

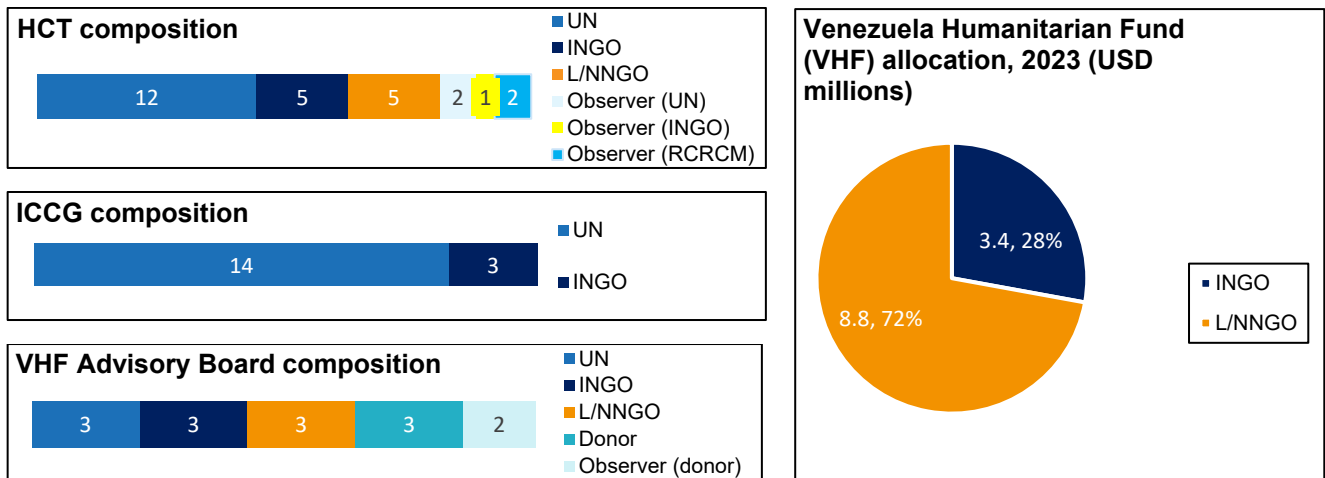
Localisation in Humanitarian Leadership - Venezuela

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A GLOBAL NGO NETWORK
FOR PRINCIPLED AND EFFECTIVE
HUMANITARIAN ACTION

VENEZUELA¹



Local/national NGO (L/NNGO) leadership in coordination: The presence of L/NNGOs in coordination seats varies. They have a notably high representation in the Humanitarian Coordination Team (HCT), which increased from four to six seats at the time of writing, but their presence in clusters is low.

Within the HCT, participants noted that L/NNGO representatives have a voice and are heard by other members. They also highlighted the standing agenda item for updates from L/NNGO networks as a good practice. However, across coordination mechanisms, participants observed a 'decision-making ceiling,' where NGO members are included in discussions but have less influence in strategic decision-making for the response².

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Within clusters, L/NGO presence is significant, with 106 L/NNGOs and 29 International non-governmental organisations (INGOs) reported delivering humanitarian assistance in 2023³. However, until recently, the nine clusters and Areas of Responsibility in Venezuela were UN-led⁴. This was especially true for clusters lacking Strategic Advisory Groups (SAGs), which are recommended to diversify input into cluster decisions, leading to a perceived limitation of NGO voice and influence. Recently, NGO leadership in clusters and inter-cluster/sector coordination has grown: two clusters now have INGO co-coordination, and one is establishing co-coordination with a L/NNGO. In some clusters, the establishment or expansion of SAG membership and L/NNGO co-chairing of Technical Working Groups has been noted and welcomed by some participants.

Many of the UN cluster coordinator positions are now held by Venezuelan staff, following a policy of nationalisation. While positively recognised by some participants as improving contextual

¹ Data on HCT, ICCG, and Cluster composition provided by OCHA Venezuela in June 2024. Data on the Venezuela Humanitarian Fund (VHF) from OCHA, *Venezuela Humanitarian Fund Annual Report 2023*, April 2024.

² Similar dynamics were described in other countries and are discussed in the main report. It is noted that mandated responsibilities within the IASC system can mean decisions on some issues sit with specific bodies or individuals, but, where this is the case, transparency on how decisions are made is important to maintain accountability.

³ OCHA, *Venezuela 5W - Presencia Operativa Humanitaria 2023*, 30 November 2023. Available at <https://reliefweb.int/report/venezuela-bolivarian-republic/venezuela-5w-presencia-operativa-humanitaria-2023-quien-hace-que-donde-cuando-y-para-quien-hasta-el-30-de-noviembre-de-2023>.

⁴ Except the Education Cluster, co-led by Save the Children, and a previous co-coordination arrangement for the Nutrition Cluster with a national NGO.

understanding in the delivery of clusters' work, representation of local and national organisations in cluster leadership remains low.

At sub-national level, the HCT decided in 2023 to focus on strengthening area-based coordination through Local Coordination Forums, led by OCHA. These play multiple roles, coordinating local response and, in some locations, with a substantial role in humanitarian access negotiations. These are intended to link to national-level clusters, and with ad-hoc sectoral technical meetings (Mesas Técnicas) able to be called locally if needed.

Participants described L/NNGO participation in these groups as diverse. For some, larger L/NNGOs were stated to be instrumental in negotiating humanitarian access, while others felt there was a need to strengthen engagement with L/NNGOs. Given the wide remit of the Local Coordination Forums and their OCHA chairs, co-chairing arrangements with L/NNGOs could present interesting opportunities to split responsibilities based on respective expertise and mandate, though this would require dedicated resources.

NGO representation: INGOs are represented and supported by an INGO Forum. PAHNAL is the main L/NNGO network, widely seen as strong and providing a key representation function in humanitarian coordination. For national NGO networks, financing for secretariat functions (providing support and representation) can be difficult to secure. Despite its reach, PAHNAL until recently had only limited resource support (from an INGO) and was otherwise primarily voluntarily supported by its members. Seat allocations in both the HCT and Venezuela Humanitarian Fund (VHF) Advisory Board also draw from other networks, including a Gender Network, and other constituencies.

Coordination participation: Some participants noted that many L/NNGOs, smaller and with few staff, find it challenging to attend coordination meetings due to the time commitment required, not to mention co-chairing groups. At the same time, some noted that these same organisations have considerable technical and contextual knowledge, indicating that the system might not be fully leveraging their potential engagement.

Government engagement in the response is complex, especially with humanitarian access challenges in certain areas - a key issue in sub-national coordination. This complexity affects who participates and leads coordination spaces. Although some clusters typically work with specific line ministries, participants had mixed opinions about government presence in some coordination meetings. Some felt it diminished the perception of these meetings as humanitarian spaces among some NGOs.

Country-based pooled fund advisory board: The orientation of the VHF to strengthen localisation – through the provision of direct funding and requirements for INGOs to form quality partnerships with L/NNGOs – was positively reflected on. The Advisory Board was highlighted by some participants as a sign of improved L/NNGO involvement, moving from initial encouragement to achieving a more equal voice. The three L/NNGO seats are allocated for representatives from a women-led organisation, one working with people with disabilities, and PAHNAL. Participants appreciated that L/NNGO members' recommendations were taken seriously, and their technical expertise was valued in shaping allocation strategies and evaluating NGO applicants for VHF grants.

Partnerships and complementarity: Some participants shared perceptions that the humanitarian system had superseded rather than built on and supported existing national civil society response capacities. One participant recalled being actively involved in coordination and working with institutional donors early in the crisis. However, this changed with the activation of the cluster system and increased funding, as UN and INGO partnerships added more layers for grants and liaison. Many L/NNGO participants expressed concerns and frustrations about the disproportionate

funding going to international rather than national actors, as well as the quality of these partnerships.

Additionally, some participants reflected on reasons for a perceived reluctance to widen L/NGO participation in coordination. This was linked to concerns about risk in the context of complex government relationships and whether organisations engaged in activities beyond aid delivery can maintain humanitarian principles. Some participants suggested that they would prefer a greater focus on the analysis of risks to enable planning tailored to specific forums.



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