

Background

Established in 2006, the Central Emergency Response Fund (CERF) has allocated close to US\$6.7 billion to support life-saving assistance in 107 countries. CERF was created as a fund “for all, by all” and has over the past 14 years been the world’s global emergency fund that with unprecedented speed, predictability and flexibility ensures life-saving aid and protection for millions of people.

Since CERF was established, global funding needs through humanitarian appeals have increased sevenfold – from US\$5.2 billion to assist 32 million people in 2006 to some \$37 billion to support over 106 million people in need in 2020. In 2016, the General Assembly endorsed the Secretary-General’s call to more than double CERF’s annual funding target to \$1 billion. This endorsement reflects Member States’ confidence in CERF. Since its inception, CERF has received contributions from 127 Member States, including from 52 that have also benefited from CERF funding – a testament to the world’s collective commitment to CERF as a “fund for all by all”.

“A strong United Nations needs a strong and reliable CERF to reach people trapped in crises and to respond to the needs of those furthest behind.” - United Nations Secretary-General, António Guterres

CERF Achievements in 2020

In 2020, the COVID-19 pandemic magnified already alarming levels of humanitarian needs. After reaching unprecedented levels in 2018 and 2019, global funding needs for UN led humanitarian appeals in 2020 skyrocketed beyond \$37 billion. Donors recognized the need for a strong CERF response: in 2019, they contributed an all-time high of \$831 million to CERF of which a large portion was provided late in the year, allowing CERF to not only disburse a then record level of \$539 million in 2019 but also to significantly scale up response in 2020.

Throughout 2020, CERF was central to the humanitarian community’s ability to respond to growing needs. The record level donor support allowed the fund to reach unprecedented levels of allocations and halfway through the year CERF had already disbursed close to \$600 million for life-saving assistance to millions of people in 34 countries – not least fueled by the COVID-19 pandemic. In 2020, the virus brought death and suffering to all corners of the world, as well as devastating and destabilizing effects heavily impacting the world’s poorest countries and further deteriorating the conditions of millions of people already caught in humanitarian crises. The pandemic far exceeded any earlier challenges faced by the humanitarian system and by mid-2020, the COVID-19 Global Response Plan stood at some \$10 billion.

The unprecedented pandemic called for flexible and innovative CERF allocations that could be disbursed with pace and agility. Halfway into 2020, CERF had disbursed \$95 million to nine UN agencies’ COVID-19-related programmes, reaching millions of affected refugees, IDPs, and vulnerable communities.² On 25 March, the day the global humanitarian response plan was launched, CERF allocated \$60 million in response to the pandemic followed shortly by an additional allocation of \$20 million in support of logistics and supply lines. Even before this, CERF supported the humanitarian response to the pandemic with \$15 million to WHO and UNICEF, allowing WHO to start working as early as 3 February. The allocations were made using an innovative approach to privilege speed, disbursing funds directly to eight UN agencies at the global level and offering them flexibility to prioritize resource distribution to where they saw the greatest needs. On 23 June,

¹ All data as of 30 June 2020.

² CERF also approved the reprogramming of some \$8 million from existing projects.

CERF released another \$25 million through IOM to support front-line NGOs deliver lifesaving health, water and sanitation – the first such allocation in CERF’s 14-year history. In total, funding from CERF has been allocated for urgent projects against the virus in over 45 countries – for real-time information see <https://pfbf.unocha.org/COVID19/>.

Throughout the year, CERF funding also targeted millions of people affected by conflict and internal strife, other disease outbreaks such as Ebola and cholera, and climate related emergencies in the form of drought, floods and devastating storms.

CERF’s Rapid Response window is used for making funding available when it is most needed at the beginning of a crisis or when ongoing crises deteriorate. Again in 2020 CERF was often the first funding source in new emergencies. Beyond providing some of the earliest humanitarian COVID-19 funding, CERF’s speed was also demonstrated in early February when the fund quickly released \$30 million to immediately scale-up shelter and other critical assistance to thousands of civilians in northwest Syria after air strikes and shelling forced an estimated 586,000 people to escape their homes. Shortly thereafter, CERF allocated \$10 million for early response to the devastating desert locust outbreak in Ethiopia, Kenya and Somalia. The timely allocation ensured an immediate scale-up of efforts to control the infestation and mitigate its impact.

To save more lives and further reduce suffering CERF in 2020 continued to explore ways to be even more timely by supporting anticipatory life-saving humanitarian action when forecasts and data predict that a high-impact shock is imminent. In 2020, CERF piloted Anticipatory Action frameworks in Bangladesh (flooding), and Ethiopia (drought), which followed the framework set up in Somalia in 2019. In June, the ERC activated the Somalia framework when the agreed-on threshold for projected food-insecurity was reached and \$15 million was allocated to help more than 3.5 million people forecasted to face severe food insecurity due to the mounting impacts of desert locusts, COVID-19 and flooding. In July, CERF released another \$5.2 million in Bangladesh for anticipatory action in advance of severe flooding that had been forecasted with 10 days’ notice.

In 2020, CERF also continued to be a lifeline for people caught in crises that don’t attract sufficient donor attention and funding but where needs are just as urgent. CERF provided a record high \$225 million to 20 underfunded and neglected crises providing life-saving assistance to millions of people.

Reaching everyone and transforming the lives of those most at risk remains a key CERF priority. Throughout 2020, CERF continued to encourage special consideration of four generally underfunded priority areas that target the most vulnerable: (a) support for women and girls, including tackling gender-based violence, reproductive health and empowerment; (b) programmes targeting persons with disabilities; (c) education in protracted crises; and (d) other aspects of protection.

Event Objectives

The 2020 CERF High-Level Pledging Event will seek to galvanize increased commitment to CERF to ensure that the fund is fit to respond to the alarming humanitarian needs. It will offer an opportunity to the humanitarian community to respond to Secretary-General António Guterres’ call during the 2018 General Assembly for increased funding to CERF towards the \$1 billion target. In particular, the event will:

1. **Showcase CERF’s results and unique added-value** delivering life-saving aid targeting the most vulnerable, including its role promoting fast and effective response, wherever and whenever crises hit. The session will focus on CERF’s critical COVID-19 response and particularly its comparative advantages for providing fast, agile and strategic allocations, as well as its complementarity with other COVID-19 funding.
2. **Offer donors an opportunity to demonstrate the global solidarity that the current humanitarian situation calls for and announce pledges to CERF for 2021** and collectively ensure that CERF is able to effectively respond to the growing humanitarian needs.

Format

The event will be organized in two segments that will take place back to back:

1. **Ceremonial Segment:** The Secretary-General will open the event followed by a high-level panel that will demonstrate the success of CERF in meeting the urgent life-saving needs of people in crises. The Emergency Relief Coordinator (ERC) will chair this session.
2. **Pledging Segment:** A separate pledging segment will offer Member States and partners an opportunity to announce pledges for 2021. The ERC will chair this session.

Participants

All Member States and Observer Missions, Regional Organizations, UN agencies, and the private sector are invited to the event.

Virtual Event

The event will be the first virtual CERF high-level pledging event and will be held on 8 December 2020, from 10 AM to 1 PM EST. Further dial-in instructions, including access to translation in the six UN official languages, will be shared, as soon as these are available.

Registration and Pledge

Participants are requested to complete the on-line registration form and indicate their intention to make a short statement and/or pledge by **1 December 2020**, by visiting <https://bit.ly/3oxzA9w>.