



# UNHCR-NGO Partnership Survey

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## *2018 Report*

*A joint initiative between InterAction and UNHCR's Implementing Partner Management Service (IPMS), with support from ICVA.*

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## Executive Summary

### Background

In order to better track partnership dynamics and develop a body of evidence on perceptions of UNHCR-NGO partnership, UNHCR's Implementing Partner Management Service (IPMS), with past support from HIAS and current support from InterAction, have been systematically soliciting UNHCR and partner feedback via an annual survey on the state of UNHCR-NGO partnership since 2014. The 2018 survey was circulated widely to UNHCR Country Offices and to NGOs and the data received was analyzed by InterAction in consultation with UNHCR-IPMS. This report reflects submissions from 73 UNHCR staff and 207 NGO staff, over half of which represent national or local NGO partners.

### Key Findings

#### *Planning and Consultation*

Types of engagement between UNHCR and NGO partners appear to be correlated with perceived utility; NGO partners engaged in and most valued coordination meetings while UNHCR staff favored joint monitoring visits and one-one-on consultations. Both NGOs and UNHCR engaged the least in formal country operational planning and rated it least useful, but of the partners who did participate in the 2018 Country Operational Planning, 70% noted that their inputs were reflected to some degree in the final product, a 10% increase from 2017.

#### *Partner Selection*

Over 70% of UNHCR respondents reported issuing at least one Call for Expression of Interest to partners in 2018 and nearly 90% of NGO partners who applied were chosen for at least one project. For those who were not selected, only 17% reported that they did not receive a proactive response from UNHCR detailing the reasoning for the non-selection. This exhibits a positive trend from UNHCR, as it is a 16% decrease from 2017 when 33% noted a lack of sufficient feedback from UNHCR. Also of note, 96% of partners reported that they were registered on the Partner Portal—a 10% increase from 2017, and a further 3% of the non-registered NGOs intended to do so in the upcoming year. UNHCR and NGO reported similar impacts on their grant management processes due to the portal- with roughly three-quarters of respondents noting moderate to significant improvements.

#### *Partner Capacity and Localization*

The majority of UNHCR staff reported positive perceptions of their partners' technical capacity to meet the needs of persons of concern and ability to effectively manage Partnership Agreement funding. Of the 7-8% who found their partners to have 'very little capability', many noted high staff turnover, low salary scales among local NGOs, and lack of administrative and operational capacity as contributing factors. Encouragingly, both UNHCR (83%) and NGO partners (61%) reported contributing to joint efforts to build the capacity of local NGOs or CBOs in their countries of operation in 2018. Respondents most frequently reported providing training, coaching, or transferring knowledge to strengthen capacity. Notably, 68% of UNHCR respondents also provided financial resources, while only 24% of NGO partners provided this type of support.

### *Project Partnership Agreements*

Regarding project inception, 37% of NGO partners reported that they had at least one Project Partnership Agreements that was not signed on time, with nearly half reporting the delays took 1-3 months to resolve. Negotiations over the budget, UNHCR delayed consideration of proposals, and joint changes after proposal submission were the leading causes for delay. Yet despite these challenges, there was still a 9% increase in PPAs signed on time as compared to 2017. Additionally, the majority of NGO and UNHCR respondents reported participating in formal joint monitoring, review, or evaluation of their projects and agreed that it was a valuable experience. Finally, as UNHCR has initiated a process to update the '[Operations Management Handbook For UNHCR Partners](#)' first published in 2003, this year's survey asked respondents to reflect on their use of the current version. While a high proportion of NGO (49%) and UNHCR (66%) respondents said that they 'seldom' or 'never' consult the handbook, many noted throughout their comments that this undertaking, if done jointly, could strengthen partnership for years to come.

### *UNHCR Funding Implications*

Only 20-30% of partners reported that more than half of their budget was from UNHCR-supported projects and INGOs were more likely than their national NGO counterparts to have diversified funding sources. Both INGOs and NNGOs reported an optimistic outlook regarding the likelihood that they would be able to continue programming without the funds they currently receive *from* UNHCR, however UNHCR staff held a more negative view with 73% believing it to be 'unlikely' or 'very unlikely'.

### *Overall Partnership Assessment*

Most importantly, both NGOs' and UNHCR's assessment of the state of partnership continues to improve year over year. Over 75% of respondents rated both communication and partnership as 'good' or excellent', while NNGOs and UNHCR were more likely to rate their partnership with each other higher than between UNHCR and INGOs. A greater proportion of respondents also reported improvements in the relationship over time as compared with past years, a clear demonstration of the continued energy both UNHCR and partners invest in joint endeavors to serve persons of concern.

### **Overarching Recommendations**

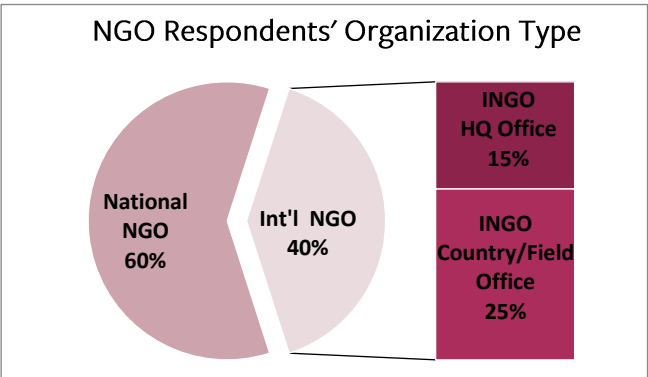
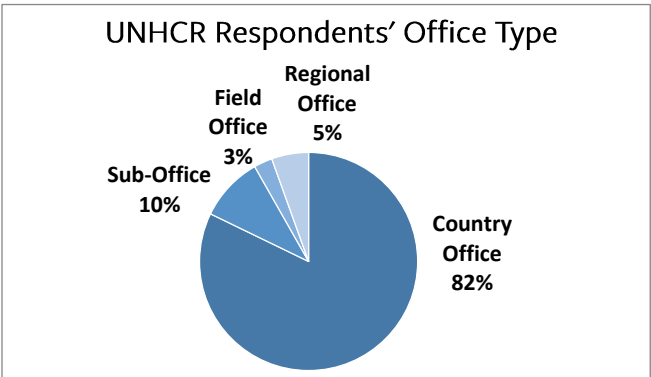
- Build on past Country Operational Planning process improvements by strengthening the utility of the COP as a meaningful joint planning and coordination tool for UNHCR and partners
- Continue to improve proactive notification of reasoning for non-selection to partners
- Capitalize on high Partner Portal membership by expanding functionality, accessibility, and resources available in line with respondent recommendations
- Reduce bureaucratic and administrative duties of UNHCR staff to allow more time spent with partners in the field to improve joint project management
- Create a new tool to assess the role of local government vis-à-vis partnership in future years
- Diversify capacity building approaches beyond training and knowledge transfer where possible
- Ensure the update of the new partnership handbook is a collaborative and consultative process and enhance awareness of the finished resource through accessible webinars

## Section 1: Respondent Demographics

This report reflects data from 73 UNHCR staff and 207 NGO respondents, over half of which represent national or local NGO partners. The number of UNHCR respondents is on par with the 2017 survey data (69) but despite the use of a consistent collection methodology there was a slight decrease of NGO respondents compared with last year (291). Overall, the number of UNHCR respondents is consequently lower since all organizations/agencies were asked to submit only one response per office.

### Type of Office Represented by Respondents

Sixty percent of the 207 NGO staff respondents represented national NGOs, while the remainder worked for International NGOs, 25% at the country or field level and 15% at a headquarters office. Of the 73 UNHCR survey respondents, 82% represented a Country Office, with the remainder working at the Sub-Office, Regional Office, or Field Office level.



### Job Function and Role of Respondents

The majority of respondents to the UNHCR survey were Sectoral Program Staff (70%), with 21% serving as Project Control, 4% as Deputy Director, Deputy Head of Office, Deputy Representative. One percent of respondents identified as the Country Representative or Head of Office. Those who indicated 'other' worked in Operations and Administration.

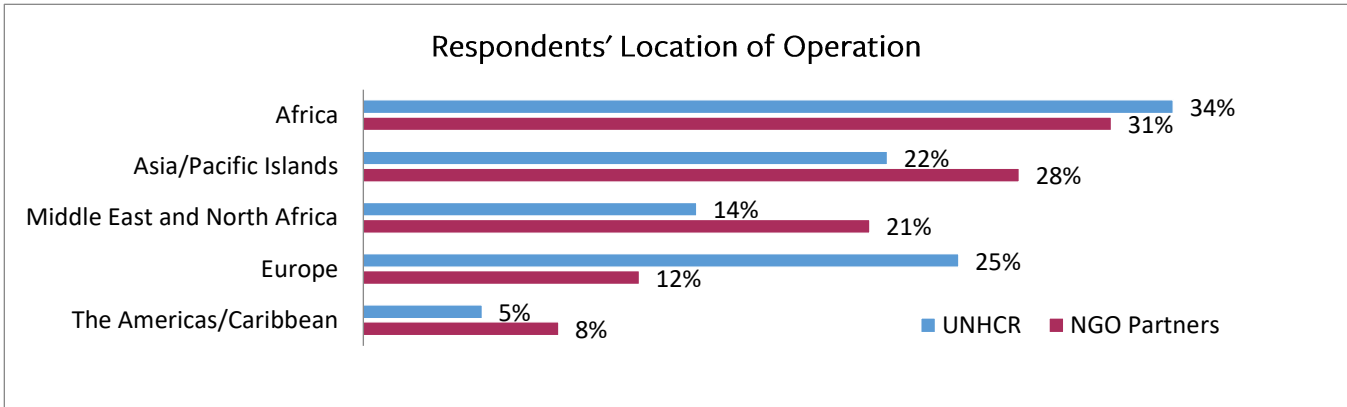
NGO respondents could indicate multiple job functions where their role intersected with UNHCR. Nearly half (48%) of all partners indicated direct partnership management as a primary function of their role with 44% holding an executive position in their organization and 38% responsible for signing the Project Partnership Agreements. Ten percent of survey respondents participated in direct project implementation and 10% selected 'other', noting policy, strategy, M&E, and grant management as key functions of their role.

Job Role of UNHCR Respondents	% of UNHCR Respondents
Sectoral Program Staff	70%
Project Control	21%
Dep. Director/Dep. Rep/Dep. HOO	4%
Other	4%
Representative/Head of Office	1%

Relevant Job Function/s of NGO Respondents	% of NGO Respondents
Manages the UNHCR Partnership	48%
Holds an Executive Position	44%
Signs the PPA	38%
Participates in implementation	10%
Other	10%

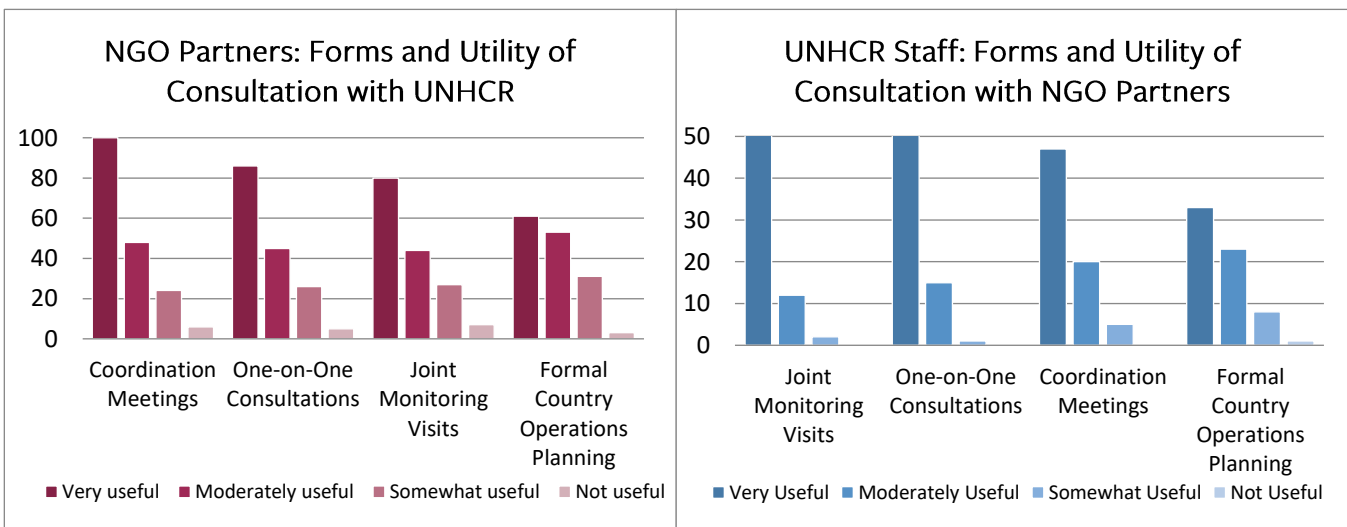
## Regional Distribution of Respondents

The survey was distributed in English, French, and Spanish to improve accessibility for field-based partners. Regional distribution of respondents was mostly proportional between NGO and UNHCR respondents in Africa and the Americas/Caribbean, with a higher proportion of UNHCR staff responding from Europe and more NGOs responding from Asia and the Middle East and North Africa.

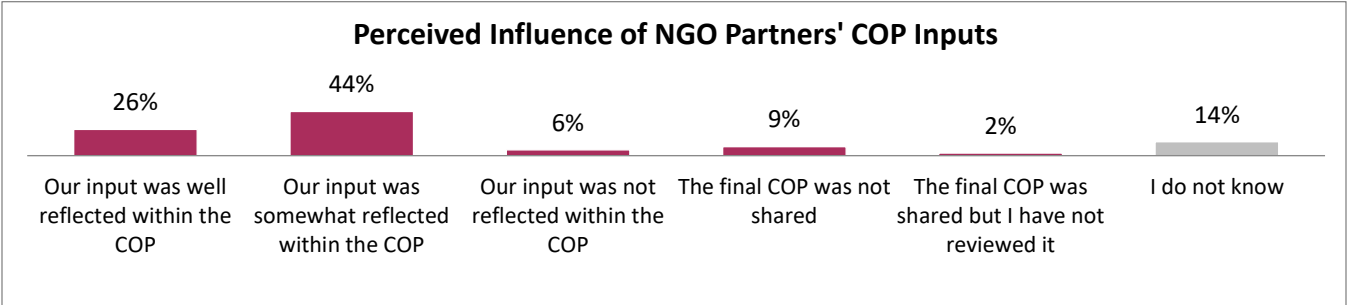


## Section 2: Planning and Consultation

Types of engagement between UNHCR and NGO partners appears to be correlated with perceived utility. For example, NGO partners reported engaging the most in interagency coordination meetings with 58% of respondents finding this form of consultation 'very useful'; correspondingly, partners reported engaging the least in formal country operations planning processes and 39% of respondents rated it as very useful. Similarly, UNHCR staff engaged with partners the most via joint monitoring visits, one-on-one consultations, and coordination meetings and rated them 'very useful' at higher rates (81%, 77%, and 65% respectively). The discrepancy in reported engagement and utility via joint monitoring visits could be due to the perception of NGOs that these visits are at best a box-ticking exercise, or at worst a micro-management tool rather than a joint exercise- a topic explored further in section 5. UNHCR staff also engaged the least in formal country operations planning and, like NGO partners, reported this process as 'very useful' at lower rates (51%).



As indicated above, the Country Operation Plan (COP) is perceived to be of less value as a strategic consultation tool, but the process management and inclusivity of the COP has improved over time. 78% of NGO partners and 85% of UNHCR staff reported that partners were invited to a COP meeting by UNHCR and of those who contributed inputs, 70% found that their inputs were reflected to some degree in the final plan.



**+** 10% increase in NGO inputs ‘somewhat/well reflected’ in the COP from 2017 (60%)

For the remainder of NGO colleagues who did not participate, some UNHCR staff elaborated on the different approaches to the COP process across contexts, noting: partners were only invited to preparatory sessions, planned sessions were cancelled due to an emergency response, or partner input was solicited in an ad hoc manner. Additionally, of the 6% who felt that their input was not reflected, some elaborated that the consultation was cursory without real influence over the strategy:

NGO partner 1: *“we were invited to listen but not given the chance to think through and contribute”*

NGO partner 2: *“Our inputs were presented but UNHCR stuck to their own planning”*

Reciprocally, 51% of UNHCR respondents reported that they were not invited to contribute to partners’ annual planning, which was corroborated by NGO partners, 40% of whom reported not inviting UNHCR to their annual planning—8% due to the fact that they did not hold a planning process. Some respondents elaborated that partners and UNHCR often consult on project-specific planning for the year rather than overall organizational strategy:

NGO partner:  
*“[Although overall organizational strategy for the year is held internally], UNHCR Representatives are invited - and participate - to all kick-off and final workshops and events related to UNHCR-funded projects. During such events, the teams normally conduct SWOT analysis for the past year and [plan] for the coming year (how to improve the intervention, expectations, lesson learnt).”*

UNHCR Staff:  
*“We did discuss planning of 2018 project partnership, however were not invited for their overall programme for 2018.”*

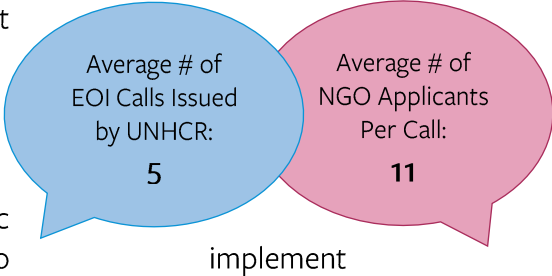
A few UNHCR staff members commented that their INGO partners were more likely to consult them during annual planning. This is validated by the NGO respondent data when analyzing the national

NGO responses in isolation; national NGO staff reported not inviting UNHCR to their annual planning 9% more frequently than the average, likely related to the higher proportion of national NGOs that reported not holding an annual planning process- 15%.

In cases where UNHCR was invited by partners, 83% of UNHCR staff reported that a representative participated in every partner planning process for which they received an invitation, while an additional 10% noted that they participated in at least some partner consultations.

**Section 3: Partner Selection**

Over 70% of UNHCR respondents reported that they issued at least one Call for Expression of Interest (EOI) to partners in their country program in 2018. Due to the structure of the survey it is unclear as to the specific reasoning why the remaining 30% did not issue a call, but some potential reasons could be: UNHCR did not have any projects in that specific program for 2018, UNHCR worked through local government to their projects, or they did not hold open calls but instead solicited potential partners directly—an exceptional circumstance requiring a waiver.



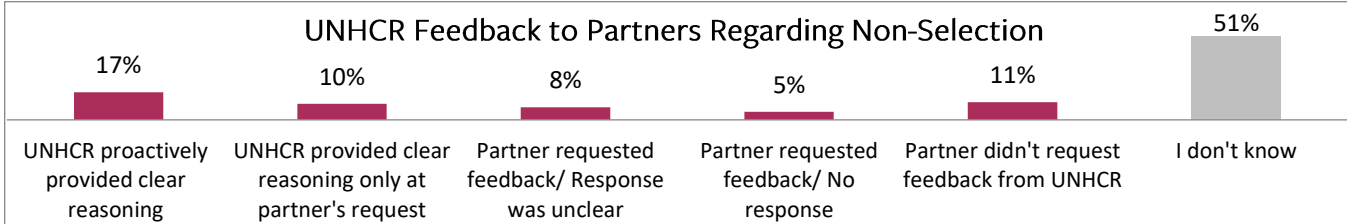
implement

The average number of EOI calls issued by UNHCR was 5; most respondents reported issuing 1-3 calls but some programs issued up to 19. On average UNHCR received 11 responses per call, ranging from 2-25 partner applications depending on the country program and type of call.

Nearly 90% of partners who participated in the UNHCR selection process for 2018 were selected for at least one project for which they applied; over half of which (53%) were selected for every project. Eleven percent reported that they were not successful in the 2018 project selection process.

Surprisingly, over 50% of respondents did not have knowledge of the non-selection feedback process. While NGO staff should be diligent about sharing the feedback internally with relevant colleagues, UNHCR’s process for providing feedback should also be made explicitly clear to partners. As a simple remedy to this challenge, UNHCR could increase partner awareness of this process by including it within the new Partner Handbook update.

For the remainder, of those who were not successful in their applications, 17% of partners indicated that UNHCR proactively provided clear reasoning for the non-selection, while 10% received it upon request. 13% of partners noted that they requested feedback but either didn’t receive it or the reasoning was not clear.

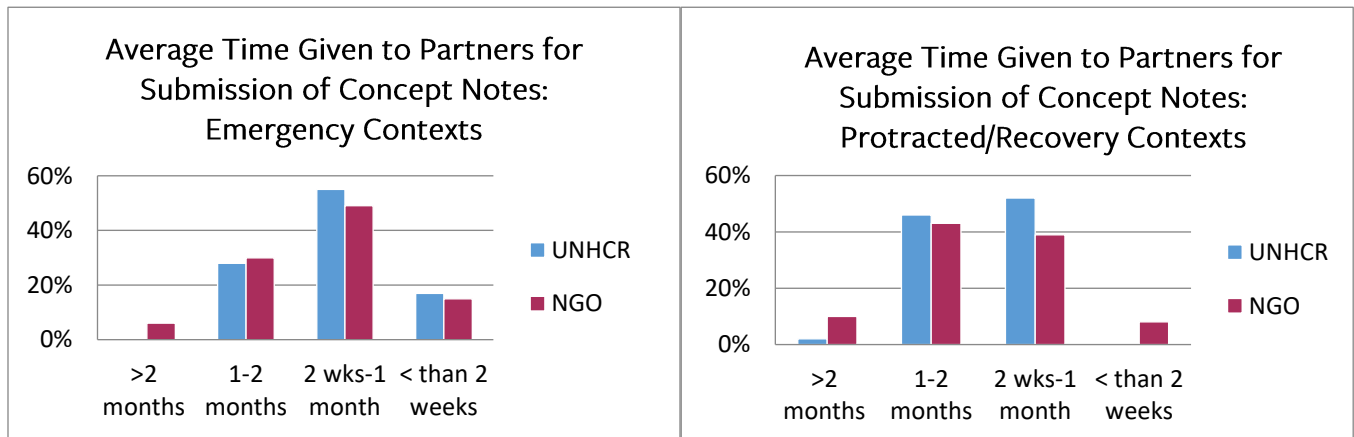


This data represents a 16% decrease in proactive feedback from UNHCR compared with 2017 (33%)—although this could partially be explained by the high proportion of respondents who selected ‘I don’t know’ as their response.

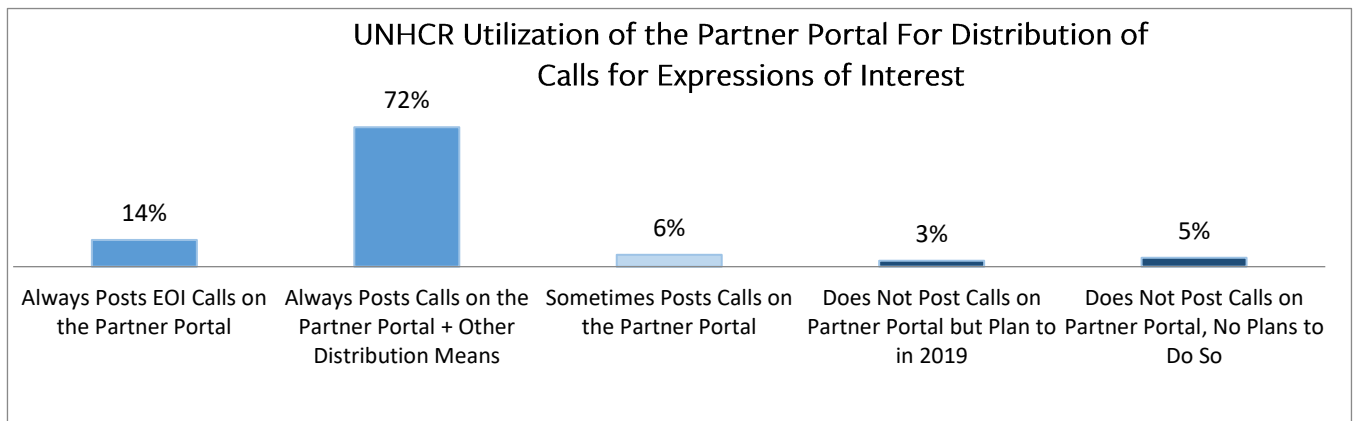
One partner shared the following perspective regarding UNHCR’s selection process:

NGO partner:  
*“I believe the majority of projects are given based on political pressure. I have seen some organizations who are worse in implementation and UNHCR staff do not want to work with them but still UNHCR [selects them] for partnership. Besides, the selection process is not at all transparent and you will never get a satisfactory answer if you ask.”*

Partners and UNHCR reported similar data regarding the timeframe given to partners to submit Concept Notes after a Call for EOI was issued. In emergency settings roughly 50% of all respondents reported that partners received 2 weeks to 1 month to apply. In protracted or recovery contexts 45% of respondents reported having anywhere from 2 weeks to 2 months to submit applications. Notably, 8% of partners reported a turnaround time of less than 2 weeks in these protracted /recovery settings.



Approximately half of NGO partners learned about UNHCR Calls For Expression of Interest via the Partner Portal and 37% received a formal email notification from UNHCR. National NGOs were 9% less likely than average to access Calls for EOI on the Partner Portal; they relied more on the formal email communications and other stakeholders- particularly NGO consortia.





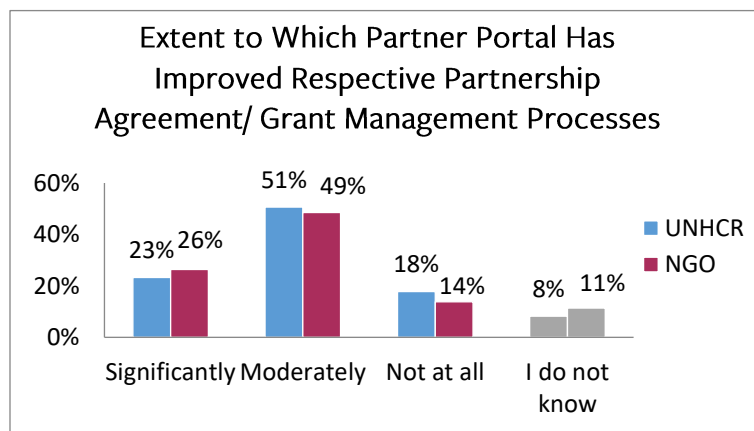
As indicated in the above graph, 14% of UNHCR staff reported that they always post Calls for EOI on the Partner Portal, 72% of which also distribute the calls via other supplemental modalities such as email listservs, coordination meeting announcements, local newspapers, and NGO consortia. An additional 6% of UNHCR staff said they sometimes post on the Partner Portal but not always. Eight percent reported that they do not share EOI Calls on the Partner Portal- 3% of which cited plans to start doing so next year and 5% that do plan to use the portal for this purpose.

UNHCR respondents elaborated on some challenges faced when using the Partner Portal to solicit Expressions of Interest:

UNHCR Staff 1:  
*"The last call was posted on the Partner Portal, however the applicants reported many technical issues with registration and uploading of the concept notes. This compromised the entire application process."*

UNHCR Staff 2:  
*"Yes, [we posted the call on the Partner Portal] but only 1 NGO has used the Portal so far to present their expression of interest- the other 79 did not."*

96% of partners reported that they were registered on the Partner Portal, a 10% increase from 2017 when 86% reported being registered. Three percent of the non-registered NGOs intended to do so in the upcoming year.



When asked to what extent has the portal improved the partnership agreement process for UNHCR and the grant management process for NGO partners respectively, the response data was again proportional between the two groups of respondents. Roughly 50% reported that the portal was responsible for a moderate improvement, while 16% reported no improvement at all in their agreement/grant processes.

Of those who reported a positive impact from the portal, most referenced its utility for accessing Calls for Expression of Interest and some referenced its improved functionality over time. Partners offered the following comments:

NGO Partner 1:  
*"The Portal has made a significant improvement especially in the communication on the calls for expressions of interest since the Portal can be consulted at any time."*

NGO Partner 2:  
*"Calls for expression of interest are fast updated, and easily accessed on a timely basis."*

Alternatively some UNHCR staff members believed the portal to simply add an extra layer of bureaucracy and others reported that their national partners were not able to access the portal (although, as mentioned above, 94% of local NGO respondents to this survey stated that they were registered on the portal). One UNHCR staff member shared this comment:

UNHCR staff member:  
*“Partners used to complain with regard to the PP registration technical issues they were continuously facing. It simply added another layer for submission of concept notes, in addition to the already required submission of the partner concept notes electronically, as well as by delivering the signed original application packages to the requested UNHCR address and dropping into the UNHCR Locked Box.”*

170 NGO partners and all 73 UNHCR respondents offered recommendations for additional functions or improvements to the Partner Portal. The most frequent suggestions included:

- NGO RESPONDENTS**
- Simplify the registration process
  - Offer additional language options
  - Enhance compatibility with large file sizes
  - Offer more learning opportunities or trainings via the portal
  - Send email notifications regarding portal updates
  - Utilize the portal for project reporting
  - Create more intuitive commands
  - Add a complaint/ feedback mechanism

- UNHCR RESPONDENTS**
- Send regular email updates about the portal to program personnel and partners
  - Extend accessibility (at least a viewer function) beyond the current limit of 3 staff per operation
  - Encourage more interactive communication via a comment exchange board
  - Offer more training materials and reference docs such as PSEA/COC and operation specific SOPs
  - Build in formal feedback to/from partners (PMC-011)

**Section 4: Partner Capacity and Localization**

Regarding UNHCR staff’s perceptions of their partners’ technical capacity to meet the needs of persons of concern and ability to effectively manage Partnership Agreement funding, respondents reported similar perceptions of competency. Roughly one quarter of UNHCR respondents believed their NGO partners to be ‘completely capable’ and 66-67% identified their partners as ‘moderately capable’. While none of the UNHCR staff found their partners to be ‘not at all capable’, 7-8% noted ‘very little capability’ among their partners.

Some UNHCR respondents shared the following supporting comments:

UNHCR Staff 1:

*“Local and smaller NGOs struggle with excessive UNHCR requirements which can be in reporting or monitoring or even participation in various FGDs, assessments, surveys, etc. Bigger NGOs have more capacities but at the same time they are more costly.”*

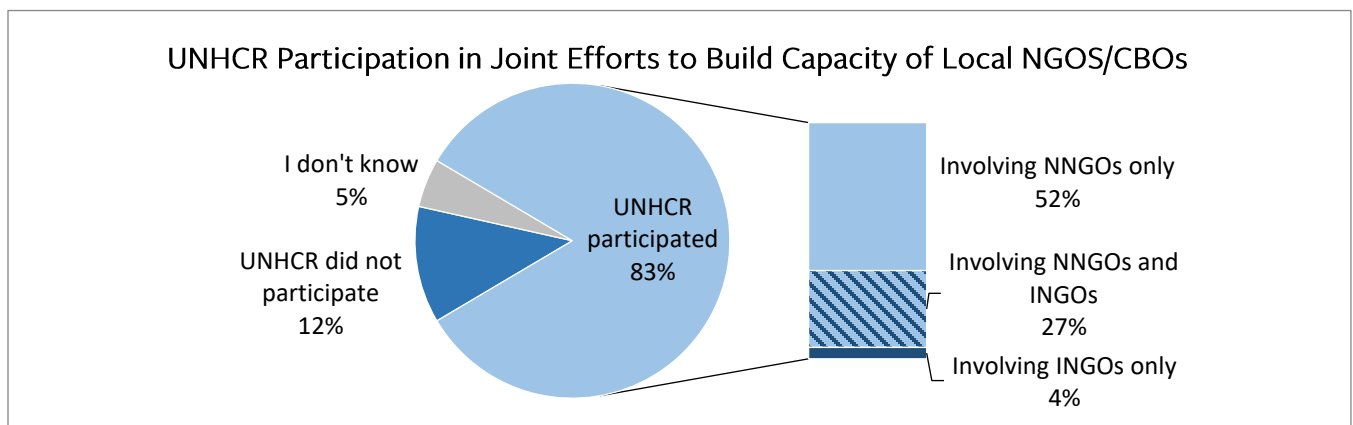
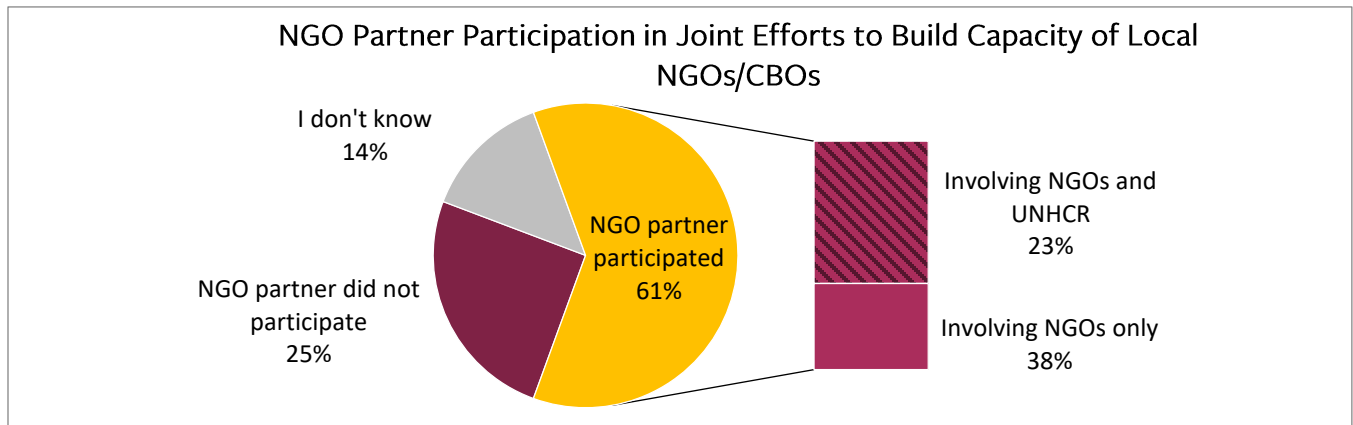
UNHCR Staff 2:

*“They have the expertise to deliver the service but lack administrative capacity for reporting requirements.”*

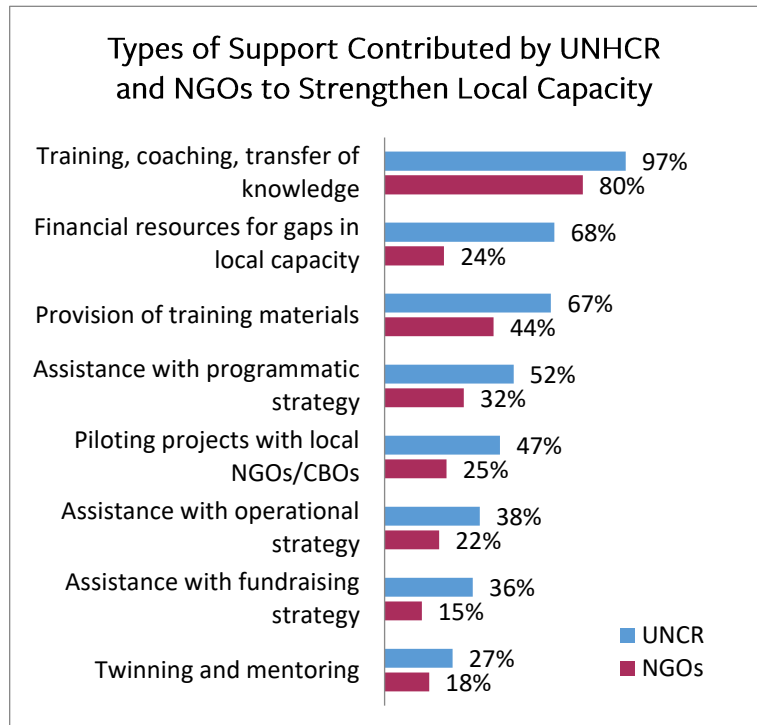
UNHCR Staff 3:

*“Staff turnover in NGO partners and identification of qualified staff are major problems. These issue are even more worrisome for local NGOs as their salary scales are low and in most instances far below the salary scales of INGOs. Many qualified national staff strive to secure jobs in an INGO, UN or an Embassy making it even more difficult for NNGOs to attract qualified staff.”*

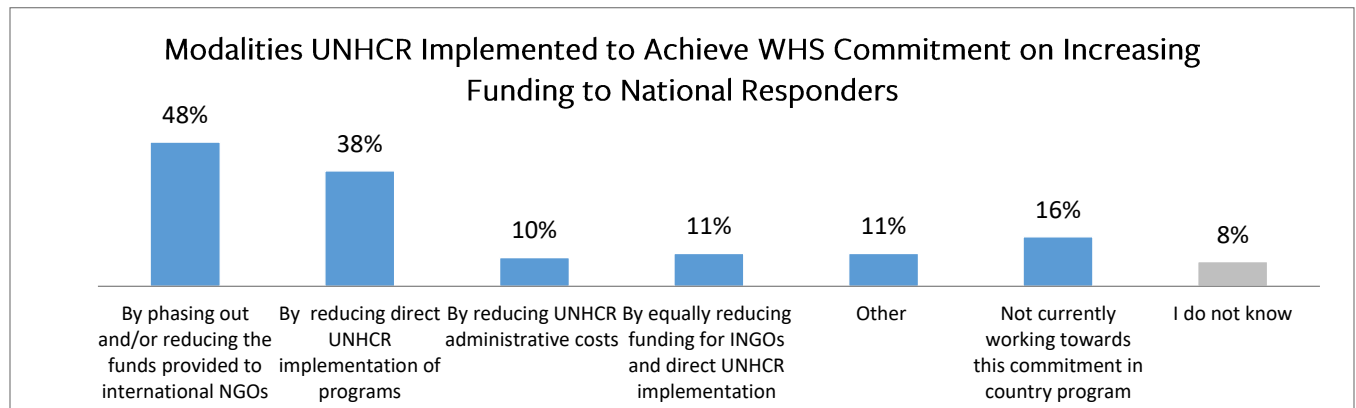
Encouragingly, both UNCHR and NGO partners reported that they are contributing to joint efforts—defined as involving one or more INGOs, NNGOs, and/or UNHCR—to build the capacity of local NGOs or CBOs in their countries of operation. 83% of UNHCR staff and 61% of NGO partners reported participating in a joint capacity building effort in 2018, roughly a quarter of which involved NNGOs, INGOs, and UNHCR.



Both UNHCR and NGO respondents most frequently reported providing training, coaching, or transferring knowledge to strengthen local NGO capacity. Sixty-eight percent of UNHCR respondents also provided financial resources, while only 24% of NGO partners provided this type of support. Provision of training materials and assistance with programmatic strategy also ranked high across both groups. Twinning and mentoring was the least likely form of support pursued by UNHCR and partners alike, which is unfortunate as this approach is known as the gold standard in capacity building. While understandably cost and time can be prohibitive in some cases, it is recommended that UNHCR and partners seek to diversify and improve the balance of their capacity building modalities.



UNHCR made a commitment at the World Humanitarian Summit to achieve by 2020 a global target of directing at least 25% of humanitarian funding to local and national responders to improve outcomes for affected people and reduce transactional costs. Although the target was a global aggregate of funding, this survey provides an indication of progress toward this goal in specific country programs.



When asked how their UNHCR office worked towards this commitment in 2018, nearly 50% of UNHCR respondents noted that they increased funding for national partners by phasing out or reducing funding for international NGO partners and 38% indicated that they reduced direct UNHCR implementation of programs in favor of funding more NGOs.

Notably, 16% of UNHCR staff stated that they did not actively work toward this commitment in 2018; one third of which were respondents from the Middle East, 1/4 from Latin America, 1/4 from Africa, and the

remainder from the Asia Pacific Region. It is possible that some country programs- for example in the Middle East- did not work toward this goal in 2018 because they have already reached the global commitment threshold. In other cases contextual factors such as the political landscape, security environment, or government regulations may limit the ability to engage local responders- as has been noted elsewhere by colleagues from Latin America.

More specific data is necessary to understand the varying patterns in implementation of this global target at the country level, but some UNHCR respondents provided additional insights from their particular countries of operation:

UNHCR Staff 1:  
*“funding to national NGOs in Iraq stands at 27 percent of the resources provided through PPAs.”*

UNHCR Staff 2:  
*“We need to opt for direct implementation [rather than] with local community-based NGOs as Venezuela suffers the highest hyper inflation of the world and most of the local partners are not allowed to open accounts in foreign currency.”*

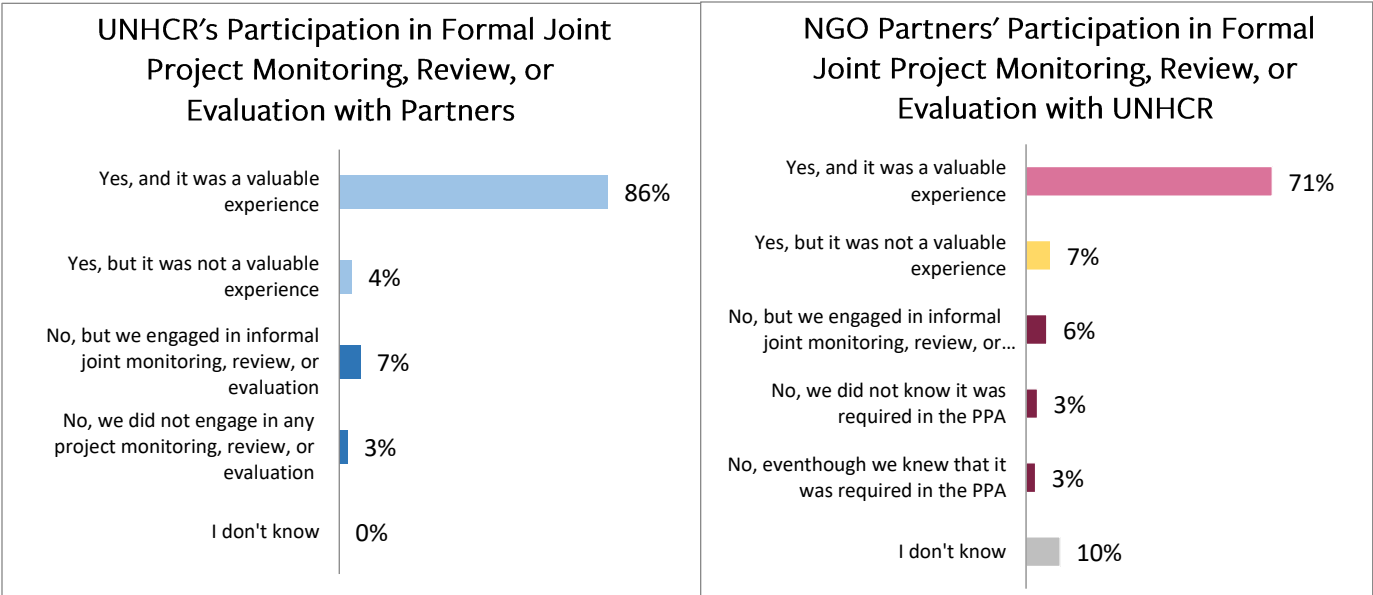
UNHCR Staff 3:  
*“We have tried to identify and work with national NGOs but it has been so far impossible in Angola, though some of our international NGOs are managed through national office with national colleagues.”*

UNHCR Staff 4:  
*“UNHCR in Ethiopia disburse 60% of funds through national NGO partners.”*

**Section 5: Project Partnership Agreements**

**Monitoring**

Respondents further reflected on the process and management of Project Partnership Agreements (PPAs) as a key element of implementing partnership assessment.



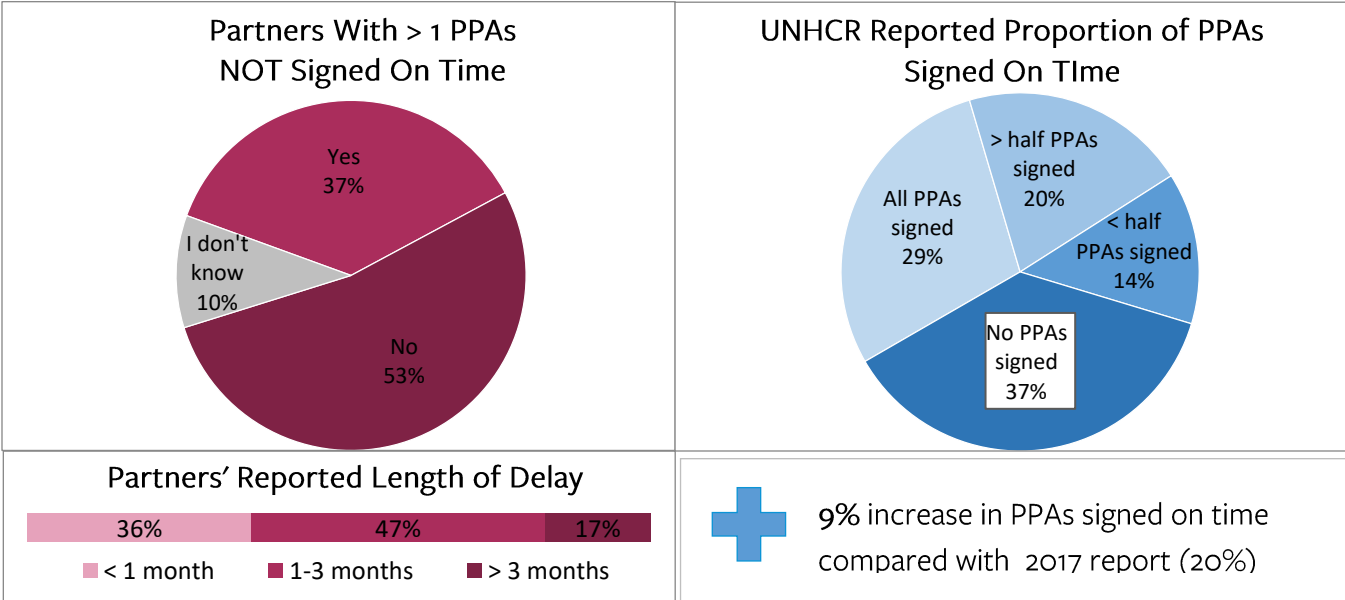
The majority of respondents reported participating in formal joint monitoring, review, or evaluation of their projects and agreed that it was a valuable experience. Less than 10% of respondents found it to not be a valuable exercise, with one partner reflecting that their UNHCR counterparts “lacked the right attitude to understand the challenges that we and our partners face in the field.” Another NGO respondent found that “the UNHCR monitors were more inspectors than monitors” and that it was not a joint exercise.

One UNHCR staff shared that the exercise “is not always meaningful as there is no sufficient time to analyze the results and data obtained from the monitoring visits.” Another added that “less documentation requirements would be very helpful” given the considerable reporting requirements.

In cases where respondents did not engage in formal joint monitoring, review, or evaluation, 6-7% did so informally. Of note, 3% of partners reported that they did not know these formal, joint activities were required by UNHCR.

**PPA Signing**

Thirty-seven percent of NGO partners reported that they had one or more Project Partnership Agreements that was not signed before the beginning of the calendar year or project start date. This is corroborated by UNHCR staff with 71% reporting delays in signing at least some PPAs by these deadlines. Nearly half of the NGO partners who experienced delays (47%) reported the issue took one to three months to resolve.



According to NGO partners, negotiations over the budget (45%), UNHCR delayed submission or consideration of project proposals (36%), joint changes after proposal submission (27%), and project narrative negotiations (24%) were the leading causes for delay.

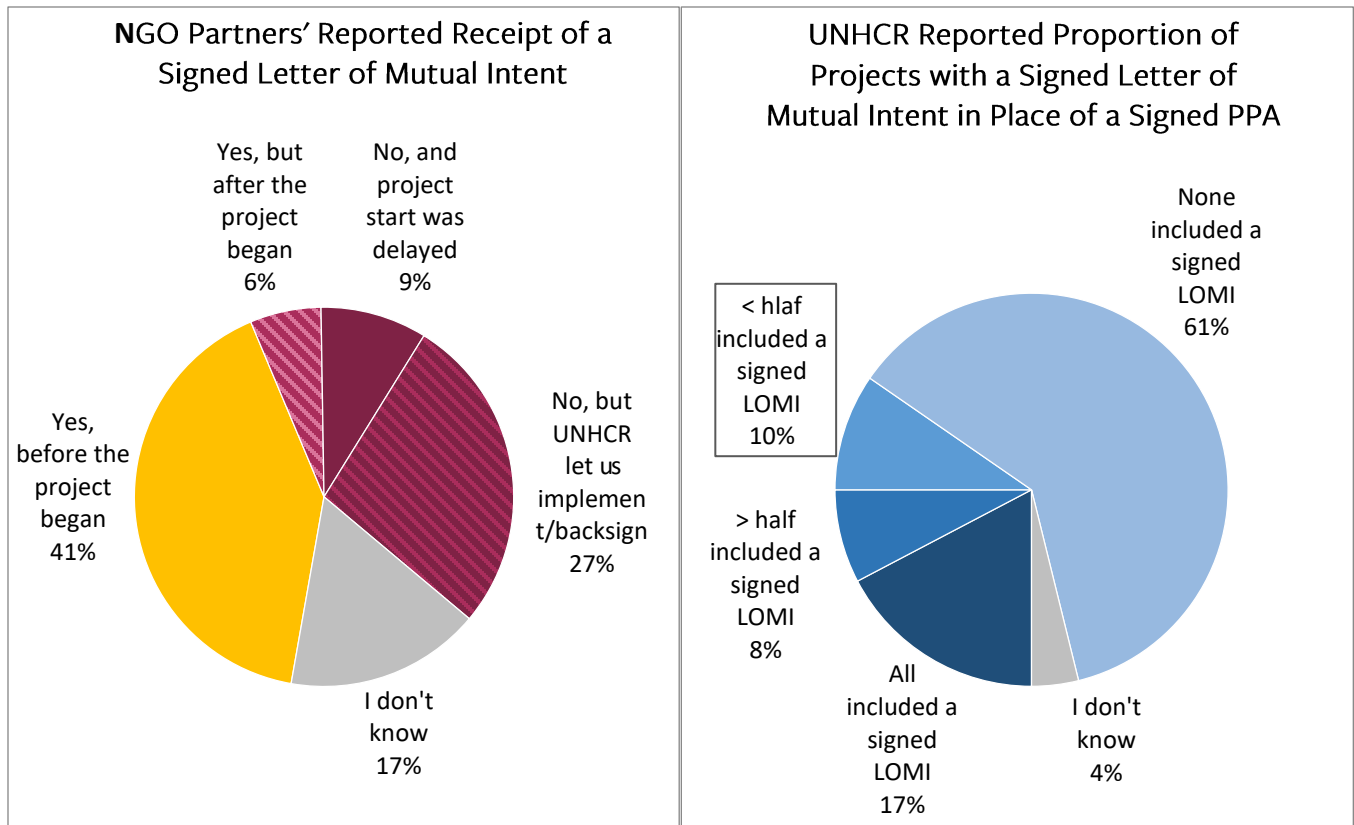
UNHCR staff shared the following insights regarding the factors that led to delays in PPA signing:

UNHCR Staff 1:  
*“Due to the reluctance of most of the partners- mainly the international NGOs- to sign the PPAs in local currency or the lack of alternatives to get a favorable USD exchange rate, the PPAs were signed by May 2018.”*

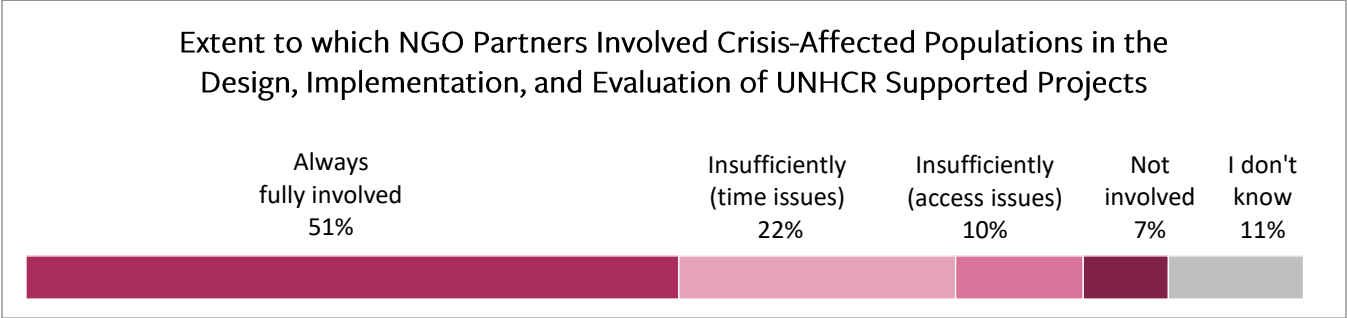
UNHCR Staff 2:  
*“UNHCR signed almost all agreements prior to January 1 but not all partners signed prior to January 1.”*

UNHCR Staff 3:  
*“[We were] In the middle of an L3 emergency.”*

In the cases where PPA signing was delayed, 41% of NGO partners reported that they received a signed Letter of Mutual Intent (LOMI) before the project began while 6% received a LOMI after project inception with delay ranging from 2 weeks to 3 months. Twenty-seven percent of partners shared that although they did not receive a signed LOMI, UNHCR allowed them to continue implementing and retroactively sign. Less than 10% reported a delay in implementation without a signed Letter of Mutual Intent. UNHCR staff on the other hand, reported that 61% of projects without signed PPAs also did not have a Signed Letter of Mutual Intent.



When queried the extent to which partners involved crisis-affected populations in the design, implementation, and evaluation phases of their UNHCR-supported projects, over 50% of NGO respondents reported that affected populations are always involved. Notably, thirty-two percent cited that time and access challenges did not allow for crisis-affected populations to be adequately involved and 7% reported no involvement of at all. Despite the difficult operating contexts, partners should strive to find ways to correct this gap with strategic support from UNHCR.



Partners shared the following details on this aspect of their programming:

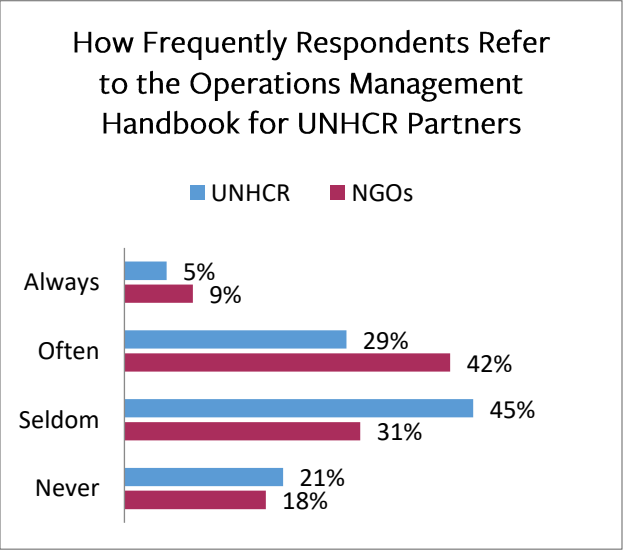
NGO Partner 1:  
*"For instance [we do this by having a] crisis affected committee fully involved in project."*

NGO Partner 2:  
*"Persons of Concern are mostly involved via the evaluation processes."*

NGO Partner 3:  
*"Resettlement-related projects tend to have limited ability to do this."*

NGO Partner 4:  
*"Unfortunately experts and planning staff at both sides (NGOs and UNHCR) [treat affected populations] as non-competent individuals. Also, the planning process is transformed into a very sophisticated and hard to understand system, it becomes a untouchable even for NGO staff."*

Finally, in 2018 UNHCR initiated a process to update the [‘Operations Management Handbook For UNHCR Partners’](#) first published in 2003. In support of plans to assess the utility of the updated handbook in future survey years, respondents were asked to reflect on their use of the current version to serve as baseline data. Forty-two percent of NGO partners noted that they often consult the Handbook regarding management of their projects with UNHCR. Alternatively, nearly half of partners (49%) said that they seldom or never consult the Handbook. Similarly, 66% of UNHCR staff reported that they do not always or often consult the Handbook.





The following comments provided further insights into the respondents' answers:

UNHCR Staff 1:  
*"It is absolutely outdated and cannot be applied in the current environment. Use of this guidance would be confusing both for UNHCR staff and partners."*

UNHCR Staff 2:  
*"The Partnership Handbook is the most useful reference material previously developed. It was used extensively from 2004-2009 prior to the launched of FOCUS... Since 2013 until now, Guidance Notes issued by IPMS were extensively used."*

UNHCR Staff 3:  
*An updated version of the Operation Management Handbook for UNHCR's Partners is vital as absence of the manual has created a 'reference vacuum' when dealing with partners. In addition, revival of the handbook would help both partners and UNHCR staff to have common understanding/interpretation of available policies and guidelines, which in turn will contribute in improving partnership management."*

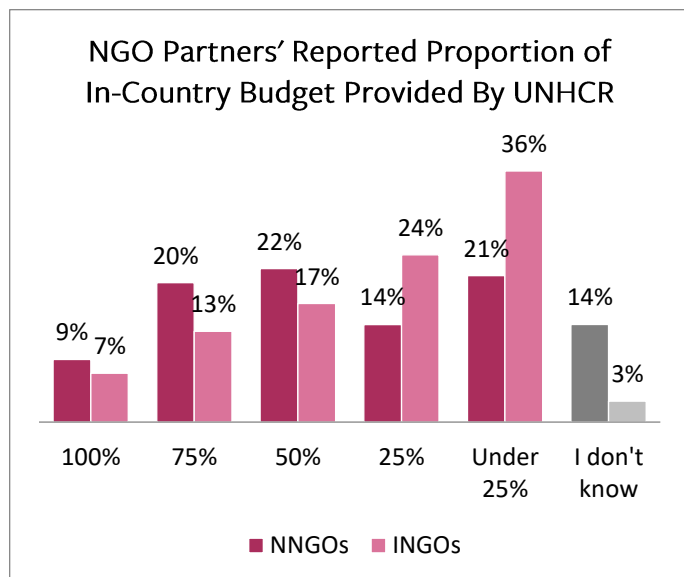
NGO Partner 1:  
*"[We] seldom refer to it now, but did a lot in the past. After 15 years of use, we have almost memorized portions of the current version!"*

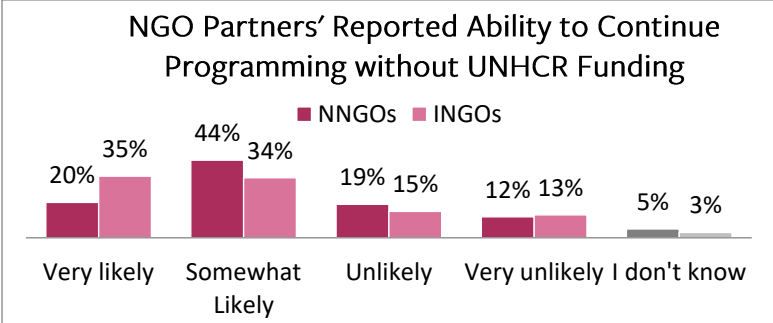
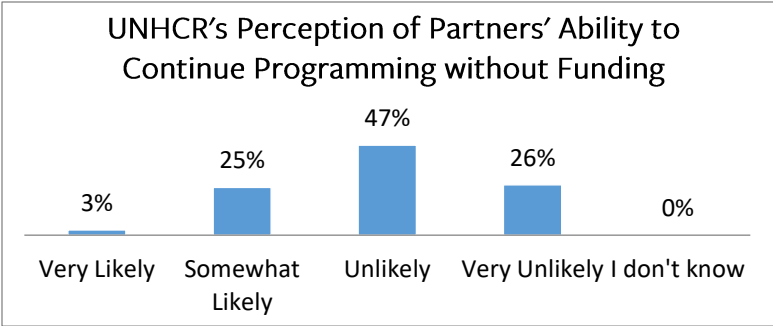
NGO Partner 2:  
*"It needs to be updated, and provide more clear guidance, some context specific. It is difficult to gain answers for specific questions from the[UNHCR] country office or Geneva."*

NGO Partner 3:  
*"The handbook is too long and unnecessary. All info about UNHCR and its activities can be found on the website already. A 2-3 page chart with current national projects, link to websites and contact list would be more handy if people wanted to reach out to someone specific."*

## Section 6: 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 on programming without the financial support provided for joint projects. Only 20-30% of partners reported that more than half of their budget was from UNHCR. INGOs were more likely than their national NGO counterparts to have more diversified funding sources, with 36% reporting that less than a quarter of their funding comes from UNHCR (compared to 21% among NNGOs).





Both INGOs and NNGOs reported a similar optimistic outlook regarding the likelihood that they would be able to continue programming without the funds they currently receive from UNHCR. Roughly 30% of NGO respondents posited that it would be unlikely or very unlikely that they would be able to source other funds to continue programming.

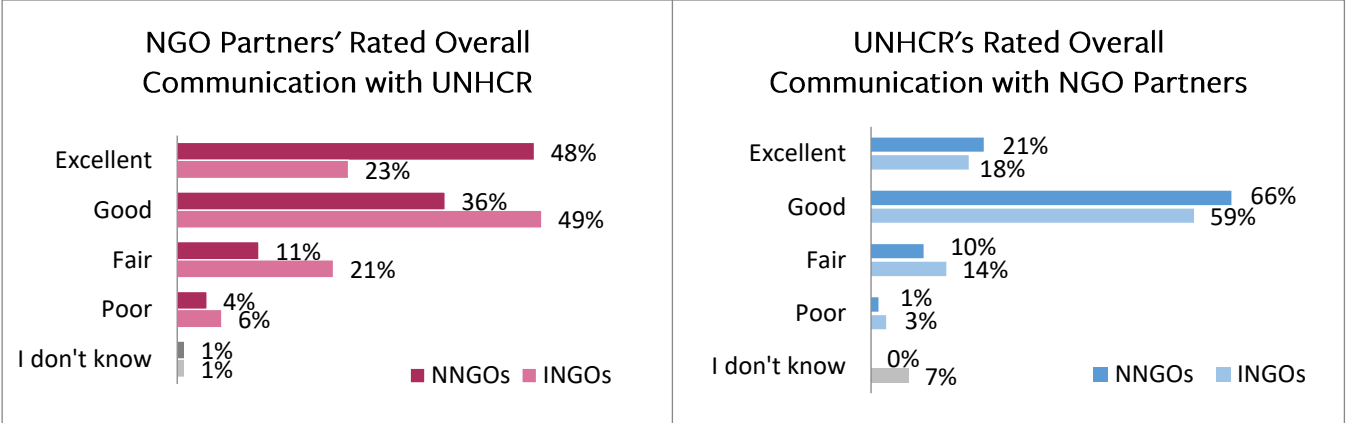
UNHCR had a decidedly more sober outlook, with nearly three-quarters of the respondents selecting that it was 'unlikely' or 'very unlikely' that their partners would be able to continue implementing current programs without the funding they receive from UNHCR. Many indicated that this was

particularly true for their local NGO partners. One staff member noted that reality is reflected in the 2019 partner selection process, as sustainability of the project is one of the key selection criteria considered.

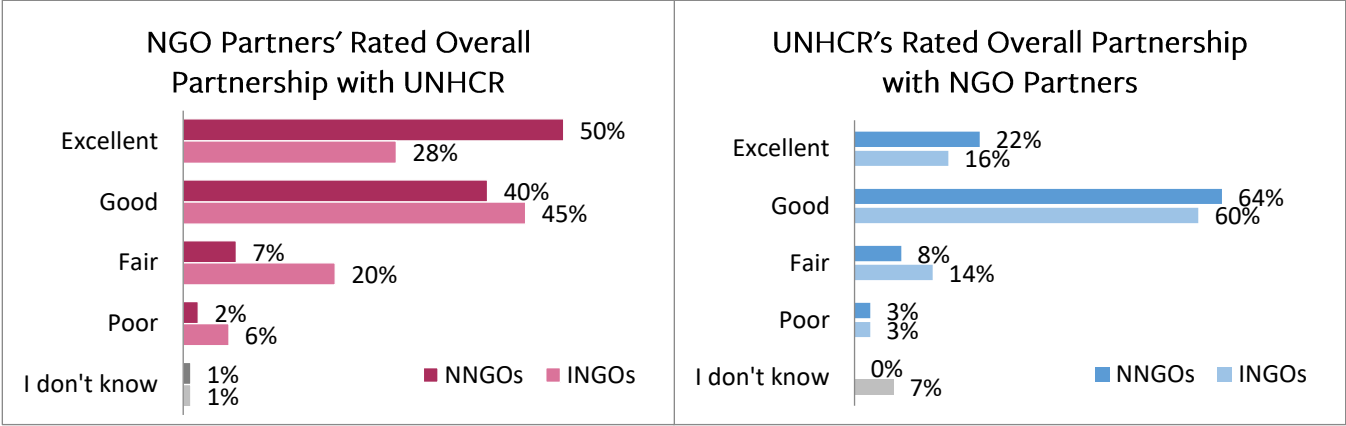
### Section 7: Overall Partnership Assessment

To gain a holistic view of perceptions of UNHCR-NGO partnership more broadly, respondents were asked to reflect on their overall communication, partnership, and changes in the relationship over the past year.

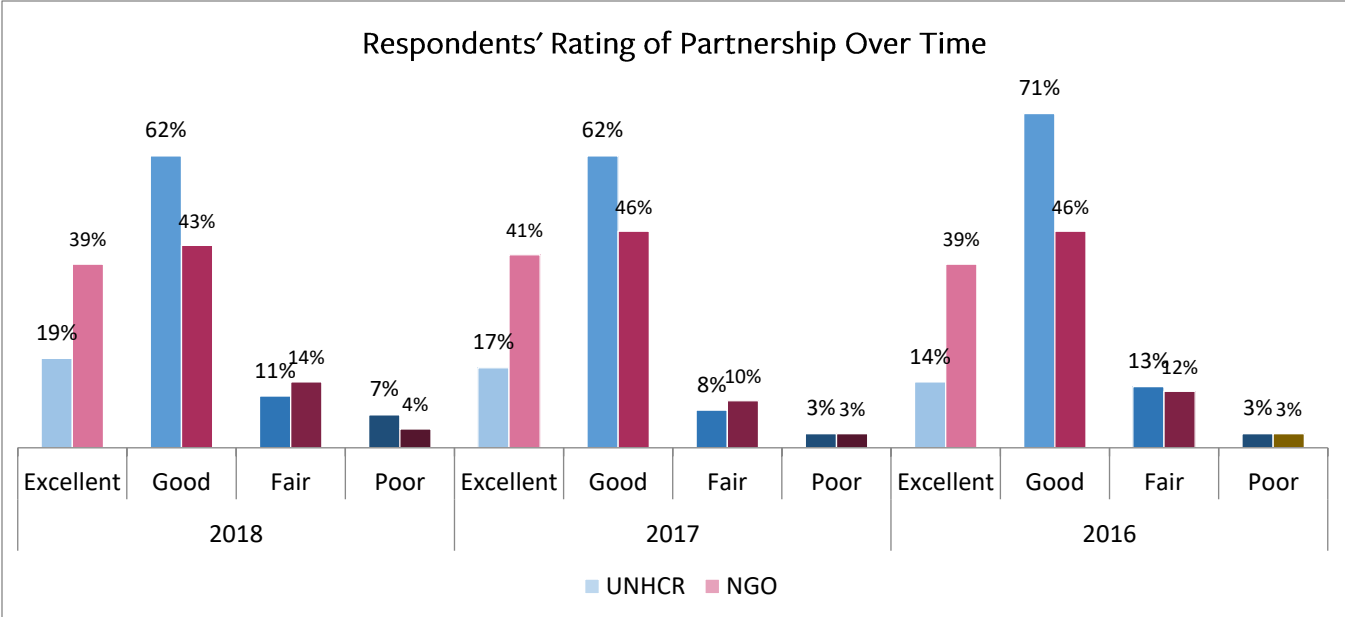
Regarding communication, similar to the 2017 data, more than 75% of all UNHCR and NGO respondents rated their communication as 'good' or 'excellent' with less than an average 5% rating communication as 'poor'. National NGO partners consistently rated their communication with UNHCR better than INGOs and similarly UNHCR staff also rated their communication with NNGOs higher than with INGOs, although by a smaller margin.



Similarly, national NGO respondents also rated their overall partnership with UNHCR higher than international NGOs, with half assessing their partnership as ‘excellent’. However, most INGO respondents evaluated their partnership positively, with nearly 75% rating it as ‘good’ or ‘excellent’. UNHCR staff members also rated their overall partnership with NGOs optimistically, with over 80% of respondents selecting ‘good’ or ‘excellent’ to describe their partnership. Again, UNHCR rated their relationship with national NGOs slightly higher than INGOs.

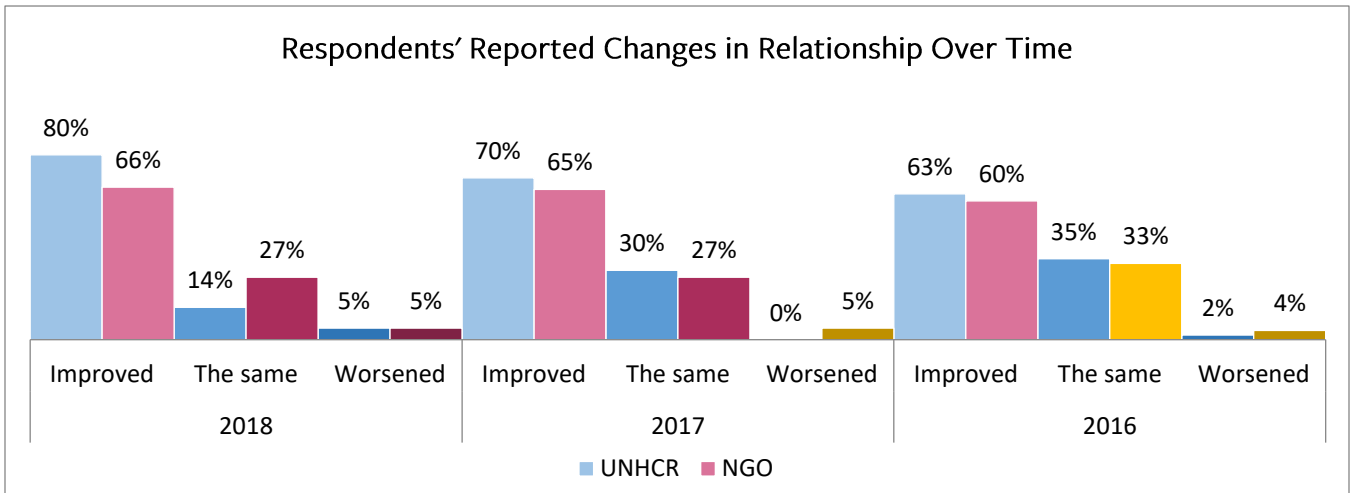
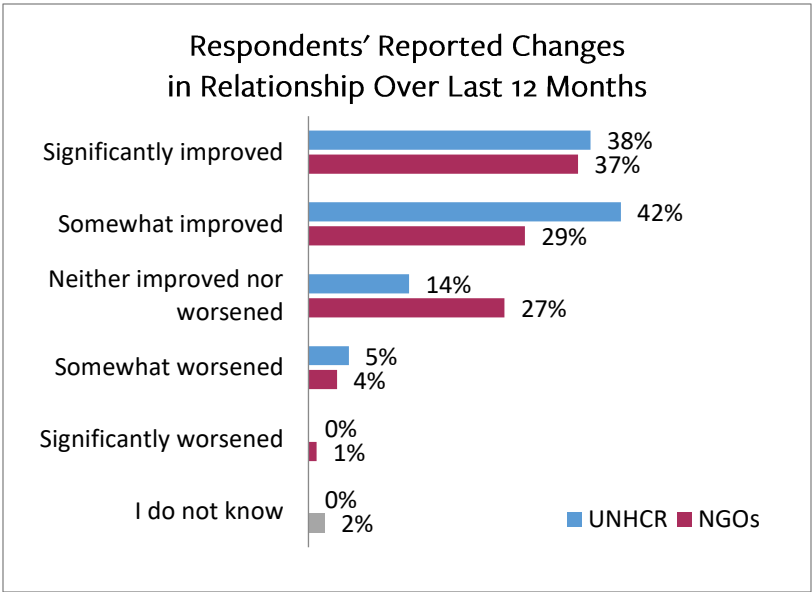


Across the past three reporting years, the trend in responses remain steady with the majority of all respondents reporting a good relationship between NGOs and UNHCR with a slight increase in ‘poor’ ratings in 2018 compared to 2017- particularly by UNHCR staff.



Correspondingly, many respondents reported that their relationship with one another has improved in the last year, with less than 5% of overall respondents reporting that the relationship has worsened.

Over time, this trend has persevered with a majority of respondents reporting improvements in the partnership over time. Notably however, in this current survey year there has been a decrease in those reporting static relationships compared to 2016 and 2017. Most of the reported change in 2018 was positive, with only a small portion of UNHCR respondents (5%) indicating that their relationship with partners had worsened since last year.



Respondents added these insights regarding factors that influence the state of partnership:

UNHCR Staff 1:  
*"[Our] relationship with NGO partners has generally been good and excellent with some. The challenging ones are usually the operational partners who are critical of our Protection/Registration Policies."*

UNHCR Staff 2:  
*"Funding constraints can jeopardize relationships with partners, especially not meeting requested personnel costs. This is critical for national partners with limited fundraising capacities and opportunities for refugee programs."*

NGO Partner 1:  
*"The attitude of UNHCR staff is lacking respect and knowledge of implementation challenges."*

NGO Partner 2:  
*"We are pleased there is now a Representative in place [who is] engaged and committed to effective partnerships."*

## Conclusion

### Strengthening Partnership

To round out the survey respondents were asked to share their ideas for any additional initiatives that would strengthen NGO-UNHCR partnerships. Their suggestions included:

#### UNHCR Recommendations

- Develop a guidance note specifically on working with NNGOs
- Improve partner access to Learn and Connect
- Promote more joint training events- e.g. 2016 Budapest audit workshop
- Develop a specific online platform to preserve the network and referral system
- Create a more systematized online monitoring system for easy follow up and tracking
- Institute modular induction and ongoing learning programs for partners to ensure continuity when partner staff turnover is high
- Develop guidelines for non-program staff on communication with partners as contradicting messages from different units create frustration and confusion
- Increase initiatives focused on learning from experience of other operations- e.g. learning exchanges with other regions or groups
- Establish a community of experience to share information among all Partners and UNHCR on prevention of fraud and corruption

#### NGO Partner Recommendations

- Reconsider UNHCR reporting mechanisms- to reduce burden of multiple submissions of same report by partners (weekly, bi-weekly, monthly)
- Strengthen clarity around how UNHCR regulations are upheld in country offices and increase speed and transparency around decision-making on partnership matters
- Increase exposure visits for UNHCR staff to learn best practices in implementation
- Pilot a 'twinning' program between select UNHCR Reps and NGO Country Directors
- Develop country specific and context specific guidelines and regulations
- Strengthen Joint Risk Management approaches via dedicated position e.g. UNHCR Kenya
- When the new partnership handbook is released, create webinars in multiple languages
- Strengthen the high-level advocacy and support required from UNHCR to expedite processes and approvals from host governments
- Increase coherence between field and global level counterparts within UNHCR and NGOs to ensure consistency of policy and application

Respondents also shared their ideas for further trainings to strengthen partnership. Topics included:

- |   |                                   |
|---|-----------------------------------|
| ✓ Targeted financial management training                    | ✓ Risk-based management           |
| ✓ ‘Rules and framework’ beyond PPA                          | ✓ Procurement                     |
| ✓ Joint development of strategic objectives for partnership | ✓ SGBV case management assessment |
| ✓ Project design  | ✓ Effective reporting             |
| ✓ Project management basics                                 | ✓ Internal controls               |
| ✓ Project monitoring  | ✓ Joint results-based approach    |

### Suggestions for Survey Improvement

When requested to share feedback on how the survey could be improved for next year, many respondents highlighted their wishes that the results of the survey be shared widely to ensure UNHCR and partners can respond to the findings and work toward improved partnership at all levels. One UNHCR respondent noted, “consistent/annual feedback can provide a baseline for progress analysis especially in operations with a large turnover”. InterAction and UNHCR are committed to this endeavor- each year the survey is disseminated widely via the InterAction, ICVA, and UNHCR listservs, is presented at the UNHCR-NGO Consultations event, and can be found online.

Another major area of feedback regarded the lack of analysis of partnership with local government vis-à-vis UNHCR and NGOs. Many UNHCR staff members commented throughout they survey about the increasing resource allocation and partnership with government agencies. For example, one UNHCR respondent remarked that they are pursuing a strategy in their program to work more with government ministries rather than NGOs ‘for more sustainable results’. Another colleague from Djibouti noted that 4 out of 8 UNHCR partners are governmental and another added, “The biggest resource allocation is made to our government counterpart, however, UNHCR almost has no say [in these projects] and the level of negotiation and persuasion on the desired activities is limited.” Besides the increasing role of government agencies as implementing partners of UNHCR, one respondent saliently remarked, “the role of the governments and authorities has not been covered, yet in all countries they have a major role to play in allowing NGO/UN agencies to work. This needs to be part and parcel of any discussion on the NGO-UNHCR partnership. This survey assumes and NGO-UNHCR relationship is a stand alone one which is misleading.”

Respondents also included suggestions to improve the design of the survey and content they wished to be covered, including:

#### Content

Partner transparency in funding sources; consistency of policy between guidance notes and PPA provisions; INGO exit strategies; assessment of the partner salary scale policy; and more detailed evaluation of agreements and reporting requirements.

#### Design

Decrease the length; supplement with field-level focus groups/contextualized surveys; pay more attention to operational challenges; and engage more global south actors in the survey design.

## The Final Word

In conclusion, UNHCR staff and NGO partners were given the opportunity to share any final reflections on partnership that they were unable to express in the survey or that they wished to be reinforced. Here's what they had to say:

"Partnership with UNHCR is very heavy in administration/meetings/communication; probably 2-3 times more than our other current donors. At the same time UNHCR PPAs do not contribute the corresponding level of funding required for in-country support or HQ positions. Every year we pay a high financial cost to remain UNHCR's partner."

"Partnership is not only about training, it's about understanding of each others roles and opportunities for complementarity. UNHCR needs to know and understand partners capacities and limitations and vice versa. UNHCR needs to be more transparent and straightforward with the partners and ensure that applicable UNHCR internal processes and requirements are well understood by them."

"There is a lack of leadership and advocacy from UNHCR—it is very passive and accepting of the status quo."

"UNHCR should lighten its own internal processes to enable staff to spend more quality time with partners in the field rather than filling in endless forms and reports."

"It is hard to have a true partnership in the current way relationship is structured and managed. Some involvement and inputs from partners into the revision of the operational handbook to make sure revision includes significant tweaks in processes, over font changes, could be a useful way to ensure that."

"UNHCR has been--and remains—the lead in the UN system when it comes to effective partnering--in all senses of the word--with NGOs. Hats off to UNHCR and hats off to Partners who have taken this unique opportunity and relationship seriously."

"Local NGOs do not necessarily consider UNHCR's mandate/POCs as their own mandate unless UNHCR provides the funds. This needs to change. Promotion of mainstreaming UNHCR's POCs in [operational partners] programming as well as promotion of the SDGs needs to be prioritized."

"[We are] generally disappointed by the failure of UNHCR to accord dignified support costs to partner orgs whilst paying themselves UN Salaries. There is also a failure to respect contractual equipment supplies such as communications, transport, fuel, offices, and internet."