

# Evaluation of the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR)

20 February 2025

IED-24-013



## INSPECTION AND EVALUATION DIVISION

Function *“The Office shall evaluate the efficiency and effectiveness of the implementation of the programmes and legislative mandates of the Organization. It shall conduct programme evaluations with the purpose of establishing analytical and critical evaluations of the implementation of programmes and legislative mandates, examining whether changes therein require review of the methods of delivery, the continued relevance of administrative procedures and whether the activities correspond to the mandates as they may be reflected in the approved budgets and the medium-term plan of the Organization;”* ([General Assembly Resolution 48/218 B](#)).

**Project team members include:**

Nicholas Kowbel, Team Leader  
Regina Zheng, Team Member  
Nadia Restrepo Asendorf, Consultant  
Fei Wang, Team Member  
Daniel Gaston, Administrative Professional

Contact Information **OIOS-IED Contact Information:**  
phone: +1 212-963-8148; fax: +1 212-963-1211; email: [ied@un.org](mailto:ied@un.org)

**Juan Carlos S. Peña, Chief of Section**  
Tel: +1-212-963-5880, e-mail: [penajc@un.org](mailto:penajc@un.org)

**Demetra Arapakos, Director**  
Tel: +1 917-367 6033, e-mail: [arapakos@un.org](mailto:arapakos@un.org)

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## Summary

The Office of Internal Oversight Services (OIOS) evaluated the relevance, effectiveness, efficiency and coherence of the contributions of the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) to promote the protection and enjoyment of human rights by Member States for all people through strengthening national protection systems at country level.

OHCHR support for strengthening national protection systems was broadly aligned with host country needs. OHCHR leveraged its technical expertise and strong human rights mandate. Meanwhile, its inclusive approach to work planning prioritized responses to stakeholder requests, Human Rights Council and treaty body resolutions and Universal Periodic Review recommendations. Still, stakeholders sought more deliberate inclusion in OHCHR's longer-term planning and strategizing.

OHCHR effectively contributed to the strengthening of national protection systems by enhancing the capacity of national human rights institutions (NHRI), civil society organizations (CSO) and governments. These efforts improved rights holders' ability to claim and defend their rights, and duty bearers to comply with their human right obligations. OHCHR partnered with NHRIs to strengthen their technical expertise and credibility, enabling them to advocate more effectively for policy reforms aligned with international human rights standards. Similarly, OHCHR enhanced CSOs capacities and leveraged its convening power to facilitate meaningful connections between CSOs, government officials and other stakeholders. Additionally, OHCHR strengthened government institutional capacities through effective technical advice and capacity building, contributing to more effective human rights implementation. Government officials, United Nations Country Teams (UNCTs) and donors consistently appreciated this work, and commended OHCHR's ability to identify political opportunities to support state institutions.

OHCHR contributed significantly to increased accountability, policy development and improved national laws that protect and promote human rights. It strengthened the capacities of states and NHRIs to create protection systems and accountability mechanisms for monitoring, investigating and redressing human rights violations. Robust monitoring data combined with OHCHR's technical expertise in human rights law ensured accountability in cases that might otherwise have been overlooked. Furthermore, OHCHR's technical support and partnerships with national and regional actors contributed to changes in national laws and regional policies to align with international human rights laws, standards and norms.

Despite the progress made, the full realization of protecting human rights for all was hindered by challenging country contexts, and the corresponding human rights challenges that outpaced OHCHR's resources and capacity to respond. Facing persistent and largescale human rights challenges, OHCHR lacked the capacity and resources to fully meet the associated needs in terms of geographical coverage, thematic coverage and depth of engagement on the ground. A lack of predictable funding and reliance on short-term projects hindered the development of longer-term engagements and sustained impacts. Furthermore, the absence of high-quality longer-term country strategies and regional strategies addressing longer term shared challenges and expected results further limited OHCHR's ability to set strategic fundraising priorities and deliver sustained results.

The quality of thematic support from headquarters divisions to field presences effectively enabled staff to carry out their national protection system activities. This was facilitated by good practices, such as clearly defined regional and country office roles, the deployment of thematic staff in the field with links to regional offices and headquarters and connecting services from HQ to the field via the desk officers.

The above notwithstanding, OHCHR's organizational structures, ways of working, and internal policies did not optimally enable delivery of thematic and operational support to national protection systems at the field level. Administration processes that hindered delivery included difficulties with inter-divisional collaboration, overly centralized financial administration, complex grants administration, lengthy and unclear report clearance processes, and challenges with coordinating fundraising between headquarters

and the field. These challenges were compounded by organizational structure issues. This included small teams with excessive responsibilities and too many functions, while decision-making and support was far removed from the point of delivery.

OHCHR played a pivotal role in mainstreaming human rights within UNCTs, contributing human rights monitoring data and expertise that informed the United Nations Sustainable Development Cooperation Framework (UNSDCF) and other UN programming. However, some challenges in collaborating with other UN entities were identified. These included instances of incoherent advice between headquarters, regional and country levels to Resident Coordinators (RC) and UNCTs, limited capacity to respond to requests, and slow financial and administrative processes when delivering joint programming.

To meet complex and growing human rights challenges, OHCHR has transitioned from an entity that was mainly headquarters focused to one with 95 field presences. However, its capacity to operate at country level is severely constrained.

OIOS makes four important recommendations for OHCHR to:

- a) Build upon its planning processes to both develop where absent or strengthen existing medium to longer term programmatic strategies at country and regional levels;
- b) Develop and commit to a plan with target dates to prioritize implementing administration reforms started under their Organizational Effectiveness 2.0 initiative;
- c) Strengthen institutional links between its divisions and offices globally and at field levels; and
- d) Conduct an overall regional level light needs assessment to inform decisions on the administrative, fundraising and thematic capacities of its regional offices.

## I. Introduction and objective

1. The overall objective of this Office of Internal Oversight Services (OIOS), Inspection and Evaluation Division (IED) evaluation was to determine, as systematically and objectively as possible, the relevance, effectiveness, efficiency and coherence of OHCHR contributions to protecting and promoting human rights through strengthening national protection systems at country level.
2. The evaluation conforms with the United Nations Evaluation Group norms and standards. The management response from OHCHR is provided in the annex.

### Mandate

3. Within the framework of the Charter of the United Nations and the Declaration of Human Rights, Member States are responsible for promoting and encouraging the respect for all human rights and fundamental freedoms. OHCHR is responsible for the promotion, protection and enjoyment of human rights by Member States for all people. The Office falls under the leadership of the High Commissioner (established by General Assembly resolution 48/141 in December 1993), entrusted with the principal responsibility for the human rights activities of the Organization, under the direction and authority of the Secretary-General and authority and decisions of the General Assembly and the Human Rights Council (A/79/6 (Sect.24) 24.1). The OHCHR strategy centers around supporting the human rights mechanisms and assisting Member States in complying with their human rights obligations.

### Programme structure

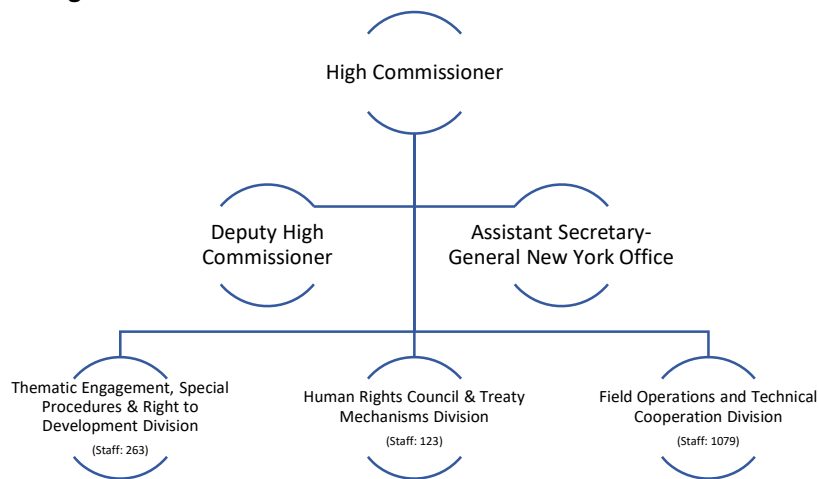
4. OHCHR has four subprogrammes and three substantive divisions. Its work is guided by two frameworks: i) the overall programme direction of the programme plan for budget section 24 which identifies the subprogrammes objectives and priorities, and ii) the strategies at country level identified in the OHCHR Management Plan (OMP), which provides a menu of outcomes areas, called pillars, associated with national protection systems. Table 1 describes the three divisions which deliver the four subprogrammes, while Figure 1 provides the OHCHR organizational structure.

**Table 1: OHCHR Divisions and Subprogrammes**

<b>Division</b>	<b>Subprogramme delivered</b>
The Thematic Engagement, Special Procedures, and Right to Development Division ( <b>TESPRDD</b> )  Develops policies, offers comprehensive guidance, tools, counsel, and capacity-building assistance on various thematic human rights matters, including for human rights mainstreaming purposes. It also supports the Human Rights Council's special procedures.	Subprogramme 1: Human Rights Mainstreaming, Right to Development, Research and Analysis  Subprogramme 4: Supporting the Human Rights Council and its Special Procedures
The Human Rights Council and Treaty Mechanisms Division ( <b>CTMD</b> )	Subprogramme 2: Supporting the Human Rights Treaty Bodies

Provides substantive and technical support to the Human Rights Council (HRC), the Council’s Universal Periodic Review (UPR) mechanism, and the human rights treaty bodies.	Subprogramme 4: Supporting the Human Rights Council and its Special Procedures
<p><b>The Field Operations and Technical Cooperation Division (FOTCD)</b></p> <p>Supervises and executes OHCHR initiatives in the field through its country, regional and sub-regional offices, and human rights advisers in United Nations Country Team (UNCT) and peacekeeping missions, as well as supporting mainstreaming human rights.</p>	Subprogramme 3: Advisory Services and Technical Cooperation

**Figure 1: OHCHR Organizational Chart**



Source: OHCHR, OHCHR OMP

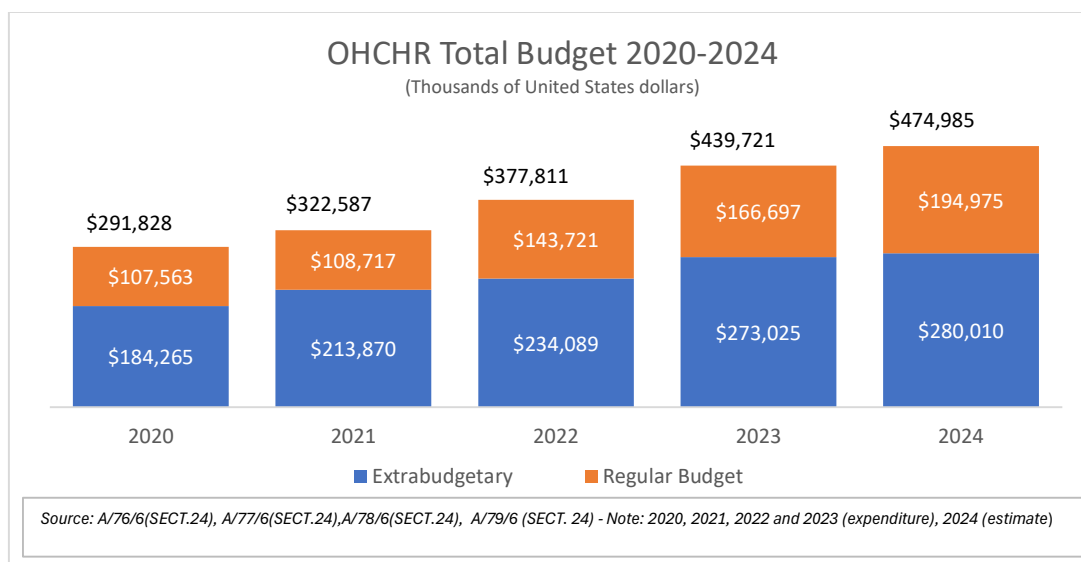
- At the time of the evaluation, the Office was undergoing a major reform initiative, referred to as Organizational Effectiveness (OE) 2.0 to create an office fit for the future. In April 2023, a consultant team undertook an assessment resulting in nine groups of proposals to improve OHCHR organizational effectiveness.

### Resources

- The total OHCHR budget for 2024 was \$475 million, shown in Figure 2. Nearly two-thirds of the OHCHR funding originates from voluntary contributions, with the remainder covered by the United Nations regular budget. OHCHR reported attracting 61.3 per cent of its overall funding for 2022 through voluntary contributions, most of it earmarked.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> OHCHR Funding Trends report, 2022-2023

**Figure 2: OHCHR Budget by Source, 2020-2024**



## II. Scope and Methodology

7. The evaluation covered the work of OHCHR at country level to support strengthening national protection systems. It focused primarily on the substantive work of subprogrammes 1 and 3 between 2020 to 2024.
8. In this evaluation, “national protection systems” refers to state laws, policies, accountability, institutional capacities, culture and practices. These are understood to be the combination of mechanisms, institutions, and actors that promote the independent monitoring and reporting, strengthening of capacities, advocacy and promotion and protection of human rights for all individuals.
9. The methodology included the following qualitative and quantitative methods:
  - a) **Case studies** of six specific OHCHR field presence types covering different regions. These are presented in Table 2 below:

**Table 2: Field presence case studies**

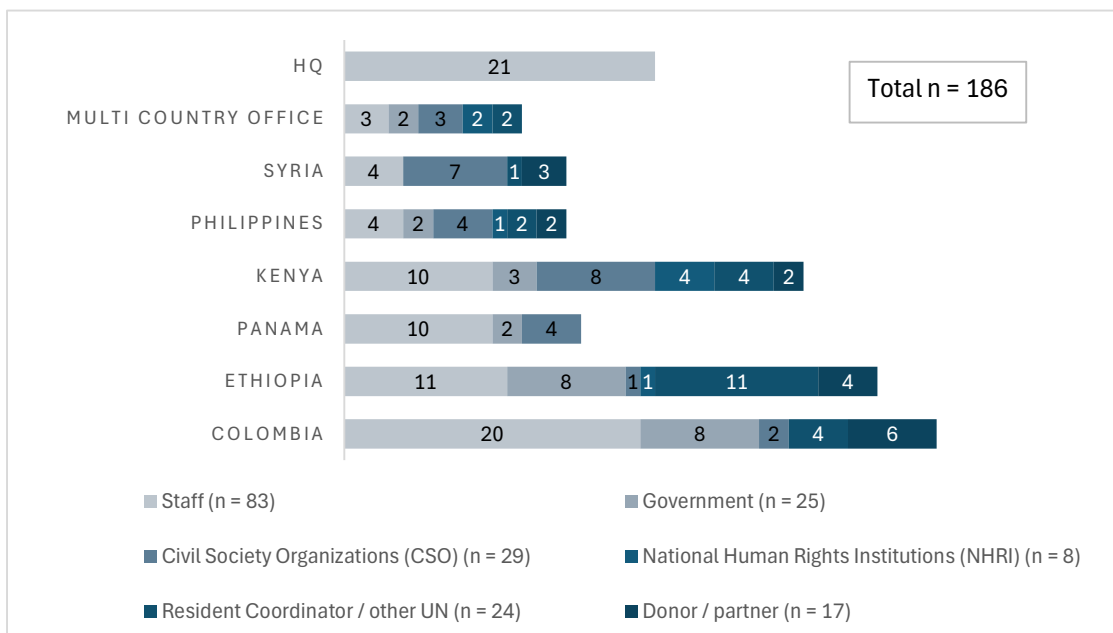
Type	Office	Data collection mode (mission/remote)
Regional office	1. Ethiopia/ East Africa Regional Office (EARO)	Mission
Regional office	2. Panama/Regional Office for Central America and the Dominican Republic (RO-CADR).	Mission
Country office – largest OHCHR presence	3. Colombia (largest OHCHR presence)	Mission
Country office – located outside country	4. Syria (country office located outside country)	Remote



Human Rights Advisors (HRAs) in Resident Coordinator (RC) Offices	5. Kenya	Mission
	6. Philippines	Remote

b) **Interviews** with a total of 186 individuals, including 83 staff and 103 stakeholders from case study field presences, as shown in Figure 3.

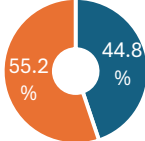

**Figure 3: Staff and stakeholders were interviewed across different field presence types**



c) **Global surveys** conducted with OHCHR staff and stakeholders identified by OHCHR headquarters (HQ) and field offices, as described in Table 3.

**Table 3: Response rates from surveyed global staff and stakeholder populations were generally high**

Survey type	Population size	Completed surveys	Response rate	Gender of respondent (Women/Men/Other)	Type of respondent
Global stakeholder survey of government officials, NHRI officials, CSO, and INGO staff, and others.	743	396	53%		

Global staff survey	1574	752	48%		
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- d) **Secondary document and data review of OHCHR evaluation reports and Performance Monitoring System (PMS) data for the six case studies, and data from the Organizational Effectiveness 2.0 (OE 2.0) assessment.**
- e) **Observations of OHCHR field location operations, particularly training activities, during missions to Ethiopia, Kenya, Panama, and Colombia where the teams also observed OHCHR field presences work outside the capitals. In addition, evaluators observed training delivered by OHCHR, including training for civil society, and UNCT partners.**

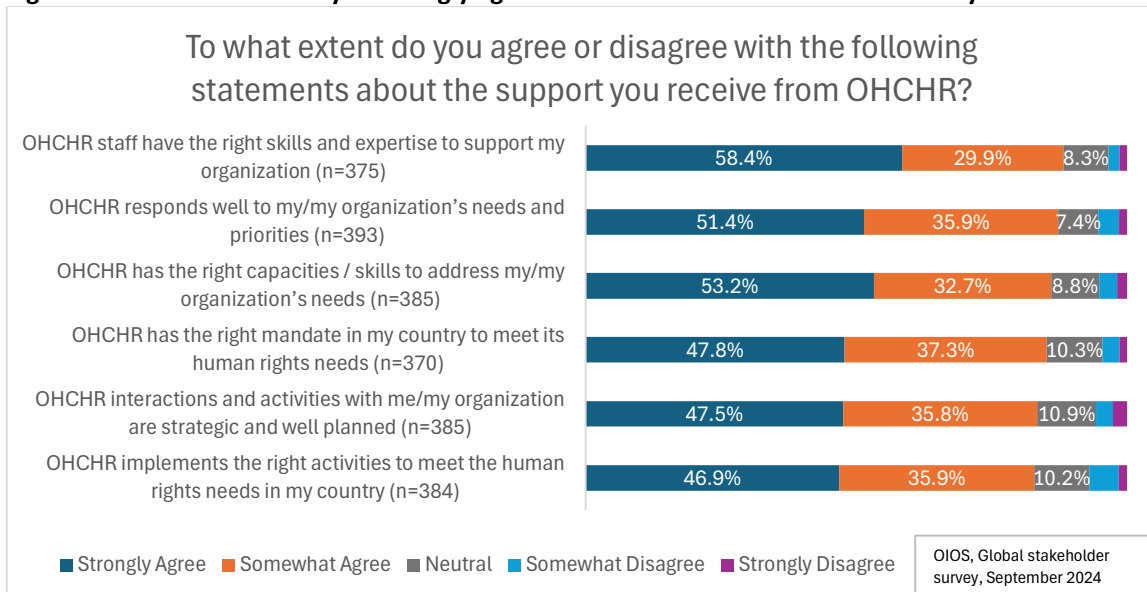
### III. Evaluation Results

#### A. OHCHR support for strengthening national protection systems was broadly aligned with country needs and leveraged its unique comparative advantages

##### *Stakeholders perceived OHCHR to be well aligned to regional and country needs*

10. OHCHR’s activities and approaches were broadly aligned with regional and host government countries’ needs. As shown in Figure 4, global stakeholder survey respondents overwhelmingly (above 80 per cent) provided positive feedback on all programme relevance indicators. Stakeholders interviewed in the six case studies also generally concurred, though some identified gaps in alignment of activities with needs due to perceived a) lack of longer-term support plans, b) financial support, and c) depth of engagement needed for sustained results. This is further explored in Section D.

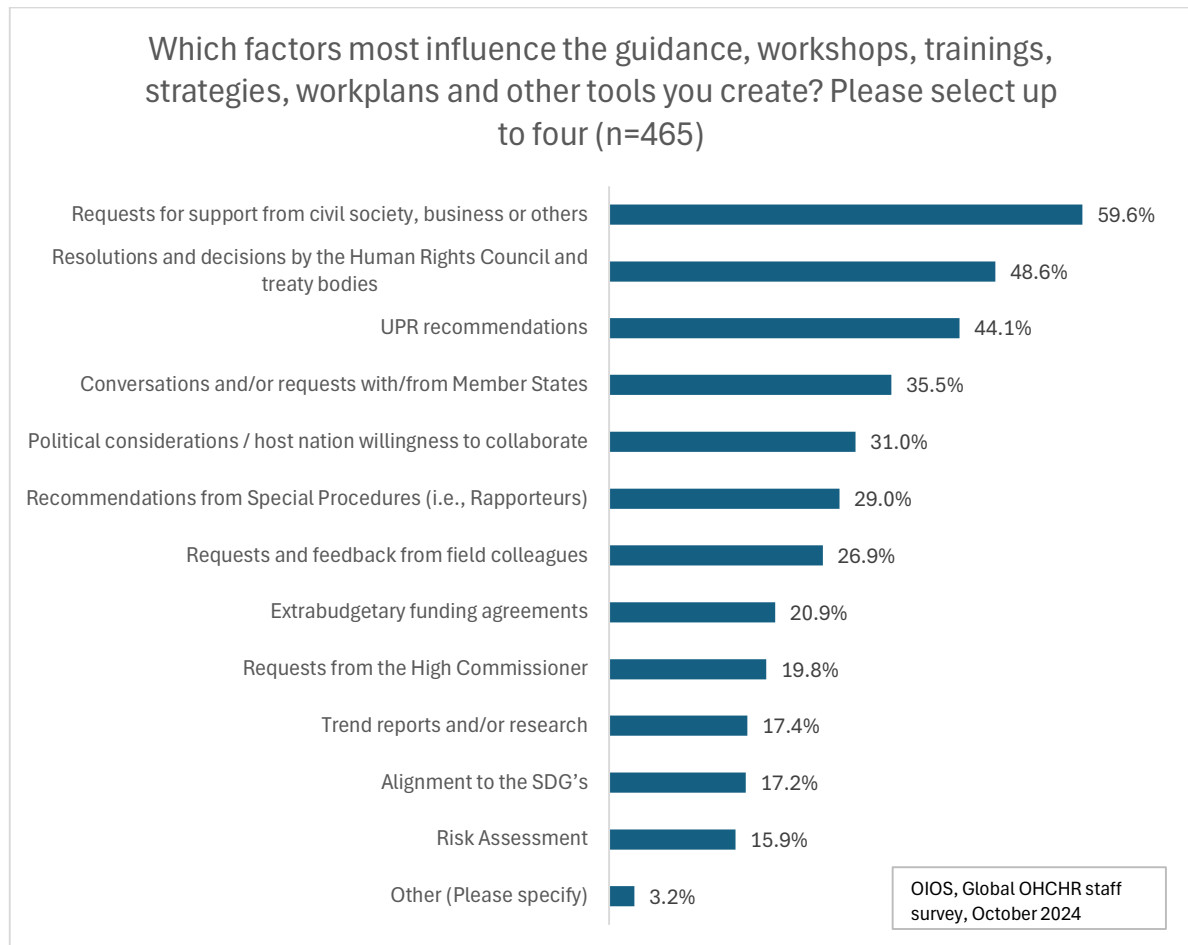
**Figure 4: Stakeholders surveyed strongly agreed with OHCHR relevance across all key dimensions**



*OHCHR support to national protection systems was informed by stakeholder requests, international human rights mechanisms and evidence from human rights monitoring*

11. OHCHR undertook an inclusive approach to work planning, with an emphasis placed on responding to stakeholder requests. The three most influential factors in work planning, identified by surveyed staff as shown in Figure 5, were requests from civil society and other private sector and non-government stakeholders (59.6 per cent), Human Rights Council and treaty body resolutions (48.6 per cent) and UPR recommendations (44.1 per cent). According to stakeholders and staff interviewed in all six case studies, the relevance of OHCHR interventions stemmed from its systematic approach to identifying stakeholder priorities for national protection systems. In all case studies, stakeholders emphasized the inclusive and consultative nature of this approach when delivering activities, although they often requested to be included more deliberately in OHCHR longer term planning and strategizing.

**Figure 5: According to staff, civil society requests and UN human rights mechanisms were the primary drivers of OHCHR work planning**



12. In line with the above, there were several examples demonstrating how this inclusive approach was adapted in different field contexts to respond to needs and prioritize action. Box 1 presents some illustrations.

**Box 1: Systematic approaches used to ensure OHCHR relevance**

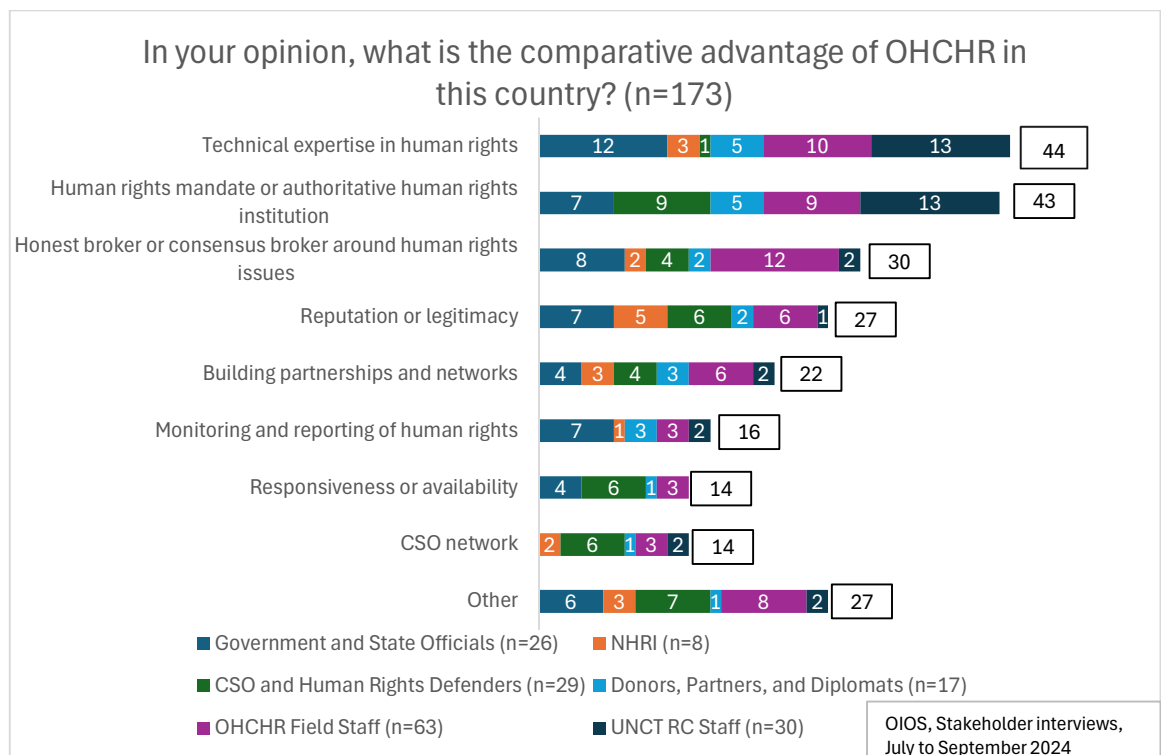
**Philippines:**  
OHCHR developed the United Nations Joint Programme (UNJP) in response to specific human rights challenges identified in HRC resolutions 41/2 and 45/33. The programme was designed and implemented using a co-creational approach, with technical working groups structured to promote consensus among government and civil society rather than majority rules. As a donor noted, *“There were technical working groups and there you had the civil society meeting with the government and ... the program managed to put all the people at the same table and start talking about issues.”*

**Kenya:**  
OHCHR determined priorities through systematic integration of multiple data sources and extensive stakeholder consultation. For example, when identifying gaps in prosecuting police officers, OHCHR drew on both treaty body recommendations and direct stakeholder input to create specimen charge sheets and reference guides. A staff member explained, *“We inform our activities based on our own research... periodic research from partners... speaking to CSO and NHRIs, government direct outreach and from mechanisms.”*

*The unique comparative advantages of OHCHR, particularly its technical expertise and strong human rights mandate, provided the Office with credibility and legitimacy*

13. Stakeholders and staff identified several comparative advantages of OHCHR that enabled regional, country and HRA offices to better understand and navigate local contexts. Those most frequently cited included technical expertise, a strong mandate, credibility, legitimacy, and convening power. Figure 6 illustrates these advantages as identified by stakeholder type.

**Figure 6: Stakeholders identified several OHCHR comparative advantages, including most commonly technical expertise and a strong human rights mandate**



14. Among these comparative advantages, OHCHR credibility and legitimacy proved especially valuable in strengthening national protection systems by fostering trust and ensuring accountability. Across all six case studies, representatives from CSOs often described OHCHR as an advocate for their safe participation, validating their activities and providing institutional backing when they faced political targeting. A CSO representative noted in this regard, *“We have had instances where organizations are targeted and OHCHR has come out in solidarity and support. [...] OHCHR was successful at helping this organization to not be punished simply for speaking truth to power.”*
15. Leveraging its role as a trusted intermediary, OHCHR also brought together CSOs, NHRIs and other government ministries, fostering collaboration. In Kenya, this allowed civil society organizations to sustain their advocacy efforts amid what interviewees referred to as a narrowing civic space, while enabling constructive engagement with government on police reform and election monitoring. In Colombia, OHCHR supported human rights defenders’ engagement with state institutions through “national guarantee tables”, while in the Philippines, OHCHR empowered NGOs – who, interviewees reported were often hesitant to engage with government agencies – to participate in discussions on National Human Rights Plan meaningfully.
16. This sustained multi-stakeholder engagement, particularly with CSOs and human rights defenders, significantly bolstered OHCHR ability to monitor human rights conditions. CSOs regularly shared real-time information about human rights situations on the ground. As one CSO representative noted, *“We are always having conversations with OHCHR on the status of human rights in the country... If we feel it’s something we need to draw their attention to, we call them and say we see it happening and will ask OHCHR to escalate and speak to stop it.”*

**B. OHCHR effectively contributed to the strengthening of national protection systems by enhancing the capacity of NHRIs, CSOs and governments, thus improving rights holders’ ability to claim and defend their rights and duty bearers comply with their human right obligations**

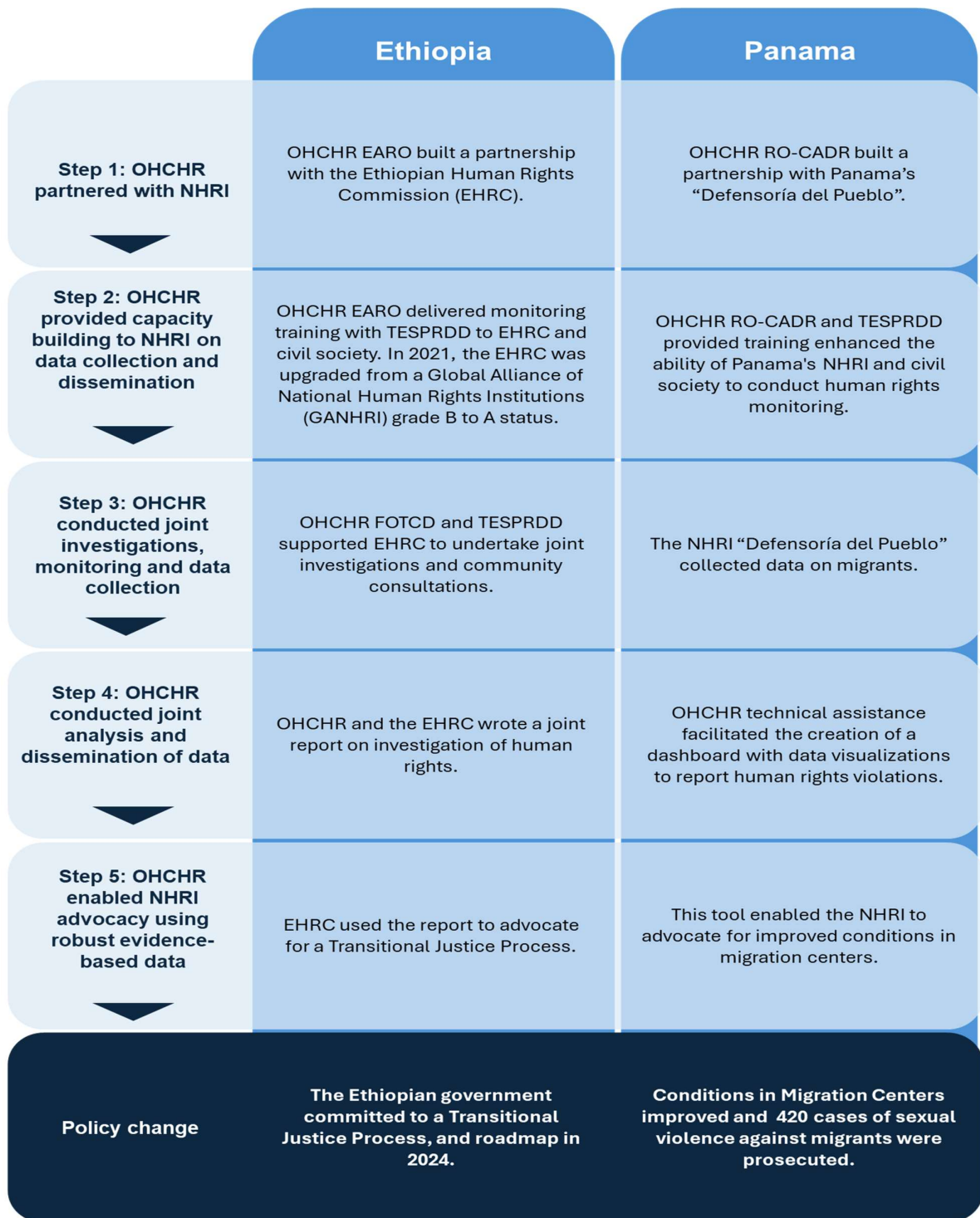
*OHCHR enhanced the capacities of NHRIs to claim and defend their rights, which supported state institutions to establish, reform and strengthen national protection systems in accordance with international human rights laws and norms*

17. OHCHR partnered with NHRIs to strengthen their technical expertise and credibility, enabling them to advocate more effectively for policy reforms aligned with international human rights standards. They did so through capacity building, monitoring, joint investigations and advocacy. Overall, 83.4 per cent of NHRIs surveyed believed that OHCHR contributed to their improved understanding of human rights issues. Similarly, 77.8 per cent reported that OHCHR improved their ability to advocate for human rights. In all five case studies with NHRIs<sup>2</sup>, OHCHR capacity-building was perceived to have empowered NHRIs to lead efforts in monitoring and data collection on human rights violations. The resulting data was analyzed and disseminated in collaboration with OHCHR, producing evidence-based insights that informed human rights policy, related reforms and decision-making. This collaborative approach, illustrated with two examples in Figure 7, was widely preferred by NHRIs, government stakeholders and OHCHR staff since it fostered national ownership of human rights advocacy.

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<sup>2</sup> Syria, the sixth case study, did not have an NHRI.

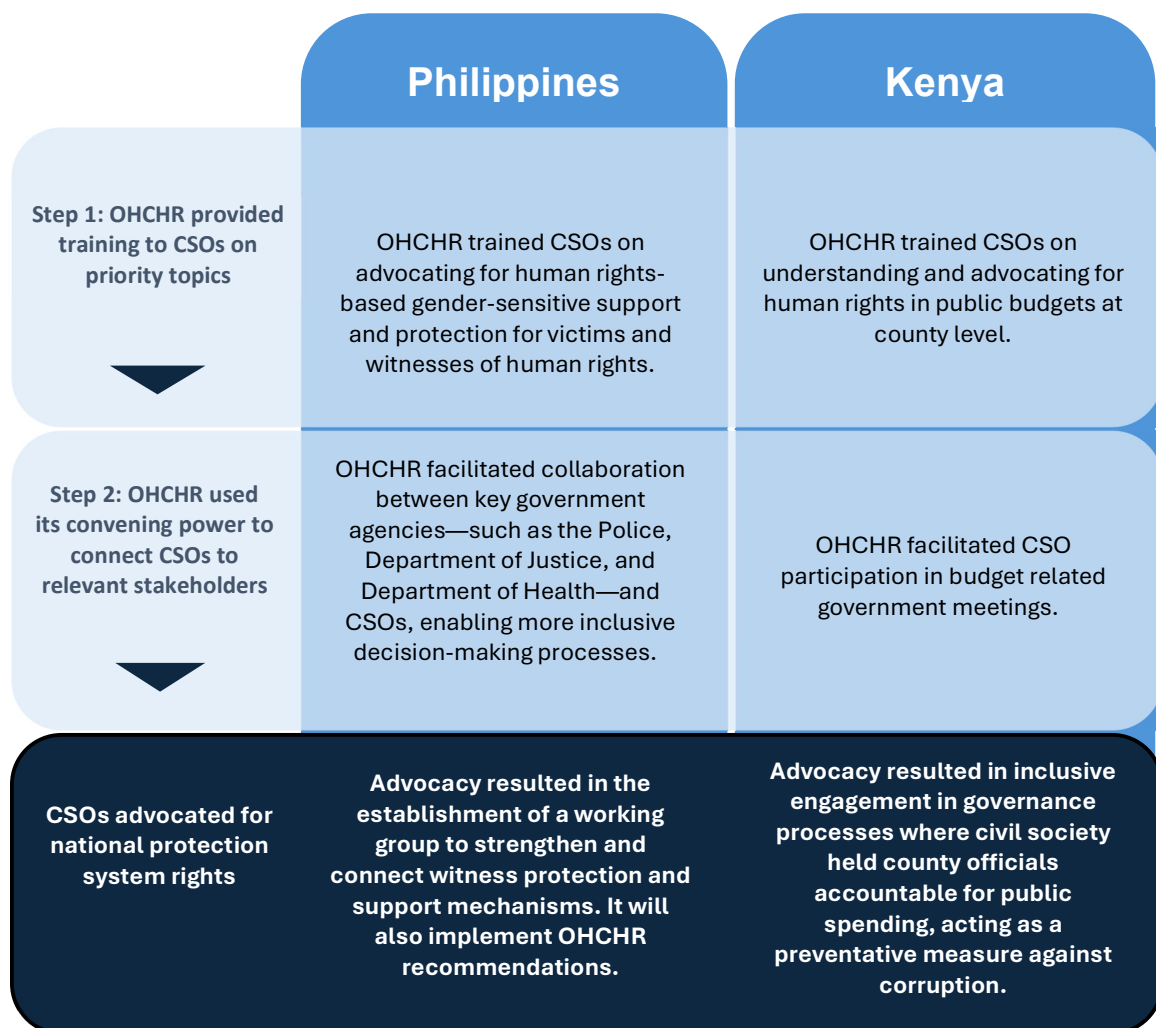
**Figure 7: OHCHR used a collaborative process to support NHRIs to improve national protection systems in Ethiopia and Panama**



*OHCHR enabled CSOs to advocate for human rights and to actively participate in decision-making processes on national protection, improving rights-holders' ability to claim their rights*

18. In all six case studies, OHCHR enhanced the capacity of CSOs and leveraged its convening power to facilitate meaningful connections between CSOs, government officials and other stakeholders. These connections enabled CSOs to effectively advocate for the rights of their constituents. Figure 8 provides examples from the Philippines and Kenya of how this approach enabled CSOs to advocate for their national protection system rights. A frequently cited enabler of this approach was OHCHR's reputation as a trusted expert and independent honest broker between government and civil society.

**Figure 8: OHCHR supported CSOs in the Philippines and Kenya to more effectively advocate for national protection systems**



19. At the same time, OHCHR effectively assisted CSOs to safeguard freedoms, for both the CSOs and their constituents, with ad hoc support to their advocacy efforts when facing human rights challenges. For example, OHCHR convened working groups in El Salvador bringing together government officials, CSOs and journalists to address penal code reforms, and in Kenya, it advocated for CSO rights and provided evidence to assert their right to assemble.

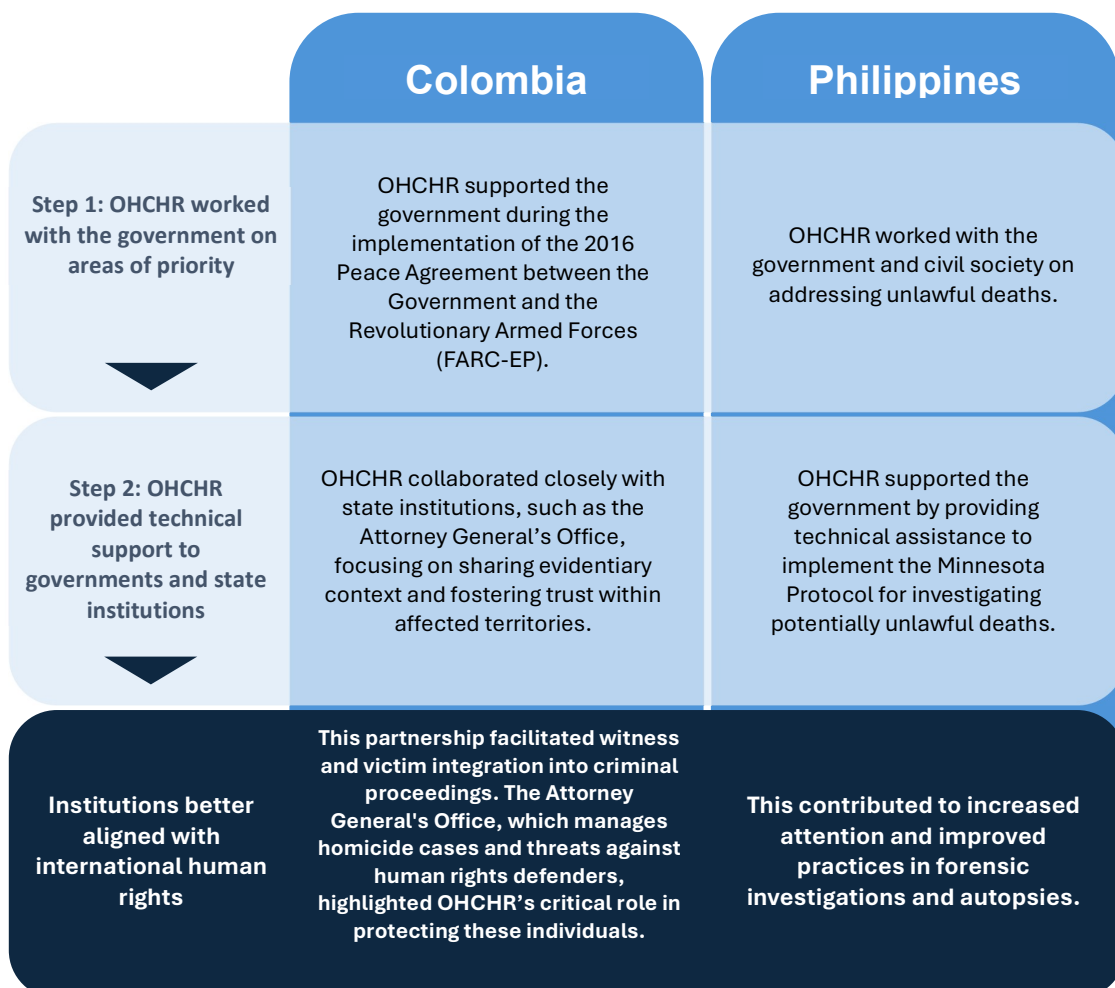


*OHCHR capacity building contributed to governments and state institutions aligning national protection systems with international human rights standards and helped duty bearers to comply with their obligations*

20. Through its technical expertise and capacity building work, OHCHR strengthened government institutional capacities and contributed to more effective human rights implementation. Among surveyed government officials, 83.3 per cent reported that OHCHR had significantly enhanced their understanding of human rights, thereby improving their ability to fulfill their obligations as duty bearers. Meanwhile, 60.1 per cent reported that OHCHR had a positive impact on building human rights institutions in their countries. Government officials, UNCTs and donors interviewed consistently appreciated OHCHR technical advice and capacity building in the five case studies where it had access to the government.

21. The primary intervention model OHCHR used for strengthening state institutions, was by providing technical assistance in priority areas identified by governments or civil society. Figure 9 illustrates the effectiveness of this approach with examples from two case studies. The ability of OHCHR country leadership to identify and/or create political opportunities for addressing human rights concerns while fostering constructive engagement with governments enabled OHCHR to effectively pursue this approach in case studies where they had access to the government.

**Figure 9: OHCHR worked with governments to improve institutional capacity**

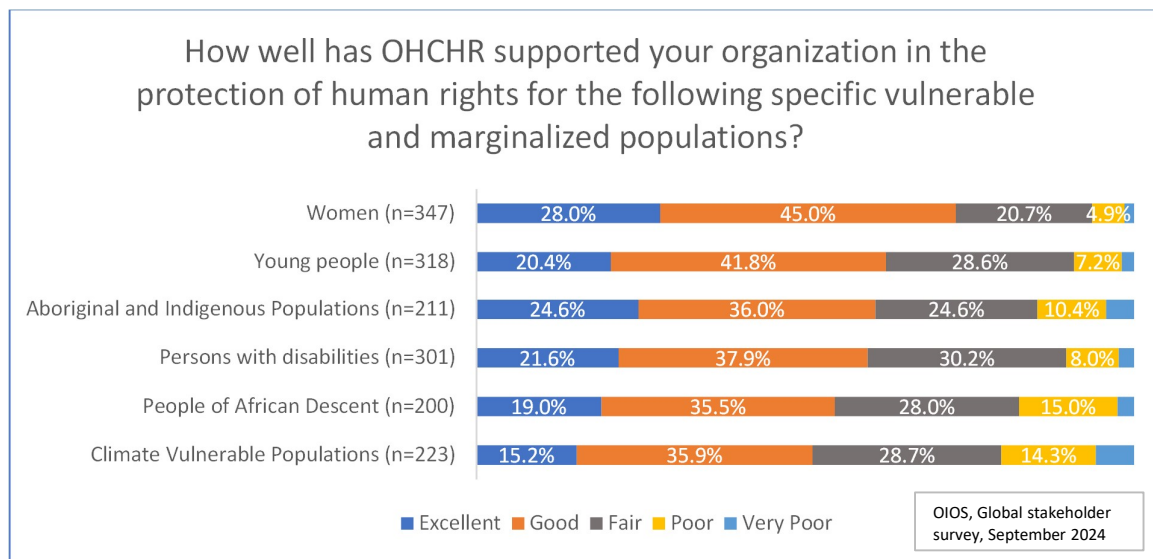




*OHCHR effectively mainstreamed the inclusion of marginalized and vulnerable groups for support in national protection systems, though progress for persons with disabilities and climate-vulnerable populations remained in the early stages*

22. OHCHR demonstrated strong commitment to mainstreaming the human rights concerns of marginalized and vulnerable populations across its programming. It was particularly effective in addressing women’s rights. OHCHR’s mainstreaming of women’s rights was commended by all stakeholder groups across case studies. As highlighted in Figure 10, surveyed stakeholders rated OHCHR’s programming highly for its attention to the rights of women, young people and indigenous populations.

**Figure 10: The majority of surveyed stakeholders rated OHCHR support to the protection of human rights for marginalized populations positively**



23. The availability of expertise enabled the successful mainstreaming of human rights. Women’s rights, in particular, were well supported thematically by the Women’s Human Rights and Gender Section of TESPRDD. This section consists of 24 global staff members (with 4 outposted gender advisors to regional offices) and has institutional mechanisms at its disposal, like the Gender Accreditation Program. By contrast, there were only two staff in headquarters responsible for providing thematic advice on disability inclusion, covering both global disability inclusion mainstreaming and support to country-level field offices. This has resulted in less systematic support and accessibility gaps, that were identified and observed during capacity-building workshops. For example, in Kenya, stakeholders reported accessibility and accommodation challenges for meetings. In Colombia, stakeholders and staff noted that while disability issues were included in planning, they were largely absent in implementation.

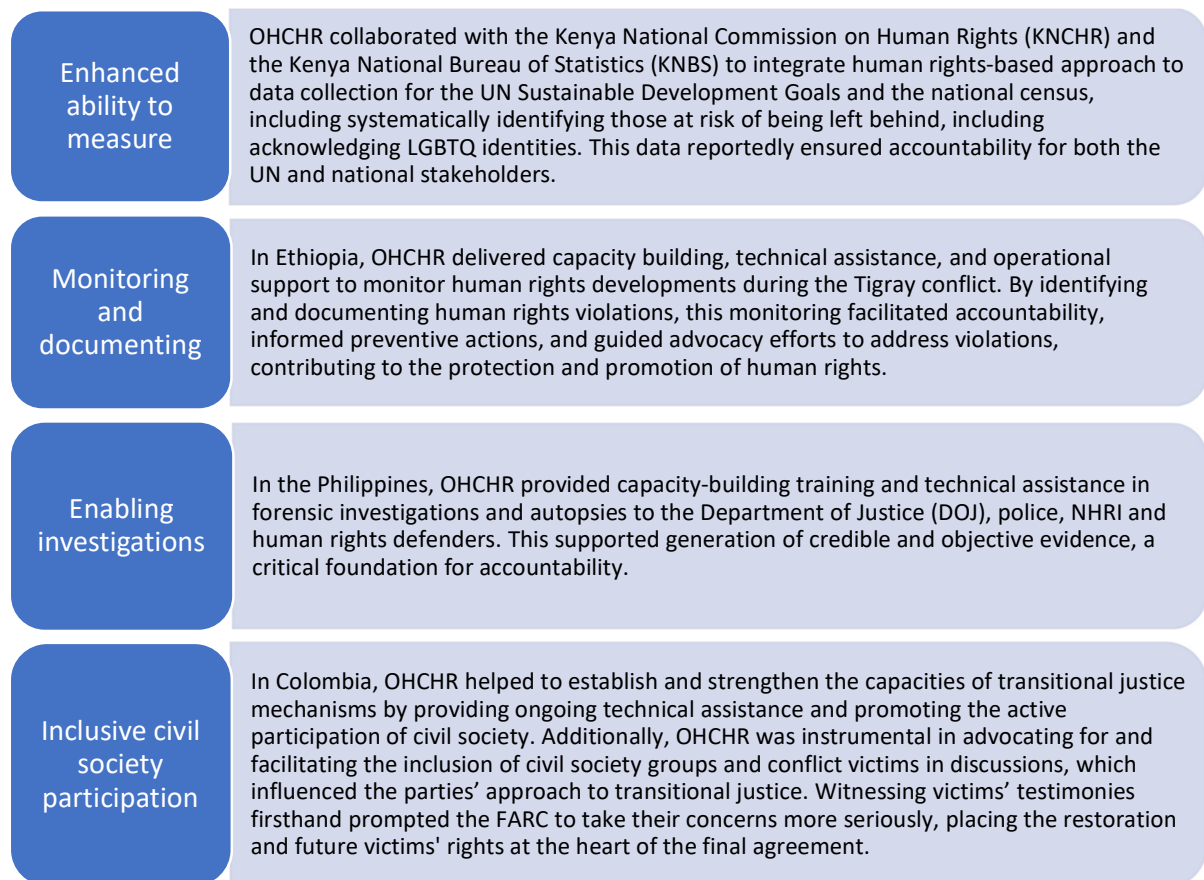
24. Meanwhile, other marginalized groups, such as climate-vulnerable populations, often required context-specific responses. Notable successes were observed in Panama and Colombia, where OHCHR supported environmental human rights defenders and communities affected by climate change, particularly through promoting the Escazú Agreement and supporting indigenous peoples at the forefront of environmental protection.

### C. OHCHR contributed to increased accountability and policy development, and improved national laws that protect and promote human rights

#### *OHCHR enhanced accountability by working with governments and NHRIs to improve their ability to measure, monitor and investigate*

25. OHCHR worked well with governments to enhance accountability for human rights. Among surveyed stakeholders, 61.5 per cent gave an excellent or good rating of OHCHR ability to enhance the states' capacity to create legal frameworks, public policies and institutions to protect against and combat human rights violations. Stakeholders in all five case studies with access to government<sup>3</sup> noted that OHCHR had strengthened state and NHRI capacities to create protection systems and accountability mechanisms to monitor, investigate and redress human rights violations. Furthermore, in three case studies, OHCHR robust monitoring data combined with its technical understanding of human rights law helped to ensure accountability in cases that would otherwise have been overlooked. Figure 11 provides examples of the institutional impact of OHCHR support on enhancing accountability.

**Figure 11: OHCHR enhanced duty-bearer institutional accountability for national protection**

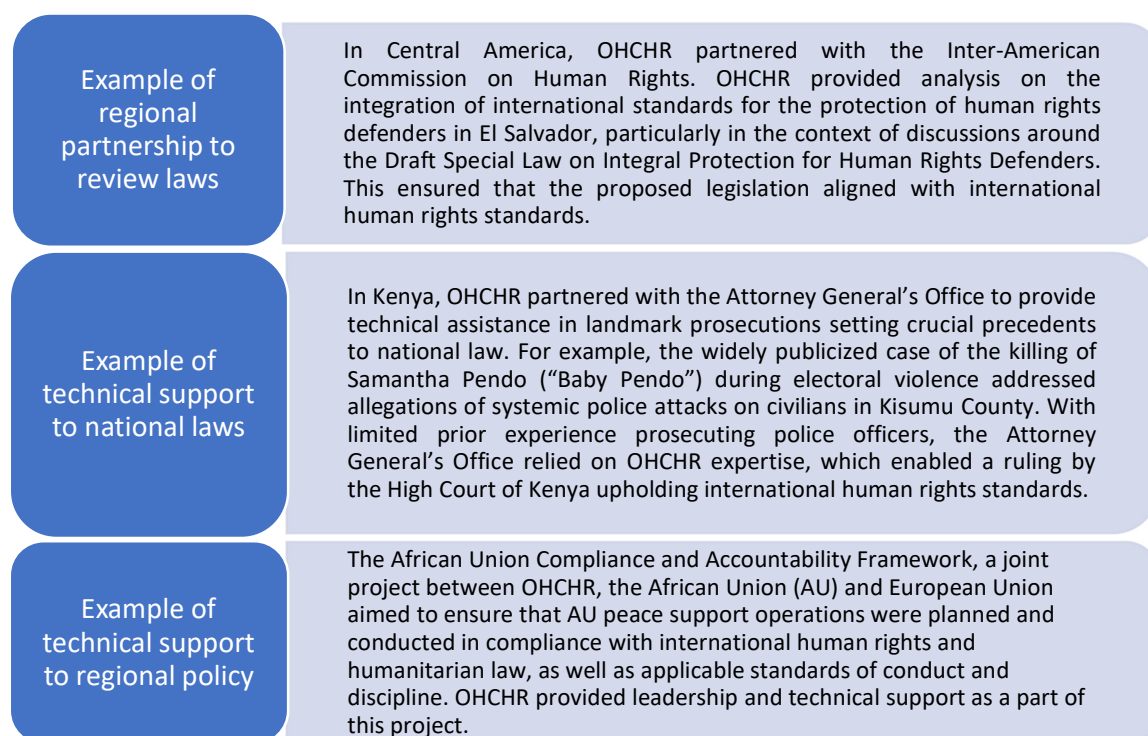


<sup>3</sup> The five case studies are all except for Syria, which does not have an NHRI and did not grant OHCHR access to government officials.

*OHCHR supported governments and state institutions in creating laws, policies and institutions that were in line with international human rights laws and norms through advisory services and technical support*

26. OHCHR contributed to changes to national laws and regional policies through technical support and establishing partnerships with regional actors. Review of the Performance Monitoring System (PMS) data for the Case Study presences found 48 examples of OHCHR influencing changes to policies, strategies, guidelines, and laws at national and regional levels. This was corroborated in five of six field presence case studies, where OHCHR contributed to changes in laws and related processes to be more aligned with international human rights law. Figure 12 illustrates examples from different case studies.

**Figure 12: OHCHR contributed to aligning regional and national legal practices with international human rights law**

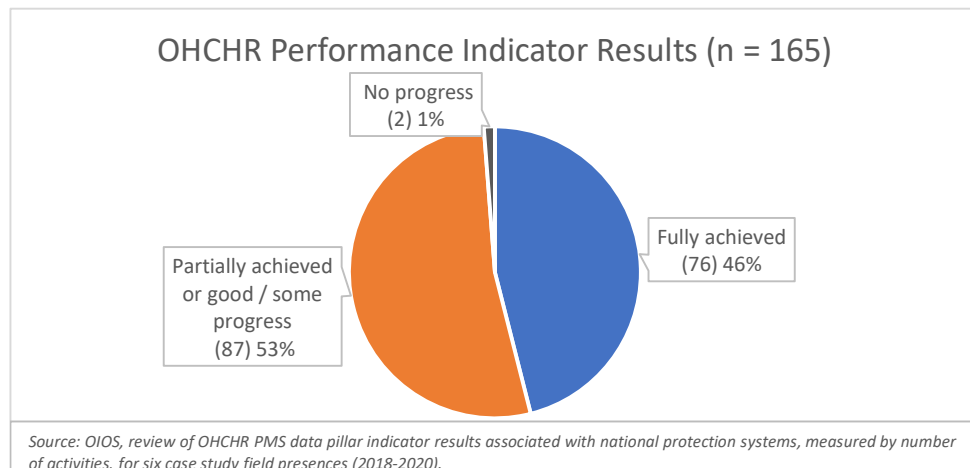


**D. The full realization of protecting human rights for all was hindered by challenging country contexts, the corresponding human rights challenges that exceeded OHCHR resources and capacity to respond, and a lack of long-term strategies at the country level**

*OHCHR performance data revealed that not all result indicators had been fully achieved*

27. Even with the progress that OHCHR has made towards national protection system outcomes discussed above, OHCHR Performance Monitoring System data showed that the Office was not fully achieving its intended results for national protection systems in the six case studies. This data is presented in Figure 13 below. OHCHR reported that for over half (54 per cent) its performance indicators related to national protection systems, results were not fully achieved.

**Figure 13: OHCHR performance reporting showed challenges in fully achieving intended results related to national protection systems**



***Gaps in OHCHR support were often due to challenging country contexts where the scale of need exceeded OHCHR capacity and resources***

28. The achievement of longer-term sustainable human rights outcomes has been hindered by protracted challenging country contexts. Issues observed across case studies included: armed conflicts, targeted attacks on human rights defenders, turnover of government staff that halted progress and continuity, and political challenges preventing engagements within country borders.
29. Confronted with these largescale human rights challenges, OHCHR lacked the capacity and resources to fully meet the associated needs. In all case studies, staff and stakeholders interviewed reported that OHCHR teams faced significant demands that exceeded their capacity to fully respond. OHCHR staff surveyed cited limited budget and funding (66.4 per cent) and team size and capacity (56.4 per cent) as significant hindering factors to effective operations. Staff and stakeholders interviewed across all case studies further attributed gaps in support to access and resource constraints. Furthermore, the case studies illustrated how resource constraints resulted in gaps in OHCHR’s geographical coverage, thematic coverage and depth of engagement on the ground, which hindered its ability to comprehensively meet the needs of affected populations. Figure 14 below provides examples of these gaps.

**Figure 14: OHCHR had gaps in access, geographic coverage, thematic coverage and depth of engagement**






***Lack of predictable funding and reliance on short-term projects hindered the development of longer-term engagement and sustained impact***

30. The OHCHR reliance on extrabudgetary funding posed significant challenges to sustaining its field operations and addressing human rights needs effectively. In the 2023 budget, 89 per cent of field office funding and 46 per cent of headquarters funding relied on extrabudgetary resources, which were often insecure and short term. Notably, extrabudgetary budget allocations for advisory services, technical cooperation and field activities (Subprogramme 3) fluctuated, with year-to-year changes reaching as high as 25.1 per cent. OHCHR field presences consistently reported having to prioritize short-term projects over longer-term strategies; this in turn hampered the ability of the Office to respond to human rights’ needs comprehensively and strategically. Across all six case studies, extrabudgetary funding was often earmarked, further constraining activities and curtailing the flexibility needed for sustained and strategic engagements with beneficiaries and stakeholders. This funding constraint also limited OHCHR’s ability to respond effectively to unpredictable and high-risk human rights situations. Stakeholders frequently emphasized the detrimental impact of insecure and earmarked funding on OHCHR’s operational agility and long-term planning. The

interview quotes in Box 2 illustrate common concerns of staff, government and donors regarding the challenges posed by the lack of predictable funding.

**Box 2: OHCHR field presences struggled with short-term project-based funding**

<p>OHCHR staff perspective</p>  <p>•OHCHR was activity-based due to earmarked funding: <i>“I think we should move away from the activity-based work. A lot of money is earmarked and then they cannot consult people on anything. I think we need to take a step back and speak with people first, and then try to fundraise.”</i></p>	<p>Government perspective</p>  <p>•Stakeholders sought longer term commitments from OHCHR: <i>“OHCHR gap is planning. They tell us last minute that they can do a meeting ... Our fear is what happens when OHCHR is not there.”</i></p>	<p>Donor perspective</p>  <p>•Donors sought a clear strategy: <i>“There needs to be a strategy, and donors need to be a part of the consultation. Not a lot of work is needed to maintain a donor like [redacted], but it is at risk. We need to have good stories to tell.”</i></p>
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31. The OHCHR Management Plan (OMP) at OHCHR sets out strategies for global results for four years, to be implemented in the work planning at country level. However, the lack of consistent quality and utility in long-term country strategies, particularly in the context of short-term funding models, as well as insufficient planning with CSO, government and donor stakeholders, hindered progress in strengthening national protection systems. Figure 15 confirms that staff and stakeholders interviewed in the case studies frequently referred to the need to strengthen strategic planning and predictable funding to support medium to long term strategies.

**Figure 15: The most frequently identified recommendations for improving sustainability of results were strengthened strategic planning and more and stable funding**



32. The annual work planning process, built around the OHCHR Management Plan (OMP) and Performance Monitoring System (PMS), informed some country strategies but did not reflect a longer-term strategy for each country. Staff held mixed views on the utility of the OMP process and the PMS for longer term planning and fundraising. Among surveyed staff, only 39.9 per cent characterized PMS as excellent or good for enabling their work, and only 49.1 per cent said that the OMP was excellent or good for enabling their work. Interviewed OHCHR staff in country offices and headquarters suggested that discussions on practical and impactful longer-term strategies for field offices remained nascent. They believed that the existing strategies were insufficient to communicate scenarios, priorities and long-term plans with stakeholders, including donors. Review of existing strategies showed a focus on short-term results, rather than longer-term strategic thinking on engagement and outcomes. Additionally, while there were similar and interconnected human rights issues in each region, OHCHR lacked unified regional strategies to address these common challenges.

**E. Although there were some good practices to build on, OHCHR organizational structures, ways of working, and internal policies did not optimally enable delivery of thematic and operational support to national protection systems at the field level**

*OHCHR offices had several organizational practices, including high-quality thematic support to field presences, that facilitated the support to national protection systems*

33. Case studies of OHCHR field presences revealed several features of the OHCHR organizational structure that facilitated support to national protection systems and represented good practices upon which to build. These included:

- a) **Clear regional/country office roles:** In both regional offices visited, staff appreciated efforts by management to clarify country versus regional multi-country office roles. This made it easier to focus the work and respond to needs and was important to UN partners as well. For example, RC and UNCT stakeholders asked that it be made clear to them who would be their focal points for various countries, which was not always clear.
- b) **Thematic staff with links to region and headquarters:** In case studies of the regional multi-country offices ROCA-DR and EARO and country presences of Kenya and Colombia, where thematic expertise was placed in the office/region, staff were able to better use that support and felt that the guidance and materials developed were relevant to them in these areas. The dual reporting links that TESPRDD and CTMD staff in the regions had to headquarters and to country/regional level leadership worked well and were considered by these staff and colleagues to be a good practice.
- c) **Connecting services to the regions:** Overall, the desk officer system for connecting OHCHR headquarters and field was seen positively, especially where desk officers were closer to the time zone of the regions they support. There were however concerns among staff over the clarity of the role, how much information should optimally flow through a desk officer and under which circumstances desk officers should be reached or not. For example, interviewed field staff noted instances where they reached out directly to colleagues in Geneva and New York for thematic support or to enhance coordination with the UN system.

34. Overall, the quality of thematic support from HQ divisions and the field was generally good. Globally, 61.7 per cent of field presence staff surveyed reported that thematic support from



headquarters helped them to carry out their national protection system activities, and many staff interviewed in both headquarters and the field concurred. Among surveyed staff, just over half of those who received thematic support for their national protection work rated the support as excellent or good from TESPRDD (52.1 per cent), CTMD (57.9 per cent) and FOTCD (50.1 per cent). Figure 16 highlights examples of thematic and field collaboration in four areas of support to national protection systems.

**Figure 16: Examples of thematic expertise sections support to field presences**

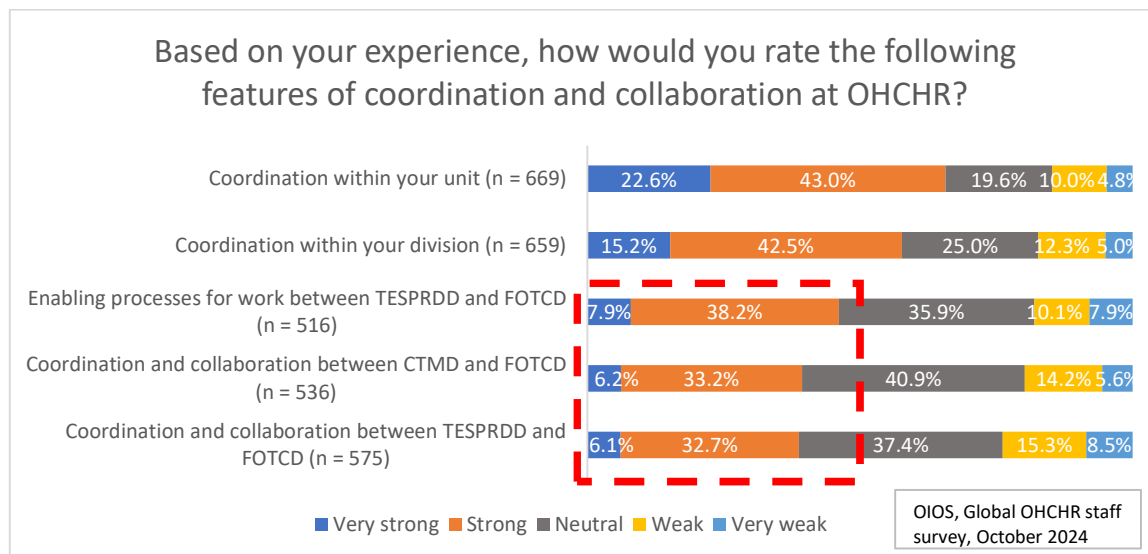
<p>UPR and treaty body reporting</p>	<p>In RO-CADR and EARO regional offices, training and technical advice from Special Procedures Branch of TESPRDD was instrumental in their support to governments and CSO stakeholders on treaty body reporting. For example, OHCHR supported Nicaraguan civil society women's groups to produce reports to treaty bodies. In another example, OHCHR organized and led the UN support on the 2023 UPR in Ethiopia with support from CTMD, including financial support for consultations, delivering technical training workshops, organizing government ministries to work together.</p>
<p>Monitoring support and training of NHRI</p>	<p>In Colombia, Panama, Ethiopia, and Kenya field presences, the TESPRDD Methodology Education and Training Section provided training and guidance both virtually and in person to NHRI jointly with the OHCHR country or regional team. The colleagues in headquarters were said to have been very responsive to country needs.</p>
<p>Thematic advice on demand</p>	<p>All OHCHR field office case studies received support from thematic sections on an ad hoc basis. For example, in Ethiopia and Colombia the Rule of Law Section in TESPRDD reviewed court decisions and draft legislation with human rights implications. In Syria, the CSO consultations were supported by the gender accreditation section in Women's Human Rights and Gender Section.</p>
<p>Programme delivery support</p>	<p>In both Philippines and Syria case studies, HQ worked with the country team or HRA to deliver a specific programme. In the Philippines, this included creation of a joint HQ and field programming committee, which was a good practice.</p>

*Nevertheless, staff reported larger systematic challenges in working between divisions*

35. Despite the good practices described above, the internal coordination between OHCHR divisions based in headquarters was generally weak, which negatively impacted the alignment of thematic work with national protection needs in field locations. This limited use of thematic support in their national protection systems work. As shown in Figure 17, fewer than half (38 to 46 per cent) of staff reported very strong or strong collaboration between OHCHR thematic and field divisions. OHCHR's internal synthesis of evaluations from 2018 to 2023 corroborated that enhancing internal coherence within the office remained a key area for improvement.



**Figure 17: Fewer than half of surveyed OHCHR staff rated inter-divisional coordination and collaboration positively**



36. The divisions faced several organizational challenges coordinating between them. As identified by FOTCD field staff and headquarters TESPRDD staff interviewed, opportunities to improve collaboration between the field and headquarters on thematic support included addressing:

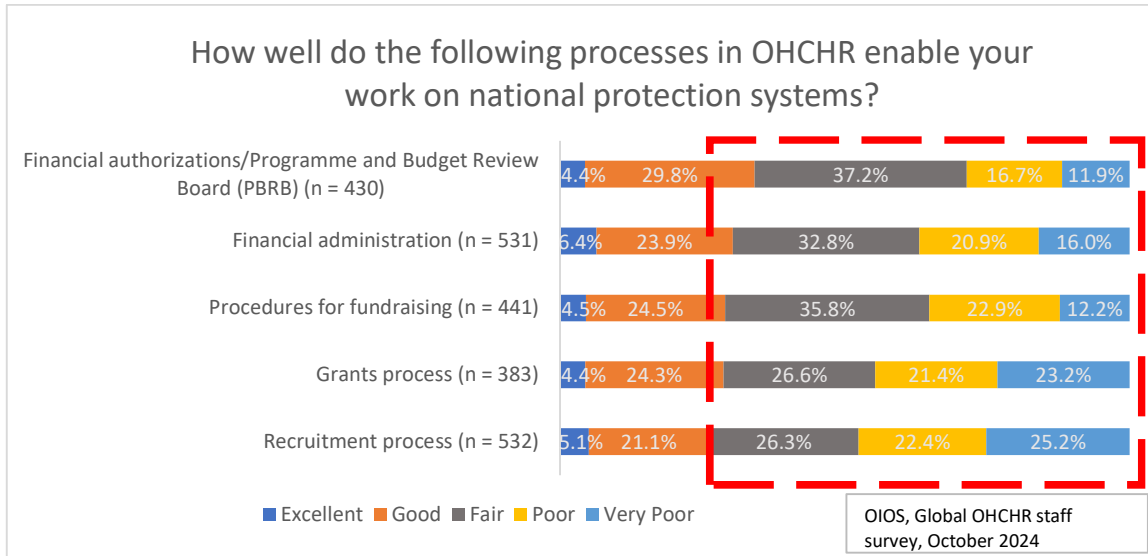
- a) **Insufficient consultation with the field, and unavailability of niche expertise:** Field staff in all case studies suggested improving the manner and frequency of consultation on thematic priorities between headquarters TESPRDD and field staff in FOTCD. Some staff interviewed also noted that it took a long time for headquarters teams to develop guidance on new issues, often speaking generally about the time between when an issue became important and when guidance related to it was developed. In each office there were examples of request for expertise that could not be met, usually due to resource constraints. As one field staff member explained, *“we don’t know those [thematic] programmes well, and they are not coordinated with the regions.”*
- b) **Difficulty sensitizing to local realities:** In four case studies, challenges were identified with developing thematic content that was sufficiently sensitized to local conditions, either in terms of language (for example in Amharic, Arabic or Spanish), relationships with governments in the region, and/or where the expertise on the issue was possibly stronger in the region than in headquarters.

*OHCHR staff experienced administrative difficulties delivering field-based support within the Office’s policies, processes and organizational structures, and broadly supported OE 2.0 proposals to address these challenges*

37. Regarding administrative policies and processes, the highly centralized internal administrative processes at OHCHR were widely experienced, by both headquarters and field staff, as often not well suited to delivering field-based support for strengthening national protection systems. This challenge was consistently observed in the case studies and in the global staff survey where 60.6 per cent of staff reported that internal processes hindered OHCHR’s national protection systems

work. OHCHR’s own internal evaluations from 2018-2023<sup>4</sup> corroborated this. Similarly, 51.1 per cent of staff surveyed reported that applicable policies related to their work either sometimes or never reflected real needs. Figure 18 shows the ratings of specific internal processes, which were perceived by at least two-thirds (65.8 per cent) of staff as only fair to poor at enabling their work.

**Figure 18: OHCHR staff surveyed were more likely to rate internal processes as fair to poor rather than excellent or good**



38. Furthermore, the case studies provided specific examples of impediments to programme delivery experienced by OHCHR field presences due to centralized administrative processes. These are described further below:

- a) **Overly centralized financial administration:** A relatively small number of staff in headquarters oversaw the finances of more than 90 field presences, therefore at times creating bottlenecks. Field staff interviewed in all case studies frequently mentioned delayed delivering due to the limited delegation of authority to their offices and the prolonged financial processes requiring back and forth with headquarters. This reportedly contributed to an inability to host workshops in a timely manner, late payments for participants, and lengthy recruitment processes. In the adjacent quote, a field office staff interviewed explained the impact of this on timeliness of their work.

Centralized financial administration

• “Very centralized on operational issues like finance and human resources, this is in Geneva and it can take a lot of time and we need to act fast.” - OHCHR staff

<sup>4</sup> This was corroborated by the OHCHR Evaluation Meta Synthesis 2018-2023 which reported that financial and administrative issues remain an area to be improved, citing examples of long delays in confirmation and transfer of funds in country offices.

- b) **Complex grants administration:** Staff interviewed in the field also reported that the grants process was prohibitively complex and burdensome to administer, particularly regarding the number of steps required forgetting approvals, and then paying out the grant. This complexity hindered their ability to support CSO work on national protection systems, as illustrated in the adjacent quote.



#### Grants administration

• *“There are CSOs that are strong here and we should be able to support them with grants, but it's so difficult to use.” - OHCHR staff*

- c) **Lengthy and unclear report clearance:** Additionally, processes for clearing reports were described by field staff and partners interviewed as time consuming, unclear and unpredictable. Some raised concerns that long delays risked diminishing influence of reports, as illustrated by the adjacent staff member quote.



#### Report clearances

• *“In Geneva it was sent to person 'a' and then 'b' and it took over 3 months, [delays] could have taken away a lot of our position of influence.” - OHCHR staff*

- d) **Challenges with coordinating fundraising:** Staff and donors interviewed identified challenges with both coordination of fundraising between headquarters and the field; and expertise and staff time needed to properly fundraise at country and regional levels. One staff member in the adjacent quote, explains the challenges of coordinating fundraising, and the expertise needed. Regional staff noted a particular challenge with generating donor interest in fundraising for regional activities.



#### Fundraising

• *“We are being asked to do more fundraising at field level but expertise is lacking so in this area there could be more support and this could benefit the whole of OHCHR.” - OHCHR staff*

39. In terms of OHCHR organizational structure, the following features hindered support to national protection systems:

- a) **Small teams with too many functions:** Among surveyed staff, 56.4 per cent reported that the size and capacity of the team hindered their national protection systems work. This was most pronounced among staff working as human rights advisors to UNCT (73.2 per cent), thematic staff in Headquarters (67.9 per cent) and in regional offices (62.7 per cent). Staff in all field presences described the workload as intense. This was corroborated by UNCT members and donors' observations of OHCHR. Meanwhile, interviewed headquarters and regional office staff were spread across too many jurisdictions covering multiple thematic responsibilities and several countries.
- b) **Decision-making and support far removed from the region:** A common challenge across field presences was having limited decision-making authority in the region or country, as well as the diverse reporting lines for different OHCHR field presence configurations. While multi-country offices were part of the regional office, country offices reported to headquarters, and HRA offices reported to regional offices and the resident coordinator. In each case study, staff and donors interviewed noted that this inconsistent structure hindered effective expertise

deployment, weakened collaboration on shared regional issues, and complicated fundraising efforts. Respondents suggested that the regional director structure could be moved closer to the regions and the point of delivery to improve decision-making support.

40. By end of 2024, aware of the challenges, OHCHR assessed proposals for organizational changes emerging from its Organizational Effectiveness 2.0 (OE 2.0) study conducted during 2023 to improve the Office's effectiveness. The level of awareness of the specific proposals discussed varied widely among staff interviewed in the field. They often requested to be more involved and consulted in decisions or changes. Nevertheless, nearly all field and headquarters staff interviewed expressed support for the overarching conclusions and proposals of OE 2.0. They emphasized the importance of two key areas for improvement:

- a) **Streamlining administration to improve programme delivery**, especially in the areas noted in paras 37 to 39 above, to align OHCHR processes with its field facing needs and enhance programme implementation.
- b) **Increasing thematic and administrative capacities of the regional offices** to bring decision-making closer to the point of delivery, as called for by the Secretary-General management reforms (A/72/492),<sup>5</sup> and by providing more backstopping on administration, fundraising and thematic expertise to country offices. As one staff member in headquarters explained, *"the proposal makes sense to have thematic expertise in the field ... but the primary challenge is that there are not enough people in the thematic areas and that it does not include country context for them to be able to relate easily."*

## **F. With some constraints, OHCHR has collaborated well with and informed the work of United Nations Country Teams**

*OHCHR played a pivotal role in mainstreaming human rights within UNCTs, contributing data and expertise that informed UNSDCF and other UN programming*

41. OHCHR contributed critical data and expertise to mainstreaming human rights in UNCTs. Among stakeholders surveyed, 81 per cent agreed that there was good collaboration between OHCHR and other UN entities. Also, across all six case studies, most interviewed OHCHR staff, RCs, and UNCT members reported that OHCHR adequately coordinated its headquarters and country-level activities with UNCT members to deliver programmatic outcomes. RCs and UNCT staff interviewed highly valued OHCHR for providing data and expertise to UNCT programming. Three main areas where OHCHR collaboration was particularly impactful included:

- a) **Supporting UNSDCF and CCA processes:** In all six case studies, OHCHR mainstreamed human rights within the UNCT planning process by: providing human rights-based training to UNCT members; liaising with government and civil society stakeholders; and co-leading UNSDCF result groups. RC and UNCT members consistently appreciated OHCHR high-quality contributions; as explained by one RC, *"I have support from the human rights advisor directly to me. It's a real lifeline to have that type of support in the country."*

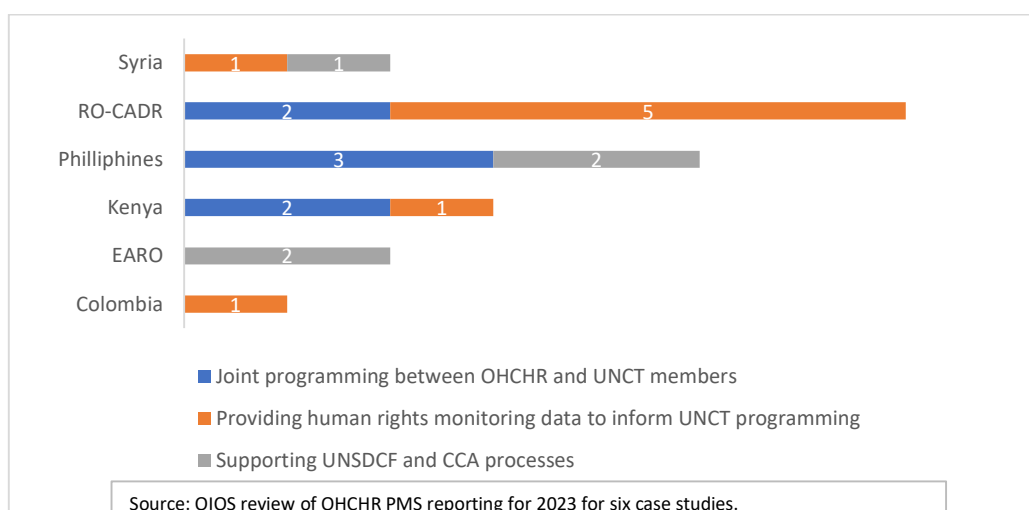
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<sup>5</sup> 27 Sept 2024, United Nations, "Shifting the management paradigm in the United Nations: ensuring a better future for all", p. 4

- b) **Providing human rights monitoring data to inform UNCT programming:** UNCT members reported using data and information from OHCHR monitoring activities and early warning networks of human rights defenders. In three case studies, OHCHR teams routinely uncovered human rights violations and brought these issues to the attention of other UN entities with relevant mandates (e.g., humanitarian context, displaced persons, etc.), thus enabling targeted mitigation action.
- c) **Joint programming between OHCHR and UNCT members:** In all six case studies, OHCHR collaborated well with UNCT and other UN entities on joint programmes, often under the coordination of the RC. This collaboration included capacity building initiatives, support to joint projects, and support to regional partnerships.

42. Furthermore, a review of OHCHR performance monitoring system data identified 20 activities across the six case studies where OHCHR reported having collaborated with UNCT members and other UN entities. Figure 19 below highlights three main areas where this collaboration occurred.

**Figure 19: OHCHR engaged in multiple collaborations with UNCTs in three main areas**



**OHCHR did, however, face some operational constraints on collaborating with other UN entities**

43. While the Secretary General’s Agenda for Protection aims for a joined-up systemwide approach to protection by ensuring that all UN entities understand their role in promoting human rights protection<sup>6</sup>, the OHCHR ability to collaborate with other UN entities was sometimes hindered by operational constraints. Some interviewed RC and UNCT members, across case studies, identified areas where OHCHR could improve collaboration with other UN entities, including:

- a) **Some instances of incoherent advice** from OHCHR headquarters and/or regional and country levels to RC/UNCT. For example, in one case study, differences in advice between the regional office and the field on the approach to stakeholder consultation stalled the quality control review of UNSDCF. In another example, statements made by OHCHR headquarters conflicted with the RC and UNCT political strategy in the country. As one RC explained, *“They may not be unified or coherent within OHCHR because when the publication that I talked about was*

<sup>6</sup> United Nations Agenda for Protection, p.15-17

*published, this took the OHCHR country office by surprise, so I think they should better coordinate.”*

- b) **Limited capacity to respond to requests for support.** In three case studies, UNCT members and RCs provided examples of OHCHR not being able to respond to requests for advice or joint programming due to resource constraints. As one RC/UNCT member explained, *“One disadvantage is that we don’t have 100% of [OHCHR] time. We are very specific with them because they are not full time. When we ask and say this is important and please help, they do it.”*
- c) **Slow financial and administrative processes for delivering joint programming:** In four case studies, RC and UNCT members noted financial and administrative difficulties working with OHCHR. For example, delayed payments to partners due to the Office’s centralized financial structure (discussed in para 38) requiring approval from Geneva. UN partners were concerned about OHCHR’s ability to spend joint project budgets due to their slow administrative processes. As one UNCT partner noted, *“For us in the projects we do with OHCHR, we get money from the donor and transfer to the headquarters. It slows down country office too much in terms of reporting. It could also affect our credibility.”*
- d) **Competing UN entity priorities:** OHCHR staff interviewed reported that complex political situations created tension for UNCT colleagues between delivering their aid programmes and collaborating with OHCHR. As one staff explained, OHCHR *“points the finger where it hurts the states and does not provide the same material or developmental support that other UN agencies provide.”* In another example, RC and UNCT staff interviewed were concerned over coordination and overlapping roles with another UN entity with a similar monitoring mandate.

## IV. Conclusion

- 44. In 2023, the United Nations commemorated 75 years of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and 30 years since the Vienna Declaration that created OHCHR. The Office was originally designed for establishing an ecosystem of laws and structures to promote human rights, including the Human Rights Council and treaty bodies, and to strengthen the human rights of all populations. While there has been much progress in this regard, the world is also facing complex and growing human rights challenges, including, in the High Commissioner’s own words, *“multiplying and intensifying conflicts... poverty and inequalities [that] remain at levels not seen in a generation, [and] backsliding on many human rights commitments, including with respect to gender and civic space.”*<sup>7</sup>
- 45. To address challenges in meeting the human rights protection needs of countries, OHCHR has evolved and diversified its support over time to increase its focus on delivering results at the country level, with close to half of its staff now based in 95 field presences. However, its capacity to operate at country level is severely constrained by both resource and organizational challenges for optimizing and sustaining its field facing offices; these include insufficient expertise as well as administrative and management systems that are currently not well designed to facilitate the agility needed from a field-based organization.

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<sup>7</sup> [OHCHR-OMP-2024-2027](#), p.3

## V. Recommendations

46. OIOS makes the following four important recommendations, accepted by OHCHR, to improve its support to national protection outcomes at the country level:

47. **Recommendation 1 (Results A, B, C and D):**

**OHCHR should build upon its planning processes to both develop where absent or strengthen existing medium to longer term programmatic strategies at country and regional levels.** These country strategies, which should exist for all countries, should inform the creation of and be informed by overall regional strategies to address shared issues within each region, including enhanced engagement with intergovernmental bodies, and relevant OHCHR priorities. The country and regional strategies should also be used to direct coordinated fundraising at global, regional and country levels.

These strategies would ideally:

- a) Consider clear goals and opportunities for achieving sustainable improvements to national protection systems,
- b) Be based on engagement with key country stakeholders, intergovernmental bodies, UN partners, and
- c) Continue to align with broader national protection goals articulated in UNSDCF.

*Indicator of implementation: Newly developed or strengthened medium to longer term programmatic strategies for each country and region.*

48. **Recommendation 2 (Results E and F):**

**OHCHR should develop and commit to a plan with target dates to prioritize implementing administration reforms started under OE 2.0.** In doing so, OHCHR should look for opportunities to streamline administration processes and better enable headquarters and field presences work. Critical areas to consider are the centralized financial administration and limited delegation of authority pertaining to recruitment and procurement; and the complex processes for grants administration.

*Indicator of implementation: Plan of action to implement administration reforms with target dates.*

49. **Recommendation 3 (Results A, and E):**

**OHCHR should strengthen institutional links between its divisions and offices globally and at field levels by establishing platforms and systems** through which to collaborate and share information, including systematic communication and consultation between field and headquarters teams.

*Indicator of implementation: Development of platforms and systems that improve communication and collaboration between division staff.*

50. **Recommendation 4 (Results A, B, C and E):**

**OHCHR should conduct an overall regional level light needs assessment to inform decisions on the administrative, fundraising and thematic capacities of its regional offices.** The needs assessment should also determine where specialized and surge expertise is most needed to effectively support field presences in the regions.

*Indicator of implementation: Light needs assessment informing on the capacity needs for each regional office.*



## Annex 1: Response received from OHCHR

NATIONS UNIES  
DROITS DE L'HOMME  
HAUT-COMMISSARIAT



UNITED NATIONS  
HUMAN RIGHTS  
OFFICE OF THE HIGH COMMISSIONER

HAUT-COMMISSARIAT AUX DROITS DE L'HOMME • OFFICE OF THE HIGH COMMISSIONER FOR HUMAN RIGHTS  
MEMORANDUM INTERIEUR • INTEROFFICE MEMORANDUM

TO:  
A: Ms. Fatoumata Ndiaye  
Under-Secretary-General  
Office of Internal Oversight Services

DATE: 19 February 2025

FROM:  
DE: Volker Türk  
High Commissioner for Human Rights

SUBJECT:  
OBJET: **Report of the Office of Internal Oversight Services (OIOS) on the evaluation of the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights's (OHCHR) contributions to protecting and promoting human rights through strengthening national protection systems at the country level**

1. In response to your memorandum of 28 January 2025, I am pleased to acknowledge the receipt of the evaluation report mentioned above.
2. OHCHR welcomes the report's findings and appreciates the feedback from stakeholders on the relevance and effectiveness of the Office's particular comparative advantages in supporting national protection systems. We also welcome findings on the importance of the Office's contribution to mainstreaming human rights within United Nations Country Teams that informed the UN Sustainable Development Cooperation Frameworks and other UN programming. We further appreciate the acknowledgement of the complex environments in which our Office operates, noting that our ability to operate at national level is often constrained by resource and capacity gaps.
3. I would highlight that important efforts are already underway in the areas of organisational challenges identified in the report. In 2024, the Office embarked on the implementation of a comprehensive organisational change management programme. The expected outcome is for OHCHR to be restructured and better positioned to lead the UN system-wide work on human rights more efficiently and effectively. The organisational change programme encompasses global operations, not only in terms of structure but also with respect to working culture, leadership models, partnerships and vision. It further encompasses our commitment to integrating the Secretary-General's UN 2.0 Quintet for Change and continuing the decentralisation efforts to facilitate greater agility and responsiveness to the demands of Member States.
4. On behalf of the Office, I accept the four recommendations in the report, and we will shortly be presenting an action plan for implementing them.
5. Many thanks to you and the evaluation team for their collaborative engagement throughout the course of this evaluation process.