

Making the case for improved tracking of humanitarian research and innovation funding flows

Ziad Issa and Jessica Camburn

November 2022

Research and innovation (R&I) can be an ally to the humanitarian system to reform its structure and improve its ability to respond to emerging challenges more effectively. Despite an increasing interest and attention in the role of R&I in the humanitarian system, knowledge about how much and where funding is going and what impact it has is limited. Realising the full potential of R&I in supporting humanitarian action requires the ability to coordinate efforts and align resources around the most pressing humanitarian issues. This can't be achieved without a clear visibility of who is investing in what, where and when. This brief presents key findings and policy insights emerging from the "Who funds what? Humanitarian research and innovation funding flows analysis."

What is the analysis telling us?

According to International Aid Transparency Initiative (IATI) data, the humanitarian system spent approximately 0.2% of the overall humanitarian assistance budget on R&I between 2017 and 2021. The funding flows analysis puts a spotlight on the key considerations required to improve how the system spends humanitarian R&I (HRI) investment:

- Significant contributions were made to HRI from outside the traditional humanitarian system.
- Most of the HRI funding was generated from high income countries (HICs) and was received by actors based in HICs.
- The available financial tracking systems in use in the humanitarian system do not effectively track spend on R&I. Major gaps in data prevent the development of a robust global overview of HRI funding reported.

The funding flows analysis

To track and analyse the available data, the research mapped the financial databases where HRI funding is recorded, including: International Aid Transparency Initiative (IATI); United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) Financial Tracking Service (FTS) and Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) Creditor Reporting System (CRS).

These databases were then queried to identify humanitarian projects that were classed as, or had a component of, research or innovation between the years of 2017 and 2021. Available data about the focus of the projects and the value and source of the funding was subsequently downloaded and analysed. The analysis set out to:

- Quantify how much has been spent on HRI
- Track the volume, source, and coverage of HRI funding
- Assess the state of the current databases where HRI funding is recorded.

Data was gathered and cleaned manually from the different databases to provide a comprehensive understanding of HRI sources and coverage. It is important to note that these databases can only track the data reported as humanitarian and official development assistance (ODA) financing. The databases are not designed to pick up significant types of HRI activity that do not rely on this type of humanitarian and/or ODA funding, such as research and innovation activity that is generated and led by communities and civil society actors, or through an organisations' internal allocations of unrestricted resources. As a result, the data presented through the funding flows analysis must be understood as one important piece of the wider funding landscape picture.

Key findings

State of the current financial databases

The analysis is a first attempt at a rigorous process to track HRI funding allocations through the databases that are available. This process has highlighted many weaknesses in the current data and an urgent need to improve tracking for HRI funding. There are currently no frameworks, reporting codes or accountable bodies for tracking HRI funding.

Funding sources

R&I in the humanitarian system is funded by two main streams:

1. **Allocations to R&I from within humanitarian assistance budgets.** Most funders in this stream are government donors in HICs.
2. **General R&I grants from actors that are not part of the traditional humanitarian system** - funders include academic, philanthropic, and private sector funders.

The analysis found that the volume of HRI funding that is coming from outside the traditional humanitarian system is considerably bigger than that which comes from within humanitarian assistance budgets. The study included only ODA grants and private development finance standard grants in our analysis. According to OECD CRS data, there were 50 ODA funded project and 26 private funders between 2017 and 2021. The UK, Sweden and the US were the top three funders.

Funding volume

The different databases analysed capture varying levels of spending on HRI. Funding from within humanitarian assistance budgets remains consistently low as a percentage of overall humanitarian resources. The analysis of the IATI database shows that less than 0.2% of the overall humanitarian assistance budget between 2017 and 2021 was allocated to address humanitarian issues through R&I.

The volume of funding for humanitarian projects that had research and/or innovation components (known as HRI Envelope) was also analysed. The HRI envelope between 2017 and 2021 was:

- In IATI: \$25.7bn, accounting for 9.8% of the total humanitarian assistance budget.
- In OCHA FTS: \$2.3bn, accounting for 0.26% of the total humanitarian assistance budget.
- In OECD CRS: \$322m, accounting for 1.32% of the total humanitarian assistance budget.

Unlike the IATI data on direct allocations to HRI, the envelope means it is only possible to track the total cost of projects which include an element of R&I but does not allow for further breakdown of costs. These figures should not be read as a total investment in HRI itself, but by showing the overall percentage of humanitarian financing that includes an element of R&I. The envelope data provides an interesting proxy indicator of the depth of engagement of R&I activity more broadly within the system.

Funding coverage

Significant data is missing from the databases about the type, destination country and focus of HRI funding. The destination country data for HRI funding was either missing or reported as 'global' in more than half of the data available on OCHA FTS and IATI.

Although it is limited, the available data suggests that Yemen, Afghanistan, and Sudan were the top three countries where HRI projects were implemented.

HRI-specific funding was predominantly spent on protection, education, and health. Emergency telecommunication, shelter and non-food items, early recovery, and camp coordination and camp management were among the least funded sectors.

Funding to local actors

The funding flows analysis used the type and location of organisation receiving the funding as a proxy measure to assess the volume of HRI funding directed to local actors. The research demonstrates that the overall funding landscape for HRI remains unchanged from our [global mapping exercise published in 2017](#). Donors from Europe and North America continue to lead on funding HRI. Actors in HICs continue to receive most of this funding. Local actors were broadly invisible in the data as funding recipients.

Policy recommendations

To enable better tracking of funding and donor coordination, the HRI system should:

Build strategic relationships between humanitarian actors and funders and non-traditional humanitarian funders. This could increase the impact of resources available for HRI without diverting funding from operational budgets. This can be achieved by:

- Establishing a mechanism within the humanitarian system for HRI to facilitate greater coordination and collaboration across a range of funders.
- Prioritising building and strengthening partnerships with non-traditional HRI funders and actors (e.g., research funding bodies) to leverage their capabilities, expertise and resources for the humanitarian system.

Devote more commitment to shifting priority setting, decision-making and funding allocations to those who are closer to where humanitarian needs are experienced. Local actors are often the first responders to any humanitarian crisis, and they hold most of the knowledge about what works best in their settings, yet their contributions are often overlooked. Funders should commit to bringing these actors into priority setting processes. To achieve this:

- The HRI system should routinely identify R&I needs and priorities. Funders should align their decisions to these priorities and direct funding to national and local actors.

Improve the way the humanitarian system reports its spending on R&I by creating better frameworks. Tracking R&I funding through the humanitarian databases has been extraordinarily challenging. To improve visibility of funding coverage and allocation, we need to develop frameworks that consolidate tools, platforms, and codes to allow the humanitarian system to improve how it reports its R&I spending. To achieve this:

- Agencies reporting data on humanitarian assistance or R&I funding can play a crucial role in improving tracking through voluntary reporting and improving project-level data systems.
- Agencies with funding databases can implement measures to allow better monitoring of HRI spending, such as providing reporting codes for funding and applying data validation measures to ensure adequate data completeness and usability for analysis.

This brief was authored by Ziad Issa and Jess Camburn. It draws on key findings of the Elrha Report, "Who funds what? Humanitarian research and innovation funding flows analysis. London: Elrha."

Citation

Issa, Z. and Camburn, J. (2022). [*Who funds what? Humanitarian research and innovation funding flows analysis*](#). Policy Brief. London: Elrha.

About the Global Prioritisation Exercise

The Global Prioritisation Exercise (GPE) aims to improve outcomes for people affected by crisis by amplifying the impact of investments in research and innovation. The GPE provides an overview of the progress and performance of the humanitarian research and innovation ecosystem with a clear set of priorities for research and innovation funding and attention.

The GPE is funded by the UK Foreign, Commonwealth & Development Office and The Netherlands Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

