

Principles of engagement of humanitarian organizations with Civilian Administration Entities

Cross-border humanitarian response

Background

Consultations with stakeholders (clusters/sectors, donors, United Nations (UN) agencies, International Non-Governmental Organisations (INGOs) and Syrian Non-Governmental Organisations (SNGOs), stabilization actors, and Civilian Administration Entities) concluded that there is an ongoing confusion with respect to the nature and operational roles between humanitarian organizations and Civilian Administration Entities in program implementation in Syria, particularly when humanitarian organizations are involved in resilience and/or early recovery activities.

This document articulates key principles that should guide the engagement of humanitarian organizations with Civilian Administration Entities in order to strengthen the provision of a principled, effective and sustainable humanitarian response in Syria.

Scope

The humanitarian community engaged in humanitarian cross-border response in Syria consider that the principles outlined in this document form the basis for engagement with Civilian Administration Entities in Syria. Each cluster/ sector may develop technical guidelines specific to their sector that should not contradict or undermine these overarching principles. Modalities of engagement between Civilian Administration Entities and clusters/ sectors remain at the discretion of each cluster/ sector, while adhering to the general principles out-lined in this document.

Humanitarian organizations acknowledge that an adjustment period might be required to adhere to these principles and to operationalise them throughout their response. This period may differ according to the capacities of the Civilian Administration Entities, as well as, the humanitarian organization itself.

Currently there are various rapidly evolving models of governance in Syria with a high degree of discrepancy and overlap in the roles and responsibilities amongst them. Humanitarian organizations need to be attuned to this reality from the outset when implementing these general principles, and recognise that accessing the highest authority does not automatically translate to engaging with the most accountable body. It places the humanitarian organisation in a position of not knowing, which Civilian Administration Entity it should engage with resulting in a possible risk to the affected population. Irrespective of which model of governance is in place, humanitarian organisations need to continuously identify which Civilian Administration Entity is best to engage with and to ensure that decision making takes place at the most appropriate level, and is most accountable to affected populations.

Humanitarian organisation engagement with Civilian Administration Entities throughout the Project Cycle Management phases is limited to operational and technical arrangements that are necessary to ensure principled humanitarian operations. The purpose of a humanitarian response is to save lives, alleviate suffering and maintain human dignity. As a result, when a humanitarian organization engages with a Civilian Administrative Entity in order to provide assistance, such an engagement does not confer any legitimacy on that Administration. On the other hand, humanitarian organisations should be cognisant of how their engagement is perceived. They should avoid endorsing formal processes requested by Civilian Administration Entities such as 'accreditation' and should prioritize contacts with Specialized Technical Administration Entities and with staff at the technical/working level.

Definitions:

Humanitarian organizations: include international and local non-governmental organizations, the ICRC, Red Crescent and Red Cross Societies, and UN humanitarian system members.

Civilian Administration Entities: Refers to an existing body that is in charge of the civilian administration and performs its duties in a given area.

Specialized Technical Administration Entities: Refers to the technical component(s) within Civilian Administration Entities.

Local community: all civilians (host and IDP communities) living in the geographical area targeted by the humanitarian assistance.

Affected population: Refers to vulnerable groups within the local community, including women and men, boys and girls.

Principles of engagement

1. Humanitarian principles

Humanity, neutrality, impartiality, and operational independence are core fundamental principles that the humanitarian community adheres to when undertaking humanitarian activities. These longstanding principles are the cornerstone of any humanitarian operation, and are derived in varying degrees from International Humanitarian Law, Human Rights Law, a UN General Assembly Resolution¹, and are part of codes of conduct and organisational mission statements guiding humanitarian organisations (such as the SPHERE Humanitarian Charter and Minimum Standards in Humanitarian Response² and the Code of Conduct for the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement and Non-Governmental Organizations in Disaster Relief³).

Throughout their engagement with Civilian Administration Entities, humanitarian organizations are guided by the humanitarian principles. Humanitarian organisations may decide to discontinue all or part of their engagement with Civilian Administration Entities in any given area, if such an engagement hinders or negatively impacts their adherence to humanitarian principles.

2. Accountability to local communities and affected populations

Humanitarian organisations are accountable to the local communities and the affected population composed of men and women, and boys and girls, of different ages and abilities. In line with the five Commitments to Accountability to Affected Populations (CAAP)⁴, the Core Humanitarian Standards (CHS)⁵, the five Minimum Standards for Protection Mainstreaming⁶ and the Statement of Commitment on Eliminating Sexual Exploitation and Abuse by UN and Non-UN Personnel⁷, humanitarian organizations place the evolving needs of local communities and people affected by crisis at the centre of humanitarian action and promotes respect for their fundamental human rights. It is underpinned by the right to life with dignity, and the right to protection and security as set forth in international law.

¹ Resolution 46/182 (19 December 1991)

² <http://www.sphereproject.org/handbook/>

³ <https://www.icrc.org/eng/assets/files/publications/icrc-002-1067.pdf>

⁴ https://interagencystandingcommittee.org/system/files/legacy_files/IASC%20Principals%20commitments%20on%20AAP%20%2528CAAP%2529March%202013.pdf

⁵ <https://corehumanitarianstandard.org/files/files/Core%20Humanitarian%20Standard%20-%20English.pdf>

⁶ http://www.globalprotectioncluster.org/_assets/files/tools_and_guidance/WV_Standards_Protection_Mainstreaming_2012_EN.pdf

⁷ https://interagencystandingcommittee.org/system/files/2_statement_of_commitment_on_eliminating_sexual_exploitation_and_abuse_by_un_and_non-un_personnel_2011_0.pdf

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3. Promotion of sustainability and do no harm

Given the natural limitations of emergency action (both in time and in scope), and the necessity to link relief and long term recovery, humanitarian response should ensure longer-term positive effects that are both life sustaining and reduce the risk of dependency on relief assistance in order to be effective and sustainable.

Humanitarian organizations should design and implement programmes that promote early disaster recovery and benefit the local economy. Furthermore, humanitarian response should be designed and implemented in a manner that takes into consideration existing service provision mechanisms and infrastructure systems at a broader geographical level. This will ensure that a response in an area does not harm local communities and/or affected populations in another area; and also will contribute to the sustainable use and share of natural resources.

Within the parameters of these principles, humanitarian organizations should link their programming to services that may already be provided by Civilian Administration Entities. This is to avoid programmatic overlap with Civilian Administration Entities, encourage technical coordination, and promote sustainability.

4. Reinforcement of local systems and capacities

Humanitarian action should enable local communities and affected populations to be the central drivers in building their resilience and build on evolving positive local coping strategies and capacities in preparedness, response and recovery. To achieve this, humanitarian organizations need to reinforce and not replace national and local systems⁸(including Specialized Technical Administration Entities, local communities and affected populations) and empower them in their capacity as first-responders in the event of future crises. Throughout this process, humanitarian organizations should ensure that they are not re-enforcing exploitative power structures and that humanitarian principles remain the framework for decisions and action.

Specialized Technical Administration Entities

Humanitarian organizations should contribute to build the operational capacities and understanding of humanitarian action of Specialized Technical Administration Entities in order to ensure smooth roll-out of humanitarian programs and a sustainable hand-over to local civilian authorities. Capacity building activities should take place in the most appropriate format according to the evolving local context, and should take into account the high turnover of Specialized Technical Administration Entity staff, as well as, the necessity to build institutional rather than individual capacities. In addition to relevant technical components, when building capacity general topics covered might include: humanitarian principles, humanitarian coordination architecture, these principles and its operationalization, humanitarian standards (such as: SPHERE, Core Humanitarian Standards, Guiding Principles for IDPs, etc...), and the Project Management Cycle (PCM).

⁸ Refers to the Secretary-General's Agenda for Humanity under Core Responsibility Four (<https://consultations.worldhumanitariansummit.org/bitcache/e49881ca33e3740b5f37162857cedc92c7c1e354?vid=569103&disposition=inline&op=view>).

Local communities and affected populations

Empowering local communities and affected populations in a gender sensitive manner are key to a participatory community based approach that better ensures an effective, relevant and sustainable humanitarian response. Capacities of local communities and affected populations should be built to enable them to provide feedback, influence and make decisions in a way that is continuously adapted to the context and reflects gender considerations.

5. Transparency

Transparency around the humanitarian response allows for effective participation of Civilian Administration Entities, local communities and affected populations, which in turn ensures a more effective, relevant and sustainable humanitarian response. Therefore, humanitarian organizations should share with Civilian Administration Entities, local communities and affected populations relevant information that may include: organizational background, contact details, accountability framework(s), staff code of conduct and roles and responsibilities, financial information that the humanitarian organisation deems suitable, summaries of evaluations, and progress reports. Humanitarian organizations should also communicate that they manage resources effectively, efficiently and ethically.

Humanitarian organizations should involve Civilian Administration Entities and local communities and affected populations in the development of the theory of change and the design of the project objectives and expected results and share how inputs from participation activities has contributed to the decisions being made.

Humanitarian organizations should ensure that information is presented in languages, formats and media that are appropriate for and accessible to the Civilian Administration Entities, the local communities and the affected populations.