



On 6 February 2023, two devastating earthquakes struck near the Türkiye-Syria border, followed by over 7,100 aftershocks and another major quake on 20 February. The Emergency Relief Coordinator declared a System-wide Scale-Up Activation on 14 February and launched Flash Appeals for both countries shortly after. To assess the collective response, the ERC launched an independent Inter-Agency Humanitarian Evaluation of the collective response of IASC members in meeting the needs of communities affected by the earthquakes. The evaluation aimed to assess how various factors either helped or hindered the collective response. Key elements like coordination, leadership, preparedness, and funding were examined to determine if they were in place to support the response. The evaluation drew on extensive data, including 174 interviews, 222 community consultations, a survey of 136 aid workers, and a review of over 150 documents, with findings validated through stakeholder engagement. This document provides an overview of the main findings of the evaluation and the recommendations.



The humanitarian response played a vital role in saving lives and meeting urgent needs, particularly in Türkiye.

Through quick actions and coordinated efforts, humanitarian actors were able to deliver critical assistance that addressed both immediate survival requirements and evolving community priorities in the aftermath of the disaster. The humanitarian response to the Türkiye-Syria earthquakes demonstrated that cash and voucher assistance was one of the most effective and flexible forms of aid, particularly in Türkiye and the former Non-Government Controlled Areas (NGCA) of Syria, where established mechanisms and functioning markets enabled rapid implementation. Communities valued this approach because it allowed them to address diverse and urgent needs such as rent, home repairs, and transportation. In-kind assistance, especially food and shelter, was also essential in the early weeks of the response due to harsh winter conditions and immediate survival needs. In the former Government-Controlled Areas (GCA) of Syria, the IASC aid delivery faced significant challenges caused by infrastructure damage and government-imposed restrictions. Despite the overall success in reaching affected populations, inconsistent collective reporting on aid delivery made it difficult to fully assess the assistance's scale, timing, and quality.

- *Recommendation: Strengthen needs assessment tools to ensure that assessments are timely, coordinated, coordinated and include disaggregated data.*
- *Recommendation: Replicate good practices, including AAP mechanisms and the role of Syrian NGOs, developed in the cross-border operation, across Syria*



The immediate response to the earthquakes was rapid in both Türkiye and Syria, though shaped by different dynamics.

Collectively, IASC members in both Türkiye and Syria were initially unprepared for a large-scale, rapid-onset disaster. Despite this, individual agencies used their capacities to act quickly. In Türkiye, the speed of the response was largely due to the activation of global emergency mechanisms and swift action of individual IASC members, who deployed surge staff, released pre-positioned supplies, and leveraged existing partnerships in support of the government-led response. In Syria, IASC members immediately released stocks pre-positioned in NGCA but the initial response was led by national and local actors. In NGCA, particularly, communities provided lifesaving assistance while international agencies mobilized. The failure of Member States to deploy Urban Search and Rescue (USAR) teams to NGCA—despite urgent appeals from humanitarian leaders—resulted in avoidable loss of life and underscored the limited influence of IASC members in securing principled support from donor governments.

- *Recommendation: 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*



Flexible and timely funding from pooled funds, internal agency reserves and private donors was a key strength, enabling rapid mobilization despite slight delays in launching Flash Appeals.

In Türkiye, private sector contributions exceeded USD\$3 billion, while in Syria, humanitarian actors relied more on

bilateral donors, whose funding was often restricted by geography or scope. The Flash Appeals had limited impact on overall funding levels, as most donors responded directly to the scale of the crisis. The Central Emergency Response Fund (CERF) and Syria's Country-Based Pooled Fund (CBPF) provided critical early funding, with the Syria Cross-border Humanitarian Fund (SCHF) setting a precedent by securing a CERF loan for rapid disbursement. However, challenges remained: CERF prioritization processes in Syria excluded key cross-border actors, and funding constraints limited the implementation of Early Recovery plans in both countries.



Support for the most vulnerable groups was a key weakness in the initial humanitarian response.

Although humanitarian actors made improvements as the responses progressed, systemic barriers to addressing the needs of vulnerable groups remain. While gender-sensitive approaches were more successfully integrated, supported by GenCap advisers and coordination mechanisms, assistance for older people and persons with disabilities (PWD) was limited. This was due to funding constraints, program design limitations, and the absence of clear criteria for identifying and prioritizing these groups.

- *Recommendation: Address the identified barriers to assisting the most vulnerable groups by advocating for funding, clarifying guidance implementation for staff and replicating successful practices.*



Aid workers were deeply affected, and uncoordinated duty of care support remains a concern.

A defining feature of the response was the significant impact on aid workers themselves, particularly in South-East Türkiye and Northwest Syria, where thousands of aftershocks created prolonged trauma. Despite efforts to harmonize duty of care, agencies applied varying internal policies, resulting in unequal support that left many staff, especially in Gaziantep, feeling neglected and frustrated. In some cases, delays in payments, bureaucratic hurdles, and the timing of psychosocial services limited the effectiveness of support. While some UN agencies extended assistance to Syrian NGO partners out of moral obligation, many frontline workers felt let down, especially given ongoing discussions around localization. These disparities did not affect the quality of the immediate response but raised serious concerns about the long-term well-being of humanitarian personnel in Syria, particularly.

- *Recommendation: Develop a coordinated approach to duty of care at global level, including a set of minimum standards*



Local partnerships were slow to develop and hindered by coordination gaps, administrative burdens, and unequal power dynamics.

In Türkiye, early collaboration between the government and humanitarian actors was constrained by unclear roles and limited information sharing. Turkish NGOs were initially focused on their own emergency efforts and those outside the existing 3RP (Regional Refugee & Resilience Plan) response had minimal involvement in the international coordination structure. Over time, engagement improved, with UN agencies providing training and capacity-building to smaller NGOs and developing new partnerships. In Syria, the earthquakes further strained the capacity of Syrian NGOs, and, while increased funding created pressure to scale up, lengthy due diligence processes delayed partnerships. Smaller Syrian NGOs struggled with complex compliance requirements, especially in hard-to-reach areas, and many perceived their relationships with international actors as transactional rather than collaborative. INGOs were generally more flexible, but the overall reliance on international funding reinforced power imbalances, leaving many Syrian NGOs feeling unsupported in their frontline roles.

- *Recommendation: Invest in community emergency response capacities and strengthen partnerships with national/local actors*



IASC leadership and coordination were partially effective, with Türkiye adapting over time to integrate better with national systems, while the Government of Syria's rigid structures and political constraints limited the overall coherence of the response.

In Türkiye, the Scale-Up helped strengthen humanitarian leadership and fostered a more collective response, though the initial UNDAC coordination model was not well-suited to a middle-income country with strong national disaster management systems. This resulted in limited engagement with Turkish authorities and NGOs and separate coordination mechanisms, which was later addressed through the Area-Based Coordination approach. In Syria, the Scale-Up did not alter existing leadership structures, and in GCA, government control and bureaucratic barriers hindered neutral and impartial assistance. The decentralization of response management to governor-led Operations Rooms further complicated coordination. In NGCA, despite initial

leadership gaps, local staff and NGOs stepped up to fill gaps, including in cluster leadership. The former Whole of Syria (WoS) architecture proved too rigid for a rapid-onset emergency, with persistent divisions between GCA and NGCA operations. While the earthquakes prompted improved access, stronger community engagement, and more localized coordination in the cross-border response, a competitive rather than collaborative approach limited the sharing of good practices and joint support for affected communities.

- *Recommendation: 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.*
- *Recommendation: Ensure that global emergency response mechanisms adapt to the context of strong government leadership and capacity.*



IASC members navigated complex environments by prioritizing access and assistance delivery while striving to uphold humanitarian principles.

The lack of USAR support to Syria and funding restrictions highlighted the limited leverage that IASC members have with donor governments when calling for needs-based assistance. In GCA, humanitarian actors also faced difficult choices between the risk of being expelled and losing all access or continuing to provide assistance, knowing that the government's control compromised the delivery of neutral and impartial assistance. The evaluation found that humanitarian actors were better able to make their adherence to humanitarian principles clear in agreements with relevant authorities in NGCA. In Türkiye, they found it challenging to communicate how they were upholding the principles of impartiality and neutrality in complementing the government's response. This led to some misperceptions about a focus on Syrian refugees rather than Turkish nationals.

Utility of the evaluation in the new operational context in Syria

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. The humanitarian operational context remains fluid, with key changes underway, including the decision to close operations of several IASC partners based in Gaziantep and closing the cross-border operation in the summer of 2025. This marks a significant shift in the coordination and delivery of humanitarian aid. Despite these changes, the evaluation findings remain relevant:

- ✓ **Lesson for critical transition** were identified that can inform the design of new humanitarian response mechanisms under a reconfigured Whole of Syria approach.
- ✓ **Insights for cross-border operations** were identified and could be replicated in other contexts.
- ✓ **Guiding engagements with authorities.** Findings from this evaluation invite IASC members to reflect on their role in advance of future responses.

Inter-Agency Humanitarian Evaluations (IAHE)

Inter-Agency Humanitarian Evaluations (IAHE) assess how Inter-Agency Standing Committee (IASC) organizations collectively support people affected by crises. They are key to maintaining and strengthening accountability and learning within the IASC. IAHEs identify what is working well and where improvements are needed, helping to

make humanitarian responses more effective and relevant. They are developed based on extensive community evidence-based lessons to improve collective humanitarian action. The IAHE's report on the collective humanitarian response to the earthquakes in Türkiye and Syria is published [here](#).

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The Inter-Agency Humanitarian Evaluation Steering Group (IAHE SG)

The Inter-Agency Humanitarian Evaluation Steering Group 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. The IAHE of the collective humanitarian response to the earthquakes in Türkiye and Syria is overseen by an inter-agency management group (IOM, ICVA, SCHR, UNCHR, UNICEF, WFP and chaired by OCHA) and implemented by Itad.