] or cultural barriers around the role of women in the home.[192] While agencies tried to address some of these challenges through advocacy, efforts to tackle more structural obstacles have generally been weak, and there has been a lack of engagement with the private sector to ensure that jobs are available on completion of training.[193]

While there were more programmes aiming to build resilience to climate shocks over the study period, they faced criticism for being overly ambitious and failing to properly articulate the problem they are trying to address. An evaluation of the Building Resilience and Adaptation to Climate Extremes and Disasters (BRACED) programme found that it lacked a clear definition of 'climate extremes', and suggested that building resilience to major events such as cyclones was too ambitious for a single programme.[194] In some instances agencies have been caught off-guard by unexpected climatic events. When floods hit Malawi in 2019, an insurance mechanism for climate change that had focused on drought was ineffective in covering losses, and floodwaters 'literally washed away many of the community assets that had been constructed'.[195]

190   UNDP, 'Evaluation of UNDP Support to the Syrian Refugee Crisis Response and Promoting an Integrated Resilience Approach' (New York: UNDP, 2021). www.alnap.org/help-library/evaluation-of-undp-support-to-the-syrian-refugee-crisis-response-and-promoting-an; H. Roxin et al., 'Effectiveness of German Development Cooperation in Dealing with Conflict-Induced Forced Migration Crises' (Bonn: German Institute for Development Evaluation (DEval), 2021). www.alnap.org/help-library/effectiveness-of-german-development-cooperation-in-dealing-with-conflict-induced-forced; Tango International, 'Evaluation of UNHCR's Livelihoods Strategies and Approaches' (Geneva: UNHCR, 2018). www.alnap.org/help-library/evaluation-of-unhcrs-livelihoods-strategies-and-approaches; Daniels, Anderson and Yusuf Ali, *2017 Somalia Response*. www.alnap.org/help-library/evaluation-of-the-2017-somalia-humanitarian-cash-based-response.

191   UNDP, 'Evaluation of UNDP Support to the Syrian Refugee Crisis Response and Promoting an Integrated Resilience Approach.' https://www.alnap.org/help-library/evaluation-of-undp-support-to-the-syrian-refugee-crisis-response-and-promoting-an; Danida and UNHCR, 'Joint Evaluation of the Integrated Solutions Model in and Around Kalobeyei, Turkana, Kenya' (Copenhagen/Geneva: Ministry of Foreign Affairs Denmark (Danida) and UNHCR, 2019). www.alnap.org/help-library/joint-evaluation-of-the-integrated-solutions-model-in-and-around-kalobeyei-turkana; Betts et al., *WFP Regional Response*. www.alnap.org/help-library/evaluation-of-the-wfp-regional-response-to-the-syrian-crisis-2015-2018; Baykal, *Strengthening the Resilience*. www.alnap.org/help-library/strengthening-the-resilience-of-syrian-women-and-girls-and-host-communities-in-turkey.

192   Baykal, *Strengthening the Resilience*. https://www.alnap.org/help-library/strengthening-the-resilience-of-syrian-women-and-girls-and-host-communities-in-turkey.

193   Danida and UNHCR, *Integrated Solutions Model*; UNDP, 'Evaluation of UNDP Support to the Syrian Refugee Crisis Response and Promoting an Integrated Resilience Approach'. (UNDP, 2021). www.alnap.org/help-library/joint-evaluation-of-the-integrated-solutions-model-in-and-around-kalobeyei-turkana.

194   Yaron et al., 'Measuring Changes in Household Resilience as a Result of BRACED Activities in Myanmar 2018' BRACED, 2018. www.alnap.org/help-library/measuring-changes-in-household-resilience-as-a-result-of-braced-activities-in-myanmar.

195   J. Nyirenda et al., 'Mid-Term Evaluation of Integrated Risk Management and Climate Services Programme in Malawi from 2017–2019' (Rome: WFP, 2019), 31. www.alnap.org/help-library/mid-term-evaluation-of-integrated-risk-management-and-climate-services-programme-in.

Early recovery and resilience activities are also poorly coordinated. An evaluation of the early recovery cluster at the start of the study period found it facing an existential crisis, as the lead agency, UNDP, deprioritised early recovery in humanitarian settings in its five-year strategy and donors withdrew support due to a lack of clear objectives. At field level, early recovery coordination was side-lined from the main response in many countries, and cluster meetings tapered off with 'diminishing participation and relevance'.[196]

The main challenges to recovery and resilience remain largely the same as those discussed in previous SOHS reports: short time frames and high staff turnover, insufficient funding and lack of effective links with the development sector. The root cause for all of these is mindset, and the system's perennial prioritisation of urgent needs now over more shock-proof communities in the future. While the system has made more progress in shifting to multi-year programming and strengthening relationships with the development sector through the nexus, these were not yet observed as influencing resilience and recovery programming over the study period; evaluations continued to cite the absence of development actors and underinvestment from humanitarian actors as barriers to longer-term thinking and engagement.[197]

196 Murray, Pedersen, and Ziesche, 'Evaluation of the Global Cluster for Early Recovery'. www.alnap.org/help-library/evaluation-of-the-global-cluster-for-early-recovery.

197 Danida and UNHCR, *Integrated Solutions Model*. www.alnap.org/help-library/joint-evaluation-of-the-integrated-solutions-model-in-and-around-kalobeyei-turkana; SANDE CONSULTORES LDA, 'External Evaluation of Cyclone Idai and Kenneth Response in Mozambique' (Oxford/London: Oxfam and DEC, 2021). https://www.alnap.org/help-library/oxfam-independent-evaluation-of-cyclone-idai-and-kenneth-response; UNHCR, 'Decentralized Evaluation of UNHCR's Livelihoods Programme in South Sudan (2016–2018)' (Geneva: UNHCR, 2019). www.alnap.org/help-library/decentralized-evaluation-of-unhcrs-livelihoods-programme-in-south-sudan-2016-2018; UNHCR, *Country Operation, Afghanistan*. www.alnap.org/help-library/unhcr-afghanistan-country-evaluation-report-2020.

DRC case study:
Waiting on recovery and resilience

Author: Local researcher, DRC
Name withheld to protect the author's identity

The humanitarian situation in DRC is prolonged yet made up of many rapid-onset emergencies caused by conflict, epidemics and natural disasters. As such, the lives of many aid recipients are characterised by instability and much of the humanitarian response is delivered in an emergency capacity, in a 'rinse, repeat' format. Displacement has left people without permanent homes and dependent on the goodwill of host communities, many of whom are also identified as 'in need'. Displaced people often live in squalid conditions and their basic protection needs are unmet; rape and attacks are ongoing and there are reports of children experiencing sexual violence.

Aid recipients emphasised the importance of the assistance they had received, expressing particular appreciation for cash transfers and projects that provided children with food and play activities (and thereby eased parents' stress). Cash transfers were praised for allowing recipients to choose how to allocate their aid resources, arguably supporting their resilience at least in the short term: 'For us, the most important assistance is cash because with that you can buy what you want, pay for medical care, schooling for children, buy clothes. If you give us the food, we will have to sell it again to cover the other needs and you will sell it at a very low price.'

At the same time, aid recipients were fatigued by instability, felt NGO consultations were tokenistic and believed that humanitarian interventions cannot provide long-term solutions to the crises they faced. The provision of humanitarian support without accompanying efforts to address the root causes of crisis has left communities in DRC in limbo: 'You see it's difficult to continue in this life, it's not a desirable life and it's not a life in which we can recover from the crisis. Each one of us needs to go home to our old life', explained one aid recipient.

Role and responsibilities

For those in the midst of crisis, conceptualising 'resilience' and 'recovery' requires significant imagination. Local NGOs emphasised working with communities to enhance livelihood resilience. This included skills training (particularly for young people) and forming credit associations, all of which have the potential to build aid recipients' resource base. Local NGOs are well-equipped to engage in these activities since they are embedded in communities, are well connected and can be more agile in their response to aid recipients' needs. However, they are also typically low on resources and, depending on their structure and governance, may target aid

recipients in ways that differ from international humanitarian standards. Local agencies reported conflicts with international NGOs over access to resources and influence.

International NGOs adapt their planning and approach according to the nature of the crisis and changes in the logistical or security context. However, overall, there was not a sense that assistance was adapted for recovery and resilience over time, beyond a few isolated examples in urban areas. One international agency worked with mobile network operators to improve mobile phone coverage to facilitate electronic cash transfers during the COVID-19 pandemic, although they admitted that coverage was still insufficient for this to be applied across the affected area. Another agency, responding to the wishes of people displaced by the 2021 Mount Nyiragongo eruption, advocated to create movable shelters, so that individuals could lift their structure and move it back to the volcanic area should the government allow them to return home. Humanitarians blamed the lack of recovery and resilience programming on short-term and inflexible donor funding, and the inaccessibility and instability of conflict-affected areas. As the head of office for Eastern DRC for a UN agency commented: 'We are limited to saving lives, but we do not change lives.'

Peace and security

The significant challenges to engaging with resilience and recovery work in DRC include under-funding, short-termism, insecurity, logistics and transport, and lack of deep understanding of local contexts, insufficient collaboration with local governments and a volatile political environment. One humanitarian worker, responsible for protection against sexual exploitation and abuse, described the daily security alerts they received and found the idea of building 'resilience' among communities affected by conflict 'ridiculous'. In their words:

> **'Building resilience in communities… it's good on paper. Is it condescending as a phrase? Completely… How am I going to go to people who have witnessed so much horror, and are still experiencing horror and trauma all the time and I'm going to be able to build that within them?… That's just ridiculous, how resilient can you be to a man with an AK-47?'**

Similarly, engaging in long-term agricultural projects is challenging in a conflict situation where crops risk being stolen or ruined. As one displaced person told us:

> **'I, personally, came from the highlands where endless fighting is experienced every day between armed community self-defence groups. Regularly houses are burnt, people killed, goods taken away… Nothing can be done to overcome this crisis unless peace is restored in the region.'**

Aid recipients struggle to imagine a 'recovery' aside from a return to their homes. The layers of crises that afflict vulnerable communities in the DRC make their lives transient and unpredictable. For communities to recover, they need homes and resources they can invest in and build on. Activities such as skills training, education and livelihood activities can provide aid recipients with knowledge and experience they can take with them, but without a foundation on which to lay this learning, they will remain vulnerable. There are no sustainable solutions to displacement without first establishing peace and stability. In this context, humanitarian assistance will continue to be required for emergency response, but there is currently no clear path to recovery in DRC.

Chapter 6: Does humanitarian action work?

IN BRIEF: The humanitarian system often struggles to measure and understand the difference it is making for the people it serves. However, there is now stronger evidence of the system's effectiveness in achieving outcomes and improving the well-being of crisis-affected people. Over the past decade, the system has invested in technical capacity, programme quality and evidence gathering, and this appears to be paying off. More recent efforts to improve accountability and participation may also make a difference, as engagement was found to play a significant role in the effectiveness of aid.

A fundamental aim of humanitarian assistance is to save lives. In this study period there was some limited positive evidence of humanitarian action reducing excess mortality in crises, but a lack of data makes it difficult to assess its precise contribution. Out of a sample of 29 countries with humanitarian responses only 4 had mortality data available consistently year on year.

There was renewed attention to the importance of effective protection and improvements at the global and country-level were evident but relatively nascent. Leadership on protection was strengthened and within the available, yet patchy, evidence of effective programming the best examples came from child protection, SGBV and multi-sectoral approaches.

Across multiple other sectors, humanitarians paid more attention to the quality of programming, referring frequently to the Sphere minimum standards in humanitarian response in their monitoring and increasing their adherence to the Core Humanitarian Standard (CHS) to track and evaluate performance.

While the past four years have brought new expectations and possibilities for timelier, and therefore more effective, humanitarian support, the system is not as fast as it could be. This is primarily because the system's operational capacity to respond early is not matched by an increase in well-timed and flexible funding. When the system does act quickly, it must rely on smaller pots of money to do so, meaning that a fast response is often an insufficient one.

Introduction

'Does it work?' is perhaps the most common performance question asked of international aid, yet also one of the most challenging to answer. Due to the difficulties inherent in monitoring and evaluation in a crisis, the humanitarian system generally has a poor track record in demonstrating

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its effectiveness beyond outputs and numbers of people reached. Data on the outcomes of humanitarian action is not a niche measurement issue; it is central to progress. Evidence gaps limit the system's ability to use the most cost-effective programme designs, prioritise across sectors and scale innovations. As a result, the 2018 SOHS observed that 'It is more difficult than it should be to say whether humanitarian activities are effective.'[198]

Answering the 'Does it work?' question is made more difficult by the lack of consensus on what humanitarian action should achieve. Over the past decade, the system has seen shifts in these expectations, due to a range of factors including a greater emphasis on dignity pushing the system to address a wider range of needs, a rise in protracted crises straining humanitarian capacity, and a greater diversity of perspectives on what humanitarian action should look like in the 21st century. All of this has changed understandings of what humanitarian effectiveness looks like, from saving lives to supporting people's resilience against future shocks; from a technical exercise in meeting needs to a holistic goal shaped by culture and context.

Traditionally, effectiveness is evaluated in terms of whether humanitarian programmes have achieved their stated objectives.[199] When we understand effectiveness in this way, it is striking how little has changed since the 2015–2017 period; many of the findings in this review repeat those of the 2018 SOHS. Around half of aid practitioners surveyed think that their sector is 'Good' or 'Excellent' at effectiveness (51%, compared with 52% in the 2018 SOHS). Yet there also continues to be confusion over how the system defines effectiveness, and evaluations indicate no meaningful progress since 2018 among humanitarian staff on connecting activities clearly to the overall objectives and outcomes of a response or programme.

Defining effectiveness in terms of meeting objectives offers a limited perspective on the achievements of humanitarian action, as aims are often poorly stated and tend to focus on what agencies do in the short term (people reached, outputs delivered) rather than what they achieve, either in the short or long term.[200] For these reasons, we focus in this SOHS edition on the outcomes achieved by humanitarian action over the period 2018–2021. We look first at the two most basic outcomes that can be expected of humanitarian action: that it saves lives and protects people from harm. We then review evidence for other outcomes, such as reducing need or achieving well-being. The final section examines two issues often linked to humanitarian effectiveness: the quality of assistance and its timeliness, the latter of which was raised by aid recipients as a priority topic for the 2022 SOHS.

198   ALNAP, 'The State of the Humanitarian System.', ALNAP Study (London: ALNAP, 2018). www.alnap.org/help-library/the-state-of-the-humanitarian-system-sohs-2018-full-report.

199   Objectives are the aims and goals of an intervention as set out by an agency and can include a mixture of outputs and/or outcomes.

200   ALNAP, 'The State of the Humanitarian System.' www.alnap.org/help-library/the-state-of-the-humanitarian-system-sohs-2018-full-report.
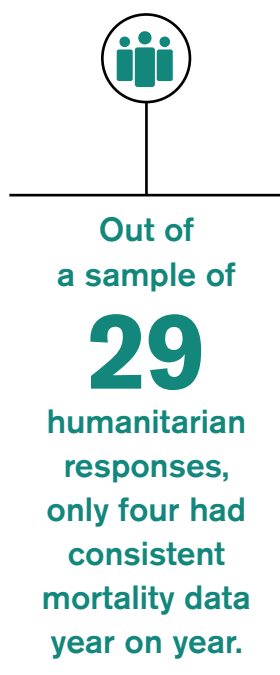
Does humanitarian action save lives?

A fundamental aim of humanitarian assistance is to save lives, yet it is difficult to understand the precise contribution of humanitarian assistance to reducing excess mortality. One key challenge is the limited availability of mortality data: a review undertaken for the SOHS shows that, out of a sample of 29 humanitarian responses, little more than half (15) produced any death rate estimates. Available estimates almost invariably only covered pockets of the affected population; only four countries had mortality data available consistently year on year, and availability of records substantially declined over 2020 and 2021, likely owing to the impact of COVID-19 on data collection. Data sets may also be incomplete or inaccurate. In Yemen, for example, understanding the effectiveness of the cholera response was complicated due to an over-diagnosis of cholera and under-reporting of deaths, making the low case fatality rate unreliable.[201]

Even when mortality data is available, it is hard to establish what constitutes 'excess' mortality due to the lack of wider historical population statistics in many humanitarian crises; most of the poorest and most vulnerable countries are also data poor.[202] Using a standard emergency threshold – such as 1 death per 10,000 people per day – for mortality is unreliable and potentially misleading.[203] It is even more difficult to establish the causal effect of humanitarian assistance on excess mortality, due to the lack of pre-crisis baselines and the difficulty in establishing a counterfactual. While some approaches may provide some actionable evidence,[204] more rigorous estimation of lives saved will likely require greater investments in expertise and data collection and availability – of which there is currently little sign.

There was limited clear or positive evidence of humanitarian action reducing excess mortality in crises over the study period. Original research for the SOHS across three recent responses suggests a weakly positive effect of assistance on mortality in Nigeria,[205] some evidence – albeit less clear – of a beneficial effect in Somalia, and no clear trend in South Sudan. Other evaluations of responses in South Sudan, Yemen and Sierra Leone attributed a fall in the mortality rate below emergency thresholds

Out of a sample of

29

humanitarian responses, only four had consistent mortality data year on year.

201 Grünewald and Farias, *Cholera in Time of War*. www.alnap.org/help-library/cholera-in-time-of-war-evaluation-of-the-msf-ocba-cholera-response-in-yemen.

202 According to the SDG Indicators Data Platform, only 16% of countries have data available on goal 1 (ending poverty) and on average they only have it available for one year.

203 ALNAP, 'Mortality Emergency Threshold: A Case for Revision', ALNAP 1997–2022, 2 August 2018. www.alnap.org/blogs/mortality-emergency-threshold-a-case-for-revision.

204 Such as measuring death rates in real-time to monitor whether they remain within acceptable ranges and comparing these against real-time evaluations of the quality and appropriateness of humanitarian services, to infer an effect on mortality.

205 Please see the methodology for the 2022 SOHS in Annex 3.

as a success for humanitarian action,[206] although the use of emergency thresholds is contested, and robust methods were not used to make this link.

Reductions in mortality may also be indirectly linked to humanitarian action through other outcomes, for example through reductions in morbidity or malnutrition. Given the strong link between undernutrition and child death, reducing undernutrition was often taken as indirect evidence of a reduction in excess mortality.[207] When sufficiently resourced, humanitarian nutrition programmes were generally found to be effective at reducing severe and moderate acute malnutrition, thus likely contributing to a reduction in deaths of children under five. WASH programmes were also linked to reductions in disease, potentially leading to lower mortality rates.

Does humanitarian action protect people from harm?

Humanitarian protection is concerned with reducing the risk of physical and psychological harm facing people in crises. There are many factors that make humanitarian protection challenging – the breadth of scope has led to confusion over what protection looks like operationally, and protection outcomes are often poorly defined and shaped by factors outside humanitarian agencies' control. The features that make protection difficult to do also make it difficult to evaluate. As a result, previous SOHS reports have noted that the evidence of protection outcomes is weak.

There has been system-wide action to address concerns that protection was not being prioritised or well-defined, most significantly in the IASC's 2016 Protection Policy, which outlined key requirements to support system-wide efforts in protection.[208] In the study period, protection was increasingly prioritised in responses – at least on paper. For example, USAID now requires that all proposals include protection indicators and in DRC, all clusters are required to report on several protection indicators.[209] However, a major new review of the IASC Protection Policy has found important limitations in implementation. These included a lack of common understanding; weak leadership and accountability; lack of

206 J. Baker and I. Elawad, 'Independent Evaluation of the UNHCR South Sudanese Refugee Response in White Nile State, Sudan (2013 - 2018)' (Geneva: UNHCR, 2018). www.alnap.org/help-library/independent-evaluation-of-the-unhcr-south-sudanese-refugee-response-in-white-nile-state; Grünewald and Farias, *Cholera in Time of War*. www.alnap.org/help-library/cholera-in-time-of-war-evaluation-of-the-msf-ocba-cholera-response-in-yemen; Watanabe, *Reinforcing Institutional Capacity*. www.alnap.org/help-library/reinforcing-institutional-capacity-for-treatment-of-acute-malnutrition-prevention-of-0.

207 Watanabe, *Reinforcing Institutional Capacity*. www.alnap.org/help-library/reinforcing-institutional-capacity-for-treatment-of-acute-malnutrition-prevention-of-0.

208 Cocking et al., *IASC Protection Policy*. www.alnap.org/help-library/independent-review-of-the-ipc-south-sudan.

209 From global key informant interviews.

> **As the UN and INGOs in an emergency response, we have a mandate to bear witness and to flag humanitarian and protection issues… we haven't done that. We have allowed protection issues to go on unchecked.**

collective ownership; an overly complicated coordination infrastructure; the prioritisation of activities over outcomes; and limited connections with the multiple actors – within and outside the humanitarian system – required to support effective protection.[210]

One aid worker interviewed in Cox's Bazar echoed the overarching sense that protection was not a 'central pillar' of humanitarian response: 'It's kind of been side-lined and it's lost its place, which needs to be addressed… As the UN and INGOs in an emergency response, we have a mandate to bear witness and to flag humanitarian and protection issues… we haven't done that. We have allowed protection issues to go on unchecked.'

Protection advocacy

There were some positive steps in protection advocacy over the study period, with variation across different aspects of protection. Evaluations cite some positive examples, including successful advocacy by UN-Habitat and the Global Land Tool Network for Yazidi land rights in Iraq and more equal ownership for women,[211] and by the Health and Protection Clusters around attacks on health facilities in Mali.[212] On the global level, collective advocacy by multiple agencies within the Call to Action on Protection from Gender-Based Violence in Emergencies, led by successive donor governments, influenced the IASC's decision to include GBV responsibilities in Humanitarian Country Team (HCT) compacts.[213] There were good examples of protection advocacy by INGOs, but these remained largely ad hoc, short-term and scattered.[214]

The more successful advocacy efforts targeted multiple stakeholders, including donors, government and development actors, and had strong individual leadership.[215] There has been some progress in strengthening leadership from the UN, NGOs and HCTs to prioritise protection in

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210 Cocking et al., *IASC Protection Policy*. www.alnap.org/help-library/independent-review-of-the-ipc-south-sudan.

211 Global Protection Cluster, 'Centrality of Protection in Humanitarian Action Review 2020' (Global Protection Cluster, 2020). www.alnap.org/help-library/centrality-of-protection-in-humanitarian-action-review-2020.

212 Global Protection Cluster, (Ibid). www.alnap.org/help-library/centrality-of-protection-in-humanitarian-action-review-2020.

213 Gemma Davies, *Protection Advocacy by International NGOs in Armed Conflict Situations: Breaking the Barriers* (London: HPG/ODI, 2021). www.alnap.org/help-library/protection-advocacy-by-international-ngos-in-armed-conflict-situations-breaking-the.

214 Davis, *Protection Advocacy*; A. Meral, et al. 'Refugee Advocacy in Turkey from Global to Local', ODI, 2021. Please also see Chapter 11 for a discussion on advocacy and humanitarian principles. www.alnap.org/help-library/refugee-advocacy-in-turkey-from-local-to-global.

215 G. Davies and A. Spencer, 'The Call to Action on Protection from Gender-Based Violence in Emergencies: An Assessment of the Role of Collective Approaches', HPG briefing note (London: HPG/ODI, n.d.). www.alnap.org/help-library/the-call-to-action-on%E2%80%89protection-from-gender-based%E2%80%89violence-in-emergencies-an.

> **Protection leadership improved in some contexts but remained absent in others, including during the COVID-19 pandemic.**

responses and advocate for the safety of crisis-affected people.[216] While outcomes are not yet clear, protection leadership improved in some contexts by the end of the study period, including in DRC and Somalia, with improved links to other clusters and stronger collective protection monitoring systems, respectively. However, strong protection leadership was not evident in several responses in this study period, including during the COVID-19 pandemic, leading to what were deemed foreseeable and avoidable rises in protection risks.[217] As we have seen in the 'Focus on: COVID-19' section, the protection impacts of the pandemic in refugee camps were considerable and the lack of effective action was notable.[218]

Globally, strategies to protect civilians have focused increasingly on improving engagement with parties to conflict, conflict-affected communities and UN missions and country coordination structures, with mixed success. Some form of engagement has been undertaken in several conflict-affected contexts, yet protection of civilians remains an area of weaker global progress compared to protection against GBV and child protection. Chapter 11 explains some of the failings in global advocacy during active conflict in this period. Engagement with parties to conflict remains challenging, including in DRC and South Sudan,[219] and there are limited examples of improved outcomes. Exceptions to this include the demobilisation of hundreds of child soldiers in Mali, which was attributed to advocacy by child protection committees, and healthcare access for older people in Aleppo during the COVID-19 pandemic, attributed to advocacy by community volunteers.[220]

Protection programming

It has been hard to know exactly where protection programming is succeeding or falling short. In part, this is due to the difficulty of attributing responsibilities between humanitarian and other actors, but it is also because progress tends to be monitored and assessed at the level of activity (e.g. number of children reached), rather than outcome (e.g. reductions in risks, vulnerabilities and people feeling unsafe).[221] During the study period, there were notable efforts

216 Global Protection Cluster, 'The Centrality of Protection in Humanitarian Action Review 2019' (Global Protection Cluster, 2019); Global Protection Cluster, 'Centrality Of Protection In Humanitarian Action Review 2020' (Global Protection Cluster, 2020). www.alnap.org/help-library/centrality-of-protection-in-humanitarian-action-review-2020.

217 Itad and Valid Evaluations, 'Joint Evaluation of the Protection of the Rights of Refugees During the COVID-19 Pandemic', (London: Itad and Valid Evaluations, 2022). www.alnap.org/help-library/joint-evaluation-of-the-protection-of-the-rights-of-refugees-during-the-covid-19.

218   Itad and Valid Evaluations (Ibid). www.alnap.org/help-library/joint-evaluation-of-the-protection-of-the-rights-of-refugees-during-the-covid-19.

219 Global key informant interviews.

220 Global Protection Cluster, 'Don't I Matter? Civilians Under Fire - Global Protection Update' (Global Protection Cluster, 2021). www.alnap.org/help-library/don%E2%80%99t-i-matter-civilians-under-fire-global-protection-update.

221 Global Protection Cluster, 'Centrality of Protection in Humanitarian Action Review 2020'. www.alnap.org/help-library/centrality-of-protection-in-humanitarian-action-review-2020.

to strengthen the monitoring and evaluation of protection, including by the Directorate-General for European Civil Protection and Humanitarian Aid Operations (DG-ECHO) and InterAction, which is experimenting with proxy indicators, risk equations and outcome mapping techniques.[222]

Within the evidence available, the best examples of effective protection programming came from child protection and protection against sexual and gender-based violence (SGBV), such as working with community-based committees; providing safe, sex-disaggregated spaces for homeless children; and developing the child protection capacities of local police and judicial actors.[223] Multi-sectoral approaches that integrated protection with other services were found to be effective in the short term. For example, Global Affairs Canada's provision of shelter, nutrition, hygiene and sexual and reproductive healthcare in DRC helped reduce the vulnerabilities of at-risk girls in the short term, but gains were difficult to sustain beyond the project period.[224]

Cash and voucher assistance has also been effective at achieving several protection outcomes.[225] Linking cash to life skills workshops for girls facing SGBV was also found to improve protection outcomes.[226] However, as discussed further in the following section on CVA effectiveness, the effects of some of these programmes were short-lived.[227] Evaluations also point to gaps where specific protection risks from CVA programming have not been effectively

222   DG ECHO 2021 Protection Mainstreaming Key Outcome Indicator and Monitoring Tool. www.dgecho-partners-helpdesk.eu/download/referencedocumentfile/204; Embracing the Protection Outcome Mindset: We all have a role to play. A results-based protection briefing paper. (Washington DC: Interaction, 2020). www.alnap.org/help-library/embracing-the-protection-outcome-mindset-we-all-have-a-role-to-play; InterAction, 'MindShift: A Collection of Examples That Promote Protection Outcomes.' (Washington DC: InterAction, 2021). www.alnap.org/help-library/mindshift-a-collection-of-examples-that-promote-protection-outcomes.

223   Global Affairs Canada, 'Evaluation of International Assistance Programming in the Democratic Republic of Congo 2012–13 to 2018–19' (Global Affairs Canada, 2020). www.alnap.org/help-library/evaluation-of-international-assistance-programming-in-the-democratic-republic-of-congo.

224   Global Affairs Canada. (Ibid). www.alnap.org/help-library/evaluation-of-international-assistance-programming-in-the-democratic-republic-of-congo.

225   F. Bastagli et al., 'World Food Programme Multipurpose Cash Assistance in Lebanon: Protection Outcomes for Syrian Refugees' (London: ODI and CAMEALEON, 2021). www.alnap.org/help-library/world-food-programme-multipurpose-cash-assistance-in-lebanon-protection-outcomes-for; N. Giordano, 'Evaluation of the Effects of UNHCR Cash-Based Interventions on Protection Outcomes in Rwanda.' (Geneva: UNHCR, 2020). www.alnap.org/help-library/evaluation-of-the-effects-of-unhcr-cash-based-interventions-on-protection-outcomes-in; S. Allen, 'CVA for Protection: A Mapping of IRC's Use of Cash and Voucher Assistance to Help Achieve Protection Outcomes.' (New York: IRC, 2019).

226   Allen, 'CVA for Protection: A Mapping of IRC's Use of Cash and Voucher Assistance to Help Achieve Protection Outcomes.' www.alnap.org/help-library/cva-for-protection-a-mapping-of-irc%E2%80%99s-use-of-cash-and-voucher-assistance-to-help.

227   Bastagli et al., 'World Food Programme Multipurpose Cash Assistance in Lebanon: Protection Outcomes for Syrian Refugees.' www.alnap.org/help-library/world-food-programme-multipurpose-cash-assistance-in-lebanon-protection-outcomes-for; Giordano, 'Evaluation of the Effects of UNHCR Cash-Based Interventions on Protection Outcomes in Rwanda.' www.alnap.org/help-library/evaluation-of-the-effects-of-unhcr-cash-based-interventions-on-protection-outcomes-in.

considered.[228] For example, women have been targeted when collecting their transfer money from ATMs and have been subject to GBV in the home.[229]

Available evidence of effectiveness is more mixed for the use of referral mechanisms for SGBV.[230] The results depend heavily on whether staff are adequately aware of the existence of referral mechanisms and how to use them safely.[231] This was difficult where referral systems were overly complicated: one interviewee in DRC explained that there were three national referral networks in place, each covering a different protection need but with different responsibilities depending on the age of the survivor.[232] Additionally, in some refugee contexts, effective referral processes for SGBV survivors were hindered by a lack of trust in government authorities, with humanitarian agencies fearful of survivors being stigmatised or deported.[233]

The sheer scale of protection needs in conflict-affected locations and displacement contexts limited progress. For example, research in Yemen found that protection had been integrated into several programmes, but the scale of need far outstripped provision. Some interviewees questioned whether initiatives such as hotlines could really protect against attacks on schools, child marriage and child labour, sexual exploitation and abuse or the recruitment of children into militant groups. Focus group discussions and interviews in DRC revealed that, despite mainstreaming of protection into WASH and nutrition programming, people displaced by conflict still face rape, attacks and sexual violence against children. According to one interviewee in DRC, 'We are witnessing the violation of human rights because there are rapes in camps, rape of minors; for what, because there is no help, as there is no help the children give themselves to sexuality to have food'.[234] (See the 'Focus on: Active conflict' section.)

228   Holst-Roness et al., *SGBV in Brazil*. www.alnap.org/help-library/evaluation-of-unhcr-prevention-of-and-response-to-sgbv-in-brazil-focusing-on-the; Broughton and Lee, Protection in Australia's Disaster Responses. www.alnap.org/help-library/evaluation-of-protection-in-australia%E2%80%99s-disaster-responses-in-the-pacific.

229   WFP, 'WFP Evidence Summary Cash-Based Transfers Lessons from Evaluations' (Rome: WFP, 2021). www.alnap.org/help-library/wfp-evidence-summary-cash-based-transfers-lessons-from-evaluations; Tirivayi et al., *School Meals Programme*. www.alnap.org/help-library/malawi-school-meals-programme-2016-2018-an-evaluation.

230   A significant caveat to this being that the evidence on referral mechanisms remains weak. The ability to measure the effectiveness of referrals can be low when agencies do not know the results of referrals to other actors and have no feedback on how the process was experienced by affected populations. A. Koclejda, G. Roux-Fouillet, and N. Carlevaro, 'Afghanistan Shelter Evaluation Report' (Norwegian Refugee Council (NRC), 2019). www.alnap.org/help-library/afghan-shelter-evaluation-report.

231   I. Betzler and O. Westerman, 'Evidencing the Value for Money of the CCI's Cash and Legal Programmes' (Mercy Corps, Oxfam, Norwegian Refugee Council (NRC), International Rescue Committee, Danish Refugee Council (DRC), 2018). www.alnap.org/help-library/evidencing-the-value-for-money-of-the-cci%E2%80%99s-cash-and-legal-programmes; Schenkenberg van Mierop, Wendt and Kabir, *Joint Appeal to Rohingya*. www.alnap.org/help-library/independent-evaluation-of-the-aktion-deutschland-hilft-ev-adh-joint-appeal-to-%E2%80%9Crohingya; Hanley, Ogwang and Procter, *SGBV in the Refugee Population in Lebanon*. www.alnap.org/help-library/evaluation-of-unhcr-prevention-and-response-to-sgbv-in-the-refugee-population-in.

232   Global key informant interviews.

233   Hanley, Ogwang and Procter, *SGBV in the Refugee Population in Lebanon*. www.alnap.org/help-library/evaluation-of-unhcr-prevention-and-response-to-sgbv-in-the-refugee-population-in.

234   Key informant interview.

What other outcomes does humanitarian action achieve for people affected by crisis?

The effectiveness of humanitarian action in achieving outcomes varied widely between sectors, as well as between contexts. Generally, the strongest evidence for effectiveness came from the food security, nutrition and education sectors, as well as in cash modalities and in the COVID-19 health response. Yet, sufficiency of funding, COVID-19 restrictions and the degree of engagement afforded to aid recipients all affected the delivery of outcomes for crisis-affected people. While a key issue influencing the effectiveness of humanitarian action in this period, the varied impacts of COVID-19 on humanitarian action and the results of the humanitarian system's attempts to respond to the pandemic are predominantly covered elsewhere in this report.

The humanitarian system was generally effective at addressing food insecurity and nutrition – when sufficient resources are available. This is important, as food remains a priority need for crisis-affected people; it was the most-cited need in both the 2018 and 2022 SOHS aid recipient surveys. In Yemen and Venezuela, the system was able to scale up to meet growing food insecurity, despite the extraordinary challenges of operating through COVID-19. Some evaluations called for a greater emphasis on the prevention of malnutrition rather than treatment, a theme that resonates with an overall push towards more anticipatory humanitarian action.[235]

Efforts at sustaining children's access to education through crisis were also effective. Over the study period, education in emergencies programming provided access to and increased schooling for boys and girls, with this extending to host populations in some refugee contexts.[236] Educational outcomes were also achieved through other sectors. For example, school feeding programmes – typically classed under food

235   L. Poulsen, E. Donelli, and S.E. Yakeu Djiam, 'Cameroon: An Evaluation of WFP's Portfolio (2012–2017)' (Rome: WFP, 2018). www.alnap.org/help-library/cameroon-an-evaluation-of-wfps-portfolio-2012-2017.

236   H. Roxin et al., 'Effectiveness of German Development Cooperation in Dealing with Conflict-Induced Forced Migration Crises' (Bonn: German Institute for Development Evaluation (DEval), 2021).; WFP, 'Evaluation of the Joint Programme for Girls Education (JPGE) with Financial Support from the Norwegian Government, July 2014 – October 2017' (Rome: WFP, 2020), www.alnap.org/help-library/decentralized-evaluation-evaluation-of-the-joint-programme-for-girls-education-jpge; J. Chaaban et al., 'Multi-Purpose Cash Assistance in Lebanon' (American University of Beirut and CAMEALEON, 2020), www.alnap.org/help-library/multi-purpose-cash-assistance-in-lebanon; Tirivayi, et al., 'Evaluation of the School Meals Programme in Malawi with Financial Support from United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) 2016 to 2018'. ; J. De Hoop, et al., '"Min Ila" Cash Transfer Program for Displaced Syrian Children in Lebanon (UNICEF and WFP). Impact Evaluation Report Endline' (New York: UNICEF and American Institutes for Research (AIR), 2018), www.alnap.org/help-library/%E2%80%9Cmin-ila%E2%80%9D-cash-transfer-program-for-displaced-syrian-children-in-lebanon-unicef-and-wfp; J. Murray, 'Evaluation of the European Union's Humanitarian Response to the Refugee Crisis in Turkey' (European Commission ECHO, 2019), www.alnap.org/help-library/evaluation-of-the-european-union%E2%80%99s-humanitarian-response-to-the-refugee-crisis-in; DFAT, 'Performance of Australian Aid 2017–2018' (Australian Government – Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade, 2019), www.alnap.org/help-library/dfats-annual-performance-report-of-australian-aid-for-2017-18; S. Lister, 'Ethiopia: An Evaluation of WFP's Portfolio (2012–2017)' (Rome: WFP, 2019), www.wfp.org/publications/ethiopia-evaluation-wfps-portfolio-terms-reference.

security – reduced absenteeism, encouraged attendance and contributed to improved educational opportunities in several contexts. Meanwhile, in Bangladesh, livelihoods support helped to increase school attendance for girls by enabling families to increase their income, which they then used for school fees.[237] A notable exception to the achievement of educational outcomes was the lack of sufficient programming targeting early childhood development and pre-school education, particularly during the COVID-19 pandemic, when educational services had to move online.[238] Indeed, attempts to deliver other education activities remotely during the pandemic has mixed results.[239] Where possible, support was provided to help children return to school.[240]

As Chapter 5 shows, cash-based programming has steadily increased in humanitarian response and, with it, consistent evidence of its effectiveness. Because agencies have had to prove the case for cash over the past decade, it tends to be better monitored than other modalities, and there is a strong evidence base for outcome-level effectiveness. Between 2018 and 2021, cash and voucher assistance was highly effective at achieving positive outcomes for crisis-affected people in the short term. These included improved access to shelter,[241]

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237   Global key informant interviews.

238   D. Nugroho et al., 'It's Not Too Late to Act on Early Learning: Understanding and Recovering from the Impact of Pre-Primary Education Closures during COVID-19' (New York: UNICEF, 2021). www.alnap.org/help-library/it%E2%80%99s-not-too-late-to-act-on-early-learning-understanding-and-recovering-from-the-impact.

239   UNHCR, 'COVID-19 Evaluative Evidence Brief #2' 2021. www.alnap.org/help-library/covid-19-evaluative-evidence-brief-2.

240   UNHCR, 'Phase II of the RTA of UNICEF'S Response to COVID-19 in Eastern and Southern Africa' UNHCR, 2021. www.alnap.org/help-library/phase-ii-of-the-rta-of-unicef%E2%80%99s-response-to-covid-19-in-eastern-and-southern-africa-%E2%80%93.

241   J. Grasset and Q. Khattak, 'Cash on the Move: Adapting Multi-Purpose Cash "Plus" Assistance to Support People on the Move. A Case Study from Peru.' (London: Save the Children International, 2021). www.alnap.org/help-library/cash-on-the-move-adapting-multi-purpose-cash-%E2%80%9Cplus%E2%80%9D-assistance-to-support-people-on-the; J. Hagen-Zanker, M. Ulrichs, and R. Holmes, 'What Are the Effects of Cash Transfers for Refugees in the Context of Protracted Displacement? Findings from Jordan: The Effects of Cash Transfers for Refugees in Jordan', International Social Security Review 71, no. 2 (April 2018): 57–77. www.alnap.org/help-library/what-are-the-effects-of-cash-transfers-for-refugees-in-the-context-of-protracted.

education[242] and health services,[243] lower morbidity for children under the age of five,[244] improved food security and diet diversity,[245] a decline in child labour and early marriage,[246] increased feelings of dignity,[247] improved

242   Hagen-Zanker, Ulrichs, and Holmes, 'What Are the Effects of Cash Transfers for Refugees in the Context of Protracted Displacement?' https://www.alnap.org/help-library/what-are-the-effects-of-cash-transfers-for-refugees-in-the-context-of-protracted; K Abay et al., 'COVID-19 and Food Security in Ethiopia Do Social Protection Programs Protect?' (Washington DC: The World Bank Development Economics Development Research Group, 2020). www.alnap.org/help-library/covid-19-and-food-security-in-ethiopia; A. Hızıroglu Aygün et al., 'Keeping Refugee Children in School and Out of Work: Evidence from the World's Largest Humanitarian Cash Transfer Program', Discussion Paper No. 14513 (IZA Institute of Labor Economics, 2021). https://www.alnap.org/help-library/keeping-refugee-children-in-school-and-out-of-work-evidence-from-the-world%E2%80%99s-largest; W. Moussa et al., 'The Impact of Cash Transfers on Syrian Refugee Children in Lebanon. Economic Research Forum', Working Paper No. 1457 (Economic Research Forum, 2021). www.alnap.org/help-library/the-impact-of-cash-transfers-on-syrian-refugee-children-in-lebanon; Daniels, Anderson and Yusuf Ali, *2017 Somalia Response*. www.alnap.org/help-library/evaluation-of-the-2017-somalia-humanitarian-cash-based-response; WFP, 'WFP Evidence Summary Cash-Based Transfers Lessons from Evaluations.' www.alnap.org/help-library/wfp-evidence-summary-cash-based-transfers-lessons-from-evaluations; Roxin et al., 'Effectiveness of German Development Cooperation in Dealing with Conflict-Induced Forced Migration Crises.' www.alnap.org/help-library/effectiveness-of-german-development-cooperation-in-dealing-with-conflict-induced-forced; Chaaban et al., 'Multi-Purpose Cash Assistance in Lebanon.' https://www.alnap.org/help-library/multi-purpose-cash-assistance-in-lebanon; T. Frankenberger, K. Miller, and T.C. Taban, 'Decentralized Evaluation of UNHCR's Livelihoods Programme in South Sudan (2016–2018)' (Geneva: UNHCR, 2019). www.alnap.org/help-library/decentralized-evaluation-of-unhcrs-livelihoods-programme-in-south-sudan-2016-2018.

243   Hagen-Zanker, Ulrichs, and Holmes, 'What Are the Effects of Cash Transfers for Refugees in the Context of Protracted Displacement?' www.alnap.org/help-library/what-are-the-effects-of-cash-transfers-for-refugees-in-the-context-of-protracted; Abay et al., 'COVID-19 and Food Security in Ethiopia Do Social Protection Programs Protect?' www.alnap.org/help-library/covid-19-and-food-security-in-ethiopia; Moussa et al., 'The Impact of Cash Transfers on Syrian Refugee Children in Lebanon. Economic Research Forum.' www.alnap.org/help-library/the-impact-of-cash-transfers-on-syrian-refugee-children-in-lebanon; Daniels, Anderson and Yusuf Ali, *2017 Somalia Response*. www.alnap.org/help-library/evaluation-of-the-2017-somalia-humanitarian-cash-based-response; Chaaban et al., 'Multi-Purpose Cash Assistance in Lebanon.' www.alnap.org/help-library/multi-purpose-cash-assistance-in-lebanon.

244   Doocy et al., 'Cash and Voucher Assistance and Children's Nutrition Status in Somalia', Maternal & Child Nutrition 16, no. 3 (July 2020). www.alnap.org/help-library/cash-and-voucher-assistance-and-children%E2%80%99s-nutrition-status-in-somalia.

245   Hagen-Zanker, Ulrichs, and Holmes, 'What Are the Effects of Cash Transfers for Refugees in the Context of Protracted Displacement?' www.alnap.org/help-library/what-are-the-effects-of-cash-transfers-for-refugees-in-the-context-of-protracted; Abay et al., 'COVID-19 and Food Security in Ethiopia Do Social Protection Programs Protect?' www.alnap.org/help-library/covid-19-and-food-security-in-ethiopia; S. Kurdi, 'The Nutritional Benefits of Cash Transfers in Humanitarian Crises: Evidence from Yemen', World Development 148 (2021): 105664. www.alnap.org/help-library/the-nutritional-benefits-of-cash-transfers-in-humanitarian-crises-evidence-from-yemen; Chaaban et al., 'Multi-Purpose Cash Assistance in Lebanon.' www.alnap.org/help-library/multi-purpose-cash-assistance-in-lebanon; Frankenberger, Miller, and Taban, 'Decentralized Evaluation of UNHCR's Livelihoods Programme in South Sudan (2016–2018).' www.alnap.org/help-library/decentralized-evaluation-of-unhcrs-livelihoods-programme-in-south-sudan-2016-2018.

246   Moussa et al., 'The Impact of Cash Transfers on Syrian Refugee Children in Lebanon. Economic Research Forum.' www.alnap.org/help-library/the-impact-of-cash-transfers-on-syrian-refugee-children-in-lebanon; Roxin et al., 'Effectiveness of German Development Cooperation in Dealing with Conflict-Induced Forced Migration Crises.' www.alnap.org/help-library/effectiveness-of-german-development-cooperation-in-dealing-with-conflict-induced-forced; Chaaban et al., 'Multi-Purpose Cash Assistance in Lebanon.' www.alnap.org/help-library/multi-purpose-cash-assistance-in-lebanon; Frankenberger, Miller, and Taban, 'Decentralized Evaluation of UNHCR's Livelihoods Programme in South Sudan (2016–2018).' www.alnap.org/help-library/decentralized-evaluation-of-unhcrs-livelihoods-programme-in-south-sudan-2016-2018.

247   WFP, 'WFP Evidence Summary Cash-Based Transfers Lessons from Evaluations.' www.alnap.org/help-library/wfp-evidence-summary-cash-based-transfers-lessons-from-evaluations; Betts et al., *WFP Regional Response*. www.alnap.org/help-library/evaluation-of-the-wfp-regional-response-to-the-syrian-crisis-2015-2018; Koclejda, Roux-Fouillet, and Carlevaro, 'Afghanistan Shelter Evaluation Report.' www.alnap.org/help-library/afghan-shelter-evaluation-report.

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livelihood opportunities[248] and overall improvements in living conditions and well-being, as reported by aid recipients.[249]

However, these benefits are generally short-term; few studies measure the longer-term effects of cash transfers, but those that do so suggest that results are not sustained over time.[250] While this may be expected for what are often intended to be short-term emergency cash payments, the general insufficiency of humanitarian funding has in some cases required the system to shift towards approaches that can support resilience and reduce the likelihood of individuals needing repeated assistance. With this in mind, experiments with providing cash earlier to prevent greater livelihood losses may be promising (see the 'Timeliness of funding' section). Providing cash assistance through social protection systems can potentially deliver longer-term benefits, though there is often tension between humanitarian actors and governments over the amount of cash payment and targeting.[251] The effectiveness of cash is therefore not universal: its efficacy depends on design and on the level of resources available. For example, with respect to food security and nutritional outcomes, in some settings multi-purpose or unconditional cash was preferred by aid recipients and more effective, whereas in others in-kind aid and vouchers were found to be more reliable in improving food consumption and dietary diversity.[252]

> **The effectiveness of cash is well evidenced but not universal: it depends on design and sufficient resource and its effects tend to be short term.**

248   Key Aid Consulting, 'British Red Cross Final Evaluation: Nepal Earthquake Recovery Programme' (British Red Cross, 2018). www.alnap.org/help-library/british-red-cross-final-evaluation-nepal-earthquake-recovery-programme; WFP, 'WFP Evidence Summary Cash-Based Transfers Lessons from Evaluations.' www.alnap.org/help-library/wfp-evidence-summary-cash-based-transfers-lessons-from-evaluations; Frankenberger, Miller, and Taban, 'Decentralized Evaluation of UNHCR's Livelihoods Programme in South Sudan (2016–2018).' www.alnap.org/help-library/decentralized-evaluation-of-unhcrs-livelihoods-programme-in-south-sudan-2016-2018.

249   Hagen-Zanker, Ulrichs, and Holmes, 'What Are the Effects of Cash Transfers for Refugees in the Context of Protracted Displacement? www.alnap.org/help-library/what-are-the-effects-of-cash-transfers-for-refugees-in-the-context-of-protracted; Chloé Maillard and N. Minnitt, 'Comparative Study of the Effects of Different Cash Modalities on Gender Dynamics and People with Disabilities Aleppo, Syria' (Utrecht: Dutch Relief Alliance (DRA), 2021). www.alnap.org/help-library/comparative-study-of-the-effects-of-different-cash-modalities-on-gender-dynamics-and; Chaaban et al., 'Multi-Purpose Cash Assistance in Lebanon.' www.alnap.org/help-library/multi-purpose-cash-assistance-in-lebanon.

250   Moussa et al 'The Impact of Cash Transfers on Syrian Refugee Children in Lebanon', (ERF, 2021). www.alnap.org/help-library/the-impact-of-cash-transfers-on-syrian-refugee-children-in-lebanon.

251   Steets et al., *Drought Response in Ethiopia*. www.alnap.org/help-library/inter-agency-humanitarian-evaluation-of-the-drought-response-in-ethiopia.

252   P. Breard, 'Evidence Summary on COVID-19 and Food Security' (United Nations Evaluation Group (UNEG), 2021). www.alnap.org/help-library/inter-agency-humanitarian-evaluation-of-the-drought-response-in-ethiopia.

Was humanitarian action timely and of good quality?

Humanitarian action is deemed effective not only by what it achieves, but also by its quality and whether it arrived at the right time.

Quality

An area of continued improvement is attention to the quality of programming: agencies increasingly refer to Sphere minimum standards in their monitoring and there has been a noticeable uptick in the use of the Core Humanitarian Standard (CHS) to track and evaluate performance. Increased community participation, which is used as an indicator of compliance with CHS, was also credited with improving quality in other areas.[253] In the SOHS survey, 56% of aid recipients felt that aid was of sufficient quality, a slight increase from the 54% reported in the 2018 SOHS.

Changes in the quality of humanitarian programming over 2018–2021 were dominated by the themes of contextualisation and sector-specific multi-agency initiatives to improve quality. On contextualisation, there were efforts by local and national actors to adapt training and standards to their contexts. This was supported to some degree by the 2018 revision to Sphere, which focused on broadening the standards to be more adaptable according to context. While this was a positive move (we know that technical standards and tools have little impact unless they are contextualised), it also created challenges for field staff, who often lacked guidance on how to adapt the new standards.[254]

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253   e.g. Mutsaka et al., *Real-Time Review*. www.alnap.org/help-library/real-time-review-of-decs-response-to-cyclone-idai; ADE, *Response to the Rohingya Refugee Crisis*. www.alnap.org/help-library/evaluation-of-the-european-union%E2%80%99s-humanitarian-response-to-the-rohingya-refugee-crisis; SANDE CONSULTORES LDA, 'External Evaluation of Cyclone Idai and Kenneth Response in Mozambique' (Oxford/London: Oxfam and DEC, 2021). www.alnap.org/help-library/oxfam-independent-evaluation-of-cyclone-idai-and-kenneth-response.

254   Maillard, Setyawan and Juillard, *Real-Time Evaluation*. www.alnap.org/help-library/real-time-evaluation-of-sulawesi-indonesia-earthquake-and-tsunam; Schenkenberg van Mierop, Wendt and Kabir, *Joint Appeal to Rohingya*. www.alnap.org/help-library/independent-evaluation-of-the-aktion-deutschland-hilft-ev-adh-joint-appeal-to-%E2%80%9Crohingya; H. Daoudi, A. King, and R. Fransen, 'Meta-Analysis of the Engagement of UNFPA in Highly Vulnerable Contexts' (New York: UNFPA, 2018). www.alnap.org/help-library/meta-analysis-of-the-engagement-of-unfpa-in-highly-vulnerable-contexts; H. Audi et al., 'Lebanon, Livelihoods and Resilience Activities (2016–2019): Evaluation' (Rome: WFP, 2019). www.alnap.org/help-library/lebanon-livelihoods-and-resilience-activities-2016-2019-evaluation; FAO, 'Evaluation of FAO's Work on Gender' (Rome: FAO, 2019). www.alnap.org/help-library/evaluation-of-fao%E2%80%99s-work-on-gender; T Bene et al., 'Strategic Evaluation of WFP Support for Enhanced Resilience' (Rome: WFP, 2019). www.alnap.org/help-library/strategic-evaluation-of-wfp-support-for-enhanced-resilience.

In the WASH sector, a new global initiative sought to address long-standing quality concerns.[255] Led by Oxfam, Solidarités International and the Global WASH Cluster, the Accountability and Quality Assurance Initiative aimed to improve quality monitoring with the piloting of a new framework in 2022. The concerns that prompted this initiative emerged repeatedly in our research, including latrines frequently failing to meet basic Sphere standards, such as locks and lighting.[256] There were also challenges with using more sustainable modalities, such as supporting and maintaining water infrastructure, as opposed to water trucking. The overuse of branding by humanitarian agencies contributed to a lack of local ownership in water infrastructure, which meant it fell into disrepair.[257] A main contributor to these challenges was the absence of engagement and consultation with communities in WASH programmes.[258]

Shelter was another sector that faced frequent challenges in quality, particularly when materials needed to be provided at short notice and there was a lack of prepositioning. The quality of shelter is closely linked to the success of early recovery, the longer-term sustainability of humanitarian

255 ADE, *Response to the Rohingya Refugee Crisis.* www.alnap.org/help-library/evaluation-of-the-european-union%E2%80%99s-humanitarian-response-to-the-rohingya-refugee-crisis; SANDE CONSULTORES LDA, 'External Evaluation of Cyclone Idai and Kenneth Response in Mozambique.' www.alnap.org/help-library/oxfam-independent-evaluation-of-cyclone-idai-and-kenneth-response; Maunder et al., *Somalia: An Evaluation*; Shaheen, Wichterich and Sardiwal, *Norwegian Church Aid.* www.alnap.org/help-library/somalia-an-evaluation-of-wfps-portfolio-2012-2017; R Ndhlovu, H. Radice, and M. Genene, 'Evaluation of Oxfam's 2017 Drought Response in Ethiopia' (Oxford: Oxfam, 2018). www.alnap.org/help-library/evaluation-of-oxfams-2017-drought-response-in-ethiopia; D. Stone and K. Chowdhury, 'Christian Aid's Rohingya Crisis Response in Bangladesh' (Christian Aid, 2019). www.alnap.org/help-library/christian-aid%E2%80%99s-rohingya-crisis-response-in-bangladesh; Solutions Consulting, 'Final Evaluation Report. Disaster Response in Yemen' (Dublin/Paris: Concern Worldwide, Agency for Technical Cooperation and Development (ACTED), 2019). www.alnap.org/help-library/disaster-response-in-yemen.

256   ADE, *Response to the Rohingya Refugee Crisis*. www.alnap.org/help-library/evaluation-of-the-european-union%E2%80%99s-humanitarian-response-to-the-rohingya-refugee-crisis; Sansom, Leidecker and Gressmann, East Africa Crisis Appeal. www.alnap.org/help-library/disasters-emergency-committee-dec-evaluation-of-phases-1-and-2-of-the-east-africa; Ndhlovu, Radice, and Genene, 'Evaluation of Oxfam's 2017 Drought Response in Ethiopia.' www.alnap.org/help-library/evaluation-of-oxfams-2017-drought-response-in-ethiopia; H. Sultan et al., 'British Red Cross Bangladesh Population Movement Operation External Evaluation' (Geneva: ICRC/IFRC, 2019). www.alnap.org/help-library/british-red-cross-bangladesh-population-movement-operation-external-evaluation; Stone and Chowdhury, 'Christian Aid's Rohingya Crisis Response in Bangladesh' www.alnap.org/help-library/christian-aid%E2%80%99s-rohingya-crisis-response-in-bangladesh; Solutions Consulting, 'Final Evaluation Report. Disaster Response in Yemen.' www.alnap.org/help-library/disaster-response-in-yemen; Sanderson, Patnaik and Osborne, *Nepal Earthquakes Appeal.* www.alnap.org/help-library/nepal-earthquakes-appeal-meta-synthesis; IMPAQ International, LLC, 'Mid-Term Evaluation of "Support for the Integrated School Feeding Program" in Côte d'Ivoire' (Rome: WFP, USAID/OFDA, 2019). www.alnap.org/help-library/mid-term-evaluation-of-%E2%80%9Csupport-for-the-integrated-school-feeding-program%E2%80%9D-in-c%C3%B4te-d.

257 D. Martin and j. Brown, '"Littered with Logos!": An Investigation into the Relationship between Water Provision, Humanitarian Branding, Donor Accountability, and Self-Reliance in Ugandan Refugee Settlements', Refugee Survey Quarterly 40, no. 4 (16 December 2021): 433–58 www.alnap.org/help-library/littered-with-logos%E2%80%9D-an-investigation-into-the-relationship-between-water-provision; and country case studies for the SOHS.

258 S. Bourne, 'User-Centred Design and Humanitarian Adaptiveness', Case Study (London: ODI/ALNAP, 2019). www.alnap.org/system/files/content/resource/files/main/ALNAP_Adaptiveness_UCD%20final.pdf.

support and protection outcomes[259] – shelter experts in recent years have suggested that this makes quality shelter programming more complex than initially recognised and, similar to the WASH sector, there are efforts underway to improve learning and share best practices more widely.[260]

Finally, as we have seen in Chapter 3, insufficient funding is frequently cited in evaluations as affecting the quality of humanitarian assistance, particularly in the nutrition sector. In response to limited funds, agencies tended to reduce the quality and frequency of rations, which in one instance was linked to an outcome of higher rates of anaemia.[261]

Early and timely action

It stands to reason that aid that comes on time saves more lives and livelihoods and prevents suffering from becoming acute. When compared to where the system was a decade ago, or to development actors' engagement in crises today, the humanitarian system appears to be considerably faster.[262] Evaluations tend to be positive about the timeliness of response, even when aid takes over a week to reach recipients, on the basis that it is not possible for agencies to be faster given the context or the way the system currently functions. But, for people in crisis who have reached the limits of their coping capacities, waiting days for support can still be too long. Humanitarians at the country level, observing the causes and impacts of delays, have a dim view of their own timeliness. Recent work on anticipatory action suggests that it is possible for humanitarian assistance to be much faster than it is currently, reaching affected populations before they are impacted by a crisis event, and this study period was marked by a major new focus on acting as early as possible – both by better preparedness for and anticipation of crises.

259 K. Sutton and E. Latu, 'Tropical Cyclone Gita Response Program Evaluation' (Geneva: CARE International, 2018). www.alnap.org/help-library/tropical-cyclone-gita-response-program-evaluation; Koclejda, Roux-Fouillet, and Carlevaro, 'Afghanistan Shelter Evaluation Report.' www.alnap.org/help-library/afghan-shelter-evaluation-report; Sansom, Leidecker and Gressmann, *East Africa Crisis Appeal*. www.alnap.org/help-library/disasters-emergency-committee-dec-evaluation-of-phases-1-and-2-of-the-east-africa; Sanderson, Patnaik and Osborne, *Nepal Earthquakes Appeal*. www.alnap.org/help-library/nepal-earthquakes-appeal-meta-synthesis; Key Aid Consulting, 'Impact Analysis of Aid in Haiti – 10 Years On' (Swiss Solidarity, 2020). www.alnap.org/help-library/impact-analysis-of-aid-in-haiti-10-years-on; Key Aid Consulting, 'British Red Cross Final Evaluation: Nepal Earthquake Recovery Programme.' www.alnap.org/help-library/british-red-cross-final-evaluation-nepal-earthquake-recovery-programme.

260 Global Shelter Cluster, 'Shelter Projects 8th Edition. Case Studies of Humanitarian Shelter and Settlement Responses 2019-2020' (IOM on behalf of the Global Shelter Cluster, 2021), 2019–20. www.alnap.org/help-library/shelter-projects-8th-edition-case-studies-of-humanitarian-shelter-and-settlement.

261 M. Saboya et al., 'Evaluation of the Nutrition Components of the Algeria PRRO 200301. January 2013 – December 2017' (Rome: WFP, 2018). www.alnap.org/help-library/algeria-prro-200301-evaluation-of-the-nutrition-components.

262 In the SOHS assessment of humanitarian action over 2010–2012, the humanitarian system was considered to be far too slow – delays in the system's response to drought in the Horn of Africa feasibly led to hundreds of thousands of preventable deaths and aid recipients in the 2012 survey cited timeliness as the biggest improvement needed in the services provided to them.

Preparedness for timely response

Preparedness, presence and partnerships were critical to the timeliness of response over 2018–2021, both in rapid-onset disasters and in protracted crises and conflict. The response to Cyclone Idai in 2019 demonstrated this clearly: agencies that pre-positioned staff and stock before the cyclone were able to reach households within the first few days of the disaster, while for others a lack of existing supplies, staff capacity and partnerships caused considerable delays.[263] In Yemen, preparedness was credited with contributing to the 'eradication of cholera within a month of the disaster event despite limited access to the affected communities during the initial phase of the response.'[264]

Preparedness has to have the right measures in place at the right scale to be sufficient. In the case of Cyclone Idai, the pre-positioned stock met only 10% to 20% of estimated needs in the immediate aftermath.[265] Cash-based assistance has the potential to offer more sufficient, timely aid, but its timeliness depends largely on the pre-existence of registration lists and distribution systems. When these are in place, cash is faster than other modalities, but when they are not, it can be slower. In-country presence is also key, when it is appropriately staffed: in contexts like Mozambique, Malawi and Indonesia, some dual-mandate agencies struggled to take advantage of their country office presence due to the inexperience of development staff in undertaking a crisis response. Of course, the 'presence' of international agencies is increasingly shaped by partnerships with local NGOs and host governments, the quality of which were key to timeliness in many responses. In Haiti, for example, lack of pre-existing relationships between international organisations based in Port-au-Prince and local actors based in remote earthquake and tropical storm struck areas in the south led to delayed international aid for those communities outside, and ongoing humanitarian programmes were hampered during the COVID-19 pandemic by a 'scramble' to find local partners when international agencies had to withdraw staff.[266]

Data- and technology-driven innovations played an increased role in improving the preparedness of the system over the study period. WFP's development of a database related to natural hazard events to estimate numbers affected by crises was credited with improving the agency's capacity for timely response; elsewhere, humanitarians used drones to gather data for existing early warning systems.[267] Yet, despite greater

263   Baker et al., *Response to Cyclone Idai*. www.alnap.org/help-library/inter-agency-humanitarian-evaluation-of-the-response-to-cyclone-idai-in-mozambique; Mutsaka et al., *Real-Time Review*. www.alnap.org/help-library/real-time-review-of-decs-response-to-cyclone-idai.

264   Baker et al. (Ibid). www.alnap.org/help-library/inter-agency-humanitarian-evaluation-of-the-response-to-cyclone-idai-in-mozambique.

265   Baker et al. (Ibid). www.alnap.org/help-library/inter-agency-humanitarian-evaluation-of-the-response-to-cyclone-idai-in-mozambique.

266   A. Khan et al., 'Learning from disruption: evolution, revolution or status quo?, (ALNAP,2021) www.alnap.org/help-library/background-paper-2021-alnap-meeting.

267   T Hanley and et al., 'Evaluation of WFP's Capacity to Respond to Emergencies. Evaluation Report Vol I.' (Rome: WFP, 2019. www.alnap.org/help-library/evaluation-of-wfps-capacity-to-respond-to-emergencies.

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investment in contingency plans and early warning systems, these have had little overall impact on the speed of humanitarian response. Some agencies struggled with speed due to outdated or inadequate contingency plans and poor use of early warning systems. Contingency plans for some organisations in Mozambique and Malawi were less useful as they did not account for a Category 3 cyclone, an important lesson for dual-mandate agencies operating in traditional 'development' contexts that may face increased disaster risks due to climate change. There were also practical problems at all levels of early warning – from triggers being poorly tied to concrete actions and early warning data being inaccessible or poorly analysed, all the way to poor donor response to analysis, which means that responses were delayed even when early warning data is available.[268]

Surge mechanisms facilitated timely humanitarian response, but these also had their limitations. Despite their aims, surge mechanisms did not always bring in skilled expertise,[269] with one evaluation noting that the skillsets of surge staff were increasingly out of step with the agency's expanding operational ambitions.[270] While attempts were made before 2018 to develop inter-agency surge rosters, these did not appear to be making a difference to the quality or timeliness of response over 2018–2021. Even when capacity contributed to a timelier response, there were trade-offs in terms of the continuity and stability of programming; one country office described the impact of surge staff as 'chaotic'.[271]

268 UNICEF, *Work to Link.* www.alnap.org/help-library/evaluation-of-unicefs-work-to-link-humanitarian-and-development-programming; FAO, 'Evaluation of FAO's Contribution to the Humanitarian–Development–Peace Nexus 2014–2020' (Rome: FAO, 2021). www.alnap.org/help-library/evaluation-of-fao%E2%80%99s-contribution-to-the-humanitarian%E2%80%93development%E2%80%93peace-nexus-2014%E2%80%932020; Hanley and et al., 'Evaluation of WFP's Capacity to Respond to Emergencies. Evaluation Report Vol I.' www.alnap.org/help-library/evaluation-of-wfps-capacity-to-respond-to-emergencies; Steets et al., 'Inter-Agency Humanitarian Evaluation of the Drought Response in Ethiopia 2015–2018.' www.alnap.org/help-library/inter-agency-humanitarian-evaluation-of-the-drought-response-in-ethiopia; FAO, 'Evaluation of the role and work of the Sub-Regional Office for North Africa (SNE) 2017–2020' (Rome: FAO, 2020), 2017–20. www.alnap.org/help-library/evaluation-of-the-role-and-work-of-the-sub-regional-office-for-north-africa-sne-2017.

269 Baker et al., *Response to Cyclone Idai.* www.alnap.org/help-library/inter-agency-humanitarian-evaluation-of-the-response-to-cyclone-idai-in-mozambique; UNFPA, 'Evaluation of UNFPA Support to the Prevention of, Response to and Elimination of Gender-Based Violence and Harmful Practices (2012–2017) Volume 1.' (UNFPA, 2018). www.alnap.org/help-library/evaluation-of-unfpa-support-to-the-prevention-of-response-to-and-elimination-of-gender; Daoudi, King, and Fransen, 'Meta-Analysis of the Engagement of UNFPA in Highly Vulnerable Contexts.' www.alnap.org/help-library/meta-analysis-of-the-engagement-of-unfpa-in-highly-vulnerable-contexts.

270 Hanley and et al., 'Evaluation of WFP's Capacity to Respond to Emergencies. Evaluation Report Vol I.' www.alnap.org/help-library/evaluation-of-wfps-capacity-to-respond-to-emergencies.

271 Baker et al., *Response to Cyclone Idai.* www.alnap.org/help-library/inter-agency-humanitarian-evaluation-of-the-response-to-cyclone-idai-in-mozambique; UNFPA, 'Evaluation of UNFPA Support to the Prevention of, Response to and Elimination of Gender-Based Violence and Harmful Practices (2012–2017) Volume 1.' www.alnap.org/help-library/evaluation-of-unfpa-support-to-the-prevention-of-response-to-and-elimination-of-gender; J. Murray, F. Pedersen, and S. Ziesche, 'Evaluation of the Global Cluster for Early Recovery' (New York: UNDP, 2018). www.alnap.org/help-library/evaluation-of-the-global-cluster-for-early-recovery; SANDE CONSULTORES LDA, 'External Evaluation of Cyclone Idai and Kenneth Response in Mozambique.' www.alnap.org/help-library/oxfam-independent-evaluation-of-cyclone-idai-and-kenneth-response.

Similar trade-offs are evident more widely as humanitarian agencies struggle to find the balance between systems that enable fast response and those that support quality, relevance and engagement. Consulting with crisis-affected populations and taking appropriate steps to engage host governments were cited frequently by humanitarian staff as in tension with timeliness. The reliance on pre-positioned stock for speed means that agencies are delivering what they have, rather than what affected populations necessarily say is of most priority for them – with anticipatory or rapid cash payments being an important exception.

The three main impediments to timely response were funding (discussed below), import delays and access. Both international and local procurement delays have increased since the beginning of 2021, but international procurement has seen the biggest increase, with logisticians citing import delays as a key risk to humanitarian supply chains.[272] Poor-quality roads and infrastructure were a major constraint to the arrival of humanitarian assistance. Echoing a major theme of this edition of the SOHS, bureaucratic impediments and government blockades were also key constraints to timeliness. In Tigray, where the government imposed a blockade on aid in June 2021, 18% of aid recipients said that aid was timely, in stark contrast to other countries, where 70% or more were positive about the timeliness of assistance. Security challenges also caused access constraints. For example, in Haiti humanitarian actors had to negotiate with gangs to secure road access to deliver goods to the earthquake- and storm-affected south of the country.[273]

Anticipating and preventing crises

Until recently, the promise of anticipatory action – that supporting vulnerable populations ahead of a crisis event is more effective, efficient and dignified – has been largely hypothetical. Despite numerous studies on the return on investment of acting early, these rely on models rather than empirical data, and the experience and evidence for anticipation in the humanitarian system has otherwise been weak.[274] However, much has changed in recent years and the rise of anticipatory and early action is one of the most significant shifts observed in the system in this edition of the SOHS.

Over the period, agencies at the forefront of the anticipatory agenda – the German Red Cross, IFRC, members of the Start Network and WFP – continued or expanded their pilots of forecast-based financing and anticipatory action. In 2019, the joint WFP-START anticipatory funding mechanism, the ARC Replica, was triggered for the first time to provide early

> **The rise of anticipatory and early action is one of the most significant shifts observed in the system in this edition of the SOHS.**

272   CHORD, 'The State of Logistics and Supply Chain in the Humanitarian Context. Global Survey Findings' (Center For Humanitarian Logistics and Regional Development (CHORD), 2022). www.alnap.org/help-library/the-state-of-logistics-and-supply-chain-in-the-humanitarian-context-global-survey.

273   Global key informant interviews.

274   L. Weingärtner, T. Pforr, and E. Wilkinson, 'The Evidence Base on Anticipatory Action' (Rome: WFP, 2020). www.alnap.org/help-library/the-evidence-base-on-anticipatory-action.

action to drought in Senegal, leading to the largest payment to date for a civil society actor for early action ($10.4 million to six agencies).[275] Anticipatory action accounted for 18% of all START-funded humanitarian action in 2020, and in 2021 the IFRC's Disaster Response Emergency Fund allocated over 1 million Swiss francs ($1 million) to forecast-based financing.[276]

The high-level commitment to anticipation by the Emergency Relief Coordinator, Mark Lowcock, was a potential game-changer for anticipatory action in the humanitarian space, elevating the issue and turning OCHA's pooled funding mechanisms into one of the largest pilot schemes for anticipatory financing in the humanitarian system. Between 2019 and 2021, $140 million was allocated through the Central Emergency Response Fund to 13 country pilots. The new Centre for Disaster Protection, and the creation of a multi-agency Anticipation Hub, made significant contributions to learning on early action through original research and the consolidation of resources and evidence.[277]

There is evidence for the effectiveness of anticipatory action, but the more critical question – is anticipatory action *more* effective (or cost-effective) than traditional post-crisis response? – has been difficult to answer due to the inability to make any meaningful comparison across crises or responses. Since 2018, two studies have made progress in this area. Pre-crisis payments made in anticipation of flooding in Bangladesh (by the Red Cross and Red Crescent in 2017 and by WFP in 2019) resulted in improved household food consumption, reduced debt and improved employment rates for households receiving the payment in comparison to households that did not.[278] In the WFP programme, even a one-day difference in when the cash payment was received had an impact on well-being outcomes.[279]

Whether anticipatory action in the humanitarian system will extend beyond pilots to changing how the wider system does its job remains to be seen. Acting before a crisis is subject to criticism that it is at odds with the classic humanitarian model and, since no contingency plan is perfect at predicting the scale or nature of a crisis, there are questions as to how much time humanitarians should devote to these.[280] Others perceive

275 Start Network, 'Annual Review 2020' (Start Network, 2021). www.alnap.org/help-library/annual-review-2020.

276 This figure does not include additional investments by individual Partner National Societies in anticipatory action and therefore the total figure for the Red Cross/Red Crescent Movement's spending on forecast based financing is higher than the DREF allocation.

277 'Centre for Disaster Protection', n.d., www.disasterprotection.org; 'Anticipation Hub', n.d.

278 While these studies did not directly compare households that received a pre-crisis payment to those receiving a post-crisis payment of equal value at a later point in time, they provided an accurate comparison between anticipatory payments and 'normal' post-crisis payments in so far as post-crisis payments still had not been made 80 days after the floods (and therefore comparison of an early payment to those who didn't receive any payment 80 days after a crisis was valid). [email communication, Ruth Hill].

279 A. Pople et al., 'Anticipatory Cash Transfers In Climate Disaster Response', Working Paper (London: Centre for Disaster Protection, 2021). www.alnap.org/help-library/anticipatory-cash-transfers-in-climate-disaster-response.

280 Grünewald and Farias, *Cholera in Time of War*. www.alnap.org/help-library/cholera-in-time-of-war-evaluation-of-the-msf-ocba-cholera-response-in-yemen.

anticipatory action as potentially diverting limited funding away from humanitarian response, and question whether anticipatory action can ever truly be 'no regrets' if a crisis fails to materialise as expected and assistance goes to people who are not severely affected.[281] In reply, supporters of anticipatory action point to the chronic and extreme vulnerability of people targeted for humanitarian assistance as justification for the 'no regrets' approach. One key informant claimed:

> 'If you think in Bangladesh you give $50 to a family that in the end was only flooded up to their hip instead of up to their neck, I'm happy to go in front of [the donor] and explain why we did this.'

Timeliness of funding

Outside of anticipatory pilots, humanitarian funding is often delayed or uncertain at the onset of a crisis, leaving agencies to take on the risk of responding to a crisis with internal funds, while being unable to recoup the costs from a donor further down the line. A study of 10 crisis responses that took place between 2015 and 2019 found that only 41% of total response funding had been committed after six months and, of what was committed, only 64% was disbursed 18 months post-crisis.[282] Donors were generally quick to disburse funds for COVID-19, but these were slow to reach frontline responders. The pandemic also affected the timeliness of funding in other ways. The move to remote meetings, for example, led to delays in the allocation of pooled funds, and local organisations reported delays in payment due to the closure of in-country financial institutions.[283]

At country level, the lack of timely funding is widely felt and contributes to humanitarian practitioners' poor assessment of their own timeliness. Only 48% of practitioners felt their sector was 'Good' or 'Excellent' at responding in a timely way[284] – an improvement on the 2018 survey (41%) but still one of the worst-performing areas according to the practitioner survey. Although affected populations were somewhat more positive about timeliness, with 57% saying they were satisfied with when aid arrived, this was a decline from 69% in 2018. Local and national NGOs are worst affected by funding

281   Grünewald and Farias, *Cholera in Time of War*. www.alnap.org/help-library/cholera-in-time-of-war-evaluation-of-the-msf-ocba-cholera-response-in-yemen; FAO, DI and NRC, 'Development Actors at the Nexus: Lessons from Crises in Bangladesh, Cameroon and Somalia' (Rome/Bristol/Oslo: FAO, DI and NRC, 2021), 10. www.alnap.org/help-library/development-actors-at-the-nexus-lessons-from-crises-in-bangladesh-cameroon-and-0.

282   E. Crossley et al., 'Funding Disasters: Tracking Global Humanitarian and Development Funding for Response to Natural Hazards' (Centre for Disaster Protection and Development Initiatives, 2021). www.alnap.org/help-library/funding-disasters-tracking-global-humanitarian-and-development-funding-for-response-to.

283   OCHA, 'Somalia Humanitarian Fund Annual Report 2020' (Somalia: OCHA, 2020). www.alnap.org/help-library/somalia-humanitarian-fund-annual-report-2020.

284   36.3% said 'Good' and 11.5% said 'Excellent'.

delays and challenges in securing funds: 'Sometimes this causes problems because the community knows that the project is going to start but it takes time. In most cases, the assistance is always delivered late.'[285]

Almost all examples of timely humanitarian action from the SOHS evaluation synthesis were supported through one of three types of mechanism: (1) pre-arranged funding agreements with donors; (2) pooled funds such as the anticipatory or rapid response windows of the CERF, country-based and NGO pooled funds, and the Red Cross/Red Crescent Movement's Disaster Response Emergency Fund; or (3) agencies' own internal contingency funds. There is clear evidence that, without these, humanitarian action would have been substantially delayed in many responses. For example, in Bangladesh, through its anticipatory funding window, the CERF made its fastest-ever allocation within four hours of the early action trigger being reached, disbursing $5.2 million to reach 43,000 households prior to the peak of the floods.[286] In Ethiopia, where delayed bilateral funding was a major factor in the slow and inadequate response, the CERF was one of the main sources of funding for several months.[287] While these types of funding mechanisms appear to make a difference, none of them is currently being used at scale, and this type of funding continues to occupy a small percentage of overall humanitarian spending.

A similar story played out at the broader level, where donors have gradually increased the funding they report for disaster preparedness and disaster risk reduction (DRR), but the overall proportion of this funding remained the same given the increases in overall international humanitarian assistance. Over the study period, support for DRR and preparedness increased by 50%, from $1.6 billion in 2018 to $2.4 billion in 2020. As a percentage of overall official humanitarian aid, however, it remained stable at 4.2% in both years. The top supporters for preparedness have also largely remained the same: the UK, US, EU, Japan and Germany, with Japan increasing its preparedness and DRR funding significantly in 2020. Germany has been a leader in funding the specific area of anticipation and early action, pledging to provide a minimum of 5% of its funding to anticipatory mechanisms by 2023.[288] However, overall funding to date for such anticipatory action or preparedness remains too piecemeal to fully maximise their benefits to people experiencing or threatened by crises. For example, despite the increase in CERF funding for anticipation, this still remains a small percentage of its overall allocation at only 3.8% in 2020 and 5.2% in 2021.

285   Key informant interview in DRC.

286   CERF Advisory Group, 'Anticipatory Action Update' (Central Emergency Response Fund (CERF), 2020). www.alnap.org/help-library/anticipatory-action-update.

287   C. Sozi, 'Ethiopia Anticipatory Action Drought 2021' (New York: UN Central Emergency Response Fund (CERF), January 2021). www.alnap.org/help-library/ethiopia-anticipatory-action-drought-2021.

288   Foreign Minister Heiko Maas, 'Statement by Foreign Minister Heiko Maas at the High-Level Humanitarian Event on Anticipatory Action' (German Federal Foreign Office, 9 September 2021). www.alnap.org/help-library/statement-by-foreign-minister-heiko-maas-at-the-high-level-humanitarian-event-on.

Figure 33: Largest donors to disaster risk reduction and preparedness, 2018–2020

Funding for DRR and preparedness increased by 50% over 2018 to 2020 but continued to comprise around 4.2% of all humanitarian funding. EU Institutions, Germany, Japan and the UK have consistently been among the top five donors to disaster risk reduction and preparedness from 2018 to 2020.

2020
- EU Institutions: $271m
- United Kingdom: $406m
- United States: $199m
- Germany: $182m
- Japan: $604m
- Other donors: $695m

2019
- EU Institutions: $242m
- United Kingdom: $415m
- France: $220m
- Germany: $233m
- Japan: $190m
- Other donors: $590m

2018
- EU Institutions: $338m
- United Kingdom: $203m
- United States: $194m
- Germany: $172m
- Japan: $162m
- Other donors: $551m

Legend:
- EU Institutions
- Germany
- United Kingdom
- Japan
- United States
- Other donors
- France

Source: Development Initiatives based on OECD DAC Creditor Reporting System.

Notes: Figures are bilateral allocable ODA. Excludes ODA targeted to COVID-19. See methodology in Annex 3. Data has been rounded up.

Focus on: Hunger

After a decline in the early 2000s, food crises regained prominence over the past decade, with food insecurity and malnutrition accounting for a significant proportion of the humanitarian caseload. Within the course of this SOHS study period, the number of people facing acute food insecurity[289] rose by 33% – from 124 million in 2017 to an estimated 161 million in 2021[290] – and the amount requested in appeals to address these needs rose by 45% between 2018 and 2021.[291] Food continued to be the most commonly cited need by aid recipients in the SOHS survey (38%).

While drought and other climate events played a role in driving these increases, conflict and a return of 'intentional starvation'[292] as a strategy for population control were the primary causes.[293] COVID-19 also increased food insecurity via its effects on livelihoods, although the impact was not as dire as initially projected by agencies, who had predicted a doubling in the number of food-insecure people worldwide.[294] Even so, the ripple effects of COVID-19 on food security are likely to be felt for years, as rising inflation and the strains on the global supply chain have left the global food system less able to absorb and adjust to shocks.

The 2018 SOHS covered the effectiveness of the humanitarian response to the 'four great famines' of 2017: Nigeria, Somalia, South Sudan and Yemen. It concluded that the system had generally succeeded in learning lessons from the flawed and delayed response to the Horn of Africa

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289 The Integrated Phase Classification (IPC) is an internationally accepted five-phase scale which governments and humanitarian actors use to understand the severity of food emergencies. Phase 1, is minimal food insecurity, phase 2 is 'stressed', phase 3 is crisis, phase 4, emergency, and phase 5, catastrophe/famine/likely famine. Acute food insecurity is IPC phase 3 or above. For a full description see IPC, 'Integrated Phase Classification', Famine Early Warning System Network (FEWS NET), n.d. https://fews.net.

290 FSIN and Global Network Against Food Crises, 'Global Report on Food Crisis' (Rome: Food Security Information Network (FSIN), 2021). www.alnap.org/help-library/global-report-on-food-crises-2021.

291 Although one reason for this increase is due to differences in RRPs were included in aggregate appeals data – see Chapters 2 and 3 for more.

292 Alex De Waal, 'Social Nutrition and Prohibiting Famine', World Nutrition 9, no. 1 (19 April 2018): 31. www.alnap.org/help-library/social-nutrition-and-prohibiting-famine.

293 Alex De Waal. (Ibid); GRFC 2021. www.alnap.org/help-library/social-nutrition-and-prohibiting-famine.

294 OCHA, 'Global Humanitarian Overview 2020' (Geneva: OCHA, 2020). www.alnap.org/help-library/global-humanitarian-overview-2020.

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drought in 2011.[295] In Somalia in particular, the system acted much faster, and interventions were perceived to be effective at averting famine and preventing deaths. Further evaluations of the famine responses published in 2018 or later have provided additional evidence for these conclusions.[296] There are, however, widespread concerns that the 2017 famine response was a one-off, rather than an indication of system change.[297] Key decisions in the 2017 famine were made by individuals who had direct experience and memory of what had happened in 2011, making performance highly contingent on individuals rather than systematic reforms; one evaluation from 2018 notes that, while the 2017 response featured a number of innovations in early action and anticipation, 'There is no plan as yet to ensure that the innovations adopted in 2017 will be sustained.'[298]

Data and evaluations continue to show that the political barriers to acting early to address food crises take precedence over issues with effectiveness. As described in Chapter 7, the technical performance of the system at addressing hunger remains strong. Since 2018, however, the system has grappled with several challenges alongside the resurgence of famine and hunger crises, particularly around conflict-driven famine, the politicisation and manipulation of food security data, insufficient funds and, in some cases, an over-emphasis on food aid that is seen as potentially undermining other forms of support.

Conflict-driven famine

A defining feature of the humanitarian system's response to hunger in recent years was the continued weaponisation of access to food that made principled humanitarian action increasingly important for food crises and highlighted the need for stronger humanitarian advocacy at the highest levels. Over 2018–2021, state and non-state armed groups restricted access to food in conflicts in Myanmar, Syria, Ethiopia, South Sudan and Yemen.[299] In what was considered a positive exception to the new age of declining multilateral support for humanitarian space, the UN Security

> **Key decisions in the 2017 famine were made by individuals who had direct experience and memory of what had happened in 2011, making performance highly contingent on individuals rather than systematic reforms.**

295   ALNAP, 'The State of the Humanitarian System.', ALNAP Study (London: ALNAP, 2018) www.alnap.org/help-library/the-state-of-the-humanitarian-system-sohs-2018-full-report; D. Hillier and B. Dempsey, 'A Dangerous Delay: the cost of late response to early warnings in the 2011 drought in the Horn of Afrrica, Oxfam, 2012. www.alnap.org/help-library/a-dangerous-delay-the-cost-of-late-response-to-early-warnings-in-the-2011-drought-in.

296   Daniels, Anderson and Yusuf Ali, *2017 Somalia Response*. www.alnap.org/help-library/evaluation-of-the-2017-somalia-humanitarian-cash-based-response; Maunder et al., *Somalia: An Evaluation*. www.alnap.org/help-library/somalia-an-evaluation-of-wfps-portfolio-2012-2017.

297   Maunder et al., *Somalia: An Evaluation*. www.alnap.org/help-library/somalia-an-evaluation-of-wfps-portfolio-2012-2017; D. Maxwell et al., 'Viewpoint: Determining Famine: Multi-Dimensional Analysis for the Twenty-First Century', Food Policy 92 (2020): 101832. www.alnap.org/help-library/viewpoint-determining-famine-multi-dimensional-analysis-for-the-twenty-first-century.

298   Maunder et al., *Somalia: An Evaluation*. www.alnap.org/help-library/somalia-an-evaluation-of-wfps-portfolio-2012-2017.

299   UN Secretary General, 'With 30 Million Facing Famine, Secretary-General Announces Prevention Task Force, Warns Security Council against Cutting Aid as Solution to Economic Woes', United Nations, 2021. www.alnap.org/help-library/with-30-million-facing-famine-secretary-general-announces-prevention-task-force-warns.

Council passed UNSC Resolution 2417, which prohibited the use of starvation as a method of warfare. Further resolutions followed on South Sudan and Yemen, based on confidential reports submitted by OCHA on conflict-induced food insecurity in both countries. In April 2021, the Secretary-General established a High-Level Task Force on Preventing Famine, which sought to improve advocacy and resource mobilisation to avert the risk of famine worldwide.

Measuring and prioritising across the IPC phases

The high-level focus on famine has also brought renewed scrutiny to the way it is measured. Famine declarations are based on the Integrated Food Security Phase Classification (IPC) process, which draws on a range of indicators including mortality and nutritional survey data, and are determined through an intensive consultation process among country-level technical staff and government representatives. Food security measurements have the distinction of being both technically and politically complicated. While the IPC process is generally a positive example of interagency and government decision-making that attempts to be driven by objective data, this process broke down in South Sudan in 2020, resulting in two competing IPC analyses and classifications being released – one by the IPC technical working group and the other by the government. A review of what went wrong concluded that a combination of patchy data and growing distrust between the government and aid agencies were primary drivers, leading to accusations from each side that a technical process had been hijacked by preferences for particular outcomes.[300] Elsewhere, governments have sought to avoid perceptions of state failure by delaying famine declarations; and in Yemen the IPC process was criticised by some key informants as being too opaque.[301] The South Sudan experience, which featured a complete breakdown in relations between the government and the humanitarian system, reflects the growing challenges for famine response in conflicts, and 'has begun to cast doubt over how the IPC should be managed in such contexts'.[302]

There may also be a need to reconsider how the system engages in food crises, especially as the slow-onset and cyclical effects of climate change continue to build. Currently, IPC Phase 5 crises – famines – command greater attention and resources, as they tend to fit the classic humanitarian model of an acute, short-term response. Fewer resources and less attention are directed to protracted hunger crises, where populations remain at lower levels of emergency (IPC Phases 3 and 4) but for longer

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300   Margie Buchanan-Smith, Jane Cocking and Sam Sharp, Independent Review of the IPC South Sudan (London: HPG/ODI, 2021). www.alnap.org/help-library/independent-review-of-the-ipc-south-sudan.

301   Maxwell et al., 'Viewpoint'. www.alnap.org/help-library/viewpoint-determining-famine-multi-dimensional-analysis-for-the-twenty-first-century.

302   Buchanan-Smith, Cocking and Sharp, *IPC South Sudan*. www.alnap.org/help-library/independent-review-of-the-ipc-south-sudan.

periods of time, resulting in higher excess mortality rates.[303] For example, in South Sudan and Somalia, excess mortality was lower during the 2017 famine period than in the periods preceding and following it, and yet the famine commanded far more resources.[304]

Funding for food crises

Even for addressing famine and more extreme food crises, the system is under-resourced. Despite the alarm raised on COVID-19's likely impacts on food security, funding to food security, nutrition and agriculture dropped in 2020. Funding rebounded in 2021, with $7.75 billion going to these three sectors, although far lower than required, and this was the case before the start of the Ukraine–Russia conflict in early 2022, which is expected to have significant effects on levels of need and the cost of food aid. The Global Network Against Food Crises, for example, estimates that 36 countries facing food crises relied on Ukraine and Russia for 10% or more of their wheat imports.[305]

Experts have also called for smarter funding for food crises, primarily through a better blend of development and humanitarian financing and a shift towards preparedness and prediction to support a more anticipatory and preventative approach. Examples over the study period included the Famine Action Mechanism, launched by the World Bank in 2018 to serve as an anticipatory funding mechanism for addressing food crises, and the rise of Forecast-based Financing and Action by the IFRC and WFP, which were used to support early action to address food insecurity in Mongolia and Somalia, among others, over 2018–2021. While the FAM is no longer in operation as a separate modality, its principles have been incorporated into several other Bank mechanisms, including a new Early Response Financing modality under IDA19, which provides financing to food security crises based on preparedness plans and early warning data.[306] While the World Bank Group brings significant financial heft – as of 2021 its Early Response window stood at $1 billion – its focus on governments and its longer timeframes have made it difficult to observe its potential impact on food insecurity or on reducing humanitarian need. More widely, while

303   Maxwell et al., 'Viewpoint'. www.alnap.org/help-library/viewpoint-determining-famine-multi-dimensional-analysis-for-the-twenty-first-century.

304   Maxwell et al. (Ibid). www.alnap.org/help-library/viewpoint-determining-famine-multi-dimensional-analysis-for-the-twenty-first-century; F. Checchi et al., 'Estimates of Crisis-Attributable Mortality in South Sudan, December 2013 – April 2018' (London: London School of Higiene & Tropical Medicine (LSHTM), 2018), www.alnap.org/help-library/estimates-of-crisis-attributable-mortality-in-south-sudan-december-2013-april-2018-a.

305   Global Network Against Food Crises. www.fightfoodcrises.net.

306   Global key informant interview.

development assistance for addressing food crises has risen over the past few years, it remains lower in total than humanitarian funding for the three key sectors of food security, nutrition and agriculture.[307]

Finally, the rise in food insecurity was perceived as leading to an overemphasis on these needs over others, raising questions as to what the immediate future of humanitarian aid will look like if hunger remains a central focus. While food continues to be a priority concern for people in crisis,[308] aid recipients in food-insecure areas in Yemen, DRC and Ethiopia also reported an over-emphasis on food aid that neglected other important needs, such as healthcare, psychosocial support, education, livelihoods and protection.

307   Global Network Against Food Crises, 'War in Ukraine and Its Impacts on Food Crises. A Review of Existing Analyses and Evidence', Global Network Against Food Crises, 26 May 2022. www.alnap.org/help-library/war-in-ukraine-and-its-impacts-on-food-crises-a-review-of-existing-analyses-and.

308   In the SOHS aid recipient survey, food continued to be the top need people cited when asked "What sort of aid was most needed?" at 38% of respondents.

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Yemen case study:
Understanding effectiveness in a food crisis

Author: Local researcher, Yemen
Name withheld to protect the author's identity

Estimates from late 2021 suggest that 16.2 million people (45% of the population) in Yemen are food-insecure and WFP has estimated that 47,000 people are living in famine-like conditions.[309] Conflict is a key contributor to food insecurity, with its negative impact on the Yemeni currency, damage to transport infrastructure, disruption of business and incomes and displacement of populations. The most recent large-scale conflict began in 2014 between Ansar Allah and the internationally recognised Hadi government, later supported by a Saudi-led coalition. In recent years, a UAE-separatist group, the Southern Transitional Council, has split off from the Hadi government, dividing authority in the south of Yemen, while Houthi rebels control much of the north. Fighting intensified in 2021 as Houthi fighters tried to take control of the city of Ma'rib, the Hadi government's last remaining stronghold in the north.

A November 2021 assessment of the war's impact estimated that, by the end of 2021, the conflict had led to '377,000 deaths – nearly 60% of which were indirect and caused by issues associated with conflict like lack of access to food, water, and healthcare'.[310] Of these deaths, a majority were estimated to be young children, who are especially vulnerable to under-nutrition and malnutrition. By the end of the study period, WFP estimated that 2.25 million children under five needed treatment for global acute malnutrition (GAM)[311] and the World Health Organization estimated that 400,000 were at risk of dying if they did not receive treatment. At the time of writing, the Ukraine war is expected to put increasing pressure on already high food prices in Yemen, by disrupting direct supply chains of wheat, rising global food prices, longer alternative supply chains and higher shipping costs. A rapidly deteriorating economy coupled with escalating conflict has led to claims that Yemen is home to the world's worst food security crisis.

309 WFP 'Yemen Profile', (Yemen, WFP, 16 Nov 2021). www.wfp.org/countries/yemen.

310 Hanna, D. K. Bohl, and J. D. Moyer, 'Assessing the Impact of War in Yemen: Pathways for Recovery' (New York: UNDP, 2021). www.alnap.org/help-library/assessing-the-impact-of-war-in-yemen-pathways-for-recovery.

311 Global Acute Malnutrition (GAM) is a measure of acute malnutrition in refugee children aged between 6 and 59 months. GAM provides information on the percentage of all children in this age range in a refugee population who are classified with low weight-for-height and/or oedema. It is obtained by combining the number of children in this age range who have moderate acute malnutrition and severe acute malnutrition.

'Active hostilities, the presence of landmines, insecurity, poor road infrastructure [and] poor telecommunication network coverage'[312] challenge operations and make it difficult to collate accurate food security data for many parts of the country. As in South Sudan, interviewees noted challenges in the IPC process, including irregular data and competing interpretations. While the IPC process is intended to facilitate analysis of robust quantitative datasets, it is ultimately a process based on building consensus between humanitarians and local authorities, delivered in relatively pressured time frames. An assessment by the Famine Review Committee of the IPC classifications in Yemen found the extrapolation of data used for the Acute Food Insecurity and Acute Malnutrition classifications to be implausible and concluded that there 'is not a body of evidence supporting a famine classification.'[313] While food security is a real problem in Yemen, the emphasis on IPC Phase 5 may have distracted from the large populations facing higher mortality and morbidity in areas classified IPC Phases 3 and 4.[314] Moreover, the Famine Review Committee warned that ongoing changes in Yemen's geopolitics, food supply chains and fuel prices present significant risk factors. More accurate, monitorable data is needed to ensure that the food security situation does not become more severe.[315]

An important implication of the IPC famine declarations in Yemen has been the prioritisation of food aid in the response, which has had knock-on effects on other forms of support. Food aid and nutritional support comprised 48% of funding in 2021, with logistics accounting for an extra 15%. In December 2021, WFP was providing 13 million people with general food assistance.

Food aid has proved a lifeline for hundreds of thousands of families in Yemen and enabled recipients to supplement their livelihood strategies and invest their resources in other needs: 'Most of the aid helps me provide my six kids with food; bread and butter, the school expenses and sometimes medicine', explained one recipient. Cash and voucher assistance was also well received and helped to mitigate the issue of recipients selling their food aid package – usually at a lower value – to meet competing needs. The delivery of cash, vouchers, or in-kind food is determined by market functionality, WFP's capability to deliver different modalities, and the availability of service providers. [316] UNHCR found

> An important implication of the IPC famine declarations in Yemen has been the prioritisation of food aid in the response, which has had knock-on effects on other forms of support.

312   OCHA, 'Yemen Situation Report' (Yemen: OCHA, January 2022). www.alnap.org/help-library/yemen-situation-report.

313   D. Maxwell et al., 'Famine review of the IPC Acute Food Insecurity and Acute Malnutrition Analysis: Conclusions and recommendations for five areas in Yemen.' (IPC, 2022). www.alnap.org/help-library/famine-review-of-the-ipc-acute-food-insecurity-and-acute-malnutrition-analysis.

314   Maxwell et al., 'Viewpoint'. www.alnap.org/help-library/viewpoint-determining-famine-multi-dimensional-analysis-for-the-twenty-first-century.

315   D. Maxwell et al., 'Famine review of the IPC Acute Food Insecurity and Acute Malnutrition Analysis.' www.alnap.org/help-library/famine-review-of-the-ipc-acute-food-insecurity-and-acute-malnutrition-analysis.

316   WFP 'Yemen Annual Country Report 2021' (WFP, 2021). www.wfp.org/operations/annual-country-report/?operation_id=YE01&year=2021#/23453/23454.

that cash assistance led to an improvement in most food consumption indicators up to July 2021 and a reduction in the use of negative coping mechanisms, with 91% of households spending cash assistance on food.[317] Monitoring from WFP does, however, show that the deterioration of food consumption in 2021 was more pronounced among cash recipients, possibly due to currency fluctuations.[318]

There is also evidence of poor coordination in some sectors, ineffective targeting and low-quality food aid. Despite the increase in cash and voucher assistance, focus group participants in Yemen still reported reselling elements of their food baskets, and noted that the quality and diversity of the food provided had reduced over time, fetching a lower price at market. Aid workers in Yemen spoke of inefficient coordination between the actors providing different aid streams, explaining that agencies do not share recipient lists in some sectors and that there is a high chance of some individuals receiving multiple aid packages, while others are missed. This is compounded by the challenges humanitarian workers face in accessing conflict areas and conducting needs assessments, which make accurate targeting difficult. Households rely on resources mobilised through informal support networks to cope and survive.[319]

A significant proportion of those in need receive at least some cash assistance, with 102 partners providing $456 million in cash and voucher assistance to 6.8 million people (of the 13.8 million receiving food assistance) between January 2021 and September 2021. However, interviews suggest that, for many, cash provisions are insufficient to meet basic needs. Other essential humanitarian assistance – in agriculture, health, water and education – have been neglected. With medical expenses rapidly increasing, some food aid recipients had sold food baskets to buy medicine for their family. In 2021, Oxfam estimated that two in every five families in Yemen used debt to purchase essential provisions, with pharmacists reporting debt increasingly being used to pay for medicines.[320] Aid recipients reported some positive outcomes from livelihood programmes, but these projects are difficult to maintain in and sometimes end abruptly, causing frustration and disappointment. As the director of one local youth initiative observed: 'What we notice is that the [aid recipients] are provided with the food packages, but they are never provided with the health and water assistance'.

317 UNHCR 'YEMEN | PDM UPDATE – JULY 2021' (UNHCR, 2021). www.alnap.org/help-library/unhcr-yemen-post-cash-distribution-monitoring-pdm-update.

318 WFP 'Yemen Annual Country Report 2021' (WFP, 2021). www.wfp.org/operations/annual-country-report/?operation_id=YE01&year=2021#/23453/23454.

319 J. Kim et al., 'Sharing to Survive: Investigating the Role of Social Networks During Yemen's Humanitarian Crisis' (Washington DC: Resilience Evaluation, Analysis and Learning (REAL), 2022). www.alnap.org/help-library/sharing-to-survive-investigating-the-role-of-social-networks-during-yemen%E2%80%99s.

320 Oxfam, 'Nearly 40 per Cent of Yemen Families Forced into Debt to Pay for Essentials', Oxfam, 2021. www.alnap.org/help-library/nearly-40-per-cent-of-yemen-families-forced-into-debt-to-pay-for-essentials.

Food assistance is the primary need expressed by crisis affected people in Yemen and to date the humanitarian community has been successful at providing millions of people with food aid and nutritional support. However, the system is stretched as the economic situation deteriorates and conflict and violence continue. In the short term, providing aid recipients with a wide range of food and other aid may help stimulate local economies and enhance the resilience of crisis-affected people. In the longer term, political and economic solutions are required. As one aid worker put it:

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'Indeed, the problem in Yemen is not a problem of food, [or] food availability; it's a problem of food affordability, and humanitarian assistance cannot really deal with that.'

Chapter 7: Does the system cause harm?

IN BRIEF: Humanitarian action aims to do good. But it can also cause harm – a risk that's poorly understood and poorly measured. Over the study period (2018–2021), the humanitarian system was forced to consider its commitment to 'do no harm' more substantively, both in terms of direct risk to individual aid recipients and potential negative impact on conflict and the environment. There was more available evidence about negative impacts than in the last SOHS study period but, overall, it remains poorly scrutinised by the system.

High-profile scandals gave momentum to the prevention of sexual exploitation, abuse and harassment (PSEAH),[321] resulting in new inter-agency mechanisms and a noticeable rise in resourcing. Implementation, however, remained slow and ad hoc. Similarly, new attention to the risks of digital harm was prompted by high-profile cases of data breaches and mishandling, and the system is beginning to learn how to address these.

Wider attention to humanitarian actors' long-term engagement in protracted conflict settings – including the addition of peace into the humanitarian–development nexus – increased awareness of how humanitarians engage in conflict sensitivity, influence social cohesion and affect aid dependency. Meanwhile, the rise of climate change on the global policy agenda brought the environmental impacts of humanitarian aid to the fore, with the system expected to make concerted efforts to 'green' humanitarian action over the next few years.

Introduction

Humanitarian aid can deliver both intended and unintended benefits for people in crisis, but it can also have unintended negative impacts on communities and the context in which it operates. The principle of 'Do No Harm' refers to a formal set of practices focused on how humanitarian efforts contribute to peace or conflict.[322] But 'do no harm' (lower case)

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321   This chapter also refers to PSEAH, which includes not only sexual exploitation and abuse of affected people but also sexual harassment of humanitarian staff. When findings are specific to PSEA (i.e. not sexual harassment of staff) we use this term.

322   The Do No Harm Project, 'The "Do No Harm" Framework for Analyzing the Impact of Assistance on Conflict: A Handbook' (Cambridge: MA: CDA Collaborative Learning Projects, 2004). www.alnap.org/help-library/the-%E2%80%9Cdo-no-harm%E2%80%9D-framework-for-analyzing-the-impact-of-assistance-on-conflict-a.

is also a general ethical principle, enshrined in the Humanitarian Charter, which commits humanitarian agencies to avoid or mitigate negative impacts arising from their work.[323]

In the study period for this SOHS, questions around the potential harm caused by humanitarian aid and aid workers were prominent both among aid recipients and in global policy discussions. High-profile scandals around sexual exploitation and abuse by aid workers, which garnered major attention at the end of the last study period, continued to prompt questions about the effectiveness of safeguarding mechanisms. New evidence emerged on the decades-old debate about the potential for humanitarian aid to fuel conflict and create aid dependency in fragile settings; the rise of climate change on the global policy agenda led to greater concerns about humanitarian action's impact on the environment; and the system engaged in difficult reflections on the harms perpetuated by racial bias. Finally, the COVID-19 pandemic presented new challenges as agencies were forced to weigh the risks of exposing staff and communities to a virus against the potential harms of withdrawal.

Previous editions of the SOHS provided minimal comment on the longer-term and wider negative impacts of humanitarian aid. This is because there is surprisingly little robust data and evidence on those factors for drawing system-wide conclusions. While more evidence was available on do no harm for this edition of the SOHS, the evidence base remains poor; most humanitarian evaluations fail to engage with these challenges in a substantive way.

This chapter examines how the humanitarian system addresses direct harm caused to individuals with a focus on PSEAH and digital do no harm, as well as indirect and longer negative impacts on conflict and social cohesion, aid dependency and the environment. The effects of racial inequality within the system are addressed in Chapter 2, while the positive and negative impacts of international actors on local- and community-driven aid are discussed in the 'Focus on: Support beyond the system' section and Chapter 9.

323 Sphere, 'The Humanitarian Charter' (Sphere, 2018), sec. 9. www.alnap.org/help-library/the-sphere-handbook-humanitarian-charter-and-minimum-standards-in-humanitarian-response; The Do No Harm Project, 'The "Do No Harm" Framework for Analyzing the Impact of Assistance on Conflict: A Handbook'. www.alnap.org/help-library/the-%E2%80%9Cdo-no-harm%E2%80%9D-framework-for-analyzing-the-impact-of-assistance-on-conflict-a; J. Martial Bonis Charancle and E. Lucchi, 'Incorporating the Principle of "Do No Harm": How to Take Action without Causing Harm Reflections on a Review of Humanity & Inclusion's Practices' (Humanity & Inclusion/F3E, 2018). www.alnap.org/help-library/incorporating-the-principle-of-%E2%80%9Cdo-no-harm%E2%80%9D-how-to-take-action-without-causing-harm.

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Are humanitarian actors doing enough to reduce and address sexual exploitation and abuse?

One of the most flagrant harms from humanitarian action is sexual exploitation and abuse committed by aid workers. The 2018 SOHS reported increased attention to preventing sexual exploitation and abuse (PSEA) over 2015–2017, including a new UN strategy on promoting a 'system-wide approach' to the issue, but it noted that implementation of PSEA policies and mechanisms remained a significant gap that is rarely addressed in evaluations.[324]

Since then, high-profile scandals have revealed the cost of years of inadequate action on sexual exploitation and abuse. The 2018 exposure of sexual abuse in Oxfam's 2010 Haiti response was followed two years later by reports of widespread sexual abuse by WHO and other agency staff in the 10th DRC Ebola response.[325] Simultaneously, the #AidToo movement brought attention to long-running sexual harassment within the humanitarian sector, prompting new high-level awareness of the gaps in PSEA implementation. A wave of resourcing, policy and operational changes followed.

Attention and resourcing

Within the UN, steps were taken to implement the 2017 strategy on PSEA.[326] This included appointing a Victims' Rights Advocate and creating a new Office of the Victims' Rights Advocate (OVRA). On the donor side, DAC established a reference group on PSEA led by Ireland, the UK and Austria, which led to the adoption of a 2019 DAC Recommendation on Ending Sexual Exploitation, Abuse and Harassment.[327] Following the Oxfam scandal, the UK government hosted a Safeguarding Summit in 2018, where donors and agencies outlined new commitments and shaped reforms. There were several agency and inter-agency initiatives, notably new IASC implementation plans, a global review of progress on preventing sexual exploitation, abuse and harassment (PSEAH) in the 2018–2021 period, and a number of reviews conducted by Humanitarian Country Teams.

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The study period witnessed a wave of resourcing, policy and operational changes to prevent sexual exploitation and abuse.

324 ALNAP, 'The State of the Humanitarian System.', ALNAP Study (London: ALNAP, 2018), 165. www.alnap.org/help-library/the-state-of-the-humanitarian-system-sohs-2018-full-report.

325 R. Flummerfelt and Peyton, 'Power, Poverty, and Aid: The Mix That Fuelled Sex Abuse Claims in Congo', 2020. www.alnap.org/help-library/power-poverty-and-aid-the-mix-that-fuelled-sex-abuse-claims-in-congo.

326 UN 'Special measures for protection from sexual exploitation and abuse: a new approach Report of the Secretary-General.' (UN: February 2017. A/17/818). www.alnap.org/help-library/special-measures-for-protection-from-sexual-exploitation-and-abuse-a-new-approach.

327 OECD 'DAC Recommendation on Ending Sexual Exploitation, Abuse, and Harassment in Development Co-operation and Humanitarian Assistance', 2019. www.alnap.org/help-library/dac-recommendation-on-ending-sexual-exploitation-abuse-and-harassment-in-development-co.

Practical initiatives for PSEAH also emerged, such as agency-specific handbooks and tools at country level[328] and better inter-agency systems for sharing misconduct information in recruitment processes. The Misconduct Disclosure Scheme, hosted by the Steering Committee for Humanitarian Response (SCHR), was used in over 31,000 recruitments in 2021 and the information it provided prevented 142 potential hires.[329] In partnership with UK FCDO, Interpol conceptualised a new system ('Soteria') to strengthen collaboration between aid agencies and law enforcement agencies to prevent the hiring of accused or convicted sex offenders.[330]

There was also a push towards hiring dedicated PSEAH staff, driven in part by donor compliance requirements. INGOs and UN agencies increased the number of PSEAH focal points and coordinators and shifted resources to improve safeguarding mechanisms – this has been enabled by donors allowing costs for PSEAH implementation to be included in funding agreements. These changes may help address confusion among staff about the responsibilities for investigating SEA complaints; previously designated focal points often acted voluntarily without formal inclusion in job descriptions.[331]

A global picture on the extent to which dedicated staffing has improved is difficult to obtain; as noted in the IASC review, it is not possible to confirm how many PSEA coordinators are in post worldwide, due to the 'fragmented' way roles are recruited and financially supported.[332] Estimates suggest that the number of full-time PSEA inter-agency coordinators in countries with HRPs or refugee response plans (RRPs) more than doubled, from 7 to 19 between 2019 and 2021.[333] In DRC, one year on from a technical mission to identify improvements after the Ebola response scandal,[334] a regional PSEAH expert noted that six sub-regional coordinator

328 Bizzarri et al., *Evaluation on Gender Equality*. www.alnap.org/help-library/inter-agency-humanitarian-evaluation-on-gender-equality-and-the-empowerment-of-women.

329 Misconduct Disclosure Scheme, 'Implementation Data. Annual Reporting', n.d. www.alnap.org/help-library/implementation-data-annual-reporting.

330 Interpol, 'Soteria. Preventing Individuals from Using Aid Work as Means to Access and Offending against the Vulnerable' (Interpol, 2021). www.alnap.org/help-library/soteria-preventing-individuals-from-using-aid-work-as-means-to-access-and-offending.

331 T Hanley and et al., 'Evaluation of WFP's Capacity to Respond to Emergencies. Evaluation Report Vol I.' (Rome: WFP, 2019). www.alnap.org/help-library/evaluation-of-wfps-capacity-to-respond-to-emergencies; S. Bond et al., 'Evaluative Review of UNHCR's Policies and Procedures on the Prevention of and Response to Sexual Exploitation and Abuse' (Geneva: UNHCR, 2019). www.alnap.org/help-library/evaluative-review-of-unhcrs-policies-and-procedures-on-the-prevention-of-and-response; Schenkenberg van Mierop, Wendt and Kabir, *Joint Appeal to Rohingya*. www.alnap.org/help-library/independent-evaluation-of-the-aktion-deutschland-hilft-ev-adh-joint-appeal-to-%E2%80%9Crohingya; Broughton and Lee, Protection in Australia's Disaster Responses. www.alnap.org/help-library/evaluation-of-protection-in-australia%E2%80%99s-disaster-responses-in-the-pacific.

332 IASC, 'Global Report on Protection From Sexual Exploitation and Abuse And Sexual Harassment' (Geneva: OCHA, 2021), 51. www.alnap.org/help-library/global-report-on-protection-from-sexual-exploitation-and-abuse-and-sexual-harassment.

333 IASC, 'IASC PSEA Dashboard', 2022. www.alnap.org/help-library/iasc-psea-dashboard.

334 IASC 2020. Senior PSEA Technical Support Mission to the Democratic Congo. www.alnap.org/help-library/senior-psea-technical-support-mission-to-the-democratic-republic-of-the-congo.

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positions for PSEA had been created to support stronger inter-agency coordination and response to PSEAH.[335] While many still consider resourcing for PSEAH activities inadequate, long-term PSEAH experts and advocates see recent investments as an important move towards improving practice and culture.[336]

Accountability and redress

It will take time to see the practical effects of improved resources and practices on PSEAH, and recent evidence remains largely negative. This was echoed by the respondents to our aid practitioner survey, the majority of whom rated PSEAH implementation as only 'Fair' or 'Poor' (60%). Even when PSEAH coordinators are in place, they may lack seniority to drive forward meaningful change or be side-lined when other concerns, such as accessing populations affected by conflict, take priority.[337] In some contexts, PSEAH reporting mechanisms are still not designed with an understanding of how communities would prefer to report, leading to low levels of trust and use.[338] Hotlines and complaints boxes were still used widely, despite repeated evidence from many contexts that these are not appropriate, given accessibility issues and survivor preferences for face-to-face reporting.[339] Survivors perceive reporting mechanisms as creating additional risks; the potential for retribution or social stigma outweighs the likelihood of adequate compensation or seeing their perpetrator face consequences. As an agency-wide evaluation of PSEAH practices noted, 'assurances to victims/survivors and witnesses regarding their safety and security is often limited, and this is likely to be a significant deterrent to reporting'.[340]

Follow-up on complaints is a pervasive challenge, both in terms of providing adequate support and compensation to survivors and in holding perpetrators to account through legal processes. IASC agencies are committed to providing 'survivor/victim-centred' assistance, but what this amounts to in practice can range widely – from GBV services to livelihoods training and from education to legal support. In many countries, survivor assistance is inadequate and hampered by a lack of dedicated resources or inter-agency mechanisms that can facilitate referrals to

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> **As an agency-wide evaluation of PSEAH practices noted, 'assurances to victims/survivors and witnesses regarding their safety and security is often limited, and this is likely to be a significant deterrent to reporting'.**

335 PSEA regional expert.

336 Global key informant interviews.

337 Bond et al., 'Evaluative Review of UNHCR's Policies and Procedures on the Prevention of and Response to Sexual Exploitation and Abuse', 29. 318; www.alnap.org/help-library/evaluative-review-of-unhcrs-policies-and-procedures-on-the-prevention-of-and-response.

338 H. Sultan et al., 'British Red Cross Bangladesh Population Movement Operation External Evaluation' (Geneva: ICRC/IFRC, 2019), 48. www.alnap.org/help-library/british-red-cross-bangladesh-population-movement-operation-external-evaluation.

339 This is because complaints/suggestions boxes are ineffective in populations with low literacy levels, some agency hotlines require mobile phone credit to access, and all hotlines require private access to a mobile phone.

340 Bond et al., 'Evaluative Review of UNHCR's Policies and Procedures on the Prevention of and Response to Sexual Exploitation and Abuse.' www.alnap.org/help-library/evaluative-review-of-unhcrs-policies-and-procedures-on-the-prevention-of-and-response.

> **This slow pace of change raises questions as to why the humanitarian system has taken so long to learn its lessons on PSEAH.**

PSEAH services.[341] An IASC global review found that only a quarter of crisis-affected people would be able to access referrals to sexual and gender-based violence (SGBV) services – and even when they do, often 'service providers are not able to support all needs of SEA victims, such as extended legal aid, including for paternity cases.'[342] Financial compensation for survivors is rare, and there is widespread confusion among humanitarian staff on available forms of support or compensation.[343]

Overall, new momentum over the study period shows how change is possible when the system works together at technical and political levels to not only make new commitments, but also design the mechanisms and ways of working needed to deliver on them. However, these efforts have been a long time coming and continue to be ad hoc. Several evaluations and reviews note the lack of progress of pilots and commitments on PSEAH extending back over a decade.[344] One UN agency has been working to mainstream PSEAH since 2009, yet still struggled with basic implementation in 2020.[345] This slow pace of change raises questions as to why the humanitarian system has taken so long to learn its lessons

341 UNOVRA, 'Mapping of Victims' Assistance Infographic.', Infographic (New York: United Nations Victims Rights Advocate, n.d.). www.alnap.org/help-library/mapping-of-victims%E2%80%99-assistance-infographic.

342 IASC, 'Global Report on Protection From Sexual Exploitation and Abuse And Sexual Harassment'. www.alnap.org/help-library/global-report-on-protection-from-sexual-exploitation-and-abuse-and-sexual-harassment.

343 Flummerfelt and Peyton 2020. www.alnap.org/help-library/power-poverty-and-aid-the-mix-that-fuelled-sex-abuse-claims-in-congo; IASC, 'Global Report on Protection From Sexual Exploitation and Abuse And Sexual Harassment'. www.alnap.org/help-library/global-report-on-protection-from-sexual-exploitation-and-abuse-and-sexual-harassment.

344 IASC, 'Global Report on Protection from Sexual Exploitation and Abuse And Sexual Harassment'. www.alnap.org/help-library/global-report-on-protection-from-sexual-exploitation-and-abuse-and-sexual-harassment; 'Despite the amount of time the IASC Principals and senior officials have committed to PSEAH, there is little evidence in terms of sustainable structures at field level, interagency investment moving from ad hoc to predictable funding and resourcing or HCs/HCTs/inter-agency coordinators meaningfully reporting incremental progress against Country Action Plans.' See also: Steets et al., *Drought Response in Ethiopia*, 37. www.alnap.org/help-library/inter-agency-humanitarian-evaluation-of-the-drought-response-in-ethiopia; J. Baker and I. Elawad, 'Independent Evaluation of the UNHCR South Sudanese Refugee Response in White Nile State, Sudan (2013–2018)' (Geneva: UNHCR, 2018). www.alnap.org/help-library/independent-evaluation-of-the-unhcr-south-sudanese-refugee-response-in-white-nile-state; Hanley and et al., 'Evaluation of WFP's Capacity to Respond to Emergencies. Evaluation Report Vol I.' www.alnap.org/help-library/evaluation-of-wfps-capacity-to-respond-to-emergencies.

345 Bond et al., 'Evaluative Review of UNHCR's Policies and Procedures on the Prevention of and Response to Sexual Exploitation and Abuse'. www.alnap.org/help-library/evaluative-review-of-unhcrs-policies-and-procedures-on-the-prevention-of-and-response.

on PSEAH.[346] That it took external media-led investigations to realise long-called-for improvements in how the system deals with sexual assault within its own ranks is an acute reminder of the barriers to genuine accountability in the system and speaks to the power dynamics between crisis-affected people and those attempting to serve them.[347]

Box E: Digital do no harm

Kristin Bergtora Sandvik, Larissa Fast, Katja Lindskov Jacobsen and Maria Gabrielsen Jumbert[348]

Do no digital harm has emerged as an important humanitarian imperative. Crisis-affected populations are often required to give personal data to aid agencies in exchange for assistance and protection, and usually have little say or control over how this is used. Where aid agencies produce large bodies of data on crisis-affected people as part of increasingly data-driven assistance practices, attendant risks and new forms of harm are emerging from how digital data is stored, accessed and shared.

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346   IASC, 'Global Report on Protection From Sexual Exploitation and Abuse And Sexual Harassment.' www.alnap.org/help-library/global-report-on-protection-from-sexual-exploitation-and-abuse-and-sexual-harassment; Baker and Elawad, 'Independent Evaluation of the UNHCR South Sudanese Refugee Response in White Nile State, Sudan (2013–2018).' www.alnap.org/help-library/independent-evaluation-of-the-unhcr-south-sudanese-refugee-response-in-white-nile-state; WFP, 'Evaluation of the Joint Programme for Girls Education (JPGE) with Financial Support from the Norwegian Government, July 2014 – October 2017' (WFP, 2020). www.alnap.org/help-library/decentralized-evaluation-evaluation-of-the-joint-programme-for-girls-education-jpge; Hanley and et al., 'Evaluation of WFP's Capacity to Respond to Emergencies. Evaluation Report Vol I.' www.alnap.org/help-library/evaluation-of-wfps-capacity-to-respond-to-emergencies; Steets et al., *Drought Response in Ethiopia*. www.alnap.org/help-library/inter-agency-humanitarian-evaluation-of-the-drought-response-in-ethiopia; Bond et al., 'Evaluative Review of UNHCR's Policies and Procedures on the Prevention of and Response to Sexual Exploitation and Abuse'. www.alnap.org/help-library/evaluative-review-of-unhcrs-policies-and-procedures-on-the-prevention-of-and-response.

347   UN, 'Third Annual Report of the Trust Fund in Support of Victims of Sexual Exploitation and Abuse' (New York: United Nations, 2020). www.alnap.org/help-library/third-annual-report-of-the-trust-fund-in-support-of-victims-of-sexual-exploitation-and. The report outlines the different activities sponsored by the UN Trust Fund in Support of Victims of Sexual Exploitation and Abuse for people subject to PSEA by UN staff members. The package of different activities included psychosocial support, medical case, income generation (including dressmaking classes) and awareness raising. It did not include reference to justice and accountability of the perpetrator to the survivor within programme activities.

348   Kristin Bergtora Sandvik (S.J.D Harvard Law School 2008) is a professor of legal sociology at the Faculty of Law, University of Oslo and a Research Professor in Humanitarian Studies at PRIO. She is Principal Investigator on the Do No Harm: Ethical Humanitarian Innovation and Digital Bodies project; Larissa Fast is Professor of Humanitarian and Conflict Response and Executive Director of the Humanitarian and Conflict Response Institute at the University of Manchester. She is also a PRIO Global Fellow and a co-Investigator on the Do No Harm: Ethical Humanitarian Innovation and Digital Bodies project; Katja Lindskov Jacobsen is a senior researcher at the Centre for Military Studies. She is a co-Investigator on the Do No Harm: Ethical Humanitarian Innovation and Digital Bodies project; Maria Gabrielsen Jumbert is a senior researcher and a research director at PRIO. She is a co-Investigator on the Do No Harm: Ethical Humanitarian Innovation and Digital Bodies project.

Several incidents over the reporting period for this SOHS highlighted the multiple dimensions of risk:

- **Data sharing with authorities.** One example of data sharing and digital harm is UNHCR sharing biometric data of Rohingya refugees with authorities in Myanmar, from which these refugees had fled. Such data sharing jeopardised the possibility of a safe return for Rohingya refugees, as the Myanmar regime could re-identify individuals using this biometric data.[349]

- **Data accessed by unknown elements.** Multiple organisations have experienced data breaches and hacks over the past four years. In 2017, the NGO Red Rose experienced a breach of its digital payment platform, which exposed personal data of those receiving cash transfers. Red Rose later branded the breach an act of 'industrial espionage'. In 2019, a hack against the UN compromised staff records, health insurance and commercial contract data. In 2022, the International Committee of the Red Cross experienced a cyberattack, compromising its Restoring Family Links services in multiple countries and resulting in the loss of the personal data of more than half a million people.[350]

- **Partnerships, uncontrolled data flows and attendant risk.** Harm may occur where access to sensitive digital data, collected by humanitarian actors, cannot easily be controlled and where there is a risk that such data may be accessed by non-humanitarian actors. This is particularly an issue where humanitarian actors engage in private sector partnerships, as illustrated by the reaction to WFP's five-year partnership with Palantir announced in February 2019.[351] Palantir is widely known for its role in US counter-terror efforts, including use of its software by the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA), and critics argued that this partnership could potentially entail 'exploitation of the data in WFP's "data lake"', including the biometric data of aid recipients.[352]

349 Human Rights Watch, 'UN shared Rohingya data'. www.alnap.org/help-library/un-shared-rohingya-data-without-informed-consent-bangladesh-provided-myanmar.

350 On RedRose, see L. Cornish, 'New Security Concerns Raised for RedRose Digital Payment Systems', Devex, 2018. www.alnap.org/help-library/new-security-concerns-raised-for-redrose-digital-payment-systems; and B. Parker, 'Security Lapses at Aid Agency Leave Beneficiary Data at Risk', *The New Humanitarian*, 2017. www.alnap.org/help-library/security-lapses-at-aid-agency-leave-beneficiary-data-at-risk; on the UN hack see. B. Parker, 'EXCLUSIVE: The Cyber Attack the UN Tried to Keep under Wraps', 2020. www.alnap.org/help-library/exclusive-the-cyber-attack-the-un-tried-to-keep-under-wraps; on the ICRC hack, see their press releases. ICRC, 'Cyber-Attack on ICRC: What We Know', ICRC.org, 2022. https://www.alnap.org/help-library/cyber-attack-on-icrc-what-we-know.

351 WFP, 'Palantir and WFP Partner to Help Transform Global Humanitarian Delivery', WFP, 2019. www.alnap.org/help-library/palantir-and-wfp-partner-to-help-transform-global-humanitarian-delivery.

352 L Raftree, 'A discussion on WFP-Palantir and the ethics of humanitarian data sharing', 2019. www.alnap.org/help-library/a-discussion-on-wfp-palantir-and-the-ethics-of-humanitarian-data-sharing; K. Jacobsen, 'Biometric data flows and unintended consequences of counter terrorism', IRRC, 2021, 614. www.alnap.org/help-library/biometric-data-flows-and-unintended-consequences-of-counter-terrorism.

- **Data, targets and harm.** Following the withdrawal of coalition forces from Afghanistan in August 2021, biometric devices – with biometric data collected by coalition forces and other actors – fell into the hands of the Taliban. While not humanitarian data, the case is still indicative of a challenge that could also be relevant in the humanitarian domain: how to prevent abandoned digital data ending up in the wrong hands. Critics have raised concerns about the potential for unintended consequences and harm if biometric databases end up in the hands of actors whose priorities conflict with principles of humanitarian protection. Likewise, the construction of large databases such as PRIME (UNHCR), SCOPE (WFP) and Restoring Family Links (ICRC/Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement) represents an inadvertent but foreseeable creation of targets for harm. Even with data safeguards and diligent management, the amount and type of data available in these databases represents a vulnerability for humanitarian actors.[353]

While the past three years have produced examples of different types of digital harm, they have also seen positive developments, including the Signal Code,[354] the development of policies on biometrics,[355] the development of publicly available guidance on data protection,[356] responsible data[357] and responsible data sharing between donors and humanitarians.[358] Nevertheless, the continued development, uptake and regulatory challenges of new technologies such as artificial intelligence require an emphasis on digital literacy in the sector, as well as ethical reflection about the costs and benefits of digital services in relation to humanitarian principles, and legal and regulatory frameworks.

353 OCHA, 'Data Responsibility Guidelines October 2021' (The Hague: Centre for Humanitarian Data, 2021). www.alnap.org/help-library/data-responsibility-guidelines-october-2021.

354 F. Greenwood et al., 'The Signal Code: A Human Rights Approach to Information During Crisis' (Harvard Humanitarian Initiative, 2017). www.alnap.org/help-library/the-signal-code-a-human-rights-approach-to-information-during-crisis-0.

355 C Nyst, Z. Rahman, and P. Verhaert, 'Biometrics in the Humanitarian Sector' (London/Oxford: The Engine Room and Oxfam, 2018). www.alnap.org/help-library/biometrics-in-the-humanitarian-sector-0.

356 ICRC, 'The ICRC Data Protection Framework' (Geneva: ICRC, 2020). www.alnap.org/help-library/the-icrc-data-protection-framework.

357 OCHA, 'The State of Open Humanitarian Data 2021: Assessing Data Availability Across Humanitarian Crises' (The Hague: Center for Humanitarian Data, 2021). www.alnap.org/help-library/the-state-of-open-humanitarian-data-2021-assessing-data-availability-across; IASC, 'Global Report on Protection From Sexual Exploitation and Abuse And Sexual Harassment.' www.alnap.org/help-library/global-report-on-protection-from-sexual-exploitation-and-abuse-and-sexual-harassment.

358 L. Fast, 'Data Sharing Between Humanitarian Organizations and Donors: Toward Understanding and Advancing Responsible Practice', Working Paper (Oslo/Bergen: Norwegian Centre for Humanitarian Studies/NCHS., 2022). www.alnap.org/help-library/data-sharing-between-humanitarian-organizations-and-donors-toward-understanding-and.

Does humanitarian aid fuel conflict?

Social cohesion and localised conflict

Social tensions can arise if aid is targeted in a way that is perceived to be unfair and untransparent. As seen in Chapter 4, communities and humanitarian agencies often hold different views on who is most 'in need' and failure to resolve these disagreements has led to increased resentment and even physical violence across many crisis responses – both among aid recipients and between targeted and non-targeted populations.[359] Aid recipients in SOHS focus group discussions said that the lack of transparency on targeting decisions had negative impacts on their community, with some taking action to make assistance more 'fair' and reduce social tension by sharing assistance with non-recipients.[360]

Aid agencies and host governments increasingly recognise that social tensions around fair targeting are especially sensitive between displaced populations/refugees and host communities. The Rohingya response in Bangladesh offers an example of that tension, including outbreaks of violence, and demonstrates how humanitarian do-no-harm efforts are influenced by the actions of others. Humanitarian agencies attempted to mitigate potential social tensions between the Rohingya and Bangladeshi host community in several ways, such as including host communities in programme planning and targeting discussions. The Bangladeshi government played a strong but not uncontroversial role by requiring aid agencies to offer 25% of their support to host communities in order to retain permission to operate. The government also required programming to be separate for host communities and refugees, which was perceived as exacerbating social tensions.[361]

More positively, when social cohesion was included in the objectives of a response, humanitarian activities were able to have a positive impact on inter-group relations. The best examples of this were found in livelihoods programmes: training programmes that included both refugees and host community members led to greater feelings of belonging among refugees and more positive attitudes from host participants towards refugees in

> **When social cohesion was included in the objectives of a response, humanitarian activities were able to have a positive impact on inter-group relations.**

359   Mansour and Dib Haj, *Lebanon Host Communities*. www.alnap.org/help-library/mid-term-evaluation-of-the-lebanese-host-communities-support-project; H. Audi et al., 'Lebanon, Livelihoods and Resilience Activities (2016–2019): Evaluation' (Rome: WFP, 2019). www.alnap.org/help-library/lebanon-livelihoods-and-resilience-activities-2016-2019-evaluation.

360   Daniels, Anderson and Yusuf Ali, *2017 Somalia Response*. www.alnap.org/help-library/evaluation-of-the-2017-somalia-humanitarian-cash-based-response; Solutions Consulting, 'Final Evaluation Report. Disaster Response in Yemen' (Dublin/Paris: Concern Worldwide, Agency for Technical Cooperation and Development (ACTED), 2019). www.alnap.org/help-library/disaster-response-in-yemen.

361   From key informant interviews.

Kenya, Lebanon and Turkey.[362] The ability of humanitarian actors to positively influence social cohesion, however, faced challenges due to wider social, historical and political dynamics outside their control that proved stronger than direct personal interactions. In two separate livelihoods programmes in Lebanon, Lebanese participants felt more positive towards the Syrians they engaged with through activities, yet their overall views of the Syrian population and competition in the labour market remained unchanged.[363]

In addition to inter-group tension, inappropriately designed humanitarian aid can also increase violence in communities, in particular SGBV. SOHS research in Ethiopia and Bangladesh pointed to increased SGBV in camp settings due to inappropriate shelter and a lack of protection programming; elsewhere, inappropriate latrine design has been linked to increased SGBV risks.[364]

Wider conflict dynamics

Humanitarian aid provides an influx of resources to a conflict zone, which can shift incentives in ways that either entrench or reduce conflict. Yet humanitarian agencies and evaluations rarely consider these impacts in detail. Few evaluations in the SOHS synthesis directly assessed the impact of assistance on conflict dynamics, while some flagged the shortfalls in how Do No Harm and conflict sensitivity were being understood and applied by humanitarian agencies.[365] The inclusion of peace in the humanitarian–development nexus offers the potential for new thinking and connections on this – though as some commentators note, humanitarian agencies need to also focus on getting the basics right on conflict sensitivity.[366]

There are many theories but little hard evidence for the potential relationship between humanitarian aid and conflict. Much of the empirical data comes from academic literature and anecdotal key informant

362 Tango International, 'Evaluation of UNHCR's Livelihoods Strategies and Approaches' (Geneva: UNHCR, 2018). www.alnap.org/help-library/evaluation-of-unhcrs-livelihoods-strategies-and-approaches; Danida and UNHCR, *Integrated Solutions Model*. www.alnap.org/help-library/joint-evaluation-of-the-integrated-solutions-model-in-and-around-kalobeyei-turkana; H. Roxin et al., 'Effectiveness of German Development Cooperation in Dealing with Conflict-Induced Forced Migration Crises' (Bonn: German Institute for Development Evaluation (DEval), 2021). www.alnap.org/help-library/effectiveness-of-german-development-cooperation-in-dealing-with-conflict-induced-forced.

363 Audi et al., 'Lebanon, Livelihoods and Resilience Activities (2016–2019): Evaluation'. www.alnap.org/help-library/lebanon-livelihoods-and-resilience-activities-2016-2019-evaluation.

364 D. Stone and K. Chowdhury, 'Christian Aid's Rohingya Crisis Response in Bangladesh' (Christian Aid, 2019). www.alnap.org/help-library/christian-aid%E2%80%99s-rohingya-crisis-response-in-bangladesh; Baker and Elawad, 'Independent Evaluation of the UNHCR South Sudanese Refugee Response in White Nile State, Sudan (2013–2018)'. www.alnap.org/help-library/independent-evaluation-of-the-unhcr-south-sudanese-refugee-response-in-white-nile-state.

365 E. Bryld et al., 'Blind Sides and Soft Spots – An Evaluation of Norway's Aid Engagement in South Sudan' (Norad, 2020). www.alnap.org/help-library/blind-sides-and-soft-spots-%E2%80%93-an-evaluation-of-norway%E2%80%99s-aid-engagement-in-south-sudan.

366 Global key informant interviews.

> A 2019 review of humanitarian programmes from 2002–2017 finds that food aid *decreased* the incidence of civil conflict and the onset and duration of civil conflict, particularly conflict caused by ethnic tensions and weather-driven food insecurity.

interviews, with mixed findings.[367] Previous studies claiming that humanitarian aid had a negative effect on peace were based on data sets dating to 1946 or earlier.[368] A systematic review of more recent data, from 2004 onwards, found no evidence that humanitarian aid increased violence.[369] Moreover, a 2019 review of humanitarian programmes from 2002–2017 finds that food aid *decreased* the incidence of civil conflict and the onset and duration of civil conflict, particularly conflict caused by ethnic tensions and weather-driven food insecurity.[370] This seems to be supported by the inter-agency evaluation of the 2017–2018 Ethiopia drought response, which found that humanitarian aid reduced pressure on resources and consequently the potential for conflict.[371]

The relationship between humanitarian aid and conflict is complex: it is affected by the dynamics play in the conflict, the proximity of aid delivery to zones of active conflict, and the degree to which humanitarian actors have fully considered these in the response strategy.

Does humanitarian aid increase dependency and undermine longer-term self-reliance?

In fragile settings where governments are unwilling or unable to meet the needs of their population, humanitarian interventions must strike a balance between supporting people through repeated or prolonged crises and avoiding creating parallel services that undermine local efforts and discourage the development of more sustainable, local services and infrastructure. The international aid system can contribute to aid dependency by continuing to directly implement services, while underinvesting in appropriate capacity and administrative support for local actors to lead their own response. Uneven efforts were made

367   Much of the evidence on whether humanitarian aid fuels conflict comes from country-based research, which remains largely anecdotal, or from the academic literature, which is limited by the fact that much of it looks at the relationship between aid and conflict as a whole, combining humanitarian with development and stabilisation aid.

368   N. Narang, 'Humanitarian Assistance and the Duration of Peace after Civil War', The Journal of Politics 76, no. 2 (2014): 446–60. www.alnap.org/help-library/humanitarian-assistance-and-the-duration-of-peace-after-civil-war.

369   S. Mary, 'A Replication Note on Humanitarian Aid and Violence', Empirical Economics 62, no. 3 (March 2022): 1465–94. www.alnap.org/help-library/a-replication-note-on-humanitarian-aid-and-violence.

370   S. Mary and A.K. Mishra, 'Humanitarian Food Aid and Civil Conflict', World Development 126 (February 2020): 104713. www.alnap.org/help-library/humanitarian-food-aid-and-civil-conflict.

371   Steets et al., *Drought Response in Ethiopia*. www.alnap.org/help-library/inter-agency-humanitarian-evaluation-of-the-drought-response-in-ethiopia.

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by international actors to address this, in connection to localisation commitments (see Chapter 9), as one INGO leader noted:

> **'We still fail to see that we're always doing ourselves out of a job, and the more we nationalise [INGOs], the less we're moving onto a place where you've got national civil society addressing its needs and a coherent, local, national government architecture… I think we've got some tough questions to answer there.'[372]**

Aid dependency is primarily assessed in humanitarian settings through perception, rather than with clear empirical measures. In several countries where humanitarian agencies have been providing basic services for decades – primarily South Sudan, DRC and CAR – aid dependency is explicitly recognised as a characteristic of the context.[373] As discussed in the 'Focus on: Resilience in protracted crises' section, a majority of aid recipients surveyed by Ground Truth Solutions do not feel that the aid they receive supports them to be self-reliant.[374]

At a programmatic level, perceptions of aid dependency vary significantly, even among the same population of aid recipients, and efforts to combat dependency can be against the expressed wishes of aid recipients themselves. A potential example is cash-based assistance: one evaluation documented a decline in the participation of cash payment recipients in livelihoods activities[375] while another noted a general concern among humanitarian actors about the potential for long-term cash assistance to create dependency.[376]

The humanitarian system also contributes to longer-term aid dependency in other ways, such as by drawing away talented staff from more poorly paid state jobs or by providing higher-quality health services than can be offered by either states or development actors, while failing to build this capacity alongside service delivery.[377] Despite widespread recognition of aid dependency in protracted settings, it remains difficult

> **Despite widespread recognition of aid dependency in protracted settings, it remains difficult to address, as humanitarians are often constrained by short-term funding cycles or host governments restrictions on the provision of long-term opportunities or support to refugees.**

372   Global key informant interview.

373   A Klausen L. et al., 'Independent Evaluation of the Linkage of Humanitarian Aid and Development Cooperation (Nexus)' (Bern: Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation (SDC), 2019). www.alnap.org/help-library/independent-evaluation-of-the-linkage-of-humanitarian-aid-and-development-cooperation-0.

374   Accessed from: https://groundtruthsolutions.org/data.

375   Tango International, 'Evaluation of UNHCR's Livelihoods Strategies and Approaches'. www.alnap.org/help-library/evaluation-of-unhcrs-livelihoods-strategies-and-approaches.

376   Steets et al., *Drought Response in Ethiopia*. www.alnap.org/help-library/inter-agency-humanitarian-evaluation-of-the-drought-response-in-ethiopia.

377   E.g. N. Crawford et al., 'The Democratic Republic of Congo's 10th Ebola Response: Lessons on International Leadership and Coordination' (London: HPG/ODI, 2021). www.alnap.org/help-library/the-democratic-republic-of-congo%E2%80%99s-10th-ebola-response-lessons-on-international.

to address, as humanitarians are often constrained by short-term funding cycles or host governments restrictions on the provision of long-term opportunities or support to refugees.

Finally, food aid was found to be a growing concern for aid dependency and as undermining resilience more broadly within the context of climate change.[378] In the Sahel and Horn of Africa, climate change is challenging traditional pastoralist practices; here, the influx of food aid may be inhibiting the incentives for and abilities of communities to develop more sustainable and resilient coping strategies.[379] Due to challenges in providing timely funding and supporting early action, countries are still primarily dealing with drought crises through short-term emergency responses, despite the existence of alternatives. Despite positive examples – including climate change occupying a central role in how WFP considers and funds resilient approaches food insecurity[380] –overall shortfalls in adaptation financing to climate-vulnerable countries[381] mean a continued default to humanitarian aid.

Box F: Doing no harm in Afghanistan
Jennifer Doherty
Humanitarian needs were already rising before the Taliban took control of Kabul in August 2021. The speed of the takeover shocked humanitarians within and outside the country, many of whom anticipated an eventual Taliban takeover months after the removal of US troops and were more immediately concerned with Afghanistan's looming food security crisis.[382] The aftermath of the advance on the capital saw the withdrawal of the majority of international staff and an increase in humanitarian needs across the country as the freeze on international financing and development assistance began to bite.

Do no harm has been tested in several ways during the initial response to the Afghanistan crisis following the Taliban takeover, demonstrating the trade-offs humanitarians face in attempting to deliver support while mitigating immediate and longer-term harm. The international community – UN agencies, donors and NGOs alike – largely split along two positions on working with the de facto regime, both of which had potential negative consequences for the Afghan population.

378   Steets et al., *Drought Response in Ethiopia*. www.alnap.org/help-library/inter-agency-humanitarian-evaluation-of-the-drought-response-in-ethiopia.

379   Steets et al. (Ibid). www.alnap.org/help-library/inter-agency-humanitarian-evaluation-of-the-drought-response-in-ethiopia.

380   WFP, 'WFP Annual Review 2021' (Rome: WFP, 2022). www.alnap.org/help-library/wfp-annual-review-2021.

381   IFRC, 'World Disasters Report 2020: Come Heat or High Water – Tackling the Humanitarian Impacts of the Climate Crisis Together' (Geneva: International Federation of Red Cross (IFRC), 2020). www.alnap.org/help-library/world-disasters-report-2020-come-heat-or-high-water-tackling-the-humanitarian-impacts.

382   Global key informant interview.

> **'The way to protect women and children is not to have them dying of hunger.'**

For those that withheld support, cooperating with the de facto regime was viewed as violating do no harm principles due to the Taliban's record on human rights. The rights of women and girls in particular were a sticking point for many agencies, who wanted assurance that their female staff would be allowed to operate safely before they continued operations in the country.[383] On a political level, there were concerns that the stability created by humanitarian aid might legitimise the regime by demonstrating that the country could continue to function under the new de facto government.

Other agencies put the immediate basic needs of Afghans suffering from hunger above broader human rights concerns that they considered beyond their humanitarian mandate. As one INGO interviewee explained: 'The way to protect women and children is not to have them dying of hunger.'

Both positions had their costs and required compromises in practice. Concerns over the deterioration of hard-won rights led to delays in aid provision which, coupled with sanctions, left local organisations and staff in a difficult position. They had limited funds coming in to pay their own salaries and they bore the brunt of criticism from communities whose needs were not being met. Local staff expressed concern in interviews that this was eroding trust with communities and adding to already high mental health burdens.

In the end, and as seen in many difficult conflict responses over the study period, humanitarian organisations opted for access, along the way seeking to secure as much support for humanitarian space and access to services for girls and women as possible. Through coordination meetings at both local and national level, humanitarian actors discussed key principles of humanitarian work with members of the Taliban regime. While working with the de facto government, these actors have sought to maintain space for principles to be upheld and for specific types of programming, such as GBV and peacebuilding activities, to be implemented in the response.[384]

Is humanitarian action 'green'?

While attempting to save lives and protect crisis-affected people, the humanitarian system risks damaging the environment through its presence and wider carbon footprint. Available data on the effects of the system on the environment is limited, with few evaluations considering environmental factors and a lack of consensus among agencies on how they should be

383 Global key informant interviews.
384 Global key informant interviews.

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measuring their carbon footprint.[385] Agencies feel they face trade-offs between addressing people's immediate physical needs and addressing longer-term environmental concerns.[386] However, this period has seen a growing understanding of the system's impact on the environment and the emergence of stronger initiatives to address negative effects. While practical attention to environmental impacts remained relatively low over the study period, it was growing by late 2021, with several positive examples of shifts in operational policy and more environmentally conscious programming.

Impacts on the local environment

Refugee responses with large-scale camps have caused some of the worst documented environmental impacts. One systematic review highlighted the lack of green spaces, limited waste management and low air quality in camp settlements, in addition to illness and deaths caused by polluted water.[387] Both in-country interviews and evaluations highlighted the Rohingya refugee response in Bangladesh as a significant environmental threat.[388] A key informant in Cox's Bazar reported that, initially, the response placed pressure on the environment through overtaxing water and sewage systems, waste plastics and traffic, depleted water tables and deforestation caused by refugees burning firewood to cook. Environmental degradation – particularly deforestation – in turn caused tensions with the host population as competition for scarce resources increased.

At the same time, attention paid by agencies to environmental issues did grow, and some have made positive changes to projects – especially as responses move beyond the initial emergency period. For example, WFP conducted a livelihoods programme focused on reforestation in Lebanon[389] and Christian Aid worked to address soil erosion and slope stabilisation in Cox's Bazar.[390] Indeed, anecdotal reports from interviews suggest

385   L. Salzenstein and K Pedersen, 'What's the Aid Sector's Carbon Footprint? Everyone Is Measuring Different Things, so We Are Comparing Apples and Pears.'', *The New Humanitarian*, 2021. www.alnap.org/help-library/what%E2%80%99s-the-aid-sector%E2%80%99s-carbon-footprint-everyone-is-measuring-different-things-so-we.

386   Stone and Chowdhury, 'Christian Aid's Rohingya Crisis Response in Bangladesh'. www.alnap.org/help-library/christian-aid%E2%80%99s-rohingya-crisis-response-in-bangladesh.

387   M. Wardeh and R.C. Marques, 'Sustainability in Refugee Camps: A Systematic Review and Meta-Analysis', Sustainability 13, no. 14 (9 July 2021): 7686. www.alnap.org/help-library/sustainability-in-refugee-camps-a-systematic-review-and-meta-analysis.

388   Stone and Chowdhury, 'Christian Aid's Rohingya Crisis Response in Bangladesh' www.alnap.org/help-library/christian-aid%E2%80%99s-rohingya-crisis-response-in-bangladesh; Tirivayi et al., *School Meals Programme*. www.alnap.org/help-library/malawi-school-meals-programme-2016-2018-an-evaluation; Schenkenberg van Mierop, Wendt and Kabir, Joint Appeal to Rohingya. www.alnap.org/help-library/independent-evaluation-of-the-aktion-deutschland-hilft-ev-adh-joint-appeal-to-%E2%80%9Crohingya.

389   Audi et al., 'Lebanon, Livelihoods and Resilience Activities (2016–2019): Evaluation'. www.alnap.org/help-library/lebanon-livelihoods-and-resilience-activities-2016-2019-evaluation.

390   Stone and Chowdhury, 'Christian Aid's Rohingya Crisis Response in Bangladesh'. www.alnap.org/help-library/christian-aid%E2%80%99s-rohingya-crisis-response-in-bangladesh.

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that Cox's Bazar looked greener in 2021 than during the environmentally destructive earlier years of the response. In addition to projects with a particular environmental focus, there is emerging evidence that increased use of cash-based programming has positive impacts on the environment by reducing the amount of food flown in from other countries for distribution and the provision of in-kind goods that sometimes go unused and end up as waste.[391]

An emerging area of success in the system is increased appropriate and efficient fuel use in programmes, particularly in displacement contexts. For example, in Sudan switching to more fuel-efficient stoves reduced wood consumption in some project locations by up to 50%.[392] In Bangladesh, UNHCR and WFP promoted the use of liquified petroleum gas cookstoves to reduce refugees' reliance on firewood and thereby reduce deforestation.[393]

Wider environmental impact

In contrast to the previous SOHS period four years prior, when climate change and the environment were seen as marginal issues, many agencies have developed policies and hired staff to improve sustainability and reduce environmental harm. In 2020, the UN committed to a new sustainability strategy. Although full implementation will take time, efforts are clearly underway. For example, UNHCR has hired a special advisor on climate change and WFP is developing new policies to ensure environmental sustainability is a consideration for both operations and programmes.[394] Other organisations and donors are also moving in the direction of greater sustainability commitments. In advance of the 26th Conference of the Parties to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (COP26), a Climate and Environmental Charter for Humanitarian Organisations was agreed.[395] Initiated by ICRC and IFRC, this commits signatories to prepare for climate change disasters and to reduce their own environmental impacts. By the end of 2021 over 200 organisations had signed. Practical measures are also evident. For example, ICRC, IFRC and the Norwegian Refugee Council are developing greener approaches to logistics, fleets and procurement, while several major donors now require

391   S. Brangeon and F. Crowley, 'Environmental Footprint of Humanitarian Assistance', Scoping Review (The Inspire Consortium and Groupe URD, 2020). www.alnap.org/help-library/environmental-footprint-of-humanitarian-assistance-scoping-review-for-dg-echo.

392   Baker and Elawad, 'Independent Evaluation of the UNHCR South Sudanese Refugee Response in White Nile State, Sudan (2013–2018)'. www.alnap.org/help-library/independent-evaluation-of-the-unhcr-south-sudanese-refugee-response-in-white-nile-state.

393   Global key informant interviews.

394   Global key informant interviews.

395   Climate Charter, 'The Climate and Environmental Charter for Humanitarian Organizations' (Climate Charter, 2022). www.alnap.org/help-library/the-climate-and-environmental-charter-for-humanitarian-organizations.

grantees to conform to higher environmental standards.[396] A new range of tools and guidance are helping organisations consider and reduce the environmental impacts of their projects. For example, MSF has developed an environmental impact toolkit,[397] while the IASC and Sphere have both released environmental guidance.[398]

Evidence indicates that these nascent efforts are necessary: evaluations revealed large amounts of carbon emitted by the transport of goods and staff during this period, exacerbated by short-term surge travel.[399] A 2019 survey by *The New Humanitarian* revealed that most surveyed agencies did not count their emissions and among those that did, there was limited comparability in the methods used.[400] There has, however, been some progress among agencies in measuring emissions over the longer term. For example, the UN has been tracking emissions across its operations for the past decade, and saw a reduction from per capita emissions of 8.3 tonnes of carbon dioxide (CO_2) equivalent in the 2010 edition of the UN's *Greening the Blue* report to per capita emissions of 6.5 tonnes CO_2 equivalent in 2019.[401] They also offset nearly all their carbon emissions, such as through tree planting or solar grids, which is a strategy increasingly used by agencies in the system to compensate for their footprint. The efficacy of offsetting approaches has, however, been questioned including concerns about competition for land use and the lack of incentive they provide for reducing emissions in the first place.[402] The full impact of the COVID-19 response on emissions and other environmental effects

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396   These include the UK, Canada, the US, Sweden and Switzerland – see Brangeon and Crowley, Environmental Footprint of Humanitarian Assistance', Scoping Review. www.alnap.org/help-library/environmental-footprint-of-humanitarian-assistance-scoping-review-for-dg-echo.

397   MSF, 'Environmental Impact Toolkit' (Geneva: MSF, 2020). www.alnap.org/help-library/environmental-impact-toolkit.

398   The Environment and Humanitarian Action (EHA), 'Humanitarian Action and the Environment. Essential Guidance for Humanitarian Actors' (New York: OCHA and UNEP, n.d.). www.alnap.org/help-library/humanitarian-action-and-the-environment-essential-guidance-for-humanitarian-actors.

399   N. Mock and H.A Ali, 'Decentralised Evaluation of UNHCR's Livelihood Programme in Djibouti (2015–2018)' (Geneva: UNHCR, 2019). www.alnap.org/help-library/decentralised-evaluation-of-unhcrs-livelihood-programme-in-djibouti-2015-2018; E. Debert, H. Sougato Baroi, and D. Sarkar, 'External Evaluation. Plan International UK's DEC Funded Response to the Rohingya Refugee Crisis in Bangladesh' (Woking/London: Plan International UK, Disasters Emergency Committee (DEC), 2019). www.alnap.org/help-library/plan-international-uks-dec-funded-response-to-the-rohingya-refugee-crisis-in-bangladesh; Baker et al., *Response to Cyclone Idai.* www.alnap.org/help-library/inter-agency-humanitarian-evaluation-of-the-response-to-cyclone-idai-in-mozambique.

400   Salzenstein and Pedersen, 'What's the Aid Sector's Carbon Footprint? Everyone Is Measuring Different Things, so We Are Comparing Apples and Pears.' www.alnap.org/help-library/what%E2%80%99s-the-aid-sector%E2%80%99s-carbon-footprint-everyone-is-measuring-different-things-so-we.

401   UNEP, 'Greening the Blue Report. The UN System's Environmental Footprint and Efforts to Reduce It' (Geneva: United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP), 2020). www.alnap.org/help-library/greening-the-blue-report-the-un-system%E2%80%99s-environmental-footprint-and-efforts-to-reduce.

402   Salzenstein and Pedersen, 'What's the Aid Sector's Carbon Footprint? Everyone Is Measuring Different Things, so We Are Comparing Apples and Pears.' www.alnap.org/help-library/what%E2%80%99s-the-aid-sector%E2%80%99s-carbon-footprint-everyone-is-measuring-different-things-so-we.

is yet to emerge. Air travel was reduced by the switch to remote meetings, but at the same time food requirements rose, staff required more vehicles to implement social distancing and large amounts of PPE waste have been generated.[403]

While there have been stronger policy and practice commitments made across the humanitarian system – which do at least give concerned individuals a standard against which to hold actors to account – interviewees said that this was not matched with strategic financial commitments. There are some exceptions. For example, WFP has committed funds to better understand the effects of climate change and improve related programming through its Climate and Food Security Analyses and the Climate and Resilience Impact Evaluation window, while the ICRC has announced a Climate and Environment Transition Fund[404] to develop its own initiatives in line with the new Climate and Environment Charter for Humanitarian Organisations. It is unclear, however, how many other actors in the system will follow suit – which is problematic given the prediction by aid practitioners and host governments in the 2022 SOHS surveys that climate change is likely to be the biggest external threat facing the humanitarian system in coming years.[405]

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403 Global key informant interviews.

404 ICRC, 'The ICRC Climate and Environment Transition Fund' (Geneva: ICRC, 2022). www.alnap.org/help-library/the-icrc-climate-and-environment-transition-fund.

405 The SOHS aid practitioner and host government surveys asked respondents what they thought would be the biggest threat the humanitarian system would face in coming years. Host government respondents most frequency cited climate change. While locally led action and sufficiency of resources were the top two internal threats to the system for practitioners, the next biggest concern was climate change as an external threat.

3

PART 3: HOW IS IT WORKING?

Chapter 8: Does the system treat people with dignity?

IN BRIEF: Over the past decade, the humanitarian system has increasingly taken on board the importance of 'upholding the dignity' of people in crisis.[1] Donors began to recognise the importance of accountability to affected populations (AAP), and agencies established more feedback or consultation mechanisms, and there have been improvements in safeguarding and protecting people from sexual exploitation and abuse.

Overall, however, there has not been a system-wide shift in how humanitarians engage with crisis-affected people or support their dignity. Aid recipients reported little improvement in communication, consultation or feedback. COVID-19 and conflict-related restrictions necessitated more remote forms of communication and engagement, instead of the face-to-face contact that most aid recipients prefer. There was little sign of agencies using feedback to adapt projects or providing meaningful opportunities for community decision-making. Many humanitarian practitioners are aware, and critical of, the limited opportunities they can offer for including affected communities in design and decision-making, and increasingly recognise that changes in mindset are required. But wholesale changes to practice lag behind. The 'participation revolution' is still in waiting.

Introduction

Respecting crisis-affected people implies seeing them as dignified individuals and self-determined communities rather than mere statistics of need. Over 2018–2021, as the humanitarian system continued to implement policies and good practices related to aid recipient engagement, it also faced renewed pressure to address the power dynamics between aid agencies and communities, with calls to 'decolonise' the aid sector. Simultaneously, the operational restrictions stemming from the COVID-19 pandemic and greater efforts to document 'survivor/community-led response' offered an opportunity for humanitarian agencies to rethink what community participation looks like.

Previous editions of the SOHS have focused on how the system performed on AAP, reflecting its own understanding of its obligations to affected people. Clearly, these are important considerations; how 'the system' chooses to interact with affected people – engage, consult and listen to them, and hold themselves accountable when things go

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1   I Mosel and K. Holloway, 'Dignity and Humanitarian Action in Displacement' (London: HPG/ODI, 2019). www.alnap.org/help-library/dignity-and-humanitarian-action-in-displacement-1.

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wrong – is a vital part of a holistic, effective and sympathetic response. But this is also part of a bigger question about relationships between aid organisations and the people they seek to support, and the outcomes as well as the mechanisms of these relationships. This chapter therefore takes dignity and respect as its framing concepts and explores how the actions and inactions of the humanitarian system can support or undermine them. It focuses on three areas: communication and consultation, opportunities for feedback to influence in decision-making, and the ability to hold agencies to account.

Box G: The ladder of engagement/participation

Shared definitions are important for the system to be able to track its collective performance. The IASC defines accountability to affected populations (AAP) as an active commitment to use power responsibly by taking account of, giving account to, and being held to account by the people humanitarian organisations seek to assist.[2] Engagement includes multiple different approaches to creating relationships between humanitarian agencies and crisis affected populations, including providing information, two-way communication, direct involvement in programme activities, consultations, accountability and participatory processes.[3] The depth and quality of participatory opportunities for crisis-affected people can vary, ranging from highly structured needs assessments to more substantive involvement in programme design and decision-making. The following table summarises these different processes.

Type of engagement	What is it?
One-way information sharing	Effective communication and information sharing with affected populations on several issues, including plans for services and activities; information on how to provide feedback and complaints; programmatic messaging to shift behaviours; and information on aid recipients' status and rights (particularly for refugees).
Consultation	Consultation aims to incorporate the needs and opinions of crisis-affected populations at key points in the project cycle, most often during the needs assessment and design phase.

2   IASC, 'The Essential Linkages between Accountability to Affected Populations (AAP) and Prevention of Sexual Exploitation and Abuse (PSEA)' (Geneva: IASC, 2015). https://aap-inclusion-psea.alnap.org/help-library/the-essential-linkages-between-accountability-to-affected-populations-aap-and.

3   D. Brown and A. Donini, 'Rhetoric or Reality? Putting Affected People at the Centre of Humanitarian Action.', ALNAP Study (London: ANLAP/ODI, 2014). www.alnap.org/help-library/rhetoric-or-reality-putting-affected-people-at-the-centre-of-humanitarian-action-0.

Type of engagement	What is it?
Feedback mechanisms	Feedback mechanisms are designed to give crisis- affected communities the opportunity to provide their opinions to humanitarian agencies on the performance of projects or their changing needs throughout the response. These may take multiple forms, including in-person meetings, phone hotlines or feedback boxes.
Complaints and accountability	Accountability mechanisms enable crisis-affected people to hold humanitarian actors to account through redress or sanction. Some of these complaints may be sensitive or criminal in nature. For these processes to be effective, there must be a meaningful response to the complaints or charges against humanitarian actors.
Participatory decision-making	Participatory decision-making requires crisis-affected populations to have the power to meaningfully influence decision-making. This goes beyond choosing options provided by agencies to having community priorities and ideas as the main steer of the project.

How do affected people rate dignity?

Dignity and respect are broad concepts influenced by many cultural and social factors, and as such are hard to define.[4] While humanitarian policies and norms reflect the centrality of dignity to a good humanitarian response, it can be hard to pin this down into operational standards and practices which take contextual differences into account. In surveys, aid recipients were largely positive about their sense of dignity: on average, aid recipients[5] across the six countries surveyed for the Grand Bargain and an average of 73% of aid recipients in the SOHS survey reported that they felt that aid workers treated them with dignity. But in focus group discussions and long-form interviews, where people are able to expand on a topic in more detail, responses were more mixed, reflecting differences in how crisis-affected people define and experience dignity and respect.

Accountability and participation are not the only determinants of a dignified response, but they play a role in enhancing feelings of dignity in some contexts. In the SOHS survey, aid recipients who had been consulted were 2.4 times more likely to say they were treated with dignity, while those who had provided feedback were 2.9 times more likely. Those who said they had been given only partial opportunities to respond rated dignified treatment lower than those who had reported having no feedback opportunity at all. This could indicate that consultation

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4   Mosel and Holloway, 'Dignity and Humanitarian Action in Displacement.' www.alnap.org/help-library/dignity-and-humanitarian-action-in-displacement-1.

5   Affected populations responded with a mean score of 3.8 to a 2018 survey question asking if they felt treated with respect by aid providers. The maximum score possible was 5, with 3 being neutral. As such, scores above 3 are treated as positive. Ground Truth Solutions, 'Grand Bargain: Field Perspectives 2018', Briefing Note (Ground Truth Solutions and OECD, 2019). www.alnap.org/help-library/grand-bargain-field-perspectives-2018.

Affected communities who were consulted about the aid they receive (*only 33%* of the 4,000+ surveyed for this SOHS) were

2.2 times

more likely to say that aid addressed their priority needs,

2.7 times

more likely to say that the aid they received was of good quality and

2.5 times

more likely to say that the amount of aid was sufficient.

Affected communities surveyed who said they were able to provide feedback or complain were

1.8 times

more likely to find the aid they received relevant to their most important needs,

2.5 times

more likely to say that the aid they received was of good quality and

2 times

more likely to say that the amount of aid was sufficient.

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and feedback practices only lead to increased dignity if they are done well; poor consultation or feedback mechanisms may be worse than having nothing at all – creating unmet expectations was a widespread challenge.[6] The 2021 aid recipient survey data also confirms the link between AAP and engagement practices and improved quality and effectiveness of humanitarian response, first reported in the 2018 SOHS. When people were consulted before distribution about what kind of aid they required, and when they had the opportunity to provide feedback, they were significantly more likely to say that the amount of aid they received was sufficient, relevant and of good quality (as seen in preceding full-page pull quotes).

Demographic factors also play a role in people's feelings of dignity, sometimes in unexpected ways. Women and people under the age of 24 were more likely to report being treated with dignity in the SOHS survey. Elsewhere, focus group discussions in Bangladesh and Lebanon revealed that men and women can have different perceptions of how aid relates to dignity. For example, women were more likely to see the delivery of dignified aid as an important form of support to meet their basic needs, while men were more likely to view aid as an inherently demeaning reminder of their inability to provide food and shelter for their family. Age also had an influence on perceptions of dignity, with younger or older people less likely to feel treated with respect if aid did not meet their specific priority needs of, for example, education or healthcare.[7] For some, needing assistance is in itself undignified.[8]

Consistent with other research,[9] we found no major difference between local and international humanitarian actors in their success at treating people with dignity according to aid recipients. Aid recipients in some focus group discussions were more negative about local and national NGO (L/NNGO) actors when it came to dignity, though others critiqued international organisations. These reflections are caveated by the fact it can be difficult for aid recipients to distinguish between international and local actors or to know for which aspects of aid delivery they are each responsible.

The most dignified form of support agencies can offer is simply giving people what they say they most need. However, as discussed in Chapter 5, this is far from straightforward and remains an area for improvement. Programme modalities that support self-reliance and recipients' agency in their own recovery, such as cash, education and livelihoods support, are commonly preferred and linked by aid recipients to their sense

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6   The question in the survey asked aid recipients 'Were you consulted by the aid group on what you needed prior to distribution?' with the possible responses of 'Yes; Partially; No'. As such, the type and quality of consultation experienced by aid recipients cannot be clearly determined from the responses.

7   Mosel and Holloway, 'Dignity and Humanitarian Action in Displacement.' www.alnap.org/help-library/dignity-and-humanitarian-action-in-displacement-1.

8   Focus group discussion in Yemen.

9   Mosel and Holloway, 'Dignity and Humanitarian Action in Displacement.' www.alnap.org/help-library/dignity-and-humanitarian-action-in-displacement-1.

of dignity.[10] But it matters how this aid is given: for example, cash be a more dignified response than in-kind, but this depends largely on effective distribution. When it is not timely or predictable, when agencies use poor communication or distribution methods, or when they do not consider safety and access for women, older people or those with disabilities, cash-based assistance can harm the dignity of aid recipients and increase the protection risks faced by women and girls in particular.[11]

How aid workers treat affected populations in needs assessment and distribution are important to ensuring dignity in all forms of humanitarian action. In several responses over 2018–2021, distribution sites ended up being places where aid recipients felt deeply disrespected. Aid recipients in Lebanon, Yemen and Venezuela expressed anger at being photographed or videoed at aid distribution points for use in donor reporting and fundraising. The global discussions on decolonising aid prompted Western humanitarian practitioners to reconsider their own agencies' approaches to imagery and fundraising, as one senior UK humanitarian described:

> 'Part of it is around our lexicon, our fundraising, our marketing, our imagery. Do we in our marketing, communications, fundraising, portray communities affected by crises as dignified, resilient human beings who are agents of their own destiny, who've been dealt a bad hand by fate but are skilful, capacitated people who are actually trying to recover, or do we portray them as hapless victims who need English people to come and save them.'

10   Mosel and Holloway (Ibid). www.alnap.org/help-library/dignity-and-humanitarian-action-in-displacement-1; WFP, 'WFP Evidence Summary Cash-Based Transfers Lessons from Evaluations' (Rome: WFP, 2021). www.alnap.org/help-library/wfp-evidence-summary-cash-based-transfers-lessons-from-evaluations; Taylor, Kreidler and Harvey, *Global Cash Evaluation*. www.alnap.org/help-library/nrc-global-cash-evaluation.

11   WFP (Ibid). www.alnap.org/help-library/wfp-evidence-summary-cash-based-transfers-lessons-from-evaluations; Taylor, Kreidler and Harvey (Ibid). www.alnap.org/help-library/nrc-global-cash-evaluation.

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In Lebanon, women were humiliated by staff when they went to collect their aid and doors were closed in their faces; in South Sudan, women were embarrassed when given personal hygiene kits while queuing alongside men for food.[12] In Yemen and Bangladesh, more serious abuses were reported, with aid recipients saying they had been beaten with sticks or whips by volunteers and aid workers in distribution lines.[13] In some cases, treatment by aid workers is so egregious that individuals reported opting out of receiving assistance to avoid interacting with aid agencies.[14]

How well do humanitarians communicate and consult with affected people?

One-way information sharing is the easier aspect of AAP practice for humanitarians to implement. Yet still only just a third of aid recipients in the SOHS survey (36%) reported that agencies did well in communicating information about plans and activities, a slight decline from the previous period.[15] As one national NGO staff member in DRC told us, communication sometimes lacked transparency 'limited to the presentation of the project, to the project activities, but we cannot tell the population that this is what funds were allocated to this activity, or that this is what was planned and what was achieved… the population should know that it is our money, and how it came to be used.'

Misinformation and a lack of transparency on decision-making generated deep dissatisfaction and even active resistance to aid programmes. As discussed in Chapters 4 and 7, poor communication of targeting criteria and decisions was an active concern for aid recipients and a threat to social cohesion. In the early phase of the 10th Ebola response in eastern DRC, communication was 'too vague or technical' and was not harmonised or translated accurately into local languages.[16] This, combined with a militarised, top-down public health response, led to increased hostility between communities and aid workers and even violent protests and attacks against aid agencies.[17]

12   Focus group Lebanon; Mosel and Holloway, 'Dignity and Humanitarian Action in Displacement.' www.alnap.org/help-library/dignity-and-humanitarian-action-in-displacement-1.

13   Focus group Yemen; K. Holloway and L. Fan, 'Dignity and the Displaced Rohingya in Bangladesh "Ijjot Is a Huge Thing in This World"' (London: HPG/ODI, 2018). www.alnap.org/help-library/dignity-and-the-displaced-rohingya-in-bangladesh.

14   Focus group Lebanon; O. Lough et al., 'Participation and Inclusion in the Rohingya Refugee Response in Cox's Bazar, Bangladesh. "We Never Speak First"' (London: HPG/ODI, 2021). www.alnap.org/help-library/participation-and-inclusion-in-the-rohingya-refugee-response-in-cox%E2%80%99s-bazar-bangladesh.

15   The more negative responses on the SOHS aid recipient survey may be influenced by the high proportion of survey participants living in areas of active conflict.

16   M. Ascuntar, 'Community First: The Key to Stopping the Ebola Epidemic', Responding to Ebola in the Democratic Republic of Congo (London: HPN/ODI, 2020). www.alnap.org/help-library/community-first-the-key-to-stopping-the-ebola-epidemic.

17   Field Group Discussions in DRC; Ascuntar (Ibid). www.alnap.org/help-library/community-first-the-key-to-stopping-the-ebola-epidemic.

The COVID-19 pandemic offered opportunities to apply lessons from recent Ebola health responses in terms of communicating with crisis-affected people – but it presented new challenges, too. The majority of crisis-affected populations prefer to communicate in person, whether in their own home or at community meetings,[18] but COVID-19 restrictions made face-to-face contact challenging, even for local NGO staff who were subject to stay-at-home orders. In refugee settings, the shift to online platforms and mobile-based communications was not tailored appropriately, leading to gaps in who was able to receive information and engage with agencies. Engagement with women and women's organisations was particularly affected, owing to lower mobile phone ownership.[19] There were clear negative impacts, as demonstrated in Ground Truth Solutions' longitudinal data in Somalia and Cox's Bazar, where rates of communication and engagement fell and aid recipients reported feeling 'abandoned' by the humanitarian community.[20]

Beyond the COVID-19 pandemic, agencies also struggled to tailor approaches to community communication preferences. While large-scale responses, such as the Syrian refugee response, may necessitate some use of remote communication, it can be distressing for aid recipients to receive certain types of information – such as news of impending cuts to cash transfers – in this way.[21] Agencies also struggled with two-way communication, both during consultation and throughout project implementation (as we later discuss in reference to feedback). Making this more challenging is that the expectations and desires of affected people to be consulted appeared to vary in ways that defied easy solutions. In some contexts, aid recipients seem to tie the lack of meaningful consultation to an overall feeling of lack of influence. For example, aid recipients in DRC described their sense that projects had already 'been decided' before they were consulted about their needs, while evaluations noted that communities described projects being 'announced' to them. In other contexts, however, aid recipients said that needs assessments made them feel undignified, with intrusive or insensitive questioning. Aid recipients in Yemen and Lebanon reported that others in their community felt ashamed to answer questions used for targeting purposes and were subsequently left out of a distribution.

18   REACH, 'Multi-Sector Needs Assessment (MSNA) Accountability to Affected Populations (AAP) Findings' (REACH/USAID, 2021). www.alnap.org/help-library/multi-sector-needs-assessment-msna-accountability-to-affected-populations-aap-findings.

19   Taylor et al., *Rights of Refugees*. www.alnap.org/help-library/joint-evaluation-of-the-protection-of-the-rights-of-refugees-during-the-covid-19.

20   Ground Truth Solutions, 'Perception Survey of Aid Recipients in Somalia' (Ground Truth Solutions, 2020). www.alnap.org/help-library/perception-survey-of-aid-recipients-in-somalia-0.

21   Betts et al., *WFP Regional Response*. www.alnap.org/help-library/evaluation-of-the-wfp-regional-response-to-the-syrian-crisis-2015-2018.

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Can crisis-affected people influence decision-making?

Aid organisations and donors invested in efforts to improve opportunities for recipients to have their views heard in programmes, partly in response to the Grand Bargain's 'participation revolution'. Agencies developed a wide range of policy guidance or tools and sought to implement multiple commitments, including improving leadership and coordination mechanisms for using feedback, strengthening links between feedback and corrective programming, and increasing flexible donor funding to enable those corrections. More agencies committed to using the Core Humanitarian Standard, which outlines best practices in engaging with affected populations. There were notable efforts by the IASC Results Group 2[22] to engage with Humanitarian Country Teams (HCTs) to use feedback at the response level. Meanwhile, agency-led initiatives from Plan International, IRC and the Start Network sought to make AAP mechanisms more inclusive for children, refugees, older people and people with disabilities.[23] There were also some efforts to use tailored feedback mechanisms with communities, despite COVID-19 pushing most of this communication into remote formats. World Vision, for example, found effective ways to support in-person feedback by working with community health workers.[24]

Donors kept attention on the issue of feedback, with several strengthening their requirements for agencies to demonstrate that feedback is being collected and acted upon. More donors asked agencies to include details of their AAP processes in proposals and some, including USAID, are improving their AAP reporting processes to better understand feedback from recipients and how it is informing project adjustments. However, the Grand Bargain reporting process revealed that donors are not adequately incentivising these practices and continue to expect fast and cost-effective responses, which aid agencies perceive as a priority that competes with AAP.[25] Allowing agencies greater budget flexibility to respond to evolving needs and use the most suitable modality still tends to be the exception rather than the rule. For example, Germany has a relatively flexible agreement with the German Red Cross based on years of

Agencies developed a wide range of policy guidance and tools and sought to implement multiple commitments to improving the voice and participation of crisis-affected people

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22   The IASC Results Group 2 was tasked with improving collective accountability and inclusion across IASC members. It operated for three years and was replaced by a new IASC Task Force on AAP from April 2022.

23   Plan International, 'Child-Friendly Feedback Mechanisms: Guide and Toolkit' (United Kingdom: Plan International, 2018). www.alnap.org/help-library/child-friendly-feedback-mechanisms-guide-and-toolkit; C. Khan, 'Accountability, Feedback & Complaints Mechanisms in Humanitarian Responses to Migration' (Start Network, 2020). www.alnap.org/help-library/accountability-feedback-and-complaints-mechanisms-in-humanitarian-responses-to; IRC, 'Inclusive Client Responsiveness. Focus on People with Disabilities and Older People', Toolbox (New York: International Rescue Committee (IRC), 2021). www.alnap.org/help-library/inclusive-client-responsiveness-focus-on-people-with-disabilities-and-older-people.

24   Global key informant interview.

25   Metcalfe-Hough et al., *Grand Bargain at Five*. www.alnap.org/help-library/the-grand-bargain-at-five-years-an-independent-review.

collaboration, and Ireland provides multi-year flexible humanitarian funding for partners that enables adaptations based on community feedback.[26]

Some agencies piloted new approaches to go beyond feedback towards deeper participation and allowed communities more choice over the aid they receive. For example, IRC is increasing its use of multi-purpose cash grants and experimenting with bundled services for refugees, whereby individuals can choose from a range of services to access those most useful for their needs.[27] Other organisations experimented with this as part of their humanitarian-development nexus pilots, and WFP increasingly used an approach to its resilience programming that integrates community-based participatory planning.[28] WFP has also been increasingly using an approach to its resilience projects that integrates community-based participatory planning.

Despite these high levels of effort and activity, on the whole, agencies still struggle to provide meaningful opportunities for community feedback and participatory decision-making. Agencies have continued to mainstream AAP practices, making complaints and feedback mechanisms now commonplace in humanitarian response in various formats – including complaints boxes, 'rumour' boxes, SMS, social media, hotlines and linking with community leaders.[29] Yet the lack of awareness among crisis-affected people of how to engage with aid agencies is a consistent problem.[30]

26   OECD, 'OECD Development Co-Operation Peer Reviews: Ireland 2020' (Paris: OECD, 2020). www.alnap.org/help-library/oecd-development-co-operation-peer-reviews-ireland-2020.

27   IRC, 'Economic Recovery and Development at the International Rescue Committee' (New York: International Rescue Committee (IRC), 2016). www.alnap.org/help-library/economic-recovery-and-development-at-the-international-rescue-committee.

28   T. Alcayna, 'Ready to Change? Building Flexibility into the Triple Nexus', Spotlight Study (London: ODI/ALNAP, 2019). www.alnap.org/help-library/ready-to-change-building-flexibility-into-the-triple-nexus. See also footnote 182.

29   For example, DRC. 'Global COVID-19 Response. Final Report May-December 2020'. Copenhagen: Danish Refugee Council (DRC), 2021. www.alnap.org/help-library/global-covid-19-response-danish-refugee-council; HAG and CARE. 'Tropical Cyclone Gita Response Program Evaluation'. Humanitarian Advisory Group and Care, 2019. www.alnap.org/system/files/content/resource/files/main/CARE_MORDI_LL-TC-Gita-Response-Final-Evaluation-Report_FINAL-FOR-CIRCULATION-1.pdf; Hanley, T, and et al. 'Evaluation of WFP's Capacity to Respond to Emergencies. Evaluation Report Vol I.' Rome: WFP, 2019. www.alnap.org/help-library/evaluation-of-wfps-capacity-to-respond-to-emergencies; Mutsaka, B., A. Dlugosz, B. Gift Kanike, T. Harris-Sapp, and h. Juillard. 'Real-Time Review of DEC's Response to Cyclone Idai'. London: DEC, 2019. www.alnap.org/help-library/real-time-review-of-decs-response-to-cyclone-idai; Danida and UNHCR. 'Joint Evaluation of the Integrated Solutions Model in and Around Kalobeyei, Turkana, Kenya'. Copenhagen/Geneva: Ministry of Foreign Affairs Denmark (Danida) and UNHCR, 2019. www.unhcr.org/5dfa287c4.pdf; Hanley, T., K. Ogwang, and C. Procter. 'Evaluation of UNHCR Prevention and Response to SGBV in the Refugee Population in Lebanon (2016–2018)'. Geneva: UNHCR, 2018. www.alnap.org/help-library/evaluation-of-unhcr-prevention-and-response-to-sgbv-in-the-refugee-population-in.

30   Mutsaka et al., Real-Time Review. www.alnap.org/help-library/real-time-review-of-decs-response-to-cyclone-idai; Key Aid Consulting, 'Impact Analysis of Aid in Haiti – 10 Years On' (Swiss Solidarity, 2020). www.alnap.org/help-library/impact-analysis-of-aid-in-haiti-10-years-on; UNICEF, Work to Link. www.alnap.org/help-library/evaluation-of-unicefs-work-to-link-humanitarian-and-development-programming; Daniels, Anderson and Yusuf Ali, 2017 Somalia Response. www.alnap.org/help-library/evaluation-of-the-2017-somalia-humanitarian-cash-based-response; Tirivayi et al., School Meals Programme. www.alnap.org/help-library/malawi-school-meals-programme-2016-2018-an-evaluation; Watanabe, Reinforcing Institutional Capacity. www.alnap.org/help-library/reinforcing-institutional-capacity-for-treatment-of-acute-malnutrition-prevention-of-0.

Although

1 in 3

aid recipients say they are able to provide feedback or complain, this varies.

In DRC,

50%

on respondents say they could provide feedback or complain.

In Tigray,

56%

of respondents say they couldn't.

In some cases, the number of operating organisations and their different accountability mechanisms can be confusing, with people being unsure of what type of aid they receive from which organisation and how to feed back to those responsible.[31] There was also a failure to fully implement lessons learned on the importance of taking local languages and communication preferences into account when designing feedback mechanisms.[32]

Only one in three aid recipients say they are able to provide feedback or complain, approximately the same as in 2018.[33] However, feedback opportunities varied significantly across responses, with half of aid recipients in DRC saying they had been able to provide feedback or make complaints, while only fewer than one in five did so in Tigray, where there was active conflict and limited access for agencies. Indeed, a majority of aid recipients do not feel that their opinion is taken into account by humanitarians in decision-making.[34] As one aid recipient in Yemen summarised: 'I don't think that we can influence decisions about aid because we are only beneficiaries and the international organisations are the ones that decide this matter.'[35]

Similar to the issues with consultation described above, over the study period, a growing gap emerged between what aid recipients expect and what aid agencies offer when it comes to feedback and influence over programming. Aid recipients in Yemen, DRC, Venezuela and Lebanon described responses to their feedback in despairing terms and refugees in Lebanon renamed a joint UN hotline as a 'coldline'.[36] Failures to consistently 'close the feedback loop' by providing a response to aid recipients is creating a trust deficit between aid recipients and agencies that threatens the uptake of consultation and feedback mechanisms. Aid recipients we spoke with were frustrated with the sense of 'powerlessness' generated by the lack of follow-up and transparency on how feedback or complaints were actioned.[37] In Bangladesh, some aid recipients explained that lack of responsiveness to their complaints over the long term has led them to give up trying to use the accountability mechanisms that are in place. According to one interviewee: 'Some site management volunteers visit the camp to collect complaints and feedback, but when we complain to them about something, it takes up to

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31   Majewski et al., *Decentralised Evaluation*. www.alnap.org/help-library/decentralised-evaluation-wfps-general-food-assistance-to-syrian-refugees-in-jordan-2015.

32   Global key informant interview; Christian Aid, 'Accountability Assessment Rohingya Response Bangladesh' (London: Christian Aid, 2018). www.alnap.org/help-library/accountability-assessment-rohingya-response-bangladesh.

33   In 2018 this was 36%, in 2022 it is 33%.

34   Only 41% of aid recipients across 6 countries said they thought humanitarian agencies took their opinions into account (Ground Truth Solutions, 2019).

35   Focus group discussion in Yemen.

36   Betts et al., *WFP Regional Response*. www.alnap.org/help-library/evaluation-of-the-wfp-regional-response-to-the-syrian-crisis-2015-2018.

37   Focus groups in Bangladesh and Yemen; WFP, 'WFP Evidence Summary Cash-based transfers Lessons from evaluations', WFP, 2021. www.alnap.org/help-library/wfp-evidence-summary-cash-based-transfers-lessons-from-evaluations.

six months to receive the response, people get tired of waiting, so they just don't give any complaint and feedback. We have complained about this drain at least 300 times in the last three years, but there is no response yet.'

The challenges with closing feedback loops and making substantive adaptations based on aid recipient input are, by now, well-known,[38] but they continue to come up in multiple evaluations. Generally, feedback data goes to the wrong people in the organisation – typically more junior staff who lack the power to do anything with it – and is not analysed or integrated properly with decision-making structures that are typically opaque or top-down or both.[39] When changes are made based on feedback, these tend to be small in scale and largely fit within the original project design – such as alterations to borehole locations, extending target groups to other individuals within a community, tailoring non-food item kits to better take the needs of women and girls into account, or changing the materials used for shelter flooring.[40]

Making more significant shifts in response to feedback is often hard for humanitarian agencies, for the same reasons that limit adaptive approaches to programming more widely. Project outputs are typically agreed at the outset of receiving grant funding and require time and effort to change; as discussed in Chapter 5, even when donors are more supportive of adjustments, humanitarian staff may not feel they have the bandwidth or time to request them. Constraints at the international level are also passed on to local and national organisations who work more directly with crisis-affected populations, placing a strain on their relationships with communities. As a Syrian national NGO representative described: 'When it comes to local people who are beneficiaries of our projects, it's hard. They get to participate in complaint and feedback mechanisms, yes, but that's related to the projects. That's related to specific activities… Otherwise it's hard and local people do not have that much of a say.'

> **When changes are made based on feedback, these tend to be small in scale and largely fit within the original project design.**

Is the system becoming more accountable to affected people?

In their work, humanitarian practitioners aim to express solidarity with crisis-affected people and a desire to support humanity and dignity in the most difficult circumstances. Even when these aims are realised, there remains an inherent power imbalance in the relationship between humanitarian actors and the people they serve; the relationship is one of choice for humanitarians, while it is almost always one of necessity or circumstance for crisis-affected people. Trying to offer meaningful accountability opportunities in the context of this relationship has always been a challenge.

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38   Participation Revolution.

39   Danida and UNHCR, *Integrated Solutions Model*, 102–3. www.alnap.org/help-library/joint-evaluation-of-the-integrated-solutions-model-in-and-around-kalobeyei-turkana; Global Key informant interviews.

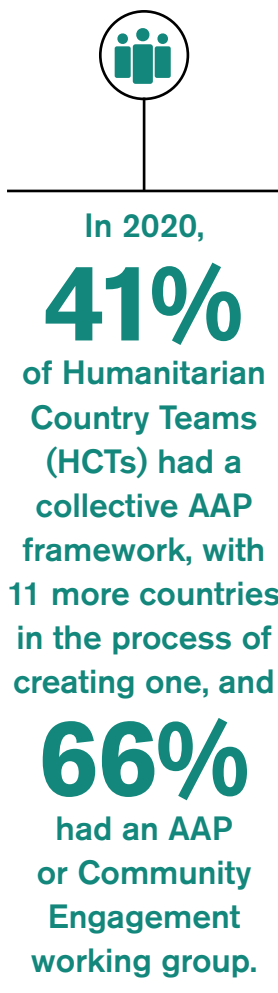40   Global key informant interviews.

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The wider political and cultural context for humanitarian action – which affects how people relate to authority and have faith in accountability mechanisms – continued to be a challenge. Aid recipients and humanitarians shared examples of recipients being excluded by governments from aid distribution for complaining (Yemen), governments shutting projects down after complaints (Bangladesh) or experiencing or fearing targeted abuse (Bangladesh and DRC). Cultural norms along with longer-term aid dependency can also erode people's sense of agency to hold aid organisations to account. In DRC and Venezuela, recipients were accustomed to being viewed only as passive 'beneficiaries'. One aid worker in Venezuela described the difficulties in understanding the true concerns of aid recipients: 'Each letter is prettier than the previous one, so in each letter people say thanks, hugs, kisses, blessings. I tell them every month, whenever I can, that's very good, it's very nice, but this doesn't help us to grow up because we cannot measure that and I know there should be weaknesses but we cannot see them.'

These power dynamics are the same reason why meaningful accountability mechanisms for crisis-affected people – those which allow communities to hold agencies to account through sanction or redress – continue to elude the system. A prominent exception to this over the study period was the effort made to strengthen mechanisms PSEAH, which included improving support to survivors for seeking legal redress against perpetrators although as Chapter 7 shows, this still had a long way to go. Bearing this in mind, there were positive signals for future improvements in meaningful accountability to affected populations at the top of the system, with increasing efforts to strengthen collective accountability and more recognition by humanitarian leaders that the system needs to make efforts beyond programmatic AAP mechanisms to change the balance of power.

Collective accountability comes in many forms, but most centres on feedback rather than redress. At the country coordination level, more HCTs now have AAP frameworks and working groups and are increasingly integrating AAP questions into needs assessments. HCTs have also created tools to better track their collective efforts, which were ready to pilot in 2022. How these high-level initiatives will affect practice, however, remains to be seen. Among NGOs, there have been several initiatives to improve collective accountability, including the creation of a shared mechanism for Start Network members in Bangladesh, and several organisations have signed up to use the Loop platform to gather and respond to community feedback in the Philippines, Somalia and Zambia. But difficulties in coordination between UN agencies on community engagement posed significant challenges to response-wide accountability to affected populations.[41] UN-created collective accountability mechanisms are not yet well-established, and practical implementation of collective accountability in this period was blocked by a lack of shared understanding

In 2020,

41%

of Humanitarian Country Teams (HCTs) had a collective AAP framework, with 11 more countries in the process of creating one, and

66%

had an AAP or Community Engagement working group.

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41   Holloway et al., *Collective Approaches*. www.alnap.org/help-library/collective-approaches-to-communication-and-community-engagement-models-challenges-and-0.

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> **One of the biggest failings of the humanitarian system is that agencies do not pay enough attention to what people caught up in crises say they want, and then trying to give that to them.**

of key concepts, practical models, limited leadership buy-in and a lack of dedicated funding to support consistent services.[42]

In terms of wider, system-level accountability to affected populations, the Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs funded an exploration into reviving the humanitarian ombudsman project, which would establish an independent mechanism to hold agencies to account. Meanwhile the departing Emergency Relief Coordinator Mark Lowcock decried the system's persistent lack of accountability to affected populations.[43] Noting that 'one of the biggest failings of the humanitarian system is that agencies do not pay enough attention to what people caught up in crises say they want, and then trying to give that to them', Lowcock called for the creation of a new independent body, staffed by representatives of crisis-affected populations, to hold the system to account by publicly grading humanitarian responses on how well they met people's priority needs.[44]

This high-level attention was welcomed by many and the former Emergency Relief Coordinator's proposal in particular seemed to have immediate traction, with inter-agency meetings held to discuss its potential implementation. At the same time, the proposal raised a number of concerns, including the need to build on existing accountability practices and structures[45] and the practical difficulties of having crisis-affected people's concerns meaningfully conveyed in a global mechanism,[46] as well as questions about whether a global approach is preferable to more locally based accountability systems that shift power closer to affected populations.[47] A task force, led by IFRC and WFP, was subsequently set up to investigate the suggestion and to determine more broadly what the system's priorities should be for creating meaningful and effective collective accountability to affected populations.

42   Holloway et al. (Ibid). www.alnap.org/help-library/collective-approaches-to-communication-and-community-engagement-models-challenges-and-0.

43   M. Lowcock, 'What's Wrong with the Humanitarian Aid System and How to Fix It – Remarks by the Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs, Mark Lowcock, at the Center for Global Development on Proposal for an Independent Commission for Voices in Crisis', Press Release (online: OCHA, 22 April 2021). www.alnap.org/help-library/what%E2%80%99s-wrong-with-the-humanitarian-aid-system-and-how-to-fix-it.

44   OCHA, 'Proposal: Piloting the Independent Commission for Voices in Crises (ICVIC)' (Geneva: OCHA, 2021). www.alnap.org/help-library/proposal-piloting-the-independent-commission-for-voices-in-crises-icvic.

45   CHS Alliance, 'CHS Alliance Response to Emergency Relief Coordinator's Proposal on Independent Commission for Voices in Crisis (ICVIC)', CHS Alliance, 2021. www.alnap.org/help-library/chs-alliance-response-to-emergency-relief-coordinator%E2%80%99s-proposal-on-independent.

46   D. Hilhorst, 'Aid Agencies Can't Police Themselves. It's Time for a Change', *The New Humanitarian*, 2018. www.alnap.org/help-library/aid-agencies-can%E2%80%99t-police-themselves-it%E2%80%99s-time-for-a-change.

47   M. Zarnegar Deloffre, 'An Independent Commission for Voices in Crisis: Changing the Referee Instead of Changing the Game' (London: HPN/ODI, 2021); CHS Alliance, 'CHS Alliance Response to Emergency Relief Coordinator's Proposal on Independent Commission for Voices in Crisis (ICVIC)'. www.alnap.org/help-library/an-independent-commission-for-voices-in-crisis-changing-the-referee-instead-of-changing.

While overall progress on the system's accountability to affected populations remains slow, practitioners noted the continued need for a deeper shift in mindsets and values for meaningful improvements in the power dynamics between humanitarian agencies and communities:

> 'The shift in power is a huge thing…
> there needs to be a huge shift in the narrative
> from victim and beneficiary to also responder…
> And that shifts the narrative away from
> charity to actually being one of solidarity'.

Chapter 9: Does the international system enable local action?

IN BRIEF: In response to calls to become 'as local as possible, as international as necessary' during the previous SOHS study period, the system has seen significant efforts and some meaningful progress, with local and national NGOs (L/NNGOs) reporting improvements since 2018. International agencies – especially INGOs – supported initiatives that were genuinely led by local actors, and there was a clear shift in thinking and rhetoric. Monitoring processes for the Grand Bargain and Charter for Change presented a picture of forward momentum in their signatories' efforts to implement commitments. But there was no real increase in funding for local actors, and for the most part L/NNGOs continued to operate as sub-contractors, with limited influence.

Overall, the study period was a missed opportunity to progress this agenda: change has been incremental and uneven and neither COVID-19 nor system-wide reflections on decolonisation galvanised significant shifts in power. Frustratingly slow change processes are common to the humanitarian system, but the strong ethical imperative to 'localise', and renewed reflections on the system's colonial past, led some to question whether the status quo persisted because the international humanitarian enterprise is inherently racist.[48]

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It is hard to find another issue that has commanded more attention and urgency in the international humanitarian system over the past four years than the way it treats local actors. The previous SOHS report was the first in the series to assess the system's performance in complementing and supporting national and local efforts at responding to humanitarian needs (under the criterion 'Complementarity'). The inclusion of that new chapter reflected growing concern during the 2015–2017 period over who delivers humanitarian aid and holds decision-making power within the system, connected to the World Humanitarian Summit and the Grand Bargain. Since the last report, 'localisation' became a key issue for many humanitarian agencies, due to both the practical necessities arising from the COVID-19 pandemic with restricted international access to crises, and the moral necessity prompted by reflections on racism and the humanitarian system's colonial past.

48   DA Global, *Is Aid Really Changing?* www.alnap.org/help-library/is-aid-really-changing-what-the-covid-19-response-tells-us-about-localisation; P. Currion, 'Decolonising Aid, Again. "The Unfinished Business of Decolonisation Is the Original Sin of the Modern Aid Industry."', *The New Humanitarian*, 2021. www.alnap.org/help-library/decolonising-aid-again-%25E2%2580%259Cthe-unfinished-business-of-decolonisation-is-the-original.

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However, as observed with previous reforms (e.g. AAP, PSEAH), an increase in rhetoric and attention is rarely paired with immediate meaningful changes in practice. In their five-year review of progress, signatories to the Charter for Change commitments[49] on localisation noted country-level implementation 'is still wanting'.[50] Humanitarian practitioners echo that assessment: while generally positive about the overall relationship between international and local/national actors (56% of respondents rated this as 'good' or 'excellent'), they were less positive about the system's performance on the specifics of supporting L/NNGO leadership capacity (36%), power sharing in decision-making forums (27%), and passing on direct funding (21%). Despite investments and advances, progress has been much slower and more uneven than desired, pointing to the need for localisation efforts to better address the gaps between global-level policy discussions and country-level realities.

The performance question for this chapter is to understand how the humanitarian system is supporting locally led responses to people in crisis, and how these changes are, or are not, keeping pace with commitments. Below, we summarise the commitments, definitions and debates around localisation that have driven action between 2018 and 2021, then address whether the system has shifted resources to local actors. We then look at how the system has engaged with governments, whether it is shifting power to L/NNGOs, and conclude by outlining the impacts of and lessons from COVID-19.

What does localisation mean?

The study period saw progress in developing localisation both as a fundamental norm and as a concrete set of global policies and practices. Views previously considered 'fringe' or radical[51] – that the humanitarian system should decolonise, that international actors impinge on the rights of local actors by undermining self-determination[52] – entered the mainstream, prompting difficult system-wide conversations,

49   The Charter for Change is an initiative led by INGOs and NNGOs to implement a range of commitments to support locally led humanitarian action, and was formed in the lead up to the 2016 World Humanitarian Summit. Charter 4 Change, 'Charter for Change Annual Meeting Report (7–9 December 2021)', 2021. www.alnap.org/help-library/charter-for-change-annual-meeting-report-7-9-december-2021.

50   Charter 4 Change (Ibid). www.alnap.org/help-library/charter-for-change-annual-meeting-report-7-9-december-2021.

51   DA Global, *Is Aid Really Changing?* www.alnap.org/help-library/is-aid-really-changing-what-the-covid-19-response-tells-us-about-localisation.

52   H Slim, 'Is Racism Part of Our Reluctance to Localise Humanitarian Action?', HPN, 2022. www.alnap.org/help-library/is-racism-part-of-our-reluctance-to-localise-humanitarian-action; Currion, 'Decolonising Aid, Again. "The Unfinished Business of Decolonisation Is the Original Sin of the Modern Aid Industry."' www.alnap.org/help-library/decolonising-aid-again-%E2%80%9Cthe-unfinished-business-of-decolonisation-is-the-original-sin.

from IASC meetings to donor groups.[53] The decolonisation discussions underlined the ethical and reputational costs that the system faces should it fail to shift power to local actors.[54]

Global definitions of 'direct funding' and 'local and national responders' were formally agreed in 2018.[55] This improved the ability to track funds to local actors within OCHA's Financial Tracking Service (FTS) and clarified expectations for the Grand Bargain commitments to fund local actors 'as directly as possible'.[56] The Grand Bargain workstream on localisation was seen as the key driver of progress at a global level, providing momentum to international agencies' policies and mechanisms for localisation. The five-year review of the Grand Bargain concluded that 'the concept of and rationale for localisation [is] no longer in question'.[57]

Matters were different at country level. Agencies held varying interpretations of what supporting locally led humanitarian action meant in practice and there was disagreement about the goals of these efforts.[58] A prime example is the term 'localisation' itself: for some, supporting locally led humanitarian action means localising the international humanitarian system through the devolution of power and resources; for others, this framing maintains echoes of colonialism, whereby local actors achieve formal power only by modelling Western-dominated values and frameworks.[59] The decentralisation of international agencies, intended to shift power away from headquarters in Western countries, was, in some eyes, a means by which international agencies could localise while retaining power and resources. For example, a key informant in Somalia explained that 'international NGOs are becoming more "local" by employing more Somalis. We can say that today 70% or more of the INGO's country directors are Somalis, so they are saying: "What [do] you mean by localisation? We are local."' Some INGOs, such as Oxfam, were

53   S. Patel, 'Localisation, Racism and Decolonisation: Hollow Talk or Real Look in the Mirror?', Humanitarian Practice Network (HPN), 2021. www.alnap.org/help-library/localisation-racism-and-decolonisation-hollow-talk-or-real-look-in-the-mirror; Good Humanitarian Donorship, 'Co-Chairmanship Priorities 2021-2023', Good Humanitarian Donorship (GHD), 2021. www.alnap.org/help-library/co-chairmanship-priorities-2021-2023.

54   A. Bagious, Internal presentation to the Good Humanitarian Donorship, November 2021.

55   Although these remain contested by some local actors.

56   IASC HFTT Localisation Marker Working Group 2018.

57   Metcalfe-Hough et al., *Grand Bargain at Five*. www.alnap.org/help-library/the-grand-bargain-at-five-years-an-independent-review.

58   Baker et al., *Response to Cyclone Idai*. www.alnap.org/help-library/real-time-review-of-decs-response-to-cyclone-idai; G. Storer et al., 'DFAT – Australian Red Cross Humanitarian Partnership 2015–2018' (Canberra: Australian Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade/ Australian Red Cross, 2018). www.alnap.org/help-library/evaluation-of-australian-red-cross-humanitarian-partnership-2015-19; K. Tong et al., 'Formative Evaluation of UNFPA Approach to South-South and Triangular Cooperation' (New York: UNFPA, 2020). www.alnap.org/help-library/formative-evaluation-of-unfpa-approach-to-south-south-and-triangular-cooperation; SANDE CONSULTORES LDA, 'External Evaluation of Cyclone Idai and Kenneth Response in Mozambique' (Oxford/London: Oxfam and DEC, 2021); UNICEF, *Work to Link*. www.alnap.org/help-library/evaluation-of-unicefs-work-to-link-humanitarian-and-development-programming.

59   A. Baguios, , 'Localisation Re-imagined: Essay series', ALNAP, 2021-2022. www.alnap.org/insights-0/essays; Somalia in-country research 2021.

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conscious of these potential implications and sought to mitigate them by pursuing a long-term strategy of addressing power imbalances in their organisation through increased local leadership in its national affiliates.[60]

Localisation is also shaped differently in each response by the dynamics of the country-level humanitarian system and its wider context. The notion of international actors surrendering power and resources to local actors embedded in communities is complicated by international actors' competition with one another and the diversity, complexity and fragmentation within both international and local organisations. Across the SOHS country studies, governments repressed domestic civil society actors while drawing on narratives of sovereignty and national self-sufficiency to limit the space for international agencies. International NGOs and UN agencies fought over who would stay and who would leave if the system moved to a more limited international presence. Elsewhere, UN agencies resisted donor and INGO attempts to localise. L/NNGOs are of course not a homogenous group: there were disagreements over who is more 'local' and wide variations in their awareness of the locally led agenda. Global-level commitments were a distant voice in these heated country-level debates; many local organisations said they had never heard of localisation or international agency global commitments to it.

Is the system shifting resources to local and national actors?

Direct reported funding to local and national actors (LNAs) – defined as governments, local/national NGOs and RCRC National Societies – was volatile over the 2018–2021 period, primarily as a result of changes in direct funding to national governments. All local actors saw a significant rise in funding in 2020 due to the COVID-19 pandemic increasing needs and hindering implementation by international actors. Direct funding then declined for all actors in 2021, with governments seeing a drop of 74% and RCRC National Societies, 48%.[61]

60   L. Ramdhani et al., 'Can INGOs Go National in the Global South without Recolonising Aid?', Humanitarian Practice Network (HPN), 2021. www.alnap.org/help-library/can-ingos-go-national-in-the-global-south-without-recolonising-aid.

61   RCRC figures may not reflect true totals, given that these numbers are based on FTS and some RCRC national societies in crisis countries rely more on non-Western donors that do not routinely report to FTS.

Figure 34: Direct international funding to national and local actors, 2018–2021

Direct funding to local and national actors was volatile between 2018 and 2021. After a steep rise in 2020, as international actors relied on local capacities to deliver during COVID-19, funding plummeted in 2021.
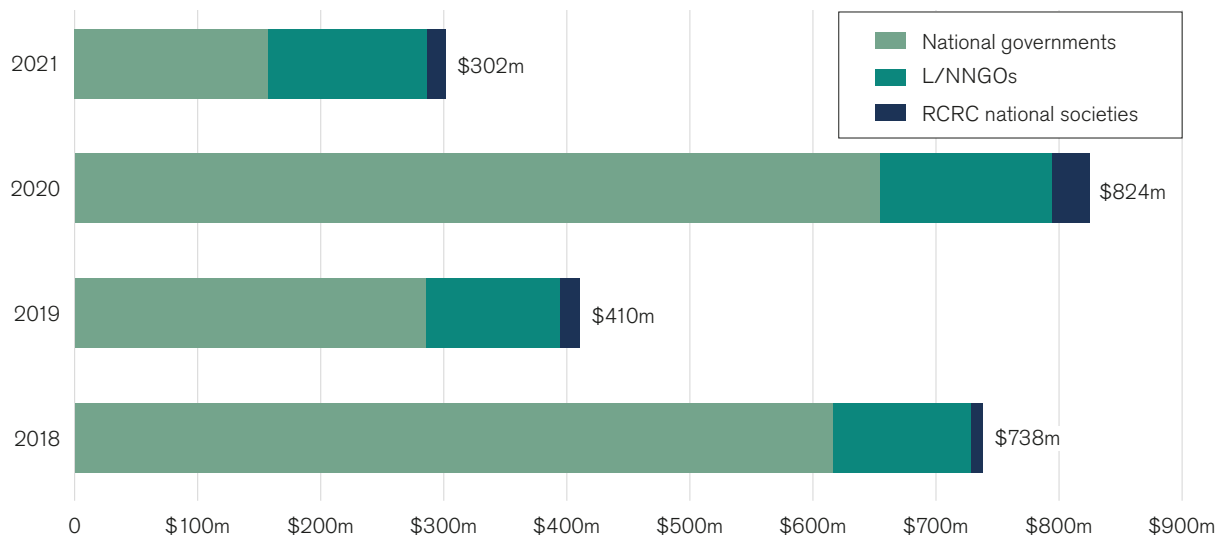
Source: Development Initiatives based on UN OCHA FTS and UN OCHA CBPF Data Hub. Southern international NGOs, which receive funding to operate within the country they are headquartered in, are included as national actors. RCRC national societies that received international humanitarian assistance to respond to domestic crises are included in local and national actors. Similarly, international funding to national governments is only considered as funding to national actors when contributing to the domestic crisis response. Funding is only shown for flows that reported with information on the recipient organisation. Data is in constant 2020 prices.

Figure 35: Proportion of direct funding to national and local actors compared with other organisation types, 2018–2021

The proportion of direct funding to local and national actors remained extremely low between 2018 and 2021, peaking at 3% in 2020, as COVID-19 increased the reliance of international actors on local capacities, and falling to a new low of 1.2% in 2021.
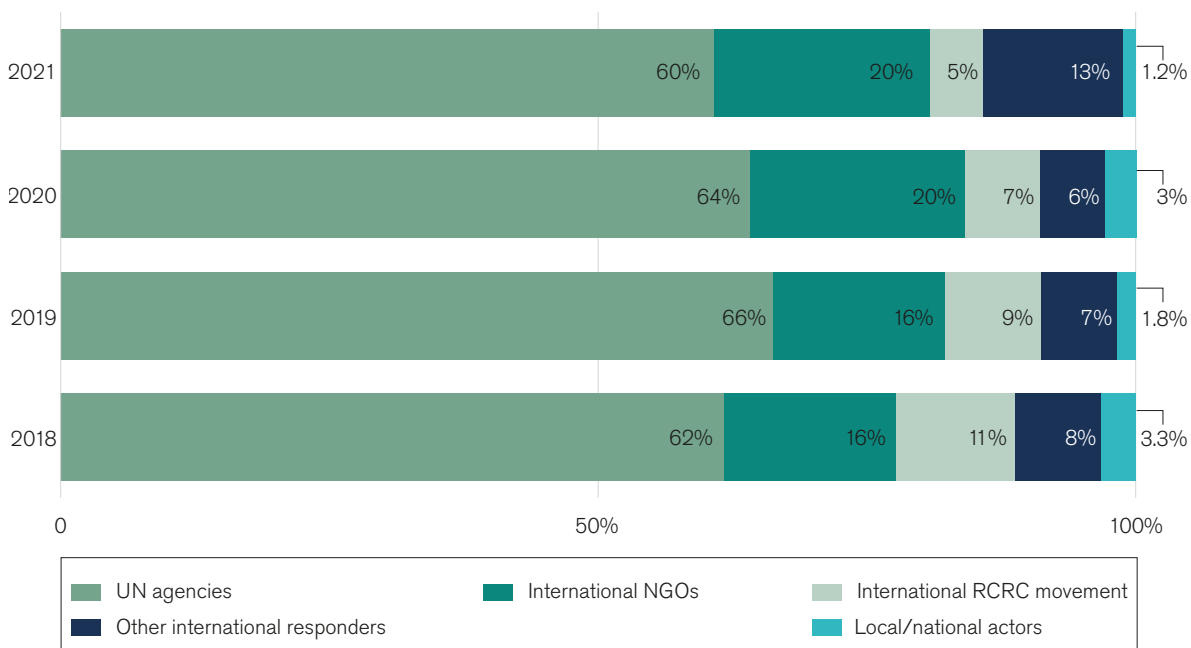
Source: Development Initiatives based on UN OCHA FTS data.

Notes: Southern international NGOs, which receive funding to operate within the country they are headquartered in, are included as national actors. RCRC national societies that received international humanitarian assistance to respond to domestic crises are included in local and national actors. Similarly, international funding to national governments is only considered as funding to national actors when contributing to the domestic crisis response. Funding is only shown for flows that reported with information on the recipient organisation. Data is in constant 2020 prices.

Overall, direct funding[62] to local actors remained extremely low as a proportion of IHA – between a high of 3.3% (2018, 2020) and a low of 1.2% in 2021. After small but steady increases in funding to L/NNGOs since 2016, both indirect and direct funding declined in 2021, to around 1.5% of all international humanitarian funding. Even in responses that were considered more locally led than usual, a majority of funding continued to pass through UN agencies and INGOs: in the 2018 Sulawesi earthquake response, 65% of funding went through internationals despite the response being led by the government and national NGOs,[63] and in the first three months of the COVID-19 pandemic, 74% of committed funds to the Global Humanitarian Response Plan (GHRP) were allocated to UN agencies.[64]

62   Direct funding includes what FTS considers as 'new money' to the humanitarian system (largely funding from governments and private donors). To capture international humanitarian assistance, DI exclude funding by governments for domestic disaster response. Indirect funding contains funding flows from FTS using that are not classified as 'new money' to the humanitarian system and also excluded domestic government responses.

63   HAG and Pujiono Centre, 'Charting the New Norm?: Local Leadership in the First 100 Days of the Sulawesi Earthquake Response' (Humanitarian Advisory Group and Pujiono Centre, 2019). www.alnap.org/help-library/charting-the-new-norm-local-leadership-in-the-first-100-days-of-the-sulawesi-earthquake.

64   Jeremy Konyndyk, Patrick Saez and Rose Worden, 'Inclusive Coordination: Building an Area-Based Humanitarian Coordination Model' (Washington DC: Center for Global Development (CGD), 2020). www.alnap.org/help-library/inclusive-coordination-building-an-area-based-humanitarian-coordination-model.

Figure 36: Total direct and indirect funding to national and local NGOs, 2018–2021

Direct and indirect funding to national and local NGOs decreased by nearly 10% in 2021 to $129 million and $328 million respectively. Direct funding accounted for around 40% of the share received by local and national actors in the same period.

Source: Development Initiatives based on UN OCHA FTS and UN OCHA CBPF Data Hub.

Notes: Direct funding is sourced from the FTS, containing all direct funding from first-level donors, such as governments or private donors, 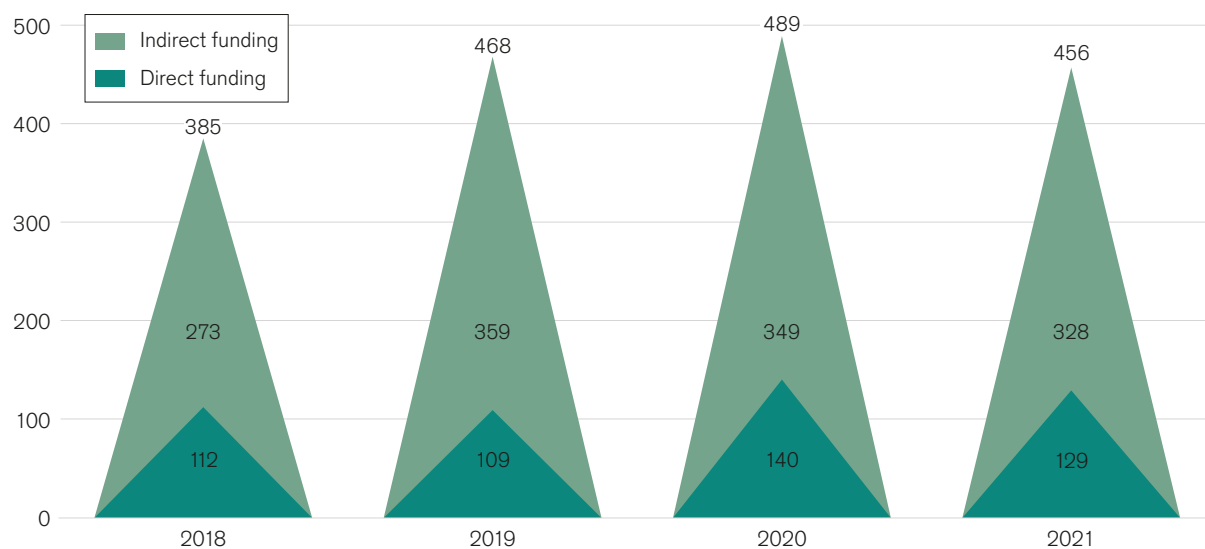to organisations that could be identified as national and local NGOs. Southern international NGOs, which receive funding to operate within the country they are headquartered in, are included as national NGOs. Calculations of indirect funding through country-based pooled funds (CBPFs), either as direct allocations or as sub-grants of CBPF allocations, are sourced through the UN CBPF data hub. Indirect funding from sources other than CBPFs is taken from FTS where *reported* as net funding received. Data is in constant 2020 prices.

Indirect funding remains difficult to track globally due to poor reporting. Official figures show that indirect funding remains fairly low, with only $328 million in indirect funding to L/NNGOs in 2021. But country-based research and data on L/NNGO expenditures suggest that the amount of indirect funding is much higher than is reported through FTS.

While not a representative sample, for the 100 or so national NGOs (across 26 countries) included in the SOHS sample, overall programming budgets grew on average by 28% over the period, and national NGOs in the SOHS localisation studies reported an increase in their funding over 2018–2021. Multiple other sources, including reporting for the Grand Bargain and Charter for Change as well as SOHS localisation research, found increases in indirect funding to L/NNGOs.[65]

65   Over half of international actors surveyed in Somalia and Turkey reported having targets for increasing funding to L/NNGOs, with some country-level donors and agencies reporting passing over 50% of their funding through L/NNGOs. At the global level, 13 Grand Bargain signatories reported giving more than 25% of their funding to local/national actors in 2020, up from seven in 2018. Amongst the Charter4Change signatories, 23% of those surveyed at HQ level 'reported transferring 25% or more to local and national counterparts'. See: Metcalfe-Hough et al., *Grand Bargain at Five*. www.alnap.org/help-library/the-grand-bargain-at-five-years-an-independent-review; Charter 4 Change, 'Charter for Change Annual Meeting Report (7–9 December 2021)'. www.alnap.org/help-library/charter-for-change-annual-meeting-report-7-9-december-2021.

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L/NNGOs and other local actors also received a greater share of indirect funding through pooled funds: their percentage share of country-based pooled funds rose steadily to 35% in 2021. In some contexts, the increase has been even higher, for example, L/NNGOs' share of funding from the Somali pooled fund increased from 39% in 2017 to over 54% in 2021.[66]

There is also variation across countries and clusters. Figures 37 and 38 provide totals of IHA to local and national actors by country and by cluster, for 2018–2021.[67]

Figure 37: International humanitarian assistance to local and national actors by country, 2018–2021

Between 2018 and 2021, almost half of all international humanitarian assistance received by local and national actors occurred in just three countries: Yemen ($1,067 million), Syria ($417 million) and Lebanon ($133 million).
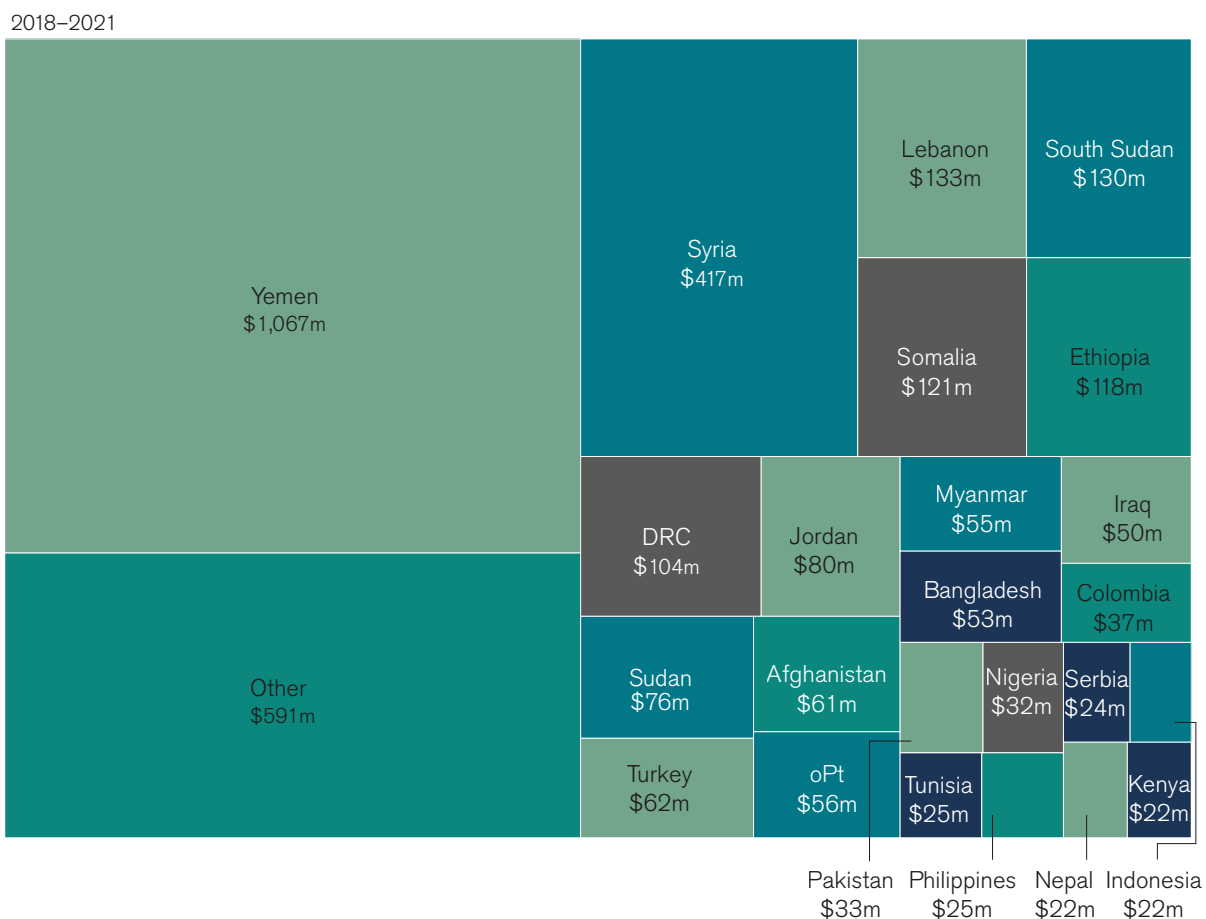
Source: Development Initiatives based on UN OCHA FTS and UN OCHA CBPF Data Hub.

Notes: Funding to local and national actors includes all direct and indirect funding to NGOs, government agencies and RCRC national societies for humanitarian response in the country they are based in as reported to UN OCHA's FTS and by country-based pooled funds. Data is in constant 2020 prices and shows aggregate funding over 2018–2021. Locations that received funding of less than US$20 million over 2018–2021 were aggregated as 'other' for clarity.

66   Research conducted by NEAR for this report in Somalia.

67   The data on both funding per country and per cluster is strongly influenced by funding from Saudi Arabia to the Yemeni government, which totalled $874 million in IHA over the period 2018–2021 – this inflated the amount of LNA funding not only for Yemen, but also for the 'coordination and support services' sector, under which half of this funding was reported. In Yemen, the health and food security clusters accounted for the majority of the rest of the funding to LNAs.

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Figure 38: International humanitarian assistance to local and national actors by cluster, in millions USD, 2018–2021

Between 2018 and 2021, more than half of all international humanitarian assistance received by local and national actors occurred in just three sectors: health ($713m), coordination and support services ($553m), and food security ($538m).

2018–2021
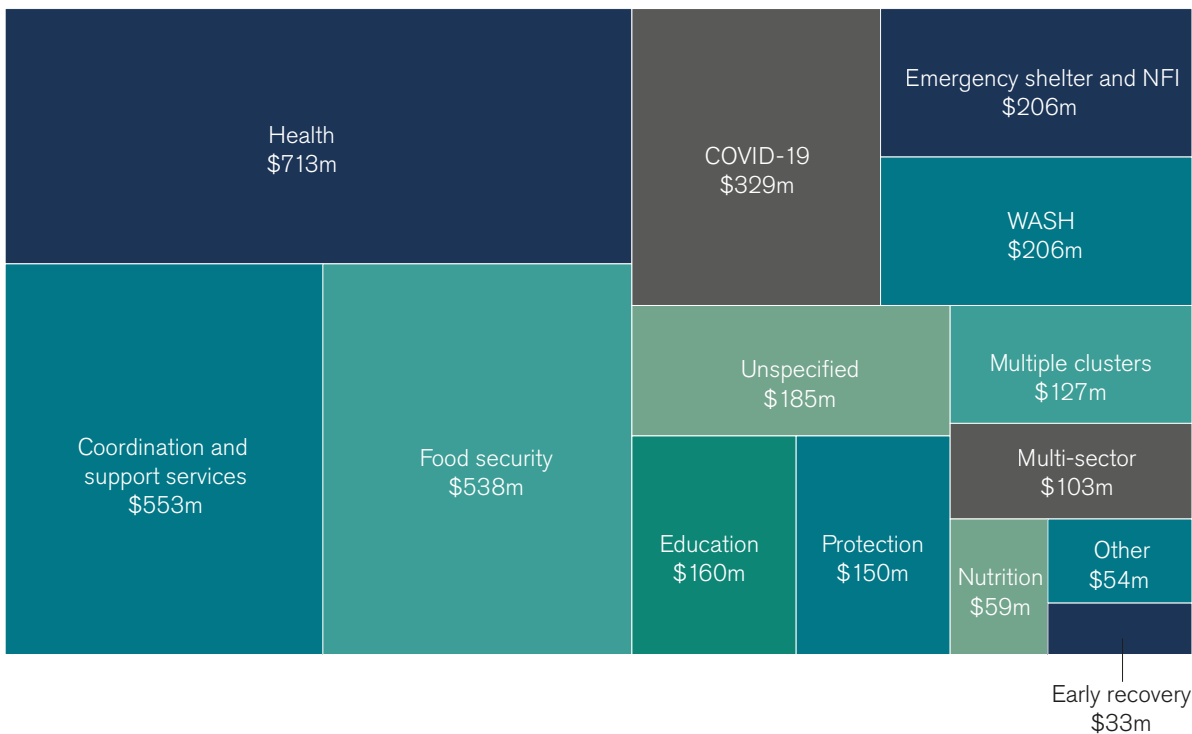
| Health $713m |
| Emergency shelter and NFI $206m |
| COVID-19 $329m |
| WASH $206m |
| Coordination and support services $553m |
| Food security $538m |
| Unspecified $185m |
| Multiple clusters $127m |
| Multi-sector $103m |
| Education $160m |
| Protection $150m |
| Nutrition $59m |
| Other $54m |
| Early recovery $33m |

Source: Development Initiatives based on UN OCHA FTS and UN OCHA CBPF Data Hub.

Notes: Funding to local and national actors includes all direct and indirect funding to NGOs, government agencies and RCRC national societies for humanitarian response in the country they are based in as reported to UN OCHA's FTS and by country-based pooled funds. Data is in constant 2020 prices and shows aggregate funding over 2018–2021. Clusters that received funding of less than US$30 million over 2018–2021 were also aggregated as 'other'. Data with multiple cluster entries were coded as 'Multiple Clusters', separate to the 'Multi-sector' cluster that often represents refugee responses.

Most of the funding for COVID-19 (99%) went to governments, as well as the bulk of direct international humanitarian assistance for the health sector (70% in 2020, 62% across 2018–2021). Food security, by far the largest sector in terms of overall funding reported to FTS, is the third-largest sector in terms of funding to LNAs. L/NNGOs also accounted for the bulk of funding received in the shelter, NFI and WASH clusters, approximately $200 million over 2018–2021.

More generally, the system's failure to financially support local actors continued to raise important questions of equity. The lack of direct funding perpetuates inequalities in the system, as local actors are unable to benefit from indirect cost sharing (see Box I). As described in Chapter 2, the top-three UN agencies receive 47% of all international humanitarian assistance, effectively becoming the 'Amazon' of the humanitarian system: while everyone believes they should 'buy local', the convenience of working with large conglomerates that provide quality-assured services at scale is too tempting.

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> **Even committed donors acknowledge that it will take some years to find a feasible alternative to large bulk contributions to international agencies.**

> **There were mixed findings about the quality of funding available to local actors, particularly L/NNGOs.**

The most significant barrier to increasing the volume of funding to local actors was the perceived inability of many L/NNGOs to meet donor accountability and compliance expectations, and the lack of support for strengthening the systems required to do so. As one country-level humanitarian practitioner in Turkey explained: 'It's kind of a chicken and egg situation. You don't want to give them something because you're not sure about their systems, but then how do they improve their systems if they don't have significant funding to improve their systems?' For donors, there is a capacity challenge; even the largest lack the staff required to manage thousands of direct grants to L/NNGOs and therefore remain reliant on intermediaries. Donors also face pressures from other parts of their government and from domestic media, where localisation may be less of a priority. As a result, even committed donors acknowledge that it will take some years to find a feasible alternative to large bulk contributions to international agencies.[68] Despite this, ambitions are increasing, including in the commitment by the US, the largest humanitarian donor, to provide 50% of all funding to programmes which 'place local communities in the lead to either co-design a project, set priorities, drive implementation, or evaluate the impact of our programs'.[69]

Funding quality, as well as quantity, is a growing concern as poor quality funding can disempower local actors even as their access to resources grows. There were mixed findings about the quality of funding available to local actors, particularly L/NNGOs. Positively, most of the L/NNGOs surveyed by NEAR in Somalia and Turkey reported receiving some support for overhead costs, staff training, coordination and project management. But this support is not consistently provided, nor is it available to all L/NNGOs in every response; the largest NNGOs tend to benefit disproportionately from having their core operating costs covered. In the limited cases where internationals receive flexible, multi-year funding, they rarely pass this flexibility on in their partnership agreements with local actors.[70]

68   Global key informant interviews and ALNAP Meeting 2021, Panel Discussion: Is Risk Really Shared between Local and International Humanitarian Actors? (online, 2021). www.alnap.org/help-library/2021-alnap-meeting-is-risk-really-shared-between-local-and-international-humanitarian.

69   USAID, Administrator Samantha Power On A New Vision For Global Development (Georgetown University Washington DC, 2021). www.alnap.org/help-library/administrator-samantha-power-on-a-new-vision-for-global-development.

70   Key informant interviews and a survey conducted in Somalia and Turkey in 2021.

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In Somalia,

55%

of L/NNGOs and international agencies surveyed said that the pandemic had undermined, rather than strengthened, locally led humanitarian action.

Box H: COVID-19 – A missed opportunity

When the implications of the COVID-19 pandemic started to become clear in March 2020 and international humanitarian staff began withdrawing from responses, it seemed that localisation's moment had arrived. Except for a handful of agencies, the international humanitarian system had no choice but to pass more resources and implementation responsibilities to local actors.

Local actors rose to the occasion, delivering PPE, re-skilling to provide health messaging, delivering food and NFIs and keeping shelters open for those facing gender-based violence. Some did so with more funding, but their proportion of overall funding did not change – including through the Global Humanitarian Response Plan (internationals also received more in 2020) – and the funding received was largely indirect and slow to arrive.[71] International agencies had to work in unprecedented ways, consequently discovering the capacity and potential that exists in crisis-affected contexts. For example, UNHCR relied on tens of thousands of Rohingya refugee volunteers to provide 'the backbone of service delivery' while camps were locked down by the government while international actors in Turkey spoke of local actors having 'proven' themselves by demonstrating capacities for risk management and implementation that surpassed international expectations.

Despite this, it was clear by 2021 that COVID-19 was not going to lead to long-lasting or significant changes in how the system operates. In Somalia, 55% of L/NNGOs and international agencies surveyed said that the pandemic had undermined, rather than strengthened, locally led humanitarian action, and in Turkey opinions were split evenly on this question. In its 2021 Annual Report, Charter for Change signatories noted the 'lost opportunity' of the pandemic, as the quality of decision-making and power-sharing in partnerships declined due to fewer joint strategy reviews and opportunities for collective project design, which typically take place as in-person workshops.[72] Discussions on decolonisation were similarly disappointing, with no real changes reported by international practitioners in how they engage in partnerships or think about their business model.[73]

71   Konyndyk, Saez and Worden, 'Inclusive coordination'. www.alnap.org/help-library/inclusive-coordination-building-an-area-based-humanitarian-coordination-model.

72   Charter 4 Change, 'Charter for Change Annual Meeting Report (7–9 December 2021)'. www.alnap.org/help-library/charter-for-change-annual-meeting-report-7-9-december-2021.

73   A. Khan et al., 'Learning from Disruption: Evolution, Revolution or Status Quo? 2021 ALNAP Meeting 19–21 October 2021 Background Paper.' (ODI/ALNAP, 2021). www.alnap.org/help-library/background-paper-2021-alnap-meeting.

Is the system working well with governments?

Power can be given or it can be taken away. In the period since the 2018 SOHS, many crisis-affected states opted for the latter, exercising greater control over how humanitarian response is delivered and by whom. This, combined with growing authoritarianism, produced a range of dynamics between INGOs, UN agencies, L/NNGOs and governments. In some contexts, such as Bangladesh and Ethiopia, the relationship between international agencies and the government was strained, while L/NNGOs felt shut out by internationals for their close working relationships with the government. In South Sudan and Indonesia, governments required international organisations to work entirely through local and national actors, with the Indonesian government allowing only Indonesian nationals to work in the Sulawesi earthquake response.[74] In Venezuela and Turkey, governments restricted the space of their own civil society, sometimes using L/NNGOs' proximity to international humanitarian agencies as a pretext.

As multilaterals, UN agencies have tended to have relatively strong relationships with governments, where the political situation allowed. While there were notable successes in collaboration on joint data collection and programming – such as health campaigns, school feeding programmes and social protection systems – the quality of UN capacity strengthening initiatives for government staff in many countries was considered poor and not as strategic as it could be.[75] Donors also made efforts to work more directly with crisis-affected states. Donor funding for state-run social protection systems, especially during the COVID-19 pandemic, 'turbo-charged the shock-responsive social protection agenda' and saw substantially increased funds going directly to governments.[76]

Governments had mixed views on how well the humanitarian system coordinated with them and respected them. While respondents to the government SOHS survey largely felt that relationships had improved, they also reported 'poor communication and consultation with host governments' as one of the biggest weaknesses in the international system. Government officials have increasingly taken the lead in coordination but frequently complain about the lack of transparency and collaboration from

74   HAG and Pujiono Centre, 'Charting the New Norm?: Local Leadership in the First 100 Days of the Sulawesi Earthquake Response'. www.alnap.org/help-library/charting-the-new-norm-local-leadership-in-the-first-100-days-of-the-sulawesi-earthquake.

75   UNHCR, *Country Operation, Afghanistan*. www.alnap.org/help-library/unhcr-afghanistan-country-evaluation-report-2020; UNICEF, 'Review of Progress in the Advancement of Child Rights in Africa: Reflecting on the Past and Future Challenges and Opportunities' (New York: UNICEF, 2020). www.alnap.org/help-library/review-of-progress-in-the-advancement-of-child-rights-in-africa-reflecting-on-the-past.

76   Storer et al., 'DFAT – Australian Red Cross Humanitarian Partnership 2015–2018.' www.alnap.org/help-library/evaluation-of-australian-red-cross-humanitarian-partnership-2015-19; UNICEF, 'Formative Evaluation of UNICEF Work to Link Humanitarian and Development Programming' (New York: UNICEF, 2021). www.alnap.org/help-library/evaluation-of-unicefs-work-to-link-humanitarian-and-development-programming.

international agencies on the funds they have received and how they are using them. In some contexts, governments felt in direct competition with an international system that actively disregards them.

Is the system shifting power to local non-state actors?

Capacity-strengthening

Capacity-strengthening is a contentious aspect of localisation – international and national NGOs alike see technical capacity-building as a valuable step in shifting greater responsibility to local actors, yet critics have questioned the framing of capacity as being overly compliance-focused and reflecting the priorities of Global North donors and agencies.

For the most part, local and national NGOs interviewed for this edition of the SOHS were positive about capacity-building and -strengthening efforts, seeing these as a step towards greater resources and critiquing international partners for not providing enough support. In Turkey, L/NNGOs appreciated the training and capacity support for PSEAH provided by internationals, while in Yemen, more capacity building was desired: 'International organisations have the knowledge and skills, but they do not share them with local organisations. International organisations are conservative about the experiences, knowledge and data they have.'[77]

The perceived lack of technical capacity and inexperience with disaster response among L/NNGOs was a consistent challenge to localisation, and the cause for what evaluations referred to as an over-reliance on short-term international staff for highly technical and thematic programming. In some contexts, particularly in the early months of the COVID-19 pandemic or in responses where governments restricted the entry of international staff, international agencies 'saturated the market' with demand for partnerships among a limited pool of skilled local groups, placing immense pressure on L/NNGOs.[78]

77   Key informant interview in Yemen.

78   CARE Canada, 'Annual Impact and Learning Review The Humanitarian – Development Nexus' (CARE Canada, 2019). www.alnap.org/help-library/annual-impact-and-learning-review-the-humanitarian-development-nexus-care-canada; UNICEF 2021; CARE Canada 2020; ADE 2021; SANDE CONSULTORES LDA, 'External Evaluation of Cyclone Idai and Kenneth Response in Mozambique'. www.alnap.org/help-library/oxfam-independent-evaluation-of-cyclone-idai-and-kenneth-response; D. Stone and K. Chowdhury, 'Christian Aid's Rohingya Crisis Response in Bangladesh' (Christian Aid, 2019). www.alnap.org/help-library/christian-aid%E2%80%99s-rohingya-crisis-response-in-bangladesh; Maillard, Setyawan and Juillard, *Real-Time Evaluation*. www.alnap.org/help-library/real-time-evaluation-of-sulawesi-indonesia-earthquake-and-tsunami; UNICEF, 'Formative Evaluation of UNICEF Work to Link Humanitarian and Development Programming.' www.alnap.org/help-library/evaluation-of-unicefs-work-to-link-humanitarian-and-development-programming; Baker et al., *Response to Cyclone Idai*. www.alnap.org/help-library/inter-agency-humanitarian-evaluation-of-the-response-to-cyclone-idai-in-mozambique.

But L/NNGOs also challenged this framing, suggesting that the capacity issue was more political than technical:

> **'As if the capacity building university is some black hole that you enter into as a local NGO and never graduate. No one tells you what to do to get this capacity, how to support you to build this capacity… So, I think the matter is not about capacity of local organisations, it is about [a] political decision… to give more trust and more power to the local actors to act themselves and set the agenda themselves.'[79]**

In Haiti in particular, the 2021 earthquake response presented a number of fresh tensions between local and international actors on capacity. For some L/NNGOs, capacity building did not enable more direct access to funding, while others felt the focus on local actors' capacities for anti-corruption compliance was a double standard:

> **'The bottom line is [in] 2010 no one was held accountable and there were no reparations – and I'm not talking about slavery – no reparation when it came to this highway robbery; where money was spent, no accountability, no report of outcomes and everything else. And you want to actually raise the issue of corruption and trust in terms of local organisations. Seriously? That is some nerve.'[80]**

Local actors said that capacity continues to be defined primarily by international agencies and expressed a desire to have more say in defining their capacity needs.[81] In the SOHS practitioner survey, when asked to rate the quality of support for local actors' leadership and capacity, over 63% said these were either poor or fair (25% and 38%). Evaluations also note the poor quality of many capacity-building efforts by international actors,

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79   ALNAP Meeting 2021, Panel Discussion: Is Risk Really Shared between Local and International Humanitarian Actors? www.alnap.org/help-library/2021-alnap-meeting-is-risk-really-shared-between-local-and-international-humanitarian.

80   Key informant interview in Haiti.

81   In-country research Turkey and Somalia 2021; Charter 4 Change, 'Charter for Change Annual Meeting Report (7–9 December 2021)'. www.alnap.org/help-library/charter-for-change-annual-meeting-report-7-9-december-2021.

which have been limited in scope, use ineffective methods[82] and have kept local actors reliant on international partnerships for funding despite years or even decades of experience in disaster response.[83]

In recognition of this, donors paid greater attention to capacity-strengthening and adopted a more hands-on approach in recent years: 'For donors, it's a change of mindset. It really means that it's not only [about] giving the money, and letting the field work it out with INGOs and local actors'.[84] Several international agencies and ministries, including USAID's Bureau for Humanitarian Assistance, the Australian Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade, Catholic Relief Services, Christian Aid and Oxfam, developed capacity-strengthening approaches that were either co-created or driven by local actors' priorities. In some cases, capacity strengthening required working with partners that were less experienced in disaster response, in order to build longer-term in-country capacity.[85]

Partnerships and decision-making

The quality of partnerships was mixed, but potentially showed improvement. Some international actors – the IFRC and several INGOs – intentionally worked to make their relationships with local actors more equitable. The Cyclone Gita response in Tonga offered strong examples: the Tonga Red Cross National Society and local NGOs took greater leadership roles and had more power in programme design and decision-making.[86] In Turkey, a small number of L/NNGOs reported that they had assessed the capacity of an international partner, reflecting a more equitable approach to partnership.

82   HAG and CARE, 'Tropical Cyclone Gita Response Program Evaluation' (Humanitarian Advisory Group and Care, 2019). www.alnap.org/help-library/tropical-cyclone-gita-response-program-evaluation; Sida and Schenkenberg, *Rohingya Response Evaluations*. www.alnap.org/help-library/synthesis-of-rohingya-response-evaluations-of-iom-unicef-and-unhcr; FAO, 'Evaluation of the role and work of the Sub-Regional Office for North Africa (SNE) 2017-2020' (Rome: FAO, 2020). www.alnap.org/help-library/evaluation-of-the-role-and-work-of-the-sub-regional-office-for-north-africa-sne-2017; FAO, 'Evaluation of the Emergency Prevention System (EMPRES) Programme in Food Chain Crises' (Rome: FAO, 2018). www.alnap.org/help-library/evaluation-of-the-emergency-prevention-system-empres-programme-in-food-chain-crises; Storer et al., 'DFAT – Australian Red Cross Humanitarian Partnership 2015–2018', 2015–2018. www.alnap.org/help-library/evaluation-of-australian-red-cross-humanitarian-partnership-2015-19.

83   Global Key Informant Interview.

84   ALNAP Meeting 2021, *Panel Discussion: Is Risk Really Shared between Local and International Humanitarian Actors?* www.alnap.org/help-library/2021-alnap-meeting-is-risk-really-shared-between-local-and-international-humanitarian.

85   Stone and Chowdhury, 'Christian Aid's Rohingya Crisis Response in Bangladesh'. www.alnap.org/help-library/christian-aid%E2%80%99s-rohingya-crisis-response-in-bangladesh.

86   Storer et al., 'DFAT – Australian Red Cross Humanitarian Partnership 2015–2018. www.alnap.org/help-library/evaluation-of-australian-red-cross-humanitarian-partnership-2015-19; K. Sutton and E. Latu, 'Tropical Cyclone Gita Response Program Evaluation' (Geneva: CARE International, 2018). www.alnap.org/help-library/tropical-cyclone-gita-response-program-evaluation.

> International organisations are looking for sub-contractor type of civil society organisations to whom they say, 'I will give you the money, you will spend it as I want and I will only pay for the operation'.

Despite some progress, the exclusion of L/NNGOs from decision-making is a recurrent theme in evaluations.[87] A large majority of practitioners also felt that the opportunities for leadership and participation of local actors in decision-making forums in their context were either poor or fair (33% and 39%). Both international and national staff reported that partnership agreements treat L/NNGOs as sub-contractors, their skills and knowledge relegated to the implementation of projects. L/NNGO staff described being 'owned' by internationals: 'What we call civil society organisations are actually dynamic organisations. But international organisations are looking for sub-contractor type of civil society organisations to whom they say, "I will give you the money, you will spend it as I want and I will only pay for the operation".'

Risk is a key issue in partnerships: donors pass compliance risks to intermediaries, while intermediaries pass operational and financial risks to local actors. This results in local actors being required to comply with anti-fraud and anti-corruption policies managed by INGOs and UN agencies, while also implementing projects without sufficient funding or the risk that failed delivery that will not be compensated. Somewhat contradicting the claim that local partners lack capacity, international and national staff described a practice of internationals selecting the 'best' or 'easiest' projects to implement themselves, while passing on riskier or more difficult projects to L/NNGO partners (see Somalia case study).

Coordination

Over the study period, there was a push to include local and national actors more in formal humanitarian coordination mechanisms, with clear progress made. NNGOs comprised 44% of cluster coordination membership globally in 2020 and in Turkey LNGOs reported being actively encouraged by internationals to join coordination meetings. There were also improvements in the use of appropriate local languages in coordination meetings, with 74% of clusters using an official or local language of the country of operation.[88] L/NNGOs interviewed in the SOHS country-level research felt that the value of coordination meetings was mixed, but that they did at least provide opportunities to share information and influence decision-making.

However meaningful leadership roles for L/NNGOs in coordination mechanisms remain rare. In 2020, L/NNGOs occupied just 11% of co-chair positions in the cluster system and only 6% of HCT membership positions. In several contexts, local actors feel their engagement is largely tokenistic

87   Maillard, Setyawan and Juillard, *Real-Time Evaluation*. www.alnap.org/help-library/real-time-evaluation-of-sulawesi-indonesia-earthquake-and-tsunami; UNICEF, *Work to Link*. www.alnap.org/help-library/evaluation-of-unicefs-work-to-link-humanitarian-and-development-programming; Sanderson, Patnaik and Osborne, *Nepal Earthquakes Appeal*. www.alnap.org/help-library/nepal-earthquakes-appeal-meta-synthesis.

88   IASC, 'Note on IASC Coordination Structures at Country Level in 2020' (Geneva: IASC, 2020). www.alnap.org/help-library/note-on-iasc-coordination-structures-at-country-level-in-2020.

and not adequately representative of their organisations.[89] Insufficient resources remain a barrier for L/NNGOs to engage, meaning that typically only the largest L/NNGOs are able to participate. L/NNGOs sometimes disengaged from coordination mechanisms due to issues of mistrust between national and international actors, as was the case in the Ethiopian drought response in 2019.[90]

Looking ahead

The past four years of localisation efforts have revealed genuine practical barriers to donors and international agencies shifting power to a more locally led model. The failure to seize the clear opportunities presented by the decolonisation debate and the pandemic for longer-term change was for many a sobering reminder of the political difficulties inherent in localisation, both within the system and outside it. As a result, international and national actors both believe that meaningful change will take time. As one L/NNGO representative in Turkey told us:

> **'The challenge is the lack of willingness to let go. And the fact that most of the international actors, whether they're donors or UN agencies or INGOs, they don't have incentives to let go… And until that incentive structure changes, I don't see much change happening.'**

This was echoed by a donor representative: 'If we think that within the coming five years, the systems that we work in will be changed, I can already tell you, that's an illusion.'

More positively, there is some hope for future progress, as there is a wide consensus on the importance of these reforms: when asked what the biggest challenge was facing the humanitarian system in the future, locally led action was the most frequently cited answer to the open question in the SOHS practitioner survey.

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89   Steets et al., *Drought Response in Ethiopia*. www.alnap.org/help-library/inter-agency-humanitarian-evaluation-of-the-drought-response-in-ethiopia; Mutsaka et al., *Real-Time Review*. www.alnap.org/help-library/social-protection-and-jobs-responses-to-covid-19%E2%80%AF-a-real-time-review-of-country.

90   Steets et al. (Ibid). www.alnap.org/help-library/inter-agency-humanitarian-evaluation-of-the-drought-response-in-ethiopia.

Box I: Locally led humanitarian action in Somalia

Khalif A Abdirahman, Researcher in Somalia

There have been some efforts to strengthen local leadership of humanitarian action in Somalia, with 62% of respondents in the ALNAP-NEAR survey believing that support for locally led humanitarian action has improved since 2017/18. However, both national and international actors agree that funding to L/NNGOs, as well as partnering practices, have not changed significantly.

Humanitarian assistance is delivered by a large number of local, national and international NGOs. Limited local resource tends to go to more informal community and religious groups, while local and national NGOs depend entirely on international actors for funds. The majority of funding is distributed to international and national NGOs via UN agencies. For example, Somalia's Humanitarian Response Plan (HRP) for 2021 sought $1.1 billion to respond to the humanitarian needs of 4 million people. The actual amount received ($776 million) was 70% of what was required.[91] In addition, there was $221 million in non-HRP funding, making the total humanitarian spend $991 million.[92] Almost all of this funding went through international actors.

Donors can manage only a limited number of contracts and therefore prefer funding NGOs through consortiums of mainly international NGOs, which both implement directly and have partnerships with local and national NGOs. The main INGOs have joined forces, grouping under three consortiums, to pool their capacity to handle larger projects, as major donors are under pressure to keep contracts to a manageable minimum. Following their lead, eight well-established national NGOs have also grouped under the Nexus Platform[93] to build their capacity to the level of the major INGOs and to support smaller national NGOs. They are making progress but do not command anywhere near the volumes of funding as the major consortiums with which they must compete.

The value and duration of partnerships with internationals are improving slightly, but not enough to be felt by the majority of L/NNGOs. There is a move towards more co-applications, increasing cooperation between national and international actors. This is encouraged by donors, which sometimes require a national actor co-applicant. Yet local organisations' continued lack of access to direct funding means they miss out on the indirect cost share, normally 5% of the project budget, which could be used to bridge funding gaps between projects.[94]

91   OCHA, 'Somalia Humanitarian Response Plan 2022 (December 2021)' (Somalia: OCHA, 2021). www.alnap.org/help-library/somalia-humanitarian-response-plan-2022-december-2021.

92   OCHA, 'Somalia Humanitarian Funding Overview (As of 31 December 2021)' (Somalia: OCHA, 2021). www.alnap.org/help-library/somalia-humanitarian-funding-overview-as-of-31-december-2021.

93   Nexus, 'Stronger Together', n.d. https://www.alnap.org/help-library/stronger-together.

94   Indirect costs, sometimes referred to as overhead expenses, include real costs incurred for the delivery of programs, including general and administrative expenses (e.g., rent and utilities).

Even where local NGOs have been allocated a greater proportion of funding, this does not necessarily mean more resources in absolute terms. According to the Humanitarian Coordinator/ Resident Coordinator for Somalia:

> *'The localisation agenda remains central in the Somalia humanitarian response as it is an essential part of the Grand Bargain commitments. I am committed to making the Somalia Humanitarian Fund [SHF] a pivotal instrument in delivering on the localisation agenda. In 2020, 53 per cent of its funds was allocated to front-line, national NGOs'.*[95]

Indeed, the percentage share of the SHF allocated to local actors has increased every year since 2016. However, the size of the fund has decreased, resulting in actual funds shrinking year on year. In 2021 it was $39 million, down from a peak of $67 million in 2017.

The operational models of some international actors prevent progress by asking local actors to deliver high-risk elements of projects. For example, local actors are used to access insecure and hard-to-reach areas with increased operational costs, as explained by one staffer from an international NGO: 'When I am faced with an activity to be carried out in a high-cost area with risks or I have a tight deadline or shortage of technical expertise, I pass the problem to [a] local organisation. There is no benefit for them, the whole thing is only risk transfer.'

In terms of decision-making, the Somali government states that, except for registrations and consultations, they do not interfere with humanitarian aid, regardless of who is delivering it.[96] Inter-agency coordination and interaction is mostly carried out through cluster meetings. Local and national NGOs stated that, while they do participate in meetings, their contribution is minimal due to power imbalances and limited resources to engage extensively. There is also concern that Somali NGOs are not able to access the most influential spaces. A national NGO leader clarified: 'Cluster meetings address limited local issues. Real decisions are made at the capital level and local and national NGOs don't have much say.'

Finally, there are fundamental challenges that slow down the localisation process, most significantly the lack of adequate NGO governance structures and regulatory frameworks, owing to the 30-year absence of state institutions in Somalia. While many social services are provided by civil society organisations, the government does not have the ability to enforce quality assurance of NGOs beyond a simple registration process. As a result, the compliance and governance expectations of the international community can exceed those of the local, provincial or federal government, leaving many local organisations ineligible for international or bilateral funding.

95   OCHA, *Somalia Humanitarian Response Plan 2021 (February 2021)* (Somalia: OCHA, 2021). www.alnap.org/help-library/somalia-humanitarian-response-plan-2021-february-2021.

96   According to a key informant in Somalia.

Box J: Locally led humanitarian action in Turkey
Support to Life Turkey research team

Since the start of the Syria crisis in 2011, Turkey has become host to the largest refugee population in the world, hosting Syrians as well as displaced populations from Afghanistan, Iraq and Iran, among others. Turkey is also prone to natural disasters. The country has a vibrant civil society, with many NGOs active in the delivery of humanitarian aid. Local organisations are among the first responders to disasters, including the refugee crisis.

Over the past decade, the diversity and competence of local organisations in Turkey has grown tremendously as they expanded their operations and many professionals gained extensive experience in the humanitarian sector. The Syria crisis saw a large number of international NGOs entering the country. Likewise, UN agencies expanded their presence as significant funding flowed into Turkey. From an initial reliance on direct implementation, as the crisis became protracted INGOs moved to a mixed model of implementation and partnership with local organisations, while UN agencies gradually shifted to partnering exclusively with local organisations.

Many local organisations describe the nature of their partnerships with international organisations in the humanitarian system as project-based and often functioning as a subcontracting relationship. As one local organisation representative put it:

'Even with the best of intentions, what seems to be the biggest problem is the upward accountability that is imposed by the humanitarian system. The deadlines and workplans and project cycles that are all designed towards upward accountability leaves us very little space to manoeuvre. It does not turn into a genuinely meaningful partnership that is equitable and that is respectful of ground realities.'

In the experience of many local actors, strategic partnerships that value the organisation and the relationship are rare. Multi-year programmes run by local partners are almost non-existent. The formal humanitarian system is also rarely able to engage with informal support mechanisms at the community level and tap into them to amplify impact.

Local organisations in Turkey clearly see that, for international actors, localisation would mean changing their entire business model by allowing local actors to set the humanitarian agenda and shape humanitarian programmes. They find it unlikely that the current power imbalance will change any time soon: 'We see more talk on localisation in global platforms, but practice hasn't changed much. Sometimes we are so hopeless that things will change, we feel the only way to do it is for us to become an international NGO.'

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For most local organisations in Turkey, capacity-strengthening still overwhelmingly takes the form of one-off training with limited impact and sustainability. Local organisations are clear about having more say in defining their capacity needs and programmatic priorities. Several local and national actors pointed to high staff turnover as a challenge in sustaining the progress they have made in improving their capacity. Not being able to retain staff with considerable skills and experience hampers gains in organisational capacity and continuity.

Despite the challenges, local organisations in Turkey have made progress in risk sharing with their international partners and accessing funding for management costs and institutional development. Likewise, space is opening for more local organisations to take an active role in coordination mechanisms.

Ten years into the war in Syria, refugees have set up a wide network of organisations all over the country. Having played a significant role in the humanitarian response to the Syria crisis, national NGOs are reaching out to these community-based refugee-led groups to equip them with the capacity to deliver aid in compliance with international humanitarian standards. This model of national NGOs acting as intermediaries represents an alternative to capacity strengthening through peer-to-peer learning and mentorship.

The COVID-19 pandemic has also demonstrated the ability of local civil society to mobilise funding and resources. In contrast to Somalia (see Box I), solidarity among civil society organisations and collaboration with local governments and the private sector have opened up new avenues for local NGO leaders to take humanitarian action into their own hands. Local civil society is well-organised around refugee protection and can be activated quickly. Two examples are the Refugee Council of Turkey and the Civil Society Disaster Platform, neither of which has any connections with the formal humanitarian system. The Disaster Platform has successfully fundraised from private citizens and the private sector to respond to crises, including the Izmir Earthquake in 2020 and the wildfires in the summer of 2021 when external funding was not present.

Through networks such as the Localisation Advocacy Group, civil society actors in Turkey have mobilised local leadership and have pushed forward the localisation agenda. Local organisations and networks aim to retain the capacity they have gained over the years, improve the quality of their partnerships, play an active role in coordination forums, and advocate for a humanitarian response that favours, appreciates and builds on local actors and existing capacity.

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Chapter 10: Does the system use resources efficiently?

IN BRIEF: As the system's estimates of the number of people needing humanitarian assistance have grown, so have its investments in building longer-term efficiency into humanitarian response. Examples range from significant improvements to funding mechanisms driven by the Grand Bargain to investments in multi-agency and digital cash payment systems. Increased use of more cost-effective modalities and working through local and national actors may also have contributed to better efficiency over 2020 and 2021. There were efficiency gains through enhanced coordination and multi-agency response consortiums, and agencies engaged more in internal-focused innovations and private sector partnerships to drive better performance.

Evidence points to an overall improvement in efficiency since the 2018 SOHS, despite humanitarian actors facing numerous external challenges – including higher rates of inflation, increased access constraints and disrupted supply chains due to COVID-19. A notable exception to this is the continued under-investment in preparedness and early action, for which there is limited but compelling evidence that suggests acting before a crisis delivers greater cost-effectiveness.

This reflects a clear trend, running back to the 2012 SOHS, of the system focusing on internal organisational processes to gain efficiency, rather than improving its understanding and use of the most cost-effective programme modalities. While this approach has delivered consistent incremental improvements over time, it has not delivered significant changes in system-wide efficiency, or a good understanding of how to design programmes to reduce the most need for the largest number of vulnerable people with available resources.

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In the face of rising humanitarian need and competing priorities for government budgets, limited humanitarian resources must be spent in the best way possible. However, persistent lack of relevant, publicly accessible data makes it hard to understand the efficiency of humanitarian action. Figures such as cost-per-output or cost-per-aid recipient are available, but do not reflect the reality that those who are in greatest need are often the most expensive to reach. More useful data, such as a weighted cost-per-outcome, or the return on investment from mechanisms that support more effective humanitarian response, is either held privately by individual agencies, or not measured at all.

Three key trends over 2018–2021 shaped considerations of how the system uses its resources. Firstly, as detailed in Chapter 3: Is there enough aid?, humanitarian funding increased but fell short of requirements. Understanding how humanitarian agencies converted this increased but over-stretched in funding into performance gains is a central question for the system's efficiency. Secondly, the implementation of the 2016 Grand Bargain agreement targeted inefficiencies in funding mechanisms and the more technical aspects of humanitarian delivery. Finally, various internally grown and externally imposed changes brought new approaches to efficiency, including increased engagement with digital innovation, more experience with consortium-based approaches and the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on supply chains.

While it is important not to over-emphasise issues of efficiency, the way in which the humanitarian system uses its limited resources is still of critical importance. Against this broader context, this chapter reviews how well the system used its resources over 2018–2021 by addressing three main areas: (1) how well resources were used to improve system performance, (2) improvements to the efficiency and quality of humanitarian funding, and (3) operational efficiency.

Box K: Defining efficiency in humanitarian interventions

For comparability, this edition of the SOHS adopts the definition of efficiency used in the 2018 edition, drawing from the same version of the DAC evaluation criteria.[97]

Efficiency measures how economically inputs (usually financial, human, technical and material resources) were converted to outputs. This generally requires comparing alternative approaches to achieving an output, to see whether the most efficient approach has been used.[98] Efficiency as an umbrella concept covers several different ways of thinking about how resources are used most economically:

▪ **Cost-efficiency** considers cost per output. For example, dollar amount per shelter constructed or cost per child reached in activity sessions. Cost-per-output is the most common approach to evaluating efficiency in the system and is the measure for which most data is available.

▪ **Cost-effectiveness** is a more challenging measure in the humanitarian system because it examines the cost of achieving specific outcomes, for which, as noted in Chapter 7, limited data is available in several sectors. Evaluations agree that

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97   The DAC criteria were revised in 2018/19 with a new conceptualisation of efficiency that includes economic, operational and timeliness. ALNAP is in the process of updating its own evaluation criteria guidance, to be produced in 2023.

98   T. Beck, 'Evaluating Humanitarian Action Using the OECD-DAC Criteria' (London: ODI/ ALNAP, 2006), 44. www.alnap.org/help-library/evaluating-humanitarian-action-using-the-oecd-dac-criteria.

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> the information required to support cost-effectiveness analysis has not been consistently collected or reported in this period.[99]
> - **Value for money** is the most complicated measure of efficient use of financial resources to assess at a system-level. The value of different modalities of support could be compared across a range of factors – such as dignity, quality, timeliness or environmental impact – depending on what is conceived as being of 'value' by the person or entity defining the term. Given the conceptual variations associated with this measure, this chapter focuses predominantly on cost-efficiency and cost-effectiveness.

How well does the system convert inputs into impacts for affected populations?

Limits of evidence

The efficiency of humanitarian aid is a highly contested and sensitive performance criterion. It is also poorly evidenced. Evaluations still frequently assess efficiency through the perception of humanitarian practitioners, rather than actual cost measures. Agencies have been slow to achieve internal transparency on how they spend their funding and, when they do so, these figures are rarely comparable to other agencies or made publicly available.

Donors do not consistently require outcome reporting by agencies, and agencies often lack the time, resources and skills to reliably measure outcomes. While a drive for efficiency was noted as one of the stumbling blocks to meaningful community engagement in Chapter 8, there are some signs that cost-efficiency and cost-effectiveness considerations are becoming less important to some donors, or at least held in balance with other priorities. Interviews with donor agencies indicated no significant changes to how they approached cost-effectiveness over the study period. Some donors expressed an interest in having better data but noted that this was difficult to combine with an overall push for less onerous assessment and reporting burdens on agencies. One major humanitarian donor reported that, while they value financial efficiency to ensure maximum support to crisis-affected people, cost-efficiency is only one criterion they consider among issues of safe and accountable quality programming: 'Cost effectiveness is the last criterion. We first want to make sure that whatever modality we're choosing, whether it be cash or something else, is feasible and is going to be the most appropriate and effective to meet the goals and objectives of the programme.'

99   ADE, Response to the Rohingya Refugee Crisis. www.alnap.org/help-library/evaluation-of-the-european-union%E2%80%99s-humanitarian-response-to-the-rohingya-refugee-crisis; P. Breard, 'Evidence Summary on COVID-19 and Food Security' (United Nations Evaluation Group (UNEG), 2021). www.alnap.org/help-library/evidence-summary-on-covid-19-and-food-security; Betts et al., *WFP Regional Response*. www.alnap.org/help-library/evaluation-of-the-wfp-regional-response-to-the-syrian-crisis-2015-2018; Global Affairs Canada, 'Evaluation of the International Humanitarian Assistance Program 2011/12 to 2017/18'. www.alnap.org/help-library/evaluation-of-the-international-humanitarian-assistance-program-20112012-to-20172018.

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Donors also sometimes use cost-effectiveness data in ways that discourage agencies from providing it. One agency key informant discussed specific examples of donors suggesting funding cuts on the basis of cost-effectiveness data – in one case, based on poor cost-efficiency of a programme, and in another, based on improvements in cost-efficiency, which led the donor to conclude the agency could achieve the same with less support. Similar concerns of efficiency data being used to shift funding priorities were reported by other research published during the study period.[100]

There were positive efforts over the study period, particularly driven by INGOs, to improve the methodologies for assessing cost-effectiveness and the comparability of data across agencies. For example, IRC worked with USAID and the Cash Action Learning Partnership (CALP) to develop better standards for assessing the cost-efficiency and cost-effectiveness of cash programming, while the Norwegian Refugee Council developed a protocol for cost harmonisation across agencies and donors. A coalition of INGOs developed and began applying a common tool (the 'Dioptra tool') for analysing cost-effectiveness, to generate cross-organisational cost-effectiveness data (see Box L).

One way to understand the efficiency of the humanitarian system at large is to look at whether it can deliver the same assistance at lower cost over time, thereby reaching more people. HRPs have begun to report on the number of people reached by assistance, showing an increase that has outpaced funding provided, as described in Chapter 5. However, these figures have only been available at the global level since 2019 and the evolving methodology hinders meaningfully comparison between years.

The figures on funding requirements/requested per person targeted are slightly more comparable and reflect the system's own estimates of how much it needs in order to reach affected people. As we saw in Chapter 3, these too have dropped, from $205 at the end of the previous SOHS study period in 2017 to $178 per person in 2021 (Figure 22). The reasons for this fall are, however, unclear: whether humanitarian assistance is becoming more efficient to deliver, or whether other factors affect the amount of funds requested per person. The figures all have to treated with caution – they are the system's collective estimates and the methodology behind them is not clear or consistent.

Requirements per targeted person across the largest HRPs in 2021, do not follow a discernible pattern (Figure 39). While the most expensive contexts were countries featuring conflict and significant access constraints – Libya, Iraq, Syria – one of the contexts with the most severe access issues observed in this edition of the SOHS, Ethiopia, also had one of the lowest requirements per targeted person ratios. This indicates that multiple factors influence the cost of humanitarian response including access, market conditions and the type of needs – but differences in arriving at the estimated costs may be an equally significant factor.

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100 L. Weingärtner, T. Pforr, and E. Wilkinson, 'The Evidence Base on Anticipatory Action' (Rome: WFP, 2020). www.alnap.org/help-library/the-evidence-base-on-anticipatory-action.

Figure 39: Requirements per person targeted and funding per person reached in UN-coordinated appeals by country, 2021

Requirements per targeted person across the largest humanitarian response plans in 2021, do not follow a discernible pattern. While the three most expensive crises by far in 2021 (Libya, Iraq and Syria) were all contexts of active conflict, multiple factors influence the estimated cost of humanitarian response including access, market conditions, the type of needs and methodology used.
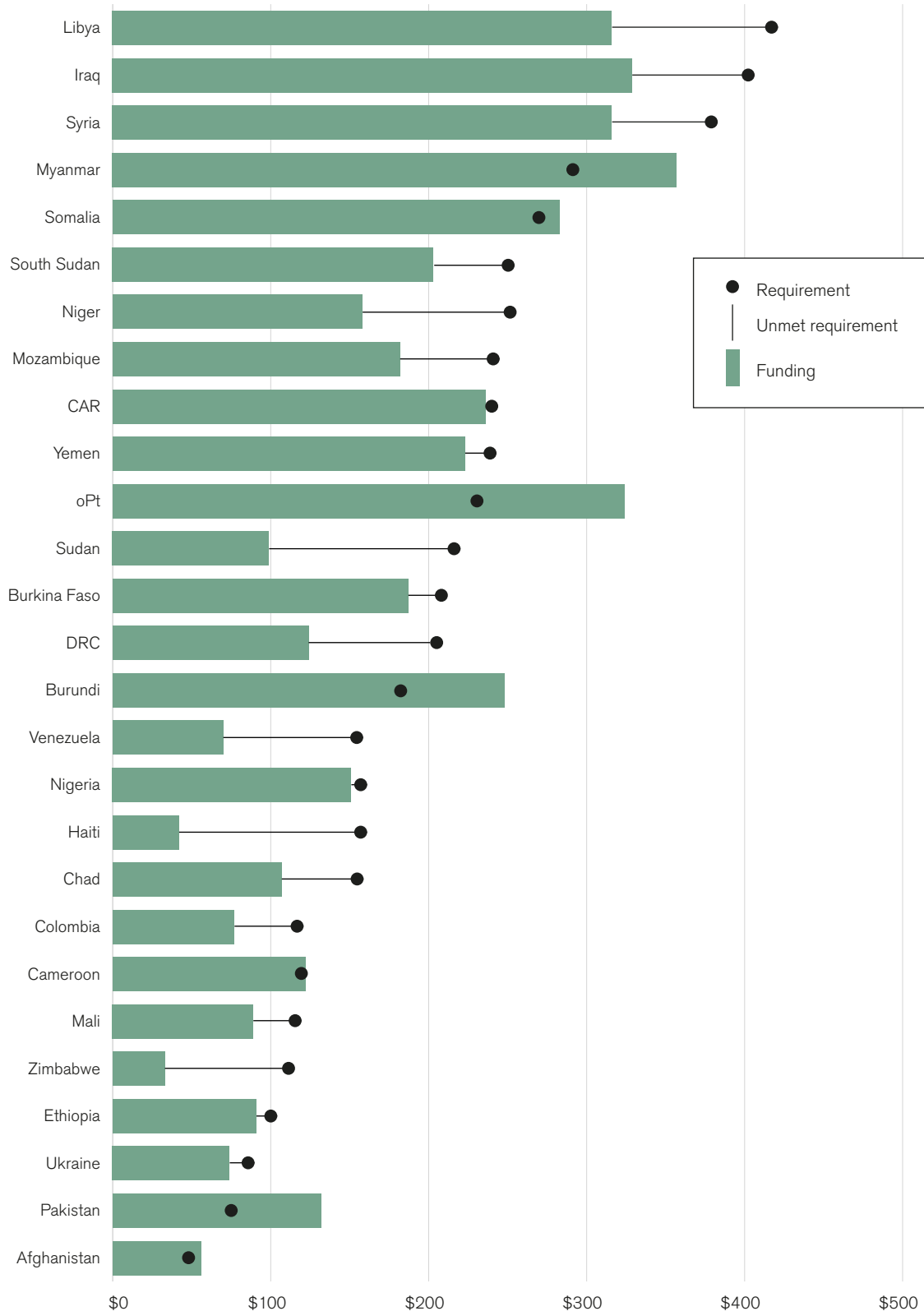
Source: Development Initiatives based on UNOCHA HPC API data.

Notes: Data in the table includes HRPs only, given those more consistently report on people targeted and expected people reached. El Salvador, Honduras and Guatemala have not been included as their expected data on people reached was not final.

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Context and modality

While humanitarian practitioners have strong opinions on what is most cost-effective, the lack of data and evidence makes it difficult to draw firm conclusions about the best programme modalities or operational approaches, and the complexity of humanitarian settings means that cost-effectiveness is highly context dependent.

Cash assistance

Cash and voucher assistance (CVA) often appears to be the most cost-efficient way to support people in crisis. Cost-efficiency comparisons between CVA and in-kind food distributions – which compare the cost of delivering cash against the same financial value of in-kind food – generally find in favour of CVA. In Kenya, for example, the cost of delivering $1 in cash was $1.18, compared to $1.94 for $1-worth of food.[101] Practitioners also generally view cash assistance as being cheaper to deliver. However, there are measurement challenges with certain aspects of CVA delivery, such as the budget transparency required to meaningfully compare the costs of single-payer systems and multi-agency platforms. As one practitioner in Lebanon put it: 'When we hear about the UN talking about the common cash approach and how [they] want to work more together to achieve better value for money? I think my perspective would be, but can you actually demonstrate value for money when there's so little information provided on your budgets?'

Being cheaper does not necessarily make a modality more cost-effective if it does not deliver the same level or quality of outcomes. While the evidence for the effectiveness of CVA is strong (see Chapter 7), cost effectiveness comparisons are generally mixed. Two significant factors affecting the cost-effectiveness of CVA are the scale of an intervention and market conditions.[102]

Scale – both in terms of number of households reached and programme duration – is key. Cash transfer programmes take time and resources to establish in new contexts, but once the initial foundations are in place, adding new recipients or providing additional payments over time requires less input. As described in Box L, the NGO partners using the Dioptra tool found that, to be cost-effective, cash programmes require a minimum of 1,000 recipients, while a study by the Cash Consortium for Iraq found that a shift from one-off to multi-month transfers brought significant

101   B. Mwongela, 'Kenya, General Food Distribution Cash Modality Scale up for the Refugees and Host Community in Kakuma and Dadaab Camp: An Evaluation' (Rome: WFP, 2018). www.alnap.org/help-library/kenya-general-food-distribution-cash-modality-scale-up-for-the-refugees-and-host.

102   J. Hoddinott, S. Sandström, and J. Upton, 'The Impact of Cash and Food Transfers: Evidence from a Randomized Intervention in Niger', American Journal of Agricultural Economics 100, no. 4 (July 2018): 1032–49. www.alnap.org/help-library/the-impact-of-cash-and-food-transfers-evidence-from-a-randomized-intervention-in-niger; Betts et al., *WFP Regional Response.* www.alnap.org/help-library/evaluation-of-the-wfp-regional-response-to-the-syrian-crisis-2015-2018; Daniels, Anderson and Yusuf Ali, *2017 Somalia Response.* www.alnap.org/help-library/evaluation-of-the-2017-somalia-humanitarian-cash-based-response.

cost savings.[103] Biometric identification (iris scanning), mobile money and digital payment technology were useful in providing faster and less labour-intensive transfer programmes, and thus improving efficiency but come with data ethics considerations.[104]

Market conditions were even more significant to the cost-effectiveness of CVA. For example, in Lebanon, inflation soared over the study period and gross domestic product contracted by over 50% between 2019 and 2021,[105] which had a significant impact on the scale of need and on the costs incurred by agencies to address this through CVA due to rising market prices and the increase in bank fees applied to cash withdrawals.[106]

Box L: The Dioptra tool and consistent humanitarian efficiency data

Lucian Lee, Advisor for Systematic Cost Analysis, International Rescue Committee; David Leege, Senior Director, Impact, Learning, Knowledge and Accountability, CARE; Tanaka Nyamadzawo, Aid Transparency Advisor, Danish Refugee Council; Marco Scagliusi, Senior Monitoring, Evaluation, & Learning Advisor, Mercy Corps; Purti Sharma, Senior Economist, Save the Children UK; Caitlin Tulloch, Director for Best Use of Resources, International Rescue Committee

Since 2018, a coalition of NGOs has developed and applied a standardised tool for frontline programme managers called Dioptra (formerly known as 'SCAN') to conduct cost-efficiency analysis of humanitarian programmes. Dioptra is a web-based software which applies a standard methodology using an organisation's existing accounting data to identify the costs and results of individual activities. To date, five NGOs – CARE, the Danish Refugee Council, IRC, Mercy Corps and Save the Children – are using Dioptra and have collectively conducted several hundred efficiency analyses, providing the opportunity to compare the efficiency of different programme modalities with multi-agency data. Here we highlight some of the key findings.

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103   I. Betzler and O. Westerman, 'Evidencing the Value for Money of the CCI's Cash and Legal Programmes' (Mercy Corps, Oxfam, Norwegian Refugee Council (NRC), International Rescue Committee, Danish Refugee Council (DRC), 2018). www.alnap.org/help-library/evidencing-the-value-for-money-of-the-cci%E2%80%99s-cash-and-legal-programmes.

104   Again, though, it is important to distinguish between efficiency from the agency perspective and from the end user's: if an individual is unable to travel to collect their transfer and biometric identification is used, they cannot send a family member in their place (Daniels, Anderson and Yusuf Ali, *2017 Somalia Response*. www.alnap.org/help-library/evaluation-of-the-2017-somalia-humanitarian-cash-based-response.

105   World Bank Group, *Lebanon Economic Monitor, Fall 2021: The Great Denial* (Lebanon: World Bank Group, 2022). www.alnap.org/help-library/lebanon-economic-monitor-fall-2021-the-great-denial.

106   Key informant interview in Lebanon.

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Cost of cash assistance

Dioptra analyses show that the costs of delivering cash assistance in humanitarian contexts vary widely, from $0.20 to nearly $3 for every $1 of assistance provided to people in need (including indirect and shared costs). Reasons for this high variation include differences in the cash transfer provided (delivering lower cash amounts appeared more costly per dollar transferred, because delivery costs were divided among fewer dollars transferred to clients), and scale (programmes which reached more households had significantly lower delivery costs per dollar transferred). Most of the 'returns to scale' are achieved once programmes reach 1,000 households (see below), and beyond that point increases in scale do not significantly reduce delivery costs. This suggests a minimum scale for cash-based programmes so that a greater proportion of resources go to those in need.

Trends in the cost-efficiency of basic needs cash programmes
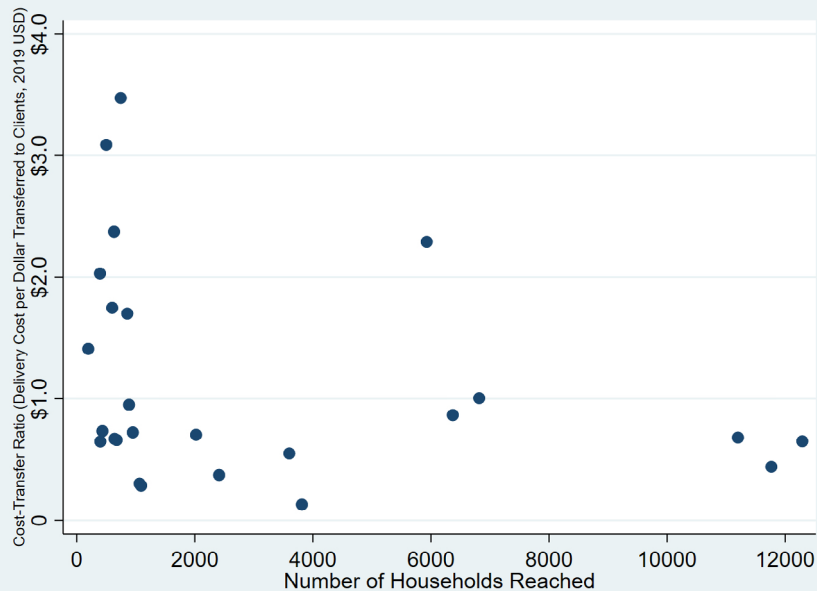
These examples suggest the importance of scale (and thus sufficiency of resources) and the need for context-sensitive efficiency benchmarks. For example, using CVA as a global benchmark for the delivery cost per dollar transferred could lead to under-resourcing of critical elements of programme quality in some contexts.

Multi-year funding

As part of the Quality Funding Caucus of the Grand Bargain 2.0, consortium members have also been conducting Dioptra analyses to assess how longer-term funding enables greater programmatic efficiency. As one example of this kind of analysis, IRC looked for two programmes delivering the same activity and implemented in the same country, differing only in the duration of their funding. Analysis showed that, for every €1 of WASH non-food items delivered, the delivery

costs for distribution through a 24-month programme were almost half that of distribution through a 12-month programme.

This efficiency gain did not appear to be driven by differences in the dollar value of NFIs between the two awards. When efficiency is considered using a metric which does not depend on the value of NFIs, such as the delivery cost per household reached, the longer-term programme was still considerably more efficient (€13.41 in delivery costs versus €78.36). Danish Refugee Council, another consortium member that participated in the Quality Funding analysis, looked at multi-purpose cash assistance programmes in their Colombia office and observed efficiency gains between the shorter- and longer-term programmes analysed.

Similar to the findings on cash assistance, this difference appears to be driven by scale: the longer-term grant enabled a much larger scale of NFI procurement and distribution. This is consistent with previous evidence, which suggests that longer-term programmes unlock efficiencies by allowing for investments in infrastructure that enable large-scale delivery and provide useful evidence of the programmatic impacts of changes to funding processes.

Logistics and supply chains

Challenges of inflation and pandemic-related supply chain issues were not limited to cash. Country-level interviews reported that hyperinflation in Venezuela made project planning virtually impossible, and inflation resulting from the de facto blockade in Ethiopia meant NGOs were unable to meet their proposal estimates. Rising fuel prices had widespread impacts across many humanitarian contexts on the cost of delivering food and other in-kind support. In a global survey of humanitarian logistics and procurement professionals, 75% reported rising local transport costs and 69% reported rising costs for international transport over 2021 – notably before the Russia-Ukraine conflict sent global fuel prices soaring in early 2022.[107]

The bureaucratic and access constraints described in Chapters 4 and 11 also had considerable impacts on the cost of humanitarian operations. In Venezuela and Bangladesh, NGOs described a huge increase in administration and bureaucracy associated with obtaining approvals and permissions for access, visas, bank accounts and international transfers. In Yemen, agencies used less cost-effective distributed supply chains to maintain services in the face of airstrikes on infrastructure and access restrictions.

Although the impact of COVID-19 on global supply chains presented challenges to efficiency, agencies seemed largely able to rise to this challenge – including through the use of pooled or collaborative

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107   CHORD, 'The State of Logistics and Supply Chain in the Humanitarian Context. Global Survey Findings' (Center For Humanitarian Logistics and Regional Development (CHORD), 2022). www.alnap.org/help-library/the-state-of-logistics-and-supply-chain-in-the-humanitarian-context-global-survey.

mechanisms. WFP created a Common Services structure for the COVID-19 response, supporting both UN agencies and INGOs with logistics capacity when commercial capacity was not available.[108] DG-ECHO created the EU Air Bridge, with the aim of complementing WFP's Global Common Services by supporting humanitarian airlifts on demand and strengthening the pooled resources through projects at international and country level.[109]

Funding mechanisms

The study period of 2018–2021 witnessed significant progress in the efficiency of funding mechanisms, primarily driven by the reform efforts of the Grand Bargain signatories. While the annual Grand Bargain reporting process frequently noted that implementation was slower than desired, with several commitments remaining out of reach at the end of the first five years,[110] comparison with previous SOHS reports indicates that the achievements of the past four years are significant compared to a decade ago.

For example, the 2012 SOHS noted the development of more 'complex proposal and reporting tools' by donors, which created additional burdens on NGOs and UN agencies; in contrast, by 2021, 30 signatories had signed up to the '8+3' template[111] developed through the Grand Bargain, a standardised format for use in project-level reporting. While the template is not in widespread use, its existence as a viable alternative to individual donor reporting offers an improvement.

Even donor assessments, an area considered 'most disappointing'[112] in the Grand Bargain reviews, have seen some improvements. While a 2020 study for the Grand Bargain found that donor assessments had doubled between 2016 and 2020, this was driven primarily by two donors rather than reflecting a general trend. Instead, there was a more common move across donors towards using Multilateral Organisation Performance Assessment Network (MOPAN) assessments and longer-term partnership frameworks and agreements – which, depending on their set-up, can reduce the costs of frequent assessments. There were also efforts to harmonise assessments and due diligence practices by UN agencies with their NGO partners and to share information on partner capacity through the UN Partners Portal, which at the end of 2021 had over 20,000 NGOs registered and five UN agencies participating.[113]

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108 WFP, 'WFP Common Services,' 2021. www.alnap.org/help-library/wfp-common-services-situation-report-31-january-2021.

109 WFP, 'WFP COVID-19 Common Services Situation Report' (Rome: WFP, 2021). www.alnap.org/help-library/wfp-common-services-situation-report-31-january-2021.

110 Metcalfe-Hough et al., *Grand Bargain at Five*. www.alnap.org/help-library/the-grand-bargainat-five-years-an-independent-review.

111 The 8+3 Template, 2019. https://interagencystandingcommittee.org/system/files/83_template_final.pdf.

112 Victoria Metcalfe-Hough, *Collaborative Advocacy between Humanitarian and Human Rights Actors: Opportunities and Challenges* (London: HPG/ODI, 2021). www.alnap.org/help-library/collaborative-advocacy-between-humanitarian-and-human-rights-actors-opportunities-and.

113 Similar to many areas of the Grand Bargain, while streamlined assessment and partnership arrangements are assumed to support efficiency gains, there has been no quantitative study confirming their contributions to overall reductions in operating costs.

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Quality funding in terms of multi-year or flexible funding can in theory increase efficiencies by avoiding repeated funding applications, hefty reporting, lengthy negotiations to alter programming in the face of changing contexts, and by enabling activities that cease to be useful to be replaced with those that better meet needs instead of being completed based on contractual obligations. But progress on flexible and multi-year funding was mixed, despite it also being frequently cited by evaluations as a factor in the timeliness, coverage and effectiveness of humanitarian response, as well as becoming an increasing priority in the localisation of humanitarian action (see Chapter 9), and for addressing needs in protracted crises.

Donors reported a significant increase in multi-year funding, including, importantly, USAID and DG-ECHO as two of the largest humanitarian donors. In 2021 USAID increased its multi-year funding by over 60% and ECHO increased the percentage of humanitarian funding provided as multi-year from 3% to 9%.[114] In volume, several key multilateral agencies – WFP, UNHCR and UNICEF – saw an increase in multi-year funding over the course of the Grand Bargain.[115] At the same time, and as with funding to local actors (see Chapter 9), these volume increases have occurred against the backdrop of a rise in overall humanitarian funding, meaning that the proportion of annual funding to these agencies has either stayed the same or declined.[116] COVID-19 also had varying impacts across donors. One donor reported that the pandemic left them less agile to respond to new crises, had created such uncertainties that they moved away from multi-year funding to more annualised approaches to allocation and had drained their contingency funds. Finally, despite years of discussion and implementation, there remain different opinions between agencies and donors on what qualifies as efficient multi-year funding. Interviewees claimed that multi-year grants that require annual approvals fail to provide the predictability and reduced paperwork that make truly multi-year funding more efficient.

Flexible funding – both unearmarked and softly earmarked – was more volatile. Overall, donors shifted to more flexible funding in 2020 to respond to COVID-19, but by 2021 much of this flexibility had receded. Unearmarked funding rose to $3.4 billion in 2020, before falling in 2021 to $2.7 billion, well below 2018 levels.

These generally static global figures mask significant variations in flexible funding from agency to agency: three UN agencies – OCHA, UNHCR and UNRWA – reported receiving more than 30% of their funding as unearmarked or softly earmarked in 2021, while WHO, after seeing

> "
>
> **Donors reported a significant increase in multi-year funding, including, importantly, USAID and DG-ECHO as two of the largest humanitarian donors.**

114   Victoria Metcalfe-Hough et al., *The Grand Bargain in 2021: An Independent Review* (London: HPG/ODI, 2022). www.alnap.org/help-library/the-grand-bargain-in-2021an-independent-review.

115   Metcalfe-Hough et al. (Ibid). www.alnap.org/help-library/the-grand-bargain-in-2021an-independent-review.

116   Metcalfe-Hough et al. (Ibid). www.alnap.org/help-library/the-grand-bargain-in-2021an-independent-review.

a sharp increase in unearmarked funding to respond to COVID-19 in 2020, had their unearmarked funding drop from $714 million in 2020 to $83 million in 2021. To improve their access to flexible funding, several agencies created or attempted to expand their own internal funding mechanisms for surge and early response.

Figure 40: Unearmarked funding to UN agencies, 2018–2021

Between 2018 and 2021 unearmarked 'flexible' funding to UN agencies was volatile. Although donors shifted to flexible funding in 2020 as a response to COVID-19 (with funding rising to $3.4bn), this quickly receded in 2021, decreasing to $2.7bn, and accounting for only 13% of total humanitarian funding to UN agencies.
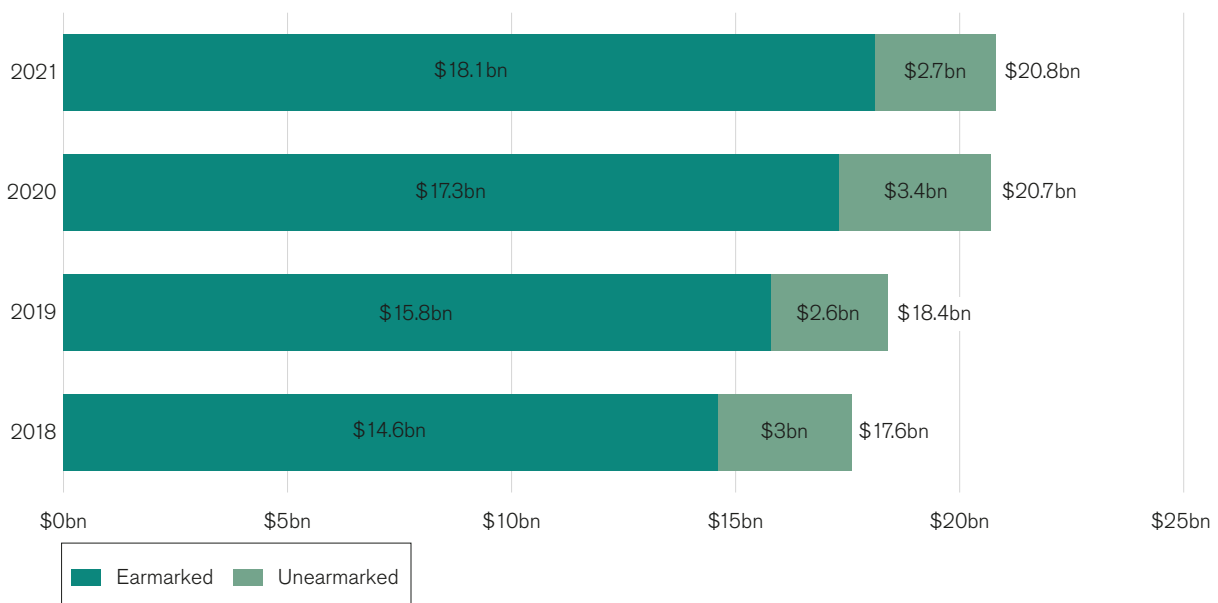
Source: Development Initiatives based on data provided bilaterally by UN agencies.

Notes: The calculations comprise earmarked and unearmarked humanitarian and humanitarian-related contributions given to the Food and Agriculture Organisation (FAO), International Organisation for Migration (IOM), UN Development Programme (UNDP), UN OCHA, UN Hight Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), UN International Children's Emergency Fund (UNICEF), UN Relief and Works Agency for Palestinian Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA), the World Food Programme (WFP), and the World Health Organisation (WHO). 2020 data for IOM and 2020 and 2021 data for UNDP is an estimation and not available at the time of writing. Data is in constant 2020 prices.

One area that continues to see little improvement since the first SOHS in 2010 is the 'pass through' or layers through which humanitarian funding is provided. If anything, the inefficiencies of these layers became more apparent during the COVID-19 pandemic, as frontline agencies waited months to see resources trickle through and the UN agencies receiving the bulk of COVID-19 response funding were poor at providing transparency on its use. One senior humanitarian practitioner described the experience:

> **'We came to find out that a lot of them did spend these first major tranches of resources on PPE. It would have been really helpful to know that up front… It should never be that it takes months for frontline actors who have public information and are very aware of how much money has gone to the big UN agencies to find out how it's been spent, right?'**

Multi-layered funding can be inefficient not only because of the additional transaction costs of passing funds through multiple agencies to reach the frontline, but also due to the poor quality of the funding received. Efficiency gains achieved through multi-year or unearmarked funding for UN agencies was rarely passed on to INGOs or L/NNGOs over the study period, meaning that funding for many frontline actors remained unpredictable and heavily restricted. While donors demonstrated more interest in reducing layers of funding, for many, existing regulatory frameworks prevented more direct funding of national actors. This was frustrating for national actors but also, as indicated by evaluations, a major driver of inefficiency for donors.[117]

The greatest success in reducing transactional layers was through an increase in resources provided through pooled funding mechanisms such as the CERF and country-based pooled funds. During the COVID-19 pandemic, when UN agencies proved slow in passing funds through to local NGOs,[118] the CERF began making direct allocations to national actors for the first time. While this was done with the intention of improving timeliness, key informants reported that it also reduced transaction costs.

Are there system-wide mechanisms to improve efficiency?

Coordination and multi-agency collaboration

Since 2005 the term 'coordination' has become synonymous with the formal UN cluster coordination system activated in countries with a UN HRP. Previous SOHS reports have noted the contributions that cluster coordination, and other forms of multi-agency collaboration, make to humanitarian effectiveness. This largely remains true, although for this study period there was considerably more evidence available on non-cluster forms of coordination and collaboration, such as multi-agency consortiums, in comparison to findings on the cluster system.

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117   e.g., Murray, *Response to the Refugee Crisis in Turkey*. www.alnap.org/help-library/evaluation-of-the-european-union%E2%80%99s-humanitarian-response-to-the-refugee-crisis-in.

118   Jeremy Konyndyk, Patrick Saez, and Rose Worden, 'Humanitarian Financing Is Failing the COVID-19 Frontlines' (Washington DC: Center for Global Development, 2020). www.alnap.org/help-library/humanitarian-financing-is-failing-the-covid-19-frontlines.

Strong coordination among agencies was credited with improved effectiveness in protection, education and food security. Area-based programming also led to more comprehensive meeting of needs in some responses. This appears to be an area of upward trajectory: when asked 'Where has the humanitarian system showed the greatest improvement over the past three years?' in the SOHS practitioner survey, coordination was the second most common answer.

When coordination was poor, the impacts on performance were clear. Specifically, coordination between the humanitarian cluster system and WHO's incident management system was a consistent problem, affecting multiple health responses, from cholera in Yemen to Ebola in DRC and the COVID-19 pandemic.[119]

After more than 15 years of the sector-based coordination system, its limitations were beginning to show, prompting efforts to rethink and trial new models.[120] While sector-based coordination has been widely credited with improving effectiveness and efficiency compared to pre-2005 humanitarian responses, it has been most successful at coordinating actors in the system whose internal structures and approaches are organised by sector. But sector-based coordination has also been critiqued for its 'siloing' of aid,[121] and proved to be limited in its ability to increase the leadership of national actors and to address cross-sector issues, such as CVA and services to IDPs.[122] Cash Working Groups (CWGs) are used unevenly across responses and were found to duplicate or compete with clusters due to the increasing use of multi-purpose cash.[123]

Efforts are under way to address these limitations. On CVA, during the study period the IASC developed a new model for cash coordination, approved by IASC Principals in March 2022. As discussed in Chapter 5, the Secretary-General's High-Level Panel on Internal Displacement call for actions to better address the needs of IDPs included a review of the cluster coordination system and its appropriateness for ensuring national leadership and addressing risk and longer-term vulnerability for displaced populations.[124]

119   Paul Spiegel et al., 'Responding to epidemics in large-scale humanitarian crises: A case study of the cholera response in Yemen, 2016–2018', *BMJ Global Health* 4, no. 4 (July 2019): e001709. www.alnap.org/help-library/responding-to-epidemics-in-large-scale-humanitarian-crises-a-case-study-of-the-cholera.

120   Konyndyk, Saez and Worden, 'Inclusive Coordination'. www.alnap.org/help-library/inclusive-coordination-building-an-area-based-humanitarian-coordination-model.

121   P. Knox Clarke and L. Campbell, 'Improving Humanitarian Coordination: Executive Summary and Recommendations' (London: ODI/ALNAP, 2016). www.alnap.org/help-library/improving-humanitarian-coordination-executive-summary-and-recommendations; Konyndyk, Saez and Worden, 'Inclusive Coordination'. www.alnap.org/help-library/inclusive-coordination-building-an-area-based-humanitarian-coordination-model.

122   J. Jodar et al., 'The State of the World's Cash 2020 – Executive summary', 2020. www.alnap.org/help-library/the-state-of-the-world%E2%80%99s-cash-2020.

123   Daniels, Anderson and Yusuf Ali, *2017 Somalia Response*. www.alnap.org/help-library/evaluation-of-the-2017-somalia-humanitarian-cash-based-response.

124   UN, 'Shining a Light on Internal Displacement A Vision for the Future.' (New York: United Nations, 2021). www.alnap.org/help-library/shining-a-light-on-internal-displacement-a-vision-for-the-future.

Over the study period, questions of whether coordination is worth the cost also persisted. Perceptions, upon which assessments of this aspect of efficiency tend to be based, were mixed in interviews and the evaluation synthesis. Practitioners in the SOHS survey were largely positive, with 45% answering that coordination benefits outweighed the costs, while country-level practitioners felt that responses without coordination were less efficient. Multi-agency consortiums and informal collaborations delivered key efficiencies in reducing duplication of effort and supporting greater harmonisation – but only if they featured strategic selection of partners, appropriate human resource capacity, joint objectives, values and common ways of working, and streamlined decision-making and contractual processes.[125] In their absence, consortia and multi-agency collaborations were deemed to be inefficient and costly.[126]

It is also increasingly important to ask, 'Efficient for whom?' when it comes to coordination mechanisms. Coordination mechanisms can be efficient sources of information and coordinated decision-making by large agencies but require an investment of time by local actors that many – from DRC, Somalia and Turkey – deemed to be inefficient due to their relative lack of influence. For example, one Somali local actor reflected, 'In front of powerful actors, you think you are better off just commenting on things and giving information, answering questions etc but you don't challenge, you don't lead and you don't object strongly.'[127]

Box M: The impact of innovation on humanitarian performance
Lydia Tanner, Ian Gray, Alice Obrecht
A decade ago, innovation was widely embraced in the humanitarian system as an answer to many of its performance challenges. Investing in a formal innovation function similar to those in the private and development sectors promised to deliver greater efficiency and effectiveness and transform the way the humanitarian system did business. Since then, repeated SOHS editions have noted increased investment and activity in innovation, while also stressing that widespread impacts were yet to be seen. Original research for the 2022 SOHS on innovation identified four areas of activity with different performance trajectories.

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125 Pham et al., *DEPP Evaluation*. www.alnap.org/help-library/depp-evaluation-summative-phase-report.; J. Baker et al., 'Evaluation of the European Union's Humanitarian Interventions in India and Nepal, 2013–2017' (Brussels: European Commission ECHO, 2018), 2013–17. www.alnap.org/help-library/evaluation-of-the-european-union%E2%80%99s-humanitarian-response-to-the-rohingya-refugee-crisis.

126 Pham et al. (Ibid). www.alnap.org/help-library/depp-evaluation-summative-phase-report.

127 This view, however, was not consistent across all local actors, as some found the opportunities for information sharing and contribution valuable.

Areas of innovation

When evaluations note the contribution of innovation to an agency's performance, they tend to describe innovations that are internally developed for the purposes of advancing that particular agency's operating capacity. These **operational innovations** are generally implemented in larger agencies and funded through core funds and overheads. They include the adoption of project management information systems and related digital data-gathering technologies, which has moved many humanitarian organisations over the past decade away from inefficient spreadsheets and paper-based systems. While getting comparable or collated data on the impacts of these innovations is impossible due to their individualised nature, evaluations often report efficiency gains from the introduction of technologies.

The second area is **programme and enabling innovations**. Hundreds of examples here, contribute to the effectiveness of many sector interventions. In WASH, LifeStraws have simplified water filtration. In nutrition, community-based management of acute malnutrition has scaled to improve the management of acute malnutrition. In education, several edtech solutions, such as Can't wait to Learn, have enabled children who are not accessing formal education due to displacement, violence and conflict to learn to read, write and count. In communication with communities (CwC), innovations with complaints boxes, radio and SMS have improved channels of engagement for some crisis-affected communities, though (as noted in Chapter 8) large challenges in implementation of effective community engagement strategies persist. In voucher, food and NFI distributions, biometric cards have reduced the time people spend queuing for assistance. These programmatic innovations are sometimes funded by internal resources, but their number has also grown due to support from innovation funds. Many of these innovations are not only effective, but also have comparable cost-effectiveness over alternatives. However, the track record for scaling programmatic innovations in the humanitarian system remains weak, leaving this potential for cost savings unlocked.

Third are **the 'humanitarian to humanitarian' (or H2H) innovations**, which are being developed and delivered by organisations providing services to humanitarian agencies. The emergence of the H2H Network in 2016 reflects the role of these innovative small organisations. Examples include Translators Without Borders (now CLEAR global), which aims to improve the use of language in CwC; ACAPS, which provides shared context analysis; and Ground Truth Solutions, which streamlines community feedback. There is some evidence that these innovations improve effectiveness by providing performance enhancing support that is best done as a shared service, and by addressing humanitarian needs that have largely been ignored before, such as contextualised and accessible information.

Finally, there are many examples of businesses, social enterprises, CSOs and universities that have traditionally worked in the development sector, social impact sector or the private sector, but are seeding and delivering innovations for humanitarian action. These **innovations from non-traditional and local actors** include scalable technologies such as Dimagi, Ushahidi and Mpesa, as well as smaller-scale entrepreneurial activities – from refugees in Kakuma Camp and Syria addressing problems in supply chains to local innovators addressing natural hazard risks through the bottle-net lifejacket in the Philippines or community-driven innovations supported by the Response Innovation Lab and through the Start Network's DEPP Innovation Hubs. Non-traditional donors are increasingly funding these innovations – for example, Audacious, which has funded the Humanitarian Open Street Map, and the MacArthur Foundation's 100&Change, which has funded Sesame Street Works.

Scoring innovation

The experience of the past decade of innovation raises important questions for its future. While agencies have partially fulfilled its promise, using new technologies and approaches to rise to the challenge of longer and more frequent crises, other system-wide solutions have failed or stalled.

Under-investment, lack of realistic expectations for how long scaling takes, and poor prioritisation in the mechanisms needed to support system-wide innovation present significant barriers.[128] The majority of innovation grants remain small, between $10,000 and $100,000 and, in the dataset collected for this edition of the SOHS, only one funder (of eight) awarded grants of over $900,000, with just 3 innovators (of 577) receiving over $1 million and 1 receiving over $2 million.[129] Without the funding needed to have impact at scale, most innovators are left tinkering at the edges.

This may also explain why the system as a whole is **slow to adopt innovations**, even those with proven track records – CVA being a prime example. Despite repeated evidence for the effectiveness and efficiency of CVA in many contexts, and despite yearly increases in CVA, this still comprises a smaller proportion of overall humanitarian assistance than could reasonably be expected. By one estimate, CVA would amount to between 37% and 43% of the share of total international humanitarian assistance if it were used as a default in the 70% to 80% of contexts where it would be appropriate.[130] At present, it amounts to 20%, indicating that the system remains slow to scaling effective ways of working.

128   GAHI, 'Lessons Learned. December 2019' (Amstelveen: KPMG, 2019). www.alnap.org/help-library/the-global-alliance-of-humanitarian-innovation-gahi-lessons-learned-exercise-2019.

129   C. Komuhangi et al., 'The State of the Humanitarian System: Innovation report.' (ALNAP, 2022).

130   J. Steets et al., 'Drivers and Inhibitors of Change in the Humanitarian System', (GPPI, 2016). www.alnap.org/help-library/drivers-and-inhibitors-of-change-in-the-humanitarian-system-a-political-economy.

Funding alone is insufficient to address scale: the system has not invested in the **mechanisms needed to support innovators**, broker partnerships and develop new business models, especially at the local level. Many of the innovations that are sector 'agnostic' have struggled to find a sustainable business model, with some closing despite having a significant impact, such as Frontline SMS, the SMS messaging platform used by humanitarian organisations globally the SMS.[131]

Finally, **understanding the impacts** of innovation is challenging. It is hard to collate monitoring and evaluation (M&E) data on impact and the 'tail' for innovations' impacts tends to be much longer than the timeframes used to evaluate humanitarian grant funding. A study for this edition of the SOHS on the M&E evidence from eight humanitarian innovation funders found that evidence of impact was only available for 16% of funded projects, and that most funders were unable to collect data on the outcomes of an innovation after grant funding had ended. While there are many examples of the impact individual innovations (such as digital data collection, cash-based assistance, community-based management of acute malnutrition, and blockchain at the largest scale), there is still a significant data gap on what impact innovations are collectively having on humanitarian effectiveness and efficiency.

131   To read more about why Frontline SMS closed see: www.frontlinesms.com/blog/2021/6/28/ frontlinesms-is-closing.

Chapter 11: Does the system uphold its principles?

IN BRIEF: Assertive states and a weakened multilateral system have meant that pressure on the space for principled humanitarian action has increased over the past 10 years. Whereas a decade ago the SOHS found that the major threat to principled action was association with militarised stabilisation agendas, recent concerns have centred on government-imposed restrictions.

In the face of growing constraints, restrictions and attacks on aid, humanitarians found it ever harder to practice their ideals of humanity, impartiality, neutrality and independence. And although they continued to pin their identity to these principles, aid workers often lacked the support, skills and will to make difficult judgement calls in complex operating environments.

Instead, agencies often defaulted to an 'access at all costs' imperative, accepting increasing compromises to their principles as the necessary price for operating in heavily controlled contexts including Syria and Ethiopia. Fear of expulsion had a chilling effect on the sector's collective willingness to speak out about abuses of civilians and blocks on aid: the humanitarian voice became more and more muted, drawing criticism – including from Venezuelan and Burmese civil society – that neutrality was being used as a cover for silence. Disunity among agencies and competition for limited funds also undermined efforts to push back against politicised aid from donors. There were also, however, signs that some humanitarians were finding their voice by working in creative collaboration with human rights and other advocates, and balancing preserving presence with promoting protection.

Introduction

The principles of humanity, impartiality, neutrality and independence mark humanitarian action out from other forms of support. They are also broad and shifting ideas (see Box N), with inherent tensions between them. Compromises are inevitable as humanitarian organisations try to find a middle ground between principles and pragmatism; as one expert noted, 'It's a tightrope as the principles often don't sit easily with crisis realities and require trade-offs.'[132]

132   C. Bennet, M. Foley, and S. Pantuliano, 'Time to Let Go: Remaking Humanitarian Action for the Modern Era' (London: HPG/ODI, 2016). cited in I. Friesen, P. Veron, and V. Mazarra, 'EU Humanitarian Aid: Caught between Nexus and Independence' (European Think Tanks Group (ETTG), 2020). www.alnap.org/help-library/time-to-let-go-remaking-humanitarian-action-for-the-modern-era.

> "
>
> **'We're in an absolute crisis of a fight for core norms'.**

Previous editions of the SOHS have reported growing pressure on the space for principled action, with attacks on aid workers and aid politicisation on the rise, and declining support for the international legal regime. These trends have continued, and to some extent worsened, over the past four years – 45% of aid practitioners responding to our survey said that respect for humanitarian space had declined, and 24% said it had not changed. As noted in Chapter 4, humanitarian actors continued to be blocked, coerced and criminalised,[133] and targeted attacks against them increased. Even before the war in Ukraine, deepening tensions and divisions between Western powers and China and Russia were playing out both in the conduct of hostilities and in the declining ability of the multilateral system to negotiate peaceful solutions and uphold international humanitarian law. There was some normative progress, including the agreement of UN Resolution 2417 on starvation in conflict and Resolution 2615, on humanitarian exemption to the Afghanistan sanctions regime, but otherwise, as one advocacy leader put it, 'we're in an absolute crisis of a fight for core norms'. Emboldened regimes also appeared to be learning from each other – copying tactics to constrain aid, including co-opting decolonisation and localisation narratives to close down humanitarian space. At the same time, social media played a new and direct role in the politicisation of aid efforts, and polarisation and misinformation fuelled perceptions that agencies were not acting in accordance with their principles.

Shifting interpretations and compromised space mean that tracking adherence to principles is difficult and evaluations rarely attempt to measure this. Yet it is possible to trace changes in policy and practice in two related spheres: the way humanitarians apply the principles in their own actions, and the extent to which they influence others to uphold international humanitarian law and maintain humanitarian space.

The focus of this chapter is on the humanitarian system's ability to navigate threats to principled action – rather than providing an assessment of international respect for international norms. It looks at changes in humanitarian actors' understanding of the principles, and how well these have been applied against three major tests – negotiating access, balancing advocacy and presence, and maintaining independence from donor interests. There are clear links to the findings on constraints to reaching affected populations, explored in Chapter 4; on performance in refugee and conflict settings, in 'Focus on: Forced displacement' and 'Focus on: Active conflict' sections; and on the effectiveness of protection, explored in Chapter 6.

Is the understanding of humanitarian principles changing?

> **Box N: Humanitarian principles and the challenge of interpretation**
>
> The four humanitarian principles have their roots in Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement and have been enshrined in UN resolutions and institutional commitments of donors and agencies. The principles are:
>
> - **Humanity:** Human suffering must be addressed wherever it is found. The purpose of humanitarian action is to protect life and health and ensure respect for human beings.
> - **Impartiality:** Humanitarian action must be carried out on the basis of need alone, making no distinctions by nationality, race, gender, religious belief, class or political opinion.
> - **Neutrality:** Humanitarian actors must not take sides in hostilities or engage in controversies of a political, racial, religious or ideological nature.
> - **Independence:** The autonomy of humanitarian objectives from any actors' political, economic, military or other objectives.
>
> These principles have been widely enshrined in the core missions of humanitarian organisations, but they are also continually contested and diversely interpreted. Humanity and impartiality are regarded by many as 'first principles' expressing the aims of humanitarian action – while neutrality and independence are often understood more as organising principles, important insofar as they support the aims and signal the legitimacy of humanitarian action. But even the 'first principles' allow a broad set of interpretations and imply difficult moral and political choices and trade-offs: a recent review of humanitarian organisations' mandates revealed wide divergence in interpretations of humanity – between a narrow and expansive interpretation of 'life-saving'[134] – and, as one commentator put it, 'the problem with humanity and impartiality as humanitarian principles is they simply tell you what's good, not how to do it'.

Humanitarians continue to hold the principles at the heart of their identity, but also remain uncertain about what to do with them in practice. The principles are stated as guiding norms for most organisations, and the overwhelming majority of practitioners responding to our survey

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134   M. Montemurro and K. Wendt, 'The Limits of Labels. HERE "Mandates Study" Mali Report' (Geneva: HERE, 2018). www.alnap.org/help-library/the-limits-of-labels.

Introduction

Part 1: What is the system?

Part 2: What is it achieving?

Part 3: How is it working?

Conclusions

Annexes

underscored the importance of humanitarian principles for their work[135] –
and yet there was limited practical support to put them into practice.
There were clear exceptions such as the ICRC's practical focus on
applying the principles, and several agencies reported making active
efforts to invest in training and support. Overall, however, a lack of
clear policies, strategic direction and operational guidance resulted
in a 'generally poor understanding of humanitarian principles across
the whole humanitarian community',[136] including among field staff and
partners on the frontline of applying them in complex environments.[137, 138]

At the same time, the interpretation of the principles continued to be
debated and revisited. Ten years ago, the SOHS documented how these
debates were driven by preoccupations about humanitarians' relationship
to stabilisation efforts and engagement with military actors in UN
integrated missions.[139] Conversations around the nexus have reignited
these concerns, as Chapter 12 examines, while discussions about race,
decolonisation and localisation often circled back to questions of who
owns the principles, and what they should be taken to mean. For some,
this has meant a reckoning with the essence of the principles – as one
commentator put it, 'Black Lives Matter was very important. It finally outed
the profound meaning of the principle of humanity and impartiality, which
is respect for every human being impartially and equally regardless of
social, racial, and cultural differences'.[140] Others, however, argued that
unrealistically purist ideals of neutrality have served to perpetuate the
exclusion of local actors,[141] as some warned that those same ideals
were being appropriated by assertive states to delegitimise Western
aid efforts.

135 According to the survey of aid workers for this edition of the SOHS, humanity and impartiality
     were felt to be the most important: 85% and 78% positively rated their importance, compared
     to 70% for neutrality and 66% for independence.

136 Maunder et al., *Emergency Response in Northeast Nigeria*, 45. www.alnap.org/help-library/
     evaluation-of-wfps-corporate-emergency-response-in-northeast-nigeria-2016-2018.

137 Maunder et al., *Emergency Response in Northeast Nigeria*. www.alnap.org/help-library/
     evaluation-of-wfps-corporate-emergency-response-in-northeast-nigeria-2016-2018.;
     Featherstone et al., *Coverage and Quality*. www.alnap.org/help-library/evaluation-of-the-
     coverage-and-quality-of-the-unicef-humanitarian-response-in-complex; Steets et al.,
     Evaluation of WFP Policies. www.alnap.org/help-library/evaluation-of-wfp-policies-on-
     humanitarian-principles-and-access-in-humanitarian-0.

138 R. Grace, 'Humanitarian Negotiation with Parties to Armed Conflict: The Role of Laws and
     Principles in the Discourse', SSRN Electronic Journal, 2020. www.alnap.org/help-library/
     humanitarian-negotiation-with-parties-to-armed-conflict-the-role-of-laws-and-principles.

139 The 2012 edition of the SOHS concluded that humanitarians had let themselves become
     too close to the stabilisation agenda, and 'many humanitarian organisations have willingly
     compromised a principled approach in their own conduct through close alignment with
     political and military activities and actors' ALNAP, *The State of the Humanitarian System 2012*
     (London: ALNAP, 2012), 12. www.alnap.org/help-library/the-state-of-the-humanitarian-
     system-2012-edition.

140 Key informant interview for ALNAPs 2021 general meeting.

141 S. Healy, 'Neutrality: Principle or Tool?', Humanitarian Practice Network (HPN), 2021.
     www.alnap.org/help-library/neutrality-principle-or-tool.

Changes in the scale, spread and nature of crises – including COVID-19 and climate change – have also prompted calls for a fundamental rethink of the principles guiding needs-based assistance. New notions of solidarity have been posited, as well as questions of the 'anthropocentricity' of humanitarian principles in an age of ecological emergency.[142] However, while humanitarian agencies were still struggling to translate the current set of principles into practical tools, training and skills, these debates felt even further from frontline application.

How well has the system negotiated principled access?

The default position of many humanitarian agencies was to take the principle of 'humanity' to mean prioritising achieving 'access at all costs', partly driven by imperatives and incentives to maintain aid delivery even in the most challenging environments. Pursuing access was often in tension with immediate and long-term compromises, but evaluations of two major UN agencies' work – one at the global and one at the country level – suggested that decisions were not backed up by organisational inclination or staff capacity to strategically weigh up the implications.[143]

Several evaluations highlighted host government conditions constraining assistance.[144] In Syria, state control of the terms of humanitarian assistance has been a feature of the aid effort over the past decade, with the Syrian government 'establishing the rules of the game' from the outset.[145] While the number of INGOs gaining permission to work in Syria has risen markedly since 2019, that permission is granted on the condition of tight oversight by the Assad regime.[146] In Ethiopia, access

> **One humanitarian leader diagnosed the humanitarian system as 'suffering from Stockholm syndrome', accepting increasing compromises as the price for permission to operate in heavily controlled contexts.**

142 One academic has proposed a new set: equity, diversity, solidarity and compassion. M. Clarke and B. W. Parris, Vale the Humanitarian Principles: New Principles for a New Environment", The Humanitarian Leader, p. Working Paper 001, Aug 2019. www.alnap.org/help-library/vale-the-humanitarian-principles-new-principles-for-a-new-environment; Another has suggested that climate change imperatives should prompt a reframing of the 'anthroprocentric' notion of impartiality. H. Slim, 'What's Wrong with Impartiality', *The New Humanitarian*, 2021. www.alnap.org/help-library/what%E2%80%99s-wrong-with-impartiality.

143 Maunder et al., *Emergency Response in Northeast Nigeria*. www.alnap.org/help-library/evaluation-of-wfps-corporate-emergency-response-in-northeast-nigeria-2016-2018; Featherstone et al., *Coverage and Quality*. www.alnap.org/help-library/evaluation-of-the-coverage-and-quality-of-the-unicef-humanitarian-response-in-complex; Steets et al., *Evaluation of WFP Policies*. www.alnap.org/help-library/evaluation-of-wfp-policies-on-humanitarian-principles-and-access-in-humanitarian-0.

144 Sida and Schenkenberg, *Rohingya Response Evaluations*. www.alnap.org/system/files/content/resource/files/main/Bangladesh%2520synthesis%2520Report%2520final%25202019.pdf; Danida, 'Evaluation of the Regional Development and Protection Programme in Lebanon, Jordan and Iraq 2014–2017' (Copenhagen: Danish Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2018). www.alnap.org/help-library/evaluation-of-the-regional-development-and-protection-programme-in-lebanon-jordan-and; Murray, *Response to the Refugee Crisis in Turkey*. www.alnap.org/help-library/evaluation-of-the-european-union%E2%80%99s-humanitarian-response-to-the-refugee-crisis-in; Lister, *Ethiopia: An Evaluation*. www.alnap.org/help-library/ethiopia-an-evaluation-of-wfps-portfolio-2012-2017; A. Koclejda, G. Roux-Fouillet, and N. Carlevaro, 'NRC Afghanistan Shelter Evaluation Report' (Norwegian Refugee Council (NRC), 2019). www.alnap.org/help-library/afghan-shelter-evaluation-report.

145 Hall, *Rescuing Aid in Syria*. www.alnap.org/help-library/rescuing-aid-in-syria.

146 Hall (Ibid). www.alnap.org/help-library/rescuing-aid-in-syria. The number of INGOs granted registration rose from 24 in 2019 to 41 by 2021.

to conflict-affected communities in Tigray remained highly compromised, and aid workers reported a high degree of government pressure on how needs were reported and aid was delivered. Commenting on global trends, one humanitarian leader diagnosed the humanitarian system as 'suffering from Stockholm syndrome', accepting increasing compromises as the price for permission to operate in heavily controlled contexts.

There has also been vocal criticism of the aid effort in Myanmar. In the aftermath of the military coup, local civil society vigorously challenged the neutrality of the international humanitarian effort, accusing agencies of working too closely with the military junta in order to preserve humanitarian access. Dependent on military authorisation, many felt that the aid effort was co-opted and diverted towards the interests of the junta, and thus undermined civil society organisations. The response of the UN system was branded 'woefully inadequate'[147] in its failure to take a stronger stance and enable local organisations to lead,[148] with one local activist noting that 'an insistence on working through the Myanmar military junta – justified by a fetishised notion of humanitarian neutrality – obscures the undeniably political nature of humanitarian aid'.[149]

With estimates that half of current conflicts involve more than two parties, negotiating access with multiple state and non-state actors has remained a daily challenge which the humanitarian system has struggled to meet. Negotiating with non-state actors presents difficulties of navigating nebulous hierarchies, weak chains of command, shifting structures and dynamic allegiances. As such, 'reaching an understanding with one commander doesn't necessarily mean you've reached an understanding with the others'.[150] In interviews in DRC and Yemen, aid workers described delicate and difficult negotiations to secure access in complex and dynamic situations where it was often hard to know who was in control, and where there was a high financial, security and reputational price to pay for operating in certain areas. Aid workers were often unclear what the right course of action looked like: in Yemen, one aid worker noted the 'fees' that their agency had to pay to multiple belligerents, including exchanging medical supplies for protection and access.

147   D. Lilly, 'The UN's Response to the Human Rights Crisis after the Coup in Myanmar: Destined to Fail?' (New York: International Peace Institute, 2021). www.alnap.org/help-library/the-un%E2%80%99s-response-to-the-human-rights-crisis-after-the-coup-in-myanmar-destined-to-fail.

148   E. Fishbein, 'Choosing Sides: Five Local Takes on Aid Neutrality in Myanmar', *The New Humanitarian*, 2021. www.alnap.org/help-library/choosing-sides-five-local-takes-on-aid-neutrality-in-myanmar.

149   K. Ohmar, 'There's Nothing Neutral about Engaging with Myanmar's Military', *The New Humanitarian*, 2021. www.alnap.org/help-library/there%E2%80%99s-nothing-neutral-about-engaging-with-myanmar%E2%80%99s-military.

150   R. Barber. and Y. Zegenhagen, 'Humanitarian Access and International Law: A Symposium for Humanitarian Practitioners, Researchers, Trainers and Policy-Makers: Summary Report.' (Burwood/Melbourne: Centre for Humanitarian Leadership and Australian Red Cross, 2019). www.alnap.org/help-library/humanitarian-access-and-international-law-a-symposium-for-humanitarian-practitioners.

Despite the importance of common positions in complex high-risk negotiations, organisations continued to adopt divergent approaches to managing threats and negotiating access. A study on aid organisations' negotiating tactics with the Taliban prior to the 2021 takeover noted the importance of improving information-sharing and coordinated positions among aid actors.[151] But in Syria, aid officials reported how UN agencies and NGOs have succumbed to the Syrian government's successful 'divide and conquer' strategy, while local frontline responders are intimidated into silence.[152]

Recognising the reduction in humanitarian space and the challenges that the international community faces in negotiating humanitarian access in many settings, in 2021 the Emergency Relief Coordinator announced the establishment of a new unit in OCHA to support 'smarter access' approaches. This aims to strengthen humanitarian engagement and provide opportunities to leverage relationships to facilitate humanitarian access.

How are agencies balancing advocacy and presence?

Recurrent tensions between speaking out about abuses and staying to deliver aid came to the fore again in the past four years. This was a common theme in countries with strong government control, where agencies had to choose whether to pay the price for taking a public stand against violations of human rights and humanitarian law. As one INGO leader put it: 'Our ability to save lives is determined by our presence on the ground and that is in the hands of the host government. So many times, the cost of our presence is our silence.'

In Bangladesh, as bureaucratic impediments and government regulations slowed and narrowed the parameters of response, senior aid workers described 'treading a tightrope between advocating for the rights and protections of refugees and working in partnership with the government to deliver the response.' In Ethiopia, MSF was suspended for three months following statements on attacks on healthcare facilities in Tigray and the NRC for over five months, accused by the government of 'spreading misinformation'. Both organisations have faced suspensions elsewhere because of their public statements, including in Iraq, Burkina Faso and Cameroon.

These tactics appear to have had the intended 'chilling effect' on a humanitarian system that has long been accused of risk-aversion and access-fixation. As one humanitarian leader put it: 'They specialise in scaring us and we specialise in being scared.' In Ethiopia, suspended

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151 L. Kelly, 'Lessons Learnt from Humanitarian Negotiations with the Taliban, 1996–2001' (Brighton: K4D Helpdesk, 2021). www.alnap.org/help-library/humanitarian-access-and-international-law-a-symposium-for-humanitarian-practitioners.

152 Hall, *Rescuing Aid in Syria*. www.alnap.org/help-library/rescuing-aid-in-syria.

NGOs found themselves an isolated minority. Others told how they chose not to take a public position which would have been at odds with the views of their national staff and would have put both staff and operations in danger. In Myanmar, however, local staff members of international agencies described their discomfort at the emphasis that their organisations were placing on neutrality, with one UN staff member telling a journalist that 'asking us to remain neutral is not the way Of course, it's easy to remain neutral when the act of injustice doesn't affect you'.[153] In Venezuela, interviewees felt that international agencies were using neutrality as a cover for not speaking out about human rights abuses and the surveillance, intimidation and arrest of local aid workers. Local human rights and humanitarian workers have been arrested, including five staff from a UN agency's local partner. Local NGOs expressed frustration with the reluctance of international organisations to speak up on their behalf.

This country-level reticence reflected a decline in vocal solidarity on the global stage. The war in Ukraine has since prompted a step-change but, during the study period, high-level advocacy for respect of international norms appeared to be at a low point – especially compared to the optimistic multilateralism that enabled the adoption of the 'responsibility to protect' principle less than two decades previous. Calls for global ceasefires and unimpeded humanitarian access, made by the UN Secretary-General and the EU High Representative at the start of the COVID-19 pandemic, went unheeded. The UN Security Council remained gridlocked, the Human Rights Council was perceived to be ineffective and the appetite for taking collective positions on high-stakes geopolitical issues was limited.

Analysts also noted an erosion of global consensus on the importance of international humanitarian law in setting limits to war, which means that 'the humanitarian community really has to step on the gas pedal, to promote these norms.'[154] One global study of protection advocacy identified a trend of international actors reducing engagement with conflict parties or third-party states on protection issues, a gradual diminution of the international humanitarian voice over the past 10 years in an age of silence.[155] There were nascent signs of increased leadership on protection advocacy at the end of 2021 and the Ukraine conflict accelerated that trend, in this instance at least, but it remained to be seen what this would mean for humanitarian advocacy elsewhere.

Advocacy efforts were also hamstrung by fragmentation within and between aid agencies. Differences on positions, tactics and degrees of engagement remained rife within the humanitarian system, and several

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153   Fishbein, 'Choosing Sides: Five Local Takes on Aid Neutrality in Myanmar'. www.alnap.org/help-library/choosing-sides-five-local-takes-on-aid-neutrality-in-myanmar.

154   Key Informant Interview for ALNAP 2021 meeting.

155   Mark Bowden and Victoria Metcalfe-Hough, *Humanitarian Diplomacy and Protection Advocacy in An Age of Caution* (London: HPG/ODI, 2020). www.alnap.org/help-library/humanitarian-diplomacy-and-protection-advocacy-in-an-age-of-caution.

sources suggest that, at the UN level, advocacy tended to be reliant on the appetite and tenacity of individuals, rather than a coherent approach. Ten years ago, the Internal Review Panel found a systemic failure of the UN system to meet responsibilities to protect people and respond to serious violations in Sri Lanka, prompting the Secretary-General's Human Rights Up Front initiative.[156] However, a recent report found that, when UN country leadership does seek to advocate on international humanitarian law and protection issues, they must contend with a lack of political and technical support within a 'still-fragmented' UN system.[157] This was echoed in our interviews: a former senior UN official lamented: 'If the UN doesn't have the courage in particular to stand up on issues, then who will do it? I believe this is a problem of leadership that we've seen deteriorate in the last few years.' In Venezuela, advocacy efforts 'fell apart', according to one campaigner, 'because you had humanitarians nervous and split in whether they thought there was a problem or not and a country team led by a development-focused person, inexperienced in confronting governments'.[158]

Connections and collaborations between international, national and local organisations were also marked by misalignments in power, priorities and policies. According to one study, this undermined collective advocacy on refugee protection in Turkey, where internationals were often seen to relate to local and national actors in an extractive or tokenistic way.[159] Similarly, in 2018 in Myanmar, Kachin organisations felt ignored by international humanitarian actors who solicited their analysis to inform advocacy efforts, but failed to credit them for this or explain how it was used, in part due to persistent assumptions around the lack of neutrality of local actors.[160]

In the face of these shortcomings, there were new efforts by humanitarian agencies to join forces with experienced advocates from other sectors. Protection advocates noted a new creative pragmatism around working with human rights actors to minimise operational risks while maximising the impact of their advocacy. For example in Gaziantep, Turkey, a Human Rights Reference Group brought together national and international humanitarian and human rights actors working on the situation in Syria to identify and address protection gaps, including through advocacy.[161] While in many cases, humanitarian agencies chose to participate under the radar in order not to jeopardise their country

156   IASC, 'Human Rights Up Front: An Overview' (Geneva: IASC, 2015). www.alnap.org/help-library/human-rights-up-front-an-overview.

157   Bowden and Metcalfe-Hough, *Humanitarian Diplomacy*. www.alnap.org/help-library/humanitarian-diplomacy-and-protection-advocacy-in-an-age-of-caution.

158   Key informant interview with senior campaigner.

159   A. Meral et al., 'Refugee Advocacy in Turkey From Local to Global. HPG Working Paper' (London: HPG/ODI, 2021). www.alnap.org/help-library/refugee-advocacy-in-turkey-from-local-to-global.

160   Metcalfe-Hough, *Collaborative Advocacy*. www.alnap.org/help-library/collaborative-advocacy-between-humanitarian-and-human-rights-actors-opportunities-and.

161   Metcalfe-Hough (Ibid). www.alnap.org/help-library/collaborative-advocacy-between-humanitarian-and-human-rights-actors-opportunities-and.

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operations, in other lower-risk contexts they were emboldened to add their voice publicly to advocate towards international governments – including the ultimately successful campaign to end US arms sales to Yemen.[162]

Are humanitarians maintaining independence from donor politics?

Although most international donors claim that they are guided by humanitarian principles, 'attempts to politicize and undermine the independence of aid are as old as humanitarian action itself'.[163] Humanitarian funding is often informed by and entwined with foreign policy and domestic objectives, including asserting soft power, countering terrorism and limiting migration. In the 20 years since September 11 and the war on terror, these influences have taken on a new scale, purpose and complexity.[164] As one interviewee put it, 'Politicisation of aid is well entrenched even with the most mainstream donors.' Global realignments in the aftermath of the war in Ukraine are bound to shift and deepen this politicisation.

For humanitarian agencies, the challenge remained how to maintain their principled independence from donors' political agendas. The widening gap between funding and needs and the continued reliance on a small number of institutional funders (see Chapter 3) made it difficult for humanitarian organisations to assert their independence, especially given the high levels of earmarked funding.[165] Médecins Sans Frontières, and to an extent World Vision International, are unusual in their ability to survive and operate on fundraising from the general public, as Chapter 2 shows; other NGOs and UN agencies are largely dependent on a handful of governments' foreign aid allocations.

The UN Emergency Relief Coordinator noted that this should not mean that humanitarian agencies should be in thrall to their funders: 'Donors are giving a massive amount of money and along with this comes their political views. We shouldn't be surprised at this, but we should be able to disagree with them.'[166] Yet agencies do not routinely or systematically push back against politicised aid – for example, an evaluation of UNICEF's work in complex emergencies found a 'lack of clarity in determining when to accept conditions and when to reject them'.[167] In the face of heightened competition for funding, agencies found it hard

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'Donors are giving a massive amount of money and along with this comes their political views. We shouldn't be surprised at this, but we should be able to disagree with them.'

162 Davies, *Protection Advocacy*. www.alnap.org/help-library/humanitarian-diplomacy-and-protection-advocacy-in-an-age-of-caution.

163 Steets et al., *Evaluation of WFP Policies*. www.alnap.org/help-library/evaluation-of-wfp-policies-on-humanitarian-principles-and-access-in-humanitarian-0.

164 Steets, et al. (Ibid). www.alnap.org/help-library/evaluation-of-wfp-policies-on-humanitarian-principles-and-access-in-humanitarian-0.

165 Steets, et al. (Ibid). www.alnap.org/help-library/evaluation-of-wfp-policies-on-humanitarian-principles-and-access-in-humanitarian-0.

166 ODI, 'Humanitarian Action in 2021: Tensions, Trade-Offs and Dilemmas', ODI, 2021. www.alnap.org/help-library/humanitarian-action-in-2021-tensions-trade-offs-and-dilemmas.

167 Featherstone et al., *Coverage and Quality*, 131. www.alnap.org/help-library/evaluation-of-the-coverage-and-quality-of-the-unicef-humanitarian-response-in-complex.

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to speak with one voice to contest or negotiate the terms or positions of institutional donors. In the case of counter-terrorism measures, which circumscribed where and how aid could be spent, agencies tended to err on the side of caution and compliance. In Afghanistan, prior to the Taliban takeover, many agencies had become deeply dependent on significant amounts of humanitarian funding from the US and UK. This funding came with counter-terrorism conditions, raising questions about whether the agencies that accepted it could truly describe themselves as neutral and independent. Following the Taliban takeover in 2021, agencies sought to 'carve out' humanitarian exemptions in international sanctions and to assert their principles, somewhere in the space between negotiating access with the new leadership in Kabul and negotiating funding with donors whose support to Afghanistan was conditional on, for example, agencies not paying tax or utility bills to the Taliban authorities.

In Yemen, controversy has continued to surround the acceptance of large volumes of funding from Saudi Arabia and the UAE,[168] given their active engagement in the conflict. Between 2016 and 2020, Gulf donors provided nearly a third of funds to the UN-coordinated response in Yemen, which often filtered through the system from UN agencies to other organisations which would not take the money directly. According to aid workers in the country, Saudi money came with requirements about which regions, commodities and modalities it could be spent on and strict monitoring conditions, including access to beneficiary lists. In 2021, a new and somewhat opaque Yemen Famine Relief Fund was established, prompting speculation about where the funds were coming from and the degree of involvement of Gulf donors. The humanitarian community was not united in its response; some agencies sent in proposals while others firmly opted out, leading one senior aid official to tell journalists, 'This is just proof that if enough money is at play there is no wisdom left, just the fear of missing out.'[169]

Migration management agendas also compromised the independence of humanitarian action. This continues the concerns humanitarian agencies raised in the last edition of the SOHS: that they are becoming 'more involved in attempts by states to control flows of refugees and migrants'. As the 'Focus on: Forced displacement' section explores, the imperative to limit onward movement of displaced people to donor countries remained a high priority for many Western governments. Some donors' funding allocations, including to Turkey and Libya, were associated with containment objectives, while elsewhere would-be migrants were prioritised for funding over other groups who may have been in greater

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168 According to some aid workers interviewed, this controversy extended to the UK because of its arms supplies to Saudi Arabia.

169 B. Parker and A. Slemrod, 'The Biggest Yemen Donor Nobody Has Heard Of', *The New Humanitarian*, 2021. www.alnap.org/help-library/the-biggest-yemen-donor-nobody-has-heard-of.

need.[170] The IFRC has described how accepting funds from one EU Trust Fund compromises agencies' independence and neutrality, as it provides funds to NGOs and UN agencies to improve the detention conditions in Libya – the very same conditions that are a consequence of EU migration management efforts.[171] According to one study: 'The political realities in Europe and the adoption of an objectives-driven approach to crisis management mean that it is decreasingly realistic to apply the principles to the full range of EU funded relief operations.'[172]

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170   The Danish Refugee Council faced criticism around its contract to provide inputs to the Danish government's Country of Origin Information reports, which were used by the Danish Immigration Service as grounds to revoke the residency permits of Syrian refugees. See C. Alfred and B. Holst, 'How Denmark's Hard Line on Syrian Refugees Is an Aid Group's Ethical Dilemma', The New Humanitarian, 2022. www.alnap.org/help-library/how-denmark%E2%80%99s-hard-line-on-syrian-refugees-is-an-aid-group%E2%80%99s-ethical-dilemma.

171   A.F. Atger, 'EU Migration Strategy: Compromising Principled Humanitarian Action. The International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies', 2019. www.alnap.org/help-library/eu-migration-strategy-compromising-principled-humanitarian-action.

172   Friesen, Veron, and Mazarra, 'EU Humanitarian Aid: Caught between Nexus and Independence'. www.alnap.org/help-library/eu-humanitarian-aid-caught-between-nexus-and-independence.

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Focus on: Active conflict

Cumulative and complex crises

**Conflict continued to drive the majority of humanitarian need –
just as it always has. Of the 30 humanitarian response plans
in 2021, 27 were for countries with active conflicts, and there
were a further eight refugee response plans to support people
fleeing conflict.[173]**

These conflicts are part of complex emergencies, fuelling and fuelled
by stress on resources (including by climate change), chronic poverty and
the collapse of state institutions. Syria, for example, saw a ceasefire in Idlib
province in March 2021, but at the same time COVID-19 containment
measures pushed a further 60% of people into food insecurity, while
wildfires destroyed crops, livelihoods and assets.[174] As multiple threats
collide, for civilians living in active conflicts hunger and disease are often
a greater threat to life than direct attack – of the five countries at greatest
risk of famine during 2018–2021 (Yemen, South Sudan, Nigeria, Afghanistan
and Ethiopia), the common driver across all of them was violent conflict.

Despite the call for a global ceasefire following the outbreak of
the COVID-19 pandemic, the number of conflicts continued to increase.
According to the Uppsala Conflict Data Program, by 2020 the number
of conflicts had more than doubled over the previous decade.[175] Violence
in 2020 included a record 56 state-based conflicts, eight of which had
reached the scale of wars.[176] In the same year, the conflict data project
ACLED counted nearly 30,000 direct fatalities from violence against

173 This is an increase from the start of the study period – in 2018, there were 24 HRPs for
conflict affected countries, and 4 RRPs.

174 OCHA, 'Syria Humanitarian Fund 2020 Annual Report' (Syria: OCHA, 2020).
www.alnap.org/help-library/syria-humanitarian-fund-2020-annual-report.

175 This includes the categories of one-sided violence by the state, state-based violence, and
non-state violence. In 2010 there were a total of 82 such conflicts. See data here: Uppsala
Conflict Data Program (UCDP), n.d. www.alnap.org/help-library/uppsala-conflict-
data-program.

176 According to the Uppsala Conflict Data Program, state-based armed conflict is defined
as involving use of armed force between two parties, of which at least one is the government
of a state, results in at least 25 battle-related deaths in one calendar year. War indicates the
scale of this – reaching at least 1000 battle related deaths in a calendar year. Pettersson
et al., 'Organized violence 1989–2020, with a special emphasis on Syria, (UCDP: 2021).
www.alnap.org/help-library/organized-violence-1989%E2%80%932020-with-a-special-
emphasis-on-syria. However there is no single definition – for examples, the Heidelberg
Institute uses different definitions with different figures see HIIK, 'Disputes Non-Violent Crises
Violent Crises Limited Wars' (Heidelberg, Germany: Heidelberg Institute for International
Conflict Research (HIIK), 2021). www.alnap.org/help-library/conflict-barometer-2020-
disputes-non-violent-crises-violent-crises-limited-wars-wars.

civilians.[177] As previous SOHS reports have documented,[178] the toll of violent conflict is cumulative: new complex emergencies appear faster than old ones are resolved. The past four years may have seen a peace agreement in South Sudan, but there was no end in sight for major protracted crises in Yemen, Syria and Mali. Meanwhile new or renewed conflicts in Ethiopia and Burkina Faso added to the list. The analysis in the 2015 SOHS still holds true: in the absence of political solutions to conflict, and of development approaches to support people's welfare in protracted conflict settings, the majority of humanitarian resources continue to be directed to chronic complex crises – 80% of country-allocable funding in the study period.[179]

Access in active conflict

How the system responds in the hardest to reach, active conflict situations is often taken as the litmus test of the humanitarian endeavour. As we have seen in Chapter 5, the ultimate 'metric of success' for humanitarians is how well they meet people's need in these most tightly constrained spaces.[180]

The mapping of humanitarian presence within conflicts, let alone the quality of that presence, remains imprecise, but evidence suggests a decade-long trend in which fewer international humanitarian organisations 'respond to highly violent, conflict-driven emergencies, irrespective of funding available and the needs of the population'.[181] There is also limited humanitarian presence at a sub-national level in many cases – including in areas outside state control in state-based conflicts. This was the case in Afghanistan before the Taliban takeover and was increasingly the case in Syria over the study period as cross-border options narrowed.

Despite this, aid is still finding ways to get through. As testament to this, one humanitarian leader pointed to the fact that the predicted famine in Yemen was averted. There is, however, a high price to pay for access – not only in terms of financial costs, but also in terms of principles, as we saw in the previous chapter. Beyond the amount of aid delivered or people reached there is also often little analysis of the positive or negative impacts of humanitarian action in these intense conflict settings. This is part of a wider lack of contextual understanding and conflict sensitivity on the part of many international agencies, and the conclusion in the 2012 SOHS that the international system had been 'amateurish' in its understanding of the conflict in Darfur resonates with emerging findings from Ethiopia and Afghanistan in 2021.

177   ACLED, n.d. www.alnap.org/help-library/acled-dataset.

178   ALNAP, 'The State of the Humanitarian System.', ALNAP Study (London: ALNAP, 2015). www.alnap.org/help-library/the-state-of-the-humanitarian-system-report-2015.

179   Data provided by Development Initiatives.

180   OCHA and UN Foundation, *Charles Petrie Speaking at the 2021 Global Humanitarian Policy Forum. From Checkpoints to High Politics: Humanitarian Access Negotiations in Action* (online, 2021). www.alnap.org/help-library/charles-petrie-speaking-at-the-2021-global-humanitarian-policy-forum-from-checkpoints.

181   Stoddard et al. (2016). www.alnap.org/help-library/efficiency-and-inefficiency-in-humanitarian-financing, cited in ALNAP, 'The State of the Humanitarian System.' www.alnap.org/help-library/the-state-of-the-humanitarian-system-sohs-2018-full-report.

Responding in new conflicts and remaining in protracted ones
While significant advances have been made in anticipating and preparing for disasters, major escalations in conflicts remain harder to predict. In 2015, the SOHS reported the early warning and preparedness failures ahead of upsurges in violence in Mali and South Sudan but pointed to the potential of new investments in risk mapping. Seven years later, this seems to have advanced very little. While the indicators and methodologies for scoring conflict risk and fragility in indices such as INFORM may have become more refined, there is limited evidence of this translating into actionable protocols for early warning and preparedness. There were promising programmatic examples of early action, with some success, including in Northern Nigeria and DRC,[182] but this was not happening at scale. In Afghanistan, most agencies had no preparedness plan in place when they knew that US troops would be withdrawing. Aid workers say that they were shocked by the speed of events and had thought they had more time to plan. This goes wider than the humanitarian system – despite warning signs, the international community as a whole was caught on the back foot by the Taliban takeover, as well as the conflict in Tigray (see 'Ethiopia case study: The conflict in Tigray' section).

At the same time, as existing conflicts become protracted, the international system appears to be no closer to sustainably meeting people's basic needs through development support, supporting resolution through political means or keeping up with humanitarian requirements. As the new UN Emergency Relief Coordinator lamented, 'Syria is in its tenth year… And in every year, the humanitarian delivery to the people of Syria gets less and less. And the poverty levels of the people of Syria gets more and more. We are failing each year more to do our job for the Syrian people. We need to look at how to move away from that'.[183] As the data in Chapter 4 shows, the sufficiency of humanitarian funding for protracted crises often fluctuates over time as new crises compete for funds. For example, in 2012 the $0.8 billion appeal for DRC was 74% funded, compared to the nearly $2 billion appeal in 2021, which was only 44% funded – the volume of funding grew, but not in step with the increase in need. Although there are smaller outliers, including the Central African Republic, where funds have kept pace with rising demand, and spikes in conflict can prompt spikes in response, the trend of declining sufficiency is true across many major protracted crises.

Other sources of support also remain inadequate. The 2015 SOHS noted that development actors were starting to recognise and prioritise working in fragile contexts. This has resulted in a far greater degree of

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182   M. Turnbull, L. Morinière, and A.T. De la Poterie, 'Start Fund: Evaluation of Crisis Anticipation' (Start Network, 2020). www.alnap.org/help-library/start-fund-crisis-anticipation-evaluation-2016-2019.

183   M. Griffiths, 'Rethinking Humanitarianism: An Interview with the UN's Humanitarian Chief Podcast', *The New Humanitarian*, 2022. www.alnap.org/help-library/rethinking-humanitarianism-an-interview-with-the-un%E2%80%99s-humanitarian-chief.

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investment and engagement by the World Bank (see 'Focus on: Support beyond the system' section), but there has not been a transformative approach to 'doing development differently' in conflict settings, and as the response to Afghanistan in 2021 shows, there is still a pendulum swing back to humanitarian modalities when development models fail. In Yemen, the World Bank's innovative solution of channelling IDA funds through humanitarian agencies to maintain social protection provision has had clear benefits, including addressing famine risk,[184] but it also means humanitarian agencies are still, to quote the Emergency Relief Coordinator, stuck delivering long-term basic services 'which is better done by others'.[185] Part of the imperative behind the triple nexus approach was to address this problem in protracted crises but, as Chapter 12 explores, it is, at the time of writing, incipient at best and at worst, paralysed in conflict settings.

184 WFP and World Bank cited in Cited in FAO, DI and NRC, 'Development Actors at the Nexus: Lessons from Crises in Bangladesh, Cameroon and Somalia' (Rome/Bristol/Oslo: FAO, DI and NRC, 2021). www.alnap.org/help-library/development-actors-at-the-nexus-lessons-from-crises-in-bangladesh-cameroon-and-0.

185 Griffiths, 'Rethinking Humanitarianism: An Interview with the UN's Humanitarian Chief Podcast'. www.alnap.org/help-library/rethinking-humanitarianism-an-interview-with-the-un%E2%80%99s-humanitarian-chief.

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Ethiopia case study:
The conflict in Tigray

Conflict broke out in the Tigray region of northern Ethiopia in November 2020 following escalating tensions between the Tigray People's Liberation Front (TPLF) and the Ethiopian government (supported by Eritrea). Millions of people fled their homes in the Tigray region and later in Amhara and Afar as the conflict spread.[186] The conflict exacerbated pre-existing vulnerabilities, including drought and desert locust swarms. By the end of 2021, an estimated 9.4 million people were in need of humanitarian assistance.[187] A joint investigation by the Ethiopian Human Rights Commission and UNHCR found serious violations of human rights, humanitarian and refugee law by all key parties involved in the conflict.[188]

After a decade of closer cooperation and engagement with the Ethiopian government, the humanitarian system was strongly criticised for its inadequate response as it struggled to shift from development and food insecurity mode to responding to a conflict to which its long-standing state partner was a party. One senior aid worker interviewed described it as 'the worst response in decades'.

Politicisation

The conflict was heavily politicised at every level, and the humanitarian system was widely felt to be naive in its response to this: too closely aligned to the government, and lacking experience and unity. National staff often held partisan views on the crisis, while many international staff had deep relationships with government officials built over many years of living in Addis. After multiple incidents of partisan social media posts and leaking of online meeting recordings, agencies had to give regular reminders to staff about neutrality and impartiality.

Meanwhile, poor access and data quality meant it was difficult to build an accurate picture of the situation in Tigray. Between December 2020 and June 2021, the response centred on the urban areas of Mekele and Shire in eastern Tigray, but huge parts of rural eastern Tigray and the entire West Tigray zone were almost completely cut off, with just a handful of NGOs working in hospitals or conducting ad hoc activities. For months, this led

186 IOM Displacement Tracking Matrix, 'Ethiopia Emergency Site Assessment 7 (1–26 June 2021)' (IOM Displacement Tracking Matrix, June 2021). www.alnap.org/help-library/ethiopia-emergency-site-assessment-7-1-26-june-2021.

187 OCHA, 'Ethiopia – Northern Ethiopia Humanitarian Update Situation Report' (Ethiopia: OCHA, December 2021). www.alnap.org/help-library/ethiopia-northern-ethiopia-humanitarian-update-situation-report.

188 EHRC and OHCHR, 'Tigray Conflict: Joint UN Human Rights Office-Ethiopian Human Rights Commission Investigation Report' (Geneva: Ethiopian Human Rights Commission (EHRC)/ Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR), 2021). www.alnap.org/help-library/tigray-conflict-joint-un-human-rights-office-ethiopian-human-rights-commission.

to significant underestimates of the number and needs of IDPs.[189] More worryingly, the available data was contested within and between agencies: reports from staff in Tigray differed from those prepared by UN agencies' Country Directors, which tended to reflect statements from the Ethiopian government. UN headquarters staff were uncomfortable overriding the judgement of senior country staff, despite their proximity to the government as a development partner and the lack of preparedness for conflict. Several interviewees were critical of the lack of conflict experience among country leadership and one questioned why headquarters 'were not able to intervene in a way that put humanitarian needs on the ground as a priority'.

There were daily challenges to principled engagement at the local level. With a dynamic and active frontline, NGOs were guided and escorted by parties to the conflict, to understand which roads could be used. Struggling to build relationships with different groups in order to secure access, staff found it hard to balance principles with aid delivery, with one aid worker reflecting that 'the practice is not as easy as we say it is'. The perception that NGOs lost neutrality contributed to distorted information, a lack of trust and concerns around sharing information, as well as risks around access and targeting of aid workers.[190]

Scale up of funding and staff

Donors were slow to act, with European donors held back by their historical relationships with the government, concerns about absorption capacity and slow contracting mechanisms. In 2021, nearly 80% of funding to the Northern Ethiopia HRP came from the US alone.[191] While early CERF funding was deemed critical for UN agencies to act, INGO representatives told us that agencies also relied on their own flexible funding in the initial stages of the response, but that this quickly proved insufficient.

It was five months until the UN scaled up its response. It took the deployment of the acting humanitarian coordinator in April 2021 to establish a cluster team for the crisis and then publish the first response plan. By this point, an estimated 4 million people needed urgent food assistance.[192]

Progress remained limited in the face of government-imposed bureaucratic impediments to deployments. These put huge pressure on staff already in the country, who faced a lack of logistical support, basic equipment and security guarantees. Organisations struggled to manage the risks to their national staff – during 2021, 23 humanitarians were killed and three disappeared. An additional 10 UN staff were in prison. Staff described the need to internationalise the response in order to protect and support their national colleagues, but recruitment was challenging; into the start of 2022, staff shortages remained across the response, particularly at senior level.

189   Key informant interview Ethiopia.

190   Key informant interview Ethiopia.

191   According to OCHA FTS, data downloaded June 2022.

192   USAID, 'Tigray Crisis Fact Sheet' (Ethiopia: USAID, O4 2021). www.alnap.org/help-library/
      tigray-crisis-fact-sheet.

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Negotiations for access

UN agencies were slow to start negotiations especially with the Eritrean military and the TPLF, only beginning in earnest in early 2021. Negotiations were difficult: an interim government was installed in Tigray and personnel were regularly rotated while the Eritrean military proved hard to engage. Nevertheless, following deployment of senior negotiators between March and June 2021, access – albeit it constrained – was secured into Tigray, allowing in vital convoys and pre-positioning of supplies across northern Ethiopia.

In mid-2021, the Ethiopian government imposed a physical and bureaucratic blockade on humanitarian aid. Negotiations stalled, and by the end of the year there was almost no movement of food or essential supplies: staff travel, telecommunications, electricity supply, banking and logistics were effectively blocked, as was information-gathering on human rights violations.[193] According to OCHA reports, by the end of the year only 1,317 trucks had entered Tigray, providing supplies to address just 13% of the critical humanitarian needs in the region.[194] Seven senior UN staff were made persona non grata, including some of those responsible for negotiations.

As the crisis moved into its second year, at the start of 2022, the UN estimated that more than 40% of the population in Tigray – 4.6 million people – were food-insecure, with 9.4 million people across northern Ethiopia in need of food assistance. The capacity of the humanitarian system to overcome external and internal barriers to reaching them remained in doubt.

193 Key informant interview Ethiopia.

194 OCHA, 'Northern Ethiopia Humanitarian Update. Situation Report' (Ethiopia: OCHA, 2022). www.alnap.org/help-library/northern-ethiopia-humanitarian-update-situation-report.

Chapter 12: Does the system connect with longer-term priorities?

IN BRIEF: There was a major new focus on the age-old problem of disconnected aid trying to address people's highly connected needs. The agreement of the DAC 'triple nexus' recommendation signalled a step-change in the system's commitment to connect humanitarian, development and peacebuilding efforts. This catalysed renewed policy debate and positions, giving impetus to internal and inter-agency efforts to bridge ways of working. Several donors reviewed and improved the links between their teams and funding streams. At country level, new nexus working groups began to join up their analysis of short- and long-term needs and to develop 'collective outcomes' for communities facing crisis and risk. Initiatives were launched to create a cadre of staff able to build connections between approaches.

Yet it was hard to know how much of a transformative effect this recent focus has had for the system, or for risk-affected people. The view from practitioners was not positive. Two-thirds of SOHS survey respondents felt that the system was doing a 'Fair' or 'Poor' job of connectedness, and nearly three-quarters rated progress in strengthening the nexus as 'Poor' or 'Fair'. Although new nexus guidance was more specific than previous iterations of the 'linking' debate, humanitarian practitioners remained confused about what it meant for their work. Without clear monitoring frameworks, progress against high-level collective outcomes was hard to track or incentivise, and the nexus risked remaining an umbrella for existing or disparate programming. The emerging body of nexus evaluations tended to focus on process rather than results. And, under stress, the system reverted to type; connectedness in the COVID-19 response was patchy rather than strategic, and the swing back to humanitarian aid in Afghanistan highlighted how the 'problem of problem states' has yet to be solved.

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It has long been understood that humanitarian aid is not the solution to humanitarian problems – that longer-term support is required to prevent and end crises, and to address ongoing needs. As one IDP in DRC told our researchers, 'Aid cannot help us recover from the crisis, for us to recover we have to go back to our usual communities. We are only waiting for the government to restore lasting peace.' A decade ago, the 2012 SOHS reported the 'long acknowledged disconnect' between emergency and development support which 'has failed populations

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at risk'.[195] Ten years on, a consistent theme from our research has been the humanitarian system's role and efficacy in addressing chronic needs and vulnerabilities. For local actors and affected people, the distinctions between types of aid have often felt 'artificial and counterproductive'.[196] For humanitarians, taking on long-term responsibilities in the absence of concerted development investment to address long-term risks and vulnerabilities overstretches capacity and poses fundamental questions about what the system is for.

Over the decades, the system's response to this disconnect has taken different forms: from discussions on Linking Relief, Rehabilitation and Development (LRRD) to the more recent programmatic focus on resilience and the UN-led 'new way of working' described in the 2018 SOHS. What is new since the 2018 report is the framing of this question as a 'nexus' between humanitarian, development and peace approaches, which focuses at the level of system coordination as well as programme delivery. The question now is whether and how this latest iteration has resulted in significant and sustainable changes in how aid works to prevent and reduce crises. The view from practitioners was not positive: two-thirds of SOHS survey respondents felt that the system was doing a 'Fair' or 'Poor' job of connectedness[197] and nearly three-quarters rated progress in strengthening the nexus as 'Poor' or 'Fair'.[198]

While organisations worked to turn high-level commitments into policies and pilots, external events 'stress-tested' the connections. Growing urgency around the climate crisis catalysed new partnerships;[199] the COVID-19 pandemic demanded novel ways of understanding and responding to crises; and events in Ethiopia, Afghanistan and Myanmar prompted a regression from new ways of working to old models of humanitarian support. At the same time, the duration and caseload of protracted crises continued to grow, heightening the pressure on humanitarian response and on communities.

This chapter focuses primarily on progress explicitly associated with the nexus agenda, rather than seeking to assess all links to longer-term processes, looking at this primarily from the humanitarian perspective. There are clear links to issues explored in other chapters, in particular questions of resourcing (Chapter 3); relevance to people's priority needs

195   ALNAP, 'The State of the Humanitarian System.', ALNAP Study (London: ALNAP, 2012), 13. www.alnap.org/help-library/the-state-of-the-humanitarian-system-2012-edition.

196   ALNAP (Ibid). www.alnap.org/help-library/the-state-of-the-humanitarian-system-2012-edition.

197   Connectedness is one of the DAC evaluation criteria which is used to assess the extent to which activities of a short-term emergency nature are carried out in a context that takes longer-term and interconnected problems into account.

198   When asked to give their opinion of how well their sector (or the system) performed in connectedness between humanitarian, development and or peace activities, 29% rated it poor, 37% fair, 26% good and only 8% excellent. When asked to rate progress in strengthening the nexus in their context, 31% rated it poor, 42% fair, 25% good and 2% excellent.

199   For example, partnerships between humanitarians and climate scientists in risk-based approaches under the auspices of the Red Cross Climate Centre and other networks, and new collaborations between OCHA and the UN Environment Programme through the Joint Environment Unit.

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(Chapter 5); and links to early action and anticipation (Chapter 6). Given the specific questions around how to apply nexus approaches in protracted refugee situations and in constrained conflict settings, there are also explicit links to 'Focus on: Forced displacement' section and Chapter 11.

How have policies on the nexus changed?

The nexus has become one of the dominant topics of policy discussion in the humanitarian system over the past four years. The 2019 OECD DAC Recommendation on the Humanitarian–Development–Peace (HDP) Nexus marked the moment where the term graduated from short-hand jargon to an official framework. With the ambition to 'reduce overall vulnerability and the number of unmet needs, strengthen risk management capacities and address root causes', the Recommendation also introduced the peace pillar, making it a 'triple nexus'. Its adherents – the DAC group of donors and seven UN agencies[200] – signed up to a broad definition of the purpose and elements of the triple nexus, which was then elaborated in a key messages document jointly produced by the IASC and the UN sustainable development group.[201]

In practical terms, the aim is 'strengthening collaboration, coherence and complementarity', with an emphasis on simultaneous implementation and drawing on the comparative advantage of each of the three pillars. It is also clear that the way that this is applied has to be context-specific: in other words, 'nexus programming is about focusing on context and being able to use the right tool in the right place at the right time'.[202] The Recommendation looks at four broad areas of action: joint analysis and collective outcomes (a joint vision for populations expressed in a set of 'smart' three-to-five-year results);[203] coordination and leadership; joined-up programming; and appropriate financing.

For humanitarian practitioners, this policy progress appears to have generated as many questions as it has resolved. Staff at all levels reported finding the policy debate abstract, and being unclear about what the nexus means, both in theory and in practice. They were unsure how nexus language maps onto other existing models for thinking about connections between emergency and longer-term approaches – including the resilience and protracted crisis approaches that many organisations

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200   UNICEF, WFP, UNDP, IOM, UNFPA, UN-Habitat and UNHCR.

201   SDG and IASC, 'United Nations Sustainable Development Group & Interagency Standing Committee (IASC) Task Team on Strengthening the Humanitarian-Development Nexus with a Focus on Protracted Contexts' (SDG and IASC, 2019). www.alnap.org/help-library/united-nations-sustainable-development-group-interagency-standing-committee-iasc-task.

202   CARE Canada, 'Annual Impact and Learning Review The Humanitarian – Development Nexus' (CARE Canada, 2019). www.alnap.org/help-library/annual-impact-and-learning-review-the-humanitarian-development-nexus-care-canada.

203   Collective Outcomes were a central component of the New Way of Working approach, intended to identify a series of common positive changes which could be achieved through complementary short-term humanitarian and longer-term development approaches.

have already developed. The introduction of the peace pillar appears to have exacerbated the confusion, and despite efforts at clarification,[204] it remains a source of contention.

Although many organisations had signalled their alignment to the humanitarian–development–peace nexus, most lacked a specific policy on what it means for them. This gap was keenly felt at the country and programme level, where staff repeatedly reported finding the debate too academic, HQ-centric and top-down. There was widespread understanding that approaches had to be context-specific, but without practical guidance on how to apply the nexus, including how to navigate the inevitable tensions around degrees of coordination between development and peace actors in complex settings, approaches were ad hoc and dependent on the experience, commitment and relationships of in-country leadership.

This created particular concerns around humanitarian principles: high-level policy[205] acknowledges the importance of protecting principled humanitarian aid, but organisational guidance was often internally inconsistent, unclear and not practically oriented.[206] In the wider debate, sceptics saw the nexus as threatening to subsume needs-based humanitarianism into a state-led development agenda, while champions saw the nexus as an opportunity to more fully realise the principle of humanity.[207] These polarised positions were unhelpful for practitioners – without contextually grounded dialogue humanitarian and development communities continued 'to talk past each other',[208] with development actors not grasping the importance of impartiality for pro-poor resource allocation, and humanitarians understating the trade-offs around principles in most fragile settings.

204 See for example the IASC, 'Exploring Peace within the Humanitarian-Peace-Development Nexus', Issue Paper (Geneva: IASC and OPAG, 2020). which makes the distinction between 'big P' peacekeeping and political peace processes, and 'little p' peace-building processes. www.alnap.org/help-library/exploring-peace-within-the-humanitarian-peace-development-nexus.

205 OECD DAC, 'DAC Recommendation on the Humanitarian-Development Peace Nexus' (Paris: OECD, 2019). www.alnap.org/help-library/dac-recommendation-on-the-humanitarian-development-peace-nexus; World Humanitarian Summit, 'Transcending Humanitarian-Development Divides: Commitment to Action UN', 2016; European Commission, 'Joint Communication to the European Parliament and the Council: The EU's Comprehensive Approach to External Conflict and Crises' (Brussels: European Commission, 2013). www.alnap.org/help-library/transcending-humanitarian-development-divides-commitment-to-action-un.

206 UNICEF, 'Formative Evaluation of UNICEF Work to Link Humanitarian and Development Programming' (New York: UNICEF, 2021). https://www.alnap.org/help-library/evaluation-of-unicefs-work-to-link-humanitarian-and-development-programming; FAO, 'Evaluation of FAO's Contribution to the Humanitarian–Development–Peace Nexus 2014–2020' (Rome: FAO, 2021). www.alnap.org/help-library/evaluation-of-fao%E2%80%99s-contribution-to-the-humanitarian%E2%80%93development%E2%80%93peace-nexus-2014%E2%80%932020.

207 See inter alia F. Schmitz Guinote, 'A Humanitarian-Development Nexus That Works', Humanitarian Law and Policy, 21 June 2018. https://www.alnap.org/help-library/a-humanitarian-development-nexus-that-works; and M. Dubois, 'The Triple Nexus – Threat or Opportunity for the Humanitarian Principles?' (Berlin: Centre for Humanitarian Action (CHA), 7 May 2021). www.alnap.org/help-library/the-triple-nexus-%E2%80%93-threat-or-opportunity-for-the-humanitarian-principles.

208 J. Macrae, 'Linking Thinking: Why Is It so Hard and What Can We Do about It?' (Netherlands: KUNO, 2019). www.alnap.org/help-library/linking-thinking-why-is-it-so-hard-and-what-can-we-do-about-it.

Box O: Humanitarian principles and the nexus

Experience of developing nexus approaches in DRC and Mali shows how context determines the relationship to humanitarian principles – and how well tensions can be addressed. While both countries face complex crises, and in both stabilisation forces are present as part of a UN-integrated mission, due to the political dynamics of the crisis and the international response principles were a defining barrier to progressing the nexus in Mali, whereas in DRC they were largely absent from discussion.

Mali is experiencing multifaceted political and security crises, with threats from jihadist groups and rising communal violence, as well as the effects of climate change and the COVID-19 pandemic. Development gains have been reversed, many development actors have withdrawn from the north, and humanitarians are delivering long-term basic services as well as emergency aid. Since the military coup in 2012, there have been multiple international military interventions, including French-led operations, supported by G5 Sahel Forces, EU missions to train the army and police, and the UN stabilisation mission, MINUSMA. Overall, there are an estimated 15,000 or more foreign military and police personnel in the country, but as one analyst described it, there is 'a sense that Mali is an "African Afghanistan", with foreign forces stuck in a conflict they can't win'.[209]

Preserving humanitarian space and principles is extremely sensitive in this context, and the space for impartial, independent and neutral humanitarian action is minimal. MINUSMA is mandated to support the Malian government, which is a party to the conflict, and EU strategic engagement in the Sahel is partly informed by migration management and counter-terrorism priorities. Popular opposition to foreign interventions is growing, and attacks on aid workers are common. Humanitarians face tough compromises around access to communities outside state control – having to choose between remote management, with its inherent transfer of risk, negotiating access with jihadists or relying on military security and escorts.

A nexus approach in Mali was under development from 2017 and a task force was created, led by MINUSMA's stabilisation unit, with co-leadership by France and subsequently by the EU, which got as far as identifying a pilot area, Mopti, before work stalled. Officially, in 2019 Mali adopted a double nexus approach, but there are widespread differences of opinion about whether and how the peace pillar of the triple nexus can be realised in this militarised and securitised setting. There has been significant concern from NGOs that the nexus agenda is being politically instrumentalised

209   A. Steinke, 'The Triple Nexus in Mali: Coordination, Securitisation and Blurred Lines Centre for Humanitarian Action' (Berlin: Centre for Humanitarian Action (CHA), 2021). www.alnap.org/help-library/the-triple-nexus-in-mali-coordination-securitisation-and-blurred-lines-centre-for.

by donors, UN agencies and the Malian government. In 2019, the Mali NGO Forum publicly cautioned against the securitisation of the nexus agenda and warned that accepting funding from MINUSMA or the EU Trust Fund for Africa was contrary to humanitarian principles. However, there was no consensus among NGO members. One NGO representative suggested that the nexus was being used as justification to skew funding away from a needs basis and towards donors' strategic priorities and state-held zones – 'Donors used to ask, "What are you doing to meet needs?" Now the question is, "What are you doing about the nexus?"' At the same time, a donor representative noted that funds can be protected for humanitarian purposes, but that unified NGO advocacy is necessary to ensure that 'red lines' for principled humanitarian aid are respected. The result was an effective impasse in coordination to develop a nexus approach.

In DRC, by contrast, the nexus approach was progressing relatively smoothly with a high degree of trust between stakeholders, and concerns around humanitarian principles were not a feature of discussions. The peaceful and democratic handover of power to the new government in 2021 opened an opportunity for renewed development investments and cooperation which many donors seized. A well-functioning nexus task team was leading the development of pilots in Kasai and Tanganyika provinces, and coordination between donors, UN agencies and NGOs was inclusive and constructive. There was a shared understanding that the nexus approach means joined-up coordination, not enforced joint working. The difference with Mali can be partly attributed to the differences in the context and the politics of international and national intervention – in the two pilot areas in DRC the state is not regarded as an active party to the conflict, and the first pilot areas were those where the UN stabilisation mission, MONUSCO, was in the process of withdrawing. DRC is also less of a geopolitical priority for donors. While this brings challenges around mobilising funding, it also reduces concerns about politicisation.

NGO actors had initially expressed concerns around what the triple nexus would mean for principled humanitarian action in DRC, arguing that peace should be 'small p' – referring to peacebuilding rather than peacekeeping – and there should be 'no guns in the nexus'. Principles nonetheless remain an active concern for humanitarian actors in their daily work, particularly in eastern provinces, with issues around negotiating access and accepting military escorts. As nexus approaches roll out in more insecure areas including Tanganyika and eventually to the Kivus, where MONUSCO engages in interventions against armed groups, task team members acknowledged that principles may become more of a live issue.

Are institutions changing to enable better connections?

Connections within donors

Donors' inability to join up their internal analysis, strategy and funding mechanisms was regularly cited in evaluations and internal reviews as a barrier to connecting humanitarian and development efforts.[210] Siloed decision-making and limited strategic coordination thwarted grantees' attempts to programme across the humanitarian–development divide.[211] In three of the four largest humanitarian donors,[212] humanitarian and development aid budgets are managed by different ministries or divisions, and subject to different planning cycles, contracting rules and coordination arrangements. This institutional separation can serve to protect principled humanitarian aid from other foreign policy objectives,[213] but measures are still required to ensure internal communication and coordination with other aid investments.

Several donors did take initiatives to better connect their humanitarian, development and peace approaches. Some sought to do this without structural changes, for example through internal processes at HQ and enhanced devolution to country teams, while others went further. The Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation (SDC) chose to undertake a major restructuring process, joining together its previously separate humanitarian aid and development cooperation departments to create geographical nexus teams from September 2022. Sweden chose to maintain a structural separation in order to preserve principled humanitarian assistance, and instead instituted a working group, built

210   ADE, Response to the Rohingya Refugee Crisis, 41. www.alnap.org/help-library/evaluation-of-the-european-union%E2%80%99s-humanitarian-response-to-the-rohingya-refugee-crisis; J. Murray, F. Pedersen, and S. Ziesche, 'Evaluation of the Global Cluster for Early Recovery' (New York: UNDP, 2018), 38. www.alnap.org/help-library/evaluation-of-the-global-cluster-for-early-recovery; R. Zetter et al., 'Evaluation on Forced Displacement and Finnish Development Policy. Final Report' (Finland: Ministry for Foreign Affairs of Finland, 2019), 60. www.alnap.org/help-library/evaluation-on-forced-displacement-and-finnish-development-policy; SDC, 'Independent Evaluation of the Linkage of Humanitarian Aid and Development Cooperation (Nexus).' (Bern: Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation (SDC), 2019), 6. www.alnap.org/help-library/independent-evaluation-of-the-linkage-of-humanitarian-aid-and-development-cooperation-0; Global Affairs Canada, 'Evaluation of the International Humanitarian Assistance Program 2011/12 to 2017/18', 3. www.alnap.org/help-library/evaluation-of-the-international-humanitarian-assistance-program-20112012-to-20172018.

211   L. Zamore, 'The Triple Nexus in Practice: Toward a New Way of Working in Protracted and Repeated Crises' (New York: Center on International Cooperation (CIC), 2019). www.alnap.org/help-library/the-triple-nexus-in-practice-toward-a-new-way-of-working-in-protracted-and-repeated; L. Poole and V. Culbert, 'Financing the Nexus: Gaps and Opportunities from a Field Perspective' (Rome/Oslo/New York: FAO, NRC, UNDP, 2019). www.alnap.org/help-library/financing-the-nexus-gaps-and-opportunities-from-a-field-perspective; CARE Canada, 'Annual Impact and Learning Review The Humanitarian – Development Nexus'. www.alnap.org/help-library/financing-the-nexus-gaps-and-opportunities-from-a-field-perspective.

212   US, Germany and the European Commission.

213   As for example in the case of Sida, which maintains a separate Humanitarian Unit, with strategic communication with the development side of the agency. See: Sophia Swithern, *Donors at the Triple Nexus: Lessons from Sweden Development Initiatives* (Bristol: Development Initiatives, 2019). www.alnap.org/help-library/donors-at-the-triple-nexus-lessons-from-sweden-development-initiatives.

up cross-team engagement and invested in support for regional and country nexus collaboration.[214] Other donors put in place country-specific mechanisms to enable their systems to better work together: the EU's €20 million Nexus Response Mechanism for the Rohingya crisis involved joint design by different directorates[215] to address protracted displacement.

These examples were far from the norm and many donors lacked the institutional tools necessary to routinely make strategic connections. According to an OECD survey, while many were able to make adjustments and alignments, over half (55%) of DAC donor member respondents did not think (or were not sure) that their organisation was able to avoid fragmented, siloed or inappropriately short-term funding.[216] Practitioners responding to our survey also pointed to incompatible planning and funding cycles as being at the heart of the problem – the prevailing model of short-term funding was by far the largest barrier they saw to realising the nexus, with 27% identifying it as the main challenge to bridging divisions. Humanitarian aid tends to be earmarked at a short-term project level, while development funding tends to be locked into multi-year host government priorities and cumbersome to shift. Failure to tackle this can result in simply trying to 'do development in humanitarian time-frames',[217] potentially ending in failure and harm.[218] Despite decades of discussion,[219] donors still struggled to find ways of shifting to 'doing development differently' in fragile contexts. The extreme events in Afghanistan and Ethiopia in 2020 and 2021 were a stark reminder of this. In Afghanistan, after 20 years of development investment, the system regressed to being largely reliant on humanitarian funding channels to support basic services. Life-saving support and basic human needs were brought together under a UN Transitional Engagement Framework, while the international system discussed the future of the aid architecture.[220]

214 Swithern, *Donors at the Triple Nexus*. www.alnap.org/help-library/donors-at-the-triple-nexus-lessons-from-sweden-development-initiatives.

215 DG DEVCO, DG ECHO and EEAS.

216 OECD, *The Humanitarian-Development-Peace Nexus Interim Progress Review* (Paris: OECD, 2022). www.alnap.org/help-library/the-humanitarian-development-peace-nexus-interim-progress-review.

217 Danida and UNHCR, *Integrated Solutions Model*. www.alnap.org/help-library/joint-evaluation-of-the-integrated-solutions-model-in-and-around-kalobeyei-turkana.

218 One evaluation cited the example of an initiative to improve livelihoods through gardening groups which, without considering wider investments in markets and infrastructure, simply led to rotting crops. CARE, CARE Canada Annual Impact and Learning Review: The Humanitarian – Development Nexus' CARE, 2020. www.alnap.org/help-library/annual-impact-and-learning-review-the-humanitarian-development-nexus-care-canada.

219 See, e.g., DFID, *Why We Need to Work More Effectively in Fragile States* (London: Department for International Development, 2005); F. Davies, 'Development Assistance and Approaches to Risk in Fragile and Conflict Affected States' (Paris: OECD, 2014). www.alnap.org/help-library/why-we-need-to-work-more-effectively-in-fragile-states.

220 UN, 'United Nations Transitional Engagement Framework (TEF) for Afghanistan' (Afghanistan: UN, 2022). www.alnap.org/help-library/united-nations-transitional-engagement-framework-tef-for-afghanistan.

Globally, the volume of aid was as much of a barrier to the nexus as its quality; struggling with immediate shortfalls, agencies often had little space to make long-term connections.[221] Although strategic, nexus-oriented investments should ease the strain on overstretched humanitarian funds in protracted settings, pressures on overall aid budgets also meant that many agencies saw it as a zero-sum game; even before the economic fall-out of COVID-19, there were fears on both the humanitarian and development sides that a nexus approach could divert funds away from their core business. In South Sudan and Mali, agencies reported that the extremely underfunded HRPs were under pressure to understate needs, while there seemed little prospect of additional longer-term donor investments. In Cameroon, agencies observed how funding scarcity also entrenches competition and territoriality and disincentivises participation in collaborative processes.[222]

Inter-agency coordination

Donors' internal divisions reflected larger divides in the overarching aid architecture, making system-level progress difficult. On the one side, humanitarian aid is highly coordinated and sector-siloed through the cluster system. On the other, development action is largely bilateral, with most aid bypassing the UN-led system, with coordination – under national development plans – taking place at the strategic, but not operational, level. Most humanitarian aid (80%) went through multilateral bodies, while most development aid (77%) was channelled bilaterally.[223] Analysts have argued that a nexus approach focused on making links between ill-fitting parallel administrations, without reforming the aid architecture and its built-in disincentives to collective action, would simply add an extra layer of meetings and structures to an already over-complicated system.[224]

Others were more pragmatic, understanding that change needed to start with bringing the right stakeholders together. At country level, new coordination structures emerged to create inter-agency connections with a view to developing joint analysis and collective plans. By the end of 2021

221 Poole and Culbert, 'Financing the Nexus: Gaps and Opportunities from a Field Perspective'. www.alnap.org/help-library/financing-the-nexus-gaps-and-opportunities-from-a-field-perspective.

222 FAO, DI and NRC, 'Development Actors at the Nexus: Lessons from Crises in Bangladesh, Cameroon and Somalia' (Rome/Bristol/Oslo: FAO, DI and NRC, 2021). www.alnap.org/help-library/development-actors-at-the-nexus-lessons-from-crises-in-bangladesh-cameroon-and-0.

223 A. Burlin, 'Forced Displacement and the Humanitarian-Development Nexus: A Roundtable Anthology', EBA Working Paper (Sweden: Expert Group for Aid Studies (EBA), 2021). www.alnap.org/help-library/forced-displacement-and-the-humanitarian-development-nexus-a-roundtable-anthology.

224 L. Perret, 'Operationalizing the Humanitarian-Development-Peace Nexus: Lessons from Colombia, Mali, Nigeria, Somalia and Turkey' (Geneva: IOM, 2019). www.alnap.org/help-library/operationalizing-the-humanitarian-development-peace-nexus-lessons-from-colombia-mali; D. Lilly, 'What Happened to the Nexus Approach in the COVID-19 Response?', IPI Global Observatory, 2020. www.alnap.org/help-library/what-happened-to-the-nexus-approach-in-the-covid-19-response-0; Macrae, 'Linking Thinking: Why Is It so Hard and What Can We Do about It?' www.alnap.org/help-library/linking-thinking-why-is-it-so-hard-and-what-can-we-do-about-it.

at least 10 countries[225] had some form of nexus coordination structure involving UN leadership in some stage of evolution. These included the well-established multi-agency task team in DRC and the task force in Cameroon, which was already planning its phase-out in order to hand over control to municipal teams.

While these emerging in-country coordination structures were successful in beginning to connect stakeholders and develop a common agenda, there was also criticism that they were UN-centric and not always sufficiently inclusive, especially of local and national civil society.[226] Although some countries made conscious efforts to involve national and local NGOs in their discussions and reviews, they often felt peripherally involved and minimally informed.[227] As shown in Chapter 9, lack of access to funding including for overheads is one of many barriers to inclusion for national and local organisations, and some feared that collective outcomes approaches may encourage a focus on 'grand projects' to the detriment of smaller, more accessible grants.

There were also different levels of engagement of government representatives in these country coordination structures – and even within the study period this proved changeable in several countries. In Burkina Faso, the government which had co-led the nexus task force was ousted in the 2021 coup, in Ethiopia partnership with the government on durable solutions became strained as a result of the conflict in Tigray, whereas in DRC the democratic election of the new government in 2021 offered the opportunity to address prior absence of state engagement. In theory, development effectiveness places country ownership at the centre, while humanitarian action asserts its distance. In reality, this divide has proven far from clear-cut, especially as humanitarians engaged more with state institutions on protracted displacement and disaster risk. New IASC nexus guidance made the distinction between context types – and thus the space for coordination with state bodies – according to the willingness and capacity of state authorities.[228] But, as events in Ethiopia and Burkina Faso showed, this space is precarious and, as one commentator put it, 'the problem of problem states hasn't been solved'.[229]

225   Burkina Faso, Cameroon, Chad, Colombia, DRC, Jordan, Libya, Niger, Ukraine and Somalia (planned).

226   M. Thomas, 'NGO Perspectives on EU Humanitarian Development Nexus Approach' (Brussels: VOICE, 2019), www.alnap.org/help-library/ngo-perspectives-on-the-eus-humanitarian-development-peace-nexus; Ndeda and Birungi, 'Addressing the Humanitarian-Development Nexus in the Horn of Africa' (London: Save The Children, 2018). www.alnap.org/help-library/addressing-the-humanitarian-development-nexus-in-the-horn-of-africa.

227   E. Fanning, and J. Fullwood-Thomas, 'The Humanitarian-Development-Peace Nexus: What does it mean for multi-mandated organizations?' Oxfam, 2019. www.alnap.org/help-library/the-humanitarian-development-peace-nexus-what-does-it-mean-for-multi-mandated.

228   These include 'constrained' settings, where state authorities are unwilling to uphold obligations to their populations and limit international engagement; 'capacity-driven' settings, where there is state willingness but limited capacity and budget support; and 'consultative' settings, where authorities are willing and have capacity but where there is emergent peace or active conflict.

229   Macrae, 'Linking Thinking: Why Is It so Hard and What Can We Do about It?' www.alnap.org/help-library/linking-thinking-why-is-it-so-hard-and-what-can-we-do-about-it.

Leadership and staff capacity

Given the challenges of connecting such diverse and divergent actors, effective nexus leadership was essential to making progress, ensuring accountability and leading difficult decision-making. However, evaluations found gaps in thought leadership, prioritisation and direction at headquarters and in-country, and within and between agencies.[230] At an inter-agency level, there were unresolved questions about where the leadership for coordination should lie, and how and when power should be located and shared. There was both expectation and precedent for the Humanitarian Coordinator/Resident Coordinator to be the focal point for in-country leadership.[231] But there were also questions about whether recent UN reform processes – which detached the role from UNDP – had left Resident Coordinators with the staffing, resources and institutional political capital to effectively play this convening role, even for the relatively small portion of development aid that flowed through the UN system.[232]

Many country teams identified the need for dedicated staff to support and drive forward coordinated action, and a new cadre of nexus advisers was deployed over the study period. At least six countries[233] had dedicated in-country nexus advisers or coordinators funded from various sources, including Sida, the UN Peacebuilding Support Office[234] and the Swiss government. There was a high-level nexus coordinator in the HC/RC's office in Sudan for an extended period prior to the 2019 revolution, to review ways of working, gain buy-in and convene actors. DRC and Cameroon both have funding for multiple posts – senior roles at the capital level, supported by subnational paid and volunteer posts. The Swiss and Swedish development agencies both created nexus adviser posts within their own staff, with Sida establishing 10 nexus-focused posts in 2019 to be deployed to country or regional offices.[235] There was a great demand

230   UNDP, 'Evaluation of UNDP Support to Conflict-Affected Countries' (New York: UNDP, 2021), 19. www.alnap.org/help-library/evaluation-of-undp-support-to-conflict-affected-countries; UNICEF, Work to Link, 98. www.alnap.org/help-library/evaluation-of-unicefs-work-to-link-humanitarian-and-development-programming; CARE Canada, 'Annual Impact and Learning Review The Humanitarian – Development Nexus', 4. www.alnap.org/help-library/annual-impact-and-learning-review-the-humanitarian-development-nexus-care-canada.

231   A stakeholder survey conducted for the OECD DAC interim progress review on the humanitarian-development-peace nexus found that the RC/HC were understood to be the most common leaders and coordinators of the nexus effort, followed by a 'group of international partners' (OECD, *Interim Progress Review*). www.alnap.org/help-library/the-humanitarian-development-peace-nexus-interim-progress-review.

232   OECD, 'Co-ordination across the Humanitarian-Development-Peace Nexus' (Paris: OECD Publishing, forthcoming).

233   Cameroon, DRC, Haiti (peace and development adviser), Jordan, Libya and Sudan (prior to the 2019 revolution).

234   The PBSO-managed Humanitarian-Development-Peace Partnership Facility has provided funds for nexus advisers.

235   In DRC, the Sida nexus adviser has been pivotal in supporting the nexus task team and convening donors in a donor nexus group.

among country teams for this type of post – a 2021 mapping exercise identified that most of the countries it surveyed identified the lack of dedicated nexus personnel as a challenge to progress.[236]

Advancing the nexus demanded investments in wider staff capacity, as well as the deployment of dedicated personnel. Evaluations and studies of nexus approaches repeatedly identify the need for staff to become more 'trilingual' – able to speak the languages of humanitarian, development and peace, and bridge mindsets, identities and skillsets. Programme staff and leadership with these abilities and with the requisite 'systems thinking' skills were however scarce, and it often proved hard to build these skills. As one evaluation noted, one consequence of often short-term humanitarian staff taking on long-term service provision in protracted crises was that they became overstretched and lacked the capacity to implement new approaches.[237] Initiatives were under way to address this skills shortage, beginning with a 'nexus academy' launched by the UN-DAC dialogue group in 2022.[238]

How have country strategies and programmes changed?

The efforts of in-country coordination task teams and advisers focused on building towards two central elements of the nexus approach – common analysis and collective outcomes. There were new efforts to bring together humanitarian, development and peace analysis to provide a more connected picture of vulnerabilities, risks and needs in protracted crises: joined-up analysis was in evidence in 10 out of the 16 countries surveyed by the IASC,[239] grounded in a range of well-tested multi-agency models.[240] There were still mismatches with UN-led Common Country Analyses (CCA), which usually took place every four years and thus were often

236   IASC, 'Mapping Good Practice in the Implementation of Humanitarian-Development-Peace Nexus Approaches: Synthesis Report. IASC Results Group 4' (Geneva: OCHA, 2021). www.alnap.org/help-library/mapping-good-practice-in-the-implementation-of-humanitarian-development-peace-nexus.

237   UNICEF, *Work to Link*. www.alnap.org/help-library/evaluation-of-unicefs-work-to-link-humanitarian-and-development-programming.

238   OECD, 'Nexus Academy. Learning, Community, and Capacity for HDP Solutions' (Paris: OECD, 2022). www.alnap.org/help-library/nexus-academy-learning-community-and-capacity-for-hdp-solutions.

239   IASC, 'Mapping Good Practice in the Implementation of Humanitarian-Development-Peace Nexus Approaches: Synthesis Report. IASC Results Group 4'. www.alnap.org/help-library/mapping-good-practice-in-the-implementation-of-humanitarian-development-peace-nexus.

240   These include OECD's resilience analysis, which has provided the foundation for development of collective outcomes in several countries, and the Recovery and Peacebuilding Assessment model (RPBA) and its sister process, the Post Disaster Needs Assessment (PDNA), which bring together national and international actors to develop a shared analysis of the root causes of crises and prioritise actions.

regarded as 'paper in a drawer'[241] and out of step with nexus processes. However, recent reforms offered potential for them to become more risk-informed, regular and 'living' processes, and so form the analytical starting point for collective action. As these reforms were in the initial stages of roll-out, it remained to be seen whether this potential would be realised.

A growing number of country teams used these analyses to develop collective outcomes. As of 2021, at least 10 countries[242] had agreed collective outcomes through a UN-led multi-agency process, and a further five[243] were planning or in the process of developing them.[244] Most commonly, these clustered around the thematic areas of access to basic services, social cohesion, food security and nutrition, displacement and disaster management.

While the process of developing collective outcomes brought key players together, their value as a practical framework for collective action remained unclear. Outcomes were expressed in very high-level terms – for example 'basic healthcare for at least 50% of people in crisis zones'[245] – and lacking clearly evidenced indicators or dates. This prompted concerns that they were too broad to drive meaningful collective action – serving as an umbrella for existing parallel activities rather than driving real systemic or programmatic change. The lack of monitoring processes meant that there was no collective accountability for collective outcomes and little incentive for achieving them. As a pilot country for both the EU nexus approach and the UN-led New Way of Working, Chad was one of the first countries to develop collective outcomes in 2016. OCHA was tasked with monitoring progress, but this primarily involved repurposing secondary data and encountered challenges around the lack of specific indicators and baselines, mismatches in timings and geographies of reporting, and an inability to attribute outcomes to interventions.[246] As with the Comprehensive Refugee Response Frameworks, most collective outcomes processes stopped short of meaningful planning or any attempt to cost and prioritise interventions. Without this, it proved difficult to convene donors around priorities, understand gaps and continuity issues, and identify where problems lay in the pipelines of funding or of fundable programmes.

241 Zamore, 'The Triple Nexus in Practice: Toward a New Way of Working in Protracted and Repeated Crises'. www.alnap.org/help-library/the-triple-nexus-in-practice-toward-a-new-way-of-working-in-protracted-and-repeated.

242 Burkina Faso, Cameroon, Chad, Côte d'Ivoire, Mauritania, Niger, Somalia, South Sudan, Ukraine and the DRC.

243 Burundi, CAR, Haiti, Occupied Palestinian Territories and Libya.

244 Others, including Colombia and Iraq, had agreed other kinds of common nexus priorities without calling them collective outcomes.

245 Collective outcome for Chad.

246 Poole and Cuthbert, 'Financing the Nexus: Gaps and Opportunities from a Field Perspective', FAO, NRC, UNDP, 2019. www.alnap.org/help-library/financing-the-nexus-gaps-and-opportunities-from-a-field-perspective.

Programmatically, it remained hard to assess the results of the recent focus on the nexus – for individual agencies, for the system as a whole and ultimately for affected people. Organisations were certainly able to identify many examples of relatively large-scale programming which combines both long- and short-term approaches to addressing emergency needs and chronic vulnerabilities, but it was hard to know either how far these were a result of new nexus thinking, or collectively represented a real shift in ways of working.[247] Organisations were, however, starting to build their abilities to evaluate their nexus efforts; at the start of the study period there were very few nexus-specific evaluations and fewer still on the 'triple nexus', but by the end of the period several had been published and there was a clear appetite to share frameworks and learning.[248] These evaluations tended to focus on processes rather than results because organisations' nexus concepts were vague and not tied to clear objectives, and because in general monitoring systems tended to be ill-equipped for the complex task of measuring transformative change.

> **Box P: Nexus approaches in the COVID-19 response – social protection**
>
> The COVID-19 pandemic was a global crisis where immediate emergency needs were clearly bound up with longer-term socioeconomic vulnerabilities – and it could have been a prime opportunity for new connections to be made between humanitarian, development and public health actors. Yet, while there were positive examples of adaptiveness and collaboration, the COVID-19 response lacked an explicit nexus framing at the global system level The separation of global plans, appeals and funding streams for humanitarian, development and health response led one commentator to lament a missed opportunity for 'any kind of transformational change in the way that aid is delivered'.[249]
>
> However, the COVID-19 pandemic did accelerate new opportunities and ways of working at the programme level – particularly in shock-responsive social protection, whereby welfare measures expand to react to increases in vulnerabilities and needs. As the potential economic impacts of the pandemic became clear, countries of all income levels scaled up existing social safety nets and introduced new provisions. By mid-May 2021, the World Bank had noted an 'exponential growth in social protection measures', ranging from school feeding to cash transfers, over the previous six months – a global rise

247   Many could be traced back to a prior focus on resilience, including livelihoods programmes in Somalia, and the FAO/WFP/UNICEF joint resilience, peace and stabilisation programme in DRC, which includes agriculture, livelihoods, basic service provision and social cohesion activities.

248   These include evaluations from DANIDA, SDC, UNICEF, FAO and GAC.

249   Lilly, 'What Happened to the Nexus Approach in the COVID-19 Response?' www.alnap.org/help-library/what-happened-to-the-nexus-approach-in-the-covid-19-response-0.

of 148% to reach a total of 3,333 measures planned or implemented across 222 countries.[250] Between 2020 and 2021, the Bank estimated that an astonishing 17% of the world's population had been covered by at least one COVID-19-related cash transfer payment.

Shock-responsive social protection has long been identified as a practical entry point for humanitarian–development collaboration.[251] Before the pandemic there were several well-tested models for linking humanitarian cash-based programming to wider social safety nets, including the Productive Safety Net Programme in Ethiopia and the Somalia Shock Responsive Safety Net for Human Capital Project in Somalia (also known as 'Baxnaano').[252] These have yielded lessons around ensuring that systems do not create social tensions through inconsistent targeting, do not neglect protection concerns through an 'assistance bias', and are grounded in evidence on what works in fragile as well as stable contexts. As systems scaled up and adapted to respond to the economic shock of the pandemic, there were both positive and negative examples of how well these lessons had been learned.

In Yemen, prior to the pandemic, the problem of fragmentationand duplication between humanitarian responses and development-backed social protection systems had been well-noted but minimally addressed – there were persistent silos and institutional territoriality, including between the World Bank-funded UNICEF social welfare scheme and the humanitarian-funded WFP cash programming response. But when the pandemic hit, there was a marked improvement in collaboration and 'cross-fertilisation of ideas' between humanitarian and development donors, including through a new and well-supported working group on cash and social protection. The World Bank subsequently increased the transfer value, including to a sub-group of ultra-vulnerable households, part-funded by humanitarian donors via the Yemen Emergency Multi-Donor Trust Fund. The experience led experts to conclude that the 'COVID-19 response has been an entry point for these donors to move forward with joint planning on how to collectively support a transitional "safety net" system for Yemen.'[253]

250 U. Gentilini et al., 'Social Protection and Jobs Responses to COVID-19: A Real-Time Review of Country Measures' (Washington DC: The World Bank Group, 2020). www.alnap.org/help-library/social-protection-and-jobs-responses-to-covid-19%E2%80%AF-a-real-time-review-of-country.

251 SDG target 1.3 calls for the substantial coverage of the poor and the vulnerable by nationally appropriate social protection floors.

252 Barca, 'Social Protection and COVID-19 – the Emerging Story of What Worked Where… and What It All Means for Future Crises', FP2P (blog), 2021. www.alnap.org/help-library/social-protection-and-covid-19-%E2%80%93-the-emerging-story-of-what-worked-where%E2%80%A6-and-what-it.

253 G. Smith, "Overcoming Barriers to Coordinating across Social Protection and Humanitarian Assistance – Building on Promising Practices" (Social Protection Approaches to COVID-19 Expert Advice Service (SPACE), DAI Global UK Ltd, 2021), 35. www.alnap.org/help-library/overcoming-barriers-to-coordinating-across-social-protection-and-humanitarian.

By contrast in Kenya, where cyclical droughts had led to a well-established national Shock Responsive Social Protection programme, the COVID-19 response revealed, rather than resolved, a lack of coordination. The national social protection system, the COVID-19 response and the multiple humanitarian cash transfer systems in the country lacked a common strategy, protocols to minimise duplication and measures to prevent wide variations in the pay-outs people received.[254] Experiences in Kenya and several other countries have led to emerging conclusions on what works in linking humanitarian response with social protection, and how to overcome stubborn challenges and divides. Many of these came back to wider nexus-related recommendations – the need to invest in and incentivise coordination, to improve shared understanding of the specific political economy and context and build a joint vision and strategy.[255] Emerging learning shows that coordination between humanitarian and social protection stakeholders was strongest where there was a joint focus on the ultimate outcomes for those in need.[256]

254   Smith (Ibid). www.alnap.org/help-library/overcoming-barriers-to-coordinating-across-social-protection-and-humanitarian; C. Clare Gardner et al., 'Opportunities of, and Obstacles to, the Utilisation of the Enhanced Single Registry. Kenya Social Protection Research Study 1' (Oxford Policy Management and UKAID, 2020). www.alnap.org/help-library/opportunities-of-and-obstacles-to-the-utilisation-of-the-enhanced-single-registry-kenya.

255   Smith, 'Overcoming Barriers to Coordinating across Social Protection and Humanitarian Assistance – Building on Promising Practices". www.alnap.org/help-library/overcoming-barriers-to-coordinating-across-social-protection-and-humanitarian.

256   L. Austin and V. Barca, 'Learnings on Linking Humanitarian Cash and Social Protection: Synthesis Note. The Grand Bargain Sub-Group on Linking Humanitarian Cash and Social Protection' (Agenda for Humanity, 2021). www.alnap.org/help-library/learnings-on-linking-humanitarian-cash-and-social-protection-synthesis-note-the-grand.

CONCLUSION

How has the system performed over time?

Tracking humanitarian performance since 2007

Since its inception 15 years ago, *The State of the Humanitarian System* report has provided a picture of change in the humanitarian system over time, primarily by tracking progress against the OECD DAC evaluation criteria, as outlined in ALNAP's 2006 guidance.[1] The 2018 SOHS used additional criteria (see Box A) in order to give more prominence to the key performance areas of accountability and participation, and localisation.

This 2022 edition uses the same indicators for the criteria that have been in use since at least the 2015 edition, but it has also looked to broaden the issues examined and the way in which they're framed in response to feedback from NGOs, affected communities and humanitarians. In interviews with local NGOs and affected communities, there was the feeling that the system was assessing itself on its own terms. Meanwhile, humanitarian practitioners felt the criteria were increasingly misaligned with the issues that were most pressing for them. Humanitarian evaluations, which remain a vital source of evidence for the 2022 SOHS and frequently use the criteria, are also increasingly presenting their findings under a range of other strategic or policy-relevant issues.

On this basis, the 2022 SOHS aimed to provide a picture of the complexities of humanitarian performance – beyond simple improvement, decline or stagnation – while answering pressing questions faced by the system. The assessment of performance in this chapter should be read in this context; rather than being a full summary of the report's insights, it is a snapshot of a sub-set of issues that have been examined consistently since the first edition of the SOHS.

We assessed change on each criterion by improvement, partial progress, mixed progress, decline and no change (see Key). Overall, the 2018–2021 period saw a distribution of mixed progress, partial progress and decline since the last period. This is not the level of improvement that many would hope to see; for some people, there is frustration that the system has not moved forward faster. But given the external challenges faced by the system over this period, the fact that performance has largely stayed the same (and in some areas slightly improved) can be seen as a positive accomplishment.

As the previous chapters have explored, the four-year study period for this edition of the SOHS is in many ways a different era to the period covered under the last edition. Over 2015–2017 there was marked progress in humanitarian policy, with the adoption of new commitments,

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1   Tony Beck, *Evaluating humanitarian action using the OECD-DAC criteria: An ALNAP guide for humanitarian agencies* (London: ALNAP/ODI, 2006). www.alnap.org/help-library/evaluating-humanitarian-action-using-the-oecd-dac-criteria.

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compacts and frameworks for action. By contrast, 2018 to 2021 saw the humanitarian system struggle to shift from policy promises to practice at a time of increasing global challenges (not least a pandemic) and as conditions for delivering effective, efficient and principled humanitarian assistance grew considerably more difficult.

Given these internal and external challenges, slow and non-linear progress may be understandable, but this is no reason for complacency, especially in the face of new challenges in the Russia–Ukraine conflict, and its wider impacts on other crises.

Humanitarian performance since 2010

Key: performance assessment summaries

Improvement	**Partial progress**	**Mixed progress**	**Decline**	**No change**
Clear progress made in policy and/ or country-level implementation	Slight or small improvements made, typically in policy or perception rather than implementation or outcome	Clear improvements made, but also clear declines in other areas	Clear decline in policy and/ or country-level implementation	Level of performance on this criterion remains largely the same as in the previous SOHS

Performance area	Summary	2012 SOHS (2010–2011)	2015 SOHS (2012–2014)	2018 SOHS (2015–2017)	2022 SOHS (2018–2021)
Sufficiency	▪ Despite increases in international humanitarian aid, there was not the same growth as in the previous period, and levels have not kept pace with the near-quadrupling over the past decade of the global requirements set out in humanitarian appeals. ▪ The COVID-19 pandemic drove a peak in requirements in the 2020 UN-coordinated humanitarian appeals, but little more than half of these were met – a new low. On average, levels of funding to appeals were lower than in the previous periods. ▪ While several major donors increased their contributions, others made significant cuts. Despite previous attention to the importance of diversifying funding sources, this has not translated into a shift away from reliance on a few donors for the bulk of humanitarian aid. ▪ Aid recipients' views showed a decline in sufficiency, and both recipients and aid practitioners noted insufficient aid as the biggest barrier to support.	No change	Decline	No change	Decline

Performance area	Summary	2012 SOHS (2010–2011)	2015 SOHS (2012–2014)	2018 SOHS (2015–2017)	2022 SOHS (2018–2021)
Coverage	▪ The response to the sharp increase in needs due to COVID-19 meant that more people were reached with humanitarian assistance, signalling some progress. In 2021 and 2020, the system reached around 70% of those it targeted for aid. There is no comparable data for the previous period, but the system is paying more attention to estimating its reach. ▪ Crisis-affected people expressed significant concerns about aid not reaching those most in need, citing concerns about targeting decisions and aid diversion. ▪ Access constraints seemed to worsen, including government-imposed impediments, making it more difficult and costly to reach affected communities. ▪ Attacks against aid workers rose by 54%, particularly affecting national staff. Sanctions and counter-terrorism measures continued to block aid in some contexts. ▪ Efforts to ensure equitable reach to women, older people and people with disabilities resulted in better frameworks, tools and visibility. However, the system has little data on how well it is doing on inclusiveness.	No change	Decline	Decline	Mixed progress
Relevance and appropriateness	▪ The proportion of aid recipients who felt that aid met their priority needs declined since the last report. Aid practitioners however continue to believe that this is their strongest area of performance. ▪ Improvements in multi-sectoral analysis have enabled the system to better understand people's priorities, but evidence of efforts by humanitarian actors to adapt or design what they offer on the basis of recipients' views continues to be limited. ▪ In the COVID-19 response, the system adapted to provide a largely relevant and appropriate health response, but there was evidence that the pandemic skewed attention away from people's other priority needs. ▪ There has been further focus on tailoring aid to better support women, older people, and people living with disabilities, and this has translated into a mix of improved practice and simplistic application. ▪ The marked increase in cash assistance has surpassed expectations and led to improvements in relevance in some areas, although it still accounts for only around a fifth of humanitarian aid and is not universally preferred by or appropriate for aid recipients.	Improvement	No change	Partial progress	Mixed progress
Accountability and participation	▪ Consultation, participation and feedback continue to be strongly linked to aid recipients' perceptions of the relevance, dignity and effectiveness of aid. ▪ While agencies continued to gradually increase their use of feedback mechanisms, these are not seen as being used effectively to influence decision-making. Both the 2015 and 2018 editions of the SOHS found that 'while there are a number of initiatives and approaches that show potential, they have not yet delivered greater accountability or participation'. Despite increased attention to accountability to affected populations (AAP) issues in the past four years, this finding still holds. ▪ COVID-19 provided a challenging context for communication and feedback with affected populations due to the shift to remote formats. Some agencies used the pandemic to strengthen ties with communities by enlisting community members as proxies for face-to-face messaging. ▪ While meaningful accountability mechanisms for affected populations remain elusive, there were positive developments in the form of high-level acknowledgement of the need to strengthen AAP and in the improvements made to PSEAH mechanisms.	N/A	N/A	Partial progress	Mixed progress

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Performance area	Summary	2012 SOHS (2010–2011)	2015 SOHS (2012–2014)	2018 SOHS (2015–2017)	2022 SOHS (2018–2021)
Effectiveness	▪ The availability and use of mortality data in crisis settings is poor, inhibiting an understanding of the degree to which humanitarian action delivers on its primary mission to save lives. However, there was some evidence that the system contributed to reduced mortality in some contexts. ▪ The system has made some progress on programming for gender-based violence and child protection. However, coordination structures for protection remained largely ineffective. Protection was overlooked during the COVID-19 response and the system was unable to meet the scale of protection needs in contexts of displacement and conflict. ▪ There was evidence of improved wellbeing and other outcomes for people in crisis, particularly in the food security, nutrition and education sectors, as well as in cash modalities and in early mobilisation of the COVID-19 health response. ▪ Increases in the use of preparedness and early action led to improved timeliness in a range of settings but remain a small proportion of overall humanitarian assistance. ▪ There were continued sector-specific attempts to improve the quality of humanitarian response, yet evaluations noted ongoing challenges with meeting quality standards.	Mixed progress	Mixed progress	Improvement	Partial progress
Efficiency	▪ As the system's estimates of the number of people needing humanitarian assistance have increased, so too have its investments in building longer-term efficiency into humanitarian response, with examples ranging from improvements to funding mechanisms to changes in coordination mechanisms and investment in multi-agency and digital cash payment systems. ▪ The ongoing lack of robust data on costs and outcomes means that assessments of efficiency remain largely qualitative, limiting the ability to fully determine how much progress is being made with new reforms. ▪ Five years of Grand Bargain implementation have delivered meaningful improvements to several drivers of inefficiency in the system, but progress remains limited, both in the number of actors engaged in these initiatives and in the overall proportion of international humanitarian assistance affected by them.	No change	Partial progress	Partial progress	Partial progress
Connectedness	▪ Significant shifts in policy frameworks on the humanitarian–development–peace triple nexus have marked a step forward in connecting the humanitarian system with approaches to longer-term risk and vulnerability. ▪ This normative shift has yet to translate beyond programmatic examples of good practice into system-wide results and observable change for affected people. Evidence so far has focused on process rather than outcomes, while aid recipients continued to report a desire for aid that better enables self-sufficiency and resilience. ▪ Investments have been made in improving connections between humanitarian, development and peace staffing and structures, with new ways of working within donors and country teams. But aid practitioners still reported confusion about what the triple nexus meant, and tensions over how to apply it. ▪ New crises challenged nexus aspirations: connectedness in the COVID-19 response was patchy rather than strategic, and the swing back to humanitarian aid in Afghanistan highlighted how the 'problem of problem states' has yet to be solved.	Improvement	Partial progress	Improvement	Partial progress

Performance area	Summary	2012 SOHS (2010–2011)	2015 SOHS (2012–2014)	2018 SOHS (2015–2017)	2022 SOHS (2018–2021)
Coherence	▪ Practitioners continue to attach great importance to the humanitarian principles, yet often lack the skills and support to apply them in complex settings. ▪ Assertive states and weakened multilateral meant that pressures on the space for principled humanitarian action increased over the past 10 years. Government-imposed restrictions and blocks on aid were cited as the primary constraint to access by humanitarian practitioners, and declining respect for international humanitarian law and refugee law was widely reported. ▪ Humanitarians' ability to handle trade-offs between their own principles was tested, with many accepting increasing compromises as the price for operating in heavily controlled contexts, including Syria and Ethiopia. ▪ There were policy bright spots, such as the passage of UN Resolution 2417 on starvation in conflict, as well as innovative advocacy collaborations. Overall, however, the risk of expulsion and a decline in avenues for influence were felt to have had a chilling effect on humanitarians' willingness and ability to call for respect for principles and rights.	▼ Decline	▬ No change	▼ Decline	▼ Decline
Complementarity	▪ Change in this area has been incremental and uneven, despite the attention to 'decolonising' the aid sector and the opportunity provided by the COVID-19 pandemic to shift towards a more locally led model. ▪ Compared to how the system viewed and engaged with local actors a decade ago, there is now a widespread recognition that local leadership is a goal for the system to work towards, but implementing the commitments made on localisation has been more difficult than some actors have anticipated. ▪ In several contexts, international agencies continue to side-line or undermine national actors and compete for resources, using risk and capacity concerns as reasons for the slow shift to localise. In other contexts, local actors are excluded from response planning altogether. ▪ In a significant shift from the 2018 study period, the relationship between governments and INGOs in particular has declined, and the relationship with UN agencies become more challenging, as national governments attempt to exert more influence over targeting and the use of humanitarian resources. While COVID-19 provided opportunities for more positive partnerships with crisis- affected states in some contexts, in others the pandemic was used as the basis for further restrictions on humanitarian actors, causing increasingly strained relations.	N/A	N/A	▲ Improvement	▽ Mixed progress

Is the system fit for the future?

Introduction

The world does not stand still while humanitarians reflect on their performance. Already, the research period for this SOHS (2018–2021) included a major pandemic, the humanitarian effects of which were still reverberating across the globe, increasing rates of climate-related disasters, and the collapse in Afghanistan of 20 years of stabilisation and development efforts. Even as this report was being written, the Russian invasion of Ukraine tested the system in ways that we are only just beginning to understand.

Humanitarians are used to dealing with disruption and uncertainty – it is their operational milieu. And although this is a sector rife with self-critiques, it has proven again and again that it can be flexible and successful in facing major new challenges and supporting people through crises, scaling up and adapting in often surprising ways. Today's humanitarian system is in many ways quite different to that of 12 years ago, when the first SOHS study was written: its finances, institutional capacity and presence have expanded to recognise and respond to a greater range of needs. It has kept professionalising and become more technically adept, and it has innovated. Cash-based programming has continued its progress from marginal and mistrusted to a mainstay of humanitarian response. The system has gone from lamenting the lack of early warning to evolving and investing in sophisticated practical models of anticipatory action.

Yet this is also a system whose basic model can be unwieldy and highly resistant to change. The previous SOHS report noted how the humanitarian system struggled to find its role and approach to 'novel' crises outside its standard playbook, such as the West African Ebola Outbreak in 2015 and the European Migration 'Crisis' in 2015–2016. More widely, the system is still dogged by the same tough questions it has faced for decades – how to link to long-term solutions, how to localise, how to put affected people at the centre of everything it does. Although the language, commitments and tools around these have moved on, meaningful wholesale progress has not happened. Similarly, the system is still lacking the evidence to clearly understand its effectiveness. While there have been evolutions in tracking and monitoring the use of aid it remains extremely difficult to follow investments through the system to understand the outcomes and impacts for crisis-affected communities.

As successive SOHS reports have shown, the system is able to change. But as the world around it changes more rapidly there are questions as to whether it can keep up. This chapter looks at what the future might hold in three areas: the changing nature of crises and risks; the scale and spread of the populations these may affect; and the shifting political and economic environment for response. Drawing on the evidence from this and previous editions of the SOHS, we ask if the system is set to meet these potential challenges.

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Changing crises

Systemic risk and complex crises

Systemic risk is the idea that the negative outcomes of an event depend on how parts of affected systems interact with each other, leading to large-scale system malfunction or collapse. In a globalised world these connections are complex and often unseen so the large-scale risks that result from them can go unmonitored and unprepared for. As the 2022 Global Assessment Report on Disaster Risk Reduction (GAR) sets out, in a world of hyper-connected systems, 'everyone is living downstream of something else',[2] and systemic risks are accelerating.

The COVID-19 pandemic and the war in Ukraine demonstrated the effects of systemic risk. As the GAR reports, the economic effects of COVID-19 measures were felt in Fiji well before the first case was registered there. The economic aftershocks of the pandemic, compounded by the Ukraine war, fractured global fuel and food systems – in the first four months of 2022 the FAO Food Price Index rose by 17%[3] – with the World Bank estimating that every percentage point rise in the Index could drive 10 million more people into poverty. Food security and political crises around the world have heightened the problem of 'risk myopia':[4] faced with multiple crises, world leaders they can lose sight of – or even exacerbate – one dimension of systemic risk while attending to another.

Climate threats

Climate change is a clear driver of systemic risk, creating cascading effects that cross geographic and sectoral boundaries. The IPCC sixth assessment report published in 2021 showed how threats to people's lives and livelihoods around the world are set to accelerate, worsen and spread. Based on current trends, the world will exceed the Paris Agreement target of 1.5°C global average maximum temperature increase by the early 2030s, if not before, accelerating the pace and severity of heatwaves, floods and droughts.[5] The complexity of climate change impacts hinders accurate predictions and multiple scenarios are possible, but the GAR projects a possible 40% increase in the number of disasters by 2030.

Climate change was the external threat most frequently cited by aid practitioners when we asked them about the future of the system (see Chapter 7). This may be because the humanitarian implications

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2   UNDRR, 'Global Assessment Report on Disaster Risk Reduction 2022. Our World at Risk: Transforming Governance for a Resilient Future' (Geneva: UNDRR, 2022). www.alnap.org/help-library/global-assessment-report-on-disaster-risk-reduction-2022-our-world-at-risk-transforming.

3   FAO, 'FAO Food Price Index' (Rome: FAO, 2022). www.alnap.org/help-library/fao-food-price-index.

4   UNDRR, 'Global Assessment Report on Disaster Risk Reduction 2022. Our World at Risk: Transforming Governance for a Resilient Future'. www.alnap.org/help-library/global-assessment-report-on-disaster-risk-reduction-2022-our-world-at-risk-transforming.

5   IPCC, *Summary for Policymakers – Climate Change 2021: The Physical Science Basis*. www.alnap.org/help-library/summary-for-policymakers-climate-change-2021-the-physical-science-basis-contribution-of.

are already being felt. Of the 20 countries most vulnerable to climate change,[6] three- quarters had humanitarian response plans in 2021 – among them some of the largest, Yemen, DRC, Sudan, South Sudan, Ethiopia and Somalia. Support for climate adaptation remains insufficient[7] and is poorly targeted to these most vulnerable countries,[8] and at least a third of people in the poorest countries are not covered by early warning systems (in Africa, this is as high as 60%).[9]

Conflict

The modern humanitarian endeavour has its roots in war, but the nature of conflict is changing. While the war in Ukraine may in some ways resemble the last century world wars, recent wars often bear little resemblance to the battlefield-based scenarios that still underpin international humanitarian law. Conflicts between armed actors are becoming more protracted and urbanised, while chronic organised crime and political violence – as in Venezuela or Myanmar – are responsible for high levels of death and displacement.[10] Localised and regionalised conflicts appear set to continue, as societies face heightened socio-economic, political and resource pressures. But the risk of a return to 'big war' may also be growing.[11] Such a conflict might be markedly different from its twentieth century predecessors – with new tactics, weaponry and theatres of war some of which are already in play, including cyber-attacks on high dependency systems, and disinformation and misinformation. As the UN Secretary-General's Common Agenda report notes, 'Longstanding agreements on nuclear weapons and other weapons of mass destruction are increasingly fragile as trust among major powers continues to erode' and the 'world is moving closer to the brink of instability, where the risks we face are no longer managed effectively through the systems we have'.[12]

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6   According to the ND-GAIN Country Index', Notre Dame Global Adaptation Initiative, 2019. www.alnap.org/help-library/nd-gain-country-index.

7   UNEP, 'Adaptation Gap Report 2021.' (Nairobi: United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP), 2021). www.alnap.org/help-library/adaptation-gap-report-2021.

8   IFRC, 'World Disasters Report 2020: Come Heat or High Water – Tackling the Humanitarian Impacts of the Climate Crisis Together' (Geneva: International Federation of Red Cross (IFRC), 2020). www.alnap.org/help-library/world-disasters-report-2020-come-heat-or-high-water-tackling-the-humanitarian-impacts.

9   WMO, 'State of the Global Climate 2021' (Geneva: World Meteorological Organisation (WMO), 2021). www.alnap.org/help-library/state-of-the-global-climate-2021.

10   K. Krause, 'From Armed Conflict to Political Violence: Mapping & Explaining Conflict Trends' 145, no. 4 (2016). www.alnap.org/help-library/from-armed-conflict-to-political-violence-mapping-explaining-conflict-trends.

11   Solferino 21 Project, 'Warfare Today and Tomorrow. War Now and next Generation Warfare', ELAC University of Oxford, n.d. www.alnap.org/help-library/warfare-today-and-tomorrow-war-now-and-next-generation-warfare.

12   UN, 'Our Common Agenda – Report of the Secretary-General' (New York: United Nations, 2021). www.alnap.org/help-library/our-common-agenda-%E2%80%93-report-of-the-secretary-general.

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Is the humanitarian system fit for these changing crises?

The humanitarian system is certainly used to working in complex crises – an estimated 80% of international aid is directed to countries facing some combination of conflict, disaster, displacement or disease.[13] Working in these settings has however not routinely meant working in ways that respond to their complexity (see Chapter 5).

Yet there have been changes within the system, including in joint assessments (see Chapters 4 and 5) and multi-dimensional analysis related to the humanitarian–development–peace 'triple nexus' (see Chapter 12). In recent decades, the focus on resilience documented in the last edition of the SOHS (see 'Focus on: Resilience in protracted crises' section), has also boosted the capacity for systems thinking[14] within some parts and partners of the system, resulting in innovative collaboration and programming. There have also been advances in approaches to the effects of climate change – the recent focus on anticipatory action brought a new sophistication to risk monitoring and early warning tools (see Chapter 6).

The extent to which these advances prepare the system for the potential magnitude of change in crises is questionable. There are gaps between the improved understanding of risk and the limited capacity to act: after the failure to respond in time to the 2011 Horn of Africa famine the system developed early warning and action mechanisms, but over a decade later it appeared that the system was failing to heed its own warnings in Somalia. Some agencies are thinking about the future of war, for example ICRC's 2022 creation of a delegation for cyberspace, but many are struggling to provide protection and assistance in today's wars (see 'Focus on: Active conflict' section, and Chapters 4, 6 and 11). More and more organisations are signing up to public commitments on climate change, but there are few examples of major practical or strategic changes. More broadly, there is little sign that agencies are rethinking what their mandate means in the face of these complex global risks. In the worlds of one climate lead: 'What is a humanitarian organisation when the world is in such a crisis – given that the challenges of climate are so omnipresent? Can the humanitarian sector overall evolve at a pace to remain relevant, given what climate change and other threats are bringing to the fore?'[15]

Growing caseload

These potential global shifts suggest more people will be affected by extreme food insecurity, conflict and disaster. Deprivation associated with worsening poverty is likely to be a cause and consequence of these crises for many households and economies – and in many fragile contexts, the line is extremely fine between extreme poverty and humanitarian need.

13   According to calculations of country-allocable aid by Development Initiatives.

14   See B. Ramalingam and J. Mitchell, 'Learning to Change' forthcoming, ALNAP.

15   Key informant interview with climate and environment lead in humanitarian organisation.

As Chapter 1 shows, the impacts of the pandemic have reversed previous development gains, pushing an additional 97 million people into poverty and setting back progress towards poverty reduction targets by at least seven years[16] – numbers that may increase further with the future effects of climate change and food price spikes. But again, complexity combined with data gaps in many of the poorest countries makes modelling difficult.[17]

These rises in extreme poverty and exposure to crisis risk do not of course automatically mean an increase in the number of people requiring support from the international humanitarian system. As seen in the COVID-19 response, social protection systems can adapt and expand in the face increased need (see Chapter 12), and disaster risk management systems can effectively mitigate and respond to the effects of weather-related events. These and other systems provide safety nets that prevent crisis exposure becoming humanitarian need. As the 'Focus on: Support beyond the system' section shows, people's safety nets are woven from multiple threads: formal and informal, domestic and international, private and public. But these safety nets may also come under stress – for example, many developing countries increased their public expenditure in response to COVID-19 but, at a time of economic downturn, some are now at risk of debt distress and are putting in place austerity measures that will reduce national and household resilience to crises.[18]

Even without factoring in future crisis scenarios, a look back at trends in the humanitarian caseload suggests that the number of people in need may have been set to increase. As we saw in Chapter 3, the number of people the system sought to reach through humanitarian response plans alone has increased by more than 60% just within the study period.[19] This is partly the result of the cumulative effect of protracted crises – as the 'Focus on: Forced displacement' section shows, more people are newly displaced each year than find durable solutions. But it is also partly the result of a growing humanitarian system whose concept of need has expanded, and which sees and responds to a greater range and breadth of needs.

Is the system ready to deal with a growing caseload?

Whether the humanitarian system can address an increased caseload is partly a question of capacity and partly a question of limits. In terms of capacity, the system has proven over the past decade that it can

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16   World Bank, 2020a; Yonzan et al., 2020 – cited in UNDRR, 'Global Assessment Report on Disaster Risk Reduction 2022. Our World at Risk: Transforming Governance for a Resilient Future'. www.alnap.org/help-library/global-assessment-report-on-disaster-risk-reduction-2022-our-world-at-risk-transforming.

17   According to one review, the most optimistic scenarios predict that climate change impacts alone could push an additional 37.6 million people into extreme poverty, or 100.7 million into poverty, by 2030. B.A Jafino et al., 'Revised Estimates of the Impact of Climate Change on Extreme Poverty by 2030. Working Paper.', The World Bank, 2020. www.alnap.org/help-library/revised-estimates-of-the-impact-of-climate-change-on-extreme-poverty-by-2030.

18   FAO, 'FAO Food Price Index'. www.alnap.org/help-library/fao-food-price-index.

19   In 2018, the number of people targeted in HRPs alone was 89.2 million. By 2021 it was 143.1 million – see Chapter 4.

expand – organisationally and financially – in response to the growth in the needs it observes. As Chapter 2 shows, there are an estimated 10% more organisations, 40% as many field staff and 90% more money in the system than there was 10 years ago. But that financing has plateaued in recent years, suggesting that similar levels of growth over the coming decade are by no means a given – especially in the context of record public debt and reductions in global economic growth.[20] Even at current levels, there are significant shortfalls: UN-coordinated appeals in 2021 were more under-funded than they were a decade ago, and although the system lacks a clear understanding of how many people it is reaching with adequate support (Chapter 3), evidence suggests that many people who require support are not receiving what they need. A growing humanitarian caseload will heighten dilemmas between reaching the most people and the people most in need (Chapter 4) and doing so in a way that better takes account of their views (Chapter 8).

Right-sizing the humanitarian system for the future demands more than increasing its resources and increasing its efficiency, though these are both important (see Chapters 3 and 10); it may also demand re-evaluating the scope of its ambitions and its role in relation to others. Mission creep has long been a concern, prompting calls for the system to pare back expectations of the number of people it assists, and what it offers – instead focusing on supporting and complementing others (see the 'Focus on: Support beyond the system' section), including states and civil society, to assume responsibility.[21] As Chapter 9 shows, persistent shortcomings must be confronted in how international actors relate to and support, rather than stymie, local and national NGOs. As Chapter 12 shows, part of the logic of the triple nexus is that reducing humanitarian needs calls for joined-up efforts between humanitarian, development and peace actors – although nexus efforts to date are far from achieving that aim.

Context constraints

When the UN marked its 75th anniversary in 2021, the Secretary-General pointed to the continued erosion of the international norms established since 1945. Shared beliefs in multilateralism and solidarity to fulfil people's fundamental rights are being challenged. A clear message emerging from our review of the past four years is that the basic norms that underpin humanitarian action are under stress. Humanitarian space is hard-won in many contexts and assumptions of people's rights to access assistance

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20   The International Monetary Fund (IMF) reduced its forecast of global growth in 2022 by 0.8 percentage points to 3.6% – see UNDRR, 'Global Assessment Report on Disaster Risk Reduction 2022. Our World at Risk: Transforming Governance for a Resilient Future', 9. www.alnap.org/help-library/global-assessment-report-on-disaster-risk-reduction-2022-our-world-at-risk-transforming.

21   Hugo Slim, Solferino 21: Warfare, Civilians and Humanitarians in the Twenty-First Century (London: Hurst & Company, 2022). www.alnap.org/help-library/solferino-21-warfare-civilians-and-humanitarians-in-the-twenty-first-century.

and protection do not hold – both in the countries in which humanitarians operate and among global powers (see Chapters 1, 4 and 11). None of this is new, but the evidence suggests it is worsening. It is hard to project future trends, but recent democratic backsliding and political polarisation are unlikely to be quickly reversed.

Stress is being felt in economic as well as political spheres – and these influence each other. Judged in purely financial terms, international commitment to the humanitarian endeavour remained substantial – even as other forms of global solidarity wavered. Although there were evident shortfalls, and humanitarian aid levels plateaued (see Chapters 2 and 3), the fact that it did not shrink could be taken as testament to continued international commitment. But there have been shifts among the governments on whom the international system depends for funding. Notably, the UK, historically one of the mainstays of support for international humanitarian action, has significantly reduced its profile as a donor. While others increased their funding, this may prove unsustainable as economies face declining fiscal space and potential recessions.

The relevance and influence of the Western-led aid model is also in question. If colonial legacies continue to be challenged and the political contours of a multipolar world become more starkly defined, the role of aid may have to change. Developing countries' demands for climate-related 'loss and damage' payment are emblematic of calls for a post-aid order, which shifts from a discretionary, benefactor model of unpredictable handouts to a model based on global justice, redress and obligation.

Is the system fit to handle these future contexts?

With these potential power shifts at play, are humanitarians in a position to promote support and tolerance for a principled humanitarian endeavour and protect their operational space? As we have seen, migration management and the national interests of some major humanitarian donors are undermining claims to adherence to the principles – and their ability to call on others to respect them. Although humanitarian agencies are developing initiatives to strengthen their negotiation and advocacy for humanitarian space, their appetite and ability to influence the terms and extent of their access is limited (Chapter 11). Ultimately, this is a problem bigger than humanitarianism – as one respondent to our survey put it: 'The humanitarian system can't – and shouldn't try – to address the underlying causes of the ongoing collapse of the international political and economic system. It's beyond our reach. We should rather focus on saving and protecting lives, leaving the big, structural issues to political leaders. It's their failure, not ours.'

Of course, reiterating that there are no humanitarian fixes to political problems does not absolve humanitarian organisations from considering their own role – past and present – in perpetuating systemic inequality. In the context of debates about localisation and decolonisation and facing existential financial concerns, many international NGOs have engaged

in soul-searching about their place in the wider humanitarian ecosystem. Localisation and decolonisation were by far the biggest 'fit for the future' issues for respondents to our survey, with one summarising the sentiments of many that humanitarians should step back: 'The humanitarian sector must have a secondary role, accompanying and supporting the affected population and guaranteeing that they are the ones leading their recovery process.' Whether current attention results in more distributed power in the humanitarian system – and ultimately in a greater ability to reach crisis-affected people in the most constrained environments – remains to be seen.

Futures thinking can often become synonymous with technological innovation. With due attention to ethical use, it will clearly be important for humanitarians to keep pace with these innovations, in order to operate smartly in a changing world. But current questions about the future of humanitarian action run much deeper than operational and technical improvements and fixes. Whether international humanitarian agencies, and their donors can step up to respond to the changing nature and scale of crises, and step back to support others to do so, rests on fundamental questions of insight, capacity, responsibility and power. In terms of insight and capacity, it is about working with others to gain a more sophisticated awareness of systemic risk and being better prepared to face it. In terms of responsibility and power, it is about sharing obligations at the highest political levels in order to move to a predictable model of international support that is based on duty as well as need; and about sharing power at the most local levels. One respondent to the SOHS practitioner survey told us: 'This not about our organisations; we are here to serve populations in need. A complete rework is needed to ensure humanitarian response is driven by people affected by crises, with their input, feedback, leadership and ownership.'

Finding the right balance between scaling up and letting go will demand conscious effort by all stakeholders – as the COVID-19 response and Ukraine responses have demonstrated,[22] new crises are not enough to change the system's status quo. Becoming fit for the future demands both deep humility and high ambition on the part of the humanitarian system: renegotiating its place as part of a larger global social contract which so many sources cited in this report, from aid leaders to the UN Secretary-General, have said the world must renew. As a recipient of local aid in Venezuela put it: 'I think humanitarian work should be dynamic, as we are growing, we are improving, getting stronger and we are beginning to move forward. It is not the idea that only humanitarian organisations are acting in our country. The idea would be to grow all together, to continue with our humanitarian intention to help the weakest and to strengthen all of us as a society.'

22   Humanitarian Outcomes, 'Enabling the Local Response: Emerging Humanitarian Priorities in Ukraine March–May 2022' (United Kingdom: Humanitarian Outcomes, 2022). www.alnap.org/help-library/enabling-the-local-response-emerging-humanitarian-priorities-in-ukraine.

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ANNEX 1

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ANNEX 3

Methodology – the State of The Humanitarian System 2022

Research components overview

This edition of the SOHS, like previous editions, has been created through a synthesis of findings from separate research components using distinct methods. To better facilitate this synthesis and make the process more transparent, ALNAP developed a study matrix with indicators for each of the report's core questions, used to ensure consistency across the different consultants and research components. It helped to ensure that all key issues were addressed and that the different components addressed these issues in the same way using a common set of questions. This study matrix is available in an online appendix.

Much of the data collection and analysis remains similar to the previous edition, however, there are some key changes to the 2022 SOHS:

1. In reflection of the fact that the international humanitarian system is but one of multiple sources of support for people in crisis, we have made more effort to describe and capture the 'systems outside the system' that individuals and communities draw on to survive and recover, as well as assess how effectively the international humanitarian system takes these efforts into account.

2. We front-loaded several of our interviews and focus group discussions with aid recipients in three response contexts to ask them what was most important to include in a report assessing the support they receive from the humanitarian system. We then made adjustments to our research questions and data collection on the basis of these findings, leading to a greater emphasis in this SOHS edition on targeting, anti-corruption, do no harm, and accountability to affected populations.

3. While we still provide a longitudinal overview of system performance against the DAC criteria, to provide a more direct connection to decision-making, this year's report organised its findings as answers to a core set of policy-relevant questions that we routinely heard being asked of the system by aid recipients and practitioners over the study period.

In an effort to use more empirical evidence rather than perception-based data, the report: commissioned new studies on innovation and mortality; sought to gather more factual evidence on use of different modalities by Cluster leads; and included more peer reviewed academic journal in the literature review component.

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Findings are drawn from ten research components, using a combination of primary data collection and secondary data synthesis:

Primary data collection and analysis

- **Country-level research:** Focus group discussions and key informant interviews, along with relevant context-specific documentation and observations, were collected in Lebanon, Ethiopia, Yemen, Venezuela, the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) and Bangladesh (Cox's Bazar).
- **Country studies on localisation:** ALNAP commissioned two country-level studies specifically examining issues and progress in localisation, in Turkey and Somalia, featuring surveys and in-depth interviews with local and international actors.
- **Aid recipient survey:** ALNAP conducted an SMS text message and computer-assisted telephone interview (CATI)-based phone survey of 5,487 aid recipients in six crisis contexts to elicit their assessment of humanitarian performance.
- **Practitioner and host government survey:** A web-based survey with 436 completed responses was used to elicit the perceptions of humanitarian practitioners and host-government representatives on humanitarian performance.
- **Key informant interviews (KIIs):** Humanitarian leaders and key thinkers were interviewed to assess performance and identify important trends. These interviews were also used to identify potential sources to address key evidence gaps.
- **Organisational mapping and analysis:** Data is collected from individual organisations as well as through a desk-based review to provide an overall picture of the number of humanitarian staff and organisations worldwide.
- **Innovation and mortality:** ALNAP commissioned original studies to assess the state of data and evidence on mortality in humanitarian settings and the impact of innovation funding in the humanitarian system over the past decade.

Synthesis of secondary data

- **Evaluation synthesis:** A synthesis of findings from humanitarian evaluations published between 2018–2022 in the ALNAP HELP library. Over 500 humanitarian evaluations were assessed for inclusion with over 130 evaluations chosen for more in-depth analysis.
- **Financial analysis:** ALNAP worked with experts in humanitarian financing to produce and analyse statistics on humanitarian financing and compare this to previous SOHS Report periods.
- **Literature review:** ALNAP reviewed over 250 research reports and academic work published within the study period on a set of 15 themes related to humanitarian policy and practice.

Primary data collection and analysis

Country-level research

The country research was managed by The Research People and conducted by several local researchers (who have not been named in the report or methodology for their own safety due to local security concerns), in six crisis affected countries.

The purpose of the field-level studies was to provide a more in-depth assessment of the performance of the humanitarian system in a number of crisis responses. The focus for this element of the research was on collecting detailed, qualitative, perception-based data from a range of respondents in specific locations, in order to build a rich and detailed picture of how the humanitarian system operates on the ground and performs in different crisis contexts. This component of the research additionally sought to understand how aid provided through the international humanitarian system relates to other sources and networks of support (including, for example, from local associations, family, diaspora or social figures).

Crisis contexts

The six crisis contexts were selected by ALNAP in consultation with TRP with the aim of achieving geographical diversity across regions, and diversity across the different types of crises that humanitarians respond to. The contexts were:

- Bangladesh
- DRC
- Ethiopia
- Lebanon
- Venezuela
- Yemen

Data collection primarily took the form of key informant interviews (KIIs) and focus group discussions (FGDs) in each location, as well as the collation of relevant documentation and observations. Data collection was conducted by experienced local Research Associates (RAs) in each context.

Case studies were conducted in a staggered approach. Exploratory research was conducted in DRC, Venezuela and Yemen in mid-2020 and continued until Autumn 2021. The research in Bangladesh, Ethiopia and Lebanon was informed by the initial country research, beginning in late 2020 or early 2021 and continuing until Autumn 2021.

Exploratory research

A small amount of preliminary data collection was conducted in the DRC, Venezuela and Yemen. Two focus groups were conducted with aid recipients in each country with the aim of exploring priorities for

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the research. FGDs explored participants' recent interactions with and perceptions of the aid system and their priorities for assessment. These focus groups highlighted recipient's concerns targeting, anti-corruption, do no harm, and accountability to affected populations. The findings of these FGDs were used to refine the SOHS research matrix to inform the focus of future data collection activities.

Data collection locations

Within each context the RAs collected data in one to three in-country locations (either in-person or remotely, depending on access and health – including COVID-19 restrictions – and safety considerations). The specific location for research in each context was decided using a stakeholder analysis and discussions with RAs on the best locations for the research. The discussions focussed on the Humanitarian Response Plan (HRP) documents and other situation updates. The in-country researchers had a significant amount of leeway to decide the final locations, with a strong emphasis on their own safety. The final research locations are outlined in the table below.

Table 1: Country focus, research locations and crisis type

Country	Locations and data collection mode	Predominant crisis context in period
Bangladesh	Cox's Bazaar (in person, multiple camp locations)	Refugee and COVID-19
DRC	Beni, North-Kivu (in person); Uvira-Fizi, South-Kivu (in person)	Ebola, conflict and flooding
Ethiopia	Tigray (remote)	Conflict and food security
Lebanon	Borj el Shamali and Shatila camps (in person); North and Akkar Governate (in person); Beirut (in person)	Refugee and financial
Venezuela	Caracas and surrounding areas (remote)	Political and financial
Yemen	Aden; Lahj; Taiz (in person)	Conflict, displacement and food security

The data collection was undertaken by in-country researchers, who were given leeway in deciding the best people to speak to in each context. In order to maintain a contextually relevant approach and appropriate representation of local actors, amongst other actors consulted, priority was given to local and national actors (including CSOs and NGOs, authorities, and other actors involved in the delivery of aid). In November 2021, 3–5 additional interviews were conducted in each context to ensure that the final sample more accurately reflected the intended sampling frame.

During the research we conducted 177 individual interviews across the six humanitarian crises identified. In addition, we conducted 37 FGDs with 264 participants in each of the contexts identified (excluding Ethiopia). Across KIIs and FGDs we therefore engaged with 441 respondents in total, across all sites.

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Table 2: Respondents per type, per country

Type of respondent	Target for KIIs	Target for FGDs
People affected by crisis		30–36
Government / National Disaster Management Authority (NDMA)	1	
Local Government	2	
National/local civil society actors involved in humanitarian action	6	
National/local civil society actors involved in human rights and democratisation	2	
UN humanitarian agencies	2	
'Northern'-based International NGOs	3	
Red Cross/ Red Crescent Movement (ICRC, IFRC, National Societies)	2	
Donor representatives, including non-DAC	2	
HC/HCT/Cluster leaders	2	
National/local academics and researchers	2	
Private-sector representatives	2	
Military representatives (where relevant)	1	
Development/DRR/peacebuilding actors (Micro Finance Institutions (MFIs), United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), NGOs)	3	
Total	**30**	**30–36**

Table 3: Aid recipient respondents by age and gender

Country	Female	Male	18–34	35–54	55+	Age not given	Total
Bangladesh	19	22	19	15	4	3	**41**
DRC	28	23	22	15	7	7	**51**
Lebanon	32	33	13	18	12	22	**65**
Venezuela	6	25	5	19	6	1	**31**
Yemen	38	38	34	25	5	12	**76**
Total	**123**	**141**	**93**	**92**	**34**	**45**	**264**

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Interview and FGDs

KIIs and FGDs were semi-structured and followed a template that developed over time in response to the SOHS study matrix and emerging themes and gaps. These semi-structured tools consisted of questions relating to the indicators tagged to this component in the study matrix. Different data collection tools were developed for different respondent groups – for example, slightly different tools were used for different key informants. In addition, to draw out more detailed, specific themes in each context, research tools also varied across locations. All tools were co-developed with RAs in each context and checked with ALNAP before use.

KIIs and FGDs were primarily focussed on gathering perception-based data in relation to each of the SOHS study criteria. However, FGDs with aid recipients additionally explored respondents' sources of support in times of crisis (open-ended questions, exploring a wider range of actors and networks than those associated with the international humanitarian system). KIIs also explored respondents' perspectives about which other humanitarian actors are important to them, as well as their perspectives on different sources of financial support (for example, from new international donors, private donors, local philanthropists and others).

Analysis

The RAs all produce a three-page structured contextual analysis paper which captured their reflections on the local context and key findings relevant to key research questions. Summaries of the sources of support outside the international humanitarian system and aid recipients' experiences of those sources were also produced.

Transcripts were coded by a team of four researchers using MAX QDA according to a shared coding matrix provided by ALNAP. The data was then analysed according to the strength of the evidence (strong/moderate/weak), based on the quantity and consistency of data on different issues across transcripts. Analysis was shared through a completed findings matrix. The matrix was updated twice to incorporate additional gap-filling interviews and to provide additional information in response to specific questions from the ALNAP team.

Constraints and limitations

Convenience sampling was used to some degree due to the access limitations posed by COVID-19 and ongoing conflict in several contexts. The sample of respondents was also influenced by the fact not all people or organisations contacted for interview responded to those requests and people within the pre-existing networks of the researchers and ALNAP tended to be more responsive. Finally, security of RAs was a key concern throughout the project and risks made work particularly challenging in some contexts. For example, planned FGDs with aid recipients and in-country KIIs led by a local RA had to be cancelled in Ethiopia due to the conflict

and associated political concerns. Instead, the research for Ethiopia was conducted via remote calls by UK-based researchers in TRP's team.

Country studies on localisation

As part of the SOHS report development, a consortium of partners led by NEAR was engaged by ALNAP to conduct primary data collection and analysis on the performance criterion related to locally led humanitarian action.

The research collected perception-based, outcome and process data in two humanitarian contexts: Somalia and Turkey. The researchers analysed the degree to which humanitarian action is locally led in each context and assessed changes – both positive and negative – in this area of performance over time, comparing between the previous SOHS research period and the current period.

The researchers included:
- A review of locally led response in the selected two countries using NEAR's Localisation Performance Measurement Framework.
- Exploration of how the actions of key local and international humanitarian actors, including government, NGOs, faith-based organisations, and civil society, have contributed to supporting locally led response across the two countries, as well as exploring challenges.
- Exploration of systemic/ pre-existing challenges and gaps within the sector that limit the opportunities for a locally led response, drawing on existing research and data from various actors.

The research was conducted by national research partners and consultants, with support from NEAR and the Humanitarian Advisory Group (HAG). The research in Somalia was conducted by Khalif Abdullahi Abdirahman and the research in Turkey was conducted by Support to Life. The researchers used a mixed methods approach through a survey in each of the countries, and targeted interviews.

Survey

A self-assessment survey was conducted by international and local organisations using an online platform, complemented by in person (phone call, hard copy) follow ups where possible/ required. The survey questionnaire was made available in local languages as appropriate. 31 responses were received in Somalia and 42 in Turkey.

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Table 4: Number of survey responses by category of respondent

Category	Respondents	
	Somalia	Turkey
National government	5	
Local or provincial government	1	5
National or local NGO / Civil Society Organisation	13	25
Private sector	1	
International NGO	5	5
Donor agency/ Foreign mission	2	
UN agency	3	4
Academic/ Research body	1	
IFRC		1
National Red Cross Society		2
Total	31	42

Interviews

Semi-structured KIIs were conducted with national and international organisations. NEAR developed a KII guide with relevant questions based on the SOHS study matrix, which was translated into local languages. Purposive sampling was used with the aim of gathering information from a range of actors both international and local. 18 interviews were conducted in Somalia and 18 in Turkey.

Table 5: Number of interviews by category of respondent

Actor category	Respondents	
	Somalia	Turkey
Local/national NGO or civil society	9	9
UN agencies	1	2
International NGO	3	3
Donor	1	1
Government	3	3
Research	1	
Total	18	18

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Document review

A review of relevant documents was conducted to capture pre-existing data and to complement the primary data collected through the research.

Data coding and analysis

On completion of data collection, data from interviews was coded in MAXQDA according to the SOHS coding framework. Data from different sources was analysed to ensure the validity of the findings and to develop a more complete understanding of locally led humanitarian action in the two humanitarian settings.

Limitations

While the sampling approach attempted to capture the experience and views of different organisations and individuals, the number of organisations and people targeted with the surveys and interviews means that the research does not represent the full picture of locally led action in these countries. The research did also not seek to capture the views of crisis-affected populations in these locations. Some of the data was also captured remotely, which may have influenced people's interpretation of the questions and their engagement in the process.

Aid recipient survey

Following the previous SOHS editions, a remote survey of aid recipients was conducted using mobile phones. The survey was conducted in six countries, including Bangladesh, DRC, Ethiopia, Iraq, Lebanon and one conflict-affected context that cannot be named due to security reasons.

Table 6: Aid recipient respondents by country, gender and age

	Country					
	Bangladesh	**DRC**	**Ethiopia**	**Iraq**	**Lebanon**	**Other conflict**
Number of respondents	1,000	1,000	1,000	510	1,000	972
Male	50%	57%	50%	49%	50%	55%
Female	50%	43%	50%	51%	50%	45%
18–24	34%	34%	33%	33%	15%	21%
25–34	33%	35%	33%	34%	35%	28%
35 and over	34%	31%	33%	33%	50%	52%

For the pooled analysis in the report that summarises result across all the countries, the sample contains only five countries with the Bangladesh respondents removed. This is because the majority of respondents in

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Bangladesh (84%) received aid from the Bangladesh government rather than the international humanitarian system and were therefore largely assessing a different entity to the other contexts. In total 5,487 recipients across the six contexts completed the survey, with the numbers per country represented in Table 6. The method for conducting research in the sixth unidentified context is not discussed in this document due to security concerns for the enumerators and for the organisation conducting the data collection. This section of the methodology instead focuses on the data collected by GeoPoll in five named countries.

Selection of countries and participants across five crisis contexts

For this edition of The State of the Humanitarian System report, ALNAP commissioned GeoPoll to carry out telephone surveys in Bangladesh, DRC, Ethiopia, Iraq and Lebanon. These countries were chosen predominantly to represent humanitarian responses in a variety of geographical areas and contexts, including a range of crisis types. The selection was also partially influenced by the choice of countries in previous editions to allow some longitudinal comparison, to gather further information related case study countries, and by the feasibility of conducting mobile surveys in those contexts.

Eligibility

The main eligibility criterion for survey respondents was for them or their family to have received humanitarian aid over the past two years. If that was not the case, the respondent would be thanked for their time and told they were ineligible. For each context, ALNAP used relevant HRPs to determine the locations in each contexts (at the first administrative level for each country) that contained the highest number of targeted affected populations. GeoPoll was asked to ensure that respondents to each survey were only located within these locations. This decision was designed to maximize the likelihood that respondents had received humanitarian assistance rather than other forms of 'development' support, knowing that sometimes aid recipients have a more holistic view of aid received that does not align with classifications made by the international system between development and humanitarian support.

Participant selection

There were two main methods for participant selection that depended on the level of information GeoPoll already held about phone owners in each context. For some, the location registered to each phone number was already known and it was possible to stratify based on the locations requested by ALNAP. In other locations, GeoPoll used random digit dialling to call phone numbers and then to determine eligibility based upon the list of eligible locations. For Lebanon, the nature of the humanitarian crisis affected the majority of the country, meaning it was not possible to clearly identify areas that were more likely to have humanitarian versus development aid. In that case, anyone would be eligible for the survey,

regardless of location, as long as they confirmed they had received humanitarian aid in the past two years. The locations and mode of participant selection are outlined per country in Table 7.

Table 7: Locations, modality and sampling by country

Country	Eligible locations for survey	Modality of collection	Sampling method
Bangladesh	Dhaka, Mymensingh, Rajshahi, Rangpur and Sylhet	CATI	Random digit dialling
DRC	Kasai, Kasai Central, Kasai Oriental, Ituri, Lomami, Nord-Kivu and Sud-Kivu	SMS	Pre-stratification on location
Ethiopia	Oromia, Somali and Tigray	CATI	Pre-stratification on location
Iraq	Al-Anbar, Diyala, Dohuk, Kirkuk, Nineveh and Saladin	CATI	Pre-stratification on location
Lebanon	Akkar, Baalbek-Hermel, Bekaa, Beirut, Mount Lebanon, North, Nabatieh and South	CATI	Random digit dialling

Aside from selecting based on location, the GeoPoll team aimed for two other demographic quotas in the sample. They sought to ensure gender parity in respondents across all contexts and the ensure that the age of the sample was split equally across three categories in each context (18–24, 25–34, 35 and up). This was roughly achieved in each context, as shown in Table 6 above. It was, however, difficult to get an equal number of men and women to respond to the text-based survey in DRC (with more men than women replying to the SMS-based survey) and it was challenging to get the split between the age categories in Lebanon (with 18–24 being the hardest category to target).

Modality
In previous SOHS surveys, the majority of surveys were conducted using text messages with the computer-aided telephone interviewing (CATI) methodology used in Iraq in 2018. For the 2021 survey, CATI was used in four out of the five countries. This allowed the team to survey people in contexts where scripts are hard to capture in text message form. It also meant people who owned phones but were not literate had more of an opportunity to participate than when using the SMS modality alone. The SMS modality was used in DRC, while CATI was used in Bangladesh, Ethiopia, Iraq and Lebanon.

Questionnaire structure
ALNAP provided GeoPoll with the content of questions for the survey, which used the same or slightly modified questions from the 2012, 2015 and 2018 editions to provide consistent comparisons over time. The respondents were asked a series of questions on their demographics, whether they were refugees of displaced, the type of crisis they experienced, the type of aid required, the agency providing that aid

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and a series of questions on the performance of that aid that largely followed the DAC criteria. In this edition, a targeting question asking whether aid went to the people who needed it most was added to the performance of aid questions from previous years. The questions were predominantly closed answer options with the performance questions all asking respondents whether they were satisfied with an aspect of performance with the answer options of 'no', 'partially' and 'yes'.

Constraints and limitations

The methodology used for the aid recipient survey suffers from a number of potential biases.

- **Selection bias**

As there is no overall, country-level list of aid recipients, it is not possible to conduct a probability sample specially targeting all aid recipients. Rather, GeoPoll targeted the whole population in areas most likely to have received humanitarian aid in a country (sometimes using pre-stratification and sometimes using random digit dialling and screening out on location) and then screened out those who were not aid recipients. It can also be difficult to ensure a clear distinction between humanitarian aid versus other types of aid; while we did attempt to target locations most likely to be receiving humanitarian aid, it is possible that in some contexts receiving multiple types of aid the sample included some development aid recipients.

The aid recipient survey only includes people with access to mobile phones. The degree to which this reflects the entire population will differ from country to country, depending on the proportion of the population who are mobile subscribers (see Table 8).

Table 8: Rates of mobile phone subscribers across 5 survey countries

	Bangladesh	DRC	Ethiopia	Iraq	Lebanon
Rate of mobile phone subscribers per 100 people[1]	107	46	39	93	63

The fact that only those individuals with access to a mobile phone are able to participate in the survey research introduces important selection biases, when comparing respondents to the whole population. In general, those who have access to phones will tend to be more urban, male, younger[2] and of a higher socio-economic status. While the survey sought to maintain a balance of gender and different age groups, this was not possible in all contexts, with an over representation of men in DRC (57% when the aim was 50%) and an underrepresentation of younger age

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1   International Telecommunication Union (ITU) World Telecommunication/ICT Indicators Database for subscribers in 2020.

2   Although it was more challenging in Lebanon to get younger people to respond to the survey than older people.

groups in Lebanon (15% for 18–24 when we aimed for 33%. However, the sample for Lebanon was able to ensure 50% above and 50% below 35). Where relevant, the report outlines differences in response to questions related to gender and age.

While using mobile surveys can help to access people in areas where it is unsafe or too costly for in-person enumerators to travel, using mobile phones only to collect data may skew the responses because the modality excludes people without access to phones who may have particular characteristics that affect their experience of receiving humanitarian aid. To explore this effect, ALNAP commissioned Ground Truth Solutions to conduct a study that compared the answers given by different sub-groups of face-to-face respondents to see if they answered aid performance questions differently. The sub-groups included people who had access to phones and were willing and able to answer SMS surveys; people who had access to phones but could only answer voice surveys; and people who had no access to phones and could only answer face-to-face surveys. The study was conducted in five crisis-affected countries. At a country-level, the study found no significant and systematic differences in answers between phone users and people who did not use phones. There were some significant differences between people who were willing to complete an SMS survey and those who did not own a phone, but this only applied to some questions in some countries and the direction of the effect (i.e. more positive or more negative responses) was not consistent. It is not possible to extrapolate from that study the extent or type of bias induced by the phone sampling in the SOHS mobile phone survey but it is important to recognise that there is likely some deviation in response from the SOHS sample of respondents and the broader population of aid recipients within and across the five SOHS survey countries.

- **Modality effects**

  The use of phone versus face-to-face surveys may also induce differences in responses. Again, the precise direction of those effects is not clear. For example, some people may be more honest in face-to-face surveys, while others may be subject to social desirability bias that makes them less likely to respond negatively to another person who is physically present. The direction and size of such effects require further study, but it is feasible that the results of the SOHS recipient survey may differ somewhat to data collected in-person. Combining the aid recipient survey data with the data provided by the in-person focus group discussions conducted by The Research People during the synthesis stage of analysis may help to offset that bias in the synthesized report findings.

- **Response scale**

  The response scale for the performance questions were the same as previous SOHS reports, seeking to enable a comparison of responses over time. However, the scale offers only three responses: Yes; Partially; and No. While 'Yes' is considered a positive response to satisfaction and 'No'

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is a negative response, it is not possible to determine whether a respondent answering 'Partially' is quite close to a 'Yes' or quite close to a 'No'. The interpretation of that response will likely be different among individual respondents. As such, the majority of analysis in the SOHS report focuses on the extreme 'Yes' or 'No' categories.

Practitioner and host government survey

The practitioner and government surveys for this iteration of the SOHS were updated to ensure that the questions asked covered the areas in the study matrix, but without sacrificing the comparability of the survey over time by retaining the majority of previous performance questions and the answer scale. The answer options for the majority of performance questions was: Poor/ Fair/ Good/ Excellent.

The surveys were translated into French, Spanish and Arabic and uploaded to SurveyMonkey for dissemination. The ALNAP team prepared a dissemination plan mapping relevant networks and government officials so that the surveys could reach staff on the ground. The survey was also promoted with targeted social media campaigns. Adverts were posted on ReliefWeb and also disseminated via the ALNAP bulletin to ALNAP members. The surveys were open for five months (from July 2021 to November 2021) and were completed by 412 practitioners and 24 government representatives from a wide geographical spread. A statistical expert was commissioned to clean the data and provide descriptive statistics.

Limitations

The main limitations of this component were the response rate and the response scale. While a range of aid practitioners completed the survey, it was more challenging to obtain responses from host country governments despite several attempts to engage individuals from crisis-affected contexts. The answer scale was designed to mimic the previous SOHS surveys, however, the scale itself is somewhat challenging to interpret. While 'good' and 'excellent' can be considered positive and 'poor' is negative, it is harder to interpret 'fair' as either positive or negative or to determine how individual respondents might have interpreted that word. As such, the analysis in the report focuses predominantly on the other answer categories.

Key informant interviews (KIIs)

In addition to the KIIs within the case study countries, ALNAP conducted key informant interviews with a view to understanding the global picture of the humanitarian system. These were conducted online, using either Zoom or Microsoft Teams. This edition of the SOHS took an iterative approach to these global KIIs. The core research team conducted a set of interviews at the beginning of the research in 2020 to understand key issues in humanitarian action for the study period and to ensure the

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most relevant questions and topics for the contemporary system were included in the study matrix that would inform all other data collection. 21 people were interviewed for this inception stage. The second set of key informant interviews were conducted in late 2021 and early 2022 to explore the findings emerging from the synthesis of all other SOHS research components, thereby testing hypotheses and delving further into key topics identified in different contexts to better understand those trends at the global level. Eighty-two individuals were interviewed at that stage. In addition to the interviews directly conducted for the SOHS based on the study matrix, the analysis also drew on data collected within set of 13 interviews that were conducted in mid-2021 by research consultants to inform the background paper for ALNAP's 2021 Annual Meeting, which focused predominantly on disruptions to the humanitarian system caused by COVID-19 and the decolonising aid debate. Permission to use the findings from that set of interviews for the SOHS analysis was sought from and granted by relevant key informants.

Table 9: Breakdown of interviewees by type of agency

	Number of individuals interviewed by type
UN agency	24
IFRC/ICRC	6
National RC Societies	1
International NGO	36
National NGOs and networks	6
Academic	6
Policy research/ Think tank	10
Development banks	4
Media	1
Donor	23
Total	**117**

Interviewees included many of the key types of actor within the sector, including UN agencies, the Red Cross and Crescent Movement (RCRC), international NGOs, national NGOs and networks, donors, development banks and other multilaterals, think-tanks, and academia. These interviews did not include crisis affected populations, whose opinions were solicited within the country research and the remote phone survey (discussed above). The team also sought respondents at different levels of the system and of the organisations and bodies outlined above – from senior leaders to those working at functional, operational or coordination levels

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in humanitarian programmes. The team also used a snowball approach, asking interviewees to recommend people who had differing views or who represented a particular aspect of a discussion, or who had specific technical or geographic expertise. In all, 103 people were interviewed for the SOHS and a further 14 provided information via their interviews for the annual meeting background paper. The breakdown of interviewees by type of agency is given in Table 9.

Interviews were semi-structured and were based on a protocol derived from the common study framework. Interviewees generally took a global, rather than an operation-specific, view of the performance of the system. Interviews were conducted in English.

Constraints

The main constraints affecting the global-level key informant interviews were related to sampling and to perceptions. First, the research team sought to interview a range of different informants based on email invitations. However, prospective interviewees were easier to contact and were more likely to respond based on personal connections and relationships. Second, as with the country data collection and survey data, the information was largely perception-based. Where relevant, the researchers asked informants to provide documentation substantiating statements but that was not always possible or appropriate. The timing of some of the final interviews in early 2022 also caused some challenges – it was understandably difficult for people to make the time for interviews who were directly involved in the emerging Ukraine crisis.

Organisational mapping and analysis

Humanitarian Outcomes (HO) collected and analysed data on the composition of the humanitarian system for this report. To describe the composition of the humanitarian system, HO conducted a humanitarian organisational mapping and gathered operational statistics. The data focused on four areas:

1. Global humanitarian resources
    - Number and relative sizes of organisations
    - Organisations' humanitarian expenditure
    - Global estimate of humanitarian personnel (total, nationals, and internationals)
    - Recent changes and trends

2. Diversity and inclusion within the humanitarian system and organisations
    - Operational differences between types of organisations in compensation and pay scales
        - Globally
        - Within response contexts
    - Diversity of board and senior management
    - Inclusion of national actors in international coordinating bodies

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3. Trends in insecurity
   - Numbers, types, and locations of major attacks on aid workers
   - Numbers and types of aid worker victims
   - Trends in means of violence and perpetrator groups
   - Attacks on healthcare facilities

4. Operational presence in humanitarian response contexts
   - Numbers of organisations and personnel operating in emergencies
   - Extent of evenness or disparities in coverage (operational presence relative to numbers of people in need) within and across emergencies

For the above queries, Humanitarian Outcomes used a combination of its pre-existing datasets within its Global Database of Humanitarian Organisations (GDHO) (updated for the study period), the Aid Worker Security Database (AWSD), and external data sources.

Global humanitarian resources

For data on global humanitarian resources, the report used Humanitarian Outcomes' Global Database of Humanitarian Organisations (GDHO). The GDHO compiles basic organisational and operational information on humanitarian providers, including international non-governmental organisations (grouped by federation), national NGOs that deliver aid within their own borders, UN humanitarian agencies, and the International Red Cross and Red Crescent movement. All the organisations included the database have responded to humanitarian needs in at least one emergency context, individually or in partnership with other organisations, even if their stated mission is not strictly humanitarian.

The GDHO research team populates the database by pulling information from public sources and through direct email queries to organisations that have participated in humanitarian response efforts (identified by UN and INGO partners lists and 3Ws and OCHA FTS data), and updates the figures each year. For each organisation they collect or impute:

- Overall programme expenditure (including non-humanitarian but excluding HQ costs)
- Humanitarian expenditure (either as direct figure or percentage of OPE)
- Overall staff (non-HQ)
- International staff numbers (if applicable)
- National staff numbers
- Humanitarian staff numbers (calculated as a percentage of overall staff according to the organisation's humanitarian programming percentage)

Within this report, 'Humanitarian organisations' are classified as not-for-profit operational organisations that provide material, technical, financial or coordination assistance to people affected by humanitarian crisis. They include dual or multi mandated organisations for which

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humanitarian assistance is only a part of their remit, but do not include strictly development, religious, human rights, or advocacy organisations that do not play an operational role in humanitarian response. Among these core actors in the humanitarian system, HO differentiate between:

- UN entities: the members of the Interagency Standing Committee on Humanitarian Affairs (FAO, OCHA, UNDP, UNFPA, UNHCR, UNICEF, UN-Habitat, WFP and WHO) plus IOM and UNRWA
- International NGOs: NGOs that operate programs in one or more countries outside of their national HQ
- National NGOs: including national, local, and community-based organisations that participate in the organised humanitarian response via coordination, funding, or partnership
- International Movement of the Red Cross and Red Crescent: including the ICRC, IFRC and 192 National Societies

'Aid Workers' are employees and associated personnel of humanitarian organisations, as defined above, working in humanitarian response contexts. While 'Humanitarian staff' are classified as paid employees of humanitarian organisations undertaking humanitarian work (as opposed to development, political, advocacy, or other non-humanitarian activities.)

The GDHO records the actual published figures for most of the largest humanitarian organisations (which in turn account for the majority of humanitarian financial and staffing resources), but for smaller organisations, published data in the form of annual reports and financial statements becomes increasingly rare. For NGOs where there is only partial information available, the GDHO algorithm imputes missing data based on the organisation's historical ratios (for example, budget/staffing, national/international staff, and percent humanitarian expenditure). For organisations where there is no information, it imputes missing figures based on averages of other organisations within the same size tier. These imputations allow HO to estimate totals for the NGO sector. The imputation algorithm has recently been refined for NNGOs, adding a geographic layer. Missing data are now imputed using averages from other similarly sized organisations by subregion rather than global averages.

To estimate global humanitarian staff, HO sum the humanitarian staff numbers of the UN agencies, the International Movement of the Red Cross and Red Crescent, and the international NGOs in size tiers 1–5 (i.e., with budgets of $2 million and up). To this HO add and estimate of staff for the smallest (tier 6) organisations, which are mostly single-country or local and not continually operational in humanitarian response year upon year.

Note that the estimation of National Red Cross and Red Crescent expenditure reflects a partial change in methodology used for calculating total estimates. In the previous SOHS report, HO summed both the staff numbers and the expenditures of the National Societies (available from the IFRC database, IFRC Federation-wide Databank and Reporting System or FDRS) in all but the high-income countries, on the reasoning that those

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countries are unlikely to require an international humanitarian intervention in response to crisis, and their disproportionately large staff sizes would inflate the global estimate of humanitarian workers. This remains the most logical way to estimate the contribution of National Society staff to the global personnel figures (and we have kept this methodology for staffing estimates), but because it artificially excludes the financial contributions of the high-income country National Societies to international humanitarian response, HO have adopted the following method of estimating expenditures for this report, in consultation with the IFRC data office: Total expenditures are summed for all National Societies, less the amounts that smaller NGOs receive from the larger ones, to reduce double counting. This leaves us with a higher expenditure estimate than we have used previously, but one that is more reflective of the Movement's contributions. It comes with its own caveat however, emphasised by the IFRC, that this must still be treated as an estimate as opposed to a precise calculation since, unlike with income, FDRS does not disaggregate expenditure to record funds transferred between national societies. In other words, some double counting may still get through.

The organisations identified as the top five largest non-governmental humanitarian actors are those with the largest humanitarian expenditure. Therefore, this group does not include some organisations that have larger overall budgets, but which devote less of them to humanitarian activities (i.e., activities varyingly termed as disaster relief, crisis response, emergency response.) Where organisations did not explicitly differentiate and quantify humanitarian expenditure, the team used their descriptions of programming areas to make this determination.

Finally, despite the lengthy and painstaking process used to calculate estimates that are as close to accurate as possible, it bears reminding that these global figures are still just that: estimates. While HO have actual figures for most of the largest organisations (which represent the bulk of humanitarian resources), for the majority of NNGOs and CBOs working in humanitarian response the reverse is true, as most do not publish their data or have a web presence. As explained above, the subregion tier averages are based on a small number of organisations in each location that have provided their data, multiplied by the organisations listed as operating in the region from partnership lists, 3Ws, and various fora and rosters. However, HO believe that these averages are roughly representative and directionally correct, and the total estimates are as close as it is possible to get. They therefore repeat their general caveat from previous contributions to the SOHS that, 'while the model used produces rigorous, systematic estimates for the organisational mapping, they are still just estimates, and should be considered and cited as such.'

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Diversity and inclusion within the humanitarian systems and organisations

For data on diversity and inclusion within the humanitarian systems and organisations, HO used internal information contributed by a sample set of organisations that supported the SOHS study by providing operational data from their headquarters and from three response contexts: Afghanistan (or Iraq), Bangladesh, and South Sudan. The organisations provided their information via a standard questionnaire, which have been aggregated for the report. The sample comprised six UN humanitarian entities, six international NGOs, and 33 national NGOs.

Trends in insecurity

For data on trends in insecurity, the report used data from three sources:

- The Global Database of Humanitarian Organisations provided data to calculate aid worker attack rates and aid worker fatality rates.
- The Aid Worker Security Database provided data for Numbers of major attacks in present and prior periods; Numbers and type of aid worker victims and outcomes; Highest incident contexts; Trends in tactics and perpetrators. The database includes reports of major attacks against aid workers from 1997–present. Major attacks were defined as incidents of violence in which one or more aid workers were killed, kidnapped, or seriously injured. The database records: date, country, and specific location; number of aid workers affected (victims); gender of victims; Institutional affiliation of victims (UN/Red Cross/NGO/other); type of staff (national or international); outcome of the incident (victims killed/wounded/kidnapped); means of violence (e.g., shooting, IED, airstrike); context of attack (ambush, armed incursion, etc.).
- The Safeguarding Health in Conflict Coalition (SHCC) provided data on attacks against health care facilities. This data is collected for the SHCC by Insecurity Insights and shared through the Humanitarian Data Exchange. Data is available for years 2017–2020 in separate files. The data includes incidents reported by media, partners, and network organisations. It also includes data from the Aid Worker Security Database (AWSD) for global data from international aid agencies coordinating health care programmes; Airwars; the Union of Medical Care and Relief Organisations (UOSSM); the Syrian Network for Human Rights (SNHR) for data on Syria; the Civilian Impact Monitoring Project (CIMP) for data on Yemen; and the Armed Conflict Location and Event Data Project (ACLED). This data was used to estimate the number of health facilities destroyed or damaged in attacks.

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Operational presence in humanitarian response contexts

Data on operational presence in humanitarian response contexts was compiled from four different sources.

- OCHA's Humanitarian Response Information records operational and emergency-specific data includes Humanitarian Response Plans and Humanitarian Needs Overviews. The report used this information to estimate: 3Ws data (organisations operating by national/ subnational locations); numbers of people in need (county/province); and number of people targeted.

- OCHA's Global Humanitarian Overview website summarises information on all humanitarian responses and includes summary tables for 2015–2021. In the report, this database provided information on: funding requirements; people in need/targeted. In the report, this database informed the context on comparative needs in and resources for responses.

- The Humanitarian Data Exchange (HDX) was used to access all available excel formatted data for OCHA's country-specific pages. The report used a sample for the presence mapping from Afghanistan, CAR, Iraq, South Sudan and Yemen.

- Consultations with national humanitarian organisations and networks.

Innovation and mortality

ALNAP commissioned original studies to assess the state of data and evidence on mortality in humanitarian settings and the impact of innovation funding in the humanitarian system over the past decade. The mortality work was conducted by Francesco Checchi at LSHTM. They conducted a review of availability of mortality information in activated humanitarian crises, an exploration of methodological options for estimation, and a quantitative study using generalised propensity score methods to estimate the impact of the presence of humanitarian assistance on excess mortality using datasets from north-east Nigeria, Somalia and South Sudan. The innovation study was conducted by Catherine Komuhangi, Hazel Mugo, Lydia Tanner and Ian Gray. The research began with a desk review that included 43 papers that highlighted the major events and trends that have shaped humanitarian innovation in the past decade. They also collated data from eight funders, via direct funder submissions and desk-based searches of publicly available monitoring and evaluation data. Four case studies were also produced and incorporated into the report. More methodological details for these components are provided in the individual study reports.

Synthesis of secondary data

Evaluation synthesis

The evaluation synthesis is designed to condense and synthesise findings from the large number of evaluations conducted throughout the international humanitarian system each year, revealing a broader picture of overall system level performance. It summarises and highlights findings of evaluations undertaken between January 2018 and October 2021.

ALNAP's M&E research team compiled documents from the ALNAP database of evaluations (HELP library), as well as other public sources, and recorded the findings for each using a specific analysis framework designed for the 2022 evaluation synthesis. The framework retained the same basic structure as the analysis matrix used in the SOHS 2018 report including a rating system to weight evaluations for inclusion based on evaluation quality and relevance. The evaluation synthesis for the 2022 SOHS added an additional dimension by also weighing evaluations for inclusion with a greater emphasis on the scope of the evaluation and the 'generalisability' of the evaluation's findings. The 2022 SOHS report also had a greater focus on specific thematic evaluation analysis, by grouping select evaluations further into 'thematic evaluation clusters' using purposive sampling. The thematic clusters were chosen based on the overall parameters and emerging thematic topics judged most relevant for the humanitarian community and SOHS 2022 report, using an iterative design approach. Thematic evaluation clusters included:

- COVID-19 & humanitarian assistance
- The HDP nexus
- Innovation
- Localisation of humanitarian action and barriers to localisation, etc

Although the analysis was mostly qualitative, the framework helped to ensure the greatest possible degree of comparability across the findings, while clearly defining the thematic areas for purposive sampling.

The evaluation synthesis included the following two steps:

Step 1

Categorising and coding the (mostly qualitative) findings and recommendations from a selected purposive sample of evaluation reports reviewed in an evaluation synthesis analytical framework. The framework and evaluation scoring system built on protocol used in SOHS 2015 and 2018 for the evaluation synthesis, as was also informed by UNEG, OECD DAC and other guidance on evaluation quality. The scoring system included the following fields:

Classification
- ID#
- Evaluation title
- Year

- Evaluator
- Published/unpublished
- Quality score
- Commissioning agency
- Evaluation type
- Theme, sector, category, etc.
- Scope and timeframe
- Subject area

Scoring criteria
- Evaluation quality
- Relevance of the evaluation to key topics in the SOHS 2022
- Scope of the evaluation & generalisability

Thematic topics
- COVID-19 & humanitarian assistance
- The HDP nexus
- Food insecurity & famine
- Forced displacement
- Localisation of humanitarian action and barriers to localisation, etc

Over 500 humanitarian evaluations were reviewed for inclusion in the 2022 SOHS analysis. The main selection of evaluations was completed taking into consideration the following three elements: (1) the scoring criteria (ie the average score across the three criteria); (2) evaluations that look at the defined thematic areas, particularly the HDP nexus and COVID-19 (that were prioritised) and (3) how representative the evaluations are of the ALNAP membership (a balance between evaluations from UN, NGO, bilateral donor, Red Cross, etc). The three considerations were used to rank the evaluations to be coded by priority level. Coding continued on an ongoing basis until approximately 130 evaluations were coded (saturation reached). The ranking system also allowed the team to continue to add and score additional evaluations uploaded to ALNAP's HELP library database towards the end of the research period.

Step 2
Synthesis of findings against each indicator in the SOHS Study Matrix/ analysis framework. The synthesis findings were presented in a structure based on the analytical framework drawn from the evaluations' key components (findings, conclusions, recommendations). The synthesis analysis took into account the strength of evidence for each finding on the basis of number, breadth and quality of evaluations supporting it.

The ALNAP team's work included the following:
1. Evaluation synthesis analytical framework.
2. Complete coding framework for MaxQDA (including emerging codes).
3. Evaluation selection criteria, scoring matrix and method for collecting evaluations.

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4. Two-page mid-point summary and short PowerPoint of findings to date.
5. Thematic analysis on a wide variety of key themes included in the SOHS 2022.
6. Final evaluation synthesis analysis (Word document following outline of 2022 SOHS).
7. Findings and key messages organised according to the main research framework and questions, to provide rich analysis in all areas of the SOHS.
8. Standalone evaluation synthesis publications on COVID-19 and the HDP nexus (forthcoming).

Each evaluation included in the Evaluation Scoring Matrix for potential inclusion in the evaluation synthesis was given an evidence score. This was on a scale of 1–3, with 3 representing the strongest evidence. The scores were based on the judgement of the researchers against three parameters, each with its own criteria:

- **Evidence depth and relevance:** the depth and extent of relevant analysis in the report ('relevant' here means that it relates to the themes highlighted in the coding system – see below). The related criteria include whether the work appears to add significantly to the existing evidence base. The score also relates to the subject and extent to which the evaluation covers key issues to be highlighted in the 2022 SOHS report.
- **Evidence quality:** the quality of the analysis and the related evidence base. Here we will consider, in particular, how well argued and evidenced the evaluations are, and the rigour of the methods and approach, amount of data, triangulation and other quality parameters (see quality scoring note).
- **Evaluation scope:** multi-sectoral, joint evaluations, response-wide evaluations, policy evaluations and other forms of evaluations that cover a wider variety and number of topics and high-order topics (i.e. evaluations with a greater potential for generalisability) will be weighted more heavily.

Each of the three parameters were scored 1–3, with the overall value score being the average of the three scores. Evaluations with the highest scores were ranked for priority to be included in the purposive sampling and were coded against the SOHS indicator framework in MAXQDA.

Following the general selection of evaluations for coding against the SOHS 2022 analytical framework, selected evaluations were clustered into thematic evaluation clusters for the purpose of further analysis. The thematic clusters allowed the research team to further explore key topics in more depth. As in the previous SOHS report, the process was both inductive and iterative.

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Limitations

Attempts to conduct a comparative review of evidence from humanitarian evaluations across the sector are hampered by several factors. One is the variability in the object of evaluation: most of the evaluation material is response and organisation specific. Related to this is the difficulty of controlling for contextual variables. A third factor is the variability in the methods of investigation adopted in the evaluations, and the way in which results are recorded. Most of the available evidence is qualitative; where quantitative results are available, the factors noted above tend to make comparison difficult or impossible. Finally, as noted in the 2018 SOHS report, the sample is likely to biased towards particular contexts and some types of organisations may tend to have evaluations that score consistently higher on quality than others, making representative sampling based on objective criteria challenging. The time lag in conducting evaluations is also a challenge, which is particularly marked in relation to COVID-19. This relates to the ongoing humanitarian impact of COVID-19 both in terms of humanitarian response, but also on the ability of organisations to continue to conduct high quality evaluations. Due to this, ALNAP's M&E team continued to code COVID-19 evaluations, beyond the formal study period and continued analysis of these evaluations to capture emerging evidence that could be feed back into the SOHS 2022 report immediately before the final publication deadline.

Financial analysis

The analyses on humanitarian funding and people in need were compiled by Development Initiatives (DI). Figures in the report are presented with methodological points where they are important to understand the analysis and a more complete methodology outlining the process and relevant caveats are presented in this Annex for all figures where some form of original calculation or interpretation were required.

Total international humanitarian assistance

DI's calculation of total international humanitarian assistance (IHA) is the sum of that from private donors and from government donors and EU institutions. Total IHA for governments and EU institutions is compiled using DI's approach developed for the Global Humanitarian Assistance report, which takes the sum of:

- 'Official' humanitarian assistance (OECD DAC donors)
- International humanitarian assistance from OECD DAC donors to countries not eligible for ODA from the FTS
- International humanitarian assistance from government donors outside the OECD DAC using data from the FTS

DI's 'official' humanitarian assistance calculation comprises:

- The bilateral humanitarian expenditure of OECD DAC members, as reported to the OECD DAC database under Table 1
- The multilateral humanitarian assistance of OECD DAC members

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The multilateral humanitarian assistance of OECD DAC members consists of three elements.

- The unearmarked ODA contributions of DAC members to 10 key multilateral agencies engaged in humanitarian response: the Food and Agriculture Organization, IOM, the UN Development Programme, UNFPA, UNHCR, UN OCHA, UNICEF, UNRWA, WFP and WHO, as reported to the OECD DAC under Table 2a and the CRS. We do not include all ODA to the Food and Agriculture Organization, IOM, the UN Development Programme, UNFPA, UNICEF, WHO and WFP but apply a percentage to take into account that these agencies also have a 'development' mandate. These shares are calculated using data on humanitarian expenditure as a proportion of the total received directly from each multilateral agency.
- The ODA contributions of DAC members to some other multilateral organisations (beyond those already listed) that, although not primarily humanitarian-oriented, do report a level of humanitarian aid to OECD DAC Table 2a. DI does not include all reported ODA to these multilateral organisations but just the humanitarian share of this.
- Contributions to the UN Central Emergency Response Fund that are not reported under DAC members' bilateral humanitarian assistance. DI takes this data directly from the UN Central Emergency Response Fund website.

When reporting on the official humanitarian assistance of individual OECD DAC countries that contribute to the EU budget, an imputed calculation of their humanitarian assistance channelled through the EU institutions is included, based on their ODA contributions to the EU institutions. DI does not include this in total international humanitarian assistance and response calculations to avoid double counting.

DI's estimate for IHA from governments in 2021 is derived from preliminary DAC donor reporting on humanitarian aid grants and multilateral ODA.

IHA by recipient country is calculated based on FTS data to be able to also analyse 2021 data, which will become available in the OECD DAC CRS in December 2022 or later. FTS data was downloaded 13 April 2022.

Private humanitarian funding

DI requests financial information directly from humanitarian delivery agencies (including NGOs, multilateral agencies and the Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement) on their income and expenditure to create a standardised dataset. Where direct data collection is not possible, DI uses publicly available annual reports and audited accounts. For the most recent year, the dataset includes:

- A large sample of NGOs that form part of representative NGO alliances and umbrella organisations such as Save the Children International, and several large international NGOs operating independently.

- Private contributions to IOM, UNHCR, UNICEF, UNRWA, WFP and WHO.
- The International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies and the International Committee of the Red Cross.

DI's private funding calculation comprises an estimate of total private humanitarian income for all NGOs, and the private humanitarian income reported by UN agencies with available data, the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies and the International Committee of the Red Cross. To estimate the total private humanitarian income of NGOs globally, DI calculates the annual proportion of total funding received that the NGOs in DI's dataset represent of NGOs reporting to UN OCHA FTS. The total private humanitarian income reported to DI by the NGOs in DI's dataset is then scaled up accordingly.

Data is collected annually, and new data for previous years may be added retrospectively. Due to limited data availability, detailed analysis, for instance on the source of funding, covers the period 2016 to 2020.

DI's 2021 private funding calculation is an estimate based on data on eight organisations that, combined, receive a large share of global private humanitarian funding year on year, pending data from DI's full dataset. These are: Médecins Sans Frontières, Plan International, Catholic Relief Services, the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies, the Danish Refugee Council, UNHCR, American Near East Refugee Air and World Relief. DI calculates the average share that these eight organisations' contributions represent in the private funding figure for the five previous years (50%, ranging between 47% and 52% over 2016–2020) and use this to scale up the private funding figure gathered from these eight organisations to arrive at an estimated total for 2021.

ODA funding from Multilateral Development Banks to humanitarian recipients

MDBs include the following organisations which report the OECD DAC CRS:
- African Development Bank
- African Development Fund
- Asian Development Bank
- Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank
- Caribbean Development Bank
- Council of Europe Development Bank
- Development Bank of Latin America
- Inter-American Development Bank
- Islamic Development Bank
- European Bank for Reconstruction and Development
- International Investment Bank
- IDB Invest
- International Development Association

- International Bank for Reconstruction and Development
- International Finance Corporation

The largest 20 humanitarian recipients each year are based on the total of ODA disbursements by country for all flows under humanitarian purpose codes.

Note that the figures are total ODA disbursements across all sectors and only include funding reported to the OECD DAC Creditor Reporting System (CRS); some MDBs do not report to the CRS, and others only report partially, some like the EBRD also report their financial contributions as other official flows (OOFs), a flow type not included in this analysis due to lack of concessionality. The majority of ODA from MDBs to countries experiencing crisis is reported as development assistance and is not assigned to humanitarian sector codes. This means that funding in this figure cannot be called 'humanitarian.'

Overall requirements and funding for UN-coordinated appeals

The terms 'UN-coordinated appeals' is used to describe all humanitarian response plans and appeals wholly or jointly coordinated by UN OCHA or UNHCR, including strategic response plans, humanitarian response plans, flash appeals, joint response plans, regional refugee response plans and other plans also tracked by FTS.

Data is in current prices to accurately present the relationship of funding against requirements each year and over time.

Appeals fund and requirements data was extracted from the UNOCHA FTS, UNHCR Refugee Funding Tracker and 3RP dashboards:

- 3RP funding dashboards and annual reports were used for the Syria Regional Refugee and Resilience Plan (3RP), where available (2018–2021).
- UNHCR Refugee Funding Tracker data was used for all other RRPs and for the Syria 3RP prior to 2018.
- FTS data was used for all other response plans, including HRPs, flash appeals, Bangladesh Joint Response Plans and Venezuela RMRPs and other plans.

Requirements and funding per technical sector in UN-coordinated appeals

Total funding is based on funding flows by sector to appeals using data from UNOCHA FTS. Total requirements are based on appeal requirements by sector also using data from UNOCHA FTS.

Data is in current prices to accurately present the relationship of funding against requirements each year and over time.

For funding flows to multiple clusters, DI broke those up evenly to each of the reported clusters. This is a simplifying assumption, as the breakdown of funding across the multiple clusters is not provided in the reporting.

FTS opts not to break up this funding in the absence of that information. However, in 2021, around US$2.9 billion of funding were directed to multiple clusters, meaning the exclusion of all that funding would underrepresent proportions met.

Non-standard sectors are aligned to UNOCHA global clusters based on DI mapping. This to avoid inconsistencies of, e.g., the same field cluster being mapped to different global clusters across response plans. Because technical sectors are aligned to FTS's global clusters based on DI mapping, totals do not match FTS overview figures.

Total funding for cash and voucher assistance

The global estimate of humanitarian assistance provided in the form of cash and voucher assistance (CVA) in 2021 is based on data collected from 27 organisations that implement humanitarian CVA. The data collection is carried out by DI with support from the CALP Network. Data is collected on:

- Overall programming costs of implementing CVA, including transfer values.
- Transfer values of CVA, disaggregated by cash and voucher assistance if possible.
- Sub-grants provided or received from other implementing agencies for CVA. This information is used to avoid double-counting.

The survey data is complemented with data from FTS for organisations that did not respond to the survey, including all funding to projects that mostly or largely consist of CVA as per their description.

To calculate an approximate estimate for the percentage of funding for humanitarian cash and voucher assistance out of total IHA for 2018–2021, DI took the total global value of humanitarian CVA overall programming costs that is part of the total international humanitarian response and divided it by total IHA provided by public and private donors.

Populations in need, targeted and expected number reached in UN-coordinated appears

UNOCHA's HPC API was scraped for caseload data for all appeals with available data. It should be noted that:

- Data are for HRPs only due to data availability. A limited number of HRPs are missing caseload data before 2021.
- Data for RRPs and Flash Appeals are excluded due to limited data availability for numbers of people targeted and expected reached for these appeal types.
- Gender, age, and other disaggregations are not available due to lack of data consistency and availability across appeal data. Just five appeals in 2021 have some level of caseload disaggregation available as of early 2022, and these disaggregations are not standardised.
- Expected reached caseload data for El Salvador, Honduras, and Guatemala are not final, and are not shown or included in calculations.

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Funding versus requirements per person reached

UNOCHA's HPC API was scraped for caseload data for all appeals which had it.

Funding and requirements for HRPs were scraped from UNOCHA's FTS. It should be noted that:

- Data are for HRPs only due to data availability. A limited number of HRPs are missing complete caseload data in 2021.
- Expected reached caseload data for El Salvador, Honduras, and Guatemala are not final, and are not shown or included in calculations.
- Data for RRPs and Flash Appeals are excluded due to limited data availability for numbers of people targeted and expected reached for these appeal types. In addition, not all RRPs are hosted by UNOCHA.
- Data for persons expected reached does not exist before 2020.
- Gender, age, and other disaggregations are not available due to lack of data consistency and availability across appeal data. Just 5 appeals in 2021 have some level of caseload disaggregation available as of early 2022, and these disaggregations are not standardised.

Earmarked funding

'Earmarked' funding comprises all non-core ('other') funding directed to multilateral organisations. Unearmarked funding may include softly earmarked contributions where this data was provided, for instance by region, to better reflect progress against the Grand Bargain commitment of providing more unearmarked and softly earmarked funding. DI's definitions of different levels of earmarking used in the data collection reflect those in the annex of the Grand Bargain document.[3]

DI's calculation of earmarking to nine UN agencies – the Food and Agriculture Organization, the International Organization for Migration (IOM), the UN International Children's Emergency Fund (UNICEF), the UN Development Programme, UNHCR, UN OCHA, UNRWA, the World Food Programme (WFP) and the World Health Organization (WHO) – is primarily based on data provided directly to DI by each agency based on its internal reporting or extracted from annual reports.

Funding to local and national actors

- DI's analysis of international humanitarian funding to local and national actors draws on data from FTS and from UN OCHA's CBPF Data Hub. FTS data is coded by DI according to a set of organisational categories provided below. CBPF data uses the funds' own classifications of recipients that might differ from the definitions below. DI's coding process relies on the following categories of local and national non-state actors and national and subnational state actors, as defined by the Inter-Agency Standing Committee Humanitarian Financing Task

3   Grand Bargain, 2016. The Grand Bargain – a shared commitment to better serve people in need. Available at: https://interagencystandingcommittee.org/system/files/hftt_localisation_marker_definitions_paper_24_january_2018.pdf.

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Team in its Localisation Marker Definitions Paper.[4] National NGOs/ civil society organisations (CSOs): NGOs/CSOs operating nationally in the aid-recipient country in which they are headquartered, working in multiple subnational regions, and not affiliated to an international NGO. This category can also include national faith-based organisations.

- Local NGOs/CSOs: NGOs/CSOs operating in a specific, geographically defined, subnational area of an aid-recipient country, without affiliation to an international NGO/CSO. This category can also include community-based organisations and local faith-based organisations.

- Red Cross/Red Crescent National Societies: national societies based in and operating within their own aid-recipient countries.

- Local and national private sector organisations: organisations run by private individuals or groups as a means of enterprise for profit, based in and operating within their own aid-recipient countries and not affiliated to an international private sector organisation.

- National governments: national government agencies, authorities, line ministries and state-owned institutions in aid-recipient countries, such as national disaster management agencies. This category can also include federal or regional government authorities.

- Local governments: subnational government entities in aid-recipient countries exercising some degree of devolved authority over a specifically defined geographic constituency, such as local/ municipal authorities.

Direct funding to the IFRC, ICRC and national societies operating internationally is recorded as funding to the 'international RCRC movement', as DI was unable to trace how funding would be shared between those actors and domestic national societies.

Depending on the analysis in this report, the emphasis is on direct funding only or on both direct and indirect funding, which are defined as follows:

- Direct funding includes all funding to local and national actors directly from the original donor entity, e.g., governments and private donors. It therefore only draws on FTS data that is marked as 'new money' to the humanitarian system and represents first-level funding.

- Indirect funding includes all funding to local and national actors from intermediaries, which could be pooled funds, NGOs, UN agencies or other institutions in receipt of humanitarian funding. It draws on allocations data from CBPFs of funding provided by those funds or as sub-grants under projects funded by CBPFs and on indirect funding as reported to FTS.

4   Inter-Agency Standing Committee Humanitarian Financing Task Team, 2018. HFTT localisation marker definitions paper 24. Available at: https://interagencystandingcommittee. org/humanitarian-financing-task-team/documents-public/hftt-localisation-marker-definitions-paper-24.

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When combining data from CBPFs Data Hub and FTS, all CBPF allocations reported to FTS are excluded to avoid double-counting.

It should be noted that with the exception of CBPFs, timely, comprehensive and disaggregated reporting on indirect funding to local and national actors to FTS or other publicly accessible databases continues to be lacking. Improved reporting practices by UN agencies in particular and INGOs of funding they provide to local and national actors would greatly improve analyses on the progress of localisation in the humanitarian system. Their inconsistent reporting makes it difficult to estimate exact volumes of indirect flows and therefore to fully understand the direct versus indirect funding to local and national actors.

Funding sources outside IHA

Government revenues for Bangladesh and Ethiopia are provided in terms of their fiscal years. Government revenue data for Bangladesh for 2019 is preliminary and for 2020 is an estimate, while data for DRC, Ethiopia, Yemen and Lebanon includes estimates from IMF staff and national authorities.

ODA towards humanitarian aid comprises gross ODA disbursements towards sector '700 Humanitarian Aid' from 'Official Donors' as reported in the OECD CRS.

ODA excluding humanitarian aid comprises gross ODA disbursements towards all ODA sectors from 'Official Donors' as reported in the OECD CRS, excluding ODA towards sector '700: Humanitarian Aid'.

Peacekeeping financing values for DRC and Lebanon for missions UNIFIL (United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon) and MONUSCO (United Nations Organization Stabilization Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo) have been transformed from financial year (July[en dash]June) to calendar year. Peacekeeping financing values for Lebanon consist of the combined values for peacekeeping operation UNIFIL and special political mission UNSCOL (United Nations Special Coordinator for Lebanon), the peacekeeping financing values for Yemen comprise the combined values for UNMHA (UN Mission to Support the Hudaydah Agreement) and OSESGY (Office of the Special Envoy of the Secretary-General for Yemen) and there is a possibility of double counting for shared costs across the two missions in each of the two countries.

Data on remittances for Yemen is not available.

All data is in USD and constant 2020 prices. For Lebanon the deflator used for non-grant government revenue and remittances is based on the DEC effective exchange rate. Numbers have been rounded to the nearest tenth.

Literature review

Unlike previous editions, the literature review was designed as a core research component from the beginning of the study and covered a broad range of topics. For the 2018 edition, the literature review was used mainly

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to provide information on a small number of specific areas not captured fully by other means in the Study Matrix after data collection for other components had commenced or finished. In the 5th edition, the literature review was used to gather documented evidence that would not be included in the evaluation synthesis for a broad range of topics across the study matrix with the recognition that different types of evidence can shed light on those topics.

Selection of literature to review

The literature review focused on a broad range of topics identified at the inception phase and others added after the final data meeting following the identification of areas where hypotheses required further testing with additional evidence. Topics included:

- Coordination
- Counter-terrorism and corruption
- Cash transfers and vouchers
- Efficiency
- Global shifts and crises
- Health system support
- Humanitarian access, international law and humanitarian principles
- Impact of humanitarian system
- Inclusion
- International development and crisis prevention
- Locally led humanitarian action
- Needs assessments
- Other forms of humanitarian assistance
- Protection
- Prevention of sexual exploitation and abuse

The reviewer from the ALNAP team constructed search strings for each of the topics in collaboration with the research co-leads. They used these to search in several search engines, including google scholar, the ALNAP HELP Library, and EBSCO. Search results were limited to work published in 2018–22 and concerning current or recent humanitarian responses. Evaluations were excluded but both grey and academic literature were included. The literature review component began in Spring 2021, with the bulk of the topics being covered prior to Autumn 2021 and final topics, identified during the component analysis meeting, completed in Spring 2022.

In addition to the search engines, the reviewer also searched relevant policy and practice websites, including:

- Humanitarian Policy Group and Humanitarian Practice Network
- Groupe URD
- Feinstein International Center (Tufts)
- Refugee Studies Centre
- Chatham House

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- OCHA
- IRIN
- Other relevant publications, including NGO policy papers

From the search process described above, the researchers identified around 20 key sources to inform a thematic synthesis on the list of topics above. Where relevant, the reviewer also considered forward and backward review of citations of included documents. In total, over 250 documents were reviewed.

Analysis of literature

The synthesis process involved several elements:

1. Collating the material according to related findings on common topics.
2. Identifying findings that appeared to be broadly common across a range of evidence from the source material.
3. Identifying gaps and contradictions.

Constraints and limitations

The nature and availability of the evidence on different topics was variable, although the reviewer attempted to focus on research with high quality methods and considered academic peer review data where it was available and relevant. As with most literature review processes, there was also scope for reviewer bias in assessing the quality of evidence or determining the most useful information to include.

Synthesis of data from components

Using approaches common to mixed method studies,[5] the SOHS research team identifies general trends and findings through frequency, weighted by quality. For example, evaluations are assessed and included/excluded in the synthesis on the basis of their quality, and claims made by key informants in country-level research are triangulated with other perspectives. At the level of each research component, research leads identify findings by the volume of data points – for example, findings supported by a minimum number of evaluations or KIIs.

The SOHS research team then synthesised the findings from each component, prioritising those that are supported by two or more components – in cases where findings from separate components contradict one another, more follow-up and investigation was carried out to understand the reason for the discrepancy.

To synthesise such a large volume of variable data, the SOHS used a shared coding framework across the research components, and employed hypothesis testing and an iterative approach in the analysis

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5   Heyvaert et al Mixed methods research synthesis: definition, framework, and potential; Yin 2013 Case study Research: Design and Methods 5th edition.

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process. For the latter, ALNAP organised meetings throughout the data collection and analysis process, where emerging data was shared and gaps identified – through this, hypotheses were developed and further data collection was targeted to confirm or disconfirm these.

Constraints and limitations

A cross-cutting constraint for the entire report is that identifying general trends and findings for so many humanitarian responses over a four-year period is inherently challenging, particularly given the absence of samples that can truly be considered 'representative', rather than illustrative, of the entirety of humanitarian action. Even when using a shared indicator framework, it is difficult to avoid the problem of data comparability that is common to mixed method approaches.[6]

The foreword for the 2010 SOHS pilot study noted that 'Almost as important as what the report says, is what it does not say'.[7] Pervasive data gaps continue to limit this report's ability to provide clear, definitive assessments on key performance issues – such as how many people are reached with humanitarian assistance each year, the degree to which needs are covered, whether humanitarian action saves lives and protects people from harm, or how cost-effective programmes and mechanisms are. For this edition of the report ALNAP went to greater lengths than previously to locate or generate this data, but it is clear that addressing these gaps requires more resources and effort than can be achieved for a single research project, even one as long-running and large in scope as the SOHS.

There have been repeated calls on the system to improve its evidence base, in each edition of the SOHS as well as by many others in the system.[8] The significant burdens stretching limited humanitarian funding described in this report are likely to mean that knowledge production, monitoring and evaluation and improving the quality and accessibility of data will continue to be deprioritised. This is at the system's own peril. Better evidence could not only guide more effective improvements to performance, but also help to demonstrate the system's value in the context of a potentially contracting global economy and the rising costs of conflicts and disasters.

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6   Heyvaert et al. 2013.

7   ALNAP 2010, The State of the Humanitarian System. Assessing Performance and Progress. A pilot Study. ALNAP/ODI. p.5.

8   E.g.: Carden, F., Hanley, T., Paterson, A. (2021) From knowing to doing: evidence use in the humanitarian sector. Elrha: London.

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ALNAP
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