

FAQ on the CERF Climate Action Account

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What role is the CERF playing in the climate crisis?

The international humanitarian system has for long addressed losses and damages from climate change by providing life-saving humanitarian assistance to people affected by climate-related disasters, such as floods, droughts, and storms, especially where the magnitude and duration of an emergency may be beyond the capacity of an affected country.

The United Nations Central Emergency Response Fund (CERF) is the world's largest pooled fund to support humanitarian action. It was created by the United Nations General Assembly (A/RES/60/124) under the Secretary-General's leadership "to ensure a more predictable and timely response to humanitarian emergencies, with the objectives of promoting early action and response to reduce loss of life".

Since 2006 over a quarter of CERF allocations each year are for climate-related events. It has allocated more than US\$2.4 billion to respond to climate hazards in 87 countries for more than 2,400 projects. Since 2020, CERF has also become the world's premier source of humanitarian anticipatory financing.

On average, CERF-funded rapid response activities in 2023 started within 1.5 days of a request. For anticipatory action, CERF disburses funding based on predictions ahead of the impact of a climate-related disaster. The combined speed, reliability, and legitimacy of the fund have saved countless lives and supported people when and where they most needed support facing the climate crisis.

Why is a climate action account needed? What is its added value?

OCHA and CERF want to be more than a band aid for the climate crisis problem. And building on the comparative advantage of CERF, an enhanced **climate action portfolio** supported by the climate action account will:

- Support and incentive to life-saving actions that also reduce exposure or vulnerability to future climate change shocks, stresses and variability,
- Scale anticipatory action for predictable climate shocks, and
- Boost responses to climate-related disasters.

But that requires more finance, including finance that is normally not available to CERF.

For instance, climate finance or disaster risk finance often has different attribution and reporting requirements compared to traditional humanitarian finance, for example requirements outlined by the OECD Rio marker. For this type of finance, the intent of reducing vulnerability to climate change is often a prerequisite.

The CERF climate action account allows donors channel such finance through the coordinated humanitarian system to mitigate and address losses and damages of climate-related disasters and promote action that also builds local resilience to future climate shocks. This funding supplements the traditional humanitarian finance already generously provided to the Fund.

In other words, the CERF's climate action account offers a quick, efficient and impactful avenue for climate-related finance to assist the world's most vulnerable communities in facing the consequences of the climate crisis.

Contributions also help catalyze and coordinate the systemic change required for the global humanitarian system to respond more efficiently and effectively to a reality shaped by increasingly frequent and severe climate disasters, while at the same time contribute to adaptation and resilience for target communities.

So, going forward, CERF funding requests will require grant recipients to provide information on whether and to what extent planned life-saving activities support adaptation and resilience to future climate shocks and stresses for individuals or communities. This will not only capture the role CERF-funded actions already play in addressing the climate crisis, but also incentivize better humanitarian programming in the future.

Our aim is that as the CERF climate action account grows, it will increasingly drive innovation and generate best practice on climate action in fragile contexts.

Is this adaptation financing in line with Rio markers?

Many donors are interested in how funding to the climate action account could be reported to OECD-DAC in concurrence with the Rio markers. As with other reporting to the OECD-DAC, the practice among Member States is diverse and subject to each donor's internal policies and practices.

The CERF climate action account guarantees donors that funding will be used against the Fund's climate action portfolio enabling donors to report these contributions to OECD DAC in line with their reporting practices, including against the Rio markers. This is similar to contributions made by donors to other vertical climate funds, such as the Green Climate Fund.

In the future, Member States will increasingly be asked to provide financing to address climate-related losses and damages. Already, more than \$700 million has been pledged. While there is no equivalent multilateral system for accounting for losses and damages finance to the OECD-DAC Rio markers yet, it is generally accepted (and reflected in a joint IASC position) that in responding to climate-related emergencies, humanitarian actors minimize and address climate-related losses and damages. Indeed, the CERF was established by the General Assembly with the explicit objective of 'promoting early action and response to reduce loss of life'.

How are the mandate, life-saving criteria and needs-based principle of CERF retained?

By expanding CERF's climate profile, OCHA does not seek to change the Fund's mandate or decision-making procedures. CERF will not change its life-saving mandate set by the General Assembly and repeatedly reaffirmed by consensus, nor the Fund's needs-based decision-making processes.

Humanitarian life-saving actions can at the same time help strengthen local resilience and enable communities to better adapt to future climate-related shocks and stresses.

An analysis shows that the CERF has funded such activities for a long time. For instance, rehabilitating or constructing communal water points – such as wells, boreholes or water tap stands – not only improves immediate access to adequate and safe water for climate disaster-affected communities, but also helps them cope with future water scarcity induced by climate change. Similarly, the provision of drought-resistant seeds and agricultural training not only helps farmers cope with the immediate effects of drought, but also equips them with the tools and knowledge to better withstand future droughts. A similar case can be made for humanitarian action spanning food security, water and sanitation, as well as health sectors. There is also growing evidence that

unconditional cash transfers can be a valuable tool in helping people adapt to climate change in humanitarian settings.

Recent examples of such activities include:

- January 2024. CERF supports the drought response in Ethiopia. CERF provided safe drinking water through some water trucking. But where possible, CERF instead supported the rehabilitation, preventative maintenance, expansion of existing water supply systems, water storage, and upgrading of generator systems to solar with a particular focus on health care facilities. This means, safe water is available now for those in need, but the projects are carried out so that there is something in place for the next drought too.
- January 2024. CERF allocates funding to Timor-Leste to get ahead of El Nino impacts. As part of that allocation, drought-resistant farming practices and home gardening kits are provided to target populations. This helps to get through the current El Nino episode, but also builds the capacity of thousands of people to deal with future drought shocks.
- April 2024. CERF allocates funding to Madagascar in response to Tropical Cyclone Gamane. The allocation supports agriculture interventions that help livestock through the impact of the current disaster, but at the same time builds the capacity of several thousand households in climate-smart livestock management. These families will be better equipped when the next storm hits.

The climate action account provides donors the assurance from the outset that their climate finance is indeed used against CERF's climate action portfolio. That is to minimize and address the impact of climate-related disasters and build local resilience against future climate shocks. At the same time, this modality ensures that CERF remains true to its mandate in making allocation decisions. Further information about CERF decision-making can be found [here](#).

What is CERF's niche within the broader climate financing architecture?

In its commitment to operationalize and maximize the impact of the climate action account, OCHA has conducted an in-depth analysis of key climate finance players. The analysis revealed a critical gap in the broader climate finance landscape.

The largest climate-specific finance instruments primarily fund mitigation and adaptation activities that do not reach people in fragile, violence-affected contexts, even though they are among those most vulnerable to climate change.¹

Moreover, mitigation and adaptation-focused instruments typically do not directly reach individuals and communities affected by climate emergencies but work through multiple Government entities. This leads to lengthy project and program approval processes.

¹ See also OECD. (2023). Development finance for climate and environment-related fragility: cooling the hotspots. <https://www.oecd.org/dac/development-finance-climate-environment-related-fragility.pdf>; Wong, C. (2022). How can climate finance work better for fragile and conflict-affected regions? <https://www.undp.org/blog/how-can-climate-finance-work-better-fragile-and-conflict-affected-regions>

Within the nascent loss and damage finance landscape, CERF is currently the only operational inter-governmentally established fund addressing climate-related losses and damages. The 'Loss and Damage Fund' (final name to be determined) launched at COP27 is not yet fully operational, and its mandates specifies that it will provide funding that is complementary to humanitarian action.

Beyond traditional climate finance instruments, the humanitarian system must transform to respond more effectively to a reality with more frequent and severe climate-related disasters, expanding efforts in anticipatory action, incentivizing humanitarian action that also supports adaptation and resilience, and boosting responses to climate-related disasters.

With the help of the climate action account, CERF is ideally positioned to fill this gap in the broader climate finance architecture while also driving the systemic change required for the humanitarian system to better address the climate crisis:

- **Legitimacy:** Established by the UN General Assembly in 2005 as an inter-governmental fund under the Secretary-General's leadership, CERF has earned the trust of UN Agencies as well as the financial support of over 130 UN Member States and observers, as well as regional Governments, corporate donors, foundations and individuals, enabling the delivery of over \$9 billion in life-saving assistance across more than 100 countries and territories.
- **Enabling principled and coordinated field-led action:** CERF allocates its funding strategically to the highest-priority sectors, adhering to collectively established priorities, such as those outlined in Humanitarian Response Plans. This approach ensures that CERF's resources are addressing the most urgent needs. It also enhances coordination and minimizes fragmented efforts in responding to climate disasters and other crises.
- **Speed:** CERF is one of the fastest responders to climate disasters and other crises. On average, CERF-funded rapid response activities in 2023 started within 1.5 days of a request. CERF is also a leader in enabling early action responses to climate disasters, employing detailed analyses and early warning systems to pinpoint the countries and people most at risk. In 2023 alone, CERF allocated \$124 million for early actions, out of which \$36 million facilitated prompt and targeted responses to floods and droughts, most of which were induced by El Niño. This rapid deployment capability positions CERF as an indispensable source for urgent climate emergency responses, especially for sudden-onset climate disasters such as storms and floods.
- **Direct reach in fragile contexts:** Existing climate finance mechanisms do not reach the weakest and most vulnerable people nearly as quickly and to the extent that it could, if at all, particularly those in fragile and conflict-affected settings. CERF's unique position as a humanitarian fund responding to climate disasters addresses this gap effectively, directing most of its resources to fragile, conflict- and violence-affected contexts. In addition, CERF stands out in that it directly reaches affected individuals and communities. In 2022, 20 per cent of CERF funds allocated were implemented through a large network of local and international responders on the ground who have partnered with UN agencies. In doing so, CERF enables timely and targeted support to those most impacted by the climate crisis.
- **Anticipatory action: CERF finances action** ahead of predictable climate hazards, enabling significantly faster, more dignified, and effective humanitarian action but also protecting development gains. In 2023, CERF remained the largest financier of anticipatory action worldwide, providing more than 50 per cent of all global pre-arranged funding for anticipatory

action. The climate action account allows CERF to further scale its anticipatory action efforts, as well as mainstream and increase co-financing of proactive measures that prevent the worst impacts of climate disasters.

- **Humanitarian action that helps communities to better cope with future climate crises:** CERF will not deviate from its humanitarian mandate to provide life-saving assistance based on humanity, neutrality, impartiality and independence. For many years, however, CERF has funded activities that also support adaptation and build resilience of individuals and communities to future climate shocks and stresses. The climate action account enables CERF to further support and incentivize activities that bridge immediate life-saving response with efforts strengthening resilience and adaptation to future climate-induced needs. In doing so, the account will drive systemic change within the humanitarian system by enabling it to better respond to a reality of increasing and more severe climate-related disasters.

Is this earmarking?

Establishing a climate action account for CERF will not change the mandate or principles of decision making of the Fund, as established by the General Assembly and the Secretary-General's Bulletin. The ERC will maintain her or his flexibility to allocate the resources of the Fund according to humanitarian need – be they driven by climate or other factors. What the climate action account will do is attributing expenditures for the CERF climate action portfolio to the account, after these needs-based allocation decisions are already made. In so doing, the climate action account enables funding that requires to be spent on climate relevant action, to be channeled through the CERF.

The climate account may be considered 'soft earmarking' of funds or a 'contract of intent' between CERF and the donor, where donor contributions from climate-financing budgets will be given to CERF to be spent on climate-related needs and action at scale. As such, these funds will replenish eligible climate-related allocations made by CERF within its annual allocation portfolio and be accounted for through clearly articulated attribution and dedicated annual reporting on CERF-funded climate action.

There is some precedence for such an 'attribution' approach, with donors having increased contributions to CERF by making a clear link to the fact that CERF increasingly invests in anticipatory action, or donors giving CERF a top-up contribution linked to the fact that CERF has responded to a certain crisis, or crises type.

However, recognizing that climate financing may have very specific requirements vis-à-vis attribution and reporting it will represent a step up in how OCHA will account for the use of this additional funding.

Is there a risk of double counting humanitarian as climate finance?

Many allocations reported to OECD DAC are tagged against a variety of priorities. There are specific guidelines in place that avoid "double counting" by the OECD (see for instance [here](#)). Especially with traditional aid flows that have a requirement to be spent on climate-related action, the issue is not so much about double counting, as it is about correct tagging.

It should also be noted that while OECD-DAC captures humanitarian aid as a dedicated sector, no corresponding sector exists for climate. Indeed, looking at climate finance reported to OECD DAC

over the past decade, billions of dollars to the humanitarian system have already been marked as climate finance within the humanitarian aid sector.

That said, OCHA is working carefully to try to reduce a risk of potential double-counting by asking donors to provide new and additional finance to the CERF climate action account.

How do you ensure additionality?

Additionality – meaning funds that would not otherwise be available to CERF – is key to justify CERF creating a dedicated climate action account. Additional funding may come from, but is not limited to, separate climate finance, DRR finance or finance intended for the humanitarian system to be spent on climate-related responses.

Different donors have different access and approaches to climate finance. These might be separate “pots” of funding, or simply an increasing requirement that existing ODA becomes more climate relevant. So the answer of what is “additional” may be different to different donors.

During the consultation, OCHA has been clear that simply shifting resources from regular CERF contribution to CERF’s climate account would undermine this innovation and that relabeling of existing, flexible humanitarian funding must be avoided. Simply making existing flexible funding less flexible is to be avoided. Donors providing funds to the climate account, would be expected to confirm the additionality.

CERF will on an annual basis account for the overall volume of dedicated financing received for the account, against the portfolio of climate-related allocations to ensure transparency and evidenced attribution to climate action.

How much funding do you expect to receive? Is there a minimum?

It is worth recalling that in the context of growing humanitarian needs Member States – through the General Assembly – have decided that CERF should at least reach \$1 billion in contributions annually.

While the ambition for the climate action account is to eventually attract significant additional funding to allow CERF to meet mounting climate-related demands, OCHA is fully aware that this new approach may not immediately yield vast sums of new funding.

It is also important in the climate finance arrangement discussions to signal clearly that CERF is part of the mosaic/financing arrangements on climate change and provide a concrete channel for climate finance, complementary to the newly established Fund for loss and damage as outlined in the decision adopted at COP28. Any donor providing additional climate finance through the account can help set a precedent leading to necessary change.

The climate action account may provide future opportunities to broaden the donor base, attracting new or returning donors. For instance, the private sector may make more significant contributions through climate-linked advocacy. It may be an attractive proposition for companies and philanthropists to directly provide funding to the UN with the understanding it is to be used to save lives and livelihoods of the most vulnerable in response to climate disasters.

OCHA also works to better positions CERF to accept funding that might become available through discussions on global levies, or taxes, or other innovative climate finance solutions, such as insurance, currently discussed.

Finally, as by positioning the climate action account to catalyze and coordinate the systemic change required for the global humanitarian system to respond more effectively to a reality shaped by the climate crisis, OCHA believes that humanitarian programming will become more effective and efficient in addressing needs while at the same time building resilience. In this regard, OCHA hopes that the CERF climate action account may help our humanitarian partners better attract climate finance in fragile places.

How does the account work?

Overarching parameters

The climate action account will ensure that CERF evolves to keep pace with new demands and help catalyze and coordinate the systemic change required for the global humanitarian system to respond more effectively to a reality shaped by the climate crisis. The aim is that as the climate action account grows, it will increasingly drive innovation and generate best practice on climate action in fragile contexts. The account will achieve this by incentivizing life-saving action that also supports adaptation and resilience, scaling anticipatory action for predictable climate shocks, and bolstering responses to climate-related disasters.

Contributions to the account are pooled and the funds will flow through a replenishment principle exclusively towards CERF's climate action portfolio. The account is established within CERF's current administrative and operational framework.

NB: The term 'account' does not mean setting up a separate bank or project account, it refers to a virtual account, meaning that the related funds will be accounted for as a separate envelope of funding. The United Nations Secretariat has one common banking system.

How will the CERF highlight aspects of life-saving projects supporting adaptation and resilience?

CERF will not deviate from its humanitarian mandate. However, for years, CERF has funded activities that also support adaptation and build resilience of individuals and communities to future climate shocks and stresses.

Going forward, CERF funding requests will require grant recipients to provide information on whether and to what extent planned life-saving activities support adaptation and resilience. This will not only better capture the role CERF-funded actions already play in addressing the climate crisis, but also incentivize improved humanitarian programming in the future.

For climate-related anticipatory action frameworks specifically, CERF is also considering introducing a dedicated top-level 'climate question' at the strategic proposal level ('chapeau') with more in-depth follow-up and engagement around the content, which the anticipatory action process will allow for. Moreover, CERF is exploring the possibility of including environmental questions into the CERF chapeaus in the longer-term as an important step to incentivize humanitarian action that is as carbon neutral and environmentally sensitive as possible.

How will reporting work?

Generally, especially through the UNFCCC processes, there is an increasing expectation that UN entities inform on their efforts in responding to loss and damage and building local resilience to future climate shocks.

In line with relevant normative guidance, and with CERF's commitment to enhance its climate reporting in any case, CERF will provide specific and enhanced climate-relevant reporting to highlight its role in responding to a climate crisis. That said and understanding that climate finance may have different reporting / attribution requirements, CERF will also account for the results attributable to the investments made through the new climate action account.

Already, CERF is set up through its sophisticated Grants Management System to tag, track and report more granularly on its climate-related action and can provide core information such as:

- Amounts spent on anticipatory and early action to minimize climate-related disasters
- Amounts spent on responding to climate-related disasters
- Disaggregation by hazard (drought, floods, storms, heatwaves, cold waves, etc.)
- Disaggregation by location (admin 1, country, region)
- Disaggregation by sector of response (food, WASH, health, etc.)
- Disaggregation of reach by sex, age, disability, displacement, etc.

CERF will provide dedicated reporting on its climate action portfolio on an annual basis. As a step towards such dedicated climate-action reporting, OCHA has just published the inaugural [report on CERF-funded climate action](#) covering 2023 CERF-funded climate action. The report is based on available data for 2023, and while it does not have the full range of climate data that will be available in the future, it nevertheless offers detailed insights into the hazards, geographical locations, beneficiary demographics and supported sectors. The report also underscores CERF's pioneering role in funding anticipatory and early action that saves lives, reduces suffering, enhances cost-efficiency, and helps communities mitigate humanitarian impacts ahead of imminent climate shocks. Through compelling examples, the report also illustrates how CERF-supported projects contribute to building resilience and adapting to future climate shocks in affected communities.

Future reporting will be further improved with the newly captured information on CERF-funded actions with adaptation and resilience benefits² (see above) and through additional climate-relevant indicators. In addition, reporting will include analysis, learning, and insights from case studies that illustrate CERF's important niche in responding to the climate crisis. The report will also attribute results to the climate action account and demonstrate its added value in strengthening CERF's climate action.

In addition, OCHA and CERF are working with individual donors who provide climate financing to CERF on what additional information would be helpful in order for these donors to report funding in line with their obligations internally and externally.

² CERF will in the future require grant recipients to provide information on whether and to what extent planned life-saving activities support adaptation and resilience to future climate shocks and stresses for individuals or communities.

How will donor attribution work?

Contributions to the climate action account will be attributed proportionally to CERF's overall climate action portfolio ex-post on an annual basis, not to individual allocations, projects, or activities. This is in line with CERF's existing method of attributing results to donor contributions.

This approach highlights the cumulative 'climate results' achieved with the support of the climate action account. Additionally, this approach provides maximum flexibility for donors to attribute their climate action account contributions to the best-suited sub-set of CERF's overall portfolio in line with their individual priorities, allowing them to make the strongest possible case for the appropriate use of their climate financing contribution and in line with their reporting requirements. Furthermore, this approach allows crediting CERF's climate action to both non-climate action account and climate action account donors in a balanced manner.

How will the climate action account be promoted?

To better showcase CERF's climate action, along with the additionality and value added by the climate action account, CERF will update its website and datahub to provide more climate action information and make the climate action account and its contributions more visible.

Furthermore, OCHA is implementing a communications plan to promote and publicize CERF's important support to enable climate action in fragile contexts, highlighting the key role of the climate action account in advancing these efforts. To this end, OCHA continues to engage in advocacy targeting Member States and potential donors and will offer donors public visibility and acknowledgment for their contributions. Additionally, OCHA is developing a public campaign to position the climate action account as an innovative, exciting, and trusted way to support people on the front lines of the climate crisis. The campaign will target the private sector and individual donors while providing further visibility of the account and highlighting Member State contributions. Central to this initiative is a new online donations platform dedicated to raising awareness and funding for the account, which OCHA plans to launch and promote in the lead-up to and during COP29 in November 2024.

What is the difference between a climate account and a climate window?

There have been various words used during the conceptual phase of the CERF climate action account, including "facility" and "window". The word "window" was eventually discarded as it potentially creates confusion with the existing "rapid response window" and "underfunded emergencies window" of CERF. These are technically "spending windows", while the climate account is technically an "income window".

What happens when the money runs out from the CERF climate account?

The climate action account is about additionality and expansion. CERF will continue to make decisions based on needs and informed by available funding in the CERF. OCHA does not intend to fund climate-related responses exclusively from the climate action account, as the account is not a new spending window. So, OCHA will continue to use CERF to respond to climate related shocks where needed as it is doing now.

How can a donor contribute to the CERF climate account?

Contributions follow the same established procedure as providing traditional funding to CERF but requires a mention in the pledging documentation so the CERF secretariat can track the funding to the CERF Climate action account. We also expect donors to make explicit that funding to the CERF climate action account is additional and would not have otherwise been available to the CERF.

Ex ante climate financing contributions are preferable and can be made to the account during the annual pledging conference as part of the overall pledge of a donor. This provides more predictability and support to CERF's role in the climate financing mosaic.

Ex post contributions of climate financing can be made in recognition of the portfolio of CERF allocations for anticipatory action or climate response already undertaken during the fiscal year.

A mix of ex-ante and ex-post by each donor is of course also possible.

What is the link between the CERF account and the new Fund for loss and damage?

OCHA views the two funds as complementary and urges all Member States to fully support the new Fund and other funding arrangements operationalized at COP28.

It is noteworthy that the Member State decision at COP28³ on funding arrangements created a new Fund with a scope that is to be "complementary to humanitarian action," thereby assigning the responsibility for addressing humanitarian related losses and damages from climate disasters to other funding mechanisms. In this context, both CERF and the climate action account are seen as crucial in filling that niche. The decision also mentions the CERF specifically, thus cementing the place of the CERF as part of the funding arrangements, especially around scaling anticipatory action. OCHA will also be actively engaged in supporting the Secretary-General in his role co-convening the annual High-Level Dialogue.

What about IASC partners

OCHA has informed key partners at the Headquarters level about its initiative to establish a mechanism for attracting additional finance to CERF. At the November 2023-IASC Principals meeting, the proposal of a CERF climate action account was well received. In addition, OCHA is in touch with key IASC partners on the operationalization of the fund, including on reporting requirements.⁴

It is important to note that many IASC partners are also engaging with donors on similar propositions. OCHA acknowledges that while CERF is an effective channel for climate finance, it should not be the sole channel. CERF has proven comparative advantages, with an added value to global climate action that includes:

- Providing timely, global humanitarian response to the most vulnerable in the climate crisis.
- Acting as a catalyst to scale-up coordinated and collective anticipatory action.

³ Decision -/CP.28 -/CMA.5 on the operationalization of the new funding arrangements, including a fund, for responding to loss and damage referred to in paragraphs 2–3 of decisions 2/CP.27 and 2/CMA.4.

⁴ See 2023 IASC Key Messages on Loss and Damages: <https://reliefweb.int/report/world/iasc-key-messages-averting-minimizing-and-addressing-loss-and-damage-humanitarian-perspective>

- Operating as a fund by all for all, with a clear General Assembly mandate and Secretary-General leadership.
- Enabling principled and coordinated field-led action in support of leadership structures.
- Offering a robust and continuously improving risk management system.
- Supporting life-saving humanitarian action that also supports adaptation and builds resilience of individuals and communities to future climate shocks, stresses and variability.
- Extending reach into the most fragile contexts and aiding people in need who are not served by governments or existing climate financing channels.