



Partnership
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UNHCR-NGO Partnership Survey

2020 Report

InterAction – Humanitarian Policy and Practice



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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

BACKGROUND

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. On an annual basis, this survey is circulated widely to UNHCR and NGO offices, and the data received is analyzed by InterAction in consultation with UNHCR-IMAS. This 2020 report reflects submissions from 105 UNHCR staff and 779 NGO staff, 57% of whom represent national or local NGO partners.

KEY FINDINGS

Despite a global pandemic and significant operational and implementation challenges facing the humanitarian community, the 2020 survey results demonstrated the strength and resilience of partnerships between UNHCR and NGOs. COVID-19 flexibilities and Project Partnership Agreement (PPA) changes that were implemented this past year were broadly popular with respondents. Feedback from UNHCR staff and NGO respondents on these changes offer opportunities to build upon these successes in the longer term and to develop partnership flexibilities that enable rapid response to humanitarian crises and enable adaptability in program operations. Additionally, feedback on other aspects of partnership, notably multi-year PPAs and the UN Partner Portal, offered insight to UNHCR and NGOs on areas where they can work to make their relationship even stronger in years to come.

PLANNING AND CONSULTATION

Given the timeline for planning and consultations, these activities were largely unaffected by the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic as the majority were completed in 2019 and early 2020. As in previous years, NGO and UNHCR respondents found coordination meetings and one-on-one consultations to be the most useful partnership methodologies; however, all partnership methods retained strong support. Despite this, since 2018, there has been a divergence among UNHCR staff members and NGO respondents on their views of the different planning and consultation methods. NGOs have increasingly rated all partnership methodologies as moderately or very useful, while UNHCR respondents' overall ratings of these same methods as moderately or very useful has decreased.

PARTNER SELECTION

The partner selection process remained consistent despite this particularly challenging year. Slightly fewer UNHCR respondents (62%) reported they issued one or more Calls for Expression of Interest (EOI) for 2020 projects, compared to 64% in 2019. However, the number of calls for proposals issued and applications received per call remained the same as in 2019, indicating that UNHCR is maintaining its levels of project funding and NGOs remain committed to applying for programs at the same levels as in previous years, despite new implementation challenges. Communication from UNHCR for non-selected applicants improved remarkably in 2020: of those who indicated that they applied for a partnership project but were not selected, 50% reported that they received proactive and clear reasoning from UNHCR when not selected, which is a 19% increase from 2019.

UN PARTNER PORTAL

The UN 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 UN Partner Portal in 2020, the same percentage as reported in 2019. However, it is worth highlighting the number of UNHCR respondents using the portal to post calls for Expression of Interest (85%) was down 11% from 2019 (96%). Furthermore, usage of the UNPP is not reaching its full potential: fewer than half of NGO respondents (44%) learned about 2020 calls for proposals through the UNPP, unchanged from 2019 despite ongoing discussions between NGOs and UN partners to better utilize the UNPP to streamline communication around them. Additionally, there is a wide gap between UNHCR and NGO perspectives of the UNPP: whereas 82% of NGOs indicated that the UNPP significantly or moderately improved their partnership agreement management processes, 30% of UNHCR respondents said the UNPP does “not at all” improve partnership, indicating a major discrepancy that must be delved into and addressed for the UNPP to truly streamline and ease the partnership process as intended.

MULTI-YEAR PARTNERSHIP AGREEMENTS

UNHCR introduced Multi-Year (MY) Partnership Agreements in 2019, offering opportunities for up to four-year agreements.¹ However, survey results reveal continued challenges in communication between

¹ As of 2019, a Multi-Year Partnership Agreement (MY Partnership Agreement) is made available for operations that have adopted Multi-Year Strategies (MY Strategies) including what is known as Multi-Year/Multi-Partner, Protection and Solutions Strategies, Multi-Year response plans such as Operations with a Regional Response Plan,

UNHCR and NGO partners around the available opportunities for MY agreements. Most UNHCR respondents (72%) reported they did not provide MY Partnership Agreement opportunities for 2020, which explains why just half of NGO respondents (50%) were aware of MY opportunities in their context. However, **qualitative feedback shows demand from NGOs for increased multi-year funding opportunities: both an expansion of those opportunities in the countries currently offering them, and an increase in the number of the contexts where they are available**, which presents UNHCR with an opportunity to expand the MY programs moving forward.

CAPACITY AND LOCALIZATION

Almost all UNHCR respondents (91%) had moderate to complete confidence in NGO partner capacity to effectively manage Project Partnership Agreement (PPA) funding. Similarly, 93% of UNHCR respondents had moderate to complete confidence in NGOs to meet the needs of persons of concern in 2020. Both UNHCR (82%) and NGO (65%) respondents reported contributing to joint efforts to build the capacity of local NGOs and CBOs in 2020, representing an increase for NGOs from 2019 (55%). In 2020, UNHCR's approaches to increasing direct funding for national partners centered primarily on reducing the direct UNHCR implementation of programs, alongside phasing out or reducing INGO funds (indicated as actions taken at their Country Office by 44% and 31% of UNHCR respondents, respectively), in line with trends in 2019.

PROJECT PARTNERSHIP AGREEMENTS

Overall, PPA signing delays decreased from 2019 to 2020, with the timeframe for delays decreasing as well. Around one third (32%) of NGO respondents reported having at least one or more unsigned 2020 PPAs by January 1, 2020, or before the start of the project (as compared to 39% in 2019), with the majority noting that delays lasted 1-3 months, as reported in 2019. As in 2019, both UNHCR and NGO respondents report that budget negotiations are the main cause for delayed PPA signing. Although most NGOs (89%) reported UNHCR adhering to terms outlined in PPAs, 62% of UNHCR respondents reported that they requested additional information, reporting, or site visits not outlined in PPAs, even with to the COVID-19 flexibilities instituted by UNHCR. The administrative burden of additional reporting remains a clear concern for many NGO partners and reduces teams' ability to implement projects.

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 MY Partnership Agreements.

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. INGOs reported having higher confidence in their ability to continue programming without UNHCR funding (67%) than their local and national (LNNGO) counterparts (62%), which is a reversal from last year's survey when 67% of LNNGOs and 63% of INGOs reported confidence to continue without UNHCR funding. However, of critical concern to many NGOs is the need for funding to cover the full and fair costs of projects: less than half of NGO respondents reported that staff (46%) were fully funded, which is a 15% decrease from last year's survey. Further, less than half of NGO respondents (46%) reported indirect and shared costs required for 2020 projects were fully and fairly funded by UNHCR, unchanged from 2019. Combined, these factors likely contribute to the drawn-out negotiations over programs and budget that ultimately delay PPA signing.

PPA CHANGES

In 2020, UNHCR updated the Project Partnership Agreement (PPA) for use in 2021 and beyond. UNHCR staff had substantially higher awareness of all PPA changes in comparison to their NGO counterparts: 25% of NGO respondents were unaware of changes to the PPA, compared to 3% of UNHCR respondents. The PPA changes were broadly popular with NGO respondents, with all changes selected as "very useful" or "moderately useful" by 60% or more of respondents. Although broadly popular, there were challenges noted in the rollout of the PPA, largely from UNHCR staff, whose major concerns were with communication of the PPA changes and confusion with the new guidelines, both of which are to be expected with any significant changes to guidelines or policies.

COVID-19 FLEXIBILITIES

In the face of the COVID-19 pandemic and extensive implementing challenges for NGO partners, UNHCR implemented several flexibilities in their partnership policies, including budgetary flexibility up to 30%, fewer reporting requirements, and enabling online submission of documentation. Overall, the key takeaway is that both UNHCR and NGO staff reported that implementation of these flexibilities was critical, with acceptance of digital documents (89% and 59%, respectively) and increased budget flexibility (67% and 69%, respectively) noted as the most helpful changes. The one consistent note from both groups of respondents was that although UNHCR's offered flexibilities included reduced reported requirements, this was not implemented globally and, in fact, many respondents indicated that reporting requirements increased during this time. A key takeaway from the survey results is that these flexibilities enable

program continuity and adaptations in humanitarian aid, despite extraordinary operational circumstances.

OVERALL PARTNERSHIP ASSESSMENT

Both NGOs' and UNHCR's assessment of the state of their partnership remained strong, with over 85% of UNHCR and NGO respondents rating the relationship as good or excellent. Further, the majority of UNHCR and NGO respondents (70% and 74% respectively) reported an overall improvement in the partner relationship during 2020, which is especially positive given the challenging context. UNHCR and NGOs report high levels of collaboration to resolve issues of mutual concern (96% of both groups felt moderately to significantly able to collaborate) and reported satisfaction with communication has continuously improved over the years of surveying.

OVERARCHING RECOMMENDATIONS FOR UNHCR

- **Maintain flexibilities established due to COVID-19.** The flexibility measures implemented by UNHCR during the COVID-19 response have enabled more nimble, adaptable approaches by NGO partners, ones that were essential to keep existing programs running under unprecedented circumstances. These flexibilities would streamline humanitarian assistance and help meet the changing needs of affected populations in any humanitarian response. Therefore, UNHCR should embrace these flexibilities permanently².
- **Continue to streamline the PPA and reduce the number of information requests outside PPA requirements.** The recent review of the PPA template simplified several critical components, in line with UNHCR's Grand Bargain commitments, and was very well received by implementing partners. UNHCR staff should refrain from requesting outside and additional information from partners, as this defeats the purpose of simplified and less frequent reporting,

² At the time of writing in July 2021, UNHCR has already mainstreamed the COVID-19 flexibilities into their policies on a permanent basis.

- **Strengthen training and communications on the new PPA across UNHCR offices.** Provide enhanced guidance to UNHCR Offices on the Project Partnership Agreements to ensure they adhere to the contractual clauses, especially when it comes to reporting frequency.
- **Commit to covering the full and fair costs of programs.** Implementing the [Money Where It Counts](#) cost classifications will enable UNHCR and NGO partners to gain a more transparent and equitable understanding of what it costs to implement a project³. Engage in dialogue with NGO partners around specific concerns, such as salary costs, to build trust around NGO decision making.
- **Leverage Multi-Year funding opportunities.** Make more widespread use of predictable funding and longer agreements to provide greater operational stability to NGO partners and improve outcomes for target populations. Ensure adequate guidance and training are provided to UNHCR staff on the use of these agreements and ensure that NGO partners are made aware of their availability. UNHCR regional and headquarters staff should also regularly monitor to ensure multi-year agreements are being offered to partners in appropriate contexts. While UNHCR has moved beyond the pilot phase of multi-year funding opportunities, encourage additional countries to offer these opportunities to meet NGO partners' demand for longer-term partnership and support operational stability.
- **Continue to capitalize on the UN Partner Portal, in line with ongoing UN 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. Support efforts to improve the notification system for calls for proposals/expressions of interest and streamline status updates to improve communication with partners throughout the selection and award process. Continue actively participating and facilitating under IASC Results Group 5 to develop a common cost classification model and a common approach to cascading of overheads to further the overall goal of ensuring that the full and fair costs of programs are covered.

³ Although UNHCR has not taken MWiC fully on board, they are working to develop a common cost classification that takes into account some of the principles from MWiC.

- **Leverage successes and identify weaknesses in planning consultation efforts.** Ensure greater participation from NGOs in Regional Consultation Meetings and bolster engagement to develop priorities and goals jointly. Identify key successes of the Regional Consultation Meetings to build upon in future consultations. Conduct an assessment of the Country Operations Planning (COP) engagement to understand why both UNHCR and NGO participants do not find this to be the most useful form of engagement. Use this information to re-envision the COP and Regional Consultations and ensure that more NGO partners are invited and meaningfully engaged.

OVERARCHING RECOMMENDATIONS FOR NGOs

- **Engage UNHCR Country Offices in a discussion on Multi-Year Partnership Agreements.** Identify how these agreements would result in strengthened programming, including capacity building for local partners. Initiate conversations with UNHCR country staff on ways Multi-Year agreements might be best suited for the specific country context and promote better outcomes for the target population.
- **Continue to share feedback on the UN Partner Portal.** Review the existing system and take note of gaps or areas for improvement. Provide feedback to UNHCR colleagues on how the Portal can be better used to reduce administrative burden and enhance partnership.
- **Request field-level harmonization trainings from UNHCR on updates to the PPA and other policy changes.** Request that UNHCR Field Office staff actively participate in these trainings to ensure that UNHCR and NGO colleagues have the same understanding of the PPA clauses and other policy changes. In particular, these trainings should focus on getting UNHCR staff and NGOs on the same page regarding additional reporting requests in order to align with recent policy changes.
- **Leverage opportunities for planning and consultation at multiple levels.** Participate in local, national, and regional consultations 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 foster trust in internal decision making and prioritization of country program goals.

BACKGROUND

INTRODUCTION

As the international humanitarian community strives to meet the demands of increasing humanitarian needs, effective, collaborative partnerships between NGOs and UN agencies have become all the more important. Partnership strengthening initiatives exist between UNHCR and NGOs, but these are often ad hoc and progress is difficult to track. Furthermore, while conference-style NGO consultations are useful for big-picture issues that a range of NGO partners face in their response efforts, they are not the only effective forum for real dialogue on partnership challenges and collaborative problem solving. More dedicated efforts are required to explore the range of specific challenges faced in partnership between UN agencies and NGOs, progress being made toward resolving those challenges, and determining recommended ways forward to strengthen their interactions.

Implementing more than 60% of UNHCR's operational budget and an estimated 80% of its field programming, NGOs are essential to the fulfillment of UNHCR's mandate. However, this close relationship is often challenged by power imbalances and divergent organizational cultures. For instance, the application of the Principles of Partnership – equality, transparency, results-orientation, responsibility, and complementarity – can vary greatly by operation and individuals leading them.

InterAction, in partnership with UNHCR's Implementation Management and Assurance Service (IMAS), has worked to understand and address these challenges by conducting an annual survey since 2014 to examine the state of partnership between NGOs and UNHCR. This annual survey allows stakeholders, particularly UNHCR, to better understand and analyze the dynamics between UNHCR and its partners, and sheds light on opportunities for strengthening the partnership to better meet the needs of refugees and affected communities.

METHODOLOGY

This report consists of data gathered via quantitative surveys, with opportunities for optional qualitative comments. Two separate surveys were utilized: one for NGO staff and one for UNHCR staff, to gather both perspectives on salient partnership issues. The surveys were translated and distributed in English, French, Spanish, and Arabic to maximize the number of participants and limit language barriers. InterAction

developed these questionnaires and updates them annually to appropriately capture NGO partners' and UNHCR staff feedback on new initiatives based on changes UNHCR has implemented in the survey year, while maintaining questions for points that are unchanged to accurately track changes in the partnership dynamic over time.

InterAction distributed the NGO staff survey via email to UNHCR's 2020 implementing partners based off of a contact list shared by UNHCR. The UNHCR staff survey was distributed by UNHCR via email to each of their country offices.

In the interest of preserving the anonymity of survey respondents, and to empower respondents to answer as candidly as possible, these surveys allowed respondents to denote their region of work, with country-level denotation optional. NGO respondents were also able to indicate their organization type (local/national or international NGO) to allow for response comparison and determine any gaps or discrepancies.

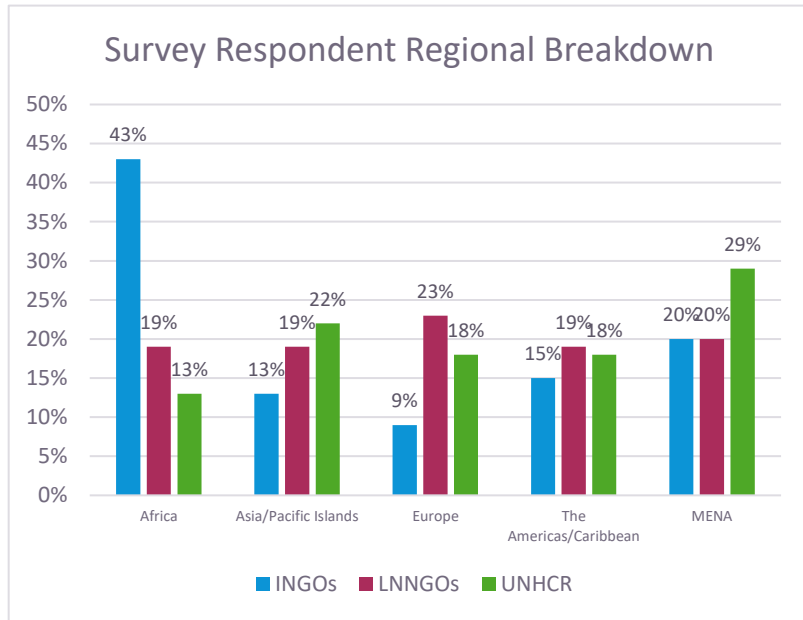
Note that the authors of this report translated comments from Arabic, Spanish, and/or French and have corrected grammatical misnomers where applicable, while maintaining the spirit of the quotation.

RESPONDENT PROFILE

This report reflects submissions from 105 UNHCR staff and 779 NGO staff, nearly 60% of whom represent national or local NGO partners. Compared to last year's survey of 2019 partnerships, the number of UNHCR respondents did not change, while the number of NGO respondents increased by 42% (229 more responses in 2020 than in 2019).

NGO survey respondents were primarily comprised of LNNGOs (57%). Of the approximately 40% of respondents who work for INGOs, 78% were based in a country or field office, while 22% were based in a headquarters office. The majority of UNHCR respondents (77%) worked at a UNHCR Country Office, while the remaining 23% of respondents worked in Sub-Offices, Field Offices, or Regional Offices/Multi-Country Offices. 3% of respondents selected the "other" option and tended to be municipal or university partners.

Overall, the distribution of respondents from both surveys was mostly proportional across regions. Africa, excluding North Africa, had the most NGO respondents (29%) and the fewest UNHCR respondents (13%). NGO respondents were balanced across other regions, with 20% working in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region and an average of 17% reported working in each Asia/Pacific Islands, Europe, and



the Americas/Caribbean. LNNGO respondents were more proportionally balanced across regions, while INGOs were highly concentrated in Africa (43%) and the MENA region (20%). The highest number of UNHCR respondents, by contrast, reported working in the MENA (29%), followed by Asia and the Pacific Islands (22%).

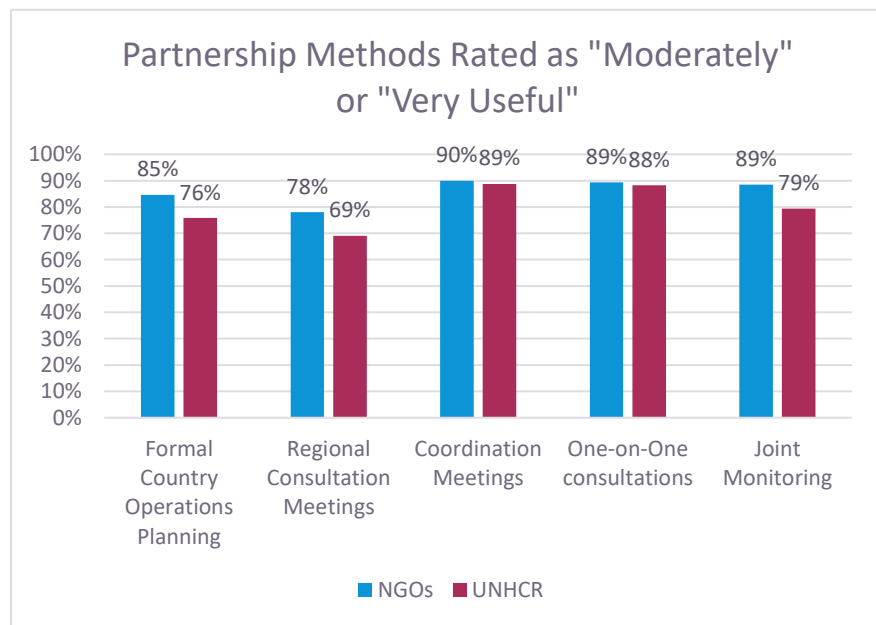
In terms of work responsibilities, more than half of NGO respondents (53%) managed the UNHCR partnership and one third (32%) signed the Project Partnership Agreement, while UNHCR respondents were predominately program or project control staff (88%). More than one third (41%) of NGO respondents held an executive position in their organization. In comparison, only 2% of UNHCR respondents held the position of Deputy Director, Deputy Representative, Deputy Head of Office, with no participation by Country Representatives or Heads of Office.

FINDINGS

PLANNING AND CONSULTATIONS

Planning and consultations between UNHCR and NGO partners looked very different in 2020 than in previous years due to the COVID-19 pandemic: after mid-March 2020, in-person consultations and planning meetings were necessarily conducted remotely, and joint monitoring activities were limited.

Despite these challenges and shifts in norms, several partnership methodologies were found to be more useful than others. As shown below, both NGO and UNHCR respondents found coordination meetings and one-on-one consultations to be the most useful partnership methodologies, and nearly equally so: 90% and 89% of NGO and UNHCR



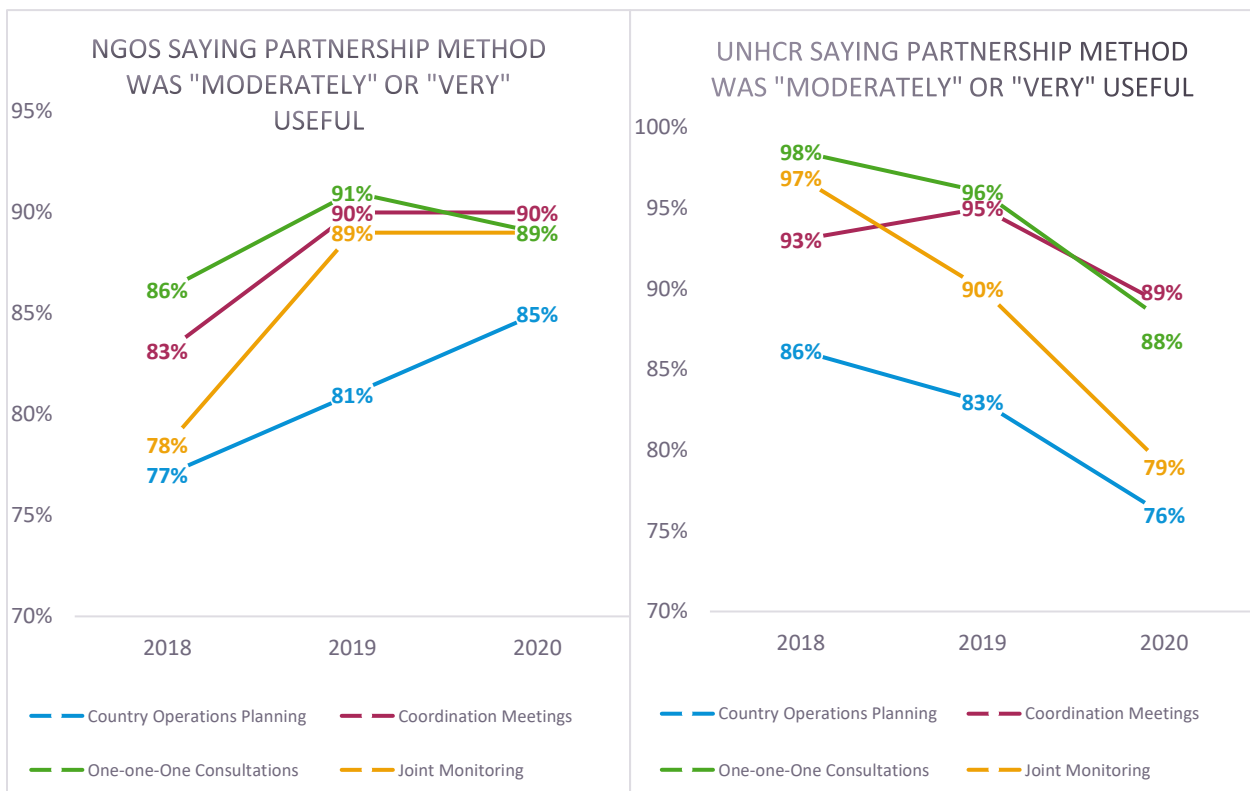
respondents, respectively, rated coordination meetings as “moderately” or “very” useful, compared to 89% and 88% for one-on-one consultations. Both methods were preferred in 2019 as well, indicating a clear preference of both NGO and UNHCR colleagues for these methodologies of partnership engagement. However, all partnership methods retained strong support, with 70% or more of both NGO and UNHCR respondents rating almost all methods as moderately or very useful.

It is important to note that given the COVID-19 context, most planning and consultation sessions were held remotely, or were canceled entirely, which was highlighted by NGO respondents. Therefore, these numbers present a different picture of the usefulness of the distinct partnership methods than in previous years.

“Coordination Meetings were happening periodically in 2019 but ceased in 2020 after COVID-19. It is recommended to bring these meetings back: at the least, this should be virtually.” -NGO respondent

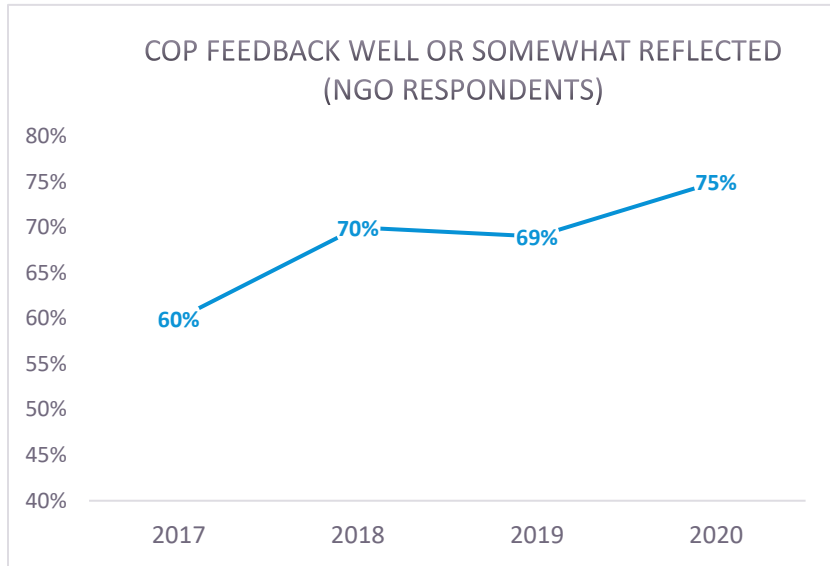
“There were limited number of joint monitoring sessions conducted in the year due to COVID-19 pandemic and budgetary constraints.” -NGO respondent

Despite strong overall satisfaction, since 2018, there has been a divergence among UNHCR staff members and NGO respondents on their views of the different partnership methods. As seen below, NGOs have increasingly rated partnership methodologies as moderately or very useful over the years, while UNHCR staff members selecting these methods as moderately or very useful has declined, particularly between 2019 and 2020. Joint monitoring has seen the sharpest decline, with an almost 20% decrease in usefulness rating over the past two years. There was not a clear reason for this decline among the comments from UNHCR staff, however it is possible the virtual nature of the partnership methods this year created additional work without associated utility.

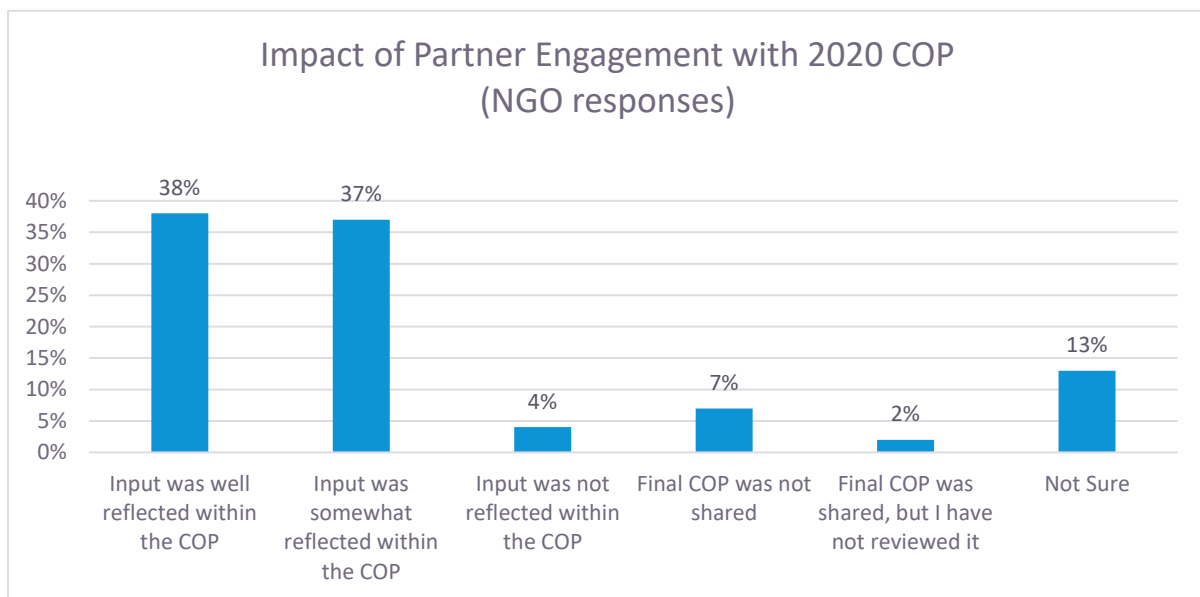


COUNTRY OPERATIONS PLANNING

NGO and UNHCR respondents were then asked more in-depth questions about each partnership process. For Country Operations Planning (COP), 68% of UNHCR respondents indicated that they invited NGO partners to engage in the 2020 COP, and 95% of NGOs who were invited indicated that they did participate in the COP process.



Despite the challenges of remote operation, the 2020 numbers remained consistent with 2019. Additionally, NGO participants’ rating of their feedback’s inclusion in the final COP saw a 9% increase (75% in 2020, up from 69% in 2019), with an overall increase of 25% since 2017. There was also a 42% decrease in the number of NGO participants who reported not receiving the final product (7% in 2020, down from 12% in 2019). Again, given the overall increase in NGO respondents, these numbers indicate that NGOs increasingly feel their feedback is being taken into account in the development of UNHCR’s Country Operations Planning.

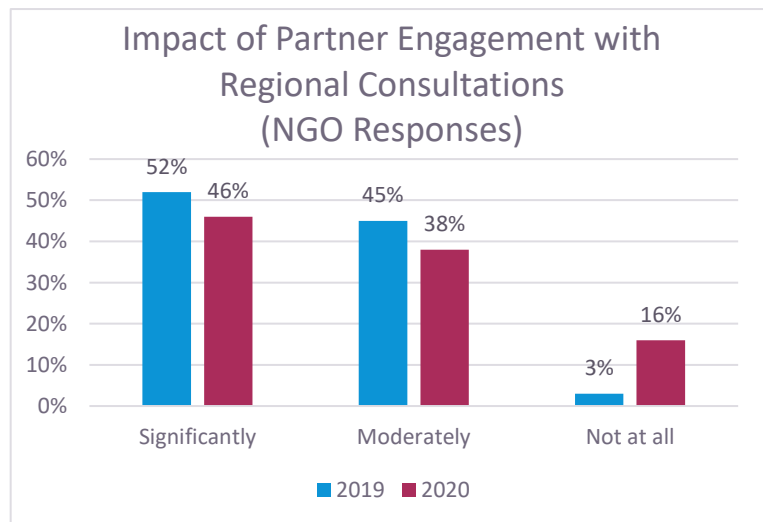


REGIONAL CONSULTATIONS

Regional Consultation Meetings, by contrast, were newly introduced in 2019 in some Regional Bureaux, with some decentralized regional structures only formally starting in January 2020. Given the context of COVID-19, these meetings took place entirely online. 31% of NGO respondents reported receiving an invitation to a Regional Consultation Meeting in 2020, almost identical to 2019’s 32%. Further, 85% of those respondents felt their participation was significantly or moderately useful to their organization. However, as seen in the table below, overall satisfaction was less robust in 2020: for example, 5 times as many NGO respondents said regional consultations were “not at all useful” this year, as opposed to 2019. As one respondent noted:

“The global or regional NGO consultations are usually reduced to the large international NGOs presenting their complaints to Senior Management and small NGOs presenting their successes to the audience in an effort to get visibility and funding.” -NGO respondent

Despite the slide in satisfaction in 2020, there is still a high percentage of NGOs who find Regional Consultations useful. Especially given how new this process is, UNHCR should build upon the success observed in 2019 and 2020 by inviting more NGOs to participate in the Regional Consultations in 2021 and continuing to reflect upon the process to ensure engagement and satisfaction remains high.



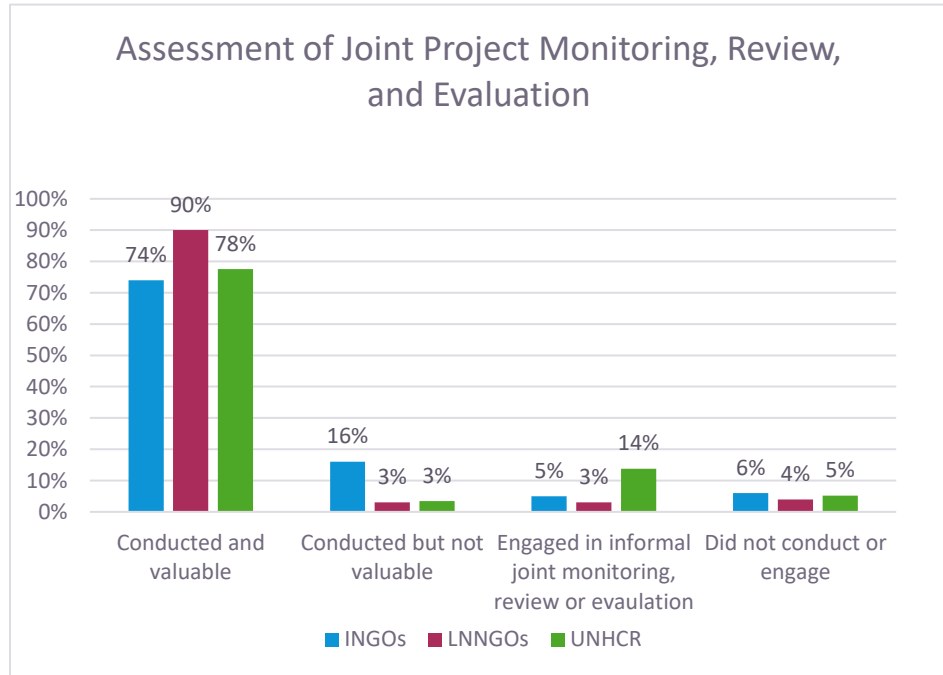
COORDINATION MEETINGS

When looking at NGOs’ own planning processes in 2020, more than half of NGO respondents (59%) invited UNHCR representatives to consult and reported that almost all UNHCR representatives who were invited (96%) participated. On the other hand, only 48% of UNHCR respondents reported they were invited by NGO partners, of which 65% participated with some or all requesting partners. This participation rate of

65% is a 28% decrease from 2019 (93%) among UNHCR staff. Markedly, less than half of UNHCR invitees (48%) participated in consultations with all requesting NGO partners. Around 18% of UNHCR respondents reported they did not know if they were invited, which could be attributed to the fact that most UNHCR respondents were program staff, while participation invitations were likely sent to more senior staff.

JOINT MONITORING

Based on the responses to the 2020 survey, most UNHCR (78%) and NGO (79%) respondents conducted a formal joint project monitoring, review, or evaluation of at least one project, as required in the PPA, and found it to be a valuable experience. UNHCR and LNNGOs found it to be



more valuable (78% and 90%, respectively) than INGOs (74%). On the NGO side, these numbers were both slight increases from the year prior. NGOs reported several positives from the process, describing it as “very collegial” and “supportive.” However, some NGO participants voiced concerns:

“This exercise tends to be overwhelmingly target/quantity oriented... and it does not prioritize PoCs’ [Persons of Concern] engagement enough.” -NGO respondent

“Joint monitoring has a number of times been characterized by criticism rather than mutual respect and feedback by some UNHCR staff, and sometimes these reviews are based on personalities and power differentials between UNHCR and IP (implementing partner) field teams that teams in most cases feel intimidated rather than supported.” -NGO respondent

As already noted, there was a sharp decline in terms of satisfaction from UNHCR respondents on joint monitoring this year with one respondent describing it as a “ticking a box exercise.” However, one of the reasons for the decline in perceived utility may have been COVID-19, as one UNHCR respondent noted that joint monitoring was “limited due to the spread of covid and the restrictions imposed.”

Overall, although there are snags in the partnership planning process, planning and consultation satisfaction remained high despite the COVID-19 pandemic and associated challenges. The feedback from NGOs was that the process was inclusive and worth participating in, while adjustments remain to be considered to address the decline in utility observed among UNHCR respondents.

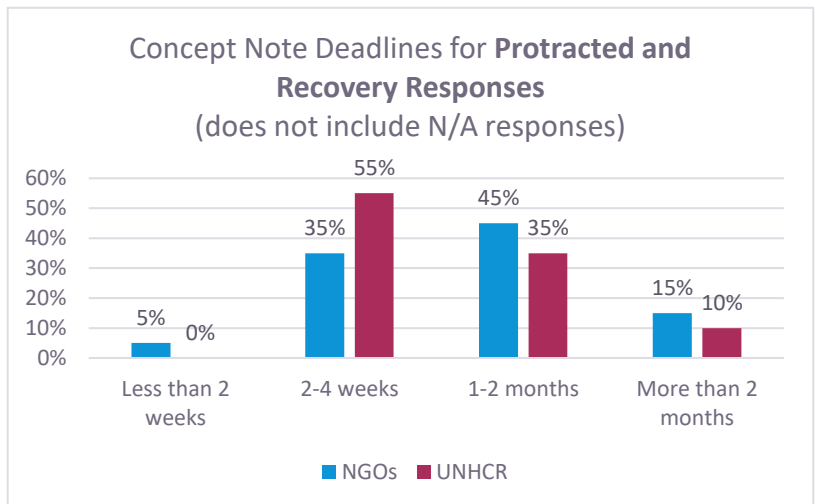
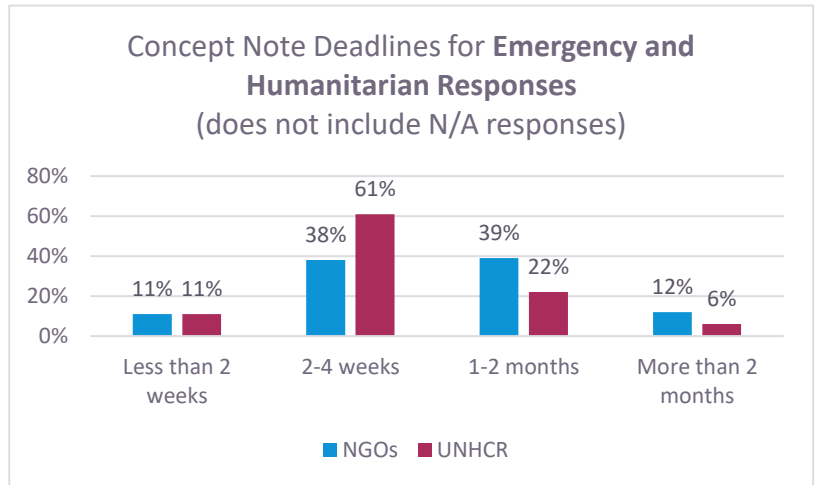
PARTNER SELECTION

UNHCR colleagues were surveyed regarding their practices for issuing Calls for Expressions of Interest, including number of calls issued, number of applications received, and time given to NGO partners to respond to the call. In 2020, slightly fewer UNHCR respondents (62%) reported they issued one or more Calls for Expression of Interest for 2020 projects, compared to 64% in 2019; however, several UNHCR respondents indicated that calls were not issued because they followed UNHCR retention policies and maintained partners from 2019 into 2020. Given the context of operating under COVID-19, this slight decrease is to be expected.

UNHCR Country Offices indicated that they were continuing to issue an average of five calls for Expression of Interest per country office and receiving an average of 10 applications from NGO partners per call. One other indicator of note was the timeline for submission of Expressions of Interest, from issuance of the call to the closing deadline. This particular indicator was asked of both UNHCR colleagues and NGO partner colleagues.

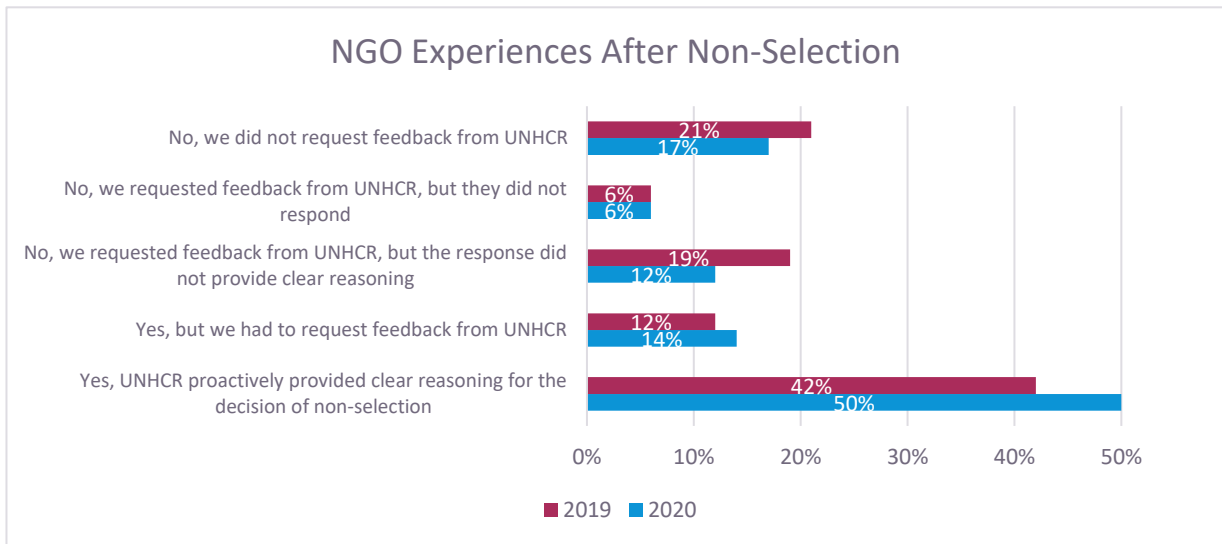
On average, UNHCR respondents reported giving less time between Calls for Expression of Interest and concept note deadlines than what NGO respondents reported receiving for 2020 projects.

In both cases of protracted and recovery contexts and humanitarian contexts, most UNHCR respondents reported giving two to four weeks to respond. In particular, 55% of UNHCR respondents reported giving two to four weeks for protracted responses versus only 35% of partners. NGO respondents also more often reported being given less than two weeks in protracted and recovery responses (5%) compared to UNHCR (0%). However, for emergency and humanitarian NGOs and UNHCR both reported giving less than two weeks at the same rate (11%).



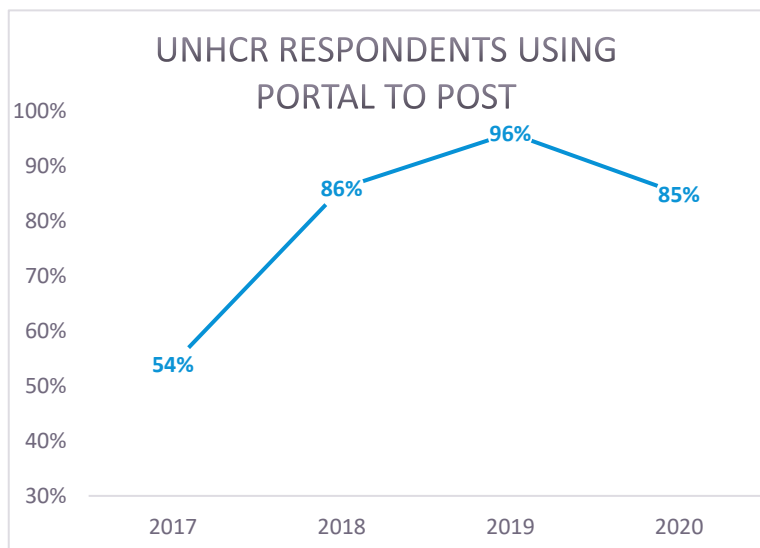
PARTNER SELECTION PROCESS

NGOs were also surveyed as to their perspectives on the partner selection process with an overall improvement being observed on NGOs’ experiences after non-selection. Of those who indicated that they applied for a partnership project but were not selected, 50% reported that they received proactive and clear reasoning from UNHCR when not selected for a 2020 project, which was a 19% increase from the year prior. Further, the number of NGOs that reported receiving unclear or no feedback at all (18%) declined 28% from the year prior.



UN PARTNER PORTAL

The UN 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 UN Partner Portal in 2020, the same percentage as reported in 2019. It is also important to note that LNNGOs are reporting being registered for the UNPP at almost the same rate as INGOs (85% compared to 88%, respectively). Of the 4% of NGO

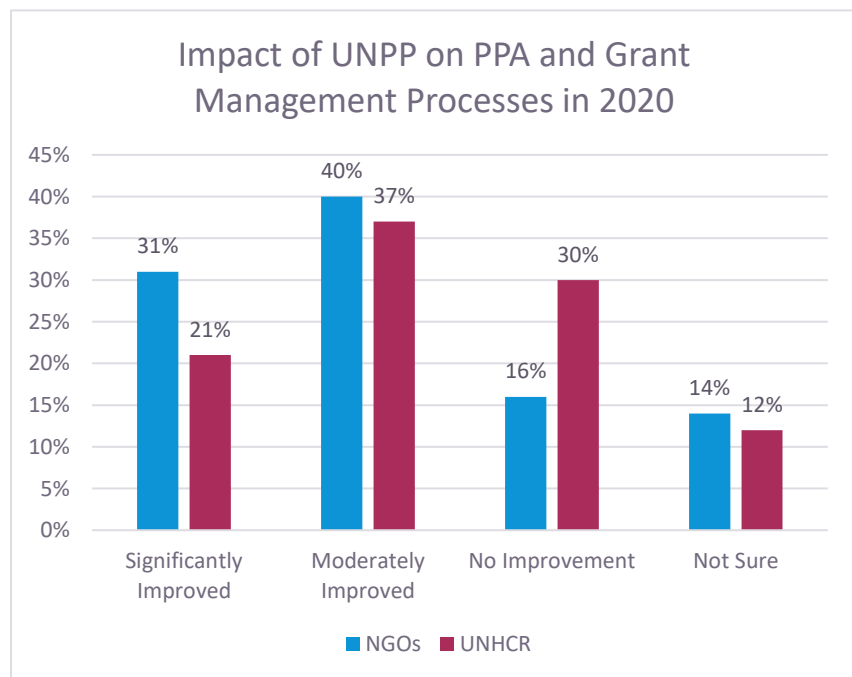


respondents that reported they were not registered in 2020, most (84%) indicated that they plan on registering in 2021. The remaining 10% of respondents were unsure if they were registered for the UNPP.

The continued utility of registering on the UNPP is evident, given the high number of NGOs registered on the Portal. Additionally, 85% of UNHCR respondents reported using the Portal to post Calls for Expression of Interest for 2020, however it is worth highlighting this number was down 11% from 2019 (96%). Furthermore, less than half of NGO respondents (44%) learned about 2020 calls through the Portal, which was almost unchanged from the 2019 survey (45%), despite requests from NGO colleagues to better utilize the streamlined UNPP as the system for communicating calls for proposals. However, it is important to note that UNHCR’s current policy of posting to the UNPP is only for new calls for proposal; any partnership agreements that are “retained,” or continued on for up to 3 additional years, are not posted to the UNPP and therefore the Calls for Expression of Interest would not be posted in these cases.

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

processes for 2020, which is consistent with last year’s survey findings. However, the contrast for UNHCR colleagues is stark: only 58% of respondents said it significantly or moderately improved their partnership agreement management processes, with 30% indicating the UNPP does “not at all” improve partnership. These numbers were significant declines from last year, when 73% of UNHCR



respondents found the UNPP significantly or moderately improved management, and only 14% found it “not at all” improved management. UNHCR respondents noted several problems and areas to fix:

“Numerous technical difficulties from partners to get registered on the portal - the process needs to be simplified; difficulties in the evaluation steps in the portal; It would be good to include a function to prepare the annex templates directly from the portal rather than prepare them offline; technical problems in announcing the Call and the results notifications through the portal; the help desk didn't respond so we had to contact HQ.” -UNHCR respondent

“It should be noted that info on the portal is often outdated. However, the templates being used are not in line with the portal and the portal is not user-friendly and/or flexible. Mapping geographical locations is not easy or intuitive. Partners do not use the portal to seek additional clarifications on the Call but rather prefer e-mail exchanges.” -UNHCR respondent

There are several key distinctions to note based on the UNPP feedback. The biggest is a clear discrepancy between the reported percentage of UNHCR calls posted to the UNPP and the number of NGO respondents learning of Calls for Proposals via the UNPP, which shows a need for improved notification systems and more trainings offered to UNHCR staff and NGO staff as to the functions of the UNPP system. As for the UNHCR respondents' acceptance gap, it is important to note that many respondents emphasized its potential for utility and improvement; however, in addition to the points noted above, common complaints from UNHCR colleagues about the UNPP included:

- Access to the Intranet which negates the usefulness of the UNPP;
- Lack of updates to the NGO partners' information and ongoing activities via the Portal;
- Integration challenges across UN agencies, so formatting required by one UN agency may not match UNHCR's preferred data;
- Platform errors such as being unable to view concept notes submitted via the UNPP, lack of response from the HelpDesk, and lack of notification systems resulting in NGO partners not being aware of new call postings;
- Technical issues such as lack of user-friendliness, no notification system, outdated templates on the UNPP that don't match current requirements, and limited geographical selection options that prevent partners from accurately defining geographical area or requiring resetting geographical site if a site is incorrectly selected.

There is also clear feedback as to the need for harmonization across UN agencies using the UNPP, as well as trainings and sensitization for local and national NGO partners to increase its utility. These issues mirror the proposed functionality improvements suggested by NGO participants, though **the most-requested functionality improvement was the implementation of a notification system for status updates on EoI submissions**. NGOs also particularly noted the desire for all communications to be streamlined via the UNPP for ease of access/reference, and for additional functions to manage the entire grant cycle (not only submissions) via the UNPP.

MULTI-YEAR PARTNERSHIP AGREEMENTS

UNHCR introduced multi-year (MY) partnership agreements in 2019, offering longer term opportunities for partnership agreements in several pilot contexts. During the initial year, many UNHCR staff members reported they did not offer MY partnership agreements, though approximately half of NGO respondents were aware they existed. In the second year, this dynamic has continued: most UNHCR respondents (72%) reported they did not provide MY Partnership Agreement opportunities for 2020, and only half of NGO respondents (50%) were aware of opportunities for multi-year funding with UNHCR (unchanged from last year's survey). The other 50% of NGO respondents reported being unaware that MY partnerships existed.

"The MYPA is not yet put into practice in my country, but UNHCR stated to look forward to implementing it in the nearest future, although it is not yet clear when exactly it will happen."

- NGO respondent

"We are not aware of the MY partnership agreement, until now. We have a yearly based project agreement with UNHCR. If there is a MY project agreement opportunity, we are interested to be part of it." -NGO respondent

UNHCR staff listed a variety of reasons for why they were not offering MY partnerships, with most respondents flagging lack of resources, lack of guidance, complicated country context, lack of perceived value, and partner capacity as prohibitive.

"There was no significant added value in doing [MY PPA] for our projects." -UNHCR respondent

“[We did not offer MY partnerships due to] uncertainty in funding.” -UNHCR respondent

“[Our] operational context is mainly driven by level 2 emergency and very volatile. The office decided that it was not suitable to provide multiyear PAs.” -UNHCR respondent

“The planning was done at annual level, and the Partners were generally low-performing. Giving the assurance of another year of partnership does not help the actual performance of the Partners.” -UNHCR Respondent

It is important to note that UNHCR has expanded the availability of multi-year funding opportunities beyond the initial 22 pilot countries to all country contexts and partners; however, availability of these funding opportunities depend on the discretion of the country office, its strategy, and operational context. Given the limited number of country contexts offering multi-year partnerships, it is not surprising that only half of NGOs are aware of this as an option, nor that UNHCR staff are reporting that their office is not offering it.

These themes were prevalent in the comments of last year’s respondents, as well. As UNHCR seeks to improve and expand multi-year agreement opportunities, it will be critical to increase awareness of these partnerships among NGO partners and UNHCR staff. Further, multi-year PPA procedures and processes must be clarified and adaptable in different country contexts to increase perceived value among UNHCR staff members.

CAPACITY AND LOCALIZATION

Based on the feedback received in the 2020 survey, UNHCR respondents have a high level of confidence in NGO partners’ capacity to effectively manage PPA funding and meet the needs of persons of concern (PoCs): 91% and 93%, respectively, indicated by choosing moderate to complete confidence in their partners’ abilities in these areas. These numbers are equivalent to the 2019 results, which is particularly significant given the challenges of operating in the COVID-19 context. However, although UNHCR confidence was high, several respondents noted challenges:

"The year 2020 posed some challenges to some of our NGO partners to effectively manage the funding due to various reasons: third party capacity to implement, newly implemented financial system, staffing management, COVID-19 pandemic. Although it did not pose major disruption to the delivery of assistance, there were rooms for improvement to effectively manage and efficiently use the funds." –UNHCR respondent

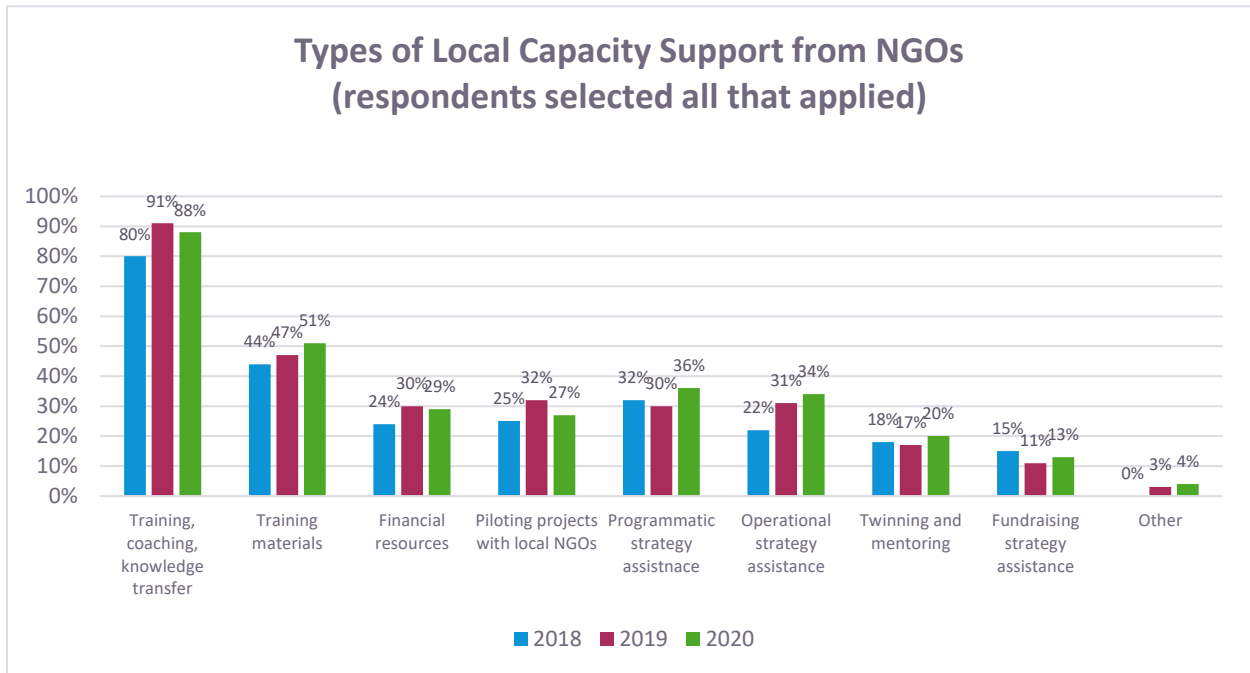
"While performance/implementation is good, management of funds from a financial perspective is of concern, but in general country management accepts this issue to avoid interruption in project implementation and assistance to PoCs." –UNHCR respondent

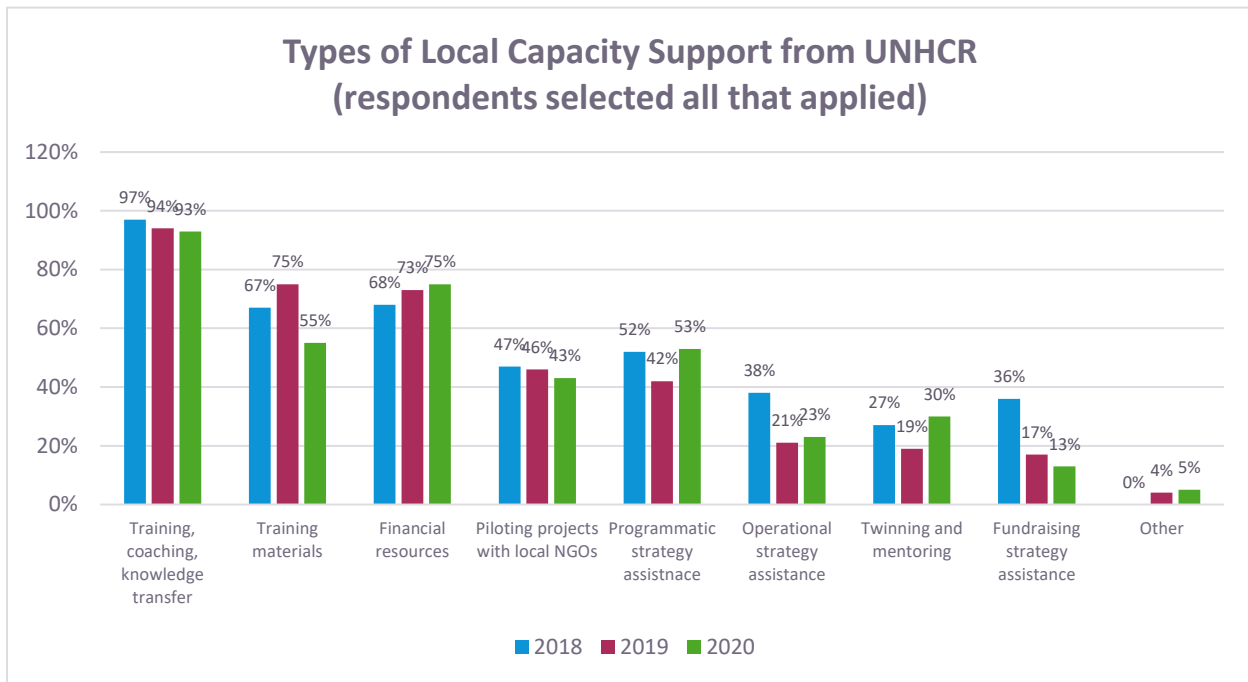
"Technical sectoral experience is present with our partners and UNHCR continues to invest in capacity building of the partners. In 2020 the operational context and the sectoral priorities as well as level of engagement have impacted the partners but they managed to adapt to the fast evolving context." –UNHCR respondent

"[Technical capacity] varies from one partner to another, some may lead in one sector and some in another. Again, there is scope for improvement/capacity building." – UNHCR respondent

CAPACITY BUILDING

Both UNHCR (82%) and NGO (65%) respondents reported contributing to joint efforts to build the capacity of local NGOs and CBOs in 2020, representing an increase for NGOs (up 18% from 55% of NGOs in 2019).





In 2020, the majority of UNHCR and NGO efforts to support local capacity were conducted by transferring knowledge/experience through training and coaching (93% and 88%, respectively), as in previous years. In addition, 55% of UNHCR respondents reported they provided training materials, compared to 51% of NGOs, and 75% provided financial resources, while only 29% 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, followed by twinning and mentoring for NGOs, and operational assistance for UNHCR.

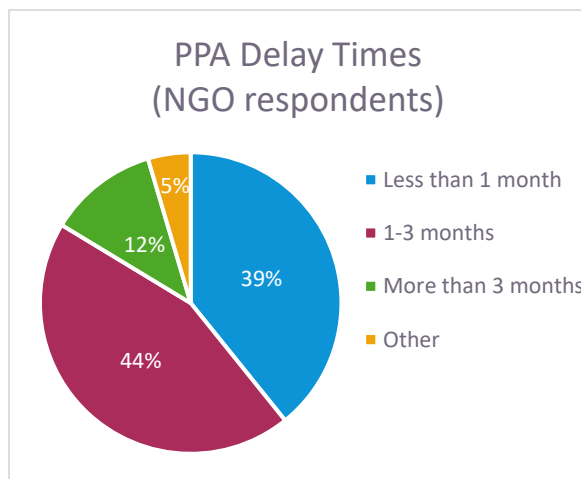
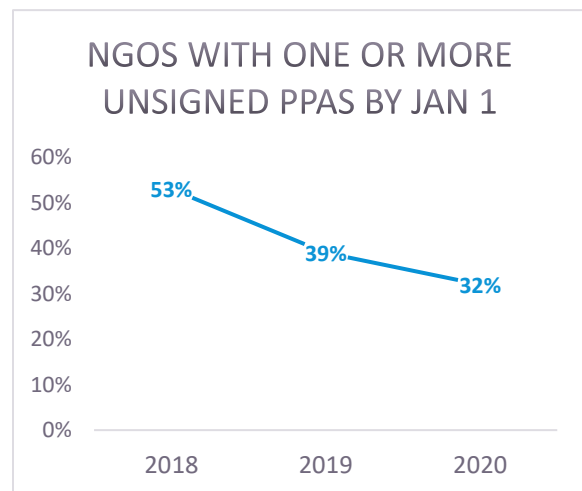
GRAND BARGAIN

As part of the Grand Bargain, UNHCR committed to transfer at least 25% of its program expenditures to local and national responders by 2020. Per UNHCR reporting at the Grand Bargain, this target was met in 2019. In 2020, UNHCR respondents' 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 (31%). This is in line with 2019, during which UNHCR respondents prioritized phasing out or reducing INGO funds (30%) as compared to reducing the direct UNHCR implementation of programs (44%). Notably, 13% of UNHCR staff stated that they did not actively work toward this commitment in 2020.

PROJECT PARTNERSHIP AGREEMENTS

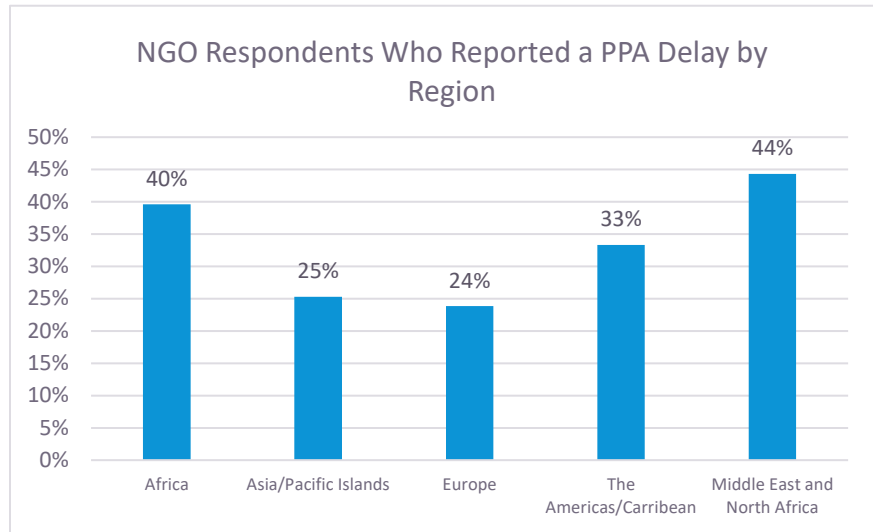
Project Partnership Agreements (PPAs) are a significant component of partnerships between UNHCR and NGOs, and in 2020 UNHCR implemented major changes to the PPA document itself to streamline the process and address some of the biggest challenges. These changes were largely focused on simplifying the PPA, such as decreasing the number of annexes, simplifying the risk and capacity assessment for partners, increasing budget flexibility and other measures to simplify budget preparation and acceptance, and simplification of the installment plan.

One of the biggest stumbling blocks in the PPA process is the delay of signing, given that PPAs are essential to beginning implementation of program activities. As shown in the graph to the right, delays reported by NGO partners have been on the decline: the percentage of NGO respondents saying they had one or more PPAs unsigned by January 1st of the implementation year has decreased from 53% in 2018 to 32% in 2020 (a 40% decrease in delayed PPAs). This is especially significant given the increase in NGO respondents: even with more NGOs sharing feedback in this annual survey, overall reported delays have decreased significantly in the past two years.

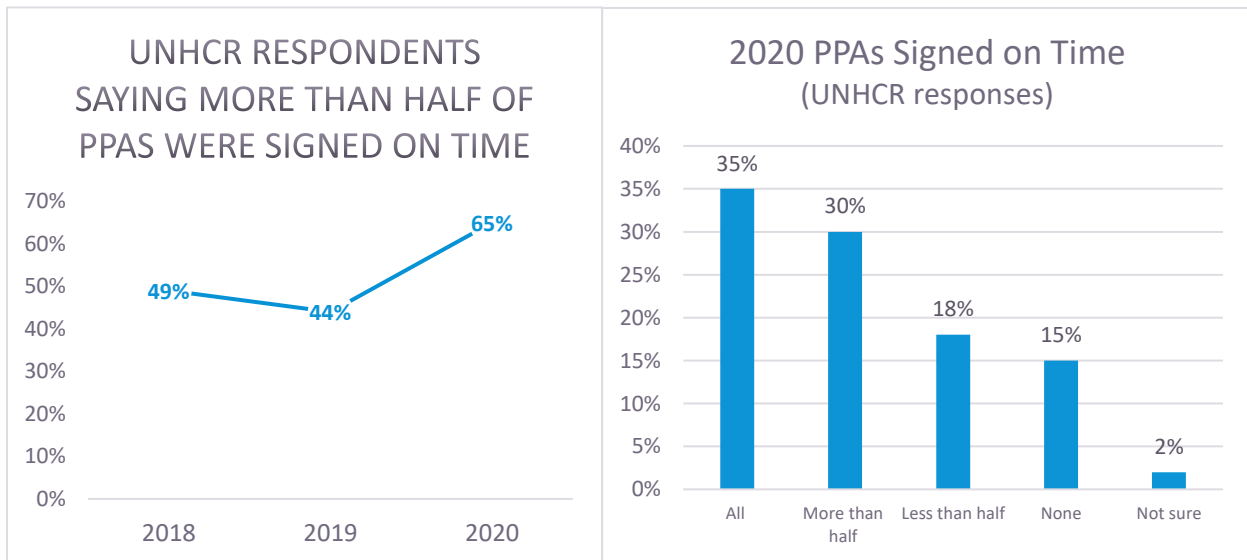


The survey also looked at the timing of delay of PPA signatures, as these can seriously impact the efficacy and efficiency of NGO partners' humanitarian interventions. As shown on the chart to the left, more than 1/3 of PPAs face short-term delays of less than 1 month. However, 1-3 months was the most commonly reported delay on signing PPAs (indicated by 44% of respondents), largely unchanged from 2019 when 42% of respondents reported waiting 1-3 months.

Survey results were also analyzed by region, to determine whether any areas in particular face greater delays. As shown on the chart to the right, the fewest PPA delays in 2020 were in Europe (only 24% of respondents indicated a delay in PPA signing), compared to 40% in Africa and 44% in MENA.

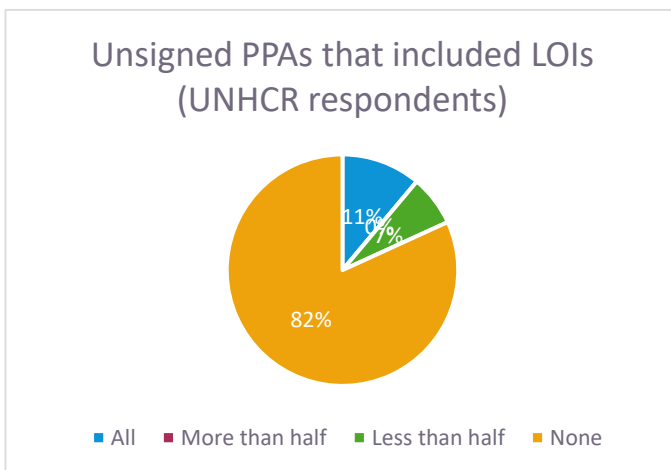


UNHCR respondents' perception of PPAs was in alignment with the feedback from NGOs. Overall, the annual trend from 2018 to 2020 has shown major reductions in delays of PPA signatures, with 65% of 2020 UNHCR respondents indicating half or more of their office's annual PPAs were signed on time (a 33% increase from 49% in 2018).

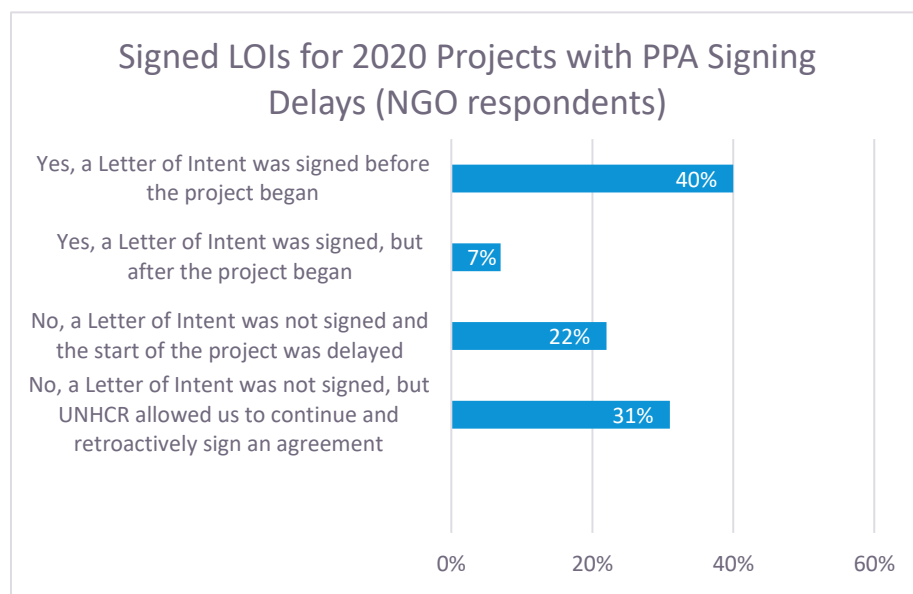


LETTERS OF INTENT

To address PPA delays, in some cases UNHCR issues Letters of Intent (LOI) to NGO partners. However, there was a difference in perception among NGO respondents and UNHCR respondents as to the regularity of use of LOIs. The overwhelming majority of UNHCR staff (82%) reported that projects without PPAs signed on time did not include a signed Letter of Intent (LOI), similar to 2019's reported 85%. However, 47% of NGO respondents said LOIs



were used, which also aligned with last year's survey (49%). This likely means that the majority of LOIs are



being issued by a minority of UNHCR Country Offices, and LOIs are therefore not being used universally to fill the gap caused by PPA delay.

This presents a significant financial risk to UNHCR's NGO partners: when projects cannot start on time due to delays and

lack of LOIs, without a signed partnership agreement of any kind, NGO respondents are on the hook to absorb any costs associated with implementation should the process fall through. Moreover, because PPA signatures vary in terms of retroactivity, this affects NGOs' ability to fully and fairly cover costs for UNHCR-funded programs that are incurred before the date of signature. Both risks place undue financial burden upon NGO partners that significantly impact their ability to implement programs:

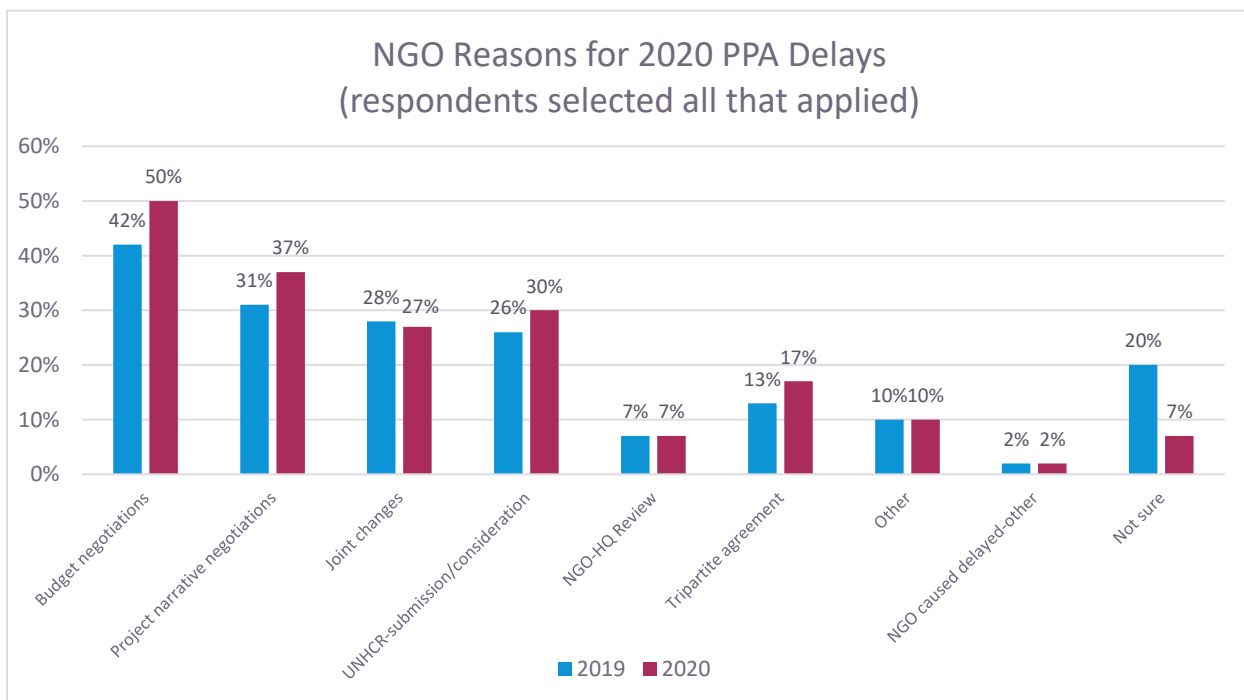
"No Letter of Intent was signed despite our requests. The PPA was not signed retroactively. Because the PPA is itemized, salaries and costs associated to the months affected by the delay had to be absorbed by other projects." -NGO respondent

“This [delay] has happened repeatedly over several years of implementation and is usually 1-3 months delay between signing and project start, during which time, we as implementing partner are asked to self-fund operations which is not always an option.” -NGO respondent

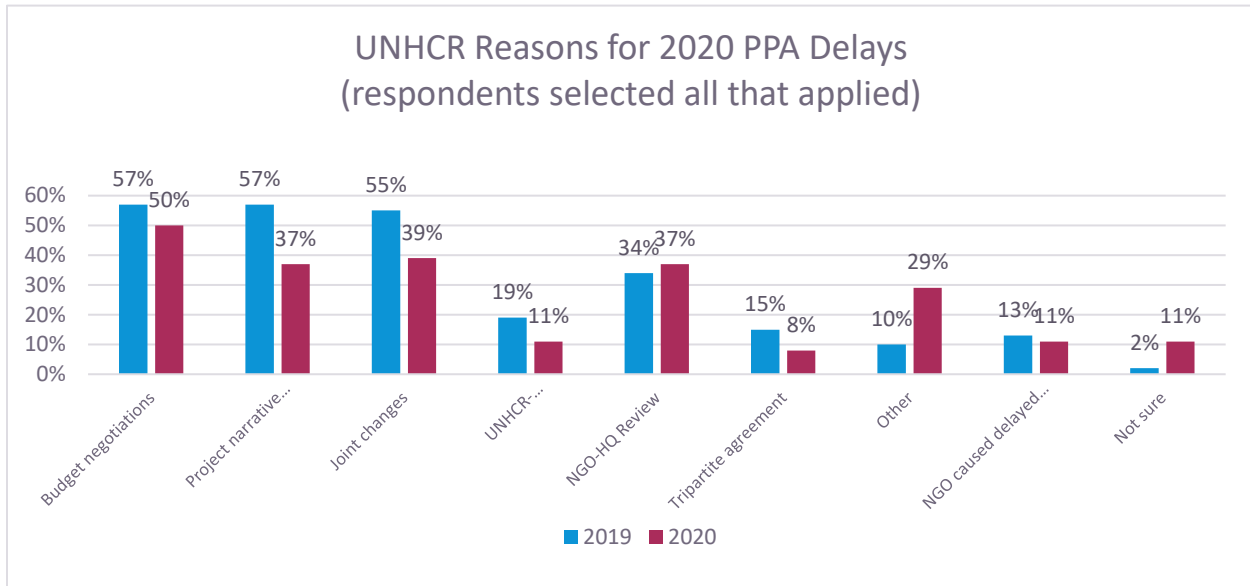
“Our organization is implementing activities at a minimal level since we are incurring costs without a formal guarantee that the donor will reimburse them.” -NGO respondent

PPA DELAYS

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. To reduce these delays moving forward, it is essential to determine their root causes.



As in 2019, budget negotiations are the main cause for delayed PPA signing with 50% of both UNHCR and NGO respondents selecting this as the reason for the delay in 2020. Project narrative negotiations and joint changes were also selected frequently by both UNHCR and NGO respondents, however UNHCR respondents selected these options less than they did in 2019.



Similar to 2019, UNHCR and NGOs were more likely to perceive the other as the reason for the PPA signing delays. Only 11% of UNHCR staff believe their submission process was the reason for the delay, in comparison to 30% of NGO respondents who believe the same. Conversely, only 7% of NGO respondents viewed their headquarter review process as causing delays, while 37% of UNHCR staff viewed this as a reason for PPAs not being signed on time. This is likely due to the perception of the main blocking point of the issue: for example, from UNHCR’s side, a PPA delay caused by a budgetary issue must be addressed by the NGO either through program activity or budgetary revision, which takes time on the NGO side; from the NGO perspective, if UNHCR is the donor requesting the changes to budget, then they would perceive the delay as due to changes required by UNHCR.

Notably there was a large increase in the number of UNHCR staff who selected “other” as the reasoning for delayed PPA signatures. Respondents noted the following:

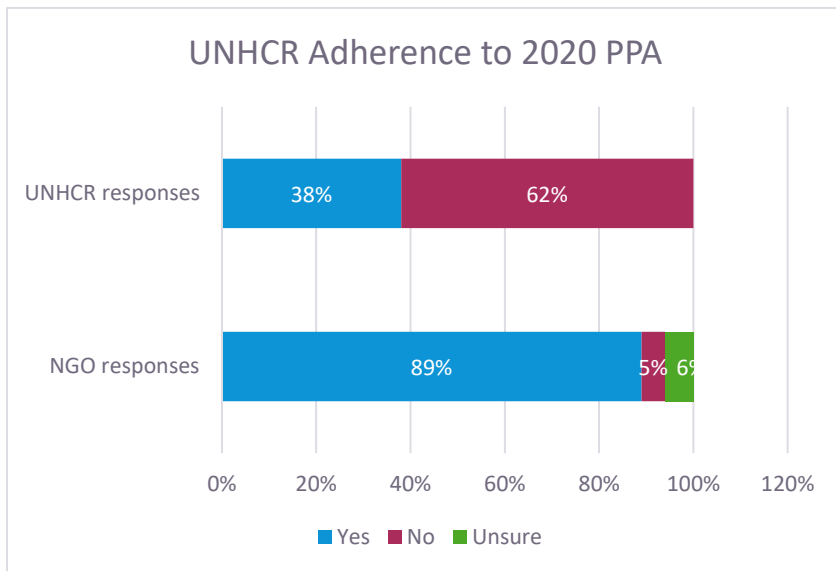
“Signatories from Partner organizations were on leave for the second half of December and were not available to sign the PPA despite the PPA being finalized within mid- December of the prior year. There is also the issue of adhering to the release of installment within 10 days of signing the agreement which was not possible at towards the end of December.” -UNHCR Respondent

“Partnership was dependent on earmarked funding and budget increase and there were delays in getting both.” -UNHCR Respondent

“Signing of agreement with one of the government partners in 2020 delayed due to bureaucratic procedures from government side.” -UNHCR Respondent

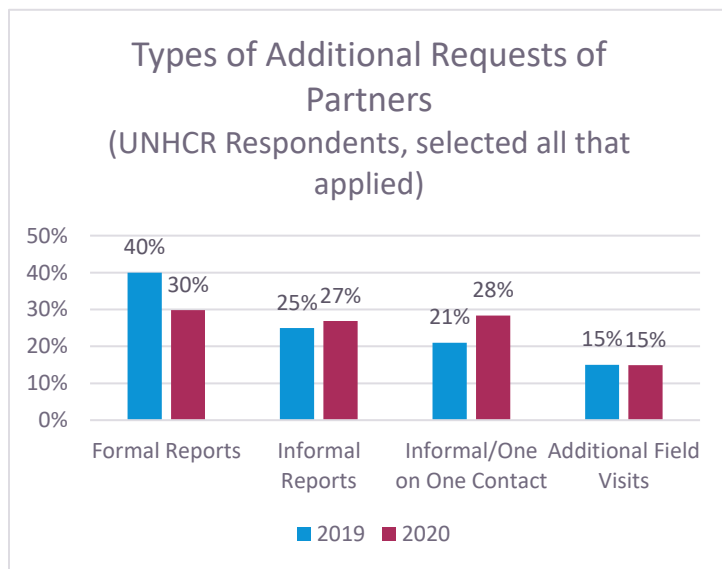
ADMINISTRATIVE BURDEN

Although most NGOs (89%) reported that UNHCR adhered to reporting requirements outlined in PPAs, qualitative feedback reveals repeated requests for additional information from UNHCR staff,

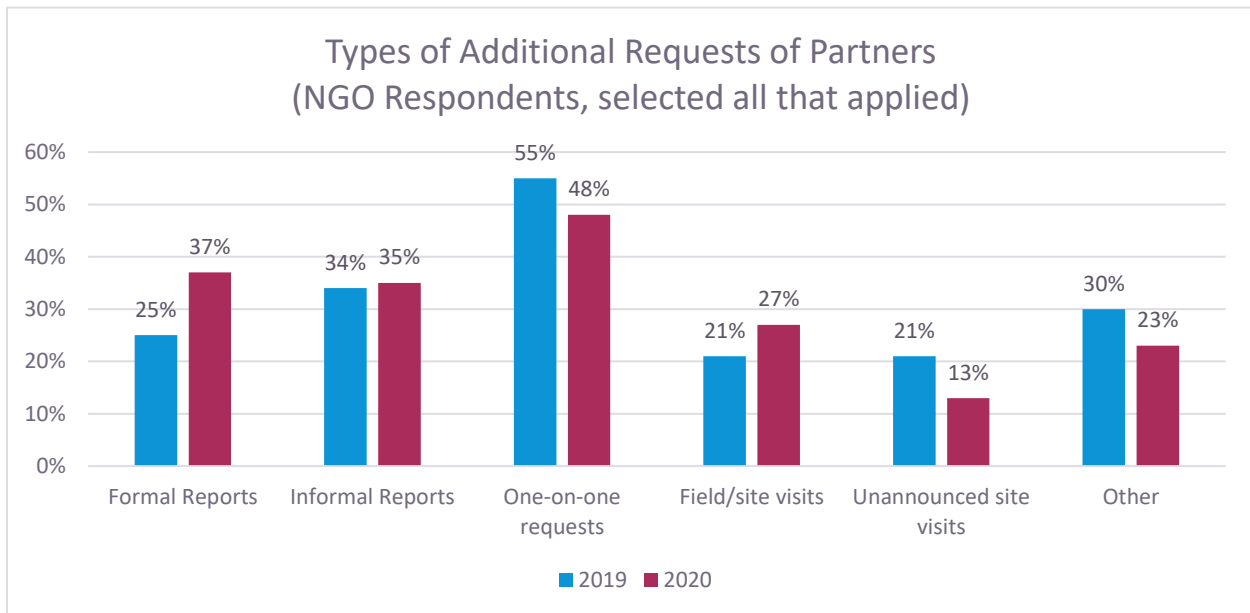


substantiated by the 62% of UNHCR respondents who reported that they requested additional information, reporting, or site visits not outlined in PPAs. This number was a slight decline from 2019, when 70% of UNHCR respondents reported that they requested additional information, reporting, or site visits.

The administrative burden of additional reporting remains a clear concern for many NGO partners. Of the 62% of UNHCR respondents who made additional requests of NGO partners beyond those stipulated in the PPA and despite COVID-19 flexibilities, 30% asked for formal reports, 27% requested informal reports, 28% requested information through informal conversations, and 15% conducted additional field visits.



Per the chart below, NGOs did not perceive the same decrease in formal requests that UNHCR staff reported, as requests for formal reports saw a 48% increase from 2019 to 2020 among NGO respondents. NGO respondents also reported a 29% increase in field visits from 2019 to 2020 despite the pandemic. However, NGOs did report a decline in the number of one-on-one requests from UNHCR staff despite UNHCR staff selecting this option more.

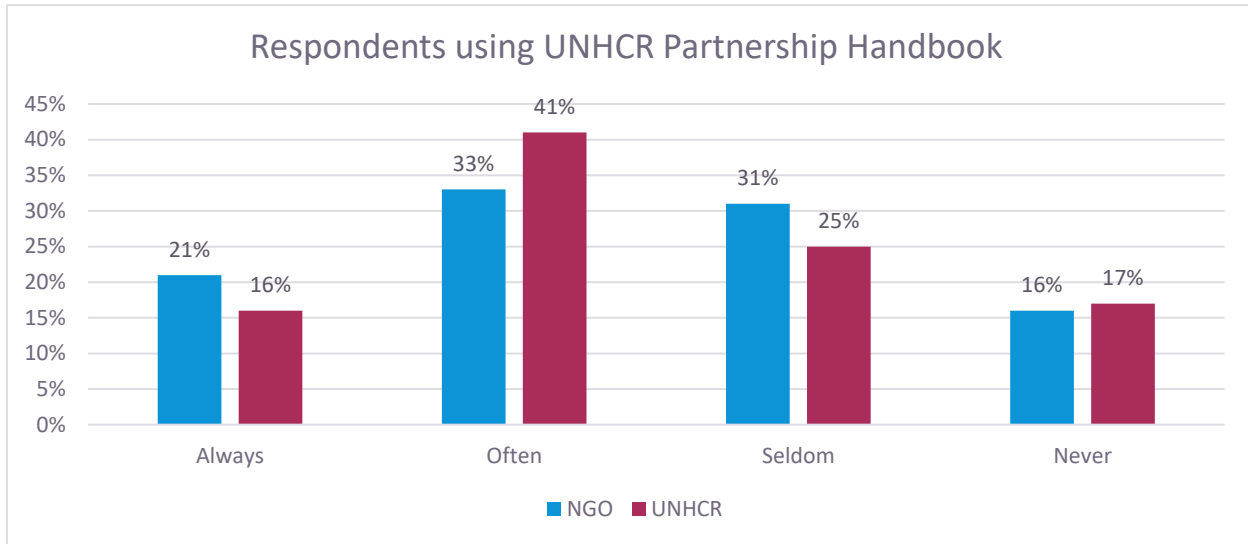


Overall, despite the challenges of the COVID-19 pandemic and UNHCR’s efforts to reduce reporting requirements, these did not trickle down to the field effectively and placed undue administrative burden on already-stretched implementing partners.

PARTNERSHIP HANDBOOK

In 2019, the UNHCR Partnership Handbook was updated to clarify the partnership processes and requirements for both UNHCR and NGO staff. More than half of NGO respondents (53%) and UNHCR respondents (58%) often or always referred to the new (2019) version of the handbook in 2020, a slight decrease for both groups of respondents compared to 2019. Of additional concern, 16% of NGO respondents and 17% of UNHCR respondents reported that they never referred to the latest handbook, which could be a sign the utility of the handbook was not increasing as rapidly as observed in the 2019

survey. Given that the handbook was introduced widely in 2019, it is possible that NGO partners had already familiarized themselves with the handbook and did not need to refer to it as often in 2020.



Most NGO respondents (93%) felt that UNHCR staff often or always adhered to policies from the revised Partnership Handbook in 2020, with very few (1%) NGO respondents reporting that UNHCR never adheres to policies in the Partnership Handbook. Comparatively, UNHCR responses denoted a high degree of confidence (93%) in their own understanding of how to implement UNHCR policies disseminated by HQ and Regional Offices. Even so, NGO respondents provided multiple examples of divergences between policy and practice that they experienced when engaging with UNHCR:

"UNHCR does not fully adhere to the policies. For example, the UNHCR guidelines on UNHCR's contribution in staff salaries says that it's UNHCR's contribution to partner's salaries but in practice UNHCR allow the ceiling as full salary of staff and Partner should not cross that ceiling. During budgeting exercise, UNHCR sometimes give us a bottom line figure and we must adjust the budget to match that one figure. This makes it difficult for partner to implement the project with the available resources." – NGO respondent

"Some UNHCR field staff push our field staff to implement ways that are contrary to our procurement policies or HR policies on staff recruitment. Once taken up with program management staff on the field level, they acknowledge that UNHCR should not get involved in

these decisions. Knowing the level of power of some individual UNHCR staff, this creates challenges for coordination and monitoring of activities." – NGO respondent

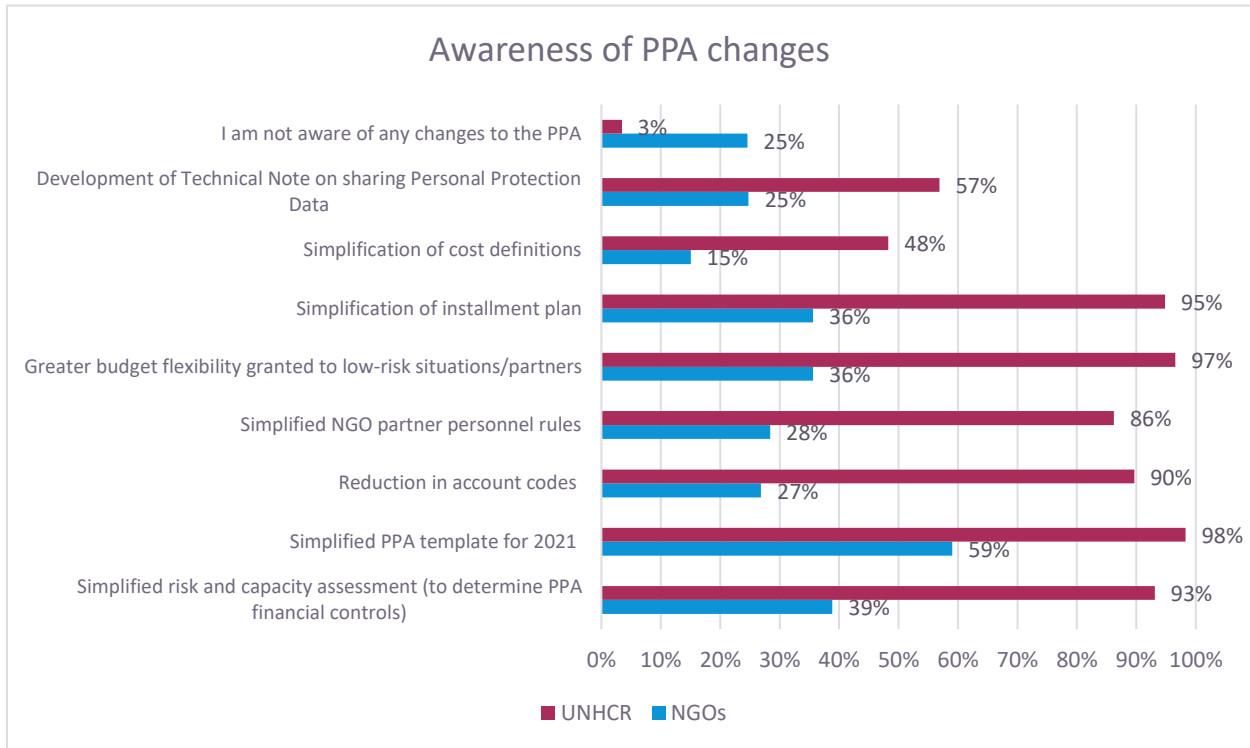
"The application of partnership practices at the country level continues to differ from policies outlined in the Global Partnership Handbook. This is primarily due to a high level of derogated authority granted to UNHCR country operations which results in an inconsistent and administratively burdensome application of partnership policies and practices."

– NGO respondent

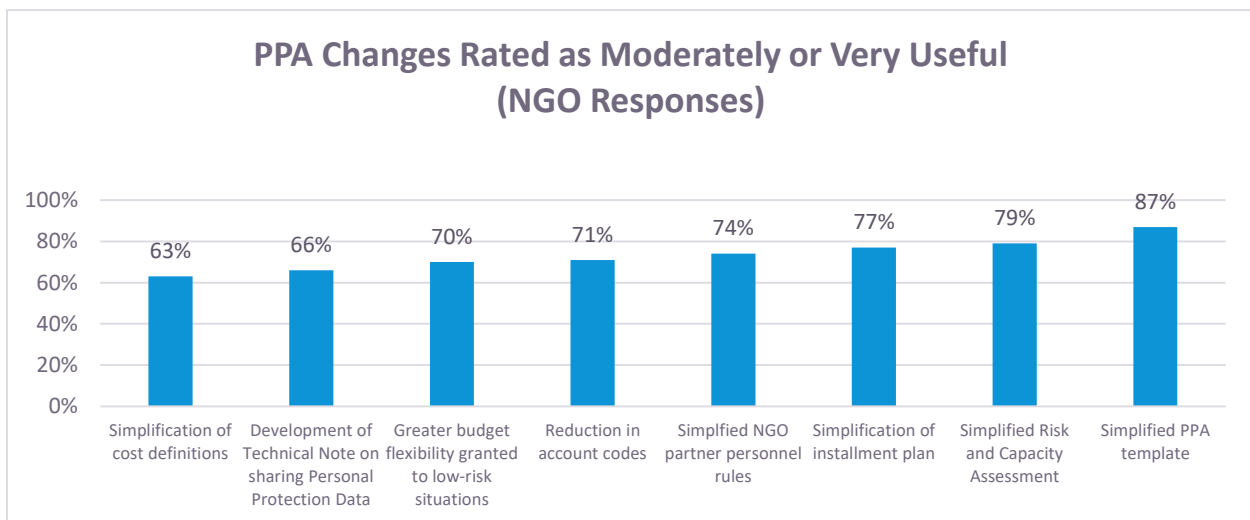
Overall, feedback stressed that even with the updated Partnership Handbook, policies continue to be interpreted and implemented based on the UNHCR country office and its staff, rather than universally standardized, which creates confusion and increased administrative burden for NGOs as they are held to different standards and policies for budgeting and programming across country contexts. Based on this NGO feedback, there is a need for improved internal communication, collaboration, training and monitoring of policy implementation to ensure that UNHCR is consistently applying its own policies across country contexts.

PPA UPDATES

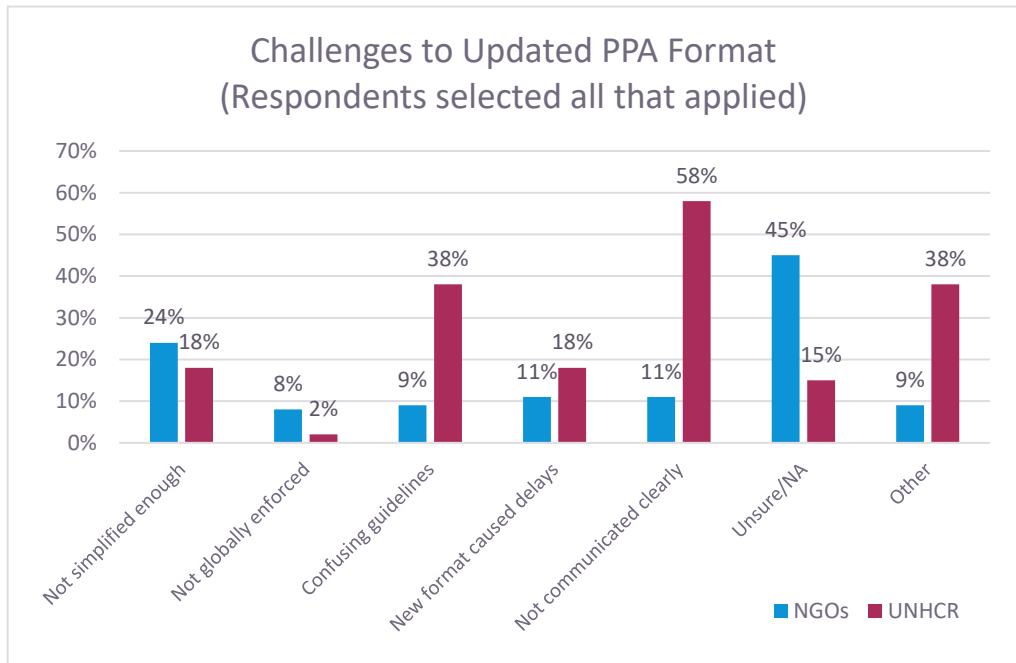
In 2020, UNHCR updated the Project Partnership Agreement (PPA) for 2021 PPAs and beyond. Based on the feedback gathered by this survey, there were varying levels of awareness of the changes among NGO and UNHCR respondents. UNHCR staff had substantially higher awareness of all PPA changes in comparison to their NGO counterparts: 25% of NGO respondents being unaware that any changes had been made to the PPA, compared to only 3% of UNHCR respondents. This discrepancy could be due in part to the roles of the NGO respondents, as approximately 20% of NGO respondents indicated that they are program implementers who are not responsible for the partnership process with UNHCR and would therefore be unaware of any partnership changes.



The PPA changes were broadly popular with NGO respondents, with all changes selected as “very useful” or “moderately useful” by 60% or more of respondents. The simplified PPA template was the most highly rated change by NGO respondents, aligning with the history of NGO requests for a more streamlined form template. The popularity of the PPA changes was reflected among UNHCR respondents’ perceptions as well, with 74% of respondents saying that the changes simplified the process for “all” or “some” partners.



Although broadly popular, there were challenges noted in the rollout of the PPA. As shown to the right, NGO respondents were less likely to note problems with the rollout than UNHCR staff. Among those who noted



challenges, 24% of NGO respondents said that the new PPA format was “not simplified enough.” Further, NGO respondents pointed out that the changes were not always implemented consistently:

“All the changes listed above have the potential to deliver significant benefits, it's just that some were not fully implemented consistently at country level.” -NGO respondent

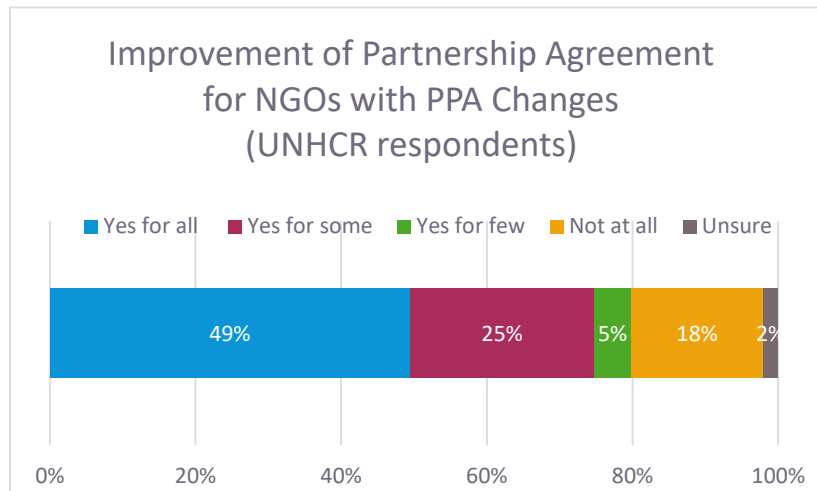
“I am aware of these changes in theory but we have not benefitted from them in practice (e.g. UNHCR still requested a personnel list with our proposal submission; Annex C/data protection issues continue to delay signature).” -NGO respondent

“The number of forms, the terminology, the reporting requirements and some of the rules on spending are still both unnecessarily complex and unclear.” -NGO respondent

“Compared to other donors, the UNHCR forms and rules are unnecessarily complex. In addition, program staff add rules and have varying interpretations of rules.” -NGO respondent

As noted by NGO respondents in other areas of this survey, interpretation and enforcement of the new PPA changes is dependent on the UNHCR country office, rather than universally standardized, and NGOs are therefore unable to fully benefit from the intended simplification measures.

As also shown above, UNHCR colleagues noted challenges with the new PPA as well, with a majority of UNHCR respondents noting communication of PPA changes (58%) as the primary among these, while a significant portion (38%) said the new guidelines were confusing or listed another problem with the rollout. UNHCR colleagues were surveyed



as to the effects of the PPA change on partnership with NGOs, and although 79% of respondents indicated some level of improvement, 18% said the PPA changes did “not at all” simplify the PPA process. This is likely due to the perceived communication gaps in rollout and lack of clarity noted by UNHCR colleagues as major challenges with this PPA update.

“Simplification in UNHCR does not automatically mean that. Reducing documents without proper procedures in place for all to understand the process does not simplify but complicates work, it just adds a new bureaucratic level of paperwork... effective communication of change is therefore critical and explanatory notes would ensure a universal application of simplification instead of ending up in diversified unofficial processes.” -UNHCR respondent

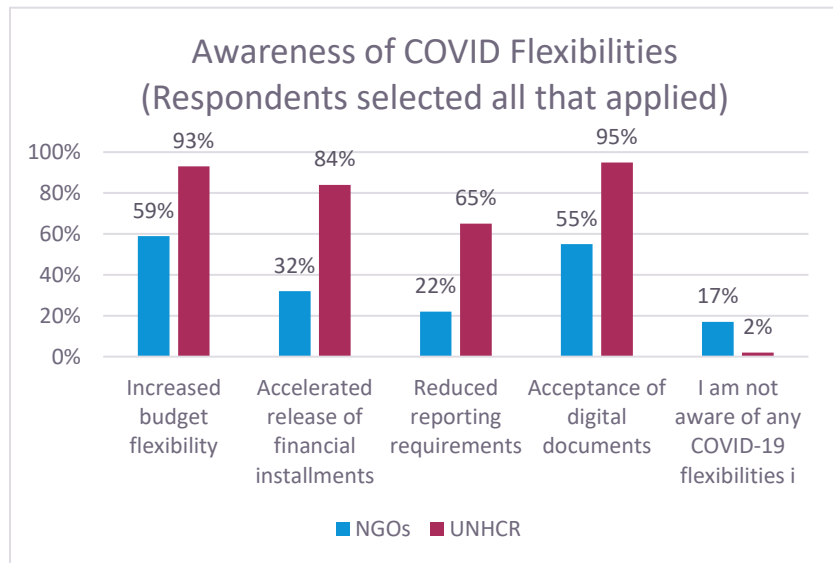
“Guidelines on partner personnel were (and remain) very confusing both for UNHCR and partners. Introduction of additional/changed annexes required extra time to communicate the changes to partners. Guidelines on the changes [were] issued after the completion of many processes by the field.” -UNHCR respondent

“Generally late communication from HQ, not via the formal channels, difficulties locating the current information, and slightly confusing in general. HQ doesn't take into account that partnership management is not a dedicated function in our offices; we also have other areas of work & deadlines. It means we need to receive these things earlier.”- UNHCR respondent

COVID-19 FLEXIBILITIES

In the face of the COVID-19 pandemic and extensive implementing challenges for NGO partners, UNHCR implemented several flexibilities to facilitate continued operations, including increased budget flexibility (up to 30% flexibility), accelerated release of financial installments, reduced reporting requirements, and acceptance of digital documentation. Overall, NGO respondents indicated awareness of COVID-19

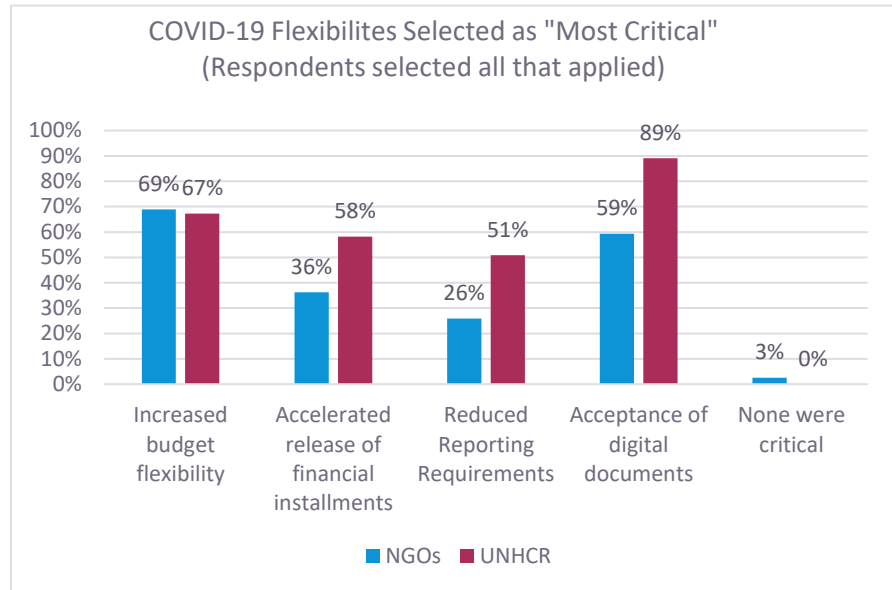
flexibilities, with more than half indicating they were familiar with increased budget flexibility (60%) and acceptance of digital documents (55%). 32% of respondents were aware of accelerated release of financial installments and 22% were aware reduced reporting requirements. Only 17% of NGO respondents selected that they were unaware of any COVID flexibilities which,



as in other areas, can likely be attributed to NGO respondents whose focus is on program activities rather than on larger policy and partnering shifts. UNHCR colleagues, on the other hand, indicated a greater overall awareness of the COVID-19 flexibilities, with only 2% unaware of any of the COVID-19 flexibilities.

Another component of the questions was the criticality of the flexibility measures put in place: which were most helpful, which were least helpful, general feedback, and what additional measures, if any, would have been useful in enabling program continuity and adaptations. On both the NGO and UNHCR side, there was an extremely low number of respondents who reported that none of the flexibilities were

critical (3% and 0% respectively), which displays a high degree of popularity for the adaptations offered. NGOs and UNHCR both ranked acceptance of digital documents (59% and 89% respectively) and increased budget flexibility (69% and 67% respectively) as the top two most critical flexibilities, indicating that they were



most helpful in adapting to the global uncertainty in 2020 and enabling program continuity in emergency circumstances. More than 50% of UNHCR respondents also selected reduced reporting requirements and accelerated release of financial payments as “most critical,” however these were less likely to be selected by NGO respondents. Given feedback outlined previously, the discrepancy in reporting requirements’ criticality is likely due to the proposed flexibility not matching the reality, as many NGO respondents indicated that although reduced reporting was offered the reporting requests from UNHCR country offices actually increased in practice.

A final key component of this section of the survey was around the barriers to successful usage of these flexibility measures. Although 92% of NGO respondents and 89% of UNHCR respondents indicated that NGO partners were able to successfully take advantage of the COVID-19 flexibilities offered by UNHCR, those who were not offered valuable insight:

“Flexibilities were short-lived (e.g. acceptance of digital documents only took place over a short period of time) and the rest remained unchanged (i.e. flexibilities were not applied at country level. Reporting was not reduced, installments were not released in a faster way).” -NGO respondent

“The controls were the same or there was micromanagement from UNCHR towards the partner on where “flexibility” would be preferred.” -NGO respondent

“I have seen great variations in applying these flexibilities. UNHCR was overly flexible with some partners, and overly strict with others.” -UNHCR respondent

“While the reporting requirements were theoretically reduced, we had to ask for multiple additional reports/updates related to COVID situation.” -UNHCR respondent

These comments emphasize a major point of partnership contention: to truly minimize administrative burden faced by NGO partners, standards and flexibilities that are established at the HQ level must be universally understood, applied, and taken into account at the Country Office level before making additional requests of NGO partners such as more frequent reporting. Furthermore, although these flexibilities were broadly popular, both UNHCR and NGO respondents had suggestions for other flexibilities that could be implemented in the future:

“Flexibility with regards to the changes noted in the 2021 contract, especially related to flexibility for personnel costs and other costs associated with personnel and remote work (like additional internet fees, telecommunication costs, etc.).” -NGO respondent

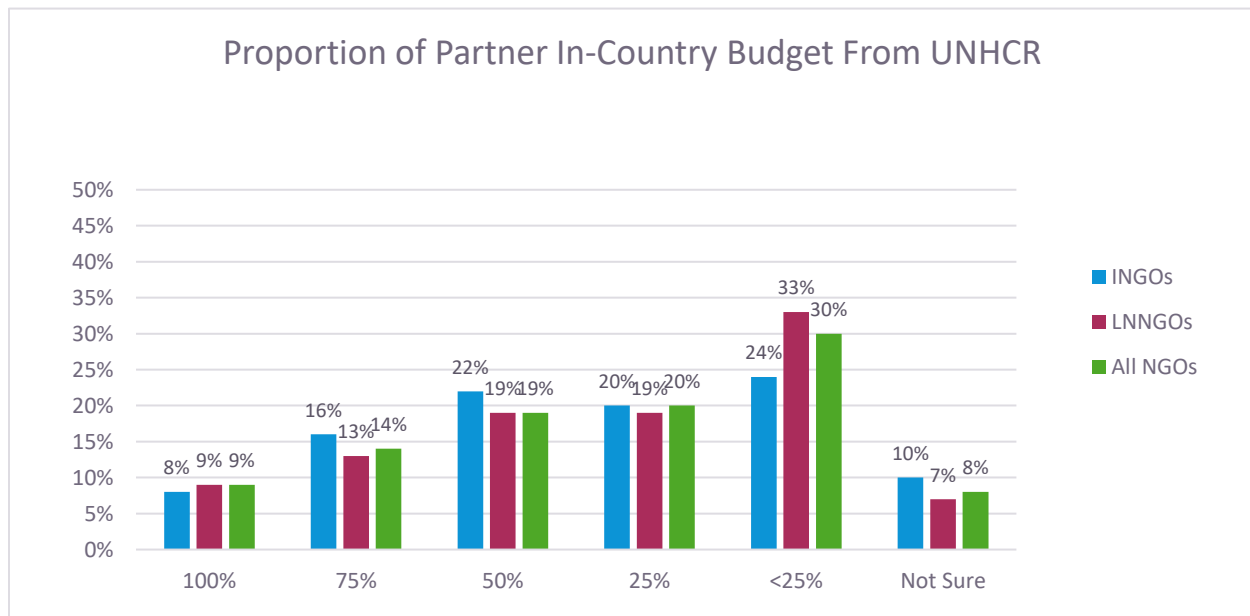
“Flexibility around personnel who were charged on the project during Covid-19 restrictions. Some staff were stuck in lockdown places and when other staff within the same line of work supported in continuing implementation, their related charges on the project were disallowed during the audits.” -NGO respondent

“[Flexibility for] procurement by partners (both pre-qualified or not) to follow flexibility applied on L2 emergencies during COVID-19 pandemic.” -UNHCR respondent

“Extension of deadlines for 2020 audit process, improved preparations for logistic arrangements, and connectivity for remote audits.” -UNHCR respondent

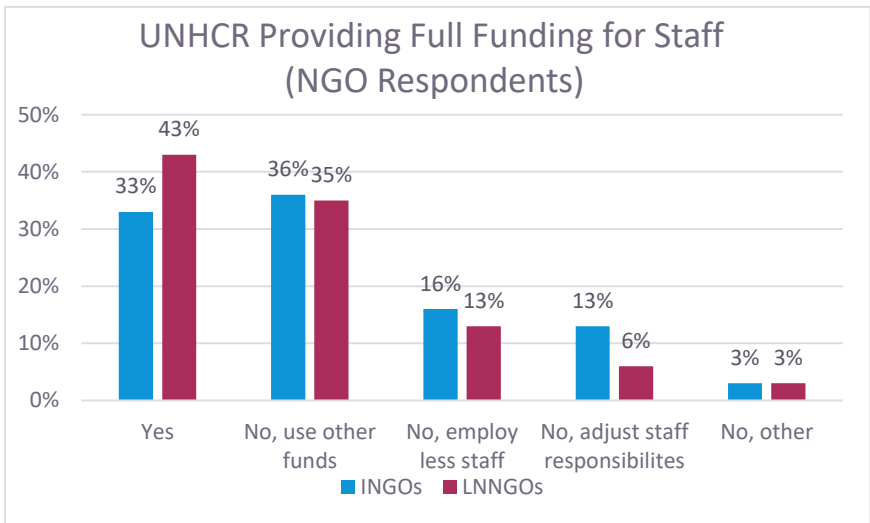
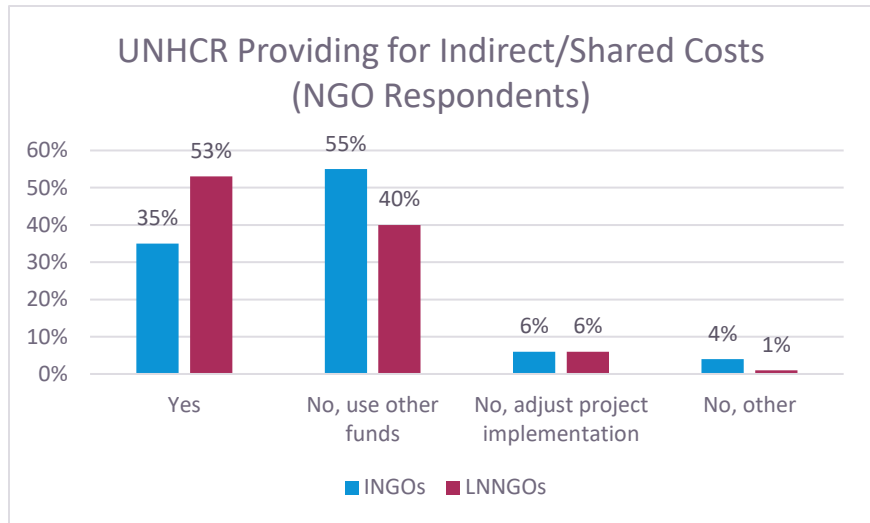
UNHCR FUNDING IMPLICATIONS

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. Survey results indicate that NGOs continue to draw a significant amount of their funding from UNHCR: 42% of NGO respondents reported that at least half of their 2020 in-country budget came from UNHCR funding. In last year’s survey, LNNGOs reported a greater dependence on UNHCR for funding (50% as opposed to 37% of INGOs indicating half or more of their budget comes from UNHCR); in 2020, however, the opposite seemed to be the case, with 41% of LNNGOs and 46% of INGOs reporting that they relied on UNHCR for 50% or more for their budget.



Given that UNHCR funding makes up a large portion of NGO budgets, NGO survey respondents were also asked whether the UNHCR project budgets provide funding for two key elements of implementation: full and fair cost coverage of staff and other indirect or shared costs. For both funding of staff and indirect

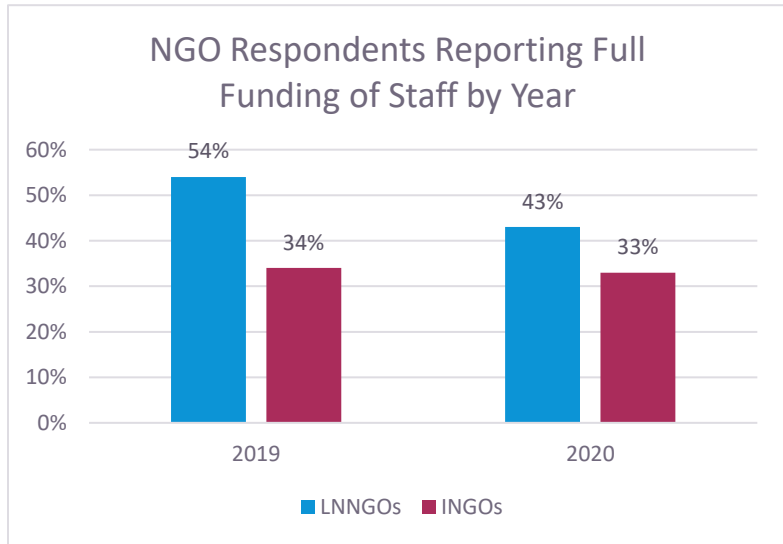
and shared costs, less than half (46%) of NGO respondents reported full and fair funding. Furthermore, as shown in the graphs to the right, the majority of NGO respondents (66%) reported that UNHCR project budget(s) for 2020 did not meet full and fair funding needs. The most common consequence NGOs reported was being forced to use other funding to cover staff costs (39%) and indirect and shared costs (46%). Others were forced to employ fewer 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. Combined, these factors likely contribute to the drawn-out negotiations over programs and budget which have resulted in delayed PPA signing.

Overall, LNNGOs reported higher levels of full and fair coverage for staffing and indirect and shared costs in comparison to INGOs. However, INGOs generally have greater indirect costs associated with larger programming and support functions in-country, as well as disagreements over UNHCR expatriate salary

caps, which could explain INGO respondents' lower numbers. However, it is also important to note that **there was a 15% decrease in the number of NGOs who reported full and fair funding for staff from last year** and, despite higher overall reporting of full and fair coverage for staffing and indirect/shared costs, LNNGOs took the brunt of this decline: LNNGOs reported a 20%



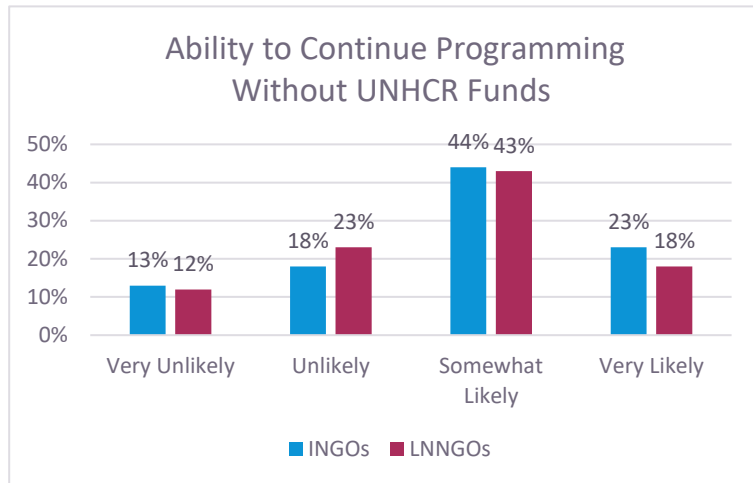
decrease in full funding for staff from last year's survey, while INGOs only reported 3% decline. NGOs were able to share more as to their perspectives on this issue:

"UNHCR does not fully and fairly cover support staff cost (admin, finance, HR, logistics) although they also spent a significant level of effort supporting UNHCR-funded projects. So, as a result we have to partially cover the costs of these support staff." –NGO respondent

"UNHCR has been exceptionally harsh on staff costs related to positions ensuring compliance but not directly involved in project delivery, thus not covering their fair share and pushing risk management to be paid by other donors on their behalf and cherry-picking only activity-based results." –NGO respondent

"We are compelled to struggle to look for other donors' support which is very frustrating." – NGO respondent

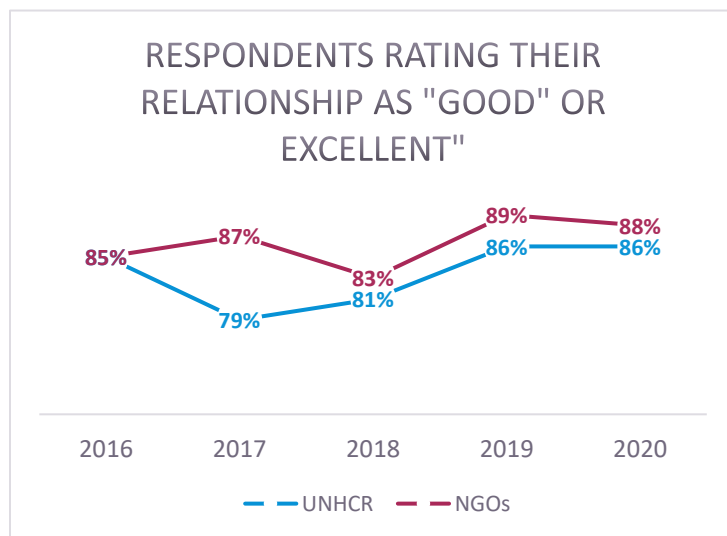
The decline in coverage of staff costs is a huge challenge for NGOs who would seek to respond to humanitarian needs. NGOs must often make operational and programmatic adjustments (hiring less staff, finding additional sources of funding, etc.) to make up the gap, which ultimately increases their overall operational risk. Therefore, although NGOs project confidence in their ability



to continue without UNHCR funding, with 64% saying they are very or somewhat likely to be able to continue on, demand for full and fair funding of program and indirect costs by UNHCR: the need for the funding has not changed. Both INGOs and LNNGOs reported a similarly outlook on future programming, with INGOs reporting slightly higher confidence (67%) than their LNNGO counterparts (62%). However, expecting NGOs to cover these costs is unfair to these organizations, and UNHCR should work to fairly cover these costs in the years to come to be a more equitable partner.

OVERALL PARTNERSHIP ASSESSMENT

To better understand perceptions of UNHCR-NGO partnership more broadly, respondents were asked to reflect on their relationship improvement, ability to address areas of mutual concern, communication, and overall partnership in 2020. Both NGOs' and UNHCR's assessment of the state of their partnership remained strong despite the pandemic with over 85% of UNHCR and NGO respondents rating the relationship as good or excellent. As shown in the graph below, overall "good" and "excellent" ratings have remained high.

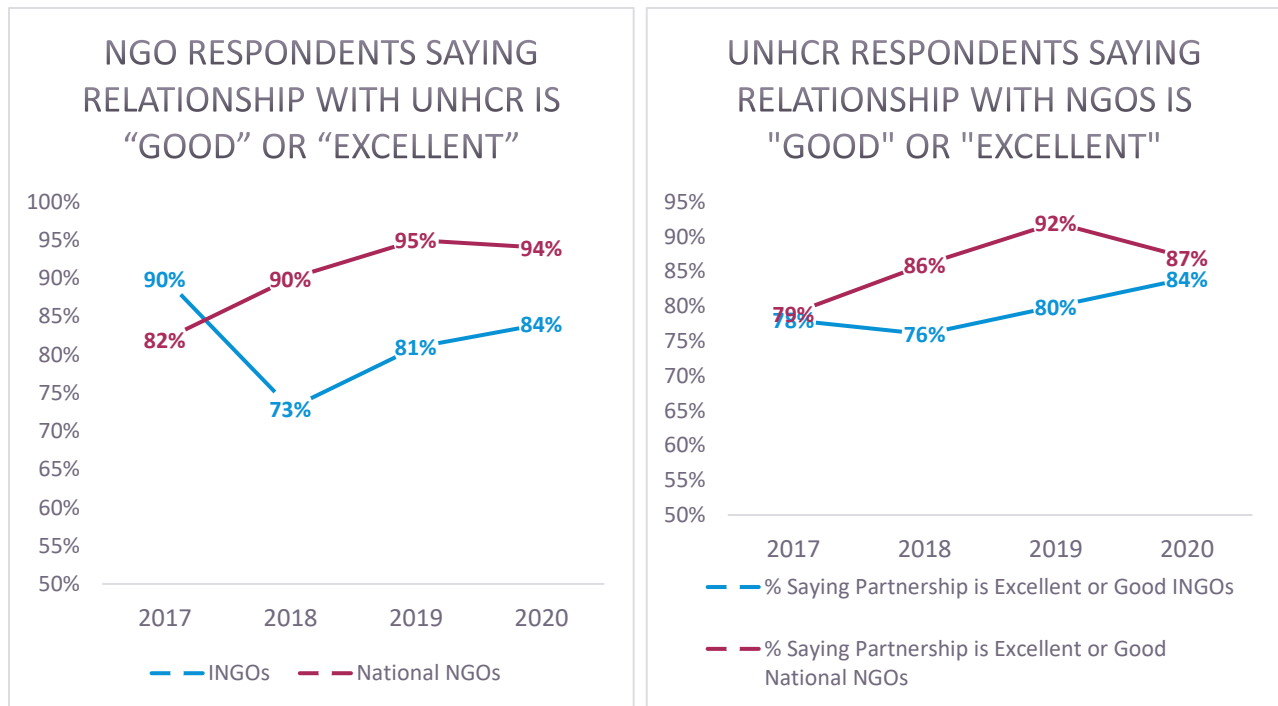


LNNGOs and UNHCR reported having a slightly stronger relationship than INGOs and UNHCR. Over 94% of LNNGOs and 87% of UNHCR respondents rated their relationship as good or excellent, as compared to INGOs and UNHCR, where 84% of both INGOs and UNHCR respondents reported a good or excellent relationship. However, there was a 12% increase in the number of INGO respondents who rated their overall relationship as excellent from the prior year.

In the space for comments on the overall status of partnerships, respondents noted the continued strength of their partnership, despite all the challenges of the last year:

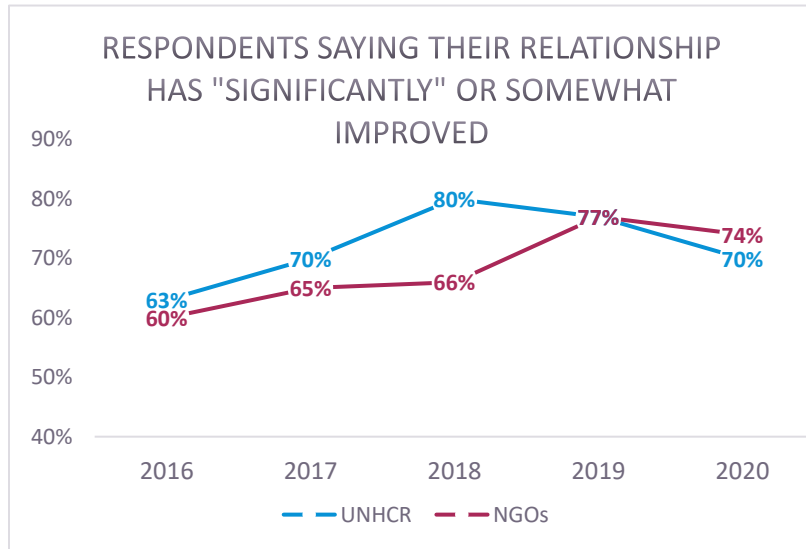
“The relationship with UNHCR has developed over the years. They are always willing to provide support and guidance which is much appreciated.” - NGO Respondent

“The partnership with UNHCR has been a real partnership and we have appreciated the coordination and cooperation of UNHCR staff.” - NGO Respondent



RELATIONSHIP IMPROVEMENT

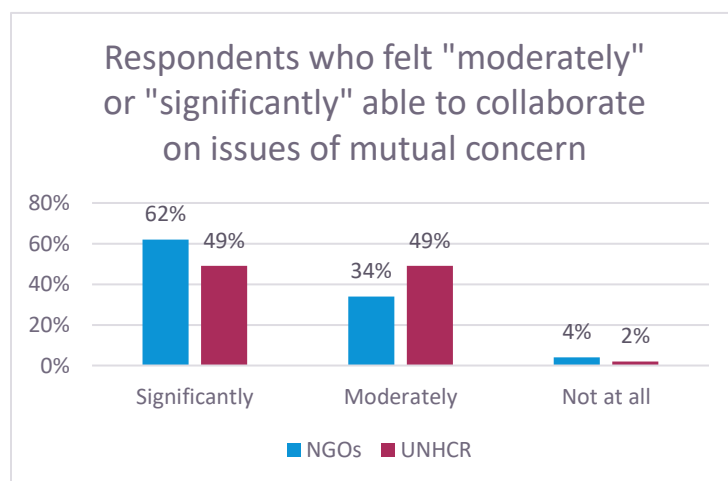
The majority of UNHCR and NGO respondents (70% and 74% respectively) reported an overall improvement in the partner relationship during 2020. Further, only 6% of NGO respondents and 4% of UNHCR respondents reported that the relationship has worsened over the last 12 months, which is especially heartening given the complications presented from the pandemic.



It is worth noting that UNHCR respondents reporting a relationship improvement has dropped 13% from its high in 2018. In comparison, NGO respondents, despite dropping slightly this year, have seen a 12% increase in those reporting a relationship improvement from 2018. There has been a slight drop off from the prior year in both UNHCR and NGO respondents who say the relationship has somewhat or significantly improved. However, given the overall high number of UNHCR and NGO respondents who have rated their relationship as good or excellent over the years, it is not surprising that the relationship improvement metric has started to plateau.

COLLABORATION

Another component of successful partnership is the ability for UNHCR and NGO partners to collaboratively address issues of mutual concern. Per the following chart, 98% of UNHCR and 96% NGO respondents felt moderately to significantly able to collaborate to address issues of mutual concern in 2020.



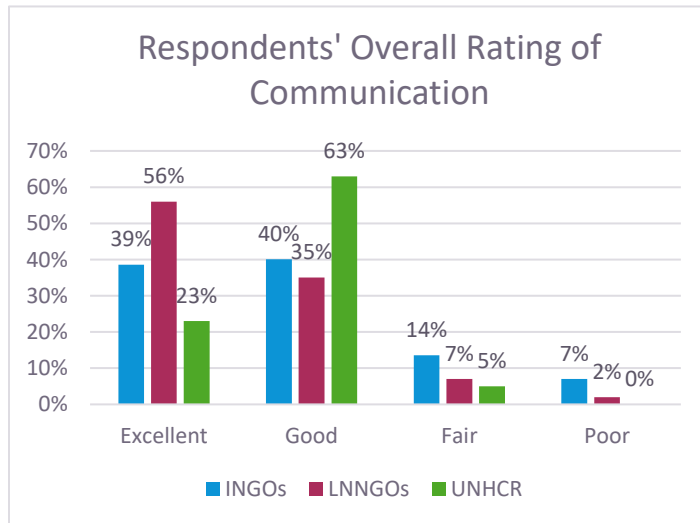
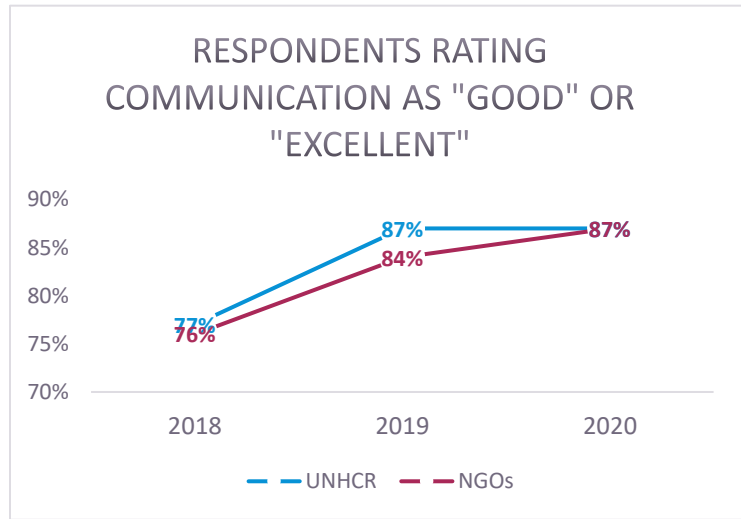
NGOs noted positives in their feedback:

"[UNHCR is] always open for practical problem solving and mutual support." -NGO respondent

"[The] culture of valuing partner concerns and feedback is much appreciated." -NGO respondent

COMMUNICATION

Communication is a critical component of successful partnership and, as shown in the chart to the right, overall rankings of successful communication between UNHCR and NGOs has continuously improved over the past several years, increasing approximately 13% from 2018 to 2020, when 87% of both NGO and UNHCR respondents rated communication as "good" or "excellent."

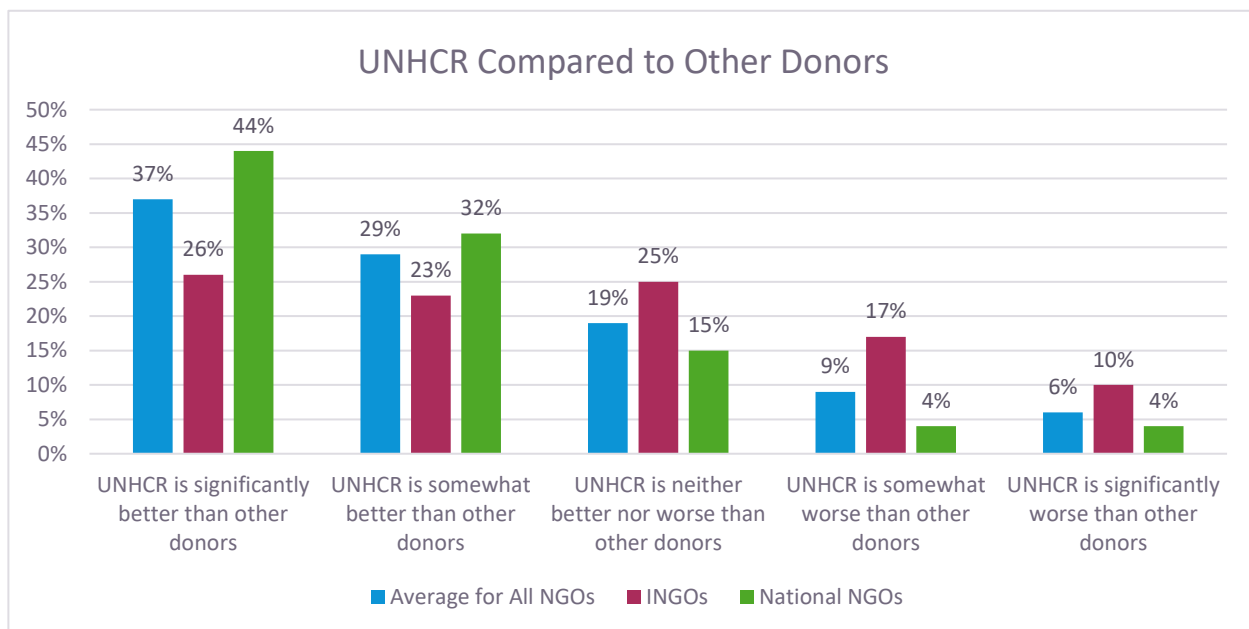


The chart at left shows the breakdown of perspectives on communication success, with a distinction made between INGOs and LNNGOs. There is some divergence between the two: LNNGOs viewed communication with UNHCR more favorably than INGOs (91% and 79%, respectively). As for those who responded that communication is poor, the following communication challenge was noted:

“Information sharing is always a difficult topic with UNHCR partnership. I think better guidance to your country teams on particularly case information sharing protocol is needed.” -INGO respondent

UNHCR COMPARED TO OTHERS

Survey respondents were also asked to compare UNHCR to other donors, in terms of administrative efforts required to secure and implement projects. 66% of NGO respondents favored UNHCR as either significantly or somewhat better than other donors. As shown on the graph below, overall, LNNGOs have a more favorable opinion of UNHCR than INGOs: 76% of LNNGOs think UNHCR is significantly or somewhat better than other donors, while only 49% of INGOs feel the same.



CONCLUSION

Despite a global pandemic, the 2020 survey results demonstrate a continued strong relationship between UNHCR and its partners. Additionally, COVID-19 flexibilities and PPA changes rolled out by UNHCR just before and during the pandemic were broadly popular with both NGO partners and UNHCR staff. Feedback from UNHCR staff and NGOs presents opportunities for UNHCR to build upon the successes of these changes in the years to come. Another positive finding from the 2020 survey was a perceived decline in overall PPA delays from both UNHCR and NGO respondents (though no decrease in length of delays), which has been a frequent challenge cited by respondents in prior years.

NGO respondents did reveal areas where UNHCR could work to improve to build more effective partnerships. Entering its second year, continued lack of awareness and confusion was reported on multi-year agreements, indicating both a demand for an expansion of this program and the need for further, more widespread training on and availability of this funding option. Further, although the simplifications to the PPA were strongly appreciated by NGO partners, NGOs continued to report continued administrative burdens from PPAs, particularly in the requests for formal reports. UNHCR and NGOs respondents were in agreement that negotiations over budget were slowing the signing of PPAs, though each group of respondents was more likely to perceive the other as the root cause of delay. Flexibilities implemented in response to COVID-19 were particularly appreciated by NGO respondents and are recommended to be carried forward indefinitely to enable flexible and adaptive operations in response to humanitarian aid. However, there is still a notable gap between policies and procedures developed at the UNHCR HQ level and awareness and implementation at the UNHCR Country Office level; one that requires exploration and action to address by UNHCR to standardize practice.

Furthermore, in the interest of streamlining and decreasing administrative burden on NGO partners, there is notable room for improvement in the use of the UNPP: the number of calls posted by UNHCR staff has decreased from 2019 to 2020 despite operations largely moving to remote and calls for the UNPP to be utilized more by NGO respondents. Addressing these areas of concern in the upcoming year will allow for a stronger more efficient relationship between UNHCR and NGOs.

Across the board, UNHCR respondents reported declining perceived utility in partnership methods and the UNPP, while their NGO partners reported continued or improving utility in these same methods. There are few comments explaining this phenomenon, however it is possible that the pandemic created extra work in executing certain partnership methods and utilizing the UNPP, without a perceived return in value among UNHCR staff. Further investigation into the perceived challenges with these methodologies is necessary to determine if additional trainings or support are needed to streamline partnership processes and utilize the UNPP to its full potential.

Finally, survey respondents provided useful feedback for improving this annual survey. Most notably, respondents suggested questions that are tailored to the country or regional level as they did not always feel able to address global level questions. Another common suggestion among NGO respondents was a request to conduct the survey on a bi-annual basis given the length of the survey, indicating that a streamlined survey would be well-received. The remainder of the survey suggestions revolved around the wording of specific questions and response options. These suggestions will be shared with UNHCR in the lead up to next year's survey.

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.