

Emergency Response Meta-Evaluation 2020-2024 Executive Summary



November 2024

This is the seventh meta-evaluation of emergency responses since the process started in 1990. This meta-evaluation covers a five-year period from 2020 to 2024 and seeks to identify good practice, areas where Concern's practice could improve, and make recommendations in relation to the implementation of future emergency responses.

After summarising the global humanitarian context and Concern's emergency responses, 48 evaluation reports that have been conducted in the five-year period of the review were analysed. Each evaluation was summarised against the extended OECD-DAC criteria and the organisational cross-cutting issues, constraints from the context or organisation, lessons learned, and recommendations. Evaluations are expected to have the extended OECD-DAC scored on a 0-5 point system; early reports used the previous 0-4 point system, but 40% of reports lack scores. Where there are no scores, or where the previous system was used, the meta evaluator has applied a score based on the text in the report, to better analyse how Concern is doing. Including an analysis of progress implementing recommendations from the previous meta-evaluation, recommendations are then proposed for the ongoing improvement of Concern's emergency responses.

The global humanitarian context in the last five years has seen the number of people in need generally increase, whilst the percentage of funding received through appeals processes has been falling. The 2024 Global Humanitarian Overview targets only 60% of those in need and is under 40% funded.

The **COVID-19** pandemic contributed to the deepest global recession in 2020 since the 1930s; combined with conflict and climate change, has driven serious increases in food insecurity. **Global food insecurity** remains virtually unchanged over the last 4 years, and much higher than pre-COVID-19 pandemic levels¹. About 10% of the world's population face severe food insecurity.

Global average temperatures and greenhouse gas emissions continue to rise, and in 2024 for the first time temperatures reached +1.5°C above pre-industrial levels². As a result, the number of **natural disasters** from 2020 to 2023³ were higher than the average incidence of the prior 20 years (2000-2019), in particular for floods and storms⁴.

¹ <https://www.fao.org/interactive/state-of-food-security-nutrition/en/>

² There is some disparity between measurement methods; and global temperatures do not smoothly increase from year to year, being influenced by natural climate variability. Scientists consider global temperatures over longer timeframes, typically a decade or more.

³ This report is being written in 2024. 2024 data not yet compiled or available for analysis.

⁴ www.emdat.be

Concurrently, the incidence of **armed conflict** is rising, as are conflict deaths (of both combatants and civilians). Of the 33,443 civilian deaths in armed conflicts in 2023, nearly 20% were in Ukraine and 70% were in Occupied Palestine and Israel.

Conflict is an important driver of **forced displacement**; at the time of writing there are a record 122.6 million displaced people. The largest number of refugees come from Syria and Afghanistan (6.4 million each), followed by Venezuela (6.1 million) and Ukraine (6 million). Sudan has the highest number of IDPs (9.1 million), followed by Syria (7.2 million) and DRC (6.7 million).

Concern launched 291 emergency responses from 2020-2023 (2024 data not yet available). Every Concern country programme has done at least one emergency response. DRC has done the highest number of responses (29 responses over 4 years). Pakistan delivered humanitarian assistance to more than 3 million people in 2022, responding to extreme flooding.

The single largest driver of emergency responses was **conflict**. 18 countries have responded to conflict at least once, and some countries (CAR, Ethiopia, Niger, and Sudan) have responded to conflict every year. Secondly, there were **COVID-19** responses in 17 countries in 2020. Thirdly 16 countries have responded to **floods**.

Unconditional cash, in 2020, was only used by 3 countries (Bangladesh, Burundi and Haiti), but by 2022 18 countries responded using cash, becoming the most widespread response modality across Concern countries for that year.

Only 14.5% of emergency responses have been evaluated, from 16 countries. More than half of these evaluations are from Syria, DRC, Somalia and Ethiopia. Only 50% of the evaluations correctly used the extended OECD-DAC criteria and applied the scoring system as per the guidelines; with the highest compliance from internal evaluations, and those from the Asia and Middle East regions. Stand-alone sections on cross-cutting issues are only featured in 20 evaluations. There is only one management response available – which is integrated into the text of the evaluation report.

Concern has largely been doing very well in emergency responses, with only a few shortcomings. The global combined score is 3.67.

Relevance and appropriateness scores 3.92. Responses were designed to address the immediate and important needs that were identified in various assessments. Concern is considered to be adaptable, and all projects have a CRM in place. Beneficiary participation in implementation is considered good in the majority of interventions, but less so in the design of responses.

Effectiveness scores 3.51. Most projects reach most of their targets, although in some cases the context was so extreme that outcome targets remained beyond reach (for example continued displacement in Chad and drought in Kenya). Concern is considered excellent in coordination.

Efficiency scores 3.45 – the lowest of the scores, driven down mainly by delays in procurement, payments or recruitment. Concern is considered to have efficient financial management. Local procurement efforts and digitisation are also appreciated.

Coverage scores 3.77. 16 reports specifically state the targeting criteria and approach was exemplary. Concern focuses on remote, underserved and insecure places, and

addresses the needs of the most vulnerable. Where there are exclusion errors, they tend to be people with disabilities, chronically ill, those with 'invisible vulnerabilities' or those that fall outside normal vulnerability criteria.

Coherence scores 4.06, the highest of the scores. Adherence to government policies and attendance at sector coordination meetings and compliance with standards (CHS, Sphere, INEE) are commonly recognised. PEER is only mentioned twice, indicating a potential concern regarding preparedness.

Impact scores 3.53. A very high proportion of projects achieve their goals or objectives (39 out of 48 evaluation reports). In some contexts the conditions are extreme enough that longer term impacts may not be feasible or attainable, but the projects are preventing the situation from getting worse. Better impacts are noted for longer term projects, and integrated approaches.

Connectedness scores 3.48. Linking emergency responses to longer term approaches tends to be done through working with partners (government or civil society), community capacity building or through integrated approaches. Other than projects that specifically focus on preparedness, future emergencies are rarely mentioned.

Cross cutting issues are less well evaluated. The most analysed is equality, with Concern good at understanding and addressing the needs of women and girls. Protection is often a specific objective of projects, and while reporting on protection mainstreaming is scarce it is well supported by head office. Accountability is well mainstreamed, with all projects having a CRM, and some of them becoming a feedback and complaints mechanism (FCRM). The main barrier to FCRM is community awareness of the system.

Conflict sensitivity is mainly applied regarding targeting. DRR mainstreaming is considered to be poor outside of projects that have specific DRR objectives. Very little mention is made of environmental impact, and HIV&AIDS is only mentioned three times across the 48 evaluations.

Concern responded wholly or partially through partners in only 10 evaluated projects, or 21% of them. Any expansion of partnership and localisation would be well guided by head office.

Key **strengths** of Concern's emergency responses are: increased use of integrated and multi-sector programming, working with government, coordination, working in consortia, working closely with communities, working with partners, and adaptable programming.

Core **areas for improvement** of Concern's emergency responses are slow systems (procurement, recruitment and payments) and sometimes slow data analysis by M&E teams. The PEER process, although kept up to date in almost every concern country, might also be a weakness. Common **constraints** are insecurity, COVID19, poor access infrastructure, changing economic conditions and government bureaucracy.

In **measuring up to previous meta-evaluations**, there has been no improvement in the proportion of emergency responses being evaluated. The systematic development and storing of management responses has gotten worse. The proposed annual 'mini-metas' have never been done. Compliance of evaluations with the guidelines is not improving either, although the recent update and re-issue of the guidelines may turn this around.

However, EmD has been more involved in emergency response evaluations, and PEER plans are being updated now in almost every country on an annual basis. The RDU has been revitalised and humanitarian training is being provided. How emergencies are classified in annual reporting has been updated. The GMS is helping to maintain institutional memory in high staff turnover contexts. Significant improvements in staffing and investment are seen in accountability and FCRM systems, and partnership and localisation support.

Recommendations for improving the evaluation of emergency responses are:

- Each RD to select at least one country per year to be evaluated (on top of other processes)
- Ensure project budgets have funding lines for evaluation
- EmD to have funds to commission or conduct three evaluations per year
- Update evaluation guidelines
- Remind everyone that might commission an evaluation of the guidelines
- Reject any evaluation TOR that does not follow the guidelines
- Require Country Management Teams to develop management responses

Recommendations for improving Concern's emergency responses are:

- Continue to strengthen feedback and complaints systems
- Improve community participation in design of emergency responses
- Strengthen qualitative monitoring
- Strengthen knowledge sharing and learning
- Move towards an organisational 'preparedness audit'
- Develop guidance and support for integrated programming
- Improve targeting to avoid exclusion errors
- Develop guidance for exit strategies
- Continue to support in-country advocacy within emergency responses
- Improve referral mapping and tracking
- Ensure SAL partnership advisors provide support to emergency responses