



UNHCR and NGO partner Rokada are distributing rapid thermal kits to people living in Kyiv, ahead of winter. One of the recipients is Oleksandra, 85, who used to be a social worker. © UNHCR/Elisabeth Arnsdorf Haslund.

November 2024

UNHCR-NGO Partnership Survey

2023 Report

InterAction – Humanitarian Policy and Practice



TABLE OF CONTENTS

Acronyms.....	3
Executive Summary	4
Background	4
Key Findings.....	4
Recommendations For UNHCR	6
Recommendations For NGOs	7
Shared Recommendations.....	8
Introduction	9
Methodology	9
Respondent Profile	10
Findings	12
Consultation	12
Multi-Year Strategic Planning	13
Partner Selection and UN Partner Portal	15
Capacity and Localization.....	17
Project Implementation and Risk Sharing	21
Community Feedback.....	22
Partnership Agreement Reporting Requirements	23
New UNHCR Partnership Templates and Terms.....	24
UNHCR Funding Implications.....	26
Overall Partnership Assessment.....	28
Conclusion	33
About InterAction	34

ACRONYMS

AAP - Accountability with Affected People

CBO - Community-Based Organization

CFEI - Call for Expressions of Interest

INGO - International Non-Governmental Organization

LNINGO - Local and National Non-Governmental Organization

MYSP - Multi-Year Strategic Planning

NGO - Non-Governmental Organization

PA - Partnership Agreement

PROMS - Project, Reporting, Oversight and Monitoring Solution

RLO - Refugee-Led Organization

UNHCR - United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees

UNPP - UN Partner Portal

Preface/Standard Notice from UNHCR

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

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

BACKGROUND

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

KEY FINDINGS

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

UNHCR FUNDING IMPLICATIONS: Nearly half (45%) of NGO respondents reported receiving sufficient UNHCR funding to cover the full and fair cost of all shared costs required for the project. Of those who reported not receiving sufficient funding, 77% said they use other funds to cover project costs. 18% of the 39 comments provided on this question particularly noted a deficit of funding for staff salaries.

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

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR UNHCR

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

Collaborate with INGOs to improve institutional support and relationship building with local civil society partners.

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

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR NGOS

- **Proactively seek feedback in the CFEI process:** Take a more active role in soliciting feedback from UNHCR in the event of non-selection for a CFEI proposal to ensure that valuable insights in this process are not overlooked.
- **Strengthen engagement with local partners:** INGOs should work with UNHCR to better leverage UNHCR-funded projects to further build relationships with LNNGOs and local partners, as well as to increase INGO support of local systems.

- **Enhance accountability in reporting:** Improve transparency in financial reporting and fundraising efforts. Openly disclosing NGO funds will help to ensure efficient coordination between NGO partners and UNHCR, prevent any duplication of efforts on project funding, and increase NGO-UNHCR trust.

SHARED RECOMMENDATIONS

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

INTRODUCTION

As the international humanitarian community strives to meet the increasing demands and complexity of humanitarian needs, effective and collaborative partnerships between NGOs and UN agencies are of paramount importance. NGO partners are essential to fulfillment of UNHCR's mandate as implementers of a large portion of the agency's field programming and recipients of significant operational budget. However, the relationship between the agency and NGOs is often challenged by power imbalances, divergent organizational cultures, and, at times, different programmatic priorities and objectives. The nature and extent to which these challenges manifest in UNHCR-NGO partnerships can vary greatly according to operations and the individuals leading them.

In the past, partnership strengthening initiatives between UNHCR and NGOs have been ad hoc, and progress has been difficult to track. Dedicated efforts are required to analyze the range of specific challenges faced in partnership between UN agencies and NGOs, to develop recommendations to strengthen those interactions, and to determine what progress is being made toward resolving the identified challenges.

Since 2014, InterAction, in partnership with UNHCR, has conducted an annual survey to examine the state of partnerships between NGOs and UNHCR. This survey allows stakeholders, particularly UNHCR, to better understand and analyze the dynamics between UNHCR and its partners, and sheds light on opportunities for strengthening partnerships to better meet the needs of forcibly displaced and stateless people.

METHODOLOGY

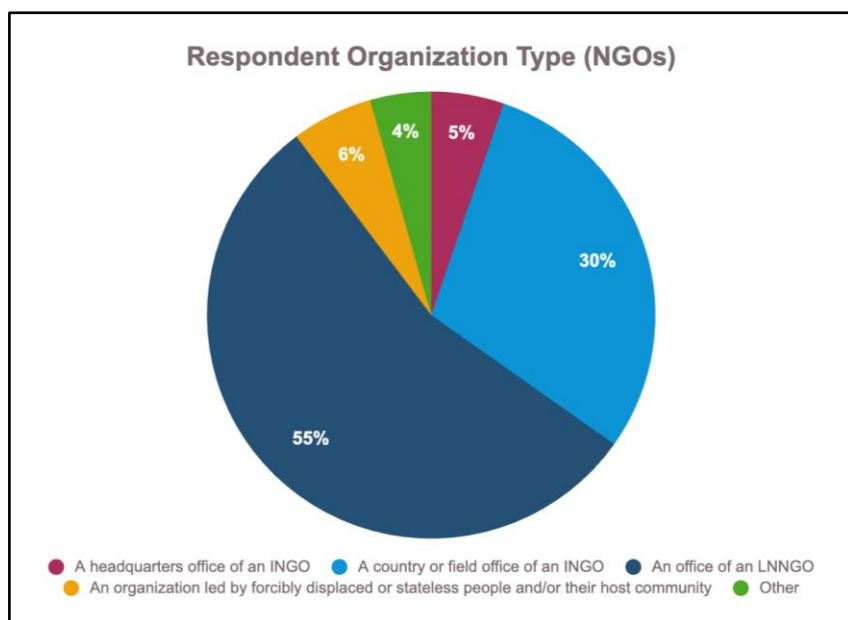
This report synthesizes quantitative and qualitative data gathered via two surveys disseminated to UNHCR and NGO staff, designed to gather perspectives on salient partnership issues. The surveys were translated and distributed in Arabic, English, French, and Spanish to maximize participation and limit barriers to candid feedback sharing. InterAction developed these questionnaires and updates them annually to ensure that feedback is captured regarding new initiatives implemented in the survey year, while preserving questions relating to ongoing issues and programs in order to accurately track any changes in the partnership dynamic over time.

InterAction distributed the NGO staff survey via email to UNHCR’s 2023 funded partners in order to encourage open and constructive feedback. UNHCR distributed the UNHCR staff survey via email to each of the country offices, requesting one response from each operation. Limited identifying information was requested in order to preserve the anonymity of survey respondents and to empower respondents to answer as candidly as possible, while also enabling UNHCR and InterAction to track region-specific trends and develop targeted recommendations as appropriate. NGO respondents were also asked to indicate their organization type (local/national, international, and refugee-led) to allow for response comparison and determine any gaps or discrepancies.

Respondents were permitted to skip questions that were not applicable to their operation. The percentage of responses cited in the findings sections below refer to the number of respondents who engaged with the specific question, which may be lower than the total. For purposes of this report, any featured qualitative responses in Arabic, French, and Spanish have been translated by the authors of this report, and grammatical errors have been corrected where applicable, while maintaining the spirit of the comments.

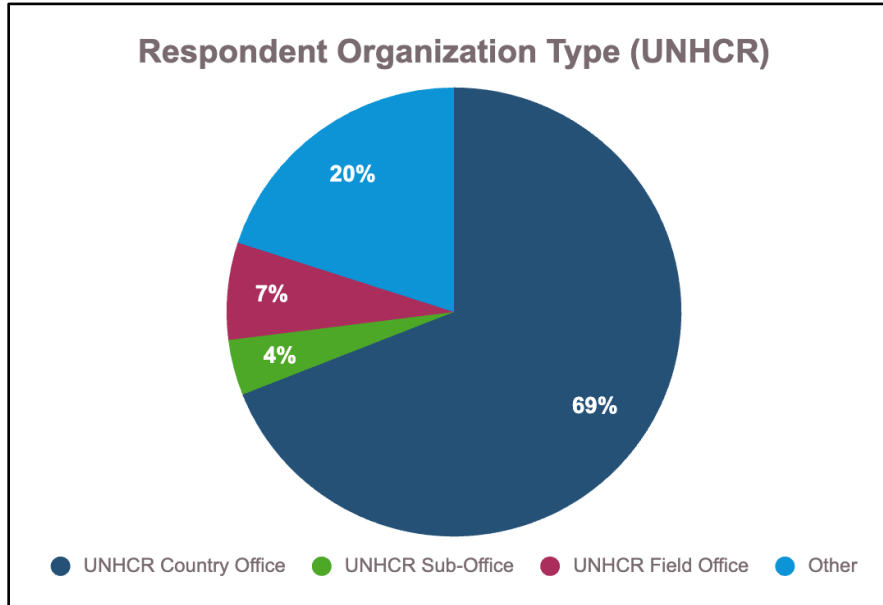
RESPONDENT PROFILE

This report reflects submissions from 82 UNHCR personnel and 524 NGO staff. More than half of NGO survey respondents were from LNNGOs, and a third of respondents were from the headquarters, country office, or field office of an INGO. The remaining 10% of respondents were from RLOs, or various categories of local

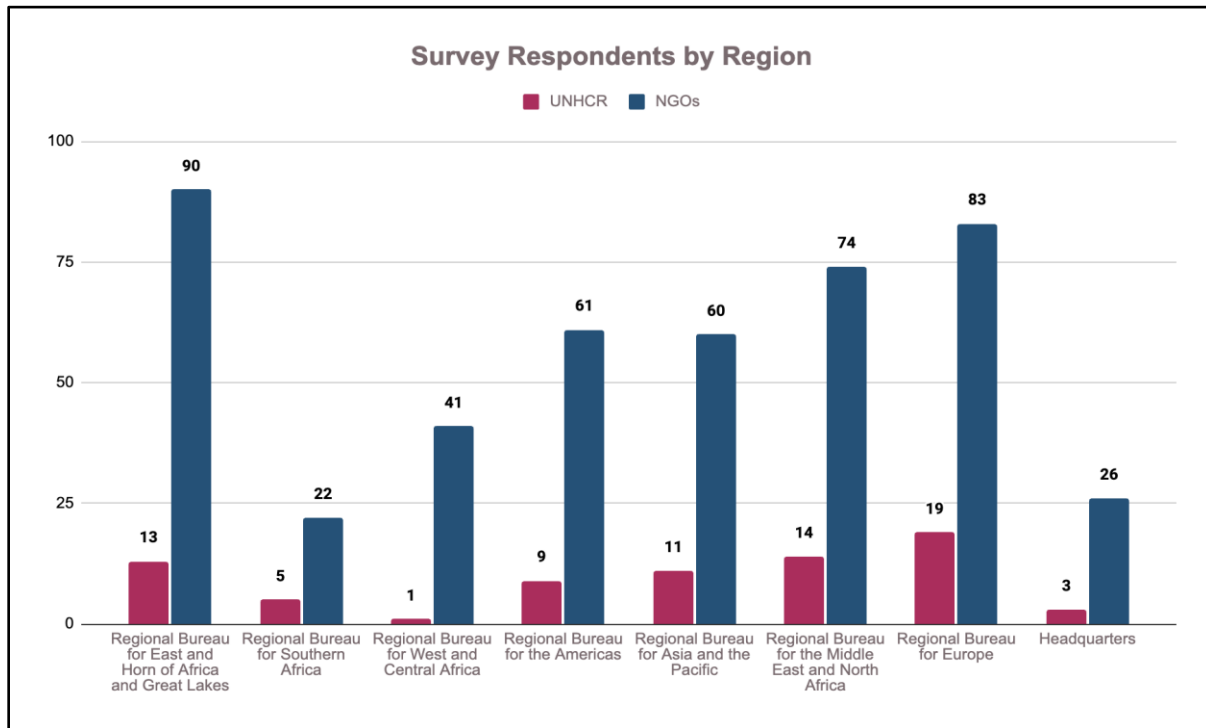


organizations such as religious institutions and universities. 60% of NGO respondents reported

that they are exclusively in contact with their UNHCR Country Office. A fifth of respondents are in contact with the UNHCR Sub Office or Field Office, while the remainder of respondents are in contact with their UNHCR Regional Bureau (4%) or a combination of the Regional Bureau and Country Office (17%).



Almost 75% of UNHCR respondents work at UNHCR country offices, while the remainder work at UNHCR field offices, sub-offices, headquarters, and regional bureaus. 80% of UNHCR respondents work in the program function.

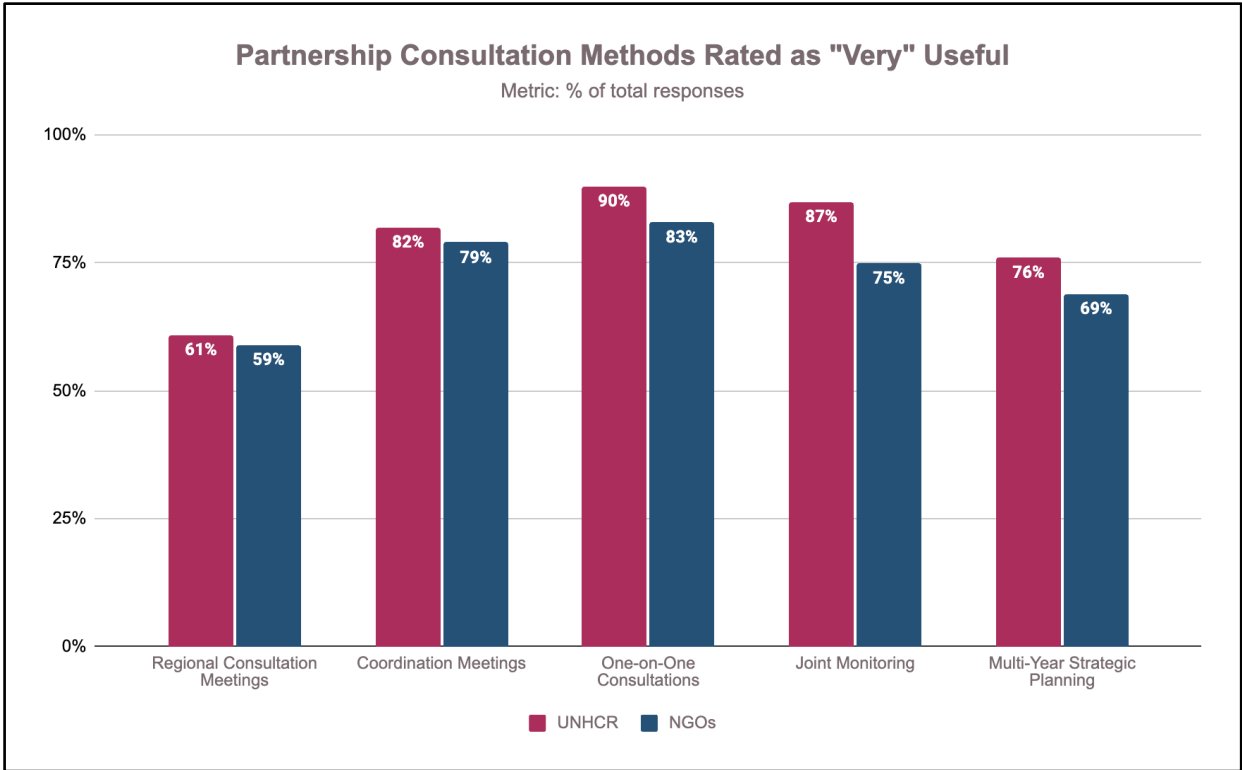


Responses were captured from UNHCR and NGO staff working with country offices located in all seven UNHCR regional bureaus, as well as UNHCR staff working at headquarters.

FINDINGS

CONSULTATION

UNHCR and NGO partners engage in a range of formal consultation mechanisms to ensure that both parties are kept up to date on project implementation and delivery and to create channels for rapidly addressing obstacles to project delivery and providing actionable feedback. These consultation mechanisms include one-on-one consultations, regional NGO consultation meetings, coordination meetings, joint monitoring, and MYSP.



Consistent with the findings from 2022, when asked how useful their operation found different types of consultations in 2023, responses from UNHCR and NGO staff were overwhelmingly positive. 100% of UNHCR respondents, and between 95% and 97% of NGO respondents depending on the consultation method, rated coordination meetings, one-on-one consultations, joint monitoring, and MYSP as “somewhat” or “very” useful. One-on-one consultations were rated by both UNHCR and NGO respondents as the most valuable type of consultation by a

small margin.¹ One NGO respondent commented that both one-on-one consultations and inter-agency coordination meetings were helpful for enabling NGO partners and UNHCR to collaborate in a way that is “focused and directed towards specific issues, allowing for in-depth discussions and tailored feedback.” Another noted that these forms of consultation were “effective in promoting a comprehensive understanding of the evolving needs and challenges within the camps.” A UNHCR respondent affirmed that all forms of consultation are mutually beneficial to both the UNHCR operation and NGOs, as they enable UNHCR to “actively engage with our partners, obtain their views on the situation in the country,” while helping the NGO partners to get a broader view of UNHCR’s engagement.

Across NGO and UNHCR personnel, regional consultation meetings were identified as slightly less useful than other consultations options, rated as “somewhat” or “very” useful by 94% of NGO respondents and 88% of UNHCR respondents. One NGO respondent clarified that regional consultation meetings did not include sufficient “space for discussion and feedback,” and another NGO respondent noted that, while the regional consultation meetings do offer a “broader perspective” on regional programming, they “lack the same level of focus and specificity” as other consultation forms.

MULTI-YEAR STRATEGIC PLANNING

The surveys were designed with a particular focus on UNHCR and NGO partners’ experiences with the MYSP, which was introduced by UNHCR as a consultation mechanism in 2021, marking a shift in approach to results-based management and country-level planning. MYSPs provide a framework for UNHCR-NGO partnership consultation for 3–5-year periods. Depending upon the stage of the 3–5-year MYSP cycle, responses from NGO partners may reflect their experiences engaging with a partial review or update of an existing multi-year strategy.

78% of UNHCR respondents affirmed that all NGO partners were invited to engage in the country-level MYSP for 2023. UNHCR respondents who noted that their partner NGOs were *not* invited to engage in the 2023 country-level MYSP explained that either the operation did not have capacity to “lead a more participative inclusion of partners in the multi-year strategy”; that

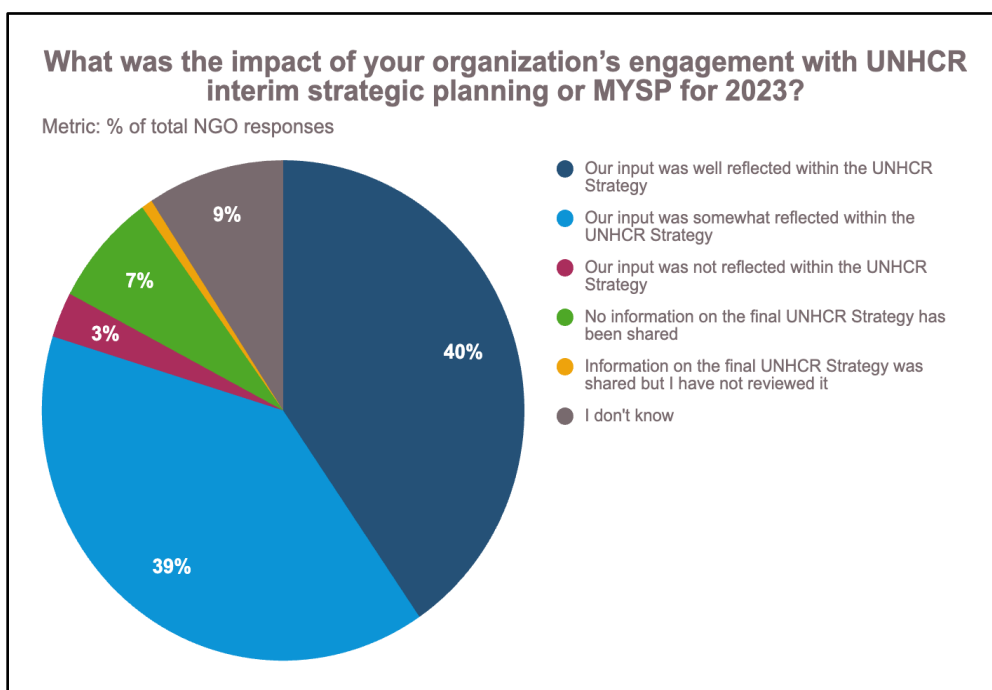
¹ Not all forms of consultation are utilized in UNHCR’s engagement with all NGO partners. Of the 422 NGO respondents who responded to this question, 31% (125 respondents) noted that Regional NGO Consultation Meetings were not relevant to their organization, and 18% (76 respondents) said that MYSP was not relevant to their organization.

“unpredictable circumstances” created obstacles to inviting partners to the MYSP; or that there was a lack of “clarity on how to engage partners in the planning process.”

75% of LNNGO and INGO respondents affirmed that their organization was either invited to or consulted regarding a country-level MYSP or interim strategic planning stakeholder meeting. By contrast, of the 21 RLO respondents that engaged with this question, only 7 (33%) said that their organization was either invited to or consulted regarding a country-level MYSP or interim strategic planning stakeholder meeting, with the remainder answering that they were neither invited nor consulted. Findings regarding the rate of inclusion of NGO partners in the MYSP process were consistent across regions.

Reflecting on the impact of their organization’s engagement with UNHCR interim strategic planning or MYSP for 2023, the quantitative feedback from NGO respondents across organization type (INGO, LNNGO, and RLO) and across regions was highly positive, and consistent with last year’s survey findings. 79% of respondents said that their input was either well reflected within the UNHCR strategy or was somewhat reflected within the UNHCR strategy. Only

3% of respondents answered that their input was not reflected within the UNHCR strategy.² One respondent praised the MYSP, saying, “we participated in the Multi-Year Strategic



² The remaining 17% of respondents did not know the extent to which their input was incorporated into the UNHCR strategy, either because they had not reviewed the UNHCR strategy material, or because further information regarding the strategy had not been shared.

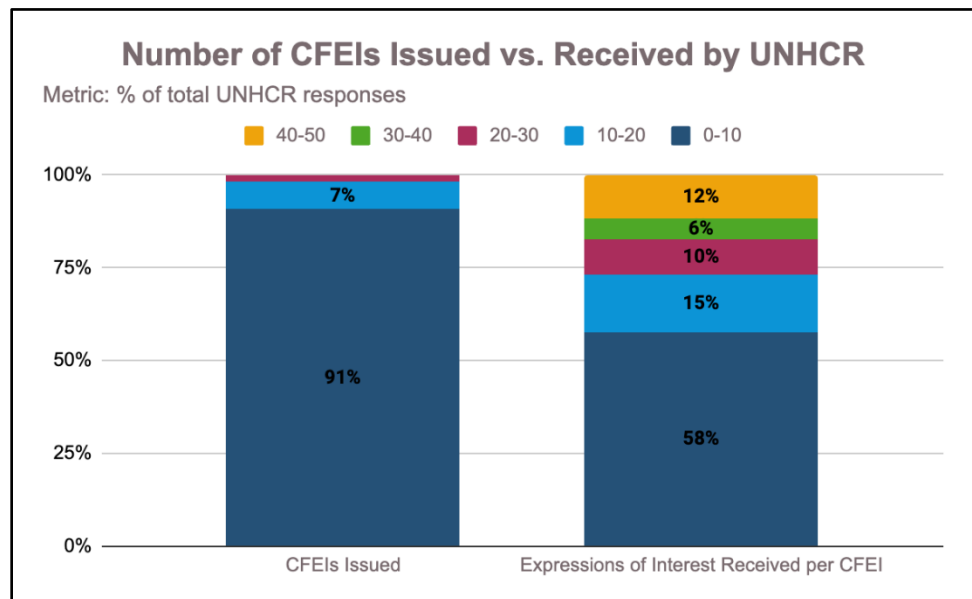
Planning processes hence learning more insights about the direction of UNHCR and how we fit in to contribute to the milestones set as we were measuring our progress.” Several other respondents noted, however, that MYSP discussions were insufficiently inclusive of NGO partners.

In order to fully realize the potential of the MYSP to enhance UNHCR and NGO partnerships and improve the quality of project delivery, further steps should be taken to ensure that partners are both invited to and actively included in the MYSP processes, discussions, and results.

PARTNER SELECTION AND UN PARTNER PORTAL

UNHCR colleagues were surveyed regarding their practices for issuing CFEIs, including the number of CFEIs issued, number of applications received, and time given to NGOs to respond. The UNPP is the official, centralized platform through which CFEIs are published by UNHCR and other participating UN agencies. In practice, when describing the process through which CFEIs are distributed, only 25% of UNHCR respondents (12 individuals) replied that their office exclusively posts CFEIs on the official UNPP. The majority of UNHCR respondents (73%) said that while they always post CFEIs on the UNPP, they also make use of a diversity of other distribution channels to ensure broad dissemination of the CFEIs. These included local social media and traditional media channels, mailing lists, and national tendering portals.

90% of UNHCR respondents who engaged with this question (49 individuals) issued 0-10 CFEIs in 2023, and no UNHCR operation issued more than 30 CFEIs. Elaborating on these findings,

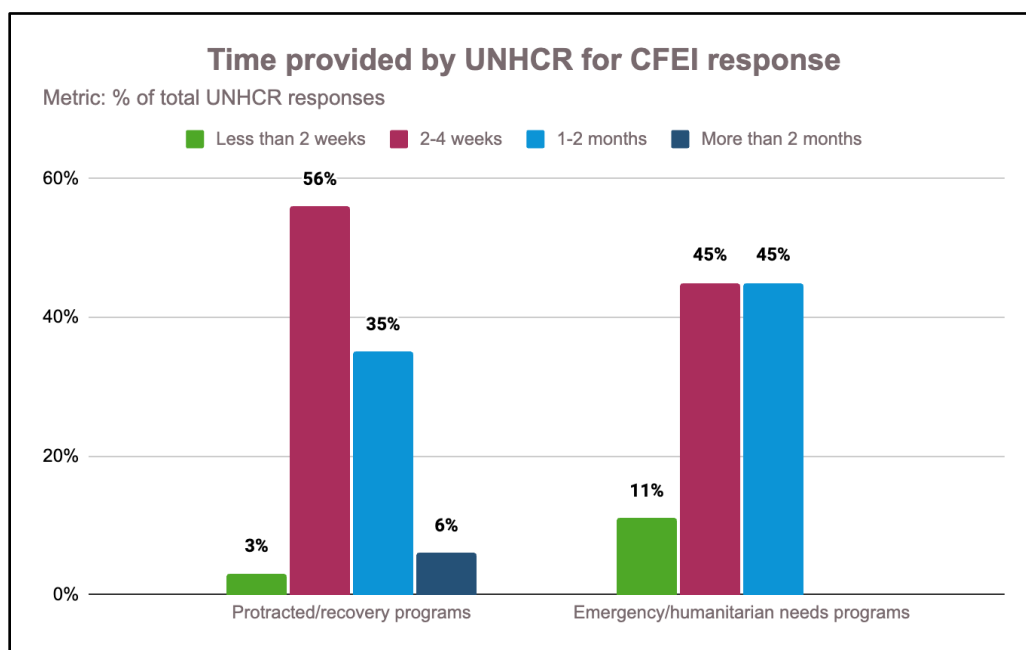


several respondents noted that many operations did not issue CFEIs in 2023, or only issued a limited number of CFEIs, as several partner organizations were already selected for

programming as a product of the operation’s Multi-Year Strategy initiated in 2022. Almost two-thirds of UNHCR respondents (30 respondents, 58%) received 0-10 concept notes per CFEI. This constitutes a 20% shift from last year’s survey, in which only 48% of respondents noted receiving 0-10 concept notes per CFEI and indicates an overall downward trend in the number of concept notes that UNHCR operations are receiving in response to CFEIs.

According to UNHCR respondents, in about 90% of cases, NGO partners were given 2-8 weeks to respond to CFEIs for both protracted/recovery programs and emergency/humanitarian needs programs. The majority of NGO respondents - 84% - affirmed that this period of time was sufficient for their organization to prepare a proposal in response.

Some concerns were raised regarding the extent to which UNHCR provided NGOs with clear feedback if they had participated in a UNHCR CFEI and were not selected. Only 16% of INGO and LNNGO respondents answered that UNHCR proactively provided clear reasoning for the decision of non-selection for a CFEI, and only an additional 5% of respondents answered that they were able to receive feedback on their non-selection from UNHCR after they requested it.



5% of respondents answered that they requested feedback from UNHCR, but UNHCR did not respond, or responded with unclear reasoning. Of the 22 RLO respondents, a higher 36% (8

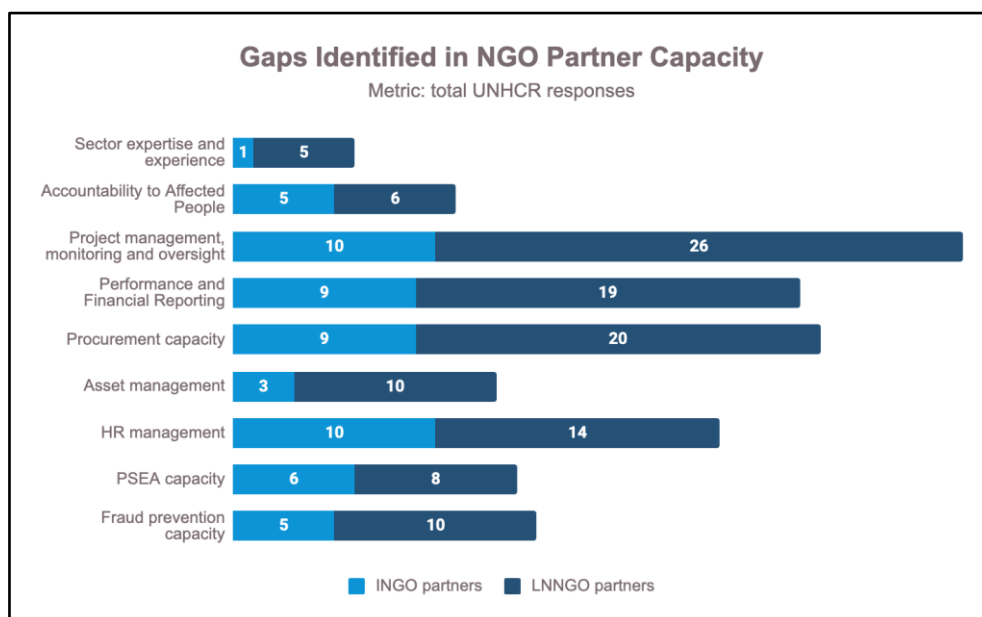
in total) answered that UNHCR proactively provided clear reasoning for the decision of non-selection for a CFEI. 66% of NGO staff answered that they either didn’t know whether reasoning had been provided or that the question did not apply to them. Since this survey was

disseminated only to funded NGO partners, further investigation is needed to develop a clear understanding of the CFEI non-selection feedback process.

CAPACITY AND LOCALIZATION

UNHCR places high importance on capacity strengthening and localization as essential to ensuring effective, participatory, and locally led humanitarian action in support of forcibly displaced and stateless communities. Comments from UNHCR respondents affirmed that “most LNNGO and INGO partners in the operation have high capacity in all areas.” With that, in evaluating partner capacity, UNHCR survey respondents identified three main areas in which the most significant gaps were perceived:

- Project management, monitoring, and oversight;
- Performance and financial reporting; and
- Procurement capacity



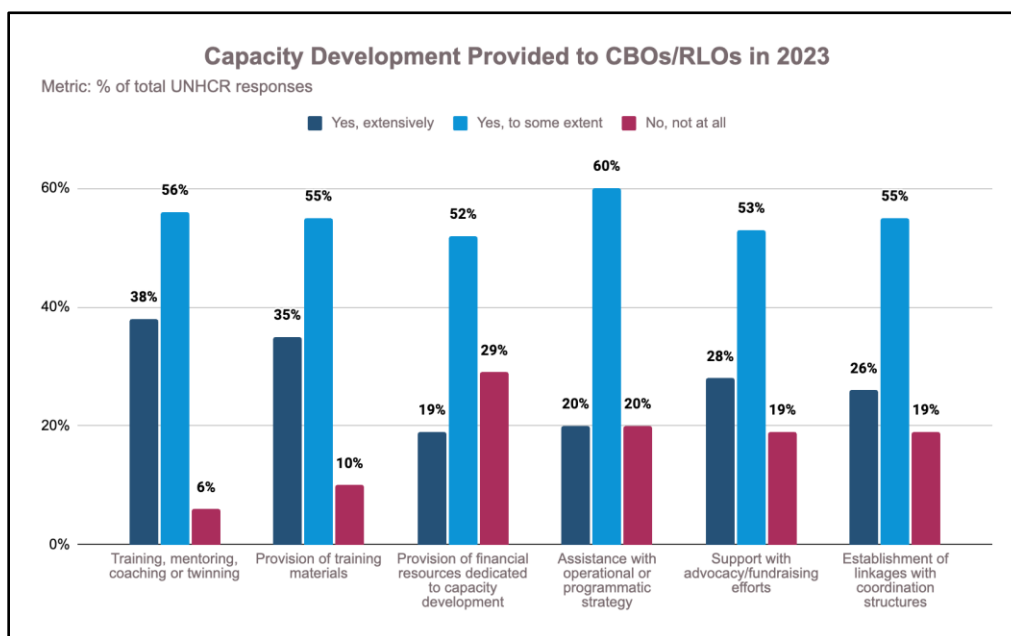
The highest percentage of capacity gaps were identified among LNNGO partners. To address these gaps, UNHCR respondents confirmed that all NGO partners are receiving partial-to-extensive

capacity strengthening support from UNHCR operations. In 2023, these capacity strengthening efforts included holding bilateral meetings with partners to provide capacity strengthening support, the provision of tailored, formal training to address capacity gaps (both those identified by the UNHCR operations and by the partners themselves), verification visits followed by updates “provided to enable them to take ownership of project management tools and procedures,” workshops, joint monitoring, and annual training plans. UNHCR respondents also

noted that partners are making efforts to independently address capacity gaps. One UNHCR respondent identified the “frequent rotation of staff and management” as a general obstacle to effective capacity strengthening initiatives.

UNHCR respondents were asked to elaborate on the specific support provided to community-based organizations (CBOs) and RLOs, given the particular importance of these organizations to successful and tailored response programming for forcibly displaced and stateless people. A high

percentage of UNHCR personnel reported providing CBO/RLO partners with some-to-extensive capacity strengthening support in at least one form

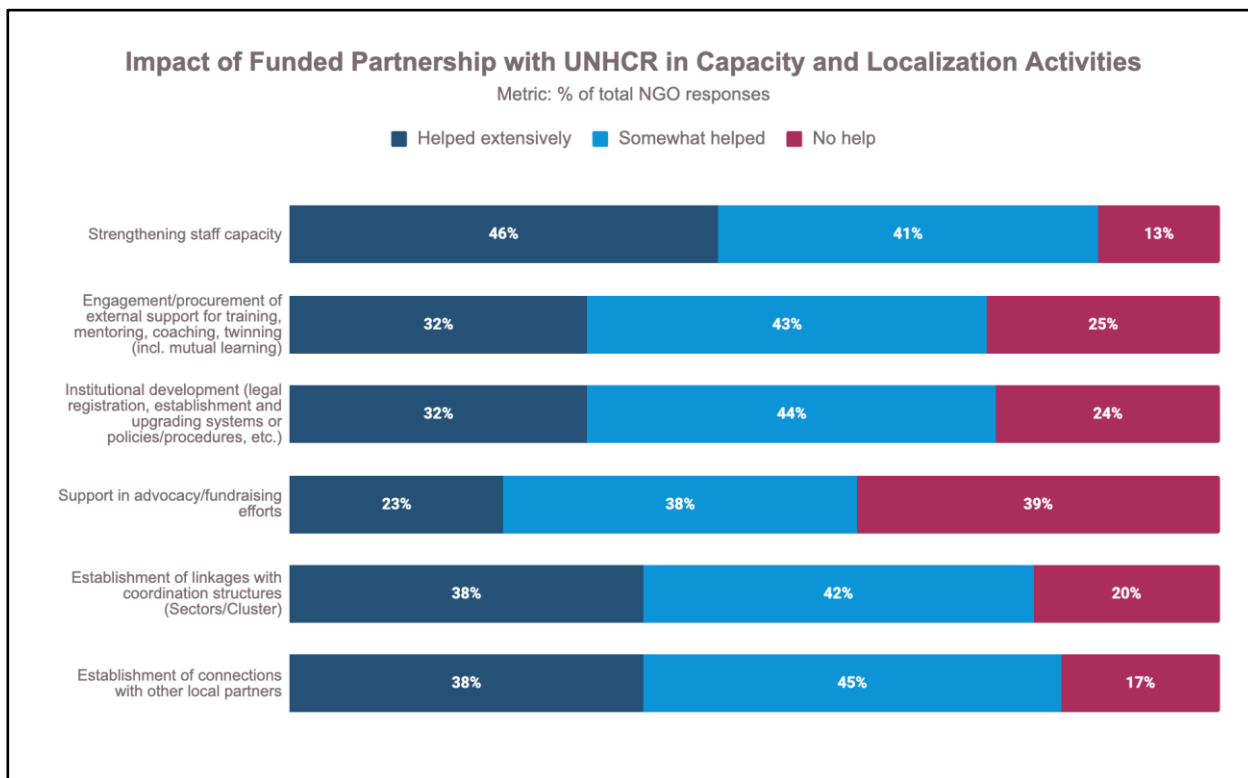


of either training, mentoring, coaching, or twinning (94%),³ provision of training material (90%), provision of financial resources (71%), assistance with strategy (80%), support with advocacy/fundraising efforts (81%), and establishment of linkages with coordination structures (81%).

Responses from NGO staff confirmed the high level of support provided by UNHCR in 2023. Of the 256 NGO respondents who responded about the extent partnership with UNHCR helped their organization with a series of activities, either directly or through support costs, 87%

³ Twinning can be described as any partnership activity between states, NGOs, service providing organizations, international organizations and/or UNHCR which aims to encourage an emerging or new resettlement state to develop or strengthen its resettlement program. It is also any partnership activity which allows a state or NGO to improve the effectiveness of their existing resettlement program. Successful twinning arrangements reinforce UNHCR’s global strategic objectives for resettlement by strengthening global protection activities and resettlement capacity and reflecting the reciprocal learning opportunities for both partners.

reported receiving some-to-extensive help from UNHCR to strengthen staff capacity, and 83% reported receiving some-to-extensive help from UNHCR to establish connections with other local partners. A slightly lower 75% of respondents (approximately 192 respondents) reported that they received some-to-extensive help in engaging/procuring external support for training,

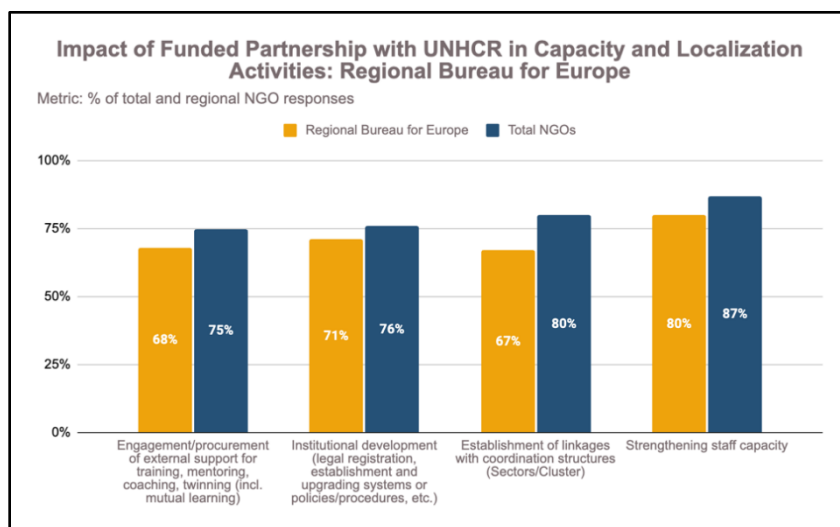
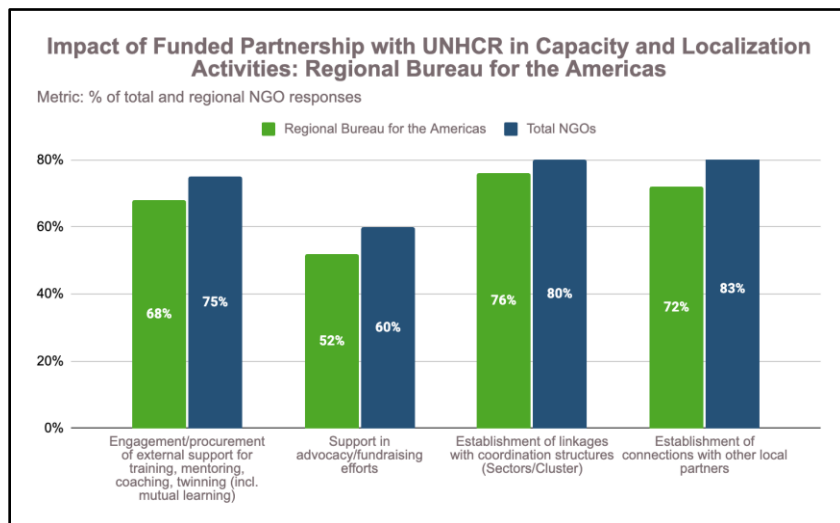


mentoring, coaching, twinning and institutional development. An outlier, only 61% of NGO respondents reported receiving some form of support from UNHCR with advocacy/fundraising efforts, making this a potential area for partnership improvement.

Of the seven regional UNHCR bureaus, NGOs partnering with operations in the Regional Bureau for the Americas and the Regional Bureau for Europe reported receiving a slightly lower rate of support across capacity strengthening activities. NGO partners associated with Regional Bureau for the Americas reported receiving lower than average rates of UNHCR support for engaging/procuring external support for training, mentoring, coaching, and twinning (7% differential), advocacy/fundraising efforts (8% differential), the establishment of linkages with coordination structures (4% differential), and the establishment of connections with other local partners (11% differential). NGO partners associated with the Regional Bureau for Europe also reported receiving lower rates of capacity strengthening in the areas of strengthening staff and capacity (7% differential), engaging/procuring external support for training, mentoring, coaching,

and twinning (6% differential), institutional development (5% differential), and establishing linkages with coordination structures (13% differential). While these deviations from the NGO average are subtle and may reflect other regional factors, they merit additional investigation as UNHCR works to increase its overall capacity strengthening efforts for NGO partners.

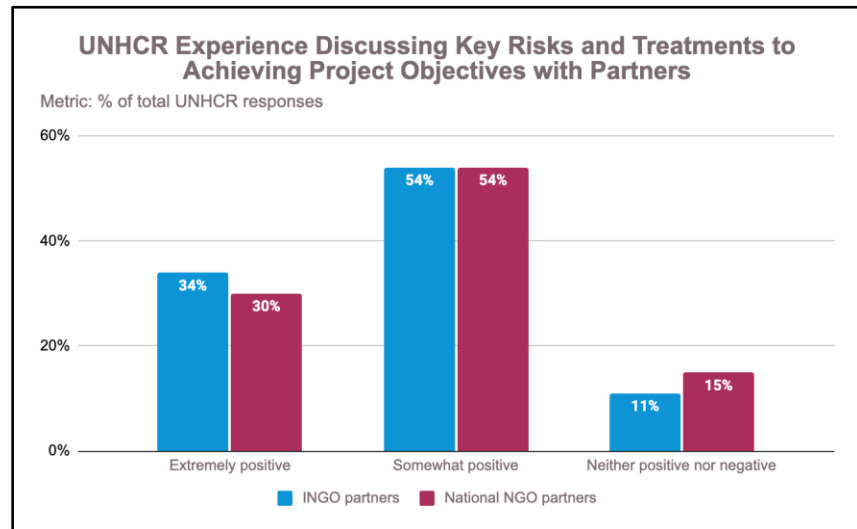
When asked about the support they provided to LNNGOs/CBOs under UNHCR-funded projects in 2023, INGO responses were mixed. Over half of INGO respondents did not provide any direct funding to LNNGOs/CBOs for capacity strengthening, nor did they provide LNNGOs/CBOs with support in fundraising activities. On the other hand, between 51%-67% of INGO respondents affirmed providing some-to-extensive support to LLNGOs/CBOs for training, mentoring, coaching, and twinning (67%); technical support for institutional development (51%); dissemination of information (61%); and inclusion in project/program design and decision-making (55%). There is an opportunity for UNHCR to work jointly with INGOs to further support LNNGOs/CBOs under UNHCR-funded projects.



PROJECT IMPLEMENTATION AND RISK SHARING

UNHCR is committed to supporting partners to collaboratively identify and mitigate project risks that may impact successful project implementation. To this end, respondents were surveyed about their experiences discussing key risks and treatments to achieve project objectives.

UNHCR responses regarding discussions of key risks and treatments with NGO partners was highly positive. 88% of UNHCR staff rated their experiences with INGO partners as somewhat-to-extremely positive, and 84% rated the experience with LNNGO partners as somewhat-to-extremely positive.



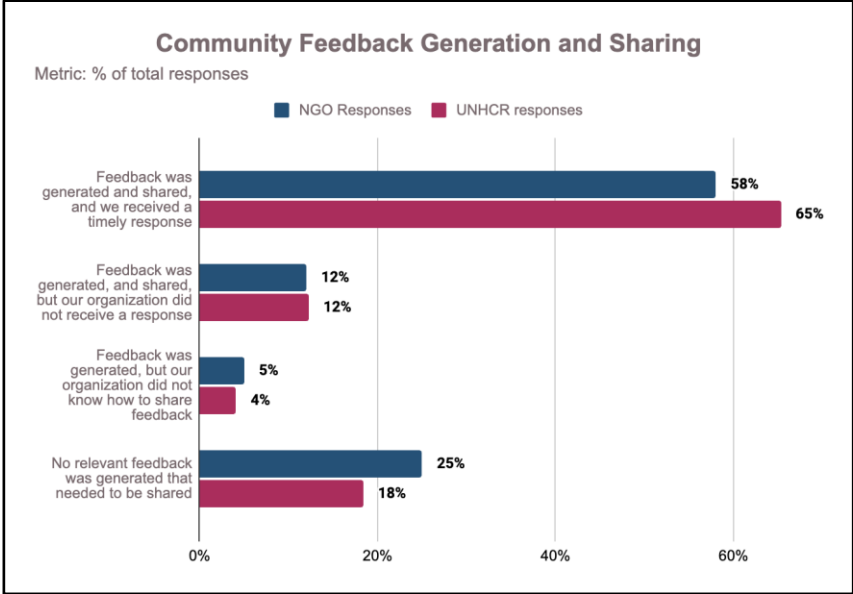
Reflecting upon these ratings, UNHCR respondents affirmed that partners were receptive to feedback and guidance on the process, describing partners as “open to discussing any potential risks and their possible treatments.” Respondents noted that attendance of training workshops was high, and that joint monitoring and risk assessment exercises were useful for identifying risks and promoting risk mitigation efforts. Several respondents emphasized that “fluid” and regular communication was essential for ensuring partners’ understanding of risks and risk mitigation efforts.

When asked to rate their engagement with UNHCR to constructively discuss the key risks and treatments to achieving project objectives, NGO partner responses were also overwhelmingly positive, with 80% of respondents rating this engagement as somewhat-to-extremely positive. In the comments, respondents echoed that regular, even frequent, meetings and communication between UNHCR and NGO partners enabled partners to receive the “necessary support enhancing the opportunities to improve implementation” and mitigate risks. Multiple respondents noted that this engagement was mutually beneficial for both UNHCR and partner organizations, as both collaborated to “better serve the target populations.”

NGO respondents further characterized UNHCR’s efforts to share responsibilities for mitigating key risks to achieving project objectives as predominantly positive, with 48% identifying it as extremely positive, and 35% as somewhat positive. According to NGO respondents, this positive engagement was facilitated by UNHCR’s constant, open, proactive, and solutions-oriented guidance and communication, as well as UNHCR’s willingness to be flexible in making project adjustments when needed to mitigate potential risks. Concerns raised by respondents related to risks to project implementation primarily revolved around funding constraints, which were seen as limiting the potential impact and efficacy of the project. Funding constraints were highlighted by some NGO respondents as increasingly worrisome in the context of the rising cost of goods in their program areas.

COMMUNITY FEEDBACK

UNHCR is committed to engaging in regular and inclusive communication with communities participating in UNHCR-funded projects, actively ensuring affected communities are informed and involved in project planning and implementation and that their feedback on project implementation is regularly taken into account.



When asked about the process of sharing community feedback with partners about UNHCR-funded projects, 65% of UNHCR staff responded that community feedback was generated by the UNHCR operations and shared with the partner, and that UNHCR received a timely response. In 22% of responses, respondents did

not share feedback with the partner, either because they did not know how to share feedback, or because no relevant feedback was generated. In only 12% of cases, respondents noted cases where feedback was generated and shared with a partner, but the partner did not revert with a response. Similarly, 58% of NGO respondents affirmed that community feedback was

generated by the organization, was shared with UNHCR, and the organization received a timely response in return. Only 12% of respondents answered that community feedback was generated by the organization and was shared with UNHCR, but no response was received. Notably, 5% of respondents answered that feedback was generated, but the organization did not know how to share it with UNHCR. In this case, further clarity on the feedback process would be helpful for improving this dynamic between NGO partners and UNHCR operations.

PARTNERSHIP AGREEMENT REPORTING REQUIREMENTS

In 2020, UNHCR reduced reporting requirements under its PA for 2021 and beyond.⁴ Consistent with 2022 survey findings, 91% of NGO respondents affirmed that UNHCR adhered to the PA reporting requirements in 2023 for most-to-all projects, with a high 72% of respondents answering that UNHCR adhered to these requirements for all projects.

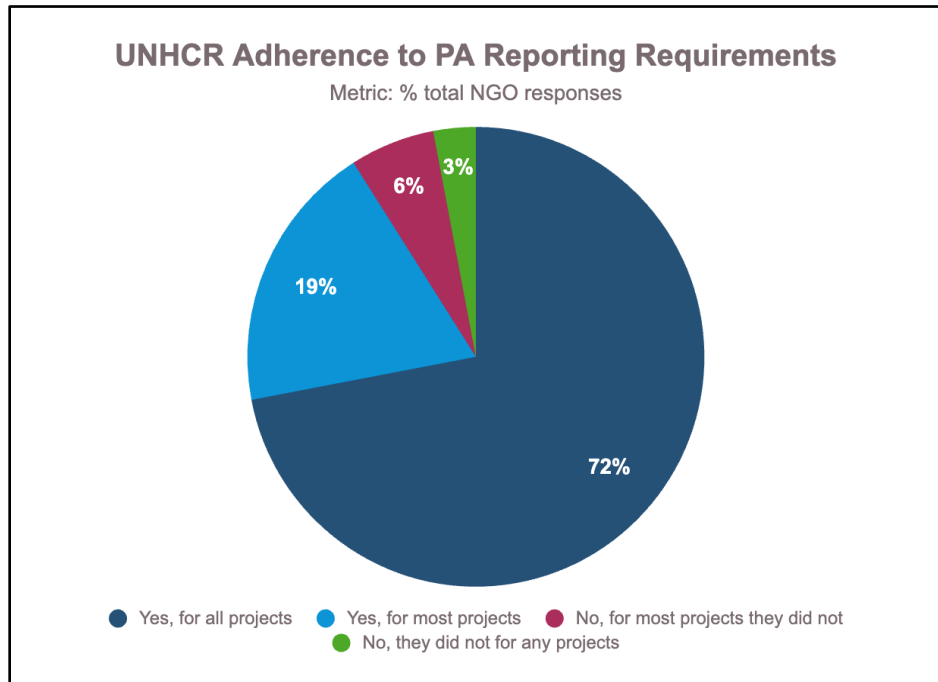
Qualitative input from NGO respondents demonstrated a more nuanced perspective on this issue. Some respondents were highly satisfied with UNHCR reporting requirements:

“In 2023, UNHCR adhered to the reporting requirements for all projects. This adherence reflects their commitment to reducing reporting burdens and streamlining processes. As a result, our organization was able to focus more on project implementation rather than extensive reporting, which enhanced overall efficiency and collaboration.”

Ten of 39 comments left by respondents, however, noted that reporting requirements remain overly cumbersome for organizations, and urged further consideration by UNHCR for how this administrative burden could be alleviated. One NGO respondent said that in spite of more efficient reporting requirements in 2023, UNHCR operations continue to request additional reports. UNHCR should encourage universal compliance with PA requirements and discourage additional requests from country offices.

⁴ PA reporting requirements were further streamlined as part of a more comprehensive change in UNHCR’s partnership management framework in late 2023, for agreements starting in 2024 and onwards. Feedback regarding this latest round of reforms will be solicited in future UNHCR-NGO partnership surveys.

UNHCR respondents also highlighted areas for improvement in project reporting, with several respondents calling for partners to specifically “increase their transparency” in disclosing funding they receive from other donors to avoid funding overlaps.



NEW UNHCR PARTNERSHIP TEMPLATES AND TERMS

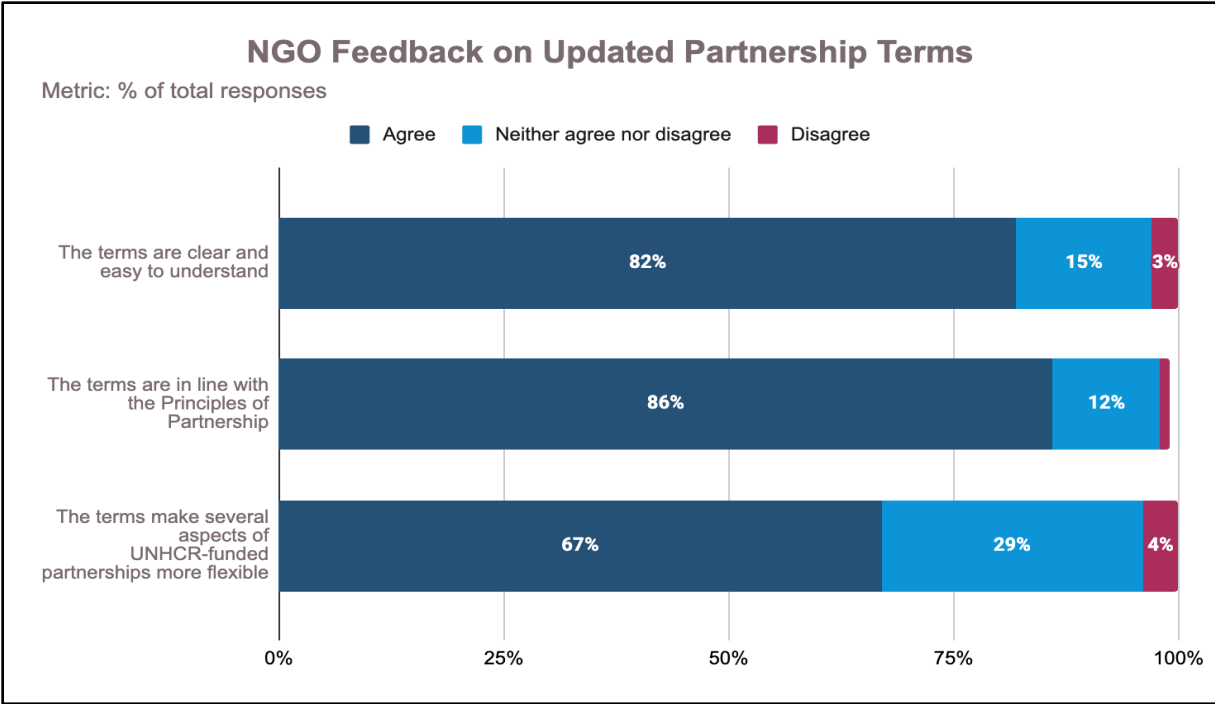
In 2023, UNHCR introduced a new architecture for partnership terms and templates. Approximately three-quarters of NGO respondents reported that they did not experience challenges adapting to and utilizing these new formats. In their qualitative input, NGO respondents emphasized that UNHCR-led trainings and overall responsiveness when issues or questions arose were useful for mitigating any challenges encountered when adapting their systems to integrate the new templates.

Responses identified that, of the new templates, the new Financial Plan was the most difficult to adopt, with 30% of respondents reporting challenges. In their qualitative comments on the Financial Plan, several respondents noted several technical issues with the way budgeting was structured within the Financial Plan template. Some respondents commented that even in instances where UNHCR personnel attempted to support the organization through difficulties with the Financial Plan, UNHCR personnel did not have the technical expertise required to comprehensively address issues or answer the organization’s questions.



In late 2023, along with its new partnership templates, UNHCR published new partnership terms for the following years. Over 80% of respondents agreed that the updated partnership terms were clear and easy to understand, and were in line with the Principles of Partnership, which emphasize equality, transparency, results orientation, responsibility, and complementarity as central to UNHCR programming. A less conclusive 67% of respondents agreed that the terms make several aspects of UNHCR-funded partnerships more flexible.

In addition to the above templates, NGO and UNHCR respondents also referenced challenges in adapting to PROMS, which was introduced by UNHCR as a new project management system in September 2023. Reflecting on the PROMS solution’s first year, one NGO respondent wrote that the “transition to the new PROMS system presented a considerable challenge for our organization. While the system provides a transparent and comprehensive platform, the transition process was demanding for all stakeholders. It introduced a significant bureaucratic element, increasing the overall administrative workload.” A UNHCR respondent echoed these concerns, writing that the “introduction of PROMS/Aconex posed many challenges to partnership management. Some of the technical difficulties impacted negatively on the cooperation between UNHCR and partners and in general, the tasks in PROMS proved to be an additional burden for partners.” Moving into PROMS’ second year of use, the integration of the



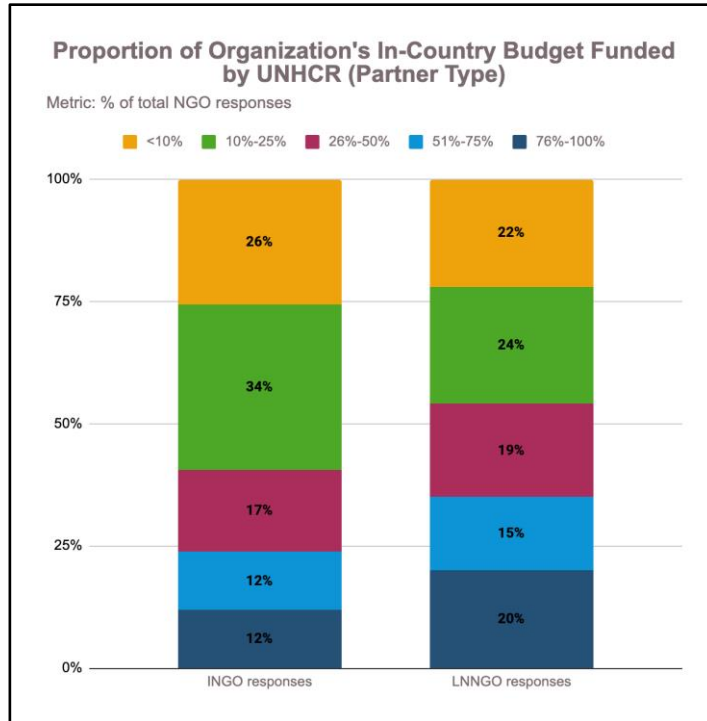
solution should be continuously tracked to determine whether further improvements are needed to ensure that it is efficient and accessible for both UNHCR and NGO partners.

UNHCR FUNDING IMPLICATIONS

To better understand the funding support dynamic between NGOs and UNHCR, NGO partners were asked to share the proportion of their in-country budget provided by UNHCR and reflect on the potential effect that reduced UNHCR financial support would have on their programming. INGO and LNNGO respondents across regions represented a wide range of dependence on UNHCR for program funding.

45% of all NGO respondents, including INGOs, LNNGOs, and RLOs, reported that UNHCR-funded project budgets provided funding for the full and fair cost of all indirect and direct shared costs required for the project. Of the remaining respondents that said UNHCR funding was insufficient to cover their full and fair required project costs, 77% reported that the organization had to use other funds to cover costs, while 19% of NGO respondents said that they adjusted project implementation to meet cost parameters defined by UNHCR.

This finding is even more significant among INGOs. Only 28% of INGOs respondents answered that UNHCR funding is sufficient to cover all of their indirect and direct shared costs required for the project, as compared to 52% of LNNGOs. However, 61% of INGO respondents reported having the capacity to compensate for this deficit by using other funds to cover these costs, as opposed to 37% of LNNGO respondents.

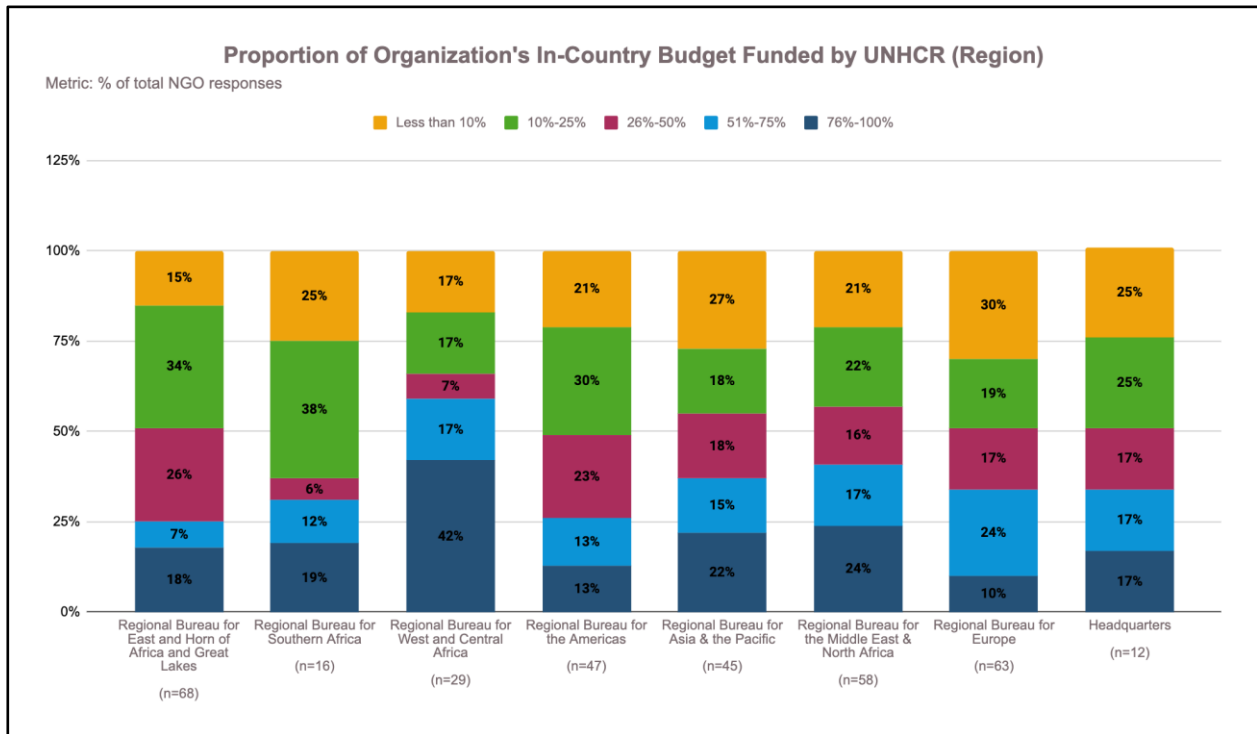


Building upon these findings, comments from NGO respondents emphasized that budget constraints would, at times, have a significant impact on the organization’s abilities to implement projects. Several respondents noted in particular that staff salary costs were not met by UNHCR funding.

One respondent noted that their organization would “struggle to implement the projects properly ... There is insufficient logistics, finance, HR, IM/IT, Security and Senior Management coverage to meet UNHCR's direct requirements, especially in reporting/dealing with amendments and providing the partnership support that is requested. These are an integral part of the project and are not valued as such. It also significantly increases risk, particularly as the actual value of the project (with GIK/cash) is 10x more than the budget, but not then reflected in the indirect/direct shared costs provided. Therefore, this falls significantly short of good principles of donorship, partnership and fairness.”

These concerns regarding both the availability of funding needed to effectively implement projects and the extent to which UNHCR funding deficits indicate an insufficient valuation of certain elements of partners’ operations, echo concerns raised by NGO respondents in last year’s survey findings. Stronger engagement between UNHCR and NGO partners should be

facilitated moving forward, to ensure greater understanding among UNHCR operations of the totality of NGO funding needs and create pathways toward addressing this long-standing issue.



OVERALL PARTNERSHIP ASSESSMENT

To better understand overarching perceptions of UNHCR-NGO partnerships, respondents were asked to reflect on the broader, intangible aspects of their relationship, namely whether NGO partners are treated respectfully and as equals by their UNHCR counterparts and credited for their efforts and successes. They were also asked about UNHCR's overall communication with and capacity strengthening support for NGO partners.

When UNHCR respondents were asked to what extent they perceive their operations to treat funded partners as equals on a scale of 1-5 (5 being the highest), nearly half of UNHCR respondents estimated that their operations were performing at the highest level, with 88% of respondents selecting either the highest or second highest level. 73% of NGO respondents selected either the highest or second-highest rating, with 39% rating UNHCR's treatment of their

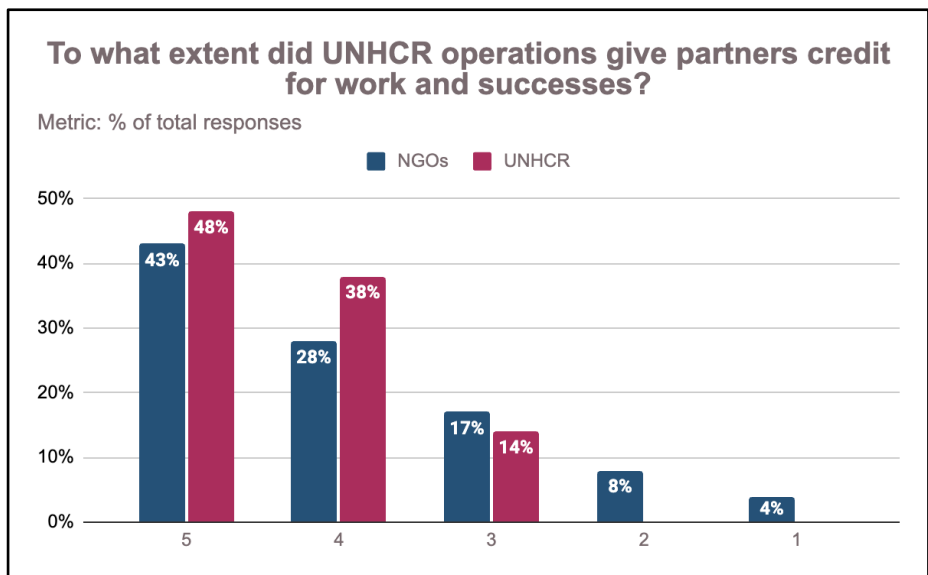
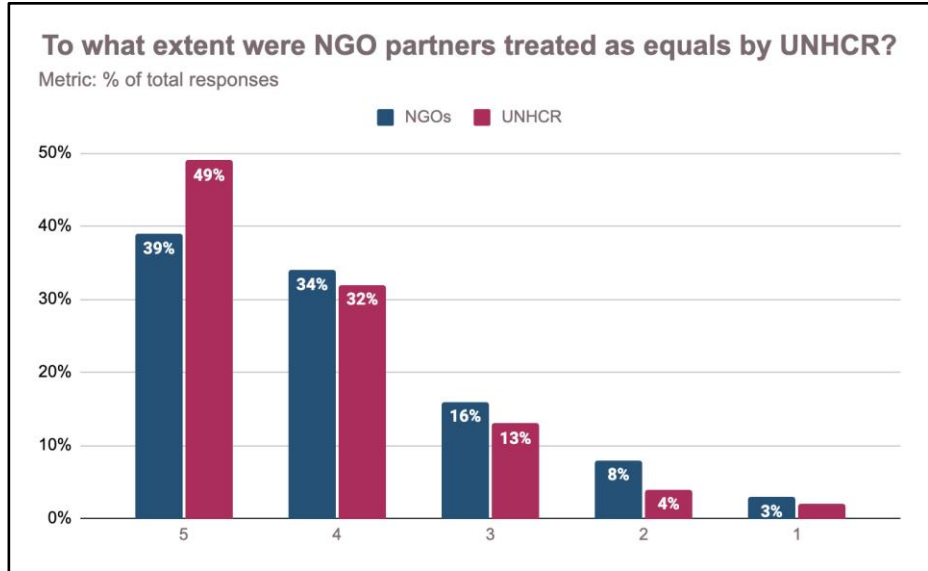
organization as that of equal partners in 2023. Only 13 NGO respondents rated UNHCR's treatment of their organization at the lowest level.

In their comments, several UNHCR and NGO respondents addressed the

question of mutual respect and equal treatment between partners. One UNHCR respondent noted that “building a collaborative and respectful relationship with partners involves open communication, mutual respect, and shared goals. Inside UNHCR we need to work actively to create a culture of collaboration”; another stated that “we should continue to move away from donor-recipient relationship and treat our partners with mutual respect.”

Several NGO respondents echoed this call, with one comment particularly noting that “some members of UNHCR international staff do tend to exhibit a superiority attitude in

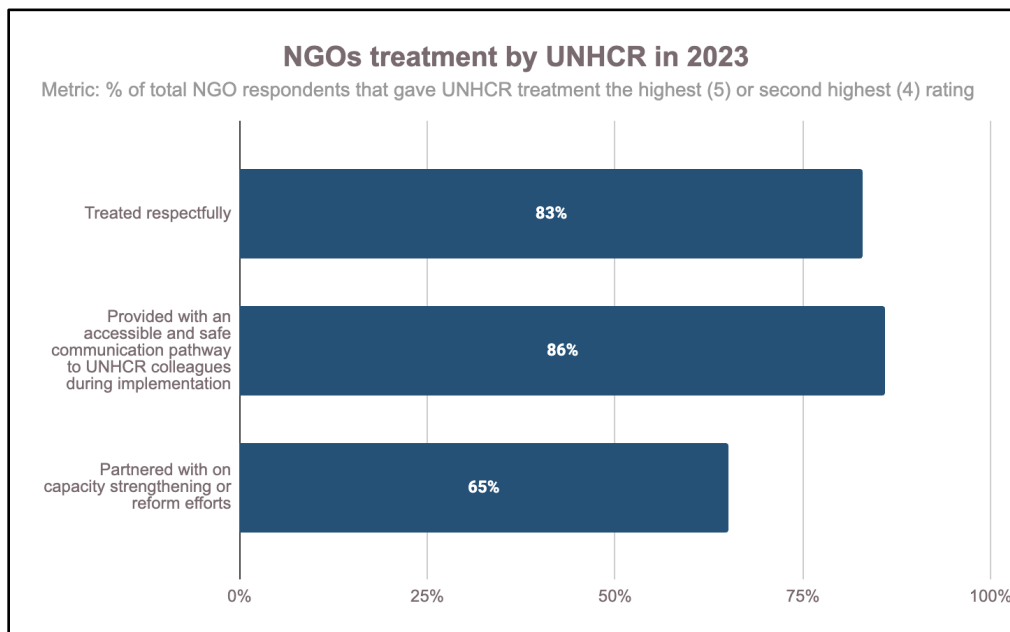
their communication and relations with local NGO partners, which are considered by design incapable to exercise analytical and strategic assessment, planning and decision-making; whereas in fact at most instances it is the new UNHCR staff that needs to be introduced and educated on local context and challenges.” Further work is therefore needed to ensure that



mutual respect is reinforced as a non-negotiable organizational standard within UNHCR operations.

When asked to what extent UNHCR respondents perceive their operations as having given their funded partners credit for work and successes in 2023, 86% of UNHCR respondents estimated that treatment was within the top two ratings, and 71% of NGO partners rated UNHCR's treatment within the top two ratings.

These findings reveal relatively strong alignment between UNHCR's and NGOs' perceptions related to credit for the work. The 15% gap between UNHCR and NGO partner responses, however, demonstrates that further diligence is required from UNHCR personnel to maintain awareness of, and give credit for, NGO partners' work and successes.

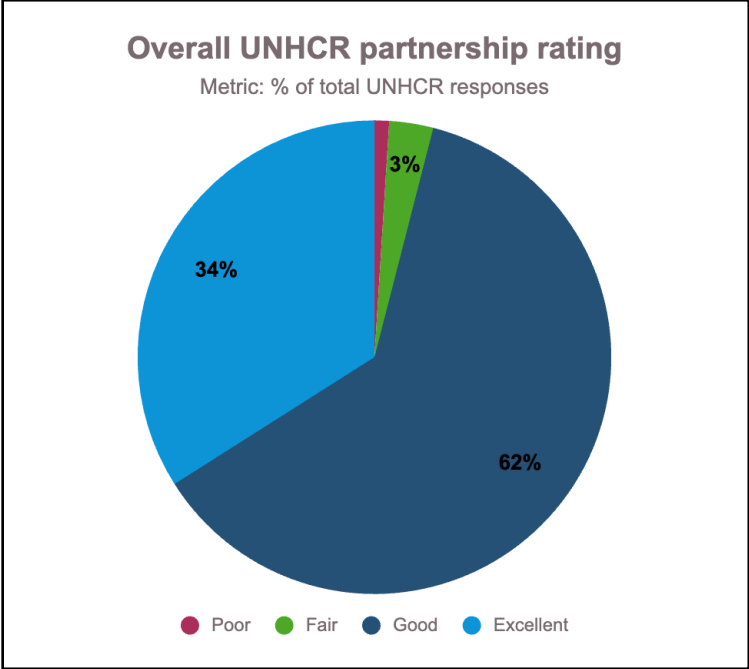


Further elaborating on UNHCR's overarching treatment of NGO partners, 61% of NGO respondents gave UNHCR the highest rating for treating their NGO partners

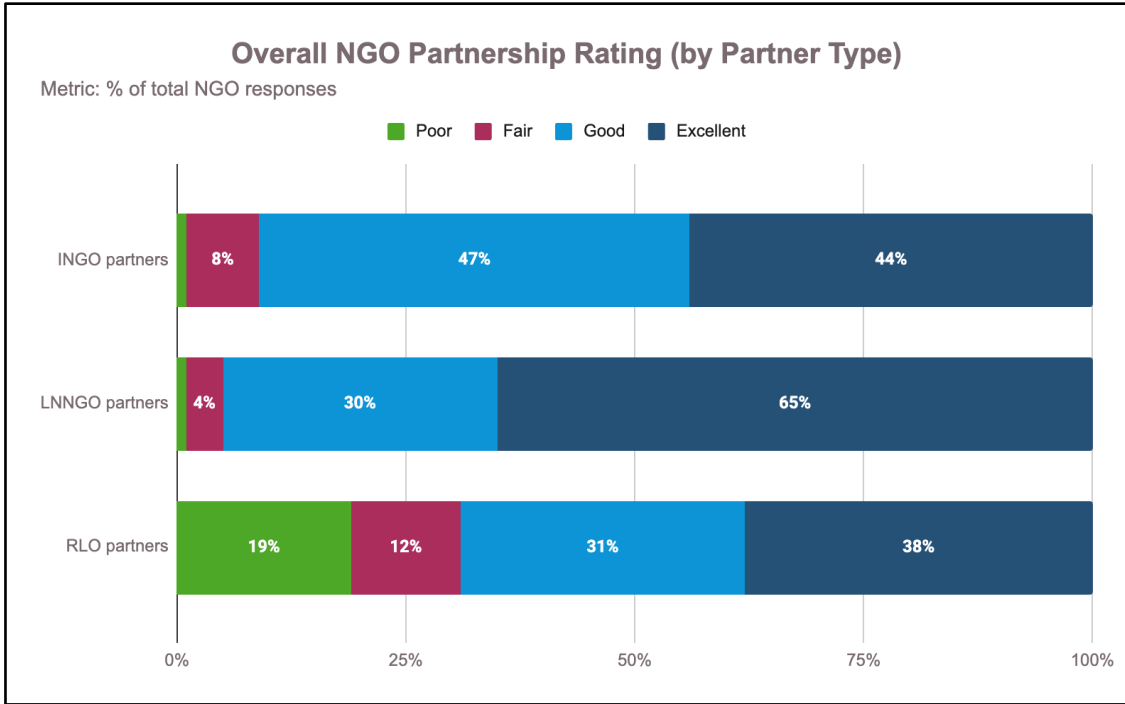
respectfully, and 83% of respondents gave either the highest or second highest ranking. Only 3% of respondents (13 respondents) gave the lowest ranking for this question. A similarly high 60% of NGO respondents gave UNHCR the highest rating for providing them with an accessible and safe communication pathway to UNHCR colleagues during implementation, and 86% of respondents gave either the highest or second highest ranking. Only 3% of respondents (10 respondents) gave the lowest ranking for this question.

When asked whether UNHCR worked with NGO partners in 2023 to provide capacity strengthening or reform efforts, feedback was slightly more mixed, with only 39% of NGO respondents characterizing UNHCR’s efforts in this area with the highest ranking, and 26% selecting the second-highest ranking. This two-thirds result aligns with the above data on UNHCR capacity strengthening for NGO partners, indicating that capacity strengthening is a clear area for improvement.

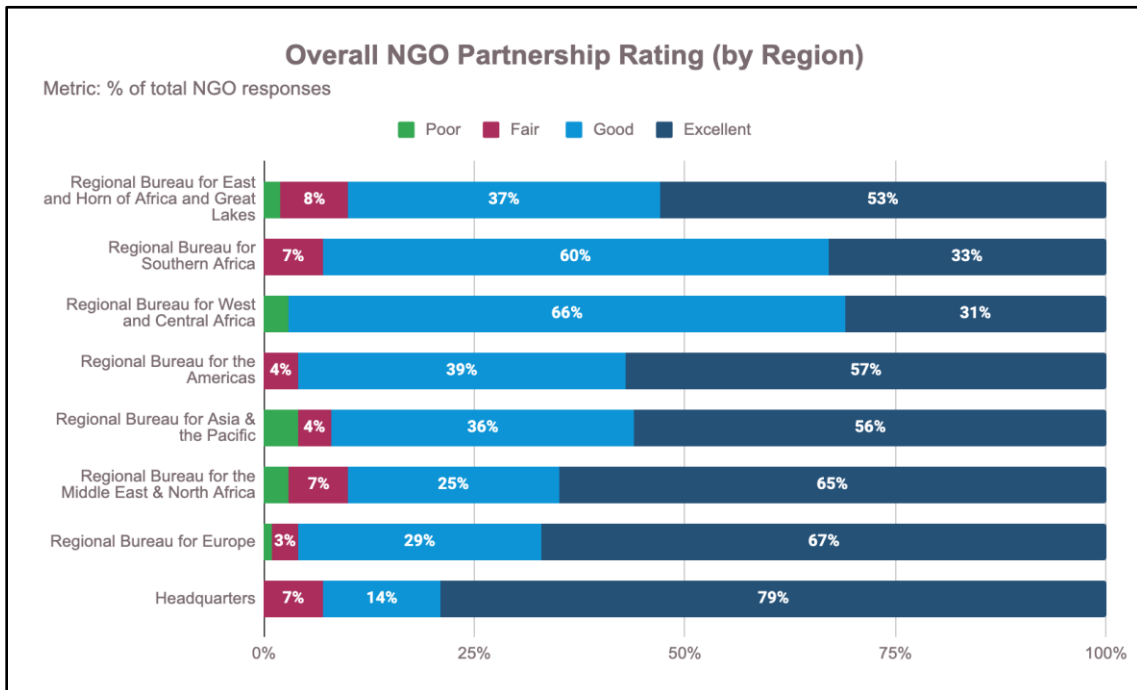
Findings regarding NGO partners’ and UNHCR operations’ overall sense of the UNHCR-NGO partnership were overwhelmingly positive. UNHCR staff respondents characterized their overall partnership with RLOs as 26% ‘excellent,’ and 70% ‘good’; with LNNGOs/CBOs as 34% ‘excellent,’ and 61% ‘good’; and with INGOs as 41% ‘excellent’ and 56% ‘good.’ In each case, these ratings either remain consistent with, or build upon, positive trends from last year’s surveys.



65% of LNNGO respondents and 44% of INGO respondents characterized their overall partnership with UNHCR as ‘excellent.’ An additional 30% and 47% of LNNGO and INGO respondents, respectively, characterized their overall partnership with UNHCR as ‘good.’ While RLO respondents offered comparatively less positive ratings, with 31% of respondents rating their overall partnership with UNHCR as ‘fair’ or ‘poor,’ limited conclusions should be drawn, as a small sample size of 16 RLO respondents engaged with this question relative to 211 LNNGO and 125 INGO respondents.



The geographic breakdown of NGO partner feedback on the overall partnership shows consistently positive results, with no more than 10% of respondents rating the overall partnership as 'fair' or 'poor' in any given region.



In their written responses, some NGO staff shared that their partnership with UNHCR in 2023 “improved significantly in terms of communication and collaboration,” and several respondents noted that the foundation for this improvement lay in an increase in partnership flexibility, respect, and trust. NGO respondents highlighted the added value of working with UNHCR, as it affords partners “access to a vast network of resources and expertise,” and increases their capacity to support the communities they service.

“We appreciate the partnership with UNHCR because we feel we are treated as a partner, our views are considered and being on the front line, they value our inputs which we gather from the communities. It’s a mutual partnership and planning together has enabled us to make the necessary adjustments which we are part of.”

CONCLUSION

The findings of the 2023 UNHCR-NGO Partnership Survey demonstrate the continued strength and evolution of the collaborative efforts between UNHCR and its NGO partners, and evidence the possibility of even further progress. Key areas for growth identified within the survey include enhancing consultation and planning inclusivity, streamlining reporting processes, ensuring full and fair funding for all partner NGO operations, and combatting power imbalances by promoting a culture of respect and equality between partners. The report also identifies opportunities for further localized capacity strengthening and improving community feedback guidance across all partnership levels.

Empowered by careful and candid input from a diversity of NGO partners and UNHCR operations, this report provides a series of recommended initiatives designed to improve the UNHCR-NGO relationship. UNHCR has made a strong commitment to incorporate NGO feedback and adjust partnering practices, building upon the identified growth areas. In contributing to the efficacy and collaborative nature of the UNHCR-NGO partnership, InterAction aspires to increase all parties’ capacity for humanitarian programming in support of refugees and displaced communities.

ABOUT INTERACTION

InterAction is a membership organization 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.