



June 2022

UNHCR-NGO Partnership Survey

2021 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 2021 report reflects submissions from 84 UNHCR operations (corresponding to over 80% of UNCHR operations) and 723 NGO staff, 50% of whom represent national or local NGO partners.

KEY FINDINGS

Overall, the 2021 survey results demonstrated the strength and resilience of partnerships between UNHCR and NGOs. Increased access to multi-year partnership agreements, permanent funding flexibilities, and 2021's streamlined Project Partnership Agreement (PPA) 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 maximize flexibilities that enable rapid response to humanitarian crises and enable adaptability in program operations. In many areas of partnership, particularly streamlining partnership practices and the UN Partner Portal, both NGO and UNHCR respondents offered insight into areas for collaborative work to make their relationship even stronger in years to come.

PLANNING AND CONSULTATION

As in previous years, all partnership methodologies retained strong support from both NGO and UNHCR respondents, with participants finding coordination meetings and one-on-one consultations to be the most useful. In the wake of COVID-19, where many are operating and joining calls remotely, many respondents note the challenge of joining online calls with a large number of participants and request clarity on objectives for each call, as well as increased discussion time designated to NGO partner feedback on consultation calls. At the country level, NGOs increasingly feel that their feedback is being taken into account in UNHCR's Country Operations Planning.

PARTNER SELECTION

The partner selection process remained consistent despite this particularly challenging year. Overall, 56% of UNHCR respondents reported issuing one or more Calls for Expression of Interest (EOI) for 2021 projects, compared to 62% in 2020, a slight decrease that, according to UNHCR respondents, is due to a combination of UNHCR's partnership retention policies and country-level operational restraints that limit the usage of Expressions of Interest. Communication from UNHCR for non-selected applicants also decreased slightly in 2021 from 2020: of those who indicated that they applied for a partnership project but were not selected, 48% reported that they received proactive and clear reasoning from UNHCR when not selected (a 4% decrease from 50% in 2020).

UN PARTNER PORTAL

The UN Partner Portal (UNPP) continues to be a key methodology for NGOs to learn about Calls for Expression of Interest from UNHCR. Most NGO respondents (91%) reported they were registered on the UN Partner Portal in 2021, with more local and national NGOs reporting being registered than international NGOs for the first time (93% compared to 88%). The number of UNHCR respondents using the UNPP to post calls for Expression of Interest has also increased in 2021 (91%, up from 85% in 2020). Additionally, most NGO and UNHCR respondents (71% and 70% respectively) reported positive impacts from using the UNPP, noting that it positively impacted their PPA management processes in 2021. Although several key areas have been noted for functionality improvements in the UNPP, this feedback indicates a significant positive perception shift towards the UNPP.

MULTI-YEAR PARTNERSHIP AGREEMENTS

UNHCR introduced Multi-Year (MY) Partnership Agreements in 2019, offering opportunities for up to four-year agreements.¹ 2021 survey results reveal increased NGO awareness of multi-year partnership agreements (73%), with increasing expansion of the multi-year programming opportunities, including a large number of NGO respondents discussing multi-year programming opportunities with UNHCR for 2023 in contexts where multi-year funding is appropriate/possible. To that end, UNHCR respondents explained

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, 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.

that the major restrictions to offering multi-year partnership agreements included a lack of resources (both human and financial), lack of guidance, country context, and lack of perceived value for multi-year agreements. These themes were present in 2019 and 2020 survey responses, though the availability of multi-year partnerships has broadened significantly. Qualitative feedback shows continued demand from NGOs for increased opportunities for multi-year programming, and clarification on multi-year PPA procedures and processes for UNHCR staff to increase perceived value of these opportunities.

CAPACITY AND LOCALIZATION

As in previous years, UNHCR respondents have very high confidence in their NGO partners to effectively manage Project Partnership Agreement (PPA) funding and meet the needs of Persons of Concern (93% and 98%, respectively), indicating moderate to complete confidence in their NGO partners. UNHCR also achieved its commitment to transfer at least 25% of its program expenditures to local and national responders, taking key actions to redistribute program expenditures via the reduction of direct UNHCR implementation and funding provided to INGOs. In terms of capacity development methodologies undertaken in 2021, UNHCR's efforts were concentrated in knowledge/experience transfer through training and coaching, provision of training materials, and provision of financial resources (89%).

PROJECT PARTNERSHIP AGREEMENTS

Overall, PPA signing delays have decreased from 2018 to 2021 (from 53% down to 39% of respondents indicating one or more unsigned PPAs by January 1). More than half of NGO respondents (55%) indicated that all PPAs were signed prior to January 1 or the start of the 2021 project. Almost 2/3 of PPAs (61%) face short-term delays of less than one month, a significant drop from 2020's average delay timeline of 1-3 months. As in previous years, both UNHCR and NGO respondents report that budget negotiations are the main cause for delayed PPA signing. Although most NGOs (88%) reported UNHCR adhering to terms outlined in PPAs, 77% of NGO respondents reported that UNHCR requested additional information, reporting, or site visits not outlined in PPAs, even with the permanent partnership 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.

Furthermore, in 2020, UNHCR updated the Project Partnership Agreement (PPA) for use in 2021 and beyond. The PPA changes were broadly popular with NGO respondents, with the majority of respondents indicating that key concerns from 2020 were not at all challenging for their organization in 2021. Although

broadly popular, there are additional challenges present in the usage of the updated PPA, which present room for growth in the coming partnership agreement signing period.

PARTNERSHIP FLEXIBILITIES

In 2020, due to the complications of operating during the COVID-19 pandemic, UNHCR implemented several flexibilities in their partnership policies, which were made permanent in 2021. Overall, NGOs are aware of these flexibilities and found them extremely useful in 2021, with increased budget flexibility (68%) and acceptance of digital documents (67%) noted as the most useful flexibilities. As in 2020, both UNHCR and NGO staff consistently noted that although UNHCR's offered flexibilities included reduced reported requirements, the reality at field level is that reporting requests (both formal and informal) beyond those stipulated in the PPA are common (as noted by 77% of NGO respondents). These flexibilities are overall critical to enable program continuity and adaptations in humanitarian aid, despite extraordinary operational circumstances, though globally consistent application of reduced reporting requirements would decrease overall administrative burden on NGO partners.

UNHCR FUNDING IMPLICATIONS

Overall, 41% of NGO respondents reported that at least half of their 2021 in-country budget came from UNHCR funding, with a clear difference between INGOs and LINGOs: local and national NGOs reported greater dependence on UNHCR for funding (47% as opposed to 33% of INGOs indicating half or more of their budget comes from UNHCR). Additionally, 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 indirect/shared costs (49%) were fully funded by UNHCR, with 51% indicating that their staff costs for 2021 projects were fully and fairly funded by UNHCR, unchanged from 2019. Combined, these factors push NGOs to resort to alternative coping strategies for funding, and this gap likely contributes to the drawn-out negotiations over programs and budget that ultimately delay PPA signing.

OVERALL PARTNERSHIP ASSESSMENT

Both NGOs' and UNHCR's assessment of the state of their partnership is overwhelmingly strong, with over 90% of UNHCR and NGO respondents rating the relationship as good or excellent. Further, the majority of NGO and UNHCR respondents rated their relationship over the past three years as somewhat or extremely positive (97% and 96% respectively). NGOs and UNHCR continue to report high levels of

confidence in their ability to collaborate on issues of mutual concern (96% of NGOs and 100% of UNHCR staff felt moderately to significantly able to collaborate) and reported satisfaction with communication remains high (rated as good or excellent by 86% and 87% respectively).

OVERARCHING RECOMMENDATIONS FOR UNHCR

- **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 operations should refrain from requesting additional information from partners, unless necessary due to changes in context or dynamics in the course of implementation and accepted in previous discussion/agreement with Partner.
- **Strengthen training and communications on the updated PPA and permanent partnership flexibilities across UNHCR offices.** Provide enhanced guidance to UNHCR Offices on the Project Partnership Agreements and on permanently implemented partnership flexibilities to ensure adherence to the contractual clauses, especially when it comes to agreed 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 project². Engage in dialogue with NGO partners around specific concerns, such as salary costs, to build trust around NGO decision making.
- **Continue to expand and 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

² 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.

made aware of their availability and how to apply for them. UNHCR regional and headquarters staff should also regularly monitor to ensure multi-year agreements are being offered to partners in appropriate contexts. Encourage additional countries and contexts 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 in and facilitating discussions in various multi-agency and multi-stakeholder venues 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.
- **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 could 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 operational 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 and 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, they are not the only effective forum for real dialogue on partnership challenges and collaborative problem solving. More dedicated efforts are required to analyze the range of specific challenges faced in partnership between UN agencies and NGOs, as well into what progress is being made toward resolving those challenges, while determining recommended ways forward to strengthen those interactions.

As implementers of a large portion of UNHCR's operational budget and 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 for candidly

sharing feedback. 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.

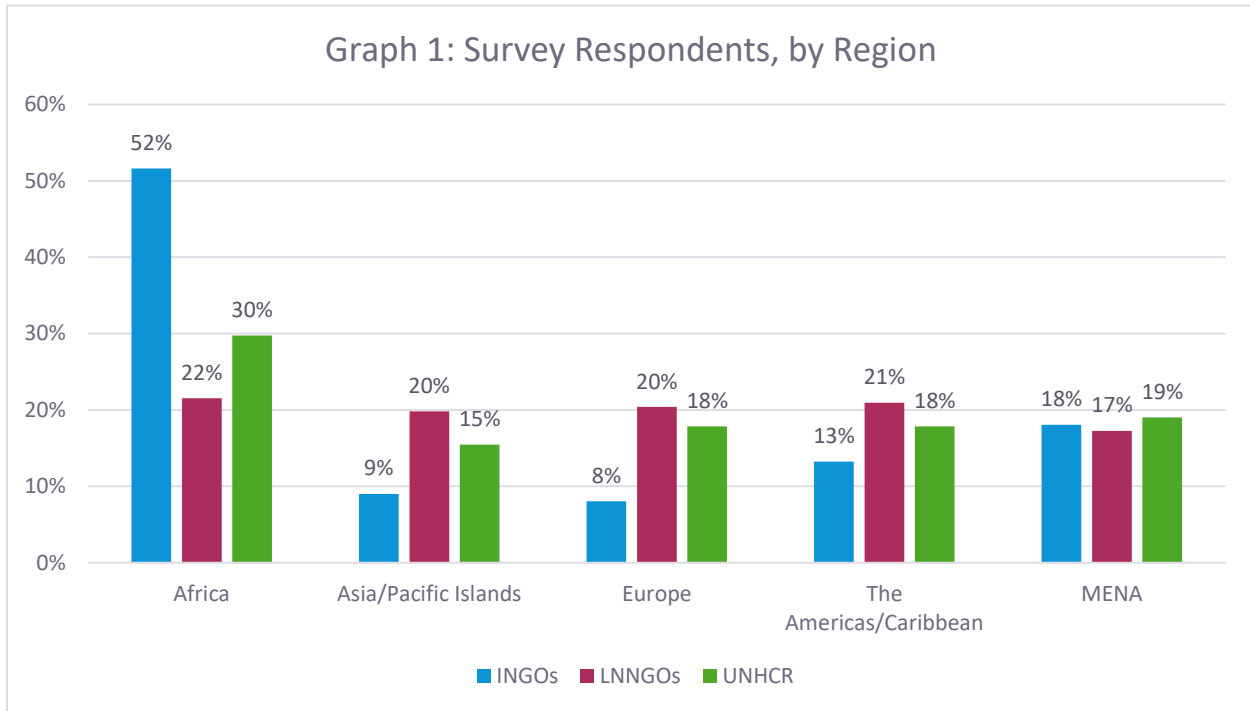
InterAction distributed the NGO staff survey via email to UNHCR's 2021 implementing partners based off of a contact list shared by UNHCR. The UNHCR staff survey was distributed by UNHCR via email to each of their country offices. In the interest of preserving the anonymity of survey respondents, and 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 84 UNHCR operations and 723 NGO staff, 50% of whom represent national or local NGO partners. Compared to last year's survey of 2020 partnerships, fewer NGO partners responded (down from 779, an overall decrease of 9%). The overall reduction of the NGO responses is likely due to the shortened timeframe of the 2021 survey (two weeks as compared to one month in 2020), whereas the methodology for survey distribution to UNHCR operations has shifted to target one respondent per operation in 2021. Responses from 84 UNHCR operations is equal to 80% of UNHCR operations with funded partnerships around the world.

NGO survey respondents were primarily comprised of LNNGOs (50%). Of the 44% of INGO respondents, 83% were based in a country or field office, while 17% were based in a headquarters office. The majority of UNHCR respondents (76%) worked at a UNHCR Country Office, while the remaining 23% of respondents worked in Sub-Offices, Field Offices, or Regional Offices/Multi-Country Offices. Five percent of UNHCR's partners identify as "other," in such areas as local churches or religious bodies, universities, and/or as liaisons with local authorities/communities.

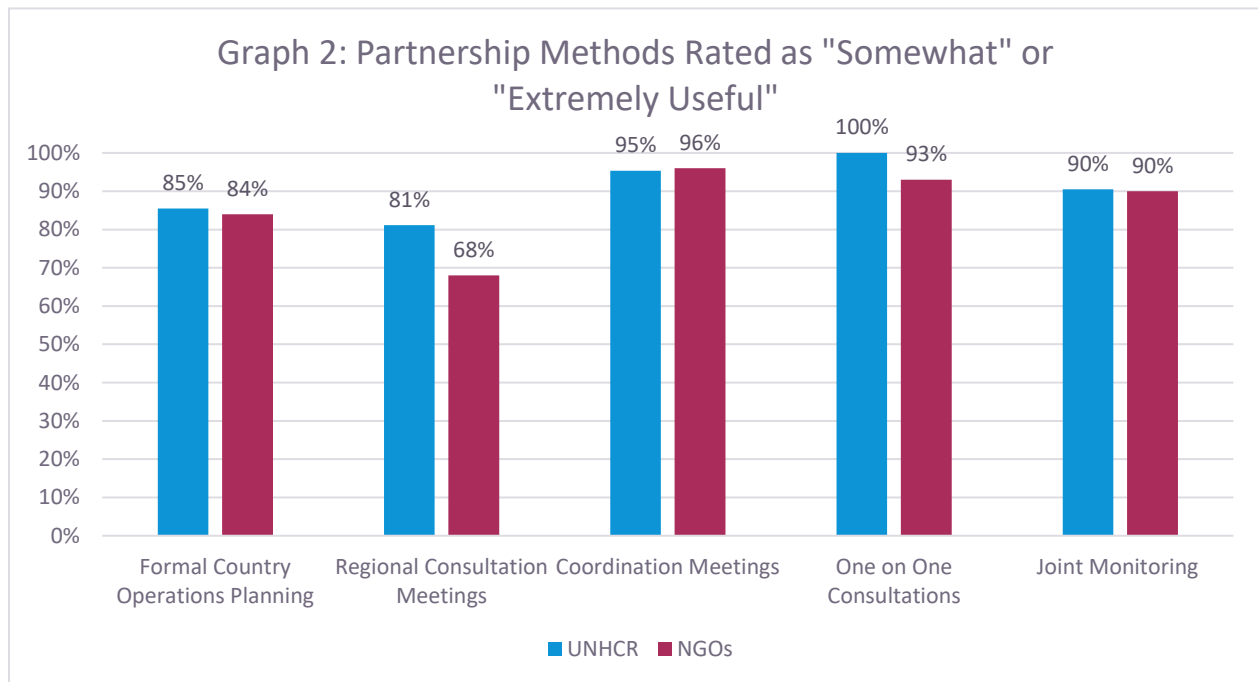


Overall, the distribution of respondents from both surveys was mostly proportional across regions. Africa, excluding North Africa, had the most respondents (52% of INGOs, 22% of LNNGOs, and 30% of UNHCR offices). Regional responses from INGOs and LNNGOs were fairly evenly distributed, with 18% working in both the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region and the Americas/Caribbean, and 15% reported working in each Asia/Pacific Islands and Europe.

FINDINGS

PLANNING AND CONSULTATIONS

Operations in 2021 saw a continuation of new norms in program planning and partnership consultations that were established during the first year of the COVID-19 pandemic. UNHCR conducted a series of remote consultations at the global level in 2021, in addition to one-on-one consultations and planning meetings.



In light of these challenges and shifts in norms, several partnership methodologies were found to be more useful than others. As shown in Graph 2, both NGO and UNHCR respondents found coordination meetings and one-on-one consultations to be the most useful partnership methodologies. Coordination meetings were rated as “somewhat” or “extremely” useful by 96% of NGO and 95% of UNHCR respondents, compared to one-on-one consultations, which were rated “somewhat” or “extremely” useful by 93% (NGO) and 100% (UNHCR).

One NGO respondent clarified that “regional consultation meetings and coordination meetings were most useful since partners were involved somehow in decision-making process where they could express their opinions and suggestions.” Survey results were similar in 2019 and 2020, indicating a clear preference of

both NGO and UNHCR colleagues for these methodologies of partnership engagement. The difficulty of operating in remote working environments was flagged by several NGO partners, with one noting that “in meetings in which a large number of actors participate, the objective of the meeting tends to be blurred. Hour-long online meetings targeting many actors are tiresome and, at times, difficult to follow.” 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.

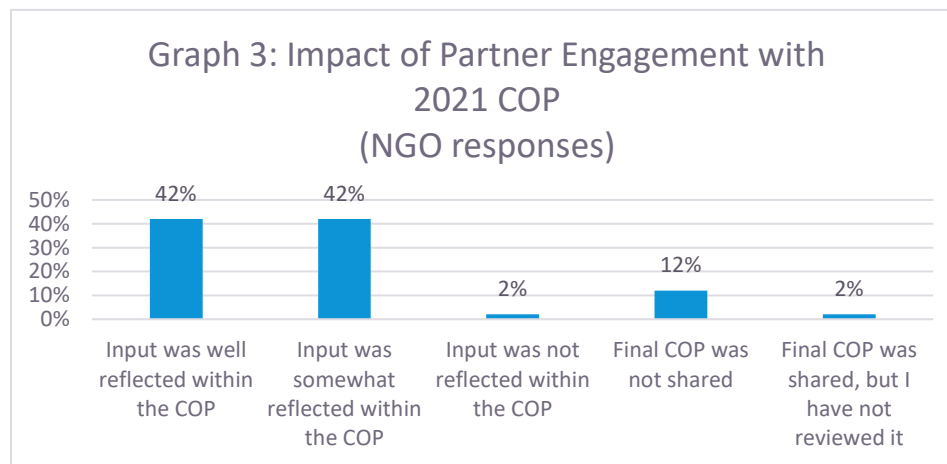
While feedback on the various methods of partnership was overwhelmingly positive, there are several key themes that have emerged from NGO feedback:

“For the last few years, the local UNHCR office has organized practically no consultations.” -NGO respondent

“While joint monitoring is useful for improving and developing performance, consultations and coordination meetings do not have effective outputs.” -NGO respondent

“These are not forms of consultation, they are meetings in which UNHCR communicates information to partners, but the partner’s point of view is not really taken into consideration.”
-NGO respondent

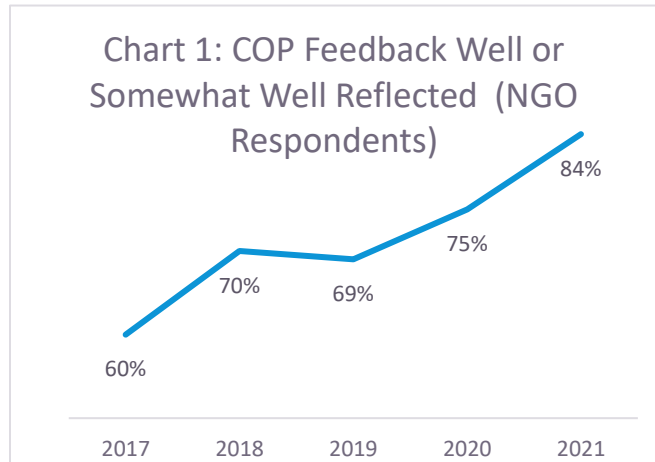
COUNTRY OPERATIONS PLANNING



Additionally, NGO and UNHCR respondents were asked more in-depth questions about each partnership process. For Country Operations Planning (COP), 74% of UNHCR respondents indicated that they invited NGO

partners to engage in the 2021 COP, whereas only 56% of NGOs indicated that they were both invited and

contributed to the COP process. Five percent of respondents were invited but did not contribute, and 10% reported not being invited but proactively contributing to the process. Invitation and inclusion in COP were broken down along regional lines, with the highest rates of exclusion in the Americas/Caribbean (41% of respondents) and Europe (30%). Additionally, NGO participants' rating of their feedback's inclusion in the final COP saw a 12% increase (84% indicated their feedback was well reflected or somewhat reflected in 2021's COP, up from 75% in 2020), a 40% increase since 2017. There was also a 71% increase in the number of NGO participants who reported not receiving the final product (12% in 2021, up from 7% in 2020). This could be due to the roles filled by the NGO survey respondents, given that some internal NGO staff may receive and review the COP but

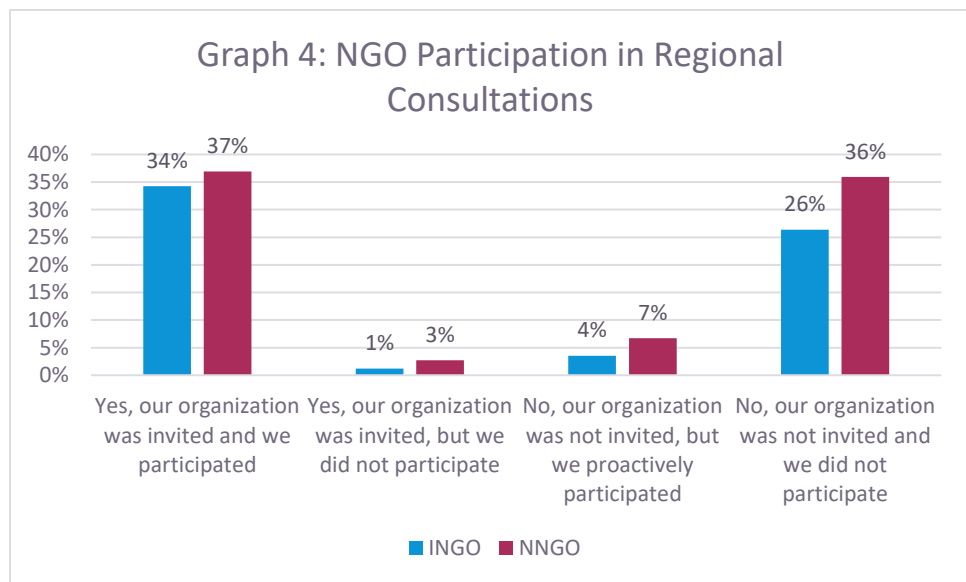


not be involved in responding to this survey. **Survey results in 2021 indicate that NGOs increasingly feel their feedback is being taken into account in the development of UNHCR's Country Operations Planning.**

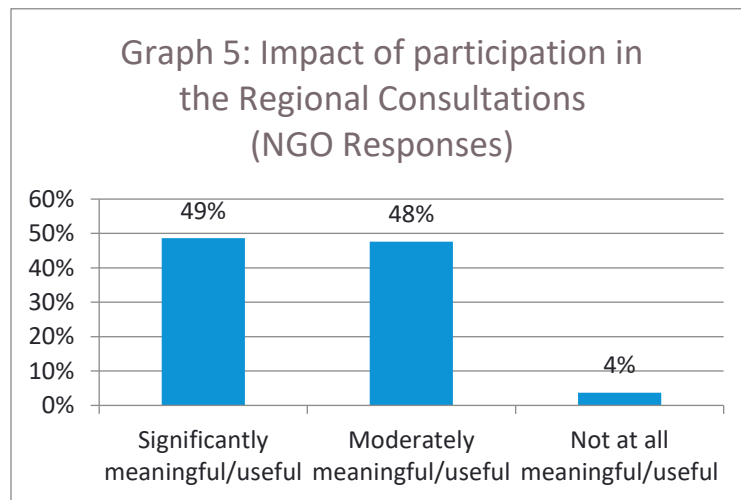
REGIONAL CONSULTATIONS

Regional Consultation Meetings, introduced in 2019 and expanded in 2020, offered another space for UNHCR-NGO coordination and partnership. Given the context of COVID-19, these meetings took place

mainly online to encourage and enable broader participation from UNHCR's implementing partners. Of NGO respondents, 51% reported receiving an invitation to a Regional Consultation Meeting in 2021, up



65% from 2020’s 31%, while an additional 42% of respondents (majority local and/or national NGO respondents) indicated that they were not invited and therefore did not participate, with the number one reason being that they were unaware of regional consultations. For this reason, **we recommend increasing outreach to NGOs for participation in regional consultations, working to include more local and national NGO partners in regional consultations, and ensuring that there is space for inputs from both INGO and NNGO partners.**



Of the NGOs who participated in the regional consultations, 96% felt their participation was significantly or moderately useful to their organization (similar for both INGOs and LNNGOs). This is a significant improvement from 2020 to 2021, with only 4% of NGO respondents finding regional consultations not at all useful. NGO respondents found that these sessions

“helped in aligning activities according to the budget,” improved the alignment of “programs to the thematic [focus] areas of UNHCR,” and encouraged “discussing new or emerging trends such as IDPs or POC as a result of climate change.” They also stated that the sessions “allow[ed NGOs] to understand key changes in UNHCR operations” and enabled “multiple opportunities to connect with partners and other stakeholders engaged in the same areas of work,” including “positioning cross-cutting issues to develop joint projects.”

A few respondents indicated that there is room for improvement, from the NGO perspective, in the regional consultations. As outlined above, clear objectives and timelines for these meetings would be appreciated, and several NGOs flagged the need for increased participation/involvement of NGO partners:

“Regional consultations would benefit from more engagement from UNHCR partners, more room for discussion.” -NGO respondent

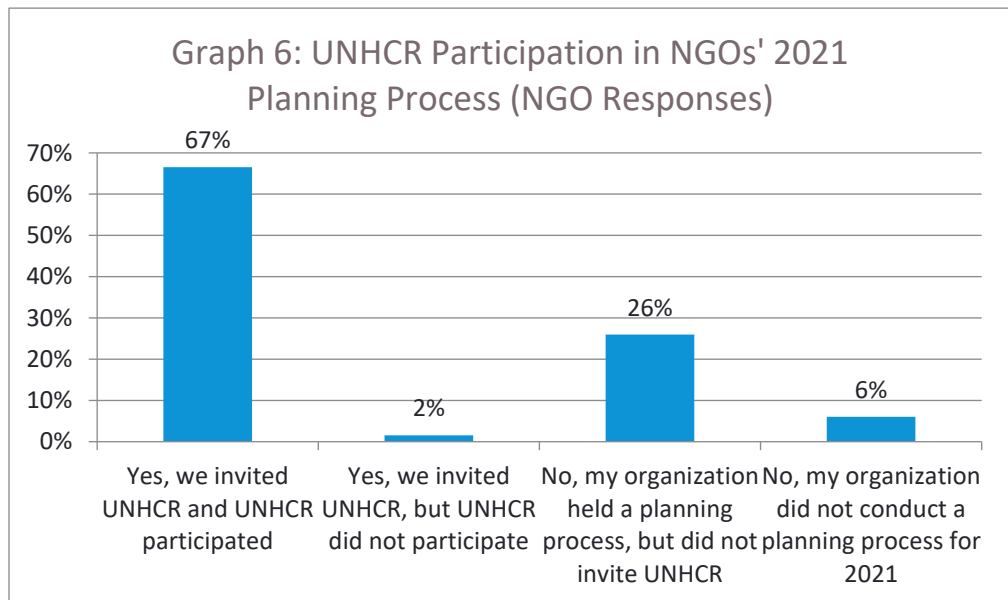
Given the overall favorability of the regional consultations, UNHCR should continue build upon the success observed in two years of implementation by inviting more NGOs to participate in the Regional

Consultations in 2022 and continuing to reflect upon the process to ensure equal speaking time and engagement of NGO partners to emphasize the partnership between UNHCR and NGOs in their working relationship.

COORDINATION MEETINGS

When looking at NGOs’ own planning processes in 2020, the majority of NGO respondents (69%) invited UNHCR representatives to consult and reported that almost all UNHCR representatives who were invited (98%)

participated. This can be attributed to the funding role that UNHCR plays for many of their NGO partners: as one respondent explained, “we usually seek input from UNHCR before we plan



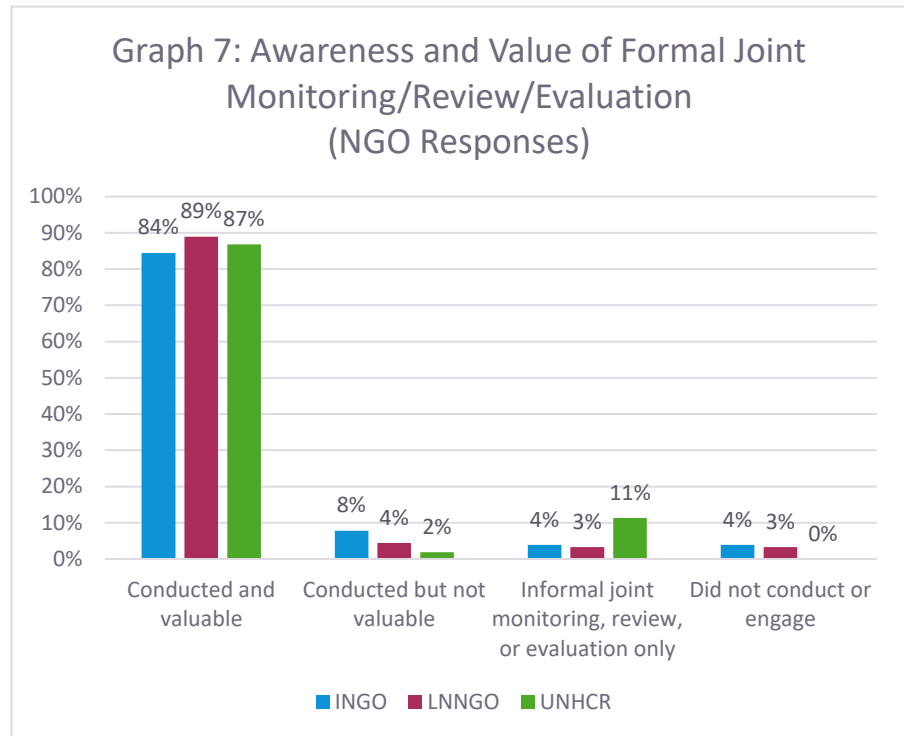
our year, as HCR partnership is a big chunk of our operations.” A number of respondents, particularly those operating in difficult contexts with limited movement allowed in the field, indicated that one-on-one coordination meetings are the main source of programming and partnership planning between UNHCR and their organization, whereas others (largely INGOs) indicate that they consult with UNHCR on an ad-hoc, project-by-project basis rather than for their overall in-country operational planning.

Of UNHCR respondents, 59% reported being invited to contribute to NGO partners’ annual planning processes, with an additional 23% of UNHCR staff reporting they were not invited, but proactively participated. Only 18% of respondents were not invited and did not contribute to NGO planning.

JOINT MONITORING

Based on the responses to the 2021 survey, most UNHCR (84%) and NGO (87%) 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, INGOs, and LNNGOs all found joint monitoring to be similarly valuable, as shown in Graph 7, with INGOs reporting the sessions as not valuable at a slightly higher rate (8%).

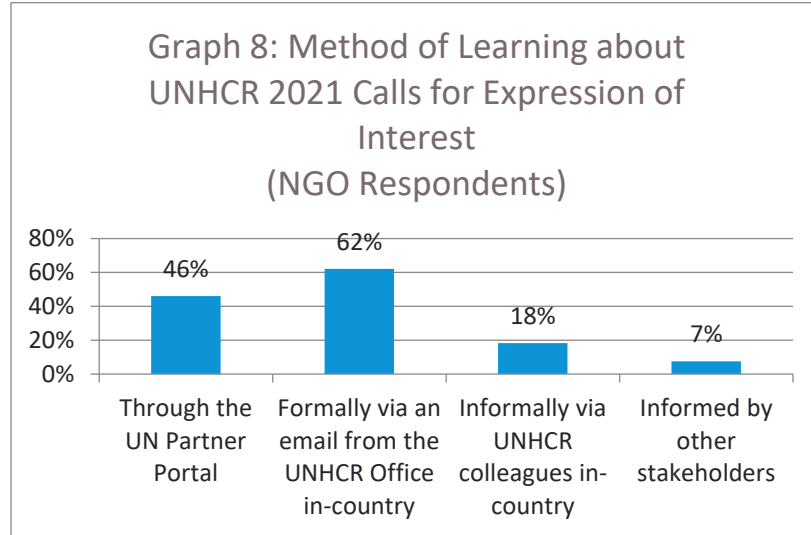
Overall, while there are stumbling blocks with the partnership planning process, planning and consultation satisfaction remained high in 2021, as in previous years.



PARTNER SELECTION

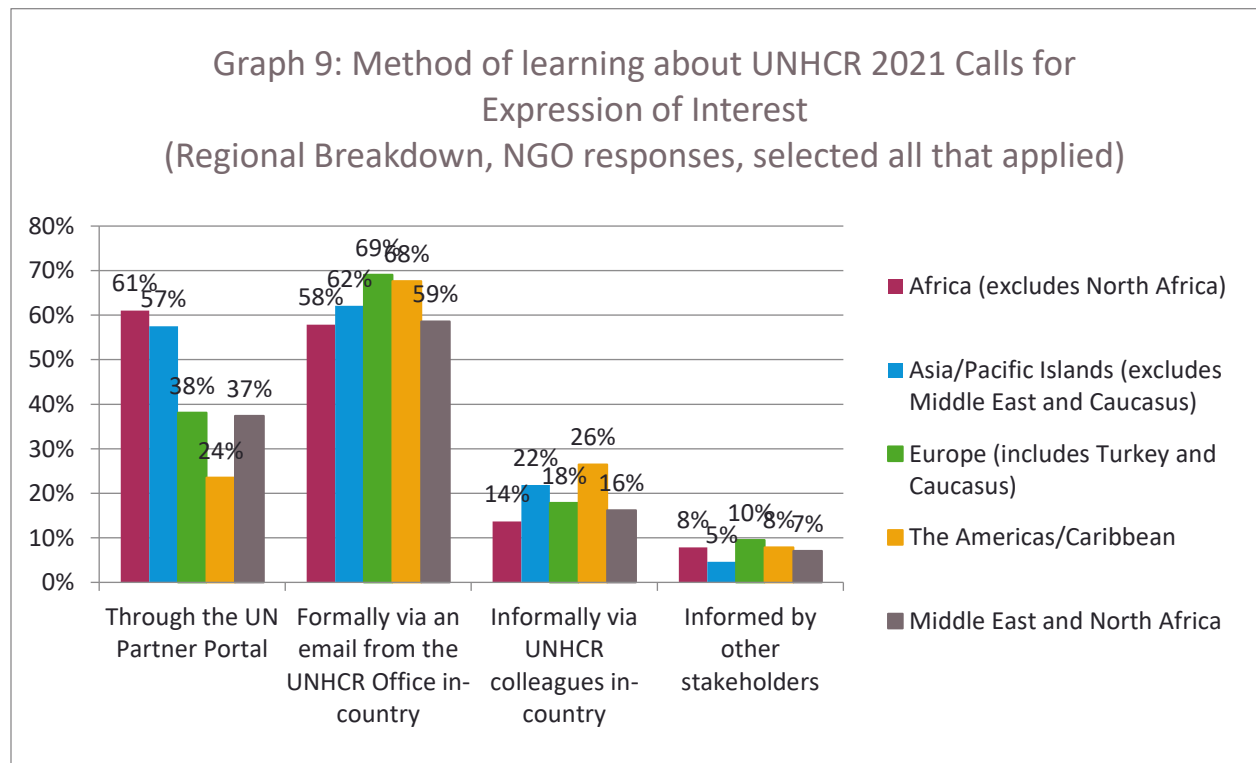
UNHCR colleagues were surveyed regarding their practices for issuing calls for Expressions of Interest, including number of calls issued, number of applications received, and time given to NGO partners to respond to the call. In 2021, fewer UNHCR respondents (56%) reported they issued one or more Calls for Expression of Interest for 2021 projects, compared to 62% in 2020. According to UNHCR respondents, this decrease is due to a combination of UNHCR’s PPA/partnership retention policies and country-level operational restraints limiting the usage of calls for Expression of Interest.

Of UNHCR Country Offices, 90% indicated that they were continuing to issue 10 or fewer calls for Expression of Interest per country office and half reported receiving 0-10 applications from NGO partners

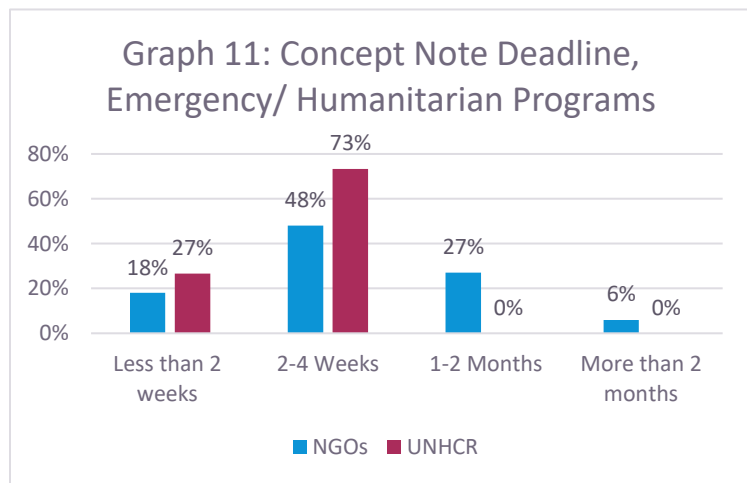
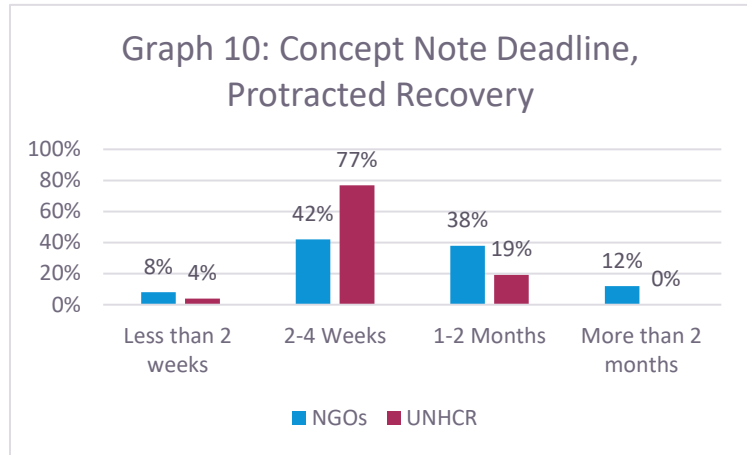


per call. NGO colleagues likewise shared the major methodologies of learning about calls for Expressions of Interest. The majority of communication about calls was received formally, with the UN Partner Portal the second-most common methodology (reportedly utilized by 46% of respondents). When compared regionally, NGO respondents in

Africa and Asia/Pacific Islands reported the highest usage of the UNPP for dissemination of calls (61% and 57%, respectively), whereas NGOs in the Americas/Caribbean learned about calls via the UNPP the least frequently (24%), as displayed in graph 9.



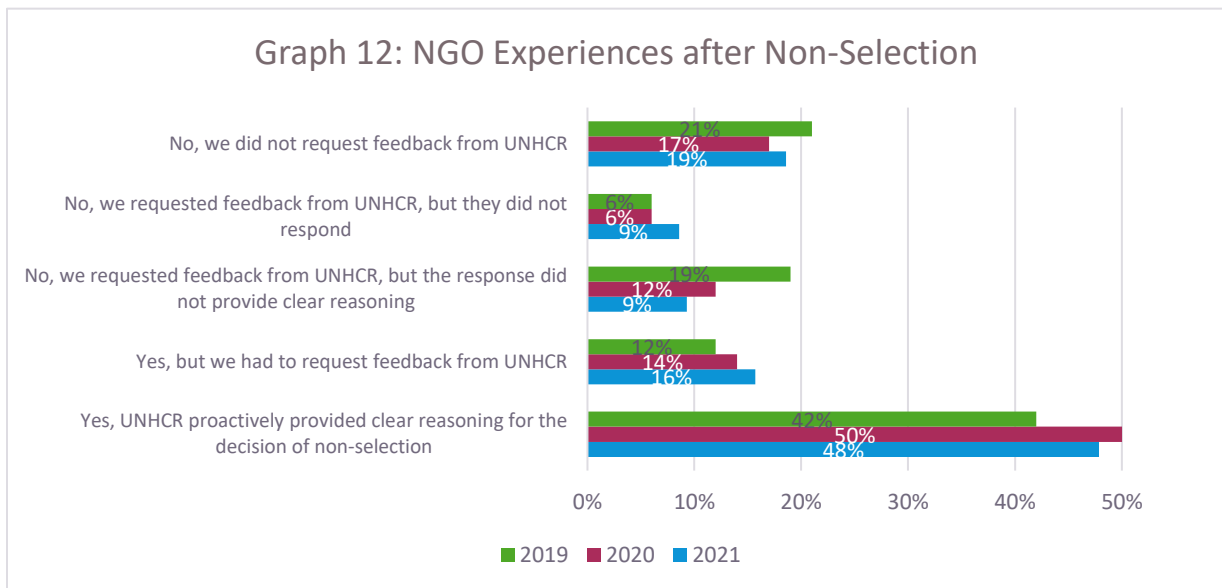
One other indicator of note was the timeline for submission of Expressions of Interest, from issuance of the call to the closing deadline. This particular indicator was asked of both UNHCR colleagues and NGO partner colleagues. On average, UNHCR respondents reported giving less time between Calls for Expression of Interest and concept note deadlines than NGO respondents reported receiving for 2021 projects. In cases of protracted/recovery contexts and humanitarian contexts, most UNHCR respondents reported giving two to four weeks to respond. In particular, 77% of UNHCR respondents reported giving two to four weeks for protracted responses versus 42% of partners. NGO respondents also more often reported being given less than two weeks in protracted and recovery responses (8%) compared to UNHCR (2%), while the opposite was true in humanitarian contexts with 27% of UNHCR respondents reporting a less than two-week turnaround time, and only 18% of NGOs reporting the same time frame.



NGOs noted that this varies widely from call to call, Country Office to Country Office, even sometimes from sub-office to Country Office in the same country context. They also shared that the timelines tend to be short and restrict the level of detail they are able to share, with one NGO respondent explaining “though the proposal timeline was short, UNHCR at field level provided clear communication/support and feedback on queries was prompt, thus we were able to meet the timelines.” Several NGOs did flag that, where possible, increasing the amount of time given for proposal submission is preferable.

PARTNER SELECTION PROCESS

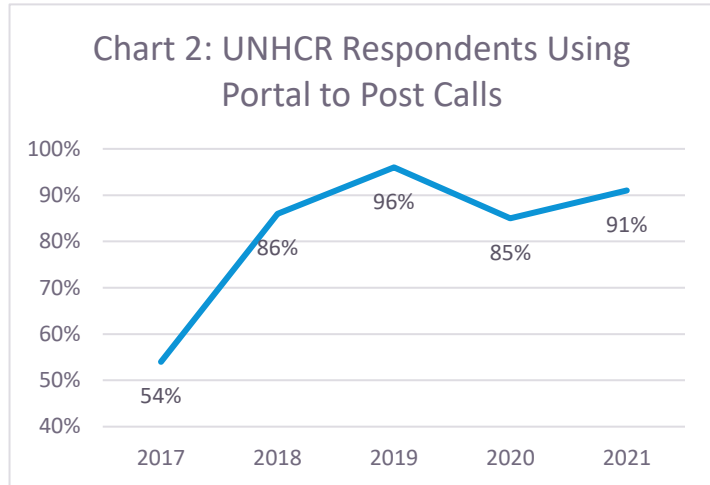
NGOs were also surveyed as to their perspectives on the partner selection process, particularly in terms of communication of non-selection for awards. Of those who indicated that they applied for a partnership project but were not selected, 48% reported that they received proactive and clear reasoning from UNHCR when not selected for a 2021 project, a slight decrease from 2020. By contrast, 2021 saw an increase in lack of explanation/response from UNHCR, as well as an increase in the NGOs who had to request feedback from UNHCR; survey results show that INGOs were more likely than LNNGOs to ask for feedback and receive unclear or no responses. The total number of NGOs that reported receiving unclear or no feedback at all from UNHCR (18%) has not changed from 2020.



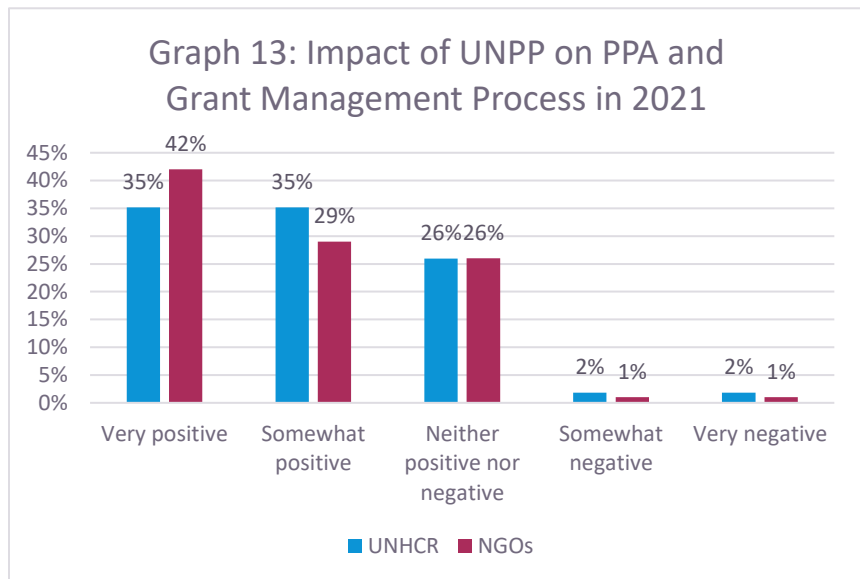
UN PARTNER PORTAL

As outlined above, the UN Partner Portal (UNPP) is a key methodology of partnership for NGOs who utilize it to learn about calls for Expression of Interest. When surveyed, 91% of NGO respondents reported they were registered on the UN Partner Portal in 2021, with more NNGO partners registered than INGO respondents (93% compared to 88%, respectively), a first in the history of the UNHCR-NGO Annual Partnership Survey.

The continued utility of registering on the UNPP is evident, given the high number of NGOs registered on the Portal. Additionally, 91% of UNHCR respondents reported using the Portal to post calls for Expression of Interest in 2021; an improvement from last year’s 85%. Furthermore, less than half of NGO respondents (46%) learned about 2021 calls through the Portal, which was almost unchanged from the 2019 survey (44%), despite requests from NGO colleagues to better utilize the streamlined UNPP as the system for communicating calls for proposals³.



Overall, most NGO respondents (71%) reported positive impacts from using the UNPP, noting that it positively impacted their organization’s PPA management processes in 2021. Regionally, Asia/Pacific Islands and Africa report the most positive outlook on the usage of the UNPP (78% and 75% reporting somewhat or very positive impacts), with



NGO respondents based/working in Europe reporting the least positive impact (47%). The overall NGO responses are very similar to those from UNHCR respondents, with 70% of UNHCR respondents indicating “very” or “somewhat” positive impacts from the UNPP, and only 4% of respondents reporting a negative

³ Due to UNHCR’s retention policy, which enables continuation of programming from year to year for ongoing contexts/programs, the total number of calls issued by UNHCR offices may decrease over times. For projects that are “retained” or continued on with the same NGO partner for up to 3 additional years, no call for proposals would be shared via the UNPP.

impact. This is a significant improvement from 2020, when only 58% of respondents reported a positive impact, and 30% reported negative impacts. This improvement indicates a positive change in UNHCR attitudes towards the UNPP, with several respondents commenting that the Portal is a useful tool. Despite the improvement in its impact, many UNHCR respondents noted problems and areas to fix:

“The portal needs freely available step-by-step guides or online tutorials on how to use it, and general results of previous UN partner audits (Unmodified, qualified) should appear. Secondly, the Portals communication errors need to be fixed: UNHCR & Partners consistently received error messages that would stall the whole program.” -UNHCR Respondent⁴

“We suggest better and faster support. It always takes partners over two weeks to register because of technical delays and limited support. Additionally, using the Portal to announce a Call was not very user friendly. We were not able to upload additional information relevant to all interested parties (such as Q&As, or details on information sessions regarding the call).” -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; this 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. In addition to the points noted above, common complaints from UNHCR colleagues about the UNPP included:

- Technical issues such as lack of user-friendliness, no notification system, frequent crashing, and inability to access partner documents
- Lack of training or guidance on how partners should use the portal
- Lack of awareness/registration of partners on the UNPP

⁴ Step by step guides and online tutorials for the UNPP are currently available, so the issue here may be a lack of awareness than availability. Therefore, we recommend increased education and awareness campaigns of available resources to improve utilization of UNPP for all NGO partners.

- Platform errors such as being unable to view concept notes submitted via the UNPP and a lack of response from the HelpDesk resulting in weeks-long waiting times.

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 calls for Expression of Interest 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).

MULTI-YEAR PARTNERSHIP AGREEMENTS

UNHCR introduced multi-year partnership agreements in 2019, offering longer term opportunities for partnership agreements in several pilot contexts. During the first two years, many UNHCR staff members reported they did not offer multi-year partnership agreements, though approximately half of NGO respondents were aware they existed. Overall NGO awareness of multi-year partnership agreements increased in 2021 to 73% (an increase of 46% from 50% in 2020). However, of NGO respondents, 60% reported that partnership agreements were not available in their contexts (to their knowledge), with more than half of those mentioning their interest in multi-year partnership agreements. NGOs shared the key justifications given by UNHCR COs where multi-year funding was not available: by far, the majority indicated that their UNHCR COs will begin multi-year opportunities in 2022 or 2023 PPAs. Other explanations given to NGOs by UNHCR range from the dynamics of operating in emergency contexts, closures of camps and/or operations in respondents' contexts, and budget constraints/limited budget visibility.

Of UNHCR respondents, 88% reported that they did not provide opportunities for multi-year partnerships in their context in 2021. UNHCR staff listed a variety of reasons for why they were not offering multi-year 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 [multi-year PPA] for our projects.” -UNHCR respondent

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

“Our operation is developing its multi-year strategy for the period 2023-2025.” – UNHCR respondent

“Because our operational context constantly changes. This makes it difficult to make assumptions and plan activities for multi-year.” -UNHCR respondent

It is important to note that UNHCR has expanded the availability of multi-year funding opportunities beyond the initial 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.⁵

These themes were prevalent in the comments of 2019 and 2020’s respondents, as well, though availability of multi-year partnerships has broadened significantly. 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 2021 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): 93% and 98%, respectively, indicated by choosing moderate to complete confidence in their partners’ abilities in these areas. These numbers are slightly higher than the 2020 results, indicating that partners are adjusting to the challenges of operating in the COVID-19 context. Although UNHCR confidence was high, several respondents noted challenges:

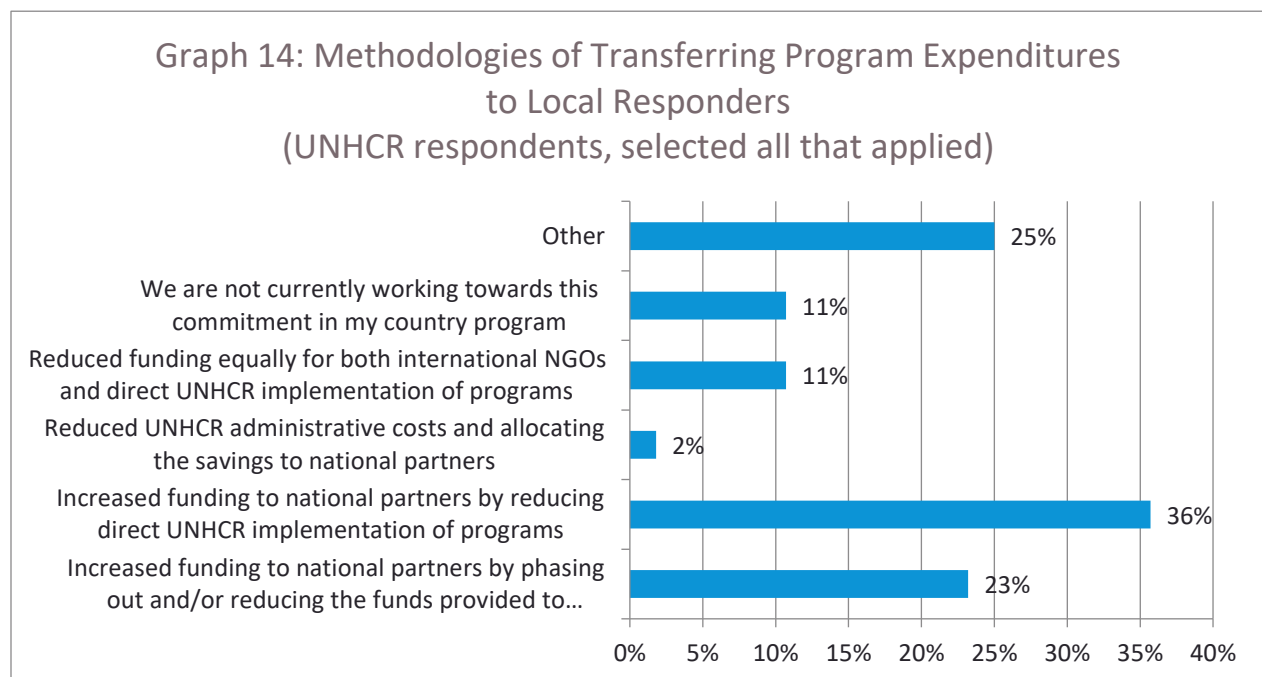
⁵ From 2021, UNHCR has begun rolling out multi-year planning, with some operations building on multi-year strategies already in 2022 and the entire organization in the coming years.

“NGOs vary very much. For example, INGOs are, in general, stronger in their programme, administrative, and financial capacities. Community-based organizations have sound technical and operational knowledge on how to address the needs and manage protection risks faced by PoC in their communities.” -UNHCR Respondent

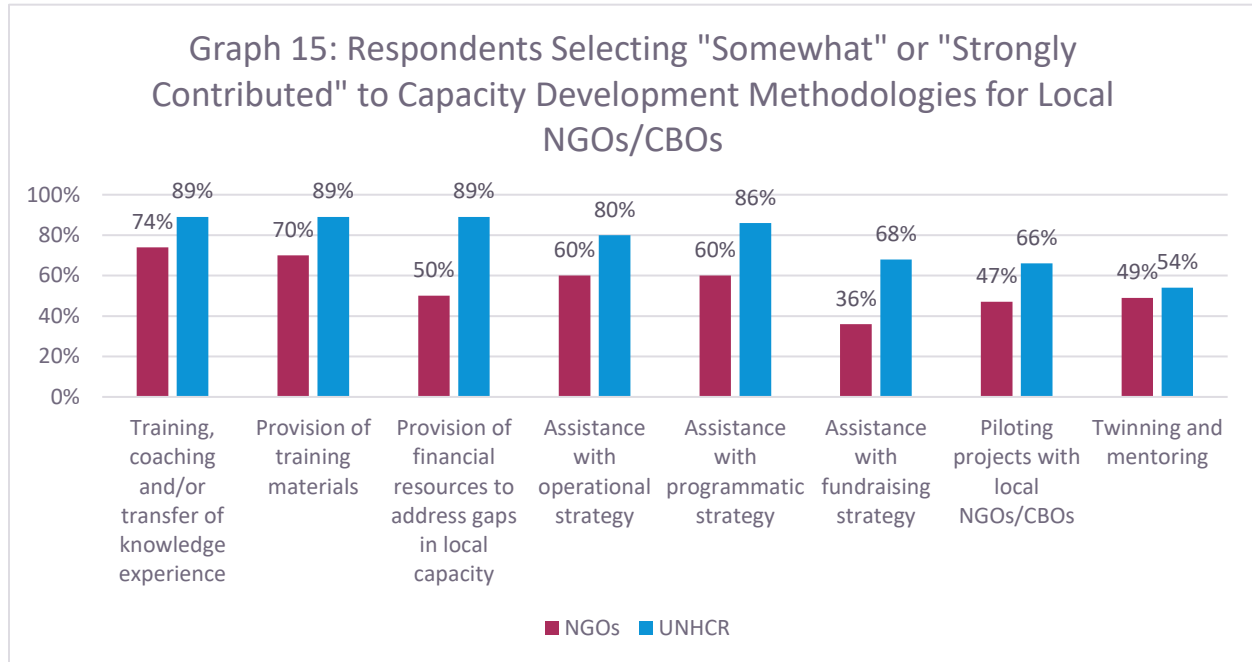
“Partners have, in general, adequate capacities to manage PPA funding, although it is important to observe that some of them, especially newer ones, will require more guidance and closer monitoring.” -UNHCR respondent

CAPACITY BUILDING AND THE GRAND BARGAIN

As part of the Grand Bargain and a World Humanitarian Summit goal, UNHCR committed to minimize links in the humanitarian funding chain and transfer at least 25% of its program expenditures to local and national responders by 2020. UNHCR successfully achieved this commitment by attaining 28% of program expenditures to national partners in 2020 and continuing to maintain that commitment in 2021. In 2021, UNHCR respondents’ approaches to increasing funds for national partners centered primarily on reducing the direct UNHCR implementation of programs (43%) alongside phasing out or reducing INGO funds (28%). This is in line with 2020, during which UNHCR respondents prioritized phasing out or reducing INGO funds (31%) as compared to reducing the direct UNHCR implementation of programs (44%).



UNHCR and NGO colleagues were asked to measure the extent to which their organizations/Country Offices contributed to joint efforts and progress made towards this commitment within the available resources across various methodologies.

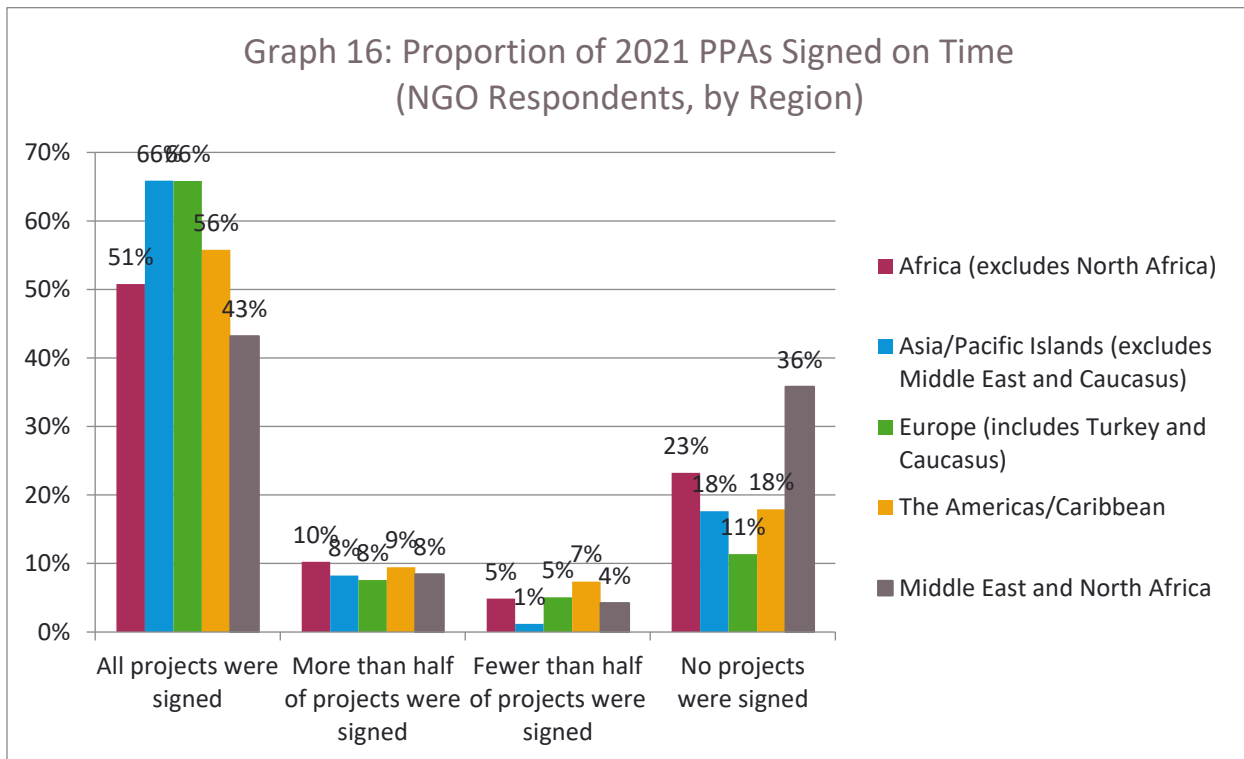
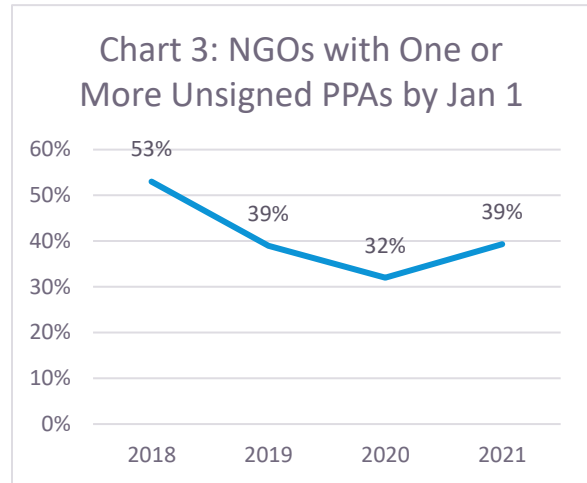


In 2021, the majority of UNHCR’s efforts to support local capacity were highly concentrated in the three areas: 1) transferring knowledge/experience through training and coaching, 2) provision of training materials, and 3) provision of financial resources to address gaps in local capacity (89% for all three). For NGOs, the most commonly contributions to local capacity were in the transfer of knowledge/experience through training and coaching (indicated as an action taken in 2021 by 74% of participants). On the other hand, assistance with fundraising strategies was the least common form of support by NGOs (36%), where UNHCR respondents indicated that they utilized twinning and mentoring methodologies the least (54%).

PROJECT PARTNERSHIP AGREEMENTS

Project Partnership Agreements (PPAs) are a significant component of partnerships between UNHCR and NGOs. In 2021, UNHCR implemented major changes to the PPA template largely focused on simplifying the PPA, such as 1) decreasing the number of annexes, 2) simplifying the risk and capacity assessment for partners, 3) increasing budget flexibility and other measures to simplify budget preparation and acceptance, and 4) 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 Chart 3, delays reported by NGO partners have declined overall since 2018: **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 39% in 2021 (a 26% decrease in delayed PPAs).** The slight uptick in 2021 PPAs is likely due to two major factors at the end of 2020, when PPAs are being negotiated and signed: 1) newly implemented PPA changes and 2) COVID-19 delays. This is an especially significant achievement given the increase in NGO survey participants from 2018 to present.

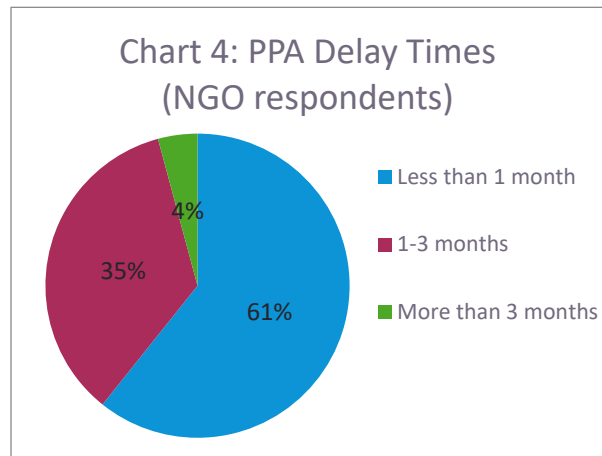


More than half of NGO respondents (55%) indicated that all of their PPAs were signed prior to January 1 or prior to the start of the 2021 project. However, there is a discrepancy both for INGOs as opposed to LNNGOs, and regionally. Fewer INGOs reported all projects were signed on time than national or local partners (54% to 62%, respectively), and 20% of LNNGOs reported that none of their PPAs were signed

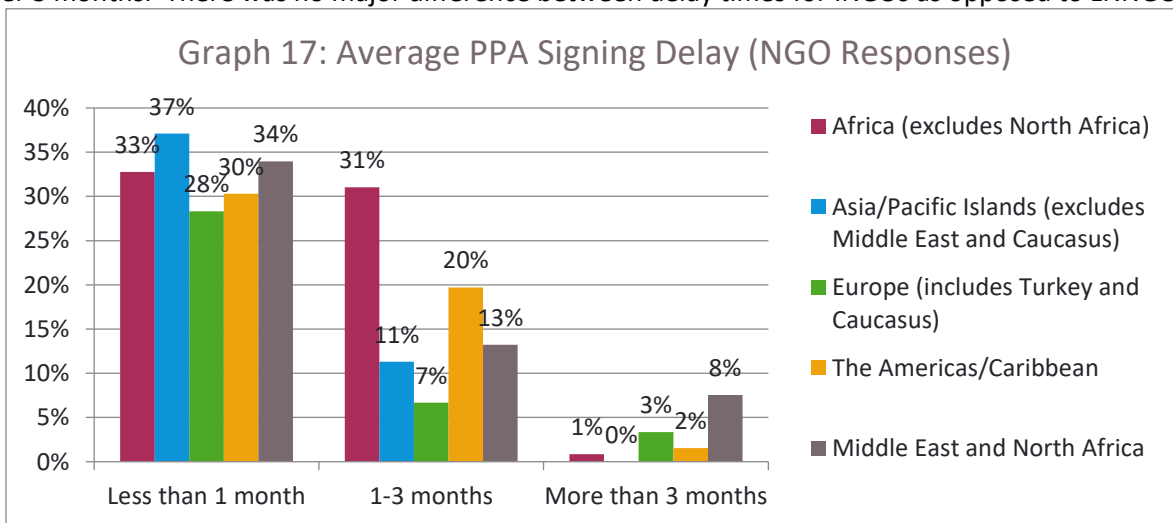
on time, compared to 29% of INGO respondents. Furthermore, as shown in Graph 16, respondents working in Asia/Pacific Islands and Europe reported all projects were signed on time, whereas NGOs in the Middle East and North Africa reported far more PPAs signed after January 1/project start date (36%) than their counterparts in other regions.

PPA DELAYS AND ROOT CAUSES

For the 45% of respondents who indicated delays in PPA signature, the survey also looked at the average delay times, as these can seriously impact the efficacy and efficiency of NGO partners’ humanitarian interventions. As shown in Chart 4, almost 2/3 of PPAs (61%) face short-term delays of less than 1 month, a significant improvement from 2020 where 1-3 months was the most commonly reported delay (by 44% of respondents).



Survey results were also analyzed by region, to determine whether any areas in particular face greater delays. As shown below, Asia/Pacific Islands region had the shortest delays overall, with all PPAs signed within 3 months of Jan 1/the project start date. Middle East and North Africa had the highest rate of significantly delayed PPA signature, with 8% of respondents noting that the average PPA signing delay was over 3 months. There was no major difference between delay times for INGOs as opposed to LNNGOs.

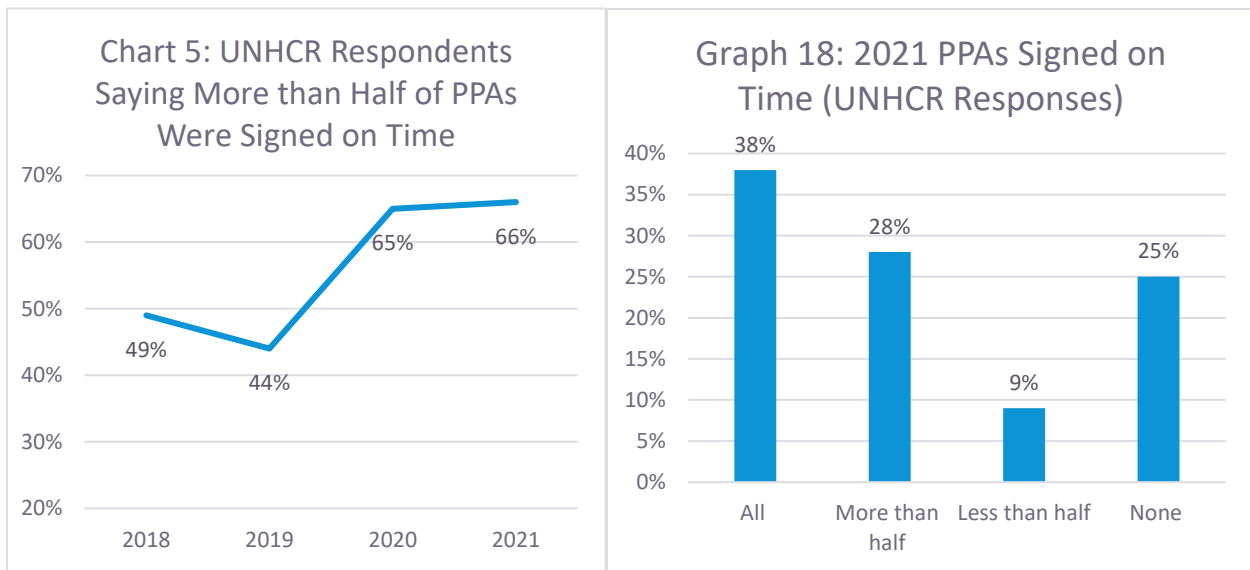


Several NGO respondents shared the impact of delays upon their operations:

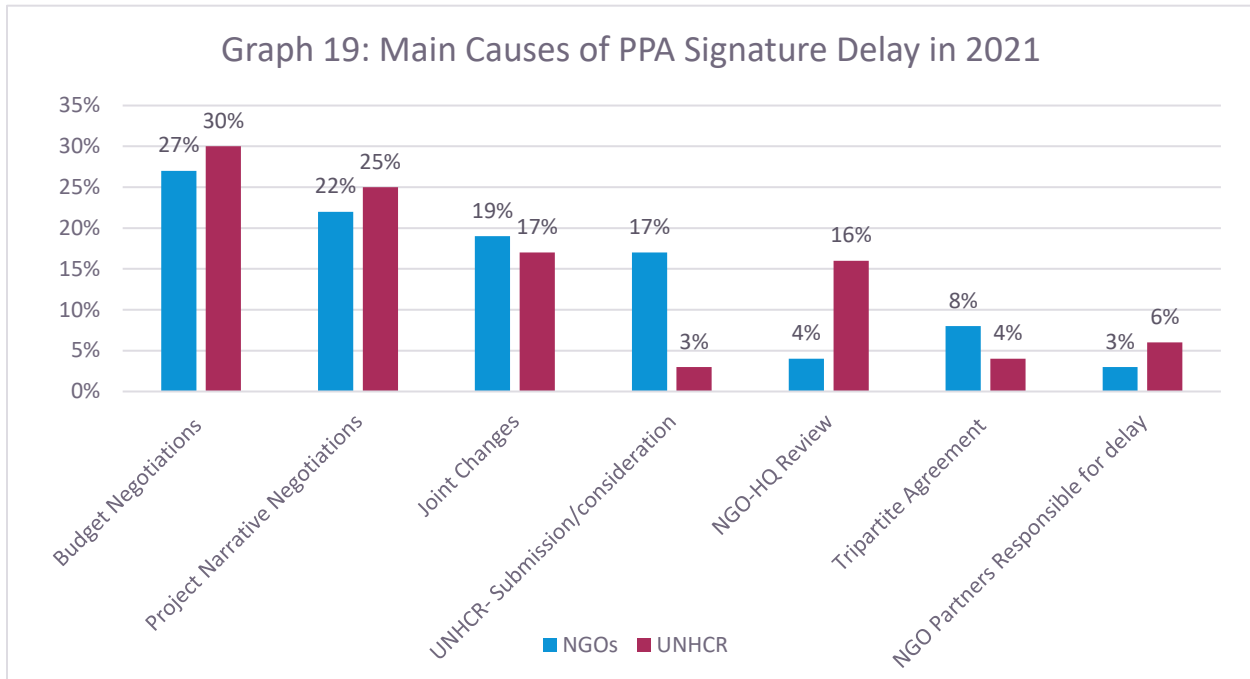
“Due to the significant layers of bureaucracy required combined with a consistently diminishing level of funding available and continual delays in PPAs being agreed and funds released, consistently delivering on time and at a high quality has become incredibly difficult. PPAs tend to be finalized on average in mid-March to April, which leaves just over half the year to implement an entire year’s worth of activities.” -NGO respondent

“The delay in signing of the PPA causes delay in the installments and hence delay in reaching beneficiaries.” -NGO respondent

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 66% of 2021 UNHCR respondents indicating half or more of their office’s annual PPAs were signed on time (roughly the same as last year’s 65%).



As previously noted, a majority of NGO respondents did not experience any PPA signing delays in 2021. However, 45% of NGO partners did experience delays in signing, which introduces substantial risk for partners to ensure program continuity and operations. To reduce these delays moving forward, it is essential to determine their root causes.

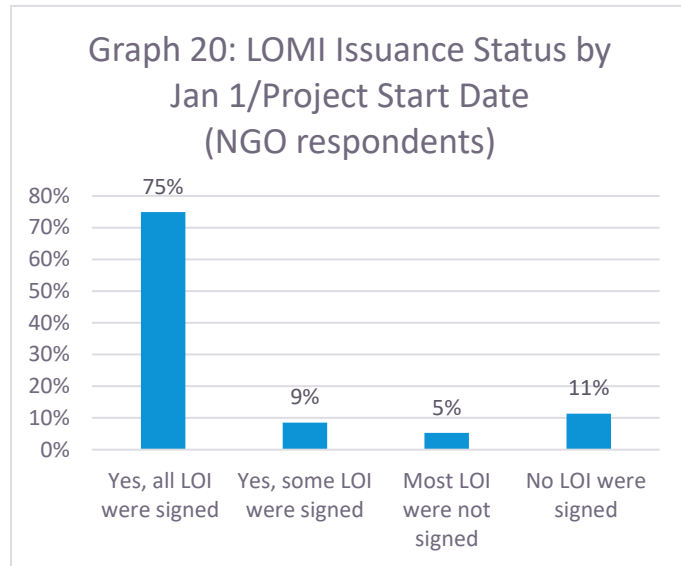


In 2021, as in previous years, budget negotiations are the main cause for delayed PPA signing, with 27% of NGOs and 30% of UNHCR respondents indicating that this caused PPA signing delays. Project narrative negotiations and joint UNHCR-NGO changes were also selected frequently by both UNHCR and NGO respondents, INGOs were more likely to perceive delays as caused by UNHCR or due to the budget than their LNINGO counterparts (38% compared to 28%), whereas LNINGOs found negotiations over project narrative to cause delays more commonly than INGOs (29% compared to 19%).

Similar to 2020, UNHCR and NGOs were more likely to perceive the other as the reason for the PPA signing delays. Only 3% of UNHCR staff believe their submission process was the reason for the delay, in comparison to 17% of NGO respondents who believe the same. Conversely, only 4% of NGO respondents viewed their headquarter review process as causing delays, while 16% 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.

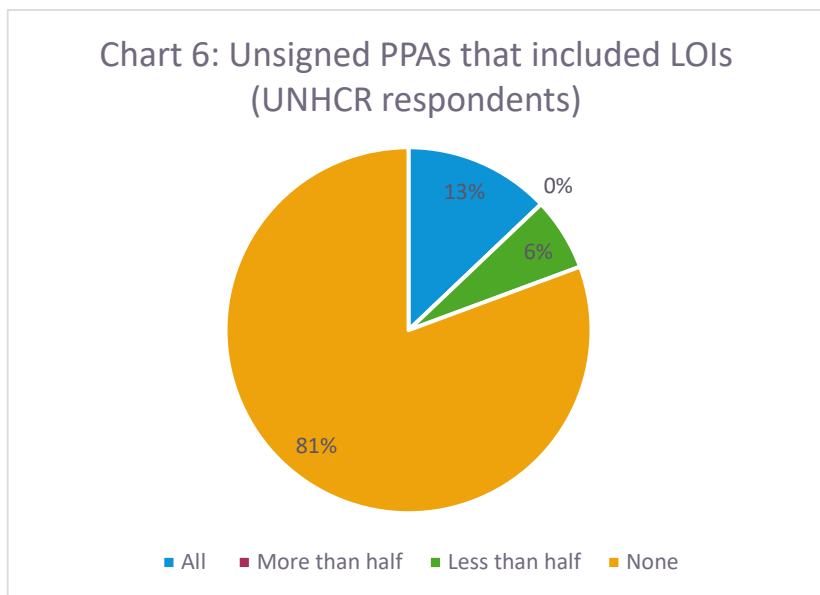
LETTERS OF MUTUAL INTENT



To address PPA delays, UNHCR is able to issue Letters of Mutual Intent (LOMI) to NGO partners, with 75% of NGO partners who faced delays reporting that they received signed LOMIs for 2021 projects before January 1/the project start date. Local and national NGOs reported higher rates of LOMI receipt than INGO respondents; geographically, NGOs in Asia/Pacific Islands and the Americas/Caribbean tended to receive LOMI before project start dates most often (60% and 55%, respectively), with MENA and Africa

reporting the fewest number of LOMIs. However, there was a difference in perception among NGO

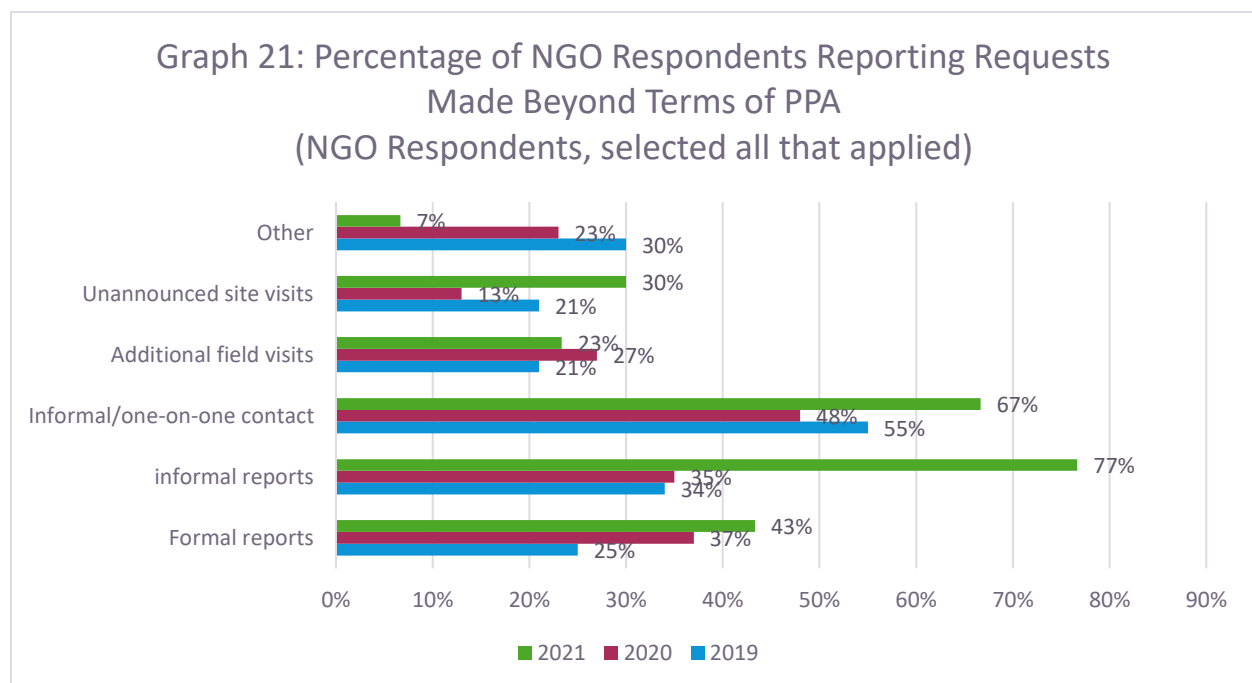
respondents and UNHCR respondents as to the regularity of use of LOMIs. The overwhelming majority of UNHCR staff (81%) reported that projects without PPAs signed on time did not include a signed LOMI, similar to 2020's reported 81%. Of NGO respondents, 75% said LOMIs were used. This likely means that the majority of LOMIs are being issued by a minority of UNHCR Country Offices, and LOMIs are therefore not being used universally to fill the gap caused by PPA delay.



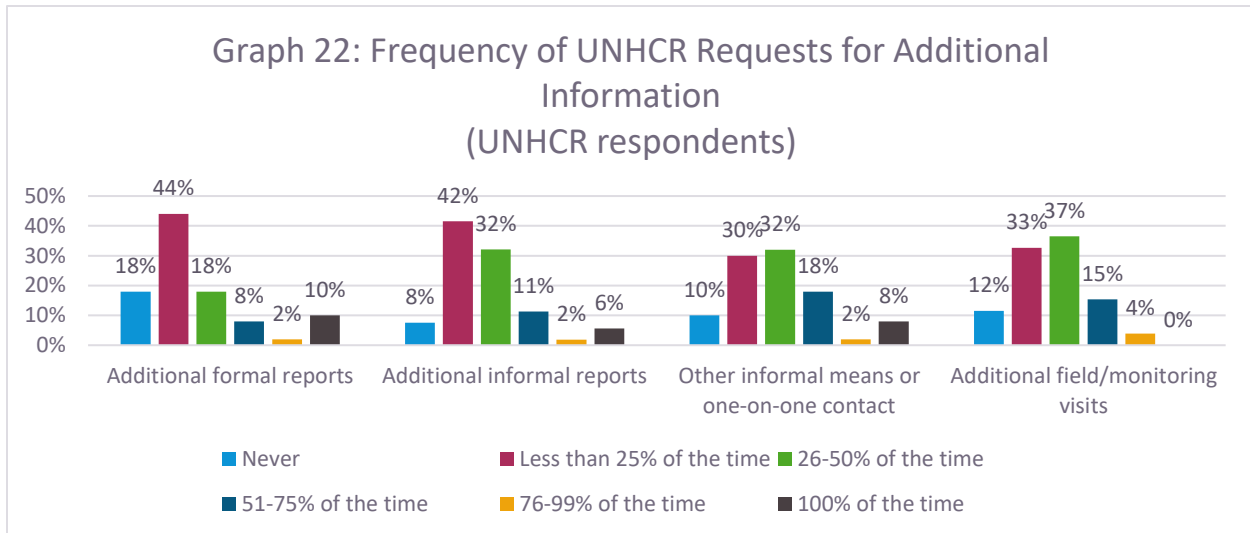
This presents a significant financial risk to UNHCR’s NGO partners: when projects cannot start on time due to delays, without a signed partnership agreement or LOMI of any kind, NGO respondents are on the hook to absorb any costs associated with implementation should the process fall through. Moreover, 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, so NGO respondents were pleased to report the increase in LOMIs in use in 2021.

ADMINISTRATIVE BURDEN

Although most NGOs (88%) reported that UNHCR does adhere to reporting requirements outlined in PPAs, qualitative feedback reveals repeated requests for additional information from UNHCR staff, particularly requests for additional reporting beyond the terms stipulated in the PPA. As shown on the graph below, **NGO respondents indicate receiving contradictory reporting requirements from different UNHCR sub-offices, with some reports requested on a weekly or monthly basis despite not being outlined in the PPA terms.** Most significantly, 77% of NGO respondents reported requests for additional informal reports from UNHCR, a 127% increase from 2019. Informal and/or one-on-one contact has also been reported by 67% of NGO partners. One NGO respondent shared that “partners are afraid the partnership might be affected with that sub-office/UNHCR” if they do not comply with additional requirements.



This issue has particularly been reported in the MENA region, where 14% of respondents indicate that UNHCR did not adhere to the reporting requirements outlined in the PPA. The administrative burden of additional reporting remains a clear concern for many NGO partners.



Despite the COVID-19 flexibilities that UNHCR made permanent in 2020 (more details on p. 39), UNHCR feedback mirrors NGOs’ responses, reporting an increase in almost all types of additional requests for information. As shown above, additional formal reports and informal reports are requested most frequently, with some UNHCR respondents indicating they request additional reports 100% of the time (10% and 6% of respondents, respectively). Explanations for additional requests were shared by UNHCR, as follows:

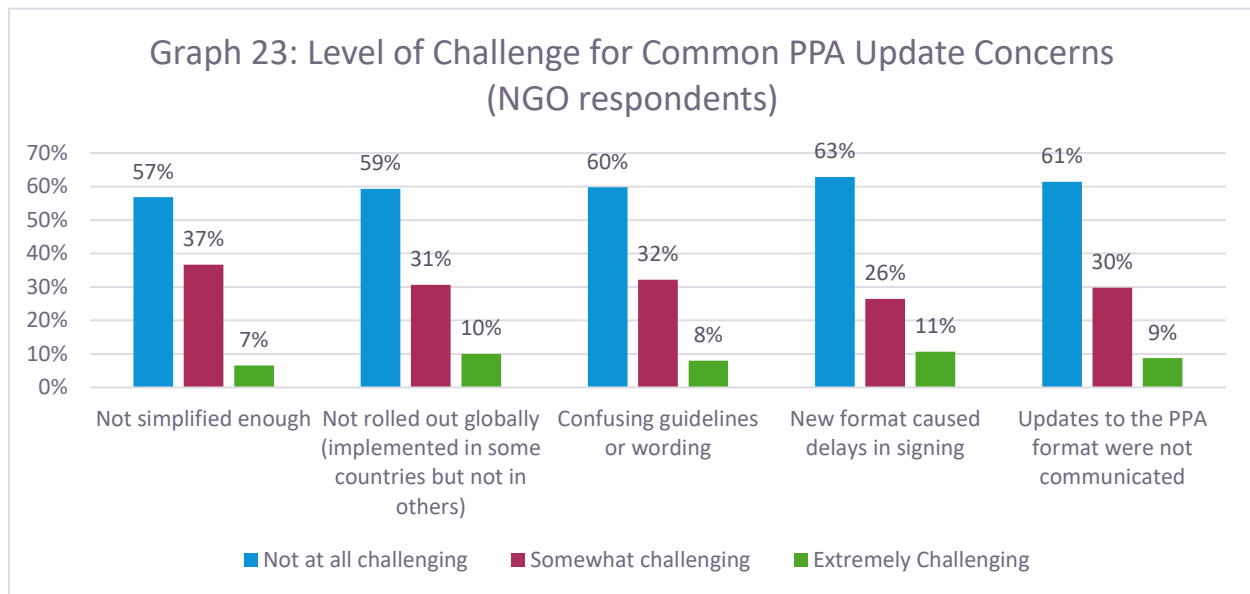
“We have requested our partners to report on some indicators on monthly basis.” -UNHCR respondent

“We build into the project coordination and deliverables that partners send informal reports, brief us and coordinate with us on issues, very occasionally go on joint visits. These are not 'reporting' requirements but from our point of view essential deliverables. Additional formal reports (PFRs) are only when expenditure is far below expected, so we add one extra PFR so we can justify next instalment payment.” – UNHCR respondent

Overall, despite the challenges of the COVID-19 pandemic and UNHCR’s efforts to reduce reporting requirements accordingly, the reality is that reduction of reporting requirements has not trickled down to the field, which placed undue administrative burden on already-stretched implementing partners.

PPA UPDATES

In 2020, UNHCR updated the Project Partnership Agreement (PPA) for 2021 PPAs and beyond. The survey requested feedback from both NGOs and UNHCR colleagues on the implementation of the new PPA, as 2021 was the first year for its usage. Respondents were asked to indicate whether they faced a range of challenges and, if so, how challenging they found each issue in 2021. Overall, NGOs indicated that the challenges they noted in 2020 are less concerning, with the majority of respondents indicating that each possible concern is not at all challenging for their organization, as shown at left. This is an improvement from 2020, when many partners indicated that they were unaware of any PPA changes, and many NGO respondents indicated that they faced no trouble at all with the new template in 2021.



NGOs were able to outline additional feedback on the usage of the new PPA, in which a few additional challenges emerged: 1) delayed usage of the new PPA by UNHCR Country Offices (some only received the new format in 2022; others have not seen an updated PPA to date); 2) inconsistent rollout across country contexts leading to confusion at NGO HQ and field level; 3) late sharing of Annex C in particular which caused PPA signing delays; 4) reporting requirements added that are beyond those stipulated in the PPA; 5) lack of narrative and budget templates shared in the new PPA; and 6) internal UNHCR staff turnover that causes misunderstandings or extended discussions of certain components of the PPA (even for programs that are a continuation of previous projects).

In their own words:

“Reporting requirements have been inconsistently communicated and applied year to year. We have experienced a lot of turnover on the UNHCR side for our project and that has resulted in delays, restart costs, and changes in expectations.” -NGO respondent

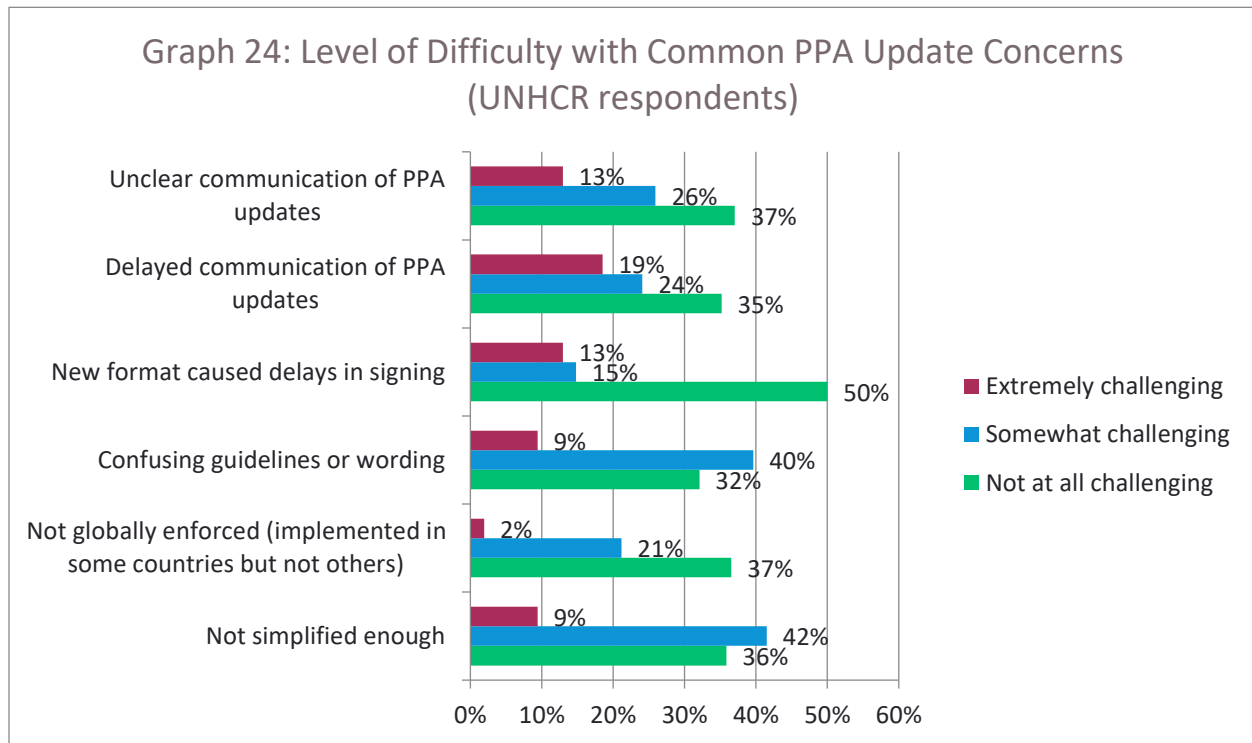
“There are some issues that are not rolled out globally (implemented in some countries but not in others)⁶ and this brings about some confusions in country level once we receive some guidance from our HQ teams and yet UNHCR country program is not aware of that issue except for UNHCR HQ.” -NGO respondent

There does seem to be a discrepancy in feedback shared by smaller organizations, many of whom flagged that the guidelines are challenging to navigate, or that the terms in the PPA are not relevant to their organization. One partner shared that “The PPA was an extremely confusing process. As a very small organization it was not set up to meet the partnership that we had with UNHCR. The reporting requirements of the PPA are beyond the capacity of our organization.” Furthermore, a significant number of NGO respondents indicated that, while the PPA changes themselves are not particularly challenging, navigating the new format does cause additional delays that impact program implementation: partners report that signing delays cause delays in service provision, paying contractors and suppliers, and in coordination with local authorities and stakeholders, all of which negatively impact NGOs’ perception in the communities in which they work.

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

⁶ UNHCR has noted that cases where certain components have not been rolled out globally are usually linked to a pilot experience.

UNHCR respondents also noted some level of challenge with each component, as shown in Graph 24. A majority of UNHCR respondents noted that the PPA was not simplified enough (51%), while a significant portion (49%) reporting that confusing guidelines or wording delayed PPA signature.



Several additional concerns were outlined by UNHCR respondents:

“The policy on budgeting for personnel and reporting personnel costs needs to be made clearer. Also the new way of planning instalments is not super-helpful: it was easier to understand for everyone and more predictable with an indicative instalment plan, and instalments being planned up for expenses to the next reporting month + 1 month.” -UNHCR respondent

“There have been so many changes lately, shared to the field by pieces and through different channels (TEAMS, Yammer, emails) that it has been difficult to keep track of changes. Sometimes we have found out that something was changed and we probably missed the announcement of the change and continue doing things as they used to, but just because we did not know that something was modified. For instance, update of Chapter 4 is no longer a reference for consultation. We don't know what has been abolished and what remains in place. Same with the

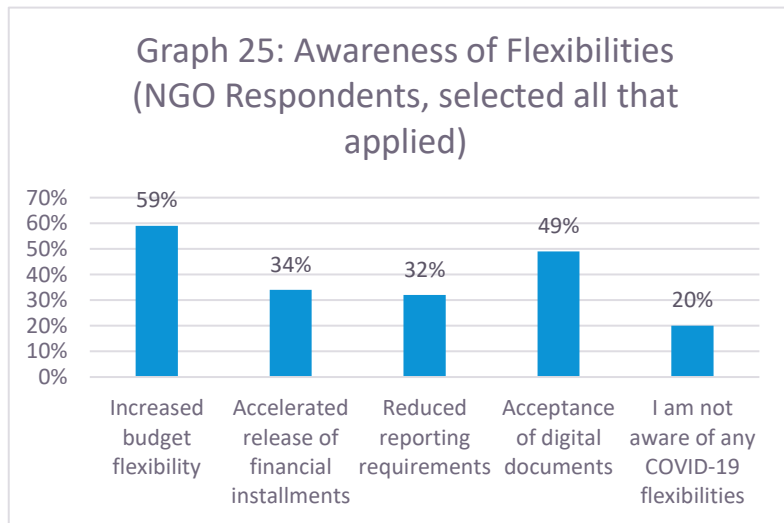
different "Implementing Management Guidance Notes" that were issued in the past, and that provided useful insights on how specific thematic things were done. Now we lost a bit of track." - UNHCR respondent

"The new PPA does not include a budget, which we think should be an integral part of the main MSRP Agreement. It is at times confusing for partners to refer to the original budget and main agreement without it showing in the PA. UNHCR determined the % of flexibilities for partners (30/50%) based on the risk assessment/categorization, INGO partners at times would require further explanation on how the scoring came to being." - UNHCR respondent

PARTNERSHIP 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 50%), accelerated release of financial installments, reduced reporting requirements, and acceptance of digital documentation. As of 2021, these flexibilities have been made permanent for all UNHCR-NGO partnerships.

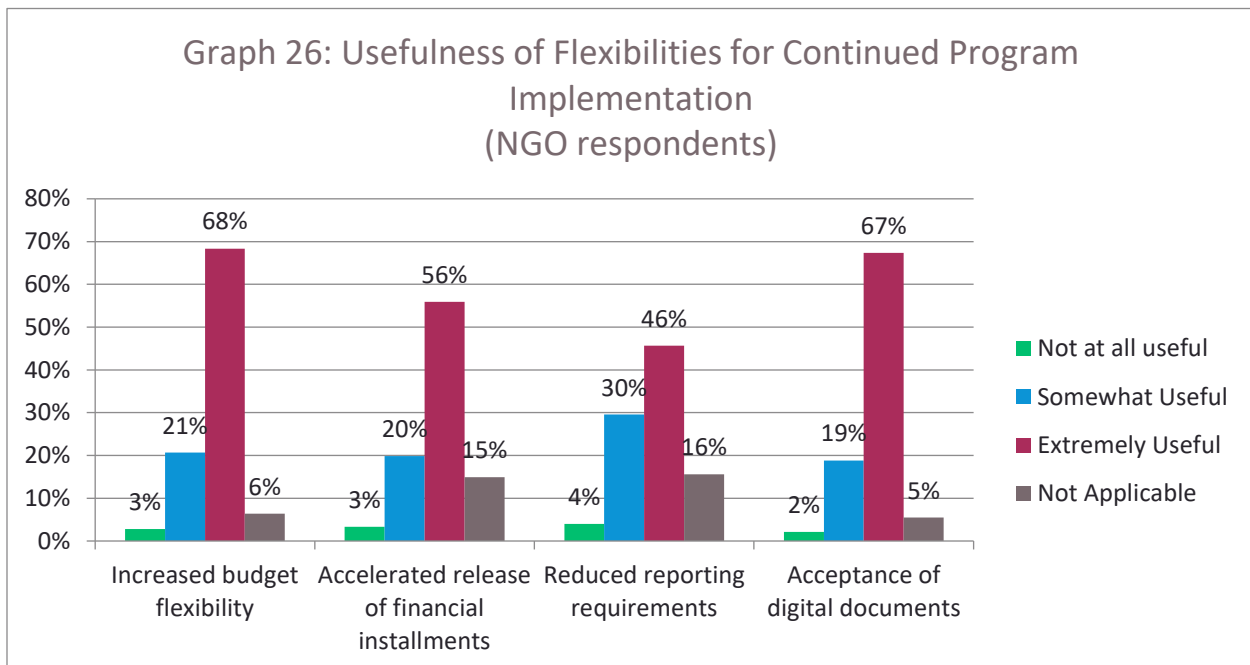
Overall, NGO respondents indicated awareness of COVID-19 flexibilities, with more than half indicating they were familiar with increased budget flexibility (59%). Almost half (49%) respondents were aware of acceptance of digital documents, 34% accelerated release of financial installments and 32% were aware reduced reporting requirements. However, 1/5 (20%) of NGO



respondents were unaware of any COVID flexibilities, which can likely be attributed to NGO respondents whose focus is on program activities rather than on larger policy and partnering shifts, as well as an increase in new NGO partners in 2021.

It is important to note that, although reduced reporting requirements have been accepted as permanent partnership flexibilities, NGO feedback does not show that overall reporting requirements have decreased. On the contrary, as shown above, despite this agreed-upon reduction and clearly outlined reporting requirement timelines in all PPAs, NGOs are facing an increase in requests for formal and informal reporting – a trend that is supported by responses from UNHCR respondents, as outlined above.

Another component of the survey requested that NGOs rank the criticality of the flexibility measures put in place: which were most useful, which were least useful, general feedback, and what additional measures, if any, would have been useful in enabling program continuity and adaptations.



The majority of the flexibilities were found to be extremely useful by all NGO respondents. There was an extremely low number of respondents who reported that specific flexibilities were not at all useful, with reduced reporting requirements being reported as “not at all useful” by 4% of respondents. NGOs ranked increased budget flexibility (68%) and acceptance of digital documents (67%) as the top two most useful flexibilities, indicating that they were most helpful in adapting to the global uncertainty in 2021 and enabling program continuity in emergency circumstances. **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.**

An additional component of this survey was determining whether NGO partners were successfully able to utilize these flexibility measures. Feedback across user experience varied from organization to organization, with UNHCR and NGOs offering the following insights:

“During the implementation in the context of COVID-19, there was budget flexibility of 20% to 30%, it was useful in implementation issues. In the same way, the acceptance of digital documents facilitated the verification in the quarters. However, in our case there was no flexibility in terms of reduced reports or accelerated release of financial installments; on the contrary, there were great delays.” -NGO respondent

“Budget revision was easily discussed and agreed upon with UNHCR especially for budget items that were affected by [COVID-19 closures]. Acceptance of digital documents had enabled us to overcome time delay. In general, we thank and look forward to continuity of such flexibilities.” -NGO respondent

“Meetings were conducted electronically and all reporting was digital, which was helpful in avoiding COVID exposure. Otherwise, digital reporting is very time consuming due to the necessity to scan everything. There was no increased budget flexibility and release of installments was not accelerated.” – NGO respondent

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, while these flexibilities were broadly popular, NGO respondents had suggestions for other adaptabilities that could be implemented in the future:

“[We would like to see] actual simplification/reduction of reporting requirements (while promised, not sure the reporting actually got any simpler or less frequent).” -NGO respondent

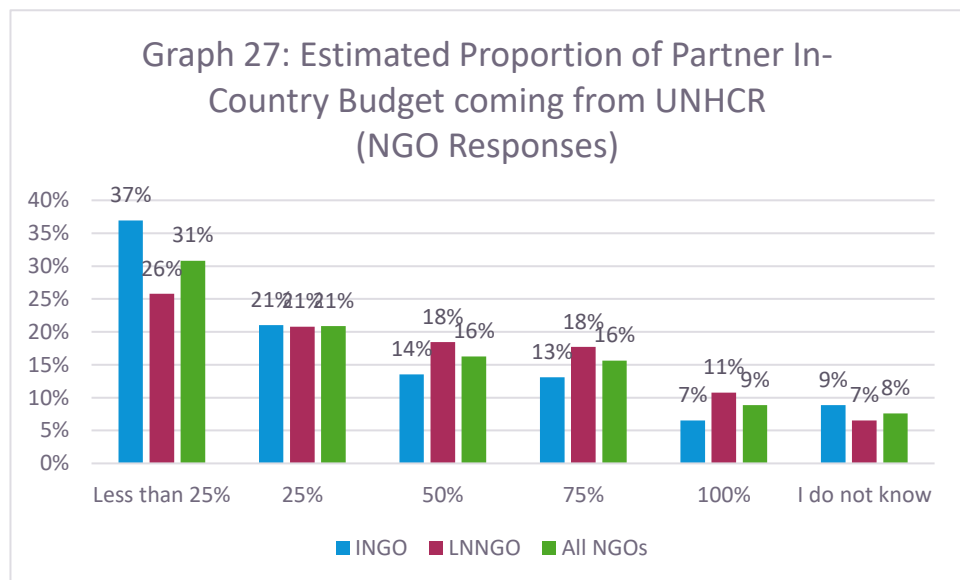
“More budget flexibility on the staff category.” -NGO respondent

Despite UNHCR’s increased budget flexibility (up to 50%, as outlined above), at least half of NGO respondents remarked on the need for increased budget flexibility, especially for staffing and indirect costs, as well as guidelines and increased flexibility for reallocation of funding between budget lines.

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

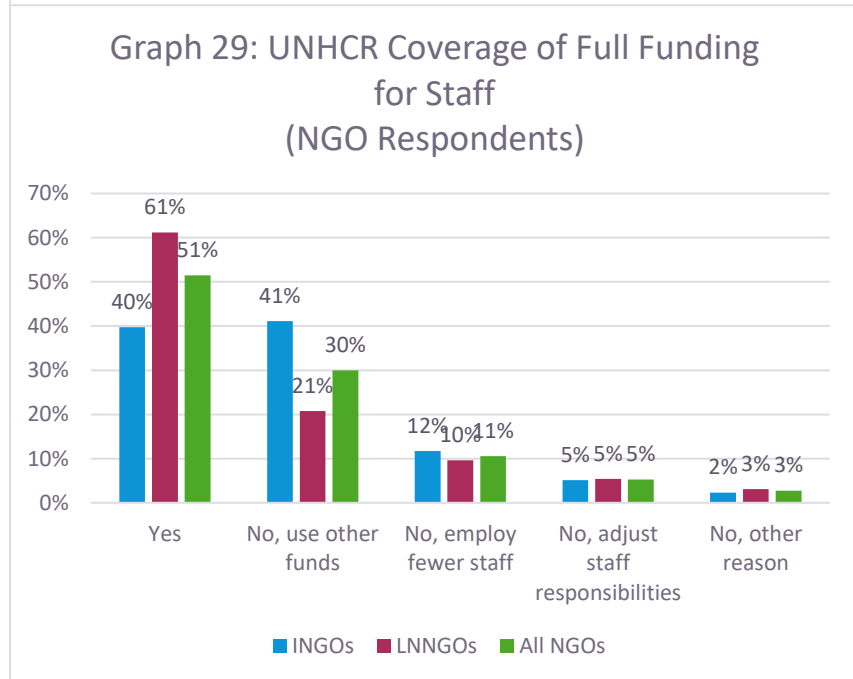
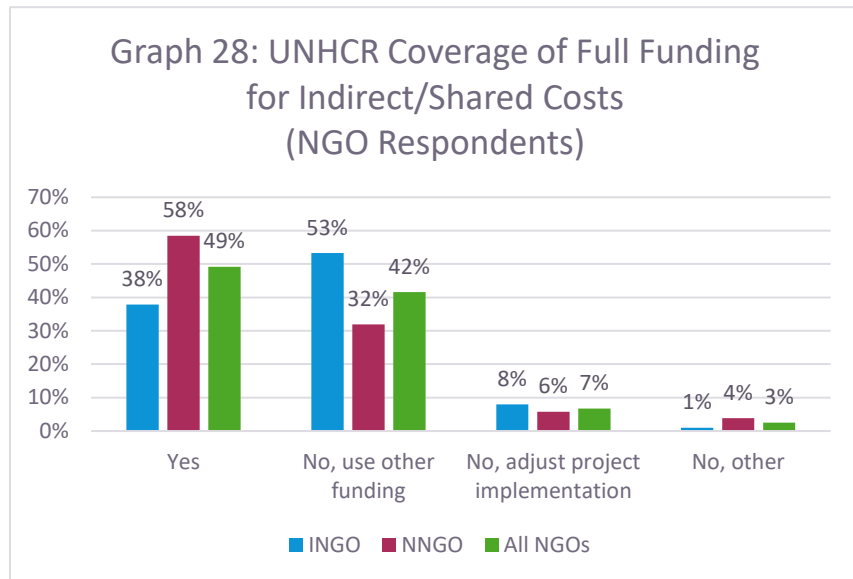
continue to draw a significant amount of their funding from UNHCR: 41% of NGO respondents reported that at least half of their 2021 in-country budget came from UNHCR funding. Overall, local and national NGOs reported greater



dependence on UNHCR for funding (47% as opposed to 33% of INGOs indicating half or more of their budget comes from UNHCR).

Given that UNHCR funding makes up a significant portion of NGO budgets, NGO survey respondents were

also asked whether the UNHCR project budgets provide full and fair funding for two key elements of implementation: 1) cost coverage of staff and 2) other indirect or shared costs. In both areas, overall NGOs report full and fair cost coverage. However, as shown at right, local and national NGOs report significantly better full and fair funding for both areas (58% for indirect/shared costs and 61% for staff costs, compared to 38% and 40%, respectively, for INGOs). Furthermore, overall coverage of indirect and shared costs is reported as slightly less full and fair than funding for staff costs, pushing NGOs to resort to alternative coping strategies to address the gap (using other funding is reported as most common for both funding areas). In their own words:



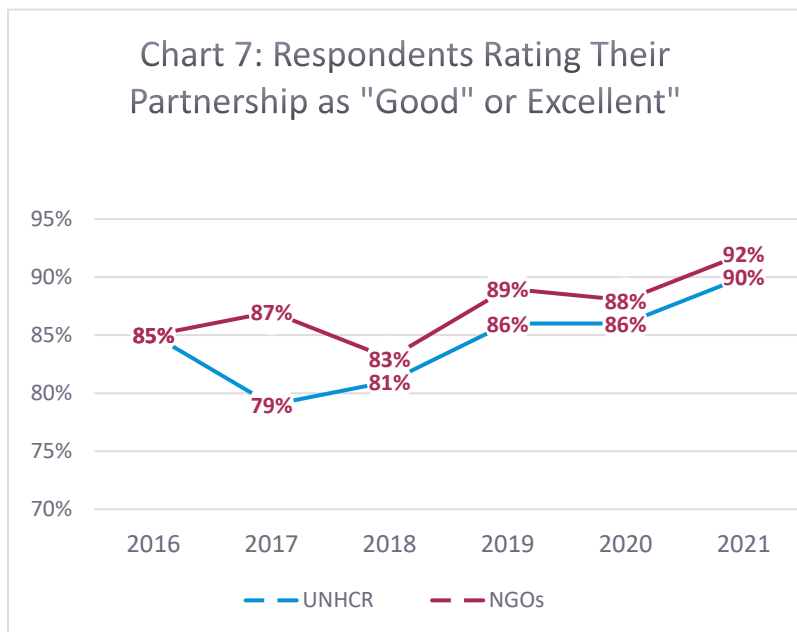
“Staff costs are an area of hardship and the workload is pressing. Budget allowed to allocate for staff is restricted.” -NGO respondent

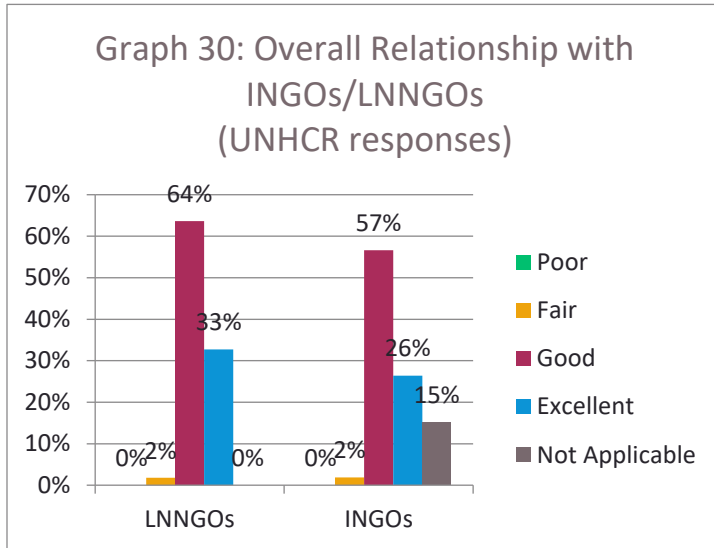
“We use other funds to cover staff cost and are not able to employ ideal number of staff for project implementation and management. This translates to increased work responsibilities of engaged staff.” -NGO respondent

Many NGO respondents 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 making such operational and programmatic adjustments resulted in reduced program quality, a decrease in sick and long-term leave coverage during a pandemic, reduced salaries and benefits, an unfair workload on their staff, all of which contribute overall to 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. Long-term, expecting NGOs to cover these costs and/or risk delivering sub-par programs is unfair to implementing partners, 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 2021. **Both NGOs' and UNHCR's assessment of the state of their partnership is overwhelmingly strong, with over 90% of UNHCR and NGO respondents rating the relationship as good or excellent.**

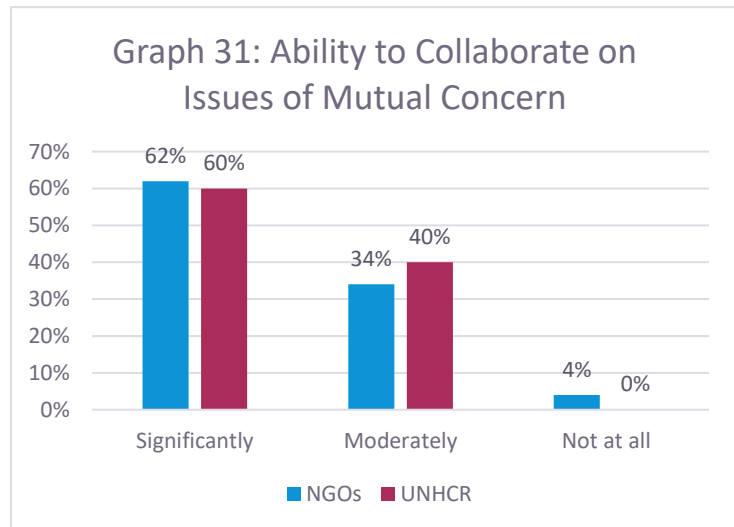




In 2021, UNHCR was asked to rate overall partnership with INGOs and LNNGOs separately, to determine if there is a distinction between local or international partnerships; as shown in Graph 30, the relationship with LNNGOs is reported as slightly better than INGOs, but this is due in large part to the types of partnerships that vary from country context to context, as 7% of UNHCR respondents indicated that their CO does not partner with INGOs.

COLLABORATION

Another component of successful partnership is the ability for UNHCR and NGO partners to collaboratively address issues of mutual concern. Per the feedback received, 100% of UNHCR and 96% NGO respondents felt moderately to significantly able to collaborate to address issues of mutual concern in 2021, demonstrating the strength of collaborative spirit between UNHCR and NGOs.



Both NGOs and UNHCR shared key areas for improvement in their feedback, with additional requests from NGOs including initiation by UNHCR for joint advocacy actions, especially in developing durable and sustainable long-term solutions and programs to strengthen local capacity overall.

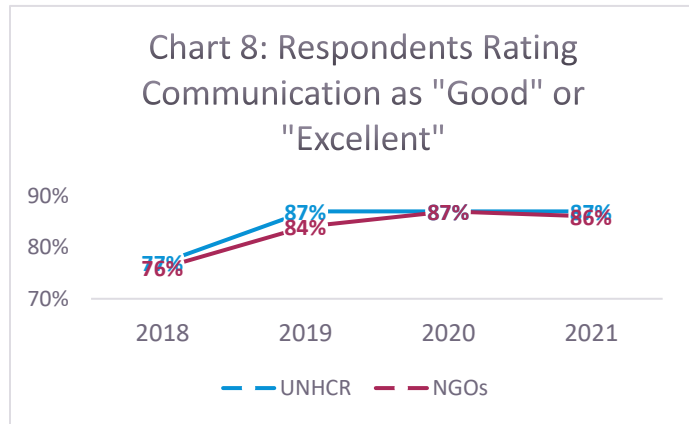
“Some areas of mutual and aligned interests, but in general, UNHCR is not nearly transparent enough to meaningfully collaborate on joint issues.” -NGO respondent

"[Our] COs describe their relationship with UNHCR as collaborative and strategic. Yet, the partnership is still perceived as demanding and challenging, with few country offices indicating that they feel treated as equal partners." -NGO respondent

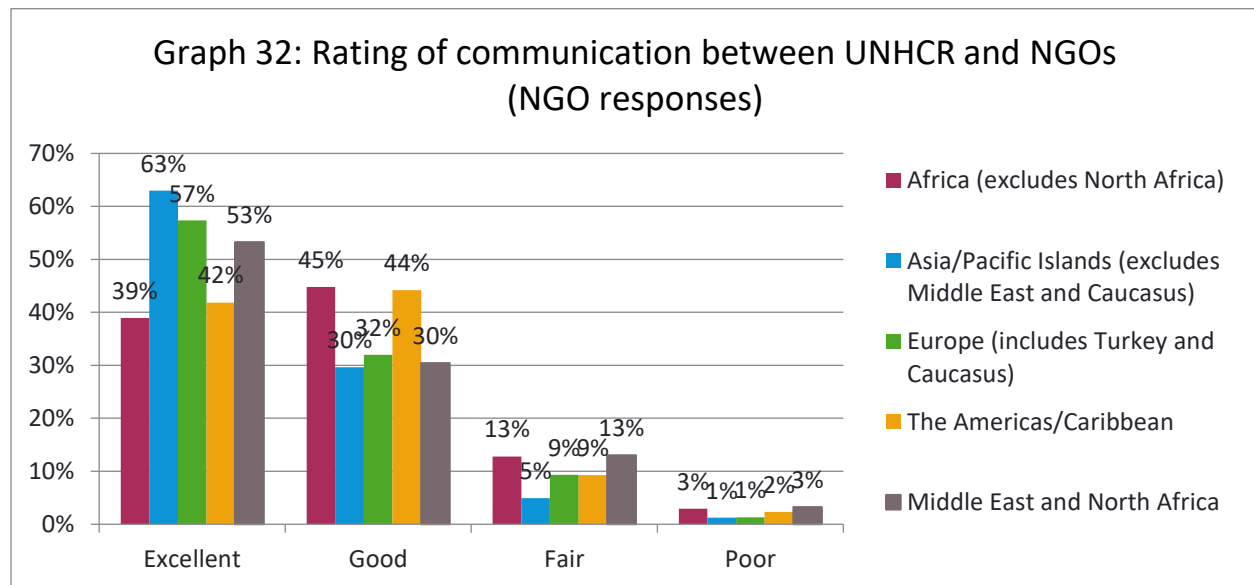
"We still need to make more efforts to reach out to national partners." -UNHCR respondent

COMMUNICATION

Communication is a critical component of successful partnership and, as shown in Chart 8, UNHCR and NGOs consistently rate their communication as good or excellent (selected by 86% of NGOs and 87% of UNHCR respondents). This is very much in line with 2020's feedback and represents an overall positive trend from 2018 to present.



Graph 32 illustrates the breakdown of perspectives on communication success, with some regional distinctions: NGOs in Asia/Pacific Islands consistently rate communication higher than in other regions, with African and MENA reporting "fair" or "poor" communications more often than other regional contexts.

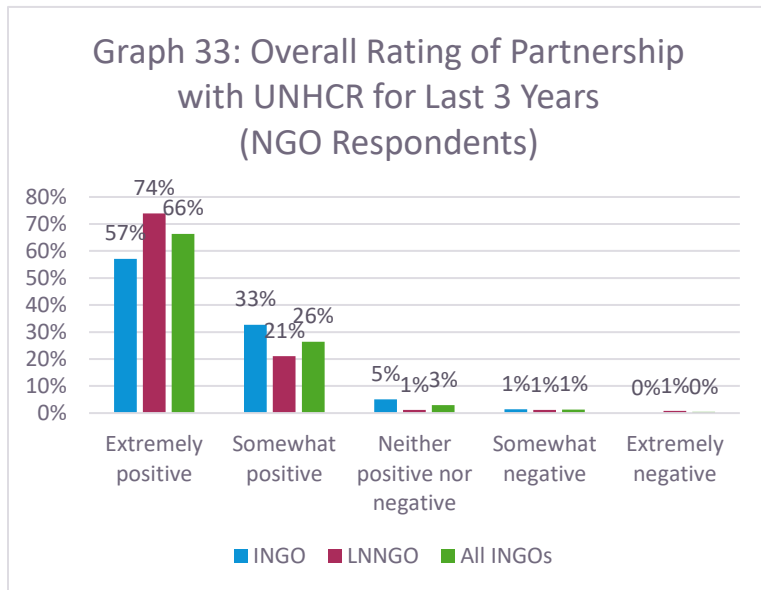


NGOs indicate using a range of communication methodologies (emails, Teams or Zoom meetings, phone calls) and having a fair amount of access to UNHCR colleagues to discuss key issues. However, many NGOs report that timing, specifically turnaround time given to respond to issues or concerns, is especially troublesome. Even given the complicated contexts in which NGOs work, we recommend ensuring that UNHCR Country Office colleagues give adequate response time to minimize mistakes and overall administration burden on NGO partners.

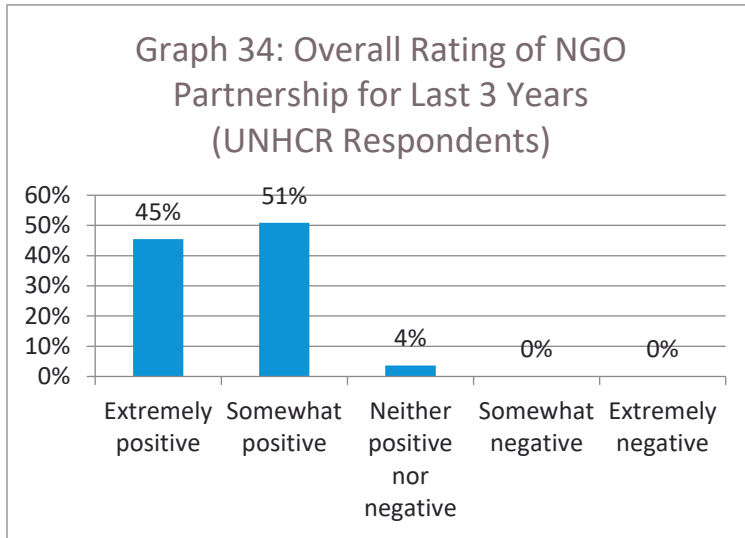
LONG-TERM RELATIONSHIP ASSESSMENT

When asked to look at the course of the last three years, **NGOs overwhelmingly noted their relationship with UNHCR as somewhat or extremely positive (93%)**, with no major discrepancy between regions or in

INGO responses compared to LNNGO feedback. There are a small number of respondents who feel that the UNHCR-NGO relationship has been deteriorating in recent years, with a shift in treatment towards “more of an employer-employee [relationship] than that of a partner,” as noted by one NGO respondent. However, the majority of respondents feel differently: one NGO respondent said that “We have maintained extremely



positive relationship as UNHCR is flexible, regularly communicates, and on our part we do the same,” while another respondent shared that “UNHCR has been a very supportive organization, very committed [to the] needs of the population.”



UNHCR respondents reported similarly positive relationships over the past three years, with 96% reporting their relationship with all NGO partners has been somewhat or extremely positive. It is worth noting that no respondents from UNHCR find their NGO partnerships to be overall negative, with key positive factors being “good communication,” especially “open dialogue with partners.” In terms of

room for improvement, a few UNHCR respondents noted that they are perceived as “a potential source of funding” by NGOs and nothing more. Staffing issues remain a challenge for UNHCR, with one respondent explaining that “limited UNHCR staffing also reduces the ability to have strong relationships” with NGO partners; another explains that “there has been the need to do so much with few resources, resulting in a strain of personnel with stagnant salaries. There is a need to incentivize staff with an inflation-adjusted salary to maintain levels of motivation.”

CONCLUSION

Despite continuing to operate in extremely challenging contexts during an extended global pandemic, the 2021 survey results demonstrate a continued strong relationship between UNHCR and its partners. Feedback from UNHCR staff and NGOs presents opportunities for UNHCR to build upon the successes of recent changes, such as permanently incorporated flexibilities and recent PPA changes, in the years to come. These adjustments show UNHCR's strong commitment to incorporating NGO feedback and adjusting partnering practices accordingly in order to address implementation challenges and distribute humanitarian aid more effectively.

As in previous years, surveying both UNHCR staff and NGO colleagues enables a candid reflection on areas where improvements can be made to build more effective partnerships. As UNHCR offers multi-year partnership agreements for the third year, NGOs indicated increased awareness of this partnership option, as well as demand for continued 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 and informal reports beyond those stipulated to in the PPA terms. UNHCR and NGO respondents were in agreement that delays in PPA signings are largely linked to negotiations over budget, 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, which have been permanently incorporated into UNHCR practices, were particularly appreciated by NGO respondents. However, there is still a notable gap between policies and procedures developed at the UNHCR HQ level as compared to awareness and implementation at the UNHCR Country Office level, a gap that requires exploration and action 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 UNPP is used by less than half of NGO respondents as the main methodology for learning about Calls for Expression of Interest, limiting the UNPP's utility as a widely-used tool to improve partnership. Addressing these areas of concern in the upcoming year will allow for a stronger more efficient relationship between UNHCR and NGOs. Further investigation into the perceived challenges with various partnership 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, UNHCR and NGO respondents requested that the survey be tailored to the country or regional level as they did not always feel able to address global level questions; country-specific reports were also requested by several UNHCR respondents. Additionally, respondents requested that survey questions be shared in advance to enable information collection from various departments and/or for those in contexts with limited access, which can easily be addressed by sharing a pdf version of the questionnaire. 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.