



November 2024

UNHCR-NGO Partnership Survey

2023 Report Executive Summary

Interaction – Humanitarian Policy and Practice



ACRONYMS

AAP - Accountability with Affected People

CBO - Community-Based Organization

CFEI - Call for Expressions of Interest

INGO - International Non-Governmental Organization

LNNGO - Local and National Non-Governmental Organization

MYSP - Multi-Year Strategic Planning

NGO - Non-Governmental Organization

PA - Partnership Agreement

PROMS - Project, Reporting, Oversight and Monitoring Solution

RLO - Refugee-Led Organization

UNHCR - United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees

UNPP - UN Partner Portal

Preface/Standard Notice from UNHCR

UNHCR is committed to the Principles of Partnership, including openness and transparency about how partners view the quality of our collaboration. To obtain this feedback, annual partner perception surveys have been conducted for several years by an independent organization that does not receive other funding from UNHCR. The reports on the annual studies are available publicly on the [UN Partner Portal](#) and findings are presented in an open event to the entire partner community. At that event, UNHCR provides its reflections on the findings and planned follow-up to address the recommendations. Relevant lessons are injected into UNHCR's continuous learning and partnership reforms.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

BACKGROUND

Since 2014, UNHCR—with support from InterAction—has solicited internal and non-governmental organization (NGO) partner feedback via an annual survey on the state of UNHCR-NGO partnerships. The purpose of the survey is to systematically track partnership dynamics and experiences over time, building a body of evidence that can be used to identify areas for improvement and inform partnership reform. The questionnaire is designed to measure the previous year's partnership experiences; this report reflects experiences from 2023. The survey, designed by InterAction in collaboration with UNHCR, is circulated widely to UNHCR offices and NGOs on an annual basis, and InterAction conducts thorough qualitative analysis to contextualize the quantitative findings. This year, responses were received from 82 UNHCR operations and 524 NGO staff, 262 of whom (55%) represent local or national NGO partners (LNNGOs), and the remainder of which represent international NGO partners (INGOs) (35%), organizations led by forcibly displaced or stateless people, known as refugee-led organizations (RLOs) (6%), and other organizations such as religious institutions and universities (4%).

KEY FINDINGS

PARTNER CONSULTATION: Five types of consultation methods were included in the survey: regional NGO consultation meetings, coordination meetings, one-on-one consultations, joint monitoring, and multi-year strategic planning. Of these, one-on-one consultations were rated by both NGO and UNHCR respondents as the most valuable. Over 96% of NGO respondents rated the five consultation methods as “somewhat” or “very” useful to their operation on average. Feedback on Multi-Year Strategic Planning (MYSP) was also highly positive, despite noting an opportunity to improve by greater inclusion of NGO partners.

PARTNER SELECTION AND UN PARTNER PORTAL: In addition to the UN Partner Portal (UNPP), the majority of UNHCR respondents noted the consistent use of other public distribution channels to solicit concept notes from NGO partners in response to Calls for Expression of Interest (CFEIs). NGO partners gave positive ratings for the amount of notice to prepare proposals but raised concerns regarding the clarity of feedback provided in the case of non-selection.

CAPACITY AND LOCALIZATION: UNHCR respondents found most NGOs to have high capacity, while noting room for improvement in project management, monitoring, performance/financial reporting, and procurement capacity. NGO respondents confirmed that UNHCR generally provides funding support for capacity development, especially in strengthening staff capacity, but that there is a need for more concerted or consistent support for advocacy and resource mobilization activities.

PROJECT IMPLEMENTATION AND RISK SHARING: More than 80% of all respondents noted positive experience in discussing key risks to operations, noting that regular and ongoing communication was key to successful outcomes.

COMMUNITY FEEDBACK: Approximately two-thirds of UNHCR and NGO respondents affirmed that when community feedback generated as part of the project was shared with the other partner for awareness or action (e.g. NGO shared project feedback with UNHCR), timely response was received from the corresponding party. However, almost 5% of both NGO and UNHCR respondents replied that they did not know how to share feedback, and 12% indicated that they did not receive a response to feedback provided to the other partner.

PA REPORTING REQUIREMENTS: Over 75% of NGO respondents affirmed that UNHCR adhered to the Partnership Agreement (PA) reporting requirements in 2023 for most or all projects. However, a number of the additional comments shared by respondents (26% of 39 received) indicated that reporting requirements remain overly burdensome.

NEW UNHCR PARTNERSHIP TEMPLATES AND TERMS: NGO respondents reported positive experiences transitioning to the new partnership templates introduced in 2023, with complications most commonly arising in the adoption of the new Financial Plan. Over 80% of NGO respondents affirmed that the updated partnership terms were clear and easy to understand and were in line with the Principles of Partnership.

UNHCR FUNDING IMPLICATIONS: Nearly half (45%) of NGO respondents reported receiving sufficient UNHCR funding to cover the full and fair cost of all shared costs required for the project. Of those who reported not receiving sufficient funding, 77% said they use other funds to

cover project costs. 18% of the 39 comments provided to this question particularly noted a deficit of funding for staff salaries.

OVERALL PARTNERSHIP ASSESSMENT: Overall, 93% of NGO respondents characterized their partnership with UNHCR as 'good' or 'excellent'. Of UNHCR respondents, 94% characterized their partnership with INGOs, LNNGOs, and RLOs as 'good' or excellent' on average.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR UNHCR

- **Enhance the effectiveness of regional consultation meetings:** Regional consultation meetings present the opportunity for partner NGOs to connect with UNHCR operations and other NGOs, and collectively explore common challenges and solutions within a shared context. On the Regional Bureau level, maximize meaningful NGO engagement in consultations through more focused and strategic agendas by soliciting input on partner priorities and desired meeting outcomes in the lead-up to regional consultation meetings.
- **Increase inclusivity of Multi-Year Strategic Planning:** Building upon the positive feedback of NGO partners who took part in the MYSP process, ensure that a greater number of partners are consistently invited to meaningfully participate in MYSP, as well as consulted in advance of such meetings. UNHCR should place particular emphasis on increasing the inclusion and participation of RLOs. Further, UNHCR should work to address any internal barriers hindering NGO participation in the MYSP process, such as limited operational capacity or lack of clarity on how to include NGO partners.
- **Improve UN Partner Portal and feedback process:** Explore opportunities to increase the capacity of the UNPP to reach wider audiences to continue to ensure broad dissemination of CFEIs. UNHCR should also enhance transparency in the CFEI selection process, creating a more rigorous standard for providing NGO partners with clear and detailed feedback in the event of non-selection.

- **Tailor capacity strengthening initiatives:** Further develop capacity strengthening initiatives to focus on identified gaps, particularly in project management, monitoring, financial reporting, procurement, and advocacy and fundraising. Targeted capacity strengthening for LNNGOs should focus on support to advocacy and fundraising efforts. Collaborate with INGOs to improve institutional support and relationship building with local civil society partners.
- **Streamline reporting requirements:** Continue efforts to simplify partnership reporting requirements to reduce the administrative burden for NGO partners, considering the relative capacity of different organizations. Refrain from issuing additional reporting requests that do not fall within the project work plan reporting requirements.
- **Address challenges with new systems:** Continuously monitor NGO partners' experience using the Project, Reporting, Oversight and Monitoring Solution (PROMS) system, in order to quickly identify improvements in the new system's usability. As necessary, provide guidance and training for NGO partners to ensure that these tools can be more effectively integrated into their work.
- **Ensure full and fair funding:** Commit to covering the full and fair costs of UNHCR-funded programs, including essential operational expenses. Engage with NGO partners to fully understand their operation and funding models in order to better anticipate the financial needs associated with overall project implementation and success.
- **Promote a culture of respect and equality:** Enforce a culture of respect for NGO partners, including through emphasis on partners' existing capabilities, competencies, and essential contributions to assistance programming. Encourage UNHCR personnel to name and interrogate power dynamics and to adhere to the partnership principle of equality throughout the contracting and partnership management process.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR NGOS

- **Proactively seek feedback in the CFEI process:** Take a more active role in soliciting feedback from UNHCR in the event of non-selection for a CFEI proposal to ensure that valuable insights in this process are not overlooked.
- **Strengthen engagement with local partners:** INGOs should work with UNHCR to better leverage UNHCR-funded projects to further build relationships with LNNGOs and local partners, as well as to increase INGO support of local systems.
- **Enhance accountability in reporting:** Improve transparency in financial reporting and fundraising efforts. Openly disclosing NGO funds will help to ensure efficient coordination between NGO partners and UNHCR, prevent any duplication of efforts on project funding, and increase NGO-UNHCR trust.

SHARED RECOMMENDATIONS

- **Clarify community feedback generation and sharing processes:** In order to align with the values of the UNHCR Accountability with Affected People (AAP) policy, both UNHCR and NGO offices should develop, disseminate, and socialize clear guidance on community feedback procedures. This guidance should include standards regarding the timeline and expectations for internal review and timely responses.