

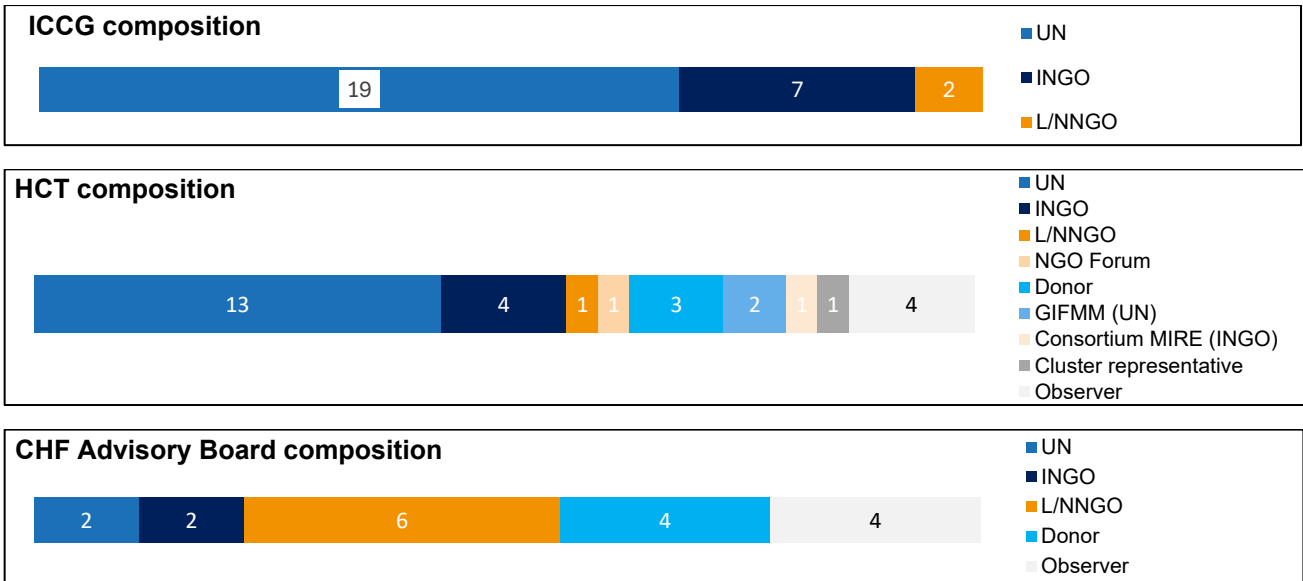
Localisation in Humanitarian Leadership - Colombia

October 2024



A GLOBAL NGO NETWORK
FOR PRINCIPLED AND EFFECTIVE
HUMANITARIAN ACTION

COLOMBIA¹



All participants described Colombia as having notably strong civil society actors with experienced staff. Some noted that many Local/national NGO (L/NNGO) leaders are experienced in representation and advocacy, even if not humanitarian. However, their inclusion in coordination leadership was relatively low, with mechanisms predominantly led by the UN.

Leadership in coordination: L/NNGOs hold some positions in coordination leadership, although in limited numbers. Within the Humanitarian Coordination Team (HCT), six seats are allocated to NGOs², with one held by a L/NNGO in 2024. Ten clusters and Areas of Responsibility (AoRs) are activated, and two are co-coordinated by L/NNGOs (Child Protection and GBV AoRs)³. Sub-national coordination is area-based, through Equipos Locales de Coordinación and Equipos Humanitarios Locales. Most of these 16 groups are led by UN agencies, with two led by an L/NNGO.

Where L/NNGOs are present in national-level structures, their capabilities to engage and lead are regarded to be strong. However, participants mostly stated that they did not consider coordination groups to be fully inclusive, with L/NNGO participation not fully realised. The need for the generation of inclusive spaces by international and especially UN actors was highlighted. This included not creating ‘in-groups’ through the use of jargon and anglicisations, and being aware of organisational power dynamics between UN, INGOs, and L/NNGOs, even when representatives are Colombian nationals. It also includes all members being willing to raise, discuss, and decide on issues in the appropriate forums, as peers.

NGO representation in humanitarian coordination is through a mixed NGO Forum, set up in 2019 for INGOs and opened to L/NNGOs in 2020. As of mid-2024, it has 30 INGO and seven L/NNGO members. Some national civil society networks exist for professions but do not intersect with humanitarian coordination. The limited membership has led to a perception among some that L/NNGO members of coordination groups are not connected to a broader L/NNGO body, which seems to be undermining their credibility as representatives.

¹ Data on HCT, ICCG, Cluster, CHF Advisory Board composition provided by OCHA Colombia in May and June 2024.

² NGO HCT seats are filled by the NGO Forum’s five elected board members plus Forum director, rotating annually.

³ Six out of the ten clusters/AoRs have NGO shared leadership – four INGOs and two NNGOs.

The role of the NGO Forum in advocating for and representing NGO members was described as important. Some participants wondered if this could or should be complemented by networks for more localised NGOs, particularly considering the contextual nuances surrounding humanitarian action definitions and principles.

The localisation work of a few INGOs, supporting specific L/NNGOs, was highlighted by multiple interviewees as having been a catalyst for change. This included multi-year support for programming, advocacy, and financial support for inclusion in coordination, such as paying initial NGO Forum membership fees.

Participation in coordination and humanitarian principles: L/NNGO participation within clusters and in area-based coordination was reported to vary between location and cluster but is generally low. Clusters were perceived by NGO participants to be useful and worth attending when they had an operational and strategic rather than process-focused. Some participants described the substantial variance in scale and capacities between larger NNGOs and very local organisations, noting this as an opportunity to engage with and bolster the capacities of local NGOs.

As a Flagship Initiative country, OCHA in Colombia currently has a strong focus on outreach to local actors, starting with a mapping exercise of local organisations delivering humanitarian aid. Participants noted that some or many of these don't identify as humanitarian, with their primary work being in development, peace, or human rights. This has brought to the forefront questions on how the humanitarian system should engage with actors who don't work under humanitarian principles, what the aims of engagement would be, and what engagement mechanisms would be supportive to local actors and improve overall local response.

Impact of dual coordination mechanisms: Colombia has two coordination systems: the IASC system activated for the internal crisis and GIFMM for refugee and migrant response, led by IOM and UNHCR under the R4V regional platform⁴. Despite efforts to combine meetings to reduce attendance time, the systems remain separate. Participants noted that the legacy of numerous meetings and dual reporting systems can deter L/NNGO participation in coordination, with the perception of UN dominance partly due to these dual mechanisms at national, sectoral, and sub-national levels.

Country-based pooled fund: The re-instatement of a Colombia Humanitarian Fund in 2024 and its intention to focus on funding for L/NNGOs, was unanimously welcomed by interviewees. Some of the fund intentions on quality financing align with previous recommendations from localisation work. Some interviewees from national organisations expressed some concern about eligibility criteria. The fund's setup was ongoing at the time of interviews, but experiences from other contexts show the importance of continuous communication regarding eligibility and selection.

Localisation progress and strategy: A 'Country-Level Dialogue on Localisation' in 2021⁵, facilitated under the Grand Bargain Localisation Workstream, identified many similar issues raised by participants in this study. These include lack of direct funding access, unequal (sub-contractor not peer) partnerships between international and local actors, and inaccessibility of coordination mechanisms to local actors. Some recommendations are being partially addressed, but progress towards others remains limited.

An HCT Localisation Strategy is being drafted in 2024, drawing on the Flagship Initiative's Localisation Thinking Group co-chaired by OCHA and a L/NNGO. The strategy outlines four pillars,

⁴ El Grupo Interagencial sobre Flujos Migratorios Mixtos (GIFMM); La Plataforma de Coordinación Interagencial para Refugiados y Migrantes (R4V).

⁵ Organised by the Colombian Red Cross, Swiss Embassy in Colombia (SDC), OCHA, and Caritas Colombia from March to May 2021. See <https://gblocalisation.ifrc.org/grand-bargain-localisation-workstream-2/resources/> (English and Spanish).

three of which are familiar: strengthening coordination and participation for L/NNGOs at local and national levels and in technical spaces, capacity-building, and increasing direct financing. The fourth is more unusual: improving communication and visibility to strengthen L/NNGOs' communications and inclusion in humanitarian platforms.

The strategy includes a detailed action plan, identifying aims and activities, critiquing the current situation for each aim, and setting specific targets and outputs, including numbers and timelines. This demonstrates good practice, as described by study participants, setting a positive trajectory for change if its outputs are achieved.



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