

HUMANITARIAN ACCOUNTABILITY REPORT 2022

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

ACCOUNTABILITY IS

NON-NEGOTIABLE

As humanitarians, our primary responsibility is to people affected by crisis. They are the sole reason our institutions and programmes exist. How communities experience and perceive our work is the most relevant measure of our performance. Hence, our accountability to them is paramount and must be acted upon. It is non-negotiable, at all times.

Inter-Agency Standing Committee 2022 Principals Statement



The 2022 Humanitarian Accountability Report (HAR) unpicks what it takes to make humanitarian organisations accountable to the people they serve. How this needs to happen, where and to whom. And this need is urgent. Since the publication of the previous HAR in 2020, the number of people in need of assistance and protection across the world has again increased – dramatically so.

Many of those already facing the consequences of conflict, disaster or poverty found themselves in the maelstrom of the COVID-19 pandemic. In 2021, 235 million people were in need of assistance. Today estimates put that figures closer to 274 million.

Accountability as a non-negotiable

There is widespread agreement that crises-affected people should be able to hold humanitarian organisations to account. Discord, where it exists, is not whether this should be the case, but how it can be facilitated and reinforced.

The Core Humanitarian Standard on Quality and Accountability (CHS), eight years old in December 2022, has provided the foundational framework that guides organisational capacity and decision-making, informing the sector what best practice looks like and then measuring its application. This dual function of the CHS, that it both sets the standard and also makes possible the verification of its application, is critical.

The Nine Commitments of the CHS promise crisis-affected people that the aid they receive:

- 1

Is appropriate and relevant
- 2

Is effective and timely
- 3

Strengthens local capacity and avoids negative effects
- 4

Is based on communication, participation and feedback
- 5

Welcomes and addresses complaints
- 6

Is coordinated and complementarity
- 7

Improves as organisations learn
- 8

Is facilitated by competent, well-managed staff
- 9

Comes from organisation that responsibly manages resources

Not only has it established a global understanding of what accountability practically is, but has given us the means by which to measure how accountable we actually are. When we look at the aggregated data collected by the CHS Alliance, the answer is: still not very. This despite a decade of global collective agreement that accountability is a priority. We talk a lot. We listen less.

The environment for providing humanitarian assistance is likely to get only more challenging: failing to instil a robust approach to accountability to crises-affected people now could risk failing forever. Failure is not an option. As the Inter Agency Standing Committee’s (IASC) Principals affirmed in their latest statement: “Accountability [...] is paramount and must be acted upon. It is non-negotiable, at all times.”

In the past decade, there is no denying that aid organisations have made efforts to become more accountable. Much of this hard work has paid off – great strides have been made, and this has been well documented in the report. Such improvements in the accountability landscape are not abstract: people affected by crises are recording significant and tangible improvements in their lived experience as a result of being more involved in the decisions which affect their lives.



Report key findings

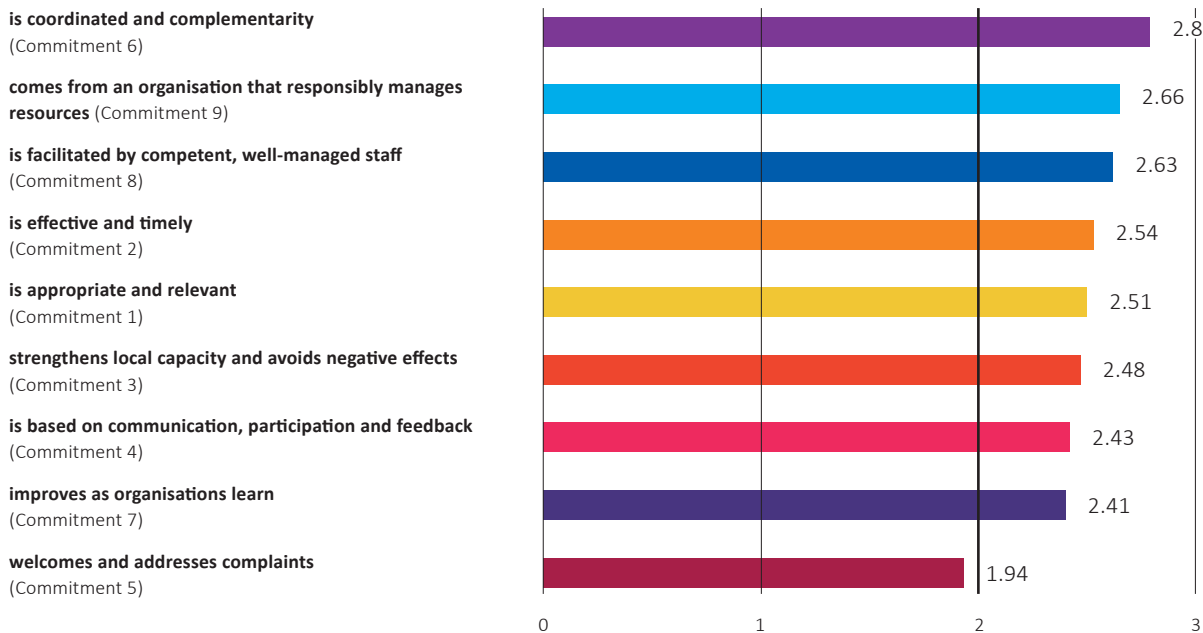
The HAR 2022 provides a “snapshot” of accountability, based on a compilation of verification data from 95 CHS-verified organisations (gathered between 2015 to 2021), along with a compilation of verification data from the 12 organisations that have completed a full four-year CHS certification cycle and gone on to be recertified against the CHS.

The data shows progress, and that progress is tangible, visible and meaningful. Yet, when the data is aggregated,

the stark fact remains; even the organisations most willing to measure and improve their accountability to people affected by crises are not yet reaching collectively a level that fulfils the requirements for any of the Nine Commitments of the CHS. There is some variation: Commitment 6 on coordination and complementarity is the closest to being met, Commitment 5 on complaints being welcomed and addressed the furthest from being fulfilled – a trend which has remained consistent through the years.

Figure 1: Average scores for all CHS-verified organisations, ranked by Commitment score

Communities and people affected by crisis can expect assistance that:



Source: Data from CHS verifications (all options) for 95 organisations from 2015 to 2021

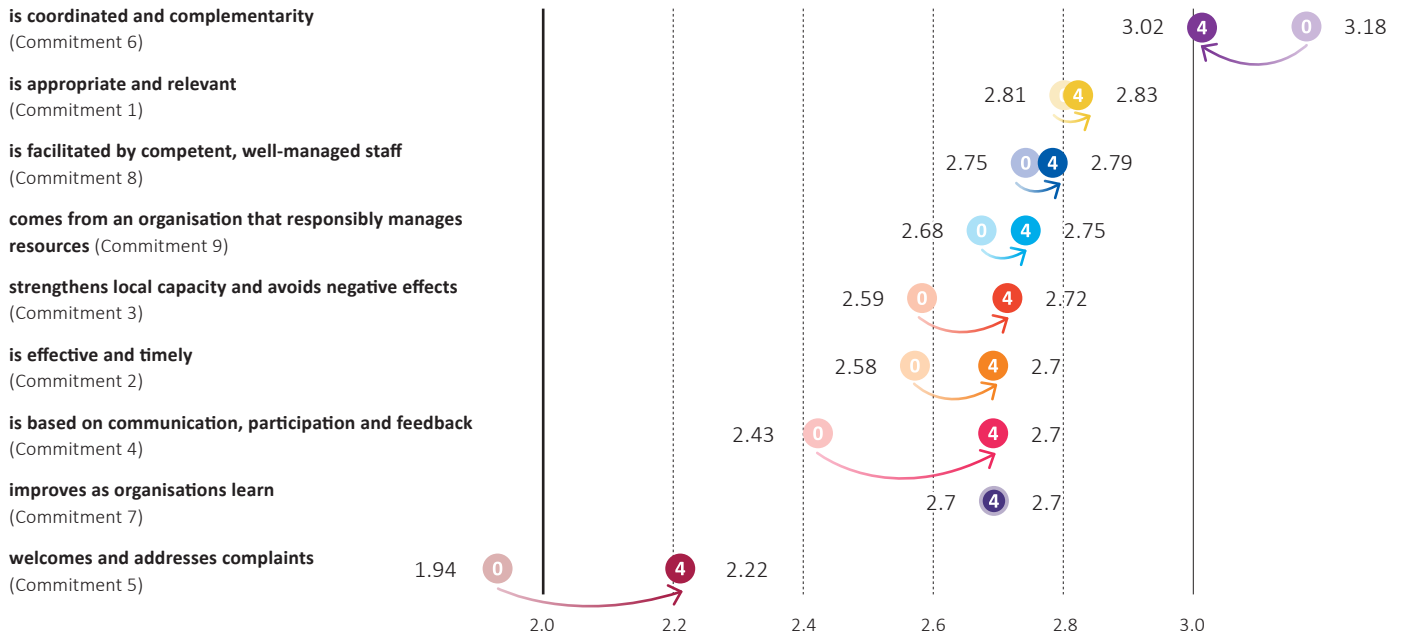
The positive news is that the organisations that have completed the CHS certification cycle show a clear improvement on seven of the nine Commitments, illustrating that dedicated and focused action by organisations ultimately improves their accountability performance.

This group of organisations have made the strongest improvements on some of the biggest challenges facing the aid system today. We see organisations getting better at welcoming and addressing complaints from those they assist. They also become better at communicating with – and listening to – people affected by crisis.

Figure 2: Average change in scores for CHS-certified organisations over a full cycle, ranked by Commitment score

Measuring change over time: average scores for CHS-certified organisations at the start and end of four years using the CHS

Communities and people affected by crisis can expect assistance that:



Source: Data from the 12 organisations that have completed at least one four-year CHS certification cycle. Scores shown are the average aggregated scores at the initial audit, compared to those at the recertification audit.

Key: 0 4 Year of audit

So, what's missing? What needs to change? We have identified **five thematic issues**, intimately linked to the successful application of the Nine Commitments of the CHS, on which the report focuses.

1 Organisational culture and leadership has a critical role to play in instilling accountability to people affected by crises. Leaders have begun to examine how to change their organisational culture to be more supportive and accountable, with a stronger duty of care and safeguarding approach. Leaders can no longer ignore structural power relations within their own organisations, and how this impacts their values, the diversity and inclusivity of the work environment, how staff are supported and – critically – what it means to centre their organisations around the needs of crisis-affected people.

2 Preventing sexual exploitation, abuse and harassment (PSEAH) is perhaps the most horrifying of accountability failures. While organisations have paid great attention to this in recent years, CHS verification data indicates that aid organisations, as a collective, are not yet fulfilling any of the requirements of the CHS PSEAH indicators. Although organisations have made systematic efforts to apply PSEAH best practice in their people management policies, there is a lack of participatory communication between organisations and crises-affected people on expected staff behaviour. Organisations in the CHS certification cycle have shown improvements on the lowest-scoring PSEAH indicators, indicating that aid organisations can improve their performance on PSEAH with a dedicated focus and an organisation-wide attention. Improvements are needed to increase political will and greater system-wide coordination and urgently bridge the gap between PSEAH guidance and practice.

3 Local and national leadership is critical when we are talking of increasing accountability to affected people. Positive in this direction is the fact that the highest scores of the CHS indicators are linked to promoting local and national leadership. However, the organisations in the CHS certification cycle have largely stalled in their progress, possibly reflecting the persistent inequalities between international and local actors and systemic obstacles. Urgent action is required by the aid system, notably donors, international non-governmental organisations (INGOs) and United Nations (UN) agencies to accelerate their commitments to localisation.

4 Inclusive action implies that all voices and needs of affected people are included in the decisions and interventions of aid organisations. The CHS data indicates that aid organisations are communicating through appropriate channels and in locally relevant ways to reach diverse communities, but are less able to act when inclusive action is negatively impacted. Aid organisations can become better sensitised to a wider range of vulnerabilities and must do more to include a greater diversity of people at all stages of the humanitarian response, as well as considering diversity in their own organisations.

5 Environmental issues and climate change are increasingly recognised as key contributors and root causes of crises globally. Aid organisations are making systematic efforts to ensure programmes improve the resilience of communities in the face of environmental degradation and climate shocks. However, aid organisations are less able to act when their programming negatively impacts the environment. Organisations need to do far more to respect and protect the natural environment, understand the implications of climate change and integrate this within their accountability commitments.

HAR 2022 ACCOUNTABILITY MANIFESTO



The 2022 HAR advocates for change through an Accountability Manifesto emphasising:

01 Learning, responding and – importantly – adapting to the views of crises-affected people needs higher prominence in all programming.

The engagement of people affected by crises in the decisions and actions that impact their lives is critical. Aid organisations need to better engage with people affected by crises and identify and act upon potential long-term negative consequences of their actions.

02 Engaged leadership for accountability.

Aid leadership needs to champion integrating accountability to people affected by crises in a whole-of-organisation approach. Leaders need to spearhead culture change in their organisations by creating caring and compassionate workplaces that reflect the values they promote in how staff are managed and supported. They need to lead by example with zero tolerance for inappropriate attitudes and behaviours of staff, volunteers and partners.

03 Accelerate accountability through local leadership.

This requires shifts in power, roles, business models, decision-making, the structure of aid organisations and efforts to continue to reduce the inequalities between international and local actors. The CHS offers a common, universal accountability framework that can be contextualised, and which is expected to improve as the CHS is revised and strengthened.

04 Driving a collective approach to accountability.

This requires the substantial collective and global effort of donors, INGOs, local/national NGOs, UN agencies and other multilateral organisations to make systemic changes to challenge unequal power dynamics and champion new systemic ways of working grounded in local realities. New ways of harnessing collective initiatives need to be scaled up with increased funding and far greater efforts to improve coordination and collaboration.

Accountability to crises-affected people risks becoming a slogan, a term that lives in the mind but can't survive in the light of the practical reality of delivering aid. Ultimately, accountability underpins effective programming: when we get accountability right, we get the response right. Accountability is practical and tangible to aid workers and is critical and meaningful to people affected by crises. We have the tools to deliver it, all that's needed is the will.



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