

## Guidance

# ENGAGEMENT, PARTICIPATION AND DECISION-MAKING BY WOMEN-LED ORGANIZATIONS IN HUMANITARIAN ACTION

IASC Reference Group  
on Gender and Humanitarian Action

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Endorsed by IASC OPAG

## Purpose

There is a lack of consistent reference to, consultation with, and dedicated funding for the meaningful engagement of formal or informal local women-led groups, networks, organizations, movements or initiatives, which contributes to rendering these groups invisible or under-prioritized, and therefore more marginalized in humanitarian action. Various definitions of local women's organizations, local women-led organizations, or local women's rights organizations are in use, making tracking of their impact, participation and leadership in decision-making, and access to funding challenging. This is an impediment to the accurate monitoring of support to and accountability for crisis-affected women and girls.

**This document seeks to adopt a coherent definition of local women-led organizations (WLOs).** A standard, non-normative definition of local WLOs for use by humanitarian actors will aid the meaningful engagement, participation and decision making of women and girls in humanitarian response, whilst also enabling the IASC and humanitarian system and other relevant organizations to track funding to the organizations that represent them. This in turn supports the implementation of the Accountability to Affected People (AAP) principle and the localization agenda.

This harmonized definition will facilitate the channeling of prioritized technical and financial support to local WLOs and aid the tracking of funding and its impact towards the empowerment of crisis-affected women and girls in all their diversity. It will provide consistency in planning, response, financing, monitoring, and reporting at Humanitarian Country Team and cluster/sub-cluster level, more accurate information about how the humanitarian system is meeting the most basic commitment to women and girls and the organizations that work towards advancing their rights and gender equality.

The IASC aligns itself with the **definition** used by the Grand Bargain and the UN Partners Portal<sup>1</sup> which reads as follows:

***Local women-led organization (WLO): An organization with a humanitarian mandate and/or mission that is (1) governed or directed by women; or 2) whose leadership is principally made up of women, demonstrated by 50 per cent or more occupying senior leadership positions.***<sup>2</sup>

The above definition does not stipulate or intend to set the agenda for local WLOs. Nor is it the only set of criteria for stakeholders to consider. It is a non-normative definition and stakeholders are encouraged to go beyond these minimum criteria to aim for more progressive and inclusive programmatic standards wherever possible. As such, the next section of this guidance note outlines additional recommended criteria that should be applied to facilitate the inclusion of women and girls in all their diversity, and their organizations, in decision making and implementation, including through financial allocations as part of a gender-responsive approach to humanitarian action.

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<sup>1</sup> The Grand Bargain Secretariat uses this definition in its annual self-reporting template that signatories use to report against their commitments. It is also the definition in the United Nations Partner Portal that is designed to facilitate collaboration between civil society organizations and their UN partners.

<sup>2</sup> Aligned with Footnote 29 in the GBV AoR Strategy 2021-2015, this guidance note defines women-led organization in "an inclusive way encompassing both women-led and girl-led organizations, as well as women's rights organizations." Please refer to the text boxes on page 2 for additional definitions.

## Recommended criteria

For the purposes of prioritization and tracking in humanitarian action, though not a prerequisite, the local WLO should ideally meet the following criteria:

1. Staffing is at least 50 per cent women, in all their diversity.
2. Has a mandate to advance gender equality and women’s and/or girls’ empowerment, rights and protection and is explicitly or implicitly aligned with the principles outlined in the IASC Gender Policy and other relevant global normative frameworks and commitments to Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women and Girls (GEEWG) in crisis settings.
3. Prioritization should be given to local women-led organizations and those with a GEEWG mandate who work with or represent forcibly displaced and stateless groups and marginalized groups, who face compounding intersectional discrimination on the basis of age, disability, SOGIESC, ethnicity or other factors.
4. Has experience in successfully implementing programs that contribute to GEEWG, particularly where these advance women’s and girls’ rights, access to resources and leadership, economic opportunities, humanitarian services, including protection and humanitarian decision-making.
5. Demonstrates accountability to women and girls, including through the coordination of community-based protection and feedback mechanisms that are tailored to women’s and/or girls’ needs and advances their full, equal and meaningful participation.
6. Has the capacity and/or capacity plans to achieve the Protection from Sexual Exploitation and Abuse and Sexual Harassment (PSEAH) standards, defined in the [UN Implementing Partner PSEA Capacity Assessment](#) and the [UN Protocol on Allegations of Sexual Exploitation and Abuse Involving Implementing Partners](#).

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| <p><b>Diversity of women’s and girls’ organizations</b></p> <p>A diversity of women’s and girls’ organizations exist, including youth- and girl-led organizations, organizations led by women and girls with disabilities, SOGIESC identities, and others. While girl-led organizations specifically can’t be included in the UN Partners Portal – given girls under the age of 18 cannot be funded by the UN – it is crucial to acknowledge these organizations’ importance and emphasize that UN agencies and other humanitarian stakeholders should urgently increase their support to and consideration of these organizations.</p> | <p><b>Women-Led Organizations and Women’s Rights Organizations</b></p> <p>The definition outlined in this guidance note includes local women-led organizations that may or may not work on women’s rights issues. While the set of recommended criteria cover much of the work of women’s rights organizations, such as those with a GEEWG mandate, the definition itself is not strictly on the makeup of local WLOs. Though there is often overlap between these two categories of women’s organizations, it is important to note the distinction.</p> |
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