Partnerships in First Line Responses (FLR)

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NRC NORWEGIAN REFUGEE COUNCIL

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NRC's longstanding Ukrainian humanitarian partner, Stabilization Support Services (SSS), registers IDPs for assistance in a humanitarian hub in Ternopil city in Western Ukraine.

Norwegian Ministry of Foreign Affairs

NRC NORWEGIAN REFUGEE COUNCIL

Terminology / Acronyms

FLR	First Line Response. NRC considers “first-line response” to have the following description/nature: • Activities triggered by a sudden event with humanitarian consequences or the aggravation of an ongoing crisis/situation, when a predefined threshold is reached (e.g., # individuals impacted, vulnerabilities and risks arising, etc- set at CO level). • Activities focus on provision of and access to an integrated response package of goods and services to fulfil basic needs of affected populations - to mitigate the impact and related risks of the event. • Activity starts shortly after the event (max. up to 12 weeks after start of event). • Activities are time bound (up to max. 6 months in duration) but are forward looking to facilitate transition to longer-term programming if need be.
Grand Bargain	The 'Grand Bargain' is an agreement between more than 50 of the biggest donors and aid providers worldwide to improve the effectiveness and efficiency of the humanitarian action, in order to get more means into the hands of people in need[1].
ICR	Indirect Cost Recovery
INGO	International Non-Governmental Organisation
Intermediary	Intermediaries are organisations, networks or mechanisms which act as an intermediary between funding partners/donors and national or local organisations through the provision of funding or other support. This function is carried out by INGOS, UN agencies, private companies/contractors, and some national organisations.
Localisation	In the humanitarian sector, localisation means empowering local responders in affected countries to lead and deliver humanitarian aid. It aims at strengthening the capacity and resources of local organisations to respond to crises and promote long-term sustainability[2].

[1] https://interagencystandingcommittee.org/content/grand-bargain-hosted-iasc

[2] https://civil-protection-humanitarian-aid.ec.europa.eu/what/humanitarian-aid/localisation_en#what-is-it

LA	Local Actor
NRC	Norwegian Refugee Council
SOPs	Standard Operating Procedures
Ukraine Context	Refers to all operations within the Central and Eastern European region delivering support to displaced persons and host communities affected by the escalation of the conflict in Ukraine from February 2022 onwards.

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Objective:

This research project has been initiated by the Norwegian Refugee Council (NRC) and explores the relationships between International NGOs (INGOs) and local actors (LAs) that started or scaled up their operations in Central and Eastern Europe because of the escalation of the Ukraine crisis from February 2022 onwards. The aim is to provide practical guidance to INGOs responding to emergencies in partnership with LAs.

Methodology:

Key informant interviews and a review of existing tools and policies have been combined to understand the approaches used to develop operational partnerships in the early stages of the response - during the first 3-6 months (referred to as a 'first line response' or FLR). The research focuses primarily on the experience from Moldova but also draws on experience from across the Ukraine response. The research was structured around NRC's Project Cycle Management (PCM) Framework, covering the five stages of programming, identification, formulation, implementation, evaluation, and learning.

Findings:

LAs played an essential part of in the Ukraine response. Many formal and informal organisations – already present in the area – stepped up to meet the needs of the displaced. For those INGOs that also responded, how they engaged in partnership with these LAs was influenced by whether they were already present in the region, networked with existing LAs and therefore scaling up, or starting operations with no prior experience or networks in place.

Most of the international organisations interviewed applied partnership approaches based on their experience from a range of other humanitarian contexts. Some, though not all, INGOs had partnership tools explicitly for use in emergency or FLR contexts. The Ukraine response led to significant adaptation of these tools by INGOs. This included reduced due diligence requirements and adapted contracting methods that enabled rapid fund disbursal and project management. However, not all of these adaptations were available in the earliest days of the FLR. Many INGOs working in partnership in the Ukraine response built on their existing commitments to localisation and for others it accelerated their engagement with the Grand Bargain commitments.

Relationships between INGOs and LAs formed very quickly. The availability of flexible funds increased the willingness (and pressure) of organisations to initiate partnerships to deliver programming. For organisations new to the region, it offered a means to start programming quickly whilst they established their legal presence within the region. As a result, there is some criticism that partnerships were a merger of convenience rather than based on a principled approach to localisation.

Not all organisations had dedicated partnership capacity within their staff structures, despite making conscious decisions to work in partnership. Most INGOs opted for an integrated role included within technical functions. Where a dedicated partnership / unit or function was in place, their primary role was to facilitate the application of due diligence processes. Partnership staffing was challenged by staff rapid turnover and recruitment challenges. Whilst making it difficult to manage partnership processes these challenges also influenced relationships. The research found that partnerships where interactions between staff were clearly established and kept to a minimum were less stressful and more effective than those involving multiple, changing staff.

The ability to effectively engage in joint project development was influenced by the pressure to deliver. There was a strong perception that a more directive approach was likely to be less time consuming and was therefore more commonly applied. The ambitions within the Grand Bargain for co-implementation were therefore perceived as difficult to realise in FLR.

INGOs showed preference funding through donations and smaller lump sum grants, which provided flexibility and quick delivery and were seen as a means for testing potential longer-term relationships. However, a focus on compliance and risk management remained a pervasive influence. Learning and adaptations to address this influence were only initiated later into the response.

Because of a focus on 'gold standard' compliance, many INGOs chose to partner with larger LAs that could handle these requirements and deliver rapidly, which unfortunately led to some LAs being overloaded. This focus often excluded smaller, less formal organisations that were delivering more directly in the early phase of the FLR.

LAs reported an over focus from their INGO partners on fund management, quantitative inputs and outputs rather than on technical capacity and impact for affected populations. However, some LAs were positive about the introduction of new approaches and attention on quality programming components including safeguarding and humanitarian principles.

Investments in 'capacity' were clearly influenced by the perspectives of those determining 'capacity'. As a result, the INGOs interviewed tended to prioritise capacity support to meet their own compliance standards rather than the needs of LAs themselves. All interviewees acknowledged that the impact and success of capacity sharing was more sustainable when those at the receiving end were part of determining its content and form.

Conclusions:

The pressure to deliver influenced almost all aspects of the partnerships discussed in this research. How they were formed, managed and the challenges and opportunities they faced. In the Ukraine response, even though significant flexible funds were available, a global, sector wide focus on compliance meant the application of sometimes heavy due diligence systems was pervasive within partnerships and staff spent much of their time working to apply, adapt and innovate standard practices.

Those organisations that were able to build on existing tools, networks and relationships found their partnerships easier and quicker to initiate than those that started from scratch. However, for INGOs starting up, early phase strategic commitments to a partnership approach and adequate resourcing alongside willingness to adapt led to successful partnerships.

Building on this, the human side of partnerships – interactions and relationships - have emerged as a key factor in partnership success. The tools and systems we have produced as a sector are only as good as the social foundations on which we build them and the people that implement them. This means that style or ethos – for both LAs and INGOs – is as important as the structures that are put in place to enable partnerships in FLR. Investment in human resources and the staff that engage in FLR must consider partnership skills as a key operational capacity given the developing context of FLRs.

METHODOLOGY

Key informant interviews and a review of existing tools and policies have been combined to identify best practices and different approaches in FLRs that combine both International NGO (INGO) and local actor (LA) [3] efforts to meet humanitarian needs. The research focuses on the experience of Moldova, with key informant interviews conducted with LAs and the INGOs between whom partnerships were established to enable the humanitarian response.

Nine interviews with LAs, primarily civil society and non-governmental organisations based in Moldova (and to a lesser extent Romania) were conducted in Romanian as a primary source of information.

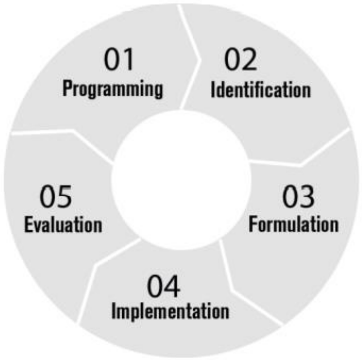
Fifteen interviews with different international NGO actors were conducted. Some INGOs presented multiple interviewees as part of the study. Of the 12 INGOs interviewed there was experience of a range of both new (start-up) and existing (scale up) operations across the region. This regional perspective is relevant as most INGOs applied the same approaches and systems across all affected countries (Moldova, Poland, Romania and Ukraine) though with some levels of contextualisation

In addition, a range of international resource organisations were also interviewed and shared their experiences from across the region. One funding network, one policy organisation, one UN agency and one INGO network were also included in the interviews.

Key outcomes / areas for investigation included:

- Best practices in establishing relationships between INGOs and LAs during a FLR.
- Examples of partnership models that have proven effective for FLRs.
- Specific challenges and opportunities within the context of Romania and Moldova.
- Longer-term sustainability considerations that could be considered

[3] NRC considers local actors to be groups of individuals, public institutions, local and national non-governmental organisations (LNNGOs), the private sector, and other civil society organisations (CSOs), such as academia and the knowledge sector, associations, faith-based organisations, cultural organisations, and formal or informal networks.



The questions[4] posed to both LAs and INGOs were structured around NRC's Project Cycle Management (PCM) Framework. This enabled coverage of the key stages in partnership relations and for the findings to be structured to provide guidance on best practice that can be applied and challenges to be addressed or avoided at each stage.

Information that was provided by key informants was only visible to the researchers. Any quoting of information provided is anonymous and limited to 'local actor', international resource organisation or 'INGO'. This was intended to support greater openness and honesty in the information provided.

The research team consisted of two key staff – Kathy Relleen Evans, who led the key informant interviews with INGOs and international resource organisations and led the research write up, and Diana Vrabie who carried out key informant interviews with LAs from the Republic of Moldova.

Limitations

The information proved here aims to provide examples of key best practice and challenges to avoid when working with partners in a FLR. It does not provide a quantitative analysis of who does what or to what extent.

The interviewees in the research were able to reflect on their own experiences and the systems and styles that they applied and identify lessons learned. The information presented here provided both a snapshot of what has worked well as well as suggestions for how to improve in future FLRs. As a result, the content is primarily anecdotal and influenced by individuals personal and professional experiences and perspectives.

[4] See Annex 2 Research questions.

INTRODUCTION

The escalation of the war in Ukraine in February 2022 led to one of the largest refugee movements seen since the Second World War. The demand and support for a humanitarian response was unprecedented and much of the international aid system turned its attention towards meeting this demand. INGOs, both those previously present in the affected areas and those with no prior experience in the region, sought to provide support and resources. As a result, there was a rapid scale up, or in some cases start up, by members of the INGO humanitarian community keen to respond to the crisis.

In total 5.7 million refugees fled from Ukraine into the neighbouring countries of Poland, Slovakia, Hungary, Romania, and Moldova with a further 5.9 million internally displaced within Ukraine[5], and many more affected. The initial efforts and outpouring of support saw individuals, informal groups and more established civil society organisations pivot from their previous areas of work towards helping Ukrainian refugees.

The countries neighbouring Ukraine had varying experiences of working with the humanitarian sector, and with INGOs in particular. Countries that were members of the European Union demonstrated less experience with the systems of international response commonly applied in humanitarian crises. However, in contrast they were well versed in working with local communities, EU institutions and the private sector. Prior to 2022, the sectoral capacity of LAs was in general focussed on working with marginalised groups and the number of organisations familiar with specialised asylum and refugee related services was limited. As a result, there were repeated references in the early stages of the response to the perceived '*lack of humanitarian capacity'* amongst existing LAs. Despite this LAs were recognised as having been *'very* responsive' to the needs of the Ukrainian refugees[6].

Perceptions of capacity, alongside the sheer size of the refugee influx, combined to justify many INGOs - previously not operational in the region - initial reasons for responding and starting up operations.

Global Considerations - A Changing Operating Environment?

Over the last ten years we have seen a growth of contexts where established operating models involving INGOs have struggled to deliver or been deemed 'less relevant' to the needs of affected populations. Assertive governments, travel

[5] https://reporting.unhcr.org/operational/situations/ukraine-situation

[6] ICVA & UNHCR (2022) p.23

restrictions, the rise of social media alongside the potential for market driven responses –are often presented as able to meet needs more immediately and directly than the traditional INGO FLR model characterised by the approach of *'deploy and distribute'*.

> New groups of responders, rooted in both local actors and diaspora networks, are procuring, transporting, and delivering much of the assistance reaching affected communities.[7]

> The Syria and the Ebola responses… have shown, the role of diaspora groups is becoming ever more important and sophisticated as communications technology and online fundraising facilitates the development of international ad-hoc responses that currently operate mostly outside of the formal humanitarian sector.[8]

More recent contexts have only further demonstrated this trend and the growing role of LAs, particularly in the early period of a crisis or in contexts with challenging access issues.

> Even at this early stage, data shows that local humanitarian action is mitigating the crisis [**Covid-19**] by responding to the immediate needs of affected communities.[9]

> Within a few hours of the disaster, different groups, volunteers, non-governmental organisations, and for-profit organisations were on the ground, taking over the response to the disaster while the international community expressed its willingness to help the Lebanese population directly through aid and funds to non-governmental organisations, local communities in Lebanon played the pivotal role in the **[2020 Beirut] disaster response**[10]

The drive to localise humanitarian aid has been growing for many years, catalysed with the World Humanitarian Summit in 2016 and the subsequent 'Grand Bargain'. Whilst the scale and scope of their involvement is still open to interpretation there is a growing recognition of the important role that LAs have to play in responding to crises.

A key challenge for many INGOs is that the newly emerging LA networks and organisations that are operating in FLR spaces do not resemble the established, formal organisations with whom they are used to working. This is challenging the traditional partnership approaches that many INGOs have adopted to date. Traditional models in which INGOs initiated partnerships which then sub granted to LAs seem no longer fit for purpose.

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[7] Wall, I. & Hedlund, K. (2016) p.13

[8] Ibid p.4

[9] Wall, I. & Hedlund, K. (2016) p.14

[10] Haddad (2022) p. 2

> Technology is facilitating very different kinds of organisational structures: groups of individuals connected through a network rather than a traditional NGO…Supporting such work presents considerable challenges to international responders, as these actors tend not to form the kind of institutions with whom aid agencies are used to establishing a formal relationship. [11]

The Ukraine response has combined attention on all these considerations. The presence of functional governmental systems and an active LA community engaged in the overall response should compound the call for INGOs and the wider humanitarian response system to speed up their efforts towards localisation to stay relevant, and more crucially, to be accepted by the populations that they seek to support.

> It's first response I've ever done that partners are this powerful and know their own value and their own resources. I think that's a great thing that they feel like they can say no to us, and they show it absolutely. (INGO Respondent)

> I feel the metrics under the Grand Bargain are hugely significant. We have to make progress on those and have an enormous impact on what we're talking about with regard to emergency response. If they're not in place it can quickly unravel a lot of that trust building and have a very negative impact on a program implementation (INGO Respondent)

[11] Wall, I. & Hedlund, K. (2016) p.5, Strzyżyńska, W. (2023) The Guardian - *Sudanese doctors are turning to social media to reach patients as hospitals and heath facilities struggle to function or close completely in the violence. Volunteers have set up 24-hour helplines on messaging platforms including WhatsApp, staffed by hundreds of doctors and specialists.*

1 PROGRAMMING

Partnership as a methodology is agreed and partners identified.

1.1 Choosing to work in partnership.

In the early days of the Ukraine response the decision to work in partnership with existing LAs was both pragmatic and pressured.

> Everything was on an ad hoc emergency basis back then because everyone was running amok. Everyone was trying to understand who the actors are, how to support them, what to do, because this was already February, March and there was no time. There was no structure at the at the time…it was kind of hard to take stock and to understand what the strategy should be. I mean, this is not an excuse, but this is also the reality and I think it's valid for a lot of other organisations. (INGO respondent)

INGOs who deployed their surge teams quickly recognised that the process to establish themselves formally in country, recruit staff and set up programming would not keep pace with the scale and speed of the refugee influx. With much of the response in February and March locally led - both through individuals and existing groups - for INGOs starting up, the decision to work with LAs provided the most practical way to become quickly operational.

> I think it was definitely a strategic decision and I would say also internally within [INGO] there was a lot of pressure for large scale response. Not to go in small but to really go in big. I think that without having an established infrastructure on the ground, not having a functional country program, it was also a bit of a pragmatic thing. In order to reach scale and get access to a lot of people we had to work through partners because it would have been so slow if we were waiting for [INGO] to set up all the infrastructure for direct implementation. I think with Ukraine particularly like there was also an acknowledgement that there was a strong civil society, there were really capable partners to work with a little bit of a different environment than some of the other crises we work in where civil society is not very developed or partners have no experience administering donor funding. I think Ukraine was sort of almost this perfect storm of the strategic ambition, the need to scale up and deliver big and then partners that had the higher level of capacity to do that. (INGO respondent)

Whether this choice then built on an organisational ethos in support of localisation or was merely understood as a stop gap to a future in which INGOs would be able to deliver direct programming, would prove important to the longevity and success of the partnerships that were formed in those first few days and weeks.

> The UN don't have the challenge that we have of startup because that's really what what's challenges us…registration recruitment and getting staff in. That isn't an issue for the UN and that's what we're trying to we're trying to overcome by working through local partners. (INGO respondent)

INGOs that were already present and therefore looking at scaling up operations, were able to build on existing operations and relationships. In addition, INGOs that were federated or previously networked, (faith-based networks or organisations with established national level representation e.g., CAFOD, CRS, Save the Children International) were able to develop partnerships with LAs with whom they had existing relationships and established ways of working.

> The faith-based network came into play, people and organisations that we have worked with in other contexts… we can reach out to and see if there's ability or interest. (INGO respondent)

> It was easier to work with INGOs that are working for more time in Moldova (LA respondent)

Of the respondents to this research most identified a mix of drivers that influenced their choice to work in partnership with LAs. Both pragmatic and principled. These starting points, and drivers, need to be kept in mind when considering the challenges and successes that were later encountered in the partnership journey.

1.2 Identifying who to work with

INGOs interviewed reported a range of approaches that they applied in order to identify suitable LAs with whom to work with. In the majority, LAs appeared passive in their identification of INGOs to work with. They did not report any formalised process for identifying INGOs for partnerships beyond contacting INGOs with representatives in Moldova directly or responding to INGO issued calls for application. However, this did not stop them from being discerning in who they chose to work with.

The research reported a degree of power within the LA community to pick and choose the INGO they wanted to work with. For organisations already operational and with proven capacity in place there was high demand from INGOs to partner with them. Some LAs chose not to work with some INGO's reporting that they were *'complicated and difficult and they don't bring what we want'*. Such comments often related to issues around reporting, and paperwork required to administer partnerships.

> We decided to refuse collaboration with those INGOs that required activities that did not develop our NGO and put too much pressure on the team for delivering

> activities that are not very relevant according to our strategy (like acting as a logistic support for distribution of kits). (LA respondent)

This highlighted a change in the power dynamics that some respondents said they had not seen in other FLR contexts and resulted in many INGOs starting to explore ideas of ways in which they could be more attractive to LAs.

INGO tools used to identify LAs for partnership.

Almost all INGO respondents referred to some form of **partner mapping** – which at its best was a formal information gathering process relying on a range of sources - needs assessments, stakeholder analysis - in a given geographic or sectoral area. This would then be used to identify where the INGO fitted into the network of actors already on the ground. However, given time pressures, mappings had differing degrees of depth and formality.

> The early phase decision about choosing who to work with, was not done through any formalised process but was done based on individual judgment, at the station, by the border, in the carpark, anywhere that refugees were gathering. Agreements were made between individuals. In that kind of situation, [INGO] calls upon its trusted staff who expect to be allowed to respond and based on their years of experience, make the right decision Obviously, we trust our staff, but we would have benefitted later from some documentation of their thinking. People want to know how you made your choices because they weren't there in the heat of the moment, they weren't part of the thinking. They weren't under the pressure that you were under. (INGO Respondent)

Several INGOs relied on **informal networking,** building on relationships that they already had in place. This was obviously easier for INGOs that were scaling up, but even those INGOs starting up made use of staff from within their organisations who were citizens of the countries in the region. Many of these staff were brought into the response to enable easier networking within their own countries and asked to build on their personal networks. As some staff had previously been employed with the larger LAs they were able to easily reestablish relationships. INGOs that applied this approach said it proved to be an effective strategy.

Given the time pressure, both building on existing relationships and the rapid identification of LAs regularly led to a process of **non-competitive selection** in which targeted LAs would then be invited to submit a request for funding.

> We know the organisation, we have met them, we can go directly and tell them, OK, this is the plan. If they are fine, we can work together. (INGO respondent)

> Using cluster mailings lists - We did a formal call where partners could submit applications against a set of criteria. (INGO respondent)

> We launched the first call for proposals it was only aimed at five organisations whom we pre identified as being high capacity, capable of operating with large budgets…we didn't have the resources to deal with a large number of applications. We tried to sign the partners as soon as possible rather than spending the time to identify all possible organisations who might be fit for this. (INGO respondent)

Not all LAs agreed with this approach.

> There is favoritism in selection of local partners and lack of will to discover new actors with whom INGOs can collaborate, especially when selection criteria are not very clear. (LA respondent)

It wasn't until later in the response that INGOs reported being able to launch more **competitive selection processes**, for example expressions of interest or open calls for proposals. Resource requirements and the slow pace of formal application processes were noted as the reasons why this approach did not occur until later in the response. This despite some INGOs reporting that they had simplified their application procedures under the pressure to establish partnerships and deliver e.g., reduced information requirements to initiate partnerships.

Overall, the identification of who to work with was not an exact science and worked as well when built into standard assessment processes as when carried out as a standalone activity. The most successful partnerships emerged from assessments where INGOs were able to identify their complementary role alongside existing capacities and then offer that support.

CALL FOR PROPOSALS IN PLACE OF NEEDS ASSESSMENTS?

Utilising information from communities' own action to determine interventions.

The need for a form of rapid locally led emergency needs assessment methodology that informs a humanitarian response could be answered through using a Call for Proposal methodology. This could allow for *'a diverse, devolved and decentralised model'*.[12]

The Paung Ku Nargis Response found that survivors' shifting needs over time could be tracked simply by recording the changing objectives of the flow of proposals being submitted by self-help groups seeking micro-grants. Collectively these proposals (which were submitted by hundreds of local groups serving hundreds of thousands of survivors) reflected the changing priorities of the autonomous response and provided a reasonable picture of changing needs and opportunities without any assessment ever having to be carried out[13]

Instead of going out and doing our own needs assessments, why not use applications from local actors as a way of gauging what the needs are. Local organisations are often more connected and more involved with local communities. And therefore, instead of having an INGO turn up and do their needs assessment, which can often take time. you do a call for proposals instead and use the information that comes in from that to help you determine the needs. In this way could we not innovate on the more formulaic approaches often used in emergency responses, turning it on its head from a localisation perspective? (INGO respondent)

[12] Wall, I. & Hedlund, K. (2016) p.21 (Bennett et al 2016)

[13] Ibid p.22 (Corbett 2010 p8)

1.3 Resourcing Partnerships

> [Do not] under-estimate the necessary investment in partnership building, both in terms of financial cost and man-hours… [including] setting up, maintaining and on-going capacity support [14]

Whether scaling up, or starting up, most teams included humanitarian surge staff who were deployed to provide additional support during the first few weeks and months. This resulted in large numbers of staff arriving or being recruited in the affected areas. In some countries, recruitment was from amongst the displaced population itself. To complement staff deployed directly, additional staff were also often drafted in to provide remote support from other locations within the region, or globally.

Not all organisations had dedicated partnership capacity within their staff structures in the early days of the FLR, despite making conscious decisions to work in partnership. Over time this changed with a growth in demand for staff and functions with partnership experience. Whether this remains contextually specific or will result in an industry wide drive for skills in this area remains unconfirmed and will likely be closely linked to the policy discussions on localisation and future operational environments.

The ability to scale up sustainably was partly linked to the registration status of different INGOs, with those already established or connected through networks in the response areas, better able to scale up due to their existing registration status.

> There was a team of us that came in from the humanitarian response department…initially probably five or six staff. They covered the functions of shelter and cash, and we also had operations as well. We had a very significant scale up both of deployed staff and then the hiring of staff as well based on the registration that we had in country. (INGO respondent)

For some INGOs, the demands of establishing their own operations and delivering partner led programming, were seen as two separate approaches. Where this was the case, staff stated that this was very stressful, particularly for those staff on the support side (finance, logistics, HR etc.)

> I think as a setup, I would probably have done it a bit differently and I would had staff only committed to supporting the ongoing projects and then have another team that was responsible for setting up the mission. (INGO respondent)

Structuring operations delivering support through partnerships:

The INGOs interviewed presented a range of different team compositions intended to support their operational responses and consequently their partnerships. The choice

[14] Ibid p.20

of team compositions relating to partnerships were dependent on the following factors:

1. Individual preferences / experiences e.g., amongst staff setting up teams and recruiting staff.
2. Availability of staff and their prior skills.
3. Organisational structures or HR requirements. e.g., set ways of structuring an office. INGOs that had flexibility in their structures were able to create and adapt positions in response to the staff they had available.

Choices about who and how country operations were structured were also linked to the compliance and programme quality requirements that INGOs applied within their partnership approaches. The level of complication or required investment in these areas determined their staff numbers, composition, and structures.

The research identified two main approaches applied to structuring teams in FLR where partnership was identified as a key programmatic methodology. In the majority these two approaches were supported by a dedicated partnership / unit or function whose primary role was to support the selection of LAs for partnership and then facilitate the application of due diligence processes.

> If you have someone like me, a partnership advisor, and I have partnership officers I help them with the paperwork and finding new partners. (INGO respondent)

When this was completed the project management of the partnership was then ‘handed over’ to one of the two models outlined below.

1. Integrated functions *Technical and support staff with partnership responsibilities integrated alongside their other technical / sectoral duties.*	The project managers have the responsibility of interacting with the partners all the time. So, they manage their budget, and they are the ones who read their narrative reports and their financial reports and they're the ones who organise monitoring and site visits. So the project manager has talked to the partners every single day. It makes it a lot easier for the programme teams to own partnerships. (INGO respondent) We're trying to build it in the description and the functions of everybody that this is just a minimum expectation that now it's part of your job to support partners - especially in the operation side. It's a big shift in the way of thinking as there's still this idea that partnerships are a programme thing rather than something that affects the whole organization and our operations (INGO respondent)
2. Dedicated partnership staff	We hired a person under the programme dealing also with the financial reporting, which is easier

within technical units *Dedicated staff integrated within technical units e.g., Partnership Finance Officer, WASH Partnership Officer*	because then it's just one focal point. (INGO respondent) The best experience is to have a dedicated person from each function working with partners. That was the best way to ensure that they are dedicated, focused. They have the skills, the knowledge in terms of how to work with other organisations. So, within each function, - finance, supply chain, even programme - we have a dedicated person for partners. (INGO respondent

The point at which dedicated partnership staff initially involved with LAs (for mapping, selection and due diligence), 'handed over' their role to technical staff (for project development and implementation) or continued to 'mediate' (during the project life cycle) between INGOs and LAs was different for each INGO. In many cases the standalone function was seen as an intermediary and continued to play a role in supporting the partnership relationship, often being called in at key stages in the project management process and compliance 'journey'.

> The partners come to me when they want to complain about our staff or if they have a problem. (INGO respondent – Partnership Manager)

This function offered a valuable service in terms of continuity and in some cases was seen as an independent function when LA staff and their INGO counterparts disagreed or fell out during project implementation. Some partnership functions reported that they found this 'middleman' role extremely stressful as they often faced pressure both internally from their colleagues and externally from LA staff to make systems work effectively for everyone.

All functions interviewed highlighted the significant stress they felt where the additional requirements for working in partnership were not adequately acknowledged within their roles.

> It puts a lot of work on the support side of our staff. We were requesting a lot more support from our procurement and logistics department and a lot more support from our finance department in terms of supporting partners with adhering to reporting deadlines, best practices. (INGO respondent)

The additional negotiation and mediation of relationships and working with teams across different systems and ways of working were highlighted. The sheer number of people involved in conversations and decision making around partnerships manifested themselves in many INGOs developing complicated 'RACI'[15] matrices that attempted to clarify who should be involved in which areas, with what capacity and with what responsibility.

Whilst these go some way to addressing issues of responsibility and engagement of different functions in general those partnerships where interactions were clearly established and minimal in number were reportedly less stressful and more effective than those that involved multiple staff.

ONE IN-BOX TO RULE THEM ALL?

For contexts experiencing high staff turnover one INGO identified a simple solution:

A shared email box, it's such a simple thing that's really helpful. If someone is on leave, then other people have access to that box. You have continuity when you have staff turnover. The new person has access to all the old emails and the communication, and they're not trying to dig up something that they don't know. This is now something we do as a standard practice (INGO respondent)

LAs did not express a preference for one structure over another. However, all models were affected by how those structures were applied and by whom and in what style. (See 'trust, communications and relationship building).

Whilst the ability to resource partnerships from an INGO perspective was highlighted, the ability of LAs to staff up their own engagement was also noted. The requirement to separate functions and duties was regularly reported as a concern by INGOs when seeking LAs who were able to apply their compliance systems.

> INGOs have expectations that local actors will correspond to their requirements, and do not take into consideration that they have a smaller team number with more diverse range of responsibility, thus expectations of prompt ad hoc delivery overloaded our personnel (LA respondent)

> To have senior leadership from local agencies having the time and space to, you know, be involved in all the negotiations as well was a challenge. (INGO respondent)

However, the ability and willingness from LAs to scale up in this regard, and to put in place those functions that reflected the needs of the INGO partners was mixed. Many raised concerns that the short term nature of project funding would result in staff redundancies or structures that they would be unable to support in the long term.

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[15] The RACI matrix is a responsibility assignment chart that maps out every task, milestone or key decision involved in completing a project and assigns which roles are Responsible for each action item, which personnel are Accountable, and, where appropriate, who needs to be Consulted or Informed https://www.cio.com/article/287088/project-management-how-to-design-a-successful-raci-project-plan.html

> We made a conscious decision we don't want to grow more than 15% in size. Its just not sustainable. (LA respondent)

1.4 Trust, communications, and relationship building.

The best structures succeed or fail on how they are applied. The importance of trust at the early stages of partnership development cannot be underestimated. The following key elements that enable trust building, effective communication and relationship building were identified by both INGOs and LAs as key to ensuring effective systems and ways of working.

Continuity: The first few months of the FLR were characterised by a constant turnover of short-term staff within INGOs. This was further complicated by challenges in securing longer term recruitments.

> It was a challenge for us internally, to be ready and fully operational. We had some weaknesses here not only in the partnership unit, but also from the support service units which were not sufficient. We had a lot of staff turnover. (INGO respondent)

Turnover, often compounded by a lack of documentation had a significant impact on partner relationships and trust.

> Our informal start up made sense, but I think it also created tensions with the partners. Our first staff deployed were like everything's all great, here's a handshake and then in came the new full-time staff and they started seeing issues and then they started saying 'wait a second, we need to do this properly'. That made them they look like the 'jerk', and it challenged the relationships. (INGO respondent)

Clear lines of communication: LAs consistently flagged concerns about the large numbers of people (often also new to working with partners) involved in engaging with them which often led to confusion and mixed messaging regarding the systems and approaches to be adhered to.

> We saw high turnover and this institutional amnesia within INGOs. Sometimes every two weeks some new person was coming, and we had to explain from the beginning what is our project about which is quite frustrating because there is no memory within the organisation (LA respondent)

Despite the development of detailed RACI matrices to address these problems, few LAs reported that they had seen these RACI, or had any involvement in their content development.

Both INGOs and LAs highlighted the need to clearly identify which individuals were responsible for partnership management, and the level of that responsibility, particularly what issues needed to be escalated and to whom.

Positive action by individuals: Significant trust was built within relationships by individuals themselves. As mentioned before, the secondment of many INGO staff who were from the region was noted as a key success.

> They're coming from the [region], so this is a major bonus. They know how to do those things. Their project manager is Romanian. She knows very well how to advocate for our needs because she lives here. She knows the realities and she can influence the [INGO] by saying 'I am Romanian, I can tell you the things are happening like this, and the legislation is like this'. (LA respondent)

Trust in the familiar: LA respondents reported that INGOs demonstrated more trust in collaboration with larger more experienced local partners. The proven experience and capacity of larger LAs were seen as easily adaptable to partnerships with INGOs. The LAs capacity for implementing larger budgets and projects, including similarity of internal procedures and policies required for due diligence made trusting them easier. Previous experience with INGOs combined with this familiarity of form to reinforce the conclusion that it was easier to trust organisations that *'looked the same as the INGOs themselves'*. However, the choice to partner with the familiar may have been to the detriment of other more innovative partnerships or may have excluded smaller organisations that were delivering more effectively in the early days of the FLR[16].

Appropriate ethos and attitudes: Even the most contextually sensitive individuals, present in the response for a significant period of time undermined the success of partnerships where their overall attitude towards partnership in FLR was negative.

> We can simplify the tools, but the let's say the attitude and the ethos of some of the staff that we send in in those early phase responses is not as open and patient to the potential or the requirement for working in partnership. So, we compounded our systematic problems with our social approach in how we engaged with partners (INGO respondent)

> We had people come in who were very used to going into [INGO] country offices and not used to working with partners…it doesn't help them if they say straight to somebody's face 'your procedures aren't good, you're not compliant', that kind of language is just unhelpful… there were plenty of people who didn't listen properly. (INGO respondent)

However, in the majority attitudes were appropriate and advanced collaborative ways of working.

> I want them to feel comfortable telling us that they made a mistake. It's so simple but I think that's just really important that they're not seeing us as being in an auditing or donor function, but really a partner where they can come and say this isn't working or we messed up. Let's work together to fix it. (INGO respondent)

[16] See Introduction

> One partner said to us the other day we really do feel like we don't look at you as the donor, you ask us what we want. And then you actually do it. I'm very conscious that we do not dictate to the partners anything, we work for them not the other way around. We've also done a huge amount of work kind of internally to make sure that that's the relationship we have. (INGO respondent)

Reliability: The issue of 'ghosting' was flagged as a concern by some LAs, who felt they invested time and resources in potential relationships or contributed to assessments by INGOs only to see no follow up or action.

> Some INGOs disappeared without providing any feedback or follow-up after their consultations. This has generated resentment, disappointment, and the feeling of being treated unfairly[17]

Further to this there were multiple acknowledgements that both INGOs and LAs over promised on how quickly they could process the due diligence requirements that were necessary to formalise partnerships. This led to an inability to deliver on contract paperwork and delayed payments which was regularly flagged as problematic, leading to delays on project delivery and risky behaviour by LAs seeking to push ahead with programming without the necessary funds in place[18].

Language: A recurring challenge listed both by respondents and throughout the literature was the issue of language, though many organisations made efforts to ensure that documents were translated some went the extra mile.

> Some of our partners speak amazing English and some of our partners, not a single one of them speaks English. And so, we do everything in Ukrainian – reports and calls could be in Ukrainian then translated. I think that helps a lot as well for them to feel comfortable expressing themselves. It really helps relationship building. (INGO respondent)

There was no conclusive recommendation on how language issues should be addressed but investment in improved communications, whether through translation or adaptation of tools or documents was highlighted by most respondents.

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[17] IASC & UNHCR (2022) p.30

[18] See p.43 Timely payments.

2 IDENTIFYING PARTNERSHIPS

Specific partners and funding opportunities are identified and partners' capacity to implement activities is confirmed.

2.1 Due diligence

Most INGO due diligence systems covered at least the following:

- Information that can ensure the organisation has effective systems and operational procedures in place – including financial, procurement and administrative systems.
- Assessment of whether a potential partner poses a financial, reputational or programmatic risk.
- Confirmation that the partner is not listed in any excluded party list due to linkages with criminal or political activity, terrorism, or diversion of funds.

Some went further into detail regarding programme capacity alongside commitments to standards and principles e.g. PSEA, safeguarding.

There was widespread agreement that the due diligence systems and tools INGOs were using were built to accommodate the most restrictive donors. Most organisations applied the same approach regardless of the donor, applying specific minimum requirements regardless of the funding source, or planned activities. This led to an application of a 'gold standard' approach to due diligence. Many INGOs reported that they lacked the flexibility (and in some case time) to adapt a 'one size fits all system' to the operating environment they found themselves in.

> The donors… they all have different requirements for my INGO…. We then take the most conservative one because if we're going to have one approach, then we're going to have one that meets them all. (INGO respondent)

Those INGOs interviewed for this research reported that the Ukraine response had challenged their existing partnership due diligence systems. As a result, there was a common drive to adapt the standard tools. The most common adaptation reported by INGOs were changes made to vetting requirements to reduce the depth of information requested and as a result the time required by the process. INGOs reported that senior in country management staff were given the ability to waive parts of the due diligence process. Whilst in other operational context waiving was often applied in situations due to security or access constraints the choice to waive within the Ukraine context was most often cited as a result of time pressure.

> This is something we're discussing internally, how to be more reactive, because if we spend too much time dwelling on all these documents, we lose the essence of an emergency response and that's a problem. (INGO respondent)

Some concern was raised regarding the stage at which the requirement for due diligence was introduced into partnership discussions.

> The first capacity to be assessed is the capacity of a local organisation to become a partner of an international organisation – as opposed to understanding what capacities local organisations can contribute towards better humanitarian outcomes for affected populations.[19]

Further to this, the one-way nature of due diligence has been criticised for creating power imbalances in relationships.

> Donor policies and the nature of the international humanitarian system…have played a major role in shaping the way capacity is assessed…It is often assumed that international organisations have capacity in a crisis, while local organisations do not. Internationals are viewed as trusted brands that donors rely on to deliver, without assessing whether that particular organisation is best placed to respond in a particular context and crisis. These assumptions mean that power, authority and control become embedded in any assessment of capacity, and lead to generic statements that local and national capacity is lacking across the board, rather than identifying specific shortages…that international assistance could meet[20]

Most INGOs interviewed for this research presented due diligence processes which consisted of two parts:

1. **Vetting -** *linked to compliance standards required for the effective management of the contract and associated financial resources.*

In general, vetting processes and tools required LAs to complete some form of checklist or respond to a series of questions and requests for information. It was commonplace that the LA had to share examples and copies of their internal policies and procedures. Most vetting tools were built on a set of criteria defined by the INGO and informed by expectations from donors.

> Our earlier due diligence was photocopy of FCDO's, which was understandable because it was 80% of our funding at that time (INGO respondent)

Most INGOs reported that they were able to adapt their traditional vetting documents, reducing the amount of information requested and fast tracking some of

[19] Barbelet, V. (2018) p.18

[20] Barbelet, V. (2018) p.11 (see Collinson, 2016 for a discussion of Barnett and Finnemore's 1999 analysis of bureaucratic agency).

the review processes. For some this was a blanket approach, whereas for others it was linked to the form of contracting or size of grant that would later be agreed[21]. The exception to the need to make adaptations, was with those INGOs that had previously established relationships, and were able to develop partnerships without having to complete full due diligence processes during the early months of the response.

There were mixed approaches to whether this process was completed through self-assessment by the LA or through a more facilitated approach with INGO staff sitting alongside LAs and completing the process.

> They already had the pressure of the war, we didn't want to add so much pressure, so we did it to together (INGO respondent)

> I tend to sit down with the partner. So it's not a self-assessment, it's a combined joint assessment where we discussed the different areas…it touches upon different aspects of both their organisational capacity but also their organisational structure and the different departments within their unit in terms of how they work and how they see themselves in terms of some examples that we provide them with. (INGO respondent)

A review of the materials and forms completed was standard practice, sometimes led by individuals or reviewed by a range of technical staff (where they were available). Some form of scoring was commonplace, and data gathered during the vetting process was often used as a baseline for later review and assessment of the partnership. In some cases, this was also used to determine capacity sharing investments.

> We had three forms based on our financial management manual and potential partners would have to fill the forms and then they would have to sign them once they would be cleared by our compliance and finance department. (INGO respondent)

> Having different people involved helps to better understand and better know the partner. So the project managers are really seeing some of the aspects, the financial person seeing another kind of aspect. All this information gathered together helps having a full picture of the partner. (INGO respondent)

For some LAs the areas for focus within INGO due diligence were unexpected and at times they lacked a clear structure and information about what was needed to complete due diligence processes.

> Some of the requirements for formalisation of the partnership were unexpected like a recruiting policy. We've had the same staff for 15 years. And the policy for safeguarding of employees, or community feedback procedure and planning of receiving feedback – our practice was more on direct communication and

[21] See Contracting

permanent contact with beneficiaries so we didn’t see why this was necessary. (LA respondent)

We invested a lot of time and effort to correspond to the requirements of the INGO, but additional ad hoc requirements created additional pressure on the team, and our director was almost ready to refuse further collaboration. We felt there was too much pressure on formal aspects rather than on concrete projects actions addressed to beneficiaries. We did adhere to the different INGOs procedures and policies, like antiterrorism, money laundering, etc., but we felt this was a formality for INGO rather than useful for us. (LA respondent)

In some instances, INGOs would support the LAs in the process of completing and meeting the standards required within the due diligence process.

We tried to support them as much as possible [with due diligence requirements] if necessary we’d share templates. If they didn't have, for example, any procurement procedure, we gave them the [INGO] minimum standards. (INGO respondent)

It is unclear whether the provision of these tools and templates were effectively absorbed by the LAs or primarily adopted to enable completion of the due diligence process.

There were mixed requirements as to whether these documents were provided in hard or electronic copy. In the majority, LAs were able to submit electronically. None of INGOs interviewed reported the use of any form of ‘live’ online application portal. Documents were instead primarily shared through email or occasionally using shared online / cloud folders.

2. **Capacity assessment** – *with capacity understood as the competence of a LA across both compliance and programmatic areas. This process was undertaken often with a view to identifying areas for capacity sharing support.*

The process was either through self-assessment by the LA or completed by the INGO. Some organisations would carry out a capacity assessment alongside their vetting process, others would require this to be completed within a minimum period after the signing of a contract.

At the due diligence phase, we work with partners to identify material risks for the project in any sort of gaps or areas of support that they might need from [INGO] and then building in a plan to make sure that we're supporting them, whether that's technical, procurement, finance, HR or whatever it is. Some support would be focused on technical. Most of the need in Ukraine was focused on safeguarding because there wasn't something in place. (INGO respondent)

In some cases, the programmatic capacity of the partner was also assessed, however this was not reported to have been completed to the same level of detail as areas of operational compliance.

It's [technical capacity] included in the Partners Assessment tool but it’s not capturing it very well, to be honest, and also a lot of the times the partners are not, I would say fully transparent about their own capacities in, in terms of delivering quality programming

A recurring theme in the discussions was the concept of *'humanitarian capacity'*. As previously stated much of the local response grew from organisations that had experience working with marginalised or vulnerable members of their communities, without any explicit humanitarian component to their work. Despite many respondents linking their own INGO purpose in the overall response to their humanitarian capacity, concrete steps as to how to measure this element within LAs was not forthcoming.

> I think we have this obsession with humanitarian capacity, as if it's something that only we can know and understand, when really if it's an organisation that knows communities, it's not like they're not going to be able to learn how to hand out tents pretty quickly. It's not rocket science, it's just about the urgency of it (INGO respondent)

The need for shared due diligence was raised but, in the research, it was uncommon for LAs to carry out any form of 'upward' due diligence towards potential INGO partners.

> Mutual due diligence - you know everything about me but I don't know anything about you? This levels the playing field a bit more and makes it a more equitable relationship. (Other resource organisation)

Regarding why the due diligence processes were necessary, most INGOs agreed that the completion of this process enabled them to identify the level of risk they were willing to take within a partnership and *'how much we are willing to transfer to partners'*. The potential for due diligence to provide a more holistic perspective was questioned.

> Existing capacity assessments are designed by international organisations to assess the capacity of potential partners to deliver their programmes and policies, as opposed to understanding what capacity exists in a particular context, and how best to support it. (INGO respondent)

For some INGOs the results of the due diligence process translated into a system of tiers or thresholds that decided the choice of contracting or level of funding that a LA would receive.

Of the INGOs interviewed the majority reported that the due diligence process could take between 4-6 weeks to complete. However, it should be noted that many organisations ran project development processes concurrently to their due diligence processes and were therefore able to begin programming at the end of this period.

OUTSOURCING AND LOCALISING DUE DILIGENCE

Our due diligence is always administered by a third party We set up a local due diligence provider in country. They review the regulatory frameworks in the country and the risk context in the country and then they start developing their own country module. It's designed with local stakeholders and is highly contextualized to their context, esp. in terms of the regulatory environment. We then add this on to our standard requirements. (International resource organisation)

This organisation reported that this approach allows them to have a different perspective on risk because of a better understanding the diligence environment where their partners are operating and more understanding of different, localised ways, of dealing with risk.

Passporting' is the concept of LAs being able to complete one due diligence process that can be accepted by a range of INGOs. This has been a growing discussion in the sector as it is commonplace for LAs to have to complete different due diligence processes for each of their INGO partners. A lack of passporting has has been criticised by LAs active in the Ukraine response.

> Ukrainian NGOs cannot afford to fill out grant applications in volume, nor multiple, repetitive, lengthy due diligence procedures, by some designated international deadline[22]

> We go through these processes up to 10 times... 3-4 hours each. That adds up to a whole week of work - in a situation of crisis this is a lot of time. Would it be possible to agree on a common, unified procedure?[23]

There were limited examples of active passporting happening in practice. Though a number of INGOs reported that they were open to the idea, there were few practical examples provided of situations where a LA had been selected based on the using another INGO's due diligence system.

> It's very ad hoc. I think it needs to be much more structured because it's basically down to the programme manager to seek it out, whereas I think it should be something that's immediate, especially at the start of a crisis. (INGO respondent)

LAs themselves recognised the value of passporting and suggested better coordination amongst INGOs whom they criticised for asking for the same information.

> It would help if INGOs created platforms of collaboration where all involved employees have access to the same information. (LA respondent)

Where passporting had more traction was amongst INGOs that had established previous networks either because of their own federated status or involvement in joint funding networks e.g., the Disasters Emergency Committee (DEC), Act Alliance etc.

> We can passport with DEC partners, but we were not able to use anybody else's due diligence, unfortunately. But we make a point of passporting our due diligence onwards to other funders. (INGO respondent)

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[22] An open letter to international donors and NGOs who want to genuinely help Ukraine - GFCF

[23] Open letter to international donors and organizations that want to help Ukrainian refugees in Poland

Globally there has been a concerted effort to build new opportunities for passporting amongst networks (e.g., Collaborative Cash Delivery – CCD Network). But these have been reportedly slow to develop.

> In Somalia, they have the NGO consortium they've developed a harmonised capacity assessment tool. This was a big piece of work to get it developed. I think the fact that they were able to agree is something of a positive step. (INGO respondent)

> We're building a digital platform for due diligence. What that means is that all of these assessments are fed up into this. database - the digital platform is a tool to catalyse passporting (International resource organisation)

Most INGOs interviewed recognised the potential for passporting of due diligence amongst INGOs, but felt this decision needed to be made at their HQ levels. Where they had committed to accepting other due diligence tools they reserved the right to carry out checks in areas they felt may not cover, or meet, their own standards.

> Yes, we can rely on other due diligence that is happening by other organisation. But at the same time, this does not limit us to it, so we need to review it if we need to have additional information, we can definitely proceed and get that. (INGO respondent)

Only one INGO interviewed reported that they used a due diligence tool that they hadn't developed in house – the MANGO health check. One reason cited for adopting this tool was the potential that LAs may have already completed this for another organisation.

2.2 Risk management

> Driven by increasingly stringent donor requirements, INGOs' risk management tools and procedures for partnering are weighted toward mitigating fiduciary risk, in other words, ensuring that the L/NNGO has adequate financial controls and can be monitored to prevent fraud, theft, or corrupt practices… As the primary grantees accountable to donors, INGOs bear the main fiduciary risk in the partnership. However, compared with large INGOs, L/NNGOs are much more vulnerable to operational/financial risk, having no margin on their budgets to meet unforeseen costs or delays… Along with INGOs, national and local partners also face increased compliance burdens (e.g. additional staff and work time required for reporting needs), but receive minimal overheads or direct administrative support costs to absorb them, and little in the way of advance funding from their international partners.[24]

[24] Stoddard et al. (2019) p.5

Risk management was mentioned by all respondents as a key consideration for their operations and partnerships in FLR. This is unsurprising given the growing attention to this issue within the humanitarian sector over the past 10-15 years. All INGO respondents raised the issue of risk as a key influencing factor in their partnerships with LAs and a driving factor in how they resourced, structured and applied tools to their work. However, this was not without some criticism.

> The compliance lens is now so foundational to how we approach partners…but we need to match our compliance requirements to the actual risks that we are facing. The losses that we incur are so much smaller than the amount of resources that we're putting into checking how we did something versus the outcome of it. (INGO respondent)

> People are just scared of any kind of misappropriation of funds, any kind of scandal. The risk focus means we can't have proper equal partnerships with organisations. When the first entry point is doing checks on them for compliance you know it's never going to be an equitable trustful relationship. (INGO respondent)

One issue of interest that did arise from interviews with INGO respondents was the conflation of compliance processes with risk management. The application of due diligence tools was often viewed as risk management having been completed. Whereas there was a clear sense from some respondents – particularly those more directly engaged in risk management – of the need to acknowledge the importance of continuously managing risks and not to see a single on -off exercise as the end of risk management.

> Basically, it's like a checkpoint. Before you enter a city. We're checking the car to see whether you have anything that would put the city in danger. But once you're in, you could just drive terribly, you could actually kill someone by running into them with that car. Due diligence is just a slice in time of what their compliance looks like. (Other Resource Organisation)

Within the Ukraine response, relationships between INGOs and LAs formed very quickly given the FLR context and added pressure for delivery. In many cases INGOs reduced the requirements of their standard due diligence tools. INGOs were pragmatic and adapted their systems and adopted 'no regrets' approaches in their partnerships. As a result, it was commonly reported that the 'agreement' to partner was often made before completion of due diligence processes. INGOs reported that they placed emphasis on building actions to address gaps that might arise in due diligence and ways to later mitigate risks into their partnerships.

> We did a due diligence as a prerequisite to a funding. But to be honest, it wasn't a prerequisite for us agreeing to go ahead. This was a was a leap of faith on our side, ultimately we made an informal agreement and a verbal agreement to push ahead… in an acute crisis like that, where there was huge, both political pressure as well as humanitarian imperative to provide assistance, we had to move ahead on that basis. (INGO respondent)

Whilst this was practical strategy, those INGOs that failed to document their choices and planned mitigations later struggled to either put in place relevant mitigation measures or faced challenges justifying the risks they had taken to other parts of their organisation or funding sources.

It should also be noted that the risk management dialogue was heavily skewed towards risks to the INGO, rather than risks that a partnership might bring to LAs.

Many LAs found a lack of consideration for existing checks and balances they were required - often due to national laws - to adhere to, disrespectful and a demonstration of the lack of consideration for existing risk management capacity amongst the response community within the region.

> [LA] is part of existing accounting systems in Moldova. INGOs should understand better legislation and fiscality of Moldova, and check accounting documentation (LA respondent)

> There's a lot of things that are not stated explicitly because it's covered by a national legislation. Nobody even bothers asking the question. You don't put it in writing as to how long your document retention is because it's in the national legislation and everybody knows it. (LA respondent)

> As INGOs we're not necessarily making it any easier for ourselves because we're tying ourselves in knots with regard to the internal administration of partnerships because we've not been able to adapt enough, often to the knowledge of what is already covered in the context and to be able to adapt our systems to what's absolutely necessary, we tend to kind of roll in with a standard set of systems and try and make them work. And we're not adaptive enough. (INGO respondent)

The most common way in which INGOs indicated they were actively seeking to manage risk was to put limitations in place in the form of financial or timebound constraints.

> We've been very careful in signing short contracts of six-month contracts and smaller sub grants. This helped us get to know these organisations, particularly as they have never done humanitarian programming before…when we've seen this is actually a potential long-term partner, then we sign another contract (INGO respondent)

Often these would be coupled with additional checks and balances applied during the implementation process.

> If a new partner would be considered risky, they would like to receive the lowest grade or I would say the highest grade of risk, which triggers a certain number of adjustments to the agreement. For example, that would mean we need to monitor them more frequently. That would mean that we need to release money in more instalments or smaller instalments…if it's a high risk we'll still go ahead. We just put more checks and balances in place. (Other resource organisation)

In some case INGOs would take on elements of the projects deemed high risk, in particular handling procurement on behalf of LAs. Whilst these mitigation measures clearly offered protection for the INGO, the lack of commitment and uncertainty around future investments was regularly cited by LAs as a concern. In addition, one INGO flagged the need for risk management to be a discussion above and beyond the bilateral relationship between LA and INGOs.

> We need to have an open and honest discussion about risks along the whole chain of delivery. So not only what my risk is in partnering with you as a local actor and now you have to deal with that, but all of the main risks within the delivery chain. And if we try to mitigate risk in this way, am I actually just transferring it down to you? Have I actually mitigated it throughout the chain or have I transferred it somewhere else? (INGO respondent)

3 FORMULATING RELATIONSHIPS

Projects identified, and contracts agreed.

3.1 Agreeing to Partner

In the Ukraine response context, once most INGOs had made their decisions to adopt a partnership approach, had initiated efforts to identify suitable LAs for partnership and had launched some form of due diligence the process of formalising relationships then began.

> The period between green lighting a relationship and having the paperwork together takes a lot longer than we usually anticipate. The back and forth on the scope of work and the project budget on one hand and the due diligence documents take time because we need to get all these documents to digest them, review them and see what the gaps are, prepare all the forms, have them filled by the partners, have them signed by the partners. (INGO respondent)

It should be noted that the process of identifying, due diligence and project development in the majority ran concurrently. This enabled some relationships to develop quickly with both sides committing time and resources to a promise of a contract without confirmed funding. Not unsurprisingly this required a significant amount of trust both on the part of LAs and INGOs.

> We quickly established an informal partnership...we signed nothing on paper with [our donor] for quite a long time and we didn't sign anything with [our LAs] for quite a bit of time. We basically hammered out an approach and started hiring staff... I have huge respect for [LA] as it took a leap of faith, for them as well, to come into that partnership in such a fluid and difficult context and work with us. (INGO respondent)

Whilst much of this trust was rewarded, this was not the case for all relationships.

> In the first round of the discussions, the [INGO] was telling us that this is emergency response so we don't have to worry about anything. It's going to be flexible. It's not going to be with a lot of reporting to do or a lot of things other than helping the refugees, but unfortunately it didn’t turn out like this… the funding was really welcomed. But let's say the fine print...it has a price. (LA respondent)

Some LAs spoke about being let down where they had started discussions with one part of an INGO, or staff member who had then subsequently left, leaving the new staff with no knowledge of what had previously been discussed or agreed. One strategy that was reported as a means to overcome this was the use by some INGOs of 'letters of intent' or 'pre award letters' that set out commitments to partnerships with LAs.

> We have pre award letters of acceptance So as soon as we have a draft budget, a draft scope of works, which we find as reasonable, and already some of the initial due diligence documents, we can sign this letter and give the partners the green light to start the project. The catch here is that we're telling them, OK, any expenses which you which you have during this period, can be charged to [INGO] once you receive the funds from us, but until then, you bear the whole risk. (INGO respondent)

3.2 Project Development

Most INGOs agreed that the design phase looks different depending on the response and so requires a flexibility to the context. The following were identified as the key approaches used in the development of projects with LAs in FLR (in order of most commonly applied):

- **Directional** – *INGOs deciding on what the partner will do and then informing them*. Some organisations were more directional than others when it came to setting the agenda for programming though recognising the limitation of this approach.

> In the initial stages, 100% of it was driven by us and some of it still is where we say like we have a very specific donor requirement that you do XYZ ... But now we're really starting to incorporate more and more of what the partners seen as a priority, even if we maybe necessarily don't. (INGO respondent)

- **Directional with LA input -** *INGOs with limited, or specific areas of focus for their activities but actively involving LA in project design.*

> We might do like a kick-off call with the partner to agree on the high-level aspects of the design and then hand it over to them to do the details. (INGO respondent)

> It sort of depends on the experience of the partner in doing project design, which donor we're talking about. If it's internal funding, it's a much lighter design process. The template is very short and straightforward, whereas if we're talking about like a BHA or ECHO proposal, there might need to be a lot more support from us and getting the compliance right. (INGO respondent)

> We had a voice on defining projects results and accepted only partnerships with INGOs whose objectives corresponded to our strategy, and our capacity. (LA respondent)

- **Collaborative design process** - *collaboration between the INGO and the LA in all aspects of project content, approach, and design.* The recognised best practice in line with localisation commitments.

> What we're doing now is very much a totally equal collaboration, with proposals to be co-developed. (INGO respondent)

> Involvement in key decision making from local agencies and local partners, being around the table at key points. Being empowered to make decisions and be at the table when those decisions are being taken, we went some way towards that but I think we could have done more. (INGO respondent)

- **LAs designing projects themselves and seeking INGO support.** This was a pure expression of an 'intermediary' role for INGOs. There were no examples shared of this approach by either INGOs or LAs.

The choice of approach was invariably influenced by the pressure to deliver. With a strong perception that a more directive approach was either less time consuming or the only feasible option in the operating environment.

> For sure we pressure them, 'give us an idea'. We wanted to do things we wanted to act, we wanted to do things fast. (INGO respondent)

> The donors mandate that we do collaboration, but then they don't give us the space or the resources to actually do it in a meaningful way. So it ends up almost being like a tick box type activity. Did you talk to the partner, 'yes, technically, we sent them an e-mail about it' (INGO respondent)

Of secondary influence was the availability of resources – primarily staff to contribute to the process. And finally, the perceived capacity of LAs themselves.

> I don't know if there was a deliberate enough effort to really empower local agencies to be at the table and be involved in the decisions on programming from an early stage. It was still too much from my perspective a kind of a cascading model of decisions. (INGO respondent)

When it came to the format of project documents in the majority INGOs set out templates within which LAs were expected to outline their proposed projects. Once these were received an internal selection process – by the INGOs - was commonly undertaken with varying degrees of documentation and involvement across each organisation.

> There was a little tracker, with some rudimentary scoring system, which the colleagues were developing at the time, and to give a go / No go decision. (INGO respondent)

> We created a selection committee with the country lead - the manager, the partnerships manager, finance and compliance. And then first, we shortlisted organisations, then we went through Q&As and amendments to their budgets and the project documents. Then we prepared the final list of applicants and we greenlit this. We have notes from this. (INGO respondent)

> There were reviews from the programmatic side, particularly focused on the scope of work and the budget. (INGO respondent)

> We have some scoring system which we applied, so it was much more advanced and now we're also developing SoPs on how to proceed with partner selection and which type of department should be involved. (INGO respondent)

INGOs continue to need to work on recognising LAs for the valuable resource and proactive role that they play in the projects delivered during the FLR phase. Ensuring their systems allow for greater input to decision making around project content and approach would enable partnerships need to respect the principle of subsidiarity, i.e., decisions should be made as close as possible to the level where they will be implemented.

ROLE OF INGOS AS 'TRANSLATORS' OF THE HUMANITARIAN SYSTEM

In the first few days of the response February, March last year, many INGOs rolled into town with their systems and structures in place and often resorted to a traditional methodology which would have been to 'do a distribution, but they found it was being done already by local organisations. In order to make a useful contribution maybe they should have considered doing something different? (INGO Respondent)

Maybe their [INGO] help would have been more appreciated in the second phase, not in the first phase in the emergency period because in that phase we did have money. People were throwing money at the local NGOs but [INGOs] added an extra layer of work that we did not agree to and we did not have the capacity to do at that moment (LA respondent)

A number of respondents raised the potential for INGOs to provide a 'translation or interpretation' service to LAs. INGOs, instead of delivering FLR programmes would invest in enabling LAs to understand what was happening with the humanitarian system around them. Why was there suddenly a plethora of working groups? What was the UN doing in town, what are the planning and funding tools that are being used? Such an approach would enable LAs to build on what they were already doing and draw on INGO experience. In practice few INGOs took on this model exclusively. Many reported that they struggled with this new identity which did not match with the traditional portrayal of international involvement in FLRs.

We're finding that INGO's are seeing local and national organisations as a threat. Obviously, that's their business model right now. We want to be able to change that narrative. If you're no longer the ones directly delivering, then maybe you could be helping these local actors. You can be servicing those local and national organisations? (International resource organisation)

3.3 Contracting

The Ukraine response was characterised, in its FLR phase, by an outpouring of funding primarily from non-traditional donations, considered by most INGOs as 'flexible' funding. This lowered the risk appetite of many INGOs and enabled them to start operations more quickly, rather than waiting on, and applying the requirements of, institutional contracts.

> We used our own funds, from different sources but governed by our HQ. They were dedicated to the Ukrainian response and the requirements and restrictions were rather light. Now we are working mostly with international donors where restrictions and requirements are much more restricted. (INGO respondent)

The availability of flexible funds also increased the willingness (and pressure) of organisations to initiate partnerships in order to keep up with the demand to deliver. It also enabled INGOs to start programming against planned institutional funding opportunities that they were confident would catch up with the speed at which the response was unfolding.

> It was an incredibly intense time and that principle of being able to do that level of work and would have been basically impossible without a front loading of resources. When I say resources, financial resources from [INGO] side in order to enable that trust building. We were underwriting this entire operation on the basis that we would all sign contracts and get funds. (INGO Respondent)

> I honestly believe if we were reliant on contractual legal contracts and flow of funds coming from those legal contracts…I think that our program would have started about four months later. (INGO Respondent)

Whilst the funding sources may have been acknowledged as flexible, the transferring of financial resources between INGOs and LAs still required some form of contracting. Some INGOs were more developed in their systems for different approaches to contracting than others. Few agencies had a useful variety of contracting tools well set up and understood by their staff and as a result struggled to apply unsuitable contracting tools that were lengthy and cumbersome during the FLR period.

Organisations that had a range of contracting options they could adapt to the context, the LA and the areas of activity were both quicker at forming partnerships and less stressed by the experience.

The contracting options used by INGOs in their partnerships generally fell into the following categories:

- **Donations or lumpsum allocations**

> When the invasion started it was our decision to disburse with just a donation agreement… going to the borders or the critical areas assessing which partners were doing, asking 'what do you need, you need money for the gas. Yes, we give you money for gas. You need money to employ someone, OK, how much?' The grants would be a maximum of €15,000, using internal funds from public fundraising, these sources gave us a certain amount of flexibility. (INGO Respondent)

> We utilised the group cash transfer modality to test and explore new partnerships with smaller organizations. It was a way to quickly disperse grants and then talk

with the smaller initiatives whether or not that they would be interested based on also their ability to deliver. (INGO respondent)

A recognition of the limitation of the donation approach has led some INGOs to put a cap in place for the number of donations that they can disburse within the financial year e.g., not more than 5 entities.

A preference for donations and lumpsum grants enabled flexibility and the ability to deliver quickly with limited documentation requirements. It was also seen as a means for testing potential longer-term relationships.

We did donations for way too long. It's easier to do a donation, but you have less accountability and less quality programming. Donations are good for the early acute phase of an emergency. But let's try to shift to a more meaningful partnership in more meaningful funding modality. (INGO respondent)

- **Small, often short/ timebound term grants / projects**

LAs indicated that they would prefer to have more rigid control for a period - in the first 3-6 month of collaboration - where they can '*test and grow trust with partner*', and for this to then be relaxed once a relationship had been tested and longer commitments could be made.

Those first few grants were financially limited, some organisations had limits of USD 10,000, some had 50,000, some had 100,000. the idea was to start to use this money as soon as we can to somehow bridge the moment until we will have a proper fundraising mechanism in place. (INGO Respondent)

- **Larger, longer-term grants / projects**

Few INGOs reported making grants with new LA partners longer than six months within the FLR period. This was different for those organisations who had pre-established relationships with LAs through networks or federations. This model allowed for larger and longer commitments.

N.B. The application of capacity sharing investments was also affected by the choice of contracting methods with many INGOs indicating that capacity sharing was not considered to the same depth amongst donations /lump sum or short-term allocations when compared to longer term project grants.

TIERS AND SCALES

One practical approach highlighted was to move away from a one size fits all contracting methods and instead to have a range of contracting options where the risk level of a LA could be linked to a 'tier' of funding and support.

We developed a tiers that allow for a certain level of funding…. Depending on the funding and then the level at which that partner is in terms of their experience and absorption capacity. So most organisations have gone in with small initial quick donations, very little kind of blowback on that, very little requirement, compliance, etcetera, and then moved on to longer term higher level relationships. (Other resource organisation)

4 IMPLEMENTING PARTNERSHIPS

Implementation of quality projects including monitoring, and performance management.

The process to establish partnerships and ensure appropriate project contracting took up significant time in the early days of the Ukraine response. For many staff deployed by INGOs this experience of an FLR was characterised by a focus on relationship building and the application of due diligence tools to formalise partnerships. However, once contracting was in place, the hard work of implementing those partnerships now came to the fore.

4.1 Applying Compliance Tools and Systems

Given that the situation in Ukraine in early 2022 resulted in one of the largest refugee movements seen since World War Two it is unsurprising that there was significant pressure to respond and deliver. Overwhelming numbers, and the proximity to Europe, combined to spotlight the situation and as the humanitarian imperative kicked in, so did the pressure to be seen to be responding amongst traditional humanitarian actors. Unfortunately, this did not translate into the same efficacy within many INGO systems.

> Each partner wanted to report big figures as indicators, but there were difficulties finding, and maintaining refugee beneficiaries within these activities. Most of them were using Moldova like a transition, or place to receive help and assistance before going back to their country. The contextual situation was changing very fast, for example we should deliver services within refugee centers, but by time the concept was approved for certain centers, those had been dissolved.... decisions were taking too long... The formalisation of the processes and projects took too long (LA respondent)

Despite these challenges there was a willingness from both INGOs and LAs to proceed without formal agreements and to make use of their flexible funds was repeatedly highlighted by both INGOs and LAs as key to successful relationships and outcomes during the FLR period.

> If you don't already have the trust built with the organisation, it then takes time to make that happen. If you don't have the flexibility of your own internal funds to pre-empt the slow contracting process, then you don't move as fast, but at the same time If you don't have some kind of longer-term guarantee of backup and support, there's less willingness to then take the risk with the funding in the first place. It's kind of like the sort of finding the elements of the perfect storm to make it work. (INGO respondent)

> I don't see how we would have been able to move forward in any way with any type of efficiency if we relied on contractual agreements to be in place or funding flows based on contractual agreements…if we had waited for contractual signatures [from funders] in order to arrange payments, we would have been hugely delayed. (INGO respondent)

Building on this, **flexibility in the application of standard compliance procedures** was key to effective partnerships in FLR.

> To make the signing process a bit easier sometimes we would leave the modality of implementation outside of the agreement. We would make a reference saying as per instruction or as per as SOP's or as per guidelines and leave that for a bit outside. (Other resource organisation)

> We lifted the procurement thresholds for them. to allow them to procure without formal tenders and we gave them instructions to hire staff with expedited timeframes and without proper recruitment processes for a period of three months. (Other resource organisation)

However, the ability to be flexible was recognised as finite and not without its concerns – by both LAs and INGOs - with the need to apply more detailed risk management after the FLR period, a necessary requirement for better outcomes and sustainability.

> There were a lot of donations, a lot of money flowing in, but at the same time, we need to understand that there was not a lot of oversight. There was a lot of gaps in terms of safeguarding and no one really paid attention to this and when we came with reporting requirements with financial requirements later on, there was a lot of pushback from the partners because they were used to just get the money, send us some WhatsApp messages or a few emails with what you actually achieved…so when we structured this, it became a bit problematic.(INGO respondent)

FLEXIBLE FUNDING- RESOUCING BEYOND PROJECTS

A challenge that a lot of small organisations have raised is the need to 'book end' projects with adequate resources that enable effective start up and close down of projects.

This need was demonstrated by the number of LAs that highlighted the difficulty of the common INGO practice of retaining a percentage of a projects' budget until after the final report has been submitted. Several LAs reported that they did not have reserves for these funds and commonly used this money to pay salaries. As a result, LAs reported having to take loans to cover their financial needs whilst waiting for the retained funds to be paid.

It was recommended that partnership agreements should build in resources for start up and close down of projects, allowing flexibility within LAs beyond project deliverables.

None of the respondents – INGO nor LA - were happy with the **reporting schedules and requirements** that they were required to either manage or deliver on.

> We required the partners to submit monthly narrative reports through our online reporting system. We requested interim financial reports. We requested monthly progress review meetings with each, and every partner and we requested final narrative and financial reporting from their side. It's too much. (INGO respondent)

LAs had several complaints about reporting requirements and formats. Specifically, the formats required by INGOs were over complicated, ad hoc in nature and time consuming. Requests for information were considered unclear and often a duplication of already available information e.g., through social media.

> Daily and weekly reporting is an additional load for local actors, as well as ad hoc information collection that is actually available from open sources, this seems to be an obsolete task (LA respondent)

> Different ad hoc reports, that should be completed manually, or changes in agreed reporting are time-consuming and double our tasks. (LA respondent)

> INGOs are requiring the same type of data in reporting but in very different formats, templates can be quite complex (LA respondent)

LAs acknowledged the need for reporting but flagged that whilst they recognised the need for INGO control systems to be rigorous at the beginning of relationships, there was a request that over time these requirements might become more relaxing and flexible after an initial period of control.

Regardless of the contracting means chosen in partnerships most **LAs complained about the failure of most of their INGO partners to pay on time**.

> Financing for a lot of applications for donations sent about 6-8 months ago was just received (LA respondent)

> [INGO] said don't worry. We're going to pay for their salaries, and we did that for September, October and everything. And we got the money back in March this year, which meant a lot of problems for the organisations because they did not have the money to pay the salaries, but they had the employees and by the time the payment came in the financial year had ended. It was an admin challenge (LA Respondent)

PREDICTABLE FUNDING – DE-LINKING PAYMENTS FROM REPORTING

Previously payments used to be attached to the expenditure of the partner. We've now disconnected this. We're not attaching the next advance to the submission of the financial report and their spending during that period. This is something which allows the partner more reliable income and flexibility, It will allow them to always have cash flow. .... It used to *take a very long time reviewing [expenditures], back and forth which used to delay the following payments which was impacting on project implementation. So it was a learning that we disconnected this, so the next payments are guaranteed to be processed even if we still have comments to the previous report (INGO respondent)*

4.2 Ensuring Programme Quality

> If we thought about our approach to working in partnership, the first conversation we should be having with local actors ought to be structured around project development, not compliance - and to focus on the ability of the proposed partnership to achieve the outcome and impact that is needed (INGO Respondent)

Whilst there was significant effort focussed on due diligence and compliance components of establishing partnerships the research showed limited commensurate focus on the programmatic capacity of LAs. The ability to manage funds and prove process seemed to take precedence. This was also reportedly transferred to the project implementation phase where discussions continued to focus on the quantitative input, output and process elements within partnerships as compared to the outcomes.

> It should be less about what the partner does and the accomplishments in numbers. I think it's very tricky when we get fixated on the numbers. We know donors expect numbers, this amount of euro/ dollars versus this per beneficiary, but it's not so simple as this. I think we can go beyond and become a bit more creative on how we actually do the measurements we need to be able to match this with the quality. (INGO respondent)

> Accountability should work both ways, not only our accountability towards the donor but also our accountability towards the local communities where we go and intervene. (LA respondent)

Some LAs were disappointed by the lack of a systemic approach demonstrated by some of the INGOs that they entered into partnership with. As a result, partnerships with more complex project deliverables (like covering education gaps for refugee pupils) proved frustrating for LAs used to engaging in systemic interventions rather than immediate lifesaving service delivery more commonly applied in FLR.

> Misunderstandings in our collaboration were mainly related to different approaches – the INGO wanted to focus on concrete indicators and reporting, but we were more interested in the system view, aspects that were not easy to report and fix as indicators. (LA respondent)

A recurring theme in the interviews was the importance of contextualisation. The need to adapt approaches, tools, and systems to the operating environment. This challenge was acknowledged by both INGOs and LAs.

> We know [INGO]. They are doing emergency response in different countries and continents They came, and they have a recipe of how to do things that worked in other communities, and they thought that it's easy. We can do the same A, B, C, D

> actions in this community, and it's going to be a good result. But people got offended. and they didn't have the enough time to adapt to the communities but at the same time they did not let us lead this dialogue. (LA respondent)

This was deemed particularly important as many LAs felt that the experience that INGOs were able to bring from other contexts was not appropriate to the context of the Ukraine response. Many LAs felt that this lack of adaptability and contextual understanding affected their relationship.

> The partner had to each time explain themselves, they had to say that, OK, but this is Ukrainian context. You don't necessarily need to be in the community in order to work with the community. It's a very digitalised society, everyone has a smartphone and internet access. (Other resource organisation)

INGOs were further criticised by LAs for failing to adjust their approaches to meet the assistance needs of refugees from the Central and Eastern European context. LAs highlighted the high standards and expectations of Ukrainian refugees and need to recognise their attitudes towards displacement, which most of them they saw as a temporary status. As a result, they were more willing to accept services considered to be 'transition' orientated rather than a local integration approach.

> Practices that worked in countries like Afghanistan or Syria are not really adaptable to the case with Ukrainian refugees or to Moldova – where you have better primary medicine assistance, better infrastructure, legal systems, fiscality etc. (LA respondent)

5 EVALUATING & INVESTING IN PARTNERSHIPS

Drawing lessons from the partnership, identifying key learning and capacity building opportunities, ensuring sustainability and effective exit.

5.1 Capacity Sharing

Almost all INGOs interviewed had some intention to develop and support the capacity of their LA partners. Not all were as explicit about investments in their own INGO capacity, despite the increasingly dominant interpretation of ‘capacity sharing’ as a process requiring a ‘two-way exchange’. Further to this across the response there were clear judgements made about what capacity was needed and often a lack of consideration for the value of local contextual skills and knowledge[25].

> In one of the first kick off workshops that we had with one of the partners the partner just stopped the entire presentation and said don't you know who we are and what we have done - this is our capacity and these are the donors that we have done previously, you don't have to sit and explain us about this, we know how to do it. (INGO respondent)

To identify areas for support most INGOs combined their due diligence with some form of capacity assessment.

> At the due diligence phase, we work with partners to identify material risks for the project, any sort of gaps or areas of support that they might need from [INGO] and then build that into a plan to make sure that we're supporting them, whether that's technical, procurement, finance or HR. (INGO respondent)

[25] Barbelet, V. (2018) p.23

However, many organisations waived this element of their identification and selection process to be able to move more quickly into implementation, though this was often recognised as a problem for partnerships as they developed.

> We've tried to be a little more systematic about building [capacity sharing] in with more recent responses…with Ukraine we were kind of playing catch up on partner support (INGO respondent)

Some INGOs experienced internal disagreement about whether capacity sharing was appropriate given the emergency nature of the response.

> We've always had this tension between institutional capacity building and the humanitarian imperative in an acute emergency, that is the sharp end of the stick. (INGO respondent)

For the LAs themselves many saw the Ukraine response as an opportunity to scale up and develop their capacities.

> As [LA] did not have previous experience in working with emergency, except pandemic times, we took it as a platform for development… Before the refugee crisis we had about 8 projects at the same time under management, that were mainly in areas of technical and development assistance for the government. Now we have about 25 projects, 9 of those being related to refugees. (LA respondent).

> The crisis related to refugees was definitely a growth opportunity for all respondents, and let us gain additional experience in developing and delivering additional services. It actually resulted in better organisation, adaptation of the local policies, and better internal procedures. (LA respondent).

For those that did push ahead with some form of capacity assessment, time pressure continued to influence the areas of focus, with a tendency for content to be transactional, focusing on the needs required to meet INGO[26] and perceived donor standards (particularly regarding compliance) rather than more widely responsive to the needs of LAs[27].

> I remember us doing huge orientation exercises with new staff on their jobs and the standard operating procedures that would come with that. This was a very significant component in terms of technical oversight and backstopping (INGO respondent)

For many this transactional focus was recognised as necessary given the initial demands to deliver. It was therefore unsurprising that capacity sharing in the FLR period was acknowledged as needing to focus on the most essential elements for getting partnerships up and running rather than longer term investments or priorities related to strategic or organisational development.

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[26] Barbelet V. et al (2019) p. vii - viii

[27] Barbelet, V. (2018) p.8

> There is so much from us to learn from them [INGOs], but not in the first phase there's no time. (LA respondent).

> In the beginning we found with our partners that we were doing quite a lot of project linked training. Now we're starting to look at organisational development aspects. (INGO respondent)

> We supported [LA] over the last year to build up their capacity and their organisational footprint to be able to meet the type of international funding streams that they now have access to. (INGO respondent)

When capacity plans were able to be discussed and developed almost all organisations stressed the need for this to be tailored to specific needs of LA partners and ideally determined by the LA themselves[28]. This was important not only regarding the content of trainings but also the style and format in which capacity sharing was accessed.

> We just started a partnership and our partners, they said to us, we want to do a team building day with your staff and with our staff, we'll dedicate our time and our staff to this. It's not something that I would have ever thought to put in the capacity building plan. (INGO respondent)

> Regarding concrete INGO procedures the necessary trainings have been provided, and this aspect was quite helpful. Also trainings like humanitarian principles, or refugee needs assessment methods also were very helpful. (LA respondent)

A range of different capacity sharing models were presented including mentorship, coaching, peer learning and accompaniment models. Conventional trainings were also reported though it was recognised these needed to be 'short, not that heavy'. This corresponds to conclusions from the wider literature review.

> Capacity building can (and indeed in the initial aftermath of a disaster should) be demand-led, short (less than half a day), and focus on "capacities" that are relatively easy to acquire and have immediate relevance, e.g., first aid training[29]

A CAPACITY-BUILDING APPROACH TO RISK MANAGEMENT IN PARTNERSHIPS INGOS AND UN AGENCIES[30]

Best practice includes the following:

Increase secondments of staff to L/NNGO partners' offices, and vice versa, for better training (and working relationships).

Devote one project in the program portfolio specifically to cultivate new partners.

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[28] Wall, I. & Hedlund, K. (2016) p.24

[29] Ibid p.24

[30] Stoddard et al (2019) p.40

build capacity strengthening into projects as a funded objective/outcome. This allows project managers to prioritize and be accountable for partner capacity strengthening as part of their core work.

Act as partner, not police. The use of regular collaborative audits, as opposed to investigations triggered by specific allegations/complaints, can help build trust in a collegial working relationship and diminish disincentives to reporting problems and irregularities that may arise.

Ensure partners' administrative costs are covered in contracts, whether by overhead percentage or direct cost budgeting. Refrain from payment solely by reimbursement (in arrears) or results based mechanisms.

Several LAs suggested that they should be supported to play a role in capacity sharing with smaller local actors. Acting as points of *'contact and platform for NGO market development'.*

As an overall conclusion, it was clear that investments in 'capacity' were clearly influenced by the perspectives of those determining 'capacity'. As a result, the INGOs interviewed tended to provide capacity support to meet their own compliance standards rather than the needs of the of the LAs themselves. This is often justified with the perspective that there will be a complimentary impact with the LA benefiting in the long term by having had to meet these standards. While INGOs can provide valuable resources and expertise, it is important to respect the autonomy and needs of LAs. This includes respecting their right to make their own decisions, manage their own resources, and determine their own priorities. For INGOs this means adapting their own systems to those of their LA partners rather than vice versa which is currently the more commonplace approach.

The impact and success of capacity sharing is clearly more sustainable when those at the receiving end are part of determining its content and form.

SHARING CAPACITY – DEDICATED RESOURCES

We've been investing in partners for long time in terms of their capacity building. A few years ago we even had a separate partnership with an NGO that specialises in organisational development. And this NGO trained other partners, developing strategy, developing fundraising, developing communications etc. (Other resource organisation)

We provide them with micro grants to help them work on development areas. They hire a consultant to develop a bespoke complaints mechanism, or a policy on anti-money laundering (Other resource organisation)

5.2 Exit & Sustainability

5.2.1 Enabling exit

A successful exit is predicated on a smooth process of extrication and ending of a partnership. Respondents reported that exiting a partnership could be both amicable or difficult, but that either situation needed a clear process with milestones and accountability.

> We made a careful choice in terms of the length of partnerships. So they are not more than 12 months. We then communicate to the partners at least three months before the end of the contract to say the contract is phasing out (INGO respondent)

A clear and accountable process was particularly important where partnerships were terminated because of disagreements or more commonly disappointments in terms of delivery (either from the INGO or by the LA).

> There will be a partnership review process that will both look at the project outcomes, but we'll also look at our relationship, the big question though is whilst we may want to continue working with them, do they want to carry on working with us? (INGO respondent)

There was widespread recognition that in the Ukraine response context the power of LAs to be the instigator of exit from a partnership was more prominent than in other FLR and that as a result there were more open questioning of the value of the INGO role within a partnership.

> From an NGO point of view, it is simpler to work directly with donors rather with intermediaries, that have to report themselves to donors and they are requiring different reports. (LA respondent)

5.2.2 Supporting sustainability

Sustainability means different things to different people. This is no less important within partnerships.

> In other contexts, we are pushing to have conversations about durable solutions and resilience from day one in FLRs. We should be taking the same approach to sustainability within partnerships and ensuring that this is top of our agenda as soon as we start a relationship with a LA. (INGO respondent)

> When we got it to the point where they were able to take over management...beyond those minimum standards, that's when they've really started to take full ownership of the response itself, not just the individual activities. Driving the agenda for where that's going to take them over the next couple of years and then figuring out how they manage change is something really powerful. (INGO respondent)

For some LA respondents working with INGOs in partnerships provided a degree of protection and when built into a programme for greater sustainability had the potential to be a responsible programme for growth and development.

> One of our partners were tempted directly by the donor to work directly with them and they choose to work through us or with us and we asked why? What's happened, what's unique, what we can offer, why you decided? And they said you are our safety buffer in terms of capacity, in terms of experience, in terms of also administrative ability to serve the very difficult requirements from the reporting, financial audit and so on and so forth. (INGO respondent)

> The systems approach to how we run the business can actually make it more enabling for LAs to be a much more active part of these FLRs where they can take advantage of the flexibility that we have and the risk taking that we're able to take and the technical staff that we can bring in. (INGO respondent)

Several respondents closely connected the ability of LAs to be sustainable after a partnership, to the issue of funding of core costs and overheads. In addition, the ability of the LA to set direction within the partnership and to have ownership of the activities and outcomes. All three elements relied on their successful inclusion from the outset of any partnership relationship if sustainability was to be successful in the long term.

> They [LA]s are the ones who are going to be held accountable for this. In one year or two years, five years time we need to make sure that they own it to the point that they're also going to manage and implement it properly… it is 100% on them. It's not because we told them to do something a certain way. It's because they take responsibility for making sure that it's done. (INGO respondent)

Overhead support: The question of flexible support for overheads (sometimes referred to as support costs, core costs or 'Indirect Cost Recovery'(ICR)) was raised with the respondents. Within the INGO respondents there was widespread recognition of the importance of supporting the overall running costs of LAs and the need to include this in partnerships both in terms of programme quality and long-term sustainability.

> If you really want to support the local response and increase of civil society, then you support the core. (INGO Respondent)

> Coverage of administrative cost give sustainability for local NGO… it is welcomed if the INGO will add administrative costs of the project. (LA respondent)

All INGOs interviewed included resources for these costs in their partnerships, however only a few considered this as a standalone percentage with the majority still requiring specific detailing within project budgets. Few INGO respondents had a committed policy position that they applied across their partnership on overheads. Many INGOs deferred their action on this issue to their donors. One organisation committed to providing for overhead costs where their donor did not, as a point of principle.

> When we signed contracts with [LAs], we were able to say we will cover a percentage of ICR which actually was not an eligible cost with [our donor] but we could do it from our private funds. This was hugely important in terms of a partnership approach. It seems small but can have huge significance if you don't do it. (INGO Respondent)

Impact on the local market: Several LAs expressed concern at the impact that the arrival and operations of INGOs was having on their own operating environments. This was centred on two main concerns. Firstly, related to a rise in expectations, both in terms of roles and salaries amongst employees within the sector, and secondly, the expectations from beneficiaries in terms of services provided and scale and scope of people that could be supported – particularly the inclusion of many existing vulnerable members of the host community in Moldova.

> Taking into consideration that some INGOs strategies are based on crisis intervention, what will happen when the war will end, and they will exit the market. For example [UN Agency] has now about 100 employees, and those will enter the market after their exit, with higher salary expectations. (LA respondent)

> INGOs now create higher expectations and higher standards for help, what will happen when this assistance will not be available anymore? (LA respondent)

> INGOs affect the local labour offer, paying much higher salaries for same roles, and stimulating the migration of personnel from local NGOs to INGO local offices. (LA respondent)

Additional concerns were raised about the potential for INGOs involvement in direct programming coming into competition with LAs.

> Due to the appearance of different local offices of INGOs there is a belief this issue will segregate NGO local market, making it more difficult and competitive to attract direct funding. This means less funds available for local actors and final beneficiaries. (LA respondent)

> Once we [INGOs] decide to do direct implementation, we compete with partners, we take their resources away, you take their staff away. This is a complaint I hear very often in Romania and Moldova (INGO respondent)

Some LAs saw opportunities for the growth of the NGO sector resulting in larger LAs being able to function as intermediaries themselves, providing support to smaller LAs.

> The INGO process for moving international funds would be better organised via big local NGOs as most of them have all necessary procedures, management, team, and capacity, they can coordinate sub granting for smaller local NGOs. (LA respondent)

This approach was also felt to be a solution to the high demand from INGOs to collaborate with those well recognised LAs. Where these LAs may struggle to directly absorb resources, the solution was seen for them to act as intermediaries, cascading assistance to smaller LAs.

Overall, the question of how sustainable the response has been to date and what efforts towards exit have been adopted is still an area that requires further investigation.

> Could we see in time, you know, with the rise of more independent funding, more diaspora engagement, that actually the institutional funding, as it were, from INGO's, is less attractive because it lacks flexibility and ease of access? (Other Resource Organisation)

CONCLUSIONS

Much of what is concluded here reinforces existing understanding regarding best practice in partnerships. These can be summarised as follows:

- Build relationships and trust.
- Understand the local context.
- Include local actors in all stages of emergency response planning, implementation, and evaluation.
- Foster collaboration and coordination among all stakeholders involved in the response.
- Support capacity building initiatives that enhance the skills, knowledge, and resources of local actors.
- Recognise and amplify local leadership and expertise.
- Ensure cultural sensitivity.
- Communicate effectively.
- Incorporate long-term sustainability into emergency response activities.

The challenge for partnerships in FLR is that the ability (and time) to build on these best practices is usually in short supply due to the pressure to act swiftly in the face of immediate, and often growing needs. In the Ukraine response, even though significant flexible funds were available, a global, sector wide focus on compliance meant the application of sometimes heavy due diligence systems was pervasive within partnerships and staff spent much time working to adapt and innovate standard practices.

The pressure to deliver influenced almost all aspects of partnerships discussed in this research. How they were formed, managed and the challenges and opportunities they faced. Those organisations that were able to build on existing tools, networks and relationships found their partnerships easier and quicker to initiate than those that started from scratch. However, for INGOs starting up, early phase strategic commitment to a partnership approach and adequate resourcing alongside willingness to adapt also led to successful partnerships.

Building on this, the human side of partnerships – interactions and relationships - have emerged as a key factor in partnership success. The tools and systems we have produced as a sector are only as good as the social foundations on which we build them and the people that implement them. This means that style or ethos – for both LAs and INGOs – is as important as the structures that are put in place to enable partnerships in FLR. Investment in human resources and the staff that engage in FLR must consider partnership skills as a key operational skill given the developing context of FLRs.

The following **considerations drawn from this research can help with improving each stage of the project cycle:**

Programming - *Partnership as a methodology is agreed and partners identified.*

- INGOs should leverage their relationships and context-specific knowledge in both start up and scale up operations. Those starting fresh must allocate adequate resources to getting up to speed and ensure partnership is understood as a deliberate component of their response strategies.
- Leadership in both INGOs and LAs should commit to clear, consistent communication and directives around partnership approaches. It's crucial to fully commit to and excel in partnerships. There's no room for half-hearted attempts in partnerships, as they undermine the integrity and effectiveness of the collaboration.
- Both INGOs and LAs should define clear roles and responsibilities within their internal structures to improve their partnership approaches. By doing so, organisations can alleviate stress among their staff, improve their internal operations, and enhance the effectiveness of their external partnerships.
- The skills and functions of partnerships need to be better reflected in job descriptions and recruitment profiles. This is particularly important in integrated roles where technical elements and implementation needs to factor in partnership approaches.
- Staffing, and staff styles had a huge implication on FLR partnership success – whether that was related to issues of staff continuity, individual and organisational styles and culture, experience, and ego. Greater investment in negotiations, mediation and associated relationship building skills are necessary as part of continuing professional development for staff responding in FLR through partnerships.

Identifying Partnerships - *Specific partners and funding opportunities are identified and partners capacity to implement activities is confirmed***.**

- INGOs should be open to adapt and accommodate non-traditional partners to foster innovation. They should rethink their standard operating procedures, be prepared to work outside their usual paradigms, and consciously engage with entities that might not fit into their conventional partnership frameworks. This approach will likely require additional effort but has the potential to yield fresh insights, strategies, and meaningful impact.
- The adherence to ‘gold standard’ tools caused stress for everyone involved. Flexibility within systems and the ability to adapt tools should be supported by devolved authority and clarity on what are mandatory requirements vs ‘nice to haves’.
- 'Lack of humanitarian capacity' is often cited when it comes to LAs, particularly by international actors. This creates a way for traditional humanitarian architecture to undermine local capacities even months after a crisis. INGOs need to identify a way to assess (and build on) contrasting / transferable skills that might be unfamiliar to our humanitarian 'lens' but equally relevant to meeting humanitarian needs in different contexts.

Formulating Relationships - *Projects identified, and contracts agreed.*

- Flexible funding was clearly a valuable enabler in the Ukraine response. However not all INGOs cascaded these flexibilities within their partnerships. As a principle, the same flexibilities e.g., reporting, budgeting that INGOs receive should be cascaded to LAs.
- Continued focus on project funding continues to challenge the viability and sustainability of LAs, Financial support should extend beyond project activities i.e. book ending projects and provision of overhead support - enabling running costs to be covered alongside start up and close down support.
- A range of contractual options is essential in FLR. This enables legal flexibility to work with a wider range of local FLR responders, establish relationships more quickly and enable rapid disbursal of funds.

Implementing Partnerships - *Implementation of quality projects including monitoring, and performance management*

- Pay on time.
- Over frequent and rigid control – sometimes without explanation – from the INGO side was perceived as burdening LAs with useless activities. An open dialogue on what information is needed and why, alongside flexibility for what is collected and shared, building on iterative ways of working should be integrated into partnerships.

Evaluating & Investing in Partnerships - *Drawing lessons from the partnership, identifying key learning and capacity building opportunities*

- Trust and respect are fundamental to partnerships and are valuable commodities that enable teams to be open to learning. Creating space and processes which bring together INGO and LA staff to understand and engage with a context is a good starting point upon which a capacity sharing needs can be understood, and relationships can be built.
- Within a partnership a focus on transactional capacity sharing alongside longer-term investments or priorities related to strategic or organisational development is necessary. The two should not be mutually exclusive and can be built into a variety of capacity sharing options including training, mentoring and peer learning.
- Recognise when staff functions require a knowledge sharing function and actively recruit for these skills.
- Active reflection on the success of a partnership should focus on more than the project outcomes. Practical ways to assess and reflect on relationships and processes should be included in M&E and built into partnerships through open processes e.g., regular partner forums, and more confidential feedback options e.g. complaints and feedback.

Overall

- INGOs should be proactive and adapt their programmatic tools and approaches to the evolving dynamics of FLR, acknowledging the growing role of LAs as first-line responders. This will enable them to scale up their operations more effectively and navigate changing contexts.

- Some INGOs have an organisational 'preference' for direct programming, which is often accompanied by the perception that partnership comes with greater risks than direct programming. This perception needs to be critically reviewed with better evidence to enable understanding of this perception.
- Systems and processes applicable to partnerships in FLR should be clearly communicated to all stakeholders – both staff within INGOs and LAs.
- Trust is best built on being realistic about when things will happen, both LAs and INGOs should not underestimate how long processes will take and should ensure a continuous and open dialogue that is clear about where bottlenecks may appear.
- Knowledge management is essential in FLR. As a sector we need to invest more in simple ways to document actions, capture how decisions are made and to reflect on the consequences of both.

In conclusion, there is much that both INGOs and LAs can do to maximise the opportunities and potential for partnerships in FLR. However, the changes that are possible within their own spheres of influence also need to be supported by donors and the wider humanitarian system.

The evidence presented here corresponds with discussions within the sector that have been ongoing for many years. The potential to fully action these recommendations is now compounded by the context in which many FLRs are now occurring.

> When we look at the majority of the rapid onset crises of recent years, particularly in conflict driven contexts, the INGO function needs to change. INGOs are often late, not enabled to respond or not able to stay. The localisation angle has been touted as the solution but honestly, we're doing it in a very exploitative way, for our [INGO] benefit. I hope that we can show a fairer, more equitable approach to engaging, but it will challenge a lot of the identities and ways of working of the big organisations. (INGO respondent)

As a sector we must take advantage of FLR contexts for innovation and change, be flexible and agile, innovate but document your choices. Be bold. Country Directors are saying *'we did stuff that we didn't think was even possible'*. Let us continue this trend.

ANNEX 1: List of Interviewees

Local Actor Organisations and Representatives

Eight local actors (LAs) operational in the Republic of Moldova and one LA in Romania, were approached to participate in this research.

The LAs all responded to the influx of Ukrainian refugees in 2022 providing a range of different services including, basic needs (first aid kits, hygiene, food and accommodation), psychological support, legal services and education inclusion. Specific areas of focus included youth and people with disabilities. One LA was operational in Transnistria. Almost all were open for dialogue and were willing to disclose both positive and negative aspects of their relationships with INGOs.

Local Actor	Representative (and function)
Interaction (Transnistria)	Oxana Alistratova
Demos, Edinet	Liliana Samcov - Director
P4EC	Daniela Mamaliga - Director
Concordia	Viorica Matas - Director
Diaconia and Banca de Alimente	Oleg Paraschiv - General Secretary and Director
Step by Step	Cornelia Cincilei - Director
Keystone	Lidia Malcoci - Director
CNTM	Roman Banari -General Secretary Romeo Leapciuc - Partnership Manager
Community Foundation (Romania)	Simona Srebrov - Program Manager, Program de Integrare Refugiați Bine360

International NGO Organisations and Representatives

International NGO	Representative (and function)
CAFOD	Josie O’Reilly - Ukraine Programme Manager
Oxfam International	Dieckens Binali – Partnership Advisor
Concern / Joint Emergency Response in Ukraine (JERU)	Carly Ziska - Partnership Advisor, Emergency Directorate
Concern International	Mark Johnson - Senior Technical Adviser - Localisation

Save the Children	Daniel Osnato - Team Leader - Ukraine Refugee Response Silvia Burcea - Mother and Child Health Program Coordinator, Romania
PIN	Natalia Hadei – Manager Civil Society Programme, Moldova Tomáš Ďuraňa - Head of Programmes, Relief and Development Department, Moldova Georgiane Cremene
International Rescue Committee (IRC)	Stephanie Puccetti - Deputy Director, Quality & Partnerships in Emergencies Yousor Lukatah - Emergency Partnerships Coordinator
Folkekirkens Nødhjælp / DanChurchAid	Gustav Bjerregaard Nielsen - Partner Engagement Coordinator - Ukraine
Norwegian Refugee Council (NRC)	Paul Cornu - Global Emergency Programme and Systems Expert Adviser / Emergency Team Leader Moldova & Romania (Feb – June 2022) Carrie Bodley Bond – Regional Head of Risk & Compliance, Central & Eastern Europe Regional Office Kaela Glass - Head of Partnership Unit, NRC Geneva
Catholic Relief Services (CRS)	Conor O'Loughlin - CRS' Country Representative for Moldova and Ukraine (Feb-Sep 2022) Amanda Schweitzer - Technical Advisor III – Local Humanitarian Partnerships and Capacity Sharing,
Mercy Corps	Radu Niculescu – Project Manager, Partnerships, Romania & Moldova
Danish Refugee Council (DRC)	Tomasz Thun-Janowski - Partnerships Coordinator, Poland

Other Resource Organisations, Networks and Persons

Organisation	Representative (and function)
START Network	Vincent Hensen - Due Diligence Platform Manager
Refugees International	Nicholas Noe - Senior Visiting Fellow
Independent Consultant	Wolfgang Gressmann

CCD	Nino Khokhobaia - Technical Advisor – CCD Localization and Capacity Strengthening for Ukraine Response
UNHCR	Anastasiya Khmilovska - Associate Programme Officer

ANNEX 2: Research Questions

INTERNATIONAL NGOS:	
AREAS FOR REVIEW (PCM Stage)	**KEY QUESTIONS Key informant interviews**
Programming • Choosing to work through partners – refection on different partnership models • Assessing What expertise can the INGO / local partner bring to partnership programming? Resource review – internal, funding etc. • Partner mapping • Understanding risks	1. What determines whether your programme response will include a partnership approach? Did you make a conscious choice to work with partners in the Ukraine response? 2. Were you already working in partnership with local actors? How did this change as a result of the escalation of the crisis? 3. How do you identify partners to work with? 4. What factors do you consider when choosing to work with local actors? 5. Are there any contexts / reasons why you would choose not to work in partnership? 6. Do you operate differently with partners in an emergency / FLR, than you would in a more stable / development context? If yes, can you explain how?
Identification • Introductory meetings with partners • Vetting / Assessment Tools	7. How do you undertake / instigate your first meeting with local actors? 8. What tools or processes do you employ to determine whether you will work with a particular local actor? 9. What is your vetting / due diligence procedure? Do you only vet partners you know you will work with? 10. Did you adapt your systems in the Ukraine context?
Formulation • Agreeing to partner • Project development • Contracting partners	11. When you've decided to work with a local actor, what are your next steps to formalise that relationship? 12. How do you involve partners in your project design and development? Is there a particular stage that local actors are involved? What influences this? 13. What is you process for contracting local actors?

<table>
<tr><td>Implementation
Project Opening Meeting
Ongoing management and supporting performance (including poor performance)
Due diligence and compliance esp. finance and support
Ensuring technical programme quality
M&E
Safety and Security / duty of care</td><td>14. How do you manage your project relationships with your partner? How do you engage with your partners?
15. What action / processes do you undertake to assesses their performance (compliance / programme)? What happens if they are under performing?
a. How and what compliance support do you provide?
b. Are there any aspects of programme quality that you are particularly focused on?
16. How do you manage change and decision making / priority setting during the partner relationship? Who gets to make decisions?
17. How do you consider safety and security / duty of care?</td></tr>
<tr><td>Evaluation
Evaluating performance
Building capacity
Exit and sustainability</td><td>18. How do you determine if a project / relationship has gone well?
19. Are there any capacity development outcomes that you see as particularly important? How do you determine what is important for capacity development?
20. What capacity sharing do you undertake, is this a standard for all partnerships?
21. When and how do you start to consider an exit strategy?</td></tr>
</table>

<table>
<tr><th colspan="2">LOCAL ACTORS</th></tr>
<tr><th>AREAS FOR REVIEW</th><th>KEY QUESTIONS Key informant interviews</th></tr>
<tr><td>INTRODUCTION</td><td>Name of Organisation, Interviewee, Position within Organisation, length of time they have worked in that organisation / role
Area of work that the organisation is involved in e.g. health, education, legal support etc.?
Have they scaled up / grown / increased their activities since February 2022 – to include Ukrainian refugees? Have they changed the areas of work thy are involved in?
Have they entered into partnerships to support this scale up / growth? Are these with organisations they were already in partnership with or with new organisations?
Which international organisations do they now partner with?</td></tr>
</table>

<table>
<tr><th colspan="2">Reflecting on your relationship with your international NGO partners could you answer the following questions:</th></tr>
<tr><td>Programming
Deciding to partner
Identifying benefits of partnership
Understanding risks</td><td><ol start="1">
Did you seek out partnerships with INGOs or did they approach you?
Have you started to work on new activities as a result of your partnerships? What have been the consequences of this?
Did you feel pressured by the urgency and needs of the situation to enter into partnerships you may not have agreed to in regular circumstances? If yes, what effect has this had?
What was the most useful way to engage with INGOs in the early days of the response?</td></tr>
<tr><td>Identification
Initial engagement
Agreeing to partner
Due diligence / Vetting / Assessment Tools</td><td><ol start="5">
What information were you asked to provide to formalise your partnership? What due diligence information was required? Was this easy, difficult to comply with? Was there flexibility in these requirements? (Specific examples?)</td></tr>
<tr><td>Formulation
Project development
Contracting</td><td><ol start="6">
Who took the lead in identifying which activities would be part of the project? How much influence did you have over the direction / content of the project?
Were the contracting documents easy to engage with, were they understandable, in your preferred language? Was there flexibility in what was required?
What information were you given about the source of the funding for the INGOs? (Do you know who the donor to the project is?)</td></tr>
<tr><td>Implementation
Project management
Compliance esp. finance and support
Ensuring technical programme quality
M&E
Safety and Security / duty of care</td><td><ol start="9">
What means of communication have been put in place between you and your INGO partner? What has worked well, not so well? Do you have a dedicated focal point with whom you engage?
How do the compliance tools you are expected to adhere to contribute to / benefit your work?</td></tr>
<tr><td>Evaluation
Evaluating performance
Sharing capacity
Exit and sustainability</td><td><ol start="11">
Has any training, capacity sharing been put in place as part of your partnership relationship? What has worked well, not so well?
What is your key learning from working with your INGO partners?</td></tr>
</table>

	13. How would you assess the behaviour of your INGO partner during their partnership with you? Has this changed over time? 14. What discussions have you had with your INGO partners regarding longer term relationships? Additional funding / resources, exit?
Other	15. If you could highlight one positive and one negative of your relationships with INGO in response to the Ukraine refugee crisis what would they be? 16. Has shifting focus/working with refugees impacted your relationships in the community?

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