



## Consultation with Local and National Civil Society on the Future of Coordination Structures for the Kahramanmaraş Earthquake Response

Presented at the United Nations Humanitarian Coordination Team  
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*Consultation Report Prepared by the Refugee Council of Türkiye (TMK)  
and the Localization Advocacy Group (LAG)*

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**Background:** On 6 February 2023, a 7.8-magnitude earthquake struck Pazarcik province in Kahramanmaras, Türkiye, and was followed by a 7.6-magnitude earthquake nine hours later in Elbistan province in Kahramanmaras. The earthquakes claimed the lives of over 50,000 people, displaced 3 million people, and caused widespread damage across the region. In response to the massive needs caused by the earthquakes, the Government of Türkiye declared a Level 4 emergency which called for international assistance, through which a 3-month Flash Appeal of 1 billion USD was issued by UN OCHA. In addition to mobilizing funding, the Flash Appeal activated the traditional humanitarian coordination structure under the framework of the IASC for responding to humanitarian emergencies. The Flash Appeal officially concluded on 17 May, with a transitional period that will continue through August 2023, and discussions have been ongoing at the UN Humanitarian Country Team (HCT) regarding the shape and scope of future international coordination structures for the recovery phase of the response.

To ensure that the perspectives, needs, and priorities of local and national civil society are meaningfully included, the Refugee Council of Türkiye (TMK) and the Localization Advocacy Group (LAG) teamed up to develop and conduct a survey with local and national civil society organizations to collect their perspectives regarding future coordination structures and determine coordination needs moving forward.

**Purpose:** This document summarizes the perspectives shared by local and national civil society organizations (CSOs) regarding international humanitarian coordination structures that have been activated in response to the February 2023 earthquakes. In doing so, this document also touches on their perspectives with regards to the coordination structures that have been operational in Türkiye in the context of the Syrian refugee response.

### **Methodology:**

The ideas contained in this report reflect the perspectives shared by local and national CSOs through an online survey conducted between 10-19 May 2023 and; a January 2023 meeting during which the National Reference Group (NRG) for Türkiye was launched under the leadership of the TMK and LAG.

- In total, 21 respondents representing **20 local and national CSOs** responded to the online survey. This included 4 women's organizations, 4 refugee-led organizations, one local network, and 11 local/national organizations.
- A total of **31 national and refugee-led CSOs** in Türkiye attended the January 2023 launch meeting for the National Reference Group (NRG), during which there were extensive discussions around the challenges to effective and inclusive coordination structures.

The findings are also complemented by observations from Local Humanitarian Forum (TIF) local coordinators regarding the involvement of local and national civil society organizations in coordination structures. These local coordinators have been assigned by TIF to facilitate the involvement of local and national CSOs in UN OCHA humanitarian coordination hubs in Hatay, Kahramanmaras, and Malatya, and as a result are in tune with trends in coordination taking place at the provincial level amongst diverse stakeholders in the earthquake response.

### **Key Findings**

#### ***Meaningful Participation in Coordination Structures in Response to the Earthquakes:***

Of the 20 organizations which responded to the online survey, a little over half (12 organizations) participated in the international humanitarian coordination structure activated in response to the

earthquake. In contrast, with the exception of 1 organization surveyed, all of the local and national CSOs indicated that they engaged in alternative coordination mechanisms at the local and national level, suggesting that **existing coordination mechanisms at the local and national level are more accessible to local and national CSOs** than international coordination mechanisms. Numerous local organizations worked through networks at the provincial level to quickly mobilize in response to the earthquakes, and have been critical for restoring livelihoods and the economic recovery for the region.

There may be a number of reasons as to why there was generally lower engagement in international coordination mechanisms by local and national CSOs, as will be explored in the section under 'Shortcomings'. These include:

- **A mismatch in priorities between local/national CSOs with international actors:** Notably, approximately half of the organizations (10) which responded to the survey felt that the international coordination structure activated in response to the earthquakes did not match the existing needs of the country. The diverging priorities of international actors from local actors in setting up coordination structures was also indicated as an issue during the NRG launch meeting;
- **A general sense that international coordination mechanisms are ineffective:** Both respondents to the survey and organizations which participated in the January 2023 meeting noted that many coordination meetings to which local and national CSOs are invited to lack a designated agenda, and are reduced to becoming briefings and information sharing platforms rather than spaces where purposeful coordination can take place;
- **Lack of funding and resources:** Many local and national CSOs both at the NRG launch meeting and in this survey indicated that participation in coordination mechanisms requires both a commitment in terms of time and human resources. They noted that both are largely unavailable to local and national CSOs due to its dependence on restricted forms of funding for the purposes of project implementation.
- **Other logistical hurdles to participating in coordination mechanisms:** The language barrier and the overly-complex nature of international coordination mechanisms were both indicated as hurdles to being able to participate in international coordination mechanisms, both in the survey and during the NRG launch event.

### ***What worked well in the international coordination structure activated through the Flash Appeal and in previous coordination structures?***

CSOs which responded to our survey most commonly indicated that the international coordination structure helped promote the **sharing of information, experiences, and relevant data** for launching humanitarian responses. These organizations noted that regular sector meetings and meetings at the hub level, as well as reports received through actors involved in international coordination mechanisms created opportunities to receive information regarding the most urgent needs emerging from the affected areas. Several organizations in particular welcomed the sharing of information regarding the international humanitarian coordination structure, which was credited as a means of helping them in navigate the coordination system.

The sharing of information is a positive development and in line with the *IASC Guidance on Strengthening Participation, Representation and Leadership of Local and National Actors in IASC Humanitarian Coordination Mechanisms* (Recommendation 10a and 10c).<sup>1</sup> At the same time, however, the responses of the organizations surveyed suggested that this **information sharing was largely**

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<sup>1</sup> <https://reliefweb.int/report/world/iasc-guidance-strengthening-participation-representation-and-leadership-local-and>; hereby shortened in this document as *IASC Guidance*.

**conducted in a one-way manner**, with information generally being shared by international actors to local and national actors, and not necessarily vice versa or in a mutually reciprocal way.

Relatedly, a number of organizations indicated that the international coordination mechanisms helped in **creating a space for local actors to interact, coordinate, network, and partner with international actors**. These organizations noted that meetings organized at the sector and hub level were important spaces for accessing funding and ensuring that there was reduced duplication in humanitarian responses. At the same time, however, others noted that while information was being shared effectively in coordination meetings that this did not always result in more effective coordination and partnerships between local, national, and international responders.

Other positive aspects regarding the international coordination mechanism activated in response to the earthquakes that were shared through the survey included:

- The genuine effort to include local actors as co-leads in the sectors and working groups (1 organization);
- The initiation of long-term planning for addressing the needs of affected populations (1 organization);
- Capacity and knowledge sharing with local and national CSOs (1 organization)

***What were the shortcomings of international coordination structure activated through the Flash Appeal and in previous coordination structures?***

Many of the shortcomings identified by local and national CSOs largely overlapped with the potential barriers to meaningful participation of local and national CSOs in international coordination structures. More specifically:

Local and national CSOs surveyed most commonly identified the **complexity of the UN system and its coordination mechanisms** as a shortcoming of the international coordination system activated in response to the earthquakes (6 organizations). Though information sharing was identified as a key positive development, the results to this question indicate that there is still a lack of clarity amongst many local and national CSOs regarding the general purpose, functions, and ways of working of the overall coordination mechanism. One CSO also indicated that the complex organizational systems of INGOs operating in the earthquake response also hindered effective coordination with local and national CSOs. These organizations indicated that the continued lack of simple and brief documents that clearly outline the international humanitarian structure and enable local and national CSOs to be able to navigate these structures continued to hinder local and national participation, suggesting that key recommendations contained in *the IASC Guidance* was not realized in the earthquake response (Recommendation 10). These organizations also noted that there was a **lack of transparency and a need for more accountability regarding the scope and shape of the international humanitarian coordination structure itself**, a need which was also raised during the NRG launch meeting in January 2023.

- The **language barrier** (3 organizations) and **other logistical barriers such as the lack of funding for enabling local and national CSOs to regularly and effectively participate in international coordination structures** were also indicated as key shortcomings in the international humanitarian coordination. While recognizing that progress has been made in this regard by some during the earthquake response<sup>2</sup>, this is not a new issue, as local and national CSOs which participated in the NRG launch meeting in January 2023 also highlighted this as a key barrier

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<sup>2</sup> For example, the WEHA Working Group instituted Turkish-English simultaneous translation in all weekly meetings.

to effective coordination in the context of the Syria refugee response. The simplicity of overcoming this barrier should not be overlooked, as TIF local coordinators noted the impact that changing the language of coordination meetings from English to Turkish can have on participation of local and national CSOs, having observed an increase in the participation of local and national CSOs following the change in meeting language.

- The coordination mechanism was **not deemed as an effective means for local and national NGOs to access direct funding** to support affected populations (3 organizations). While recognizing that the coordination system is not a funding mechanism, the continued difficulties in accessing direct funding by local and national actors in the context of the earthquake response suggest that further work is needed in ensuring the visibility of local and national CSOs amongst donors, in line with the *IASC Guidance* (Recommendation 15).
- Surveyed local and national CSOs also indicated that the international coordination mechanism **did not sufficiently engage with or develop meaningful linkages with local actors and existing coordination mechanisms at the local level** (3 organizations). Relatedly, surveyed organizations also suggested that there was a **lack of diversity in the local and national CSOs involved in the coordination structure** (3 organizations) and that there were in particular significant barriers for grassroots and other community-based organizations and informal networks to participate in these structures, in spite of *IASC Guidance* for ensuring a diversity of actors in international coordination structures (Recommendation 10f).
- The **diverging priorities between local and national CSOs and international actors involved in the earthquake response** was also identified as a shortcoming of the international coordination structure (3 organizations). These organizations noted that there were limited opportunities to conduct joint advocacy based on shared priorities, a lack of focus on localization, and insufficient opportunities for influencing the decision- and policy-making taking place within the coordination structure.
- Participants at the NRG launch meeting also underlined that **existing power imbalances between local/national CSOs with international actors** resulted in many local and national CSOs not feeling like equals. To overcome this, it was recommended that further work is needed in ensuring the co-development of coordination mechanisms.
- At the same time, **limited coordination between international actors and local and national government actors** was noted as a key barrier to an effective humanitarian response that involves all actors, resulting in gaps in the provision of protection, WASH, shelter, and other basic services across different areas. One TIF local coordinator noted that while there were promising signs of national government actors becoming more involved in coordination structures that there is still limited participation and engagement of local municipalities.

While recognizing the importance of sharing information and acknowledging the important role that coordination structures have had in facilitating information flows between local, national, and international actors, it was noted that **information sharing did not always result in the development of meaningful partnerships between local, national, and international actors or more effective coordination**. Reasons for this include the differences between information being shared in coordination meetings with the actual implementation of activities, as well as coordination meetings often being designed as briefing spaces rather than a space for purposeful dialogue between a diversity of actors.

Although **response planning and preparedness** was not raised as a positive development or shortcoming, as can be seen below, the local and national CSOs surveyed recommended a coordination structure that promotes preparedness and resilience against future disasters.

- ***Recommendations for Future Coordination Structures***

The following recommendations were shared by surveyed local and national CSOs for ensuring the effectiveness of future coordination structures:

- **Access to financial/human resources** for local and national CSOs that ensure their meaningful and sustainable engagement in coordination structures, including providing funding to existing local and national networks which convene local and national CSOs;
- **Ensuring access to funding for a diversity of local and national CSOs**, ensuring the inclusion of women-led organizations, refugee-led organizations, grassroots organizations, and other rights-based organizations;
- **Coordination that promotes preparedness and resilience against future disasters** with a range of actors involved in the international humanitarian architecture, including local and national CSOs, local and national government actors, international actors, donors, private sector actors, and development agencies, amongst others;
- **Coordination at the local/provincial level (area-based coordination)**, rather than on the basis of sectors, by recognizing and drawing on the existing capacities of local CSOs and networks, the needs particular to an area, the capacities/coordination structure existing in a particular area, including informal networks that are more attuned to the needs of their respective communities;
- **Inclusion of affected populations in the coordination structure** to better meet the needs of affected people and ensure transparency in planning and response;
- **Better collaboration between local and national actors with international actors in coordination**, including by bringing together local and national networks with international coordination structures.
- **Improved information sharing and visibility regarding the responses of local and national actors**, and not just the responses of international actors.

These recommendations are largely in line with the recommendations shared by local and national CSOs during the NRG launch meeting when asked to recommend future areas of work for the NRG for strengthening coordination. These recommendations included:

*In the short-term:*

- Mapping existing coordination mechanisms to understand what has worked well and what can be improved;
- Engaging volunteers for facilitating the meaningful participation of local and national CSOs in international coordination structures.

*In the long-term:*

- Establishing peer support networks between small-scale and large-scale CSOs to promote capacity sharing;
- Advocating for the involvement of local and national CSOs and institutions as co-chairs in coordination mechanisms;
- Increasing funding for local and national CSOs to promote the meaningful participation of their personnel in coordination structures;
- Establishing a communications strategy for encouraging the participation of local and national CSOs in coordination structures and increasing their visibility in the overall humanitarian response.