



August 2020

UNHCR-NGO Partnership Survey

2019 Report

InterAction – Humanitarian Policy and Practice



EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Since 2014, UNHCR’s Implementation Management and Assurance Service (IMAS)—with support from InterAction—has systematically solicited UNHCR and non-governmental organization (NGO) partner feedback via an annual perception survey on the state of UNHCR-NGO partnership. The purpose of the survey is to better track partnership dynamics and develop a body of evidence on perceptions of UNHCR-NGO partnership. The survey was circulated widely to UNHCR and NGO offices, and the data received was analyzed by InterAction in consultation with UNHCR-IMAS. This report reflects submissions from 105 UNHCR staff and 550 NGO staff, nearly half of whom represent national or local NGO partners.

KEY FINDINGS

The 2019 survey results demonstrate continued improvement in the overall relationship between UNHCR and NGO partners. Responses from both UNHCR and NGO partners reinforce the importance of equality and transparency and demonstrate the successful application of these principles, citing consultations, partner selection, and tools such as the U.N. Partner Portal as examples. Both NGOs’ and UNHCR’s assessments of the state of partnership demonstrate that continued engagement and collaboration contribute to an improved relationship and positive outcomes.

PLANNING AND CONSULTATION

Both UNHCR and NGO partners rated one-on-one consultations as the most useful means of planning and engaging with one another. However, NGOs also found similar value—and were most likely to participate—in coordination meetings. Comparatively, UNHCR most commonly engaged using Country Operations Planning (COP), although it was not cited as the most useful. Similar to 2018, few respondents from both UNHCR and NGOs cited COP as useful compared to other forms of consultation. Regional Consultation Meetings were introduced in 2019 in some regional offices, noting that decentralized regional structures only formally started in January 2020. While only 32% of NGO respondents reported receiving invitations in 2019, 92% of those that participated felt their participation was significantly or moderately useful to their organization. Recognizing the value that Regional Consultations held for partners, UNHCR should invite more NGO partners in the upcoming year to build on successful engagement in 2019.

PARTNER SELECTION

Most UNHCR respondents (64%) reported their offices issued one or more Calls for Expression of Interest for 2019 projects. Compared to 2018, UNHCR issued fewer calls, down from five to four per year, and receiving fewer applications per call, down from 11 to nine in 2019. Fewer NGO respondents (14%) reported that they received proactive and clear reasoning from UNHCR when not selected for a 2019 project, compared to 2018 (17%). An improvement to note is reflected in 2019 data. Fewer respondents (16%) reported that they did not receive a clear reason for non-selection, as compared to the 24% of respondents who reported not receiving clear reasoning in 2018.

U.N. PARTNER PORTAL

The U.N. Partner Portal (UNPP) continues to be a useful tool for both UNHCR and NGO partners. Most NGO respondents (86%) reported they were registered on the U.N. Partner Portal in 2019. However, this is a 10% decrease from respondents in 2018 (96%). Of the 3% of NGO respondents that reported they were not registered in 2019, most (77%) indicated that they plan on registering in 2020. The utility of registering on the UNPP is evident, given that 96% of UNHCR respondents reported using the UNPP to post Calls for Expression of Interest for 2019 (up 16% from 2018) and nearly half of NGO respondents (45%) learned about 2019 calls through the UNPP. Overall, most NGO and UNHCR respondents (71% and 73% respectively) reported positive impacts from using the UNPP, noting that it moderately to significantly improved their grant management and partnership agreement management processes in 2019.

MULTI-YEAR PARTNERSHIP AGREEMENTS

The analysis of Multi-Year (M.Y.) Partnership Agreements is a new addition to the annual UNHCR-NGO Partnership Survey for 2019. UNHCR introduced M.Y. Partnership Agreements in 2019, offering opportunities for two-year agreements.¹ During the initial year, UNHCR signed three M.Y. Agreements at the H.Q. level, and five UNHCR countries signed M.Y. agreements. However, survey results reveal some challenges in communication between UNHCR and NGO partners around the opportunities for M.Y.

¹ As of 2019, a Multi-Year Partnership Agreement (M.Y. Partnership Agreement) is made available for operations that have adopted Multi-Year Strategies (M.Y. Strategies) including what is known as Multi-Year/Multi-Partner, Protection and Solutions Strategies, Multi-Year response plans such as Operations with a RRP, etc. In addition, any other operation that is interested in and willing to adhere to the conditions and procedures stipulated in this guidance can also use M.Y. Partnership Agreements.

agreements. Most UNHCR respondents (72%) reported their offices did not provide M.Y. Partnership Agreement opportunities for 2019, and just over half of NGO respondents (51%) were aware of M.Y. opportunities in their context. Where M.Y. Agreements were available, UNHCR engaged three partners on average in discussions, reflecting the low number of NGO respondents (36%) who reported seeking M.Y. agreements. Of those that sought M.Y. agreements, almost all NGOs (81%) were selected. However, 75% of NGO respondents who were not ultimately selected reported that they did not receive proactive and clear reasoning from UNHCR for non-selection. As UNHCR seeks to improve and expand M.Y. agreement opportunities, it should take steps to more clearly outline processes to ensure both UNHCR and partners are aware of the criteria and relevant procedures.

CAPACITY AND LOCALIZATION

Almost all UNHCR respondents (96%) had moderate to complete confidence in NGO partner capacity and technical experience to effectively manage Project Partnership Agreements (PPA) funding and meet the needs of persons of concern in 2019 (up 4% from 2018). Both UNHCR and NGO respondents (82%) and NGO (55%) reported contributing to joint efforts to build the capacity of local NGOs and community based organizations (CBOs) in 2019, representing a slight decrease from 2018 (83% of UNHCR respondents and 61% of NGOs). Most UNHCR and NGO respondents (94% and 91% respectively) supported local capacity efforts by transferring knowledge and experience through training and coaching, as they had in 2018. UNHCR respondents reported their approach to increasing funds for national partners centered primarily on reducing the direct UNHCR implementation of programs (44%) alongside phasing out or reducing international non-governmental organization (INGO) funds (30%). This marks a shift from 2018 during which UNHCR prioritized phasing out or reducing INGO funds (48%) as compared to reducing the direct UNHCR implementation of programs (38%).

PROJECT PARTNERSHIP AGREEMENTS

There was an increase in the number of perceived PPA signing delays from 2018 to 2019. More than one third (39%) of NGO respondents reported having at least one or more 2019 PPAs not signed prior to January 1 or the start of the project (as compared to 37% in 2018), with almost half of respondents (42%) noting that PPA delays lasted one to three months. Both UNHCR and NGO respondents continue to report negotiations over project narrative and budgets as the main cause for delayed PPA signing as they

did in 2018. Although most NGOs (86%) reported UNHCR adhering to terms outlined in PPAs, 70% of UNHCR respondents reported that they requested additional information, reporting, or site visits not outlined in PPAs. The administrative burden of additional reporting remains a clear concern for many NGO partners and reduces teams' ability to implement projects.

UNHCR FUNDING IMPLICATIONS

Over half of NGO respondents (64%) are confident in their ability to implement programming with other funding sources if UNHCR funding were to cease. While national partners reported having higher confidence in their ability to continue programming without UNHCR funding than their international counterparts, national NGOs are far more dependent on UNHCR funding, with 50% reporting that 50% or more of their budget comes from UNHCR. Overall, fewer UNHCR respondents (42%) reported having the same level of confidence in their partners' ability to continue operating if UNHCR funding were to cease. Although low, this shows a more optimistic outlook from UNHCR in comparison to the 23% of 2018 respondents that believed NGOs would likely be able to continue programming without UNHCR funds. A critical concern to many NGOs is UNHCR's lack of funding to cover the full and fair costs of projects. About half of NGO respondents reported that staff (54%) and indirect or shared costs (45%) required for 2019 projects were actually fully and fairly funded by UNHCR, which likely contributes to the drawn-out negotiations over programs and budgets that delay PPA signing.

OVERALL PARTNERSHIP ASSESSMENT

The majority of UNHCR and NGO respondents (both 77%) reported an overall improvement in the partner relationship during 2019, an 11% increase compared to 2018 NGO partner responses, and a 3% decrease from UNHCR respondents in 2018. National NGOs and UNHCR reported having a stronger relationship, with 96% of national NGOs and 91% of UNHCR respondents rating it as good or excellent, as compared to INGOs and UNHCR, with 81% of INGOs and 80% of UNHCR respondents reporting a good or excellent relationship. Nonetheless, both NGOs' and UNHCR's assessment of the state of their partnership continues to improve, demonstrating that continued engagement and collaboration can contribute to an improved relationship and positive outcomes.

OVERARCHING RECOMMENDATIONS FOR UNHCR

- **Leverage successes and identify weaknesses in planning consultation efforts.**
Ensure greater participation from NGOs in Regional Consultation Meetings and use engagement to develop priorities and goals jointly. Identify key successes of the Regional Consultation Meetings to replicate and strengthen in upcoming consultations. Conduct an assessment of the COP engagement to understand better why both UNHCR and NGO participants do not find this to be the most useful form of engagement. Use this learning to redefine the COP and Regional Consultations and ensure that more NGO partners are invited.
- **Provide clarity on existing processes and strengthen communications across UNHCR offices.**
Provide enhanced guidance to UNHCR Offices on the availability, criteria, and parameters of Multi-Year Partnership Agreements to ensure Offices can appropriately inform and engage partners on opportunities. Set expectations for engaging partners and providing feedback throughout the process.
- **Take concerted steps to improve communication with partners throughout the selection and award process, specifically regarding Multi-Year Partnership Agreements.** Ensure there is an appropriate amount of time to submit expressions of interests, specifically in protracted settings where an immediate response may not be required. Provide partners with clear reasoning for selection and non-selection.
- **Continue to capitalize on the U.N. Partner Portal, in line with ongoing U.N. harmonization efforts, and seek to increase the functionality of the system.** For example, use the portal to process e-signing of PPAs and relevant documentation and consider incorporating reporting templates and requirements for online submissions as appropriate.
- **Simplify the PPA document and reduce the number of information requests outside PPA requirements.** With the upcoming review of the PPA template, UNHCR should take advantage of the opportunity to streamline and simplify required documents in line with its Grand Bargain commitments. Similarly, as UNHCR already uses the 8+3 reporting template, UNHCR staff should

refrain from requesting outside and additional information from partners, as this defeats the purpose of simplified and less frequent reporting.

- **Commit to covering the full and fair costs of programs.** Implementing the pilot of [Money Where It Counts](#) will enable UNHCR and NGO partners to have a more transparent and equitable understanding of what it costs to implement a project. Engage in discussions with NGO partners around specific concerns, such as salary costs, to build trust around NGO decision making.
- **Leverage opportunities such as Multi-Year Funding to strengthen capacity-building approaches.** Make use of predictable funding and longer agreements to provide more robust support to national NGOs, directly and through INGO partners. Expand capacity building methods to include more substantial support in the form of mentoring and twinning arrangements and support for engagement in cluster coordination and decision-making bodies.

OVERARCHING RECOMMENDATIONS FOR NGOS

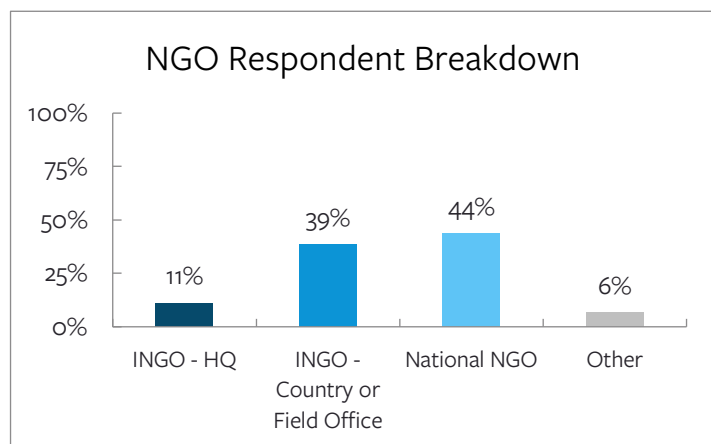
- **Leverage opportunities for planning and consultation at multiple levels.** Participate in local, national, and regional consultations as feasible to build relationships with UNHCR colleagues. Engage UNHCR early to demonstrate an interest in shaping and participating in processes such as Country or Regional consultations. Consider including UNHCR in internal planning processes to build trust in internal decision making and prioritization of country program goals.
- **Use joint monitoring visits, planning, and consultations to identify opportunities for joint advocacy.** Strengthen collaboration and coordination by, during visits and engagements, highlighting key trends and concerns that would benefit from UNHCR's engagement and advocacy.
- **Engage UNHCR Country Offices in a discussion on Multi-Year Partnership Agreements.** Identify how such agreements would result in strengthened programming, including capacity building for local partners, and initiate conversations with UNHCR country staff on how Multi-Year agreements might best be best for the context.

- **Register and make use of the U.N. Partner Portal.** Use the existing system to ensure updates on Calls for Expression of Interest. Provide feedback to UNHCR colleagues on how the Portal can be better used to reduce administrative burden.
- **Consider programs that include more substantive capacity building approaches, such as twinning and mentoring of local organizations.** Build more substantive capacity building activities into programming. Use existing relationships with UNHCR to connect UNHCR to local organizations and have conversations with local organizations and UNHCR to design partnership approaches.

BACKGROUND

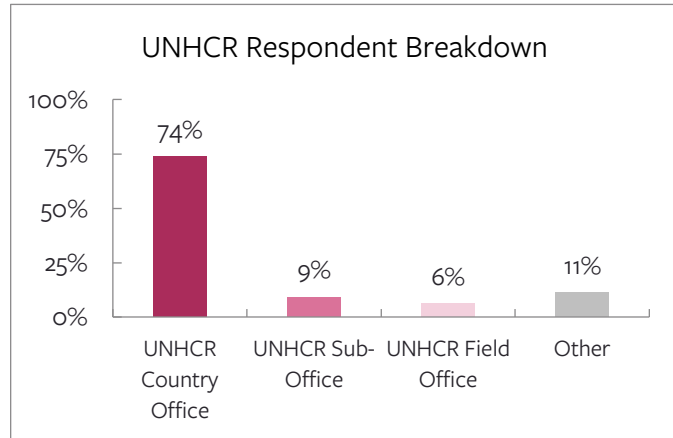
This report reflects submissions from 105 UNHCR staff and 550 NGO staff, nearly half of whom represent national or local NGO partners. Compared to last year’s survey of 2018 partnerships, the number of UNHCR respondents increased by 32 and the number of NGO respondents increased by 343. Overall, the number of UNHCR respondents is lower relative to NGO respondents because UNHCR was asked to submit one response per office, while multiple staff from each NGO were encouraged to complete the survey.

NGO survey respondents were primarily comprised of INGOs (50%)—of which 11% are based in a headquarters office, 39% are based in a country or field office—and national NGOs (44%). In addition, most NGO respondents (64%) were not members or were not aware of their membership with any consortia. ICVA members were most represented in the survey, with 16% of NGO respondents, followed by InterAction members, who made up 13% of NGO

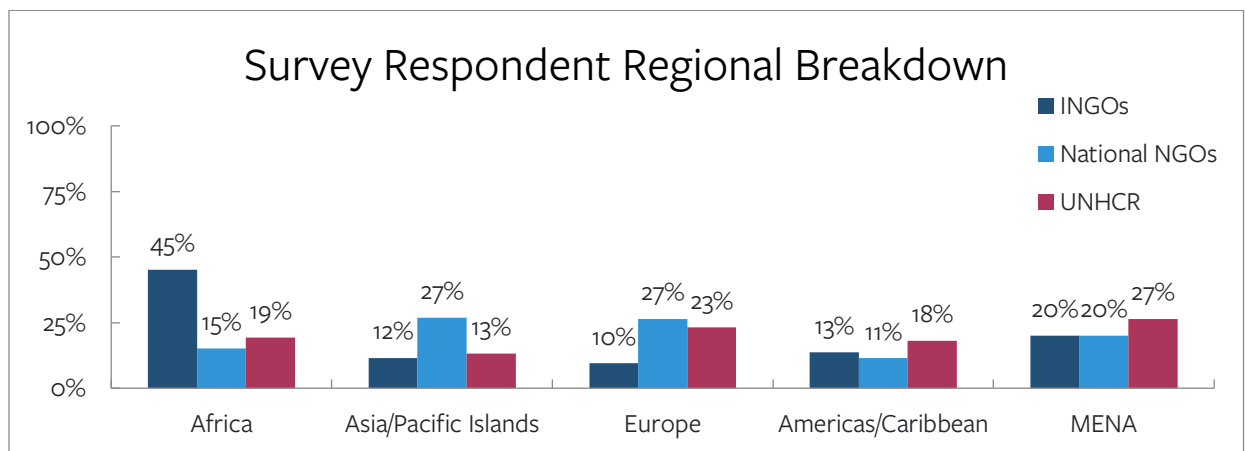


respondents. Most UNHCR respondents (74%) worked at a UNHCR Country Office, while the remainder worked at a Sub-Office, Field Office, or Regional Office/Multi-Country Office.

More than half of NGO respondents (53%) managed the UNHCR partnership and almost one third (28%) signed the Project Partnership Agreement, while UNHCR respondents were predominately program or project control staff (88%). More than one third (37%) of NGO respondents held an executive position in their organization. In comparison, only 2% of UNHCR respondents held the position of Deputy Director, Deputy Representative, Deputy Head of Office, or higher.



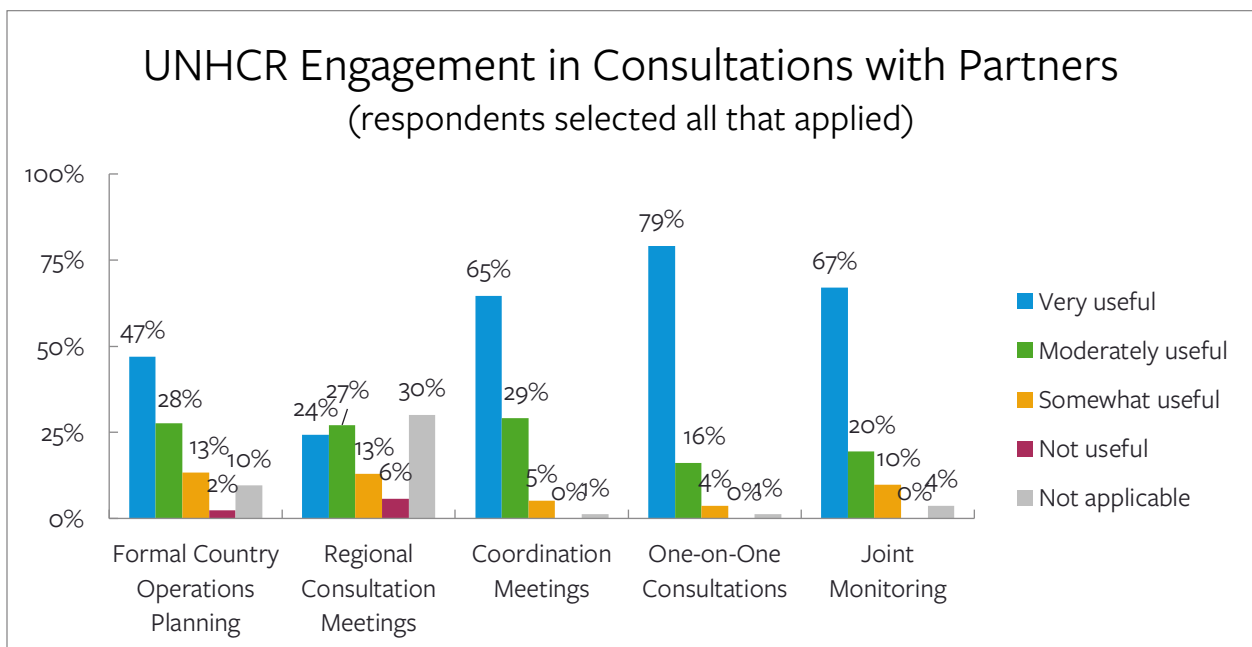
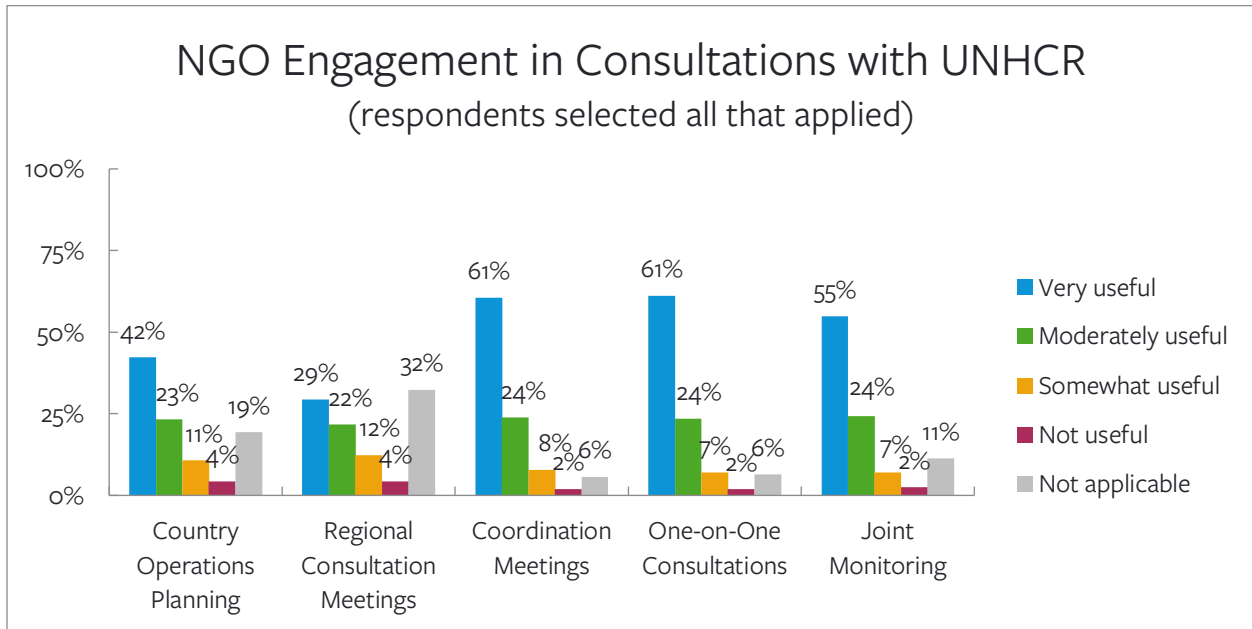
Overall, the distribution of respondents from both surveys was mostly proportional across regions. NGO respondents most represented the Africa region (31%), with fewest responses coming from the Americas/Caribbean region (12%). UNHCR respondents most represented the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region (27%). To note, the highest proportion of national NGOs represented the Asia/Pacific Islands region and Europe (both 27%), while these two regions had the lowest INGO responses.



PLANNING AND CONSULTATION

Both UNHCR and NGO partners rated one-on-one consultations as the most useful means of planning and engagement with one another. However, NGOs also found similar value in coordination meetings, which they were most likely to engage in. More than half of both INGOs and national NGOs rated coordination meetings as very useful, with slightly more national NGOs (66%) than INGOs (54%) favoring them highly. However, some partners perceived coordination meetings as “one-way directives given to the NGO implementing partner without focusing too much on the suggestions or recommendations provided by that partner.”

Comparatively, UNHCR used their COP as the most common means of engagement, although it was not cited as the most useful. Similar to 2018, fewer respondents from both UNHCR and NGOs cited COP as useful compared to other forms of consultation. Regional Consultation Meetings were introduced in 2019 in some Regional Bureaux, noting that decentralized regional structures only formally started in January 2020. While only 32% of NGO respondents reported receiving invitations in 2019, 92% of those that participated felt their participation was significantly or moderately useful to their organization. Recognizing the value that Regional Consultations held for partners, UNHCR should seek to ensure a greater number of NGO partners are invited in the upcoming year and leverage the opportunity to build on successful engagement in 2019.

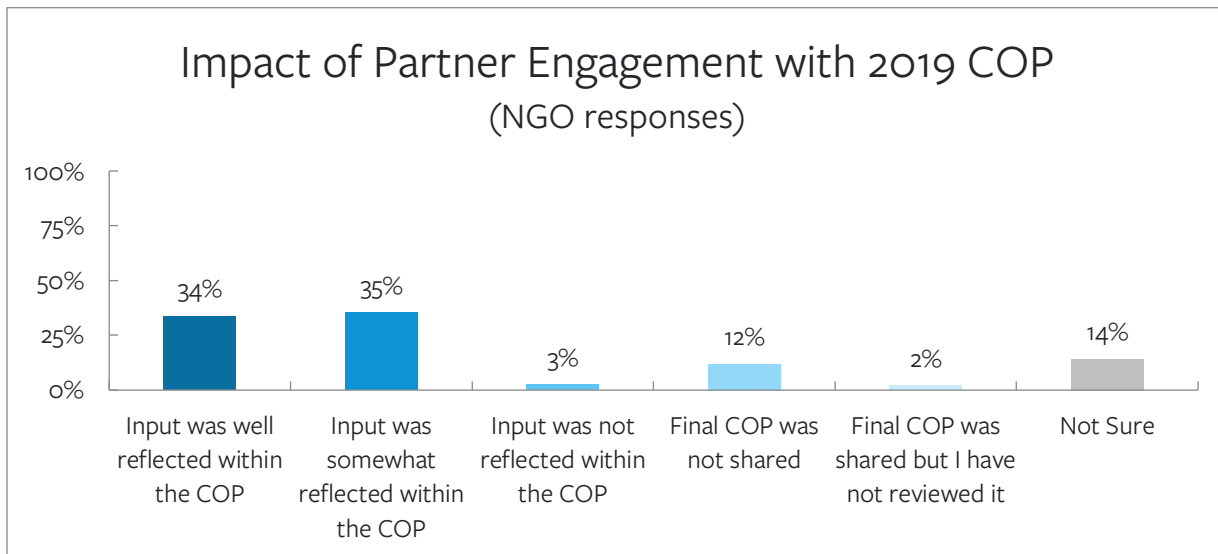


UNHCR respondents reported they used their COP as the most common means of engagement with NGO partners in 2019. Most UNHCR respondents (69%) invited NGO partners to engage in annual COP for 2019, in which almost all (95%) participated if invited. Of those NGO participants, most (69%) felt their

input was well or somewhat reflected in the final COP. However, 12% of NGO contributors reported that the final product was not shared with them.

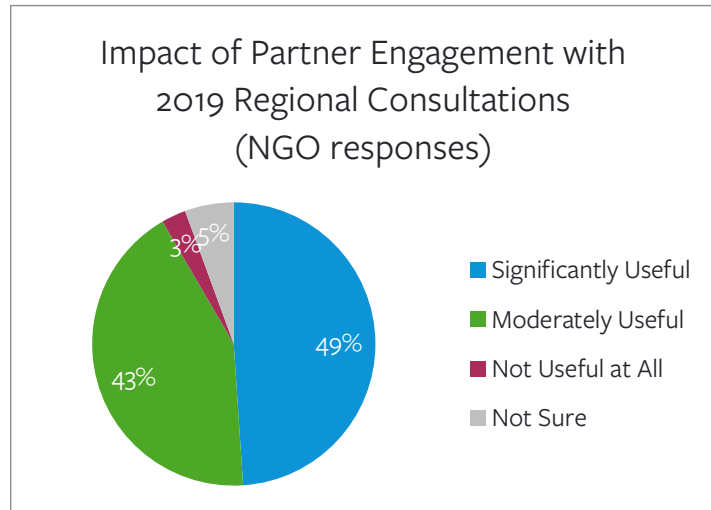
“We were invited to the presentation of the country plan, but not consulted for the development of the plan or actions and planning needed for HCR programming for the next 1-3 years.”– NGO respondent

“Our organization was invited, but contributions were not requested. The purpose of the meeting was more to provide information than seek feedback.”– NGO respondent



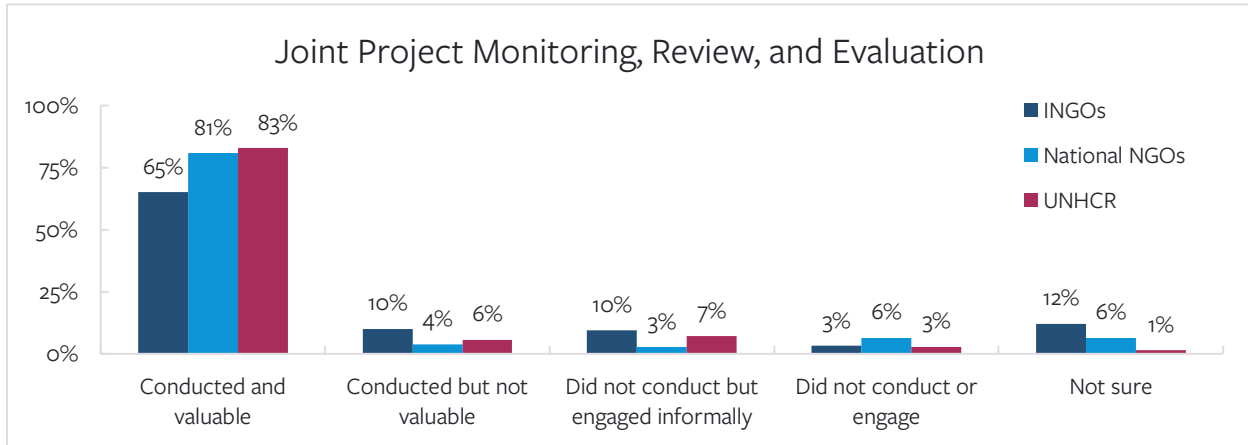
Although Regional Consultation Meetings are fairly new, 92% of the NGO respondents that participated in the meetings felt their participation was significantly or moderately useful to their organization. In fact, more NGO participants reported Regional Consultation Meetings as “significantly useful” (49%) than “moderately useful” (43%). While more INGOs reported being invited to Regional Consultations than national NGOs, a higher percentage of national NGOs reported them as more useful (51% of national NGOs, as compared to 29% of INGOs reported Regional Consultations as significantly meaningful).

Some NGO respondents commented that Regional Consultations were “useful to understand but provided limited opportunity to influence.” One partner noted that they “received feedback on the segment [they] proposed, but not on the whole country operation.” Overall, participation was seen as a positive experience by many partners. One responded that “There was a lot of



interaction among partners in the region and staff from UNHCR HQ, as well as other stakeholders, especially from the private sector.” Recognizing the value that Regional Consultations held for partners, UNHCR should seek to ensure a greater number of NGO partners are invited in the upcoming year and leverage the opportunity to build on successful engagement in 2019.

When looking at individual NGOs’ planning for 2019, more than half of NGO respondents (57%) invited UNHCR representatives to consult and reported that almost all UNHCR representatives who were invited (92%) participated. On the other hand, only 36% of UNHCR respondents reported they were invited by NGO partners, of which 93% participated with some or all requesting partners. More than half of UNHCR invitees (57%) participated in consultations with all requesting NGO partners. A significant percentage of UNHCR respondents (28%) reported they did not know if they were invited, which could be attributed to the fact that most UNHCR respondents were program staff, while invitations were likely sent to more senior staff. Regardless, almost all UNHCR respondents reported participating in NGO planning for 2019 when invited by their partners to consult. It is also worth noting that most UNHCR (83%) and NGO (73%) respondents conducted a formal joint project monitoring, review, or evaluation of at least one project with one another, as required in the PPA, and found it to be a valuable experience. UNHCR and National NGOs found it to be more valuable (83% and 81%, respectively) than INGOs (65%).



PARTNER SELECTION

Most UNHCR respondents (64%) reported they issued one or more Calls for Expression of Interest for 2019 projects. Compared to 2018, offices are issuing fewer calls, down from five to four per year, and receiving fewer applications per call, down from 11 to nine in 2019. Fewer NGO respondents (14%) reported that they received proactive and clear reasoning from UNHCR when not selected for a 2019 project compared to 2018 (17%).

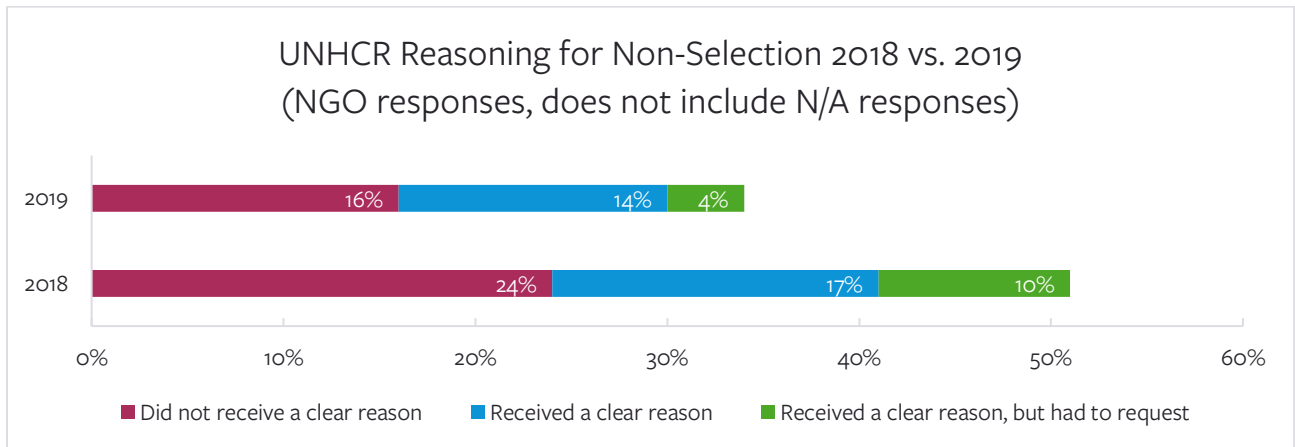
“We had mixed information; in most cases UNHCR provided feedback, but sometimes there was no communication or follow up.” – NGO respondent

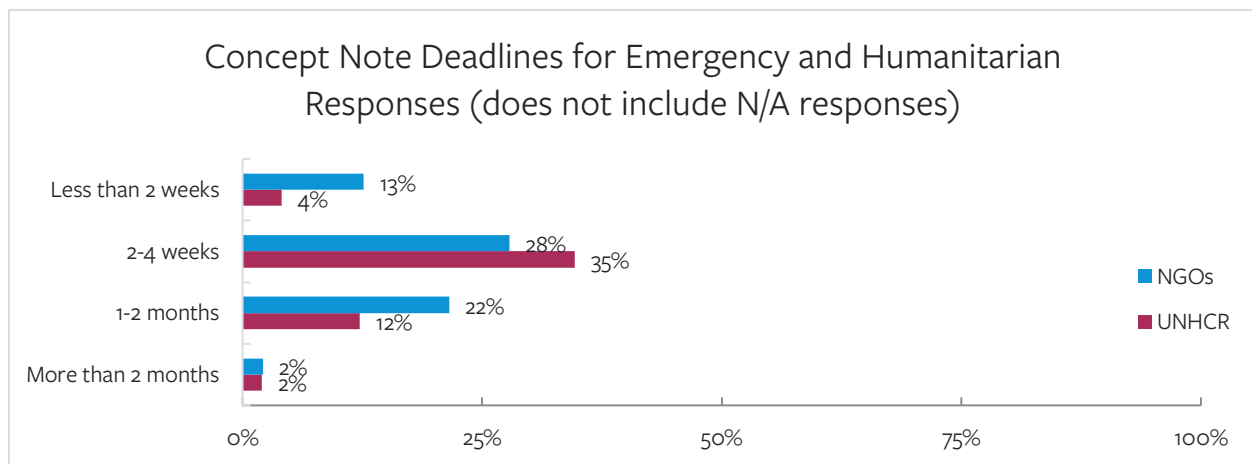
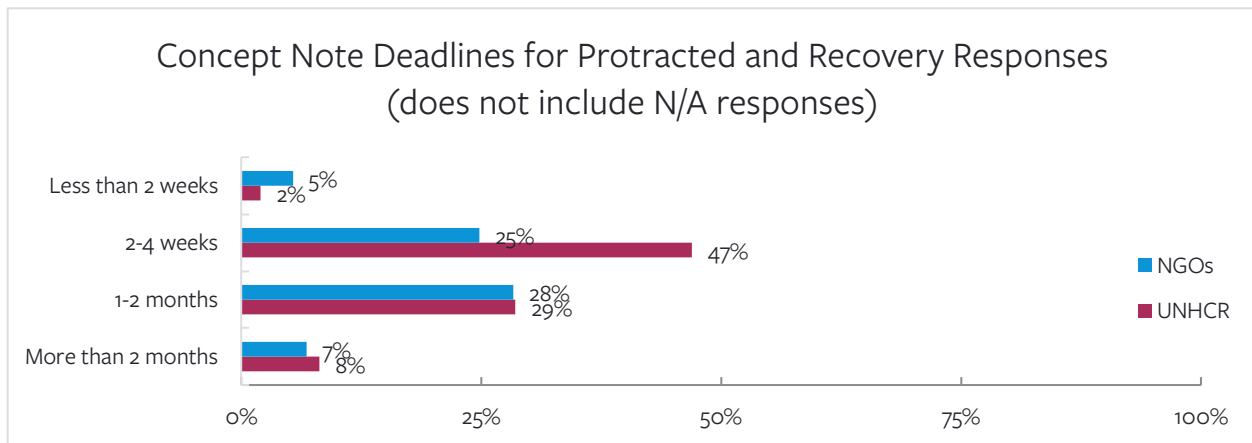
“There were conflicting reasons in writing versus what we were told in person.” – NGO respondent

“UNHCR informed us about the non-selection but didn’t provide clear reason. The letter shared by UNHCR for non-selection was very generic.” – NGO respondent

The Call for Expression of Interest was applied in a completely opaque manner.” – NGO respondent

It is worth noting, however, that there was an 8% decrease in NGO respondents (16% of respondents) that reported not receiving a clear reason for non-selection in 2019 compared to 2018 (24% of respondents). This includes partners that requested feedback but did not receive a clear response or a response at all.





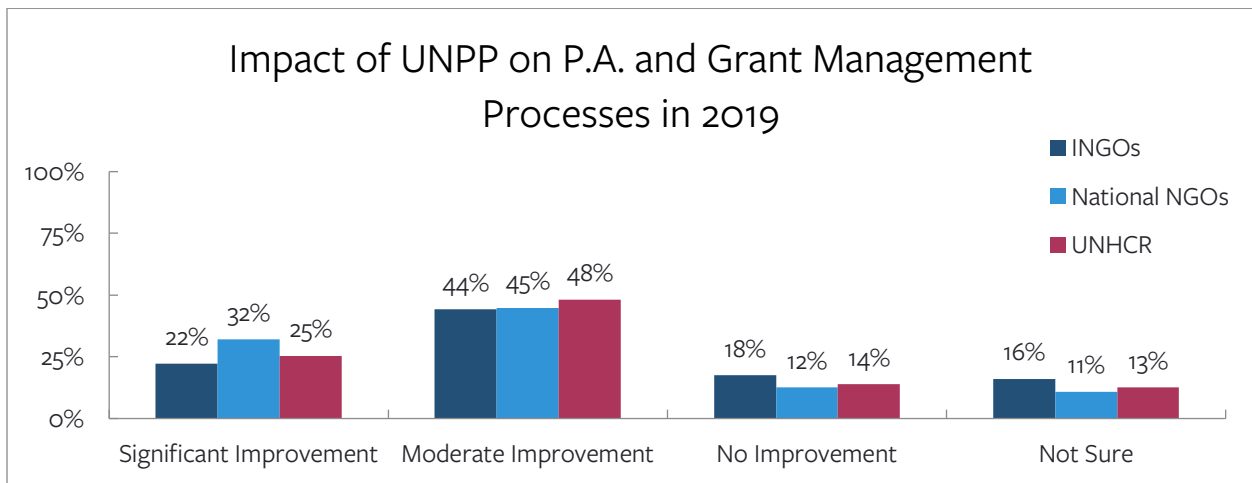
UNHCR respondents reported giving more time on average between Calls for Expression of Interest and concept note deadlines than what NGO respondents reported receiving for 2019 projects. In both cases of protracted and recovery contexts and humanitarian contexts, most UNHCR respondents reported giving two to four weeks to respond. In particular, 47% of UNHCR respondents reported giving two to four weeks for protracted responses versus only 25% of partners. NGO respondents also more often reported being given less than two weeks in both protracted and recovery responses (5%) and emergency and humanitarian responses (13%) compared to UNHCR reports (2% and 4%, respectively).

U.N. PARTNER PORTAL

The UNPP continues to be a useful tool for both UNHCR and NGO partners. Most NGO respondents (86%) reported they were registered on the U.N. Partner Portal in 2019—although this is a 10% decrease

from the 96% of respondents in 2018. Of the 3% of NGO respondents that reported they were not registered in 2019, most (77%) indicated that they plan on registering in 2020. The utility of registering on the UNPP is evident, given that 96% of UNHCR respondents reported using the Portal to post Calls for Expression of Interest for 2019 (up 16% from 2018). However, less than half of NGO respondents (45%) learned about 2019 Calls through the Portal, which speaks to either the need for better publicization of the Portal for this use or the strength of in-country communications and relationships.

Overall, most NGO and UNHCR respondents (71% and 73% respectively) reported positive impacts from using the UNPP, noting that it moderately to significantly improved their grant management and partnership agreement management processes for 2019.



While noting its usefulness, both UNHCR and NGO respondents provided suggestions to improve the Portal further. Most UNHCR and NGO respondents agreed that more dedicated technical support, improved alerts and notifications, additional language support, increased information and updates, easier accessibility, and additional functions to manage the entire grant cycle (not only submissions) would be very beneficial to the UNPP.

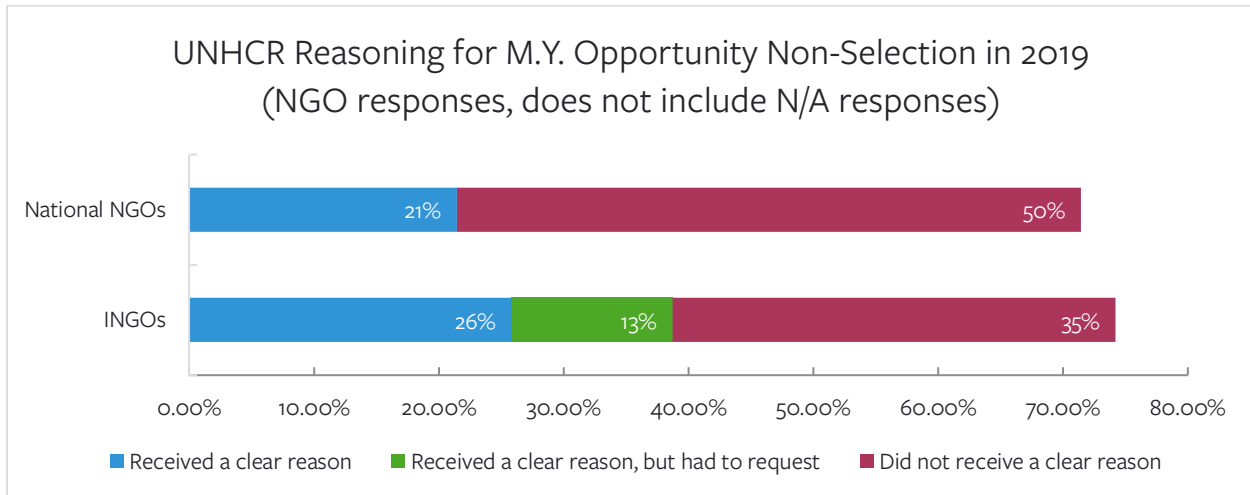
NGO respondents specifically suggested to “link with project proposal and grant management (like GMS) to make it more comprehensive” and make it a “more integrated and comprehensive grant management system (borrow from OCHA).” In addition, NGO respondents commented that “UNPP does not cater for

organizations which are families. It requires manual registration per country” and that there should be an “offline option [in which the] operation/design of the portal should take more into account of poor internet connections in certain implementing environments.”

UNHCR respondents added that the UNPP should include “more trainings/resources for partners to make it more beneficial for them outside of just active calls” and “Integrate into one of the regularly used tools (FOCUS or MSRP), that would make it frequently used by UNHCR staff.”

MULTI-YEAR PARTNERSHIP AGREEMENTS

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UNHCR respondents emphasized that M.Y. Agreements are still very new. Given the many uncertainties they face in various contexts, they perceived such opportunities as additional burdens rather than a simplification of processes.

“The Operation engaged is a new partner selection for all the sectors and therefore the Operation did not know at the time which NGOs we were going to partner with for 2020. Furthermore, it was a new process with little clarity at the field level, especially taking into account the UNHCR one-year financial budget year. It was perceived at that time as an additional burden, rather than a simplification of processes” – UNHCR Respondent

Overall, UNHCR responses noted minimal benefits of M.Y. Agreements as currently structured. One UNHCR respondent commented that: “It was done in some offices. The office opted not to have a M.Y. as unspent balance cannot be carried over causing double budgeting and loss of resources.” Several other UNHCR respondents perceived M.Y. opportunities similarly, explaining that “multi-year PPA doesn’t allow budget carry-over, and therefore is not very useful” and that “without budgets which carry over to the second implementation year, was seen by some as a little pointless.”

Given the perceived lack of clarity around M.Y. opportunities in UNHCR offices, NGO respondents left similarly uncertain. “Most UNHCR Country Offices we contacted were little aware of the option, and not

ready to pursue M.Y. P.A.s” or “indicated that it was not yet an option in that context,” one partner staff member explained. In many cases, “the discussion was not even on the table.”

Most UNHCR respondents reported their reasoning for not providing M.Y. opportunities was primarily due to context (nature of operation, government impediments, partner risk factor, etc.), uncertainty or lack of funding, or because their office was not a pilot country or M.Y. opportunities were not yet available in their country or context. The majority of NGO respondents confirmed receiving similar reasons.

“UNHCR communicated that this would be provided during the second half of the year 2020. It was also shared that, the financial system at this point doesn’t allow Ethiopia to start this opportunity.”

– NGO respondent

“The country was not prioritized for MYPA due to funding limitations.” – NGO respondent

“UNHCR did not provide information for not starting Multi-Year Agreements in 2019 Budget year but there was a call for 2020 budget year.” – NGO respondent

“This was raised with the UNHCR Rep and Program Team again and again with no answer contributing to a cloud of in transparency.” – NGO respondent

“Lately UNHCR is signing PPAs with a duration of even less than 12 months. In some countries even only for 3 months. The most commonly provided explanation is the lack of visibility on the funds available for that particular year. Therefore, not only are multi-year agreements not on the table in many places, but annual agreements are not even signed anymore.” – NGO Respondent

While NGOs did report that they felt there was a lack of clarity about M.Y. opportunities, several NGO respondents noted the positive potential of them. One respondent remarked that “Multi-year agreements can significantly help partners [specifically NNGOs] with staffing stability,” but “M.Y. Agreements are not very meaningful if they do not allow budget carry over to the second implementation year.”

Based on feedback from respondents, improvements to the process would include a better explanation of the benefits and process by which a UNHCR office can use M.Y. Agreements, and that the ability to allow budget carry over to the second year is key to their successful implementation. As UNHCR seeks to improve and expand M.Y. Agreement opportunities, it should take steps to more clearly outline processes to ensure both UNHCR offices and NGO partners are aware of the criteria and relevant procedures.

CAPACITY AND LOCALIZATION

Almost all UNHCR respondents (96%) had moderate to complete confidence in NGO partner capacity and technical experience to effectively manage Project Partnership Agreements (PPA) funding and meet the needs of persons of concern in 2019 (up 4% from 2018). Although UNHCR confidence was high, several respondents noted challenges.

“Overall, partners are completely capable but small, so some formal internal control requirements are more difficult to comply with despite best efforts.” – UNHCR respondent

“Most partners particularly struggle with Internal Control and Procurement Policies which they do not have sufficient resources to fully manage and comply with. They are mostly small NGOs and rely on full funding from UNHCR which is very limited.” – UNHCR respondent

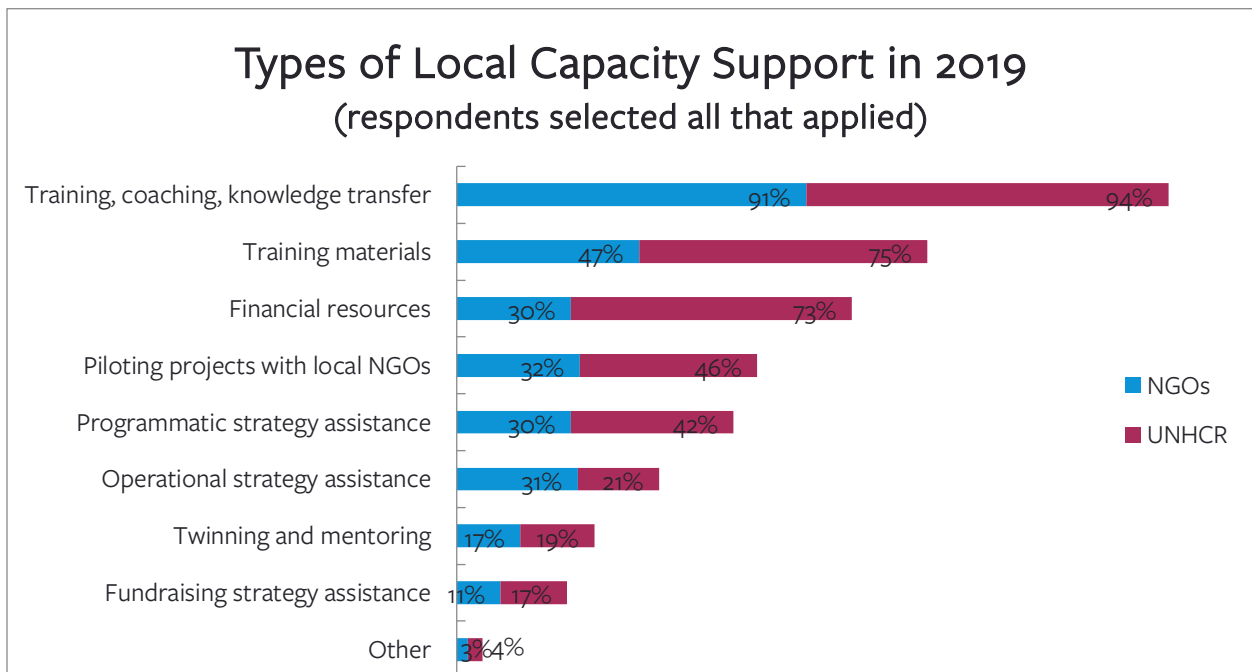
“While partner capacity in technical sectors is commendable, UNHCR continuously engages in partner capacity building, in the area of protection activities delivery and case management.” – UNHCR respondent

“Capacity varies from partner to partner.” “Some partners have sufficient technical sectoral experience while others have less.” “A couple of new national partners need specific capacity building.” “Technical capacity is often dependent on the quality of the team, instead of the quality of the institution.” – UNHCR respondents

Both UNHCR (82%) and NGO (55%) respondents reported contributing to joint efforts to build the capacity of local NGOs and CBOs in 2019, representing a slight decrease from 2018 (83% of UNHCR and 61% of NGOs). One UNHCR respondent explained that “joint capacity building for local NGOs is organized in cooperation with international NGOs while capacity building for CBOs is organized directly by UNHCR.”

Most UNHCR and NGO respondents (94% and 91%, respectively) supported local capacity efforts by transferring knowledge/experience through training and coaching, as they had in 2018. In addition, 75% of UNHCR respondents reported they provided training materials, compared to 47% of NGOs, and 73% provided financial resources, while only 30% of NGO respondents did the same. On the other hand, assistance with fundraising strategies was the least common form of support by both UNHCR and NGOs, closely followed by twinning and mentoring.

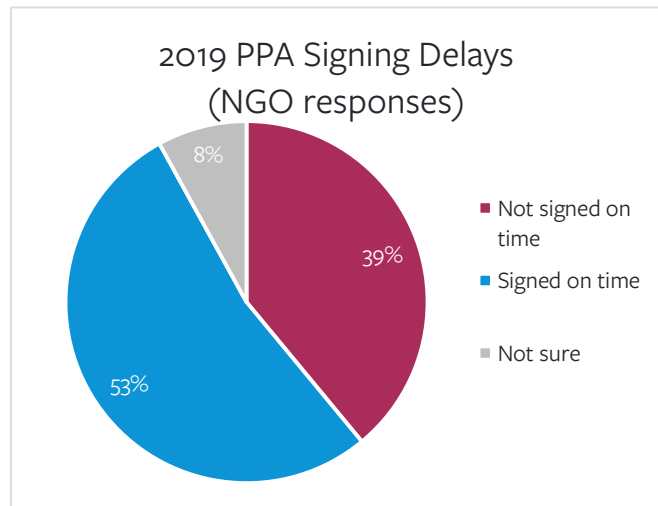
“We organized many trainings and workshops to build local NGO and CBO capacity, but it depended on individual organization capacity and staff turnover rate.” – UNHCR respondent



UNHCR committed as part of the Grand Bargain to transfer at least 25% of its program expenditures to local and national responders by 2020 and met this target in 2019. In 2019, UNHCR approaches to increasing funds for national partners centered primarily on reducing the direct UNHCR implementation of programs (44%) alongside phasing out or reducing INGO funds (30%). This marks a shift from 2018, during which UNHCR prioritized phasing out or reducing INGO funds (48%) as compared to reducing the direct UNHCR implementation of programs (38%). Notably, only 6% (10% less than last year) of UNHCR staff stated that they did not actively work toward this commitment in 2019.

PROJECT PARTNERSHIP AGREEMENTS

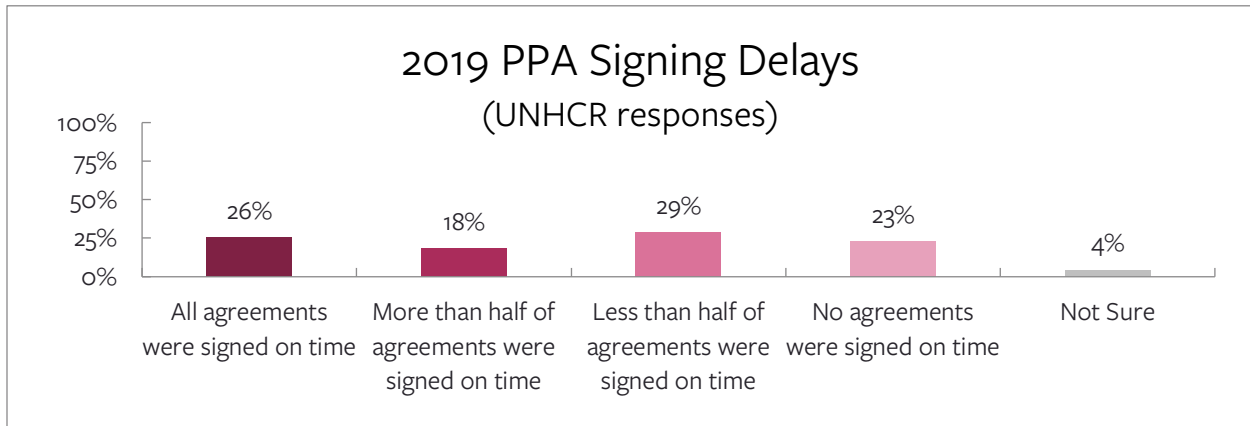
There was an increase in the number of perceived PPA signing delays from 2018 to 2019. More than one third (39%) of NGO respondents reported having at least one or more unsigned 2019 PPAs before January 1 or before the start of the project (as compared to 37% in 2018), with almost half of respondents (42%) noting that PPA delays lasted one to three months. The Asia/Pacific region had the fewest 2019 PPA delays (23%) while the highest number of delays occurred in MENA (51%) and Africa (47%).



“We have never in our history of 5+ years had our PPA signed before the start date of the project.” – NGO respondent

“No PPAs were signed prior to January 1. The PPA’s were signed a lot earlier than normal, which was good. However, because of UNHCR global rules of not backdating the PPAs, UNHCR ended up on four separate PPAs taking three weeks to respond to submissions and then requesting detailed revisions to a PPA in less than 24 hours and becoming upset if the response was not provided within a day.” – NGO respondent

“All PPAs we have had with UNHCR over the past three years have been signed after the start of the project.” – NGO respondent

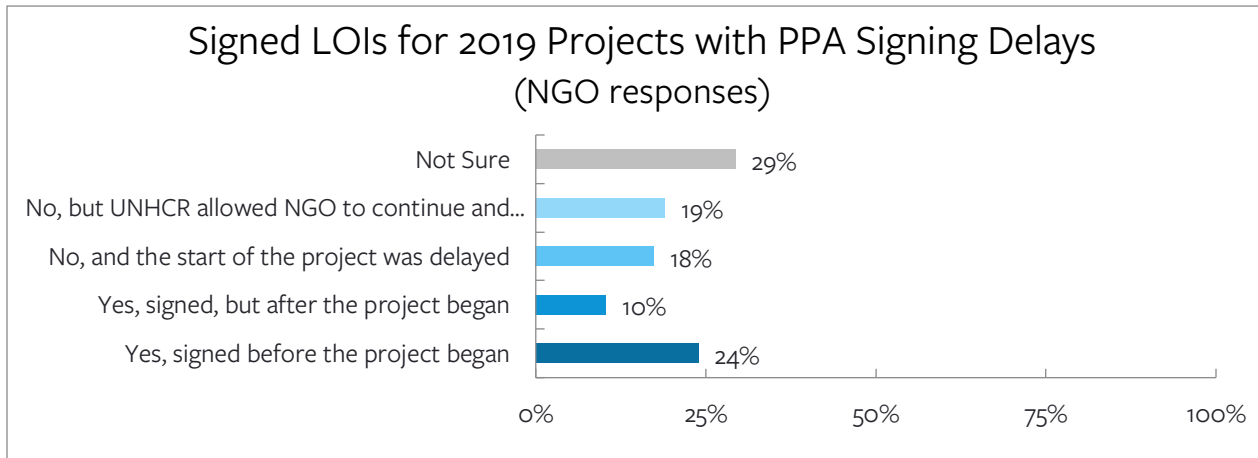


Most UNHCR respondents (75%) reported that projects without PPAs signed on time did not include a signed Letter of Intent (LOI). However, 19% of NGO respondents reported that when there was not a LOI, they were able to continue by retroactively signing an agreement later. One UNHCR respondent provided the following insight:

“Based on the experience with Letters of Mutual Intent (LOMIs) in 2018, the operation decided not to consider LOMIs in 2019 for the following reasons: (i) signing LOMIs took a similar amount of time and partners were not convinced that it provides sufficient level of details to proceed with project implementation and (ii) partners were reluctant to include all relevant targets in LOMIs due to the fear that their engagement in the relevant activity and its scope will not be approved by the national authorities.”

– UNHCR respondent

Nonetheless, significant PPA delays combined with a lack of tools for mitigating the delays’ impact on programs introduces substantial risk for partners to ensure program continuity.



As in 2018, both UNHCR and NGO respondents report that negotiations over project narrative and budget negotiations are the main cause for delayed PPA signing. A significant portion (55%) of UNHCR respondents noted that their office and NGO offices both required more time to work together to make changes. Notably, UNHCR reported delays due to NGO H.Q. review and signature (34%), while NGOs were most likely to attribute delays to negotiated and shared processes or to UNHCR, as compared to their internal procedures.

“Due to the delays in the approval process imposed by the national authorities, the signing of PPAs was not possible before the start of the project cycle. Only two out of 29 partnership agreements were signed in December 2018.” – UNHCR respondent

“Normally, the government does delay their part of signing. Initially, few PPAs are signed by UNHCR and partners, and implementation starts while waiting for the government to sign.” – UNHCR respondent

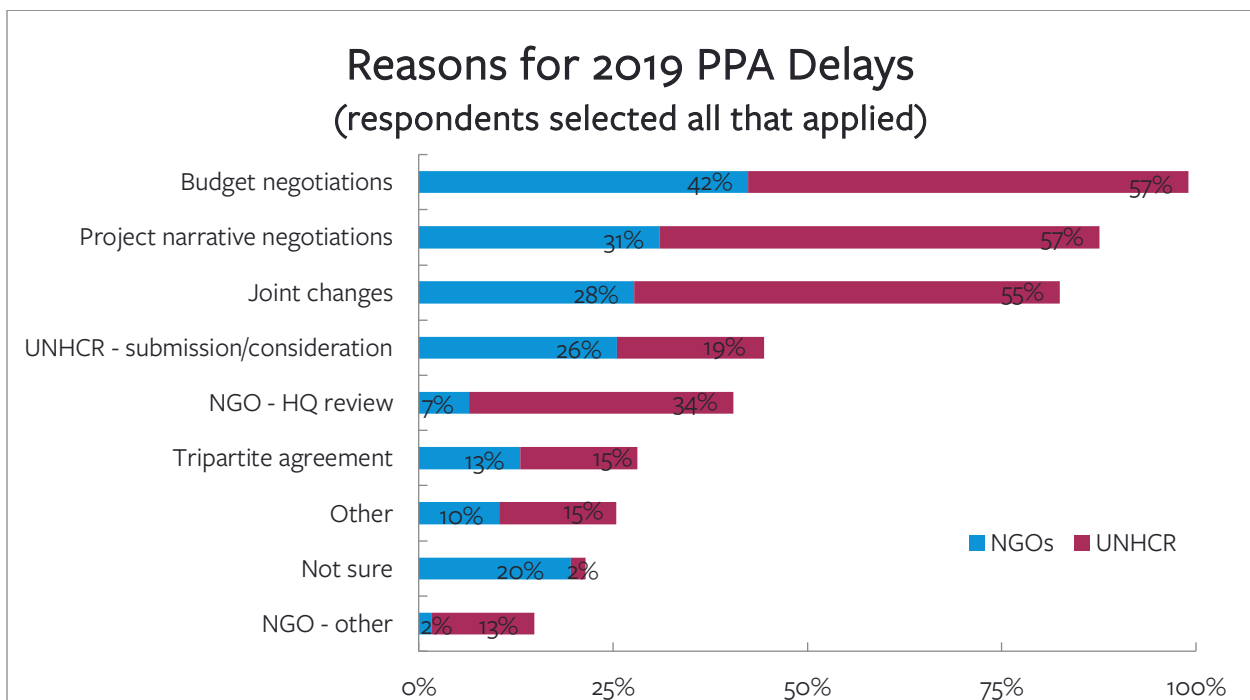
“NGOs did not submit the proposal on time; UNHCR staff changes/gaps - former staff did not initiate discussions on PPAs and did not provide any hand-over to a new incoming programme staff.” – UNHCR respondent

“UNHCR continued to request additional activities and components to be added to the PPA, thus changing the narrative and financial pieces. We signed the PPA four months into implementation in 2020. In 2019 we signed the PPA amendment for the period June-December in December 2019.”

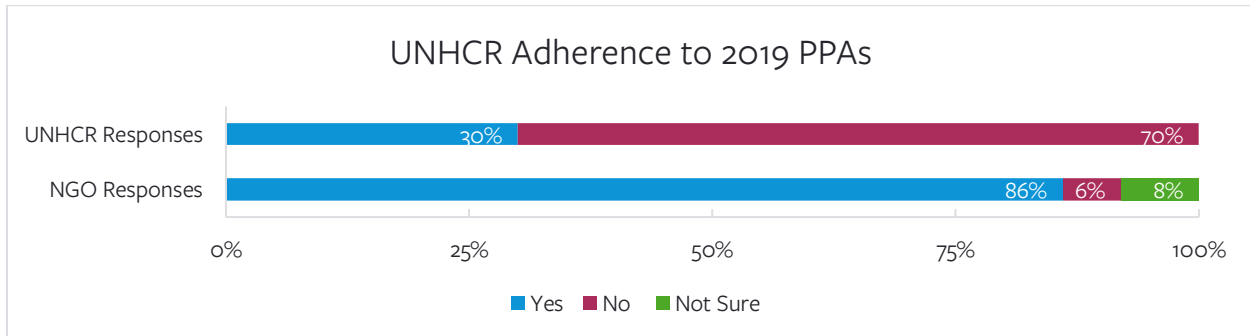
– NGO respondent

“UNHCR delayed the decision on the type of PPA that would be signed for part of our activities for eight months due to internal HCR policy discussions and waivers.” – NGO respondent

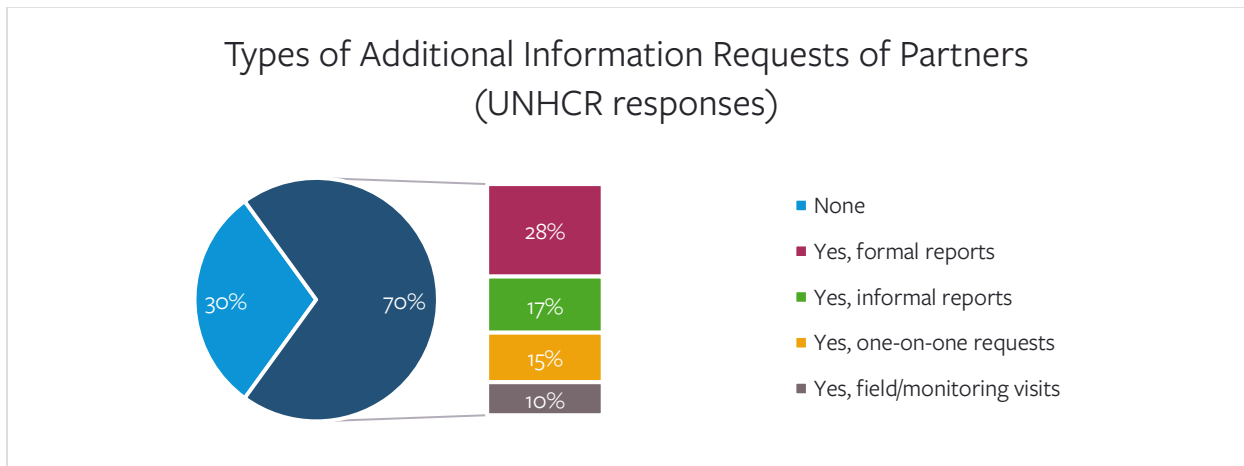
“Negotiations over protection data and Annex F delayed the agreement (with appreciation for UNHCR to have agreed to engage on the issue at global/interagency level).” – NGO respondent



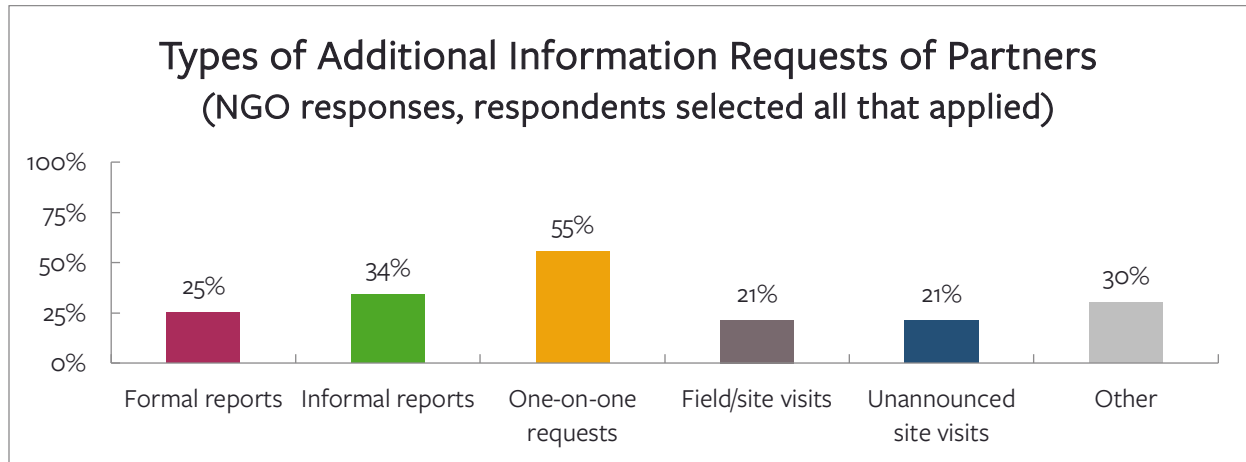
Although most NGOs (86%) reported that UNHCR adhered to reporting requirements outlined in PPAs, qualitative feedback reveals repeated requests for additional information from UNHCR staff. This qualitative feedback is substantiated by the 70% of UNHCR respondents who reported that they requested additional information, reporting, or site visits not outlined in PPAs.



The administrative burden of additional reporting remains a clear concern for many NGO partners and reduces teams’ ability to implement projects. UNHCR respondents who made additional requests of NGO partners outside of 2019 PPAs reported that they mainly requested formal (28%) and informal (17%) reports, followed by one-on-one requests (15%).



In contrast, NGO respondents reported that the most cited additional requests from UNHCR in 2019 were one-on-one requests (55%), although informal (34%) and formal (25%) reports were common as well. Similar to UNHCR’s responses, additional field and monitoring visits occurred the least.



“UNHCR required all the official reporting mentioned in the PPA, plus weekly reports, monthly reports, and data and information on spot requests.” – NGO respondent

“UNHCR asked for many additional reporting requirements, expecting daily, weekly, monthly, quarterly and annual reports. UNHCR, however, challenged the fact that we included the time for a Grants Manager in the budget.” – NGO respondent

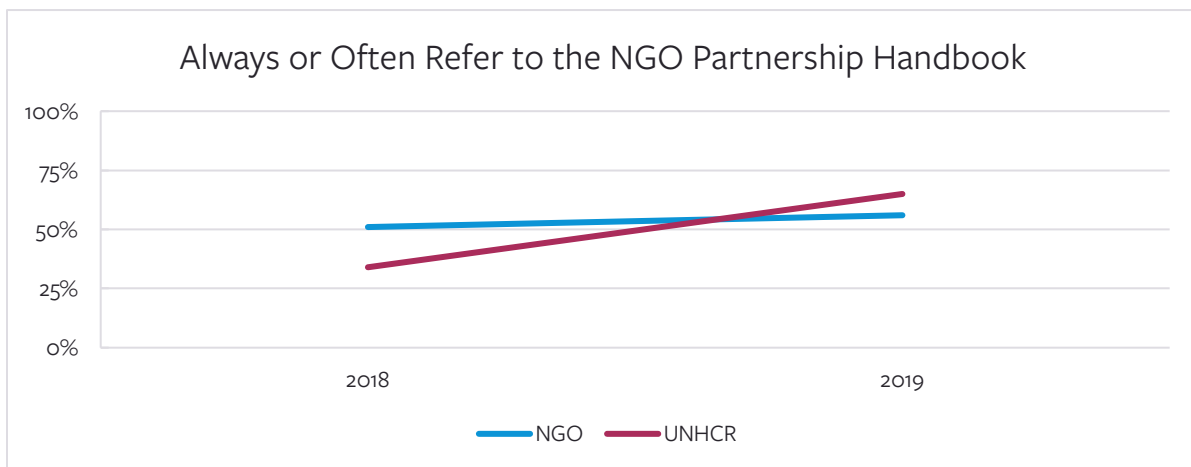
“We did request additional reports, site visits, etc. but they were as outlined in the annexes to the signed PPA (project description, monitoring plan etc.). We also sought additional informal information when reports were unclear. In one case, we did an additional visit due to dissatisfaction with the previous formal report.” – UNHCR respondent

“We request monthly short narrative updates (less than three pages) from partners, as an additional means of monitoring.” – UNHCR respondent

Additionally, UNHCR recently updated the “UNHCR Partnership Handbook.” More than half of NGO respondents (56%) and UNHCR respondents (65%) often or always referred to the new (2019) version of the handbook in 2019. This marks a 5% increase for NGOs and a 31% increase for UNHCR compared to 2018. To cite another improvement, only 14% of NGO respondents and 6% of UNHCR respondents (4%

and 15% less than in 2018, respectively) reported that they never referred to the latest handbook, confirming the increased utility of the updated handbook over time.

One UNHCR respondent noted that “The biggest problem is with the dissemination of new information, which, for some reason, was channeled to project control colleagues rather than a program. Also, the guidance is dispersed among various Q&As, e-mails, and webinars. it would be very helpful to have them consolidated in the updated Chapter 4.” A second respondent noted that “There are many changes and interpretations from different levels (H.Q./Regions) were needed to be on the same page.”



Most NGO respondents (75%) felt that UNHCR staff often or always adhered to policies from the revised Partnership Handbook in 2019. Comparatively, UNHCR responses denoted a high degree of confidence (91%) in their own understanding of how to implement UNHCR policies disseminated by H.Q. and Regional Offices. Even so, NGO respondents provided multiple examples of divergences between policy and practice that they experienced when engaging with UNHCR.

“It specifically shows in the project implementation, where UNHCR does not ‘understand’ whether they are implementer or donor, they intervene when there is not a need/have to intervene, and when the partner asks them to provide advocacy, they are reluctant to do it. Sometimes they impede the independence of the INGO by directly going to employees without respecting the hierarchy of the partner.” – NGO respondent

“UNHCR practice often depends on who the current UNHCR Staff person is at a particular time...and changes of UNHCR Staff happen very often.” – NGO respondent

“They do not follow basic steps to ensure Do No Harm. They often implement poorly thought through activities which expose to danger their staff and those of the partners.

They systematically reach out to staff during night and weekends for non-urgent request.”

– NGO respondent

“Stated policies can be interpreted differently. Accordingly, UNHCR staff can be rigid and can be flexible.” – NGO respondent

“There are several layers of ambiguity in some of the policies, and UNHCR Country Offices interpret in different ways. One well-known example is the PICSC 7% (with appreciation to UNHCR HQ for the efforts undertaken to clarify at Country Office level - yet inconsistencies continues).”

– NGO respondent

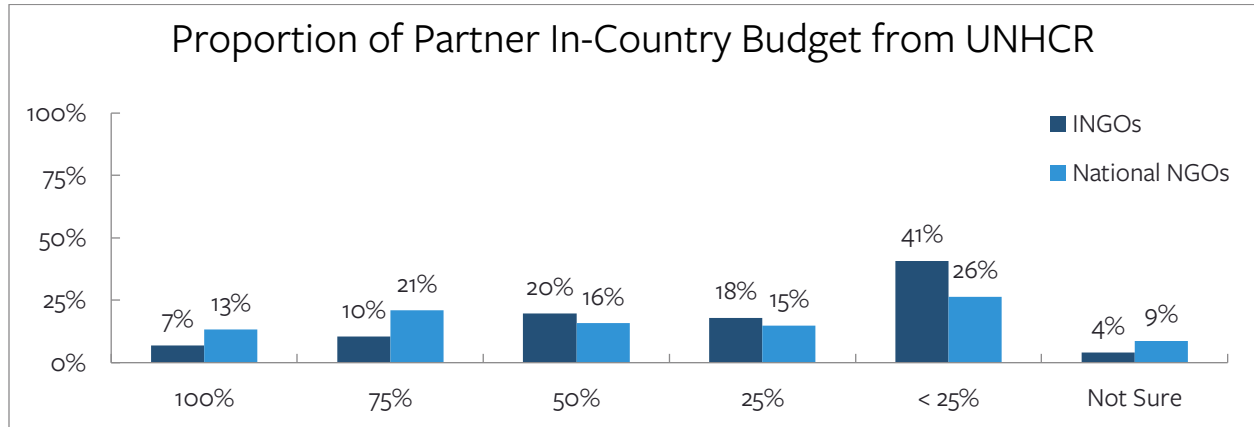
Overall, feedback stressed that policies could be interpreted differently based on UNHCR office and staff. This connects back to the importance of UNHCR offices improving internal communication and collaboration to ensure that they disseminate consistent information to NGO partners.

UNHCR FUNDING IMPLICATIONS

To better understand the funding support dynamic between NGOs and UNHCR, partners were asked to share the proportion of their in-country budget provided by UNHCR and reflect on the potential impact a reduction in UNHCR financial support would have on programming.

NGOs continue to draw a significant amount of their funding from UNHCR. Nearly half of NGO respondents (44%) reported that 50% or more of their 2019 in-country budget came from UNHCR funding. This reflects only a 2% decrease from 2018. In particular, national NGOs are far more dependent

on UNHCR funding, with 50% reporting that 50% or more of their budget comes from UNHCR. In contrast, only 37% of INGOs reported the same.



Given that UNHCR funding makes up a large portion of NGO budgets, it is concerning that many NGO respondents reported that UNHCR project budget(s) for 2019 did not provide funding for the full and fair cost of staff or other indirect or shared costs required for project implementation and management. When NGOs cannot get funding from UNHCR, they are required to look elsewhere for supplemental funds or reduce program quality.

About half of NGO respondents reported that staff (54%) and indirect and shared costs (45%) required for 2019 projects were fully and fairly funded by UNHCR, which likely contributes to the drawn-out negotiations over programs and budget that delay PPA signing. The most common consequence NGOs reported was being forced to use other funding to cover staff costs (28%) and indirect and shared costs (42%). Others were forced to employ less staff or adjust staff responsibilities and project implementation to meet personnel policies and cost parameters defined by UNHCR. NGOs reported that taking such actions resulted in reduced program quality and a more significant risk to NGO organizational operations. Most national NGO respondents reported staff (69%) and other indirect and shared costs (54%) were fully and fairly funded by UNHCR compared to only 38% and 34%, respectively, for INGOs. INGOs may have greater indirect costs associated with larger programming and support functions in-country, as well as disagreement over UNHCR expatriate salary caps.

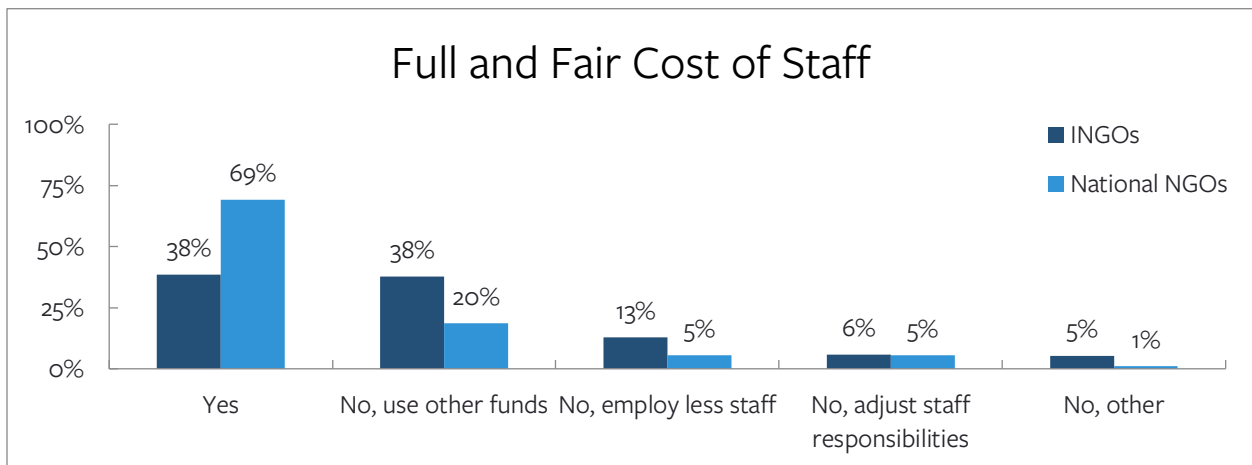
“They want us to lower costs for staff—that would make it far less than we could get competent staff for.” – NGO respondent

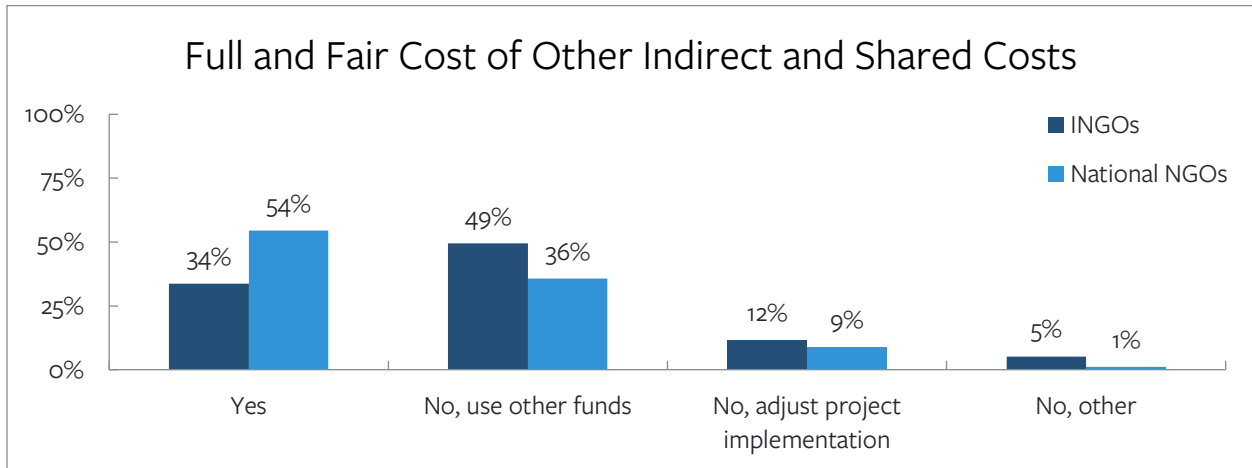
“Staff have to cover more responsibility, especially caseworkers who take double the standard workload. To cover up, we used other funding sources to cover the gaps.” – NGO respondent

“But it’s getting harder to do so, and as a consequence, in some countries, we’ve decided to not pursue UNHCR funding anymore (which is a pity).” – NGO respondent

“Have had to downscale security measures and support staff required to properly implement the project and ensure full duty of care for security measures of staff.” – NGO respondent

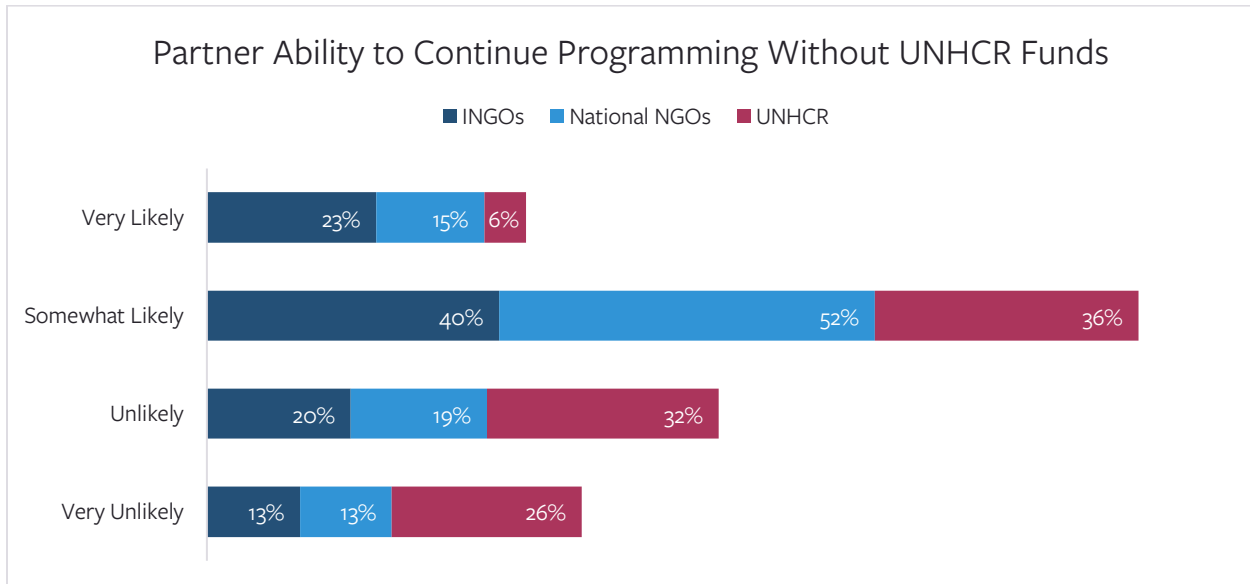
“Even raising this issue with UNHCR is very difficult. All negotiations are about how much we can do for the least possible financial resources.” – NGO respondent





Both INGOs and NGOs reported a similarly optimistic outlook on future programming, with over half of NGO respondents (64%) reporting confidence in their ability to implement programming with other funding sources if UNHCR funding were to cease. National partner NGOs reported having higher confidence in their ability to continue programming without UNHCR funding (67%) than their international counterparts (63%). However, national NGOs are far more dependent on UNHCR funding than INGOs, with 50% reporting that 50% or more of their budget comes from UNHCR. The opposite was true in 2018, with more INGOs (69%) reporting they would be able to continue programming without UNHCR funds than national NGOs (64%). However, in both 2018 and 2019, national NGOs tended to display moderate confidence in their ability to continue programming without UNHCR funds by indicating it was “somewhat likely” compared to more INGOs reporting stronger confidence with “very likely.”

Overall, fewer UNHCR respondents (42%) reported having the same level of confidence (somewhat likely to very likely) in their partners’ ability to continue operating if UNHCR funding were to cease. Although less than half, this shows a more optimistic outlook in comparison to 2018, when 23% of respondents believed that NGOs would likely be able to continue programming without UNHCR funds.

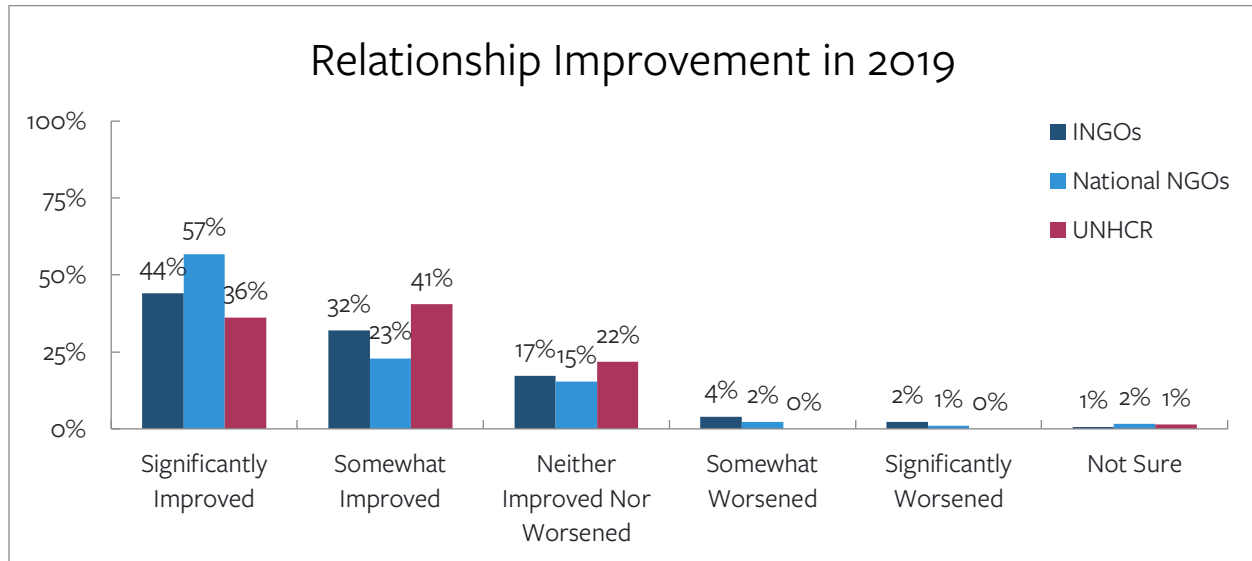


OVERALL PARTNERSHIP ASSESSMENT

To better understand perceptions of UNHCR-NGO partnership more broadly, respondents were asked to reflect on their relationship improvement, communication, and overall partnership in 2019.

The majority of UNHCR and NGO respondents (both 77%) reported an overall improvement in the partner relationship during 2019, an increase of 11% of NGO respondents and only a 3% decrease for UNHCR, compared to 2018 responses. Less than 5% of NGO respondents and 0% of UNHCR respondents reported that the relationship has worsened over the last 12 months, meaning only 4% of all respondents reported negative feedback. The 0% negative feedback from UNHCR marks a 5% decrease from 2018, continuing an overall positive improvement in the UNHCR respondents' perception of the partnership over time.

"We are constantly building our partnership through different activities on a daily basis."
 – NGO respondent

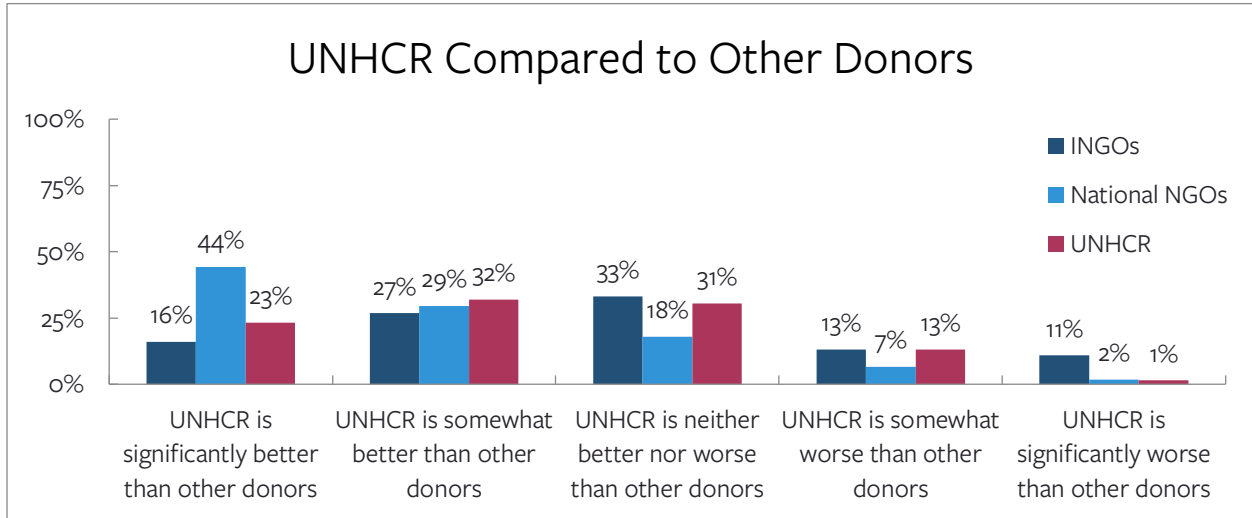


Almost all UNHCR and NGO respondents (both 94%) felt moderately to significantly able to collaborate to address issues of mutual concern in 2019. Most NGO respondents (60%) favored UNHCR over other donors regarding administrative effort required to secure and implement projects in 2019, while 55% of UNHCR respondents evaluated themselves as favorable donors. Specifically, national NGOs prefer UNHCR as a donor much more than INGOs, with 44% significantly favoring UNHCR compared to only 16% of their international counterparts. Feedback from UNHCR respondents noted areas in which they felt partners had challenges.

“Our policies are sometimes unclear to partners as they are written in language that is difficult to understand for non-native speakers. Clarifications provided by the Headquarters are sometimes informal. There are numerous changes in policies and requirements which cause confusion to partners. “... the Portal is unpopular and seen as highly bureaucratic. The partnership agreement documents are seen as very complex. The minimum level of PPA reporting is more onerous than other donors require.” – UNHCR respondent

NGOs had similar responses, noting that UNHCR was good at adhering to PPAs and offers flexibility. However, short project durations (12 months) combined with highly bureaucratic and administrative processes created an additional burden.

“UNHCR’s requirements are significantly more time-consuming and extensive (with little oversight benefit in relation to time spent).” “It provides roughly 3% of our funding but takes around 15% of management.” – NGO respondent



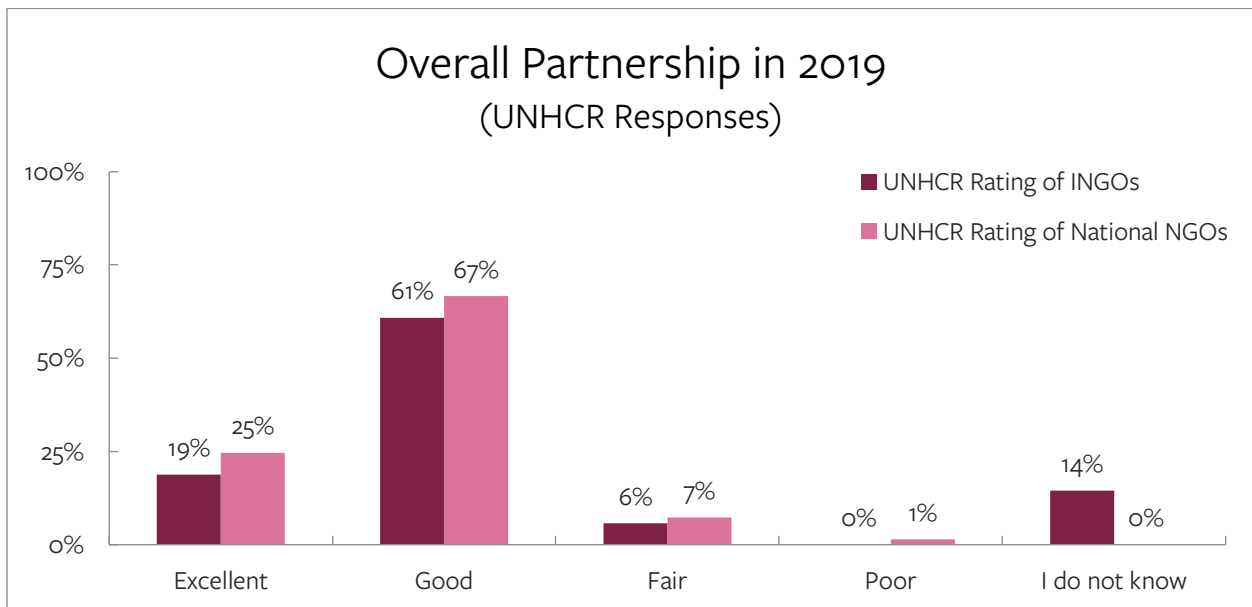
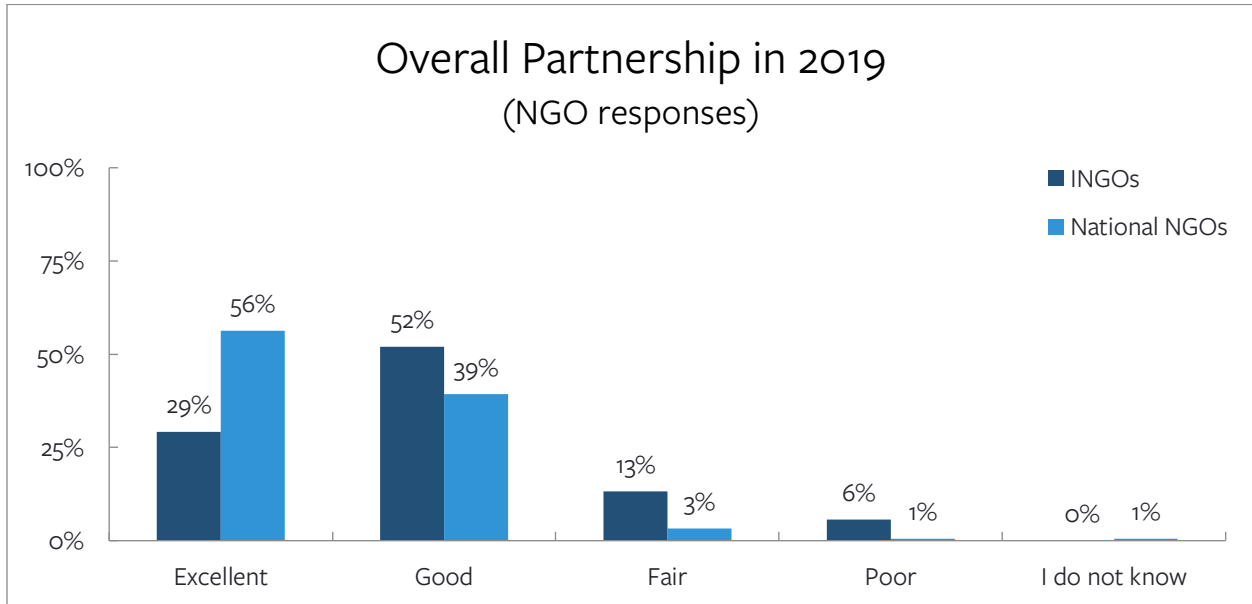
In general, NGO and UNHCR respondents continued to view their communication and overall partnership in a positive light.

“Communication greatly improved at the H.Q. level with new IPMS management, which is trickling down to the C.O. level as well.” – NGO respondent

“Communication was the main issue. However, that was ironed out and now we are quite fine.” – UNHCR respondent

National NGOs and UNHCR reported stronger communication between each other, with 88% of national NGOs and 93% of UNHCR respondents rating it as good or excellent. This is slightly better than INGOs (78%) and UNHCR (80%), which reported their communication as good or excellent. Similarly, national NGOs and UNHCR reported having a stronger relationship, with 96% of national NGOs and 91% of UNHCR

respondents rating it as good or excellent, as compared to INGOs and UNHCR, with 81% of INGOs and 80% of UNHCR respondents reporting a good or excellent relationship.



Nonetheless, both NGOs’ and UNHCR’s assessment of the state of their partnership continues to improve year over year, demonstrating that continued engagement and collaboration can contribute to an improved relationship and positive outcomes for persons of concern around the world.

"We are determined to make [the partnership] better and will be engaging with UNHCR more to keep improving." – NGO respondent

"UNHCR shall continue with NGO capacity building, the recent introduction of 4% PICS for local NGOs... and... supporting NGOs involvement in regional networks." – UNHCR respondent

"The relationships with our partners should be based on mutual respect and understanding."
– UNHCR respondent

CONCLUSION

The 2019 survey results demonstrate continued positive improvement in the overall relationship between UNHCR and NGO partners. Specifically, in areas such as consultations, partner selection, and project partnership agreements, UNHCR and NGO feedback reinforces the importance of equality and transparency.

NGO responses identify multiple areas in which UNHCR could improve processes and communications that would result in more efficient and effective partnerships. Examples include providing more clarity and feedback during selection processes, specifically on M.Y. agreements, and simplifying administrative burdens associated with PPAs and reporting. Areas in which both UNHCR and NGO responses align regarding reasoning for delays in PPAs highlight the need for a review of project and budget design and coverage of full and fair costs. Reinforcing multi-year partnerships is key, as is ensuring that M.Y. agreements allow budget carry over to the second implementation year.

UNHCR feedback identifies how NGO partners can help enhance local communication channels to incentivize a bottom-up approach for driving change. Partners, in particular INGOs, are encouraged to continue improving flexibility, communicating through proper UNHCR channels, and contributing to capacity building. Continued INGO partner contribution to capacity building is perceived by UNHCR as a positive element in the spirit of partnership.

Additionally, UNHCR respondents reflected on improving internal communication and coordination among UNHCR offices and staff (specifically on processes and compliance) to ensure that consistent information is sent to partners. Some suggested sharing new partnership policy and requirement updates on UNHCR broadcast (rather than just on IMAS Intranet page or yammer, which are not regularly accessed) to reach a wider audience. Also, respondents thought it might help to develop a common U.N. database on partner performance to make the selection process easier (similar to service providers in supply sector) and revise NGO partner selection criteria and ratings to place more weight on financial management and technical experience. Other ideas included opening consultations to new or other partners, rather than the same ones every year, and continuing to build NGO partner capacity through comprehensive support strategies and increased funding.

Furthermore, survey respondents provided useful feedback for improving this annual survey. Most notably, they suggested conducting the survey at the end of the year, immediately after the implementation period, to allow for more accurate data collection (due to frequent staff rotations) and time for both UNHCR and NGO partners to make corrective actions for the following implementation year. Another common suggestion was to include questions and feedback about the role of government partners in the overall relationship. Otherwise, several respondents provided minor suggestions such as tailoring questions and responses to specific roles and functions or clarifying some questions and response options. Some UNHCR respondents thought that when distributing the survey, it might help to address it to a specific role or function (or to senior managers) to ensure the most appropriate colleague completed it.

ABOUT INTERACTION

InterAction is a convener, thought leader, and voice for nearly 200 NGOs working to eliminate extreme poverty, strengthen human rights and citizen participation, safeguard a sustainable planet, promote peace, and ensure dignity for all people.