

OCHA Member States Briefing Geneva, 29 July 2025

In Attendance: Algeria, Argentina, Australia, Botswana, Bulgaria, Cabo Verde, China, Costa Rica, Cyprus, Denmark, EU, France, Germany, Indonesia, Ireland, Israel, Malaysia, Malta, Mauritania, Mauritius, Monaco, Myanmar, New Zealand, Philippines, Portugal, Russian Federation, Slovenia, Sudan, Tanzania, United Kingdom, United States, CARE, MSF, OIC, Oxfam, Plan International, UNDP, UNHCR, UNICEF, WFP.

Speakers:

- Ramesh Rajasingham, Head and Representative of OCHA Geneva and Director of the Coordination Division
- Justin Brady, Chief of the Interagency Standing Committee secretariat and the Interagency Support Branch, Coordination Division, OCHA
- Gareth Price-Jones, Executive Secretary, SCHR
- Indrika Ratwatte, Deputy Special Representative for the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan and the United Nations Resident and Humanitarian Coordinator in Afghanistan,
- Anja Nitzsche, Chief, Partnerships and Resource Mobilization Branch, Financing and Partnerships Division, OCHA

Ramesh Rajasingham:

- In Gaza, we welcome Israel's announcement of a one-week scale up of aid, lifting customs barriers, designation of secure routes for humanitarian convoys.
- Some movement restrictions appear to have been lifted yesterday, 100 trucks collected. This is progress but we must save as many lives as we can.
- We need sustained action, quicker clearances for convoys, multiple trips to crossings, safe routes that avoid crowded areas, no more attacks on people seeking aid.
- Aid must not be blocked or under fire, and hostages must be released.
- We don't just need a pause. We need a permanent ceasefire.
- On reset, outlines the key points from ERC Tom Fletcher's message to staff on staffing cuts and restructure around strategic priorities.

Justin Brady:

- We are 4.5 months into reset. Managing expectations has been one of the most difficult parts.
- People thought reset would be finished and implemented by now – this was never our approach and is not the reality.
- We have made excellent progress and created conditions for an improved response that is locally led and globally protected and supported.
- Hyper prioritisation by the EDG was done quickly but important to note that needs have not gone away.
- The Deputies are delivering on their work led by Denise, Ted, Gabriela.
- The Fletcher letter outlined the four Ds. Spoke with the ERC last week on the way forward, which will focus on the 4 Ds plus 6 renewal topics.
- ERC wants IASC members and observers to lead these groups, accompanied by OCHA technical staff and IASC secretariat.
- Work will be advanced by the Principals meeting in New York in October.
- The UN80 process is ongoing in parallel and includes a humanitarian cluster led by WFP, UNICEF, IOM, and UNHCR.
- Does not mean others are excluded but it is meant to be focused on UN.

- The humanitarian reset should be driving discussions more broadly, while UN80 should focus on UN specific actions.
- We have the impression that it is moving swiftly, although the reset is far ahead, as we do not have the luxury of time.
- HCs are being encouraged to innovate, make structures more contextually appropriate.
- We are working on FAQs which will help to understand what has and hasn't been agreed.
- Afghanistan a good example of innovation.
- Appreciative of NGO engagement.

Gareth Price-Jones:

- Speaking about wider reset, not just the coordinated work within the IASC, but also what's happening across the UN system through the UN80 process, in the Grand Bargain discussions with donor states, and critically, within individual organisations.
- These internal decisions, made by NGOs, Red Cross Societies, UN agencies, and donor governments, often have the most direct and significant impact on affected communities and on humanitarian staff.
- Yet, we have limited visibility into how these decisions are being made, due in part to their sensitivity and the understandable need for careful internal communication.
- It would be good to work with Member States to understand better how funding decisions are made. This includes assessing how these decisions impact the full spectrum of humanitarian actors – affected people, affected States, donor governments, INGOs, local NGOs, the Red Cross, and UN agencies.
- At SCHR, we are especially concerned about the gap in engagement with affected states. These governments are coping with multiple layers of disruption – geopolitical shifts, changes in trade, reduced bilateral aid – and yet they remain the primary duty bearers responsible for meeting the basic needs of their citizens.
- We recognise that donor states are facing extremely difficult choices. However, we've tracked an estimated \$84.5 billion in planned cuts across development and humanitarian funding over the next 2–3 years. Most from the United States, but most donor countries have announced cuts.
- We want to hear what you need from us. It is also crucial that you share more detailed information about the timing and implementation of your funding reductions. This will allow humanitarian actors to plan appropriately and minimise harm. The reality is stark: every step we take to manage these cuts better can save lives.
- We're already seeing warning signs. Across the board, excess mortality is rising, and we're witnessing negative effects, such as increased recruitment by armed and criminal groups as services vanish and communities become more desperate. These are real-time consequences of financial withdrawal that can further destabilise already fragile contexts.
- A sense of the scale: SCHR members alone will have lost approximately \$2.6 billion in annual funding in 2023 and 2024. We're in the process of laying off over 10,000 staff, individuals who were saving lives, shaping policy, and advocating for those most affected.
- Our partnerships with local actors, including women-led organisations, remain critical, but many are also under threat. We have prioritised funding to local

partners wherever we can, but these relationships are also being tested by the scale of the crisis. It is a challenge to balance the required speed in decision-making with consultation.

- While individual giving from the public remains relatively strong, it cannot compensate for the steep drop in institutional funding. Without a major shift in donor policy, we project a 40–50% decrease in overall funding by 2026.
- So far, organisations have seen cuts between 10 and 30%, but that is just the beginning. These deepening cuts will degrade our collective capacity, and the human cost will be measured in suffering, displacement, and lives lost.
- Important to note that, of 14 projected famines over 10 years, only 4 occurred, showing that humanitarian aid works.
- Also important to acknowledge that cynics have not been proven right. We haven't focused on protecting our own. Humanitarian leaders have done the hard work, cutting headquarters and regional positions, reducing costs in places where we had more flexibility, while doing our utmost to protect frontline staff and operations where we had the power to do so.
- I've recently spoken with affected people in Syria and Yemen who understood the scale of the problem and spoke constructively about innovating, engaging with local businesses and authorities.
- IASC leaders have agreed to simplify structures, particularly clusters. Our next step is to ensure country teams and global clusters have clear guidance, so we can maintain global coherence while supporting the area-based coordination we've spoken about for some time.
- We've also made progress toward a restructured Humanitarian Programme Cycle for 2026. The aim is to ensure we all have the data, tools, and strategic direction needed to manage the next phase of this crisis.
- However, challenges remain. For instance, some Humanitarian Coordinators are interpreting their empowered status in inconsistent ways, leading to tensions within Humanitarian Country Teams. We are likely to see some friction here. We're actively working through the Emergency Directors Group to resolve this and ensure context-specific solutions stay anchored in humanitarian norms and standards.
- In the broader reset, we must go beyond marginal adjustments. This isn't just about trimming budgets or cutting layers. We need a bigger vision for what the humanitarian system can and should deliver in this new reality. That includes not just assistance, but also policy, advocacy, communications, and data — and an honest assessment of which parts of the system are best equipped to deliver.
- We need to look beyond the headlines on hunger, trucks, supplies, and support the full humanitarian package which includes health, WASH, protection, etc.
- We ask Member States to review the impact of recent policy shifts, particularly the move away from large-scale international assistance. This is not just a moral question, it is also strategic. At its peak, the entire humanitarian ecosystem cost less than a third of what the world spends annually on peanuts. The direct impact of funding cuts will be visible, and we must work together to communicate that reality to citizens and parliaments.
- How can we mobilise citizens to support the humanitarian endeavour? We believe that's not only the right thing to do, it's also the smart thing to do.
- Close with two asks:
 - Invest in understanding and mitigating the impacts of funding policy shifts, now and over the next 2–3 years.

- o Invest in diplomacy and peace. The root causes of humanitarian need remain political, and durable solutions will only come from political courage and leadership. These investments are modest in financial terms but immense in impact.
- Leaders and Member States who step up during this time will be remembered by history.

Indrika Ratwatte:

- There has been a significant increase in returnees, with the largest and most exponential surge occurring in the last six months. As of mid-July 2025, 1.5 million people have returned, adding to the 8 million who came back in 2024.
- A video of the border with Iran illustrates the current situation on the ground. Of these returnees, 14% are women and 43% are children, with 60% categorized as youth.
- Quick vulnerability assessments are being conducted at the border, along with biometric registration. Cash assistance is provided—\$28 per person, up to \$140 per family. The private sector has been instrumental in supporting with buses and transportation. However, the border remains a significant choke point.
- The main question remains: what happens to all of these people next? There is a clear challenge in mounting a coordinated response in high-return areas. We must prioritize the most highly affected districts and work with de facto authorities to take the lead while we fill the gaps.
- Areas like Kandahar, Nangarhar, and Kunduz are of particular concern. Targeted interventions are needed in communities of return, with a focus on WASH and livelihoods.
- The impacts are wide-ranging. Host communities are saturated, creating food and nutrition security issues.
- The country's inability to host them will lead to onward movement. Many returnees are unable to sustainably integrate and end up relying on smuggling and trafficking networks that thrive on desperation. Data shows that returnees are paying smugglers to reach Türkiye, which is already overwhelmed with millions of Syrian refugees.
- 65% of returnees are young men which, as Gareth pointed out, creates fertile ground for recruitment into violent extremism and radicalisation. Armed groups are actively exploiting this opportunity.
- The economic impact is also severe, with a 33% drop reported, and a \$900 million loss in remittances over 1.5 years. Many of the returnees had left 30 years ago and are now returning with large families, placing immense pressure on land, water, and other critical resources.
- A special thanks goes to the donors who have stepped up. \$10 million has come from CERF and another \$10 million from AHF, with most of this support going to local actors. There is now a renewed call for donors to mobilize additional resources for both the AHF and the Basic Human Needs Fund. The focus is on an area-based, community-centric, joined-up response.
- More returns are expected throughout the rest of the year. In June alone, 1.5 million registration cards in Pakistan expired.
- Coupled with below-average rainfall and drought conditions resembling those of 2018—which resulted in 300,000 internally displaced persons—the outlook is concerning. About 70% of the population relies on agriculture-based livelihoods. \$16.6 million has been allocated to support anticipatory action.

- The reset, which was briefed on in June, is still ongoing and is supported by the P2P. The main outcomes so far have been informed by feedback from clusters and NGOs, with a focus on enhancing efficiency, impact, and accountability.
- Gender takes priority over everything, especially considering the context.
- We are moving toward a decentralized, area-based devolution model in the regions. Changing the operational architecture has been challenging, but we're encouraging colleagues to push for convergence. Data consolidation and the use of common platforms are underway. We look forward to global guidance, recognizing that "the train has left the station."
- Our ambition is to have clarity on transitions by the end of August and to finalize transition modalities before 2026. The KPIs moving forward will be enhanced efficiency, increased impact, and stronger accountability.

Anja Nitzsche:

- 16% received to date, while 25% had been received by this time last year.
- Already having deadly consequences in human terms.
- 33% of allocations of pooled funds to national partners.

Questions:

Denmark:

- Expectation for a more efficient UN.
- Don't expect it to be swift, but would like to see action pretty quickly.
- Reset and UN80 should not be two competitive tracks.
- Strong call to ensure coherence.
- Where do you see the cluster system going forward, how will it be rationalised?
- Important that different aspects previously covered by subclusters and other structures are still addressed.
- ERC called for special protection for women and girls. Definitely support that, especially given what's going on in the world.
- On Afghanistan, very difficult situation. Underline that we are not back to normal in Afghanistan
- Regime leaving out and invisibilising 50% of population. It is a special context with special conditions.

United Kingdom:

- Appreciate Ramesh's frankness on staffing.
- Timely reminder that reset is already happening, multiple tracks.
- UNGA HLW coming up.
- Need to have an active conversation on what we are losing.
- Urge agencies to make decisions in a joined up, collaborative way so we are not left with gaps that could have been avoided.
- On phase 2 of reset, can you say more about ownership of the 10 strands? Which need MS support?
- Localisation would seem to need support from the UK perspective, and that Member States should encourage agencies to do it.
- Secondly, women and girls and their place in the reset.
- On prioritisation, 114 million people is only a few million fewer than last year, seems like a stretch. Is this realistic?
- On Afghanistan, outrageous statistic that every two hours a woman in Afghanistan dies from a preventable pregnancy related issue.

Responses:

Indrika:

- Humanitarian aid won't build resilience.
- What we are talking about is moving from extreme fragility to some degree of stability.
- We continue addressing operational issues at all levels, and push for space for Afghan women, both staff and in general.
- Tight boundary setting last year already, and again now.
- Food assistance needed for vulnerable and hard to reach but we also need food systems investment.

Justin:

- Cluster system remains, we are just streamlining it.
- Gender, women, girls are not just an add-on in Tom's communications. We engage with UN Women on the gender capacity project.
- There has been an emphasis on looking at pooled funds and directing allocations to WLOs but we shouldn't set arbitrary targets and find there are no appropriate WLOs to allocate to. We should ensure it's appropriate to the context.
- Accused of releasing the "work stream kraken". We've made proposals on who should lead and Fletcher is reviewing.
- Reached out to IOM on innovation, use of AI.
- Welcome MS engagement, feedback.

Gareth:

- Concerned by lack of engagement with both affected and host states.
- Although NGOs face complicated governance structures, they are managing to make decisions more quickly.
- It was understood that delaying decisions was costing up to 1.5 million per day. Decisions were made in February and March, and by Easter many desks were empty.
- On clusters, 71% had dedicated coordinators, but this figure has decreased to 39% over the past few years, leading to a reduction in coordination capacity.
- As a result, data collection will be less detailed. Efforts are being made to preserve the most critical data. We ask donors to monitor impacts themselves and feed the data in.
- Sadly, mortality will become a key indicator moving forward.
On prioritisation, we know that we never reach the targeted numbers.
- At the Humanitarian Programme Cycle (HPC), discussions are ongoing about how to capture the full extent of need.
- Scope setting is focused on measuring the impact of shocks, while boundary setting questions how much we can realistically deliver.
- We must remain ambitious – we owe that to the affected populations. At the same time, we are trying to adapt and remain realistic.
- It is important to acknowledge that humanitarian needs have not disappeared.
- We need clarity from Member States on what we are expected to be doing.
- Mandates continue to pose a challenge.
- There is a pressing need for greater investment in peacebuilding and diplomacy. These factors are significantly driving current humanitarian needs. Return on investments in these areas will be high.

- We are heading toward more conflict and displacement. This reality means we must engage more directly with DFAs and local actors on the ground.
- There is also a need to reinforce IHL. Unfortunately, we are seeing an acceleration in breaches, for example, with the latest drone attack on WFP in Sudan.
- Support needs to go beyond the financial—it must also be political.

Anja:

- Focused on who needs lifesaving assistance now, those at intersectional severity levels 4 and 5 and whose lives are at stake in next few months.
- Landed on 29 million and believe we can reach it.