Standby Partnership
Network Strategy
2026–2028

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Who we are

The Standby Partnership (SBP) Network is a unique global system that enables United Nations Agencies to rapidly scale up their response in humanitarian emergencies and protracted crises by deploying highly qualified experts through partner organizations. These "Experts on Mission[1]" provide critical technical and operational support exactly when and where it's needed most.

The Standby Partnership operates through formal agreements between participating **UN Agencies, Funds, Programmes, Departments and Offices** and a diverse group of deploying partners, including NGOs, government entities, donor agencies, private sector actors, foundations, and intergovernmental bodies. Together, they form a flexible and coordinated system capable of reinforcing crisis response across sectors and regions.

The origins of the Standby Partnership trace back to **1991**, when the **Danish Refugee Council (DRC)**, the **Norwegian Refugee Council (NRC/NORCAP)**, and the **Swedish Civil Defence and Resilience Agency (MCF)** answered a UNHCR call for surge personnel during the Iraq war. Since then, the Network has grown substantially, with more than 50 sending partners and 17 UN agencies joining forces over that time to strengthen the global response capacity.

The growth in the scope of the Standby Partnership Network is also reflected in the increasing scale and diversity of requests and deployments.

[1] *Regulations Governing the Status, Basic Rights and Duties of Officials other than Secretariat Officials, and Experts on Mission: https://docs.un.org/en/ST/SGB/2002/9*

SBP
in Numbers 2024

96 UN **Country Offices** and **Regional Offices** requesting SBP deployees

964 **deployments in the field during 2024** supporting Country Offices and Regional Offices

Crisis hotspots: Ukraine, Sudan, the Israel–Hamas conflict, Lebanon, and Syria saw significant requests for experts.

TOP 5
Requested profiles: Information Management, Health, Gender, WASH, and Protection

73% of deployment requests **were met by the Standby Partnership Network** and Regional Offices.

UNICEF was the largest requester of standby experts in 2024, followed by **WFP, UNFPA, WHO,** and **UNHCR.**

140,346 **days** were delivered in field by deployees

87 **nationalities** deployed worldwide — **53%** of the experts came from the **Global South**

TOP 3
Deploying organisations: NORCAP, CANADEM, and MCF led the charge in deployments.

Top deployment countries: Sudan, Ukraine, Chad, South Sudan, and the State of Palestine received the highest number of deployment days.

37% of deployees were **women**, showing progress but room for growth.

$70 MILLION
equivalent support provided by Standby Partners in humanitarian, development, and health emergencies contexts

Today, the SBP Network continues to evolve—offering a proven, adaptable platform to deliver expertise, promote collaboration, and transfer skills to achieve sustainable results, while ensuring timely and accountable support in emergencies worldwide.

Global Context

Halfway through 2025, global humanitarian appeals reached USD 44 billion, yet received less than 13% of required funding, forcing many UN agencies and INGOs to reduce programmes by 20–30%, depending on the context. At the same time, crises are escalating in complexity—from protracted conflicts to climate shocks—often in contexts where access is constrained and public trust is fragile.

When reprioritizing individual country plans, the focus has been on two key goals. First, reaching people and places facing the most urgent needs, guided by severity-based assessments of humanitarian needs. Second, prioritizing life-saving support based on planning already undertaken for the 2025 humanitarian response. This approach helps ensure that limited resources are directed where they can do the most good, as quickly as possible.

In this context, the ongoing humanitarian reset, as called for by OCHA and key UN leaders, seeks to reimagine the structure, priorities, and delivery of humanitarian assistance in the face of unsustainable funding models and escalating global needs. The reset emphasizes greater efficiency, more locally led responses, anticipatory action, and a shift from reactive to resilience-based programming. For UN internal surge mechanisms, this transformation may require significant adaptation, as traditional surge deployments—often designed for short-term, high-intensity crises—evolve toward more strategic and flexible models.

Against this constrained global backdrop, UN agencies need more than ever to optimise the way they operate and to forge strong partnerships. The role of the Standby Partnership has therefore become increasingly critical, enabling the timely mobilisation of flexible, expert-driven, and accountable capacity in rapidly evolving crises.

[2]*UN, partners unveil hyper-prioritized aid appeal amid 'cruel math' of brutal funding cuts*, OCHA

Introduction to the SBP Network Strategy

This strategy **sets out the collective direction for the Standby Partnership Network** over the period 2026–2028. It reflects a growing commitment among partners not only to **maintain the efficiency and effectiveness of deployments**, but to go further, ensuring that the **system remains agile, impact-driven, and strategically positioned** within the global response ecosystem. It also acknowledges the need to **demonstrate value in a context of funding scarcity**, shifting key donor dynamics, and increasing demand for expert-driven support.

Developed through extensive consultation with key Standby Partnership Network members, this strategy reaffirms the **enduring strengths of the SBP model— agility, speed, quality, flexibility, partnership and accountability—** while setting out **three core objectives** that will guide our joint efforts:

1. Strengthened Partnerships: enhancing coordination, collaboration, and knowledge sharing and promoting sustainability;

2. Deploying Excellence: ensuring the quality, speed, agility, and impact of expert support;

3. Amplified Reach: advancing visibility and advocacy to engage and influence key stakeholders.

This document is designed to align our collective efforts, support shared learning, and ensure that Standby Partnership Network continues to serve as a trusted, strategic enabler of expert response in a changing world.

Vision

We envision a world where strong partnerships and synergies enable the timely mobilization of high-quality expertise to strengthen emergency operations—reducing suffering and improving outcomes where support is most needed.

Purpose

By harnessing trusted partnerships, the Standby Partnership Network enables a rapid, timely, agile, and sustainable deployment mechanism that strengthens emergency responses to better support the people we serve, with particular attention to inclusiveness and gender equality.

Goal

To ensure that the Standby Partnership Network remains impactful, agile, and relevant by mobilizing effective expert deployments, strengthening partnerships, and promoting sustainable knowledge sharing in response to emergencies.

Specific Objectives

Specific Objective 1:
Strengthened Partnerships

Strengthen coordination, collaboration, and knowledge sharing across the Standby Partnership Network by leveraging trusted partnerships to identify best practices, expand joint initiatives, and promote shared learning.

Specific Objective 2:
Deploying Excellence

Enhance the quality, technical expertise, speed, relevance and impact of expert deployments by applying clear standards, streamlining deployment processes and tools, and systematically measuring deployment outcomes and overall support under the SBP mechanism.

Specific Objective 3:
Amplified Reach

Expand advocacy and visibility to strengthen and promote the value of the Standby Partnership Network and of the SBP mechanism, among existing and emerging supporters, stakeholders and sectors with the aim of securing greater funding, enhancing recognition within the UN and beyond, and improving the Network's overall effectiveness and agility.

Theory of Change

IF Trusted partnerships are leveraged to coordinate expert deployments,

AND IF Deployment quality, timeliness, and sustainability are ensured through robust standards and streamlined processes,

AND IF The Standby Partnership Network's value is clearly communicated and advocated to diverse stakeholders,

THEN The Network will drive more agile, high-quality, and strategically aligned deployment solutions,

RESULTING IN Stronger humanitarian and development responses and improved support to the people we serve.

Key Commitments

The following commitments translate the Standby Partnership Network's vision, purpose, and objectives into concrete action areas. Each commitment underpins one or more of the **Specific Objectives** by strengthening partnerships, ensuring deployment excellence, and amplifying the Network's reach. Analysed together, they provide the operational backbone for achieving the Network's goal of remaining impactful, agile, and relevant in support of humanitarian and development responses.

Strengthen Strategic Partnerships

Strengthen coordination with existing UN and sending partner entities while broadening collaboration with new stakeholders and sectors to reinforce the Network's collective response.

Enable Rapid, Timely and Reliable Deployment

Enhance the timely mobilization of high-quality experts to meet critical needs in humanitarian and development responses.

Promote Evidence-Based Learning and Knowledge Sharing

Systematically capture, share, and apply lessons learned and good practices to enhance deployment effectiveness and strengthen collective knowledge sharing.

Commit to Operational Agility, Flexibility and Innovation

Streamline systems and processes to ensure the Network can respond quickly and flexibly in rapidly evolving operational contexts, including through optimizing digital tools and exploring new approaches.

Key Commitments

Amplify the Recognition of the Standby Partnership Network

Expand visibility, and advocacy efforts to position the Network as a strategic, cost-effective and high-impact deployment mechanism, able to attract broader support within an evolving global ecosystem.

Represent Deployees within the UN Ecosystem

Ensure that Standby Deployees, Experts on Mission / Affiliate Personnel, are represented and included in appropriate policy, processes and forums related to their status and work.

Deployment Process Cost-Effectiveness

Enhance coordination structures to streamline deployment processes, minimize duplication, and avoid lengthy procedures, ensuring cost-effectiveness and timely mobilization of experts.

Regular Review Process

The Strategy is considered a live document and the SBP Network is committed to regularly review and adapt it, if necessary, once the Humanitarian Reform is more settled.

Monitoring and Evaluation

The Strategy is accompanied by a **Monitoring, Evaluation, Accountability and Learning Framework** that operationalizes the Network's strategic objectives. The framework defines how the Network will systematically track performance, ensure accountability to members and affected populations, and strengthen learning across its operations. It establishes clear mechanisms to generate, analyse, and use data to inform decision-making, and enhance transparency in delivering high-quality standby support and partnerships for humanitarian response.

Goal Indicators

To ensure that the Standby Partnership Network remains impactful, agile, and relevant by mobilizing effective expert deployments, strengthening partnerships, and promoting sustainable knowledge sharing in response to emergencies.

- Proportion of deployees who made a meaningful contribution to strengthening UN operations at the field level, as assessed through the Deployment and Performance Evaluation Report.

- Percentage of UN agencies and sending partners who report that the Network's activities, tools, coordination, and support mechanisms have helped improve their institutional or operational adaptability in rapidly changing humanitarian contexts.

- Proportion of partners who acknowledge that the Network offers valuable platforms, such as events, working groups and coordination fora for building new partnerships and sharing technical, operational, or strategic knowledge.

Specific Objective Indicators

Coordination, Collaboration & Knowledge Sharing across the SBP Network

- Number of Network members who report tangible benefits and express satisfaction with the collective outputs and support mechanisms of the Network.

Monitoring & Evaluation

- Number of new or updated Standby Partnership Agreements signed, or inactive partnerships reactivated.
- Number of joint partnerships events, coordination and working group meetings.
- Number of joint and individual monitoring missions conducted.
- A standardized membership mechanism is actively used for onboarding and reviewing membership.

Quality, Speed, Impact of Expert Deployments

- Average days from selection to start of deployment.
- Percentage of total deployment requests that were successfully filled with a deployee.
- Percentage of deployments rated as very good and exceptional in timeliness, duration, profile, impact and sustainability.
- Percentage of deployments high or very high achievement of results.
- Number of partners implementing improvements to deployment processes based on Network recommendations and standards.

Expanded Advocacy and Visibility

- Number of advocacy efforts led to reform, inclusion or adoption of policy, guidelines or formal commitments.
- Number of formal publicly available external communication outputs.
- Percentage of growth and reach of SBP digital platforms.
- Percentage of partners satisfied with advocacy and communication materials.
- Number of humanitarian forums where Standby Partnerships are represented.
- Number of engagements with new partners and donors.

Thank you to the active members of the Standby Partnership Network

...To the sending agencies and donors that deployed their standby experts:

Swedish Civil Defence and Resilience Agency · DRC Danish Refugee Council · CANADEM · HELP NGO · iMMAP · redr australia

LUXEMBOURG AID & DEVELOPMENT · NORCAP Part of Norwegian Refugee Council · Global Medic · THW · PÄÄSTEAMET Estonian Rescue Board · Foreign, Commonwealth & Development Office

Government of the Netherlands · DHL · FCA Finn Church Aid · dsb Norwegian Directorate for Civil Protection · CISCO

OXFAM · DANISH EMERGENCY MANAGEMENT AGENCY · MAP ACTION · FUEL RELIEF FUND · Australian Aid · ACTION CONTRE LA FAIM

FOLKE BERNADOTTE ACADEMY · UK-MED · TETRA TECH International Development · BLG LOGISTICS · Schweizerische Eidgenossenschaft Confédération suisse Confederazione Svizzera Confederaziun svizra — Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation SDC

zif Center for International Peace Operations · Fondation VEOLIA · JUSTICE RAPID RESPONSE · PELASTUSOPISTO EMERGENCY SERVICES ACADEMY FINLAND

Irish Aid An Roinn Gnóthaí Eachtracha Department of Foreign Affairs · icmc International Catholic Migration Commission · NORWEGIAN CHURCH AID · Ericsson Response · CASCOS BLANCOS WHITE HELMETS ARGENTINA · impact INITIATIVES

...And to the UN agencies that hosted these experts:

United Nations Department of Safety and Security · unicef · World Health Organization · UNFPA · WFP World Food Programme

UNHCR The UN Refugee Agency · OCHA · IOM UN MIGRATION · FAO · unesco

UN WOMEN · UNOPS · unrwa · UNDP · UNMAS · UN-HABITAT

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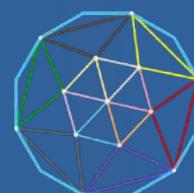All figures are stated in United States Dollars.

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