

CHAPTER 1.3

ORGANISATIONAL DECISIONS AND SYSTEM-LEVEL FUNCTIONS

'It was less prioritisation and more just stemming leaks caused by cutting of funds.'

– Representative of an international organisation

Humanitarian actors made tough decisions in this period on how to prioritise organisational and system-level roles and structures. The sudden financial shock in 2025 caused large-scale cuts to experienced staff, with local organisations the worst hit by funding freezes, cuts and uncertainty. The speed and scale of the cuts meant many organisations moved quickly, without longer-term strategic thinking or inter-organisational coordination and complementarity. Meaningful engagement with staff, local organisations and people affected by crisis was not employed effectively in decisions at organisational or system levels. The Humanitarian Reset prioritised specific mechanisms for coordinated response in a reduced system, but several local and international actors pushed for a more wholesale reconfiguring of the international system or alternative locally led forms of support. Data infrastructures lost funding, catalysing calls to protect the system's ability to monitor and anticipate future needs. The narrowing of the humanitarian remit and withdrawal from multiple contexts underscored the need to coordinate much more effectively with development, peace and climate systems, which also faced significant shocks.

From organisational growth to rapid cuts

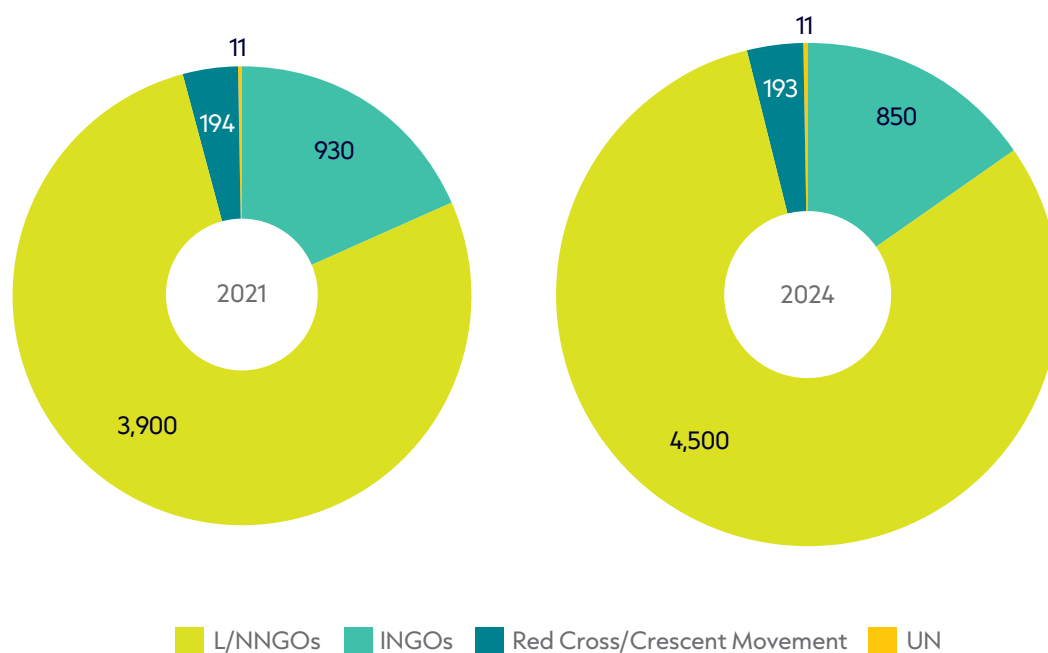
The last *The State of the Humanitarian System* (SOHS) reported that, in 2021, there were approximately 5,000 humanitarian organisations in the system, including 930 international non-governmental organisations (INGOs), 3,900 local and national NGOs (L/NNGOs), 194 Red Cross/Red Crescent (RC/RC) organisations^{xliv} and 11 United Nations (UN) entities. By 2024, this number had grown to just under 5,600. The number of UN and RC/RC members remained steady: 11 and 193^{xlv}

^{xliv} The International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies (IFRC), International Committee for the Red Cross (ICRC) and national societies.

^{xlv} The Nicaraguan Red Cross was dissolved in May 2023.

respectively. The number of INGOs decreased to 850, which reflected some formally announced closures, while some others were removed from the Global Database of Humanitarian Organisations (GDHO)^{xlvi} after determining they had no active humanitarian programmes. L/NNGOs and community-based organisations (CBOs) underwent a sizeable increase to approximately 4,500, representing 81% of all organisations in the system.^{xlvi} As in the 2022 SOHS, this growth can partially be attributed to data improvements and more systematic data gathering on CBOs, although community-led assistance structures also expanded in contexts like the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC), Ethiopia, Sudan and Ukraine.

Figure 1.15: Estimated number of humanitarian organisations, 2021 vs 2024



Source: Data from GDHO (www.humanitarianoutcomes.org/GDHO).

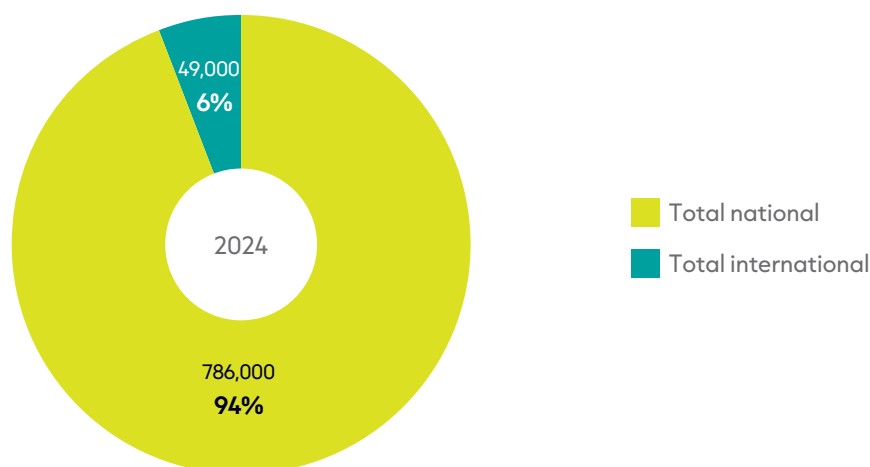


During the same period, the number of global humanitarian staff grew to the highest ever recorded: approximately 835,000 in 2024 (compared to approximately 755,000 in 2021).^{xlvi} All other organisation types saw a small reduction in their staff numbers from a peak in 2022, while the number of L/NNGO staff grew each year. National staff across organisational types continued to fuel the system: 94% of all staff in 2024 were nationals of the affected country of operation.

^{xlvi} See Humanitarian Outcomes (n.d.) <https://humanitarianoutcomes.org/projects/gdho>; see also Annex 1 for more information.

^{xlvi} These figures represent best estimates derived from GDHO data. The database is updated on a rolling basis, and lags in identifying new organisations or confirming closures mean that point-in-time counts are indicative rather than precise.

^{xlvi} While this reflects stronger data collection of staff numbers in national and local organisations, it also represents a real rise in those organisations' personnel: from 194,000 in 2021 to 269,000 in 2024. This is the largest recorded total across the full 2012–24 SOHS period – and a 9% increase on the 2020 figure cited in 2022 SOHS. However, part of the increase is due to a methodological change: in the last SOHS, the L/NNGO staffing figure was based on the estimated number of L/NNGOs working in the humanitarian system in official response contexts in 2020, compiled from the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs' (OCHA) 'Who's doing what where' (3Ws) data pulled from <https://humanitarianresponse.info>. Improvements in the GDHO have enabled a direct count in this report.

Figure 1.16: National and international in-country humanitarian personnel, 2024

Source: Data from GDHO (www.humanitarianoutcomes.org/GDHO).



While data is not yet available to confidently capture the effects of the 2025 cuts, a preliminary estimate based on a stratified sample of humanitarian organisations



By the end of 2025, a preliminary estimate of 23% of staff were lost across the system; L/NNGOs bore the brunt, potentially losing 41% of their staff against 2024 levels



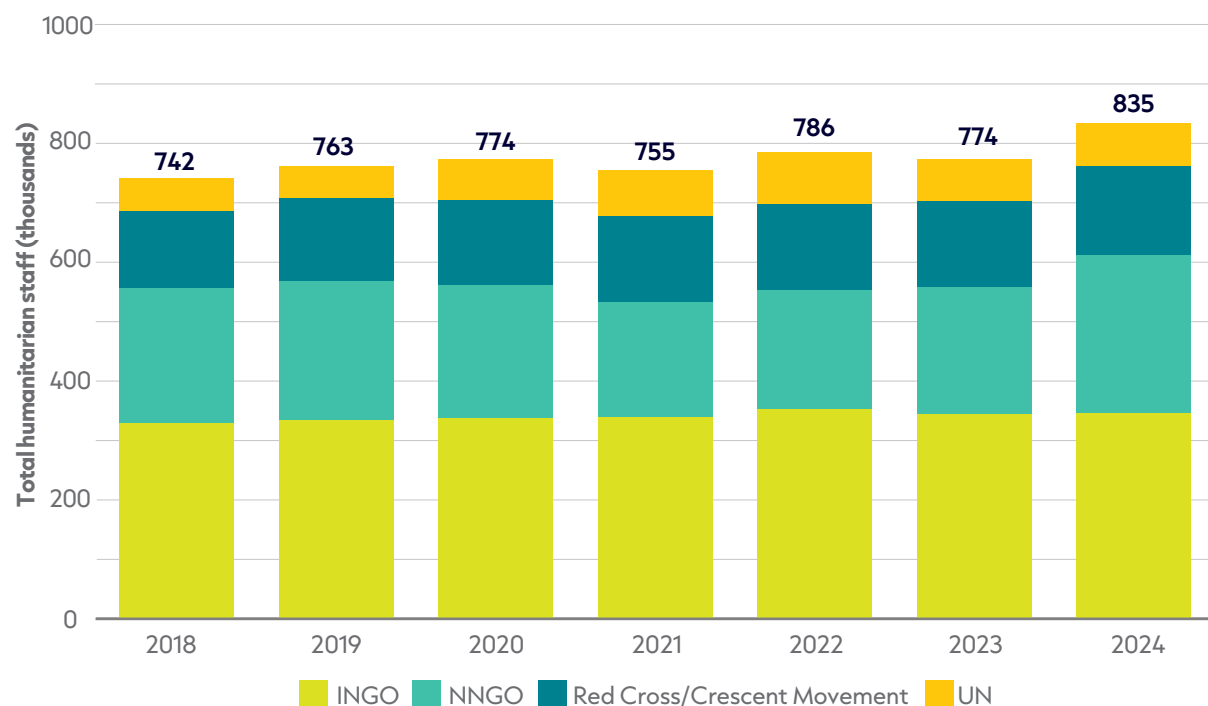
within the GDHO suggests that the number of organisations fell by 9% between 2024 and 2025 to approximately 5,100.^{xlix} L/NNGOs were the only organisation type to suffer significant closures: approximately 500 closed in 2025 – a reduction of 11%. For reasons discussed shortly, international organisations were better able to protect their existence, but all types of organisations experienced staff losses. By the end of 2025, a preliminary estimate of 23% of staff were lost across the system; L/NNGOs bore the brunt, potentially losing 41% of their staff against 2024 levels.

Expenditure patterns of agencies in 2022–24 echoed those of the last SOHS. In 2024, UN agencies had the highest total humanitarian expenditure^l at US\$21.65 billion, compared to US\$5.45 billion for the top-five INGOs, US\$2.33 billion for ICRC and IFRC, and US\$14.52 billion for all other humanitarian organisations.

Over the 10 years from 2015 to 2024 (inclusive), average increases in humanitarian expenditure were highest for the UN at 4.8%, followed by the top-five NGOs at

^{xlix} Since most organisations had not yet published 2025 statistics at the time of writing, for the 2025 estimates of number of organisations/staff numbers/expenditure, the consultants used the GDHO tier classifications to construct a stratified sample of humanitarian organisations, from which the researchers collected available figures via individual consultation. The sample included: the five largest INGOs, three additional Tier 1 (largest) INGOs (Médecins Sans Frontières (MSF), World Vision, Catholic Relief Services, International Rescue Committee (IRC), Norwegian Refugee Council (NRC), Save the Children, CARE and Oxfam), all UN humanitarian agencies; 20 INGOs across Tiers 2–6 (to represent a range of sizes and geographic location); 293 national NGOs participating in a two-phase survey conducted between February and December 2025, of which 69 responded to the follow-up phase; and a global estimate of impacts on the international entities of the RC/RC Movement, based on public statements and reporting.

^l Humanitarian expenditure is calculated as the portion of total operational expenditure spent on emergency relief aid as opposed to development or other assistance.

Figure 1.17: In-country humanitarian personnel by organisation type, 2021–2024

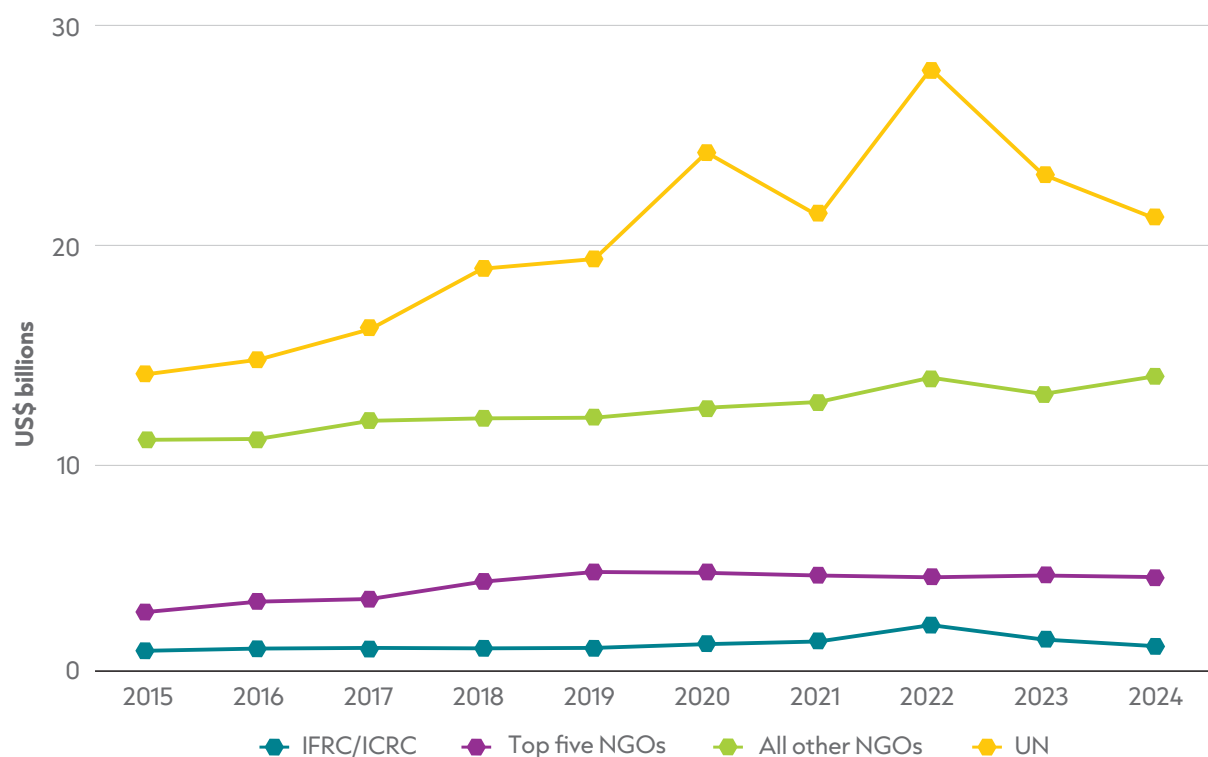
Source: Data from GDHO (www.humanitarianoutcomes.org/GDHO).



3.9%. Taking just this study period, annual average growth was highest among all other NGOs at 3.0%, followed by the UN at 1.8%. In 2024 the top five INGOs in terms of humanitarian spend were MSF, World Vision International, IRC, NRC and Catholic Relief Services replaced Save the Children International in 2024.

Expenditure trends have somewhat tracked available funding, largely growing over the decade up to 2024. Peaks were seen in 2020 and 2022, in line with the Covid-19 pandemic and Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine. Spending reduced for UN and the UN and RC/RC bodies (ICRC and IFRC), following the 2022 peak of system funding. Apart from the top-five INGOs, NGO spending rose amid funding reductions in 2024, potentially due to local organisations responding to high levels of needs in conflicts like Gaza, Sudan and Ukraine.

Annual expenditure figures up to the end of 2025 are not yet available for most organisations, making it difficult to assess the impact of the cuts. If preliminary estimates of staff cuts directly translated into expenditure cuts, we could see reductions of 26% for the UN, 18% for the top-five INGOs, and 25% for all other NGOs. Early indications of large cuts facing ICRC and IFRC did not materialise in 2025, and their annual reports for that year show a combined decline in humanitarian spend of just 2%. However, some organisations expect impacts to

Figure 1.18: Humanitarian expenditures by organisation type, 2015–2024

Source: Data from GDHO (www.humanitarianoutcomes.org/GDHO).

Notes: Numbers adjusted for inflation.



continue with further cuts in 2026 and beyond. In addition, the estimate does not include all additional costs of redundancies or trade-offs between keeping national over (more expensive) international staff, which organisations told us they made; nor does it include all cuts to programming or core costs for every organisation.¹⁵⁸

Organisational priorities after funding cuts

Some organisations began responding to funding shortfalls prior to 2025. For example, a major liquidity crisis at ICRC led to substantial budget cuts in 2023, the World Food Programme (WFP) began a major internal strategic review process, the UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) began rationalising positions, and several organisations – like IFRC, NRC, Save the Children and World Vision – began discussing reprioritisation before the end of 2024.¹⁵⁹ Our humanitarian practitioner survey revealed that, in the face of the sudden 2025 cuts, the most common prioritisation practice was terminating staff contracts (among 50.4% of respondents), followed by reprioritising and altering programming, scaling back or closing frontline services and closing bases and offices.

Large-scale job cuts came quickly in some organisations, many directly tied to the Stop-Work Orders issued by the United States in January 2025. By the end of



February, the US government had fired or placed on leave over 5,600 US Agency for International Development (USAID) employees globally.¹⁶⁰ By April, over 12,000 staff contracts had been terminated across the sector.¹⁶¹ Staff cuts were particularly quick and deep for local NGOs due to reliance on project-based funding and low reserves.¹⁶² UN cuts arrived more slowly (aside from for the International Organization for Migration (IOM), which depended more heavily on US project funding),¹⁶³ but by the end of the year, António Guterres had announced an 18.8% reduction in UN staff from approved levels for the year due to the combination of US cuts and shortfalls from other member states.¹⁶⁴



Cuts fell disproportionately, hitting local female staff and young professionals the hardest

Even within organisations, cuts fell disproportionately, hitting local female staff and young professionals the hardest – who held a high proportion of health, education and gender programming roles.¹⁶⁵ Several UN organisations reportedly removed junior positions and younger staff, raising questions about reduced future capabilities, innovations and leadership.¹⁶⁶ Of 31 multilateral agencies in a Multilateral Performance

Network (MOPAN) study, only UNHCR and the World Health Organization (WHO) reported making cuts to their senior-level positions.

Some organisations we spoke to tried to limit negative effects at the country level; for example, the UN Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) managed a 20% budget cut primarily by not renewing vacant posts at headquarters level, IFRC planned to reduce global and regional staff more than country staff, and NRC consolidated several regional positions into a smaller number of global roles for gender, disability and climate.

Some other organisations reconfigured their geographic structure in a bid to save costs and potentially move decision-making closer to crisis-affected contexts. For example, among 18 multilateral organisations in a MOPAN survey, 10 consolidated offices and nine relocated from higher-cost hubs in locations like New York or Geneva.¹⁶⁷ The UN Children's Fund (UNICEF) consolidated seven regional offices into five, WFP closed its southern Africa regional bureau in Johannesburg and consolidated its functions with the East Africa bureau in Nairobi, and UN Women relocated staff positions to Nairobi and Bonn.¹⁶⁸ In several contexts, however, operational presence drew further away from people affected by crisis. One interviewee described how OCHA's 16 Colombian offices became four sub-offices and one capital office; another interviewee, in Somalia, saw strong reductions in OCHA's presence, including the closure of field offices and increased reliance on roaming capacity from Mogadishu.



While legal structures – particularly in international organisations – provided some cushioning through formal redundancy procedures, many processes were sudden and painful. One INGO staffer in our online consultation said:



'Duty of care to staff was promoted in emails but not in actions, with staff being let go of – without any warning – with little notice.'

A national staff member shared their experience: 'I gave 10 years to this organisation, and they let us go over a two-line email. That broke something in me.'¹⁶⁹

Opportunities to re-enter the sector were limited for people who lost jobs. Job vacancies published on ReliefWeb decreased by approximately 65% between 2024 and 2025.¹⁷⁰ Staff who stayed in post also faced challenges. A national network member in Ukraine told us that remaining staff found the loss of colleagues 'very stressful and demotivating'. Community World Service Asia (CWSA) survey of national staff highlighted the mental toll of job losses, uncertainty and doing the work of multiple people.¹⁷¹ Overall, interviewees and survey respondents felt the departure of experienced colleagues was a huge loss to the sector.

Varied exposure to negative impacts of cuts

Some organisations were able to adapt their adjustments made in 2023 or 2024 to the 2025 shock: IFRC accelerated a strategic review for efficiency, NRC brought forward a planned structural adjustment and WFP sped up its internal reform process. Organisations that were less affected in the short-term were not so reliant on USAID or had more diversified funding streams or substantial core funding; for example, Oxfam America had a policy of not accepting government funding, and Concern had a diversification policy that limited its reliance on a single donor to 30% of total funding.

Some international organisations allocated core funding and reserves to cover positions and programmes, with some telling us they spent over US\$1 million a day delaying staffing cuts. However, reserves were exhaustible, and organisations that used substantial amounts expressed concerns about weathering challenges in coming years. In contrast, smaller and local NGOs with limited reserves or core funding worried about their very survival beyond 2025.¹⁷²

The disproportionately harsh effects of the cuts on L/NNGOs highlighted the system's limited progress on localisation (see [Chapter 4.1](#)). Local respondents to a 2025 OCHA survey reported the highest levels of funding cuts;¹⁷³ many remained reliant on project-based funding and had received few overhead costs in previous



years, restricting their ability to absorb losses. Both the lack of flexible funding and the impact of partners' decisions higher up the chain limited their prioritisation choices – and, in some contexts, forced short-term or permanent closures.¹⁷⁴

In Sudan, for example, 70% of community kitchens had to pause activities in February 2025.¹⁷⁵ A MOPAN report found that multilateral organisations' scaling back of support for local and community-based partners reduced jobs, technical assistance and community engagement.¹⁷⁶ Feminist, women-led and refugee-led organisations in particular were reportedly adversely affected, including those working intersectionally with age, disability and sexuality.¹⁷⁷



The disproportionately harsh effects of the cuts on L/NGOs highlighted the system's limited progress on localisation



These difficult experiences could present an opportunity for international actors to learn to bolster localisation efforts. As one respondent to our online consultation said:



'We had nine years after making the commitment of the Grand Bargain; if we had implemented it, we would not be in the situation we are in now – but we ignored it.'

Some humanitarian actors, especially local ones, found ways to adapt or collaborate to ease the impact of cuts. In South Sudan, frontline and coordination actors recounted sharing vehicles, staff and infrastructure;¹⁷⁸ the Feminist Humanitarian Network reported feminist organisations sharing office space, IT facilities and transportation;¹⁷⁹ and a third of women-led organisations responding to a UN Women survey planned more collaborative consortium funding bids.¹⁸⁰ For CBOs, there was a sense that funding cuts did not mean the work stopped. One feminist leader quoted in a report explained:



'We lost all funding, but we kept gathering in someone's living room. That space became our shelter, our strategy room, our care centre.'¹⁸¹

Another said:



'We held healing circles online, in secret. No budget. Just us. We needed a place to cry and to dream.'¹⁸²



Organisational decision-making processes

Staff described many organisational responses to the 2025 cuts as reactive and pragmatic rather than long-term and strategic. One online consultation respondent said:



'It was less prioritisation and more just stemming leaks caused by cutting of funds.'



Aid practitioners told us the three most frequent drivers of prioritisation choices were top-down



Uncertainty hindered clear decisions; weeks after the US issued Stop-Work Orders, organisations remained unsure whether suspended programmes would be unfrozen¹⁸³ and whether they would be paid for committed funds. Aid practitioners told us the three most frequent drivers of prioritisation choices were top-down: 'cuts were donor imposed, we did not have much choice' (43.15% of respondents), 'our organisation's HQ provided instructions' (35.73%),

and 'country leadership team identified where costs could be reallocated' (27.64%). Fewer respondents cited more participatory or collaborative decision-making.

Our online consultations revealed staff were frustrated that organisational decision-making was opaque, unfair and influenced by the ease with which certain staff, consultants and partners could be let go. While some reported transparent processes that took labour union concerns into account, and others thought their leadership did the best they could under pressure,^{li} many others highlighted inequities. One INGO staffer reported:



'Country offices bared [sic] the brunt of the cuts, while [the Senior Management Team] and senior leaders in global roles prioritised saving their positions. Where was the humanitarian mandate?'

Former staff of Development Initiatives criticised the organisation – a casualty of the earlier 2024 cuts – for not giving severance pay to its personnel in Kenya and prioritising payments to United Kingdom-based staff.¹⁸⁴

Organisations were often isolationist and short-term in decision-making. MOPAN reported that multilateral organisations were 'making short-term budgetary adjustments rather than pursuing co-ordinated approaches to longer-term sustainability'.¹⁸⁵ One INGO survey respondent told us their organisation used internal analysis because guidance and support from Humanitarian Country

li Of 50 respondents, only 12 (24%) disagreed with the statement: 'The organisation did the best they could in the circumstances.'



Teams (HCTs), clusters and donors came too slow. Several survey respondents and interviewees were concerned that prioritisation focused too much on reducing costs and not enough on efficiencies, which would enable a stronger strategic approach or deliver for the greatest number of people affected by humanitarian crisis. The ability to make more strategic decisions, however, was entwined with various factors: the existence of adaptive management processes, flexible funding or reserves that could allow investment in more effective transitions, and the extent to which organisations (as opposed to donors or partners) had decision-making autonomy.

Few organisations reported using data to make prioritisation decisions. IRC was an exception, publicly leaning into cost-efficiency and impact data to make key prioritisation decisions in its 2025 strategy. In our practitioner survey, the second-rarest response to the question of what drove prioritisation decisions was a new needs assessment (by only 13.6% of respondents). One online consultation respondent explained that years of limited focus on systematic monitoring and evaluation meant that, even if leaders wanted to use data to inform their decisions, it simply was not available. They warned:



'If you can't measure it, you can't improve it.'

Recent consultations by ALNAP suggest that internal monitoring, evaluation, accountability and learning (MEAL) staff and functions were often hit by cuts, potentially threatening future strategic decision-making.

We found little evidence that local and national actors were systematically involved in their upstream partners' prioritisation decisions. Respondents to our aid-practitioner survey ranked 'identifying priority activities in coordination with local and national NGOs/civil society organisations' among the least-common influences over their organisations' decisions (sixth most frequent, by only 16.18% of respondents) – slightly more common than coordinating with local and national governments or engaging with recipient communities (14.16%). Local NGOs in Sudan described the process of prioritisation as top-down and internationally driven. And those in Ukraine reported that very few of their international partners engaged with them on decisions (although UNHCR was an exception) and that international actors prioritised their own capacity. In general, many local organisations found themselves on the backfoot when experiencing humanitarian scale-down and exit for the first time. One local NGO representative expressed their disbelief:



'such a huge organisation [an INGO] has no plan B; this is outrageous simply because we were left like this – we were simply left with nothing.'



A broad range of interviewees commonly expressed concerns that the humanitarian system had entered a crisis of not only funding but also legitimacy.

Future competition or complementarity?

Amid predictions that the funding environment would remain constrained in coming years, several agencies explored mitigation strategies. Local and international organisations reported creating income-generation projects,¹⁸⁸ adopting different technology solutions, pursuing private partnerships¹⁸⁹ or focusing more on programming that requires soft skills rather than hardware. Some INGOs sought to maintain functions for attracting new donors and funding opportunities; for example, Save the Children¹⁹⁰ prioritised maintaining fundraising and marketing positions over some other roles. In line with the public legitimacy gap, some INGOs increased their public advocacy¹⁹¹ and efforts to lobby governments to reinstate their official development assistance (ODA) commitments.¹⁹² For example, VOICE launched a media campaign about humanitarian assistance, targeting young European adults.

Reduced funding risked creating greater competition. A review by the Network for Empowered Aid Response (NEAR) concluded that 'INGOs are showing their colours to how they are reacting to funding cuts'.¹⁹³ An INGO respondent to our online consultation reported:



'INGOs wanting to "plant their flag" and focus on getting the most funding for their organization.'



The coming years will be critical in determining whether the international system evolves towards greater complementarity or slips further into competition



In an effort to counter such practices, the International Council of Voluntary Agencies (ICVA)¹⁹⁴ called for greater commitment to complementarity among humanitarian organisations through stronger consideration of their added value and by making space when individual organisations are not best-placed to respond. Similarly, a MOPAN study encouraged multilateral organisations to better consider their comparative value and avoid overlap by assessing their respective core functions, thematic areas and organisational attributes.¹⁹⁵ As the effects

of the cuts continue to be felt, the coming years will be critical in determining whether the international system evolves towards greater complementarity or slips further into competition. The latter could further undermine the system's



legitimacy in the eyes of people affected by crisis and local humanitarian actors, increasing the trust deficit. As one online consultation respondent said:



'Go back to your origin story: Why do you exist in the first place? Why were you set up? Is there anyone else whose place you are occupying?'

Prioritisation processes at the system level

OCHA's Humanitarian Reset was the biggest driver of the processes and structures to be prioritised at the system level. The Inter-Agency Standing Committee (IASC) published the Reset Roadmap in 2025, elaborating on the Define, Devolve, Deliver and Defend pillars of its previous approaches.^{lii} The Reset outlined a greater focus on transitioning away from humanitarian support, stronger strategic leadership for Humanitarian Coordinators and HCTs and streamlined coordination, greater collective advocacy on protection and humanitarian diplomacy, and increased use of multipurpose cash to deliver assistance. It also promised a more people-centred approach to accountability and a greater focus on localisation and locally led action, including via greater pooled-fund commitments and targets for local and national actors. The Reset added a new Enable pillar and outlined commitments to anticipatory action and environmental concerns, which did not feature strongly in earlier communications.¹⁹⁶

The Reset announcement and subsequent elaboration drew varied reactions from different system actors. Many donors and international humanitarian actors we spoke to welcomed the strategic direction the Reset provided at a complex time. They were optimistic about proposals to improve efficiency and maximise cash and pooled funds. However, several were concerned over tensions between its stated commitments and questioned whether a focus on 'lifesaving' would enable meaningful, people-centred approaches.¹⁹⁷ There were also questions about whether some of the mechanisms prioritised would function in a constrained political environment. For example, interviewees noted the drop in use of cash in recent years and increased restrictions, from both donors and governments, in states affected by crisis. For pooled funds to play a more positive and consistent localisation function than previously, concerted efforts would also be required to make these funds more accessible and the governance more inclusive of local actors (see [Chapter 4.1](#)).¹⁹⁸

The UN80 reform process, launched by the Secretary-General in March 2025, also aimed to prioritise functions across the broader UN structure (see [Humanitarian crises and global shifts 2022–2025](#)). While many interviewees and commentators welcomed the opportunity to make the UN fit for purpose, they expressed

lii Define: focus on greatest needs; Deliver: timely and streamlined response; Devolve: people-centred; Defend: principles and humanitarian space (see IASC (2025) <https://interagencystandingcommittee.org/sites/default/files/2025-11/Humanitarian%20Reset%20Roadmap%2C%2010%20November%202025.pdf>).

concerns that decisions prioritised rapid cost-cutting over a strategic approach to future aims and functions. A recent MOPAN review concluded that the siloed nature of structural realignment and operational reduction risked 'creating a mismatch between the system envisioned through reform and the system that is emerging through attrition'.¹⁹⁹

Frustration was apparent in some quarters that both the Reset and UN80 were too focused on doing more of the same on a smaller scale. Vocal international and local humanitarian leaders urged more fundamental system adjustments to make assistance more locally led and people-centred.²⁰⁰ Some senior humanitarians noticed a desire among key international actors to back a UN-coordinated system because multilateralism was under attack and due to concerns about substantial changes during uncertainty. One humanitarian told us:



'There's a real fear that if you dismantle the system as it's currently configured, what comes afterwards may be chaos or even worse. And nobody, especially in these kinds of strained times, wants to take that risk.'

Other discussions centred on whether system decision-making was inclusive – and whether it should be. Several interviewees recognised inherent trade-offs between making collaborative decisions and acting decisively in a period of crisis, with one senior humanitarian suggesting that the Emergency Relief Coordinator needed to ask for 'forgiveness rather than for permission' when democratic processes were not feasible. In an early effort to feed into centralised decisions, civil society networks raised joint concerns about the Reset in an open letter; later, the UN engaged more with IASC representatives and opened up several consultations with NGOs, including local and national actors.²⁰¹ Many L/NGOs still saw the Reset process as exclusive, some questioned the continued relevance of UN-led processes to their work, and some advocated for a greater need to recognise existing – or imagine new – locally led ecosystems of humanitarian action.²⁰² As one local representative told us:



'Let them do their thing, we'll get on with ours. What has their prioritisation got to do with us?'

Prioritising system information structures

The cuts had rapid negative effects on several information infrastructures that humanitarian planning depended on. Many interviewees were concerned



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about the closure of the Famine Early Warning Systems Network (FEWS NET) in January 2025 and, following its partial resumption in mid-2025, referenced the need to protect it.^{liii} Interviewees also expressed strong concerns about the scaling down of multisectoral needs assessment and growing reliance on out-of-date assessments to make vital decisions. A MOPAN survey reported that 10 multilateral organisations had reduced their resources for monitoring, evaluation and institutional learning.²⁰³ For example, the International Organization for Migration's (IOM) displacement-tracking matrix faced cuts to operations, and we were told of large pressures to cut information-management costs at OCHA, posing risks to food security and displacement monitoring. In 2025, dedicated information-management support in cluster coordination also substantially declined,²⁰⁴ while ReliefWeb reported that the total volume of humanitarian information updates dropped by approximately 20% compared to 2024, noting that: 'behind these figures are real consequences: fewer assessments, delayed analyses, smaller teams and reduced visibility for crises struggling to compete for attention and funding.'²⁰⁵

These reductions risked short- and long-term consequences for prioritising people with the greatest needs. A senior UN staffer told us:



'People don't understand that to be able to prioritise Integrated Food Security Phase Classification (IPC) 4 or 5 – you need data to do that.'

Aid workers in Mali, Somalia and South Sudan all raised concerns about the ability to track worsening vulnerability indicators, especially in contexts no longer prioritised in Humanitarian Needs and Response Plans where humanitarian presence reduced.²⁰⁶ Over the longer term, a senior WFP staffer stressed the need to:



'collect evidence on the cost of inaction, in terms of impacts on community, markets and social cohesion – the impacts of what the system collectively has not been able to prioritise.'

In the face of such threats, there were several efforts to protect data within the humanitarian system: FAO reported prioritising its data functions following the cuts, leadership at WFP made a strong directive to protect monitoring and, despite being hit by funding cuts and job losses, ReliefWeb maintained most of its functions through technical efficiency improvements that began in 2024.²⁰⁷ In October 2025, the IASC principals agreed to establish an ecosystem-wide Humanitarian Data Collaborative to create a resilient and equitable data

liii FEWS NET brought in climate data, including from scientific partnerships with NASA and the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA), which were also severely affected by US funding cuts. This highlights the indirect effects of wider US government cuts on the humanitarian data ecosystem (see Worley (2025) <https://www.thenewhumanitarian.org/analysis/2025/03/25/humanitarian-data-drought-deeper-damage-wrought-us-aid-cuts>).



system, enabling all actors – including local organisations and communities – to access the information needed for decision-making.²⁰⁸ The Swedish International Development Agency (Sida) also convened major donors to track data-capacity gaps and establish coherent policies on supporting data ‘enablers’ who supply the system with key information.^{liv}

Coordinating with interacting systems

In line with recommendations from actors like the interagency Global Solutions Working Group, the Reset Roadmap aimed to ‘embed resilience-building and planned transitions out of humanitarian action into all operations, including via joint analysis/planning approaches’.²⁰⁹ Some interviewees were hopeful that strong transition planning could encourage humanitarians to leave contexts where they were arguably no longer needed. However, multiple interviewees at headquarters and country levels expressed confusion around the Reset plan to accelerate the transition of international humanitarian response out of eight operations, and questioned why these included countries like politically volatile Colombia.^{lv} Some questioned the likelihood of a smooth transition and of other actors stepping in to fill gaps, given the limited strengthening of local structures in recent years and lack of progress on the humanitarian–development–peace nexus (see [Chapter 5.1](#)).

We found limited evidence that system-level prioritisation decisions were made in coordination with decision-making in development, peace and climate systems. While development- and peace-focused agencies told us they felt excluded from humanitarian planning processes, senior humanitarians described limited



There was growing scepticism that development, peace and climate actors – who also experienced financial shocks – would fill the gap left by a shrinking humanitarian remit and footprint



engagement from development leadership, beyond some individual actors committed to cross-system collaboration in the UN Development Programme (UNDP) and the World Bank. Overall, there was growing scepticism among humanitarians that development, peace and climate actors – who also experienced financial shocks – would fill the gap left by a shrinking humanitarian remit and footprint.

While final figures on development and peace funding are not yet available for 2025, the systems are poised for significant declines. Growth in development spending had already stagnated in 2024, and funding for peace had dropped.

liv Other donors involved in the initiative included the Directorate General for European Civil Protection and Humanitarian Aid Operations (DG ECHO); the UK Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office (FCDO); Canada, Switzerland, Norway, Belgium, Germany, the Netherlands and Spain.

lv The planned accelerated transition contexts were Cameroon, Colombia, Eritrea, Iraq, Libya, Nigeria, Pakistan and Zimbabwe.



While there was much speculation in 2025 that the cuts to development would be even harsher than those to the humanitarian system, preliminary analysis by the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) indicates that, among Development Assistance Committee (DAC) donors, development spend dropped by 26.3% between 2024 and 2025, while humanitarian spend dropped by a larger 35.8%.²¹⁰ However, ALNAP's analysis found that approaches differed among individual donors.^{lvi}

Trends also indicate that development financiers, including bilateral and multilateral development banks, became increasingly driven by national self-interest and returns on investment, which made conflict-affected or politically volatile contexts and social-safety-net systems less attractive investments than roads and jobs.^{lvii} While non-climate ODA grew in 2024, climate finance took a hit from US cuts and from restrictions on climate programming, along with likely future cuts reported from European donors.²¹¹ Given the reduced resources across other international support systems, it is even more crucial for the different systems to not make prioritisation decisions in isolation, because these decisions have powerful effects on the lives of people experiencing vulnerability. One consultation respondent said:

Given the reduced resources across other international support systems, it is even more crucial for the different systems to not make prioritisation decisions in isolation

'Meaningful nexus thinking should be more urgent than ever but it seems that any gains made over the last years in moving towards effective nexus programming are being lost, with prioritisation between humanitarian, development, climate and peace-building once again being seen as a zero-sum game and silos being reinforced.'

Conclusion

Some innovations and collaborations emerged from difficult prioritisation decisions at both organisational and system levels during this period. However, decision-making, uncertainty and sudden exits reduced trust, both among humanitarian organisations, and between humanitarian practitioners

lvi In ALNAP's GHA analysis, among donors for which data is available for both ODA and humanitarian spending, 20 favoured humanitarian spending over other forms of ODA, while 18 favoured the remainder of ODA, calculated by the percentage change in humanitarian versus other ODA spending (see ALNAP (2026) <https://alnapp.org/help-library/resources/global-humanitarian-assistance-gha-report-2026/>).

lvii For example, a review of the World Bank Group Strategy for Fragility, Conflict, and Violence, 2020–25 found that their support was inefficient to overcome constraints to private investment in fragile, conflict-affected and violent settings (see World Bank (2025) <https://ieg.worldbankgroup.org/evaluations/evaluation-wbg-strategy-fragility-conflict-violence-2020-25>), while their strategy for 2026–30 has a stronger focus on delivering jobs – not necessarily the basic services most needed by people affected by crisis (see World Bank (2026) <https://www.worldbank.org/en/topic/fragilityconflictviolence/publication/a-wbg-strategy-for-engaging-in-fcv-settings-2026-2030> World Bank 2026).



and people affected by crisis. Cuts to staff and organisational closures disproportionately hit local organisations – which, despite years of commitments to localisation, lacked the flexible finances that enabled other organisations to weather the sudden shock.



Humanitarian actors will need to choose whether to become more competitive or more complementary



As the effects of the cuts continue to manifest, and to most effectively use remaining resources for people affected by crisis, humanitarian actors will need to choose whether to become more competitive or more complementary. The loss of skilled staff, MEAL functions and system-level monitoring data risks a system-wide loss of learning and the ability to plan and respond, requiring stronger collective efforts to maintain these functions.

The retraction of humanitarian presence in multiple contexts underscores the need for humanitarians to coordinate more meaningfully with (similarly financially strained) peace and development systems in prioritisation choices that combine to impact people's lives. Lessons learned from the sudden 2025 cuts could improve how the international humanitarian system prioritises staff, functions and collaborations in the future, whether working with the UN-coordinated system or alternative locally led structures.

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