Inter-organizational Competition in Humanitarian Governance

Cecilia Corsini

St Antony's College

University of Oxford

A thesis submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

Department of Politics and International Relations (DPIR)

University of Oxford

Trinity 2024

Wordcount: 77,653 (excluding bibliography)

Abstract

In a world where humanitarian crises are increasing in severity and frequency, the humanitarian system is often described as a 'competitive marketplace,' an international regime densely populated by diverse actors – UN organizations, the Red Cross/Red Crescent Movement, international and local non-governmental organizations (NGOs), private entities, governments, and civil society – all vying for scarce resources from a limited pool of fatigued donors (Weiss 2013). Existing theoretical approaches on inter-organizational competition suggest that, under conditions of density and resource scarcity, competing actors are encouraged to pursue niche specialization as an avenue to secure organizational survival. This logic underpins the UN's Humanitarian Cluster Approach, where each UN organization, agency, or programme with a humanitarian role is assigned to a specific sector of the response, taking on coordination, advocacy, and provider-of-last-resort responsibilities. While the Cluster Approach was intended to reduce duplication and establish a clear division of labour among UN entities, in practice, humanitarian workers and external observers lament the persistence of siloed thinking and competition among UN organizations.

This thesis investigates why competition persists among UN organizations in humanitarian response despite institutional differentiation. Under conditions of population density and resource scarcity, inter-organizational competition endures even with niche specialization if donor states view these niches as substitutes and prioritize resource allocation accordingly. When international organizations (IOs) perceive the threat of resource reallocation and niche substitution, they react to ensure their survival. The competitive strategy each IO adopts depends on its organizational type – either specialist or generalist. Specialist IOs pursue competitive issue framing, aligning the framing of a salient policy problem with their existing capabilities and expertise. Generalist IOs, on the other hand, engage in competitive horizontal

expansion, using their adaptability to fill gaps and provide services according to donor needs, even when these services fall outside their primary mandate.

In the humanitarian sector, the threat of resource reallocation occurs when donors prioritize one sector's humanitarian needs over another. The World Food Programme (WFP) and the International Organization for Migration (IOM) have consistently secured relatively high levels of humanitarian funding by employing competitive issue framing and competitive horizontal expansion, respectively. The United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), with its privileged position in controlling the appointment of in-country Humanitarian Coordinators, was less responsive to competitive pressures and failed to implement either strategy. Since losing control of the Humanitarian Coordinator appointment process in 2018/19, UNDP has been progressively 'competed out' of the humanitarian sector.

Acknowledgements

To Laura and Lavinia.

Completing this DPhil thesis would not have been possible without the kindness and the support of several individuals. Dr Ranjit Lall agreed to become my DPhil supervisor at a late and delicate stage of my degree and provided support and thoughtful guidance during this last academic year, enabling me to achieve what only a few months ago seemed out of reach. At the Department of Politics and International Relations of the University of Oxford, I had the chance to interact with and learn from many brilliant scholars, and I am particularly grateful to Professor Richard Caplan and Professor Andrea Ruggeri for their kind guidance and encouragement.

Over the years, I received precious feedback - in Oxford, virtually, and in Bayreuth - from Professor Duncan Snidal, Professor Karolina Milewicz, and the other participants of the Snidal-Milewicz seminar, Lucinda Cadzow, Jeffrey Ding, Farsan Ghassim, Gemma Lligadas Gonzalez, Kate Guy, David Hagebölling, Yutao Huang, Tuuli-Anna Huikuri, Edward Knudsen, Evgenija Kroeker, Kan Li, Claas Mertens, Hayley Pring, Samuel Seitz, Scott Singer, Giuseppe Spatafora, Kenneth Stiller, and Daniel Tate.

I am very thankful to Professor Bernhard Reinsberg for his mentorship and kindness, as well as for the opportunity to expand my knowledge of IO resourcing and humanitarian funding while exploring Scotland.

During the course of the DPhil, I was lucky enough to receive feedback and learn from leading scholars in the field of international relations, including Professor Matthew Evangelista (through Fondazione Luigi Einaudi, Turin, Italy), Professor Mette Eilstrup-Sangiovanni (Workshop on the vitality, resilience, decline and death of international organizations,

Maastricht, 26-27 June 2023), and Dr Tyler Pratt (International Studies Association Conference 2024, San Francisco, USA).

The DPhil can feel like a solitary endeavour, but I was lucky enough to be surrounded by a group of wonderful friends, in Oxford and beyond. I am grateful to my best friend, 'sista-from-another-mista' Cleo, for providing feedback on my thesis, for forcing me to take breaks to travel with her, and, most of all, for her unwavering emotional support during the DPhil and beyond. My friend Alessandra welcomed me to Geneva in 2016 and inspired me to pursue a doctoral degree, offering wine, company, and encouragement all along the way. For me, Geneva is not only the humanitarian capital of the world but also the place where I had the privilege of meeting many dedicated practitioners and scholars of international relations and international law, some of whom I am fortunate to call my friends, including Agnese, Cecilia, Emma, Fédora, Francesco Rom., Giulia, and Ugne. I am deeply grateful to my brilliant friend Leonie, who, despite moving to New York for her PhD before I arrived in Oxford, shared all the best coffee spots and wine bars with me. Her Sunday lunchtime calls provided welcome company during the isolation of Covid-19. In Oxford, I also owe thanks to Alejandro, Ashrakat, Azim, Christine, Dawei, Francesca B., Francesco Raff., Gerda, Giuliano, Giuseppe, Leonardo C., Leonardo P., Marta A., and Marta Z., whom I've known since my years in Maastricht, as well as Mats, Michael 'Micha' G., Natasja, Raquel, and Sara F., for their friendship and support.

Most of all, I am grateful to my wonderful parents, Andrea and Valentina, for their unconditional love, support, and encouragement. I am the luckiest daughter in the world.

All mistakes remain my own.

Table of Contents

Abstract 2
Acknowledgements 4
Table of Contents 6
List of Figures 9
List of Abbreviations 11
Chapter 1: Introduction 13
1.1 Introduction 13
1.2 The UN in humanitarian response: One coordination system, two research puzzles 18
1.3 Literature review 24
1.3.1 IO autonomy in international regimes: an IR approach 25
1.3.2 Public policy, public administration, and the quest for organizational survival 30
1.3.3 Humanitarian action as a subject of academic inquiry 32
1.4 The argument in brief 34
1.5 Research design and methods 37
1.5.1 Research design and case selection 38
1.5.2 Methods: data collection, transcription, and analysis 42
1.5.3 Potential limitations 46
1.6 Thesis overview 48
Chapter 2: Global humanitarian governance and the architecture of international humanitarian coordination 52
2.1 Introduction 52
2.2 The global humanitarian system as an international regime 54
2.3 The evolution of post-World War II global humanitarian governance 61
2.4 The Humanitarian Cluster System at the country level 65
2.4.1 The origins of the Cluster System 65
2.4.2 Structure and rationale of the Cluster System 68
2.4.3 Stages of Cluster activation at the country level 72
2.5 Conclusion 74
Chapter 3:Theoretical framework 78
3.1 Introduction 78
3.2 Competition in the social sciences: Beyond the conceptual ‘monopoly’ of economics 81
3.3 Resource Dependence Theory & Population Ecology: Organizational theory and inter-organizational competition 85
3.4 Studying bureaucracies in IR: Should we open the IO black box? 90
3.5 Inter-organizational competition despite institutional differentiation 94
3.6 Organizational type and competitive strategy 100

3.7 Going beyond the institutionalisms 104
3.7.1 Historical institutionalism 104
3.7.2 Sociological institutionalism and the 'garbage can' model 105
3.7.3 Rational choice institutionalism 106
3.8 Competition among UN organizations in the humanitarian system 107
3.9 From hypotheses to observable implications 112
Chapter 4: The international humanitarian regime as a competitive environment 117
4.1 Introduction 117
4.2 Environmental density: The humanitarian space as a crowded marketplace 121
4.3 Resource scarcity: Rising needs, doubtful donors, and dwindling aid 127
4.4 Threat of resource reallocation: The perils of donor-induced prioritization 134
4.5 Limits to coordination and cooperation in the Humanitarian Cluster System 139
4.6 Conclusion 148
Chapter 5: Winning the competition: The World Food Programme (WFP) and the International Organization for Migration (IOM) 150
5.1 Introduction 150
5.2 WFP and competitive issue framing 154
5.2.1 The history of WFP: A short overview 155
5.2.2 Why WFP competes 157
5.2.3 How WFP competes 163
5.3 The Winners: IOM and Competitive Horizontal Expansion 174
5.3.1 IOM: An overview 174
5.3.2 Why IOM competes 178
5.3.3 How IOM Competes 182
5.4 Winning the competition: A glance at WFP's and IOM's humanitarian funding record 193
5.5 Conclusion 201
Chapter 6: Losing the Competition: The United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) 203
6.1 Introduction 204
6.2 A humanitarian development? UNDP's role within the UN humanitarian system 207
6.3 Why UNDP did not compete: No threat of substitution 216
6.4 How UNDP lost the competition: No competitive strategy 222
6.5 UNDP's humanitarian trajectory in numbers 229
6.6 Conclusion 241
Chapter 7: Conclusion 243
7.1 Introduction 243
7.2 Contributions to scholarship 249

7.3 Insights for policy practitioners 254
7.4 Scope conditions and limitations 258
7.4.1 Distinctive features of humanitarian IOs 259
7.4.2 On inter-IO competition beyond humanitarian action 260
7.4.3 Methodological limitations 264
7.5 Future research 265
Appendix A: Classifying humanitarian IOs: Generalists vs specialists 272
Appendix B: List of Interviews 276
Appendix C: List of consulted documents and meetings 279
Bibliography 289

List of Figures

Figure 1: The humanitarian coordination architecture at the global level 64

Figure 2: From resource scarcity to inter-IO competition 95

Figure 3: Classifying humanitarian IOs 111

Figure 4: Coding categories 115

Figure 5: UN 2022 Total Expenditure Breakdown 128

Figure 6:Unmet funding requirements 129

Figure 7: Interview evidence 141

Figure 8: Evolution of WFP's funding gap 2019-2023 158

Figure 9: Why WFP competes 162

Figure 10: How WFP competes 173

Figure 11: Why IOM competes 180

Figure 12: How IOM competes 191

Figure 13: Top recipients of multilateral humanitarian aid 2016 194

Figure 14: Top recipients of multilateral humanitarian aid 2018 194

Figure 15: Top recipients of multilateral humanitarian aid 2022 195

Figure 16: WFP funding by sector 2016 196

Figure 17: WFP funding by sector 2018 196

Figure 18: WFP funding by sector 2022 197

Figure 19: IOM funding by sector 2016 198

Figure 20: IOM funding by sector 2018 198

Figure 21: IOM funding by sector 2022 199

Figure 22: Funding coverage per sector 2016, 2018, 2022 200

Figure 23: UNDP in the humanitarian system 208

Figure 24: funding requirements covered by global sectors 2016 232
Figure 25: Funding requirements covered by global sectors 2018 233
Figure 26: Funding requirements covered by global sectors 2022 234
Figure 27: multilateral recipients of Early Recovery funding 2016 235
Figure 28: Multilateral recipients of Early Recovery funding 2022 236
Figure 29: Top recipients of multilateral humanitarian aid 2016 237
Figure 30: Top recipients of multilateral humanitarian aid 2018 237
Figure 31: Top recipients of multilateral humanitarian aid 2022 238
Figure 32: Classifying humanitarian IOs 275

List of Abbreviations

ALNAP Active Learning Network for Accountability and Performance

CBPF Country Based Pooled Fund

CERF UN Central Emergency Response Fund

CLA Cluster Lead Agency

DAC Development Assistance Committee

DfID UK's Department for International Development

ECHO European Civil Protection and Humanitarian Aid Operations

ERC Emergency Relief Coordinator

EU European Union

FA Flash Appeal

FAO Food and Agriculture Organization

FTS Financial Tracking Service (OCHA)

GHO Global Humanitarian Overview

HC Humanitarian Coordinator

HCT Humanitarian Country Team

HDP Humanitarian-Development-Peace Nexus

HNO Humanitarian Needs Overview

HRP Humanitarian Response Plan

IASC Inter-Agency Standing Committee

ICRC International Committee of the Red Cross

ICVA International Council for Voluntary Agencies

IDP internally displaced person

IFRC International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies

INGO international non-governmental organization

IO international organization

IOM International Organization for Migration

IPC International Phase Classification

MSF Médecins Sans Frontières

NRC Norwegian Refugee Council

OCHA UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs

ODI Overseas Development Institute

ODA Official Development Assistance

OECD Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development

RC Resident Coordinator

RRP Regional Response Plan

SDGs Sustainable Development Goals

SOHS The State of the Humanitarian System

UN United Nations

UNDP UN Development Programme

UNFPA UN Population Fund

UNHCR United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees

UNICEF UN Children's Fund

UNRWA UN Relief and Works Agency

USAID US Agency for International Development

WASH Water, sanitation, and hygiene

WFP World Food Programme

WHO World Health Organization

WHS World Humanitarian Summit

Chapter 1

Introduction

"There is a design fault in the humanitarian enterprise because it is based, of course, on the competition between agencies. Competition for money, brand, profile. […] We then tell these agencies 'Yes, you can compete, but actually we don't want you to compete, we want you to coordinate and cooperate'. It's a tension that is not resolved and I think, frankly, ultimately it is not resolvable by our current system."

Martin Griffiths, former UN Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs, for The New Humanitarian, 26th January 2022

1.1 Introduction

The city of Geneva (Switzerland) is widely recognized as the humanitarian capital of the world. Nestled amid the Swiss Alps, far removed from the turmoil and suffering of the world's many humanitarian hotspots, Geneva, or more precisely, *la Genève internationale,* serves as the somewhat idealistic backdrop for most of the crucial negotiations concerning the international community's response to humanitarian crises globally. Extending from the shores of *Lac Léman* to the *Grand Morillon* hill near the French border, the UN quarter of the city hosts the headquarters and representation offices of most international organizations (IOs) with a humanitarian mandate. For the newest intern in town venturing into the realm of humanitarian affairs, it is not uncommon to find herself participating in an IOM Executive Board Annual Session in the morning, attending an OCHA-led crisis briefing at the *Palais de Nations* at lunchtime, and engaging in an afternoon donor meeting with the World Food Programme all in

a single day. Before long, the multitude of acronyms and jargon becomes familiar, the halls of the *Palais des Nations* become distinguishable, and the meetings start to feel somewhat repetitive. While the daily grind of international Geneva might appear tedious on the surface, keen observers soon notice stark differences in the strategies adopted by IOs to secure donor support and in their effectiveness.

Fundraising seems to be the central concern of humanitarian IOs in Geneva, an underlying theme to all the donor meetings the intern attends. Whether humanitarian IOs appeal for funding for a new emergency, advocate for continued support in a situation of protracted crisis, or make the case for predictable, long-term, unearmarked resources to scale up their preparedness capabilities, staff members of these institutions are always asking for money. After a few days, the intern notices that expressions such as 'the widening humanitarian funding gap', 'the small pool of donors', and 'the skyrocketing humanitarian needs' seem to be an integral part of the Geneva jargon. The focus on humanitarian funding is understandable: at the beginning of 2023, the number of people in need of humanitarian assistance and protection around the world due to conflicts, climate, and natural emergencies rose to 339 million, bringing the total estimated funding requirements to an unprecedented $51.5 billion. Available humanitarian resources have not increased to match the steep rise in needs: at the end of the same year, only 38% of the combined humanitarian appeals had been funded. More than 80% of humanitarian funding comes for a small number of donors, who have increasingly resorted to earmarking their humanitarian contributions, making financial flows less predictable for IOs. As resources become scarcer, each UN agency scrambles to present its case to donors and position itself as the best provider of humanitarian assistance in the latest crisis.

During these meetings and briefings, the intern frequently hears requests and pledges to 'deepen inter-agency coordination', 'strengthen the Clusters', 'deliver assistance based on each agency's comparative advantage', etc. She soon discovers that a coordination mechanism

known as the Cluster System or Cluster Approach has been in place since 2005 at both the global and country levels. This coordination system assigns a functional area of responsibility to each UN organization according to its mandate and organizational expertise. In other words, each organization is responsible for the sector of the humanitarian response where it has the greatest capability to bring relief to the people who need it most. This way, all UN organizations involved in humanitarian response are represented and have a well-defined role in a system where, in theory, no organization steps on another's toes and none is considered more important than the others.

The intern wonders: If a division of labour exists among UN organizations, why do donors still lament the lack of coordination within the UN system? And if the Cluster Approach assigns a well-defined role to each UN actor, why do these organizations continue to compete for donors, positioning themselves as the best providers of humanitarian assistance to maximize funding? While listening to an interview with Martin Griffiths, the UN Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs and Emergency Relief Coordinator, she realizes that even seasoned humanitarians grapple with the same questions[1].

The UN humanitarian system has undergone numerous reforms aimed at improving inter-agency coordination and ultimately delivering more effective responses and better outcomes in the field. Starting with resolution 2816 in 1971, which introduced the UN Office of the Disaster Relief Coordinator in Geneva, some of the most pivotal moments include the 1991 UNGA resolution 46/182, which led to the establishment of the Inter Agency Standing Committee; the 1992 inauguration of the Department for Humanitarian Affairs (which became OCHA in 1998); the 2005 Humanitarian Reform, which introduced the Cluster System and a pooled funding

[1] Martin Griffiths stepped down at the end of June 2024. On October 9th 2024, UN Secretary General António Guterres appointed Tom Fletcher, former UK ambassador and principal of Hertford College at the University of Oxford as the new Emergency Relief Coordinator.

mechanism known as the CERF; the 2011 Transformative Agenda, which introduced clearer parameters for improved collective action in emergencies; and the World Humanitarian Summit in 2016, which launched the Grand Bargain - a framework for mutual engagement between the largest donors and humanitarian organizations to address the financing gap and the effectiveness of humanitarian responses. These initiatives all attempt to tackle collective action problems related to coordination and fundraising within the humanitarian system. Yet, more than 50 years after UNGA resolution 2816, the same challenges continue to plague humanitarian response, becoming even more evident as the severity and frequency of both man-made and natural disasters increase.

Coordination in humanitarian response is a persistent issue, but financing and fundraising are equally contentious topics in humanitarian governance. Although mechanisms exist for a centralized, UN-wide fundraising process—where the UN Humanitarian Coordinator in the crisis-affected country advocates for resources on behalf of all UN organizations—in practice, each UN organization often bypasses these UN-wide appeals and approaches donors bilaterally. Despite the humanitarian community's acknowledgment that each UN organization plays an equally important role as a Cluster Lead Agency, the scramble for funding results in some IOs faring considerably well, while others remain chronically underfunded from crisis to crisis.

Although the UN-wide coordination system is designed around complementarity, competition among UN organizations persists. Moreover, there is significant variation in how different IOs perform in this competitive environment. This thesis is structured around a two-part research question: *Why do humanitarian international organizations (IOs) compete against each other even after niche specialization? How do they compete and what makes some international organizations successful while others struggle to survive in this competitive landscape?*

Existing theoretical approaches on inter-IO competition suggest that under conditions of scarcity, competition should decrease as organizations find their niche of specialization. However, in the humanitarian space, niche specialization does not lead to resource partitioning, and competition persists. As donor states face budgetary constraints due to domestic pressures and global trends, they cannot fully fund every sector of the response, leading to resource prioritization and a concentration of resources in a few sectors. For IOs, donor-led prioritization poses the risk of resource diversion away from their niche, threatening their ability to maintain operations and ultimately their survival within the humanitarian system.

In response to the risk of niche substitution, IOs engage in competitive behaviour to secure necessary resources. The strategic response of an IO depends on whether it is a specialist or a generalist organization. Specialist organizations typically engage in competitive issue framing, attempting to influence the narrative around a crisis to align with their mandate and capabilities. In contrast, generalist organizations often pursue a competitive horizontal expansion strategy, acting as gap fillers by providing services and operations based on available opportunities, regardless of whether these align with their original mandate.

This introductory chapter is structured as follows. Section 1.2 details the two puzzles at the heart of this dissertation arising from the UN coordination structure in humanitarian response. Section 1.3 provides an overview of the different strands of existing literature related to IOs in competitive environments, upon which this dissertation builds. The chapter then summarizes the two-part argument that is tested in this dissertation. Section 1.5 outlines the research design, case selection strategy, and data collection strategy used to test the argument presented in section 1.4. Finally, the last section of the chapter provides an overview of the structure of the dissertation.

1.2 The UN in humanitarian response: One coordination system, two research puzzles

The international community has long recognized the moral imperative of using available resources as efficiently as possible to avoid waste and maximize the impact of relief efforts for people in need around the world. This is particularly true nowadays when throughout the UN's humanitarian branch there is a shared perception that the system is approaching a breaking point. The combined impact of the Covid-19 pandemic, the Russian war of aggression against Ukraine, escalating inflation, and climate change has led to an unprecedented situation. The number of people in need rose from 136 million in 2018 to 255 million in 2022. As of June 2023, estimated global humanitarian needs have surged to an alarming USD 55 billion, with a staggering 362 million people urgently requiring relief assistance. At the same time, available humanitarian financing is showing signs of stagnation. According to the mid-year update of the 2024 Global Humanitarian Overview compiled by the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA), only USD7.9 billion had been raised by the end of May, representing just 16% of the total required to address humanitarian needs in 2024[2]. Not only the volume of total humanitarian ODA is insufficient compared to escalating humanitarian needs worldwide, but the 'quality' of this funding has also declined in recent years, as earmarked resources represent an ever-growing share of IOs' total budget. Humanitarian actors, including UN agencies and programmes, often find themselves overstretched, forcing them to make difficult choices about which populations to assist and to what extent.

Achieving efficiency in the face of scarce resources requires effectively resolving the collective action problems that humanitarian actors encounter. The current coordination framework, known as the Humanitarian Cluster System, was designed to address this by clearly

[2] OCHA. *Global Humanitarian Overview 2024, Mid-Year Update (Snapshot as of 31 May 2024).* Retrieved in August 2024 from https://www.unocha.org/publications/report/world/global-humanitarian-overview-2024-mid-year-update-snapshot-31-may-2024

dividing labour among UN organizations, with each international organization (IO) assigned a specific area of humanitarian response. Additionally, a centralized fundraising procedure was developed over the years to promote system-wide coherence and provide all UN organizations with equal opportunities for quick funding access. However, this intricate architecture—resulting from years of reflection, negotiation, and reform—has led to two unintended and puzzling outcomes. First, despite the division of labour established by the Cluster System, UN humanitarian organizations still find themselves in competition with one another. Second, although each UN agency is theoretically given equal importance as a lead in its designated functional area, some organizations are notably more successful than others in securing funding for their humanitarian operations.

An efficient response requires, above all, effective coordination among actors, with clearly defined areas of intervention and sectors of competence to avoid wasting resources. Following the failures in delivering assistance after the 2004 crisis in Darfur and the Indian Ocean tsunami, UN agencies and donor countries recognized the urgent need for a coordination system among humanitarian actors. The Humanitarian Reform process initiated in 2005 introduced several innovations, most notably the Humanitarian Cluster System. Grounded in insights from Economics and Organization Theory, this system aims to reduce competition, inefficiencies, and duplication by introducing a clear division of labour based on each organization's comparative advantage. Under this coordination system, each UN organization with an operational role in humanitarian response, as designated by the Inter-Agency Standing Committee, is assigned to a sector of humanitarian response, referred to as a Cluster. As a Cluster Lead, the UN agency is responsible for coordinating sector-specific actors, identifying gaps and needs, and collaborating with national and local authorities wherever possible. The system's primary objectives are to ensure accountability, leadership, and partnership in every

international humanitarian response. The Cluster Approach has been successful in bringing structure to humanitarian response by institutionalizing meetings and communication among UN system organizations, local and international NGOs, national authorities, and, at least in theory, beneficiaries. However, NGO representatives have criticized the Cluster System for being too UN-centric, arguing that it unfairly benefits Cluster Lead Agencies and imposes burdensome requirements on smaller, local organizations, which may have to divert personnel from programming to coordination due to limited resources.

While not exempt from criticism, the Cluster System has introduced a degree of structure—albeit asymmetrical—into the relationship between UN organizations and other humanitarian actors. It has also cemented the UN's leading role in international humanitarian response, assigning coordination responsibilities and recognizing its agencies as providers of last resort. Although humanitarian action is not the exclusive domain of the UN and its specialized agencies, it has become one of their most defining and recognizable activities.

In addition to assigning responsibilities and coordinating field operations, UN agencies face another collective action problem: fundraising. As the quantity and quality of multilateral humanitarian aid declines compared to escalating funding needs, fundraising has become an essential activity for these IOs to sustain their operational role and global presence. Because UN agencies in humanitarian response cannot rely on a predictable, continuous flow of resources from donors, they must invest significant effort in fundraising, which diverts time and personnel away from programming (Aldashev and Verdier 2010a; Cooley and Ron 2002). In principle, the 2005 Humanitarian Reform and subsequent system reviews have addressed this issue by promoting the centralization of fundraising efforts, allowing UN organizations to minimize the diversion of time and resources from programming. Coordinated fundraising can also enhance a crisis's visibility among donors. At the country level, UN-wide coordinated

fundraising efforts are structured as follows: the UN Humanitarian Coordinator, supported by Cluster Lead Agencies, drafts a Flash Appeal immediately following a crisis. This document guides donors in identifying the most pressing needs in each sector, enabling them to allocate resources accordingly.

Despite various humanitarian reform processes initiated from the 1970s through the 2010s aiming to address the collective action problems facing UN organizations, these challenges persist. Even with the centralized process of releasing system-wide appeals, UN organizations continue to devote significant efforts to bilateral fundraising to maximize funding for their programmes. Although coordination among UN agencies and other actors within the same sector has improved, the introduction of the Cluster System has done little to enhance coordination among UN organizations themselves and has instead produced two puzzles of interest for researchers studying inter-IO relations.

The first puzzle concerns the persistence of inter-IO competition despite niche specialization. As detailed in section 1.3, scholars of Organization Theory have long examined inter-organizational competition, which arises under conditions of resource scarcity and environmental density when organizations rely on the same pool of scarce resources for survival. The literature also suggests that niche specialization can reduce inter-organizational competition; as organizations specialize, they occupy unique niches that are less densely populated than the broader organizational landscape, leading to resource partitioning, reduced competition, and greater coexistence. The Humanitarian Cluster approach attempts to institutionalize this division of labour within the UN system by assigning each UN agency a sector of responsibility based on its mandate and expertise. This design aims to reflect each IO's comparative advantage in a *primus inter pares* setting, where UN agencies recognize each

other's operational roles in humanitarian response. However, this niche specialization has not reduced competition among UN organizations, which remains intense, as noted by former UN Emergency Relief Coordinator Martin Griffiths. In principle, Cluster activation in crisis response should be flexible, initiating operations only in sectors where needs are identified on the ground. In practice, however, all Clusters are often activated, even when the situation on the ground would only require a more targeted response in one or a few sectors. UN organizations frequently undermine the coordination efforts of the Humanitarian Coordinator and OCHA, favouring an insular approach to humanitarian response. There is broad consensus in the humanitarian community that the current system remains challenged by "*siloed approaches, structural inefficiencies and sometimes destructive competition between agencies. Agencies carry out their own needs assessments, develop their own plans, and work under separate leadership structures. In the current system, priorities are frequently defined according to what the agencies can supply, rather than what beneficiaries need most*"[3]. The UN Inter Agency Standing Committee, which includes the heads of all UN humanitarian organizations, acknowledged that "*while the need for joint planning is often talked about, in reality every organization is an island. 'Turf wars' are a common occurrence, with each organization trying to position itself as the best implementer—and therefore most deserving of donor funds. This duplicates efforts and saps energy which humanitarian aid can ill afford to lose*[4]".

The second puzzle concerns the varying track records of UN agencies in this competitive environment. While some international organizations (IOs) have managed to secure sufficient

[3] Independent Commission for Aid Impact. *The UK's approach to funding the UN humanitarian system*. 2018. Retrieved in March 2023 from https://icai.independent.gov.uk/html-version/humanitarian-reform/

[4] High-Level Panel on Humanitarian Financing. *Report to the Secretary-General: Too important to fail—addressing the humanitarian financing gap*. January 2016, page 3
Retrieved in March 2023 from https://interagencystandingcommittee.org/sites/default/files/migrated/2017-02/hlp_report_too_important_to_failgcoaddressing_the_humanitarian_financing_gap.pdf

resources and even thrive in the competitive humanitarian marketplace, others remain chronically underfunded from crisis to crisis, sometimes even having to scale back their engagement in the humanitarian realm. UN organizations often go to great lengths to persuade Humanitarian Coordinators to prioritize their sectors in coordinated UN appeals. Simultaneously, they approach donors bilaterally to advance their own agendas, which can undermine collective UN-wide fundraising efforts. While some UN agencies limit their operations to their designated Clusters, others frequently engage in activities across multiple sectors. This difference in fundraising success leads to some sectors of the humanitarian response being inadequately serviced despite clear needs on the ground, while other functional areas are overrepresented. This creates a burdensome coordination architecture, far from the lean, adaptable system envisioned by the 2005 Humanitarian Reform.

As humanitarian needs worldwide reach unprecedented levels, and the compounded impact of climate change, geopolitical tensions, and economic shocks is likely to worsen in the coming years, understanding the causes of persistent inter-organizational competition among humanitarian international organizations is not just a question of academic interest for researchers of global governance – it is a moral imperative for the international community. If humanitarian donors and organizations are truly committed to saving lives and alleviating human suffering, they must address the factors that hinder successful coordination. Without doing so, the humanitarian community is likely to continue along the path of well-meaning but incremental reforms that began in the 1970s - introducing new acronyms, mechanisms, and formal coordination structures- without making a real difference for the people these changes are intended to benefit.

1.3 Literature review

This section examines existing scholarly literature on the dynamics of inter-IO relations, within the humanitarian realm and beyond. The literature that speaks to the research question investigated in this dissertation can be divided into three broad categories: the theoretical approaches in international relations that focus on IO autonomy, regime complexity, and institutional overlap, the body of Public Administration literature considering the role of bureaucratic politics and entrepreneurial civil servants in domestic agencies, and the limited research on relations among humanitarian IOs and the system in which these organizations are embedded.

To broaden the collective understanding of the phenomenon of inter-IO competition in international relations, this dissertation aims at closing the gap between sociological and rationalist theories acknowledging IO agency but mostly focusing on individual IOs, and population-wide approaches that stress state behaviour under circumstances of environmental density and institutional fragmentation, while neglecting IOs' reaction to competitive pressures stemming from the policy space in which they operate.

Organizations and the people working within them as social actors have been studied at the domestic level by scholars of Public Administration well before IOs became a topic of interest for international relations theorists (Bendor 1994; Bendix 1945). In particular, bureaucratic politics sheds light on the role of entrepreneurial civil servants who prioritise the survival of their organizations above other considerations, including the achievement of the original mandate. In the policy process, bureaucrats secure survival by framing policy problems in a way that closely aligns with their organization's mandate (Morgan and Dennehy 1997; Gioia and Chittipeddi 1991). Other studies describe how individuals within organizations gradually push the boundaries of their institution's remit to include new issues that are perceived as politically relevant, in a process commonly known as mission creep (Wilson 2000;

Downs 1967). IPA literature acknowledges how expanding mandates and contrasting framings of the same policy problems in a quest to secure political relevance and scarce resources eventually lead to institutional overlap and inter-organizational rivalry. While the IPA literature sheds light on the internal mechanism that lead to inter-organizational competition, these theoretical insights, apart from a few notable exceptions (Johnson 2014; Ege and Bauer 2013; Ege 2020; Ege et al. 2023), have not been widely applied to the field of international relations and the study of inter-IO relations.

Inter-organizational competition as a reality of the humanitarian system is well acknowledged both in academic research and grey literature. Existing academic literature usually focus on specific dyads of organizations, such as IOM-UNHCR, FAO-WFP, and on how mandate overlap impacts inter-organizational relations. Less research has been conducted on the systemic drivers of competition and on how/if different humanitarian IOs react to competitive pressures.

1.3.1 IO autonomy in international regimes: an IR approach

Investigating how and why international organizations compete against each other implies attributing to IOs a certain degree of autonomy and agency. This has not always been a given in International Relations. Indeed, the study of international organizations (IOs) in International Relations has evolved considerably over the last few decades. As a relative new phenomenon of international politics, with most of today's IOs being established after the end of World War II, IR scholars were initially sceptical in treating IOs as independent actors in global governance (Barkin 2023b). From a realist perspective, IOs are epiphenomena, merely reflecting the current distribution of power among states at a certain point in time (Mearsheimer

1994). Liberal institutionalists and functionalist scholars have traditionally considered IOs through the prism of international law and the rules made by states for states (Abbott et al. 2000). From this perspective, international organizations are the fora through which member states interact and cooperate (Abbott and Snidal 1998; Keohane 1984; Martin 1992). The discipline has progressively moved beyond viewing IOs as entities devoid of agency, instead defining them as actors in their own right and investigating how they interact with their external environment and other international actors, particularly nation-states (Pevehouse and Borzyskowski 2017). Notably, two approaches emerged that broadened the theoretical landscape in the study of international organizations: the sociological institutionalist approach and principal-agent (PA) theory.

Sociological institutionalist scholars highlight the role of the expert and moral authority of international organizations as the primary source of their autonomy (Barnett and Finnemore 2004; Barnett and Coleman 2005). From this perspective, IOs leverage their perceived image as apolitical, technocratic entities to gradually carve out more autonomy from their member states, thereby shaping the substance of political agendas. To maintain legitimacy and secure continued access to material resources IOs progressively expand their remit beyond their delegated mandate (Kreuder-Sonnen 2019; Littoz-Monnet 2021). Maintaining relevance in global governance by aligning their services with emerging policy issues and challenges that are perceived as particularly salient by states is key to ensure organizational survival and is a central preoccupation of international organizations (Sinclair 2017; Hall 2016).

Principal-agent (P-A) theory also recognizes IOs' agency in the extent to which they successfully gain autonomy from their principals, the member states. However, differently from the sociological institutionalist theorists, P-A proponents point to incomplete contracts as the main source of IO autonomy. Borrowing from disciplines like Economics and Comparative Politics, Principal-Agent (P-A) theory examines IOs as agents to which principal-states

delegate authority to address specific issues in international politics (Miller 2005; D. Hawkins et al. 2006; D. G. Hawkins 2006). This literature acknowledges that IOs can behave strategically without undertheorizing the important role of their member states. States delegate authority to IOs to capitalize on the benefits of specialization. Depending on the terms of the delegation contract, agency slack may occur, allowing IOs to pursue independent action beyond what was originally prescribed by the principal.

This dissertation builds on these approaches in several ways. In line with both sociological institutionalist and P-A approaches, it acknowledges IO agency and theorizes IO autonomy as the difference between an IO's original remit and the control their member states exert relating to the services/operations actually carried out by an organization. While focusing on IOs, this dissertation also recognizes the primary role played by member states in determining the external conditions in which IOs operate and in controlling the flow of those material resources on which IO survival ultimately depends. As it is centred specifically on humanitarian IOs, the dissertation also builds on the literature treating crisis as an opportunity for further mandate expansion and enhanced organizational autonomy (Kreuder-Sonnen 2019; E. C. Heldt and Mueller 2021). When crisis strikes and a response is urgent, the IO can leverage its expertise and superior understanding of the situation on the ground to weaken the principal-agent contract and secure additional resources.

Despite providing a solid theoretical ground to analyse IO agency, both P-A theory and sociological institutionalist approaches also suffer from some limitations when applying them to interactions among IOs. These approaches mostly focus on individual IOs and do not analyse their social interactions beyond the dyadic dimension of the principal-agent/ state-IO relation. While P-A approaches shed light on the trade-off between control and performance, and how this might lead to agency slack, this literature has paid little attention to IO-IO relations and

mutual perception. Similarly, constructivist approaches have not paid much attention to inter-organizational dynamics.

Other theoretical approaches have expanded their research agendas beyond the individual IO to include inter-organizational relations and populations of IOs as their object of interest. Some researchers have focused on the ecology of IOs, investigating the conditions conducive to population growth and decline (Abbott, Green, and Keohane 2016; Shanks, Jacobson, and Kaplan 1996; Gray 2018; Borzyskowski and Vabulas 2019; Eilstrup-Sangiovanni 2020; 2021; Morin 2018). This body of literature shows that, contrary to expectations, institutional stickiness is not sufficient to guarantee organizational survival and that IOs remain vulnerable to crises, due to both internal weaknesses and external pressures, risking decline, loss of influence, or even dissolution (Dijkstra and Debre 2022; Debre and Dijkstra 2023). While this literature does not consider whether IOs react to internal and external threat, it confirms that organizational survival remains a primary concern for any international organization, encouraging it to attempt and capture additional resources, at the expense of other IOs.

Over the last decade, scholars studying international organizations (IOs) have developed a growing interest in inter-organizational interactions, including competition (Frey 2008; Gehring and Oberthür 2009; Biermann and Koops 2017; Hannah, Ryan, and Scott 2017; Lipscy 2019; Brosig 2020; Lall 2020; Clark 2021; Kranke 2022). The literature on international regimes and regime complexes is the sub-field of IR that, to date, has addressed the topic of inter-IO competition most systematically (Alter and Raustiala 2018; Alter and Meunier 2009; Raustiala and Victor 2004; Orsini, Morin, and Young 2013).

International regimes are defined as "'a set of implicit or explicit principles, norms, rules, and decision-making procedures around which actors' expectations converge" (Krasner 1982, 186). As a consequence of the exponential growth of overlapping organizations,

international agreements and treaties, IR scholars started challenging the assumption that regimes existed in a vacuum and that they could be analysed individually. Instead, researchers turned their attention to the notion of regime complex, defined as "an array of partially overlapping and non-hierarchical institutions governing a particular issue-area" (Raustiala and Victor 2004, 279).

The regime complexity literature stands out for theorizing IOs as immersed in dense institutional environments rather than as isolated entities in global governance (Gómez-Mera 2021). Until recently, however, research on international regime complexes have focused primarily on states pursuing their interests by exploiting fragmentation, institutional overlaps, and duplications and on the impact that this had on the prospects for international cooperation (Busch 2007; Hofmann 2009; Haftel and Hofmann 2019; Reinsberg and Westerwinter 2023; Greenhill and Lupu 2017; Hofmann 2019).

This trend has begun to change over the last few years as regime complex scholars gradually shifting their focus to also consider IO agency (Margulis 2021). While recognizing the specific characteristics of the environment in which IOs are embedded and how these institutions differ from private firms in the way their supply and demand curves are defined, this literature draws from theories developed to study competition among firms and other social organizations, such as Organizational Ecology and Resource Dependence Theory (Lipson 2017; Biermann and Harsch 2017a). Both these theoretical perspectives suggest that competition should foster organizational specialization, leading to a clear division of labour at the population level, which reduces duplications and overlap, and consequently mitigates competition itself (Hannan and Carroll 1992; Biermann and Harsch 2017a; Lipson 2017; Gehring and Faude 2014; Ries 2017).

The regime complexity literature describes competition as a consequence of overlapping mandates under conditions of institutional density. However, this perspective

mostly discusses inter-IO competition as the deliberate result of the strategic behaviour of member states. The regime complexity literature, notwithstanding some rare exceptions (Downie 2022), offers little insight regarding how competition unfolds as a process and on the strategic role that IOs play in it. In addition, existing research has not investigated whether specialization is truly sufficient at taming competition in the long run. If the resources available continue to decline, is having a niche of specialization sufficient for an IO to ensure organizational survival? Is differentiation a sustainable solution to inter-IO competition? The theoretical framework outlined in chapter 3 will address the limits of formal differentiation as theorized in the regime complexity literature.

1.3.2 Public policy, public administration, and the quest for organizational survival

The second strand of literature informing this study on inter-IO competition comes from public policy and public administration studies. Scholars in this field have long sought to understand the dynamics between the different agencies and bureaucracies of the state and how the individual interests and preferences of civil servants influence relations among these institutions. The bureaucratic politics approach investigates governmental policy making as the result of power struggles and contrasting views among civil servants and politicians (Allison 1969; Gilad, Alon-Barkat, and Weiss 2019). This literature emphasizes the importance of securing key resources and visibility to ensure organizational survival in a crowded institutional space (Wilson 2000; Bach and Wegrich 2019). As governmental organizations specialize, each bureaucracy aims to protect and expand its own turf -the set of issues and actions that fall under its area of competence and jurisdiction. Each bureaucracy's turf is distinct and unique compared to that of other organizations; Wilson (1989) likens an organization to "a fish in a coral reef: to survive, it needs to find a supportive ecological niche".

Focused on maintaining their turf, bureaucracies are often reluctant to cooperate with other organizations and resist external attempts to perform tasks that fall within their domain. A key aspect of turf politics is that bureaucrats seek for opportunities to maximize resources, expand their policy programme portfolio, and secure organizational autonomy (Niskanen 1971).

For bureaucracies, the opportunity to implement programmes, secure resources, and consolidate their turf often presents itself alongside new policy problems that require solutions. Public policy as a discipline provides insight into the policymaking process, with various theoretical models attempting to explain how inputs become outputs that, in turn, produce policy outcomes. Traditional linear models of the policy process assume a shared understanding of a policy problem, leading to the consideration and comparison of different policy alternatives until one solution is chosen based on well-defined selection criteria, such as cost-effectiveness and appropriateness (Cairney 2012). More recently, theories like the Multiple Streams Approach and the Narrative Policy Framework have shifted the focus to the political and contested nature of the policymaking process, which is shaped by the competing interests and views of different sets of actors (Howlett, McConnell, and Perl 2017).

Theories of public policy have been applied at different levels of analysis, from the local to the global, where scholars have used these theoretical insights to trace how policy problems are created and politicized by different actors, including international bureaucracies (Knill and Steinebach 2023). Similarly, insights on national bureaucracies have been applied to understand the organizational behaviour of IOs (Ege et al. 2023; Ege and Bauer 2013; Ege 2020; Littoz-Monnet 2017; 2021). However, studies examining how international bureaucracies perceive and interact with one another remain limited, with most research focusing on how IO staff behave vis-à-vis NGOs (Johnson 2014; 2016). The framework

outlined in Chapter 3 draws on theoretical insights from Public Policy studies to explain how staff preferences and IO interests align for organizational survival, and how humanitarian IOs influence the humanitarian response policy process to ensure their continued existence.

1.3.3 Humanitarian action as a subject of academic inquiry

Humanitarianism and humanitarian action have been analysed through the lens of several disciplines, including International Relations (Barnett and Weiss 2013; Barnett 2011), Economics (Carbonnier 2015), Public Health (Olu et al. 2015; Leaning, Briggs, and Chen 1999), and Management Studies (Ruesch et al. 2022).

In international relations, constructivist scholars have focused on the gradual establishment of norms and ideas - the humanitarian principles - that have increasingly defined the boundaries of the humanitarian system. As humanitarianism evolved into a set of principles, norms, and institutions, so did the professional identity of the people working within the system (Barnett 2011). From a critical perspective, researchers have highlighted the social inequities and the racist, paternalistic structures embedded in the humanitarian system, particularly within UN agencies and large international non-governmental organizations (Barnett 2021).

Scholars have examined the evolution, role, and behaviour of individual IOs and their staff within the humanitarian system. This literature shows that different organizations have varied success in delivering their mandates and providing assistance to those in need (Shaw 2001; 2008; Ross 2022; Megan Bradley 2017; Megan Bradley, Costello, and Sherwood 2023; Browne 2011; Murphy 2006; Audet 2016). System-wide overviews highlight the interplay of key actors and organizations involved in humanitarian response at the local, national, and global level (Mac Ginty and Peterson 2015; Maxwell and Gelsdorf 2019; Miriam Bradley

2023a). From an institutional perspective, existing research details the system's complexity and density (Hilhorst and Jansen 2010; Barkin 2023a; Seybolt 2009; Ruesch et al. 2022). Humanitarian response is carried out by both local actors, such as civil society groups closely integrated within affected communities, and international actors, including international organizations and NGOs (Stephenson 2017). The system has been likened to a competitive marketplace, with numerous entities vying for limited resources on a crisis-by-crisis basis, heightening uncertainty over organizational survival (Weiss 2013). Unlike a typical market populated by private firms where demand is driven by consumers, in the humanitarian system it is the donor states who allocate humanitarian aid, not the beneficiaries, who dictate the demand curve, affecting aid distribution (Coyne 2013; Lowcock 2022). This often results in aid allocation based not only on objective levels of need, but also on the interests and preferences of individual donors. Existing literature points to distortions in the allocation of resources across crises, with some contexts receiving more assistance than others, due to geopolitical considerations rather than humanitarian reasons (Miriam Bradley 2023a).

From an organizational perspective, scholars have noted how donor influence affects the ambiguous ways in which humanitarian needs are defined, measured, and estimated by organizations. Due to the lack of a widely accepted standard methodology for needs assessment, this critical phase of response is often shaped by humanitarian organizations to align assessments with perceived donor preferences, thereby securing financial support for their operations (Glasman 2019). Existing literature on inter-organizational competition in the humanitarian system falls into two categories: competition among NGOs, traditionally seen as more competitive due to their less institutionalized nature compared to UN agencies, and competition between pairs of UN organizations, such as FAO and WFP, UNHCR and IOM,

and WHO and UNICEF (Moretti 2021; Betts 2013; Hanrieder 2014b; Aldashev and Verdier 2010b; Cooley and Ron 2002).

The theoretical framework outlined in chapter 3 integrates insights from humanitarian scholarship with IR approaches to IOs and their inter-institutional relations. This framework balances perspectives that view international organizations as entirely shaped by their circumstances with those that consider organizations in isolation from their policy contexts. The next section presents an overview of the main argument drawing on the literature presented so far.

1.4 The argument in brief

While offering valuable insights, existing literature in IR and beyond does not fully explain why competition persists among UN organizations in humanitarian response, even after niche specialization. Specifically, scholars of international regime complexity, drawing from Organizational Ecology, often view niche specialization as a stable solution that creates a lasting equilibrium within an international regime (Henning and Pratt 2023). Additionally, while international regime researchers have primarily focused on how states exploit mandate overlaps and inter-institutional competition to advance their interests, this dissertation examines inter-organizational competition from the perspective of IOs as fully-fledged actors whose room for manoeuvre is influenced by external factors controlled by member states. The theoretical argument advanced in this thesis offers a two-fold contribution: first, it underscores the limitations of specialization among international institutions; second, it identifies how IOs respond to competitive pressures when formal differentiation fails to ensure organizational survival.

Traditionally, scholars of international regimes have described niche specialization as a panacea preventing mandate overlap and inter-institutional competition. Formal differentiation among IOs is often theorized to reduce competition between institutions by dividing labour and allowing for resource partitioning (Henning and Pratt 2023; Gehring and Faude 2014). However, this perspective does not account for the many moving parts in international politics that affect IOs' prospects of organizational survival: resources can become even scarcer than they were at the time when niches were defined and member states' attention and priorities might be redirected away from a certain policy problem to other more pressing issues. These changes in circumstances might affect the perceived relevance of a certain niche vis-à-vis other spaces. If states perceive the niches IOs occupy as substitutes for funding and attention, competition will persist even after niche specialization. This is indeed what occurs in humanitarian response. The Cluster System was designed to establish a clear division of roles among UN agencies and avoid overlap, duplications, and inefficiencies (Gillmann 2010). In humanitarian response, a Cluster corresponds to a niche of specialization, where a UN organization is recognized as the reference organization for that functional area of the response, which comes with advocacy and provider of last resort responsibilities. As mentioned at the beginning of this chapter, in recent years, humanitarian needs worldwide have risen at an unprecedented rate and member states, subject to internal budgetary constraints, have been unable to channel enough humanitarian assistance to meet this demand. Hence, as donors struggle to fully fund every sector in every crisis response, need prioritization has become integral to the humanitarian domain. Donors now prioritize certain crisis responses over others, often influenced by narrow geopolitical interests. Most relevant to this dissertation, within each response, donors ask the UN system to prioritize the most urgent sectoral needs. For UN organizations, each crisis is an opportunity for securing funding to sustain operations while ensuring visibility to donors. The risk of their sector going underfunded poses a significant

challenge for UN organizations, especially since most of their humanitarian funding is aid earmarked to specific crises responses. Donor-led prioritization under conditions of resource scarcity thus reignites inter-organizational competition, even within the division of labour introduced with the Cluster System.

Having established the systemic conditions conducive to inter-organizational competition, the second part of the argument focuses on how individual IOs respond to external competitive pressures. A response is anticipated if an IO perceives the threat of niche substitution or resource diversion. Drawing from bureaucratic politics and Public Policy, this dissertation highlights variation in reactive behaviour between generalist and specialist organizations. To classify an IO as either generalist or specialist, it must meet at least two out of three criteria: the time horizon of intervention (whether it primarily engages in humanitarian operations or also participates in long-term development projects), its demographic focus (whether it targets a specific demographic), and the breadth of its operations (whether its range of activities is broad or narrow)[5].

Specialist IOs tend to utilize competitive issue framing, seeking to align the general perception of policy problems with the specialized solutions they already have in their portfolio. In the case of humanitarian specialist IOs, their goal is to shape the narrative around a certain crisis in a way that puts the spotlight on the needs in their sector of responsibility. To set the framing of the crisis, specialist IOs behave as first movers, both in terms of presence on the ground and of approaching donors. On the other hand, generalist organizations, capable of providing a broader range of services, opt for a competitive horizontal expansion strategy. This involves adapting their operations to address the specific policy gaps left open by specialist

[5] Appendix A details the procedure used to classify the twelve UN organizations with IASC membership as generalist or specialist.

organizations in any given context and being receptive to donor preferences. Humanitarian generalist IOs in crisis response often behave as second movers, coming in shortly after specialist IOs. These strategies enable IOs to maintain their operational roles and secure a continuous flow of funding. The next section provides an overview of the research design and methodology used to test this two-fold argument throughout the thesis.

1.5 Research design and methods

Over the decades, the methods used to study international organizations (IOs) have diversified alongside the growing number of research questions about them. The choice of methodological approaches to study IOs ultimately depends on the theoretical assumptions surrounding these institutions. As discussed in the literature review (section 1.3), an IO can be viewed as a coordination mechanism, a reflection of the preferences and interests of its most powerful member states, a technocratic entity that sets and diffuses norms and standards, or as an unruly agent seeking to limit the control exerted by its principals. This dissertation focuses on a small subset of international organizations (i.e. UN agencies and programmes with a humanitarian role) viewed as self-directed agents navigating a competitive policy space. This approach emphasizes organizational perceptions, agency, and behaviour, while also accounting for the systemic conditions and environmental constraints in which these entities operate. To uncover the motives behind inter-organizational competition and the factors that prompt an IO to respond in certain ways to external conditions, it is essential to provide a thick description of the phenomenon under analysis, shedding light on key perceptions and beliefs. This thesis utilizes process tracing and a structured, focused comparison of cases to explore how the humanitarian policy environment shapes relations among UN agencies (chapter 4) and how these organizations react to external competitive pressures (chapters 5 and 6). This dissertation

combines archival documentation analysis with direct observation and semi-structured interviews with individuals who have firsthand experience working within these IOs and shaping their organizational behaviour in the humanitarian sector. This combination of methods not only enables data triangulation but also facilitates the study of change and continuity within the humanitarian sphere, challenging the dominant narratives produced by the UN, the Inter-Agency Standing Committee, and individual agencies, which often pay lip service to ideals of inter-organizational cooperation and coordination.

The empirical section of this dissertation is divided into two main parts. Building on the history of the humanitarian system outlined in Chapter 2, Chapter 4 provides a broad overview of humanitarian governance, presenting evidence for the three factors conducive to inter-organizational competition introduced in Chapter 3. The second part narrows its focus to individual organizations: Chapter 5 examines two international organizations, the World Food Programme (WFP) and the International Organization for Migration (IOM), which have managed to survive and even thrive in a competitive environment. Chapter 6 then considers the case of the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), exploring how this IO struggled to respond effectively to systemic competitive pressures. These three organizations were selected as a representative subset of the twelve UN agencies and programmes with IASC membership, indicative of a recognized operational role in humanitarian response.

To address potential limitations in hypothesis testing - such as interviewees withholding information or providing incomplete or inaccurate accounts, and other challenges inherent to the interviewing process - interview data was triangulated with information collected through direct observation and the analysis of archival documents.

1.5.1 Research design and case selection

Recognizing international organizations as fully-fledged actors of international relations implies acknowledging their ability to engender processes that produce international outcomes of relevance. Process tracing has long been the preferred method for unpacking how causal processes work in real-world cases, including those involving international organizations (Checkel 2014). Moreover, a focus on process and mechanisms also allows for rich theoretical description highlighting points of contact between rationalist and constructivist insights (Bennett and Checkel 2015). The dissertation is articulated as a structured two-level, within-case analysis, which also allows for the cumulation of findings across cases at the organizational level. This methodological approach is defined as 'structured' meaning that "the same set of general questions – reflecting the research objective – guides data collection and is scrutinized in each case under investigation" (Jankauskas, Eckhard, and Ege 2023, 302). After outlining the theoretical framework, Chapter 3 also provides a description of the observable indicators, which constitute evidence in support of the hypotheses. Chapter 4 examines the macro-level dynamics of the humanitarian system as a competitive international regime. Chapters 5 and 6 then zoom in and focus on individual international organizations, tracing their perceptions of competitive pressures and their responses (or lack thereof) to these external stimuli.

While small-N methods enable the probing of causal mechanisms and strengthen the internal validity of findings, they present challenges in terms of generalizability to a broader universe of international organizations (external validity). To address this, it is essential to select cases that can be confidently considered representative of the wider population of interest. A three-IO case design includes a representative sample from this population, allowing for the tracing of processes that lead to success or failure in the competitive humanitarian space and highlighting different strategies adopted by generalist and specialist organizations. Feasibility

was also a key criterion in case selection, with practical considerations regarding access to headquarters and personnel guiding the choice of IOs with headquarters or crisis-related offices in Europe (i.e., Rome and Geneva). The population of interest is a small one, which includes the following humanitarian IOs: Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO), the International Organization for Migration (IOM), the United Nations Human Rights Office (OHCHR), the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA), the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), the United Nations Human Settlements Programme (UN-HABITAT), the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA), UN Women, the World Food Programme (WFP), and the World Health Organization (WHO). The heads or designated representatives of these agencies are all members of the Inter-Agency Standing Committee (IASC), a mechanism established in 1992 to ensure inter-agency coordination on humanitarian assistance in response to both man-made and natural emergencies. The Committee includes UN entities with an operational role in humanitarian response, meaning that they provide humanitarian assistance in the form of either protection or aid, and that they deploy staff to assist crisis-affected populations[6]. New applications for membership are accepted on a case-by-case basis depending on the IO's operational role and its area of specialization. The latest UN organization to join IASC was UN Women in October 2022.

While these organizations share an operational role in humanitarian response, they differ significantly in their areas of specialization and their histories of engagement in humanitarian action. Some of them, such as WFP, UNHCR, and UNICEF, have long been champions of humanitarian assistance, with a clear and explicit humanitarian mandate since their inception. Others, such as UNDP, OHCHR, UN-HABITAT or IOM, were initially

[6] IASC. (n.d.). IASC membership. Retrieved in January 2023 from https://interagencystandingcommittee.org/about-inter-agency-standing-committee/iasc-membership

mandated to focus on areas such as development or human rights, and only later expanded their activities into the humanitarian realm. The degree of specialization of these IOs varies greatly. As illustrated in chapter 3, in this dissertation specialization is defined more precisely than it is usually the case for humanitarian IOs. Here, specialization is based on whether the IO is active solely in humanitarian operations or also conducts long-term development programming; whether it caters to the needs of a specific demographic (e.g. children, women, refugees, etc.); and the breadth of the operations and services it provides. An IO is classified as either generalist or specialist if it meets at least two of these three criteria (time-horizon of intervention, demographic focus, and range of operations). The three organizations examined in this dissertation were thus chosen to represent variation along two key dimensions: their history of engagement with the humanitarian system and their degree of specialization.

Established in 1961 as a joint effort between the UN and FAO, the World Food Programme (WFP) has been dedicated to assisting people in emergencies through food aid, beginning with its first operation in response to the 1962 Iran earthquake. Today, WFP is the largest humanitarian agency globally, with a truly international reach, and was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize in 2020 for its efforts in combating food insecurity. Since its inception, WFP has remained committed to its original mandate of fighting hunger worldwide. Its operations are largely concentrated in the food security sector, though it also plays a key logistical role in humanitarian response, leveraging decades of expertise in delivering food aid to crisis zones. As a result, WFP is both a specialist organization and a traditional humanitarian actor.

The International Organization for Migration (IOM) is a newcomer to the humanitarian realm and has become officially affiliated to the UN only in 2016, the same year the organization became a IASC member. IOM's original mandate focuses on migration management, but over the years the organization has conducted a wide variety of operations in

different sectors of the humanitarian response. It can be therefore classified as a generalist, non-traditional actor in humanitarian response.

Finally, the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) was originally established as the UN's development arm, but over time it has gradually expanded into the humanitarian realm, particularly in areas such as infrastructure maintenance and early recovery. Early recovery as a sector includes a wide range of interventions, from providing emergency transportation and connectivity to promoting sustainable livelihoods in crisis-affected areas. Given its central role in the broader UN system, UNDP can be classified as a generalist and a non-traditional humanitarian organization.

1.5.2 Methods: data collection, transcription, and analysis

One challenge researchers of International Organizations may encounter is being exposed only to the official organizational discourse, while being excluded from the internal dynamics, discussions, and conflicts that shape outcomes. Combining different methods of data collection has often proven effective in overcoming these hurdles (De Pryck 2023). To collect original data on the responses of humanitarian IOs to competition, this dissertation combines direct observation of organizational representatives, semi-structured interviews with individuals involved in UN humanitarian response, and archival research. Archival documents, mostly retrieved online, are used to triangulate the data from interviews and observations.

A. Direct observation

Observation data was collected through attendance at seven in-person meetings held in Geneva, Switzerland, from March to July 2023, as well as through virtual participation in other relevant events in the following months. These meetings were not sensitive in nature, as both the official

agenda and relevant reports were made available to the public after their occurrence. These meetings included donor briefings on ongoing crises led either by OCHA for the entire UN system or by individual IOs, and tripartite meetings between representatives of donors, multilateral institutions and local NGOs on broad themes and areas of humanitarian action (e.g. Grand Bargain annual meeting). Most sessions were conducted in English or French, with simultaneous interpretation available. Relevant information was retained through notetaking, recording only the institution represented, not individual speakers.

Data from thematic, non-crisis specific meetings contributed to assessing the state of the humanitarian system and the systemic factors conducive to inter-organizational competition, as posited in Hypothesis 1 (chapter 3). Data from crisis-specific briefings was used to investigate the behaviour of individual IOs operating in a competitive environment, as described in hypothesis 2 (2a and 2b) of the theoretical framework. Coding was based on the categories illustrated in chapter 3. Additionally, direct observation facilitated the identification of potential interviewees with an informed perspective on the humanitarian system and the internal dynamics of UN organizations. Appendix C includes a list of the relevant meetings and events.

B. Archival documents

Reports, websites, social media posts, and other institutional documents are tangible outputs produced by IOs that are accessible to the general public and researchers alike. However, rather than being perfect mirrors of internal processes, these documents serve as channels through which IOs convey their worldviews, preferences, and assumptions (Bueger 2023). To ensure data triangulation, documents were obtained from different sources, including individual IOs, the UN system as a whole (released by OCHA or UN ECOSOC), assessment by donor

countries, and independent evaluations carried out by external actors independent from both donor states and UN organizations.

Furthermore, documents can be classified based on their content: some reports focused on the state of the humanitarian system or on overall sub-themes (e.g. humanitarian financing, coordination, etc.). Other documents focused on individual organizations and their performance (e.g. MOPAN's organizational assessments) or the performance of one of the Humanitarian Clusters. A last set of documents includes reports and appeals released directly by individual organizations.

Data on humanitarian funding requirements - both system-wide and those of individual UN organizations - presented in chapters 5 and 6 was obtained from OCHA's Financial Tracking System, the most comprehensive source for humanitarian financing, even though organizations and donor governments disclose contributions and financial flows to OCHA on a voluntary basis. All documents consulted for this dissertation are publicly available on the websites of the relevant IOs or research institutions.

Data from documents focusing on cross-organizational, system-wide trends was used to assess the state of the humanitarian system and the systemic factors conducive to inter-organizational competition, as posited in Hypothesis 1 (chapter 3). Reports produced by individual IOs or assessing the performance of individual IOs were used to investigate the behaviour of organizations operating in a competitive environment, as described in hypothesis 2 (2a and 2b) of the theoretical framework. The coding was based on the categories illustrated in chapter 3.

C. Interviewing

Most of the original data for this dissertation was gathered through in-depth, semi-structured interviews. Interviewing has always been a preferred method for scholars of IOs, as it allows

for the mapping of an IO's institutional life, the perceptions and organizational culture shared by its staff, and the way the IO strategically shapes the narrative it presents to the external world (Badache et al. 2023). The dissertation draws on 63 interviews with individuals with direct experience in humanitarian response and a deep understanding of humanitarian governance. Interviewees were identified using a mixed method sampling strategy. A first group was identified by reviewing key documents, including assessments of the Cluster System, reporting on humanitarian needs both at the global level and regarding specific crises, and independent evaluations of coordination among UN agencies. A second group was identified by attending donor briefings and other humanitarian affairs-related events in Geneva between March and July 2023. The third group of interviewees was selected with a snowball sampling technique: at the end of the interview, interviewees of the first two groups were asked to name two people who they thought might have insights to share regarding inter-organizational competition. This mixed strategy allowed to reach a larger number of potential interviewees with relevant knowledge and experience on the subject of interest, while limiting the selection bias that is inherent to snowball sampling.

Interviewees fall into the following categories: individuals with experience in a UN organization, country representatives (from both donor and recipient countries), and independent experts. Many interviewees had worked across various sectors and institutions during their careers, often fitting into more than one category. Among individuals with work experience within the UN system, most interviewees were current or past employees of the three IOs of interest (IOM, WFP, and UNDP) or of OCHA, while eight people had work experience in other UN organizations. In terms of seniority, UN interviewees were mid or senior career (P4+), with experience both at the field and headquarters level. This group included eight former UN Humanitarian Coordinators (both under UNDP and OCHA) and a former Emergency Relief Coordinator/ UN Under Secretary General for Humanitarian Affairs.

The second group of interviewees included country representatives: among donors, the sampling was focused on the small number of countries (including the EU) that together accounts for more than 80% of total humanitarian assistance channelled through multilateral institutions. On the recipient side, sampling focused on a country (Haiti) that had experienced emergencies in correspondence to different stages of the humanitarian system reform. Notably, the country representative group is the category that registered the lowest response rate with only three donor representatives and three high-level recipient representatives (one former Prime Minister and two senior civil servants directly involved in the response to the 2010 earthquake and the 2016 Hurricane Matthew).

The last group included twelve experts of humanitarian affairs and humanitarian financing working in think tanks and other research institutions in Geneva, London, and beyond, including the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), the Overseas Development Institute (ODI), the Centre for Disaster Protection, Development Initiatives, the Assessment Capacities Project (ACAPS), and HERE-Geneva.

Most interviews were conducted in English; however, to accommodate interviewees who are not native English speakers, two interviews were conducted in Italian and three in French. Where possible, interviews were recorded and transcribed immediately. In other cases, detailed notes were taken during and immediately after the interview. Most transcripts were then coded using NVivo software for qualitative analysis, based on the coding categories outlined in Chapter 3.

1.5.3 Potential limitations

Investigating how IOs perceive their external environment and how this affects internal decision-making processes at the organizational level poses several methodological challenges.

The first challenge is distinguishing the official institutional narrative from the true factors driving a specific behaviour of an IO. The second challenge is determining the extent to which the views and perceptions of individuals within IOs can be coherently aggregated at the organizational level. A third challenge, common to all research that partially relies on interview data, is assessing whether the information provided by interviewees is influenced by personal bias.

While these challenges cannot be entirely resolved, certain precautions can mitigate their impact on the reliability of the findings. Specifically, data collection included a two-level triangulation strategy, incorporating both different data types and various sources within the same data type. By combining three distinct data sources -archival documents, direct observation, and semi-structured interviews- it is possible to identify the official institutional narrative and challenge it by questioning individuals and observing IO representatives' interactions with the external world during meetings and briefings.

It is impossible to distinguish with absolute certainty between the personal preferences and interests of individuals representing IOs in such settings, or those who agree to be interviewed, and the official positions of their organizations. However, as discussed in chapter 3, given that career progression for international civil servants is so closely tied to the performance of their IO, it is reasonable to assume that external competitive pressures on IOs are perceived as threats by their staff as well. Additionally, interacting with multiple subjects from each IO at different levels of seniority helps outline perceptions and assessments that are widely shared within the organization.

Finally, while it is impossible to fully eliminate deceit and personal bias from interview data, this issue can be mitigated by including interviewees with diverse backgrounds, affiliations, perspectives, and interests. Among those interviewed with experience at one of the three IOs of interest, both current staff and former employees were included, providing a more

comprehensive view of the internal IO perspective. This evidence was triangulated with interviews of individuals from other IOs, think tanks, research institutions focused on humanitarian affairs, and representatives of donor and recipient countries. Additionally, guaranteeing anonymity fostered a safe environment, allowing interviewees to express their views on the system and their organizations more freely than they might in a public setting.

1.6 Thesis overview

This dissertation investigates why and how UN organizations compete against each in humanitarian response despite the clear division of labour introduced with the Humanitarian Cluster System. The dissertation is structured as follows. Chapter 2 provides a quick introduction to the international humanitarian system. The chapter starts by providing a history of international humanitarianism, from the establishment of the Red Cross/Red Crescent Movement in 1863, through the early days of the UN and its agencies, the wave of professionalization in humanitarian response in the 1990s, and up to the present. The chapter also discusses the humanitarian principles as the distinctive norms setting humanitarian actors and institutions apart from other spheres of action. Lastly, chapter 2 briefly illustrates the Humanitarian Cluster System and the roles of OCHA, the Humanitarian Coordinator, and individual UN agencies in emergency response.

Chapter 3 introduces the novel theoretical framework underpinning this dissertation. The chapter defines inter-organizational competition as a social phenomenon, where organization A purposefully seeks to secure control over a scarce good (either tangible or intangible) needed for survival, while knowing that at least one other organization is also vying for the same resource. After a review of the relevant theoretical approaches, the chapter outlines how the

threat of niche substitution leads to persistent inter-organizational competition despite niche differentiation. It then discusses the relation between organizational type, either generalist or specialist, and the two competitive strategies IOs can resort to in response to resource scarcity, namely competitive horizontal expansion and competitive issue framing. Lastly, chapter 3 weighs the merits of the novel theoretical framework against alternative explanations, such as historical institutionalism and path dependence.

Chapter 4 illustrates why competition among UN organizations persists despite the clear division of labour embedded in the Humanitarian Cluster System by testing hypothesis 1. The chapter shows that, in the humanitarian regime, all conditions conducive to persistent inter-IO competition despite specialization are met, including population density, resource scarcity, and the threat of resource re-allocation from one niche to another. First, chapter 4 delves into the reasons leading to declining levels of humanitarian aid, despite a rise in the number of both humanitarian actors and of people in need around the world. Then, it moves on to consider how donor-led prioritization has become a pervasive phenomenon in the humanitarian space. The chapter illustrates how prioritization can be implemented both at an intra-organizational and an inter-organizational level and that the current system of incentives upon which global humanitarian governance rests encourages the latter form and heightens competition among IOs. Finally, the chapter concludes by illustrating how these three conditions hinder the global humanitarian architecture's effectiveness in promoting inter-organizational coordination and cooperation, which in turn impacts its ability to deliver relief services to people affected by crises worldwide.

Chapter 5 focuses on two ‘winner’ cases in the competitive humanitarian arena. Though through different strategies, both the World Food Programme (WFP) – a specialist IO – and the

International Organization for Migration (IOM) – a generalist organization – succeed in securing funding and maintaining a significant presence in humanitarian response. The chapter starts by illustrating why, despite being one of the most well-established humanitarian actors, the WFP remains sensitive to competitive pressures. Then, it moves on to consider how the Programme remains competitive by actively shaping the narrative around humanitarian crises to ensure that food security retains the attention of donors. Chapter 5 then introduces the case of IOM, a newcomer to the UN system and the humanitarian foray, and discusses the reasons that make IOM competitive in the humanitarian policy space. It then provides evidence of the winner status of both WFP and IOM in the humanitarian system, illustrated in terms of funding secured and operational presence, while proving that competitive pressures are still increasing for both organizations.

Chapter 6 considers the case of a loser of the competition. At the time of the introduction of the Cluster System, the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) had a privileged position within the humanitarian system: it was assigned to the Early Recovery Cluster and was also in charge of appointing UN Humanitarian Coordinators, who most of the time were the same person as the UNDP's Country Representative. Despite the apparent leverage that this double hat gave UNDP in terms of visibility with donors and decisional power regarding the allocation of UN pooled funding, the role of UNDP has considerably declined over the years. While the role of Humanitarian Coordinator gave UNDP a false sense of security, the Programme failed to both adequately develop and 'sell' the importance of Early Recovery in humanitarian response and to expand the range of operations it carried out in humanitarian contexts. In 2018, the position of UN Resident Coordinator was de-linked from the UNDP Country Representative and shortly after the Early Recovery Cluster was shut down, relegating UNDP to a marginal role in humanitarian response.

Finally, chapter 7 highlights the major contributions to existing literature of the dissertation and discusses the policy insights relevant for those interested in strengthening humanitarian coordination. Meaningful change requires both donors and IOs to rethink the humanitarian funding landscape and the control that IOs exercise over defining needs in crisis contexts. The chapter also considers the applicability of the dissertation's theoretical framework to other policy contexts. Certain conditions must be met, including resource scarcity, institutional differentiation, and weak state preferences regarding the substance of interventions carried out by operational IOs. The framework could be applied in areas such as international development and interactions among IOs within the Humanitarian-Development-Peace Nexus. The dissertation's methodological limitations are also considered, such as the absence of humanitarian aid recipients in the interview sample and the lack of direct observational evidence of IO behaviour at the country level. Future research could build on this project by focusing on country-level dynamics, intra-organizational competition, and the role of private funding.

Chapter 2

Global humanitarian governance and the architecture of international humanitarian coordination

2.1 Introduction

Contemporary humanitarian governance is a complex affair: a myriad of actors at the local, national, and international level strive to follow the principles of independence, impartiality, humanity, and neutrality in their relief operations, while *de facto* depending on national governments, both donors and recipients of aid, to obtain the resources and the permission to deliver assistance to those in need. The history of humanitarianism is long and tortuous: humanitarian governance developed from an essentially European affair in the second half of the nineteenth century to a global phenomenon in a world where crises and emergencies requiring humanitarian intervention have become increasingly complex and long-lasting (Barnett 2011; Slim 2022).

The current architecture of global humanitarian governance was established after the end of World War II to provide relief to war-torn Europe and has since then undergone multiple rounds of reform, which have widened its geographical scope and created hierarchies between different actors at the local, national, and international level. While humanitarian governance has changed profoundly since 1945, one feature has remained stable over the decades: the primary role played by the UN and its specialized agencies, programmes, and funds. Over the years, states granted an ever-increasing degree of autonomy to UN humanitarian agencies in managing humanitarian crises. There is a large degree of consensus that only a non-state, universal actor, such as the UN and its agencies, can scale-up its operations to deliver aid where

is needed without being perceived as interfering into the political life of a sovereign state. It is no surprise then that among the three pillars in which foreign aid is usually categorised (i.e. peace, humanitarian, and development assistance), the humanitarian branch is where most funding is channelled and allocated through the multilateral, UN system rather than bilaterally[7]. Although the specific agency at the helm of the humanitarian coordination architecture has changed over the years[8], its association to the UN umbrella has remained a constant feature of the system.

While the humanitarian realm remains a densely populated environment, a clear hierarchical structure exists among humanitarian actors, which is topped by the UN and its specialized agencies. This dominant position of UN agencies vis-à-vis other humanitarian actors coupled with the significant autonomy that UN organizations are granted by states makes humanitarian governance a counterintuitive case for the study of inter-organizational competition. Is there space for competition when the whole system is so heavily influenced by a small number of organizations that supposedly share the same goals and the same values? As the empirical part of this dissertation will demonstrate, despite their central role and their common affiliation to the UN system, IOs with a humanitarian mandate still compete against each other. What is more, by doing so, they risk reducing the effectiveness of the humanitarian response. Understanding the root causes and dynamics of inter-agency competition in humanitarian settings is therefore not only topical from an academic standpoint, but also highly relevant in terms of the policy implications it carries.

[7] Development Initiatives. Falling Short? Humanitarian funding and reform. 2024. Retrieved in October 2024 from https://devinit-prod-static.ams3.cdn.digitaloceanspaces.com/media/documents/Falling_short_Humanitarian_funding_and_reform.pdf

[8] The UNHCR played a key role in the coordination of international humanitarian efforts from the 1970s until the 1990s. Then, the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) took on the role of coordinator in the cluster system until the so-called 'de-linking' process in 2018, when it was replaced by the Emergency Relief Coordinator and Humanitarian Coordinators.

Before introducing a theory of inter-organizational competition in humanitarian governance (see chapter 3), this chapter briefly illustrates the current architecture of global humanitarian governance. First, it discusses the main features of the global humanitarian governance as an international regime: What are the norms and principles that define membership within the regime? What sets apart the humanitarian regime from other cognate domains related to aid flows, such as international development? Then, it presents a short history of the international humanitarian coordination architecture: while traditional analyses of humanitarianism trace its origins to the 19th century—specifically to 1859, when Henry Dunant witnessed the aftermath of the Battle of Solferino and laid the groundwork for establishing the ICRC—this chapter focuses on the evolution of humanitarian governance after World War II, when the UN and its specialized agencies were established. Lastly, the chapter introduces the current coordination mechanism, the Humanitarian Cluster System (or Humanitarian Cluster Approach), its evolution, and the most significant changes it has undergone over the years. The chapter briefly describes the different stages of activation of the Cluster Approach in humanitarian emergencies as well as the role of the different actors involved. The chapter also summarizes the major points of criticism to the Cluster System that internal participants and external observers have raised over the years.

2.2 The global humanitarian system as an international regime

The international humanitarian regime encompasses all the actors and institutions that are involved in relief efforts during humanitarian emergencies. Small and large NGOs of different political/religious affiliations, public and private donors, national governments (both donors and recipients), UN operational agencies as well as the Red Cross/Red Crescent movement. This section provides a concise introduction to the international humanitarian regime. First, it

discusses those norms and principles that shape its boundaries and set the rules of the game within the regime itself. Then, it touches upon the *why*, *when,* and *where* of humanitarian action, that is the circumstances under which humanitarian actors can exercise their mandate and become fully operational. Lastly, it considers the main challenges that UN agencies face when engaging in humanitarian action.

International regimes are defined as "sets of implicit or explicit principles, norms, rules and decision-making procedures around which actors' expectations converge in a given issue-area of international relations" (Krasner 1982, 185). As such, they "prescribe behavioural roles, constrain activities and shape expectations" (Keohane 2020). When it comes to the domain of humanitarian response, the norms separating the actors who belong to the international humanitarian regime from those who do not are well-known and widely recognized by the international community. The principles of humanity, impartiality, neutrality, and independence are explicitly mentioned in the mandate of most humanitarian organizations. These 'fundamental principles' were first adopted by the humanitarian actor *par excellence*, the International Committee of the Red Cross and the national Red Cross/ Red Crescent societies, during the 20th Conference of the Red Cross in 1965[9]. Since then, the UN General Assembly has also adopted these four principles as the core of its humanitarian activities, first in Resolution 46/182 (which included humanity, neutrality, and impartiality) and later in Resolution 58/114 (which added independence as a core principle)[10].

An organization acts according to the principle of humanity when its activities aim at protecting life and health and ensuring respect for human beings (Mac Ginty and Peterson 2015). To be considered neutral, humanitarian actors must avoid taking sides in hostilities or

[9] The 'fundamental principles' proclaimed by the International Conference of the Red Cross also include voluntary service, unity and universality.
[10] OCHA, "OCHA on Message: Humanitarian Principles". (June 2012), https://www.unocha.org/sites/dms/Documents/OOM-humanitarianprinciples_eng_June12.pdf

engaging in political, racial, religious, or ideological controversies. Impartial humanitarian action is conducted solely based on need, prioritizing the most urgent cases of distress and making no distinctions based on nationality, race, gender, religious beliefs, class, or political opinions (Mac Ginty and Peterson 2015). Lastly, humanitarians are required to act autonomously "from the political, economic, military or other objectives that any actor may hold with regard to areas where humanitarian action is being implemented"[11]. In the same way as the core norms and rules that shape the boundaries of other international regimes and prescribe a well-defined role to their members, the fundamental humanitarian principles determine (in broad terms) what humanitarian organizations can or cannot do and how they can or cannot behave.

The when, where, and why of humanitarian action—that is, the circumstances under which humanitarian international organizations can exercise their mandate— are tightly linked to the definition of a humanitarian emergency. The humanitarian regime encompasses all those actors and institutions that are involved in the response to humanitarian emergencies/crises. A humanitarian emergency is a disaster that causes serious disruption to the functioning of a community, which cannot be addressed by local and national organizations alone and requires the support of the international community. Whether a disaster is addressed as a humanitarian crisis does not depend solely on the magnitude of the disaster itself, but also on the vulnerability of the country affected and on the resilience of its institutions (Anderson and Gerber 2018). If the needs of the affected population can be effectively addressed by local organizations and national institutions, the disaster is defined as a national or local emergency and does not warrant an international humanitarian response.

[11] Ibid.

Humanitarian emergencies are classified based on the nature of the triggering event: an emergency can escalate as a result of either a natural (e.g. earthquake, tsunami, etc.) or a man-made disaster (e.g. a technological disaster, such as a nuclear incident) or because of an armed conflict (Anderson and Gerber 2018). When a disaster occurs against a background of political instability and violent conflict then the crisis is defined as a complex humanitarian emergency. Humanitarian emergencies are also classified based on their suddenness (slow-onset vs. sudden-onset emergencies) and on their duration (short-term vs. long-term crises). Nowadays, an increasing number of countries in receipt of humanitarian assistance are facing long-term, complex humanitarian emergencies.

While this dissertation focuses on UN agencies with a humanitarian mandate, to fully appreciate the complex architecture of international humanitarian coordination as well as its shortcomings, it is worth exploring the wide array of actors that populate the international humanitarian regime. As illustrated in the rest of this chapter, the existing coordination mechanisms, which define and constrain the activities of the UN agencies of interest in this research project, are the direct result of the complex interactions of UN organizations with other humanitarian actors. According to the Global Database of Humanitarian Organizations (GDHO), there are more than 4,400 organizations that provide aid during humanitarian crises. The vast majority are national NGOs (3,400 circa), followed by 860 international NGOs, 193 entities affiliated with the Red Cross/Red Crescent movement and 11 United Nations agencies[12]. These organizations differ in terms of size, humanitarian expenditure, religious affiliation, degree of specialization and geographical focus. They also cover a vast variety of functions and operational issue-areas, ranging from legal assistance to individuals fleeing

[12] Humanitarian Outcomes. "Global Database of Humanitarian Organizations". Accessed on 23 July 2021. https://www.humanitarianoutcomes.org/projects/gdho The GDHO does not include UN Women, even though the agency holds IASC membership since October 2022.

conflict to the provision of water and sanitation infrastructure to communities affected by a natural disaster (Carbonnier 2015).

The humanitarian regime is distinct in that, while it presents clear boundaries in terms of organizational membership, it is also diverse in the issue areas and functions covered by its members. This reflects the current reality of humanitarian affairs: humanitarian action is no longer confined to warfare and the moral imperative of assisting the wounded on the battlefield. Today, humanitarian actors face an ever-growing range of situations requiring intervention, with the needs of those seeking assistance becoming increasingly complex and diverse (Weiss 2013).

The humanitarian regime is characterized by a strongly hierarchical structure, with UN agencies and the Red Cross/Red Crescent movement at the top. States remain key actors in humanitarian affairs, as they are the primary providers of resources for humanitarian interventions and are responsible for requesting assistance to deploy relief efforts (Audet 2016). However, UN agencies enjoy a significant degree of freedom in their strategic and programmatic decision-making compared to their more limited room for manoeuvre in international development. This distinction becomes evident when considering the share of total humanitarian assistance that is controlled by UN organizations. According to the ODI, in 2023 multilateral organizations, particularly the UN system, received 58% of all funding from Grand Bargain donors[13]. Since humanitarian principles are core norms that regulate the international humanitarian regime and dictate appropriate behaviour, states are generally cautious not to contravene them, at least in appearance. Actors within the regime are bound by the principles of impartiality and neutrality in conflict scenarios, where aid delivery is guided

[13] Development Initiatives. Falling Short? Humanitarian funding and reform. 2024. Retrieved in October 2024 from https://devinit-prod-static.ams3.cdn.digitaloceanspaces.com/media/documents/Falling_short_Humanitarian_funding_and_reform.pdf

solely by need rather than political considerations. In contrast, development assistance is deeply political. Governments and national institutions are expected to oversee their country's development strategy, prompting donor states to engage directly with recipient counterparts. For humanitarian relief, however, donors often prefer to channel aid through supranational entities, such as the UN and its specialized agencies, which are better positioned to meet neutrality and impartiality standards. Consequently, UN agencies enjoy considerable autonomy in decision-making on issues related to the humanitarian aspects of their mandate.

The hierarchical structure of the international humanitarian regime is not evident only in the relative autonomy states grant to UN agencies and the Red Cross/Red Crescent movement, but also in the authority that these organizations have over international and local NGOs operating in the field (Lowcock 2022). As explained in section 4, the current mechanisms of coordination divide humanitarian action into broad sectors based on issue area. Within each sector (or 'Cluster' to use the technical term), one UN agency is the point of reference for the international community and oversees the distribution of tasks and funding across the other organizations (such as NGOs, both local and international) operating in the same field.

While UN agencies may appear to have the upper hand in humanitarian affairs, they must navigate a complex environment that presents several challenges. The first challenge arises from the fact that many UN agencies wear a 'double hat' as both humanitarian and development actors (Lowcock 2022; Crisp 2018). Often, these organizations must fulfil both mandates within the same crisis-affected countries. To pursue long-term development goals, they need to collaborate with government and local authorities. In conflict-affected countries, where central authority is contested or not recognized by the entire population, pursuing a development mandate entails making politically-charged decisions to advance development objectives.

When this occurs, the neutrality and impartiality of these organizations are compromised, hindering their ability to assist all communities in need. As a result, double-hatted organizations face a trade-off between engaging with political actors to achieve long-term objectives or remaining neutral and impartial to reach people in need across political and societal divides.

The second challenge stems from the complexity of humanitarian needs (Coyne 2013). Organizations that identify as humanitarian may address very different issues arising from the same humanitarian emergency. Due to the fragmentation of humanitarian needs, each agency often views its own sector as the most urgent. This has led to accusations that humanitarian agencies think and operate in silos, without considering crises from a holistic perspective.

The third challenge is the growing imbalance between the supply and demand for humanitarian Official Development Assistance (ODA)[14]. While humanitarian ODA has consistently increased over the past decade, it has not kept pace with the rising global needs, exacerbated by the Covid-19 pandemic and the conflict in Ukraine. According to the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA), at the end of 2023, the humanitarian aid received by the system only covered 38% of the global funding needs, leaving an unprecedented gap of USD35 billion in unmet appeal requirements. Over the last decade, the humanitarian funding gap has risen dramatically from 13.2% of total requirements in 2013 to the current (provisional) 2024 estimate of 75%, driven both by donor fatigue and an increase in the number and severity of humanitarian crises around the world. This chronic underfunding means that all humanitarian organizations, even the largest ones, operate in an environment of scarcity, where the risk of vital resources being diverted to other actors is high.

[14] OCHA. *Global Humanitarian Overview 2024*. July 2024. Retrieved in August 2024 from https://www.unocha.org/publications/report/world/global-humanitarian-overview-2024-june-july-update-snapshot-31-july-2024#:~:text=As%20of%20end%20July%202024,at%20more%20than%20%2436%20billion.

The international humanitarian regime, with its distinctive traits and inherent tensions, provides an ideal context for understanding competitive inter-organizational interactions. Compared to other international regimes, the primary actors in humanitarian affairs—UN agencies and the Red Cross/Red Crescent Movement—enjoy a relative degree of independence from state interference in their operational decision-making. At the same time, they must operate in a resource-scarce environment, offering a wide range of increasingly diverse and complex services. The next section presents a brief history of the international humanitarian coordination architecture and then focuses on the current coordination mechanism: the Humanitarian Cluster System.

2.3 The evolution of post-World War II global humanitarian governance

Many of the key organizations at the centre of today's humanitarian governance—most notably the UN and its specialized agencies, programmes, and funds—were established after World War II. Among these, the Office of the High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) gradually carved out a central role in the provision of international humanitarian relief between the early 1950s and the 1980s (Anderson, Becknell, and Taliano 2018). During the secession of East Pakistan/Bangladesh, UNHCR acted as the coordinator between UN agencies and local and international NGOs, serving as "the focal point for the overall relief effort" (Seybolt 2009, 1034). In the following years, UNHCR came to be regarded as the de facto agency responsible for coordinating the response operations of other international humanitarian actors. However, its central role attracted repeated criticism, with concerns that the agency's focus on refugee matters might divert attention and resources from other critical aspects of humanitarian emergencies (Crisp 2018). A debate arose within the humanitarian community about the most appropriate coordination architecture for international emergency responses. One side, led by

UNHCR, advocated for appointing a lead UN agency to oversee humanitarian efforts. Organizations such as WFP, however, belonged to the opposing camp, arguing that assigning coordination responsibilities to a single organization would create a conflict of interest between the agency's mandate and its responsibility to delegate tasks and allocate scarce resources to other organizations. In 1991, UN General Assembly resolution 46/182 elevated the role of Emergency Relief Coordinator to the rank of Under-Secretary-General and established the Department of Humanitarian Affairs, now known as the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (UN OCHA) (Hoffman et al. 2018). UNHCR was thus demoted from its central coordination role in humanitarian emergencies, except in cases involving significant refugee flows (Hanatani, Gómez, and Kawaguchi 2020)[15]. The Inter-Agency Standing Committee (IASC) was also established, to provide a high-level forum for the ERC to consult and strategize with the heads of the main UN and non-UN humanitarian organizations.

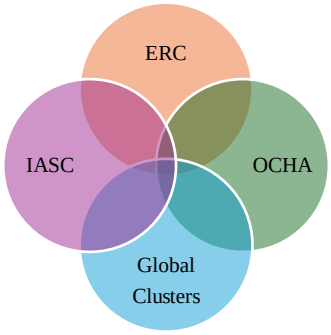
Despite the important innovations introduced in the early 1990s, by the turn of the millennium, global humanitarian governance still proved largely inadequate to meet the needs of people affected by crises and conflicts. The international community's failure to adequately respond to the 2003 crisis in Darfur and the 2004 Indian Ocean tsunami triggered the reform process commonly known as the 2005 Humanitarian Reform (Anderson, Becknell, and Taliano 2018). This reform introduced three key elements deemed essential to improving the timeliness, effectiveness, and predictability of humanitarian responses. First, it established the Central Emergency Response Fund (CERF), a centralized financing system designed to quickly deploy resources for relief efforts. Second, it reinforced the roles of the Emergency Relief Coordinator (ERC) and Humanitarian Coordinators to strengthen leadership in humanitarian operations.

[15] In more recent years, the UNHCR had to share its coordinator role with the International Organization for Migration (IOM) whenever the crisis resulted in local communities becoming internally displaced.

Third, it introduced the Humanitarian Cluster Approach to enhance coordination among actors operating in specific sectors, including food security, camp management, education, shelter, emergency telecommunications, health, logistics, nutrition, protection, and water, sanitation, and hygiene. While the reform provided a clearer structure for organizing relations between all humanitarian actors (UN and non-UN, local and international), it cemented the role of UN agencies as the central actors in global humanitarian governance. This drew harsh criticism from those humanitarian actors who felt sidelined by the hierarchization and centralization embedded in the 2005 reform[16] (Maxwell and Gelsdorf 2019). Nonetheless, a few months later, the innovations of the Humanitarian Agenda were implemented in response to the devastating earthquake that struck Pakistan and Kashmir in October 2006[17]. Since then, the system has undergone further changes and adjustments (through processes such as the 2010 Transformative Agenda and the 2016 World Humanitarian Summit), but the elements introduced in the 2005 Agenda continue to play a prominent role in shaping how international humanitarian efforts are organized and distributed globally. The Cluster System, where UN agencies take the lead in coordinating humanitarian responses across various sectors, constitutes tangible evidence of the UN's central role in global humanitarian governance.

[16] The issue of sidelining NGOs and local actors by UN agencies is often mentioned in discussions about partnerships and localization in humanitarian response (for instance, during the European Humanitarian Forum session on partnerships held and during ICVA Annual Conference in March 2023).
[17] IFRC. *Why Humanitarian Reform?* Interview to Mark Cutts (UN OCHA). December 2007. Retrieved in October 2022 from https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=UN-vtFbUGs8

Figure 1: The humanitarian coordination architecture at the global level



Nowadays, the humanitarian coordination at the global level is centred around four main actors and entities: the UN Emergency Relief Coordinator (ERC) supported by the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA), the Inter-Agency Standing Committee (IASC), and the Global Clusters (figure 1).

The Emergency Relief Coordinator (ERC) oversees all emergencies requiring UN humanitarian assistance (Lowcock 2022). As Under-Secretary-General (USG), the third highest rank in the UN system, he or she reports directly to the UN Secretary-General. The ERC is the focal point for relief activities involving governmental, intergovernmental, and non-governmental agencies (Shahpar and Kirsch 2018). Additionally, the ERC plays an increasingly significant advocacy role before the UN Security Council (UNSC), the UN General Assembly (UNGA), and the broader public. As head of OCHA, the ERC chairs Inter-Agency Standing Committee (IASC) meetings. OCHA, the branch of the UN responsible for coordinating humanitarian efforts, regularly gathers data, compiles reports on humanitarian crises and relief operations, and assists organizations in identifying gaps and needs on the ground.

The IASC is the highest-level humanitarian coordination forum in the UN system. Its goal is to strengthen international humanitarian assistance by bringing together the ERC (as chair),

the heads of key UN agencies involved in humanitarian response, and leaders of international NGOs, represented through consortia like ICVA (Shahpar and Kirsch 2018). The IASC allocates responsibilities among organizations globally, advocates for humanitarian principles and a common ethical framework, identifies gaps, and resolves disputes on system-wide humanitarian issues. Since 2018, the IASC also appoints Humanitarian Coordinators and selects coordination arrangements.

Lastly, Global Clusters are groups of organizations working in the same sector of humanitarian response (e.g., food security, WASH, health, shelter, protection, nutrition). Unlike country/regional Clusters, which may or may not be deployed depending on the specifics of a crisis, Global Clusters are always active. Their aim is to provide clear leadership, predictability, and accountability for organizations in the same humanitarian sector by identifying best practices, institutionalizing policy guidance, building response capacity, and providing operational support to clusters within countries. In the next section, the focus will shift from the global to the country level, specifically examining UN Country Clusters and the role UN agencies play within these structures.

2.4 The Humanitarian Cluster System at the country level

2.4.1 The origins of the Cluster System

Despite their differences in nature and origins, the crises in Darfur and South Asia both had devastating impacts on local populations and underscored the inadequacy of the international community's humanitarian responses. Critics particularly faulted UN agencies for their ineffective coordination with other humanitarian actors and local/national authorities (Hilhorst and Jansen 2010).

Jan Egeland, then ERC and head of OCHA, asked ECHO director Costanza Adinolfi to gather a group of experts in humanitarian affairs and carry out a comprehensive review of the state of the international humanitarian system. The Humanitarian Response Review was released in August 2005[18]. Among the main recommendations, the authors found the system particularly lacking with regards to assistance to internally displaced individuals (IDPs) and to the protection of vulnerable groups, particularly women and girls (Adinolfi, Bassiouni, Lauritzsen, Williams 2005). The review also highlighted the need to strengthen systemic coordination, both under the UN umbrella, among the UN, the Red Cross/Crescent Movement, and national/international NGOs, and between international actors and national governments.

How exactly these recommendations evolved into the Cluster System remains unclear to many humanitarians, particularly those working for NGOs or the Red Cross/Red Crescent Movement, to whom the new approach was presented as a *fait accompli*. The mysterious origins of the Cluster System are attributed by some to a high-level UN official who, after a long day of inter-agency brainstorming that yielded little to no results, sketched the Cluster Approach design—now featured on OCHA's website—on a restaurant napkin in Geneva, Switzerland[19]. Regardless of the exact sequence of events, when ERC Jan Egeland introduced the Cluster Approach to the members of the IASC Working Group on Coordination (a deputy-level meeting of IASC member organizations), several attendees could not help but notice the mismatch between the problems highlighted in the review and the proposed solution[20]. First, the new approach encompassed all sectors of humanitarian response and did not appear to be tailored to the specific issues identified in the review, namely the needs of IDPs and the

[18] Adinolfi, Bassiouni, Lauritzsen, Williams. 2005. *Humanitarian Response Review*. Retrieved in April 2022 from https://interagencystandingcommittee.org/sites/default/files/migrated/2014-12/Humanitarian%20Response%20Review%202005.pdf

[19] Author interview #2, 04/08/2022, online; author interview #19, 25/01/2023, online

[20] Author interview #2, 04/08/2022, online; author interview #44, 22/11/2023, online, own translation from Italian

protection of women and girls [21]. Second, the negotiation process failed to address the calls for stronger coordination and equitable partnerships between UN agencies and other actors in the humanitarian sector. Instead, NGOs and the Red Cross/Red Crescent Movement were largely excluded from the development of the Cluster System[22]. It comes as no surprise that in the Cluster Approach, with a few exceptions (e.g., Save the Children co-leading the Education Cluster or the IFRC co-leading the Shelter Cluster), NGOs and Red Cross/Red Crescent organizations are largely subordinated to and dependent on UN agencies' willingness to include them in decision-making processes.

Another feature of the Cluster Approach that seasoned humanitarians noted was that UN agencies without a clear humanitarian mandate in the pre-Cluster era successfully carved out their own niche in the new system. One example is the World Health Organization (WHO). Before 2005, WHO had never taken a lead role in humanitarian response; this had been the domain of large international NGOs specializing in emergency health assistance, such as *Médecins Sans Frontières* (MSF)[23]. At best, WHO played an advisory role to health ministries suddenly facing emergencies and lacking technical capacity. However, as the designated Lead Agency of the Health Cluster, WHO was now responsible for coordinating and advocating for organizations with much more established humanitarian mandates, even in contexts where these actors had been operating for years.

Despite the criticism the Cluster Approach received from within the humanitarian community, it was first implemented, for lack of a better alternative, during the 2006 earthquake in Pakistan, and then on a much larger scale following the devastating 2010 earthquake in Haiti. Since then, the Cluster System has been the primary coordination model for international humanitarian responses.

---

[21] Ibid.
[22] Author interview #59, 03/06/2024, online
[23] Author interview #2, 04/08/2022, online; author interview #59, 03/06/2024, online

2.4.2 Structure and rationale of the Cluster System

As mentioned in section 2.3, the Humanitarian Cluster System operates at the global, country, and often regional levels, covering eleven main sectors of humanitarian response: food security, camp management, early recovery, education, emergency telecommunications, health, logistics, nutrition, protection, shelter, and water, sanitation and hygiene (WASH). Clusters are groups of humanitarian organizations and actors working within the same sector. They are led by one or two UN agencies and include other international organizations (IOs), international and local NGOs, civil society actors, and governmental institutions involved in the humanitarian response (Townes et al. 2018).

At the global level, all Clusters are always active and serve as platforms for gathering best practices, promoting information-sharing, and improving strategic coordination among member organizations. At the country level, Clusters are activated based on the needs on the ground and operate only for a limited time (though in protracted crises or complex emergencies, some humanitarian Clusters have been active in the same country for years). UN agencies may share Cluster leadership responsibilities with an international NGO. The UN Cluster Lead Agency (CLA) at the country level may or may not be the same as the CLA at the global level. When governmental institutions play a significant role in relief operations, they are involved in managing Cluster activities, and Clusters are then referred to as Sectors (Ruesch et al. 2022).

Clusters are an integral part of the broader coordination framework known as the UN Country Team (UNCT), which the UN establishes in countries where its agencies are active—whether for humanitarian reasons, peace promotion, post-crisis recovery, or sustainable development. The UNCT includes representatives from UN agencies, bilateral donors, local and international NGOs, and local and governmental authorities. It is led by the UN Resident Coordinator (UN

RC), the highest-ranking UN official in the country, responsible for overseeing the UN's diplomatic mission and supporting the implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.

Initially, the UNDP representative, who served as the Cluster Lead Agency (CLA) for the Early Recovery Cluster, also held the roles of Resident Coordinator (RC) and Humanitarian Coordinator (HC). This positioned UNDP as the agency responsible for inter-Cluster coordination, resource allocation, and strategic alignment within the UNCT. However, other UN agencies with humanitarian mandates raised concerns about a potential conflict of interest between UNDP's role as the Early Recovery CLA and its responsibilities as an advocate for the other Clusters. In 2018, following General Assembly Resolution 72/279, which called for the repositioning of the UN Development System and the separation of the HC/RC role from UNDP, the agency was effectively demoted from its leadership position within the Cluster System [24].

Today, when a humanitarian crisis occurs, the Emergency Relief Coordinator, in consultation with other members of the Inter-Agency Standing Committee (IASC), appoints a Humanitarian Coordinator (HC) to oversee the Cluster System and manage the overall humanitarian response. In most cases, the HC role is assigned to the Resident Coordinator (RC) (Shahpar and Kirsch 2018). The Humanitarian Country Team (HCT) is also established as a forum to promote

[24] UNDP Information Note, "Implementation of General Assembly Resolution 72/279 on *Repositioning of the UN Development System*", Executive Board of UNDP, UNFPA and UNOPS – Annual Session 2019, retrieved on September 20 2021 from https://www.google.com/url?sa=t&rct=j&q=&esrc=s&source=web&cd=&ved=2ahUKEwj07Z6d9c7zAhXPi1wKHZwtDm8QFnoECAQQAQ&url=https%3A%2F%2Fwww.undp.org%2Fcontent%2Fdam%2Fundp%2Flibrary%2Fcorporate%2FExecutive%2520Board%2F2019%2FAnnual-session%2FUNDP%2520Information%2520Note-Implementation%2520of%2520GA%2520Resolution%252072-279.pdf&usg=AOvVaw0_e6iGoV1uygpr7K9v_bCe

coordination and strategic decision-making among Clusters, donors, and national authorities[25]. The main purpose of the HCT is to ensure that "the activities of [humanitarian] organizations are coordinated, and that humanitarian action in-country is principled, timely, effective and efficient, and contributes to longer-term recovery"[26]. The HC/RC, in consultation with national authorities, the HCT and the ERC, decides which Clusters should be activated at the national level and nominates CLAs.

During a humanitarian emergency, Clusters cover the following functions: first, they are instrumental in supporting service delivery within their specific sector. Clusters also inform the strategic decisions made by the RC/HC and the Humanitarian Country Team. In order to do this, Clusters have planning and implementation responsibilities: they draft programming plans, identify objectives and suitable indicators for monitoring their progress, and clarify funding requirements. Clusters are also supposed to work in concert with government and local authorities to progressively build national capacity in preparedness and contingency planning.

In the HCT, organizations are usually represented by their highest-ranking official at the country level. In order to allow for effective decision-making at the strategic level, HCT meetings are always limited in size[27]. During HCT meetings, officials of CLAs wear the double-hat of Cluster representative and member of a UN agency. As Cluster representatives, these individuals are supposed to voice the concerns of other member organizations and lobby for funding to support the projects and operations of all actors in the Cluster. At the same time, they are also meant to advance the interests of their own agency and to maximize the visibility

[25] See section 3
[26] IASC Operational Guidance on Humanitarian Country Teams, November 2009. Retrieved from https://www.humanitarianresponse.info/en/coordination/clusters/document/iasc-operational-guidance-humanitarian-country-teams in October 2021.
[27] IASC. *Operational Guidance on Humanitarian Country Teams*, November 2009.

of its operations to secure continued access to resources and demonstrate the organization's significant contribution in the provision of humanitarian relief. While UN agencies with Cluster Lead Agency (CLA) responsibilities have secure access to the HCT and the Humanitarian Coordinator (HC) and can influence key decisions on funding allocation from centralized pooled funding mechanisms (i.e., the CERF and CBPFs), other organizations are rarely invited to join HCT meetings. This double role of CLA representatives has been criticized by local and international NGOs as a tool to promote the interests of large UN agencies while marginalizing the role and the voices of smaller, local actors[28].

At the operational level, coordination across Clusters is supported by the Inter-Cluster Coordination Groups and inter-Cluster Coordinators. This cadre of UN professionals was established in 2010 to address concerns that the Clusters' siloed approach to humanitarian needs had negatively impacted the operationalization of their response in the field[29]. The main objective of Inter-Cluster Coordination groups is to streamline the number of active Clusters according to the actual needs on the ground and reduce inefficiencies and duplications efforts. Recent system-wide reviews conducted both by OCHA and by independent expert evaluators indicate that Cluster Coordinators have achieved a mixed record in carrying out their function.

The Cluster System has brought significant improvements to humanitarian relief efforts around the world, but it has also received strong criticism from a wide array of actors. While some argue that the Cluster System has brought a degree of order and clarity to an environment

[28] Author interview #44, 22/11/2023, online, own translation from Italian; author interview #59, 03/06/2024, online

[29] OCHA. *Operational Guidance: Generic Terms of Reference for Cluster Coordinators at the Country Level,* September 2010. Retrieved in October 2022 from https://sheltercluster.s3.eu-central-1.amazonaws.com/public/docs/operational_guidance_generic_terms_of_reference_for_cluster_coordinators_at_the_country_level.pdf

populated by a remarkably high number of very different organizations, its critics claim that by creating a rigid hierarchy with UN agencies at the top, it systematically marginalizes the voices of NGOs, particularly local actors who often have a better understanding of the real needs of affected populations. The Cluster System also excludes organizations that either cannot or choose not to apply for Cluster membership, meaning their operations are often overlooked during planning and programming phases.

Another weakness of the Cluster System is the strict division into technical sectors. Critics argue that this has created independent silos, which are inadequate to capture and address the complexity of humanitarian needs on the ground[30]. The introduction of Inter-Cluster Coordinators has done little to reverse this trend at the operational level and has had virtually no impact on the UN-centred dynamics within the HCT.

2.4.3 Stages of Cluster activation at the country level

The Inter-Agency Standing Committee (IASC) provides the guidelines that structure the country-level process during which Clusters are activated, become operational, and are eventually discontinued[31]. When a humanitarian emergency occurs, or a situation of instability significantly worsens, the first step in activating the Cluster System is for local or national authorities to request assistance from the international community. Two criteria must be met for the activation process to begin: first, Clusters can be activated if coordination and response gaps exist due to a sharp deterioration of the humanitarian situation. Second, activation is

[30] Author interview #2, 04/08/2022, online; author interview #44, 22/11/2023, online
[31] IASC Sub-Working Group on the Cluster Approach and the Global Cluster Coordinators' Group. *Cluster Coordination at Country Level Guidance*, July 2015, Retrieved in August 2021 from https://interagencystandingcommittee.org/system/files/2020-11/Reference%20Module%20for%20Cluster%20Coordination%20at%20Country%20Level%20%28revised%20July%202015%29.pdf

possible if the government's capacity to coordinate the response is insufficient to meet the needs on the ground in accordance with humanitarian principles[32].

After an initial analysis of the humanitarian needs on the ground and available resources, the ERC nominates the HC—typically the existing country RC—who then begins a consultation process with the rest of the HCT. The HC/RC informs the ERC of the outcome of the consultations and the two draft a final proposal regarding two aspects of the Cluster System: the Clusters that should be activated and the UN agencies that should lead each Cluster[33]. Usually, CLAs at the global level are also appointed at country level, but exceptions are often made on the basis of each agency's response capacity and ability to scale up within a given country. The proposals are then sent to IASC principals and to Global Clusters for review and approval within 24 hours. Once the proposed Clusters and Cluster Lead Agencies are approved, Clusters become operative within 72 hours (although the time to deploy more specialized, senior staff might be longer depending on Lead Agencies' pre-crisis presence within the affected country).

Coordination across Clusters is jointly managed by the HC/RC, the HCT, OCHA and Inter-cluster Coordinators. At the strategic level, the HCT articulates the strategic objectives (SOs) of the UN-wide response and, in consultation with Lead Agencies, in principle should decide which Cluster or group of Clusters should be assigned to each SO. At the operational level, the inter-Cluster coordination platform, chaired by OCHA with the support of Inter-Cluster Coordinators, ensures that Clusters and groups of Clusters operationalize SOs efficiently and coherently in their programming.

[32] Ibid.
[33] IASC. *Guidance Note on Using the Cluster Approach to Strengthen Humanitarian Response,* November 2006. Retrieved in October 2022 from https://sheltercluster.s3.eu-central-1.amazonaws.com/public/docs/iasc_guidance_note_on_using_the_cluster_approach.pdf

Clusters remain in place until their responsibilities are passed on to the relevant national/local institutions. The HC/RC together with the HCT conducts periodical reviews to assess whether each Cluster is still necessary to face the emergency. These reviews occur two months after activation in the case of sudden onset emergencies and on a yearly basis if the Cluster System operates in a protracted, complex crisis. Clusters can be deactivated when the humanitarian situation improves and national institutions have acquired sufficient capacities to meet remaining humanitarian needs. Cluster de-activation occurs gradually depending on how quickly existing national and development institutions are able to take on the Cluster's core functions.

2.5 Conclusion

From an IR lens, contemporary global humanitarian governance can be described as a complex, densely populated international regime, where a myriad of different actors interact to provide relief to crisis-affected communities. The actors populating the humanitarian regime differ among themselves in terms of institutional capacity, specialization, and budget size. The regime includes large, multilateral organizations, small, local NGOs as well as state agencies and civil society groups. In principle, all humanitarian actors share a commitment to the principles of independence, impartiality, neutrality, and humanity: such principles are often explicitly mentioned in organizational mandates and therefore represent the boundaries that demarcate the international regime of humanitarian assistance.

At first glance, UN agencies seem to have the upper hand within the humanitarian regime. By virtue of their supra-national status, their member states regard them as the most credible providers of impartial, neutral humanitarian aid. As such, UN agencies enjoy more

autonomy in humanitarian affairs than they do in the case of development assistance (which is mostly delivered and administered on a bilateral basis). This tendency of states to delegate to UN agencies the delivery of humanitarian relief reinforces the dominant position of UN organizations over international and local humanitarian NGOs.

While UN agencies enjoy a position of relative autonomy and power vis-à-vis their member states and other actors in the international humanitarian regime, they also face significant challenges. The double humanitarian-development mandate that UN agencies are often tasked with is one such challenge. In working towards the Sustainable Development Goals, UN agencies are supposed to collaborate and support national governments. While providing humanitarian relief, UN organizations are expected to remain neutral and apolitical. This tension has often raised questions on whether UN agencies are truly well-positioned to carry out their humanitarian duties. Other challenges stem from the inherent complexity of humanitarian needs and from the insufficient funding allocated for the response to most humanitarian crises.

Despite the autonomy they enjoy in the humanitarian regime, UN agencies navigate a densely populated, resource-scarce environment. Since the end of World War II, numerous attempts were made to overcome these challenges and improve coordination among humanitarian actors. As shown in this chapter, these rounds of system reform were often driven by UN agencies themselves, when they perceived that one organization—initially the UNHCR and later the UNDP—had gained near-monopolistic control over the delivery of humanitarian relief.

In the current architecture of international humanitarian governance, and especially within the UN Cluster System, UN organizations are responsible for one specific sector, or Cluster, of the humanitarian response: in other words, UN agencies operating in humanitarian emergencies

have their own niche of specialization. Contrary to what is posited by theoretical frameworks that are usually applied in IR to study inter-IO interactions, such as Organization Ecology and Resource Dependence Theory, this division of labour does not seem to prevent inter-agency competition from occurring. Instead, several expert evaluations carried out a few days following international humanitarian responses highlight the 'silo mentality', which seems to inform the decision-making of each UN agency operating in the same humanitarian context.

The process of contestation and competition that shapes the architecture of global humanitarian governance is far from over. The next chapter will introduce the theoretical framework illustrating why inter-organizational competition occurs despite niche differentiation. Differentiation does not necessarily guarantee organizational survival, if the niche or sector of specialization is not deemed indispensable by those actors holding 'the power of the purse'. When this happens, an organization needs to ensure that its niche remains funded, either by highlighting the relevance of its sector with regards to a certain policy problem, or by expanding the range of issues and services it encompasses. Whether an IO opts for the first or second avenue depends on its organizational type. Specialist organizations attempt to align the framing of the policy problem with their existing policy portfolio, while generalists expand their policy portfolio to better address the issue of interest. In humanitarian response, specialist organizations therefore develop strong data gathering and communications capacities, whereas generalists prioritize flexibility and organizational agility.

After the theoretical framework, the empirical section of this dissertation is structured as follows: Chapter 4 explores the dynamics contributing to the persistence of inter-IO competition within the broader humanitarian system. Chapter 5 focuses on two successful IOs in the competitive humanitarian policy space. Despite differences in mandate, size, and scope, both the World Food Programme (WFP) and the International Organization for Migration (IOM) consistently rank among the top four multilateral recipients of humanitarian aid. Chapter

6 examines the unusual case of the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP). Its privileged position within the UN humanitarian system made UNDP less responsive to competitive pressures, resulting in its failure to implement either strategy outlined in Chapter 3. Since losing its role as Resident and Humanitarian Coordinator for the entire UN system in 2018/19, UNDP has been progressively 'competed out' of the humanitarian sector.

Chapter 3

Theoretical framework

3.1 Introduction

This dissertation investigates why and how UN organizations compete against each other in humanitarian governance. As discussed in the previous chapter, UN organizations with a role in humanitarian response are operational IOs and act as the last resort service-provider and point of reference for a specific sector of the humanitarian response, as set down in the system-wide coordination arrangement known as the Humanitarian Cluster Approach. Despite this apparent division of labour, there is plenty of evidence in the form of reports, evaluations, interviews, and other testimonies, which suggest that turf wars, inefficient duplications, and a distinctive 'siloed mentality' of UN organizations are still very much a reality of today's humanitarian relief efforts worldwide. The persistent inter-organizational competition, despite differentiation, stands in contrast to Organizational Ecology and Resource Dependence Theory, which suggest that competition should decrease as organizations occupy narrower, less crowded spaces.

Integrating insights from organization theories, bureaucratic politics, and the field of public policy, this chapter introduces a two-level framework whereby population-level conditions trigger competitive behaviour at the organizational level. Competition among IOs is complex, because, besides the competitors, it also involves a third party with allocating and adjudicating power (in the case of humanitarian governance, the donor-states). Organizational survival is the imperative by which every IO abides. Survival has both a short-term and a long-term dimension: in the short term, surviving implies remaining operational in terms of having the

ability to sustain operations and programming, hire staff, maintain headquarters, etc. In the long-term, surviving means establishing and reinforcing the relevance of its mandate. To ensure survival then, an IO needs financial resources to remain operational in the short term, and visibility to ensure that its mandate remains relevant in the long term. Both financing to sustain operations and visibility of IOs are available in scarce quantities, which do not satisfy overall demand. Organizational theories, such as Population Ecology and Resource Dependence Theory, posit that competition is a function of systemic conditions and, particularly, of resource scarcity and environmental density and that it should decrease as organizations differentiate into distinct niches of specialization. In other words, a clear division of labour such as the one envisioned in the UN Cluster System should be sufficient to avoid competition among the organizations involved.

Instead, this thesis argues that in a situation of complex competition, the presence of a third party, with decision-making power over the allocation of scarce resources, 'cancels out' the benefits of niche specialization. Organization theories argue that niche differentiation stifles competition *because* it leads to resource partitioning. However, humanitarian IOs, even when catering to different sectors of the humanitarian response, remain dependent on the same pool of scarce resources, controlled by a small number of institutional donors, the third party(-ies) to the competitive relation. While having a niche protects an organization against competitors, it does not automatically ensure that the third party will consider the niche as deserving of the resources it controls. In other words, the third party holding the power of the purse might decide to reallocate resources from one niche to another.

To survive, IOs need to ensure that their niche remains relevant in the eyes of the third party. This is linked to the second part of the research question considering how humanitarian UN organizations compete against each other. What are the strategies that an IO implements to secure access to the financial resources necessary to survive? IOs can either opt for *competitive*

horizontal expansion or *competitive issue framing*. The former entails the expansion of an IO's mandate to incorporate functions that have little or no ties to its original remit. In other words, the organization adapts the services it offers to the reality 'on the ground' and the preferences of its member states. An organization adopting the latter strategy actively attempts to frame the policy problem that is perceived as salient to fit its organizational mandate and therefore the type of solution the IO itself can offer. Competitive issue framing entails adapting the reality 'on the ground' to the services offered by the organization. The choice of strategy depends on whether the IO is a generalist or a specialist organization (this distinction is illustrated in detail in appendix A).

This chapter is structured as follows. First, it provides a definition of competition that moves beyond the conceptual monopoly of economics and is applicable to a wider array of social actors, including IOs. Then, it briefly outlines the contributions and limitations of two organizational theories, Population Ecology and Resource Dependence Theory, and of bureaucratic politics, and considers how these theoretical approaches are relevant to the study of inter-IO competition. The chapter continues by considering why inter-organizational competition still occurs despite niche differentiation. In the case of complex competition, where a third party holds the power of the purse, niche differentiation loses its screening effect if it is not followed by resource partitioning. When organizations perceive a threat of resource re-allocation from one niche to another, inter-organizational competition persists despite niche differentiation.

It then discusses the relation between organizational type, either generalist or specialist, and the two competitive strategies IOs can resort to in response to resource scarcity, namely competitive horizontal expansion, and competitive issue framing. The chapter also weighs the merits of the novel theoretical framework against three alternative explanations that are

commonly applied to explain change in international organizations: historical institutionalism, sociological institutionalism, and rational choice institutionalism. Lastly, the chapter applies the theoretical framework to the case of operational UN organizations in the humanitarian system and outlines the expected observable implications deriving from the hypotheses.

3.2 Competition in the social sciences: Beyond the conceptual 'monopoly' of economics

When thinking about competition in the social sciences, the most obvious connection one can draw is with economics and theories on private firms interacting in the market economy. From Adam Smith's invisible hand to Cournot's theory of oligopoly, competition has played a central role in models seeking to explain the behaviour of economic actors. Given the continuous attention that competition has received in the field, it is striking that economists have traditionally treated it as a relatively unproblematic concept, whose occurrence is considered as a 'natural' state, or at least a desirable one, where only deviances should be investigated.

Research on competition in economics, being mostly restricted to the case of firms and markets, inevitably limits its usefulness for other social scientists who investigate competition in less-structured contexts and might be more interested in understanding what causes competition in the first place (Arora-Jonsson, Brunsson, and Hasse 2021). Indeed, competition has found numerous applications in a vast range of disciplines, including sociology, politics, and psychology. Besides reclaiming competition as a phenomenon of interest for disciplines other than economics, social scientists have started to question the supposed beneficial effects of increased efficiency and innovation as set down in the theory of perfect competition that has become pervasive in public discourse (Worthen et al. 2009).

Moving beyond the conceptual 'monopoly' traditionally held by economists, this section aims at providing a definition of competition that is applicable to all social sciences and

to a plurality of social actors, including operational IOs. The section will briefly touch upon the fundamental building blocks shared by different conceptualizations of competition, which transcend disciplinary divides. These are: actorness, survival, scarcity, performance, and contest.

To observe competition in its simplest form, there need to be at least two distinct actors, who compete against each other. *Actorness* is defined here as an entity's ability to exist and carry out actions independently, whilst being aware of one's environment and of the other actors operating in it. It implies self-awareness, the ability to elaborate goals and act in a manner consistent with their pursuit, while adjusting one's moves depending on the actions and the (perceived) goals of other actors (Leiulfsrud and Sohlberg 2018; Bretherton and Vogler 2010; Hawkins and Jacoby 2006). In the case of competition, actors are those entities that can articulate needs or, more broadly, desires, elaborate how to pursue those needs and desires in the environment in which they exist, and make educated guesses about other actors' intentions and how these might impact their actions. To exercise actorness, an entity must ensure its own *survival*- that is, its continued existence despite environmental changes and internal vulnerabilities (Barnett and Coleman 2005). Thus, an actor will prioritize needs that are linked to survival over other secondary needs.

In the social realm, competition often involves not only two competitors but also a third party that plays a key role in determining the outcome. This third party can set the rules of the game *a priori* or make the final adjudicating decision *a posteriori* between competing actors. Situations where a third party holds allocative or adjudicative power over competitors are considered cases of complex competition.

If actorness is the essential condition for competition to occur from a micro-level perspective, *scarcity* is the *sine qua non* requirement from the systemic point of view (Grossman and Mendoza 2003). To compete, two actors need to make a claim over the same

good and this object needs to be available in limited quantity, insufficient to simultaneously satisfy the claims of both actors. Competition entails a zero-sum situation between two or more parties. The object of competition can be either tangible or intangible. If it is tangible, like in the case of natural or financial resources, scarcity is linked to the finite quantity of the good. In some cases, a third party might enjoy control over the contested good and make decisions about the exact quantity to be supplied. If it is intangible, like prestige or status, it is often acquired in terms of relative positioning vis-à-vis competing actors (Brunsson and Wedlin 2021). Competitor A cannot claim a reputation as 'the best at X' if Competitor B can make the same claim.

Competition revolves around the relative positioning of each actor vis-à-vis its competitor(s). To prevail in the competitive interaction, one must be stronger, faster, smarter, etc. than the other(s). For one actor to emerge as the winner, another has to lose. *Performance* is therefore the key determinant of the outcome of competition. For simple forms of competition, where there are only competitors with no adjudicating third party, the relative performance is gauged in terms of which actor manages to secure access to the contested good. However, in the social realm most competitive interactions include a third party, as discussed above. Performance in this case is measured against a standard set by the third party (be it expressed in terms of rules of the game or subjective preferences).

Competition can be a one-time occurrence or repeat itself across several interactions over time. When competition between two actors stretches over time, it can be observed within a series of individual contests, where a certain amount of the scarce resource is allocated to one of the contestants. The annual ranking of OECD member states' education systems (the so-called PISA ranking) or the allocation of a public contract to a private contractor are both examples of a contest in different social contexts. These contests can vary in length and frequency as well as in the extent to which they can be considered independent with respect to

the outcome of previous competitive interactions. In some instances, competitors might retain an advantage as winners of the previous contest. In others, every contest might be considered as a 'blank slate', where previous wins do not affect one's chances of success.

Competition can therefore be defined as *a social phenomenon, whereby actor A purposefully seeks to secure control over a scarce good (which can be either tangible or intangible) needed to ensure survival, while being aware that at least another actor will also orient their actions to gain access to the same resource*. In line with other social scientists that are critical of the deterministic conceptualization of competition in economics, this definition does not make any *a priori* claim with respect to the desirability of its effects.

In the field of international relations, competition has been traditionally considered a prerogative of states, since classical theoretical approaches like realism and liberal institutionalism attribute actorness exclusively to states. For realism, IOs are merely fora where inter-state competition might be mitigated or tools used by the most powerful states to exert their influence over less powerful ones. According to functionalist approaches to international cooperation, since IOs are only established when it is convenient for states to achieve coordination, duplication of functions across institutions is not a likely scenario, because it would defeat the purpose of efficiency. When duplication occurs, it is a result of states engaging in forum shopping and 'cherry-picking' the regulatory forum that most closely aligns with their preferences (e.g. Haftel and Hofmann 2019; Alter and Meunier 2009). According to this literature, forum shopping (and inter-institutional competition) declines when institutional differentiation is high, and states can no longer consider IOs as substitutes (Henning and Pratt 2023).

Even in the literature that attributes a certain degree of actorness and independence to IOs, the process and outcomes of inter-organizational competition have remained relatively

under-investigated, notwithstanding a few notable exceptions (Abbott, Green, and Keohane 2016; Gehring and Faude 2014; Frey 2008; Lipscy 2019; Lall 2020; Morin 2018; Holzscheiter 2017). From a theoretical standpoint, the contribution of this dissertation is twofold: first, it conciliates views that consider IOs as entities embedded within a dense institutional environment that shapes their manoeuvring space and exposes them to competitive pressures, with those approaches that highlight the autonomy and agency of IOs as independent actors in international relations. Second, it challenges the assumption that institutional differentiation is a solution to inter-IO competition, offering instead a more dynamic understanding of niche specialization.

The next section of the chapter will briefly present two theoretical approaches, Population Ecology and Resource Dependence Theory, that IR scholars have borrowed from other disciplines to analyse inter-IGO competition. Then, the chapter will discuss how insights from bureaucratic politics might prove useful in shedding further light on inter-organizational dynamics.

3.3 Resource Dependence Theory & Population Ecology: Organizational theory and inter-organizational competition

While there is a significant body of IR literature that focuses on the design, effectiveness, and relative autonomy of IOs, IR theorists have seldom investigated dynamics of inter-IO relations and how they impact international governance. Among the exceptions to this trend, a few studies have relied on insights from organizational theories to analyse conditions for inter-IO cooperation and competition (Abbott, Green, and Keohane 2016; Eilstrup-Sangiovanni 2020; Morin 2018). Two theoretical approaches are particularly useful for studying inter-IO relations: Resource Dependence Theory (RDT) and Population Ecology (PE; also known as

Organizational Ecology) (Brosig 2020). Both approaches theorize IOs as *open systems* and emphasize "the relational character of organizations" (Biermann and Harsch 2017b, 138). They adopt a systemic perspective and focus on the interaction between organizations and the environment in which they operate. However, they differ with regards to the preferred unit of analysis. Whilst RDT prioritizes a bottom-up approach centred around managerial decision-making and organizational embeddedness, PE takes groups of organizations (i.e., populations) as its starting point (Biermann and Koops 2017).

RDT conceptualizes organizations as open systems, which require resources (both tangible and intangible, although this classification remains underspecified) to carry out their function and survive. Organizations do not possess all the necessary resources and are dependent on other actors in their external environment to obtain them. This dependence creates uncertainty for organizations regarding environmental dynamics and infringes on their organizational autonomy (Biermann and Harsch 2017b). RDT revolves around an organization's strategy to strike a balance between its resource dependencies and its concerns over organizational autonomy. It is indeed the distribution of resources across the environment that leads organizations to either coordinate or compete.

RDT theorists disagree on whether domain similarity (for IOs that means operating in the same issue area) results in cooperation and competition (Biermann and Harsch 2017a). For some, dependency on the same set of resources encourages pooling and exchange of resources. For others, it might result in turf battles and duplication. In studying private market firms, RDT identifies several strategies adopted by organizations to manage resource dependence and preserve organizational autonomy: when coordination is not feasible or desirable, organizations alter the social environment in which they operate to create a regulatory context, which better suits their interests and needs. Alternatively, they can attempt to control the source of dependence by merging either horizontally or vertically with another firm. Organizations can

also invest to develop the internal capabilities and expertise necessary to produce resources independently.

PE adopts a systemic perspective revolving around the evolution patterns of populations and examining the environmental conditions conducive to the birth and death of organizations. A population "comprises all organizations that dispose of a comparable environmental vulnerability" (Ries 2017, 159). In organizational theory, researchers have focused on firms belonging to the same economic sector (e.g., pharmaceutical, automotive, etc.).

Differently from RDT, proponents of PE do not consider the possibility that organizations are able to shape their environment. Borrowing from biology, PE posits that organizations exist in a scarce-resource environment, where the Darwinian mechanism of 'survival of the fittest' is constantly operating. Proponents of PE have established different criteria according to which organizational selection occurs: among the most established ones is the efficient use of resources. PE is mostly concerned with organizational mortality rates within different populations: researchers investigate at what population density level the number of additional organizations stops to increase and begins to fall instead (Hannan and Freeman 1977). When does the cost of joining a population 'niche' becomes too high for newcomers? By focusing mostly on the life and death of organizations, PE neglects other forms of change, which happen internally to organizations.

RDT and Population Ecology both study the relationship between organizations and the environment in which they operate. The two theoretical approaches differ with respect to the unit of analysis they consider: while RDT focuses on the individual organization, PE adopts a systemic approach, by focusing on groups of organizations (populations). Albeit from two different perspectives (bottom-up for RDT, top-down for PE), both theoretical approaches

focus on organizations' struggle for resources, autonomy, and ultimately survival. While PE takes competition as the default force underlying populations of organizations, RDT opens to the possibility of inter-organizational cooperation.

Most importantly, through different avenues, both theories reach the conclusion that niche differentiation should tame inter-organizational competition. From a PE perspective, a niche that is very specialized is populated by a small number of actors and as such provides a more secure environment for organizations than a broader sector that is more densely populated. From a RDT perspective, niche differentiation is a deliberate strategy that an organization can adopt to swing the resource dependence imbalance to its advantage, by producing rare 'products' that are needed by other actors in the environment and cannot be acquired elsewhere.

Even though both theoretical approaches offer important insights for the study of inter-IO relations, their application to IR presents some significant limitations. First, while the identification of the organizations (and populations) of interest is not particularly problematic when it comes to private firms, it is much more difficult to establish in the case of organizations as intended by IR scholars (Lipson 2017). The organizations that populate regimes of global governance differ significantly in terms of institutionalization, membership, size, scope of mandate, etc. A regime revolving around a specific issue area might include NGOs, IGOs, public-private partnerships, private foundations, etc. Considering the differences across actors populating the same regime, one can question the extent to which IR scholars are comparing 'apples with apples' in the same way that is taken for granted when organization science researchers study firms in a private market. For those hoping to apply a PE frame to study IGOs within a particular regime, this might prove problematic since the size of any given regime

decreases significantly if one decides to only include IOs and exclude other types of actors, which might make large-N quantitative analyses unfeasible.

Second, IOs and private firms provide different kind of goods, which might lead to different rationales underlying good provision and resource procurement (Lipson 2017). In the provision of public good some degree of division of labour is considered as a desirable outcome. When it comes to private goods, an agreement between firms (tacit collusion, collective dominance, etc.) is considered as an undesirable distortion of the market and is often prohibited under anti-trust legislation.

Most importantly, it is difficult to fit the role of states in the framework provided by RDT and PE. For IOs, states are at the same time principals and members, suppliers and clients, actors populating the external environment and participants to their internal decision-making processes. While roles along supply chains are well-identifiable in a market situation, the position of states and the control they exert over the resources IOs need to remain operational complicates the applicability of both RDT and PE to IR. States are the 'third parties' with allocational power, which characterize situations of complex competition (see section 3.2). Since they play such a prominent role in deciding the fate of organizations, it is hard to establish whether inter-IO dependency has a significant impact or whether there are additional environmental conditions other than states' preferences that influence the growth of populations of IOs.

Despite the limitations regarding the applicability of Population Ecology and Resource Dependence Theory to international relations, the two theoretical approaches provide important, top-down insights on how to conceptualize the environment in which IOs are embedded in. The next section will consider how the bottom-up perspective provided by bureaucratic politics theory can be used to explain how IOs articulate their preferences and interests, and how these lead to inter-organizational competition.

3.4 Studying bureaucracies in IR: Should we open the IO black box?

While RDT and PE study inter-organizational competition by focusing on the relative positioning of organizations and on the allocation of resources, the literature on bureaucratic politics in political science and sociology provides insights on the drivers of competition that originate within individual organizations. Indeed, to understand inter-organizational interactions, one first needs to conceptualize what drives the behaviour and shapes the preferences of an organization. Having discussed top-down explanations of organizational behaviour (i.e. Population Ecology and Resource Dependence Theory), this section will consider how the bottom-up perspective focusing on bureaucracies and bureaucrats can be applied to inter-IO competition.

While it remains relatively under-studied in IR, inter-organizational competition has received more attention in political science, with regards to relations between different bureaucracies of the state. In analysing the behaviour of US government agencies, Wilson (2000) provides a blueprint for articulating the interests of an organization. An important question related to organizational behaviour is to what extent the individual preferences of bureaucrats (especially executives and senior staff) working within an organization can be aggregated into a coherent set of organizational interests. Bureaucrats are driven by a mix of material concerns (e.g. salary, job security, career advancement etc.) and ideational interests (i.e. a genuine belief in the mission of one's agency). Civil servants at the domestic level might also be constrained by their political affiliation (especially if their appointment was made on a political basis).

Career concerns at the individual level can sometimes trigger inter-departmental competition within the same agency, especially if the organization in question has a very broad mandate (Ellison 2006). This is because decisions on career advancements are often related to the performance of one's office/department. Department performance is often measured in

terms of resources secured. Since an organization's resources are limited, inter-departmental dynamics are often perceived as a zero-sum game.

However, when it comes to *inter*-organizational relations, Wilson (2000) posits that the personal interests of the civil servant are aligned with that of her agency as a whole. Indeed, bureaucrats, especially executives, have a primary interest in continued organizational maintenance, that is in "assuring the necessary flow of resources to the organization" (Wilson 2000, 181), since it is a pre-requisite to achieve their own career goals. If an organization cannot operate because it does not possess sufficient resources, it will be deemed superfluous and eventually shut down and its employees will find themselves out of work. Securing continued organizational existence of their agency is therefore a paramount concern for every bureaucrat. When organizational maintenance is threatened, internal divisions become of secondary importance as does bureaucrats' allegiance to external actors.

Wilson (2000) also argues that the common notion that maximizing the inflow of resources is sufficient to secure optimal levels of organizational maintenance is flawed. While it is true that more resources are in principle a positive outcome, extra resources are not desirable if they come at the price of less autonomy and more external interference[34]. Autonomy, defined as "a condition of independence sufficient to permit a group to work out and maintain a distinctive identity" (Selznick as cited in Wilson 2000, 182) is essential to organizational maintenance. Crucially, this definition suggests that there are two dimensions to organizational autonomy, one external and one internal. The external dimension of autonomy is concerned with the independence from other actors within a well-defined domain or 'jurisdiction'. The internal dimension of organizational autonomy entails the articulation of a mission, which justifies the existence of an organization and confers it with a sense of purpose

[34] This is consistent with the trade-off between resources and autonomy identified by Resource Dependence Theory scholars (section 3.3).

and a distinctive identity. Governmental agencies (and the bureaucrats working in them) are therefore subject to pressure from two distinct sources: on the one hand, they are required to manage constituent (i.e., political) control and make a convincing case for the continued existence of the agency. On the other, they must defend the boundaries of their domain from other organizations infringing on their turf. Just like for RDT and PE, resource and autonomy concerns are key drivers of inter-agency competition.

Several IR researchers have applied this lens to IOs, conceptualized as bureaucratic actors with a distinct (and sometimes contrasting) agenda from those of their member states. Scholars have opened the black box of IOs to consider the influence of bureaucrats and executives working in them (Ege and Bauer 2013; Bauer, Knill, and Eckhard 2017; Thorvaldsdottir, Patz, and Eckhard 2021; Ege et al. 2023; Biermann 2017; Knill and Steinebach 2023). Just like for civil servants working for national agencies, bureaucrats working in IOs are driven by personal considerations relating to their own career (e.g., salary, job security, career advancement etc.) and ideational interests (i.e., a genuine belief in the mandate and mission of one's organization). The preferences of IO personnel might be influenced by their nationality and by the policy preferences of their country of origin, which might clash with the goal of securing the independence of the organization they work for.

In the same way as for government agencies at the domestic level, for IOs, decisions on career advancement are tightly linked to the performance of one's department or office, which is often measured in terms of budget. Within the UN system, advancing in seniority (or moving from one P-level to the next) usually requires serving in country or regional offices for several years before being considered for coveted headquarters roles in New York, Geneva, or Rome. To qualify for such promotions, UN officials must demonstrate a successful track record for their

office, which includes attracting resources and securing greater autonomy from headquarters. This creates intra-agency competition between headquarters and decentralized offices, as well as among regional and country offices across different regions.

Both at the domestic and at the multilateral level competition can be an intra-organizational affair as much as it is an inter-agency one. However, when the organization as a whole is threatened, then the allegiance to one's organization trumps inter-departmental rivalry, because the organization's survival itself (and with it, the careers of the staff working in it) is at stake. Thus, when studying inter-IOs relations, and particularly inter-IO competition, it is reasonable to assume that the career goals and personal interests of bureaucrats closely align with those of their organization. Just like governmental agencies at the domestic level, IOs are presented with the challenge of balancing financial needs with the maintenance of a certain degree of organizational autonomy. To survive as an organization, an IO needs to secure autonomy vertically, vis-à-vis states – the principals that exercise oversight over an IO's mandate and control the flow of resources – and resources horizontally, with respect to those actors (other IOs, but also NGOs, civil society organization, etc.) that depend on the same set of resources.

Examining the inner workings of IOs, as scholars of bureaucratic decision-making often do, inevitably raises the question of how reasonable it is to distinguish between the interests of individual bureaucrats and those of the IOs they serve. Chapter 1 discussed in greater detail the relation between the unit of analysis (i.e., UN agencies) and the unit of observation (i.e., interviewees working in UN agencies). While dynamics internal to the organization and related to individual preferences can certainly be an important determinant of organizational behaviour, in the case of inter-organizational competition, when organizational survival is at stake, the interests of individual bureaucrats are closely aligned with the main goal of the

organization (i.e., continued organizational survival). Since it is in the ultimate career interest of any member of personnel that their organization continues to operate and remains relevant in global governance, the imperative of organizational survival trumps any other form of allegiance (be it to one's department or office, or to a particular member state).

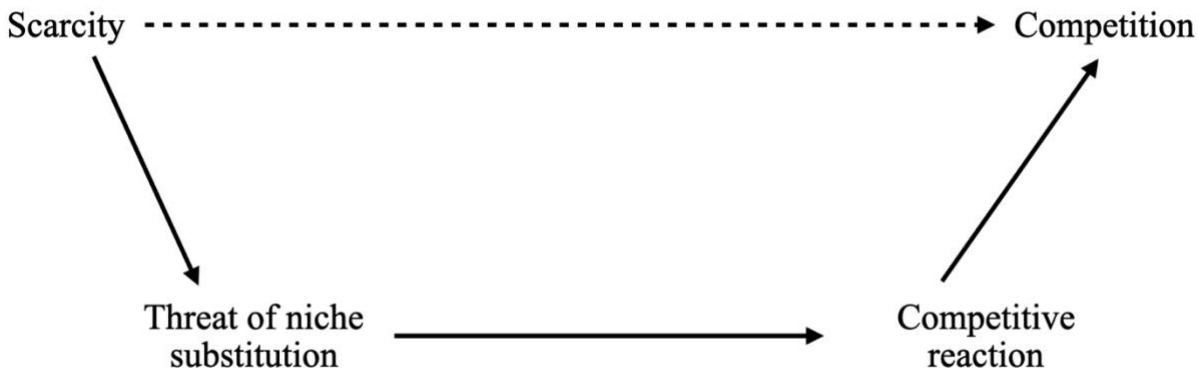
Albeit through different routes and from different starting points (i.e. bottom-up vs. top-down; the individual bureaucrat vs. populations of organizations), both bureaucratic politics and organization theories (more specifically, PE and RDT) reach the same important conclusion: survival is the ultimate organizational imperative. In addition, bureaucratic politics is helpful in solving an apparent methodological challenge: when investigating inter-organizational competition, is it reasonable to assume that the goals of the organization (the unit of analysis) are in line with the interests of the bureaucrat working in them (the unit of observation)? While other factors may influence individual decision-making within an organization, competition with another institution threatens the organization's autonomy—and, consequently, the careers of its bureaucrats. In competitive situations, organizational survival tends to override any individual-level preferences or considerations.

3.5 Inter-organizational competition despite institutional differentiation

Existing studies applying organizational theories to the study of relations among IOs have highlighted and theorised the relation between scarcity, environmental density, and competition (Lipscy 2019; Gehring and Faude 2014). The reasons why competition persists despite niche differentiation, such as in the case of UN organizations in the humanitarian system, remain underexplored. Similarly, while existing literature has focused on populations of organizations, there is little understanding regarding the strategies an IO can resort to in a competitive

environment, when niche differentiation is no longer a guarantee of survival. The diagram below (Figure 1) presents a graphic representation of the causal mechanisms connecting *resource scarcity* to the outcome of interest, namely *inter-organizational competition*.

Figure 2: From resource scarcity to inter-IO competition



According to Organizational Ecology and Resource Dependence Theory (RDT), as well as scholars of international regime complexity, organizations differentiate under conditions of scarcity and high environmental density, allowing them to find a less crowded niche with a resource base that competitors do not seek (Henning and Pratt 2023; Biermann and Harsch 2017a; Hannan and Carroll 1992). However, this strategy is effective only as long as the organization's services and beneficiaries are matched by an equally exclusive resource base. In other words, niche differentiation remains a viable strategy for organizational survival only if it includes resource partitioning. Resource partitioning refers to the process of dividing available resources (e.g., multilateral funding for humanitarian response) among competing parties, ensuring that each entity receives enough to sustain its operations.

While in the natural sciences, niche width depends on the range of environmental resources a species requires to survive, niche identification for social actors is a more complex matter. According to Hannan and Carroll “the fundamental niche of an organizational form

consists of the social, economic, and political conditions that can sustain the functioning of organizations that embody the form" (1992, 28). An organization's niche is often subject to change, either as a result of organizational behaviour or due to exogenous changes in the environment that limit (or increase) the resources available to populations of organizations. Taking the example of the media industry, Carroll (1985) differentiates between generalist newspapers and specialist newspapers and illustrates how these two types of organizations can coexist because they cater to different audiences of readers. These readers are also its buyers (or buyers of the products advertised in the newspapers): in other words, they also provide (directly or indirectly) the (financial) resources that are necessary for the newspaper to survive as an organization. What makes a niche an optimal environment for an organization is the absence of competitors *and* exclusive access to a resource base sufficient to ensure organizational survival. The assumption that task specialization automatically translates into access to an exclusive set of resources might hold for private firms operating in a competitive market. It becomes more problematic when applied to other organizational types, such as operational IOs relying on ODA disbursements, where niche differentiation is not automatically followed by resource partitioning.

When task/audience specialization is not accompanied by a corresponding differentiation in the resource base, an organization's niche loses its screening function. If an organization carves out a niche of specialization within a densely populated environment, but this niche is not endowed with an exclusive resource base, the organization will still have to compete for access to the same pool of resources as the other entities populating that same environment. IOs stand as providers of public goods, meaning that there is varying overlap between the direct beneficiaries of their work and those who hold the power of the purse, namely member states. The extent of this overlap varies according to the issue area: some IOs provide services that directly benefit the states that fund them, while others assist beneficiaries

that are far removed from the member states that foot the bill. This is the case of IOs channelling Official Development Assistance, especially short-term humanitarian aid.

As established in section 3.2, inter-organizational competition is complex, due to the presence of a third party with adjudicating power, in the case of this dissertation, the member states financing IOs. Under conditions of scarce resources, if the adjudicator holding the power of the purse does not correspond to the target 'customers' or beneficiaries of an organization's niche, differentiation is no longer a guarantee of survival. On the contrary, an organization will have to face the threat of *niche substitution*, whereby the adjudicating party might decide to prioritize and reallocate resources from one niche to another. In the humanitarian regime, this sectoral prioritization is based on the interests of states controlling the resource flow rather than on the preferences of the beneficiaries of IOs' programmes and operations. When scarcity induces states to prioritize across niches, access to resources is no longer ensured and organizational survival is threatened.

H1: If resource partitioning does not follow niche differentiation and IOs perceive a threat of niche substitution, under conditions of scarce resources, competition will occur among IOs occupying different niches.

Conversely, it follows from H1 that if an IO has continued access to resources despite systemic resource scarcity, it will not engage in competitive behaviour.

H1a: If following niche differentiation an IO's access to resources is unimpeded, then the IO will not perceive the threat of niche substitution and will not engage in competitive behaviour.

To survive, IOs strive to ensure that their niche remains relevant vis-à-vis other niches in the eyes of the donor states holding adjudicating power. An IO's niche is relevant when there is complementarity between the 'solution' (meant as the services, programmes, and operations) an IO can offer and a policy problem perceived as salient by states at any given time. Public Policy theories focusing on unpacking the policy process offer important insights into how some policy solutions are chosen over others to tackle a wide array of societal problems (Cairney 2012). The textbook linear model of the policy-making process presupposes a shared understanding of a policy problem that leads to different policy alternatives being considered and compared until one solution is chosen over others according to well-defined selection criteria (e.g., cost-effectiveness, appropriateness, etc.). More recent theories, such as the Multiple Streams Approach or the Narrative Policy Framework, are critical to the policy cycle model and emphasize the political nature of the policy process, which encapsulates different set of interests of the actors involved. In particular, MSA conceives the policy outcome as the result of an explicit effort of policy actors to influence the collective understanding of a problem to match their most preferred policy solution.

Theories of Public Policy have found applications at different levels of analysis, spanning from the local to the global (e.g. Mattli and Woods 2009). In global governance, operational IOs, conceived as unitary, self-interested actors (see section 3.4) playing an active role in the policy process, have an interest in ensuring that their operational toolkit fits the policy problems that states want to address. To do so, operational IOs can choose among two alternative avenues: *competitive horizontal expansion* and *competitive issue framing*. The first option is for the IO to try to adapt their existing offer in terms of services to the policy problem that requires addressing. When a policy problem emerges, the IO is flexible enough to expand the array of solutions it provides to match the preference of the donor states requiring its services (*competitive horizontal expansion*). The notion of IO mandate expansion is by no

means a novel one in IR. Existing literature focusing on programmatic IGOs illustrates how these organizations ensure the continued relevance of their mandate by expanding it to incrementally incorporate new policy issues, a process known as mission-creep (Kreuder-Sonnen 2019). On the one hand, principal-agent explanations point to insufficient control mechanisms and ambiguous delegation contract as the source of organizational mission creep (Lawrence 2007). The focus is therefore on the principals and their potential shortcomings rather than on the agents and their strategies to expand and survive. Sociological institutionalist explanations on the other hand focus more on IGOs as autonomous bureaucracies exploiting their expert authority as a source of legitimacy and neutrality to justify mandate expansion (Barnett and Finnemore 2004; Littoz-Monnet 2020). The defining feature of mission creep in international organizations (IOs) is that it is intentional and incremental, which is why the concept is primarily associated with normative IOs focused on setting standards and making norms. Operational IOs, whose primary role is implementation, generally do not expand gradually over time. Instead, an operational IO has limited room for manoeuvre in expanding its 'service offering,' which typically aligns with the emergence of new policy issues requiring solutions from member states. To counter the threat of niche substitution arising from resource scarcity, an operational IO will expand its mandate horizontally, pushing the boundaries of its niche based on ground needs. When an IO chooses competitive horizontal expansion, its aim is for its policy solutions to be chosen over those of competing organizations. Unlike mission creep, with competitive horizontal expansion, the IO lacks the time to build a compelling narrative or convince stakeholders of the coherence of its new offering with its original mandate.

Alternatively, an operational IO can opt for *competitive issue framing*. Instead of expanding operations to better reflect the reality of the most salient policy issues in global governance,

IOs might decide to focus on ensuring that the issues states perceive as salient align well with the services they are already best positioned to offer. In other words, operational IGOs might attempt to frame a certain policy issue as a problem they are best equipped to solve with the capabilities already at their disposal. For example, in the case of a major natural disaster, an IGO with a mandate focused on the provision of food aid will frame the situation as a food security crisis, while a health-oriented organization might try to establish a narrative centred around the spread of infectious disease or the lack of access to healthcare in emergency circumstances. Instead of competing by widening the scope of their mandate to cover more functions than their competitors, an alternative strategy to ensure survival in a competitive environment is to secure resources by framing a policy issue in a way that is best solved by the operational capabilities of the organization. When an IO opts for competitive issue framing, its aim is to ensure that its preferred frame of the policy problem is chosen over those proposed by other IOs.

Both strategies aim to establish relevance concerning a specific policy issue and secure a sustained flow of scarce resources, often at the expense of other IOs occupying different niches. When multiple organizations respond to threats to their niches through competitive behaviour, the systemic outcome is complex competition, where a third party allocates resources to one or a few IOs at the expense of others. Winning organizations consolidate their niche positions relative to competitors, while losing organizations may opt to pursue a new issue area.

3.6 Organizational type and competitive strategy

The previous section outlined why inter-organizational competition may persist even when IOs occupy distinct niches. If a niche serves an ‘audience’ that differs from its direct resource

base—as with UN organizations assisting people in need of humanitarian aid—niche differentiation alone may not ensure organizational survival. Specifically, if states funding these IOs lack sufficient resources to finance every organization, they may prioritize one IO's function over another's. Under scarcity, IOs may find themselves competing for the same resource pool, even if they previously occupied distinct 'safe space' niches. The question now is *how* IOs compete. This section explains how organizational type influences the choice of competitive strategies.

Drawing from biology, Organizational Ecology distinguishes between generalist and specialist organizations. In the natural sciences, generalist species can thrive in a wider range of environmental conditions and can make use of a variety of different resources. Conversely, specialist species require a very specific diet, a narrow habitat, and more specific environmental conditions to survive. With social actors, such as firms, determining niche width and drawing a clear line between specialist and generalist organizations is a more complex endeavour. Retrieving Carroll's analysis of newspapers competing in the same market provides a useful analogy for making the generalist-specialist distinction (1985). Generalist newspapers present two distinctive features. First, they are "locally diversified" with respect to the range of activities they undertake and the subsections they include, which leads them to capture a larger share of the overall market. Second, generalist newspapers are also "vertically integrated" (Carroll 1985, 1266), meaning that their organizational structure entails control of the production, manufacturing, and distribution processes. Specialist newspapers target a smaller, well-defined segment of the population and are more likely to only focus on production, relying on the manufacturing and distribution capacities of external actors.

When considering IOs, distinguishing between specialists and generalists is particularly challenging due to the inherent complexity of policy issues requiring transnational coordination. Existing literature identifies niche width—defined by the number of issue areas covered by an organization's mandate, which in turn determines its target audience (e.g., states, civil society, companies) and the breadth of its membership—as a useful heuristic for categorizing an IO as either a specialist or a generalist (Eilstrup-Sangiovanni 2020; Shibaike 2023). Categorizing an IO as either a generalist or a specialist depends on the policy space or international regime it is considered to belong to. Within a narrowly defined regime, an IO offering multiple services in that specific field might be classified as a generalist. However, if the regime's boundaries are expanded to include a broader issue area, the same IO might be viewed as a specialist. Thus, identifying the relevant regime and the population of IOs is essential for accurate classification. In addition, the distinction between generalists and specialists is not necessarily static: over time, an IO may expand its mandate to cover a broader range of issue areas and competencies, or it could focus on certain policy tasks while abandoning others. Section 3.8 and Appendix A outline the criteria used for IO classification within the humanitarian regime.

By offering a wide array of services, generalist IOs occupy the centre of a crowded environment and cater to a broad 'target audience.' This wide service range serves as a hedge against changing conditions, allowing these organizations to adapt to various scenarios. Specialist IOs, in contrast, engage in a relatively narrow range of activities. Although they possess a clear comparative advantage in their area of expertise, they are less equipped to respond to change. For specialist IOs, it is essential that the services they provide remain visible and relevant to pressing policy issues. Consequently, when resource scarcity threatens their niche, specialist IOs employ competitive issue framing to align the policy problem with the solutions within their focused portfolio. Conversely, generalist IOs covering a wide array of

issue areas will not have developed a sufficient specialization to influence the framing of a policy problem but will manage to tailor and adapt its vast policy offer to the problem under consideration. Generalist IOs will therefore resort to competitive horizontal expansion, whereby the organization adapts its offer to the perceived needs of the moment even if these are far off its original mandate. Since the distinction between generalist and specialist organizations is not necessarily static, choosing one strategy does not automatically preclude the use of the other. However, if an IO consistently adopts a strategy that is misaligned with its organizational type, it may incur reputational costs over time. For example, a specialist IO that frequently engages in competitive horizontal expansion could undermine its reputation for having a clear comparative advantage in a specific sector. Conversely, a generalist organization that repeatedly relies on competitive issue framing risks damaging its reputation for flexibility and adaptability. Therefore, this dissertation proposes the following hypothesis:

H2: Under conditions of scarcity and perceived threat of resource re-allocation and niche substitution, organizational type will determine the competitive behaviour adopted by the IO.

H2a: If an IO is classified as a specialist within a given international regime, it will employ competitive issue framing to secure funding for its niche.

H2b: If an IO is classified as a generalist within a given international regime, it will resort to competitive horizontal expansion to ensure that its niche remains funded.

Under conditions of scarcity, niche differentiation, when not accompanied by resource partitioning, can trigger competitive behaviour among organizations within the same policy space, each striving to keep their niche relevant and well-funded. If it appears likely that states

with financial influence may redirect resources from one niche to another, the specialist-generalist divide informs how an IO will respond when its survival is under threat. Specialists and generalists adopt distinct strategies: specialist IOs aim to frame policy issues to align with their areas of expertise, reinforcing the boundaries of their niches to ensure relevance and prevent external interference. Generalist IOs, on the other hand, may expand their offerings to better match the evolving nature of the policy problem, actively encroaching on other organizations' niches if necessary.

3.7 Going beyond the institutionalisms

Having outlined the theoretical framework, this section sets out to weigh its merits against existing approaches that identify alternative drivers, other than resource scarcity and the threat to organizational survival that comes with niche substitution, to explain the behaviour of IOs operating within the same policy space. Institutionalism in particular has been advanced to explain gradual change in international organizations (Hanrieder 2014a; Fioretos 2011). This section considers historical institutionalism, sociological institutionalism, and rational choice institutionalism. For each alternative theory, this section discusses the explanatory variable of IO behaviour, the advantage of the novel theoretical framework introduced in this chapter, and the observable implications expected for the alternative explanation to hold.

3.7.1 Historical institutionalism

Path dependence is historical institutionalism's main explanatory variable for the way in which institutions, including IOs, develop and persist. The main intuition behind this approach is that 'history matters.' Change may occur as a result of external shocks or incremental adjustments,

but once an institution embarks on a given path, reversing the trend is difficult. From a historical institutionalist standpoint, it is not the combination of resource scarcity and the threat of niche substitution that explains IO behaviour, but rather how past choices and events related to an IO's design and mandate are locked in to determine continuity through mechanisms such as positive feedback effects or sunk costs. Compared to the novel theoretical framework introduced in this chapter, historical institutionalism remains focused on the impact that states' actions and decisions have on the continuity and evolution of institutions. While the argument advanced in this dissertation does not negate the importance of past events, choices of institutional design (which might determine whether an IO has a specialist or a generalist focus), and other influential decisions made by member states, it presents these as the boundaries that limit the IO's room for manoeuvre.

If the historical institutionalist perspective holds, organizational behaviour would not be activated by external competitive pressures. Instead, IOs would engage in issue framing or horizontal expansion based on their original organizational setup, irrespective of any perceived threat of niche substitution.

3.7.2 Sociological institutionalism and the 'garbage can' model

Sociological institutionalism focuses on the influence of shared norms, values, and cultural expectations in shaping institutions. From this perspective, IO behaviour is driven less by competitive dynamics and more by social legitimacy and the desire to conform to globally accepted norms and standards of appropriateness. While under competitive pressures, IOs have an incentive to stand out and outperform others; from a sociological institutionalism point of view, IOs are more likely to adopt similar practices and rhetoric to reinforce their legitimacy.

In other words, if sociological institutionalism holds in contrast to the framework introduced in this dissertation, alignment would occur instead of differentiation.

The 'garbage can' model, on the other hand, highlights the role of randomness in decision-making. Rather than being driven by clear competition, IOs face situations where policy issues, solutions, and potential stakeholders are disconnected and often come together by chance. Organizational behaviour thus emerges from a messy, ad hoc process rather than a strategic, competitive response. The implications for this model suggest that there is no expected correlation between a given IO's behaviour and its organizational type or the competitive pressures it faces.

3.7.3 Rational choice institutionalism

In rational choice institutionalism, IOs are embedded in a system of rules and incentives. Principal-agent (P-A) models, in particular, emphasize the relationship between states and IOs, highlighting how IOs behave based on the 'contract' (i.e., the mandates, constraints, and oversight) imposed by state principals. Information asymmetry and imperfect contracts create 'agency slack,' allowing IOs to deviate from the purpose for which they were originally established. Both P-A approaches and the theoretical argument advanced in this dissertation recognize the key role of states in defining the room for manoeuvre available to IOs. However, in P-A approaches, the only external stimulus that matters is the control imposed by states and whether it can be evaded. In terms of observable implications, from a P-A perspective, generalist IOs would expand their remit when state oversight is less stringent, regardless of whether their policy environment is densely populated and resource-scarce.

Having outlined potential alternative explanations provided by historical institutionalism, sociological institutionalism, and rational choice institutionalism, the next

section will consider how resource scarcity determines the competitive behaviour of UN organizations operating in the humanitarian realm.

3.8 Competition among UN organizations in the humanitarian system

Chapter 2 of this dissertation outlined the history of the global humanitarian system from the end of the Second World War to the present day. Given the steep increase in short-term humanitarian aid as a proportion of total ODA over the last 20 years, compared to long-term development assistance, an increasing number of IOs have entered the system, often in a typical 'follow the money' fashion, despite not being traditional humanitarian actors. This trend was clearly visible during the lengthy 2005 negotiation process that ultimately led to the formulation of the Humanitarian Cluster System, the global coordination architecture still in use today. Even UN organizations that previously had no role in humanitarian response (such as WHO) began lobbying the then ERC for a seat at the negotiating table. The outcome was a coordination system where the UN emerged as the dominant actor in humanitarian response, with its specialized agencies, funds, and programmes gaining leadership roles in specific Clusters, effectively dividing the spoils of the ever-growing 'humanitarian market' among themselves.

Despite the dominance of UN organizations, the 'humanitarian market' remains crowded, with a diverse array of actors—including donor states, recipient governments, international NGOs, and local civil society groups—each pursuing different interests and agendas. These actors become active whenever disaster strikes or a prolonged humanitarian emergency unfolds. In other words, crisis is business as usual for humanitarian actors. Given the urgency intrinsic to humanitarian response, they must often be operational within hours of an emergency's onset. These sudden spikes in activity provide each organization with only a

brief window to ensure its sector of the response is adequately funded. For many, humanitarian emergencies are not organizational crises but opportunities to mobilize resources, an essential chance in a field marked by uncertain funding flows.

Since the 2010s, while humanitarian aid has continued to take up an ever-larger share of total ODA, the rise in available humanitarian funding did not match the ever-growing humanitarian needs deriving from both sudden-onset and protracted, complex crises around the world. In addition, humanitarian donors' strong preference for earmarked, voluntary contributions further magnifies the uncertainty surrounding the availability of sufficient resources. As donor countries disburse humanitarian aid on a crisis-to-crisis basis, international organizations are more constrained in their ability to predict whether they are going to have access to sufficient funding to remain operational in both the short- and the long-term. Resource scarcity is therefore a stark reality of contemporary humanitarian governance.

The division of labour introduced with the Humanitarian Cluster System does not necessarily entail that all sectors of a humanitarian response will be adequately funded in the aftermath of an emergency. Both Organizational Ecology and Resource Dependence Theory (RDT) suggest that as niche differentiation becomes a more pronounced feature of a population of organizations, competition among them becomes less intense. According to Organizational Ecology, organizations that differentiate either as generalists or specialists can coexist because they cater to different populations. From an RDT perspective, competition decreases as each organization finds its exclusive resource base and reduces its dependency on other organizations. As organizations specialize their complementarity increases and so does the number of opportunities for inter-organizational cooperation. Both approaches rest on the common assumption that once an organization identifies its own specialized niche, it will also

gain access to an exclusive resource base. This assumption holds well when considering firms in a competitive market, where clients determine the demand curve and thus influence quantity and price of the output, but it becomes problematic when applied to the provision of global public goods and particularly to the case of humanitarian assistance. Specialist humanitarian organizations cater to a particular demographic (e.g., children, refugees, women) and/or to a specific set of humanitarian needs (e.g. food security, WASH, camp management, protection, health, etc.)[35]. These niches are somewhat artificial and only partially address the complexity of humanitarian disasters, as the needs of affected populations are often multi-faceted and compounded. Despite increasing specialization among UN organizations, they continue to draw from a largely unchanged pool of resources: the bulk of humanitarian aid (and ODA in general) has consistently come from a small group of donor countries over the decades. There is a clear divide between those who directly benefit from humanitarian aid—the countries and people targeted by ODA programmes—and those who fund these efforts, mainly donor states. Donors, motivated by various factors ranging from moral imperatives to political interests in supporting allies, often face difficult choices in funding allocation. With almost no overlap between those who benefit from aid and those who finance it (primarily UN DAC countries), humanitarian donors frequently cannot fully cover the cost of a response, leading to prioritization of certain needs over others. As global humanitarian needs continue to soar, the resource base has not grown commensurately, leaving a widening gap between demand and available funding.

The sectoral differentiation introduced with the Cluster System assigns to each UN operational organization a specific sector (or Cluster) of the humanitarian response. The Cluster corresponds therefore to a niche of specialization, where each UN organization holds a leadership role over a group of local and international actors that work specifically in that

[35] See Appendix A for a detailed discussion of the generalist-specialist classification.

sector. However, the Cluster System and, more generally, the current architecture of humanitarian governance, does not include a Cluster-specific funding mechanism, which guarantees that the UN organization can access the sufficient resources to fund its operations and those of the Cluster at large. More importantly, while this sectoral specialization narrows down the target population of beneficiaries and/ or the set of tasks assigned to each organization, it does not alter the number of organizations relying on the same resource base for sustaining their operations.

Therefore, the expectation to be confirmed in the empirical chapters, based on hypothesis 1, is as follows. UN organizations operating in the humanitarian system find themselves embedded in a densely populated, resource-scarce environment, where institutional differentiation is not followed by resource partitioning. Despite the sectoral division of labour enshrined in the Cluster System, the organizational survival of these IOs is not guaranteed, as differentiation into sectors of the humanitarian response is not accompanied by Cluster-specific funding mechanisms. On the contrary, all UN humanitarian organizations depend on the ever-shrinking pool of resources provided by a small number of large institutional donors. The division of labour established with the Cluster System thus loses its screening function, threatening the survival of UN organizations and inducing inter-organizational competition.

Section 3.7 outlined the relationship between organizational type and competitive strategy adopted by an organization. Organization Ecology distinguishes two organizational types: specialist and generalist organizations. As the name suggest, specialist organizations perform a narrow range of activities. Generalist organizations, by contrast, provide a wide range of operations and services to a broader 'target' population. Transposing this distinction to classify international organizations is not without its challenges and always necessitates specifying the population of reference from the outset. Within the UN system, each organization can be

considered as a 'pioneer' organization, since each entity has (close to) universal membership and was conceived to tend to a specific policy issue, and not to counterbalance the activity of an existing IO (within the UN system). It is the mandating states that decided that one UN agency was to oversee assisting refugees, one was tasked with securing children's rights, another was in charge of post-crisis recovery at large, etc. Depending on how broad or narrow is the IO population of reference, UN organizations could be classified as generalist by virtue of their nearly universal membership or as specialist, if focusing on their issue-based mandates.

Appendix A illustrates in detail the criteria for IO classification used in this dissertation as well as how they were operationalized in the case of the twelve UN organizations with an operational role in humanitarian response[36]. The first criterion is the time horizon of an IO's intervention. The IO could focus exclusively on providing short-term humanitarian assistance or to also promote long-term development[37]. The second criterion is whether the IO focuses its programming on a specific demographic (e.g. women, children, migrants, refugees, etc.). The third criterion is the range of interventions carried out by IOs.

In this dissertation, IOs are classified as either specialist or generalist if they meet at least two out of the three categories of target demographic, range of interventions, and time horizon of intervention. The classification of the UN's humanitarian agencies and programmes can be summarized as follows:

Figure 3: Classifying humanitarian IOs

IO	Target Demographic	Intervention Range	Timeframe	ORGANIZATIONAL TYPE
FAO	No	Narrow	H & D	Generalist
IOM	Yes	Broad	H & D	Generalist
OCHA	No	Narrow	H	Specialist
OHCHR	No	Broad	H & D	Generalist
UNDP	No	Broad	H & D	Generalist

[36] These UN organizations are full members of the Inter-Agency Standing Committee, as membership is primarily based on having an operational role in humanitarian response.
[37] It may also be the case that most of an IO's annual expenditure falls under development assistance, while humanitarian assistance remains a minor share. In that case, the IO would still be classified as a specialist under the 'time horizon' criterion.

UNFPA	Yes	Narrow	D	Specialist
UN-HABITAT	No	Broad	D	Generalist
UNHCR	Yes	Broad	H	Specialist
UNICEF	Yes	Narrow	H & D	Specialist
UN WOMEN	Yes	Narrow	D	Specialist
WFP	No	Narrow	H	Specialist
WHO	No	Broad	H & D	Generalist

Out of the twelve UN entities holding IASC membership, six are classified as generalist organizations and six fall under the specialist category. As the humanitarian marketplace becomes densely populated and available resources grow scarcer, generalist organizations retain diversity in the expertise of their staff in order to provide a wider array of services while relinquishing the ability of assisting specific demographics, which are the target of specialist IOs. Conversely, specialist organizations that only focus on a specific segment of the humanitarian market, deliver the same, narrow set of interventions from crisis to crisis.

Section 3.7 introduced the relationship between organizational type and competitive strategy: under conditions of scarcity that have not been mitigated by niche differentiation, the type of competitive behaviour adopted by the IO to ensure organizational survival will depend on whether the organization has a generalist or specialist focus. Thus, the expectation to be confirmed in the empirical chapters, based on hypothesis 2, is as follows. In humanitarian response, specialist IOs will resort competitive issue framing and attempt to frame the crisis from the perspective of their existing capabilities, focus, and expertise. In contrast, generalist IOs, will opt for competitive horizontal expansion and attempt to fill the gaps in the response by adding new services and operations to their offer.

3.9 From hypotheses to observable implications

So far, the chapter has introduced the theoretical expectations to be tested in the empirical chapters. This section links the hypotheses to potential observable implications drawn from the

data. Chapter 1 outlined the data collection strategy and discussed in detail the advantages and challenges related to elite interview, archival work, and observant participation in the study of International Organizations. The empirical chapters are based on the analysis of primary sources (official reports of individual IOs, UN system-wide reports, assessments carried out by Ministries of Foreign Affairs of member states, and evaluations drafted by independent bodies such as MOPAN, transcripts/quotes from events held in Geneva and online between March 2023 and March 2024) as well as on more than 60 interviews of staff working in these IOs, independent experts, and representatives of both donor and recipient countries. Observable implications supporting Hypothesis 1 (i.e. if there is a risk of re-allocation of resources from one niche to another, then niche specialization will not shield organizations from scarcity) entail a relation between *resource scarcity* (i.e. dwindling humanitarian financing, rise of earmarked funding and loss of organizational autonomy) and *niche specialization* (i.e. the specific sector of humanitarian action covered by the IO and the corresponding Cluster), which are presented as a *threat to organizational survival* (i.e. loss of relevance and influence in the humanitarian field vis-à-vis other actors in the system). Specifically, the source of the threat is to be identified in the potential for re-allocation of available resources from one niche to another (i.e. away from the sector of the humanitarian response that is covered by a given IO). Conversely, observable implications against Hypothesis 1 would entail evidence against a link between survival and niche specialization, claims that the division of labour in the humanitarian system is working well, or that resource scarcity is not affecting IOs in the system.

According to hypothesis 2, a perceived threat to organizational survival arising from scarcity and the existence of other competitors and their respective niches should trigger a reaction, the competitive behaviour. Whether an IO will react through competitive horizontal expansion or competitive issue framing depends on its organizational type. Hypothesis 2a posits that a specialist IO will resort to competitive issue framing. Evidence in support to this

hypothesis includes claims that an IO defined as specialist in section 3.8 of this chapter takes measures to influence the dominant narrative around a humanitarian crisis, actively influencing UN-wide reporting on the crisis, where it will push for its sector to be prioritized during the needs assessment phase, and bilaterally reaching out to donors as soon as the crisis begin to promote their perspective in donor MFAs and shaping the way in which aid allocations are portrayed and justified. Hypothesis 2b theorizes that generalist IOs resort to competitive horizontal expansion. Observations in support of this hypothesis include claims of generalist IOs not behaving as first movers but intervening once gaps in the response become evident. These IOs can also be expected to use their flexibility and vast operation portfolio as their main selling point with donors, rather than specific expertise tied to one sector of the humanitarian response (see section 3.6). In addition, evidence around patterns of engagement across humanitarian clusters would also support Hypothesis 2. In particular, generalist IOs are expected to progressively engage in activities spanning a larger number of humanitarian Clusters than the ones they were originally assigned to. Conversely, specialist IOs are expected to stick to the same Clusters where they were assigned Cluster leadership and not venture into other sectors of the humanitarian response.

Observations that refute the role of survival instinct as a trigger for competitive behaviour would undermine Hypothesis 2. Likewise, evidence that organizational type does not correspond to a specific competitive strategy, as outlined in H2a and H2b, would challenge these hypotheses. For example, if a specialist organization were associated with an expanding operational portfolio covering multiple sectors of humanitarian response, this would contradict the expectations of H2a. Similarly, for generalist IOs, evidence against H2b would include observations of them focusing primarily on communications, needs assessments, and advocacy with donors rather than expanding their operational scope. Table 2 provides a summary of the coding categories grouped by hypothesis.

Figure 4: Coding categories

Hypothesis	Category	Definition	Confirming Evidence	Disconfirming Evidence
1	**Scarcity**	Lack of sufficient resources to meet the demand of all IOs in the humanitarian system.	• Rising humanitarian needs • Decrease in humanitarian funding • Increase in number of actors in the humanitarian field • Rise in earmarked funding (as opposed to core funding)	• Decreasing humanitarian needs • Increase in funding/ steady flow of humanitarian funding • Steady/ declining number of humanitarian actors • Rise of unearmarked contributions
1	**Niche specialization**	The domain/ issue area of exclusive competence of a given IO.	• References to Cluster Lead role of a given Cluster • Claims of holding a comparative advantage in a specific sector of the response	• No mention of an IO's CLA role • No mention of comparative advantage, specialization, exclusive competences
1	**Perceived threat to survival**	Perception -from the IO's perspective- of a risk of vital resources being diverted to other organizations in the system.	• Donors pushing for prioritization • Risk of losing relevance /influence in the humanitarian field • Explicit mentions of competition with other UN organizations • Comparisons with other UN organizations	• No request from donors to prioritize across sectors of the humanitarian response • No mentions of perceived risk of loss of organizational relevance and influence • No descriptions of other UN organizations as competitors
2 **2a & 2b**	**Competitive behaviour (competitive horizontal expansion and competitive issue framing)**	Reaction triggered by the survival instinct of an IO to avoid the diversion of vital resources.	• Generalist IOs use flexibility and vast operation portfolio as their main selling point • Specialist IOs use expertise/ comparative	• Generalist IOs not associate with flexibility and vast operation portfolio; behaving as first-movers • Generalist IOs have not expanded activities to other clusters

			advantage as selling point • Generalist IOs as second-movers • Specialist IOs as first movers • Specialist IOs carrying out limited activities in other clusters • Generalist IOs significantly expanding activities in other clusters over time	• Specialist IOs not associated with specific expertise; not behaving as first-movers; expanding significantly beyond sector of expertise

Chapter 4

The international humanitarian regime as a competitive environment

4.1 Introduction

It will only take a few days in her new position for the intern to realise that much of what is happening in the halls and rooms of the *Palais des Nations* in Geneva revolves around resourcing humanitarian IOs and their crisis response operations. All the meetings she attends and write reports on focus on a specific crisis, detailing how UN agency X is responding, the unprecedented needs of affected people in the agency's sector of competence, the urgent intervention needed to avert the worst-case scenario, and the exact amount of money needed from donors to achieve this. Interestingly, for the same humanitarian emergency, she attends an OCHA-led meeting where the Humanitarian Coordinator or their deputy, flown in from the crisis-torn country, tries to persuade donors to support the UN-wide response detailed in the Flash Appeal they have just drafted. The Humanitarian Coordinator lists each sector's response in order of priority based on urgency, severity of needs, and the number of affected people (i.e., People in Need or PiN). Only a few hours later, in a different room of the Palais or one of the headquarter buildings scattered between *Avenue de la Paix* and *Crêts de Morillon*, the intern attends a video-call with a UN agency's in-country representative. They argue that – differently from what transpires from the Flash Appeal - the needs in their sector are in fact the most urgent and deserving of donors' attention and financial support. What initially seemed like a well-concerted response effort of the UN system now appears to be a race among humanitarian IOs to secure funding for their operations before other organizations.

While this might surprise a newcomer to the humanitarian field, it is well-known to relief workers, policy makers, and others who have built their career in this domain. Behind

the united UN-system façade, in recent years inter-organizational competition in humanitarian governance has worsened due to skyrocketing humanitarian needs worldwide, driven by factors such as the COVID-19 pandemic, the Russian war of aggression against Ukraine, climate change, and more recently, the Israeli-Hamas war. Importantly, competition in humanitarian governance does not concern exclusively interactions among international organizations (IOs) and (international) non-governmental organizations (INGOs/NGOs) operating in the same niche, but also occurs between IOs under the UN umbrella.

The policy domain in which humanitarian IOs, including UN entities, have to operate has been described as a "competitive market place", a space populated by a myriad of actors at the global, regional, national, and sub-national level, all dependent on the same pool of scarce resources in order to remain operational (Weiss 2013; Miriam Bradley 2023b; Maxwell and Gelsdorf 2019; Audet 2016). In a densely populated, resource-scarce environment organizations are bound to compete against each other and their success or failure in securing resources necessary for survival may vary greatly. Over the last decade, scholars studying international organizations (IOs) have developed a growing interest in inter-organizational interactions, including competition (Frey 2008; Gehring and Oberthür 2009; Biermann and Koops 2017; Hannah, Ryan, and Scott 2017; Lipscy 2019; Brosig 2020; Lall 2020; Clark 2021; Kranke 2022). The literature on international regimes and regime complexes is the sub-field of IR that, to date, has addressed the topic of inter-IO competition most systematically (Alter and Raustiala 2018; Alter and Meunier 2009; Raustiala and Victor 2004; Orsini, Morin, and Young 2013). The international regime literature stands out for theorizing IOs as immersed in dense institutional environments rather than as isolated entities in global governance. Until recently, however, research on international regime complexes focused primarily on states pursuing their interests by exploiting fragmentation, institutional overlaps and duplications and on the impact

that this had on international policymaking (Busch 2007; Hofmann 2009; Haftel and Hofmann 2019; Reinsberg and Westerwinter 2023; Greenhill and Lupu 2017; Hofmann 2019).

This trend has begun to change over the last few years as some regime complexity scholars gradually shifting their focus to consider IO agency (Margulis 2021). While recognizing the specific characteristics of the environment in which IOs are embedded and how these institutions differ from private firms in the way their supply and demand curves are defined, this literature draws from theories developed to study competition among firms and other social organizations, such as Organizational Ecology and Resource Dependence Theory. Both these theoretical perspectives suggest that competition should foster organizational specialization, leading to a clear division of labour at the population level, which reduces duplications and overlap, and consequently mitigates competition itself (Hannan and Carroll 1992; Biermann and Harsch 2017a; Lipson 2017; Gehring and Faude 2014; Ries 2017).

However, this does not seem to be the case in the humanitarian system, where competition persists despite the apparent division of labour among organizations that fall under the United Nations umbrella. Scholars of international regime complexity have so far failed to consider what happens after niche of specialization are formed, assuming that institutional differentiation stabilizes inter-organizational relations and reduces competitive interactions. In particular, while the literature has investigated how IOs react to scarcity, it has not done so with regards to their member states. This is surprising given that states are also impacted by resource scarcity: when budgetary pressures exist due to domestic political constraints, member states might be unable to finance multilateral institutions to pursue their objectives and, as a consequence, might be forced to allocating resources strategically, according to some criterion.

In light of the limitations in the existing literature, the theoretical framework outlined in chapter 3 posits that, under conditions of scarcity, inter-organizational competition might persist even

when there is a clear division of labour among IOs. This is because member states assign different levels of importance and priority to different niches of IO specialization and decide to (re-)allocate resources accordingly. More concisely, hypothesis 1 states that if states manage scarcity by re-allocating resources between one niche and another, inter-IO competition persists despite niche specialization. This chapter tests hypothesis 1 in the case of the humanitarian regime, as it seeks to illustrate why competition among UN organizations persists despite the clear division of labour introduced with the Humanitarian Cluster System. The chapter shows that, in the humanitarian regime, all conditions conducive to persistent inter-IO competition despite specialization are met. These include the 'classic' necessary conditions of population density and resource scarcity, as well as the novel condition theorized in chapter 3, the threat of resource re-allocation from one niche to another. The chapter draws on more than sixty elite interviews with UN staff members, donor state representatives, and independent humanitarian policy experts to illustrate the driving factors behind the persistence of competition among the UN organizations. The chapter will first delve into the reasons leading to declining levels of humanitarian aid, despite a rise in the number of both humanitarian actors and of people in need around the world. Then, it will move on to consider how prioritization has become such a pervasive phenomenon in the humanitarian space and a real 'trigger word' for humanitarian IOs seeking to secure scarce resources. The chapter illustrates how prioritization can be implemented both at an *intra-organizational* and an *inter-organizational* level and that the current system of incentives upon which global humanitarian governance rests encourages the latter form and heightens competition among IOs. Finally, the chapter concludes by illustrating how these three conditions hamper the effectiveness of the current global humanitarian architecture at promoting inter-organizational coordination and cooperation, decreasing the system's effectiveness at delivering relief services to people affected by crisis around the world.

4.2 Environmental density: The humanitarian space as a crowded marketplace

Among the conditions traditionally described as conducive to competition, in international relations as well as in other disciplines, environmental density stands out as one of the primary drivers at the systemic or population level. As the number of actors in a policy space increases, the share of resources available to each entity shrinks to an ever-smaller fraction of the total. Depending on the nature of the environment under consideration, such a situation has the potential to lead to conflict, price hikes, species extinction, mass migration, etc.

Evidence from the interviews shows that the relation between density and inter-organizational competition also holds for the humanitarian policy space. Eighteen interviewees - including independent experts, UN staff, as well as donor representatives- described the humanitarian regime as densely populated and acknowledged that this increasing crowdedness intensifies competition among humanitarian actors. According to the Global Database of Humanitarian Organizations (GDHO) compiled by the think tank Humanitarian Outcomes, the most comprehensive dataset on actors involved humanitarian response, in 2020 there were 5146 organizations providing aid in humanitarian crises, including international and national non-governmental organizations, UN humanitarian agencies, and organizations of the International Red Cross Red Crescent Movement. While the number of humanitarian organizations has increased by almost 10% over the last decade- mostly driven by the rapid growth of local NGOs – the estimated population of humanitarian workers has grown by nearly 40% to more than 600,000 people[38].

[38] ALNAP (2022) *The State of the Humanitarian System*. ALNAP Study. London: ALNAP/ODI. Retrieved in October 2023 from https://sohs.alnap.org/system/files/content/resource/files/main/alnap-2022-sohs-report.pdf

The interviews point to three main drivers of environmental density: the professionalization of humanitarian aid, the widening conceptualization of what constitutes humanitarian assistance, and the migration of actors from long-term development to humanitarian activities.

Since the early 2000s, the system has seen the rise of a 'humanitarian professional', equipped with a specific skillset and profile tailored to crisis response (Mac Ginty and Peterson 2015; Lowcock 2022). This push toward professionalization is driven by the belief that the 'any aid is better than no aid' approach that characterized the early days of humanitarian action is no longer justifiable in the 21st century (Kent 2004). Professionalization requires that the humanitarian workforce meet certain standards of behaviour and competence. This allows humanitarian organizations to hire more strategically, with a clearer understanding of the skills each individual brings. This implies that, by hiring staff that is specifically trained for humanitarian response, organizations that once conducted occasional humanitarian operations alongside other activities (e.g. long-term development, peacebuilding), now tend to exclusively identify as humanitarian and orient their programming accordingly[39].

Alongside the professionalization of the humanitarian career, the system has also undergone a conceptual transformation, expanding the definition of what constitutes humanitarian action (Lowcock 2022). As humanitarian crises have become more complex, multifaceted, and protracted, so too has the range of interventions designed to address them (Kent 2004). While the primary aim of humanitarian assistance remains 'saving lives and maintaining dignity', what that entails has evolved significantly since the early days of the UN. Humanitarian organizations still engage in life-saving activities, yet their work now extends beyond immediate relief. Today, their focus also includes education, protection services, emergency

[39] Author interview #6, 27/09/2022, online

employment, and other holistic support initiatives that go beyond food, healthcare, and shelter for those affected by crises[40].

The broadening of humanitarian activities is closely linked to a parallel and opposite trend in the long-term development sector. Over the last decade, within the UN system, while humanitarian expenditure increased by 164%, the multilateral aid spent on development activities has stagnated[41]. Unlike the allocation of humanitarian assistance, responsibility for delivering long-term development goals ultimately rests with recipient governments, with multilateral institutions supporting the implementation of national development strategies. In today's fraught geopolitical environment, marked by great power competition, traditional (Western) donors have grown more cautious about supporting multilateral development institutions, often preferring to deliver aid bilaterally to reinforce alliances or build new ones. Meanwhile, the increasing frequency, severity, and duration of both natural and man-made humanitarian emergencies have shifted much of the international community's focus from long-term development goals to addressing complex global crises. The urgency of the climate crisis and the growth of climate financing as an additional multilateral avenue have further drawn attention and resources away from traditional development activities. Thus, donors have redirected their attention from long-term development to humanitarian efforts, partly due to the evolving nature of crises and climate financing and partly due to the politically sensitive nature of development work. As noted by one interviewee with experience in both development and

[40] Author interview #19, 25/01/2023, online; author interview #58, 23/05/2024, online

[41] Economic and Social Council, United Nations. *Implementation of General Assembly resolution 75/233 on the quadrennial comprehensive policy review of operational activities for development of the United Nations system: Report of the Secretary-General*. New York, NY: United Nations, 2023
Retrieved in January 2024 from:
https://digitallibrary.un.org/record/4011668?ln=en&v=pdf

humanitarian UN agencies, who had served as a Humanitarian Coordinator in multiple crisis settings:

"The development system is suffering badly at the moment because of this competition for humanitarian crisis and the climate crisis that are happening. It's causing a credit squeeze, which is really creating more competition than ever[42]*."*

"I think the constrained fiscal space is affecting operations for everyone, globally. I would say the development world is even more affected because there's always money for humanitarian lifesaving operations, but the UN's developmental [component] is really suffering."

With the development space shrinking, development actors have gradually ventured into the humanitarian arena, using the need to better connect humanitarian relief and development activities as a justification for moving beyond their original remit[43]. Lacking a well-defined humanitarian mandate, these organizations enter the humanitarian foray with the purported goal of 'advancing the Humanitarian-Development Nexus', 'creating the conditions for early recovery after crisis', 'strengthening local resilience to crisis', 'building and strengthening early warning systems', etc[44]. This applies also to UN organizations, most notably to UNDP, whose case will be considered in depth in chapter 6. The former UN Humanitarian Coordinator observed that:

"So, the UNDP and those agencies that have one foot in development and one foot in humanitarian [relief] are really seeing a slide in the developmental component. Which I think

[42] Author interview #14, 11/01/2023, online
[43] ALNAP (2018) *The State of the Humanitarian System*. ALNAP Study. London: ALNAP/ODI. Retrieved in November 2024 from https://sohs.alnap.org/the-state-of-the-humanitarian-system-sohs-2018-full-report
[44] Author interview #24, 22/05/2023, online

is detrimental because I think the UN's long-term sustainability of operations tends to become, you know, dumping food and building a few tents and stuff like that. So ultimately, it's become highly charged in terms of that scramble for resources."[45]

As the humanitarian field becomes more crowded, donors allocating resources face a wider range of alternatives for channeling aid to people in need[46]. In line with insights from the regime complex literature, interviewees link this development to the worsening fragmentation of the humanitarian landscape, with donors exploiting this abundance of options for advancing their own preferences and interests, implementing a forum shopping strategy[47]. According to several UN staff members and independent observers, this donor-driven cherry-picking creates distortions in the system, hampering the principled allocation of humanitarian aid based on need and consequently 'watering down' humanitarian actors' commitment to the core humanitarian principles. According to one senior OCHA staff member:

"The problem is there are too many agencies chasing the same problem, and their mandates have become blurred because they're chasing the money essentially everywhere[48]*."*

While UN staff members and independent experts emphasized how density and fragmentation lead to decreased systemic coherence and a weakening of the humanitarian principles in favour of self-interested donor states, the donor representatives surveyed in this dissertation highlighted the challenges that donors themselves face when dealing with a large number of potential interlocutors[49]. The fragmented humanitarian landscape, both in terms of potential

[45] Author interview #14, 11/01/2023, online
[46] Author interview #19, 25/01/2023, online
[47] Ibid.
[48] Author interview #14, 11/01/2023, online
[49] Author interview #30, 10/07/2023, online; author interview #39, multiple conversations March-July 2023, Geneva, Switzerland

humanitarian partners and in terms of the needs and interventions needed in response to crises, complicates the decision-making behind the allocation of resources. While this process is supposed to remain a quick and efficient one given the urgency inherent to humanitarian assistance, having to consider the needs assessments and funding requests of several partners leads way to a lengthy and burdensome process for national ministries of Foreign Affairs, which are often already suffering from understaffing. This creates an opportunity for UN organizations to act as intermediaries between donors and small, local humanitarian organizations that have no representation in Geneva or at the donor capital level. By taking over the burden of vetting and selecting operational partners on the ground on behalf of donor states, UN organizations have found an additional source of revenue in leveraging overhead fees, even when the bulk of the programming and project implementation is carried out by someone else[50]. The practice of increasing the size of one's budget by establishing an overhead rate constitutes yet another incentive for UN organizations without a humanitarian mandate to enter this policy space[51]. The donor representatives interviewed in this thesis noted that while the intermediary role of UN organizations (as well as the Red Cross/ Red Crescent movement and some of the largest international NGOs) reduces the burden of decision-making, it does not eliminate it altogether as donors are still being approached for funds by all the UN organizations with an operational mandate in humanitarian response[52].

Environmental density in the humanitarian system reduces the potential resource share available for each actor, increases the chances of aid diversion from one humanitarian entity to the other, reduces the attention that donors are able to dedicate to individual organizations' demands, while encouraging a cherry-picking approach that undermines the coherence of the

[50] Author interview #6, 27/09/2022, online; author interview #14, 11/01/2023, online
[51] ALNAP (2018) *The State of the Humanitarian System*.
[52] Author interview ##30, 10/07/2023, online; author interview #39, March-July 2023, in person (Geneva, Switzerland)

system and weakens the principled delivery of humanitarian relief. The next section will consider how resource scarcity, the other factor singled out as a driver of inter-organizational competition by both Organizational Ecology and Resource Dependence Theory, impacts the humanitarian policy space.

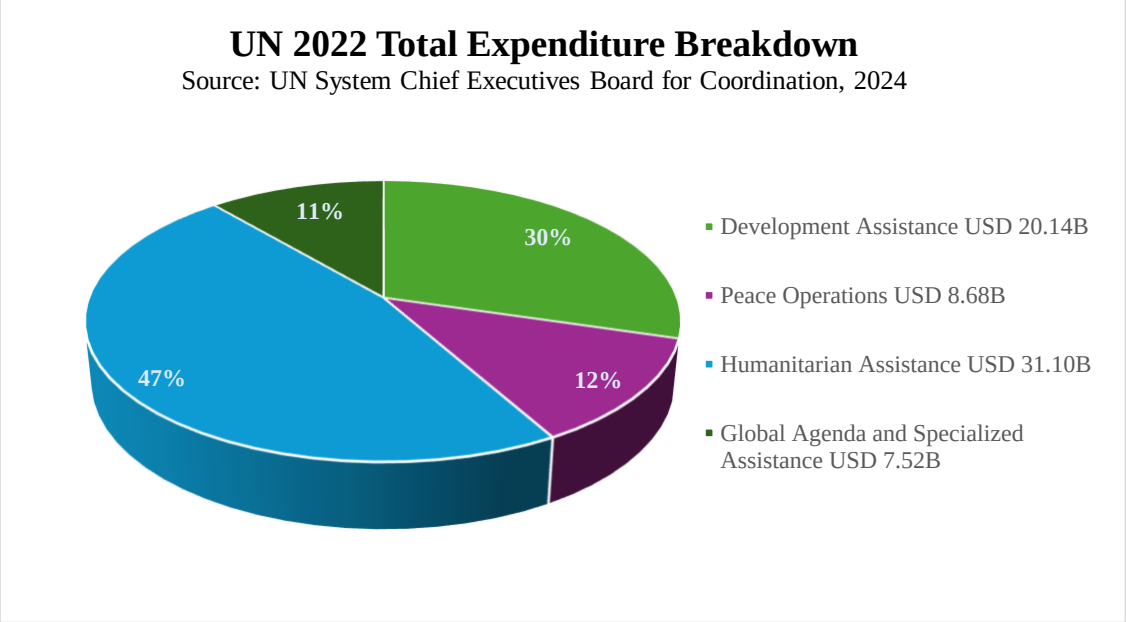
4.3 Resource scarcity: Rising needs, doubtful donors, and dwindling aid

Theoretical approaches investigating inter-organizational competition, whether focusing on international organizations within International Relations or extending to other disciplines to include a broader range of organizations, identify resource scarcity as a key factor behind this phenomenon. Given the expansion of humanitarian activities compared to long-term development, both within and beyond the UN system, one might question whether resource scarcity is an issue adversely affecting the humanitarian sector and the IOs operating in it. Indeed, the previous section has highlighted the significant growth experienced by the humanitarian sector over the last two decades, both in terms of the breadth of programming and the increased share of total multilateral ODA. Over the past ten years, humanitarian aid has been the major driver of growth in total multilateral ODA, with a 5% increase recorded from 2022 to 2023, raising total multilateral humanitarian assistance from $23.9 billion to $25.05 billion[53]. This trend is even more pronounced within the UN system, where humanitarian expenditure has increased by over 164% in the last decade. In 2022, the UN system allocated 52% of its resources to humanitarian activities (compared to 33% for development assistance, 12% for peace operations, and 11% for advancing the UN global agenda and providing specialized assistance)[54]. According to five interviewees, humanitarian

[53] OECD. April 2024. Preliminary 2023 ODA statistics. Retrieved in June 2024 from https://public.flourish.studio/story/2315218/
[54] UN System Chief Executives Board for Coordination. *Financial Statistics: Expenses by Function.* Retrieved in June 2024 from https://unsceb.org/expenses-function

response has become the defining feature and distinctive service provided by the UN and its affiliated agencies and programmes to member states and their citizens, overshadowing its role as guarantor of international security, peace, and promoter of sustainable development[55].

Figure 5: UN 2022 Total Expenditure Breakdown

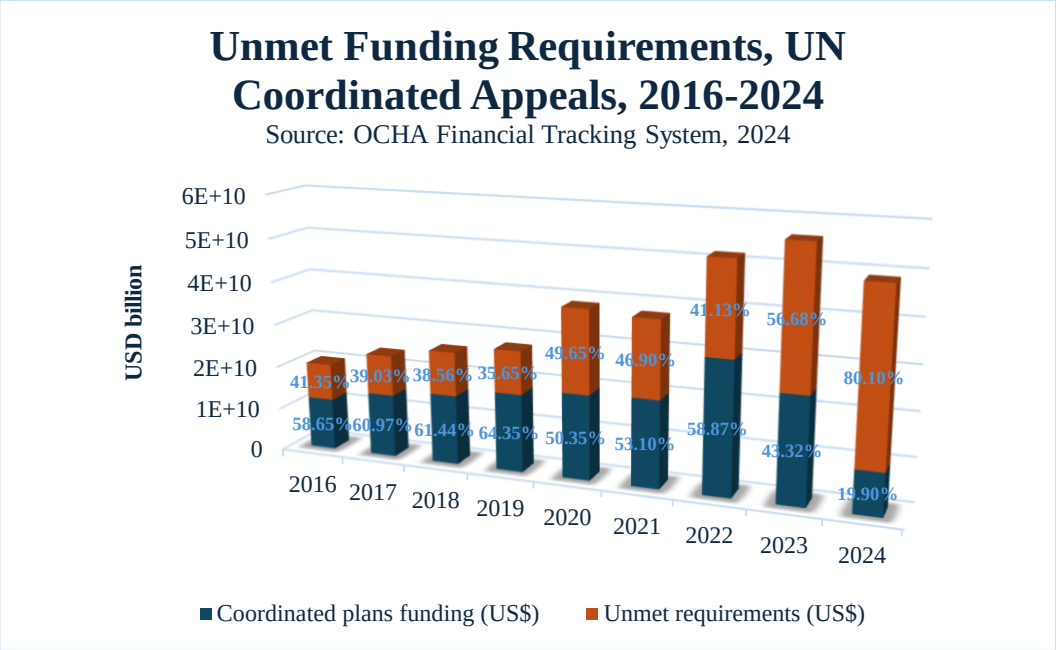


Despite the overall increase in resources available for humanitarian assistance, the humanitarian landscape appears much gloomier when global trends in need are considered. The number of people in need of humanitarian assistance has more than doubled over the past five years, making absolute increases in resources seem less significant[56]. Among the interviewees, there was strong consensus that resource scarcity characterizes the humanitarian space in which UN entities operate and fosters competition among these organizations[57]. Figure 2 shows that since 2016, the humanitarian funding gap—the annual shortfall between the scale of

[55] Author interview #6, 27/09/2022, online; author interview #11, 12/12/2022, online; author interview #19, 25/01/2023, online; author interview #57, 14/05/2024, online; author interview #58, 23/05/2024, online
[56] Development Initiatives, 2023. *Global Humanitarian Assistance Report 2023*. Retrieved in January 2024 from https://devinit.org/resources/global-humanitarian-assistance-report-2023/
[57] Author interview #2, 04/08/2022, online

humanitarian needs on the ground and the resources allocated by donor states—has risen sharply, leaving nearly 60% of the UN system's humanitarian requirements for 2023 unmet[58].

Figure 6:Unmet funding requirements



The evidence from the interviews, along with the review of official reports and data released by the UN and its affiliated agencies, programmes, and organizations, points to three interrelated factors aggravating resource scarcity in the humanitarian system: environmental density, the changing nature of humanitarian crises, and the confidence crisis in the multilateral system.

As mentioned in the previous section, environmental density and resource scarcity are often considered together when discussing competition, as they are interrelated and influence their respective levels within the same population. In the case of the humanitarian sector, the increase in resources allocated to relief assistance has not kept pace with the extraordinary growth in the number of actors providing humanitarian aid at the international, national, and

[58] OCHA FTS data for 2024 is provisional and provides an estimate as of 09/07/2024.

local level. Even within the UN system, the fact that many agencies and programmes have ventured into the humanitarian domain without a clear mandate means that donors have to either write smaller checks to each organization or select one or a few IOs at the expense of others. Before the establishment of the Inter-Agency Standing Committee in 1992 and the introduction of the Cluster System in 2005, WFP, UNICEF, and UNHCR were the primary conduits for multilateral humanitarian ODA. Nowadays, donors face twelve UN organizations operational in humanitarian response. The significant growth in the number of humanitarian organizations over the last few decades, both within and beyond the UN system, has drastically reduced the attention and available resources that donors are able to allocate to each individual IO[59].

However, density is not the only driver of scarcity in the humanitarian system. The resources available have not only shrunk in terms of the share for each humanitarian organization but also relative to the vast size of global humanitarian needs (see Figure 6). Another recurrent explanation for rising humanitarian needs worldwide provided by interviewees is the changing nature of humanitarian crises, including both man-made emergencies and sudden-onset natural disasters. The interplay of rising geopolitical tensions, climate change, and, more recently, the Covid-19 pandemic has caused humanitarian crises to become more frequent in number, more severe in terms of number of people affected and the depth of their needs, and more protracted, often lasting longer than three months since the onset of the emergency[60]. In 2022, the number of people affected by crisis reached 406.6 million, a one-third increase compared to 2021[61]. Of the 82 countries experiencing humanitarian emergencies in 2022, 44 were in a state of protracted crisis, accounting for 83% of total people in need[62]. More than three quarters of

[59] Author interview #30, 10/07/2023, online
[60] ALNAP (2022). *The State of the Humanitarian System*.
[61] Development Initiatives, 2023. *Global Humanitarian Assistance Report 2023.*
[62] Ibid.

those in need of humanitarian relief lived in countries where at least two of the three main drivers of humanitarian crisis – climate change, socio-economic instability, and conflict/ violence – were present, with 54% living in countries facing all three risks simultaneously[63]. Of the 82 countries facing a humanitarian crisis, 34 registered populations facing acute food insecurity[64]. While the rise in frequence and severity of humanitarian crises worldwide has re-directed much of the attention and efforts of the international community towards delivering short-term humanitarian relief away from pursuing long-term development objectives, the increase in aid spent on short-term relief has failed to match the rising levels of humanitarian needs globally, leading to an ever wider humanitarian funding gap.

Lastly, interviewees, including independent experts of multilateral humanitarian financing and representatives of donor states, pointed to the eroding trust in the multilateral system's ability to deliver solutions to issues of global governance as a key factor behind declining levels of multilateral humanitarian aid[65]. Several recent developments in international politics - including the rise of populist movements, escalating geopolitical tensions, and frequent trade wars - have undermined the legitimacy of the multilateral system, reflecting a backlash against globalization (Lavelle 2020; López-Claros, Dahl, and Groff 2020). As the rationale for international cooperation loses momentum, international institutions have seen a sharp reduction in financial support from member states, which is essential to sustain their activities. The widening gap between the demands of member states and the resources they are willing to provide puts IOs under significant budgetary pressures (Reinsberg, Michaelowa, and Eichenauer 2015). On one hand, the number, severity, and urgency of transnational policy issues requiring multilateral policymaking have increased. Challenges such as the rise of

[63] Ibid.
[64] Ibid.
[65] Author interview #24, 22/05/2023, online; author interview #39, March-July 2023, Geneva, Switzerland; author interview #59, 03/06/2024, online; author interview #63, 07/08/2024, online

artificial intelligence, public health crises like global pandemics and antimicrobial resistance (AMR), climate change, and an upsurge in violent conflict all require international cooperation among governments with diverse interests and varying levels of impact (Guilbaud, Petiteville, and Ramel 2023). The imbalance between the states contributing most to a problem and those most affected by it often leads to delays in negotiating IOs' budgets, further contributing to the uncertainty about securing the resources necessary for organizational survival.

On the other hand, economic disruptions driven by conflict, the Covid-19 pandemic, and climate change have led to a significant surge in operational costs for IOs, straining their budgets and hampering their ability to fulfil their mandates (Fontaine-Skronski, Thool, and Eschborn 2023). For example, following Russia's invasion of Ukraine in 2022, inflation and recurrent supply chain disruptions are compelling the World Food Programme (WFP), the largest humanitarian organization within the UN system, to scale back its operations. This involves reducing the number of people it assists and cutting rations at a time when food insecurity has reached unprecedented levels[66]. Alongside geopolitical tensions, a global rise in populist politics, marked by insular tendencies, has been observed, even in those Western countries that traditionally contribute significantly to the multilateral system (Copelovitch and Pevehouse 2019; De Vries, Hobolt, and Walter 2021). One of the clearest signs of the multilateral system's challenged state is the notable decline in collective funding, coupled with the rise of funding modalities that enhance donor control over IO agendas, thereby constraining IOs' flexibility and programmatic coherence.

This trend is even more pronounced in the humanitarian realm, where multilateral humanitarian institutions are increasingly expected to do more with less[67]. The growing

[66] The New Humanitarian. *What WFP cuts mean for people in hunger crises around the world*. Published on 13 December 2023. Retrieved in January 2024 from https://www.thenewhumanitarian.org/feature/2023/12/13/wfp-aid-food-cuts-mean-people-hunger-crisis-around-world

[67] 'Doing more with less' was a recurrent expression used by representatives of donor countries throughout several panels of the European Humanitarian Forum held in Brussels in March 2023.

complexity of humanitarian crises, coupled with the increasing difficulty of securing access to assist those in need, makes it unlikely from the outset that humanitarian organizations will fully deliver on their mandates. Simultaneously, the protracted nature of many severe crises leads to donor fatigue[68]. As emergencies become permanent crises, donors begin to question the ability of humanitarian organizations to deliver effective relief, making them more reluctant to fund response efforts. This not only widens the funding gap, as illustrated in figure 2, but also leads to a 'trust crisis', as one expert in humanitarian financing defines it[69]. Consequently, donor preferences have shifted, leading to a sharp rise in earmarked funding. Many humanitarian UN organizations now rely on less than 10% of their total budget from core (i.e. unearmarked) resources, severely hampering their ability to deliver their mandate in accordance with humanitarian principles[70]. Due to the prevalence of voluntary, earmarked contributions, humanitarian IOs are unable to plan resource allocation beyond one year or even a few months, forcing them to constantly seek for funding opportunities.

Theoretical approaches investigating inter-organizational competition identify resource scarcity as one of the key drivers behind this phenomenon (Lipson 2017; Biermann and Harsch 2017a; Hannan and Carroll 1992). There is a remarkably strong consensus among interviewees regarding the insufficiency of resources available to meet the ever-rising levels of humanitarian needs worldwide. The crowded nature of the humanitarian policy space, the changing nature of crises, and the waning confidence in the multilateral system were mentioned as contributing factors to the widening humanitarian funding gap. The humanitarian sector garners enough

[68] Author interview #24, 22/05/2023, online; author interview #39, multiple conversations, March-July 2023, Geneva, Switzerland
[69] Author interview #32, 21/07/2023, online
[70] UN organizations expressed concern about the effects of earmarking on their ability to deliver principled humanitarian assistance in several fora during the months of fieldwork in Geneva, including UN ECOSOC's Humanitarian Affairs Segment held on 21-23 June 2023 and the Grand Bargain Annual meeting held on June 19 2023.

attention and resources from donors to attract actors from other areas of global governance, particularly the development sector. However, it remains resource-constrained, as humanitarian organizations have no assurance of securing adequate funding to sustain their operations when the next crisis occurs. So far, this chapter has demonstrated how the two 'traditional' drivers of inter-organizational competition apply to the humanitarian system. The next section will focus on the novel condition introduced in the theoretical framework – the threat of resource re-allocation – and on how this applies to the humanitarian domain.

4.4 Threat of resource reallocation: The perils of donor-induced prioritization

The theoretical framework introduced in chapter 3 posits that inter-organizational competition will persist despite niche specialization if – under conditions of resource scarcity and environmental density – there is a threat that the actors exercising the 'power of the purse' (i.e. member states) reallocate resources from one niche to another. Evidence from interviews and analysis of primary sources—including independent assessments of organizational performance, IO-issued statements and briefings, and OCHA-led system-wide evaluations—suggests that this hypothesis holds in the humanitarian policy space. The potential for resource reallocation across niches is embedded in the humanitarian system through the widely applied, albeit contested, logic of needs prioritization.

Prioritization can be implemented in two ways: at the intra-organizational level, IOs are asked to identify ways to cut costs in the delivery of their operations by, for instance, targeting a smaller population, cutting portions or medical treatments, discontinuing operations in certain countries, or focusing strictly on life-saving activities. At the inter-organizational level, donors ask to the UN and the humanitarian system as a whole to identify the sectors where needs are concentrated depending on the type of crisis under consideration, while limiting the resources

spent on other humanitarian organizations working on different issues (Obrecht 2017). IOs tend to advocate against the former type of prioritization, as it forces them to make "impossible decisions"[71] and reduces the total pool of resources on which they can leverage overhead fees. This type of prioritization drives the lower funding requirement estimated for 2024. Indeed, the most recent iteration of OCHA's Global Humanitarian Overview foresees needs for a total of $46.6 billion in 2024 against $51.5 billion in 2023[72]. This decline is primarily due to a reduced number of people in need targeted across various crisis contexts. However, because intra-organizational prioritization conflicts with the bureaucratic principle of resource maximization—especially in an environment where future funding is uncertain—IOs tend to resist such requests and are often reluctant to scale back their operational reach[73].

The latter form of prioritization is formally accepted within the system, as it rests on the notion that humanitarian relief organizations should provide an accurate representation of needs on the ground to their donors and strengthen the system-wide coherence of each humanitarian response (Slim 2023). Interviewees mentioned limited financial resources and escalating humanitarian needs worldwide as the primary reason behind the consolidation of prioritization as a standing practice within the system[74]. The climate of mistrust between donors and implementing agencies also results in micro-management from the donor side, while humanitarian organizations accuse donors of failing the accountability test vis-à-vis people in

[71] Author interview #28, 25/03/2023, online; author interview #39, several conversations March-June 2023, Geneva, Switzerland; Author interview #58, 23/05/2024, online
[72] OCHA. *Global Humanitarian Overview 2024.* Geneva, Switzerland: OCHA, 2023. Retrieved in February 2024 from: https://www.unocha.org/publications/report/world/global-humanitarian-overview-2024-enarfres
[73] Multilateral Organization Performance Assessment Network (MOPAN), (2024), *Fit for Purpose in the Hardest Places: Learning from MOPAN assessments of organizations working in crises*, MOPAN Insights, Paris. [unpublished]
[74] Author interview #28, 25/03/2023, online; author interview #39, several conversations March-June 2023, Geneva, Switzerland; Author interview #58, 23/05/2024, online

need around the world[7576]. According to two IOs staff members prioritization represents a convenient strategy for donors to shift the attention away from the 'quantity of funding' – that is the growing humanitarian funding gap – to the 'quality of funding' – the cost-effectiveness of humanitarian operations – where the blame can be more easily attributed to IOs[77]. For the donor representatives surveyed in this thesis, prioritization is a necessary precaution to ensure that taxpayers' money is not wasted by ever-expanding humanitarian bureaucracies[78]. In other words, donors worry that, without proper oversight, humanitarian agencies may prioritize their own organizational interests by inflating needs and corresponding funding requirements. According to a senior OCHA staff member:

"A lot of it [competitive pressure] is from donor prioritization as well, because donors are not humanitarians, they have their own agenda. So, the visibility is important because increasingly donors are telling us that they have to answer to their ministers, who have to answer to the general population. So, they want quick fixes, they want quick results and that's what they prioritize[79]."

The responsibility for implementing inter-organizational prioritization often falls on the shoulders of the in-country, OCHA-appointed UN Humanitarian Coordinator[80]. This creates a very challenging situation for the UN Coordinator, who has the ultimate responsibility to draft the Flash Appeals/ Response Plans detailing the scale and nature of the needs after the beginning of a crisis[81]. As reported by a former Humanitarian Coordinator, donors are not very

[75] The argument of 'collective failure' from the donor community emerged multiple times during the fieldwork in Geneva, including the High-level Pledging Event to Support the Humanitarian Response in Sudan and the Region that took place on June 19 2023.
[76] Author interview #24, 22/05/2023, online
[77] Author interview #19, 25/01/2023, online; author interview #28, 25/03/2023, online
[78] author interview #39, several conversations March-June 2023, Geneva, Switzerland
[79] Author interview #16, 18/01/2023, online
[80] See chapter 2 for an overview of the UN Cluster System and of the role of UN Humanitarian Coordinator
[81] Author interview #6, 27/09/2022, online

precise in formulating their policy preferences other than demanding contained funding requirements from their multilateral partners:

"Something you might look at […] is prioritization. I've had maybe hundreds of meetings with donors and prioritization almost always comes up. "'We want you to prioritize', 'how do you prioritize?', it gets very difficult one internally, politically as part of it. In a general crisis setting, all these things are needed. And it's hard to say 'no, I don't think the health is as important, I think we have to do this other [thing] first, you get in line.' So [donors] call for it. No one ever quite delivers it, but people continue to call for it. And no one has yet, to my knowledge, came up to the HC to say 'okay, in a crisis, based on the circumstances, this is what we should prioritize.' It doesn't work."[82]

For prioritization to be implemented at the country level, the Humanitarian Coordinator and the Humanitarian Country Team should be able to develop a Humanitarian Response Plan – the UN-system official document providing an overview of the crisis, of the most pressing needs, and the resources necessary to address them – that only highlights the sectors where relief efforts are most urgently needed. This would result in the selective activation of a small number of Humanitarian Clusters, with only a few UN organizations taking a leading and operational role in the response. However, in a policy field where guaranteed funding over time is not secure and a widespread belief that in the eyes of donors a UN organization is "only as good as their last emergency"[83] the prospect of having their Cluster inactive is equivalent to a missed opportunity for securing visibility and funding. According to an independent expert with a long experience within the UN, achieving evidence-based prioritization in the

[82] Author interview #11, 12/12/2022, online
[83] Dalton, von Hippel, Kent, Maurer 2003, p.9

humanitarian system is not a realistic scenario: *"Real prioritization might in some cases, mean just to say 'Well, look, let's not do food or let's not do a certain sector at all, and let's just put all the money into something different.' And the agencies are never really gonna accept that.*[84]*"* Several interviewees noted that this logic trickles down from the organizational level to individual perspective of individual country-level staff members of UN organizations[85]. Within the UN system, an individual's success rate in securing funding is often used as a metric for career advancement. Consequently, for any country representative negotiating the Humanitarian Response Plan, there is minimal incentive to step back and allow their sector to be deemed of secondary importance. Inter-sectoral prioritization, which emphasizes certain Humanitarian Clusters and the significance of their sectors in a given response, thus serves as a form of niche substitution driven by resource reallocation from donor states. With limited capacity to fund each UN organization in a response—and often lacking sufficient information or strong preferences due to the urgency and distance of many crises—donors frequently rely on the UN system to guide their allocation decisions.

UN organizations find themselves in a challenging position. To ensure that their niche remains adequately funded, these IOs rely on scarce, earmarked resources predicated on their operational presence. At the same time, UN organizations serve both as the assessors of needs and the implementers/ service providers of the sector, with donors depending on them to gather information to guide their decision-making in the response to each crisis. UN organizations therefore have little incentive to step aside and allow other humanitarian organizations to access scarce resources and visibility. Instead, each IO, wary of resource reallocation, takes measures to exploit the system and secure resources for its niche. The next section will examine how the

[84] Author interview #19, 25/01/2023, online
[85] Author interview #8, 09/11/2022, online; author interview #5, 21/09/2022, online; author interview #44, 22/11/2023, translated by the author from Italian, online; author interview #32, 21/07/2023, online; author interview #57, 14/05/2024, online

current system of coordination – the Humanitarian Cluster System – despite being designed to reduce inefficiencies and duplication, still presents significant levels of inter-organizational competition.

4.5 Limits to coordination and cooperation in the Humanitarian Cluster System

Hypothesis 1 introduced in Chapter 3 posits that *if states manage scarcity by re-allocating resources between one niche and another, inter-IO competition persists despite niche specialization.* Sections 4.2 to 4.4 of this chapter have shown how the three conditions of environmental density, resource scarcity, and threat of resource reallocation apply to the humanitarian system and the IOs populating this space. Figure 7 provides an overview of the interview evidence in support of hypothesis 1.

This section explores how these three conditions – density, scarcity, and the threat of resource reallocation across niches – impact the current system of coordination in the humanitarian space, the Humanitarian Cluster System. In the aftermath of the inadequate responses to the 2004 tsunami and the Darfur crisis, which were plagued by duplication, competition, and delivery failures, representatives of governments, international organizations, and major NGOs acknowledged the need to move to a more coordinated and organized system to ensure effective responses to future crises. After numerous rounds of consultations and negotiations, a coordination system headed by the United Nations and its specialized agencies, funds, and programmes, known as the UN Humanitarian Cluster Approach, was established.

Originally, the Humanitarian Cluster System was meant to provide a nimble mechanism for deploying and coordinating the response of only those actors whose mandate and skills

corresponded to the specific situation on the ground[86]. As illustrated in chapter 2, the Humanitarian Cluster System divides the humanitarian response into different sectors, such as health, protection, or food security, with a designated UN organization responsible for each issue area. While there was discontent among Non-Governmental Organizations regarding the disproportionate influence of the UN in the system, the approach was largely commended as a way to finally establish coordination in humanitarian governance, both at the headquarters and field levels[87]. Indeed, while each UN organization was assigned to its own sector of responsibility (i.e. a Humanitarian Cluster), the activation of each Cluster was supposed to be conditional of the type of needs arising in any given crisis. UN agencies sitting in the Humanitarian Country Team were supposed to collaboratively contribute to the development of the Humanitarian Response Plans and Flash Appeals, in order to provide donors with the most accurate overview of a crisis within hours after the onset of an emergency.

[86] Author interview #63, 07/08/2024, online
[87] Author interview #2, 04/08/2022, online; author interview #6, 27/09/2022, online

Conceptual Expectations	Evidence	Interview Count	Examples
Environmental density	*Confirming*: - increasing breadth of humanitarian action; - existing organizations coming from development to the humanitarian sector; - rising number of local NGOs asking for more funding; *Disconfirming:* - UN agencies, ICRC, and few large INGOs as an 'oligopsony'	*Confirming* n=18 *Disconfirming* n=4	*Confirming: "*I think sometimes we talk about the humanitarian response being led by the UN or the humanitarian coordinator, but in fact on the ground the heavy lifting is done by a lot of our partners. And they're also demanding more space. They're not prepared to be led by the UN as they once did. They wanna see their flag flying, and they want to have their direct resource mobilization efforts through their own donors and they'll often stand outside our appeals, knowing full well that they have other opportunities to get resources without the UN getting in their way." *Disconfirming*: "The dominance of big aid, of the big agencies it is very, very heavy. You know, there's just not a lot of choice on the shelf."
Resource scarcity	*Confirming*: - insufficient funding as a defining feature of the humanitarian system; - budgetary pressures on humanitarian IOs; - rise of earmarking/ worsening 'quality' of humanitarian funding	*Confirming* n=52 *Disconfirming* N/A	*Confirming*: "Of course all agencies need money, because we're in an imperfectly funded system. The management fees of the implementation are necessary to pay for salaries and involvement in a disaster brings exposure, and exposure brings funding. In a resource-constrained environment, this is what you're going to get."
Threat of niche substitution	*Confirming:* - prioritization; - eroding trust; - voluntary contributions *Disconfirming:* - donors preferring UN organizations over others	*Confirming* n=21 *Disconfirming* n=3	*Confirming*: "The donors internally are also not unitary actors and donor capacity has gone down over the years and day to day they process more millions per bureaucrat than they used to. And so, the result is they can only sign bigger checks. Because signing a small check is almost as much work as signing a big check. So they give a big check. Once." *Disconfirming*: "The UN is still riding pretty high and a lot of the big emergency donors give their money to the UN. Many donors quite like working through the UN."

Figure 7: Interview evidence

Interviews and document reviews reveal that, while the new coordination mechanism has indeed improved communication channels and provided a structure for assigning clear responsibilities among humanitarian actors in the same sector (including UN organizations, NGOs, the RC/RC movement, and local authorities), it has largely failed to curb inter-organizational competition among UN organizations. The Cluster System addresses the coordination challenge of 'who does what' in response to an emergency by establishing a clear division of labour. However, it does not resolve the cooperation issue related to raising sufficient resources to sustain each agency's operations. Although issuing a shared appeal may increase crisis visibility for donors, the uncertainty of future fundraising opportunities creates incentives for each IO to mobilize as much funding as possible, which can undermine the coherence and cohesiveness of the humanitarian system.

According to an external observer and expert in humanitarian action, the coordination system was set up to fail at limiting competition from the start of the Humanitarian Reform process in 2005[88]. Coordination mechanisms within the UN are rarely enforced in a top-down manner. Rather, they typically arise from extensive negotiations among various stakeholders, primarily the agencies themselves. UN organizations are often hesitant to relinquish autonomy and are quick to seize opportunities to increase their visibility and secure additional resources (Maxwell and Gelsdorf 2019). As noted by key participants, the negotiations that produced the Humanitarian Cluster System were no exception. Representatives from each UN entity worked diligently to ensure that their organization was allocated its own 'piece of the pie'. As another independent humanitarian expert put it: "*Coordination within the UN system is a synonym for competition: when coordination systems are discussed, people really are referring to ways to negotiate limits to the autonomy of individual UN agencies*"[89].

[88] Author interview #44, 22/11/2023, online
[89] Author interview #2, 04/08/2022, online

Notably, UN operational agencies successfully limited the reach and authority of the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) from its establishment in the 1990s, even before the Cluster System was introduced. According to interviewees[90], even after the de-linking process, which transferred the responsibility of appointing Humanitarian Coordinators from UNDP to OCHA, the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs is still working to define its role in humanitarian response—or, as some suggest, experiencing a "two-decade-long identity crisis"[91]. The Office was never able to fully perform its coordination role because other UN organizations never granted it the necessary space to do so. While it has no operational mandate in principle, it also lacks authority over other UN organizations in the humanitarian space and does not have the capability to independently gather information and assess needs. One independent expert commented: "*If OCHA wants to do that [needs assessment], they would need some sectoral expertise. I can tell you what happens if OCHA starts hiring food security experts - you get some very angry phone calls from Rome*."[92] For another interviewee with previous work experience for OCHA:

"*Even if OCHA had the resources, [independent needs-assessment] would not be politically feasible. The other agencies would not let it. So OCHA-led needs assessment boils down to its herding cut function. It gathers all of them [the UN agencies' representatives], they go out in the field, during which each one of them is interested in how to make a case for more money for their agency. I know this, because I worked for OCHA and I did this too […] you had to do*

[90] Author interview #44, 22/11/2023, author translation's from Italian, online; author interview #57, 14/05/2024, online; author interview #58, 23/05/2024
[91] Author interview #58, 23/05/2024, online
[92] Ibid.

the executive summary, collating bits of the things each of them had written. In the rare cases we tried to do our own analysis, there was no overlap with what the agencies had written."[93]

Over the years, OCHA has attempted to compensate for this disadvantageous position by carving out a more operational role in the direct allocation of cash aid to recipients and by establishing pooled funds for emergency response (i.e. the Country-Based Pooled Funds and the Central Emergency Relief Fund) to be distributed to UN organizations rapidly in the first days following the onset of a crisis[94]. While OCHA is in control of how these resources are assigned to the agencies, its pooled funds represent just a fraction of total humanitarian aid allocated to the UN system by donors and are therefore not very consequential[95].

The weakness of OCHA vis-à-vis the operational UN agencies is reflected in the challenges facing the Humanitarian Coordinator appointed by OCHA in the response to every crisis. He/ she is in charge of ensuring the coherence of the response carried out by the different entities of the UN system. Jointly with the UN organizations, the HC also decides which Clusters should be activated, how to allocate resources from the OCHA pooled funds, and which sectors to prioritize in the drafting of key reporting, such as Flash Appeals and Humanitarian Response Plans.

In the aftermath of an emergency all IOs push for their Cluster to be activated and for their sector to receive sufficient attention in the HRP. A senior staff member of OCHA defined the writing up of the Humanitarian Response Plan as "*a purely political process*", whose

[93] Author interview #44, 22/11/2023, author's translation from Italian, online
[94] Author interview #11, 12/12/2022, online; author interview #8, 09/11/2022, online; author interview #18, 25/01/2023, online
[95] Author interview #8, 09/11/2022, online

ultimate goal is "*to position the agencies*"[96]. A staff member of a UN operational agency described the position of the HC as follows:

"It's complicated because if you don't have sufficient resources to please everyone, someone will have to make decision. And the decision will be either "we have a response that has no sense, but you want to please everyone". So, you give a little bit of funding to everyone and everyone is almost happy because they get a piece of the cake. But in the meantime, no one can provide the good, relevant and recommended response, because they are lacking capacities. They're lacking funding. That's option A.

As for option B - then you decide that the priority would be one or two sectors or clusters and then you end up having only those well-funded so that they can implement their operations. But the others that have not been supported will complain.

And so, you have two options: either you scatter your funding and you don't get the required impact and this is what happened very frequently - especially in the case of the CERF, which is in the hands of the Humanitarian Coordinator and what he wants to do 90% of the time is to please all agencies to give a little bit to everyone - or you fund only some but then other agencies will complain and bypass the Humanitarian Coordinator and the UN-wide system of coordination and liaise with donors bilaterally.[97]"

Due to the political nature of the drafting process, both Flash Appeals and Humanitarian Response Plans have lost some of their value as guiding documents for crisis response, as donors suspect these reports reflect the budget-maximizing preferences of large bureaucracies rather than the actual needs on the ground. Simultaneously, fearing that their sectors may not

[96] Author interview #26, 23/05/2023, in person (Geneva, Switzerland)
[97] Author interview #5, 21/09/2022, online

be sufficiently highlighted in system-wide reporting, UN organizations often approach major donors bilaterally in Geneva or at the capital level, where they maintain offices and representations[98]. This places additional strain on donors, who are already overstretched in terms of attention and resources and often lack the capacity to review all individual appeals issued by UN organizations simultaneously[99]. A representative from a mid-sized donor noted that their Ministry of Foreign Affairs often makes large contributions to the first two or three UN organizations that approach them, citing insufficient manpower to assess all requests and monitor organizational performance after disbursement[100]. By their own admission, since other donors followed the same practice, this approach hindered the overall coherence of UN-led responses.

The responses of UN agencies to this competitive environment, as revealed through interviews and document analysis, can be grouped into two broad categories. On the one hand, there is significant evidence that UN agencies tend to adopt a 'hammer-nail' mentality, where they describe crises and humanitarian needs "*as a mirror image of their own specialism, capacity and social values*" (Slim 2023, p. 3). An independent observer of humanitarian affairs noted that donors often struggle to distinguish "*the people's needs from the system's needs*"[101]. Another external expert described the humanitarian project cycle as a "*wildly competitive process*", where agencies tend to "*shoot the arrow and paint the target afterwards*", aligning their advocacy for sector-specific needs to fit their objectives to the point where they "*almost reverse engineer the evidence base to fit what they want.*"[102] When it comes to conducting needs assessments and drafting reports and appeals for donors, UN agencies "*have so many*

[98] Author interview #44, 22/11/2023, author's translation from Italian, online
[99] Author interview #58, 23/05/2024, online
[100] Author interview #30, 10/07/2023, online
[101] Author interview #44, 22/11/2023, online
[102] Author interview #58, 23/05/2024, online

people and they control the discourse, the narrative around a crisis, since they control the methodology. They basically are in a position to cook the books. And when they can, they do"[103].

On the other hand, UN agencies have been observed to display a 'can-do-that-too' approach to humanitarian response in order to secure scarce resources. To maintain their presence and staff, UN agencies often overstretch themselves and the boundaries of humanitarian action. UN humanitarian agencies frequently "*claim to have core competencies in various donor-determined areas. Inevitably, this leads to turf battles and results in negative forms of overlap and duplication*" (Dalton, von Hippel, Kent, Maurer 2003, p.10). Indeed, from crisis to crisis, several UN agencies systematically fundraise for programming outside their designated Cluster of competence, with some organizations involved in four or more Clusters in a single response[104].

While the Humanitarian Cluster System was introduced to enhance coordination among UN organizations and other humanitarian actors, it did not resolve the cooperation problem associated with fundraising in a resource-scarce environment. The niche differentiation established by the Cluster System, which assigns UN organizations to specific sectors of humanitarian response, lacks a mechanism to ensure resource partitioning, leaving inflows to each niche uncertain. Donor states, who control humanitarian ODA allocations, frequently call for cross-sector prioritization since available resources often fall short of meeting total humanitarian funding requirements. Facing the risk of essential resources being diverted from their niche, IOs compete with one another, undermining the coordination architecture of the

[103] Ibid.
[104] Author interview #17, 19/01/2023, online

humanitarian system. Implementing UN agencies have systematically resisted initiatives to enhance OCHA's authority as a coordinating body and have effectively 'captured' the drafting processes of Flash Appeals and Humanitarian Response Plans, limiting their value as reference documents for donors. According to interviewees, UN agencies under external competitive pressures also exhibit dysfunctional behaviours that detract from humanitarian response effectiveness. The next chapter will delve into these two distinct organizational responses to competitive pressures and explore the link between organizational type (i.e., generalist or specialist) and the behaviours displayed by UN humanitarian organizations.

4.6 Conclusion

This chapter has shown that inter-organizational competition persists in the humanitarian system despite the prominent role assigned to UN organizations and the apparent division of labour introduced by the Humanitarian Cluster System. The three driving factors of competition outlined in chapter 3 were identified in the humanitarian space, including two 'traditional' explanations for competition – environmental density and resource scarcity – and the 'novel' threat of niche substitution.

The interviews uncovered three main drivers of environmental density: the professionalization of humanitarian aid, the widening conceptualization of what constitutes humanitarian assistance, and the migration of actors from long-term development to humanitarian activities. Environmental density in the humanitarian system reduces the potential resource share available for each actor, increases the chances of aid diversion from one humanitarian entity to another, and limits the attention that donors can give to the demands of each IO. There was strong consensus among the interviewees that resource scarcity posed a serious challenge for UN organizations and the humanitarian system as a whole. While the rise

in the frequency and severity of humanitarian crises worldwide has redirected much of the international community's attention and efforts towards delivering short-term humanitarian relief - away from pursuing long-term development objectives - the increase in aid spent on short-term relief has failed to match the rising levels of humanitarian needs globally, leading to an ever wider humanitarian funding gap.

Donor-led prioritization drives inter-organizational competition among UN agencies despite the sectoral differentiation of the Cluster System. Since Clusters or sectors of the humanitarian response are not linked to specific funding mechanisms, prioritization becomes a form of niche substitution via resource reallocation. In this scenario, niche specialization loses its screening effect against competitive pressures because it is not followed by resource partitioning. As a result, UN agencies resist top-down efforts to enforce prioritization and coordination. In the early stages of the response, they attempt to set the crisis framing or expand their offer to align with the perceived preferences of their donors.

The current humanitarian system is affected by external factors beyond the control of humanitarian actors, such as the changing preferences and interests of donor states, and factors driving humanitarian crises, including geopolitical tensions, state fragility, and climate change. While all UN agencies operate in a challenging environment, variation in the operational space and funding received suggests that while some IOs effectively react to external pressures, others fail to do so. The next two chapters will illustrate how IOs react - or fail to react - to competition in the humanitarian space.

Chapter 5

Winning the competition: The World Food Programme (WFP) and the International Organization for Migration (IOM)

5.1 Introduction

On a standard working day of the typical Geneva-based intern taking her first steps in the realm of humanitarian affairs, she is likely to attend multiple meetings, such as the International Organization for Migration (IOM) Standing Committee Bi-annual Session in the morning, a World Food Programme (WFP) crisis briefing at lunchtime, and an Inter-Agency Standing Committee (IASC)-Donor meeting in the afternoon. The reports drafted from her notes, while similar in format and register, exhibit remarkable variety in the substantive areas international organizations (IOs) had touched upon in presenting their programmes and interventions around the world. On the second day of the IOM's Standing Committee in the spring 2023, its Director for the Department of Operations and Emergencies reported on IOM's humanitarian activities in 2022[105]. In just one year, IOM reached 31.1 million people in 115 countries through operations encompassing sheltering, humanitarian protection, camp management, WASH services, emergency health and psychosocial support for those affected by humanitarian crises.

In contrast, the report summarizing the WFP-led briefing will provide detailed information on the number of food-insecure people in a specific context, the severity of their food insecurity, and the reasons why WFP is best positioned to reach and alleviate their suffering through food aid, to be delivered both in cash and in kind.

[105] Soda, Federico. *Agenda Item 12: IOM's Response to Migration Crises*. (Power Point presentation). 32nd session of the standing committee on programmes and finance. 27-28 June 2023. Retrieved in October 2023 from https://governingbodies.iom.int/system/files/en/scpf/32nd/it-12-ppt-ioms-response-to-migration-crises.pdf

The third report on the IASC-donor meeting will outline each Global Humanitarian Cluster's self-reported achievements in strengthening gender-sensitive programming. These Clusters, led by specialized UN agencies and programmes, coordinate the UN's response across key sectors of humanitarian intervention during crises. A WFP representative led the update of the Food Security and Logistics Clusters. IOM was not present at the meeting, but six different Cluster representatives reported it as one of the most engaged partners in their sectors worldwide. While interns in Geneva are often tasked with writing policy memos that may go unread, their reports can still reveal the varying trajectories of operational IOs in humanitarian affairs. Some IOs are at the forefront of every crisis response, while others struggle to justify their presence in humanitarian contexts. All strive to secure their share of scarce resources, with some proving more successful than others.

The humanitarian system is often referred to as a ‘competitive marketplace’, where numerous humanitarian actors struggle to secure visibility and resources for their operations in a world of skyrocketing needs and dwindling funding (Weiss 2013). As donors fail to raise sufficient resources, there is a growing chorus of voices looking to increase the effectiveness of the humanitarian system and rationalize the allocation process of available funding. Humanitarian IOs, such as UN operational organizations, are urged to concentrate their efforts in areas where they have a comparative advantage and to adhere to a clear division of labour, whereby each IO has its own sector of responsibility in humanitarian response (Carbonnier 2016). Simultaneously, donors are increasingly opting for prioritizing one sector of the humanitarian response over others, despite the varied and multi-dimensional nature of humanitarian needs.

Notwithstanding the clear delineation of responsibilities into distinct sectors within the Cluster System (see chapter 2), ongoing inter-organizational competition among UN organizations

represents a puzzle for scholars studying the behaviour of IOs and a headache for policy practitioners striving to limit duplications and inefficiencies in humanitarian response. Persistent inter-organizational competition, despite niche differentiation, stands in contrast to Organizational Ecology and Resource Dependence Theory, which suggest that competition should decrease as organizations occupy narrower, less crowded spaces.

The theoretical framework introduced in chapter 3 posits that competition decreases only if niche differentiation is followed by resource partitioning. In humanitarian response, sectoral differentiation is not necessarily a guarantee of organizational survival if key financial actors, namely donor states, prioritize one sector other the other and reallocate resources accordingly. Thus, when IOs perceive niche substitution as a threat to their own survival they behave competitively to secure vital resources. The choice of strategy depends on whether the IO is a generalist or a specialist organization. Specialist organizations tend to utilize *competitive issue framing*, seeking to align the general perception of policy problems with the specialized solutions they have in their portfolio. On the other hand, generalist organizations, capable of providing a broader range of services, opt for a *competitive horizontal expansion* strategy. This involves adapting their operations to address the specific policy gaps left open by specialist organizations in any given context.

Chapter 1 illustrated the rationale behind the selection of WFP, UNDP, and IOM as three representative cases from a pool of twelve IOs holding IASC membership and, consequently, classified as UN operational organizations in humanitarian response. WFP functions as a traditional humanitarian actor, whereas UNDP and IOM are newer entrants in the humanitarian landscape. While WFP and UNDP have always been part of the United Nations, IOM's related status to the UN was only finalized in 2016. Existing studies on competition among UN organizations in humanitarian affairs, focus on dyads such as WFP and FAO or UNHCR and

IOM, where there is a clear thematic overlap of organizational mandates (Moretti 2021; Betts 2013). This dissertation goes beyond the dyadic dimension, examining the competitive behaviour of individual IOs as a result of systemic conditions, rather than focusing solely on a specific competitor.

Based on the analysis of primary documentation, including independent evaluations, performance assessments, and expert interviews, this chapter illustrates how WFP and IOM emerge as winners in the competitive humanitarian market. Most of the 63 individuals surveyed in this research project have direct experience working for, with, or in close collaboration with WFP and/or IOM. The respondents include current and former WFP/IOM staff, personnel from other UN entities, donor representatives, and experts or practitioners in the humanitarian system who have either worked with or examined the work of WFP/IOM at both field and headquarters levels. In line with the theoretical expectations outlined in Chapter 3, evidence from the interviews and the review of key documents show that both IOM and WFP engage in competition, as being assigned a sector of responsibility within the Humanitarian Cluster System does not guarantee sufficient funding for their crisis response operations. Both organizations rely heavily on voluntary (earmarked) contributions, making resource diversion a constant threat.

WFP is a specialist organization focused on food aid and the logistics of humanitarian response. To secure adequate funding, WFP employs a competitive issue-framing strategy, ensuring that the narrative surrounding a crisis consistently includes the food security dimension. This is achieved by swiftly entering the field when a disaster occurs, collecting crisis data, proactively providing communications materials to donors, and shaping the crisis narrative in UN-wide reporting. IOM, as a generalist organization, is flexible enough to adopt a competitive horizontal expansion strategy. Its long history of offering *ad hoc* migration

management services based on specific requests from member states allows IOM to address a broad spectrum of humanitarian needs during emergency responses, effectively filling operational gaps.

This chapter is structured as follows. Section 5.2 focuses on the case of the World Food Programme (WFP). It illustrates why, despite being one of the most well-established humanitarian actors, WFP remains sensitive to competitive pressures. The section then examines how the Programme has remained competitive by actively shaping the narrative around humanitarian crises, ensuring that food security remains a priority for donors. Section 5.3 introduces the case of IOM - a newcomer to the UN system and the humanitarian sphere- and discusses the factors that make IOM competitive in the humanitarian policy space. Section 5.4 provides evidence of the "winner" status of both WFP and IOM in the humanitarian system, as demonstrated by their secured funding and operational presence, while showing that competitive pressures on these actors are increasing and that asserting their dominance in the system is not without challenges.

5.2 WFP and competitive issue framing

As the recipient of the 2020 Nobel Peace Prize, the World Food Programme (WFP) is widely recognized as one of the most impactful humanitarian organizations, both within the UN system and globally. Headquartered in Rome, with 87% of its 23,000 staff operating in the field and in 80 country offices, and boasting a 2023 annual budget of USD 8.3 billion[106], the WFP is frequently acknowledged as the largest humanitarian organization with a truly global footprint.

[106] WFP. *WFP at a glance: A guide to the facts, figures and frontline work of the World Food Programme.* Updated 2 August 2024. Retrieved in September 2024 from https://www.wfp.org/stories/wfp-glance

Donors, partners, and independent evaluators consistently rate the WFP as one of the top performers in terms of delivering relief aid and successfully completing projects/programmes[107] (Ross 2022; Clay and Schram 2013; Shaw 2001). As one UN staffer put it: "*There are certainly things that could be done better, but the world would be a much darker place without the WFP in it*"[108].

5.2.1 The history of WFP: A short overview

While the WFP has become a fixture of the humanitarian landscape, its influence and leading role in aid delivery did not always extend as widely; instead, they developed gradually over the course of several decades. The WFP was first established in 1961 as a joint initiative of Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) and the UN. In 1960, following resolution 1496 (XV) on '*The provision of food surpluses to food-deficient peoples through the UN system*', the director-general of FAO was tasked with an exploratory study to be presented at the next FAO Intergovernmental Advisory Committee in April 1961 (Shaw 2001). The USA was represented by George McGovern, the director of the Office of Food for Peace of the Kennedy administration. McGovern strongly supported the establishment of a FAO in-house programme dedicated to the distribution of multi-lateral food aid and presented a proposal to the Intergovernmental Advisory Committee recommending the creation of a three-year, 100$-million initiative complementary with the US' own bilateral food aid programmes (Shaw 2001). The WFP became fully operational in 1962. The first three years of the programme were soon deemed a success and the WFP became a permanent addition to FAO's activities. In this

[107] Zhang and Chulkov, 2009. "*Review of Management and Administration in the World Food Programme"*. UN Joint Inspection Unit, retrieved in March 2023 from https://www.unjiu.org/sites/www.unjiu.org/files/jiu_document_files/products/en/reports-notes/JIU%20Products/JIU_REP_2009_7_English.pdf
[108] Author interview #3, 06/03/2021, online

first period, WFP received ten emergency assistance requests for both natural and man-made disasters: the Programme encountered serious difficulties in delivery operations due to both political and logistical limitations. Indeed, for most of the 1970s and the early 1980s the bulk of WFP's efforts focused on long-term development programming. During the 1980s, WFP played a key role in the response to severe famine situations in Ethiopia and Sudan. WFP-led Operation Lifeline Sudan, which led to the airdrop of 1.5 million tons of food into what is now South Sudan, remains to this day the largest humanitarian operation of this kind. These success stories increased the visibility of the organization as well as the voluntary contributions from institutional donors, which led the Programme's budget to overtake FAO's (Lall 2023).

During the 1990s, the balance in WFP's operation portfolio moved drastically from long-term development assistance to emergency interventions in humanitarian contexts. In the same decade, WFP also cemented its primacy in assistance delivery vis-à-vis other UN organizations and agencies, delivering a quarter of global food aid and a third of all UN development assistance (Lall 2023). The Programme also secured operational and *de facto* independence from its parent organization, the FAO. This success following WFP's operational turn to emergency intervention is explained by the significant strengthening of the Programme's logistics and transport capacities, which took place during the 1980s and 1990s (Shaw 2008). To deliver food aid in remote and conflict-afflicted regions, WFP established the UN Humanitarian Air Service (UN HAS), which is still managed by the Programme to this day and offers passenger and cargo transport to humanitarian workers from all UN entities. Over the years, WFP has also built up a system of emergency telecommunications that remains unmatched across the humanitarian community. Today the WFP is the UN's largest humanitarian agency, co-leading the Food Security Cluster with FAO, and heading both the Logistics and the Emergency Telecommunications Clusters (OCHA 2023).

5.2.2 Why WFP competes

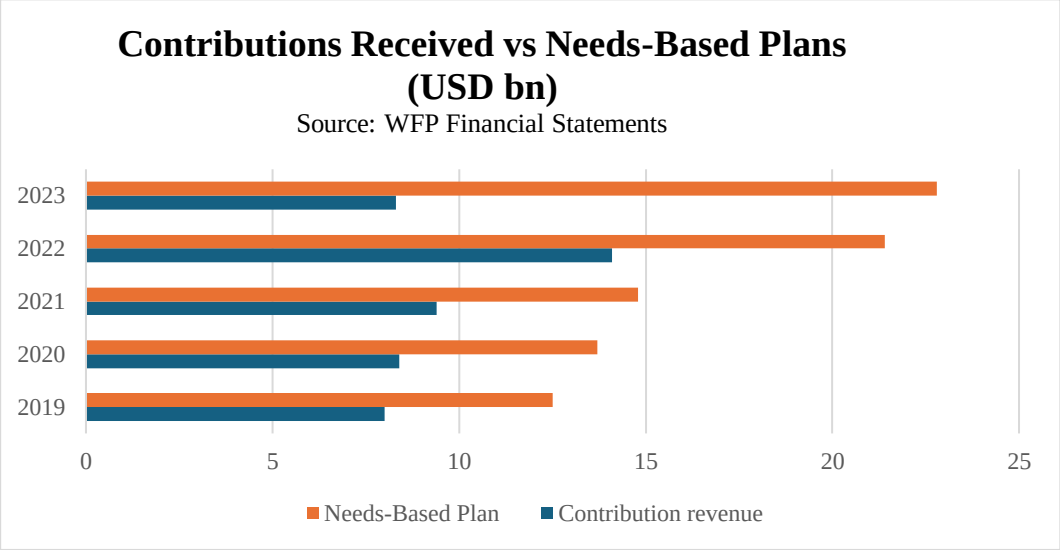
The theoretical framework outlined in chapter 3 posits that, under conditions of resource scarcity, IOs compete even if they have their own niche of specialization, since states often prioritize one niche over the others and re-allocate resources accordingly. Chapter 4 has illustrated how serious an issue scarcity is in the humanitarian realm: a small number of donor states provides almost the total amount of multilateral humanitarian aid. These states must make allocation decisions in a world where humanitarian crises are increasingly frequent and severe, whilst considering competing domestic priorities and political pressures (Ahmed 2021). Furthermore, due to internal budget pressures, the bureaucracies of these countries' Foreign Ministries are shrinking, which means that each donor has a limited capacity to consider multiple humanitarian IOs and parse their available resources into numerous individual allocations, preferring to sign "big checks" to a small number of multilateral partners[109]. Evidence confirming Hypothesis 1 substantiates the claim that IOs are threatened by scarcity and the potential of resource reallocation despite niche specialization and includes instances of donors pushing for prioritization, a perceived risk of losing relevance and influence in the humanitarian system within the IO itself, and explicit mentions of competition with other UN organizations.

The interviews with six current employees of WFP, including senior management, former staff of the Programme, and other external observers, who have worked in close contact with WFP on the field and at headquarters level, and the analysis of relevant documentation shows how WFP is not exempt from competitive pressures. Despite WFP's prominent role in the humanitarian system, the last decade has not been without its challenges, even for the Programme. The stark rise in the number of food-insecure people worldwide has risen over the

[109] Author interview #58, 23/05/2024, online

years to an unprecedented 282 million[110]. Just like for other UN organizations, the increase in humanitarian funding to WFP from institutional donors, corporations, and private individuals has not matched the skyrocketing rise in humanitarian needs that the Programme is supposed to address. Indeed, in 2023, WFP registered its highest recorded shortfall, receiving USD 8.3 billion against total annual funding requirements estimated at USD 22.8 billion[111]. Figure 8 provides an overview of the evolution of WFP's funding from 2019 to 2023[112].

Figure 8: Evolution of WFP's funding gap 2019-2023



All six current employees surveyed in this thesis identified WFP's budget structure as the primary challenge that makes the Programme particularly vulnerable to yearly fluctuations in humanitarian financing[113]. This issue was also reported by five external observers, including one former WFP employee, three OCHA staff members, and one independent expert in

[110] Food Security Information Network (FSIN). 2024. Global Report on Food Crises 2024. Rome, Italy. Retrieved in August 2024 from https://www.fsinplatform.org/sites/default/files/resources/files/GRFC2024-full.pdf
[111] WFP Executive Board. 2024. *Annual Performance Report for 2023*. Retrieved in July 2024 from https://docs.wfp.org/api/documents/WFP0000159843/download/?_ga=2.252344143.757117006.1727174888-597254826.1727174888
[112] Ibid.
[113] Author interview #25, 22/05/2023, online; author interview #26, 23/05/2023, Geneva, Switzerland; author interview #27, 23/05/2023, online; author interview #28, 25/05/2023, Geneva, Switzerland; author interview #50, multiple conversations, online; author interview #55, 29/02/2024, online

humanitarian affairs[114]. The World Food Programme entirely relies on voluntary contributions from institutional donors, who make up for the bulk of its yearly budget, as well as donations from the private sector. As of 2018, WFP's top 10 donors were contributing 86% of the organization's funding[115]. The majority of the funding WFP receives is in the form of yearly, earmarked donations, which makes it difficult for the organization to plan ahead and allocate resources across crises solely on the basis of need. While a voluntary contribution-based model would represent a significant constraint for the performance of any IO, it is particularly burdensome for WFP, given its predominant operational nature and the high costs associated with its operations such air and land transport and delivery of food aid and the setting up of emergency telecommunication services[116].

The second challenge that WFP has faced in recent years is linked to the ever-changing composition of the humanitarian system. With the expansion of what is considered humanitarian assistance beyond operations meant to ensure the mere survival of individuals affected by disasters to include also services meant to sustain their continued dignity, such as education programming, the humanitarian marketplace has become more densely populated than it was in the heyday of WFP's famine response during the 1990s (see chapter 4). Within the organization, staff members share the perception that newcomer organizations to the field represent a challenge to traditional humanitarian actors, as they might divert the focus of the response away from essential components of humanitarian response, such as food security[117].

[114] Author interview #6, 27/09/2022, online; author interview #11, 12/12/2022, online; author interview #18, 25/01/2023, online; author interview #50, multiple conversations in 2022, online; author interview #24, 22/05/2023, online
[115] MOPAN. 2019. *MOPAN Assessment Report: World Food Programme (WFP).* Paris, France Retrieved from: https://www.mopanonline.org/assessments/wfp2017-18/WFP%20report%20final.pdf
[116] Author interview #28, 25/05/2023, Geneva, Switzerland
[117] Author interview #28, 25/05/2023, Geneva, Switzerland; author interview #55, 29/02/2024, online

Two external observers, with leading research roles in humanitarian affairs, provide disconfirming statements suggesting that WFP ‘s position is so secure in the system that it cannot be seriously challenged by other actors. One interviewee went as far as describing the humanitarian system as a WFP-dominated monopoly or at best an oligopoly between WFP, UNHCR, and UNICEF[118]. Both interviewees pointed to WFP’s relation with its parent organization, the FAO, as a case in point. Despite technically co-leading the Food Security Cluster, the FAO plays a marginal role in humanitarian response, which is widely accepted as a prerogative of WFP, with FAO simply “scraping the bottom of the barrel” of the remaining resources for food security and livelihoods[119]. Indeed, as illustrated at a later stage in this chapter (see section 5.4), over the years, WFP has consistently ranked as the first humanitarian IO in terms of funding received, both in absolute terms and relative to its total annual ask[120]. The potential for competition between FAO and WFP stemming from their common mandate focus on food and partially overlapping mandates has been widely acknowledged and documented (Margulis 2017; Clay and Schram 2013; Shaw 2008). However, as discussed in Chapter 1, the type of competition centred around scarce (financial) resources, which is under consideration in this dissertation, transcends the dyadic dimension to focus on the complex system in which WFP and other UN organizations are embedded. The systemic factors that generate inter-organizational competition despite niche specialization, scarcity and density, are beyond the control of each individual IO, no matter how large and influential. Indeed, as confirmed by WFP staff and WFP reporting, the Programme has also suffered from funding shortages. While the WFP remains the most well-funded humanitarian actor in absolute terms, in relative terms the contributions received by the Programme are increasingly insufficient to cover the humanitarian needs the WFP aims to address. As noted by the WFP Executive Board,

[118] Author interview #58, 23/05/2024, online
[119] Author interview #35, 14/08/2023, online, author’s translation from Italian
[120] See Financial Tracking Service, OCHA, https://fts.unocha.org/home/2024/countries

while the Programme "*anticipated that the donors will continue to respond robustly*" to "*the pressures that lead to increased food insecurity*", "*the funding gap [over the 2022-2024] is expected to widen as the projected operational requirements are likely to grow*.[121]"

As this trend worsens with every passing year (with the exception of 2021 following an unprecedented surge in funding to respond to the Covid-19 global pandemic) and WFP's reliance on short-term, earmarked contributions continues unaltered, the uncertainty around its ability to fund its operations, staff, and offices around the world has reached unprecedented heights[122]. Indeed, one of the experts that claimed that WFP was among the best funded humanitarian organizations, also admitted that in 2023 the Programme had implemented unprecedented cuts in programming and introduced a hiring freeze[123]. The hiring halt continued the following year, as evidenced by the 1st regular session of WFP Executive Board held in February 2024[124]. All WFP employees mentioned this uncertainty as a major factor contributing to keeping the Programme alert and agile in reacting to funding opportunities and potential competitors. It is the lack of complacency regarding its primacy in the humanitarian system that has led to WFP's consistently ranking as the winner (together with UNICEF and UNHCR) of the humanitarian system.

[121] WFP Executive Board. 2022. *Update on the WFP management plan (2022-2024)*. Page 4-5 . Retrieved in December 2022 from https://executiveboard.wfp.org/document_download/WFP-0000138971
[122] Author interview #28, 25/05/2023, Geneva, Switzerland
[123] Author interview #58, 23/05/2024, online.
[124] WFP Executive Board. 2024. *Summary of the work of the 2024 first regular session of the Executive board*. Retrieved in May 2024 from https://executiveboard.wfp.org/document_download/WFP-0000160017

Figure 9: Why WFP competes

Conceptual expectations	Evidence	Interview count	Example
Scarcity + Density	*Confirming* Scarce resources as a defining feature of the humanitarian system affecting WFP; budgetary pressures; soaring humanitarian needs/ # of food insecure people	*Confirming* n=25	*"There is also a competition across the board for resources. Resources are insufficient. This is the root cause. Needs are becoming extremely acute, especially in our sector. […] We use the word 'unprecedented'. It really is so, it's a fact. We need to go back to the aftermath of WWII to find a situation that is as bad as it is now[125]."* *"We have gaps everywhere. We are cutting rations everywhere, we are throwing millions of people in need out of the window, you know? [In that sense] we are not very successful, but we are one of the most aggressive organizations at resource mobilization."*
Threat of niche substitution	*Confirming* Competitive funding environment; other sectors perceived as less important than food security; WFP not secure regarding funding flows; voluntary contributions	*Confirming* n=19	*"The resources come from the same group of donors as for UNICEF, HCR, IOM, etc[126]. "* *"We are funded on a voluntary basis. If you want to survive, you need to be proactive."* *"As a WFP country manager, you never have more than a four-month visibility window, in terms of the money to continue. Not only to distribute food, but also to pay the salaries[127]."*
	Disconfirming WFP being in a secure, dominant position in humanitarian system; system dominated by WFP, UNHCR, UNICEF	*Disconfirming* n=2	*"There's not enough competition […] it's an oligopoly - or rather oligopsony - of WFP, UNHCR, and UNICEF. And they don't threaten each other.[128]"*

Figure 9 summarizes the empirical evidence gathered in the interviews. It presents evidence both in favour and against hypothesis 1 gathered from interviews with individuals working in the humanitarian sector, who claimed to have direct experience working with or for WFP on the field and/or at headquarter level. The findings were in line with data on humanitarian

[125] Author interview #28, 25/05/2023, online.
[126] Author interview #56, 29/02/2024, online.
[127] Author interview #28, 25/05/2023, online.
[128] Author interview #58, 23/05/2024, online.

funding reported to OCHA's Financial Tracking System, as well as with evidence from several comprehensive assessments of WFP's performance carried out by MOPAN and the UK Department for International Development (DfID). In line with theoretical expectations, the interviews and the review of relevant reports/ documents reveal the extent to which WFP remains vulnerable to competitive pressures. Like other humanitarian actors, WFP operates in a densely populated, resource-scarce environment. While WFP remains the largest UN organization and the first recipient of humanitarian funding, its primacy is not unchallenged in a domain where resources are dwindling, operational costs are high, and traditional approaches to humanitarian assistance are being challenged. Due its reliance on voluntary contributions, WFP is an active competitor within the 'humanitarian marketplace' and in every new crisis strives to gather sufficient resources to sustain its costly operations in food security and related logistics and communications services. While the organization has collaborative agreements in place with some UN organizations (such as UNICEF and FAO), a UK DfID assessment notes how, in crisis response, WFP "*has a strong reputation for being an independent, input-driven and sometimes competitive partner*" (DfID MRA 2011). The next section considers how the World Food Programme moves in this competitive environment to defend its primacy in the humanitarian system.

5.2.3 How WFP competes

Hypothesis H2 introduced in Chapter 3 posits that the type of competitive behaviour adopted by the IO to react to the threat of resource reallocation depends on whether the IO can be classified as a generalist or a specialist organization. According to the classification presented in Chapter 3 (table 1) and Appendix A, WFP is a specialist organization, as it mostly operates in humanitarian response (with only a modest share of its total budget capacity dedicated to

long-term development) carrying out a limited range of activities. H2a theorizes that a specialist IO will resort to a competitive issue framing strategy, preferring to influence the framing of policy problems (e.g., humanitarian crises) according to their existing mandate rather than expanding their operational toolkit. Evidence in support of H2a includes observations of WFP acting as a first mover, shaping the narrative around a humanitarian crisis so that the food (in-)security angle remains prominent, and leveraging its comparative advantage in food security, whilst limiting its operations in other sectors of the humanitarian response. Evidence against H2a would include observations of WFP not behaving as a first mover in crisis response, not attempting to frame the narrative of a crisis in terms of food security, and/or expanding its activities well beyond the food security sector.

Initially conceived as a temporary solution to food insecurity in the aftermath of World War II, the Programme has evolved and refined the logistics associated with distributing perishable food aid to remote and challenging locations. Leveraging its extensive experience in food distribution, WFP has developed unparalleled transportation and communication capabilities, upon which the broader UN system relies (Ross 2022; Shaw 2008; 2001). Throughout various crises, WFP consistently manages all aspects of food aid distribution, including stockpiling, early needs assessment, transportation, and delivery. Consequently, the WFP has specialized in executing a set of tasks that encompass every stage of the response within a well-defined sector. Hence, WFP can be regarded as a specialist organization within the humanitarian system.

The findings from the expert interviews and the evidence from independent reviews and assessments appear to support hypothesis 2a. In crisis response, to ensure that its niche remains adequately resourced, WFP adopts a *competitive issue framing strategy.* It does so by entering the field as soon as disaster strikes (*first-mover IO*), gathering data on the crisis, delivering

communications material on the crisis to donors, thus actively shaping and influencing the framing of the crisis in UN-wide reporting, mostly within the first 72 hours of an emergency[129].

When asked about the key features that enable the WFP to maintain its prominent position in the humanitarian system, the six WFP staff surveyed unanimously cited the Programme's ability to rapidly deploy personnel, regardless of how remote the crisis is from its Roman headquarters[130]. Rapidity was also mentioned by external observers, including OCHA staff[131]. These findings align with the theoretical expectation that WFP acts as a first mover in crisis response. Over the years, WFP has developed strong first-responder capacities[132]. The Programme can initiate operations in the immediate aftermath of a crisis, often within hours of the emergency's onset. WFP relies on one of the most successful emergency contingency funds in the humanitarian system, the Immediate Response Account (IRA). Funded through overhead fees charged on donor contributions, the IRA can mobilize resources within 24 hours of an emergency to support Country Offices in kickstarting a response, deploying additional staff to the field, and enabling cargo transport in crisis conditions. The IRA is replenished after the first ad-hoc contributions reach the Programme. Although the IRA accounted for only 4% of WFP's USD 14 billion revenue in 2022, it has consistently enabled the organization to be one of the very first international responders on the ground in emergency contexts[133]. As stated by an employee of another UN organization: *"WFP has very strong needs-assessment capacity. It is*

[129] Author interview #19, 25/01/2023, online; author interview #57, 14/05/2024, online.
[130] Author interview #25, 22/05/2023, online; author interview #26, 23/05/2023, Geneva, Switzerland; author interview #27, 23/05/2023, online; author interview #28, 25/05/2023, Geneva, Switzerland; author interview #50, multiple conversations, online; author interview #55, 29/02/2024, online
[131] Author interview #16, 18/01/2023, online; author interview #18, 25/01/2023, online; author interview #19, 25/01/2023, online; author interview #31, 21/07/2023, online
[132] MOPAN. (2019). *MOPAN Assessment Report: World Food Programme (WFP)*.
[133] Author interview #25, online, 22/05/2023

able to deploy people on the field in a matter of hours, they are always there first. They have a big global footprint and they are very good at moving staff around."[134]

Being one of the first organizations, or indeed the first UN entity, on the ground allows WFP to begin its data collection and needs assessment phase earlier than other humanitarian actors. Nine interviewees specifically highlighted the Programme's ability to gather and present data in a clear and easily understandable way as a key factor that sets WFP apart from many other humanitarian organizations[135]. WFP employs staff dedicated to needs assessment in most country offices and has a fast deployment roster to provide reinforcement when in-country capacity requires it. The data WFP collects focuses on the number of individuals affected by food insecurity and the severity of their needs, with special attention to specific demographic groups, such as children and pregnant/ nursing women. WFP has adopted FAO's Integrated Food Security Phase Classification (IPC) to categorize food insecurity into five severity levels, ranging from 'none' to 'catastrophe/famine.' While other UN organizations also use their in-house classification systems, the IPC classification is particularly well-known across the humanitarian system, both to donors and other entities, as it is easy to understand and communicate[136]. Being a first responder with a well-known and predictable classification system for emergencies makes other actors, such as donors and other local assistance providers, reliant on the information gathered and processed by WFP[137]. This means that the initial data informing the international community's decision-making in any given crisis is heavily focused on food insecurity, potentially neglecting other urgent needs. According to a donor interviewee:

[134] Author interview #26, online, 23/05/2023
[135] Author interview #25, 22/05/2023, online; author interview #26, 23/05/2023, Geneva, Switzerland; author interview #27, 23/05/2023, online; author interview #28, 25/05/2023, Geneva, Switzerland; author interview #50, multiple conversations, online; author interview #55, 29/02/2024, online; author interview #16, 18/01/2023, online; author interview #43, 22/11/2023, online; author interview #57, 23/05/2024, online
[136] Author interview #28, 25/05/2023, Geneva, Switzerland
[137] Author interview #57, online, 23/05/2024

"WFP is very competent when it comes to logistics, it is a true first responder. This gives them [WFP] the upper hand when it comes to establishing the number of people in need and the nature of those needs. Of course, it's always food. And nutrition. People suffer because they starve, mostly. And – you know - if they're under the rubble of their home, a food ration might not be life-saving."[138]

WFP uses its early data in two main ways. First, it conveys information bilaterally to institutional donors to kickstart fundraising efforts immediately after an emergency [139]. WFP's data reaches the humanitarian departments of Foreign Affairs Ministries in donor countries, providing the foundation for national response strategies. The Programme also organizes regular events on global food security in Geneva and New York to maintain high levels of donor awareness and sensitivity on the issue [140]. Additionally, political decision-makers use WFP's information to advocate for resource mobilization with their constituencies. WFP's advocacy and fundraising efforts are supported by a vast network of representation offices in key donor capitals, such as Washington DC, London, Berlin, and Brussels[141].

Second, WFP invests significantly in data collection and vulnerability assessments "often as a service to the humanitarian system as a whole"[142]. More specifically, the Programme provides data and information to the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA)[143]. As discussed in Chapter 2, OCHA is responsible for coordinating the response and compiling all UN-wide official reports on any given humanitarian crisis. However, OCHA

[138] Author interview #23, online, 16/05/2023
[139] Author interview #26, 23/05/2023, Geneva, Switzerland; author interview #27, 23/05/2023, online
[140] For instance, 2023 Briefing on Food Crises. Geneva (Switzerland), 11 September 2023. Organized by the Global Network Against Food Crises and co-hosted by the European Union (EU) and the United States of America.
[141] Author interview #25, 22/05/2023, online
[142] MOPAN. (2024). *MOPAN Assessment Report: World Food Programme (WFP).* Page 36
[143] Author interview #27, 23/05/2023, online; author interview #46, 30/10/2023

often lacks sufficient staff on the ground to conduct data gathering and assess the severity of the crisis. As a result, it relies on information provided by other agencies to compile the initial UN-wide report, the Flash Appeal, which is typically released within a day of the crisis's onset. As time progresses, new iterations of the Flash Appeal are released, incorporating information from all UN entities and other responding organizations. However, the early version of the Flash Appeal often relies heavily on WFP-collected data. According to an OCHA staff member:

"Their [WFP's] numbers, their information reaches the HCT [Humanitarian Country Team] and the [Humanitarian] Coordinator fast. It informs how the crisis is communicated during the first few hours – that's crucial."[144]

A senior WFP staff member working in the organization's Global Communications Office confirmed the Programme's close work with OCHA:

"Our data and visual content are used for the [Flash] Appeal. We also back up the HRP [Humanitarian Response Plan] even though it's OCHA's show."[145]

In line with theoretical expectations, the interview evidence shows that WFP not only invests significant resources in gathering crisis data but is also highly adept at communicating it effectively to donors. All WFP staff and four external observers, including a representative from a donor country, mentioned the Programme's rapid and effective communications strategy as one of its major strengths compared to many other humanitarian organizations[146]. In

[144] Author interview #46, 30/10/2023
[145] Author interview #27, 23/05/2023, online
[146] Author interview #25, 22/05/2023, online; author interview #26, 23/05/2023, Geneva, Switzerland; author interview #27, 23/05/2023, online; author interview #28, 25/05/2023, Geneva, Switzerland; author interview #50, multiple conversations, online; author interview #55, 29/02/2024, online; author interview #16, 18/01/2023,

addition to its strong rapid deployment and data-gathering capacities, WFP has significantly invested in its communications capabilities, both at the country office and headquarters levels. Every country office has a dedicated Communications Officer responsible for gathering materials such as testimonies, images, pictures, and videos. Just as WFP maintains a roster of staff that can be rapidly mobilized worldwide, it also has Communications specialists who can be deployed within hours. A senior staff member from the Global Communications Office confirmed that at WFP *"We are well aware that the first 72 hours are key for fundraising. It is a window of opportunity. So, we deploy Communications specialists immediately, during the needs assessment phase. We develop the messaging as we gather the numbers"*[147].

In terms of data gathering, WFP's Communications specialists focus on the food security aspect of an emergency and the measures taken by WFP to address the crisis. The images and testimonies collected in the first few hours of the response are sent to donors alongside needs-assessment data, helping decision-makers and officials within MFAs 'package' the crisis to justify resource mobilization[148].

A senior WFP employee working in the External Relations Division believes that the communications services tailored for institutional donors are key in explaining why WFP is one of the IOs that consistently captures a high proportion of the (scarce) available resources in almost every humanitarian crisis:

"We [WFP] do some of the best Comms in the field. Maybe only UNICEF and UNHCR are this good. We are pro-active, we approach donors and provide them with data, information and

online; author interview #59, multiple conversations, online; author interview #60, multiple conversations, Geneva, Switzerland

[147] Author interview #27, 23/05/2023, online

[148] Ibid.

Comms material – you know, pictures, videos, testimonies, interviews – everything they need to sell the crisis at home."[149]

Indeed, most interviewees, both internal and external to the Programme, agreed that WFP's Communication strategy is among the most successful at mobilising resources within the humanitarian system[150]. One interviewee remarked that, thanks to its strong communications apparatus, WFP "*can sell beer to a drunk man*"[151]. WFP not only uses its superior Communications capabilities to persuade donors to support its fundraising efforts, but also provides them with material to craft a persuasive narrative for mobilizing resources to address food insecurity in a specific crisis with their domestic constituencies. By offering the first glimpse into an emergency and its ensuing humanitarian needs, WFP is adept at framing a crisis primarily as a matter of food insecurity, even if this means other needs take second place. While WFP is praised for its ability to quickly scale up operations and its impressive operational footprint, independent evaluators often note that WFP's communications practices are not always fully transparent and are sometimes used competitively, which ultimately undermines the coherence of the UN system-wide response[152].

By shaping the perceptions of donors, who hold significant financial influence in funding humanitarian responses, and the broader humanitarian community in the immediate aftermath of a crisis, WFP aligns the identified problem with policy solutions within its expertise, particularly in food aid delivery and logistics/telecommunications assistance. By maintaining visibility for its operations, WFP ensures that its specialized niche in food security consistently attracts a substantial share of available funding across various crises, even as resources decline.

[149] Author interview #28, 25/05/2023, Geneva, Switzerland
[150] Author interview #62, 10/06/2024, online
[151] Author interview #58, 23/05/2024, online
[152] MOPAN. (2019. *MOPAN Assessment Report: World Food Programme (WFP).*

Originally envisioned as a three-year initiative meant to end after the United States had effectively distributed its food surpluses, over the decades WFP has evolved into the primary conduit through which donor states channel multilateral aid. Despite its heavy reliance on voluntary contributions, WFP stands out as the most impactful entity within the UN system and the wider humanitarian community (Lall 2023).

While few would contest WFP's primacy in the humanitarian system, the methods by which the Programme maintains its dominant position occasionally attracts words of harsh criticism. Specifically, several external observers surveyed in this project, including both practitioners in the field and experts of humanitarian action, acknowledged that WFP's success at times comes at the cost of a balanced representation of a crisis, where the complexity and multidimensionality of needs is fully accounted for and reflected in the funding choices made by donors. According to an independent expert of humanitarian affairs, in humanitarian response "*the way the humanitarian narrative is generated is from the people who have a dog in the race, a direct interest in attracting resources towards itself. WFP has been successful in framing several emergencies that may not primarily be food crises as food crises* [153]". That WFP's success at highlighting food security might at times come to the detriment of other sectors and the coherence of humanitarian response was acknowledge by a WFP senior staff member and former country director as well: "*What we see is an unbalanced response, because we make everything about food. We get more funds and so we have greater means than other partners. So, we often see beneficiaries receiving either our food basket or cash for food selling the food basket and allocating the cash to cover needs in other sectors. They're doing so*

[153] Author interview #58, 23/05/2024, online

because the other sectors are not responding at scale. But, of course, we never hear someone from the food security sector saying 'We want protection to be funded'[154]".

While the findings presented above align with the competitive issue-framing strategy outlined in hypothesis 2a, four external observers challenged the claim that WFP's operations fall exclusively within the domain of food security and that the Programme, despite its narrow mandate, does not typically expand beyond its niche[155]. They cited WFP's strong track record regarding cash assistance (as opposed to in-kind assistance) as evidence of this expansionary trend. Indeed, over the last decade, multipurpose cash and voucher assistance has emerged as one of the most efficient and popular forms of aid, accounting for more than 21% of total international humanitarian assistance in 2021. For an organization whose original mandate revolved around the distribution of U.S. surplus food production, the rise of cash assistance could be seen as a threat to the predominance of in-kind aid and an erosion of WFP's role in the humanitarian system. However, in recent years, WFP has successfully positioned itself as one of the major providers of cash and voucher assistance, alongside IFRC and UNHCR.

Three of the four interviewees mentioned above also emphasized WFP's leadership in logistics, transport, and emergency telecommunications as further evidence of the Programme's tendency to expand beyond the food security sector[156]. In addition to leading the Food Security Cluster within the Humanitarian Cluster System, WFP also serves as the lead agency for both the Logistics and Telecommunications Clusters (see Chapter 2). One external observer, a prominent figure in the humanitarian system, even suggested that WFP has effectively taken over the role of the United Nations Office for Project Services (UNOPS), the

[154] Author interview #28, 25/05/2023, Geneva, Switzerland
[155] Author interview #11, 12/12/2022, online; author interview #19, 25/01/2023, online; author interview #44, 22/11/2023, online; author interview #58, 23/05/2024, online
[156] Author interview #11, 12/12/2022, online; author interview #19, 25/01/2023, online; author interview #43, 22/11/2023, online

UN entity responsible for assisting other agencies with procurement and project implementation, in humanitarian contexts[157].

When asked about WFP's role in disbursing cash assistance and providing emergency logistics and telecommunications, WFP staff did not deny the Programme's involvement in these activities but challenged the claim that these may clash with WFP's focus on food security[158]. Cash assistance is not a sector but a modality of humanitarian assistance, complementary to in-kind food aid. WFP's leadership in logistics and telecommunications stems from decades of experience in building and expanding a supply chain capable of delivering food aid to remote, conflict-ridden, and disaster-stricken locations worldwide. According to WFP staff surveyed for this research, WFP's leadership in these areas allows it to fully exercise its comparative advantage, rooted in its specialized focus on food security. While WFP's operations and assistance modalities have evolved over the decades, its leadership has ensured that these new forms of assistance align with the Programme's reputation as the UN system's 'food champion.' Programmatic coherence centred on food security remains the foundation of WFP's competitiveness within the humanitarian system.

Figure 10: How WFP competes

Conceptual expectation	Evidence	Interview count	Examples
First-mover	*Confirming* Mentions of WFP's rapidity in response; efficiency of deployment; organizational mechanisms enabling rapid response	*Confirming* n=27	*"[WFP] is so competent in terms of logistics and delivery that it is often one the first UN perspectives on the ground[159]"* *"You know that the 72 hours are crucial, because of the attention. We know that it's like a wave coming in, and we are on it. We are ready.[160]"*
Emphasis on data gathering	*Confirming* Success of Integrated Food Security Phase Classification (IPC); rapid deployment roster to boost needs-assessment capacity on the ground	*Confirming* n=9	"*That phase [needs-assessment] from a Communications perspective is all about giving the numbers and information about the activities and the levels of funding and how we can use them to position WFP as a partner of choice[161]*"

[159] Author interview #26, 23/05/2023, Geneva, Switzerland
[160] Author interview #27, 23/05/2023, online

			"WFP, for example - I don't know if you're familiar with the OCHA joint intersectoral analysis framework, that's a new way of measuring people in need. The moment we came up with that methodology, WFP was the first to complain because up until that time, we had basically based the people in need figure on the IPC WFP assessment of people in need of food.[162]"
Emphasis on data dissemination	*Confirming* strong Communications department; Communications experts deployed globally; Emphasis on communications material tailored for donors	*Confirming* n=15	"*WFP might not be well known by the masses, but its well known by the governments; we have representatives in donor capitals everywhere, and they're good[163].*" "*In most countries of operations, we already have a Communications Specialist, with an ability to gather multimedia content. We have a coordinating team in Rome that determines what type of content we need. We also deploy more people, if need be[164]"*
Programmatic coherence/ Activities focus on sector of specialization	*Confirming* Exclusive focus on food security; active in limited number of Clusters	*Confirming* n=17	*"No matter where you put them, WFP will always find needs that are food related, and usually acute. What a surprise.[165]"*
	Disconfirming WFP expanded its activities beyond the provision of food assistance	*Disconfirming* n=4	*"[When] I was the Emergency Relief Coordinator […] I also pushed WFP to do UNHAS, logistics, cluster, telecom, et cetera, which they do as a common good[166]."*

5.3 The Winners: IOM and Competitive Horizontal Expansion

5.3.1 IOM: An overview

The International Organization for Migration (IOM) was established in 1951 as a joint initiative of the US and Belgium as the Provisional Intergovernmental Committee for the Movements of

[159] Author interview #26, 23/05/2023, Geneva, Switzerland
[160] Author interview #27, 23/05/2023, online
[161] Ibid.
[162] Author interview #16, 18/01/2023, online
[163]Author interview #28, 25/05/2023, Geneva, Switzerland
[164] Author interview #27, 23/05/2023, online
[165] Author interview #44, 22/11/2023, online, own translation from Italian
[166] Author interview #63, 07/08/2024, online

Migrants from Europe (PICMME) to help resettle people displaced by World War II. The 'Provisional' was soon dropped from its name and PICMME turned into the Intergovernmental Committee for European Migration (ICME), when it became clear that Member States' interest in regulating migration flows went well beyond the immediate aftermath of World War II (Megan Bradley, Costello, and Sherwood 2023). Over the decades, ICEM provided assistance in the resettlement of refugees, displaced persons and economic migrants within Europe and beyond: some notable examples of this efforts are its resettlement of Hungarian refugees who had fled to Austria and Yugoslavia and the assistance provided to Jewish refugees fleeing the Soviet Union in the early 1970s[167]. Most of the organization's resettlement work happened in parallel or, at times, in coordination with UNHCR, when it worked as implementing partner for the UN refugee agency, such as in the case of the resettlement of Pakistani refugees from Bangladesh and Nepal in 1971[168]. In recognition of its increasingly global role, ICEM's Council changed the Organization's name to the Intergovernmental Committee for Migration (ICM) in 1980 and once again in 1989 when ICM became the International Organization for Migration (IOM) upon the amendment and ratification of the 1953 Constitution[169].

During the 1990s, IOM experienced a significant humanitarian shift, not so much in its normative commitments, but rather in the contexts in which it operated and the services it provided to people on the move (Megan Bradley, Costello, and Sherwood 2023). It provided medical assistance to the displaced populations in former Yugoslavia, tended to demobilised soldiers in Mozambique in 1993, and provided shelter to Hondurans left homeless by hurricane Mitch in 1998[170]. Since 1997, its activities in the humanitarian sphere have been regulated by

[167] IOM. (n.d.). *IOM History*. Retrieved in December 2023 from https://www.iom.int/iom-history#:~:text=The%20International%20Organization%20for%20Migration%20(IOM)%2C%20or%20as%20it,following%20the%20Second%20World%20War.
[168] Ibid.
[169] Ibid.
[170] Ibid.

a Memorandum of Understanding with UNHCR, which aimed at promoting complementarity[171].

IOM's venturing into the humanitarian realm was not always a welcome development for other humanitarian actors, sceptical of the organization's ability to uphold humanitarian principles of independence, neutrality, impartiality, and humanity, while delivering its mandate of promoting orderly migration. IOM's accountability in humanitarian contexts is recurrently pointed out as a major concern, since its mandate is to "*to provide special assistance to migrants and for States concerned by migration, helping countries in developing specific services, search for practical solutions on all aspect of migration*[172]". This clearly ties the organization's work to the will of its member states, which becomes problematic when the considerations on the dignity of migrants and displaced people do not align well with the interests and preferences of sovereign states. While IOM delivers "*at the request of its Member States*", it is impossible to separate its mission from the humanitarian system, since humanitarian crisis is often the root cause of mass migration and displacement. IOM is therefore considered a newcomer into the humanitarian realm, who has nonetheless become a fixture of the system across crises in all regions of the world. While humanitarian organizations have been guarded regarding IOM's humanitarian role, they have also accepted and, to a certain degree, facilitated its incremental integration into the wider system of humanitarian coordination. In 2015, IOM released its first Humanitarian Policy, a document to guide IOM's work in humanitarian action. While clearly stating IOM's commitment to "*save lives, and alleviate human suffering*", it also reaffirms its accountability to its Member States, confirming

[171] UNHCR. (1997). *Memorandum of Understanding between the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees and the International Organization for Migration*. Retrieved in September 2023 from https://emergency.unhcr.org/sites/default/files/IOM-UNHCR%2C%20MoU%2C%201997.pdf

[172] Medecins Sans Frontieres. (n.d.) *The practical guide to humanitarian law: the International Organization for Migration*. Retrieved in September 2023 from https://guide-humanitarian-law.org/content/article/3/international-organization-for-migration/#:~:text=The%20IOM%20mandate%20is%20to,assistance%20to%20migrants%20in%20need.

the organization's contradictory stance over the principle of neutrality[173]. In 2016, the UNGA adopted the Agreement Concerning the Relationship Between the UN and IOM. IOM used the agreement as a basis to rename itself UN Migration and assert its 'UN-related' status, even though that was not explicitly mentioned in the agreement (Cullen, 2023). While being 'UN-related' does not amount to any official legal category, for humanitarians it has come to IOM's (implicit) acknowledgement and (partial) internalization of the humanitarian principles (Gilbert, 2023). IOM further strengthened its positioning in the humanitarian realm by securing formal participation to the Inter-Agency Standing Committee (IASC) and other humanitarian fora. When the Humanitarian Cluster System was established, IOM was assigned with the Leadership of the Camp Coordination and Camp Management Cluster (CCCM), thus cementing its operational role in crisis response on a par with other UN agencies, funds, and programmes.

Despite the continuous scrutiny and criticism, over the years IOM has grown to constitute an inherent fixture in global humanitarian governance. Nowadays, the IOM counts 175 member states and 557 field offices in more than 100 countries, where most of its 32000 staff work, with a (relatively) small headquarter presence in the UN neighbourhood in Geneva, Switzerland[174]. With the bulk of its institutional presence concentrated in the field rather than at headquarter-level, IOM is one of the most decentralised IOs in the multilateral system, operating in most sudden-onset and complex, protracted crisis scenarios around the world.

[173] IOM. *IOM's Humanitarian Policy: Principles for Humanitarian Action*. Council, 106th Session. Geneva, Switzerland: 12 October 2015. Retrieved in October 2023 from https://www.iom.int/sites/g/files/tmzbdl486/files/2018-07/IOM-Humanitarian-Policy-Principles-on-Humanitarian-Action.pdf

[174] Multilateral Organization Performance Assessment Network (MOPAN). (2023). *MOPAN Assessment of International Organization for Migration (IOM),* OECD Publishing: Paris

5.3.2 Why IOM competes

Hypothesis 1 in chapter 3 posits that inter-organizational competition persists even under conditions of niche specialization when there is a possibility that states prioritize one niche over the other. Evidence confirming Hypothesis 1 substantiates the claim that IOs are threatened by scarcity and the potential of resource reallocation despite niche specialization. Such evidence would include instances of donors demanding of the UN system to identify the most pressing needs and prioritize one sector of the humanitarian response over others, mentions of a perceived risk of losing relevance and influence in the humanitarian system within IOM itself, and interviewee observations of competition with other UN organizations.

The interviews with IOM former and current staff members (including senior management), employees of other UN organizations, donor representatives and other external observers, who have direct experience working with or in close contact to IOM on the field or at headquarter level seem to confirm that in the humanitarian system IOM is subject to competitive pressures. Together with UNHCR, IOM co-leads the Camp Coordination and Camp Management (CCCM) Cluster and is active in numerous other sectors of the humanitarian response in crisis contexts around the world. However, as a result of the escalating humanitarian needs and a decline in available aid outlined in chapter 2, securing a position at the table, whether through sectoral leadership or full membership of the UN Inter-Agency Standing Committee (IASC), does not guarantee a steady source of funding for IOM's humanitarian operations.

For most interviewees with direct experience working for or in close contact to IOM, securing sufficient funding to remain operational in humanitarian response, which nowadays accounts for 57% of IOM’s budget, represents a challenge for the organization primarily due to its

distinctive financing model[175]. Indeed, IOM's funding structure, is characterized by a substantial 92% earmarked budget, making it one of the multilateral system's entities with the smallest core budget. This assessment is also reflected in the 2023 MOPAN Report, which identifies "*IOM's financial framework, with its heavy reliance on earmarked funding [as] the primary constraint for organizational development*"[176]. According to the interviewees, over the years, IOM leadership was unsuccessful at convincing institutional donors to increase the core funding share of IOM's budget, in order to provide the organization with a modicum of predictability in terms of planning and incoming resources from year to year. Although IOM, as a UN-affiliated entity, has the right to seek funding from UN pooled mechanisms like the Central Emergency Relief Fund (CERF) and Country-Based Pooled Funds (CBPFs), the swift disbursement of these resources and their limited availability compared to *ad hoc* contributions from institutional donors make them highly sought after by all UN organizations engaged in humanitarian response. Despite its increasing prominence in humanitarian roles, IOM has not secured a consistent share of resources to sustain its global response efforts, relying heavily on *ad hoc* voluntary contributions to fund the majority of its operations.

The near-total absence of core resources makes it almost impossible for IOM's Operations and Emergencies Directorate to plan ahead and promotes a crisis-to-crisis mode of governance. This, in turn, highly empowers local and country offices, which often act as direct points of contact for institutional donors in the immediate aftermath of disasters, bypassing the Geneva headquarters[177]. Furthermore, Leading the CCCM Cluster entails coordination responsibilities that demand extra resources, increasing the organization's delivery costs. The overreliance on short-term projects as a source of funding leads IOM to adopt a 'follow the

[175] MOPAN, (2023), *MOPAN Assessment of International Organization for Migration (IOM).*
[176] Ibid., p. 28
[177] Author interview #31, 21/07/2023, online

money' approach, which leaves the organization very little room to allocate resources across its responses to different crises[178].

Another source of competitive pressure identified by interviewees derives from IOM's purported focus on migration management without a clear, mandated humanitarian role. While IOM has secured a leading role regarding global migration management thanks to its ability to deliver and maintain excellent relations with both destination and origin countries, in humanitarian affairs the organization's niche is not as secure from external interference. According to the IOM employees surveyed in this project, when seeking donor support in crisis-affected contexts, IOM must continually measure itself against more seasoned and traditionally recognized UN humanitarian organizations with established public images as reliable relief providers[179]. According to four external interviewees, this is particularly true in the juxtaposition with UNCHR given the partial overlap between IOM's mandate as the UN's global migration organization and UNHCR's exclusive claim over all humanitarian situations including refugee flows[180]. UNHCR's strong record as a major provider of humanitarian assistance and protection in situations of cross-border displacement challenges IOM's own *raison d'être* in the humanitarian realm, as the organization still lacks a comparably clear and convincing narrative about its global mandate and its role in humanitarian contexts[181].

Figure 11: Why IOM competes

Conceptual expectations	**Confirming evidence**	**Interview count**	**Example**
Scarcity + Density	*Confirming* - Scarce resources as a defining feature of the humanitarian system; - Prevalence of voluntary contributions for IOM; - Soaring humanitarian needs;	*Confirming* n=15	*"Its budget is so tightly earmarked and with such little core that IOM operates on a month-to-month planning horizon[182]"* *"IOM's financial structure hinders long-term planning[183]"* *"IOM has very little, too little core to function with a longer time horizon[184]"*

			"I've got crisis coordinators that are coordinating more than one country. Which should never happen. We are all stretched quite thin and we're all quite worried[185]."
Perceived threat to survival	*Confirming* - IOM's attempts to build more core for long term planning; - UNHCR perceived as a more legitimate humanitarian actor also programming with IDPs;	*Confirming* n= 11	*"Being largely project funding driven creates a huge dependency on donors and limits the ability to more independently drive the organization's strategic priorities[186]"* "*So there's competition within the area of the mandate, like UNHCR and IOM because they're also competing with "what's a displaced person? And where does displacement happen?" [Anything that is] trans boundary is also becoming blurred.[187]"* *"IOM has attempted to build an emergency unearmarked pot of money, but has so far failed to convince donors to fund it".* *"If we're there, if we are present and we have the capacity, it could be us or it could be somebody else.[188]"*

The table above summarizes the evidence from the interviews, which is supported by the analysis of performance assessments carried out by external institutions, such as MOPAN. Due to its funding arrangements and the uncertainty surrounding the viability of its role—stemming from the lack of a mandated humanitarian function—IOM remains an active competitor for resources in humanitarian response and views every new crisis as a golden opportunity to increase its budget and strengthen its position in the humanitarian sector. The next section illustrates what strategy IOM implements to remain competitive in the humanitarian space.

[178] MOPAN, (2023), *MOPAN Assessment of International Organization for Migration (IOM).*
[179] Author interview #5, 21/09/2022, online; author interview #30, 21/07/2023, online
[180] Author interview #14, 11//01/2023, online; author interview #63, 07/08/2024, online; author interview #58, 23/05/2024, online; author interview #17, 19/01/2023, online
[181] MOPAN. (2023). *MOPAN Assessment of International Organization for Migration (IOM).*
[182] Author interview #32, 21/07/2023, online
[183] Interview quote from MOPAN. (2023). *MOPAN Assessment of International Organization for Migration (IOM). Box 4, page 35*
[184] Author interview #24, 22/05/2023, online
[185] Author interview #31, 21/07/2023, online
[186] Interview quote from MOPAN. (2023). *MOPAN Assessment of International Organization for Migration (IOM). Box 4, page 35*
[187] Author interview #14, 11//01/2023, online
[188] Author interview #28, 25/05/2023, online

5.3.3 How IOM Competes

Hypothesis H2 (and H2b) introduced in Chapter 3 posits that the type of reactive behaviour adopted by the IO to the threat of resource reallocation depends on whether the IO can be classified as a generalist or a specialist organization. According to the classification presented in Chapter 3 (table 1) and Appendix A, IOM is a generalist organization: while its focus lies on a specific demographic (migrants) the organization plays an active role in humanitarian response, in long-term development projects, and in migration management on behalf of donor and recipient countries. IOM provides a very wide range of operations and programmes, which span from data gathering to direct delivery, research, and procurement.

H2b theorizes that a generalist IO will adopt a competitive horizontal expansion strategy, identifying specific gaps left by other humanitarian organizations and expanding its operations and programmes to fill them, even if these activities are not directly related to its organizational mandate. Evidence supporting H2b would include observations of IOM acting as a second mover, identifying sectors of the humanitarian response where other actors have not responded quickly enough, thereby expanding its operations to include services far removed from its focus on IDPs and migrants. Evidence against H2b would include instances where IOM behaved as a first mover in crisis response, limiting its operations to its Camp Management responsibilities in situations involving mixed migrant flows (refugees and IDPs) without expanding into other sectors of the humanitarian response.

The evidence gathered from interviews with IOM staff, employees of other UN organizations, donor country representatives, and independent experts in humanitarian response supports the theoretical framework outlined in Chapter 3. Due to its history and its budget model, IOM is often labelled as the project-based newcomer in the humanitarian

field[189]. Its project-based nature, coupled with the absence of a clear humanitarian and protection mandate, has led IOM to engage in crisis scenarios wherever there is a loosely defined migration and/or displacement element. In assisting member states (both origin and destination countries) with regulating migration flows in non-humanitarian settings, the organization has refined its ability to respond to *ad hoc* demands, ranging from border governance to the regulation of labour migration, from monitoring population movements to carrying out repatriations. IOM is a generalist organization, providing a wide array of services—spanning procurement, programming, planning, and implementation—across various contexts, including the humanitarian, development, and security realms.

In line with the theoretical expectations outlined in Chapter 3, the data shows that in crisis response IOM adopts a *competitive horizontal expansion* strategy to ensure that its niche remains adequately resourced to support its operations. Interviews and independent assessments of IOM's performance suggest that in crisis response, while mobilizing rapidly, the organization behaves as a second mover, entering the field shortly after larger humanitarian actors, such as WFP or UNCHR. According to one senior IOM staff member in the Department of Operations and Emergencies, this is a consequence of IOM's financing structure[190]. This view is also reported in the most recent assessment released by MOPAN[191].

Unlike other major UN humanitarian organizations, such as WFP, IOM cannot rely on a significant contingency or reserve fund to sustain the immediate phase of its response and then replenish it after receiving contributions from institutional donors. Its Migration Emergency Funding Mechanism (MEFM) has a very limited reach and has never achieved its target of USD 30 million, stabilizing at around USD 2 million[192]. Due to this limitation, IOM

[189] Author interview #5, online, 21/09/2022
[190] Author interview #31, online, 21/07/2023
[191] MOPAN. (2023). *MOPAN Assessment of International Organization for Migration (IOM)*.
[192] Ibid.

is constrained in its ability to quickly jumpstart a response in the immediate aftermath of a crisis, as it must first mobilize adequate funding. According to a governing body representative surveyed by MOPAN "*IOM is very agile because of its projectized nature, but the lack of core funding makes it difficult to quickly act on new crises. They first need to get the funding, so other organizations with more core funding can come in at an earlier stage. Once IOM has the funding, though, they are very agile and able to scale up*"[193]. IOM typically enters the humanitarian response after larger, traditional humanitarian players, which can quickly kickstart their operations using unearmarked funds collected by charging overheads to donors. As a result of this delay, by the time IOM is able to deploy its response, the framing of the crisis has already been established. In fact, during humanitarian emergencies, the narrative is often set within the first couple of days, if not within the first few hours, of the disaster's occurrence.

As the organization is not equipped to set the framing of the crisis, IOM has never invested a considerable share of resources into developing a strong communications apparatus. Differently from IOs, such as UNICEF or WFP, IOM does not target the larger public to mobilize domestic audiences and put pressure on decision-makers. As stated in DFID's 2011 Multilateral Aid Review, IOM "*has a limited ability to shape humanitarian policy*"[194]. As one senior staff member of another UN organization pointed out, *"[At IOM], there isn't a very large Global Communications Office"* preoccupied with gathering pictures from country offices and selling a story to the public[195]. Despite having excellent relations with donors, the latest MOPAN assessment highlights that the organization does not invest significantly in bilateral

[193] Ibid., Box 7, p. 45
[194] Department for International Development (DfID). *Multilateral Aid Review: International Organization for Migration (IOM).* London, UK: DfID, 2011. Retrieved in November 2023 from: https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/5a7c9fc6e5274a29d8363cd0/IOM.pdf
[195] Author interview #18, 25/01/2023, online

donor engagement, as it maintains "*a relatively small Donor Relations Division within its Department of External Relations, with only limited capacity for donor intelligence*[196]". According to an expert of humanitarian financing, liaising with donors is a responsibility of IOM country officers responding to crises:

"*In IOM's case, they don't have a big Comms department. They've got a tiny Comms department because everyone has to communicate. It's everyone's job, right? It's no longer some corporate function that's being funded out of core that does all our communications for us. It's like 'I have to communicate': the IOM representatives in the field, for example, are all getting paid out of the earmarks. They're not paid out of core budget. So, they know that they have to behave properly and do the right thing, otherwise their salary doesn't get funded. I mean, it's a hugely good incentive, right? To do that, to do the right stuff."*[197]

One of the staff members interviewed for this project pointed out that, in recent years, IOM has significantly increased the resources it devolves to knowledge management and communications in order to promote organizational coherence and promote a clearer message around the organization's mission[198]. However, the MOPAN assessment still finds that the organization is still lacking a strong "*strategic communication function to support its global advocacy*"[199].

Instead, IOM identifies gaps left unfilled by other major actors and steps in without hesitation. IOM's role as a gap-filler in humanitarian response is widely acknowledged by donors, recipients, and other UN organizations. Among the interviewees, there is strong consensus that

[196] MOPAN. (2023). *MOPAN Assessment of International Organization for Migration (IOM)., p.9*
[197] Author interview #24, 22/05/2023, online
[198] Author interview #5, 21/09/2022, online
[199] MOPAN. (2023). *MOPAN Assessment of International Organization for Migration (IOM),* p.60

IOM's flexibility and agility are its greatest strengths, enabling it to fill 'operational gaps'—a point also confirmed in the assessments and evaluations analysed in this study[200]. According to an employee of another UN organization:

"[In humanitarian response] IOM takes full advantage of being a mercenary organization by design. I've worked not for, but with IOM being my implementing partner, I've reviewed their systems, IOM is like a franchise. […] They sell their agility, their nimbleness, their ability to deliver anything. At any time."[201]

This agility partly derives from IOM's lean headquarter structure and extensive field presence[202]. Both interviewees currently working for IOM and three external experts agreed in identifying IOM's ability to consistently maintain good relations with key local and national actors. One large-donor representative in charge of maintaining relations with IOM claimed that:

"IOM is a very agile organization. They invest a lot in maintaining in-country presence. They pay a lot of attention to networking, forming relationships with local and national authorities. So when disaster strikes, they're already there, they know who to talk to and where to go. They see gaps and they fill them – no hesitation."[203]

---

[200] DfID. (2011). *Multilateral Aid Review: International Organization for Migration (IOM).*
DfID. (2013). *Multilateral Aid Review: International Organization for Migration (IOM)* update 2013. Retrieved in November 2023 from https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/5a7c08f1ed915d01ba1caba1/IOM-2013-summary-assessment-update.pdf
MOPAN. (2023). *MOPAN Assessment of International Organization for Migration (IOM);*
MOPAN. (2019). *MOPAN Assessment of International Organization for Migration (IOM)*
[201] Author interview #23, 16/05/2023, online
[202] MOPAN. (2023). *MOPAN Assessment of International Organization for Migration (IOM);*
MOPAN. (2019). *MOPAN Assessment of International Organization for Migration (IOM)*
[203] Author interview #29, 07/06/2023, Geneva, Switzerland

IOM also appears to use a higher threshold for the risk profile of its operations in humanitarian response. IOM has a long history of operating in high-risk, fragile contexts, and over time the organization has developed a strong security management and training system[204]. A senior staff member at IOM's Department of Operations and Emergencies confirmed that often IOM stands as a "*provider of last resort*" going to areas and providing services "*when nobody else is ready or willing to do it*", as in the case of the response to the 2013-2016 Ebola crisis, where IOM was at the forefront of the response in several West African countries[205].

Being accustomed to providing *ad hoc* migration management services depending on the specific requests of states means that IOM is also able to cater to a wide range of humanitarian needs during emergency response. Indeed, according to the staff member from IOM's Operations and Emergencies Department, "*The issue of migration is so broad and potentially touches upon so many things. Our areas of intervention are really, really extensive*."[206] IOM is able to quickly deploy personnel with a vast variety of expertise, because it maintains an emergency roster of staff "*who are pre-vetted and classified by speciality and can be redeployed from existing positions into new emergencies on a temporary basis*[207]". Over the years, IOM has perfected and streamlined its procurement processes, as well as its logistics and contracting. One external expert noted that, in terms of procurement, IOM has become more effective than UNOPS itself[208]. Differently from most UN humanitarian organizations on the ground, IOM is first and foremost an implementer: as stated by a high-level IOM staff member, "*Getting things done is in our DNA […] we have local partners, but no subcontractors […] we're not just present with the flag, we are present on the ground*"[209].

[204] DfID. (2011). *Multilateral Aid Review: International Organization for Migration (IOM).*
[205] Author interview #31, 21/07/2023, online
[206] Author interview #31, 21/07/2023, online
[207] MOPAN. (2023). *MOPAN Assessment of International Organization for Migration (IOM), p. 44*
[208] Author interview #58, 23/05/2024, online
[209] Ibid.

This *modus operandi* has attracted strong criticism from fellow UN organizations that have a more specialized approach to humanitarian response. There is a widespread perception that IOM seeks out financial resources, at the expense of implementing a response that is in line with its comparative advantage and sectoral expertise[210]. As stated by one external expert, "*IOM collects money wherever it can, with no clear identity*"[211]. Indeed, nowadays, IOM response to humanitarian emergencies stretches well beyond the boundaries of CCCM. IOM has also achieved 'partner status' to the Shelter, WASH, and Health Clusters. In 2022, IOM was the highest recipient of Shelter funding, a Cluster led by UNHCR. In the same year, IOM was also the second largest provider of WASH services in emergencies after UNICEF[212]. This is perceived as a threat by other UN organizations historically leading the response in those sectors.

While IOM's mandate is broad, oftentimes the link of its operations and projects to migration is all but clear. A former employee of IOM with pluriannual experience in emergency response implementation, stated that:

"Sometimes, I had a hard time figuring out the link between our [IOM's] work and the migration mandate. We would re-build a road in the middle of [names capital city affected by natural disaster] or a basketball field. There was no displacement. UNDP should have taken care of that – but we were there first, I guess"[213]

[210] MOPAN. (2023). *MOPAN Assessment of International Organization for Migration (IOM);* MOPAN. (2019). *MOPAN Assessment of International Organization for Migration (IOM)*
[211] Author interview #44, 22/12/2023, online, own translation from Italian
[212]IOM Standing Committee, Day 2, Item 12 'Report on IOM's response to migration crises', 28/06/2023
[213] Author interview #21, 21/04/2023, online

An employee working for a UN fund compared IOM to a 'weed' that spreads to every sector of humanitarian action and compromises the quality of the final response[214]. According to another interviewee from a UN programme:

"There's this competition with these newcomer agencies… For instance, IOM that does everything. IOM - its name, its mandate is migration, but they get into sexually reproductive health. They get into socioeconomic integration or development. They rebuild stuff. They get into project implementation no matter what … HIV, AIDS … they get into pretty much anything."[215]

Other stakeholders in the humanitarian system noted that while IOM's project delivery is agile and rapid, the quality of the service delivered is sometimes suboptimal. The fast turnover of employees and IOM's strong reliance on temporary and local staff means that the organization suffers from a loss in institutional memory and is not always able to replicate the lessons learned in other crisis contexts. According to two representatives of peer organizations:

"IOM is a large organization that prioritizes fundraising by chasing work regardless of its internal expertise. Very often that work either duplicates the work of other agencies or could be done better by other agencies with clearer mandates and experience in the given area. In its own area of expertise (migration) the quality of IOM's work is high. This is often not the case in work areas where IOM has limited expertise and no strong mandate."[216]

[214] Author interview #41, online, 13/10/2023, own translation from French
[215] Author interview #17, online, 19/01/2023
[216] Interview excerpt from MOPAN Assessment of IOM, 2023., p. 45

"The organization functions mostly through projects that don't necessarily fit into an overall programme or cohesive strategy. This has an impact on staff retention and on programme quality."[217]

Despite the criticism, IOM's role in crisis response has continued to grow over the past decades, partly because key decisionmakers in humanitarian emergencies often prioritize speed over quality in the response. Some interviewees also noted that this trend is due to IOM's improved ability in recent years to advocate for its role in the humanitarian realm[218]. These observations stand in contradiction with hypothesis 2b on generalist IOs and competitive horizontal expansion. Both IOM employees pointed out that IOM has recently developed tools to inform the narrative of crises: in particular, the Displacement Tracking Matrix (DTM) is now a key tool informing UN-wide reporting on the development of crises around the world. The DTM is not without its own challenges and controversies, but it has been used to compile 86% of the Humanitarian Needs Overviews (HNOs) and Humanitarian Response Plans (HRPs) compiled in 2022 (Megan Bradley, Costello, and Sherwood 2023). Still, as mentioned earlier in this section, IOM does not invest in communications as significantly as other traditional humanitarian actors, such as UNICEF or the WFP, which often means that the organization is unable to leverage the DTM as a tool for capturing the attention of donors. When it comes to fundraising, country offices are left to their own devices, with little or no support from headquarters, whose ad-hoc assistance is covered by (some of) the earmarked funds a country office manages to secure for a particular response[219]. In addition, since it lacks contingency funding, IOM is only able to join the response at a later stage when other major actors have already significantly influenced the framing of the crisis.

[217] Ibid., p. 45
[218] Author interview #5, 21/09/2022, online; author interview #31, 21/07/2023, online
[219] Author interview #62, 10/06/2024, online

Figure 12: How IOM competes

Conceptual expectation (Competitive issue framing)	**Confirming evidence**	**Interview count**	**Example**
Second-mover (identifying gaps)	*Confirming*: • IOM entering the crisis response after larger humanitarian actors • Lack of mechanisms to ensure pre-positioning of resources	n=6	*"The preparedness also involves [the] stockpiling [and] prepositioning of relief items and basically having a pipeline full of assistance that you can access and deploy immediately at the onset of a crisis. [Since] we don't have a lot of that of voluntary contributions or unearmarked funding, it is one of our limits. […] we're not, I think, as well prepared or set up as some of the some of the really big [agencies], the WFPs or UNICEFs of the world.[220]"*
Gap-filler role	*Confirming*: • Flexibility • Strong mechanisms to ensure deployment of wide array of competences • Risk-acceptance • 'Doer' reputation	n=16	*"IOM feels quite agile at capturing opportunities. Even though we have the Clusters there are often gaps in the response to fill[221]."* "*Sometimes we are the responder of last resort. Nobody's ready or willing to do it. The Ebola crisis is an excellent example of this, where basically IOM was at the front line of the Ebola crisis. I'm going back almost 10 years. For obvious reasons, nobody wanted to touch it, because it was Ebola. There was basically no support, not just for the affected people, but for people that would be trying to assist them - really, really nobody else wanted to do it.* *And we stepped up to that. And I think that what happens when we assume those kinds of responsibility or responses, they are incredible opportunities for internal growth and development of the organization.*[222]" *"IOM is very dynamic. It always positions itself and its strategies to what is best needed by the host country[223]."*

[220] Author interview #31, 21/07/2023, online
[221] Author interview #16, 18/01/2023, online
[222] Author interview #31, 21/07/2023, online
[223] Interview excerpt from MOPAN Assessment of IOM, 2023. Box 3, p.33

Programmatic expansion beyond original mandate	*Confirming*: • Diversity in types of programmes covered in different settings • Operations carried out in several other clusters than the one led by IOM (CCCM) • No coherent narrative	n=13	*"It seems to me that IOM's funding and budgeting provides incentives for broadening activities to attract funding rather than focusing on some strategic areas of operation. I think budget reform, and securing a larger share of unearmarked funding, is key to address this[224]."* *"When it comes to IDPs or it comes to refugees, big competition between IOM and UNHCR, but because IOM has no boundaries, they could get into other things. This competition follows the money, meaning sometimes it's caused by the donors themselves. The donors give IOM 2 million and then they stretch it into all sorts of … sometimes [for] the donors, it's easier to give everything to one agency or to split it into two, rather than to give one bit to the recovery agency, one bit … to split it into different agencies[225]."*

Figure 12 summarizes the evidence from the interviews, which is supported by the analysis of performance assessments carried out by independent bodies and donor states. IOM's generalist nature deriving from a broadly defined migration mandate coupled with its financial structure leads to a projectized set-up prioritizing short-term delivery and encouraging a crisis-to-crisis mindset (Megan Bradley 2017). As such, in humanitarian response, where available resources are always scarce, the IOM adopts a competitive horizontal expansion strategy and plays a role of operational gap filler, even in sectors that are well-removed from its original mandate. This turned out to be a winning strategy. Since becoming an UN-related agency in 2016, IOM has almost tripled the amount of humanitarian funding received. Since 2019, it has also consistently ranked as the fourth largest recipient of humanitarian funding among the UN organizations involved in the Cluster System receiving more than USD $1.6 billion in 2023[226]. Once considered the newcomer and underdog of the competitive humanitarian marketplace, IOM has become one of its most successful players. The next section offers a comprehensive discussion of what it means to emerge as a 'winner' in the humanitarian space.

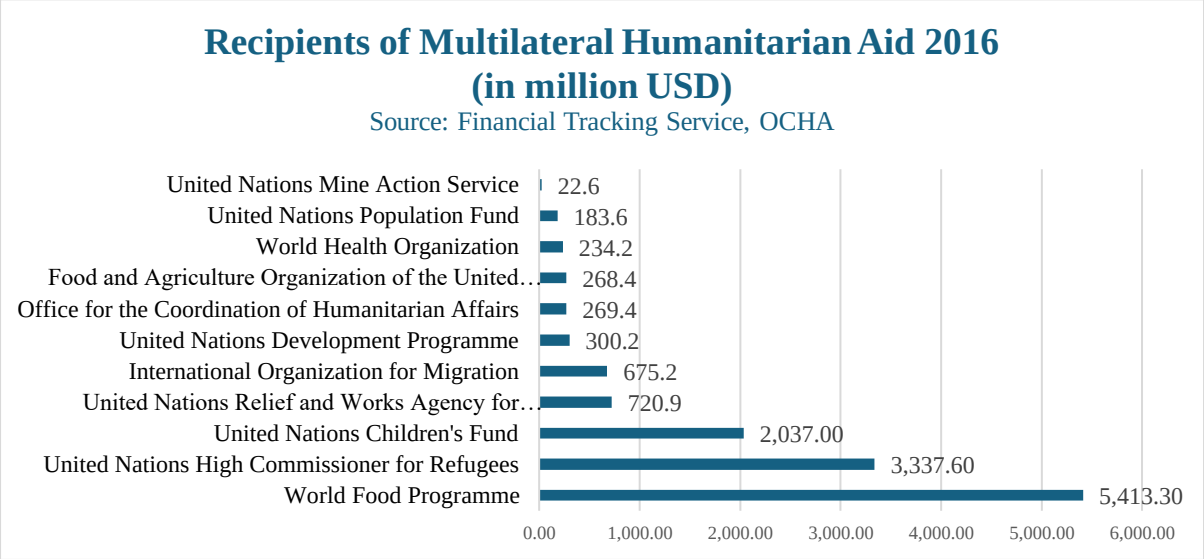
[224] Interview excerpt from MOPAN Assessment of IOM, 2023. Box 4, p.35
[225] Author interview #6, 27/09/2022, online
[226] Financial Tracking Service. *Data visualization tool*. Retrieved in June 2024 from https://fts.unocha.org/home/2024/powerbi

5.4 Winning the competition: A glance at WFP's and IOM's humanitarian funding record

So far, the chapter has illustrated how both WFP and IOM successfully implement different competitive strategies to secure resources in a highly competitive, densely populated environment, such as the humanitarian policy space. The extent of WFP and IOM's success can be gauged by considering both the proportion of funding they receive relative to their total annual requests, and by comparing their funding records with those of other UN organizations involved in humanitarian affairs.

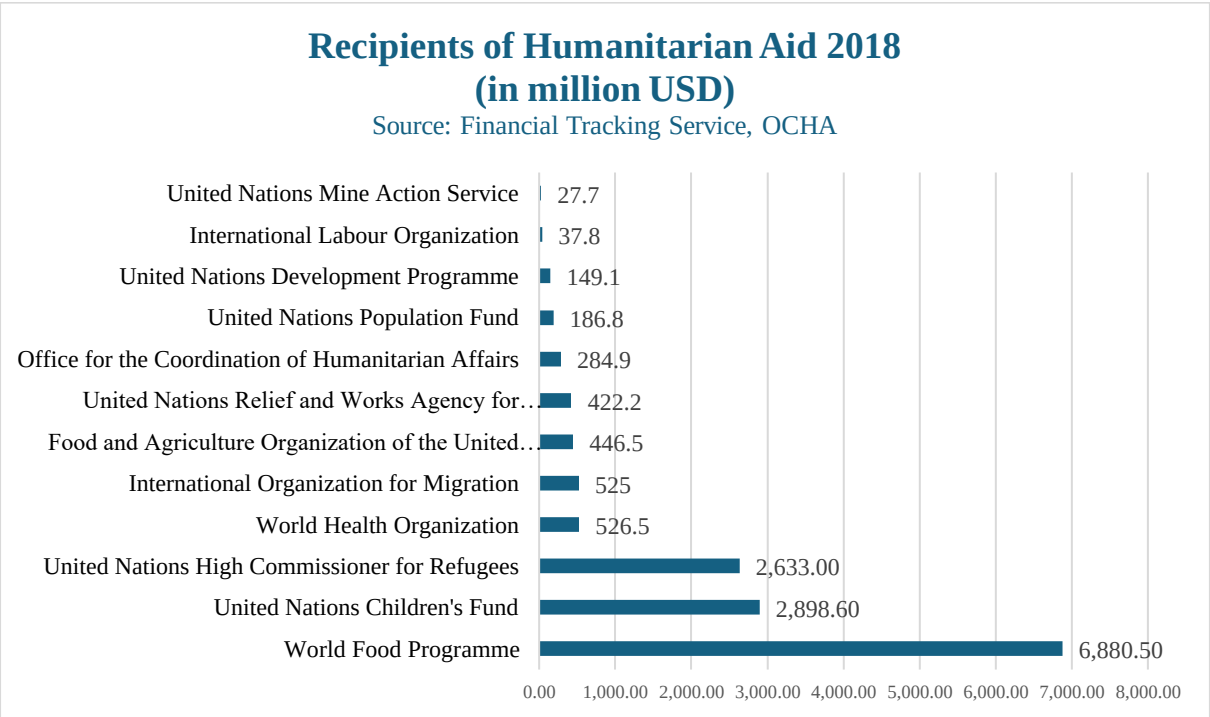
This section focuses on the funding records of WFP and IOM for 2016—the year of the World Humanitarian Summit (WHS) and the Grand Bargain—2018, two years after the WHS when some of the coordination innovations introduced at the summit were implemented, and 2022, two years after the Covid-19 pandemic. When considering funding flows to both organizations from 2016 to 2022, as reported by OCHA's Financial Tracking System, WFP and IOM consistently rank among the top recipients. In 2016, the World Food Programme was the largest recipient of multilateral humanitarian aid, receiving more than $5 billion, or 23.8% of the total disbursed by donors to international humanitarian organizations, both within and outside the UN system. In the same year, IOM, having released its humanitarian policy in 2015, received 3% of total multilateral humanitarian aid, or $675.2 million, ranking as the 6th organization overall and the 5th UN entity in terms of funding received, following the three 'humanitarian big' (WFP, UNHCR, and UNICEF) and the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine (UNRWA).

Figure 13: Top recipients of multilateral humanitarian aid 2016



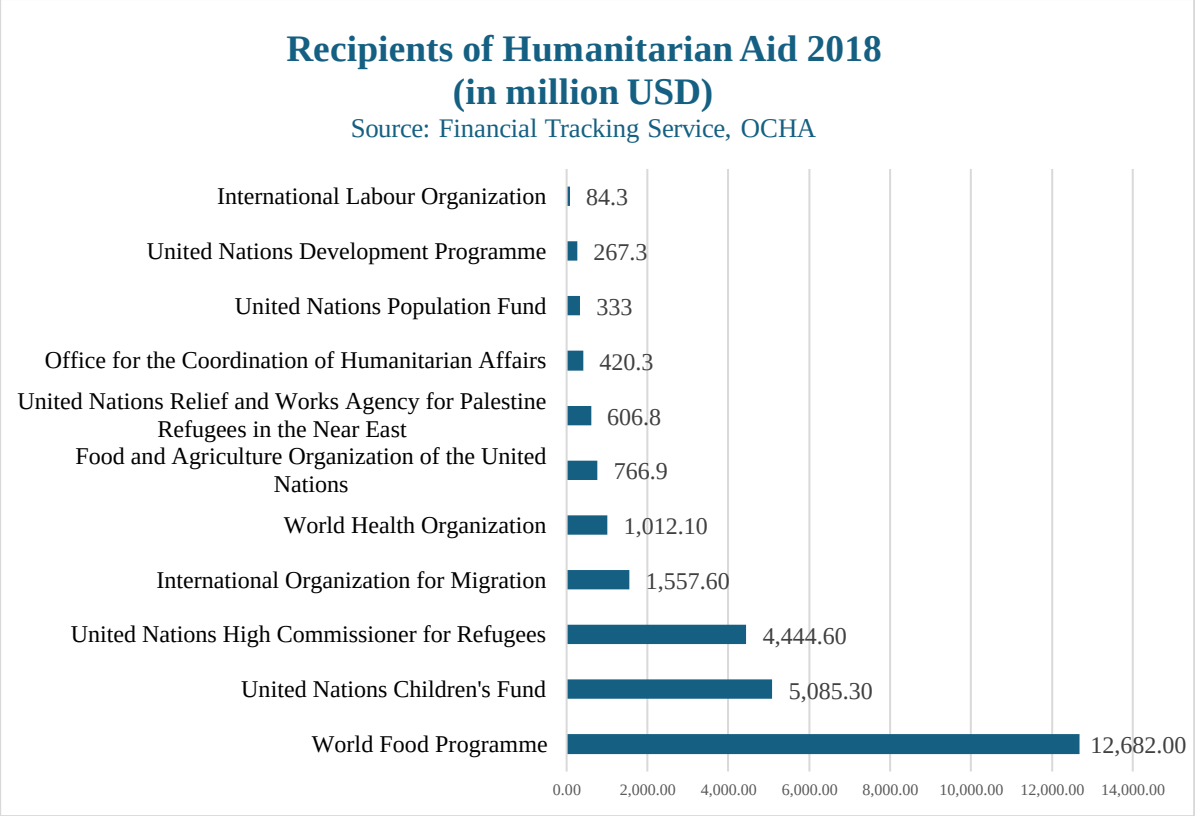
In 2018, both WFP and IOM scored similar results. WFP alone secured $6.9 billion or 26.9% of total multilateral humanitarian aid. IOM secured 2% of humanitarian ODA, for a total of $525 million. Both WFP and IOM maintained their position as respectively first and fifth most funded UN entities, even though IOM's share out of total funding declined slightly from 2016.

Figure 14: Top recipients of multilateral humanitarian aid 2018



In 2022, WFP received an unprecedented USD12.7 billion accounting for more than 30% of total multilateral humanitarian aid. In 2021, IOM surpassed the World Health Organization to become the 4th most funded organization of the UN system and the following year it secured 3.8% of the total or approximately USD1.6 billion, surpassing the USD1 billion threshold for the first time in the history of the organization.

Figure 15: Top recipients of multilateral humanitarian aid 2022



As an indication of the different strategies implemented by WFP and IOM to remain competitive and secure scarce resources one can consider how the funding received by each organization was distributed across sectors of the humanitarian response[227]:

[227] Source: OCHA Financial Tracking Service. *Data Visualization Tool*. https://fts.unocha.org/home/2024/powerbi

Figure 16: WFP funding by sector 2016

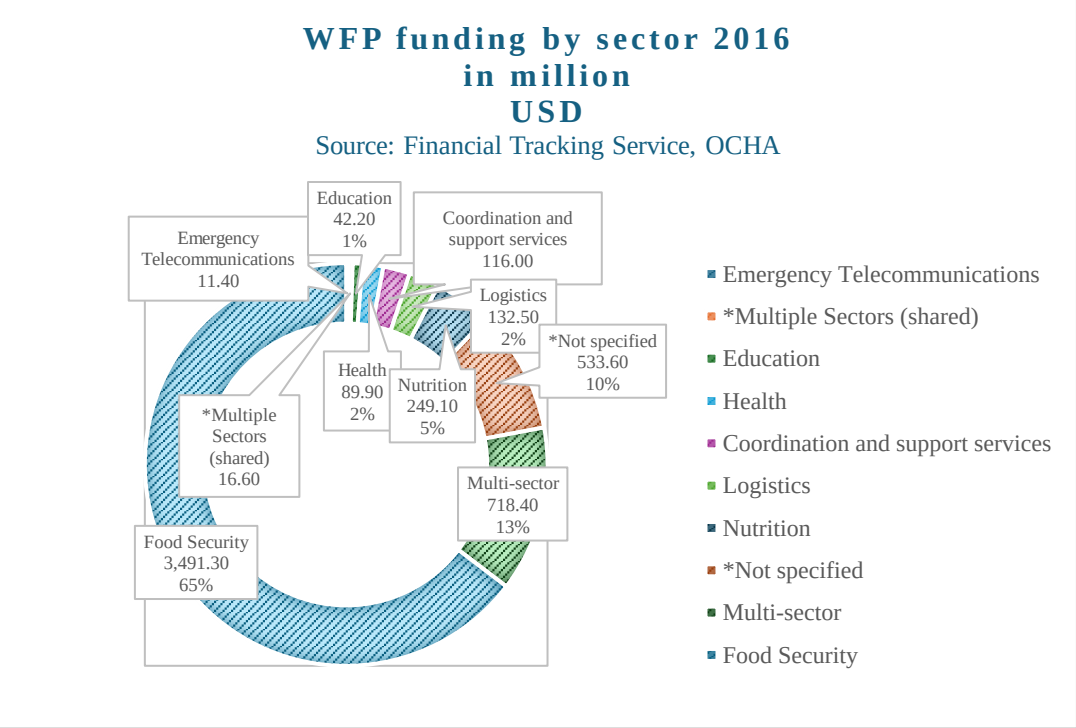


Figure 17: WFP funding by sector 2018

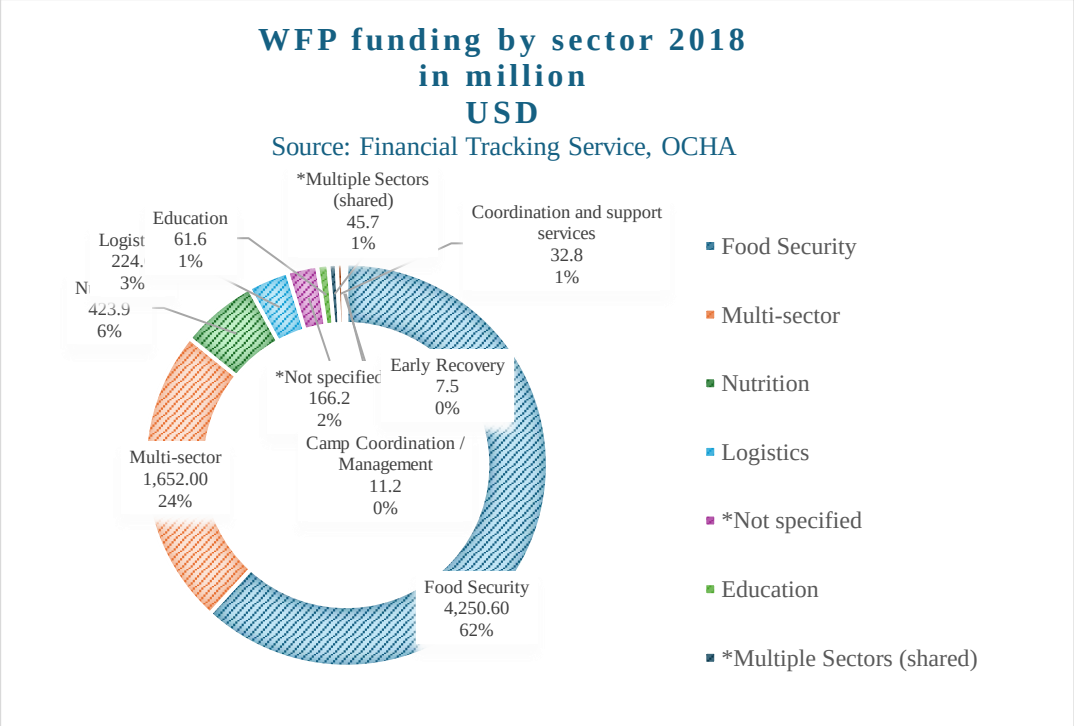
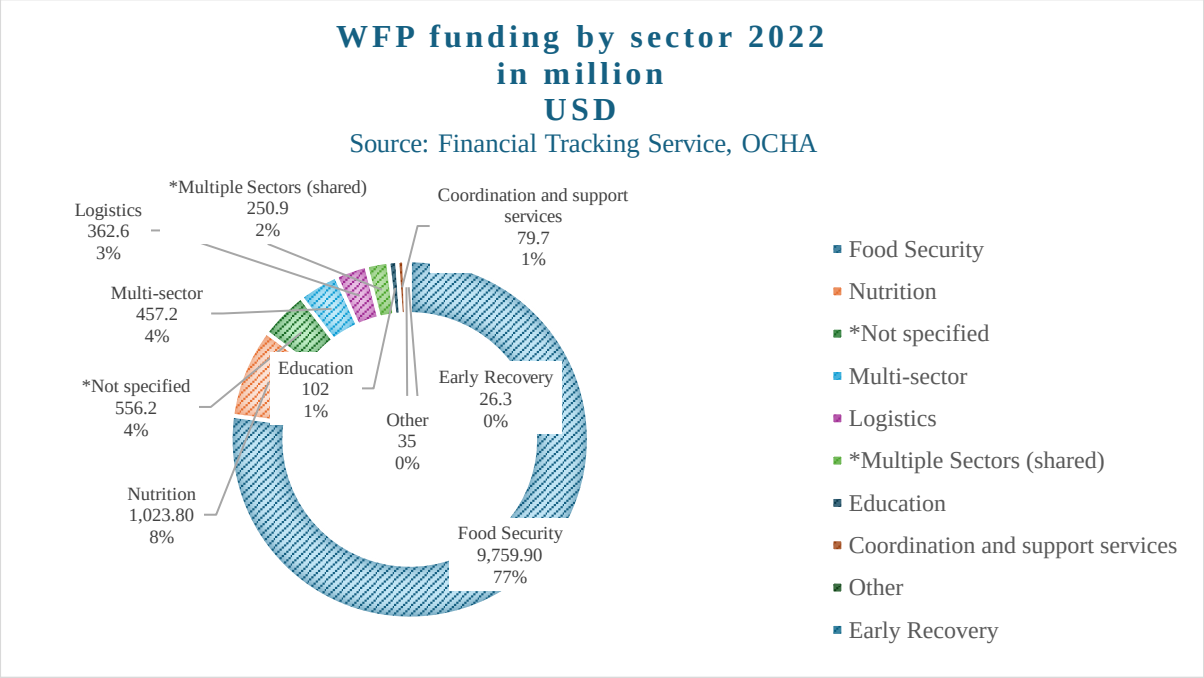


Figure 18: WFP funding by sector 2022



Figures 16 to 18 provide an overview of the top 10 sectors for WFP operations and programming for 2016, 2018, and 2022. For all years, food security remains WFP's primary sector of activity capturing more than 60% of the total funding received by the Programme and peaking at 76.9% in 2022. When considering funding for the sectors with a strong thematic/ operational overlap where WFP holds Cluster (co-)leadership responsibilities (i.e. Nutrition, Logistics, Emergency telecommunications), the funding captures almost or above 70% of its total funding for all years considered.

Figures 19 to 21 represent the top 10 sectors where IOM concentrates its activities for the same years[228].

[228] Source: OCHA Financial Tracking Service. *Data Visualization Tool*. https://fts.unocha.org/home/2024/powerbi

Figure 19: IOM funding by sector 2016

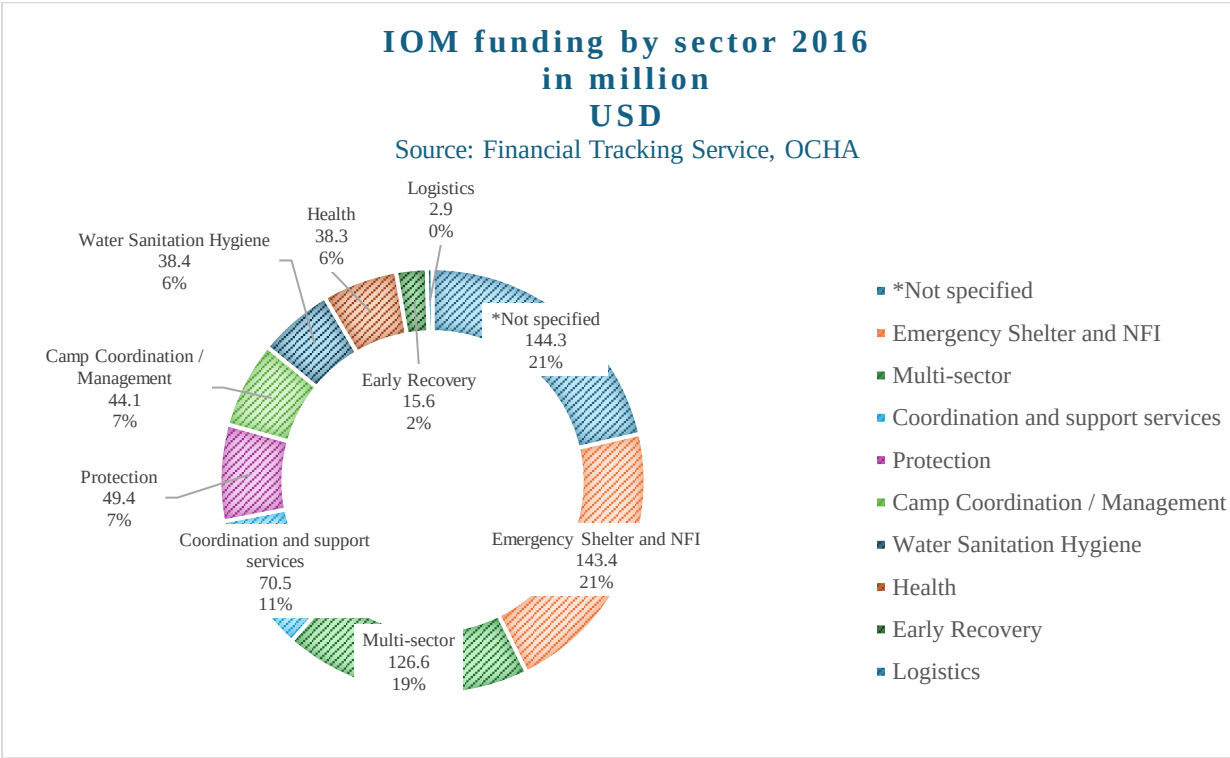


Figure 20: IOM funding by sector 2018

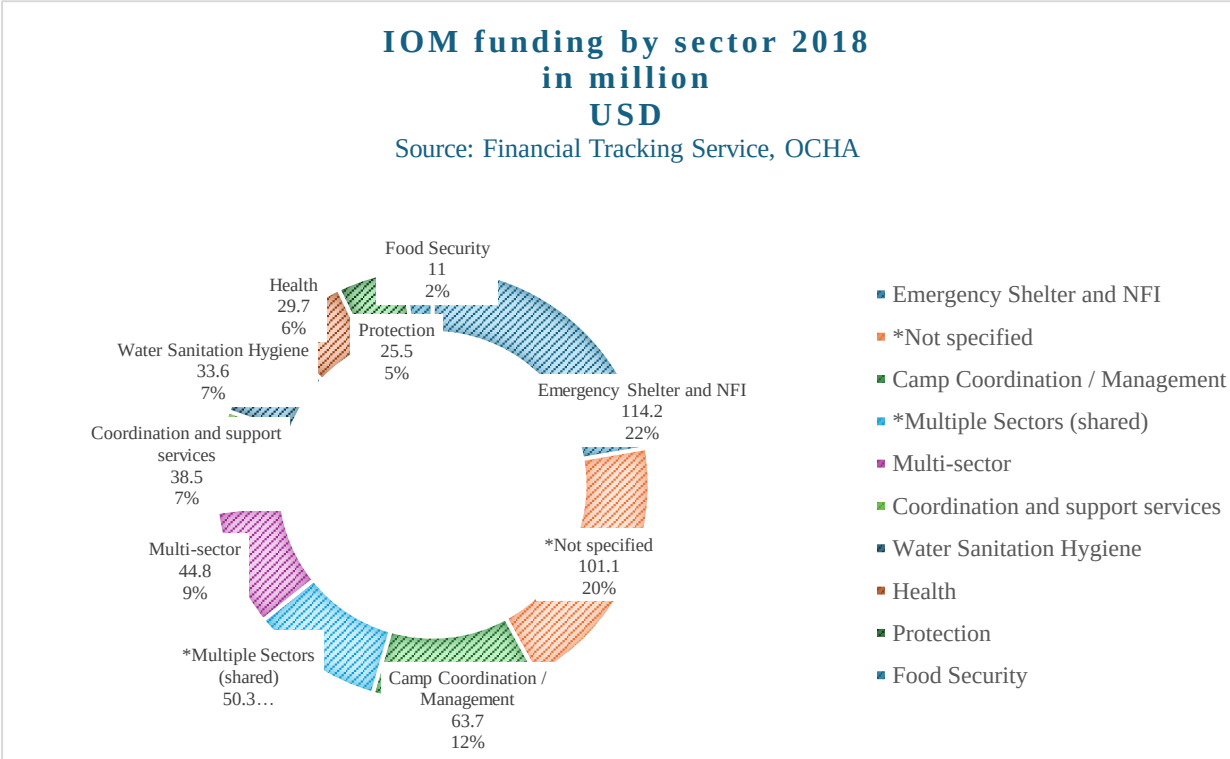
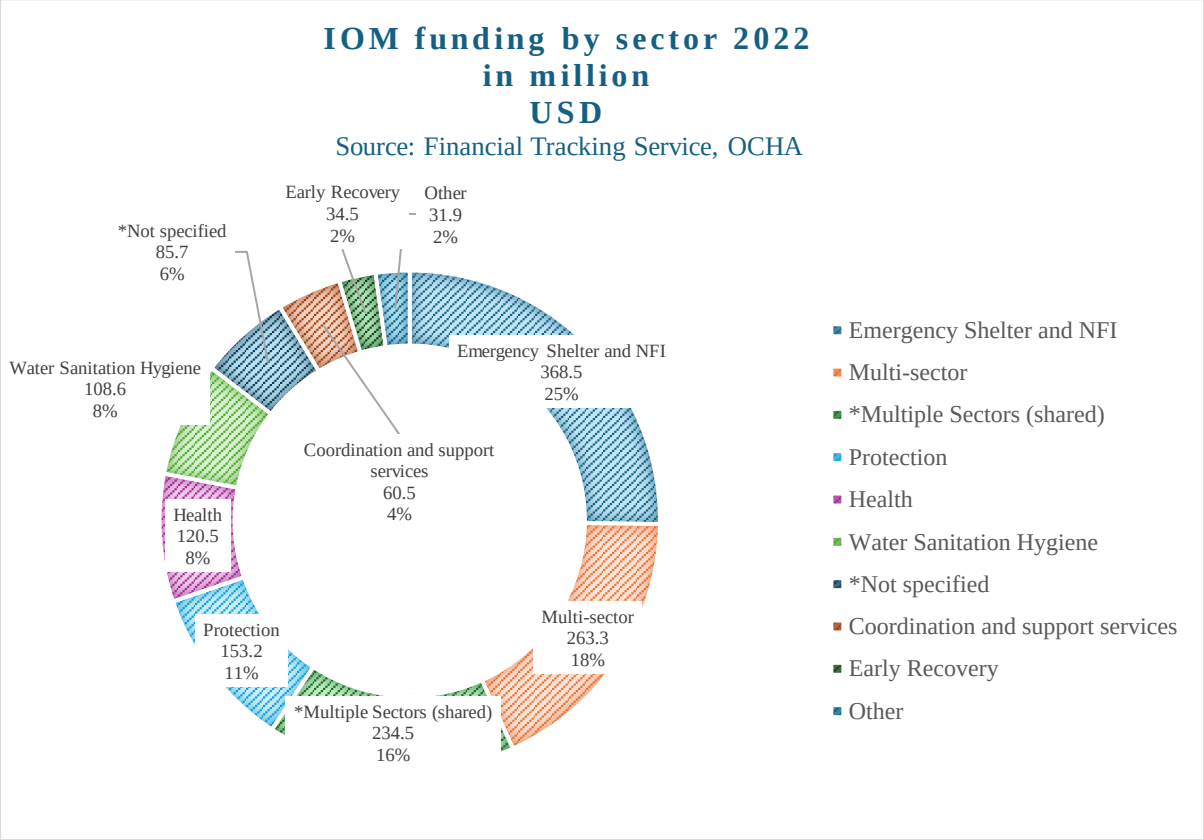


Figure 21: IOM funding by sector 2022



Compared to WFP, IOM's activities and the resources allocated to sustain them are more distributed across different sectors beyond the Camp Coordination and Camp Management (CCCM) Cluster, where it holds leadership responsibilities. Notably, in 2022, the CCCM Cluster did not rank among its top 10 sectors in terms of funding received. Emergency shelter and the provision of non-food items (NFIs) is the most significant sector of IOM's humanitarian activities in terms of funding, receiving more than 21% of total humanitarian ODA to IOM for all three years considered. IOM describes this category as encompassing a wide range of activities that are "*context-driven, rely on IOM's operational presence and cross-sectoral activities, and vary depending on the different stages of the response*."[229]

[229] IOM Emergency Manual. November 2023. *Shelter and NFI*. Retrieved in December 2023 from https://emergencymanual.iom.int

Interestingly, for all three years, a significant share of resources was allocated to activities falling either under the 'Not specified' or the multi-sector categories (40% in 2016, 37% in 2018, and 37.3% in 2022). IOM is also active in a range of sectors not thematically linked to global migration and displacement, such as WASH, Health, and Early Recovery.

Figure 22: Funding coverage per sector 2016, 2018, 2022

Year	Global Sector	GHO Funding (USD)	GHO Requirements (USD)	GHO Coverage	Unmet GHO Requirements (USD)
2016	Logistics	123.9M	322.5M	38.4%	186.4M
2016	Food Security	4,847.7M	4,847.7M	57.7%	1,726.1M
2016	Camp Coordination /Management	57.7M	124.0M	43.9%	66.0M
2018	Logistics	222.0M	410.4M	54.1%	198.3M
2018	Food Security	4,769.2M	7,277.2M	65.5%	2,507.9M
2018	Camp Coordination/ Management	93.9M	292.2M	32.1%	198.3M
2022	Logistics	410.4M	617.3M	66.4%	207.9M
2022	Food Security	7,277.2M	19,745.1M	73.3%	7,749.8M
2022	Camp Coordination/ Management	68.0M	390.0M	17.4%	321.9M

While the World Food Programme (WFP) and the International Organization for Migration (IOM) fare well in terms of absolute funding compared to several other UN organizations, the picture is less positive when considering their annual sectoral requirements and the corresponding share of met and unmet needs. Figure 22 provides an overview for the years 2016, 2018, and 2022[230]. Despite being the best-funded organization within the UN system, the WFP, which is responsible for food security, leads a sector where, on average, almost 40% of the annual requirements remain unmet.

[230] Source: OCHA Financial Tracking Service. *Data Visualization Tool*. https://fts.unocha.org/home/2024/powerbi

In the funding rankings, the IOM is fourth, trailing significantly behind the Big Three (WFP, UNHCR, and UNICEF), but it is still better funded than other organizations such as the UNDP. However, in its sector of responsibility within the Cluster System, CCCM, as well as in Emergency Shelter and NFI—which include a wide range of emergency activities often handled by the IOM—the share of unmet requirements remains high, well above 50%. In 2022, only 17.4% of global needs for CCCM were covered.

Both WFP and IOM consistently rank among the top recipients of multilateral humanitarian funding, both in absolute terms and relative to other UN organizations. However, over the years, fluctuations in the proportion of total funding received by these agencies have occurred, reflecting donor fatigue, rising humanitarian needs, and an increasing number of actors entering the field. Given their heavy reliance on voluntary earmarked contributions, it is unsurprising that both organizations remain highly competitive in crisis response, albeit in different ways.

5.5 Conclusion

The humanitarian system is often described as a competitive environment where numerous actors struggle to secure visibility and resources for their operations in a world of rising needs and shrinking funding. In this context, some IOs fare better than others, even within the UN family. This chapter highlights WFP and IOM as illustrative examples of IOs that are highly competitive and more successful than others at securing scarce humanitarian funding to support crisis response activities. Originally designed to distribute agricultural surpluses for long-term development projects, WFP's current focus is predominantly humanitarian. Today, the Programme is widely regarded as the UN's largest and most successful humanitarian actor.

In contrast, IOM, the UN's global migration agency, lacks an explicit humanitarian mandate and only introduced its humanitarian policy in 2015. Although often seen as an outsider in the humanitarian realm, IOM's diverse operational capabilities have enabled it as a key actor in global crisis response.

Both WFP and IOM rely almost entirely on voluntary earmarked contributions, with only approximately 6% of their total budgets coming from core funding[231]. This funding uncertainty makes both organizations sensitive to the risk of scarce resources being diverted to other actors within the humanitarian space.

As a specialist organization, WFP employs a competitive issue-framing strategy, shaping the narrative around crises to highlight the food security dimension, which it is best equipped to address. This approach reinforces its reputation as *"the only agency capable of delivering emergency food assistance in difficult and often dangerous environments*[232]". On the other hand, IOM, a generalist organization without a strong sectoral or thematic comparative advantage, uses a competitive horizontal expansion strategy to fill gaps in crisis responses and solidify its 'doer' status within the UN system.

While both IOs consistently rank among the top recipients of multilateral humanitarian aid, they are not immune to the systemic funding pressures that characterize the humanitarian landscape. Given their heavy reliance on voluntary (earmarked) contributions, it is unsurprising that both organizations remain highly competitive in crisis response—albeit in different

[231] UN programmes and funds, including WFP, do not receive assessed contributions. Between 2011 and 2023, unearmarked contributions accounted for only 5 to 7% of WFP's total annual revenue. In contrast, IOM receives assessed contributions from its member states, but these represented just 2 to 3% of its total annual revenue during the same period and were primarily allocated to headquarters operations and staff salaries. Additionally, unearmarked contributions from donor states to IOM averaged only 1% of its annual revenue during this time. (UN System Chief Executives Board for Coordination, *Financial Statistics: Revenue by Entity*. Retrieved in September 2024 from https://unsceb.org/fs-revenue-agency)

[232] DfID. (2011). *Multilateral Aid Review: World Food Programme (WFP)*. Retrieved in April 2023 from: https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/5a7b9cdaed915d4147621840/wfp.pdf

ways—since securing resources for today’s crisis does not guarantee funding for the next emergency. The next chapter will examine the United Nations Development Programme, one of the 'losers' in the humanitarian marketplace.

Chapter 6

Losing the Competition: The United Nations Development Programme (UNDP)

6.1 Introduction

After months of attending humanitarian briefings and writing reports for the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the Geneva-based intern has likely realized that not all UN organizations hold equal significance in the humanitarian sphere. At the latest meeting she attended—a briefing session between a working group of the Inter-Agency Standing Committee (IASC) and the largest humanitarian donors—the intern noticed that not all UN organizations leading a response Cluster participated in the meeting. For instance, the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), which leads the Early Recovery Cluster focused on infrastructure and livelihood restoration, was notably absent. This observation highlights the different trajectories followed by international organizations in humanitarian affairs. While some appear to be at the forefront of every crisis response, others struggle to justify their involvement. Ultimately, all seek to secure their share of scarce resources, with varying degrees of success.

Under conditions of scarcity, securing sufficient funding for an IO to initiate operations in the aftermath of a humanitarian emergency becomes a zero-sum game, where success for some organizations means others remain under-funded. The previous chapter illustrated successful cases of both a traditional humanitarian IO, the World Food Programme (WFP), and a newer entrant to the humanitarian system, the International Organization for Migration (IOM). This

chapter will instead consider the case of UNDP, an IO that has struggled over the years to establish itself as a major player of the humanitarian system.

UNDP's trajectory in the humanitarian regime is noteworthy. As the development arm of the UN system, during the late 1990s and early 2000s, the UNDP leadership dedicated significant time and resources to carve out a role in humanitarian response. It advocated for Early Recovery as essential for ensuring the long-term sustainability of international responses to humanitarian crises. UNDP's efforts were remarkably successful, leading to the official recognition of Early Recovery as one of the sectors within the UN Humanitarian Cluster System. Moreover, despite initially being viewed as an outsider in humanitarian affairs, UNDP also managed to secure a pivotal role within the broader UN system and in humanitarian response. In the early 2000s, UNDP representatives in-country began serving as UN Resident Coordinators (RC), and subsequently as Humanitarian Coordinators (HC). However, recent years have revealed that UNDP's involvement in humanitarian response remains marginal at best. It primarily offers policy advice to governments in contexts where relations with national authorities are feasible and plays a limited operational role, attempting to act as a gap-filler in broader response efforts. Experts surveyed in this thesis almost unanimously identified UNDP as the least competitive among all UN agencies engaged in humanitarian response (UNFPA and UN Women, both relatively new to the humanitarian system, were also mentioned). Given UNDP's strong initial position within the humanitarian system, its inability to establish a significant presence in humanitarian responses globally and to secure consistent funding for its operations is puzzling and deserving of further investigation.

The chapter delves into the case of UNDP examining a scenario where, under conditions of niche specialization and resource scarcity, the IO under consideration did *not* engage in direct

competition with other organizations reliant on the same pool of resources. While this may seem contradictory to the theoretical expectations outlined in Chapter 3, the analysis of the UNDP case reveals that the anticipated threat of niche substitution, necessary to prompt a competitive response, was not as acute for this IO. Until 2018, UNDP's in-country representatives automatically served as the UN Humanitarian Coordinator, representing the entire UN system and wielding significant decision-making power in coordination, advocacy, and financing matters in all international humanitarian responses. This dual role within the UN humanitarian system, established before the inception of the Humanitarian Cluster Approach (see chapter 2), ensured UNDP's consistent participation and influence in crisis responses for almost two decades. Since UNDP in-country representatives were regularly involved in key humanitarian meetings and negotiations globally, the organization never invested in defining a strategy to remain competitive within the humanitarian arena. Hypothesis 2 of the theoretical framework posits that organizational type (either generalist or specialist) dictates the competitive behaviour adopted by an IO under conditions of scarcity despite niche specialization. According to hypothesis H2b, UNDP, as a generalist IO with a very vast array of capabilities deriving from the broad mandate bestowed by its member state, is expected to resort to competitive horizontal expansion. However, in the absence of a perceived threat to its survival, UNDP has repeatedly failed over the years to seize opportunities to expand its programming offer and solidify its role in the humanitarian sector.

The chapter is structured as follows. First, it offers a concise history of the United Nations Development Programme, highlighting its gradual entry into the humanitarian sphere as a strategic move to contend with stronger competitors in the development sector, whose focus was also on poverty eradication. Despite lacking a clear humanitarian mandate, UNDP attained a significant position in humanitarian response by spearheading the Early Recovery Cluster,

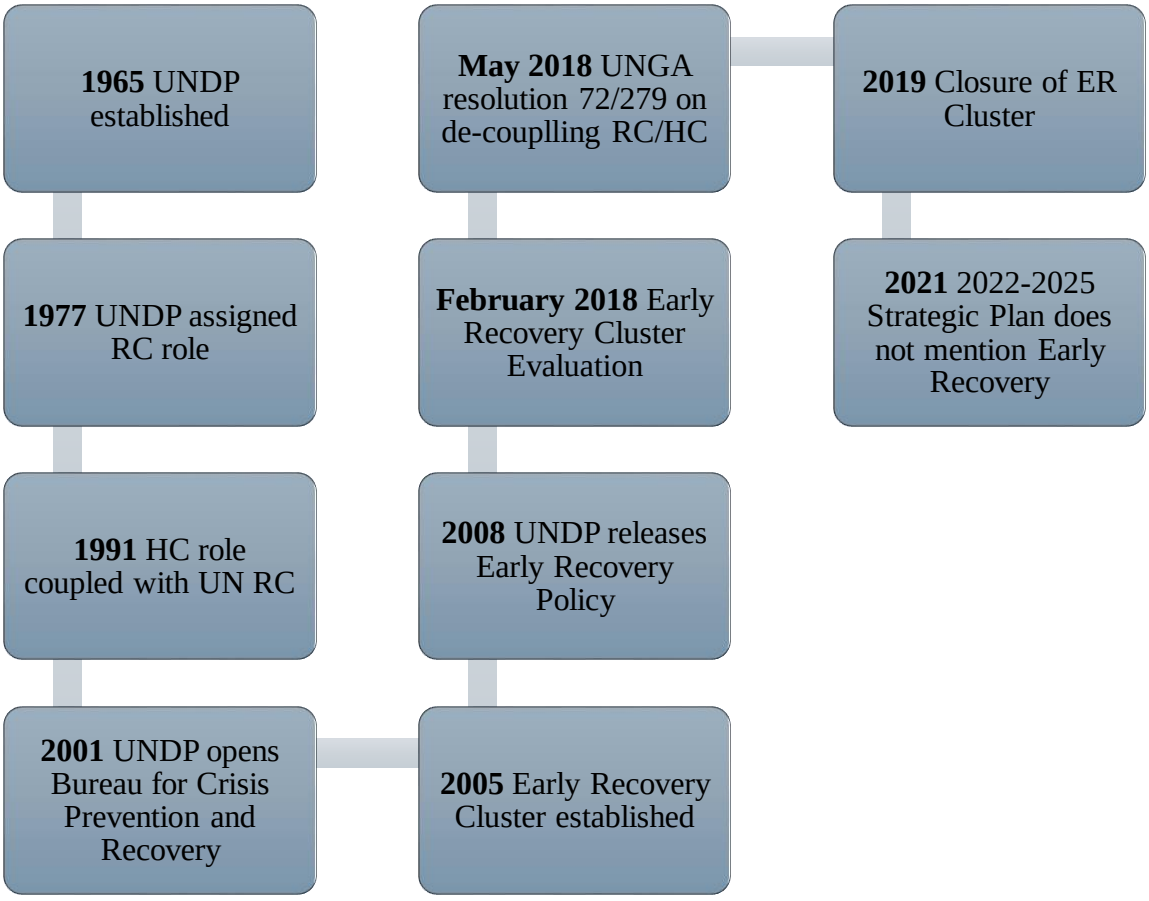
the sector responsible for the restoration of critical infrastructure, and by serving as the in-country UN Resident Coordinator/ Humanitarian Coordinator, the highest-ranking UN representative within a country, where a humanitarian crisis is unfolding. Second, the chapter examines why UNDP failed to compete, amidst a crowded humanitarian space and ever-decreasing resources allocated to humanitarian responses. It then delves into how UNDP failed to implement a competitive strategy and then lost its advantageous position within the humanitarian system. The last section presents evidence of UNDP's failure to compete, operationalized in terms of decreasing funding, illustrating its gradual exclusion from the humanitarian sphere. It discusses how the Programme's Crisis Bureau is re-orienting its efforts away from traditional humanitarian response towards less saturated policy spaces, such as the promotion of Humanitarian-Development-Peace Nexus, climate change adaptation, and long-term development in fragile contexts.

6.2 A humanitarian development? UNDP's role within the UN humanitarian system

UNDP's history of involvement with the humanitarian system is a rich and varied one, pointed with both successes and setbacks. Initially established as the UN's development arm, with a mandate emphasizing long-term perspectives and active collaboration with national governments, UNDP shifted focus in the late 1990s and early 2000s. During this period, the Programme invested significant resources to carve out a role in humanitarian affairs, advocating for Early Recovery as essential to ensure the long-term sustainability of international humanitarian responses. In the 21st century, notwithstanding its status as the development 'outsider', UNDP effectively secured a key role within the UN humanitarian system, when in-country UNDP representatives also started serving as UN Resident Coordinators (RC) and, by extension, Humanitarian Coordinators (HC). Despite its unique

position as both UN RC/HC and reference operational agency for Early Recovery in humanitarian response, UNDP's activities in crisis response remained systematically underfunded and limited in scope. Moreover, UNDP lost its RC/HC role in 2018-19, followed by the *de facto* closure of the Early Recovery Cluster. Since then, UNDP has focused on a rebranding effort, particularly emphasizing the HDP Nexus and promoting sustainable development in fragile contexts. UNDP's engagement with humanitarian affairs can be divided into three distinct periods: an expansion phase until the early 2000s, followed by a period of retrenchment starting in the late 2010s, and the current phase characterized by transition and reorientation.

Figure 23: UNDP in the humanitarian system



The United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) was officially established by the UN General Assembly in 1965, out of the merging of two, pre-existing entities: the Expanded

Programme of Technical Assistance (EPTA), which focused on the provision of technical support services to less developed countries, and the Special Fund, which provided the resources necessary to support such activities (Murphy 2006). UNDP was conceived to avoid duplications and bring coherence across UN development activities, while guaranteeing that the assisted governments retained the ultimate responsibility for the implementation of their national development strategies (Browne 2011). It was also meant to coordinate efforts with other multilateral development actors, such as the World Bank and other regional development institutions. However, the modest nature of the funding reaching UNDP in turn limited the support and guidance that the organization was able to provide to other UN entities engaged in development activities. Soon, specialized UN agencies started to bypass UNDP and approach donors directly to fund their development programming. As a result, UNDP gradually became more operational, keeping its own resources 'in house' for the direct implementation of projects at the country level. The unintended consequence of this 'operational' turn was to pit UNDP in direct competition with the World Bank, which had much larger financial means as well as a longer track record in assisting governments in the implementation of their national development strategies (Browne 2011). This asymmetry in capabilities was soon exploited by the World Bank that approached UNDP as an implementation partner for WB-designed projects in countries where the Bank did not have sufficient presence, as it was often the case in fragile contexts. Within the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), there was a prevailing belief that the organization was gradually being diminished to a mere subcontractor for the World Bank, serving primarily to promote the World Bank's development plans in fragile countries, where the Bank had little or no in-country presence[233].

[233] Author interview #24, 22/05/2023, online

In the 1990s and early 2000s, a changing funding landscape turned the development sector into an increasingly competitive field. While total Official Development Assistance began to stagnate, humanitarian crises became increasingly frequent, more severe, and more protracted in time, which resulted in humanitarian aid occupying an ever-increasing share of total multilateral ODA, leaving less resources for long-term development. Simultaneously, institutional donors took to earmark an ever-larger share of their voluntary contributions to multilateral organizations, which further intensified competition among development agencies over project-specific grants. As a voluntarily funded organization, UNDP had historically relied on core (i.e. unearmarked) contributions to sustain the bulk of its activities. This left the Programme particularly exposed to the marked reversal in funding modalities (Schmid, Reitzenstein, and Hall 2021). As of 1992, core resources accounted for 75% of the Programme's total funding. Since then, the share of core funding has steadily declined, with earmarked resources becoming the primary budget source in 1997 and core funding shrinking to just 12% by 2022[234].

The tight competition over ever-scarcer, more strictly earmarked development resources coupled with the need to distinguish itself from the World Bank contributed to the Programme's gradual venturing into humanitarian response, marking the beginning of UNDP's expansive phase, which was to last until the mid-2010s[235]. This transition was facilitated by the in-country Resident Coordinator role that UNDP already played in the wider UN development system since the position was first established in 1977. In the early 1990s, the new role of UN Humanitarian Coordinator was created and it was soon associated with the position of UN

[234] UNDP. 2023. *Funding Compendium 2022*. Retrieved in December 2023 from https://www.undp.org/sites/g/files/zskgke326/files/2023-08/undp_funding_compendium_2022_vs_1_as_of_24_aug_2023.pdf
[235] Author interview #44, 22/11/2023, online, author's translation from Italian

Resident Coordinator and UNDP Resident Representative[236] (Hanatani, Gómez, and Kawaguchi 2020). He/ she is in charge of bringing humanitarian UN agencies, programmes and organizations together to assess needs, establish priorities, and develop a UN-wide strategy to assist people affected by humanitarian emergencies. More concretely, the RC/HC is responsible for the drafting of the Flash Appeals (FA) and the Humanitarian Response Plan (HRP), the document that provides donors with an overview of the priorities, needs, and foreseen costs of the response to a specific crisis. He/ she consults with UN agencies and donors present at the country level in a forum known as the Humanitarian Country Team (HCT) and identifies the priority sectors of the response. The RC/HC also attends meetings with donors in Geneva and New York to provide updates and appeal for resources to fund the operations outlined in the Flash Appeals and Humanitarian Response Plans.

Internally, UNDP also underwent a process of organizational restructuring, meant to attract more visibility and resources to the Programme's role in crisis response. In 2001, UNDP introduced a Bureau for Crisis Prevention and Recovery (BCPR) (with offices in Geneva and New York) tasked to elaborate guidelines for UNDP country offices' response to humanitarian emergencies.

In the aftermath of the inadequate global response to the Darfur crisis and the 2004 tsunami in Southeast Asia, UN humanitarian organizations came together to devise a more efficient model of humanitarian coordination[237]. Jan Egeland, the then Emergency Relief Coordinator and chief of OCHA, launched a comprehensive evaluation process. This process aimed to assess the state of the humanitarian system and elaborate policy recommendations to kickstart a reform of the

[236] General Assembly resolution 46/182 from 1991 refers to "*the Resident Coordinator [who] should normally coordinate the humanitarian assistance of the United Nations system at country level*".
[237] For a more detailed history, see chapter 2

humanitarian sector. The findings were included in a final report[238], which was supposed to provide a blueprint for system-wide reform. One of the experts who took part in the consultations following the release of the report expressed surprise that non-humanitarian UN agencies like the WHO and UNDP had been included alongside traditional humanitarian organizations, such as the WFP or UNHCR[239].

This extended consultation and reform process resulted in the introduction of a new coordination mechanism, the Humanitarian Cluster System (or Humanitarian Cluster Approach), where each sector of the humanitarian response is allocated to a specific UN entity. UNDP's BCPR was instrumental in ensuring that the Programme was assigned its unique niche of responsibility, known as Early Recovery. The stated goal of Early Recovery was to rehabilitate basic infrastructure to enable disaster-hit communities to resume their normal economic activities, averting severe loss of livelihoods and long-term dependency on foreign aid (Dijkzeul and Addis 2022). It is defined as "*a set of specific programmatic actions to help people to move from humanitarian relief towards self-sustaining development*"[240].

In 2008, UNDP released its official Policy on Early Recovery, which emphasized the double horizontal (strategic, advisory, cross-sectoral) and vertical (operational and programmatic) role for UNDP and the Early Recovery Cluster in humanitarian response. The rationale for Early Recovery was grounded on the premise that humanitarian action should go beyond saving lives in the immediate aftermath of a crisis: it should also support affected communities to restore their capacities and livelihoods and make them more resilient to future crises. Indeed, in the 21st century most humanitarian disasters (both natural and man-made) occur in already fragile contexts, which leads to longer crises and worsens the dependency of

[238]Adinolfi, C., D. Bassiouni, H.F. Lauritzsen, H. R. Williams, *Humanitarian Response Review*, OCHA, Geneva: August 2005
[239] Author interview #4, online, 04/08/2022
[240] UNDP. 2012. *UNDP and Early Recovery*. Retrieved in March 2023 from https://www.undp.org/sites/g/files/zskgke326/files/publications/20121101_UNDP_early_recovery.pdf

local populations on the humanitarian assistance from the international community. This makes crises more severe for affected communities and costlier for the donors financing the response. By stretching the traditional boundaries of humanitarian action, UNDP presented itself as the best positioned organization to design and implement programmes needed to support people to transition away from humanitarian relief to sustainable development, thanks to the substance of its original mandate, its decentralized and global presence, and its long-standing tradition of collaborating with national and local authorities[241]. The programmatic responsibilities envisioned by UNDP encompassed community infrastructure rehabilitation, debris management, local governance support, crisis prevention, and aid coordination. Even though traditional humanitarian actors expressed doubts about the ability of a development IO to uphold the humanitarian principles of political neutrality and independence, the case for Early Recovery was an easy sell to donors, eager to find ways to reduce humanitarian needs across the board[242].

Hence, In the first years of the UN Cluster System, the UNDP enjoyed a unique position in humanitarian governance both at the global and at the country-level. First, it was the Cluster Lead Agency of the Early Recovery Cluster, responsible for providing policy guidelines at the global level and of representing Early Recovery partners at the country level. When a crisis ensued, the UNDP's Country Representative was in charge of highlighting the Early Recovery needs for that particular emergency within the broad UN system and advocating for funding for the Cluster's activities with donors. Second, until 2018/19, the role of UNDP Country Representative also encompassed the responsibilities of the UN Resident

[241] Ibid.
[242] Author interview #2, 04/08/2022, online

Coordinator/Humanitarian Coordinator, the highest-ranking representative of the UN in a country with ongoing operations (e.g. peace, development, humanitarian).

However, in the late 2010s, the trajectory of UNDP's venture in the realm of humanitarian assistance took a downturn. In 2018, upon recommendation of the UN Secretary General, the UN General Assembly passed a resolution, which called for decoupling the role of UN Resident Coordinator from that of UNDP Resident Representative[243]. This decision was officially justified as necessary to enable the UN RC/HCs to focus solely on advancing the Agenda 2030 objectives and on coordinating crisis responses, without needing to divide their attention to matters specific to UNDP. In fact, the move was also driven by longstanding concerns from other UN operational agencies, who perceived UNDP's dual role as granting it an unfair advantage in terms of visibility and representation[244].

This change was not the only setback suffered by UNDP. Between 2017 and 2018, a key review process tasked to review UNDP's contribution to the system raised doubts about the concept of Early Recovery as a component of the humanitarian response, leading to the discontinuation of the Cluster (Murray, Piedersen and Ziesche 2018). At the headquarters level, UNDP lost its role as the lead in the Working Group on Early Recovery, which aimed to influence the global policy agenda to strengthen the position of Early Recovery as an integral component of international crisis response. At the country level, UNDP's operations were significantly scaled back in terms of programme size and scope, with the organization transitioning to a primarily advisory role, supporting other operational actors in the field.

[243] UNGA. (2018). *Draft Resolution: Repositioning of the United Nations development system in the context of the quadrennial comprehensive policy review of operational activities for development of the United Nations system*. New York, NY: UNGA, 2018. Retrieved in September 2023 from https://documents.un.org/doc/undoc/ltd/n18/141/07/pdf/n1814107.pdf

[244] Author interview #44, 22/12/2023, online, own translation from Italian

UNDP's underperformance in the humanitarian realm initiated a new chapter in the Programme's involvement in this policy domain. Indeed, the Programme's 2018-2021 Strategic Plan only mentions Early Recovery in humanitarian settings "once and in passing" (Murray, Piedersen and Ziesche 2018, p.5). Since 2020, UNDP has shifted its focus away from traditional humanitarian response towards championing the concept of the Humanitarian-Development Peace Nexus, a vaguely defined approach that calls for better coordination among actors belonging to the three different pillars of official development assistance (i.e. the humanitarian, development, and peace pillars). UNDP is also actively working to establish itself as a leading global development actor that is able to implement sustainable development programming in highly fragile contexts.

From the introduction of the Cluster System in 2005 until 2018, when the RC/HC position was 'de-linked' from the UNDP Country Representative, UNDP wielded significant influence over humanitarian responses worldwide due to its dual role. The RC/HC is responsible for identifying priority sectors in a response, activating the relevant Clusters, ranking priorities in the HRP, and advocating for UN agencies with donors and UN Pooled Funds. Until the end of 2018, this same individual was also the most senior UNDP staff member, ensuring that the organization's perspective on the crisis was incorporated into the Response Plan and that donors were informed about the resources necessary to support UNDP's programming, both within the HCT and beyond. After establishing its niche in Early Recovery, UNDP's role in the humanitarian system seemed secure. It is therefore surprising that Early Recovery as a sector has nearly disappeared from today's UN-wide humanitarian responses, leading to the repurposing of Early Recovery Cluster offices in Geneva by the end of 2018. Operations now broadly defined as Early Recovery, such as infrastructure restructuring and cash-for-work programmes, are often carried out by other UN agencies. Meanwhile, UNDP has re-focused its

efforts on promoting the HDP Nexus and sustainable development in fragile contexts. The troubled history of the Programme's engagement in humanitarian affairs suggests that UNDP is a case of failure in securing sufficient resources and visibility in a highly competitive policy space. The next section applies the theoretical framework developed in Chapter 3 to explore why niche specialization has not been sufficient for UNDP to survive in the humanitarian sphere.

6.3 Why UNDP did not compete: No threat of substitution

The theoretical framework outlined in Chapter 3 illustrated that inter-organizational competition persists despite niche specialization when resource scarcity is such that states holding the power of the purse can decide to re-allocate resources from one niche to the other. Chapter 4 illustrated how this happens in practice within the humanitarian system. Nowadays, as the rationale for globalization and international cooperation is increasingly challenged, resource scarcity (i.e., budgetary pressures IOs are subjected to) is pervasive in the multilateral system and applies particularly to the case of humanitarian IOs for several reasons. First, over the last decade, the frequency, severity, and duration of humanitarian crises has increased significantly, and while donors have scaled up the resources devoted to humanitarian relief, this increase has not been sufficient to match escalating humanitarian needs worldwide. Most humanitarian funding becomes available in the immediate aftermath of a humanitarian crisis, which leaves humanitarian IOs with a very narrow window of opportunity to secure sufficient resources to fund their operations and provides them with no certainty about their ability to respond to the next emergency. Second, with the turn of the millennium, the consensus over what humanitarianism is has evolved and expanded to encompass programmatic areas that go beyond the immediate objective of saving lives. Third, as a result of the expansive notion of

humanitarianism and of the increasing diversion of resources from long-term development to immediate humanitarian relief, new actors have entered the humanitarian marketplace, making it a densely populated policy space. In an attempt to manage resource scarcity in the face of skyrocketing humanitarian needs, donor states have increasingly resorted to prioritization. In the response to a crisis, the UN system and its individual agencies and programmes are expected to identify and prioritize the most pressing humanitarian needs, in an acknowledgement that the resources gathered for the response will not be sufficient to meet the requirements of each individual IO. This can be done by either adjusting the scope and depth of each IO's operations (e.g. by reducing food rations, limit healthcare assistance to lifesaving services, etc.). However, need prioritization is more often achieved by re-allocating resources from one sector of the humanitarian response to another considered more urgent in the response to a crisis. While in theory this process should be one based on consensus based on an objective interpretation of the situation on the ground common to the entire UN system, in practice each IO perceives prioritization as a threat to its own niche of specialization (its assigned Humanitarian Cluster). As prioritization may result in the diversion of resources, which are vital to remain operational in the humanitarian space, each IO's instinct for organizational survival is triggered, which leads the organization to react.

As illustrated in the previous section, in the early 2000s, as an increasing share of total multilateral ODA was being directed to immediate humanitarian relief and resources for long-term development began to stagnate, UNDP, leveraging the newly created Bureau for Crisis Prevention and Recovery, obtained a seat at the negotiation table where the entire global humanitarian system of coordination was being redesigned and strongly advocated for the inclusion of its own sector of responsibility, Early Recovery.

The reform of the humanitarian system also led to the establishment of a new role, the UN Humanitarian Coordinator, that was to be covered by the UNDP's Resident Representative, who had already been acting as the Resident Coordinator at the country level for the entire UN Development System. As the frequency and severity of humanitarian crises increased dramatically in the 2010s, need prioritization has become a pervasive phenomenon across the humanitarian landscape. UNDP's niche in the humanitarian system was as threatened as any other sector of the humanitarian response, if not more, considering the novelty of Early Recovery in humanitarian programming. Indeed, as one of the newest additions to an inherently fragmented and resource-scarce system, the UNDP's Early Recovery Cluster was perceived as "a competing Cluster" by other UN entities[245]. According to the theoretical prepositions outlined in chapter 3, having a niche potentially exposed to resource reallocation should trigger a competitive reaction.

Based on the evidence drawn from interviews with UNDP staff, personnel of other UN operational organizations, representatives of donor and recipient states, as well as independent experts in humanitarian affairs, along with the review of independent evaluations and reports on UNDP's humanitarian performance, it is clear that this reaction *did not* take place in the case of UNDP. While this might seem contradictory to the theoretical framework underpinning this thesis, UNDP's lack of reaction is explained by the fact that the unique role UNDP played within the humanitarian system prevented the organization from perceiving the potential for niche substitution as a threat to its own 'survival' within the humanitarian realm. First, as an IO with a traditional focus on long-term development, UNDP was not able to fully adapt to the

[245] Murray, Julian, Pedersen, F., Ziesche, S. (2018). *Evaluation of the Global Cluster for Early Recovery*. New York, NY: United Nations Development Programme., p.49. Retrieved in July 2021 from: https://library.alnap.org/system/files/content/resource/files/main/evaluation_of_the_global_cluster_for_early_recovery_-_2018.pdf

fast-paced dynamics of humanitarian funding for the response of sudden-onset emergencies. Second, UNDP's in-country double-hat helped the organization retain a seat at the table in all crisis settings, but also diverted attention and efforts away from setting a clear strategy for promoting Early Recovery. This ultimately proved fatal for UNDP's resilience in the system once it was stripped of its privileged, additional role.

Two interviewees, who had either served or were currently working for UNDP at a senior level with the Crisis Bureau, pointed to UNDP's business model as one of the reasons that made the Programme less reactive to the competitive environment in which it was embedded[246]. The same observation was made by two independent experts of humanitarian financing and is clearly highlighted in the 2021 MOPAN Assessment of Performance[247]. As a development organization, over the years UNDP has enjoyed a relatively high share of voluntary unearmarked contributions (around 12% albeit steadily decreasing over the last 10 years), which make up the core component of its total budget[248]. While this is a stark decrease in core funding compared to the levels of the 1970s, it still amounts to a high share of total revenue compared to other humanitarian IOs, such as WFP and IOM, whose core funding is less than 6% of their total annual revenue[249]. Furthermore, in long-term development even earmarked allocations have a longer-time span than in humanitarian settings, which make them more predictable and give IOs more time for planning. According to the interviewees, UNDP's historical reliance on core funding for its development activities has left the organization less

[246] Author interview #23, 16/05/2023, online; author interview #35, 14/08/2023, online, own translation from Italian
[247] Author interview #32, 21/07/2023, online; author interview #24, 22/05/2023, online
[248] UNDP. 2023. *Funding Compendium 2022*. Retrieved in December 2023 from https://www.undp.org/sites/g/files/zskgke326/files/2023-08/undp_funding_compendium_2022_vs_1_as_of_24_aug_2023.pdf
[249] UN System Chief Executives Board for Coordination. *Financial Statistics: Revenue by Entity*. Retrieved in September 2024 from https://unsceb.org/fs-revenue-agency

agile than other traditional humanitarian actors in rapidly mobilizing additional resources necessary to respond to a new crisis.

Interviewees also identified UNDP's overreliance on its Country Representatives' dual role as Humanitarian Coordinators to secure visibility as one of the main reasons the Programme was less sensitive to potential resource diversion[250]. By definition, the UN Humanitarian Coordinator is always present at any coordination meeting at the country level and is expected to serve as the reference point for the entire UN humanitarian response at both the headquarters and donor capital levels. With the support of OCHA, the Coordinator is ultimately responsible for drafting key documents, such as Humanitarian Flash Appeals, which are intended to identify the priority sectors of the humanitarian response shortly after the onset of an emergency[251]. The RC/HC can also determine the priorities for CERF and CBPF disbursements, ultimately directing the use of the most important pooled funding mechanisms and kickstarting the response of the UN system[252]. The double-hat position allowed UNDP to activate the Early Recovery Cluster without investing the same time and resources as other UN Cluster Lead Agencies. The UNDP representative was always present, chairing key meetings and simultaneously representing both the entire UN system and the Programme. While it is difficult to determine if and to what extent individual UNDP Representatives exploited this position, other agencies and organizations perceived it as an unfair advantage. This perception led to strong advocacy for reforming the RC/HC system, which was ultimately implemented in 2019 by the UNGA upon the recommendation of UN Secretary-General António Guterres[253]. The

[250] Author interview #18, 25/01/2023, online; author interview #19, 25/09/2023, online; author interview #57, 14/05/2024; author interview #58, 23/05/2024, online
[251] IASC Sub-Working Group on the Cluster Approach and the Global Cluster Coordinators' Group. (2015).*Guidance: Cluster coordination at country level.* Geneva (Switzerland), 2015. Retrieved in September 2022 from: https://interagencystandingcommittee.org/sites/default/files/migrated/2020-11/Reference%20Module%20for%20Cluster%20Coordination%20at%20Country%20Level%20%28revised%20July%202015%29.pdf
[252] Ibid.
[253] Author interview #44, 22/11/2023, online, own translation from Italian

necessity of having impartial and independent Humanitarian Coordinators was one of the key points used by the UN Secretariat when explaining the rationale behind the de-linking of this role from UNDP Country Offices.

The RC/HC appointment, while providing an important opportunity for organizational visibility, indirectly affected UNDP's ability to elevate its work with the Early Recovery Cluster. Over the years, with few exceptions, the Cluster remained critically under-staffed, to the point that its presence was not always apparent to other humanitarian stakeholders. As one of the 2018 UNDP Independent Review survey respondents testified:

"[The Early Recovery Cluster] is one of the least equipped or present clusters in the field. I have worked in multiple natural and complex emergencies, but early recovery is rarely present compared to other clusters. Also, UNDP generally sends one individual where others have entire teams. I don't think UNDP has ever seriously supported the cluster. This has meant it always appears weaker and less effective than the other clusters." [254]

Due to its funding dynamics and the RC/HC appointment, UNDP showed less responsiveness to resource scarcity, as its unique role in the UN system provided a certain level of visibility. While the HC/RC was instrumental in ensuring the Early Recovery Cluster was activated in the international humanitarian response to several crises, the sector has consistently faced chronic under-resourcing over the years. UNDP never appointed additional staff specifically dedicated to profiling Early Recovery activities, placing significant pressure on in-country UNDP personnel, who were responsible for both coordinating UN system activities and implementing UNDP's crisis response programmes. At the same time, due to the inherent visibility of the RC/HC position, UNDP did not invest in effectively defining and framing Early

[254] Survey result, Evaluation of the Global Cluster for Early Recovery, UNDP 2018, p.11

Recovery as its exclusive domain, nor did it develop a strategy to stay competitive in an environment of diminishing resources. The next section examines how UNDP lost the competition amid skyrocketing humanitarian needs, dwindling financial resources, and more strategic humanitarian rivals.

6.4 How UNDP lost the competition: No competitive strategy

International organizations, whose survival in a given policy sphere is threatened by the potential reallocation of resources from their area of specialization to another, often respond by taking measures to neutralize this threat. According to hypothesis 2 outlined in Chapter 3, depending on whether an IO is a generalist or a specialist organization, it responds by either crossing the boundaries of its niche to expand its activities beyond them, or by reinforcing those boundaries to prevent external encroachment and the risk of losing relevance and visibility.

According to the classification outlined in Chapter 3, UNDP is categorized as a generalist organization. While its original mandate focuses solely on long-term development, UNDP has a universal reach, lacks a specific population target, and offers a broad range of interventions and programmes (see Appendix A). Based on hypothesis 2, a generalist IO like UNDP would be expected to respond to the threat of niche substitution by adopting a strategy of competitive horizontal expansion. However, as this section demonstrates, because the Programme did not perceive a threat of niche substitution, it not only failed to react competitively but also failed to prevent other IOs from encroaching on its turf.

Over the decades, UNDP had built a strong reputation of a trustworthy implementation partner of a wide array of development projects even in challenging contexts. As a generalist IO with a very strong pre-existing in-country presence and strong ties with local and national authorities, UNDP could have exploited the conceptual flexibility of Early Recovery to encompass a wide array of programmes and ensure a strong operational presence in very diverse crisis contexts. Similarly to IOM, UNDP could have exploited its reputation to act as a flexible gap-filler in crisis response aiming to shorten the dependence of affected communities on external humanitarian relief. As discussed in section 6.3, the UN HC/RC role provided UNDP an opportunity for securing visibility for UNDP during crisis response. However, several interviewees also pointed out that the fact that UNDP country offices also had to carry out this coordinating role on behalf of the entire UN system operating at the country level diverted resources and attention away from identifying a space for UNDP's activities within the crisis[255]. As argued by a senior OCHA representative:

"*They had 10 years and in those 10 years they were wearing both hats, but they didn't profile their Recovery work well. Had they done that, the Resident Coordinator probably could have done an even better job, because he or she would then even have a stake in it and that stake is UNDP being an organization like no other, they can do local procurement, they can do local recruitment of internationals, they have local bank accounts, they've got basic agreements of the governments. UNDP in terms of having a presence on the ground had the best opportunity to be an amazing organization but they couldn't really identify what their niche was. It was just spread too thin and there were too many sections within UNDP fighting in competition for*

[255] Author interview #6, 27/09/2022, online; author interview #11, 12/12/2022, online; author interview #13, 29/12/2022, online; author interview #24, 22/05/2023, online

theirs to be prioritized. So, I think yes, it could have worked better. UNDP didn't do it well enough."[256]

UNDP did not adopt a competitive horizontal expansion strategy. On the contrary, it also failed to react to other organizations, such as IOM and UNHCR, progressively encroaching on its turf[257]. Interviewees identified the overall slowness of UNDP's bureaucratic machinery as one of its main shortcomings, particularly detrimental in a humanitarian context where organizations are expected to react within hours of a crisis onset. According to a senior staff member at UNDP with experience in several crisis contexts:

"*The UNDP's procurement, HR, and finance systems are not suited for a quick response. UNDP did set rosters for fast-track procedures, et cetera, a lot. But in reality, its systems are not fast enough to procure or to supply. UNDP is not in the business of stockpiling things. Even though they have this other thing called long-term agreements with suppliers, those take forever for extra delivery on the ground. And the delegation of local procurement and local hiring varies from Bureau to Bureau and Country Office to Country Office."*[258]

The inherent slowness of UNDP often leaves a vacuum in the response that is soon filled by more proactive organizations. According to several interviewees, UNDP invested little time and resources in defining what counts as Early Recovery and what does not, assuming that it would still be considered as a key part of every humanitarian response. For a staff member of UNCHR:

[256] Author interview #16, 18/01/2023, online
[257] Author interview #6, 27/09/2022, online
[258] Author interview #23, 16/05/2023, online

"*Look at UNDP, for instance. They tell you 'We do Early Recovery': what does that mean? Tell me. They do some employment generation projects, those, for instance, I like, but tell me, when you employ thousands of people for one month or two months, where is the Early Recovery here? What are you recovering?*[259]"

This lack of 'brainstorming' at headquarters level, resulted in a limited capacity to recognize opportunities for programming at the country level, which compounded the slowness of the organization to put the response machinery in motion. The ambiguity surrounding exactly which interventions qualify as Early Recovery has allowed other UN agencies to intervene, filling the void and acquiring additional resources for their programmes. According to a humanitarian worker surveyed for the evaluation of the Early Recovery Cluster:

"The humanitarian agencies really did not want UNDP to bleed funds from this context. They felt that UNDP was well funded with dev funds and their occupation in this space increased the competition for the limited humanitarian funds. So, they hid behind lack of conceptual clarity and created confusion over something that they had been doing all along as part of their humanitarian response.[260]"

Given that the focus in the Humanitarian Programming Cycle is more on the promptness of the response rather than the evaluation and monitoring of outcomes, the programme execution by these organizations might be subpar. However, this shortfall usually does not diminish their public profile or visibility. According to an interviewee with experience in crisis response with UNDP and other UN agencies:

[259] Author interview #13, 29/12/2022, online
[260] Survey for 'Evaluation of the Global Cluster for Early Recovery', 2018, page 24

"If there's a need, if there's a vacuum, somebody else will fill it. Whether adequately or otherwise, people will fill it. Now, for instance, you may have heard that agencies like UNHCR, which have a singularly humanitarian mandate, often get into what can be best defined as Early Recovery. Sometimes it's supply-driven, because the donor does not like UNHCR and then UNHCR finds no space for carrying out traditional tarpaulin distribution and you know, safe spaces for women and children, et cetera. So, they start getting into Early Recovery such as repair, rehabilitation of assistance services, livelihoods, et cetera. The trouble is they make a hash out of it. UNHCR does not have the systems, the capacity, or the temperament for doing that, but since they do it, they do a very short job of it, and that is without exception everywhere I've seen them operating in this field. So, if UNDP doesn't step in, somebody else will step in and make a hash of an effort, sadly."[261]

As the portion of Early Recovery projected programming costs that remained unfunded increased with each crisis, UNDP Country Offices began shifting their attention from tangible program implementation (either through direct execution or by aiding local intermediaries/partners) towards providing policy advisory services to local/national authorities. Although policy advising helped reduce operational costs, it simultaneously led to a decrease in the visibility of Early Recovery activities. As stated by a senior staff member at the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA):

"*They [UNDP] just needed to unpack [Early Recovery] a little bit more clearly. But what they did is they didn't think big, they thought small. And eventually, they thought that for Early*

[261] Ibid.

Recovery they had to give policy advice on countries' recovery, but policy advice doesn't bring any programming."[262]

While UNDP did not stretch the boundaries of Early Recovery to widen its operation portfolio, it was never successful at convincingly framing a humanitarian emergency in the language of Early Recovery either. Slowness and organizational overstretch deriving from its HC/RC role constrained UNDP's ability to frame crises from the perspective of Early Recovery. Interviewees reported how, in the aftermath of a crisis, it usually took a significant longer time for UNDP to deploy personnel to carry out needs assessments[263]. Other more successful organizations often already have prepositioned staff that can gather data quickly and package it in a way that highlights needs in their own sector and convey it to the RC/HC to inform the drafting of the Flash Appeal. The most experienced UN agencies deploy Communications specialists to the field while the needs-assessment phase is taking place to collect visual material and testimonies, which are then used for bilateral communication material with donors and also shared with the UNCT to add visual content to UN-wide reports (see chapter 5).

Multiple interviewees pointed to Early Recovery as a part of the issue[264]. Its multifaceted nature makes it difficult to encapsulate into a single compelling image, making it a tough sell to donors and the general public alike. While the complex nature of Early Recovery makes it less directly appealing than programmes like feeding malnourished children, the UNDP cannot be entirely absolved of responsibility. While Early Recovery might undoubtedly represent a hard sell to the general public, the cost-effective rationale of a reduced dependency on external humanitarian relief remains a compelling narrative. Indeed, during the process of

[262] Author interview #16, online, 18/01/2023
[263] Author interview #34, online, 14/08/2023; author interview #16, online, 18/01/2023; author interview #24, online, 22/05/2023
[264] Author interview #16, online, 18/01/2023; author interview #12, online, 28/12/2022; author interview #24, online, 22/05/2023

reform of the humanitarian system that ultimately gave rise to the Cluster System, UNDP championed Early Recovery as a strategy to decrease aid dependency in affected communities, aiming to cut costs for donors in the medium and long term. According to a high-ranking UNDP representative, the narrative of enhancing crisis resilience to decrease future expenditure indeed holds appeal for overstretched donors. Yet, the organization failed to invest in a robust Communications strategy at both the headquarters and country level[265].

"*UNDP, sadly, does not take its communication business very seriously at all. And particularly the crisis communications side is extremely weak. I often speak with my colleagues [names office] who are responsible for communication and - maybe they're just too simple or too moral - and they say "you know, we cannot really sell Early Recovery as a pressing humanitarian issue". I disagree. I think it's a matter of being creative at least. The way I sold Early Recovery in [names crisis-affected city] is through highlighting the cost of inaction. "You don't invest in livelihoods today, you'll have a million more begging tomorrow. And then you'll have people selling their kidneys, people being trafficked to [names location]", which scares donors, you know? Getting into crime, joining [names terrorist organization], all the undesirable coping mechanisms.*"[266]

What emerges from interviews with UNDP representatives (including two former HC/RCs), other UN agencies, and donor states is that UNDP failed to clearly define what Early Recovery encompassed and effectively communicate its added value or comparative advantage to donors. Due to significant financial constraints, donors and UN leadership often have to prioritize one sector (Cluster) of the response over another. Since niche visibility is crucial for organizational

[265] author interview #24, online, 22/05/2023
[266] Author interview #23, online, 16/05/2023

survival, and programming is necessary to maintain visibility, securing sufficient resources to implement post-crisis programming becomes a key priority for all humanitarian organizations. While the shared humanitarian appeal process—such as Humanitarian Response Plans, Flash Appeals, and shared needs assessments—remains part of contemporary humanitarian responses, UN agencies still liaise bilaterally with donors to maximize resources for their crisis response[267]. In other words, the division of labour encapsulated in the Cluster System is no longer a guarantee of niche visibility and organizational survival. In the humanitarian sphere, it is ultimately up to the UN organizations to secure the viability of their niche from crisis to crisis, with some being more successful than others. The next section will shortly outline the extent of UNDP's debacle in the humanitarian field following the reform of the Resident Coordinator/Humanitarian Coordinator system in 2019.

6.5 UNDP's humanitarian trajectory in numbers

For more than a decade, UNDP held the position of UN Humanitarian Coordinator, merging the duties of its Resident Representative with the responsibilities of coordinating the humanitarian response of the entire international community. This distinctive role, held by UNDP—an IO without a clear humanitarian mandate—allowed the organization to retain visibility and influence across crises. However, it also diverted attention and resources from defining a clear comparative advantage. The consequences of this complacency became evident in 2018, a watershed moment for UNDP within the humanitarian system.

A few years after the introduction of the Cluster System and the figure of the UN Humanitarian Coordinator, other UN organizations began voicing concerns about the conflict

[267] Author interview #13, online, 29/12/2022; Author interview #14, online, 29/12/2022; Author interview #43, online, 29/02/2024

of interest inherent in UNDP's dual role. In 2018, the UN Secretariat recommended to the UNGA that UNDP be de-linked from the RC/HC system to ensure the Coordinator's impartiality and full commitment to coordination responsibilities. As a result, UNDP was left without an explicit humanitarian mandate and a poorly defined role in the response.

Having failed to clearly define its niche and the relevance of Early Recovery in humanitarian response, UNDP quickly lost ground to other organizations. It lost funding to agencies like WFP and UNHCR, which were more effective at profiling their work, and it ceded core functions to more entrepreneurial organizations like IOM, known for quickly identifying and filling gaps in response efforts. The Early Recovery Cluster was disbanded in 2019, the only Cluster in the humanitarian system to be permanently shut down due to underperformance. Since then, UNDP's direct involvement in humanitarian response has decreased, and the organization has gradually repositioned itself as a facilitator of the Humanitarian-Development-Peace Nexus, enabling the transition from emergency response to long-term, sustainable solutions. As one interviewee put it: "*They got burned in the [humanitarian] system. So now they are trying to play for both [humanitarian and development] teams, while avoiding direct competition with either side*"[268].

This section presents evidence of UNDP's gradual decline within the humanitarian system, drawing primarily from independent evaluations of its performance in humanitarian settings and data on humanitarian funding flows gathered by OCHA's Financial Tracking System. Two trends are evident: the first is the declining relevance of Early Recovery operations in the years before and after the RC/HC de-linking reform, coupled with shrinking funding for UNDP's activities and the organization's failure to expand operations into other sectors of humanitarian response—contrary to the theoretical expectations for generalist IOs outlined in Chapter 3. The

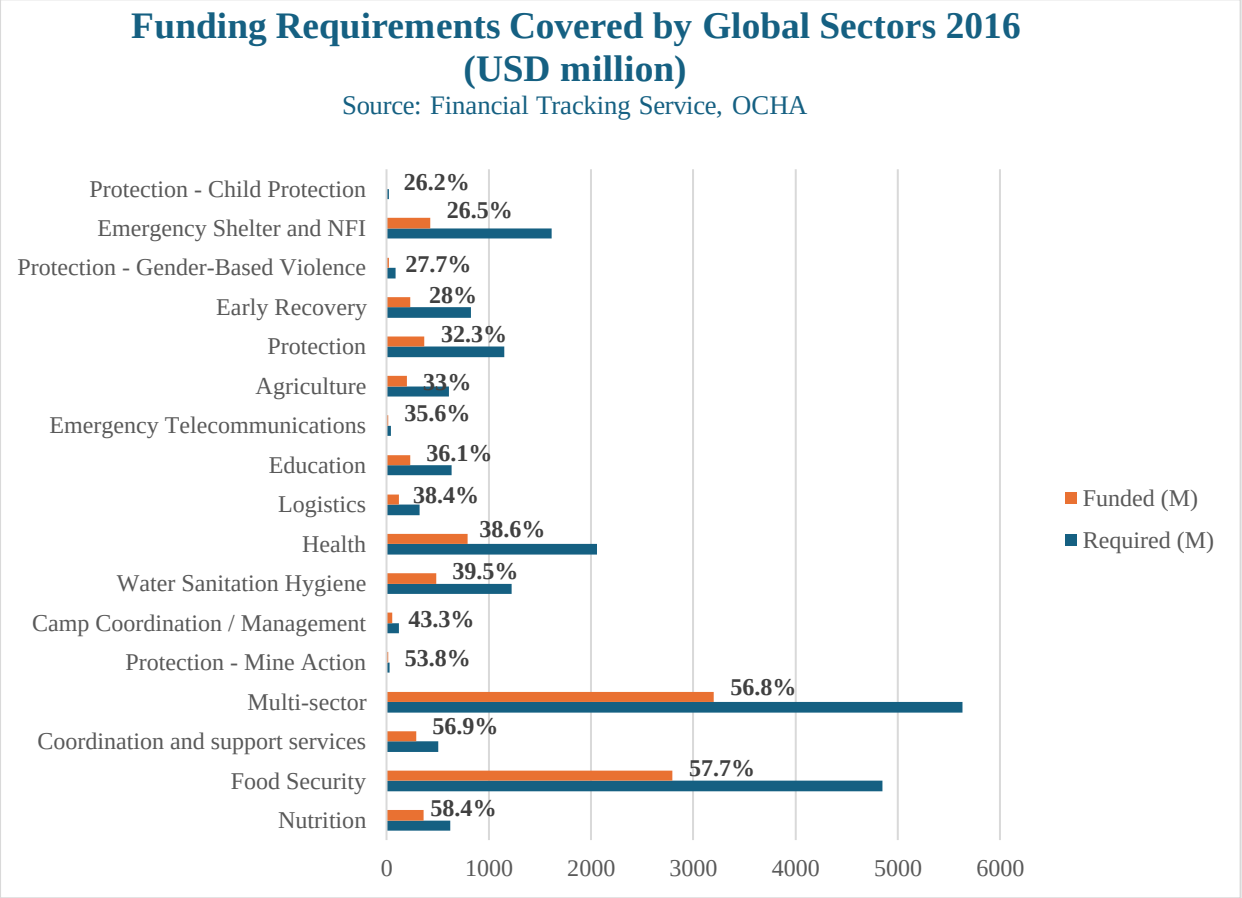
[268] Author interview #32, online, 07/08/2023

second trend is the success of other UN organizations in securing an increasing share of available resources while expanding their activities to include Early Recovery. This chapter illustrates these trends by comparing humanitarian funding data from OCHA for the years 2016, 2018, and 2022.

As discussed in the previous sections, the shielding effect of holding the HC/RC position allowed UNDP to maintain a clear role in humanitarian response, which mitigated the triggering effect of niche substitution and resource reallocation seen in other UN organizations. This, however, negatively impacted the amount of resources the international community allocated to Early Recovery compared to other sectors. As illustrated in Chapter 4, the rate of unmet funding requirements rose from 39.7% of the global humanitarian ask in 2016 to 56.8% in 2023. However, this funding gap is more pronounced in some sectors than in others, with Early Recovery among those that have suffered the most from under-resourcing over the years.

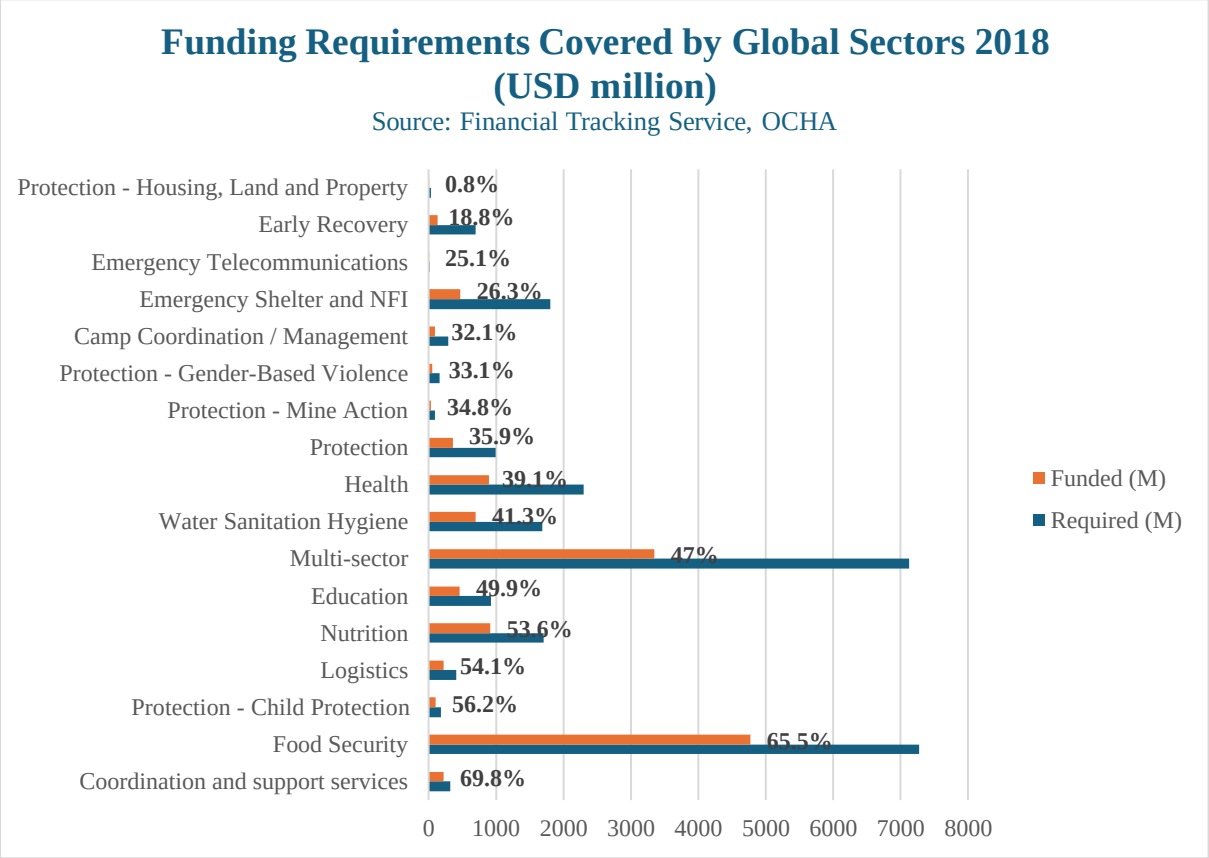
Figures 24 to 26 show the proportion of Early Recovery funding requirements met in 2016, 2018, and 2022, respectively. In 2016, global plan funding coverage (across all sectors) stood at 60.3%, while Early Recovery ranked as the 14th most funded sector, with only 28% of its global ask met (Figure 24). In contrast, Coordination and Support Services—a set of reporting, coordination, and advocacy activities led by the HC/RC and their staff, with UNDP as the primary recipient—ranked as the third best-resourced sector (after Food Security and Nutrition), with 56.9% of its funding requirements met, only slightly below the overall 2016 plan funding coverage average of 60.3%.

Figure 24: funding requirements covered by global sectors 2016



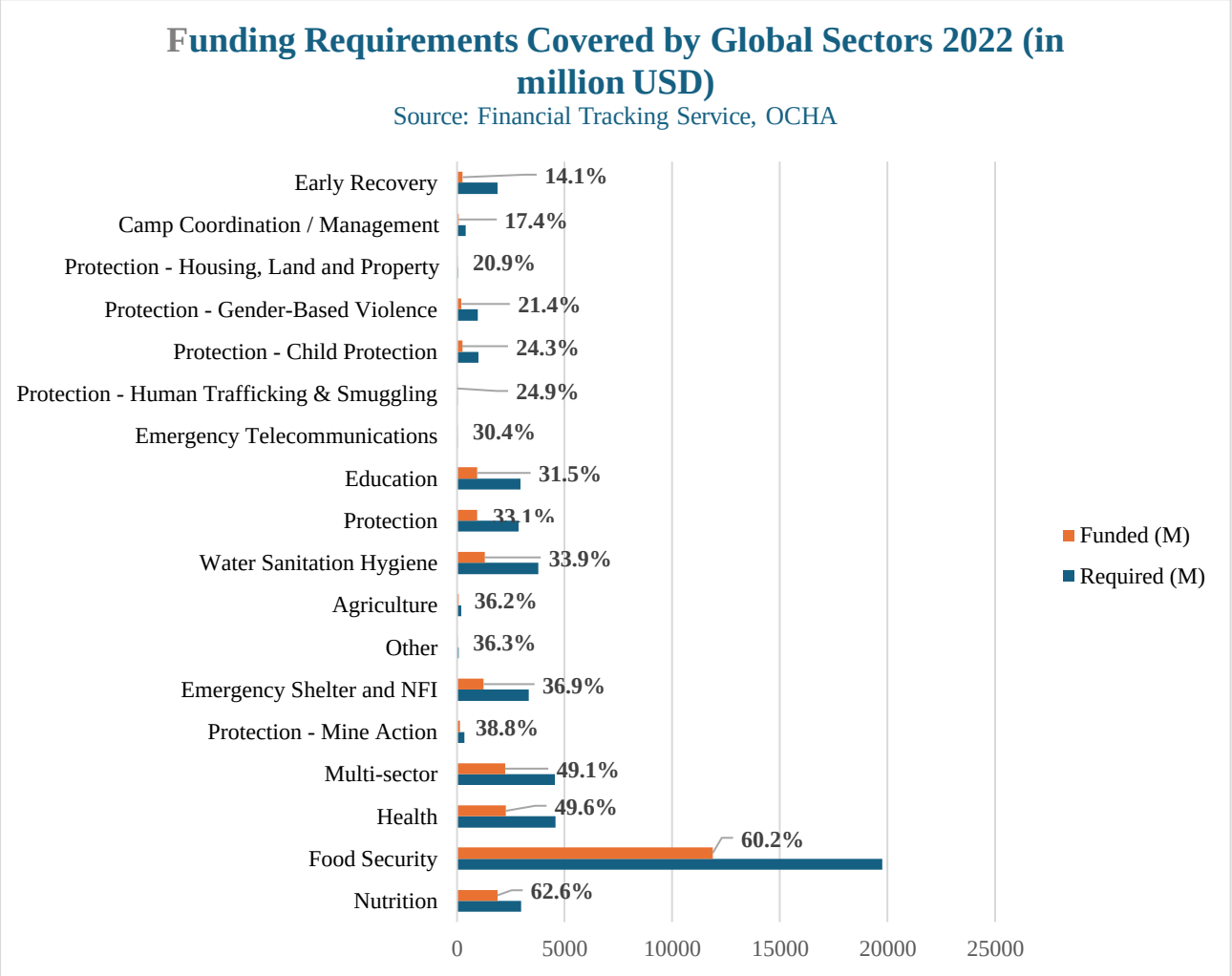
In 2018, with global plan funding coverage at 61.4%, Early Recovery dropped to the 16th most funded sector, with international donors covering only 18.8% of its total funding requirements. In contrast, coordination and support services were the best-funded sector globally, with 69.8% of funding needs met, more than 8% higher than the overall plan funding coverage (Figure 25). 2018 marked the final year in which the RC/HC system remained integral to UNDP, as the de-linking process took effect on January 1st, 2019.

Figure 25: Funding requirements covered by global sectors 2018



Finally, in 2022, global plan funding coverage dropped to 58.8%, and Early Recovery, following the shutdown of the Global Cluster, became the least funded sector globally, with only 14.1% of the required resources (Figure 26).

Figure 26: Funding requirements covered by global sectors 2022

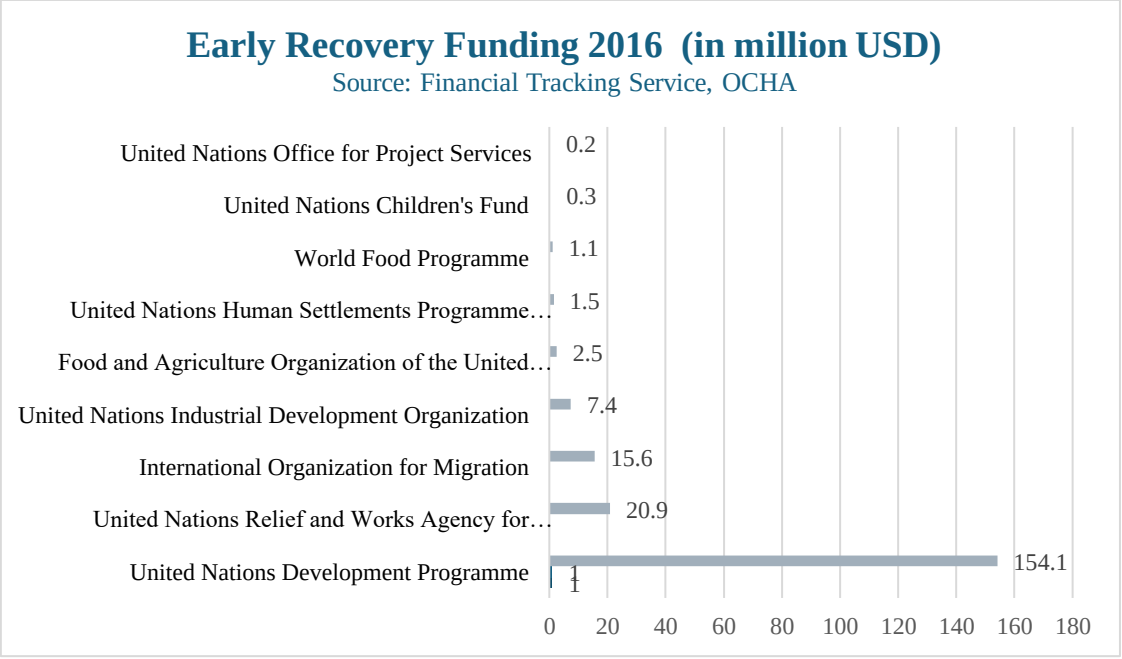


Despite being a generalist organization with a broad mandate, global footprint, and reputation as the operational backbone of the UN Development System, UNDP did not expand its activities beyond Early Recovery. In 2016, more than 50% of the resources it received were allocated to Early Recovery (USD 154.1 million), with the remainder going to multi-sectoral activities (USD 101.8 million), which involved providing advisory services to other humanitarian actors rather than direct implementation, to integrate Early Recovery and Crisis Resilience into their operations. Coordination and Support Services followed with a total of USD 25.9 million, while resources spent in a few other sectors were negligible (below USD 5 million globally).

This trend continued in 2018, when the bulk of available resources were again used for multi-sector advisory activities (USD 82.1 million, or 55% of UNDP's overall funding), followed by Early Recovery (USD 31.7 million, or 21.3%), and Coordination and Support Services (USD 9.7 million, or 6.5%). By 2022, following the deactivation of the Early Recovery Cluster and the de-linking of the RC/HC system, Early Recovery activities dropped to USD 23.4 million (8.75% of overall funding), while Coordination and Support Services fell to USD 23.1 million. Most of UNDP's 2022 funding was allocated to activities classified as shared across multiple sectors or under the 'Other' category, which primarily included advisory services on cross-sectoral issues[269].

Not only did UNDP fail to expand its humanitarian operations beyond Early Recovery and coordination services, but, over time, the Programme also lost its position as the system's primary supplier of Early Recovery programming. In 2016, UNDP ranked as the top recipient of Early Recovery funding, receiving more than 65% of total resources allocated to the sector (Figure 27).

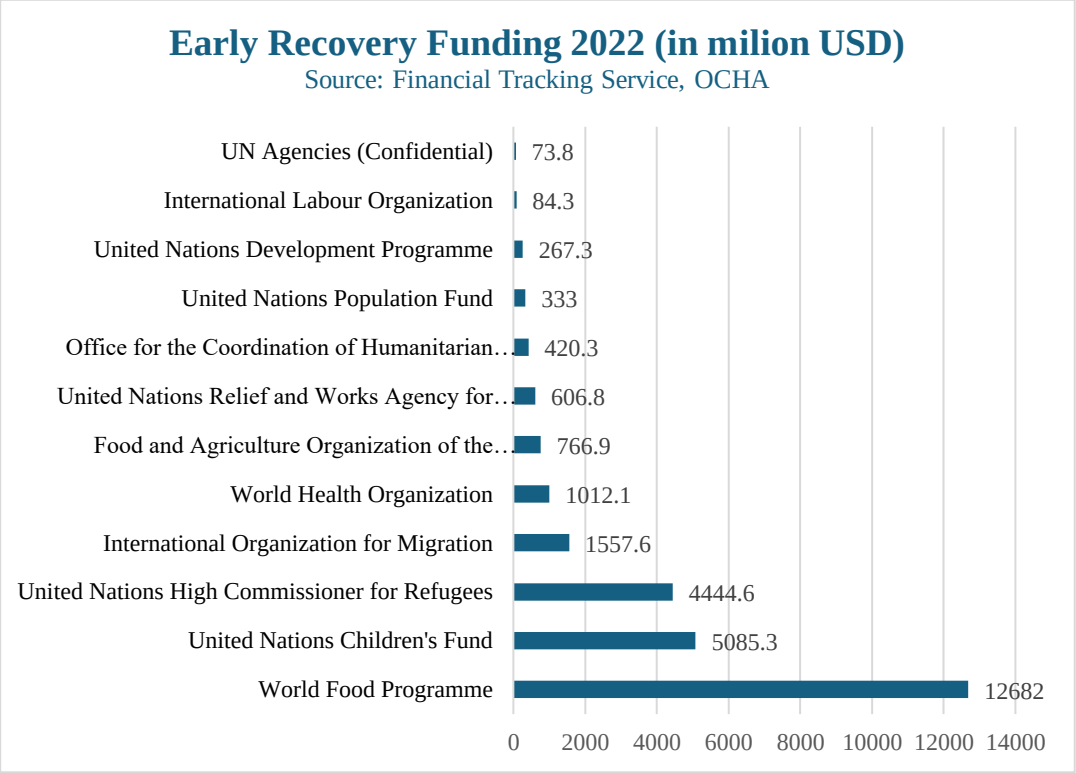
Figure 27: multilateral recipients of Early Recovery funding 2016



[269] Author interview #23, 16/05/2023, online

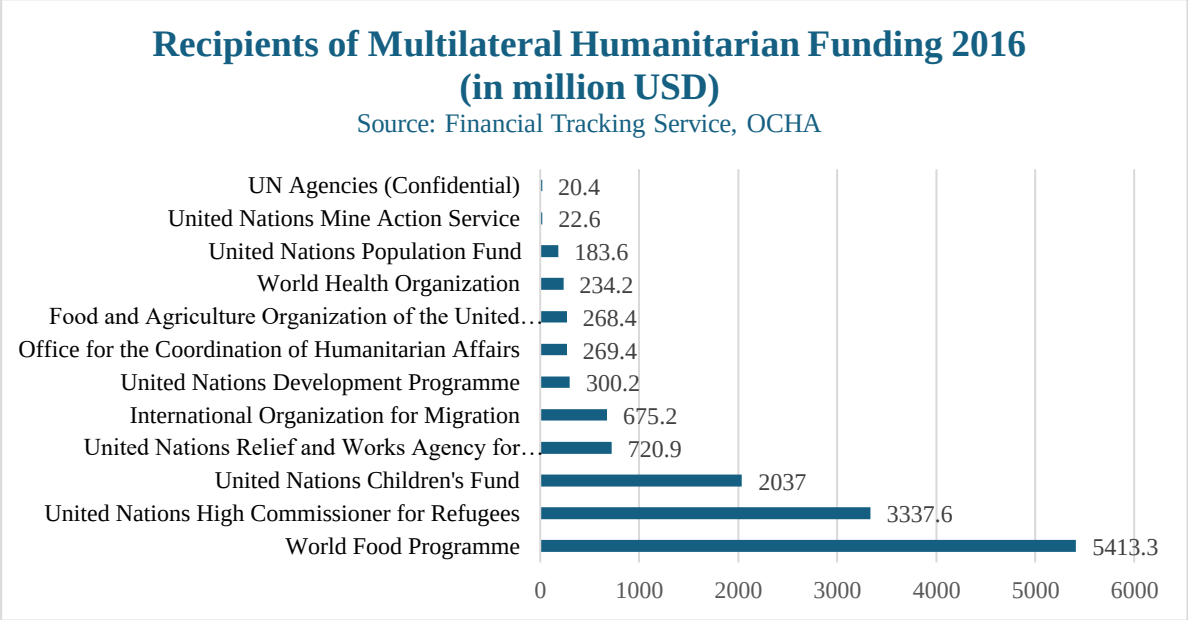
However, by 2018, the Programme received only 31% of total Early Recovery funding, and in 2022 this figure dropped further to 10.4%, with the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), UNRWA, OCHA, IOM, UNHCR, and WFP surpassing it (Figure 28).

Figure 28: Multilateral recipients of Early Recovery funding 2022



Overall, the share of global multilateral humanitarian aid reaching UNDP has declined since 2016. In 2016, secured 2.2% of total humanitarian ODA ranking as the 6th largest recipient in the system (figure 29).

Figure 29: Top recipients of multilateral humanitarian aid 2016



In 2018, UNDP's share of total multilateral humanitarian aid dropped to 0.98% as the Programme became the 10th UN entity per humanitarian funding (Figure 30).

Figure 30: Top recipients of multilateral humanitarian aid 2018

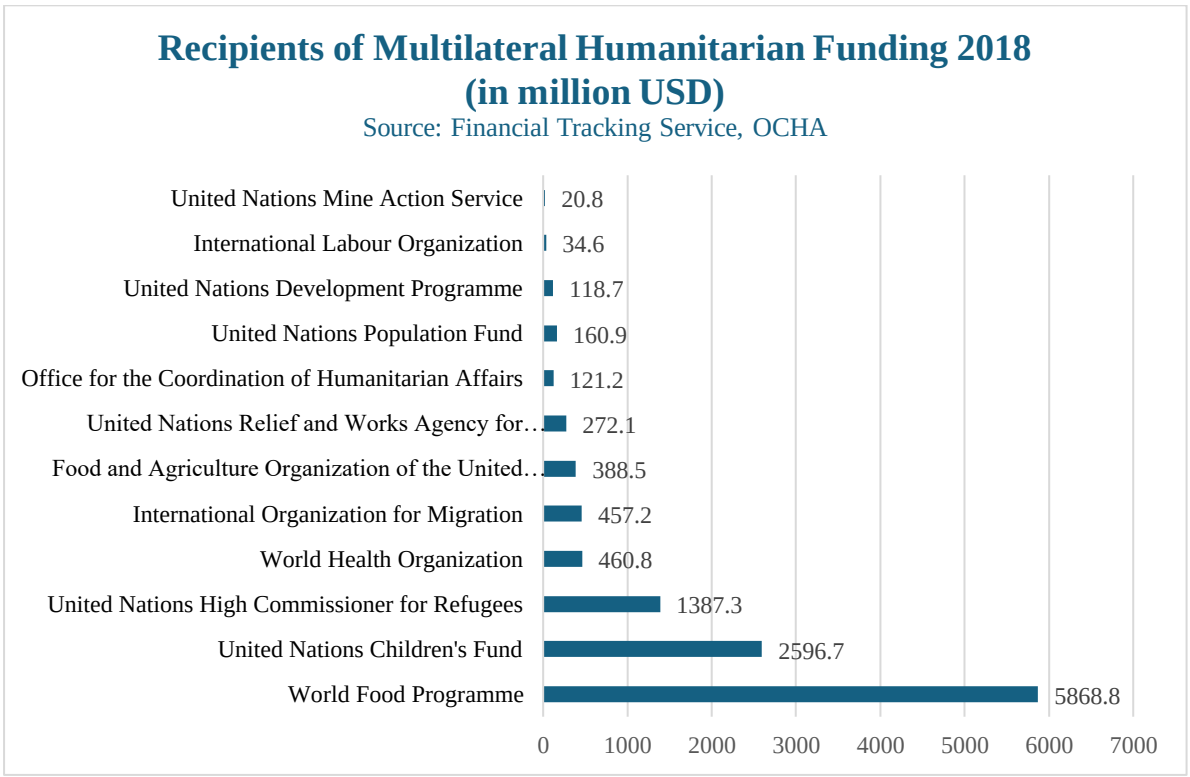
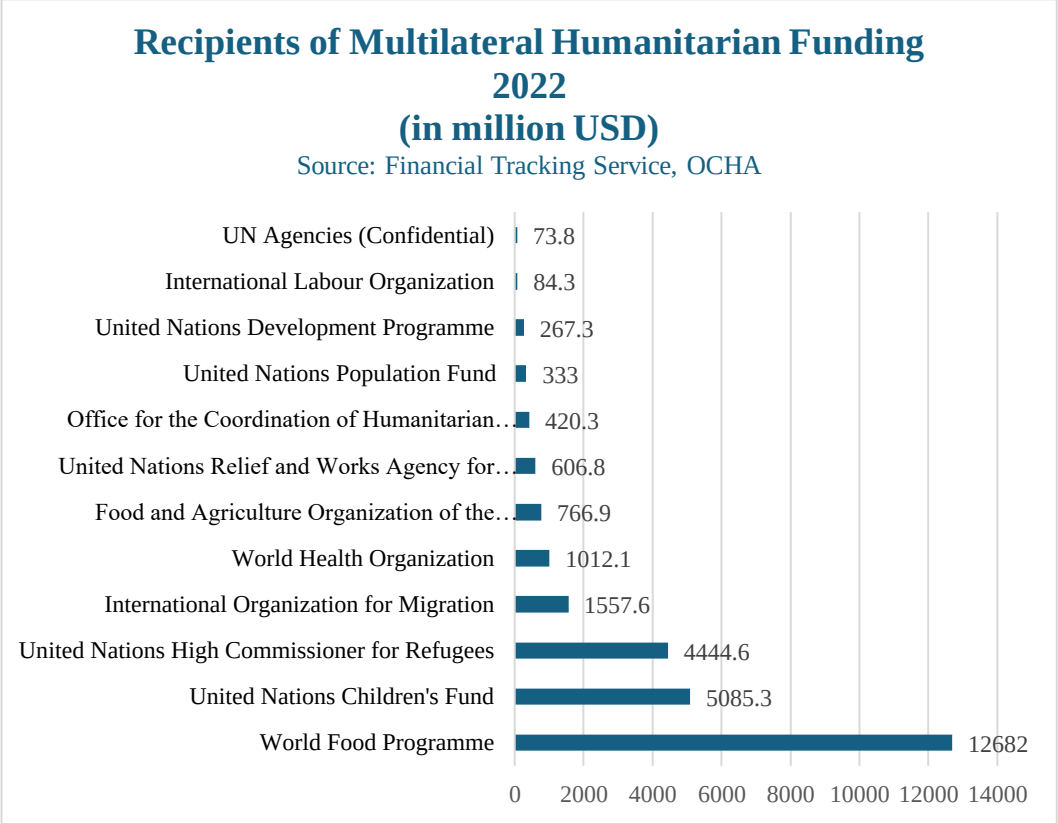


Figure 31: Top recipients of multilateral humanitarian aid 2022



In 2022, UNDP achieved a similar result, ranking as the 10th UN entity by funding received, with its total share slightly decreasing to 0.96% of total humanitarian aid (figure 31).

As mentioned in previous sections, since the de-linking of the RC/HC system and the closure of the Early Recovery Cluster between 2018 and 2019, UNDP has initiated a repositioning process to remain involved in the humanitarian sector—where an ever-increasing share of total multilateral ODA is directed—while avoiding direct competition with other humanitarian actors who are better equipped to attract resources for field operations[270].

A blueprint for UNDP's organizational repositioning process was already evident in the independent review of the Early Recovery Cluster, commissioned by UNDP in 2017 and

[270] Author interview #44, 22/11/2023, author's translation from Italian, online; author interview #24, 22/05/2023, online

published in early 2018. While sceptical of UNDP's operational contribution to the humanitarian system, the reviewers acknowledged that the Programme was well-positioned to bridge the gap between humanitarian action, long-term development objectives, and possibly even peacebuilding efforts. UNDP's potential role as an integrator is widely accepted by humanitarian stakeholders, seeing it as well-placed to "*connect humanitarian action to development (and, sometimes, peace), strengthen governance so that crisis response connects to government systems, and align humanitarian planning with national (development) planning and Agenda 2030*[271]". The review also noted that other humanitarian actors, including UN entities with operational mandates, viewed UNDP's horizontal role (i.e., strategic, advisory, cross-sectoral) positively. In particular, the review highlighted that "*if perceived competition for humanitarian funding is removed from the equation, then humanitarian and development stakeholders are comfortable recognizing UNDP's role as an integrator*[272]".

UNDP's shift away from its operational humanitarian function toward its new role as the champion of the Humanitarian-Development-Peace (HDP) Nexus becomes clear in the 2018-21 Strategic Plan. The plan, which outlines the Programme's intended trajectory over four years, mentions Early Recovery only once and frames UNDP's role in crisis response as supportive and complementary to that of humanitarian actors[273]. In the subsequent Strategic Plan (2022-2025), the concept of Early Recovery disappears entirely. In this latest plan, UNDP's objective to champion the HDP Nexus is significantly scaled back, appearing only twice as a vague commitment to "*an integrated approach that links development, disaster risk reduction, humanitarian action, and sustaining peace*[274]". UNDP's involvement in crisis

[271] Murray, Julian, Pedersen, F., Ziesche, S. (2018). *Evaluation of the Global Cluster for Early Recovery, p.58*
[272] Ibid.
[273] Executive Board of the UNDP. (2017). *UNDP Strategic Plan, 2018-2021*. New York, NY. Retrieved in December 2022 from https://www.undp.org/iraq/publications/undp-strategic-plan-2018-2021. P.15
[274] UNDP. (2021). UNDP Strategic Plan, 2022-2025. New York, NY. Retrieved in December 2022 from https://www.undp.org/publications/undp-strategic-plan-2022-2025, p.16

response is now framed solely in terms of risk prevention, with a focus on supporting national and local authorities to build resilience to crises and uncertainty.

The 2021 MOPAN Assessment Report, the most widely recognized independent evaluation of multilateral organizations, describes UNDP's future trajectory as "a work in progress[275]". Specifically addressing the Programme's role in the humanitarian system, the evaluation notes that "*delinking [the RC/HC system] has not been easy, and challenges remain in repositioning UNDP in the humanitarian-peace-development nexus*[276]". Despite efforts to emerge as the leading organization bridging humanitarian action, peacebuilding, and long-term development—culminating in the publication of an HDP Nexus Strategy and the launch of an HDP Nexus Academy in 2021 to educate stakeholders on related challenges—the MOPAN 2021 Assessment highlights an overall "*inability to leverage UNDP's comparative advantage on the humanitarian-development-peace nexus at the global level or elevate micro-level successes to more sustainable solutions*[277]". Furthermore, other UN organizations are also advancing claims to champion the HDP Nexus. For instance, an IOM report states that "*given its unique and diverse programming and its extensive operational footprint, IOM has a distinct comparative advantage within the United Nations system in operationalizing the humanitarian-development-peace nexus*[278]". As such, UNDP's control over the HDP Nexus discourse is far from assured.

Overall, external reviews and UNDP's latest Strategic Plans reveal a tension between the Programme's aspirations to position itself as a 'thought leader' and 'innovator' in crisis response, scaling down its operational role, and what the system still recognizes as UNDP's

---

[275] MOPAN. (2021). *MOPAN Assessment Report: United Nations Development Programme (UNDP)*., p.12. Retrieved in September 2022.from: https://www.mopanonline.org/assessments/undp2020/index.htm
[276] Ibid., p.26
[277] Ibid., p.173
[278] IOM. (2023). *Annual Report for 2022: 114th Session.* Geneva (Switzerland)., p.6 Retrieved from: https://governingbodies.iom.int/system/files/en/council/114/c-114-inf-1-annual-report-for-2022.pdf

main comparative advantage: being the 'operational backbone of the UN system.' Interestingly, despite UNDP's efforts to redefine itself, its role as project implementation branch for other multilateral partners—initially the reason for its entry into the humanitarian field—remains the organization's most distinctive feature.

6.6 Conclusion

Despite its outsider status, at the turn of the millennium, the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) appeared to have cemented its place in the humanitarian space. The Programme not only held the key role of UN Humanitarian Coordinator through its in-country representatives, but also championed the introduction of Early Recovery as an operational sector in humanitarian response, positioning itself as the best-suited organization to lead this new domain. According to the theoretical framework outlined in Chapter 3, as an operational organization in a resource-scarce environment, UNDP was expected to be sensitive to the potential reallocation of resources away from its newly found niche of specialization (i.e., Early Recovery). As a generalist IO with a broad mandate, global presence, and strong implementation capacities, UNDP should have responded to competition by adopting a strategy of competitive horizontal expansion, filling gaps left by other humanitarian actors, even if those operations extended beyond its mandate.

However, this chapter has demonstrated that, contrary to theoretical expectations, UNDP did not expand its humanitarian operations because it did not perceive the same level of competition as other actors in the same policy space. By overseeing the UN Humanitarian Coordinators network, UNDP maintained visibility in every humanitarian response, regardless of its operational role. Yet, these coordination responsibilities proved burdensome, requiring significant resources and staff to support the Humanitarian Coordinator and the broader UN

system, which detracted from its operational role in Early Recovery. As a result, UNDP not only failed to expand the scope of Early Recovery activities but also left gaps for other, more agile actors to fill. Unlike other UN organizations, UNDP had access to a larger (though shrinking) share of core resources, which led to a lack of investment in developing a robust crisis communication and fundraising strategy.

When the RC/HC role was decoupled from the UNDP Resident Representative position in 2018-19, the Programme was unprepared to step up its operational activities and unable to present a 'credible offer' to secure sufficient funding. UNDP clearly had not implemented a competitive horizontal expansion strategy, as the range of its operational activities in humanitarian contexts remained limited and marginal. Furthermore, the Programme failed to clearly define what Early Recovery actually entailed. Consequently, following an independent review process initiated by UNDP, the decision was made in 2018 to shut down the Early Recovery Cluster offices at headquarters and scale back UNDP’s operational role in humanitarian response, limiting its presence to an advisory and support role for other UN entities in the field.

Since then, UNDP has attempted to redefine its role in crisis contexts, positioning itself as an 'innovator' and 'integrator' across the humanitarian, development, and peace pillars of the UN system (i.e., the HDP Nexus). However, the results of these efforts have been mixed at best. Despite its best efforts to challenge this designation, UNDP's role as project implementation branch serving other multilateral organizations—initially the reason for its entry into the humanitarian field—remains the most distinctive feature of its brand.

Chapter 7

Conclusion

"There's an old joke about a group of friends, where someone says, 'We've heard each other's jokes so many times, why don't we just give them numbers? Then, we can just say the numbers.' Somebody says 'two'—everyone laughs. Somebody says 'seven'—everyone laughs. Somebody says 'nine,' but nobody laughs. 'Why didn't you laugh?' 'Well, you didn't tell it the way it's supposed to be told.' In humanitarian response and the UN system at large, we all know what is going to happen, yet we keep thinking that this time it's going to be different."

Former Resident Coordinator/ Humanitarian Coordinator in Haiti[279]

7.1 Introduction

This dissertation investigates why and how UN agencies involved in humanitarian response compete with each other, despite the division of labour by functional area introduced by the Humanitarian Cluster System. According to existing literature on international regime complexity, niche specialization and institutional differentiation should reduce inter-organizational competition, as states cannot exploit the substitutability of international organizations (IOs) to engage in forum shopping. However, this dissertation argues that in resource-scarce environments like the humanitarian regime, donor states may choose to prioritize certain niches (i.e., sectors of humanitarian response) over others. When this occurs, individual IOs perceive this prioritization as a threat to their survival and respond by attempting to secure access to scarce resources.

[279] Author interview #6, 27/09/2022, online

The dissertation also demonstrates that an IO's competitive response to the threat of niche substitution depends on its organizational type—whether it is a generalist or a specialist. Specialist IOs tend to engage in competitive issue framing, shaping the narrative around a policy issue (such as a humanitarian crisis) to align with the policy solutions they can provide based on their expertise and capabilities. In contrast, generalist IOs act as second movers, filling gaps by identifying unaddressed issues that could appeal to states, even if these issues fall outside their original remit and mandate.

Investigating the causes of competition among humanitarian UN agencies in the early 2020s is both urgent and appropriate. The COVID-19 pandemic, the Russian war of aggression against Ukraine, rising inflation, food prices, and heightened geopolitical instability have all contributed to unprecedented humanitarian needs. At the same time, domestic budgetary constraints and the rise of populist politics have increased public scrutiny in donor countries regarding how humanitarian organizations spend taxpayers' money. This heightened scrutiny reflects a reality that is unique to humanitarian international organizations: their performance in delivering relief assistance is often subject to a higher level of public oversight compared to institutions with more regulatory and less visible mandates.

The visibility and public attention that come with the responsibility of saving lives and maintaining human dignity present a double-edged sword for humanitarian IOs. On one hand, this increased visibility (at least in certain crisis contexts and for limited periods) allows these organizations to pressure member states to financially support their operations and, to some extent, to launch fundraising campaigns targeting individuals and the private sector, albeit with mixed success. On the other hand, because humanitarian action is by definition urgent and indispensable, the salience of the issue often invites stronger criticism of inefficiencies. The focus on the humanitarian mandate can overshadow the reality that these IOs are large

bureaucracies, whose staff may also be motivated by factors other than the humanitarian imperative, such as career advancement and vested interests.

This dissertation reconciles these two perspectives on humanitarian IOs, shedding light on how the competition among UN agencies for scarce resources shapes the humanitarian response process. Chapter 1 outlined the puzzle motivating the dissertation. The Humanitarian Cluster System was introduced in the early 2000s to establish a clear division of labour among UN organizations involved in humanitarian response, aiming to avoid duplications and inefficiencies. Despite the existence of this coordination structure, inter-IO competition is a well-acknowledged reality of the contemporary humanitarian system. The persistence of inter-IO competition despite niche specialization challenges the notion, widely held in the international regime complexity literature, that institutional differentiation should contain forum shopping and inter-organizational rivalry. The chapter also provided an overview of the relevant literature, considering sociological and principal-agent approaches to IO autonomy, international regime literature on mandate overlap, and specific literature on humanitarian IOs and coordination challenges in the sector.

Chapter 2 provided a quick introduction to the international humanitarian system. It began with a history of international humanitarianism, from the establishment of the Red Cross/Red Crescent Movement in 1863, through the early days of the UN and its agencies, to the wave of professionalization of humanitarian response in the 1990s, and up to the present. The chapter also provided an overview of humanitarian principles as the distinctive norms that set humanitarian actors and institutions apart from other spheres of action. Lastly, Chapter 2 briefly illustrated the Humanitarian Cluster System and the roles of OCHA, the Humanitarian Coordinator, and individual agencies in emergency response.

Chapter 3 introduced the novel theoretical framework underpinning this dissertation. It defined competition as a social phenomenon where actor A purposefully seeks to secure control over a scarce good (which can be either tangible or intangible) needed for survival, while knowing that at least one other actor will also orient their actions to gain access to the same resource. After reviewing relevant theoretical approaches, the chapter outlined how the threat of niche substitution leads to persistent inter-organizational competition despite niche differentiation. It then discussed the relationship between organizational type, either generalist or specialist, and the two competitive strategies IOs can employ in response to resource scarcity, namely competitive horizontal expansion and competitive issue framing. Lastly, Chapter 3 weighed the merits of the novel theoretical framework against alternative explanations, such as historical institutionalism and path dependence.

Chapters 4 to 6 tested the hypotheses introduced in Chapter 3. Chapter 4 illustrated why competition among UN organizations persists despite the clear division of labour embedded in the Humanitarian Cluster System (hypothesis 1). The chapter showed that, in the humanitarian regime, all conditions conducive to persistent inter-IO competition despite specialization are met, including population density, resource scarcity, and the threat of resource reallocation from one niche to another. First, the chapter delved into the reasons behind declining levels of humanitarian aid, despite a rise in both the number of humanitarian actors and the number of people in need worldwide. It then considered how prioritization has become a pervasive phenomenon in humanitarian governance. The chapter illustrated how scarcity, density, and the threat of niche substitution hamper the effectiveness of the current global humanitarian architecture in promoting inter-organizational coordination and cooperation, which in turn impacts its effectiveness in delivering relief services to people affected by crises worldwide.

Chapter 5 focused on two 'winner' cases in the competitive humanitarian arena. Through different strategies, both the World Food Programme (WFP) – a specialist IO – and the International Organization for Migration (IOM) – a generalist organization – succeed in securing funding and maintaining a significant presence in humanitarian response. The chapter began by illustrating why, despite being one of the most well-established humanitarian actors, the WFP remains sensitive to competitive pressures. It then examined how the Programme stayed competitive by actively shaping the narrative around humanitarian crises to ensure that food security retained donor attention. Chapter 5 then introduced the case of IOM, a newcomer to the UN system and humanitarian foray, and discussed the reasons that make IOM competitive in the humanitarian policy space. It provided evidence of the winner status of both WFP and IOM in the humanitarian system, illustrated in terms of funding secured and operational presence, while proving that competitive pressures are still increasing for these two actors.

Chapter 6 considered the case of a 'loser' in the competition. At the time of the Cluster System's introduction, the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) held a privileged position within the humanitarian system: it was assigned to the Early Recovery Cluster and was also responsible for appointing UN Humanitarian Coordinators, who were often the same person as the UNDP's Country Representative. Despite the apparent leverage this dual role gave UNDP in terms of visibility with donors and decision-making power regarding the allocation of UN pooled funding, its role has considerably declined over the years. While the role of Humanitarian Coordinator gave UNDP a false sense of security, the Programme failed both to adequately develop and 'sell' the importance of Early Recovery in humanitarian response and to expand the range of its operations in humanitarian contexts. In 2018, the position of UN

Resident Coordinator was de-linked from the UNDP Country Representative, and shortly after, the Early Recovery Cluster was shut down, relegating UNDP to a marginal role in humanitarian response and a shrinking share of multilateral humanitarian funding.

This concluding chapter highlights the major contributions of this dissertation to the academic literature and the ongoing policy debate on humanitarian coordination, while also acknowledging its limitations and suggesting avenues for future research. The next section summarizes how this dissertation builds on existing literature within the field of international relations, particularly in relation to sociological approaches to IOs and scholarship on international regime complexity. Section 7.3 outlines key insights for policymakers interested in strengthening humanitarian coordination. Meaningful change requires both donors and IOs to rethink the humanitarian funding landscape and the control that IOs exercise over defining needs in crisis contexts. Section 7.4 explores the applicability of the dissertation's theoretical framework to other policy contexts. Certain conditions must be met, including resource scarcity, institutional differentiation, and weak state preferences regarding the substance of interventions by operational IOs. The framework could be applied in areas such as international development and interactions among IOs within the Humanitarian-Development-Peace Nexus. The dissertation's methodological limitations are also considered, such as the absence of humanitarian aid recipients in the interview sample and the lack of direct observational evidence of IO behaviour at the country level. Future research could expand on this project by shifting the focus to country-level dynamics and exploring intra-organizational competition within different departments and offices of the same IO. Additionally, the role of private funding should be investigated to determine whether it mitigates or exacerbates inter-IO competition in the humanitarian sector.

7.2 Contributions to scholarship

In the field of international relations, this dissertation's argument is particularly relevant to global governance and international political economy (IPE), given the centrality of international organizations as a subject of academic inquiry. It bridges the gap between two tendencies in IPE literature on IOs: those that view IOs as actors versus those that see them as fora. Principal-agent (P-A) and constructivist scholars often examine individual IOs to understand their autonomy as agents in international relations. Another trend adopts a broader perspective, focusing on IO populations and the wider context in which they operate. Some literature examines the conditions that drive the growth or decline of IO populations, while another strand focuses on international regimes and regime complexes, exploring how states exploit institutional fragmentation and overlapping mandates to advance their own interests.

While this dissertation views humanitarian IOs as embedded within a dense institutional environment, or regime, that shapes their manoeuvring space and exposes them to competitive pressures, it also builds on approaches that highlight the autonomy and agency of IOs as independent actors in international relations. A key contribution of this dissertation is its challenge to the assumption that institutional differentiation is a solution to inter-IO competition, offering instead a more dynamic understanding of niche specialization. Lastly, this work is relevant to scholars of humanitarianism, as it sheds light on how inter-organizational dynamics affect the coordination and delivery of relief assistance.

Taking a frog's-eye perspective, scholars from both the rationalist and constructivist schools have examined the conditions and consequences of IO autonomy. The principal-agent (P-A) model focuses on the trade-offs in the relationship between IOs (and their bureaucrats) and member states (Hawkins 2006). It highlights the permissive conditions for organizational autonomy, particularly through the monitoring and contracting costs that limit member states'

ability to control IOs, leading to agency slack (Heldt 2017). A related perspective, rooted in bureaucratic politics and public choice theory, theorizes civil servants as holding monopolistic control over certain services in relation to the states they are meant to serve. Both approaches emphasize information asymmetry as the main driver of bureaucratic autonomy and deviant organizational behaviour.

Constructivist scholars also focus on organizational autonomy, viewing it as the primary source of organizational pathologies that lead to internal dysfunctions and undesirable policy outcomes (Barnett and Finnemore 2004). However, they argue that IO autonomy stems not from imperfect contracts or information asymmetries between the institution and its member states, but from the successful wielding of an IO's moral and expert authority (Littoz-Monnet 2017; 2021). IOs derive legitimacy from their superior expertise on the policy issues within their mandate, allowing them to be seen as impartial and apolitical actors. This perception provides their bureaucrats considerable leeway to pursue preferred policies. In line with these perspectives, this dissertation places IO agency at the forefront, particularly emphasizing IOs' concern with organizational survival and how that concern is reflected in the preferences of the civil servants within them. However, this dissertation goes beyond the traditional focus on individual IOs and their relationships with state principals, acknowledging that other actors in the policy space—including other IOs—can impose external constraints and pose threats to organizational survival[280].

From a bird's-eye perspective, scholars have examined the survival of IOs both within populations of similar organizations and within more diverse institutional landscapes. One sub-

[280] A few exceptions exist that look at organizational pathologies from an open system perspective: see for instance Kranke 2022

group of scholarship has focused on the life and death cycles of IOs, investigating the absolute decline in the total number of IOs, the relative decline of IO populations compared to alternative forms of institutional cooperation, and the conditions leading to either formal dissolution or de facto irrelevance (Debre and Dijkstra 2023; Dijkstra and Debre 2022; Eilstrup-Sangiovanni 2021; 2020; Gray 2018; Abbott, Green, and Keohane 2016). In this literature, institutional termination and decline are depicted as events that happen to IOs, with variation in outcomes primarily attributed to differences in institutional design—factors that IOs themselves cannot influence.

Another body of literature revolves around the concept of international regimes - "sets of implicit or explicit principles, norms, rules and decision-making procedures around which actors' expectation converge in a given area of international relations" (Krasner 1982, 186) – and international regime complexes (Alter and Meunier 2009; Alter and Raustiala 2018; Morse and Keohane 2014; Raustiala and Victor 2004). This scholarship highlights the strategic importance of inter-organizational links for self-interested member states (Hofmann 2019; Haftel and Hofmann 2019). States exploit institutional fragmentation and overlapping mandates to pursue their objectives and assert their preferences in global governance (Karlsrud and Reykers 2020; Panke and Stapel 2023).

While this literature has provided valuable insights into how IOs embedded in institutionally dense and complex environments can be exploited to strategically distort cooperation outcomes, it typically portrays these outcomes and pathologies as state-driven. In contrast, this dissertation focuses on IOs as actors that are aware of and reactive to external stimuli, although they remain constrained by their member states, primarily through the withholding of essential financial resources. As such, this dissertation contributes to the limited research[281] that bridges the perspectives of IO as fora with those of IO as actors, offering a

[281] See Ahrne, Brunsson, Kerwer 2016

more nuanced understanding of the systemic causes of inter-organizational competition and the ways individual IOs respond to external competitive pressures.

A second key contribution of this dissertation relates to the literature on the evolution of regime complexes and the question of whether complexity weakens or facilitates global governance. This body of scholarship theorizes that institutional differentiation is a crucial feature of regime complex architecture, influencing the extent to which member states can exploit fragmentation and complexity to their advantage. When institutional differentiation is high, institutions no longer act as substitutes for one another, limiting states' ability to engage in forum shopping (Henning and Pratt 2023). From an organizational standpoint, if organizations are not substitutes, they can offer distinct, potentially complementary services to states, drawing from separate resource pools. In other words, differentiated IOs occupy distinct niches.

This dissertation challenges the idea that institutional differentiation is a definitive solution to inter-organizational competition, as it overlooks the role of shifting external factors. For instance, niche specialization may occur at time t, but if resource scarcity worsens at time t+1, states may be compelled to prioritize certain niches over others. In other words, the complementarity or substitutability of niches is shaped not only by the institutions themselves but also by states' perceptions and external conditions beyond the control of IOs. This approach aligns with emerging research that emphasizes complexity and the fluidity of policy boundaries (Hofmann and Pawlak 2023).

This dissertation places particular emphasis on operational international organizations, as opposed to programmatic IOs. Although the distinction between the two is more of a spectrum, programmatic IOs primarily serve as norm and standard setters, whereas operational IOs focus on implementing programmes on behalf of member states. Additionally, this dissertation

introduces a more refined classification of (humanitarian) international organizations as either specialist or generalist. Existing literature on IO authority and autonomy has traditionally concentrated on programmatic IOs and their use of expert authority to justify mission creep, mandate expansion, and the resulting growth in personnel and budget (Littoz-Monnet 2020; 2017). However, this scholarship has largely overlooked whether this logic applies to IOs without treaty-based authority or those with significant operational components. This dissertation identifies two strategies that operational IOs employ in a competitive environment: competitive issue framing and competitive horizontal expansion. Interestingly, it shows that programmatic expansion is not driven by expertise. Instead, it is generalist IOs that adopt this strategy, while specialist organizations focus on shaping the narrative around a crisis to ensure that perceptions align with their expertise and existing capabilities.

Lastly, this dissertation contributes to the scholarship on humanitarianism and humanitarian governance within international relations and beyond. Specifically, it adds to the body of research examining how traditional humanitarian actors survive and adapt in response to the rise of non-traditional actors and the increasing severity of humanitarian crises worldwide. It also contributes to the literature on the institutional barriers to successful localization of humanitarian action, as the findings illuminate the (sometimes distorting) role that UN organizations play in defining needs on the ground and determining which interventions are most critical in a humanitarian response. The next section will explore the practical insights this dissertation offers for those working in the humanitarian sector, extending its relevance beyond academia.

7.3 Insights for policy practitioners

From a policy perspective, this dissertation underscores the crucial impact of donor-led prioritization and identifies two types of strategic responses that IOs adopt to handle competitive pressures. While the lack of coordination and intense inter-organizational competition has long been recognized as a challenge within the humanitarian sector, the international community's response has primarily involved reform processes that bring together multiple negotiating parties, including UN organizations (Balcik et al. 2010; Stephenson 2017). However well-intentioned, these efforts have resulted in only incremental changes. Chapter 2 illustrated how negotiations surrounding the Humanitarian Cluster, in particular, provided an opportunity for UN organizations without an explicit humanitarian role to gain a foothold in this area. The Cluster System aimed at improving coordination but failed to address the underlying cooperation problem revolving around fundraising for humanitarian responses. It also did little to strengthen local community involvement or enhance organizational accountability to beneficiaries, leaving decision-making power largely in the hands of donors and humanitarian organizations. Key takeaways for policymakers seeking to address competition and poor coordination in humanitarian responses include rethinking how donors allocate humanitarian funding, how UN agencies shape responses during the needs-assessment phase, the excessive risk aversion of both donors and UN organizations, the marginal role of OCHA, and the lack of accountability to affected populations.

While resourcing and financing are common concerns for all stakeholders in humanitarian governance and throughout the UN system, this dissertation highlights how financing becomes a key driver of inter-IO competition, even under conditions of niche specialization. First, the resources allocated by donors for humanitarian response have increasingly fallen short of meeting the skyrocketing global needs, particularly since the COVID-19 pandemic and the

Russian war of aggression against Ukraine. Theoretical approaches such as Organizational Ecology identify resource scarcity (along with population density) as a key factor in driving organizational competition. However, the volume of humanitarian aid is not the system's only challenge. Donors have increasingly relied on earmarking to ensure accountability to their taxpayers over resources allocated to multilateral partners. As the share of core funding has declined in favour of earmarked voluntary contributions, the predictability of funding for humanitarian IOs has decreased. Although donors justify earmarking as a way to keep IOs accountable and agile, this funding modality creates uncertainty about an IO's ability to remain operational, pushing each organization to view every new humanitarian crisis as a fundraising opportunity.

Once a crisis occurs, donors often ask UN organizations to act as a unified system and prioritize the areas where needs are most urgent. However, since each IO is striving to secure resources, donor-led prioritization inevitably pits UN agencies against each other, despite the differentiation introduced with the Cluster System. Although humanitarian organizations have recently intensified efforts to diversify their funding sources, resourcing IOs remains primarily the responsibility of the states that created them. National diplomats, concerned with addressing coordination failures and inter-organizational competition, should consider how their preferred funding modalities contribute to competitive pressures among UN organizations.

IOs cannot set the systemic conditions that define their room for manoeuvre, but as autonomous actors in global governance, they can adjust their behaviour to secure organizational survival. This dissertation illustrates how humanitarian international organizations respond to the competitive environments in which they operate. Specialist IOs engage in competitive issue framing, while generalist organizations pursue competitive horizontal expansion. Specialist

IOs act early in crises to shape the narrative in a way that aligns with their existing expertise and capabilities. Generalist IOs tend to enter the field at a slightly later stage, identifying and filling gaps left by specialists, regardless of how closely these new tasks align with their original mandate. These strategies reflect long-standing observations in evaluations of the humanitarian system: UN organizations are often accused of adopting either a 'can do that too' mentality or a 'hammer-nail' approach to crises. This is possible because UN organizations are tasked not only with service delivery and programming but also with the crucial responsibility of needs assessment (and often monitoring).

The UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) was initially created to address these issues, but its role has been hampered and contested by other UN agencies from the start. OCHA remains chronically under-resourced and relies on the data-gathering capabilities of individual agencies to produce reports that provide an overview of the funding needs across the UN system during a crisis. Interviewees, including OCHA officials and former Humanitarian Coordinators, admitted the difficulty of drafting unbiased reports when UN agencies are inflating figures and pushing to prioritize their sectors in the UN-wide response. Those interested in improving humanitarian coordination within the UN system should focus on granting OCHA the resources and authority it was originally designed to have.

The accountability chain in humanitarian response does not point toward people in need or disaster-affected communities. Since donor states provide the financial resources, humanitarian IOs focus their advocacy and fundraising efforts on them. Interviews and fieldwork in Geneva revealed that, after a crisis begins, UN agencies rush to gather information for UN-wide reports and provide assessments to donors bilaterally at the capital level. Because the needs-assessment phase becomes a race against time for individual agencies, there is little incentive to make the process more inclusive by involving local communities and civil society organizations.

However, the speed of needs assessments is not the only reason for the lack of accountability to affected populations. Donors are risk-averse when it comes to involving local communities directly in the decision-making process, as domestic audiences in donor countries are particularly sensitive to scandals involving misallocated aid. Humanitarian IOs also have little incentive to further engage beneficiaries and local organizations, as doing so could undermine their ability to use the needs-assessment phase to bolster their fundraising efforts.

Overall, this dissertation demonstrates that competition among UN agencies persists because both donor states and IOs seek to retain maximum control over decision-making in humanitarian response, often to the detriment of the populations they are meant to assist. Improving humanitarian coordination, therefore, requires changing the system of incentives that drives competitive behaviour. While resource scarcity is beyond the control of donor states and UN agencies due to the worsening global humanitarian crises, the allocation of these scarce resources can be made more efficient, even in the presence of inter-organizational competition. Achieving this requires the participation and agreement of both donor states and UN humanitarian agencies, which is why previous rounds of reform in the humanitarian system have fallen short.

On the donor side, increasing the predictability of funding flows would reduce the uncertainty IOs face regarding their operational sustainability, preventing them from treating every crisis as an urgent fundraising opportunity. On the UN side, responsibility for conducting needs assessments must be separated from the organizations responsible for programming and service delivery to ensure that donors receive information that accurately reflects the situation on the ground. There are two key approaches to achieving this. First, OCHA's capabilities must be strengthened, and its reliance on data from other agencies must end so that it can fulfil the coordination role it was originally created for. Second, for humanitarian response to truly

provide relief to those in need, UN organizations must finally deliver on their long-standing commitment to localization, empowering local responders in affected communities to lead humanitarian assistance efforts. Existing research shows that humanitarian IOs have resisted localization due to concerns over a long-term decrease in their size and influence (Frennesson et al. 2022). Developing mechanisms to give local communities a more prominent role in the needs assessment phase would provide donors with a more representative evaluation of ground-level needs without completely stripping IOs of their operational role. By separating the definition of needs from the delivery of services, competition among UN agencies could potentially foster positive outcomes by encouraging innovation and efficiency.

7.4 Scope conditions and limitations

Section 7.2 highlights the main contributions of this dissertation. This research project focuses on a group of twelve UN entities (organizations, programmes, and funds) with an operational role in humanitarian response. The findings demonstrate how UN organizations with operational humanitarian roles compete for resources, even within the division of labour established by the Cluster System. This challenges existing views on institutional differentiation and niche specialization, which are often seen as factors that reduce inter-organizational competition. The second contribution of this dissertation is in outlining the strategic options available to humanitarian IOs and explaining how the strategic behaviour of generalist and specialist IOs differs. While certain specificities are unique to IOs in humanitarian response, these findings may also have relevance for institutions outside the humanitarian policy space. Some limitations, both methodological and in the scope of the research question, should be acknowledged and could serve as starting points for future research on inter-IO competition.

7.4.1 Distinctive features of humanitarian IOs

To assess whether the findings of this dissertation are applicable to other policy domains, it is first important to highlight the distinctive features of humanitarian governance. The primary consideration is that humanitarian action revolves around 'crises.' While these catastrophic events cause significant disruption and suffering for civilian populations, they do not constitute a crisis for humanitarian IOs as institutions. In fact, for these organizations, humanitarian crises are 'business as usual.' What sets humanitarian crises apart is the urgency and narrow window of time in which responders must act. By definition, crises are sudden events. Even though the humanitarian community has begun investing in anticipatory action and early warning mechanisms, the ability of humanitarian organizations to predict the origin and nature of the next emergency remains limited. At the same time, due to the severe negative impact of these events on human life, they tend to attract significant public attention, though the level of attention can vary from crisis to crisis. Donor governments are often compelled to respond quickly to alleviate suffering and save lives. However, because of the sudden nature of these crises, donors often lack sufficient information to determine what is needed on the ground. While they have a strong preference *for* intervention, they usually have weak preferences regarding the type of intervention required, making them more receptive to the proposals of IOs than they might be in other policy domains. Furthermore, humanitarian assistance is meant to be neutral and impartial by definition, so donor states may defer more to IOs than they would in more politicized policy areas.

The second peculiarity of humanitarian action, closely linked to the sudden nature of humanitarian response, is the strong prevalence of earmarked funding as donors' preferred funding modality. Earmarked funding reduces the predictability of resource flows for humanitarian IOs, increasing their tendency to view each crisis as an opportunity to secure

visibility and funding. While earmarking is more common in humanitarian action than in any other issue area, this funding modality has rapidly expanded to other domains of global governance, including international development, over the last two decades.

Humanitarian IOs' ability to demonstrate their contributions to global governance is limited to specific crises and is difficult to extend beyond the crisis context. Unlike institutions in slower-moving domains with a regulatory or normative role, which can gradually expand their mandate over time, humanitarian IOs operate only during unpredictable, time-limited windows of opportunity. Their capacity to secure resources by acting as norm and standard setters under 'normal circumstances' is therefore constrained. Additionally, the operational costs associated with humanitarian IOs' programming are necessarily higher than those of IOs with purely regulatory or normative functions.

7.4.2 On inter-IO competition beyond humanitarian action

Having identified the distinctive features of the humanitarian policy space, the next step is to determine how well the contributions of this dissertation apply to other policy domains. Certain systemic conditions must be in place for the findings to extend beyond the humanitarian sphere. The policy domain should be densely populated by operational IOs focused on programming and implementation, rather than those concerned with setting and overseeing international regulations, norms, and standards—a process that tends to be more political and heavily influenced by member states. Additionally, institutional differentiation must exist, where the policy space has gradually divided into distinct areas of intervention over time.

Even though the Cluster System assigns to each UN IO a leadership role in one functional area of humanitarian response, inter-organizational competition persists. This occurs because, over the years, donor states - responding to internal budgetary constraints - have increasingly prioritized one or a few Clusters (i.e., sectors) of the humanitarian response over the others as a way to allocate scarce resources. As a result, despite the existence of a division into niches of specialization, external factors and actors can determine whether these niches are perceived as complementary or substitutes. This challenges the prevailing view in regime complexity theory, which suggests that institutional differentiation diminishes competition among IOs by limiting states' ability to engage in forum shopping.

This first contribution might be extended to IOs in other domains, where niches of specialization for IOs have been identified (whether geographically or thematically), and where resource scarcity persists due to factors like donor budgetary constraints, rising needs for intervention, or increasing costs of multilateral programming. While the rapid and sudden nature of IO intervention is unique to the humanitarian sphere, donor-led prioritization and resource reallocation could be relevant to other policy domains, where donors do not have strong political interests or preferences regarding the substance of policies to be implemented by their multilateral partners. For instance, a donor state seeking to increase its involvement in the development process of a third country, might view 'hard' development (e.g., infrastructure projects) and 'soft' development (e.g., programmes aimed at strengthening institutions and promoting good governance) as interchangeable rather than complementary. In such cases, niche substitution could lead to competition even among IOs with a universal mandate and broad membership (e.g., UN IOs), not just those established by emerging powers challenging the Western-led order.

The extent to which the threat of niche substitution could fuel inter-organizational competition in slower-moving fields like international development depends on several factors: the strength of donor preferences regarding specific areas of intervention, the political weight that the donor attributes to the recipient, and, to some extent, the preferences of recipient authorities themselves, who are typically more engaged in long-term development projects than in humanitarian interventions. In practical terms, this could be assessed by examining how strictly earmarked the voluntary contributions destined to a certain country are. For instance, soft geographic earmarking may indicate weak donor preferences, which leaves room for competition among IOs in the development space.

In response to the threat of resource reallocation away from their niche, UN organizations adapt to competitive pressures. Depending on whether the IO is a specialist or generalist institution, it will either employ a competitive issue-framing strategy or engage in competitive horizontal expansion. The criteria for distinguishing between generalist and specialist IOs can be easily applied to other domains, such as international development. These criteria include the range of operations performed by the IO (as listed on its website, budgetary reports, or annual strategic plan), whether it primarily focuses on long-term development or also participates in humanitarian response, and whether it targets a specific demographic.

A key challenge lies in distinguishing between the fast-paced, reactive nature of competitive horizontal expansion and the slower, more incremental process of mission creep, especially in domains where IO interventions are not as tightly time-bound as in humanitarian response. This distinction can often be assessed on a case-by-case basis by examining whether organizational overlap occurs in contexts where resources are earmarked for programmes with a defined time horizon. Additionally, tracing the origin of the expansion—whether it stems from an internal initiative by the organization's civil servants or is a response to an external

stimulus, such as a member state request or a specific event—can help differentiate between mission creep and competitive horizontal expansion.

Before discussing potential avenues for future research, it is important to acknowledge the limitations of this dissertation, which are tied to the research design and methodological choices made throughout the project. The unit of analysis is the individual international organization (IO), which is treated as a coherent, unified entity, even though it often has a complex and geographically dispersed structure. This approach oversimplifies the reality of the differing agendas and conflicting interests within the various components that make up an IO. In the context of humanitarian governance, for instance, country and regional offices frequently push for autonomy from their headquarters in Geneva or New York, much like IOs seek autonomy from their state-principals.

Additionally, several of the IOs examined in this dissertation have dual mandates in both humanitarian action and long-term development, often leading to internal conflicts between different offices and departments. While this dissertation assumes that the imperative of organizational survival overrides these internal divisions, it is important to recognize that competition can be just as much an intra-organizational issue as it is inter-organizational. One scenario not considered in this research is the possibility that high levels of internal fragmentation and rivalry might negatively affect an IO's ability to succeed in inter-organizational competition.

This dissertation focused on financial resources, specifically the humanitarian component of Official Development Assistance (ODA) allocated by donor states to their multilateral partners. While these resources remain the most important funding source for humanitarian IOs, the proportion of their total humanitarian budget coming from alternative sources—such

as donations from individuals, private foundations, and the business sector—has increased over the past two decades. It is beyond the scope of this dissertation to determine whether competition over these alternative sources of funding is as intense, or if IOs use the same strategies, as outlined in Chapter 3, to secure their share of private funding.

7.4.3 Methodological limitations

From a methodological perspective, the data collection process has some limitations. While these do not undermine the findings presented in Chapters 4 to 6, they do restrict the conclusions that can be drawn about the impact of inter-organizational competition on the effectiveness of humanitarian responses. The first methodological limitation relates to the direct observation of IOs. Due to Covid-19 travel restrictions, fieldwork was conducted only in Geneva and not at the country level, where IO country offices interact with Humanitarian Coordinators (HCs) and donor representatives to assess needs and draft appeals and reports. This absence of in-country observational data was partially mitigated by online interviews with in-country IO officers and current and former humanitarian coordinators. However, while the three IOs selected are representative of the broader group of twelve UN organizations with IASC membership, the lack of data from country-level operations provides only a partial view of the complexity of humanitarian responses and the role IOs play. This account assumes coherence between the behaviour observed at headquarters (in Geneva) and the operations of IO country offices.

A second limitation concerns the sample of stakeholders interviewed for this dissertation. Direct beneficiaries of humanitarian operations were not contacted due to both ethical concerns and challenges in outreach, although the list of interviewees includes two individuals with experience in locally led NGOs. While the exclusion of beneficiaries does not

affect the validity of the results, it does limit the ability to draw conclusions about the impact of inter-organizational competition on the effectiveness of humanitarian response. Having outlined the major limitations of this dissertation, the next section will discuss how these issues might be addressed in future research and point to additional avenues for exploration.

7.5 Future research

This dissertation explores why and how humanitarian international organizations within the UN system compete despite the apparent division of labour established with the UN Cluster System. It sheds light on why inter-IO competition persists, even with institutional differentiation through niche specialization. Additionally, it examines the connection between organizational type and the strategic behaviours adopted by IOs in response to competitive pressures. While the findings in Chapters 4 through 6 address the puzzle that motivated this research, the interviews and the fieldwork in Geneva also raised new questions and ideas worthy of academic investigation. Future research on inter-IO competition in the humanitarian realm can be pursued in the following ways: by applying the theoretical framework beyond the humanitarian sector to other closely related fields, such as long-term development; by focusing on the intra-organizational level to explore how competition among different components or departments of IOs affects inter-organizational competition outcomes; by investigating whether similar strategic behaviours apply to IOs competing for private funding; and by more systematically assessing the impact of inter-IO competition on IO performance in humanitarian response, including the perspectives of country-level actors and recipients of humanitarian aid.

As mentioned in the previous section, while certain specificities distinguish humanitarian organizations from IOs operating in other domains, the theoretical framework developed in

Chapter 3 could be applied to other fields, provided certain conditions are met. This is particularly relevant for development IOs, which operate in a crowded policy environment characterized by pronounced institutional differentiation, both geographically and thematically. Although there is variation across recipient countries, the ambitious sustainable development goals that the international community aims to achieve by 2030 require more funding than donor states have allocated so far. In this context, competition for multilateral funding may be especially pronounced, as donor countries often channel a significant portion of their development aid bilaterally through their own development agencies.

However, several caveats must be considered when applying the theoretical framework to the development sector. First, there is significant variation in the roles played by development IOs: some provide financial loans, others offer technical assistance or advise governments, while others implement projects funded by loan-granting IOs. Whether comparisons should be limited to IOs offering the same type of service or broadened to include IOs across the entire development supply chain requires careful consideration. Second, international development is more politically sensitive than humanitarian response. Both donor and recipient countries are likely to have stronger preferences regarding the substance of development projects than in emergency response, potentially limiting the scope of action for international organizations.

Additionally, the theoretical framework could be extended to include IOs operating in adjacent regimes. Inter-organizational competition among development, humanitarian, and, to a lesser extent, peace actors is a commonly discussed issue within the international community. Strengthening coherence and coordination across the Humanitarian-Development-Peace (HDP) Nexus is a recurring theme in policy documents from organizations like the UN ECOSOC and in system-wide assessments commissioned by donor states. In this context, institutional differentiation refers to IOs being associated with one of these three pillars, even

as protracted crises and high levels of state fragility blur the lines between humanitarian, development, and peacebuilding interventions.

In light of domestic budgetary constraints, donor states may choose to prioritize one pillar over the others, increasing competition among their multilateral partners. Reports on HDP Nexus coordination reveal either the expansion of IOs beyond their original mandates or contrasting narratives about the simultaneous presence of these actors in a given country. For example, peace actors argue that the impartiality of humanitarian organizations can sometimes reignite local grievances. Humanitarian IOs, in turn, often criticize development counterparts for collaborating with national authorities, even when those authorities contribute to the crisis. Meanwhile, development actors claim that humanitarian agencies create dependency on aid among the populations they serve.

Clashes between humanitarian and development objectives also occur within IOs that hold a dual mandate. While balancing dual roles as providers of humanitarian relief and advocates for sustainable development can increase an organization's overall budget by tapping into different funding sources, it often undermines organizational coherence. Offices, bureaus, or departments responsible for either humanitarian or development policy tend to interact with different ministries or departments within donor countries (the same is true for the EU Commission, where DG ECHO and DG INTPA serve different functions). This can lead to inconsistent messaging when approaching donors.

Intra-organizational rivalry may also arise between headquarters and country offices, as the latter often seek greater autonomy. Career incentives within IOs, as discussed in Chapter 4, encourage staff members—particularly at the country level—to secure funding for their own offices, a key factor in career advancement. This can result in staff approaching donor states directly, at times undermining the organizational narrative set by headquarters. Examining

intra-organizational rivalry could shed light on how international bureaucracies expand and evolve over time. It is also relevant in the context of inter-IO competition. Some interviewees with experience at UNDP pointed to internal fragmentation and rivalry between headquarters and country offices as one reason why UNDP has been slow to respond to new humanitarian emergencies and ineffective in establishing Early Recovery as a distinct sector of humanitarian response. Investigating whether intra-organizational rivalry impacts the outcomes of inter-IO competition would build on this research, moving beyond the 'black box' view of IOs.

Another issue that this dissertation does not explore in depth is the role of private funding. This thesis focuses primarily on multilateral ODA (Official Development Assistance) allocated to humanitarian response as the main object of inter-IO competition. While humanitarian aid provided by institutional donors remains the primary funding source for most IOs—especially humanitarian organizations—donor states are increasingly struggling to meet rising global humanitarian needs. As a result, more attention is being given to alternative funding sources, including the business sector, philanthropic foundations, and wealthy individuals in wealthier countries.

In the context of heightened inter-IO competition, two scenarios regarding private funding can be considered. First, competition could extend to resources provided by private donors, with some IOs outperforming others due to more effective communication strategies and outreach capabilities. IOs that specialize in specific issues may have an advantage over generalist organizations in securing private funds, as they tend to be more adept at storytelling and framing their causes competitively. Alternatively, private funding could serve as a survival mechanism for IOs that have been less successful in obtaining humanitarian aid from state donors. Exploring why certain IOs turn to the private sector for funding and identifying the

conditions that make IOs successful in securing private resources would further contribute to the literature investigating the dynamics IO survival.

Lastly and perhaps most importantly, this dissertation has not systematically investigated the impact of inter-IO competition on the performance of IOs in delivering humanitarian assistance to people in need. The sample of stakeholders involved in the interviewing phase only included representatives of donor states, staff members of UN organizations with a humanitarian role, and independent experts of humanitarian affairs, affiliated with research centres, academic institutions, and think tanks. While according to the market logic, competition makes private firms more innovative and efficient, this dissertation suggests that this might not be the case for humanitarian IOs. Donor-led prioritization nullifies the coordination and the division of labour envisioned by the Cluster System, promoting either a 'can-do' mentality or a 'hammer-nail' approach to humanitarian emergencies (see section 7.3). While some of the interviewees with direct field experience provided examples of some blatant failures of IOs and how this affected the populations these organizations were supposed to assist, the dissertation does not systematically investigate the relationship between the type of organizational behaviour and the results seen on the ground. Existing literature that assesses the performance of IOs even in humanitarian response includes for the most part quantitative studies that equate performance to the volume of the funds raised and the speediness of the response rather than to the satisfaction levels reported by beneficiaries themselves. To truly understand the extent to which inter-IO competition is an issue in humanitarian governance assessing the extent to which their programming really delivers life-saving assistance to those in need is crucial. Future research should take the country level as the starting point of the empirical investigation, which could include the direct observation of meetings of the Humanitarian Country Teams and to shed light on how decisions made in this forum translate in concrete assistance for local populations.

As discussed in the introduction of this chapter, the perspective that both scholars and the general public adopt when evaluating the performance of humanitarian international organizations (IOs), especially those within the UN system, is unique. These organizations are among the most well-known and widely recognized IOs due to the significant public attention their life-saving missions attract. While their humanitarian work garners visibility, it also bestows a 'moral' status upon them, often overshadowing the fact that they are also large bureaucracies that function like any other. As one interviewee pointed out, people are far more likely to recognize organizations like the World Food Programme (WFP) or UNICEF than the Universal Postal Union[282]. However, they are also more likely to hear about scandals or failures related to the delivery of assistance. For large bureaucracies, survival is the ultimate organizational imperative, even if that means revisiting or stretching the boundaries of their mandates. When material and financial resources become scarce, IOs tend to prioritize their survival over other goals, including coordinating effectively with other organizations to deliver humanitarian aid quickly and efficiently. While this may seem counterintuitive to an external observer, it is an undeniable reality within the humanitarian system that policymakers must confront. Due to the magnitude of their missions and their multilateral nature, UN humanitarian organizations require a vast and complex support structure. Extreme calls to scale back UN involvement in favour of other actors risk backfiring, ultimately harming the very people such reforms are intended to help. Although the UN's humanitarian system is not always operating at peak efficiency, no other humanitarian actor has the same level of recognition or reach to perform the critical work that some UN organizations accomplish daily. A balanced approach is needed —one that acknowledges the bureaucratic dynamics at play within humanitarian IOs,

[282] Author interview #62, 17/07/2024, online

mitigates their negative repercussions, and even seeks to turn these dynamics into opportunities to improve efficiency and reduce costs.

This dissertation provides a comprehensive overview of the reasons why competition persists among international organizations in humanitarian response despite the sector-based division of labour introduced with the Humanitarian Cluster System. It contributes to the academic literature on international regime complexity by revealing the limitations of institutional differentiation as a remedy for forum shopping and inter-IO competition. Additionally, it builds on existing research concerning IO change and adaptation, demonstrating how both generalist and specialist operational IOs respond to competitive pressures in rapidly evolving environments. From a policy perspective, this dissertation emphasizes the crucial role of donor-led prioritization and identifies two types of strategic responses IOs can adopt to manage competition. These findings are valuable for policymakers, diplomats, and IO officials seeking to improve humanitarian coordination and enhance the effectiveness of UN humanitarian agencies in a world where their work is more necessary than ever before. After all, even a six-month internship might provide enough time and insight to begin reflecting on the present and future state of the humanitarian system.

Appendix A: Classifying humanitarian IOs: Generalists vs specialists

This dissertation classifies UN organizations involved in humanitarian work as either specialist or generalist. This categorization approximates what is a nuanced distinction on a spectrum. As discussed in Chapter 3, this distinction only applies to a well-defined issue area. Within a narrowly defined policy regime, an IO offering multiple services in that field might be considered a generalist. However, if the boundaries of the regime are expanded to encompass a broader issue area, the same IO might be regarded as a specialist. In this dissertation, the policy space of interest is the international humanitarian regime, which includes institutions involved in delivering humanitarian assistance worldwide. As this research focuses on humanitarian IOs within the UN system, the attention is on organizations that are part of the Inter-Agency Standing Committee (IASC). While not all of these IOs have an explicit humanitarian mandate, according to IASC rules, only organizations with an operational role in humanitarian response can be accepted as full members. As of 2024, IASC has twelve member organizations: the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO), the International Organization for Migration (IOM), the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA), the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR), the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA), the United Nations Human Settlements Programme (UN-HABITAT), the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), UN Women, the World Food Programme (WFP), and the World Health Organization (WHO). The introduction of the Cluster System during the Humanitarian Reform process of 2005, and the sector-based division of labour among UN organizations, represents an attempt by the international community to achieve institutional differentiation in the international humanitarian regime.

Existing databases of humanitarian IOs tend to conflate the sector of intervention with the target demographic and/or the modality of intervention. The categorization introduced in this dissertation considers all these criteria to distinguish between specialist and generalist humanitarian IOs. The first criterion is the programming horizon of an IO. Official Development Assistance is usually divided into humanitarian aid or development assistance, with the former targeting people in need during crises to provide immediate relief, and the latter focusing on achieving long-term development objectives in a target country. With the rise of fragility and protracted crises worldwide, an increasing number of multilateral organizations now engage in both the humanitarian stream and long-term development. One organization can be classified as humanitarian (H), development (D), or both (H&D). Focusing exclusively on humanitarian or development is considered a specialist feature, while working in both streams counts as a generalist indicator.

Operationally, the time horizon is based on the expenses by function of each IO as recorded by the UN System Chief Executives Board (UN CEB). The UN CEB establishes standards for UN organizations to classify their revenue and expenditures. Standard II provides definitions for functions carried out by UN system organizations and distinguishes between "development assistance," "humanitarian assistance," "peace operations," and "global agenda and specialized assistance." "Humanitarian assistance" is defined as "material or logistical assistance provided for humanitarian purposes, typically in response to humanitarian crises, including natural and man-made disasters. The primary objective of humanitarian aid is to save lives, alleviate suffering, and maintain human dignity."[283] "Development assistance" comprises "activities specifically aimed at promoting the sustainable development of programming countries, with a focus on long-term impacts."[284] To be classified as H or D (i.e., specialist), an

[283] UN Chief Executives Board for Coordination. March 2024. *Data standards for UN system-wide reporting of financial data,* p.12
[284] Ibid.

IO had to allocate at least 2/3 of its expenses to one function (based on an average of annual expenses from 2011 to 2022 reported on an accrual basis). For each IO, Table 1 reports the programming horizon classification along with the average percentage expenditure per functional area. Interestingly, not all IOs with IASC membership count humanitarian assistance as their primary expenditure category.

The second criterion considered for classification is whether the IO has a specific *target demographic*. Focusing its programming on a specific demographic is considered as a specialist feature, whereas programming with a whole-of-society approach counts as a characteristic of a generalist organization.

The third criterion is the breadth of the range of interventions carried out by IOs. There are ten types of interventions in humanitarian response: advocacy/lobbying, capacity-building/training, cash-based programming, coordination (excluding Cluster Lead responsibilities), evaluation and standards, funding (to other IOs), information and communication, material assistance, policymaking, and research. In this dissertation, carrying out up to five types of interventions qualifies as a narrow range of intervention, a characteristic of a specialist organization. Delivering more than five of these activities constitutes a broad range of intervention. The range of intervention for each IO was established by analysing project descriptions and purpose codes for multilateral contributions to UN agencies, as reported by the OECD Creditor Reporting System (CRS)[285], for two years that coincided with humanitarian system reform processes (2005, 2016). These results were then triangulated with information on humanitarian programming available on individual IO websites. Table 1 reports the activity count for each IO.

[285] The Creditor Reporting System (CRS) is a comprehensive database established in 1973 by OECD, which provides consistent and coherent information about aid spending by DAC donors https://data-explorer.oecd.org/?fs[0]=Topic%2C1%7CDevelopment%23DEV%23%7COfficial%20Development%20Assistance%20%28ODA%29%23DEV_ODA%23&pg=0&fc=Topic&bp=true&snb=19

To be classified as either a generalist or a specialist, an IO must meet this classification under at least two out of the three criteria. According to this novel classification system, of the twelve IOs holding IASC membership, six are generalists, while the other six are specialist organizations.

Figure 32: Classifying humanitarian IOs

IO	**Target Demographic**	**Intervention Range**	**Programming Horizon**	**Organizational type**
FAO	No	Narrow (3)	H & D (H 26%; D 49%)	Generalist
IOM	Yes (migrants)	Broad (10)	H & D (H 49%; D 37%)	Generalist
OCHA	No	Narrow (4)	H	Specialist
OHCHR	No	Broad (7)	H & D	Generalist
UNDP	No	Broad (8)	D (97%)	Generalist
UNFPA	Yes (women, children, families)	Narrow (4)	D (D 79%)	Specialist
UN-HABITAT	No	Broad (9)	D (H 7%; D 67%)	Generalist
UNHCR	Yes (refugees)	Broad (6)	H (H 100%)	Specialist
UNICEF	Yes (children)	Narrow (4)	H & D (H 45%; D 54%)	Specialist
UN WOMEN	Yes (women)	Narrow (5)	D (D 90%)	Specialist
WFP	No	Narrow (4)	H (H 94%)	Specialist
WHO	No	Broad (6)	H & D (H 19%; D 28%)	Generalist

Appendix B
List of Interviews

To ensure the anonymity of interviewees, this list includes only their most recent institutional affiliation at the time of the interview to prevent cross-identification. Additional details include the interview date, modality (online or in-person), and language. Three interviewees were consulted twice over several months; these conversations are recorded as separate interviews. Interviews 39, 51, and 60 consist of multiple conversations with three individuals, held mostly in Geneva or online, between 2021 and 2023.

1. External expert, Groupe URD, 02/08/2022, online, English
2. External expert, HERE-Geneva, 04/08/2022, online, English
3. Officer, UNDP, 27/08/2022, online, English
4. Senior officer, WHO, 29/08/2022, online, English
5. Officer, IOM, 21/09/2022, online, English
6. Senior officer and Humanitarian Coordinator, UNDP, 27/09/2022, online, English
7. External expert, Groupe URD, 28/10/2022, online, English
8. Senior officer, OCHA, 09/11/2022, online, English/Italian
9. External expert, HERE-Geneva, 02/12/2022, online, English
10. External expert, Haitian government official, 07/12/2022, online, English
11. Senior officer, OCHA, 12/12/2022, online, English
12. Senior officer, UNDP, 28/12/2022, online, English
13. Officer, OCHA, 29/12/2022, online, English
14. Senior officer, UNDP/OCHA, 11/01/2023, online, English
15. External expert, University of Oxford, 17/01/2023, in person, English
16. Senior Officer, OCHA, 18/01/2023, online, English

17. Senior officer and Humanitarian Coordinator, UNDP, 19/01/2023, online, English
18. Senior officer, OCHA, 25/01/2023, online, English
19. Senior officer, OCHA, 25/01/2023, online, English
20. Officer, UNHCR, 26/01/2023, online, English
21. External expert, Mennonite Central Committee, 21/04/2023, online, English
22. External expert, Canadian Foodgrains Bank, 28/04/2023, online, English
23. Senior officer, UNDP, 16/05/2023, online, English
24. External expert, OECD MOPAN, 22/05/2023, online, English
25. Senior officer, WFP, 22/05/2023, online, English
26. Senior officer, WFP, 23/05/2023, in person (Geneva, Switzerland), English
27. Officer, WFP, 23/05/2023, online, English
28. Senior officer, WFP, 25/05/2023, in person (Geneva, Switzerland), English/ Italian
29. Donor representative, EU Neighborhood, 07/06/2023, in person (Geneva, Switzerland), English
30. Donor representative, MFA (the Netherlands), 10/07/2023, online, English
31. Senior officer, IOM, 21/07/2023, online, English
32. External expert, Centre for Disaster Protection, 21/07/2023, online, English
33. Senior officer, OCHA, 07/08/2023, online, English
34. External expert, NGO in Haiti, 22/08/2023, online, French
35. Officer, UNDP, 14/08/2023, online, Italian
36. External expert, ITECA ONG Haiti, 05/09/2023, online, French
37. External expert, Development Initiatives, 12/09/2023, online, English
38. External expert, Development Initiatives, 12/09/2023, online, English
39. Donor representative, DG ECHO, multiple conversations, March-July 2023, in person (Geneva, Switzerland), English

40. Senior officer, OCHA, 19/09/2023, online, English

41. External expert, SciencesPo, 02/10/2023, online, English

42. Senior officer, UNICEF, 13/10/2023, online, English

43. External expert, former Prime Minister, Haiti, 08/10/2023, online, French

44. External expert, ODI, 22/11/2023, online, Italian

45. Officer, UNHCR, 20/10/2023, online, English

46. External expert, Inter-Council Network, 02/11/2023, online, English

47. Officer, OCHA, 30/10/2023, online, English

48. Senior officer, OCHA FTS, 19/10/2023, online, English

49. Officer, UNFPA, 21/11/2023, online, English

50. Officer, FAO, 08/02/2022, online, English

51. Officer, WFP, multiple conversations, online, Italian/English

52. Officer, UN, 15/02/2021, online, English

53. Officer, OCHA, 17/01/2024, online, English

54. External expert, Zayed University, 18/01/2024, online, English

55. Officer, OCHA, 02/02/2024, online, English

56. Senior officer, WFP, 29/02/2024, online, English

57. Senior officer and Humanitarian Coordinator, UNDP, 14/05/2024, online, English

58. External expert, Trumanitarian/ALNAC, 23/05/2024, online, English

59. External expert, Humanicontrarian, 03/06/2024, online, English

60. Senior officer, UNDP, multiple conversations in 2021, online, English

61. External expert, OECD MOPAN, 10/06/2024, online, English

62. External expert, Uni Bayreuth, 17/07/2024, online, English

63. External expert, NRC, 07/08/2024, online, English

Appendix C

List of consulted documents and meetings

On the state of the humanitarian system

Active Learning Network for Accountability and Performance in Humanitarian Action. *Review of the OECD DAC criteria for evaluating humanitarian action*. London, UK: ALNAP/ODI, 2023
Retrieved from:
https://alnap.cdn.ngo/media/documents/alnap-oecd-guidance-literature-review-report.pdf

Active Learning Network for Accountability and Performance in Humanitarian Action. The State of the Humanitarian System 2022: Key facts and figures. London, UK: ALNAP/ODI, 2022
Retrieved from:
https://sohs.alnap.org/sohs-2022-report/a-reader's-guide-to-this-report

Active Learning Network for Accountability and Performance in Humanitarian Action. *The State of the Humanitarian System*. ALNAP Study. London, UK: ALNAP/ODI, 2018.
Retrieved from:
https://sohs.alnap.org/the-state-of-the-humanitarian-system-sohs-2018-full-report

Adinolfi, Costanza, Bassiouni, D.S., Lauritzsen, H. F., Williams, H. R. *Humanitarian Response Review: An independent report commissioned by the United Nations Emergency Relief Coordinator & Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs, Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA*). New York and Geneva: United Nations, 2005
Retrieved from:
https://interagencystandingcommittee.org/sites/default/files/migrated/2014-12/Humanitarian%20Response%20Review%202005.pdf

Benlahsen, Thierry-Mehdi, Rodier, *E. Broke or broken? A necessary discussion about the humanitarian funding gap*. Brussels, Belgium: Egmont Institute, 2023
Retrieved from:
https://www.egmontinstitute.be/broke-or-broken-a-necessary-discussion-about-the-humanitarian-funding-gap/

Bennett, Christina, Foley, M., Pantuliano, S. *Time to Let Go: A three-point proposal to change the humanitarian system*. London, UK: Humanitarian Policy Group, Overseas Development Institute, 2016
Retrieved from:
https://remake-aid.odi.digital

Clarke, Paul Knox, Campbell, L. *Improving Humanitarian Coordination: Themes and recommendations from the ALNAP meeting 'Working together to improve humanitarian coordination*'. London, UK: ALNAP, 2016
Retrieved from:
https://alnap.cdn.ngo/media/documents/improving-humanitarian-coordination-full-working-paper.pdf

Darcy, James, Hofmann, C. *According to need? Needs assessment and decision-making in the humanitarian sector*. London, UK: Humanitarian Policy Group, Overseas Development Institute, 2003
Retrieved from:
https://odi.org/en/publications/according-to-need-needs-assessment-and-decision-making-in-the-humanitarian-sector/

Department for International Development. *Saving Lives, Building Resilience, Reforming the System: The UK Government's Humanitarian Reform Policy*. London, UK: DFID, 2017
Retrieved from:
https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/5a82a72f40f0b6230269bfec/UK-Humanitarian-Reform-Policy1.pdf

Development Initiatives. *Falling short? Humanitarian funding and reform*. Bristol, UK: Development Initiatives, 2024
Retrieved from:
https://devinit-prod-static.ams3.cdn.digitaloceanspaces.com/media/documents/Falling_short_Humanitarian_funding_and_reform.pdf

Development Initiatives. *Global Humanitarian Assistance Report 2023*. Bristol, UK: Development Initiatives, 2023.
Retrieved from:
https://devinit.org/resources/global-humanitarian-assistance-report-2023/

High-Level Panel on Humanitarian Financing. *Report to the Secretary-General: Too important to fail—addressing the humanitarian financing gap*. January 2016
Retrieved from:
https://interagencystandingcommittee.org/sites/default/files/migrated/2017-02/hlp_report_too_important_to_failgcoaddressing_the_humanitarian_financing_gap.pdf

Inter-Agency Standing Committee Humanitarian Financing Task Team. *Donor Conditions and Their Implications for Humanitarian Response*. Geneva, Switzerland: IASC, 2016
Retrieved from:
https://interagencystandingcommittee.org/sites/default/files/migrated/2016-05/20160416_donor_conditions_study_final_0.pdf

Multilateral Organization Performance Assessment Network (MOPAN). *Fit for Purpose in the Hardest Places: Learning from MOPAN assessments of organizations working in crises*, MOPAN Insights, Paris, 2024. Unpublished.

Multilateral Organization Performance Assessment Network (MOPAN). *Lessons in Multilateral Effectiveness: Rethinking Effective Humanitarian Organizations*. Paris, France: OECD, 2021
Retrieved from:
https://www.mopanonline.org/analysis/items/lessonsinmultilateraleffectivenesshumanitarianorganisations.htm

Multilateral Organization Performance Assessment Network (MOPAN). *MOPAN Assessment Report: United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA)*. Paris, France: OECD, 2021
Retrieved from:
https://www.mopanonline.org/assessments/ocha2020/index.htm

Obrecht, A. *Using Evidence to Allocate Humanitarian Resources: Challenges and Opportunities*. ALNAP Working Paper. London: ALNAP/ODI, 2017
Retrieved from:
https://library.alnap.org/help-library/working-paper-using-evidence-to-allocate-humanitarian-resources-challenges-and

Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA). *OCHA on Message: General Assembly resolution 46/182*. Geneva, Switzerland: OCHA, 2012
Retrieved from:
https://reliefweb.int/report/world/ocha-message-general-assembly-resolution-46182-enar

Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA). *OCHA's strategic plan 2023-2026: Transforming coordination*. Geneva, Switzerland: OCHA, 2023
Retrieved from
https://reliefweb.int/report/world/ochas-strategic-plan-2023-2026-transforming-humanitarian-coordination

Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA). *Global Humanitarian Overview 2024: Snapshot as of July 31 2024*. Geneva, Switzerland: OCHA, 2024
Retrieved from:
https://www.unocha.org/publications/report/world/global-humanitarian-overview-2024-june-july-update-snapshot-31-july-2024

Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA). *Global Humanitarian Overview 2024.* Geneva, Switzerland: OCHA, 2023.
Retrieved from:
https://www.unocha.org/publications/report/world/global-humanitarian-overview-2024-enarfres

Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD). *Earmarked funding to multilateral organizations: How is it used and what constitutes good practice?*. Paris, France: OECD, 2020
Retrieved from:
https://www.oecd.org/en/publications/earmarked-funding-to-multilateral-organisations_a5620480-en.html

Reindorp, Nicola, Wiles, P. *Humanitarian Coordination: Lessons from Recent Field Experience*. London, UK: Overseas Development Institute, 2001
Retrieved from:
https://odi.org/en/publications/humanitarian-coordination-lessons-from-recent-field-experience/

Saez, Patrick, Konyndyk, J., Worden, R. *Rethinking Humanitarian Reform: What will it take to truly change the system?* Washington, DC: Center for Global Development, 2021

Retrieved from:
https://www.cgdev.org/sites/default/files/Rethinking-humanitarian-reform-what-will-it-take.pdf

Slim, Hugo. *How should we define and prioritise humanitarian need: An ethics-based perspective for impact initiatives.* Oslo, Norway: Norwegian Centre for Humanitarian Studies, 2023.
Retrieved from:
https://www.humanitarianstudies.no/resource/how-should-we-define-and-prioritise-humanitarian-need/#:~:text=In%20international%20policy%2C%20therefore%2C%20humanitarian,death%20emergency%20of%20significant%20scale

Stoddard, Abby, Poole, L., Taylor, G., Willitts-King, B. *Efficiency and Inefficiency in Humanitarian Financing*. London, UK: Humanitarian Outcomes, 2017
Retrieved from:
https://humanitarianoutcomes.org/sites/default/files/publications/humanitarian_financing_efficiency_.pdf

Swithern, Sophia, Schreiber, D. *Co-ordination across the Humanitarian-Development-Peace Nexus*. Paris, France: OECD, 2023
Retrieved from
https://www.oecd-ilibrary.org/development/co-ordination-across-the-humanitarian-development-peace-nexus_fd302760-en

On the Humanitarian Cluster Approach and Humanitarian Coordination

*Global Cluster Coordination Group. Operational Guidance: Generic terms of reference for Cluster Coordinators at the country leve*l. Geneva, Switzerland: Global Cluster Coordination Group, 2010
Retrieved from:
https://sheltercluster.s3.eu-central-1.amazonaws.com/public/docs/operational_guidance_generic_terms_of_reference_for_cluster_coordinators_at_the_country_level.pdf

IASC Sub-Working Group on the Cluster Approach and the Global Cluster Coordinators' Group. *Guidance: Cluster coordination at country level.* Geneva, Switzerland: IASC, 2015
Retrieved from:
https://interagencystandingcommittee.org/sites/default/files/migrated/2020-11/Reference%20Module%20for%20Cluster%20Coordination%20at%20Country%20Level%20%28revised%20July%202015%29.pdf

Independent Commission for Aid Impact. *The UK's approach to funding the UN humanitarian system*. London, UK: ICAI, 2018.
Retrieved from:
https://icai.independent.gov.uk/html-version/humanitarian-reform/

Inter-Agency Standing Committee. *Guidance Note on Using the Cluster Approach to Strengthen Humanitarian Response*. Geneva, Switzerland: IASC, 2006

Retrieved from:
https://sheltercluster.s3.eu-central-1.amazonaws.com/public/docs/iasc_guidance_note_on_using_the_cluster_approach.pdf

Inter-Agency Standing Committee. *Standard Operating Procedures: Humanitarian System-Wide Scale-up Activation. Protocol 1: Definition and Procedures*. Geneva, Switzerland: IASC, 2018
Retrieved from:
https://interagencystandingcommittee.org/sites/default/files/migrated/2020-11/Protocol%201.%20Humanitarian%20System-Wide%20Scale-Up%20Activation-%20Definition%20and%20Procedures%2C%202018.pdf

Inter-Agency Standing Committee. *Introduction to Humanitarian Action: A brief guide for Resident Coordinators*. Geneva, Switzerland: IASC, 2015
Retrieved from:
https://reliefweb.int/report/world/introduction-humanitarian-action-brief-guide-resident-coordinators

Inter-Agency Standing Committee. *Reference Module: The implementation of the Humanitarian Programme Cycle, Version 2*.0. Geneva, Switzerland: IASC, 2015
Retrieved from:
https://interagencystandingcommittee.org/sites/default/files/migrated/2020-11/IASC%20Reference%20Module%20for%20the%20Implementation%20of%20the%20Humanitarian%20Programme%20Cycle%202015%20%28Version%202%29.pdf

Steets, Julia, Grünewald, F., Binder, A., de Geoffroy, V., Kauffmann, D., Krüger, S., Meier, C., Sokpoh, B. *Cluster Approach Evaluation 2 Synthesis Report*. Berlin, Germany/ Plaisians, France: Global Public Policy Institute/ Groupe URD, 2010
Retrieved from:
https://digitallibrary.un.org/record/752307?ln=en&v=pdf

UN General Assembly. *Strengthening of the coordination of humanitarian emergency assistance of the United Nations: resolution / adopted by the General Assembly*. A/RES/46/182, 14 April 1992
Retrieved from:
https://www.refworld.org/legal/resolution/unga/1992/en/20488

On IOM

IOM. *Annual Report for 2022: 114th Session.* Geneva, Switzerland: IOM, 2023.
Retrieved from:
https://governingbodies.iom.int/system/files/en/council/114/c-114-inf-1-annual-report-for-2022.pdf

Department for International Development (DfID). *Multilateral Aid Review: International Organization for Migration (IOM).* London, UK: DfID, 2011
Retrieved from:
https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/5a7c9fc6e5274a29d8363cd0/IOM.pdf

Department for International Development (DfID). *Multilateral Aid Review: International Organization for Migration (IOM)* update 2013. London, UK: DfID, 2013
Retrieved from:
https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/5a7c08f1ed915d01ba1caba1/IOM-2013-summary-assessment-update.pdf

Department for International Development (DfID). *Multilateral Aid Review: IOM response to summary assessment 2013*. London, UK: DfID, 2013
Retrieved from:
https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/5a7c08f1ed915d01ba1caba1/IOM-2013-summary-assessment-update.pdf

International Organization for Migration. *IOM's Humanitarian Policy: Principles for Humanitarian Action*. Council, 106th Session. Geneva, Switzerland: 12 October 2015.
Retrieved from:
https://www.iom.int/sites/g/files/tmzbdl486/files/2018-07/IOM-Humanitarian-Policy-Principles-on-Humanitarian-Action.pdf

Multilateral Organization Performance Assessment Network (MOPAN). *MOPAN Assessment Report: International Organization for Migration (IOM)*. Paris, France: OECD, 2023
Retrieved from:
https://www.mopanonline.org/assessments/iom2022/MOPAN%202023%20IOM.pdf

Multilateral Organization Performance Assessment Network (MOPAN). *MOPAN Assessment Report: International Organization for Migration (IOM)*. Paris, France: OECD, 2019
Retrieved from:
https://www.mopanonline.org/assessments/iom2017-18/IOM%20Report.pdf

United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR). *Memorandum of Understanding between the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees and the International Organization for Migration*. UNHCR, !997.
Retrieved from:
https://emergency.unhcr.org/sites/default/files/IOM-UNHCR%2C%20MoU%2C%201997.pdf

On UNDP

Department for International Development (DfID). *Multilateral Aid Review: United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) summary assessment 2013*. London, UK: DfID, 2013
Retrieved from:
https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/5a748b3fe5274a7f9c586d6d/UNDP-2013-summary-assessment.pdf

Department for International Development (DfID). *Multilateral Aid Review: UNDP response to summary assessment 2013*. London, UK: DfID, 2013
Retrieved from:
https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/5a7c30fd40f0b674ed20f6c7/UNDP.pdf

Department for International Development (DfID). *Multilateral Aid Review: United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) including the Bureau for Crisis Prevention and Recovery*. London, UK: DfID, 2011
Retrieved from:
https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/5a796d5c40f0b642860d800d/undp-inc-bcpr.pdf

Department for International Development (DfID). *Multilateral Aid Review: UNDP response to summary assessment 2011*. London, UK: DfID, 2011
Retrieved from:
https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/5a7c2dc9ed915d76e2ebb987/UNDP-response.pdf.pdf

Modéer, Ulrika. *UNDP Management Response to 2020 MOPAN Assessment*. New York, NY: UNDP, 2021
Retrieved from:
https://www.mopanonline.org/assessments/undp2020/UNDP%202020%20Management%20Response.pdf

Multilateral Organization Performance Assessment Network (MOPAN). *MOPAN Assessment Report: United Nations Development Programme (UNDP)*. Paris, France: OECD, 2021
Retrieved from:
https://www.mopanonline.org/assessments/undp2020/index.htm

Murray, Julian, Pedersen, F., Ziesche, S. *Evaluation of the Global Cluster for Early Recovery*. New York, NY: United Nations Development Programme, 2018
Retrieved from:
https://library.alnap.org/system/files/content/resource/files/main/evaluation_of_the_global_cluster_for_early_recovery_-_2018.pdf

United Nations Development Programme. *UNDP and Early Recovery*. Geneva, Switzerland: United Nations Development Programme, 2012
Retrieved from:
https://www.undp.org/sites/g/files/zskgke326/files/publications/20121101_UNDP_early_recovery.pdf

United Nations Development Programme. *Information Note: Implementation of General Assembly Resolution 72/279 on Repositioning of the UN Development System*. Executive Board of UNDP, UNFPA and UNOPS – Annual Session 2019
Retrieved from:
https://www.google.com/url?sa=t&rct=j&q=&esrc=s&source=web&cd=&ved=2ahUKEwj07Z6d9c7zAhXPi1wKHZwtDm8QFnoECAQQAQ&url=https%3A%2F%2Fwww.undp.org%2Fcontent%2Fdam%2Fundp%2Flibrary%2Fcorporate%2FExecutive%2520Board%2F2019%2FAnnual-session%2FUNDP%2520Information%2520Note-Implementation%2520of%2520GA%2520Resolution%252072-279.pdf&usg=AOvVaw0_e6iGoV1uygpr7K9v_bCe

United Nations Development Programme. *Funding Compendium 2022*. New York, NY: UNDP, 2023
Retrieved from:

https://www.undp.org/sites/g/files/zskgke326/files/2023-08/undp_funding_compendium_2022_vs_1_as_of_24_aug_2023.pdf

United Nations Development Programme. *UNDP Strategic Plan, 2018-2021*. New York, NY: UNDP, 2017.
Retrieved from:
https://www.undp.org/iraq/publications/undp-strategic-plan-2018-2021

United Nations Development Programme. *UNDP Strategic Plan, 2022-2025*. New York, NY: UNDP, 2021
Retrieved from:
https://www.undp.org/publications/undp-strategic-plan-2022-2025

On WFP

WFP Executive Board. *Annual performance report for 2023*. Rome, Italy: WFP, 2024.
Retrieved from:
https://docs.wfp.org/api/documents/WFP-0000159843/download/?_ga=2.119898056.1178009465.1728401622-597254826.1727174888

WFP Executive Board. *Update on the WFP management plan (2022-2024)*. Rome, Italy: WFP, 2022.
Retrieved from:
https://executiveboard.wfp.org/document_download/WFP-0000138971
WFP Executive Board. *Summary of the work of the 2024 first regular session of the Executive board*. Rome, Italy: WFP, 2024.
Retrieved from:
https://executiveboard.wfp.org/document_download/WFP-0000160017

Department for International Development (DfID). Multilateral Aid Review Update 2013 Progress Rating. London, UK: DfID, 2013
Retrieved from:
https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/5a7c0f1e40f0b645ba3c672b/WFP-2013-summary-assessment-update2.pdf

Department for International Development (DfID). *Multilateral Aid Review: World Food Programme (WFP)*. London, UK: DfID, 2011
Retrieved from:
https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/5a7b9cdaed915d4147621840/wfp.pdf

Food Security Information Network (FSIN). *Global Report on Food Crises 2024*. Rome, Italy: FSIN, 2024
Retrieved from:
https://www.fsinplatform.org/sites/default/files/resources/files/GRFC2024-full.pdf

Multilateral Organization Performance Assessment Network (MOPAN). *MOPAN Assessment Report: World Food Programme (WFP).* Paris, France: OECD, 2024
Retrieved from:
https://www.mopanonline.org/assessments/wfp2024/MOPAN_2024_WFP_Part1.pdf

Multilateral Organization Performance Assessment Network (MOPAN). *MOPAN Assessment Report: World Food Programme (WFP).* Paris, France: OECD, 2019
Retrieved from:
https://www.mopanonline.org/assessments/wfp2017-18/WFP%20report%20final.pdf

Steets, J., Meier, C., Harmer, A., Stoddard, A. & Spannagel, J. *Evaluation of WFP Policies on Humanitarian Principles and Access in Humanitarian Contexts*. London, UK: Humanitarian Outcomes, 2018
Retrieved from:
https://humanitarianoutcomes.org/publications/evaluation-wfp-polices-humanitarian-principles-and-access-humanitarian-contexts

Zhang and Chulkov. "*Review of Management and Administration in the World Food Programme"*. Geneva, Switzerland: UN Joint Inspection Unit, 2009
Retrieved from:
https://www.unjiu.org/sites/www.unjiu.org/files/jiu_document_files/products/en/reports-notes/JIU%20Products/JIU_REP_2009_7_English.pdf

Events

1. European Humanitarian Forum (third edition). Brussels (Belgium), Monday 18 March – Tuesday 19 March 2024. Organized by the Directorate-General for European Civil Protection and Humanitarian Aid Operations (ECHO). Attended virtually (live streaming with the possibility of asking questions during the panels).

2. 2023 Briefing on Food Crises. Geneva (Switzerland), 11 September 2023. Organized by the Global Network Against Food Crises and co-hosted by the European Union (EU) and the United States of America.

Video recording and relevant documents available at:
https://www.fightfoodcrises.net/events/2023-briefing-food-crises

3. Economic and Social Council, Substantive session, Humanitarian Affairs Segment. Geneva (Switzerland), 21-23 June 2023. Organized by UN ECOSOC.

Summary document and official statements available at:
https://www.unocha.org/events/ecosoc-humanitarian-affairs-segment2023#:~:text=The%202023%20HAS%20will%20take,Vice%2DPresident%20for%20the%20HAS.

4. Grand Bargain Annual Meeting. Geneva (Switzerland), Monday 19 June 2023. Organized by the Inter-Agency Standing Committee.

Summary document and official statements available at:
https://interagencystandingcommittee.org/grand-bargain-official-website/grand-bargain-annual-meeting-2023-0

5. High-level Pledging Event to Support the Humanitarian Response in Sudan and the Region. Geneva (Switzerland), Monday June 19 2023. Organized by OCHA. Attended virtually.

Video recording, summary document, and official statements available at:

https://www.unocha.org/events/high-level-pledging-event-support-humanitarian-response-sudan-and-region

6. European Humanitarian Forum (second edition). Brussels (Belgium), Monday 20 – Tuesday 21 March 2023. Organized by the Directorate-General for European Civil Protection and Humanitarian Aid Operations (ECHO). Attended virtually (live streaming with the possibility of asking questions during the panels).

7. International Council for Voluntary Agencies (ICVA) Annual Conference 2023. Geneva (Switzerland), Friday 17 March 2023. Organized by ICVA.

Video recording and event summary available at: https://www.icvanetwork.org/events/icva-annual-conference-2023/#:~:text=On%2017%20March%202023%2C%20ICVA,access%20to%20humanitarian%20quality%20funding.

Bibliography

Abbott, Kenneth W., Jessica F. Green, and Robert O. Keohane. 2016. 'Organizational Ecology and Institutional Change in Global Governance'. *International Organization* 70 (2): 247–77. https://doi.org/10.1017/S0020818315000338.

Abbott, Kenneth W., Robert O. Keohane, Andrew Moravcsik, Anne-Marie Slaughter, and Duncan Snidal. 2000. 'The Concept of Legalization'. *International Organization* 54 (3): 401–19. https://doi.org/10.1162/002081800551271.

Abbott, Kenneth W., and Duncan Snidal. 1998. 'Why States Act through Formal International Organizations'. *Journal of Conflict Resolution* 42 (1): 3–32. https://doi.org/10.1177/0022002798042001001.

Ahmed, Maram. 2021. *Innovative Humanitarian Financing: Case Studies of Funding Models*. Palgrave Studies in Impact Finance. Cham: Palgrave Macmillan. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-83209-4.

Aldashev, Gani, and Thierry Verdier. 2010a. 'Goodwill Bazaar: NGO Competition and Giving to Development'. *Journal of Development Economics* 91 (1): 48–63. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jdeveco.2008.11.010.

———. 2010b. 'Goodwill Bazaar: NGO Competition and Giving to Development'. *Journal of Development Economics* 91 (1): 48–63. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jdeveco.2008.11.010.

Allison, Graham T. 1969. 'Conceptual Models and the Cuban Missile Crisis'. *American Political Science Review* 63 (3): 689–718. https://doi.org/10.2307/1954423.

Alter, Karen J, and Sophie Meunier. 2009. 'The Politics of International Regime Complexity'. *Persp on Pol* 7 (1): 13–24. https://doi.org/10.1017/S1537592709090033.

Alter, Karen J., and Kal Raustiala. 2018. 'The Rise of International Regime Complexity'. *Annual Review of Law and Social Science* 14 (1): 329–49. https://doi.org/10.1146/annurev-lawsocsci-101317-030830.

Anderson, Mark, Kristin Becknell, and Joanna Taliano. 2018. 'History of Humanitarian Emergencies'. In *Health in Humanitarian Emergencies*, edited by David Townes, 1st ed., 9–24. Cambridge University Press. https://doi.org/10.1017/9781107477261.003.

Anderson, Mark, and Michael Gerber. 2018. 'Introduction to Humanitarian Emergencies'. In *Health in Humanitarian Emergencies*, edited by David Townes, 1st ed., 1–8. Cambridge University Press. https://doi.org/10.1017/9781107477261.002.

Arora-Jonsson, Stefan, Nils Brunsson, and Raimund Hasse. 2021. 'A New Understanding of Competition'. In *Competition*, by Stefan Arora-Jonsson, Nils Brunsson, and Raimund Hasse, 1–25. Oxford University Press. https://doi.org/10.1093/oso/9780192898012.003.0001.

Audet, François. 2016. *Comprendre Les Organisations Humanitaires: Développer Les Capacités Ou Faire Survivre Les Organisations?* Québec (Québec): Presses de l'Université du Québec.

Bach, Tobias, and Kai Wegrich. 2019. 'Blind Spots, Biased Attention, and the Politics of Non-Coordination'. In *The Blind Spots of Public Bureaucracy and the Politics of Non-Coordination*, edited by Tobias Bach and Kai Wegrich, 3–28. Cham: Springer International Publishing. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-76672-0_1.

Badache, Fanny, Leah R. Kimber, Lucile Maertens, and Michigan Publishing (University of Michigan), eds. 2023. *International Organizations and Research Methods: An Introduction*. Ann Arbor [Michigan]: University of Michigan Press.

Balcik, Burcu, Benita M. Beamon, Caroline C. Krejci, Kyle M. Muramatsu, and Magaly Ramirez. 2010. 'Coordination in Humanitarian Relief Chains: Practices, Challenges

and Opportunities'. *International Journal of Production Economics* 126 (1): 22–34. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ijpe.2009.09.008.
Barkin, J. Samuel. 2023a. 'Human Rights and Humanitarian Aid'. In *International Organization*, by J. Samuel Barkin, 101–14. Cham: Springer International Publishing. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-031-22559-8_8.
———. 2023b. 'Sovereignty and Globalization'. In *International Organization*, by J. Samuel Barkin, 7–20. Cham: Springer International Publishing. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-031-22559-8_2.
Barnett, Michael. 2011. *Empire of Humanity: A History of Humanitarianism*. Ithaca, N.Y: Cornell University Press.
———. 2021. 'The Humanitarian Club: Hierarchy, Networks, and Exclusion'. In *Global Governance in a World of Change*, edited by Michael N. Barnett, Jon C. W. Pevehouse, and Kal Raustiala, 1st ed., 155–81. Cambridge University Press. https://doi.org/10.1017/9781108915199.006.
Barnett, Michael, and Liv Coleman. 2005. 'Designing Police: Interpol and the Study of Change in International Organizations'. *International Studies Quarterly* 49 (4): 593–620. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1468-2478.2005.00380.x.
Barnett, Michael, and Martha Finnemore. 2004. *Rules for the World : International Organizations in Global Politics*. Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press.
Barnett, Michael, and Thomas G. Weiss. 2013. *Humanitarianism Contested*. 0 ed. Routledge. https://doi.org/10.4324/9780203829301.
Bauer, Michael W., Christoph Knill, and Steffen Eckhard, eds. 2017. *International Bureaucracy: Challenges and Lessons for Public Administration Research*. Public Sector Organizations. London: Palgrave Macmillan.
Bendix, Reinhard. 1945. 'Bureaucracy and the Problem of Power'. *Public Administration Review* 5 (3): 194. https://doi.org/10.2307/973057.
Bendor, Jonathan. 1994. 'The Fields of Bureaucracy and Public Administration: Basic and Applied Research'. *Journal of Public Administration Research and Theory: J-PART* 4 (1): 27–39.
Bennett, Andrew, and Jeffrey T Checkel. 2015. *Process Training: From Metaphor to Analytic Tool*.
Betts, Alexander. 2013. 'Regime Complexity and International Organizations: UNHCR as a Challenged Institution'. *Global Governance* 19 (1): 69–81.
Biermann, Rafael. 2017. 'The Role of International Bureaucracies'. In *Palgrave Handbook of Inter-Organizational Relations in World Politics*, edited by Joachim A. Koops and Rafael Biermann, 243–70. London: Palgrave Macmillan UK. https://doi.org/10.1057/978-1-137-36039-7_11.
Biermann, Rafael, and Michael Harsch. 2017a. 'Resource Dependence Theory'. In *Palgrave Handbook of Inter-Organizational Relations in World Politics*, edited by Joachim A. Koops and Rafael Biermann, 135–55. London: Palgrave Macmillan UK. https://doi.org/10.1057/978-1-137-36039-7_6.
———. 2017b. 'Resource Dependence Theory'. In *Palgrave Handbook of Inter-Organizational Relations in World Politics*, edited by Joachim A. Koops and Rafael Biermann, 135–55. London: Palgrave Macmillan UK. https://doi.org/10.1057/978-1-137-36039-7_6.
Biermann, Rafael, and Joachim Alexander Koops, eds. 2017. *Palgrave Handbook of Inter-Organizational Relations in World Politics*. London, United Kingdom: Palgrave Macmillan.

Borzyskowski, Inken, and Felicity Vabulas. 2019. ‘Hello, Goodbye: When Do States Withdraw from International Organizations?’ *The Review of International Organizations* 14 (2): 335–66.
Bradley, Megan. 2017. ‘The International Organization for Migration (IOM): Gaining Power in the Forced Migration Regime’. *Refuge: Canada’s Journal on Refugees* 33 (1): 97–106. https://doi.org/10.25071/1920-7336.40452.
Bradley, Megan, Cathryn Costello, and Angela Sherwood, eds. 2023. *IOM Unbound?: Obligations and Accountability of the International Organization for Migration in an Era of Expansion*. 1st ed. Cambridge University Press. https://doi.org/10.1017/9781009184175.
Bradley, Miriam. 2023a. *The Politics and Everyday Practice of International Humanitarianism*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
———. 2023b. *The Politics and Everyday Practice of International Humanitarianism*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
Bretherton, Charlotte, and John Vogler. 2010. *The European Union as a Global Actor*. 2. ed., Repr. London: Routledge.
Brosig, Malte. 2020. ‘Whither a Theory of Inter-Organisational Relations: A Burgeon Field of Research Between Conceptual Innovation and Fragmentation’. *Journal of Intervention and Statebuilding* 14 (2): 171–86. https://doi.org/10.1080/17502977.2020.1717133.
Browne, Stephen. 2011. *The United Nations Development Programme and System*. Routledge Global Institutions Series 57. Abingdon, Oxon ; New York: Routledge.
Brunsson, Nils, and Linda Wedlin. 2021. ‘Constructing Competition for Status: Sports and Higher Education’. In *Competition*, by Nils Brunsson and Linda Wedlin, 93–111. Oxford University Press. https://doi.org/10.1093/oso/9780192898012.003.0006.
Busch, Marc L. 2007. ‘Overlapping Institutions, Forum Shopping, and Dispute Settlement in International Trade’. *International Organization* 61 (04). https://doi.org/10.1017/S0020818307070257.
Cairney, Paul. 2012. *Understanding Public Policy: Theories and Issues*. Houndmills, Basingstoke, Hampshire ; New York: Palgrave Macmillan.
Carbonnier, Gilles. 2015. *Humanitarian Economics: War, Disaster and the Global Aid Market*. London: Hurst & Company.
———. 2016. *Humanitarian Economics: Humanitarian Economics*. Oxford University Press. https://doi.org/10.1093/acprof:oso/9780190491543.001.0001.
Carroll, Glenn R. 1985. ‘Concentration and Specialization: Dynamics of Niche Width in Populations of Organizations’. *American Journal of Sociology* 90 (6): 1262–83. https://doi.org/10.1086/228210.
Checkel, Jeffrey T. 2014. ‘Mechanisms, Process, and the Study of International Institutions’. In *Process Tracing*, edited by Andrew Bennett and Jeffrey T. Checkel, 1st ed., 74–97. Cambridge University Press. https://doi.org/10.1017/CBO9781139858472.006.
Clark, Richard. 2021. ‘Pool or Duel? Cooperation and Competition Among International Organizations’. *International Organization* 75 (4): 1133–53. https://doi.org/10.1017/S0020818321000229.
Clay, Edward, and Stokke Schram. 2013. *Food Aid and Human Security*. Routledge.
Cooley, Alexander, and James Ron. 2002. ‘The NGO Scramble: Organizational Insecurity and the Political Economy of Transnational Action’. *International Security* 27 (1): 5–39. https://doi.org/10.1162/016228802320231217.
Copelovitch, Mark, and Jon C. W. Pevehouse. 2019. ‘International Organizations in a New Era of Populist Nationalism’. *The Review of International Organizations* 14 (2): 169–86. https://doi.org/10.1007/s11558-019-09353-1.

Coyne, Christopher J. 2013. *Doing Bad by Doing Good: Why Humanitarian Action Fails*. Stanford (Calif.): Stanford economics and finance, an imprint of Stanford university press.
Crisp, Jeff. 2018. 'Humanitarian Action and Coordination'. In *The Oxford Handbook on the United Nations*, by Jeff Crisp, edited by Thomas G. Weiss and Sam Daws, 582–600. Oxford University Press. https://doi.org/10.1093/oxfordhb/9780198803164.013.32.
De Vries, Catherine E., Sara B. Hobolt, and Stefanie Walter. 2021. 'Politicizing International Cooperation: The Mass Public, Political Entrepreneurs, and Political Opportunity Structures'. *International Organization* 75 (2): 306–32. https://doi.org/10.1017/S0020818320000491.
Debre, Maria J., and Hylke Dijkstra. 2023. 'Are International Organisations in Decline? An Absolute and Relative Perspective on Institutional Change'. *Global Policy* 14 (1): 16–30. https://doi.org/10.1111/1758-5899.13170.
Dijkstra, Hylke, and Maria J Debre. 2022. 'The Death of Major International Organizations: When Institutional Stickiness Is Not Enough'. *Global Studies Quarterly* 2 (4): ksac048. https://doi.org/10.1093/isagsq/ksac048.
Dijkzeul, Dennis, and Annalisa Addis. 2022. 'Humanitarian–Development Integration? Comparing "Linking Relief, Rehabilitation and Development", "Early Recovery", "Resilience" and the "Triple Nexus"'. In *Forced Displacement and Migration*, edited by Hans-Joachim Preuß, Christoph Beier, and Dirk Messner, 55–75. Wiesbaden: Springer Fachmedien Wiesbaden. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-658-32902-0_4.
Downie, Christian. 2022. 'Competition, Cooperation, and Adaptation: The Organizational Ecology of International Organizations in Global Energy Governance'. *Review of International Studies* 48 (2): 364–84. https://doi.org/10.1017/S0260210521000267.
Downs, Anthony. 1967. *Inside Bureaucracy*. Boston, Massachusetts: Little, Brown and Company.
Ege, Jörn. 2020. 'What International Bureaucrats (Really) Want: Administrative Preferences in International Organization Research'. *Global Governance: A Review of Multilateralism and International Organizations* 26 (4): 577–600. https://doi.org/10.1163/19426720-02604003.
Ege, Jörn, and Michael W. Bauer. 2013. 'International Bureaucracies from a Public Administration and International Relations Perspective'. In *Routledge Handbook of International Organization*, 1st ed.
Ege, Jörn, Michael W. Bauer, Nora Wagner, and Eva Thomann. 2023. 'Under What Conditions Does Bureaucracy Matter in the Making of Global Public Policies?' *Governance* 36 (4): 1313–33. https://doi.org/10.1111/gove.12741.
Eilstrup-Sangiovanni, Mette. 2020. 'Death of International Organizations. The Organizational Ecology of Intergovernmental Organizations, 1815–2015'. *The Review of International Organizations* 15 (2): 339–70. https://doi.org/10.1007/s11558-018-9340-5.
———. 2021. 'What Kills International Organisations? When and Why International Organisations Terminate'. *European Journal of International Relations* 27 (1): 281–310. https://doi.org/10.1177/1354066120932976.
Ellison, Brian A. 2006. 'Bureaucratic Politics as Agency Competition: A Comparative Perspective'. *International Journal of Public Administration* 29 (13): 1259–83. https://doi.org/10.1080/01900690600928110.
Fioretos, Orfeo. 2011. 'Historical Institutionalism in International Relations'. *International Organization* 65 (2): 367–99. https://doi.org/10.1017/S0020818311000002.

Fontaine-Skronski, Kim, Valériane Thool, and Norbert Eschborn, eds. 2023. *Does the UN Model Still Work? Challenges and Prospects for the Future of Multilateralism*. Leiden Boston: Brill.

Frennesson, Lina, Joakim Kembro, Harwin De Vries, Marianne Jahre, and Luk Van Wassenhove. 2022. '"International Humanitarian Organizations' Perspectives on Localization Efforts"'. *International Journal of Disaster Risk Reduction* 83 (December):103410. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ijdrr.2022.103410.

Frey, Bruno. 2008. 'Outside and inside Competition for International Organizations—from Analysis to Innovations'. *The Review of International Organizations* 3 (4): 335–50. https://doi.org/10.1007/s11558-008-9045-2.

Gehring, Thomas, and Benjamin Faude. 2014. 'A Theory of Emerging Order within Institutional Complexes: How Competition among Regulatory International Institutions Leads to Institutional Adaptation and Division of Labor'. *The Review of International Organizations* 9 (4): 471–98. https://doi.org/10.1007/s11558-014-9197-1.

Gehring, Thomas, and Sebastian Oberthür. 2009. 'The Causal Mechanisms of Interaction between International Institutions'. *European Journal of International Relations* 15 (1): 125–56. https://doi.org/10.1177/1354066108100055.

Gilad, Sharon, Saar Alon-Barkat, and Chagai M. Weiss. 2019. 'Bureaucratic Politics and the Translation of Movement Agendas'. *Governance* 32 (2): 369–85. https://doi.org/10.1111/gove.12383.

Gillmann, Nina. 2010. *Interagency Coordination during Disaster: Strategic Choices for the UN, NGOs, and Other Humanitarian Actors in the Field*. 1. Aufl. The United Nations and Global Change, Band 4. Baden Baden: Nomos.

Gioia, Dennis A., and Kumar Chittipeddi. 1991. 'Sensemaking and Sensegiving in Strategic Change Initiation'. *Strategic Management Journal* 12 (6): 433–48. https://doi.org/10.1002/smj.4250120604.

Glasman, Joël. 2019. *Humanitarianism and the Quantification of Human Needs: Minimal Humanity*. 1st ed. Abingdon, Oxon; New York: Routledge, 2020. | Series: Routledge humanitarian studies: Routledge. https://doi.org/10.4324/9781003006954.

Gómez-Mera, Laura. 2021. 'International Regime Complexity'. In *Oxford Research Encyclopedia of International Studies*, by Laura Gómez-Mera. Oxford University Press. https://doi.org/10.1093/acrefore/9780190846626.013.648.

Gray, Julia. 2018. 'Life, Death, or Zombie? The Vitality of International Organizations'. *International Studies Quarterly* 62 (1): 1–13. https://doi.org/10.1093/isq/sqx086.

Greenhill, Brian, and Yonatan Lupu. 2017. 'Clubs of Clubs: Fragmentation in the Network of Intergovernmental Organizations'. *International Studies Quarterly* 61 (1): 181–95. https://doi.org/10.1093/isq/sqx001.

Grossman, Herschel I., and Juan Mendoza. 2003. 'Scarcity and Appropriative Competition'. *European Journal of Political Economy* 19 (4): 747–58. https://doi.org/10.1016/S0176-2680(03)00033-8.

Haftel, Yoram Z., and Stephanie C. Hofmann. 2019. 'Rivalry and Overlap: Why Regional Economic Organizations Encroach on Security Organizations'. *Journal of Conflict Resolution* 63 (9): 2180–2206. https://doi.org/10.1177/0022002719832057.

Hall, Nina. 2016. *Displacement, Development, and Climate Change: International Organizations Moving beyond Their Mandates*. Global Institutions. London: Routledge.

Hanatani, Atsushi, Oscar A. Gómez, and Chigumi Kawaguchi, eds. 2020. *Crisis Management beyond the Humanitarian-Development Nexus*. First issued in paperback. Routledge Humanitarian Studies Series. London New York: Routledge, Taylor & Francis Group.

Hannan, Michael T., and Glenn R. Carroll. 1992. *Dynamics of Organizational Populations: Density, Legitimation and Competition*. New York Oxford: Oxford university press.
Hannan, Michael T., and John Freeman. 1977. 'The Population Ecology of Organizations'. *American Journal of Sociology* 82 (5): 929–64.
Hanrieder, Tine. 2014a. 'Gradual Change in International Organisations: Agency Theory and Historical Institutionalism'. *Politics* 34 (4): 324–33. https://doi.org/10.1111/1467-9256.12050.
———. 2014b. 'WHO Orchestrates?' In *International Organizations as Orchestrators*, edited by Kenneth W. Abbott, Philipp Genschel, Duncan Snidal, and Bernhard Zangl, 191–213. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. https://doi.org/10.1017/CBO9781139979696.011.
Hawkins, Darren G., ed. 2006. *Delegation and Agency in International Organizations*. Political Economy of Institutions and Decisions. Cambridge, UK ; New York: Cambridge University Press.
Hawkins, Darren G., and Wade Jacoby. 2006. 'How Agents Matter'. In *Delegation and Agency in International Organizations*, edited by Darren G. Hawkins, David A. Lake, Daniel L. Nielson, and Michael J. Tierney, 1st ed., 199–228. Cambridge University Press. https://doi.org/10.1017/CBO9780511491368.008.
Hawkins, Darren, David A. Lake, Daniel L. Nielson, and Michael J. Tierney. 2006. 'Delegation under Anarchy: States, International Organizations, and Principal-Agent Theory'. In *Delegation and Agency in International Organizations*, edited by Darren G. Hawkins, David A. Lake, Daniel L. Nielson, and Michael J. Tierney, 3–38. Political Economy of Institutions and Decisions. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. https://doi.org/10.1017/CBO9780511491368.002.
Heldt, Eugénia. 2017. 'Regaining Control of Errant Agents? Agency Slack at the European Commission and the World Health Organization'. *Cooperation and Conflict* 52 (4): 469–84. https://doi.org/10.1177/0010836717703673.
Heldt, Eugénia C., and Tony Mueller. 2021. 'The (Self-)Empowerment of the European Central Bank during the Sovereign Debt Crisis'. *Journal of European Integration* 43 (1): 83–98. https://doi.org/10.1080/07036337.2020.1729145.
Henning, C., and Tyler Pratt. 2023. 'Hierarchy and Differentiation in International Regime Complexes: A Theoretical Framework for Comparative Research'. *Review of International Political Economy* 30 (6): 2178–2205. https://doi.org/10.1080/09692290.2023.2259424.
Hilhorst, Dorothea, and Bram J. Jansen. 2010. 'Humanitarian Space as Arena: A Perspective on the Everyday Politics of Aid'. *Development and Change* 41 (6): 1117–39. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-7660.2010.01673.x.
Hoffman, Peter J., Peter Joshua Hoffman, Thomas G. Weiss, and Jan Egeland. 2018. *Humanitarianism, War, and Politics: Solferino to Syria and Beyond*. New Millennium Books in International Studies. Lanham Boulder New York London: Rowman & Littlefield.
Hofmann, Stephanie C. 2009. 'Overlapping Institutions in the Realm of International Security: The Case of NATO and ESDP'. *Perspectives on Politics* 7 (1): 45–52.
Hofmann, Stephanie C. 2019. 'The Politics of Overlapping Organizations: Hostage-Taking, Forum-Shopping and Brokering'. *Journal of European Public Policy* 26 (6): 883–905. https://doi.org/10.1080/13501763.2018.1512644.
Hofmann, Stephanie C., and Patryk Pawlak. 2023. 'Governing Cyberspace: Policy Boundary Politics across Organizations'. *Review of International Political Economy* 30 (6): 2122–49. https://doi.org/10.1080/09692290.2023.2249002.

Holzscheiter, Anna. 2017. ‘Coping with Institutional Fragmentation? Competition and Convergence between Boundary Organizations in the Global Response to Polio: Boundary Organizations in the Global Response to Polio’. *Review of Policy Research* 34 (6): 767–89. https://doi.org/10.1111/ropr.12256.

Howlett, Michael, Allan McConnell, and Anthony Perl. 2017. ‘Moving Policy Theory Forward: Connecting Multiple Stream and Advocacy Coalition Frameworks to Policy Cycle Models of Analysis’. *Australian Journal of Public Administration* 76 (1): 65–79. https://doi.org/10.1111/1467-8500.12191.

Jankauskas, Vytautas, Steffen Eckhard, and Jörn Ege. 2023. ‘Structured, Focus Comparison’. In *International Organizations and Research Methods: An Introduction*. Ann Arbor, Michigan: University of Michigan Press.

Johnson, Tana. 2014. *Organizational Progeny: Why Governments Are Losing Control over the Proliferating Structures of Global Governance*. Oxford University Press. https://doi.org/10.1093/acprof:oso/9780198717799.001.0001.

———. 2016. ‘Cooperation, Co-Optation, Competition, Conflict: International Bureaucracies and Non-Governmental Organizations in an Interdependent World’. *Review of International Political Economy* 23 (5): 737–67. https://doi.org/10.1080/09692290.2016.1217902.

Karlsrud, John, and Yf Reykers. 2020. ‘Ad Hoc Coalitions and Institutional Exploitation in International Security: Towards a Typology’. *Third World Quarterly* 41 (9): 1518–36. https://doi.org/10.1080/01436597.2020.1763171.

Kent, Randolph C. 2004. ‘The United Nations’ Humanitarian Pillar: Refocusing the UN’s Disaster and Emergency Roles and Responsibilities’. *Disasters* 28 (2): 216–33. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.0361-3666.2004.00254.x.

Keohane, Robert O. 1984. *After Hegemony: Cooperation and Discord in the World Political Economy*. 1st Princeton classic ed. A Princeton Classic Edition. Princeton, N.J: Princeton University Press.

Keohane, Robert O. 2020. *International Institutions and State Power: Essays in International Relations Theory*.

Knill, Christoph, and Yves Steinebach, eds. 2023. *International Public Administrations in Global Public Policy: Sources and Effects of Bureaucratic Influence*. Routledge Studies in Policy and Power. London ; New York, NY: Routledge, Taylor & Francis Group.

Kranke, Matthias. 2022. ‘Pathologies of a Different Kind: Dysfunctional Interactions between International Organizations’. *Global Studies Quarterly* 2 (1): ksab038. https://doi.org/10.1093/isagsq/ksab038.

Krasner, Stephen D. 1982. ‘Structural Causes and Regime Consequences: Regimes as Intervening Variables’. *International Organization* 36 (2): 185–205. https://doi.org/10.1017/S0020818300018920.

Kreuder-Sonnen, Christian. 2019. ‘International Authority and the Emergency Problematique: IO Empowerment through Crises’. *International Theory* 11 (2): 182–210. https://doi.org/10.1017/S1752971919000010.

Lall, Ranjit. 2020. ‘Assessing International Organizations: Competition, Collaboration, and Politics of Funding’. In *The Power of Global Performance Indicators*, edited by Judith G. Kelley and Beth A. Simmons, 1st ed., 300–338. Cambridge University Press. https://doi.org/10.1017/9781108763493.011.

———. 2023. *Making International Institutions Work: The Politics of Performance*. 1st ed. Cambridge University Press. https://doi.org/10.1017/9781009216265.

Lavelle, Kathryn C. 2020. *The Challenges of Multilateralism*. New Haven: Yale University Press.

Lawrence, Robert Z. 2007. ‘International Organisations: The Challenge of Aligning Mission, Means and Legitimacy’. *The World Economy* 0 (0): 070916231942002-??? https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-9701.2007.01018.x.
Leaning, Jennifer, Susan M. Briggs, and Lincoln C. Chen, eds. 1999. *Humanitarian Crises: The Medical and Public Health Response*. Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press.
Leiulfsrud, Håkon, and Peter Sohlberg. 2018. *Concepts in Action: Conceptual Constructionism*. BRILL. https://doi.org/10.1163/9789004314207.
Lipscy, Phillip Y. 2019. ‘Policy Area Discipline: Accountability through Competition among International Organizations’. In . Washington DC.
Lipson, Michael. 2017. ‘Organization Theory and Cooperation and Conflict Among International Organizations’. In *Palgrave Handbook of Inter-Organizational Relations in World Politics*, edited by Joachim A. Koops and Rafael Biermann, 67–96. London: Palgrave Macmillan UK. https://doi.org/10.1057/978-1-137-36039-7_3.
Littoz-Monnet, Annabelle. 2017. ‘Expert Knowledge as a Strategic Resource: International Bureaucrats and the Shaping of Bioethical Standards’. *International Studies Quarterly* 61 (3): 584–95. https://doi.org/10.1093/isq/sqx016.
———. 2020. *Governing through Expertise: The Politics of Bioethics*. 1st ed. Cambridge University Press. https://doi.org/10.1017/9781108921060.
———. 2021. ‘Expanding without Much Ado. International Bureaucratic Expansion Tactics in the Case of Bioethics’. *Journal of European Public Policy* 28 (6): 858–79. https://doi.org/10.1080/13501763.2020.1781231.
López-Claros, Augusto, Arthur L. Dahl, and Maja Groff. 2020. *Global Governance and the Emergence of Global Institutions for the 21st Century*. United Kingdom ; New York, NY: Cambridge University Press.
Lowcock, Mark. 2022. *Relief Chief: A Manifesto for Saving Lives in Dire Times*. Washington DC: Center for Global Development.
Mac Ginty, Roger, and Jenny H. Peterson, eds. 2015. *Routledge Companion to Humanitarian Action*. London ; New York, NY: Routledge.
Margulis, Matias E. 2017. ‘The Global Governance of Food Security’. In *Palgrave Handbook of Inter-Organizational Relations in World Politics*, edited by Joachim A. Koops and Rafael Biermann, 503–25. London: Palgrave Macmillan UK. https://doi.org/10.1057/978-1-137-36039-7_24.
———. 2021. ‘Intervention by International Organizations in Regime Complexes’. *The Review of International Organizations* 16 (4): 871–902. https://doi.org/10.1007/s11558-020-09403-z.
Martin, Lisa L. 1992. ‘Interests, Power, and Multilateralism’. *International Organization* 46 (4): 765–92. https://doi.org/10.1017/S0020818300033245.
Mattli, Walter, and Ngaire Woods, eds. 2009. *The Politics of Global Regulation*. Princeton, N.J.: Princeton Univ. Press.
Maxwell, Daniel G., and Kirsten Heidi Gelsdorf. 2019. *Understanding the Humanitarian World*. Routledge Global Institutions Series. Abingdon, Oxon ; New York, NY: Routledge.
Mearsheimer, John J. 1994. ‘The False Promise of International Institutions’. *International Security* 19 (3): 5. https://doi.org/10.2307/2539078.
Miller, Gary J. 2005. ‘THE POLITICAL EVOLUTION OF PRINCIPAL-AGENT MODELS’. *Annual Review of Political Science* 8 (1): 203–25. https://doi.org/10.1146/annurev.polisci.8.082103.104840.

Moretti, Sebastien. 2021. ‘Between Refugee Protection and Migration Management: The Quest for Coordination between UNHCR and IOM in the Asia-Pacific Region’. *Third World Quarterly* 42 (1): 34–51. https://doi.org/10.1080/01436597.2020.1780910.
Morgan, Sandra, and Robert F. Dennehy. 1997. ‘The Power of Organizational Storytelling: A Management Development Perspective’. *Journal of Management Development* 16 (7): 494–501. https://doi.org/10.1108/02621719710169585.
Morin, Jean-Frédéric. 2018. ‘Concentration despite Competition: The Organizational Ecology of Technical Assistance Providers’. *The Review of International Organizations*, August. https://doi.org/10.1007/s11558-018-9322-7.
Morse, Julia C., and Robert O. Keohane. 2014. ‘Contested Multilateralism’. *The Review of International Organizations* 9 (4): 385–412. https://doi.org/10.1007/s11558-014-9188-2.
Murphy, Craig N. 2006. *The United Nations Development Programme: A Better Way?* 1st ed. Cambridge University Press. https://doi.org/10.1017/CBO9780511618000.
Niskanen, William A. 1971. *Bureaucracy & Representative Government*. 1st ed. Routledge. https://doi.org/10.4324/9781315081878.
Olu, Olushayo, Abdulmumini Usman, Solomon Woldetsadik, Dick Chamla, and Oladapo Walker. 2015. ‘Lessons Learnt from Coordinating Emergency Health Response during Humanitarian Crises: A Case Study of Implementation of the Health Cluster in Northern Uganda’. *Conflict and Health* 9 (1): 1. https://doi.org/10.1186/1752-1505-9-1.
Orsini, Amandine, Jean-Frédéric Morin, and Oran Young. 2013. ‘Regime Complexes: A Buzz, a Boom, or a Boost for Global Governance?’ *Global Governance: A Review of Multilateralism and International Organizations* 19 (1): 27–39. https://doi.org/10.1163/19426720-01901003.
Panke, Diana, and Sören Stapel. 2023. ‘Towards Increasing Regime Complexity? Why Member States Drive Overlaps between International Organisations’. *The British Journal of Politics and International Relations* 25 (4): 633–54. https://doi.org/10.1177/13691481221115937.
Pevehouse, Jon C. W., and Inken Von Borzyskowski. 2017. ‘International Organizations in World Politics’. In *The Oxford Handbook of International Organizations*, edited by Jacob Katz Cogan, Ian Hurd, and Ian Johnstone, 1st ed., 3–32. Oxford University Press. https://doi.org/10.1093/law/9780199672202.003.0001.
Raustiala, Kal, and David G. Victor. 2004. ‘The Regime Complex for Plant Genetic Resources’. *International Organization* 58 (02). https://doi.org/10.1017/S0020818304582036.
Reinsberg, Bernhard, Katharina Michaelowa, and Vera Z. Eichenauer. 2015. ‘The Rise of Multi-Bi Aid and the Proliferation of Trust Funds’. In *Handbook on the Economics of Foreign Aid*, edited by B. Mak Arvin and Byron Lew. Edward Elgar Publishing. https://doi.org/10.4337/9781783474592.
Reinsberg, Bernhard, and Oliver Westerwinter. 2023. ‘Institutional Overlap in Global Governance and the Design of Intergovernmental Organizations’. *The Review of International Organizations* 18 (4): 693–724. https://doi.org/10.1007/s11558-023-09488-2.
Ries, Florian. 2017. ‘Population Ecology: How the Environment Influences the Evolution of Organizations’. In *Palgrave Handbook of Inter-Organizational Relations in World Politics*, edited by Joachim A. Koops and Rafael Biermann, 157–68. London: Palgrave Macmillan UK. https://doi.org/10.1057/978-1-137-36039-7_7.
Ross, Sandy. 2022. *The World Food Programme in Global Politics*. Boulder: Lynne Rienner Publishers.

Ruesch, Lea, Murat Tarakci, Maria Besiou, and Niels Van Quaquebeke. 2022. ‘Orchestrating Coordination among Humanitarian Organizations’. *Production and Operations Management* 31 (5): 1977–96. https://doi.org/10.1111/poms.13660.

Schmid, Lisa Katharina, Alexander Reitzenstein, and Nina Hall. 2021. ‘Blessing or Curse?: The Effects of Earmarked Funding in UNICEF and UNDP’. *Global Governance: A Review of Multilateralism and International Organizations* 27 (3): 433–59. https://doi.org/10.1163/19426720-02703002.

Seybolt, Taylor B. 2009. ‘Harmonizing the Humanitarian Aid Network: Adaptive Change in a Complex System’. *International Studies Quarterly* 53 (4): 1027–50. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1468-2478.2009.00567.x.

Shahpar, Cyrus, and Thomas D. Kirsch. 2018. ‘Who’s Who in Humanitarian Emergencies’. In *Health in Humanitarian Emergencies*, edited by David Townes, 1st ed., 25–34. Cambridge University Press. https://doi.org/10.1017/9781107477261.004.

Shanks, Cheryl, Harold K. Jacobson, and Jeffrey H. Kaplan. 1996. ‘Inertia and Change in the Constellation of International Governmental Organizations, 1981â€“1992’. *International Organization* 50 (4): 593–627.

Shaw, D. John. 2001. *The UN World Food Programme and the Development of Food Aid*. New York: Palgrave.

———. 2008. *Global Food and Agricultural Institutions*. London: Routledge.

Shibaike, Takumi. 2023. ‘The Power of Specialization: NGO Advocacy in Global Conservation Governance’. *International Studies Quarterly* 67 (2): sqad023. https://doi.org/10.1093/isq/sqad023.

Sinclair, Guy Fiti. 2017. *To Reform the World: International Organizations and the Making of Modern States*. First edition. The History and Theory of International Law. New York, NY: Oxford University Press.

Slim, Hugo. 2022. *Solferino 21: Warfare, Civilians and Humanitarians in the Twenty-First Century*. London: Hurst & Company.

Stephenson, Max O. 2017. ‘The Theory and Practice of International Humanitarian Relief Coordination’. In *Palgrave Handbook of Inter-Organizational Relations in World Politics*, edited by Joachim A. Koops and Rafael Biermann, 485–502. London: Palgrave Macmillan UK. https://doi.org/10.1057/978-1-137-36039-7_23.

Thorvaldsdottir, Svanhildur, Ronny Patz, and Steffen Eckhard. 2021. ‘International Bureaucracy and the United Nations System: Introduction’. *International Review of Administrative Sciences* 87 (4): 695–700. https://doi.org/10.1177/00208523211038730.

Townes, David A., Andre Griekspoor, Peter Mala, Ian Norton, and Anthony D. Redmond. 2018. ‘Response to Humanitarian Emergencies’. In *Health in Humanitarian Emergencies*, edited by David Townes, 1st ed., 35–52. Cambridge University Press. https://doi.org/10.1017/9781107477261.005.

Weiss, Thomas George. 2013. *Humanitarian Business*. Cambridge: Polity.

Wilson, James Q. 2000. *Bureaucracy: What Government Agencies Do and Why They Do It*. New ed. New York, NY: Basic Books.

Worthen, Wade B., A. Scott Henderson, Paul R. Rasmussen, and T. Lloyd Benson. 2009. *Competition: A Multidisciplinary Analysis*. BRILL. https://doi.org/10.1163/9789087908287.