



Promoting Equitable Partnerships with Local Responders in Humanitarian Settings

DG ECHO guidance note

March 2023



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Luxembourg: Publications Office of the European Union, 2023

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PDF	ISBN 978-92-76-62091-4	doi:10.2795/653711	KR-04-23-063-EN-N
Print	ISBN 978-92-68-01092-1	doi:10.2795/155733	KR-04-23-063-EN-C

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ABBREVIATIONS

CBPF	country-based pooled fund
DG ECHO	Directorate-General for European Civil Protection and Humanitarian Aid Operations
DREF	Disaster Relief Emergency Fund
HCT	humanitarian country team
HIP	humanitarian implementation plan
HNO	humanitarian needs overview
HRP	humanitarian response plan
IASC	Inter-Agency Standing Committee
IFRC	International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies
INGO	international non-governmental organisation
L/NA	local/national actor
LIFT	Local Initiative Fund in Türkiye
NEAR	Network for Empowered Aid Response
NGO	non-governmental organisation
OCHA	United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs

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INTRODUCTION

Context

In humanitarian crises, the primary stakeholders in managing the response are the local and national authorities concerned. They are also responsible for ensuring that the population’s right to live in dignity, including in times of crisis, is properly safeguarded. Together with local and national civil society or non-governmental actors, they are often the first responders to a crisis, playing a key role in rapidly delivering high-quality assistance to people in need. In many contexts, humanitarian action is more timely, cost-effective and efficient when locally driven, as local actors possess the knowledge, the networks and the political and cultural awareness to deliver results on the ground. In addition, local actors typically have greater access to the populations affected owing to their geographical proximity, particularly where conflict dynamics may restrict access for international actors. Local actors are often first to respond to crises, remaining in the communities they serve before, during and after emergencies. While the humanitarian system has long acknowledged, at least in theory, that local/national actors (L/NAs) should rightfully have a priority role in responding to crises¹, it has yet to systemically and systematically instigate changes that would provide local and national first responders with meaningful support. Evaluations of humanitarian action over the last 20 years have consistently highlighted the humanitarian system’s

failure to take into account local response capacity, or to provide local responders with adequate support².

At the 2016 World Humanitarian Summit³, the international community recognised the structural challenge posed by growing needs and a finite resource base. It agreed on the ‘Grand Bargain’, a unique agreement with the aim to ‘get more means into the hands of people in need and to improve the effectiveness and efficiency of the humanitarian action’. At that same World Humanitarian Summit, L/NAs with experience of crisis response united to call for improved recognition of their role. Their initiative led to one of the Grand Bargain commitments to ‘making principled humanitarian action as local as possible and as international as necessary’. It called for international humanitarian actors to ‘engage with local and national responders in a spirit of partnership and aim to reinforce rather than replace local and national capacities’. Signatories of the Grand Bargain, including the Directorate-General for European Civil Protection and Humanitarian Aid Operations (DG ECHO), undertook to take concrete action, including the commitment to achieve, by 2020, a target of at least 25 % of humanitarian funds being allocated to L/NAs ‘as directly as possible’⁴; to increase and support multi-year investment in L/NAs’ institutional capacity; and to support and complement national coordination mechanisms⁵.

¹ As early as 1994, the code of conduct for the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement and non-governmental organisations (NGOs) in disaster relief indicated that ‘disaster response should be built on local capacities’, and recognised that the ‘overall planning and coordination of relief efforts is ultimately the responsibility of the host government’.

² Two examples can be cited. The *Tsunami Evaluation Coalition* concluded: ‘With nothing but good intentions, the international community (...) leave[s] the very communities we are there to help on the side-lines. Local structures are already in place and more often than not the “first responders” to a crisis. The way the international community goes about providing relief and recovery assistance must actively strengthen, not undermine, these local actors.’ Similarly, a few years later, the *real-time evaluation of the response to the 2010 earthquake in Haiti* concluded: ‘The affected population was largely excluded from the design and implementation of the response because assessments did not include an analysis of existing local capacities. This led to the biased assumption that there was no local capacity. In addition, the emphasis on speed and the lack of contextual and language knowledge of most humanitarian actors made communication with the affected population and local authorities difficult.’

³ See the outcome documents for the summit available online (<https://agendaforhumanity.org/summit.html>).

⁴ The *Definitions Paper of the IASC Humanitarian Financing Task Team, Localisation Marker Working Group*, defines ‘as directly as possible’ funding as ‘Funding channelled through a pooled fund that is directly accessed by national and local actors’ and ‘Funding to a single international aid organisation (including a federated/membership organisation) that reaches a local/national actor directly from that one intermediary.’

⁵ Signatories of the Grand Bargain committed to taking concrete action, in particular by (i) increasing and supporting multi-year investment in L/NAs’ institutional capacity; (ii) understanding better and working to remove or reduce barriers that prevent organisations and donors from partnering with local and national responders; (iii) supporting and complementing national coordination mechanisms, where they exist; (iv) committing to achieving, by 2020, a target of at least 25 % of humanitarian funds being allocated as directly as possible to L/NAs; (v) developing, with the Inter-Agency Standing Committee (IASC), and applying a ‘localisation’ marker to measure direct and indirect funding to L/NAs; and (vi) making greater use of funding tools that increase and improve the share of humanitarian assistance delivered by L/NAs.

Following the signing of the Grand Bargain in 2016, a number of organisations (including many DG ECHO partners) have taken a range of steps to put into practice the intentions to localise the provision of humanitarian action. In recent years, attention on the central role of L/NAs in crisis response has increased even further. The peak of the COVID-19 pandemic clearly highlighted the extent to which local actors were often the first to respond to crises, filling a vacuum left by international actors, who were often unable to continue operating due to state travel restrictions. Yet, in 2020, the percentage of direct funding to L/NAs remained remarkably low⁶, local actors were often

subcontractors of international actors rather than equal partners, and few local actors had leadership roles.

This guidance document seeks ways of translating the Grand Bargain commitments into concrete action, while recognising that DG ECHO has already embarked on numerous projects and programmes that support localisation, although not yet in a systematic manner (Box 1). The aim is to ensure that DG ECHO has in place the appropriate policy framework, and the practical tools to implement the commitments set out above, at both headquarter and field office levels, through its advocacy, normative work and programming.

Box 1: DG ECHO's support to localisation through the Enhanced Response Capacity

DG ECHO has notably been working on strengthening relations with L/NAs since the localisation of humanitarian aid was translated into a global commitment by the 2016 World Humanitarian Summit. Through its assistance with preparedness, response and recovery operations in many contexts, DG ECHO has demonstrated its support for the localisation agenda. Although not all of DG ECHO's programmes and projects were designed and implemented with localisation in mind, many have provided pathways for addressing obstacles related to key challenges of funding, partnership, capacity strengthening and enhanced participation in coordination mechanisms.

One DG ECHO funding mechanism in particular, the Enhanced Response Capacity, has stimulated multiple initiatives dedicated to introducing new approaches to fill localisation gaps, including supporting activation of the localisation workstream of the Grand Bargain. It has supported research into international non-governmental organisation (INGO) / non-governmental organisation (NGO) partnership models in several countries, with a view to strengthening local leadership of crisis response and further enhancing localisation. DG ECHO has also financed projects that either established umbrella organisations or are managed by existing umbrella organisations.

- As a donor to the Start Network, DG ECHO financially supported the Start Fund – the first multi-donor pooled fund managed exclusively by NGOs.
- DG ECHO contributed initial funds for the establishment of the platform Network for Empowered Aid Response (NEAR), which introduces local actors into global coordination mechanisms such as the Grand Bargain Facilitation Group, and Inter-Agency Standing Committee (IASC) structures.
- DG ECHO also funded the diaspora emergency action and coordination initiative, which bridges the gap between established humanitarian aid approaches and diaspora organisations engaged in humanitarian activities.

The combined effects of the pandemic, climate change and environmental degradation, ongoing long-term conflicts and new conflict situations such as that in Ukraine have led to dramatic levels of food insecurity, with increasing gaps between needs and available funding. Innovative humanitarian responses, based on a nexus approach and

building on existing local dynamics, are required. In addition, there are greater impediments to humanitarian aid access and delivery, making international interventions more complex and more problematic. To meet the humanitarian imperative, the international community must work more effectively and efficiently; giving local actors primacy

⁶ Development Initiatives' [Global Humanitarian Assistance Report 2022](#) notes 'Efforts to reform the delivery of humanitarian assistance continued in 2021 but progress on Grand Bargain priorities remains uneven. Significantly less funding was provided directly to local and national actors in 2021. Following an increase in 2020, direct funding reduced by almost two thirds, to the lowest volume (US\$302 million) and proportion (1.2 %) of total international humanitarian assistance in the previous five years. Funding increases in 2020 to local and national actors (primarily national governments) for the health sector and Covid-19 response were not sustained in 2021.'

in humanitarian action and protagonism in the process of reshaping the humanitarian ecosystem to respond to today's challenges while preparing for tomorrow's threats is a key step in this regard.

There is thus a powerful dynamic in favour of reform in the humanitarian sector, with strong expectations of significant recognition of L/NAs as protagonists in responding to crises, including their taking enhanced leadership roles in humanitarian contexts.

DG ECHO's renewed commitments on localisation

DG ECHO acknowledges the need to continue to seek **reforms to the humanitarian system** to further recognise and respect L/NAs' capacity to respond to crises, to strengthen L/NAs' leadership roles in humanitarian action and to increase the share of funding being channelled to L/NAs as a result.

In addition to developing equitable partnerships with humanitarian actors, DG ECHO seeks to develop synergies and complementarity through new partnerships, fostering a coordinated approach where needed, while allowing space for creative and critical dialogue in relation to policy development and implementation.

DG ECHO brings the following assets to this process:

- its convening power as one of the world's largest humanitarian donors;
- its role as a key, standard-setting donor and advocate;
- its support for learning and the development of policy and good practice.

DG ECHO's **advocacy role** entails developing, with its main partners, the policies and changes in practice required at global level. DG ECHO actively contributes to the Grand Bargain's standard-setting process, including through its involvement in the Grand Bargain 2.0, which introduced localisation as an 'enabling priority'. DG ECHO has continuously provided technical expertise to the localisation workstream, has participated in the Grand Bargain caucuses related to the role of intermediaries and on quality funding, and is fully engaged in the negotiations of the Grand Bargain caucus on funding for localisation. DG ECHO is engaged in the United Nations Office for the

Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) Donor Support Group, UN executive boards, global clusters, and the IASC working and consultative groups. DG ECHO is working in the Donor Cash Forum to create a new cash coordination model, with an important role for L/NAs as co-leads. DG ECHO's support for the localisation agenda also comes up regularly in its relations with key partners, including through its strategic dialogues.

DG ECHO, **as a key, standard-setting donor**, embraces and supports the localisation agenda. As set out in the [Commission communication on the EU's humanitarian action: New challenges, same principles](#), DG ECHO has institutionalised localisation as part of its own policy framework by making a commitment to increase its support to local actors and humanitarian responders, in line with the Grand Bargain. To invest further in strengthening local capacities, DG ECHO is increasing its multiannual and flexible funding arrangements with humanitarian partners. It is committed to prioritising environmentally friendly and locally procured humanitarian supplies, and maximising the use of local labour and expertise to reduce travel-related carbon emissions. It is expanding its support of country-based pooled funds (CBPFs) and other funding mechanisms that prioritise local actors (Box 2). DG ECHO also encourages equitable partnerships between international and L/NA responders, shared responsibilities and shared funding.

DG ECHO recognises that localisation reform efforts can only be successful through joint action of DG ECHO's staff, DG ECHO humanitarian aid partners, and other humanitarian and development aid donors and actors.

Among DG ECHO's key actions is the development of this guidance note on the promotion of equitable partnerships with local responders.

While DG ECHO's role as a key donor requires it to further adapt its funding mechanisms in alignment with the localisation agenda, this must be achieved within the legal constraints enshrined in European Union law in relation to providing direct funding to local actors. Article 7 of the [humanitarian aid regulation](#) (Council Regulation (EC) No 1257/96) requires that NGOs eligible for Community (i.e. EU) financing for the implementation of operations must meet the following cumulative criteria: '(a) be non-profit-making autonomous organizations in a Member State of the Community under the laws in force in that Member

State; (b) have their main headquarters in a Member State of the Community or in the third countries in receipt of Community aid. This headquarters must be the effective decision-making centre for all operations financed under this

Regulation.’ This means that DG ECHO is not able to fund L/NAs directly. DG ECHO’s commitment to the localisation agenda is therefore channelled as directly as possible.

Box 2: DG ECHO’s support to country-based pooled funds, multi-year funding and innovative funding mechanisms

- DG ECHO contributes to the Disaster Relief Emergency Fund (DREF), which was established by the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies (IFRC) in 1985 to offer immediate financial support to national Red Cross and Red Crescent societies. This fund can be considered a good example of supporting the localisation agenda. The DREF enables national Red Cross and Red Crescent societies to act as first responders immediately after a disaster or to anticipate needed responses (through the DREF anticipatory action window).
- DG ECHO has provided financial support to CBPFs in South Sudan and Ukraine on a pilot basis. The first pilot phase was followed by provision of support to other CBPFs, such as those in Afghanistan and Venezuela. Through the CBPFs, DG ECHO is able to financially support local and national NGOs as directly as possible, including by promoting their participation in country-level mechanisms.
- DG ECHO has engaged in multi-year funding for many years already, notably in the field of disaster preparedness / risk reduction, and more recently also regarding education in emergencies. DG ECHO has made the commitment to increase the share of its multi-year portfolio by the end of 2023, with the ambition of extending its multi-year funding to new areas and sectors, for example protracted crises or actions specifically aiming to promote solutions that are more environmentally sustainable.
- Since 2020, DG ECHO has launched nine multi-country, multiannual pilot Programmatic Partnerships that aim to develop strategic partnerships over a period of at least 24 months, when relevant. These partnerships promote certain aspects of the Grand Bargain, such as localisation and a participatory approach, increased efficiency and effectiveness in the delivery of assistance, a joined-up approach with development actors (nexus), joint needs analysis and the use of cash (see Box 5). The pilot Programmatic Partnerships with IFRC and Save the Children are illustrative examples that showcase the meaningful engagement of local actors.
- DG ECHO supports innovative projects such as the Local Initiative Fund in Türkiye (LIFT). This fund fosters, expands and improves the services provided by local NGOs and community-based organisations to respond to the urgent needs of vulnerable and at-risk groups in Türkiye.

Links with current DG ECHO policies and relevant EU policies

DG ECHO believes that its commitment to **‘making principled humanitarian action as local as possible and as international as necessary’** enhances its **core mandate** to provide a needs-based emergency response to preserve life, prevent and alleviate human suffering, and maintain human dignity. This is already clearly stated in DG ECHO’s policy guidelines and in other policy documents related to the EU humanitarian–development–peace nexus. It is important to emphasise that localisation is not an end in itself, as the objective of EU humanitarian intervention is still to meet the basic needs of affected populations. However, supporting localisation should not

only enable additional efficiency gains in the delivery of assistance, leading to the needs of affected populations being addressed more effectively. Over time, the support can contribute to strengthening the capacity of L/NAs, and building engagement and trust between all humanitarian actors. DG ECHO acknowledges that, while working with L/NAs may not be possible in all contexts and/or sectors, localisation should be pursued where it allows for efficiency and/or quality gains. The guidance is built on an incentive-based approach that encourages and prioritises localisation, which means that, if projects are similar, priority will be given to the one that best promotes the localisation agenda.

For more than 20 years DG ECHO’s disaster preparedness programme has played **a key innovative role in building**



In Mauritania, the Alphas Chapo group, a local partner of Action Against Hunger (ACF), uses drama as a very good communication tool to fight against under-nutrition. Fatoumatou, an actress of the local group, uses a doll to show good attitudes and behaviours to protect babies from under-nutrition.

local capacities. The programme targets vulnerable people living in disaster-prone or high-risk regions of the world, with the objective of reducing the impact of disasters induced by natural hazards by strengthening local physical and human resources. The approach DG ECHO promotes in its revised [Disaster Preparedness Policy](#) is both innovative and vital in helping to build the capacities of local responders, particularly in countries where legal frameworks significantly constrain partnerships between international humanitarian actors and local responders. The policy clearly states that anticipatory action and enhanced predictability of response can only be achieved if local preparedness and response capacities are in place, as set out in the Grand Bargain commitments. Preparedness programmes or projects strengthen the capacity of first responders to act as locally, and as rapidly, as possible. A system-wide approach is encouraged to ensure linkages and simultaneous capacity building at community and government levels, whenever possible, while respecting the principle of 'do no harm', and other humanitarian principles. DG ECHO can play a particularly significant role in the development of robust social protection schemes

that link humanitarian interventions across all key sectors (such as direct cash assistance, health, nutrition, protection or education interventions) to strengthen national systems aiming to provide free, quality, inclusive, shock-sensitive services and assistance.

DG ECHO's [thematic policy paper on the use of cash transfers](#) in responding to humanitarian crises marks a step change in linking cash transfers and social protection. The document has important synergies with reforms addressing digitalisation, localisation and the greening of humanitarian assistance. It encourages a system-wide approach that strengthens local capacity while building links to sustainable solutions. These linkages can be part of longer-term strategies to provide better services to vulnerable people in crisis contexts and to promote initiatives that foster vulnerable people's self-reliance. They may involve working through social protection systems, and may also contribute to improving the preparedness and shock responsiveness of systems, thus potentially reducing the need for humanitarian aid.

Other policy guidelines underline **the value of engaging with L/NAs to strengthen the relevance and effectiveness of humanitarian actions**. DG ECHO's [Gender Policy](#) recognises that different gender-related groups have particular capacities, knowledge and perspectives that they can use to contribute to recovery, building peace, promoting resilience and fostering disaster preparedness and disaster risk reduction. The [EU Gender Action Plan III](#) indicates that, in order to work in a context-sensitive way, it is essential to forge strong partnerships and dialogue with local actors, civil society and local communities, and to support women's organisations. DG ECHO's [operational guidance on the inclusion of persons with disabilities in EU-funded humanitarian aid operations](#) strongly encourages partners to enter into partnerships with local disabled people's organisations 'when pertinent and feasible to ensure that interventions benefit from their local knowledge and know-how ... as they often possess unique knowledge about the location of persons with disabilities, about the diversity of disabilities and about the possible solutions to overcoming the barriers'. Humanitarian coordination structures – whether the cluster system, refugee coordination mechanisms or other mechanisms – are also strongly encouraged to reach out to and facilitate the participation of disabled people's organisations in coordination structures, and ensure that these organisations are sufficiently supported to do so. Furthermore, in its recent [guidance on reducing the environmental footprint of humanitarian aid](#), DG ECHO fully acknowledges the value of using traditional knowledge to inform a more environmentally sustainable humanitarian response, and is also committed to promoting local knowledge and expertise.

Other DG ECHO and EU policy guidance documents emphasise the need to **work with L/NAs as part of exit strategies, or as a way to secure the humanitarian-development-peace nexus**. For example, the [Humanitarian Protection thematic policy document](#) highlights the fact that humanitarian agencies cannot and should not be seen as a substitute for the role and responsibility of national authorities in providing protection. Exit strategies for protection programmes should be envisaged at the earliest possible stage. Early collaboration with local or national

authorities and other actors is needed to ensure that they are able to pursue longer-term programmes. European Commission services, UN agencies or the World Bank may have a role to play in this collaboration.

In the staff working document [Education in Emergencies in EU-funded Humanitarian Aid Operations](#), the Commission commits to a targeted approach to the strengthening of education systems, in situations where it already has a role in political dialogue and bilateral support in specific contexts. Where possible and appropriate, EU funding will support government systems, including those of governments hosting refugees, in being primarily responsible for guaranteeing the right to education.

In its [Humanitarian Logistics Policy](#), DG ECHO recommends working with local populations to build the capacity of local communities, including specifically to support markets (by improving their professionalism and organisation), thereby limiting community vulnerability and strengthening the capacity to recover rapidly in the aftermath of crises. This could also involve working with local government authorities, for example by developing their capacity to manage humanitarian aid and to put in place governance systems to allow aid to be accessed by those for whom it is destined. There could be secondary benefits, such as reducing the environmental footprint of humanitarian operations.

Finally, the recent Commission staff working document [Addressing displacement and migration related to disasters, climate change and environmental degradation](#) recognises the need for a coordinated approach that involves both humanitarian and development stakeholders, and other stakeholders such as civil society organisations, local communities, and research and climate actors. The EU has committed to continuing to strengthen collaboration between humanitarian and development actors on addressing the causes and negative impacts of disaster and climate-related displacement. To this end, the EU is involved in several programmes that use a nexus approach, aiming to strengthen resilience and adaptation of affected populations. Many of these projects directly target local and national capacities⁷.

⁷ Through the Global Facility for Disaster Reduction and Recovery, the EU is supporting African, Caribbean and Pacific national governments and regional institutions to implement disaster risk reduction activities. Most of the more than 140 projects funded through the facility touch directly or indirectly on climate-related displacement. The facility focuses on four priority areas: (i) mainstreaming disaster risk reduction; (ii) risk identification and assessment; (iii) early warning systems and communications on disaster risk reduction; and (iv) risk transfer and integration of disaster risk reduction into post-disaster recovery.

Overview of the policy

DG ECHO’s aim in publishing this guidance note is that the wider humanitarian community should **recognise, respect, support and strengthen the capacity of L/NAs** to respond to crises, including taking the lead in specific contexts, with the result that **the needs of affected populations are more appropriately addressed, and future humanitarian responses are better prepared and more effective**⁸.

DG ECHO recognises that **local/national actors (L/NAs)** may be either **state or non-state actors**. DG ECHO applies definitions of these types of actors as noted in Box 3, while acknowledging that, in many instances, responses to crises and shocks emerge from the fabric of local social structures, involving the communities themselves, volunteer groups, civil protection groups, local authorities, members of diasporas and the private sector. The term ‘L/NAs’ is used throughout the guidance note, covering both state and non-state actors, while acknowledging that, depending on the context, certain recommendations may not be equally applicable.

Box 3: Definitions of L/NAs

The Grand Bargain signatories agreed to the following definitions of L/NAs.

Local and national non-state actors: ‘Organizations engaged in relief that are headquartered and operating in their own aid recipient country and which are not affiliated to an international NGO’.

National and subnational state actors: ‘State authorities of the affected aid recipient country engaged in relief, whether at local or national level’.

Source: Definitions Paper of the IASC Humanitarian Financing Task Team, Localisation Marker Working Group.

This guidance note is based on good practice in humanitarian aid programming, taking account of current developments in the localisation of aid. It draws on recommendations collected through an extensive consultation process with a wide range of stakeholders, including L/NAs, DG ECHO partners and donors.

This guidance note summarises DG ECHO’s position on how it will further operationalise its commitment to localisation in responding to humanitarian crises, and sets out key recommendations, expectations and commitments for more equitable partnerships with local responders. However, it is intended to be a dynamic document that will be continuously updated to reflect changes and emerging challenges in humanitarian contexts.

The primary readership of the policy set out in this guidance note is DG ECHO’s staff, together with its humanitarian aid partners. DG ECHO works with about 200 partner organisations to provide humanitarian assistance across the world. These include NGOs, international organisations (including UN agencies) and Member States’ specialised

agencies. As DG ECHO funding is mainly channelled through its partners, this document aims to provide guidance to its staff and its humanitarian partners on how to operationalise DG ECHO’s commitment to localisation through interventions that it funds and other forms of collaboration. The commitments and considerations are particularly aimed at this audience.

This guidance note should also give L/NAs a clearer understanding of what they can expect from DG ECHO and its partners. It is also relevant to other humanitarian and development aid donors and actors, including the Directorate-General for International Partnerships, the Directorate-General for Neighbourhood and Enlargement Negotiations, and agencies involved in civil protection.

Overview of the document

This guidance note is structured according to the desired outcomes of humanitarian assistance, rather than the project cycle, to reinforce DG ECHO’s policy commitments

⁸ Adapted from the [OECD definition of localisation](#).

and better reflect cross-cutting issues. DG ECHO's commitments and expectations regarding stronger support for L/NAs are considered under five main headings:

1. **recognising the value, resources and skills of local/national actors, and supporting (institutional) capacities;**
2. **establishing more equitable partnerships;**
3. **ensuring the participation of local/national actors throughout the humanitarian response cycle;**
4. **strengthening the participation and leadership of local/national actors in humanitarian coordination;**
5. **facilitating access to localised financing models.**

These headings identify key areas in which progress is needed towards more effective operational outcomes. Under each heading, key issues and questions are set out under the following subheadings:

- **DG ECHO's expectations and commitments.** A policy statement explaining what DG ECHO expects from partners and what it commits to.
- **What does this mean?** Unpacking the expectations in practice, drawing on good practice.
- **Key considerations for partners.** A set of questions to help DG ECHO staff and partners change or improve practice.
- **Other related issues.** Cross references, as appropriate, to other relevant areas of DG ECHO policy.
- **What resources are available?** A non-exhaustive selection of hyperlinked resources.

The following cross-cutting issues are mainstreamed in, or integrated within, the narrative for each topic.

Inclusion and diversity. Ensuring targeted support for local populations and groups that traditionally have often been left behind in the delivery of humanitarian aid, is key to ensuring localisation. This applies to, among others, women-led and women's rights organisations (or more informal women's groups), local organisations representing people with disabilities, youth organisations, refugee and migrant organisations, and groups representing indigenous or marginalised people. It is critical that these populations – which are often among those most in need – are involved in analysing and planning the assistance required. Inclusion and diversity are thus an integral part of the localisation agenda. The groups referred to above should also be considered for leadership roles, as appropriate. In line with DG ECHO's [Gender Policy](#) and [operational guidance on the](#)



In Niger, Nurse Mariama shows Massaouda how to measure the arm of her child to check her condition at the Lingui health post. The trainings are part of the nutrition programme run by medical NGO ALIMA and their local partner.

[inclusion of people with disabilities](#), the issues of inclusion and diversity are mainstreamed in this guidance note.

Measuring collective outcomes and strengthening mutual accountability. As stated above, system-wide change towards more local leadership and equitable partnerships in responding to humanitarian crises will not be easy to achieve. Clearly defined commitments should be developed, agreed and applied by all stakeholders, working together. Measuring and reporting on progress on the localisation agenda will become an additional responsibility of DG ECHO's staff when assessing and monitoring projects. This will inevitably entail some increase in reporting and monitoring requirements. DG ECHO is aware that the terms of the Grand Bargain call for a reduction in reporting and monitoring requirements, which may sometimes overstretch the capacities of local organisations and actors. DG ECHO will look for ways to streamline and, where possible, simplify, reporting procedures in ways consistent with its own accountability and transparency requirements.

Overview of the guidance note by outcome and topic

To navigate through the document, click on an item in the table below.

Overarching collective objective	L/NAs’ leadership and their capacity to respond to crises must be recognised, respected and strengthened to better address the needs of affected populations, and to prepare more effective humanitarian responses in future				
Outcomes (and areas for DG ECHO leverage)	Chapter 1 ‘Recognising the value, resources and skills of local/national actors and supporting (institutional) capacities’	Chapter 2 ‘Establishing more equitable partnerships’	Chapter 3 ‘Ensuring the participation of local/national actors throughout the humanitarian response cycle’	Chapter 4 ‘Strengthening the participation and leadership of local/national actors in humanitarian coordination’	Chapter 5 ‘Facilitating access to localised financing models’
Activities and processes for DG ECHO and its partners	Section 1.1 ‘Recognising value and skills’ Section 1.2 ‘Assessing capacity’ Section 1.3 ‘Capacity strengthening and sharing’ Section 1.4 ‘Facilitating access to flexible multi-year funding for capacity strengthening’	Section 2.1 ‘Partnerships with local/national actors as the preferred mode of delivery’ Section 2.2 ‘Transparency’ Section 2.3 ‘Equitable share of overhead costs’ Section 2.4 ‘Minimising the transfer of risk to local/national actors’	Section 3.1 ‘Direct and enhanced two-way communication’ Section 3.2 ‘Participation in needs assessments and context analysis’ Section 3.3 ‘Participation in strategic response planning and humanitarian implementation plan programming processes’	Section 4.1 ‘Integrating with existing national and/or area-based coordination mechanisms’ Section 4.2 ‘Supporting the participation of local/national actors in coordination mechanisms’ Section 4.3 ‘Advocacy’	Section 5.1 ‘Increasing and adapting funds provided to local/national actors’ Section 5.2 ‘Framing the role of the intermediary’
Cross-cutting issues	Measuring collective outcomes and strengthening mutual accountability Ensuring inclusion and diversity: the role of women’s rights or women-led organisations, youth organisations, local organisations of persons with disabilities and of marginalised or under-represented groups				
Additional information	Annexes Glossary Bibliography				

1. RECOGNISING THE VALUE, RESOURCES AND SKILLS OF LOCAL/NATIONAL ACTORS, AND SUPPORTING (INSTITUTIONAL) CAPACITIES

Policy objectives

Humanitarian activities funded by DG ECHO should **reinforce and complement local and national responses**. This entails acknowledging and giving due weight to the comparative advantages of local and national humanitarian actors: their long-term presence in the country and on the ground; their knowledge and understanding of local dynamics, needs and capacities; their ability to provide an immediate response to crises; their connection to any diaspora of local populations; etc. When at all possible, activities that DG ECHO funds should strengthen local humanitarian ecosystems and L/NAs' institutional⁹ and technical capacity so that the activities facilitate not only L/NAs' participation, but also their leadership in responding to crises and coordinating humanitarian interventions. In support of this approach, as set out in the Commission communication on the EU's humanitarian action: New challenges, same principles, DG ECHO is committed to '[e]xtend multiannual and flexible funding arrangements with humanitarian partners – liaising with development instruments whenever a nexus approach can be foreseen'. DG ECHO has stepped up both its efforts to increase multi-year funding and also its close coordination with the Directorate-General for International Partnerships and Directorate-General for Neighbourhood and Enlargement Negotiations. Humanitarian aid partners are encouraged to look for longer-term funding to complement that being developed by DG ECHO, and to coordinate more closely with international development actors.

1.1. Recognising value and skills

DG ECHO's expectations and commitments

For many years, the context of humanitarian aid interventions has grown increasingly more complex and

constrained due to overlapping crises and funding depletion. At the same time, L/NAs have been calling for greater recognition of their role and changes in power dynamics with international actors. **DG ECHO recognises L/NAs' comparative advantages and specific capacities**, and is committed to promoting local knowledge, expertise and leadership. In its recent guidance on reducing the environmental footprint of humanitarian aid, for example, DG ECHO fully acknowledges the value of using traditional knowledge to inform a more environmentally sustainable humanitarian response. DG ECHO expects its partners to take L/NAs' specific capacities more fully into account. To this end, **DG ECHO encourages the development and use of L/NAs' assessment tools that focus on supporting L/NAs' existing capacities and strengths** (rather than tools that focus only on gaps that need filling). DG ECHO expects partners to co-develop innovative criteria, highlighting the existing capacities and strengths of L/NAs in humanitarian contexts, and encourages 'non-traditional' capacity-strengthening approaches (e.g. mentoring).

What does this mean?

→ As requested by many L/NAs, DG ECHO partners should review and revise evaluation criteria used to assess potential partners. In addition to management capacity issues, DG ECHO partners should apply criteria that assess and rate issues such as L/NAs' knowledge of context and environment; technical capacity, including quality assurance; long-term presence on the ground; abilities to access marginalised and isolated groups; and links with local grassroots organisations and communities. **DG ECHO will look favourably on proposals from partners that recognise and strategically build on the existing capacities and strengths** of potential local partners (Single Form, Chapter 10 'Implementation').

⁹ Institutional capacity building is here considered to cover issues such as financial management, compliance with international standards, including humanitarian principles; fundraising skills; risk management; leadership development, and the hiring and retention of qualified staff, in a way that promotes growth; greater funding absorption capacity; and, ultimately, the ability of L/NAs to access donor funding independently.

Key considerations for partners

- Who are the first-line responders and key local stakeholders? What are their strengths and capacities? What involvement did they have before and during the crisis?
- Is external support needed or requested by local responders? If so, why, in what form and for what duration is this support requested/needed? Might providing external support through non-local/non-national actors undermine existing local capacity?
- In chronic crises, what should be done to ensure local capacities are empowered to provide the necessary response?

Other related issues

- ✓ Section 3.3 'Participation in strategic response planning and humanitarian implementation plan programming processes'.
- ✓ Section 4.1 'Integrating with existing national and/or area-based coordination mechanisms'.
- ✓ Section 4.2 'Supporting the participation of local/national actors in coordination mechanisms'.

1.2. Assessing capacity

DG ECHO's expectations and commitments

Capacity should be understood in relation to specific contexts and crises. At national and regional levels, analysis of capacity and knowledge of the local 'fabric' of crisis response structures should involve meeting L/NAs in the field and establishing direct relations with them to discuss and take into full consideration the reality of the local situation, and to enable meetings with relevant communities and individuals. While acknowledging and welcoming the fact that various initiatives to map local humanitarian response capacities are already being undertaken, DG ECHO encourages its partners to work

directly with national experts or consultants, platforms of national organisations or other groups of local actors (to avoid duplication) to better understand and map the dynamics of existing response mechanisms and the actors involved¹⁰. L/NAs should be similarly encouraged to assess, against commonly agreed criteria, the capacities of its international partners when determining whether/how they wish to work together.

What does this mean?

→ **Mapping existing humanitarian response capacity in specific contexts** is a starting point from which to assess how far humanitarian action could, in those contexts, be further localised, and provides an indication of strengths or gaps in local capacity that need to be addressed. **DG ECHO encourages the humanitarian community and its partners to carry out enhanced analysis of the actors already in place**, to identify a wide variety of actors in the territory, including smaller or less formalised organisations and movements that, while 'off the radar' of the wider humanitarian aid system, are, nonetheless, qualified to provide assistance locally and are already doing so. This assessment could be undertaken using coordination platforms (including clusters, if relevant).

→ Mapping existing humanitarian response capacity should enable DG ECHO partners to **enlarge and diversify the scope for partnerships with L/NAs**, rather than empowering only a limited number of more 'visible' L/NAs (with the risk of overloading them). DG ECHO also strongly recommends that its partners work with existing national coordination platforms, state representatives and local governments, development actors, networks of civil society organisations and other potential partners at local or national level, whenever possible, to avoid duplication of effort, while respecting the 'do-no-harm' principle and other humanitarian principles.

→ The strengths and capacities of local or national women's or women-led organisations, local organisations people with disabilities, and local or national organisations composed of, or representing, marginalised or under-represented groups should

¹⁰ Where relevant, this mapping could be undertaken under the auspices of the relevant cluster(s).

be analysed. These groups are often very active in responding to crises but may be less visible than other L/NAs; therefore, they may need to be specifically targeted. DG ECHO **focuses specifically on the diversity of local actors** supported by the activities it funds to ensure that minority or marginalised groups are meaningfully included. It also prioritises the participation and empowerment of women's or women-led groups and organisations representing the most vulnerable and discriminated groups.

Key considerations for partners

- How and by whom is the analysis of local response capacity undertaken? What can be done to ensure that this is not a top-down exercise but an empowering and participative process for the L/NAs concerned?
- Are there umbrella organisations or coordination platforms capable of facilitating, undertaking or participating in an analysis of local response capacities in a given context?
- Have different levels of capacity (e.g. individual, organisational or collective) been considered in the assessment?
- Is DG ECHO or any other actor already implementing capacity-strengthening programmes for local responders? If so, have capacity assessments already been carried out, and to what extent are they available? What is already in place that could be replicated or built on?

Other related issues

- ✓ Section 2.1 'Partnerships with local/national actors as the preferred mode of delivery'.
- ✓ Section 3.1 'Direct and enhanced two-way communication'.
- ✓ Section 3.2 'Participation in needs assessment and context analysis'.

1.3. Capacity strengthening and sharing

DG ECHO's expectations and commitments

DG ECHO fully recognises that local partners, including grassroots organisations, have significant existing capacities, which should be considered an asset for programme design and implementation. The potential complementarity between the knowledge and skills of international and local actors should be fully exploited in determining the appropriate response, particularly building on the L/NAs' knowledge of the local systems and needs.

Capacity strengthening should always be demand-driven, with L/NAs invited to establish priorities. Support for local capacity must also be multidimensional. DG ECHO is committed to diversifying its support for capacity strengthening. There is a continuing need for capacity strengthening in 'classic' areas such as project management, humanitarian project cycle management, proposal writing, monitoring, reporting and evaluation, and humanitarian principles. DG ECHO partners should be able to provide this (and DG ECHO encourages them to undertake this collaboratively with other partners to avoid duplication). At the same time, other areas are in need of support and strengthening, for example organisational governance, strategic planning and resource mobilisation (to broaden the donor base and thus ensure independence and sustainability). Many L/NAs also require support to implement up-to-date policies at currently expected standards; this entails institutional strengthening, and training or mentoring. DG ECHO will use the instruments available to contribute to capacity strengthening, such as the Enhanced Response Capacity and/or geographical humanitarian implementation plans (HIPs), when they are considered directly relevant to the proposal.

Capacity-strengthening/capacity-sharing plans should be contextualised, mutually identified and agreed for the long term based on project/programme and institutional needs. They should draw on a range of approaches, such as mentoring, shadowing, secondments, peer exchanges and on-the-job (and more traditional) training, with follow-up monitoring. External independent verification or quality assurance certification mechanisms

can support and recognise these long-term institutional processes¹¹.

Capacity strengthening is not a one-way endeavour towards L/NAs. L/NAs can play an invaluable role in ensuring that their international partners understand the contexts and cultures in which they are working, and provide valuable guidance and inputs on technical and other issues. Identifying areas where L/NAs may be instrumental in ensuring that the partners work effectively and appropriately should be considered and included.

What does this mean?

- For projects with a capacity-strengthening component, **DG ECHO encourages capacity assessments informed by an analysis jointly carried out by the L/NA and the international partner**, or by self-evaluation by the L/NAs (when possible, ensuring the quality of the methodology used to avoid biases related to self-diagnosis). Assessments should consider L/NAs' criteria and ratings, rather than being based exclusively on partners' or donors' criteria and requirements.
- DG ECHO intends to further engage in supporting local capacity through its projects, using examples of good practice to inform new initiatives. For example, in Venezuela, DG ECHO has broadly supported the development of local partners' capacities, specifically in the early stages of the crisis, following a context-informed approach. DG ECHO wishes to encourage this type of approach more widely. **Partners are therefore encouraged to include and describe specific plans for strengthening the capacity – particularly the institutional capacity – of L/NAs in their proposals**, especially L/NAs such as women's groups, local organisations representing people with disabilities or groups representing marginalised people. Unless a proposal clearly explains why the local/national partner does not need specific capacity strengthening or why localisation cannot reasonably be expected in a given context, proposals should set out:
 - the institutional capacity-strengthening/capacity-sharing plan;
 - institutional capacity strengthening and support alongside project implementation, detailing the methodologies to be used.
- Recognising that capacity strengthening is a two-way process whereby the international actor also takes the opportunity to learn from local actors, **DG ECHO encourages and will, when relevant, give priority to projects that include capacity-strengthening methodologies in which international and local actors learn from each other.** These may include innovative forms of coaching, shadowing and mentoring that allow a more organic process of peer-to-peer learning. This should enhance the complementarity of international and local actors when working together.
- **Umbrella organisations and national coordination platforms can play a critical role in capacity-strengthening initiatives**, as they facilitate peer learning and contextualised standard setting. DG ECHO will welcome activities aiming to support such cross-sectoral and contextualised approaches to capacity strengthening, and invites its partners to look for innovative approaches.
- The assessment of existing actors and capacities should also aim to **anticipate the eventual 'exit strategy' of the programme by planning a process to transfer responsibility and to support local leadership** in a phased approach. DG ECHO encourages, and will prioritise where the context permits, humanitarian aid operations that include strategies demonstrating how these projects **link to longer-term goals developed with national or local authorities or organisations to ensure local ownership and sustainability beyond humanitarian programme cycles.** Examples include the systematic inclusion of managed handovers, road maps or toolkits developed as part of the project, enabling the progressive transfer of competences from international to local stakeholders.
- Country evaluations commissioned by DG ECHO will increasingly **include measurement of the effects of activities it funds** on L/NAs in order to learn from experience and improve practice. When capacity-

¹¹ See, for example, the audit processes based on the [Core Humanitarian Standard](#).

strengthening activities, in particular in protracted crises, fail to enhance national and local capacities, renewed reflection and re-evaluation should focus on finding more effective strategies.

- For projects with a capacity-strengthening component, **community-based and grassroots organisations should be systematically considered as potential implementing partners** when designing humanitarian action. **DG ECHO will favourably consider partners that target grassroots organisations** for the implementation of a community-led humanitarian response.

Key considerations for partners

- Which organisation is best placed to provide professional support for the capacity strengthening of local actors? Is it the international partner, a local specialised service provider, an umbrella organisation, a coordination platform or another organisation?
- Does support include provision for a capacity-strengthening pathway to build institutional resilience, improving its capacity to respond to future crises? If not, are there other opportunities (e.g. development donors' support or specialised longer-term programmes) to work towards this end?
- Are there opportunities for peer-to-peer learning exercises? If not, how might processes be established to facilitate in situ and 'horizontal' learning between local responders, as well as with international actors?
- What opportunities are there for the international partner to learn from L/NAs so that it can deliver more effective humanitarian action? In the view of L/NAs, in what areas does the partner need to strengthen its capacity and how can L/NAs help in this regard?
- Is it possible to identify grassroots organisations that could be considered implementing partners to strengthen the locally led humanitarian response?

Other related issues

- ✓ Section 2.1 'Partnerships with local/national actors as the preferred mode of delivery'.



A local brigade in Somotillo, Nicaragua, is participating in a general simulation drill being held to strengthen local response capacities.

- ✓ Section 3.1 'Direct and enhanced two-way communication'.
- ✓ Section 5.1 'Increasing and adapting funds provided to local/national actors'.

1.4. Facilitating access to flexible multi-year funding for capacity strengthening

DG ECHO's expectations and commitments

Current humanitarian funding mechanisms are often focused on the short term and are not appropriate to support the long-term institutional capacity strengthening of local actors. **Evolution is needed from a project-based approach to capacity strengthening to the provision of structural, longer-term support to L/NAs.**

Over the last 5 years **DG ECHO has increased both its multi-year financing (with a duration of 24 months or more) and its support to capacity-strengthening efforts**, notably by seeking to consolidate the response or preparedness capacity of L/NAs. Disaster preparedness programmes and rapid response mechanisms have been fundamental in building local response and preparedness capacity. For example, in many parts of Myanmar where, due to significant access challenges for INGOs, the humanitarian response is reliant on local actors (including communities, civil society organisations and community-based organisations), the first line emergency response (FLER) programme further promotes the localisation of aid by strengthening local capacities to respond to crises. In addition, DG ECHO's [guidance note on disaster preparedness](#) identifies the reinforcement of local capacity as one of its most important objectives.

DG ECHO is committed to continuing its efforts to promote flexible and efficient humanitarian action through an expansion of multi-year and flexible funding arrangements. In the framework of the Grand Bargain, a commitment is made to increase the share of DG ECHO's multi-year portfolio by the end of 2023 by at least 30 %, compared with 2021, with the ambition of extending multi-year funding to new areas and sectors, such as in protracted crises or for actions specifically aiming to promote solutions that are more environmentally sustainable. Meanwhile, when relevant, **DG ECHO expects its partners to demonstrate a longer-term commitment in their partnerships with L/NAs, especially women-led and women's rights organisations and/or those representing marginalised people.**

What does this mean?

→ Multi-year funding provides unique opportunities for improving the effectiveness and efficiency of DG ECHO's assistance. Therefore, DG ECHO encourages partners to pass down the multi-year or flexible funding (when available) to local/national organisations. This would also support DG ECHO's **commitment to continue investing in local and national preparedness, locally-led emergency response mechanisms and anticipatory action.** DG ECHO is also committed to further supporting early warning systems and the development of contingency plans. It will additionally continue to support the strengthening of institutional

capacity at national and local government levels, and to provide assistance to regional entities.

- Strengthening the capacity of local actors to mitigate the risk of human-induced crises or disasters provoked by natural hazards implies long-term support. That is why DG ECHO encourages partners **to provide more structural and long-term support** to L/NAs. Where the context permits – and particularly in protracted crises and multi-year-funded activities – dedicated funds should be allocated for the management and institutional development of L/NAs.
- **Priority will be given to multi-year funding proposals that include a significant gender-related component, and/or envisage setting up long-term partnerships with groups representing marginalised people, local organisations of people with disabilities and women's organisations.** The value and contribution of these groups as first and local responders in humanitarian contexts are clear, and working with them to identify their needs and priorities for additional support will strengthen a proposal.
- DG ECHO field offices and EU delegations will continue to **work towards the common objective of strengthening resilience at local and national levels, by means of local participation, safeguards and programmes to strengthen local capacities.** They will continue to focus on the most vulnerable people and groups, as stated in [Council conclusions – Operationalising the humanitarian–development nexus](#), working with both humanitarian and development actors, and relying on the 'nexus' approach.

Key considerations for partners

- What are the opportunities to work alongside, or as part of, longer-term programmes and strategies to support the institutional capacity strengthening of local actors and enhance disaster preparedness efforts?
- As crises evolve, are there opportunities for donors and partners to advocate for durable solutions or to link humanitarian response to longer-term development approaches? What role is there for local actors in longer-term approaches? How can this role be strengthened?

Other related issues

- ✓ Section 2.1 'Partnerships with local/national actors as the preferred mode of delivery'.
- ✓ Section 5.1 'Increasing and adapting funds provided to local/national actors'.

What resources are available?

Barbelet, V., [Rethinking capacity and complementarity for a more local humanitarian action](#), Humanitarian Policy Group report, Humanitarian Policy Group, Overseas Development Institute, 2019.

CHS Alliance, '[Verify](#)', web page.

DA Global, [Is Aid Really Changing? What the COVID-19 response tells us about localisation, decolonisation and the humanitarian system](#), British Red Cross, 2021.

DG ECHO, 'Projects should be implemented through a protection mainstreaming, disability, gender and age inclusion lens and taking into account the potential of using traditional ecological knowledge', in [Guidance on the operationalisation of the minimum environmental requirements and recommendations for EU-funded humanitarian aid operations](#), European Commission, Brussels, 2022, pp. 20–22.

IFRC, [Localisation of humanitarian action in the Red Cross Red Crescent: National society development building capacities for crisis management, resilience and peace – A longitudinal study on the effectiveness of support for national society development and its relevance for localization in 5 national services](#), 2021.

Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development, Development Assistance Committee, [Recommendation on the Humanitarian–Development–Peace Nexus](#), OECD/LEGAL/5019, 2020.

2. ESTABLISHING MORE EQUITABLE PARTNERSHIPS

Policy objectives

Despite some shifts in past years, **the relationship between L/NAs and international humanitarian organisations often remains unequal**, often taking the form of subcontracting arrangements, with L/NAs used to achieve results that international organisations and donors set as objectives. L/NAs and communities affected by, or responding to, humanitarian crises should be seen not just as subcontractors or recipients of aid, but as equal

partners in the crisis response. **DG ECHO partners should therefore aim to examine and change their practices, attitudes and power dynamics in favour of equitable partnerships with L/NAs.** Key principles governing such partnerships for all activities funded by DG ECHO should include equality, transparency, a results-oriented approach, shared responsibility and complementarity of roles¹². This should translate into joint decision-making on programming, budgeting, reporting, etc. It is also important that the transfer of risks for L/NAs be minimised.

Box 4: Equitable and meaningful partnerships

‘L/NAs are often treated as implementers/sub-contractors and not fully included in strategic and decision-making processes. However, the involvement and participation of L/NAs in all aspects of the humanitarian programme cycle (analysis, strategic planning, implementation, monitoring and evaluation) is essential for accountability to affected populations and ensuring that assistance and protection is relevant. Coordinators therefore have a responsibility to promote a culture of principled partnership, both in the ways they interact with the members of their coordination groups and in the ways in which members interact with each other. Relations among organizations involved in humanitarian action should be based on mutual respect, trust and the Principles of Partnership. These are equality, transparency, a results-oriented approach, responsibility and complementarity.

Equitable partnerships between international actors and L/NAs also require a shift towards longer-term partnerships that are systematically built together focusing on the strengths and strategic engagement of each party and not on the delivery of a specific project, allowing for broader social transformation and shifting uneven power dynamics and unconscious bias between L/NAs and international organisations.

The overall objective in any partnership is that, over time, the need for humanitarian assistance should be reduced. Partnerships should be based on complementarity and should develop greater trust and promote mutual accountability. Strategic partnerships should also be complemented by operational partnerships that are flexible, transparent, equitable, and allow for L/NAs to contribute throughout the programme cycle and help them to strengthen institutional capacity, as required.’

Source: IASC guidance note [Strengthening participation, representation and leadership of local and national actors in IASC humanitarian coordination mechanisms](#).

2.1. Partnerships with local/national actors as the preferred mode of delivery

DG ECHO’s expectations and commitments

Unless there are objective, context- or sector-specific, documented reasons for not working with L/NAs, the preferred

mode of delivery of projects funded by DG ECHO is through equitable partnerships with L/NAs. In some countries where international organisations are obliged to partner with local humanitarian actors¹³, a culture of strategic partnerships is nurtured. This has the additional effect of strengthening local organisations, which then become the ‘go-to’ partners for their own governments. DG ECHO is committed to actively supporting this transition to partnerships, which is already

¹² See ‘Principles of Partnership’ in the Glossary.

¹³ Such as in Nepal after the 2015 earthquakes, where there was a massive influx of international aid agencies.

under way, **by promoting partnerships as the preferred mode of project delivery and implementation.**

What does this mean?

- DG ECHO partners should **mainstream the objective of equitable partnerships with L/NAs throughout their organisations.** The objective should be adopted at senior leadership and management levels, made explicit in recruitment policies, and monitored as part of the performance assessments of key staff, especially operational or programme staff and financial managers¹⁴.
- DG ECHO partners are encouraged to **form partnerships at local level.** This is clear in the Single Form, where partnerships with L/NAs will be the default field provided under the mode of delivering humanitarian aid (Chapter 10.6, 'Are there any other participants in the action?'). In contexts where this mode of delivery is not feasible (e.g. absorption capacity, political issues that need to be taken into consideration), partners are expected to provide explanations as to why such a partnership would not be possible or appropriate.
- When relevant, DG ECHO will give priority to proposals **that have equitable partnerships at their core** and envisage the following in delivery:
 - the presence of L/NAs, with a defined role for them in implementing proposed activities, with account taken of the diversity of stakeholders at local level, including groups representing marginalised people and women's organisations;
 - the participation and leadership of L/NAs throughout all stages of the programming cycle, including needs assessment, project/programme design, project/programme implementation, and monitoring, evaluation, accountability and learning;
 - an L/NA role and voice in project or programme governance;
 - an appropriate share of funding – including overhead costs – allocated to L/NAs (see Section 2.3 'Equitable share of overhead costs');

- a schedule of payment to avoid cash flow problems.

- DG ECHO is committed to ensuring that **the implementation of these commitments** is reflected in partners' reports, and when visiting L/NAs and projects on the ground. DG ECHO partners should report:
 - how local leadership and decision-making are being reinforced/supported;
 - the final share of funding allocated to L/NAs (see Section 2.2 'Transparency');
 - feedback from L/NAs giving their views of the quality of the partnership.

Key considerations for partners

- What is the partnership strategy chosen, with which organisations are they partnering, what for and how? If there are no local partners involved in the funded activity, why not?
- Do L/NAs and international partners have previous experience of working together? Do they have a strategic, as well as operational, partnership? How do partners evaluate their relationship?
- How is equity or equality understood and guaranteed between the partners?
- How will L/NAs be involved in the different phases of the programme cycle? How is it envisaged that L/NAs will be associated with the governance and monitoring of the project? How will L/NAs' voices and roles be acknowledged and made visible?

Other related issues

- ✓ Section 1.1 'Recognising value and skills'.
- ✓ Section 5.1 'Increasing and adapting funds provided to local/national actors'.
- ✓ Section 5.2 'Framing the role of the intermediary'.

¹⁴ See Commitment 2 – in Grand Bargain Intermediaries Caucus, [The role of intermediaries in supporting locally led humanitarian action](#), 2022.

2.2. Transparency

DG ECHO's expectations and commitments

Transparency is instrumental in building mutual trust and equity between partners. A lack of transparency, on the other hand, particularly in relation to the contractual provisions of projects, limits the L/NAs' understanding of donors' requirements and keeps them in a subcontracting role. **DG ECHO partners are expected to share project and budget information** with their local and national partners, as well as with DG ECHO, and to include L/NAs in their exchanges with DG ECHO. DG ECHO is committed to, and expects its partners to be transparent about, L/NAs' contribution to humanitarian action in their external communications. This external communication and visibility material should reflect the role of local partners and should be agreed with them to avoid exposure to additional security or reputational risks.

What does this mean?

- In order to report back and deliver on the Grand Bargain commitments, DG ECHO requires its partners to **identify, monitor and report the funding that they allocate to L/NAs** as part of funding and reporting agreements. Partners should indicate in the Single Form the funds going to local actors (Single Form, Chapter 10.6.1 'Implementing partners / partners', subheading 'Estimated amount of the budget allocated'). As DG ECHO is committed to allocating at least 25 % of its humanitarian funding to L/NAs as directly as possible, **in case of similar project proposals, DG ECHO will prioritise proposals where at least 25 % of the EU contribution to the action provided by DG ECHO is to be spent on activities implemented by L/NAs.** DG ECHO partners should disclose funding awarded to programmes and operations, and the proportions allocated to local, national and international partners¹⁵.
- **DG ECHO is committed to, and expects its partners to increase reporting** on, platforms such as the international aid transparency initiative and OCHA's financial tracking service. This includes reporting

on intermediary¹⁶ funding and advocating for these platforms to include such data.

- **DG ECHO partners should be transparent about their local partners' contribution to humanitarian action in their external communications.** This external communication and visibility materials should reflect the role of local partners and should be agreed with them to avoid exposure to additional security or reputational risks.
- As member of the Grand Bargain caucus on funding for localisation, **DG ECHO commits to follow-up the outcomes of the caucus recommendations.**

Key considerations for partners

- Is the information about funding allocations to L/NAs shared with DG ECHO? Is it shared with local partners? If not, why not?
- If the share of the budget allocated to L/NAs is below 25 % of the total amount of the project, are there objective reasons for this? What are these reasons?
- What are the relevant communication channels to report back to key stakeholders and to the public about L/NAs' contributions to the humanitarian response? Might these communication channels pose security risks for the L/NAs? Have the L/NAs been consulted and have they approved this communication?

Other related issues

- ✓ Section 1.1 'Recognising value and skills'.
- ✓ Section 3.1 'Direct and enhanced two-way communication'.
- ✓ Section 5.2 'Framing the role of the intermediary'.

¹⁵ See commitment 7 in Grand Bargain Intermediaries Caucus, [The role of intermediaries in supporting locally led humanitarian action](#), 2022.

¹⁶ See the definition of 'intermediary' in the Glossary.

2.3. Equitable share of overhead costs

DG ECHO's expectations and commitments

In financing models involving intermediary organisations, it is important to ensure that an **adequate, equitable amount of indirect costs reaches L/NAs**, enabling them to maximise their cost recovery. As stated in the IASC guidance on the provision of overheads to local and national NGOs, '[e]nabling L/NNGOs [local and national NGOs] to recover their full direct and indirect costs is critical for more efficient and effective humanitarian action ... While providing overheads will not independently "solve" localisation, it is an important step in enabling more locally led humanitarian practice. It is also an important point of principle and a step towards redressing some of the inequities in the humanitarian financing system.' DG ECHO adheres to the principles and actions outlined in the IASC guidance and is committed to contributing, with its partners, to a fairer and more equitable sharing of overhead

costs. In activities funded by DG ECHO, **L/NAs should be granted overhead costs** in an adequate way as part of their partnerships with international humanitarian agencies and organisations so that they can build and maintain the capacity to operate effectively. Indirect cost and overhead cost policies must be transparent and open.

What does this mean?

- In line with the IASC recommendations on the provision of overheads to local and national partners, **DG ECHO strongly encourages its partners to develop organisational policies or guidance on the provision of overheads to local and national organisations.**
- DG ECHO partners are expected to provide an **adequate share of overhead costs** to their local/national partners and **share information on this with DG ECHO**, together with the **rationale used to calculate costs** (e.g. a fixed percentage or a proportionate share in accordance with the European Commission's budget



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A meeting of the ALIMA team in Nzerekore Guinea Conakry, 2014. The NGO ALIMA coordinates the Ebola treatment centre in collaboration with a platform of African medical NGO composed of BEFEN, FORSANI, SOS MEDECINS, KEOGO, Alerte Santé and AMCP.

executed by L/NAs), unless these costs are covered by complementary funds (e.g. long-term institutional agreements supported by other funding sources). In cases where L/NAs' overhead costs for activities funded by DG ECHO are covered by funding sources other than the European Commission's budget, an explanation is required as to how the overhead costs are covered and the rationale used to calculate the costs. In cases where overheads are not covered for local/national partners, written justification is required. To that end, DG ECHO requires its partners to provide in the Single Form:

- the percentage of funding allocated to local actors' overhead costs (as a percentage of the project budget);
- the rationale used to calculate costs.

→ Partners are invited to **present some project-related costs as direct costs** (e.g. policy development, the organisation of lesson-learning workshops or participation in these workshops), whenever this would be possible under the relevant cost eligibility rules. DG ECHO already does this on a regular basis.

Key considerations for partners

- What is the rationale used to calculate the share of overhead costs allocated to L/NAs? Has it been agreed, discussed and accepted by the L/NAs concerned?
- Which activities directly related to the humanitarian response, or supporting the management and institutional development of L//NAs, can be included as direct costs?

Other related issues

- ✓ Section 1.4 'Facilitating access to flexible multi-year funding for capacity strengthening'.
- ✓ Section 2.2 'Transparency'.
- ✓ Section 5.1 'Increasing and adapting funds provided to local/national actors'.
- ✓ Section 5.2 'Framing the role of the intermediary'.

2.4. Minimising the transfer of risk to local/national actors

DG ECHO's expectations and commitments

As with all humanitarian activities that DG ECHO funds, DG ECHO partners must put in place adequate measures to manage fiduciary risk. DG ECHO requires partners to comply with the obligations set out in the anti-money-laundering and counter-terrorism financing legal framework and sanctions (EU restrictive measures). Security issues need careful assessment. L/NAs often deliver assistance in remote or hard-to-reach areas and are thus regularly exposed to high levels of risks. In 2020, 95 % of victims of attacks on aid workers were staff of national agencies or organisations working in the country¹⁷. Partnership arrangements should ensure, in line with the 'do no harm' and conflict-sensitivity principles, that an unreasonable burden of additional risk is not transferred to L/NAs.

DG ECHO acknowledges the need to **ensure that adequate resources are provided to fund safety- and security-related costs, with risks being managed within the partnership, rather than being transferred to L/NAs**. DG ECHO partners are encouraged to **intensify dialogue with L/NAs on this issue, and to define roles and responsibilities in a transparent and constructive manner** at the earliest stages of programme planning. As a signatory of the Grand Bargain, DG ECHO recognises the need for better sharing of risks as part of the localisation policy, and will consider the funding of training, equipment and other means of improving the safety and security of local partners to be direct costs. In addition, DG ECHO acknowledges that the duplication of due diligence requirements and a lack of harmonisation in the sector constitute some of the tougher barriers to successfully furthering the localisation agenda. DG ECHO will therefore look into ways of supporting common approaches to harmonising due diligence requirements and/or making external independent verification or quality assurance certification mechanisms available or accessible to L/NAs, including through the Enhanced Response Capacity.

¹⁷ ALNAP, Obrecht, A., Swithern, S. and Doherty, J., *The State of the Humanitarian System (SOHS) 2022 Edition*, 2022.

What does this mean?

- Donors and international humanitarian organisations need to develop their approach to risk. This requires **transparent dialogue with L/NAs**, undertaken in a spirit of mutual trust. L/NAs should not simply be expected to assume additional risks at the behest of donors or international humanitarian organisations.
- **The levels of investment of all stakeholders, and corresponding risks, should be fully assessed and recognised.** Risks of fraud or corruption among all stakeholders should be openly discussed and managed as necessary, with the aim of zero tolerance of fraud and corruption in humanitarian interventions, to ensure that aid reaches beneficiaries as intended without losses or diversion. To that end, adequate reporting and accounting measures are needed, with L/NAs' administrative and financial procedures strengthened as necessary as part of the institutional capacity strengthening provided for in specific projects.
- Engaging with L/NAs has specific implications in high-risk contexts, as partners receiving or managing EU funds are required to **comply with EU restrictive measures**, which entails providing humanitarian assistance through actions or people not subject to EU sanction regimes. When this is not possible, partners should make use of humanitarian exceptions in the relevant EU sanctions. In accordance with international humanitarian law where no other option is available, the provision of humanitarian aid should not be prevented by EU restrictive measures. DG ECHO partners are therefore expected to ensure that their L/NA partners comply with the EU restrictive measures and anti-money-laundering / counter-terrorism financing frameworks mentioned above, and that all due diligence measures are regularly carried out in line with EU legislation and DG ECHO's contractual requirements before making payments. DG ECHO encourages partners to support their local and national partners in complying with these requirements. DG ECHO also encourages partners to harmonise their approaches to the due diligence of L/NAs with those of other partners to avoid duplication; this harmonisation includes conducting collective analysis of L/NAs that covers issues such as their capacity, their presence on the ground and possible risks. DG ECHO will also consider ways of supporting efforts to harmonise due diligence requirements.
- Wherever possible, DG ECHO partners should invite L/NAs to take part in **joint risk evaluation processes**, risk mitigation planning and the development of specific scenarios for risk management according to the context. DG ECHO encourages its partners to **describe evaluation and risk management processes** in detail in the Single Form (Chapter 7.5 'Assumptions and risks (including risk of fraudulent activities and environmental risk)').
- **Training, advice and timely information on security and risk management and safeguarding should be provided to L/NAs for operations in high-risk areas.** DG ECHO strongly encourages its partners to integrate L/NAs into their own systems (e.g. by training trainers, sharing methodologies, and supporting L/NAs to run their own training sessions on topics such as field monitoring, first aid or how to react to security incidents). The services of DG ECHO, including online training, could be made accessible to L/NAs, including those that are implementing DG ECHO projects and those that wish to do so.
- **DG ECHO partners should work with their national and local partners to reinforce their own policies**, providing support, for example, for the development and implementation of internal policy, codes of conduct and standard operational procedures, or system implementation.
- **DG ECHO is committed to continuing to support partners in providing L/NAs with equipment to mitigate risks** (e.g. vehicles, communication systems, and devices such as satellite telephones or radios and fire safety equipment), where such costs are eligible.
- DG ECHO recognises the specific risks faced by female aid workers and women-led organisations, and the added value of their work for aid delivery. **DG ECHO is committed to continuing its advocacy in favour of female humanitarian workers' access.**

Key considerations for partners

- What are the main risks related to project/programme activities, and have they been evaluated from the different perspectives of international and local actors?
- Was the process of risk analysis and mitigation planning conducted as a collective exercise involving all partners? Do all partners accept the outcome of the exercise?
- What can be done to reduce risk within the scope of the proposed project-/programme-related activities?

- Are there opportunities for donors and partners to advocate (or take concrete actions regarding) reducing risks and providing stronger safety guarantees for L/NAs?

Other related issues

- ✓ Section 1.3 'Capacity strengthening and sharing'.
- ✓ Section 3.2 'Participation in needs assessments and context analysis'.
- ✓ Section 5.1 'Increasing and adapting funds provided to local/national actors'.

What resources are available?

GISF (Global Interagency Security Forum, previously the European Interagency Security Forum), [Security Risk Management: A basic guide for smaller NGOs](#), 2017.

GISF, [Partnerships and Security Risk Management: From the local partner's perspective](#), GISF research paper, 2020.

GISF, [Partnerships and Security Risk Management: A joint action guide for local and international aid organisations](#), 2021.

IASC, Results Group 5 on Humanitarian Financing, [Provision of Overheads to Local and National Partners](#), guidance note, 2022.

NEAR, ['Localisation performance measurement framework'](#), web page, 2019.

Pacific Islands Association of Non-Government Organisations and Humanitarian Advisory Group, [Measuring Localisation: Framework and tools](#), 2019.

Van Brabant, K. and Patel, S., [Localisation in Practice: Emerging indicators and practical recommendations](#), Global Mentoring Initiative, 2018.

3. ENSURING THE PARTICIPATION OF LOCAL/NATIONAL ACTORS THROUGHOUT THE HUMANITARIAN RESPONSE CYCLE

Policy objectives

The involvement and participation of L/NAs throughout the humanitarian response cycle (needs assessments, design of response plans, implementation, monitoring and evaluation) constitute good practices that might imply cultural changes in some instances. Humanitarian actors should be committed to ensuring L/NAs' involvement and participation. L/NAs' participation helps ensure that assistance and protection analysis are relevant in a given context and will have longer-term benefits. L/NAs' participation also improves accountability for humanitarian interventions, as local actors are often better known to communities than international actors, and local actors may be more likely to be held accountable by the people affected by crises. The role of local and national authorities is key, as any humanitarian response plan (HRP) must be aligned with local and national response plans and policies. **DG ECHO commits itself to involving key L/NAs in its own response planning mechanisms and to supporting L/NAs' involvement in the (UN-led) humanitarian response cycle, adapting processes and ensuring proper means are made available for such participation. It expects its partners to do the same.**

3.1. Direct and enhanced two-way communication

DG ECHO's expectations and commitments

Dialogue, consultation and more regular direct communication or engagement with L/NAs, where relevant and possible, can significantly change mindsets and expectations, and encourage the creation of equitable partnerships and improved L/NA participation throughout the humanitarian response cycle, especially for groups

representing marginalised people, local organisations of people with disabilities, and women's groups and organisations. **DG ECHO recognises the need to enhance and improve dialogue with L/NAs.** The fact that DG ECHO funds L/NAs only indirectly should not inhibit open and direct discussions, as appropriate or necessary, between DG ECHO and L/NAs participating in a programme or project.

What does this mean?

- **DG ECHO is committed to communicating more extensively and more directly with L/NAs** in the countries where it operates (including communication with platforms of NGOs, local and national authorities, academics etc.). DG ECHO is committed to organising regular meetings with L/NAs, particularly in major countries of operation, to promote dialogue and mutual understanding through engagement with or the establishment of localisation advocacy groups or, where relevant, national reference groups¹⁸.
- Regarding local and national organisations indirectly supported by DG ECHO, **good practices already exist that DG ECHO is committed to mainstreaming.** This includes:
 - Ensuring that DG ECHO staff meet with local actors and communities – preferably early in their field visit, or early in the programming cycle if programming is still under way – whenever they visit programmes that DG ECHO funds.
 - Establishing a direct channel of communication between DG ECHO and L/NAs participating in programmes or projects. This should both allow local partner organisations to engage on issues that may arise within partnerships or other coordination groups, and enable DG ECHO to consult L/NAs at strategic programmatic moments during the planning and

¹⁸ National reference groups are national-level, constituent-based, consultative forums for humanitarian stakeholders that are led by local and national actors. They were established by the Grand Bargain in June 2021 to promote the Grand Bargain 2.0 framework and its two enabling priorities: (i) unblocking barriers to quality funding to allow effective and efficient response while ensuring visibility and accountability; and (ii) providing greater support for the leadership, delivery and capacity of local responders, and the participation of affected communities in addressing humanitarian needs.

implementation of programmes (e.g. through L/ NAs’ participation in the HIP programming process; see Section 3.3 ‘Participation in strategic response planning and humanitarian implementation plan programming processes’).

- **Channels of communication should be set up, or strengthened if they already exist, with umbrella organisations or national coordination platforms to facilitate enhanced direct communication with L/NAs in specific contexts.** DG ECHO is committed to ensuring that communication with these collective organisations or groups is more effective, and encourages its partners to engage with them in a strategic way.
- DG ECHO is committed to **supporting translation and interpretation services** to facilitate communication in local languages, where such costs are eligible. Communication should be inclusive and also accessible to people with disabilities. Partners are encouraged to include the costs of these services in their proposals.

Key considerations for partners

- What communication channels with local actors exist to allow identification and understanding of the situation on the ground or the cultural context?
- Are there national coordination platforms available to facilitate two-way communication with the broader local and national community of actors?
- Are local and national women’s groups or organisations, local organisations of people with disabilities, and local or national organisations composed of or representing marginalised groups represented in national coordination groups or platforms? Are their voices and views considered? Is information about humanitarian aid accessible to them? If not, how can these organisations have effective access to channels of communication and make their voices and views heard?
- Are processes and tools available to collect feedback from L/NAs? Are the processes/tools appropriate



In Somalia, the Danish Refugee Council and its local partner Kaashif provide child-friendly spaces to children who were forced to leave their home and have no access to schooling. From the initial stages, Kaashif seeks the input of the displaced community so that people feel engaged and involved in the activities being organised.

to the context? Are they appropriate and successful in resolving emerging issues between partners, and promoting equitable, effective partnerships?

Other related issues

- ✓ Section 4.1 'Integrating with existing national and/or area-based coordination mechanisms'.
- ✓ Section 4.2 'Supporting the participation of local/national actors in coordination mechanisms'.

3.2. Participation in needs assessments and context analysis

DG ECHO's expectations and commitments

DG ECHO strongly believes that L/NAs can add value to needs assessments. DG ECHO aims to **promote L/NAs' active participation in these assessments**, with full advantage being taken of L/NAs' close relationships with affected communities, their understanding of the contexts, their geographical proximity and their cultural knowledge, all of which enables them to provide rapid, nuanced analysis at this critical stage of the humanitarian response cycle. **Local actors should play an important part in needs assessments** because they are particularly well placed to understand local contexts, they are familiar with local languages and cultures, and they are readily accepted by communities. Where appropriate, **local authorities must be included** as a matter of principle, as they are responsible for responding to communities' needs at local level. Information about plans for needs assessments should therefore be shared with L/NAs and they should be invited to participate in the assessments.

What does this mean?

- DG ECHO recognises that **arrangements should ensure that L/NAs play a central, if not leading, role in the needs assessment process**. DG ECHO is committed to increasing its advocacy in favour of L/NAs' increased participation at all levels, pushing for humanitarian country teams (HCTs) and clusters to include L/NAs in assessments and HRP design.

- In parallel, **DG ECHO will continue to provide funding as appropriate to enable the participation of L/NAs in needs assessments**. Participation of women's or women-led organisations, organisations of people with disabilities, and organisations representing marginalised or under-represented groups should be given support, including by covering the costs of translation and interpretation, transportation and training, where eligible, and also by ensuring the accessibility of meeting rooms etc. The process should be accessible to all.

- **DG ECHO encourages its partners to involve L/NAs in their programme-level needs assessments**, including interagency needs evaluation processes. This should be detailed in the Single Form (Chapter 4.1 'Assessment dates and methodology'). Priority will be given to the proposals that have adopted the most inclusive methodologies, including:
 - use of mixed teams to conduct the evaluation (for example, 50 % local actors, including local authorities, local technical departments and other relevant local bodies);
 - provision of support for needs assessments led by local actors, when possible.

Key considerations for partners

- What role is there for L/NAs in needs assessments and context analysis? How may it be ensured that their knowledge and understanding of the context are fully taken into account in strategy development and programming?
- What provisions should be made to ensure that L/NAs fully participate in needs assessments? Are there specific constraints on their participation and how might these be overcome?

Other related issues

- ✓ Section 1.1 'Recognising value and skills'.
- ✓ Section 5.1 'Increasing and adapting funds provided to local/national actors'.
- ✓ Section 5.2 'Framing the role of the intermediary'.

3.3. Participation in strategic response planning and humanitarian implementation plan Programming processes

DG ECHO's expectations and commitments

L/NAs have a critical role to play in influencing decisions on humanitarian assistance, from needs assessments to the allocation of resources – how and to whom resources should be allocated, and what level of assistance should be provided to different recipients or for different elements of the humanitarian response. **DG ECHO recognises that L/NAs should participate more fully in making strategic programmatic choices.** It is committed to further promoting and supporting L/NA participation in HIP consultations and processes, at field and regional levels. DG ECHO also expects UN agency partners to enable L/NAs to participate in the development of humanitarian needs overviews (HNOs) and HRP.

What does this mean?

- **DG ECHO is committed to ensuring the active and inclusive participation of L/NAs in the HIP programming process.** This entails setting up relevant consultations with umbrella organisations and national coordination platforms, involving L/NAs in HIP meetings (during the preparation, introduction and revision of the plan), and providing training and information sessions, including sessions for government or local authority representatives. Women's groups and women-led organisations, organisations of people with disabilities and organisations representing marginalised people should be taken into account. DG ECHO intends to ensure that L/NAs participate in the preparation, initial presentation and revision of HIPs, whether in meetings with DG ECHO partners or in dedicated meetings for L/NAs.
- DG ECHO strongly encourages its partners to facilitate L/NA's participation in the **HNO development process and HRP planning workshops, and to ensure that L/NAs are involved in the discussion of response**

priorities. This could include the funding of travel so L/NAs can take part in national-level workshops. Coordination leads should ensure that institutional and technical capacity-building priorities are reflected in the HRP and in sector response plans.

- **The HNO process should ensure that local capacity to respond to humanitarian needs is specifically analysed, outside the immediate context of needs assessments for affected communities.** Similarly, the HRP should describe the roles of L/NAs and suggest why international aid is needed to complement local assistance. In countries where these instruments are in place, DG ECHO encourages its partners to revise the methodologies used for HNOs and HRPs, to reflect these requirements.

Key considerations for partners

- How are L/NAs included in needs assessments and programming processes? Is their participation meaningful, going beyond their involvement in collecting data from communities?
- How may L/NAs be made part of strategic processes such as HIPs and HRP programming? Who should participate and what should be the modalities of participation?
- Is the national coordination platform the appropriate body to engage with for these processes? If not, why not? Which other entities or groups would be more appropriate?

Other related issues

- ✓ Section 1.1 'Recognising value and skills'.
- ✓ Section 2.1 'Partnerships with local/national actors as the preferred mode of delivery'.
- ✓ Section 5.1 'Increasing and adapting funds provided to local/national actors'.

What resources are available?

DG ECHO, [The inclusion of persons with disabilities in EU-funded humanitarian aid operations](#), operational guidance, European Commission, Brussels, 2019.

Schmalenbach, C., with Christian Aid, CARE, Tearfund, ActionAid, CAFOD, Oxfam, [Pathways to Localisation: A framework towards locally-led humanitarian response in partnership-based action](#), 2019

Humanitarian Practice Network, Overseas Development Institute, 'Disability inclusion in humanitarian action', Humanitarian Exchange, No 78, 2020.

4. STRENGTHENING THE PARTICIPATION AND LEADERSHIP OF LOCAL/NATIONAL ACTORS IN HUMANITARIAN COORDINATION

Policy objectives

As part of the Grand Bargain, donors and aid organisations commit to **supporting and complementing national coordination mechanisms, where they exist, and to including L/NAs in international coordination mechanisms**, as appropriate and in keeping with humanitarian principles¹⁹. DG ECHO promotes humanitarian interventions alongside existing national structures, where possible, as the latter have primary responsibility to meet the needs of populations affected by crises. If the context does not allow for integration with national coordination mechanisms (e.g. in volatile conflict settings), DG ECHO commits to facilitating the inclusive and diverse participation of local actors in international coordination systems such as the cluster system, and seeks to support opportunities for L/NAs to shape and lead the agendas of coordination meetings and discussions. It expects its partners to take the same approach.

4.1. Integrating with existing national and/or area-based coordination mechanisms

DG ECHO’s expectations and commitments

As stated in the IASC guidance note [Strengthening participation, representation and leadership of local and national actors in IASC humanitarian coordination mechanisms](#), ‘[i]nternationally led humanitarian coordination structures should always take existing national and local approaches and structures into account, and proactive efforts should be made to identify, link with and work through these coordination and leadership structures’. In particular, when responding to an urban crisis requiring

multi-sectoral and multi-stakeholder coordination, [the IASC Guidance Note for Coordination in Urban Crises](#) recommends the adoption of area-based coordination mechanisms, operating at city and/or municipal levels. This can facilitate joint planning and response implementation between local and international actors. These coordination mechanisms could either (i) build on existing local mechanisms, in line with the principle of reinforcing rather than replacing, or (ii), when not already in existence or appropriate, be established in line with several agreed criteria²⁰.

DG ECHO and its partners should support and participate in existing national and/or local coordination systems and avoid creating parallel coordination systems. DG ECHO recommends that its partners integrate national/local platforms rather than create new ones, wherever possible. An analysis of the political situation will often be required in order to avoid humanitarian action being ‘instrumentalised’ by one or other party to a political cause, or otherwise politicised, or used in support of objectives that run counter to humanitarian principles.

What does this mean?

→ DG ECHO encourages its partners to support and participate in **national and area-based coordination systems**, where these exist. There is strong evidence that this is likely to promote the involvement of local actors and results in more coherent approaches across the nexus. Where relevant, DG ECHO will liaise with and consult locally led structures, including the national reference groups, where these platforms exist. DG ECHO strongly encourages its partners to participate in L/NA-run coordination mechanisms, where these have been established, rather than establishing parallel systems, to ensure the provision of international assistance

¹⁹ Grand Bargain workstream 2 (localisation), commitment 3.

²⁰ The coordination mechanisms (including the cluster system) should be established by relevant humanitarian coordination bodies in the country (e.g. humanitarian coordinators /HCTs) with clear terms of reference, purpose/deliverables and reporting lines, ensuring this body fits into the broader humanitarian architecture.



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DG ECHO, IFRC and Syrian Red Crescent staff in front of EU-funded flights landed in Syria to provide emergency support to the Syrians impacted by the earthquakes of February 2023.

that builds on local capacities and complements local response mechanisms, contributing to preparedness for possible future disasters and strengthening long-term resilience (this also pertains to the activation of the cluster system).

- DG ECHO requires its field staff and encourages its partners to **systematically study the type of coordination systems in place and avoid undermining national (or regional) systems where these exist**. DG ECHO partners are reminded to provide an analysis of the coordination systems in place in the country of intervention in the Single Form (including an analysis of the risks of instrumentalisation and/or politicisation), and to ensure that they are supporting and/or linking with national mechanisms (Single Form, Chapter 11 'Field coordination').
- The **unintended effects of humanitarian aid on L/NAs** should be monitored, such as the potential negative effects of international presence (e.g. brain drain, undermining of existing national coordination bodies or the exclusion of L/NAs from the humanitarian response).

Key considerations for partners

- What aid coordination mechanism(s) were in place before the crisis? How effective were they? How might they be supported to improve effectiveness in responding to crises or emergencies? Is there scope for scaling up in this way?
- Are there risks of humanitarian aid being instrumentalised for political purposes by existing national or local coordination mechanisms? How might these risks be prevented/mitigated, while ensuring local actors have an appropriate role in the humanitarian response?
- How might coherence and cross-sectoral integration be ensured to avoid the humanitarian response developing sectoral silos?
- What unintended effects might humanitarian aid have on L/NAs?

Other related issues

- ✓ Section 1.1 'Recognising value and skills'.

- ✓ Section 3.3 ‘Participation in strategic response planning and humanitarian implementation plan programming processes’.
- ✓ Section 4.3 ‘Advocacy’.

4.2. Supporting the participation of local/national actors in coordination mechanisms

DG ECHO’s expectations and commitments

Although experience shows that active participation and leadership by L/NAs in coordination mechanisms significantly improves the quality and coverage of the humanitarian response, L/NAs still face many barriers that hinder their full involvement (e.g. language barriers, inadequate logistics, insufficient information sharing or other barriers that may be specific to the nature of the organisation²¹). Barriers should be identified and analysed so that they may be removed, allowing L/NAs to have a real influence on decision-making processes.

DG ECHO (together with international partners and other donors) is committed to following up the Grand Bargain commitments on the role of L/NAs in strategic decision-making processes at country level, and requests its international partners, in particular UN partners, to monitor progress using agreed key indicators²².

What does this mean?

→ DG ECHO strongly encourages partners who facilitate coordination groups to reach out to L/NAs – such as local NGO forums and networks, community-based and grassroots organisations, development actors, academics, members of any diaspora groups, and organisations targeting the most vulnerable – to **better understand current barriers** as a first step to then removing these barriers. Supporting the development of the coordination platforms so that they maximise

the role, leadership and participation of L/NAs and encourage diversity and inclusion is important.

- DG ECHO is committed to continuing to provide **financial support for the increased participation of L/NAs in coordination platforms**, notably through the translation of key documents into local languages and the costs of interpretation; the training of coordination and facilitation specialists among local actors (in particular for national platform representatives); and providing funding to ensure the involvement of local actors, in particular women(-led) and youth-led organisations, local organisations representing people with disabilities, and organisations focusing on marginalised / the most vulnerable groups in humanitarian coordination clusters (e.g. through programmatic partnerships, which may include the costs of translation and travel, per diem allowances etc.).
- Partners should aim to go further by facilitating the **use of local languages** in coordination meetings, which is likely to be particularly relevant to improving the status and enhancing the role of L/NAs. International actors are also likely to require access to local knowledge, which can be accessed by translating relevant local research papers and publications.
- New coordination models based on the principle of localisation have been developed in recent years; DG ECHO is committed to promoting and advocating these approaches. DG ECHO strongly supports the orientations taken by the new IASC cash coordination model, which specifies that, **at country level, a co-chairing model should be used that includes both a programmatic chair and a non-programmatic chair, and that it should strive for one of the co-chairs to be a local actor**. If a tripartite set-up is required (i.e. two co-chairs plus a lead agency), this will only be for a limited period, with an ambitious handover plan in place including targets and timelines for sustainable local leadership, and efforts should be made to ensure effective co-leadership²³.

²¹ For example, women’s (or women-led) organisations and organisations representing people with disabilities may face obstacles related to gender and/or disability-related discrimination and accessibility.

²² As described in the IASC guidance note [Strengthening participation, representation and leadership of local and national actors in IASC humanitarian coordination mechanisms](#).

²³ The IASC guidance also shares examples of other coordination models that could be considered, for example L/NAs co-leading a cluster, L/NAs being members of the clusters strategic advisory groups, L/NAs leading a technical working group or L/NAs leading a subnational coordination platform (regional cluster).

→ **Evaluations funded by DG ECHO should assess the participation and the leadership role of L/NAs both in coordination mechanisms and throughout the project cycle** to learn from experience and improve practice. If the strategic role of L/NAs is still limited, deeper reflection will be necessary to find more effective strategies.

Key considerations for partners

- Are processes and tools in place to ensure the meaningful participation of L/NAs in coordination and other strategic decision-making mechanisms?
- How might L/NAs' participation in coordination bodies be strengthened (if it is perceived as currently inadequate or insufficient)?
- What arrangements might be put in place to enable L/NAs to take on leadership roles in humanitarian coordination bodies? What might be a realistic timetable

to institute change in this regard? Where might support be sought?

Other related issues

- ✓ Section 1.1 'Recognising value and skills'.
- ✓ Section 3.1 'Direct and enhanced two-way communication'.

4.3. Advocacy

DG ECHO's expectations and commitments

To ensure that localisation takes root on the ground, enhanced advocacy is key to ensure that the principles and actions set out in this guidance are further shared with other donors and partners. DG ECHO is committed to supporting an evolution towards a locally led humanitarian response through advocacy at different levels (locally, nationally and,



In Mozambique, EU humanitarian funds given to the Red Cross aim to provide people displaced by cyclone Idai in the Sofala province with safe water and shelter.

where appropriate, internationally), and also by providing support for activities that enhance and strengthen L/NAs' decision-making and leadership capacities.

What does this mean?

- DG ECHO is committed to advocating for **local actors**, including representatives of women's organisations or women-led organisations or groups, organisations of people with disabilities, and groups representing marginalised and under-represented people, **to be included in humanitarian coordination** structures, including at global level. The issue should regularly be on the agenda of strategic planning meetings with OCHA and other key partners.
- At country level, DG ECHO will advocate for the inclusion of local organisations in coordination mechanisms such as clusters and HCTs (e.g. by systematically associating a local/national organisation with the international partners and/or ECHO staff attending the meetings). DG ECHO will engage with relevant IASC bodies to create an **enabling environment** for women's leadership and decision-making, and develop standards and guidance on enhanced representation of currently under-represented actors in humanitarian coordination

structures, drawing on examples of good practice, and data and analysis of challenges and opportunities emerging from the field.

- At global level, and following consultations with L/NAs, DG ECHO will not only undertake **to reflect L/NAs concerns in its advocacy efforts, give a voice to the most vulnerable individuals, but also create a space for a diverse range of actors to voice these concerns**, for example in the context of the European Humanitarian Forum.

Other related issues

- ✓ Section 3.2 'Participation in needs assessments and context analysis'.
- ✓ Section 3.3 'Participation in strategic response planning and humanitarian implementation plan programming processes'.
- ✓ Section 4.1 'Integrating with existing national and/or area-based coordination mechanisms'.
- ✓ Section 4.2 'Supporting the participation of local/national actors in coordination mechanisms'.

What resources are available?

Charter4Change and NEAR, [Centering Local Leadership in Humanitarian Coordination: A dialogue between national civil society networks & international actors at humanitarian networks and partnerships week \(22nd April 2021\)](#), 2021.

IASC, Results Group 1 on Operational Response, [Strengthening participation, representation and leadership of local and national actors in IASC humanitarian coordination mechanisms](#), guidance note, 2021.

5. FACILITATING ACCESS TO LOCALISED FINANCING MODELS

Policy objectives

Recalling again the commitment to ‘making principled humanitarian action as local as possible and as international as necessary’, increased support – including financial support – should be given to L/NAs. Bearing in mind the legal constraints on providing direct funding to local actors, DG ECHO is nonetheless committed to the ideal of flexible, efficient humanitarian action, with the deployment of funding mechanisms that may benefit L/NAs more directly. In line with the key actions set out in the Commission communication on the EU’s humanitarian action: *New challenges, same principles*, DG ECHO is already increasing its support to localised financing models, including expanding its support to pooled funds (where funds from a range of different donors are combined and managed), and introducing more multi-year funding modalities and other funding mechanisms that give priority to local actors. These other funding mechanisms include project-embedded funding mechanisms with multiple windows, tailored to the needs of both the affected communities and the local organisations assisting them. DG ECHO asks its partners to provide increased structural support to local organisations and to be more transparent about reporting funding flows, including any funds allocated to L/NAs.

5.1. Increasing and adapting funds provided to local/national actors

DG ECHO’s expectations and commitments

CBPFs are one of the ways of supporting local and national responders. Since 2019, the European Commission has been supporting selected CBPFs, such as the South Sudan Humanitarian Fund and the Ukraine Humanitarian Fund. In 2022, the Commission expanded its support further by contributing to the Afghanistan Humanitarian Fund and Venezuela Humanitarian Fund. To build on these experiences, DG ECHO is committed to

continuing to contribute to CBPFs with a strong focus on local responders, in line with its priorities and interests, which include localisation, cost-effectiveness, enhanced donor coordination, accountability, visibility, flexibility and adaptable responses²⁴. In addition, beyond its support for CBPFs, and as stated in the Commission communication on the EU’s humanitarian action: *New challenges, same principles*, DG ECHO is committed to increasing its support to other funding mechanisms that benefit local actors, such as multi-year funding and Programmatic Partnerships.

What does this mean?

→ DG ECHO is committed to providing further support for pooled funding mechanisms that empower L/NAs. These include (but are not limited to) IFRC’s DREF, OCHA-managed CBPFs and LIFT. DG ECHO recognises the relevance of other pooled fund mechanisms, including those that are locally led, in promoting partnership with L/NAs. DG ECHO remains committed to measures enabling proactive outreach to and effective communication with local actors. **Priority will be given to projects that demonstrate a clear intention to empower L/NAs** and allow L/NAs to be significantly engaged in the management of funds and decision-making. Projects that focus on local or national women’s organisations and on local or national organisations composed of or representing marginalised groups will be particularly welcome.

→ **In addition to encouraging use of pooled fund mechanisms, DG ECHO encourages its partners to design and submit innovative response models for special financing – seed grants and micro-financing – suitable for small organisations and community-level investments, taking account of the role of women, as represented by local women’s groups and organisations, and organisations representing marginalised groups.**

²⁴ European Commission, *Follow-up report to the communication on the EU’s humanitarian action: New challenges, same principles*, Publications Office of the European Union, Luxembourg, 2022.

→ As already mentioned in Section 1.4 ‘Facilitating access to flexible multi-year funding for capacity strengthening’, **DG ECHO is committed to promoting flexible and efficient humanitarian action through an extension of ‘multiannual and flexible funding**

arrangements’, allowing, for instance, long-term, quality support to be provided to national and local actors. Programmatic Partnerships are one of the instruments that allow DG ECHO and its partners to respond to this commitment.

Box 5: Programmatic Partnerships

Programmatic Partnerships are one of the tools DG ECHO uses to provide high-quality, long-term funding. From 2023, Programmatic Partnerships are to be integrated into geographical HIPs. As the partnerships are more strategic in nature than short-term projects, they can respond, for instance, to protracted crises with a focus on longer-term outcomes; promote and scale up innovative policy approaches with different geographical scopes; encourage enhanced exchanges between DG ECHO and partners; and seek to support the further development/promotion of strategic orientations of mutual interest.

Programmatic Partnerships are a specific operational modality for NGO partners under the EU Humanitarian Partnership Certificate, for UN agencies under the Financial and Administrative Framework Agreement, and for the IFRC and the International Committee of the Red Cross under their financial framework partnership agreement.

The roll-out of Programmatic Partnerships follows the piloting of this model, which started in 2020 and was undertaken in three stages, offering a multi-year, multi-country perspective based on a longer-term logic of intervention. In 2022, nine pilot Programmatic Partnerships were ongoing, totalling funds of EUR 150 million.

Programmatic Partnerships can and should be designed to promote certain aspects of the Grand Bargain, such as localisation, increased efficiency and effectiveness in the delivery of assistance (including, for instance, using a joined-up approach with development actors), enhanced emergency response capacity and encouraging innovative approaches to address humanitarian needs.

It is important, given the context of the localisation agenda, that the advantages granted to a humanitarian organisation through a Programmatic Partnership, such as flexibility or predictability, trickle down to the organisation’s implementing partners. In the case of multi-year funding, these advantages should also be granted to L/NAs, including transferring a share of the indirect support costs.

For more information, see DG ECHO [guidance note on Programmatic Partnerships](#).

→ Within the framework of the [financial regulation](#) system (Regulation (EU, Euratom) 2018/1046, Article 204), the upper limit on funding allocated by INGOs and some Member States’ specialised agencies to implementing partners is EUR 60 000. However, **partners are invited to provide an explanation, which could allow them to exceed this upper limit if the context requires it**. This applies if:

- a limited number of non-profit NGOs have the capacity, skills or expertise required;

- there are only a limited number of organisations in the country of operation, or in the region(s) where the action takes place;
- in a confederation, family or network context, the partner would rely on other members of the confederation, family or network to ensure geographical coverage, while minimising costs and avoiding duplications.



Through a Programmatic Partnership with DG ECHO, Save the Children launched, in 2021, a programme to tackle the education, protection and mental health needs of children caught up in the Sahel crisis. In Mali, Save the Children trains teachers, including on child rights, child safeguarding and delivering psychosocial support.

Key considerations for partners

- What funding mechanisms (e.g. pooled funds, special windows for seed grants and micro-financing) exist or could be put in place to facilitate access to funds for L/NAs, taking into account the constraints and opportunities under DG ECHO's financial rules? What innovative options could be adopted?
- How might funding mechanisms be best developed to empower L/NAs and to adapt to their way of operating, as well as being effective in meeting humanitarian needs?

Other related issues

- ✓ Section 1.4 'Facilitating access to flexible multi-year funding for capacity strengthening'.

²⁵ See 'Intermediary' in the Glossary.

5.2. Framing the role of the intermediary

DG ECHO's expectations and commitments

As previously mentioned in this guidance note, DG ECHO is committed to the promotion of equitable partnerships between international organisations with an intermediary role²⁵ and L/NAs. **Intermediary organisations should demonstrate their added value and further support locally led action, taking better account of the needs/demands of local partner organisations.**

What does this mean?

- DG ECHO encourages its partners to develop humanitarian **intervention models in which L/NAs are a central component** and the comparative

advantages and capacities of local actors, and their ability to assess local needs and priorities, help determine the nature of the humanitarian response. Building on its experience with initiatives such as LIFT (see Box 6), **DG ECHO commits to supporting similar approaches in its major countries of operation and will therefore prioritise projects relying on an intermediary model to support a locally led response** based on the principles of equitable partnerships (see Section 2.1 ‘Partnerships with local and national actors as the preferred

mode of delivery’), with no direct implementation by international partners (unless required on the basis of complementarity), but rather the provision of continuous support to the local partner structure through adapted strengthening actions (technical training, institutional support, peer learning etc.). DG ECHO encourages its partners to develop proposals supporting such local solutions with a strong bottom-up and context-specific approach, demonstrably rooted in local structures and organisations, that can build on the good practices of (listed in Box 6).

Box 6: Local Initiative Fund in Türkiye

In 2019, the Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit (GIZ) and DG ECHO launched **LIFT** to address the needs of the most vulnerable groups in Türkiye. The LIFT ensures access to services for hard-to-reach refugees by providing **extensive support to local organisations**. The project prioritises supporting people with specific vulnerabilities from refugee and host communities through local initiatives (community-based grassroots organisations) in collaboration with public stakeholders and well-established (mentoring) NGOs in a joint learning-and-support process for the delivery of needs-based, integrated, localised and coordinated assistance.

Through the capacity-building component, the project improves the individual and organisational capacities of partner organisations in a variety of fields with the direct support of GIZ and a peer support structure that is facilitated through a mentoring approach. More than 20 implementing partners of different sizes and capacities engage in guided exchange and supervision with each other, which constitutes a sustainable mechanism through which NGOs can work together, build organisational capacities, establish referral pathways, and increase their credibility and ability to receive (national and international) funding in the future.

The LIFT project’s good practices

While keeping in mind that there is no one-size-fits-all approach to localisation – as localisation is contextual by nature – the following are some elements of good practice seen in the project that **DG ECHO partners can consider implementing**:

- **Local actors at the centre of the project. Local organisations constitute the entry point** for identifying hard-to-reach beneficiaries, who are then assisted with the support of larger (mentor) organisations with demonstrated capacity in the protection sector. The role of local organisations is to reach out and identify targeted beneficiaries, and provide basic assistance such as information sharing on rights, awareness raising, advocacy, psychosocial support, legal assistance and referrals, while the organisations themselves are supported by their mentor organisations to deliver more complex service provision that requires improved organisational capacities.
- **Focus on capacity strengthening / the critical role of mentoring.** Actions are undertaken throughout the project for the improvement of networking structures, organisational capacities, technical expertise and structured coordination mechanisms. Here, capacity-strengthening measures aligned with a solid mentoring approach and a partner/peer network are used as instruments of localisation, enabling local actors to identify and address their own needs for capacity building and strengthening.
- **Humanitarian–development–peace nexus.** The project was jointly designed to strengthen engagement between humanitarian and development actors.
- **Multi-sectoral approach.** This is an integrated intervention across different sectors with strong referral pathways to local/national service structures.
- **Strong link between implementing partners (local initiatives and NGOs) and institutional partners (local and national).** This link is solidified through **local coordination structures**, also involving **national steering mechanisms** and **international actors** at project level.

Key considerations for partners

- Is direct implementation by international actors justified in this context? Why?
- What might be the main characteristics and added value of an intermediary role for international partners supporting a locally led response in this specific context?

Other related issues

- ✓ Section 2.2 'Transparency'.
- ✓ Section 2.3 'Equitable share of overhead costs'.

What resources are available?

Featherstone, A. and Mowjee, T., [Desk review on enhancing the potential of pooled funds for localisation: Final report](#), Grand Bargain workstream 2: localisation, 2020.

Grand Bargain Enhanced Quality Funding Workstream, [Quality Funding: How to reach critical mass](#), 2020.

Grand Bargain Localisation Workstream, [Bridging the Intention to Action Gap: The future role of intermediaries in supporting locally led humanitarian action](#), 2021.

6. ANNEXES

Glossary

Capacity and complementarity²⁶

- **Capacity development:** The process whereby actors in a given process unleash, strengthen, create, adapt, and maintain capacity over time with the intention of addressing a particular objective²⁷.
- **Capacity building or capacity strengthening:** A deliberate process in which people and/or organisations are provided with external support to enhance their capacity. Capacity strengthening is an improvement on capacity building, as it implies reinforcing or strengthening what L/NAs already possess.
- **Capacity sharing:** A process whereby existing capacities are acknowledged, respected and shared across multiple actors. It is horizontal as opposed to linear in nature.
- **Complementarity:** ‘An outcome where all capacities at all levels – local, national, regional and international – are harnessed and combined in a way that supports the best humanitarian outcomes for affected populations’²⁸. It recognises and assesses existing capacities at all levels, and the process of combining those capacities.

Implementing partner: For DG ECHO, an implementing partner is ‘any legal entity [other than the DG ECHO partner] to which the Organisation [the partner] entrusts any tasks under a DG ECHO-funded Action, and transfers the corresponding financing’²⁹. An implementing partner can be an entity affiliated to the grant-holder or one with which the grant-holder is affiliated (e.g. NGO family, network or federation), local entities established in the country of implementation of the action (e.g. local or grassroots

organisations) or non-local entities, which are neither affiliated to the grant-holder nor established in the country of implementation of the action.

Intermediary: ‘Intermediaries are organisations, networks or mechanisms which act as an intermediary between funding partners/donors and national or local organisations through the provision of funding or other support. This function is carried out by INGOS, UN agencies, private companies/contractors, and some national organisations. This role is neither static nor fixed. Organisations, networks or mechanisms may sometimes act as intermediary, as well as directly implement. Thus, the term “intermediary” refers more to a function than a predetermined role delivered by predetermined actors’³⁰.

Local/national actors (L/NAs): L/NAs may be state or non-state local, subnational or national actors³¹.

- **Local and national non-state actors:** ‘Organizations engaged in relief that are headquartered and operating in their own aid recipient country and which are not affiliated to an international NGO’³².
- **National and subnational state actors:** ‘State authorities of the affected aid recipient country engaged in relief, whether at local or national level’³³.

Nexus: ‘Nexus refers to the interlinkages between humanitarian, development and peace actions. The nexus approach refers to the aim of strengthening collaboration, coherence and complementarity. The approach seeks to capitalise on the comparative advantages of each pillar – to the extent of their relevance in the specific context – in order to reduce overall vulnerability and the number of

²⁶ Taken from work carried out by IASC Task Force 5 on Localisation. See the task force’s [website](#) for more resources.

²⁷ Tjønneland E., ‘Capacity Development’, Humanitarianism: Keywords 2020, Brill 2020, pp. 16-18.

²⁸ Barbelet, V., *As local as possible, as international as necessary: Understanding capacity and complementarity in humanitarian action*, Humanitarian Policy Group working paper, Humanitarian Policy Group, Overseas Development Institute, 2018.

²⁹ As defined in the *Single Form Guidelines 2021*, p. 39.

³⁰ Taken from final outcome document from the Grand Bargain caucus on the role of intermediaries (August 2022).

³¹ Definitions Paper of the IASC Humanitarian Financing Task Team, Localisation Marker Working Group.

³² Definitions Paper of the IASC Humanitarian Financing Task Team, Localisation Marker Working Group.

³³ Definitions Paper of the IASC Humanitarian Financing Task Team, Localisation Marker Working Group.

unmet needs, strengthen risk management capacities and address root causes of conflict³⁴.

Overhead costs: ‘Broadly, overheads [also referred to as “indirect costs”] are used to refer to expenditures outside of normal programme implementation costs that are necessary for an organisation to deliver its mission. These outgoings could cover central support costs, such as senior management positions; or functions, such as establishing and maintaining overarching organisational policies and systems. Overheads ultimately enable an organisation to deliver programmes effectively, efficiently, and safely. Two useful definitions of overheads / indirect costs are:

- “A percentage charge applied to an organisation’s expenditure for programme-related costs that are not directly attributable to a specific programme.” (DI, 2008)
- “The necessary and reasonable costs incurred to manage the organisation as a whole, provide oversight over all its activities and put into place the overarching policies, frameworks and systems that enable it to operate.” (Money Where It Counts protocol, 2019)³⁵

DG ECHO partner: DG ECHO partners are preselected European NGOs, international organisations (including UN agencies) and Member States’ specialised agencies³⁶.

Pooled funds: Pooled funds allow donors to combine their contributions into single, unearmarked funds to support local humanitarian efforts; these funds are then managed by another organisation. Examples include the **CBPFs**

established by the Emergency Relief Coordinator and managed by OCHA at country level under the leadership of the Humanitarian Coordinator (HC); IFRC’s **DREF**, which receives unearmarked funds from donors and provides rapid financial support to Red Cross / Red Crescent societies to allow an immediate response to humanitarian disasters and start early action preparation; and the Start Fund (one of several pooled funds managed by the **Start Network**), which enables rapid response to sudden-onset, impending and chronic crises.

Principles of Partnership: The Principles of Partnership (equality, transparency, results-oriented approach, responsibility and complementarity) were identified by the Global Humanitarian Platform³⁷ as an attempt to acknowledge and fix some gaps within the humanitarian reform process, which included the neglect of the role of local and national humanitarian response capacity. The Principles of Partnership are applicable to UN agencies and intergovernmental organisations, the Red Cross / Red Crescent Movement and INGOs, and also provide a framework for all actors in the humanitarian space – including governments, academia, the private sector and affected populations – to engage in a more equal, constructive and transparent setting. With an ever-increasing number and diversity of actors in the humanitarian sector, the Principles of Partnership remain a key point of reference for partnership inception, development, implementation and review.

³⁴ OECD, *DAC Recommendation on the Humanitarian–Development–Peace Nexus*, OECD/LEGAL/5019, 2023.

³⁵ Taken from IASC, Results Group 5 on Humanitarian Financing, *Provision of overheads to local and national partners*, guidance note, 2022.

³⁶ Lists of DG ECHO Partners are available online (https://civil-protection-humanitarian-aid.ec.europa.eu/partnerships/humanitarian-partners_en).

³⁷ The *Global Humanitarian Platform* was established in 2006 by leaders of 40 humanitarian organisations, including NGOs, UN agencies, the International Organization for Migration, the World Bank, and the Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement.

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