

Time for a Better Bargain:

How the Aid System Shortchanges Women and Girls in Crisis



In recent years, donor countries and agencies have engaged in unprecedented discussions and commitments to gender equality, from setting feminist development policies to passing UN resolutions on Women, Peace and Security. But despite the talk, the numbers tell a different story — one in which women and girls still get shortchanged. Funding to frontline women’s organizations in fragile and conflict-affected areas remains at just 0.2% of total bilateral aid, despite an upward trend of increased total aid committed to support gender equality efforts.¹

CARE’s global advocacy campaign, **#SheLeadsInCrisis**, calls this out: Women are most affected by crises; they must lead efforts to prevent and respond to them. CARE’s report [*Time for a Better Bargain: How the Aid System Shortchanges Women and Girls in Crisis*](#) appraised key actors in the international aid system — the top 11 government donors and five UN agencies — on three priority areas: **resourcing** women’s organizations; **funding** gender equality and empowerment programs; and **elevating** women’s leadership and equal participation in humanitarian settings.

Despite positive and often impressive individual donor and UN agency initiatives, CARE’s analysis revealed:

- Donors and UN agencies have fallen short, with notable exceptions, of significantly funding women’s groups in fragile and conflict-affected states; seven of 11 top donors allocated less than 1% of aid to fragile states and directly to women’s organizations.
- Most do not sufficiently fund gender equality or gender-sensitive programs; seven of 11 government donors allocate barely 2% of funds to targeted gender equality programming in humanitarian settings. Only four are close to ensuring all funded programs in humanitarian settings account equally for the needs of women and girls and men and boys.
- UN agencies and humanitarian coordination clusters do not systematically track which of their partners are women’s rights or women-led organizations, making it difficult to assess whether the rhetoric around empowering local women’s groups³ is matched in reality.
- One notable success has been increased gender parity in UN operations, showing that, with adequate political will and resourcing, change is possible.

Worryingly, the COVID-19 pandemic’s economic and social toll threatens to reverse even modest progress on funding gender equality efforts and to exacerbate chronic under-resourcing of frontline women’s organizations in fragile and conflict-affected contexts, despite evidence that crisis response led by women and girls leads to more effective, inclusive and long-lasting impact.⁴

¹UN Secretary General Report, [Women, Peace and Security, 2020](#). ²CARE International, [Women Responders: Placing Local Action at the Centre of Humanitarian Protection Programming, 2018](#). ³The phrases “women’s groups” or “women’s organizations” include women-led and women’s rights organizations as well as, where appropriate, girls-led organizations. ⁴CARE International, [Women Responders: Placing Local Action at the Centre of Humanitarian Protection Programming, 2018](#).

SUMMARY REPORT CARD

RESOURCING

Resourcing women's rights organizations, women-led organizations and women's institutions

GOAL

- Increase funding to women's groups to 4% by 2020

OVERALL RATING

UNSATISFACTORY

FUNDING

Funding for gender equality programs (gender-targeted, transformational or gender-mainstreamed programs)

GOAL

- 15% target for gender equality and women's and girls' empowerment programming in humanitarian settings
- Only provide financial support to programs that demonstrate how they meet women's and girls' needs equally with men's and boys' by 2020

OVERALL RATING

UNSATISFACTORY

APPROACHING

PARTICIPATION AND LEADERSHIP

Participation and leadership of women and women's organizations in humanitarian and crisis responses

GOAL

- 25% of implementing partners are women's organizations by 2020
- Local and national memberships of humanitarian clusters is composed of 50% women's groups by 2020
- At least 40% of leadership positions in humanitarian contexts are held by women
- At least 30% of staff at all levels are women by 2020

OVERALL RATING

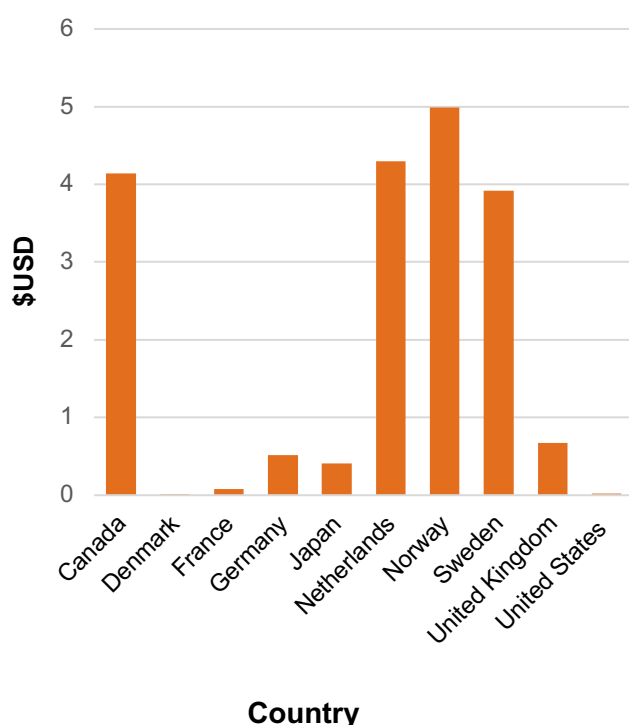
MISSING

MISSING

UNSATISFACTORY

SATISFACTORY

Money Allocated to Women's Groups in Fragile States for Every \$1,000 in Official Development Assistance



The report urges humanitarian donors, UN agencies, and international non-governmental organizations to:

- Explicitly commit to gender-specific, time-bound funding indicators, including in revisions of the [Grand Bargain](#) humanitarian aid agreement;
- Systematically track and report funding to and partnerships with women-led and women's rights organizations;
- Increase the amount and quality of humanitarian funding that goes to women-led, girls- or gender-focused organizations;
- Ensure that women, girls and women's organizations are equitably represented and have an equal voice in humanitarian decision-making structures.

With COVID-19 pushing record numbers of people toward humanitarian assistance, now more than ever, funding and influence must flow into women- and girls-led crisis response, for effective, long-lasting, intergenerational impact.