

OCHA POOLED FUNDS-NGO DIALOGUE PLATFORM

Terms of Reference

October 2025

Purpose

1. The purpose of the OCHA Pooled Funds-NGO Dialogue Platform (hereafter, “the Platform”) is to facilitate an open, diverse and inclusive forum for regular dialogue between OCHA and the NGO community to inform the strategic direction and management of Country and Regional Funds. It also serves to enhance communication with the Pooled Fund Working Group (PFWG), particularly with its donor co-chair.
2. The Platform was established in response to the need identified by NGO partners for a strong partnership with OCHA vis-à-vis Country and Regional Funds, and to complement the dialogue between OCHA and NGOs that takes place at the country level.

Background

3. The Country and Regional Funds are a key financing mechanism in today’s humanitarian architecture, and a pillar of OCHA’s humanitarian financing mandate. Since the first Fund was piloted in Angola in 1997, the number of Funds has steadily grown — now including Regional Funds for West and Central Africa, Latin America and Caribbean, Eastern and Southern Africa, and Asia and the Pacific — supported by contributions from an increasingly diverse group of donors. Local, national, and international NGOs are critical partners of Country and Regional Funds, understanding localization as a core principle to meet humanitarian needs effectively.
4. Recognizing the expansion of the Country and Regional Funds and the important partnership with NGOs, OCHA’s Pooled Fund Branch (PFB) and the NGO community have identified opportunities for promoting mutual understanding and technical collaboration to optimize impact. Country and Regional Funds are seen as a humanitarian financing mechanism able to ensure independence and impartiality in decision-making, and to increase the predictability, timeliness and flexibility of funding for humanitarian responses.
5. Considering the unprecedented challenges, including funding cuts that have triggered cascading impacts across the humanitarian system and hit humanitarian actors hardest, as well as the ongoing Humanitarian Reset¹, the Platform will contribute to a leaner, people-centered response by fostering collaboration over competition, advancing localization and participation, and promoting flexible funding with fewer requirements. This approach safeguards principled assistance, empowers local partners, and strengthens strategic decision-making to uphold Grand Bargain commitments and sustain progress toward locally led action.
6. Whilst the lead role in establishing partnerships with NGOs and other stakeholders at country level is played by the respective Humanitarian Coordinator (HC), Advisory Board, coordination bodies including clusters/sectors, and the OCHA Country Office, the Platform provides a space at the global level to address policy, operational, and advocacy issues affecting all Funds.
7. The Platform contributes to the deliberations of the Pooled Fund Working Group (PFWG), the global advisory body for Country and Regional Funds, and feeds into the work of other interagency bodies as deemed relevant.

Scope and Objectives

8. The Platform is a consultative forum that provides input, feedback, and suggestions on policy, operational and advocacy issues, to advance the relevance, reach and effectiveness of the Country and Regional Funds and inform good practices. It draws on NGOs’ knowledge and engagement with Funds and facilitates and coordinates the sharing of experiences and ideas with OCHA. The Platform also serves as a collaborative space for OCHA to directly consult with NGOs, exchange and disseminate information, and gather actionable feedback for continuous improvement. Additionally, it may facilitate exchanges with other constituencies represented in the PFWG, including donors and UN agencies.

¹ The Humanitarian Reset, launched by the USG and Emergency Relief Coordinator (ERC) on 10 March 2025, is a transformative initiative to reform the humanitarian system by addressing funding gaps, streamlining operations, and placing local leadership at the center of crisis response.

9. The Platform has three main objectives:

- i. **Policy:** Strengthen Funds' global policy to reflect the perspectives of a broad range of NGO stakeholders, with particular emphasis on ensuring the meaningful participation and leadership of local and national NGOs.
- ii. **Operations and management:** Improve the effectiveness, accountability, and transparency of Funds' management by strengthening operational practices and promoting continuous learning. This will be achieved through the exchange of good practices, open discussion of challenges, and inclusive problem-solving approaches with NGO partners — with a focus on ensuring that NGO partners contribute to the best possible response for affected populations, in a principled and accountable manner.
- iii. **Advocacy:** Develop joint advocacy between OCHA and NGOs in support of Funds, where appropriate.

Governance of the Platform

10. The Platform is permanently co-chaired by OCHA and an NGO co-chair (either a single NGO or a partnership between one local/national NGO and one international NGO) on a two-year rotational basis. The NGO co-chair is nominated by the wider NGO membership of the Platform and is responsible for managing communication and consultation with members, playing a liaison role between OCHA and the NGOs to ensure effective dialogue. Where co-chairing is shared, arrangements must guarantee that the leadership and perspectives of the local/national NGO are prioritized and remain central to the Platform's deliberations.
11. Before the end of the tenure of the NGO co-chair(s), the NGO co-chair(s) and OCHA will initiate a transparent process to identify the next NGO co-chair(s). This will include a call for expressions of interest. Following review and recommendation by members of the Platform Advisory Group (PAG)² supported by a limited group of NGOs selected from the Consultative Group,³ the NGO co-chair(s) are appointed by OCHA and the outgoing NGO co-chair(s) for a period of two years. To ensure continuity and strengthen local leadership, the local/national NGO co-chair has the option to extend by one additional year ("2+1" term) upon written request, subject to mutual agreement by the Platform membership and OCHA.
12. In the case of a partnership between one local/national NGO and one international NGO to ensure the role of NGO co-chair of the Platform, a staggered rotation process will be established to prevent the simultaneous replacement of both NGO co-chairs.
13. The following criteria⁴ will be used to inform the selection process of the NGO co-chair(s):
 - i. Partnership with Country and Regional Funds:
 - a. For international NGOs: number of countries with active Funds' grants.
 - b. For local/national NGOs: must have received funding from at least one Fund's allocation in the two years prior to the call for expressions of interest.
 - c. For both: current or recent (within two years) membership on one or more Fund Advisory Boards.
 - ii. Commitment for the full two-year period⁵. While the NGO co-chair(s) role is organizational, expressions of interest should include the explicit intention to assign a named individual to the role throughout the period of tenure, to ensure continuity and consistency.
 - iii. Experience and participation in Funds-related forums, such as the PFWG and OCHA Pooled Funds-NGO Dialogue Platform but not excluding other types of relevant interaction.
 - iv. Expressions of interest from local/national NGOs, including women's organizations and organizations of persons with disabilities (OPDs) are strongly encouraged.
14. Secretariat functions will be shared by OCHA and the NGO co-chair(s) by mutual agreement.

² Current members of the PAG that have expressed interest in the position of NGO co-chair will not participate in the review and recommendation process.

³ The selection from the Consultative Group will prioritize local and national NGOs, with at least 60 per cent of representation vs INGOs, such as four local/national NGOs and two INGOs, with a maximum of six selected NGOs.

⁴ The same criteria will apply in case of partnership between a local/national NGO and an international NGO. In case of an NGO network, the network should have proven expertise in humanitarian policy; and/or direct experience with Country and Regional Funds, for example as a member of Advisory Boards; and/or has members that are registered with the Funds or have implemented projects as sub-partners.

⁵ For local or national NGOs, refer to paragraph 11 regarding the optional one-year extension of the term.

15. The NGO co-chair(s) will:

- i. Chair the Platform Advisory Group (PAG).
- ii. Facilitate the development of meeting agendas, such as PAG and PFWG meetings, in collaboration with OCHA and donor the co-chair.
- iii. Manage communication and consultation with the NGO community through country and regional hubs, national and regional NGO networks, and other formal and informal channels as relevant.
- iv. Play a liaison role, as needed, between NGOs, OCHA, and the donor co-chair on policy or advocacy initiatives, such as the implementation of the Country and Regional Funds' Global Guidelines.
- v. Represent the voices and interests of NGOs in a constructive and inclusive manner.
- vi. Provide guidance and strategic advice on the operations and activities of the Pooled Funds Resource Facility and participate in its Steering Committee.⁶
- vii. Foster synergies with other NGO initiatives and related working groups (e.g., Grand Bargain, IASC, NGO networks, Humanitarian Reset, among others).
- viii. Co-organize and co-chair Platform meetings.
- ix. Ensure that recommendations generated by the Platform are recorded and tracked via an annual workplan, and that feedback on their consideration and outcomes is communicated back to members.

16. OCHA will:

- i. Provide the NGO co-chair(s) with access to up-to-date contact lists (e.g., Advisory Board members, eligible partners registered in OneGMS).
- ii. Engage meaningfully and proactively with NGOs, including consulting the Platform when revising global guidelines and developing other policy or advocacy initiatives.
- iii. Co-organize and co-chair Platform meetings.
- iv. Provide timely feedback on the status of recommendations made by the Platform, including rationale where recommendations cannot be adopted, to ensure transparency and accountability.

17. Jointly, OCHA and the NGO co-chair(s) will:

- i. Agree on a calendar of meetings, including bi-weekly meetings with the NGO co-chairs, and quarterly meetings between the PAG and OCHA PFB (typically preceding the bi-annual PFWG meetings); and other ad hoc, topic-specific meetings as relevant. Regular working level meetings will be scheduled as needed for ongoing coordination.
- ii. Facilitate coordination and communication on all consultative processes with evaluation consultants or learning processes, where the Platform might have an added value.

Membership structure

18. Membership of the Platform is open to all local/national and international NGOs engaged in or interested in working with the Country and Regional Funds. Participation of local/national NGOs with direct Fund experience is highly encouraged. Diversity, equity, and inclusion will be promoted through ongoing dialogue and communication with the NGO community in between meetings.
19. Due to the increasing number of NGOs partnering or wishing to partner with the Funds, a three-tier membership arrangement allows for effective representation and constructive dialogue among NGO members and with OCHA:

Tier	Objective	Membership	Functioning	Meetings
Informational level	Two-way information	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Includes all eligible NGOs partners 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Engagement is largely through a global mailing list used to share new 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Virtual, ad hoc meetings when OCHA and the NGO co-

⁶ The Pooled Funds Resource Facility, established by the PFWG in June 2023 with donor support, aims to strengthen the meaningful participation of local and national NGO representatives in the governance of Country and Regional Pooled Funds. This includes engagement in Funds' Advisory Boards and the PFWG itself. The Facility supports participants through learning opportunities, mentoring, and peer-to-peer exchange, and covers costs related to attending select meetings. The NGO co-chairs and, at least, two PAG members are part of the Resource Facility Steering Committee.

<i>(About 6,000 members)</i>	sharing	<p>registered in OneGMS.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Other interested NGOs that register directly with the Platform 	<p>guidance, policies, and global-level documents</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Feedback is gathered through tools such as online surveys 	<p>chair(s) deem it important to present new policies, guidance, or initiatives</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Members can contact OCHA and the NGO co-chair(s) at any time through existing channels, including to propose topics for meetings
Consultative level <i>(Over 120 members)⁷</i>	Enable the Platform co-chairs to engage in targeted consultations with NGOs	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • INGO and local/national NGO members of Funds' Advisory Boards • Representatives of country-level NGO forums where such forums do not sit on an Advisory Board • Members of the Platform Advisory Group (PAG) are invited to combine country experience with global perspectives 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • OCHA and the NGO co-chair(s) of the Platform may request this group (or a sub-group) to organize consultations on specific global, regional, or thematic issues related to the Funds 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Virtual and ad hoc, organized as needed given the geographic spread of members
Platform Advisory Group (PAG) <i>(Chaired by the NGO co-chair(s) of the Platform, with eight members)</i>	To organize and solicit input from the Platform members and contribute to OCHA's initiatives on behalf of NGO partners	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Eight NGOs/NGO networks with significant operational and policy experience • Outgoing NGO co-chair(s), invited to join for one year as observers to ensure continuity • Additional NGO representatives, invited on an ad hoc basis depending on the theme and scope of consultation 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Platform co-chairs engage with this group to discuss specific policy or operational issues requiring NGO guidance. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The PAG meets regularly (every 2-4 weeks) • OCHA and the NGO co-chair(s) of the Platform will meet with the PAG on a quarterly basis, typically preceding the bi-annual PFWG meetings. • Additional ad hoc meetings convened on specific topics as required

20. Engagement between the three levels of the Platform (Informational, Consultative, and PAG) takes place throughout the year and is aligned, with discussions of the PFWG.
21. At each level, discussions are expected to be open, frank, and constructive, with the aim of producing concrete inputs that OCHA can consider in shaping Funds' policy and practice.
22. To support transparency and follow-up:
 - i. Meeting records: Minutes or key action points are circulated whenever relevant.
 - ii. Ongoing communication: Email updates and conference calls are used to maintain dialogue between meetings.

⁷ NGO members of the ABs are automatically part of this group. When a meeting of the group — or of any of its subgroups — is convened, members are invited to actively participate.