ALNAP

THE STATE OF THE HUMANITARIAN SYSTEM

INCEPTION REPORT

2026 EDITION

ALNAP is the global network for advancing humanitarian learning. Our goal is for all humanitarians to benefit from our sector's collective experience.

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1. SUMMARY

The ALNAP State of the Humanitarian System (SOHS) report is an independent study that analyses the size and shape of humanitarian action and assesses the overall performance and progress of humanitarian policies and responses over time. This Inception Report describes the aims and scope of research for the sixth edition of the SOHS.

The sixth edition will assess performance over the period January 2022–December 2025. It will also compare its findings with the five previous editions to capture key trends covering a 19-year period.[1] The main objective of the SOHS report remains the same as previous editions: to gather and synthesise evidence to form an overall picture of the international humanitarian system, and indicate how well it is serving the needs of people affected by conflict and crises. As with previous editions, the report will be primarily descriptive and evaluative, rather than prescriptive. As such, it will present findings but not precise recommendations.

The sixth edition will retain core elements of the existing methodology to support meaningful longitudinal comparisons with previous SOHS editions. However, elements of both the structure of the report and the research approach will evolve to maximise its relevance and usefulness for contemporary humanitarian policy makers and practitioners. This Inception Report outlines those key continuities and alterations, which are summarised in Box 1. It also presents a draft research framework and provides a detailed description of each of the research components. Finally, it presents the timeline and management arrangements for the completion of the final report and initial considerations for communicating and supporting uptake of its findings.

Box 1: Summary of key continuities and alterations for the sixth edition

1 **Aim and scope**

Continuation:
- A focus on describing the size and shape of the humanitarian system and assessing its performance over time
- The longitudinal assessment of the OECD criteria in a concluding table and the focus on policy relevant chapter questions to structure the research framework (as adopted in the fifth edition)

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1   The study period of the 2010 pilot study began in 2007.

- A focus on the international humanitarian system as the core unit of study

Alteration:

- Introduction of contemporary framing performance questions deemed pertinent to the specific challenges of the operating environment facing humanitarians in this study period. The questions will be drawn from the descriptive opening section of the report and will be answered by drawing together relevant findings to facilitate contemporary policy and practice relevant conclusions alongside the longitudinal view of system performance
- Deepened exploration of the connections between the humanitarian system and development and peace actors, and between the international system and locally led humanitarian action

2 Research approach and methods

Continuation:

- Use of the regular core research components
- Commissioning some choice original thematic studies (introduced in the fifth edition)
- Engagement of crisis affected people to inform research from design phase onward (introduced in the fifth edition)

Alteration:

- A proactive and iterative approach to chapter drafting and data gathering led by co-leads through KIIs and literature reviews alongside the implementation of the standard research components
- Increased diversification of perspectives throughout the design, research and writing cycle
- More equitable engagement with local researcher partners and the production of country specific outputs to accompany the global report
- Reduced number of original thematic studies commissioned beyond the standard research components to enable a stronger examination of those chosen themes

2. AIMS AND SCOPE

This section outlines the aims and overarching research questions for the SOHS. It describes the intended audience and sets the scope of the research by defining the core unit of analysis: the humanitarian 'system'.

2.1 AIMS AND RESEARCH QUESTIONS

As with previous editions, the three primary research objectives for the SOHS are:

i. **To define and describe the architecture of the humanitarian system(s):** What are the current levels and trends in funding flows? What is the distribution of human and financial resources? What are the numbers/types of agencies involved? How has the composition of the humanitarian system and its borders changed over the past decade? What are the trends?

ii. **To assess the humanitarian caseload:** How many humanitarian responses took place in the study period? What are the locations and types of emergencies? What are the approaches to making a reasonable estimate of people in need of humanitarian assistance, those for whom humanitarian assistance is intended, and people actually receiving humanitarian assistance? What are the trends?

iii. **To assess performance:** How has the humanitarian system performed both on key policy-relevant questions and on OECD DAC criteria at the programme/project level and at the policy/structure level? How well is the humanitarian system meeting the expectations of crisis-affected populations? What are the trends and how does this period compare with previous periods? What are emerging key policy issues and shifts in practice?

In addition to these continued objectives, this new addition will add another research objective:

iv. **To identify key trends and challenges in the operating environment specific to this study period and to assess how the humanitarian system has performed in the face of those contemporary challenges.** In addition to the core functions the system is expected to perform over time, how has it faced up to substantial new challenges that emerged in the 2022-25 period? How does its performance on these key trends in the operational environment set it up for the future?

2.2 FUNCTION AND AUDIENCE

The SOHS serves both a learning and an accountability function for the humanitarian system. The primary aim is to inform policy and practice across constituencies in the humanitarian system: from donor governments and philanthropy, United Nations (UN) agencies, INGOs and national/local NGOs to the Red Cross/Crescent Movement, academics and consultants. It does this by providing a robust and evidence-driven analysis of humanitarian performance and trends, which can be used by decision-makers and change agents to hold humanitarian actors to account, motivate improvement and identify pathways to get there. While the Report's analysis will be relevant for those seeking to bring evidence-driven change and improvement to the humanitarian sector, it does not aim to make concrete specific recommendations. Beyond humanitarian audiences, its findings on the connections between humanitarian action and development and peace efforts will be relevant for those working within those systems.

The report also more broadly acts as a global resource for individuals and organisations with an interest in how humanitarian assistance is provided, and who wish to know whether humanitarian action is meeting expectations. The SOHS findings aim to address a broad audience that includes crisis-affected populations, organisations that work in, or with, the international humanitarian community, and members of the public in donor countries (particularly via engagement with relevant media) — although the way in which these findings are communicated will differ accordingly.

2.3 UNIT OF ANALYSIS: DEFINITION OF THE INTERNATIONAL HUMANITARIAN SYSTEM

Actors working to support people affected by crisis all constitute a part of the broad humanitarian landscape or ecosystem. This ecosystem includes survivors of disaster and their communities as first responders, families and diaspora, religious groups, the private sector, local civil society groups and local/national NGOs, local and national governments, international NGOs, the UN, donors, among others. As such, international humanitarian action is but one piece of that puzzle and not necessarily the most important one for individual people affected by crisis in different contexts. It is, however, the subsection of the broader humanitarian landscape that the SOHS report is mandated to assess every 3-4 years.

As in previous reports, the sixth edition will provide a longitudinal analysis of the size, shape, and performance of international humanitarian action. While recognising the fundamental importance of the broader landscape of crisis action and the changing nature of its configuration over time, the report defines its unit of analysis as the international humanitarian system. We provide a working definition below and describe how the study will consider actors that straddle or lie beyond the margins of this system.

Defining international humanitarian action

The SOHS study team adopts a working definition of the international humanitarian system as: The network of interconnected institutional and operational entities through which humanitarian action is undertaken when local and national resources are, on their own, insufficient to meet the needs of a population in crisis.

These entities are operationally or financially related to each other and share common overarching goals, norms, and principles. However, the level to which these entities are related in a cohesive (versus fragmented) manner may vary over time or geographic space. The international humanitarian system is international in the sense that it is cross-border, and humanitarian in the sense that at least one actor involved in its funding or delivery self-identifies with the goals, norms, and principles of humanitarianism. These actors may be funded by governments as well as private individuals and entities, and include local, national and international NGOs conducting humanitarian activities; UN humanitarian agencies; the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement; host government agencies and authorities; regional intergovernmental agencies; multilateral agencies; government aid agencies; and other offices that provide humanitarian funding and coordination.

Humanitarian action is the principled provision of assistance and protection in order to save lives, prevent and reduce suffering and preserve people's dignity, in crises arising from armed conflict, climate hazards and other causes.[2] Humanitarian action is international when these activities involve resources (financial, technical or in-kind) provided by an entity in one country to respond to a crisis in another. International humanitarian action excludes actions that are fully resourced within the country experiencing the crisis, which fall within the domain of domestic crisis management.

Connections on the borders of international humanitarian system

The working definition helps to set a scope for the report, albeit one that can be contested. There is limited clarity and consensus on the borders of what counts as humanitarian action versus longer-term development assistance, on which actors count as local versus global, and the extent to which relevant principles[3] are enacted that make these actions 'humanitarian.' As established in the fifth report; to better understand the role of international humanitarian action, it is important to recognise the importance of locally led action and the range of different sources of support available to crisis affected people. Similarly, the system's engagement in fragile contexts and the growth of protracted crises requires stronger considerations of its connections with development and peace actors.

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2   ALNAP. 2015. *The State of the Humanitarian System 2015*. London: ALNAP; IASC. 2015. *Human Rights Up Front: An Overview* Geneva: IASC

3   These principles have traditionally been considered to include humanity, impartiality, neutrality and independence. However, some actors contest the appropriateness of the continued use of some of these principles, such as neutrality.

The sixth report will continue with the approach of the fifth edition to recognise these porous margins and increase its understanding of the efforts of broader actors in crisis affected contexts. The report will not, however, seek to assess the performance of these other entities. It will maintain its focus on holding the international humanitarian system to account by assessing the effectiveness of its engagement with these other efforts to support people affected by crisis. This report will seek to deepen the recognition and examination of connections with these wider systems and consideration of how actors in these systems view the role and performance of humanitarians.

3. RESEARCH APPROACH AND METHODS

This section describes the overall research approach for the SOHS Report, followed by an overview of the methods used for data collection and analysis. A more detailed description of the draft framework guiding the performance assessment is provided in Section 3.3, and a detailed description of individual research components is given in Section 4.

3.1 RESEARCH APPROACH

The SOHS reports together create a longitudinal study using a relatively consistent mixed-methods research approach over time. The sixth edition will make some shifts - in both the research questions that structure the framework of the report and some of the research components used to provide the data — to support relevance and accessibility to practitioners and policy makers and to reflect a greater diversity of voices and perspectives.

3.1.1 ADAPTIVE APPROACH TO THE SIXTH EDITION

To inform the inception phase and study design, we engaged a range of stakeholders in a set of four multi-actor consultations in April 2024, including several representatives from local NGOs and networks. However, further efforts will be made to strengthen the voices of crisis affected people and local humanitarian actors in the design of the report. Continuing the approach of the fifth edition a small number of initial focus group discussions will be conducted as part of the in-country research (described in Section 4) to help refine the study matrix and ensure the report asks questions that crisis affected people consider most important in this period. The co-leads will also engage with the local in-country researchers during the initial stages of research to understand key themes, trends and priorities from their perspectives — those discussions will feed both into the study matrix for the global report and also inform the direction of a set of country-specific reports (also discussed in Section 3.1.2).

This adaptive approach means the study matrix for the report will evolve in the months following the publication of this inception report. A full study matrix that reflects this evolution — including indicators — will be published online a quarter of the way through the primary data-collection phase. This Inception Report provides the initial themes and research questions, which will be adapted based on initial exploratory research. The final analysis and writing of the report will allow scope for

shifting the direction of the specific chapters and the overall framing of the report to best reflect the evolving understanding of the system over the study period and emerging trends, crises, or influential policy events. Periodic reviews will be held to adjust the research approach accordingly.

3.1.2 ENGAGING MORE DIVERSE PERSPECTIVES TO INFORM THE REPORT AND ITS IMPACT

The sixth edition will make additional efforts to engage a diversity of perspectives within the research, analysis and writing processes through four main shifts.

While maintaining existing members of the SOHS Support and Advisory Group (SAG) that have been integral to previous reports, we have extended invitations to more representatives of organisations from global majority contexts to join the SAG to provide a greater diversity of perspectives at key stages of the research cycle, from inception through to dissemination. In addition to increasing the Local and National (LNA) membership of the SAG, we have invited development and peace actors to the group to ensure advice is received from key stakeholders engaging with humanitarians across the humanitarian-development-peace (HDP) nexus.

We have also sought stronger partnerships with local researchers in the qualitative in-country research component, asking them to engage more actively in the design and analysis that contributes to the global research report but also in developing tailored country reports. We aim to approach these relationships with a view to more equitable partnerships than in the past, providing space for greater influence of local researchers in determining the key issues to explore in their context. The production of local reports should also lead to a less extractive approach than focusing only on the production of the global report, providing a tailored resource that can be used for local influence. A new position has been hired to focus on that component and the equitable partnership approach: a Senior Research and Partnership Coordinator.

The sixth edition will continue the efforts made in the last report to represent the perspectives of crisis affected people throughout the research cycle. The design of the research will be informed by initial Focus Group Discussions (FGDs) and by an analysis of existing data that captures their perspectives. For example, we will analyse recent qualitative and quantitative data gathered from people affected by crisis by Ground Truth Solutions. Beyond the research design, these voices will continue to inform the research findings through two regular SOHS research components: in-country qualitative data collection and the aid recipient survey (described in Section 4).

Finally, we have sought to diversify the research and writing leadership within the core SOHS team. In recent years, leadership and coordination of the report has been provided by global minority researchers. ALNAP's new approach to global recruitment has allowed us to hire a Senior Research and Partnership Coordinator based in Kampala, Uganda, to support the SOHS coordination and development of country reports, and the lead authorship team will be expanded to reflect greater

diversity of perspectives.

3.1.3 ASSESSMENT OF PERFORMANCE AND PROGRESS OVER TIME

The SOHS Report is a longitudinal study which both assesses performance for a particular period of time and also compares this performance against previous periods to understand whether — on the whole — humanitarian policy and action is improving, declining or remains unchanged. Earlier editions had largely taken a deductive approach, whereby the qualitative and quantitative data is collected, analysed, and triangulated over a period of 18 months following a pre-existing set of performance criteria drawn from the OECD evaluation criteria that reflect the different quality measures humanitarian action is expected to meet. The first four editions of the report structured their research questions around these set performance criteria; however, the fifth edition altered that approach by framing the research questions in the form of policy-relevant questions that were viewed as more accessible to a non-evaluative audience. For example, the research question and chapter heading "Does humanitarian action work?" largely maps on to the OECD criteria 'effectiveness'. Despite the shift in the chapter framings, the longitudinal comparison of the OECD criteria over time was retained and presented in a table in the conclusion. The sixth edition will maintain the approach of the last report by largely using policy relevant research questions to create an accessible structure while also retaining the production of the longitudinal OECD criteria table in the conclusion to support continuity. The policy questions will speak to issues of contemporary importance and will link to the important challenges and demands presented by the external operating environment in this study period, 2022-25. The descriptive discussion of key trends, crises, and the financial size of the system in the opening section of the report will help to situate the performance of the system within that operating environment.

Table 1 outlines the draft set of policy research questions and how the OECD criteria can be loosely mapped within their structure to enable the creation of the longitudinal table in the conclusion. Qualitative and quantitative data will be collected, analysed, and triangulated concurrently over a period of 18 months according to a set of more detailed sub-research questions (see Tables 1, 2, and 3) and a list of qualitative and quantitative indicators, which will be provided in the detailed SOHS study matrix. The SOHS report itself will not necessarily be structured according to this framework but will be designed to present the data and findings in an accessible and compelling way to inform policy and practice.

3.2 OVERVIEW OF DATA COLLECTION AND RESEARCH COMPONENTS

This section describes the eight consistent research components, or methods, used in the SOHS research approach and the newer addition of thematic studies that were introduced in the fifth edition to fill key evidence gaps across the different policy questions that structure the report.

3.2.1 THE CORE RESEARCH COMPONENTS

Since 2012, each edition of the SOHS Report has drawn on eight methods of data collection and analysis. Data collection across these eight components is integrated, using a shared research framework outlining the questions and indicators related to each area of the performance assessment. The draft research framework for the sixth edition is described in Section 3.3, and the individual research components or methods are described in further detail in Section 4.

Primary data collection and analysis

In-country research: Focus group discussions (FGDs) and key informant interviews (KIIs), along with relevant context-specific documentation and observations, are collected for a minimum of five crisis contexts over the study period.

Aid recipient survey: ALNAP conducts a survey of aid recipients in four to six crisis contexts to elicit their assessment of humanitarian performance. In the past, these have been conducted using SMS text message, interactive voice response (IVR) and computer-assisted telephone interviews (CATI)-based modalities. The previous edition surveyed 5,487 aid recipients.

Practitioner survey: An online survey is used to elicit the perceptions of humanitarian practitioners on humanitarian performance. Previous editions also sought to capture the perspectives of host-government representatives through a similar survey approach. Recent attempts to capture government perspectives via the survey had very limited response rates. As such, the sixth edition will only conduct the survey with humanitarian aid practitioners and will access the perspectives of host government representatives via key informant interviews at the in-country and global levels.

Key informant interviews (KIIs) at global level: Humanitarian leaders and key thinkers from multiple contexts are interviewed to assess performance and identify important trends. These interviews are also used to identify potential data sources to address key evidence gaps and to triangulate and test hypotheses emerging from other sources of data.

Organisational mapping and analysis: Data is collected from individual organisations as well as through a desk-based review to provide an overall picture of the number of humanitarian staff and organisations worldwide, their makeup, and their expenditure.

Analysis and synthesis of secondary data

Evaluation synthesis: A synthesis of findings from humanitarian evaluations published in the study period is conducted, with the aggregate findings weighted according to quality.

Financial analysis: ALNAP works with experts in humanitarian financing to produce and analyse statistics on humanitarian finance flows and compare this to previous

SOHS Report periods.

Literature review: A review is conducted of research reports and academic work published within the study period on a sub-set of themes related to humanitarian policy and practice.

3.2.2. THEMATIC STUDIES

The fifth edition of the SOHS Report adopted a new methodology in the commissioning of a set of primary research studies to fill key evidence gaps to help assess the performance of the system where existing data was lacking. These were also designed to provide more empirical data to complement the perception-based assessment of performance provided by other existing research components.

The thematic studies commissioned for the fifth edition provided useful insights that helped to strengthen the analysis across several performance components — including around effectiveness, efficiency, complementarity, and connectedness — and to strengthen the original knowledge contribution of the SOHS research. The sixth edition will continue with commissioning some select original research. It will, however, alter the approach by commissioning a reduced number of original thematic studies as independent research. The last report commissioned five individual primary studies,[4] which spread the available resources across different themes in a way that limited the depth of data gathering and analysis that could be achieved for some of the particularly challenging areas. For example, it was difficult to adequately assess the contribution of humanitarian action to reduced mortality with available time and resources. While findings from each of the studies provided some data that could be incorporated into the SOHS report, there was not enough depth and rigour to answer some of the questions we would have liked to answer and only the innovation study provided the depth of information to support publication of a standalone report.

The sixth edition will commission only 1-2 primary thematic studies to allow for more substantial depth in the data gathering and analysis. The publication of any reports that come from those studies will be staggered around the launch of the main SOHS synthesis report. In some cases, a thematic issue may not be a priority for a new independent thematic study but may still require additional investment to answer key questions in the main SOHS report. For these thematic issues, some additional data gathering will be incorporated into existing research components. For example, via additional investment in new financial statistics or via additional targeted KIIs and literature reviews.

Given the more targeted investment in a smaller number of commissioned thematic topics during a constrained funding environment for humanitarian research, careful prioritisation of where ALNAP can add most value to the sector via this new primary research is essential. ALNAP held a series of four multi-sector consultation events

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4   These studies were focused on the following topics: Innovation, mortality, accountability modalities, localisation and the HDP nexus.

in April 2024 to identify topics of greatest contemporary interest to the sector, where original research would add value for policy or practice, and that would avoid overlap of research planned by other organisations over the study period. At these consultations we presented eight thematic concept notes[5] for discussion and collective prioritisation. The direction chosen for these studies is described in section 4.9.

3.3 RESEARCH FRAMEWORK

The role of the research framework is to guide data collection and analysis. When complete, the full research framework comprises five components: (i) research questions; (ii) study matrix; (iii) coding matrix; (iv) data-collection tools (e.g. interview protocol); and (v) interpretation and analysis plan.

The following section outlines the research questions (i). The study matrix (ii) will be made available online in early 2025 and a final version will be published alongside the final report.

3.3.1 ASSESSING PERFORMANCE: KEY POLICY-RELEVANT PERFORMANCE QUESTIONS AND THE DAC CRITERIA

The sixth edition of the SOHS will build on the approach of the fifth edition by constructing the research framework around key policy-relevant performance questions. As noted above, there is scope for these questions to be refined during the data collection and analysis phase in line with shifts in trends, crises, and policy events. They can be considered placeholders in this inception report outlining the proposed approach.

This framework continues to allow longitudinal assessment of the OECD criteria because those criteria are nested within the different policy questions of the research framework (see Table 1). The SOHS was originally designed to provide a longitudinal assessment and accountability tool for the sector, with the OECD criteria providing a useful structure to allow that tracking over time. After two decades, the OECD criteria remain a key common structure for evaluating humanitarian action, however, conceptions of what is means to engage in good quality humanitarian action have shifted over time and there have been successive alterations by the OECD on the criteria. The SOHS has sought to reflect some of those shifts by slightly adapting the OECD criteria in successive reports.

The OECD published a revised set of evaluation criteria for the development community in 2020 and ALNAP has engaged in a series of multi-stakeholder consultations to update the definitions and guidance on applying these criteria in humanitarian evaluations. These updated definitions and guidance will be published

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5   Making sense of the development, peace and diplomacy gap; Looking outside the multilateral humanitarian system; Displacement; Humanitarianism in the new age of geopolitics; Protection; Climate Crisis; Efficiency; Sufficiency and the humanitarian prioritisation challenge.

in 2025 and will be reflected in this sixth edition of the SOHS. We expect to largely maintain the ability to support longitudinal comparison using these updated criteria because the adjustments to the adapted criteria used in recent SOHS reports are expected to be relatively small. As the guidance is finalised, we have presented the criteria used in the last report in the table below and will update the phrasing when the new guidance is finalised.

3.3.2 ASSESSING PERFORMANCE AT PROGRAMME AND SYSTEM LEVEL

The sixth edition of the SOHS will explore performance of the system at both the programme and system level. It will continue to synthesise evidence on the programmatic performance of the system to provide an aggregate picture of progress at implementation-level for different functions of the humanitarian system. It will also retain the growing focus of the last report on system-level performance, which included an examination of progress against key commitments made in the World Humanitarian Summit and Grand Bargain. It will, however, need to explore the increased number of system change initiatives that have gained prominence over the study period, including Grand Bargain 3.0, OCHA's Flagship Initiative, the Charter for Change, the Pledge for Change, reforms to the humanitarian program cycle, and CHH-Lancet Commission on Health, Conflict and Displacement, among others. This system level view will be of particular importance given the structural nature of several of the contemporary operational challenges and trends identified in recent consultations. The draft research framework below integrates key questions reflecting both levels of analysis within each main policy relevant research question.

3.3.3 RESEARCH FRAMEWORK

The draft research framework will form an initial structure for gathering data and synthesising the findings on system performance. This initial framework, as our findings will help determine the key messages and how they should be presented to maximise use and relevance for policy makers and practitioners. The framework will be complemented by a more detailed study matrix which will contain the research sub-questions and indicators and match the research components to these questions. Within each area, the report will gather data both on challenges to performance and on where good practice examples have emerged. Each research question will involve a disaggregation of performance for different profiles of recipients, including by sex and age. The experiences of different identity groups — such as people living with disability, migrants or LGBTQI+ individuals — will also be considered within the research, however, presenting a clear disaggregation by other groups may be challenged due to varying levels of data availability.

Table 1: Proposed SOHS research framework: Policy research questions and correlation to the OECD criteria

Framing research questions	Sub-questions	Correlating OECD criteria[6]
Describing the context and the shape and size of the system		
What are the crises and broader global trends in this study period?	• What have been the key crises in the study period? What are driving those crises and how have these root causes changed over time? • What shifts in geopolitics, civil society space, and social movements have occurred during the study period? How is the information environment shifting? • What are the key events and initiatives shaping humanitarianism in this study period? • Given these crises, trends, and initiatives, what are the most pressing demands on the system and related performance questions for the system in this study period?	Not applicable as a OECD performance area
What is the shape and size of the system and its responding actors?	• What is the financial size of the system and how has this changed over time? How volatile are those changes? • Where does the system's finances come from and how has the range and type of sources changed over time? • What are the wider networks and systems of crisis action? • What is the relative contribution of the international humanitarian action?	Not applicable as a OECD performance area

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6   The OECD criteria will likely be reflected mainly in the longitudinal tracking table than in the main chapter structure for the report, which may reflect some more contemporary key challenges. This is something the co-leads will continue to discuss with different stakeholders and ALNAP's communications team beyond the inception period. The OECD criteria column of this table indicates where we are likely to find data to populate the OECD criteria table from among these different policy questions.

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Framing research questions	Sub-questions	Correlating OECD criteria[6]
	• What is the profile/composition of humanitarian system actors in terms of organisations, staff, and volunteers? • How has the configuration of actors within the humanitarian system changed over time?	
What is the shape and size of the system and its responding actors?	• How cohesive is the system and how has that changed over time? • Is the system living up to commitments on diversity and decolonisation?	Not applicable as a OECD performance area
What are the key performance challenges posed by the operating environment to humanitarian actors in this study period?	To be finalised based on the findings in the above sections and evolutions through the study period, but potentially: • How has the system prioritised humanitarian action in a sharply constrained funding environment? • Is the system delivering effective and efficient humanitarian action? • Has the system protected people and its principles in a new period of geopolitics/conflict? • How far has the system come in meaningfully shifting its power? • How is the system learning and adapting to the changing nature of crisis?	Those that emerge as criteria most noteworthy for progress or challenges linked to the contemporary performance questions
Assessing the performance of the humanitarian system		

Framing research questions	Sub-questions	Correlating OECD criteria[6]
What is the system achieving?		
Is there enough assistance?	• Are the volume and distribution of resources sufficient to meet needs? • How are resourcing modalities used to meet those needs? • How well funded are (which) responses? • How many people in need are reached? • Do they receive enough? • How do humanitarians prioritise needs within and across responses? • Do humanitarians enter and exit contexts appropriately? How are those choices made? • What is the impact of underfunding and prioritisation decisions?	Sufficiency
Does humanitarian support reach the right people?	• Does humanitarian assistance support people in most acute need? • Does coverage/reach differ according to key population groups/identities or levels/types of crises and the duration of crisis?	Coverage
Does humanitarian support reach the right people?	• How and why are prioritisation decisions made at different levels of the system? • What are the barriers and enablers to effective coverage at programmatic and system level? • Are people affected by crisis satisfied with targeting decisions? • How is the system connecting with other actors to support vulnerable people the humanitarian system does not cover?	Connectedness

Framing research questions	Sub-questions	Correlating OECD criteria[6]
Do humanitarians provide the right type of support?	• Do humanitarian assessments adequately capture the priority needs of the affected population? • What type of needs are being met? • Do interventions address the priority needs of recipients? • Does appropriateness/relevance differ according to key population groups/identities or levels/types of crises and the duration of crisis? • To what extent does programming, policies and organisational structures enable or constrain the priority needs of targeted populations to be met?	Relevance and appropriateness
Does the system deliver effective and efficient humanitarian action?	• Is programming across key sectors achieving its objectives and technical quality? Whose perceptions of quality are met? • Is humanitarian action timely? • Does the system adopt effective and efficient modalities of delivery and coordination? • Does it adopt effective and efficient funding practices to maximise operational outcomes? • Does the system make effective use of innovations? • How was it navigated a changing communications environment? • To what extent is aid diversion a challenge? • Has humanitarian action produced negative externalities? Including social, economic, environmental. Has it sought to address and mitigate these externalities?	Effectiveness Efficiency Impact

Framing research questions	Sub-questions	Correlating OECD criteria[6]
Is the humanitarian system protecting people from harm in crisis?	• How do humanitarians navigate challenges to protect people affected by crisis and conflict? • Do humanitarians perform an effective protection function at programmatic and system level? • Does the system respond to protection risks created by evolving technology? • Are humanitarian actors linking effectively across the development and peace systems to support protection at the programmatic and political level?	Effectiveness Connectedness
How is the system working?		
Does the system treat people with dignity and uphold accountability?	• Do people affected by crisis feel treated with dignity by the system? • To what extent are people affected by crisis treated with dignity with respect to PSEA? • Do people affected by crisis trust the system to address their interests? • To what extent are people affected by crisis able to hold humanitarian actors to account for the decisions-made on their behalf? • Does the system act to address previously identified programmatic and systemic shifts required to support improved AAP and PSEA? • Beyond programmatic accountability, is humanitarian action accountable at the system level? • Does participation/accountability support stronger humanitarian performance?	Accountability and participation Impact

Framing research questions	Sub-questions	Correlating OECD criteria[6]
Is the system becoming more locally led?	• How is the system performing on key system level commitments to localise? • What does the wider system of local action look like? For example, locally led action and mutual assistance. • How is the system complementing and supporting locally led action? • Do humanitarian programmes and activities appropriately consider and support national and sub-national domestic authorities? How does this differ across different political contexts? • Are there differences in performance between international, national, and local actors? Including but not limited to performance on effectiveness, efficiency, trust, and accountability.	Localisation/ Complementarity Impact
Has the system engaged in principled humanitarian action?	• Are humanitarian efforts guided by core humanitarian principles? • Do people affected by crisis consider the system to be 'principled'? • How are humanitarian principles applied in the allocations of assistance by actors at different levels? • How are humanitarian principles interpreted and applied at the operational level? • Is international law, human rights law and refugee law respected in humanitarian settings? • What are the constraints to respecting international law, human rights law, refugee law and humanitarian space? • How have principles been balanced with access and presence at the operational and system level?	Coherence Coverage

Framing research questions	Sub-questions	Correlating OECD criteria[6]
Does the system connect with longer-term priorities?	• How present are peace and development actors in fragile contexts? • Do humanitarian activities appropriately engage and connect with partners to address longer-term vulnerabilities, risks, and root causes of crisis? What are the outcomes for vulnerable people? • How do perceptions of connections and relationships differ between humanitarian actors and longer-term peace and development actors? • What are the enablers and constraints to connectedness on longer-term vulnerabilities, risks, and root causes of crisis? E.g. policies, finances, and structures. How do they vary across different political contexts?	Connectedness
Is the system adaptive to the changing nature of crises?	• How are humanitarians addressing the growing scale of protracted crisis and conflict? • How are approaches, partnerships and resources adapting to support people in protracted contexts? • Is the system addressing potential negative consequences of long-term humanitarian engagement in protracted contexts? Including but not limited to dependency on assistance or effects on crisis dynamics? • How are humanitarians addressing the growing number and range of climate related disasters? • Are humanitarians engaging with climate financing and other relevant financial mechanisms? • How are approaches to anticipatory action, early warning and resilience evolving in relation to climate crises?	Effectiveness Impact

Framing research questions	Sub-questions	Correlating OECD criteria[6]
	• How is climate factoring into conceptions of the HDP nexus? • What systems are in place to support adaptation to evolving crisis trends?	Connectedness
Concluding assessment		
How has the humanitarian system performed over time?	How has the humanitarian system shifted and changed since ALNAP began gathering data for the SOHS in 2007? Considering: • How has the performance of the humanitarian system on the OECD criteria changed? • What impact has been achieved by the system? • How have the questions we need to ask of that system changed? • How has the state of evaluative evidence evolved over that time period at programmatic and system-level?	Longitudinal performance within each of the OECD criteria will be aggregated here from their relevant sections of the rest of the report
How did the system perform on key contemporary challenges and is it fit for the future to tackle emerging trends?	• Reflecting across the contemporary performance questions linked to the operational context,7 where has the system seen progress and challenges? • Given those conclusions and trends emerging in 2026, how well does the system seem set up for future challenges and opportunities?	Those that emerge as criteria most noteworthy for progress or challenges linked to the contemporary performance questions

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7   Examples noted above include: How has the system prioritised humanitarian action in a sharply constrained funding environment? Has the system delivered effective and efficient humanitarian action? Has the system upheld its principles and protected civilians in a new age of geopolitics? How far has the system come in shifting its power structure? How has the system evolved to meet the changing nature of crises?

Table 2: Thematic components for additional research

Thematic areas for additional research

Thematic area	Research question	Approach
Sufficiency and prioritisation	- Where and who have been prioritised for targeting by humanitarian actors under new economic constraints? - How are these decisions being made? What factors are influencing decision-making? - What has been the impact on these decisions on performance - Who is addressing the needs of vulnerable people no longer prioritised by humanitarians? - Are humanitarians making connections with broader actors to connect people with less acute needs to support?	Commissioned independent research study
Looking outside the multilateral system	- What are the spending patterns of the top 10 non-DAC donors of humanitarian aid and their levels of engagement with the multilateral humanitarian system? - What is the role of different types of international and local private sector actors in a crisis and their engagement in fragile settings? What are risks and opportunities for engaging? - What does the wider and 'informal' system of support look like for people affected by crisis? - How well does the multilateral humanitarian system connect with wider networks and systems?	Expanded data gathering in existing components, including additional financial analysis

Thematic area	Research question	Approach
Development peace and diplomacy gaps	• What is the 'toolbox' of foreign policy options related to crises/conflicts and when/why are they used? • What are the opportunities for influencing these decisions? • How do aid-receiving states influence the nature of third-party interventions in their crises?	Expanded data gathering in existing components, including additional KIIs
Climate change	• How is climate change altering the landscape of crisis for humanitarian actors? What are the growing threats? • What role should humanitarians play in the climate crisis? • How much funding are humanitarian donors putting towards climate action? • What approaches are being used for financing and impact?	Expanded data gathering in existing components, including additional financial analysis

Table 3: Performance on key crisis/response[8] types

Assessing performance on key crisis/response types:

Crisis/Response type	Research questions	Approach
How is the system performing on forced displacement?	How well is the humanitarian system able to support refugees and IDPs?	Data gathered within existing components

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8   It is important to note that some of these categories are not strictly crises, but could be the effect of crises or of political decisions. They type of humanitarian action relevant to addressing these issues may also not always be a 'response' but could also be more proactive and anticipatory.

Crisis/Response type	Research questions	Approach
How is the system performing on food security?	How well is the humanitarian system able to reduce severe food insecurity and avert famine?	Data gathered within existing components
How is the system performing in active conflict?	How well is the system supporting and protecting people in active conflicts?	Data gathered within existing components
How is the system performing on in epi-demics?	How well is the system able to reduce the spread and impact of epidemics and disease in crises?	Data gathered within existing components
How is the system performing on climate induced disasters?[9]	How well is the system able to prepare and respond to (a) specific example/s of crises linked to climate change?[10]	Data gathered within existing components

9   Climate change is presented both tables because it sits as a thematic issues area where the SOHS requires more concerted evidence gathering and also as a specific type of threat or crisis that the system seeks to respond to.

10   For example, tropical storms, extreme heat, drought and floods influenced by climate change.

4. DETAILED DESCRIPTION OF RESEARCH COMPONENTS

4.1 IN-COUNTRY RESEARCH

The purpose of the in-country research is to provide a more in-depth understanding of the performance analysis and key trends and themes in humanitarian operations in specific crisis responses. The country studies will be used to understand how the humanitarian system operates and how it performs in different crisis contexts. They will also be used to understand the specific constraints and features of the different context types, and the role these play in how assistance is planned, coordinated, and provided. This component also provides the opportunity to interrogate key policy questions of this study period by exploring important contextual examples of those themes and issues, such as contexts affected by climate change or inter-state conflict.

For the sixth edition, ALNAP will strengthen its partnership approach with local researchers for this component and ideally work with local research institutions or learning networks to implement this component. Through this approach, local researchers will feed into the overall study matrix of the global report, help determine key thematic issues to focus on in each context, and co-produce country reports to be published alongside the global report. These will present context specific findings that can be used to support local change for those who participated in the research. Working with institutions and learning networks rather than sole researchers should also help support the sustainability of dissemination plans and the uptake of findings.

Up to six country cases will be chosen to achieve a representative balance of the main characteristics that shape the crises to which humanitarians respond, while also capturing key crisis events in the study period that enable the examination of key thematic issues. These will include consideration of the following (not mutually exclusive) factors:

- A spread across geographic regions
- At least one protracted/long-term crises
- At least one 'forgotten' or underfunded crisis
- At least one context featuring strong locally led action
- At least one 'politically estranged' context
- At least one context experiencing interstate war
- At least one context experiencing the effects of climate change

The in-country studies provide a critical opportunity to consult with people affected by crisis and with national stakeholders and thereby ensure that the views of national authorities and national and local civil society organisations (CSOs) are represented in assessing the performance of the system. The in-country research will include interviews, FGDs and documentary research. The in-country research will be designed to achieve broad representation from different humanitarian actors and the entities and individuals engaged in crisis response within a given country but also to explore thematic questions pertinent to that context.

Within the six selected contexts, a sampling frame will be used to identify people affected by crisis for a series of FGDs, seeking a balance across age group, gender, and ethnic identity. The type of organisation engaged with, and type of assistance provided will also be included in the sampling frame, to elicit a wide set of experiences with humanitarian action. In some contexts, there may be security and access issues that require research engagement with people affected by crisis via online FGDs, one-to-one interviews or diary-based data collection.

KIIs and FGDs will be conducted according to an interview protocol designed on the basis of the SOHS study matrix and tailored to key issues in each context. They will be audio recorded with the prior permission of the interviewees, transcribed, and then coded using MaxQDA according to a coding matrix provided by ALNAP which will be used for consistency across all the SOHS Study components.

A small number of FGDs with crisis affected people will be conducted in late-Autumn 2024 to understand their key priorities that the research should consider. The research framework and study matrix will be updated to reflect those perspectives. The bulk of the FGDs and KIIs will take place from January 2024 to late 2025, following discussions with country research leads on refining research questions and approaches for those contexts.

Table 4: Country-level key informant interviews (KIIs): interviewees by type (per country)

Organisation type	Indicative minimum target for KIIs & FGDs[11]
People affected by crisis	30
Government/National Disaster Management Authority (NDMA)	5
National/local civil society actors involved in humanitarian action	8
National/local civil society actors involved in human rights and democratisation	3
UN humanitarian agencies	5

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11   The need to include specific types of stakeholders will depend on specific country contexts and appropriateness, but also the extent to which specific participants are likely to bring different perspectives and fill evidence gaps. A point of saturation of information may be reached prior to meeting the indicative targets.

Organisation type	Indicative minimum target for KIIs & FGDs[11]
International NGOs	8
Red Cross/Red Crescent Movement (ICRC, IFRC, National Societies)	2
Donor representatives, including non-DAC	4
HC/HCT/Cluster leads	5
National/local academics and researchers	2
Private-sector representatives	3
Military representatives (where relevant)	2
Development/DRR/peacebuilding actors (Micro Finance Institutions (MFIs), United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), NGOs)	8

4.2 AID RECIPIENT SURVEYS

The aid recipient surveys carried out in previous editions of the SOHS provided valuable insights into how recipients experience humanitarian assistance. They shed light on the effectiveness of the mechanisms used by humanitarian actors to improve the quality, relevance, and accountability of their work, and facilitate comparisons of the perspectives of humanitarian professionals and aid recipients on the quality of aid.

The sixth edition will use a mixture of in-person and remote modalities — including computer-assisted web interviewing (CAWI), computer-assisted personal interviewing (CAPI) and computer-assisted telephone interviewing (CATI) —to collect data from aid recipients in selected humanitarian response settings. The surveys will use largely the same research questions from previous editions to provide consistent comparisons over time. As such, Aid recipients will be asked for their opinions of the timeliness, quantity, and quality of aid, whether it addressed their priority needs, and how it could be improved. A small number of questions may be altered or added to explore issues particularly pertinent to the key issues and policy questions for this period. For example, a question could be included to ask about the extent to which people affected by crisis have trust in the humanitarian system.

Previous SOHS reports have relied solely on remote methods for the survey. A portion of the surveys in each context will be conducted in-person for this edition to include the views of people who do not have access to mobile phones. The sample frame will also be constructed by in-person engagement to increase the level of confidence that people included have actually received assistance from humanitarian action,

which is harder to verify accurately through mobile contact. A mapping of active humanitarian organisations in the locality will also be conducted to increase confidence that the people reached by the survey have received humanitarian assistance (rather than assistance from development actors or no assistance).

The surveys will aim to reach approximately 5,000 aid recipients across five contexts. The sample will have a gender and age balance and seek to be as representative as possible of different social sectors, which will be supported by the range of modalities used.

4.3 GLOBAL AID PRACTITIONER SURVEY

The purpose of the global aid practitioner survey is to gather qualitative and quantitative information from the widest possible range of humanitarian aid practitioners, while allowing trends to be tracked from previous SOHS editions. The survey will seek to elicit a current appraisal of the system as it relates to respondents' direct experience, as well as an assessment of whether and how these areas have changed since data was last collected in 2021.

Questions in the online survey will therefore remain largely the same as in the SOHS 2022 report to maintain a baseline comparison across years, although some questions may be omitted and others added based on their usefulness to the analysis and relevance to current policy questions.

The survey will be available online in at least Arabic, English, French and Spanish, with other key languages — for example, Ukrainian — considered. Support and Advisory Group (SAG) members will be identified to promote and disseminate the survey among their respective organisations and networks.

The links to each survey will be disseminated by the study team and SAG members, and published on the ALNAP website. In addition, the team will seek permission to place the online survey and links on the following websites and networks: ReliefWeb, DARA, InterAction, ICVA and OCHA. We will also request that key networks of local actors kindly disseminate the survey to their members to increase the diversity of perspectives provided. For example, the Asia Disaster Risk Reduction Network, the NEAR network, and the Pacific Island Network of Non-Government Organisations. The survey will also be disseminated through targeted use of social media and through in-country networks supported by local research partners engaged in the in-country research.

The survey will be launched by February 2025 and kept open until September 2025. The analysis will be completed by the end of November 2025.

4.4 KEY INFORMANT INTERVIEWS: HQ/GLOBAL LEVEL

The HQ/global or regional-level KIIs are designed to gather perception-based data from key stakeholders in the humanitarian system at these levels to complement the in-country KIIs (described above). The study team will conduct interviews with approximately 60 key informants online, or in person where travel is not required.

The bulk of the interviews, which will be conducted concurrently with other study activities, will be completed by October 2025 to feed into the main analysis period alongside the data produced by other components. The bulk of the interviews will be held across the period August 2024–October 2025, to allow the team to conduct both broad-based and exploratory interviews at the start of the data-collection period and more targeted interviews to gather data for specific research question and chapters. However, additional interviews will take place over the course of the writing up to March 2026 to help fill evidence gaps or explore hypotheses from the initial data analysis taking place in Autumn 2025.

The initial selection of interviewees will be designed both to achieve broad representation from across the humanitarian system and with key development and peace actors (as indicated in Table 3) but also to explore key thematic issues of particular relevance to this study period as outlined in Section 4.9. While national authorities and national NGOs will mainly be interviewed in the in-country research and can input via the practitioner surveys, the co-leads will also conduct some interviews of local actors at an early stage to better engage with those perspectives throughout the research cycle.

Table 5: HQ/global-level key informant interviews (KIIs): interviewees by organisation type 4.5 Organisational mapping and analysis

Organisation type	Minimum target for interviews[12]
Regional bodies	3
UN humanitarian agenices	10
International NGOs	10
Red Cross/Red Crescent Movement (ICRC, IFRC, National Societies)	5
Donor representatives, including non-DAC	10
Cluster heads and sub-clusters	5
Academic experts in related topics	4
Private-sector representatives	3
Donor government military representatives (where relevant)	3
Development/DRR/peacebuilding actors (UN/INGOs)	5
Multilateral development banks	2
Local or national NGOS and networks	5

12   The need to include specific types of stakeholders will depend on the extent to which specific participants are likely to bring different perspectives and fill evidence gaps. A point of saturation of information may be reached prior to meeting the indicative targets.

The second component contributing the statistical analysis will map the organisational configuration of the system. The sixth edition of the SOHS will build on past analysis to provide the longitudinal trend on key organisational statistics, including original data collection and analysis to provide the following:

- Number of organisations engaged in humanitarian action worldwide
- Largest humanitarian organisations, based on staff and annual humanitarian expenditure
- Total international staff
- Total national staff
- Building on the analysis conducted for the fifth edition, we will also seek to explore pay differentials between different type of staff and organisations.

Organisational data collection and analysis will, wherever possible, be disaggregated according to the balance of gender, ethnicity, and local/international staff, and at different levels of leadership or seniority across organisations. Gaps in the availability of such data will also be noted.

4.6 EVALUATION SYNTHESIS

The evaluation synthesis is designed to condense and synthesise findings from the large number of evaluations conducted within the international humanitarian system each year, revealing a broader picture of overall system-level performance. It will summarise findings of evaluations undertaken between January 2022 and December 2025. The evaluation synthesis will be a particularly rich source of data to inform the assessment of longitudinal performance against the different DAC criteria, as well as evaluating performance on key thematic areas.

The study team will compile documents primarily from the ALNAP database of evaluations within the HELP Library, as well as other public and non-public (i.e. internal organisational, or 'grey' literature) sources, and record the findings for each using a specific matrix for the evaluation synthesis. This matrix will retain a similar structure to that used in the fifth edition, including a rating system to weight findings based on evaluation quality. Although the synthesis analysis will remain mainly qualitative, the matrix will help to ensure the greatest possible degree of comparability across the findings and avoid potential bias.

The evaluation synthesis method will include two steps:

Step 1:

Categorising and coding the findings and recommendations from each evaluation report in an evaluation synthesis matrix. The matrix and coding framework will build on the protocol used in the evaluation synthesis for the SOHS 2022, as well as being informed by other evaluation syntheses and the United Nations Evaluation Group (UNEG), OECD and other guidance. While the framework will evolve in the early stages of the analysis it will likely include the following fields:

- ID#
- evaluation title
- year
- evaluator
- published/unpublished
- quality score
- commissioning agency
- evaluation type
- scope and timeframe
- subject area
- findings against criteria and indicators presented in the SOHS study matrix and the OECD criteria (see Table 1 and 2)
- core conclusions
- weaknesses
- good practices
- priority recommendations

Step 2:

Synthesising findings against each indicator in the SOHS study matrix listed as relevant to the evaluation synthesis in a summary report. The synthesis findings will be presented in a structure based on the analytical framework presented in Table 1 , drawn from all relevant areas of the evaluation synthesis matrix (findings, conclusions, recommendations). The synthesis will take into account the strength of evidence for each finding on the basis of the number, breadth and quality of evaluations supporting it. It will also present an overview of trends in evaluation approaches and quality in the period.

4.7 FINANCIAL FLOWS TO HUMANITARIAN EMERGENCIES

The data collected for this component will support the descriptive analysis of the size and shape of the humanitarian system and how that has shifted over time, while also contributing key quantitative data points for the performance analysis across different OECD criteria and related policy questions.

The full set of financial analysis questions will be finalised as part of the initial consultations. The initial areas for data analysis are:

- Total IHA trend 2012-2025
- Proportion provided by donor governments, including breakdown by government and any significant changes/trends, 2022-2025
- Proportion of IHA provided by private sector and private donations, 2022-2025, and indication of trends

- Funding volumes to types of emergencies — complex emergencies, disasters caused by environmental hazards, refugee displacement, 2022 — 2025, and indication of trends
- 'Humanitarian' funding from multilateral development banks, 2022-2024
- Deep dive on World Bank crisis/emergency instruments
- Volume of funds through the United Nations Central Emergency Response Fund (CERF), country-level pooled funds, Common Humanitarian Fund (CHF) and START Fund, 2022—2025
- Overview of delivery channels: UN agencies, NGOs, the Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement, private organisations (as implementers, depending on what data allows), host governments, unspecified, 2022-2024
- Concentration of funding among agencies; top 20 recipients of aid in study period and comparison to previous period
- Changes in distribution and concentration over the past 10 years; how many countries account for 50% of IHA and how many countries occupy the 'tail' of emergencies that received less
- Disbursements of forgotten crisis pooled funds (CERF underfunded crises; CBPF in countries that are on the ECHO forgotten crisis list; could also include internal donor allocation mechanisms for forgotten/overlooked crises)
- Total stated requirements and levels of funding UN-coordinated appeals, by country, 2022—2025
- Requirements and funding per intended recipient in UN-coordinated appeals, 2022-25
- Requirements and funding per technical sector in UN-coordinated appeals, 2022-2025
- Total IHA for cash and voucher programming, 2022-2025
- Proportion of IHA for cash and voucher programming compared to all other IHA, 2022-2025
- Populations in need and populations targeted and reached in UN coordinated appeals (also disaggregated by gender and age), 2022-2025
- Trends in levels of requirements met over course of 10-year crises
- Trends in levels of requirements met over first 5 years of a crisis (by crisis type)
- Analysis of patterns in sectoral spending over course of crises
- Which countries have been receiving large volumes of IHA for the longest period and have consecutively featured in the top 10 recipients (i) every year; (ii) 8—10 times; or (iii) 5—8 times
- Volumes of IHA for disaster risk reduction (DRR), disaster preparedness, broken down by donor, 2022-2025
- Unearmarked funding: 2022—2025 trends in volumes, donors and recipient agencies

- Specified funds for early/anticipatory action
- Cost data on particular aspects of humanitarian distribution and comparison in-country, e.g. cost of transporting a particular relief item, cost of fuel, to highlight differences in operating costs across countries
- Total flows to national and local NGOs, direct and (where possible) indirect, 2022-2025
- Proportion of aid to national and local NGOs compared with other groups, such as the UN agencies, Northern-based international NGOs, 2022-2025
- Mapping of local/national organisations receiving funds by sector/geography, 2025 size of humanitarian financial flows compared to other significant financial flows in largest recipient countries of IHA in 2025 and in case-study countries: national governments' non-grant revenue, peacekeeping, remittances, non-humanitarian ODA, including expenditure on DRR and climate-change adaptation (CAA)
- Volumes of IHA for early recovery in conflict settings, 2022-2025
- Other data, including pertaining to the thematic focus areas (described below) on detailed analysis of flows of development, peace and climate funding

4.8 LITERATURE REVIEW

Key policy and practice themes will be determined by the co-leads for the literature review of research reports and academic work published within the study period. A set of topics will be determined during the inception phase based on the study matrix to feed into the main analysis of data in Autumn 2025 and additional topics will be chosen after that point to help fill evidence gaps highlighted by other research components or to explore newer issues emerging towards the end of the study period.

The methodology will follow a similar structured search and screening approach to inclusion, analysis, and presentation of findings used in the last report.

4.9 THEMATIC STUDIES

This edition of the SOHS will again include some choice primary thematic studies; a research component adopted for the fifth edition to provide objective performance data designed to fill key research gaps of contemporary relevance. Several topics were identified in the inception phase that require additional efforts to explore in the sixth edition. The majority of these topics will be examined through additional data collection in the existing research components outlined above. For example, they can be captured through commissioning of additional data in the financial analysis or conducting targeted global KIIs in these topics. Only one — Sufficiency and the humanitarian prioritisation challenge — is likely to be commissioned as an independent research study due to the depth of additional data gathering required to answer important research questions on that theme. The list of topics ALNAP will explore as new themes for this edition are outlined below with brief descriptions of

the topic, research methods, and likely research questions.

Sufficiency and the humanitarian prioritisation challenge

After years of steady increase, followed by a relative plateauing of humanitarian funding, the humanitarian sector is facing an unprecedented drop in funding levels during the study period for the sixth edition. It will be critical to understand and reflect the impacts of this drop and how humanitarian agencies grappled with a fall in financing — in particular, to understand how this has affected how different humanitarian actors make needs-based allocation of scarce humanitarian resources. Evaluations are unlikely to capture these issues in detail in time for the drafting of the SOHS report in late 2025 and therefore reflecting these trends adequately will require a dedicated primary research component. This thematic issue will be explored in a commissioned piece of research. The precise research methodology will be discussed with the consultant lead.

Several key questions can be raised that examine both decisions made and their implications:

- Where and who have been prioritized for targeting by humanitarian actors in this period of economic constraints? Why were decisions made?
- What has been the impact for people affected by crisis who are not targeted as a result of budget cuts to humanitarian programmes? Are actors working across the HDP nexus in these settings to address broader vulnerabilities?
- How have prioritisation decisions had an impact on performance of humanitarian assistance? For example, in terms of efficiency, effectiveness, relevance or sustainability?

Making sense of the development, peace, and diplomacy gap

Attempts to strengthen linkages with development and peace efforts have increased significantly in the humanitarian sector over the past 8 years, as so-called 'HDP nexus' approaches are touted as the answer to an over-stretched humanitarian system. But the promise of nexus approaches has been hampered by several challenges — these range from a lack of consensus on what good HDP linkages look like in practice, to challenges incentivising stronger development engagement in fragile settings, particularly those featuring 'politically constrained/estranged' states.

Data exists to support understanding of the drivers for the HDP nexus and how organisational efforts are performing. However, additional KIIs will be conducted to capture some understudied aspects of the nexus made more important by the current situation of interstate conflict and geopolitical turmoil. The aim of these KIIs would be to better understand the political decision-making dynamics that serve as the root cause for many of the known challenges and dysfunctions in foreign aid and diplomacy that are hampering better development and peace engagement in fragile settings. Potential research questions to be explored include:

- How is the 'toolbox' of foreign policy options (e.g. diplomacy, foreign aid, sanctions) framed and decided by political operatives and appointees in aid-providing states?
- What, if any, are the opportunities for influencing these decisions to address the known gaps and challenges in HDP nexus efforts?
- How do aid-receiving states navigate, advocate, and influence the nature of third-party interventions in their crises?

Looking outside the multilateral humanitarian system

International humanitarian assistance and protection efforts are rarely the only form of support available to people affected by crises. People in crises draw on a wide mix of assets and resources which include both domestic sources — community self-help, government salaries, private sector philanthropy, religious giving — as well as private international sources — such as philanthropic foundations, remittances, or zakat. Getting an adequate picture of this mix of resources is challenging. Few organisations collect data on these resource flows, and figures that do exist for remittance tracking or zakat, are disaggregated only down to the country level. Some private sector actors already form a key part of the multilateral humanitarian system through supply chains, while others — large, small, local, or international — operate outside it.

Existing research components will be expanded to collect additional data on support outside of the multilateral humanitarian system. This will include targeted KIIs, tailored questions in the in-country research and additional data collection commissioned within the financial statistics component to capture some of these funding flows. Draft questions that may be answered include:

- Where and how much do the top 10 non-DAC donors give for humanitarian aid?
- Who are the primary recipients of this aid and what programmes and activities do they fund with it?
- How do non-DAC donors define their humanitarian work in contrast to development or wider foreign policy aims and how do they target/prioritise?
- What is their view of the multilateral humanitarian system and their motivations for engaging or not engaging?
- What is the volume and estimated value of support provided by different types of international and local private sector actors[13] in a crisis response, and how does this compare with volume and cost of the humanitarian response?
- How are the decisions and behaviours of private sector actors influenced by the protracted nature of crises in the most extremely fragile settings?
- Where are the perceived risks and opportunities for private sector actors to

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13   For example, multinational corporations without a disaster/service delivery focus; local private sector (formal and informal); and private sector companies (both domestic and international) with disaster/service delivery focus that can replace or be sub-contracted by humanitarian agencies.

engage more systematically in crisis response?

- How well does the multilateral humanitarian system coordinate with these wider networks and systems?

Climate change

While the pressure mounts for humanitarians to determine how they will respond to the growing climate crisis and where they can add most value, there is a dichotomy over their appropriate role. Some actors are arguing for a larger piece of the pie, scaling up anticipatory action and broadening and solidifying the humanitarian remit to include disaster risk reduction and resilience programming. Others are calling for a stronger nexus approach, working with actors who are better positioned to address the underlying structural problems and inequalities rather than expanding their own function.

To better understand how humanitarian actors are adapting in relation to the climate crisis, existing research components will gather additional data on these issues. Additional data points will be captured through targeted KIIs, in-country research in affected contexts, and via the financial statistics component to explore financial flows of climate financing to humanitarian agencies. Potential questions that will be explored include:

- What operational role should humanitarians be expected to play in the climate crisis? What are the options and entry points?
- Where can the humanitarian system add most value, and what are the tensions and trade-offs for an already stretched sector?
- How much funding are humanitarian donors putting towards climate action?
- What tools and approaches are humanitarian donors investing in and prioritizing to support a humanitarian response to the climate crisis?
- What is the range of anticipatory actions for climate change being conducted by humanitarian actors and what is their impact, including locally led climate adaption models?

5. ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS

ALNAP will seek approval from the ODI Research Ethics Committee for components of the project likely to engage with vulnerable individuals, including the in-country research and the aid recipient survey where we seek the perspectives of people affected by crisis. We will also work with research partners to gain local research approval where officially required but also where engagement with formal or informal gatekeepers would be useful to support the safety of in-country researchers and participants.

Full ethical considerations will be outlined in the submission to relevant approval bodies and tailored by research component and context, but key issues to consider in this research will include: informed consent and the ability for participants to withdraw from the process; the attempts but limits to ensuring anonymity to KII, survey and FGD participants; safe storage, transfer and protected access to data; physical and psychological safety of participants and researchers (particularly in contexts affected by conflict); and bias in the analysis and representation or findings (including a consideration of the researchers' own positionality and backgrounds). We will put in place measures to help mitigate these risks in consultation with partners who understand local contexts.

6. FINAL REPORT

ALNAP will present a global main report for the sixth SOHS edition, summarising the findings of the size and shape of the system, and its performance against key policy questions linked to the OECD criteria. The research will also produce shorter country specific reports from the in-country research. The main global report will be published in English alongside a summary, which will be translated into key languages.

The co-authors will take an iterative approach to analysing and drafting the final report by dividing out key chapters and thematic issues to focus upon early in the process. They will produce initial outlines of chapters during the inception phase that highlight key questions and data-points required to effectively address the respective relevant policy question for each chapter. This process will support the refinement of the study matrix to enable more proactive gathering of data across the components and particularly in specific KIIs and literature reviews that can be conducted by the co-authors rather than waiting for the data to flow in from the other research components at a later time. Key phases in the production of the report are outlined below.

1. Initial framework and study matrix developed October 2024
2. Draft chapter outlines and data needs identified: by December 2024
3. Final study matrix updated March 2025
4. 50% data point meeting with research components: July 2025
5. 75% data point meeting with research components: September 2025
6. 100% data point meeting with research components: November 2025
7. Gap filling research and writing of full report: November 2025-March 2026
8. First draft of the global report to be shared with SAG: April 2026
9. Post-peer review revisions: May 2026
10. Production: June-August 2026
11. Final report to be published: circa September 2026

7. MANAGEMENT ARRANGEMENTS

Management arrangements for this edition of the SOHS will be similar to the previous edition, engaging a consortium of consultants with particular expertise in the various components of the Study. The consortium will work in partnership with researchers from the ALNAP Secretariat. The internal and external co-leads will take the lead in writing the final report.

ALNAP and the SOHS consortium of researchers will remain in close contact throughout the research, analysis, writing and dissemination phases of the Report. This will be in the form of (at least) quarterly bilateral check-in meetings between ALNAP researchers and consultants working on specific components, as well as mid-term and final meetings for the consortium to address emerging findings and evidence gaps in the research.

As in previous years, the Study will be supported and guided by a Support and Advisory Group (SAG). Its main function will be to provide guidance and advice on substantive issues and content, primarily though written and verbal comments on the draft report. The research team will prepare a table of comments and responses indicating how comments have been addressed. Where possible, SAG assistance to the in-country research via their country contacts and to dissemination efforts for the practitioner survey and the final report will be welcome.

The ALNAP Steering Committee will also receive regular updates on the Study and be asked to provide advice at key points throughout the process.

ALNAP's SOHS Research Lead, Senior Programme Manager and Project Manager will coordinate the research study. ALNAP's Head of Research and Impact will provide strategic advice and lead engagement with the SAG.

8. COMMUNICATION & IMPACT

ALNAP communications colleagues will be involved throughout the SOHS research cycle as essential members of the SOHS project team. The communications and engagement plans will build on the various written and audiovisual products produced for the last report, including thematic written briefs, an animation, an e-reader and the successful set of nearly 60 tailored briefings and launches conducted for the fifth edition with diverse actors across the system.

A communication plan will be drafted in the inception phase in discussion with the research leads to ensure that the overall framing of the report, its key questions and findings lend themselves to effective communication and learning processes to inform policy and practice. In addition to designing the dissemination plans for the final main report and public engagement at key points throughout the research process, the Communications team will work closely with the in-country researchers to explore context specific engagement opportunities and the best formats for sharing the country reports. SAG input on these plans and engagement in the dissemination of the final report products and learnings will be appreciated.

ANNEX 1: MULTISTAKEHOLDER CONSULTATIONS ATTENDEES

First Name	Last Name	Organization
Abby	Stoddard	HO
Alexander	Gaus	Global Public Policy Institute
Amanda	Weyler	Sida
Andrew	Knight	GNDR
Anita	Kattakuzhy	NEAR
Arjen	Joosse	WV NL/DRA
Ayesha	Hassan	CWSA
Barbara	Lecq	FCDO
Barnaby	Willitts-King	GSMA
Cecille	Roselli	NRC
Charles	Boutet	GAC
Cyprien	Fabre	OECD
Dan	Maxwell	Tufts
David	Burt	Start Network
Dmytro	Kondratenko	Ukraine Evaluation Society
Dominique	Albert	ECHO
Elisa	Gabellieri	Give Directly
Erin	Weir	InterAction
Helen	Dempster	Center for Global Development
Heng	Aik Cheng	Mercy Malaysia
Hesham	Yousuff	Institute for Peace
Isabelle	De Schrijver	ECHO
James	Purcell	WEF
Jekulin	Lipi	GNDR
Jess	Lees	HAG
Jess	Camburn	Elhra
John	Mitchell	ALNAP
Josh	Hallwright	CHL
Kate	Hodkinson	OCHA CHD
Katie	Rickard	REACH/Impact Initiatives
Katie	Striffolino	MercyCorps

Lilian	Barajas	OCHA
Lisa	Fry	GAC
Lorreine	De La Cruz	CDPF
Lydia	Poole	CDP
Maria	Gabrielsen Jumbert	PRIO
Marta	Bruno	FAO
Marta	Valdes Garcia	Oxfam
Marzia	Montemurro	HERE Geneva
Meg	Sattler	GTS
Megan	Daigle	HPG
Melissa	Goncalves Marques	Grand Bargain Secretariat
Meriah-Jo	Breckenridge	HO
Mihir	Bhatt	AIDMI
Niklas	Rieger	DI
Nishanie	Jayamaha	ICVA
Pascal	Richard	SDC
Rachael	Cox	ICRC
Ralf	Sudholf	CHA
Riccardo	Polastro	WHO
Saeed	Ullah Khan	Glow Pakistan
Sarah	Telford	OCHA CHD
Seema	Chandra	Aus DFAT
Shama	Mall	CWS
Simone	Di Vicenz	Christian Aid
Sorcha	O'Callaghan	HPG
Stuart	Campo	IOM
Susan	Fraser	Irish Aid
Tanya	Wood	CHS
Veronique	De Geoffroy	Grupe URD
Vincent	Sanfuentes	BHA