Research Terms of Reference

Localisation – Decentralised Coordination Assessment

UKR2616

Ukraine

October 2026

REACH Informing more effective humanitarian action

1. Executive Summary

Country of intervention	Ukraine					
Type of Emergency	□	Natural disaster	x	Conflict	□	Other *(specify)*
Type of Crisis	□	Sudden onset	□	Slow onset	x	Protracted
Mandating Body/ Agency	FCDO					
IMPACT Project Code	64BAG-4					
Overall Research Timeframe *(from research design to final outputs / M&E)*	12/10/2026 – 31/03/2027					
Research Timeframe *Add planned deadlines (for first cycle if more than 1)*	1. Pilot/ training: 09/11/2026		6. Preliminary presentation: N/A			
	2. Start collecting data: 10/11/2026		7. Outputs sent for validation: 15/02/2027			
	3. Data collected: 13/01/2027		8. Outputs published: 25/02/2027			
	4. Data analysed: 27/01/2027		9. Final presentation: (tentative)			
	5. Data sent for validation: 28/01/2027					
Number of assessments	x	Single assessment (one cycle)				
	□	Multi assessment (more than one cycle)				
Humanitarian milestones *Specify **what** will the assessment inform and **when***	**Milestone**		**Deadline (can be tentative)**			
	□	Donor plan/strategy	_ _/_ _/_ _ _ _			
	x	Inter-cluster plan/strategy	_ _/_ _/_ _ _ _			
	□	Cluster plan/strategy	_ _/_ _/_ _ _ _			
	□	Other (Specify):	_ _/_ _/_ _ _ _			
Audience Type & Dissemination *Specify **who** will the assessment inform and **how** you will disseminate to inform the audience*	**Audience type**		**Dissemination**			
	X Strategic X Programmatic □ Operational □ [Other, Specify]		**X** General Product Mailing (e.g. mail to NGO consortium; HCT participants; Donors) □ Cluster Mailing (Education, Shelter and WASH) and presentation of findings at next cluster meeting x Presentation of findings (e.g. at HCT meeting; Cluster meeting) x Website Dissemination (Relief Web & REACH Resource Centre)			

Stakeholder mapping *Has a detailed stakeholder mapping been conducted during research design to identify all actors that could* ***contribute*** *to and/or* ***benefit from*** *the research?*	x	Ongoing external engagement with partners and fora with Localisation components to understand relevant stakeholders	□	No
General Objective	To assess how and to what extent new decentralised humanitarian subnational coordination structures in Ukraine have contributed to strengthening the leadership role, handing over coordination, and decision-making to civil society organisations (**CSOs) operating in frontline areas**.			
Specific Objective(s)	1. To examine frontline CSOs' awareness of, access to, and participation in decentralised coordination structures, particularly regional Humanitarian Operations Coordination Groups (HOCGs) and Area-Based Coordination mechanisms (ABCs). 2. To assess the extent to which participation in decentralised coordination enables frontline CSOs to develop a shared operational understanding of providing assistance, and to identify unmet needs, response gaps, and overlaps. 3. To uncover whether decentralised coordination (HOCGs and ABCs) enables frontline CSOs to influence decision-making and contribute to timely responses by identifying needs and gaps, and to assess how humanitarian response efforts could be better aligned to promote meaningful localisation.			
Research Questions	- To what extent are frontline CSOs aware of, able to access and participate in regional HOCGs and ABCs? - How does participation in decentralised coordination structures influence coordination among frontline CSOs, including shared operational understanding and the identification of unmet needs, gaps and overlaps? - To what extent do HOCGs and ABCs enable frontline CSOs to influence decision-making and contribute to timely responses to identified needs and gaps? - How could decentralised coordination structures (HOCGs and ABCs) be improved to strengthen localisation and advocate for changes in the humanitarian response?			
Geographic Coverage	Focus on CSOs operating in frontline areas – mostly East and South of Ukraine; interviews may take place in other locations where relevant key informants are based			
Secondary data sources	See Section 3.3			
Population(s) *Select all that apply*	□	IDPs in camp	□	IDPs in informal sites
	□	IDPs in host communities	□	IDPs [Other, Specify]
	□	Refugees in camp	□	Refugees in informal sites
	□	Refugees in host communities	□	Refugees [Other, Specify]
	□	Host communities	X	Local actors (CSOs, NGOs, volunteer groups)
			X	International organisations
Data collection tool(s)	**x**	Structured (Quantitative)	**x**	Semi-structured (Qualitative)

<table>
<tr><th></th><th colspan="8">Sampling method</th><th colspan="4">Data collection method</th></tr>
<tr><td>Structured data collection tool # 2</td><td colspan="8">x Purposive
x Snowballing
□ [Other, Specify]</td><td colspan="4">X Quantitative survey (Target 280-300):
- Representatives of Local/Ukrainian CSOs: 280-300
Total (quantitative): 280-300</td></tr>
<tr><td>Semi-structured data collection tool # 1</td><td colspan="8">x Purposive
x Snowballing
□ [Other, Specify]</td><td colspan="4">x Key Informant Interview (Target 34-46):
- Representatives of local CSOs: 26-34
- Representatives of INGOs: 4-6
- Representatives of UN: 4-6
Total: 34-46
x Individual interview (Target #): 34-46
□ Focus group discussion (Target #):_ _ _ _ _
□ [Other, Specify] (Target #):_ _ _ _ _</td></tr>
<tr><td rowspan="2">Disaggregation by gender and age
Are you planning to conduct sex/age disaggregated analysis?</td><td colspan="4">Gender</td><td colspan="4">Age</td></tr>
<tr><td>□</td><td colspan="3">Yes</td><td>□</td><td colspan="3">Yes</td></tr>
<tr><td></td><td>x</td><td colspan="3">No</td><td>x</td><td colspan="3">No</td></tr>
<tr><td rowspan="2">Data management platform(s)</td><td>x</td><td colspan="3">IMPACT</td><td></td><td colspan="3"></td></tr>
<tr><td>□</td><td colspan="7">[Other, Specify]</td></tr>
<tr><td rowspan="4">Expected ouput type(s)</td><td>X</td><td colspan="2">Situation overview #: 1</td><td>□</td><td colspan="2">Report #: 0</td><td>□</td><td>Profile #: 0</td></tr>
<tr><td>□</td><td colspan="2">Presentation (Preliminary findings) #: 0</td><td>□</td><td colspan="2">Presentation (Final) #: 0</td><td>□</td><td>Factsheet #: 0</td></tr>
<tr><td>□</td><td colspan="2">Interactive dashboard #:0</td><td>□</td><td colspan="2">Webmap #: 0</td><td>□</td><td>Map #: 0</td></tr>
<tr><td>□</td><td colspan="7">[Other, Specify] #: 0</td></tr>
<tr><td rowspan="2">Access</td><td>x</td><td colspan="7">Public (available on REACH resource center and other humanitarian platforms)</td></tr>
<tr><td>□</td><td colspan="7">Restricted (bilateral dissemination only upon agreed dissemination list, no publication on REACH or other platforms)</td></tr>
<tr><td rowspan="4">Visibility Specify which logos should be on outputs</td><td colspan="8">REACH</td></tr>
<tr><td colspan="8">Donor: FCDO</td></tr>
<tr><td colspan="8">Coordination Framework: N/A</td></tr>
<tr><td colspan="8">Partners: N/A</td></tr>
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2. Rationale

2.1 Background

In 2025, Ukraine's humanitarian coordination system was decentralised via regional Humanitarian Operational Coordination Groups (HOCGs) and Area-Based Coordination platforms (ABCs) – with participants evenly balanced between national and international; they intended to bring coordination and decision-making closer to the frontline[1]. Local CSOs in Ukraine have long become frontline responders in the humanitarian crisis. HOCGs are subnational operational decision-making bodies guided by the Humanitarian Country Team and responsible for supporting coherent, timely and targeted responses to area-

[1] OCHA, Ukraine Humanitarian Subnational Coordination

specific needs in line with the four strategic priorities of the Humanitarian Needs and Response Plan (HNRP)[2]. ABCs complement this structure by providing inclusive, multisectoral platforms closer to the assistance delivery, building on locally based coordination and connecting local civil society organisations (CSOs) and volunteer groups with the relevant coordination hub. NGO Platform play an important enabling role within this architecture, providing organisational and coordination support to HOCGs and ABCs and remaining deeply engaged throughout all stages of implementation and information dissemination. As these structures have evolved over the past 2 years, there is a need to assess whether the changes introduced have strengthened the effectiveness of locally-led coordination. Moreover, challenges repeatedly raised by humanitarian actors during events and through feedback further highlight the need for systematic evidence on how these mechanisms function in practice. The coordination under the HNRP 2026 is characterised by deepening humanitarian needs, evolving conflict dynamics and ongoing risks for frontline. Although HOCGs and ABCs have the potential to strengthen locally led coordination, evidence remains limited on how consistently this potential is realised in practice. The proposed assessment will therefore examine how these decentralised mechanisms influence operational coordination and the participation and leadership of Ukrainian CSOs, identifying barriers, enabling factors and emerging practices that could contribute meaningfully to localisation efforts.

2.2 Intended impact

To address these challenges, IMPACT will assess how decentralised coordination mechanisms shape operational coordination and the participation and leadership of Ukrainian CSOs, while identifying barriers, enabling factors and emerging practices that could strengthen localisation efforts. The assessment will include both a quantitative survey with approximately 300 local CSOs and qualitative interviews with up to 30 local CSOs and 10 international organisations. The primary geographic focus will be on local CSOs operating in frontline areas - mostly East and South of Ukraine.

In addition to identifying gaps and practices, the assessment will support ongoing efforts for more effective and inclusive decentralised coordination. By involving both international and Ukrainian CSOs, it aims to strengthen collaboration, promote meaningful local leadership and advance the localisation agenda in Ukraine. The findings may also inform OCHA's continued support to HOCGs and ABCs, including efforts to strengthen these mechanisms, facilitate more effective engagement among coordination actors, support evidence-based advocacy and provide targeted mentoring and guidance.

3. Methodology

3.1 Methodology overview

This assessment will use stakeholder consultations and a mixed-methods approach, combining quantitative and qualitative data to examine how decentralised coordination mechanisms shape operational coordination and the participation and leadership of operating in frontline areas of Ukraine. This approach will support a nuanced understanding and analysis of key barriers, enabling factors and emerging coordination practices to foster the localisation agenda in Ukraine.

1. **Consultations** (October) will be held with representatives of local CSOs and international humanitarian organisations who participated in HOCG/ABC to explore their understanding. These discussions will help contextualise the assessment by clarifying the strategic intentions, operational models, and expectations of actors. Insights from these consultations will inform the research design, contributing to a more balanced understanding of current localisation efforts.

2. **Quantitative primary data collection** (November-December)

[2] OCHA, Ukraine Humanitarian Needs and Response Plan 2026, January 2026

A structured, closed-ended survey will collect quantitative data on frontline CSOs' awareness of, access to and participation in HOCGs and ABCs. It will examine whether participation supports a shared operational understanding of who is providing assistance, helps identify unmet needs, gaps and overlaps, and enables CSOs to influence decisions and contribute to timely responses. The survey will also capture barriers and enabling factors affecting meaningful participation, and respondents' perspectives on how decentralised coordination could better support local leadership and localisation. Respondents will include representatives of Ukrainian CSOs operating in frontline areas, with questions structured around the assessment's research questions.

3. **Qualitative primary data collection** (December-January)

Semi-structured Key Informant Interviews (KIIs) will be conducted with representatives of Ukrainian CSOs and international organisations operating in frontline areas and involved in decentralised coordination. Interviews will explore experiences of accessing and participating in HOCGs and ABCs, developing a shared operational understanding, identifying needs, gaps and overlaps, influencing decisions, and contributing to timely responses. They will also examine barriers, enabling factors and opportunities to improve decentralised coordination and promote meaningful localisation.

Interviews will be carried out by REACH field teams with the support of the assessment staff. The data collection will take place in October 2026 - January 2027. The findings will be shared with local and international organisations, OCHA, NGO platform and will also be shared back to all local non-governmental actors who participated. The final product will also be posted publicly on REACH's website.

3.2 Population of interest

The population of interest for this assessment is local CSOs and international organisations operating in frontline areas and involved in HOCGs and ABCs on the one hand, and local Ukrainian CSOs operating in frontline areas on the other. The geographic focus is on actors operating mostly in the East and South oblasts of Ukraine, closer to the frontline. If time, internal capacity, and respondents' availability permit, perspectives from other areas, collected using the same methodology and leveraging REACH's existing contacts, may also be included to ensure a more comprehensive and diversified overview of CSOs' challenges and support needs.

The following populations will be interviewed:

- Senior or partnership staff of local CSOs and international organisations operating in frontline areas and involved in decentralised coordination
- Representatives of local Ukrainian CSOs operating in frontline areas, HCT and Cluster representatives will be interviewed for their perspective as well.

3.3 Secondary data review

Prior to research design, a comprehensive review of grey literature and consultations related to the evolution and intended functions of decentralised coordination evidence were conducted. The review examined functions, membership and areas of responsibility of HOCGs and ABCs and their links with coordination hubs.

The assessment will also draw on additional literature to provide a broader context and ensure the findings are grounded in a comprehensive understanding of the existing evidence on operational coordination, communication, shared decision-making, and the participation and leadership of Ukrainian CSOs. Relevant operational perspectives from humanitarian organisations will also be considered to understand expectations on locally led coordination and complementarity among national and international actors.

The findings from the secondary data review will inform the research questions, sampling, and the overall approach to the assessment, ensuring it addresses how decentralised coordination structures enable leadership of Ukrainian CSOs and promote meaningful localisation.

Sources

Secondary source	Purpose of source
• Ukraine Humanitarian Needs and Response Plan 2026 • OCHA Ukraine: Dnipro Humanitarian Operational Coordination Group • IMPACT/REACH: Best Practices of Localisation Assessment, 2025 • Humanitarian Localisation Baseline for Ukraine: Progress Report 2025 • Amplifying the Voices of Local Actors in the Current Localisation Dynamic in Ukraine, 2025	- Inform the appropriateness of research questions - Ensure avoidance of duplication - Key definitions where relevant - Contextual understanding of capacity-building initiatives in Ukraine

3.4 Key definitions

- Decentralised humanitarian coordination refers to the delegation of operational coordination and area-specific decision-making to subnational mechanisms located closer to frontline response delivery. In Ukraine, this includes HOCGs and ABCs, which bring together national and international actors and can include (but are not limited to): sharing information, identifying needs and gaps, reducing duplication and coordinating timely, coherent and targeted humanitarian aid.
- Humanitarian Operational Coordination Group (HOCG): A subnational body that brings regional humanitarian organisations together to make area-specific operational decisions and support a coherent, timely and principled response aligned with the HNRP. Geographical coverage: Dnipropetrovska, Donetska and Zaporizka oblasts (Dnipro HOCG), Kharkivska oblast (Kharkiv HOCG), Mykolaivska oblast (Mykolaiv HOCG).
- Area-Based Coordination (ABC): A local, multisectoral coordination platform connecting humanitarian actors operating directly in the areas of assistance delivery to jointly identify needs and gaps, coordinate response activities, make the most effective use of resources, and reduce duplication. Geographical coverage: Sumska oblast (Sumska ABC), Khersonska oblast (Khersonska ABC).

3.5 Primary Data Collection

Secondary Data Review and consultations will begin before the start of primary data collection to deepen the assessment team's understanding of the evolution, intended functions and operational models of HOCGs and ABCs, as well as frontline CSOs' participation in these structures.
A quantitative tool will be developed for local CSOs. KIIs will be based on questionnaires adapted to international and local organisations, with considerable overlap and some question-route differences to explore their respective experiences of accessing and participating in HOCGs and ABCs, developing a shared operational understanding, influencing decisions, and contributing to timely responses. Candidates for the assessed organisations will be selected according to the sampling criteria in Section 3.1, and they will be recruited using REACH and Acted contacts in the scoped oblasts.

The quantitative component will be utilised first to capture a broad overview of decentralised coordination across various organisations. By using structured surveys facilitated through the ODK Collect phone app and Kobo forms, REACH can gather quantifiable data to be further analysed. A purposive selection of respondents will be used to ensure diversity in organisational profiles, geographic coverage, and thematic focus. Snowball sampling may be applied to identify additional relevant organisations based on referrals from initial participants. While the assessment does not aim to be statistically representative, this approach will allow for the collection of localised insights that reflect a range of experiences and perspectives across the humanitarian organisations in Ukraine.

The qualitative component will be implemented after the quantitative. After a quick quantitative data analysis, based on responses given, participants for KIIs will be chosen to provide the most diverse sample of local CSOs. This component is

aimed at providing deeper insights into the experiences and perspectives of both INGOs and local CSOs. Priority will be given to interviews conducted via video call, as security restrictions mean that access to key informants is limited.

Data collection will take place in November 2026 – January 2027 by REACH teams. All local CSOs' key informant interviews (KIIs) will be conducted in Ukrainian or Russian, depending on the respondent's first language. IO KIIs are likely to be conducted in Ukrainian, with some senior IO staff interviews potentially in English if that is their working language. Recording will be used if possible, but detailed notes rather than transcripts based on the recording review will be used for analysis.

Table 1. Data collection methods and samples

Type of Data	Partner Type	Actor Type	SAMPLE SIZE
Quantitative	Local/Ukrainian	Representatives of local CSOs operating in frontline areas of Ukraine	280-300
Qualitative	International	Representatives of INGOs operating in frontline areas and involved in decentralised coordination of Ukraine	4-6
	Local/Ukrainian	Representatives of local CSOs operating in frontline areas of Ukraine	26-34
	International	Representatives of UN agencies operating in frontline areas of Ukraine	4-6

3.6 Data Processing & Analysis

During qualitative data collection, the Localisation Team Assessment Officer will regularly monitor the quality of incoming notes and debriefs to ensure that sufficient levels of details are being asked for and transcribed. The transcripts and debriefs will be translated into English automatically, with translation verified and edited by the Assessment Officers. Recordings can also be consulted to address insufficient details.

During quantitative data collection, data cleaning will be performed, including checking for duplicates, time checks, and reviewing all unstructured responses. Assessment staff will monitor enumerator misunderstandings and communicate them to field teams. The assessment team will maintain a cleaning log in Excel, recording all changes made to the raw data. This log will be sent to the Field Coordinator for clarification and corrections, which will then be updated by the Data Officer.

Quantitative data will be analysed using Microsoft Excel pivot tables, with the possibility of automation using R. The analysis will be limited to descriptive statistics due to the small number of surveys. Analysis will focus on absolute numbers and specific responses from CSOs. For organisations selected for qualitative follow-up, the analysis will integrate quantitative and qualitative findings.

MaxQDA will be used to code transcript notes on a rolling basis, due to the high volume of KIIs. Qualitative interviews may be recorded with consent. If recording is not possible, note-takers will aim for verbatim note-taking in the source language. Digital transcription of notes will occur promptly after discussions. The MaxQDA coding/analysis will be “translated” into a REACH Data Saturation and Analysis Grid.

3.7 Limitations

The research is indicative and cannot be assumed to be representative of all local CSOs with activities on the frontline of Ukraine, so further conclusions should be made with caution. In addition, in previous REACH assessments it was noted that sometimes local CSOs can be hesitant to criticise IOs, so although the question route introduction will emphasise that results will be anonymous and aggregated to overview general rather than actor-specific trends, and questions asked in a way that emphasises mechanisms over people/organisations as actors, some bias may still be present in the findings. The issue of

social desirability bias on both the international and local side will be carefully monitored during analysis, and if findings seem notably skewed, this limitation will be clearly noted in the final report.

4. Key ethical considerations and related risks

The proposed research design meets / does not meet the following criteria:

The proposed research design…	***Yes/ No***	***Details if no (including mitigation)***
… Has been coordinated with relevant stakeholders to **avoid unnecessary duplication** of data collection efforts?	Yes	
… **Respects respondents, their rights and dignity** (*specifically by: seeking informed consent, designing length of survey/ discussion while being considerate of participants' time, ensuring accurate reporting of information provided*)?	Yes	
… Does not **expose data collectors to any risks as a direct result** of participation in data collection?	Yes	
… Does not **expose respondents / their communities to any risks as a direct result** of participation in data collection?	Yes	
… Does not involve **collecting information on specific topics which may be stressful and/ or re-traumatising** for research participants (both respondents and data collectors)?	Yes	
… Does not involve **data collection with minors** i.e. anyone less than 18 years old?	Yes	
… Does not involve **data collection with other vulnerable groups** e.g. persons with disabilities, victims/ survivors of protection incidents, etc.?	Yes	
… Follows IMPACT SOPs for management of personally identifiable information?	Yes (To note: PII/contact details will be collected only with explicit consent, stored separately from analytical responses, and shared only where the respondent has specifically consented.)	

5. Roles and responsibilities

Task Description	***Responsible***	***Accountable***	***Consulted***	***Informed***
Research design	Assessment Officer	Assessment Team Lead	IMPACT HQ Research	DCC; Communications/

			design & Data (RDD) unit	Translation Team
Supervising data collection	Field officer	Field coordinator	IMPACT country representative	Operational partners (ACTED)
Data processing (checking, cleaning)	Data Officer	Assessment Team Lead	IMPACT HQ RDD Unit	DCC; Field team
Data analysis	Assessment Officer	Assessment Team Lead	IMPACT HQ RDD unit	Assessment Team Lead
Output production	Assessment Officer	Assessment Team Lead	IMPACT RRU	IMPACT RRU
Dissemination	Assessment Officer	IMPACT country coordinator	IMPACT HQ Research department and Communication department	NGO platform, working groups International: global clusters/ working groups
Monitoring & Evaluation	Assessment officer, Field officer	Assessment Team Lead	Assessment Team Lead	IMPACT country coordinator; IMPACT HQ RDD department
Lessons learned	Assessment officer, Field officer	Assessment Team Lead	IMPACT HQ RDD Unit; Assessment Team Lead	IMPACT country coordinator

6. Data Analysis Plan

Presented in a separate file.