



2023–2024

Annual Report



We are HSOT

We are a team of humanitarian and stabilisation experts who support the Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office to deliver the UK's humanitarian and stabilisation priorities. We are committed to supporting FCDO to save lives, alleviate suffering and maintain dignity of people affected by crisis.

We bring extensive operational expertise and provide the UK Government with world-class response capabilities. Our team provides a full spectrum of preparedness planning and response to sudden-onset disasters, protracted crises and complex emergencies to meet humanitarian needs and restore stability in fragile and conflict-affected states.

We contribute to strategic thinking and provide technical expertise and analysis to inform FCDO's decision-making and policy development on longer term strategic priorities in areas such as climate resilience and prevention of violence against women and girls. Through our work, we strive to maintain FCDO as a global leader in international development, security and responding to humanitarian needs.

From Ukraine to Türkiye, to Gaza and the Caribbean — we have been a trusted partner of the UK Government since 2017 and have responded to 87 major humanitarian disasters.

We are a diverse team of over 80 UK-based experts working closely with FCDO colleagues. The team maintains a high readiness to respond (eight hours from the onset of a crisis) and also includes 900+ humanitarian and stabilisation consultants on our rosters that we can deploy to support FCDO strategic priorities, UK Overseas Missions and United Nations agencies.

We solve problems and deliver at pace with impact. We are a team known for our 'can do' attitude and agility who can be relied upon to deliver at pace and at scale during times of crisis. We hold ourselves and others to the highest professional and ethical standards and aim to raise the bar across the sectors we work in.

HSOT is implemented by positive impact firm Palladium and is part of the UK aid-funded Humanitarian Emergency Response Operations and Stabilisation (HEROS) programme since 2017.



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Foreword

This has been a devastating year for so many communities affected by conflict, instability and natural disasters - a year that has tested the humanitarian sector in many ways. Spikes in new and protracted crises, such as Gaza, Sudan, South Sudan and Somalia, have exacerbated internal displacement and refugee flows. The year also saw global malnutrition and famine trends worsening with alarming levels of acute food insecurity.

Simultaneously, humanitarian access in many crises has deteriorated, with aid delivery repeatedly impeded by security threats, political interference, and logistical and bureaucratic barriers. These barriers keep vulnerable people from receiving

basic humanitarian assistance and services when they need it most, with women, girls, disabled people and the elderly disproportionately affected.

In a year of such adversity, HSOT has continued to leverage the extensive expertise of our core team and consultants to work alongside FCDO teams on humanitarian and stabilisation priorities pursuing opportunities, preparing for possible scenarios, and responding with excellence, wherever we can. From Sudan to Ukraine, the Middle East to the Caribbean and beyond, HSOT has reliably provided early warning, analysis, contextual insight and operational response. This is all provided at pace and at scale whether it is remote advice or on-the-ground support. In striving for continued improvement – for ourselves and teams in FCDO – we have focused on preparedness and

exercising. Our report offers a flavour of the achievements across our contract.

Alongside the complex response work, the team has undertaken exciting work on AI, climate resilience, and greening the supply chain. As a team, we have focused on AI as it plays a critical role in enabling humanitarian data analysis, enhancing disaster prediction and supporting decision-making. Our expertise has helped shape solutions-thinking on climate resilience within FCDO and among international partners as we encourage the linkage with humanitarian preparedness across the department. Our work on greening has looked across our supply chains to explore specification and supplier-based improvements upstream as well as local recycling and reverse logistics for packaging downstream.

As a team that stretches across humanitarian and stabilisation efforts, HSOT brings a natural synergy given the overlap between addressing the immediate impacts of humanitarian crises and fostering resilience and long-term recovery that builds or rebuilds stability and sustainable systems in fragile contexts. The features covering the contribution our experts are making in Sudan are testament to this.

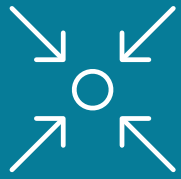
In wrapping up the year, I want to thank the team for all their hard work. I continue to be impressed by the insight, professionalism and commitment they bring to a job that is equal parts reward and challenge. As we move forward into the final year of the HEROS contract, I look forward to maintaining and driving up the standards and quality of our work right to the finish line!



Rebecca Pankhurst-Lapiña,
HSOT Director

HSOT in numbers

YEAR 7



4

major humanitarian
disasters responded to



95,802

core relief items
delivered



223

maps created for
info and analysis



202

deployments and
remote advisory tasks

SINCE
2017

87

major humanitarian
disasters responded to

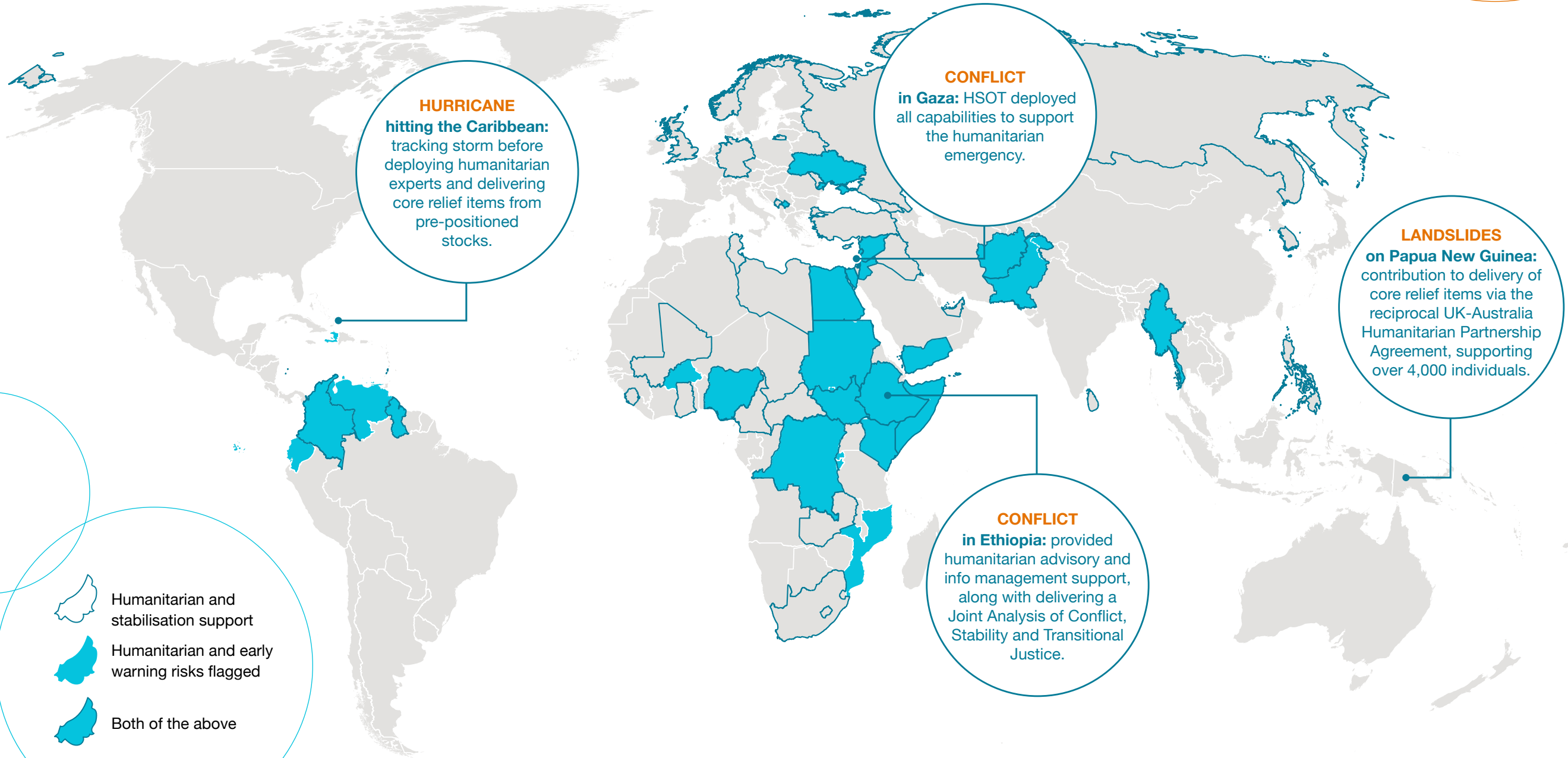


with a
value of

£162.8M



Our global reach





Spotlight intervention Gaza

Gaza

Humanitarian Response

On 7 October 2023, Hamas and other Palestinian armed groups launched a terrorist attack on Israel. In response, Israel began airstrikes followed by a large-scale ground operation resulting in heavy civilian casualties and mass displacement of civilians.

Two months later almost 1.9 million people in Gaza – nearly 85% of the entire population – were estimated to be internally displaced. A year on Gaza is unrecognisable, and the conflict has caused a devastating humanitarian crisis. As of 26 September, more than 34,000 people have been killed according to conservative estimates, of which more than 11,300 are children.

The Gaza context has presented severe challenges to deliver a robust humanitarian response, as Gaza is an active war zone with a very complex operating environment. Humanitarian access has been severely impeded, and hundreds of medical and aid workers have been killed while working to deliver aid and medical care. The limited

humanitarian access has left civilians with little access to food, safe drinking water, shelter, electricity, and fuel. The healthcare system is overwhelmed, while overcrowding and poor sanitary conditions have resulted in a significant increase in communicable diseases.

Providing support at pace

From the morning of 7 October, HSOT stood up significant information management and analysis support as it was clear that a team of four humanitarian affairs officers (HAOs) was needed to produce twice daily situation reports (sitreps), seven days per week. The first humanitarian situation report was issued at 13:14 on 7 October. On 9 October, HSOT

logistics experts issued the first humanitarian Supply Chain Plan with options for delivering core relief items, and humanitarian advisers produced the first Info Brief on International Humanitarian Law (IHL) in relation to the Occupied Palestinian Territories.

Reacting to the sudden-onset crisis, HSOT's Security Team also provided surge support with work commencing early morning of 7 October. Initial security support included accounting for HSOT staff deployed in the region, reaching out to key contacts to establish or build on existing relationships with i.e. Palladium office in Egypt, overseas security managers and international NGO (INGO) security focal points in Jerusalem, Cairo, Amman, and Beirut to report on the unfolding security situation across Gaza, Israel and the region. This behind-the-scenes security work supported HSOT's Deployment and Roster Management Team's quick actions to deploy HSOT core team members. From 15 October to 24 November, 10 core team advisers and analysts surged to support the humanitarian response.



Humanitarian information and analysis is critical

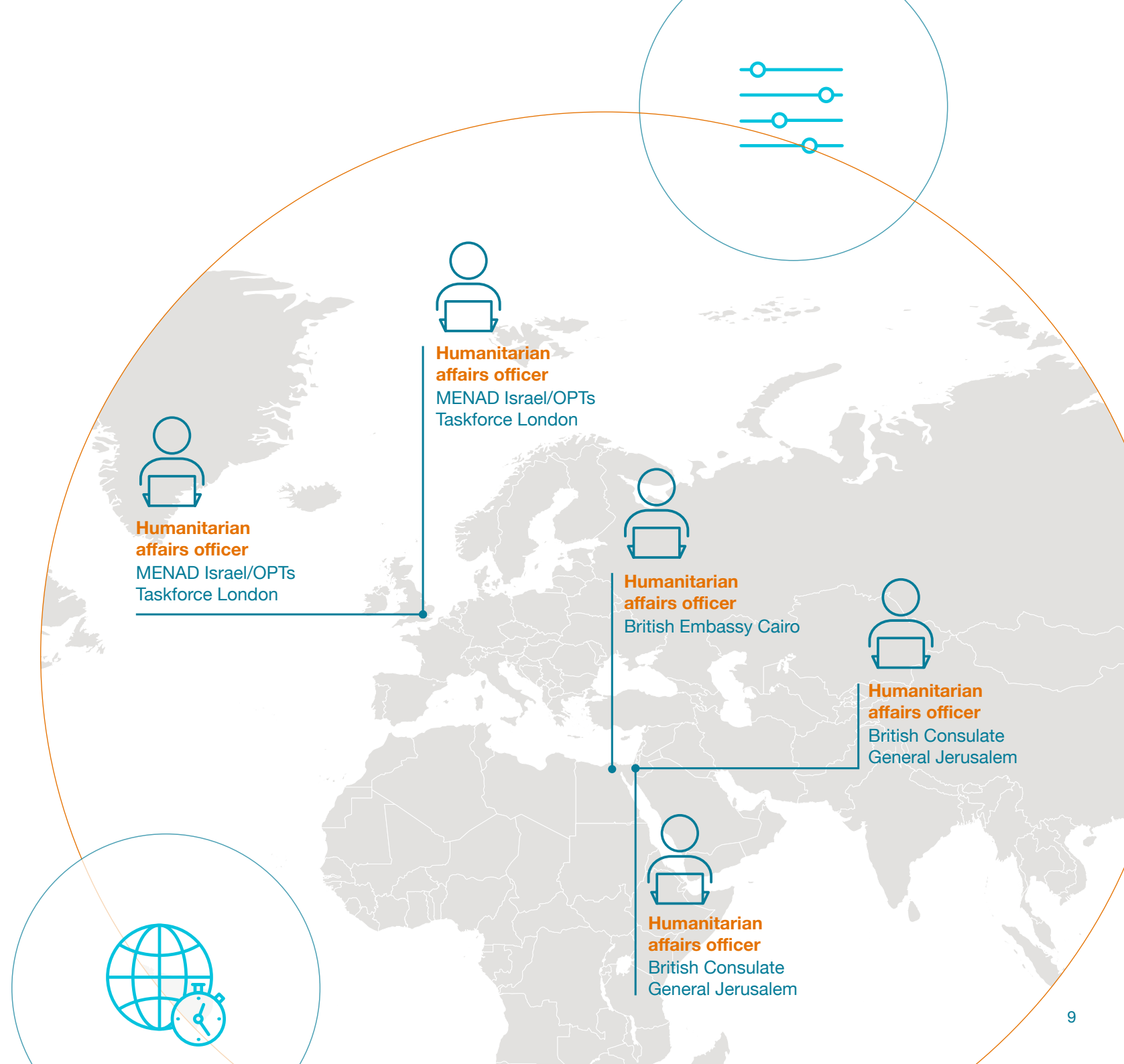
HSOT provided five information and analysis staff to the humanitarian pillar of the FCDO crisis structure. Staff worked in a prolonged shift pattern from 5 AM in the morning to 10.30 PM to provide situation reports. This ensured that there was enough team capacity to also provide info and data for ad hoc incoming tasks. In week one of the response, this dedicated team worked with colleagues in the Office for Conflict, Stabilisation and Mediation (OCSM) to facilitate a humanitarian scenario-building exercise. By bringing together a team of humanitarian experts, regional experts and key stakeholders from MoD, HSOT's Early Warning and Analysis Team produced scenarios with high levels of credibility.

Throughout the year, HSOT has continued to provide a five-person strong team of dedicated Humanitarian affairs officers (HAOs) to provide info, and analysis supporting FCDO's response to the humanitarian crisis in Gaza. The team has been spread across four different countries, and dealing with an incredibly poor data landscape, and a humanitarian situation that often changes drastically on a daily basis yet have produced high quality info and analysis products for FCDO. The Humanitarian Affairs Officers highlight that effective collaboration has been key

to the team's success. Each HAO have different skills and are plugged into different networks – whether that is FCDO internal or external partners such as UN agencies and INGO forums. The team of five has been working together very closely, harnessing their collective knowledge and expertise to produce evidence-based analysis supporting FCDO's response decision-making. The team also highlights that communication has been key to maintaining a good working structure. Team members check in with each other on a daily basis, which provides a chance to share goals for the day, updates and any 'roadblocks' that needs clearing.

“It's not an exaggeration to say that we couldn't work without the humanitarian affairs officers...”

The team of HAOs has been highly valued by FCDO HQ and Embassy humanitarian teams. In the words of one colleague, “It's not an exaggeration to say that we couldn't work without the Humanitarian affairs officers. What they provide is absolutely fundamental to an evidence-based response. With all responses, there is a need for data and information at pace, but for Gaza, there has been an insatiable demand. We have needed rapid, accurate and high-quality info products on demand”.



The importance of triangulating data

To combat disinformation necessitated that the team put additional effort into triangulating and verifying information. In the context of this conflict, there has been a high level of distrust, and therefore figures and information have come under extra scrutiny. For example, a lot of attention has been placed on the number of trucks carrying aid, because it is the only metric that has been available for counting aid entering Gaza. The team has overcome this challenge by showing the evidence behind using a particular figure – explaining the rationale for using specific numbers and sources. Producing Info Notes in a digestible format has also helped show the different routes and how aid items are transported into Gaza.

Technical notes

The team have provided a suite of regular info products including Humanitarian Situation Updates, Funding Overviews, Humanitarian Needs Updates, and Daily Bullet Points for FCDO Humanitarian situation updates, funding overviews, humanitarian needs updates, and daily bullet points for FCDO seniors and ministers. The team of HAOs has also delivered ad hoc info products to provide humanitarian context and analysis on a specific issue. Often the

team has been able to anticipate gaps in analysis, or identified areas where info was confused or unclear. Working closely with HSOT's logistics experts and humanitarian advisers, the team produced a series of technical briefing notes to create a better understanding of key issues impacting the response. These covered issues such as mortality data, nutrition, aid supply routes and supply chain challenges, drinking water and fuel supply among others. For example, the technical note detailing the humanitarian impacts of water shortages in Gaza set out in a concise

“Experienced humanitarian advisers, HAOs and logistics experts were deployed throughout the region – to Egypt, Israel, Jordan, Cyprus and Occupied Palestinian Territories.”

two-page document the availability of safe drinking water in Gaza, the impact that the lack of power and fuel has on the functioning of water pumps and desalination plans. It also set out in clear terms the percentage of water infrastructure that has been damaged and what rehabilitation works would be required. The info product also included relevant details such as cost and availability of bottled water, and the health risks from exposure to contaminated water or drinking salt/sea

water. HSOT's range of regular and issue-focused technical notes has provided FCDO colleagues with access to key humanitarian info and analysis creating a solid evidence-base for humanitarian programming and policy.

Deploying humanitarian experts – the value of in-country expertise

Following 7 October, HSOT supported the UK's response at pace but also at scale. Experienced humanitarian advisers, HAOs and logistics experts were deployed throughout the region – to Egypt, Israel, Jordan, Cyprus and Occupied Palestinian Territories. The deployed experts were working in tandem with HSOT colleagues supporting the crisis structure response from London. This rapid scale up helped to ensure the UK was ahead of the curve in understanding the humanitarian consequences of the expanding war and allowed for sound new funding allocations. The deployment of HSOT's humanitarian experts also helped the UK to ensure continuity in terms of staff – a crucial element in this complex emergency.

Having in-country experts facilitated dialogue with the humanitarian community at all levels; with the UN Humanitarian Coordinator (UNOCHA) and the Humanitarian Country Team plus wider UN actors, ICRC and



HSOT team of humanitarian adviser and HAO briefing the then Foreign Secretary, David Cameron, during visit to Al-Arish.

international and national NGOs. In-country humanitarian experts also strengthened FCDO in-house understanding of the humanitarian architecture, procedures and principles. In turn, this enabled UK diplomats, legal and reconstruction experts to speak confidently with their government counterparts on the unfolding humanitarian situation. Importantly,

the UK continued to co-chair the Good Humanitarian Donorship Initiative (GHD) in Jerusalem contributing to shaping the outlook of other humanitarian donors. GHD members without in-country humanitarian staff sought the UK's information and analysis to shape their own humanitarian strategies and response.

High volume of humanitarian advisory support

The humanitarian advisory team for the Gaza response undertook a significant amount of work in assessing humanitarian needs and in identifying the most critical requirements to inform UK lobbying efforts. For example, HSOT worked with the World Health Organisation (WHO), the humanitarian Health Cluster, and donor coordination forums to raise the urgency of medevacs out of Gaza for the most critical injured. Through their lobbying

and advocacy, it became a priority discussion point in humanitarian coordination forums, and FCDO was kept abreast of all the facts of the situation and key sticking points to help in diplomatic negotiations on the issue of medevacs. HSOT deployed advisers also helped facilitate access for medical charity UK-Med to operate as well as for medical evacuations within Gaza. This demanded working closely with existing contacts and key actors to ensure cover for the movement of patients.



HSOT's humanitarian adviser deployed to Cairo provided advice to the British Embassy political team on prioritised and appropriate humanitarian messaging to the Government of Egypt. The adviser also supported HMG to engage with the various mechanisms supporting the response, including the UN's 2720 processes, the Access Support Unit, the Egyptian Red Crescent and UNOCHA's coordination structure.

Technical areas of expertise bring additional benefit

HSOT's humanitarian advisers with specific technical expertise led on particular strands of work. For example, HSOT's Health Adviser liaised with the London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine to provide situational analysis, which was critical in raising the profile of the severity of the health situation in Gaza. The Health Adviser also brought in NHS Subject Matter Experts (SMEs) on prosthetics to help advise on a longer-term mobile amputee project, which is now being rolled out via FCDO's Jordan team.

With large parts of buildings destroyed or damaged, shelter has been a humanitarian key focus. HSOT's humanitarian adviser with shelter expertise provided support directly into humanitarian coordination forums



UK-FCDO supported camp in Rafah, in southern Gaza © UNICEF

including the Shelter Cluster, the Housing, Land and Property Rights Community of Practice, and the Site Management Services Working Group. Working closely with the Shelter Cluster and HSOT logistics experts, the Shelter Adviser developed tailored shelter kits combining tarpaulin with a set of tools that can be used to repair existing homes and to create and repair emergency shelters in conditions of repeated and prolonged displacements. Evidence shows that shelter kits support self-reliance and are linked to benefits for displaced people's livelihoods and health including mental health. The Gaza specific shelter kit enable people to build a basic house with a lifetime of 1-3 years.

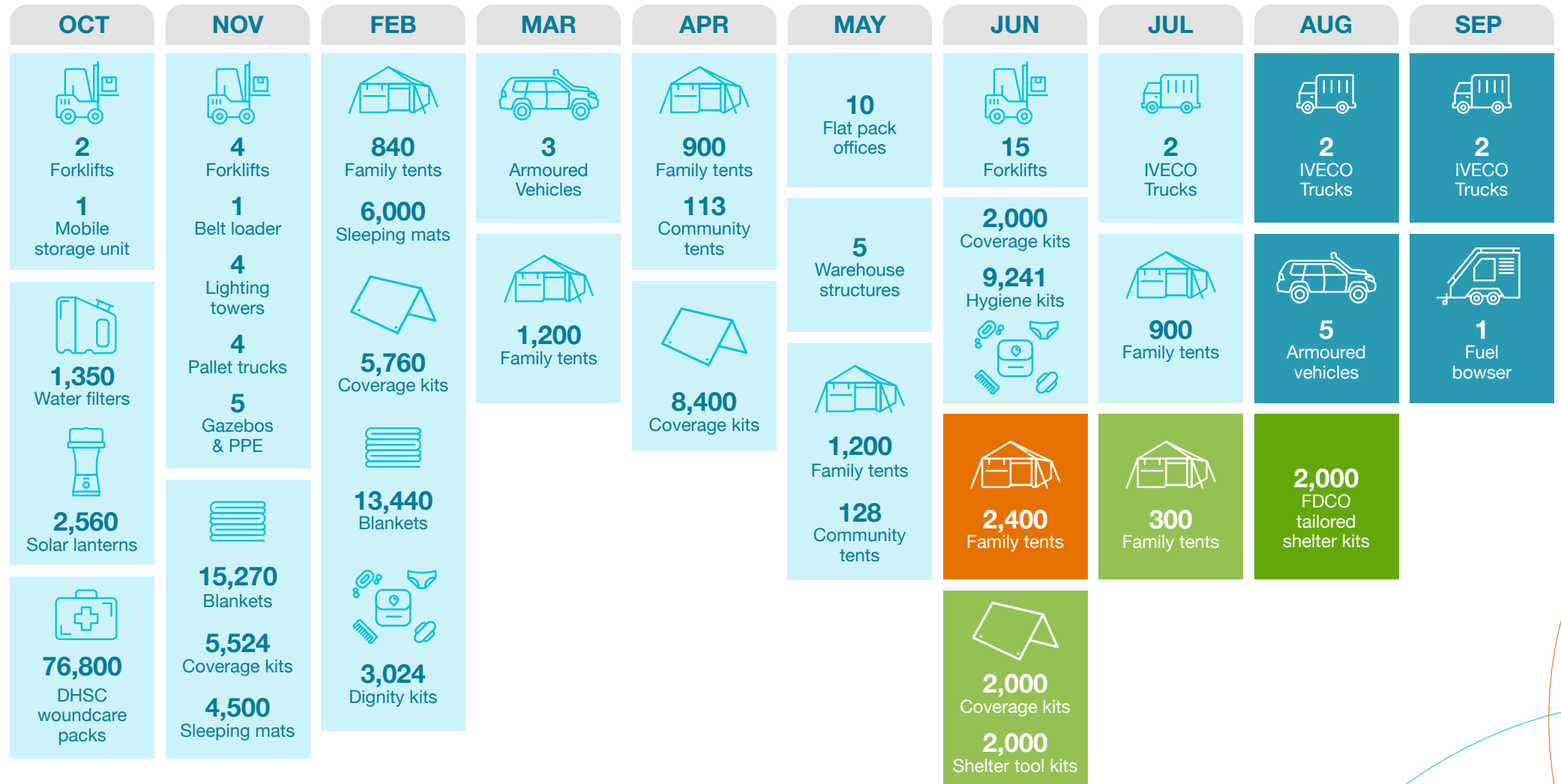
Designing a humanitarian strategy on how to best reach vulnerable displaced populations, HSOT's adviser working closely with FCDO's Jerusalem team helped direct the UK's approach to Cash Assistance. In the face of the disappearance of physical cash inside the Gaza Strip, the UK's cash programme contributed to breaking ground for new cash initiatives. With its long-term partner, UNICEF, the UK encouraged the piloting of digital payments and other donors to follow in the UK's footsteps.

Delivering aid – logistic challenges

HSOT's Procurement and Logistics Team has provided substantial support that has been both dynamic and agile – adapting supply chain support as the crisis and tasks evolved. In the weeks that followed the start of the Gaza crisis, HSOT's logistics experts arranged five flights delivering 74 tonnes of aid supplies via Al-Arish town that serves as a logistical hub for humanitarian aid crossing into Gaza through Egypt. HSOT core team members deployed to Cairo to plan and coordinate and travelled onwards to Al-Arish airport to coordinate with partners and to ensure a smooth handover.

The Egyptian Red Crescent Society (ERCS) coordinates the delivery of humanitarian aid through Al-Arish into Gaza. At the outset, the volume of aid was proving a challenge to process. To help overcome this challenge, HSOT worked with the MoD to also send Mechanical Handling Equipment (MHE) to bolster the Egyptian Red Crescent Society's logistics capabilities at the airport and warehouses. An HSOT logistics expert travelled alongside the specialist plant machinery on RAF planes from the UK via Cyprus to Al-Arish, which proved critical for the loading and off-loading.

HSOT supply chain delivery - Gaza response October 2023 - September 2024



HSOT goods delivered to various locations

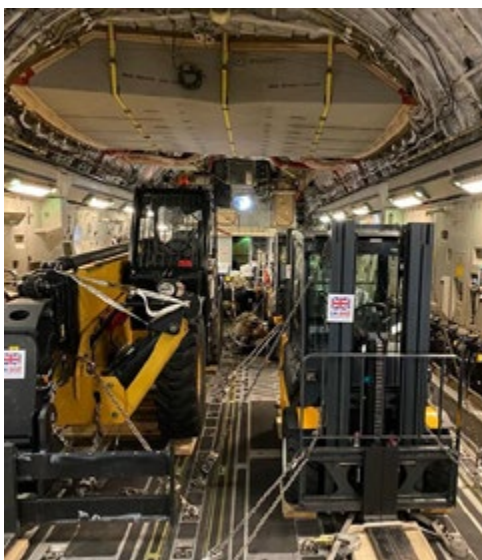
Goods held in the FCDO Disaster Response Centre, UK. Awaiting onward movement

Goods prepositioned in UAE. Awaiting onward movement

Goods prepositioned in Jordan (phase 1). Awaiting onward movement

Goods prepositioned in UAE (phase 2). Awaiting onward movement

The supply chain enabling equipment delivered on behalf of the UK government – belt loaders, forklifts, generators and a mobile storage unit – helped ERCS increase sufficiency in managing the incoming aid and tackle bottlenecks.



Supporting Cyprus operations

Following the announcement by the US to initiate Joint Logistics Over-the-Shore (JLOTS) operation in Gaza and the UK's decision to utilise this mechanism, the HSOT's Logistics and Procurement Team's expertise was leveraged to support this complex logistics challenge. As the delivery routing shifted to include transit through Cyprus, the team began

to route aid via the Cyprus Maritime Corridor. This included forklifts to support Joint Logistics Over-the-Shore operations over the beach as well as core relief (CRIs) for downstream partners such as IOM.

The Procurement and Logistics Team deployed core staff and consultants on rotation for 4+ months into the Larnaca Joint Rescue Coordination Centre to act as FCDO's representative, working alongside UK & US military planners, USAID, UNOPS, WFP and IOM to coordinate imports, secure scanning and to facilitate Israeli clearance requests for cargo preparation and loading of UK supplies to vessels linking up with the floating pier and Ashdod port.

On 24 April, the provision of CRIs started with an air charter moving 8,400 emergency shelter coverage kits (100mt) from the UK's pre-positioned stockpile in the UAE directly into Cyprus. Following this initial rapid movement of core relief items to show UK support to the Cyprus Maritime Corridor, shipments switched to land and sea routes. Drawing on the logistic team's European supplier base, HSOT then delivered 9,241 hygiene kits and 900 family tents from Spain and Belgium and an additional 2,000 shelter coverage kits arriving by container service into Limassol port from FCDO's UK stockpile. Work is continuing through Cyprus as well as from the UK,

from where HSOT's team of logistics experts continue to support with the complex COGAT pre-clearance processes.

HSOT delivered 29,000 core relief items including 840 family tents via road from UAE to Jordan to handover to UNICEF

Managing complex handover at Gaza border point

In February 2024, HSOT delivered 29,000 core relief items including 840 family tents via road from UAE to Jordan to handover to UNICEF on the King Hussein Bridge at the border between Jordan and the West Bank. This task required significant planning and co-ordination in advance as it was a large convoy of 18 trucks, which needed to pass through multiple countries and customs points alongside the specific screening requirements put in place by the Government of Israel.

Planning began in January with initial meetings with UNICEF in Amman to plan receipt and onwards movement. UNICEF agreed to arrange approvals directly with the Israeli Coordination of Government Activities in the Territories (COGAT) for entry into Gaza. Prior to collection in the UAE,

the cargo was packed according to the specifications set by the Government of Israel for scanning in Nitzana, with particular regard to the dimensions of the pallets due to difficulties scanning oversized cargo. This presented a particular difficulty for preparing the tents for movement, as these would usually constitute oversized cargo.

This was a very complex operation with many moving parts. For example, Israel set conditions including using Jordanian registered trucks with Jordanian drivers whose details had to be approved in advance by Israel. The cargo was loaded to trucks which

all had to arrive at King Hussein Bridge before transshipment to UNICEF's Israeli trucks could start. This added complexity to the loading of trucks in the UAE, as well as tracking progress of 18 trucks through the various border crossings between UAE and Jordan, including Saudi Arabia.

The core relief items were loaded at FCDO's warehouse in the Jebel Ali freezone before beginning the journey overland via al-Omari crossing within KSA and Jordan. At King Hussein



Bridge, the core relief items were reloaded onto UNICEF trucks using forklifts operated by the Jordanian border authorities. One of HSOT's logistics experts was deployed to Jordan to coordinate with the British Embassy, UNICEF and Jordanian officials to oversee the handover, verifying that reloading of the aid cargo had been completed properly onto UNICEF's Israeli-registered trucks before the crossing into the West Bank and onwards journey to Gaza.

Following on from this initial package of support to UNICEF, which included 840 tents and other shelter, households and WASH items, HSOT Procurement and Logistics Team arranged a second delivery of UK aid. The team placed contracts with suppliers in Pakistan and arranged delivery by sea and road to

UNICEF in the Zarqa free zone in Jordan. UNICEF could then draw down stocks in line with Israel pre-clearance and as the situation in Gaza allowed. A further 3,300 family tents for vulnerable families and 241 larger community tents for use as health centres, educational

HSOT has procured a further 2,700 family tents, stored in the UAE to reduce lead times

settings and for psychosocial spaces were moved along this route. Additionally, HSOT has procured a further 2,700 family tents, stored in the UAE to reduce lead times and enable FCDO to respond quickly to requests for further shelter items.



Developing a 3-point pre-positioning system for aid deliveries

Israeli authorities regulate the entry of all goods into the Gaza Strip including all aid deliveries, which undergo extensive checks. One complicating factor is that many items are considered to be 'dual-use' and require special permission. 'Dual-use' means that items have an inherent civilian use but it is deemed that they could potentially be used for military purposes. Therefore, the process for bringing in aid is very complex – involving multiple requests, screenings, inspections, and repeated transshipments that can be unpredictable and cause lengthy delays.

In response to the delays, humanitarian access issues and as a way to reduce the impact of manufacturing lead times on availability of stock, HSOT developed a system to preposition stocks of core relief items on a rotation basis. In this set up, the first rotation is stored in a Free Zone in Jordan for quick draw down when an implementing partner is identified. The second rotation is located in UAE ready for movement forward to Jordan once the stocks of aid in Jordan have been drawn down. The third rotation would then be procured – following moving the aid stocks from UAE to Jordan. This overland route through Saudi Arabia



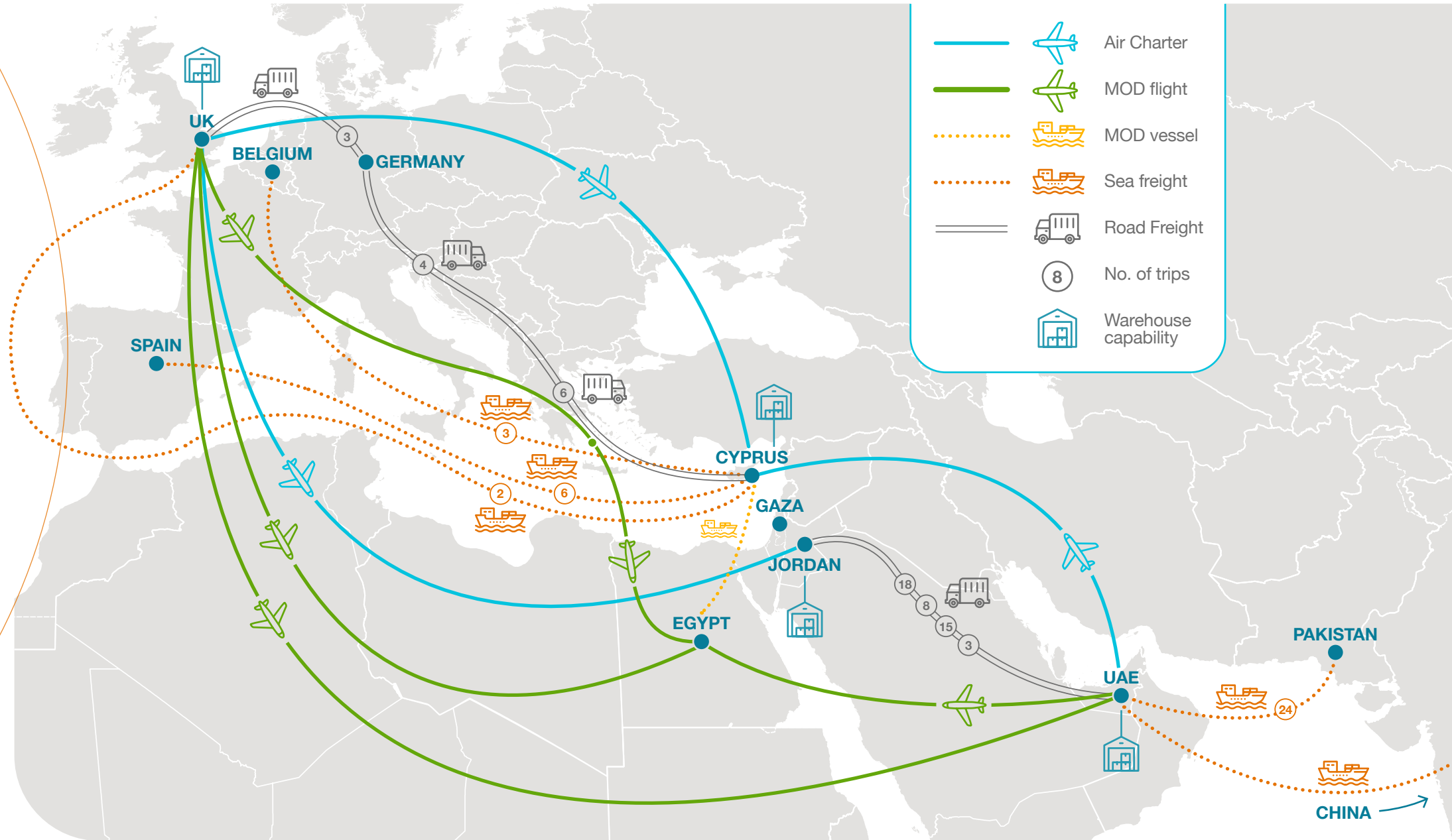
Response routes

October 2023 – September 2024

enables stocks held in UAE to be moved more affordably to Jordan, either for temporary storage in free zones, or in transit for immediate onwards movement. This approach has the extra benefit of more flexibility by allowing for alternative relief items to be procured depending on the humanitarian needs in Gaza at the time.

HSOT developed a system to preposition stocks of core relief items on a rotation basis.

In the latest initiative to further develop this flexible approach, HSOT's Procurement and Logistics Team has developed tailored shelter kits with HSOT's Humanitarian Shelter Adviser and UN Shelter Cluster, sourced supplies in China and developed a network for FCDO to hold its own shelter supplies under a transit status in Jordan. By taking this approach, FCDO is able to remain flexible to changing needs across the aid commodity range, adapt to changes in humanitarian access and respond quickly to demand.



UN Standby Partnership mechanism

The UN Standby Partnership is an essential part of the UN's architecture to respond to rapid-onset humanitarian disasters. On behalf of FCDO, HSOT manages the UN Standby Partnerships (SBP) roster and managed 66 SBP requests for Gaza during the last year. 17 requests for SBP humanitarian experts were funded by FCDO – Roben Picalli was one of experts sent to support the UN's humanitarian response.

A Day in the Life of an SBP deployee in Gaza

Roben Picalli was deployed to Gaza from January to March 2024. His mission was made possible through the support of the UK Foreign and Commonwealth Office (FCDO) and CANADEM.



Roben Picalli has been working in the humanitarian sector for the past 20 years with breaks in between missions and positions. Specialising in emergency response and Water and Sanitation, he has been deployed three times with CANADEM working for UNICEF as a WASH Cluster Coordinator.

I arrived in Gaza at the beginning of January after a 7-hour trip from Cairo. By the time we crossed the border, it was very dark. We were greeted by a colleague who immediately recognised me from eight years back. [...] I asked my colleague how his family was, and he told me that his wife and three daughters were killed a few weeks prior. I didn't manage to say another word afterwards until we reached the compound. I ended up sharing the basement of the house with him and another colleague with only thin MDF sheets separating the space. There were two reassuring things for me in the basement: it was the most secure area for the situation we were in and there were many cases of bottled water stacked all the way to the ceiling.

Workwise, I had to be immediately fully operational, going through long days, important meetings, and field visits whenever possible, trying to coordinate and prioritise critical interventions. I was very happy to see familiar faces in the office still doing great work and more dedicated than ever. One of my most important achievements was the first mission to



North Gaza to deliver fuel to the Water Treatment Reservoir after two months of denied requests. During the mission, I became increasingly aware that this was not the place I had visited eight years ago, everything looked different, and the destruction was visible everywhere.

UNICEF colleagues visit a Water Treatment Reservoir in North Gaza to deliver fuel.
© UNICEF





Hearing
from our
experts



Dr. Lisa Walker

Education Adviser

Lisa is an education specialist with 15 years of experience in education development and education in emergencies and protracted crises.

Since January 2024, Lisa has served as an Education Adviser in Sudan, providing technical, strategic, and governance support to the British Office Sudan during ongoing violent conflict marked by severe food insecurity, disease, and mass displacement. Her main focus has been supporting stakeholders to restore and maintain access to safe, quality education for over 19 million school-age children deprived of education since April 2023.

Tailoring the education response to Sudan's conflict challenges

Enhancing sector coordination

I've collaborated with the Local Education Group, a key coordination structure supporting dialogue and joint planning across donors, UN agencies, the humanitarian cluster system, and international and domestic NGOs. My role involves providing technical and strategic support to strengthen education sector coordination and efficiency. In Sudan, where mechanisms were fragmented, my work with the education cluster and Local Education Group has improved stakeholder planning, monitoring, and unified messaging on education needs. This has helped highlight vulnerable populations and align donor efforts, improving the education response to reach the most marginalised children and youth.

Supporting a shift from development to humanitarian response

Local Sudanese organisations needed guidance on adapting to conflict.

My work included coordinating with UNESCO and Local Education Group members to create a Transitional Education Plan tailored to Sudan's conflict challenges. Working with the World Bank, UNICEF, and Save the Children, we reprogrammed funds to respond to widespread school closures, displacement, and children's trauma. This approach has bolstered the quality and relevance of education interventions for the most marginalised children and youth.

Enhancing accountability and multilaterals

In Sudan, FCDO's primary investment in education is delivered through Education Cannot Wait (ECW) and Global Partnership for Education (GPE). Through ECW and GPE Secretariats, I've advocated for conflict-sensitive monitoring to ensure education investments in Sudan adapt to real-time needs. For instance, in areas where schools serve as shelters for displaced populations, we're coordinating with communities to provide alternative

learning spaces. This approach supports education continuity for marginalised children even in crisis settings.

My focus on supporting monitoring and transparency has improved programme adaptation, enabling stakeholders to meet the evolving needs of Sudanese children, youth, and education staff.

An assignment that required a specialist skill set

From my earliest role supporting quality and inclusion in marginalised schools in Tanzania, to working in response operations in Syria, my trajectory in education equips me uniquely for this work. My journey into this sector began with a grassroots role in Tanzania, where I helped design education programming and train teachers. This experience, along with my roles in crisis settings like Syria, confirmed that to educate effectively, one must deeply understand, adapt to, and build upon local capacities and priorities, a crucial skill given the complexities of Sudan's environment.

Lisa's work was highly valued by the Sudan Country Team: "Lisa was an invaluable resource to FCDO Sudan at a time of significant capacity constraints within the FCDO team. Lisa joined the team when the education sector in Sudan was severely disrupted and humanitarian needs were escalating due to the outbreak of conflict in Sudan. Leadership and coordination among education partners was weak and Lisa stepped in to fill this gap. She was instrumental in revitalising the Local Education Group, in setting up a donor education coordination group and forging relationships with GPE and ECW. Partners (donors, UN agencies, GPE, ECW) were united in their praise for Lisa and the critical role she played to strengthen and bring coherence to the education response in Sudan."



FCDOs strategic use of UN Standby Partnership

FCDO Ethiopia funded the deployment of Mohammed Adar, a humanitarian adviser from Standby Partner CANADEM's roster into the International Organization for Migration (IOM) Ethiopia office, through the Standby Partnership (SBP) Mechanism. This deployment is unique where IOM seconded Mohammed Adar into the President's Office of the Somali Regional State of Ethiopia, to advise on humanitarian issues. It's also novel in being the highest-grade position SBP has been used for within the global SBP network, setting a strong example of how SBP can be used to bring surge expertise into senior strategic positions.

Positive impact for all parties

Through this deployment, FCDO are providing positive value at two levels.



The regional government is benefiting from senior humanitarian expertise where it's most needed, whilst IOM are able to learn from this position and maintain strong ties with the regional government's office. This strategic position has created a vital link between the humanitarian community and the government-level decision makers, ensuring key humanitarian issues remain on the agenda.

Regional expertise

IOM reported this has been a very successful deployment with the SBP candidate's profile being a key factor. Mohammed Adar has experience in the region and speaks Somali which has helped him gain acceptance from the local community, while bringing the necessary seniority and leadership to

have significant influence. This deployment also highlights the useful flexibility of the SBP model, where Mohammed Adar was pre-identified as a strong candidate for the role, and SBP partner CANADEM were able to mobilise quickly to add him to their roster to be put forward for the role.

Focus and achievements

Initially, the deployment focused on drought relief with the Somali region facing the worst drought in 40 years. Nine out of 11 zones in the region were affected with the regional government leading response efforts. Mohammed Adar supported the coordination efforts, "My role was to support the government with coordination and leadership and to form a bridge between the government, UN system and international NGOs. The response was successful but what the region is facing is far deeper because of climate change; droughts have happened before but were more short-lived. What we are seeing now is unprecedented".

Because of the effects of climate change, the deployment pivoted to focus on longer term resilience to climate shocks. Mohammed Adar shared, "The way of life is no longer sustainable. We have to look

at how we can prepare people to cope with the change".

A key output of Mohammed Adar's work has been to support the creation of a multi-year resilience strategy for the Somali region, setting out what is needed to prepare communities to be resilient against the humanitarian impacts of climate change. This was a significant achievement, making the Somali region the first in Ethiopia to have this strategic plan. The next step was for the strategy to be rolled out across the international community. FCDO Ethiopia funded an extension of the SBP deployment for Mohammed Adar to kick off this work.

Sustainable impact

Getting support from the international community will be key for the sustainability of the resilience plan. Mohammed Adar has mentored other staff to build in sustainability after his deployment finishes and has also supported efforts to build capacity within the regional government's office that could engage directly with humanitarian partners, which is currently at the early stages.



Mohammed Adar

Senior Adviser
IOM/Regional
Government
Ethiopia



Analysis of Serious Organised Crime helping to effectively target UK engagement

Dr Sasha Jespersen has an extensive track record of working with a range of government departments and institutions to deliver technical advice, research and programming on migration, modern slavery, border management and organised crime. This includes working with UK government departments, as well as the European Commission, the Economic Social Research Council and UN University to ensure research is useful for strengthening policymaking and programming.

Iraq Serious Organised Crime Joint Analysis overview

I was working with the Justice and Home Affairs Attaché in Baghdad to draft a Serious Organised Crime (SOC) Joint Analysis focused on Iraq. There are major challenges with addressing SOC within Iraq, particularly given the threat of increased conflict in the Middle East means SOC is not necessarily seen as the biggest priority, despite its role in funding militias.

Shifts in government priorities

For the UK, Iraq has become more of a priority because of the number of Iraqi migrants, many from the Kurdistan region seeking to reach the UK by crossing the English Channel in small boats, and the takeover of smuggling routes across Europe by Kurdish Iraqi gangs – a challenge that gained more attention following a BBC podcast that successfully tracked down the ‘Scorpion’.

Within Iraq, SOC has become more of a priority, with the government shifting resources from counterterrorism to tackling drug trafficking in particular.

Strategic entry points and lessons learned

My engagement was brief; I spent three months speaking with different HMG departments with an interest or link to SOC in Iraq, engaging with experts outside of government, and conducting two field visits to the country. The aim was to identify entry points for viable

action to begin shifting the dial on SOC. This included working across government and with international partners to ensure any activity was coordinated and contributed to stability in Iraq and the wider region.

“I spent three months speaking with different HMG departments with an interest or link to SOC in Iraq, engaging with experts outside of government, and conducting two field visits to the country.”

Key entry points included collaboration with local government bodies on drug-related SOC and identifying areas where UK-led training or funding could support SOC measures. SOC assessments serve as foundational tools for the HMG in guiding interventions, providing high-level insights that allow for initial understanding. However, making these recommendations practical and actionable remains challenging, often requiring a more granular approach

tailored to the evolving political and criminal landscape. Ensuring recommendations are adaptable will allow for more practical implementation in the face of changing conditions in Iraq and the surrounding regions.

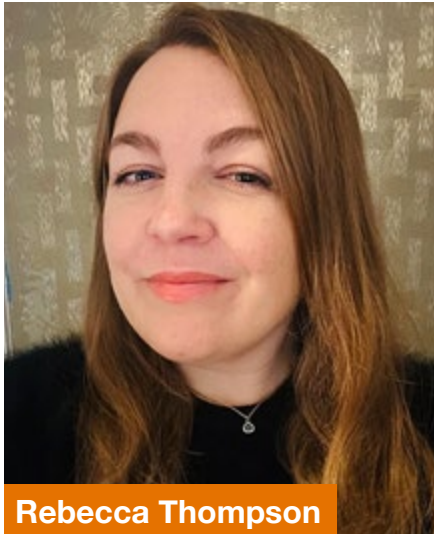
A senior FCDO colleague who worked closely with Sasha on this deployment, commented: “The SOCJA process carried out by Sasha has deepened the knowledge of the British Embassy, Home Office, and beyond on the serious organised crime threat. This has proven invaluable in enabling HMG to more effectively target further engagement and programming, in a way that, without it, HMG would have carried significantly greater risk. Sasha was a consummate professional, personable so that even very senior stakeholders in the Iraqi government felt open talking to her and she was a pleasure to work with.”



Sasha Jespersen

Serious Organised Crime Adviser





Rebecca Thompson

Humanitarian Access and Interference Adviser



UK influencing humanitarian access and delivery in Afghanistan

Rebecca Thompson is a deployable civilian expert, and humanitarian and conflict adviser with close to two decades living in and working on fragile and conflict-affected states (FCAS). She is an Arabic speaker, with post graduate qualifications in International Humanitarian Law and protection.

Influencing field-level engagement with the Taliban on access

Since March 2023, my role has focused on enhancing the capacity of the FCDO Afghanistan Programmes and Policy Department (APPD) and UK international partners to negotiate and deliver principled humanitarian aid in Afghanistan under the Taliban regime. Navigating this complex environment involves significant challenges, particularly due to Taliban-issued edicts that restrict operational capacity, such as the prohibition of female aid workers.

As part of my role, I regularly design and facilitate closed-door discussions for FCDO on how the UK and international partners can address the substantive challenges posed by the Taliban to humanitarian access in Afghanistan. For example, I recently leveraged my professional networks and invited former UN Emergency Relief Coordinator Jan

Egeland to London to take part in a UK policy challenge discussion with our senior directors and wider department on engagement with the Taliban. In a notable achievement, I was a co-facilitator at the Senior Officials Preparatory Meeting on Afghanistan 2024, an assignment I was requested to undertake on behalf of the UK by the European Union.

This collaboration underscores my contribution to the UK's vital role in shaping the international approach towards the region. These dialogues also play a critical role in bridging communication gaps and fostering dialogue between the UK and its partners to come to common policy positions and approaches. These meetings also provide opportunities to explore avenues to address, mitigate and – in some cases – circumvent operational restrictions to ensure the principled, safe, and equitable delivery of UK aid.

Assessment trip to Uzbek-Afghan border

An essential aspect of my responsibilities has also included leading field missions focused on assessing humanitarian access at specific locations such as the Afghan border and neighbouring countries. These on-the-ground evaluations have been crucial for developing informed strategies to overcome barriers to aid delivery.

I supported FCDO to design and deploy the first post August 2021 UK mission to the Uzbek-Afghan border in Termez. We went to assess humanitarian cross border access and conflict conditions in northern Afghanistan. Making use of my field experience in conflict setting and networks in the region, we were the first FCDO team to talk to Afghan refugee women recently arrived in Uzbekistan and the first UK representatives to visit a centre for Uzbek returnees who had recently come from Al Hol camp in Syria and wider Iraq. On return, we were able to secure additional aid from HMG to give support to Afghan refugees who may have otherwise tried to make the dangerous journey to Europe and the UK.

Fostering active dialogue and coordination among aid delivery partners

I also advise on safety and security barriers to the delivery of humanitarian aid in Afghanistan. As part of this role, I initiated and coordinated the 'Saving Lives Together' operational Kabul based security partner group, which is tasked with monitoring security threats within the aid operating environment like those posed by Da'esh. This initiative enhances the security framework within which aid organisations operate, providing key information and risk assessments that directly impact decision-making processes as well as feed into UK national security priorities and interests.

My contributions have been recognised in the Independent Commission for Aid Impact's 2024 review, particularly concerning my role's substantive achievements in strengthening FCDO's risk management strategies to ensure the principled delivery of UK aid under the Taliban. This acknowledgment highlights the integral role I have played in refining and advancing the UK's capacity to deliver aid effectively amidst the volatile operating environment in Afghanistan.

Supporting Sudanese peace mediation amidst conflict

The Sudanese conflict, stemming from a fierce power struggle between the Sudanese Armed Forces (SAF) and its former infantry unit, the Rapid Support Forces (RSF), has torn apart the nation. Thousands have lost their lives, with over eight million people fleeing to neighbouring countries. Widespread war crimes, atrocities, and severe violations of human rights have marked this conflict, while around half of Sudan's population – approximately 25 million people – are now facing acute hunger, making Sudan one of the world's worst humanitarian crises.



Harriet Martin

Senior Mediation Adviser

Consultant Harriet Martin, a specialist in international peace support and author of 'Kings of Peace, Pawns of War,' brings extensive experience in conflict resolution and strategic engagement across regions like Myanmar, Libya, Yemen, and Sudan. In May 2023, she was contracted by the Office of Conflict Stabilisation and Mediation (OCSM) and later by the British Office Sudan, to support UK efforts on finding a resolution to the conflict following the outbreak of conflict in Sudan the previous month.

In the wake of the outbreak of conflict the UK embassy's political team relocated to Addis. Harriet Martin and later Bela Kapur, both Deployable Civilian Experts from the UK's Civilian Stabilisation Group supported the British Office Sudan. Harriet Martin undertook seven trips to Addis within her first year, working closely with the UK political team to help with the technical thinking around a process which would support diplomatic efforts towards peace.

The role of civilians in this process was one of Harriet's early points of focus. Sudan's conflict erupted just four years after the nation achieved a civilian transitional government, a result of widespread protests against the regime of former President Omar Al Bashir. Led by economist Prime Minister Abdallah Hamdok, this brief civilian administration aimed to bring about deep reforms to address the entrenched corruption within the state apparatus. However, this endeavour came to a sudden halt with the 2021 coup led by SAF leader General Abdel Fattah Al-Burhan and his ally, Mohamed Hamdan Dagalo, head of the RSF.

Challenges in a disrupted environment

Initially, Harriet concentrated on supporting a close-knit group of Hamdok's core supporters, organising a workshop to envision what a civilian-led alliance against the conflict might look like. This effort was in support of the

"I always made it clear I didn't represent the UK officially in these discussions. My role was to create an understanding of what was needed for a functional process,"

work of Global Governance Partners (GPG), a UK-backed consultancy that focuses on democratic governance. Known for its deep-rooted and trusted relationships within the Sudanese political landscape, GPG had played a significant role in supporting the transitional process and continued to help facilitate Sudan's political civilian space during the conflict.

Although this initial grouping around Hamdok dissolved during the summer of 2023, it later resurfaced in October as 'Taqaddum' (meaning 'progress'), a broader coalition named the Coordination of the Democratic and Civilian Forces. With Hamdok at its helm, Taqaddum attracted a wider array of stakeholders, including many political figures who had previously been involved in the transitional process.

While the UK embassy worked to formally gather diplomatic support for Taqaddum, Harriet actively promoted the initiative informally. Through countless coffees, lunches, and dinners with various diplomats and technical interlocutors in Addis, Harriet consistently advocated for the importance of building a broad-based civilian alliance. "I always made it clear I didn't represent the UK officially in these discussions. My role was to create an understanding of what was needed for a functional process," she explained. Diplomatic scepticism was common, as many questioned whether Taqaddum was inclusive enough.

During Taqaddum's first executive retreat in Nairobi in December 2023, Harriet spent her evenings in the hotel with the team, brainstorming an inclusivity strategy. By Boxing Day, she found herself at her kitchen table in Devon, working with Taqaddum's inclusivity coordinator to create pie charts that captured their current levels of gender inclusion, geographic diversity, and the average age of Taqaddum's members.

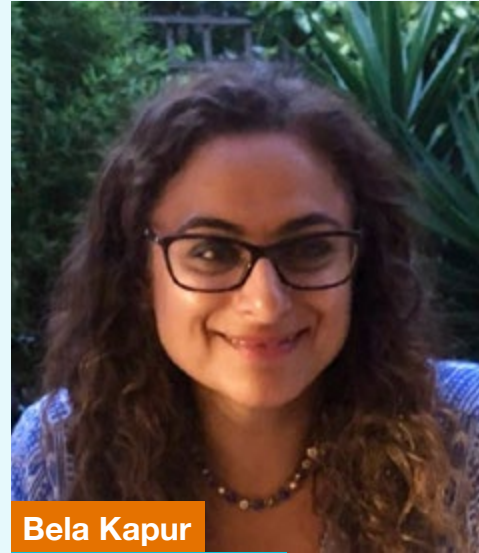
To support addressing inclusivity further, Harriet brought in specific expertise, including Meredith Preston McGhie, a pluralism expert with vast Sudanese experience, and Bela Kapur, a UK-backed gender adviser from the UK's Civilian Stabilisation Group. They worked with Build Up, a digital peacebuilding team, to develop a network for Taqaddum and supported

the efforts to reach out to a broader network to organise a national convention to bring multiple Sudanese voices and interests together. "This work is teamwork – it demands a vast range of specific skills. Building trusted relationships is everything", she added. "I am totally relationship driven in my work – getting to know people and building trust is fundamental."

Harriet spent extensive time discussing Sudan's crisis with other analysts and mediations experts. "My background in journalism and communications has been as valuable as any other experience. By building a unified narrative with other technical experts working on a crisis we can offer diplomats clearer, more coherent thinking on the best way forward for the process."



Building inclusive peace efforts for Sudan



Bela Kapur

Women's Engagement Adviser



Bela Kapur has 30 years' experience of working in and on conflict. She is an adviser on conflict, peacebuilding and gender, and facilitator of spaces for civil society, UN and state actors.

Bela Kapur, as the Women's Engagement Adviser was working with Taqaddum, the Coordination Body for Democratic and Civil Forces in Sudan. In this role, she supported Taqaddum's efforts to ensure that the Taqaddum Founding Conference was inclusive not just in numbers, but in action. Working alongside Harriet Martin, British Office

"My role was to help make sure women's participation was meaningful,"

Sudan, and colleagues from Global Partners Governance (GPG) and Build Up, Bela focused on elevating women's voices and expanding the conference's inclusivity strategy. This ambitious initiative brought together participants

from Sudan's 18 states – including many internally displaced persons, refugees living in neighbouring countries, and the Sudanese diaspora, all in pursuit of a common goal.

"My role was to help make sure women's participation was meaningful," Bela explained. "This meant more than having women present; it meant ensuring that women were able to actively contribute and make a real difference to the Conference discussions and outcomes." Before the conference, women attended a preparatory meeting which Bela saw first-hand inspired them and helped equip them with facts, materials, and strategies for their effective participation. Speakers shared insights and knowledge that strengthened attendees' readiness, helping them prepare to not only make their voices heard on equal footing with all other delegates during the conference but also help them to influence outside the formal conference.

Representatives from all Sudan's states

The journey to achieving this ambitious inclusivity wasn't without its challenges. Taqaddum had high goals – 30% women, 40% youth, and representatives from all 18 Sudanese states, as well as religious leaders, farmers, and individuals from remote areas and conflict zones. Bela recounted how some participants travelled from distant regions, including a determined individual from Darfur who travelled by donkey to cross into Chad. This dedication was essential, not only for

Taqaddum's legitimacy but also to its strength as a representative body.

Working as part of a team, including Harriet Martin and experts from GPG and Build Up, Bela worked with Taqaddum to follow-through on their stated commitment to inclusivity. "This wasn't a solitary effort," she noted. "Our team's aim was to work with Taqaddum so that they could deliver on their goal of being as representative as possible, ensuring that everyone's voice was valued."

One of Bela's key insights was the importance of physical presence as a

means of solidarity. "I had the sense that sometimes, just being there in silence spoke volumes," she reflected. During late-night sessions, Bela joined Sudanese women, often without an interpreter, to provide quiet support. "Even when we couldn't understand each other perfectly, I sense my presence showed I was with them."

Organising the conference presented huge logistical challenges, but Taqaddum's commitment to diversity was unwavering. They resisted pressures to revert to traditional hierarchies, holding firm on including youth and diverse voices even as state-level committees proposed older, male representatives. "The patience and commitment to inclusivity and diversity these leaders displayed was remarkable," Bela observed. To ensure representation, they waited until the final days to confirm attendees, striving for a diverse assembly.

Held at the Skylight Hotel in Addis Ababa, the Founding Conference exemplified Taqaddum's commitment to inclusivity. It included participants from all regions of Sudan, as well as refugees. Artists, religious leaders and native administrators participated, as well as a number of individuals with disabilities. Bela recalled watching interpreters use sign language alongside a vibrant assembly of Sudanese voices,



"Our team's aim was to work with Taqaddum so that they could deliver on their goal of being as representative as possible, ensuring that everyone's voice was valued."

describing it as "a new standard for inclusivity in peace-making."

Reflecting on the experience, Bela shared that it was Taqaddum's leadership that made the conference a success. The team also played a critical role in supporting the efforts of

Taqaddum. "This work was about showing up, supporting each other, and creating an environment where inclusivity wasn't just a box to tick, but a core value. The resilience of the Sudanese people in coming together despite every challenge was inspiring."

With Bela's contributions and the collaborative efforts of the team, the Taqaddum Founding Conference marked a vital step forward in Sudan's peace process, paving the way for a future where the different communities of Sudan feel welcome, heard, and seen.





Beyond responses

Ready to respond

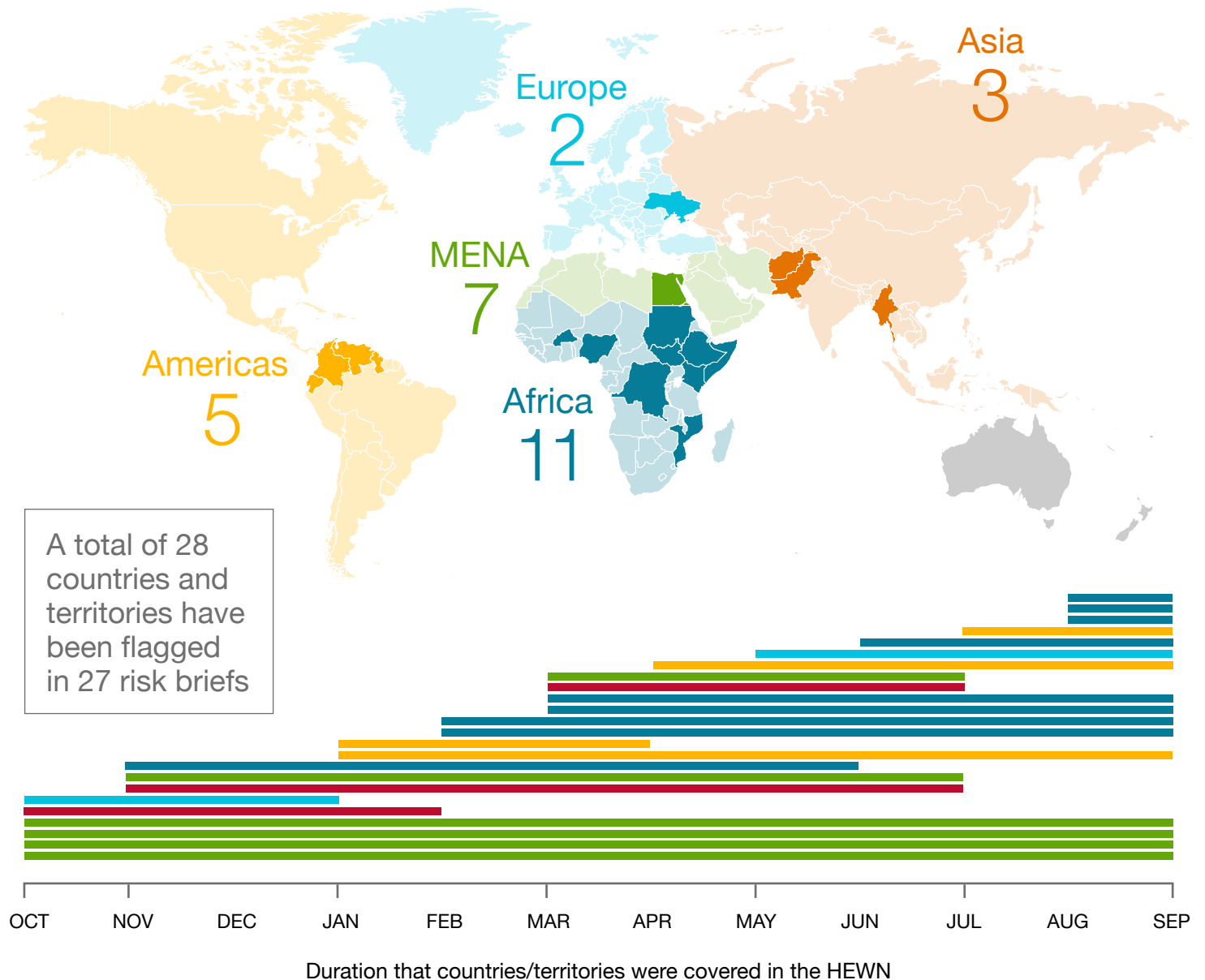
Preparing for a disaster response is critical behind-the-scenes work. It is a fundamental part of assuring that HSOT and FCDO colleagues are ready to respond 365 days a year. Preparedness tasks are scheduled all year around and cover many aspects of support to FCDO. In quieter periods, the team pivots to focus efforts on making sure systems are ready to support the team to respond.

Alerting FCDO to humanitarian risks

The Humanitarian Early Warning Note (HEWN) is a suite of early warning products, which provides FCDO with an inhouse, objective, and independent assessment on potential humanitarian need across all geographies. The products serve to flag risks that may be overlooked, to inform senior decision makers in a timely way of either slow onset situations or spikes in protracted crises, which may require FCDO humanitarian intervention.

The HEWN is published monthly and is a key tool to help FCDO identify risk and stay abreast of humanitarian emergencies. HSOT's team of analysts review quantitative and qualitative sources to identify areas of concern. Once a risk is identified, the analysts undertake risk analysis, and a risk brief is produced. This geographic context is subsequently added to the HEWN's risk list. Risks are reviewed monthly and are deactivated if they no longer pose a concern.

A year in HEWN – October 2023 – September 2024



Head of HSOT's Early Warning, Analysis and Reporting Team Clody Wright says, "The HEWN is shared across FCDO's humanitarian network and with seniors to ensure that there is always a comprehensive understanding of upcoming humanitarian risks. The HEWN helps inform FCDO monthly risk and preparedness meetings to ensure that risks are flagged to relevant Overseas Missions.

Risk briefs for the Humanitarian Early Warning Note (HEWN) are reviewed every month. Humanitarian risks are deactivated when they no longer pose a concern, or if risks progress.

Occupied Palestinian Territories and neighbouring countries have been included in the HEWN throughout October 2023 to September 2024

Focused joint Away Days sharpens collaboration

As part of work to improve response readiness, HSOT and FCDO counterparts came together for Away Days of joint discussion and learning. The agenda focused on increasing collaboration and familiarity between the teams, sharing learning from previous responses and to discuss ways of working, response toolkits, organograms, and processes. Humanitarian Response Lead Steve Williams says, "This was time well

spent – we looked at our role in the early stages of a crisis, key lessons identified from previous responses, development of a Technical Advisory Coordination Cell, and also included an important people-oriented session on wellbeing." The focus for Day 2, featured joint table-top scenario exercises designed to introduce team members to response frameworks and to stress test key tools. The joint

"The HEWN is shared across FCDO's humanitarian network and with seniors to ensure that there is always a comprehensive understanding of upcoming humanitarian risk..."

simulation exercise departed from the standard simulations process and instead staff were split into three teams that randomly picked an abstract fictional scenario to respond to. The teams' response was developed over three separate stages (alert-onset, 0–12 hrs and 12–48 hrs), under semi-competitive but relaxed conditions. The exercise was very well received, and staff appreciated the space to think through an emergency response in a non-conventional way.

Sharpening media and communication skills

From January to March 2024, HSOT's humanitarian communications adviser delivered media training to FCDO humanitarian colleagues and HSOT core staff to be better prepared to take advantage of media interview opportunities during humanitarian responses. Working closely with an experienced training provider and the FCDO Crisis Communications team, HSOT's adviser prepared a series of humanitarian scenarios that informed the training. The training has provided FCDO with a list of humanitarian spokespeople cleared for media interviews, who can help communicate the impact of the government's humanitarian response to UK audiences. The interview preparedness training was well received, and plans are in the works to train further humanitarian colleagues. One participant's feedback read, "I found it useful to think through the audience, the key messages, and the delivery style. I haven't used it yet but was cleared to talk to the BBC last week by central comms on the basis of having had the training. The training itself was very professional and [the trainer] has clearly worked across the civil service for many years."

During the spring, HSOT also delivered photography training to humanitarian

Photo courtesy of Adam Finch

© Adam Finch



"We delivered a hands-on training giving participants a chance to practice photography techniques."

colleagues likely to be deployed during the early stages of a response. HSOT's Humanitarian Communications Adviser, Therese Bjorn Mason, explains, "Often HSOT core staff are the first on the

ground when the UK responds to a humanitarian disaster, and the FCDO comms team asks the team to capture imagery of aid on its way to those who need it. We delivered a hands-on training giving participants a chance to practice photography techniques and followed up with a session on safeguarding and ethical guidelines when taking pictures."

Getting ready for the hurricane season

As part of getting ready for the July–November hurricane season, HSOT and the Humanitarian Response Group (HRG) co-designed and co-delivered a series of briefing sessions. The series complimented briefings by FCDO teams making up a comprehensive programme on all the facets of a FCDO hurricane response.

In early June, HSOT facilitated a two-hour ‘Caribbean Humanitarian Response 101’ session, which provided an overview of Caribbean response for those new to the region. The primary audience was HRG and HSOT, to ensure both teams’ readiness to respond, but also included attendees from FCDO geographic teams, the Relief and Recovery Unit, and communications colleagues covering crises. This preparedness work forms part of hurricane preparedness across the organisation providing FCDO teams involved in Caribbean hurricane response with essential humanitarian information to upskill colleagues, help ensure a ‘humanitarian by default’ approach to Caribbean responses, and to ensure good collaboration between different teams.

Later in June, HSOT’s logistics experts presented a deep dive into their Caribbean Supply Chain Plan as part of the briefing series. Supply Chain Operations Manager Alex Franklin explains, “The briefing provided



participants with an understanding of FCDO prepositioned core relief stocks (CRIs), procurement and transport options, and additional procurement and logistics capabilities and expertise that can be drawn on for response.”

In July, the briefing series culminated with a hybrid Table-Top Exercise (TTX). Over 30 HRG and HSOT staff participated in the TTX alongside a small cross-department panel of key stakeholders and many members of HRG’s Humanitarian Response Team (a pool of civil servants who have signed up to surge in when humanitarian crises hit) who observed remotely. The exercise focused on building understanding of key humanitarian priorities and actions in the first phase of a large-scale Caribbean disaster response, increasing familiarity with core humanitarian crisis processes, and the likely activity of other responding FCDO teams and identifying potential barriers to delivering a fast, efficient and effective FCDO response.

Readiness work undertaken to strengthen security and staff welfare

As part of HSOT’s work to strengthen the HRG and HSOT’s response readiness, the Security Team has continued to refine its pre-deployment procedures to ensure both depth and resilience in response capabilities. The team has updated the HEST scenarios to address the latest emerging physical threats such as drone warfare. Security Team colleagues also revised the safeguarding training with a greater emphasis on protecting core staff and consultants – supplemented by more specific ‘vulnerable’ traveller advice where necessary. To mitigate the growing threats of digital crime, they also introduced a bespoke and graduated selection of cyber defensive techniques.

HSOT staff have always had access to workplace stress counselling, but HSOT have also generated, within the team, a welfare unit that reach out to deployed staff proactively. In addition, HSOT now has four TRiM trained core staff. TRiM is a trauma-focused peer support system designed to help people who have experienced a traumatic, or potentially traumatic, event. The four-member team is able to deploy to help staff cope with, and

be more likely to recover from, traumatic events.

For HSOT’s team of security experts, preparedness work also entails scoping visits to assess safety and security in advance of deploying experts. This year, the team has managed a significant increase in requests for off-FCDO platform deployments to high-risk locations. Scoping visits go beyond a safety and security assessment and also involves considering accommodation, comms, and provision of healthcare services. HSOT conducts the recces in small teams made up of colleagues from HSOT’s Security and Deployment and Roster Management (DRM) teams as the joint visits have proven to be valuable for assessing conditions on the ground and anticipate potential challenges. Operational Security Adviser Justin Holt says of the task, “I travelled to Hargeisa together with a DRM colleague in preparation for deploying consultants later in the year. Neither of us had visited Somaliland before, so there were considerable gaps in our knowledge. However, in just a few days, we managed to bridge these gaps by meeting with staff from the British Office, evaluating potential accommodation, and visiting the key sites where the consultants might operate.”



Rosters of deployable experts are a crucial part of the response toolkit



On the 12 June, HSOT's Consultant Conference brought together more than 100 members of the humanitarian and Civilian Stabilisation Group (CSG) rosters at Toynbee Hall in London. HSOT manages a roster of 300+ humanitarian experts and FCDO's Civilian Stabilisation Group (CSG) roster, which brings together conflict and stabilisation expertise. Both rosters are a crucial part of FCDO's response toolkit, and a valuable resource as it brings unique skillsets and diverse expertise. Roster members are able to deploy – sometimes immediately – to some of the most challenging places in the world to assist with complex tasks.

For the UK Government, the rosters provide an essential added capability, and the conference serves as an important forum to hear from and speak to the consultants that make up the rosters. The second annual Consultant Conference saw a hybrid format to allow collaboration between 55 in-person and 60 remote participants. During the FCDO panel discussion, consultants heard from FCDO key stakeholders, but the day also allowed for participants to share their reflections and insights to inform approaches. Consultants also shared insights in smaller groups that enabled peer-to-peer learning and encouraged sharing of best practices.

Reviews and lessons learned at the heart of response readiness

Reviews and lessons learned are a big part of the readiness workstream, as these pinpoint what is working well, and where actions and processes can be streamlined or developed further.

Following a comprehensive review of the UK's roster for the United Nations Disaster Assessment and Coordination (UNDAC) system, HSOT commenced recruitment for new UK UNDAC members in February. The aim was to ensure current UK members remain engaged and available to consistently provide expertise for UNDAC – expertise to support the international response system during the first phase of sudden-onset disasters, such as earthquakes or floods. Recruitment concluded in April with the selection of two new UK UNDAC members, and their successful assessment on the UNOCHA induction course in South Korea in May. Partnership Manager Charlotte Elgar says, "The onboarding of two new deployable UNDAC members increases the UK's UNDAC roster to eight active members, thus making sure that this mechanism remains a key response capability of the FCDO."

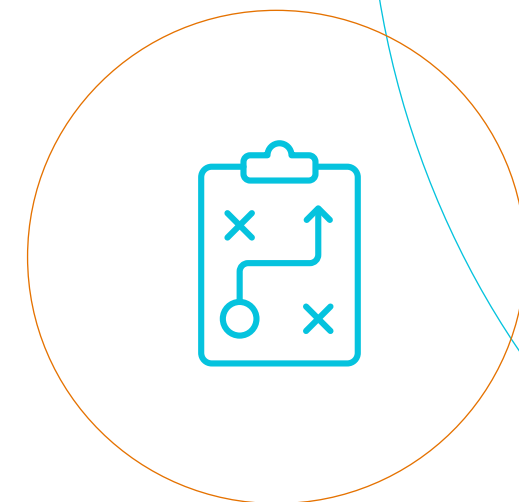
In addition to bolstering the UK UNDAC team, HSOT also conducted a

comprehensive review of the performance of FCDO's UN Standby Partnership partners over the past seven years. The review found that FCDO SBP partners are performing well with no key gaps identified and their rosters are highly valued by the UN agencies.

Implementing a robust monitoring, evaluation and learning strategy

Monitoring, evaluation and learning (MEL) are at the heart of HSOT readiness tasks. Working with FCDO colleagues, HSOT has implemented an action tracker to quantify progress against lessons identified from previous responses to lessons learned. Katherine Williams, HSOT's MEL adviser says, "The Central Lessons Log and Action Tracker consolidates all response lessons from recent humanitarian responses, and enables us to share lessons that are relevant at the onset of crises. The tracker also documents actions, and assigns roles, responsibilities and priorities for addressing the actions. We are now able to measure the number of lessons captured, actions defined, actions completed or ongoing."

HSOT has also helped developed a set of 31 Humanitarian Response Indicators. The indicators have been designed under a conceptual framework



that were informed by the Humanitarian Framework, FCDO Value for Money (VfM), DAC Criteria and Sphere Standards and core objectives of humanitarian responses being fast, effective, principled and meet the needs of those most acutely affected. This MEL approach has the advantage of having significant power for reporting and training but also provides a data set, which can be used to compare humanitarian responses over time. Katherine Williams says, "It's important to have quantitative info to help triangulate qualitative results from the lessons process. results from the lessons process. The approach helps the team identify where our assumptions of what works needs to be investigated, or where we have recurring wins."

Readiness tasks are embedded in HSOT's supply chain approach

Supply Chain Plans are usually produced following a humanitarian crisis to present delivery options to the FCDO. Importantly, the final product reflects work undertaken throughout the year by HSOT's Procurement & Logistics (P&L) Team, both within and outside of response. The fundamentals of supply chain resilience are embedded in the team's approach, maximising flexibility in the delivery options provided to FCDO.

HSOT's Procurement and Logistics approach

Previous research and work undertaken on improving the sustainability of HSOT's procurement and approach to transportation is routinely applied to supply chain options. Additionally, HSOT has developed tools to identify and mitigate any potential sexual exploitation and abuse and harassment, which are routinely used when drafting Supply Chain Plans to assess SEAH risks whether via a specific supplier or in a particular geographic location.

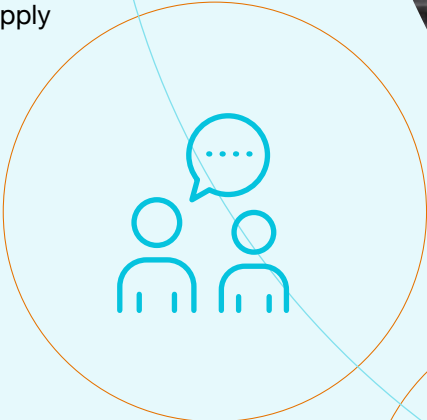
Other aspects of improving HSOT's readiness include increasing the number of long-term framework agreements

(LTAs) HSOT holds with suppliers that the team can draw upon, regular communication with suppliers and partners, designing where and how FCDO supplies are held and undertaking the necessary maintenance activities on FCDO's equipment. Via research throughout the year, HSOT also stays aware of how our global supply chains are vulnerable to geopolitical influences, such as the impact of Red Sea shipping issues or airspace closures over Ukraine. In response, HSOT builds in options for location of production, location of stockholding and transport to maximise flexibility in its supply chains. Ultimately, this means that a HSOT Supply Chain Plan presented to FCDO following a humanitarian crisis contains improvements to readiness (agility and responsiveness) that HSOT has purposefully incorporated within the network.

This year, several key activities were completed which will improve future Supply Chain Plans. For example, as part of the hurricane season preparedness activities, the team updated the Caribbean Supply Chain Plan. The 2024 plan draws on past experience within the region – applying lessons learned and demonstrating the most resilient and flexible approach. As part of the update to the Caribbean Supply Chain Plan, HSOT has collaborated with suppliers, and key

HSOT also stays aware of how our global supply chains are vulnerable to geopolitical influences, such as the impact of Red Sea shipping issues or airspace closures over Ukraine

partners through informal meetings with other donor organisation logisticians, as well as communication with the World Food Programme (WFP). HSOT has also undertaken a review of logistics warehouses and distribution centres on British Overseas Territories in the Caribbean, alongside updating the delivery routes and schedules from major transport providers in the area. This year, readiness activities also included improving supply chain planning by developing a specific risk register for the Occupied Palestinian Territories (OPTs) and collaborating with FCDO and UK's International Search and Rescue Team (UKISAR) to prepare for future deployments.



HSOT humanitarian advice and policy support

HSOT brings humanitarian advice and policy support to the Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office to preserve lives, alleviate suffering, and uphold the dignity of communities affected by disasters.

The way the HSOT core team delivers support is flexible – humanitarian experts can surge in to work with FCDO teams in-country or support teams remotely. The team also provides a range of technical support covering key humanitarian sectors including humanitarian access, protection, supply chain management, climate resilience, health, shelter, water and sanitation among others, and

delivers advice and analysis to support UK decisions on policy, advocacy, and humanitarian programme delivery.

Sudan: technical and strategic support to maintain humanitarian cross-border access

In February, authorities from the Sudanese Armed Forces (SAF) announced that the de-facto government would no longer allow humanitarian aid to move through the border crossing with Chad to reach western areas of Sudan. This announcement effectively halted the majority of UN aid reaching areas controlled by the Rapid Support Forces (RSF), reducing aid delivery to a trickle in locations where people

were already suffering from severe hunger and malnutrition. HSOT deployed, Clare Third, a humanitarian adviser specialising in humanitarian access to support the UK's British Office Sudan to develop a strategy, which was translated into an action plan supporting the UK to use all available levers to advocate for prompt entry of aid to support people affected by conflict. "I engaged widely across the humanitarian response with other humanitarian access experts from UNOCHA, the World Food Programme, UNICEF and INGOs delivering in the area, and provided technical feedback on key UN response documents, including the UN's humanitarian access strategy for Sudan."

Humanitarian organisations face significant challenges delivering aid to the civilian population in Sudan with access blocked by the warring parties, and instances of aid workers killed. A convoy of WFP trucks cross from Chad to Sudan via the Adre crossing, which was re-opened in August. © WFP/Sylvain Barral



HSOT's adviser also contributed advice to support the UK's efforts to support INGOs continuing to maintain humanitarian aid delivery cross-border into western Sudan. Additional support included technical inputs to inform high-level advocacy and asks on humanitarian access towards parties to the conflict, while advice also informed UK action and statements at the

UN Security Council, as well as bilaterally with other diplomatic partners.

Supporting FCDO's climate resilience agenda

One of the key policy agendas driving our humanitarian response efforts is climate resilience, especially in regions facing a complex mix of risks related to conflict, climate

change, and crisis. Addressing climate resilience involves collaboration across several departments within the FCDO, with HSOT's technical humanitarian adviser playing a critical role in developing effective policies and programming interventions.

This year, the HSOT Humanitarian Climate and Resilience Adviser, Erica Mason,

has crafted a strategic approach for FCDO aimed at achieving climate resilience goals. This includes unlocking additional climate finance for fragile and conflict-affected states, enhancing coordination across the Humanitarian-Development-Peace nexus, and empowering local actors in decision-making processes. To support this strategy, the adviser represented the UK at significant events, including the World Bank Fragility Forum in February, convening on the COP28 Climate Relief, the Recovery and Peace Declaration at Wilton Park in March, and a WFP field visit to resilience projects in Mauritania in September.

The HSOT humanitarian adviser also provides expert policy advice on several critical FCDO initiatives, including updates to the guidance on International Climate Finance (ICF) and the development of the FARE programme, which builds on the Supporting Pastoralism and Agriculture in Recurrent and



“I engaged widely across the humanitarian response with other humanitarian access experts from UNOCHA, the World Food Programme, UNICEF and INGOs delivering in the area...”



WFP field visit in Mauritania to see climate resilience projects

Protracted Crises (SPARC) programme to address vital areas like agriculture and natural resource management.

A significant development in this area is the newly announced Resilience and Adaptation Fund (RAF), which allocates climate finance equivalent up to 15% of FCDO's bilateral humanitarian provisions. HSOT's advisory support has been instrumental in shaping the structure and policy framework of the RAF to ensure its effectiveness and relevance. Through the RAF, the UK seeks to mitigate the impacts of future disasters by helping affected populations prepare for and adapt to changing climate conditions. Erica Mason explains, "This fund aims to strengthen the resilience of vulnerable communities by focusing on food and water security and integrating resilience measures alongside traditional humanitarian relief efforts."

Engagement with both internal stakeholders and external partners has become increasingly

important for advancing climate resilience. The HSOT humanitarian adviser's support has been vital in navigating stakeholder engagement and maintaining FCDO's credibility and ambition on this pressing policy agenda. As the frequency of humanitarian crises driven by climate change rises and available funding diminishes, this work remains a crucial component of the UK's comprehensive and holistic response to global challenges.

Guidance Note refresh on mental health and psycho-social support

All humanitarian and health crises lead to an increase in mental health needs. Both man-made and natural disasters can disrupt the availability of, and people's access to, existing mental health services, putting those with pre-existing conditions at greater risk. Crises can also cause widespread suffering and distress, resulting in significant psychological and social impacts on affected populations. People

and families affected by humanitarian crises face prolonged hardships and disruptions that weaken their resilience, placing them at a higher risk of developing long-term mental health conditions, which in turn affects the whole of society.

An HSOT humanitarian health adviser led the work to update FCDO's Guidance Note on mental health and psychosocial support (MHPSS). The last



version was from 2019, and this update was geared towards raising awareness about MHPSS in emergencies. The goal is to provide both advisers and non-technical FCDO staff with a practical tool. The guidance note offers a clear understanding of MHPSS, featuring the latest evidence-based information, practical advice, and key advocacy points.

The guidance sets out how effective MHPSS interventions help reduce the harmful effects of stress and potentially traumatic events. They can also prevent the increase in mental health conditions, support recovery for those already affected, and individuals and communities in regaining a sense of normalcy and stability.

The process of updating the Guidance Note involved gathering and reviewing an extensive range of sources, as well as interviews with over a dozen key external experts in mental health and psychosocial support in humanitarian settings. An initial

draft was created and then reviewed internally by a selected group of FCDO advisers and generalists. A second, refined draft was subsequently sent to a selection of external stakeholders for further review, before a formal launch to FCDO audiences.

“In disaster-affected populations, approximately 22% are affected by mental health conditions versus 7% in normal situations. MHPSS interventions are key to prevent and manage such conditions.”

Supporting the UK to place women’s voice and leadership front and centre of humanitarian response

In 2024, the UK ramped up efforts to support inclusive locally-led humanitarian action. An HSOT humanitarian adviser supported the FCDO in its efforts to catalyse change, so that women-and girl-led and women’s rights organisations (WLOs/WROs) get the recognition and support they deserve.

WLOs/WROs, from small community groups to national level organisations, are often at the forefront of humanitarian action, pivoting their work to provide rapid assistance and meet humanitarian needs. They commonly provide assistance and protection to not only women and girls, but to some of the most marginalised people left behind by mainstream responses. Including indigenous people, LGBTQI+ people, people with disabilities, religious and ethnic minorities, displaced communities, and those living in remote locations. As new research by the Equality Fund shows, WROs bridge immediate response and early recovery, while working to address underlying structural inequalities, including addressing gender-based violence in all its forms.

Yet, as a result of gender inequalities and failures within the humanitarian system, WLOs/WROs are systematically excluded from humanitarian decision-making and significantly underfunded.



Excluded from decision-making

Research into the COVID-19 response found that although WLOs/WROs were at the forefront of this response globally, their voices were excluded from local, national and humanitarian decision-making processes. This not only marginalised women’s specific

needs and contributions, it also restricted their access to funding secured in those spaces.

Restricted access to funding

A recent UN Women assessment of Palestinian WLOs operating in Gaza and the West Bank showed that, these organisations were

providing critical humanitarian assistance in the form of food and non-food items, cash, protection and mental health related services. However, financial struggles were hampering their ability to deliver these critical services, with 56% reporting decreased funding and 88% facing major financial difficulties.

Supporting dialogue and step change

Despite donor, UN and NGO commitments, the sector has struggled to find ways to facilitate a step-change on women's voice and leadership. Making progress in addressing these challenges requires meaningful cooperation with and support to diverse WLOs/WROs at every stage of humanitarian response.

HSOT's humanitarian adviser worked with the FCDO's Women and Girls Department and the Humanitarian Department to support a Wilton Park event on Women's Rights Organisations in Crises in February 2024 that

created a space for meaningful dialogue and innovation. The event brought together donors, philanthropists, representatives of the humanitarian system with informal grassroots actors, the more established national women's rights organisations and feminist funds.

"We aren't just an object of humanitarian action, we are agents."

One clear message from WLOs/WROs was they are not just waiting round for international humanitarian actors to arrive. As one disability rights activist put it: "we aren't just an object of humanitarian action, we are agents."

Women's and feminist funds

The efforts of women's and feminist funds, created by, for, and with women, girls and nonbinary people, have the potential to address these challenges and provide wider learning for the humanitarian

sector. Humanitarian Adviser Jessica Skinner explains, "For donors such as FCDO, it is hard to develop and manage direct partnerships with multiple, often smaller, organisations. This is where the network of global, regional and national women's funds comes in. They are embedded within and connected to local movements, and hence the network may offer the opportunity to provide funding at scale through the partnerships they hold with grassroots organisations."

HSOT's humanitarian adviser has continued to play an instrumental role in convening, evidence-building and influencing to drive this forward. As an outcome of the Wilton Park event, a network of women's and feminist funds came together to explore ways to enhance their support to WLOs/WROs in humanitarian crises. The group developed a concept for a new pooled funding mechanism, the First Response Fund, to be hosted by the Equality Fund,



UK-funded INGO, Premiere Urgence, providing medical assistance to Sudanese refugees in Libya via mobile health clinics. Image credit Premiere Urgence.

to finance and accompany WLOs/WROs as they pivot their response to crises. The HSOT humanitarian adviser has been playing an important challenge role as the group develops this concept and has been supporting FCDO to utilise its convening power to promote this emerging practice among donors, including through UK engagement at the Call to Action on Protection from GBV and co-chair ship of the Good Humanitarian Donorship network; supporting donors to

strengthen inclusive locally-led humanitarian action.

Designing a humanitarian programme for Sudanese refugees in Libya

The repercussions from the ongoing civil conflict in Sudan are widespread, with displacement most acutely suffered by the most vulnerable. In April, the UN launched a coordinated appeal to respond to the needs of hundreds of thousands of extremely vulnerable Sudanese



refugees likely to take the dangerous journey to cross the Sudan-Libya border to flee conflict. By that time, tens of thousands of people had already arrived in Alkufra, a remote and under-served region of Libya. The influx of Sudanese refugees created a humanitarian crisis, which was further exacerbated by flooding in the region. Many refugees were living in makeshift tents on the outskirts of Alkufra and lacking adequate water and sanitation facilities, while the UN

also flagged increasing concern that women and children were exposed to heightened risks of violence.

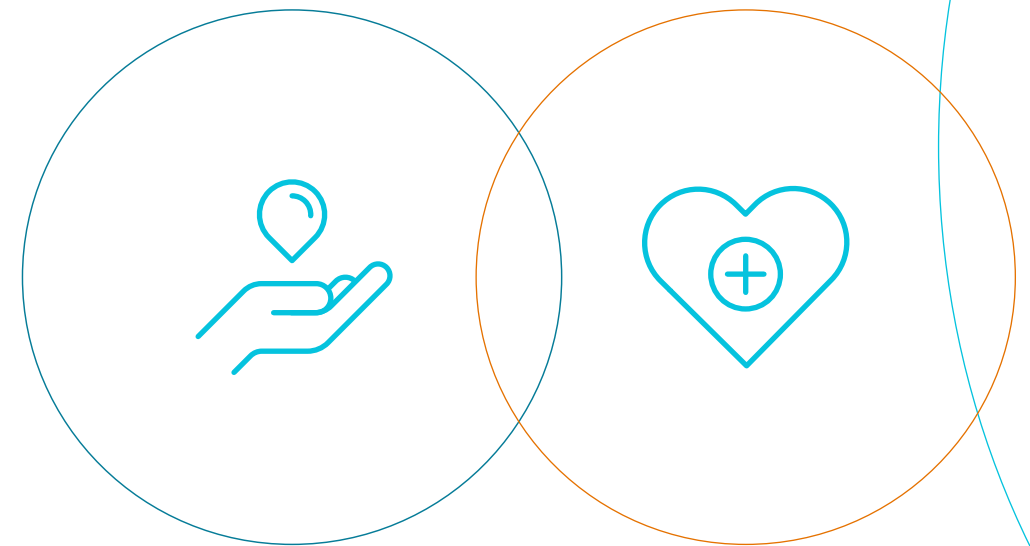
A humanitarian adviser from HSOT's core team was surged in to remotely support the UK's embassy in Tripoli to identify humanitarian priorities. Clare Third, HSOT humanitarian adviser with expertise in access and forced displacement, explains how she supported the team. "I engaged with partners

and donors and identified where UK funding could play an impactful role. Subsequently, I helped the team to develop a case for the UK to allocate additional humanitarian funding to the Libya Sudanese refugee response. As a result, the UK allocated £2 million of funding to support Sudanese refugees in Libya, especially focusing on getting aid to women and children." Following consultations with a range of humanitarian actors, HSOT's adviser developed programming recommendations, which took

The UK allocated £2 million of funding to support Sudanese refugees in Libya, especially focusing on getting aid to women and children.

into consideration the unique humanitarian access constraints in Alkufra. Programming was also informed by the UK's priorities to respond to the needs of women and girls, ensuring protection of

vulnerable refugees, and build local capacity. UK funding, allocated to an international NGO (INGO) and UN agencies, is delivering a health, protection and water, sanitation and hygiene (WASH) response. The INGO partner, which has a long-term presence in the area, is working closely with the community and local authorities through a well-established team of Libyan staff, while the UN partner is closely delivering alongside local NGOs.



The background features a complex network of thin, glowing blue lines connecting various nodes. Some nodes are highlighted with larger, semi-transparent blue circles. The overall aesthetic is futuristic and digital.

Exploring innovation

As part and parcel of our work, HSOT proactively support opportunities for innovation. Improvements are trialled and tested through research and development, and improvements are implemented and then scaled. The team also looks to influence other humanitarian actors to adopt innovative approaches to support best practice.

Driving operational gains with AI

Artificial intelligence (AI) and Machine Learning (ML) are rapidly being developed and applied across sectors. These new technologies have the potential to enhance efficiency for routine tasks but also harness the power of data and advanced analytics – with the end goal of improving humanitarian decision-making.

This year, HSOT's Early Warning Analysis and Reporting team (EWAR) piloted the use of media monitoring databases for humanitarian risk flagging and horizon scanning. The pilot uses

publicly available media monitoring databases and AI tools to test their combined potential to make the task quicker and more efficient, while still delivering relevant results for HSOT analytical products.

Luminita Tichel, AI/ML Workstream Lead, explains,

“Now we can process more information in less time by incorporating automated information-gathering techniques and AI-assisted synthesis. At the same time, we’re gaining more insights through additional analytical outputs.”

By exploring opportunities, risks and limitations of applying AI set out in lessons learned, the pilot is providing insights into the effectiveness of AI-driven analysis while also laying the groundwork for how the team will deploy the technology going forward.

This pilot is already having an impact and is proving valuable for other aspects of HSOT's horizon scanning activity. The team have outlined the methodology in a technical and non-technical form for relevant FCDO teams and high-level audiences. Next, the team will evaluate the results and propose further action for improving the application of AI-assisted information and analysis.

Waste compactor – solving the problem of plastic waste

Innovation is most effective when solving a problem. In response to humanitarian disasters, HSOT on behalf of the UK Government, sends numerous tons of shelter coverage kits (plastic tarpaulins) and other Core Relief Items (CRIs) packed in cardboard and shrink-wrap. The problem: this produces a lot of recyclable and non-recyclable plastic, causing environmental damage and placing the burden of waste management and recycling on the communities affected by disaster.

The team is already doing a lot to tackle single-use plastics; removing plastic bags and wrappers from their supply chains. Wanting to go a step further, HSOT's Procurement & Logistics team designed, built, and tested a waste compactor. The compactor, inspired by the need to manage packaging waste, can be flat packed for easy transport and makes use of readily available materials and machinery that are in all warehouses: wooden pallets and forklift trucks.

The design is also replicable by any small-scale workshop worldwide. FCDO can produce compactors and deliver them together with a consignment of aid items. The drawings will be made available to all at no charge by publishing them on the UN Global Logistics Cluster website. Technical Adviser Stuart Kinsey confirmed, "In tests with cardboard waste, our in-house HSOT-designed compactor saves 25% by volume and produces neat, pallet-sized bales of plastics, cardboard or other materials (like canvas tents), making them easy to handle and transport back for recycling."

"In tests with cardboard waste, our in-house HSOT-designed compactor saves 25% by volume..."



Launch of groundbreaking humanitarian fire risk reduction guidance

On 31 January 2024, the Global Shelter Cluster launched a first of its kind State of Fire Safety report and the first edition of the Fire Risk Reduction Guidance for Humanitarian Shelters and Settlements. The report and guidance were prepared by Kindling – an organisation dedicated to promoting fire safety in vulnerable communities around the world including those affected by humanitarian emergencies. The work was funded by USAID's Bureau of Humanitarian Assistance (BHA) and FCDO, and HSOT's humanitarian adviser, Phil Duloy, has been involved since the inception two years ago.

The guidance focuses on why fires happen and what can be done to minimise the risk of fire. To explore those questions, the report authors engaged with a wide range of actors across the humanitarian sector. They set out to establish a baseline, which is shared in [The State of Fire Safety in Humanitarian Shelter and Settlements](#), while in tandem provide strategic recommendations and offering practical advice in the [guidance report](#) to support people working in humanitarian operations across the world.

HSOT Humanitarian Adviser, Phil Duloy, is a shelter specialist and has been involved in the work on behalf of FCDO. Duloy says, "We need to get to a point where the consideration of fire risks is second nature and an implicit part of our thinking on shelter and settlements. And we have a long way to go, but Kindling's work and this new guidance can take us a good distance in the right direction."

"As a former NGO staff member, Red Cross delegate, UN staffer, Cluster Coordinator and now adviser to FCDO, I have come across fires in humanitarian settings more times than I care to recall. Every time is a tragedy. Before this guidance was developed, it was extremely rare that most humanitarians could identify what fire risk management should look like. The Global Shelter Cluster guidelines that have been launched adds a great deal, where previously fire risk management was only lightly addressed. These new guidelines can help us to make shelter and settlements safer and drive accountability to affected populations."

In practical terms the guidance highlights best practices and should be used to advocate to host governments and to donors for safer conditions. Thanks to a thoughtful development process, humanitarians can make use of this excellent guidance. Phil Duloy continues, "The authors deserve real praise for having synthesised clearly so many interlinked technical inputs. The design of the guidance means that readers do not need any prior knowledge of fire management. It's really a groundbreaking piece of work."

Reverse logistics of armoured vehicles:

a sustainable approach for FCDO's humanitarian operations

Humanitarian organisations rely heavily on armoured vehicles (AVs) to safely conduct operations in conflict zones. However, the costs associated with purchasing, transporting, and maintaining these vehicles can be daunting.

In response, HSOT implemented an in-house reverse logistics programme focused on refurbishing two armoured vehicles for donation to the Gaza response. The aim was twofold – extending their lifespan and avoiding the financial strain of purchasing new AVs. To successfully refurbish the vehicles, HSOT was able to draw on lessons from previous AV maintenance alongside in-house technical expertise in this field.

This reverse-logistics initiative is driven by several key objectives. First, increasing environmental sustainability.

By minimising the need for new manufacturing and transportation, the programme significantly lowers greenhouse gas emissions associated with production, shipping, and disposal, contributing to a lower carbon footprint and a more sustainable operational model.

Moreover, the refurbishment process enhances both safety and effectiveness. Global Warehouse Manager Steve Mottram explains, "Each vehicle undergoes a rigorous selection and assessment process – we evaluate the armour integrity and overall condition to confirm their suitability for refurbishment. Selected vehicles are then meticulously stripped down for a detailed inspection of critical components like brakes, suspension systems, and armoured glass. We also assess armour elements in conjunction with certified armouring companies. Damaged parts are repaired or replaced through armourers' approved supply chain partners, and upgrades are also made to improve road safety, ensuring that the vehicles meet high

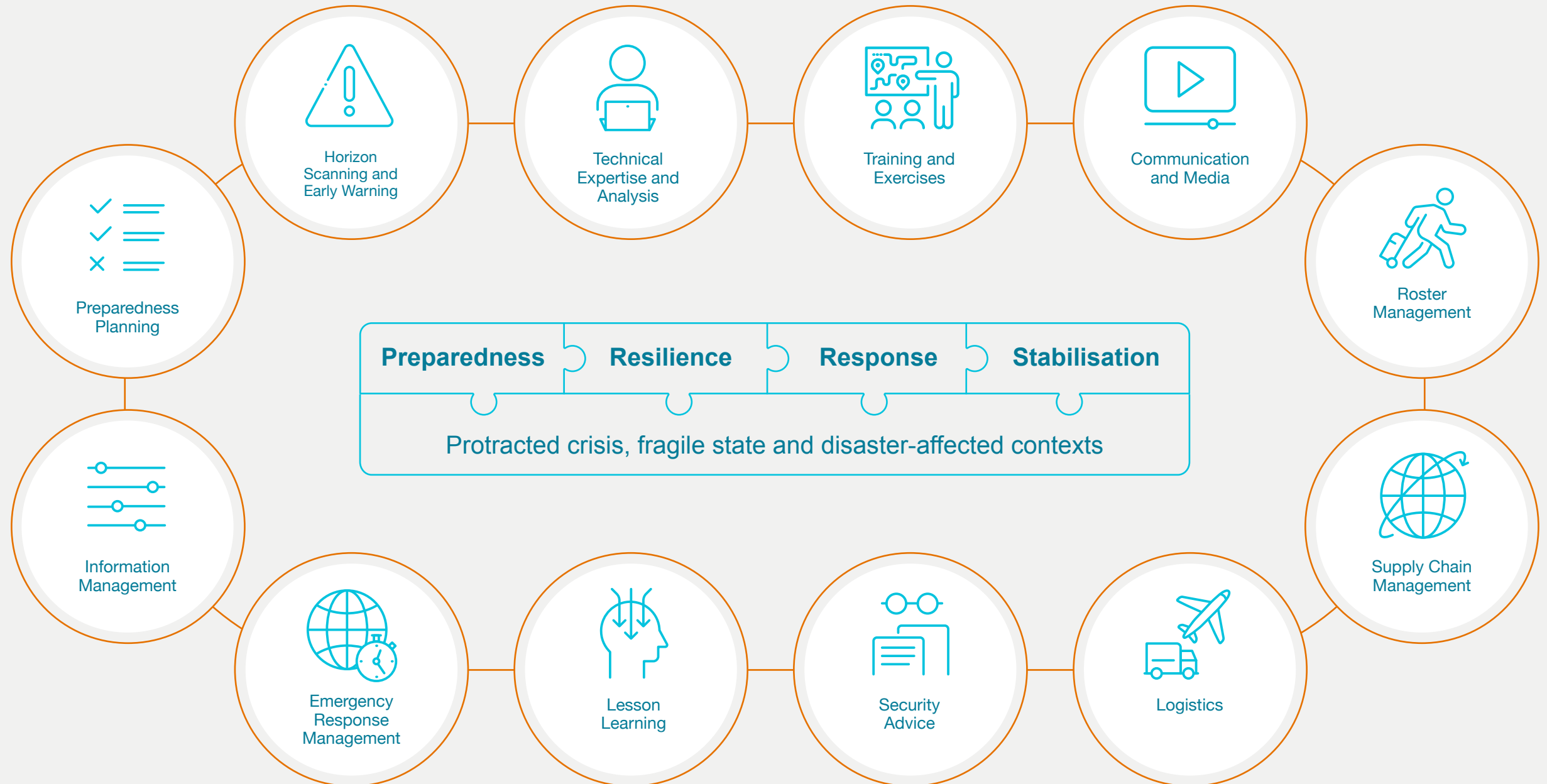
standards and remain reliable in challenging environments."

This in-house refurbishment programme also significantly reduces costs. Refurbishing existing armoured vehicles can cost around £50,000, compared to approximately £200,000 for newly procured ones, yielding a substantial saving of about 75%. The refurbishment programme is substantial value for money and allows the FCDO to allocate resources more effectively, enhancing their overall operational capacity.

Ultimately, this reverse logistics initiative not only ensures that humanitarian partners have access to safe, reliable vehicles but also aligns with a commitment to cost-effectiveness and environmental responsibility. As refurbished vehicles prepare for deployment, they symbolise HSOT's proactive approach to resource management in humanitarian efforts.



HSOT Capabilities



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