

State channeling much of aid via UN Office for Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs.

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The deep end of the OCHA

Let's go back to the present, where U.S. humanitarian funds are flowing, in both new — and well-tread — directions.

First thing to know about the \$2 billion that the Trump administration is channeling through the [U.N. Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs](#), or OCHA, is that the administration is not messing around in terms of scope, size, or speed.

“Surgical precision” is how one document describes deploying aid to Kenya. In this “sharply constrained funding environment,” it says, the goal is “safeguarding the essential functions of human survival, preventing system collapse, and ensuring that every dollar translates into measureable, lifesaving impact.”

As my colleague Elissa Miolene writes, the humanitarian funds are **designed to be lean, strict, fast-tracked, and time-bound**. It's “explicitly for life saving assistance” and will “target those in most severe humanitarian need, whose fate of life or death depends on a rapid response,” OCHA spokesperson **Eri Kaneko** says.

The other thing to know is that for all the vitriol the administration has hurled at large INGOs and traditional players in foreign assistance, a lot of familiar names appear on the OCHA list, including the Norwegian Refugee Council, which is expected to receive \$60.7 million; Save the Children, with \$40 million; Catholic Relief Services, with \$38 million; and Mercy Corps, with \$38 million. [Check out the story for the full list.](#)

In fact, across all 14 countries approved for funding, **local organizations are slated to receive just 13% of U.S. funding** — with U.N. agencies and INGOs receiving the lion's share.

The approach has attracted cautious optimism and plenty of skepticism.

“[The Trump administration] could have chosen to take the U.S. out of the humanitarian space, or they could've chosen a mechanism that actually is proven to work, in terms of coordinating with the humanitarian system, and that's OCHA,” says **Peter Yeo**, president of the Better World Campaign, noting that he remains hopeful this is a “decent” way forward.

Others argue that throwing the kitchen sink at OCHA is **a sign the State Department isn't capable of getting funds out the door itself**. They also point out that the **\$2 billion is a tiny fraction** of what [USAID](#) once allocated — and that while the U.S. originally positioned this funding as part of OCHA's long-standing pooling of funds from various donors, the money here would actually be tightly earmarked.

“Pooled funds are an important tool, but these aren’t functioning like pooled funds,” says **Courtney Blake**, who worked at USAID managing its relationship with OCHA. “Pooled funding should be a key component of an effective, modern US government humanitarian funding strategy. **It should not be a primary or singular vehicle** of a modern strategic U.S. funding strategy. And so in either case, it’s pretty far off the mark from what it should be, even if on the surface it looks nice.”