

**Grand Bargain in 2020:
Annual Self Report – Narrative Summary**

Name of Institution: International Rescue Committee (IRC)

Point of Contact (please provide a name, title and email to enable the consultants to contact you for an interview):

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(NB. Please limit your answer to no more than **5 pages in total** – anything over this word limit will not be considered by ODI in their analysis. Please respond to all of the questions below.)

Grand Bargain in 2020

Question 1: Reflecting on the information you have provided in the Excel spreadsheet, please highlight the 2 or 3 key outcomes or results relating to the Grand Bargain that your institution achieved in 2020?

In 2020 IRC continued to make the most progress towards implementing Grand Bargain commitments in the areas of transparency, cost effectiveness and enhanced quality funding, with major strides on cash-based programming and localisation.

Towards our transparency commitments, IRC continued to publish IATI data on all projects funded by UK's FCDO and Dutch MoFA, and published IATI Activities for a number of awards funded by European donors, which do not make it a requirement, including Irish Aid, Danida and Sida. As of the end of 2020 IRC has completed IATI publishing for 95 awards, as compared to 2019, when IRC had published 78 IATI Activities.

With regard to **improved cost effectiveness and value for money**, IRC continued to lead a consortium of implementers who have adopted a rigorous and consistent approach (Dioptra, formerly known as SCAN) to cost-efficiency analyses. In 2020, three NGOs piloted Dioptra in six countries and showcased these experiences at an event for NGOs, donors, and UN agencies in March. A fourth NGO began piloting later in the year, and a fifth and sixth NGO began planning for installation in 2021.

In addition, 2020 saw us intensifying IRC's efforts to secure **more and better quality funding, particularly multi-year funding**, to frontline implementers responding to the COVID-19 pandemic. We consistently called for a high-level political dialogue among Grand Bargain signatories to overcome current barriers in the humanitarian aid system which prevent quality funding flows from cascading down the transaction chain in a timely and transparent fashion. In this regard, we also issued a [joint statement](#) with NRC following the Grand Bargain annual meeting. Eventually, our advocacy contributed to the decision by the Co-Conveners of the Enhanced Quality Funding workstream to hold a series of roundtable discussions on a number of issues, including the cascading target.

In Fiscal Year 2020 we delivered 17.85% of our **material assistance in the form of cash or vouchers (CVA)**, a moderate decline compared to previous years' performance but nevertheless a remarkable increase from the 7% of material assistance delivered through CVA in FY2016. IRC directly transferred \$32.7 million in cash and \$2.78 million in voucher assistance to clients.

Finally, IRC accelerated progress on its **localisation commitments**. A central ambition of its new 'Strategy100' is to significantly enhance the scale and quality of partnerships with local actors. In 2020, we released a new version of our partnership framework (PEERS), which had already won the [Humentum Operational Excellence Award](#). In addition, each IRC country office worked through an annual review of its programme approach based on an analysis of local capacities and systems; prioritizing principled, collaborative partnerships with local actors. In addition, a key principle of our global COVID-19 response plan has been to support the local and national response. We are currently collating and analysing data relating to funding flows from IRC to local actors in 2020. We

are also taking steps to ensure that our organizational systems deliver more timely, comprehensive and accurate data from FY21 onwards. Looking forward, the Strategy100 ambition includes a specific commitment to substantially increase the scope of our partnerships, commencing with a targeted 50% increase in FY21.

Question 2: How has your institution contributed to the advancement of gender equality and women’s empowerment¹ in humanitarian settings through its implementation of the Grand Bargain? What results/outcomes have been achieved in this regard? (please outline specific initiatives or changes in practice and their outcomes/results). Please refer to the Guidelines for definitions of Gender Equality and Women’s Empowerment, which are included in this self-report template package.

IRC has committed to advancing gender equality and women’s empowerment through our internal policy and practices, partnerships with fellow NGOs, client-reaching programs, and advocacy. These efforts together are integral to achieving our ambition of becoming a feminist organization, as expressed in June 2019.

To advance gender equality within the IRC, and as reported last year, we launched our first [Gender Action Plan](#) (GAP) in May 2019. GAP is an organization wide, 3-year plan that identifies actions to 1) attract and promote female staff, 2) ensure that staff have consistent attitudes that uphold gender equality, and 3) establish an organizational culture where women are safe and respected. The IRC publicly releases [progress reports on the GAP](#), with the most recent released in June 2020. The June 2020 report showed that leadership reflects a significant underrepresentation of women of colour and women from the Global South, which we continue to work to improve through the development of Equitable Recruitment Guidance. Further work towards achievement of the GAP included an increase in the number of Women@Work groups, which act as platforms to collectively bargain for more equitable organizational culture across all IRC countries, from 68 to 79 groups while nearly tripling membership in the groups. Gender equality sensitization sessions were conducted with over 3,000 staff between October 2019 and March 2020, and over 2,000 staff members were trained on IRC’s Anti-Sexual Harassment training as of March 2020. We have also increased the percentage of female Safety and Security staff (from 45-52%) in order to ensure that female staff are active participants in the design and management of their own security needs while ensuring female representation in a field of humanitarian work where they are often under-represented.

IRC has also integrated gender equality into all programmatic frameworks and tools across the sectors in which we work. Programmatically, we fulfill our commitment to gender equality by ensuring that we consider the different needs and realities of our female and male beneficiaries and adjust our approach accordingly when implementing programs. **Gender equity is embedded in the IRC’s “Good & Great” Standards**, a set of strategic objectives to improve the quality of program delivery.

To further our feminist approach and response to GBV, as well as to enhance our ability to contribute to Grand Bargain efforts towards localization, IRC has continued to engage in the *Listen Up* and *Building Local Thinking Global* projects. Both projects are supported by the US State Department Bureau of Population, Refugees and Migration, as reported in 2020, and both also take explicitly feminist approaches to partnership in the humanitarian system to challenge patriarchal structures and hold the humanitarian system to account, by strengthening client feedback and shifting power to local actors. The Women’s Protection and Empowerment team has created the position of a Senior

¹ Refer to the IASC definitions of gender equality and women empowerment, available [here](#).

Technical Advisor for Participation and Women's Movement Building, which provides technical assistance to both of these projects, while also evaluating ways the IRC can better partner with and support local women-focused and women-led organizations.

As a founding member of the *Feminist Humanitarian Network* (FHN), an international network of women leaders committed to a transformed humanitarian system that promotes a feminist humanitarian agenda, in 2020 the IRC continued to pursue increasingly partnership-based advocacy activities to amplify the reach of women's rights and women-led organizations working in their own countries or communities on public policy platforms.

IRC – both independently and with partners – actively pushed for the recognition of the gendered nature of the COVID-19 pandemic and specifically the increased risks to women and girls' safety in multilateral coordination and resource mobilization for the humanitarian response to COVID. A joint letter initiated by IRC and CARE directed at the Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs and Emergency Relief Coordinator was supported by 588 organization across the globe, including several governments, IOs and the Call to Action. IRC – again both independently and with partners – generated and disseminated evidence around how the pandemic and its ensuing restrictions affect the safety of our clients. Reports can be found [here](#), [here](#), [here](#) and [here](#).

Question 3: How has the humanitarian-development nexus been strategically mainstreamed in your institutional implementation of the Grand Bargain commitments? Please explain how your institution has linked commitments 10.1 - 10.5 with other commitments from other workstreams.

As an outcome-oriented organisation, IRC continued to measure its progress based on **lasting outcomes**, rather than inputs, outputs or activities. Our approach has led us to invest in more solid partnerships with local actors in country. Advocacy-wise, IRC has been a leading voice on the nexus and influenced financing to support it, including by calling for more and better funding for protracted crises from the World Bank, major bilateral donors and UN agencies. The secondary impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic on our clients, particularly with regard to their ability to secure sustainable livelihoods, further justified our calls for **more durable solutions** to their plight. In 2020 we published a number of reports providing additional evidence that we need timely, flexible and longer-term support for people caught in crisis. They include a [policy brief](#) on the World Bank's response to COVID-19 and reports on the more developmental needs of affected populations, such as [economic opportunities](#) and [education](#).

Grand Bargain 2016-2020: Overall achievements and remaining gaps

Question 4: What are the 2-3 key achievements/areas of most progress by your institution since 2016? Please report on your institutional progress for the period 2016-2020, **even** if your institution did not become a signatory until after 2016.

Progress in 2020 confirms the overall positive trend of IRC's performance since 2016, most notably in transparency, reduced management costs, cash-based programming. In particular:

- **on transparency**, IRC has gone from zero awards published on the IATI platform in 2016 to 95 awards published by 2020, a 95% increase;

- **on cash-based programming**, IRC made an organisational commitment to increase its percentage of material assistance through CVA to 25%, a percentage it managed to exceed in FY2018 (27%). CVA is now considered IRC's default approach to support basic needs and food security;
- **on cost efficiency**, in 2016 there was no agreed-upon approach to measuring cost efficiency across the aid sector. IRC's SCAN/Dioptra tool has shown that a consistent approach to measuring cost efficiency is both feasible and useful and today the Grand Bargain Cash sub-group uses this tool as the default approach for the efficiency analysis of basic needs programmes. Four other NGOs besides IRC (CARE, Mercy Corps, Save the Children and CRS) use the tool to assess cash transfer programmes;
- **on participation**, over the last five years IRC developed its first organisational approach - Client Responsiveness; rolled-out a suite of guidance; established a dedicated technical support team; and in country put in place SOPs and now routinely uses client feedback data in its decisionmaking process.

Question 5: What, in your institutional view, have been the main achievements of the Grand Bargain signatories, as a collective, since 2016? Please indicate specific commitments, thematic or cross-cutting issues or workstreams where you think most progress has been made collectively by signatories.

The Grand Bargain has produced important technical work on key structural challenges to the humanitarian aid sector. In some instances, for example on cash-based programming and enhanced quality funding, it has helped better understand systemic blockages, clarify definitions and produce the evidence or tools needed to identify lasting solutions. It has created the space for some of the most important constituencies to negotiate aid reforms at working level. In some instances, for example on harmonised reporting, it has done all that it can at technical level by successfully piloting a tool that only awaits collective adoption. As a global convener, the Grand Bargain has become the main forum for addressing humanitarian aid efficiency and effectiveness challenges.

Question 6: What has the Grand Bargain not been able to achieve in its five year tenure? What outstanding obstacles, gaps, areas of weakness still remain after five years, in terms of improving the efficiency and effectiveness of humanitarian action? Please indicate specific commitments, thematic or cross-cutting issues or workstreams where you think there remain key gaps or obstacles.

By far, the main gap has been the **failure to adapt to long-standing humanitarian crises by shifting the financing model to multi-year, flexible financing to frontline and local implementers**, with rigorous financial transparency and accountability for results. Secondly, the Grand Bargain has lacked the political will to enact many of the technical solutions already identified by individual work streams: for example, the need to agree on a common cash coordination mechanism; the adoption of a consistent cost-efficiency measurement tool across different constituencies; and a set target for ensuring that the funding provided to first-level recipients cascade down the transaction chain to frontline implementers. To remedy this weakness, **IRC strongly advocates for a high-level political dialogue** to accelerate progress. This dialogue would engage top decision-makers at Head of Agency/CEO-level from all constituencies (NGOs, donors, UN agencies and the Red Cross) and focus on removing existing barriers to system-wide change by agreeing on time-bound solutions. It is important to recall that a high-level political dialogue was last held when the Grand Bargain was first established in 2016. It is therefore not surprising to see why the forum has slowly turned into a highly technical bureaucracy instead of sustaining the original momentum.

Risk and the Grand Bargain

Question 7a: How has risk (financial, operational, reputational, etc) affected your institution's implementation of the core commitments since you became a signatory to the Grand Bargain?

As an implementing partner, IRC is committed to respond to humanitarian crises in the most timely, efficient and effective manner. Our clients expect us to deliver the best possible aid at the right time, however we often find ourselves in a situation where we need to frontload significant resources without any predictability over the funding approved, allocated or disbursed by bilateral donors and UN agencies. Our hope when the Grand Bargain was first established was that the donor and UN community would do its part by increasing the volume and speed of funding that needs to reach the ground. We also expected this funding to be of better quality, more flexible and longer-term, for us to adequately respond to the increasingly protracted nature of humanitarian crises.

Five years on, **IRC is still bearing most of the risk in responding to humanitarian crises without notable gains in aid predictability or timeliness.** The spread of the COVID-19 pandemic has exacerbated this situation and has been a striking reminder that in times of acute crises, our clients cannot wait. Without adequate resources reaching the ground when they are most needed, all Grand Bargain commitments are harder to implement. The Grand Bargain should help share the risk between donors and implementing partners more equitably. **Instead of risk-sharing, we still witness risk-transferring to frontline implementers, including local actors.**

Question 7b: How has your institution sought to mitigate or address these risks to enable implementation of the core commitments?

IRC is actually still grappling with chronic exposure to risk. Our main suggestion is once again to urgently convene high-level negotiations between leaders from donor, UN and NGO constituencies to agree on a more equitable way to share risk.