

U.N. Humanitarian Funding Mechanisms

How the U.N. Pools Donor Funds to Respond to Humanitarian Crises

The U.N. Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) manages two types of pooled humanitarian funds. These funds combine contributions from multiple donors into a single, unearmarked pot that is centrally managed to support coordinated humanitarian responses.

1. Country Based Pooled Funds (CBPFs)

Country Based Pooled Funds are established for a specific country or crisis and are managed by OCHA to support the agreed Humanitarian Response Plan (HRP).

- CBPFs typically represent a small share of overall humanitarian spending in a crisis—about **3–6% globally**.
- In **2024**, global contributions totaled approximately **\$1.1 billion**, with **\$1.2 billion allocated**. In **2025**, contributions reached **\$1 billion**, with **\$1.05 billion allocated**—the highest levels to date.
- Funding decisions are made in country by the U.N.'s **Humanitarian Coordinator (HC)**, advised by an **Advisory Board** of 10–20 representatives from donors, U.N. agencies, international NGOs, and local actors.
- Partners must meet minimum standards for capacity, performance, audit, and monitoring. Funds are open to U.N. agencies and NGOs, with a **clear preference for local and national partners**. In 2024, **46%** of CBPF funding went to local and national organizations.
- CBPFs do **not allow donor-directed earmarking** within allocations. Funding follows collective country priorities set out in the HRP.
- CBPFs operate through **two allocation modalities: Standard Allocations** and **Reserve Allocations**. Both follow the same governance framework but differ in speed, documentation, and purpose.

2. CBPF Standard Allocations (SA)

Standard Allocations are the primary, planned funding mechanism under CBPFs and are aligned with the HRP cycle. They are usually launched **once or twice per year**.

- The HC initiates the process based on needs, available funding, and Advisory Board input.
- OCHA develops an **Allocation Strategy Paper**, followed by an open **call for proposals** with defined objectives and sector funding envelopes.
- Submitted proposals undergo a technical review focused on quality, relevance, cost-effectiveness, and alignment with the strategy.
- The HC makes final approval decisions. OCHA then signs grant agreements and disburses funds.
- The full process—from strategy development to disbursement—typically takes **5–12 weeks**.

3. Reserve Allocations (RA)

Reserve Allocations are designed to respond quickly to **sudden emergencies, rapid deterioration, or time critical gaps**. They are faster and more flexible than Standard Allocations.

- The HC, with OCHA and partners, develops a shorter Allocation Strategy, which may include rapid response funding, contingency planning, or consortium approaches.

- OCHA issues a targeted call to selected partners based on capacity and access.
- Reviews focus on speed, feasibility, risk, and cost-effectiveness using an accelerated process.
- HC approval, grant agreements, and disbursements are expedited.
- Reserve Allocations can move from trigger to disbursement in **8–20 days**.

4. Key Differences Between Standard and Reserve Allocations

Both allocation types:

- Are approved by the HC
- Follow common vetting, due-diligence, and monitoring standards
- Align with HRP priorities

Key distinctions:

- **Standard Allocations** are planned, consultative, and open-call processes that take several weeks.
- **Reserve Allocations** are emergency-driven, developed quickly with shorter documentation, limited consultation, and invitations to pre-selected partners. They allow greater flexibility, including project amendments or consortia.

5. Central Emergency Response Fund (CERF)

CERF is the U.N.’s global emergency fund, managed by the **Emergency Relief Coordinator (ERC)** with OCHA support.

- It provides **rapid funding for immediate, life-saving activities** across crises worldwide.
- Only UN agencies can receive CERF funding, though they may sub-grant to NGOs.

CERF is intended to **jump-start humanitarian operations**, not fund longer-term

CBPF vs. CERF (at a glance)

	CBPF	CERF
Geographic Scope	Country-specific	Global
Primary Purpose	HRP implementation	Immediate life-saving response
Main Allocation Types	Standard & Reserve	Rapid Response & Underfunded Emergencies
Decision-maker	HC	ERC
Partner Eligibility	UN & NGOs (vetted)	UN agencies only
Speed	SA = planned; RA = fast, responsive	RR extremely fast (48 hours)

6. The U.S.–OCHA Memorandum of Understanding (MOU)

The U.S.–OCHA MOU enables U.S. government support to OCHA-managed pooled funds (CBPFs and CERF).

- OCHA has established **dedicated sub-accounts** within CBPFs to track U.S. contributions. This allows transparency while maintaining pooled-fund principles.
- The MOU does **not create earmarking authority**. All funds remain subject to standard allocation procedures and HC or ERC decision-making.
- Additional **quarterly reporting** is required for CBPF allocations and impact.
- Allocation authority remains unchanged:

- HCs set CBPF strategies
- The ERC approves CERF allocations
- The U.S. does not direct funding at the project or country level

Indicative Funding (as of 25 February)

Country/Region/Category	Expected Amount	HRP
Ukraine	\$125m	Yes
Syria	\$150m	Yes
Haiti Region	\$125m	Yes
DR Congo	\$150m	Yes
Ethiopia	\$100m	No
Nigeria	\$125m	Yes
Myanmar	\$100m	Yes
Bangladesh	\$150m	No
Mozambique	\$50m	Yes
Central America (El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras)	\$150m	No
Uganda	\$75m	No
Kenya	\$50m	No
South Sudan	\$100m	Yes
Sudan	\$200m	Yes
Chad	\$100m	Yes
Colombia	\$100m	Yes
CERF	\$50m	N/A
Impact monitoring/other costs	\$200m	N/A