



# Beyond the Earthquake: Local organizations in the humanitarian response in Türkiye and Syria



Save the Children



Humanitarian  
Leadership  
Academy



# Acknowledgments

This project was carried out in collaboration with the Humanitarian Leadership Academy, part of Save the Children. The report was funded by the Disasters Emergency Committee (DEC) within the Sustainable Humanitarian Innovation for Transformation programme (SHIFT) run by the Humanitarian Leadership Academy and partners in the region. The report was prepared by NSDation Consultancy Services.

The research team would like to express sincere thanks to the HLA team, as well as the research participants for their time and contribution to the research. The views expressed in this publication are the authors' alone and are not necessarily the views of the HLA, SCUK or the DEC.

**Research Team:** Aya Yagan and Gökhan Erkutlu

# Table of Contents

<b>Executive Summary .....</b>	<b>5</b>
<b>1. Introduction.....</b>	<b>9</b>
Background .....	9
Definitions .....	10
<b>2. Research Methodology.....</b>	<b>13</b>
<b>3. Research Findings.....</b>	<b>19</b>
3.1 Local Organizations in the Earthquake Response: A Brief Snapshot .....	19
3.2 Evolution of the humanitarian landscape in response to the earthquake in Türkiye and Syria .....	21
3.3 Key trends of local organizations governance systems .....	23
3.4 Addressing evolving needs and adapting to challenges of the earthquake response.....	26
3.5 Addressing internal and external challenges.....	29
3.6 Coordination and partnership dynamics .....	32
3.7 Funding .....	39
3.8 Ways forward: challenges and opportunities.....	41
<b>4. Conclusions and Recommendations .....</b>	<b>45</b>
<b>5. Annexes.....</b>	<b>49</b>

# Acronyms

Acronym	Full Form
AFAD	Disaster and Emergency Management Presidency
BTF	Bridge to Türkiye Funds
CBOs	Community Based Organizations
CHS	Core Humanitarian Standards
CSOs	Civil Society Organizations
DEC	Disasters Emergency Committee
FCRM	Feedback and Complaint Response Mechanism
HLA	Humanitarian Leadership Academy
HR	Human Resources
IGAs	Income Generating Activities
INGO	International Non-Governmental Organization
KII	Key Informant Interview
KVKK	Turkish Personal Data Protection Authority
MHPSS	Mental Health and Psychosocial Support
NGO	Non-Governmental Organization
PSS	Psychosocial Support
PTT	Post and Telegraph Organization (Turkish)
SOPs	Standard Operating Procedures
STDV	Foundation for Support for Civil Society
TİF	Türkiye Local NGO Humanitarian Forum
TPF	Turkish Philanthropy Funds
UN	United Nations
WASH	Water Sanitation

# Executive Summary

The local humanitarian landscape in the aftermath of the 2023 Türkiye and Syria earthquake showcased a diverse and extensive network of organizations, each playing a pivotal role in the response. This network included grassroots volunteer groups, community-based organizations (CBOs), civil society organizations (CSOs), and non-governmental organizations (NGOs). Alongside these local actors, international non-governmental organizations (INGOs) and United Nations (UN) agencies also played a critical role in the overall response, contributing resources, technical expertise, and large-scale operational support. Together, these entities represented a mosaic of efforts, from informal, community-driven initiatives to formalized organizations with significant operational capacity.

In Syria, Syrian NGOs and grassroots organizations swiftly mobilized, forming new alliances and consortia to respond to the crisis. With over 12 years of experience navigating a protracted conflict, these organizations leveraged their deep community ties and contextual knowledge to address immediate needs effectively. Larger Syrian CSOs, many of which were legally registered in Türkiye, capitalized on pre-existing partnerships and legal frameworks to scale their operations and access international funding. Meanwhile, in Türkiye, the response was characterized by an interplay of national CSOs and grassroots organizations, as well as partnerships with intermediary organizations that facilitated funding and technical support. These diverse actors collectively formed a complex ecosystem that bridged gaps in resources and expertise, enabling a multi-layered response to the crisis.

## Research objective

The objective of this research was to explore the operations of local organizations during and after the humanitarian response to the earthquake in Türkiye/Syria. The research aimed to highlight the contributions of local actors in this context, providing robust evidence on the scale and nature of their operations. It encompassed both formal organizations, such as local non-governmental organizations (NGOs), and informal initiatives, including volunteer and grassroots organizations. The research also assessed the feasibility of including informal initiatives, acknowledging the challenges of tracking and engaging these entities. Beyond quantifying the contributions of local organizations, the study explored how international actors could provide tailored and meaningful support.

Furthermore, the research aimed to provide a detailed snapshot of local humanitarian organizations involved in the earthquake response, examining their operations, challenges, and needs. It sought to analyse how these organizations

navigated crises and identify actionable ways to support their capacity, sustainability, and leadership. The findings were intended to inform strategies to strengthen localization and contribute to the broader agenda of empowering local actors in humanitarian responses.

## Summary of key themes

- **Organizational adaptation and governance**
  - Many organizations demonstrated adaptability by decentralizing decision-making and revising governance structures to improve crisis responsiveness. However, the push for formalization among smaller organizations often led to operational inefficiencies and mission drift. Larger CSOs successfully leveraged established networks to mobilize resources, while smaller entities often relied on informal collaborations and community-driven efforts, underscoring the need for more inclusive and equitable governance models.
- **Partnership dynamics**
  - Pre-existing partnerships with intermediary organizations enabled larger CSOs to mobilize quickly and integrate technical expertise, ensuring structured responses. In contrast, smaller organizations, unable to meet stringent partnership criteria, relied on grassroots networks and informal collaborations. Power imbalances within partnerships often relegated local actors to implementer roles, limiting their strategic influence and autonomy.
- **Funding models and resource allocation**
  - The earthquake response highlighted significant disparities in funding models and resource allocation. While larger organizations benefited from diversified donor bases and long-standing partnerships, smaller CBOs struggled with limited access to funding streams, reliance on short-term grants, and exclusion from administrative cost coverage. These dynamic exacerbated inequities, particularly for grassroots actors who were critical in reaching underserved populations.
- **Sustainability and capacity building**
  - The transition from emergency funding to long-term recovery exposed vulnerabilities in organizational sustainability. Short-term funding cycles left many organizations unable to plan strategically, while limited investment in capacity-building efforts hindered their ability to scale. Collaborative approaches, including private-sector partnerships



and income-generating projects, showed potential but require further investment and strategic alignment.

## The way forward

To create a more inclusive and resilient humanitarian ecosystem, the following priorities should guide future efforts:

- **Balance institutionalization and flexibility**

Support systems of donor agencies and intermediary organisations must respect the unique strengths of grassroots initiatives while providing targeted resources to formalize operations when appropriate. Donors should avoid pressuring volunteer networks into premature formalization, instead fostering an inclusive environment where diverse organizational types can coexist and thrive. In practice, this can take the following forms:

  - Provide unrestricted or low-administrative burden grants tailored to different organizational capacities, allowing grassroots groups to scale operations at their own pace.
  - Offer voluntary mentorship, training, and technical support on governance, compliance, and financial management without requiring immediate formalization.
  - Encourage collaborations between formalized and non-formalized organizations, ensuring grassroots initiatives retain autonomy while benefiting from institutional backing.
- **Enhancing governance and accountability:** Intermediary organisations should strengthen decentralized governance models, particularly in remote management settings, to improve decision-making and responsiveness at the local level. Establishing standardized accountability frameworks across different organizational types will enhance transparency, ensure operational consistency, and reduce risks associated with fragmented oversight.
- **Strengthen partnerships and coordination:** Donor agencies and intermediary organisations should promote equitable partnerships that recognize the expertise of local actors and integrate their insights into strategic decision-making. Simplifying compliance requirements and fostering inclusivity in coordination platforms will enable smaller organizations to participate meaningfully and scale their contributions. Mandate standard minimum overhead costs for local partners to support sustainable operations and effective risk management.
- **Invest in capacity building and sustainability**

Intermediary organisations should prioritize capacity-building initiatives that address gaps in disaster preparedness, governance, and financial planning. Encourage private-sector engagement and income-generating projects to diversify funding sources and reduce dependency on donor-driven models.

- **Transform funding models**

Donor agencies should transition to long-term, flexible funding mechanisms that reduce administrative burdens, include operational cost coverage. Funding models should prioritize equitable resource distribution and support sustainable development initiatives alongside emergency response efforts.



# 1. Introduction

## Background

On February 6, 2023, a 7.8-magnitude earthquake<sup>1</sup> devastated South-East Türkiye and North-West Syria (NWS), followed by several strong aftershocks. The earthquakes, the largest in centuries in the region, struck in the heart of winter, killing more than 50,000<sup>2</sup> people and causing mass destruction of buildings and infrastructure across both countries. More than a million survivors were left homeless<sup>3</sup>, forced to live outside in bitterly cold weather. The earthquakes exacerbated an already complex situation in the region, which has been destabilised by years of conflict and displacement.

The humanitarian community estimates that in February 2023, 8.8 million people lived in areas that were most affected by the earthquake in Syria and were impacted to varying degrees.<sup>4</sup> Several factors influenced and exacerbated the severity of humanitarian needs, including pre-existing large scale humanitarian needs, logistical and access constraints to certain areas, winter conditions and an ongoing cholera outbreak. Prior to the earthquake, some 15.3 million people in Syria were assessed to require humanitarian assistance in 2023, an all-time high for the country which entered its 12th year since hostilities started.<sup>5</sup>

The humanitarian response to the earthquake was shaped by the engagement of various international and national actors but was predominantly locally-led. In Türkiye, the response was primarily led by Turkish authorities, supported by international and national actors, including national funding agencies, municipalities, civil society organisations, and private donations. In Syria, the response largely extended and adapted existing partnership models between intermediary international organizations and national entities, such as Civil Society

<sup>1</sup> Reuters 2023: <https://www.reuters.com/world/middle-east/major-earthquake-strikes-turkey-syria-about-200-dead-many-trapped-2023-02-06/>

<sup>2</sup> Reuters 2023: <https://www.reuters.com/world/middle-east/earthquake-death-toll-surpasses-50000-turkey-syria-2023-02-24/>

<sup>3</sup> Reuters 2023: <https://www.reuters.com/world/middle-east/magnitude-63-earthquake-strikes-turkey-syria-border-region-emsc-2023-02-20/>

<sup>4</sup> OCHA 2023: [https://reliefweb.int/report/syrian-arab-republic/flash-appeal-syrian-arab-republic-earthquake-february-may-2023-](https://reliefweb.int/report/syrian-arab-republic/flash-appeal-syrian-arab-republic-earthquake-february-may-2023)

enar?\_gl=1\*u1vc7r\*\_ga\*MTU2  
S4xNzM1NjA5NjEzLjYwLjAuMA

<sup>5</sup> Ibid.

Organizations (CSOs) and Community-Based Organizations (CBOs). Humanitarian actors operating in the Syria response redirected their focus, efforts, and resources to address the crisis, leveraging these partnerships.

To establish a shared understanding of key actors, the following definitions have been developed and applied throughout this research.

---

## Definitions

---

Definitions for key terms in this report are outlined below to support shared understanding. Where no agreed definitions are available in the literature, components of existing concepts have been combined to form a definition for the purpose of this assignment. These terms are highlighted below:

### Broader Definitions

- Locally led humanitarian action: The terms ‘locally led humanitarian action’ and ‘local humanitarian leadership’ will be used through this research to emphasise the importance not just of recognising or respecting local humanitarian action, but also that humanitarian action needs to be owned and led from the ground up. The term localisation will be used to refer to the process of respecting, recognising and strengthening local leadership.<sup>6</sup>
  - National and local actors: Organisations engaged in relief that are headquartered and operating in their own aid recipient country and which are not affiliated to an international NGO.<sup>7</sup>
  - Donors: Donors are institutions, organisations, or agencies that provide funding support to humanitarian and development actors. This includes institutional government donors.
  - Intermediary: The term intermediary refers to organisations, networks or mechanisms acting in an intermediary role between donors and
- 

---

<sup>6</sup> This definition is adapted from Gingerich et al (2017) and Barbelet (2019). This report will refer to locally led humanitarian action or local humanitarian action in most places. Where it refers to the process of supporting local humanitarian action, it will use the term ‘localisation’ drawing on the following definition: “Localising humanitarian response is a process of recognising, respecting and strengthening the leadership by local authorities and the capacity of local civil society in humanitarian action, in order to better address the needs of affected populations and to prepare national actors for future humanitarian responses” (from OECD, Localising the response, Commitments into Action series, 2017).

<sup>7</sup> A local actor is not considered to be affiliated merely because it is part of a network, confederation or alliance wherein it maintains independent fundraising and governance systems

local implementing organisations. There are two main types of intermediaries:

- Single intermediary<sup>8</sup>: Funding to a single international aid organisation (including a federated/membership organisation) that reaches a local or national actor directly from that one intermediary. National actors passing funding to other national actors or local actors can also act as intermediaries.
- Pooled funding: Funding channelled through a pooled fund that is directly accessed by local and national actors (such as Country Based Pooled Funds, START Funding or the IFRC's Disaster Relief Emergency Fund).
- Partnership: The research will use a broad definition of partnership to refer to the diversity of ways in which national actors, international actors and donor partners work together. This includes long-term, short-term, project partnerships, implementation partnerships, non-operational partnerships, managing contractor partnerships; multi-year funding relationships, and any informal or formal partnerships also between donors, international and/or local partners.

## Specific Groups Definitions

The research will focus on small and medium size and formal and informal organizations falling under these categories listed below:

- Community-Based Organizations (CBOs):

CBOs are non-governmental entities that emerge organically from within the affected communities themselves. They are composed of local residents, volunteers, and leaders who have a deep, intrinsic understanding of the community's needs, cultural norms, and social structures. CBOs focus on localized responses, such as distributing aid to immediate neighbourhoods or managing community-specific shelters. CBOs can be either registered or unregistered, and this distinction significantly impacts their operations, fundraising capabilities, relationships with government entities, and community perception.<sup>9</sup> Their knowledge of local cultures, languages, and

---

<sup>8</sup> Sometimes it is referenced as INGO across the report.

<sup>9</sup> Registered CBOs: Formally recognized by local authorities, these CBOs can access official funding, participate in NGO forums, and partner with INGOs and government agencies, allowing them to operate more transparently.

vulnerabilities makes them uniquely effective in addressing urgent needs on a small scale. Example activities: Coordinating temporary shelters for displaced families, managing food distributions, and addressing specific community needs in both rural and urban areas.

- Civil Society Organizations (Local organizations):

Civil Society Organizations (CSOs), a broader spectrum of organized groups, such as NGOs, advocacy groups, and faith-based organizations. These organizations are typically registered and recognized by the government, and often operate at regional or national levels, with formal structures, governance systems, and professional staff. They are involved in policy advocacy, capacity building, and large-scale service delivery, often liaising with international partners and donors. CSOs generally have more resources than CBOs and may work across multiple communities. Example activities: Implementing large-scale food aid programs, providing psychosocial support, and advocating for the rights of affected populations in coordination with international organizations.

- Volunteer-based networks:

Volunteer networks consist of groups of individuals who organize informally to provide support during humanitarian crises. These networks are often temporary, set up in response to specific disasters, and may include local and international volunteers. They are characterized by their flexibility and ability to rapidly mobilize resources and manpower. They play a critical role in distributing aid, providing on-the-ground labour for recovery efforts, and offering services like medical assistance. Volunteer networks differ from grassroots movements in that they may lack long-term community engagement and are primarily focused on immediate, short-term relief efforts. Volunteer-based networks often fill critical gaps in emergency relief, offering services such as search and rescue, distribution of aid, and psychosocial support. Their strength lies in their ability to adapt quickly to changing needs and their strong motivation driven by a sense of solidarity and community service. Example activities: Assisting in search and rescue operations, providing first aid, and distributing emergency supplies.

---

Unregistered CBOs: Operating informally, they rely on local resources and volunteers but face limitations in accessing official funding and participating in formal coordination, which can affect their legitimacy with external actors.

## 2. Research Methodology

The research utilized a qualitative methodology, integrating key informant interviews (KIIs), and participatory workshops to capture nuanced insights while addressing the diverse nature of the local response landscape. The research was structured around four distinct phases.

**Figure 1: The Research Roadmap**



## Research objectives and questions

### Objectives

- To create a snapshot of local humanitarian organizations operating in the earthquake response
- To understand the operations of local humanitarian organisations, their needs and challenges
- To provide the HLA with recommendations on ways to support local humanitarian organizations involved in this specific response.

## Overarching research question:

How have local organisations (including local NGOs, volunteers, grassroots organisation) evolved their support to local populations since the earthquake in 2023?

## Sub-questions:

- How are local organisations understanding/addressing evolving needs of the populations, particularly those of women, youth, people with disabilities?
- How have they coordinated among themselves and with other actors during and after the response?
- How has funding changed between 23 and 24?
- How have the relationships with INGOs/international organisations changed over time?
- What are the future needs that need to be addressed?

# Research phases

## Phase 1. Development of thematic framework

### 1. Desk review

The research began with a desk review using open-source information search, supplemented by resources provided by HLA. Materials were categorized into a secondary resource database, distinguishing those relevant to the research objectives.

The desk review uncovered critical insights, trends, and gaps in the existing knowledge, laying the foundation for the study. Findings informed the creation of a thematic framework outlining key themes, operational contexts, organizational structures, and capacities. This framework guided the design of primary data collection tools, ensuring that subsequent stages were rooted in evidence and aligned with identified priorities.

### 2. Mapping

A detailed mapping exercise followed the desk review to identify and document local organizations and initiatives involved in the humanitarian response. Starting with an initial list provided at proposal stage, which included well-known organizations operating in Syria and Türkiye, the research team expanded the database through networks, connections, and contextual knowledge. This process was further enriched by a database provided by the HLA from a recent training



conducted with earthquake response organizations. The list of interviewed stakeholders is provided in Annex A.

## Phase 2: Participatory assessment and discussion

The cornerstone of the research was KIIs conducted with senior management staff from local organizations. These interviews explored organizational capacities, governance, challenges, and their strategic priorities in responding to the earthquake. A purposive sampling strategy ensured diversity in leadership, organizational type, geographic reach, and thematic focus.

### Sampling framework

The sampling strategy for this research was designed to ensure representation of diverse local organizations engaged in the earthquake response across Türkiye and Syria. Out of the planned 40 in-depth interviews (KIIs), 37 were conducted. Below is an overview of the sampling approach, including the criteria and methodology employed:

### Sampling design<sup>10</sup>

A total of 40 organizations were initially identified for KIIs, based on a list of local organizations provided in the final mapping database. These organizations were selected using a **criterion-based purposive sampling approach**, which allowed for the inclusion of diverse and relevant local actors. Key criteria used for selection included:

- Leadership structure (Syrian-led vs. Turkish-led)
- Ensuring a balance between Syrian-led and Turkish-led organizations to capture varied leadership perspectives and strategies in responding to the earthquake.
- Organizational type (CBOs, CSOs, Volunteer Networks)
- Representing a spectrum of formal and informal entities, including CBOs, CSOs, and grassroots volunteer networks.
- Geographic diversity
- Incorporating organizations from both urban and rural settings, with a focus on areas significantly impacted by the earthquake in both Türkiye and Syria.
- Thematic and sectoral diversity

<sup>10</sup> The findings in this research report are based on the data and insights gathered from a specific sample of local organizations. While the study aims to provide a well-rounded understanding, it does not capture the full spectrum of local NGOs operating in the response. Variations in organizational structures, capacities, contexts, and approaches mean that perspectives may differ, sometimes significantly. These differences highlight the diversity within the sector and should be considered when interpreting the results. The conclusions presented reflect the experiences and realities of the organizations engaged in this research but do not claim to represent the entire local response landscape.



- Selecting organizations based on diverse operational areas, including shelter, health, education, protection, and livelihoods.
- Prioritizing organizations targeting vulnerable groups such as women, youth, people with disabilities, and marginalized communities.
- Women-led organizations
- At least 12 women-led organizations were included in the sample, ensuring that the perspectives and experiences of women leaders were adequately represented in the research.

The profiles of participating organisations are presented in the following infographic:

## Profiling of Local Organizations

### Research Respondents:

19 Turkish NGOs 18 Syrian NGOs 12 of the 37 are women-led organizations

### Organization Type:



Community-Based  
Organizations (CBO)



Civil Society  
Organizations (CSO)



Social  
Enterprises



Volunteer-Based  
Networks

### Activities:



Humanitarian  
Assistance  
(Relief Aid)



Recovery  
and  
Resilience  
Projects



Specialized  
Programs  
(Focused on  
Children, Youth  
and Women)

### Operational Locations:

#### Türkiye

Kahramanmaraş  
Adıyaman  
Hatay  
Malatya

#### Syria

Aleppo  
Idlib

#### Other



### Target Groups:



Refugees



Internally Displaced  
Persons (IDPs)



Disaster- and  
Earthquake-Affected



Ethnic Minorities

**Figure 2: Local Organisations Profiles**

### Key informant interviews with international and local stakeholders

To provide a broader perspective, KIIs were conducted with representatives of international humanitarian actors. These interviews focused on understanding the local organizational landscape, examining how partnerships evolved, and

identifying the challenges of sustaining local organizations in a shifting funding environment.

Five KIIs were completed with individuals holding strategic roles:

- A representative from a UN agency
- Two representatives from humanitarian pooled funds
- Two representatives from humanitarian networks (one diaspora humanitarian network and one national humanitarian NGOs network)

### **Participatory workshops**

To validate findings, the research included participatory workshops in place of traditional focus group discussions. This choice aimed at mitigating interview fatigue and foster broader dialogue among humanitarian actors. Two online workshops were held via Zoom, one with Turkish-led organizations and another with Syrian-led organizations. Conducted in Arabic and Turkish, these sessions created a space for participants to engage directly with the findings, discuss challenges, and co-develop actionable recommendations. A discussion guide is included as Annex B.

### **Phase 3. Thematic analysis**

All data collected during the research underwent a comprehensive thematic analysis. Transcripts were reviewed, coded as per the framework themes that are linked to research questions, and analysed to identify recurring patterns and themes. This approach ensured that the unique experiences of different types of organizations—CBOs, CSOs, and volunteer networks—were reflected.

### **Phase 4. Reporting**

The findings were compiled into a final report, emphasizing practical recommendations to strengthen local organizations' roles in recovery and resilience. In collaboration with HLA, the report was refined through consultative discussions, ensuring that diverse perspectives were integrated while maintaining the independence of the analysis.

## 3. Research Findings

The findings of this research are organized according to the research questions, addressing key aspects of the operational landscape of local organizations involved in the earthquake response. This structure provides a comprehensive framework for understanding the operating context, evolution of local humanitarian landscape, governance, partnerships, funding strategies that influenced the response efforts.

### 3.1 Local Organizations in the Earthquake Response: A Brief Snapshot

#### The operating context

The 2023 earthquake in Türkiye and Syria caused widespread devastation, affecting millions and creating an immediate need for large-scale humanitarian intervention. In Syria, the earthquake worsened the challenges of a protracted crisis that had already displaced millions and severely weakened infrastructure. The hardest-hit areas in northern Syria, including Idlib and Aleppo, were already struggling with limited resources and access to basic services due to over a decade of conflict.<sup>11</sup> In Türkiye, the earthquake severely affected multiple provinces, including Hatay, Gaziantep, Adiyaman, and Malatya, with extensive damage to buildings, infrastructure, and services, further straining local response capacities.<sup>12</sup>

Since 2012, the Syrian crisis has shaped the humanitarian landscape in the region, with Türkiye emerging as a critical operational hub. Border cities like Gaziantep and Hatay have become key humanitarian centres due to their geographic proximity to Syria and well-developed infrastructure.<sup>13</sup> These hubs host a wide range of actors, including international NGOs (INGOs), CSOs, CBOs, grassroots networks, volunteer groups, UN and donor agencies. Over the years, this ecosystem has facilitated a robust response to the Syrian crisis, coordinated through a cluster approach addressing needs in sectors such as Health, Food Security, Shelter, Protection, and Education. These actors have played vital roles in delivering emergency aid and supporting long-term resilience-building programs.

<sup>11</sup> OCHA 2024: <https://www.unocha.org/publications/report/syrian-arab-republic/syrian-arab-republic-annual-report-2023-humanitarian-response-january-december-2023#:~:text=In%202023%2C%20humanitarian%20needs%20in,to%20new%20displacement%20and%20suffering>

<sup>12</sup> Red cross 2024: <https://www.redcross.org.uk/stories/disasters-and-emergencies/world/turkey-syria-earthquake>

<sup>13</sup> UNHCR 2023: [chrome-extension://efaidnbmnnnibpcjpcglclefindmkaj/https://www.unhcr.org/tr/sites/tr/files/legacy-pdf/turkey\\_response\\_planpdf.pdf](https://www.unhcr.org/tr/sites/tr/files/legacy-extension://efaidnbmnnnibpcjpcglclefindmkaj/https://www.unhcr.org/tr/sites/tr/files/legacy-pdf/turkey_response_planpdf.pdf)

A key operating modality in this humanitarian ecosystem has been the partnership model involving intermediary organizations and local NGOs. Intermediary organizations serve as bridges between donors and local implementers, channelling funding, technical support, and accountability oversight. Before the earthquake response, Syrian-led NGOs in Türkiye have primarily focused on supporting refugees through shelter, education, and protection programs. However, their operations in Türkiye have remained relatively small compared to their extensive cross-border activities in northern Syria, where most of their funding and projects are concentrated. Turkish local NGOs and civil society groups, initially focused on civil society initiatives such as women's empowerment, education, and protection for vulnerable groups, have also adapted over time to take on more significant roles in humanitarian response efforts.

This pre-existing humanitarian ecosystem in Türkiye played a critical role in enabling a swift response to the 2023 earthquake. The government, through the Disaster and Emergency Management Presidency (AFAD)<sup>14</sup>, led the earthquake response by coordinating search and rescue operations and overseeing aid distribution. At the same time, INGOs, UN agencies, and local civil society organizations mobilized their teams, leveraging their established networks and resources. Cities like Gaziantep, already a humanitarian hub, benefited from existing infrastructure and experienced actors who could quickly adapt to the crises. However, other regions, such as Hatay, faced significant delays due to infrastructure damage that disrupted communication and logistics<sup>15</sup>. Similarly, areas like Adiyaman and Malatya, where fewer humanitarian organizations were present, experienced disparities in response capacity, highlighting regional inequalities in aid delivery.

In Syria, the earthquake response relied heavily on local NGOs already engaged in conflict-affected areas. Their contextual knowledge and proximity to affected communities enabled them to respond to urgent needs such as search and rescue, shelter management, food distribution, and medical care. However, despite their critical role, local organizations faced significant challenges, including limited resources, particularly in accessing heavy machinery for removing rubble, and

---

<sup>14</sup> <https://en.afad.gov.tr/about-us>

<sup>15</sup> SBB 2023: <chrome-extension://efaidnbmninnibpcjpcglclefindmkaj/https://www.sbb.gov.tr/wp-content/uploads/2023/03/2023-Kahramanmaras-and-Hatay-Earthquakes-Report.pdf>

delays in adapting UN Security Council Resolution 2165<sup>16</sup> for cross-border operations to meet earthquake-specific needs<sup>17</sup>.

Furthermore, the earthquake response unfolded against a backdrop of decreasing humanitarian funding for the Syria crisis. Shifting donor priorities, emerging global conflicts, and donor fatigue had already led to significant downsizing among intermediary organizations and local NGOs, leaving many actors underprepared for a disaster of this magnitude<sup>18</sup>. This reduction in resources and operational capacity exacerbated the challenges of delivering timely and effective aid.

## 3.2 Evolution of the humanitarian landscape in response to the earthquake in Türkiye and Syria

### Rise of community-based responses and grassroots scaling

The immediate aftermath of the earthquake highlighted the pivotal role of local volunteer networks, which acted as first responders in both Türkiye and Syria. Leveraging their deep community ties, these networks mobilized rapidly to address urgent needs such as shelter, food, water, sanitation, and psychosocial support. In Türkiye, these groups played a significant role by collecting household items such as clothing, hygiene kits, blankets, and other essentials to support displaced families. For example, local soup kitchens run by CBOs provided culturally familiar meals, reflecting the dietary preferences of affected communities and offering a sense of comfort during a chaotic time.

In Syria, delays in international systems, including the UN and INGOs, due to bureaucratic processes and approval requirements, created a vacuum that amplified the role of local actors.<sup>19</sup>

Over time, many grassroots initiatives transitioned into formal CBOs to gain legitimacy, access humanitarian funding, and establish partnerships with national and international actors. This shift was partly driven by the high demand for local

<sup>16</sup> Global Centre for the Responsibility to Protect 2024: <https://www.globalr2p.org/resources/resolution-2165-syria-s-res-2165/>

<sup>17</sup> Commons Library Research Briefing 2023: <chrome-extension://efaidnbmnnnibpcajpcglclefindmkaj/https://researchbriefings.files.parliament.uk/documents/CBP-9727/CBP-9727.pdf>

<sup>18</sup> NES NGO Forum 2024: <https://reliefweb.int/report/syrian-arab-republic/syrians-left-hanging-lowest-levels-funding-humanitarian-needs-hit-highest-levels-thirteen-years-crisis>

<sup>19</sup> Chatham house 2023: <https://www.chathamhouse.org/2023/02/syrian-rescue-efforts-slowed-bureaucracy-and-regime>

partners from humanitarian organizations that were not registered in Türkiye or sought to expand their operations in response to the earthquake. This evolution represents a critical development in the humanitarian ecosystem. However, as a UN key informant for Syria noted, *"Everyone wanted to become a CSO,"* reflecting both the opportunities for growth and the challenges of institutionalisation, such as navigating complex bureaucratic processes and ensuring accountability.

*"There were donors interested in including these initiatives as implementing partners, which drew significant attention and motivated many to establish or expand their scope of work. One of the noticeable effects we observed was that volunteer teams or small initiatives began striving to formalise and grow into organisations, regardless of whether this approach was appropriate or whether donor engagement was right or wrong. However, this was a clear outcome of the earthquake response."* A UN key informant for Syria explained.

### **3.2.1 The push toward formalisation: Opportunities and risks**

The transformation of grassroots initiatives into formalized organizations brought both significant benefits and critical challenges. On the positive side, formalization enhanced their ability to scale operations, access funding, and engage more effectively with external stakeholders. Several Turkish CBOs, for instance, successfully tapped into domestic funding mechanisms such as STDV (Foundation for Support for Civil Society)<sup>20</sup> and Sivil Düşün<sup>21</sup>, while others received funding from international intermediary organizations. This marked a major shift for Turkish CSOs and CBOs, transitioning from development-focused and community support programs such as advocacy, education, and women's empowerment to responding to a humanitarian emergency.

Suddenly, these organizations found themselves operating as first responders, gaining increased attention and funding from intermediary organisations. Shifting to life-saving humanitarian assistance such as Water, Sanitation, and Hygiene (WASH), shelter, Non-Food Item (NFI) distribution, and Mental Health and Psychosocial Support (MHPSS). Over time, this exposure significantly expanded their knowledge of humanitarian systems and quality standards, such as the Sphere Standards and the Shelter Minimum Standards. As a result, many CBOs adapted their operations to align with these humanitarian quality standards and ensure accountability in their interventions.

---

<sup>20</sup> <https://siviltoplumdestek.org/>

<sup>21</sup> <https://www.sivildusun.net/>



### Case study example 1:

Before the earthquake, a small Turkish women's solidarity association focused on advocacy and empowerment without prior experience in humanitarian aid. When STDV offered funding after the disaster, they moved to Kahramanmaraş and shifted their focus to emergency needs, addressing WASH for women and girls and setting up child-friendly spaces.

A Turkish CBO representative reflected, *“During the process, we realized that what we were doing was women-focused disaster intervention—feminist disaster intervention. We were applying feminist principles without even labelling it as such initially. It developed organically as we responded to the crisis.”*

Another example is the capacity-building funds from STDV, which, although limited in scale, enabled some organizations to improve their technical and administrative capacities. This included implementing better financial management systems and developing internal policies. Additionally, many organizations began collaborating with experts and consultants to support their organizational development, such as strategic planning and association management.

However, the rapid push toward formalization posed challenges for many newly structured organizations. This premature institutionalization led to several risks, including:

- **Dilution of grassroots diversity:** Volunteer-driven initiatives, characterized by their deep community ties and flexibility, risk losing their unique strengths as they transition into formal structures.
- **Operational inefficiencies:** Newly-formed organizations struggled with scaling, resource management, and reporting mechanisms, undermining their mid- long-term sustainability.
- **Exclusion of smaller actors:** The emphasis on formalization sidelined smaller, informal grassroots efforts that play a critical role in immediate, localized responses.

## 3.3 Key trends of local organizations governance systems

To respond efficiently to sudden crises, local organizations, recognized the need to shift decision-making processes by delegating authority to field-level staff and restructuring leadership models. These adaptations were complemented by

broader organizational changes, such as relocating operations to regions with better infrastructure, establishing centralized operations rooms, and revising internal Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs) to streamline processes like procurement and approvals.

By giving more responsibilities to field teams, creating task-specific emergency committees, and merging departments (e.g., HR and safety) into unified response units, organizations not only improved operational efficiency but also fostered a sense of ownership and accountability among frontline staff.

### **3.3.1 Decentralization and shifts in leadership roles**

The evolving humanitarian needs pushed both established and new organizations to shift decision-making closer to the ground and adjust their leadership structures to improve crisis response and operations. Many organizations, particularly CSOs, reported moving away from centralized, hierarchical models in favour of more flexible decision making that enabled field staff to make timely, ground-based decisions. For instance, some Syrian CSOs allowed field managers to address urgent challenges, such as infrastructure damage and medical needs, without waiting for approval from central offices. This not only accelerated response times but also increased field-level ownership of operations.

#### **Case study example 2:**

A Syrian-led CSO empowered local staff to lead weekly needs assessments, ensuring real-time, tailored responses. Field teams had autonomy to adjust distribution plans on-site, such as reallocating hygiene kits or food parcels based on immediate camp observations. This approach reduced delays and enhanced the relevance of aid delivery.

#### **Case study example 3:**

In Jindires (Syria), local field coordinators were given decision-making power to prioritize search and rescue efforts and direct food distribution. With limited access to senior leadership due to communication challenges, they independently managed resources and adjusted delivery schedules. This led to rapid mobilization of rescue teams and immediate food provision delivered life-saving aid to the hardest-hit areas.

### **3.3.2 Relocating operations for greater efficiency**

Local organizations adapted their structures and operations to meet the unique challenges of the earthquake response. Strategic shifts in departments, staff, and locations were implemented to enhance accessibility, coordination, and efficiency.

## Strategic relocation and operational adjustments

- Moving for accessibility: Offices and operational hubs were relocated from hard-hit areas like Hatay to more accessible locations such as Gaziantep, improving coordination and response times.
- Deploying staff to high-need areas: Field teams were reassigned to severely affected locations like Jindires and Afrin, prioritizing sectors such as food distribution, psychosocial support, and shelter.
- Expanding volunteer networks: New volunteers were mobilized and trained, filling operational gaps and ensuring aid reached hard-to-access communities.

## Structural and procedural changes

- Merging departments for efficiency: Some organizations combined functions, such as HR and safety or partnerships and programs, to streamline approvals, improve communication, and reduce bureaucratic delays.
- Revising internal SOPs: Established CSOs simplified procurement processes, sped up approvals, and consolidated units like human resources and security into unified response teams.

## Enhancing coordination and decision-making

- Establishing operations groups: Informal coordination groups using WhatsApp and Skype facilitated multi-sectoral response efforts, resource allocation, and communication with partners.
- Creating flexible response units: Emergency units combining procurement, logistics, and field operations were set up to respond rapidly to evolving needs.

## Leveraging digital solutions

- Transitioning to online operations: Digital tools such as e-signatures and online approval systems replaced traditional paperwork, allowing remote teams to function efficiently despite logistical disruptions.

### Case study example 4:

To address immediate needs, a Syrian CSO raised the procurement threshold from \$5,000 to \$25,000, reducing tender processes from 21 days to just three. During the initial response phase, documentation requirements were temporarily relaxed, enabling faster mobilization of resources. As stability improved, donors reinstated standard procedures. Flexibility was further demonstrated through operational waivers, such as for coordination and purchasing, which were approved with support from humanitarian clusters. These adaptations enhanced the speed of the emergency response.

## 3.4 Addressing evolving needs and adapting to challenges of the earthquake response

In responding to the needs of vulnerable populations—such as women, youth, and persons with disabilities—local organizations levels of effectiveness were shaped by their expertise, resources, and systemic constraints. Their efforts were often underpinned by an understanding of their communities and the ability to act quickly, often in resource-constrained environments.

### 3.4.1 Programmatic transformations: Addressing needs in real-time

Local organizations transitioned from traditional development-focused programming<sup>22</sup> to emergency response by adapting their operations to prioritize immediate needs such as food security, WASH, shelter, and MHPSS. Programmatic shifts were informed by continuous needs assessments. These assessments were conducted independently by local organizations or collaboratively as part of joint evaluation exercises. Cash assistance emerged as a critical strategy, providing affected populations with flexibility with large number of humanitarian actors shifting to cash and voucher assistance (CVA) after the first 6 months of the response<sup>23</sup>.

### 3.4.2 Women led efforts

Women-led NGOs demonstrated a unique capacity to address the gender-specific needs of women and girls.

For example:

- **Hygiene and dignity kits:** Organizations distributed culturally sensitive hygiene kits, including menstrual health products, to displaced women and girls.
- **Safe spaces:** Women-friendly spaces were established to provide psychosocial support and vocational training, fostering a supportive environment for women in displacement settings. "Our female volunteers handled hygiene kit distribution, ensuring women felt safe and respected. These actions empowered women to voice their needs confidently." shared a women-led CBO in Syria.
- **Awareness raising:** Organizations integrated awareness campaigns to break cultural stigmas, ensuring menstrual health was recognized as a critical component of emergency response. One Turkish CSO remarked:

<sup>22</sup> For Syria, traditional refers to resilience and recovery building programmes. For Turkey, traditional includes development programmes.

<sup>23</sup> DEC 2024: <https://www.dec.org.uk/story/how-can-cash-assistance-help-people-in-disaster-zones-stories-from-the-turkey-syria>

"Menstrual health needs are often ignored in emergencies. We integrated menstrual hygiene support into our programming, breaking stigmas and ensuring women had access to essential products and services." shared a women-led CSO in Türkiye.

### 3.4.3 Youth-centred Initiatives

Young people were among the most affected populations, facing disruptions in education, employment, and psychosocial well-being. Local organizations implemented:

- **Non-formal education:** Online learning platforms were established to ensure continuity in education, integrated with psychosocial support activities.
- **Youth engagement workshops:** One Syria CBO adapted their normal youth citizenship workshops and went for analysing the earthquake's impact on youth in sectors such as health, education, and employment. As a result, they integrated psychosocial support into citizenship workshops, addressing trauma and promoting social cohesion. "We tailored workshops to help youth understand the post-earthquake context, focusing on employment challenges and access to education." reported a CBO in Syria.

### 3.4.4 Support for persons with disabilities

local organizations worked to ensure inclusive responses for persons with disabilities:

- **Accessible shelters:** Temporary shelters were equipped with facilities for persons with mobility impairments.
- **Case management:** Individual needs were assessed, and services such as wheelchairs and medical supplies were provided in collaboration with other organizations.

The adaptation of these actors played a role in meeting a wide range of needs, addressing gaps, and in some cases supporting to underserved rural areas. Their diversity enabled tailored responses, leveraging strengths such as community trust, cultural sensitivity, and operational agility. This multifaceted approach ensured more effective delivery of aid and strengthened the connection between humanitarian efforts and the specific needs of affected populations.

### 3.4.5 Adaptation strategies and inequities

The earthquake response revealed distinct adaptation strategies between larger CSOs and smaller, community-driven CBOs, highlighting structural inequities within the humanitarian ecosystem:

- Larger CSOs leveraged established networks, human, logistic and financial resources to deliver larger, multi-sectoral responses. Their formalized systems facilitated rapid mobilization, enabling initiatives such as integrating MHPSS into programming, coordinating search and rescue efforts, and blending education with psychosocial support through online platforms to ensure continuity of care and learning for children and youth. However, these same formal systems sometimes limited flexibility, as adherence to established processes slowed decision-making in fast-changing environments. To address this, (as explained earlier under governance adaption) some larger CSOs revised their internal procedures, decentralizing decision-making and streamlining approvals to enhance responsiveness.
- Smaller CBOs, these organizations used networks of volunteers representing various segments of Syrian and Turkish communities. This positioning enabled them to better understand and represent the needs and priorities of different groups while addressing cultural barriers. For example, organizations working with minority groups such as the Dom community or minority refugee communities were particularly effective in delivering localized and culturally sensitive responses. However, their ability to meet the demands of large-scale emergency responses was hindered by limited scalability and reach, a lack of structured human resource systems, and insufficient financial resources.

For many CBOs, the earthquake marked their first experience with large-scale humanitarian assistance, exposing gaps in resources planning, management, and operational capacity. Many local organizations relied on reactive measures, such as mobilizing untrained volunteers, reallocating limited resources to urgent needs without proper planning, and implementing temporary, ad hoc solutions like distributing essential items based on immediate demands.

Interviewees from multiple organizations highlighted that smaller CBOs, relied heavily on volunteer support and informal networks, which were effective but proved insufficient for broader emergency needs or longer-term interventions. The lack of preparedness was evident in gaps in financial planning, as some organizations struggled to align budgets with emergency priorities or establish systems for managing funds effectively. Furthermore, organizations reported challenges in establishing clear plans and procedures for disaster response. Without prior training or experience in areas such as logistics, emergency response, coordination, and monitoring, many CBOs adopted reactive and ad hoc approaches, limiting their long-term impact.

#### Case study example 5:

In Türkiye, a right-based organizations that traditionally focused on minority groups, such as the Dom community, faced significant challenges in adapting to the broader humanitarian landscape. The earthquake's widespread impact on entire households, rather than specific groups, diminished their visibility and capacity to align with the needs of international partnerships or secure direct funding. Their specialization and limited scalability restricted their role in the larger humanitarian response framework

## 3.5 Addressing internal and external challenges

### 3.5.1 Resources management

The most significant impact on human resources for local NGOs was that their staff and volunteers were directly affected by the earthquake. Many respondents shared personal stories of sudden displacement or the loss of loved ones. They described the dual burden they faced—coping with their own shock and grief alongside a sense of responsibility to assist those affected. Despite these challenges, they adapted quickly, leveraging available resources such as existing stocks, mobilizing their teams and volunteers, and embarking on an emergency response journey.

As the temporary funding waned<sup>24</sup>, local organizations faced difficult decisions about prioritizing basic needs and maintaining workforce capacity. In response, many adopted adaptive but unsustainable strategies to navigate these challenges:

- **Rehiring staff temporarily:** Organizations brought back former employees for the duration of project periods, capitalizing on their prior experience and institutional knowledge. Although practical, this approach resulted in high turnover and instability as funding cycles ended, undermining workforce continuity and organizational cohesion.
- **Shifting HR resources:** To address immediate needs, staff were reallocated from other sectors, teams, or geographic areas to focus on earthquake response efforts. This was effective in the short term.
- **Increasing workloads on existing staff:** Many organizations added earthquake response duties to the responsibilities of their existing workforce. This necessity-driven approach led to significant staff burnout, reduced overall efficiency, and lowered morale, especially when additional compensation or support was not provided.

The earthquake highlighted systemic weaknesses in mobilizing skilled personnel on short notice. Medical CSOs faced acute shortages in specialized roles such as nursing and physical therapy, compounding the workload on existing staff. The

<sup>24</sup> Refer to the introduction of the financial resources section for further details.



urgency of the situation made training new hires impractical, while remote onboarding presented additional logistical hurdles. In Türkiye, a relatively better supply of healthcare professionals slightly alleviated these challenges, but the issue remained critical in Syria.

Compounding these challenges was the turnover of qualified staff, who frequently moved between local and international NGOs in search of better opportunities. This turnover created a persistent vacuum of skilled personnel.

### 3.5.2 Duty of Care protocols

Although humanitarian work was not new to the affected region, the direct impact on organizational staff highlighted a significant gap in duty of care (DoC) policies, affecting the well-being of many volunteers and staff. Local organization respondents noted that, particularly since the decline in funding for the Syria crisis—DoC budgets have been systematically deprioritized and often entirely removed.

During the earthquake response, INGOs and back donors demonstrated varying approaches to addressing the DoC issue. Larger and more established CSOs with pre-existing DoC frameworks often implemented structured measures such as financial compensation, access to psychosocial counselling, and the provision of secure accommodations for staff. For example, some organizations ensured immediate access to counselling services to mitigate trauma and stress, while others provided logistical support, such as transportation and temporary housing for staff working in affected regions. Smaller or volunteer-driven organizations, which lacked formalized DoC frameworks, relied on practices such as peer support or group discussions, to address emotional challenges. While these measures fostered solidarity in the short term, they were insufficient to address long-term needs, such as consistent mental health support or comprehensive safety protocols.

*"One of the critical gaps is the lack of care for field teams, despite the immense pressures they face. Employee well-being must be recognized as the donor's responsibility, as it requires substantial financial allocations to address effectively."* A UN key informant for Syria explained.

There is a growing consensus among local organizations and key informants involved in this research on the necessity of establishing DoC policies. Many participants emphasized that these policies should be coordinated and standardized to ensure equitable treatment and support for local organizations.

This approach would foster consistency, provide clear guidelines for safety and well-being, and enhance the overall resilience of local actors in future emergencies.

### 3.5.3 Technical capacity

The assessment of technical capacity and knowledge to respond to the earthquake revealed contrasts between Syrian and Turkish NGOs. Nearly all Syrian NGOs reported that their staff possessed essential expertise in humanitarian principles, quality standards such as CHS and Sphere, and safeguarding measures, including FCRM, PSEA, and protection protocols. These competencies were developed through years of addressing the Syria crisis. In contrast, Turkish NGOs faced a steep learning curve in emergency response, as this was a new challenge for many of them. Respondents noted that some partners and donors provided capacity-building activities to enhance staff capabilities in disaster response. These included online crisis management training, risk management workshops, and on-the-job learning opportunities through field operations, which helped Turkish NGOs strengthen their ability to respond to the crisis.

While these initiatives enhanced technical expertise in areas such as WASH, psychosocial support, and emergency coordination, their practical application was inconsistent. Interviews indicated that while some teams successfully integrated these skills into their response efforts such as hygiene promotion and setting up latrines, others faced challenges in translating theoretical knowledge into practice due to limited resources, time constraints, or a lack of follow-up support. This underscores the importance of not only providing training but also ensuring that capacity-building programs are tailored to operational realities and accompanied by sustained mentorship and support mechanisms.

Respondents noted that capacity-building efforts during the earthquake response were predominantly operational, focusing on immediate project delivery rather than broader organizational development. This was perceived as a lack of investment in professional growth, particularly for newly established organizations, which left many vulnerable to future crises. Additionally, while community mobilization and culturally sensitive approaches were recognized as essential for addressing diverse community needs, efforts to integrate these strategies were inconsistent and sporadic, limiting their overall impact on affected populations.

When assessing anticipated capacity needs, both Syrian and Turkish organizations identified gaps in technical expertise, including disaster logistics, risk management, sudden-onset emergency coordination, and trauma-informed care. These challenges were compounded by financial planning issues, as some

organizations—especially smaller CBOs—lacked systems to align budgets with emergency priorities or allocate resources for unforeseen crises.

**Figure 3: HR Challenges**



## 3.6 Coordination and partnership dynamics

Coordination among local organizations and between local and international actors during and after the earthquake response was conducted on multiple levels and involved various strategies to maximize efficiency and impact. However, this process revealed both successes and ongoing challenges.

### UN-Led coordination and challenges

The UN cluster system, established in 2013, serves as the primary mechanism for coordinating humanitarian aid from Türkiye into northwest Syria. It facilitates collaboration among UN agencies, international organizations, and NGOs, ensuring targeted responses through nine sector-specific clusters, such as health and shelter. Based in Gaziantep, OCHA plays a central role in supporting needs assessments, information sharing, and operational coordination, including cross-

border aid facilitation<sup>25</sup>. This structure is designed to enhance efficiency and resource allocation in the Syria response.

However, while the pre-existing cluster system provided a framework for coordination, it was slow to adapt in the immediate aftermath of the earthquake. In the first few weeks, formal coordination mechanisms were largely inactive, requiring time to adjust to the scale and complexity of the crisis. Existing communication channels within the clusters were later repurposed to support earthquake response efforts.

### **3.6.1 Local coordination in Türkiye: Turkish and Syrian NGOs**

To bridge the initial coordination gap, local organizations took the lead in establishing alternative coordination mechanisms. Many relied on informal networks, such as WhatsApp groups, to communicate with partners operating in northwest Syria. These groups, initiated by both local actors and intermediary organizations, played a crucial role in synchronizing response efforts. For instance, a shared tracking form was developed to organize planned interventions, detailing which organization would deliver services, in which area, and on what date. This real-time coordination helped minimize duplication and address gaps in aid distribution. One Syrian CSO respondent highlighted how these informal systems ensured that distributions were efficiently completed and met critical needs.

Over time, coordination structures in Türkiye evolved in response to emerging challenges. During the first six months of the earthquake response, OCHA managed coordination efforts. However, the UN later introduced an Area-Based Coordination model, which remained in place until June 2024. Despite these adjustments, challenges persisted. The 3RP system, originally designed for the Syria Refugee Crisis, struggled to integrate effectively with earthquake relief operations. Similarly, while the cluster system remained active in Hatay, it failed to gain sufficient traction in other affected regions, remaining largely cantered at the national level through Gaziantep. These difficulties underscored the challenges of adapting pre-existing coordination systems to the rapidly changing demands of an earthquake response.

Turkish local organizations reported facing challenges when attending UN cluster meetings, due to language barriers, technical jargon, and perceptions of inadequacy compared to larger INGOs and national NGOs. This limited equitable participation and hindered the effective alignment of local and international efforts. One Turkish CBO representative described these challenges:

---

<sup>25</sup> Health cluster 2023: <https://healthcluster.who.int/countries-and-regions/syria-cross-border-turkey?utm>

*"We often feel sidelined, with limited opportunities to influence decision-making or share our on-the-ground insights. Our voices are frequently perceived as 'shy' compared to the more established and resource-rich CSOs, whose larger-scale interventions often dominate discussions."*

In contrast, another local coordination efforts demonstrated significant success in certain areas. For example, in Adiyaman, civil society actors independently organized a coordination mechanism called the *Adiyaman Civil Society Solidarity Group*. Unlike Hatay, where INGOs and the UN coordination system were already active, Adiyaman's local actors took the initiative to establish their own system. This enabled them to address local needs effectively and ensure a timely response tailored to their context.

A notable example of localized coordination was the establishment of TIF (Türkiye Initiative Forum), a platform launched by national NGOs after the earthquake. TIF provided a space for local NGOs to coordinate, advocate for their needs, and bridge the gap between local actors and the UN coordination system. By partnering with the UN, TIF streamlined coordination efforts, enabling local CBOs and CSOs to voice their concerns directly to the UN, INGOs, and donor organizations. As part of the localization effort, TIF played an active and equal role in the UN coordination process, defining agenda points and scheduling meetings based on feedback from its members.

### **3.6.2 Coordination among Syrian NGOs in Türkiye**

Some Syrian CSOs leveraged their memberships in broader humanitarian alliances, such as the Syrian NGO Alliance (SNA), to enhance their advocacy and resource mobilization efforts. Through these alliances, they issued collective statements and organized fundraising campaigns, securing additional support for earthquake-affected areas. These networks enabled Syrian CSOs to consolidate their efforts, providing a stronger voice in negotiations with donors and international partners.

### **Remote coordination within Syria**

Coordination at the local level in Syria was fragmented but remained essential for aligning response efforts. While many organizations relied on pre-existing coordination structures, such as the UN cluster system, these mechanisms faced significant challenges in adapting to the rapidly evolving crisis. Focal points in different regions played a key role in facilitating information-sharing between field teams and partner organizations. However, without a central coordinating

authority, coordination efforts were largely dependent on individual organizations' willingness to collaborate, which varied based on internal priorities and operational constraints.

The key coordination efforts included:

- **Information sharing:** Coordination groups in Türkiye relayed information to teams inside Syria, ensuring that interventions were aligned and minimizing duplication.
- **Response efforts:** Organizations worked together to meet urgent needs, such as supplying fuel for civil defence teams, with multiple actors pooling resources to respond effectively.
- **Needs assessments:** Regular meetings and established communication channels enabled organizations to share real-time data on evolving needs, allowing for a more targeted and informed response.

While formal coordination mechanisms like the UN cluster system struggled to adapt quickly, localized and informal efforts—such as Turkish NGO-led platforms like TIF and Syrian CSO advocacy alliances—played a role in facilitating an effective humanitarian response helping to bridge critical gaps.

### 3.6.3 Partnerships dynamics during the Earthquake response

The partnership landscape in Türkiye and Syria serves as a critical bridge between donors and local implementing organizations. This approach enabled the flow of resources, technical expertise, and coordination. While various types of relationships exist, the most prevalent model involves INGOs functioning as intermediaries and CSOs as their local implementing partners<sup>26</sup>. The types of partnerships that emerged during the earthquake response are:

#### Pre-existing relationships and intermediary organisations

Established partnerships with international intermediary organizations provided larger CSOs with critical advantages during the earthquake response. These collaborations facilitated access to funding, technical expertise, and logistical support, enabling effective service delivery in areas like WASH, shelter, and psychosocial support.

#### Local and grassroots collaborations

Smaller CBOs, often constrained by limited access to resources from intermediary organizations, relied heavily on grassroots networks and relationships. These were pivotal in reaching underserved areas and leveraging local expertise.

<sup>26</sup> For further details, refer to the definitions table.



The distinct value of CBOs lies in their ability to remain embedded and effective within their communities. However, many CBOs expressed ambitions to grow rapidly and transition to the level of CSOs. As previously noted,<sup>27</sup> the earthquake response created a push toward formalization across the sector, and this trend was particularly evident among CBOs eager to elevate their status and expand their capacity to operate as CSOs.

### **Government partnerships**

In Türkiye, partnerships with entities such as AFAD and the Turkish Red Crescent played a role in enhancing logistical support and expanding access to previously unreachable areas. These collaborations streamlined the movement of teams and materials, improving operational efficiency. Additionally, respondents reported having partnership with the private sector companies who contributed with funding and donations as a response to the disaster.

#### **3.6.4 Challenges in partnership dynamics**

##### **Power imbalances**

Some local organizations raised concerns about the perceived imbalances in partnerships, where intermediary organisations or donors wielded significant influence over decision-making and project design. While this ensured alignment with donor priorities and compliance standards, it often limited the ability of local organizations to tailor interventions to the specific needs of their communities. One Turkish CBO respondent shared:

*"Sometimes there is a perception that the one who gives the money has every right to say, and the one who receives the money should digest everything that is said and do whatever the funding organization wants. This irritates us a lot. It is not an equal partnership. Naturally, we are not a team that will go to any lengths just to get a resource or fund that will not develop us."*

Partnerships between CSOs and CBOs revealed their own set of power imbalances. One Syrian CBO explained that under a particular project, the CSO exerted strict control over decision-making, leaving the CBO with little to no room for shared decision-making or input. This dynamic often undermined the collaborative spirit necessary for effective and context-sensitive programming.

Respondents from Syrian CBOs and women-led organizations highlighted challenges related to prolonged and unequal partnerships, particularly when compared to more established CSOs. Many noted that international intermediary

---

<sup>27</sup> Refer to section evolution of the landscape for boarder details.



organizations tend to prioritize their existing or long-standing trusted partners for funding and collaboration. As one Syrian CBO respondent explained, *"We have a small team with significantly lower operational costs, yet we struggle to sustain ourselves without consistent funding."*

These disparities became especially visible during the earthquake response. Established CSOs with pre-existing partnerships created significant barriers for newer CBOs. These Syrian CSOs, often licensed in Türkiye, possessed formal offices and greater legitimacy, enabling them to access funding and partnerships more effectively. Consequently, many smaller Syrian entities resorted to merging with or operating under the umbrella of existing CSOs to meet donor requirements and secure direct support.

### **Resource competition and inefficiencies**

Competition for limited funding created challenges among organizations, sometimes leading to fragmented efforts and disparities in resource allocation. The limited availability of donor funding specifically targeting local actors, with only a few exceptions like STDV in Türkiye, further intensified competition among CBOs and CSOs.

*"We struggled to secure funding for our mobile health unit. Meanwhile, in some areas, clinics had too many patients, while other villages had no medical services at all."* A respondent from a Syrian CSO shared.

These dynamics occasionally resulted in inefficiencies in targeting, with some areas receiving overlapping services while others remained underserved. For example, in Jindires (Northwest Syria), the medical system collapsed due to earthquake damage, yet there was no immediate coordinated effort to restore services. Some organizations engaged in joint assessments, but medical interventions remained fragmented, with some areas receiving mental health services but lacking primary healthcare, while others had medical support but no psychosocial services. In contrast, in Türkiye, in areas where multiple actors remained engaged, water trucking services were redundantly provided by multiple organizations, leading to inefficient resource allocation.

### **Unequal risk-sharing**

Respondents shared that the burden of risk management often fell disproportionately on local organizations, with limited support or shared accountability from international partners. Local NGOs were frequently left to navigate operational, financial, and reputational risks alone, including dealing with local authorities, managing exchange rate fluctuations, addressing border issues,

ensuring field security, handling logistics, and planning human resources. Participants mentioned efforts such as leveraging technology, conducting safety assessments, and providing psychological support for staff, but these measures were largely implemented without significant external assistance.

Intermediary organizations primarily focused on financial oversight, often acting as middlemen without actively consulting or involving local partners in risk management decisions. This dynamic undermined the principles of equitable collaboration and localization. One Syrian organization respondent explained, *"While donors provided funding, they avoided responsibility for risks associated with operating in volatile areas, leaving us to handle the consequences if something went wrong."*

### **Visibility and partnership opportunities challenges**

The data highlights that civil society groups in Türkiye are highly diverse, with many operating primarily at the provincial or community levels. While their localized focus enables valuable grassroots engagement, it also presents significant challenges in gaining visibility and accessing partnership opportunities during the earthquake response. These challenges were compounded by language barriers, limited experience with emergency response systems, and a lack of understanding of humanitarian coordination mechanisms.

### **3.6.5 Positive dynamics in partnerships during the earthquake response**

#### **Flexibility and trust in partnerships**

Some local organizations highlighted the adaptability of intermediary organizations and donors during the earthquake response, which allowed for programmatic adjustments based on evolving needs. For example, local actors reallocated resources from food distribution to hygiene kits after updated assessments revealed shifting priorities. Intermediary organizations demonstrated trust in the field teams' judgment, granting them the flexibility to make critical decisions. A Syrian CSO respondent shared, *"Our partner (the INGO) did not pressure us; the most important thing was to ensure we felt comfortable in our work. They did not demand immediate photos or reports, even after a month. For example, they only requested a final report and told us to inform them of any challenges we faced so they could help find solutions."*

#### **Experience sharing as a capacity booster**

The earthquake response created opportunities for knowledge exchange between intermediary organizations and local actors, as well as among local organizations. This exchange, particularly in managing large-scale disaster responses, enhanced the capacity of local organizations by equipping them with valuable insights and practical skills that will be beneficial in future crises.

Intermediary organizations provided technical support in areas such as financial management, proposal writing, monitoring and evaluation, and compliance with donor regulations. INGOs and UN agencies introduced global humanitarian standards (e.g., Sphere, CHS, Do No Harm) and shared lessons learned from previous crises, such as responses to other disasters, the Syria conflict, and COVID-19.

Local actors became more involved in humanitarian coordination clusters, gaining access to data-sharing platforms, needs assessments, and funding opportunities. INGOs and donors gained a deeper understanding of local dynamics, influencing their localization strategies beyond the earthquake response.

#### **Case study example 6:**

In Türkiye, an INGO partnered with a national NGO and embedded a WASH expert within their operations to enhance the capacity of a local NGO managing water trucking services. This expert provided in-depth training on quality standards, developed monitoring tools, and introduced standardized operating procedures (SOPs) to ensure efficiency and compliance with humanitarian standards. Even after the expert's departure, the local NGO continued implementing these SOPs, demonstrating how targeted technical support can create long-term improvements in humanitarian service delivery.

### **Empowerment of grassroots and volunteer networks.**

For many local responders, the earthquake became an opportunity to improve internal systems and governance structures, even if these changes were not sustained long-term. These advancements contributed to strengthening the broader humanitarian ecosystem by expanding the pool of capable responders and emphasizing the importance of localized action.

## **3.7 Funding**

The decline in funding between 2023 and 2024 significantly disrupted operations for organizations in Syria and Türkiye. In Syria, the uncertainty around the UN cross-border resolution and the reliance on short-term funding left organizations unable to address long-term needs effectively. The funding dynamics following the earthquake response revealed significant challenges for local organizations in Syria

and Türkiye, marked by the shrinking of general humanitarian funds<sup>28</sup> and the reliance on short-term, project-based grants.

Larger Syrian CSOs leveraged diverse donor bases, pre-existing partnerships, and internal contingency funds to respond rapidly to immediate needs. In contrast, many smaller CBOs in Syria faced acute funding challenges. Their reliance on partnerships with CSOs and project-specific funding streams left them vulnerable to donor shifts and unable to scale operations. Nearly two years after the earthquake response, many of these newly evolved organizations<sup>29</sup> have either scaled down their activities or shifted focus to other areas, ceased operations entirely, while others consolidated their efforts.

Türkiye's funding landscape was shaped by partnerships with intermediary organizations such as STDV, which provided local NGOs with access to funding and technical expertise. These intermediary organizations often prioritized established partners. This preference left many grassroots actors underfunded despite their potential role in reaching marginalized communities.

### 3.7.1 Short-term funding

While short-term funding facilitated rapid mobilization and immediate crisis responses, it also created operational vulnerabilities. A recurring issue was the exclusion of administrative costs from project budgets, which limited their ability to scale efforts or maintain institutional resilience. For example, some organizations reported reallocating budget savings from ongoing projects to meet emergency needs, but this approach proved unsustainable over time.

In Türkiye, smaller CBOs struggled due to the absence of administrative cost coverage in project budgets, forcing them to rely on volunteers. Donors often prioritized short-term, high-cost projects that addressed immediate needs but lacked long-term sustainability, rather than investing in initiatives that could build local capacity, strengthen infrastructure, and create economic opportunities.

In Türkiye, short-term funding exacerbated operational pressures. Inflation during the crisis significantly reduced the purchasing power of emergency funds, while the lack of financial reserves left many organizations ill-prepared to address the scale of the disaster. Smaller organizations often relying on local donations that were insufficient for sustained recovery efforts. Additionally, key informants noted that the absence of clear allocation plans led to hasty spending on readily available activities.

<sup>28</sup> NES NGO Forum 2024: <https://reliefweb.int/report/syrian-arab-republic/syrians-left-hanging-lowest-levels-funding-humanitarian-needs-hit-highest-levels-thirteen-years-crisis>

<sup>29</sup> See section The push toward formalization: opportunities and risks

Some organizations successfully balanced short-term emergency funding with long-term development goals. In Syria, for instance, one CSO integrated women's empowerment and community development initiatives by incorporating vocational training for women into its funding strategy, leveraging existing donor networks to maintain a dual focus on relief and resilience. Another organization channelled resources into durable housing projects, benefiting earthquake-affected families while promoting sustainable recovery.

In Türkiye, intermediary organizations played a pivotal role in bridging funding gaps for underrecognized local actors. Entities like STDV and TİF provided mentorship, administrative support, and small-scale funding to grassroots organizations, enabling more equitable resource distribution. However, systemic challenges persisted, such as the high compliance requirements and limited opportunities for smaller organizations to diversify their funding bases.

## 3.8 Ways forward: challenges and opportunities

### 3.8.1 Key needs and challenges

Local organizations reported facing persistent challenges in achieving long-term financial and operational sustainability:

- **Over-reliance on donor funding:** Many organizations remain heavily dependent on donor-driven projects, leaving them exposed to sudden shifts in donor priorities. For example, organizations in Syria reported difficulties securing funding for initiatives beyond immediate relief, preventing them from addressing long-term recovery or development needs effectively.
- **Insufficient support for operational costs:** A frequent challenge reported by local organizations is the exclusion of administrative and operational costs from project budgets. This forces them to use limited resources for essential functions like staff salaries and office maintenance. One organization in Türkiye noted that, despite their critical role in providing emergency relief, they struggled to cover basic operating expenses due to rigid donor funding structures.
- **Retention of skilled staff:** Inconsistent funding cycles and the inability to provide stable salaries have resulted in high turnover rates among skilled personnel. This is particularly problematic in conflict-prone areas like Syria, where maintaining experienced staff is crucial for continuity and efficiency. One Turkish CSO respondent highlighted that some staff left for more secure jobs, eroding the organization's institutional memory and reducing their capacity to deliver high-quality programs.
- **Challenges linked to regional instability:** In Syria, the unpredictable political and security situation creates significant barriers to long-term

planning and project implementation. Organizations working on infrastructure projects, such as water supply systems or renewable energy initiatives, cited examples of their efforts being disrupted by renewed violence or shifting control over territories.

- **Limited focus on capacity building:** Many organizations reported a lack of meaningful capacity-building support. Short-term training workshops are **often prioritised instead of funding institutional improvements like** compliance systems, financial management tools, or long-term staff development. For example, a CSO in Syria pointed out that funding for "child protection training workshops" was repetitive, while critical gaps like financial systems upgrades remained unfunded.
- **Challenges with localization goals:** Some international donors preferred to fund local organizations through intermediaries, limiting direct funding opportunities and creating additional layers of oversight. This reduced the effectiveness of localization efforts. A Syrian CSO respondent noted that intermediary organizations retained a significant percentage of funding for overhead, leaving local implementers with minimal resources.

### 3.8.2 Strategies for sustainability beyond the earthquake response<sup>30</sup>

Amidst these funding challenges, several organizations are piloting and testing various strategies to ensure sustainability. While some have explored diversified funding sources and proactive planning, the majority are still experimenting with approaches that are yet to demonstrate long-term value as sustainable financial resources.

#### Income-generating activities

Local organizations in Syria and Türkiye have increasingly prioritized income-generating initiatives as a strategy to secure financial sustainability. For example, two Syrian CSOs established non-profit companies under their associations to generate income while involving target communities. These companies focused on practical ventures such as dairy production facilities and service centres, ensuring both financial returns and community empowerment. Similarly, a community-based organization (CBO) in Türkiye expressed aspirations to establish a cooperative aimed at creating income for its members while addressing local economic challenges.

#### Partnerships for resource sharing

Local organizations in Syria and Türkiye have increasingly turned to collaborative models to overcome resource constraints and operational challenges. In Türkiye,

<sup>30</sup> Respondents provided somewhat general insights on this aspect, likely because these are primarily pilot projects, and some may have been hesitant to elaborate further as the effectiveness of these strategies has yet to be fully demonstrated.



organizations have focused on fostering strong relationships with municipalities and government bodies, securing access to local resources and gaining legitimacy for their operations. One organization highlighted how its long-standing collaboration with local authorities facilitated faster project approvals and ensured alignment with national priorities.

In Syria, smaller organizations have partnered with larger CSOs to access resources and enhance their credibility. Some have even proposed forming coalitions or alliances to jointly bid for large-scale projects, reducing overhead costs and improving bargaining power with donors. However, while these partnerships offer advantages, they also come with challenges. Competition and lack of trust among organizations often hinder the success of such initiatives.

### **Private-sector engagement**

Engaging with the private sector has emerged as a promising but underutilized avenue for sustainability, particularly in Syria. Several organizations successfully partnered with private companies to implement recovery projects, such as solar energy systems and economic empowerment programs. For instance, one CSO collaborated with a private-sector partner to establish renewable energy infrastructure, addressing both immediate recovery needs and longer-term sustainability goals.

In Türkiye, although private-sector engagement remains limited, examples of successful collaborations are beginning to emerge. One CSO focused on menstrual hygiene partnered with a Turkish company producing sanitary pads, securing funding aligned with its mission. Additionally, corporate social responsibility (CSR) funds have supported local organizations, such as a case where a private company allocated resources to a community-based initiative, demonstrating the potential of private-sector partnerships to bridge funding gaps. Despite these successes, many smaller organizations lack the networks and credibility needed to attract private-sector partners leading to sporadic partnerships.

### **Crowdfunding and global platforms**

Some organizations in both Syria and Türkiye have turned to global crowdfunding platforms to diversify their funding sources. While these platforms offer an alternative revenue stream, they require significant effort to build donor trust and maintain consistent engagement. A Syrian CSO, for instance, launched a crowdfunding campaign highlighting the urgent needs of earthquake-affected communities, successfully raising funds to support immediate relief efforts.



However, these initiatives are often limited by their dependence on effective digital outreach and the ability to appeal to international audiences.

## 4. Conclusions and Recommendations

The earthquake response has reshaped the humanitarian landscape in Türkiye-Syria, revealing critical insights into governance, risk management, accountability, partnerships, and funding dynamics. The crisis exposed structural weaknesses while simultaneously demonstrating the transformative potential of local actors, grassroots initiatives, and emerging partnerships. However, the response also underscored the challenges of navigating a fragmented system within the broader contextual realities of the region, including its pre-existing humanitarian structures, socio-political dynamics, and resource constraints.

### 4.1 Governance and organizational adaptation

Grassroots organizations, many newly formed, adapted rapidly to address the needs of affected communities. This rapid shift highlighted the flexibility and potential of civil society but also exposed significant gaps in emergency preparedness and strategic capacity. Many local organizations lacked disaster-response frameworks, relying instead on reactive, ad hoc approaches. For CBOs, particularly Turkish non-humanitarian actors, the effort was characterized by a "learn-as-you-go" approach. Syrian organizations, often managed from Türkiye with field teams in Syria, found centralized decision-making ineffective, realizing the necessity of adopting more decentralized and adaptive approaches.

While local actors demonstrated unparalleled agility, their structural limitations—such as insufficient training, underdeveloped governance systems, and a lack of strategic foresight—restricted their ability to sustain and scale their efforts.

#### Donor agencies and intermediary organisations

**Recommendation 1:** Support diverse organizational models, from informal grassroots initiatives to larger formal organizations, recognizing that both have critical roles in the humanitarian ecosystem. For instance, volunteer-led groups can address hyper-local needs or rural areas while larger organizations manage broader-scale interventions. Collaborative platforms can encourage partnerships between these groups, creating complementary responses to complex crises.

**Recommendation 2:** Promote decentralized governance models and simplify compliance processes to enable greater participation of grassroots organizations, and provide technical support to strengthen governance structures, financial management, and accountability mechanisms. This could include financial literacy training for grassroots organizations, helping them navigate complex funding requirements and maintain compliance with donor expectations.

**Recommendation 3:** Invest in and support women-led CBOs by enhancing their culturally sensitive programming, such as gender-focused aid delivery and the creation of safe spaces. Expand their roles in long-term recovery efforts through initiatives such as vocational training and psychosocial support programs, ensuring their sustained impact in community resilience-building.

## 4.2 Human resources and capacity building

Capacity-building dynamics revealed disparities between larger CSOs and smaller CBOs, with the latter struggling to access training and resources for disaster response. Donor-driven capacity-building efforts often lacked a strategic focus, emphasizing immediate deliverables over sustainable development, leaving newly established organizations vulnerable. This gap was compounded by the limited focus on duty of care, with smaller organizations often lacking the necessary structures to support staff well-being, mitigate burnout, or provide psychological support during high-stress emergency operations. The strain on smaller actors, compounded by gaps in financial planning and technical expertise, highlighted the need for integrated, long-term investments in professional growth.

### Local NGOs

**Recommendation 1.** Local NGOs should institutionalize DoC by embedding it into their project design and partnership agreements. This involves integrating DoC measures such as staff well-being protocols, safety provisions, and psychosocial support into project planning, while advocating for donors and intermediary organisations to prioritize and fund these measures.

### Intermediary organisations

**Recommendation 2:** Allocate dedicated funding for duty of care within local NGOs' budgets, ensuring staff well-being is prioritized alongside programmatic activities. This includes financial support for mental health and psychosocial services, staff insurance, safety measures, and burnout prevention initiatives.

**Recommendation 3:** Promote joint preparedness practices, including simulations and drills, to familiarize staff emergency frameworks and their application. Encourage collaboration among partners to co-develop policies, sharing frameworks, and best practices to streamline coordination.

## 4.3 Partnership and collaboration

The earthquake response in Türkiye and Syria illuminated the importance of trust and pre-existing relationships in driving effective partnerships and coordination.

This underscores the importance of investing in relationship-building as part of preparedness strategies, as demonstrated by organizations that expanded their partnership pools and operational capacities significantly during the response.

Many small CBOs, operating informally and peer-to-peer, struggled to navigate the technical and bureaucratic requirements of these systems. This misalignment not only limited their participation but also reinforced inequities in access to resources and decision-making.

### **Donor agencies**

**Recommendation 1:** Transition to long-term, flexible funding models that prioritize reducing administrative burdens on local NGOs, particularly CSOs. This includes developing streamlined reporting processes and multi-year funding agreements to enable sustainable interventions, mitigate resource instability, and support organizations in addressing long-term community needs.

**Recommendation 2:** Set concrete, forward-looking targets for allocating a percentage of funding specifically for capacity-strengthening initiatives for local organizations. Expand eligible costs to include diverse capacity-building efforts, such as joint initiatives that bring together CBOs and grassroots organizations to foster collective learning and mutual support.

**Recommendation 3.** Simplify application and proposal processes for grassroots organizations to access funding or join coordination mechanisms. For example, providing funding in local languages and reducing the need for legal formalization can encourage participation.

### **Intermediary and local NGOs**

**Recommendation 4.** Facilitate partnerships with local businesses to secure alternative funding and in-kind support. For example, agreements with construction companies for discounted building materials could accelerate shelter reconstruction efforts, while collaborations with telecommunications providers could enhance digital cash transfer programs.

## **4.4 Funding and sustainability**

The emphasis on emergency funding, while effective for rapid mobilization, often came at the cost of long-term sustainability. The exclusion of operational costs from budgets, high compliance requirements, and a lack of diversified funding sources further exacerbated vulnerabilities, particularly for grassroots organizations. In Syria, political instability and reliance on temporary funding mechanisms created

additional barriers, while in Türkiye, intermediary organizations often prioritized established actors, leaving smaller entities underfunded.

### **Donor agencies:**

**Recommendation 1:** Funding models should integrate development-focused components to reduce future vulnerabilities. Support livelihood programs that enable communities and local organizations to generate their own revenue streams. For instance, social enterprises focusing on vocational training and small business support could help communities rebuild while also sustaining humanitarian operations.

### **Intermediary and local NGOs:**

**Recommendation 2:** Encourage diversification of funding sources by supporting local fundraising initiatives, social impact investment, and cooperative funding mechanisms. A practical example could be the establishment of a regional emergency response fund, managed collectively by local organizations, to ensure financial flexibility during future crises.

## 5. Annexes

### Annex A. List of local NGOs and Key Informants

#	Turkish / Syrian Led Organization	Organizational Type	HQ Location	Target Location	Target Group
1	Turkish	CBO	Kayseri	Kahramanmaraş	Afghani Refugees & Asylum Seekers
2	Syrian	CSO	Istanbul	Multi locations	Syrian
3	Syrian	CSO	Gaziantep	Multi locations	Syrian
4	Turkish	CBO	Hatay	Hatay	Disaster & EQ Affected
5	Turkish	CSO	Eskisehir	Adiyaman	Women
6	Turkish	CBO	Adiyaman	Adiyaman	Children
7	Syrian	CBO	Gaziantep	Multi locations	Syrian
8	Turkish	CBO	Adiyaman	Adiyaman	Youth
9	Syrian	CBO	Gaziantep	Multi locations	Syrian
10	Syrian	CBO	Gaziantep	Multi locations	Syrian
11	Turkish	CBO	Adiyaman	Adiyaman	Syrian Refugees
12	Turkish	CBO	Hatay	Hatay	Disaster & EQ Affected
13	Syrian	CSO	Gaziantep	Multi locations	Syrian
14	Syrian	CSO	Gaziantep	Multi locations	Syrian
15	Syrian	CSO	Gaziantep	Multi locations	Syrian
16	Syrian	CSO	Gaziantep	Multi locations	Syrian
17	Turkish	CBO	Adiyaman	Adiyaman	Youth
18	Syrian	CSO	Gaziantep	Multi locations	Syrian
19	Turkish	CSO	Istanbul	Adana / Hatay / Kahramanmaraş	Women
20	Turkish	CBO	Mardin	Adiyaman	Women
21	Turkish	Social Enterprise	Istanbul	Hatay	Disaster & EQ Affected
22	Syrian	CBO	Mersin	Multi locations	Syrian
23	Turkish	CBO	Malatya	Malatya	Syrian
24	Syrian	CSO	Gaziantep	Multi locations	Syrian
25	Syrian	CSO	Gaziantep	Multi locations	Disaster & EQ Affected
26	Turkish	CBO	Hatay	Hatay	Roma Minorities
27	Turkish	CSO	Istanbul	Adiyaman / Hatay	Roma Minorities
28	Syrian	CBO	Gaziantep	Multi locations	Women
29	Syrian	CBO	Gaziantep	Multi locations	Syrian

30	Syrian	CSO	Gaziantep	Multi locations	Syrian
31	Turkish	CSO	Istanbul	All EQ Affected 11 Provinces	Disaster & EQ Affected
32	Turkish	CSO	Istanbul	Adiyaman	Vulnerable communities
33	Syrian	CSO	Gaziantep	Multi locations	Syrian
34	Syrian	CBO	Gaziantep	Multi locations	Women
35	Turkish	CSO	Istanbul	Hatay	Disaster & EQ Affected
36	Turkish	Volunteer Base	Istanbul	Hatay	Disaster & EQ Affected
37	Turkish	CBO	Hatay	Hatay	Neighbourhood

### Key Informants

Organisation	Type	Coverage
DEMAC	Humanitarian network	Syria
UN Women	UN Agency	Syria
AFNS	Humanitarian network	Syria
Türkiye Local NGO Humanitarian Forum (TİF)	Network Organization	Türkiye
Sivil Toplum için Destek Vakfı (STDV)	Funding Agency	Türkiye

### Annex B. Workshop discussion guide

#### 1. Role & reliability of civil society

- How do CSOs support communities?
- What challenges affect their sustainability?
- How has the withdrawal of national/international actors impacted local CSOs?

#### 2. Capacity building & localization

- What are key capacity gaps for local CSOs?
- How effective are existing training/mentorship programs?
- What barriers limit access to capacity-building opportunities?

#### 3. Fund management & accountability

- What are the main funding challenges for local CSOs?
- how can transparency and accountability be improved?
- how does competition for funding affect collaboration?



#### **4. Strengthening civil society**

- What steps can enhance local CSOs' effectiveness?
- How can digital platforms support collaboration?
- How can communities engage more in decision-making?

#### **5. Disaster preparedness & long-term planning**

- How can disaster preparedness link with poverty reduction?
- What makes preparedness plans sustainable?

#### **6. Roles of key actors**

- INGOs: how can they shift from implementers to supporters?
- Donors: what funding changes would better support local CSOs?
- Local governments: how can they enable a stronger civil society?
- Local CSOs: what internal challenges affect growth?

#### **7. Challenges & solutions**

- Financial constraints: how do limited budgets affect operations?
- Capacity gaps: what key skills are missing?
- Coordination issues: how does competition hinder collaboration?
- Trust & recognition: how can local CSOs gain credibility?
- Bureaucracy: what legal/admin hurdles exist?

#### **8. Sustainable localization**

- Donor commitments: how can donors better support localization?
- Funding models: what forms of support would be most effective?
- Joint proposals: how can local CSOs collaborate to access funding?
- Technical support: what mentorship models work best?
- Simplified reporting: how can reporting be more accessible?