

GLOBAL INSIGHTS:
The Humanitarian
Research and
Innovation
Landscape –
2024 Report

Acknowledgements

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We would like to extend our thanks to the individuals and organisations whose time and insights contributed to shaping both the initiative and this comprehensive report. The GPE – spanning two years of study – involved collaborative efforts across multiple institutions and resulted in the production of 16 reports.

GPE Partners

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Report Authors

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Global Insights: The Humanitarian Research and Innovation Landscape – 2024 Report

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Glossary & Definitions

AUB	American University of Beirut
CBO	Community-Based Organisation
CHS-A	Core Humanitarian Standard Alliance
Clusters	Clusters are designated by the Inter Agency Standing Committee (IASC) for the coordination of UN and non-UN agencies in each of the main sectors such as health, food security, education, etc.
CRS	OECD's Creditor Reporting System
CVA	Cash and Voucher Assistance
DRA	Dutch Relief Alliance
FCDO	Foreign, Commonwealth & Development Office, UK
FGD	Focus Group Discussions
FTS	OCHA's Financial Tracking Service
GBV	Gender-Based Violence
GNDR	Global Network for Disaster Reduction
GPE	Global Prioritisation Exercise
GSMA	A global organisation unifying the mobile ecosystem
HDP	Humanitarian Development Peace Nexus. A term used to capture the interlinkages between the humanitarian, development, and peace sectors. It refers to attempts in these fields to work together to more effectively meet people's needs, mitigate risks and vulnerabilities, and move towards sustainable peace.
HIC	High Income Country
HRI	Humanitarian Research and Innovation
IASC	Inter-Agency Standing Committee

IATI	International Aid Transparency Initiative
ICRC	International Committee of the Red Cross
ICVA	International Council of Voluntary Agencies
IFRC	International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies
INGOs	International Non-Governmental Organisations
Innovation	A means of adaptation and improvement through finding and scaling solutions to problems, in the form of paradigms, products, processes, learnings, or wider business models (Betts & Bloom, 2014).
Intermediaries	Agencies that accept funding to then pass on to other actors, for example, an innovation fund that issues calls for research proposals.
IRC	International Rescue Committee
KII	Key Informant Interview
LAC	Latin America and Caribbean
LMICs	Low and Middle-Income Countries
LNGOs	Local Non-Governmental Organisations
MSF	Médecins Sans Frontières
NCDs	Non-Communicable Diseases
NGO	Non-Governmental Organisation
OCHA	United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs
ODA	Official Development Assistance
ODI	Overseas Development Institute
OECD	Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development
OESEA	Oceania, Eastern and South-Eastern Asia

Research	A systematic set of activities that are planned, organised, and have a described methodology, and aim to answer specific questions or describe and address specific issues and to develop new applications of existing and available knowledge.
ROI	Return on Investment
SCA	South and Central Asia
SEA	Southern and Eastern Africa
SDGs	Sustainable Development Goals
UNHCR	United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees
UNICEF	United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund
UNFAO	United Nations Food and Agriculture Organisation
UN-Habitat	United Nations Human Settlements Programme
USAID	United States' Agency for International Development
VfM	Value for Money
WANA	Western Asia and North Africa
WCA	West and Central Africa
WFP	World Food Programme
WHO	World Health Organization



Foreword



It is hard to feel much optimism for humanity in the face of multiple, entrenched, and escalating humanitarian crises; when the scale of unmet need remains so stubbornly high and political will to address them so weak.

Yet we would argue that science, innovation, and technology offer one important avenue of hope. Research and innovation (R&I) are drivers of change and have always been part of how humanitarian practice has developed. Recent advances in technology now offer the potential to transform human knowledge and capabilities at unprecedented speed and scale, yet there is a risk these advances will only widen the gap between those who are able to access these benefits and whose needs are counted, and those who are considered too difficult to reach.

Thousands of people across the globe contribute to humanitarian research and innovation (HRI). Some of them consider themselves humanitarian actors, but many would not. They work in community-based organisations, NGOs, universities and research institutions, the private sector, and of course, humanitarian and UN institutions. The diversity of this community is both its strength and its challenge.

In 2020, Elrha embarked on a global programme of research based on a hypothesis that better describing the global R&I community and understanding how it works within, and alongside, the humanitarian community would help us all to become more strategic and intentional in how we use this resource to create stronger synergies and deliver greater impact in addressing humanitarian needs. By documenting who the R&I actors are, where the funding comes from, and importantly, talking to the producers and users of HRI, we can better identify shared challenges, opportunities, and priorities for the future development of our sector. This report is the culmination of over two years of research and consultation in which we commissioned 16 unique reports exploring different aspects of the HRI ecosystem: from global output mapping and financial data tracking, to regional, national, and community level consultations, and donor conversations.

The result is this most comprehensive overview of the HRI landscape to date. It identifies real progress in our sector and captures the diversity and talent that is available to support the humanitarian community in addressing unprecedented global need.

However, it also identifies the significant challenges, inequities, and missed opportunities that must be addressed if the full potential of R&I is to be realised. Undertaking the research has not been without its challenges either. The gaps in the data point to the lack of prominence and purpose for R&I within the formal structures of the international system. To realise the full potential of R&I in the humanitarian system, we must address these gaps and become more systematic in how we record, monitor, and coordinate activity.

Advances in science and technology are going to bring further rapid change to our world: it is up to all of us in the humanitarian community to build enduring and equitable partnerships with R&I actors and ensure these transformative capabilities respond to the needs and priorities of the most vulnerable.

To that end, it is our hope that this report and its recommendations provide a catalyst for collective reflection, dialogue, and action.

Mark Bowden
Chair, Elrha GPE Reference Group

Jess Camburn
CEO, Elrha



We extend our gratitude to all those who have contributed to Elrha’s Global Prioritisation Exercise (GPE) to make the initiative, this report – and the numerous regional, national, community, and thematic reports – possible. This includes Elrha and its staff, all our partner organisations who conducted the research and consultations, and all those who participated in the research and shared their perspectives. We would also like to acknowledge and thank the GPE Reference Group who have guided and championed the work, and the donors who have made it possible: the UK Foreign, Commonwealth & Development Office (FCDO) and the Netherlands Ministry of Foreign Affairs.



Executive Summary

Executive Summary

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Elrha’s Global Prioritisation Exercise (GPE) aims to improve outcomes for people affected by crisis and address gaps in knowledge about how humanitarian research and innovation (HRI) operates.

Through understanding the HRI landscape and highlighting changes that could improve things further, it is hoped to amplify the impact of investments in HRI. This report is an overview of the findings, conclusions, and recommendations of the two-year study.

HRI is a catalyst to improve the humanitarian system’s ability to respond to established and emerging challenges more effectively. Successful sectors invest in research and innovation (R&I) to enable continuous improvement in terms of impact, efficiency, and effectiveness. The humanitarian sector needs to do the same to benefit those communities affected by crisis and to improve the impact of funds made available by taxpayers and other donors.



Given the projected growth in humanitarian need, and the growing gap in the resources available, there is a compelling argument that investment in R&I should be made as one strategy in improving the impact for affected communities of humanitarian services.

In 2017, Elrha – a global organisation – published the first phase of the GPE for HRI, a report that set out a baseline of the actors contributing to the ecosystem, and the detectable HRI outputs. Subsequently, the GPE was officially launched in 2021, seeking solutions to complex humanitarian problems through HRI. This represented the first global effort to understand HRI in the humanitarian system. This report provides an overview of the 16 reports produced, including findings about the issues that require future HRI attention (Chapter 7) as well as a set of conclusions and recommendations on how to improve the HRI ecosystem (Chapter 8).



The main themes that come through the GPE are:

There has been a significant increase in investment in HRI, with a doubling of resources over the last five years, but resources remain insufficient in the view of many practitioners, and low relative to other sectors.

There is a need for better partnerships beyond the humanitarian sector with the wider research community and private sector where more financial resources, capabilities, and opportunities lie.

Too much R&I is supply driven rather than demand driven. Policies, processes, and methodologies for including different voices, and the needs of different groups in populations affected by crises, need strengthening. The funding and the choice of issues to work on are shaped by the architecture of the wider humanitarian system and the institutions who primarily pay for the work, mostly in the high-income countries of the Global North. There are low levels of problem definition and prioritisation by the communities affected by crises. Localisation is seen as a key issue in HRI as it is with humanitarianism more broadly, and it was noted that there is increasing participation of local actors, but mainly only in data collection. Shifts in power, where local actors set the agenda or make decisions on priorities or funding, are slow to materialise.

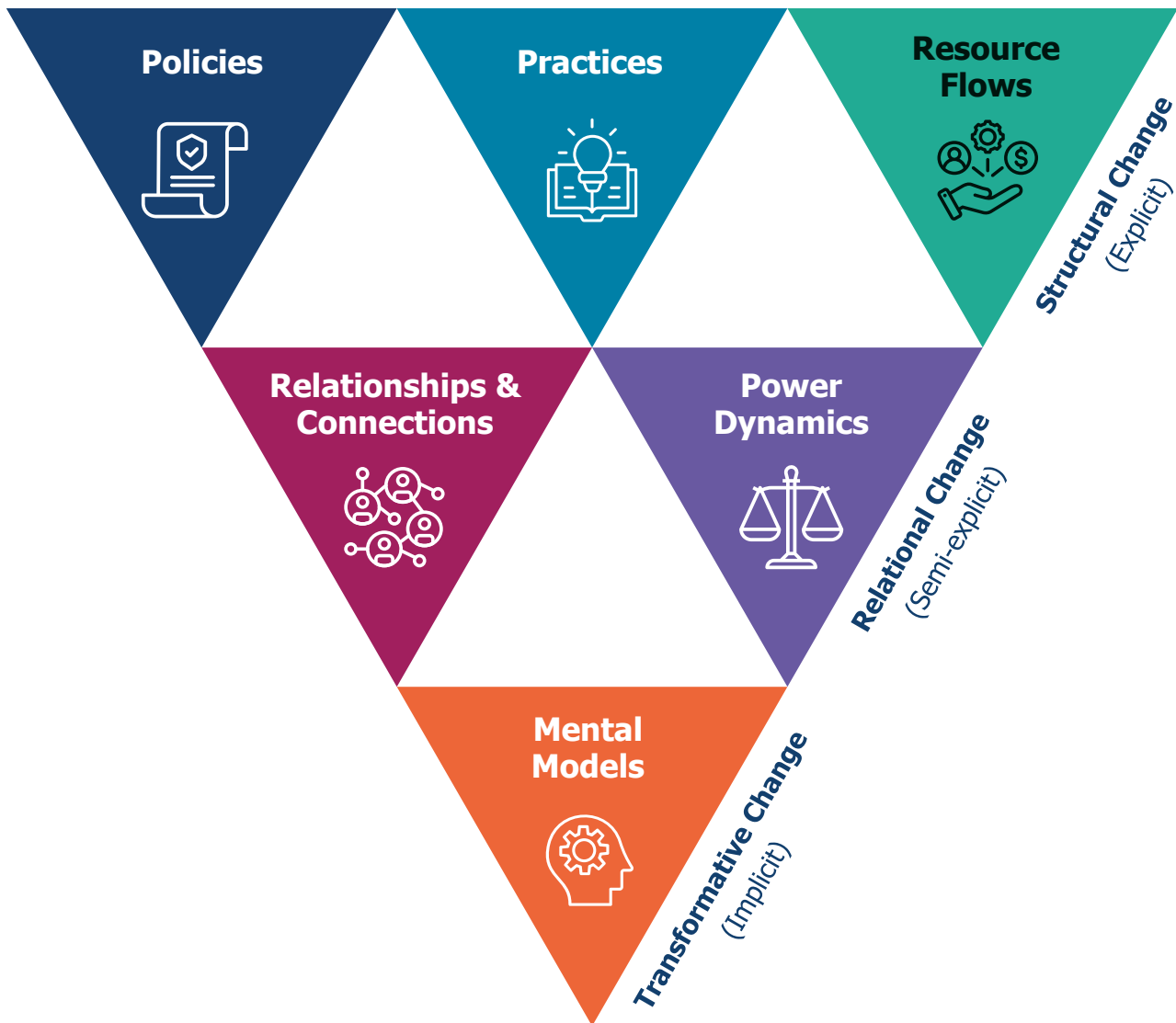
Thematic issues tend to dominate the R&I agenda, but there is a large demand to research and innovate around more systemic issues and how they impact communities affected by crisis and the humanitarian sector's way of working. The thematic focus reflects the architecture of the humanitarian system which is built around the delivery of core humanitarian services. Among thematic issues, health, including a focus on communicable diseases and mental health were prioritised, with food security second.

However, a majority of those who participated in the six regional consultations prioritised broader system-wide issues such as the impact of climate change, and within that, a focus on the preparedness phase. There was interest in the connectedness of climate change in exacerbating other issues, for example, disease outbreaks, floods, droughts, and the subsequent effect on food security and livelihoods. The consultations also highlighted interest in a deeper understanding of the interconnectedness between complex issues such as increased inequalities and democratic backsliding, and how these different systemic changes can reinforce each other in ways that impact the humanitarian endeavour.

There is an insufficient feedback loop from HRI to scaling up new approaches. This is a function of the weak connection between findings from HRI and changes in programme policy which are often subject to a wider range of political considerations.

There is insufficient coordination on HRI. This means there can be duplication or gaps in research, or simply HRI around issues that are not a priority for practitioners or affected communities.

Figure 1: Six Conditions of Systems Change



Inspired by the feedback in the regional consultations for systemic change, this report uses the ‘Six Conditions of System Change’ by John Kania, Mark Kramer, and Peter Senge to analyse the breadth of findings and recommendation in the 16 reports of the two-year GPE. The framework looks at system change holistically, examining the visible and less visible aspects to create a set of recommendations for enabling change given the complex nature of both the HRI ecosystem and the broader humanitarian sector. This framework captures six pivotal conditions to understand the system as it has evolved: what is seen – the policies, practices, and resource flows, what relationships and power dynamics enable and constrain those and the mental models that influence the system as a whole. Given the complex nature of the HRI system and, therefore, the challenge to effecting change, the conclusions and recommendations are set out to facilitate dialogue in the sector about how to achieve genuine transformation through working not only on visible structural changes, but also the reshaping of relationships, power dynamics, and the underlying mindset governing decision-making within the system. The framework aligns with the GPE’s mission to foster systemic change by comprehensively addressing both the overt and less visible dimensions of the complex HRI system.



Policies

(Rules, guidelines, policies, and priorities that guide actions.)

- HRI offers multi-dimensional benefits to humanitarian efforts, but it needs greater policy and financial commitment to drive significant change.
- The policy framework to create the feedback loop between research findings and programme policy / uptake is weak. Innovations often evolve over multiple crises in different contexts as practitioners try new approaches before there is confidence in making them mainstream, creating a significant lag in uptake. Donors should support the scaling of innovation, incentivise adoption and research uptake, and all actors need to strengthen systems for the integration of learning from HRI into policy development and scaling up.
- Funders and humanitarian agencies should work together to create better frameworks that consolidate the tools, platforms, and codes for reporting expenditure on HRI.



Practices

(Activities and procedures of institutions, organisations, coalitions, and networks for HRI. Informal shared habits and ways of working.)

- Too much HRI is supply driven rather than demand driven. Institutional donors, international non-governmental organisations (INGOs), intermediaries, and academics should make the agenda setting, priorities, and any decisions about funding more needs based by further exploring ways to meaningfully engage people affected by crisis. The policies may be in place, but practice for a needs-based HRI is not.
- Thematic issues tend to dominate the HRI agenda, but there is a large demand for research and to innovate around more systemic issues, such as the impact of climate change, to increase the understanding of how different systemic changes reinforce each other and how the humanitarian system can adapt.
- To mitigate imbalanced power dynamics, institutional donors, INGOs, intermediaries, and academics should ensure funding calls, partnership agreements, monitoring, and evaluations include the participation and ownership of the affected communities.
- Global clusters should support in-country clusters in framing HRI challenges that can be used as agenda-setting priorities.
- More HRI should be made available in languages other than English to ensure wider access, reach, and uptake, especially with local actors.
- The governments of countries who experience vulnerability to hazards and conflict should invest in the research capacity of their own nations. These efforts should be supported by international humanitarian donors, research institutions, and operational agencies.



Resource flows

(How money, people, knowledge, information, and other assets such as infrastructure are allocated and distributed.)

- There has been a significant increase in investment in HRI, more than double between 2017 and 2021, but at only 0.2% of overall humanitarian expenditure, practitioners report resources remain insufficient to generate significant change. The majority of funding comes from the Global North, and the relatively small number of donors who support the global humanitarian endeavour tend to set the R&I agenda.
- Current funding cycles are too short for effective HRI and uptake, so greater flexibility in HRI funds will help.
- There is a need for intermediate funders because major donors find it difficult to directly engage with many local non-governmental organisations (LNGOs).
- To overcome barriers and (perceived) limited capacity, and the bias towards international collaborations over local engagements, institutional donors, intermediaries, and academic institutions should identify and intentionally support and build the capacity of a local and more diversified HRI community through long-term relationships with governments, national, local, and civil society organisations, including academics.
- Donors and operational agencies need to agree a way of measuring funding flows for R&I within humanitarian reporting, notably the International Aid Transparency Initiative (IATI) / OCHA's Financial Tracking Service (FTS).



Relationships and connections

(Quality of connections and communication occurring among actors within the HRI ecosystem.)

- There is insufficient coordination on HRI. Donors and clusters should establish stronger mechanisms for coordinating HRI investments.
- There is a need for HRI networks to work across clusters and thematic-focused groups to connect different disciplines and across operational agencies, and academic institutions.
- Humanitarian actors should build stronger relationships and partnerships with non-traditional humanitarian actors and bring them more intentionally into the HRI ecosystem.
- Institutional donors, intermediaries, and academic institutions can identify and build long-term relationships with governments, national and local civil society organisations, and academic institutions to build a more diverse HRI community.



Power dynamics

(The distribution of decision-making power and influence – both informal and formal – among individuals and organisations.)

Localisation is seen as a key issue in HRI as it is with humanitarianism more broadly. National and local actors need to be meaningfully engaged in policy dialogue and setting HRI agendas.

There is a lack of equivalence in the attention given to different crises, with some issues and some population subgroups receiving more attention than others. R&I funding should be needs led to maximise impact.

The balance between accountability to taxpayers who fund research and the affected communities who are the intended target groups of high-quality research is not always transparently and intentionally managed. Goal conflicts, for example between accountabilities, need to be better recognised and intentionally managed.

There is not always adequate consideration of issues such as gender or those of specific marginalised groups, for example, women, children, the elderly, people with disabilities, the LGBTQIA+ community, or ethnic minorities among others. All actors to require and enable inclusive and participatory HRI, recognising that communities are not homogenous groups.



Mental models

(Habits of thought – deeply-held beliefs and assumptions of operating that influence how we think, what we do, and how we talk.)

- HRI is not fully embraced within the humanitarian system which impacts political and financial commitment. Innovation requires a degree of risk-taking which requires staff to be given the space and confidence of senior managers to try different approaches out. Develop guidelines and ways of working to ensure that HRI is conducted ethically in humanitarian settings, maintaining high standards of safeguarding and without distracting humanitarian actors from their focus on saving lives.
- There is a self-perpetuating paradigm where Global South HRI capacities are seen as weaker and, therefore, receive less access to funding. Organisations to review how their organisational culture enables or inhibits innovation, and to uncover any unconscious biases and explore new partnerships, closer to the affected communities.
- Whilst there are large research funds available, they are usually not set up with humanitarian objectives in mind that makes accessing such money difficult for humanitarian agencies. All actors to advocate for more research-funding resources to address humanitarian-related issues.

What does the systemic analysis tell us about how to strengthen the HRI ecosystem? Running between the mental model, relationships and power, policy, practice and resource layers, there seem to be four broad, systemic issues:

1. The reports and consultations in this process have suggested that both policymakers and operational colleagues intellectually understand the potential impact of HRI in improving the effectiveness and efficiency of assisting affected populations, but that intellectual understanding does not translate into the financial, policy, and process commitments necessary to actualise the ambition.
2. The locus of resources and, therefore, power and decision making is in the Global North. There is an inherent emphasis on a supply-driven system with the emphasis more on *'how do we better deliver?'* than on *'what are the problems that affected communities experience and how do we solve them?'* To change this paradigm, there is a need to bring in more Global South-based institutions and have a greater level of involvement of diverse and affected communities. There is, additionally, a challenge to national governments of countries at risk of crises, private sector, and civil society in the Global South to invest in HRI themselves.
3. There is a need to strengthen relationships and partnerships beyond the humanitarian sector bubble to seek greater relationships with research funds and research institutions, as well as private sector organisations, who would not see themselves as humanitarian, to open up new opportunities for resources, skills, expertise, and novel solutions.
4. The links between the research community and operational community are weak. There is a need for the translation of research findings to make it more digestible for operational practitioners, but also there needs to be an onus on operational practitioners to seek out the new knowledge being generated.

Much of what is required lies with collaborative and transformative leadership. Leaders who are willing to reach across sectoral boundaries, open to new practices and ways of working, and able to take some level of risk, within ethical limits, to try that which is new and create the right culture that allows such uptake.

The GPE has highlighted that a lot of HRI is being conducted. However, the value of this work is not being fully maximised, and there is a general underinvestment. If the humanitarian community is to ever catch up with the growth in needs for humanitarian services, there needs to be more effective and efficient ways of working. This report hopefully points to a range of actions that can be undertaken by all actors in the humanitarian system and beyond, according to their capacities, that if undertaken would enhance the humanitarian endeavour.



It is hoped that the GPE, and this summary report, will enable greater understanding of which HRI issues the sector needs to address, and ways to improve the HRI ecosystem as well.

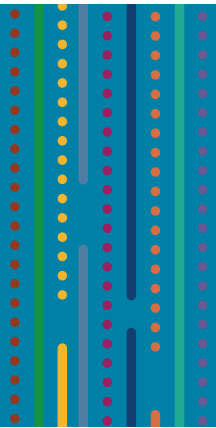


1. Introduction

1. Introduction

Elrha's Global Prioritisation Exercise (GPE) aims to amplify the transformation of humanitarian research and innovation (HRI) with the aim of ultimately improving outcomes for people affected by crisis as well as to address fundamental gaps in knowledge about how HRI operates.

This overview examines the HRI landscape, addressing aspects that define its structure, functionality, and impact, and highlighting changes that could improve things further. HRI is a catalyst to addressing established and emerging challenges more effectively. An example of successful HRI is the use of cash and voucher assistance (CVA) (see box).



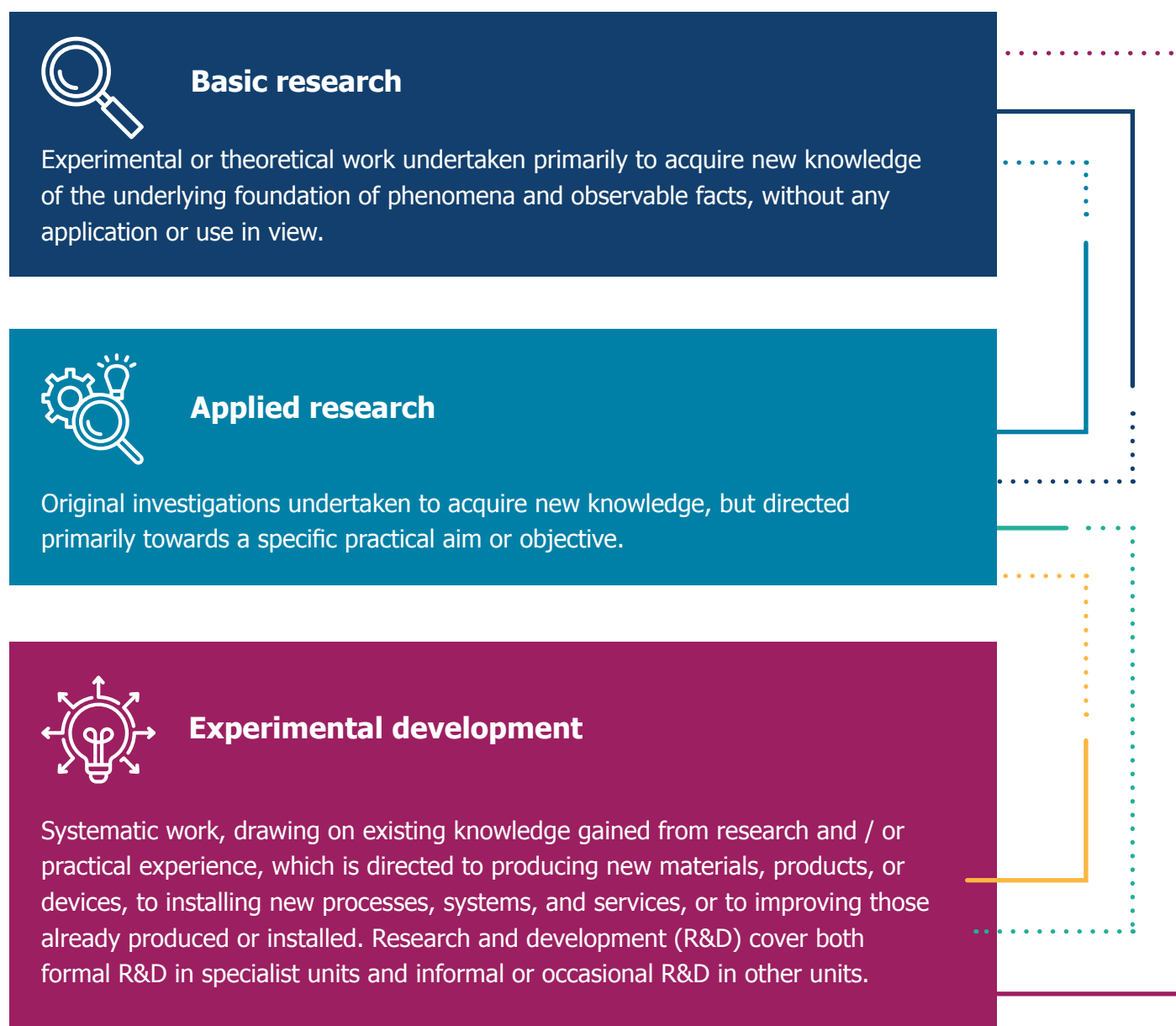
CVA has evolved into a prominent humanitarian intervention method. Historically, CVA represented a small fraction of aid, but by 2019, it constituted about 20% of humanitarian spending, amounting to \$5.6 billion. The rise in CVA is attributed to organisations adopting it as a fundamental approach, offering the potential to reach 18% more people compared to traditional in-kind contributions. Recent technological innovations, including fintech tools like blockchain, have further advanced the role of CVA in the humanitarian field.

There is a consensus that other successful sectors invest in R&I to enable continuous improvement, both in terms of efficiency and effectiveness, and the humanitarian sector similarly needs to do the sameⁱ – primarily to benefit those communities affected by crisis, but also to improve the impact of funds made available by taxpayers and private donors. Given the continued actual and projected growth in humanitarian need, and the growing gap in the resources available,ⁱⁱ many consulted in the studies articulate a compelling argument that investment in R&I should be made as one strategy in improving the experiences of affected communities of humanitarian services.

This report is an overview of the principal findings, conclusions, and recommendations of the reports and consultations commissioned during the GPE. The conclusions and recommendations in this report are taken from the source documents within the GPE process (more detail below) and distilled by the authors of this overview. In drawing out key themes and issues from multiple sources, it inevitably reflects some level of interpretation, but we have sought to be faithful to the original work. Where appropriate, the authors have identified their interpretation or analysis.

Innovation in the GPE is defined as, 'a means of adaptation and improvement through finding and scaling solutions to problems, in the form of paradigms, products, processes, learnings or wider business models'.ⁱⁱⁱ Humanitarian innovation is any innovation applied to humanitarian assistance, 'an iterative process that identifies, adjusts and diffuses ideas for improving humanitarian action'.^{iv}

Research, on the other hand, is 'a systematic set of activities that are planned, organised, and have a described methodology and aim to answer specific questions, or describe and address specific issues, and to develop new applications of existing and available knowledge'. The internationally recognised Frascati definition of research^v includes the following typologies:



Humanitarian research is any research related to the humanitarian sector. In this project, 'research' includes both academic and operational research, including evaluations, assessments, and other knowledge-building activities.

This report provides an overview of two years of study, producing 16 reports. Collectively, they provide an analysis of the progress and performance of the HRI ecosystem. This work was commissioned by Elrha – a global organisation that seeks solutions to complex humanitarian problems through HRI. In 2017, Elrha published the first phase of the GPE for HRI, a report that set out a detailed baseline of the funding landscape, the actors contributing to this ecosystem, and the detectable HRI outputs. This represented the first global effort to understand HRI in the humanitarian system, and included the following findings from the period 2016–2017:

- The humanitarian system’s knowledge production pathways of publication and dissemination are biased towards high income countries (HICs). Donor agencies / governments were the dominant type of funder, with the vast majority headquartered in Europe and North America with limited representation of funders from the Global South.
- The overall funding targeted at research remained small, largely with grant timelines of 12 months or less.
- Innovation had more diversity in its funding base, supported to a greater extent by non-government organisations (NGOs), United Nations (UN) agencies, and the private sector. It attracted the interest of funders who had preferences for the types of innovation they wanted to support. Grants tended to focus on longer-term funding cycles (one to five years).
- Strategic priorities were in response to the World Humanitarian Summit (WHS) and Grand Bargain commitments. Donors also expressed a strong interest in engaging more with the private sector as part of ongoing and future strategies.
- 77% of academic outputs were in research, whereas 55% of practitioner outputs were in innovation, and 33% in research.
- For both R&I, health was the sector most frequently focused on (35% for innovation and 28% for research).

Conducted five years later, the second phase of the GPE study is more comprehensive than the 2017 study, including:

- An **HRI funding flows analysis**, carried out by a consortium of researchers across the world led by the American University of Beirut (AUB). This consortium identified what is currently underway in terms of HRI worldwide, including where it is happening, who is funding it, and how actors from low and middle-income countries (LMICs) are engaged.
- A **consultation process** that engaged stakeholders from donors to operational agencies – international, national and local, research groups, and community stakeholders, where the six regional consultations were led by Deakin University.
- A desk-based global mapping of the literature being produced led by the AUB. This showed an increase in the amount of documented HRI compared to 2017.
- A case study from a Ukraine scale-up led by independent consultants.

After the introduction and methodology, this report is structured to highlight different aspects of the HRI ecosystem (Chapters 3 to 6).

Chapter 7 presents the most frequently mentioned issues that require further HRI attention identified in the studies and consultations, with conclusions and recommendations relating to the HRI ecosystem being captured in Chapter 8. In more detail:



Chapter 3: The Architecture of the Humanitarian System and the Humanitarian Research and Innovation (HRI) System

This gives a basic description of the humanitarian system architecture, and the associated R&I ecosystem, building on a desk review^{vi} of five platforms of five bibliographic databases for documents examining HRI to identify who is producing what. The search spanned from 1 January 2017 to 30 June 2021.

The findings are categorised to address the following questions:

1. Identification of actors and capacities: The overview process focused on identifying the actors and funders producing and funding HRI and assessing what capabilities, including skills, and approaches the humanitarian system employs to produce R&I.
2. Analysis of output producers: The review examines who produces what outputs, considering any potential Global North / South biases and power dynamics.
3. Typology and focus of outputs: The review classifies the types of outputs being generated and identifies the specific humanitarian issues these outputs aim to address.
4. Coordination and relationships among actors: The review investigates how these actors coordinate and work with each other, as well as seeking to understand the interconnection and relationships between different actors engaged in HRI.



Chapter 4: The Architecture of the Humanitarian Research and Innovation (HRI) Landscape

This chapter expands on Elrha's 2022 report 'Who funds what? Humanitarian research and innovation funding flows analysis.' This report was the first attempt to track funding allocations for R&I within the humanitarian system. The detailed findings and methodology can be found with the report [here](#).

Here we present the main findings from the funding flows report to establish a baseline for monitoring HRI spending, identify potential disparities, and promote more effective coordination. This chapter addresses the following key questions:

1. Who provides funding and in what amounts?
2. Who receives funding and in what amounts? Are there any Global North / South biases in the funding distribution?
3. What stages of the HRI process receive funding? This includes research, innovation, adoption, and scaling.
4. What specific areas or projects are being funded?
5. What are the geographical sources and destinations of funding?



Chapter 5: Role and Responsiveness

This chapter examines the extent to which R&I can provide timely responses to humanitarian challenges, and the contributions of R&I in various humanitarian contexts globally. The consultation reports explored the ways in which R&I has been contributing to humanitarian operations. The role of R&I in each phase of the humanitarian response cycle is highlighted, and where possible, special attention was given to issues such as the invasion of Ukraine. The overall chapter addresses the following areas:

1. What is the role of R&I in the humanitarian system?
2. How can HRI enable better humanitarian outcomes?
3. What are the facilitators and blockers to enable a timely response from HRI?



Chapter 6: Equity and Power Relations

This chapter combines data from the fundings flows report and the mapping of R&I actors alongside the consultations reports to unpack the role that regional, national, and community level actors play in shaping the HRI agenda. It draws specific attention to equity and power relations, and dynamics among the actors within the HRI ecosystem. The following questions are addressed:

1. What roles do regional, national, and local actors play in the HRI system?
2. Who determines the R&I agenda within the humanitarian system?
3. What are the power dynamics within partnerships in the HRI ecosystem?



Chapter 7: Insights

Articulating the humanitarian challenges that HRI can address will enable a more strategic approach in setting HRI agendas. This chapter outlines the thematic areas where HRI should be focused according to the consultations and studies undertaken in the GPE.

The consultation reports included in this overview exercise identified specific challenges faced by different regions that can be tackled through HRI. The regional consultations were led by Deakin University based on interview data. Participants expressed their perspectives on the areas for further HRI they believed important. In addition, Elrha commissioned a desk review exercise to review regional humanitarian challenges as identified in global reports, academic literature, and cluster strategy documents. It is worth noting that the challenges the reports discuss tend to look at what has already happened, whereas the consultations / interview findings in the regional reports were more forward looking with discussants articulating what they want, not what they have.

The following questions are addressed in this chapter:

1. What areas require attention in HRI?
2. How can foresight be incorporated and commented upon in the context of HRI?



Chapter 8: Conclusions and Recommendations

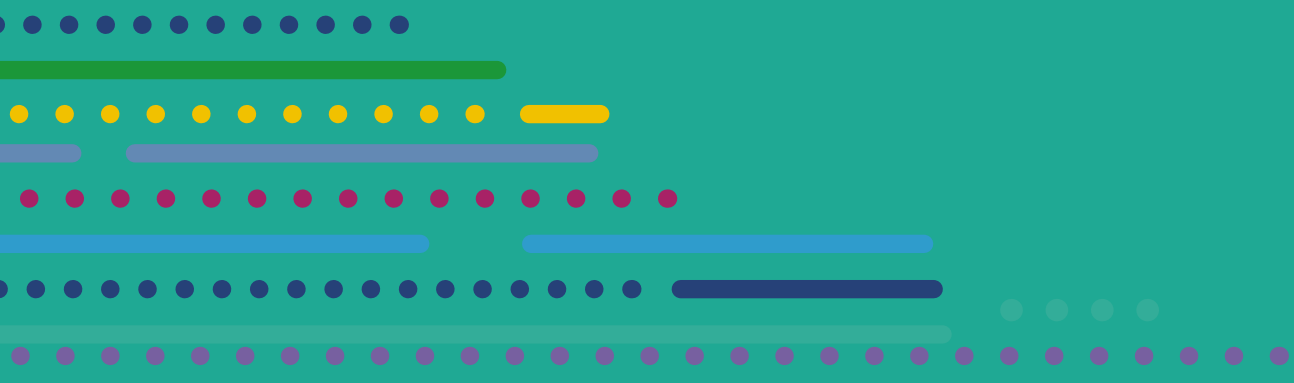
Whereas Chapter 7 focuses on what thematic issues are priorities for R&I, the consultations and reports also flagged issues with the nature of the HRI system, within the broader humanitarian system, itself. Recognising both systems as being complex, the findings and recommendations are structured around a systems-based analysis – the ‘*Six Conditions of System Change*’ developed by John Kania, Mark Kramer, and Peter Senge. This framework is used to group recurrent themes from the findings across the different studies, and outlines policy and practice changes that would foster a more coordinated, strategic, and effective approach for R&I in the humanitarian system.



Community meeting in the village of Mandina Mandinga in the Gabu Region, Guinea Bissau.
Image credit: Tiago Fernandez



2. Methodology



2. Methodology



To develop this overview report, a series of research questions were developed after reviewing the various reports and data sources generated by the GPE, coupled with discussions with Elrha to establish the scope of the report.


The reports and data sources were reviewed again, and relevant information extracted and recorded against each research question.



The research questions this report seeks to answer are:

1. What does the architecture of the HRI system look like? Who are the actors? And how do they react? How is output production structured, considering potential biases and coordination mechanisms?
2. Within the HRI funding landscape, what entities provide funding, to whom, and in what amounts? Is there evidence of Global North / South or gender biases in funding distribution? How is funding allocated across different stages of the innovation process, what specific initiatives are funded, and what is the geographical distribution of funding sources and recipients? How is coordination managed within the HRI funding ecosystem?
3. What is the overarching role of R&I in the humanitarian system throughout the humanitarian cycle? What factors influence HRI's ability to provide timely responses to humanitarian needs?
4. Who sets the HRI agenda? What are the roles of regional, national, and local actors? What are the power relations in these partnerships?
5. What are the thematic areas and humanitarian challenges that require HRI attention?

This information was then reviewed with key themes and commonalities summarised, and discrepancies and context-specific details highlighted. Some of the reports were quantitative in nature whilst others were qualitative, and so, this report presents a qualitative set of findings as a whole.



The reports included in this overview exercise were:



Systematic mapping of the humanitarian research and innovation (HRI) ecosystem^{vii}

The overarching question that the review sought to answer was: *'Who is doing what, where, and funded by whom in the HRI space?'*

The review was led by the American University of Beirut (AUB) and involved a systematic search for documents published between 1 January 2017 to 30 June 2021. The search string: humanitarian AND (research OR innovation*) was used to search:

- 57 multidisciplinary bibliographic databases across five platforms to capture journal articles and conference papers.
- Relief Web – to capture grey literature, solely if classified by Relief Web as being one of 'Assessment', 'Analysis', 'Evaluation', or 'Lessons Learned'.

The title, abstracts, and full text were then screened against a list of inclusion and exclusion criteria. Records were deemed relevant and included if they comprised humanitarian research or were documents describing or reporting on humanitarian innovation. Basic descriptive statistics were used to summarise key bibliometric data and humanitarian event types, specific humanitarian crises, geographies, and thematic focus.

The review shed light on who the key HRI actors are, where they are geographically located, and presented key outputs from these efforts including thematic and geographic focus areas for HRI investments.



Humanitarian research and innovation (HRI) funding flows analysis^{viii}

To track and analyse the available data on HRI funding, a research team at the AUB mapped the financial databases where HRI funding is recorded, including the International Aid Transparency Initiative (IATI), United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) Financial Tracking Service (FTS), and the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) Creditor Reporting System (CRS).

These databases were then queried to identify humanitarian projects that were classified as, or had a component of, R&I between the years of 2017 and 2021. Available data about the focus of the projects, and the value and source of the funding was subsequently downloaded and analysed. The analysis set out to:

- Quantify how much has been spent on HRI.
- Track the volume, source, and coverage of HRI funding.
- Assess the state of the current databases where HRI is recorded.

Data was gathered and cleaned manually from the different databases to provide a comprehensive understanding of HRI funding sources and coverage. The Funding Flows Analysis Report can be found [here](#). There was a short report on donor ways of working and coordination based on interviews with donor officials. This was not published, but is available on request.

Multi-level global, regional, national, and community consultations

The Alfred Deakin Institute, of Deakin University, led a series of regional consultations to examine the perspectives of a diverse range of stakeholders. They were developed together with regional partners: All India Disaster Mitigation Institute (India), Eastern Mediterranean Public Health Network / EMPHNET (Jordan), Indika Foundation (Indonesia), Passion Africa (Kenya), University of São Paulo (Brazil), and World Vision International West and Central Africa Regional Office (Senegal).

The participants in the regional consultations were selected from a purposive sampling, and included a) donors, b) researchers and innovators, c) HRI commissioners / administrators, and d) HRI end users such as humanitarian operational practitioners, policymakers, and others, in six geographic regions based on the UN Statistical Division (UNSD) geographic classifications:^{ix}

- Oceania, Eastern and South-Eastern Asia (OESEA)^x
- Southern and Eastern Africa (SEA)^{xi}
- West and Central Africa (WCA)^{xii}
- Western Asia and North Africa (including a specific focus on Lebanon as a national case study) (WANA)^{xiii}
- Latin America and Caribbean (LAC)^{xiv}
- South and Central Asia (SCA)^{xv}

The regional consultations led by Deakin University are the core source for identifying the priority areas for attention or critical challenges that HRI might tackle. This is presented in Chapter 7. Issues were ranked by the authors of this report based on how many participants identified the same issue. This chapter includes overall analysis as well as thematic priorities.

The community consultation (led by Philanthropy Advisors) sought to analyse and recognise HRI opportunities and challenges from the perspective of community-led organisations. The consultations took place in Syria, South Sudan, and Bangladesh. The global consultations mainly targeted HRI donors including institutional donors and international non-governmental organisations (INGOs). To ensure coherence across the different consultations, AUB's Global Mapping Report's database was used as a starting point to map the community-based organisations (CBOs) in Syria, South Sudan, and Bangladesh. To reach the desired sample size of key informant interviews (KIIs) per country, a snowballing approach was followed. Purposive sampling was then used to identify respondents for the KIIs, identifying organisations and individuals that are knowledgeable about, connected to, or have taken part in, HRI initiatives that are also available and willing to contribute to the study.

The research method used in these consultations involved individual-level consultations through online interviews with key informants. The interviews were recorded, transcribed, and analysed to reflect on the role of R&I in the humanitarian system, and understand the experience of various actors in implementing, using, and funding R&I in humanitarian contexts.



Ukraine case study

Although the GPE did not have a regional consultation focused on the European region, this case study was conducted in response to the urgent humanitarian crisis in Ukraine, with the aim of understanding how innovation and research were applied to address the challenges and assess the ability of R&I to mobilise resources and respond to the emerging crisis. Ukraine was a major scale-up, and for most Ukrainian organisations, this was a new context, as the invasion had profound impacts on all aspects of Ukrainian life.

The case study highlights the enablers for R&I in the response to the Ukrainian crisis, as well as exploring the political, operational, and contextual bottlenecks that are hindering the role of research, evidence, and innovation in responding to the recognised humanitarian challenges.

33 semi-structured interviews were conducted with key informants. This report is not a systematic study, but it offers good anecdotal evidence of significant innovation that is taking place within a hugely demanding response context.



A return on investment and (ROI) value for money (VfM) assessment methodology for the humanitarian innovation ecosystem^{xvi}

There has been over a decade of increasing activity and investment in innovation in the humanitarian system, yet there is limited comprehensive data on the impact and value of these investments on improving humanitarian outcomes. Arguing for continued and even increased investment in humanitarian innovation, when resources are extremely stretched, requires evidence of its benefit to humanitarian action. However, the specific challenges posed by working in the humanitarian system (volatile contexts, short timeframes, resourcing, diversity, independence of actors, etc) make measuring ROI and VfM particularly challenging. This report was an initial overview of the different approaches for assessing ROI and VfM on investment strategies at a portfolio level, and to generate learning about what data and changes are required to enable the humanitarian system to pilot a new model that could be adopted by a range of actors currently investing in innovation within the humanitarian system.

This report outlines a set of indicators to assess ROI and VfM for innovation-focused investments to help increase alignment of methods that could be adopted by actors currently investing in humanitarian innovation. The co-authors, Fab Inc and the International Rescue Committee (IRC), first mapped the landscape of existing practice around ROI measurement of humanitarian innovation through a desk-based literature review. This involved constructing search queries using keywords within key organisations' websites. These organisations included the list of organisations selected for KIIs, as well as additional key actors identified based on experience in the sector. A semi-structured interview guide was developed and loosely followed during the interviews. An aligned approach to ROI and VfM was developed based on the learnings and common themes that came out of the literature review and the KIIs.

Representation and sample size

Many of the reports are built on interviews, KIIs, and focus group discussions (FGDs) and so are qualitative in nature, alongside quantitative reports such as those on funding. The type of work done in the GPE is unique and gives a greater understanding of the current HRI landscape, and in future iterations, it is hoped to build on this work to gain an increasingly deep understanding of HRI in the future.

Table 1: The number of participants interviewed for each report

Report	Number of Participants Interviewed
Community Consultation in Syria, Bangladesh, and South Sudan	77 KIIs and 25 participants in FGDs
Global Consultation	61 participants in KIIs, FGDs and scoping workshop
Donor Report	10 donors
Ukraine Case Study	33 KIIs
ROI / VfM Report	12 KIIs
Lebanon National Report	7 KIIs
South and Central Asia Report	17 KIIs
Latin American and Caribbean Report	17 KIIs
Oceania, Eastern and South-Eastern Asia Report	19 KIIs
Southern and Eastern Africa Report	15 KIIs
West and Central Africa Report	15 KIIs
Western Asia and North Africa Report	21 KIIs
Total Number of Participants Interviewed	329 participants

2.1 Validation

This report was shared with the lead authors of the GPE reports for input and peer reviewed by members of the GPE Steering Committee.

Limitations

The state of the financial databases: It is important to note that the financial databases included in this review can only track the data reported as humanitarian and official development assistance (ODA) financing. The databases are not designed to pick up significant types of HRI activities that do not rely on this type of humanitarian and / or ODA funding, such as R&I activities that are generated and led by communities and civil society actors, or through an organisation's internal allocations of unrestricted resources, or from within the academic sphere. There were also major gaps in the quality of data on the value, source, destination, and coverage of R&I funding. Therefore, findings should be seen as one part of the global HRI funding picture and indicative rather than absolute.

Priority setting: Priorities for further HRI are presented at a global level. Given the limited sample size in relation to the large geographical coverage, these are indicative and there is a risk of over-extrapolation. That said, the findings across the different source reports informing this study were triangulated and found to be consistent which gives the authors confidence in the high-level conclusions presented in Chapter 7. As a first study of this nature, important methodological learning has been gained during the process which will be invaluable to future studies.

2.2 Methodological recommendations for research on HRI

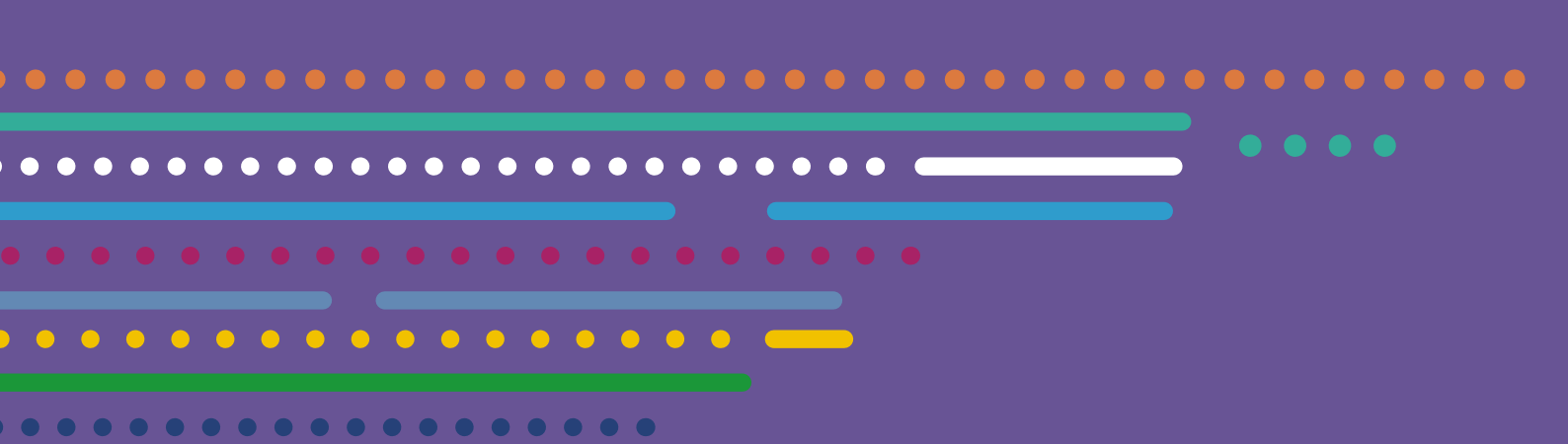
Based on learning from this exercise, future studies to track the trends in HRI should consider the following methodological recommendations:

2.2.1 Expand data sources for HRI activities and funding tracking: Future research should consider how to capture data from local and national organisations, and from non-humanitarian actors such as academia to create a more comprehensive picture of the R&I landscape.

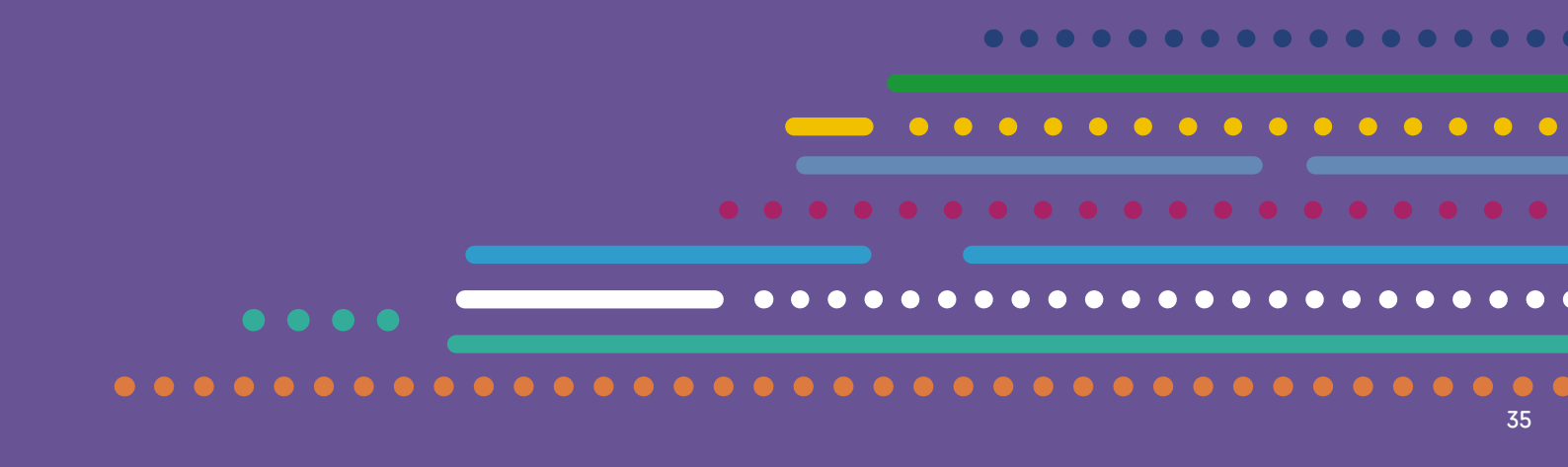
2.2.2 Increase and diversify participants' recruitment process in the consultations: Future research should increase the sample size to be more representative of the various humanitarian contexts and stakeholders' groups in each region. As well as including a recruitment strategy to achieve diversity of participants for consultation.

2.2.3 Piloting the data collection tools: Further piloting the data collection tools and interview protocols before conducting future research to refine and clarify any questions that might be misinterpreted and to further pursue a more diverse and needs-based perspective.

2.2.4 Future priority setting: It is suggested that future priority setting should be done at the country level. This enables increased involvement of more diverse and affected communities in not only data collection, but also agenda setting and priorities for HRI and facilitates coordination among national and local actors.



3. The Architecture of the Humanitarian Research and Innovation (HRI) Landscape



3. The Architecture of the Humanitarian Research and Innovation (HRI) Landscape

3.1 A general description

This chapter provides an overview of the architectural framework of the humanitarian system and the HRI ecosystem, and how they relate. This is based on an examination conducted by the American University of Beirut (AUB),^{xvii} utilising five platforms of bibliographic and grey literature databases covering documents related to HRI from 1 January 2017 to 30 June 2021. The primary objective was to identify key players, funding sources, and outputs within the HRI space. The results address:

1. Who are the research and innovation (R&I) actors? Where are decisions made about what R&I should take place?
2. What HRI outputs are being produced and by whom?
3. What are the types of HRI outputs and what do they focus on?
4. How well do HRI actors and funders work and coordinate with each other?

'The State of the Humanitarian System' defines 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."^{xviii}

Broadly speaking, the humanitarian system includes these different groups of organisations:

- UN member states – the state has primary responsibility for protecting its citizens. Most governments have some form of crisis assistance agency and other key government departments.
- Institutional donors – these are member states who provide funds to support crisis assistance. The formal humanitarian system relies disproportionately on funding from a relatively small number of donor governments, the three largest – the US, Germany, and EU institutions – together accounted for 64% of total international humanitarian assistance from public donors, with the US alone providing 39%.^{xix} Many other donors provide resources through other means such as bilateral assistance.
- UN agencies provide direct support to member states to assist them in meeting their obligations to their citizens or refugees, but also provide direct humanitarian assistance.
- There are a number of other intergovernmental bodies such as the World Bank, and regional development banks who provide funding in the event of an emergency to governments, as well as funding for crisis preparedness and risk-reduction activities.

- The International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement is a global network comprised of 192 national societies, the International Federation of Red Cross (IFRC) secretariat, and the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC). National Red Cross societies frequently play an auxiliary role to government crisis response capacities, but are independent.

UN, intergovernmental, Red Cross, and Red Crescent societies have an array of evaluation, learning, technical teams, information management, and analysis capacities. These exist to support their respective organisation's mission, contributing to quality performance, learning, and potentially R&I.

- There is a very large array of civil society organisations (CSOs), also known as non-governmental organisations (NGOs), who may be international, national, or local. These CSOs cover an enormous breadth of organisational varieties from faith-based organisations such as churches and temples, through to women's rights organisations, and specialist agencies working on a particular theme or geographical location. There is an enormous variety in their size and capacities. The scale and level of resourcing of the NGO / CSO will determine what level of capacity it has for evaluations, learning, and R&I. Larger organisations may have significant capacity, smaller ones close to zero.



It is worth noting that across this huge variety of organisations relatively few are dedicated only to humanitarian assistance. A majority have a wider mission of which humanitarian is but a part, for example, they also work on longer-term issues of development, poverty or inequality, or even only enter the humanitarian sector when they find the place where they are working is impacted by a crisis such as an earthquake or a sudden and large refugee influx.



Food prepared for flood-affected people by local NGOs at relief camp in Sunderban, India
Image credit: Wirestock

In addition to these organisations directly engaged in the funding and implementation of humanitarian action, there is a range of organisations and institutions who support the coordination, communication, learning, and policy development as well as campaign for change in the system. Of note are:

- The Inter-Agency Standing Committee (IASC) which brings together leaders of major operational agencies to discuss policy and ongoing operations.
- Clusters which operate at a global level, and within individual humanitarian responses, to provide coordination and technical direction on the main thematic areas of camp coordination and management, early recovery, education, emergency telephone communications, food security, health, nutrition, shelter, logistics, protection, and water, sanitation and hygiene (WASH). There are also sub-clusters / areas of responsibility which focus on specialist areas, for example, under the 'protection' bracket, there are child protection and gender-based violence (GBV) sub-clusters. Clusters, particularly global clusters, frequently commission research, and promote innovation and learning.
- The wide range of networks which bring together agencies wanting to work collectively on a particular issue. These cover a range of initiatives including the quality of humanitarian action such as the Core Humanitarian Standard Alliance (CHS-A), coordination on a range of policy issues such as the International Council of Voluntary Agencies (ICVA) or the NEAR network, collective fundraising such as the Dutch Relief Alliance (DRA) or working to promote particular innovations such as the Cash Learning Partnership (CALP) Network which has been developing evidence and guidelines for market-based approaches, or national networks of organisations seeking to coordinate activities and policy work. Despite some efforts around the World Humanitarian Summit, there is no recognised mechanism or network for HRI globally.
- Dedicated think tanks and policy organisations such as the Overseas Development Institute (ODI), Harvard Humanitarian Initiative, Active Learning Network for Accountability and Performance (ALNAP), Groupe URD and a number of private consultancy groups play a significant role in terms of undertaking research and promoting learning and dialogue in the sector about innovative approaches.
- There are dedicated innovation funds or platforms, such as Grand Challenges Canada, Elrha's Humanitarian Innovation Fund (HIF), the World Food Programme (WFP) Innovation Accelerator, and the Response Innovation Lab (RIL) which were established to directly promote more innovation in the sector. These actors work as intermediaries, attracting funding from donors and then working in partnership with operational agencies convening, funding, and documenting novel approaches.

Donors frequently have evaluation and / or learning teams, and in most cases, technical specialists who contribute either directly to R&I or commission studies. Predominantly, research funding has a broad remit, separate to government humanitarian commitments, and is programmed by non-humanitarian teams.^{xx} Innovation funding is most commonly spent within the context of operational grants, although it can also be granted to intermediary specialist institutions (such as Elrha and GSMA).

Of further note is that the clusters and many of the major UN agencies were established around the need to address particular thematic issues. For example, the WFP was established to tackle global hunger and the shelter cluster brings together agencies working on challenges facing emergency shelter. Many humanitarian agencies have developed specialisms so that they are able to articulate their value-add to the system and attract funding because of the niche they fill. Many networks have been established where it was felt there was a gap in the formal system in order to take forward particular thematic agendas. Groups have also been formed to address broader systemic issues within the humanitarian system, for example, IASC working groups on issues such as the Nexus.

Beyond these organisations and networks, there are many organisations who would not consider themselves primarily to be humanitarian organisations but who nonetheless contribute to the humanitarian endeavour. For example, national, local, and civil society actors frequently step up and substantially contribute in different ways in an emergency response. Universities would not consider themselves humanitarian agencies, but many will conduct research and study issues relevant to humanitarian action. Similarly, private companies would not consider themselves humanitarian agencies, but in the event of a crisis, may seek to contribute to relief efforts, and some companies seek to apply their technology and products to crisis settings.

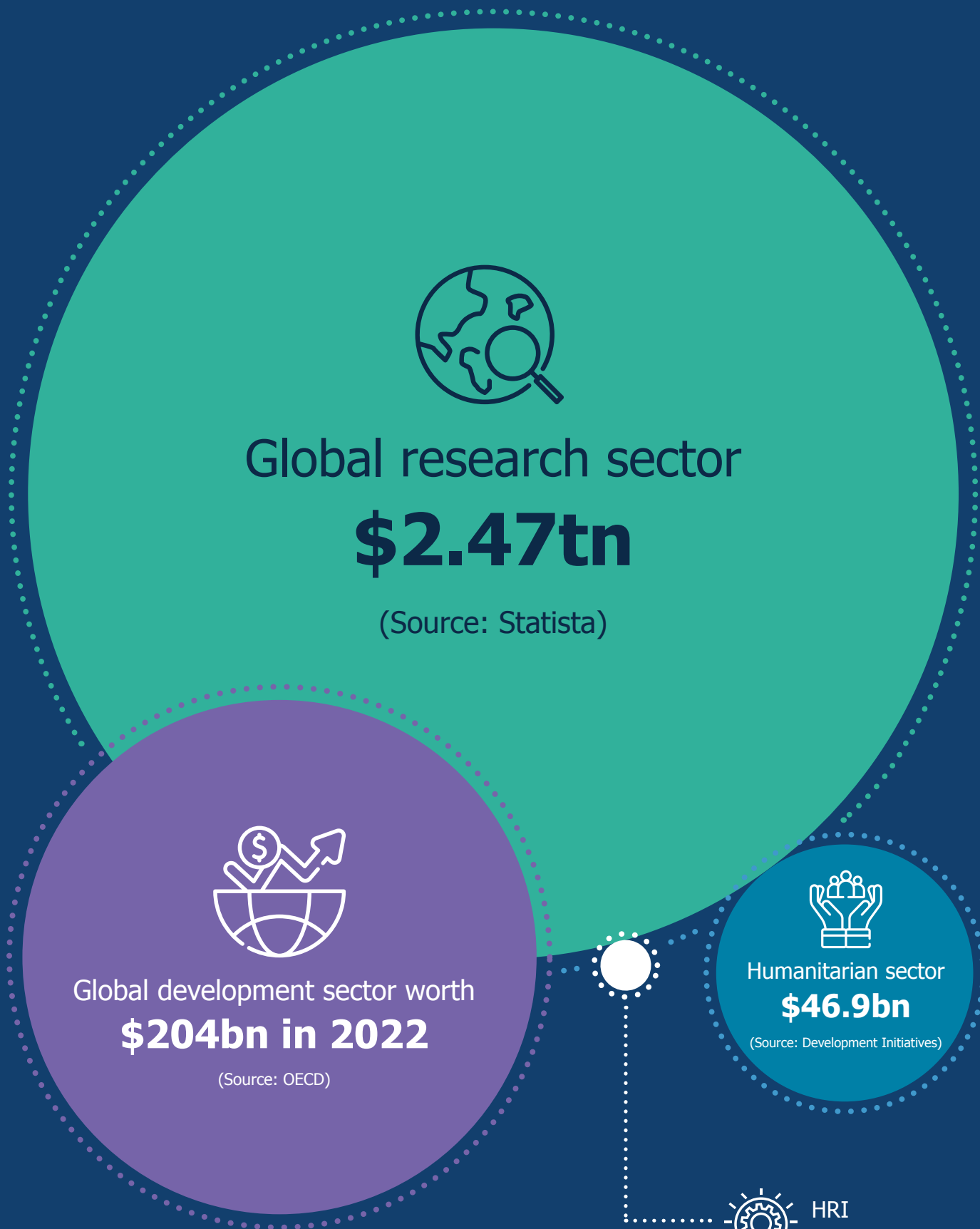
This brief description does not begin to capture the complexity of the humanitarian system since within many of these organisations there are many subdivisions. For example, within host governments, in addition to specialist government departments such as national disaster management authorities and health ministries, there are layers of regional, local, and municipal government. Research institutions such as universities will conduct research on humanitarian contexts from different thematic departments, for example, separately looking at earthquake analysis and the epidemiology of pandemics even within the same university.

The HRI components of the sector reflect this complex web of institutions, with much of the HRI ecosystem effectively embedded within individual organisations as those agencies seek to maximise their performance. However, this requires investment, and so, there is a tendency for these resources to be with larger, better financed organisations. Smaller agencies will have less or no capacity. Whilst these teams operate independently, within the construct of their agency, they are connected via common donors, relationships between operational agencies, coordination structures or spaces for exchanging information.

The R&I ecosystem can, thus, be seen as both a small subsection of the humanitarian sector, but in other ways, connected to a much larger academic, governmental, and private sector research area that goes far beyond that of the humanitarian sector, as shown below in Figure 2.



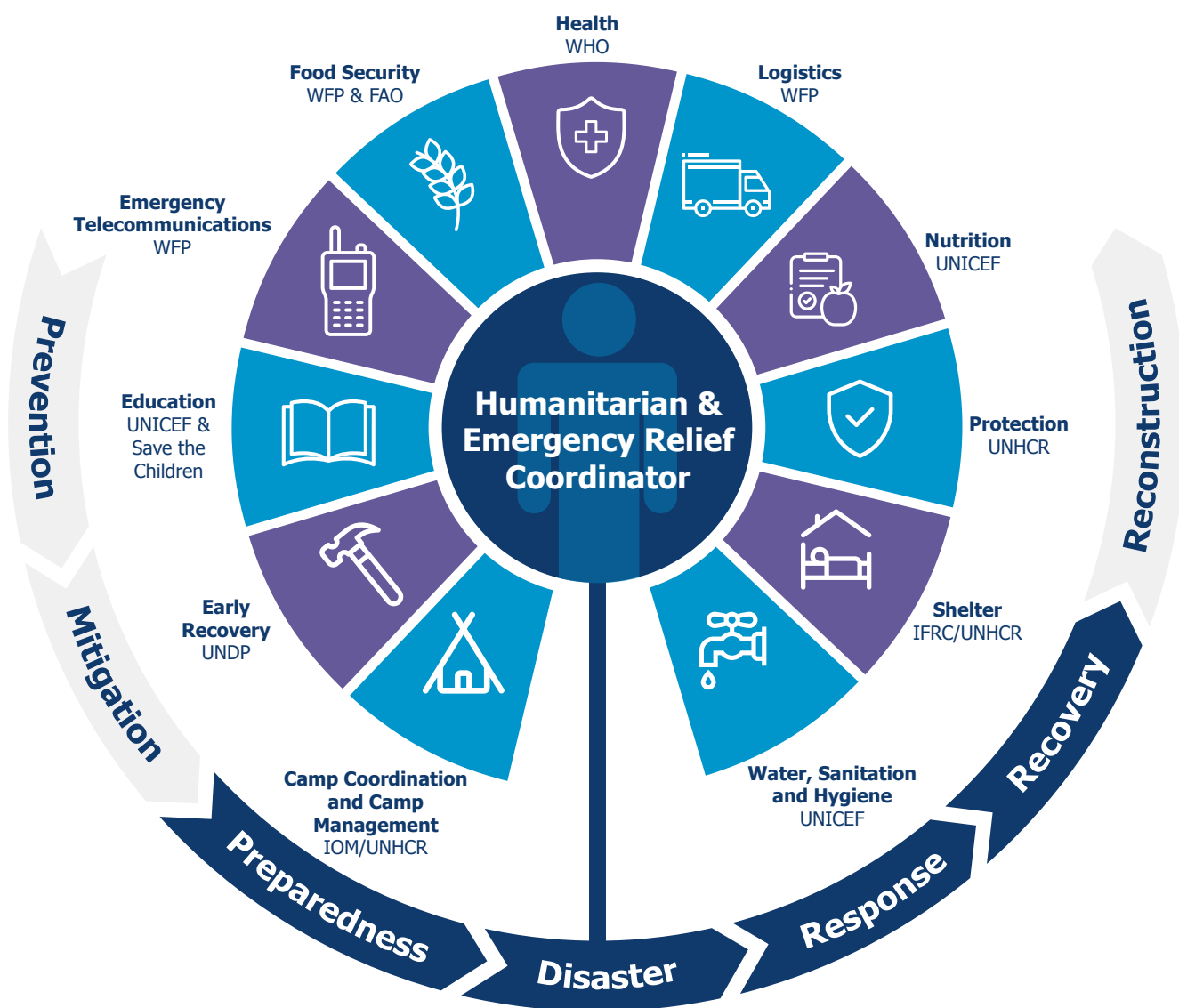
Figure 2: Relative size of the HRI, wider humanitarian system, development, and global research sectors, according to total value by funding. *Note the circles are indicative and not to scale.*



3.2 How the architecture shapes HRI

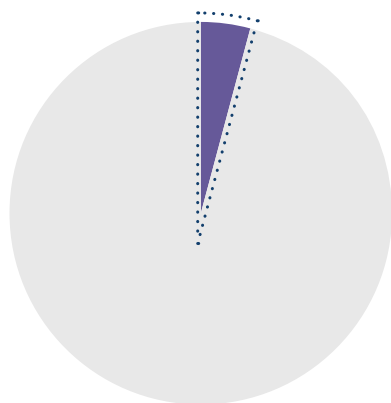
According to research by the AUB,^{xxi} the nature of the architecture of the humanitarian system appears to shape spending priorities for R&I with greater attention on thematic areas than on more system-wide issues, mirroring the IASC cluster system. For more detail, see Section 4.6.

Figure 3: Diagram highlighting clusters and lead agency^{xxii}



3.3 Geographies of focus are not proportional to the level of humanitarian need

Some humanitarian crises receive comparatively more attention than others, and research attention is not always proportional to the magnitude of the crisis itself. For example, among the records examining specific conflicts, the Syrian conflict was the most frequently examined yet several other contemporary conflicts received comparatively less attention.



Only 4%

of conflict records covered the war in Yemen, despite the UN describing it as the largest humanitarian crisis in the world.^{xxiii}

Research in the GPE suggested many factors may influence this. Different conflicts draw varying levels of political attention which influences funding and interest. Security considerations affect access to specific areas, including populations affected by crises which would affect the ability to conduct and publish research on active conflicts. In relation to the Syrian conflict, there has been investment and the establishment of institutional infrastructure, collaborative research platforms, and initiatives. Similar platforms and networks have not emerged to address conflicts such as that in Yemen. Lebanon and Jordan were among the most-studied countries and the mapping exercise also identified countries in southern Europe, such as Greece and Italy as being the source for a lot of studies. All these locations reflect, largely, the humanitarian consequences of the Syrian conflict – specifically, the countries surrounding Syria, or Mediterranean countries reached by Syrian and other refugees, are relatively easy to access and safe to conduct research in.

The literature examining natural disasters was more equitably distributed, covering a range of specific crises and geographic settings.

3.4 The populations most studied are not the most affected communities

In about two-thirds of bibliographic records (where they were recorded), occupational groups – top among them humanitarian practitioners – were the population group most studied.^{xxiv} Populations affected by crises came in second, covered in less than half of the records. Within this group, refugees were the population subgroup most involved as research participants (45%). Other subpopulations received much less attention. For example, internally displaced persons (IDPs) were four times less likely than refugees to be covered (11%). Again, this finding may reflect issues of access, with refugees being more identifiable, particularly if registered with the UNHCR or other

organisations, and accessible to researchers compared to populations in active conflict settings. It may also reflect the differential research priorities of funders or researchers / research institutions themselves. There were major gaps in data about critical population groups, for example, communities hosting IDPs and caregivers.

This raises questions about the extent to which the focus for research is based on the most vulnerable / those with the most complex problems versus those who are easier to identify and access.

3.5 Academics and operational agencies write in a way that makes sense to them

The Global Mapping Review (2017 to 2021) – part of the GPE – found 3,799 actors as being involved in the production of R&I studies. The majority of these actors were academic institutions, international non-governmental organisations (INGOs), and UN organisations. National, local, and civil society actors produced less than 2% of the total R&I studies identified in this review.^{xxv}

Research and academic institutions were the primary producers of peer-reviewed bibliographic¹ articles, with authors from academic institutions contributing almost 93% of documents. INGOs authored or co-authored 13%, and government, public sector, or parastatal institutions 8%. INGOs contributed most to the body of grey literature, with just under 60% of the content, followed by UN organisations contributing about a third, followed by independent research and policy think tank institutions. Academic institutions and networks / partnerships each contributed to less than 3% of documents.

This is, in many ways, not really a surprise. Academic bodies often measure success in terms of the number of peer-reviewed papers that are published in credible journals. Whereas operational agencies often rely on their experience as practitioners, reflecting the culture of operational agencies, so the nature of the papers does not reach a research standard as it is not designed in that way.

These findings are based on reports that could be found publicly. However, it should be noted that a lot of innovation is difficult to identify because many innovations are funded within the context of ongoing operational grants, reflecting incentives within funding systems that make it easier for donors to support innovations as a relatively small component of a grant designed to deliver humanitarian services, but which in turn, makes tracking such innovations difficult unless the implementing agency chooses to publish either a grey or peer-review document on their work. In some cases, needs assessments were also listed as research, when this is really outside the scope of what the GPE defines as 'research'.

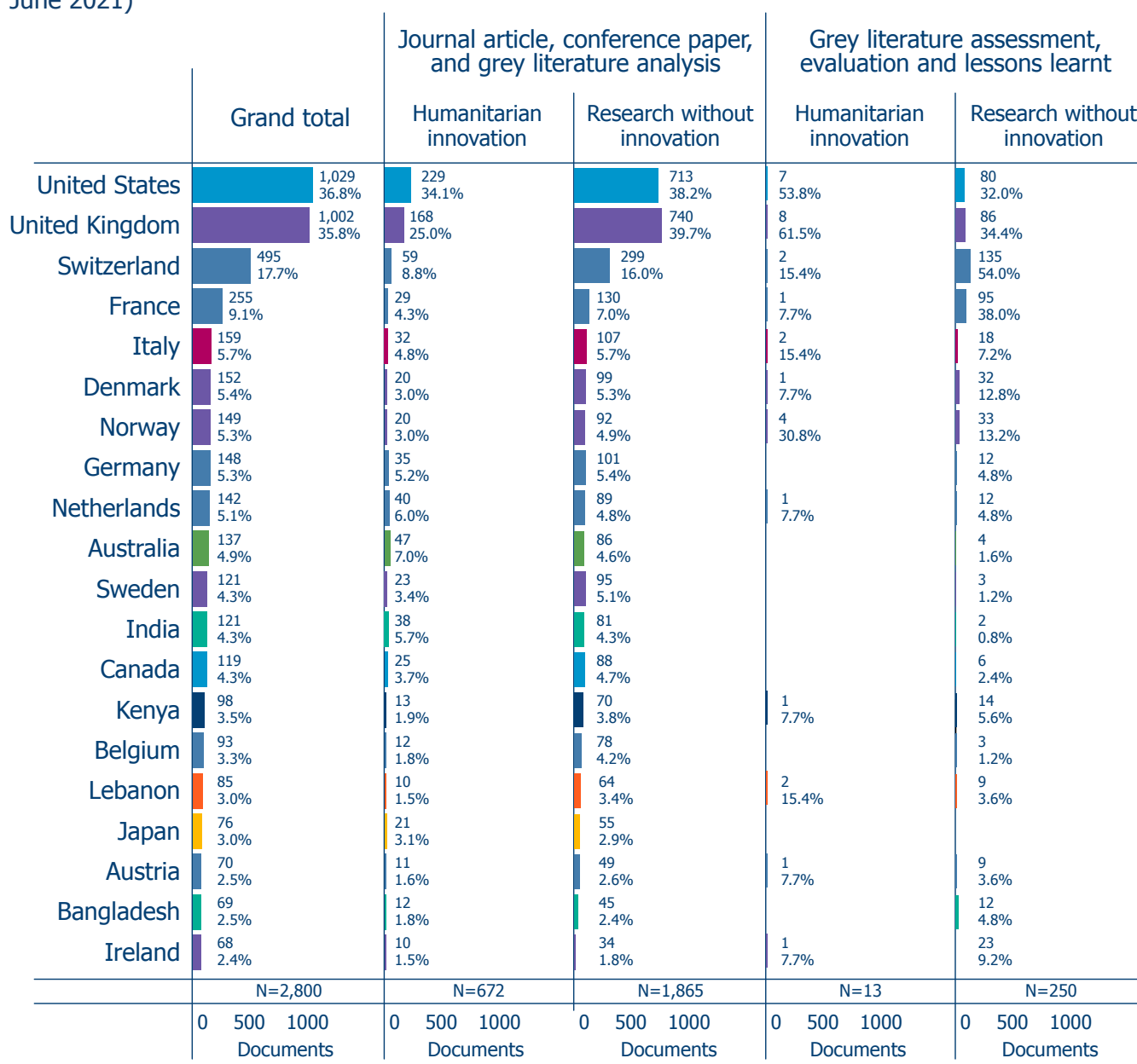
1. To see what was included in the bibliographic vs grey literature, please see Chapter 2.

3.6 The producers of HRI remain predominantly in the Global North

Authors from across 115 countries produced 1,388 bibliographic records and from 132 countries produced 1,412 grey literature records, respectively. The vast majority of these were based in Europe and North America.^{xxvi}

The top three countries producing R&I papers were the US, UK, and Switzerland (see Figure 4 below).

Figure 4: Top 20 countries of journal article and conference paper author institutions (January 2017–June 2021)



■ Africa, Sub-Saharan Africa
 ■ Americas, Northern America
 ■ Asia, Eastern Asia
 ■ Asia, Southern Asia
 ■ Asia, Western Asia
■ Europe, Northern Europe
 ■ Europe, Southern Europe
 ■ Europe, Western Europe
 ■ Oceania, Australia, and New Zealand

N=1,388 journal articles and conference papers. N=1,412 grey literature documents
 Column percentages sum to more than 100% as documents may have authors or collaborators from institutions in more than one country.

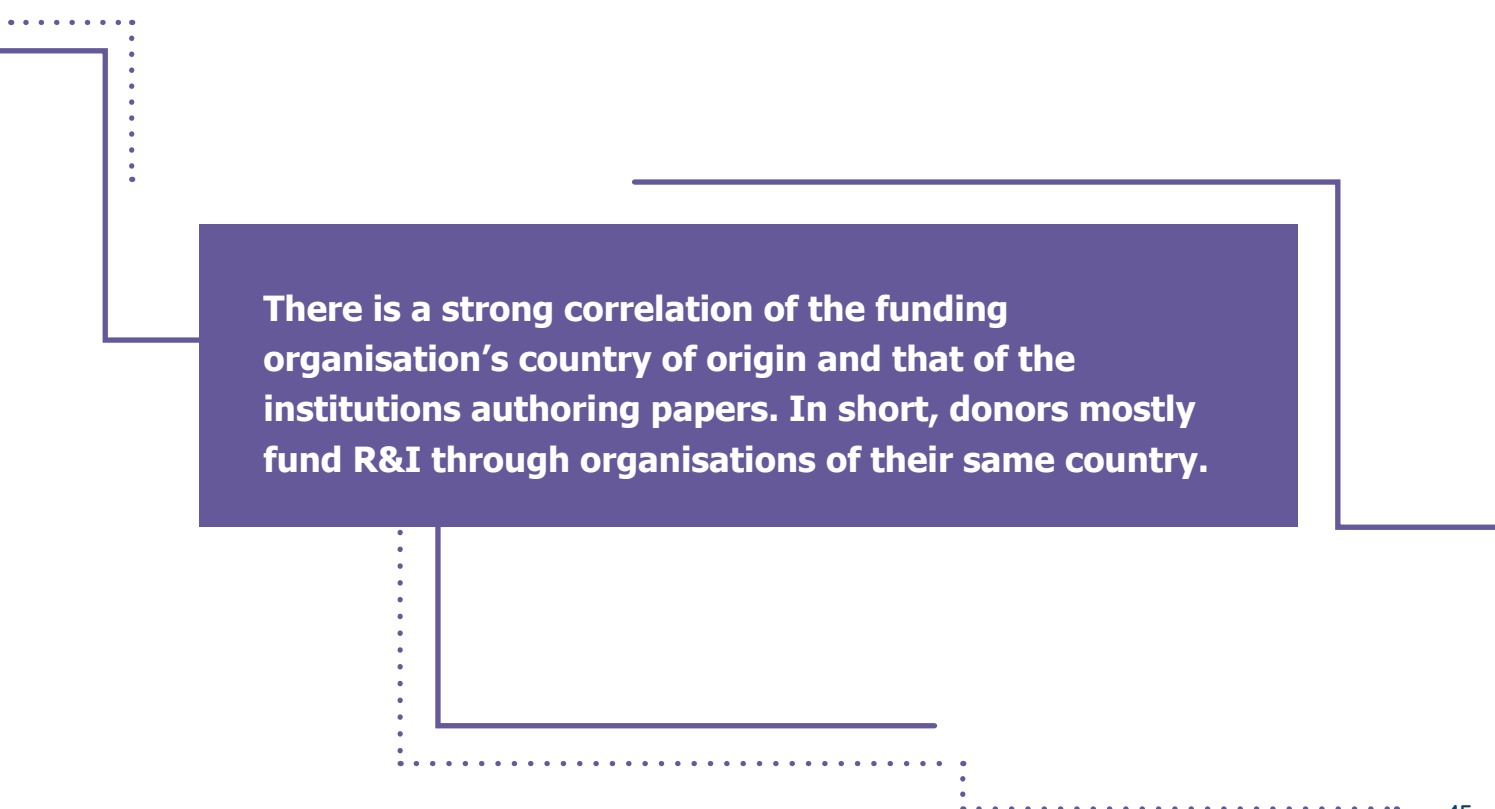
Authors from high-income countries (HICs) produced 76.3% of the records, while lead authors from upper- and lower-middle-income countries (LMICs) contributed 14.8% and 10.7% of records, respectively. In contrast, fragile and extremely fragile countries contribute very few documents as lead authors (4.8% and 1.3%), and lead authors from low-income countries (LICs) contributed the least – only 1.7% of records.

This mirrors both where institutions are based, and where their funding comes from. HICs account for the most institutions (59.5%), but produce even more HRI output proportionally. There is a strong correlation of the funding organisation's country of origin and that of the institutions authoring papers. In short, donors mostly fund R&I through organisations of their same country.

There are two ways to look at this that are arguably both concurrently true. One is to see that the pattern of funding maintains a neo-colonial approach in terms of centres of knowledge, but also that the countries most affected by humanitarian crises are not making appropriate levels of investments in HRI themselves.

In recognition of this inequality, some collaborative platforms have also emerged, such as the International Humanitarian Studies Association, an interdisciplinary network of scholars and researchers from across the globe who focus on issues of crises, conflict, and political instability. The recently launched Global Alliance on War, Conflict and Health also seeks to break down disciplinary silos and bridge the research-policy-practice nexus. Many universities – who receive funding from Global North government donors – partner with universities in the Global South.

This finding, however, is the same as observed in the 2017 mapping report – it would seem that the last six years have seen little change.



There is a strong correlation of the funding organisation's country of origin and that of the institutions authoring papers. In short, donors mostly fund R&I through organisations of their same country.

3.7 How is HRI coordinated across the humanitarian system?

There is no real coordination body for the HRI ecosystem. As a result, there is no common agenda and HRI efforts remain siloed and respond to each individual organisation's priority or agenda. There were attempts around the World Humanitarian Summit to address this, but they were ultimately unsustainable.



"I am not aware of any governance around R&I. It seems that organisations have their own agenda and there is no coordination structure."

UN agency representative

An unpublished report for the GPE^{xxix} (available on request) found that there was very little donor coordination at the global or strategic level. Some level of coordination had previously taken place via the Norwegian Mission in Geneva that periodically convened colleagues across donor missions in Geneva. However, based on respondents interviewed, these had largely lapsed since the COVID-19 pandemic. Donor officials at the global level who were interviewed were very open to greater levels of coordination, and all of the respondents spoken to in the research said they would welcome more coordination to understand what each other is doing, and indeed, what 'the system' would find helpful. It was unclear what prevents this from happening. The most likely answer is simply one of capacity given the low levels of dedicated human resources allocated for managing the R&I work internally within donor agencies.

Other organisations provide a convening role, such as Elrha or Grand Challenges Canada, that enables dialogue, but falls short of a coordinated approach to how R&I is used in support of the wider humanitarian system.

During regional and national discussions, most participants with a donor role reported that formal HRI coordination mechanisms among donors do not exist within their region either. A range of mostly informal coordination mechanisms were described between partners and donors to identify what issues they are working on and with whom. Donor staff also liaise with each other about their activities and priorities. Some donor staff felt they should explicitly not seek to be coordinating R&I priorities, but instead advocate operational agencies to set out their needs. It was also reported that duplication is not necessarily a bad thing, particularly if this involves donors partnering and coming together to maximise impact.

This essentially leaves coordination to be driven by others, either the potential recipient organisations working in the same thematic space who often coordinate amongst each other (meeting regularly and coordinating in response to funding calls) or efforts within some of the global clusters. Clusters support communities of practice and, in some cases, have a dedicated agenda on research, eg, the Global Shelter Cluster has a research focal point proactively connecting across some of the above barriers, and the WASH cluster conducted a survey to identify priorities for WASH in crises research to inform the WASH Sector Road Map 2020–2025.

Dedicated innovation platforms also play a role at the global level, with Elrha's HIF commissioning a gap analysis in the WASH sector, consulting over 1,700 people affected by crises and nearly 700 in-country WASH practitioners in 35 countries. In addition to this, a survey was conducted with 246 global WASH practitioners, and a review of 614 academic articles and grey literature publications was completed. This gave a sense of the gaps to prioritise from which they could undertake 'deep dives' into specific areas and use this to design an innovation challenge. Grand Challenges Canada also takes the approach of identifying issues that need addressing and then setting them as challenges, with funds, that other organisations could then bring their R&I capacities to bear on.

The private sector is still far from being systematically included in humanitarian coordination systems. More needs to be done to fully leverage the private sector's expertise and contribution. However, examples do exist such as the work of GSMA or the Zurich Flood Resilience Alliance.



National research organisations not familiar with these informal networks, or the IASC cluster system, noted they can find it difficult to engage. This was highlighted in the Ukraine case study where Ukrainian research institutions, who wanted to access resources to study issues such as the impact of the invasion on the environment, struggled because of their unfamiliarity with the cluster-based coordination system and did not have the established informal relationships. Coordination structures had not been able to resolve the lack of relationship between Ukrainian research organisations and the humanitarian sector, focused as they were on coordinating the very significant operational humanitarian response. A respondent in the study did suggest that one role clusters could play is to identify key research questions which would then act as a focus point for agencies interested in contributing to solving that particular question, so not taking on an additional role per se, but helping formulate the key agenda that the different agencies can then focus their attention on.

Table 2 summarises some of the coordination mechanisms reported in the regional consultations:

Table 2: Examples of coordination mechanisms

Level	Examples
<p>Global</p> <p>This includes global fora that bring in donors and actors from the wider humanitarian system. Participants in the consultation see that these global coordination mechanisms are often not systematic and appear ad hoc. R&I is not always on the agenda and the focus is on wider humanitarian actions.</p>	<p>Start Network, International Council of Voluntary Agencies (ICVA).</p>
<p>Regional</p> <p>Regional networks, platforms, cross-border partnerships, and regional platforms. Participants in the consultations saw these as useful fora for discussing humanitarian challenges affecting the region, allowing researchers and innovators to connect to the UN agencies and bigger INGOs operating in the region.</p>	<p>Asian Disaster Reduction and Response Network (ADRRN).</p> <p>Centro de Coordinación para la Prevención de los Desastres en América Centra (CEPREDENAC).</p>
<p>National</p> <p>Country-level networks that link national government in a specific country with NGOs, private sector actors, civil society organisations, and university research centres.</p>	<p>The All-India Disaster Mitigation Institute (AIDMI).</p> <p>Response Innovation Labs (RIL).</p>
<p>Local</p> <p>Networks that connect community-based organisations with each other, and occasionally with other regional and global agencies such as the NEAR Network.</p>	<p>Resilience Nexus Learning Action Network (RNLAN) in Somalia.</p>
<p>Internal (within organisations, federations)</p>	<p>Examples of this include research departments within federations that generate evidence to support operational work in country offices or global advocacy efforts / innovation units that work to provide innovation services for programmes' operations globally, eg, WFP accelerator, International Rescue Committee's (IRC's) Airbel Center.</p>

Challenges for coordination in HRI were widely acknowledged and were broadly consistent across different regions in the consultations, including:

- Donors and international organisations have their own priorities which may not necessarily be related to local HRI needs and may even be considered politically motivated, rendering coordination difficult. (For example, US funding on Mexico tends to be concentrated on containing the migrant population within Mexico rather than focusing on those who have already crossed the border into the US). While it is expected that funders will fund issues that align with their strategy and agendas, this is problematic when donors do not have the agility to address emerging issues.
- Donors and agencies may compete for visibility on an issue, potentially leading to duplication or a lack of transparency and sharing of information.
- Different funding schedules: Donors have different financial years and funding calendars which limits opportunities for designing complementary agendas and harmonised funding calls.
- Resource limitation: This particularly refers to the lack of designated human resources in donor agencies to engage in coordination initiatives. This also becomes a bigger challenge in agencies that do not have R&I departments.

Another area of challenge is the coordination between operational agencies and academic institutions. Participants saw opportunities if the silos could be broken down, for example, the inclusion of social scientists could help address the human-centred, behavioural aspects of innovation, or enable more independent analysis and access to broader data sets from outside the organisation or sector.

However, participants also identified significant barriers to greater collaboration between the two sectors:

- The priorities of stakeholders do not always align. Academics are seen as prioritising publications, while NGOs want action and impact on the ground.
- There is a lack of awareness within academia and the humanitarian sector of the benefits of specific areas of research to humanitarian issues.
- Silos within academia itself: Academics do not necessarily communicate well with each other. The use of different language styles and even the challenge of publishing multi-disciplinary research are barriers, because journals can reflect the siloed nature of academia.
- Bureaucratic issues around formal partnership arrangements which can become an obstacle to a more timely, productive cooperation.
- Even where there is a will to collaborate, it can be difficult to align priorities, systems, and data which then obstructs data collection and sharing. One participant described an effort to collaborate between two areas of the same organisation and with a university on a piece of humanitarian research. Each entity ended up doing their own survey because their data-gathering processes and systems did not match up.

3.8 Conclusions

3.8.1 The humanitarian system is a complex web of institutions with different mandates, funding sources, cultures, identities, and missions. Within this complexity, the architecture has evolved in a way which tends to focus more on thematic issues – such as shelter or health – with budgets and institutions designed to address particular problems. The closer one gets to a particular context, the more the interconnectedness of issues becomes clear and the greater the desire to fund more systemic-oriented HRI.

3.8.2 The majority of HRI funding comes from the Global North, and the relatively small number of donors who support the global humanitarian endeavour tend to set the R&I agenda. These donors usually work with organisations with whom they are familiar, in the same countries of origin, and so the centres of research and knowledge generation tend to be in the Global North rather than centred on the locations of action. Consequently, the approach focuses on sectors or issues which mirror the budget allocation and research foci of Global North institutions. In this way, the architecture and funding streams (see Chapter 4) tend to reinforce the existing patterns of organisation and practice.

3.8.3 There is little donor coordination around HRI or between operational agencies, and so opportunities to address the siloed approach across sectors are few. Further, there is little coordination between operational agencies and research institutions with each tending to generate their own literature; universities and research bodies generate peer-reviewed literature whilst operational agencies primarily generate grey literature. It is unclear how much knowledge exchange happens across this boundary between operational and research agencies. HRI tends to happen within silos, so whilst the nexus and localisation have a lot of discussion in policy arenas, it is not clear where the R&I agenda for driving these agendas is coordinated from. These findings are not new and are generally consistent with those reported in the 2016–17 mapping report.

3.8.4 The production of HRI literature has grown over the study period, both grey and peer-reviewed bibliographic literature, however, the absolute amount of literature remains small considering the relative size of the sector.



3.9 Recommendations

3.9.1 Donors and operational agencies should strengthen mechanisms for coordinating HRI investments. These should build on existing networks / platforms where possible at the national level as well as at the global level. There is a need for HRI networks to work across clusters and thematic focused groups to connect across different disciplines, and to connect between operational agencies, academic institutions, and the private sector. Such coordination should include innovation platforms, alliances, and the private sector as well as global clusters, so that there is more of a joined-up conversation. Identifying key questions and existing initiatives will allow for the better targeting of resources and sharing of learning.

3.9.2 Global clusters should support in-country clusters in framing R&I challenges that can be used as agenda-setting priorities, enabling the energy and capacities of the humanitarian system, academics, and private sector to be brought to bear.

3.9.3 The governments of countries who experience vulnerability to hazards and conflict should invest in the research capacity of domestic institutions, including national universities and government departments such as national disaster management authorities. These efforts should be supported by international humanitarian and research institutions.

3.9.4 There should be a campaign to make the case for more research-funding resources to address humanitarian-related issues, from larger research funds rather than from stretched humanitarian budgets. To do this, it will be necessary to make the connections between humanitarianism and wider issues such as climate change.





4. The Humanitarian Research and Innovation (HRI) Ecosystem-Funding Landscape

4. The Humanitarian Research and Innovation (HRI) Ecosystem-Funding Landscape



As of Dec 2023, the number of people requiring humanitarian assistance had increased to 299.4 million people,^{xxx} an increase from 274m people in Dec 2022.

This increase is driven by three main drivers



Conflict

Such as the eruption of widespread conflict in Sudan and hostilities between Israel and Gaza



The global climate emergency



Economic crises

Including those in Afghanistan, Syria, and Venezuela.

Although funding for humanitarian assistance grew to \$46.9bn in 2022 (a 27% increase from 2021),^{xxxi} funding requirements have also increased from \$51.5 billion at the beginning of 2023 to \$54.2 billion as of the end of March 2023. 75% of this funding requirement was still unmet^{xxxii} as of March 2023.

The amount, source, and destination of funding for research and innovation (R&I) in the humanitarian system is one of the critical gaps in our knowledge about R&I. The earliest efforts to quantify spending on research and development (R&D) goes back to the 2015 Deloitte study on R&D funding for the World Humanitarian Summit.^{xxxiii} Using a bench-marking exercise, the Deloitte study estimated that the current spend on R&D was less than 0.4% of the total humanitarian resources, putting the humanitarian sector below even the most low-tech industries in terms of their investment in R&D.

In 2022, Elrha and the American University of Beirut (AUB) carried out a funding flows analysis to quantify how much the humanitarian system has been spending on R&I, and track the source, coverage, and volume of HRI funding globally.^{xxxiv} Understanding these funding flows is a vital step towards improving the structure and ways of working within the HRI ecosystem.

In this chapter, why and how R&I funders invest in R&I, and through which mechanisms are explored. This chapter builds upon Elrha’s 2022 report titled, ‘Who funds what? Humanitarian research and innovation funding flows analyses.’

Due to the absence of spending targets or specific priorities for HRI, it is challenging to assess the adequacy of funding in comparison to recognised humanitarian needs or to identify gaps between needs and funding requirements. Critical data on the type, destination, and coverage of HRI investments is missing from the databases, and so the data and findings should be viewed as illustrative rather than comprehensive of the current HRI funding landscape.



The key questions addressed in this chapter are as follows:

1. Who are the HRI funders, and what amounts do they provide?
2. Who are the recipients of funding, and what amounts do they receive? Are there discernible Global North / Global South biases in the distribution of funding?
3. Which stages of the HRI process receive funding, encompassing research, innovation, adoption, and scaling?
4. What specific areas or projects are currently receiving funding?
5. What are the geographical sources and destinations of funding?

4.1 Funders and funding

Based on a systematic review commissioned by Elrha, a total of **745 unique funding organisations** were identified¹ including both initial / primary and intermediate funders.

The majority of these funding organisations were governments and their public sector bodies. Among the top 20 funders were:

- The UK (via the Foreign, Commonwealth & Development Office (FCDO)) and the US (via the United States Agency for International Development (USAID)) were the locations of the primary funding organisations.
- Non-governmental organisations (NGOs) such as the ODI, Wellcome, and Elrha (an intermediate funder).
- United Nations (UN) agencies with UNICEF and the UN Refugee Agency (UNHCR) among the top UN funders.
- European Union (EU) intergovernmental entities.
- Other high-income countries governments including Australia, Canada, Germany, the Netherlands, Norway, and Sweden.

Funding for HRI comes from two main streams:



This systematic literature review identified the main funders for HRI based on the frequency of funders (number of outputs funded). It did not consider the volume of funding provided by individual funders. The funding flows analysis report identified the HRI funders and funding volume by analysing public data from the International Aid Transparency Initiative (IATI), the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) Financial Tracking Service (FTS), and the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) Common Reporting Standard (CRS) about humanitarian projects funded between 2017 and 2021 that were classed as, or had a component of, research and / or innovation.

The following table (Table 3) summarises the main HRI funders according to each database and the available indicators. It is important to note that the exercise did not take into account the funding committed or provided by individual funders, which might not be reported to the IATI, OECD CRS, and OCHA FTS, or might be reported elsewhere.

Table 3: Top HRI funders in OCHA FTS, IATI, and OECD CRS between 2017 and 2021²

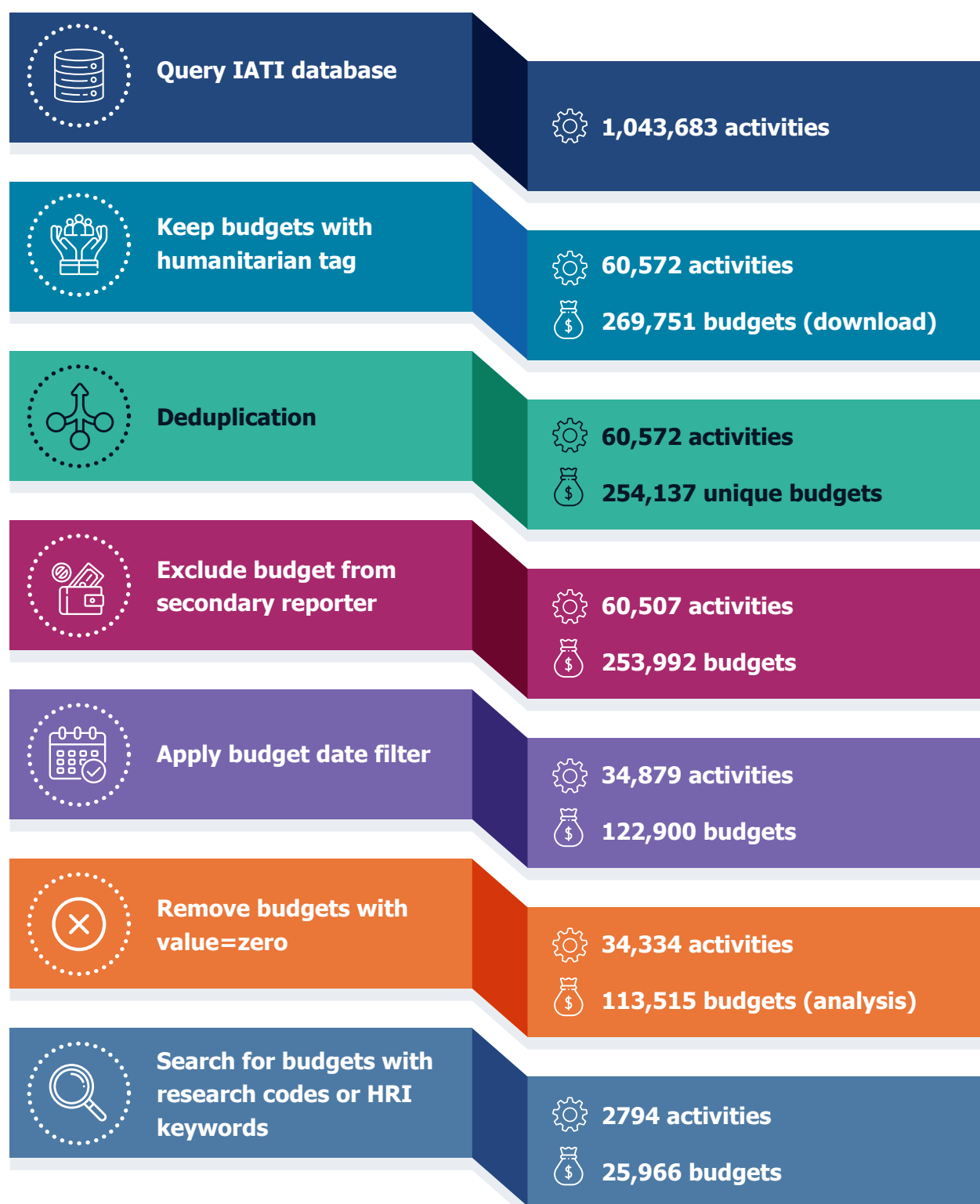
Measure	OCHA FTS		IATI	OECD CRS
	Funding amount in USD	Number of funded projects	% of total HRI funding reported in the IATI	Top funders according to grant amount
1st Funder	Germany (\$150m)	Norway (28)	UNICEF (50%)	UK
2nd Funder	EU (\$50m)	Denmark (26)	UK FCDO (35.5%)	Sweden
3rd Funder	US (\$45m)	US (24)	Save the Children International (5.9%)	US

* It is important to note that the funder's name in this table is listed as it is reported in the databases. Some databases state the funder's name (eg, USAID) while others state the funder's country (eg, the US).

2. There is significant missing data in the financial databases and in the funding statements of published outfits. Therefore, these findings should be seen as only one part of the actual HRI funding landscape as it is difficult to get a fully detailed picture based on current reporting standards.

4.2 Funding volume

The IATI database was queried to extract all humanitarian budgets reported. The query retrieved 1,034,683 activities. The following cleaning steps were followed as outlined in Figure 5 below:³



3. Records tagged as 'Reporting Org Secondary Reporter' were excluded because, as per IATI documentation, a secondary reporter is one that reproduces data on the activities of an organisation for which it is not directly responsible. IATI databases specify the sector code(s) of the activities which are the same as OECD Creditor Reporting System Purpose Codes. This field was used in the analysis to identify activities that include research codes and humanitarian subsector codes.

The average conversion rate of each currency to USD during the period between 2017 and 2021 was calculated to estimate the equivalent amount in USD.

When analysing OCHA FTS and IATI databases, it is important to differentiate between the two following amount categories:

- **HRI envelopes:** The amounts in this category are the sum of total budgets that meet any of the following criteria:
 - ◇ have one or more research codes. This applies to the IATI database only. Amounts in HRI-specific category are subsets of HRI envelopes.
 - ◇ mention any of the research or innovation keywords in the project details ('title narrative' or 'description narrative' in IATI, 'description' in OCHA FTS databases).
- **HRI-specific:** The amounts in this category are allocated to the R&I-specific sector codes. This amount was calculated using the specific percentage allocated to research sectors provided in each budget. We were able to calculate these amounts only in the IATI database because the OCHA FTS database does not use these codes.

The private sector as a HRI funder



"We see private sector engagement as a way to achieve our goals and bring forward their positive impact."

Representative from a grant-making institution

According to OECD CRS data, the private sector had invested \$231.3m in HRI between 2017 and 2021, accounting for around 10% of the overall HRI funding reported to OECD.

There were 26 unique private sector actors visible on the OECD CRS, with The Mastercard Foundation, Wellcome, the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, and the IKEA Foundation leading in grants.

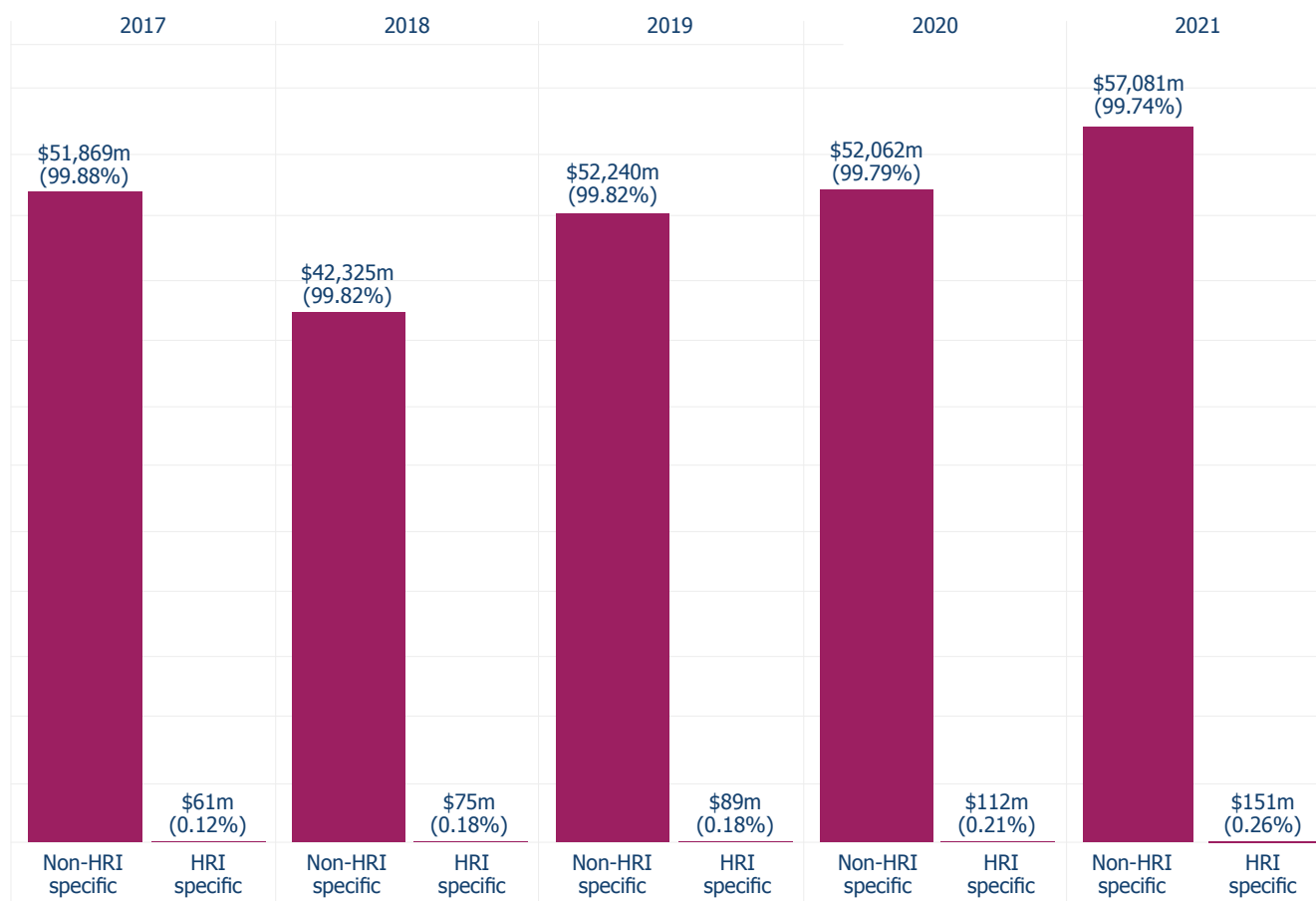
The private sector is still far from being systematically included in humanitarian coordination systems. More needs to be done to fully leverage the expertise and contribution to principled, accountable disaster response and recovery in sudden-onset and complex emergencies.

The total humanitarian budget’s value in the IATI between 2017 and 2021 was \$261,937m. The report calculated the estimates for the volume of investments based on the available data for projects active during the 2017–2021 period:

- In the IATI database: HRI-specific funding totalled nearly half a billion US dollars during 2017–2021. This represents 0.19% of all humanitarian funding reported in the IATI over the same period.
- HRI envelope funding in the IATI totalled \$25.7bn, accounting for 9.8% of the total humanitarian assistance budget.
- HRI envelope funding in OCHA FTS was \$2.3bn, accounting for 0.26% of the total humanitarian assistance budget.
- HRI envelope funding in OECD CRS was \$322m, accounting for 1.32% of the total humanitarian assistance budget.

When zooming in on the HRI-specific funding in the IATI, the data shows a consistent increase in the percentage of HRI funding from 0.12% in 2017 to 0.26% in 2021 as shown in Figure 6. This is more than a doubling, whilst overall humanitarian funding went up by some 10% between 2017 and 2021. However, the humanitarian system remains in the bottom list of sectors and industries investing in R&I.^{xxxv}

Figure 6: HRI-specific funding trend in the IATI between 2017 and 2021



4.3 Funding recipients

The systematic R&I mapping review^{xxxvi} suggests an increase in the numbers and diversity of a dynamic and growing community of researchers, innovators, and funders in comparison with the Elrha 2017 Mapping Report. However, despite this increasing diversity, HRI funding is still both generated and mostly received by actors in high-income countries.

This systematic review took the location country of R&I producers as a proxy to analyse the geographical recipients of R&I funding. The review highlighted that the top ten countries producing the most R&I records were the US, the UK, Switzerland, Australia, France, the Netherlands, Canada, Germany, India, and Italy.

Of those actors receiving HRI funding, academic institutions produced the most outputs, followed by international NGOs / CSOs, independent research / policy think tanks and UN agencies.

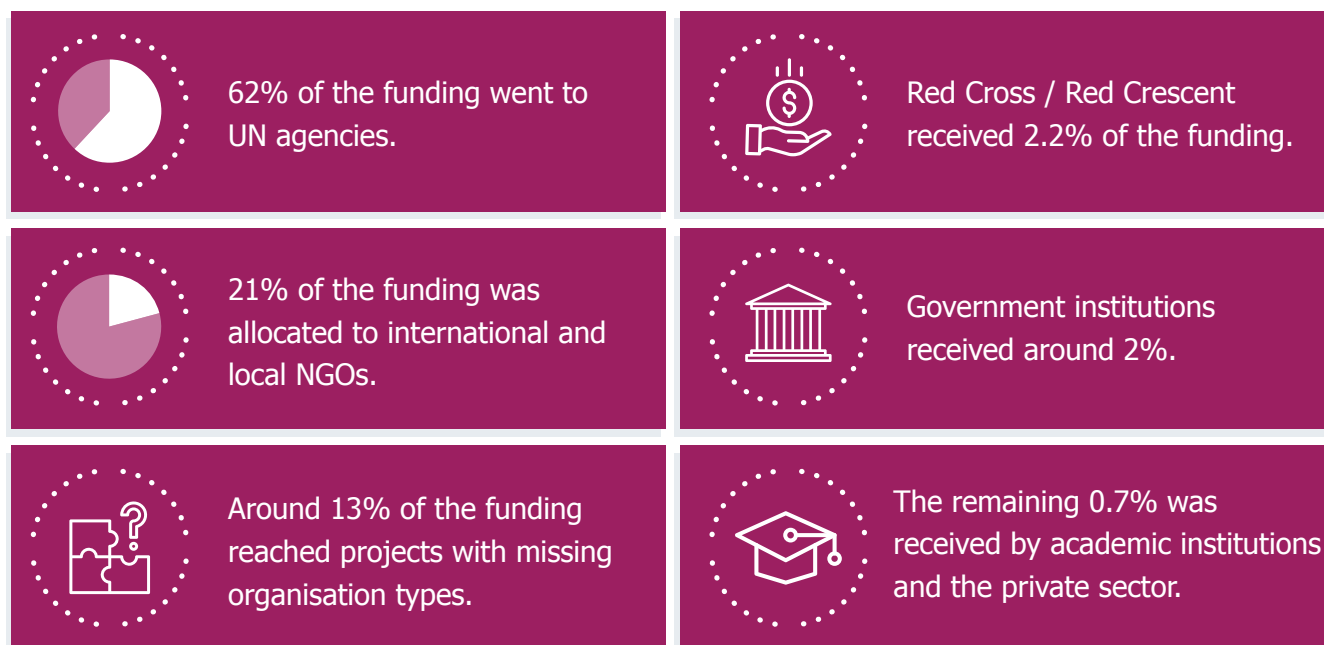
However, the funding flows analysis report^{xxxvii} shows different lists of major recipients of HRI funding. The top recipient countries were also not consistent across the different databases. Table 4 includes the top recipient countries of HRI funding between 2017 and 2021 by HRI-funding category in the IATI and OCHA FTS.

Table 4: Top recipient countries of HRI funding between 2017 and 2021 by HRI funding-category (IATI and OCHA FTS)

IATI (HRI-specific)			IATI (HRI envelopes)			OCHA FTS (HRI envelopes)		
Recipient country	% of total	Amount \$	Recipient country	% of total	Amount \$	Recipient country	% of total	Amount \$
Unknown	50.3%	248.3m	Lebanon	17.1%	4,386.9m	Global	53.3%	171.5m
Yemen	10.9%	53.6	Unknown	8.4%	2,152.8m	Unknown	17.6%	56.7m
Sudan	3.4%	16.9m	Yemen	6.0%	1,544.4m	Uganda	7.8%	25.0m
Afghanistan	3.4%	16.7m	Nigeria	5.4%	1,384.0m	Somalia	4.0%	13.0m
Ethiopia	2.7%	13.4m	Bangladesh	3.3%	853.7m	Iraq	2.4%	7.7m
Myanmar	2.4%	11.7m	Uganda	3.0%	771.2m	Chad	2.2%	6.9m
ESAR	2.2%	11.1m	Jordan	2.7%	684.2m	DRC	1.8%	5.8m
South Sudan	2.2%	10.7m	Mali	2.7%	699.8m	South Sudan	1.5%	4.8m
Venezuela	2.2%	10.8m	Sudan	2.7%	700.0m	Kenya	1.4%	4.6m
Central African Republic	2.0%	10.1m	Myanmar	2.5%	630.9m	Occupied Palestinian territory	1.1%	3.6m
Other countries	18.4%	90.8m	Other countries	46.2%	11,844.7m	Other locations	6.9%	21.3m
Total	100%	494m	Total	100%	27.594m	Total	100%	321.9m

After removing \$809m in unspecified bilateral disbursements reported to OECD from 2017–2021, the top three recipients were regional funding to sub-Saharan Africa, followed by the Africa region overall, and then the Syrian Arab Republic. The top ten recipients were all in the Africa and Middle East regions.

UN OCHA FTS data for 2017 through 2021 shows that the destination organisation types were:



4.4 Funding to local actors

Increasing direct funding to local actors has been a priority for the humanitarian system since the Grand Bargain commitments in 2016. While there is no specific commitment in the Grand Bargain to direct R&I funding to local actors, localising the R&I agenda has been a priority for many actors in the past years. Initiatives for locally-led R&I have emerged such as the [CLIP programme](#).

The report took the location, type of organisations, and lead authors producing R&I outputs and receiving HRI funding as a proxy measure to assess local actors' leadership in R&I. The data suggests that:

- Less than 2% of R&I outputs produced between 2017 and 2021 were led by national, local, and civil society actors.
- Institutions based in high-income countries (HICs) continue to hold most of the leadership roles and receive most of the funding for HRI.

The **Horizon 2020 programme** data has information on all organisational members of awarded project teams or consortia. When analysing this data for humanitarian research, we concluded that the coordinator role in humanitarian research projects tends to be taken by an organisation in the EU, while international partners and third parties tend to be based in the US, Japan, New Zealand, China, Brazil, Russia, Mexico, or India.

The global diversity of organisations funded within Horizon 2020 humanitarian research projects is most noted among the partners and participants. Some of these are even located in fragile and extremely fragile countries. Leadership roles in HRI EU Horizon grant-funded projects tend to be taken by individuals based at institutions located in HICs, with few exceptions.

4.5 Funding coverage

The level of R&I activities and funding varied significantly across the various humanitarian thematic clusters^{xxxviii} and humanitarian topics. In addition, different financial databases showed different levels of spending on each humanitarian topic – this might be caused by the lack of standard sector reporting codes and frameworks for R&I.

The systematic desk review revealed that the primary areas of focus for both HRI outputs based on the frequency of documents discussing these themes were **protection, health, crisis management, and logistics**. Among the cluster-based thematic areas, the areas of nutrition, emergency telecommunications, and camp management and camp coordination (CCCM) were the least frequently examined.

Thematic focus areas also differed by crisis type. Health was more commonly examined in conflict-related studies, while logistics was more commonly examined in natural disaster-related studies. These differences can perhaps be explained by the nature of issues faced, and the opportunities for HRI during the different crises.

When innovation types were examined using a modified Doblin framework, the three most described innovation types were process innovation, model innovation, and product innovation. Other innovation types fell well below by a large margin. Focus on these innovation types was consistent across the thematic focus areas.

The analysis of IATI and OCHA FTS databases based on the number of mentions of each humanitarian topic and sector in the project description and abstract (as illustrated in Table 5) shows that HRI-specific funding was mostly spent **on protection, education, and health**. Emergency telecommunications, shelter and non-food items (NFIs), early recovery, and CCCM were among the least-funded sectors.

The discrepancy in results between what is reported in the financial databases and what is found in the desk review could be a result of the lack of standard reporting codes for R&I and / or the different timeframes organisations have for reporting their spending to the IATI / OCHA FTS in comparison to the timeframes of publishing their R&I outputs.

Table 5: Number of mentions of each humanitarian subsector and the funding of their projects (OCHA FTS and IATI, 2017–2021)

Subsector	IATI (HRI envelope)		OCHA FTS (HRI envelope)	
	Budget value	Number of mentions	Amount	Number of mentions
CCCM	\$240.7m	448	\$3.1m	3
Early recovery	\$166.3m	339	\$5.2m	4
Education	\$10,913.9m	8,875	\$36.6m	15
Food security	\$529.4m	833	\$4.8m	5
Health	\$10,306.1m	7,452	\$3.9m	10
Logistics	\$995.5m	794	\$0m	0
Nutrition	\$7,574.0m	5,393	\$7.2m	5
Protection	\$7,514.1m	10,191	\$29.1m	36
Shelter and NFIs	\$159.0m	294	\$7.4m	5
Emergency telecommunication	\$0.0m	1	\$0m	0
Water, sanitation, and hygiene (WASH)	\$6,187.7m	4,627	\$1.8m	2

4.6 What stage of innovation is being funded?

The majority of the data reported to the financial databases used for the funding flows analysis report does not have details about the stage of the research or innovation being funded. The systematic desk review reviewed the outputs' description to categorise the outputs by innovation type. The three most common innovation types examined in peer-reviewed documents were **process, model, and product innovation**.

Innovation types (adapted from the Doblin Innovation Framework)^{xxxix}

Configuration	Model	Innovative models in humanitarian operations, financing, or research. Also includes new approaches, paradigms, curricula, strategies, and frameworks.
	Network	New humanitarian and innovation (H&I) partnerships, collaborations, information-sharing platforms, logistics networks, coordination activities, as well as newly established summits / roundtables.
	Structure	New H&I technology integrations and organisational restructurings.
	Process	Innovative processes in the form of new methodologies, algorithms, process improvements and optimisations, protocols, guidelines, new validated measurement scales / tools, and taxonomies.
Offering	Product	Innovative products including all tangible items or new constructions, as well as software / hardware, websites, platforms, data sets, and other forms of media.
Experience	Service	Innovative humanitarian programming offering new services, as well as investment or loan / credit services.
	Channel	Innovative ways to reach or engage stakeholders or populations in crisis.
	Brand	Innovative public relations (PR) content and strategies for humanitarian organisations.
	User Engagement	Innovative methods for stakeholder engagement, simulation, and training tools for humanitarian practitioners, as well as class or course content.

4.7 Conclusions

4.7.1 The Elrha 2017 Global Mapping Exercise^{xi} found that the vast majority of both R&I funders and funding recipients are currently headquartered in Europe and North America. In 2023, the overall funding landscape for HRI remains unchanged. Funders from Europe and North America continue to lead on funding HRI, and such funding still relies on the same small group of funders. While new funders, such as private foundations are emerging in this space and increasing their investment, there is still a need to diversify the funding portfolio for the HRI ecosystem.

4.7.2 Non-traditional humanitarian actors have provided many resources for HRI beyond funding, for example, evidence or innovation that have been generated in other sectors outside the humanitarian system, but were leveraged to support the humanitarian response. However, these non-traditional actors are still far away from being systematically involved in R&I dialogues – their contributions are often ad hoc and responsive to specific issues or crises. Engaging these non-traditional actors and their capabilities more systematically would enable a more resourceful, sustainable, and responsive R&I ecosystem.

4.7.3 The analysis of the IATI database shows that less than 0.2% of the overall humanitarian assistance budget between 2017 and 2021 was allocated to address humanitarian issues through R&I. Despite an increase in the recognition of the evolving role of R&I in humanitarian response, the humanitarian system remains in the bottom list of sectors investing in R&I. There remains a notable gap in our knowledge about where R&I is mostly needed and where it makes a difference. Understanding R&I priorities on the ground can help donors and actors channel their resources toward the most pressing challenges, however, this cannot be achieved without a meaningful engagement for local and national actors in identifying R&I priorities and setting the agenda for their countries and regions.

4.7.4 Engaging local and national actors is key for the effectiveness and success of R&I partnerships.^{xii} The data suggests that local and national actors are, sometimes, receiving R&I funding, but leadership roles in setting up the agenda and thematic focus of R&I are still held by Global North-based organisations. There needs to be more work to assess the quality of these partnerships with donors and their intermediate funders holding themselves accountable to engage local and national actors in setting up R&I agendas, and track and report the funding flows to them.

4.7.5 There is a need to improve the existing financial reporting databases to allow better reporting and monitoring for HRI funding as shown by the different results on the funders of HRI across the various databases. There is also significant missing data on the geographic coverage of HRI funding. The data-cleaning process has also revealed inconsistency in the way the geographic coverage was reported – even within the same database. There is currently no agreed standard or guidelines on how the humanitarian system should report its spending on R&I.



4.8 Recommendations

4.8.1 The need for increased funding to support HRI initiatives is consistently expressed in the reports. This funding should be accessible to a wide range of stakeholders, including local actors and NGOs, and should prioritise projects that address the most pressing humanitarian challenges.

4.8.2 Donors and operational agencies need to include national and local actors in policy dialogue, priority setting and decision-making, increasing direct funding and decision-making to local actors.

4.8.3 The humanitarian system should prioritise building stronger partnerships and relationships with non-traditional humanitarian actors and bring them more intentionally into the HRI ecosystem to utilise the impact of HRI resources and capabilities, thus, reducing the pressure on humanitarian actors and budget.

4.8.4 Donors should agree frameworks that consolidate the tools, platforms, and codes for establishing a shared, clear reporting and tracking framework for HR. This is to understand funding flows and enable better visibility of what, and who, is being funded to assist in decision-making / fund allocation. This should include data on other markers such as gender or disability.

4.8.5 Humanitarian actors and funders should create better coordination mechanisms for R&I to enable better articulation and identification of HRI needs and priorities.





5. Role and Responsiveness

5. Role and Responsiveness

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Over recent years, the humanitarian research and innovation (HRI) architecture has evolved with the establishment of innovation labs, research units, and challenge funds, for example.

These developments were undertaken to be responsive to the needs and aspirations of the affected communities, as well as improving the way that the humanitarian system responds. However, humanitarian organisations have been criticised for their ad hoc and reactive approach to crisis, mobilising their resources and capacities mostly when ex post crisis. This has catalysed a shift towards an anticipatory approach, recognising most crises are to some extent predictable, and propose mitigation and preparedness measures to minimise their impact on people. R&I was key in supporting this shift, providing tools, evidence, early warning systems, and advocating for new ways of working and collaboration.

This chapter explores the capacity and ability of HRI to offer a timely response to humanitarian challenges and assesses the HRI contributions in diverse global humanitarian contexts. It builds on the GPE regional consultation reports that investigated the status of the HRI ecosystem in different geographic regions. These consultations were based on a standardised key informant interview (KII) guide, modified by regional partners for cultural sensitivity and regional relevance. The interview guide comprised seven modules covering:

- Demographics.
 - The role of R&I in humanitarian crises.
 - Regional HRI needs.
 - Alignment of investments with HRI needs.
 - Regional and national stakeholder engagement with HRI.
 - Decision-making and coordination processes.
 - Responsiveness of the HRI system.
-

Findings were reviewed to understand to what extent R&I has been able to support humanitarian operations, understanding its role throughout each phase of the humanitarian response cycle, and unpack the factors that support or impede the HRI system from responding to new crises and emerging issues. The analysis framework for this overview report examined the role of HRI across all regions and regional differences highlighted when they were unique to a specific context or crisis.



This chapter addresses the following questions:

1. What is the role of R&I in the humanitarian system and in each phase of the humanitarian response?
2. How can HRI enable better humanitarian outcomes?
3. What are the facilitators and blockers to enabling a timely response from HRI?

5.1 The role of R&I in humanitarian response

The need to enhance the response, efficiency, and effectiveness within the aid system has never been greater, especially in the face of funding and resources shortfalls – expected to worsen even further in 2024. The GPE consultations asked humanitarian practitioners, researchers, innovators, and donors their thoughts on the role HRI has to play and what this entails.

A small proportion of participants raised concerns about the ethical implications and the feasibility of carrying out R&I activities during an emergency response. Some of the participants believe that during onset emergencies, the primary focus should be on the delivery of time-sensitive humanitarian support to communities affected by crisis and funding should be directed towards operations and aid delivery. Additionally, the focus of humanitarian personnel needs to be on managing the response as communities affected by crisis will be concerned about seeking immediate relief rather than R&I.

Some participants reported that R&I faces resistance from senior humanitarian personnel who have decades of experience functioning in a particular way. Some participants also cited the potential harm of research conducted for the wrong reasons, such as consulting communities affected by crises to satisfy donors, but felt there was a role for research once the acute phase had passed.



"In the first phase, the research phase, for me is a big red flag...after three or four months, and you can really do more research...ethical research. But I think this is where the damage can be done during the acute phase of the response."

Oceania, Eastern and South-Eastern Asia (OESEA) report



In Ukraine, a number of humanitarian organisations were making use of technology given the high levels of digital literacy after years of government-driven investment in the digital sector there. This was successful in many ways, with some smartphone-based apps allowing for data collection in high-risk areas to improve coordination of the provision of medical supplies to pharmacies in frontline towns. However, another agency identified that many of the people who chose to remain in frontline towns were older and were much less digitally literate than younger generations in Ukraine, and so to meet their needs it was necessary to adopt more traditional approaches.

A volunteer measures the blood pressure of a grandmother in Ukraine. **Image credit:** SVPhilon

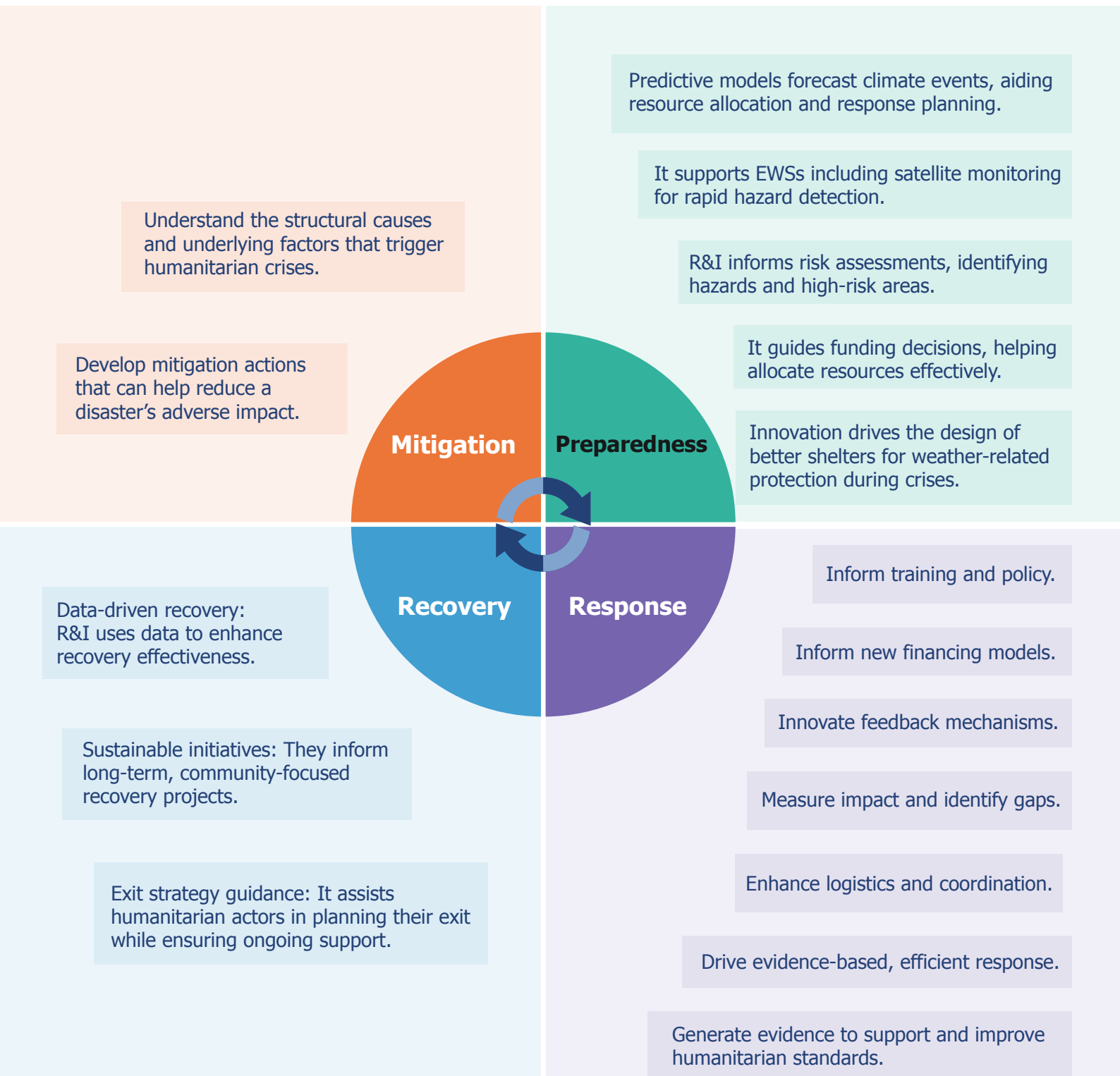
The majority of participants recognised the significance of the various functions HRI can play to support humanitarian actions. Participants identified that HRI could **inform and improve humanitarian action** through generating data and evidence, informed by communities affected by crisis, about the needs and type of intervention required, and to **ensure continuous improvements and adaptations of these interventions**. When traditional ways of working fail to deliver impact, R&I also plays a critical role in **informing new ways of working** and developing innovative approaches, policies, and programmes.

Participants also emphasised HRI can **improve accountability to communities affected by crisis** by centring humanitarian actions around people's needs, and designing innovative feedback mechanisms that, for example, enable high standards of safeguarding. R&I can also promote **greater accountability to funders** by ensuring the efficient use of resources to address the most pressing challenges.

Policy and advocacy campaigns are essential to raise awareness on specific humanitarian issues and hold the humanitarian actors and donors accountable to address them. **Successful and impactful advocacy campaigns** are those informed by research and evidence to influence key stakeholders and identify clear actionable recommendations.

Most participants reported a substantial role for innovation in **early warning systems (EWSs) and anticipatory action**, especially in relation to natural hazards. This is likely to be because of the significant potential role technology (eg, satellites) plays in these EWSs and innovation being commonly seen as technological products brought in to support humanitarian action.

Figure 7: Summary of roles reported for HRI by participants for their settings against a simplified crisis management cycle



Other roles for HRI

1. Support operationalising the humanitarian-development-peace triple nexus.
2. The identification and implementation of bigger structural and system reforms. Providing critical insights to identify current weaknesses and inefficiencies and enable the development of evidence-based solutions to inform policy changes, operational improvements, and resource allocation. HRI can be a catalyst for change. This is strengthened when HRI is done in a way that promotes collaboration, knowledge sharing, and stakeholder engagement.
3. The use of R&I to understand the underlying causes of crisis and support systems thinking to identify changes to the processes needed to address and prevent crisis.



"The 'HDP Triple Nexus' is the term used to capture the interlinkages between the humanitarian, development and peace sectors. It specifically refers to attempts in these fields to work together to more effectively meet people's needs, mitigate risks and vulnerabilities, and move toward sustainable peace."¹

5.2 How HRI enables better humanitarian outcomes

R&I was widely reported in the consultations as a powerful tool for improving humanitarian outcomes and transforming aid delivery. This can both be by outside agencies learning to improve their services, or through adopting locally-led innovation. Indeed, a combination of both can be powerful. Some examples highlighted in these consultations were:

Informed decision-making: R&I provides humanitarian actors with data-driven recommendations and insights about how aid should be delivered, what issues should be prioritised, and how funding and resources might be allocated. For example, innovative EWSs can improve anticipatory action, such as forecasting severe flood events which can help humanitarian actors make decisions on when and how to evacuate and resettle affected communities.

Develop needs-driven responses: Through R&I, humanitarian actors can tailor their programmes to communities' needs that might otherwise be missed, such as through identifying population subgroups that would benefit most from an organisation's programmes and understand their needs.

Understand vulnerability and risk: Another important aspect of R&I within the humanitarian system is its contribution to understanding vulnerability and risks associated with crises. Participants noted that tools like hazard, vulnerability, and risk assessments enable humanitarian actors to understand the intensity and nature of risk. This, in turn, enables communities and responders to improve their preparedness and response activities. Additionally, research helps humanitarian actors to identify not only the immediate impacts of crises, but also the root causes, empowering them to design more effective interventions.

Address context-specific challenges: Innovations driven by research support humanitarian actors in better understanding and responding to context-specific challenges and developing new products, interventions, and policies utilising available data and new technologies. Engaging with local actors and communities enables responders to gain insights into social realities and to design and tailor their responses to the specific needs of communities. R&I can be helpful in fostering a more inclusive and culturally-sensitive approach to humanitarian action, ultimately contributing to improved outcomes.

Optimise humanitarian resources: R&I can influence funding decisions and enable better allocation of resources by identifying the most effective ways of delivering aid, for example, more accessible and cost-effective WASH services that adapt to communities' needs. This continuous improvement ensures humanitarian assistance is more targeted and impactful, and resources are used in the most efficient way.

5.3 Challenges for HRI in supporting humanitarian outcomes

Some participants reported that R&I may not be effective in improving humanitarian outcomes, due to:

Disconnect from the operational system: When R&I initiatives are ad hoc and tailored to a specific project or intervention rather than being incorporated into an organisation's strategies, they become disconnected and fail to achieve impact at the wider system level.

Late integration into the emergency response: Participants had different views on how early HRI should be integrated into an operational response scale-up, however, a majority thought that too often it was brought in too late to have an impact on response modalities. However, in the Ukraine case study, respondents noted that successful innovations often developed over multiple responses in different contexts, allowing teams to learn about the opportunities and limits of novel approaches.

Related, R&I requires **long timelines** to give results and often funding cycles are not supportive of this, which creates a lag in how quickly learning and the adoption of any innovation is taken on.

Similarly, funding models do not systematically support the full journey of R&I such as research uptake or innovation scaling which means that many successful innovations may stop at the pilot phase resulting in missed opportunities for broader impact. Research findings may fail to reach decision makers or might be inadequately translated into operational responses. This issue can arise from a focus on traditional ways of working (the 'business as usual' approach) and resistance to adopt innovative solutions. In Elrha's 'Journey to Scale' project,⁴ resistance was found to come from a fear of disrupting power structures, and a reluctance to challenge established norms and traditional ways of working which creates a significant barrier to seamlessly integrating innovative solutions into the broader HRI landscape.

As a result of these factors, innovations often evolve and go to scale over multiple crises in different contexts as a small group of practitioners champion new approaches before there is confidence to make them mainstream. This confidence building can take significant time – often several years.

4. Not part of the GPE.

5.4 HRI responsiveness

The extent to which R&I can respond and quickly mobilise resources to emerging challenges is crucial to its relevance. Factors that support a timely responsiveness to new issues include:



Funding availability: One of the main factors that support a prompt response from R&I is the availability of sufficient and flexible funding. Participants emphasised the need for adequate resources that can be quickly mobilised to an emerging crisis.



Strong partnerships: Pre-established agreements and strong partnerships between humanitarian organisations and R&I actors enable the humanitarian system to quickly leverage available evidence and innovative approaches to support response programming. This also includes partnerships with the private sector which can provide unique approaches and perspectives to further support humanitarian actions.



Political will and recognition for HRI: When leaders among humanitarian actors, donors, and policymakers recognise the added value and role of R&I, they are motivated to direct resources and funding to support R&I initiatives during onset emergencies. An example of this includes leveraging R&I to the Ebola response in West Africa when many actors felt uncertain of how to respond appropriately.



Preparedness and anticipatory approach: Organisations that have strong warning systems and are able to forecast and prepare for crises are more likely to leverage R&I capabilities and mobilise their resources to support their preparedness efforts.



Coordination among stakeholders: Strong coordination mechanisms between humanitarian actors and funders, headquarters and country offices, and R&I actors enable better articulation of needs and accelerate the ability of R&I to support the humanitarian system.



National capacity: Countries that have invested in research and development (R&D), and have pre-existing strong R&I institutions, infrastructure, and resources can provide timely support to humanitarian actors by informing decision-making from the available evidence and providing available innovation to support humanitarian operations.

5.5 Factors that impede timely R&I responsiveness to new issues



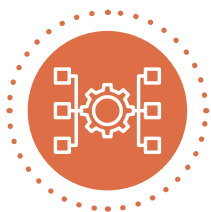
Funding availability: The shortfall of resources for R&I within humanitarian budgets alongside the inflexibility of this funding constitute a significant challenge to mobilise R&I capacities when needed.



Bureaucratic processes: Long and intensive due diligence and procurement processes hinder humanitarian actors' ability to work with R&I actors in a timely manner during onset crises.



Lack of human resources: Insufficient R&I-dedicated human resources and personnel within humanitarian organisations to coordinate and leverage R&I support impede the timely responsiveness of R&I. Without these dedicated personnel, R&I gets deprioritised during response planning.



Infrastructures, capacities, and logistics: The lack of country-level resources and R&I capacities, alongside humanitarian access constraints undermine the humanitarian system's ability to implement timely R&I projects when crises strike.



Lack of political will and interest: When there is a lack of political will and recognition of the importance of R&I, stakeholders may not prioritise it, instead focusing primarily on immediate relief operations. This will make it challenging for R&I actors to engage with stakeholders across the project lifecycle, from planning to execution, which can slow down R&I efforts.



The Ukraine case study highlighted how deploying senior leaders to scale-ups could significantly help HRI and adoption. Any novel approach requires risk-taking, therefore, having a senior trusted leader who is able to understand in detail the issues being faced by the operational team, while still having the seniority to authorise new approaches made a significant difference to realising innovation. The fact that many organisations were well funded for their Ukraine response also allowed them to take more risks in experimenting with new approaches such as IT-based engagement with the affected population.



Independence Square in Kyiv
Image credit: Maksym Diachenko

5.6 Conclusions

5.6.1 R&I emerged in the consultations as a powerful force in enhancing humanitarian outcomes, whether through external agencies improving their services or embracing locally-led innovations. The combination of both approaches proved particularly impactful. Examples showcased R&I's role in informed decision-making, tailoring responses to community needs, understanding vulnerability and risk, addressing context-specific challenges, and optimising resources. Despite these benefits, challenges such as disconnects from operational systems, late integration, and inadequate funding models exist, hindering the scale-up of successful innovations. Overcoming these challenges is crucial for unlocking R&I's full potential in humanitarian efforts.

5.6.2 HRI is seen as a vital player and driver for improvements but lacks the adequate policy and financial commitments to drive the level of change needed. While R&I are seen as vital players and drivers for improvements, concerns exist about the ethical and operational feasibility of conducting it during the acute phase of crises. Balancing immediate relief needs with long-term R&I objectives remains a challenge.

5.6.3 The responsiveness of HRI to emerging challenges is seen as, in the consultations, critical for its relevance in humanitarian work. Factors like funding availability, strong partnerships, political will, preparedness, and coordination shape timely responses. On the other side, obstacles such as resource shortfalls, bureaucratic processes, lack of human resources, infrastructure constraints, and political apathy can impede swift mobilisation for HRI. Recognising and addressing these factors, both supportive and obstructive, are essential for enhancing R&I's agility in responding to new humanitarian challenges and improving crisis outcomes.

5.6.4 The policy framework to create the feedback loop between research findings and programme policy / uptake is weak. Whilst research is produced and operational agencies and donors invest in innovations within operational grants, innovations often evolve over multiple crises in different contexts and only when committed practitioners continue to push an agenda. This creates a very long lag time and inhibits scaling up. There needs to be stronger feedback loops between R&I outputs and programme policy reviews.



5.7 Recommendations

The consultations proposed actionable recommendations to improve the integration of R&I within the humanitarian system and enhance its responsiveness:

5.7.1 Developing guidelines and ways of working to ensure that HRI is conducted ethically in humanitarian settings, maintaining high standards of safeguarding and without distracting humanitarian actors from their focus on saving lives.

5.7.2 Strong partnerships among humanitarian actors, donors, academic institutions, innovation bodies, and the private sector can lead to more effective research agendas and innovative solutions aligned with humanitarian priorities.

5.7.3 Leadership has an important role to play in instilling confidence to take measured risks when trialling, or scaling up, innovative approaches.

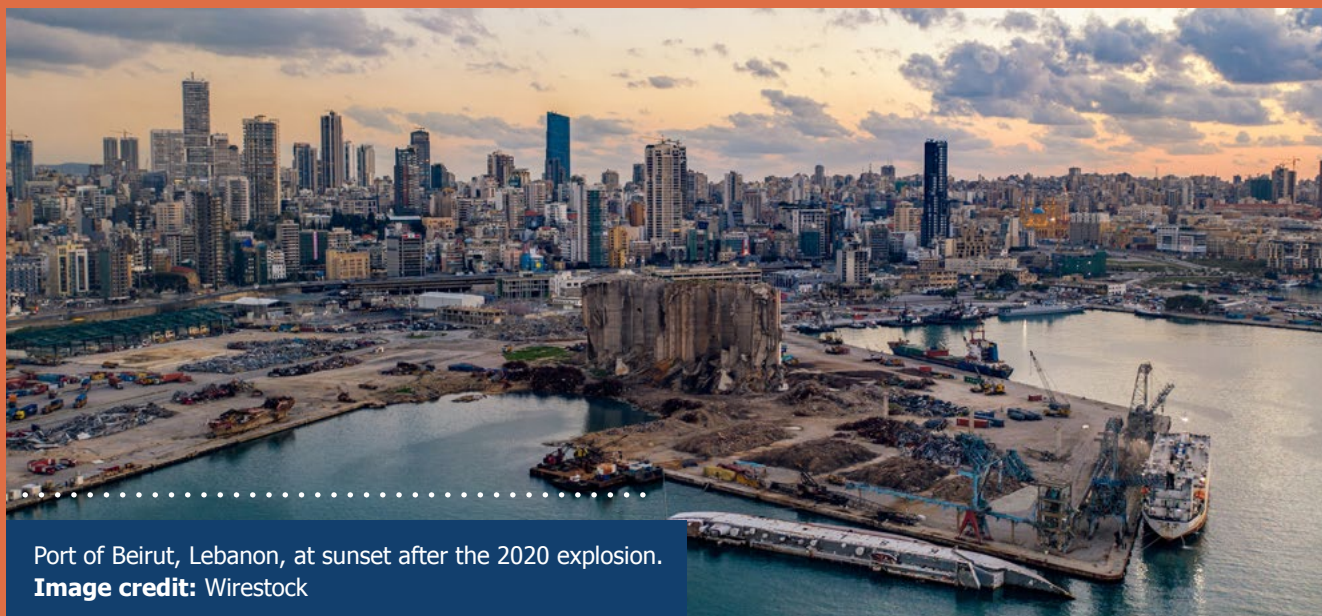
5.7.4 Increased available and flexible funding allow for more experimentation. Humanitarian actors should explore access to resources and capabilities from non-humanitarian actors such as academic institutions and the private sector.

5.7.5 Align R&I agendas with the wider humanitarian system agenda by identifying evidence gaps, innovation needs, and invest in building capacity within humanitarian organisations to coordinate HRI efforts and promote awareness within them about the role and value of R&I.

5.7.6 Support the scaling of innovation, and incentivise adoption and research uptake to maximise the impact of R&I investments. This means recognising that such cycles are longer than typical humanitarian funding cycles and may require trialling in multiple emergencies.

Summarising the findings, the consultations suggest that HRI has a crucial role within the humanitarian system, acting as a force to increase the agility, flexibility, and responsiveness of humanitarian actors to address evolving humanitarian needs. However, a system shift in the way R&I is funded, implemented, and integrated is required to harness the full potential of R&I improving outcomes for communities affected by crisis.





Port of Beirut, Lebanon, at sunset after the 2020 explosion.

Image credit: Wirestock



Case Study

Lebanon is facing a humanitarian crisis characterised by widespread poverty, economic collapse, and a high refugee population, compounded by the impact of COVID-19 and the Beirut Port explosion. Lebanon has a well-established research infrastructure and history of humanitarian research during past conflicts. Consultations with seven R&I actors in Lebanon highlighted opportunities such as:

- Developing a stronger understanding of the evolving humanitarian needs.
- Evaluating the impact of the compound humanitarian issues on the refugee populations in Lebanon and on the Lebanese host population.
- Improving the cash and voucher assistance (CVA) mechanisms.
- Informing the work on the water-energy-food nexus and understanding how they relate to each other.

However, they also reported challenges to the production and uptake of R&I in Lebanon due to funding constraints, limited collaboration, and lengthy bureaucratic processes for grant calls.

Despite Lebanon's strong civil society and vibrant academic community, there was not always an active, equitable, and meaningful engagement between them. Barriers included high staff turnover, dominance of some stakeholder groups, and the local humanitarian architecture and dynamics being poorly understood by grassroots-level institutions.

To address this, strategies to support civil society-led initiatives were being implemented such as equitable and inclusive platforms for engagement, efforts to avoid 'brain drain', working with new partners, and ensuring meaningful engagement of community researchers as well as populations affected by crises.

6. Equity and Power Relations

6. Equity and Power Relations

This chapter explores power relations and dynamics between actors, including issues of participation, transparency, accountability, and ownership.

This chapter integrates information from the funding flows report,^{xlii} the mapping of research and innovation (R&I) actors,^{xliii} and consultation reports^{xliii} to explore the influence of regional, national, and community-level actors in shaping the humanitarian research and innovation (HRI) agenda, their leadership role, and the amount of funding provided to them. Qualitative information from interviews, commissioned by Elrha, are also used.



This chapter addresses the following questions:

1. What roles do regional, national, and local actors play in the HRI system?
2. Who determines the R&I agenda within the humanitarian system?
3. What are the power dynamics within partnerships in the HRI ecosystem?

6.1 Actors holding power today

In the consultations, there was a desire to see a greater shift from viewing affected communities as passive recipients to recognising them as active agents with expertise, knowledge, and the power to shape their humanitarian outcomes. This evolution is ongoing, with all the reports showing a trend in involving affected communities in HRI. However, data from the different consultations also shows that, in practice, the participation and ownership of people affected is still limited, and usually involves local actors and communities more as data collectors than having agency in setting the agenda and priorities.

The agenda setting and the decisions around the HRI agenda largely remain with decision makers in the Global North. Further, HRI funding is still both generated and mostly received by actors in the Global North (see Chapter 3 and Figure 4). One example of this is that 76.3% of the authors that produce R&I papers are from high-income countries (HICs).

The data strongly indicates that HRI is supply driven, ie, agenda and priorities are set by actors in the Global North. Local communities and populations affected by crisis are mostly involved in data collection. Actual changes for further localisation within R&I appear to be highly limited, facing similar constraints as operational grants in general.



"Increasingly, we're seeing that the trust in humanitarian actors can take a really direct hit when innovations are deployed, and the benefits are not demonstrated or understood by local populations."

UN agency representative, Global Consultation

The engagement of regional and national actors is also influenced by the politicisation of research topics by the government.



"In some countries, only the researchers who share the establishment's point of view are awarded grants and given other resources. Dissenting voices in research are often sidelined, with few opportunities of engagement."

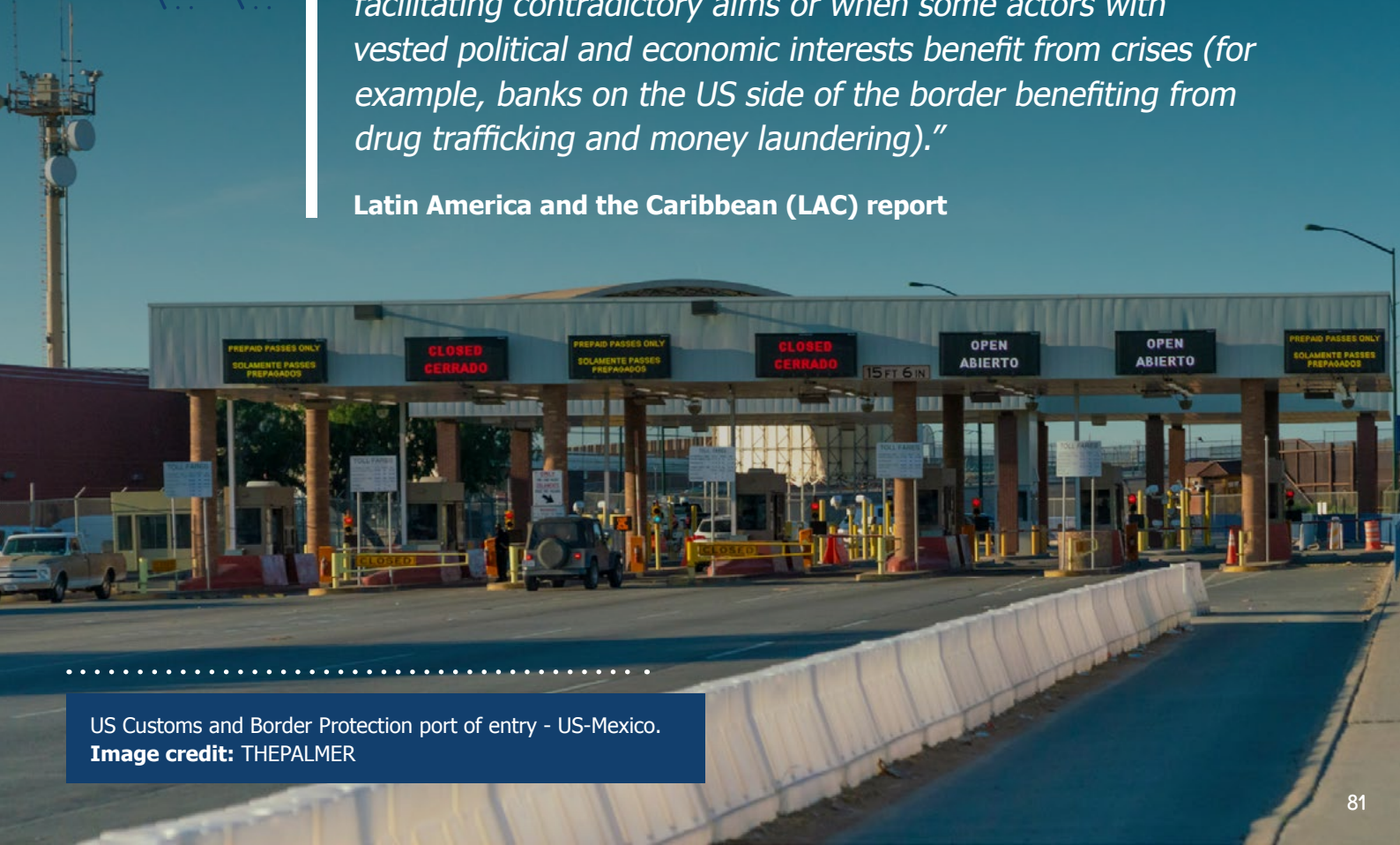
South and Central Asia (SCA) report

Limited political collaboration can skew resource distribution, and discussants felt they could be driven by vested interests prioritising political and economic gains over the region's genuine needs.



"Political and economic interests affect humanitarian action when imposing different agendas (mostly, by governments), facilitating contradictory aims or when some actors with vested political and economic interests benefit from crises (for example, banks on the US side of the border benefiting from drug trafficking and money laundering)."

Latin America and the Caribbean (LAC) report



6.2 Groups missing out

A coherent message from across all the reports and consultations is that populations affected by crisis and representatives from such communities, national NGOs, subnational actors, and grassroots organisations are largely being left out of the decision-making process of determining HRI needs and priorities. Communities are not homogeneous, and in particular, minority population subgroups are excluded. Some groups that are mentioned in the majority of the regional reports as being excluded are migrants and refugees, women, children and youth, people living with disabilities, and the private sector. Other groups that are mentioned in a few regions are local leaders in remote areas, armed group members, specific ethnic groups and native populations, the LGBTQIA+ community, patients (for health research), the elderly, populations affected by violence, prisoners, and detainees.



"The absence of these voices may lead to important HRI needs and opportunities for innovation being missed."

South and Central Asia (SCA) report

Other views related to the exclusion of different groups are that "political sensitivities against some populations" or towards some issues "results in a tendency not to focus on such groups" (West and North Africa (WANA)). One such example from the region is that gender-based violence (GBV) does not receive sufficient attention because much of the region reportedly remains patriarchal (WANA). Also, consultations tend to focus on the perspectives of those involved with service delivery and with suppliers of HRI, and much less with those who will benefit from the application of the R&I (SCA). Another view expressed is that there is little to no engagement from the humanitarian offices and operational units at the regional and national levels (LAC).

It is worth noting that data is not available to analyse HRI from different groups' perspectives, for example, from a gender perspective.

6.3 Distribution of resources

The research demonstrates that the overall funding landscape for HRI remains largely unchanged. Donors from Europe and North America continue to lead on funding HRI. Actors in the Global North continue to receive most of this funding.

Participants expressed that the limited amounts available, especially in research investments, act as a barrier to genuine participation by, for example, restricting HRI collaboration and engagement with different stakeholders. Donors from the Global North primarily influence HRI priorities, often leading to a focus that aligns more with donor interests, overshadowing regional, national, and local needs. Also, the allocation process is further muddled by the intricacies of grant-contracting systems.



"Donor requirements for accessing funding are still a challenge for local actors, particularly those directed to HRI given that the prioritisation of funding in Syria is largely still life-saving humanitarian assistance."

Community Consultation

6.4 Decision-making

A coherent message from the reports and consultations is that the decision-making processes in organisations typically follow a top-down approach, with headquarters making decisions and lower-tier offices executing them. These decisions are typically centralised and based outside the region. Country offices usually have a limited role in setting priorities and local actors are predominantly excluded from decision-making.



"If the framing is done in a very exclusive space, you make the design easier but the translation a lot harder."

Global Consultation

The alignment with national and international agendas influences the HRI agenda. One example is the extensive HRI in Syria as compared to Yemen, where the needs are extensive, but the political attention less so (for further info, see Section 3.3). Geopolitical interests are perceived by the participants to be driving the agenda.



*Rohingya refugees in Bangladesh
"...are side-lined as bystanders of the decisions which are made on their behalf. They have been here for five years, when we talk to them, you see that people have enormous amounts of ideas...the problem with research and information and evidence-based creation is that the Rohingya participate but they just get interviewed...they do not control how and what type of questions are asked."*

Community Consultation



A general lack of understanding about collaboration's benefits and a bias towards known entities have been noted. A preference to use expertise from outside the region or country is an expressed challenge in several reports.



"Reliance on external actors is believed to be quicker, and there is a reluctance to engage local, national, and regional actors as this is considered a more difficult alternative."

West and Central Africa (WCA) report

However, not everything is top down. Some organisations have adopted a collaborative approach, inviting various stakeholders for input and joint planning, while others use a mixed method combining both strategies.



"A combination of top-down and bottom-up approaches are used by some organisations to determine priority-setting processes. Mostly these occur through knowledge innovation hubs that have become popular in the region and have allowed agencies to constitute framework approaches and have strategic agreement partnerships with research institutions and the community."

South and East Africa (SEA) report

6.5 Knowledge production

The research highlights gaps and challenges in knowledge production, emphasising the need for integrating local perspectives alongside international or academic viewpoints. There is a gap between NGOs and academia, resulting in a weak connection between academic institutions and humanitarian groups. Despite recognising the value of regional, national, and local stakeholder involvement for contextualising research, various barriers exist. These include (perceived) limited research capacity within humanitarian organisations and a perceptual bias towards international collaborations over local engagements. It also includes socio-cultural factors and language impediments. For example, the use of English in primarily French-speaking areas poses challenges. Also, there's a shortage of platforms for knowledge exchange. Even when there are platforms, it is not always easy to share due to political sensitivities.



"Limited data sharing: institutes and initiatives intended to facilitate research and collaboration are constrained due to the inability of countries to freely share data in, for example, SCA."

South and Central Asia (SCA) report

The UN clusters and sectors of interventions frame a lot of the HRI space, aligning it to thematic topics. However, in all of the regional consultations, systemwide or systemic issues, like climate change impact, localisation, and anticipatory action were highlighted for further HRI even more than the thematic areas. It was only the consultations in WANA that emphasised thematic areas to a greater extent than systemwide issues. The interconnectedness between different areas, including thematic areas, was mentioned in all reports. Systemwide issues are not only mentioned at a more abstract global level. Local actors, like the Rohingya research participants in Bangladesh, have broader queries related to the policies governing their rights while in exile, their ability to access socioeconomic opportunities, as well as longer term questions about their future status in Bangladesh.



"...we struggle to, even within the UN, to match up their priorities with our own, and then their funding structures with our own."

Oceania, Eastern and South-Eastern Asia (OESEA) report

Feedback from the consultation reports indicates that research often does not reflect on-ground realities, reducing its policy relevance. In addition to that, it can be dangerous to conduct research, especially on specific topics in countries which are characterised by a shrinking space for civil society and academia.



"Shrinking civic space. There is a real and perceived risk of engaging regional and national stakeholders in HRI in such fragile situations."

West and Central Africa (WCA) report

6.6 Accountability to affected populations

All reports and consultations mention a positive trend to involve affected communities. Most of them also mention that much remains to be done. Affected communities may be involved in data collection, less so in setting the agenda and priorities from their perspective. Even when there is an interaction, there could be a lack of accountability towards the involved communities.



"There is a need to "develop innovative ways to increase accountability to affected populations. Notably, organisations are losing access to some communities because those communities do not consider them accountable."

West and Central Africa (WCA) report

Voices of people with different needs (for example, women, children, the elderly, or people with disabilities) must be ensured at the appropriate level of inclusion.



"Gender has a great impact, especially on female stakeholders and their ability to access and participate in some research initiatives."

South and East Africa (SEA) report

Political interests and bureaucratic hurdles, especially the prolonged periods needed to secure approval, pose challenges and can influence HRI.



"Stakeholders are hesitant to engage on topics that are extremely sensitive."

South and East Africa (SEA) report



"...there are institutional barriers to change and barriers to research and engagement. Engagement is superficial. Even in instances where researchers come together, there is no deep dialogue."

South and Central Asia (SCA) report

6.7 Partnership between different actors

The reports and consultations suggest an evolving landscape where local actors are becoming essential partners in HRI, although they often are not leading these endeavours. Roles and responsibilities within partnerships may be skewed, with international organisations often perceived as more capable than local entities in HRI.



"INGOs' concerns regarding LNGOs pertain to reliability, competency, and impartiality. Another concern shared by actors is that most INGOs that collaborate with local actors do not consider LNGOs / CBOs as partners, but as their subcontractors. Syrian NGOs simply implement the innovative products or research methodology designed by INGOs / donors under remote management. Many INGO or donor approaches are not compatible with the localisation mindset, as they do not consider local actors as an asset to cultivate."

Community Consultation

In the consultations, it is highlighted that for humanitarian innovation, localisation matters because the success of an innovation is dependent on a range of local factors such as user acceptance, availability of resources and supply chains. Also, given the general acknowledgement of the fact that communities are almost always the first to respond to crises, they are well placed to provide for their needs. Similarly, for humanitarian research, it is recognised in all of the reports that local actors and / or affected communities should be active participants rather than only subjects of research. Although the political will for this is clearly there, it is only reflected to a limited extent in practice.



"Biases against researchers from the Global South are prevalent and are contributing to undervalue their contributions."

South and East Africa (SEA) report

Most of the reports and consultations reveal that the partnership with local actors only starts at the data collection phase and not during the conception of the analytical framework, which poses a problem of efficiency for some of these partnerships. One aspect that has been reported to be hindering these collaborations and networks is the general competition that prevails in the sector – one example being between community-based organisations (CBOs) in Syria. Indeed, organisations and governments are not always willing to share their data and knowledge. In South Sudan, NGOs and CBOs have an expanding role in research and identifying community needs, although CBO capacities in humanitarian contexts are, sometimes, limited. There are also examples where there is an unwillingness to share by Global North researchers.



"For other research organisations, particularly research entities in the Global South, a lack of shared values and unwillingness to share power by Western universities hampers collaboration because without this willingness, the relationship and research becomes 'exploitative'. One participant explained that this barrier is still a reality because "the research community doesn't recognise its colonial nature."

Oceania, Eastern and South-Eastern Asia (OESEA) report

6.8 Conclusions

Who determines the HRI agenda and what are the roles played by different actors in the humanitarian system?

6.8.1 The agenda setting and the decisions around the HRI agenda largely remain with decision makers in the Global North and they have a significant influence over HRI directions and outcomes. During consultations, participants strongly felt that HRI is not needs based, but rather supply based, ie, agenda and priorities are set by actors in the Global North. Local communities and populations affected by crisis are mostly only involved in data collection. Throughout the reports, participants expressed the need to localise HRI further to enhance its efficiency and effectiveness.

At the same time, the reports and consultations show that this is an evolving landscape where local actors are increasingly becoming essential partners in HRI and there are interesting examples of intentional changes to enable this transformation (for example, the demands of local consultations when submitting proposals).

6.8.2 Also, some bilateral donors give unrestricted funds to enable more flexibility, although these funds may be restricted by the intermediaries (eg, UN organisations or INGOs). The power of money is well recognised and, hence, this is an area where changes could have significant impact.

6.8.3 The reports and consultations highlight the importance of actors being accountable to populations affected by crisis, but less about the concurrent accountability towards taxpayers, donors, and organisational mandates. The participants see a bias towards funders / taxpayers and organisational mandates. Goal conflicts between these two accountabilities are important to recognise and intentionally manage.

6.8.4 There are positive examples of the participation of local actors and affected communities. However, participation and inclusion should be further developed to make sure groups who may be excluded, for example, migrants and refugees, women, children and youth, ethnic groups, or people living with disabilities, have a voice.

6.8.5 Participants in the consultations noted that agenda setting and priorities were not always locally relevant as they were identified in other places. Hence, for actors conducting HRI, it is recommended to review and possibly improve the processes, methodologies, and qualifications of researchers conducting HRI and interacting with the affected communities.

The power dynamics at play and affecting HRI

6.8.6 HRI is largely aligned to thematic topics. However, in most of the regional reports, systemwide or systemic issues, like climate change impact, localisation, and anticipatory action were highlighted for further HRI more than thematic areas. The interconnectedness between different areas was mentioned in all the regional consultations.

6.8.7 Decision-making processes in organisations typically follow a top-down approach, with headquarters making decisions and lower-tier offices executing them.

6.8.8 Several reports and consultations noted donors and intermediaries like INGOs have a bias towards known entities with a preference to use known expertise from outside the region or country with whom they already have established relationships. The linkages between NGOs and academia are weak and that means there is room for strengthening those links. Barriers mentioned were the (perceived) limited research capacity within humanitarian organisations and a perceptual bias towards international collaborations over local engagements. It also includes socio-cultural factors and language impediments.

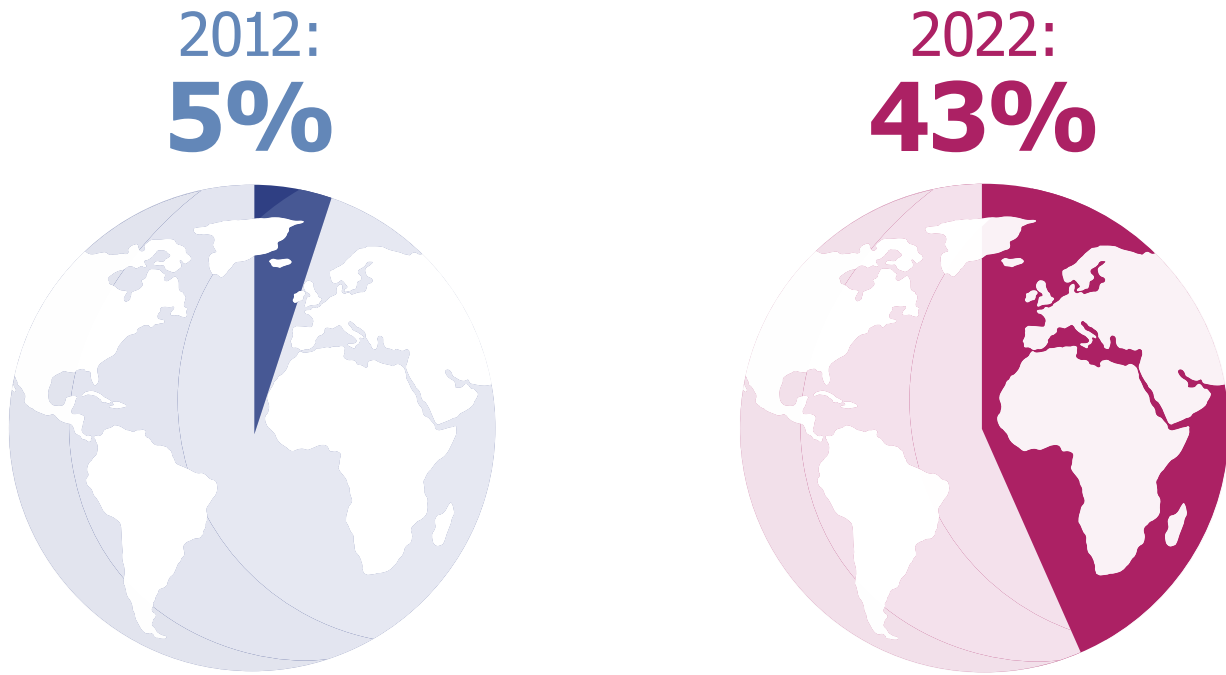
6.8.9 Several reports and consultations highlight that it can be difficult, even impossible, to conduct research on specific topics in countries which are characterised by political sensitivities and a shrinking humanitarian and civic space. The authors of this overview report note that the difficulties are taking place in the rapidly changing global context of democratic backsliding. This affects many areas of society, including civil society and academia, as well as the rule of law and media. Researchers in social sciences (by V-Dem) show that democratic backsliding ('autocratisation')⁵ is taking place on a global scale. The level of democracy enjoyed by the average global citizen in 2022 is down to 1986 levels. This has implications for the space for researchers, communities, and civil society. These difficulties are mentioned in, for example, the WANA regional report – if a topic is of “a sensitive nature, some governments might not only opt not to participate but might also hinder the process of dissemination of results.”



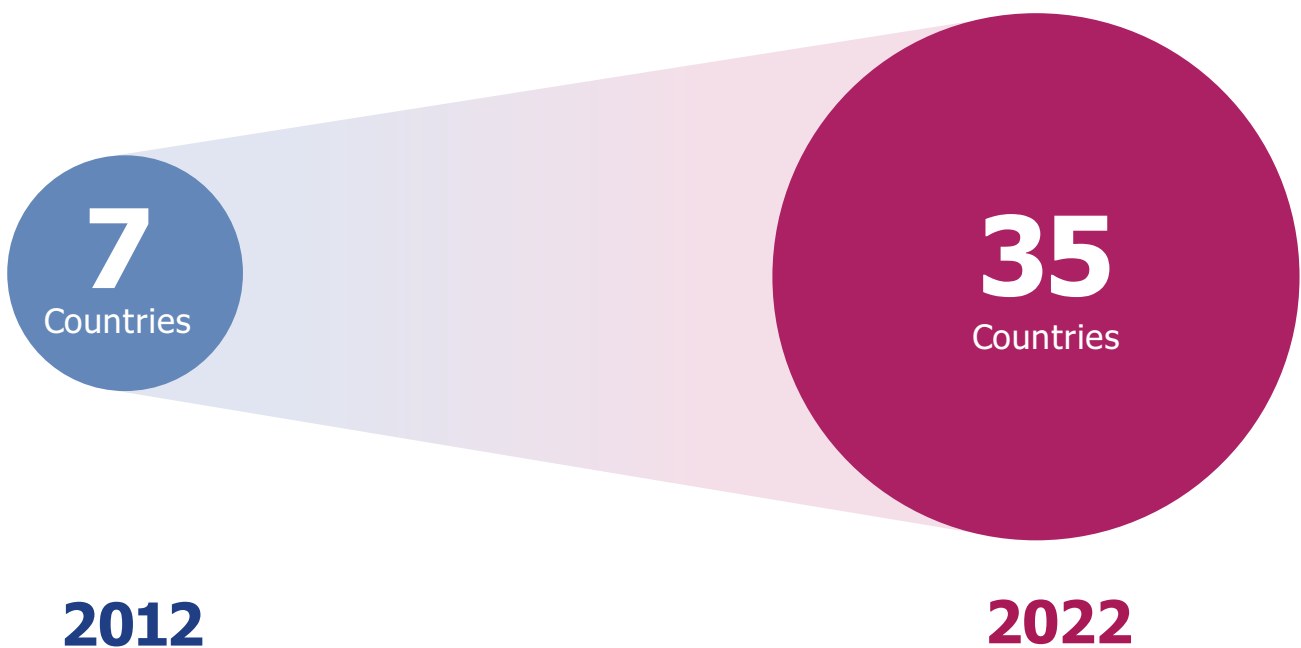
5. Autocratisation is a democratic backsliding. Democratisation means that a country is making moves away from autocracy and toward democracy. Autocratisation is the opposite, meaning any move away from democracy toward autocracy https://www.v-dem.net/documents/29/V-dem_democracyreport2023_lowres.pdf

Figure 8: Increasing autocratisation. Source: V-Dem Institute Democracy Report 2023

Share of the world's population living in autocratising countries



Freedom of expression deteriorating



6.9 Recommendations

6.9.1 HRI institutional donors, INGOs, intermediaries, and academics should make the agenda setting, priorities, and decisions about funding more needs based by strengthening process and policy requirements to meaningfully engage people affected by crisis. This may include making unrestricted funding available, include consultations with local actors and affected communities as a condition for funding and in reporting mechanisms.

6.9.2 To mitigate unbalanced power dynamics, HRI institutional donors, INGOs, intermediaries, and academics should ensure that funding calls, partnership agreements, monitoring and evaluations ensure the participation and ownership of diverse and affected communities.

6.9.3 In many cases, working with local partners is taken as a proxy for working with local communities. However, it is important to intentionally monitor the inclusivity and level of participation rather than assume local actors will always actively include all sections of a community. This may involve reviewing processes and methodologies to track the inclusion of women, children, the elderly, people with disabilities, the LGBTQIA+ community, or ethnic minorities, among others. Such processes should recognise intersectionality, eg, a woman living with a disability.

6.9.4 Institutional donors, intermediaries, and academic institutions can further identify and intentionally support and build long-term relationships with governments and national, local, and civil society organisations, including academics to build a more diverse HRI community. In relation to this, identifying and recognising the specific competencies, processes, and methodologies required to further a needs-based HRI, may increase the value and acknowledgement of the work and ensure that differences in voices and needs are captured when identifying agendas, setting priorities, and collecting data. Organisational work may also involve working on one's internal culture to uncover unconscious biases and explore new partnerships closer to the affected communities.

6.9.5 More HRI needs to be made available in languages other than English to ensure wider access and reach, but also to allow more work to be undertaken by authors whose language is not English and have their work disseminated so the insights and learnings from such actors and settings receive due attention.



A decorative graphic in the top right corner of the page. It features several overlapping L-shaped lines in orange, yellow, green, and blue. Each line is accompanied by a series of small dots in the same color, creating a dotted effect. The dots are arranged in a grid-like pattern, with some lines and dots extending further down the page.

7. Insights

7. Insights

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Defining the humanitarian challenges that HRI can effectively address is crucial for a strategic approach to shaping HRI agendas.



This chapter explores the following questions:

1. What areas require attention in HRI?
2. How can foresight be incorporated and commented upon in the context of HRI?

This chapter is based on the GPE Regional and National Consultations Consortium, which is a multi-institutional collaboration led by the Alfred Deakin Institute for Citizenship and Globalisation at Deakin University (Australia). The regional consultations are developed together with: All India Disaster Mitigation Institute (India), Eastern Mediterranean Public Health Network / EMPHNET (Jordan), Indika Foundation (Indonesia), Passion Africa (Kenya), University of São Paulo (Brazil), and World Vision International West and Central Africa Regional Office (Senegal).

Although the regional reports are not finalised yet, the draft findings were used for this report to provide an aggregated overview.

In the regional consultations, participants were asked to identify the most important issues across their region that they believe require further HRI attention. The authors of this report then undertook a proxy ranking by using the number of times participants highlighted the same issue. The small number of participants in relation to each region's size, and the diversity of humanitarian situations within each region means the responses to the research questions may not fully represent the broader perspectives of the wider humanitarian community in each region but are considered indicative. To complement the regional consultations, data from a desk review of regional humanitarian challenges based on global reports, academic literature, and cluster strategy documents were also used. The literature tended to focus on past events, while the interviewees in the regional consultations tended more to look forward, with discussants articulating their aspirations rather than recounting past experiences. Encouragingly, there was a good alignment between the two exercises, suggesting that the findings are valid.

The overall analysis of the thematic and regional priorities is presented first, including conclusions and recommendations. Thematic analysis is presented thereafter.

7.1 Summary analysis of HRI areas that require further attention

The participants in the regional consultations identified the important topics for further HRI in their view.

The majority of the issues raised are systemwide issues, like climate change and localisation, with less attention paid to thematic issues. The number of entries for systemwide issues are substantially more numerous and more participants identify them as being most important for further HRI.

Preferences by region are shown in Table 6 below, aggregating thematic and systemwide issues. In the regional consultations, participants were asked to identify the key areas which they believe are the most important for further HRI investment or the critical challenges that HRI should address. Issues were ranked by the authors of this overview report based on how many participants identified that issue. For example, if ten participants identified topic xx and eight participants topic yy, then, topic xx would be ranked top (#1) and topic yy would be ranked second (#2). These rankings are shown in the table below. Several entries may have the same ranking. Aggregating and ranking the data has been undertaken to get an overview of the qualitative material and to show trends and indications, but the participants themselves were not asked to rank topics.

There is a dominance of health issues among the thematic topics – identified as one of the most important areas for further HRI in four out of the six regions. Under the theme of health, it is worth noting that mental health stands out as an important area to focus on, as revealed in the regional reports as well as in the literature review. The second most frequently mentioned issue for further HRI was food security, mentioned by participants in three out of the six regions. The literature review gives a similar priority level to protection as to health, whereas protection does not receive the same level of attention in the regional consultations.



It is also worth noting that WANA respondents had a clear preference for HRI on thematic issues compared to the others, which either had a preference for systemwide issues, or in the case of LAC, a balance between the two.

Systemwide issues were regarded as important topics for further HRI in all of the regional consultations, with climate change, in particular, mentioned universally. There are a range of issues raised in relation to climate change, although some specific areas for further HRI are clear, including:

- To understand how climate change affects the humanitarian sector's way of working.
- To understand how climate change affects and requires changes in how we work with thematic issues, for example, health (predicting future pandemics and epidemics), food security, and nutrition (changing the prerequisites of food production).

- To understand how climate change interacts with political instability, shrinking civil society space, and increased prices, and how these factors reinforce each other, and increase unpredictability and volatility.
- How to be better prepared, especially for slow-onset crises.

Elrha also commissioned literature reviews^{xiv} in the different regions and similar trends are reflected in the focus among those reports that are assessed as having a high strength of evidence (reviewed by peers). Climate change and early warning systems (EWSs) are the most common topics outside the thematic areas.



In five out of six of the regional consultations, cross-cutting issues that affect the whole humanitarian system were raised, such as improved data sharing, scaling up HRI, and shrinking space for civil society.

Localisation (including how to make HRI needs based, shifting not only data collection to local actors but also decision power on agenda and priorities, and understanding the perspective of populations affected by crisis) and the humanitarian-development nexus (for example, protracted crisis, food insecurity, social protection systems, and alleviation of poverty) are highlighted in four out of six regions.

Another topic that was consistently raised in all of the regional consultations (usually coming under the heading of 'nexus' or 'humanitarian ecosystem') is political instability and conflict. There is a wish to understand the root causes and drivers, the shrinking space for civil society, and low-intensity protracted conflicts and their impact on humanitarian work.

Other issues raised were anticipatory action and innovation, both highlighted by three out of six regions, and migration / refugees (including tension between refugee populations and host communities, and how to better integrate migrants / refugees into these local communities) in two out of six regions.

Technical developments and digitalisation were other issues raised consistently in all of the consultations, under different headings. Further understanding of their potential in, for example, transfers of cash and the triangulation of data as well as the vulnerabilities of these systems (eg, regarding cyber security and the breakdown of communication systems) is evidently required.

Recognition that local communities are not homogeneous, but rather consist of many different groups of people is highlighted in the reports. This was especially evident in terms of gender issues, and requests for further attention to stakeholders like women, children, the elderly, refugees / migrants, the LGBTQIA+ community, people with disabilities, and ethnic minorities are needed to ensure efficient and effective HRI.

Table 6: Based on topics expressed as important issues in the regional consultations^{xlvi}

In the table, blue represents thematic topics while green represents systemwide issues as discussed in the region. The number is the ranking as allocated by the authors of this overview report, based on how many participants identified that particular issue across both tables. Therefore, '1' represents the highest number of participants. For example, in WANA, most participants indicated health as a priority issue followed by climate change, education, livelihoods, and food security and shelter equally.

Region	Western Asia and North Africa (WANA)	Oceania, Eastern and South-Eastern Asia (OESEA)	South and Central Asia** (SCA)	Southern and Eastern Africa (SEA)	West and Central Africa (WCA)	Latin America and the Caribbean (LAC)
Health	1			6		4
Food security	5				2	3
Protection						2*
Cash						
WASH						
Shelter	5					
Livelihood	4					
Education	3					
Climate change	2	1		2	1	2
Localisation		2		3	1	
Anticipatory action		3		4		
Hum-dev nexus		4		7	2	
Hum system		6		1	1	1
Migration / refugees						1
Innovation		7		5		
Other/ Neglected*		5	8			

* Gender-based violence (GBV) and trafficking, low-intensity protracted conflicts, slow-onset crises, and early warning systems (EWSs) to avoid economic and assets losses (OESEA). EWSs, smaller and less visible crises, political instability, and conflict (SCA).

** The SCA consultation listed the most important topics for HRI, but information on the number of participants that listed them is not available, and hence, it was not possible to summarise and rank their views.

The ultimate goal of achieving impact is not listed among the issues highlighted for further HRI but is brought up as a key issue in several consultations (for example, OESEA, SCA, SEA, and WCA). This includes how we can measure impact while still focusing on output. Learning processes are not always systematic and it is, therefore, unclear whether the ability to scale up HRI findings is intended or reached.

The most prominent foresight issue mentioned in the findings is the impact of climate change. Most of the entries focused on the preparedness phase. It also includes the risk of new pandemics and epidemics. Other foresight issues raised are to understand the root causes of conflicts and their impact on humanitarian crises. Along similar lines, it is also imperative to understand the drivers of radicalisation and why people, often young men, join terrorist groups and the growing trend towards shrinking space for civil and humanitarian society. Issues related to political instability and shrinking space were verbalised almost as strongly as climate change, although they appear under different headings.



A drone view of burning pasture in Brazil in dry season, showing the effects of climate change. **Image credit:** Jose Moraes

7.2 Recommendations

7.2.1 Governments, private sector, academics, donors, and international non-governmental organisations (INGOs) should research how climate change exacerbates thematic areas, for example, floods and disease outbreak, and how it affects ways of working in the humanitarian sector.

7.2.2 Governments, private sector, academics, donors, and INGOs should research the interconnectedness of emergencies' impact on affected communities and complex issues like the impact of climate change, increased inequalities, and rapidly developing democratic backsliding. This is to increase the understanding of how different systemic changes can reinforce each other in an unprecedented way, and how this may affect the levels of volatility of change and uncertainty, and the ways of working in the humanitarian sector.

7.2.3 Governments, donors, and INGOs should explore opportunities for joint HRI together with, for example, research institutions or the private sector on issues that go beyond the traditional humanitarian sector, such as the interconnectedness on the impact of climate change, increased inequalities, and shrinking civil society space. In addition, they should research the implications of the findings on how this will affect the space available to conduct HRI.

7.2.4 Governments, donors, and INGOs should further develop the understanding of priorities and localisation with formal agenda and priority-setting processes for HRI that are needs based, transparent, equitable and inclusive, and shifts the decision-making closer to those who are affected by crises for increased effectiveness and efficiency.

7.2.5 All actors conducting HRI should explore how the issues of representation and diversity could be further strengthened in the processes and methodologies used when identifying needs and priorities for HRI.

7.2.6 Donors, HRI actors, and UN clusters should strengthen systems for learning and sharing around HRI to further encourage sharing, efficient use of resources, integration into policy development, and scaling up.

7.2.7 There is scope for further HRI into anticipatory action and innovations, as well as the advantages and disadvantages of technical developments and digitalisation.

7.2.8 Explore how HRI can increase knowledge, improve practice to achieve even better impact, and create better learning processes.



7.3 Findings: Thematic issues that require further HRI attention

The participants in the qualitative regional consultations were asked to identify topics that require additional HRI and indicate the three they regarded as the most important issues. Their views on thematic topics are shared below. This also includes examples of other issues identified, but not indicated as being the most important ones.



Health

Health was raised as the most important topic for further HRI in five out of six regional consultations (all but OESEA) and the following topics were highlighted:

- Communicable diseases and health security due to a high risk of pandemics and epidemics. This is especially important in populations where infections are easily transmitted such as among displaced populations.
- The importance of mental health and psychological wellbeing was clearly evident. It is especially noted where the population is directly affected by deteriorating living conditions and / or a protracted crisis. There is a lack of comprehensive packages tailored to mental health.
- Improve access to, and the availability of, health care services to help address provision gaps.
- Health promotion and community health can reduce the burden on health services.
- Sexual and reproductive health rights and services, particularly during emergencies.
- Gender-based violence (GBV). The number of women affected by GBV increased during the COVID-19 pandemic; violence against women often leads to unwanted pregnancies.
- Non-communicable diseases (NCDs). HRI can help understand the determinants of NCDs which are highly prevalent. Complications of NCDs are high.
- Monitoring and surveillance mechanisms are lacking in the health sphere.
- Maternal and child health.
- Adolescent and young people's health.
- Understanding health risk factors and determinants to design interventions that target risk factors. (WANA on all of the above points)
- HRI in the humanitarian-development nexus mentions gender transformative approaches and HRI related to sexual exploitation and GBV, particularly among refugee women and girls in humanitarian crises. (SEA)
- Mitigation to address the impacts of climate change, for example, regarding the resurgence of certain diseases (eg, arboviruses).
- Indigenous health requiring responses less influenced by traditional Western scientific approaches. (LAC)
- Identification of high-risk areas for any future public health emergencies. (SCA)

Other health topics requiring further HRI mentioned in the regional consultations were:

- Climate crisis having a profound effect on every aspect of life, including an increase in heatwaves. (WANA)
- Improving the use of technology and other approaches for virus mapping. (OESEA)



Food security

Food security was raised as the most important topic for further HRI in LAC, WANA, and WCA. The following topics were highlighted:

- Food insecurity's contribution to increased displacement.
- The linkages between food insecurity, agricultural technology, and green landscapes.
- Water scarcity in the region. (WANA on the above points)
- The drivers and consequences of hunger. (WCA)
- Approaches, other than through humanitarian assistance, to address chronic food insecurity. (WCA, LAC)

Other food security topics that require further HRI mentioned in the regional consultations were:

- Food security in eastern Australia, regional communities, and remote Australia. (OESEA)
- Food security and food systems. (SEA)
- Models that have been successful in other parts of the world. (WCA)
- New ways of expanding nutrition programmes. (WCA)
- Food security linkages to climate-induced crisis. (LAC)
- To support local innovations which can be scaled up to build resilience against crises, in terms of local food production and preservation, including what crops to grow and which processes and food technologies to scale up. (OESEA)
- Food accessibility. (SEA)



Livelihood

Livelihood was raised as the most important topic for further research in WANA and the following topics were highlighted:

- Economic issues directly related to health, food, and water security.
- Studies on income and jobs, exacerbated by the many crises impacting the region.
- How to integrate migrants into services and develop inclusive policies addressing their livelihood issues. (WANA)

Other livelihood topics for further HRI mentioned in the regional consultations were:

- Research on how the humanitarian sector can improve data sharing and the exchange of experiences. For example, food supply to Afghanistan may previously have come from Kazakhstan, Ukraine, and elsewhere, transported via Tajikistan, but now this is not possible. (SCA)
- How to make the agricultural sector more resilient, particularly for women. (SCA)
- New models to support displaced persons who want to integrate into work, including in transit countries, and improved ways to connect them to the private sector and to other opportunities. (LAC)
- The cumulative humanitarian and economic impact of smaller, but recurrent crises or slow-onset crises: economic and asset losses, and what more can be done in terms of early warning and preparedness. (OESEA)
- Research on sustainable livelihoods to alleviate poverty, especially in South Sudan and Ethiopia. (SEA)
- The social and economic needs of populations affected by crisis. (WCA)
- Women's participation in the labour force. As men migrate in pursuit of better employment opportunities, women are required to play key roles in agriculture and farming. (SCA)



WASH

None of the regions mentioned WASH as the most important topic for further research. However, WASH-related topics requiring further research that were mentioned include:

- Water security. (WANA)
- Improved purification methods, newer filters, and improved accessibility to filters. (LAC)



Protection

Protection was raised as the most important topic for further research in LAC. The following topics were highlighted:

- Protection of migrants and displaced populations (protecting their human rights, privacy, and dignity). (LAC)
- Rising GBV due to both COVID-19 response and displacement. (LAC)

Other protection topics, including violence and organised crime, that require further HRI mentioned in the regional consultations include:

- Quantifying and researching the disproportionate protection risks faced by some population subgroups (eg, plight of unaccompanied or orphaned children, risks to sex workers in Venezuela, and eviction threats to indigenous populations from Venezuela who are living in informal settings).
- How to adjust protection mechanisms and services, and advocate.
- How to improve the humanitarian response and protection of populations on the move and not harm resident communities (eg, indigenous communities in Panama who are being negatively impacted by population movement through the country's regions).
- Violence and protection.
- Research to accurately quantify the number of people displaced (particularly internally displaced) due to violence.
- Preventing gang violence at the community level (eg, in Honduras and El Salvador).
- Sociological studies of violence: What it means for societies to be subjected to this level of violence and the consequences, thereof.
- Research on specific types of organised crime and violence, including:
 - ◊ urban violence (a cross-cutting regional issue)
 - ◊ internal armed conflicts (eg, Colombia).
- Emergent protection risks across the region due to the consolidation of gang violence and organised crime across LAC during the COVID-19 pandemic. Better understanding of protection risks, impact on population, and specific emergent needs. (LAC on all of the above)
- Protection concerns such as GBV, including longitudinal studies on GBV.
- Trafficking of children in Cox's Bazar. (OESEA)
- GBV. (WCA)
- Number of women affected by GBV increased during the COVID-19 pandemic; violence against women often leads to unwanted pregnancies. (WANA)
- Gender transformative approaches and HRI related to sexual exploitation and GBV, particularly among refugee women and girls in humanitarian crises, were emphasised. (SEA)
- Topics on sexual exploitation among refugee girls and women should be tackled since these groups are prone to sexual violence and GBV, especially during humanitarian crises. (SEA)



Education

None of the regions mentioned education as being the most important topic for further research. However, education-related topics that were mentioned as requiring further research include:

- Capacity to integrate displaced children into education systems. School rehabilitation approaches. Curricula appropriate to meet labour market trends. Further attention is needed on the lack of attention to education that leads to an increase in the number of school dropouts and the social, emotional, and learning needs of school children. (WANA)
- To assess affected populations' literacy and information technology dexterity. (WCA)



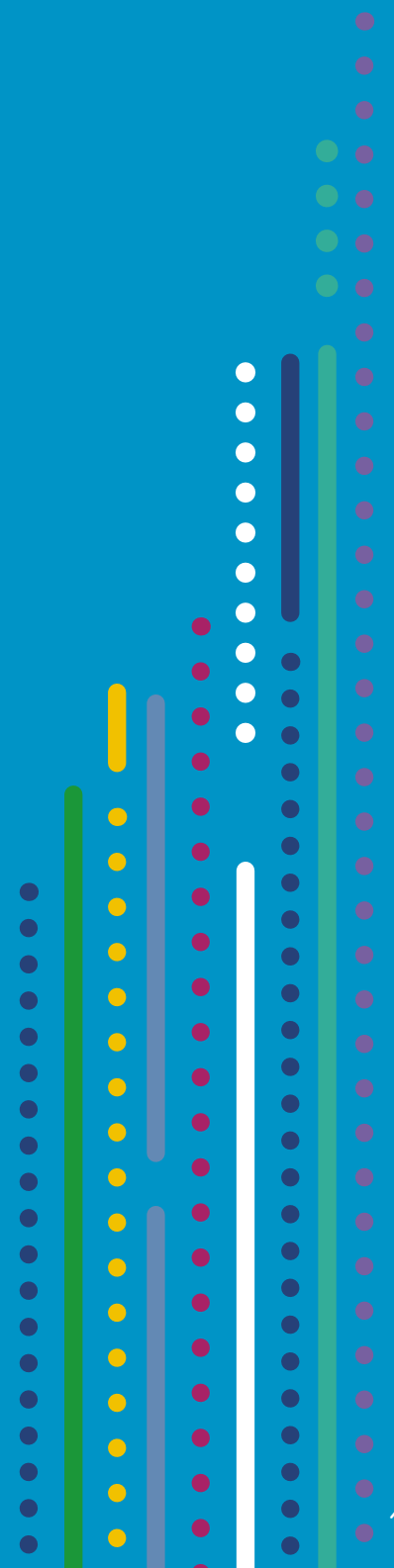
Shelter

None of the regions mentioned shelter as being the most important topic for further research. However, shelter-related topics that were mentioned as requiring further research include:

- High-quality, comfortable shelters that are able to protect people from the climate crisis and other crises. (WANA)
- Innovations to improve construction, including identifying better and more resistant materials, together with identifying improved building techniques. (LAC)



8. Conclusions and Recommendations



8. Conclusions and Recommendations

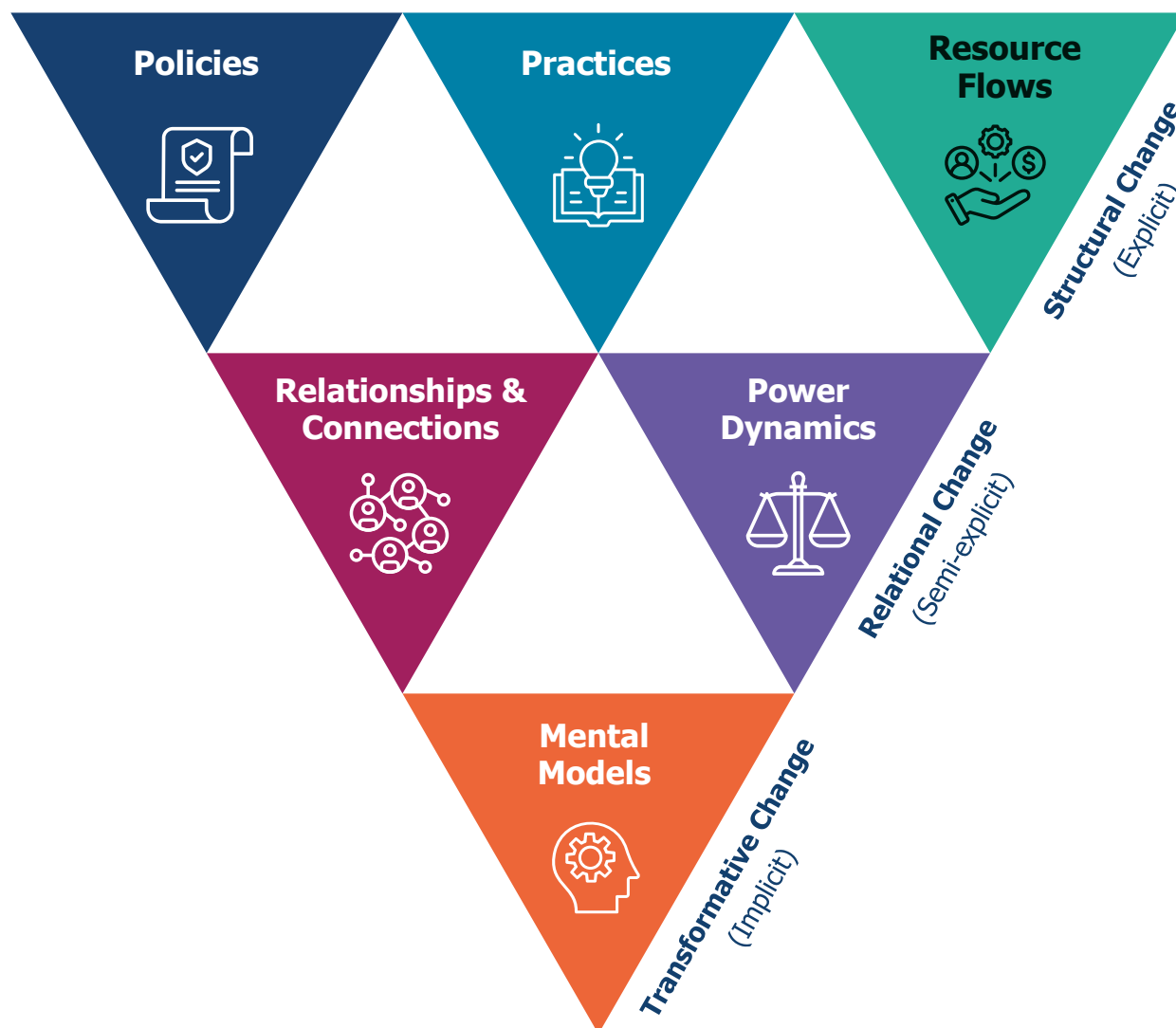
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A consistent theme of the reports produced during the Global Prioritisation Exercise (GPE) was the recognition that the needs of people in vulnerable situations are increasing, in particular because of the negative impact of climate change, as well as political and economic crises. At the same time, the global community is failing to meet these growing needs.

In addition to the imperative requirement for an increase in resources for humanitarian assistance, the reports described a need for change in how the humanitarian system works for greater effectiveness and efficiency, if there is to be hope of closing the needs-to-resources gap. Research and innovation (R&I) was seen as a tool to enable such change across all the studies. There were no comments or studies suggesting that HRI was not valuable, only that there was a need for more of it, and a more intentional process of taking successful innovation to scale.

Chapter 7 focuses on areas that require further HRI attention based on the research undertaken during the GPE, particularly the regional consultations. However, a lot of the feedback from practitioners focused on their concerns about the system as a whole and how it functions. The conclusions and recommendations presented capture how the HRI ecosystem itself can be strengthened and were drawn directly from the research conducted during the GPE.

The framework '*Six Conditions of System Change*^{xlvii} is used to categorise the wide breadth of conclusions and recommendations. The use of this systems model was inspired by the number of findings and comments that argued for systemic change. This model invites reflection at different levels to see how relationships, power, and ways of thinking determine the ways of working and practices that take place. In synthesising the key themes, there is inevitably some level of interpretation on the part of the authors of this report. For the full, original findings, and recommendations of the work undertaken during the GPE, the reader is recommended to read the original reports themselves. It will be important to continue to test these findings over time to improve the volume and quality of data inputs, and to track how the HRI context evolves.

Figure 9: Six Conditions of Systems Change

Policies

(Rules, guidelines, policies, and priorities that guide actions.)

- HRI offers multi-dimensional benefits to humanitarian efforts. It can provide data-driven insights, improve accountability, and assist humanitarian actors to design better interventions. However, it needs greater policy and financial commitment to drive significant change. [5.6.1, 5.6.2]
- The policy framework to create the feedback loop between research findings and programme policy / uptake is weak. Innovations often evolve over multiple crises in different contexts as practitioners try new approaches before there is confidence enough to make them mainstream, creating a significant lag in uptake. [5.6.4] All actors to strengthen systems and policies for the integration of learning from HRI and monitoring, evaluation, accountability and learning (MEAL) into programme policy. [7.2.6, 7.2.8] Donors could support the scaling of innovation and incentivise adoption and research uptake through flexible funding that recognises that such cycles are longer than typical humanitarian funding cycles. Ways to track this investment across operational grants may need to be developed. [5.7.6]

- There is currently no agreed standard or guidelines on how the humanitarian system should report its spending on R&I. Neither is it possible to extract data on gender for further analysis. [4.7.5] Funders and humanitarian agencies should work together to create better frameworks that consolidate the tools, platforms, and codes for reporting expenditure on HRI. Future research should consider how to capture data from local and national organisations, and from non-humanitarian actors such as academia to create a more comprehensive picture of the R&I landscape. [2.2.1, 4.8.4]



Practices

(Activities and procedures of institutions, organisations, coalitions, and networks for HRI. Informal shared habits and ways of working.)

- Too much HRI is supply driven rather than demand driven. Institutional donors, INGOs, intermediaries, and academics should make the agenda setting, priorities, and any decisions about funding more needs based by further exploring ways to meaningfully engage people affected by crisis. The policies may be there, but practice for a needs-based HRI is not. [3.8.2, 4.7.4, 4.8.4, 6.8.1, 6.8.4, 6.8.5, 6.9.1, 7.2.4, 7.2.5]
- Thematic issues tend to dominate the HRI agenda, but there is a large demand for R&I around more systemic issues. Investment is needed in researching the interconnectedness of emergencies' impact on affected communities and complex issues like the impact of climate change (the most frequently requested), increased inequalities, and democratic backsliding to increase the understanding of how different systemic changes reinforce each other and how the humanitarian system can adapt. [6.8.9, 7.2.1, 7.2.2]
- To mitigate imbalanced power dynamics, institutional donors, INGOs, intermediaries, and academics should make sure that funding calls, partnership agreements, monitoring, and evaluations ensure the participation and ownership of affected communities, while recognising their diversity and heterogeneity. [6.9.2, 7.2.5]
- Global clusters should support in-country clusters in framing HRI challenges that can be used as agenda-setting priorities, enabling the energy and capacities of the humanitarian system, academics, and private sector to bear fruit. [3.9.3]
- More HRI outputs to be made available in languages other than English to enable wider access, reach, and uptake, especially with local actors. [6.9.5]



Resource flows

(How money, people, knowledge, information, and other assets such as infrastructure are allocated and distributed.)

- **There has been a significant increase in investment in HRI (with a doubling of resources over the last five years), but participants still think resources remain insufficient.** The majority of funding comes from the Global North, and the relatively small number of donors who support the global humanitarian endeavour tend to set the HRI agenda. [3.8.2] Assess and document more evidence on value for money (VfM) and what return on investment (ROI) HRI can give. This will require process design to enable the measurement of ROI.
- There is a need for intermediate funders (such as Elrha and GSMA) because major donors find it difficult to directly engage with many LNGOs. The due diligence and compliance requirements of many donors, together with other issues such as a lack of overhead contribution, make it difficult for LNGOs / local actors to engage.
- Most research budgets are managed by departments outside of humanitarian teams, and so, humanitarian issues are not a primary focus within the research budgets. There is, therefore, a need to further strengthen partnerships beyond the humanitarian sector with the wider research community who have access to finance beyond humanitarian budgets and other capabilities. Similarly, the private sector is conducting HRI, applying their products in humanitarian settings which offers potential for new resources. All humanitarian actors should advocate to make the case for more research-funding resources from larger research funds to address humanitarian-related issues. [3.9.5, 5.7.4]
- **Current funding cycles are too short for effective HRI and uptake.** Whilst some bilateral donors give unrestricted funds to enable more flexibility (although these funds may be restricted by the intermediaries, eg, UN organisations or INGOs), this would enable improvements. [6.8.2] There is no agreed way of measuring funding flows for R&I within humanitarian reporting.
- The governments of countries that experience vulnerability to hazards and conflict should invest in the domestic research capacity, including national universities and government departments such as national disaster management authorities. These efforts should be supported by international humanitarian donors, research institutions, and operational agencies. [3.9.3]
- To overcome barriers, (perceived) limited capacity, and the bias towards international collaborations over local engagements, institutional donors, intermediaries, and academic institutions should identify, intentionally support, and build the capacity of a local and more diversified HRI community through long-term relationships with governments and national, local, and civil society organisations, including academics.



Relationships and connections

(Quality of connections and communication occurring among actors within the HRI ecosystem.)

- **There is insufficient coordination on HRI.** Donors and clusters should establish stronger mechanisms for coordinating HRI investments and learning. These should build on existing networks / platforms where possible, including at the national level. There is a need for HRI networks to work across clusters and thematic-focused groups to connect different disciplines, and across operational agencies and academic institutions. [3.9.1, 4.8.6]
- Humanitarian actors should build stronger relationships and partnerships with non-traditional humanitarian actors and bring them more intentionally into the HRI ecosystem to utilise the impact of HRI resources and capabilities. [4.8.3, 5.7.2, 7.2.3]
- Institutional donors, intermediaries, and academic institutions can further identify, support, and build long-term relationships with governments and national, local, and civil society organisations, including academic institutions to build a more diverse HRI community. [6.9.4]



Power dynamics

(The distribution of decision-making power and influence – both informal and formal – among individuals and organisations.)

- **Localisation is seen as a key issue in HRI as it is with humanitarianism more broadly.** It was noted that changes are taking place in terms of increasing the participation of local actors, but mainly only at the level of collecting data. National and local actors need to be meaningfully engaged in policy dialogue and setting HRI agendas. [4.8.2]
- There is a lack of equivalence in the attention given to different crises, with some issues and population subgroups receiving more attention than others. R&I funding should be needs led to maximise impact.
- The balance between accountability to taxpayers who fund research and the affected communities who are the intended target groups of high-quality research is not always transparently and intentionally managed, with a bias towards funders / taxpayers and organisational mandates. [6.8.2] Goal conflicts, for example, between accountabilities, need to be better recognised and intentionally managed. [6.8.3]
- There is not always adequate consideration of issues such as gender or those of specific marginalised groups, for example, women, children, the elderly, people with disabilities, the LGBTQIA+ community, and ethnic minorities, among others. It is equally important to recognise the intersectionality of issues. [6.2] All actors to require inclusive and participatory HRI, and to recognise that communities are not homogenous groups. This may involve reviewing processes and methodologies to strengthen inclusion when collecting data. [6.9.3]



Mental models

(Habits of thought – deeply-held beliefs and assumptions of operating that influence how we think, what we do, and how we talk.)

- HRI is not fully embraced within the humanitarian system which impacts political and financial commitment. [5.6.1] Innovation, in particular, requires a degree of risk taking, which can be seen as unethical (“what if it does not work?”), challenges established ways of working and is counter to how organisational procedures are designed (since they are designed for existing ways of working). Risk taking requires the relevant staff to be given the space and confidence of senior managers to try different approaches out. Leadership that creates confidence is key when trialling, or scaling up, innovative approaches. [5.7.3] Develop guidelines and ways of working to ensure that HRI is conducted ethically in humanitarian settings, maintaining high standards of safeguarding and without distracting humanitarian actors from their focus on saving lives. [5.7.1]
- There is a self-perpetuating paradigm where Global South HRI capacities are seen as weaker and, therefore, receive less access to funding. There were examples of partnerships, for example, between universities in the Global North and Global South, but the dominant paradigm remains Global North-centric. Organisations to review how their organisational culture enables or inhibits innovation, and to uncover unconscious biases and explore new partnerships, closer to the affected communities. [6.9.4]
- Whilst there are significant research funds available, they are usually not set up with humanitarian objectives in mind, making accessing such money difficult for humanitarian agencies. All actors to advocate for more research-funding resources from larger research funds to address humanitarian-related issues. [3.9.5, 5.7.4]

What does the systemic analysis tell us about how to strengthen the HRI ecosystem? Running between the mental model, relationships, power, policy, practice, and resource layers, there seems to be four broad, systemic issues:

1. The GPE has highlighted that considerable HRI is underway. However, the value of this work is not being maximised and there is a general underinvestment. This starts with the question of “what level of priority and value do we place on HRI?” The reports and consultations in this process have suggested that both policymakers and operational colleagues intellectually understand the potential impact of HRI in improving the effectiveness and efficiency of assisting affected populations. However, that intellectual understanding does not fully translate into the financial, policy, and process commitments necessary to actualise the ambition.
2. The locus of resources and, therefore, power and decision-making is in the Global North. Not unreasonably, the organisations providing the money want the money to help them to better achieve their goals. There is an inherent emphasis on supply-driven systems with the emphasis more on “how do we better deliver?” than on “what are the problems that affected communities experience and how do we solve them?” To change this paradigm, there is a need to bring in more Global South-based institutions and have a greater level of involvement of diverse and

affected communities. Realistically, most funding will remain in the Global North, at least for the foreseeable future. However, if more can be done to shift the centre of agenda setting – which will require Global North-based organisations to consider their own internal biases and the appropriate balance of accountabilities and power – then change is possible. There is, additionally, a challenge to national governments of countries at risk of crises, the private sector, and civil society in the Global South to invest in HRI themselves.

3. There is a need to strengthen relationships and partnerships beyond the humanitarian sector bubble. The humanitarian sector is a complex system and more energy is spent on internal relationships than looking at the opportunities for collaborations externally. Seeking greater relationships with research funds and research institutions, as well as private sector organisations, who would not see themselves as humanitarian, may open up new opportunities for resources, skills, expertise, and novel solutions. This is true at the global, regional, and national level. Such organisations and companies are likely to be attracted to those broader questions asked by affected communities and national organisations, such as the relationship between humanitarian need, inequality, shrinking political space, and climate change, as they present opportunities for conversations of mutual interest.
4. The links between the research community and operational community are weak. Having very different metrics and incentive schemes (one based on quality papers produced, one on volume of operational grants won) mean that even what learning is produced has limited influence on practice. There is a need for the translation of research findings to make it more digestible for operational practitioners, but also there needs to be an onus on operational practitioners to seek out new knowledge. In the same way medical professionals are expected to be abreast of new research to retain their licence to practise, operational agencies should demand that staff and leadership, in particular, spend time accessing and seeking to understand what research is learning and what results innovations are providing.



Finally, much of this is about collaborative and transformative leadership. Leaders who are willing to reach across sectoral boundaries, open to new practices and ways of working, and able to take some level of risk within ethical limits to try that which is new and create the right culture that allows such uptake. Participants widely felt that the HRI system was insufficiently inclusive and needs led. This reflects wider issues within the sector, notably the concentration of power and financial resources, as well as the siloed nature of thinking within the sector which is most visible in the thematic / sectoral approach of most agencies. It is possible to address these challenges. Primarily, through intentional relationship building and meaningful engagement with non-traditional humanitarian actors, such as research funds that can add value to the sector's thinking and capacity. However, this will require leadership to take risks, interrogate organisational cultures, and be willing to share power with others, notably national and local actors.

Endnotes

Endnotes

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