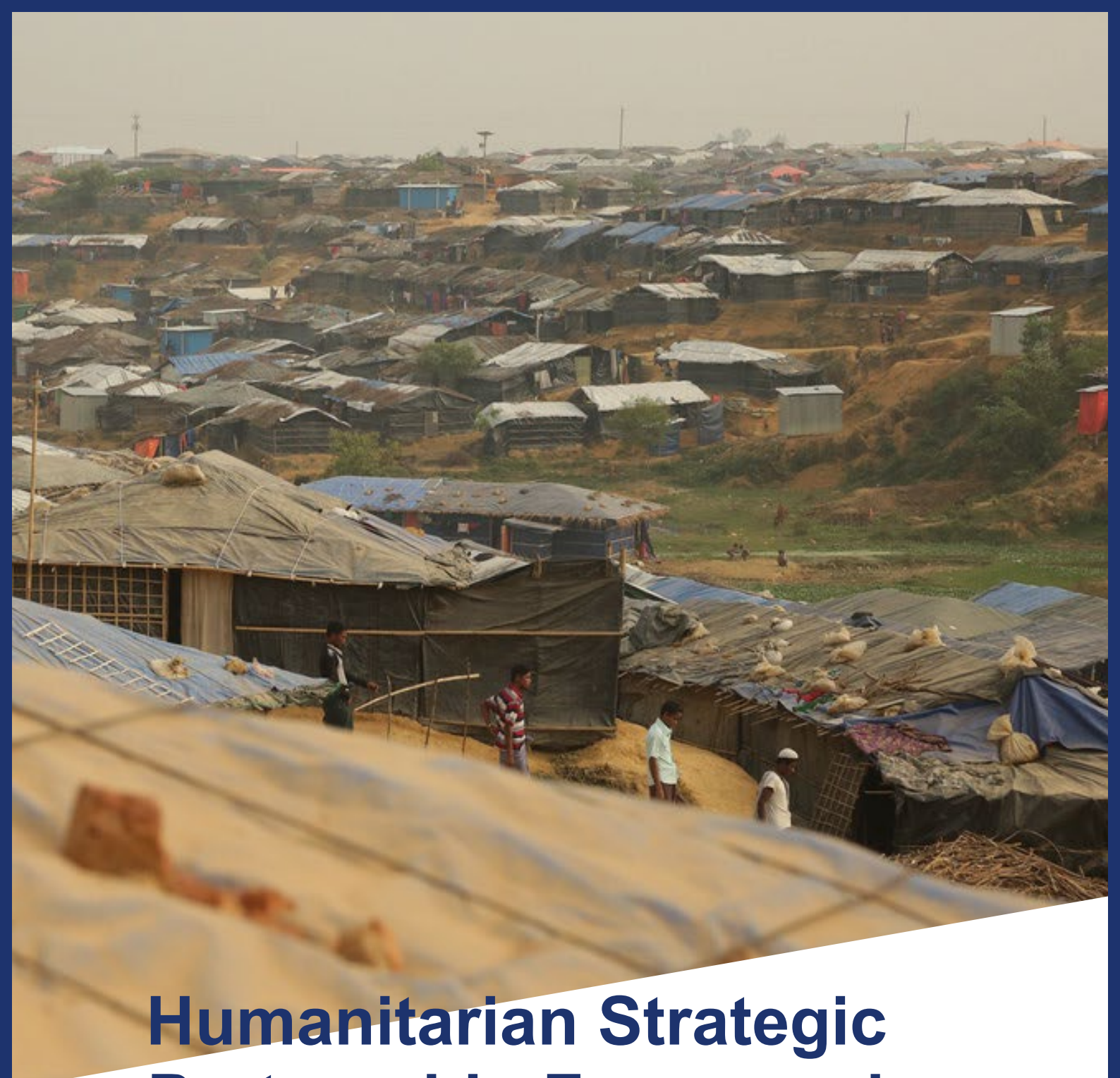




Humanitarian Strategic Partnership Frameworks

FINAL EVALUATION REPORT

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The views expressed in this report are those of the independent consultants, and do not represent the views of the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade or the Australian Government or any of the stakeholders interviewed for the evaluation.

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ABBREVIATIONS

Acronym	Full Form
AAP	Accountability to Affected Populations
CAA	Central Assurance Assessments
CBPF	Country Based Pooled Fund
CERF	Central Emergency Response Fund
DFAT	Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade
EOL	Exchange of Letters
FCDO	Foreign Commonwealth and Development Office
FTE	Full-Time Equivalent staff
GEDSI	Gender Equality, Disability Equity and Rights, and Social Inclusion
HIMR	Humanitarian Investment Monitoring Report
HLC	High-Level Consultation
HPD	DFAT's Humanitarian Division
HUS	DFAT's humanitarian section managing the partnerships discussed in this evaluation
IASC	Inter-Agency Standing Committee
ICRC	International Committee of the Red Cross/Crescent
IMR	Investment Monitoring Report
JPO	Junior Professional Officer
KII	Key Informant Interview
MEL	Monitoring, Evaluation, and Learning
MOPAN	Multilateral Performance Network
MPA	DFAT's Multilateral Performance Assessment
NACC Act	Australia's National Anti-Corruption Commission Act 2022
OCHA	Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs
OECD DAC	Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development - Development Assistance Committee
PC MELF	DFAT's Protracted Crises Monitoring, Evaluation, and Learning Framework
PPA	DFAT's Partner Performance Assessment
PSEAH	Preventing Sexual Exploitation, Abuse, and Harassment
SPF	Strategic Partnership Framework
UN	United Nations
UN SWAP	United Nations System-wide Action Plan on Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women
UNDIS	United Nations Disability Inclusion Strategy
UNHCR	United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees
WFP	World Food Programme

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

INTRODUCTION

The Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (DFAT) has commissioned Alinea International to evaluate the relevance, effectiveness, and efficiency of its humanitarian Strategic Partnership Frameworks (SPFs) between Australia and the World Food Programme (WFP); the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR); the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA), the Central Emergency Response Fund (CERF), and the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC). The findings and recommendations presented in this report are intended to inform future partnership arrangements with these organisations. Findings may have broader relevance to other SPF arrangements.

Context

WFP, UNHCR, ICRC, OCHA and the CERF are central to implementation of Australia's new Humanitarian Policy, which was released in October 2024.

This evaluation takes place in the penultimate year of the four-year term of the current phase of SPFs, amid significant reductions in global humanitarian funding and calls for donors to substantively re-think the way they fund multilateral agencies and humanitarian response. Globally, donors channel roughly two thirds of OECD-DAC humanitarian funding through multilateral agencies.¹ In 2024-25, Australia provided AUD300 million to WFP, UNHCR, ICRC, OCHA and CERF² which represents approximately 44 per cent of Australia's 2024-2025 budget estimate of AUD676 million for the humanitarian sector. The way in which donors fund these partners and incentivise performance matters.

About SPFs and EOLs

The modality through which Australia funds these partners is called SPFs. SPFs are non-binding frameworks which set out Australia's priorities, shared partnership objectives and deliverables, indicative allocations of baseline core funding, (and additional earmarked funding for the OCHA Regional Office), and other provisions including partnership implementation, governance, reporting requirements, and risk management. Current SPFs are multi-year and were signed in 2022.

Additional funding to countries, regions, or thematic priorities is provided through a subsidiary arrangement, called an Exchange of Letters (EOL). The EOL is a pre-agreed template annexed to the SPF which is used to engage partners under their respective SPF. The EOL can be used by any Australian government agency to provide multi-year, or one-off payments. It incorporates the objectives and safeguards of the SPF and includes additional, optional pre-agreed clauses.

The SPFs are intended to provide timely, predictable, multi-year funding to partners to strengthen the effectiveness and efficiency of humanitarian action, and to better influence and shape partner activities. In this way, they are also intended to meet Australia's commitment as a leading donor in applying the Good Humanitarian Donorship principles, in line with Grand Bargain commitments. The EOLs are intended to facilitate the disbursement of additional earmarked funding for specific purposes.

¹ Patrick Saez, Lewis Sida, Rachel Silverman, and Rose Worden. 2021. "Improving Performance in the Multilateral Humanitarian System: New Models of Donorship." CGD Policy Paper 214. Washington, DC: Center for Global Development. <https://www.cgdev.org/publication/improving-performance-multilateral-humanitarian-system-new-models-donorship>

² DFAT written advice 30 July 2025, applying the following methodology: the 2024 - 25 actuals are compared to the 2024 - 25 budget estimate (\$676m) (see Table 4 of the 2024-25 ODA Budget Summary on DFAT website). The humanitarian sector funding includes humanitarian funding from bilateral and regional programs. DFAT is still in the process of finalising sector data for 2024 - 25 actuals which is why 2024 - 2025 humanitarian actuals cannot be provided at this time.

Scope of the evaluation

The evaluation considers the five SPFs for UNHCR, ICRC, WFP, OCHA and CERF. It is not an evaluation of SPFs and subsidiary arrangements with other multilateral partners.

The evaluation focuses on the performance of the SPFs and EOLs as a modality for engaging the partners to provide humanitarian assistance. It is not an evaluation of the performance of the partners themselves. As such, there is flexibility within the evaluation to compare SPFs and EOLs against new policies and strategies that were not in place at the time of signing, for the purpose of informing future partnership arrangements.

Key Evaluation Questions

The evaluation sought to answer the following Key Evaluation Questions (KEQs):

1. To what extent are the SPFs aligned with current Australian international development and humanitarian programming policies and priorities? (RELEVANCE)
2. To what extent are the SPFs shared partnership objectives and deliverables being progressed? (EFFECTIVENESS)
3. To what extent are the SPFs an efficient financial, compliance, and partnership modality for DFAT and Partners? (EFFICIENCY)
4. What alternative modalities exist?

Methodology

This is a summative evaluation applying a mixed methods approach, combining key informant interviews, stakeholder surveys, a document and literature review, written inputs from DFAT risk and safeguard staff, and one illustrative case study concerning WFP and UNHCR in Bangladesh to facilitate a “deep dive” into the use of SPFs and EOLs for two partners at the country level. Gender equality and social inclusion dimensions were also considered throughout the evaluation. Overall, the Evaluation Team interviewed 51 DFAT and SPF partner stakeholders, analysed 60 survey responses, and received four written responses from DFAT risk and safeguarding staff.

Limitations

This is an unusual evaluation in that it evaluates the SPFs against Australia’s current policies rather than those which were current at the time the SPFs were developed. Discrepancies between SPFs and current policies should be interpreted as areas of focus for future partnership modalities rather than as evidence of poor performance by the current modalities. The evaluation has also required careful navigation to assess the extent of the progress of partner performance, while not assessing partner performance.

SPFs are only one of many tools that DFAT uses to engage and influence its humanitarian partners, and DFAT is not the only donor or factor affecting the effectiveness, efficiency, and relevancy of its partnerships. As such it is not possible to attribute progress in effectiveness, efficiency, and relevancy solely to the SPF itself.

Not all findings could be made with robust evidence given available data. The strength of evidence underpinning the KEQs is specified in the report.

The full analysis informing KEQ 4 was provided separately to DFAT to facilitate a frank discussion on the strengths and weaknesses of other donor modalities. Parts of KEQs 1.2, 1.3, 2.7, 3.3 and 3.4 were also provided separately as they contained discussion of confidential legal matters.

FINDINGS

Overview

SPFs are critical tools supporting DFAT's humanitarian objectives, enabling DFAT to provide high volumes of humanitarian assistance in short timeframes with limited staffing resources. This capability is essential to address urgent lifesaving need in times of crisis. SPFs effectively complement DFAT's global and country level engagement with partners and advocacy to progress humanitarian objectives. DFAT staff emphasised that without SPFs they would not be able to provide the volume of assistance in the timeframes that they have, and with the staffing resources available, with the requisite risk and safeguarding arrangements in place.

The evaluation found that overall, SPFs as a modality to provide funding to humanitarian partners, are relevant and efficient, and effective at supporting the management of risk and safeguards. They are likely to be effective at progressing shared partnership objectives and deliverables, though available evidence to evaluate this is mixed. There is opportunity to improve understanding of their effectiveness—while current systems provide evidence of activities to progress the SPF shared partnership objectives and deliverables, it is not possible to understand the extent of progress, or compare progress across partners or years.

Relevance

The evaluation assessed alignment of the SPFs with current Australian international development and humanitarian programming policies, priorities and commitments, with sub questions on alignment with current risk management requirements, and changes that may be required to ensure SPFs remain flexible and adaptable to broader DFAT policies, priorities, and commitments.

The evaluation found strong alignment with Australia's international development and humanitarian programming policies, priorities, and commitments, despite substantive changes to these over the life of the SPFs, indicating high levels of flexibility.

SPFs broadly align with current risk management requirements.

Current SPFs include a list of shared partnership objectives and deliverables that were negotiated separately with each partner. The breadth of these objectives has facilitated high levels of flexibility and adaptability. No changes are needed for the purpose of maintaining this flexibility and adaptability. Rather the challenge may lie in maintaining the existing levels of flexibility going forward, should DFAT choose to focus on progressing a smaller number of objectives in future arrangements. Minor updates are required to remove reference to superseded policies such as the response to COVID-19 and *Partnerships for Recovery*.

Effectiveness

The evaluation assessed effectiveness as progress against SPF shared partnership objectives and deliverables, of which there are 120 across the five SPFs. Sub questions focused on alignment with partner mandates, alignment with EOLs, and partner monitoring and reporting of progress. Further sub questions

inquired into the extent to which SPF strengthened partner performance and Australia's influence and international standing.

The evaluation found strong evidence of activities to progress many of the SPF shared partnership objectives and deliverables. Variation in data availability and reporting limited robust assessment of the extent of this progress. As such, available evidence does not enable an assessment of the extent of this progress with a reasonable level of confidence.

There is a diversity of perspectives among DFAT officers regarding whether the shared partnership objectives and deliverables are the outcomes that DFAT and partners most seek from SPFs. Partners are seeking predictable, multiyear core funding that enables them to rapidly access funds to deliver their mandates.

The way in which SPFs have been structured has facilitated partners to prioritise funding to meet critical and lifesaving needs. Partners reported strong alignment between the shared partnership objectives and deliverables and partner mandates. This underpins the ability of SPF funding to support partner priorities. Partners further reported that SPFs enabled their performance through the provision of flexible multi-year core funding. Partners emphasised how critical this has been to their operations and their ability to provide lifesaving assistance. They also reported that Australia's international standing and influence was bolstered through the multiyear core funding.

While DFAT officers largely agreed that SPFs supported their international standing, some believed that earmarked funding would increase Australia's influence of partner activities and performance. DFAT officers cautioned that a less flexible approach to funding would require an increase in DFAT resourcing to manage and monitor effectively. Having a documented list of shared objectives and deliverables supported DFAT's ability to advocate for progress irrespective of staff turnover.

Efficiency

The evaluation assessed the efficiency of SPFs as a financial, compliance and partnership modality for DFAT and partners. Sub questions focused on speed to finalise EOLs and provide humanitarian assistance, risk management, monitoring and reporting.

The evaluation found that once SPFs were agreed, funding through EOLs could be very quick (though it is not always the case), enabling DFAT to rapidly provide funding to humanitarian crises. The process was highly efficient for DFAT and the partner. Interviews with other donors indicate there may be even more efficient modalities available, should DFAT seek even faster and less resource intensive options to fund partners.

Inherent in these investments is a substantive resourcing investment to understand performance specific to the shared objectives and deliverables which must be resourced by either the partner or the donor. The responsibility and resourcing currently rest largely with DFAT.

DFAT officers reported that they could "not deliver their current humanitarian caseload without the SPFs." SPF partners cited the core funding in DFAT's SPFs as crucial in allowing organisations to respond quickly.

They described using core funding to launch crisis response in various contexts, including one partner who was able to respond within 24 hours of the 2025 Myanmar earthquake due to global core funding.³

The SPF and template EOL approach to risk management clauses has been effective in supporting standardisation of risk management across DFAT, supporting alignment with DFAT standards and policies. Partners generally reported no change in their management of risk, transparency, and safeguarding, and incident reporting as a result of their SPF, although there are some examples of change.

The SPF modality has, to some extent, supported efficient, consistent, and high-quality monitoring, evaluation and reporting for the purpose of understanding performance over the life of the arrangement. Some EOLs have supported high-quality monitoring, evaluation and reporting to a far higher extent.

As partners were not required to report against the shared partnership objectives and deliverables, they did not directly do so. DFAT commissioned an external provider to track progress in performance against the shared partnership objectives and deliverables through a Performance Arrangement and annual reports. The external provider reviewed public partner reports, MOPAN assessments, and any additional data provided by partners on request, to produce the Performance Arrangement reports.

The Performance Arrangement reports do not rate performance (as DFAT's HIMR and Multilateral Performance Assessment [MPA] processes do), which makes it difficult to compare data across years or partners, and understand whether activities have resulted in progress and improvements in performance. This gap in understanding performance may be addressed with the Multilateral Performance Assessment (MPA) process which is due to be reintroduced.

DFAT has had some success in negotiating EOLs which share the reporting responsibilities for country level investments with partners, with the added benefit that reporting may be received in time to inform DFAT's quality assurance processes. One Post reported it was particularly useful where partners completed DFAT's Protracted Crisis Monitoring and Evaluation Framework.

Alternative modalities

Consultations with other donors found that there is no perfect approach to multilateral partnership modalities. Donors consulted applied similar approaches to multilateral funding as DFAT, and calibrated their partnership modalities to their level of resourcing, strategic priorities, and risk appetite. Donor partners also noted that the humanitarian system was under extreme pressure and is being asked to do more with less.

The review of alternative modalities found the potential for DFAT to improve the efficiency of its partnership modality by frontloading key clauses in the main SPF and introducing a lighter-touch EOL or draw down mechanism for earmarked funding. However, DFAT would need to ensure sufficient time and resources to manage lengthy up-front negotiations, and weigh up the potential efficiency gains against reduced flexibility to tailor EOLs to country priorities.

Consultations with donors found that SPFs are only one part of the picture on effective multilateral engagement. Clear and consistent policy engagement, particularly when it is progressed with other donors, is likely to be the key factor in influencing multilateral performance. Donors noted the importance of more coordinated work on expectations and the need to continue to advocate strongly for partner's humanitarian mandates at a time when these are under significant pressure.

³ KII 36

Findings and recommendations

Finding 1: SPFs as a modality are relevant and efficient, and effective at managing risk. They are critical tools supporting Australia's humanitarian objectives, enabling DFAT to provide high volumes of humanitarian assistance in short timeframes within existing staffing capacity. There may be opportunity to explore modalities for more efficient funding transfers, with potential trade-offs including less opportunity to contextualise funding and the need to commit more funding upfront (or less core funding).

Recommendation 1: DFAT HPD retain SPFs or a similar modality to SPFs to engage humanitarian partners to deliver Australia's humanitarian objectives. Before entering into new arrangements, it is recommended that DFAT HUS review alternative modalities and provide an options paper to the appropriate DFAT senior management for decision, outlining funding, risk and policy impacts of proposed changes.

Finding 2: Available data indicates SPFs are likely to be effective. Partners are engaging in activities to progress SPF shared partnership objectives and deliverables, and core funding enables partners to respond quickly to lifesaving needs. Clear and consistent policy engagement, particularly when progressed with other donors, is likely to be the key factor in influencing partner performance, rather than the SPFs alone. Considering SPFs together with all DFAT's levers to influence performance is likely to improve effectiveness. Some of these levers represent policy-trade-offs that are currently unsettled and being considered⁴ within DFAT, such as the extent to which DFAT would like to support each organisation's own objectives or incentivise performance on DFAT's priorities.

Recommendation 2: DFAT HUS leads a planning process that considers all DFAT's levers for engaging with humanitarian partners, structures future arrangements and supports their implementation to maximise effectiveness. At a minimum, it is recommended this planning process:

- a. Define what DFAT would like to achieve through its partnership with these organisations.
- b. Determines whether DFAT's objectives are best achieved through an approach more aligned with Good Humanitarian Donorship, or whether DFAT would like to more actively manage the partnerships. Review and set resourcing in line with the chosen approach.
- c. Determine a small number of reforms or performance improvements that DFAT would like to focus on.
- d. Plan an approach that aligns with 2b across each of DFAT's levers, including the balance of core and earmarked funding, the balance between flexibility and relevance of priorities versus focusing on priorities for change, DFAT and partner staff resourcing capacity, DFAT's approach to Good Humanitarian Donorship and DFAT's approach to risk management.
- e. Seek opportunities to coordinate with other donors to progress shared priorities together.
- f. Translate this approach into clauses for negotiation with partners.
- g. Translate this approach into partnership engagement plans and elevate visibility of these plans across DFAT to support a common understanding of priorities and approach to engagement.

Should DFAT consider any alterations to existing SPFs, it is recommended that it do so with thorough consideration of the likely impact on people in need of lifesaving assistance, and for the partners themselves.

Should this not be feasible in advance of starting negotiations for new arrangements, it is recommended these steps be completed within the limitations of signed arrangements.

Finding 3: DFAT has implemented important systems to support the understanding of performance against the shared partnership objectives and deliverables. It does however remain difficult to identify trends in

⁴ DFAT written advice 30 July 2025

performance, and many DFAT officers find the current system to be resource intensive in terms of their time required to interpret the data (although at least one officer disagrees).

Recommendation 3: DFAT HUS strengthen SPF monitoring and performance systems including by:

- a. Determining how to best share reporting responsibilities between DFAT and the partner to support performance and Good Humanitarian Donorship principles, considering the current humanitarian funding context.
- b. Developing a monitoring and evaluation framework and plan that enables comparison of performance across partners and years, building on existing performance arrangements and MPA processes. Hold informal MPAs in the years that MPAs are not mandated.
- c. Prioritising a small number of indicators that DFAT requires and will be used for partnership management.
- d. Ensuring that all DFAT officers engaged in managing these partnerships work together to progress agreed policy priorities (supported through partnership engagement plans).
- e. Broadening the next mid-term review or evaluation to consider holistically DFAT's engagement with humanitarian partners funded by SPFs, including all levers for supporting partner performance. Emphasise forward-looking questions and processes to evidence recommendations that can directly inform new arrangements. Complete at least two years before the next arrangements expire, to inform sensitive and lengthy negotiations.
- f. Establishing an evidence base for the structure of its funding (core and multi-year v earmarked and single year) to inform decisions going forward.

INTRODUCTION

DFAT has commissioned an evaluation of the SPFs between Australia and key humanitarian partners, namely: WFP, UNHCR, OCHA, and its CERF, and the ICRC. The purpose of the evaluation is to assess the relevance, effectiveness, and efficiency of the current SPFs and provide concrete, actionable recommendations for future humanitarian funding modalities.

The primary users of the evaluation are DFAT's Humanitarian Division (HPD) and multilateral posts. Secondary users are geographic desks and posts.

This evaluation takes place amid significant reductions in humanitarian funding globally and calls for donors to substantively re-think the way they fund multilateral agencies and humanitarian response. Donors channel roughly two thirds of OECD-DAC humanitarian funding through multilateral organisations.⁵ As such, the ways in which donors fund multilateral organisations and incentivise performance matters.

Background and Rationale

Australia is a mid-size humanitarian donor. In 2024, Australia ranked 14th among OECD-DAC donors, providing USD3.3 billion in official development assistance, which includes funding for both humanitarian and development assistance.⁶ In 2023, Australia provided over a third (35.9 per cent) of its official development assistance (including humanitarian and development assistance) in the form of contributions to multilateral organisations.⁷

Partnerships with four humanitarian entities, WFP, UNHCR, OCHA and CERF, and ICRC make up a significant proportion of Australia's humanitarian funding. These partnerships are formalised through multi-year SPFs and their associated EOLs. Australia provided AUD896million to WFP, UNHCR, ICRC, OCHA and CERF from FY2022-23 to FY2024-25.⁸ Of this, 38 per cent was provided as core funding (SPFs), and 62 per cent as earmarked funding (EOLs).⁹

The timely, predictable, and flexible multi-year funding that SPFs offer to partners is intended to strengthen the effectiveness and efficiency of humanitarian action and enable Australia to better influence and shape partner activities. This funding model is also intended to consolidate Australia's reputation as a leading donor in applying the Good Humanitarian Donorship principles, in-line with Grand Bargain commitments.¹⁰

Current SPFs with WFP, UNHCR, OCHA, CERF and ICRC were signed in 2022 to enable a systematic, coordinated, and consistent approach to partnering with and funding multilateral and other humanitarian partners, and to secure more robust compliance and safeguards measures in alignment with Australian policy and laws. The SPFs include indicative allocations of baseline core funding over an initial period of four years, subject to budget appropriations. The Department of Home Affairs is a partner with DFAT to the UNHCR SPF. In addition to standard contractual clauses on funding, the SPFs include shared partnership objectives and deliverables, partnership implementation principles, clauses on risk management and safeguarding, and stipulations concerning performance and reporting. Shared partnership objectives and

⁵ Patrick Saez, Lewis Sida, Rachel Silverman, and Rose Worden. 2021. "Improving Performance in the Multilateral Humanitarian System: New Models of Donorship." CGD Policy Paper 214. Washington, DC: Center for Global Development. <https://www.cgdev.org/publication/improving-performance-multilateral-humanitarian-system-new-models-donorship>

⁶ OECD-DAC, DAC countries: ODA volume, 2024, accessed 21 June 2025, <https://www.oecd.org/en/topics/development-co-operation.html>

⁷ OECD-DAC, Development Co-operation Profiles: Australia, Contributions to multilateral organisations as a share of total ODA, Gross disbursements, per cent, accessed 21 June 2025, https://www.oecd.org/en/publications/development-co-operation-profiles_04b376d7-en/australia_b4d74d53-en.html

⁸ Financial data provided by DFAT 22 July 2025

⁹ Financial data provided by DFAT 22 July 2025

¹⁰ Australia's International Development Policy 2023. Australia's Humanitarian Policy, 2024. IASC, the Grand Bargain, <https://interagencystandingcommittee.org/grand-bargain>

deliverables vary across SPFs; there are 120 objectives in total (see KEQ 2: Effectiveness for further discussion). However, common themes across all SPFs include Australian policy priorities such as support to the Indo-Pacific region, and advancing gender equality, disability, social inclusion (GEDSI) principles. SPFs also include specific clauses which seek to improve reporting on performance and compliance with domestic legislation, including Australian counterterrorism and sanctions laws.¹¹ The SPFs are due to expire on 30 June 2026.

Partnership managers in DFAT's HPD provide day to day management and oversight of the humanitarian SPFs, in close collaboration with DFAT bilateral and multilateral Posts, policy, risk, and safeguarding sections.

Consistent with the principles of Good Humanitarian Donorship, DFAT has largely relied on partners' existing annual reporting and Multilateral Performance Network (MOPAN) joint-reporting¹² to track progress of the SPFs. In addition, DFAT's HPD has commissioned a baseline assessment and annual Performance Arrangement assessments for each SPF partner, and completed Central Assurance Assessments of OCHA, ICRC and WFP with FCDO.¹³ A pilot MPA was completed for WFP in 2024.¹⁴ DFAT will extend the pilot to all partners in 2025.¹⁵

EOL templates attached to each SPF enable the quick provision of funding earmarked for particular country, regional, or thematic investment, and reinforce the principles, objectives, and safeguards of the relevant, headline SPF to which they are attached. EOLs include standard clauses on funding, risk management, and safeguarding, alongside optional clauses which managers can include to require additional risk or reporting arrangements.¹⁶ Funding through EOLs can be multi-year or single payments. EOLs are mainly managed by DFAT Desks, Posts, or thematic teams, with support from HPD Partnership Managers. Reporting requirements vary, with some DFAT Posts and Desks incorporating specific reporting requirements and others relying on standard partner reporting (see KEQ 2.3 for further discussion). DFAT reports on EOL performance through Investment Monitoring Reports (IMRs), Partner Performance Assessments (PPAs) and Final Investment Monitoring Reports (FIMRs). Earmarked funding through EOLs comprised 65 per cent of funding expensed under this modality since the signature of SPFs in mid-2022.¹⁷

Evaluation purpose

The evaluation serves the dual purpose of accountability and learning. The evaluation is intended to provide a clear and independent record of the extent to which SPFs as a modality are fit for purpose, assessing the relevance, effectiveness, and efficiency of the current SPFs. It provides concrete and actionable recommendations to inform anticipated negotiations on future partnership arrangements.

The evaluation is tasked to assess:

1. **SPF relevance** in light of current Australian international development and humanitarian programming policies and priorities, including cross-cutting thematic issues,
2. **SPF effectiveness** in relation to the extent to which the frameworks can progress shared objectives and deliverables, and

¹¹ SPFs with WFP, UNHCR, OCHA, CERF, ICRC

¹² Noting ICRC's first MOPAN commenced in 2025

¹³ DFAT, Performance Arrangements for WFP, UNHCR, OCHA and ICRC 2022, 2023 and 2024. KIs 4, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 12, 13, 14, 19 and written advice 30 July 2025

¹⁴ DFAT, 2023-24 Multilateral Performance Assessment (MPA):WFP, internal unpublished report. DFAT, Australia's development program — performance assessment, accessed 21 June 2025, <https://www.dfat.gov.au/development/performance-assessment>

¹⁵ DFAT written advice 11 July 2025

¹⁶ EOL templates with WFP, UNHCR, OCHA, CERF and ICRC

¹⁷ Internal financial data provided by DFAT to the evaluation team in March 2025

3. The **efficiency** of SPFs as a financial, compliance, and partnership modality for DFAT and its humanitarian partners.

The evaluation also provides:

4. **Lessons** to be considered in approaches to future partnership arrangements, including other donor models and a case study of two partners (WFP and UNHCR) in one country context (Bangladesh).

Evaluation scope

The evaluation covers the period from signature of the current SPFs in June 2022 (WFP, ICRC, UNHCR, OCHA, CERF) to March 2025, though including funding amounts through to June 2025.¹⁸ It includes five SPFs with these partners and their associated EOLs. Since 2022, DFAT and its SPF partners have signed EOLs supporting 21 country-level operations in: Afghanistan; Armenia; Bangladesh; Cambodia; Ethiopia; Jordan; Kenya; Lebanon; Libya; Myanmar; Nepal; Pakistan; the Occupied Palestinian Territories (oPts); Papua New Guinea; Philippines; Sahel; Sri Lanka; Somalia; Sudan; Ukraine, and Yemen. EOLs have also funded thematic priorities including WFP's disability trust fund, OCHA's Anticipatory Action pilots in the Indo-Pacific, the CERF Climate Action Account, and the OCHA Office of the Special Adviser on Solutions to Internal Displacement, among others.¹⁹

The evaluation assesses program relevance, effectiveness and efficiency, while identifying lessons, to answer the following four key evaluation questions:

1. KEQ 1: To what extent are the SPFs aligned with current Australian international development and humanitarian programming policies and priorities? (RELEVANCE)
2. KEQ 2: To what extent are the SPFs shared partnership objectives and deliverables being progressed? (EFFECTIVENESS)
3. KEQ 3: To what extent are the SPFs an efficient financial, compliance, and partnership modality for DFAT and Partners? (EFFICIENCY)
4. KEQ 4: What alternative modalities exist?

The evaluation identifies lessons to be considered in approaches to future partnership arrangements, including other donor models and a case study of two partners in one country context. See the full list of sub-evaluation questions in the evaluation matrix at **Annex 1**.

The evaluation focuses on the performance of the SPFs and EOLs as a modality for engaging key humanitarian organisations to provide humanitarian assistance. It is not an evaluation of the performance of the humanitarian partners themselves. As such, there is flexibility within the evaluation to compare SPFs and EOLs against new policies and strategies that were not in place at the time of signing, for the purpose of informing future partnership arrangements.

Evaluation methodology

This is a summative evaluation applying a mixed methods approach, combining key informant interviews, stakeholder surveys, a document and literature review, written inputs from DFAT risk and safeguarding staff and one case study to facilitate a deep dive into the use of SPFs and EOLs for two partners at the country level. GEDSI dimensions were also considered throughout the evaluation.

¹⁸ DFAT written advice 11 July 2025

¹⁹ Internal financial data provided by DFAT to the evaluation team in March 2025

PHASE I: DOCUMENT REVIEW AND LITERATURE REVIEW

The evaluation assessed over 54 internal program documents and publicly available reports. Particularly important to the review were:

- The signed SPFs and EOLs, and relevant templates,
- DFAT thematic policies and strategies,
- Performance Arrangements, baseline and reports for 2022, 2023 and 2024, with a trend analysis of the quality of partner reporting against the information needs in the Performance Arrangements,
- Risk and safeguarding policies and practice notes, and
- Country level reporting for Bangladesh, including both DFAT partnership assessments and SPF partner reporting.

A full list of documents reviewed is at **Annex 4**.

PHASE II: INTERVIEWS, SURVEYS, CASE STUDIES AND WRITTEN INPUTS

Overall, the Evaluation Team interviewed 51 DFAT, Department of Home Affairs and SPF partner stakeholders (target: 30), received 60 survey responses (target: 52), and received four written responses from DFAT risk and safeguarding staff. The evaluation was able to achieve an acceptable balance of inputs from DFAT and partners, female and male-identifying respondents, and headquarter/multilateral and country/response-level informants. DFAT staff made up 47 per cent of key informant interviews (KIIs) and 38 per cent of survey respondents. 68 per cent of KIIs and 53 per cent of survey respondents identified as women, 37 per cent and 43 per cent identified as men, and 3 per cent preferred not to disclose.²⁰ Only 16 per cent of KIIs were from a response/country level. However, the Evaluation Team were able to balance this by conducting an in-depth case study of one response (Bangladesh), and over half (53 per cent) of all survey responses were from a country/response office.

Key informant interviews

The evaluation conducted a total of **51 key informant interviews (34 women, 17 men)** between 15 April to 31 July 2025 (target: 30 KIIs with 15 women, and 15 men). Interviews were semi-structured with new lines of enquiry added iteratively to triangulate and test early responses. Respondents for remote interviews were selected using purposive sampling to target respondents who were expected to have the most detailed knowledge of SPFs and EOLs and could provide the greatest insights on their relevance, effectiveness, and efficiency, alongside generating lessons for the future. As a result, stakeholders targeted for KIIs largely consisted of DFAT Canberra staff, multilateral Posts, and headquarter-level SPF partners. The Evaluation Team also interviewed three donor representatives, selected through a snowballing technique where SPF partners and DFAT multilateral Posts were asked to identify other donor representatives who could provide perspectives on alternative partnership modalities.

The evaluation achieved its target for interviews with SPF partners (12 interviewed, target: 12) and overachieved on the number of interviews with DFAT staff (28 achieved, target: 14) as many DFAT staff recommended additional colleagues who had insights or experience to share.²¹

²⁰ Interview and survey database for the Humanitarian SPF evaluation

²¹ Interview and survey database for the Humanitarian SPF evaluation

Surveys

The Evaluation Team developed tailored surveys for DFAT, WFP, UNHCR, OCHA/CERF, and ICRC. The survey was sent to all DFAT and Department of Home Affairs Canberra staff engaged in the management of SPFs and Posts in the 16 responses that have signed EOLs, based on a contact list developed by the SPF Evaluation Reference Group.²² Headquarter and response-level staff across SPF partner offices were also invited to respond to a survey tailored for each of the four humanitarian SPF partners (WFP, UNHCR, OCHA and ICRC). The invitation to participate in the surveys was distributed through donor focal points in each partner organisation.

The survey provided an opportunity for a rapid analysis of the experience of a broad range of DFAT staff and SPF partners and to identify differences in perceptions across the different categories of stakeholder staff. The surveys asked respondents to rank the extent to which SPFs were relevant, effective, and efficient compared to other available modalities using a Likert Scale. It also included open ended questions for respondents to provide advice or recommendations to improve current or future partnership modalities. For instance, the survey included questions on the extent to which stakeholders were familiar with, or had engaged with, Australia's SPFs to allow the Evaluation Team to analyse changes in perceptions according to the stakeholders' level of engagement.

Case study

The Evaluation Team delivered one case study (**Annex 2**) exploring SPFs and EOLs with WFP and UNHCR as part of the Bangladesh Rohingya and Host Community Humanitarian Investment. The country and partners were selected in consultation with DFAT, based on the focus on each of the SPFs on the Indo-Pacific region and the comparatively large amount of funding provided to Bangladesh Rohingya and Host Community Humanitarian Investment response, and to UNHCR and WFP in that context. The case study provided a deep dive to test, explore, and understand how the SPFs and EOLs were operationalised at the country level.

Written request to DFAT risk and safeguarding staff

The Evaluation Team received four written responses to a questionnaire sent to DFAT legal, risk, and safeguarding experts to understand the extent to which the current SPFs and EOLs align with Australia's risk and safeguarding policies and Australian legislation. DFAT staff were asked to provide advice on options to strengthen alignment between future partnership arrangements and Australia's risk standards, balancing this against Australia's commitment to Good Humanitarian Donorship. The Evaluation Team balanced this advice against the evidence on relevance, effectiveness, and efficiency gathered through other methods in developing recommendations to strengthen future partnership arrangements. Sensitive and confidential legal information has been provided separately to DFAT.

PHASE III: SYNTHESIS AND REPORTING

The Evaluation Team organised evidence from the document review, KIs, survey, case study, and written risk request against a structured analysis template which mapped early findings against each sub-evaluation question. The Evaluation Team then held analysis workshops to test the strengths and limitations of the evidence, triangulate evidence across data sources, identify gaps for follow up, and explore linkages across the different key evaluation questions.

The Evaluation Team ranked evidence on a scale of strong, adequate, or weak, based on the reliability of the source, and the extent to which it was validated by other evidence. Only strong evidence was used to

²² An Evaluation Reference Group was managed by DFAT to support the evaluation process, DFAT 11 July 2025

develop the findings, lessons, and recommendations in this report. Weak evidence was excluded from the evaluation, except to highlight key differences in opinion or misunderstandings which may impact on the overall effectiveness of SPFs as a partnership modality. Where differences of opinion existed, the evaluation has sought to clearly outline each and provide findings based on the evaluations team's judgement, drawing on the strengths and weaknesses of the evidence presented.

The Evaluation Team presented initial findings to DFAT in a sensemaking workshop on 27 May 2025 with seven DFAT humanitarian and program quality staff to test and validate early findings. The Evaluation Team incorporated feedback from the sensemaking workshop into the draft evaluation report. A second workshop discussing feedback on the draft evaluation report was held with DFAT on 1 July 2025, and comprehensive feedback provided to the Evaluation Team in writing on 11 July 2025. A final evaluation report was submitted to DFAT on 25 July 2025 with feedback provided on 30 July 2025 and a revised final evaluation report submitted on 31 July 2025. This final report is formatted for accessibility and for publication. Each version of the evaluation report was subject to internal quality assurance by Alinea International. The final evaluation report will be sent to partners and key stakeholders (including the Department of Home Affairs) for fact-checking prior to publication.

Limitations

SPFs are only one of many tools that DFAT uses to engage and influence its partners. As such, it is not possible to attribute evolutions in effectiveness, efficiency, and relevancy solely to the SPF itself. This caveat underpins all findings in the evaluation.

This is an unusual evaluation in that it evaluates the SPFs against Australia's current policies rather than those which were current at the time the SPFs were developed. Discrepancies between SPFs and current policies should be interpreted as areas of focus for future partnership modalities rather than as evidence of poor performance by the current modalities.

Not all findings could be made with robust evidence given available data. The strength of evidence underpinning the KEQs is specified in the report.

The Evaluation Team experienced the following issues but were able to adapt and mitigate the impact on the overall evaluation.

One of the four SPF partners chose not to send the survey to country/response level staff as they believed these staff would not have sufficient visibility over the modality to respond. The survey results and associated findings do not therefore reflect the experience of one of the SPF partners. It does, however, provide an indication to the Evaluation Team of how familiar partners are with the SPF modality at country/response level. Stronger than expected responses from other SPF partners meant that the evaluation exceeded the planned response rate from country/response level SPF staff (27 responses received, target: 16).

During data analysis, the Evaluation Team found that there was a high degree of overlap between *Question 1.1: To what extent are the current SPFs aligned with Australia's Humanitarian Policy, International Development Policy and associated strategies* and *Question 1.4: To what extent are the current SPFs compatible with Australia's international development and humanitarian commitments?* DFAT and Alinea International agreed to combine these questions in the analysis now presented under KEQ1.1.

Publication

DFAT and Alinea International agreed that confidential and sensitive data informing findings would not be published. This includes information subject to confidentiality requirements in the SPFs, sensitive discussions

related to legal issues not appropriate for publication, as well as other donor views on the strengths and weaknesses of their own partnership modalities. These have been communicated to DFAT separately.

KEY EVALUATION QUESTIONS (KEQ)

KEY EVALUATION QUESTION 1: RELEVANCE

To what extent are the SPFs aligned with current Australian international development and humanitarian programming policies and priorities?

The evaluation found strong alignment with Australia's international development and humanitarian programming policies, priorities, and commitments. This demonstrated high levels of flexibility within the SPFs given the substantive changes to Australia's policies over the life of the Frameworks. SPFs broadly align with current risk management requirements, with some exceptions particularly where there are new legislative requirements since SPFs were signed.

The Evaluation Team considers the strength of evidence informing KEQ1 to be high, as it draws on analysis of direct source material, interviews with experts, and DFAT review of draft findings.

1.1 To what extent are the current SPFs aligned and compatible with Australia's Humanitarian Policy, International Development Policy and associated strategies and commitments?

All SPFs demonstrate alignment with Australia's Humanitarian Policy, International Development Policy, and related strategies, including those focused on gender equality and disability equity and rights. The degree of alignment varies, reflecting differences in how explicitly these priorities are referenced within SPFs, rather than fundamental differences in their compatibility, substance, or intent. In many cases, alignment is implicit, rather than articulated through discrete text. DFAT reports that differences in the SPF clauses are a result of negotiations with partners to ensure SPFs reflect their specific mandates, the nature of their operations, and the preferences of their own policy and legal advice. DFAT accepted these proposed changes where they were considered consistent with the letter and spirit of the standard text.²³ While this provides a sound policy foundation, the result is that the depth, clarity, and consistency of policy coverage differs across SPFs.

To assess alignment, the Evaluation Team coded each SPF against a set of 51 Australian policy priorities and commitments, covering themes such as GEDSI, Indo-Pacific focus, and locally-led development, among others. From a benchmarked perspective, the UNHCR SPF demonstrates the strongest overall alignment at the policy level, reflecting clear coherence with Australia's priorities on gender equality, humanitarian action, and engagement in the Indo-Pacific. WFP's SPF also reflects consistent alignment across core policy areas, particularly in articulating Australia's Indo-Pacific focus. OCHA and ICRC SPFs show reliable alignment with humanitarian objectives and recognition of regional engagement. CERF's SPF presents the narrowest policy alignment overall, with comparatively less visibility of Australia's Indo-Pacific and disability inclusion priorities, although its humanitarian focus remains broadly consistent with DFAT's policy settings. This reflects the nature of CERF, as a global fund managed by OCHA to support UN agencies responding to the world's most severe humanitarian crises requiring international assistance.

The evaluation notes that all SPFs under review were agreed prior to the development of the current iterations of the International Development Policy, International Gender Equality Strategy, International Disability Equity and Rights Strategy, and Humanitarian Policy. This explains, for instance, why no SPF includes reference to First Nations' Peoples and approaches, or the commitment to climate action and investment level climate targets as detailed in the International Development Policy. Although DFAT's

²³ DFAT written advice 11 July 2025

Climate Change Action Strategy (2019) was published prior to the SPFs being signed, alignment with this policy is generally weaker than those concerning inclusion or humanitarian themes, which were able to draw on DFAT's pre-existing humanitarian and development policies and strategies, including on gender equality and disability inclusion. The next phase of SPFs provide an opportunity to integrate the new gender equality, First Nations Peoples and approaches, disability equity and rights, climate action and localisation objectives that are a feature of the International Development Strategy (2023). The extent to which DFAT chooses to integrate each of these new policies in new arrangements will need to be balanced against the benefits of prioritising a few objectives (see discussion in response to KEQ 2).

1.2 To what extent are the current SPFs aligned with DFAT's development risk management requirements, including for high-risk contexts?

The SPFs are mostly well aligned with DFAT's risk management requirements.

Chapter 8 of DFAT's International Development Programming Guide requires DFAT investment managers to include clauses and provisions in funding arrangements to manage the following risks: environmental and social safeguards, child protection, preventing sexual abuse, exploitation and harassment (PSEAH), fraud and corruption control, due diligence, and terrorism resourcing risk.²⁴

Clauses addressing environmental and social safeguards, child protection, PSEAH, terrorist resourcing risk and fraud control and anti-corruption are included in all five SPFs.²⁵ All five of the SPF's also include clauses that allow DFAT to conduct due diligence assessments every three years. Agreements with WFP, ICRC, OCHA and UNHCR, allow for earlier assessments if there is a "significant change to [SPF partner's] procedures and controls or operating environment."²⁶

1.3 To what extent are the current SPFs and their EOL templates aligned with DFAT's internal legal and reporting requirements?

As above, SPFs and EOLs mostly align with DFAT reporting requirements on fraud and PSEAH, child abuse and terrorism resourcing risk.

1.4 What changes may be needed to ensure SPFs remain flexible and adaptable to broader DFAT international development and humanitarian policies, priorities and commitments, in Australia's national interest?

The current SPFs include a list of Australia's strategic priorities and a list of shared partnership objectives and deliverables that were negotiated separately with each partner. These lists reflect pre-existing priorities of Australia and each agency, and have been effective in enabling SPFs to progress the various mandates and priorities of each partner. DFAT officers reported that these agreed clauses within SPFs were useful when advocating with partners to address policy priorities. There were no reports that DFAT was restricted in progressing a policy priority with a partner due to policy misalignment in an SPF or EOL.²⁷

Combined with the analysis in KEQ1.1 above, this indicates no changes are needed for the purpose of flexibility and adaptability of the SPFs and EOLs. The challenge may be to maintain the existing flexibility in any updates to the SPFs. To align more specifically with DFAT's updated policies, SPFs and EOLs may

²⁴ The IDPG includes an additional risk area – Partner Government Systems. However, we have not assessed that as it is not relevant to the SPF delivery modality. Written advice 20. Evaluation team review of signed SPFs and EOL templates with WFP, UNHCR, OCHA, CERF, ICRC, June 2025. DFAT International Development Programming Guide, September 2024, Chapter 8: Development Risk Management

²⁵ Evaluation team review of signed SPFs and EOL templates with WFP, UNHCR, OCHA, CERF, ICRC, June 2025

²⁶ Evaluation team review of signed SPFs and EOL templates with WFP, UNHCR, OCHA, CERF, ICRC, June 2025

²⁷ KILLS with DFAT staff

benefit from removing references to superseded policies such as the response to COVID-19 and *Partnerships for Recovery*, and consider the inclusion of priorities related to Australia's First Nations approach to foreign policy, alongside climate change commitments.

KEY EVALUATION QUESTION 2: EFFECTIVENESS

To what extent are the SPFs shared partnership objectives and deliverables being progressed?

There is strong evidence of activities to progress many of the SPF shared partnership objectives and deliverables. Variation in data availability and reporting limits robust assessment of the extent of this progress. As such, available evidence does not enable an assessment of the extent of this progress with a reasonable level of confidence. The Evaluation Team has considered multiple data sources to respond to each of the sub-questions. Evidence underpinning the remaining findings against each evaluation sub-question is considered strong unless otherwise specified.

The five SPFs collectively nominate 120 shared partnership objectives and deliverables. Themes common to all objectives and deliverables include GEDSI, localisation, and multilateral cooperation, with certain partners such as UNHCR and ICRC addressing more discrete themes (such as refugees and resettlement, and international humanitarian law) as result of their specific mandates. Almost half of all the 120 commitments use unique language, increasing complexity in tracking the progress of these commitments.

A Performance Arrangement and annual reports for each of the SPF partners were commissioned by DFAT to track progress in performance against the shared partnership objectives and deliverables. These Performance Arrangement reports, collated for DFAT by an external provider, draw from publicly available multilateral self-reporting, and additional reporting upon request, to assess performance against 23 standard indicators, which broadly align with the prominent themes of all shared partnership objectives and deliverables. These indicators were carefully selected together with DFAT and aligned with global reporting frameworks and DFAT reporting requirements.²⁸

In order to assess the extent to which SPFs shared partnership objectives and deliverables are being progressed, the Evaluation Team reviewed reports for progress in partner performance. The detail of the analysis is not provided in this report as the assessment of partner performance is outside the scope of this evaluation.

Performance Arrangement reports provide qualitative data that demonstrates partners are engaging in activities to progress many of the shared partnership objectives and deliverables. The results of the quantitative data are more mixed. The Evaluation Team analysed each of the nine quantitative indicators included in the standard Performance Arrangement annual reports for evidence of progress. Of these, seven had sufficient partner reporting to enable meaningful analysis. Review of these quantitative indicators from 2022-2024 found instances of progress, regression and no change. This does not necessarily indicate that there was not progress, as these indicators do not consider for example whether DFAT's funding to that partner increased or decreased that year, which would directly impact the numbers of people able to be assisted with DFAT's funding. As such, on the basis of the quantitative data, the Evaluation Team was not able to provide an assessment of the extent of progress with confidence.

DFAT's external partner managing the Performance Arrangements and annual reports conducted a rapid (in 8 days) trend analysis of the extent to which the individual partner's quality of reporting has changed

²⁸ DFAT written advice 11 July 2025 and IOD Parc Trend Analysis on DFAT Strategic Humanitarian Partners Reporting (2022-2024) Presentation

between 2022 and 2024. Its analysis differed from the Evaluation Team's approach above as it focused on progress in the quality of reporting, rather than progress in performance against the shared partnership objectives and deliverables. As such this data does not inform the assessment of progress against KEQ 2.

In monitoring performance of all of its humanitarian investments, DFAT has completed 232 HIMRs and PPAs since 2021.²⁹ While some DFAT officers sought to apply aggregate HIMR data³⁰ to assess progress against SPF shared partnership objectives and deliverables, others noted that attribution to SPF shared partnership objectives and deliverables is too weak for this to be informative.³¹ This is because aggregate HIMR data and additional aggregate reporting:³²

- Includes country-level funding provided through EOLs but excludes all SPF core funding (as DFAT exempts partner core funding from PPAs and HIMR quality assurance processes), and
- Includes all investment level humanitarian partners beyond SPF partners, including other multilaterals (IOM, UNFPA, UNICEF) and non-government organisations outside the scope of this evaluation.

PPA data also excludes all SPF core funding, and all partnerships under AUD3 million. The Evaluation Team does not consider the HIMRs or PPAs to provide a more robust assessment of performance against the shared partnership objectives and deliverables of the SPFs than the Performance Arrangement reports. In addition to the limitations listed above, HIMRs and PPAs apply a different criterion to the shared partnership objectives and deliverables. The team has however reviewed HIMR data for completion and on DFAT request. It found that aggregate HIMR scores for DFAT's HPD investments (compiled by an additional external provider for the period 2023–2024)³³ indicated generally strong performance across key criteria. In 2024, HPD investments improved compared to 2023 in the areas of gender equality, protection, efficiency, and effectiveness. However, performance declined on disability equity and connectedness over the same period.³⁴ High average performance scores across HPD programs may suggest that SPF-associated investments have likely progressed in ways that are aligned with the shared partnership objectives and deliverables, however this statement is made with weak confidence.

2.1. To what extent are the shared objective and deliverables documented in the SPFs aligned to partner mandates?

The shared objectives and deliverables documented in the SPFs are highly aligned to partner mandates. Around half of the 120 shared partnership objectives and deliverables contain common themes and language, particularly related to GEDSI, an Indo-Pacific focus, localisation, and multilateral cooperation (see KEQ 2 for further discussion). However, the remaining 60 commitments contain specific language which is tailored to partner mandates. Examples include a focus on refugees and resettlement in the UNHCR SPF which aligns with Home Affairs' equities as a partner to the UNHCR SPF,³⁵ and a shared objective to support international humanitarian law under the ICRC SPF.³⁶

Partners reported a very high degree of alignment between the SPF strategic objectives and their own mandates, both through the survey and key informant interviews. For instance, 29 of 36 SPF partners

²⁹ DFAT written advice 11 July 2025

³⁰ DFAT Initial Findings Workshop and written advice 11 July 2025

³¹ DFAT written advice 11 July 2025

³² Additional aggregate reporting includes: Praxis Consultants, 2025. *DFAT Humanitarian Investments: Gender Equality, Disability Inclusion and Localisation Assessment*, 2023; Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade, 2024. *2022/23 Humanitarian Spend Dashboard*; Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade, 2024. *HPD-Managed Investments, 2022-23 Performance Data*.

³³ Bluebird Consultants, 2024. *Synthesis of Humanitarian Investments from 2024 Quality Reports*.

³⁴ Ibid.

³⁵ DFAT written advice 11 July 2025

³⁶ Evaluation team review of signed SPFs and EOL templates with WFP, UNHCR, OCHA, CERF, ICRC, June 2025

surveyed said the objectives were “very aligned” to their mandates and six said they were “partially aligned” (one reported they “did not know”).³⁷ Survey responses included the following from a senior operations coordinator for an SPF partner (May 2025):

The SPF and EOL are fully aligned with [our organisation’s] strategic priorities and make an important contribution to the protection of, and services delivered to, the recipients.

2.2 To what extent are partners monitoring and reporting progress against the shared objectives and deliverables documented in the SPF?

By design and as specified in the SPFs themselves, partners do not monitor and report progress directly against the shared partnership objectives and deliverables documented in SPFs. Instead, SPFs include standard clauses which note that partners’ “own monitoring and evaluation systems will form the principal basis for performance monitoring and reporting” under the frameworks (see further discussion at KEQ 3.5). Partners therefore do not monitor and report specifically against the shared objectives and deliverables as documented in the SPFs for global core funding, or for country level response funded through EOLs.

At the global level, this means DFAT has taken on the responsibility for interpreting organisations’ public annual reports against the shared partnership objectives and deliverables. DFAT has commissioned an external provider to extract and interpret available data from each partner’s global annual reports, compiled as Performance Arrangement reports. Further information is detailed in the response to KEQ 2 above, and discussed again in KEQ 3.5 below.

DFAT staffs’ survey responses also indicated variable views about the utility and quality of existing SPF reporting. When asked to “what extent have SPFs contributed to more consistent and high-quality monitoring, evaluation and reporting from partners?” 35 per cent of respondents indicated that SPFs had made reporting “much” or “slightly” better, while the remaining 65 per cent registered either that SPFs had made “no impact” or that they “don’t know”. Likewise, when asked “how useful is the current reporting you receive from partners?” 48 per cent of DFAT staff indicated that SPF reporting was “somewhat” useful, while a further 9 per cent suggested the reporting was “somewhat not useful” and the remaining 43 per cent indicated they “don’t know”.

Both DFAT and SPF partners questioned whether SPFs were intended as a performance measurement tool. SPF partners reported that there was “already a very high degree of alignment between the SPF and agency objectives”³⁸ and, for instance, that their internal “quality assurance measures are constantly being approved and refined. It is not just linked to a single donor; it is more of a global/broader response to assurance.”³⁹ Around a third of DFAT staff interviewed by the Evaluation Team reported that the SPFs and EOLs were primarily a tool for efficient aid delivery and that performance was managed through other mechanisms.⁴⁰

2.3 To what extent do the EOLs address the shared objectives and deliverables documented in the SPFs?

The answer to this question depends upon whether the reader expects the shared objectives and deliverables documented in the SPFs to be repeated in the EOLs. EOLs directly address shared objectives and deliverables documented in the SPFs in the sense that EOLs are an instrument to implement the SPFs and are intended to be read together with the SPF.⁴¹ In this sense, they address the shared objectives and

³⁷ Survey, May 2025. KII 27, 33, 34, 35, 36

³⁸ Survey respondent ID8, country/response office, May 2025

³⁹ Survey respondent ID16, headquarters official, May 2025

⁴⁰ KII 7, 9, 24,

⁴¹ KII 25

deliverables to a great extent, and do not contradict the SPF shared objectives and deliverables. However, EOLs do not repeat the shared objectives and deliverables in the EOL main template text. A comprehensive review of all SPFs, templates, and signed EOLs sighted by the design team demonstrated that EOLs can include operational interpretations of some of the shared objectives and deliverables through optional clauses. In this sense, EOLs can address the shared objective and deliverables to some extent. For example:

Table 1: Extent to which EOLs address the shared objectives and deliverables in SPFs

WFP SPF Shared Partnership Objective and Deliverable	WFP EOL optional clause
a) Effective implementation of the <i>UN System-wide Action Plan on Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women (UN SWAP)</i> and <i>Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action</i> , as well as the <i>WFP Gender Policy 2026</i>	This program of work will embed targeted protection initiatives that seek to address the needs of people through their active participation in decisions that affect their lives, including women, children, the elderly, youth, peoples with disabilities and marginalised groups <i>through...</i> (list). This program of work will establish and prioritise mechanisms that prevent and respond to sexual and gender-based violence for women and girls, particularly those in marginalised groups. Reporting will disaggregate data by sex and age and disability, and include data that evidence: a. strengthened inclusion of women and girls and people with disabilities;

DFAT and partner managers of investments implemented through EOLs do not always consider SPFs in day-to-day operations.⁴² For example, an in-country representative of a partner reported they had not sighted the SPF nor its shared objectives and deliverables, despite supporting the negotiation of the EOL.

2.4 To what extent have the documented partnership implementation activities agreed in the SPF been undertaken?

DFAT and SPF partners have achieved strong progress in partnership implementation activities related to engagement in boards and governance processes and regular interaction via multilateral Posts and headquarter focal points. Australia has also engaged with SPF partners in Indo-Pacific regional offices and at country level where Australia has a strong bilateral investment. These partnership implementation activities are key to influencing for partner performance (see KEQ 2.5). Australia has made mixed progress on High Level Consultations (HLC) and participation in field visits, though DFAT officers note that alternative senior level engagement has been planned and taken forward.⁴³

Each of the SPFs contain five main partnership implementation activities, except for the CERF SPF which contains only two commitments (participation in governance processes and regular interaction via multilateral

⁴² KII 30, 31, 32

⁴³ KII 6, 7, 9, 10, 15, 16, 17, 23, 27, 34, 36. Written feedback received June 2025. DFAT, Multilateral Placements Program, accessed 13 June 2025, <https://www.dfat.gov.au/international-relations/international-organisations/un/multilateral-placements-program>. Written feedback received 11 July 2025.

Posts and focal points). The WFP and UNHCR SPF also contain an additional commitment to second Australian personnel to partner staff. Table 2 below provides further detail.

Table 2: Progress in partnership implementation activities

Partnership implementation activity	Included in SPFs with	Progress
Active participation in Boards/Governance processes	WFP, ICRC, OCHA, UNHCR, CERF	Achieved
Regular interaction via Australian multilateral posts and focal points	WFP, ICRC, OCHA, UNHCR, CERF	Achieved
Formal High-Level Consultations	WFP, ICRC, OCHA, UNHCR	Mixed progress: One formal High-Level Consultation plus high-level visits
Engagement, dialogue and partnership at the regional and country levels	WFP, ICRC, OCHA, UNHCR	Strong engagement with Indo-Pacific regional offices and countries with a strong Australian diplomatic presence Limited in other contexts, consistent with SPFs' Indo-Pacific priority. ⁴⁴
Secondment and Junior Professional Officer (JPO) Programme opportunities to place Australian Government officials, Australia Assists specialists and Australian volunteers to WFP's operations and offices	WFP and UNHCR	The WFP JPO has been deployed and the UNHCR JPO has been recruited. ⁴⁵
Joint field visits	WFP, ICRC, OCHA, UNHCR	Minimal involvement (two trips attended)

Neither DFAT nor SPF partner reporting tracks the extent to which the partnership implementation activities in the SPFs have been progressed.⁴⁶ However, KIIs with DFAT and SPF informants reported strong progress in ongoing engagement in SPF partner board and governance processes and via multilateral Posts and headquarter focal points. Australia also engages strongly in dialogue with SPF partners in Pacific regional offices and in key countries where Australia has a strong presence, such as Bangladesh, Myanmar, Lebanon, Jordan, and Pakistan.⁴⁷

⁴⁴ DFAT written advice 30 July 2025

⁴⁵ DFAT written advice 30 July 2025

⁴⁶ Evaluation team review of Performance Arrangement data for ICRC, WFP, UNHCR and OCHA for 2022, 2023 and 2024

⁴⁷ KII 6, 7, 9, 10, 15, 16, 17, 23, 27, 34, 36

The remaining objectives have not been progressed to the same extent. Australia has held only one formal HLC with SPF partners since the agreements were signed (with ICRC). However, DFAT reported they took alternative approaches to engaging at high levels across the period under review. For instance, DFAT hosted visits by the head of WFP in 2022, the head of UNHCR in 2023, and other senior level consultations with ICRC. DFAT staff reported that regular official level engagement may offer more value than HLCs because it allows for more in-depth discussion on performance issues.⁴⁸ However, several partner staff reported that more HLCs would help to strengthen partnership implementation by providing more regular opportunities to agree on, and refocus, strategic priorities.⁴⁹

Since mid-2022, Australia has attended just two of the annual official joint field visits organised by humanitarian SPF partners (with OCHA and UNHCR, each in 2023).⁵⁰ DFAT staff reported that there would be considerable benefits for Australia in attending these visits, both to build DFAT's understanding of the operational and contextual constraints that SPF partners are addressing, and to build networks and strengthen collaboration with other humanitarian multilateral donors. However, budget constraints and challenges acquiring security approval for travel to high-risk contexts were consistent barriers preventing Australia from attending field visits.⁵¹

2.5 To what extent have SPFs as a modality influenced individual partner performance globally and at country level?

The broad nature of SPFs has facilitated their flexibility and relevance, and enabled partners to work towards their own priorities for effective humanitarian action.⁵² SPFs as a contracting modality provide a broad range of hooks that DFAT staff can leverage to progress policy and risk discussions on a broad range of issues, including ongoing Australian engagement on GEDSI and the Indo-Pacific region (KEQ 2.6). SPFs do allow Australia to invest quickly in new crises that matter to Australia (KEQ 3.2) and play a key role in driving risk discussions with partners (KEQ 3.3). However, SPFs on their own do not influence performance. This requires broader and consistent engagement with partners for which the SPFs provide a framework (per Table 2, KEQ 2.4). Because the current framework is so broad and flexible, it is not always clear to partners, or even DFAT staff, on exactly what changes Australia wants to see.

At the global level, and as discussed above, both DFAT and SPF partners reported that having a large number of priorities documented in the shared objectives and deliverables enabled discussions on performance regarding any of these issues, especially with turnover in SPF management teams on both sides.⁵³ The objectives were an “important hook that allows staff to push for various clauses” (KEQ 2.6).⁵⁴

However, the ability for SPFs to influence partner performance has been limited. The SPFs and EOLs do not define what performance improvements Australia expected to see or how to measure progress towards these changes (KEQ 2.2).⁵⁵ Some DFAT Canberra staff reported that this ambiguity allowed SPF partners to “agree to objectives without the need to follow through.”⁵⁶ For instance, a DFAT official noted:

*“Partners already feel Australia has a lot of asks, and often seek prioritisation on what Australia really wants them to focus on. **Australia is not really able to articulate that to them.** It’s an interesting time to be doing that work. We’re conscious that demands will increase on partners in a very*

⁴⁸ Written feedback received June 2025

⁴⁹ KII 27, 34, 35, 36

⁵⁰ KII 6, 7, 9, 10, 15, 16, 17, 23, 27, 34, 36

⁵¹ KII 6 and 35

⁵² KII 4, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 12, 13, 14, 27, 29, 33, 34, 35, 36

⁵³ KII

⁵⁴ KII 13

⁵⁵ Evaluation team review of SPF and EOL templates, April to May 2025. KII 2, 4, 12, 13, 14

⁵⁶ KII 4, 12, 13

underfunded system. ... a lot of partners will need to pull away from Australia's reform priorities to deliver basic lifesaving assistance. We are sensitive to that as well moving forward. We will need to do more with less.

It may be worth revising existing expectations."

Australia provides multi-year core funding to enable partners to deliver against their Strategic Plans⁵⁷ and measures performance against SPF shared partnership objectives and deliverables. SPF partners and DFAT had divergent views on the extent to which the multi-year, core funding contained in the SPFs improved partner performance. SPF partners reported that predictable core funding was critical to agency performance by allowing them to allocate financing to their own priority areas (including advance financing or against internal advances)⁵⁸ and reducing the resources needed for contract management, increasing those available for delivery.⁵⁹ However, some DFAT respondents reported that core funding reduced Australia's ability to push for performance. They noted that earmarked funding and standalone agreements would greatly increase Australia's ability to incentivise performance on priority areas, but that this would require a significant increase in DFAT resourcing in order to drive this change.⁶⁰ For instance, a DFAT officer noted that:

"SPFs are all carrot, no stick. While this gives Australia a good reputation as a flexible donor, it limits our capacity to drive change."

Almost half of all DFAT staff surveyed (11 of 23) did not know whether SPFs influenced partner performance at the global level. Views on influence at the country level were slightly more positive, but only 4 out of 23 respondents thought SPFs and EOLs influenced partner performance "very much". Instead, most respondents reported that SPFs influenced partner performance "a little" or "somewhat" at the global level (10 of 23 respondents) and the country level (11 of 23 respondents).⁶¹

Engagement in the Indo-Pacific

The Evaluation Team found limited evidence to suggest that SPFs influenced increased partner engagement in the Indo-Pacific, beyond earmarking that directly restricts funding to the region. SPF partners were well aware of Australia's focus on, and advocacy for, the Indo-Pacific region but attributed this to consistent Australian policy engagement rather than the influence of SPFs in particular.⁶²

Similar to the overall view on whether SPFs influenced partner performance, almost half of all DFAT officers who responded to the survey thought that the humanitarian SPFs were a "little" or "somewhat" useful as a modality to achieve Australia's strategic priority of a stronger Indo-Pacific focus among SPF partners (11 of 23 respondents), but only 2 of 23 thought they helped "very much" (7 of 23 reported they "did not know").⁶³ DFAT's management of a WFP multi-year EOL in Bangladesh is a good example of how the modality was able to support effective performance in the Indo-Pacific. DFAT was able disburse one tranche of funding early and provide additional assistance. With the support of other donors this meant WFP was able to avert a ration cut from USD12.50 per person per month to USD6 per person per month in early 2025.⁶⁴

⁵⁷ DFAT written advice 11 July 2025

⁵⁸ DFAT written advice 11 July 2025

⁵⁹ KII 27, 30, 31, 34, 35, 36

⁶⁰ KII 4, 14, 15, 24

⁶¹ Survey question 2.5, 2.5.1 and 2.5.2, response from DFAT humanitarian SPF partnership managers, multilateral Posts, desks and bilateral Posts which have used SPFs/EOLs, May 2025

⁶² KII 27, 33, 34, 35, 36

⁶³ Survey question 8a, response from DFAT staff involved in SPFs and EOLs, May 2025

⁶⁴ KII with WFP Bangladesh

Engagement on GEDSI

DFAT respondents also thought that SPFs were “a little” or “somewhat” useful for progressing DFAT’s gender equality (15 of 23) and disability equity and rights strategic priorities (16 of 23), but only one respondent reported that they helped “very much”.⁶⁵ Performance Arrangement reports for 2022-24 found clear evidence of activities designed to address GEDSI, however it is not possible to track the extent to which progress was achieved (e.g., see KEQ 2).

SPF partnership managers in WFP, UNHCR, ICRC and OCHA were well aware of Australia’s priorities in this area but largely cited sustained Australian policy engagement and advocacy as the reason for their awareness rather than the SPFs (KEQ 2.6).⁶⁶

2.6 To what extent have SPFs strengthened Australia’s influence and international standing?

DFAT and partners report that providing multi-year, flexible core funding through SPFs increases the visibility of Australia’s contribution to the multilateral system and supports DFAT’s international standing as a principled and pragmatic donor.⁶⁷ The value of the core, multi-year funding reported by partners cannot be overstated.⁶⁸

DFAT officers in Canberra and at Post reported that providing multi-year, flexible core funding, explicit in SPFs, increases the visibility of Australia’s contribution to the multilateral system and positions Australia as a principled contributor to the global humanitarian system.⁶⁹ SPF partners unanimously reported that Australia’s SPFs, in particular the unearmarked, multi-year core funding put Australia in the top tier of donors applying Good Humanitarian Donorship principles and contributed to Australia’s reputation as a pragmatic and responsive partner.⁷⁰

The evidence on whether Australia was able to leverage its good standing for influence was more mixed. DFAT respondents cautioned that the system was still “pay to play”. For example, donors need to make a minimum contribution to earn a seat on the board of multilateral humanitarian partners. The proportion of Australia’s financial contribution, the strength of its engagement at the headquarter and country level, and how hard DFAT chooses to push on particular policy priorities were instead seen as the key factors in driving influence.⁷¹ SPF partners were quick to point out that agency-wide strategies and performance standards set by executive boards or their equivalent were the key factors influencing agency performance.⁷² DFAT staff in both Canberra and at Post reported that they believed Australia could gain more influence from its SPF funding than it currently was, but this would require a commensurate investment in policy coordination across Canberra and Posts, and stronger Australian engagement for example in HLCs and field visits.⁷³

2.7 What changes may be needed to strengthen coherence between core funding through SPFs and country funding through the EOLs?

There is no evidence of incoherence between SPFs and EOL templates, including EOL template optional clauses, as written. This is because EOLs are subject to the terms and conditions of the SPFs unless

⁶⁵ Survey question 2.5, 2.5.1 and 2.5.2, response from DFAT humanitarian SPF partnership managers, multilateral Posts, desks and bilateral Posts which have used SPFs/EOLs, May 2025

⁶⁶ KII 27, 33, 34, 35, 36

⁶⁷ KII 11, 12, 14, 15, 17, 24, 25, 26

⁶⁸ KII 27, 34, 35, 36

⁶⁹ KII 11, 12, 14, 15, 17, 24, 25, 26

⁷⁰ KII 27, 34, 35, 36

⁷¹ KII 12, 13, 16, 17

⁷² KII 27, 34, 35, 36

⁷³ KII 12, 13, 16, 17

otherwise specified. In practice, however, EOLs can supersede their headline SPF in cases where there is “any inconsistency” between the instruments. Although the review did not identify any significant irregularities, it observed that EOLs are often the vehicle through which key operational performance expectations and reporting requirements are articulated. One interviewee cautioned that there is a disconnect between what partner head offices commit to via the SPF, and what country offices are positioned to deliver via the respective EOLs.⁷⁴

KEY EVALUATION QUESTION 3: EFFICIENCY

To what extent are the SPFs an efficient financial, compliance and partnership modality for DFAT and Partners?

The evaluation found that once SPFs were agreed, funding through SPFs and EOLs was highly efficient for both DFAT and the partner. The template approach to risk management clauses in EOLs has likewise been effective in supporting risk management across DFAT’s investments.

While monitoring and reporting against SPFs has been highly efficient for partners, DFAT has entirely borne the cost of interpreting global reporting to understand performance against core funding. Some EOLs have successfully negotiated clauses that share the resourcing and responsibility for monitoring and reporting with partners (though there are at least two examples of EOLs that have not aligned reporting requirements across the EOL and annexes, making it even more resource intensive for DFAT and partners), with the added benefit to DFAT that reporting is received in time to inform DFAT’s investment level quality assurance processes.

DFAT has emphasised that speed is about efficiency, but also effectiveness, for instance: “delays in funding and therefore delays in assistance leads to increased suffering and higher mortality rates”.⁷⁵ The speed of the SPF funding model works on two levels: (a) core funding allows agencies to pre-finance new and rapidly deteriorating crises while waiting for additional donor resources to be made available, at which point it goes back to the organisation’s central reserves, and (b) rapid funding through EOLs to get funding on the ground as quickly as possible.⁷⁶

3.1 To what extent have SPFs maximised programming efficiencies and decreased overhead and related costs for DFAT and partners?

SPFs have maximised programming efficiencies and decreased overhead and related costs to partners. SPFs enable highly efficient engagements through EOLs, but incur a resourcing and financial cost to DFAT which must oversee and manage performance.

Efficiencies attained through SPFs were mainly due to decreased negotiation time of interlocutors and the legal teams of each organisation. Core funding tranches agreed in the SPF are disbursed on receipt of a letter requesting payment with no additional requirement for additional delegate approval, aid contracting, or legal clearances (by DFAT and the partner) because these are completed prior to signing the SPF.⁷⁷ DFAT staff compared timeframes to sign EOLs of 2-3 days and up to some weeks,⁷⁸ versus weeks and even months without an SPF.⁷⁹ 17 of 23 DFAT staff who responded to the survey said the SPFs made delivery

⁷⁴ KII 30

⁷⁵ DFAT written advice 11 July 2025

⁷⁶ DFAT written advice 11 July 2025

⁷⁷ DFAT written advice 11 July 2025

⁷⁸ KII 32 and DFAT written advice 11 July 2025

⁷⁹ KII 32

more efficient (1 reported “no impact”, and 5 did “not know”) and 16 said the EOLs improved efficiency (1 reporting “no impact”, and 6 did “not know”).⁸⁰

DFAT officers reported that they could “not deliver their current humanitarian caseload without the SPFs.” Delivering the same level of humanitarian funding on a contract by contract basis would either require a significant increase in DFAT staffing and management resources, or require DFAT to focus its assistance through a narrow set of partners, decreasing DFAT’s ability to tailor support to specific contexts and regional and bilateral priorities.⁸¹

The efficiency of SPFs was reinforced in interviews and surveys of SPF partners. One SPF partner shared anecdotally that Australia’s arrangement required 0.5 FTE to manage, compared to up to eight FTE for other donors.⁸² None of the 37 SPF partners surveyed said that Australia’s SPFs and EOLs were less efficient than other arrangements. 11 said they were “much better” or “slightly better”, 18 thought they were the “same” as other donor modalities, and eight reported they “did not know”.⁸³ Some SPF partners reported examples of more efficient modalities which allow parties to agree to draw down funding without a separate EOL.⁸⁴

Relatedly, DFAT headquarters staff reported that this front-end efficiency came at a cost in terms of monitoring and reporting. DFAT staff reported spending significant time trawling through generalised reporting to fulfil oversight and performance reporting requirements, in addition to engaging an external provider to support annual performance arrangements.⁸⁵

3.2 To what extent have SPFs supported timely and efficient humanitarian responses through the provision of funding that is earmarked to respond to humanitarian crises?

SPFs are a crucial tool to support timely and efficient response to humanitarian crises, particularly in contexts where Australia does not have a strong bilateral presence.

SPF partners cited the core funding in DFAT’s SPFs as crucial in allowing organisations to respond quickly to new and emerging crises. SPF partners described using core funding to launch crisis response in Gaza, Myanmar, and Sudan. One SPF partner was able to respond within 24 hours of the Myanmar earthquake in March 2025 due to global core funding.⁸⁶ Another said that DFAT’s flexibility to release a tranche of its multiyear core funding early, together with other donors, helped to prevent an impending 50 per cent cut to rations.⁸⁷ One DFAT respondent was sceptical, however, noting that earmarked EOL funding allocated to a response at country level, “was often used last”, and that Australia was often asked to grant no-cost extensions to its funding.⁸⁸ Interviewees spoke to opportunities to support even faster funding arrangements and pre-position funding for known crises.⁸⁹

The majority of DFAT staff surveyed (15 of 23) said that having to negotiate funding based on DFAT’s standard grant arrangement, rather than SPFs, would have a very negative impact on Australia’s ability to deliver timely, efficient, and effective assistance (five thought there would be a “slightly negative” impact, two

⁸⁰ Survey questions 10a and 10b, responses from DFAT staff engaged in SPFs and EOLs at headquarters, multilateral Posts and country/response Posts

⁸¹ KII 6, 7, 9, 10, 14, 24, 25, 26, 29, 32

⁸² KII 36

⁸³ Survey question 14b, responses from humanitarian SPF partners, May 2025

⁸⁴ KII 27, 34, 35, 36

⁸⁵ DFAT written advice, 30 May 2025. DFAT written advice 11 July 2025

⁸⁶ KII 36

⁸⁷ KII 30

⁸⁸ KII 14

⁸⁹ KII 12, 31

“did not know” and one saw “slight positives” in terms of greater transparency over deliverables).⁹⁰ DFAT staff noted that having pre-negotiated clauses on safeguarding and counter-terrorist financing was important to enable funds to be disbursed through EOLs quickly at country level (KEQ 3.3).⁹¹ One DFAT respondent said that it took, on average, three weeks to negotiate standard grant arrangements compared to 72 hours for EOLs.⁹² Other relevant reflections from DFAT officials at Post and in Canberra included:

“SPFs are effective and efficient in allowing Posts to engage quickly with partners, especially during humanitarian emergencies.”

“SPFs and EOLs are a useful and efficient modality for engaging the partners. I have experience engaging partners where an SPF is not in place, and EOLs take considerably longer to establish and may not be consistent across engagements.”

3.3 To what extent have SPFs supported DFAT in robust risk management of Australian funding?

SPFs are important tools supporting DFAT’s ability to manage risk. Humanitarian contexts demand risk-informed, rather than risk-averse, decision-making.⁹³ SPFs and EOLs contain important clauses needed to manage risk in line with DFAT standards, with optional clauses for high-risk contexts in the EOLs (KEQ 1.3). Several DFAT officers noted that without SPFs, it would be too complex to ensure all humanitarian arrangements contained sufficient risk management clauses.⁹⁴

DFAT officials involved in negotiating the SPFs noted that the extensive negotiation process, and the Central Assurance Assessments of each SPF partner conducted jointly with the UK in 2020-21 greatly increased their understanding of partner risk capacities and systems, and helped them work with DFAT decision makers to take a more risk informed, as opposed to risk averse, approach to funding decisions.⁹⁵

Posted officers largely reported relying on country specific risk management systems in place at Post to manage EOL funding. However, several respondents said it was useful to be able to refer back to the headquarters-agreed clauses in the SPFs when managing risk and compliance issues.⁹⁶ DFAT posted officers also reported that, while they engaged closely with SPF partners in country on contextual, reputational, and performance risks, they relied on the global assessment of partners’ systems for fraud control, anti-corruption, environmental and social safeguards, child protection, PSEAH, sexual abuse and due diligence. Posted staff lacked the resources or time to ensure compliance with these risks on a country-by-country basis.⁹⁷ Two DFAT Posts (one bilateral, one multilateral) reported at times being drawn into risk and compliance discussions which they felt they were not resourced to manage.⁹⁸

The survey revealed widely divergent views among DFAT staff, both in Canberra and at Post, on whether the SPFs performed better than other donor modalities in facilitating risk management, compliance and incident reporting. A majority of respondents “did not know” (seven of 22), followed by those who thought it performed “slightly better” (five of 22) or “slightly worse” (four of 22). Only three of 22 respondents thought the SPFs performed “much better” than other donor modalities.⁹⁹

⁹⁰ Survey question 13, responses from DFAT staff engaged in SPFs and EOLs at headquarters, multilateral Posts and country/response Posts

⁹¹ KII 6, 7, 9, 10, 14, 24, 25, 26

⁹² KII 6

⁹³ KII 6

⁹⁴ KII 8, 9, 12, 13

⁹⁵ KII 6

⁹⁶ KII 24, 25, 26

⁹⁷ KII 24, 25, 26

⁹⁸ KII 15, 24

⁹⁹ Survey question 17e, responses from DFAT staff engaged in SPFs and EOLs at headquarters, multilateral Posts and country/response Posts

3.4 To what extent have the SPFs influenced partners' management of risk, transparency, safeguarding and incident reporting?

Partners generally reported no change in their management of risk, transparency, and safeguarding, and incident reporting as a result of their SPF, although there are some examples of change. One partner had employed a full time risk officer at country level which they attributed to multiple donors' attention to risk,¹⁰⁰ and a DFAT officer reported deep engagement with a partner to ensure that the commitments of Australia's counter terrorism legislation were upheld by geographically targeting humanitarian assistance.¹⁰¹ DFAT staff in Canberra were doubtful about the extent to which SPFs had encouraged stronger incident reporting, particularly PSEAH and child protection.¹⁰²

Partners emphasised that they are subject to robust standards and cautioned against tailored approaches that could increase overheads, slow response times, and contravene UN privileges and immunities.

3.5 To what extent has the SPF modality supported efficient, consistent and high-quality monitoring, evaluation and reporting?

The SPF modality has, to some extent, supported efficient, consistent, and high-quality monitoring, evaluation and reporting for the purpose of understanding performance over the life of the arrangement. Some EOLs have supported efficient, consistent and high-quality monitoring, evaluation and reporting to a far higher extent, especially given DFAT requirements for IMRs and PPAs. Monitoring core SPF funding can be challenging with policy settings that align with Good Humanitarian Donorship.

This section is not an assessment of the monitoring, evaluation and reporting produced by multilateral partners independently of the SPFs. Instead, this evaluation finds only that there is opportunity to strengthen systems to more efficiently support understanding of global-level performance and progress against the shared partnership objectives and deliverables specified in the SPFs.

SPF core funding

DFAT's Aid Programming Guide (2024, page 19) sets out several requirements for the performance and delivery of multilateral programs.

- Policy settings are established in strategic partnership frameworks
- Performance is assessed using periodic MPAs.
- Reporting is required for DFAT's:
 - Annual Report,
 - Annual Bilateral Development Partnership Talks,
 - Annual Performance of Australian Development Cooperation Report, and
 - Online data portal.

¹⁰⁰ KII 30

¹⁰¹ KII 8

¹⁰² KII 4, 13. DFAT survey responses ID 3, 8, 10, 11, 19, and 25

During the timeframe of this evaluation, except for a pilot MPA for WFP, DFAT paused the requirement for MPAs to assess performance. This has been an important gap in the monitoring, evaluation and reporting of SPF core funding over the period. DFAT advises that following the successful pilot, MPAs are due to resume shortly.

Assessments of SPF performance rely on partners' own global, public reporting for monitoring, evaluating and reporting against global core funding. This is by design (KEQ 2.2) and explicit in the SPF common clause that notes "partners' own monitoring and evaluation systems will form the principal basis for performance monitoring and reporting".¹⁰³ While core funding to SPFs is intended to support partner delivery of their strategic plans¹⁰⁴ performance is assessed against the SPF shared partnership objectives and deliverables. DFAT interprets partners' public reporting against the SPF shared partnership objectives and deliverables to understand performance and inform its own internal reporting requirements. DFAT does not assess performance against partners' own monitoring and evaluation systems. DFAT has supplemented this approach with Central Assurance Assessments of OCHA, ICRC and WFP (conducted jointly with the UK in 2020-21, see section 3.3), and MOPAN Assessments. DFAT conducted a due diligence assessment of UNHCR in 2022 and a comprehensive due diligence assessment in 2024.¹⁰⁵

This approach may be a function of a policy decision related to Good Humanitarian Donorship and internal quality and reporting requirements, although this is not explicit nor commonly agreed amongst DFAT staff.¹⁰⁶ Australia's current Humanitarian Policy (2024) is silent on Good Humanitarian Donorship. It commits to "leveraging our strategic partnership agreements with international organisations to drive our priority reform areas and improve the performance of the humanitarian system" but is not explicit as to how this relates to reporting.

Following signature of the SPFs, DFAT commissioned an external agency to develop Performance Arrangements, which are referred to, but not annexed to the signed SPFs. The external agency engaged in a consultative process to identify 23 publicly available indicators to support DFAT's understanding of performance against the shared partnership objectives and deliverables.¹⁰⁷ It has provided DFAT with annual reports with available data against each of the indicators, drawing on publicly available data and at least in some instances, additional inputs from partners.¹⁰⁸

As outlined in response to KEQ 2, this data has been useful to provide an evidence base of activities undertaken to progress the shared partnership objectives and deliverables. A trend analysis by the external agency has found that the quality of partner reporting is improving over time.¹⁰⁹ It further identified ongoing challenges including several indicators for which reporting is lagging, and that the MOPAN assessment cycles are sporadic.¹¹⁰ Several DFAT staff reported that there continued to be major gaps in reporting sex, age, gender and disability related data for many SPF partners even after several years of sustained engagement on this matter.¹¹¹

The performance arrangements and trend analysis do not rate investment performance or partner performance (as DFAT's HIMR and MPA processes do, respectively), which makes it difficult to compare

¹⁰³ SPF agreements with OCHA, CERF, ICRC, WFP, UNHCR

¹⁰⁴ DFAT written advice 11 July 2025

¹⁰⁵ DFAT written advice 30 July 2025

¹⁰⁶ KII12

¹⁰⁷ IOD Parc Trend Analysis Presentation 24 February 2025 and annual Performance Arrangement reports by partner

¹⁰⁸ DFAT written advice 11 July 2025 and select emails between DFAT and partners

¹⁰⁹ IOD Parc Trend Analysis Presentation 24 February 2025

¹¹⁰ Dates for most recent MOPANs: WFP 2017-18 and 2024; OCHA 2015-16 and 2020; UNHCR 2017-18 and 2024; ICRC forthcoming in 2025, per MOPAN Performance Evidence Library available at: <https://www.mopan.org/en/our-work/performance-evidence.html> accessed 19 July 2025

¹¹¹ KII 2, 4, 6, 12, 13, 14

data across years or partners, and understand whether activities have resulted in progress and improvements in performance.

This gap in understanding performance may be addressed with MPAs which are due to be reintroduced. DFAT piloted the new MPA process with WFP during the evaluation period. DFAT officers report a rigorous and highly useful process, combining peer review from WFP investment managers in Canberra and Post to agree a consolidated performance rating against each criterion.¹¹²

Separately, DFAT has produced a theory of change¹¹³ which establishes the links between Australia's SPF partnerships, common performance and reform objectives, agency-specific performance expectations and performance management actions. As DFAT is measuring performance against the SPF shared partnership objectives and deliverables, it would be useful to adapt the theory of change to more explicitly address these going forward.

Inherent in these investments is a substantive resourcing investment to understand performance specific to the shared objectives and deliverables which must be resourced by either the partner or the donor. The responsibility and resourcing currently rest largely with DFAT. As outlined in KEQ 3.1, many DFAT staff reported monitoring and reporting performance against the SPFs to be a resource intensive (taking a lot of their time, and consultant time to find and interpret data, while not requiring much resourcing from partners) and imperfect process, though at least one DFAT officer believes that it is not resource intensive.¹¹⁴ Regardless of where the responsibility falls, establishing expectations and frameworks in advance of signing agreements will increase likelihood that the process will be less resource intensive and more useful in future.

Funding through EOLs

There has been some success with monitoring and reporting against EOLs. Internal quality assurance processes have incentivised DFAT staff to collect this data, as they are required to complete IMRs for investments over AUD3 million, and PPAs each year. DFAT has negotiated some highly useful clauses in EOLs. For instance, some EOLs for the Syria response require partners to submit data against DFAT's Protracted Crisis MEL Framework, and for the Bangladesh Rohingya and Host Community Humanitarian Investment response, partners are required to submit an additional 8+3 report in advance of DFAT's internal reporting deadlines. 8+3 reports are templates common to multiple donors which facilitate efficient reporting for humanitarian partners with a large number of donors. DFAT officers indicated that this additional reporting has been helpful for understanding performance and completing IMRs and PPAs.

When negotiating EOLs it is important to ensure reporting requirements are aligned, and that DFAT only requests the data it needs. Analysis of the Bangladesh Rohingya and Host Community Humanitarian Investment EOLs (see case study in **Annex 2**) found that reporting requirements were specified in three different locations in the EOL for UNHCR and WFP, and that the data requested did not directly align, making it difficult for the partner to understand where to invest resources in measuring each of the indicators requested. The Evaluation Team notes that this represents learning from some of DFAT's first EOLs established under the current SPFs.

When considering future approaches to reporting requirements, interviews for the Bangladesh Rohingya and Host Community Humanitarian Investment case study (at **Annex 2**) found that Australia was the only donor requesting reporting using the 8+3 template. This undermines the intention of a more coordinated approach

¹¹² KII8

¹¹³ KII12 and DFAT written advice 11 July 2025

¹¹⁴ DFAT written advice 11 July 2025

to reporting across donors. Australia may wish to consider with partners whether pursuing 8+3 template reporting will achieve the intended objectives.

KEY EVALUATION QUESTION 4: ALTERNATIVE MODALITIES

4. What alternative modalities exist?

Consultations with other donors found that there is no perfect approach to multilateral partnership modalities. Donors consulted applied similar approaches to multilateral funding as DFAT, and calibrated their partnership modalities to their level of resourcing, strategic priorities, and risk appetite. Donor partners also noted that the humanitarian system was under extreme pressure and is being asked to do more with less.

The strength of evidence underpinning these findings is reasonable, drawing on KII with three donors.

The review of alternative modalities found the potential for DFAT to improve the efficiency of its partnership modality by frontloading key clauses in the SPF and introducing a lighter-touch EOL or draw down mechanism for earmarked funding. However, DFAT would need to ensure sufficient time and resources to manage lengthy up-front negotiations, and weigh up the potential efficiency gains against reduced flexibility to tailor EOLs to country priorities.

Consultations with donors found that SPFs are only one aspect of effective multilateral engagement. Clear and consistent policy engagement, particularly when it is progressed with other donors, is likely to be the key factor in influencing multilateral performance. Donors noted the importance of more coordinated work on language and expectations and the need to continue to advocate strongly for partner's humanitarian mandates at a time when these are under significant pressure.

The full text analysis responding to KEQ4 has been provided separately to support a frank discussion with donor partners on the strengths and weaknesses of their multilateral partnership modalities.

FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Finding 1: SPFs as a modality are relevant and efficient, and effective at managing risk. SPFs are critical tools supporting Australia's humanitarian objectives, enabling DFAT to provide high volumes of humanitarian assistance in short timeframes and with solid risk management approaches, within existing staffing capacity. EOLs can be established relatively quickly with minimal resource investment when compared to investments without SPFs in place.

The evidence base for this finding is strong, confirmed by DFAT reporting and triangulated across interviews and survey responses from SPF partners and DFAT staff at headquarters, multilateral and bilateral Posts.

Discussions with other donors on alternative modalities indicate there may be opportunity for more efficient funding transfers, with the potential trade-offs including less opportunity to contextualise funding parameters, and possibly the need to pre-position funding upfront (rather than drawing down on response funding), or earmark core funding to future responses.

Recommendation 1: DFAT HPD retain SPFs or a similar modality to SPFs to engage humanitarian partners to deliver Australia's humanitarian objectives. Ensure any future iterations retain at least existing levels of contracting efficiencies and effective risk management. Future iterations will need to remove reference to past policy priorities (e.g., *Partnerships for Recovery*) and update risk management clauses in line with legislative and policy changes to support ongoing relevance.

It is recommended that DFAT HUS review alternative modalities used by other donors and determine whether there is opportunity to adopt similar approaches as part of SPFs or similar modalities. Given any changes are likely to have trade-offs that impact funding, risk management, and policies, it is recommended that DFAT officers provide an options paper to senior management outlining funding, risk, and policy impacts of proposed changes for decision in advance of entering SPF negotiations. For example, specifying an annual response amount in the SPF for each partner could improve the speed to provide funding, but may require earmarking a portion of the core funding within the SPF (reducing total core funding).

Finding 2: Available data indicates SPFs support effectiveness. Core funding enables partners to allocate funding to critical needs, and partners are engaging in activities to progress SPF shared partnership objectives and deliverables.

The evidence base for this finding is mixed. While DFAT produces a large volume of reporting, differences in the timing, focus, and scale of reporting mechanisms makes it difficult to consistently assess progress against key outcomes. There are also differing opinions within both DFAT and SPF partners on the extent to which the purpose of the SPFs alone is to drive partner performance. Some suggest SPFs are intended to facilitate timely and efficient humanitarian action and effective risk management.

Partners consistently emphasised that **DFAT's multi-year, core funding is critical to their effectiveness and ability to meet lifesaving needs**. They report that it has enabled them to allocate funding to where they deem it is most needed, and to retain important staff and processes longer. Some DFAT staff raised questions about whether DFAT may be able to elicit more influence and visibility from increased earmarking of its funding.

Once frameworks are agreed, other aspects of partnership management become more important for effectiveness and influencing performance than the SPFs or EOLs, such as partnership engagement and

advocacy with other donors and across the international humanitarian system. Clear and consistent policy engagement, particularly when it is progressed with other donors, is likely to be the key factor in influencing partner performance.

Considering the SPF's together with all DFAT's levers to influence international organisations is likely to improve DFAT's ability to influence effectiveness and incentivise performance. Some of these levers represent policy trade-offs that are unsettled and currently being considered amongst DFAT staff interviewed for this evaluation, particularly to what extent DFAT would like to support each organisation's own objectives or to incentivise focus on areas that DFAT prioritises, and how SPF's and associated levers should best be activated to this end.

Considering holistically what DFAT would like to achieve through these partners, and across all its levers to influence performance will support a key action under its Humanitarian Policy (2024), to: *leverage our strategic partnership agreements with international organisations to drive our priority reform areas and improve the performance of the international humanitarian system.*

This finding is made in the context of evolutions to the humanitarian funding environment and architecture, which will directly influence the success of DFAT's future approach to SPF's and engagement with partners.

Recommendation 2: DFAT HUS leads a planning process that considers all DFAT's levers for engaging with humanitarian partners, structures future arrangements and supports their implementation to maximise effectiveness. It is recommended that DFAT engage in planning to determine what it wants to achieve and how, to maximise achievement of its objectives. Many of the important questions underpinning this planning process have been asked in response to this evaluation and have been documented and shared separately with DFAT. At minimum, the Evaluation Team recommends this planning process should:

- a. Define what DFAT wants to achieve through its partnership with these humanitarian organisations. Is it the shared partnership objectives and deliverables, or do these need revising?
- b. Determine whether DFAT's objectives are best achieved through a more efficient "hands off" approach aligned with Good Humanitarian Donorship, or whether DFAT would like to more actively incentivise performance through clauses in an SPF or similar modality. Review and set resourcing in line with the chosen approach. Ensure the approach is feasible within DFAT staffing constraints, and within the changing global humanitarian architecture and resourcing.
- c. Determine a small number of reforms or performance improvements that DFAT wants to see across the duration of the SPF and/or whether it wants to be able to agree a new focus each year with partners.
- d. Plan an approach that aligns with (2b) above across each of DFAT's levers for supporting partner performance to achieve DFAT's objectives in a way that also responds to the current funding context for the humanitarian sector. This may be facilitated by a theory of change. Within this discussion, consider at minimum:
 - i. the balance of core and earmarked funding,
 - ii. the balance between flexibility and relevance of priorities across the duration of the arrangements, versus focusing on priorities for change,

- iii. DFAT and partner staff and resourcing capacity,
 - iv. DFAT's approach to Good Humanitarian Donorship,
 - v. DFAT's approach to risk management, and
 - vi. How DFAT will progress its objectives through engagement with partners.
- e. Seek opportunities to coordinate with other donors to progress shared priorities together.
 - f. Translate this approach into clauses for negotiation with partners.
 - g. Translate this approach into partnership engagement plans and elevate the visibility of these plans, supporting DFAT staff in Canberra and at Post with a common understanding of priority areas and key approaches to engage.

Should DFAT consider altering the structure of its funding to international organisations, it is recommended that it do so with thorough consideration of the likely impact on people in need of lifesaving assistance, and for partners managing a multitude of donors with varying conditions including short-term, project-based funding.

The Evaluation Team recognises that the expiry of existing SPFs may make it infeasible to complete this recommendation in advance of starting negotiations for new arrangements. However, these steps remain important and should be completed, within the limitations of signed arrangements if required.

Finding 3: DFAT has implemented important systems to support the understanding of performance against the shared partnership objectives and deliverables in the absence of MPAs (with the exception of WFP). Central Assurance Assessments, MOPAN assessments, and international organisations' own evaluations have been important data sources.

It does however remain difficult to identify trends in performance using the current monitoring and evaluation system. Many DFAT officers also find the current reporting system to be resource intensive (in terms of their time required to interpret the data), though others disagree. While the system will improve substantially with the reintroduction of MPAs, there is opportunity to further strengthen the system so it is less time consuming for DFAT and provides a better indication of progress in performance.

This finding is backed by strong evidence. While there are some dissenting views in DFAT, most of the DFAT staff and SPF partners interviewed for this evaluation noted the potential to improve reporting mechanisms, which was confirmed through the Evaluation Team's analysis of current systems.

Several DFAT staff reported that there continued to be major gaps in reporting sex, age, gender and disability related data for many SPF partners.

Recommendation 3: DFAT HUS strengthen SPF monitoring and evaluation systems, namely:

- a. Determine how the share of reporting responsibilities between DFAT and the partner will support achievement of the performance improvements (see Recommendation 2) and Good Humanitarian Donorship objectives. Consider the different approaches that have been negotiated through EOLs, e.g. partner contribution to the Protracted Crises Monitoring, Evaluation, and Learning Framework.

- b. Develop a monitoring and evaluation framework and plan that enables comparison of performance across partners and years, and can feed directly into HPD-managed performance dashboards. Ideally, this will align with DFAT's other humanitarian reporting and inform understanding of contributions to the Australia's Humanitarian Policy. For the years where MPAs are not mandatory, it would support DFAT's understanding of performance to produce an informal MPA for each partner using the same template and with a smaller group engaging in peer review.
- c. Prioritise a small number of indicators that DFAT requires and that will be used for partnership management.
- d. Ensure all DFAT officers engaged in managing these partnerships work together to progress agreed policy priorities and the indicators that are most important to DFAT (supported through partnership engagement plans).
- e. Broaden the next evaluation to look more holistically at the relevance, effectiveness and efficiency of Australia's engagement with humanitarian partners funded by SPFs. This review should consider all DFAT levers for supporting partner performance. Emphasise forward-looking questions and processes to ensure it captures the evidence to make informed recommendations on important issues being considered by DFAT, and directly inform new arrangements. This evaluation or mid-term review of DFAT's engagement with these international organisations should be complete at least two years before arrangements expire to enable sufficient time for negotiating future arrangements.
- f. DFAT invest in establishing an evidence base for the structure of its funding (core and multi-year v earmarked and single year) to inform decisions going forward. This may form part of the mid-term review and evaluation, or it could be undertaken as stand-alone research.

These findings may be transferrable to other multilateral partnerships, if their SPFs are structured similarly.

ANNEX 1 EVALUATION MATRIX

KEQ 1: To what extent are the SPFs aligned with current Australian international development and humanitarian programming policies and priorities? (RELEVANCE)

Sub-Question	Data Source	Method	Tools
To what extent are the current SPFs aligned with Australia's Humanitarian Policy, International Development Policy and associated strategies?	SPFs and Australia's policies and strategies Reports by IOD Parc and Linda Kelly	Document review and desk analysis	Reconstructed policy matrix
To what extent are the current SPFs aligned with DFAT's development risk management requirements, including for high-risk contexts?	SPFs DFAT risk requirements DFAT risk experts	Document review and desk analysis Written request to DFAT risk experts KII DFAT risk	Analysis matrix KII Guide
To what extent are the current SPFs and their EOL templates aligned with DFAT's internal legal and reporting requirements?	SPFs DFAT's internal legal and reporting requirements DFAT quality and performance experts	Desk analysis KII DFAT quality and performance experts Written advice from DFAT legal adviser	Analysis matrix KII Guide
To what extent are the current SPFs compatible with Australia's international development and humanitarian commitments?	SPFs Documentation outlining Australia's commitments DFAT policy experts	Desk analysis KII DFAT policy experts	Analysis matrix KII Guide
What changes may be needed to ensure SPFs remain flexible and adaptable to broader DFAT international development and humanitarian policies, priorities and commitments, in Australia's national interest?	SPFs DFAT SPF managers, policy experts	Desk analysis KIIs	KII Guide

KEQ 2: To what extent are the SPFs shared partnership objectives and deliverables being progressed? (EFFECTIVENESS)

Sub-Question	Data Source	Method	Tools
2.1 To what extent are the shared objective and deliverables documented in the SPFs aligned to partner mandates?	SPF Partners DFAT	Survey	Survey
2.2 To what extent are partners monitoring and reporting progress against the shared objectives and deliverables documented in the SPF?	DFAT managers of SPF partners or relevant investments, HSI performance manager PRD SPF partners	Survey KII IOD Parc, HSI Case study	Survey KII Guide
2.3 To what extent do the EOLs address the shared objectives and deliverables documented in the SPFs?	SPF and EOL templates DFAT managers of SPF partners or relevant investments DFAT Humanitarian advisers DFAT desks / posts SPF partners	Comparative analysis of SPF and EOL templates KII Case study: analysis of SPF and EOLs for Bangladesh	Analysis matrix
2.4 To what extent have the documented partnership implementation activities agreed in the SPF been undertaken?	DFAT managers of SPF partners	KII	KII Guide
2.5 To what extent have SPFs as a modality influenced individual partner performance globally and at country level?	DFAT managers of SPF partners or relevant investments HSI performance manager SPF partners OTP	Survey KII Case study	Survey KII Guide
2.5.1 To what extent have SPFs as a modality influenced partner engagement in the Indo-Pacific region (positively or negatively)			
2.5.2 To what extent have SPFs as a modality influenced partner			

Sub-Question	Data Source	Method	Tools
engagement on gender equality and disability (positively or negatively)?			
2.6 To what extent have SPFs strengthened Australia's influence and international standing?	DFAT multilateral posts DFAT managers of SPF partners or relevant investments SPF partners Other donors	Survey KII Case study	Survey KII Guide
2.7 What changes may be needed to strengthen the coherence between core funding through SPFs and country funding through the EOLs?	DFAT managers of SPF partners or relevant investments DFAT Humanitarian advisers SPF partners SPFs and EOLs in Bangladesh	KII Case study Document review	KII Guide

KEQ3: To what extent are the SPFs an efficient financial, compliance and partnership modality for DFAT and Partners? (EFFICIENCY)

Sub-Question	Data Source	Method	Tools
3.1 To what extent have SPFs maximised programming efficiencies and decreased overhead and related costs for DFAT and partners?	DFAT managers of SPF partners globally and relevant investments Humanitarian Advisers SPF partners	Survey KIs Case Study	Survey KII Guide
3.2 To what extent have SPFs supported timely and efficient humanitarian responses through the provision of funding that is earmarked to respond to humanitarian crises?	DFAT managers of SPF partners Desks and posts SPF partners <i>Optional if data is available:</i> time to sign SPF v time to contract without SPF?	Survey KIs Case Study	Survey KII Guide
3.3 To what extent have SPFs supported DFAT in robust risk management of Australian funding?	DFAT managers of SPF partners DFAT risk experts SPF partners	Survey Written request to DFAT risk experts KIs Case Study	Survey KII Guide
3.4 To what extent have the SPFs influenced partners' management of risk, transparency, safeguarding and incident reporting?	DFAT managers of SPF partners DFAT risk experts SPF partners	Survey Written request to DFAT risk, compliance and transparency experts KIs Case Study	Survey KII Guide
3.5 To what extent has the SPF modality supported efficient, consistent and high-quality monitoring, evaluation and reporting?	DFAT, SPF partners HSI performance manager DFAT PRD SPFs and EOLs for Bangladesh WFP and UNHCR reporting for Bangladesh Global PPAs for partners	Survey KIs Case Study Document review	Survey KII Guide

KEQ4: what alternative modalities exist?

Sub-Question	Data Source	Method	Tools
4.1 What modalities are used by other donors to contract these multilateral partners?	SPF partners Other donors	Survey KIIs Case Study	Survey KII Guide
4.2 What are the strengths and challenges of other donor models?	Other donors SPF partners	Survey KIIs Case Study	As above
4.3 What lessons or recommendations do DFAT staff and partners have regarding the modality for contracting multilateral partners?	DFAT SPF managers SPF partners	Survey KIIs Case Study	As above

ANNEX 2 BANGLADESH CASE STUDY

DFAT's partnership with WFP and UNHCR as part of the Bangladesh Rohingya and Host Community Humanitarian Investment

Selection of Bangladesh, WFP and UNHCR

The country and partners were selected for this case study in consultation with DFAT, based on Australia's national interest focus on the Indo-Pacific region, and the large amount of funding provided to the Bangladesh Rohingya and Host Community Humanitarian Investment and to UNHCR and WFP in that context.

DFAT's engagement with these partners in this context is somewhat unique, in that it is underpinned by an investment design summary and is a multi-year agreement. WFP and UNHCR are two of 12 partners DFAT is funding in Bangladesh for the Bangladesh Rohingya and Host Community Humanitarian Investment, and the EOLs were some of the first EOLs negotiated under the current SPFs.¹¹⁵

Funding and the Exchange of Letters

The Australian Government has provided more than AUD100 million as multi-year funding to WFP and UNHCR under the current partnership and phase of the humanitarian package. This package has been used to implement activities outlined under the Joint Response Plan providing humanitarian assistance to the Rohingya and Host Communities.¹¹⁶

Partner	Purpose	Value	Timeframe
UNHCR ¹¹⁷	Humanitarian Assistance to Rohingya response – Country-Level Contribution, as described in the Rohingya and Host Communities Joint Response Plan 2023 and subsequent iterations of this plan (EOL 77332/4)	AUD14.96 million	Multiyear: May 2023 to December 2025
	Humanitarian Assistance to Rohingya in Bangladesh – Earmarked Contribution (EOL 77332/1B) ¹¹⁸	AUD28 million	FY2022 – 23 to FY2024 - 25
WFP ¹¹⁹	Bangladesh Rohingya and Host Communities Humanitarian Response 2023-2025 in accordance with WFP's appeal against the 2023 Rohingya and Host Communities Joint Response Plan and subsequent iterations (EOL 77335/7)	AUD57.4 million	Multiyear: May 2023 to December 2025 <i>NB: EOL amended three times to increase value from AUD46 million</i>

WFP and UNHCR EOLs for this package are largely consistent with the respective EOL templates agreed with the SPF. All of the optional clauses have been included for both EOLs, including on protection and inclusion, localisation, climate change and disaster risk reduction, and optional clauses requiring reporting disaggregated data by sex, age and disability, data that evidences strengthened inclusion of women, girls and people with disabilities, accountability to affected populations, the amount of funding received by local

¹¹⁵ KII29, 32 and DFAT written advice 11 July 2025

¹¹⁶ DFAT written advice 11 July 2025

¹¹⁷ DFAT UNHCR EOL 77332/4

¹¹⁸ DFAT written advice 30 July 2025

¹¹⁹ DFAT WFP EOL 7735/7 and amendments

partners and their increasing capacities, and how programming seeks to reduce risks and minimise the impacts of climate change. They also include the optional clauses to manage risk in high-risk contexts.

EOLs and Reporting Requirements

Both WFP and UNHCR EOLs have **additional requirements beyond their EOL templates**, including a clause earmarking geographically, and a clause and two annexes requiring additional reporting. Annex 1 to both the WFP and UNHCR EOLs outlines performance and reporting expectations and reiterates reporting requirements broadly reflecting the EOL template optional clauses for gender equality, disability inclusion, localisation, and accountability to affected populations (see Table 3 for details). Annex 2 specifies a requirement for the supplementary 8+3 report template, which does not reflect the reporting requirements requested in **Annex 1**.

Both WFP and UNHCR are required to provide the 8+3 reporting by March 31 each year for the previous calendar year. This is in line with public reporting timelines and other donor expectations for the response,¹²⁰ although the timing makes it more difficult to complete its PPA and IMR processes, as compared to when Post receives reporting from other partners far earlier than March¹²¹.

Reporting Completed

WFP and UNHCR submitted Australia-specific 8+3 reports to DFAT in line with the EOLs, in addition to publishing annual reports. These additional 8+3 reports were substantive; the UNHCR 8+3 report for 2024 was 30 pages, and the WFP 8+3 report was 50 pages. DFAT has used this data to inform its PPAs for WFP and UNHCR and IMRs for the investment. Despite the intention to align additional reporting requirements to other donor requests in line with the Grand Bargain commitment to harmonise reporting requirements,¹²² neither partner reported that other donors had requested reporting in the 8+3 format.

An analysis of DFAT's reporting requirements in the EOL main text, Annex 1 and Annex 2 demonstrates that both UNHCR and WFP 8+3 reporting included most requirements. They tended to follow the template provided for reporting at Annex 2. Specific indicators required in Annex 1 seem to be reported against where they aligned with agency MEL frameworks, and where they aligned with the Annex 2 template. Key gaps include specifics requested against DFAT priorities not in the 8+3 template: gender equality, disability inclusion and localisation, including the amount of funding invested to support each. It seems that relevant sections in the PPA reports were successfully completed without this data.

The public reports the WFP and UNHCR produce each year are a little more challenging for DFAT to use to attribute results and activities. In the case of WFP, these reports are for activities across the whole of Bangladesh, and not just for the Rohingya response (UNHCR only reports on the Rohingya response and has no other activities in Bangladesh). They also arrive after the IMR and PPA processes are due to be complete.

Table 3: A review of DFAT requests for data against the 8+3 reporting

EOL main text	UNHCR	WFP
Data disaggregated by sex	✓	✓
Data disaggregated by age	✓	✓
Data disaggregated by disability	✓	✓

¹²⁰ DFAT written advice 11 July 2025

¹²¹ DFAT written advice 11 July 2025

¹²² The 8+3 Template (2019) available at: https://gppi.net/assets/4pager_83_final_A4.pdf

EOL main text	UNHCR	WFP
Data disaggregated by location	✓	✓
Strengthened inclusion of women and girls	✓	✓
Strengthened inclusion of people with disabilities	✓	✓
Demonstrates how decision-making power has been increasingly transferred to beneficiaries, including the most vulnerable;	✓ (consultations)	✓ (consultations)
how programs have adapted as a result;	✓	✓
and how AAP activities have become increasingly consistent with other agencies' initiatives	-	-
the amount of funding received by local partners	✓	-
and local partners' increasing capacity including on humanitarian principles and safeguards;	-	✓ but not specific topics
increasing influence in the partnership and the response;	-	-
and the amount of funding invested to increase this capacity and influence	-	-
How programming seeks to reduce risks, manage shocks and minimise the impacts of climate change and disasters on sustainable development and reduce the risks of humanitarian crises and biodiversity loss.	✓	✓

Annex 1 (if additional to the above)	UNHCR	WFP
Australian funding expended	✓	✓
Explain how analysis of disaggregated data has informed gender equality programming, using examples	-	-
Identify and report progress against gender equality outcomes with qualitative and quantitative data	✓	-
Report on allocated human and financial resources to progressing gender outcomes at country- and response- level, as well as any regional or global support specifically to Bangladesh, and actively engage with response-wide mainstreaming efforts as agreed with DFAT	-	-
Explain how analysis of disaggregated data has informed disability inclusion programming, using examples	-	✓
Identify and report progress against disability inclusion outcomes with qualitative and quantitative data	✓	-

Report on allocated human and financial resources to progressing disability inclusion outcomes at country- or response level, as well as any regional or global support specifically to Bangladesh and actively engage with response-wide mainstreaming efforts, as agreed with DFAT	-	-
Clearly identify and report progress against localisation outcomes with qualitative and quantitative data, providing examples.	-	-
Report the percentage of funding channelled through local actor(s) (including the percentage of funding awarded to local or national women-led and or women rights' organisations), in line with commitments made under the Grand Bargain.	✓	-
Report the percentage (or evidence) of partnership or funding agreements that incorporate multi-year institutional support for local actors.	-	-
Provide evidence of national/local systems being used and/or strengthened, as appropriate in Bangladesh.	Partly	Partly
Using examples, report on how decision-making power has been increasingly transferred to affected populations, including gender and ability diverse groups; how feedback has been collected from affected populations and the coherence of those feedback systems with other actors' mechanisms; how programs have been adapted as a result of recipients' feedback; and how agencies' AAP activities have become increasingly consistent with other agencies' initiatives.	Largely	Largely

Annex 2: 8+3 template	UNHCR	WFP
[value] of cash transferred to recipients plus related programme costs	✓	✓
[value] of voucher-based assistance provided to recipients plus related programme costs		
[value] of in-kind assistance given to recipients plus related programme costs		
[value] of services delivered to recipients plus related programme costs (if measurable)		
Overall performance	✓	✓
Changes and amendments	✓	✓
Measuring results: progress against outputs, outcomes and targets	✓	✓
Affected persons: number of people taking part disaggregated by gender, age, disability	✓	✓
Participation of and accountability to affected populations	✓	✓
Risk management	✓	✓

Annex 2: 8+3 template	UNHCR	WFP
Exit strategy and sustainability	✓	✓
Lessons learned	✓	✓
Value for money / cost effectiveness	✓	✓
Coordination efforts	✓	✓
List implementing partners, their role and contribution	✓	✓

DFAT Reporting Requirements

Investments at country level are subject to annual IMRs (or HIMRs), and each partner above a financial threshold are subject to annual PPAs.

Neither partners nor DFAT were required to report on the shared partnership objectives and deliverables documented in the SPFs for WFP or UNHCR in the response to the Rohingya crisis in Bangladesh.

A review of the PPAs indicates DFAT staff were able to assess partner performance. The absence of financial reporting by gender, disability, and localisation capacity building activities did not seem to impact the assessment.

Strengths of the SPF and EOL modality in Bangladesh

- **EOLs were able to be amended to suit the context.** The EOLs allowed earmarking to the Joint Response Plan, provided funding across multiple years, included all the optional clauses for high-risk contexts and DFAT was able to add in bespoke detail regarding reporting requirements.
- **EOLs enabled DFAT and partners to respond to urgent need through fast processing.** When negotiating the EOLs, partners didn't need to go back to headquarters often because clauses were mostly already agreed. It had to be checked, but this was all aligned.¹²³ One partner commented that DFAT Post managed EOL negotiations very well. They gave informal advance notice, so processes could get moving. This enabled the formal approach to be straightforward.¹²⁴ DFAT also emphasised the counter-factual: Dhaka Post negotiated a funding arrangement with another humanitarian partner which did not have an SPF in place. The agreement took five-to-six months to set up, and ended up being a contract of 18 months due to delays in time for signing. Without an SPF, both DFAT and the partner invested substantial time in negotiating the contract, the money could not be used for six months, and it had to be used in a shorter time period, for instance, informants reported that the:¹²⁵

“best point of comparison is when we don't have an SPF. The real difficulty is when you don't have one in place”¹²⁶, and “We've received a lot of benefit; it definitely makes life easier.”

- Other models described by partners are annual and project-based, with reporting on activities on specific timelines with requests for no-cost extensions and regular addendums to complement earlier funding, adjust timeframes, beneficiaries, activities; a high amount of effort for both sides. At a time when organisations are reducing resourcing, it is even less feasible to resource such a time-consuming

¹²³ KII31.

¹²⁴ KII31

¹²⁵ KII 32

¹²⁶ KII32

reporting responsibility. All donors provided funding in advance to one partner; no donors provided funding on completion.¹²⁷

- **Enables partners to allocate funding to critical needs.** Partners emphasised the importance of multi-year, flexible funding. “The fact that Australia’s funding is flexible at the operational level helps us to orient funding to critical needs”.¹²⁸ WFP highly valued DFAT’s flexibility to disburse one tranche of funding early and provide additional assistance; with the support of other donors this meant WFP was able to avert a ration cut from \$12.50 per person per month to \$6 per person per month in early 2025.¹²⁹ The WFP EOL was easily amended to provide additional funding. UNHCR noted that protection tends to be underfunded; Australia’s funding in line with UNHCR priorities has been very helpful. With earmarking that is overly stringent, activities go unfunded.
- **Supports substantive flexible funding to agency plans as well as predictable multiyear funding, which has underpinned Australia’s position as a leading donor in the Rohingya response.**¹³⁰ This provides Australia with more influence when advocating with government on behalf of affected people.¹³¹ Australia is seen as a leader in advocating for the rights of people with disabilities.¹³²
- **Avoids transaction costs in fragmented grants.** “Australia’s contract is much more sustainable and avoids the transaction costs involved in fragmented grants.”¹³³
- **Additional reporting supports DFAT’s quality assurance processes.** Both UNHCR and WFP submit 8+3 reporting by 31 March annually, which DFAT then uses as its evidence base to complete internal quality assurance processes including PPAs and HIMRs. The EOL is useful to DFAT to have the leverage to specify and work with partners on reporting. This wasn’t possible in the previous phase of the EOL which didn’t have the same requirements for performance and reporting.
- **Performance of partners is improving.** DFAT reports that the HIMR assesses performance on gender and disability is improving year on year, though notes data disaggregation is still to be improved. DFAT’s focus on risk through the EOL and also in partnership engagements has, with other donors, helped WFP to employ a full-time risk management officer and a full-time gender protection officer in country.¹³⁴

Challenges of the SPF and EOL modality in Bangladesh

- **Post reports no major challenges.** However, they did add the caveat that things haven’t gone wrong, so they haven’t had to test the clauses in the EOL.¹³⁵
- **The EOLs do not short-cut time required to manage the investment once the EOL is signed.** See further findings below that partners highly value Australia’s time to engage in partnership with them, and Australia’s advocacy for the needs of affected people.
- **Partners do not always provide the reporting requested in the EOL, Annex 1, and Annex 2.** While the reporting reviewed for this evaluation includes disaggregated data, DFAT reports that this is not

¹²⁷ KII30

¹²⁸ KII31

¹²⁹ KII with WFP Bangladesh

¹³⁰ KII29

¹³¹ KII30

¹³² KII29

¹³³ KII30

¹³⁴ KII WFP in Bangladesh

¹³⁵ KII32

always the case, and the disaggregation for people with disability and gender is often at population level rather than specific to the group being assisted.¹³⁶

- **The reporting requested by DFAT varies across the EOL, Annex 1, and Annex 2, and goes beyond DFAT's requirements for its internal quality assurance processes.** A review of the varied reporting requirements suggests DFAT may benefit from investing upfront in aligning its data requirements, and reporting requirements across SPFs, EOLs, and each EOL annex. This will make the required data clearer to all stakeholders. DFAT may wish to determine in advance which indicators are most useful, feasible, and efficient to report on. For example, it was questioned whether DFAT needs data on funding allocated gender, disability, and capacity building for localisation.¹³⁷
- **DFAT has still needed to invest resources to interpret partner reporting, even with the additional reporting provided.** For example, DFAT noted they still need to engage regularly to ensure agency staff in-country know what reporting DFAT requires and when.¹³⁸ DFAT also engages an external provider to analyse reports, who analyses reports by the IMR template, not by EOL requirements.¹³⁹
- **Australia seems to be the only donor requesting the harmonised 8+3 reporting in Bangladesh, though some are "looking at it".**¹⁴⁰ This is not a weakness of the EOL but may negate the expected benefits of using the 8+3 template and the commitment to harmonised reporting, rather than a template that is more directly relevant to DFAT.

Further findings

- **The EOL is a tool that facilitates funding to partners. It is not the most important aspect of the relationship or partnership management.** UNHCR, for example, has highly valued its engagement with the High Commission, and Australia's advocacy role with government officials on the protection of refugees, and with other donors for core funding. In addition to Australia's flexibility with tranche disbursements, WFP has valued its engagement with DFAT in advance of reporting season to understand Australia's requirements, and the feedback from DFAT each year to support year-on-year improvements. WFP also highly valued the Australia Assists deployees as technical support. Both partners noted DFAT's skill and humanitarian expertise, and its advocacy and engagement in a coordination role for the Rohingya response.
- **The clauses within the SPFs are not as relevant at country level for informing performance and reporting (though note the SPF remains an important header arrangement).** DFAT's Rohingya response in Bangladesh has its own design, and own outcomes, which may differ from global SPF priorities. Country-level priorities supersede the list of shared partnership objectives and deliverables in the SPF. Partners in-country rely on the EOL and do not engage in the SPFs.

¹³⁶ KII30

¹³⁷ KII29

¹³⁸ KII32

¹³⁹ KII29

¹⁴⁰ KII29, 32

ANNEX 3 ORGANISATIONS CONSULTED

Key informant interviews and written responses

The evaluation team **interviewed a total of 51 people** (34 women, 17 men; 43 from headquarters / multilateral posts, 8 from country / response level).

Organisation	Women - Headquarters/ multilateral Post	Men - Headquarters/ multilateral Post	Women - Country/ response level	Men - Country/ response level	Total
DFAT*	15	7	3	3	28
Home Affairs	3	1	0	0	4
WFP	1	0	1	0	2
UNHCR	1	1	1	0	3
OCHA/CERF	3	2	0	0	5
ICRC	1	1	0	0	2
Donors	5	2	0	00	2

Survey

A total of **60 people completed the survey** (32 women, 26 men, 2 prefer not to say; 28 from headquarters/multilateral posts, 32 from country/response level).

Organisation	Women - HQ/ multilateral Post	Men - HQ/ multilateral Post	Prefer not to say - HQ/ multilateral Post	Women - Country/ response level	Men - Country/ response level	Prefer not to say - Country/ response level	Total
DFAT*	13	4	1	3	1	1	23
WFP	0	0	0	3	1	0	4
UNHCR	0	1	0	9	5	0	15
OCHA/ CERF	3	5	0	0	1	0	9
ICRC	1	0	0	0	8	0	9

*DFAT count includes consultants supporting DFAT on performance monitoring.

ANNEX 4 DOCUMENTS REVIEWED

Please note that many of these documents, such as the agreements and performance reports referenced here, are internal DFAT and / or partner documents and not available publicly.

1. Strategic Partnership Frameworks with WFP, UNHCR, OCHA, CERF and ICRC and associated EOL templates (10 documents)
2. Australia's International Development Policy, 2023
3. DFAT's thematic policies and strategies, including:
 - a. Australia's Humanitarian Policy
 - b. International Gender Equality Strategy
 - c. International Disability Equity and Rights Strategy
 - d. Climate Adaptation Strategy
 - e. Good Practice Note on Integrating Climate Change into Development Assistance for Implementing Partners
 - f. First Nations Engagement Guidance Note
4. Australia's International Development Performance and Delivery Framework, 2023
5. Performance of Australian Development Cooperation Report 2023-24
6. Localisation Practice Note, Australia's International Development Performance and Delivery Framework and relevant guidance notes and/or templates
7. DFAT's Protracted Crisis Monitoring and Evaluation Framework
8. DFAT's Development Risk Management Policy and Practice Notes, and other risk management policies and/or frameworks, including:
 - a. International Development Programming Guide (Section 10)
 - b. Environmental and Social Safeguard Policy
 - c. Fraud and Corruption Control Framework
 - d. Managing Terrorist Resourcing Risk Guidance Note
 - e. Child Protection Policy
 - f. Preventing Sexual Exploitation, Abuse and Harassment Policy
9. Annual Multilateral Performance Assessment pilot completed for WFP (MPA)
10. Reporting provided by WFP and UNHCR for the response in Bangladesh since 2022, including
 - a. EOLs for WFP and UNHCR for response in Bangladesh signed since 2022.
 - b. Humanitarian Investment Monitoring Reports (HIMR) for
 - c. Partner Performance Assessments (PPA) for WFP and UNHCR in Bangladesh 2022, 2023, 2024, 2025
 - d. UNHCR Bangladesh 8+3 report, 2024
 - e. WFP Bangladesh 8+3 report, 2023
 - f. UN ISCG, 2023 Report on the Joint Response Plan for the Rohingya Humanitarian Crisis, Bangladesh
11. DFAT HPD IMR and FIMR synthesis and performance dashboard for 2023 and 2024

12. Patrick Saez, Lewis Sida, Rachel Silverman, and Rose Worden. 2021. "Improving Performance in the Multilateral Humanitarian System: New Models of Donorship." CGD Policy Paper 214. Washington, DC: Center for Global Development. <https://www.cgdev.org/publication/improving-performance-multilateral-humanitarian-system-new-modelsdonorship>
13. DFAT, Australia in the World Snapshot, 2025, <https://www.dfat.gov.au/publications/international-relations/australia-world-2025-snapshot>
14. SPF and EOL financial data 2017-18 to 2024-25
15. UNHCR Flexible and Unearmarked Funding Report, 2024, <https://reporting.unhcr.org/flexible-funding-2024>
16. IOD Parc Performance Arrangement, baseline report (2022), annual reports (2023, 2024) and trend analysis (2025).
17. Praxis Consultants (2025) DFAT Humanitarian Investments, Gender Equality, Disability Inclusion and Localisation Assessment, 2024
18. Bluebird Consultants 2023 HPD Quality Reporting Synthesis and Synthesis of Humanitarian Investments from 2024, and HPD performance dashboard