

Funding to national and local humanitarian actors in Syria:

Between sub-contracting and partnerships

Executive Summary

May 2016

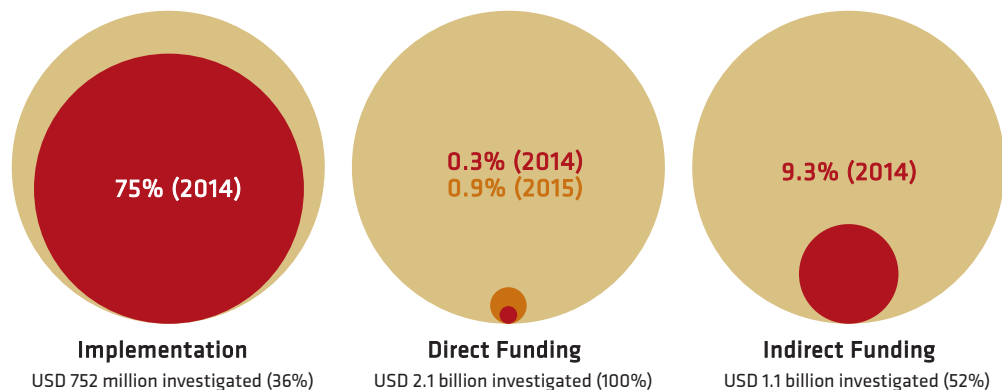
A new report from L2GP estimates, that while Syrian humanitarian actors were responsible for delivering 75% of the humanitarian assistance in 2014, they received only 0.3% of the direct and 9.3% of the indirect cash funding available for the overall Syria response. Despite their crucial role, Syrian NGO's struggled to get their most basic costs covered in the sub-contracting and partnership agreements they have with international agencies. While international actors are all committed to transparency, 30% of the known funding remains unknown in terms of which humanitarian actor actually received the funding. Private remittances and assistance from diaspora groups were found to play a crucial role in day-to-day survival but it remained impossible to estimate their exact volume.

Based on available data, “Between sub-contracting and partnerships” approximates that the total known humanitarian funding for Syria was USD 2.1 billion in 2014. More than 70% of this funding came from just five large donors: The US, the Kuwaiti-based International Islamic Charity Organisation (IICO), the European Commission, the UK and Germany. Five UN agencies were reported to have received 50% of the known humanitarian assistance to Syria in 2014.

The figure shows how Syrian humanitarian actors were responsible for delivering approximately 75% of the official humanitarian assistance to Syria that year.¹ At the same time, analyzing more than 50% (USD 1.1 billion) of the funding, just 10% was made available as direct or indirect cash grants to Syrian humanitarian actors.

The two figures to the right do not include in-kind donations.

SYRIAN HUMANITARIAN ACTORS



¹ Data on who implements the actual relief activities inside Syria is incomplete. This estimate is based on an analysis of WFP, UNHCR and ICRC. Their total share of the funding was 36% (USD 750 million) in 2014.

Syrian humanitarian actors were only known to have received USD 1.5 million directly from foreign government donors – along with USD 5 million via UN OCHA-managed pooled funds. In total, this amounted to just 0.3% of the total direct (first level) funding available in 2014. In 2015, the reported direct funding to Syrian NGOs (including diaspora groups) grew to approximately USD 20 million (0.9%) out of a total reported funding of USD 2.3 billion. While these figures would indicate that Syrian NGOs received more direct funding than other national and local responders elsewhere in the world, the level of direct funding is still just 1% of all available funding.

While UN/INGO counterparts received the bulk of the funding, and then subcontracted their Syrian “partners” to implement much of the actual assistance, Syrian humanitarian actors were found to be much less likely to obtain overheads. Frequently they were not even able to recover the full costs of the relief activities they implement on behalf of donors and their so-called partners. A standard 7% overhead coverage for Syrian NGOs, which is usual for international actors, was only allowed in a few cases such as the OCHA managed Humanitarian Pool Fund. High salary differences between UN agencies, INGOs and Syrian humanitarian actors were reported to hamper Syrian NGO’s capacities as qualified staff leaves for better-paid jobs with international organisations.

Interviews with actors engaged in the Turkey Syria cross-border responses did identify examples of “good-practise partnerships” but also examples not unlike those found in the for-profit sector. Some of these contractual agreements resemble the kind of business deal where international companies possess the know-how, “owns” the design, and controls access to investors and markets, while local “business partners” deliver cheap labor and low production costs - even if this is not the intent of the UN/INGO in question.

Apart from analyzing international humanitarian funding, the paper also highlights how Syrian aid groups continue to raise very substantial private funds primarily from the Syrian diaspora. Despite war and conflict, individual remittances sent directly from Syrians abroad to family and friends at home also continue on a considerable scale. In 2010, the World Bank reported a total of USD 1.6 billion in remittances going into Syria. While unable to establish a current magnitude of remittances, this and other recent research confirm that they continue at very substantial levels.

In conclusion, while the available data was often scarce and inconsistent, it is evident that Syrian actors’ share of international humanitarian funding in no way matches their role in the actual delivery of assistance. The case study illustrates how the global humanitarian enterprise can no longer escape addressing issues of funding and financing to national and local actors. Money - and access to it - is power. As suggested by for instance the High Level Panel on Humanitarian Financing and the Charter4Change initiative, access for local and national actors to funding needs to increase considerable – as must the levels of financial transparency at all levels in the humanitarian system.

The research for “Between sub-contracting and partnerships” was undertaken between October 2015 and April 2016 and consisted of analysis of data on funding flows, literature review and more than 50 interviews in the region along with extensive e-mail correspondence.

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Find the full report here: <http://www.local2global.info/area-studies/funding-syria>

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