



1. Background

Today more than 75 per cent of people affected by humanitarian crises are women and children. The death of more than 500 women every day from complications of pregnancy and childbirth in countries affected by humanitarian crisis and fragility, and persistent high levels of gender-based violence, testify to the need for stronger collective action. Further, humanitarian crises have severe—even fatal—consequences for survivors of Gender-Based Violence (GBV); those who are forced to adopt risky survival strategies, such as engaging in transactional sex; the HIV positive population; married and vulnerable girls; pregnant women and new mothers and their babies.

The Central Emergency Response Fund (CERF) enables UNFPA to provide timely, life-saving GBV and Sexual Reproductive Health (SRH) interventions in a multitude of contexts through the provision of equipment and medicines for clinical deliveries, supplies for emergency obstetric care, reproductive health kits, clean delivery kits to help prevent infections among women who cannot reach a medical facility during delivery, hygiene kits, post-rape treatment and GBV protection and response services.

In 2016, the Central Emergency Response Fund (CERF) supported UNFPA interventions in 33 countries with a total of US\$23.1 million in funding. This sum represents a 44% increase from the CERF allocation of US\$16.1 million in 2015.

Within the context of the Grand Bargain, UNFPA is committed to providing at least 25% of funding to local and national responders. In 2016 alone, more than 35% of CERF contributions to UNFPA were disbursed to I/NGOs, Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies and government partners, a steady increase from 2014 and 2015.

Progress made on improving efficiency and effectiveness of disbursements of CERF funds to partners

UNFPA is strongly committed to ensuring it effectively and efficiently disburses CERF funds and provides services to populations in need. UNFPA is carefully tracking its own performance in the disbursement of funds, identifying challenges that affect implementation and undertaking corrective action on a number of levels.

As reported last year, UNFPA has implemented a series of actions to improve the timeliness of disbursements of CERF funds notably:

- **Institutionalization of a financial tracking tool for CERF in UNFPA and enforcing country office accountability:** The financial tool tracks and analyses the timing of the first CERF disbursement and sub-grants from UNFPA to its implementing partners on a monthly basis based on the internal benchmarks set for disbursement. This CERF financial tracking tool is reviewed on a monthly basis by UNFPA's Humanitarian Steering Committee, which is chaired by UNFPA's Executive Director.
- **Preparedness actions to timely implement CERF funds:** UNFPA has strengthened preparedness measures in country offices through capacity development, technical support, prepositioning of supplies and dedicated human and financial resources. In 2016, 78% of country offices, exceeding the UNFPA Strategic Plan target of 56%, developed humanitarian contingency plans that include addressing the sexual and reproductive health needs of women, adolescents and youth; providing services for gender-based violence survivors; and working across sectors of humanitarian action to mitigate gender-based violence risks.
- **Use of UNFPA's Emergency Fund to kick-start CERF activities:** UNFPA has an internal funding mechanism called the Emergency Fund in order to provide timely access to funding for country offices to kick-start a humanitarian response when a crisis breaks out. In this manner the UNFPA Emergency Fund can support planned implementation of CERF activities while country offices await CERF funds.
- **Issuance of UNFPA's CERF guidance note:** The note provides guidance to UNFPA country offices on how to more effectively disburse CERF funds to implementing partners in a timely manner, quicken CERF implementation and report on the disbursement of funds to implementing partners, as well as other key management recommendations for CERF grants.
- **CERF training and webinars:** five surge assessment workshops produced an increase in the number of candidates available for deployment from 118 to 206 members. These workshops included a specific session on implementing CERF activities. In 2017, UNFPA and the CERF Secretariat also jointly organised a webinar for UNFPA staff globally, and fully integrate CERF session into UNFPA's simulation exercise on surge with direct support from the CERF Secretariat. UNFPA will also continue to participate in annual CERF trainings conducted by OCHA at headquarters, country and regional levels.

These actions have yielded positive results in terms of UNFPA's performance in the management of CERF funds. As per CERF's annual reporting, an improvement can be seen in the average disbursement speed of 22% and an improvement in implementation speed of 32% from 2014 to 2015. This improvement continued consistently in 2016 and 2017. UNFPA's internal key performance indicator for April 2017 shows that, on average, it took 26 days to advance funds to implementing partners. This is more than 30 days faster, or more than 55% better, than when consistent tracking and monitoring started.