

ABOUT SOHS 2026

Worldwide, a broad range of institutions and individuals undertake humanitarian action – that is, providing assistance and protection to save lives, prevent and reduce suffering, and preserve people’s dignity in crises arising from armed conflict, climate or geological hazards and other causes. This ecosystem of support operates both at home (for example, encompassing governments, national disaster-management agencies, survivors and their communities, religious groups, the private sector, local/national non-governmental organisations (NGOs), local civil society groups) and abroad (for example, encompassing family, friends and diaspora groups).

The **international humanitarian system** is an additional, supportive layer of this ecosystem – and the layer that The State of the Humanitarian System (SOHS) assesses. For the purposes of this report, we define 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.

The 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 identifies with the goals, norms and principles of humanitarianism.ⁱ These actors – which may be funded by governments or private individuals/entities – include local, national and international NGOs conducting humanitarian activities, United Nations humanitarian agencies, the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement, domestic government agencies and authorities, regional intergovernmental agencies, multilateral agencies, government aid agencies and other government offices that provide humanitarian funding and coordination.

This working definition sets the scope for this report, albeit one that can be contested. There is limited clarity and consensus on the borders of what counts as humanitarian action versus longer-term development assistance, on which actors count as local versus global, and on the extent to which relevant principles are

ⁱ These principles have traditionally been considered to include humanity, impartiality, neutrality and independence. [Chapter 3.2](#) discusses more about their interpretation and implementation.



enacted that make these actions 'humanitarian'. To better understand the role of international humanitarian action, it is essential to recognise the importance of locally led action and the range of aforementioned sources of support available to people affected by crisis.

Similarly, the system's engagement in fragile contexts and the growth of protracted crises requires us to consider its connections with development and peace actors. In this report, we aim to recognise these porous margins and better understand the efforts of broader actors in contexts affected by crisis. However, the SOHS focuses on holding the international humanitarian system to account. While it explores the effectiveness of the international system's engagement with other entities, as well as how they can influence the international humanitarian system, it does not assess the performance of those entities.

RESEARCH SCOPE AND OBJECTIVES

This sixth edition of the *SOHS* assesses the size, shape and performance of the international humanitarian system between January 2022 and December 2025. It also identifies key trends that have emerged over the 20 years since the first SOHS study period began.

Its three primary research objectives (as in previous editions) are:

1. To describe the architecture of the international humanitarian system: What were the levels and trends in funding flows? What was the distribution of human and financial resources? What were the numbers/types of agencies involved? How has the composition of that system and its borders changed?
2. To assess the humanitarian caseload: How many humanitarian responses took place in the study period? What were the locations and types of emergencies? How did the humanitarian system identify and reach people in need of humanitarian assistance?
3. To assess performance: How did the humanitarian system perform, both against key challenges in this period and against Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) criteria, at the programme/project level and the policy/structure level? How well did the humanitarian system meet the expectations of people affected by crisis? How did this period compare with previous periods? How has the humanitarian system's navigation of a changing operational environment set it up for the future?



To address the system's performance against some of the key challenges in this period (and building on the approach adopted in the previous edition, the 2022 SOHS), this report is structured as follows.

PART 1: Introduction

- About the 2026 SOHS
- What have been the crises and global shifts?

PART 2: Performance of the international humanitarian system

- How has the humanitarian system prioritised in a period of constrained funding? ([Chapter 1](#))
- What works and at what cost? Effectiveness and efficiency under constraints ([Chapter 2](#))
- Has the system contributed to protecting people affected by crisis and its principles in a new period of geopolitics? ([Chapter 3](#))
- Is the humanitarian system sharing power or reshaping it? ([Chapter 4](#))
- How is the system learning and adapting to the changing nature of crisis? ([Chapter 5](#))

PART 3: Conclusion

- How has the system performed in this period?
- Is the system fit for the future?



Box 1: SOHS performance criteria

Since the creation of the first *SOHS*, ALNAP has used the OECD evaluation criteria, originally developed for evaluating development assistance, as a basis to provide a consistent assessment framework across different editions. The *SOHS* performance criteria are adapted from the OECD criteria designed to be used in humanitarian settings.¹

ALNAP launched new guidance on the OECD criteria for humanitarian agencies in September 2025.² Given that this was towards the end of the period covered in this report, we used the same criteria as in previous editions of the *SOHS*.

- **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 recipients' most important needs (as judged by both humanitarian professionals and people affected by crisis).
- **Accountability and participation:*** The degree to which people affected by crisis can hold actors within the international humanitarian system accountable and 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 consistency with humanitarian principles and comply with international humanitarian law (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, particularly governments and civil society organisations.
- **Connectedness:** The degree to which the international humanitarian system coordinates with development, resilience, risk-reduction and peace-building systems.
- **Impact:** The degree to which international humanitarian action produces (intentionally or unintentionally) positive or negative longer-term outcomes for people and societies affected by crisis.

* These are traditionally assessed under other OECD criteria, which we have pulled out to examine in more detail for this report.



RESEARCH COMPONENTS AND METHODS

Similar to previous *SOHS* reports, data gathering on and analysis of the system's performance largely focused on the adapted OECD criteria presented in [Box 1](#). Specific research questions were also informed by early focus group discussions (FGDs) with people affected by crisis in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC), Myanmar and the border of Ukraine in Poland; by consultations with 60 senior policy-makers and practitioners; and by discussions with our in-country research partners.

The report attempts to strike a balance between describing the past four years and providing findings that are relevant to a system facing a new constrained funding environment and a shifting geopolitical context since significant cuts in 2025. It also takes the opportunity to examine nearly 20 years of evidence across six editions of the *SOHS* to consider the extent to which the system has learned and changed over time and whether it is fit for an uncertain future.

Our findings are drawn from 10 research components to enable triangulation of different data sources and to build a detailed picture of system size, shape and performance: a combination of primary data collection and secondary data synthesis. Detailed methodologies for each component can be found in the accompanying [Methodology](#) document.



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Primary data collection and analysis

Country-level research

Local research partners conducted and analysed FGDs, key informant interviews (KIIs), and collections of context-specific documentation and observations in Afghanistan, DRC, Myanmar, Palestine, Sudan and on the Poland–Ukraine border. These contexts were chosen to allow us to investigate key thematic issues and challenges that arose in the study period. These findings are also presented in separate country reports, authored by local research partners, which are available [here](#).



Aid-recipient survey

ALNAP worked with consultants to conduct a survey of 5,438 aid recipients in five crisis contexts (DRC, Haiti, Myanmar, Niger and Sudan) using computer-assisted telephone interviewing, computer-assisted web interviewing and computer-assisted personal interviewing to elicit their assessment of humanitarian performance. These contexts were chosen to provide some crossover and triangulation with the qualitative country studies, as well as more variation in regions and crisis types represented.

Practitioner survey

ALNAP conducted a global web-based survey, with 451 completed responses, to elicit the perceptions of humanitarian practitioners and host-government representatives on humanitarian performance. The survey was available in Arabic, English, French, Indonesian, Spanish and Ukrainian.

Global KIs

ALNAP conducted interviews with humanitarian practitioners and thought leaders to assess performance, identify important trends and address key evidence gaps.

Organisational mapping and analysis

ALNAP commissioned a consultant to analyse data collected from individual organisations and through desk-based review to estimate the number of humanitarian staff and organisations worldwide.

Thematic research on prioritisation

ALNAP commissioned two original studies to explore the process of prioritisation and its effects following funding cuts by the United States in 2025. The first synthesised global KIs, an online anonymous consultation and a document review to track system and organisational responses to the cuts. The second presented two case studies of the effects in Mali and South Sudan, drawing on FGDs with people affected by crisis and interviews with local and international humanitarian practitioners and national governments. ALNAP also commissioned two briefing papers.

Synthesis of secondary data

Evaluation synthesis

ALNAP commissioned a consultant to synthesise findings from humanitarian evaluations published between January 2022 and October 2025. From over 1,000 humanitarian evaluations, a shortlist of 420 was reviewed for inclusion, of which over 110 were chosen for more in-depth analysis.



Financial analysis

ALNAP conducted an analysis of data on public and private humanitarian financing.

Thematic study on the humanitarian–development–peace nexus and climate financing

ALNAP worked with a consultant to explore interactions between flows of humanitarian funding and development, peace and climate financing to contexts affected by crisis.

Literature review

ALNAP worked with a consultant to review over 300 research reports published within the study period on a set of 16 themes related to humanitarian policy and practice.

ENDNOTES

- 1 Beck, T. (2006) Evaluating Humanitarian Action Using the OECD-DAC Criteria: An ALNAP Guide for Humanitarian Agencies. London: ALNAP/ODI Global. <https://alnnap.org/help-library/resources/evaluating-humanitarian-action-using-the-oecd-dac-criteria/>
- 2 ALNAP (2025) Adapting the OECD Criteria for the Evaluation of Humanitarian Action. An ALNAP Guide. London: ALNAP/ODI Global. <https://alnnap.org/humanitarian-learning/monitoring-evaluation/updating-our-oecd-dac-guidance/>