

Localizing humanitarian aid in Ukraine: Where is the storm of change?

In Ukraine, a country with a strong and diverse national civil society, a functioning government, extensive experience leading humanitarian response since 2014, and a prominent desire for change, there is little to show for the efforts to localize humanitarian aid. After several strongly worded open letters to Grand Bargain signatories, INGOs and donors, regional and national workshops on localizing humanitarian aid in Ukraine, numerous advocacy efforts by individual organizations and a stream of subsequent recommendations, national organizations barely feel a light breeze of change where there should be a storm.

Ukrainian NNGOs directly received [less than 1%](#) of the \$3.9 billion in funding that was tracked by the UN in 2022. For national organizations, the situation in 2023 doesn't feel much different. Donors and intermediaries have failed to develop the practical policies and mechanisms that would achieve their localization commitments. It can feel like burn-rates are prioritized over efficiency, and political rhetoric rather than effectiveness and accountability. Supporters of localisation continue championing the same recommendations to anyone willing to listen, but they are overlooked or dismissed again and again.

For some organizations, it's easy to say they are "moving towards equitable partnerships", as this is rather hard to measure. However, when we ask people working in the sector if local actors in Ukraine receive a fair proportion of funding compared to international actors, just 17% of international actors say they do.

Earlier this year, NGO Resource Center conducted a study to establish a [humanitarian localization baseline](#) for Ukraine. **144 local and 36 international actors working in Ukraine contributed to the baseline**, which analyzed progress across seven areas: leadership, coordination and complementarity, partnership, funding, participation, and policy influence. Unsurprisingly, funding and policy influence scored the lowest in localization practices. As many indicators turned out to be mutually dependent, it is evident that when donors and subcontracting agencies fail to provide adequate operational and overhead costs, national actors don't have the time or human resources to engage in influencing policy. Only 22% of Ukrainian organizations said that they always or mostly have the ability to influence humanitarian policy, compared to 43% of international organizations.

We believe this baseline can be a catalyst for change. Now that we have established 'where we are' in terms of localization in this response, the baseline can be used by national and international actors in Ukraine and elsewhere as a tool for localization strategies, response plans and roadmaps. With concrete and measurable indicators, it can help us hold the humanitarian system accountable for putting words into action. We plan to repeat this initiative next year to track the implementation of localization commitments, and most importantly for us, to see if the local actors in Ukraine can feel the storm of change.

Oksana Ginchuk, Deputy Director of NGORC

[NGO Resource Center](#) is a Ukrainian NGO working to address immediate needs and building a better future for Ukraine through the support to civil society and NGOs.