

# PERFORMANCE AT A GLANCE: OCHA

United Nations Office for the Coordination  
of Humanitarian Affairs

OCTOBER 2021

## Overview

### *A unique position in the humanitarian system*

The United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) is the part of the UN Secretariat mandated with promoting a co-ordinated international response to humanitarian emergencies. Its vision is of a world that comes together to help crisis-affected people rapidly receive the humanitarian assistance they need.

It promotes this goal through five core functions:

- co-ordination
- humanitarian financing
- policy making
- advocacy
- information management.

The head of OCHA chairs the highest level humanitarian co-ordination forum, the Inter-Agency Standing Committee (IASC), and OCHA also manages two major pooled funds: the Central Emergency Response Fund (CERF) and Country-Based Pooled Funds (CBPFs). OCHA occupies a unique and central position in the humanitarian system and its performance is both affected by and directly impacts that broader system's functioning. As part of the UN Secretariat, it also faces constraints on its ability to offer the agility and flexibility required of a humanitarian organisation with more than 70% of its expenditures in field-based activities.

### *Growing demands on a strained humanitarian system*

The period since the last MOPAN review of OCHA, released in 2017, has been a turbulent one in global humanitarian affairs. Large-scale crises in Myanmar, South Sudan, Syria, Venezuela, Yemen and elsewhere have placed the international humanitarian system under considerable strain. Displacement as a result of conflict, violence and natural disasters has risen to historic levels: by the end of 2019, 50.8 million people were internally displaced and 20.4 million were refugees.<sup>1</sup> Humanitarian crises have also become more complex and more protracted, with the international humanitarian system often called upon to provide emergency support to populations in need over many years.

*OCHA's work –  
advocacy and  
co-ordination  
in particular – is  
recognised by  
stakeholders as  
invaluable to a more  
coherent functioning  
of the system overall,  
and to pushing the  
envelope on key  
issues and emerging  
priorities.*

1. *Global Humanitarian Overview 2021*, OCHA, 2021, p. 27-28,  
[https://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/GHO2021\\_EN.pdf](https://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/GHO2021_EN.pdf).

New causes of humanitarian crises are also emerging. The past decade has been the hottest on record and extreme weather is on the increase. Climate change is also driving more people into food insecurity. Some of the most challenging humanitarian crises involve a combination of climate disruption and conflict. Public health crises are also an increasing driver of humanitarian need. Since the 2014 Ebola epidemic, outbreaks have become annual occurrences in parts of Africa. In 2020, the COVID-19 pandemic created an unprecedented global humanitarian emergency as tens of millions of people lost their livelihoods. The UN estimates that 235 million – 1 in every 33 people worldwide – are in need of humanitarian assistance and protection, the highest figure in decades.<sup>2</sup> In 2020, in response to the COVID-19 pandemic, the UN issued its first ever global humanitarian appeal, seeking USD 10.3 billion for 63 countries.<sup>3</sup>

The rise in humanitarian need placed considerable strain on the global humanitarian sector and, by extension, on OCHA as its co-ordinator. OCHA was also called upon to play a leading role in ambitious reforms to the sector. The Grand Bargain, signed by 63 funders and humanitarian organisations, codified a set of mutual commitments around reforming humanitarian action and humanitarian finance. Long-standing concerns around the lack of sustainable solutions for long-running humanitarian crises led to renewed calls for greater coherence between humanitarian action and development assistance (“the nexus”). The sector also accelerated its efforts to address the long-standing challenge of sexual exploitation and abuse. OCHA sought to tackle these challenges against the background of a growing gap between humanitarian needs and resources, and a zero-growth budget set out for itself.

### **Successful reform and a changed organisation**

Despite the challenging context, OCHA has made considerable progress and undertaken a major reform process since the last MOPAN assessment. It now clearly articulates its coherent strategic vision, based around its five core functions. Following a major organisational restructuring, its 2018 New Operating Model has given it greater operational coherence, with clear alignment between its functions and structures. It has also improved its agility and responsiveness as contexts change.

This was well demonstrated in its early response to the COVID-19 pandemic, when OCHA moved quickly and effectively to co-ordinate the first COVID-19 Global Humanitarian Response Plan within a few weeks of the World Health Organization’s announcement of the pandemic. Following its extensive reform process, it also established an Organisational Development Unit to keep its systems and processes under review – a positive sign of an organisation committed to learning and on an improving trajectory.

### **Not all reform objectives met and not all changes well-owned**

However, it has not achieved all of its reform objectives. It has fallen short of its ambitions on decentralisation. While some procurement and budget execution functions were devolved, there is no clear overall trend towards decentralisation of either budgets or staffing. External partners remain concerned that understaffing in the field remains a constraint on OCHA’s effectiveness. Limitations around resourcing are at odds with OCHA’s overly conservative financial approach – reflected in both the organisation’s zero-growth budget and its end-of-year reserves, which are higher than required by its own policy and which have grown throughout the review period. This approach may be an overcorrection after issues with overspending that occurred prior to the assessment period.

The assessment also encountered concerns, both from within OCHA and from external partners, that decision making has become more top-down and less consultative. Despite a volatile external context and shifting priorities, OCHA has not updated its 2018-21 Strategic Plan. Some important changes in strategic direction have been made without any formal strategic review process, including a corporate prioritisation of anticipatory action and some major changes to CERF. This created uncertainty and a lack of buy-in among some staff and external partners. Given that OCHA works by promoting voluntary co-ordination, gaps in ownership and buy-in amongst stakeholders could present a serious risk.

2. *Global Humanitarian Overview 2021*, OCHA, 2021, p. 66, [https://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/GHO2021\\_EN.pdf](https://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/GHO2021_EN.pdf).

3. *Global Humanitarian Response Plan*, UN Coordinated Appeal, July Update, 2020, [www.who.int/health-cluster/news-and-events/news/GHRP-revision-july-2020/en](http://www.who.int/health-cluster/news-and-events/news/GHRP-revision-july-2020/en).

### ***Continued delivery on core mandate***

In spite of these challenges, OCHA has continued to build on its strengths in relationship management and to achieve valuable results for the humanitarian system. Its work on resource mobilisation, information management and advocacy enables other humanitarian actors to respond more quickly and flexibly to evolving humanitarian crises. Its support for reforms and joint initiatives across the sector have improved collaborative working and promoted the mainstreaming of important issues such as protection from sexual exploitation and abuse. Its knowledge products are highly regarded, even if some feel they are too numerous and complex. At country level, OCHA's promotion of the Humanitarian Programme Cycle enables humanitarian actors to work together around a coherent cycle of needs assessment, planning, implementation and monitoring.

OCHA's management of the CERF and CBPFs is also generally quite strong, and their envelopes have significantly expanded. It has clear criteria for allocating funds to urgent or underfunded needs, and its financial management processes are generally sound. On the whole, with regard to its management of these funds, it succeeds in striking an appropriate balance between the competing demands of speed, flexibility, transparency and accountability, although there is still some work to do in streamlining processes.

While OCHA's planning and budget processes are not well aligned, making it difficult to link resources to results, its criteria for allocating resources are nonetheless clear and appropriate. Its budget processes also allow for a good level of flexibility in response to emerging humanitarian needs, aided by a relatively high proportion of unearmarked funding for a UN entity.

### ***Persistent issues in performance management***

There are some areas where OCHA's performance has not improved significantly since the last MOPAN review. Performance management remains an area of significant weakness. In its 2018-21 Strategic Plan, OCHA committed to introducing a comprehensive results-based management (RBM) system, but did not proceed with this. While it reports against key performance indicators in its corporate results framework, generating some useful performance data, the lack of an integrated results management system leaves it poorly placed to track progress towards its strategic objectives or identify areas of underperformance. As part of the UN Secretariat, there were pressures on OCHA to wait for the roll-out of standard systems, but the fact remains that OCHA did not have a functioning RBM system at any point in the review period, has regressed in some ways over that period, and appears now to be on only a slow-moving trajectory towards reform.

Contrary to UN guidance, OCHA's evaluation function is neither managerially nor financially independent, and OCHA has systematically underinvested in evaluation and learning over the review period. It also lacks an effective system for risk management, which remains insufficient at country-level and out of date at corporate level: its corporate risk register was not updated at any point in the review period. The lack of investment in basic corporate systems is a cause for concern, and may point to a lack of demand from senior management for performance information.

### ***Important advocacy with inconsistent implementation and prioritisation of resources***

Over the review period, OCHA has been required to respond to a growing number of cross-cutting agendas and humanitarian reform commitments, which have stretched its resources and lead to mixed results. OCHA is a strong advocate for human rights and gender equality. Protection issues and the needs of women and girls are routinely considered in humanitarian needs assessments and response plans and prioritised in grants from OCHA-managed pooled funds. OCHA has actively promoted accountability to affected populations across the humanitarian sector, principally through feedback mechanisms and complaints lines. OCHA has also been a strong advocate for the prevention of sexual exploitation and abuse (PSEA) across the sector, and has progressively strengthened its standards and due diligence processes for pooled fund grantees.

While its own policies on PSEA and sexual harassment meet international standards, their implementation is significantly under-resourced. Across a number of other reform areas and cross-cutting issues – including environmental sustainability, promoting a diversity of humanitarian actors (particularly through localisation), strengthening the alignment of humanitarian action and development assistance, and tailoring humanitarian assistance to the needs of the most vulnerable groups (“leave no one behind”) – OCHA’s efforts have been unsystematic. A pattern has emerged of OCHA making ambitious commitments that it is unable to follow through, particularly in the field, suggesting a lack of clear implementation plans, prioritisation and realistic resource allocation and mobilisation.

### ***Big picture and looking ahead***

OCHA has improved its organisational performance significantly from the previous MOPAN review, due in large part to the major reforms undertaken in 2017. The organisation presents a more coherent and consistent vision of its role in the humanitarian sector, and has demonstrated increased agility and ability to fulfil that role through an organisational structure that is increasingly fit for purpose. OCHA’s work – advocacy and co-ordination in particular – is recognised by stakeholders as invaluable to a more coherent functioning of the system overall, and to pushing the envelope on key issues and emerging priorities. OCHA demonstrated flexibility and effective leadership during the COVID-19 pandemic, but while it seemed to have passed that stress test overall, the assessment also raises questions about whether OCHA can meet the demands placed on it with the resources it has. Frank reflections are needed on what OCHA’s priorities are (and are not) and what resources are realistically needed to achieve them. Addressing these issues – and persistent gaps in key corporate systems – would help OCHA continue on what has been a positive trajectory over the past years, and to continue providing an essential function for a humanitarian system facing the most difficult context since its creation.

## **STRENGTHS & AREAS FOR IMPROVEMENT**

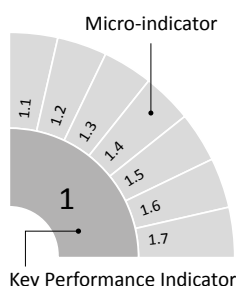
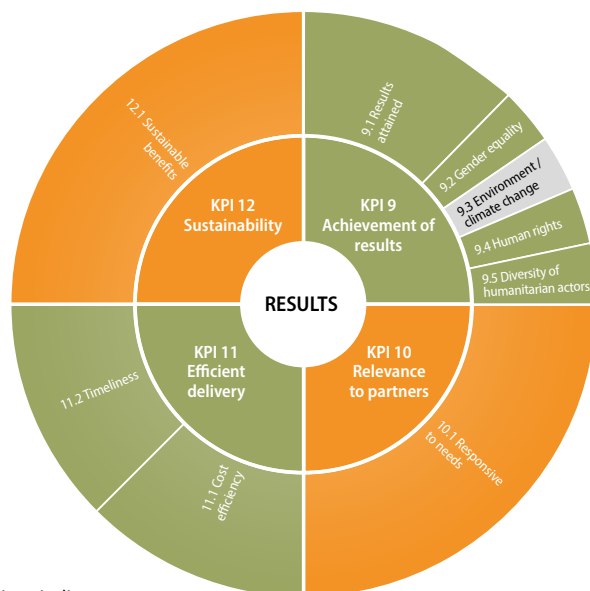
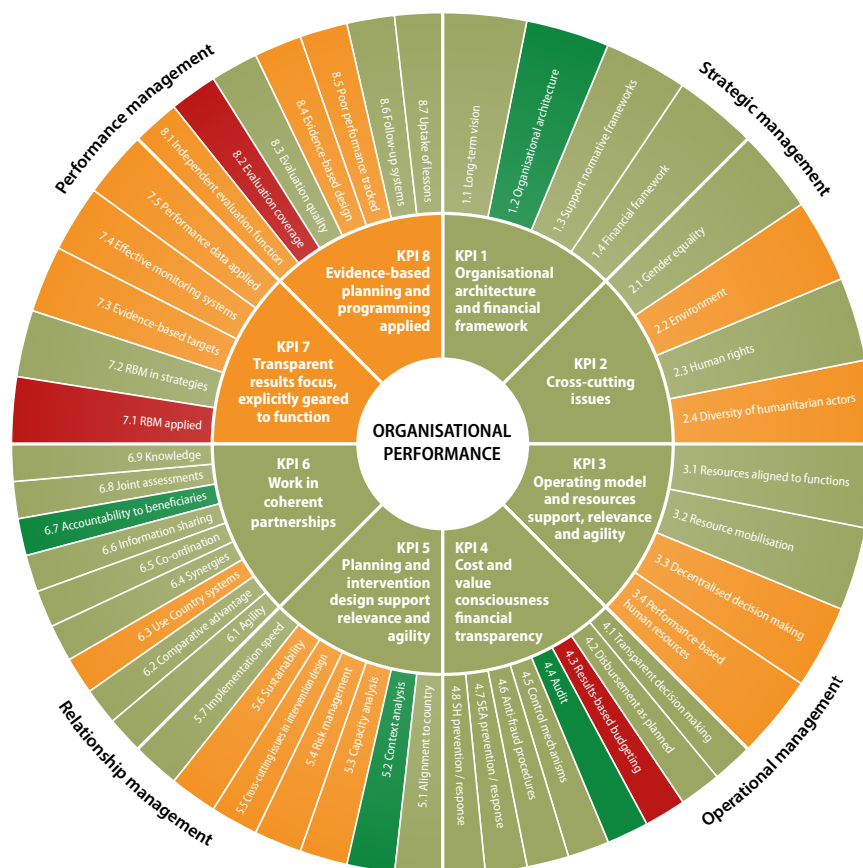
### ***Main strengths***

- a coherent mandate and organisational vision
- a reformed organisational structure that is more coherent and better aligned to OCHA’s functions and strategic objectives
- flexible resource mobilisation and allocation in response to new and evolving crises
- strong management of pooled funds
- effective partnerships with other humanitarian actors
- a significant contribution to improving the relevance, timeliness and flexibility of humanitarian operations
- effective advocacy for key humanitarian reforms, including accountability to affected populations and PSEA.

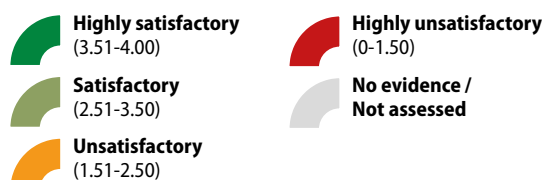
### ***Main areas for improvement***

- changes to OCHA’s strategic direction without sufficient consultation, leading to some uncertainty and lack of buy-in among staff and external partners
- lack of follow through on a commitment to introducing results-based management
- weak systems for corporate risk management
- mixed performance in integrating cross-cutting issues, linked to a lack of resourcing
- lack of an independent evaluation function and underinvestment in evaluations.

## PERFORMANCE RATING SUMMARY FOR OCHA



### How to read these charts



### MISSION AND MANDATE:

OCHA was established and mandated in 1991 by General Assembly Resolution 46/182 to bring together humanitarian actors to ensure a coherent response to emergencies. OCHA's head chairs the Inter-Agency Standing Committee and it also manages two key pooled funds: the Central Emergency Response Fund (CERF) and Country-Based Pooled Funds (CBPFs).

### GOVERNANCE:

OCHA is part of the UN Secretariat, and as such, adheres to a number of overarching rules and processes. The organisation is headed by the Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs and Emergency Relief Coordinator. OCHA is directly accountable to the Secretary-General and General Assembly of the United Nations and does not have a separate executive board, but does have an informal Donor Support Group, and advisory bodies for CERF and CBPFs.

### STRUCTURE:

OCHA is organised into three divisions: Coordination, Humanitarian Financing and Resource Mobilization, and Operations and Advocacy (which includes its field presence). Its headquarters are divided between New York and Geneva. In 2021, OCHA had 5 regional offices, 32 country offices, and 20 countries with Humanitarian Advisory Teams.

### FINANCE:

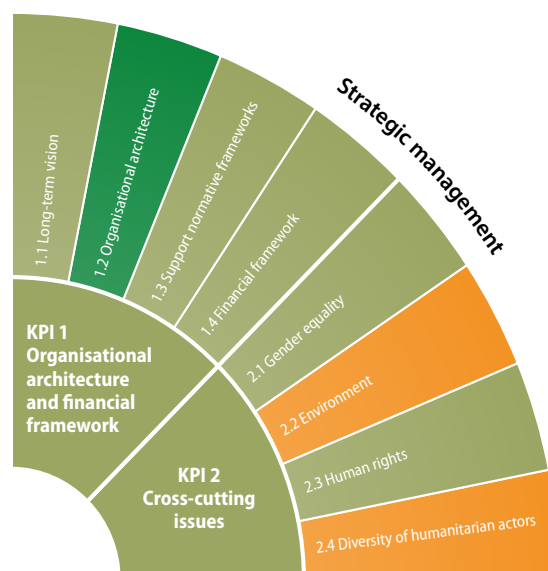
OCHA's income for 2019 totalled over USD 2 billion, of which USD 260 million was extra-budgetary for operations and programming. The remainder is divided between CERF (USD 835 million) and CBPFs (USD 948 million). Within OCHA's programme budget, 75% is spent on field-based activities and 25% in headquarters. Only 6% of OCHA's budget is from the UN regular budget. The remainder, 94% of its own budget and 100% of its pooled funds, is from voluntary contributions. In 2019, the United Kingdom was the largest funder, at 35.9% of the total, followed by Germany (14.2%) and Sweden (10.4%).

## Key findings by performance area

### STRATEGIC MANAGEMENT OF OCHA

OCHA has a coherent vision for its work, based on a clear understanding of its mandate and comparative advantage. This is a significant improvement from the previous MOPAN assessment. OCHA has undertaken major institutional reforms over the assessment period, improving the organisation's coherence and alignment with its strategic objectives. However, recent changes in strategic direction without a formal strategy update have led to some uncertainty and a lack of buy-in among staff and partners. Budget processes have improved but are not yet integrated with planning, making it difficult for OCHA to align its budgets with intended results. An overly conservative fiscal stance has led OCHA to hold higher reserves than required by its financial policies.

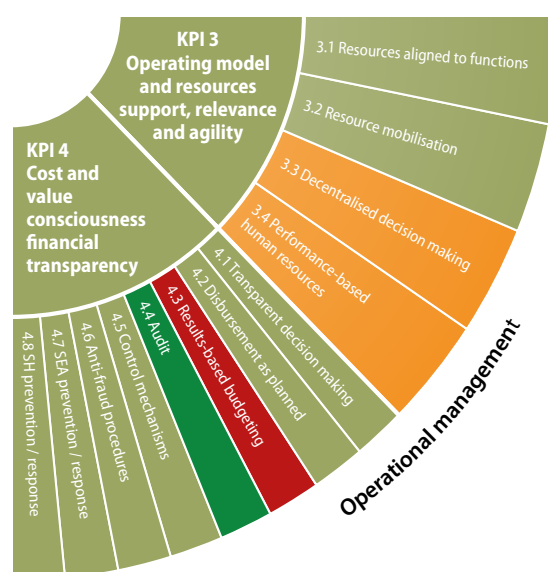
OCHA shows mixed but overall satisfactory performance on cross-cutting issues. Gender equality and human rights are well integrated into its policies, budgets, systems and processes, but stakeholder feedback suggests that performance is mixed across its countries of operation. OCHA does not prioritise climate and the environment, and its work on promoting a diversity of humanitarian actors (principally through the localisation of humanitarian finance and co-ordination processes), though positive, is not anchored in a clear strategy or approach.



### OPERATIONAL MANAGEMENT OF OCHA

OCHA does not follow the principles of results-based budgeting, but its criteria for allocating financial resources are nonetheless clear and transparent, and aligned with the objectives in its Strategic Plan. It has succeeded in expanding its access to multi-year, flexible donor funding, which supports relevance and agility. Reforms to its operating model, together with new mechanisms such as Regional Support Teams, have enhanced its ability to respond to evolving contexts and new challenges.

The picture is mixed on decentralisation. Delegation of certain financial management functions to the field have improved the organisation's flexibility, but there is no clear trend towards decentralisation of the budget and OCHA's field operations remain understaffed. There are concerns that other aspects of its decision making, particularly around CERF, have become more centralised and less consultative.





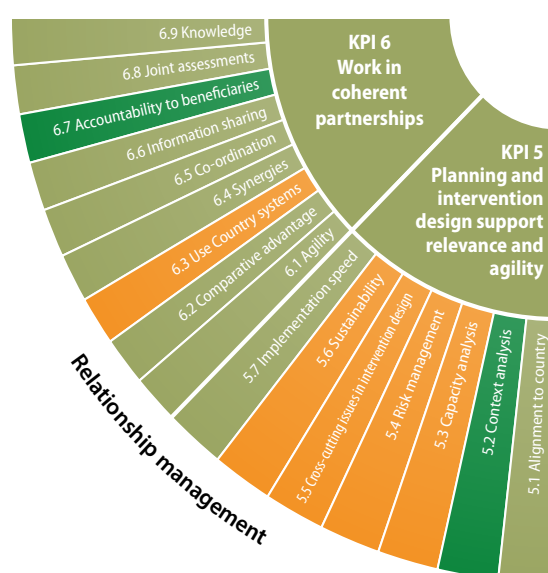
OCHA's management of its pooled funds generally strikes an appropriate balance between speed and transparency, and between in-grant flexibility and the need for effective oversight. OCHA is currently redesigning its pooled fund management structures to improve coherence across CERF and CBPFs. Fiduciary risk management is sound and audits reveal compliance with OCHA's financial policies and UN rules, although this assessment did not look at country-level audits. OCHA is a strong advocate for the mainstreaming of PSEA across the humanitarian sector, helps co-ordinate prevention and investigations at both global and country levels, and is progressively strengthening its standards and due diligence processes for pooled fund grantees. Its own policies on PSEA and sexual harassment meet international standards, but their implementation is significantly under-resourced. A 2018 evaluation found gaps in OCHA's systems for protecting staff in the field from sexual harassment. Measures have been taken to address the gaps, but their effectiveness has not yet been assessed.

## RELATIONSHIP MANAGEMENT OF OCHA

As a co-ordination agency, at both global and national levels, OCHA enables other humanitarian actors to respond quickly to evolving humanitarian contexts and to prioritise the populations and groups most in need. At the global level, it plays an important role in improving the coherence of the international humanitarian system through global reform initiatives and a wide range of formal and informal platforms and networks. Its work supports joint planning, programming, monitoring and evaluation through its support for the Humanitarian Programme Cycle. That said, some external partners raised concerns that a recent trend towards more cumbersome processes and top-down decision making had undermined the quality of its partnerships.

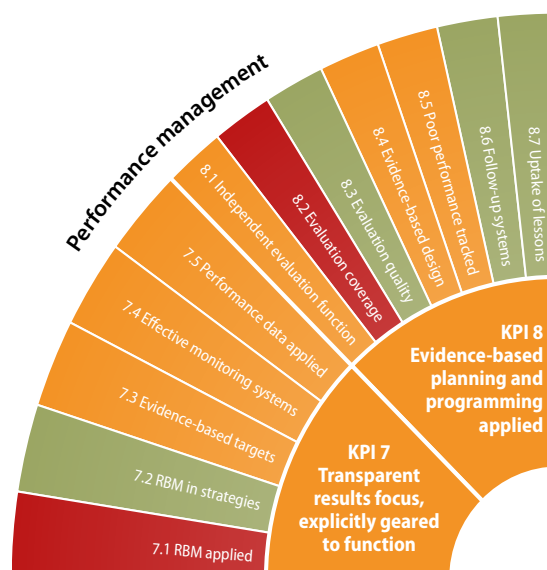
OCHA's pooled funds help to influence other funding flows, including by increasing the visibility of underfunded disasters, providing rapid funding to kick-start urgent humanitarian responses and by filling gaps in the coverage of support. OCHA plays a key role in collating, analysing and sharing information on humanitarian needs and funding flows, contributing to greater transparency across the sector. Its knowledge products are highly regarded, although there are concerns that they have become too numerous and complex. While OCHA does not work directly with communities, it is a strong advocate for accountability to affected people across humanitarian operations.

OCHA's main shortcomings in this area are in its risk management, which is unstructured, and its lack of a systematic approach to working with national partners. While OCHA is naturally limited in its ability to align to national priorities and use country systems in conflict settings, it lacks a clear approach to promoting country leadership of humanitarian response in other contexts. OCHA does not undertake routine assessments of national delivery capacity, which undermines its ability to pursue localisation in an informed way.



## PERFORMANCE MANAGEMENT OF OCHA

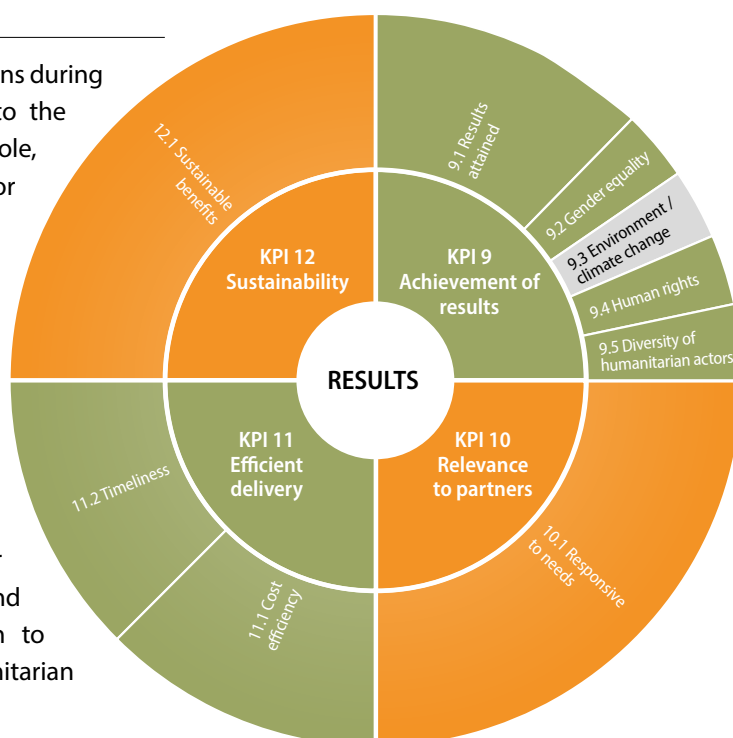
Performance management is an area of weakness for OCHA. Its business processes are designed around responsiveness to humanitarian needs, rather than results logic. In its Strategic Plan, OCHA committed to developing a comprehensive results-based management approach, with an ambitious set of tools and processes, but it did not implement the plan. Results management therefore remains relatively unstructured: there is a corporate results framework with key performance indicators and various reporting mechanisms, but OCHA does not track progress towards its objectives in a systematic way and is poorly placed to identify underperformance. OCHA-managed pooled funds have much stronger performance and accountability frameworks, using results chain logic to map their own performance and that of their grantees.



OCHA's evaluation function is neither managerially nor financially independent. Its evaluation policy has not been updated since 2010. The evaluation unit is not at liberty to choose its own topics, there is no systematic evaluation coverage of the organisation's strategic objectives, and OCHA does not allocate enough resources to allow evaluation of all its core functions. Its formal evaluations are conducted to a high standard, with strong methodologies and quality assurance processes, but the quality of other review products is mixed. OCHA has a system for tracking follow-up on evaluation recommendations, but there is no formal requirement to demonstrate how learning from past interventions is taken into account in the design of new ones. OCHA staff learn well at an individual level and are often regarded as experts in their fields, but learning processes are not well institutionalised.

## OCHA'S ACHIEVEMENT OF RESULTS

OCHA has conducted only five centralised evaluations during the assessment period, three of which related to the performance of the humanitarian sector as a whole, plus a decentralised evaluation of the Centre for Humanitarian Data. To complement this relatively limited set of evaluation data, the assessment of OCHA's results also draws on internal management data, but the level of confidence in the evidence base is lower than for other performance areas. Internal reporting shows a good level of delivery against corporate results indicators, with most targets met or exceeded. In country reviews, CERF was assessed positively for its contribution to mobilising rapid support for sudden-onset disasters, while an evaluation found CBPFs to have made a significant contribution to ensuring timely, co-ordinated and principled humanitarian assistance.





Despite a strong focus from the pooled funds on the needs of women and girls, progress across the sector in integrating gender equality has been slow. OCHA has made an important contribution in ensuring that humanitarian needs assessments and response plans address the needs of vulnerable groups, but there has been limited progress across the sector in tailoring support to particular categories of people in need, in accordance with the “leave no one behind” principle, suggesting room for improvement in OCHA’s advocacy in this area. OCHA has largely met its own targets for the efficiency of its management of pooled funds, but there is mixed evidence as to whether this has improved the timeliness of humanitarian response. There has been only limited progress on encouraging more sustainable forms of humanitarian support.

## About this assessment

This was the second MOPAN assessment of OCHA; the first was conducted in the 2015-16 Assessment Cycle and published in 2017. This assessment was championed by the Republic of Korea and the United States on behalf of the Network. It covers the period from mid-2017 to early-2021, though evidence from outside this range may have been used. It relies on three lines of evidence: a document review, interviews with staff at headquarters level and country/regional level, and an online partner survey.<sup>4</sup> The assessment covers OCHA’s headquarters and regional and country presence.

### 3.1 Methodology applied in this assessment

The MOPAN 3.1 methodology employed in this assessment uses a framework of 12 key performance indicators (KPIs) and associated micro-indicators (MIs). It comprises standards that characterise an effective multilateral organisation. As part of MOPAN’s efforts to ensure its assessments remain relevant to stakeholders and aligned to international best practice, the MOPAN methodology is always evolving. More details are available in MOPAN’s 3.1 methodology manual.<sup>5</sup> Further information about the application of the MOPAN methodology to OCHA is available in Chapter 4 of the full report. For full details of the OCHA Assessment, please visit [mopanonline.org](http://mopanonline.org).

## About MOPAN

The Multilateral Organisation Performance Assessment Network (MOPAN) is a network of 21 countries<sup>6</sup> that share a common interest in assessing the effectiveness of the major multilateral organisations they fund, including UN agencies, international financial institutions and global funds.

The Network generates, collects, analyses and presents relevant and credible information on the organisational and development effectiveness of the organisations it assesses. This knowledge base contributes to organisational learning among the organisations, their direct clients and partners, and other stakeholders. Network members and other stakeholders use the reports for their own accountability needs and as a source of input for strategic decision making.

4. The online survey was conducted among a sample of OCHA’s partners that work with them across 13 offices, as well as globally: 3 regional offices (Kenya, Panama and the Regional Office for the Syria Crisis), 7 country offices (Afghanistan, Central African Republic, Chad, Ethiopia, the Philippines, Venezuela and Yemen) and 3 Humanitarian Advisory Teams (Madagascar, Peru and Tajikistan).

5. Available at [www.mopanonline.org](http://www.mopanonline.org).

6. As at 1 October 2021: Australia, Belgium, Canada, Denmark, Finland, France, Germany, Ireland, Italy, Japan, Korea, Luxembourg, the Netherlands, Norway, Sweden, Switzerland, the United Arab Emirates, the United Kingdom and the United States; the European Union and Qatar are observers.