

RAPID REFLECTION ON THE SCALE-UP OF CASH COORDINATION

FOR THE SYRIA EARTHQUAKE RESPONSE

NORTHWEST SYRIA

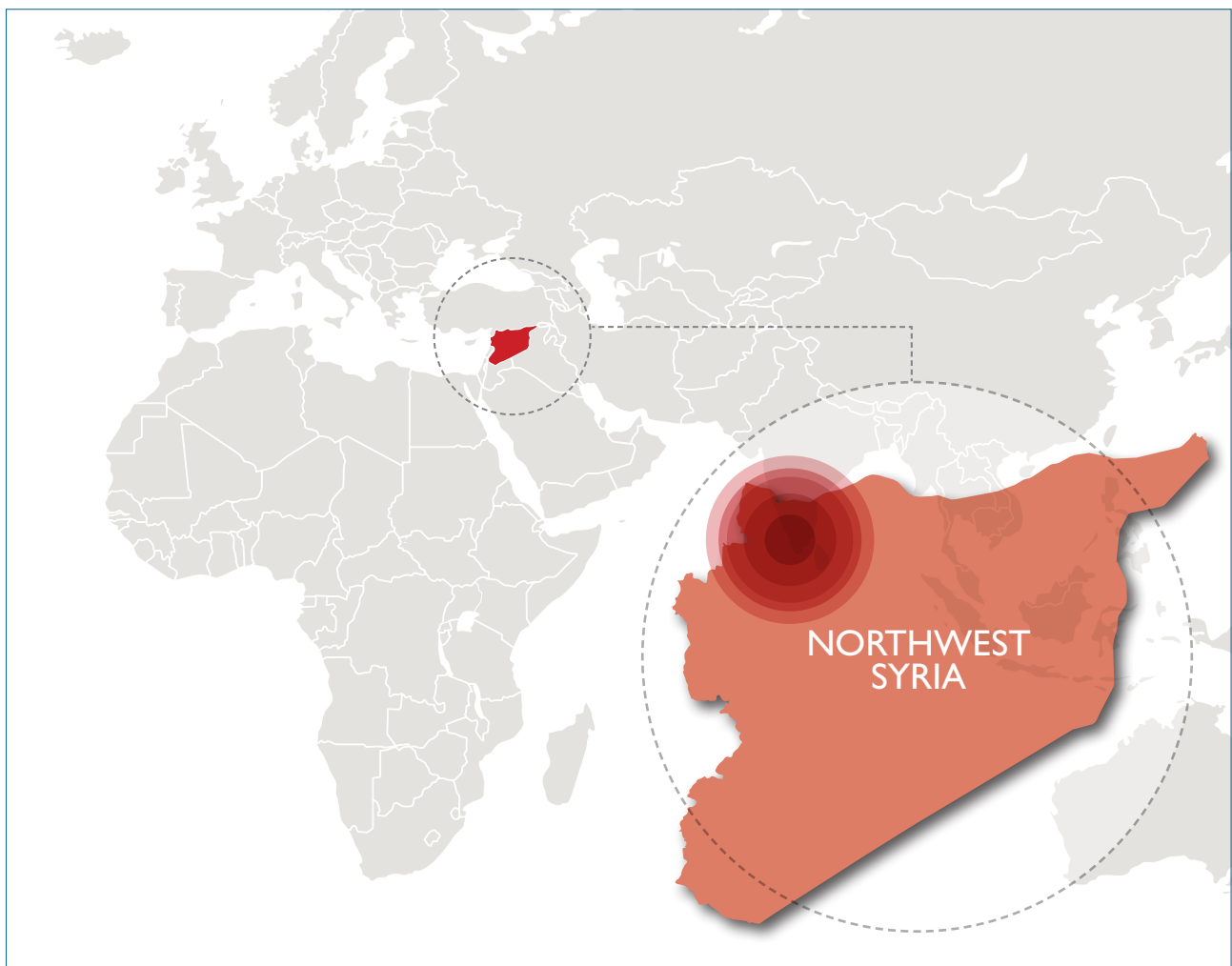
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ACRONYMS

BHA	Bureau of Humanitarian Assistance
CAG	Global Cash Advisory Group
CVA	Cash and voucher assistance
ECHO	European Civil Protection and Humanitarian Aid Operations
FSP	Financial service provider
IDP	Internally displaced person
ICCG	Inter-Cluster Coordination Group
JRAM	Joint Rapid Assessment of Markets
KI	Key informant
MEB	Minimum expenditure basket
MoFSS	Ministry of Family and Social Services
MPCA	Multi-purpose cash assistance
NWS	Northwest Syria
TAS	Takaful Al Sham
ToR	Terms of Reference





The February 2023 earthquakes on the Türkiye–Syria border killed over 50,000 people and injured more than 100,000,¹ further exacerbating vulnerabilities and increasing humanitarian needs in an area already affected by a 12-year-long conflict and refugee crisis.²

The magnitude of the disaster and the significant use of cash and voucher assistance (CVA) to respond to the needs emphasized the importance of quality cash coordination. Building on the Global Cash Advisory Group (CAG) key performance indicators for cash coordination as a guide, this paper reflects on the extent to which cash coordination was: (1) timely and effective, and (2) inclusive, transparent and accountable.

It draws from seven semi-structured key informants' interviews, desk review of available literature and a round table organized on 8th August with key cash stakeholders.

¹ UN.org. (2023). 'Türkiye-Syria Earthquake Response'. <https://www.un.org/en/turkiye-syria-earthquake-response>

² Hisham Khan. (2023). 'The Turkey and Syria Earthquake'. Relief Web. <https://reliefweb.int/report/turkiye/turkey-and-syria-earthquake>

OI CONTEXT

Following the earthquakes on the Türkiye–Syria border, the United Nations launched a US\$397.5 million Flash Appeal for Syria. The Appeal included a dedicated multi-purpose cash assistance (MPCA) Chapter with a requirement of US\$20.6m.³

THE PRE-EXISTING NORTHWEST SYRIA (NWS) CASH WORKING GROUP (CWG) IN GAZIANTEP SUPPORTED THE EARTHQUAKE RESPONSE

Reporting to the Inter-Cluster Coordination Group (ICCG), chaired by OCHA, the CWG Coordinator is funded by the Bureau of Humanitarian Assistance (BHA) and hosted by Takaful Al Sham (TAS), a Syrian NGO registered as a non-profit, charity organization in Türkiye. The NWS CWG was actively supported prior and during the earthquake response (February–July 2023) by the Whole of Syria Cash and Market Advisor based in Amman, deployed by CashCap to the role since 2018. CWG key directions are steered through a Senior Advisory Group, and technical topics are advanced through ad hoc task forces.⁴

To support cash coordination during the earthquake response, OCHA deployed a surge Information Management Officer to the CWG, and additional support to cash coordination was provided by the International Organisation for Migration (IOM). As of August 2023, the CWG is expanding through two area-based CWGs: one in Idlib and one in Aleppo. NWS-CWG is now coordinated by a Turkish national, as full-time Coordinator supported by two Syrian Area-based Coordinators based in Northwest Syria.

CHRONIC VULNERABILITIES AND REDUCED CAPACITY TO RESPOND

In Northwest Syria, the earthquake hit an area affected by 12 years of conflict, hosting more than 3.7 million internally displaced persons (IDPs).⁵ The area is further characterized by limited public services but a locally-led response, in part due to the limited access of international aid actors.

CROSS-BORDER OPERATIONS

For the past decade, humanitarian interventions in Northwest Syria have been implemented cross-border, from Türkiye. Remote management of humanitarian cash programme is therefore the primary operational paradigm in this context. Such experience, plus the annual anticipation of the potential end of the UN Security Council Resolutions governing the cross-border response, has progressively increased humanitarian actors' preparedness to respond to shocks and to coordinate CVA, as evident in the earthquake response.

³ UN OCHA. (2023). 'Syria and Türkiye Flash Appeal, Appeal Data, MCPA Paid Contributions'. <https://fts.unocha.org/appeals/1149/summary>; <https://fts.unocha.org/appeals/1150/summary>
Note that within the Flash Appeal, the Multi-purpose Cash & Social Protection sector targeted 1.5 million earthquake-affected people and appealed for US\$143.6 million.

Sectoral cash and voucher assistance is planned under Shelter/NFI, Food Security, Early Recovery and Livelihoods sectors.

⁴ Source: CWG Governance Structure.

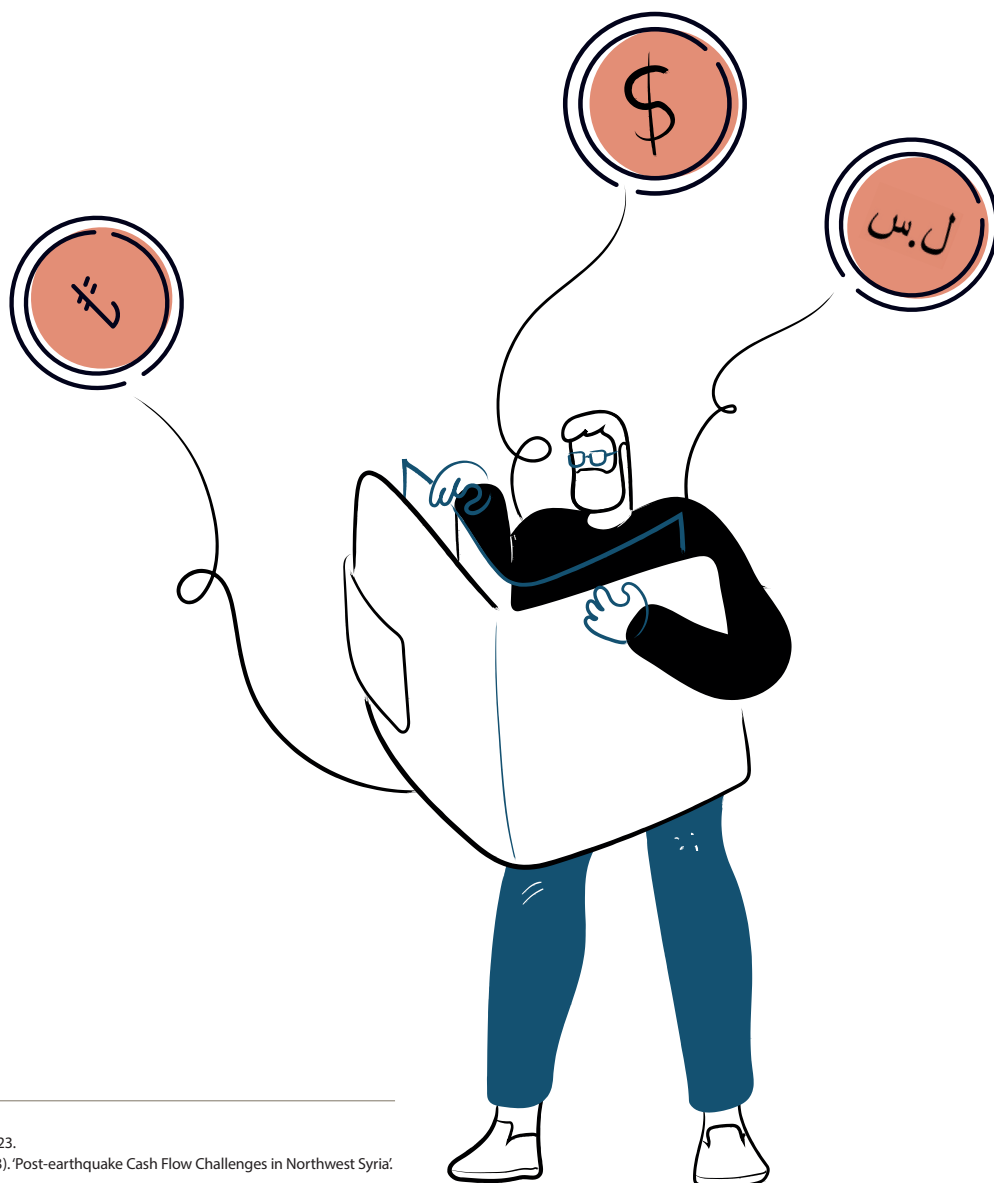
⁵ ACAPS. (2023). 'Türkiye/Syria – ACAPS Thematic Report: Profiles of earthquake-affected governorates'.

CASH CONDUCTIVE ENVIRONMENT

From the start of the earthquake response, the CWG had engaged donors such as BHA and ECHO to advocate for their support in the use of cash overall and emergency MPC in particular. Further, CWG member organizations operating in the area had pre-existing capacity to deliver cash at scale; some of them have already been pre-positioning MPC as part of their rapid response mechanisms over the years.⁶

MULTI-CURRENCIES CASH RESPONSE

Responding to fluctuating availability of bank notes, inflation and currency depreciation, cash response in NWS was delivered over time in multiple currencies. Pre-earthquake CVA was first distributed in Syrian pounds, then US dollars. Post-earthquake, CVA was distributed in the first weeks in Turkish lira, before reverting to US dollars.⁷



⁶ CWG. (2023). 'After Action Review'. 2 May 2023.

⁷ CWG Bulletins and Crisis Analysis Syria. (2023). 'Post-earthquake Cash Flow Challenges in Northwest Syria'.

02 TO WHAT EXTENT WAS THE CASH COORDINATION EFFECTIVE AND TIMELY?

KEY FINDING 1

THE CWG SHARED TIMELY AND COMPREHENSIVE GUIDANCE ON MPC THAT HAS BEEN WELL ADHERED TO BY ITS MEMBERS.

A week into the response, the CWG shared clear recommendations on MPC transfer value and frequency, as well as indications on geographical areas to prioritize as being the worst hit by the earthquake.⁸ From week one of the response, the CWG published a bulletin that contains both technical recommendations and progress updates on MPC distribution. These bulletins are comprehensive, clear and publicly available. Interviewed CWG members were unanimous in endorsing their importance. Further, MPC-related recommendations are summarized in a two-pager guidance, publicly available.⁹

The After-Action Review on MPC,¹⁰ conducted by the CWG, notes that the timeliness of the coordination was hampered in the first days by the interruption of communication channels and the suspension of CVA by authorities to allow for a more systematic registration of cash recipients. Yet the CWG and its members quickly overcame these challenges, as communication was re-established and authorities lifted the suspension to resume cash delivery.

CWG recommendations are well adhered to by the CWG members, which further demonstrate the relevance and effectiveness of cash coordination in NWS. A review of MPC 4Ws, as of June 2023, shows that 92 percent¹¹ of the reported one-off MPC matches the CWG-recommended transfer value of US\$150.

The effectiveness of MPC guidance and coordination during the earthquake response was also supported by pre-existing tools and guidance, such as the harmonized tool for MPC post-distribution monitoring.¹²

Finally, the CWG played an advocacy and advisory role to decision-makers, leading to the allocation of US\$4.5 million pooled funds dedicated to MPC. The CWG also supported partners in developing their funding requirements for their MPC project proposals. It was a first that MPC had a standalone budget under the pooled funds, emphasizing the role of the CWG as a strategic catalyst for the scale-up of CVA, and as the 'de facto' coordination body for MPC.

KEY FINDING 2

BEYOND MPC, THE CWG PROVIDED EFFECTIVE SUPPORT TO ASSESS THE FEASIBILITY OF CVA THROUGH FINANCIAL SERVICE PROVIDER (FSP) ENGAGEMENT AND JOINT MARKET ASSESSMENT.

In the aftermath of the earthquake, FSPs, within the complex landscape of NWS, increased their transfer fees. The CWG acted as a platform to facilitate the conversations between CWG members and FSPs. The CWG also acted as a discussion platform among CWG members on the topic of working with FSPs. For

⁸ CWG Bulletin, 7–13 February 2023.

⁹ Available at: <https://drive.google.com/file/d/1BGevaZoTlnWOLJ4bhHt1zpALziqOnS8A/view>

¹⁰ CWG. (2023). 'After-Action Review', 2 May 2023.

¹¹ Three local non-governmental organizations (LNGOs) are distributing less than the recommended US\$150 (US\$50–130) and one INGO is distributing more (US\$200).

¹² Available at: <https://drive.google.com/file/d/11EUdxeZFvZ0iaUBc1yvvJ7bIDJXbNFvk/view>

example, the 26th February Bulletin has a whole section dedicated to FSP engagement, which provides four clear recommendations¹³ for how to engage with them and coordinate as much as possible on the transfer fees.

From the early stages, the CWG shared recommendations on which currency to use for cash distribution (Turkish lira in the first few weeks of the response, and then US dollars as was the case prior to the earthquake). This recommendation was accompanied by the rationale, underpinned by Accountability to the Affected Populations (AAP) principles, as well as suggested key messaging to the affected communities.¹⁴ The CWG then adjusted its recommendations as the US dollar liquidity improved.

In February, the CWG set up the Joint Rapid Assessment of Markets (JRAM), in partnership with REACH, supporting the cash feasibility assessment and transfer value calculation. REACH continues to publish monthly reports, which are shared with the CWG members and published widely about 15 days after data is collected (e.g. March Market monitoring results are available by 15th April once analysis and reporting is completed).

KEY FINDING 3

CWG ENGAGED LARGELY WITH THE ICCG AND THE CLUSTERS TO SUPPORT THE DESIGN AND USE OF CVA.

Interviewed CWG and Cluster members equally report a strong inter-cluster coordination over the use of CVA, with regular updates of the inter-sectoral 4W matrix on the use of CVA.

The CWG regularly engages with multiple sectors on the design and use of CVA. The CWG attends cluster meetings and collaborates with the Early Recovery, Food Security and Shelter/NFI clusters on providing guidance on the design and wage rate for Cash for Work.¹⁵ Interviews with the CWG Coordinator and members revealed other examples of sectoral engagements, as follows:

- ▶ **Food security cluster:** CWG supported the development of the 2023 Interim Cash for Food guidance.
- ▶ **The CWG and Shelter/NFI cluster** has an ongoing collaboration on the calculation of the transfer value for cash for winterization, which was agreed at US\$150, the same as the one-off MPC transfer value. The CWG Coordinator also took part in the Shelter and NFI cluster After Action Review post-earthquake response.
- ▶ **Health cluster:** The CWG initiated engagement to support referral of chronically ill persons into MPC programmes.
- ▶ The CWG also collaborated with the **Gender-Based Violence sub-cluster** to form a task force that developed a joint standard operating procedure (SOP) on external referrals to enhance the MPC support package for gender-based violence survivors and at-risk groups.

The CWG Coordinator regularly attends the ICCG as an observer and is a well-accepted supporter of sectoral cash. The effectiveness of the sectoral engagement of the CWG is further demonstrated by the fact that, in the first week of the response, as the CWG was building up its information management capacity, the food security and livelihoods (FSL) cluster hosted the emergency MPC implementation plans in its live, earthquake response tracker, which also facilitated deduplication.

¹³ The recommendations were: (i) Ensure that your Finance/Procurement teams are already engaged with their counterparts in other CWG member organizations and are exchanging information on rates and experiences with MTAs; (ii) For well-funded international organizations, do not take unilateral decisions on MTA rates. Be mindful that not all humanitarian organizations have the budget bandwidth you have. Coordinate to avoid indirectly undermining prevailing market rates and other partners' contractual agreements; (iii) Continue robust vetting of other MTAs in consultation with your donors to expand the pool of tried and tested FSPs, especially if you have plans to scale up CVA. This could minimize risks and monopoly, increase your scale-up capacity, while promoting healthy market competition; and (iv) Flag FSP issues in real time with the CWG. We will be engaging with you on a more robust FSP mapping in the coming weeks and a safe platform to facilitate harmonized approaches with FSPs.

¹⁴ CWG Bulletin 26th February 2023

¹⁵ CWG Bulletin 26th February 2023

03 TO WHAT EXTENT WAS THE CASH COORDINATION INCLUSIVE, TRANSPARENT AND ACCOUNTABLE?

KEY FINDING 4

IN NORTHWEST SYRIA, CASH COORDINATION IS LOCALLY-LED AND INCLUSIVE OF NATIONAL AND INTERNATIONAL ORGANIZATIONS.

All key informants working for national and international organizations were unanimous about the high degree of inclusivity of the CWG. An examination of the 4W matrix as of June 2023 shows that both national and international actors regularly report on the MPC they distribute (9 INGOs, 13 N-NGOs).

The CWG governance structure is localized: the eight Strategic Advisory Group seats are equally split between national and international organizations, and the CWG Coordinator is a local Turkish organization, Takaful Al Sham (TAS). Furthermore, TAS received direct international funding for the position, from BHA, a rather unique situation in the region and globally. The largely localized nature of the response (see Section I: Context) and the advocacy made by the Whole of Syria Cash and Market advisor were the two main factors mentioned by key informants that explain such direct funding.

The CWG meetings are held in English, but the key tools and guidance are published both in English and Arabic (e.g., MPC guidance & recommendations or MPC post-distribution monitoring (PDM)).

One key informant acknowledged that effective engagement from national organizations was dependent on their resources and capacity to attend CWG meetings. This is true globally, yet the capacity of local actors in Northwest Syria is conducive to locally-led cash coordination.

KEY FINDING 5

CWG COMMUNICATION IS REGULAR AND TRANSPARENT.

Communication is deemed transparent and inclusive of existing members. The CWG uses a Skype group where tools, assessment results and lessons learned documents are regularly shared. The use of the Skype group was deemed agile and effective by most informants, yet some newcomers, yet to be admitted to the group, found it difficult to receive the information shared. CWG meetings were described as a good learning opportunity in which members, both national and international, are encouraged to present their approaches.

Most documents such as the bulletins, the guidance, recommendations and assessments are regularly published on the CWG web platform.¹⁶ Finally, the CWG conducted an After-Action Review of MPC distributed as part of the earthquake response in May 2023, which further demonstrates its willingness to harness learning and build accountability among its members.

¹⁶ See: <https://response.reliefweb.int/turkiye-cross-border/cash-working-group-northwest-syria-nws>



04 IMPLICATIONS AND GOOD PRACTICES

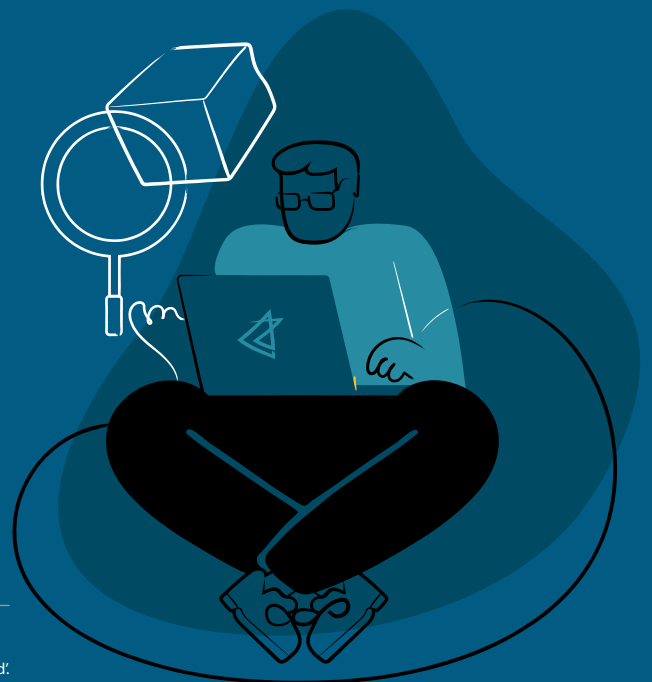
The review found an effective cash coordination steered by a well-organized cash working group sharing timely and clear guidance to its members and across sectors. The guidance was relevantly adjusted over time as the context evolved.

The cash coordination in Northwest Syria was locally driven, inclusive of national and international organizations, and transparent. This contributed to a high adherence to CWG recommendations, resulting in a more coherent cash response.

The NWS CWG provided a successful example of effective and timely, locally-led cash coordination, as a result of:

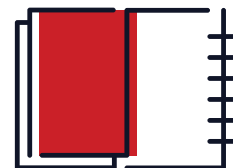
- ▶ **the cash preparedness of the CWG members (e.g., developing a framework agreement with FSPs for rapid CVA disbursement prior to the earthquake);**
- ▶ **a good level of resources available for the cash coordination and cash response; and**
- ▶ **the existence of a well-organized CWG before the earthquake struck.**

The CWG, through its localized governance and successes, makes the case for increased resources to be allocated to national organizations, so that the humanitarian system can finally deliver on its localization commitments.¹⁷



¹⁷ See for example: HPN. (2023). 'Syrian RLOs and the Earthquake Response: Have we learned a lesson?'; Refugee International. (2023). 'Earthquake Aftermath: Aiding Northwest Syria without rehabilitating Assad'.

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