EBA
The Expert Group for Aid Studies

Dnr. Komm2026/00458-1

Invitation for proposals: Study of the humanitarian system's reshaping

The Expert Group for Aid Studies (EBA, www.eba.se) is a government committee under the Swedish Ministry for Foreign Affairs mandated to evaluate and analyse issues related to Sweden's official development assistance. EBA consists of an expert group of ten members and a secretariat placed in Stockholm. EBA works with 'dual independence'. This means that EBA independently defines what issues to explore and which studies to commission while conclusions and potential recommendations are the responsibility of the author(s).

EBA hereby invites proposals for a study of the rapid transformation of the humanitarian system and the emerging consequences of this transformation.

The overall aim of the study is to describe and analyse the reforms that are being forced upon international humanitarian work by decreased funding, increasing needs and geopolitical shifts. While shifts in financing patterns are relatively well described already, consequences for the organisation and the functioning of the system need deeper scrutiny.

Please note that this is a two-stage procurement process. Together with the invitation to submit full proposals in the second stage, the text may be amended in part, without altering the fundamental conditions of the procurement.

Background and motivation for the study

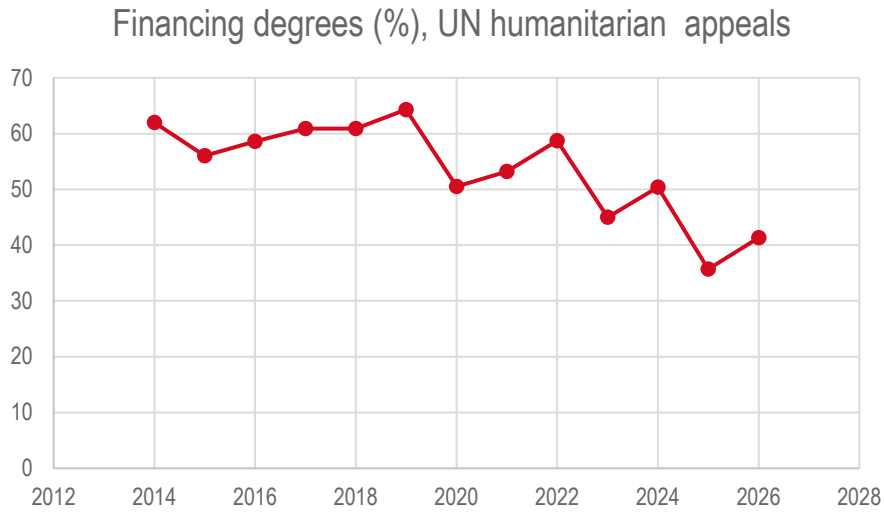
The international humanitarian system[1] is in a period of profound change. Over the past decade, humanitarian needs rose sharply as a result of protracted conflicts, increasing forced displacement, recurring climate-related disasters and growing vulnerability in many low- and middle-income countries. This development also led to a significant expansion of international humanitarian funding. At the same time, dependence on a relatively limited number of large donors and multilateral actors increased.

Over the past two to three years, however, several of the assumptions that shaped the humanitarian system's development have come under pressure. A record number of conflicts worldwide have generated historically high humanitarian needs. At the same time, geopolitical tensions have increased and several traditional donor countries have reconsidered their aid and foreign policy priorities. The result has been a widening gap

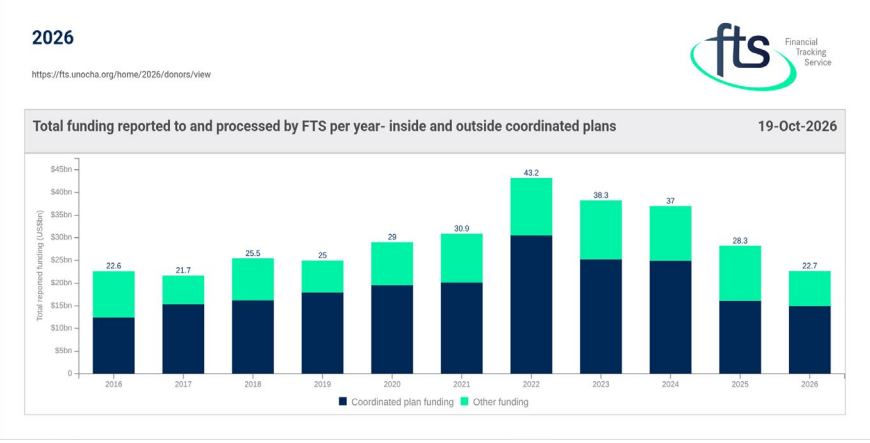
[1] A clear definition of the humanitarian system and its functions is lacking. However, for a recent attempt at describing the "system" see IAEH (2026). ALNAP (2026) may provide complementary guidance.

between identified needs and available resources. According to ALNAP's *Global Humanitarian Assistance Report 2025*, this marks the largest recorded decline in international humanitarian funding and a clear break with the long-standing growth trend that previously characterised the sector. The trend is continuing. ALNAP's *State of the Humanitarian System 2026* describes an unprecedented funding collapse.[2] Or, as Carl Skau, Deputy Executive Director of the UN World Food Programme (WFP), has put it: in today's resource shortage, humanitarian actors are forced to "take from the hungry to give to the starving".[3]

The following graphs show the extent to which the humanitarian needs in the UN's consolidated appeals have been funded by the international community over the past decade. They also show how total humanitarian funding has developed in recent years and in which crisis areas the largest cuts have occurred.



Total humanitarian financing 2016-2026

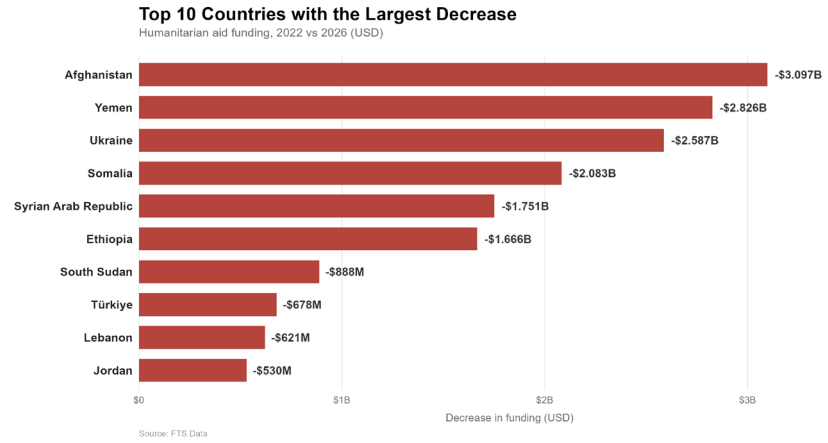


Source: OCHA Financial Tracking System

The countries facing largest financial reductions 2022-2026 are to a large extent also those who are worse affected by crises. Reasons behind the reductions vary widely, the graph

[2] Active Learning Network for Accountability and Performance, ALNAP.
[3] Carl Skau, Swedish Radio, *Sommar i P1*, 2026

below is intended to illustrate the importance of decreases, rather than to rank or compare country cases.



Source: OCHA Financial Tracking System

At the same time, several reform processes are under way within the humanitarian system. Issues such as localisation, locally led action, local leadership, quality and flexible funding, increased use of so-called pooled funds, innovative forms of financing and new forms of collaboration between humanitarian, development and national actors have become increasingly important. The discussion about a possible so-called *Humanitarian Reset* reflects a broader view that the system is facing not only a funding crisis but also a more far-reaching institutional transformation.

These developments coincide with a significant transition in the Grand Bargain process, launched at the World Humanitarian Summit in Istanbul in 2016. The initiative has sought to advance key humanitarian reforms, including localisation, by promoting more flexible and predictable funding, strengthening the leadership and participation of local actors, and fostering more effective and inclusive coordination. While progress has been uneven and implementation has often fallen short at country level, the Grand Bargain remains the principal multistakeholder platform for driving reform across the humanitarian system. At its annual meeting in October 2026, participants agreed on a renewed governance and implementation model, with a stronger emphasis on country-level change, collective accountability, and the practical delivery of reform commitments. The new structure reflects both lessons learned over the past decade and the evolving realities of the humanitarian system, positioning the Grand Bargain for a new phase focused on implementation and impact.

It remains unclear whether the changes now being observed should be understood as a temporary adjustment to more limited funding or as the beginning of a more lasting restructuring of the humanitarian system. Several recent analyses point to the latter. They highlight that the current funding crisis has also exposed deeper structural dependencies and vulnerabilities within the existing humanitarian architecture. At an overarching level, this concerns how the humanitarian community is being forced to adapt to a fundamentally changed geopolitical landscape and the increasing prevalence of “polycrises”. At the same time, there is a significant risk that changes in both the quality and the volume of funding

flows will lead to unintended, and in some cases less appropriate, changes to the humanitarian system at various levels.

Despite extensive analysis of humanitarian needs, funding gaps and resource flows, knowledge remains limited about how changes in funding affect how the humanitarian architecture actually functions and how effective the system is. This applies, for example, to the following questions:

- how coordination mechanisms change when resources decline,
- how relations between international and national actors are affected,
- which organisations gain or lose influence, and
- how the division of responsibilities evolves in different crisis contexts.

There is currently no comprehensive analysis of how changing funding patterns are de facto translated into organisational and institutional change. Nor is there an analysis of how power relations between the parties involved are affected, particularly at country level.

Study motivation

For Swedish development cooperation policy, this is an important issue for several reasons. Sweden has long been a major humanitarian donor and has played an active role in efforts to build an effective, principled and multilaterally anchored humanitarian system. Sweden has also been strongly engaged in the reform processes that have emerged under the Grand Bargain. In addition, the Swedish government formed under the Tidö agreement (2022-2026) has frequently emphasised the priority given to humanitarian aid within overall development assistance.

In light of the far-reaching international changes now taking place, there is a need for better knowledge about their consequences for how humanitarian response is organised and implemented. Funding may change in several respects: its volume, its composition, its mechanisms, and donors' choice of which organisations receive support. If it does, it is reasonable to assume that power relations, incentives, divisions of responsibility and forms of collaboration will change as well.

The study could also make a timely contribution to discussions on the implementation of the renewed Grand Bargain framework. As the process shifts towards stronger country-level engagement, collective accountability and practical delivery of reform commitments, important questions remain regarding the effectiveness of existing reform approaches. Against a backdrop of shrinking humanitarian resources and growing needs, the study could examine which of the Grand Bargain's core assumptions and reform priorities have proven most relevant and sustainable in practice, and what this implies for the next generation of humanitarian system reform.

The study can further help shed light on what recent developments have actually meant. They may have brought a real shift towards greater local leadership and more direct funding to national actors. Alternatively, they may have led to increased competition for

resources and a further concentration of power and resources in a smaller number of established organisations.

A further motivation is that the existing literature focuses mainly on funding volumes, levels of need and funding gaps. There are considerably fewer studies analysing the institutional, system-wide consequences of changing funding flows. Such a study would therefore fill an important knowledge gap and contribute a more system-oriented perspective on the ongoing transformation of the humanitarian system.

Previous studies and evaluations

In particular ALNAPs State of the Humanitarian System 2026 provide information about current financial trends, and their effects on the humanitarian system's delivery. Less is, however, known about the organisational setup and the functionings of the system that current shifts bring.

Intended users: Who is this study for?

The primary target audience for this evaluation include the political leadership, as well as the managers and officers responsible for humanitarian aid at the Ministry for Foreign Affairs and at Sida. Other Swedish and international actors within the humanitarian system, at both policy and implementation level, are also among the target groups.

The primary target audiences (MFA and Sida) will be invited to participate in the study's reference group in order to ensure the opportunity for process learning and successive feedback on the study process and results.

Aim and evaluation questions

The overall purpose of the study should be to analyse how recent changes in global humanitarian aid flows are affecting the humanitarian system. More specifically, it should analyse how they affect the organisation and functioning of the humanitarian architecture at global and national levels.

Particular attention should be paid to how changing funding patterns affect coordination, governance, the division of responsibilities and overall localisation ambitions. Throughout, consideration should be given to how this affects power relations between different humanitarian actors.

The following questions should guide the study:

Q1: How have global funding flows for humanitarian aid changed over the past decade? How did flows develop during 2023–2026 compared with the preceding decade? How has the distribution changed between different donors (traditional as well as non-traditional), funding instruments and implementing actors? Which actors, countries and types of humanitarian intervention have been most affected by the changes of recent years?

Q2: How do changing funding patterns affect relationships and functions within the humanitarian system? How are the established coordination structures within the humanitarian system affected? Have new forms of collaboration, partnership or leadership emerged as a consequence of changing resource flows? How are relations, including power relations, affected between the UN system, international organisations, non-traditional humanitarian donors, national authorities and local civil society actors?

Q3: What obstacles and opportunities can be identified for the future functioning and structure of the humanitarian system?

Comments on the questions

The study should combine quantitative and qualitative methods. Information should be sought from donors, UN agencies, international organisations, national authorities and local actors. Respondents should also include representatives of the national reference groups established under the Grand Bargain, as well as its expected new leadership.

The first question involves mapping humanitarian funding flows using literature and data from sources such as OCHA's Financial Tracking Service, OECD/DAC, CERF and the country-based pooled funds, and ALNAP. The aim is to identify key changes in four areas: volumes, funding channels, recipient categories and the extent of direct funding to national actors. The mapping should include a stakeholder analysis.

The second question may open for discussions of (causal) relationships, where determinants may include more than resource flows, even if the latter is in focus. A contextual understanding is sought for, where resource flows still remains the primary object of study.

The second question could, for example, be answered through comparative case studies. The selection should reflect different types of humanitarian context and different funding dynamics. For example, the study could include four contexts:

- a high-profile conflict with extensive international mobilisation,
- an underfunded conflict,
- a protracted humanitarian crisis where localisation has long been a central issue,
- a refugee context where the interplay between humanitarian and development actors is particularly prominent.

Regarding functions within the humanitarian system, the study could, for example, analyse the conditions for delivering on commitments made under the Grand Bargain. This applies in particular to commitments on localisation, quality funding and participation in decision-making processes.

The third question calls for a forward-looking assessment based on the answers to the first two questions. The analysis is not intended to produce speculative recommendations. Rather, it should highlight opportunities and obstacles for achieving a future organisation of humanitarian aid that functions well and fulfils its objectives.

Study design

A key objective of the study is to provide grounded, rigorous and analytically sound descriptions and answers to the questions. Scientific method(s) suitable for this purpose must be used to ensure valid and reliable results and conclusions, and a high degree of transparency should be applied. The issue of causality should be addressed and discussed carefully, when relevant. A central reference is EBA's "Policy and guidelines for quality assurance of studies" (EBA, 2020).

Tenderers are encouraged to let their expertise in humanitarian work and research design guide the choice of approach in answering the study questions. This includes analytical framework, specific methodological approach, and delimitations.The study should apply a gender lens in the analysis. ***The choice of study design and specific methods should be carefully motivated.***

For the study to contribute to learning for key audiences, we emphasise the importance to understand how and why effects have emerged or not, how contextual factors have played in and how conclusions relate to previous research and evaluations. EBA welcomes proposals that engage intended users during the process.

If needed, the author(s) may, after the award decision, be given the opportunity to, in dialogue with EBA and the study's reference group, slightly refine or adjust the formulation of the study questions.

Potentially important empirical material for the study may include written sources from the MFA, Sida, and other Swedish actors, such as country, regional, and thematic strategies, evaluations, mid-term reviews, and final reports, as well as previous research etc. While there is no requirement for the main applicant to understand Swedish, the evaluation team should include someone with the ability to analyse documents written in Swedish.

General structure and deliverables

EBA works under what is termed "double independence". This means that EBA defines which questions and areas are to be studied, independently of the MFA. At the same time, analysis, conclusions, and potential recommendations in each study are the responsibility of the author(s).

For all studies, EBA sets up a reference group consisting of experts in the field. Members are assigned by EBA in dialogue with the evaluators. The overall purpose of the reference group is to strengthen the quality of the report. The group will be chaired by one of EBA's members.

The team shall deliver a report (in English) presenting the results from the study to be published in the EBA report series.

- The length of the report should not exceed 22 000 words (approx. 40-45 A4-pages), excluding annexes.
- The report shall include a summary in English and Swedish.
- The team shall present the final report at a public seminar or other dissemination event (details to be specified in consultation with EBA at a later stage).

Procurement procedure, budget, and timetable

The procedure will be a restricted procedure in two stages.[4] At both stages, tenderers are expected to disclose potential conflicts of interest pertaining to members in the evaluation team, as this may be ground for exclusion of a proposal. We expect tenderers to argue for why a certain condition will not constitute a conflict of interest.

First stage: Application to submit tenders

All suppliers have the right to apply to submit tenders (expression of interest). EBA will invite up to five (5) suppliers to submit tenders.

Applications to submit tenders shall be registered at the tender portal Kommers Annons eLite (www.kommersannons.se/elite), no later than ***7 December 2026***. The application shall contain:

1. CV of the principal investigator
2. A list of the principal investigator's most relevant publications (academic or grey). At most 5 studies from the last 10 years are to be listed.
3. Preliminary team if more than one author, described using at most 300 words in total.
4. Three full sample studies conducted by members of the proposed team. At least one shall have been authored by the principal investigator. Note that the studies should be sent in as files, not as links in a document.
5. A short account for how, according to the authors, respective study has contributed to new, reliable knowledge of relevance for this study (at most 300 words, i.e. 100 words per study).
6. A self-declaration in the form stated in Appendix 2 (and thus not a European Single Procurement Document, ESPD).

Applicants are kindly asked not to submit any unsolicited material.

Selection of applicants to invite to submit tenders will be based on the submitted material assessed against sub-criteria 1-5 of criterion 2 (see Appendix 1). Since the proposed team is preliminary, main weight will be put on the principal investigator's experience and competence.

Second stage: Submission of tenders

Selected suppliers are invited to submit a full proposal. The proposal shall be written in English and shall **not exceed 12 pages and 7,000 words**. The proposal shall include a detailed presentation of study design, methods used and delimitations. Choices made shall be clearly justified. It is up to the tenderers themselves to choose the design and method of the study. The proposal shall also include a presentation of the members of the team, a detailed schedule, clear allocation of time and tasks between the members of the group, and a budget (stated in SEK, including price per hour for each team member).

As appendices to the proposal shall be included:

[4] The Public Procurement Act (2016:1145), chapter 19.

i. CVs;

ii. At most three sample studies (reports or articles) carried out by members of the proposed team. At least one shall have been authored by the principal investigator. These studies may be the same as or different from the ones in the first stage.

iii. A self-declaration in the form stated in Appendix 2.

The maximum cost for this evaluation is ***SEK 1 100 000 excl. VAT.*** The budget shall be denominated in SEK. The budget shall enable four meetings with the study's reference group (to be appointed by EBA) and participation at the launching event. The reference group will meet either physically in Stockholm or online.

The proposal shall be registered at the tender portal Kommers Annons eLite (www.kommersannons.se/elite) no later than ***22 February 2027***. Tenderers are advised to monitor the tender portal regularly, as it is not possible to guarantee the receipt of e-mails.

Proposals shall be valid until ***31 July 2027***.

Selection of proposals in the second stage

An assessment group comprising members of EBA will assess proposals received based on the relationship between price and quality. The following criteria will be used when assessing proposals received:

- Quality of proposal, in terms of design, methods and plan for implementation (weight: 50 per cent).
- Experiences and qualifications of team members (weight: 40 per cent).
- Cost (weight: 10 per cent).

See Appendix 1 for the factors that will be considered under each of these three criteria. The assessment of each proposal will be based on the material submitted by the tenderer by the end of the bidding period.

Questions to EBA during the process

During the procurement process, EBA is not permitted to discuss documentation, tenders, evaluation or any such questions with tenderers in a way that benefits one or more tenderers. All questions shall be sent to the Questions and Answers function on the procurement portal Kommers Annons eLite, www.kommersannons.se/elite. Questions and answers to questions are published anonymously and simultaneously to everyone registered for the procurement.

Any questions related to the first stage may be posed until ***30 November 2026***.

Any questions related to the second stage may be posed until ***15 February 2027***.

Preliminary timetable

Last day to apply to submit tenders (first stage)	7 December 2026
Invitation to (5) suppliers to submit tenders	17 December 2026
Last day to submit full tender (second stage)	22 February 2027

Decision by EBA	10 March 2027
Contract signed	March 2027
First reference group meeting (inception phase)	April 2027
Final report delivered	November 2027
Decision by EBA	December 2027
Launch event	Q1 2028

Confidentiality

After the communication of EBA's selection, all submitted proposals will become official documents, meaning that the Swedish principle of public access to official records applies. Sentences, sections, or paragraphs in a document may be masked in the public version if "good reasons" (thorough motivations in terms of causing economic damage to the company) can be provided and deemed valid. The tenderers are fully responsible for making their claims of confidentiality.

References

ALNAP (2025), "Global Humanitarian Assistance Report". https://alnap.org/help-library/resources/global-humanitarian-assistance-gha-report-2025-e-report/

ALNAP (2026): "State of the Humanitarian System 2026". https://alnap.org/sohs/

EBA (2020), "Policy and guidelines for quality assurance of studies". https://eba.se/en/policy-for-quality-assurance/.

IAEH (2026), "Syntehsis Report: A synthesis and meta-analysis of findings from country-specific Inter-Agency Humanitarian Evaluations covering the period 2015-2025". Inter Agency Standing Committee. https://interagencystandingcommittee.org/inter-agency-humanitarian-evaluations/synthesis-findings-crisis-specific-inter-agency-humanitarian-evaluations-2015-2025-enfresar

Appendix 1. Assessment criteria

Criteria	1. Quality of proposal in terms of design, methods, and plan for implementation. (Weight: 50 per cent)	2. Experiences and qualifications of team members in the areas of interest. (Weight: 40 per cent)	3. Cost. (Weight: 10 per cent)
Scale	Criterion 1 and 2 are graded on a scale of 0–5 where: 5=Extraordinary or exceeds all expectation; 4=Very good; 3=Good; 2=Fair, reasonable, in line with what can be expected; 1=Sub-standard; 0=Not applicable/not possible to assess. Note: Sub-criteria are assessed in falling importance according to number but are not graded numerically.		Continuous grade [0,5] as a share of the lowest bid offer, where the lowest bid is graded 5.
	Each criterion is finally weighted (0.50*Criterion 1+ 0,40*Criterion 2 + 0,10*Criterion 3) to obtain a total grade in the interval [0, 5].		
Specifications *(numbered in order of importance)*	1. Does the study design, i.e. suggested methodological approach and plan for implementation, make it possible to fulfill the study's purpose?* 2. Have the approach and method(s) been described in a specific and transparent manner? 3. Have important or pertinent limitations with the method been described and discussed clearly? 4. Will the study design enable conclusions that can be expected to form the basis of use, learning, and reflection among the study's target groups? 5. Does the proposal have a thorough and realistic workplan and timeline? * An overall assessment that the evaluation is feasible to implement and that it can be implemented without any ethical breaches occurring is presupposed. While such an appraisal is required, it is not included as a separate sub-criterion.	The team participants' experience/expertise of/in:* 1. Evaluation or research in areas related to the topic, i.e. humanitarian aid, international humanitarian system; 2. Relevant advanced evaluation or research methodology; 3. Quality of the studies attached to the proposal; 4. Conducting relevant work in the thematic context; 5. Academic merits of the team members; 6. The team members' engagement in the evaluation as specified in the proposal's work and time plan and as shares of proposed budget * Sufficient language skills in relation to the needs of the assignment are required to be shown and are therefore not specified as a separate sub-criterion.	Total price in SEK (VAT excl.)

Appendix 2 – Tenderer's Self-Declaration

I, the undersigned, being the authorised signatory for ***[Insert Company Name]***, hereby declare that the tenderer is not in any of the situations that would lead to exclusion from public procurement.

Specifically, I declare that the tenderer:

1. Has the legal capacity to enter a binding contract.
2. Is not in breach of its obligations relating to the payment of taxes or social security contributions.
3. Has not been found guilty of serious professional misconduct or grave misrepresentation.

Should the tenderer be awarded the contract, we undertake to provide any necessary certificates or supporting evidence upon request without delay.

Date:

Signature:

Name and Position: