INTER-AGENCY HUMANITARIAN EVALUATION

FINAL REPORT

INTER-AGENCY HUMANITARIAN EVALUATION OF THE RESPONSE TO THE EARTHQUAKES IN TÜRKİYE AND SYRIA

August 2025

FOREWORD

The Türkiye-Syria earthquakes were among the most devastating natural disasters this region has faced in recent memory. In the face of immense destruction and loss, humanitarian workers across both countries responded with extraordinary courage, compassion, and commitment. To all those who stepped forward to save lives and support communities in their darkest hour—thank you. Your humanity and dedication are the foundation of our collective response.

As we reflect on this response, it is essential to do so with humility, honesty, and a genuine commitment to learning. System-wide learning and accountability are central to the humanitarian mission: they enable us to better serve affected communities, adapt to shifting crises, and ensure aid remains relevant. To evolve, the sector must draw lessons from both successes and failures, turning every experience into an opportunity for improvement.

Evaluations like this Inter-Agency Humanitarian Evaluation are not merely technical exercises but vital tools for evidence-based learning and accountability — to affected people, to donors, and to the States that entrust us with this responsibility.

In an era marked by misinformation and growing pressure on the humanitarian system, the credibility of our work depends on our willingness to examine ourselves critically. This evaluation is a testament to that commitment. It is complex, yes, but it is also necessary. I am encouraged to see that it offers clear, evidence-based insights that can inform the Humanitarian Reset we are undertaking.

To the humanitarian workers in Türkiye and Syria: your actions have inspired us. We will learn from your experience and continue striving to serve the most vulnerable with integrity, effectiveness, and compassion.

Tom Fletcher
Emergency Relief Coordinator

Management, funding, and implementation of the evaluation

The evaluation is commissioned by the Inter-Agency Humanitarian Evaluation Steering Group (IAHE SG) and funded by the following IAHE SG members: IOM, OCHA, UNHCR, UNICEF, UN WOMEN, and WFP. The IAHE SG is an associated body of the Inter-Agency Standing Committee (IASC). Itad Ltd. is contracted to conduct the evaluation.

Acknowledgments

The Evaluation Team would like to thank the staff of the OCHA Evaluation Section in New York, the Management Group, and all others who participated in the evaluation for the time and support they provided, and for the information and documentation they shared that has formed a key part of the analysis. We would also like to thank all the field staff in Türkiye and Syria who offered their time and support for the evaluation.

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Disclaimer

WHO WE ARE

The Inter-Agency Humanitarian Evaluation Steering Group (IAHE SG) conducts independent evaluations to promote system-wide learning and accountability in major crises.

As an independent body working closely with the Inter-Agency Standing Committee (IASC), we support the leadership and senior management of humanitarian organizations with evidence-based lessons to improve collective humanitarian action.

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SCHR Steering Committee for Humanitarian Response

UNDP

UNFPA

UNHCR The UN Refugee Agency

unicef

UN WOMEN

WFP World Food Programme

World Health Organization

ALNAP

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1. Introduction

1. OCHA commissioned Itad to undertake the IAHE of the collective humanitarian response to the earthquakes that struck Türkiye and Syria in February 2023. This evaluation report presents the findings of the evaluation organized by thematic topics linked to the Theory of Change (ToC, see Figure 1 below), followed by conclusions and a targeted set of practical recommendations.

2. Section 1 of the report presents the purpose, objectives, and scope of the evaluation, an overview of the evaluation methodology, and a brief summary of the context for the earthquake response in Türkiye and Syria. Section 2 presents the evaluation findings. Section 3 presents the Evaluation Team's conclusions followed by recommendations in Section 4.

1.1 Evaluation purpose, objectives, and scope

Purpose

3. The purpose of IAHEs and this evaluation is to strengthen system-wide learning and promote accountability. The evaluation independently assessed the collective action of the IASC members in responding to the earthquakes to identify lessons for future Scale-Up Activations, especially responses to sudden onset natural disasters (this IAHE is only the second Scale-Up Activation in response to a natural disaster after the Scale-Up of the response to Cyclones Idai and Kenneth in Mozambique in 2019 and since the new Scale-Up protocols were put in place). It also sought to provide accountability toward those affected by the earthquakes, national governments, donors, and the public.

The evaluation sought to achieve the following objectives:

- Assess the results achieved and outcomes generated by the collective response.
- Determine the extent to which the IASC member agencies' collective response planning and actions were relevant, appropriate, coherent, and effective in addressing the humanitarian needs.
- Determine the extent to which the IASC member agencies' collective preparedness efforts enabled them to address the humanitarian needs of the affected population.
- Determine the extent to which the IASC member agencies' response was gender-responsive, by identifying, including, and addressing the needs and perspectives of the women, girls, and most vulnerable groups affected by the earthquake.
- Identify good practices, opportunities, and learning areas that will illustrate how collective and joint (or at least coordinated) response mechanisms might be strengthened or be refigured to contribute to a relevant, coherent, and effective response, specifically in the case of earthquake responses.
- Provide learning of the relevance and effectiveness of the Scale-Up Activation for the two responses in Türkiye and Syria and contribute to learning across different Scale-Up Activations.

Scope

4. The table below describes the substantive, temporal, and geographic aspects of the evaluation scope.

Table 1 Scope

Scope	Description
Substantive	The substantive scope was to evaluate the collective response of the IASC member organizations in addressing the humanitarian needs of earthquake-affected populations in Türkiye and Syria.
Temporal	The evaluation focused on the period from the day of the earthquakes (February 6, 2023) until the start of data collection (August 2024) but covered actions taken prior to the earthquakes to gauge preparedness levels.
Geographic	The evaluation focused on earthquake-affected areas in Türkiye and Syria as defined in the country Flash Appeals. In Türkiye, the most affected areas were the southern provinces Adiyaman, Kahramanmaraş, Malatya, and Hatay. In Syria, the most affected areas were the NGCA of NWS and GCA in the governorates of Aleppo, Hama, Idlib, and Lattakia.

1.2 Methodology and approach

5. During the inception phase, the team made the decision to differentiate three complex operating contexts during the data collection phase of this evaluation: Türkiye, NGCA, and GCA. The two countries affected, Türkiye and Syria, are completely different in terms of their political and economic situations, and they offered very different operating environments for the three international humanitarian operations that are the focus of this evaluation. Within Syria, the earthquakes affected NWS, where the context of NGCA (with a history of a cross-border international humanitarian response and a humanitarian architecture based in Türkiye) was very different to that of areas controlled by the GoS, which received humanitarian assistance from actors operating from Damascus.

6. The evaluation employed a **theory-based**, **mixed-methods** approach, combining quantitative and qualitative data collection and analysis methods. Figure 2 below provides an overview of our mixed-methods approach (for a more detailed breakdown please refer to Annex 8). The evaluation used a reconstructed ToC (see Figure 1 below) for the international humanitarian responses as the guiding framework. The Evaluation Team (ET) mapped all the evaluation questions under the ToC and used it to test assumptions, as well as to identify key areas of focus and themes. The team also used an evaluation matrix (see Annex 7) to guide how it would collect data from key stakeholders.

7. The evaluation placed **learning** and **utilization** at the heart of the evaluation approach to ensure that priority was given to understanding what contributes to or hinders outcomes and progress—the “why” and the “how.” A key focus was on understanding the factors that have enabled or constrained progress and results and how IASC members can build on the lessons distilled by the evaluation for future Scale-Up Activations. The evaluation focused on areas that are within the IASC members’ control to be able to act upon, ensuring that the recommendations made are practice-oriented, realistic, and usable.

8. This evaluation design was **participatory** and ensured active engagement with IASC members, local actors, and affected earthquake communities in generating evidence. The team also returned to the field after data collection to discuss and validate findings with key stakeholders, and held workshops to co-create recommendations. In addition, the Accountability to Affected Persons (AAP) adviser for the cross-border operation supported the team by consulting community members in NGCA about the draft evaluation recommendations, and their inputs have been incorporated (see

Annexes 4 and 5). For the limitations and mitigation measures of this evaluation, please refer to Annex 9 of the report.

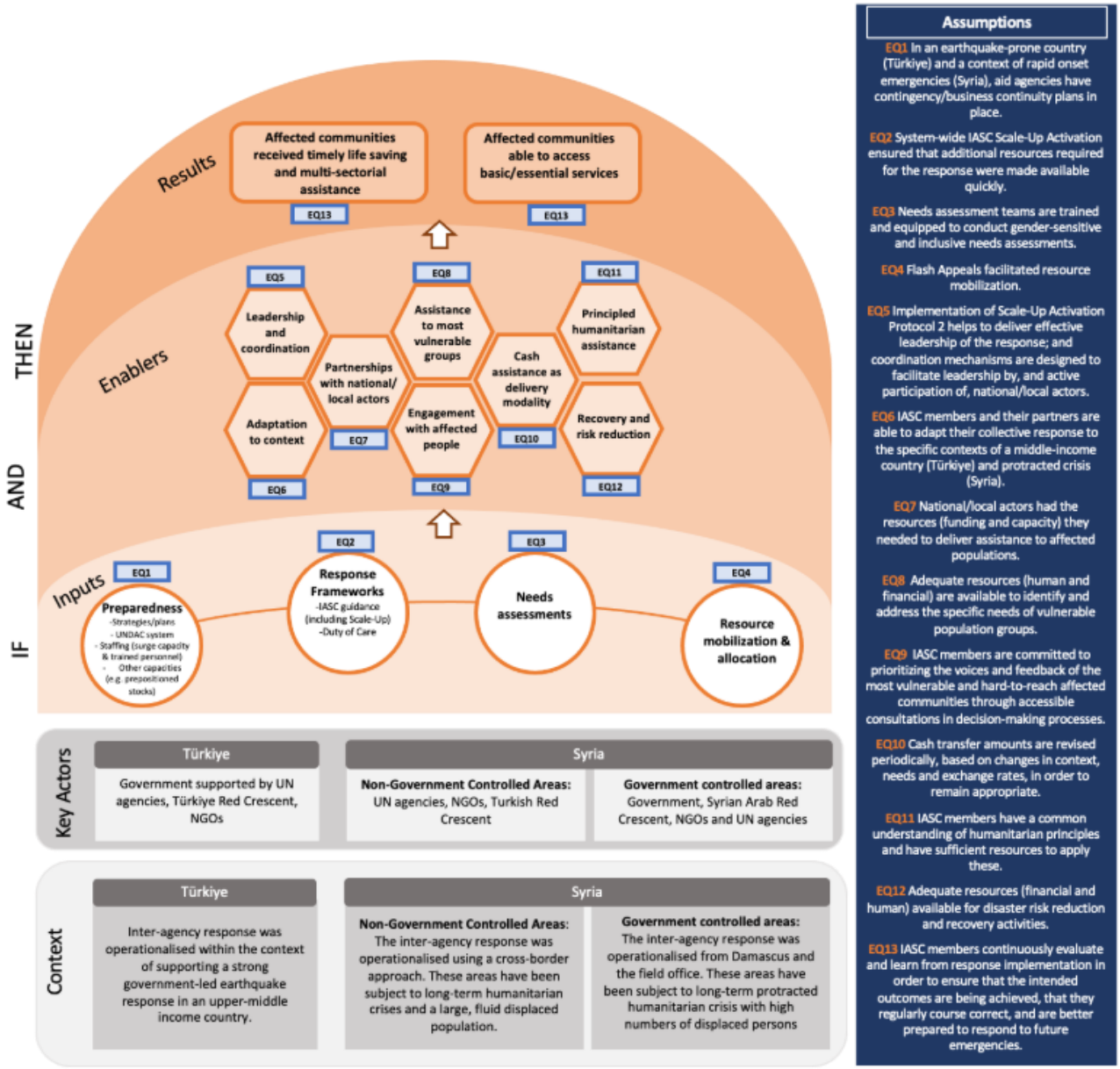


Figure 1 Reconstructed Theory of Change

Data analysis and synthesis

9. The ET implemented a structured approach to analyze qualitative and quantitative data, ensuring key lessons and challenges were identified (See Annex 8 on Methodology for more details).

- **Coding**: Notes from key informant interviews (KIIs), FGDs, documents, and other secondary sources were coded in MAXQDA using a framework linked to evaluation questions (EQs) to identify patterns and themes.
- **Analysis**: The team held regular discussions to refine findings, triangulate evidence, and analyze trends across datasets. Quantitative data from the aid worker survey and financial data from UN OCHA were integrated for specific EQs.
- **Synthesis**: Internal workshops between the ET identified common themes and emerging findings, validated through sessions with key stakeholders, including the UN Country Team Plus (UNCT+), Humanitarian Liaison Group (HLG), HCT, and Strategic Steering Group (SSG). Co-

creation workshops ensured recommendations were contextually relevant.

- **Triangulation**: Data was cross-verified across sources (e.g., FGDs, KIIs, document reviews, and secondary sources) and different field levels. A final workshop with the HLG, Inter-Cluster Coordination Group (ICCG), and volunteer groups validated findings with the ET. During the reporting phase, the draft evaluation report was circulated to key stakeholders at global, national, and sub-national level, and their feedback has been incorporated into this report.

	Key informant interviews	Focus Group Discussions	Aid worker survey	Document reviews
Responses	**180 stakeholders** interviewed out of 245. Response rate 70%	**222 stakeholders** participated across 24 FGDs.*	**136 respondents** across the 3 contexts.**	The ET consulted over **150 documents** and conducted an in-depth and systematic review.
Stakeholders	UN agency staff, National and Local NGOs, INGOs, Donors, global level, Government.	Affected communities across affected regions in Türkiye, NGCA and GCA.	Aid staff working in the UN, local and international NGOs, red cross and red crescent movement.	Cluster & agency -level reporting, evaluations and reviews, funding data, humanitarian dashboards
Sampling	**Purposive & snowball sampling** Informants were selected based on their direct involvement in the earthquake response and IASC coordination efforts.	**Purposive sampling** Selection criteria ensured that that a) communities were affected by the earthquake and b) they had received aid, ideally from multiple agencies.	**Purposive sampling** Selection was based on aid worker involvement in the delivery of humanitarian assistance and protection during the earthquake response.	**Purposive sampling** Selection of documents was based on relevance to the Evaluation questions and criteria.

* FGDs do not have a response rate because FGD participants were selected directly by UN partner, and as a result, the ET does not have a response rate.
** The survey was disseminated by UN staff, and as a result, the ET was not able to gather estimates for a response rate.

Figure 2 Overview of mixed-methods approach

Strength of evidence

10. The ET developed findings through systematic triangulation and an assessment of the strength of evidence underpinning each finding. To guide this process, the ET applied an Evidence Assessment Framework (EAF) that considers the type, diversity, and number of data sources contributing to each finding. The strength of evidence for each individual finding and further detail on the approach is presented in Annex 1. Evidence strength is categorized using a tailored scale, described below, which reflects the available data sources.

11. For this evaluation, a data source refers to one of the following:

- A KII with national, regional, or global stakeholders
- A FGD with affected communities
- Responses from the quantitative aid worker survey
- Documentation (e.g., Flash Appeals, response plans, operational reports)
- Publicly available secondary resources, e.g., financial data, data dashboards
- Other (validation sessions, other relevant stakeholder engagement, draft evaluation report feedback).

Table 2 Strength of Evidence Framework

Term	Definition
Strong 	At least **three distinct and independent data sources** support the finding. These may include combinations such as: • KIIs from multiple levels • FGD evidence + survey data + documentation • Financial/operational data triangulated with qualitative sources
Moderate 	The finding is supported by **two different data sources**, for example: • KII + FGD • Survey + document review • FGD + financial data
Limited 	The finding is based on **one data source only**, such as • A single KII or FGD • Survey data only • Document review without supporting primary data

Gender mainstreaming approach

12. Combining qualitative and quantitative data collection and analysis methods, the team used a mixed-methods approach and a gender-responsive methodology by ensuring sex-disaggregated FGDs in local languages, enabling women and men to share experiences in safe spaces. The survey and KIIs explicitly examined the extent to which the response addressed the needs of women, girls, and other vulnerable groups, integrating their perspectives into the analysis. The ET ensured that the evaluation and data collection activities employed a gender-sensitive approach by taking the steps below:

a) The evaluation systematically integrated questions into data collection tools for the KIIs and aid worker survey on how the earthquake response addressed the specific needs of women and girls. This involved reviewing response plans, policies, and operational reports to evaluate the extent to which gender considerations were integrated into humanitarian interventions.

b) The survey and KIIs included targeted questions on gender inclusion, protection risks, and the effectiveness of measures to prevent gender-based violence (GBV). Additionally, data (where possible) was disaggregated by gender to identify disparities in access to aid and services.

c) In our data collection with affected communities, the ET aimed to ensure that there was equal representation of women and vulnerable groups. Measures like gender-disaggregated focus groups with in-country consultants of the corresponding gender were used to support the participation of women.

d) During data collection, the ET spoke with representatives of women-led organizations to explore their participation and role in the earthquake response.

1.3 Context

Timeline of key events

13. On February 6, 2023, two catastrophic earthquakes with magnitudes of 7.7 and 7.6 on the Richter scale struck Kahramanmaraş in southeastern Türkiye, near the Türkiye-Syria border, affecting 11 Turkish provinces: Kahramanmaraş, Gaziantep, Şanliurfa, Diyarbakir, Adana, Adiyaman, Malatya, Osmaniye, Hatay, Elazığ, and Kilis, and governorates in NWS like Aleppo, Latakia, Hama, and Idlib. They were followed by more than 7,100 aftershocks and another

earthquake of 6.4 magnitude in Hatay province on February 20, 2023.[1] The earthquakes and aftershocks caused major damage and destruction in both countries.[2] The total area affected was estimated to be 120,000km^2.[3] The earthquake occurred in geographic regions with significant internal displacement and refugees following the civil war in Syria.

14. Protocol 1 for a humanitarian System-Wide Scale-Up Activation lays out the procedure for the ERC to decide on activation within 48 hours of the event (following consultation with the Emergency Directors Group (EDG), IASC Principals, and other key stakeholders).[4] In the case of the Türkiye-Syria earthquakes, the ERC made the decision on the activation with IASC Principals on February 14, 2023, eight days after the earthquakes struck. The Scale-Up was deactivated on May 17, 2023 in Türkiye and on August 1, 2023 for Syria.

15. On February 16, 2023, the UN launched two Flash Appeals to provide lifesaving assistance to the people affected by the earthquakes in Türkiye and Syria. Under the IASC protocols and formal learning and accountability needs, an evaluation of Scale-Up responses should be launched within 9 to 12 months of the declaration of the Scale-Up. Therefore, the ERC officially launched the IAHE of the collective response to the crisis in Türkiye and Syria on September 19, 2023. The Itad team was contracted to undertake this IAHE in May 2024.

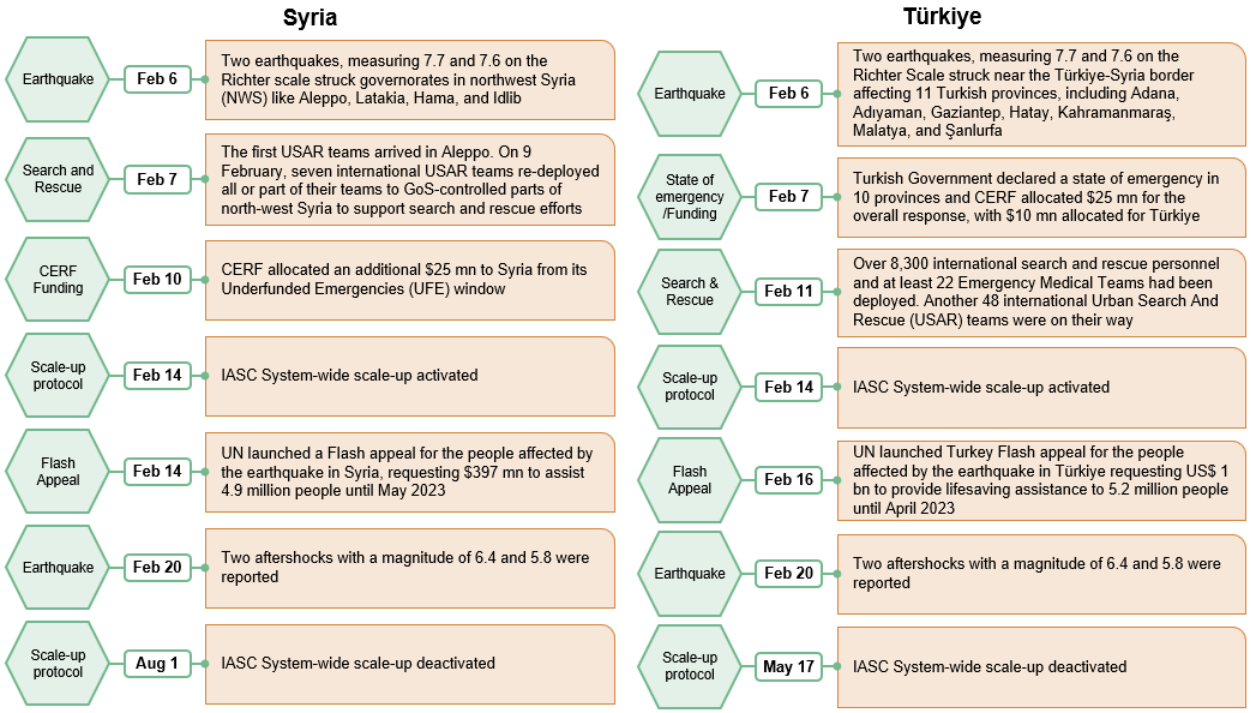


Figure 3 Earthquake timeline

[1] OCHA (2023) Flash Appeal Türkiye: 2023 Earthquakes, February – May 2023; OCHA (2023) Türkiye: 2023 Earthquakes Situation Report No. 4, as of February 23, 2023.
[2] ReliefWeb (2023) The Turkey and Syria Earthquake (February 13, 2023): The Turkey and Syria Earthquake - Türkiye | ReliefWeb
[3] INSARAG (2023) INSARAG After Action Review—2023 Türkiye and Syria Earthquakes: A comprehensive report of INSARAG's Largest International Search and Rescue Operation.
[4] IASC (2018) Standard Operating Procedures Humanitarian System-Wide Scale-Up Activation: Protocol 1: Definition and Procedures

Türkiye context

16. As of 2023, Türkiye was considered the 17th largest economy in the world, with a gross domestic product (GDP) of around $1.024 trillion, making it a middle-income country that is a member of the Group of 20 (G20) inter-governmental forum, the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD), and the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO). Türkiye experienced high growth rates from 2002 to 2022 with real GDP growth averaging 5.4%, and its income per capita doubled. Türkiye has made much progress in adopting effective social policies to reduce poverty and improve access to basic services. During this period, rapid growth was accompanied by poverty reduction, decreasing the rate from about 20% in 2007 to 7.6% in 2021.

17. Türkiye is a seismically active area and has been affected by many earthquakes over hundreds of years. The 1668 North Anatolia earthquake is the most powerful recorded in Türkiye, with an estimated magnitude of 7.8–8.0 on the Richter scale. An earthquake with a magnitude of 7.8 struck eastern Türkiye on December 27, 1939. The Gölcük earthquake, with a magnitude of 7.6, hit Western Türkiye on August 17, 1999.[5]

18. Türkiye has long-standing disaster management and response capacity. The Ministry of Interior Disaster and Emergency Management Presidency (AFAD) is a well-resourced National Disaster Management Authority with a centralized decision-making structure as well as being highly organized at sub-national level. Prior to the February 2023 earthquakes, the government had demonstrated its ability to respond to sudden onset emergencies without international help in several earthquakes and the 2021 forest fires in Southern Türkiye. It had the capacity and resources for distributing emergency relief and providing shelter for earthquake-affected persons. It had a range of long-standing partnerships with the Turkish Red Crescent (TRC) and Turkish NGOs. The TRC is also well organized and capacitated for disaster response, with a nationwide network of 25 Local Disaster Response and Logistics Centers. In addition, it has its own tent manufacturing facilities, enabling it to support the government with urgent shelter assistance when needed.[6]

19. Türkiye has been hosting the world's largest population of people defined as "persons under temporary and international protection" since 2014.[7] According to IOM figures, as of February 2025, there were "more than 4.1 million foreigners in Türkiye, of whom 3 million are seeking international protection. Most of them are Syrians (2,820,3621) who have been granted temporary protection status. Another group of foreigners are international protection holders, mainly from Iraq, Afghanistan, the Islamic Republic of Iran and Ukraine."[8] Over 1.74 million refugees were living in the 11 provinces affected by the earthquakes in 2023.[9] Prior to the earthquake, the Regional Refugee and Resilience Plan (3RP) mechanism coordinated the international response to their needs, representing more than 100 partners with over 10 years' experience of working in many of the earthquake-affected areas.[10]

20. The government of Türkiye led the earthquake response, and the international humanitarian community complemented its response by providing assistance to affected populations (for more information on the initial humanitarian response and architecture, see Section 2.2 in the Inception Report). According to the 2022 Address-Based Population Registration System (ABPRS) data, the total population in the 11 provinces heavily affected by the earthquake was 14,013,196, which corresponded to 16.4% of the country's population (85,279,553 people). The Flash Appeal identified 9.1 million people as directly affected in the 11 hardest-hit provinces, with humanitarian actors targeting 5.2 million as needing humanitarian assistance. With a death toll that exceeded 40,000 and

[5] OCHA (2023) Flash Appeal Türkiye: 2023 Earthquakes, February – May 2023.
[6] The Turkish Red Crescent itself provided a significant response to the February 2023 earthquakes. See 'Türk Kızılay Surrounds the Earthquake Zone with Humanitarian Aid Networks'

[7] UNHCR and UNDP (2023) 3RP Regional Refugee and Resilience Plan: Türkiye Country Chapter 2023–2025.
[8] IOM (2025), Türkiye — Migrant Presence Monitoring - Situation Report (Feb 2025) | Displacement Tracking Matrix
[9] OCHA (2023) Flash Appeal Türkiye: 2023 Earthquakes, February – May 2023.
[10] For further information on the 3RP refugee response, see: 3rpsyriacrisis.org

more than 100,000 people injured, the earthquakes caused large-scale displacement.[11] The earthquakes also caused significant economic disruption as Türkiye saw a 16% reduction in the country's economic activity in the earthquake-affected areas.[12]

21. Humanitarian actors themselves were severely affected by the earthquakes, with staff losing their lives or family members and/or losing their homes. The Irish NGO, GOAL, lost 31 staff members. UN agency interviewees in Gaziantep described the psychological impact of colleagues losing family members and of having to leave their homes and take shelter in offices with other colleagues or even sleep in cars.

22. The earthquakes had huge implications for recovery efforts since assessments estimate that over 1.9 million housing units were destroyed and that recovery and reconstruction would cost $85.1bn.[13] With around 70% of the population living in first- and second-degree seismic zones, the risk remains high. Türkiye continues to face significant earthquake risks because it is located on two major fault lines.[14] Earthquakes in southeastern Türkiye as recently as September to November 2024, as well as a large earthquake in Istanbul in April 2025, have highlighted the ongoing risk of another significant earthquake.[15]

[11] OCHA (2023) Türkiye: 2023 Earthquakes Situation Report No. 11, as of March 23, 2023.
[12] ILO (March 2023) The effects of the February 2023 earthquakes on the labour market in Türkiye
[13] World Bank, (April 2025) Turkey Overview: Development news, research, data | World Bank
[14] North Anatolian Fault, Turkey; East Anatolian Fault
[15] Barlaman Today (September 2024) 5-Magnitude Earthquake Hits South-eastern Türkiye, No Damages Recorded; Reuters (October 2024) Earthquake damages buildings in eastern Turkey, rattles Syria | Reuters; The New Region (November, 2024) No casualties reported in 4.9 magnitude quake striking Turkey's Malatya: AFAD; Wikipedia 2025 Istanbul earthquake - Wikipedia

Figure 4 Map of earthquake affected areas

Syria context

23. Before 2010, Syria was a middle-income country set to achieve the Millennium Development Goals. However, more than 12 years of conflict reversed the progress and the country has grappled with "a catastrophe" caused by armed conflict leading to protracted (and often repeated) displacement, recurrent disease outbreaks, economic decline (with high inflation and currency depreciation) and climate-related events such as drought. The economic decline worsened access

to basic services.[16] As a result, the 2023 Humanitarian Needs Overview (HNO) identified 15.3 million people in need of humanitarian assistance.

24. In Syria, the earthquakes caused the most severe loss of life and damage in the Aleppo, Hama, Idleb, and Latakia governorates. The final death toll was 8,476 and more than 12,800 people were injured. Many families lost their breadwinner to death or injury, when the economic situation was already extremely difficult, and this increased the vulnerability of millions of people who had been unable to meet their basic needs even before the earthquakes.[17] Due to the protracted crisis situation and impact of the earthquakes, almost every person living in NWS was affected. The Flash Appeal identified 8.8 million people as being in need and targeted 4.9 million for humanitarian assistance.[18] It is estimated that at least 79 aid workers based in NWS died, in addition to many losing family members.[19] A number of reports highlight the impact of the earthquakes on humanitarian responders in NWS.[20]

25. NWS continued to experience active armed incidents and shelling in 2022, often leading to the temporary suspension of humanitarian activities.[21] Syria had the largest internally displaced population in the world, with 6.8 million internally displaced persons (IDPs) at the end of 2022. IDPs were concentrated geographically, with almost 2.1 million living in Northwest and Northeast Syria (NES). Over 80% of IDP households had been displaced for over five years, as of December 2022.[22] The February 2023 earthquakes occurred against the backdrop of this protracted crisis.

26. Humanitarian actors provided assistance through a cross-border operation from Gaziantep in Türkiye and through a humanitarian operation from within GCA (for more information on the humanitarian response, see Section 2.2.3 in the Inception Report). The crossline operation to deliver aid to NGCA from GCA had been limited, with the UN conducting only six missions between March and November 2022, and no assistance was provided through this mechanism during the earthquake response (see Section 2.5 for further details).[23] The cross-border operation to provide aid through the Bab al-Hawa crossing point without requiring the GoS's consent was governed by a UN Security Council Resolution (UNSCR) for nine years.[24] This was a key mechanism to provide humanitarian access and reach around 4 million people in need in NWS and was renewed annually until July 2022, when it was extended only for six months, until January 10, 2023. Humanitarian actors were concerned that the cross-border operation would not be re-authorized in January 2023 and had pre-positioned stocks within NWS as part of a contingency plan. The Resolution was renewed until July 2023 when the Russian Federation vetoed the draft and there was insufficient support from Security Council members for its version.[25] In the absence of the UNSCR, the GoS developed the consent model, allowing the UN and its partners to deliver humanitarian aid to NGCA

[16] OCHA (2024) Humanitarian Needs Overview: Syrian Arab Republic, Humanitarian Programme Cycle 2024. Issued February 2024.
[17] INSARAG (2023) INSARAG After Action Review—2023 Türkiye and Syria Earthquakes: A comprehensive report of INSARAG's Largest International Search and Rescue Operation; OCHA (2024) Syria Humanitarian Fund 2023 Annual Report.
[18] OCHA (2023) Flash Appeal: Syrian Arab Republic Earthquake, Humanitarian Programme Cycle February – May 2023.
[19] iMMAP (2023) Post-Earthquake Perspective: Challenges and Strategies for Humanitarian Aid in Northwest Syria, Ad Hoc Series Part 1, June 15, 2023.
[20] Peer-2-Peer Support/IASC (2023) Syria Earthquake Operational Peer Review Mission Report; OCHA (2024) Syria Cross-Border Humanitarian Fund 2023 Annual Report.
[21] OCHA (2022) Humanitarian Needs Overview: Syrian Arab Republic, Humanitarian Programme Cycle 2023. Issued December 2022.
[22] OCHA (2022) Humanitarian Needs Overview: Syrian Arab Republic, Humanitarian Programme Cycle 2023. Issued December 2022.
[23] OCHA (2022) Humanitarian Needs Overview: Syrian Arab Republic, Humanitarian Programme Cycle 2023. Issued December 2022.
[24] Security Council Report (2023) August 2023 Monthly Forecast (31 July 2023): In Hindsight: The Demise of the Syria Cross-border Aid Mechanism, August 2023 Monthly Forecast : Security Council Report
[25] In Hindsight: The Demise of the Syria Cross-border Aid Mechanism, August 2023 Monthly Forecast: Security Council Report, July 2023.

through the Bab al-Hawa crossing point for six months, starting from 13 July 2023.[26] (For more information on the humanitarian architecture, see Section 2.3 in the Inception Report).

Understanding Syria's transition: A note to the reader

27. The political and humanitarian landscape of Syria underwent a dramatic shift in December 2024 with the overthrow of the Bashar al-Assad regime by Hay'at Tahrir al-Sham (HTS) and other opposition groups. The situation remains unstable in some regions as fighting continues among various armed groups, which affects the northeastern and southern parts of Syria.[27] Military activity by external actors persists, including the Türkiye-backed Syrian National Army (SNA), US-backed Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF), and the Israel Defense Forces (IDF).[28]

28. During a victory speech on January 30, 2025, former HTS leader and current de facto president, Ahmed al-Sharaa, declared that HTS will work to form a comprehensive transitional government and will prioritize "(1) achieving civil peace and pursuing criminals from the previous regime; (2) completing the unification of all Syrian territory; (3) building strong state institutions based on competency and merit; and (4) establishing the foundations of a strong economy."[29] Moving forward, the current transitional government will face much difficulty in unifying armed factions and addressing specific challenges where fighting continues among rival groups near the Iraqi and Turkish borders. UN Special envoy Geir Pedersen underscored the importance of forming a unified Syrian national army to ensure future stability.[30]

29. Syria faced international sanctions for about 45 years, and in 2011 had severe sanctions imposed by the US, EU, and UK in response to the previous regime's human rights violations and war crimes. Moreover, specific armed groups such as HTS were also subject to UNSC-mandated counter terrorism measures that limited their access to certain assets and resources.

30. Although most sanctions imposed on the previous regime are still in place, despite the dissolution of Assad's Ba'ath party,[31] Ahmed al-Sharaa has started bilateral discussions with global powers to lift these sanctions, with some success. As of March 2025, the UK has started to gradually ease restrictions and lifted asset freezes on 24 Syrian entities, underscoring their "commitment to help the people of Syria rebuild their country and economy."[32] The EU and the US[33] have also suspended some restrictions for key economic sectors related to energy to support the political transition, and have tried to facilitate engagement between key sectors needed for humanitarian and reconstruction purposes.[34] This gradual lifting of sanctions could improve conditions and potentially benefit humanitarian operations and aid delivery; however, the designation of the transitional government by the international community is likely to depend on its ability to demonstrate effective governance and stability during the transition.

31. Although Syria entered a new era at the end of 2024, the humanitarian challenges still remain. As of April 2025, UNHCR estimated that approximately 1 million IDPs had returned to their areas of origin in Syria, and nearly 400,000 people from outside the country had returned to Syria.[35] The first Whole of Syria (WoS) multi-sectoral assessment since the regime change outlined that humanitarian needs persisted, with 49% of communities (out of 1,018 communities across most of

[26] In Hindsight: The Demise of the Syria Cross-border Aid Mechanism, August 2023 Monthly Forecast: Security Council Report; OCHA (2024) Annual Report 2023 Humanitarian Response: Syrian Arab Republic. Humanitarian Programme Cycle January – December 2023. Issued June 2024.
[27] Syrian Arab Republic: Humanitarian Situation Report No. 2 (As of 27 February 2025) - Syrian Arab Republic | ReliefWeb, February 2025.
[28] Syria after Assad 2024/25: Consequences and next steps - House of Commons Library, December 2024.
[29] The Status of Syria's Transition After Two Months | The Washington Institute, February 2025.
[30] In Syria, top UN envoy highlights international backing for political transition | UN News, January 2025.
[31] Syria's Baath party dissolved: What happens next? | Syria's War News | Al Jazeera, January 2025.
[32] Update on Syria: Lifting asset freezes on 24 entities - GOV.UK, March 2025.
[33] Syria Sanctions Since the Fall of Assad: Updates from the United States and European Union, March 2025.
[34] Syria: EU suspends restrictive measures on key economic sectors - Consilium, February 2025.
[35] Voluntary Returns of Syrian Refugees and IDPs - Three-month Impact Report (January - March 2025) - Syrian Arab Republic | ReliefWeb, April 2025.

Syria except for Homs, Tartous, and other regions) classifying their needs as severe, which was defined as the inability to fully meet basic needs. The assessment also showed that "access to humanitarian assistance remained critically low across all governorates" and although the primary barrier was the lack of available humanitarian assistance, the volatility of geopolitical dynamics could further block humanitarian access to certain populations.

32. The humanitarian operational context remains fluid, with key changes underway following the overthrow of the Assad regime. The recent decision to close the OCHA Gaziantep office and the cross-border operation in the summer of 2025 marks a significant shift in the coordination and delivery of humanitarian aid.[36] This change brings uncertainty around the future structure of humanitarian operations under the transitional government as the humanitarian coordination structure for NWS transitions to a WoS structure. The WoS multi-sectoral assessment also outlined "the political transition in Syria after the collapse of the Assad government presents an opportunity for an integrated and comprehensive WoS approach that addresses the needs of affected populations across all regions." However, if the momentum behind the transitional government's priorities mentioned above stalls, there is a risk of renewed fragmentation, which could complicate the operational landscape, particularly humanitarian access and coordination.

Implications for the evaluation

33. The ET has identified the following key reasons why the evaluation findings remain relevant despite the significant changes to the Syria context:

- **Lessons for a critical transition.** The report captures lessons learned from a period marked by protracted conflict and humanitarian complexity, which are particularly valuable during the current transition. With the upcoming closure of the cross-border operation in summer 2025,[37] the evaluation provides insights that can inform the design of new humanitarian response mechanisms under a reconfigured WoS approach. These findings offer evidence to guide future structures, policies, and partnerships as the humanitarian system adapts to a single in-country operation.
- **Insights for cross-border operations.** The evaluation also identified key takeaways from cross-border humanitarian operations, which continue to hold importance regardless of the political transition. The analysis of the cross-border response remains relevant, despite its closure, as it was a vital artery for delivering needed assistance to communities and offers relevant good practice examples that could be replicated moving forward. Moreover, reference to the pre-December 2024 situation in the report's findings and analysis remains relevant for understanding the complexities of humanitarian work in Syria moving forward. The report retains the use of terms such as NGCA and GCA because the evaluation examined separate humanitarian responses that have occurred in the past. This distinction remains essential because it clarifies and contextualizes the findings in relation to the operating environment at the time.
- **Guiding future engagement with authorities.** Findings from this evaluation can provide insights on how IASC members engage with the new authorities and power structures and invite IASC members to reflect on their role in advance of future responses and emergencies.
- **Purpose of IAHEs.** The evaluation will still fulfill the purpose of IAHEs, which is to strengthen system-wide learning and promote accountability for how the humanitarian response was delivered.

34. In maintaining the relevance of the evaluation findings, the draft report was shared with key stakeholders at the global level and to field offices across Türkiye and Syria. The recommendations were shared with local community volunteers in NGCA through the AAP adviser for their feedback on the applicability of the findings, conclusions, and recommendations in the current context. The

[36] The New Humanitarian | OCHA, the UN's emergency aid coordination arm, to cut staff by a fifth, April 2025.
[37] The New Humanitarian | OCHA, the UN's emergency aid coordination arm, to cut staff by a fifth, April 2025

ET has collaborated closely with the Management Group (MG) and OCHA to refine recommendations that align with key developments across the contexts.

2. Evaluation findings

35. This section presents the findings organized thematically. Table 3 below maps the EQs that are addressed in each sub-section. The ET has disaggregated findings by context, reflecting the influence of context on the response and making the findings relevant for humanitarian actors operating in each context. The following sub-sections generally present findings from Türkiye first, followed by findings for NGCA and GCA of Syria. Where findings are based on one or two contexts only, this is made clear in the headings of the findings.

Table 3 Report section mapping with Evaluation Questions

Section	Evaluation Question
2.1 Preparedness	**EQ 1** To what extent did IASC member agencies have relevant and usable strategies/plans and capacities in place to respond to the emergency?
2.2 Response Timeliness	**EQ 2** How did the System-wide IASC Scale-up Activation, IASC guidance, and other relevant response frameworks contribute to the timeliness and effectiveness of the response? **EQ 6** How well did the IASC's collective response adapt to the specific contexts in Türkiye and Syria? **EQ 11** To what extent was the collective response of IASC member agencies aligned with the humanitarian principles of humanity, neutrality, impartiality, and independence? What challenges were encountered?
2.3 Needs Assessment	**EQ 3** To what extent were IASC member agencies able to identify critical needs and gaps in a timely way?
2.4 Resource Mobilization and Allocation	**EQ 4** To what extent were IASC members and their partners able to mobilize timely and flexible funding to respond adequately to the needs of the most affected populations? **EQ 12** How adequately were recovery considerations and the basic tenets of DRR incorporated into the humanitarian response?
2.5 Leadership and Coordination	**EQ 5.1** What factors influenced the effectiveness of the IASC's leadership of the response (including of clusters/sectors) across the different response contexts? **EQ 5.2** How well did IASC member organizations coordinate their efforts, both internally within the IASC and with non-IASC members such as local government and NGOs, in responding to the humanitarian needs? **EQ 6** How well did the IASC's collective response adapt to the specific contexts in Türkiye and Syria? **EQ 11** To what extent was the collective response of IASC member agencies aligned with the humanitarian principles of humanity, neutrality, impartiality, and independence? What challenges were encountered?
2.6 Partnerships with Local/ National Actors	**EQ 7** To what extent did the IASC members ensure that they complemented and supported national and local capacities at response level?
2.7 Assisting the Most Vulnerable Groups	**EQ 8** To what extent was the collective response of IASC member agencies gender-responsive, equitable, and inclusive?

2.8 Engagement with Affected People	**EQ 9** To what extent has the collective response been based on consultation with affected people, in particular the most vulnerable and hard-to-reach groups? **EQ 10** To what extent did IASC member agencies provide relevant forms of assistance, including cash and vouchers (when this was feasible and appropriate)?
2.9 Delivering Results for Affected Communities	**EQ 13.1** To what extent were the planned strategic objectives of the Flash Appeals achieved? **EQ 13.2** What positive or negative, intended or unintended, outcomes did the IASC collective response generate? **EQ 10** To what extent did IASC member agencies provide relevant forms of assistance, including cash and vouchers (when this was feasible and appropriate)?

2.1 Preparedness

36. This section addresses the first evaluation question, focusing on the extent to which IASC members across the Türkiye and Syria contexts had a relevant and usable collective preparedness plan in place that could help them to respond to the February 2023 earthquakes. It also looks at whether IASC members have put in place plans for responding to future large-scale disasters.

Summary of findings: Preparedness

Despite **Türkiye** being seismically active, the UNCT did not have a joint preparedness plan for its actions in case of a major earthquake due to existing government capacity and the lack of IASC-government discussions about a shared plan. In 2024, the Emergency Preparedness and Response Working Group started work on a joint preparedness plan for future large-scale disasters.

In **NGCA**, humanitarian actors had not prepared for a natural disaster because of the focus on the ongoing response to the protracted crisis and contingency planning for non-renewal of the UNSCR on the cross-border operation. Working with limited funding, they were in the very early stages of planning for a large-scale emergency as of November 2024 when the Syria context changed dramatically. Similarly, in **GCA**, the Syria HCT was focused on responding to the protracted conflict with limited funding, rather than on planning for a large-scale natural disaster response. Post-earthquake attempts to plan with the GoS for future emergency responses had proved challenging, given the government's fragmented humanitarian response structure.

Finding 1: Across all three contexts, IASC members did not have a joint preparedness plan for their actions in case of a large-scale rapid onset emergency. In Türkiye, this was mainly because of the government's clearly demonstrated capacity to undertake disaster management. In Syria, this was because humanitarian actors were focused on the protracted crisis. As of the end of 2024, IASC members in all three contexts still did not have such a plan in place due to ongoing context-specific challenges.

Strength of evidence
Strong

37. **Despite Türkiye being seismically active, the UNCT did not have a joint preparedness plan for its actions in case of a major earthquake. This was because of existing government capacity and the lack of IASC-government discussions about a shared plan.** The IASC guidance on developing an Emergency Response Plan for Resident/Humanitarian Coordinators (RC/HCs) and HCT members is predicated on the principle that governments have primary

responsibility for providing humanitarian assistance to those in need.[38] Therefore, one function of a preparedness plan is to enable the humanitarian community to outline its capacity and the value that it can add to national response. An Emergency Response Preparedness Working Group used this guidance to develop an inter-agency contingency planning document for Türkiye in 2019 and also applied the IASC's guidance on preparedness for the COVID-19 pandemic.[39] However, the working group was dormant after the pandemic and there was no collective preparedness plan in place that UNCT members could use when the earthquakes struck in February 2023.

38. One reason that the UNCT did not prepare for a major earthquake was that the Turkish government had demonstrated its capacity to respond to earthquakes and other disasters without international support (as noted in Section 1.3, AFAD is responsible for disaster management and has considerable experience of responding to natural disasters[40]). UN representatives mentioned, in interviews and the validation workshop, that the government had also requested the UN not to respond to previous earthquakes (such as the one in Izmir in 2020). Another reason for the lack of earthquake preparedness planning was that disaster management was not put on the agenda for discussions between IASC members and the Turkish government. As a result, UNCT members were not linked to the government's national or sub-national disaster response mechanisms. Instead, individual UN agencies had direct working relationships with government entities at both national and sub-national levels and government interviewees referred to agreements on thematic topics as well as specific projects.

39. Interviews highlighted that, in the absence of emergency preparedness planning, IASC members had not considered the impact of a major earthquake on their collective ongoing operations (should offices and warehouses be damaged, for example, could agencies share office space if one agency's office was destroyed) and staff (such as duty of care measures required and coordinated approaches to providing accommodation for staff whose homes were damaged/destroyed).[41]

40. As noted in Section 1.3, there were a number of earthquakes in Southeast Türkiye in late 2024.[42] These were a reminder of the risk of another large-scale earthquake and key informants and validation workshop participants noted that there have also been warnings that the next significant earthquake would strike Istanbul.[43] This could have devastating consequences in a densely populated urban area, potentially overwhelming national response capacities once again. During the validation workshop, IASC members highlighted that they were acutely aware of the need to be prepared to support the national response in such an event, and also to deal with the effects on their own operations and staff. However, they had not put in place a plan or any measures because they needed to align closely with the plan of the government, which will lead the response. Efforts to engage with AFAD at national level on collective preparedness actions had not resulted in a concrete agenda or plans. However, the Emergency Preparedness and Response Working Group, co-chaired

[38] Inter-Agency Standing Committee (2015) Guidance: Emergency Response Preparedness, IASC Task Team on Preparedness and Resilience. This guidance covers risk analysis and monitoring, minimum preparedness actions, and advanced preparedness actions and contingency planning.
[39] Inter-Agency Standing Committee (2020) Interim Guidance: IASC Emergency Response Preparedness (ERP) Approach to the COVID-19 Pandemic, Preparedness, Early Action and Readiness Sub-Group.
[40] https://en.afad.gov.tr/about-us
[41] The UNCT had discussed preparedness as part of the Regional Refugee and Resilience Plan (3RP), focusing on the Syrian refugee crisis rather than natural disasters.
[42] The fault line between Erzincan and Bingöl's Karlıova district in Southeast Türkiye is also identified as being on the verge of generating a magnitude 7 or higher earthquake in the area. See Alashan, S., K. Akbayram and O.M. Nemutlu (2023) Estimating the Recurrence of Earthquakes with Statistical Methods in the City of Bingöl: A district-based approach, Bulletin of the Mineral Research and Exploration.
[43] Kayaalp, E. (2024) Cambridge University Press at; *Engineering, Law and the Anticipated Istanbul Earthquake*; Minister renews warning about potential earthquake that could affect millions in İstanbul; Minister renews warning about potential earthquake that could affect millions in İstanbul; Istanbul, Turkey's biggest city, worries next earthquake will be a big one**.** In fact, an earthquake with a magnitude of 6.2 struck Istanbul on April 23, 2025. Although there were no fatalities, there were some injuries and some damage to buildings. See https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/2025_Istanbul_earthquake

by the World Food Programme (WFP) and the World Health Organization (WHO), was reactivated in 2024 to work on a joint preparedness plan for future large-scale disasters.[44]

41. **In NGCA of Syria, before the earthquakes, humanitarian actors focused on contingency planning for non-renewal of the UNSCR on the cross-border operation, rather than on preparing for a natural disaster.[45]** The cross-border operation to provide humanitarian aid to NGCA from Gaziantep in Türkiye without requiring the GoS's consent was governed by a UNSCR for nine years.[46] It was renewed annually until July 2022, when it was extended only for six months, until January 10, 2023. The build-up to each renewal of the UNSCR was an anxious period for humanitarian actors working on the cross-border operation, involving intense advocacy (particularly by NGOs) and contingency planning in case the Resolution was not renewed. There was a sense of frustration among humanitarian actors that, when the Resolution was extended only for six-month periods, they were spending almost more time and effort on the renewal process than on meeting the needs of affected populations. Thus, they had limited time and resources to consider the consequences of a large-scale natural disaster in Türkiye that would affect the cross-border response. Also, while NWS is affected by severe winters, floods, and fires in the summer, response planning for these recurrent emergencies was integrated into the ongoing response to the protracted crisis (in the Humanitarian Response Plan (HRP)) so there was no planning for a major natural disaster.

42. **Due to the focus on the ongoing response to the protracted crisis and limited resources for preparedness measures, humanitarian actors in NGCA were in the very early stages of planning for a large-scale emergency as of November 2024.** The Operational Peer Review (OPR) of the earthquake response in Syria in July 2023 recommended that the HLG, together with the ICCG and OCHA, develop an emergency preparedness plan for natural disasters by March 31, 2024 but this had not been implemented due to limited resources.[47] During a validation workshop in November 2024 (see Section 1.2 and Annex 4 for details), HLG members noted that they had recently started discussing scenario-based planning for an escalation in violent conflict that could lead to mass casualties and large-scale population displacement. Actions to respond to these scenarios could be applied to natural disasters as well. However, with the focus on responding to ever-increasing humanitarian needs due to the protracted crisis, these were at an early stage and much more work was required to put in place a joint plan that could apply to different rapid onset emergencies. The sharp decrease in funding for the Syria crisis as a whole in 2024 (see Section 2.4) meant that there were very limited resources to invest in preparedness measures. Section 1.3 outlined the rapid fall of the Assad regime, and this overtook the HLG's planning process. The focus then shifted to planning and implementing the closure of the cross-border operation in June 2025.

43. **In GCA, prior to the earthquakes, the Syria HCT focused on responding to the protracted conflict with limited funding, rather than planning for a large-scale natural disaster response. In 2024, attempts to plan with the GoS for future emergency responses had proved challenging, given the government's fragmented humanitarian response structure**. The decline in funding for the Syria crisis prior to the earthquakes (see Section 2.4) meant that humanitarian actors focused their limited resources on addressing ongoing humanitarian needs. This made it difficult to invest in DRR and prepositioning stocks in case of a large-scale rapid onset emergency (with donors also placing strict restrictions on the use of their funding). Responsibility for humanitarian response within the GoS was split across five government entities – the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the Ministry of Local Administration and Environment, the Ministry of Social Affairs

[44] In addition to UN agencies, the working group has the Turkish Red Crescent and the International Federation of the Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies (IFRC) as members, since they are key actors in delivering Türkiye's national disaster response plan.

[45] The Operational Peer Review of the earthquake response in Syria also noted this. See Peer-2-Peer Support/IASC (2023) Syria Earthquake Operational Peer Review Mission Report.

[46] Security Council Report (2023) August 2023 Monthly Forecast (31 July 2023): https://www.securitycouncilreport.org/monthly-forecast/2023-08/in-hindsight-the-demise-of-the-syria-cross-border-aid-mechanism.php

[47] Peer-2-Peer Support/IASC (2023) Syria Earthquake Operational Peer Review Mission Report.

and Labor, the Syrian Arab Red Crescent (SARC) and the Syria Trust. In addition, the GoS established new sub-national Operation Rooms for the earthquake response that made coordination and data sharing more complex (see Section 2.5). This made it difficult to identify and align with any government preparedness plans and also to coordinate with government entities in the event of a future large-scale emergency. The HCT sent a Note Verbale (in Arabic) to the government at the end of September 2024 proposing the creation of a single coordination and Disaster Risk Management structure with the support of IASC members in order to facilitate coordination in future emergency responses. However, it had not received a reply by the time of a validation meeting at the end of November 2024 and the context in Syria then changed dramatically, with the fall of the Assad regime, as outlined in Section 1.3.

2.2 Response timeliness

44. This section outlines the factors that influenced the timeliness of the international response to the earthquakes. It begins with the declaration of the System-Wide Scale-Up Activation, and the triggering of global and individual agency emergency response mechanisms (addressing EQ 2). It goes on to examine the significant impact of the earthquakes on aid workers, who set aside their personal challenges to deliver a timely response, and the extent to which they received duty of care support (EQ 2). The section concludes with a focus on NGCA, addressing EQ 6 on the extent to which the collective response adapted to the unique context and EQ 11 on adherence to humanitarian principles.

Summary of findings: Response timeliness

The immediate response to the earthquakes in **Türkiye** was quick, largely due to the activation of global emergency response mechanisms as well as the immediate actions of most IASC members. These included making use of pre-positioned stocks, surging staff into the affected areas, and utilizing pre-existing agreements with partners and suppliers.

In **Syria**, national and local actors and affected communities were the first responders, providing crucial lifesaving assistance until aid agencies arrived. This was an important determinant of the timeliness of the response.

This highlights how different actors responded as quickly as they were able, even though the System-Wide Scale-Up Activation took eight days – longer than the 48 hours outlined in Protocol 1. This was because the EDG needed to consider the Turkish government's perspective and ensure access to NGCA.

In **NGCA**, the failure of Member States to deploy Urban Search and Rescue (USAR) teams resulted in unnecessary loss of life and suffering, with communities believing that the UN had failed them. Member States' lack of response to advocacy by humanitarian leaders to adhere to humanitarian principles in providing USAR support highlighted the limited leverage that IASC members have with donor governments.

However, the impact of the earthquakes also led to an unprecedented opportunity for the ERC to negotiate access into NGCA for non-Syrian humanitarian workers. The Deputy Regional Humanitarian Coordinator (DRHC) and UN agencies used this to increase their visibility and counter the negative views that communities had about the UN's failure to assist them. IASC members also used the access to strengthen a number of aspects of the cross-border operation, including coordination and AAP, which had been weak when the earthquakes occurred. Recognizing that communities remained at risk of being cut off from external assistance, humanitarian actors had started supporting community capacities for disaster response.

In both **South-East Türkiye and North-West Syria**, humanitarian workers were impacted by the earthquakes to an unprecedented extent but put aside their personal circumstances to deliver a timely response. **Across all three contexts**, aid agencies provided different types of duty of care support to their staff, with some providing a generous range of support. Despite

attempts to develop a harmonized approach to duty of care at country level, agencies applied their own internal policies/approaches. This left some aid workers in **Gaziantep**, who reported still being traumatized, angered by the disparities in the level of support across agencies. In **Syria**, particularly, delays and bureaucratic procedures reduced the effectiveness of the support.

UN agencies have no legal obligation to provide duty of care support to NGO partners, but in **NGCA** a few agencies felt morally obliged to provide duty of care payments for SNGO partner staff. The SCHF, in particular, set an example that other CBPFs could emulate. SNGO staff, who were on the front line of aid delivery, were frustrated by the limited support because they had expected that the localization agenda would translate into greater support.

Finding 2: In spite of a delay in declaring a System-Wide Scale-Up Activation for Türkiye and Syria, the immediate response to the earthquakes was fast in Türkiye, largely because of the activation of global emergency response mechanisms and quick actions by individual IASC members.

Strength of evidence
Strong

45. **The System-Wide Scale-Up Activation for the Türkiye-Syria earthquakes took eight days rather than the 48 hours outlined in Protocol 1 because the EDG needed time to take into consideration the Turkish government's perspective and access to NGCA.**[48] As per Protocol 1, the EDG met on a call on February 6, 2023 to discuss a potential activation, based on the destruction caused by the earthquakes both in Türkiye and in NWS and the possibility of a deterioration in the situation due to the severe aftershocks. Its decision on whether or not to declare the Scale-Up was based on two key considerations. One was the existing structures and capacity of the Turkish government (recognizing that these had been overwhelmed by the scale of the disaster) and the other was access to NGCA. It took time to get the information needed, though the ERC and the acting EDG chair met immediately with the Turkish government to discuss its priorities and expectations of international assistance. They also traveled to Syria and were able to negotiate unprecedented access to NGCA for international staff members (see Finding 4 for further details). Therefore, the ERC made the formal declaration on February 14, 2023 in consultation with the EDG and the IASC Principals.

46. **The scale of the earthquake impact led to the immediate triggering of global USAR and coordination mechanisms (through the United Nations Disaster Assessment and Coordination (UNDAC)), particularly for Türkiye**. The INSARAG mechanisms to provide USAR assistance are not dependent on IASC System-Wide Scale-Up Activation.[49] In response to a Turkish government request for international assistance within two hours of the first earthquake, 225 international teams from 90 countries/organizations and comprising 11,320 personnel responded to the earthquakes in Türkiye.[50] The GoS was slower to request USAR assistance for the areas under its control but the first USAR teams arrived in Aleppo on February 7, 2023.[51] On February 9, seven international USAR teams redeployed all or part of their teams to GCA to support national civil defense search and rescue efforts.[52] However, as described under Finding 3, Member States did

[48] IASC (2018) Standard Operating Procedures Humanitarian System-Wide Scale-Up Activation: Protocol 1: Definition and Procedures

[49] For details of INSARAG mechanisms, see INSARAG (2023) INSARAG After Action Review—2023 Türkiye and Syria Earthquakes: A comprehensive report of INSARAG's Largest International Search and Rescue Operation.

[50] INSARAG (2023) INSARAG After Action Review—2023 Türkiye and Syria Earthquakes: A comprehensive report of INSARAG's Largest International Search and Rescue Operation.

[51] There was a view that UN agencies could have done more to raise awareness within the government about INSARAG (Syria is not a member) and how to activate international assistance in a large-scale disaster.

[52] INSARAG (2023) INSARAG After Action Review—2023 Türkiye and Syria Earthquakes: A comprehensive report of INSARAG's Largest International Search and Rescue Operation; iMMAP (2023) Post-Earthquake Perspective: Challenges and Strategies for Humanitarian Aid in Northwest Syria, Ad Hoc Series Part 2, September 17, 2023.

not deploy USAR teams to NGCA, citing concerns about sovereignty because the GoS had not included these areas in its request.

47. The UNDAC system is designed to deploy within 24 to 48 hours to support UN agencies and governments during the first phase of a sudden onset disaster.[53] This was also activated immediately, and the UNDAC team leader (TL) and first team members arrived in Türkiye 22 hours after the first earthquake. By February 9, 50 UNDAC team members had deployed across Southeast Türkiye, including Gaziantep for the cross-border response. An UNDAC team also deployed to GCA on February 13, based on a request from the GoS.

48. **Most individual IASC members took immediate actions, which facilitated the speed of their response. These included making use of pre-positioned stocks, surging staff into the affected areas, and utilizing pre-existing agreements with partners and suppliers.** The primary purpose of the System-Wide Scale-Up Activation is to encourage IASC members and partners to mobilize the operational capacity and resources required to respond quickly and in a way that is commensurate with the scale of a crisis. The timing of the internal agency Scale-Up Activations in response to the earthquakes varied from within hours of the first earthquake to the first week of March 2023, while one UN agency did not declare an internal Scale-Up Activation.[54] Nevertheless, IASC members acted quickly (particularly within Türkiye and for the cross-border operation) because the scale and urgency of the crisis was so clear (so that the System-Wide Scale-Up Activation did not have to play a "signaling" function).[55] However, the impact of the earthquakes was so severe that agencies had to continue to scale up their response significantly.

49. Having pre-positioned supplies available speeded up the response in both Türkiye and NGCA. Within Türkiye, some agencies (such as UNICEF and IOM) had stock in warehouses that they were able to release for the earthquake response. WFP also had a sizable food stock in the country since Türkiye is WFP's largest supplier of food stocks globally. This, combined with its pre-earthquake partnerships with local authorities and major suppliers, enabled WFP to start delivering food aid just three days after the earthquakes, and it was able to provide food assistance to 1.6 million people during its emergency response. Other UN agencies were able to dispatch pre-positioned supplies from hubs outside Türkiye. As a result, UN agencies provided significant emergency assistance in support of the Turkish government response within the first couple of weeks.[56]

50. For the cross-border operation, stocks pre-positioned inside NGCA (because of concerns about the non-renewal of the UNSCR in January 2023) proved vital in the first few days after the earthquake. This is because the border crossing at Bab-al-Hawa was closed for three days, mainly because Turkish border staff closed the crossing and left to deal with the deaths of family and colleagues and to ensure the safety of survivors. However, the earthquakes also damaged roads, making the crossing temporarily unusable. Interviewees were unanimous in their view that the actions of the border guards were perfectly understandable in the circumstances but humanitarian actors had to deal with an unprecedented access challenge. UN agencies addressed this by releasing their pre-positioned stocks to SNGO partners inside NGCA, who were able to distribute them to affected communities. SNGO interviewees appreciated UN partners that provided the flexibility to distribute supplies without requiring the usual paperwork.

[53] For more information about UNDAC, see https://undac.unocha.org/about/

[54] See IAHE (2024) IASC System-Wide Scale-Up Mechanism. From protocol to reality: lessons for scaling up collective humanitarian responses, Annex 3: Timeline of IASC Activations post 2018. This aligns with the learning paper's finding that there is a correlation between a System-Wide Scale-Up Activation and UN agency corporate emergency declarations but not a causal or automatic link between the two.

[55] An IASC learning paper on the System-Wide Scale-Up Activation mechanism noted that the use of emergency activations "as a signal of crises' relative importance or severity" was one of three problems with the previous Level 3 system that the System-Wide Scale-Up Activation Protocols were intended to address. The review found that activations still had a signaling function, particularly due to the number of protracted crises with chronic funding shortages. See IAHE (2024) IASC System-Wide Scale-Up Mechanism. From protocol to reality: lessons for scaling up collective humanitarian responses.

[56] OCHA (2023) Türkiye: 2023 Earthquakes Situation Report No. 4, As of February 23, 2023.

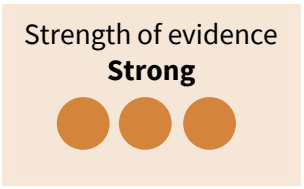
51. The ability of IASC members to surge support staff with relevant technical expertise to Gaziantep and Southeast Türkiye, both for the response within the country and for the cross-border operation, helped to scale up the response quickly and fill critical staffing capacity gaps.[57] UN agencies could deploy large numbers of staff from a mix of headquarters, Regional Offices, and within Türkiye itself (for example, UNICEF had a large number of Turkish national staff in Istanbul who could deploy to replace staff in South-East Türkiye that needed to be rotated out, while WFP was able to deploy 55 surge staff to Türkiye). Agencies also deployed specialists in supply chain management, communications, coordination, psychosocial support[58] and other technical areas to fill gaps in the responses.

52. Some interviewees suggested that humanitarian staff working on the cross-border operation tended to be more experienced with operating in a protracted conflict than in dealing with a rapid onset natural disaster, particularly of this magnitude. Therefore, agencies deployed staff with emergency response experience, trying to bring in staff with previous knowledge of the context where possible so that they did not have to spend time trying to understand the complexities of the Syria crisis and providing cross-border assistance. One agency noted prioritizing Arabic speakers and those who could travel inside NWS for deployment.

53. Few agencies sent surge support staff into GCA, mainly due to existing in-country capacity. Agencies either already had staff present in the affected areas or were able to move in-country staff with relevant experience to the affected areas. The movement of staff was facilitated by the GoS's decision to relax travel rules for humanitarian agency staff between Damascus and earthquake-affected areas. In addition, since a smaller area of GCA was affected by the earthquakes (compared with NGCA), the response was smaller and so there was less need to deploy surge support.

54. In Türkiye and NGCA, existing agreements with NGO partners and suppliers helped IASC members to respond faster. UN agencies that had partnership agreements with NGOs in Türkiye for the 3RP response and with SNGOs for the cross-border operation were able to respond through these partners. However, in both contexts, UN due diligence procedures meant that it took a long time to establish new partnerships to expand operations (see Section 2.6). UN agencies that had contracts with trucking companies in place were also able to utilize these for the earthquake response. NGO interviewees noted that markets in NGCA continued to function despite the earthquakes and Turkish border restrictions. This was because private sector actors used commercial crossings that had continued to operate.[59] Therefore, they were able to procure supplies locally, which made their response quicker.

Finding 3: In NGCA, the failure of Member States to deploy USAR teams resulted in unnecessary loss of life and suffering, with communities believing that the UN had failed them. Member States' lack of response to advocacy by humanitarian leaders to adhere to humanitarian principles in providing USAR support highlights the limited leverage that IASC members have with them.



55. **Without international USAR assistance to NGCA, affected communities and the Syrian Civil Defense (White Helmets) did not have adequate equipment to rescue survivors. This led to tragic and unnecessary loss of life.** In contrast to their huge USAR response to Türkiye, Member States did not send USAR teams to NGCA, leaving it to the White Helmets and affected communities themselves to try to rescue survivors (some NGOs deployed rescue teams, and a Qatari and a French team managed to cross the border but they all lacked adequate rescue

[57] The provision of surge support is not dependent on corporate emergency declarations. See IAHE (2024) IASC System-Wide Scale-Up Mechanism. From protocol to reality: lessons for scaling up collective humanitarian responses. As a result, UN agencies were able to send significant surge support very quickly.

[58] In Türkiye, during focus group discussions, affected communities really valued the psychosocial support provided by UN agencies.

[59] iMMAP (2023) Post-Earthquake Perspective: Challenges and Strategies for Humanitarian Aid in Northwest Syria, Ad Hoc Series Part 1, June 15, 2023. Cash Working Group (CWG) members also identified this through a rapid assessment.

equipment[60]). A few interviewees paid tribute to the bravery and hard work of the White Helmets. For example, one member continued to perform his duties even though his wife and family were trapped under rubble. However, the White Helmets did not have the specialized equipment they needed for effective search and rescue. This, combined with damage to roads and other infrastructure, meant that they could only access 5% of the earthquake-affected areas.[61] FGD participants repeatedly referred to the slow arrival of assistance, and one described how "*rescue teams did not arrive until two days later and even when they did, cars were stuck on the roads, preventing access to the affected areas, leading to many people dying under the rubble*." Even when they were able to access communities, without equipment like thermal detectors, the White Helmets often searched in the wrong places for survivors. In Türkiye, three survivors were rescued 11 days after the earthquakes.[62] However, in NGCA, communities "*gave up trying to rescue people on day five because they had no equipment, even though there were people probably still alive. That should not have happened*."

56. FGD participants in NGCA described the impact of the failure to provide USAR assistance and the unnecessary loss of life:

> "On the first day, we received no help. It was just us helping each other, using shovels or anything available. For two days, we stayed like this until we retrieved the bodies of my son and daughter-in-law.
>
> The money that was distributed helped us buy some essential needs, but the delay in rescue teams cost us lives. Despite the positive impact of the food and tents that arrived later, the psychological pain was immense as we lost family members due to the delayed rescue operations.
>
> Losing loved ones due to the delay in reaching the injured was the biggest challenge, and aid couldn't compensate for that."

57. **The lack of USAR assistance and the UN's low visibility policy throughout the crisis led communities to believe that the UN had failed to assist them.** The ERC recognized the consequences of failing to provide USAR assistance and felt impelled to apologize on behalf of the international community. He tweeted "*We have so far failed the people in NWS. They rightly feel abandoned. Looking for international help that hasn't arrived. My duty and our obligation is to correct this failure as fast as we can*."[63] The tweet went viral and Syrian communities (as well as some SNGOs) interpreted it as an acknowledgment of the UN's failure to send USAR teams. They did not understand that the UN is entirely reliant on Member States to provide the teams and they were also unaware of the extent of the UN's humanitarian assistance throughout the conflict because UN agencies had adopted a low visibility policy of not putting logos or branding on any of the assistance delivered in NGCA. Therefore, communities were angry at what they saw as the continued lack of support from the UN. As described under Finding 4 below, UN agencies had to invest time and effort in addressing this misperception once they gained direct access to NGCA.

58. **Member States' refusal to provide USAR support to Syria highlighted the limited leverage that IASC members have in calling for adherence to the humanitarian principles.** OCHA senior leadership requested 14 Member States send USAR teams to NGCA but they did not accede on the grounds of not violating the sovereignty of the GoS (which had not requested assistance for areas not under its control). However, there were suggestions that Member States also had concerns about the security of their teams and political sensitivities/red lines about providing assistance to de facto authorities that were listed by the UN as a terrorist group. The White Helmets

[60] iMMAP (2023) Post-Earthquake Perspective: Challenges and Strategies for Humanitarian Aid in Northwest Syria, Ad Hoc Series Part 1, June 15, 2023.
[61] Fox, T. (2023) The Slow UN Earthquake Response in Northwest Syria is Costing Lives: How bureaucracy and untethered political will are leaving victims to suffer https://newlinesmag.com/spotlight/slow-un-earthquake-response-to-northwest-syria-is-costing-lives/
[62] https://www.theguardian.com/world/2023/feb/17/three-rescued-from-rubble-11-days-after-earthquake-in-turkey
[63] https://x.com/UNReliefChief/status/1624701773557469184?lang=en

also requested specialist teams and equipment for NGCA from the global community but their requests went unheeded.[64] Even in GCA, where a sovereign government requested USAR assistance, only Member States who were supportive of the Assad regime, such as Lebanon and Russia, responded. Interviewees from GCA referred to the politicization of aid to Syria, which no doubt limited the response from donor governments. The inability of humanitarian leaders to convince Member States to prioritize the principles of humanity and impartiality over their stated concerns about Syrian sovereignty and the legality of sending cross-border assistance underlines the limited power that IASC members have in holding Member States to account for upholding the humanitarian principles.[65]

Finding 4: In Syria, the role of national/local actors and affected communities as first responders was an important determinant of the timeliness of the response given that it took a few days for aid agencies to mobilize and gain access to NGCA. The impact of the earthquakes led to an unprecedented opportunity to negotiate access into NGCA for non-Syrian humanitarian workers, which was used to boost visibility and strengthen a number of different aspects of the cross-border operation, including coordination and AAP.

Strength of evidence
Strong

In the immediate aftermath of the earthquakes, **local communities helped each other, providing crucial lifesaving assistance until aid agencies arrived.** FGD participants in NGCA described how people came together to provide what assistance they could in the very first hours and days.

> “After our houses were destroyed, there were people who took in families who no longer had shelter, offering them food and water.”
>
> Those who were not affected immediately began helping, and anyone who could house a displaced person did so, offering food, drink, and even transport to safer areas.
>
> All aid arrived significantly late, especially aid from local and international organizations. Had it not been for the goodwill of individuals, such as those handing out money on the streets in the early days of the disaster, there would have been a real famine. I personally received cash assistance directly from someone distributing money in the street, which helped me secure some essentials during the first days of the disaster.” *(FGD participant, NGCA)*

59. In GCA, local associations, schools, and mosques played a significant role in providing assistance, particularly in the initial days after the earthquakes. People received clothing, blankets and mattresses as well as food and water, and schools and mosques were used as shelters, from the day of the first earthquakes in some cases.

> “Schools were opened directly after the earthquake and it was a service provided personally by school principals without government intervention. The same applies to mosques. Each mosque imam brought food to the displaced people in the mosque he was responsible for at his own expense, meaning that the service was provided by the local community.

[64] iMMAP (2023) Post-Earthquake Perspective: Challenges and Strategies for Humanitarian Aid in Northwest Syria, Ad Hoc Series Part 1, June 15, 2023. This was also supported by evidence from KIIs.

[65] For definitions of the humanitarian principles of humanity, neutrality, impartiality and independence, see https://www.unocha.org/sites/unocha/files/dms/Documents/v.2.%20website%20overview%20tab%20link%202%20Humanitarian%20Principles.pdf

> There was an abandoned school where people took refuge because it is close to their homes. The residents provided them with aid such as firewood, blankets, and foam mattresses. [For] 48 hours, no organization or association came to provide aid.
>
> During the earthquake moments, no associations or organizations provided any assistance, and the neighborhood residents only helped each other." *(FGD participant, GCA)*

60. **The impact of the earthquakes led to an unprecedented opportunity for the ERC to negotiate access into NGCA for non-Syrian humanitarian workers.** In the years leading up to the 2023 earthquakes, international aid agencies could only provide assistance to affected populations in NGCA through SNGO partners or their Syrian staff members. This led to a remote operation in which SNGOs undertook needs assessments, delivered aid and were responsible for AAP (with monitoring conducted by Third Party Monitors in many cases). There was no UN presence inside NGCA, but with constant uncertainty about the renewal of the UNSCR governing the cross-border operation, the ERC (with OCHA support) had been negotiating with the GoS to lay the foundation for direct international access to NGCA for some years. The impact of the earthquakes brought about a breakthrough in these negotiations and also secured the reopening of two additional border crossings – one at Bab-al-Salameh and one at Al Ra'ee. As noted under Finding 2, the Bab-al-Hawa border crossing closed for three days when the earthquakes struck and humanitarian actors lost access to NGCA but trucks could take assistance across the border as soon as it reopened.

61. IASC members were quick to capitalize on the access, taking a variety of steps to increase aid provision. UN agencies used the newly opened border crossings to send aid trucks into NGCA, despite the logistical challenges of redirecting trucks along unfamiliar routes. The crossings also required travel within insecure parts of NGCA, which in turn required notifications to the warring parties. One step that OCHA and UN agencies took to increase the amount of assistance delivered to NGCA immediately after the reopening of the border crossings was to negotiate with the Turkish government and Syrian authorities that Turkish trucks, driven by Turkish drivers, would transport aid straight into NGCA (instead of transferring them to Syrian trucks as before).

62. **The DRHC and UN agencies also used access into NGCA to increase their visibility and counter the negative views that communities had about the UN's failure to assist them.** As described under Finding 3, communities blamed the UN for the lack of USAR assistance and were also unaware of the level of UN humanitarian assistance they had received. Therefore, the DRHC (who arrived just as access opened up) and UN agency staff immediately began to conduct frequent missions into NGCA, meeting with different stakeholders, including affected communities, to try to change their misperceptions (by the end of May, the UN had completed 116 inter-agency cross-border missions[66]). These efforts were complemented by high-level visits from the UN High Commissioner for Refugees and the Director-General of the WHO. The DRHC also used media engagement to change the narrative while UN agencies reversed their low visibility policy to raise awareness of their contribution to the response. The low visibility policy had been deemed necessary for the security of SNGO partners during the protracted conflict (before the earthquakes made an international presence in NGCA possible) but this had unforeseen consequences when Member States failed to respond to the immediate, lifesaving search and rescue needs of communities. It was unfortunate that the UN in Gaziantep had very limited communications capacity at the time of the earthquakes and also significant gaps in leadership positions. There was also a suggestion that the UN could have addressed community perceptions about the lack of a UN presence on the ground immediately after the earthquakes by deploying an UNDAC team to NGCA, which could have comprised UN staff only, if Member States were reluctant to deploy their nationals.

63. **Direct access to NGCA enabled IASC members to strengthen a number of different aspects of the cross-border operation, including coordination and AAP, which had been weak when the earthquakes occurred**. One benefit of access was that IASC members could collect

[66] iMMAP (2023) Post-Earthquake Perspective: Challenges and Strategies for Humanitarian Aid in Northwest Syria, Ad Hoc Series Part 2, September 17, 2023.

needs data as well as community feedback directly, and increase the oversight of the assistance provided. As described in Section 2.5, they were also able to strengthen the role of SNGOs in coordination activities. In addition, they worked on a variety of measures to improve AAP and community consultations (see the Good Practice Box on the LCOP in Section 2.8). The presence of international staff inside NGCA also allowed for increased policy-level engagement and advocacy with de facto authorities on humanitarian needs and concerns. This helped the DRHC to negotiate with the de facto authorities and secure their agreement to operate with the consent model when the UNSCR was not renewed in July 2023. Overall, the access resulted in "*better support to partners, direct contact with communities and a better understanding of local capacities, as well as a stronger coordination and monitoring of the response.*"[67]

64. **To maximize the benefits of direct access for the humanitarian response, the UN considered different options to establish a presence in NGCA beyond short missions. However, SNGOs were concerned about the potential risks, particularly for operational independence, and the HLG decided that the benefits did not outweigh the costs.** Once access was granted, UN leadership at the highest level felt that it was important to establish a UN presence inside NGCA. IASC members, under the DRHC's leadership, developed a paper outlining five steps or levels of presence, from the first step of daily missions into NGCA to the fifth step of UN international staff staying in Idlib. SNGOs expressed grave concerns about this because it had implications for the independence of their operations. Their primary concern was whether the UN structure in NGCA would start reporting to Damascus if the UNSCR was not renewed and about community acceptance if they saw SNGOs working with entities that were also engaging with the de facto authorities. There were additional concerns about a UN footprint in NGCA leading to an increase in operating costs, such as office rents. On the UN side, there were concerns about security (particularly when the conflict escalated in October 2023) and whether the operational benefits of a UN presence on the ground would justify the considerable security costs (for secure buildings, armored cars, etc.). As a result, in December 2023, the HLG decided that the UN presence would not go beyond daily missions, with the option of staying overnight in WFP accommodation on the Turkish side of the border (if a mission took longer than a day).

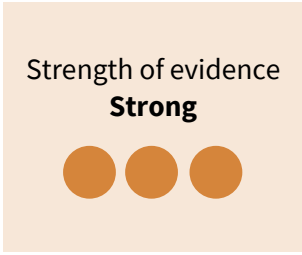
65. **Recognizing that local communities might be cut off from external assistance again in future, humanitarian actors had made efforts to strengthen their ability to respond to emergencies since the earthquakes.** The OPR recommended training community-based organizations, women-led organizations, and the staff of NGOs based inside NGCA on community-based disaster preparedness and disaster response management.[68] IASC member efforts had focused mainly on engaging with communities to strengthen AAP, rather than disaster management (see Section 2.8 for details), and they clearly needed to do much more to implement the OPR recommendation (which should have been completed by 31 March 2024). However, the evaluation identified examples of SNGO efforts to train communities. This included an SNGO-led awareness campaign on how affected communities should protect themselves during an earthquake. This was needed because "*During the earthquake people reacted in a way that was standard when there were bombings and missiles, which was to stay protected in the buildings; however, during the earthquake … this was the wrong reaction so we trained people on what to do*." Good Practice Box 1 below provides an overview of how training community volunteers in emergency response prior to the earthquakes made it possible for one SNGO to respond quickly.

[67] Peer-2-Peer Support/IASC (2023) Syria Earthquake Operational Peer Review Mission Report.
[68] Peer-2-Peer Support/IASC (2023) Syria Earthquake Operational Peer Review Mission Report.

Good Practice Box 1: Investment in community capacity in order to facilitate emergency response

An SNGO with 2,000 trained volunteers in NGCA was able to mobilize them, together with community committees and youth groups. The volunteers provided an ambulance service, giving first aid support and transporting people to hospitals. They also helped to rescue people, organize temporary shelters and internet for people in tents, and to set up mobile kitchens to deliver hot meals. They were able to do all this with very limited resources. The SNGO was also able to procure goods through Long-Term Agreements (LTAs) with suppliers inside NGCA (which overcame the problem of border closure) and distribute these through the community and youth groups. The SNGO had trained its volunteers in first aid, emergency rescue and humanitarian principles. Most of them had been working as day workers so they understood humanitarian response. The SNGO was able to work with 20 groups on the earthquake response. In addition to distributing procured supplies, they collected in-kind donations from communities themselves, brought them to the SNGO's warehouses to check that they were of adequate standard, and then distributed them to those in need, with supervision and support from the SNGO.

Finding 5: Humanitarian workers (in international, national and local organizations) in South-East Türkiye and NWS were impacted by the earthquakes to an unprecedented extent but put aside their personal circumstances to deliver a timely response. International humanitarian agencies in both Türkiye and Syria were unable to agree on a coordinated approach to duty of care.[69] The resulting differences in levels of support to staff had left some aid workers in Gaziantep angry and describing their trauma, even 18 months after the earthquakes. This did not impact on the quality of the earthquake response but had implications for the long-term well-being of humanitarian workers.



66. **A defining feature of the humanitarian response was the extent to which aid workers themselves were affected by the earthquakes. This was because the earthquakes hit an area that was an important base for the cross-border and 3RP operations. They impacted the response capacity of some SNGOs in particular.** Humanitarian actors often fly into an area affected by a major natural disaster after the event but, in this case, international and local aid workers underwent the same experience as those they were assisting. As a result, "*the response was about victims supporting victims.*"[70] The earthquakes had a particularly traumatizing effect on those in Gaziantep, South-East Türkiye and NWS because there were three earthquakes in total and more than 7,100 aftershocks. This meant that, rather than experiencing one major shock, people felt constantly unsafe over an extended period of time. Some aid workers (international and local) described how they were still traumatized more than 18 months after the earthquakes, reliving the trauma that they had undergone each time there was an earthquake in the area and living with the underlying fear that "*Might we be under the rubble next time?*" They continued to work as normal (particularly those involved in the cross-border operation) but the traumatized state they described suggested implications for their long-term well-being.

[69] UNDP has defined duty of care "as a non-waivable duty to manage foreseeable risks that may harm or injure our personnel and eligible family members in the line of duty." See https://popp.undp.org/taxonomy/term/7091. The ICRC explains that the "consequence of a breach of such a duty is a legal liability imposed upon the author (of the breach) to compensate the victim for any losses they incur." See https://unsceb.org/sites/default/files/imported_files/ICRC%20-%20Duty%20of%20Care%20ICRC%20definition.pdf. The IASC developed a global set of minimum standards for duty of care specifically for the COVID-19 pandemic. See IASC (2020) Minimum Standards on Duty of Care in the Context of COVID-19: Guidance, Endorsed by the IASC Operational Policy and Advocacy Group (OPAG) in November 2020.

[70] The cover of the Syria Cross-border Humanitarian Fund Annual Report highlighted one of many moving stories of Syrian aid workers who set aside often tragic personal circumstances to continue their work. See OCHA (2024) Syria Cross-Border Humanitarian Fund 2023 Annual Report.

67. Documents and interviews highlighted that many aid workers lost a lot of family members and colleagues, particularly in Hatay and NWS.[71] The earthquakes also affected aid agency offices and communications, which impacted the ability of some aid agencies (UN and NGO) to continue their operations. It was difficult for those based in Gaziantep to reach partners in the NGCA because some SNGOs lost so many staff and family members that they closed their operations for a period. Around 15 SCHF partners informed the Fund that they had to suspend operations temporarily. This meant that few SNGOs were able to provide aid in the first few days of the emergency and international agencies could not step in to fill the capacity gap due to the lack of access (even when international staff were able to travel to NGCA, assistance continued to be delivered largely by SNGOs). Many interviewees, particularly NGO staff, reported living in, and working from, their cars. UN agencies such as UNICEF, UNHCR, IOM, and OCHA, as well as a few NGOs, allowed staff members to bring their families to live in the office, even though turning office spaces into living accommodation made it hard to work. Despite these difficult personal and professional circumstances, humanitarian aid workers focused on overcoming logistical challenges to get aid to affected communities.

68. **In both Türkiye and Syria, aid agencies provided different types of duty of care support to their staff (with some UN agencies being particularly generous). However, delays and bureaucratic procedures reduced its effectiveness in some cases.** Figure 5 below, based on data from the aid worker survey, shows that aid agencies provided different types of duty of care support to their own staff (Annex 3 provides a more detailed analysis of survey responses). Interviews also highlighted that UN agencies offered various forms of support, such as bringing in surge support in order to rotate staff out of the affected area, giving staff leave, allowing staff time off to relocate families and work remotely for a period, providing financial support, and funding repairs to staff homes. A few UN agencies were able to combine different types of support to provide a generous overall package of duty of care. Psychosocial services were a common form of support across all three contexts and several interviewees spoke about access to counseling, particularly in the early days of the response. However, this may not have been the best time for people to make time to process what had happened because they were focused on the immediate response. It was not clear for how long different agencies made counseling services available but the fact that international staff members from UN agencies and SNGO staff working on the cross-border response reported still being traumatized at the time of data collection highlights the need for longer-term mental health support. This is a gray area for duty of care policies, though, and longer-term health policies may be required to address the need for sustained mental health support.

[71] NGO Forum Northwest Syria (2023) Duty of Care Workshop Report, May 10, 2023; Zielinski, J. (2023) Making room for aid workers' own grief in the Türkiye-Syria quake response, *The New Humanitarian* (March 28, 2023): Peer-2-Peer Support/IASC (2023) Syria Earthquake Operational Peer Review Mission Report; OCHA (2024) Syria Cross-Border Humanitarian Fund 2023 Annual Report; iMMAP (2023) Post-Earthquake Perspective: Challenges and Strategies for Humanitarian Aid in Northwest Syria, Ad Hoc Series Part 1, June 15, 2023.

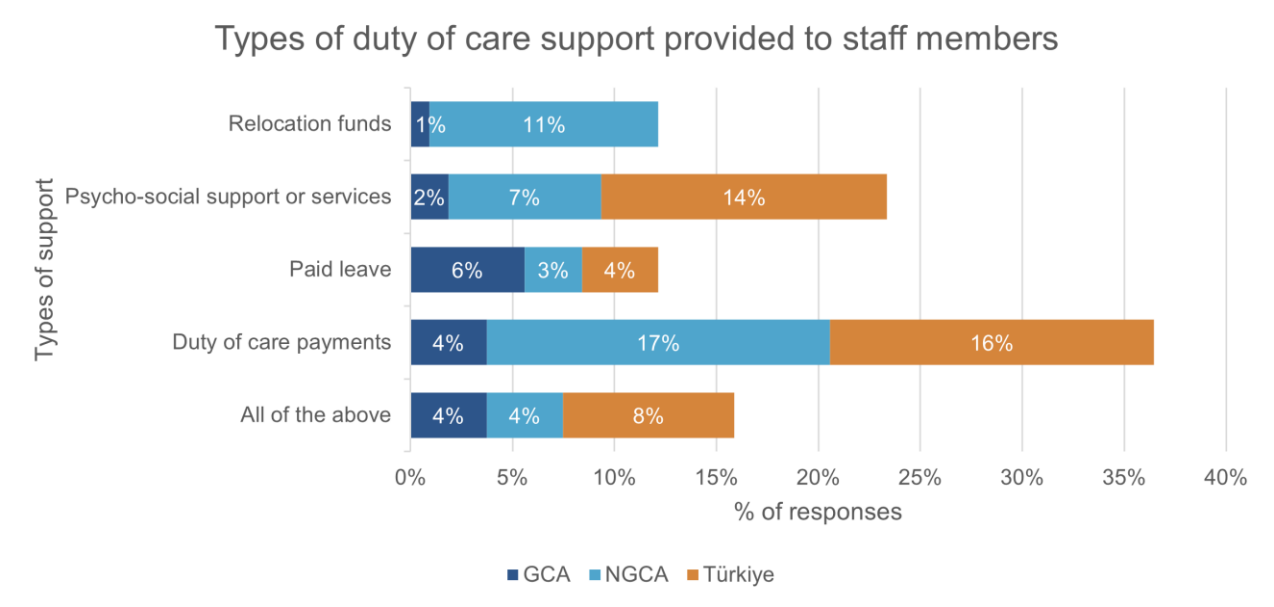


Figure 5 Duty of Care support for staff (by location)

69. UN agency staff members (particularly those working on the response in Syria) identified some challenges with the provision of duty of care support that they felt had made it less effective. In a few cases, duty of care provision became about bureaucracy and calculating levels of payment whereas staff wanted to feel that managers understood their personal situations, for example, the importance of getting leave to take families to safety. Some agencies were generous in allowing staff to take time off or to relocate but some interviewees also felt pressured to remain at work to deliver the response, and anger at the lack of managers' understanding had lingered. OCHA interviewees in both Gaziantep and Damascus reported that the length of time taken to make duty of care payments to national staff (often months) had proved challenging. OCHA international staff in-country felt that they had to "*fight for it*" to secure the payments.

70. **Despite attempts to develop a harmonized approach to duty of care at country level, UN agencies and INGOs applied their own internal policies/approaches because these are set at headquarters level. Some aid workers were angered by disparities in the level of support across agencies**. In Türkiye, aid agencies discussed the development of minimum standards of duty of care for their own staff. NGOs shared their internal standards with each other but it was not possible to come to an agreement on minimum standards. For the cross-border response and at WoS level, there were similar discussions between UN agencies but they also failed to reach consensus. The main obstacle to adopting a harmonized approach at country or WoS level was that duty of care policies of international aid agencies were set at headquarters level and in-country leadership had limited flexibility.[72] The lack of a harmonized approach to duty of care meant that the levels of support provided were uneven across agencies, with some agencies far more generous than others. This impacted staff across all types of aid agencies, demotivating some, and creating resentment and anger. UN staff, in particular, compared the support they received with what staff in other UN agencies or even INGOs got and "*jealousies were arising*".

71. **Duty of care support to NGO partners fell outside UN agency policies but a few made exceptions to cover duty of care support costs for SNGO partners. SNGO staff, who were on the front line of aid delivery and most affected by the earthquakes, were frustrated because they expected more generous support.** The aid worker survey showed that INGOs and

[72] Although there was a view that an agreed approach at response level would have given international NGOs more room to negotiate with their headquarters and make the case for flexibility or exceptions to their global policy.

national/local NGOs were more likely to have a duty of care policy that covered care for partner staff than UN agencies (see Figure 5). UN agencies were especially constrained in supporting their partners in this specific response because they tend to have duty of care provisions for conflict situations, where they may be putting staff in harm's way, rather than natural disasters or "Acts of God." Since their policies did not include duty of care support for partners, some UN agencies argued that they had no legal responsibility to make an exception for the earthquake response. They were also concerned that providing support to SNGO partner staff in this case would set a precedent for other crises. However, a small number of UN agencies felt that they had a moral obligation to provide duty of care to the staff of SNGO partners, and interviewees praised UNICEF for this approach. The SCHF was also a notable exception in making duty of care payments to its partners, setting an example that other Country-Based Pooled Funds (CBPFs) could emulate. As described in Section 2.4, the Fund has been innovative and it was able to use existing CBPF procedures to allow all its operational NGO partners affected by the earthquakes to make duty of care payments to their staff. SNGOs praised it for this initiative (though they also noted that it takes a few weeks for CBPFs to process grants so they did not receive the funding immediately). The SCHF supported 1,014 aid workers and was faster than OCHA's duty of care payments to its own staff. The overall cost of doing this was approximately $25,000, which was a small part of the SCHF's total disbursements of $140mn in 2023.

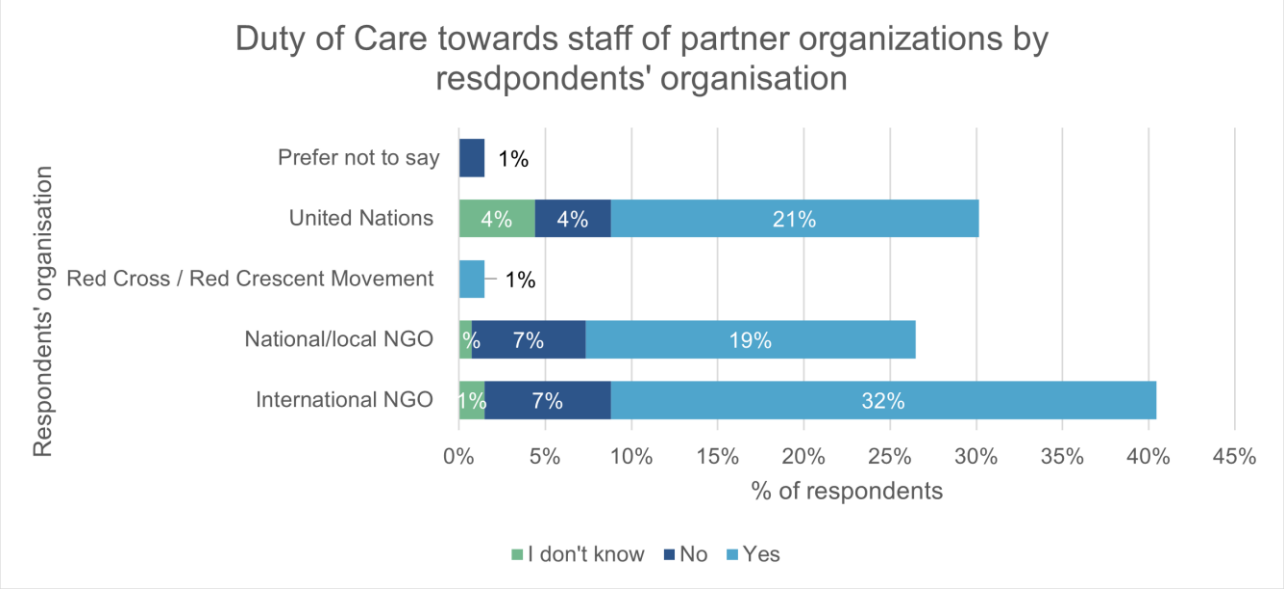


Figure 6 Were Duty of Care policies in place for partners? (by type of organization)

72. As noted above, SNGOs (particularly those located inside NGCA) were severely impacted by the earthquakes. Since they were the ones delivering assistance to affected communities, they expected that long-term talk of the localization agenda would translate into duty of care support for their staff. NGO representatives argued that the lack of duty of care funding was a major challenge because the UN was a significant source of funding for NGOs (not least because institutional donors also channeled a lot of their earthquake response funding through UN agencies). The lack of a harmonized approach across UN agencies toward partners (and potentially a lack of clear explanation about the limitations that UN agencies had with their duty of care policies) made it harder for SNGOs to comprehend why they did not generally receive duty of care support, resulting in frustration (see also Section 2.6 for SNGO views on the nature of their partnerships with UN agencies).

2.3 Needs assessment

73. This section addresses EQ 3 and examines the extent to which needs assessments were conducted in a timely, coordinated, and systematic manner.

Summary of findings: Needs assessment

In **Türkiye**, the Multi-sector Initial Rapid Assessment (MIRA) and TERRA were conducted quickly, with limited time to include a comprehensive set of needs indicators, resulting in an incomplete needs picture. The TERRA assessment was undertaken in collaboration with the government, marking a first attempt at coordinated efforts; however, the lack of coordination between IASC members and the Turkish government hindered a comprehensive approach early on. Nevertheless, significant steps, like the creation of the ESMAT, have since been taken to address these gaps.

In **NGCA and GCA**, the absence of a unified needs assessment approach, along with the lack of standardized tools and guidance, led to untimely and inconsistent assessments. This made it challenging to make informed planning and programming decisions. In **NGCA**, positive steps have since been taken to address gaps, including the development of a RNA tool, although further work is needed to ensure teams can use it effectively. In **GCA**, there have been some positive but limited steps toward systematic needs assessment with the use of the SNAT. There were also some limited successful examples of coordination and systematic approaches, such as the Water, Sanitation and Hygiene (WASH) and Education clusters, which started to inform programming.

Finding 6: In both Türkiye and Syria, IASC members found it challenging to base their planning and programming on initial needs assessments since the assessments suffered from duplication, delays, and inconsistent data. However, they made efforts to overcome these obstacles as the response progressed.

Strength of evidence
Strong

74. **In Türkiye, the MIRA and TERRA were conducted quickly but lacked comprehensive data collection, resulting in an incomplete needs picture. The lack of coordination between IASC members and the Turkish government hindered a comprehensive approach early on, but significant steps, like the creation of the ESMAT, have since been taken to address these gaps**. The MIRA and TERRA assessments were carried out quickly, with limited time to include a comprehensive set of needs indicators. They also lacked thorough data collection, both in terms of geographic coverage and the inclusion of vulnerable groups. The TERRA assessment was also undertaken in collaboration with the government, marking a first attempt at coordinated efforts. According to interviews with IASC members and the document review, these initial assessments provided some insight into needs but did not offer a complete, collective understanding of the situation during the early days of the response. IASC members reported that the data was insufficient for planning, and they had to conduct additional assessments to gain a clearer understanding. To fill these gaps, IASC members carried out individual assessments, and the Displacement Tracking Matrix (DTM) was also deployed to provide data and analysis on population movement. These efforts were critical in generating more complete information, which helped guide area selection by AFAD and international partners. However, without a coordinated approach, multiple assessments were conducted simultaneously at the sector and organizational levels, leading to duplication. The delay in establishing a comprehensive and unified assessment strategy, combined with this overlap, hindered IASC members' ability to effectively share and use needs assessment data for planning and programming. Key stakeholders noted that these challenges were exacerbated by the fluid post-earthquake environment, where affected people were frequently relocating and needs were evolving rapidly, particularly among the most vulnerable groups.

75. As noted in Section 2.5, IASC members and the Turkish government did not have a strong pre-existing relationship in relation to working on disaster response. This also significantly influenced the extent to which a comprehensive and collective approach to needs assessment was possible in the early days of the response. Coordination challenges with the Türkiye government (described in

Section 2.5) meant that IASC members, local authorities, and the government were not consistently sharing data with each other. IASC members also noted during KIIs that there were delays in the government's authorization of needs assessments in specific areas and that this was due to the devastating impact of the earthquake on the government's own staff, the high demand for assistance on the ground, and the lack of established relationships and coordination mechanisms with IASC members (see also Section 2.6 on partnerships). The elections on May 14 to 28, 2023 further exacerbated delays in coordinating needs assessments with the government. These challenges hindered the ability to gather timely and accurate information, which was crucial for an effective humanitarian response.

76. However, significant steps have been taken to try to address gaps and improve collective needs assessments. The earthquake provided an opportunity to collaborate more closely with local authorities, initiate some data-sharing practices, and establish coordination mechanisms between IASC members. The UNDAC team, along with IASC members, had early discussions with the TRC, AFAD/government representatives, and other partners to try to identify needs, particularly those of the most vulnerable. After the first few weeks of the response, the 3RP needs assessment registry and Relief Web's Türkiye page were expanded to include the earthquake needs assessments.[73] These dashboards served as a repository where IASC members could filter by location and sector to find out what needs assessments had been carried out. However, the use of these dashboards remained limited as individual agencies, partners, and sectors continued to carry out simultaneous needs assessments. This was due to a lack of coordination and communication among the various agencies, partners, and government, leading to duplication of efforts. Another notable example of progress is the establishment of the ESMAT following OCHA's phase-out: see Good Practice Box 2 below. A few interviews with IASC members revealed expectations and hopes that ESMAT would influence more government decisions and help mobilize additional donor resources. Nonetheless, ESMAT proved to be a highly valuable tool for providing strategic direction and served as a bridge to donors, highlighting evidence-based community needs.

Good Practice Box 2: The ESMAT in Türkiye

ESMAT, co-chaired by IOM and UNHCR, has demonstrated that a coordinated and systematic approach to needs assessment was possible. By promoting inter-sectoral needs assessments and evidence-based approaches, ESMAT has set a precedent for how IASC members and sectors can work together to ensure a comprehensive approach to needs assessments. ESMAT has played a pivotal role in coordinating needs assessments and their data collection. While specific success metrics are not extensively documented, IASC members highlighted in interviews that ESMAT's contributions have been very valuable to the overall response efforts.

- **Data collection and needs analysis:** ESMAT disseminated comprehensive province profiles, incorporating key findings from assessments and inputs from various sources, including the DTM, Area Based Coordination (ABC) hubs updates, and contributions from sectors and agencies.[74] These profiles were instrumental in shaping area-level response strategies.
- **Severity index development**: the DTM Türkiye team, with the support of ESMAT, has developed the severity index, which assessed the impact of the earthquakes across different regions. This index helped identify areas with medium to high severity, allowing for the prioritization of assistance to the most affected populations.[75]
- **Inter-agency coordination:** ESMAT has been instrumental in enhancing collaboration on needs assessments among various actors. For instance, in November 2023, ESMAT provided and disseminated information that was used by the ABC in inter-sectoral meetings with local authorities in Kahramanmaraş and Malatya. This included completing situation overviews and developing province profiles to guide targeted interventions.[76]

[73] Inter-Agency Assessment Survey Registry tool, and ReliefWeb's Türkiye Earthquake Response assessments.
[74] IOM (2023). Türkiye and Northwest Syria earthquake response and recovery December monthly update. Available at:
[75] ABC (2024). Türkiye south-east earthquake response, quarterly progress report, Jan–March 2024.
[76] IOM (2023). Türkiye and Northwest Syria earthquake response and recovery December monthly update and UN Türkiye, 2024. Anniversary of the February 6 earthquakes and the UN response.

77. **In Syria, the absence of a unified needs assessment approach, along with the lack of standardized tools and guidance, led to untimely and inconsistent assessments. This made it challenging to make informed planning and programming decisions.** Many assessments were conducted simultaneously using different tools and methodologies in both NGCA and GCA. According to the Syria 2023 OPR, the discontinuation of the Humanitarian Needs Assessment Program in NGCA in late 2022 resulted in an uncoordinated needs assessment process, with 108 assessments reportedly conducted in parallel but never fully analyzed.[77] The Earthquake Needs and Response Overview for Syria (2023)[78] also noted the simultaneous conduct of numerous needs assessments. The overview highlighted that since the earthquake at least 143 assessments have taken place, including 66 in NGCA and 77 in GCA. These simultaneous assessments created confusion and made it hard for IASC members both in NGCA and GCA to use them for informed decision-making. Additionally, interviews with IASC members noted that this also led to claims of over-burdening the affected communities.

78. In NGCA, specifically, the REACH assessment was completed in the aftermath of the earthquakes;[79] however, IASC members criticized it for lacking comprehensive sector involvement and inclusion of vulnerable groups. Since then, there have been positive steps to address these gaps. IASC members worked on a tailored RNA tool, which they launched and tested in October 2024. This testing was still in its early stages, not all IASC members were aware of this tool, and implementing partners (IP) did not know how to use it, so further work was expected in the coming months to ensure the teams started using it effectively. Despite the positive steps toward a more streamlined approach to needs assessment, there was still no inter-sectoral coordination tool that captured all needs and evidence together.

79. In GCA, there were multiple uncoordinated individual assessments due to a lack of clear methodologies and limited coordination among IASC members. However, later in the response, there were some positive but limited steps toward coordination and systematic needs assessment at the cluster level. The Syria OPR highlights that there was a lack of clear needs-based assessment methodologies for the estimations of the number of affected people, making it difficult to obtain a clear picture of the needs on the ground.[80] Interviews with IASC members noted limited coordination among international agencies on assessments, and in some cases the existence of separate streams of assessments that created confusion as well as duplication in the processes on the ground. The first inter-sectoral assessment was conducted in May 2023 using the SNAT; however, IASC members during interviews criticized this tool as it was not comprehensive and did not include data on vulnerable groups. Later in the response, there were some limited successful examples of coordination and systematic approaches at cluster level, such as the WASH and Education clusters conducting coordinated needs assessments with the Ministry of Health. These assessments started to inform programming by identifying an immediate need for water trucking to temporary shelters and other displacement sites. Cluster-level assessments were also found useful in terms of updating the HRPs with a view on integrating the earthquake response; however, the lack of a standardized approach and high-quality data substantially limited the effectiveness of needs assessments and their use.

[77] Peer-2-Peer Support/IASC (2023). Syria Earthquake Operational Peer Review Mission Report.
[78] OCHA (2023). Syria Earthquake Needs and Response Overview – Post Earthquake Overview.
[79] REACH (2023). Northwest Syria, Earthquake Response Rapid Needs Assessment – February 15, 2023.
[80] Peer-2-Peer Support/IASC (2023). Syria Earthquake Operational Peer Review Mission Report.

2.4 Resource mobilization and allocation

80. This section begins by addressing EQ4 on the extent to which humanitarian actors were able to mobilize timely and flexible funding before assessing the role of the Flash Appeals in mobilizing funds for the response. It goes on to examine the contribution of pooled funds in providing timely funding. It concludes by addressing EQ12 with an assessment of resource mobilization to respond to residual humanitarian needs and Early Recovery.

Summary of findings: Resource mobilization and allocation

Across both **Türkiye and Syria**, the most timely and flexible funding came from agencies' internal funding mechanisms, which helped to kick-start the responses, and private donors who provided unearmarked funding. The CERF allocated $25mn to both countries on February 7, 2023. UN agencies in **Türkiye** used this as a catalyst for scaling up interventions and mobilizing additional funding. Bilateral donors facilitated quick action by allowing partners to reprogram existing funding, but they provided limited additional funding, reflecting a de-prioritization of the Syria crisis. The evaluation found limited evidence that the Türkiye and Syria Flash Appeals helped to mobilize additional funds beyond what donors would have contributed because the scale of the disaster was clear.

In **Türkiye,** a lack of government experience with Flash Appeals made it difficult to secure buy-in, resulting in the Appeal being delayed until 10 days after the earthquakes. A government request led to a Flash Appeal of $1bn, despite estimates suggesting emergency funding needs were only half of this. However, the Türkiye Flash Appeal then received only 61% of the requested funding. Before the earthquakes, donors had been disengaging from the Syrian refugee response in the country, so funding to address the scale of the post-earthquake humanitarian and recovery needs was inadequate. Apart from a few exceptions, funding shortfalls limited UN agency implementation of DRR and Early Recovery activities, despite indicators being integrated into the TERRA needs assessment.

The **Syria** Flash Appeal's initial estimate of response costs by clusters was generally considered fair. This led to frustration when the requested amount was capped to $400mn due to a belief that the original request was "unrealistic." Still, the Appeal was fulfilled, receiving 104% of funding, although funding across sectors was uneven, leaving some gaps. The CERF allocated an additional $25mn on February 10, 2023 but the prioritization process, which took until April, proved challenging. Those delivering the cross-border operation were largely excluded, and there was a lack of clarity over the extent to which allocations to GCA and NGCA were needs-based. This was symptomatic of WoS coordination challenges, and the issue persisted beyond the earthquake response. The two CBPFs enabled timely funding and added value by financing activities that other donors may not have supported. The SCHF provided significant funding, and made innovative use of a CERF loan to release funding quickly. The smaller Syria Humanitarian Fund (SHF) likewise provided timely funding and filled gaps in the response.

A significant challenge for the **Syria** response was that the country faced a situation of simultaneously increasing humanitarian needs and decreasing funding prior to the earthquakes. Funding for the earthquake response proved insufficient to address the new needs, with **GCA** facing particular challenges. The funding shortage, together with donor restrictions on the use of humanitarian funding and the application of sanctions, made it difficult to implement Early Recovery activities.

Finding 7: In both Türkiye and Syria, the most timely and flexible funding came from agencies' internal funds (which are designed to help kick-start responses) and private donors (who provided unearmarked funding). Bilateral donors facilitated quick action by allowing partners to reprogram existing funding but, in line with funding trends for the region, they provided limited additional funding.

Strength of evidence
Moderate

81. **Across all the contexts, UN and INGO internal emergency funding mechanisms provided quick and flexible funding that helped them to start responding quickly.** Activating corporate scale-up protocols enabled most UN agencies to access internal emergency funding. This funding is released fast and it is flexible because its purpose is to help agencies to start implementing activities that they can use to leverage additional funding from bilateral donors. For some agencies (such as UNICEF), this funding is in the form of a loan that the country office is expected to pay back once it receives bilateral donor funding. Interviewees working on the cross-border response noted that UNICEF had not been able to pay the loan back to headquarters because funding from donors for NGCA had not been at the expected level. INGOs that have internal emergency funding mechanisms were also able to access these very quickly, with NGOs working on the cross-border response highlighting that some INGOs were able to provide funding to SNGO partners within 48-72 hours. Similarly, a Turkish NGO representative noted that INGOs with access to their own funding were able to provide funding to IPs very quickly, while some UN agencies were slower due to their internal procedures.

82. **Individual members of the public and the private sector made significant contributions (financial and in-kind) to both UN agencies and NGOs**. This included UNICEF's National Committees, established in 32 countries, which mobilized millions of dollars in funding from the general public for both Türkiye and Syria (two National Committees provided over $25 million for the Syria response).[81] UNHCR also raised several million dollars from the public for its earthquake response.[82] INGOs reported receiving considerable funding from individual donors, and British NGOs were able to access funds raised from the public by an appeal from the Disasters Emergency Committee (DEC).[83] In Türkiye, the private sector gave at least $3bn in cash and in-kind donations, mainly to the Turkish government, members of the Red Cross and Red Crescent movement and NGOs, but UNICEF, UNHCR, and WFP also received contributions.[84] Funding from individual donors and the private sector was flexible because it was not earmarked to specific projects or activities.[85] This meant that agencies that received donations from the general public could allocate the funding across contexts based on the needs and their operations.

83. By contrast, bilateral donors to Syria (and GCA in particular) restricted their funding to specific geographic locations or to the earthquake response, even though it was difficult to distinguish between conflict-related and earthquake-related needs because of the high levels of vulnerability caused by the protracted crisis. UN and NGO interviewees in GCA pointed out that this made it challenging to follow a needs-based approach. For example, an SNGO stated that it was confined to responding to two very specific locations within GCA so that "*you could not even provide assistance that was 500m away from the geographic territories set by the agency*."

[81] UNICEF (2024) Türkiye Consolidated Emergency Report 2023; UNICEF (2024) Syrian Arab Republic Consolidated Emergency Report 2023

[82] UNHCR (2023) Syria and Türkiye Earthquake Emergency: Funding update 2023 (as of 31 December 2023). See https://reporting.unhcr.org/syria-and-t%C3%BCrkiye-earthquake-emergency-funding-update-2023

[83] The DEC mobilized £160mn for the Türkiye/Syria earthquakes response, which was one of the largest amounts it has raised. See https://www.dec.org.uk/appeal/turkey-syria-earthquake-appeal

[84] According to OCHA-UNDP Connecting Business Initiative's Türkiye-Syria Earthquake Private Sector Donations Tracker. For further details, see https://data.humdata.org/visualization/turkiye-ps-tracker/#/

[85] UNHCR reported the majority of its funding from private donors as softly earmarked. See UNHCR (2023) Syria and Türkiye Earthquake Emergency: Funding update 2023 (as of 31 December 2023). The DEC funding also had a longer timeframe than bilateral donor grants, with members able to spend funds until July 2025.

84. **Bilateral donors allowed their partners to reprogram existing funding, but they provided limited additional funding, reflecting a de-prioritization of the Syria crisis.** Large institutional donors allowed partners to reprogram existing funding, which enabled them to respond more quickly. However, not all donors provided enough additional funding to cover the reprogrammed funds. For example, only €15mn out of the €80mn that European Civil Protection and Humanitarian Aid Operations (ECHO) allocated to the response in Türkiye was new funding, with the rest being reprogrammed from the ongoing refugee response coordinated under the 3RP. In Türkiye, institutional donors tended to provide an advance on the funding that they were going to provide for the refugee response the following year, which made NGOs think carefully about the sustainability of their operations. As discussed below, the limited funding was part of a downward trend in donor funding for the 3RP in Türkiye and the Syria crisis overall.

85. There was a similar situation in Syria, meaning that pre-earthquake activities got de-funded, and a couple of interviewees described this as "robbing Peter to pay Paul."[86] When some donors made statements about the amount that they had contributed for the earthquake response, they did not make it clear how much was redirected from the ongoing crisis (which was not replenished) and how much was genuinely additional funding. This lack of clarity is not uncommon in crises.

86. Some bilateral donors were also slow in disbursing their additional funding, and this had an effect on onward funding to SNGOs as IPs. Examples included an SNGO in GCA that had existing partnerships with a couple of UN agencies that enabled it to access funding within a couple of weeks. Apart from this, funding took around four months, or even five to six months, to arrive. Similarly, an SNGO in NGCA received funding within a week from one INGO but then funding from other INGOs and a UN agency took between one and three months.

Finding 8: A slight delay in launching the Türkiye and Syria Flash Appeals did not impact the speed of resource mobilization but there was limited evidence that the Appeals (which became delinked from identified or estimated needs in the affected contexts) helped to mobilize additional funds beyond what donors would have contributed because the scale of the disaster was so clear.

Strength of evidence
Strong

87. **Both the Türkiye and Syria Flash Appeals were issued slightly outside the stipulated timeframe, but this did not make a significant difference to the response because of the factors identified in Finding 7, which led to a quick mobilization of funding.** Scale-Up Activations are not intended to be a fundraising tool, and there is no causal link between a System-Wide Scale-Up Activation and the launch of a Flash Appeal.[87] As described below, the Flash Appeal processes for Türkiye and Syria started well before the Scale-Up Activation declaration.

88. The development of the two Flash Appeals began on February 6 itself because General Assembly Resolution 46/182 stipulates that a Flash Appeal should be issued within three to five days of an emergency and no more than a week later.[88] However, there were delays in agreeing the Appeal requirements in both Türkiye and Syria. For Türkiye, the Appeal was drafted at headquarters level and in the OCHA Regional Office due to limited capacity within the IASC system in-country (but with input from UN agencies in-country, channeled through the Resident Coordinator's Office (RCO)). The UNDAC team in-country also had extensive discussions with the government to explain international humanitarian financing mechanisms and secure its buy-in. This took time because the government had no prior knowledge of Flash Appeals and assumed that this was a way to raise funds for its response, rather than for UN agencies and NGOs responding to the disaster. As a result,

[86] A study of the earthquake response in Northwest Syria also noted this challenge. See iMMAP (2023) Post-Earthquake Perspective: Challenges and Strategies for Humanitarian Aid in Northwest Syria, Ad Hoc Series Part 1, June 15, 2023.
[87] IAHE (2024) IASC System-Wide Scale-Up Mechanism. From protocol to reality: lessons for scaling up collective humanitarian responses. This review found that a Flash Appeal was launched in only one of the four case study countries that had a System-wide Scale-Up Activation.
[88] OCHA (2017) Flash Appeal: A Quick Guide. See https://www.unocha.org/publications/report/world/flash-appeal-quick-guide

the Türkiye Flash Appeal was issued on February 16 2023 (10 days after the first earthquakes). In Syria, it took humanitarian actors time to agree on the level of needs across GCA and NGCA (as described below) so the Flash Appeal was launched on February 14, eight days after the earthquakes. The slight delay in launching the two Appeals did not impact the overall speed of resource mobilization because, as outlined under Finding 7, international agencies were able to access internal emergency funding mechanisms, individual and corporate donors responded to the images on their TV screens, and bilateral donors allowed partners to reprogram existing funding.[89] Also, as described under Finding 9 below, the CERF released $25mn for the response in both Türkiye and Syria on February 7, 2023.

89. **There were inconsistent approaches to identifying the requirements for the two Flash Appeals. The Türkiye Appeal was almost doubled to $1bn at the government's request to reflect its estimate of the funding required. The Syria Appeal requirement was reduced unilaterally by the humanitarian leadership at the WoS level in Amman to be more "realistic."** Although a Flash Appeal is independent of a System-Wide Scale-Up Activation, its development is regarded as one element of strengthening the collective nature of the response (which is a widely accepted informal function of an activation).[90] However, this was not how the Flash Appeal process functioned in Syria. In Türkiye, the process brought IASC members together to provide inputs, but it was challenging to secure government support for the Appeal.

90. During its discussions with OCHA and the RCO, the Turkish government was clear that the Appeal should request $1bn. In its view, this was a small amount because it had estimated that the cost of responding to the disaster would be $103bn. It would have been difficult for a Flash Appeal, which is an initial, short-term funding request for an acute emergency, to call for such a huge level of funding. This is particularly because, based on the available evidence, the approximate level of funding required to address immediate humanitarian needs was around half of the $1bn eventually requested at the government's behest.[91]

91. The Syria Flash Appeal was drafted in Amman, based on inputs from the sectors/clusters in both GCA and NGCA, which calculated needs using a mix of data available due to the protracted crisis and some newly conducted needs assessments. The quality, accuracy, and timeliness of the data collected for the Flash Appeal varied greatly across the contexts and sectors (see Section 2.3 for details of the challenges with needs assessments). In some regions, assessments were based on assumptions rather than actual field conditions, especially in GCA, where access was restricted and IASC members lacked established on-the-ground partnerships in the affected areas. This resulted in data that was often unusable and failed to accurately represent the needs of the most vulnerable groups. Nevertheless, although some sectors/clusters were more precise than others, there was general agreement that they had arrived at a fair approximation of the cost of responding to earthquake-related needs. As a result, UN agency staff and cluster coordinators were frustrated that the total amount requested in the Appeal was capped at $400mn, undermining the efforts made to identify needs as accurately as possible. The justification for the cut was that the total requested by the sectors/clusters was unrealistic for a three-month response but this did not appease humanitarian agencies struggling to address earthquake-related needs on top of the extensive pre-existing humanitarian needs caused by the protracted conflict. There was "*no such thing as too much money for Syria because there's such a big hole*" due to the lack of funding and support for the crisis, particularly in 2022. In addition to the frustration about the cap on the Appeal funding request, there were some concerns that the Appeal presented equal levels of need across NGCA and GCA when the NGCA was clearly more severely affected by the earthquakes (see Section 2.5 for more details on the competition for resources between the two operations).

[89] However, WHO Türkiye noted that it was only able to receive a relatively small amount of funding from its internal emergency funding mechanism, while the Flash Appeal enabled it to mobilize $8mn in flexible funding from the governments of Kuwait and Norway and $3.5mn in earmarked funding from ECHO and the US.

[90] IAHE (2024) IASC System-Wide Scale-Up Mechanism. From protocol to reality: lessons for scaling up collective humanitarian responses.

[91] The Appeal had originally used WFP's Automatic Disaster Analysis and Mapping (ADAM) dataset and estimated severity of needs to identify the number of people in need of humanitarian assistance.

92. **The levels of funding to the two Flash Appeals suggest that the Syria Appeal was well funded (at 104%) while the Türkiye Flash Appeal was not (at 61%).[92] However, this is not an accurate picture because of the disparity in the funding requested, and there were still funding gaps for Syria**. Figures 7 and 8 below present data on funding to the two Flash Appeals. Figure 7 shows that Türkiye received $779.2mn in humanitarian funding for activities/projects outside the Flash Appeal. OCHA's Financial Tracking Service (FTS) does not list the recipients of funding outside the Appeal but the Turkish government is likely to have been the main recipient of non-Appeal funding (since it was not eligible to be a direct recipient of funding to the Appeal).[93]

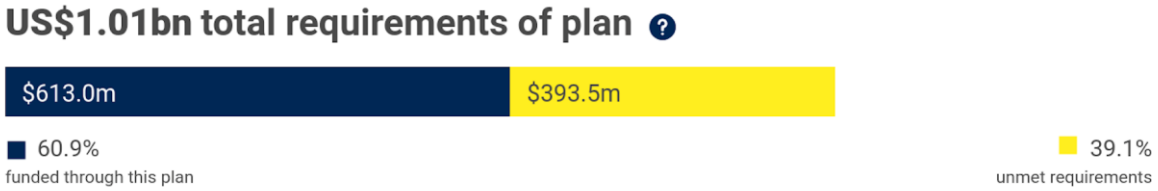


Figure 7 Humanitarian funding to Türkiye within and outside the Flash Appeal

93. Figure 8 below shows that the Syria Appeal received 104% of the $397mn requested. However, funding across sectors was uneven, with some sectors (such as shelter/non-food items (NFIs), WASH, health and multi-purpose cash) receiving more funding than they requested, while others (such as protection, education, and camp coordination, and camp management) received less. This was despite the fact that addressing needs in the underfunded sectors, particularly protection, was vital in the earthquake response (see Section 2.7 for further details on addressing protection needs).[94] Therefore, there were still gaps in the response.

Figure 8 Funding to the Syria Flash Appeal[95]

94. **Few bilateral donors relied on the Flash Appeals to provide funding to partners, since the scale of the disaster was clear.** Interviews, including with donors, showed that very few bilateral donors needed the Flash Appeals to trigger funding for the earthquake response, particularly as many allowed partners to reprogram existing funding.[96] One bilateral donor was funding education

[92] See OCHA's Financial Tracking Service for data on funding to the two Flash Appeals in 2023: https://fts.unocha.org/plans/1150/summary; https://fts.unocha.org/plans/1149/summary

[93] This assumption is based on the fact that the Humanitarian Transition Overview lists funding outside the Appeal to IASC sectors and this shows relatively modest amounts. See OCHA (2023) Türkiye Earthquake Response: Humanitarian Transition Overview.

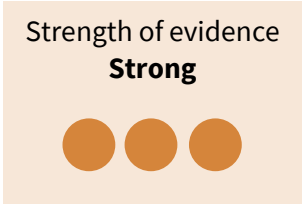
[94] For the complete data on funding by cluster/sector, see https://fts.unocha.org/plans/1149/summary

[95] Source: OCHA's FTS. See https://fts.unocha.org/plans/1149/summary

[96] This is similar to the finding of an IAHE learning paper, that donor funding decisions are usually based more on internal assessments of the severity of a crisis and political interests than a Scale-Up Activation. See IAHE (2024) IASC System-Wide Scale-Up Mechanism. From protocol to reality: lessons for scaling up collective humanitarian responses. However,

and mental health and psychosocial support (MHPSS) activities in Türkiye prior to the earthquakes, and this did not change as a result of the needs and priorities highlighted in the Appeal. Many UN agencies also launched their own appeals for the earthquake response, which would have guided donors and limited the utility of the Flash Appeals for mobilizing funds. For example, WFP noted that it was able to mobilize funding for activities that were included in the Türkiye Appeal and start responding within 48 hours, well before the Flash Appeal was launched.

Finding 9: The CERF's immediate release of funding for both Türkiye and Syria helped to scale-up programs and mobilize additional funding in Türkiye. In Syria, challenges in the country-level prioritization processes reflected the complexities of the WoS approach. Those delivering the cross-border operation were largely excluded, and there was a lack of clarity about the extent to which allocations were needs-based.



95. **The CERF allocated a total of $50mn to the earthquake response, with the majority of the funding provided to Syria. In Türkiye, there was a lack of familiarity with the CERF mechanism, but the project approval and fund disbursement processes were fast.** The CERF's aim is to respond to emergencies as soon as possible and the impact of the first earthquakes were so evident that it made a regional allocation of $25mn on February 7, 2023 from its Rapid Response (RR) window. Since the Turkish government and the TRC had considerable response capacity, the Secretariat allocated $10.2mn to Türkiye and the rest to Syria. On February 10, the CERF allocated an additional $25mn to Syria from its Underfunded Emergencies (UFE) window. This UFE allocation was planned for the protracted crisis, before the first earthquakes struck, but was reprogrammed to respond to earthquake-related needs (the application process was completed in April 2023).

96. UN agencies in Türkiye were unfamiliar with CERF processes and requirements so they found the application process difficult.[97] OCHA surge support staff guided applicants in navigating the process but the considerable turnover in the team was challenging. Interviewees indicated a perception of some delays in the process but CERF data shows that project applications were approved on February 16, 2023 and funding disbursed on February 21, 2023.[98] In view of difficulties with needs assessments (identified in Section 2.3), there was a view that the allocation of the CERF grant was driven by individual agency priorities rather than strategic prioritization of response needs. However, recipient agencies reported that the CERF's early allocation of funding was a catalyst for mobilizing additional funding and scaling up interventions.[99]

97. **CERF allocation processes in Syria were challenging because those delivering the cross-border operation were largely excluded. This was symptomatic of the challenges with the WoS approach and led to a lack of clarity about the extent to which the UFE grant allocation, in particular, was needs-based.** The complexities of the WoS coordination mechanism (see Section 2.5) meant that humanitarian actors involved in the cross-border operation had little to no involvement in CERF allocation processes, leaving them unclear about the extent to which

there may be exceptions, such as smaller or newer donors who might rely on a Scale-Up Activation as a trigger for releasing funding, and one UN agency highlighted that it was only able to receive funding from some bilateral donors after the launch of the Flash Appeals.

[97] UN agencies were particularly confused by a CERF requirement that 40% of the funding should be channeled to NGOs (which the CERF Secretariat has put in place to promote greater funding to national/local NGOs). At the time, the UN's partnerships with Turkish NGOs were limited to 3RP programs, so this was not an easy target to meet.

[98] https://cerf.un.org/what-we-do/allocation/2023/country/177. For more information on CERF Rapid Response grants, see https://cerf.un.org/apply-for-a-grant/rapid-response. The CERF Secretariat commissions independent reviews of its work regularly, both of responses to individual crises and thematic reviews for lesson learning. Review reports are available at: https://cerf.un.org/partner-resources/performance-and-accountability/PAF-reviews

[99] CERF (2023) Türkiye Rapid Response Earthquake 2023 23-RR-TUR-57543: CERF Allocation Report on the Use of Funds and Achieved Results. The report provides details of how the six UN agencies that received CERF funding utilized this. The agencies were IOM ($2.25mn), UNDP ($0.5mn), UNFPA ($0.8mn), UNHCR ($2.3mn), UNICEF ($2.25mn) and WFP ($2.1mn).

decisions were needs-based.[100] The Secretariat sent the letter for the UFE grant award, which was to be used for the earthquake response, to the acting HC in Damascus and relied on the UN in the field to coordinate across the Damascus and Gaziantep hubs.[101] Instead of being a coordinated decision at WoS level, the funding was allocated to individual UN agencies in Damascus, which then had internal negotiations with colleagues in Gaziantep.[102] Since there was general agreement that earthquake-related needs were greater in NGCA, UN agencies working on the cross-border operation were frustrated that the proportion of CERF funding they received was equal to, or less, than those working in GCA, rather than commensurate with the level of needs.[103] This was reflected in comments that there had been a "*friendly fight*" with colleagues and a pushback for Damascus to receive "*a major share of the cake*" and that "*there should be a more needs-based allocation of CERF funding in future.*" The lack of CERF funding for protection activities in NGCA, despite clear evidence of the need,[104] the relatively low levels of funding under the Flash Appeal,[105] and it being a priority area for the CERF, reinforced the view that CERF funding had not been allocated on the basis of needs.

98. In addition, though the CERF guidance on the UFE grant was clear about consulting NGOs and funding national/local NGOs in particular, NGOs were not involved in the allocation process. This included NGO cluster co-coordinators in Gaziantep.

99. **Difficulties with allocating CERF grants to Syria on the basis of needs persisted beyond the earthquake response.** Although it was outside the scope of this evaluation, interviewees referred to a fractious process for a 2024 UFE grant that took five months to agree and once again left UN agencies and cluster coordinators in Gaziantep arguing that priority needs for the NGCA had been ignored because the process "*was not data driven or needs-based.*"

Finding 10: In Syria, the two CBPFs made funding available quickly (based on their procedures) and added value by financing important activities that other donors may not have supported.

Strength of evidence
Moderate

100. **The SCHF provided significant funding for the earthquake response and was innovative in using a CERF loan to allocate funding quickly.** It allocated $106mn in total between February and May 2023, in addition to reprogramming existing funding. The SCHF was in the process of signing funding agreements with partners when the first earthquakes happened. With the endorsement of the SCHF Advisory Board, it allowed partners to reprogram $5.3mn from initiatives already operational on the ground in order to facilitate a faster response.[106] The Fund was also able to secure a CERF loan against pledged funding to provide $34.6mn to partners through a Reserve Allocation within two weeks (see the Good Practice Box below). It then allocated $400,000 in March 2023 to support AAP and risk management, and $70.9mn in May. In this second phase of funding in May, the SCHF supported environmentally friendly debris removal, which was also respectful of bodies of the dead among the rubble, as well as small grants to restart small businesses. These initiatives filled a gap in the response because affected populations got the chance to resume their lives after the earthquakes with funding that other donors may have been reluctant to provide.

[100] The RR grant was discussed at an ad hoc Strategic Steering Committee (SSG) meeting but with only UN representatives at the WoS response level participating. The meeting was chaired by the Regional Humanitarian Coordinator (RHC) and the acting Syria HC. The cross-border operation was represented by the head of the OCHA office in Gaziantep, who was the acting DRHC at the time.
[101] Syria was a unique context in having two completely separate humanitarian operations for different areas of the same country, and the CERF's procedures are not designed for this.
[102] It was reported that UN offices in Gaziantep tended to be sub-offices without their own decision-making power.
[103] Two agencies shared financial data while others provided qualitative evidence.
[104] Assessments highlighted the increased protection risks due to the earthquakes. See Said-Foqahaa, N., Barham, T., & Sawalha I. (2023). Gender Analysis of the Earthquake Response in Northwest Syria: Key Findings,
[105] It was 62% funded in the end. See https://fts.unocha.org/plans/1149/summary
[106] OCHA (2024) Syria Cross-Border Humanitarian Fund 2023 Annual Report.

Good Practice Box 3: SCHF's innovative use of the CERF loan facility to make a faster Reserve Allocation

At the beginning of 2024, the SCHF had no money in its bank account available to fund partners for the earthquake response, but it had received pledges from donors and was in the process of signing Memoranda of Understanding. From past experience, the fund manager knew that it would take time for donors to disburse the money and to receive it into OCHA's bank account. This would delay the SCHF's ability to make a Reserve Allocation to enable partners to respond quickly. Therefore, authorized by the OCHA Head of Office who was handling the responsibilities of the DRHC, the SCHF approached the CERF Secretariat for a loan against the signed pledges. Although the CERF is not allowed to make grants to OCHA, it can make a loan.[107] Given that the SCHF had pledges totaling $60mn, the CERF Secretariat approved a loan of $20mn. The money could be transferred very quickly within OCHA's internal system and the SCHF was able to launch a Reserve Allocation. The SCHF only needed to use $10mn of the loan when it came to disburse funds and the entire loan was repaid within two months.[108]

The SCHF's use of a CERF loan was innovative because it was the first time that a CBPF had accessed this global financing tool. It enabled the SCHF to allocate funding to partners responding to the earthquakes, particularly SNGOs, faster than would have been possible otherwise. Now that a precedent has been set, other CBPFs can follow this example when they face a situation that requires a rapid response, but donor pledges have not been converted into disbursements (which is not infrequent).

101. **The SHF was smaller than the SCHF[109] but provided timely funding that added value to the response.** The SHF allocated $27.5mn for the earthquake response through two Reserve Allocations. The first was for $4.5mn in February 2023 and made use of the cost-extension modality to speed up the funding process.[110] This included support for the scale-up of structural safety assessments of heavily damaged buildings. This was a strategic use of the funding because it helped affected people to determine whether it was safe to return to their buildings or not, potentially reducing the need for shelter assistance. In March, the SHF allocated another $23mn for the ongoing earthquake response, removing debris and creating job opportunities for earthquake survivors.[111] The latter activity would again have helped to reduce the need for longer-term humanitarian assistance.

Finding 11: In both Türkiye and Syria, it was positive that IASC members developed plans to integrate Early Recovery into their earthquake response. However, the extent to which most agencies could implement these and respond to residual humanitarian needs was limited due to funding constraints.

Strength of evidence
Strong

102. **Prior to the earthquakes, donors were disengaging from the Syrian refugee response in Türkiye and earthquake response funding was inadequate to address the scale of humanitarian needs.** Major institutional donors like ECHO were starting to phase out their programs in Türkiye, and FTS data shows that total humanitarian funding decreased from $1bn in 2021 to $700mn in 2022.[112] Bilateral donors provided additional funding for the earthquake response, so total funding increased to $1.4bn in 2023. However, this was insufficient to address the full extent of

[107] The CERF had made loans to OCHA in the past but this was the first time that it made a loan to a CBPF.
[108] OCHA (2024) Syria Cross-Border Humanitarian Fund 2023 Annual Report.
[109] For data on total funding to the SHF from 2020-2024, see: https://cbpf.data.unocha.org/bookmark.html?viz=contributions&country=Syria&year=2021%7C2022%7C2023%7C2024%7C2020
[110] "A cost extension refers to a situation where the budget of a previously approved project is exceptionally increased, to respond to changing circumstances in which the project is implemented to better meet the overall objectives of the project. The budget increase may be combined with an extension to the period for project implementation." See OCHA (2022) Country-based Pooled Funds: Global guidelines, paragraphs 174–177.
[111] OCHA (2024) Syria Humanitarian Fund 2023 Annual Report.
[112] See the Trends in Reported Funding section of the FTS page on funding to Türkiye for all figures cited in this paragraph: https://fts.unocha.org/countries/229/summary/2023

earthquake-related humanitarian needs, and this was demonstrated not only in KIIs but also in FGDs where participants highlighted significant residual needs that remained unmet, particularly in the shelter sector but also in education and psychosocial support.

103. **DRR and Early Recovery indicators were integrated into needs assessments in Türkiye, but IASC members were only able to implement limited activities due to significant funding constraints.** The TERRA evaluated the financial impact of the earthquake and outlined recovery recommendations, such as changes in construction standards and policies, promoting resilience against disaster risks, following Building Back Better principles,[113] ensuring inclusivity for vulnerable populations and incorporating green and nature-friendly solutions to align with Türkiye's 2053 net-zero targets.[114] The Flash Appeal raised $52.7mn for Early Recovery activities (both within and outside the Appeal) and UN agencies then used the TERRA assessment to advocate with donors for more recovery and risk reduction funds. However, humanitarian funding to Türkiye dropped sharply to only $200mn in 2024 so most agencies could only implement a few activities with the funding available, including supporting municipal institutions to resume services (such as education and social services).[115] However, in line with the Build Back Better Principles recommended in the TERRA, WFP implemented a fully funded $12mn recovery program across the five most affected provinces. This targeted smaller agri-food system actors to enable them to recover production rates to at least pre-earthquake levels and simultaneously link them to more profitable and stable markets. The program reached 6,600 individuals and was implemented with a range of partners, including the Directorate of Agriculture, Governorates and municipalities, the private sector, and civil society. The United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) piloted driving tests for entrepreneurial women, which was later scaled up to benefit over 4,600 individuals through a broader business continuity support program. UN agencies tried to leverage private sector funding for Early Recovery and risk reduction activities as well but with limited success, and significant needs in the reconstruction of houses and infrastructure remained unaddressed.

104. **Prior to the earthquakes, Syria faced a situation of increasing humanitarian needs and decreasing funding.[116] Humanitarian funding in response to the earthquakes was insufficient to meet the new needs generated that came on top of the unmet existing needs. Funding then decreased very sharply in 2024, leaving significant unmet needs**. Interviewees spoke of donor attention moving away from the Syria crisis (to other crises, particularly Gaza in 2024), and FTS data showed that total funding to Syria decreased slightly between 2022 and 2023 (from $2.36bn to $2.2bn), despite the increased humanitarian needs due to the earthquakes.[117] Funding declined more sharply in 2024, down to $1.4bn.

> "We saw the tap dried very fast because there were so many competing priorities. A lot [of funding] came in during very first phase but you have to be able to stagger the use of resources because you went from very limited resources and an office that was about to cut down to a lot of resources for the first month and then nothing remaining. There is a need for advocacy with Western donors to make them understand that NWS was the most affected. It was already in very bad shape before and the investment should have been sustained over time," *(IASC member, WoS)*

Humanitarian actors made it clear that such reduced funding made it extremely difficult to address the high levels of vulnerability created by the long conflict and exacerbated by the earthquakes, particularly in NGCA. One indicator of the impact of reduced funding was the closure in medical

[113] GFDRR (no date) Building Back Better in Post-Disaster Recovery, Global Facility for Disaster Reduction and Recovery. Available at: https://www.gfdrr.org/sites/default/files/2017-09/Building%20Back%20Better%20Guidance%20Note_0.pdf

[114] Government of Türkiye (2023). Türkiye earthquakes recovery and reconstruction assessment. Available at: https://reliefweb.int/report/turkiye/turkiye-earthquakes-recovery-and-reconstruction-assessment

[115] See the Early Recovery tab of the dashboard reporting outputs for the Türkiye earthquake response and 3RP in 2023: https://app.powerbi.com/view?r=eyJrIjoiYjM4Njc4NDgtZmZjMi00ZTVkLWI1MWUtNzY2ZTFmNzU3N2E0IiwidCI6ImU1YzM3OTgxLTY2NjQtNDEzNC04YTBjLTY1NDNkMmFmODBiZSIsImMiOjh9

[116] OCHA (2022) Humanitarian Needs Overview: Syrian Arab Republic, Humanitarian Programme Cycle 2023. Issued December 2022.

[117] See the Trends in response plan/appeal requirements section at: https://fts.unocha.org/plans/1114/summary

facilities in NGCA, both before and since the earthquakes.[118] FGDs in NGCA also highlighted the impact, with participants frequently saying that aid stopped completely six months after the earthquakes (see Annex 2 for a timeline of the assistance they received).

105. The lack of funding in 2024 had affected UN agencies and NGOs alike, and there were many reports in September 2024 of humanitarian organizations reducing staff numbers and scaling down their operations. This had hit local aid workers in NGCA particularly hard. "*The current situation for humanitarian workers is dire. Many have lost hope of continuing work next month. Some have already been dismissed*." At the same time, Syrian refugees were being forced to return from Lebanon and also from Türkiye, increasing the population of NWS and also the humanitarian needs. The impact of the events of November–December 2024 in Syria, with the fall of the Assad regime, were not clear, but aid budget cuts by major donors would only exacerbate the situation.

106. The funding situation in GCA was possibly worse. One UN agency had a 40% reduction in its funding in 2022, so it was barely able to meet humanitarian needs even before the earthquakes, and it was only earthquake-related funding that enabled it to keep operating in 2023. Similarly, NGOs in GCA were deeply worried about the possibility of maintaining their humanitarian response, despite efforts to remind donors of the scale of ongoing humanitarian needs. Again, this was prior to the fall of the Assad regime and donor budget cuts, with the effects of these factors unclear.

107. **In Syria, in addition to lack of funding, donor restrictions on the use of humanitarian funding (and the application of sanctions) made it difficult to implement DRR and Early Recovery activities. However, Early Recovery funding under the Flash Appeal supported activities such as debris removal.** Donors had been reluctant to fund longer-term activities despite the length of the conflict-related crisis in Syria in order to avoid supporting either the Assad regime or non-state actors. Their red lines were often based on the blurred boundaries between Early Recovery and reconstruction, with the latter being politically sensitive. In response to the Flash Appeal, however, the Early Recovery and livelihoods cluster/sector received $25.3mn (against a request for $22.9mn).[119]

108. In NGCA, UNDP used Early Recovery funding (including an allocation from the SCHF) to start clearing debris within a few weeks of the earthquakes. Six months after the earthquakes, it began to explore ways to recycle and reuse the debris, for example, for rehabilitation of community infrastructure.[120] Other Early Recovery activities, also implemented around six months after the earthquakes, included skills development training and an emergency livelihoods project providing short-term conditional cash grants (in exchange for work on rehabilitation projects). In GCA, IASC members took the approach of making the earthquake response sustainable rather than providing purely emergency aid. For example, they worked on rehabilitating Aleppo's main drinking water supply lines instead of relying on water trucking, and subsequently on using solar systems to power WASH facilities.

109. In NGCA, IASC members advocated continuously that Early Recovery was necessary to increase community resilience to disruptions to cross-border assistance and the risk of future shocks, and to avoid aid dependency. They argued that, without increasing the long-term resilience of communities, NGCA would be stuck in perpetual cycles of crises underpinned by chronic vulnerabilities. However, beyond the earthquake response, Early Recovery funding was very limited, leading to a fragmented approach to programming. At the end of 2023, the ICCG developed an earthquake-specific Early Recovery strategy. However, they could not implement it due to the lack of sufficient funding. Therefore, the ICCG updated the strategy and shifted the focus to conflict-related issues. Despite the revisions, the strategy was not implemented largely due to continued

[118] For data on closures prior to the earthquakes, see iMMAP (2023) Context Update: A Political Analysis of the Earthquake Response and its Impact on the Humanitarian Landscape in Syria, Earthquake Edition, March 6, 2023. At the beginning of 2024, the health cluster identified 168 health facilities facing a funding shortfall, which WHO and cluster members were able to reduce to 77 facilities threatened with closure by September 2024.

[119] https://fts.unocha.org/plans/1149/summary

[120] This was done in partnership with UNEP and an engineering university in Idlib that had the capacity to test the earthquake rubble and identify that it could be reused for non-loadbearing structures.

funding shortages. As a result, the ICCG refocused its efforts again, trying to ensure that the specific needs of NGCA were adequately reflected in the WoS Early Recovery Strategy developed in 2024.

110. In GCA, a consortium on earthquake and resilience was formed, engaging in advocacy activities and discussions with partner organizations. However, the continuously dynamic protracted crisis situation, for example the influx of Syrians forced to return from Lebanon in September 2024, complicated recovery and risk reduction activities because IASC members had to continue responding to the complex and evolving crisis with limited funding. Nevertheless, in 2024, they developed a WoS Early Recovery Strategy and planned to establish an Early Recovery Trust Fund to mobilize financing for recovery activities across the country. The process took several months because of disagreements regarding how this strategy could effectively address the vastly different needs and contexts of GCA and NGCA.

111. Stakeholders in NGCA argued that their feedback and inputs into the strategy were not adequately incorporated into the final version. This had led to a sense of exclusion and frustration that the strategy did not fully reflect the unique challenges and needs of NGCA communities. Additionally, key stakeholders pointed out that the strategy failed to cover all relevant sectors comprehensively, particularly those that are priority areas in NGCA, leaving some critical recovery efforts underrepresented. In addition, NGOs were unclear about whether they would have access to funding from the new Early Recovery Trust Fund, despite being the primary providers of assistance. There was also uncertainty around who would control the allocation of funds and how decisions would be made, raising concerns that the trust fund may not be as accessible or responsive to the needs of those on the ground in NGCA. This lack of clarity had led to apprehension among NGOs that their role in the recovery process would be overlooked or underfunded. The fall of the Assad regime resolved some of the challenges by bringing both NGCA and GCA under the new government in Damascus but huge levels of Early Recovery and reconstruction needs remained.

2.5 Leadership and coordination

112. This section addresses EQ 5.1 by examining IASC leadership of the earthquake response in the context of strong governments that led the response. It also assesses the impact of vacancies in leadership positions in NGCA at the time of the earthquakes. The section addresses EQ 11 by looking at the challenges that strong government control over the response in GCA posed for upholding humanitarian principles. It responds to EQ 5.2 with a focus on coordination, starting with the coordination structures established for the response in Türkiye; and also assesses the extent to which the HCT's emergency response coordination structure in particular adapted to the specific context of Türkiye (EQ 6). The section reviews the shift to more localized coordination mechanisms for the cross-border operation and concludes with an assessment of the added value of the WoS coordination architecture for the earthquake response (EQ 5.2).

Summary of findings: Leadership and coordination

In **Türkiye,** the government used its significant capacity and experience to lead the earthquake response. Unusually, recognizing that the scale of needs exceeded its search and rescue capacity, it requested immediate international assistance through INSARAG, but it was well positioned to lead the subsequent humanitarian response. The UN system had been focused on the Syrian refugee response and development assistance so the System-Wide Scale-Up Activation contributed to strengthening humanitarian leadership, as well as the collective and humanitarian nature of the response. IASC members supported and complemented the government's response, including by supporting the government's distribution of in-kind assistance and provision of services, and collaborating on post-Scale-Up Activation measures.

A new coordination structure, based on the UNDAC model for the USAR response, proved unsuited to the **Türkiye** context of strong government leadership and national/local capacity. Government participation was limited, and many Turkish NGOs struggled to understand how to gain access to it. Seeking to address these challenges, this structure evolved into the ABC model in August 2023, with support from the RCO. This sought to increase government and

NGO participation, and it had remained in place, evolving further into the SET-ICG in 2024, although there was a lack of consensus about its future role and purpose.

In **GCA**, the effectiveness of IASC leadership was limited by the control that the GoS exercised over the response despite its limited and fragmented humanitarian response capacity. Its decision to decentralize the response to Operations Rooms added further difficulties, with Operations Rooms suffering staffing issues and making data sharing difficult. IASC members adapted to the GoS's approach as best they could. However, the GoS's control meant humanitarian actors found it challenging to deliver assistance neutrally and impartially. Additionally, crossline assistance to NGCA was highly politicized and de facto authorities were suspicious of the GoS's motives, leading to difficulties in securing agreements for crossline missions. In practice, very little aid was delivered this way.

In **NGCA,** humanitarian actors were better able to adhere to humanitarian principles in agreement with relevant authorities. Vacancies in leadership and senior positions on cross-border operations did not have a detrimental impact on the initial response, as staff on the ground stepped up until positions were filled, but staff having to take on responsibilities beyond their roles highlighted a weakness in the humanitarian leadership system. NGOs additionally supported leadership and coordination of the response by taking on cluster leadership responsibilities. The earthquakes' disruption exposed the limitations of coordinating cross-border operations solely from Gaziantep, leading to the establishment of more localized coordination structures in NGCA in which SNGOs played a more prominent role.

The overall design of the WoS architecture was not suitable for a timely and agile response, and it was unable to overcome competition for resources between the GCA and NGCA hubs. The competitive approach hindered the hubs in taking an objective view of needs and how best to assist affected communities. The Scale-Up Activation was also not able to strengthen the collective nature of the response sufficiently to overcome the challenges.

Finding 12: The roles of strong governments in Türkiye and GCA shaped the leadership of the IASC response in different ways. In Türkiye, the System-Wide Scale-Up Activation contributed to strengthening humanitarian leadership and the collective nature of the IASC response that supported and complemented the government's response. The GoS's control over the humanitarian response was challenging for IASC leadership.

Strength of evidence
Strong

113. **In Türkiye, the government used its significant capacity and experience to lead the earthquake response. Sections of Protocol 2 of the System-Wide Scale-Up Activation on empowered leadership were implemented and the Scale-Up Activation also fulfilled functions such as strengthening the humanitarian and collective nature of the IASC response to some extent**. As described in Section 2.2, the Turkish government took the unusual step of requesting immediate international assistance through INSARAG to respond to the earthquakes on February 6 because it was quick to recognize that the scale of destruction exceeded its search and rescue capacity. Based on this request, the UNDAC mission's objective was to coordinate the large number of international USAR teams that deployed, and the government appreciated its work.[121] However, the government played the leading role in the response that followed (as outlined in Section 1.3 on context). In addition to the resources and capabilities of AFAD and the TRC, government entities at sub-national levels had considerable public service provision capacity and were also experienced at working with IASC members on the response to Syrian refugees and host communities within the 3RP framework. In addition, the TRC and civil society actors had developed humanitarian response experience through responding to natural disasters, and assisting refugees and displaced populations in the decade preceding the earthquakes. Interviewees highlighted that the response

[121] INSARAG (2023) INSARAG After Action Review—2023 Türkiye and Syria Earthquakes: A comprehensive report of INSARAG's Largest International Search and Rescue Operation.

capacity of these government entities was affected in the immediate aftermath of the earthquakes but they recovered quickly.

114. An IASC Scale-up Activation is intended for contexts "*where capacity to lead, coordinate and deliver humanitarian assistance does not match the scale, complexity and urgency of the crisis*."[122] At the time of the earthquakes, the UN system in Türkiye was focused on development assistance and the Syrian refugee response under the 3RP. To strengthen leadership and coordination capacity for a crisis of this magnitude, in accordance with the Scale-Up Activation SOPs, the ERC appointed the RC in Türkiye as Humanitarian Coordinator (HC) for a period of three months to lead the international humanitarian response.[123] Also as outlined in Protocol 2, an HCT was established to support him in leading the IASC's response for the period of the Scale-Up Activation. This included representatives of the Red Cross/Red Crescent Movement (both the TRC and the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies (IFRC)), and national and international NGOs.[124]

115. A Scale-Up Activation often helps to instate (or reinstate) the humanitarian nature of the response (which includes a focus on a principled humanitarian approach that is discussed further under Finding 25). A study highlighted that an Activation may be motivated by the aim of "shocking" the system into rapid and urgent change processes in response to an emergency.[125] There was a view that, since there had been no need for international emergency responses in Türkiye for many years, many of the staff of IASC member agencies were unfamiliar with mechanisms such as the System-Wide Scale-Up Activation, UNDAC, CERF, Flash Appeals. Hence, the rapid arrival of a large UNDAC team, the establishment of the HCT and a new humanitarian coordination structure, as well as other processes were a "shock" to their ways of working. However, as outlined in Finding 2 and also below, IASC members started their humanitarian response quickly and supported the government-led response in a variety of ways. It was also noted (particularly at the validation workshop) that the UNDAC team and other surge support staff, used to operating in emergency situations, were unfamiliar with working in a G20 country with a well-structured government that had significant disaster management capacity, including an existing coordination structure (the consequences of this are discussed under Finding 15). So this was also a "shock" or challenge to their established ways of working.

116. One informal but generally accepted function of a System-Wide Scale-Up Activation is to strengthen the collective nature of the humanitarian response, and this happened to an extent in Türkiye. The collective response can be strengthened in a number of ways, such as strengthening clusters, a joint statement of key priorities and rapid/multi-sector needs assessments, the development of a Flash Appeal and/or discussions around CERF allocations, an OPR, and discussions about collective benchmarks.[126] As described under Finding 15, there were new coordination structures established for the earthquake response that included new and strengthened sector coordination. Section 2.3 described the conduct of needs assessments (and the initial challenges with these) while Section 2.4 described the Flash Appeal process and discussion around the CERF allocation. However, there was no OPR in Türkiye, and discussions around collective benchmarks did not continue beyond February–March.[127]

117. In view of the government's capacity and leadership, rather than "leading" certain aspects of the response (as outlined in Protocol 2 on empowered leadership), the HC and HCT needed to

[122] IASC (2018) Standard Operating Procedures Humanitarian System-Wide Scale-Up Activation: Protocol 1: Definition and Procedures.
[123] IASC (2018) Standard Operating Procedures Humanitarian System-Wide Scale-Up Activation: Protocol 2: Empowered Leadership.
[124] This transitioned into the UNCT+ in August 2023.
[125] IAHE (2024) IASC System-Wide Scale-Up Mechanism. From protocol to reality: lessons for scaling up collective humanitarian responses.
[126] IAHE (2024) IASC System-Wide Scale-Up Mechanism. From protocol to reality: lessons for scaling up collective humanitarian responses, p. 4.
[127] The HCT agreed on 24 operational benchmarks and used a traffic-light approach to assess progress for February–March but not beyond this.

identify how international actors could support the government's own response. For example, one of the HC's responsibilities was to lead the HCT in preparing the Flash Appeal and to take responsibility for delivering on this initial strategy. As described in Section 2.4, though, there were challenges in securing government buy-in. HCT members then depended on collaboration with government entities for delivering the strategy outlined in the Appeal, given the government's prominent role in the delivery of the humanitarian response.

118. IASC members contributed to the Turkish government's response in a variety of ways, including distributing in-kind assistance through a variety of national and sub-national government entities[128] and supporting government provision of services. For example, one UN agency supported government provision of education and child-friendly facilities for refugee children, while another trained social workers to provide psychosocial support.[129] A UN agency reported collaborating with the Ministry of Health, which led the health sector response, to jointly plan and deliver $10mn of assistance, thereby avoiding duplication. International aid agencies also provided technical support to national/local actors to improve the design and quality of the humanitarian response (on topics including quality standards, winterization, and the design of folding shelters). In addition, UN agencies filled gaps in the response, such as meeting acute needs in the WASH sector until water companies recovered their capacity.

119. One area where the HC and HCT needed to collaborate with the government and align with its work was the development of a transition plan and post-activation measures. From April to July 2023, the HCT developed an Early Recovery framework that would be implemented until December 2023, when the 3RP and UN Sustainable Development Cooperation Framework (UNSDCF) would be updated. OCHA developed the Humanitarian Transition Overview (HTO) on behalf of the Inter-Sector Coordination Group and humanitarian actors working on the earthquake response. The purpose of the HTO was to ensure the continuity of humanitarian support to complement the Turkish government's response.[130] It was launched by the UNCT+ and the government at a workshop in August 2023 to align the response with existing frameworks and appeals.[131] The ABC structure (see Finding 15 for further details) had a strong focus on following up on the HTO and recovery framework, particularly the needs of local authorities for recovery and rebuilding. However, as described under Finding 11, the lack of donor funding for recovery activities limited implementation. Interviewees and validation workshop participants also noted challenges with securing government buy-in at national level for the recovery initiatives of IASC members and partners.[132] Meanwhile, the government started the development of its 12th National Development Plan (NDP) during this period, consulting with UNCT members, and the new UNSDCF for 2026–2030 was informed by the 12th NDP.

120. **In GCA, the effectiveness of IASC leadership was limited by the control that the GoS exercised over the response, even though it had limited capacity for emergency response. The GoS's decision to decentralize response management to Operation Rooms also made it difficult for IASC members to work with the government on the earthquake response.** Since there was a humanitarian leadership and coordination structure in place for the protracted crisis in Syria, the System-Wide Scale-Up Activation did not result in any changes to this.[133] As described in Section 2.1, the GoS had a complex architecture for humanitarian response comprising five government entities. Throughout the protracted crisis, the GoS had maintained tight control over the humanitarian response through a complex set of operational restrictions, which gave humanitarian

[128] See, for example, the assistance provided with CERF funding. CERF (2023) Türkiye Rapid Response Earthquake 2023 23-RR-TUR-57543: CERF Allocation Report on the Use of Funds and Achieved Results.

[129] For further details see the Early Recovery and Health and Nutrition tabs of the dashboard at: https://app.powerbi.com/view?r=eyJrIjoiYjM4Njc4NDgtZmZjMi00ZTVkLWI1MWUtNzY2ZTFmNzU3N2E0IiwidCI6ImU1YzM3OTgxLTY2NjQtNDEzNC04YTBjLTY1NDNkMmFmODBiZSIsImMiOjh9

[130] OCHA (2023) Humanitarian Transition Overview: Türkiye Earthquake Response, Issued August 2023.

[131] During this period the government included UNCT members in consultations.

[132] This was also the finding of a UNICEF-commissioned evaluation. See UNICEF (2025) Evaluation of the UNICEF L3 Response to the Earthquake in Türkiye.

[133] In his email of February 14, 2023, which communicated the Scale-Up Activation to the humanitarian leadership in the region—the Regional HC, the Deputy Regional HC, the Syria RC/HC, and the RC in Türkiye, who was designated as HC as well—he ERC expected that the earthquake response would be coordinated through existing mechanisms in the region.

actors very limited operational space.[134] For the earthquake response, the government established new decentralized Operation Rooms to lead and coordinate the response. There were numerous challenges with these, including problems with intra-government coordination and data protection (see Section 2.9 for more details on the data protection concerns for cash programming).[135] Interviews identified inadequate staffing of the Operation Rooms, staff having no experience of humanitarian response, and a reluctance to share data with the UN as additional problems. These hampered the response and support that IASC members could provide, and international actors considered the Operation Rooms to be largely unhelpful: "*Syria is the most complex operating context in world, but the coordination architecture just adds to the complexity.*" However, IASC members adapted to the government's approach as best they could. Area HCT coordination mechanisms were reactivated and empowered to operate in a decentralized way at governorate level so that they could coordinate with the Operation Rooms.[136] An UNDAC team was also deployed to government-held areas of NWS to support coordination at the start of the response.

Finding 13: In Syria, IASC members found it challenging to deliver neutral and impartial assistance because of the GoS's restrictions on humanitarian assistance and the politicization of crossline assistance. In NGCA, humanitarian actors were better able to make their adherence to humanitarian principles clear in agreements with relevant authorities.

Strength of evidence
Moderate

121. **The GoS's control and restrictions on humanitarian assistance constrained humanitarian actors' efforts to deliver neutral and impartial assistance.** As noted above, the GoS's establishment of new Operation Rooms made it difficult to get data from the government, which made it harder to ensure that the humanitarian assistance provided was needs-based. NGOs in GCA were subjected to a complex registration system that restricted their operations to specific geographical areas in some cases. This meant that they could not always work in areas with the greatest needs, except through partners, which undermined their efforts to operate according to humanitarian principles. The GoS also used other bureaucratic impediments to exert control over humanitarian assistance, making it harder to respond on the basis of needs alone. The GoS's approach was a long-standing one as part of the protracted crisis, limiting the room for maneuver that IASC members and their partners had in adhering to, and advocating for, a principled humanitarian approach. This did not change with the earthquake response and the Scale-Up Activation.[137] One way in which the GoS controlled the distribution of aid during the earthquake response was to insist that all assistance flown into Damascus had to be distributed through SARC. A senior UN official argued that the UN system was not asserting humanitarian principles strongly enough, allowing the GoS to get away with imposing a variety of restrictions.

122. **Some international actors and the GoS promoted crossline assistance to NGCA from Damascus as a mechanism for providing a principled humanitarian response. However, crossline assistance was highly politicized and, in practice, very little aid was delivered through this mechanism and none for the earthquake response.** The purported aim of crossline assistance was to deliver assistance to people in NGCA who could not be reached through the cross-border operation from Türkiye, and the first crossline mission was in August 2021. A number of interviewees noted that, in practice, it was perfectly possible to reach everyone in need of humanitarian assistance in NGCA through the cross-border operation, but the GoS and its allies continued to push for crossline deliveries as one of the conditions for renewing the UNSCR that

[134] Human Rights Watch (2019) Rigging the System: Government Policies Co-opt Aid and Reconstruction Funding in Syria; Dr Haid Haid (2011) Principled Aid: A Framework for International Agencies, Chatham House Research Paper.
[135] Peer-2-Peer Support/IASC (2023) Syria Earthquake Operational Peer Review Mission Report.
[136] Peer-2-Peer Support/IASC (2023) Syria Earthquake Operational Peer Review Mission Report.
[137] Although one informal function of the activation is to (re)instate the humanitarian nature of the response, which includes adopting a principled humanitarian approach. An IASC learning paper found that it can be difficult for international humanitarian actors to deliver an impartial and independent response when they are working with a controlling government. See IAHE (2024) IASC System-Wide Scale-Up Mechanism. From protocol to reality: lessons for scaling up collective humanitarian responses.

governed the cross-border operation.[138] The UN's stance was that crossline deliveries from Damascus were a way to ensure that aid reached all affected populations in NWS impartially. However, it has been argued that crossline assistance was a political move by the GoS because it could "*bolster Damascus' sovereignty over the WoS territory, increase its international legitimacy,*" and give the regime "*control over vital lifelines for opposition forces.*"[139] At the time of the earthquakes, the road from Gaziantep to the sole border crossing at Bab-al-Hawa was damaged. There was considerable discussion about crossline assistance versus opening up new border crossings that would have to be mandated by the UN Security Council. In the end, as outlined in Section 2.2, the ERC was able to negotiate the opening of two additional border-crossing points.

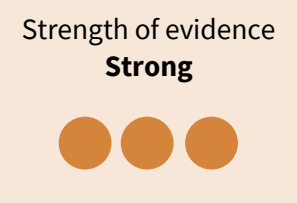
123. **Despite the UN approach that crossline assistance was in line with the humanitarian principles, it was always problematic to secure the agreement of the de facto authorities to crossline deliveries, and the number of crossline missions remained very small compared with the number of trucks crossing the border from Türkiye (leading to it being described as "tangibly ineffective").[140]** According to a UN interviewee, the de facto authorities were suspicious of the GoS's motives, particularly as the corridors for the aid convoys and areas supposed to receive crossline assistance were shelled regularly, especially since the escalation in the conflict in October 2023.[141] Therefore, "*People in NWS fear regime control over aid distribution, they fear regime control over cross-border and crossline delivery*." Once the UNSCR was replaced by the consent model, the governments calling for crossline assistance lost their leverage and the de facto authorities refused their consent. There was a view that, had the GoS offered heavy machinery and the equipment required to rescue people from the rubble immediately after the earthquakes, the de facto authorities may have accepted this as crossline aid. However, the GoS did not make such an offer. The crossline assistance that it did offer on February 12 was rejected by HTS.[142]

124. **In NGCA, humanitarian actors had agreements with a variety of authorities and non-state actors to make clear that their operations were underpinned by adherence to the humanitarian principles.** Humanitarian actors agreed Joint Operating Principles (JOPs) with the de facto authorities in Idlib, covering areas such as adherence to humanitarian principles and international humanitarian law, respecting the operational independence of humanitarian actors, and data protection. The de facto authorities had not signed the JOPs but it was a tool to make them aware of the UN and NGO approach to humanitarian operations. The situation in northern Aleppo was more challenging due to the large number of fragmented armed groups. However, 25 groups had signed a declaration of commitment in 2018 that humanitarian actors could refer back to their efforts to operate according to the humanitarian principles. In addition, UNICEF had signed a Children and Armed Conflict (CAAC) action plan with the Syrian Interim Government's SDF in 2019.[143] Following the earthquakes, when discussions with the de facto authorities intensified over cross-border access under the consent model, correspondence between the DRHC and the de facto authorities emphasized that "*The office also insists on the necessity of adhering to humanitarian principles concerning the dignity of the beneficiaries, respecting their demands, and avoiding harm through politicized decisions that distort humanitarian work and violate its independence and*

[138] iMMAP (2023) Post-Earthquake Perspective: Challenges and Strategies for Humanitarian Aid in Northwest Syria, Ad Hoc Series Part 2, September 17, 2023.
[139] iMMAP and USAID (2023) Barriers to Cross-line Aid Access: Northwest Syria, Spot Report February 10, 2023.
[140] iMMAP (2023) Post-Earthquake Perspective: Challenges and Strategies for Humanitarian Aid in Northwest Syria, Ad Hoc Series Part 1, June 15, 2023.
[141] A report on crossline assistance also noted that governments, such as the US and Türkiye, were also hesitant about the crossline modality because of several reports of aid failing to reach areas outside GoS control, and the economy of humanitarian aid being used to finance the regime or support only organizations close to Damascus. See iMMAP and USAID (2023) Barriers to Cross-line Aid Access: Northwest Syria, Spot Report February 10, 2023.
[142] iMMAP (2023) Post-Earthquake Perspective: Challenges and Strategies for Humanitarian Aid in Northwest Syria, Ad Hoc Series Part 1, June 15, 2023.
[143] An action plan is a written, signed commitment between the UN and parties to conflict who are listed as having committed grave violations against children in the Secretary-General's Annual Report on Children and Armed Conflict. The Security Council requests these parties to develop action plans to address grave violations against children. See https://childrenandarmedconflict.un.org/tools-for-action/action-plans/

neutrality." Recognizing the complex operating environment, the DRHC had made efforts to promote adherence to the humanitarian principles by all actors through video communications during visits to NGCA, in high-level forums discussing Syria, and in interactions with the HLG.

Finding 14: In NGCA, vacancies in leadership and senior positions of the cross-border operation at the time of the earthquakes did not have a detrimental effect on IASC members' leadership of the response. This is because staff who were on the ground stepped up to the challenge until the positions were filled. NGOs also supported leadership of the response, particularly by taking on cluster leadership responsibilities.



125. **Humanitarian staff who were in leadership positions took on responsibilities beyond their role to kick-start the humanitarian response in the immediate aftermath of the earthquakes. That this was necessary highlights a weakness in the humanitarian leadership system**. The System-Wide Scale-Up Activation did not lead to any changes in the leadership and coordination structure for the cross-border response. There were vacancies in several strategic and operational positions when the earthquakes hit, but these posts were filled quickly, many just before or around the time of the Scale-Up Activation declaration. The DRHC post in Gaziantep had been vacant for five months,[144] and OCHA did not have a Deputy Head of Office or Head of Coordination (and the Head of Access was on leave). The ERC requested the Regional HC (RHC) cover the role of the DRHC until a replacement could be found, but he declined on the grounds that he did not have operational expertise. It therefore fell to the OCHA Head of Office to lead the immediate response, push for the reopening of the Bab-al-Hawa crossing into NGCA, and coordinate with UN agencies to get aid into NGCA as soon as possible. She performed the functions of the DRHC but without an official *ad interim* designation, which meant having significant responsibility without authority. This was possible because IASC members were willing to accept her authority. When international staff gained access to NGCA for the first time, she also took on the responsibility of Ad Hoc Designated Official (DO) for missions into NGCA, which was a considerable charge.[145]

126. The SCHF manager was the officer in charge when the earthquakes struck (since the Head of Office was returning from a mission when the earthquakes struck) and arranged for OCHA staff to move into the office with their families. In addition to caring for their welfare in difficult circumstances, he ensured that the SCHF continued to operate and could launch a Reserve Allocation quickly, as described in Section 2.4. Several interviewees also commended a Junior Professional Officer (JPO), who was responsible for coordination in the absence of the OCHA Head of Coordination, for starting remote coordination meetings immediately. Such examples of staff dealing with multiple challenges and taking on additional responsibilities to ensure a quick start to the response and support their colleagues were found across UN agencies as well as SNGOs.

127. **A combination of quick appointments and rapid surge support deployments helped to fill staffing gaps in the response.** The DRHC arrived on surge support for three weeks on February 12, 2023, six days after the earthquakes, just as the ERC secured access for international staff into NGCA. He began to provide strategic leadership, particularly as the HLG was not fully operational in the immediate aftermath of the earthquakes. This included leading several missions into NGCA from February 14 onwards and addressing the community backlash against the UN described under Finding 3. The OCHA Head of Office continued to perform certain DRHC functions, such as being the DO or signing off on SCHF projects, until the appointment was confirmed.

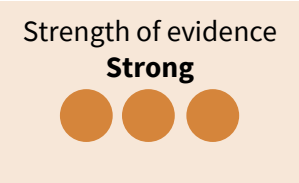
128. As noted in Section 2.2, IASC members were able to deploy surge support staff quickly. This enabled them to fill critical capacity gaps in the response. Recognizing the scale of the crisis, they also appointed senior staff quickly, including dedicated cluster coordinators (timings of their arrival

[144] Although the previous DRHC had given notice of his departure in January 2022, the UN system did not appoint his replacement till February 2023, when the earthquake response required an accelerated appointment procedure.
[145] The DO is accountable to the Secretary-General for the safety and security of UN personnel, premises and assets in the Designated Area. See https://www.un.org/en/safety-and-security/governance

varied across the different clusters). The new OCHA Head of Coordination arrived at the same time as the DRHC and was able to build on the foundations laid by the JPO to strengthen inter-cluster coordination.

129. **SNGOs and Syrian staff of INGOs stepped in to provide additional support in the first few weeks of the response, lessening the impact of gaps in IASC leadership (including in cluster coordination).** A small group of SNGOs based in Gaziantep or supporting operations remotely, and quickly, organized themselves to work with OCHA in coordinating and leading the response in the first few weeks until the HLG was functional once more. As described in Finding 11, funding for the Syria crisis had reduced significantly prior to the earthquakes. This had led IASC members to downsize operations in 2022. As a result, at the time of the earthquakes, several cluster coordinator posts within the cross-border operation were vacant, or coordinators were double hatted. Therefore, at the start of the response, NGO cluster co-coordinators, who were largely Syrian staff, took on leadership functions until surge support arrived and cluster coordinator positions were filled with full-time appointments. They were well placed to do this, since they were already in post and were Arabic speakers, so they could communicate easily with cluster member staff inside NGCA when needed.

Finding 15: In Türkiye, the newly established coordination structure for the earthquake response was not well suited to the context of strong government leadership and significant national/local response capacity. However, this evolved into the Area Based Coordination model that sought to address the initial challenges.



130. **The HCT decided to establish a new coordination structure for the earthquake response because, after extensive discussion (including with 3RP partners), it was believed that this would be more appropriate for responding to earthquake-related needs than pre-existing 3RP structures.**[146] Following on from the coordination of the USAR response, the OCHA team deployed anticipated the need for a humanitarian program to deliver on the Flash Appeal and engaged with relevant partners (3RP, UN agencies, and the TRC) in Gaziantep on a coordination structure (since that would be the likely hub). Following discussions on using the existing 3RP coordination mechanism, the HCT decided to establish a new structure. Figure 9 below provides an overview of the 3RP coordination structure before the earthquake response, the HCT coordination structure established for the earthquake response, and the structure that it evolved into once OCHA phased out of Türkiye. The justification for creating a new coordination model for the immediate earthquake response was that the existing 3RP coordination structure was intended to address the needs of Syrian refugees whereas the earthquakes affected host communities as well. Also, the 3RP was designed for a protracted crisis, with a focus on longer-term activities such as livelihoods, not a sudden onset disaster, so it did not include sectors that were important for the earthquake response, such as shelter, WASH, Early Recovery, and Temporary Settlement Support. There was a concern about the 3RP mechanism's adaptation to the very different requirements of the earthquake response, and the HCT made the decision to set up a new coordination structure. However, some felt that setting up a completely new structure that was unfamiliar to most stakeholders led to confusion among different actors and local authorities (despite OCHA teams making an effort to support mayors, governors, AFAD officials, and ambassadors appointed to facilitate coordination—see Finding 18). There was a view that the new coordination model was complex and resource-intensive, given that it was intended for a three-month emergency response, and that it could have built more on the foundation of the existing partnerships under the 3RP and utilized existing tools and mechanisms because it would have been more effective to capitalize on the existing 3RP mechanism. The 3RP coordination mechanism was paused, as most of the sector coordinators focused on the earthquake response, but there were attempts to make use of parts of the 3RP

[146] The RC and some UNCT members, including UNHCR, suggested expanding the existing 3RP coordination mechanism for the earthquake response, recognizing that the Turkish government would have a limited timeframe for the emergency response operation and that funding for the response would also be short-term. However, the UNCT's ultimate decision was to establish a separate coordination structure.

response, such as hotlines for affected populations and a dashboard for reporting against agreed indicators. The latter had mixed results; while adapting the hotlines for the earthquake response proved challenging (see Finding 26 on community feedback mechanisms), the dashboard proved useful because 3RP partners, who were also responding to the earthquakes, were familiar with it.[147]

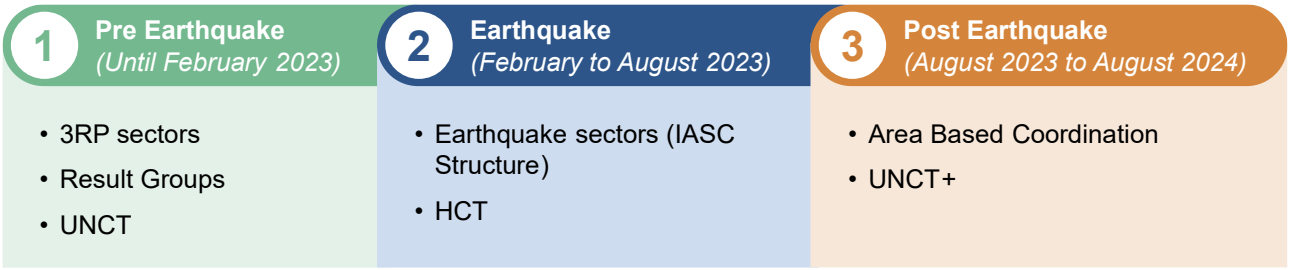


Figure 9 Evolution of coordination structures in Türkiye

Source: Resident Coordinator Office

131. **The HCT-established coordination structure was not well adapted to accommodate existing national/local response capacity, which led the government and Turkish NGOs to use their own coordination mechanisms. Factors contributing to the lack of adaptation included the lack of contextual analysis, the speed of the response and the lack of established communication channels with the government. Efforts were made to address the challenges as the response progressed and the coordination structure evolved**. The UNDAC team, which arrived in Türkiye 22 hours after the first earthquake, set up coordination cells for USAR teams, an On-Site Operation Coordination Center (OSOCC) in Gaziantep, and sub-OSOCCs in Hatay, Kahramanmaraş, Adiyaman, and Malatya, the four most affected provinces (as requested by the Turkish government). UN interviewees appreciated the deployment of UNDAC and OCHA staff members (despite the demands of other ongoing emergencies) and their contribution to the first six months of the response. However, at the validation workshop, participants identified that those deploying as surge support to the response had not analyzed existing capacities and relationships, or how to adapt the coordination model to be inclusive of national/local leadership and capacity in a middle-income country with established government coordination mechanisms and partnerships. This was probably because, given the scale of the disaster, the OCHA team's priority was to support the response by IASC members and their partners as quickly as possible. Another obstacle was the rapid turnover of international surge support staff because they had no time to build up their knowledge of the political, social, and cultural specificities of the country before they were rotated out. Although there were some efforts to provide translation into Turkish,[148] challenges meant that meetings were generally conducted in English, and Turkish NGOs delivering the response struggled to understand IASC terminology and ways of working. In their view, "*It was so top down, so poorly integrated, it just failed to link up to local actors*." There was also a perception of "*arrogant UN officials acting like they're in a developing country context. They didn't take into account the offense caused."* The challenges due to rapid turnover in the OCHA deployments led to UN agencies calling for a team leader to be deployed for the duration of the response.

132. There was limited government participation in the IASC coordination meetings and a government perception that "*The UN's coordination of humanitarian aid was inefficient."* Therefore, the government continued with its own coordination mechanisms and direct engagement with

[147] See https://app.powerbi.com/view?r=eyJrIjoiYjM4Njc4NDgtZmZjMi00ZTVkLWI1MWUtNzY2ZTFmNzU3N2E0IiwidCI6ImU1YzM3OTgxLTY2NjQtNDEzNC04YTBjLTY1NDNkMmFmODBiZSIsImMiOjh9

[148] The minutes of an HCT on February 27, 2023 mentions translation capacity being increased across the coordination hubs and coordination meetings in Malatya being separated for NGOs "to overcome language barriers and facilitate broader participation by national actors." OCHA coordination teams initially worked with local volunteers on translation but were required to go through a formal contracting process. After approximately two weeks, they were able to engage UN volunteers.

individual IASC members (particularly where there were existing relationships under the 3RP). Many Turkish NGOs struggled to understand how to gain access to the HCT-established structure. "*They all felt like they didn't know who was in charge of what, they didn't know who to speak with. By the time they managed to speak with the right person in the OCHA system, the decision had already been made elsewhere*." In the end, they "*set up their own parallel structures because the UN ones were a waste of time.*" These networks shared live information through platforms like WhatsApp, which sometimes resulted in UN agencies being excluded from critical information sharing loops in the initial phase of the response.

133. When UNDAC left Türkiye in May 2023, it designated a team of three OCHA Humanitarian Advisers to work with the RCO to support a transition to the ABC model, outlined in the recovery framework developed by the HCT (referenced in Finding 12). Good Practice Box 4 below outlines the RCO's role in supporting a smooth transition from the HCT-established coordination structure to the ABC. In August 2023, the ABC took over coordination, aligning different coordination structures in the earthquake-affected provinces by bringing together earthquake response and 3RP sectors as well as development Result Groups to unify the response in South-East Türkiye.[149] As part of its coordination function, it included two knowledge-generating mechanisms – ESMAT (described in Section 2.3) and the Information Management Working Group. The ABC was based in Gaziantep and operationalized through hub-level coordination supported by a hub coordinator (a dedicated UN staff member) in each of the main affected provinces: Adıyaman, Hatay, Kahramanmaraş, and Malatya.[150]

134. The mechanism was designed to address the shortcomings of the initial coordination mechanism, so participants made an effort to increase NGO involvement[151] and enhance joint approaches to local authorities. With the transition to the ABC, the participation of the government and NGOs in sector meetings increased (government entities increased their engagement primarily in education, shelter, protection, and WASH). Communication between UN agencies and local authorities also increased with the establishment of the hubs. From August 2024, NGO networks started to co-chair the hubs together with the UN.

135. International humanitarian actors found the ABC coordination structure useful for organizing their response even though the 3RP coordination mechanisms were reactivated after the emergency phase of the earthquake response. There was a view that the ABC had an advantage over the 3RP's sector-based approach, because it "*brought together the right actors into the right space, with a context analysis for each area, and helped to build a tailored response.*" The ABC structure continued operating until August 2024, when it was renamed the South-East Türkiye Inter-Sector Coordination Group (SET-ICG). During the validation workshop in November 2024, IASC members expressed their intention to continue with the SET-ICG. However, there was a lack of consensus about its future purpose and role in the absence of a continued humanitarian response to the earthquakes.

Good Practice Box 4: Supporting an expanded RCO coordination role to ensure a smooth transition from emergency to longer-term coordination

To ensure that the initial earthquake response coordination structure established by the HCT would be integrated into the development and refugee workstreams smoothly, UN agencies, under the RCO's leadership, prepared a gradual transition to an integrated coordination structure by the time OCHA left Türkiye in August 2023. The ABC was overseen by an Advisory Group co-chaired by UNHCR, IOM and the RC's Office (RCO), with the RCO providing significant support until December 2024. The RCO was

[149] It included 10 programmatic areas: protection, economic empowerment, health, education, DRR & the environment, WASH, shelter, TSS, basic needs, and community-based initiatives. It also covered four cross-cutting areas: Women Empowerment in Humanitarian Action (WEHA), Prevention of Sexual Exploitation and Abuse (PSEA), Accountability to Affected Persons (AAP), and Disability Inclusion Task Team (DITT).

[150] Reliefweb (2023) Area Based Coordination (ABC) Gaziantep for the Earthquake Recovery (22 November 2023): https://reliefweb.int/report/turkiye/area-based-coordination-abc-gaziantep-earthquake-recovery-november-2023-entr; OCHA (2023) Humanitarian Transition Overview: Türkiye Earthquake Response. See also IAHE (2024) Inter-Agency Humanitarian Evaluation of the Response to the Earthquakes in Türkiye and Syria: Inception Report.

[151] It included representatives from the Local Humanitarian Forum and INGO Forum.

able to support the ABC because the RC decided to deploy two RCO staff members to Gaziantep for three days a week from April to May 2023 onwards. The RCO presence in the earthquake-affected area added value, both during the initial and later response phases, by contributing to the ABC's inclusion of national/local actors and improved coordination.

This level of support for coordination is outside the normal scope of an RCO's work, and there is no budget for such activities. It is therefore noteworthy that the UN Development Coordination Office (DCO) provided additional resources to the RCO in Türkiye to make this additional coordination work possible. It provided a total of $147,000 in 2023 and 2024 from the surge capacity budget line. This funding also allowed for simultaneous translation at meetings of the cross-cutting groups and for the translation of key reports.

Finding 16: The disruption caused by the earthquakes to the cross-border operation exposed the limitations of coordinating it solely from Gaziantep and highlighted the need for more localized coordination structures inside NGCA. It was positive that, as a result of changes introduced, SNGOs were playing a more prominent role in coordination.

Strength of evidence
Strong

136. **When the earthquakes cut communications as well as physical access in the first few days after the earthquakes, SNGOs inside NGCA had to find ways of coordinating among themselves.** The cross-border operation was coordinated from Gaziantep and, prior to the earthquakes, there were no mechanisms for coordination inside NGCA, mainly due to restricted access. In the immediate aftermath of the earthquakes, SNGO staff inside NGCA lost communication with their managers and the clusters in Gaziantep.[152] They had to identify needs and respond to affected communities so they soon started coordinating and sharing information with each other through WhatsApp and Skype groups. Nevertheless, one consequence of a lack of coordination mechanisms inside NGCA was the sheer number of potentially duplicative needs assessments conducted in the immediate aftermath of the earthquakes, with SNGOs consulting some communities multiple times about their needs (as highlighted in Section 2.3). As described under Finding 14 above, coordination in Gaziantep was also difficult because of vacancies in cluster leadership positions. Continuity in the operation of clusters generally came from the Syrian staff of INGOs in cluster co-coordinator positions. This underlined the need for a localized and fit-for-purpose coordination model inside NGCA to complement the cluster coordination mechanism in Gaziantep.

137. **Following recognition of the importance of coordination mechanisms inside NGCA and greater access (which facilitated direct engagement with partners on the ground), humanitarian actors established more localized coordination structures. This resulted in SNGOs playing a greater role in coordination and also being better connected to clusters in Gaziantep.** The experience of being cut off from SNGOs working inside NGCA by the infrastructure damage of the earthquakes made those coordinating the cross-border response aware of the importance of having a system that could operate independently of Gaziantep in case of future emergencies (one scenario considered at the time was the GoS ending the consent model for cross-border assistance). An OPR recommendation on localized coordination within NGCA was supposed to be implemented by December 2023. Although the cross-border operation did not meet this deadline, it had established Local Coordination Groups (LCGs) hosted by NGOs and cluster focal points[153] within NGCA, connecting field-level coordination to the ICCG in Gaziantep. There was also a system of Humanitarian Field Officers (HFOs) hired by an SNGO to support OCHA functions inside NGCA. While these were very positive steps, there was a concern that the structure remained siloed, with focal points reporting to individual cluster leads in Gaziantep, which retained decision-making power.

[152] Peer-2-Peer Support/IASC (2023) Syria Earthquake Operational Peer Review Mission Report.
[153] Cluster focal points were positions funded by INGOs or SNGOs. They were either full-time cluster coordinators or program staff who dedicated a percentage of their time to support cluster coordination.

138. The opening up of international access to NGCA (discussed in Section 2.2) was particularly important for the shift because it created an opportunity "*to set up coordination mechanisms closer to the people, closer to the responders and to drag the clusters into NWS*." For example, clusters began to have in-person meetings inside NGCA, which was more inclusive of SNGOs, who had to join meetings in Gaziantep remotely. OCHA coordination staff also used the greater access to explain cluster coordination to the de facto authorities. As a result, cluster coordinators could travel into NGCA to meet with the de facto authorities to discuss sector-specific issues when needed. In response, the de facto authorities had started appointing cluster coordinator counterparts in sectors such as shelter, food security, and camp coordination, and camp management, further strengthening coordination.

Finding 17: The design of the WoS architecture was not well suited to a timely and agile response. Its inability to overcome competition for resources between the GCA and NGCA hubs limited its added value to the earthquake response.

Strength of evidence
Moderate

139. **The protracted conflict context in Syria had led to complex leadership and coordination arrangements that led to delays when applied to a sudden onset emergency.** Humanitarian actors working within Syria and from neighboring countries set up the WoS coordination architecture in 2014 to work together to improve the effectiveness of the response to the conflict.[154] The aim was to ensure access to all those in need and resulted in a "hub" or area-based approach, essentially three different humanitarian operations for different parts of the country: the HCT-coordinated response for GCA (based in Damascus); the HLG-coordinated cross-border operation for NGCA based in Gaziantep; and the NGO Forum coordinated response for NES, operating both from Iraq and within NES. They were overlaid by a coordination mechanism to bring them together at Amman level (as highlighted in Figure 10 below). The UN-led operations also had a complex leadership structure with the RHC in Amman at the same level of seniority as the Syria RC/HC and the DRHC reporting only to the RHC, with no structural link to the RC/HC in order to maintain the independence of the cross-border operation from Damascus.

[154] Abdullah, S. F. and L. S. Baker (n.d.) Experiences of the "Whole of Syria" coordination for nutrition: Field Article: https://www.ennonline.net/sites/default/files/wholeofsyriacoord_FA_FEX56.pdf

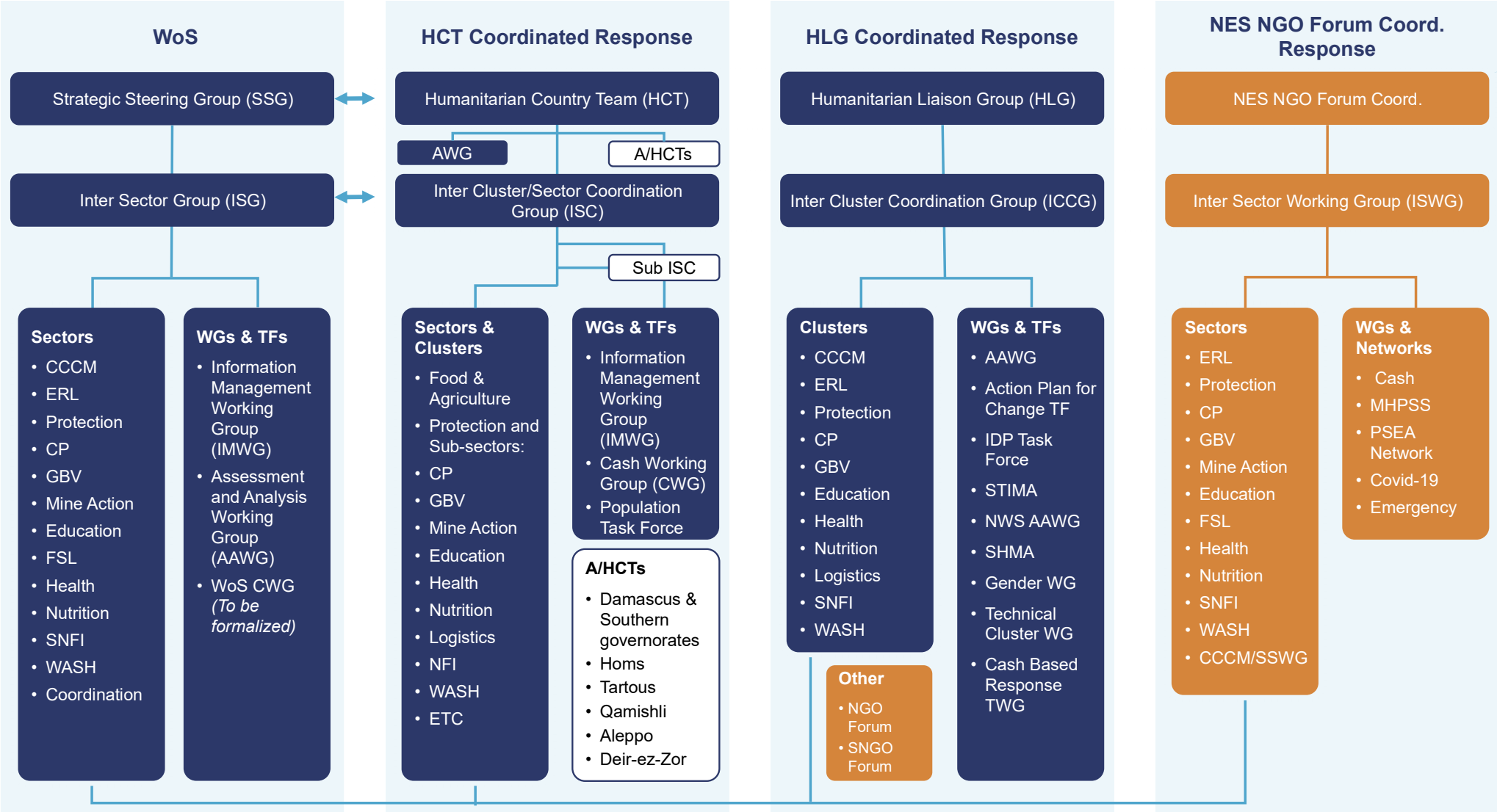


Figure 10 Whole of Syria coordination structure

140. The structure had a degree of success for the protracted conflict and displacement crisis, although the IASC EDG discussed it in February 2023 and recommended Peer-2-Peer support while the OPR recommended in July 2023 that it be reviewed to "recalibrate" it. However, WoS decision-making was complex (the lack of clarity about decision-making on the allocation of CERF grants is one example). It also relied on consensus, which slowed down decisions. One reason for the delay in issuing the Flash Appeal was the need to reach agreement on the level of needs across GCA and NGCA (see Section 2.4). There were also complaints about the inter-sector coordination (ISC) architecture at Amman level, because "*all documents needed to pass through this structure, which made it very difficult to agree on things.*" Therefore, the WoS structure and procedures were not appropriate for a sudden onset crisis that required quick decisions and agility.[155] In addition, since the earthquakes did not affect NES, only two of the three hubs/humanitarian operations were involved in the response, rather than the "whole" of Syria.

141. **The earthquake response was delivered at hub level, but the hubs competed over resources and the WoS coordination was not able to add value by overcoming this, due partly to donor approaches and partly to the leadership and coordination structure. The System-Wide Scale-Up Activation did not strengthen the collective nature of the response sufficiently to overcome the challenges**. As outlined under Finding 12, one function of a System-Wide Scale-Up Activation (albeit not a formal one) is to strengthen the collective nature of the response.[156] Section 2.3 highlighted the challenges with coordinating needs assessments in NGCA and GCA while Section 2.4 outlined the challenges with agreeing on needs and having an agreed approach to the Flash Appeal. There were also challenges with CERF allocations while discussions about benchmarks were undertaken separately within the two hubs/operations. Although there was an OPR for Syria, resource constraints had limited implementation of its recommendations. The challenges (symptomatic of the long-term challenges with the WoS structure) highlight that the Scale-Up Activation was not sufficient to contribute to strengthening the collective nature of the response in Syria.

142. The Damascus and Gaziantep hubs went ahead with delivering individualized/localized responses, based on their operating environments.[157] Donors also funded the operations separately, based on their priorities. A lack of clear data on funding to GCA and NGCA led to perceptions within both operations that the other was better funded. This fueled a competition for resources between the two operations, even within the same agency, and complaints of an inequitable allocation of resources.[158] The WoS approach did not add value even with resource mobilization in this situation, because "*why would donors want to hear about [evolving needs and the response] from Amman when they can hear it from the person on the ground?*"

143. Those working on the cross-border operation were particularly vocal about NGCA priorities not being taken into account in the Syria Flash Appeal, the allocation of CERF grants, and the development of the WoS Early Recovery Strategy (see Section 2.4). Some UN interviewees in NGCA believed that the CERF grants had been used in areas of GCA not affected by the earthquakes, despite their purpose. It was not possible to verify this view because reports on the use of the CERF grants for the earthquake response were not available. An absence of "free and

[155] The Strategic Steering Committee (SSG) itself acknowledged this and requested a small group of senior staff from regional offices to propose changes to WoS coordination arrangements for the earthquake response (document from February 18, 2023 shared with the Evaluation Team).

[156] IAHE (2024) IASC System-Wide Scale-Up Mechanism. From protocol to reality: lessons for scaling up collective humanitarian responses.

[157] For the cross-border operation, access into NGCA within a few days of the earthquakes changed the response dynamic completely as described in Section 2.2.

[158] A record of a meeting of a small group of senior staff from regional offices to discuss the WoS coordination approach to the earthquake response referred to the need to avoid competition between the hubs (document from February 18, 2023 shared with the Evaluation Team). The Peer-2-Peer Support Mission on WoS coordination, undertaken in September–October 2024, also corroborated the findings on competition, mistrust, and misunderstandings between areas of response and views on the unfair allocation of resources.

regular information sharing"[159] contributed to the view among humanitarian actors delivering the cross-border response that the processes and priorities were driven from Damascus rather than decided jointly at Amman level, shifting decision-making power to GCA.

144. The WoS leadership structure did not help to overcome the mistrust between the two operations since there was no direct link between the Syria RC/HC and the DRHC. The RHC might have played a greater role in addressing this, but he was more focused on addressing political challenges like the renewal of the UNSCR than on operations. As a result, those working on the cross-border operation were very positive about the new RHC adopting a more hands-on approach and taking a greater interest in operations.

145. This WoS structure's inability to overcome challenges between the individual operations was one important reason why it made a limited contribution to the earthquake response. Ultimately, the competitive approach made it harder for both operations to take an objective view of humanitarian needs across NWS (not helped by the lack of reliable, comprehensive, and comparable needs assessments) and how best to support affected communities who were often in adjoining geographical areas. Another consequence was a lack of sharing of good practice to strengthen the responses.

2.6 Partnerships with local/national actors

146. In addressing EQ 7, this section starts by examining the factors that shaped IASC members' partnership with the Turkish government. It goes on to focus on both new and established partnerships with NGOs.

Summary of findings: Partnerships with local/national actors

In **Türkiye**, collective efforts to collaborate and harmonize with national actors during the early stages of the response had limitations and failed to accommodate existing national and local response capacity. While the Turkish government and IASC members made efforts to collaborate and coordinate, there was limited information sharing on concrete aspects of the response in the initial phase, compounded by the lack of an established agreement on the role of international actors in the disaster response. Difficulties in expectation management of the government also hindered efforts to engage with them on the role of IASC members in future emergencies. Additionally, IASC members were late in expanding new partnerships with Turkish NGOs due to them not being included in the initial IASC coordination structure. However, agencies with pre-existing partnerships, particularly under the 3RP, were able to leverage these for the earthquake response, and agencies were able to provide valuable training and capacity building of Turkish NGOs.

In **Syria**, the time to establish partnerships with SNGOs was determined by due diligence requirements and the impact of the earthquakes on SNGO capacity. Smaller SNGOs found it challenging to meet due diligence requirements. This led to a missed potential of utilizing their ability to operate in hard-to-reach areas due to their links with communities. Additionally, power imbalances from SNGOs' reliance on international funding and their struggles to fulfill compliance requirements meant SNGOs perceived their relationship with international agencies to be contractual rather than collaborative. Furthermore, an unexpected consequence of the earthquakes was INGOs inadvertently taking staff away from SNGOs because they were able to pay competitive salaries, leaving resource gaps for some SNGOs.

[159] Although senior staff from regional offices identified this as key to avoiding competition, there was no evidence of such information sharing, perhaps due to the need to maintain the independence of the cross-border operation (document from February 18, 2023 shared with the Evaluation Team).

Finding 18: In Türkiye, collective efforts to collaborate and harmonize with national actors during the early stages of the response had limitations and failed to accommodate existing national/local response capacity. Moreover, challenges in meeting the government's expectations of the UN's contribution hampered efforts to engage with them on the role of IASC members in future emergencies.

Strength of evidence
Strong

147. **The Turkish government and IASC members made efforts to collaborate and coordinate; however, there was limited information sharing on concrete aspects of the response in the initial phase of the response, compounded by the lack of an established agreement on the role of international actors in the disaster response.** In the first few weeks of the response, the Turkish government appointed ambassadors from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MFA) on a rotating basis to lead on partnerships with IASC members, which was a new approach. They served as conduits between the IASC members and local authorities in key hubs, which helped streamline coordination and communication at the sub-national level. IASC members highlighted that this arrangement helped to prevent duplication of efforts and helped optimize the use of resources. Initially, this model was planned for three months but, since it was found to be useful, it was extended to six months. IASC members provided weekly updates on their response to the government at national level from February 16 to May 16, 2023, and government interviewees noted that this was very useful for them.

148. There were other initiatives between IASC members and government entities, for example, UN agencies provided local-level training to ministerial bodies. They also supported the government with the delivery or resumption of services, for example, a Provincial Directorate for Education worked directly with UNICEF on education services, and child and family support (see Section 2.9 for further details on IASC member support to the government's response efforts). IASC members that had a long-standing partnership with the Turkish government were better positioned to support the government's effort because "*They had the comparative advantage of being present at scale and having existing relationships with the Türkiye government, beyond municipalities to the regional and national structures"* (Türkiye IASC member).

149. Despite these efforts, there were limits to the level of information sharing and partnership. For example, since the government led the distribution of aid, including essential commodities provided by UN agencies (see Section 2.9), the UN agencies had to wait for approval and direction from the government before delivering assistance. There were sometimes delays in receiving government approval that slowed down distributions and created logistical bottlenecks, with vital aid left stored in warehouses. To overcome this challenge, some IASC members took proactive steps to navigate the situation and strengthen their partnerships with the government. For instance, IOM advocated for a more collaborative approach by providing the commodities and coordinating with AFAD and other bodies to manage the distribution process. This solution proved successful and led other IASC members to seek guidance on implementing similar strategies to improve the distribution process.

150. As described under Finding 15 in Section 2.5, government participation in the HCT-established coordination mechanism was limited. MFA representatives attended coordination meetings with the HCT, but while their presence was appreciated, there was also concern that their role appeared to be more as observers than active participants. This may have been due to the fact that the MFA-appointed Ambassadors were not disaster management specialists and did not have an operational role in the government's response, compounded by language barriers (please see more details under Finding 15). This made it difficult for international humanitarian actors to gather information from them regarding the national response plan, the areas where national capacities were overwhelmed, and where international support would be most welcome. IASC interviews highlighted that the response failed to accommodate existing national and local response capacities, leading the government to continue with its own coordination mechanisms and direct engagement with individual IASC members.

151. An important factor contributing to this sense of two responses was the lack of a pre-existing agreement on the potential role of IASC members in disaster response (as noted in Section 2.1). By contrast, a humanitarian actor like the IFRC had a much better working relationship with national government agencies, primarily due to the strength of the pre-existing relationship between AFAD and the TRC. The lack of clarity on the UN's role was a challenge in terms of ensuring that its response adapted to the national disaster response plan and that it could demonstrate its added value to the government.

> "They didn't exchange views on potential gaps to be filled in L4 disasters. They should have done this beforehand. They didn't have the foresight for this. That's why the UN was pushed into the position to fill gaps as they arose. Without more strategic planning, this didn't work well. The UN did things from their own perspective without thinking about how this will be perceived in the country." *(Türkiye IASC member)*

152. **IASC members faced challenges in managing the Turkish government's expectations of the level of their contribution to the response.** The government had specific expectations regarding the mobilization of funding through the Flash Appeal and the delivery of a certain level of assistance. As described in Section 2.4, these expectations were partly based on the initial assumption that the government would receive funds directly from the Flash Appeal. This misunderstanding caused a significant setback in the partnership-building process and, from the government's perspective, the UN resources remained insufficient to meet the overwhelming needs in some of the most affected areas, particularly one year after the earthquake.

Finding 19: The expansion of IASC member partnerships with NGOs was slow in both Türkiye and Syria, partly due to the time required for due diligence. In Türkiye, the delay was further compounded by Turkish NGOs initially prioritizing their own earthquake response efforts. In Syria, the earthquakes' impact on SNGO capacity was an additional factor.

Strength of evidence
Moderate

153. **New IASC member partnerships with Turkish NGOs were established late and took time, partly because the NGOs were focused on USAR operations and partly due to a lack of inclusion in the new HCT coordination structure. Nevertheless, UN agencies were able to provide valuable training and capacity-strengthening to Turkish NGOs.** Turkish NGO engagement with the UN system was initially limited, as many were focused on USAR efforts to save lives. In addition, UNDAC's role and mandate, operating in support of the government following its request for international assistance, meant there were early limitations on the extent to which engagement with NGOs and civil society organizations (CSO) could take place, as the government maintained primary oversight of these interactions (e.g., regarding the role of national and international NGOs, registration processes, etc.). Engagement increased as sectors were established under the HCT coordination structure, and later, under the ABC structure, Turkish NGO partners were further integrated, with some taking on co-chairing roles in various sectors. However, UN processes for establishing new partnerships were often slow and time-consuming, meaning that some partnerships for delivering humanitarian assistance were not formalized until as late as October 2023. As outlined under Finding 15 in Section 2.5, language barriers also posed challenges. While some NGOs participated in coordination meetings, these were initially conducted entirely in English, limiting broader NGO participation. Agencies with pre-existing partnerships, particularly under the 3RP, were able to leverage these for the earthquake response.[160] For example, United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA), present in Türkiye since 2015, brought its partners together to take action quickly and strengthen their relationships through the response.

154. **Despite these challenges, IASC members took steps to support and strengthen the capacities of Turkish NGOs.** This included providing training and resources on MHPSS as well as protection, with Turkish NGO therapists able to attend UN-led trainings on psychosocial support,

[160] See also UNICEF (2025) Evaluation of the UNICEF L3 Response to the Earthquake in Türkiye.

child protection issues, and strategies for engaging with public institutions. Also, UNFPA conducted specific capacity-building activities to enhance their participation of women's organizations in the humanitarian response. Smaller Turkish NGOs that were new to humanitarian response were not familiar with the humanitarian principles, so UN agencies sought to raise their awareness and equip their staff to deliver principled humanitarian assistance. These efforts extended to offering refreshers for larger and more experienced national and international NGOs. The training helped to build consistency in NGO understanding of humanitarian principles.

155. **In Syria, due diligence requirements and the impact of the earthquakes on SNGO capacity determined the length of time taken to establish new partnerships.** As noted under Finding 3 in Section 2.2, the earthquakes had a significant impact on the capacities of SNGOs as they lost staff, homes, and family members. As funding for the earthquake response increased, so did pressure on SNGOs, in NGCA particularly, to expand their programs, including through new partnerships, because they were the major channel for delivery on the ground. However, they struggled with lengthy due diligence procedures for the new partnerships, particularly with UN agencies. In Latakia, the limited presence of IASC members prior to the earthquake meant that it took them time to understand the roles and capacities of SNGOs working on the ground, while it took SNGOs time to understand the international humanitarian architecture, which also delayed the establishment of new partnerships. SNGOs with LTAs and INGOs were able to access funding and begin operations quickly, and some INGOs were also able to speed up partnership processes by using emergency procurement procedures, while still completing compliance checks and vetting procedures. However, SNGOs were still subjected to a fragmented vetting process, and the NWS NGO Forum had discussed establishing a platform to share information from due diligence processes to minimize the burden on SNGOs.

156. Smaller SNGOs found it challenging that due diligence criteria were applied regardless of the size of an NGO. Larger organizations with established resources and capacity could meet complex administrative and proposal writing requirements whereas smaller NGOs with strong community networks lacked the resources and technical expertise to compete effectively. This had implications for the coverage of the humanitarian response because smaller NGOs potentially had the ability to operate in hard-to-reach areas due to their community links.

Finding 20: In Syria, despite the rhetoric around the localization agenda, power imbalances between SNGOs and IASC members and compliance requirements meant that SNGOs perceived their relationships with international agencies as contractual rather than collaborative partnerships.

Strength of evidence
Moderate

157. **In NGCA, SNGOs struggled with fulfilling compliance requirements while simultaneously trying to deliver the earthquake response (although INGOs were more flexible with their requirements than UN agencies). They felt that the level of scrutiny did not embody a spirit of equitable partnership.** The imperative to deliver assistance on the ground despite their reduced capacity in the immediate aftermath of the earthquakes meant that SNGOs struggled to meet compliance requirements (such as providing quality Monitoring, Evaluation, and Learning (MEAL) reporting and data collection), in both NGCA and GCA. One challenge specific to SCHF partners was the funding ceiling that is applied based on the assessed level of risk of an NGO. This left many NGOs unable to access further funding once they hit their ceiling for existing projects.[161] By contrast, some INGOs were flexible with their reporting requirements, allowing SNGOs to send reports through platforms such as WhatsApp and even delaying report deadlines in the first and second months of the response. This enabled SNGOs to focus on implementation rather than compliance bureaucracy.

[161] The ceiling can apply to a single project and/or to the total number of projects that an NGO is implementing at a given time. See OCHA (2022) Country-based Pooled Funds: Global Guidelines

158. **Reliance on international humanitarian actors for funding inevitably meant a power imbalance in the relationships. However, IASC members have been taking steps to strengthen the role of SNGOs in humanitarian response in NGCA.** In spite of international commitments to increase humanitarian funding to national/local NGOs since the Grand Bargain agreed nine years ago, levels of direct funding remain extremely low (with CBPFs as one major source of direct funding). Most SNGOs remained heavily reliant on UN agencies and INGOs for funding for the earthquake response, even in NGCA where they were almost the sole delivery channel due to the lack of international access prior to the earthquakes. The resulting power imbalance underlined to them the lack of implementation of commitments and guidance on localization, including the IASC guidance on localization and COVID-19, which called for partnerships based on the principle of equality and more flexible funding agreements.[162] Smaller SNGOs were particularly vocal in expressing their frustration.

159. For SNGOs, one unexpected consequence of the earthquakes was competition with INGOs for staff. INGOs scaled up their own activities and staffing due to increased funding for the earthquake response (which reversed the decline in funding outlined in Section 2.4) and inadvertently took staff away from SNGOs because they were able to pay competitive salaries, leaving resource gaps for the SNGOs. For SNGOs, this was another indication of the imbalance in resources between international and national actors.

2.7 Assisting the most vulnerable groups

160. This section focuses on EQ 8 and starts by exploring the extent to which IASC members tailored their efforts to address the needs of vulnerable groups, including the challenges faced and effective approaches used. Additionally, it examines the use of data disaggregation to tailor assistance to vulnerable groups, as well as the PSEA and protection mechanisms implemented during the response.

Summary of findings: Assisting the most vulnerable groups

Across the three contexts, insufficient funding, program adaptation challenges, and a lack of agreed criteria to identify vulnerable groups meant IASC members struggled to meet the needs of older people and PwD. Aid workers perceived the mainstreaming of disability and inclusion into the response to have been much less successful than efforts to integrate gender-sensitive approaches. The establishment of Gender Advisers and working groups and the enhancing of cluster coordination mechanisms all contributed to advancing more tailored approaches and gender-sensitivity across the three contexts.

In **Türkiye,** the Flash Appeal highlighted the specific needs of women and girls, though it lacked a nuanced assessment of men and boys. Later in the response, a Gender Advisor deployed by UN Women to the RC/HC office engaged with cluster coordination groups to support the systematic integration of gender into planning processes. Working with the government also presented challenges in the acceptance of gender-focused language and the extent to which the needs of vulnerable groups could be collected and openly discussed. The inconsistency in protection approaches also caused IASC members to struggle to deliver PSEA.

In **GCA,** cluster coordination groups, especially in WASH and protection, made deliberate efforts to integrate a gender-sensitive approach during planning, though resistance from local authorities hindered the prioritization of this. The initial response in GCA was also hampered by inadequate data on vulnerable groups due to government information restrictions, though IASC advocacy enabled improved data disaggregation. As in Türkiye, working with the GoS limited the extent to which the needs of vulnerable groups could be collected and openly discussed. PSEA efforts were hampered by the government-centered context, a lack of trust

[162] IASC (2020) Localisation and the COVID-19 Response: Interim Guidance, IFRC and UNICEF in collaboration with IASC Results Group 1 on Operational Response Sub-group on Localisation.

between local authorities and international organizations, and a lack of a robust inter-agency mechanism on PSEA.

In **NGCA**, a pre-existing GenCAP adviser and the Women's Advisory Group (WAG) were key in integrating gender considerations. Initial access and data limitations hindered response efforts, though improvements in tailored planning resulted in increased access, volunteer group involvement, and inter-cluster coordination. Local political dynamics presented obstacles to fully embedding gender-sensitive approaches. However, pre-existing mechanisms for PSEA in NGCA were helpful and were significantly strengthened by community reporting.

Finding 21: IASC members struggled to meet adequately the needs of older people and PwD across the three contexts due to insufficient funding, program adaptation challenges, and a lack of agreed criteria for identifying vulnerable groups. Despite these significant obstacles, they took commendable steps to implement an equitable and gender-sensitive approach.

Strength of evidence
Strong

161. **The aid worker survey, along with interviews and FGDs, revealed that the inter-agency response struggled to mainstream inclusion and disability and to address the needs of the elderly and PwD across the three contexts.** According to the aid worker survey, the mainstreaming of disability and inclusion into the response was perceived as less successful compared to other aspects such as gender, PSEA, and protection. For instance, in Türkiye, 80% of respondents rated gender mainstreaming as good or very good, whereas only 64% felt the same about disability and inclusion mainstreaming (see Figure 12 for a full breakdown). This is consistent with FGDs with affected communities and the survey, where respondents further indicated that the response was less effective in meeting the needs of the elderly (42%) and PwD (44%) compared to those of women and girls (59%).

There were some challenges, especially for the elderly and people with special needs, as

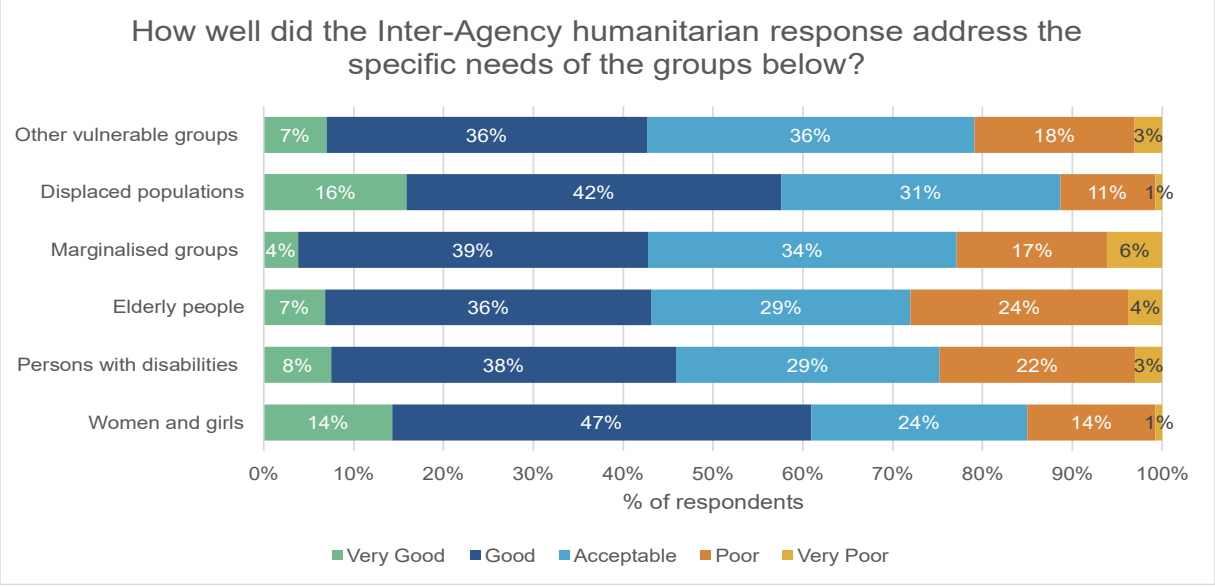


Figure 11 Aid worker survey: In your opinion, how well did the inter-agency humanitarian response address the following specific needs?

they were selected to receive aid by the organizations, but the aid wasn't handed over to their relatives. It was very difficult for them to collect the aid, and the distribution centers were often far from them." *(Türkiye FGD participant)*

> "As a person with disabilities, there were major challenges for me in the absence of proper transportation, and poor infrastructure, it was difficult for me to reach aid distribution points. I did not have the physical ability to wait in long queues for food or tents. Even when money was distributed, I did not have the ability to go to the markets to buy what I and my family needed. I relied a lot on my younger brother to help me, but he was not always there, which prevented me from receiving aid many times." *(NGCA FGD participant)*

> "We, the elderly, suffered from bad treatment by everyone, when we went to stand in line to receive aid, young people, children and adolescents would crowd us and take our turn, and the whole day would be wasted waiting for a share. We, the elderly, should be taken care of and identified by an organization or association." *(GCA FGD participant)*

162. When asked about the obstacles to addressing these specific needs, aid workers primarily cited insufficient funding (81%), challenges in program adaptation (39%), and lack of agreed criteria for vulnerability identification (36%). IASC interviewees across the three contexts further explained that the lack of funding greatly limited the targeting of vulnerable groups, specifically noting that, despite creating extensive guidance, they struggled to implement it due to constrained resources.

> "The focus on women and girls is always taken into consideration in the different responses; however, other groups are often overlooked and the projects and activities are not always taking them into consideration." *(Türkiye IASC member)*

> "Lack of resources were the main constraint into putting specialized services for elderly and PwD in place. For other marginalized groups such as LGBTQ+, local social norms prevented more specific attention." *(GCA IASC Member)*

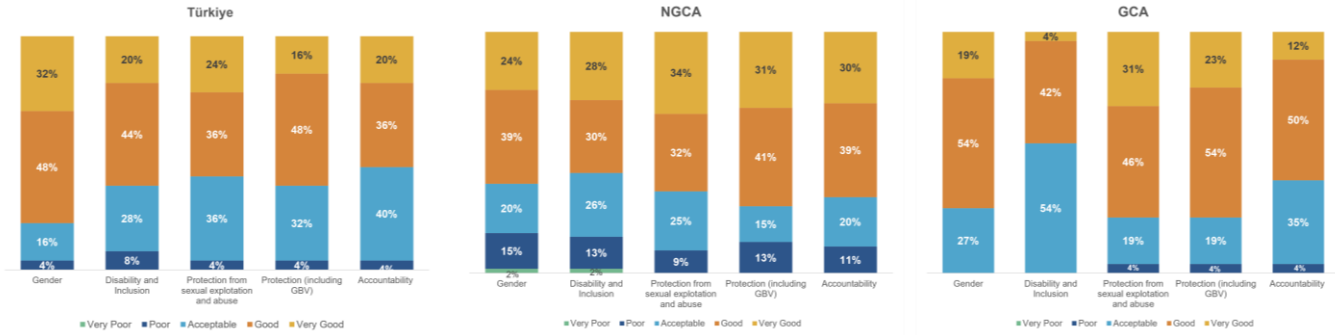


Figure 12 Aid Worker Survey: In your opinion, how well did your organization mainstream the following key issues in its earthquake response?

163. Interviewees with IASC members across the contexts also noted that, especially in the early response, they lacked the tools and frameworks to identify the most vulnerable groups and to adapt interventions to their specific needs, leaving critical gaps in addressing these groups' unique vulnerabilities. In GCA, for example, the Protection Cluster aimed to support the elderly and PwD with psychosocial programs that considered family reunification; however, activities were very limited due to the lack of agreed criteria for vulnerability identification (see more on needs assessment and data disaggregation on Section 2.3 and Finding 22 below).

> People with disabilities and the elderly faced significant difficulties in receiving aid, especially in the first week after the earthquake. There were no facilities to meet their needs. Many of them couldn't reach the distribution points due to the lack of transportation or accessible facilities, making them rely on others to bring them aid, and that aid came very late. This primarily affected people who were staying in homes; those in camps received aid like everyone else." (*NGCA FGD)*

164. **Across the three contexts, IASC members made commendable efforts to integrate gender-sensitive approaches at coordination and planning levels, including establishing a Gender Adviser in Türkiye, Gender Standby Capacity Project (GenCap) adviser in NGCA, and specific working groups, and enhancing cluster coordination mechanisms.** In Türkiye, the Flash Appeal notably highlighted the specific needs of women and girls, though it lacked a nuanced assessment of vulnerability and risk for men and boys. At the coordination level, a Gender Adviser deployed by UN Women to the RC/HC office played a central role in ensuring that gender considerations were integrated into needs assessments and planning frameworks. This work was complemented by the Women Empowerment for Humanitarian Action (WEHA) group, which the Gender Adviser chaired. WEHA brought together gender focal points from all clusters and working groups, serving as a key platform to advance gender mainstreaming through technical guidance and the development of tools such as gender checklists. Interviews with IASC members, however, emphasized the need to address the unique needs of women and girls, particularly in areas such as protection and health. Challenges were observed regarding the acceptance of gender-focused language by national authorities in planning and coordination contexts, which limited the ability of coordination groups to articulate tailored gender-sensitive strategies.

165. In NGCA, similar to Türkiye, a GenCAP adviser and the WAG, which had been established during the protracted crisis response, played a key role in integrating gender considerations across cluster coordination mechanisms and working groups. The WAG sought to address the gender imbalance in leadership and ensure that women's voices were included in high-level discussions. This group, supported by UN Women training, consisted of seven members who brought diverse perspectives to the table, including representation from women with disabilities. This initiative was viewed as a crucial addition to the planning architecture, emphasizing the importance of gender-sensitive analysis and advocacy. However, local political dynamics presented obstacles to fully embedding gender-sensitive approaches. The need for access and coordination with local authorities often constrained the extent to which gender-focused priorities could be adopted. Despite these challenges, the coordinated efforts by GenCAP and the WAG reflected a commitment to ensuring that gender considerations were prioritized in the strategic planning and response frameworks.

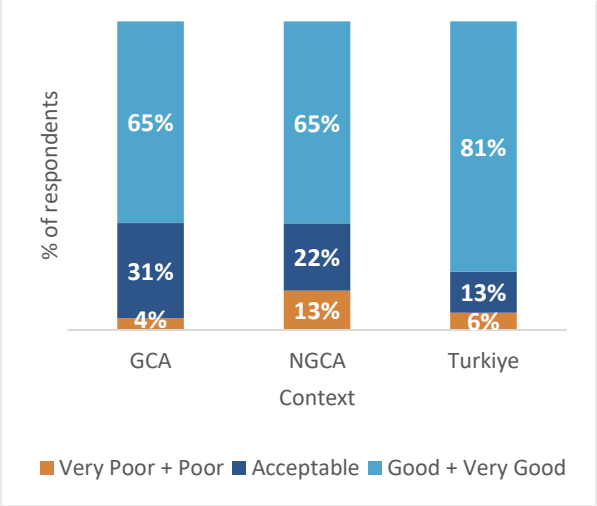
166. In GCA the cluster coordination groups, particularly in the WASH and protection sectors, also made deliberate efforts to integrate a gender-sensitive approach during planning. In the WASH sector, for example, safety considerations for women and girls influenced the design of facilities to ensure protection and privacy. Similarly, the Protection Cluster expanded its child protection program to address family reunification and psychosocial support, recognizing the unique vulnerabilities faced by women and children. Despite these efforts, local authorities posed challenges to embedding gender-sensitive approaches. Resistance to discussing and articulating gender-specific vulnerabilities hampered organizations' efforts to prioritize gender-sensitive approaches. Nevertheless, the efforts made demonstrated a commitment to addressing gendered needs even amidst political constraints.

Finding 22: Early in the response, IASC members faced significant challenges in collecting disaggregated data, which hindered tailored planning for vulnerable groups across all three contexts. These challenges included time constraints, limited data quality, coordination issues, and access limitations. However, as the response progressed, IASC members improved disaggregated data through better coordination and advocacy.

Strength of evidence
Strong

167. **In Türkiye, initial data limitations due to time constraints and lack of coordination hindered immediate support to vulnerable groups, but significant improvements were achieved over time through IASC advocacy and leveraging pre-existing mechanisms.** As noted in Section 2.3, the early phase of the emergency presented significant challenges in collecting comprehensive needs data. Cross-cutting themes such as age, gender, disability, and the specific vulnerabilities of migrants, refugees, and irregular populations were not systematically captured in assessments or reports. This was largely due to the urgency of the response, the scale of the disaster, and limited coordination between IASC members and local authorities. Over time, the quality of disaggregated data improved considerably. IASC members built on and expanded pre-existing collective reporting systems and coordination efforts, eventually establishing inter-agency needs assessment mechanisms under the ABC framework in August 2023. IOM's mobility tracking and DTM tools also provided essential real-time data that informed shelter responses and support for IDPs. The 3RP Information Management Working Group (IMWG) also provided frameworks and guidance on data collection and the categorization of vulnerable groups, drawing on the 3RP's prior experience with data disaggregation. OCHA played a key role in strengthening data collection through guidance, advocacy with local actors, and efforts to raise awareness and build capacity at various levels. Building on the work of the Ageing and Disability Inclusion Task Team (ADITT),[163] which had been established prior to the earthquake, along with the efforts of the WEHA[164], along with the efforts of the Assessment & Analysis cell, IASC members improved data collection and analysis, enabling more tailored responses to vulnerable groups. Key stakeholders in interviews noted that gender and age disaggregation especially became very advanced later in the response. The Aid Survey supported this, with 81% of respondents in Türkiye stating that IASC members' use of disaggregated data for planning and implementation was good or very good (see Figure 13). In Türkiye, ADITT and the Protection Sector undertook efforts to improve data disaggregation for PwD through consultations, technical guidance, and training on safe identification and referral. These initiatives helped raise awareness and encouraged more inclusive programming. However, key informants highlighted that capturing disability data still needed improvement (see Finding 21).

Figure 13 Aid Worker Survey: In your view, how well did your organization base its planning and implementation on needs data disaggregated by sex, age and disability?



> In the first phase of the response (first 21 days) data was scarce. We established an Assessment & Analysis cell with the support of partner organizations to support a broader Assessment Working Group. These started producing early (provincial) analyses, largely relying on secondary data and initial field observations" *(Türkiye IASC member).*
>
> Disaggregating data during the emergency response was challenging. However, we managed to standardize our data collection tools and conducted rapid training for our data collection team. We also utilized electronic data collection to minimize errors and performed regular checks through the MEAL team" *(Türkiye local NGO).*

168. **Initial access and data limitations on vulnerable groups in NGCA hindered effective response efforts, but significant improvements in data disaggregation and tailored planning were achieved over time through increased access, volunteer group involvement, and inter-cluster coordination.** The initial response in NGCA faced significant challenges due to access and

[163] See further reports and resources of the ADITT at https://response.reliefweb.int/turkiye/disability-inclusion-task-team
[164] See further reports and resources of the WEHA at https://response.reliefweb.int/turkiye/weha

limited data on vulnerable groups, which hindered agencies' ability to plan and implement responses that effectively addressed these groups' specific needs. As the response evolved and borders re-opened, UN agencies gained increased access and opportunities for better data collection. The Aid Survey indicated that 65% of respondents in NGCA rated IASC members' use of disaggregated data for planning and implementation as good or very good (see Figure 13), reinforcing the message that data use improved later in the response. Several interviews with IASC members noted that cross-cluster coordination and the activation of AAP working groups enabled IASC members to enhance the gender-specificity of household-level data. The gradual expansion of protection programming also contributed to better data disaggregation, supporting mainstreaming efforts. The reopening of the borders also allowed UN agencies to expand monitoring capacities and gather more detailed tracking of needs and resources across the affected areas. These improvements facilitated better data disaggregation across gender, age, and disability metrics, enhancing the ability to address the specific needs of vulnerable groups more effectively.

169. **In GCA, the initial response was hindered by inadequate data on vulnerable groups due to government restrictions on information and reliance on outdated data, but efforts to enhance data disaggregation gradually improved through IASC advocacy.** The document review and several interviews with IASC members noted that initially the response relied heavily on outdated and secondary data in GCA, and data collection and quality were constrained by the government's control over information, which posed further challenges. According to interviewees, over time data quality improved thanks to the advocacy efforts and better cluster coordination. The Aid Survey indicated that 65% of respondents in GCA rated the use of disaggregated data for planning and implementation as good or very good (see Figure 12), reinforcing the improvement in data quality. However, IASC members noted that it remained challenging to coordinate with the government and to collect disability data due to the absence of pre-earthquake metrics and coordinated mechanism for data collection.

> Often there is no time for counting, we make therefore estimates based on earlier gender breakdowns." *(GCA IASC member)*

170. **Challenges with working with the government in both Türkiye and GCA limited the extent to which the needs of vulnerable groups could be collected and openly discussed.** In particular, challenges in conducting gender-sensitive needs assessments, such as those related to GBV and LGBTQ+ issues, were significant. The government and local authorities were reluctant to address these topics openly, making it difficult to discuss them within coordination mechanisms. However, the earthquake provided a unique opportunity to start advocating for needs assessment of the most vulnerable groups with the government and local authorities and, later in the response, there were a few examples of GBV assessments in both Türkiye and GCA.

Finding 23: Pre-existing mechanisms for PSEA in NGCA were helpful for the response and were strengthened considerably to improve community reporting. IASC members in Türkiye and GCA struggled to deliver effective PSEA due to the lack of robust inter-agency mechanisms and inconsistency in protection approaches across IASC members.

Strength of evidence
Moderate

171. **In Türkiye, a new collective strategy and training initiatives with local NGOs strengthened PSEA outreach following the earthquake. However, insufficient funding, lack of collective follow-up mechanisms to ensure timely investigations, and ongoing challenges in integrating protection and gender-sensitive language limited the overall effectiveness of PSEA efforts and accountability mechanisms.** In Türkiye, prior to the earthquake, a UN PSEA Task Team was already in place. During the earthquake response, PSEA activities expanded significantly. In April 2023, a dedicated PSEA strategy was developed with a focus on incorporating new aid providers and training them on PSEA standards. Building on previous efforts, IASC members collaborated with local NGOs to reach new actors and deliver training sessions, equipping them with practical tools for prevention, reporting, and accountability. PSEA hotlines were also

established, with cluster coordinators actively promoting their use and integrating them into broader accountability frameworks to enhance reporting and response mechanisms within the humanitarian effort.

172. Despite these efforts, several challenges persisted. The existing PSEA Task Team had already faced significant issues prior to the earthquake, particularly around the integration of protection and gender-sensitive language in appeals, guidance, and community communications—issues that were exacerbated during the emergency response. These communication gaps hindered effective engagement between IASC members, national actors, and communities. Additionally, many smaller local NGOs struggled to meet international PSEA standards, underscoring the need for ongoing training and support. The role of the PSEA Adviser within the RCO also remained limited due to short-term, non-continuous deployment, insufficient funding, and a lack of mechanisms and coordination to ensure timely investigations and the provision of technical support. These factors significantly constrained the overall effectiveness of PSEA efforts and limited the ability to respond to allegations and uphold accountability.

173. According to IASC members, protection mainstreaming efforts were more coordinated and effective than PSEA efforts in Türkiye, but differences emerged in the emphasis placed by individual UN agencies. Some agencies prioritized accountability mechanisms and PSEA integration, while others focused on immediate protection needs within their cluster activities. Challenges included varying levels of commitment to cross-cutting protection issues and the uneven engagement of local actors.

174. **In NGCA, PSEA efforts were notably advanced and responsive due to pre-existing, well-funded mechanisms established during the protracted crisis. Moreover, despite funding challenges the Protection Cluster developed protection profiling to make sure vulnerable groups were considered and recognized in the response.** These complex PSEA mechanisms allowed for a more structured and effective response, ensuring that measures to prevent and address sexual exploitation and abuse were swiftly implemented and monitored. Established in 2017, the PSEA network benefited through the years from substantial funding and a structured team of around eight people. During the response, although the PSEA team lacked investigative power, they diligently followed up with organizations to ensure timely investigations and offered technical support when requested. The network's ability to maintain coordination, capacity building, community mobilization, and mainstreaming efforts, even in the face of staff displacement and psychological strain, underscores the robustness and articulation of the system. The PSEA hotline continued to operate through the response, providing a vital reporting mechanism and the proactive distribution of awareness materials, and the prior integration of PSEA into the humanitarian architecture further highlighted the network's comprehensive and well-structured approach to addressing sexual exploitation and abuse. IASC members also highlighted some challenges in interviews, including PSEA network's funding uncertainty, local NGOs struggling to operationalize PSEA frameworks due to limited resources and difficulties in community engagement following the earthquake. However, community engagement improved with the establishment of the LCOP later in the response (see Section 2.9).

175. In terms of protection mainstreaming in NGCA, document review and interviews with IASC members highlighted that, before the disaster, protection was not funded and often deprioritized in favor of immediate lifesaving activities, leaving critical gaps in addressing protection risks such as legal documentation, family reunification, and psychosocial support.[165] The Protection Cluster conducted a rapid assessment post-earthquake that revealed the widespread displacement and increased vulnerability, particularly for women, children, and PwD.[166] Post-earthquake, the Protection Cluster brought these gaps into view, especially highlighting the lack of pre-disaster planning and coordination frameworks, as the cluster had not been very active just prior to the

[165] Protection Cluster, North-West Syria (2023). Rapid Protection Assessment Initial Findings; Protection Cluster, North-West Syria. 2023. Protection Analysis Update.
[166] Protection Cluster, North-West Syria (2023). Rapid Protection Assessment Initial Findings; Protection Cluster, North-West Syria. 2023. Protection Analysis Update.

earthquakes. This contributed to an insufficiently coordinated case management system, which in turn hampered responses to family separation and GBV.[167] Interviewees also noted that UN agencies differed in their ability to engage with local NGOs and authorities. Some agencies integrated protection within sectoral interventions effectively, while others faced difficulties due to limited capacity-building efforts and lack of harmonized guidelines.

176. Despite the challenges, the Flash Appeal contained a strategic objective on protection, recognizing its importance, and the Protection Cluster has been taking significant positive steps to address gaps. A Centrality of Protection (COP) strategy was endorsed in May 2024, funding advocacy has been ongoing (see Section 2.4) and the cluster has been advocating and drafting protection profiling to ensure the assistance of the most vulnerable groups. This profiling approach has been ensuring that all at-risk groups, including PwD, women, and girls, are considered, recognizing the diverse and complex protection-related issues they face: see Good Practice Box 5.

Good Practice Box 5: NGCA risk profiling mechanism

In NGCA the Protection Cluster decided to implement a comprehensive checklist of protection profiles because, after many years of the protracted crisis, everyone in NGCA became vulnerable, making traditional vulnerability criteria insufficient. The cluster utilized an effective risk profiling mechanism to inform decisions and prioritization of assistance. Using a strategic approach, the Protection Cluster sought to provide assistance at the household level. Prioritizing individuals and assisting them was difficult when the whole community faced the same threats, such as shelling or recruitment by armed groups.

The Protection Cluster developed a checklist of protection profiles. These profiles included: single-headed households, female/male-headed households, age, and gendered risk profiling for both males and females, ensuring unique risks of both were captured: homelessness, displacement, mental health illness, and protection risks like torture, detention, bombing, and shelling. Each risk profile was assigned a weight and used a formula to count the occurrence (eg., how many times a household was displaced), and a percentage was created at the end of the checklist. Households scoring over 80% are classified as severe risk, followed by moderate risk (50–79%) and low risk (below 50%). Profiling helped them allocate finite resource allocations based on those experiencing severe protection risk.

177. **In GCA, PSEA efforts were significantly limited due to a government-centered context and lack of strong PSEA mechanisms. Protection was also challenging due to inconsistency in approach across IASC members.** In GCA, despite an established PSEA framework, several challenges hindered its effective implementation. One significant issue was the limited trust between local authorities and international organizations. This lack of trust created a barrier to collaboration and hindered the smooth operation of PSEA mechanisms (see more in Section 2.9). Additionally, the centralized governance model in place restricted the autonomy of NGOs, making it difficult for them to implement PSEA mechanisms effectively. There were allegations of misconduct against some actors providing aid in GCA. For example, Female FGD participants in Aleppo referred to beatings at a mosque, theft, harassment, and sexual assaults. In particular, FGD participants referred to misconduct by the Iraqi Popular Mobilization Forces, an Iraqi militia group backed by Iran. A few male FGD participants described the way in which they provided assistance as humiliating. While international aid agencies have no control over these actors who are outside the traditional humanitarian system, these findings demonstrate the need for strengthening protection mechanisms, particularly for PSEA. In response, IASC members delivered capacity-building workshops to increase awareness on PSEA, emphasizing survivor-centered approaches and the effective management of complaint mechanisms. These workshops aimed to equip local NGOs with the necessary skills and knowledge to handle PSEA issues sensitively and appropriately, ensuring that survivors received the support they needed.

> “I witnessed a lot of humiliation, abuse, and harassment of women by members of the Iraqi Popular Mobilization Forces in the distribution lines. They forced women to kiss their hands

[167] North-West Syria Protection Cluster. 2023. Earthquake Response Overview; Protection Cluster. 2023. Main Protection Risks and Impacts Prioritized Activities – Phase 2.

> in exchange for taking rations, and some of them sexually exploited the needy." *(GCA FGD participant)*
>
> "The Iraqi Popular Mobilization Forces were a high-level humiliation, as they began to talk about women's honor and expose them to sexual exploitation in exchange for the services provided. There was a stereotype toward women who were receiving aid from the Iraqi Popular Mobilization Forces, as members of the Iraqi army chose women to marry from among the beneficiaries, and there was an insult to the honor of Syrian women." *(GCA FGD participant)*

178. The implementation of protection mainstreaming across various clusters also showed considerable variation due to differences in agency capacity and expertise. Interviews with IASC members noted that while some agencies made clear and concerted efforts to address protection issues within the shelter and NFI clusters, others struggled to adapt mainstreaming strategies to the centralized governance context. This inconsistency led to uneven protection outcomes across different sectors. Agencies that succeeded in integrating protection considerations into their work often did so by tailoring their approaches to the specific needs and contexts of the affected populations. However, the overall effectiveness of protection mainstreaming was undermined by the lack of a cohesive and coordinated approach across all clusters.

2.8 Engagement with affected people

179. This section addressed EQ 9 by examining the extent to which IASC members consulted the affected communities, especially the most vulnerable groups, during the response. It also explores whether the affected communities were aware of, and utilized, complaints and feedback mechanisms (CFM), and the follow-up from IASC members. The section also addresses EQ 10 by presenting community perceptions about the assistance that they received.

Summary of findings: Engagement with affected people

Across the **three contexts**, the evaluation found that consultations with affected populations by IASC members were often limited during the response. This was largely due to the absence of a clear and comprehensive engagement strategy, as well as weak coordination in communication efforts. As a result, engagement was rarely inclusive or accessible to all groups, which contributed to the limited engagement of vulnerable populations.

In **Türkiye**, affected communities frequently perceived engagement efforts as one-way communication, focused mainly on information dissemination. Additionally, limited coordination between local authorities and IASC members hindered meaningful interaction with communities and created confusion around communication roles and responsibilities. Concerns were also raised regarding the role of local leaders—particularly Mukhtars—in community engagement, with reports of both over- and under-reporting of needs, especially for vulnerable groups. Moreover, awareness and use of feedback mechanisms were limited, partly due to the coexistence of multiple, uncoordinated systems, which created confusion. Affected communities also expressed particular concern about the lack of follow-up. They also noted that perceptions of trust, credibility, transparency, and accountability varied significantly depending on the actors involved.

In both **NGCA** and **GCA**, there were serious allegations of aid diversion, with affected people reporting that assistance was sometimes misappropriated or distributed based on personal relationships. In NGCA, IASC members made efforts to address these issues—most notably through the implementation of a rumor tracker, which was considered the most effective initiative in this regard. Despite this, communities in both areas expressed dissatisfaction with communication delays and persistent concerns around accountability. While there were some efforts by individual agencies in GCA, IASC members in NGCA established more structured and coordinated AAP mechanisms to respond to community concerns.

In **NGCA** the establishment of a LCOP also led to more inclusive and participatory engagement. Communities reported increased awareness of complaint and feedback mechanisms, thanks to more accessible communication methods such as flyers, WhatsApp links, face-to-face interactions, and direct outreach by aid staff. Nevertheless, actual use of these mechanisms remained limited, largely due to concerns about follow-up and accessibility barriers for vulnerable groups. In GCA, while some consultations did take place, they were primarily conducted through local community leaders, with no clear strategy for engaging the broader population. Community members also indicated a lack of awareness of available feedback mechanisms and noted the absence of a clearly defined system for lodging complaints.

Finding 24: Consultations with affected people by IASC members across the three contexts were limited during the response due to the absence of a clear and comprehensive engagement strategy and poor communication coordination. However, in NGCA, the post-earthquake establishment of inclusive engagement mechanisms improved community consultations considerably.

Strength of evidence
Strong

180. **In Türkiye, communities perceived engagement as one-way communication, lacking comprehensive consultation. Poor coordination between local authorities and IASC members hindered meaningful interaction with affected communities, resulting in confusion over communication responsibilities**. The Communicating With Disaster-Affected Communities (CDAC) Network analysis of the communication and engagement ecosystem in earthquake-affected areas of Türkiye (2023) highlighted that, prior to the earthquake, humanitarian communication and engagement focused mainly on Syrian refugees and vulnerable host community members. After the earthquake, engagement efforts expanded to include both Syrian refugees and Turkish citizens, utilizing channels such as hotlines, social media, face-to-face interactions, women's safe spaces, and mobile teams to communicate with affected people.[168] However, FGD participants interviewed by the ET flagged that these engagements were often perceived as a one-way communication for information sharing only, and the majority of FGD participants claimed that communities had not been consulted and engaged throughout the response. They noted that there was no clear engagement strategy for aid distribution and there was a lack of communication on why the broader community was not consulted. FGD participants said:

> Community members were not consulted about what aid was most suitable or necessary. *(Türkiye FGD participant)*"
>
> "We never understood how aid was determined, especially during the container period. Instead of those who needed help, other people took precedence. Aid was distributed randomly." *(Türkiye FGD participant)*

181. The fragmented communication coordination between local authorities and IASC members hindered meaningful interaction with affected communities, resulting in confusion over communication responsibilities. Beyond the initial lack of internet and phone connectivity, KIIs with IASC members also highlighted challenges in meaningfully engaging with affected communities due to their limited ground presence in the vast affected areas and a lack of communication coordination between IASC members and local authorities. This led to confusion over whether IASC members or local authorities were responsible for consulting and communicating with the communities. As the response progressed in Türkiye, some limited consultations with the communities took place, especially through partners with long-standing community relationships. These partners collaborated

[168] CDAC Network (2023). An analysis of the communication and engagement ecosystem in earthquake-affected Türkiye. Available at : https://www.cdacnetwork.org/resources/an-analysis-of-the-communication-and-engagement-ecosystem-in-earthquake-affected-turkiye

with the sectors and the WEHA group to reinforce communications and consultations around aid distribution and specific referral mechanisms such as the GBV referral mechanism

182. **In NGCA, community engagement was limited initially, with no clear consultations on aid distribution or selection criteria. However, IASC members have since taken positive steps by setting up a LCOP, which led to inclusive engagement.** The Syria Multi-Sectoral Needs Assessment (MSNA) 2024 data indicated that 64% of interviewed community members reported that no one in their family had been consulted about the type of assistance available.[169] FGD participants interviewed by the ET also reinforced this claim, highlighting that community members had not been consulted in the aftermath of the earthquake. They also noted there was no clear engagement and/or communication around aid distribution and how people were selected. FGD participants said:

> “The community was not given the opportunity to participate in setting the criteria for selecting the beneficiaries of the aid. The organizations would come and distribute the aid based on their own criteria that were not always clear to us. People were not consulted on how the distribution was done.” *(NGCA FGD participant)*
>
> “Aid agencies did not consult the community adequately, especially the most vulnerable groups. Much of the assistance that was provided did not meet people’s real needs. For example, some families needed medical care, while food was distributed instead. There needed to be better consultation to determine priorities.” *(NGCA FGD participant)*
>
> “All the organizations set the selection criteria, and the community did not participate in setting any criteria for selecting the people. Each organization has its own policy and specific criteria.” *(NGCA FGD participant)*

183. A LCOP was established later in the response to enhance consultation with affected populations and integrate them into decision-making processes. This community of practice consists of more than 200 volunteer groups that engage and consult with the community on aid distribution. This initiative has led to several successful consultations, demonstrating the value of community engagement and empowering the community to be part of the solution, see Good Practice Box 6 below.

[169] IRC (2024). Syria Multi-Sector Needs Assessment. Available at: https://reliefweb.int/report/syrian-arab-republic/syria-multi-sector-needs-assessment-2024

Good Practice Box 6: Local community of practice in NGCA

In the aftermath of the earthquake in Syria, the OCHA office established a LCOP in NGCA to enhance consultation with affected populations, integrating them into the decision-making process. This initiative has led to several successful consultations, demonstrating the value of community engagement and empowering the community to play an active role in the response, setting a precedent for future humanitarian initiatives.

Key consultations and achievements

Mapping of volunteer groups: the LCOP conducted a comprehensive mapping of nearly 200 volunteer groups to identify crucial groups to work with in the community. This helped in identifying the areas of operation and focus sectors; 25 of these groups were found to be working with PwD, highlighting an important focus area.

Validation sessions: two pilot validation sessions were conducted with volunteer groups to assess ICCG priorities. The sessions were designed to transition participants from a passive role into active contributors, focusing on solutions rather than problems.

In the first validation session, ICCG priorities were discussed and validated with the community; participants provided input on which groups should be prioritized in aid distribution in case funding decreased. This led to a re-evaluation of the most vulnerable groups, with child-headed households identified as the most vulnerable by the community, followed by disability-headed and women-headed households.

Another successful consultation was the shelter validation session. In response to numerous complaints about the heat in shelters using sandwich panels, the LCOP facilitated a validation workshop with the shelter cluster where community representatives, including elderly, women, and PwD, were invited to participate. Engineers explained shelter designs and participants flagged key challenges and gaps, such as the lack of bulletproof walls in sandwich panels, which made the shelters unsafe during clashes. The group's input surprisingly revealed that the preferred shelter type was concrete, a model that the cluster had not prioritized, considering it cheap and not suitable in comparison to sandwich panels or hybrid shelters, but that was in fact preferred by the community due to due to its perceived durability and safety. This consultation led to a shift in the cluster's approach, emphasizing the importance of validating shelter options with the affected communities before decisions are made.

184. **In GCA, FGD participants noted that while there had been some engagement and consultations with the community, these were primarily conducted with local community leaders without a clear strategy to engage the wider community.** The community perceived the engagement as somewhat one-sided, with IASC members consulting community leaders but not providing follow-up communication regarding aid distribution, selection criteria, and next steps. Participants also expressed that they felt IASC members engaged with them more actively when the media were present. This caused disappointment among FGD participants, as they had to publicly voice their needs but felt there was no follow-up afterwards.

> "We did an interview on TV and they asked us about our demands, and there was no response at all, and I lost my entire family and all that remained was my granddaughter." *(GCA FGD participant)*
>
> "During the first period after the earthquake and for a month, we were just media material for broadcast on TV channels." *(GCA FGD participant)*
>
> "During the first period in the shelter centers, most of the associations came to us and registered our names and took our information and then left without returning*."(GCA FGD participant)*

185. **Moreover, across all three contexts, KIIs and FGD participants noted that engagement and consultations with affected populations were rarely comprehensive and accessible to all,**

leading to the exclusion of vulnerable groups. The majority of the FGD participants noted that this was particularly true for the elderly, PwD, and minority groups, who were often not included in the engagement. For example, few minority languages other than Turkish and Arabic were used during community engagement. However, there were some observed efforts in GCA to make engagement more accessible to all, with some organizations providing videos in sign language for deaf children, for example.

> "People with disabilities or the elderly who did not have means of communication were not able to benefit from engagement and complaints mechanisms. These mechanisms were not designed to be inclusive, and the focus was on technical means such as phones or the internet. This made it difficult for the most vulnerable groups to submit complaints or feedback." *(NGCA FGD participants)*

Finding 25: In Türkiye and Syria, inadequate community engagement practices led to perceptions of favoritism, corruption, and aid diversion, resulting in social tensions and mistrust in humanitarian assistance among affected populations. In NGCA, after gaining access post-earthquake, IASC members implemented measures such as risk management to address these challenges, with the rumor tracker being the most successful measure.

Strength of evidence
Strong

186. **In Türkiye, concerns about local leaders' roles in community engagement, along with social and community tensions, highlighted the need for better community engagement and awareness-raising, particularly on the humanitarian principles.** Mukhtars, neighborhood chiefs, and municipality leaders played a central role in collecting data, reporting, and engaging the community during data collection. However, FGD participants were particularly concerned about Mukhtars over- or under-reporting needs, especially of vulnerable groups. This led to allegations of corruption and favoritism, as some community members felt that aid distribution was influenced by personal biases or political affiliations.

> Aid was sometimes distributed badly. A phone call was made to someone known to the Mukhtar, a truck was sent there, but it was not clear where the aid was going. Wherever I went, aid was distributed to ones who did not need."(*FGD participants in Türkiye)*

187. By instating (or reinstating) the humanitarian nature of the response, a System-Wide Scale-Up Activation is expected to strengthen a principled humanitarian approach (although this is not a formal function of the activation).[170] However, the efforts made by IASC members to provide needs-based, impartial assistance were not always clear to communities. Despite efforts by the Turkish government and aid agencies to address the needs of both Turkish citizens and Syrian refugees affected by the earthquakes, KIIs and FGDs revealed perceptions of bias among different communities and aid providers. According to Turkish citizens, the international community provided assistance to Syrian refugees while they were overlooked, and this led to tensions. An FGD participant expressed their frustration, saying, "*The aid given to Syrian refugees is constant and uninterrupted; why aren't we receiving this aid? We are also displaced people. In our own country, we have become more disadvantaged than refugees. We are earthquake survivors and are also in need.*" The international community supported host communities in various ways. In Türkiye, the government made the decision to accommodate some Turkish nationals in pre-existing Presidency of Migration Management (PMM) camps, originally established for Syrian refugees. UN actors supported this as part of broader coordination efforts. However, tensions emerged as some Turkish citizens perceived that the containers in these camps were better equipped than those provided by AFAD, contributing to negative perceptions of the UN and humanitarian actors.

[170] IAHE (2024) IASC System-Wide Scale-Up Mechanism. From protocol to reality: lessons for scaling up collective humanitarian responses.

188. Stakeholders interviewed noted that informal and formal shelters provided during the response were often segregated by nationality, potentially isolating Syrian refugees and exacerbating pre-existing divisions between communities. IASC interviewees also felt that Turkish nationals had been relocated to formal settlements more quickly than Syrian refugees and that the quality of shelter provided for them was of a much higher standard than that provided to earthquake-affected Syrian refugees. Key informants emphasized the lack of engagement with communities to communicate and advocate on the importance of the humanitarian principles at the field level, which could have helped to dispel misinformation, address community grievances, and reduce resentment between Turkish nationals and Syrian refugees.

189. **There were allegations of aid diversion in both NGCA and GCA, with affected communities alleging that aid was misappropriated or distributed on the basis of personal relationships. In NGCA, efforts were made by IASC members to address these issues, with the rumor tracker being the most successful measure implemented.** The ET could not verify specific allegations, particularly as it was not always clear whether the allegations were against local authorities or aid agencies. However, IASC members have been aware and concerned about aid-related allegations in Syria both before and during the earthquake response, as evidenced by the document review.[171] Moreover, interviews with IASC members highlighted the need for strengthening awareness and community engagement along with monitoring and complaints mechanisms.

> “There were constant complaints about corruption and manipulation in the distribution of aid. We heard about people exploiting their positions to obtain aid for themselves and their relatives, while there were families in dire need waiting in vain. This type of corruption greatly affected the credibility of donors, and made people lose confidence in the aid distribution system,” *(NGCA FGD participant)*

190. FGD participants felt that the perception of aid misappropriation led to a sense of injustice among aid recipients and negatively affected the community’s sense of solidarity. Similarly, in the GCA, there were numerous allegations of corruption and aid diversion, particularly by those in positions of authority. The GoS’s role in the provision of assistance was a long-standing challenge prior to the earthquakes, with a report referring to the “GOS’s track record of obstructing, politicizing, and diverting aid.”[172]

> “The people responsible for distribution in schools as well as the employees were distributing as they pleased, and people benefited according to personal relationships and connections. There were some who received more aid than others.” *(GCA FGD participant)*

191. The sheer number of these allegations highlights the challenges humanitarian actors face in community engagement, monitoring, and complaints reporting mechanisms. Misinformation spread over social media, and even the families of UN staff members believed that aid would be stolen and those in need would not receive it. Interviews with IASC members revealed that despite efforts by the UN to counter this narrative, it persisted, making some earthquake-affected areas unsafe for humanitarian actors. Since the earthquakes, IASC members working in NGCA had put in place risk management measures to identify and track cases of fraud and aid diversion (as described below in Good Practice Box 7). The DRHC has recognized the critical need for robust risk management measures for the cross-border operation since his arrival, in part to defend the credibility of the humanitarian operation against politically motivated accusations of aid diversion at the Security Council. As a result, he ensured that the Risk Management Unit (RMU) continued to be financed through the SCHF when there was a gap in donor funding. Currently hosted by UNFPA, the RMU has helped to establish a common understanding of the key risks of aid diversion. These include fake and multiple identities, beneficiary selection criteria, and procurement fraud. The RMU tracks

[171] iMMAP (2023). Post-earthquake perspective NWS – September; iMMAP (2023). Post-earthquake perspective NWS – June; SIRF (2024). The Syria humanitarian response – a crossroads; Save the Children (2022). Education interrupted.
[172] iMMAP (2023) Post-Earthquake Perspective: Challenges and Strategies for Humanitarian Aid in Northwest Syria, Ad Hoc Series Part 2, September 17, 2023.

reports of aid diversion through mechanisms such as the rumor tracker, the Safeline hotline, and reports of interference in the implementation of humanitarian activities by OCHA's Access Unit. However, it does not have investigative powers. The RMU classifies the information it receives into rumors, allegations, and facts and issues quarterly reporting on the clusters affected, type of alleged perpetrator, etc. The AAP adviser in particular has worked hard to raise awareness of Safeline and to develop a referral mechanism for allegations/complaints that the AAP Task Force oversees. This follows up on whether a cluster or aid agency head has responded to the allegation or complaint in a timely way.

Good Practice Box 7: RMU mechanisms to detect and identify aid diversion in the NGCA were strengthened and used systematically after the earthquake

Rumor tracker

The rumor tracker was specifically created in February 2023 as a result of the earthquake response and is managed by the AAP adviser: "The objective of the tracker was to actively listen to communities and find instances of false and misleading information and respond to them appropriately."[173] The rumor tracker helped UN agencies develop communications to counter misinformation and negative messaging on social media. It also helped them to adapt their programming to respond to community concerns, such as winterization assistance or cuts to food distributions. For example, by developing clear messaging to counter the community's anger at the UN for failing to provide USAR, teams saw an immediate reduction in negative messaging on social media.

Between January 2023 and the last quarter of 2024, the RMU recorded 333 incidents related to aid diversion, with over 70% of these incidents originating from the rumor tracker. Of the reported cases, 35% were related to thefts and seizures, 28% involved interference with the implementation of humanitarian activities, and 10% were due to favoritism. Notably, the incidents most frequently affected multiple clusters (32%), with the Emergency Response cluster (18%) being notably impacted due to cash-based programs.

Safeline

Originally established in 2019 as an AAP mechanism under the PSEA program (see Good Practice Box 8 for more AAP mechanisms), Safeline expanded its scope after the earthquake to address a broad range of issues, including aid diversion, corruption, and fraud. Humanitarian actors used it to identify specific cases of misconduct or corruption or dissatisfaction with services and then addressed these via clusters or individual agencies. Analysis of Safeline data also identified that the elderly and PwD were less likely to use it, so the AAP Task Force identified ways of ensuring that these vulnerable groups made increased use of this feedback mechanism.

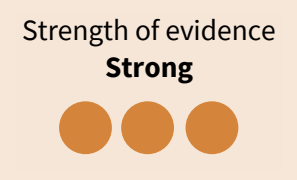
From its inception to date, Safeline has recorded a total of 21 incidents. Of these, 71% of the alleged perpetrators were aid workers, followed by 24% local authorities, including camp managers, and 5% de facto authorities.[174] The most common form of alleged misconduct involves requests for a portion of humanitarian assistance, including demands for money in exchange for placing individuals on beneficiary lists. The majority of these allegations, about 62%, came from the Early Recovery cluster, largely due to the cash-based programs it implements. This underscores the particular vulnerability of cash programs to abuse, as individuals may attempt to exploit these resources for personal gain.

192. In NGCA and GCA, additional measures like post-distribution onitoring (PDM)[175] were implemented alongside the rumor tracker to ensure aid reached communities in need and to identify aid diversion. However, the effectiveness of these measures varied across agencies and contexts due to concerns about the accuracy of data reflecting ground realities. All cluster members, including UN agencies and both local and international partners, are required to conduct PDM during both

[173] Rumour Tracker, Microsoft Power BI, September 2024.
[174] Safeline, Microsoft Power BI, September 2024.
[175] Post-Distribution Monitoring (PDM) plays a critical role in humanitarian operations by assessing whether aid is reaching intended beneficiaries and addressing any potential diversion of resources.

emergencies and regular activities.[176] Some agencies such as the UNFPA have successfully conducted field missions into the NGCA to verify that supplies are reaching those in need. These missions included secondary and tertiary visits to assess the impact of distributions and ensure that corrective actions could be taken if necessary. This process allowed the agency to report back to donors with more accurate and comprehensive data. However, not all agencies experienced the same level of success in conducting effective PDM. WHO, for instance, shared concerns that their Third Party Monitoring (TPM) was not always accurate in reflecting the realities on the ground, particularly in their work with other agencies in the NGCA. In contrast, the shelter cluster in the GCA developed specific PDM tools to assess the effectiveness of shelter rehabilitation efforts. These tools allowed partners to identify any damage or gaps in the shelters provided, and ensure that the appropriate assistance was provided. To ensure that their responses were in line with community needs, partners were required to hold FGDs with beneficiaries, which helped incorporate direct feedback from affected populations into the response.

Finding 26: Community usage of complaint feedback mechanisms remained low across all three contexts due to a lack of trust in follow-ups, fear of harassment when filing complaints, and mistrust in data usage. This was despite awareness-raising activities by IASC members, particularly in NGCA.



193. **In Türkiye, there was limited awareness and use of feedback mechanisms due to the existence of multiple systems causing confusion, lack of clear communication, and fears of aid being cut off**. According to CDAC (2023), there were 28 organizations with active communicating lines with the communities during the earthquake. These organizations primarily shared information through hotlines and WhatsApp, while also utilizing community centers, household visits, participatory assessments, and outreach by community leaders and volunteers.[177] They collected feedback via phone lines, staff complaints, email, feedback boxes, committees, and other mechanisms. However, when conducting FGDs with the community in Türkiye, the ET found that not many individuals were aware of the feedback mechanisms. Only four out of eight FGDs had a least one participant that knew about feedback mechanisms who then became aware of these mechanisms when directly engaging with local partners during aid distribution. For example, the cash assistance hotline was well known to those using the service within refugee camps due to the team's strong presence, which predated the earthquake. However, it was less recognized outside the camps, where the service was just being expanded, leading to limited use during the earthquake response. Moreover, for community members who were aware of these feedback mechanisms, the existence of multiple systems caused confusion, making it difficult to navigate the process and determine which channel to use for specific concerns. This often resulted in challenges in effectively utilizing the mechanisms, with frequent referrals and back-and-forth communication between the community and organizations before reaching the appropriate point of contact. For example, in some camps where both refugees and Turkish nationals lived, two separate hotlines were set up to contact the same staff: one for refugees and one for Turkish nationals. This duplication created significant confusion, as community members were uncertain which hotline to use for their feedback. Additionally, FGD participants highlighted that even when they were aware of feedback mechanisms, most refrained from using them due to fears of aid being cut off, uncertainty about where their complaint would go, or concerns about how it would be handled by the organization (see Finding 27 for more on the lack of accountability from IASC members regarding follow-ups).

194. **In NGCA, communities reported increased awareness of complaint feedback mechanisms due to effective communication methods like flyers, direct mentions by aid staff, WhatsApp links, and face-to-face contact. However, their use remained limited because of a lack of trust in organizations to follow up and accessibility issues among vulnerable groups**.

[176] Cross-Border Operation from Türkiye to North-West Syria Aid Diversion Risk Matrix, August 2023.
[177] CDAC Network (2023). An analysis of the communication and engagement ecosystem in earthquake-affected Türkiye. Available at : https://www.cdacnetwork.org/resources/an-analysis-of-the-communication-and-engagement-ecosystem-in-earthquake-affected-turkiye

According to the 2023 HNO for Syria, only 15% of households across Syria were aware of functioning complaint feedback mechanisms before the earthquakes.[178] However, this awareness increased to 44% in northern Syria in 2023 according to the 2024 MSNA.[179] FGD participants reinforced this point, with the majority of participants interviewed by the ET being aware of feedback mechanisms. They claimed they were informed through flyers showing hotline numbers, aid staff directly mentioning them and WhatsApp links sent to them. Community members mentioned face-to-face contact and WhatsApp interactions as the best means for communication and engagement. The 2023 Syria HNO also noted that channels like social media, often used by responders, were perceived as one-way sources of information rather than engaging platforms for providing feedback and support. However, even if the majority of FGD participants became aware of feedback mechanisms during the response, their use remained very limited due to a lack of trust in organizations to follow up (see paragraph below and Finding 27 for more on the lack of accountability from IASC members on follow-ups). Moreover, the Syria 2024 MSNA highlighted low use and awareness among vulnerable groups, noting that feedback mechanisms were not used, for example by adolescent girls, who are less likely to have access to mobile phones.[180] FGD participants agreed with this, mentioning:

> “The elderly and people who did not have phones or other means of communication did not have the ability to easily submit complaints. Many of them were not even aware of the existence of these mechanisms due to the lack of communication from aid agencies. The complaints mechanisms were often based on phones or the internet, which was not available to many people, especially in poor or devastated areas.” *(NGCA FGD participant)*

195. **In GCA, FGD participants flagged that they were not aware of feedback mechanisms, there was no clear mechanism for complaints, and they did not know how to reach organizations**. During FGDs with the community in GCA, the ET found that awareness of feedback mechanisms was limited. In three out of six FGDs, participants mentioned that at least one person in the group was aware of these mechanisms, with a total of five individuals across all discussions reporting awareness. Those who were aware noted that they had attempted to call the hotlines but they either did not receive a response or experienced a lack of follow-up from the organization.

> We could not find out how to communicate with associations.” *(GCA FGD participant)*
>
> “There is an organization that gave us a complaints number, but no one responded when I tried to contact them.” *(GCA FGD participant)*

196. **FGD respondents across all three contexts expressed fear of filing complaints due to incidents and allegations of harassment when seeking feedback and mistrust in how their data and feedback were used.** Many FGD participants recounted personal experiences or knew of others who had faced intimidation or retaliation while filing a complaint. Additionally, there was a pervasive mistrust in how their data and feedback were handled, with some fearing that their information could be misused or shared without their consent. These concerns directly impacted the use of follow-up mechanisms across all contexts, with FGD participants stating:

> Not everyone can benefit from the complaint and feedback mechanisms because they believe their complaints will be ignored. Especially with the presence of well-known bad actors in the organizations, there is no accountability for them despite repeatedly reporting them to the police.” *(Türkiye FGD participant)*
>
> I did not use any complaints mechanism because I did not trust them, as I knew them. Favoritism and corruption were very evident in the distribution of aid, and we had no trust

[178] OCHA (2022). Syrian Arab Republic: 2023 Humanitarian Needs Overview. Available at: https://reliefweb.int/report/syrian-arab-republic/syrian-arab-republic-2023-humanitarian-needs-overview-december-2022-enar

[179] IRC (2024). Syria Multi-Sector Needs Assessment. Available at: https://reliefweb.int/report/syrian-arab-republic/syria-multi-sector-needs-assessment-2024

[180] Ibid.

that complaints would reach the right people or be taken seriously. Many people complained and nothing changed, which increased the lack of trust." *(NGCA FGD participant)*

The cadres must be chosen appropriately in terms of ethics and behavior first and they must be prepared and trained second, instead of the current cadres, most of whom are acquaintances and relatives, so we suffer in dealing with them." *(GCA FGD participant)*

Finding 27: The lack of response to complaints and feedback led to discontent among affected people about the accountability and trustworthiness of IASC members across both Türkiye and Syria. However, the post-earthquake establishment of well-structured collective mechanisms in NGCA have improved accountability and trust levels.

Strength of evidence
Moderate

197. **Across the three contexts, most agencies did not have systems in place to close the feedback loop during the initial phase of the response.** Complaint mechanisms like WhatsApp lacked a database system for follow-up, and interviews noted that physical feedback boxes were not regularly checked. For example, the use of WhatsApp often resulted in employees receiving numerous messages and feedback but not systematically recording and following up on these in all three contexts. However later in the response, organizations solved this issue by sharing a link on WhatsApp that would link to a form; however, the majority of the FGD participants still claimed that they did not receive follow-ups from their complaints.

> A response message was sent to me via WhatsApp, which is an automated message sent to respond to everyone in the same format that the complaint will be investigated, and no action has been taken." *(NGCA FGD participant)*

> "I filed a complaint via the phone number and WhatsApp, and no response was sent to me due to the refusal to receive the service or investigate the complaint." *(NGCA FGD participant*)

198. **In Türkiye, affected communities raised significant concerns about the lack of follow-ups, especially among vulnerable groups. They also noted that perceptions of trust, credibility, transparency, and accountability varied depending on the specific actor involved.** FGD participants expressed widespread dissatisfaction with delays and the overall lack of timely responses. They reported that phone numbers provided by IASC members and local authorities were often unanswered, or the response times were so slow that trust in these mechanisms diminished. This frustration was even more acute among vulnerable groups. The CDAC Report (2023) highlighted that women were particularly dissatisfied with delays and lack of responses to their questions, while PwD also remained unsatisfied with existing communication channels and follow-ups. Interviews with IASC members noted that there were no collective efforts to solve the lack of follow-ups, with limited and varied efforts from the individual IASC members. FGDs participants noted:

> The complaint mechanism is inadequate; when you file a complaint, you don't receive a response." *(Türkiye FGD participant)*

> "Not everyone can benefit from the complaint mechanism, as the number is only given during registration for services or upon receiving them, and it is sent electronically, so they cannot access it." *(Türkiye FGD participant)*

199. Affected communities in Türkiye also highlighted that trust, credibility, transparency, and accountability issues were perceived differently depending on the actor involved. According to the CDAC Report (2023), Turkish men and youth generally trusted authorities and were willing to share their feedback directly with them. In contrast, Turkish women and Syrian refugees preferred to engage with NGOs, with refugees particularly placing their trust in humanitarian organizations and community advocates to address their concerns.

200. **Communities in NGCA and GCA were overall dissatisfied with the delays in communication and concerned about accountability. While there were no collective efforts in GCA, with only limited efforts from individual agencies, IASC members in NGCA set up well-structured AAP mechanisms to address these concerns**. In NGCA and GCA, the CDAC analysis of the communication and engagement ecosystem in earthquake-affected NWS (2023) highlighted that communities expressed dissatisfaction with the considerable delays between communicating queries and concerns and receiving responses. They called for more two-way communication channels—engagement and interaction as opposed to passive reception of messages—especially concerning sensitive issues. FGD participants reinforced this point, particularly noting the major delays and not receiving a reply:

> “There is an organization that gave us a complaints number, but no one responded when I tried to contact them.” *(GCA FGD participant)*
>
> I didn’t receive any response from the relief agencies regarding the complaints I submitted. I expected at least some follow-up, but nothing happened.” *(NGCA FGD participant)*
>
> I submitted a complaint about my family not receiving aid, but I didn’t receive any response from the relief agency. It was very frustrating as it felt like complaints weren’t taken seriously or handled effectively.” *(NGCA FGD participant)*

201. In NGCA, IASC members have made notable efforts to address the lack of accountability and trust, setting up well-structured AAP mechanisms, particularly in the wake of the challenges faced during the earthquake response. To improve transparency and ensure communities’ concerns are addressed, collective AAP mechanisms have been established, which include a rumor tracker and a dedicated hotline for PSEA and general complaints. These systems have been designed to not only collect and log concerns but also to categorize and assess the risk level of the reported rumors, complaints, and allegations. This categorization helps to prioritize issues that require immediate attention and ensures a more efficient follow-up with the community. Once reported, these concerns are forwarded to the relevant cluster, ensuring that communities receive a timely response. This approach represents a good practice example that has been implemented since the earthquake response, and it illustrates a proactive attempt to build trust and enhance accountability within the system (see Good Practice Box 8).

Good Practice Box 8: Enhancing accountability of IASC members and building trust through engagement and AAP mechanisms in NGCA

The collective AAP mechanisms implemented in NGCA have been addressing community concerns around feedback follow-ups and bolstered the accountability and trustworthiness of IASC members. These mechanisms include:

Rumor tracker: This tool categorizes and rates the risk of rumors circulating within the community. By identifying this promptly, the tracker can help maintain trust and transparency.

Safeline: Originally established in 2019, this tool was used after the earthquake to address issues related to aid diversion such as fraud and corruption. Humanitarian actors used it to identify such cases of communities’ dissatisfaction with services that were then addressed by clusters or individual agencies**.** (For more on Safeline and the rumor tracker, see Good Practice Box 7).

Hotline for PSEA and complaints: A dedicated hotline for PSEA and other complaints ensures that sensitive issues are reported and handled with the care and confidentiality. FGDs participants have flagged that this hotline is accessible to community members and can provide a safe channel for raising concerns.

System for categorizing and rating risks: Complaints and allegations are systematically categorized and rated based on their severity and urgency. This structured approach ensures that high-risk issues can be prioritized and addressed promptly.

Cluster reporting: The categorized complaints and allegations are then reported to the relevant cluster for follow-up. This ensures that the appropriate sectoral experts are involved in resolving the issues, enhancing the effectiveness of the response.

Community feedback loop: This two-way communication aims to build trust and directly involve volunteers groups from the community to discuss complaints feedback.

Training and capacity building: Staff involved in handling complaints and feedback are trained regularly on ethical behavior, confidentiality, and effective communication. This ensures that they are well equipped to manage sensitive issues and maintain the trust of the community.

2.9 Delivering results for affected communities

202. Based on the strategic objectives of the Türkiye and Syria Flash Appeals, the reconstructed ToC for this evaluation identified two results on which this evaluation would focus. The first was that affected communities received timely, lifesaving, and multi-sectoral assistance. The second was that affected communities were able to access basic/essential services. The ET designed the community engagement methodology to obtain the views of affected communities against these objectives.[181] This section also draws on evidence from documents and KIIs.

203. This section begins with an overview of the cash and in-kind assistance as well as services provided to affected communities (addressing EQ 10 and EQ 13.1). It goes on to present the views of affected communities on the timeliness and relevance of the assistance they received as well as whether this had positive outcomes for them (EQ 13.2). The section concludes by outlining data limitations that made it challenging to identify collective results beyond the output level.

Summary of findings: Delivering results for affected communities

Across all three contexts, communities welcomed cash assistance as the most relevant and flexible form of assistance. Of in-kind assistance, food and shelter were priorities due to winter conditions. Generally, food, water, and cash assistance arrived sooner than other forms of lifesaving assistance like shelter, which often forced communities to seek alternatives in the immediate aftermath of the earthquakes. The lack of a requirement for collective reporting against Flash Appeals meant that data on the collective response, even at output level, was limited and did not reflect the type, scale, timing, and quality of assistance that communities received.

With **Türkiye** having well-established cash delivery mechanisms, the use of cash assistance was a key component of the humanitarian response. Collaboration with the TRC, IFRC, and government ministries enabled IASC members to reach large numbers of affected people. The government and humanitarian actors prioritized meeting the immediate basic needs of communities, with IASC members and their partners supporting both in-kind assistance and service provision. In-kind donations from some governments and the public were well intentioned but their quality and usability varied.

In **Syria**, community respondents reported that the aid received was relevant and had a positive impact on their lives. The 12-year protracted crisis in the country made it difficult for humanitarian actors to distinguish between existing and new humanitarian needs, including in reporting. Consolidated reporting at WoS level made it challenging to assess the timeliness and effectiveness of the distinct responses in NGCA and GCA.

In **NGCA**, some NGOs were able to deliver cash programs immediately, but others were hampered by the severe impact of the disaster on the Turkish postal service. Local actors played a vital role in providing lifesaving assistance in the immediate aftermath of the

[181] IASC (2024) Inter-Agency Humanitarian Evaluation (IAHE) of the Response to the Earthquakes in Türkiye and Syria: Inception Report. Available at: https://interagencystandingcommittee.org/inter-agency-humaniatrian-evaluations-steering-group/inter-agency-humanitarian-evaluation-iahe-collective-response-earthquakes-turkiyesyria

earthquakes. Access and challenges of transporting certain types of assistance into NGCA (particularly shelter) led to some delays. In **GCA**, humanitarian actors implemented cash programs and provided in-kind assistance where communities did not have access to functioning markets. Data protection was a significant challenge in GCA, due to GoS control over aid recipient lists. The GoS's attempt to control bilateral in-kind aid distribution despite its limited capacity also led to delays. This caused some food to spoil before it was distributed.

Finding 28: In Türkiye and Syria, pre-existing cash programs and market resilience facilitated successful cash and voucher programming during the earthquake response, which was valued by communities as a relevant and flexible form of assistance.

Strength of evidence
Strong

204. **Recognizing that Türkiye had well-established cash delivery mechanisms, including as part of the Syrian refugee response, the use of cash assistance was one of three key considerations to guide the humanitarian response**.[182] Among IASC members, WFP provided a significant cash response since it was already partnering with the TRC to address food needs in refugee camps (managed by the PMM).[183] They operated a joint scheme for e-vouchers, which were used exclusively in camp markets. However, the earthquakes destroyed camp markets and rendered automated teller machines (ATMs) inoperable, so WFP switched quickly to distributing in-kind food baskets, in coordination with PMM, until markets reopened after three weeks. WFP also partnered with the TRC and IFRC to provide multi-purpose cash (MPC) grants of $115 per household per month (reaching around 543,000 people). UNICEF implemented a cash program for earthquake-affected communities as well, using data from the Ministry of Family and Social Services (MoFSS) and AFAD to identify vulnerable households with children. It partnered with the TRC to use an SMS modality to distribute the cash, thereby avoiding challenges with the distribution and use of cards.

205. It proved difficult to coordinate the overall cash response in Türkiye initially because the scale of the disaster prompted an equally large-scale response, and many organizations established cash programs. There was an initial lack of data on who was already receiving cash assistance, and organizations also used different modalities, such as cash cards, vouchers and cash-for-work (for example, in the shelter sector). Some agencies distributed cash cards that recipients were unable to use because banks were not operating at first.

206. **The continued operation of markets and some financial services in NGCA made it both feasible and appropriate to deliver cash programs.** As described under Finding 2, markets were resilient even when the border crossing from Türkiye was closed by earthquake damage. Seven SNGOs had LTAs with financial service providers who were still operational, so they were able to deliver an MPC program in the first week, distributing $1.8mn to 13,000 people. In total, humanitarian actors distributed $18.3mn in cash and voucher assistance between February and May 2023 to more than 500,000 people.[184] Some NGOs implemented sector-specific cash and voucher programs. For example, Early Recovery cluster members undertook a cash-for-work program while shelter cluster members distributed vouchers for people to purchase materials to repair their homes. The use of vouchers rather than cash was common in NGCA, both as a way of maintaining a paper trail for accountability purposes and because of the lack of a banking system. Vouchers were particularly relevant after the earthquakes because of the infrastructure damage, which meant that ATMs were not operational even where they were installed.

[182] The other two considerations were to put people at the center of the response and to ensure that the response was as local as possible and as international as necessary. See OCHA (2023) Flash Appeal Türkiye: 2023 Earthquakes, February – May 2023.
[183] A dashboard reporting assistance provided by sector and agency on a monthly basis includes the provision of cash and voucher assistance by a variety of aid agencies (both under food security and livelihoods and as multi-purpose cash).
[184] OCHA (2023) Northwest Syria Earthquake: Humanitarian Response – People Targeted, Reach and Gap (February to May 2023).

207. **Although some NGOs were able to deliver cash assistance quickly, many were hampered by the severe impact of the earthquakes on the Turkish postal service (Posta ve Telgraf Teşkilatı or PTT), which was commonly used in NGCA.** PTT was not operational for several weeks, so NGOs had to find alternative mechanisms such as the Hawala system and by routing transfers through NES. There was also a delay because some new actors did not follow established protocols and SOPs in the initial response phase, and all NGOs were asked to pause and ensure a coordinated response. There were also coordination challenges because every sector used a different needs and assistance tracker, and the Cash Working Group (CWG) had no information manager to collate data on the cash assistance provided by different members and sectors. The CWG addressed this by collaborating with the food security and livelihoods cluster to use its tracker. One ongoing challenge with cash programming was the need to re-assess the value of cash grants because the minimum expenditure basket had been set some years ago and did not reflect the price inflation that had occurred. This was being addressed at the time of data collection.

208. **In GCA, humanitarian actors implemented MPC and emergency cash assistance programs where communities had access to functioning markets and provided in-kind lifesaving assistance, such as tents, kits, and food baskets in areas where markets were destroyed or inaccessible**. Among IASC members, UNICEF distributed emergency cash assistance 96 hours after the first earthquakes and supported 66,600 families (330,000 people) in earthquake-affected areas to address winterization needs.[185] Clusters coordinated conditional cash assistance, supporting households with rent or the construction of dignified shelters near their destroyed homes. This was important to affected populations because many people preferred to stay close to their communities rather than relocate to reception centers.

209. **Data protection was a significant challenge for humanitarian actors in GCA.** This was because of GoS control over aid recipient lists for cash programs (through SARC and the Operations Room in Aleppo) and the national decree requiring banks and financial service providers to share aid recipient details with the authorities prior to making payments.[186] International sanctions also restricted the transfer of funds and complicated effective delivery because, even when NGOs were able to receive funding in foreign currency, they could only access and distribute it in local currency, which was subject to rapid devaluation. Furthermore, the Operations Room in Aleppo determined that cash distributions for repairing earthquake-related damage would be guided by the extent of structural damage households sustained during the earthquake, with the Syria Engineering Syndicate surveying and categorizing households to determine their eligibility to receive assistance. IASC members had concerns about the decision-making process and FGD participants also described how some households used their own engineers to assess damage and then carried out restoration work with their own funds because they were afraid that the Public Safety Committee would simply order the demolition of their homes instead of helping to repair them.

210. **Cash programs were highly relevant for affected communities because they were able to use cash to address their most pressing needs.** In Türkiye, in particular, FGD participants emphasized cash assistance as the most appropriate form of aid for them but this was echoed in other contexts.

> “For me, it was the financial aid that made the biggest difference. When I lost my home, I had no way to support my family. But the cash aid that was distributed helped me secure basic needs such as fuel and food. Although it wasn’t enough to cover all our needs, it gave me the opportunity to look for temporary solutions to survive and get through the first difficult days.” *(FGD participant, NGCA)*

FGD participants gave other examples of needs that would not have been met through in-kind assistance such as rent payments and home repairs, transportation costs and baby milk (FGD participants in Türkiye, in particular, identified the lack of infant food as a gap in the assistance they

[185] UNICEF (2025) Evaluation Report: Evaluation of UNICEF’s L3 Response to the Earthquake in Syria: Final evaluation report

[186] See, for example, UNICEF (2023). Syria EQ AAR Summary Report.

received). In GCA, those who received cash assistance appreciated it because many had lost their sources of income.

Finding 29: In both Türkiye and Syria, the harsh winter conditions meant that food and shelter assistance were a priority for affected communities. While humanitarian actors and the government in Türkiye were able to address these needs for large numbers of people quickly, government restrictions delayed humanitarian actors in Syria. In Türkiye, ensuring the quality of in-kind donations was challenging, with some donations being unusable.

Strength of evidence
Strong

211. Annex 2 presents a timeline of the assistance that FGD participants across all three contexts reported receiving. This shows the variety of in-kind assistance received and that there were also variations in the timing of assistance, with some FGD participants across the three contexts receiving tents, blankets, and bedding, warm clothes and/or heating (in NGCA particularly) within a week or at least in less than a month. A few participants in Türkiye reported receiving tents in two to five months, while hygiene or dignity kits tended to be distributed later in the response.

212. **In Türkiye, humanitarian actors and the government prioritized meeting the immediate basic needs of affected populations with the provision of food and shelter assistance.** FGD participants described being cold and hungry in the immediate aftermath of the earthquakes, with some highlighting the struggle to feed their children. UN agencies, the TRC, and NGOs responded by distributing food packages and setting up mobile kitchens to provide hot meals, reaching millions of people.[187] Within the first two weeks, IASC members and their partners had distributed 3.35 million food packages along with kitchen sets and cooking equipment, as well as shelter items, blankets, and heaters to cope with the winter weather.[188] The Turkish government provided a broad spectrum of assistance to those affected by the earthquakes. This included a significant amount of shelter assistance, such as one million tents dispatched from the very beginning of the response and the establishment of 398 container cities with a variety of services such as schools, mobile kitchens, and psychosocial services.[189]

213. **IASC members in Türkiye were able to support basic service provision within the first month of the response and to support the government with the procurement of kits and shelter assistance.** These included medical services, protection services, education spaces and psychosocial support for children, in-kind shelter assistance (95% of which was distributed through AFAD), and hygiene items.[190] FGD participants (particularly female participants) highly valued the psychosocial support and specialized assistance for children and women that they received from UN agencies because these helped to address the long-term psychological and social needs of affected communities. UN agencies used the CERF RR grant that was released on February 7 to procure reproductive, maternity, and hygiene kits for distribution by different government entities and to fund the distribution of tents, blankets and electric heaters to Temporary Accommodation Centers (also through the Turkish government). By August 2023, IASC members and NGOs reported having assisted 5.4 million people in total.[191]

214. The logistics and emergency telecommunications sector (established on February 16, 2023) also provided vital support to humanitarian actors to overcome the challenges caused by

[187] OCHA (2023) Türkiye Earthquake: Humanitarian Needs and Response Overview, Interim Update, April 11, 2023; for the Turkish Red Crescent's response see: https://www.kizilay.org.tr/Haber/KurumsalHaberDetay/7637; see also the Food Security and Livelihood tab of the Türkiye Earthquake Response 2023 dashboard for details of food packages and provision of cooked meals through municipality/partner kitchens.
[188] OCHA (2023) Türkiye: 2023 Earthquakes Situation Report No. 4, As of February 23, 2023.
[189] Presidency of the Republic of Türkiye Directorate of Communications (2024) Disaster of the Century's First Anniversary: Reconstruction and Recovery Efforts (see pages 160–163 for details of shelter assistance specifically). Available at: https://www.iletisim.gov.tr/images/uploads/dosyalar/ASRIN_FELAKETININ_1_YILI_KITABI_EN.pdf
[190] OCHA (2023) Türkiye Earthquake: Humanitarian Needs and Response Overview, Interim Update, April 11, 2023
[191] OCHA (2023) Humanitarian Transition Overview: Türkiye Earthquake Response.

infrastructure damage.[192] Although mobile phone networks were affected in the immediate aftermath of the earthquakes (which FGD participants noted), Turkish network operators restored at least some connectivity very quickly.[193] However, gaps and needs remained, and the emergency communications sector (ETS), led by WFP, supported UNDAC teams at two coordination sites, in Hatay and Kahramanmaraş, troubleshooting connectivity issues and extending data access to humanitarian hubs. It also set up 20 charging stations in two temporary settlements in Hatay and Malatya for people to charge their mobile phones. In addition, the ETS supported the UN's security communications, by improving Ultra High Frequency (UHF) radio coverage (used as a backup in case mobile networks are disrupted) in Gaziantep, Hatay, Şanlıurfa, and Malatya, and training humanitarian workers on the use of security communications devices. As the logistics sector lead, WFP provided covered temporary common storage in Hatay, Malatya, and Adıyaman for its partners, facilitating the storage of a total of 3,519 m³ of cargo. It also made Mobile Storage Units available on loan to humanitarian organizations, on request and as available.

215. **Although governments, private individuals, and the private sector were well intentioned in donating in-kind assistance to Türkiye, its quality and usability were variable.** Due to the level of media attention to the impact of the earthquakes on Türkiye, the country received in-kind assistance from governments, the private sector, and individuals. In the immediate aftermath of the earthquakes, according to interviewees based in Gaziantep, the "*borders of Europe with Türkiye were blocked because so many people from Europe were sending assistance and there was a huge queue of trucks*" that also affected some IASC members who were trying to bring supplies into the country. Governments, in particular, flew in-kind donations into Gaziantep, and IOM facilitated customs clearance for these flights on behalf of other UN agencies, where this was needed. It had to screen the items because not all were suitable for distribution, for example food and medicines that had expired, old cast iron cookware, or tents that were only suitable for children to play. This was resource-intensive, leaving the agency "*trying to save lives and balance this with the donation of sub-standard relief items*." FGD participants also highlighted receiving inappropriate donations, including clothes like high-heeled shoes and swimsuits for children.

216. **In Syria, local actors played a vital role in providing basic lifesaving assistance at the start of the response. Challenges with transporting shelter assistance into NGCA led to delays, while in GCA the GoS's attempt to control the response, despite its limited capacity for emergency response, resulted in delays in the distribution of food and other aid.** As described under Finding 4 in Section 2.2, schools, mosques, local associations, and individual community members provided the basic food, water, shelter, and warmth that people needed in the first few days after the earthquakes. As humanitarian actors mobilized and gained access to affected communities, they provided food and emergency shelter, as well as WASH, health, and protection services in the first month.[194]

217. In NGCA, as already noted, the impact of the earthquakes closed the border crossing but OCHA advocated successfully with the Turkish government for staff to be deployed to reopen the Bab al-Hawa border crossing so that humanitarian actors could resume the transport of in-kind assistance, and the response scaled up quickly. However, one area that remained challenging in the provision of cross-border assistance was government restrictions on certain types of assistance that could be transported across the border in the early phase of the response. These included tents and sandwich panels for shelters, because the huge impact of the earthquakes created immense needs in Türkiye itself. Aid agencies tried to procure these within NGCA but the high demand and limited supply led to a sharp inflation of prices. As a result, data from FGDs show that participants consistently reported a delay in receiving tents and shelter assistance. Nevertheless, the shelter cluster reported that 134,625 people received emergency tents/temporary shelter by May 2023.[195]

[192] The assistance described in this paragraph is based on information from WFP and OCHA (2023) Türkiye Earthquake: Humanitarian Needs and Response Overview, Interim Update, April 11, 2023.
[193] OCHA (2023) Flash Appeal Türkiye: 2023 Earthquakes, February – May 2023.
[194] OCHA (2023) Earthquake Needs and Response Overview: Syrian Arab Republic, March 15, 2023.
[195] OCHA (2023) Northwest Syria Earthquake: Humanitarian Response – People Targeted, Reach and Gap (February – May 2023).

Affected communities valued both shelter and food assistance: "*The aid provided to us was a turning point in our lives after the earthquake. The new tents gave us the safe shelter we desperately needed. The distribution of food baskets helped provide enough food for all of us. The aid reduced the impact of the earthquake on us*."

218. In GCA, cluster-level reporting as of mid-April 2023 shows that the in-kind assistance and services from UN agencies and NGOs included almost 1.3 million cooked meals, support for over 500,000 mental health consultations and better access to water for over 200,000 people.[196] Communities in GCA also received assistance from a variety of sources, other than UN agencies and NGOs. Thirty-three Member States delivered in-kind assistance to GCA, including two plane-loads of winterized tents, shelter equipment, and heaters that landed in Damascus through the European Union Air Bridge for Syria.[197] The GoS took control of the distribution of bilateral in-kind contributions, leading to delays because the aid ended up being stored in warehouses (Findings 1 and 12 highlighted the GoS's capacity limitations). By the time it was distributed, some of the food had spoiled. FGD participants gave examples of receiving out-of-date food or food that had gone bad. According to one female FGD participant, "*The rice was rotten and damaged in the distributions after the earthquake period… Only during the first earthquake, the food was clean and suitable, but after this period, the aid was damaged and unfit for consumption*." In Lattakia, female FGD participants said that they were careful to check the expiry dates on what they received and to throw away items that had expired.

219. In addition, FGD participants in GCA mentioned receiving mattresses, blankets, and food aid from Red Crescent societies (from countries such as Lebanon and the United Arab Emirates) and food aid, blankets, foam mattresses, and clothes from the Iraqi Popular Mobilization Forces (see Finding 23 under Section 2.7). They were especially critical of the aid distributed by the Iraqi entity, complaining of dirty blankets and damaged or unsuitable clothes.

Finding 30: Across all three contexts, FGD participants' views on the timeliness and relevance of assistance varied, because what they received and when differed even within a context. Whether the assistance they received had a positive outcome for them or not also depended on the manner in which aid distributions were organized.

Strength of evidence
Moderate

220. **Communities reported that some types of aid that were immediately lifesaving, like food, water, and cash, generally arrived sooner than others, like tents and shelter assistance, psychosocial services, and NFIs, which required time to procure and deliver.** The timeline of assistance developed with FGD participants (see Annex 2) shows that the timing of the delivery of assistance varied (sometimes within the same geographical location). As already highlighted in earlier sections, local communities or local actors provided crucial assistance such as food and water and some shelter (in schools, mosques, community centers, and homes, in NGCA in particular. In Türkiye, people often took shelter in their cars until they were able to find alternatives). Humanitarian actors were also able to distribute cash relatively quickly across the three contexts, as outlined in Finding 28.

221. In NGCA, female FGD participants said that they received basic items on time but shelter was delayed (with people waiting up to two weeks or longer for tents). Male respondents in the same location agreed, explaining that assistance arrived after one week or more. In a camp setting, female FGD participants complained of shelter and heating arriving after the cold weather had ended.

222. **For FGD participants in Türkiye, the timeliness of aid determined its usefulness, but they were also most likely to experience delays due to the impact of the earthquakes. They**

[196] OCHA (2023) Syrian Arabic Republic: Earthquake Humanitarian Dashboard (HCT Coordinated Response), 6 February – 13 April 2023.
[197] OCHA (2023) Earthquake Needs and Response Overview: Syrian Arab Republic, March 15, 2023.

argued that better organization of aid distributions would have increased coverage. Male and female FGD participants in Hatay frequently cited timeliness as being important for them.

> Yes, the aid made a difference during the time I received it, as it enabled me to meet all my family's needs for a month."
>
> It [aid] didn't make a significant difference as it didn't meet the needs and arrived late."
>
> The difference was very small, as we received aid about six months later, which met our family's needs for only one month."

The delays in the arrival of assistance are not surprising given the scale of devastation, with key roads and Hatay airport damaged, as well as power outages and a loss of phone communications in the immediate aftermath of the earthquakes.[198] In Malatya, an FGD participant described how "*It was a very challenging time. We could only buy one loaf of bread from a grocery store. We wanted to go to the district because we couldn't get help, but we were stranded. It was snowing, the phones weren't working. We stayed in the car until morning*." FGD participants in Malatya also mentioned having to wait for assistance such as winter supplies and how it took around two weeks for them to receive blankets.

223. In Hatay, FGD participants highlighted problems with the coverage of aid distributions and how information about them was communicated.

> Much of the aid did not reach the right places due to a lack of organization. There has been a big problem in the distribution of aid. It has not been determined exactly who the aid will reach."
>
> "Due to the lack of adequate communication, the aid could not fully reach those in need. People who were unaware of it could not benefit from this aid. If there was coordination at the local level and communication, a fairer distribution could be made."
>
> In Malatya as well, male FGD participants felt that "*The distribution and organization of aid became a problem. It could have been more effective if aid had been distributed in an organized manner and reached everywhere*."

224. **For many FGD participants in Syria, the assistance they received was relevant and had a positive impact on their lives.** Male and female FGD participants in NGCA highlighted the importance and relevance of the assistance that they received.

> The tents and food aid we received after a few days significantly improved our living conditions. Without that aid, we would have been without shelter for a longer time since my husband cannot work… The aid was a great relief for us."
>
> The aid we received after the earthquake made a huge difference in our daily lives, especially in the beginning. After the disaster, we were suffering from severe shortages of food and water, and the food aid that arrived a few days later was essential for survival. But it wasn't just about securing basic needs; it helped provide temporary stability for us and our families, alleviating the anxiety and fear we felt in the first days."

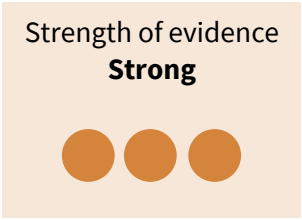
225. In GCA, assistance in response to the earthquakes made a difference to people's lives, because it came at a time of economic hardship and vulnerability caused by the protracted conflict that was worsened by the natural disaster.

> As a result of the effects of the war, the economic situation for everyone was very bad, and the majority of the people were below the poverty line, so we were in constant need, and this assistance came after the earthquake. Some types of food, such as shawarma and meat patties, we were never able to provide for our children because of the high prices

[198] INSARAG (2023). INSARAG After Action Review—2023 Türkiye and Syria Earthquakes: A comprehensive report of INSARAG's Largest International Search and Rescue Operation.

and salaries that were never enough for us. However, of course, we wished that we could obtain this assistance safely inside our homes without having to be displaced to shelters, schools, and mosques, and without going through the bad experience of the earthquake, as even good food for us was as if we were taking poison as a result of the fear and terror we were living in. We left our house immediately after the earthquake and while we were leaving the building collapsed completely behind us. I thank God that I did not lose anyone from my family during the earthquake." *(Female FGD participant, GCA)*

Finding 31: In both Türkiye and Syria, the lack of a requirement for collective reporting against Flash Appeals, combined with factors such as the lack of mechanisms for aggregating data and the incorporation of the earthquake response into the ongoing crisis response in Syria, meant there was a patchwork of output-level data available. This did not reflect the type, scale, timing, and quality of assistance that affected communities received.



226. **In the absence of a requirement to report against the Flash Appeal, humanitarian actors generally share output data through dashboards, but there were gaps in the reporting on the earthquake response across all three contexts.** IASC guidance on Flash Appeals does not require participating agencies to report on assistance provided with funding mobilized through the Appeals.[199] Table 4 below summarizes the reporting available, which was mainly at output level (or the number of people that received a type of assistance), together with data limitations.

Table 4 Overview of reporting on the earthquake response

Source	Brief description	Limitations
Türkiye Earthquake Response 2023 Dashboard **January 2023 – December 2023**	This searchable dashboard provides sector/cluster reporting on a monthly basis against indicators. Data can be filtered by location, partner, and nationality of beneficiary.	Combines 3RP response and earthquake response data, which is why it includes pre-earthquake data.[200] Dataset contains gaps, related to the shelter sector[201] and because it does not reflect fully the assistance provided by some UN agencies. Output indicators do not include details of the services provided.
Türkiye Earthquake: Humanitarian Needs and Response Overview, Interim Update **February – March 2023**[202]	Complements the Flash Appeal with an overview of the situation one month after the earthquakes. Identifies needs, strategic and operational priorities, and funding requirements for the remainder of the response.	Covers only the period from February 6 to March 31, 2023. No timeline for the assistance or indication of coverage, either geographical or how the amount of assistance provided compared with the level of needs.
CERF Türkiye Rapid Response Earthquake 2023	Report on UN agency-specific use of funding by sector, including number of planned vs reached	Agency-specific reporting. No timeline for assistance provided, i.e., whether it was timely, as per the aim of the RR grant.

[199] IASC (2009) Revised Guidelines for Flash Appeals.
[200] However, for the February – May 2023 period of the System-wide Scale-Up Activation, the 3RP program pivoted to respond to the needs of the earthquake-affected, so results reported on the dashboard (available here) during this period should relate specifically to the earthquake response.
[201] Although the dashboard did not include shelter sector data for technical reasons, the shelter sector had its own dashboard (available here). However, this only covers the recovery period, from September 2023 onward, rather than the emergency response period that is covered by the inter-sector dashboard.
[202] OCHA (2023) Türkiye Earthquake: Humanitarian Needs and Response Overview, Interim Update, April 11, 2023

Source	Brief description	Limitations
February – August 2023[203]	people. Includes reporting against the CERF results framework.	
Government of Türkiye, Disaster of the Century's First Anniversary: Reconstruction and Recovery Efforts[204]	Report on the government's response to the earthquakes one year later. This includes a section on cooperation with the UN and assistance from individual UN agencies on pages 460–467.	UN agencies are likely to have reported this data elsewhere, e.g., the CERF report or the earthquake response dashboard.
Syrian Arab Republic Earthquake Needs and Response Overview: Post-earthquake overview **February – March 5 2023**[205]	Complements the Flash Appeal with an update on the impact of the earthquakes one month later. Identifies needs, strategic and operational priorities, and funding requirements for the remainder of the response. Provides sector/ cluster-level reporting on the number of people targeted and reached by sector-specific indicators.	Covers only the period from February 6 to March 5, 2023. Does not distinguish between the humanitarian operations in NGCA and GCA, i.e., does not detail geographical coverage.
Syrian Arab Republic Annual Report, 2023 Humanitarian Response **January – December 2023**	Report on the overall humanitarian response. Total number of people reached by sector disaggregated by area of response, but sector-specific output data does not distinguish between response areas. Also reports on inter-sector results against HRP indicators, aggregated across response areas.	Does not report output data/results specifically for the earthquake response. Output-level data is not reported against level of need (i.e., no indication of coverage) and no timeline of assistance provided.
Northwest Syria Earthquake Humanitarian Response – People Targeted, Reached & Gap **February – May 2023**[206]	Cluster level, brief overview of people that have been targeted (based on the Flash Appeal but updated, if necessary) and reached for activities under the different clusters. Report is NGCA-specific.	The total number of people reached by each cluster is calculated in different ways, and there is no inter-sectoral aggregation of the number of people reached. The reach does not convey the scale, type, or quality of assistance, e.g., there is no distinction between a person receiving a food basket or kit or a complex protection intervention. No indication of the timing of assistance.
Syria Cross-Border Humanitarian Fund Annual Report **January 2023 – December 2023**[207]	Annual report that details donor contributions, allocations and sector-level reporting for the humanitarian response.	Cluster reporting on achievements is for the entire humanitarian response in 2023 rather than specifically for the earthquake response. There is limited output reporting.

[203] CERF (2023) Türkiye Rapid Response Earthquake 2023 23-RR-TUR-57543: CERF Allocation Report on the Use of Funds and Achieved Results.
[204] Presidency of the Republic of Türkiye Directorate of Communications (2024) Disaster of the Century's First Anniversary: Reconstruction and Recovery Efforts. Available at: https://www.iletisim.gov.tr/images/uploads/dosyalar/ASRIN_FELAKETININ_1_YILI_KITABI_EN.pdf
[205] OCHA (2023) Türkiye Earthquake: Humanitarian Needs and Response Overview, Interim Update, April 11, 2023.
[206] OCHA (2023) Northwest Syria Earthquake: Humanitarian Response – People Targeted, Reach and Gap (February – May 2023)
[207] OCHA (2024) Syria Cross-Border Humanitarian Fund 2023 Annual Report.

Source	Brief description	Limitations
Syrian Arab Republic Earthquake Humanitarian Dashboard **February 2023 – April 13, 2023**[208]	Report by sector of cumulative reach by indicator, the people targeted under the Flash Appeal, response modality. Report is GCA-specific.	Does not cover the full Flash Appeal period to May 2023 and does not show the number of people reached against the number of people targeted to indicate coverage. Does not indicate timing of assistance provided.
Syria Humanitarian Fund Annual Report **January 2023 – December 2023**[209]	Annual reporting on donor contributions, allocations, and sector-level reporting for the humanitarian response.	Only includes data on financial allocations to clusters, partners, and targeted populations for the humanitarian response rather than output reporting on the earthquake response. Limited output reporting overall.
Area Based Coordination Progress Reports, **August 2023 – August 2024**	Reports on achievements made by sectors and other ABC members. Done on monthly and later quarterly basis. Shared with UNCT+, partners, and donors.	Cluster reporting only includes reach per cluster and a brief description of activities under each cluster rather than reporting on output results for the earthquake.

227. **While the reporting limitations outlined above are not uncommon in humanitarian responses (particularly as future funding is not based on results reporting), there were context-specific contributory factors in the case of the earthquake response that led to additional data gaps.** As Table 4 makes clear, the different types of reporting covered different time periods and made it challenging to aggregate even output data systematically at the collective IASC level, to link the output data to needs identified at the beginning of the response, or to identify a clear timeline for the delivery of assistance.

228. In Türkiye, IASC members delivered a significant portion of their earthquake response through the government. Some agencies received information from government entities on the distribution of assistance. For example, WHO received handover notes from the Ministry of Health for all the equipment, supplies, and medicines that it provided, although damage to health information systems limited the availability of disaggregated data on end-users, and UNICEF had a strong reporting mechanism for government partners. Others, however, had limited information on the government's use of in-kind assistance (including where, when, and to whom contributions were distributed).[210] This was partly due to the coordination challenges highlighted in Section 2.5. Also, while UNDAC tried to adapt the existing 3RP dashboard for the earthquake response, this had limitations. Despite efforts by the 3RP IMWG, it was also difficult to distinguish between responding to the ongoing versus the earthquake-specific needs of Syrian refugees and vulnerable Turkish communities who were part of the existing 3RP response, and this is reflected in reporting on the dashboard.

229. In Syria, the earthquakes represented just one (albeit major) event in a 12-year protracted crisis. This meant that, after a relatively short emergency phase, humanitarian actors quickly shifted back to responding to the overall crisis (especially in NGCA, when the conflict escalated in October 2023). The impact of the protracted crisis also made it challenging for humanitarian actors to distinguish between existing and new humanitarian needs, even in the case of physical infrastructure damage (leaving aside the needs of vulnerable populations who had already been displaced multiple times). Interviewees gave examples of being put in impossible situations when donors insisted on

[208] OCHA (2023) Syrian Arabic Republic: Earthquake Humanitarian Dashboard (HCT Coordinated Response), February 6 – April 13, 2023.
[209] OCHA (2024) Syria Humanitarian Fund 2023 Annual Report.
[210] See, for example, CERF (2023) Türkiye Rapid Response Earthquake 2023 23-RR-TUR-57543: CERF Allocation Report on the Use of Funds and Achieved.

funding being used specifically for the earthquake response because one wall of a house may have been damaged by conflict and another by the earthquakes or the collapse of a water tank during the earthquakes may have occurred due to weakening by the impact of conflict. As a result, it is understandable that reporting focused largely on the overall protracted crisis response, rather than the earthquake response specifically. Even where reports might be expected to report on the earthquake response, such as CBPF reports on earthquake-specific Reserve Allocations, this was not the case. Reports on the use of CERF funding for the earthquake response in Syria were also not publicly available. Finally, reporting on the Syria crisis response has generally been at the WoS level, combining reporting from GCA, NGCA, and NES even though the three operations were responding to very distinct needs and contexts. The earthquakes affected very specific geographical areas, particularly NGCA, so the combined reporting also made it more challenging to assess the timeliness and effectiveness of the two separate responses in GCA and NGCA.

3. Conclusions

Conclusion 1. IASC members in both Syria and Türkiye were unprepared for a large-scale rapid onset disaster, including for the impact this had on their own operations and staffing, which led to challenges with the initial response. These were addressed in Türkiye and the cross-border operation as the response progressed, but IASC members still did not have a joint plan to deal with any future large-scale natural disasters due to ongoing context-specific challenges. However, it was positive that, in Türkiye, IASC members had started to develop a preparedness plan.

230. Despite regular seismic activity in Türkiye and recurrent emergencies in Syria, the earthquakes of February 2023 found humanitarian actors in both countries unprepared for a large-scale rapid onset disaster. In Türkiye, a major factor was existing government capacity to respond to earthquakes and natural disasters without international support (which meant that the government did not table discussions on disaster response with the UNCT). In Syria, this lack of preparedness was due to the protracted crisis and limited resources for preparedness measures. The devastation caused by the earthquakes and their impact on aid workers themselves overwhelmed existing humanitarian response mechanisms across all three contexts. This affected the quality of needs assessments, coordination, assistance to the most vulnerable groups, and AAP. IASC members were also unprepared for the impact of the response on their own operations and staffing. Duty of care plans were not harmonized across agencies, which led to resentment among some aid workers in Gaziantep (see Conclusion 5).

231. While the challenges in the initial response were addressed in Türkiye and the cross-border operation as the response progressed, IASC members still did not have a joint plan to deal with any future large-scale natural disasters in the region. This was a particular concern in Türkiye because of the history of seismic activity in the country, the long-standing warnings of a major earthquake in Istanbul (which experienced an earthquake in April 2025), and the fact that earthquakes cannot be predicted. International humanitarian actors needed to develop a preparedness plan jointly with the government to identify how best to complement the government's response in future. The reactivation of the Emergency Response Preparedness Working Group in 2024 to develop a joint plan for future large-scale disasters was a positive development. In Syria, however, the dramatic change in the operating environment due to the fall of the Assad regime meant that humanitarian actors were focused on adapting to this, including through the closure of the cross-border operation, rather than on potential natural disasters.

Conclusion 2. The delay in declaring the System-wide IASC Scale-Up Activation did not make a significant difference to the speed and scale of the mobilization of operational capacities and resources by IASC members because the scale of the disaster and the need to respond were apparent. While the Activation declaration led to the establishment of empowered humanitarian leadership in Türkiye and contributed to strengthening the humanitarian and collective nature of the IASC response, it brought about little change to the response in Syria.

232. The main purpose of a Scale-Up Activation is to encourage short-term mobilization of operational capacity and resources. A recent IAHE learning paper highlighted that there is no direct causal link between a system-wide activation and activation of individual agency emergency protocols.[211] The evaluation findings support this; given that the scale of the crisis and needs was apparent from the outset, most agencies took immediate actions to mobilize surge support, release stocks that they had in storage, and use pre-existing agreements with partners and others to speed up the delivery of assistance without waiting for the System-Wide Scale-Up Activation. However, corporate scale-up declarations are generally required to trigger the release of internal emergency funding mechanisms, and the evaluation found that this was done, though the timing of the internal scale-ups varied by agency.

233. Scale-Up Activations are also used where the capability to lead, coordinate, and deliver assistance and protection does not match the scale, complexity, and urgency of a crisis. In addition to mobilizing operational capacities, a Scale-Up Activation fulfills informal functions, including (re)instating the humanitarian nature of the response, strengthening the collective nature of the response, and signaling the severity of a crisis. While these did not apply in the context of Syria, one positive aspect of the System-wide Scale-Up for Türkiye was that this led to actions on strengthening leadership and coordination. It also contributed to strengthening the collective and humanitarian nature of the IASC response that supported and complemented the government's response. The signaling function was less relevant in Türkiye because the impact of the disaster was clearly visible and received extensive media coverage. This, in turn, prompted a generous response from the general public around the world and the private sector.

Conclusion 3. In Türkiye, the initial HCT coordination structure and other emergency response mechanisms were not adapted to suit a middle-income country that had a strong government with considerable disaster response capacity. The new coordination structure did not capitalize on existing in-country structures and capacities. Therefore, the ABC model, which sought to be more inclusive of national/local actors, was a positive development.

234. IASC members valued the rapid deployment of UNDAC and OCHA teams to Türkiye, and their contribution to the first six months of the response, while the government also appreciated UNDAC's coordination of the numerous USAR teams deployed in immediate response to the earthquakes. OCHA worked with the HCT to establish a new coordination model (based on the UNDAC structure for USAR coordination) that was deemed more appropriate for responding to a sudden onset disaster and earthquake-related needs than the pre-existing 3RP mechanism. However, this approach did not take account of the context of a middle-income (G20) country with long-established government coordination and response mechanisms and partnerships. There was a view that the new structure was overly complex and resource-intensive and led to confusion among different actors and local authorities. It did not secure adequate participation of the government (both national and sub-national) and Turkish NGOs, partly because IASC ways of working were not comprehensible and accessible to national and local actors delivering the response. The government and Turkish NGOs therefore used their own (parallel) coordination mechanisms. Efforts were made to address the shortcomings of this initial coordination mechanism when transitioning to the ABC model. This led to increased participation of the government and NGOs as well as strengthened communication between UN agencies and local authorities. While humanitarian actors felt that the ABC model enabled a more tailored and contextually appropriate response, there was a lack of consensus about its future purpose and role.

235. Getting the government's buy-in for the launch of the Flash Appeal was also problematic, and the rationale for having a Flash Appeal for Türkiye was not clear. The Appeal would not have influenced the decisions of the general public and the private sector to donate generously to a high-profile earthquake response and there was limited evidence that it mobilized additional resources from bilateral donors. However, with the funding mobilized, IASC members supported the

[211] IAHE (2024) IASC System-Wide Scale-Up Mechanism. From protocol to reality: lessons for scaling up collective humanitarian responses.

government's response in a variety of ways, albeit they were not able to fulfill the government's high expectations of their financial contribution.

236. These challenges highlight the issue with launching a standard humanitarian response in a context where a government with strong capacity is in the lead, without pausing to reflect on the relevance of existing mechanisms, and that a one-size-fits-all approach predicated on a humanitarian response in a country with limited government capacity is no longer appropriate. With climate-related disasters, in particular, potentially overwhelming the response capacity of even middle- and upper-middle-income countries, global emergency response mechanisms could be activated increasingly in contexts with fully functioning governments and disaster management capacity, therefore requiring them to adapt in order to remain relevant.

Conclusion 4. The role of national/local actors and affected communities as first responders was a crucial element in the provision of lifesaving assistance in the immediate aftermath of the earthquakes, particularly in Syria. Therefore, efforts in NGCA to strengthen the capacity of local communities for disaster response and AAP, and to make coordination structures more localized, were important for improved emergency responses in future.

237. Local communities mobilized quickly to be first responders across all three contexts. However, their role was particularly important in NGCA because of the lack of international USAR teams and specialist search and rescue equipment, and the closure of the border crossing and access limitations, which delayed aid agencies (although SNGOs on the ground in NGCA supported affected communities despite extremely difficult personal circumstances and working conditions). In GCA, schools, mosques, and local associations provided a lifeline in the first few days. This made the efforts undertaken in NGCA to establish the LCOP and to strengthen the skills and capacity of local communities for disaster response (which made them part of the solution rather than passive aid recipients) particularly valuable in preparing them for future emergencies. At a time when cuts to humanitarian budgets are limiting the ability of humanitarian organizations (even national/local NGOs) to respond, international humanitarian community investment in the capacity of local communities—who are always the first responders to humanitarian crises—on disaster preparedness and response management has become even more urgent.

Conclusion 5. One notable weakness of the initial response across all three contexts was assistance to the most vulnerable groups such as the elderly and PwD. Although humanitarian actors made improvements as the responses progressed, systemic barriers to addressing the needs of vulnerable groups remain.

238. Across the three contexts, IASC members made efforts to integrate gender-sensitive approaches at coordination and planning levels. However, the evaluation found that mainstreaming of disability and inclusion and assistance to vulnerable groups, such as the elderly and PwD (who were significantly impacted by the earthquakes) was a weakness of the response across the three contexts, from the collection of needs data to the delivery of assistance and to having accessible accountability mechanisms. Systemic barriers identified through the aid worker survey remain, but the evaluation identified good practice in prioritizing assistance based on risk and vulnerability of specific groups. This approach will be increasingly necessary for international humanitarian actors due to the significant reduction in humanitarian assistance globally.

Conclusion 6. IASC members' lack of a coordinated approach to duty of care support (largely due to policies set at global level) led to disparities in support that angered and frustrated some aid workers, particularly in the cross-border response.

239. Aid workers in South-East Türkiye (particularly SNGO staff) were severely affected by the earthquakes but often went above and beyond the call of duty to respond immediately, putting aside their personal losses and circumstances. In both Türkiye and Syria, aid agencies were unable to agree on a coordinated approach to duty of care support (potentially because country-level staff have limited flexibility to change headquarters-level policies). This meant that they provided different types and levels of duty of care support to their staff, with some UN agencies being particularly generous. Comparing what they received, some of the staff in agencies delivering the cross-border

operation, were angry. This was not surprising in light of the levels of trauma that they reported, even 18 months after the earthquakes (and despite psychosocial support they received). While the IASC developed minimum standards on duty of care for COVID-19, evidence from the evaluation highlights the urgent need to agree on a coordinated approach, with a set of minimum standards that are applicable across a wider range of emergencies. The IASC needs to deal with this at the global level, since this is where agencies develop their duty of care policies. Given that a few UN agencies covered the duty of care costs of SNGOs, even though they had no legal obligation to do so, there is also a need for clarity on whether IASC members would ever provide duty of care support to the staff of partners, particularly in cases where they have little or no presence on the ground (such as NGCA prior to the earthquakes or Gaza).

Conclusion 7. In all three contexts, IASC members faced challenges and difficult choices in upholding the humanitarian principles and prioritized access and their ability to provide assistance. The challenges highlighted the limited leverage that IASC members have when advocating with donor governments or in contexts where the government tries to control or manipulate humanitarian aid, as in GCA.

240. In contexts where governments/de facto authorities regard their priorities differently and make it challenging to adhere to the principles, humanitarian actors faced difficult choices between the risk of being expelled and losing all access or continuing to provide assistance knowing that the principles will be compromised. However, as in the case of calling for Member States to provide USAR teams to NGCA demonstrates, they also have limited leverage with donor governments in calling for the needs-based assistance.

241. Evidence from the evaluation showed that humanitarian actors were better able to make their adherence to humanitarian principles clear in agreements with relevant authorities in NGCA but, in GCA, IASC members had limited room for maneuver. The GoS's control over humanitarian assistance throughout the protracted crisis made it very difficult for humanitarian actors to operate in a principled manner and to maintain their independence. This was due to government restrictions, the politicization of aid (including crossline assistance), and attempts to control assistance, for example by insisting on the use of its own humanitarian needs data or requiring that aid recipient details be shared for cash assistance programs. In Türkiye, IASC members found it challenging to communicate how they were upholding the principles of impartiality and neutrality in their role of complementing the government's response. This led to some misperceptions about a focus on Syrian refugees rather than Turkish nationals.

Conclusion 8. Affected communities across Türkiye and Syria benefited from relevant forms of assistance, including cash and voucher programming. However, the lack of a requirement for collective reporting against Flash Appeals along with context-specific factors (such as combining reporting on the protracted crisis and earthquake response in Syria) impacted the ability of IASC members to report on and demonstrate collective results systematically.

242. The evaluation identified successful cash and voucher programming in Türkiye and Syria, which was valued by communities as a relevant and flexible form of assistance. IASC members in Türkiye were able to support basic service provision within the first month of the response and to support the government with the procurement of kits and shelter assistance. In GCA, humanitarian actors provided in-kind lifesaving assistance, such as tents, kits, and food baskets in areas where markets were destroyed or inaccessible.

243. It was challenging, however, for the evaluation to identify the full extent of results, even at output level, including the timing of assistance provided, due to different types and timeframes of reporting. Reporting on the results on humanitarian responses has been a long-standing challenge for IASC members, particularly collective reporting. The earthquake response was no different, although there were unexpected gaps in data for Syria, such as in pooled fund reporting. Tight government control in GCA, as well as the fact that the earthquake response was rolled into the ongoing protracted crisis response in Syria, meant that it was not possible to disaggregate results. Ultimately, the lack of systematic collective results reporting, particularly against needs or number of

people targeted for assistance, made it challenging to identify the extent to which the response delivered on the objectives of the Flash Appeals across all three contexts.

244. In the current context of funding pressures, it will be even more important for IASC members to demonstrate what has been achieved with the funding mobilized for a response. However, current Flash Appeal guidance does not require this. Reviewing Flash Appeal guidance (which dates from 2009) and the mechanisms for collecting data would ensure that IASC members are clear at the outset of a response about what data they need to collect to report against Flash Appeal objectives.

Conclusion 9. The earthquakes were a catalyst for change in the quality of the cross-border response, particularly around improving coordination, AAP mechanisms, and risk management. However, weaknesses in the WoS coordination architecture and a competitive rather than collaborative approach meant that the GCA and NGCA hubs missed opportunities to share good practice and identify how best to support affected communities.

245. While tight government control over the response in GCA restricted the international humanitarian community's operational space, in NGCA, the earthquakes were a catalyst for change in the quality of the cross-border response. Although the initial response had limitations, humanitarian actors made major improvements once they gained access, particularly around coordination, AAP mechanisms, and risk management.

246. The evaluation also identified that weaknesses in the WoS coordination architecture and a competitive rather than a collaborative approach between the humanitarian operations for NGCA and GCA had a negative effect on both responses. This included a failure to build a shared understanding of the needs of affected communities and how best to address these by putting them at the heart of the response. Political developments in Syria since late November 2024 provide an opportunity for the international humanitarian community to restructure and revitalize the humanitarian operation in the country and to develop a unified humanitarian response mechanism that builds on lessons learned from the cross-border operation and replicates the good practices identified by this evaluation across the country.

4. Recommendations

247. In this section, we present both global- and country-level recommendations. These were developed by the ET based on the detailed inputs from the co-creation workshops with the Türkiye and NGCA country teams, as outlined in Annex 8 Methodology. Additionally, the ET reviewed the relevance of the recommendations made by stakeholders for the cross-border operation in light of recent events in Syria.

Recommendation 1: Ensure that global emergency response mechanisms adapt to the context of strong government leadership and capacity		
Conclusion	**Sub-recommendation**	**Actions**
Conclusion 3: In Türkiye, the initial HCT coordination structure and other emergency response mechanisms were not adapted to suit a middle-income country that had a strong government with considerable disaster response capacity. The initial coordination structure did not capitalize on existing in-country structures and capacities.	**1.1 Global level:** In situations of large-scale rapid onset disasters in countries where existing national emergency response capacities and mechanisms have been overwhelmed, the IASC must first assess whether the activation of international response tools like UNDAC or Flash Appeals is needed. If these tools are activated, the IASC should consider whether and how to adapt them to fit the local context and existing systems, to avoid using a one-size-fits-all approach or creating entirely new structures.	**Global level:** IASC, OCHA
	1.2 Global level: As large-scale, rapid onset disasters become more common, UN leaders (for example RCs and UNCT members) in countries focused on development work should be trained on Protocol 2 of the Scale-Up SOPs and global emergency tools, such as the CERF. Countries that are at greater risk of natural disasters should be prioritized for the roll-out of training.	**Global level:** OCHA and UN DCO
	1.3 In Türkiye, ensure that existing national and sub-national coordination structure is sufficiently flexible to respond to large-scale emergencies and is inclusive of national/local actors.	**Türkiye:** UNCT+

Recommendation 2: Assess the applicability of the System-Wide Scale-Up Activation declaration as a response tool for contexts of large-scale sudden disasters and communicate the rationale for the decision clearly		
Conclusion	**Sub-recommendation**	**Actions**
Conclusion 2: The delay in declaring the System-wide IASC Scale-Up Activation did not make a significant difference to the speed and scale of the mobilization of operational capacities and resources by IASC members because the scale of the disaster and the need to	**2.1 Global level:** The IASC should guide decision-making on whether and how the Scale-Up will add value to the response by taking into consideration the following issues: • Whether the signaling function is necessary when the disaster has already attracted significant media and political attention. • Reviewing the need for the informal functions typically associated with a Scale-Up Activation. • Assessing the type and level of operational capacities that may need to be mobilized to complement national or local capacities, especially in contexts where those capacities are already substantial.	**Global level:** EDG

respond were apparent.	If the IASC declares a Scale-Up, the rationale and functions should be communicated clearly to stakeholders at field level to ensure alignment among different actors involved in the emergency response.	

Recommendation 3: Develop a coordinated approach to duty of care at global level, including a set of minimum standards		
Conclusion	**Sub-recommendation**	**Actions**
Conclusion 6: IASC members' lack of a coordinated approach to duty of care support (largely due to policies set at global level) led to disparities in support that angered and frustrated some aid workers in the cross-border operation.	**3.1 Global level:** IASC members need to agree on their approach to duty of care. This should include minimum standards, which should be contextualized at country level and identify, for example: Whether and how to finance duty of care for national/local NGO partners. Who is eligible for support and what types of assistance will be provided, such as psychosocial support, medical evacuation, financial aid. Levels of support, such as amount of paid leave and financial payments.	**Global level:** IASC

Recommendation 4: Address the identified barriers to assisting the most vulnerable groups by advocating for funding, clarifying guidance implementation for staff and replicating successful practices		
Conclusion	**Sub-recommendation**	**Actions**
Conclusion 5: One notable weakness of the initial response across all three contexts was assistance to the most vulnerable groups such as the elderly and PwD. Although humanitarian actors made improvements as the responses progressed, systemic barriers to addressing the needs of vulnerable groups remain.	**4.1 Global level: I**ASC members should: • Advocate strongly for funding to address the specific needs of vulnerable groups like the elderly and PwD. • Ensure that program staff are clear about how to implement IASC guidance/internal policies on the inclusion of vulnerable groups in humanitarian programs. • Identify and replicate good practices in adapting programs to be accessible to those with specific needs. • Develop risk profiling or other mechanisms to target assistance to the most vulnerable.	**Global level:** IASC members

Recommendation 5: Invest in community emergency response capacities and strengthen partnerships with national/local actors		
Conclusion	**Sub-recommendation**	**Actions**
Conclusion 4: The role of national/local actors and affected communities as first responders was a crucial element in the	**5.1 Across humanitarian contexts,** IASC members should strengthen the ability of local communities to respond to emergencies by replicating and building on the good practices in NGCA, such as: • Establishing networks of volunteers and training them in a variety of roles for emergency response,	**Global level:** IASC

provision of lifesaving assistance in the immediate aftermath of the earthquakes, particularly in Syria.	including needs assessment, assistance delivery, and cross-cutting issues (GBV/PSEA) and supporting AAP. • Training community members on basic rescue and first aid, and supporting them to organize themselves in an emergency.	
	5.2 Global level: IASC members should agree on a shared and mutually accepted due diligence mechanism/system (building on existing country-level examples). This would avoid the need for national/local NGOs to be subjected to multiple due diligence processes when a disaster happens and speed up the establishment of new partnerships considerably.	**Global level:** IASC
	5.3 In Syria, IASC members should invest in community-based NGOs (especially in hard-to-reach areas), local structures such as camp management, Area Mukhtars (community leaders), and local unions, and advocate for them to get greater direct access to humanitarian funding.	**Syria**: HCT supported by ISCG

Recommendation 6: Develop emergency response preparedness plans for both Syria and Türkiye, based on multiple scenarios and their impact, in line with IASC guidance and based on consultations with national disaster management authorities

Conclusion	Sub-recommendation	Actions
Conclusion 1: IASC members in both Syria and Türkiye were unprepared for a large-scale rapid onset disaster, including for the impact this had on their own operations and staffing, which led to challenges with the initial response.	**6.1 In Türkiye,** take action at strategic, sectoral, and individual agency levels to improve preparedness, ensuring a coordinated and comprehensive response. This should include engagement with the government on the UN emergency response capacity and to formalize roles and responsibilities. IASC members should also strengthen their relationships with the TRC, understanding their emergency preparedness plans and response procedures in order to complement these.	**Türkiye:** RC and UNCT+ and SET-ICG
	6.2 In Syria, under the leadership of the RC/HC, the HCT should develop an emergency preparedness plan, taking into account the new context and risks.	**Syria:** RC/HC and HCT, supported by ISCG

Recommendation 7: Strengthen needs assessment tools and mechanisms to ensure that assessments are timely, coordinated (to avoid over-burdening affected communities), comprehensive (including coverage of hard-to-reach areas) and include disaggregated data

Conclusion	Sub-recommendation	Actions
Conclusion 5: Mainstreaming of disability and inclusion and assistance to vulnerable groups was a weakness of the response across the three contexts, including the collection of needs data.	**7.1 In Türkiye**, IASC members and their partners should: ensure a single knowledge management hub, using ESMAT and other tools, is ready for large-scale disasters; strengthen relationships with government and local authorities for data collection; and collaborate with national/local actors to better identify and address the needs of vulnerable groups.	**Türkiye:** UNCT

Conclusion 8: Weaknesses in the WoS coordination architecture and a competitive rather than a collaborative approach between the humanitarian operations for NGCA and GCA had a negative effect on both responses. This included a failure to build a shared understanding of the needs of affected communities and how best to address these by putting them at the heart of the response.		
	7.2 In Syria, inter-cluster groups should consolidate needs assessment data and strengthen the capacity of small SNGOs, volunteer groups, and local associations to identify the needs of vulnerable groups.	**Syria:** ISCG

Recommendation 8: Replicate good practices, including AAP mechanisms and the role of SNGOs, developed in the cross-border operation across Syria		
Conclusion	**Sub-recommendation**	**Actions**
Conclusion 9: The earthquakes were a catalyst for change in the quality of the cross-border response, particularly around improving coordination, AAP mechanisms, and risk management.	**8.1 In Syria**, IASC members and NGOs should scale up good practices, including AAP mechanisms, such as Safeline and the rumor tracker, to the rest of the country. They should also strengthen the role of volunteer groups in humanitarian response and ensure that SNGOs have a significant role in coordination and decision-making.	**Syria:** HCT members; agency AAP focal points; ISCG

5. Abbreviations and acronyms

3RP	Regional Refugee and Resilience Plan
AAP	Accountability to Affected Populationse
ABC	Area Based Coordination
ABPRS	Address-Based Population Registration System
ADITT	Ageing and Disability Inclusion Task Team
AFAD	Ministry of Interior Disaster and Emergency Management Presidency
ATM	Automated Teller Machine
CAAC	Children and Armed Conflict
CBPF	Country-Based Pooled Funds
CERF	Central Emergency Response Fund
CFM	Complaints and Feedback Mechanisms
COP	Centrality of Protection
CSO	Civil Society Organizations
CWG	Cash Working Group
DCO	UN Development Coordination Office
DEC	Disasters Emergency Committee
DRHC	Deputy Regional Humanitarian Coordinator
DRR	Disaster Risk Reduction
DTM	Displacement Tracking Matrix
EAF	Evidence Assessment Framework
ECHO	European Civil Protection and Humanitarian Aid Operations
EDG	Emergency Director's Group
EQ	Evaluation Questions
ERC	Emergency Relief Coordinator
ESMAT	Earthquake Solutions and Mobility Analysis Team
ESSN	Emergency Social Safety Net
ET	Evaluation Team
ETS	Emergency Communications Sector
FGD	Focus Group Discussion
FTS	Financial Tracking Service
GBV	Gender-Based Violence
GCA	Government Controlled Areas
GDP	Gross Domestic Product
GenCap	Gender Standby Capacity Project
GoS	Government of Syria
HC	Humanitarian Coordinators
HCT	Humanitarian Country Team
HFO	Humanitarian Field Officers
HLG	Humanitarian Liaison Group
HNO	Humanitarian Needs Overview
HRP	Humanitarian Response Plan
HTO	Humanitarian Transition Overview

HTS	Hay'at Tahrir al-Sham
IAHE	Inter-Agency Humanitarian Evaluation
IASC	Inter-Agency Standing Committee
ICCG	Inter-Cluster Coordination Group
IDF	Israel Defense Forces
IDP	Internally Displaced Persons
IFRC	International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies
IMWG	Information Management Working Group
INGOs	International Non-Governmental Organizations
INSARAG	International Search and Rescue Advisory Group
IOM	International Organization for Migration
IP	Implementing Partners
ISC	Inter-Sector Coordination
JOPs	Joint Operating Principles
JPO	Junior Professional Officer
KIIs	Key Informant Interviews
LCG	Local Coordination Groups
LCOP	Local Community of Practice
LNOB	Leave No One Behind
LTA	Long-term Agreements
MEAL	Monitoring, Evaluation, and Learning
MFA	Ministry of Foreign Affairs
MG	Management Group
MHPSS	Mental Health and Psychosocial Support
MIRA	Multi-sector Initial Rapid Assessment
MoU	Memoranda of Understanding
MoFSS	Ministry of Family and Social Services
MPC	Multi-Purpose Cash
MSNA	Multi-Sectoral Needs Assessment
NATO	North Atlantic Treaty Organization
NDP	National Development Plan
NES	Northeast Syria
NFI	Non-food Items
NGCA	Non-Government Controlled Areas
NWS	Northwest Syria
OCHA	Office for Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs
OECD	Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development
OPAG	Operations, Policy, and Advocacy Group
OPR	Operational Peer Review
OSOCC	On-Site Operation Coordination Center
PD	Project Director
PDM	Post-distribution Monitoring
PMM	Presidency of Migration Management
PSEA	Protection from Sexual Abuse and Exploitation
PTT	Posta ve Telgraf Teşkilatı
PwD	Persons with Disabilities
QA	Quality Assurance

RC	Resident Coordinator
RCO	Resident Coordinator's office
RHC	Regional Humanitarian Coordinator
RMU	Risk Management Unit
RNA	Rapid Needs Assessment
RR	Rapid Response
SARC	Syrian Arab Red Crescent
SCHF	Syria Cross-border Humanitarian Fund
SDF	Syria Democratic Forces
SET-ICG	South-East Türkiye Inter-sector Coordination Group
SHF	Syria Humanitarian Fund
SNAT	Syria Needs Assessment Tool
SNGO	Syrian Non-governmental Organizations
SOPs	Standard Operating Procedures
SSG	Strategic Steering Group
TAC	Temporary Accommodation Centers
TERRA	Türkiye Earthquakes Recovery and Reconstruction Assessment
TL	Team Leader
ToC	Theory of Change
ToR	Terms of Reference
TPM	Third Party Monitoring
TRC	Turkish Red Crescent
UNCT	United Nations Country Team
UNCT+	United Nations Country Team Plus
UNDAC	United Nations Disaster Assessment and Coordination
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
UNHCR	United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees
UNSCR	UN Security Council Resolution
UNSDCF	UN Sustainable Development Cooperation Framework
USAR	Urban Search and Rescue
WAG	Women's Advisory Group
WASH	Water, Sanitation, and Hygiene
WEHA	Women Empowerment in Humanitarian Action
WFP	World Food Programme
WHO	World Health Organization
WoS	Whole of Syria