Master Thesis M.Sc. Human Geography

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Aftershocks of change? Assessing the Consequences of the 2023 Earthquake on UN legitimacy in Northwest Syria from a local Point of View

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Abstract

When the February 2023 earthquake struck the Turkish-Syrian border, opposition-held Northwest Syria (NWS) was disproportionately affected but left with no external support for days. Türkiye and Syrian regions controlled by the formal Syrian Government (GoS), however, received assistance instantly. Besides earthquake-related damages that disrupted access to NWS, the UN's insistence to await legal permission for additional cross-border access from the GoS contributed to the delay. The permission was only granted after days, leaving the United Nations (UN) amassed in criticism. UNOCHA's leadership responded to this with acknowledgement and a promise to take corrective action instantly.

This thesis project explores in how far the UN's earthquake-induced response crisis in NWS is locally perceived to have induced the UN to change its conduct. By means of qualitative interviews conducted between July and October 2023, it does so from the perspective of local aid group members. It set out with the assumption that restoring local legitimacy is key for the UN moving forward, as this is critical for it to be effective and produce sustainable results. In terms of its theoretical framework, I draws on path dependence theory and "critical junctures", which I connect with local legitimacy concepts as well.

The findings suggest that the earthquake-induced crisis has affected the UN's post-earthquake conduct, however not in the direction assumed. Rather, the participants refer to the changes in the UN's conduct, if any, as beneficial for the GoS. This particularly concerns the power shifts from the NWS and Türkiye cross-border hub to the GoS, connected to the development in cross-border aid operations. To tap into this further, another confirmatory sequence of interviews with the same group was added. In both sequences, participants see the earthquake as "a window that's been opened" (Participant 1(1), 2023: Pos. 96) for the UN's cross-border mechanism and power relations in Syria to change.

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List of Abbreviations

AFAD	–	Afet ve Acil Durum Yönetimi Başkanlığı, the Turkish disaster control agency
AFNS	–	Aid Fund for Northern Syria
e.g.	–	Exempli gratia, “for example”
FSA	–	Free Syrian Army (a Syrian opposition armed group)
GoS	–	Formal Government of Syria
HDP	–	Humanitarian, Development and Peace [e.g. nexus, action, intervention]
HRC	–	Human Rights Council (UN)
HTS	–	Hayat Tahrir Al-Sham (an armed extremist group)
i.e.	–	Id est, “that is”
ibid	–	Ibidem (meaning “in the same place”, refers to the source cited before)
IS	–	The Islamic State (an armed extremist group)
n.d.	–	No date
n.p.	–	No page
NES	–	Northeast Syria
NGOs	–	Non-governmental organization(s)
NWS	–	Northwest Syria
OSES	–	Office of the Special Envoy of the Secretary-General to Syria
p.	–	Page
Para.	–	Paragraph
Pos.	–	Position
pp.	–	Pages
SDF	–	Syrian Democratic Forces (Kurdish-led forces predominantly in NES)
SIG	–	Syrian Interim Government (a predominantly diaspora-formed quasi-governmental entity by the Syrian opposition to the GoS)
SOC	–	National Coalition for Syrian Revolutionary and Opposition Forces (a predominantly diaspora-formed alliance of Syrian opposition groups)
SSG	–	Syrian Salvation Government (a quasi-governmental entity formed by HTS, while also including non-HTS members)
UN	–	United Nations
UNDP	–	UN Development Program
UNGA	–	UN General Assembly
UNHCR	–	UN Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees
UNOCHA	–	UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs
UNOHCHR	–	Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights
UNSC	–	UN Security Council
SCHF	–	Syria Cross-border Humanitarian Fund (the UN-administered pooled fund for NWS)

1. Introduction

On February 6, 2023, several earthquakes struck the Turkish-Syrian border region, causing widespread devastation. The South of Türkiye and opposition-held war-torn Northwest Syria (NWS) were disproportionately affected. While external assistance arrived in Türkiye and other Syrian territories under the control of Syria's formal Government (GoS) hours later, NWS remained without external assistance until after the critical window for lifesaving response (72-100h hours) had closed. "Where was the UN?" (Al Saleh, 2023). "Why did the UN aid take so long to arrive?" (Garthwaite, 2023). The UN, despite giving various explanations for its (in-)action, quickly found itself amassed in criticism and accusations of "bias" and "neglect" (see e.g. Al Saleh, 2023; Chulov, 2023; OHCHR, 2023).

It is not the first time that UN-associated actions would have deterred humanitarian access to NWS (see e.g. UN Press, 2023). Nor is it the first time that those opposing the GoS would have felt let down by the UN (Ban & Laidler, 2017; UN News, 2012; US Mission to the UN, 2021). Yet, the type and magnitude of the disaster is unprecedented, and so is the asymmetry in international assistance and public outrage about the actions and performance of the UN. As a reaction, UN OCHA's leadership acknowledged having "failed the people in north-west Syria" one week later and promised to "correct this failure as fast as we can" (Griffiths, 2023). Does the earthquake-induced crisis and its conduct in this period lead the UN to change the way in which it engages in NWS from here?

Path dependence theory suggests that crises can be turning points, "critical junctures", for rapid and profound institutional change (Capoccia & Kelemen, 2007; Mahoney, 2000). These junctures "undermine the stability of existing institutions by exposing their inadequacies, weakening their legitimacy" (Sorensen, 2022, p. 7) and allow "for agency or contingency to shape divergence from the past" (Soifer, 2012, p. 888). Thereby, previous studies on rapid-onset disasters suggest that the window for change to materialize is relatively small and that the outcome of the juncture disproportionately affected by pre-juncture conditions and trends (Le Billon & Waizenegger, 2007).

What also plays into this are questions of (local) legitimacy in the context of international interventions and the local turn, which are a current subject of debate. What these suggest, among others, is that being locally perceived as legitimate is critical for the success of international humanitarian, development and peace (HDP) interventions, including those of the UN as, 2018; Donati, 2003; Gippert, 2017; Hancock & Mitchell, 2018; Jones, 2014; Lederach, 1997; Richmond & Mac Ginty, 2020b; Tallberg & Zürn, 2019; Whalan, 2013). How the the need for institutions' (local) (re-)legitimation during and after a critical juncture, when their 'legitimacy' is 'weakened' and their 'inadequacies' are 'exposed', links with the outcome of a juncture, however, is not yet well explored.

What this paper is interested in is to explore (1) what changes in the UN's conduct local aid group members perceive six months after the earthquake, and (2) how they regard these changes from a legitimacy point of view. I do so means

of qualitative interviews that I conducted with ten members of local aid groups between July and October 2023, coded and analyzed thereafter in MAXQDA.

Besides learning about the viewpoints of the people and how the presumed juncture unfolded in this context, the study is means to provide ´insights into different facets of local legitimacy as well as to draw linkages between critical juncture frameworks and legitimacy conceptions, too.

The thesis is structured as follows: First, chapter 2 provides an introduction into the context. This includes an introduction into case of NWS and its cross-border aid operations and structures, as well as the 2023 earthquake and its effects on the region. It also provides an overview of the UN's mandate and role in NWS and summarized its involvement in NWS since 2011.

Chapter 3 presents the theoretical framework of path dependence theory and critical junctures as windows of opportunity for accelerated institution change. This, I connect further with concepts of local legitimacy, which this chapter presents thoroughly based on an extensive literature review as well. Section 4 presents the research design methodology of this exploratory, qualitative study, followed by section 5, in which I present the findings. Section 6 discusses the findings vis-à-vis the research question, after which the last chapter 7 provides a conclusion for this thesis overall.

2. Introducing the case of Northwest Syria

2.1. At a glance: 13 years of conflict, crisis, resistance and retreat

Syria has been in a state of armed conflict and multiple crises for more than 13 years today. What began as a peaceful uprising against repressive, authoritarian rule in 2011 in the South of the country quickly turned into one of the deadliest intrastate wars of the 21st century (Pettersson & Öberg, 2020; Tarabay, 2018; UCDP, 2024b). According to data by the Uppsala Conflict Data Project (UCDP), the total number of battle-related deaths in Syria (2011 – 2023) exceeds 400,000 (UCDP, 2024b). This accounts for numerous armed conflicts fought between various state and non-state actors on Syrian ground at the same time. The war over government between the formal government of Syria (GoS) of President Bashar Al-Assad and Syrian insurgents, however, is with more than 285,000 battle-related deaths by far the deadliest and the one focused on here (UCDP, 2024a).

2.1.1. The beginning of the Syrian Civil War and the advance of the rebels

When talking about the beginning of the Syrian civil war, public memory in Syria is shaped around instances of unprecedented grievances and excessive use of violence by members of the GoS (Tarabay, 2018). Inspired by early success stories of other countries in toppling their authoritarian regimes during the Arab Spring, peaceful protests began in Dar'aa in the South of Syria in March 2011. New technologies, especially the use of social media, enabled the protests to spread quickly throughout the country up to the very north (Bellin, 2012). Within months, millions of civilians were mobilized, calling for freedom and the end of the regime (Tarabay, 2018).

In contrast to the Arab Spring in Tunisia, however, the military remained largely loyal to President Assad. They shot at and abducted demonstrators and their social leaders. Despite this, mobilization for protest continued, leading to brutal massacres and hundreds of thousands of missing and dead (Bellin, 2012; Britannica, n.d.; Tarabay, 2018; Van Veen et al., 2021). Nevertheless, over the years that followed, the insurgents were by and large victorious. Eventually, by the end of 2015, the regime's rule was under serious threat (see Figure 1).

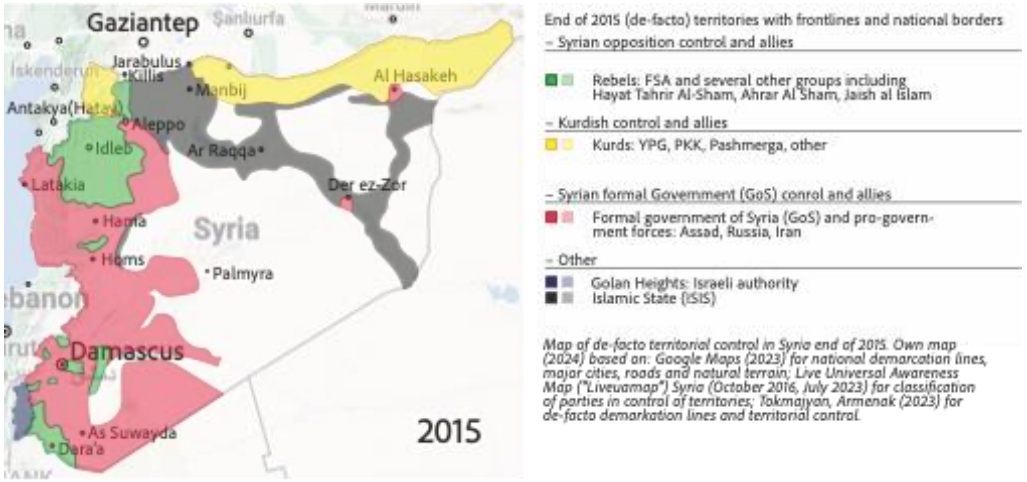


***Figure 1**: Map of de-facto territorial control in Syria end of 2015*

2.1.2. The turning point of Russia's intervention and the rebels' retreat to NWS

In late 2015 then, Russia decided to intervene in the conflict directly on the side of the GoS, together with Hezbollah and Iran. This is when the tables turned. With the notable exception of the US Government, which directly backed the Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF) in the Northeast, among others as part of its fight against the Islamic State (IS), and Türkiye in the north, other foreign support for opposition groups remained mostly material, financial and in form of capacity building (Gunes, 2021; Romano, 2021; UCDP, 2024a; US Department of Defense, 2024). With Russian military support and air control, the GoS gradually drove out the different rebel groups across the country, taking back control over the largest part of Syria.

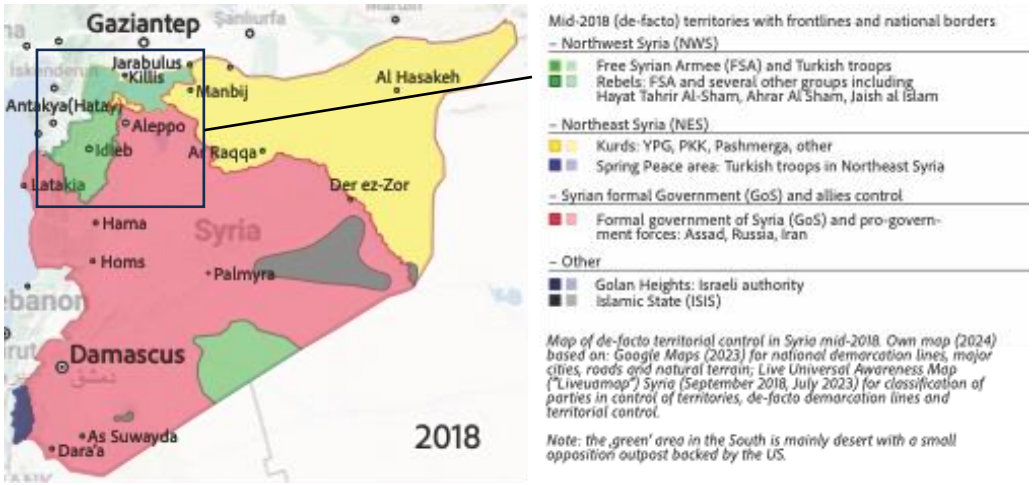


***Figure 2**: Map of de-facto territorial control in Syria mid-2018*

Today, the only area still partially controlled by opposition groups is a relatively small geographic zone between the frontline with the GoS and the Turkish border (see Figure 2). This Zone is what is today commonly referred to as Northwest (NWS). Rebels from other parts of the country who have succeeded in negotiating their evacuation during previous takeovers by the GoS have been taken to this area (see e.g. Reuters, 2018; Voice of America, 2017).

In parallel, the Republic of Türkiye also intervened militarily in the Northwest in 2018 and in the Northeast in 2020, driving out Kurdish residents and military forces to the Northeast of Syria (NES). As a result, the northern-most part of NWS today is under direct authority of the Republic of Türkiye and the Syrian Free Army (SFA), an armed group part of the opposition against the GoS.

Despite its small geographic size, NWS is still home to an estimated 4 to 5 million people, the majority of whom are internally displaced persons (IDPs) depending on humanitarian aid (UNOCHA, 2024c). Taking UNHCR's operational data base (2024b) as a baseline for the total population in the GoS-controlled territory and NES, this accounts to more than 20 percent of the country's total population.

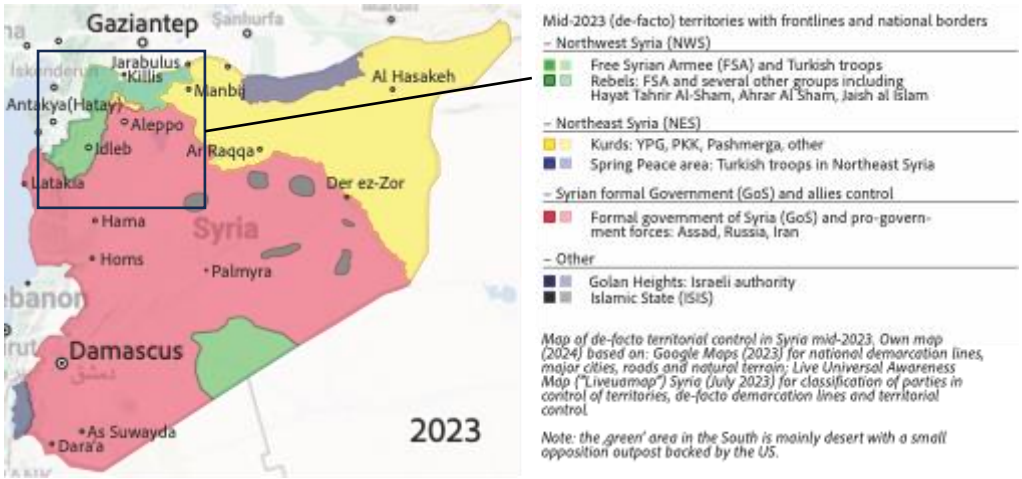


***Figure 3**: Map of de-facto territorial control in Syria mid-2023*

2.1.3. Multiple crises and the rebels' further decline

While shelling and atrocities caused by the GoS and its allxwies have been a constant in NWS, the last major military operation against the region took place in 2019/2020. As a result of it, the Russian, Iranian and Hezbollah-backed GoS-forces took back large parts in the south and east of the then remaining rebel-controlled and Türkiye-backed zone (see , causing hundreds of thousands to flee further north (Gurcan, 2019; Kajjo, 2019).

The operation ended with a ceasefire agreement brought about by Russia and Türkiye in March 2020 (Soldatkin & Kiselyova, 2020). As the new demarcation line was oriented on the intersection of the two major northern highways, the M4 and the M5, the humanitarian crisis that was unleashed by the operation is also be referred to as the M4/M5 crisis in NWS (for more information see as well: Cafarella, 2020; Tokmajyan, 2023; UNOCHA, 2020).

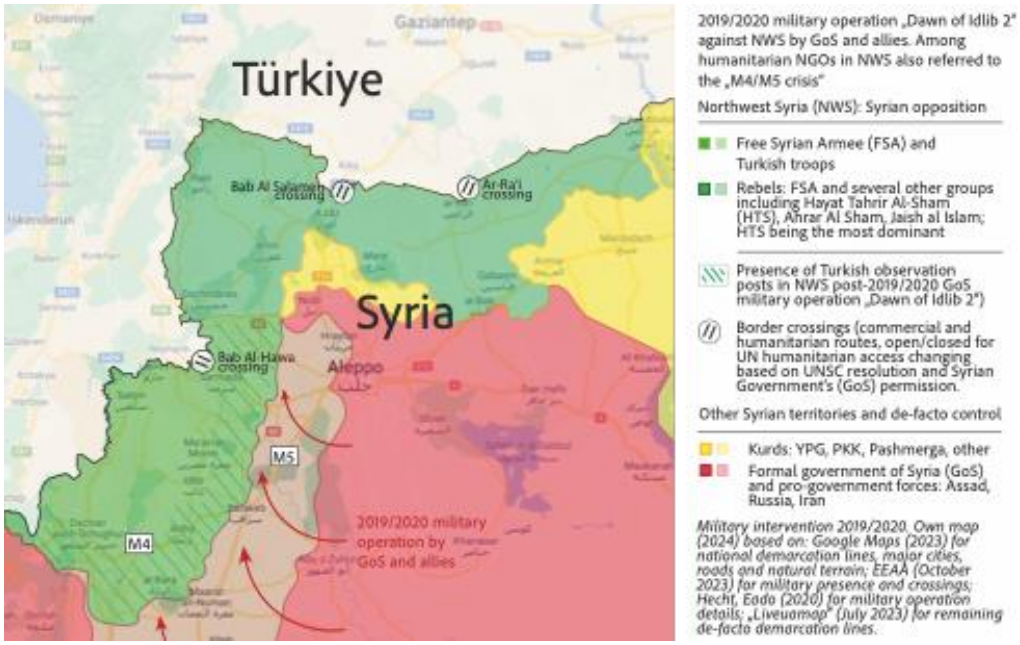


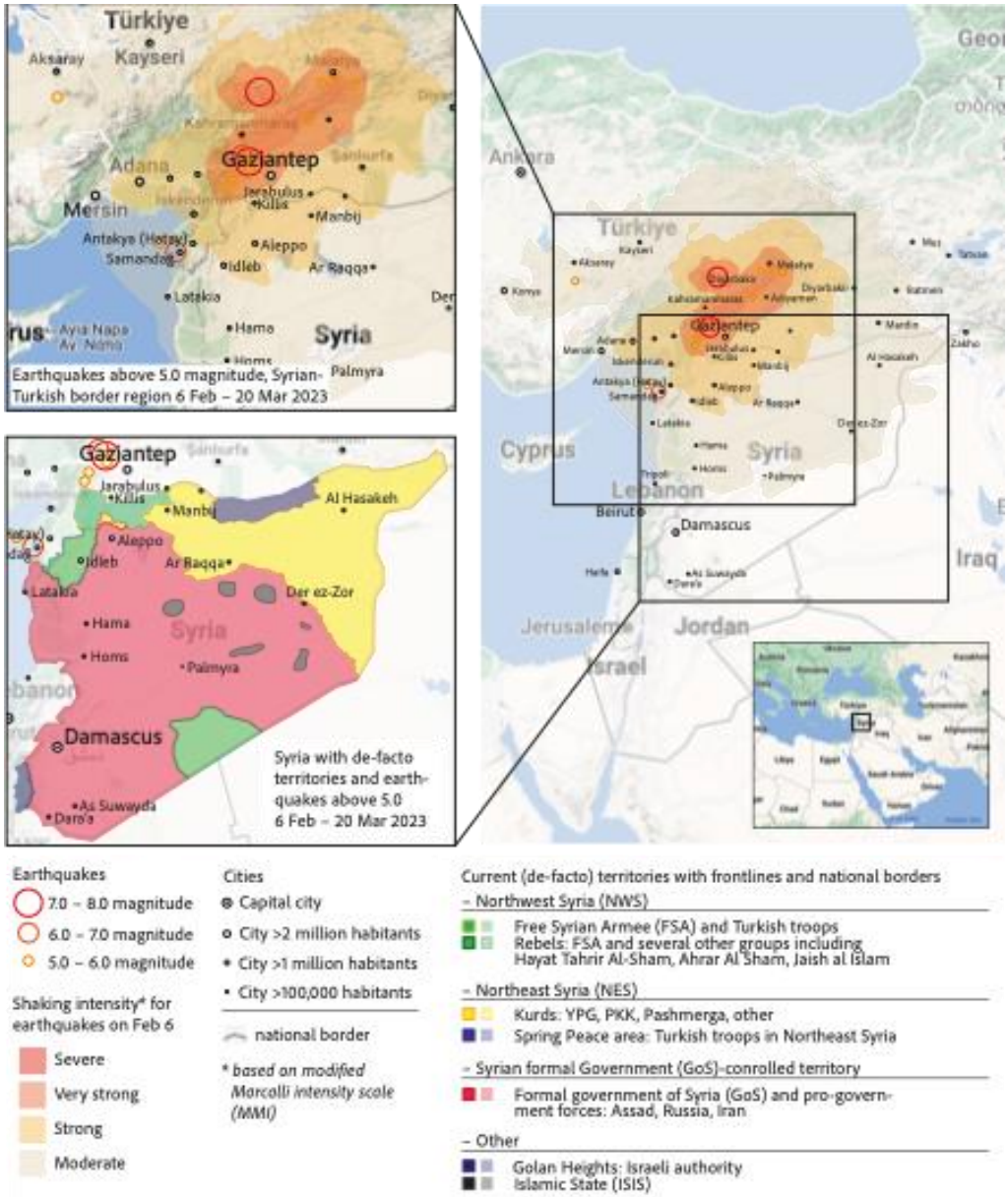
***Figure 4**: 2019/2020 GoS-led Military Operation "Dawn of Idlib 2" and M4/M5 crisis*

In this episode of war against the Northwest, the 2019/2020 military operation was the first of a series of major crisis, which seamlessly transitioned into the years of the COVID-19 pandemic and with it into years of humanitarian, social and economic crisis. What improved during the COVID-19 pandemic years was that attacks on NWS and related atrocities declined between 2021 and 2023.

For the first time in over a decade, the Syrian civil war did not cross the UCDP's threshold of 1,000 battle-related deaths in 2021 to classify it as a war (UCDP, n.d., 2024a). Economic and financial crises, diminishing aid budgets as well as health-related crises such as cholera outbreaks in and 2022 and 2023, however, have continued to shatter the region since (Haid, 2023; REACH, 2024; Taim, 2023; UNHCR, 2024a).

2.1.4. The 2023 twin earthquakes and their aftermath

On February 6, the two earthquakes with a magnitude of up to 7.8 and 7.6 on the Richter scale struck the war-affected region in addition, followed by more than 14,000 smaller quakes and aftershocks (see Figure 5). The quakes left more than 5,000 dead and thousands of people injured while at least temporarily displacing hundreds of thousands of people in NWS alone (Disasters Emergency Committee, 2024; UNOCHA, 2023b). The impact on bordering and allied Türkiye was with more than 50,000 dead and over 100,000 injured even larger and made the earthquake the globally most devastating one since Haiti in 2010 (DHA, 2023; Disasters Emergency Committee, 2024).



Map of the 2023 earthquake with (de-facto) controlled territories in Syria. Own map (2024) based on: GFZ/Geofon (March 26, 2023) for Earthquake-related data; Steven Bernard (Financial Times, February 9, 2023) for MMI scales and cartographed earthquake impact; Google Maps (July 2023) for national borders, major cities, roads and natural terrain; and Live Universal Awareness Map ("Liveuamap") Syria (March 26, 2023) for demarcation and classification of Syrian de-facto territories and parties in control.

***Figure 5**: Map of the 2023 earthquake with (de-facto) controlled territories in Syria*

As the Turkish emergency infrastructure and road systems in the South collapsed, also the access to NWS via the at that time only humanitarian border crossing in Bab Al-Hawa was blocked (see Figure 5 and Figure *6*). What is more, also the UN's operating hub for NWS is located in Gaziantep in the South of Türkiye, as are all major cross-border operating local and international aid organizations and agencies. Naturally, the earthquakes impacted the aid response to NWS as well: They uprooted the organizations' employees and forced them to evacuate or otherwise work from their cars while on the road, thus further destabilizing the coordination mechanism and emergency response in NWS (Dutch Relief Alliance, 2023; UNOCHA, 2023a, 2023b, 2023c, 2023d; UNSC, 2023a).

Further down the road, the earthquake-induced crisis accelerated the already profound economic crisis in both Türkiye and NWS. Housing prices and rents have surged since then, while financial support, after a temporary spike in the direct aftermath of the disaster, diminished over the course of few months again (Haid, 2023). Today, less than 25 percent of the 2024 Humanitarian Response Plan for Syria have been funded (UNCHOA, 2024). This interim result is a drop even from the 2023 level, for which 40 percent of the however high financing requirements were met. Since 2016, no other Humanitarian Response Plan saw less than 50 percent of its requirements financed, signaling a decline in funding for the context overall (ibid).

What is more, shelling and atrocities in NWS have also begun to pick up again, so that battle-related deaths now once again exceed the UCDP's threshold of war (Al Jazeera, 2023; UCDP, 2024a; UNOCHA, 2024c). Although both the pandemic and the earthquake have for a period reopened windows for both the UN-led and the alternative Russia, Iran and Türkiye-hosted peace talks to take place, both processes have by now stagnated again. Even after more than a decade of armed conflict, hence, there is still no political solution to the conflict in sight (Griffiths, 2024; Mohamad, 2023; Pedersen, 2024).

2.2. Northwest Syria today: Key actors, governance and access points

2.2.1. Key actors and territorial governance

The northern-most part of NWS is governed by the Free Syrian Army (FSA) and the Republic of Türkiye. There are two border crossings, Bab Al-Salameh (also written: Al-Salam) and Ar-Ra'i (also written: Al-Rai), that connect this part of Syria with the Republic of Türkiye (see Figure 6). The remaining part of NWS in the south is controlled by different moderate and extremist armed groups. Hayat Tahrir Al-Sham (HTS), a former al-Qaeda affiliate and armed group categorized as Islamic extremist and terrorist by the UN and major donor states, has established itself as the most dominant actor by far in this part of NWS since 2017/2018 (Holtz, 2023; Solomon, 2022).

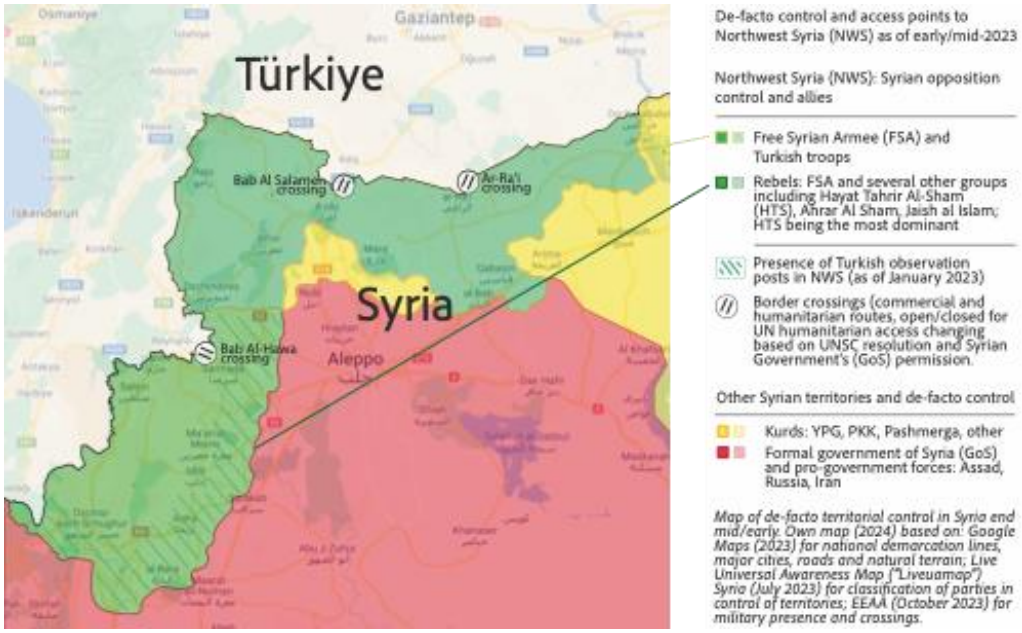


***Figure 6**: Map of Northwest Syria with (de-facto) military control and crossings in mid-2023*

Besides its military control over the region, established from its stronghold, Idlib city and the surrounding areas, HTS also controls the Bab al-Hawa border crossing in the southwest of NWS and evokes quasi-governmental authority claims over the region overall. For purposes of territorial governance, it has established the so-called "Syrian Salvation Government" (SSG) in 2017, which, besides HTS members, also consists of civilian non-HTS members, but is largely under HTS' immediate control (Holtz, 2023; Solomon, 2022).

With the SSG, HTS acts in competition over territorial governance in NWS not only vis-à-vis the GoS but also the opposition-formed "Syrian Interim Government" (SIG). The latter was formed over a decade ago as an alternative governmental entity for Syria by the National Coalition for Syrian Revolutionary and Opposition Forces (SOC), a mostly diaspora-run alliance of Syrian opposition groups. Unlike HTS, the SOC is a recognized opposition party and formally represented in the UN-led peace talks (OSES, 2024a). At the local level, however, it is HTS and its SSG that predominantly call the shots (ACLED, 2023). The SOC and the SIG, meanwhile, are considered weak at local levels in comparison, if not to have failed altogether now (Alzoubi et al., 2019; Mukhopadhyay & Howe, 2023).

2.2.2. Humanitarian actors and governance in NWS

(1) The UN-led cross-border humanitarian aid mechanism

With an estimated 5.1 million people living in the region, closed in by the front lines with the GoS in the south and the Turkish border in the north, access to external aid is crucial for NWS. This makes humanitarian NGOs and the broader aid communities important actors in this context, too.

Numerous humanitarian non-governmental organizations (NGOs) based in Türkiye and Syria, as well as UN and other aid agencies provide cross-border assistance from Türkiye. This UN-led cross-border humanitarian coordination and response mechanism has been operational since 2014, circling around a regional UN hub based in Gaziantep formed by the UN and "a large number of international, Syrian and Turkish NGOs" (UNOCHA, n.d.: n.p). The legal basis for the mission's operation is UNSC resolution 2165 (2014).

Cross-line assistance via the GoS is not considered an option for NWS, as there is "extensive evidence" for "systematic aid diversion and obstruction by the Assad regime, as part of its consistent strategy to besiege areas of opposition during the conflict." (iMMAP, 2023: p.24). To nevertheless ensure programming coherence across the country, the UN has linked all its hubs and regional offices that are connected to the Syrian crisis under the superseding structures of a "Whole of Syria" (WoS) approach (see (2) for further details).

(2) Other humanitarian governance structures in the region

Besides the UN and the NGO community operating from Türkiye cross-border, there are also humanitarian actors and governance structures established in NWS itself. In the northern FSA and Türkiye-controlled area, for instance, the Turkish disaster control agency Afet ve Acil Durum Yönetimi Başkanlığı (AFAD) co-coordinates aid provision with aid providers under the Gaziantep-based UN

Cluster approach. For the HTS-dominated part in the south, both the SSG and the are (competing to be) involved in some of the coordination structures, however typically in an "unstable" manner that varies between entities, sectors and governance levels. Also local governance entities, such as local councils, may play a role in this regard (see e.g. Alzoubi et al., 2019).

Overall, however, even relatively well established quasi-governmental are often found to be without formal structural ties to a broader governance system (ibid). Nevertheless, both territorial and sectoral quasi-governmental entities exist and are active in the context. As for territorial governance bodies, for instance, "local councils" assume responsibility for representation and administration of individual communities. As for the sectoral, quasi-governmental institutions, for instance in the health and education sector, the Idlib Health Directorate (IHD) has reportedly played a central and effective role as a regulatory and central coordination body in NWS since its foundation in 2013. The Education Directorate and other sectoral governance bodies are found to be less effective in comparison, but generally exist as well and may be involved in the humanitarian governance system (ibid).

2.2.3. Humanitarian access to NWS

(1) Humanitarian access to NWS in general

Access to NWS via Türkiye is granted to Syrian nationals who are registered with the Turkish authorities via one of the Türkiye-based NGOs linked with the UN Clusters. Also UN officials have (at least nowadays1) access to NWS and conduct regular visits to the ground. All other members of the aid community operate remotely from the Gaziantep hub or elsewhere.

Humanitarian goods are shipped in via one of three currently open humanitarian routes by the UN and its partners, or alternatively by private sector actors via one of three commercial routes that are located alongside them. Before and during the earthquake, only one humanitarian route, the one in Bab Al-Hawa, was open for UN humanitarian convoys, in addition to the commercial routes, which were and are open for private sector trade.

Overall, the (allegedly needed2) legal permission for UN cross-border aid provision has become a political bargaining chip for the GoS and its allies over last years. As such, Russia (and China) at the UNSC and the GoS as the internationally recognized state actor may grant or withhold access at their discretion, with conditionality being applied.

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[1] Based on the interviews conducted for this thesis, it is disputed whether the UN's mandate encompassed physical access for its members of staff to NWS before the earthquake. Except for a few visits to the Bab Al-Hawa border zone in recent years, no UN representative has visited NWS in over a decade. Only after the earthquake, the situation has changed (see Interviews 1-10).

[2] There is ongoing debate about whether the UN actually requires the cross-border resolution as a legal basis to provide humanitarian aid cross border. Akhavan et al. (2014) and again as Simma et al. (2023) argue that it does not. Münichsdorfer (2023) provides an overview of different arguments and the evolution of the debate.

(2) UN humanitarian cross-border access between July 2014 to July 2023

For a period of nine years, cross-border access to NWS for the UN's humanitarian action was granted by UNSC resolution 2165 (2014) and several succeeding provisions. The most recent version of this is UNSC resolution 2672(2023), which was adopted one month before the earthquake in January 2023. It granted humanitarian access for the UN via the one main border crossing, Bab Al-Hawa, and linked Türkiye with the HTS-controlled part of NWS (see Figure 6).

In July 2023, however, this resolution was not renewed again for the first time in nine years, which marks a major turning point in the way the UN works cross-border in NWS. This also coincides with the first period of the interviews conducted for this thesis. Since then, the continuation of the cross-border mechanism is legally subject to permission by the GoS directly (Security Council Report, 2023; UNOCHA, 2024d). Already before the non-renewal of the cross-border resolution in July 2023, however, the humanitarian cross-border access for the UN had been shrinking gradually over the years. The same is true for the duration for which each renewed permission would be given.

In the beginning, in 2014, the first UNSC cross-border resolution 2165 (2014) had established humanitarian access for the UN via several crossings between Jordan and Syria, Iraq and Syria and also included two crossings between Türkiye and NWS: Bab Al-Hawa and Bab Al-Salameh (S/RES/2165, 2014b). Proportionately to the GoS' regain of power and control, however, the number of humanitarian access points diminished. As such, Bab Al-Salameh crossing was eventually closed alongside the border crossings between Iraq and NES as well as Southern Syria and Jordan in July 2020. This left only Bab Al-Hawa, the main border crossing, active as a humanitarian route for the following years as including the time the 2023 earthquakes (Security Council Report, 2023).

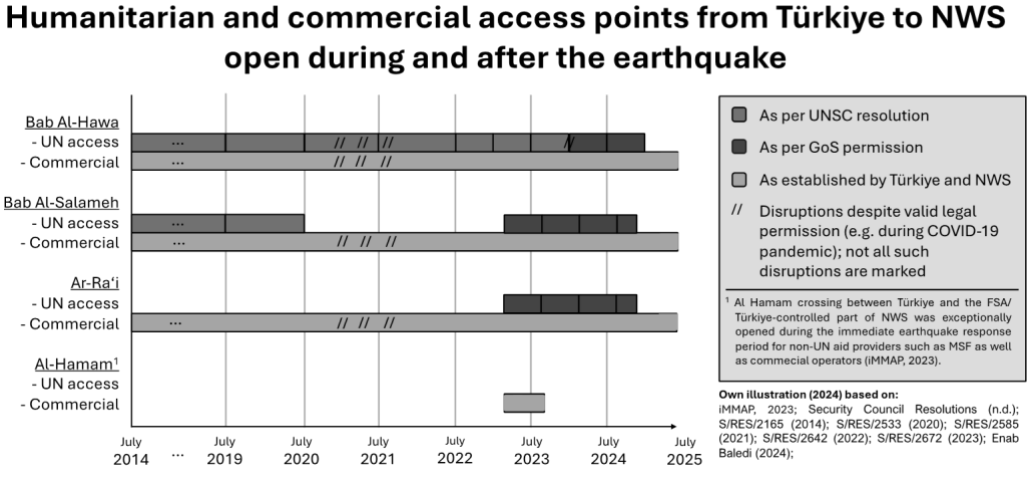


***Figure 7**: Overview of UN humanitarian and commercial access points to NWS (2014-2025)*

Regarding the periods for which the resolutions would be granted, the 2014 cross border resolution (S/RES/2165, 2014) covered a period of 1.5 years. Later resolutions were renewed for 1 year until July 2022, at which point the period of renewal diminished to half a year only (Security Council Resolutions, n.d.; UNSC, 2023b). The renewed rounds of negotiation have provided UNSC

member Russia and the GoS with repetitive political bargaining power vis-à-vis the opposition and other UNSC members (iMMAP, 2023; Security Council Report, 2023).

What is more, as particularly highlighted in the interviews conducted for this thesis, the short durations of permission granted also made it increasingly difficult for the UN to plan ahead and ensure effective provision of aid. This is as uncertainty over the respective next period would remain high until another renewal was agreed among UNSC members or, at present, between the UN and the GoS close to the due date each time again (ibid; see as well: interviews 2 and 6).

(3) UN humanitarian cross-border access after the earthquake

For the current period, the GoS has granted the UN humanitarian access via the main Bab Al-Hawa border crossing until January 2025. As recently as August 12, 2024, the GoS furthermore extended humanitarian access for UN convoys via Bab Al-Salameh and Ar-Ra'i crossings (Enab Baladi, 2024b). It had given permission to reactivate these two crossings for humanitarian use ten days after the earthquake in February 2023, which is why access via these two crossings is negotiated on a separate time frame from the Bab Al-Hawa main access route (see Figure 6). The UN's insistence on obtaining permission from the GoS while the clock was ticking for saving lives during the critical disaster period (the first 72-100 hours after the earthquake) furthermore is what caused massive criticism and accusations of "bias" and "neglect" (Al Saleh, 2023; Chulov, 2023; OHCHR, 2023).

According to external reports as well as interviews conducted for this thesis, the opening of the additional two crossings was enabled through negotiations between the UN and the GoS to facilitate the earthquake response (OHCHR, 2023). This particularly concerns agreements, or "the golden handshake" (Interview 2), between Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs and Emergency Relief Coordinator, Martin Griffiths and GoS President Al-Assad. Other reports meanwhile establish that the GoS was informed about a planned UNSC meeting that would otherwise grant additional access soon after, which the GoS supposedly anticipated and used as both an opportunity to negotiate concessions and present itself as "acting in good will" (iMMAP, 2023: p.24).

As evidenced by the interviews conducted for this thesis, as well as external reports (see e.g. iMMAP, 2023), the Syria-Türkiye aid community remains concerned about the GoS' power over permitting access directly, as well as future concessions it may require for renewing the permission. UNOCHA formally states, meanwhile, that: "Following the lapse of the Security Council's authorization for the operation, it [the cross-border aid mechanism] continues to function effectively under the consent of the Government of Syria." (OCHA, 2024).

(4) Access points outside the UN cross-border humanitarian mechanism

Besides being the main access point by far and the only access point approved to be used by the UN (iMMAP, 2023; Security Council Report, 2023; UNSC, 2023a), the Bab Al-Hawa humanitarian route is, as mentioned earlier, not the

only point of entrance for humanitarian goods. There are commercial routes that may be used by other actors than the UN, too. Bab Al-Salameh and Ar-Ra'i crossings, for instance, have been operational for years, including during the earthquake period, in this capacity. Also, Bab Al-Hawa has a commercial route alongside its humanitarian one, though this route was equally blocked during the immediate post-earthquake period as the humanitarian route (see as well 2.1.4).

The commercial routes are not open for UN convoys, however, as the UN is (allegedly3) bound to follow a UNSC mandate or be granted permission by the legitimate state actor – in this case the GoS – to provide humanitarian assistance cross-border in line with international law. Private sector actors, however, may use the commercial routes for shipping medical and other humanitarian supplies to NWS. These may then be purchased by humanitarian organizations in NWS directly, thus not restricting access to supplies merely to the humanitarian route(s) only. Bab Al-Hawa nevertheless remains the most important access point by far, for which the other additional crossings – both humanitarian and commercial – would not be able to compensate (iMMAP, 2023; see as well: Interviews 2 and 6).

2.3. The United Nations mandate and engagement in Syria

2.3.1. The overarching mandate and rationale for the UN's engagement

(5) Peace, security, human rights and commitment sovereignty of states

As set out in the Charter of the United Nations (1945: para. 1), the UN was founded to 1. "Maintain international peace and security, and to that end: take effective collective measures for the prevention and removal of threats to the peace […]"; 2. "To develop friendly relations among nations based on respect for the principle of equal rights and self-determination of peoples, and to take other appropriate measures to strengthen universal peace"; 3. To achieve international co-operation in solving international problems of an economic, social, cultural, or humanitarian character, and in promoting and encouraging respect for human rights and for fundamental freedoms for all […]".

Furthermore, the UN's Universal Declaration of Human Rights (Resolution A/RES/217, 1948) as well as succeeding provisions, such as those linked to the Responsibility to Protect (RtoP) (A/HRC/RES/33/19, 2016; A/RES/60/1, 2005; A/RES/63/308, 2009; Global Centre for the Responsibility to Protect, 2024), reaffirm global community's responsibility to protect Member States' populations. Across different pillars, this Responsibility to Protect firstly rests with each state for its own population. Secondly it is established in form of assistance and thirdly in form of collective action by the international community if a state fails to protect its population on its own (Global Centre for the Responsibility to Protect, 2024; UN, n.d.).

[3] (see footnote 2)

Considering the mass atrocities and human rights violations the GoS was reported to commit against its own people starting in 2011, this provides both a legal and moral basis, if not impetus, for the UN to engage in Syria. One of its organs is particularly concerned to bring this about: the UNSC. While the UN is committed to the principle of sovereignty and independence of its Member States (Charter of the United Nations, 1945: para. 2), namely, there is an exception for the "application of enforcement measures under Chapter VII" (ibid). This grants the UNSC the right to take "action with respect to threats to the peace, breaches of the peace, and acts of aggression" (Charter of the United Nations, 1945: para. 39-51), by which token it may overrule the sovereignty rights of its Member States.

(6) Humanitarian assistance in conflict and natural disaster-affected areas

The impetus for engagement and dealing with sovereignty rights not only concerns peace and security, but also the provision of humanitarian assistance. For emergency situations in conflict and natural disaster-affected zones alike, Resolution A/RES/46/182, 1991: paras. 1) and succeeding resolutions provide that: "Humanitarian assistance is of cardinal importance for the victims of disasters and other emergencies […] [and] must be provided in accordance with the principles of humanity, neutrality and impartiality.".

In this, "The United Nations has a central and unique role to play in providing leadership and coordinating the efforts of the international community to support the affected countries. The United Nations should ensure the prompt and smooth delivery of relief assistance in full respect of the above-mentioned principles" (ibid: para. 12). Thereby, however, "[t]he sovereignty, territorial integrity and national unity of States must be fully respected in accordance with the Charter of the United Nations […]" (ibid: para. 3).

This brings us back to the UN's principle of commitment to sovereignty and independence of its Member States, and non-interference in their domestic concerns. The UNSC may overrule Member States' sovereignty rights in cases in which their actions pose a threat in line with Chapter VII of the Charter of the United Nations.

In summary, hence, the UN has both the mandate and power to intervene in cases where international peace and security are threatened. Furthermore, there are international legal provisions and norms, such as the RtoP, that urge it to intervene in cases in which states fail to protect their population from mass atrocities and crimes. For the case of Syria, this has arguably been the case since 2011. One way to attain this could be via the call for collective action by Member States orchestrated through the UNSC (Simonovic, 2016).

As for humanitarian action, specific provisions exist that both grant and expect it to promptly engage in a humanitarian capacity in emergency situations, be they caused by human-induced violence or (natural) disasters. For both, peace-related and humanitarian action, it is particularly the UNSC has the power to overrule sovereignty rights in cases in which state actors fail to provide the above on their own.

On this basis, the UN has engaged in Syria since 2011 as well (see next section for details). However, several resolutions have remained unadopted at the level of the UNSC early on already (Jafarova, 2014). Respective actions, for instance to hold the perpetrators of war crimes to account and ensure the protection of civilians and their access to humanitarian aid, have consequently remained untaken as well (Simonovic, 2016; UN Secretary-General António Guterres, 2024; see as well section 3.3).

2.3.2. The UN's conduct and mandate in Syria

(1) UN-led Peacekeeping, peacebuilding, peacemaking since 2011

The UN has been involved in different capacities the Syrian crisis almost since its outset in 2011. In the first months, it was especially the Human Rights Council that was engaged in the context, among others by establishing a commission of inquiry into the mass atrocities and human rights violations that were reported at the time (see eg.: A/HRC/RES/S-16/1, 2011; A/HRC/RES/S-17/1, 2011; A/HRC/RES/S-18/1, 2011). Other resolutions at the UNSC were blocked by China and Russia early on (Jafarova, 2014).

In 2012, the UN General Assembly (UNGA) and the UNSC respectively condemned the violence in Syria. Consequently, the latter established supervisory capacities, including to monitor the ceasefire that the GoS had agreed to in March 2012 (S/RES/2042 (2012), 2012; S/RES/2043 (2012), 2012). The former endorsed the Arab League's plans for a political transition and appointed a Special Envoy to Syria (A/RES/66/176, 2012; A/RES/66/253, 2012).

As the first Joint Special Envoys of the United Nations and the League of Arab States, Kofi Anan set up a six-points plan for Syria in 2012, which the GoS agreed to in March 2012 (S/RES/2042 (2012), 2012; S/RES/2043 (2012), 2012). In June 2012, Joint Special Envoy Anan briefed the UNSC that the plan was not being implemented and that mass atrocities by the GoS were continuing (Nesirky, 2012).

Before his departure, Anan undertook to develop additional plans together with representatives of the UN and the League of Arab States to put the six-points plan into practice (A/66/865–S/2012/522, 2012). Yet, the situation deteriorated further, even so that the UN peacekeeping mission UNSMIS had to cease its operations for security reasons and retreated from Syria in August 2012 (UNSMIS, 2012a, 2012b). Moreover, he did not find the UNSC's actions sufficiently supportive, which he named as "primary reason" for his resignation (Jafarova, 2014).

The succeeding Special Envoys followed the path of advancing a political solution to the conflict. Thereby, the first, Lakhdar Brahimi in August 2012, was still appointed in a joint capacity as a Joint Special Envoy of the United Nations and the League of Arab States, while the two following postholders, Staffan de Mistura in 2014 and Geir O. Pedersen in 2019 represented the UN only. Brahimi's tenure (2012 – 2014) saw the convention of a joint "Geneva II" conference and succeeding Geneva-based negotiations between members of the opposition and the GoS. At the end of his tenure, however, there was path to a political solution in sight (UNDPPA, n.d.).

De Mistura's period as Special Envoy (2014 – 2019), which Sara Hellmüller (2020) describes as particularly inclusive und bottom-up, encompassed "[i]ntense diplomatic engagement […] between Russia and the US, and other key international stakeholders" (UNDPPA, n.d.). While resulting in renewed commitments to finding a political solution and laying the groundwork for a vision for post-conflict democratic Syria at the end of 2015 (S/RES/2254, 2015), also De Mistura departed in 2019 as well with no political solution to the conflict in sight (UNDPPA, n.d.).

Pedersen, who has been the Special Envoy to Syria for the past five and a half years by now, followed up on the provisions made in UNSC resolution 2254(2015). Among others, this includes establishing and facilitating the "Syrian Constitutional Committee", which is set out to draft a new post-conflict constitutional basis for the Syrian Arab Republic by members of both the opposition and the GoS (OSES, 2024a). This process has proved difficult as well however: Since the first session commenced in October 2019, only few further meetings were convened and little progress on substance made.

As Pedersen summarizes in his April 2024 briefing to the UNSC: besides additional confidence-building measures, "resuming the Constitutional Committee would also bring the Syrian parties back into the same room to address many of the underlying issues that drive this conflict. However, despite my best and ongoing efforts, its meetings have yet to resume." (OSES, 2024b). Alternative peace building efforts, such as the Astana Format that is formed by Russia, Iran and Türkiye, reportedly struggle for relevance as well, while meetings have continued to take place up to this year (Mohamad, 2023; Republic of Türkiye Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2024).

As the UN, Syrian opposition groups and their allies cling to finding a political solution (OSES, 2024b), the Astana Format members focus on an allegedly more authoritarian 'power peace' version of the same (Abboud, 2021; Beaujouan, 2024; Republic of Türkiye Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2024). Meanwhile, the GoS has begun to normalize ties with other Arab nations as well as to reintroduce itself as the legitimate state actor on the global stage (El Yaakoubi & Nakhoul, 2023; Robinson, 2023). The earthquake has presented itself in this respect as a critical window of opportunity for the GoS and its positioning and international relations, too (ISPI, 2023; Robinson, 2023).

(2) UN-led humanitarian and development action in Syria

In line with Resolution A/RES/46/182 (1991: para. 2), "Humanitarian assistance must be provided in accordance with the principles of humanity, neutrality and impartiality.". In line with that the "United Nations has a central and unique role to play in providing leadership and coordinating the efforts of the international community" in providing humanitarian aid to affected countries, the organization has also done so in the case of Syria since 2014. Its specific mandate for this is granted by Resolutions S/RES/2139 (2014), S/RES/2165 (2014) and succeeding provisions. (UN, 2023)

In a nutshell, the UN's humanitarian mission to Syria has served Syria and its de-facto separated regions as platform for (1) pooling and streamlining international funding, (2) coordinating programming activities; (3) international

humanitarian advocacy, as well as (4) a means a means for technical assistance, training and expertise. UNOCHA is the leading UN entity that coordinates and streamlines the humanitarian efforts and clusters for each hub part of the Syrian crisis. Overall, there are "16 resident entities and offices […] and 7 non-resident entities" involved in the UN's "common system in Syria" (UN, 2023). These are linked through the Clusters as well as the superseding structures in decision-making processes for each hub and the UN's "Whole of Syria" (WoS) approach.

With Syria having become de-facto territorially divided over the years of conflict, the UN has set up overarching mechanisms for coordination and programming coherence across the different regions. The approach the UN has been using to this end since 2014 is referred to as the "Whole of Syria" (WoS) approach.

The WoS approach is designed to "sit[] on top of the hub coordination structures, loosely based on the cluster system" (Sida et al., 2016: p. 2) and links the different hubs part of the Syrian crisis response with each other. In the beginning, this included the Türkiye cross-border hub, the Damascus-based hub for the GoS and Amman in Jordan, which is now inactive, in addition to other regional offices. An example for a regional office was the one in Erbil, Iraq, which covered the coordination for Kurdish-led NES until 2022.

In terms of its architecture, the WoS approach consists of the "Resident/Humanitarian Cooordinator" (RC) based in Damascus, the "Regional Humanitarian Coordinator" (RHC) based in Amman, Jordan, and the "Deputy Regional Humanitarian Coordinator" (DRHC) in Gaziantep, Türkiye (ECHO, 2024), so as to ensure that all hubs are individually represented within the UN system.

An evaluation report from 2016 on the establishment of the WoS approach found the WoS approach to function overly well. Yet, it highlighted that due to its connecting the different hubs with one another, "suspicion and mistrust" were high between the Damascus and the cross-border hub in Türkiye at the time. The same remarks are found for the relationship between the UN and NGOs in Türkiye, which is described to be built on a "legacy of distrust between" (Sida et al., 2016: p.23).

What is more, besides other downsides and advantages of this WoS connection, the approach rests on having all coordinating positions filled for representation. At the time of the 2023 twin earthquakes, for example, the Gaziantep-based DRHC position was vacant (iMMAP, 2023), thus undermining its functioning in this case.

In terms of funding, the UN coordinates both the overall pool funds for the country, as well as a sepcific regional fund for opposition-held areas (Hauch & Van Veen, 2024). The cross-border assistance is funded in addition through a multi-donor pooled fund, the "Syria Cross-border Humanitarian Fund" (SCHF), which the UN set up in 2014 based on Resolutions (S/RES/2165, 2014). Along parallel lines, the UN has coordinated the development of annual regional response plans for Syria as a whole and convened several rounds of funding conferences to support these plans (UNCHOA, 2024). In early 2024, the UN announced its plan to launch a separate Early Recovery Trust Fund (ERTF) for

Syria later this year, which it would coordinate from outside the region so that it would be politicized (Enab Baladi, 2024a; Hauch & Van Veen, 2024).

In parallel, a UK-led initiative, bringing together several key governmental aid donors and NGOs, launched an alternative multi-donor "Aid Fund for Northern Syria" (AFNS) 2in December 2022, which would be managed outside of the UN system and allow for "more cost-effective" funding to opposition-held areas (Hauch & Van Veen, 2024: p. 2).

By design, the AFNS is set out to reduce aid diversion and appropriation by the GoS, since it supports opposition-held areas only. It also fosters the involvement of "local actors" in both the mechanism and by establishing direct funding relations between donors and local organizations, while allowing for targeted early recovery funding that is presently not provided as much under the UN's funding and coordination platforms. What is of particular importance, however, is that the AFNS would also remain operational in case the UN's cross-border mandate is ever not renewed (ibid: pp.7).

On the one hand, the AFNS entails setting up parallel aid funding and coordination structures outside the UN system. On the other hand, it helps "elimintat[ing] the regime's leverage over the entire humanitarian response and will allow the UN to drive a harder bargain with Damascus regarding humanitarian aid to regime-held Syria." (Hauch & Van Veen, 2024: p. 11).

Overall, the UN's relationship with the GoS is frequently described as having "become problematically intertwined in the provision of humanitarian aid" (ibid). This is among others showcased by uncovered cases of fraud involving key members of the UN in recent years (Chulov, 2022; SLDP & Obsalytics, 2020). The interviews conducted for this thesis underline the same (Participant 1, 2023a; Participant 2, 2023; Participant 3, 2023a; Participant 6, 2023a).

The UN's conduct during the immediate earthquake-induced disaster response period in February 2023 has been described as "catastrophic". Local aid group members publicly questioned: "Where was the UN?" (Al Saleh, 2023) and "Why did the UN aid take so long to arrive?" (Garthwaite, 2023). The UN's Commission of Inquiry on Syria in March 2023 speak of Syria as the "[e]picentre of neglect" (OHCHR, 2023)

The failure of the UN and the broader international community to respond to the earthquake-induced disaster has been detrimental for the affected population in NWS. Thousands of people have died buried underneath the rubble while waiting "for international help that hasn't arrived (Griffiths, 2023). Giving priority to UNSC decisions and sovereignty claims of the GoS instead of moral duties – including the protection of human rights and lives – the UN failed to provide international assistance to NWS before the critical window for lifesaving support had closed (Al Saleh, 2023; Garthwaite, 2023; OHCHR, 2023).

Other aid donors, in parallel, reportedly found themselves unable to channel assistance into the region outside of the UN mechanisms as well (Chulov, 2023). Consequently, those affected in the "epicentre of neglect" (OHCHR, 2023: n.p.) were left feeling "abandoned and neglected by those supposed to protect them, in the most desperate of times" (ibid).

“It has been said that the United Nations was not created in order to bring us to heaven, but in order to save us from hell” (Dag Hammarskjöld, UN Secretary-General, 1954). For many who have experienced this or similar situations, however, this statement hardly holds true. How can we make sure that such a disaster is prevented from ever repeating itself? Is there a way to induce the UN to reform? And context-specifically, for the case of NWS in specific: how does the UN ensure to “correct this failure as fast as we can” (Griffiths, 2023)

In political systems in which those in charge can be held accountable for their actions and failures by those affected, such as by means of elections, through social movements and protests or, where established, the rule of law, there is a certain impetus for a change in conduct and reform. In the case of the UN, however, there are no effective mechanisms in place to hold the UN accountable for its actions, even in fatal situations such as this. Does its need for securing legitimacy serve as an alternative mechanism to induce the needed institutional change and reform?

2.3.3. Key areas of shortcomings attributable to the UN in Syria

A recent Carnegie Endowment for International Peace (2023: p.) report shows from different perspectives that the UN, including the UNSC, has globally “addressed significant challenges to international peace and security” (Patrick et al., 2023). Syria, however, is named explicitly as a “glaring omission” from this, and the overall picture described as “mixed” (ibid). Calls for reforming the UN and the UNSC are respectively vocalized, both as part of the Syrian context and at a global level, from inside the UN and other external positions alike (Cronin, 2002; Debusmann, 2012; Hauch & Van Veen, 2024; Jafarova, 2014; Kayyali, 2023; Patrick et al., 2023; Reuters, 2023).

(1) Humanitarian and development action

As for the context of Syria concretely, there are many provisions encompassed in the UN’s mandate that have remained unfulfilled. In terms of humanitarian assistance, for instance, the UN finds itself in a situation in which the situation has not improved. For NWS in particular, UNOCHA (2024) resumes that in 2024, “after 13 years of conflict, the humanitarian situation in north-west Syria is at its worst” (UNOCHA, 2024a: n.p.).

For the whole of Syria as well, the level of aid dependency is up by 9 percent in comparison to the year before (UNHCR, 2024c; UNOCHA, 2024a). Meanwhile, the UN coordinated Humanitarian Response Plan for the country has with only 24 percent of the planned budget as of August 2024 never been as much underfunded (UNOCHA, 2024c).

In terms of early recovery and development cooperation, the UN appears to be making steps backwards rather than forth at presence. Due to the multiple crises that have affected the context in recent years in addition to the conflict, including the 2023 twin earthquakes and the COVID-19 pandemic, the focus has shifted back from early recovery to lifesaving support (Hauch & Van Veen, 2024). Meanwhile, the UK-initiated multi-donor pool fund, ANFS (see section (2)) presents an alternative for key donor countries advance early recovery actions outside of the UN system.

The UN's dependence on the UNSC's and GoS' permissions for providing cross-border assistance furthermore structurally limits its effectiveness and dependability for the aid community NWS in specific. The limited bargaining power it has vis-à-vis the GoS and its allies further adds to this. In addition, individual UN staff members' involvement in cases of fraud as well as allegations of systemic corruption with proximity to the GoS (Chulov, 2022; Hauch & Van Veen, 2024; SLDP & Obsalytics, 2020) undermine its effectiveness and credibility in the provision of humanitarian and development ais.

(2) Protection, justice and peace

Another area concerns human rights violations, truth and justice, which is furthermore linked to the UN's prospects of peacemaking and peacebuilding as well. As the Special Envoy to Syria (OSES) states prominently: "[i]mpunity has been a hallmark of the Syrian conflict". This hinders the Special Envoy's efforts of conflict resolution and challenges "one of the UN's core values – accountability" (ibid). In reflection of its efforts and mission in Syria, OSES resumes:

"Syrians have witnessed unprecedented devastation and displacement, compounded by gross and systematic violations and abuses of international law, humanitarian law and human rights law, including the use of internationally proscribed chemical weapons, mass incarceration and unlawful detention, forced disappearances, torture and other ill-treatment, extrajudicial killings, the indiscriminate bombing of civilians and civilian infrastructure such as hospitals and schools, sieges and severe access restrictions, and the use of starvation as a method of war." (UNDPPA, n.d.: n.p.).

The number of war crimes committed in Syria is accordingly vast. The UN's ability to hold the perpetrators accountable, however, is limited in turn. This is particularly true for that involve the GoS. Until now in any case, vetoes by Russia and at times China in addition have prevented the UNSC to take punitive action, (Al-Labwani, 2021; Naqvi, 2017; Sarkin, 2022; Van Schaack, 2016), let alone transfer the case of Syria to the International Criminal Court (ICC) (UNSC, 2014; Van Schaack, 2016). Linked to this as well as a point in itself, even after more than a decade, there is still no political solution to the conflict in sight (OSES, 2023, 2024b; UN Secretary-General António Guterres, 2024).

3. Conceptual pillars and theoretical framework of this thesis

This research projects explores if and how the UN is locally perceived to have changed its course after its earthquake-induced legitimacy crisis, and how these changes in conduct, if any, resonate with members of local aid groups from a legitimacy point of view. Drawing on path dependence theory, it treats the post-earthquake response disaster as a "critical juncture", that is, as a window of opportunity for accelerated institution change in the case of the UN's conduct in NWS. This, it further connects with a conception of local legitimacy that it derives based on a literature review.

This chapter provides insights into the two conceptual pillars of this research project: (1) critical juncture frameworks and (2) local legitimacy. After

introducing and discussing them as presented in the literature, I use them to build the conceptual framework for this thesis. This includes defining how these two pillars are used specifically in this thesis, as well connecting them conceptually.

3.1. Path dependence theory and critical junctures

3.1.1. The concept in general and its applicability for the current case

As illustrated in the preceding chapter, the UN has a long history of failing GoS opponents and advocates for human rights in the context of Syria. For instance, with regards to humanitarian cross-border assistance, Russian and, at times, Chinese vetoes at the UNSC have caused humanitarian access to NWS to diminish continuously over the years. In terms of accountability questions, to provide another example, it has protected the GoS from being held accountable for mass atrocities, including the deployment of chemical weapons, the systematic abduction and torture of civilians and other severe crimes, rather than protecting the victims of these attacks (Adams, 2015; Amnesty International, 2017; Borger & Inzaurralde, 2015; Guimarães & de Carvalho, 2017; Melling & Dennett, 2017; Sarkin, 2022; Syrian Network for Human Rights, 2023; UN Press, 2022; UNSC, 2014; Van Schaack, 2016; Webb, 2021).

While there is growing pressure at both a global and context-specific level for the UN – and the UNSC in particular – to change (Debusmann, 2012; Guimarães & de Carvalho, 2017; Patrick et al., 2023; Reuters, 2023; UNSC, 2023d), none of these circumstances have so far sufficed to induce the organization to do so effectively. This reflects what path dependency is all about: even where there is support and impetus for formal or informal institutions to change, institutions are "sticky". They are reluctant to change other than gradually (Boettke et al., 2008; Sarigil, 2015), as dominant actors in the respective political arenas produce and reproduce them over time (D. Collier & Munck, 2017; R. B. Collier & Collier, 2002).

What path dependence theory suggests as well, however, is that severe crises can be turning points, "critical junctures", for rapid institutional change (Capoccia & Kelemen, 2007; Mahoney, 2000). These junctures "undermine the stability of existing institutions by exposing their inadequacies, weakening their legitimacy" (Sorensen, 2022, p. 7), and allow "for agency or contingency to shape divergence from the past" (Soifer, 2012, p. 888).

Current debates related to the earthquake-induced disaster in Syria, for instance, allege that the earthquake-induced disaster may have constituted the onset of such a juncture with regards to the normalization of relations with the GoS by several Arab States (El Yaakoubi & Nakhoul, 2023; The Soufan Center, 2023). UN Special Envoy Pedersen has presented the possible revival of the UN-led political process due to increased cooperation in the aftermath of the earthquake as a "potentially important juncture", as well (UNSC, 2023e). This

project alleges that is provided a window of opportunity for the UN to change its conduct as well.

What may unsettle periods of relative stability as described before are abruptly caused and severe legitimacy crises (Sorensen, 2022). Such crises may become important junctures that open up options for alternative actions and change. These "critical junctures" are specific periods in history that have the potential to disrupt the afore-described historic sequences of relative stability. "[T]riggered by a crisis that undermines the legitimacy of existing institutions" (Sorensen, 2022, p. 6), they bear the potential for profound institutional change to happen relatively quickly (Capoccia & Kelemen, 2007; R. B. Collier & Collier, 2002; Sorensen, 2022). This is what makes path dependence theory and critical juncture frameworks as part of this broader theory particularly interesting for the current case at hand.

3.1.2. Differentiating between outcome and process-oriented concepts

Critical juncture frameworks have been used in comparative historical and political analyses for more than fifty years already (D. Collier & Munck, 2017). They are typically used to trace back how institutions developed, often by means of a counterfactual analysis (Mahoney, 2000) and in any case retrospectively, from a period – a critical juncture – that weakened the legitimacy of previous pre-juncture institutions.

There are different interpretations of what a critical juncture is and entails: on the one hand, there are outcome-oriented frameworks, which regard a juncture as 'critical' where it has produced a historical legacy. That is, the outcome of the juncture, produced and reproduced by mechanisms of reproduction over time, diverges from the past (D. Collier & Munck, 2017; R. B. Collier & Collier, 2002),

On the other hand, there are process-oriented approaches. To be considered as 'critical', these process-oriented conceptions do not per se require a devergent outcome from the past. What makes them "critical" instead is that after several options for institutional development were made available through the juncture, one is eventually adapted and reproduced over time. That is, they become "critical" after options for divergence were at some point available during the juncture out of which one is eventually selected and produced over time. At this moment, then, "it becomes progressively more difficult to return to the initial point when multiple alternatives were still available." (Mahoney, 2000, p. 513), which is what closes the juncture – the window for change – and makes it 'critical'.

In contrast to outcome-oriented conceptions, however, this selected and persistently reproduced option does not need constitute divergence from the pre-juncture period. Following this conception, it may also present a return to the original pre-juncture, as long as divergence was among the options for

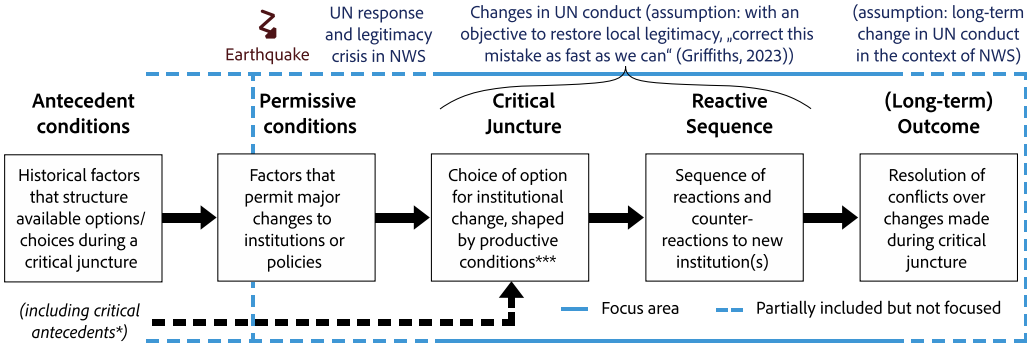
available (Capoccia & Kelemen, 2007; Mahoney, 2000; Soifer, 2012; Sorensen, 2022).

3.1.3. The critical juncture framework used in this research project

This research project draws on the process-oriented definition, which it projects on the earthquake-induced crisis of the UN in the context of NWS. That is, it alleges that the earthquake-induced crisis has opened up options for the UN to change course. As actions are presently undertaken – which may or may not present divergence from before, the window for amplified change continuously shrinks.

In Mahoney's (p. 513) words: with every option out of a variety of options for action and potential change theoretically available selected, "it becomes progressively more difficult to return to the initial point when multiple alternatives were still available.". Once the eventual pathway selected is produced and reproduced over time, the opportunity for profound institutional change is closed (the juncture has become critical), even where this selected outcome resembles a return to the past.

The following provides an overview of the analytical structure of critical juncture sequence in line with the above-described strand. For analytical purposes, it furthermore illustrates (here in blue) where this research project presumes to be placed, including initial assumptions about the UN's locally perceived changes in conduct:



* Critical antecedents, as defined by Slater and Simmons (2010: p.1), are „factors or conditions preceding a ctitical juncture that combine in a causal sequence with cators operating during that juncture to produce divergent outcomes

** Permissive conditions, as defined by Soifer (2007: p. 1573), are causal conditions that "represent the easing of the constraints of structure and make change possible

*** Productive conditions, as defined by Soifer (2007: p. 1573), are conditions that „in the presence of the permissive conditions, produce the outcome or range of outcomes that are then reproduced after the permissive conditions disappear and the juncture comes to a close

***Figure 8**: Analytic structure of the critical juncture sequence. Adopted and modified from Mahoney (2000), Slater & Simmons (2010), Soifer (2012) and Sorensen (2022).*

3.2. Legitimacy in the context of international interventions and the UN

3.2.1. Making a case for local legitimacy in the context of UN engagement

(1) The theorized need for the UN to be locally perceived as legitimate

The UN legitimizes its interventions in fragile and conflict-affected contexts both on the grounds of international law and by invoking the responsibility to protect conflict and post-conflict subjects (Charter of the United Nations, 1945; Richmond & Mac Ginty, 2020a; Visoka, 2020). As introduced earlier, Resolution A/RES/46/182 (1991) extends this to victims of natural disasters, too. Where the UN is mandated to coordinate humanitarian action, those engaged in humanitarian work locally and internationally increasingly rely on its mechanisms and capacities to function over time.

Where it is expected but fails to protect human lives and rights in situations such as this, the outcome is likely to be detrimental. Besides the social and human costs that this causes, this concerns its "global credibility and local effectiveness", too (Visoka, 2020, p. 45). Both of these legitimacy perspectives and the need of the UN to be viewed as legitimate arguably increase the pressure for it to reform – context-specifically and/or overall (Autesserre, 2014a, 2021; Borger & Inzaurralde, 2015; Conduit, 2023; Debusmann, 2012; Kayyali, 2023; Reuters, 2023).

(2) Global legitimacy and international pressure for the UN to reform

As established in the literature, the UN depends on being perceived as legitimate in terms of its actions, both in local and global respects (Visoka, 2020). On the one hand, being perceived as legitimate is crucial for its humanitarian, development and peace (HDP) interventions to be locally supported, effective and to produce sustainable results (Donais, 2009; Galtung & Eide, 1976; Gippert, 2016, 2017; Mac Ginty, 2016; Pouligny, 2006; Richmond & Mac Ginty, 2020a; Visoka, 2020; Whalan, 2013). On the other hand, it is crucial for the UN-centric system to remain in relevant, effective and in place over time (Borger & Inzaurralde, 2015; Buchanan & Keohane, 2006; Nadin, 2019; Tallberg & Zürn, 2019).

With regards to the latter, the UN's legitimacy – and that of the UNSC in specific – has been in long-term decline (UNSC, 2023d). It is found unable to function where the interests of one or more permanent members of the UN Security Council (UNSC) conflict with broad-based moral concerns (Acharya & Plesch, 2020; Boyd, 1970; Cronin, 2002; Nadin, 2019).

It is also unable to "maintain peace and security" (Charter of the United Nations, 1945, art. 1, para. 1) and promote "friendly relations among nations" (ibid, para. 2), considering that at present, the number of conflicts (Strand & Hegre, 2021) and "[t]ensions between major Powers are at an historic high" (UNSC, 2023b). This is underpinned by ever-more prominently voiced calles for reform (Borger & Inzaurralde, 2015; Reuters, 2023; UNSC, 2023d), whereby Syria is often presented as a case in point (Amnesty International, 2017, 2023; Borger & Inzaurralde, 2015).

(3) Local legitimacy for the UN's engagement in the case of Northwest Syria

With regards to local legitimacy considerations, the UN and the liberal interventionist strategies associated with it have been criticized for decades. This is true both for its interventions across different fragile and conflict-affected contexts in general, and context-specifically for the case of Syria as well (see as well section 2.3.3 earlier). As for the former, critical scholars and proponents of the local turn have criticized for years that the UN's typical liberal-style interventions do not work. They are often (perceived as) undemocratic and externally imposed on the affected population, therefore lacking legitimacy among those concerned (Baaz & Stern, 2017; Barnett, 2016; Chandler, 2016; Gippert, 2016; Van Leeuwen et al., 2019; Whalan, 2013).

Others oppose them for their neo-colonialist and paternalist mindsets (Barnett, 2016; Chandler, 2016) and, at an individual level of engagement, for the superiority-invoking practices of system-turned "arrogant know-it-alls" (Barnett, 2016, p. 23). Rather than establishing a basis of bottom-up support for its interventions locally, hence, the UN's actions are often met with resistance, ignored and fail to take root over time (Autesserre, 2021; Mac Ginty, 2016). In line with Whalan (2013) and Gippert (2016, 2017), all of this adversely affects local legitimacy perceptions in contexts of international interventions, which further limits the UN's effectiveness and prospects of success.

Further, context-specifically for the case of Syria, UNSC decisions have for more than a decade deterred humanitarian access to rebel-held NWS (UNSC, 2023a). They have de-facto granted impunity to the GoS (Al-Labwani, 2021; SWP, 2019; US Mission to the UN, 2021), and inhibited interventions that would be expected to uphold the Responsibility to Protect (Adams, 2015; Melling & Dennett, 2017). More than USD 78 billions of official development aid (ODA) were provided to the country between 2012 and 2021 alone (OECD, 2023).

Yet, aid dependence ratios have increased over time. Also a political solution to the conflict remains after years and several rounds of negotiations today largely out of sight (OSES, 2015; Petrini et al., 2021). The UN's actions in the critical response period we unprecedented in their detriment. Yet, it is all of this taken together that illustrates that the UN system has been unable to function in this context for more than a decade, and is, accordingly, in urgent need for change (Borger & Inzaurralde, 2015; Chulov, 2023; Conduit, 2023; Kayyali, 2023; Webb, 2021).

3.2.2. Introducing the concept of legitimacy

(1) The concept of legitimacy from a traditional perspective

In the political sciences, the concept of legitimacy is closely connected with Max Weber's (1918) work. Until recently, it has been understood predominantly in a state-centric manner, that is, to describe state-society relations of 'legitimate' power and obedience. Hence, it was often explored in connection with the question: what makes a state's power over its citizens valid and accepted without inducement and coercion – and on what basis can this type of power be established and maintained (Zelditch, 2001; Smith, 1970; Weber et al., 1968

[1918])? Or, the other way around: why is it that those ruled ‘collectively’ and ‘voluntarily’ accept and comply with a given authority, even where liberal theory’s typical carrots and sticks are not in place (Gippert, 2017; Whalan, 2013; Zelditch, 2001)?

Max Weber answered this question by drawing on legitimacy, or more specific, “Legitimitätsglaube” (the believe that something is legitimate). In this respect, he postulated that “power is legitimate where those involved in it believe it to be so” (Weber, 1956, pp. 23, as cited in Beetham, 1991, p.8). This definition has for long constituted the traditional basis for discussion on legitimacy in the political sciences. Over the past century, however, Weber’s subjective belief-based definition, among other elements of his legitimacy-oriented work, has been both highly influential and subject to ongoing critique (see e.g.: Beetham, 1991; Fossen, 2011; Jessop & Barker, 1993).

Beetham (1991), for instance, challenges Weber’s conceptual work on the grounds of the subjective beliefs-based (descriptive) definition. He also challenges the bases upon which a state, in Weber’s conception, may establish its ‘legitimate’ authority over those it rules as “reductionist”. What matters, according to (Beetham, 1991, p. 11), is, that a certain relation of power “can be justified in terms of their [people’s] beliefs”, not their belief in its legitimacy per se: “We are making an assessment of the degree of congruence, or lack of it, between a given system of power and the beliefs, values and expectations that provide its justification. We are not making a report on people’s ‘belief in its legitimacy’” per se.

As a result of the ongoing debates, there is a variety of (1) different approaches to understanding legitimacy, its (2) theorized sources and/or scales, the (3) ‘bases’ as well as the (5) Legitimacy-receiving and sending subjects/ entities in the literature today. I briefly introduce these in the following. While on their own providing an overview of the interdisciplinary field of study and relevant debates, especially the different approaches and scales (see 5.2.2.) are directly connected to the research question and theoretical framework of this study. Complemented by the other elements introduced in the subsequent sections, they furthermore inform the empirical data generation and data analysis. Furthermore, as some of the terms are used in the literature in contradictory or ambiguous ways, this section adds to enhancing definitory clarity as well.

(2) On different approaches to understanding legitimacy

In terms of approaches to understanding what legitimacy is, the literature differentiates traditionally between (a) descriptive and (b) normative approaches. Thereby, (a) is often conflated with something referred to as “empirical” legitimacy as well (Hurrell, 2005; Idler et al., 2018; Jessop & Barker, 1993).

In (a) a descriptive sense, legitimacy refers to a 'psychological property' of an entity ('an authority, institution, or social arrangement') "that leads those connected to it believe that it is appropriate, proper, and just" (Tyler, 2006, p. 375). Both descriptive and 'empirical' legitimacy, then, are "based on perceptions" (Idler et al., 2018, p. 44): "What are these beliefs that substantiate the empirically observable claim? Why is a particular claim of legitimacy accepted, by whom and at what point?" (Duyvesteyn, 2017). Along these lines, Weber's definition as well as that used by Whalan (2013) fall into this category.

In contrast to this, (2) normative legitimacy relates to the moral justification of these beliefs: Based on what norms are the claims for something to be legitimate justified? That is "not simply to say something about the subjective state of mind of particular individuals. It is to say that the arrangement meets certain substantive requirements – say, standards of justice and rationality expressed in a normative conception of legitimacy – irrespective of whether people believe that they are met or not." (Hinsch, 2010). This is in line with Beetham's (1991) definition introduced above.

While these two perspectives are dominant wherever the literature differentiates different interpretations of what legitimacy is (see e.g. Duyvesteyn, 2017; Harel & Shinar, 2022; Idler et al., 2018; Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy, 2017), they are not the only ones. Visoka (2020), for instance, argues that "relational legitimacy" is another category on the same level of analysis and differentiation. Herein, he regards legitimacy neither as descriptive nor normative. "Rather, it [legitimacy] is deeply anti-foundational. This, though does not exclude the possibility that norms and values are used for the legitimation purpose. At best, legitimacy is a circular process of relational validation, acceptance, and refusal.".

On parallel lines, Richmond & Mac Ginty, (2020b), Boege & Tanis (2020), (Schwoebel, 2018b; Tschunkert & Mac Ginty, 2020) make similar cases for hybrid (local-international) legitimacy(ies). These entail that different approaches and constituting elements of legitimacy may exist in parallel, be it in complementary or (self-)contradictory ways. "In reality, […] hybridized forms of legitimacy are more likely to exist whereby societies develop their own set of legitimacies that make up and ethos and politico-cultural logic. Ideal types and binaries have little role in these modernities whereby institutions, citizens and a host of other bodies operating at different levels of society invent and reinvent legitimacy.".

(3) On different legitimacy sources, levels and scales

The questions behind potential 'sources' or 'scales' of legitimacy ask: 'Legitimacy, perceived by whom?'; 'bestowed by whom?'; 'or, stemming from where?'. Among others, we can differentiate between different levels at a (a) micro and (b) macro level, as well as between (c) perspectives 'within' and 'outside' of a certain entity.

With regards to (a), we may, for instance, differentiate between different levels and types of sources at a micro-level, such as 'individual' (propriety), 'collective' (validity) and 'public' (levels of) legitimacy (Tyler, 1997, 2006; Tyler & Jackson, 2014; Zelditch, 2001). At (b) the macro level, the literature frequently differentiates between local, domestic, national and international levels (Mitchell, 2018), while considering hybrid forms as well (Richmond & Mac Ginty, 2020a; Schwoebel, 2018a; Tschunkert & Mac Ginty, 2020). Another option is to differentiate between internal (legitimacy bestowed "within the socio-political entity itself") – and external legitimacy ("conformed externally from outsiders") (Mitchell, 2018)

As will be further discussed in section 3.2.3, for the case of the binary conceptions of the local and the international, these sources/ scales introduced herein are conceptually not unproblematic but require caution, clarification and contextualization. What is noteworthy moreover is that the scholarly contributions availed for this review are at times contradictory, such as that they use the same terms to refer to different or more than one thing at a time. Mitchell (2018), for instance, uses the terms "local" and "international" legitimacy to describe the to-be-legitimized entities: local actors and the international community respectively. Simultaneously, he refers to the "local" as a 'source' of bestowing legitimacy as well. In contrast, Gippert (2016, 2017), Richmond & Mac Ginty (2020b) and Whalan (2013) refer to it only with regards to the latter.

Furthermore, these levels and sources are neither clear-cut categories, nor are they necessarily mutually exclusive. As such, legitimacy as a concept does not need to be a zero-sum game (Gippert, 2016; Mitchell, 2018). As Richmond & Mac Ginty (2020b: 2) argue further, legitimacy is something that can be scaled. However, "[c]ontradictions creep in when these different scales are connected into a unified whole at state level, or a universal framework at international level, distorted by power relations."

This entails that the same entity (or source) at an individual level may regard more than one entity, action or otherwise as legitimate for different reasons, even where these legitimacy claims may appear to be inherently contradictory (Boege & Tanis, 2020; Visoka, 2020). Vice versa, especially in contexts of protracted conflict where a variety of conflicting legitimacy claims may be at work, "it is quite possible for rival parties, incumbents and insurgents, to enjoy legitimacy from different sources" that vary over time (Mitchell, 2018, p. 3).

(4) On different bases from which legitimacy may be derived

The literature provides a variety of different conceptualized 'bases' (Mitchell, 2018) upon which legitimacy can be bestowed. Alternatively, scholars at times refer to 'mechanisms' instead, which I avoid here since I do not go into detail on the underlying theorized procedures of how these are theorized to work. The guiding question for this section is: on what grounds can legitimacy be established? From what is it derived?

Starting off in the traditional state-centric work of Weber (1968 [1918]), he introduces three bases upon which a state can establish its 'legitimate' authority: (1.a) legal-rational; (1.b) traditional and (1.c) charismatic. In this, (1.a.) is closely linked to the concept of "legality" and compliance with formal (and, arguably, informal) institutions. The other two are related to actors and practices that are believed to be legitimate due to their (1.b) longstanding designation and claims to power, and (1.c) for reasons that rest in the personality and behavior of individual leader(s).

Other 'bases' established in the literature include, among others, the triplets of (2) input-output-throughput (politically focused) legitimacy (F. Scharpf, 2011; F. W. Scharpf, 1997); (3) source-substantive-procedural legitimacy (Whalan, 2013); (4) pragmatic-moral-cognitive (organizational) legitimacy (Suchman, 1995); and (5) identity related-ideological-pragmatic forms (Mitchell, 2018) – to name just a few. Thereby, many of these categories are interrelated or refer to the same broader ideas as the respective other triplets.

Suchman's 'moral' legitimacy, for instance, is meant to encompass Weber's legal-traditional-charismatic triplet at large (Suchman, 1995, p. 579). Also 'throughput' and 'procedural', or 'substantive' and 'output' legitimacy, vice versa, in essence, draw on the same grounds (F. Scharpf, 2011; F. W. Scharpf, 1997; Schmidt, 2020). Further, these categories are not necessarily mutually exclusive. In many cases, scholars use them in specifically extended, reduced or otherwise adjusted manners in their legitimacy-focused work (see e.g. Gippert, 2017 in comparison to Whalan, 2013).

In line with its exploratory nature, this project remains conceptually open with regards to what 'bases' legitimacy may be derived from. For developing the empirical process and later, for the thesis project itself, these terms and conceptions may, however, prove valuable for orientation and reflection. The references included above herein provide further insights.

(5) On subjects (recipients) of legitimation

As introduced earlier, when it comes to legitimacy in the political sciences, the state has for long been the primary focus as a 'recipient' of legitimacy. The shift to explore it also for other types of entities, such as non-state actors (Duyvesteyn, 2017; Podder, 2017; Schlichte & Schneckener, 2015) and UN missions (Gippert, 2016, 2017; Whalan, 2013), has occurred only recently.

In other disciplines, however, scholars began to explore legitimacy for a wide range of entities earlier (Beetham, 1991; Zelditch, 2001). Suchman (1995), for instance, conceptualizes it in the context of organizations. Tyler (2006) and Zelditch (2001) approach it in psychological and psychosocial respects. Also in business studies, legitimacy concepts are deployed, for instance, with regards to certain that of decision-making processes and the inclusion of different stakeholder groups (see e.g. Santana, 2012). Besides these entities, naturally,

also strategies, processes, actions and goals are frequently referred to as legitimate or not (Mitchell, 2018). This makes the group of possible 'recipients' of legitimacy theoretically infinite, yet in comparison to the state so far largely undertheorized and underexplored.

What is noteworthy, moreover, is that there is a gradual shift among the social sciences alongside a broader 'relational turn' (Selg & Ventsel, 2020) of approaching legitimacy as a multidirectional relationship between two or more entities. Along these lines, Mitchell (2018: p.18) summarizes that legitimacy "implies that at least two entities are involved in legitimacy as a relationship. One confers (or withholds) the quality of legitimacy on the other so that a source and a recipient are always involved. The conferring of legitimacy on the recipient enables that entity to require approval and support for its behaviour and some conformity with its requirements from the source."

In an ontologically 'thicker'4 form of relationality, Visoka (2020, p.45) argues that all relational entities – 'the state, the international, the post-conflict subjects' – "are independent and constantly legitimize and delegitimize one another intentionally and unintentionally." Thereby, "a relational understanding of legitimacy reveals that every act of legitimation is also an act of self-legitimation", thus making all entities involved in such a relationship recipients of legitimacy in some form (or: constituting the entities involved through their legitimating relationship in the first place).

This project taps into this multidirectional understanding of legitimacy only to an extent. It is interested to explore the legitimacy perceptions of local actors vis-à-vis the UN's (changes in) conduct in the context of NWS in a normative sense. Thereby, it derives the relevance for why these perceptions matter from the assumption that the UN depends on being locally perceived as legitimate so as to be effective and produce sustainable results (see e.g. Buchanan & Keohane, 2006; Visoka, 2020). Along these lines, I do not regard legitimation as a one-directional process between a powerful legitimacy-(to-be-)receiving entity and a legitimacy-(to-be-)conferring source. Rather, the project regards it as a multidirectional process wherein both sides have their respective leverage and power over one another. Herein, the concept of legitimacy does not only induce local actors to comply with and support the UN's interventions. It also induces the UN to change its conduct to (re-)build legitimacy the other way around.

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[4] In his work on relational peacebuilding, Brigg (2016) differentiates between three types of relationality: 'thin', 'thicker' and 'thick'. Thereby, thin relationality is "based on preexisting entities" (ibid, p.58). It refers to "relationships among entities (for example individuals, organizations or states) without questioning how entities come into being (ibid). 'Thicker' relationality "identifies the ways entities are mutually conditioned and changed through interation" (ibid). 'This' relationality, then, "gives conceptual priority to relations over entities and thus embraces a more fluid and fundamentally dynamic understanding of the social and political world [in his case] of peacebuilding" (ibid).

3.2.3. Adding the "local" and the multidirectional to the concept of legitimacy

(1) On the local-international binary conception and scholarly divide

Local actors have been a prominent subject in both conflict resolution and post-structuralist/ post-colonialism-inspired peace research since the 1990s at the latest (Lederach, 1997; Mac Ginty, 2015, 2016; Mac Ginty & Richmond, 2013; Paffenholz, 2016). Today, they are present across a variety of policy-relevant disciplines and different schools of thought. Also, the definitions of local legitimacy, where provided, primarily refer to it as 'the belief of local actors' that the actions and goals of an entity are legitimate along the lines of being 'right, fair and appropriate' (Whalan, 2013). While there is broad consensus among the scholarship today that for international HDP interventions to be effective, they need to be "rooted in the local people and their culture" (Lederach, 1997), who these local people are remains often unclear.

Mostly in critique to the dominant framework of the liberal peace, proponents of the local turn attach importance to utilizing local knowledge(s) and leadership (Autesserre, 2014b, 2017, 2021; Barnett, 2016; Pouligny, 2006), establishing local accountability (Campbell, 2018), and to ensuring that interventions are not merely internationally but also locally deemed legitimate (Donais, 2009; Donati, 2003; Galtung & Eide, 1976; Gippert, 2017; Richmond & Mac Ginty, 2020a; Visoka, 2020; Whalan, 2013; see as well Barakat & Milton, 2020; 2016; Roepstorff, 2020). However, the focus on the local and its conception have proved challenging for the scholarship as well: "Where, actually, is the local?" (Mac Ginty, 2015), and what are the criteria that make an actor so?

As part of the local turn, post-liberal and critical scholars have engaged intensively with questions such as these. Some have attempted to refine and better operationalise the prevalent categories (see e.g. Paffenholz, 2016 for a functionality-based attempt; or Krampe & Ekman, 2020 for an actor-oriented approach). In the context of the "Grand Bargain", the UN has attempted to do the same (IASC HFTT, 2018).

Others, meanwhile, have introduced alternative conceptions to describe local and international entities engaged in international interventions, such as the "local-locals", "peacelanders", "aidlanders" and "Peace, Inc." (Autesserre, 2021; Mosse, 2011). Yet again others have resorted to hybridity with respect to governance, social orders, peace (Belloni, 2012; Dougherty, 1944), and legitimacy as well (Boege & Tanis, 2020; Richmond & Mac Ginty, 2020a; Schwoebel, 2018b).

Notwithstanding all these efforts, however, the local-international divide remains by and large unresolved. The reason for this is that "the local" and "the international" are binary constructs. They are "mutually conditioning" (Brigg, 2016, p. 56), existing only in relation to the respective other (Schneckener, 2016). This makes it difficult to overcome the local/internal–

international/external divide in an actor-oriented manner (ibid). While resorting to hybridity does, arguably, help to outmanoeuvre the problem.

As Schneckener (2016) argues, however, it does not resolve the divide itself, as for this, hybridity would either need to consist of components that could be clearly identified as local and international respectively, thus making a differentiation between them actually possible; or, anything hybrid would be hybrid all the way down, making any reference to any other levels – such as "local" and "international" – inherently useless (Schneckener, 2016).

Resorting to relationality allows to overcome the conceptual divide. Other than describing – and in fact, essentialising – actors as "local", "international" or otherwise, these approaches take relations, not entities, as the ontological starting point (Brigg, 2016; Visoka, 2020). As such, entities – such as the state, the organization, the conflict subject – all are relational entities, produced in and through their interaction with one another.

Problematic is, however, that especially ontologically 'thicker'5 (Brigg, 2016) approaches easily become abstract and are often hard to be applied in a practical sense (Schneckener, 2016). As a result, there is broad consensus among the scholarship today that the binary conceptions of the local and the international (or at times, the liberal) are both reductionist and problematic. They both are "overdetermined and undertheorized at the same time" (Schneckener, 2016, p. 12). Yet, as they are "mutually conditioning" (Briggs,2017: 56), that is, existing only in relation to the respective other (Schneckener), it will remain difficult to overcome the local-international binary in an actor-oriented approach.

(2) Revisiting the concept of "the local" for this thesis

To circumvent this issue, this study resorts to a definition that is based on the self-identification of an entity (such as individuals, groups or organizations) as being local in relation to an international (or otherwise non-local) counterpart. As such, local legitimacy shall refer to the belief of those who identify as local in their relationship with the to-be-legitimised entity of interest that its conduct is 'right', 'appropriate' and 'fair' 'within a particular context' (much of this definition is inspired by Whalan, 2013). Local actors, then, are those who context-specifically identify as local in such a relationship and context.

This definition effectively circumvents the reductionist and essentialising construct of the local. Nevertheless, it produces other issues, too: First, just because an individual or group identifies as local in a certain relationship and context, this does not mean that other self-identifying locals do so, too (see e.g.

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[5] (see footnote 4)

Sen, 2006). Second, even where others as well consider self-identified locals as local in the specific relationship and context of interest, this does not mean that their opinions are representative for the views of the (somewhat totalized) local at large. Third, identity-based membership (or association) with specific social groups are not single, they are plural (Sen, 2006; Wilson, 2018), and may even be contradictory at times. As such, an entity may identify as local, international, or otherwise in their relationship with a certain entity at the same time.

In the context of NWS, for instance, members of the Syrian diaspora in Europe and North America have frequently claimed to be – and to represent – (part of) the local, for instance in the UN-led peace negotiations or meetings with representatives of the EU and other delegations (see e.g. the SOC in: Mukhopadhyay & Howe, 2023). In similar ways, Syrian 'diaspora' organizations in their relationship with international institutions and aid donors, often do the same.

When shifting the view to individuals and communities inside NWS, however, these aforementioned groups may be regarded as (rather) distant and not 'as local' as perceived by those living in the region itself. In addition, as they are not mandated by means of a democratic election or else for instance, they are 'local-locally' often not considered to be in a position to speak and negotiate on their behalf. For this, the first Syrian Democratic Conference in Berlin in 2023 is a recent case in point, while also e.g. Baczko et al. (2017), Hellmüller (2020) and Mukhopadhyay & Howe (2023) provide additional insights.

(3) Revisiting the concept of "local legitimacy" for this thesis

Based on this, this paper's focus on local legitimacy perceptions calls for additional caution and conceptual clarification. Although the body of research on the notion of local legitimacy has grown in recent years (see e.g.: Gippert, 2016, 2017; Hancock & Mitchell, 2018; Richmond & Mac Ginty, 2020b; Whalan, 2013), many of the studies conducted so far use the term without defining it further (Mitchell, 2018). Others that define it fall short of explaining who the local actors are that are at the granting (Gippert, 2017; Whalan, 2013) or, at times, the receiving end of legitimation processes (Mitchell, 2018).

Whalan (2013, p.6), for instance, defines (local) legitimacy as "the belief of local actors that [in her case] a peace operation and its goals are right, fair, and appropriate". She does not define who these local actors are. Along similar lines as for local actors, the reference to "local legitimacy" accordingly taps into the same debates as those on local and international actors, and requires further conceptual clarification – at least in a study-specific regard.

To not fall into the same trap, this project resorts to a research participant-specific proxy for a definition while encouraging more research and conceptualization to be performed. That is, it considers those as local who self-identify as local vis-à-vis an international(ized) counterpart, in this case the UN.

Therein, the latter is the entity seeking to be locally legitimized and those self-identifying as local granting (or withholding, vice versa) legitimacy. Local (il-)legitimacy herein is viewed as a normative construct in line with Whalan (2013), referring to self-identifying locals' context-specific perceptions and beliefs that an entity's actions, behavior and goals are "right", "appropriate" and "fair".

(4) Adopting a multi-directional perspective on local legitimacy

As introduced in section 3.2.2, legitimacy and processes of legitimation have been a subject of study and theorization for centuries already (Beetham, 1991; Zelditch, 2001). Scholarly attention of the so far predominantly state-centric and "essentially contested" concept in the political sciences (Hinsch, 2008; Jessop & Barker, 1993; Matheson, 1987; Weber et al., 1968) has recently been shifting to other entities than the state as well (see e.g. Duyvesteyn, 2017; Podder, 2017a; Schlichte & Schneckener, 2015 for state actor-focused analyses; Gippert, 2016, 2017; Mersiades, 2006 and Whalan 2013 for its application on UN missions andHancock & Mitchell, 2018 and Richmond & Mac Ginty, 2020c for the case of HDP interventions in fragile and conflict-affected contexts).

Yet, with the notable exception of Boege & Tanis (2020); Richmond & Mac Ginty (2020b) and Visoka (2020), most legitimacy-oriented contributions until now adopt a rather mono-directional perspective on legitimacy. Herein, legitimacy is typically equated with a carrot and stick-free means of attaining compliance and support for the respective legitimacy-receiving entities – such as the state, the armed non-state actor, the UN mission and the like (Gippert, 2016, 2017; Whalan, 2013).

Whalan (2013: p.6; emphasis as original), for instance, argues that the "power relationship between a peace operation and local actors is a social one, [wherein] the reception of power matters; that is, the power of a peace operation depends on how it is locally perceived by local actors." Local legitimacy, from the perspective of a UN peace mission, then constitutes a "source of compulsory power because it 'pulls' local actors towards cooperation: the belief of actor (B) that (A) is legitimate provides (A) with a source of influence to get (B) to do what it otherwise would not do."

The focus of this research project is the other way around: with the UN having been expected to but failed to respond to those affected by the earthquake in NWS, it explores in how far its need to be locally perceived as legitimate prompts the UN to change course. That is, analogous to Whalan, the need for (A) to be perceived as legitimate by (B), after its actions severely undermined the same, induces (A) to change the way in which it engages with (B). What I allege here is, hence, that the power, agency and "source of influence" (Whalan, 2013) is not only with (A) over (B), but bidirectionally as well with (B) over (A).

This bidirectional, relational understanding of legitimacy blends well into the current debate. Among others, Boege and Tanis (2020, Mitchell (2018);

Moulden (2018), Podder (2017b), Richmond and Mac Ginty, (2020a), Schwoebel (2018), Visoka (2020) and Wilson (2018) focus in their recent contributions on hybrid and relational concepts of legitimacy, or in other ways on the interaction between different actors and scales and their overlapping/hybrid and conflicting legitimacy constructs and claims. Exploring how the UN's conduct has changed, as well as how these perceived changes resonate with local aid group members from a legitimacy point of view contributes to this debate from the reversed perspective as most contributions so far have done.

3.2.4. The concept of local legitimacy used in this research project

As detailed in the preceding chapter, this project is interested in local legitimacy perceptions vis-à-vis the changes in conduct undertaken by the UN since the earthquake-induced crisis. In line with section 3.2I accordingly resort to an empirical, descriptive understanding of legitimacy along similar lines as Whalan (2013). As described earlier, she defines (local) legitimacy as "the belief of local actors that [in her case] a peace operation and its goals are right, fair and appropriate within a particular normative context" (ibid, 2013, p.6), whereas the reference to 'local actors' remains conceptually unclear.

Defining local legitimacy as 'the belief of those who identify as local in their relationship with the to-be-legitimised entity of interest that its conduct is right, appropriate and fair within a particular context', my approach differs from that of Whalan (ibid) in two important ways: First, in terms of the specification of 'local actors' wherein I refer to them as 'those who identify as local in their relationship with the to-be-legitimized entity'; and second, in view of the reference to the UN's 'conduct' more broadly than in Whalan's case, a specific "peace operation and its goals".

3.2.5. On local aid group members active in NWS: the designated group of context-specifically self-identifying locals vis-à-vis the UN

To explore local legitimacy perceptions vis-à-vis the UN's post-earthquake changes in conduct, this research projects turns to the perceptions of local aid group members active in NWS. By doing so, I leverage on their unique position as both members of the affected communities in NWS and intermediaries between these communities and international interveners, including the UN. To embed their shared perspectives in a broader 'local' context, such as (Gippert, 2016, 2017) has done in her work on the EU Police and Rule of Law Missions in Bosnia and Kosovo, it would be interesting to involve other (sub-)groups who identify as local in this study, too.

Due to access limitations to NWS, however, doing so is not an option for this master's thesis project. As such, the case and context-specific meaning of 'local legitimacy' refers specifically to the beliefs that 'local aid group members' involved as research participants in this study express in a set of qualitative

interviews. Where feasible, this may, however, also include their views on the perceptions of other individuals in this context, while participant triangulation to validate these accounts is possible through other participant aid group members only.

The designated participant group of "local aid group members" herein refers to individuals who are both (1) members of aid groups directly active in the region who identify as local in this context in their relationship with the UN, and (2) members of the affected communities in NWS at the same time. As for (1), "members of aid groups active in the region" thereby means that they are presently employed or long-term contracted by an aid organization that operates directly in NWS. That is, not through partner organizations.

I notably exclude two groups herein, however: First, individuals who are directly involved in humanitarian service provision, so as to not affect service delivery in the conflict and disaster-affected region in this period. Second, members of diaspora organizations who are based outside of Southern Türkiye and Syria. Even though there are individuals among this group who are closely attached to and emotionally involved in the context of NWS, which is the reason for making this specification in the first place, many may only have limited direct contact to their colleagues and community members in NWS itself.

As for (2), "members of the affected communities in NWS" concerns individuals who currently live or have spent at least part of their personal lives in NWS, and who have relatives or other close relations in region. The specification "have spent at least part of their personal lives in NWS" is chosen to account for the circumstance that many aid group members today live in Türkiye while the border is, for them, quite permeable.

On the one hand, physically, they are, depending on their role, often permitted to cross in and out and may do so even on a daily basis. On the other hand, virtually, many spend most of their working time in direct contact with their peers across the region. My focus in this project is in general on the former group as well as on those who are permanently based in NWS. For language and access reasons, as well as to ensure that female aid group members' views are not excluded, however, not per se excluding the latter group may turn out to be important. In comparison to their male peers, female aid group members rarely cross the border between NWS and Türkiye for professional reasons.

3.2.6. On the legitimacy of the UN's changes in 'conduct' in the context of post-earthquake NWS

In her work on the legitimacy of UN peace operations in Cambodia and the Solomon Islands, Whalan (2013) focuses on (1) source, (2) procedural and (2) substantive 'bases' (see section 3.2.2) of legitimacy. Herein, (1) source legitimacy, by her definition, is derived from the entity's "initial claim to authority,

which, at the local level, includes narrow legality as well as broader normative coherence."

(2) Substantive legitimacy is defined as the type of legitimacy that is derived from the entity's "outputs, or effectiveness". That is, where we find that these "lead local actors to perceive it to be more or less justified, we find substantive legitimacy to be at work. Conversely, failure to achieve its goals or meet expectations can substantively delegitimize an [in her case, peace] operation" (ibid, 2013: p. 207). (3) Procedural legitimacy, finally, "is distinguished from both source and substantive legitimation, observable when the fairness of an operation's practices provides reasons for local actors to cooperate with it" (ibid, 2013: p. 208).

Gippert (2017), in part building on Whalan's (2013) work, differentiates and context-specifically explores the latter two categories, finding the results reassuring and valuable on the one hand, yet in nuances in her operationalization of these terms rather blurred. Drawing on these results, this research project remains conceptually open in terms of what, in specific, may bestow legitimacy (or illegitimacy) from the point of view of the research participants.

That is, by referring to the UN's (changes in) 'conduct', it includes potential legitimacy perceptions vis-à-vis its 'initial claim to authority' (or mandate), its 'outputs and effectiveness', and the 'fairness' of its 'practices' alike. While prepared to probe into these categories where they are mentioned, however, it does not induce the research participants to reflect about them in a pre-defined manner.

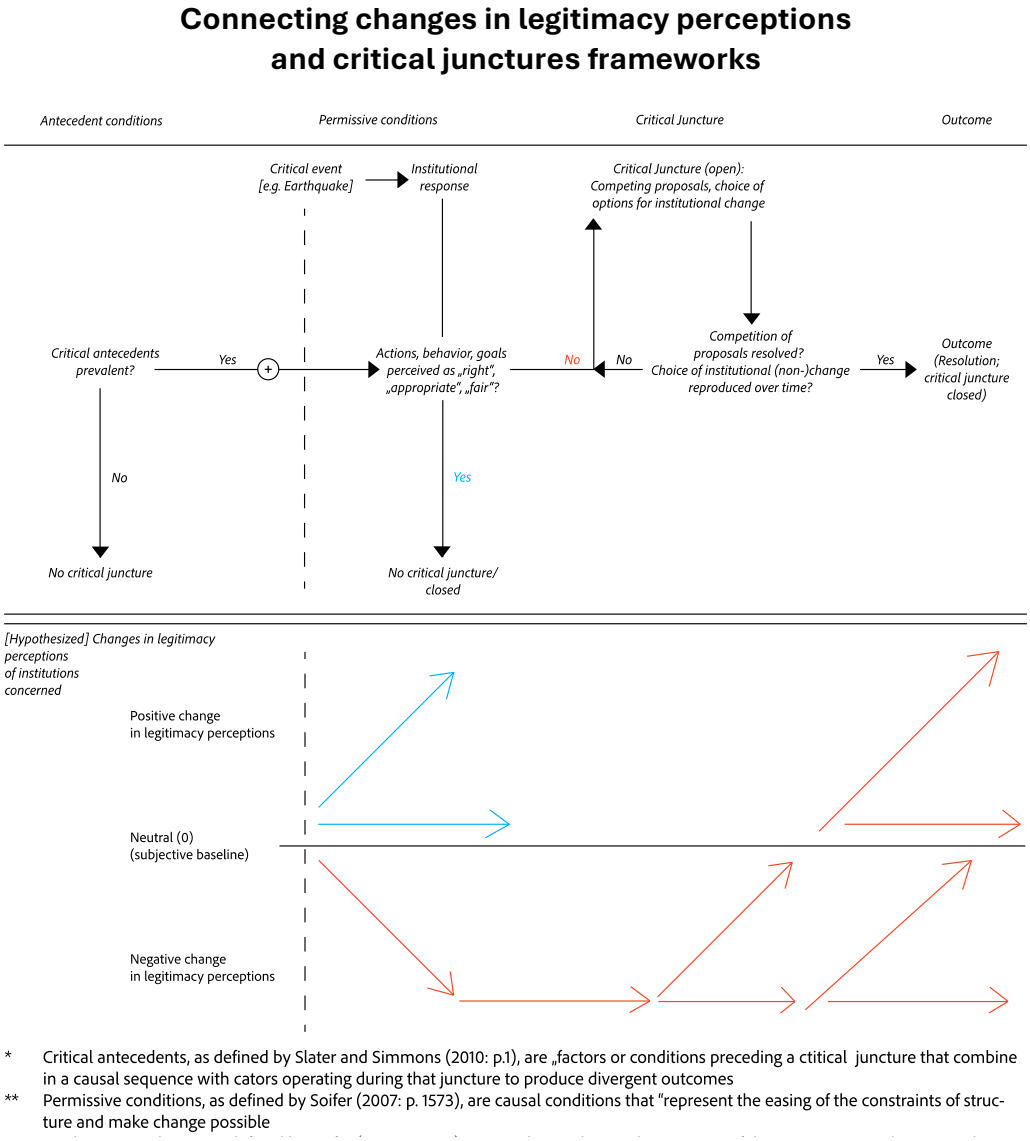
3.3. Connecting critical junctures with the local legitimacy conception

3.3.1. Illustrating the theorized link between legitimacy and critical junctures

The two theoretical pillars that this thesis uses as a basis, critical juncture frameworks and (normative) local legitimacy, have one conceptual nodal point: legitimacy. As described earlier in section 3.1.1, crises – such as I allege the earthquake response drama to be for the UN in Syria – can cause critical junctures to open, making rapid institutional change possible for a limited period of time (Capoccia & Kelemen, 2007; Mahoney, 2000). This is as they "undermine the stability of existing institutions by exposing their inadequacies, weakening their legitimacy" (Sorensen, 2022, p. 7), and allow "for agency or contingency to shape divergence from the past" (Soifer, 2012, p. 888).

The underlying assumption herein is that there is a relationship between legitimacy perceptions vis-à-vis an institution in a given moment and the probability of institutional change to be possible: The more "right", "appropriate" and "fair" an institution's goals, actions and behavior, the less likely it is to change. When affected by a crisis, vice versa, the poorer the perceived legitimacy of an institution, that is, the less "right", "appropriate" and "fair" its goals, behavior and actions are perceived, the higher the pressure and opportunity for it to change, even drastically, in this moment.

This furthermore underlines once again that the term “crisis” in the context of critical juncture frameworks is not to be equated with the event or respective other impulse that comes before a critical juncture opens, such as the earthquake in the chosen case. Rather, as also highlighted by Soifer (2007), Slater and Simmons (2010) and Sorensen (2022), it refers to the legitimacy crisis surrounding an institution that may be unleashed in the aftermath of such an event or other impetus by it being perceived as functioning “right”, “appropriate” and “fair. If, after a crisis-inducing moment such as the earthquake, institutions work well, there may not be a critical juncture and calls for them to change. To the contrary, where institutions continue to work well under pressure and crisis-like conditions, they may even be more so regarded as appropriate and right. Figure 9 below illustrates this theorized connection between critical junctures and legitimacy perceptions.



* Critical antecedents, as defined by Slater and Simmons (2010: p.1), are „factors or conditions preceding a ctitical juncture that combine in a causal sequence with cators operating during that juncture to produce divergent outcomes

** Permissive conditions, as defined by Soifer (2007: p. 1573), are causal conditions that “represent the easing of the constraints of structure and make change possible

Figure 9: *Critical juncture framework with changes in (local) legitimacy perceptions combined*

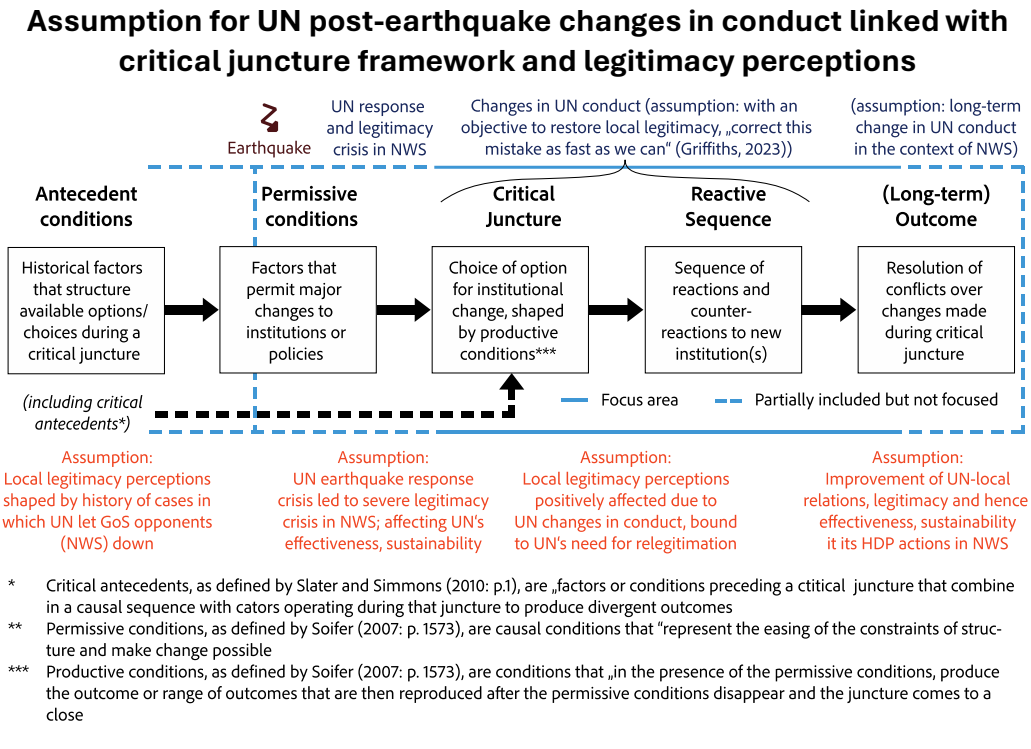
Whether and in which direction institutional change then unfolds and is thereafter reproduced over time, however, additionally depends on other

factors, such as antecedent and permissive conditions as well as sequences of reactions and counter-reactions to the newly changed post-juncture institutions (see section 3.1). Also here, legitimacy perceptions play a role: Where post-juncture changes in institutions are put to the test and do not withstand counter-reactive efforts, they may evolve and change further or change back to pre-juncture conditions, before another period of "relative stability" begins. Where they do, such a period of "relative stability" may begin earlier then.

What is to be considered in addition is thereby that pre-juncture conditions and trends tend to disproportionately influence the way in which the juncture unfolds. Previous studies on other rapid-onset disasters in the context of protracted conflicts confirm this, too (see e.g. Le Billon & Waizenegger, 2007).

3.3.2. Applying the connected framework on the case explored

For the case under exploration, this is important for two reasons: First, as we seek to explore in how for the UN's conduct in the post-earthquake period in Syria is locally perceived as being "right", "appropriate" and "fair", the views on the UN's conduct in the pre- and peri-disaster period can be expected to influence post-earthquake perceptions and need to be considered. Second, locally perceived changes in the UN's conduct, if any, can be expected to work in the same direction as the UN's long-term evolution in conduct has already been (locally perceived to be) on the way.



* Critical antecedents, as defined by Slater and Simmons (2010: p.1), are „factors or conditions preceding a ctitical juncture that combine in a causal sequence with cators operating during that juncture to produce divergent outcomes

** Permissive conditions, as defined by Soifer (2007: p. 1573), are causal conditions that "represent the easing of the constraints of structure and make change possible

*** Productive conditions, as defined by Soifer (2007: p. 1573), are conditions that „in the presence of the permissive conditions, produce the outcome or range of outcomes that are then reproduced after the permissive conditions disappear and the juncture comes to a close

***Figure 10**: Re-legitimation-driven assumption for changes in UN post-earthquake conduct linked with critical juncture framework and legitimacy perceptions*

What I have formulated as an assumption at the outset is that the UN's post-earthquake conduct is set out to change due to its need to restore local legitimacy in the region after its "catastrophic" (Al-Saleh, 2023) earthquake-related disaster response (see Figure 10). However, what these notions suggest is that pre-juncture conditions tend to disproportionately affect the direction the juncture takes. In view of the UN's historic record in Syria of letting those opposing the GoS down (see section 2.3.3), however, this would suggest that changes in conduct undertaken by the UN, if any, may work in the opposite direction as here assumed. I will consider and explore this and other possibilities further where the generated data points in any such a direction.

4. Research Design and Methodology

4.1. Research Design

4.1.1. Research Objective and Research Question

What this thesis is interested in is to explore the changes in local legitimacy perceptions vis-à-vis locally perceived changes in the UN's post-earthquake conduct in the context of NWS, if any. While based on a set of assumptions derived from scholarly contributions around the local turn and local legitimacy studies as well as critical juncture frameworks (see preceding chapter as well as section 4.1.3 below), it does to in an open-ended qualitative and exploratory manner. In specific, the thesis seeks to answer the research question: How do members of local aid groups active in the region view the UN's changes in conduct since the disaster from a legitimacy point of view six months after the earthquake?

4.1.2. Research Sub-Questions

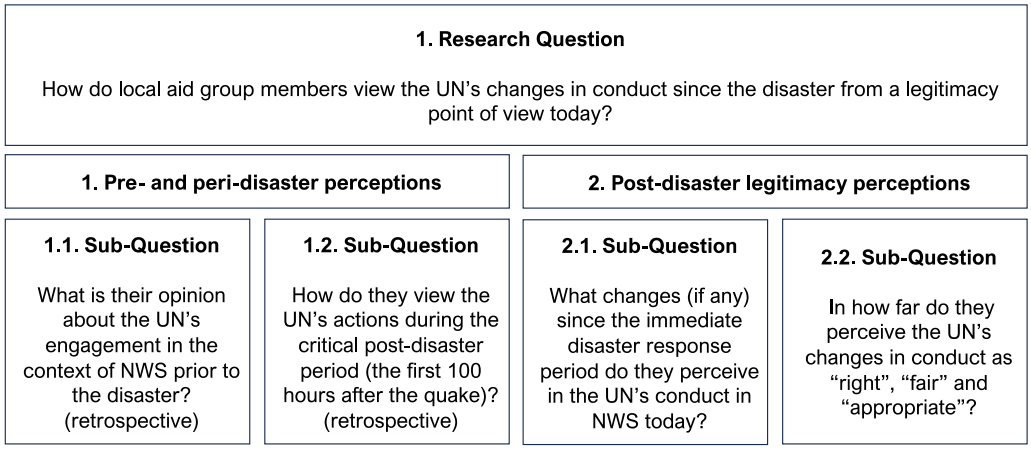


***Figure 11**: Research question with sub-questions. Own figure (March 2023).*

To answer this question, there are four sub-questions that the project is set out to explore. Thereby, the first two are retrospective in nature and focus on the opinions of the designated group of research participants about the UN's engagement in the context of NWS prior to (1.1.) and during (1.2.) the critical

lifesaving post-disaster period. As established in chapters 2 and 3, legitimacy perceptions vis-à-vis the UN can be expected to be disproportionately influenced by pre-disaster conditions and trends (Le Billon & Waizenegger, 2007), which is what sub-question 1.1. is meant to account for. Also, the views on the UN's actions during the disaster period may vary among individual aid group members and influence the legitimacy perceptions of the actions taken individually as well. Rather than assuming a broad-based legitimacy crisis with long-term effects, sub-question 1.2. seeks to provide respective insights into the individual perspective of aid group members, hence.

The other two sub-questions are focused on the local legitimacy perceptions (that is, the perceptions shared by aid group members involved in this study, to be precise). Sub-question 2.1, first, takes stock of the changes (if any) that the research participants perceive in the way in which the UN engages in the context since the disaster, so as to focus the attention on the UN's reaction to the local legitimacy crisis it induced. Building on these accounts, sub-question 2.2 explores in how far the group of research participants views these changes along the lines of being "right", "appropriate" and "fair".

With this, I draw on a descriptive (empirical) understanding of legitimacy (see chapter 3.2.2) along the lines presented by Whalan (2013) on the legitimacy of UN peace missions. The project's interest in "local" legitimacy, equally in line with Whalan (2013) and (Gippert, 2017), is thereby reflected in the views of the group of research participants and in line with the qualitative research design chosen, limited to these.

This does not mean that the data generated as part of this project cannot support making infomed assumptions that go beyond this group of participants and that can be further tested and explored, especially where they are combined and triangulated with other available data sources and insights. However, they only provide insights into the views on the subject matter from one specific angle and moment of time, generated in the specific interaction between the research participants and me as the researcher. To make further generalizations is, hence neither possible nor intended by this project.

4.1.3. Underlying assumptions

The theorized assumptions formed at the outset of this project, although only being used as a general orientation for entering the data generation process of this exploratory qualitative research endeavor, include: (1) That the UN depends on being locally perceived as legitimate – and in the case of the post-earthquake response crisis in NWS explored herein – its local re-legitimation after the "catastrophic" (Al-Saleh, 2023) peri-disaster conduct; (2) That the disaster-induced legitimacy crisis surrounding the UN's conduct in opposition-held NWS is a critical juncture that opens up opportunities for prompt and profound institutional change; (3) That the UN can be expected to change its conduct in

the context of Northwest Syria as publicly declared6 and needed with a view to restoring post-disaster local legitimacy; and (4) That there is a connection between changes in UN conduct undertaken as well as locally perceived, and changes in local legitimacy perceptions vis-à-vis the these changes in conduct.

At the same time, in line with results from earlier rapid-onset disaster studies and the literature review conducted on legitimacy and critical juncture frameworks, I recognize that: (1) With regard to assumptions 1 and 3 listed above, there are different sources of local legitimacy that compete with one another. Local legitimacy bestowed by local aid workers in their role as both community members and humanitarian civil society representatives of NWS may in the context of war and disaster-affected Syria not be on top of the list for the UN. (2) The window of change in cases such as this tends to be relatively small and opportunities for change, even though they open up, may not be seized or counter-acted in a way that they do not become visible outside, in this case, the UN.

Moreover, (3) as previous studies on other rapid-onset disasters suggest, changes made during a critical juncture work predominantly in the direction in which long-term developments have already been on the way. In view of the UN's record in Syria over the past decade, this can be expected to contradict assumption 3 or even work in the opposite direction. The results of the literature review conducted on the context and evolution of the Syrian conflict and crisis at least suggest that in many critical moments, the UN's decisions and those of its respective entities have not benefitted GoS-opposing groups in the past (see section 2.3.3).

Furthermore, (4) There may be discrepancies between changes in conduct made or internally struggled for to be made by the UN or its individual entities and personnel, and changes in conduct perceived and esteemed by the group of research participants. One the one hand, they are limited to external perspectives only. On the other hand, as path dependence theory suggests in line with point (3) made just above, their post-disaster views and legitimacy perceptions are likely to be disproportionately shaped by what they were before the disaster-induced crisis. (5) Changes in legitimacy perceptions are not only

[6] With this, I refer once again to UN Relief Chief Martin Griffiths' tweet one week after the earthquake: "We have so far failed the people in north-west Syria. They rightly feel abandoned. Looking for international help that hasn't arrived. My duty and our obligation is to correct this failure as fast as we can. That's my focus now." (Griffiths, 2023).

influenced by changes in conduct made by the UN as the here assumed reaction to its legitimacy crisis, but also by discourses and practices of other entities.

To take all the above into account, this thesis taps into the field in an exploratory manner, including not only questions about perceived changes in conduct since the disaster but also questions about perceptions before the earthquake and in general. While it uses the assumptions formulated above as an orientation for entering the field at the outset, it remains open for other directions and alternative interpretations, such as those laid out herein. This includes being open to add further steps of inquiry where information generated point into other directions those initially assumed.

4.2. Methodology and research methods

4.2.1. Methodology

As already shining though in the preceding sections, this study is based on an interpretivist epistemology and constructivist ontology. With regard to epistemology, I hence regard the knowledge that the research participants share with me as socially constructed through their interactions with me and with their broader environment (Brandwein, 2013; Myers & Klein, 2011). This is also explicitly incorporated in the research question, which focuses on the research participants' perceptions of changes in the UN's conduct and in how far they deem these as legitimate.

Building upon a constructivist ontology, I furthermore regard "the social world (that is, social relationships, organizations, division of labours) are not 'given'. Rather the world is produced and reinforced by humans through action and interaction" (Orlikowski and Baroudi, 1990: p.5). What follows from this is, among others, that, regardless of whether the UN or any other actor infers that changes in its conduct in NWS were made since the earthquake-induced crisis or not, what matters herein are the perceptions of the research participants as shared in the interviews, that is, in the moments in which they were being co-produced. That there are interpretive moments linked this research and, such as that between me and the research participants in the moment of conversation, me during the (post-)transcription and data analysis, as well as concerning the reader's own interpretation of my (re-)produced interpretations herein, needs to be considered.

What this epistemological and ontological foundation entails is that the results from this study can neither be generalized nor transferred beyond the current case and context. It is the context-specifical particularities and meanings produced that are of interest, both for gaining a better context-specific understanding from one specific (set of) perspective(s). This may, for instance, inform entities such as the UN's in a case-specific manner in view of its declared objective to "correct this failure as fast as we can".

Nevertheless, in so far as these particularities are related to a "common problem" across societies, they may nevertheless be used to inform further analysis and comparative studies, if the research design for any such studies is developed accordingly (Adcock, 2013). This may include inspiring further research on critical juncture frameworks and (local) legitimacy conceptions, such as what type(s) of (local) legitimacy is relevant for inducing international institutions to change in a critical juncture moment and why, and how changes in legitimacy perceptions are linked with and induce changes in conduct by a to-be-legitimized entity overall.

4.2.2. Research methods: interviews and voice note exchanges

As research methods to explore changes in local legitimacy perceptions as outlined in section 3.2I choose semi-structured qualitative interviews. This, I combine with desk research on the context of the Syrian conflict and crisis and the UN's engagement since 2011, both to prepare the question guide and for the conversations, as well as to later embed and reflect on the results. The introductory chapter 2 is a product of the latter as well. Lastly, to follow up on one specific aspect after the first set of interviews conducted that shared across all conversations, I added another step of additional inquiry, resorting to a mix of further interviews and messenger-based exchange via voice notes.

With regards to the choice of methods, qualitative semi-structured interviews are (1) First, particularly suited for in-depths discussions about participants' views on a certain subject matter, allowing to go beyond the surface and dig deeper into what they think and why with follow-up questions wherever relevant points are made. (2) Second, while the prepared structure ensures focus, they still grant the researcher "autonomy to explore pertinent ideas that may come up in the course of the interview, which can further enhance understanding" (Adeoye-Olatunde & Olenik, 2021: p.1). This supports both the exploratory nature of the research project and is in line with what the research question seeks to answer.

(3) Third, qualitative interviews, in comparison to group interviews or focus group discussions, for instance, also allow also sensitive topics to be discussed. For cases such as this, confidence and anonymity are critical, which may not be assured in group settings with several other participants present. Considering that the questions asked concern aid group members' views on the UN, which is probably a donor or at least a key entity in the funding, advocacy and coordination landscape they professionally engage with, confidence and anonymity are key to be ensured for the conversations held. Despite shared experiences, possibly even shared grievances and close connections, aid group members in the same context compete for resources, access and recognition and know each other well, thus disqualifying group interviews as a method here.

(4) Forth, other than interviews, group discussions may have the advantage that viewpoints of individuals are immediately be reflected and (d-)evaluated by a

group of participants who all have relevant insights and knowledge. This helps identifying and prioritizing shared viewpoints while challenging non-popular, individual outlying perspectives. Asking about legitimacy perceptions vis-à-vis the UN in NWS requires a sound understanding of the context, for which such group discussions may be helpful.

To an extend at least, however, in this case I consider myself able outweigh this inherent advantage of group interviews and discussions with my personal background and experience, having worked in the context for several years. In addition, conducting several interviews helps to contrast individually raised points where needed, which may also include specific follow-up steps. This is also a type of qualitative triangulation and, hence, data validation, thus further supporting the research process and validity of its results overall.

(5) Fifth, conducting the interviews online allows for time and location-based flexibility. This is particularly important considering that the group of research participants all are engaged full time in lifesaving humanitarian projects and coordinating work. It furthermore allows reaching people who are based in NWS and other remote areas, to which I would not be able to get access otherwise. As a potential downside, the virtual nature of the conversation my affect the interaction between researcher and participant and rapport built. Yet, with the shared connection of both having experienced or been affected the earthquake and worked for the same context can be expected to overcome any such barriers. This is further supported by the familiarity of this kind of means for conversations that can be expected for the group of participants, as most of the coordination in their professional context is cross-border and remote.

As for the additional step of inquiry added in the process, partially performed by a follow-up interview and partially by voice notes exchanged via an online messenger, the latter provided an option for following up where time or internet connection were an issue. To ensure that language barriers would not undermine comprehension of the questions asked, they were from my side both recorded and typed. There are no research method papers detailing advantages and disadvantages of this method used. Yet, it provided me with a means to tap into the area of interest that I only identified as relevant later in the process with the previously interviewed participants, however, while allowing them to record their answers asynchronously whenever they had a moment that suited them for this. Considering their professional involvement and limited time, I deem this was context-specifically appropriate.

Overall, I conducted interviews with ten members of aid group active in the region, based at least partially in Gaziantep and/or NWS between July and September 2023. To follow up, I reached out to six of them again, four of whom provided my with another opportunity for an interview or responded in written or by voice note to my additional questions. The other two apologized for not

being able to respond, as their personal or professional circumstances would, at the time, not have support this.

The following provides an overview with the different steps taken to conduct this research project, connected with critical events during this period for the context of NWS. Activities for preparation (including initial desk research and question guide design) analysis and text production are colored in yellow/orange. Activities directly related to qualitative data generation (participant recruitment, interviews and the additional step taken for inquiry) are colored in blue.

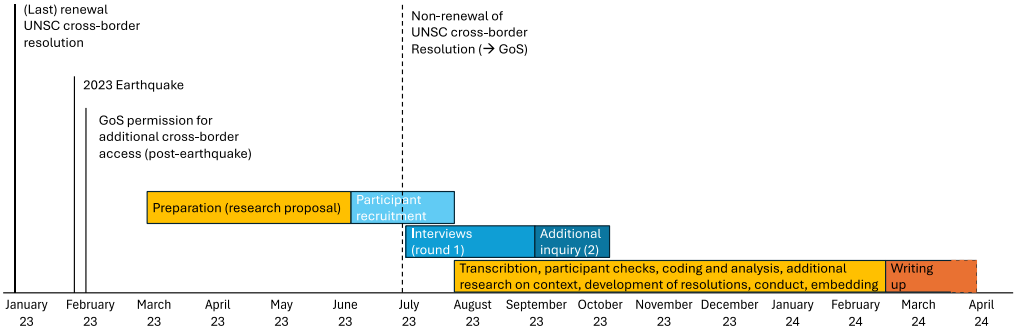


***Figure 12**: Overview of the research process and important events in NWS. Own figure, 2024.*

4.2.3. Question guide for semi-structured interviews

Recalling the research question and sub-questions for this thesis, two central questions are: (2.1) what changes in UN conduct do the participants perceive since the earthquake; and (2.2.) what do they think of these changes in conduct, if any, from a legitimacy points of view. These are further embedded with questions around their views about the UN and its conduct in NWS (1.1.) before and (1.2.) during the critical earthquake-induced disaster period (see Figure 11 above).

The reason for this, to recap, is twofold: first, as elaborated on in sections 3 and 4, pre-established views can be expected to disproportionately influence participants' post-disaster views. Second: Exploring peri-disaster perceptions, even though in retrospect only, helps clarify in how far the participants individually as well perceive the UN's conduct during the critical earthquake response period as a critical failure and respective crisis of legitimacy. That is, if the underlying assumption that it has opened a critical juncture as assumed is supported by their individual views as well.

The question guide for the semi-structured interviews is designed to first focus on descriptive exchange and reflections about the UN's conduct during each of the three plus one periods of inquiry individually (the forth here being added during the interviewing process regarding the UNSC's failure to renew the cross-border resolution in July 2023 as it turned out to be a dominant issue). Only then, they would go into comparing the UN's conduct across the different periods, that is, about what changes in conduct the participants perceive. This is done as an attempt to support accuracy in participant memory and reporting,

inspired by research on retrospective travel documentary and autobiographic reporting (see e.g. Beckett et al., 2001; Bemtsen & Rubin, 2002; Bluck, 2003; Bluck et al., 2005; Brückner, 1990; Burt, 1992; Müggenburg, 2021).

The limitations of inquiring about the periods before and during the earthquake in retrospect only, including participant memory losses and reflections that include and may be shaped by later moments and events, cannot be outweight by this. Yet, as Müggenburg (2021: p. 302) shows, there are techniques that "can support retrieval and response behaviour regarding past behaviour, for example, the choice of even type, memory characteristics and recall aids, such as temporal and thematic landmarks, [all of which may] help improve accuracy". This is what the chosen structure of the question guide seeks to do: to first descriptively recall specific temporal and thematic landmarks – the perceived conduct of the UN's goals, actions and behaviour before, during and after the earthquake as well as, added during the data generation process, regarding the cross-border resolution non-renewal by the UNSC in July 2023.

The question guide used is presented below. I tested it with former colleagues not involved in the research project and revised it with a view to topical and context-specific sensitivity considerations before conducting the first interviews in July 2023. Except for participant 2, who had publicly shared his views about changes in UN conduct after the disaster both verbally and in writing and hence tapped into this area automatically first, all interviews followed the presented chronological flow of questions presented here.

Every interview covered the questions presented in dark blue font (see Table 1 below) and probed into them furthere as relevant and feasible (see interview transcripts, Annex II) Questions in black font were used in some but not in all interviews, depending on both context and time. Especially, I was prepared to skip or rephrase any questions that would address experiences made during the earthquake if ever participants would appear to feel uncomfortable. However, possibly thanks to this being a shared experience between us, none of the participants were reluctant to open this topic. Pressing the participants on any specific context-specific knowledge or details they were not feeling comfortable to share is not what the interviews would have intended.

Probing questions in light blue were only used in cases in which evaluative statements about the UN and its conduct were proactively made by the participants. If not, I used broader questions such as "what do you think about this", differentiated between goals, actions and individual staff members' behaviors where feasible, so as to not limit the participants' own views and interpretations of what legitimacy is and means by defining it as theoretically derived before. The following present an abridged version of the Question guide, that is, without probing and sub-questions. Annex I contains the full version.

Topic	Question/ Content
Starting the interview	Restate research purpose; ask about any open questions; request permission to tape; reference written information provided before
Ice-breaker and professional, personal information	1. Can you start by telling me a bit more about yourself? 2. How did you first become involved / interested in this sector?

	3. What is the most important aspect for you in your work? 4. What is the most difficult challenge that you face in your work today?
[Embedding research topic; segue to 1.2] Sub-question 1.2 Sub-question 1.1. Sub-question 2.1. Sub-question 2.2. [Probing into views shared; reflections on positioning in population/ wider context)	[Beware of potential sensitivity; adopt person-specifically] 5. It has been five months now since the earthquake. Has the situation around you calmed down again? 6. Thinking in your professional capacity about the situation in NWS, how has the situation developed since the earthquake? 7. What do you think about the way the UN acted in the immediate disaster period? 8. What did you think about the UN's engagement in NWS before the earthquake? 9. Did you notice any changes in the UN's conduct since the immediate disaster response period? And (probing): What do you think about [these changes] if any? 10. What about the future? How do you think the UN will engage in NWS from now on? 11. In your point of view, how do people in NWS view this?
Wrap up and recap on expectations for a perfect view on 2.2.	12. In your words, what would the UN need to do in the future to remedy the past? 13. Before we close, is there anything you would like to add?
Closing remarks	Appreciation. Information on next steps and timeline.

***Table 1**: Question guide without probing and sub-questions. Own table, 2023.*

4.2.4. Questions used for follow-up interviews and voice note exchange

As it became clear during the first part of the interviewing process, the UNSC's failure to renew the cross-border resolution was a major issue for all participants – even more so than the UN's conduct and "failure" during the earthquake as it appears. Hence, as described in the preceding section as well, I added an additional step of inquiry, interviewing and/or exchanging questions and answers asynchronously with the participants first interviewed again. The questions used for this in both writing and verbal recording and/or interviewing are presented in the following.

Before asking them via voice notes, there was an exchange of messages about whether the participants would be okay to answer a couple of follow-up questions and if they preferred this synchronously via zoom again or asynchronously via voice notes. Participant 1 opted for another interview and all others opted for exchange via voice notes while highlighting openness to discuss further also via zoom at a later moment. I asked all questions as separate messages and voice notes, so that the participants could respond to them each individually:

Topic	**Question/ Content**
Intro-duction	Good evening. As discussed, here are the questions for following up on our last conversation and the new developments around the vetoed cross-border resolution. I'll number them through, so you can maybe simply answer each directly with a voice note or text, whatever is easier for you, whenever you have a moment. I'm also going to record the questions by voice note, just to make it nicer (more like an actual conversation): Last time we spoke about your perception of the UN's

	conduct and its legitimacy in NWS, particularly related to the earthquake.
Question 1	About one month ago, the UN Security Council did not renew the cross-border resolution to NWS via Turkey. Can you tell me, in your words, what actually happened there?
Question 2	What has happened/ changed since then with regards to cross-border aid and the UN's conduct in the region?
Question 3	in how far does this (the non-renewal of the cross border resolution and the UN's conduct that you relate to this more broadly, if you like) affect your point of view about the UN and it's conduct at large?
Question 4	How so?
Question 5	Is there anything else you would like to add?

***Table 2**: Questions used for follow-up interview and voice note exchanges*

4.3. Research participants

4.3.1. Rationale for selection

The group of research participants, members of aid group active in NWS, is uniquely positioned as both members of the affected communities in NWS and professionals with insights into the UN-led HDP system at the same time. At the same time, my own years-long involvement in this context allows me to both connect to and reflect on the insights provided with the needed proximity and context-specific knowledge, while enabling me to reassure the research participants of save handling of any information shared, based on direct and indirect (i.e. through mutual relations and recommendations) trust-based professional relations kept over time.

Involving this particular group has several advantages: Firstly, they have, as per their profession, broad-based access and frequent exchange with a large number of individuals and different communities in the region and can thus be expected to have broad-based insights into important subject matters and local perspectives. Besides them, access to individuals in NWS is typically limited. The UN and other international entities, hence, typically rely on this group for broader needs and priority-based representation, too.

Secondly, they also have, for instance through the Cluster mechanisms or other fora, frequent access and exchange with other aid group members as well as representatives of the UN. This helps them see and discuss different perspectives and allow for a broader picture view, while consolidating their own opinions, too. Third, as intermediaries between the UN and the affected communities in NWS, they are furthermore used to engage with the broader population's needs, priorities and aspirations, and advocating for them vis-à-vis the UN.

4.3.2. Participant selection

To ensure a high level of validity of the results (Schwartz-Shea, 2013), I sought to involve a context-specifically diverse group of aid group members in this

study. That is, members of different organizations and with different socio-demographic backgrounds, where possible, to allow for effective participant triangulation (ibid) of my results. At the same time, with a view to the sensitivity of the research topic and questions to be discussed, there needs to be some level of prior relation and basis of trust, either established directly over the years or indirectly through recommendations of mutual contacts.

Lastly, with NWS still being in a mode of conflict and crisis, no person involved should be kept from providing humanitarian services. Although their perspectives would have been interesting, I hence excluded anyone with direct aid worker roles on the ground as possible participants. Language barriers would have also made their involvement difficult, presumably, and translation not be something I would have been willing or able to professionally avail.

Accordingly, I use a purposive sampling strategy, which considers both group diversity and adaptation to the context and sensitivity involved. That is, I only involved people (1) Who are not involved in the direct provision of lifesaving assistance, so that service provision is not affected by any means. At the same time, they are to be closely involved in the day-to-day activities, i.e. not distant as what might otherwise be assumed; (2) With whom I have at least basic direct or indirect trustful relationship established; and (3) Who cannot be reasonably expected to be adversely affected by taking part in this research. In addition, my purposive sampling strategy ensures to (4) exclude close friends or otherwise close contacts with whom a separation between the research project and personal life may not have been possible.

What is to be considered in this regard is, that, on the one hand, members of aid groups may not have been willing to share their opinions about the UN and its conduct in the region with an unknown researcher, even where anonymity is assured. This is especially relevant where there is an existing partnership with a UN entity or otherwise established dependence involved, as explained in section 4.2.2 on research methods above. On the other hand, they may confuse the researcher, especially where she is white and European individual, with a donor representative or otherwise as someone with the ability to provide funds or pursue other motives than the genuine interest in the research results.

Both would adversely affect the quality of the interviews conducted. Having myself, however, experienced the earthquake first-hand in Türkiye, having worked in the context of NWS for years while building close relations with hundreds of aid group members over time, the access that I have and can use for conducting this research project allows me to balance this off. Even though what I observe and interpret in this process will be affected by the partially shared experiences between me and the participants, as well as my familiarity with this context and cultural norms, it is what grants me trust-based access in the first place.

That there may be an element of subjective selection bias potentially involved, even if unconsciously done, cannot be fully ruled out. Yet, my knowledge of the context and people involved in turn also allows me to select people from different organizations and background as well as those that may typically not share the same opinions in direct confrontation with one another, which random participant selection or other sampling strategies would not be able to ensure.

Eventually, the group of participants selected consists of ten members of local aid groups, two of whom are permanently based in NWS and the rest either in southern Türkiye or with a base there, while except for three (including both women), having regular physical access to the ground. All ten, meanwhile, have been involved in the context for several years already and maintain direct relations with the UN through the Clusters, other UN entities and/or UN members of staff. Furthermore, they all have regular meetings and other types of exposure with aid workers on the ground and are from and/or have direct family and friends living in NWS still, even though this access is in four cases limited to remote interactions or meetings in southern Türkiye where possible.

The majority of the participants has a health or health-related background, which may on the one hand be explained by my personal access being predominantly in this field as well. It may also be because health professionals are disproportionately represented in managerial positions in the field overall. Except for two, they all work for different organizations and cover or have covered different geographic areas in their work, including the FSA and Türkiye-administered area in the north of NWS and the HTS-dominated part in the south. Eight of the participants I knew before, either from previous joint projects and professional relations, or from advocacy and representational meetings. Two participants I had no previous connection with, but was introduced via otherwise non-involved mutual contacts.

4.3.3. Participant recruitment, outreach and follow-up

All research participants were introduced to the study in a way that I deemed ethically sound while not giving away too much: they were invited by email in written to partake and informed about the research objective, their potential role and rights as participants, as well as data protection and anonymity provisions. For any further questions, which none of them asked, I invited them to reach out any time or discuss them before the interview would start. I also informed them before the interview in writing that I intended to audio-record the interview conducted via zoom. I refrained from video-recording them, in one part to make the conditions as comfortable as possible during the guided conversation, an in another as the video material was not needed for the analysis later on.

With the consent of the participants, the audio of the interviews were recorded and stored in a safe space. As soon as time allows after the interviews, I transcribed them and analyzed them both thematically and narratively, using MAXQDA. All participants consented to the recording, on average covering a

bit more than an hour of conversation. Wherever these tapped into private information not linked to the research question and objective, they were later on abridged in the transcripts.

Within four months after I conducted the first interview, all research participants have received a transcript of the conversation were asked to provide feedback and consent. Through this, I sought to ensure a high level of ethical and professional conduct, academic rigor and quality. By the end of January 2024, all participants had confirmed the correctness of the transcripts and provided consent. I provide the question guide as well as the transcripts in the Annex.

4.4. Data analysis

4.4.1. Thematic Analysis and coding technique

For the analysis of the generated data (interviews, voice note recordings), I resorted to thematic analysis and a hybrid coding approach. Thematic analysis allows to examine qualitative data to identify common themes across the data sources used. That is, it allows to make visible patterns of meaning and topics that come up repeatedly (or not). In this case, these topics and patterns concern perceptions of legitimacy vis-à-vis the UN's conduct in Syria. In specific, this includes points of view about whether, and how so, the research participants view its goals, actions and behavior as "right", "appropriate" and "just". Thematic analysis allows to dive into these perceptions, reveal patterns related to them and connect them within and across the different interviews. Due to its interpretive nature, this method of analysis fits well to the research endeavor and methodology chosen (Flick, 2022; Naeem et al., 2023)

As for the coding technique used, hybrid refers to a mix of both deductively and inductively derived codes for the qualitative analysis. Deductively, I used different types of legitimacy in line with Whalan as categories and differentiated in addition between different periods of time the participants referred to in their narratives. Inductively, I coded opinions shared about the UN with regard to its goals, actions and behavior, as well as other themes that "emerged" as patterns and ideas (themes) during the qualitative thematic analysis process of the "careful reading and re-reading of the data" (Rice & Ezzy, 2000: p.258).

As is typical for qualitative research and thematic analyses (Elliott, 2018; Fereday & Muir-Cochrane, 2006; Moser & Korstjens, 2017; Rice & Ezzy, 2000), I performed the analysis in several sequential steps. The first step already took place during the interview and transcription process, as I took notes that I added in form of memos or in square brackets in the transcripts wherever they provide additional information or contextualized the conversation. In a second step, I coded segments that revealed viewpoints about the UN and sorted by periods of time while adding in-text comments and memos in addition. In this step, I initially also coded references to other entities and self-statements wherever they were used as points for comparison for UN-related opinions. This was done, so far, without using the deductively created legitimacy categories, so as to make sure that no emerging themes would get lost.

In a third step, I reviewed the coded segments and categorized them in the different legitimacy categories used by Whalan (see code book below for detail

as well). In a fourth step, I consolidated the then extensive list of inductive codes thematically and compared as well as, where possible, aligned them between the different time periods chosen as the first level of codes. During all steps of the analysis, I also coded aspects that I came across while analyzing the interviews serendipitously, for which thematic analysis is particularly advantageous (Elliott, 2018; Fereday & Muir-Cochrane, 2006; Rice & Ezzy, 2000). The code book created is illustrated below as well as in more detail in Annex I.

4.4.2. Code Book

In terms of time period, I differentiate between (2) pre-disaster, (3) peri-disaster, and (4) post-disaster views presented by the participants, in addition to (1) specific descriptions about changes in conduct perceived and/or changes in legitimacy perception described when comparing the pre-/peri-disaster period and the post-disaster period specifically.

As all participants named the non-renewal of the UNSC cross-border resolution in connection with the UN's post-earthquake increased presence and engagement in NWS as a critical moment. At the time of conducting the interviews, this had only happened days before but is connected to a long-lasting struggle for NWS (see sections 2.2 and 2.3). This, I accordingly added as an additional time period: (5) Views on UN post-UNSC cross-border resolution. This is also the category for which to explore I conducted the afore-described additional step of inquiry, that is, conducting another round of short follow-up interviews or voice note-recorded exchanges, respectively (see section 4.2.2 on research methods above).

In terms of legitimacy, I differentiate for all respective periods between (.1) Source Legitimacy; (.2) Substantive Legitimacy and (.3) Procedural Legitimacy as bases from which legitimacy may be derived (see as well section 3.2.2(4)). Using these three as deductive categories provides the theoretical basis for the analysis in line with the conceptual framework and focuses the thematic analysis itself. Other codes and sub-codes were created inductively during the analysis process in MAXQDA.

To recap on Whalan's (2013) definitions for these three categories: (.1) Source legitimacy refers to "judgements about the appropriateness of a [UN mission] based on its creation in accordance with appropriate rules and norms and its capacity to achieve its mandated goals and purposes". It specifically refers to its "mandate, design, and conflict setting, rather than its outcomes [(.2)] (substantive legitimacy) or [(.3)] practices (procedural legitimacy)." (Whalan, 2013). Differentiating between these three bases of legitimacy helps focus the analysis and to include all potential aspects of what legitimacy perception may involve.

In terms of additional inductive categories, I coded: (A) "Earthquake – critical juncture", with includes segments that support or, vice versa, undermine the assumption that the earthquake-induced crisis is (perceived as) a critical moment and juncture by the research participants as well (or not); (B) Implicit or explicit reflections about the question "what actually is the UN", as this differs among participants and moments of reflection.

(C) “Multiple crises too much pace”, which contains segments that evoke the impression that with so many crises to deal with in NWS, the participants have a hard time processing them individually. Herein, even the earthquake and the related legitimacy crisis surrounding the UN may (or not) become only one of several critical moments and may not even be the one top of mind for the participants (anymore) at the time of the interview. (D) “(Not) local – (not) legitimate” is a category that I created for passages that reveal connections between someone or something (not) being (perceived as) local and therefore (not) being (viewed as) legitimate, which I came across multiple times as well.

Annex I provides a more extensive version of the code book, including second-level and third-level sub-codes. The MAXQDA file used for the analysis is provided together with this thesis.

1	Changes in views on UN conduct and legitimacy Hints given or explicit statements made that suggest that:	1	Changes in UN conduct perceived Participants perceive changes (or not) in UN conduct when comparing the period before/during and after the earthquake-induced disaster
		2	Changes in views on UN conduct Participants describe that and how their views about the UN have (not) changed when comparing the period before/during and after the disaster
2	Views on UN pre-disaster Opinions and judgements about the UN and its conduct concerning the period before the earthquake	1	Source legitimacy*
		2	Substantive legitimacy**
		3	Procedural legitimacy***
3	Views on UN peri-disaster Opinions about the UN and its conduct concerning the period during the critical disaster response period (in essence the first 72-100 hours)	1	Source legitimacy*
		2	Substantive legitimacy**
		3	Procedural legitimacy***
4	Views on UN post-disaster Opinions about the UN and its conduct regarding the period after the critical disaster response, while not related specifically to the UNSC cross-border resolution	1	Source legitimacy*
		2	Substantive legitimacy**
		3	Procedural legitimacy***
5	Views on UN post-UNSC cross-border resolution Opinions and judgements about the UN and its conduct	1	Source legitimacy*
		2	Substantive legitimacy**

	concerning the non-renewal of the UNSC cross-border resolution (mid-July 2023)	3	Procedural legitimacy***
6	Other/ serendipitous Codes not directly related to the research question but relevant for the topic at large	1	Earthquake critical juncture Segments supporting or undermining the assumption that the earthquake opened a critical juncture
		2	What is the UN Segments that differentiate between different interpretations of what the UN actually is
		3	Multiple crises too much pace Notions that suggest there are so many crises in NWS that there is hardly any time to process them (such as the earthquake even)
		4	(Not) local - (not) legitimate Implied or explicit notions that equate (not) being local (whatever that is) with (not) being legitimate

* Source legitimacy (based on Whalan, 2013: p. 207) refers to legitimacy is derived from the entity's "initial claim to authority, which, at the local level, includes narrow legality as well as broader normative coherence."

** Substantive legitimacy (ibid: pp. 207) refers to legitimacy that is derived from an entity's "outputs, or effectiveness". That is, where the outputs and/or effectiveness of an entity "lead[s] local actors to perceive it to be more or less justified, we find substantive legitimacy to be at work. Conversely, failure to achieve its goals or meet expectations can substantively delegitimize [it]"

*** Procedural legitimacy (ibid: p. 208) refers to legitimacy that is "distinguished from both source and substantive legitimation, observable when the fairness of an [entity's] practices provides reasons for local actors to cooperate with it"

***Table 3**: Code book for the thematic analysis. Own figure, 2024).*

5. Findings

Recalling the research question and sub-questions to be answered for this exploratory thesis project, two central questions are: (2.1) what changes in UN conduct since the earthquake do the participants perceive; and (2.2.) what do they think of these changes in conduct, if any, from a legitimacy point of view (see Figure 13, provided here again for clarification, originally presented in section 4.1.2). As elaborated on in sections 3 and 4, I further embed these with two additional sub-questions to then answer the research question. These two tap into the participants' views about the UN and its conduct in NWS (1.1.) before and (1.2.) during the critical earthquake-induced disaster period:

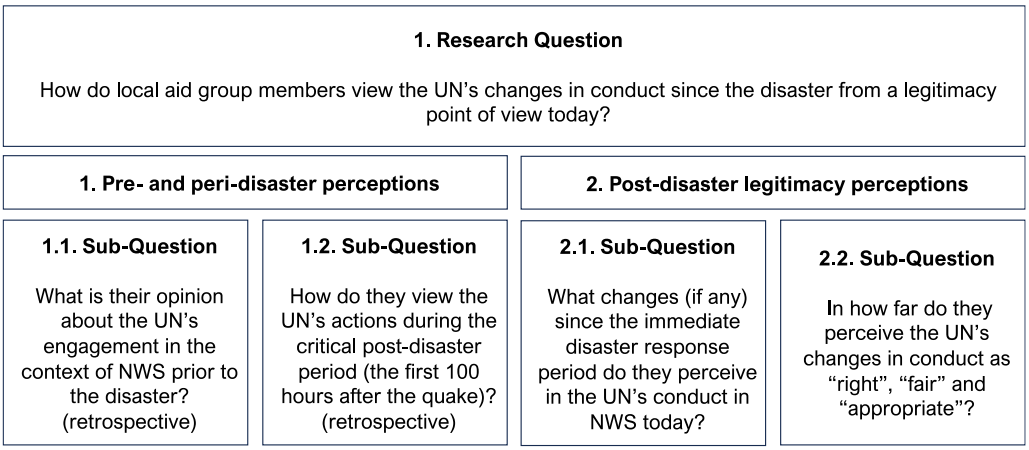


***Figure 13**: Research question with sub-questions. Own figure (March 2023).*

While the interviews in all but one case (Participant 2, see section 4.2.3 for details) focused on descriptive and reflective exchange about the UN's conduct during each of the three plus one periods of inquiry first and only then went into comparing these across the different periods, I here present the results in the opposite order. That is, first: What changes in conduct do the participants perceive and how do they view them in terms of them being "right", "appropriate" and "fair"?; and second: What do they report to have thought about the UN's conduct in NWS before and during the earthquake?

I present the findings categorized by the afore-listed sub-questions in this section for the earthquake-focused inquiry as well as the later added inquiry on the UNSC's non-renewal of the cross-border resolution jointly, so as to keep their interrelated nature as presented by the participants. In the succeeding discussion and reflection section, they are in part as well treated separately.

5.1. Changes in the UN's post-disaster conduct and legitimacy perceptions

One of the key underlying assumptions for the research project was that the UN would change the way in which it engages in NWS after it found itself amassed in criticism and accusations of "bias" and "neglect" after the earthquake-induced crisis. Martin Griffiths' promise to "correct this failure as fast as we can" (Griffiths, 2023) supports this expectation, too. This, again, I assumed to be connected with changes in local legitimacy perceptions, that is, which changes in conduct to benefit NWS specifically after the disaster, legitimacy perceptions would change to be more positive (again) as well.

Do the research participants report to perceive any changes in the UN's conduct, that is, its goals, actions and behavior collectively speaking six months after the earthquake (results related to sub-question 2.1)? If so, what are they? And how do they evaluate these changes in conduct, if any, from a legitimacy point of view (results related to sub-question 2.2.)?

5.1.1. Perceived changes in the UN's post-disaster conduct (sub-question 2.1)

Even though these are questions that I asked the participants directly after speaking about the three plus one periods of inquiry individually (i.e. the pre/peri/post-disaster periods plus the post-UNSC cross-border resolution

period added later), two themes dominated their answers: (1) First: At least for the medium and long-run, "[n]othing has changed" (Participant 1, 2023a: pos. 198). (2) Second: Except for an interim surge in emergency funding, whatever may have changed is not linked to any intentions by the UN to make up for its failure during the critical period of disaster response. To the contrary, it rather is expected to be brought about for other reasons and not in the best of interest for NWS.

(1) Theme 1: The UN's post-disaster conduct – nothing (really) has changed

I asked the participants, first without any hints and later with probing into the Whalan-inspired legitimacy categories related to goals, actions and behavior, weather they perceived the UN's conduct to have changed after the earthquake-induced crisis. Martin Griffiths' February 2023 tweet herein served as an additional anchor for reflection in the last past of the interview. In the course of the interviewing processes, I also included aspects mentioned in earlier interviews to probe into further, where relevant and feasible.

Without any exceptions, the dominant view transported by the group of participants in the interviews is that "[n]othing has changed" (Participant 1, 2023a: pos. 198). Similar statements to this are made by Participants 2 (2023: pos. 124); 3 (2023a: pos. 105); 4 (2023a: pos. 130); 5 (2023: pos. 172) 6 (2023: pos. 62-75) and 7 (2023: pos. 50), Participant (8, 2023: pos. 109) and Participant 10 (2023: pos. 242). Participant 9 (2023a: pos. 78-80) meanwhile acknowledges that the UN's way of engaging in NWS is "better [than] before this [[before the earthquake]. [.] Because they [[the UN]] returned to focus in this area […] they sent big humanitarian aids. It's better than [.] before the earthquake, so it's, now it's better". Yet, similar to the other participants, he concludes by saying "[b]ut we will not receive (uhm) the real needs" (ibid).

Also in response to Martin Griffiths' statement in specific, responses such as the one by Participant 3 (2023a: pos. 104-106) are dominant in the narratives provided: "[N]othing [has changed] […], you can't see, yani [[I mean]], if you compare with what [Martin Griffiths was] speaking [about] and what [has happened] on the ground, [there is] not anything implemented. […] The best statement, only. Nothing [followed/ really has changed]–.". Participant 4 (2023: pos. 172 - 176) describes that the UN was a "failure to provide the assistan[ce]" during the disaster. On the question if it improved in line with what Martin Griffiths' statement suggested, she says: "I don't think so. […] No, no. For [the] earthquake, no.". And Participant 9 (2023a: 42-44) states: "It's nothing for us. […] He apologized but what […] will [it] help us"?

Overall, the picture that the group of participants draws is one in which the UN before the earthquake is the same as the UN after the earthquake. This at least concerns any changes in the sense that the UN has improved in comparison to before the earthquake when it comes to "real" changes, that is, meeting the expectations that the participants have and had already then.

Where there are changes, these are either described as one of three things: either, they are (1) earthquake response-related only temporary in nature, such as the surge in emergency funding; they are (2) earthquake response-related but only regarding issues that came up during the earthquake response period itself, not before. Or they are (3) likely more related to other things than to the

UN trying post the disaster to restore local legitimacy in NWS specifically. This does not imply, however, that the earthquake may not have served as a "window" (Participant 1) of opportunity for any such changes to materialize.

(2) Theme 2: (Temporary) changes in funding, allocations and conditions

While the UN "didn't do anything" (Participant 4, 2023: pos. 80) during the critical lifesaving period in the aftermath of the earthquake, "after the first week […] the UN agencies supported hugely the response […]. At least from a health perspective […]" (Participant 1, 2023: pos. 80). As other participants highlighted equally: "They increased the fund. Absolutely. They increased the funds, yes." (Participant 5, 2023: pos. 179). Their support overall in the immediate aftermath of the disaster was "very very limited […]. But actually, after the earthquake, the fund became good, to be honest. […] Because, as you know, most of [the] donors [.] sent money to help" (Participant 10, 2023: pos. 166- 172).

However, this surge in funding is described to be only temporary in nature, and in addition as not necessarily dominantly related to the UN: "After the earthquake, it was six months, we received a lot of assistance. Various assistance. But after these six months, I think we are coming back to the […] before-the-earthquake situation." (ibid: pos. 180). Furthermore, Participant 10 (2023: pos. 222) describes that "[m]ost of [the] fund[ing] is coming from the international [[individual donor agencies of states, such as USAid]] not the UN. I think the UN assistance is very, very, very limited." Overall and long-term, hence, "[i]n terms of funding, there was no change." (Participant 2, 2023: pos. 124) and also other possibly enacted changes in conduct (see sections below) do "not affect on the volume, or the amount of humanitarian aid coming to Syria. It […] still is as it [was]" (Participant 3, 2023a: pos. 50).

Other participants meanwhile describe the UN as an important donor, while equally supporting the notion that the surge in post-disaster funding is over now six months later and funding very soon expected to diminish again. Participant 4 (pos. 116) for instance says: "[T]hey [[the UN]] still provide the same assistance as before the earthquake. The same project[s] [are] ongoing right now.", whereas "previously, each month, they [[a UN agency]] provided this [increased] assistance. Now they've cut it like, one month, like, once each two months [[instead of every month, they now provide this assistance only over a period of two months]]. […] This is a big issue actually […]. Because they cover a lot of the area in Northwest Syria by first assistance […] for the vulnerable[] people."

At the same time, other participants describe to see "a slight change of the strategic objectives of the allocations itself that comes from [the] SCHF [[Syria cross-border humanitarian fund]] toward more emergency based projects because […] before the earthquake, I think, it was like more and more being developed for an early recovery response, more than an emergency response, but I think just after the earthquake they have this returned back down to the emergency, so there is a slight change in strategic goals also, yes. (Participant 1, 2023: pos. 160). This is equally described by Participants 3 (2023a: pos. 28), 6 (2023a: pos. 102), 8 (2023a: pos. 6).

Lastly, Participant 5 (2023), also with regards to UN-provided funding yet in different respects, adds that she would have expected the UN to be more flexible during a disaster like the earthquake. “There is not much flexibility [with the UN as a donor]” (ibid: pos. 110), however. This is true for it before and after the earthquake, so there is no change. With “flexibility” she refers to the donor’s tendency to accept needs-based (no cost) adjustments in previously signed contracts. Particularly in moments of unprecedented crises such as the earthquake, flexibility along these lines would be important to ensure that what is needed in the moment is provided and what is not (anymore) is not. Other state donors, in comparison, are described as more flexible and better donors for her, hence.

(3) Theme 3: The UN’s physical missions to and presence in NWS

“[W]hat I know is that since the earthquake till today, they [[the UN]] haven't stopped their visits and - their convoys. (.) […] They are going in and visiting all facilities and coordinating with all of the stakeholders inside and conducting lots of-. It's on a […] bi-monthly basis that they are going inside and doing their assessments on all of this and collecting information. And they had, like, two months ago, I think they had this huge meeting in Dar-Salame, I think, with many stakeholders from inside, from the field actually; they asked for field personnel from NGOs and local authorities to discuss about how they can work out this idea of having [.] actual offices inside Northwest Syria.”(Participant 1, 2023a: pos. 82).

What Participant 1 describes with this statement is his observation that there is a noticeable change in the UN’s conduct in NWS after the earthquake in comparison to before. With the exception of few visits to the border region by former Deputy Humanitarian Regional Coordinator Marc Cutts, there were “zero” (ibid: pos. 86) such physical visits by any UN representative in a decade and more. Although the idea that the UN would open an office in NWS was being circulated for some time already, it never actually happened and still has not been implemented by the time of conducting the interviews. And this “is the only change that I have witnessed” (Participant 1, 2023: pos. 152).

This being said, for him, the earthquake has but served as a “window that has been opened” for these visits to now be enabled and conducted “very frequently” (ibid: pos. 96-97). This does not entail, in his opinion, that the UN conducts these visits for any reason that would support the population and NGOs active in NWS or be otherwise done for the benefit of the context. Rather, it has long been planned and is now made possible because of the earthquake, but may altogether rather benefit the GoS than NWS long-term. Participants 2 states something similar, both with regards to that he has equally observed this and regards it as “the only change [in the UN’s conduct] so far” (pos. 124). Also, he highlights, however, that the UN’s regular visits and presence are not acceptable for him with “no clear ToR” (Terms of Reference):

“[W]e don't want you [[the UN]] to be present in northwest Syria unless we have the clear theory in terms of the reporting mechanisms (Transcript P2 (1), Pos. 12). As otherwise: “If we lose the cross-border [access], who are these guys reporting to? Are they going to report to Damascus? And then are they going to be doing crossline missions from Damascus to this space […]? So, this means Damascus will have control. This means there will be information sharing. This

would mean, (uhm) the decision-making would be in Damascus." (ibid: pos. 12). Participant 3 (2023a: pos. 60) shares this view, describing how "you know, you know, they [[the UN]] know that maybe the[re will be issues with the] renewal of – [the] cross-border [aid work] and the cross-border resolution, so if they will work crossline, so they need some offices inside Syria [in the] opposition area to coordinate with Damascus and receive and manage their activities in their hands on the ground."

"They [[the UN]] start, sit with them [[smaller organization in NWS]], and ask, and take some statistics from their side. Also, [they engage in] coordination with the local authority on the ground directly. You know, (UN)OCHA [has] the right to sit with - all military or civilian or any entities on the ground. But after the earthquake they visited [.] Idlib, Harim, more, many cities [.] in Northwest Syria. And [there are] some - - plans [that] they shared with some organization[s] and we heard about this [[[the plans]]], and some of our colleagues spoke about, [there is] the plan to open[] two offices, one in Azaz and one in Sarmada [[both are central hubs in Northwest Syria for the coordination and distribution of humanitarian aid]] (ibid: pos. 60).

Participant 7 (2023: pos. 28) describes this similarly: [T]he UN teams, they start[ed] conducting field visits. Every few days there is a field visit inside Syria, visiting the local councils, the Syrian NGOs in the field, the camps, the –; everywhere. Even they conducted the meeting, […] I forgot the UN agency, with one of the ministries of the Salvation Government [[which is linked to Hay'at Tahrir al-Sham (HTS)]]] in Idlib. So, it was very interesting to have [a] photo [with] the UN vehicles in front of one of the ministries of the Salvation Government. So they tried to have communication with all stakeholders to maybe facilitate the implementing the responses." Yet, "one of our concerns [is] that maybe their field visits were to see how to conduct crossline operations. Because in that time, they start[ed] speaking about [.] establishing [.] two offices for the UN inside Syria. […] So for us, it's very welcome to have offices inside Syria for the for UN agencies, but [only] if their offices are linked to Gaziantep hub, to support the cross-border resolution operations, not to be, maybe, logistic offices to support the cross-direct [[cross-line]] operation [[via the GoS]]" (Participant 7, 2023: pos. 34-36).

A question that is connected with these notions is: why do these missions only take place now and didn't happen earlier? What barrier was there that the earthquake removed? While Participants 1 and 2 allow for some pre-disaster confusion about the UN's permission to enter, or are convinced that the permission must have been given with the additional access via the two border crossings in Bab Al-Salameh and Ar-Ra'i by the GoS, suspicion about the UN's hidden plans and intentions prevails. Participant 2, for instance, describes how he encouraged the UN to conduct such visits in February after the earthquake (pos. 118), while insisting on a clear ToR for future visits and practices in NWS.

Participant 1, meanwhile, refers to security concerns and an unclear mandate about whether the UN was allowed to enter NWS or not as reasons provided to him, which he says is "a bit difficult for a[n] excuse for not visiting" all those 12 years before (pos. 98). Instead, he recalls having heard rumors about the UN's plans to establish its presence in NWS long before the earthquake, specifically concerning UN offices to be established "inside northern Syria, in Idlib […] linked to [the] Damascus UN offices. You see? […]. Eight months before; eight

months before the earthquake! […] [so this is about] [a]ccomplishing the political agenda" (pos. 188 – 192) and not a reaction of the UN to change its conduct for the benefit of NWS.

Participant 3 (2023a. p. 50) also expresses the UN's start to conduct physical visits with a particular sense of incomprehension and apparent lack of benevolence: "And you know, […] they [[the UN]] request[ed] the approval of [the] Syrian government to enter inside Syria […] after the approval, what [do] we see on the ground? What [do] we see on the ground? We see that UN agencies, after 12 years of conflict, they come inside Syria […] Wat prevent[ed] them to come before? What kind of reasons? You know, the people only [.] saw the UN agencies on the ground in 2011, when [there was] some of - violence [on part] of regime forces [against] the people in Khan Shaykhun, and in some areas in Homs (City). And [there, some] investigators from UN agency [came] to see it, the– . (.) I - - speak now about the rebel and opposition area which are not controlled by regime. Only in 2011, they [[the people inside Syria]] saw them [[UN officials]] on the ground."

Equally as participants 1 and 2, he discredits security reasons to be a good for not entering for so long, especially since the earthquake did not change anything in this regard. Only: "[a]fter 12 years (.), after the earthquake, they [are now] still coming every day […]. Their cars come and go inside Syria without any fear. They before spoke that: '[Northwest Syria is] No safe place to go. [There is] No guarantee to save, to protect themselves from terrorism or from military group[s] on the ground'. But they came and they visited and stayed there and met with local organization[s], with local entities on the ground, and they, now they have regular - visits on the ground."

Other participants, meanwhile, confirm that the physical UN missions are a novelty since the earthquake, but on their end do to not connect them to any actual change: "That's true" that UN representatives now visit frequently. "And then took pictures and photos. […] Before the earthquake, they were not coming to inside Syria. But after the earthquake, I saw a lot of UN members, WHO and other agenc[ies], all of them entered, my god, and took some photos and […] khalas [[that is all]]. […] 'Yatik al Afia' [[May God give you health and all the good things – a rather polite way of greeting as well as saying good-bye, including in formal occasions]]" (Participant 10, 2023: pos. 196-204). The UN's visits do "not affect on the volume, or the amount of humanitarian aid coming to Syria. It [did] not affect it, [it] still is as it [was] (Participant 3, 2023: pos. 50)

(4) Theme 3: Changes in post-earthquake coordination and communication

As another change after the disaster, participants 2 and 7 in particular also name a change in coordination and communication between the UN and their local counterparts. This, however, may equally as the one before not be related to the organization seeking to make up for its failure during the critical disaster response period. Nor are all notions in this regard related to a change from the pre-disaster period to today.

For one part, for instance, participant 2 describes how there were "tensions" between the UN and the local NGO community during the disaster response period until recently, if not still now. This, he relates among others to the UN

Gaziantep missions' staff members having taken the accusations and criticism against the UN for its failure to respond to the crisis personally, even though this was clearly not directed towards them (pos. 18). Also, the local NGOs' hesitation to permit them regular access to NWS without a clear ToR, he presumes, may have caused suspicion along the lines of local NGOs having anything to hide (pos. 12).

While regular meetings and closer exchanges of information are described to contribute to easing these tensions (pos. 66), there appear to be grievances still on part of the local UN staff: 'We're gonna retaliate against the NGOs; against the Syrian NGO's in particular for being critical and vocal against the UN' is one of the notions Participant 2 describes to have heard recently, for instance (pos. 38). Yet, both asking and then answering the question aloud: "[H]as the UN's behavior changed? I think it has. I think we are more talking to each other, but there was a lot of disappointment with the UN and again with the earthquake, there was a huge tension, there was a huge hatred to the UN." (pos. 12).

Participant 7, meanwhile, describes how before the earthquake, some key local organizations were not included as members in relevant clusters. This concerns, for instance, the White Helmets (also called the Syria Civil Defense and one of the key organizations in research and rescue operations as well as other health and humanitarian fields in NWS) in the Health Cluster. After the earthquake, however, these key organizations became more actively involved (pos. 40). Recent meetings between the Clusters and these actors are described as "very positive" and the pathway "to improve the relationship between the White Helmets and the UN, the Health Cluster" to be eventually paved.

Other changes in NWS-related coordination mechanism that are described, e.g. by Participants 1 and 7, do not directly relate to actions taken by the UN directly, but affect it indirectly. This specifically concerns the setup of the Aid Fund for Northern Syria and respective "downsizing [of] the amounts under [UN]OCHA towards the new mechanism" (Participant 1, 2023: pos. 152-154). The ANFS serves as "an alternative option [other than the UN funding and coordinating mechanism] to be ready to the period after not renewing the cross-border resolution" (Participant 7, 2023: pos. 88), even though it is probably not as well funded as the UN's SCHF pool fund has been in the past (ibid: pos. 92).

What matters more than the funding for Participant 7, in any case, is the coordination: "it's not about managing the fund. [It's about] being [a] platform for coordination, leading the coordination, supporting the local partners regarding the coordination and to support the localization.". What is more, despite this alternative fund's activation and first rounds of funding now happening in the post-earthquake period, they are not directly related to changes in the UN's conduct in NWS in the post-disaster period.

The same is true for other notions of post-earthquake changes and inter-entity coordination shared by the participants, which may nevertheless affect NWS and the role of the UN. This includes that various states as well as the UN itself are described to having used the earthquake as an opportunity to normalize ties with the GoS and welcome it back as the legitimate state actor in Syria to the world stage. It also concerns the GoS' newly gained powers of prolonging or withholding permission of humanitarian access for the UN to NWS. One regards the two additional crossings in Bab Al-Salameh and Ar-Ra'i that it approved to

open after the earthquake, and the other concerns Bab Al-Hawa, which is permitted to be kept after the UNSC permission was not renewed.

For anything else, the participants appear to be closely aligned in their opinions. Namely, that "before the earthquake, they [[the UN]] are kind of the same after the earthquake, [only] with, as I told you the confusion, of this cross-bording [[whether they will be able, and in which way, to continue operating cross-border through Türkiye in Northwest Syria]]" (Participant 8, 2023: pos. 109). This, however, is not related to the earthquake and any changes in the UN's conduct locally perceived to have been applied as a consequence to it. Yet, due to its dominance across all interviews, it is investigated further as a separate critical juncture and context for alternative interpretation of changes in UN conduct.

5.1.2. Changes in UN post-crisis local legitimacy perceptions (sub-question 2.2)

How do the participants evaluate the changes in conduct, that is, provided that they perceive them as changes in conduct in the first place? Are they described along the lines of being "right", "appropriate" and "just"? And how have their views about the UN in general evolved since the critical disaster response period? What I assumed, as described above, is that the UN would seek to restore local legitimacy in NWS and change its conduct in the region, to which local aid group members would respond with a change in legitimacy-related views.

(1) Views on the UN and its conduct post-crisis – normalization without change

With regards to perceiving changes in conduct, the group of participants shared that "nothing has changed" before. Nevertheless, despite there being no real changes in the UN's conduct perceived, the participants' opinions about the UN six months after the disaster by an large seem to have normalized again.

As such, the group of participants, again, appear to share views such as: "I didn't actually have a different view before the earthquake [than I have now]." (Participant 1, 2023: pos. 110); "before the earthquake, they are kind of the same [as] after the earthquake" (Participant 8, 2023: pos. 109); and "[t]o be honest with you, I think the UN['s] job before the earthquake, [is] as - - their job after the earthquake." (Participant 10, 2023: 242). Participant 2 (2023: pos. 212) similarly responds to the question, whether his opinion about the UN has changed when comparing the time before the earthquake six months later with: "No, not at all. No.".

Participant 5 (2023: pos. 91) underlines that the UN's conduct during the earthquake period has "absolutely, absolutely" affected her views about the organization, however. At least now, she would be more hesitant to apply for funding with the UN, she says, as long as there are other donors who are willing and able to support instead. What plays a particular role in this for her is, according to her narrative, the lack of flexibility they have shown in their funding and programming conditions, despite the unparalleled disaster having led to rapid and profound changes that would have required adjustments to be made. The UN, however, would have remained rigid with contractual agreements, thus, in her points of view, not meeting the needs in a period of drastic change. In

conclusion, she would now rather orientate herself towards donors in the future, who support her and her organization to provide "[w]hat they really need on the ground, rather than follow what the donor wants.". The UN had proved to her not to be the right entity for such endeavors (ibid: pos. 94).

Also other participants' opinions, even where they report them not to have changed between the pre and post-disaster period really, differ in terms of whether they regard the UN and its conduct overall as right, appropriate and fair, or not. For Participant 4 (2023: pos. 140), for instance: "[B]efore, and till, right now, we are satisfied [with the UN and its conduct in NWS]. Actually, just the problem was in the earthquake, which is [a] big problem, because they didn't respon[d] immediately." Other than that, the UN is and has been doing fine. In contrast, Participant 10 (2023: 242) describes its conduct in both the pre- and post-disaster period as: "[t]wo [[[Both]]] of them bad and not good." And Participant 1 (pos. 212 – 220) sees the UN with its global functions and role overall out of place. He would, hence, have them rather "to turn off themselves. […] The whole mechanism [.] to be dismissed […] [a]nd having a new […] way of, like, institutions, for holding these global responsibilities [instead of the UN]."

Participant 9 meanwhile highlights that the UN has played a critical role in the early period after the revolution, but then gradually diminished in terms of its effectiveness and the importance of its role for NWS. Even though he is the only one who explicitly states that the UN is doing better now than before the disaster, he is at the same time convinced that "we will not receive the real needs" from the UN (pos. 80). For him, the UN has a lot of power, capacities and resources at its disposal but falls short of using this and being "really humanitarian" in the context of NWS, too (ibid: pos. 146). That includes for him, besides putting human lives above anything else, to also hold the perpetrators of atrocities and war crimes to account and, as such, as well to remove President Assad's and his GoS (ibid: pos. 66). Despite describing the UN as doing better now than before the earthquake, hence, his opinion about the UN also does not seem to have changed when comparison the pre- and post-earthquake periods.

(2) Views about the UN linked to post-crisis funding and priorities

What are the participants' views on the afore-described post-disaster surges in funding, as well as the shift of the UN's strategic allocations to emergency assistance, where these are described as changes perceived in the UN's post-disaster conduct?

All ten research participants mention the surge in emergency funding as an observed post-disaster change. As Participant 10 (2023: pos. 170) states: "actually, after the earthquake, the fund became good (smiling), to be honest (laughing).". Yet, as illustrated in Table 4, they all as well describe this either as something that is (a) short-lived, (b) not solely attributable to the UN and/or as (c) not a stand-alone phenomenon that matters without it being connected to e.g. timely and effective use. Furthermore, with regard to what the region and people affected by the earthquake would have truly needed, they describe the post-disaster funding pouring in as both (d) coming too late and (e) still not enough (in absolute, needs-based terms).

UN-related opinions regarding post-disaster surge in emergency funding

(a) Only temporary and short-lived	1	Describing it from a structural, long-term perspective: “In terms of funding, there was no change.” (Participant 2, 2023: pos. 124)
	2	“Starting from this month, actually, or I think, [the] previous month, [the] UN office[s] started cutting [the funds] I think. So that’s not enough. Actually. It’s not enough for the beneficiar[ies], for the people in Northwest Syria.” (Participant 4, 2023: pos. 198)
	3	“[T]he general situation before the earthquake was very, very bad and the fund was very limited, but after the earthquake increased and most of [the] hospital[s] were funded and supported. But I think after the six months, after the earthquake, we are coming back to the same situation as before the earthquake.” (Participant 10, 2023: pos. 180)
(b) Not (solely) attributable to the UN	1	“A lot of donors, they start[ed] allocating fund[s] for us, but maybe the best impact [was] achieved through [.] advocacy campaigns. The solidarity from the local communities inside Syria and from the Syrians in the diaspora, worldwide. The main support for us, I'm talking about the fund, [came] from the individuals worldwide.” (Participant 7, 2023: pos. 22)
	2	“Yes, the money, or the fund, which I mentioned it, it increased a little bit after the earthquake. It wasn't from the UN. I mean, [this was because of] other donors, not the UN.” (Participant 10, 2023: pos. 178)
	3	“I think, [the] UN maybe donated some projects, mental health project and other. But, as you know, day after day, the fund inside Syria is decreasing and month to month you may see these big organization[s] decrease 30 percent of their staff or the their fund. [As for the] UN, WFP decreased their assistance from big baskets, food basket, to small.” (Participant 10, 2023: pos. 180)
(c) Not a stand-alone phenomenon that matters without it being connected to e.g. timely and effective use	1	“As I understand from [the] FSL cluster, they, (uhm) as you know, once they shared with us like, a gap analysis, like, [an] analysis for the situation in Northwest Syria. This area [[speaking of Jenderis]], actually, which is the most affected by the earthquake, now, is over–; there is an overlapping in coverage in the assistance in this area.” (Participant 4, 2023: pos. 20)
	2	“They increased the fund. Absolutely. They increased the funds, yes. But, how these funds are assisting the people, this is the way they should […] care more about. For example, the need is changed; the people have moved; there is a lot of […] people who have moved to [one] place and another and the distribution of service[s] there and the response is not fair.” (Participant 5, 2023: pos. 179)
	3	They [[the UN]] sent a lot of shipments inside Syria. They restore[d] their coordination mechanism. But at the end, (speaking as if speaking to the UN): ‘please tell me, [for] how many out of those people who[se] [.] homes were destroyed, you [.] created for them new homes? Tell me how many PT [[physio therapy]] centers for the people they rehabitated to […] have, like, a physical rehabilitation, you have?’” (Participant 6, 2023a: pos. 60)
	4	“In the way of the UN agencies, we should do [a] rapid need assessment, then more in-depth need assessment and then blah blah blah, and then–, and time is passing. Nothing is only

		just –, excel sheet here and excel sheet there; meeting here, meeting there; discussion here, discussion there. And time is passing. To the extent, that in some sub-clusters […] five days ago, […] we finished the urgent response plan for the earthquake. We just finished it. After now seven months. Like, people started to recover or something, so when we finally finished it, I couldn't help to say that: 'So, okay, what to do with this plan now?' […] Really, with we spent seven months to come up with this tool, which we won't need now" (Participant 8, 2023: pos. 45-49)
(d) Coming too late	1	Before the earthquake, "a lot of donors" had already begun to reduce their funding for NWS significantly and there were no prepositioned supplies in the region (see as well: Participant 2, 2023: pos. 22; Participant 6, 2023a: pos. 38) "[W]hen the earthquake happened, imagine that the electricity turned off because it was from a Hatay, from Turkey. [M]any of our hospitals can't work, because we don't have electricity and we don't have fuel for generators." (Participant 9, 2023a: pos. 16)
	2	[T]he golden time in this big crises, I think, [is] in the first three to five days. And this time go away. So they [[the UN]] had –; they sent some medical consumables and drugs and maybe some small devices, but it's later. It didn't help the patients from earthquake. Maybe it helped us nowadays, or any other patients, but in the in the golden time they didn't - - send anything. (Participant 9, 2023a: pos. 44)
	3	Imagine, in the 7th day, he [Martin Grifiths] told [us]: 'Send to us what you need. Send to us your needs.' (With a smile expressing ridicule and disbelieve that this request could possibly be meant seriously). Send us your needs.'. I was angry [[…]]. (In response to Griffiths): "In the 7th day[] you asked me to send my needs and the crisis and all the people who will die, died, and who will stay, stayed and we are finish[ed].". In the 8th or 9th day, some aids enter. General aids and some of them medical, but it's not especially for earthquake." (Participant 9, 2023a: pos. 32)
(e) Not enough (volume, absolute and/or relative to what the UN is expected to be able to provide)	1	"[A]fter the first week when the UN agencies started […] the UN agencies supported hugely the response, you know. At least from a health perspective let's say, they did have a huge amount of, you know –.". Yet, the UN and other international actors are blamed for not having done enough, which is "I think [.] because the bigger you have an as an expectation for the more you get annoyed [[the higher your expectation the more you get annoyed]] and you experience accusations for –; it's just like any […] human feelings for people. So, for example, when I know you are […] my relative and you are the rich relative that I have and I have a cousin who is not living very well, you know, and when I am in a bad situation I will be expecting more from you, like more efficient support than others, so it's the same thing with the UN here." (Participant 1, 2023a: pos. 80; 102)
	2	"[S]o, if the people [are] looking [what is there]: health system not, education not, and food security not and shelter, yani [[what I mean here is]] good building[s] for living, not. On the ground, they're looking to kind of life which respect[s] their humanity. Yani [[That is]], for a human. It's not different between when [there is a] conflict or when [there is an] earthquake or any natural disaster or conflict. So, yani [[you see]] the expectation[s], but […] what they can say [[what can they say]]?"

		(Participant 3, 2023a: pos. 100)
(f)	Not enough (volume, activities relative to other rapid-onset disasters, including Türkiye in current situation)	1 „[A]nyway, the level of support, maybe we can say, […] the amount of support coming from the UN agencies is not as expected from [the] people. We thought that it will be different, especially during the earthquake, but it [is] not; not if we compare with other response [[in other cases]]. It's [.] nothing." (Participant 3, 2023a: pos. 50)
		2 "I read lots of resources from WFP how the UN agencies usually send convoys, like, through the air. They have planes that are dropping aid to those kinds of besieged areas, you know. So I was always wondering and asking these questions, upsetting all the colleagues from UN agencies at that time. I asked them why doesn't our WHO Office in Gaziantep do this what they do anywhere else [[provide aid to hard-to-reach areas by any means, even if by plane]]? I told them: Do the same for these people." (Participant 1, 2023a: pos. 142)
		3 We have the UN (.) at the global level and that's where we have issues, and it's the UN at the global level that let us down. The UN at the global level failed maybe to do air drops (.) or aid, yeah. (Participant 2, 2023: pos. 16)

***Table 4**: UN-related opinions regarding peri-/post-disaster surge in emergency funding*

What is more, a theme than runs through the majority of the interviews conducted is that the participants (f) compare the funding and assistance provided to NWS during and after the disaster to what they believe the UN and the international community would have provided to other disaster-affected areas, portraying the way in which NWS is treated as not fair. This includes direct comparisons with Türkiye, while a comparison of aid and other types of support being provided to NWS and the GoS-controlled region is a general and dominant theme.

Yet, as Table 5 below shows, many participants still view the UN's role as a donor in NWS as important and at least in part making it locally viewed as legitimate (see e.g. Participant 6, 2023a: pos. 88). At the same time, there are some who prepare for and at times seem to prefer a pooled funding (and coordination) mechanism that is outside of the UN system for humanitarian and development action in NWS and beyond in the future:

Opinions related to the UN's role in NWS as a donor (in general)

(g)	Important and contributes to UN legitimacy in NWS	1 "The UN gets its legitimacy from three aspects: [.] the fund that they provide" is one of them. "At least for northwest of Syria, I can say that they are partially legitimate because they still [are] providing some fund

			where it makes the entire humanitarian and local NGOs needing[] to work with them. (Participant 6, 2023: pos. 88)
		2	"But we still need the UN. And we still, we cannot say to this fund: 'No, we cannot. We don't want your fund.'" (Participant 5, 2023: pos. 141)
		3	[F]or the cross-border response, […] if you do some calculation, 50 percent, 50 percent, of the response is by UN agencies. I mean here, fund-wise. 50 percent of the fund, especially in health, […] in health more than 70 percent, is based on UN agency fund. So, other 30 percent by, you name it, GIZ, DHA and others. So, it really will be disaster if they just go away [[if the UN withdraws from NWS]]". (Participant 8, 2023: pos. 55)
(h)	Not as important as other aspects of what the UN does	1	„[T]he coordination mechanism of [the] UN [is] still working good […] So the presence of UN agencies and this coordination mechanism, yani [[what I mean to say is]], [even] if [it is in place] without any [actual provision of] aid, it will help with the coordination and help with this kind of supervision [.] on the humanitarian response in Northwest Syria." (Participant 3, 2023a: pos. 78)
		2	„The UN gets its legitimacy from three aspects: From the fund that they provide; from the actions they do, which is mainly the coordination. And from the governance they provide." With regards to finding, they "still [are] providing something". Regarding the coordination, they are "leading" it. […] During the earthquake response it became clear that they "were the only entity that it is legitimate to do coordination. If that coordination will be done by Syrians, maybe, I do not know, maybe it will be worse. Maybe it will be better." (Participant 6, 2023a: pos. 89 – 93)
		3	When the alternative fund for NWS, the AFNS, ist activated, in case the UN leaves, its role as a donor can be outweighed to an extent. What will be more difficult to replace is the "[c]oordination, the technical capacity they have, and the advocacy […]. Having, yani [[I mean]], the existence of [the] UN in this area make[s] the advocacy easier for the–; any need for this area." (Participant 7, 2023: pos. 55)
		4	The UN has for more than a decade served the humanitarian community in NS as "the only platforms who were responsible [.] [for] the response, coordination-wise, technical support-wise as well […]. We need those platforms. We cannot work without them [yet]." (Participant 8, 2023: pos. 41 - 55)
(i)	Not as important and consequential as that of other donors	1	Most of fund is coming from the International, not the UN. I think the UN - assistance is very, very, very limited. Not good. So you can see, USAid, DHA, GIZ, DFID, ECHO, these [are] the main donors to the Syrian sectors. If one of these donors stop, you will see the disaster. But the –; if [the] UN stop their assistance, no change in the situation, because their fund is very limited. (Participant 10, 2023)
(j)	Not used effectively	1	„Look to the Humanitarian Needs Overview in the last three years and you will see how much the [[[number of]]] people in need they are increasing in Syria a year after year, which is really not understood unless those

		humanitarian aids, (.) either they are aid diverted or they are not used in a proper way, or they are not real, or uh they are without a clear planning or a good planning and design, which makes them always to be diverted or (.) not reaching to the people in a correct way“ (Participant 6, 2023b: pos. 8)
(k) Not enough (volume, absolute)	1	Before the earthquake, “a lot of donors” – including UN agencies – warned us that “in the beginning of 2023, [.] ‘we will decrease all our funds for ‘Siri’ [[Syria]]’. Maybe 30 percent, 40 percent, et cetera”. It is not enough. (Participant 9, 2023a: pos. 16)
	2	“[S]o, if the people [are] looking [what is there]: health system not, education not, and food security not and shelter, yani [[what I mean here is]] good building[s] for living, not. On the ground, they're looking to kind of life which respect[s] their humanity. Yani [[That is]], for a human. It's not different between when [there is a] conflict or when [there is an] earthquake or any natural disaster or conflict. So, yani [[you see]] the expectation[s], but […] what they can say [[what can they say]]?” (Participant 3, 2023a: pos. 50)
(l) not enough (relative to what is provided to the GoS)	1	“If you think that we are fully humanitarian, you are wrong and the UN is playing a huge role in really putting us into that, a kind of political war with the regime, about the number of the beneficiaries, about the services, about the shipments coming crossline, cross-border, about the amount of the fund coming out of the 2.3 billion last year, how much the regime should take and how much we should take. And the HNO [[humanitarian needs overview]], the HRP [[humanitarian response plan]]. You know that last year, we worked without HRP because the regime would not approve the HRP? […] And the UN implemented one year completely without having [an] HRP for the country. Because the regime did not approve the HRP.” (Participant 6, 2023a: pos. 44-48)
	2	“[I]f you're looking to a location [under the control of the] Syrian government […] and [to] Northwest, […] [i]f you compare this […], if you divide the population in this [[the UN’s]] allocation[s], it must be different at the real [[in reality]] on the […] ground. So, we will [not] know what [are] the criteria of allocation[s] for this this area.” (Participant 3, 2023a: pos. 86)
	3	“Okay, you [the UN] are - - giving funds to support the people [.] inside the Northwest [of] Syria and, at the same time, you go and you are supporting (.) the Syrian regime, who is the reason for this war, the other party (laughing with a clear touch of frustration and questioning the justification for this). How come?“ (Participant 5, 2023: pos. 227)
(m) to be replaced; or at least, alternative options for this need to be and are being considered	1	“[N]ow [with] the AFNS [[Aid Fund for Northern Syria]] mechanism, […] the funding communities and the international NGOs, they can have an alternative mechanism of supporting with aid and humanitarian and development mechanisms worldwide […] I think it's better now to think about establishing another mechanism of institutional, [I mean, another] international mechanism, to work out all of their [[donors]] collective, you know, pooling funds” (Participant 1, 2023a: pos. 228-230)
	2	“[Y]ou know that there is a[n] alternative mechanism of managing the fund, ANFS. […] I think it's somehow, it's,

		yani [[what I mean to say is that]], an alternative option to be ready to the period after not renewing the cross-border resolution, but […] we discussed that internally, and we agree that it's not about managing the fund. [It's] about being [a] platform for coordination, leading the coordination, supporting the local partners regarding to the coordination and to support the localization. In Northwest of Syria and in other areas of Syria. (Participant 7, 2023: pos. 88)
	3	"If [the cross-border] resolution will not continue [[and, hence, the UN withdraw from providing aid cross-border to Syria]], there is some solutions by donors, who they establish [the] AFNS, which will be the second solution for [[instead of]] UN agencies or WHO or OCHA. […] [T]he donors will put their money in this institution and after that, we will take the priorities from inside [Syria] and we will send this money to NGOs or INGOs to make this project inside Syria. But this solution maybe takes some time to start." (Participant 9, 2023b: pos. 4)

***Table 5**: Opinions related to the UN's role in NWS as a donor (in general)*

In terms of the shift in the UN's strategic allocations from a mix of emergency and early recovery before the disaster to only emergency assistance that some of the participants refer to, they describe it in one respect as: (g) a normal and expected shift: "It's been like bouncing [back and forth], from time to time in northwest Syria.", while it is "not a very, very substantial change that happened" in the first place (Participant 1, 2023a: 152).

In other respects, however, participants (h) discredit it for not being enough for NWS in the current situation (any more): "[Y]es, we need emergency response, but at the same time, the people need recovery, early recovery" (Participant 3, 2023a: pos. 86). Table 6 below provides an overview of opinions shared about changes in UN allocations and programming priorities.

UN-related opinions connected to peri-/post-disaster changes programming

The post-disaster shift in allocations is	#	Quotes by participants (excerpts)
(n) Normal and expected, including for the context of NWS writ large	1	After the earthquake, the SCHF's allocations went back to emergency rather than recovery, which is a "slight" change. Yet, it "was bouncing [back and forth] as you remember, it was bouncing [back and forth]" all the time in the context of NWS. (Participant 1, 2023a: pos. 162)
	2	In the past, "[w]e tried to [do activities that would allow us to contribute to] the early recovery phase, but unfortunately, we are facing a lot of challenges doing this. Always the – fund[ing] part [[lack of funding for such endeavours]], or partners are not really interested anymore or supporting [these activities]. Also, since 2020, we […] were trying to push ourselves to the early recovery phase, but then COVID-19 came back to emergency response again and then an earthquake and then cholera, so we are facing a lot of different nature-made, man-made, I don't know, fund-made crises dragging us down again to the emergency response,

		starting from [.] scratch to figure out what's going on and how to respond again." (Participant 8, 2023: pos. 6)
	3	Early recovery in the immediate post-disaster period is what would not be expected from the UN. Such as that "the last allocation [was] (raising the voice and with an expression of disbelieve in the voice) focusing in education and early recovery?! (.) After [the] earthquake?! (Imitating to speak to the UN): 'You want to focus on education and early recovery? What the fuck?! I mean, so, who, I mean, who reported this to you? Who is the one who reported these needs to you? To do this?" (Participant 8, 2023: pos. 41)
(o) Not enough for NWS (anymore at this stage)	1	"[W]e need emergency response, but at the same time, the people need recovery, early recovery […].You know now some children cannot say their names. Sometimes they cannot [calculate] one plus one, they [don't] know what [is] the result[]. […] So the 5 million [.] people [in] Northwest Syria need this kind of response […]. UN agencies, when you're speaking about UN agencies, you're speaking about emergency only. About emergency. 12 years you're speaking about emergency. But this kind of emergency [is] also not enough. Not enough." (Participant 3, 2023a)
	2	"'Humanitarian, humanitarian, humanitarian'. Tamam [[Okay]]! You are speaking about early recovery. Let us do some early recovery for help, enough for humanitarian [only]. Let us see how we can go toward development." (Participant 6, 2023: pos. 102)

***Table 6**: UN-related opinions connected to peri-/post-disaster changes in UN programming*

(3) Changed views about the UN linked to post-crisis physical missions to NWS

The group of participants is united in that are aware that the UN has begun to conduct physical missions to northwest Syria after the earthquake. This, they say, did not happen this way despite the decade-long presence and humanitarian mandate of the entity in the region, except for exceptional visits of few UN representatives to the border region in recent years:

"You know, [before the earthquake] it only happened when Mark Cutts [[the former United Nations Deputy Regional Humanitarian Coordinator]] […] broke the habit of the UN and he actually visited […] two or three times in his life while he was working in Gaziantep. But, actually, there were zero visits from any other staff of UN agencies, you know. But still, […] even for Mark Cutts, his visits were very, very limited to very near places of the border itself" (Participant 1, 2023a: pos. 88).

How do the participants describe the now regular physical visits of UN representatives in NWS from a legitimacy point of view? That is, do they regard them as something that is "right", "appropriate" and "just", or rather something that is different if not the opposite of this? As Table 7 shows, those participants who share their thoughts and viewpoints about this matter see both potential for the former and the latter. However, concerns that these physical visits benefit the GoS rather than NWS and the Gaziantep-based NGO community, be this intended by the UN or not, predominate:

UN-related opinions connected to post-disaster physical visits of UN to NWS

The physical visits that the UN conducts to NWS since the disaster are…	#	Quotes by participants (excerpts)
(a) Maybe positive for humanitarian action and the population in NWS in the future	1	"[W]hen the UN agencies come to [the] field and see [the] needs of [the] people on the ground, and when they visit markets, and visit villages, and see the infrastructure and see the people, and see the schools, see the children, woman[] and others. And when they see how [is] the projects' implementation […] [i]t's very good because […] before, we [did] not have evidence, […] [only what was] reported to us, [they did] not see [it] by [there] own eyes." (Participant 3, 2023a: pos. 62)
	2	"[S]ome considered [that] all the people [who] live in Northwest Syria they are terrorists. Sometimes [they see] that HTS control[ls] all area and [that it is] very difficult to work there and [that there is] interference [in] all activities […]. When they (.) visited many cities on the ground and feel it and see it, maybe [it] changes the political position and on the humanitarian [response] maybe in the future." (Participant 3, 2023a: pos. 62
	3	[W]e always called for UN presence as in protection by presence. And they never honored that interaction by persons, and they were never willing to go in. Because you remember […] we always had our facilities being bombed and they would just deny it. And you say: 'look, if only the UN were here, they would come immediately and verify [it].'" (Participant 2, 2023: pos. 2 – 12)
	4	"One hundred times we told them: "guys, why you are not going in?". They went in only for several visits, occasions after what happened at the earthquake, just to show themselves between the camps. But why you are not in? Why we do not have, like, an office in Azaz, or in Sarmada, or in Idlib [[three larger cities and also the central hubs in NWS for coordinating and operating humanitarian assistance]]? This is really hampering your work. We want you to be in!" (Participant 6, 2023a: pos. 54)
	5	"[W]hen the UN agencies they start[ed] conducting field visit[s] to inside Syria, (.) we were so happy […] That they start going to inside Syria; to be in touch directly with the people inside Syria. (Participant 7, 2023: pos. 18)
(b) Not having any real effect on the ground (so far); expectation that physical UN missions would have some effect along the lines of what NWS needs (i.e. is "right", "appropriate" and "just") at least	1	"Maybe in the future [it] will help, but for now, you know, [there is] no difference on the ground". At least so far, they do "not affect on the volume, or the amount of humanitarian aid coming to Syria. (Participant 3, 2023a: pos. 55; 62)
	2	"Their [[the UN's]] visits […] inside Syria, for example, didn't help in the advocacy for renewing the cross-border resolution. Their staff, they saw [.] the suffering of the people in the field, inside [[Northwest]] Syria, and they visited the camps, they visited the hospitals, the other public facilities and maybe, I don't know. We expected that they will share this information [.] and [that] they will advocate in [a] better way for renewing the cross-border resolution. But? Nothing happened in this domain. (Participant 7, 2023: pos. 36-38)
	3	Before - the earthquake, they [[the UN]] were not coming to inside Syria. But after the earthquake, I saw a lot of UN

		members, WHO and other agenc[ies], all of them entered, my god, and took some photos and [[…]] khalas [[that's it]]. (Participant 7, 2023)
(c) Not coordinated with the NGO community of the NWS (Gaziantep) hub and hence, not okay this way or at least received with hesitation and suspicion	1	"When the GoS gave the UN permission to enter after the earthquake, the 'UN decided: 'Okay, now we can go in. We want to establish a presence in northwest Syria.'. […] [W]e [[the Syrian NGO alliance]] always called for UN presence […] and they were never willing to go in. […] [N]ow, because Assad told them [[the UN]] 'you could come in', and they just decided to go in, we said: 'no'. […] To be clarified between the UN and the NGOs would need to be in particular: the reporting mechanisms between the UN and actors based in NWS, especially in case the cross-border resolution is not renewed at some point; and (2) How and what for UN officials may approach local entities and NWS-based staff members of the respective Gaziantep-based NGOs, and what needs to be dealt with at Gaziantep level. (Participant 2, 2023: pos. 2 – 12; 212)
	2	We observed on the ground that the UN agencies, from the beginning of the earthquake, started visits to Syria and their coordination […] [was] with the small local association[s] on the ground and their visits not totally coordinated with the organization[s], big organizations or big partners. And they visit facilities, they visited some areas affected by earthquake, or the big facilities on the ground, as maybe, I mean, hospitals, big hospitals and the big health facilities. So, I think […] they started to prepare, started to establish inside Syria, and [there are] some rumours about [that] they decided to open offices, one in Sarmada and one in Azaz. (Participant 3, 2023b: pos. 6)
	3	By now (August 2023), the UN „visited Northwest Syria more than ten times. […] [[Until now, the White Helmets and other actors as well have been]] waiting for one time, just to communicate, [[for the UN to]] communicate with [[the]] team. And since [[it is organizations such as the White Helmets who]] are the first responders for such kind of disasters, (.) also, it was also for us [a] question mark why they didn't ask […] to have a meeting […]. Every time, we see that [[these long-established organizations have the suitable infrastructure and]] are ready to share it with everyone, to have [a] better response, to have better services, to conduct better services to the beneficiaries." After escalating this situation, "I think, the situation [is] somehow […] better". (Participant 7, 2023: pos. 18)
(d) Supporting the GoS (be it intentionally or unintentionally), and hence not right, appropriate or fair for NWS	1	"[I]t was earlier and very long time planned for. […] [E]ight months before earthquake [.] they [[UN local staff members]] were [[discussing ideas to]] have UN offices inside northern Syria, in Idlib, […] linked to [the] Damascus UN offices." In this sense, being present in NWS can be seen as a step towards [a]ccomplishing the political agenda. [.] […] I think that it's very, very naïve not to expect this [[that the UN would follow the political agenda of state actors]] because we remember back again that all of the system, the UN agencies are built on an agreement, [an] international agreement of (.) governments, to establish this institution, right?" This, again, is linked to one of the beliefs that "Syrians" have, who "never reached the point to believe […] who and how they are supported from, the entities or the global

		community […]. [S]o, the UN agencies, they have been in the picture very early already, like, in 2016, to be […] actually conducting an agenda to supporting Assad themselves." (Participant 1, 2023b: pos. 106; 188-192)
	2	I think if it wasn't for that golden handshake [[between Martin Griffiths for the UN and President Al-Assad for the GoS, agreeing on the GoS to give the UN permission for additional cross-border access to NWS post-disaster]], we wouldn't have lost the [cross-border] resolution in my view, so [.] that made a negative impact in our view, as the NGO community. (Participant 2, 2023: pos. 2)
	3	'[W]e don't want you [[[the UN]]] to be present in Northwest Syria unless we have the clear […] reporting mechanisms. If we lose the cross-border [resolution-based permission to operate cross-border from Turkey], who are these guys reporting to? Are they going to report to Damascus? And then are they going to be doing crossline missions from Damascus to this space […]. So this means Damascus will have control. This means there will be information sharing. This would mean, the decision-making would be in Damascus, so this is where the objection came, and this is where the tension came. (Participant 2, 2023: pos. 2 – 12)
	4	[A]fter the earthquake, they gained opportunity to see more […]. Before the earthquake they cannot visit because […] there [is] no[] approval from the regime. So after the earthquake they [[the UN]] came, and saw if they can work or not. Especially […] they know that maybe the[re will be issues with the] renewal of […] the cross-border resolution, so if they will work crossline, so they need some offices inside Syria [in the] opposition area to coordinate with Damascus and receive and manage their activities in their hands on the ground." To establish offices in NWS for this purpose is what is being circulated after meetings that the UN has had with "some small committees on the ground, with some organization[s] […] very small, not registered in Turkey […] [and] coordination with the local authority on the ground directly.". "If the Gaziantep hub close[s] and only in Northwest Syria [there are] offices for UN agenc[ies], it has, you know, representative[s] of the UN in Damascus. They [the offices] will […] only [be] implementer[s] of [the UN in Damascus]", for the better of the worse. (Participant 3, 2023a: pos. 60; 80)
	5	"I see from my opinion [.] that in the future […] they [[the UN]] will start a new mechanism, especially after the […] their visits to Syria and they show that they are on the ground. And […] [t]hey [[the UN]] will coordinate with the whole of Syria in Damascus, but it also need the acceptance of local authority to cross the convoys from regime area to opposition area cross-lines." (Participant 3, 2023b: pos. 6)
	6	[O]ne of our concerns [is] that maybe their field visits were to see how to conduct crossline operations. Because in that time, they start[ed] speaking about [.] establishing [.] two offices for the UN inside Syria. […] [F]or us, it's very welcome to have offices inside Syria for the [.] UN agencies, but [only] if their offices are linked to Gaziantep hub. To support the cross-border resolution operations, not to be maybe logistic offices to support the […] cross-line operations"

	(Participant 7, 2023: pos. 34-36)

***Table 7**: UN-related opinions connected to post-disaster physical missions of the UN to NWS*

(4) Changed views about the UN linked to post-crisis coordination

As depicted in section 5.1.1(4) some of the participants state that there are differences in the cluster coordination and/or the mode of communication between them and the UN since the earthquake. Do they regard these changes as "right", "appropriate" and "fair", or offer any other views on them? And have they affected their opinions about the UN's conduct overall?

Participant 2 speaks of several "tensions" between the NGO community in Gaziantep and the UN during and after the crisis. He points out on several occasions during the interview that "I want to make clear [.]: "We have two different issues. We have the UN at the global level and that's where we have issues, and it's the UN at the global level that let us down. The UN at the global level failed maybe to do air drops or aid, yeah. We don't want to blame the UN in Gaziantep because they were in the same boat as everyone else." (Participant 2, 2023: pos. 16). If and in how far their relationship developed further remains unclear, however. While the narrative, given the many aspects named in which "tensions" occurred and "the air" needed to "cleared" suggests that this kind of interaction and relationship is not new, it also is unclear if his point of view changed based on the exchange they have had in this period.

Participant 7, meanwhile, presents himself positive about the recent meetings and inclusion of certain key organizations in relevant UN Clusters. Being part of these clusters, he says, is very important for coordinated action. Although the tensions between organizations he is involved with and the UN only started when the earthquake-induced crisis began (Participant 7, 2023: pos. 18-20), their non-(active-)inclusion in the Cluster was established before the disaster already. Hence in this case, the change in relationship and inclusion in relevant clusters constitutes a change, attributable to the UN and the earthquake situation, and is described as being viewed positively by Participant 7.

5.2. Pre-disaster legitimacy perception vis-à-vis the UN (sub-question 1.1.)

As outlined in chapters 3, 4 and 5, pre-established conditions do not only matter disproportionately for the direction that a critical juncture takes (Le Billon & Waizenegger, 2007; Soifer, 2012; Sorensen, 2022). They can also be assumed to matter disproportionately with regards to how viewpoints and changes in legitimacy perceptions are shaped. What, hence, do the interviews reveal about the participants' opinions vis-á-vis the UN and its conduct in Syria before the earthquake-induced disaster?

Do they regard (1) its stated goals and mandate, as well as its capacity to attain and fulfill these as appropriate (source legitimacy)? How do they evaluate its (2) performance and how this performance is justified (substantive legitimacy)? And (3) do they regard its "procedures for making decisions and exercising power" (Whalan: p. 161) as right, appropriate and just? While I analyzed this in some depths and will probably use the results in a separate paper, a summary of the findings suffices for the purpose of this thesis. And that is: the overall picture

here is mixed, with the majority of participants seeing both positive and negative things in the role the UN has played in the context of NWS over the years.

As for (1) Source legitimacy, there are no notions provided in the interviews that would directly evaluate whether the UN's mandate and goals are congruent to local preferences. Part of the reason why appears to be that there is no clarity about what its goals and mandate are. It is expected to ensure coordination and funding for humanitarian emergencies, be they human or nature made, but does this entail having liberties of crossing national borders without the UNSC's permission, as suggested by Participant 1 (2023a) and 5 (2023)? And in view of the earthquake, does the UN have the means and mandate to support with air drops, for instance (see expectations of Participant 1(2023a), 2(2023) and 3(2023a)?

Would it have had to be more prepared for such a disaster in the first play, given that NWS is a high-risk zone for earthquakes, such as suggested by Participant 7, 2023), including by ensuring adequate supplies for such a situation to be storied in NWS beforehand (see suggestions by Participant 2 and 6). And what is about toppling a regime that has been committing war crimes and mass atrocities against civilians for over a decade without being held accountable, so as to restore peace and stability? As Participant 9 (2023a) suggests, it has the capacity and should do so the be "really humanitarian", by which means the UN would also allow the population to reduce aid dependence and rebuild their country.

Source legitimacy is derived from an entity's original claim to authority, its mandate and goals. It benefits from congruence with local preferences and demonstrated capacity to attain these goals. In what the participants describe with regards to their pre-disaster opinions, its financial endowment (especially in earlier periods of the Syrian crisis), advocacy and coordination capacities, external expertise, its international legal coverage as well as (Participant 8) its power to legitimize local actors and actions, accordingly work in its favor. Yet, they link its state-based and state-favoring setup with the GoS and its allies, which the group of participants opposes.

There is a lot of suspicion that the UN intends to move back to a one-state-actor scenario, which is what its system work well in and is made for (Participants 1 (2023a) and 3 (2023a). With (procedural legitimacy) no oversight mechanisms and not way for local actors, let alone any other entity, to hold the UN accountable for its actions in NWS (Participant 1): can we "really [ever] know what happened, yani [[I mean]], as a fact not as a perception of what being happening? […] What was the real, yani [[I mean]] talks and decisions being made under the table or in the closed rooms? (Participant 1, 2023b: pos. 28 - 30).

In this respect, two major themes can be identified that prevail across all interviews conducted: (1) Suspicion that the UN follows an agenda that is neither in line with its humanitarian principles, nor in the best of interest for the population and humanitarian actors in NWS, but follows state-actor-oriented politics. (2) That it is often-times closely linked with the GoS and its allies, with all actions taken being perceived by the many of the Participants as ultimately advancing the interests of the GoS (Participants 1, 2, 3, 5, 6, 7 and 9) or their individual and corrupt own (Participant 1).

The latter becomes clear from statements such as “I know how are they [[the UN]], once they [have] opened their offices back in Damascus and operating from there, it's quite clear what's their [[the UN’s]] agenda.” (Participant 5, 2023: pos. 145). As for their own internal mechanism, Participant 1 (2023a, pos:110) meanwhile highlights: “[Y]ou know, there's no way of finding accountability towards any of the employees working in any rank of the UN agencies, you know. It's built a very corrupted environment. There is a huge amount of corruption inside, like in the institutions like the UN agencies. This is my viewpoint before the earthquake until now.”. With this, he also draws yet another connecting line between the UN and the GOs, with the former being like “a corrupted government. Like for us in Syria, we are very familiar with this” (ibid: pos. 118)

This being said, overall, “it’s complicated” (Participant 8, 2023), the relationship of local aid workers and the UN, as “we still need them” and “they still need us” (see e.g. Participants 6, 7 and 8). This is particularly connected to its (substantive legitimacy) funding, advocacy and coordination capacities, even where its effectiveness has for several years already been limited by access reductions and shorter periods of renewals of the cross-border resolution (see e.g. Participant 6, 2023a).

5.3. Peri-disaster legitimacy perception vis-à-vis the UN (sub-question 1.2.)

As the preceding sections have illustrated already, the UN’s conduct during the critical disaster response period is by all participants viewed as catastrophic. “[T]hey [[the UN]] didn't do anything at the beginning of the – catastrophe (.) inside Syria. You know, maybe two, three days, after that we, the Northwest of Syria, we still didn't receive anything from them. And there's no-one of them who, like, talk[ed] to [the] media and explain[ed] that. Just we don't didn’t receive the assistance and the people under the rubble. This is the situation, so we don't satisfy [[[we are not satisfied]]].” (Participant 4, 2023: pos. 80).

There were no air drops as some would have expected (Participant 1, 2023a; Participant 2, 2023) and the first convoys that arrived in NWS days after the earthquake were pre-scheduled, not specifical for the disaster response (Participant 1, 2023a; Participant 2, 2023; Participant 3, 2023a; Participant 4, 2023; Participant 6, 2023a; Participant 7, 2023; Participant 9, 2023a; Participant 10, 2023). There is some understanding described by the interviews for roads being blocked and Türkiye itself being heavily affected (see e.g. Participant, 1, 2023a; Participant 2, 2023).

However, the participants demonstrate little understanding for the UN’s decision to negotiate legal permission for additional access to NWS in this unparalleled moment of crisis: “[A]t such catastrophic area they shouldn't –; they should have their rescue teams on the move straight away, not to wait for approvals and permits, and so. For sure they should expect that the Syrian regime would block the response to opposition areas. This is […] expected. But they did not. They should have […] to say “no” at such catastrophic times. The […] response teams should be on the move and not wait to approvals or permits.” (Participant 5, 2023: pos. 84).

Participant 1 (2023a) is furthermore convinced that the UN would not have actually needed this permission, with Participants 2 (2023), 3 (2023a) and 6 (2023a) present differently, acknowledging that legal issues have prevailed. Nevertheless, the UN effectively abandoned NWS in the critical period, which includes notions that: (1) It did not use all available means and capacities it would have had (globally); (2) It did not do the same for NWS as it would have for other disaster zones in similar situations; (3) It did not follow the humanitarian principles that it both declares to abide by and requests of its local partners to abide by, too; and (4) it did not meet the expectations with regard to it being the closest NWS has to a functioning state (see Annex: Maxqda file).

6. Discussion

6.1. Answering the research question

In view of the findings presented in the preceding sections, there now appears to be a short answer to the research question. How do local aid group members view the UN's changes in conduct since the disaster from a legitimacy point of view today? – They do not perceive any (real) changes in the UN's post-disaster conduct in comparison to how it was perceived before. This is, at least they do not link any of the UN's changes in conduct perceived post-disaster to the earthquake and attempts by the UN to restore its legitimacy in NWS in response to it.

As such, funding is reported to have surged in the immediate post-earthquake period, which constitutes a change from before. However, the participants perceive is as only temporary in nature and already now, six months later, coming to an end. It is not described as an actual change in the UN's post-disaster conduct. Communication and coordination between the UN and some of the participants are described to have improved after the disaster, which in one case includes changes in coordination involvement and their relationship's pre-crisis status quo (Participant 7, 2023).

This, however, appears more to be the result of peri-crisis positioning and politics than constituting a proactive, broad-based response to local actors by the UN with the intention to restore local legitimacy. Considering that the "tensions" between the UN Gaziantep hub and Gaziantep-based Syrian NGOs that accusations of misconduct during the crisis are described to have been caused, still appear to prevail at the time of the interviews, six months after the earthquakes struck (Participant 2, 2023).

What is more, the UN has begun to conduct regular physical missions to NWS, which they had not done in more than a decade. If anything, "this is the only change […] witnessed" (Participant 1, 2023a: pos. 152) for the majority of those who participated in the interviews. They also describe that they regard the earthquake and related access negotiations between the UN and the GoS as enabling forces, a "window that's been opened" (ibid: pos. 96 – 97) for this change in UN conduct to materialize. However, the dominant view established in the interviews is that the newly established presence of the UN in NWS rather advances the GoS' position and control over the region, than supporting NWS' interests long-term (Participant 1, 2023b, 2023a; Participant 3, 2023b, 2023a; Participant 6, 2023b, 2023a; Participant 7, 2023; Participant 9, 2023b).

6.2. Illustrating changes in local legitimacy perceptions during the juncture

Building on the combined critical juncture and local legitimacy framework developed for this thesis (see *chapter 3 and Figure 9*: Critical juncture framework with changes in (local) legitimacy perceptions combined *in particular)*, Figure 14: Changes in UN conduct and legitimacy perceptions in the presumed earthquake-induced critical juncture period. Own illustration, 2024.illustrates the perceived changes in UN conduct and legitimacy perceptions by the group of participants during the presumed earthquake-induced critical juncture period. As Figure 14 before, it uses an imaginary neutral subjective legitimacy index-like line (that is: at this points, the UN and its

conduct in NWS are neither locally perceived as “right”, “appropriate” and “fair”, nor not to be so, basically cancelling one another off) as a central diving line that separates predominantly positive (listed above) and negative (listed below) UN-related opinions and legitimacy perceptions.

Pre-disaster legitimacy perceptions derived from the interviews *(see chapter 5.2)* are included on the left hand side of the dashed earthquake line. Equally as the viewpoints shared for the period during the presumed critical juncture (the period beginning with a minor time lapse after the earthquake), they are listed above or below the imaginary neutral line depending on whether they are predominantly seen as positive or negative from a legitimacy point of view. The colored curve seeks to illustrate the range of different perceptions offered by the interviews.

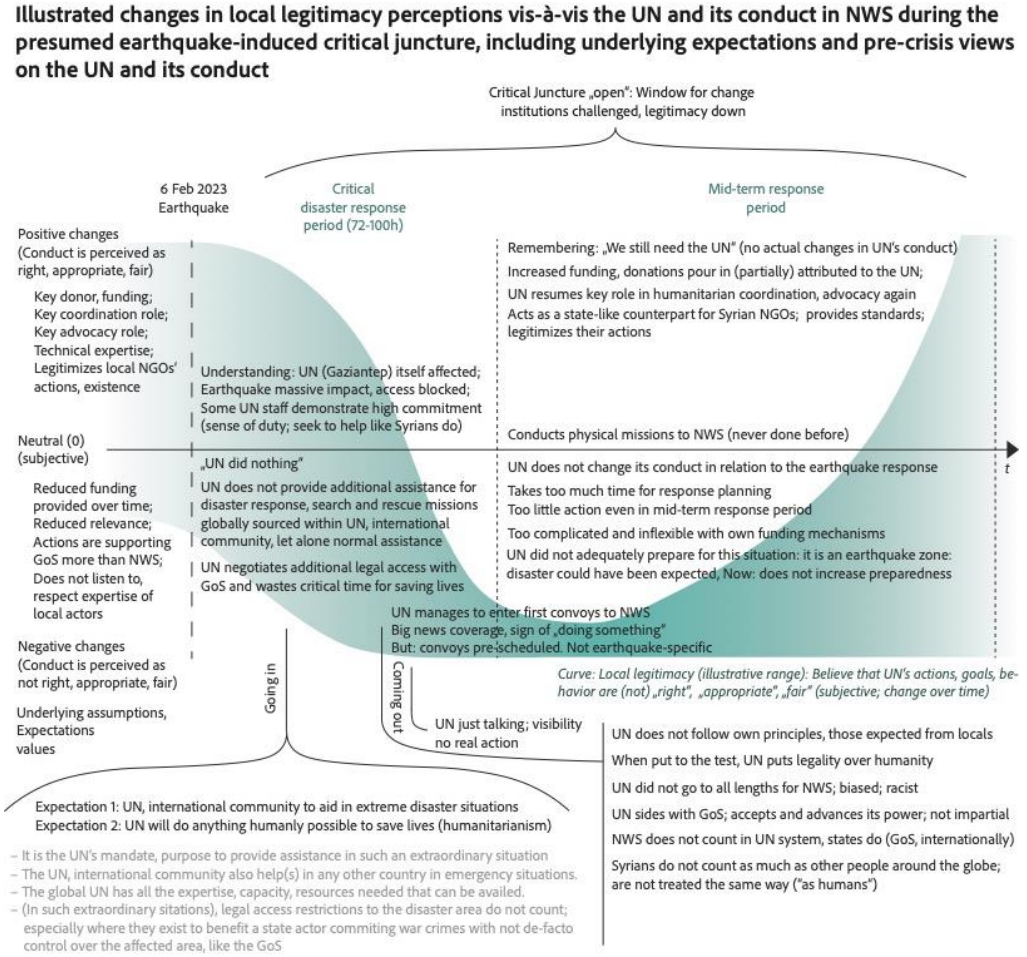


***Figure 14**: Changes in UN conduct and legitimacy perceptions in the presumed earthquake-induced critical juncture period. Own illustration, 2024.*

Here, the UN’s conduct during the critical period can be seen as a low point across the group of participants. Both before and after, however, perceptions are divergent between the individual participants. Some reflect to have a generally positive view about the UN and its conduct in NWS, such as Participant 4 (2023: pos. 136-138): Before and after the earthquake, “[t]ey were working good and provid[ed] assistance […]. Actually, just the problem was in the earthquake, which is big problem, because they didn't respon[d] immediately.”. Others, meanwhile, report a more negative general view, up to the point that the

UN is seen as a vehicle to reproduce a corrupted and unjust environment for NWS and its people, so that it should by and large “turn off” itself (Participant1, 2023a: pos 212).

The dominant view, across the group of participants suggests a more complex and “complicated” (Participant 8, 2023) relationship between the research participants and the UN. In this, the UN is portrayed as an entity (or system) that local aid groups need in various respects, even though its goals, actions and behavior do often-time times not appear to be perceived as “right”, “appropriate” or “fair”. To the contrary, without any exception, the participants expect it to be advancing a GoS-favoring agenda in one way or another, which is opposite of what the Syrian opposition, and the local NGO community sees as their own interest.

Along these lines, some participants respond positively to options that gradually replace the UN as a donor and coordination mechanism in the future (*see opinions about the AFNS of Participants 1, 2023a; 7, 2023 and 9, 2023b, for instance*). Others, at least at the time of the interview, still refer to their relation with the UN as: “We still need you [[the UN]]. Whatever you did to us, but we still need you.”. (Participant 8, 2023: pos. 117; see as well: Participants 3, 2023a; 5, 2023; 6, 2023a and 7, 2023). Which of these legitimacy bestowing elements weights how much for the participants in the given moment, that is, in the moment in which they (ca-)produce and share these views in interaction with me, and whether they may in total to an extent cancel one another off, cannot be said based on the data generated. The range illustrating positive and negative changes in legitimacy perceptions is, accordingly, displayed as dynamic and altogether blurred.

What the illustration includes in addition are some of the dominant pre-disaster expectations that the research participants imparted, explicitly or implied, in the interviews. These expectations and assumptions can be seen as the relative subjective baseline upon which legitimacy views are shaped and changed. Going into the disaster period, this includes participants’ expectations that the UN would (1) aid in extreme disaster situations, such as this one, and (2) that humanitarianism comes before any other thing. Going out, the accounts provided suggest that these expectations were not fulfilled in the point of view of the majority of participants, which is summarized in the bottom right corner of Figure 14.

Notwithstanding this, the majority of participants reports that their general opinions about the UN and its conduct has not changed when comparing the pre- and post-disaster period in NWS. Only the interview with Participant 5 suggests at times, that her opinion about the UN has worsened due to its conduct in the disaster period, or at least that pre-held negatively leaning assumptions would now be additionally confirmed. Figure 14: Changes in UN conduct and legitimacy perceptions in the presumed earthquake-induced critical juncture period. Own illustration, 2024. captures this with the colored illustrative range of local legitimacy perceptions as well. Here, opinions diverge again after the peri-disaster low point that is shared by the group of participants around as well as in the period following the UN’s conduct during the critical disaster response period.

6.3. Reflecting about the initial assumptions and results

That the participants report that their opinions about the UN and its conduct do not differ today in comparison to the pre-earthquake period is striking, especially when considering that they do not describe anything in the UN's conduct really to have changed as well. That there is a connection between changes in UN conduct and changes in legitimacy perceptions is one of the key assumptions made at the outset of this study, however. The findings, hence, do not support this assumption. How can we explain this? And what can we derive from this, also in reflection on the theoretical framework used?

6.3.1. Perceived changes: Perceptions influenced by pre-established opinions

First, in line with one of the other assumptions made initially: legitimacy perceptions – and perceptions overall – can be expected to be disproportionately affected by pre-established views and conditions, just like pre-juncture conditions can be expected to disproportionately shape the outcome of a critical juncture, too. Hence, where the participants have long-established views about the UN and its conduct, they may interpret its post-disaster conduct in the same light as before, regardless of what the UN does and seeks to change. This way, changes in conduct made by the UN and intended in the way presumed at the outset of this thesis, namely, to be made to restore local legitimacy in NWS, may be interpreted differently by the participants and not regarded as 'real' changes in conduct after all.

The accounts offered about the UN's physical visits to NWS can be interpreted as a case in point: The majority of the participants refer to these newly initiated physical missions as a novelty and "the only change I have witnessed" in the UN's conduct after the disaster (Participant 1, 2023a: pos. 152; see as well: Participants 2, 2023; 3, 2023a; 4, 2023; 6, 2023a; 7, 2023; 10, 2023). Yet, only few interviews hint at potentially positive aspects related to an increased presence of the UN on the ground in NWS (Participant 2, 2023; Participant 3, 2023a; Participant 7). What is a dominant theme across the interviews, in contrast, is brought-based suspicion against the UN's intentions and plans. This is particularly related to its proximity to the GoS and a widespread belief that it, intentionally or not, to take decisions that are more beneficial to the GoS than NWS.

Along these lines, the majority of participants suspects that the UN began to conduct these visits to see "if they can work or not" from NWS (Participant 3, 2023a: pos. 60), preparing for cross-line aid provision in the future in direct coordination with the GoS (Participant 2, 2023a; 2023b; 3, 2023a, 2023b; 4, 2023; 7, 2023 as well as Table 7: UN-related opinions connected to post-disaster physical missions of the UN to NWS. The UN in Syria has a history of, arguably, more often than not letting those opposing the GoS down while acting to the benefit of the GoS *(see section 2.3)*. Hence, interpreting these visits as suspicious rather than well-intended 'real' post-disaster changes in conduct by the UN, follows on the same line.

That the participants report their opinions about the UN and its conduct to be the same before and after the crisis even though nothing really seems to have changed may be explained by a similar logic: The UN's conduct during the

earthquake constitutes an unparalleled low point for all participants. Yet, due to the long-established opinions vis-à-vis the UN, they may interpret it as a confirmation of the already negative opinion they held beforehand, or regard it, vice versa, as an exception that does not affect their generally positive opinion from before.

My exchange with Participant 5 (2023, 144-148) about whether the UN's conduct during the disaster would have changed or further underpinned her existing opinion of the UN may serve as a case in point: Me: "[…] you said [earlier] that your opinion was affected by the way the UN engaged during the earthquake, right? Was there anything [else] […]. Participant 5: "Impacted my opinion: No. Because I know who are they [[who they are, referring to the UN]], once they [.] [have] opened their offices back in Damascus and operating from there, it's quite clear what's their agenda." Me: "So maybe that underlines it more? Is it that it was more visible even? Or no?" Participant 5: It was definitely more visible. Because I couldn't expect [the UN to act in the way they did] in such a time.".

6.3.2. Retrospective inquiry

What is more, (4) I inquired about the participant's views only at one, in some cases two moments in time retrospectively. That is, it is not possible based on the generated data to compare different viewpoints provided across different moments of time. As noted earlier, autobiographic memories tend to change over time (Bluck, 2003; Bluck et al., 2005; Müggenburg, 2021). Hence, whether the opinions about the UN co-produced during the interviews would have been the same as if I conducted one interview before and one after the earthquake can equally not be assessed. Especially where one crisis haunts the next, such as is the case with e.g. the cross-border resolution non-renewal at the time of conducting the interviews in NWS, memories may be influenced by more recent concerns and events.

All if this are limitations that I have both accepted as part of the research design and the underlying interpretivist research philosophy chosen. Having assumed that the UN would be eager to restore local legitimacy and, hence, to alter its conduct in NWS for this purpose, the focus on what local aid group members perceived is, accordingly, in line with the research objective and interests. Yet, that e.g. participants' post-disaster perceptions about the UN and its conduct have evolved in the same direction as before the crisis along similar lines as critical junctures, too, would be an interesting result to explore further.

6.3.3. (Re-)interpretation of the importance of local legitimacy for the UN in NWS

There is another possibility for why the participants report not to have perceived any (real) changes in the UN's after the disaster: Namely that restoring local legitimacy – at least among the group of participants – was not sought by the UN as presumed at the outset and hence, no changes in conduct were pursued. The assumption that the UN depends on local legitimacy is based on scholarly contribution by, among others Gippert, 2014; Hancock & Mitchell (2018); Lederach (1997); Richmond & Mac Ginty, 2020b and Whalan, 2013). They postulate that for the UN's missions and programmes to be effective and be

continued locally long-term, the UN depends on being locally perceived as legitimate. In the words of Whalan (2013: 6), that is that its goals, actions and behaviour are locally viewed as “right”, “appropriate” and “just”.

What “local” means in this respect, however, is in most of these contributions not defined further. In others, meanwhile, it is presented in a totalizing manner, referring to local actors as a kind of collective group without further differentiated positions and views (see section 3.2.3 as well). While not calling into question the UN’s intentions to ensure aid effectiveness and sustainability, the question is: is it *these* local actors whose legitimacy the UN depends on and seeks?

With regards to its mandate of being impartial and its dedication to support regional localization of aid, one could argue, yes, they are. There are other reasons and political interrelations that would support this, too. However, local legitimacy hardly concerns this group of local actors alone. There are various actors in NWS – and Syria as a whole – that can be considered local in their relation to the UN, including, among others, HTS and the GoS.

Chapter 2 has highlighted that the GoS has had the upper hand in the conflict dynamics since 2016 at the latest. The UN, undoubtedly, has an interest in finding a political solution to end this conflict after all these years. Also the dominant view transported by the interviews is one that depicts the UN as pursuing plans that supports the recognized state actor, the GoS, in its regain of power over the whole of the country, rather than benefit NWS. Yet, this was one of the key assumptions made for this thesis and nothing that was as part of it explored. It may serve as another explanation for why no changes in conduct are perceived by the research participants. Yet, further exploration would be needed to learn – and respectively say – more.

6.3.4. (Re-)interpretation of the presumed earthquake-related critical juncture

Another possible explanation is related to the above but applied on the critical juncture framework directly: namely, that the participants reported not to have perceived any ‘real’ changes in UN conduct because the juncture developed differently than presumed. What supports this explanation this is the remaining assumption formulated at the outset, namely that pre-juncture conditions disproportionately influence the outcome of the juncture itself. What are the (relevant) pre-juncture conditions that were dominant for the UN’s conduct in Syria before the presumed earthquake-induced critical juncture? Or more precisely and in line with point (1) above: what do the participants perceive that they were?

What is striking in this respect is, how often the non-renewal of the cross-border resolution came up in the interviews in connection with the UN’s newly introduced visits to NWS and the participants’ expressed fears that both would jointly advance the power and position of the GoS over NWS *(see Table 7:* UN-related opinions connected to post-disaster physical missions of the UN to NWSWhen asked whether they believe that this would be in the interest of the UN, several participants confirm this. On the one hand, it would be a normal way of operating for them, having one state actor accountable for service provision

and coordination for a country (see e.g. Participants 1, 2023a; 2023b; and 4, 2023).

On the other hand, the UN may see it from a practical perspective as a means to prepare for crossline support whenever its permission to provide assistance cross-border is eventually not renewed by the GoS (see Participants 1, 2023a; 2023b; 2, 2023; 3, 2023a; 2023b; 4, 2023; 7, 2023). Also, the current power dynamics and territorial control over Syria suggest that the GoS and its allies have had the upper hand for some years already and continue to foster its grip on the country. Meanwhile, any attempts of the UN and related international institutions to demonstrate their power in the context, such as by holding the GoS accountable for mass atrocities and war crimes, have mostly failed over the past decade and more until now (see chapter 2).

What I have assumed at the outset is that the earthquake-induced crisis has opened a critical juncture for the UN in the context of NWS to alter its conduct and restore local legitimacy, which it depends. What the interviews suggest, however, is that rather than (or in addition to) this, the earthquake has served as a "window that's been opened" (Participant 1, 2023a: pos. 98) for the UN to advance its pre-established course: preparing for the end of the UNSC cross-border resolution, cross-line operations in NWS in direct coordination with the GoS and the end of the UN's Gaziantep cross-border hub.

This perspective is what the additional step of inquiry conducted for this thesis was to explore further. The results of this have been included in the findings (chapter 5) together with the results from the other interviews and an alternative critical juncture-related interpretation provided hereafter still.

6.3.5. Limitations derived from the research methods and philosophy

Lastly, what also needs to be considered when reflecting about the results is that the analysis builds upon the viewpoints that the participants have co-produced with me in the interviews. The analysis does not take additional reports, e.g. by the UN or other entities, into account or evaluate them specifically. That means: The findings reveal what changes in UN conduct the participants describe to be aware of themselves, to be precise, in the moment of interaction with me.

Participant triangulation and specifically probing into respectively mentioned aspects has helped identifying relevant aspects across the larger group of participants, so that possible aspects of changes in conduct by the UN may not have been easily overlooked. Yet, they remain perceptions that are shaped and reshaped constantly and in mutual interaction. Hence, although not reported by the participants, there may be changes in conduct undertaken by the UN post-disaster that the participants may not have interpret as actual changes or not shared or perceived themselves for other reasons. The (2) interpretive moments between them and me in the interview, as well as (3) my own perceptions and interpretations in the coding process and analysis may also contribute to possible changes undertaken by the UN post-crisis may have been overlooked.

6.4. Suggesting an alternative "juncture" view as initially suggested

6.4.1. Description of the alternative cross-border-related critical juncture

Following point (4) above, the findings suggest that not (only) the earthquake-induced crisis has served as a window for change in NWS to happen. Rather, they describe it to be connected to a larger critical juncture, which advances the GoS' power and control over the country, including over the coordination of humanitarian assistance in NWS. The rationale behind this, as shared in both the first round of interviews and the additional exchanges sought for further exploration thereafter (see Participant 1, 2023b; Participant 3, 2023b; Participant 6, 2023b; Participant 9, 2023b) is as follows:

Before the earthquake, the UN did not have physical access to NWS. One UN agency is reported to have operated a warehouse before in the region (Participant 3, 2023a), but physical access was otherwise limited to a few visits by senior UN representatives to the border region (Participant 1, 2023a). After the earthquake and the UN's negotiations with the GoS during the critical disaster response period, this changed. The GoS formally gave the UN permission to enter and use two additional crossings in addition to the access granted under the UNSC cross-border mandate. The UN has conducted physical missions to NWS on a regular basis since then.

This is also the moment when the power to grant or withhold cross-border access for the UN's humanitarian operations to NWS shifted to the GoS. Due to vetoes by Russia and China, the UNSC cross-border resolution was not extended after July 2023 for the first time in nine years (Participants 4, 2023; 10, 2023; 1, 2023b; 6, 2023b). Some participants showed themselves convinced that its was the "golden handshake" between Martin Griffiths for the UN and the GoS when negotiating the post-disaster access to NWS in the first place, without which "we wouldn't have lost the resolution in my view, so [.] that made a negative impact in our view" (Participant 2, 2023: pos. 2 – 3).

Others, meanwhile, refer to plans that they expect the UN to secretively having had long before the disaster and, with the earthquake and the physical access to NWS, was able to advance. It began with the UN conducting physical missions to NWS after the earthquake, followed by coordination meetings with local NGOs in NWS, at times without informing let alone inviting the Gaziantep-based organizations and long-term partners of the UN there (Participant 1, 2023b; Participant 3, 2023b, 2023a; Participant 6, 2023b). Later on, they report, UN representatives were having meetings with local authorities, including the HTS-associated SSG (Participant 1, 2023b, 2023a; Participant 3, 2023a, 2023b; Participant 7, 2023) and are furthermore continuously involved in renegotiation cross-border access with the GoS without the presence of Syria-based NGOs.

As Participant 2 (2023) has stressed, there was no "clear ToR [[Terms of Reference]]" for the UN's actions in NWS once they gained access. In case the cross-border mechanism ever stops completely, the aid community in the cross-border hub would need to make sure the UN does not directly coordinate and share information with the GoS. Because "you know, all people know, the regime, they will put their hand in everything. Even in the assistance, they will control that [the] assistance could go to this area, not to this area; for those

people, not for those people. Which is a big problem." (Participant 4, 2023: pos. 98).

All of this, accordingly, can be interpreted as what many of the participants regard as really having changed after the earthquake: the UN having taken by the UN in the direction of advancing the shift in power and control of the GoS over NWS and the whole of the country at large.

6.4.2. Projecting the alternative juncture view on the theoretical framework

To recap once again, the thesis started off with the initial assumption that the earthquake-induced legitimacy crisis would open a critical juncture and induce the to change its conduct in NWS, so as to restore local legitimacy. I illustrated the derived theoretical connection between critical juncture frameworks and (local) legitimacy with Figure 9: Critical juncture framework with changes in (local) legitimacy perceptions combined. I further used Figure 14: Changes in UN conduct and legitimacy perceptions in the presumed earthquake-induced critical juncture period. Own illustration, 2024. to map the exploratory findings and interpret them within this framework.

In a reduced version with less detail included and an imaginary index-like baseline starting at a neutral pre-crisis zero point, the presumed changes in local perceptions vis-à-vis (changes in) UN conduct could look like illustrated in the following. The different curves, similar to the colored range used to illustrate changes in legitimacy perceptions in Figure 14: Changes in UN conduct and legitimacy perceptions in the presumed earthquake-induced critical juncture period. Own illustration, 2024., herein represent a variety different directions moment-to-moment changes in legitimacy perceptions could take.

Overall, the findings related to the earthquake-induced critical juncture scenario suggest that an imaginary line like the yellow one below would best represent the viewpoints shared in the interviews: before the earthquake and after, the views are described not to have changed, while the period during the earthquake is regarded as an unprecedented low point.

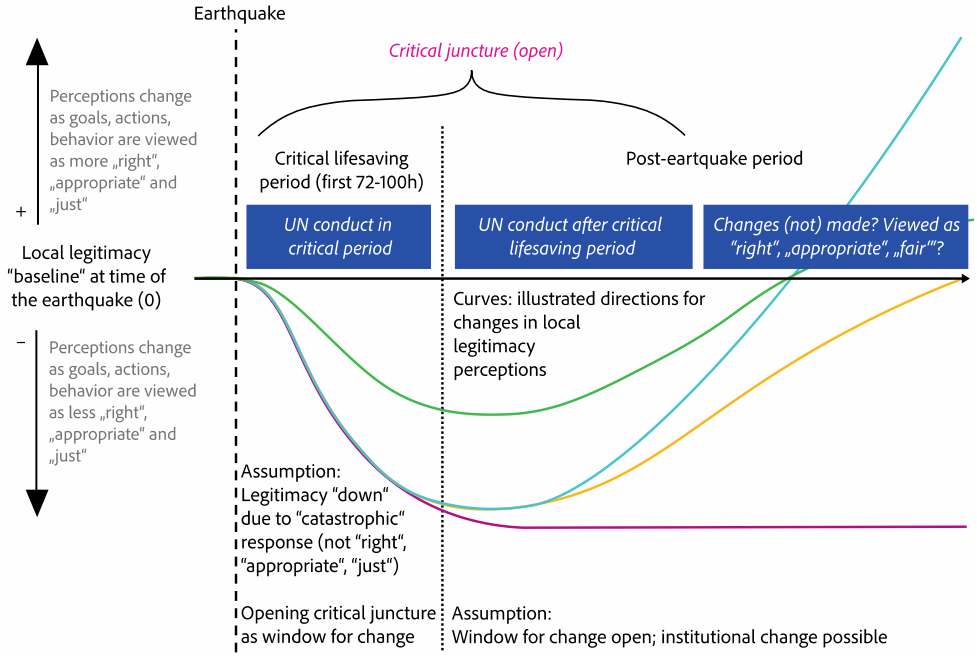


***Figure 15**: Reflection on theoretical framework for initial earthquake-induced critical juncture view*

Yet, the changes along this imaginary curve of changes in legitimacy perception can, at least based on the findings, not be linked as presumed to any 'real' changes in conduct by the UN (here illustrated in the blue boxes). Equally, this does not entail that the window of opportunity, i.e. the presumed critical juncture, was not open for the UN to be taken in the first place, nor that there were no forces within the UN and elsewhere that would not have tried to bring about institutional change.

Zooming out and taking the above-described alternative view on the earthquake-induced critical juncture framework, combined with the cross-border resolution non-renewal and pre-established views vis-à-vis the UN and the GoS into account, may yield the following bigger-picture view (see Figure 16: Reflection on framework for alternative cross-border-related critical juncture view. The earthquake still remains a central part in this enlarged critical juncture framework, as it has triggered the UN to negotiate additional access with the GoS, as well as seek and be granted physical access to NWS.

What is added to this bigger picture view now meanwhile are the points of cross-border access negotiations, presumed antecedent conditions (along the lines described above), notions that would suggest reactive sequences by aid group members and underlying beliefs that shape the participants' points of view. Further zooming out, this alternative view on the earthquake-induced critical juncture could be connected with overarching political developments as well. Examples for this could be the GoS' gradual regain of power and control over NWS, as well as other mentioned aspects that follow along similar power lines.

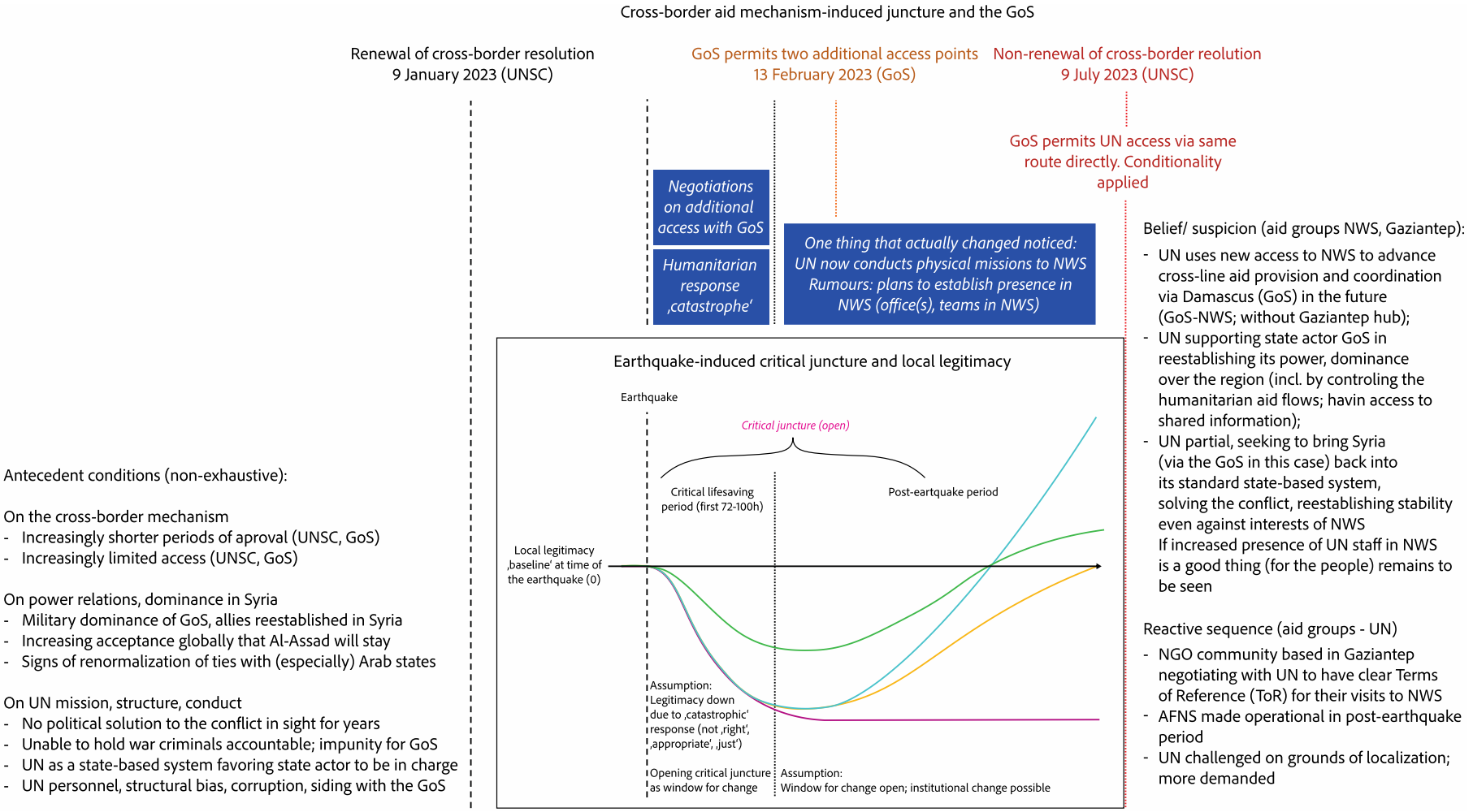


Figure 16: *Reflection on framework for alternative cross-border-related critical juncture view*

6.4.3. Reflecting about and comparing the initial and alternative results

In comparison to the initially presumed critical juncture framework, the alternative version depicted based on the exploratory findings above does includes locally perceived changes in UN conduct. Nevertheless, even here, these changes in conduct do not seem to affect how the group of research participants views the UN and its conduct in comparison to before. It is possible, hence, that the assumed relationship between changes in conduct and changes in legitimacy perceptions does not exist in the same way as assumed at the outset. Other possible explanations follow the same logic as those listed in reflection of the initial findings in section 6.3.

In reflection of both the critical juncture frameworks and local legitimacy perceptions included in the theoretical framework of this thesis, what these findings suggest is that: (1) "Institutions are sticky" (Mahoney, 2000) and not easily changed. (2) The same appears to be true for opinions and legitimacy perceptions, which once formed, appear not easily to be changed. (3) While among others Sorensen, (2022, p. 7) postulates that critical junctures may be opportunities for accelerated institutional change because the "undermine the[ir] stability […] by exposing their inadequacies, weakening their legitimacy" the exploratory results of this study do not reveal a connection between changes in conduct and changes in legitimacy perception.

(4) The notions that the window of opportunity for change to happen during a critical juncture is relatively short and (5) disproportionately affected by pre-juncture conditions are something that also the exploratory results of this thesis suggest. This is, analogous to (1) and (2), not only true for critical junctures, but for legitimacy perceptions, too. This is also one possible explanation for why the research participants reported to neither have perceived any 'real' changes in the UN's post-crisis conduct', nor that their opinions about the UN would have changed when comparing the pre- and post-crisis period. Where they do report perceiving changes in the UN's conduct, however, is in ways that are regarded as confirming what they had expected and thought of the UN already before.

7. Conclusion

What this thesis set out to explore was, how local aid group members view the UN's changes in conduct since the disaster from a legitimacy point of view today (i.e. at the time of conducting the interviews, six months after the disaster). Drawing on critical juncture frameworks and local legitimacy perceptions in conjunction, I assumed there to be a connection between the legitimacy crisis and accelerated impetus and opportunity for institutional change for the UN in NWS.

Furthermore, I assumed the UN to have an interest to restore local legitimacy in NWS in line with Whalan (2013), Lederach (1997) and other proponents of the local turn. This is as international actors are said to depends on local legitimacy

for their missions to be effective and produce sustainable results. At the same time, however previous critical juncture-studies suggest that the window of opportunity for accelerated change is relatively small and their outcomes to be disproportionately affected by pre-juncture conditions.

What the results of the study suggest is that the earthquake-induced crisis in NWS constitutes the opening of a critical juncture. At least, it is regarded by the research participants, a group of ten members of aid groups active in the region, as having served as "a window that's been opened" (Participant 1, 2023a: Pos. 96) for the UN's conduct in NWS to change. This particularly relates to the UN having begun visiting NWS regularly, which is seen as a novelty by all participants since the crisis: after the earthquake, "[w]e see that UN agencies, after 12 years of conflict, they come inside Syria" (Participant 3, 2023a: pos. 50). Other changes perceived are connected to a temporary surge in funding and, for some individual participants, to changes in the communication and coordination between local NGOs and the UN.

This being said, unlike what I had assumed at the outset, none of these perceived changes are not seen as the results of intentional actions by the UN to restore local legitimacy, or "make up for this failure as fast as we can" (Griffiths, 2023). On the contrary, the research participants regard especially the newly established visits and increased presence of the UN in and to NWS as something that secretly and intentionally (see e.g. Participants 1, 2023a; 3, 2023a; 4, 2023; 7, 2023 and 10, 2023), or otherwise accidentally (see e.g. Participants 1, 2023b; 2, 2023; 6, 2023a) advances the GoS' interests of regaining control over the whole of Syria. As for the surge in post-disaster emergency funding and other identified changes, meanwhile, these are in comparison to this either perceived as temporary and not 'real' changes in conduct, as altogether minor in consequence or not attributable to the UN (alone).

As for the first aspect, the participants connect the UN's newly gained access to NWS with the non-renewal of the UNSC cross-border resolution that followed some months after the earthquake. Herein, the group of participants collectively suspects that the UN uses their physical access, at least in part, to prepare for future cross-line assistance directly via the GoS and without the UN's Türkiye cross-border hub being involved. The GoS, meanwhile, is depicted as the embodiment of evil for many of the participants, with the idea that it could regain control over the aid distribution and NWS in whichever way is reacted to with notions of resistance, anger and fear.

What is striking in view of the research question is that, although there are no 'real' changes regarding the UN's conduct as a means to restore legitimacy in post-disaster legitimacy reported, the research participants' opinions before and after the disaster are as well reported not to have changed. It was one of the assumptions made at the outset that there is a connection between changes in

conduct and changes in local legitimacy perceptions. The results, however, do not suggest that this connection exists, nor do they give any hints about how the opinions held vis-à-vis the UN and its conduct normalize again after the quake.

Does this suggest that, regardless of what the UN does in NWS, the way in which it is perceived in terms of its goals (source legitimacy), performance (substantive legitimacy), actions and behavior (procedural legitimacy) remains unchanged now that it has been active in the region for so many years? While the result that there are no perceived relevant changes in UN conduct, nor changes in opinion about the UN post-crisis may also be attributed to the research design and interpretation themselves, this is a possible implication.

As Le Billon & Waizenegger (2007); Soifer (2012) and Mahoney (2000) postulate: "institutions are sticky" and even during critical junctures, pre-juncture conditions and trends can be expected to disproportionately affect the outcomes of the juncture. This may be relevant in this case in two ways: (1) First, to suggest that the UN would not have changed its conduct in another direction as the one that was already pursued long-term before the disaster; and (2) Second, also with regards to the changes in opinions and legitimacy perceptions, suggesting that they, too, are sticky, having been produced and reproduced in interaction between the UN and local aid group members over more than a decade.

Hence, what the participants co-produce in the interviews with me does not suggest that they see any changes in the UN's post-disaster conduct in light of something intended to particularly support NWS, let alone constituting 'real' changes at all. Connecting these accounts with the theoretical framework allows me to embed and project the initially assumed UN conduct-related critical juncture onto the larger picture. In this, a broader critical juncture moment is depicted which shows the perceived changes in cross-border access as well as the anticipated future of UN-led humanitarian action in NWS, gradually being handed over to the GoS, that the participants suspect and/or perceive.

"[C]an [we] really know what happened, yani [[I mean]], as a fact not as a perception of what's being happening? […] [W]hat really, really happened? What was the real, yani [[I mean]], talks and decision[s] being made under the table or in the closed rooms? Can we ever know this? In the future?" (Participant 1, 2023b: pos. 28-30). Alone for the interpretivist research philosophy and approach chosen, this would not something that would be attempted as in there being an ultimate truth that exists and can be verified.

However, although further confirmatory research on this would be valuable in addition, what the findings of this project suggest is that: where opinions have been produced and reproduced over more than a decade, even in moments of severe crisis, these are likely not to be changed easily anymore. Whichever actions are taken after a crisis, they may be interpreted in the same spirit and

light as they would have been before. The same appears to apply to changes in action themselves, being likely to be disproportionately influenced by pre-crisis trends and conditions, too.

As an implication and conclusion, hence: where being perceived as legitimate matters, in line with path dependency's proclamation that "institutions are sticky", to pave the way for this from the beginning appears to be crucial. Critical junctures may serve as windows of opportunity for institutions to be changed. Yet, pre-juncture conditions as well as legitimacy perceptions both appear to disproportionately influence the outcome of the juncture that is then produced and reproduced again over time.

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Annex I

This part of the annex includes the following:

1. Question guide prepared for the semi-structured interviews in detail
2. Code book in detail (MAXQDA export)

1. Question guide for the semi-structured interviews

Topic	Question/ Content
Before starting the interview	[ ] Research project and objective introduced to participant [ ] Participants informed in writing about rights and protection; data usage: anonymity; confidentiality; information about data usage, storage, transfer; dealing with questions perceived as uneasy; right to opt out any time; revoking consent, incl. of data used; provision of post-interview written transcript and opportunity for feedback/ confirmation [ ] Written consent form received back signed [ ] Physical interview: provide/care for drink(s); snacks; Virtual: encourage to get coffee/tea; snacks
Introduction	Restate research purpose; ask about any open questions; request permission to tape
Ice-breaker	1. **Can you start by telling me a bit more about yourself?** • Probe: [if appropriate] which area are you originally form; where are you based now? • Probe: professional, academic background; • Probe: experience in the aid sector; involvement since when? • Probe: how would you describe the organization you work for? Participation on other platforms/ with other organizations in parallel? 2. **How did you first become involved / interested in this sector?** • Probe: Worked for other organization(s) before? Volunteering during the uprising? 3. **What is the most important aspect for you in your work?** • Probe: What motivates you? (position, type of work; impact; colleagues; responsibility; profession; …) 4. **What is the most difficult challenge that you face in your work today?** • Probe: resources/ funding, stability, inter-personal, context-specific, profession-specific, other • Probe: what do you think would need to happen to resolve or mitigate this issue?
[Embedding research topic; segue to sub-question 1.2]	**[Beware of sensitivity of these questions; adopt person-specifically where necessary]** 5. **It has been five months now since the earthquake. Has the situation around you calmed down again?** • Probe: stabilization in personal environment (feeling of safety, shops/ offices/ schools open; children back to school) • Probe: stabilization in professional context/ field of work?

Sub-question 1.2:

How do they view the UN's actions during the critical post-disaster period (the first 100 hours after the quake)?

Sub-question 1.1:

What is their opinion about the UN's engagement in the context of NWS prior to the disaster?

Sub-question 2.1.

What changes (if any) since the immediate disaster response period do they perceive in the UN's conduct in NWS today?

Sub-question 2.2.

In how far do they describe these perceived changes in the UN's conduct as "right", "appropriate" and "fair"

[reflection: positive/ negative view on whether there indeed is potential for the UN to change long-term]

[Embedding responses in reflection of the broader context]

- Probe: what is still not as was before?

6. **Thinking in your professional capacity about the situation in NWS, how has the situation developed since the earthquake?**
   - Probe: NWS/ specific districts; NWS- in comparison to Türkiye
   - **Probe: Actors involved; most crucial contributions? Performing best/ worst? Why?**
   - Probe: Other discussions, such as on visits of Arab state delegates to Damascus, sanctions debate, cease-fire
   - Probe: Implications for personal/professional conduct: working with family in car; extreme overload; poor information

7. **What do you think about the way the UN acted in the immediate disaster period?** [potentially connect to **6.2**]
   - Probe: Differentiation – (1) first 72-100h < (2) first month
     - Where mentioned, probe into: "right", "fair", "appropriate", synonyms and antonyms
     - Do you see a way in which these actions/ practices could be justified? / Are they justified for you? How so/ not?
   - Probe: what has [impressed]/ [angered]/ [surprised] you the most? (humanitarian response, legal permission requesting, acknowledgement of failure; deadlock understandable; better without it? Local > international?)

8. **What did you think about the UN's engagement in NWS before the earthquake?**
   - Probes: Rather positive/ negative? How so?
     - Where mentioned, probe into: "right", "fair", "appropriate", synonyms and antonyms
     - Do you see a way in which these actions could be justified? / Are they justified for you? How so/ not?
   - Probes: Humanitarian assistance; capacity and recourses; needed vs. better without it?
   - Probes: Other areas (development, peace negotiations, …)

9. **Did you notice any changes in the UN's conduct since the immediate disaster response period?**
   - Probes: Goal(s), actions, behaviour
   - Probes: Humanitarian action; political and peace; other
   - Probes: Can you tell me more about this?
   - Probes: In how far has [this] changed?

   - Probes: Do you think this is a positive/ negative change? How so?
     - Probe into: "right", "fair", "appropriate", synonyms and antonyms
     - Do you see a way in which these [changes in] action[s] can be justified? / Are they justified for you? How so/ not?

	• Probes: M. Griffith quote[7] – what do you think about this statement; and from your point of view, is the UN on track? 10. **What about the future? How do you think the UN will engage in NWS from now on?** • Probes: Role of the UN in cross-border assistance (e.g. broadened vs. reduced by GoS/UNSC; alternative interpretations of mandate vs. stick to UNSC and GoS permissions; dependence on UN resources and capacities vs. better without them/ local > international); political pressure with lower GoS isolation since the EQ; peace process • Probes: How likely do you think this is? / How so? / What is the rationale behind it? • Probes: Are there any indications for that the UN is moving in this direction already that you see today? • Probe: Can you tell me more about this? 11. **In your point of view, how do people inside NWS view this?** • Probe: Opinions about the UN in NWS before the earthquake and since then? • Probe: Opinions about actions the UN has taken since the earthquake? • Probe: What do you base your view on? (e.g. do you have regular exchange with people in NWS who share their opinions with you? Is it based on what you see on social media/ whatsapp? Internal/external reports? Other?)
Wrap up	12. **In your words, what would the UN need to do in the future to remedy the past?** • Probes: [link to answers – 14.] • Probe on reference period reflected in the answer (is the past = the earthquake situation? The time since the UN's presence in Syria in 2012? Why did the person think of this when thinking of the past?) • Probe: do you think other people around you share this view? 13. **Before we close, is there anything more you would like to add?**
Closing remarks	Thank you. [ ] Will transcribe our conversation and send you copy for you to review and confirm that I captured our conversation correctly. [ ] Would you be open for a follow-up conversation if I have any more questions while transcribing and analyzing what you told me during the next 2-3 weeks?

[7] *M. Griffith quote: At the #Türkiye-#Syria border today. We have so far failed the people in north-west Syria. They rightly feel abandoned. Looking for international help that hasn't arrived. My duty and our obligation is to correct this failure as fast as we can. That's my focus now."*

	End recording

2. Code book (MAXQDA) in detail

List of Codes	Memo	Frequency
Codesystem		1573
0 Quotes and contextual information	Codes for highlighting segments that may serve as direct quotes and other own categories for contextual information on interviews, interviewees and the like	0
Quote potentials (narrow)		11
Highlighted Segments (broad)		283
1 Changes in views on UN conduct and legitimacy	Hints or explicitly made statements that suggest that participants perceive (1.1.) changes (or not) in UN conduct when comparing the period before/during and after the earthquake-induced disaster; and/or (1.2.) describe that views about the UN have changed (or not) and if so, how.	0
1.1. Changes in UN conduct perceived pre/post-disaster		0
Changes maybe not linked to EQ		2
Nothing has changed		9
Changes in Cluster cordination and communication by UN		8
UN, HoSs reestablishing/ normalising ties with GoS		2
Changes in UN funding and programming activities		20
Regular physical visits of UN staff after EQ (none before)		18
1.2 Changes in views on UN conduct pre/post-disaster		1
Changes not enough		2
(No) changes in opinion on UN pre-/post-EQ (self-reported)		8
2 Views on UN pre-disaster	Views about the UN before EQ	0
1.1 Pre-EQ: Source Legitimacy	Source legitimacy refers to "judgements about the appropriateness of a [UN missioin] based on its creation in accordance with appropriate → rules and norms → and its capacity to achieve its mandated goals and purposes Importantly, source legitimacy refers to legitimation processes relation to the fiven structures of a [UN operation] - that is, its mandate, design, and conflict setting - rather than its outcomes (substL) or practices (procL)." Whalan: 65 (1) Rules and Norms (2) Institutional Credibility (signaling its credibility to achieve its goals) # financial resources, #expertise	0
SL (1): (Perceived) structural setup, governance system		0
State-based and favouring system		2
SL (2) UN's capacity to achieve mandated goals, purposes		0
Power to legitimize local actors, actions		1
Legal coverage	talking to sanctioned groups, for instance.	1
External expertise		5
Coordination		1
Advocacy		2
Funding		3
SL (3): Congruence local preferences - UN mandate, goals		0

1.2 Pre-EQ: Substantive Legitimacy	Refers to legitimacy derived from a UN mission's performance on (or failure of) delivering results, i.e. → achieving its goals → meeting local expectations	0
SubstL (1): Justifiability of outputs, effectiveness		0
Effectiveness, funding for humanitarian action		17
Programming/ funding priorities		2
Project durations (linked to xb-resolution)		1
SubstL (2): Achievement of goals, expectations		0
Expectation: UN to address root causes of crisis (toppling GoS)		1
UN allocation fairness between GoS-NWS		1
UN (physical) presence in NWS		5
UN flexibility with partners		2
1.3 Pre-EQ: Procedural Legitimacy	Derived from a UN mission's actions refers to judgements about the fairness of procedures for making decisions and exercising power within a given relationship - to evaluations of the rightness of a [UN] operation's practices. It may adhere to 'right' legal processes (by way of meaning: the process through which laws are implemented). → Practices perceived as standard and accepted by UN at large → Practives by individual UN staff → communication practices, incl. transparency → accountability (ability to hold UN accountable locally) → sense of ownership, consultation participation	0
PL (1): Adherence to own norms, standards		0
UN (believed to) support GoS more than NWS		1
UN defending human rights not enough		2
Not following own standards as highjacked by GoS		2
Corruption, arbitrary decision-making		5
PL (2): Staff behaviour towards local actors		2
PL (3): Transparency, communication		0
UN not honest about own mandate, options, limits		3
Unclear why UN not present in NWS before EQ		2
PL (4) Ownership, consultation, participation		2
PL (5): Options for holding UN accountable		0
No way to hold UN agencies accountable		1
No way to hold UN employees accountable for anything		1
3 Views on UN peri-disaster	Views about the UN relating to the UN's conduct during the critical crisis response period (in essence: the first 72-100 hours post-EQ; until UN provided humanitarian aid with additional cross-border access permission by GoS)	0

3.1 Peri-EQ: Source Legitimacy	Source legitimacy refers to "judgements about the appropriateness of a [UN missioin] based on its creation in accordance with appropriate → rules and norms → and its capacity to achieve its mandated goals and purposes Importantly, source legitimacy refers to legitimation processes relating to the given structures of a [UN operation] - that is, its mandate, design, and conflict setting - rather than its outcomes (substL) or practices (procL)." Wahlan: 65 (1) Rules and Norms (2) Institutional Credibility (signaling its credibility to achieve its goals) # financial resources, #expertise	0
SL (1): Structural setup, governance supporting goals, purpose		0
State-based and favouring system		4
Roles and responsibilities in WoS approach not suitable for NWS		4
System where (well-intentioned) individuals cannot change much		2
SL (2): UN's capacity to achieve mandated goals, purposes given		0
Power to change national decisions where in line with needs		1
Power to legitimize local actors, actions		1
External Expertise		3
Pace in decision-making		3
Coordination		3
SL (3): Congruence local preferences - UN mandate, goals		0
3.2 Peri-EQ Substantive Legitimacy	Refers to legitimacy derived from a UN mission's performance on (or failure of) delivering results, i.e. → achieving its goals → meeting local expectations	0
SubstL (1): Justifiability of outputs, effectiveness		0
EQ unparalleled: Difficult conditions outside of UN's control		11
SubstL (2): Achievement of goals, expectations		0
UN played role during critical EQ period		3
NWS abandoned by UN in critical period		36
Basis of expectation: disaster expertise of UN (preparedness)		2
Basis of expectation: treat all parts of Syria equally		1
Basis of expectation: humanity, humanitarianism		2
Basis of expectation: replacement of state (NWS)		2
Basis of expectation: comparison to other disaster zones		8
Basis of expectation: available means, capacity		7

3.3 Peri-EQ Procedural Legitimacy	Derived from a UN mission's actions refers to judgements about the fairness of procedures for making decisions and exercising power within a given relationship - to evaluations of the rightness of a [UN] operation's practices. It may adhere to 'right' legal processes (by way of meaning: the process through which laws are implemented). → Practices perceived as standard and accepted by UN at large → Practives by individual UN staff → communication practices, incl. transparency → accountability (ability to hold UN accountable locally) → sense of ownership, consultation participation	0
PL (1): Adherence to own norms, standards		0
UN (not) protecting human rights, adhering to humanitarianism		13
(Im-)Partiality: GoS benefiting more from UN than NWS		7
Adherence to legal restrictions (border, outside access)		16
PL (2): Staff behaviour towards local actors		1
Taking (UN) blame personally, reacting		1
Commitment, behaviour of UN staff peri-EQ		9
PL (3): Transparency, communication		0
Solidarity, empathy, compassion, care		1
Dishonesty in communication, public display of aid		5
Clarity on what to expect from UN during EQ		4
PL (4) Ownership, consultation, participation		0
UN (at times) not consulting properly with relevant actors		1
UN (global) meeting locals at wave length (power, negotiation)		1
PL (5): Options for holding UN accountable		0
Lack of accountability, admitting own mistakes		3
Lack of responsibility by accountable positions WoS		1
4 Views on UN post-disaster	Views about the UN in the period after the immediate EQ-induced crisis, not directly related to the critical period but that after (might subjectively differ a bit in terms of exact period, but in general starts ofter the UN has been granted access to NWS by GoS and is providing humanitarian aid in/to NWS); at the same time: not related to UN cross-border resolution non-renewal. This is coded separately with codes under number 5.	0

4.1 Post-EQ: Source Legitimacy	Source legitimacy refers to "judgements about the appropriateness of a [UN missioin] based on its creation in accordance with appropriate → rules and norms → and its capacity to achieve its mandated goals and purposes Importantly, source legitimacy refers to legitimation processes relating to the given structures of a [UN operation] - that is, its mandate, design, and conflict setting - rather than its outcomes (substL) or practices (procL)." Wahlan: 65 (1) Rules and Norms (2) Institutional Credibility (signaling its credibility to achieve its goals) # financial resources, #expertise	0
SL (1): (Perceived) structural setup, governance system		0
System where (well-intentioned) individuals cannot change much		2
There is no workable alternative to the UN	Funding, programming, coordination, advocacy, technical expertise	3
State-based and favouring system (GoS > NWS)		4
UN political and humanitarian role(s) mixed		4
WoS governance system does not work for NWS		1
SL (2): UN's capacity to achieve mandated goals, purposes given		0
International advocacy, representation of non-state territory N		1
Financial ressources		2
External expertise		1
Coordination (incl. as an expertise)		2
(Ability to overcome) legal restrictions to UN achieve goals		2
Capacity, expertise: Data for informed decision-making		2
SL (3): Congruence local preferences - UN mandate, goals		1
Physical presence: good reasons vs. secret adverse intentions		16
No Go:UN (expected to) be planning advance GoS benefits, agenda		5
EQ/ external shock preparedness to be part of UN mandate		2
Existing UN NWS mandate not matching EQ response requirements		1
4.2 Post-EQ: Substantive Legitimacy	Refers to legitimacy derived from a UN mission's performance on (or failure of) delivering results, i.e. → achieving its goals → meeting local expectations	0
SubstL (1): Justifiability of outputs, effectiveness		0
Frequent visits UN in NWS actually established, maintained		3
UN representing, acting for benefit of NWS people's needs		3
Post-EQ (hum/dev) funding, effectiveness of UN		18
SubstL (2): Achievement of goals, expectations		0
Localization as explicit goal: sustainability, self-reliability		3

UN/IC (not) meeting expectations in post-EQ period/ general		14
UN positive role in (non-immediate) post-EQ period/ general		2
4.3 Post-EQ: Procedural Legitimacy	Derived from a UN mission's actions refers to judgements about the fairness of procedures for making decisions and exercising power within a given relationship - to evaluations of the rightness of a [UN] operation's practices. It may adhere to 'right' legal processes (by way of meaning: the process through which laws are implemented). → Practices perceived as standard and accepted by UN at large → Practives by individual UN staff → communication practices, incl. transparency → accountability (ability to hold UN accountable locally) → sense of ownership, consultation participation	1
PL (1): Adherence to own norms, standards		0
localization, trustful (local) partnerships		3
(Im-)Partiality: GoS benefiting more from UN than NWS		0
UN dedicated to humanitarianism, humanity		3
UN planning, strategies (as required from partners)		2
Provisions previously agreed not enacted related to EQ		2
UN: Good coordination and documentation (clear SOPs and ToRs)		1
PL (2): Staff behaviour towards local actors		0
UN staff out of touch, not empathetic, self-focused, disgusting		1
Accusations of malpractice since on the ground		1
Tensions remain due to criticism, conflicts during EQ response		1
PL (3): Transparency, communication		0
Communication around xb resolution and consequences for NWS		4
Public clarity on what UN is, does, can be expected to do		2
Communication around presence in NWS		3
PL (4) Ownership, consultation, participation		2
UN visits to NWS not focused on big orgs/ established partners		5
UN limited in granting ownership, trust to Syrian NGOs		7
UN sometimes does (not) listen/ follow 'local' advice		6
PL (5): Options for holding UN accountable		0
Evaluations on UN (GZT) hum/dev actions impact		1
Statements of apology, reaction to EQ		1
No way to hold UN (inst., indiv.) accountable		3
Operational peer review on EQ (UN, Syrian NGOs)		3
5 Views on UN post-xb resolution (consolidated)	Views about the UN in the period surrounding the cross-border resolution non-renewal and shift of role of giving permission to the GoS (related to and/or post mid-July 2023).	124
6 Other/ serendipitous	Other themes with relevance for the research project not directly related to the research question and design.	0

6.1. Hypothesis critical juncture		15
6.2. What actually is "the UN"?	UN = organization/ institution, wherein individual staff members (are supposed to) represent the organization? Or is the UN a complex body with a lot of different people and their opinions present? Do different UN entities act and think differently from each other? Do individual members of staff/ representative also count as a piece of "the UN"?	38
6.3. Mutliple crises too much pace	Codes that suggest that the situation after the EQ became "normal" again for the Syrian expatriates in Turkey/ the population again super quickly, as in: because one crises follows immediate by the next, people don't have time to digest what actually happened. Here: EQ followed by xb-resolution followed by Gaza followed by ... (...)	13
6.4. (Not) local = (not) legitimate?	Being local/ Syrian is framed in the same way as being legitimate.	13
7 General views on UN (backup)	This refers to opinions about the UN and its agencies, bodies, associated entities and/or individual representatives and employees that are unaffected by the EQ and xb-resolution. Mostly they are linked to the way of working/ the system in which the UN operates itself.	0
UN seeks Syria to reunite, fits with its system ≠ NWS interests		3
UN to be political. Deal with root cause of conflict: GoS		4
UN = lifeline NWS. Only protection of NWS (people) from GoS		1
UN (org+individuals) interest keep status quo, not ∆ for better		3
UN in NWS: huge power, no state-level counterpart. Unbalanced.		1
Presence, representation of UN allows NWS to exist at all.		3
At times UN listens, in line with local experts, expectations		1
UN doesn't listen; does not follow local experts' adivce		2
UN standards not questioned enough anymore. Absolutely right?		3
UN is more important than governments: int. regonition		2
UN critical counterpart for legitimizing local NGOs' actions		5
UN/ internationals bring with them helpful things to learn from		1
UN (NWS/GZT) = (imperfect) replacement of 'state' in NWS		9
UN role in NWS can and has to be replaced if not working		4
UN to embrace localization, bottum-up/ inclusive programming		1
UN system needs to be replaced/overhauled/ reformed	UN system/ mechanism regarded as flawed and not suitable (globally). Needs to be (significantly) reformed or replaced by something else	8
UN bigger than itself: other actors cling to it too		2
UN = needed though not perfect. No alternative		15
UN (different types of) advocacy is key		8
UN coordination mechanism, technical capacity is key		10
UN as intermediary NWS/GoS: without it, NWS far worse		2
UN (own) agency limited. Pressure of global system		13
UN has to stand with people in need. Cannot abandon them		5

	UN has to uphold humanitarian values/principles. Hum		0
	UN has to uphold humanitarian values/principles. Hum > anything		10
	UN to be neutral, non-political		4
	UN = evaluated like a perfect replacement of (int) "state"		2
	UN expertise = responsible for mistakes it could have prevented		1
	UN (local) partners bound to principles UN itself fails to hold		3
	UN does not live up to own proclaimed capacity/ excellence		7
	UN not standing to its word. Not following suit		2
	UN short-term oriented with no long-term vision, exit strategy		3
	UN does not have a consistent plan/ vision		6
	UN decisions/ system: mismatch affectedness - accountability		4
	UN mismatch humanitarianism vs (state-based) legality, politics	Underlying legitimacy perceptions and patterns: for humanity and humanitarian principles (such as equally invoked by UN programming and funding modalities) vs. formal state-based legitimacy (legality) and global politics	8
	UN unreliable, irresponsible. Cause harm with no accountability		2
	UN irresponsible: protection of human rights and life		4
	UN not listening to people and their needs		4
	UN distant from the ground. Avoiding emot. attachment, "seeing"		3
	UN distant, non-emotional, non-human-centric		4
	UN fails/ failed at localization; no faith in local partners		12
	UN = (rather rigid) donor	Even being reduced to that. Being a donor that is unflexible, not really focused on the needs on the ground in the way org(s) see it. Top-down providing funds for implementation of humanitarian projects while following their own agenda.	4
	UN legitimacy/ good conduct = volume on funding/proj. provided		15
	UN reducing funds = reducing relevance		2
	UN funding/programming not effective/ meeting actual needs		13
	UN programming ≠ sustainable, localized, responsible		7
	UN-led peace process not a thing at all. Not associated with UN		2
	UN pushes GoS-NWS to deal/compete with eachother		1
	UN agencies (SYR) largely influenced, controlled by GoS		3
	UN for GoS = channel through which they achive pol. goals		1
	UN-GoS negative association		12
	UN does not go to all expectable lengths for NWS		5
	UN siding with GoS (against NWS/ opposition)		6
	UN-provided aid: GoS fairs better than opposition-held areas		2
	UN WoS not fair for NWS		7
	Lack of honesty, own agenda, politics (org/system/collective)		27
	Opposition-held SYR (treated) worse off than other contexts	Comparisons between UN engagement in NWS and other contexts (constant)	7

	Perceived discrimination against Syrians; rel. less important		5
	UN = GoS-like qualities	Explicit linkages between UN and GoS (as an ideal that interviewees oppose to) Note: illegitimacy of one entity (state) <-> other entities linked to it/ doing the same (Gippert, others)	1
	UN staff supports UN decisions even against NWS/hum. interests		1
	UN staff cannot see, apprehend what is best for NWS		2
	UN staff can see what is best for NWS (even against UN system)		2
	At UN: well-intentioned Individuals limited by system		8
	Corruption, lack of transparency, accountability (indiv.)	within the UN. Explicitly	13
	Personal (dis-)liking & school-yard politics		1
	UN (HQ) staff distant/don't care/fake; Career/self-focused.		3

Annex II: Interview and voice note exchange transcripts

This part of the annex includes the following sources. (1) Refers to the first interview conducted. (2) Refers to the second interview or voice note exchange conducted:

1.	Transcript P1(1)	–	Participant 1. (2023a). Transcript Participant 1 (1).
2.	Transcript P1(2)	–	Participant 1. (2023b). Transcript Participant 1 (2).
3.	Transcript P2(1)	–	Participant 2. (2023). Transcript Participant 2 (1).
4.	Transcript P3(1)	–	Participant 3. (2023a). Transcript Participant 3 (1).
5.	Transcript P3(2)	–	Participant 3. (2023b). Transcript Participant 3 (2).
6.	Transcript P4(1)	–	Participant 4. (2023). Transcript Participant 4 (1).
7.	Transcript P5(1)	–	Participant 5. (2023). Transcript Participant 5 (1).
8.	Transcript P6(1)	–	Participant 6. (2023a). Transcript Participant 6 (1).
9.	Transcript P6(2)	–	Participant 6. (2023b). Transcript Participant 6 (2).
10.	Transcript P7(1)	–	Participant 7. (2023). Transcript Participant 7 (1).
11.	Transcript P8(1)	–	Participant 8. (2023). Transcript Participant 8 (1).
12.	Transcript P9(1)	–	Participant 9. (2023a). Transcript Participant 9 (1).
13.	Transcript P9(2)	–	Participant 9. (2023b). Transcript Participant 9 (2).
14.	Transcript P10(1)	–	Participant 10. (2023). Transcript Participant 10 (1).

Transcript P1 (1)

1	R: So, thank you again for participating in this thesis project. What would be a good starting point is if you could tell me a bit more about yourself. (…). Just briefly. who are you and what is your professional background?
2	P1: Okay. So, I am [[Participant]]. I am a pharmacist, graduated from [[a university in Syria]]. I am a father [[…]]. I live with my family in Gaziantep since [[about ten years ago]], after I was forcibly displaced from my hometown and came to Turkey [[…]]. Then [I] started [working] in the humanitarian sector, at that time early in [[the same year]]. And [this type of work is] still ongoing today, in altogether different functions, positions and organizations, but mainly in health programming. So this is who I am very briefly.
3	R: Thank you. May I ask what motivated you initially to enter the humanitarian sector? And what is it that keeps this work so interesting for you that you are still in it?
4	P1: Well, to be very honest, there are a lot of good things in this kind of work. But as a whole, when we started to dig for [opportunities to establish our] life in our new place in Turkey, we did not have too many choices, except for the humanitarian sector itself. There were only the newly started local NGOs – before even the Clusters and the INGOs started to work – there were only the few, very few, local NGOs that started to support the people cross-border, so, supporting them by crossing the border from Turkey's side to Northwest Syria. So, this was the only, like, available chance for me to be hired and earning money again; having to support my life, my family. Later on we saw this kind of support in humanitarian as we are like volunteering to support people who we thought that they are at most need from our expertise and experiences that we have learnt through our journey in Syria. So this is what we liked in humanitarian work and me myself I stick to this goal.
5	R: May I ask who is 'we' when you say 'we'?
6	P1: (Smiling) Ah, when we say we, we mean a group of my friends whom I am surrounded by in Gaziantep. Always. I started working for [[my first employing organization]] with most of them together.
7	R: That was [[some ten years ago]]?
8	P1: Yes, exactly. [[Some ten years ago]] I was recruited by [[a member of the Syrian diaspora and member of the board of the organization]] who was representing [[the organization]] in Gaziantep at the time. Because before, they were based in [[another location in Turkey]] and things were evolving very fast, so the Working Groups started and other NGOs and INGOs started working, coming to Southern Turkey to work in Northwest Syria, and Gaziantep was the hub. So [[the organization]] wanted to open their first office in Gaziantep and I was recruited as [[part of the team of the organization working from this new office]]. But then I left [[the organization]] again (.) [[Over the past ten years, I worked at times for government-like entities but mostly for large humanitarian organizations that some would consider INGOs and others would consider local NGOs, almost exclusively in the health sector and in increasingly senior positions]]. I have been in my current, managerial position [[at one of the larger health organizations working cross-border Turkey-Northwest Syria]] for about a year now.
9	R: So you have been involved in the cross-border aid to Northwest Syria for about a decade already?
10	P1: Yes, for almost ten years. We have 2023 now, so yes, it's been ten years now.
11	R: How often do you nowadays still cross into Northwest Syria yourself? I remember that you used to visit Northwest Syria frequently, but that was when you were still in your previous position. You even have experiences with going in and, willingly or at times even unwillingly, spending weeks there. How often do you now get a chance to go inside?
12	P1: Yes. Unfortunately I have lost my permission for the cross-border access for about four months by now. So, the past four months [it] was zero. Before the earthquake, I mean, between the beginning of this year and the earthquake I had the chance of one visit only. Maybe two visits, actually. Anyways, but now very recently I regained the permission, so I am intending to go back to what was my usual [routine], as for the past ten years, I was in touch, in, you know, going into Syria and spending time there for at least once or twice each month. At least.
13	R: Yes, I remember you usually spent a lot of time there. [[...]]

14	P1: [[...]].
15	[[...]] Speaking of the earthquake: I mean, this is the topic that I am for this thesis project particularly interested in. (.) I mean, [[...]] We both were there.
16	P1: [[...]].
17	R: [[...]] (.) How is everything now? Has the situation calmed down again? (…) Did things become normal again somehow?
18	P1: Ah, I think yes, yani [[[What I mean is that]]] we barely remember that there was an earthquake happening. Only when we touch on memories of a colleague or friend who we have lost. Or when there are some new governmental rules, some governmental issues regarding the earthquake, like, you know, like, they now categorized the buildings in Gaziantep in three levels: the ones non-damaged, 'chasar sid', and the ones medium damaged and the ones severely damaged. So, the medium damaged, the 'ortachasar' they call it, they give them three months, or maybe four months period, they five them to withdraw their belongings from their houses. And, like, you know two or three weeks ago we started to see, yani [[[what I mean is that]]] several of those buildings are being collapsed, yani [[[what I mean is that]]] intentionally, they are knocking them down intentionally. So the time is to allow people to get their things out in order to then collapse them [[[the buildings]]].
19	R: When you say they (.), you mean the Turkish authorities, right?
20	P1: Yes. Yes, yes.
21	R: Okay. And for other parts of life, like, the kids are going to school again, and people go to work? I mean, I think you mentioned to me earlier that you went back to your place and even to work quite early already, right?
22	P1: Yeah, exactly. [[...]] mainly after one month we were back to our home and our life was more normal again. Or let's say, we continued. Ah, but there was one change still. I remember now. We were not going to the office until still another month and a half after. I think we started going back to the office in May. First of May we started going back to the office, yes.
23	R: So you worked from home? Or did you also have one of these experiences where you were working form the car, basically?
24	P1: Yani [[[Well]]], for me, myself, I did not enjoy working from the car. (Laughing). We were maybe only following up some 'Whatsapp groups' [[[messenger groups used for both – and often mixed - personal and professional purposes]]]. I don't really call this working from the car, you know. The first three days when we were working from the car, there were several other people they were working actually on emails, proposals and communications with donors and national entities, (umm), authorities, but myself I couldn't do it, until I settled in a hotel when they evacuated us from Gaziantep and we reached [[another city in Turkey]] in the third day. That's when I opened my emails. But in the first three days I was just working on the 'Whatsapp groups', checking [on] my staff and colleagues in the projects, if everyone is okay and fine, and that was the only thing I did from the car to be honest (laughing).
25	R: I understand. And you mentioned already you had your family with you.
26	P1: Yes, exactly. I had my [[direct and extended]] family [[...]] with me. [[...]]
27	Ah - okay. I see. And (.) do you remember from this immediate post-disaster period, how it was in Northwest Syria?
28	P1: Unfortunately I am not able to fully judge that today, like, what inside Northwest Syria exactly happened. But what I can elaborate on is, the - geography affected by the earthquake in Northwest Syria was [much smaller] in Northwest Syria than the geographies affected in Turkey. So, there were like some, some villages and cities, like, Afrin mainly, (umm), Jinderis, and some areas surrounding Al-Dana that I know where they are mostly affected, like where the buildings collapsed, and the people were displaced and issues like this. But I also remember that their coping mechanisms inside Syria started a lot earlier than the coping mechanisms that have become active in Turkey. Maybe coping mechanism is not the right word, but what I mean is, like, people were dealing with is faster somehow. And one theory that we have, yani [[[what I mean

	is that]]], built, at that time, I really remember that this is an amazing theory that we have, that people inside Syria, for more than ten years, they were being, yani [[[what I mean is that]]], suffering from much of the war, catastrophes, from the bombardments and being stuck, from the sitting in camps, this very harsh life that they have, this makes is easier for them to cope faster and work faster to survive from this catastrophe of the earthquake. The White Helmets and their - - mechanisms of saving lives looks very, from the first minutes of this earthquake, very fast, you know, while there were cities and provinces in Southern Turkey, all of them waited for almost a week for someone to come and help them. (.)
29	R: So basically, you are saying that because of all of these years of being on their own and having to be self-organised more with the White Helmets and other smaller grassroots and community-based organizations, the response was faster even though there is no actual government in Northwest Syria that would have been responsible for managing the situation?
30	P1: A hundred percent. In, (umm), in contrast, in Turkey, we knew that there are from the first 24 hours –; 48 hours, you know, on the day when they declared – (.). I don't know what is the name of the declaration that - - was made by the ministry of interior of that they can accept–; they accept missions from international aid organizations and then other - kind of groups that have been, at the sudden, that came and supported in - searching for survivors and - establishing the temporary places of having sheltering for the - - displaced people. In Syria, in those 3, 4, 5 days and even after the first week nobody touched on them. Nobody helped them from outside. And still they managed well much - - better to survive than - the Turkish.
31	R: So that means (.), you think that this - is because people are so used to being self-organised and to basically being confronted with this suffering and devastation already over decades? //
32	P1: // And we have, we have an example from our kind of work that, you know, the health sector has an example where - we know that our doctors in Syria when they are in their duties in hospitals, you know, and they're start to work very, very fast to save survivors, you know, to save lives that when they got news about their areas of families that are being hit and they didn't just let the people, the patients, alone to rush to their families, no, they kept on working until, like, after two or four hours until they themselves discovered that they have lost their families. In Turkey you know that all the affected areas that the life has - really vanished there was no hospitals, no doctors, no people that are serving other people you know they were just waiting there in the streets for somebody to support them and, well. (.) I think this - incident happened in Dana maybe, or in Harem or something, I don't remember, but one of the surgeons he was in in the emergency room and - working on several surgeries for people being saved and - after four hours he got the news that his building with his wife and children in it was under the rubbles and all died and he continued, he believed, continuing his work. (…)
33	R: Oh wow. (…). I think (.) that's incredible. This story.
34	P1: I don't know, baz [[[but]]] yes, I think this kind of people we would like, you know, they were like for the past 10 years working to save people, you know, it's very interesting to be studied how this kind of people, how they are supporting themselves in the huge, I don't know, it is a very mystery for all of us, you know, how they continue giving while they are in a hard, in very hard situations themselves. (.)
35	R: Yeah, indeed. Very impressive. (.)
36	P1: Yeah. (…)
37	R: You, (umm), you already mentioned now that –. You pointed out the important role of individuals like - this doctor, and also like other humanitarian colleagues, you - mentioned the While Helmets. Do you remember, or, if you - think back to - the first, as you said, - days, or let's say the first hundred days, ah sorry, the first hundred hours after the earthquake in Northwest Syria, who do you think were the most important actors involved in the response?
38	P1: Well, (umm), let me say you know they [[[disaster response professionals, not further defined]]] - told us that the first, like, 48 hours or the first 72, I think, hours are the ones that are the most important for lifesaving issues. The heroes of those first 72 hours are - the actual people, and, the doctors, or I'm not saying only doctors, it's not only doctors, you know, it's all of the humanitarian workers inside Syria. We're talking about inside Syria now, we are not talking about Turkey, right?
39	R: Yes, yes.

40	P1: Yes, so all of the humanitarian workers: doctors, pharmacists, [people] with health backgrounds, WASH [[[water, sanitation and hygiene]]] backgrounds; all of them, all of those were the - - actual heroes and the White Helmets of course were there that supported all of the searching and what was the picking up the people from under the rubbles, so yes, so after that the NGOs and the INGOs started, like, to be more organised themselves because their main offices were also very, very, you know, very affected by this situation in Turkey because they were all settled in in the southern region [of Turkey] or in the north region [of Syria]. (.)
41	R: You mean, when you say 'after', do you mean after the first 72 hours?
42	P1: Yes, exactly, after the first 72 hours the NGOs were more active.
43	R: Okay, okay.
44	P1: Yes. Yeah I'm talking more or less than -, like, the most of them [[[NGOs and INGOs based in Turkey and operating cross-border in Northwest Syria]]], that are maybe 70% of them, started to reorganise themselves then [[[after the first 72 hours]]]. Like, for example, at [[a larger health-focused humanitarian organization established by Syrians in Gaziantep in response to the crisis in Syria]] I think, I mean, I am talking about my own organization that I have been working at that time, so, they started, that is, we started on the 5th day, we established the taskforce of the earthquake response in the 5th day. Of course there was, you know, we considered, or let me say, we can say that during the first 72 hours all of our, our employees, our doctors and facilities, they were working [by] themselves as usually they were, you know, because usually when you have like [[a large hospital in the region]] that very well knows how they are working with [[my organization]], you know, it doesn't need to be supported on a weekly and a daily basis from anyone from [[our team]] when they have their own structure and they have their own functionality that they keep on working.
45	R: (Laughing) So you mean, no micromanagement needed from [[your CEO]] or from you or from anyone?
46	P1: Yeah exactly (laughing). No-one. Not from [[my CEO]], not from [[other potentially important people]], not from me (laughing). Yes. (.)
47	R: So they were basically continuing their work and, of course, in that sense again it's maybe difficult to differentiate between what individuals do in their professional or private capacities, if they have a respective background, and what organizations do as an organizations, right? (…). So it's more like everybody who is involved in the humanitarian sector was doing the best they can. Is that how you wanted me to understand you?
48	P1: Yes. (.)
49	R: So, the structured response (.), the coordinated, structured response that was led by organizations, like, at the NGO level or INGO level, <u>that</u> came after the first 72 to 100 hours?
50	P1: Yes. It started, like, they [[[(I)NGOs based in Turkey and operating cross-border in Northwest Syria]]] started to regain it [[[the lead on the response]]]. I think, they were rising again to start to know how, you know, how they can start -, to build a response, and there was also the point when any, you know, the [finger pointing] that started from the first, second day about what's and where is the role of the UN, and where is the role of the international community, where is the role of people involved. We were - - like, for me myself, I'm talking about myself now, I was like in in this shock of not knowing exactly what, (.), what extent that this [[disaster]] had and what is the response that needs to be supported from outside, like, when I was in in Turkey, I mean, and seeing the huge amount of, you know –, we were travelling to [[another city in Turkey that was considered relatively safe]] outside, when, (…), when we saw the cities [while] on the roads and that huge catastrophe that happened and I was in in the shock, not knowing exactly to what extent and what kind of efforts that can be done from that can be saved. And we started to hear about the first time that AFAD, like, AFAD is collapsing, and the Red Cross is Collapsing. (.)
51	R: AFAD is the Turkish (.) - - disaster response authority, right?
52	P1: // Yes, the authority under the interior ministry, yes. And –
53	R: // And with the Red Cross we are talking about the one in Syria or Turkey?
54	P1: // Yes, ah, the TRC. The Turkish Red Cross.

55	R: // Ah, ok, and –
56	P1: // No, no, the TRC. The Turkish Red Cross. We don't have a Red Cross in Syria because for me in the area that's not regime control there is no Red Cross, so no, the Turkish Red Cross. (Laughing). We have a Health Directorate. (Laughing).
57	R: Yes, okay. Sorry, I didn't want to interrupt you. I just wanted to follow up on AFAD and the Red Cross, as I was not sure if I understood well.
58	P1: No worries, no worries. So yes, I have also my own experience, you know, at that day there was the – [[[earthquake]]], the WhatsApp groups [[[in this sense, this refers to various Whatsapp and other messenger groups that are typically used for often interconnected personal and professional matters related to the humanitarian response in Northwest Syria]]], you know, we were talking about what's happening and starting [] the [finger pointing], like, where are the UN agencies and what's the role of the international community. I have the experience, you know, I have the one friend who is–; who started working [[for one of the UN entities based in Gaziantep]] officially [[with a connection to the]] health cluster [[…]]. He was the first person (.), he was actually the first one who had contacted me at 7:00 AM when we were staying in the in the streets. (.)
59	R: So, at 4:20 [AM] there was the earthquake and at 7:00, basically two hours and a bit later, he was already on the phone with you?
60	P1: // Yeah exactly. And I know that, after - 11 AM, he [[[the friend who was working for one of the UN entities in Gaziantep]]] was at - - the office with [[some of his colleagues]] at the latest, starting to point at the maps, so, they were sitting under the tables and they were starting to point on maps figuring out where [are] the cities, the most severe damaged places inside Syria and how can they mobilise any kind of support to support, and where are the facilities and they were trying to figure out exactly a plan immediately when they were under the table and we were having the third earthquake. So they were under the table planning the immediate response and looking for what they can do when there was the next earthquake (.)
61	R: // you mean –
62	P1: // Yes, so –
63	R: // Ah, sorry. You mean the other earthquake at around 1:00 PM? They were in the office then, working on a plan?
64	P1: Exactly.
65	R: So, the second big one, basically.
66	P1: Exactly, yes. So, they also, they - - also left the office immediately, and they went back to their families immediately. (…)
67	R: Oh, oh I can Imagine.
68	P1: Yes, (laughing), exactly, (.) freaking out again. And this [[[when the second heavy earthquake struck]]] was when - they [[[other people/friends involved in the Whatsapp Groups who are also involved in the humanitarian response]]] were talking about the UN agencies not responding, and UN agencies not thinking about others, you know, I thought - about, you know, this guy, in this time he was the UN for me. I know that he's a Syrian guy that is like not carrying all the UN agencies' behaviour himself, you know, but then, for example, his [[colleague is not from Syria]] and he was at that time with him at the office, you know, so I don't know. I had very much a conflict of emotions at the time, as I didn't know if I should be angry or not be angry. I think till the first office day when the guy [[[Martin Griffiths, UN Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs and Emergency Relief Coordinator]]] from the UN went inside [[[Northwest Syria]]], and started the convoy, starting up in northwest Syria, carrying out all of this huge political, what do we call it, a storm let's say, yeah, things got more clear I think for me, or for us. There was the - eventual situation that we had from the 10 years of the war that created something that cannot be described let's say on the population level, on the social economic behaviours that we had, on the thinking behaviour that we had, so we are not able process, at least the way I think for myself, I think, that we are not able, (...), we are not healthy enough in our minds to be able to judge things correctly. (…). Yeah.

69	R: You think? Yes?
70	P1: Yes. I am totally convinced of this point.
71	R: You mean, judge in the sense of, (.), who should be doing what in which situation, or (.) ?
72	P1: Who is a friend and what's the role of other people, supporting to what extent and - - how much needed for, example, if you remember, [[Researcher]], for me, I was very annoyed from one very small point; we all, we all were attacking the UN agencies when - no one was mentioning at all the Salvation Government, Hayat Tahrir Al-Shams [[[HTS, the dominant armed, extremist non-state actor in Northwest Syria]]] where they, you know, were they were claiming for 3-4 years back that they are controlling and building a country and, you know, they were like showing off even the [leader of HTS] was like going to markets and putting rules and building institutes, you know, and claiming that they were in charge.
73	R: Ah, yes. I think I saw that they were putting things on Social Media, is that right?
74	P1: Yes, yes, yes. Exactly, yes. They [[[HTS]]] were showing off that they were building an actual country with a government and institutions and it was working for - many of the people. They actually believed that this Salvation Government, I mean, is a good choice for Idlib City because they are like really acting as an organised institution, like a government for them, you know. But at the earthquake, nobody, nobody touched on them. What did they, I mean, what did they do - - - - - ? How did they participate in saving people, you know? But it was zero. Nobody they supported. And they - didn't move any penny to support people; they didn't move any - of their vehicles to support people, it was all based on the NGOs working [[[in the area]]] and the humanitarian workers.
75	R: (Ah) (.) (Ah), I didn't know that. I, –. (...). Because I, I did hear in the aftermath, – maybe you can correct this then for me – that the Salvation Government, which is basically HTS kind of government with health and, umm, other ministries, right?
76	P1: Yeah.
77	R: Yeah, and like, and other, (.) other functions as well, but well, I did hear that they [[[HTS]]] did claim having been important in the response afterwards. (…). Like, that they claimed that they were part of it [[[the response]]] and that they, like, that it's basically because of their efficiency and their effectiveness as a (.) - - government or, a government-like entity to be so effective in the response despite that external help coming in was not early enough (...). I'm just saying this is one of the sources that I've read – it's not even, it's not from an interview or somebody telling me in person, it's what I read publicly online; I'm (.) – . But - then, you would say that the information that I got is not correct?
78	P1: (Ah) for sure they would claim this. Yani [[What I mean is that]], this is very, very much expected for everyone working close to them. For sure they will claim [[this]] because they are clever enough nowadays to know how and when to marketize themselves. But I would say that in a in a very good scenario they had 5% to 10% of supporting anything regarding the earthquake response. (.).
79	R: Okay, so, basically that means, if we look at the actors that were involved in the first let's say 100 days, ah, sorry, 100 hours, do I understand it right that, (umm) you would put the UN higher than the Salvation Government, I mean, in terms of what they tried to do?
80	P1: Yes. (.). Of course. And after the first week when the UN agencies started, when they came for the security visit and the UN representatives started to visit, the UN agencies supported hugely the response, you know. At least from a health perspective let's say, they - did have a huge amount of - you know, they even had the idea to start, I mean, the idea was being discussed a lot, of having an actual office inside Northwest Syria for the first time since ten years. (...)
81	R: Ah, really? And is this, is this already accomplished? I mean, so they have an office in Northwest Syria now?
82	P1: Up to my knowledge it was not accomplished till today, but what I know is that since the earthquake till today, they haven't stopped their visits and - their convoys. (.)
83	R: You mean, UN staff is going into Northwest Syria themselves?

84	P1: Yes, exactly. They are going in and visiting all facilities and coordinating with all of the stakeholders inside and conducting lots of, - –. It's on a week, (ah), no, not a weekly, no, I think a bi-monthly basis that they are - - going inside and doing their assessments on all of this and collecting information. And they had, like, two months ago, I think they had this huge meeting in Dar-Salame, I think, with many stakeholders from inside, from the field actually; they asked for field personnel from NGOs and local authorities to discuss about how they can work out this idea of having [] actual offices inside Northwest Syria.
85	R: Okay, but that means there's a definite difference from before, right? How often would you say, I mean, that a representative of the UN, a member of staff, would visit northwest Syria physically before the earthquake?
86	P1: Zero
87	R: You mean, not even once a year?
88	P1: Zero. (…). You know, it only happened when Mark Cutts [[[the former United Nations Deputy Regional Humanitarian Coordinator for the Syria crisis]]], you know, this guy, you remember, it was this guy who broke the habit of the UN and he actually visited, like, for three, I mean, two or three times in his life while he was working in Gaziantep. But actually there were zero visits from any other staff of UN agencies, you know. But still, also, I mean, even for Mark Cutts, his visits were very - - , (.) very limited to very near places of the border itself.
89	R: Okay, I see. And why, (umm) - do you think that this changed now with the earthquake? (...). I mean, there must have been a reason why they didn't visit frequently before, right?
90	P1: Why they did not visit frequently before, nobody actually has the answer (laughing).
91	R: (Laughing). Okay (?)
92	P1: They all the time, you know, they all the time say that they don't have the man– the, you know, the ‘mandatorates’. No the man– (.)
93	R: The mandate?
94	P1: Yes, the mandates. They say all the time that they don’t have the mandates, to, you know, actually do [] those visits, you know. (Laughing)
95	R: (Laughing)
96	P1: But, - what I see as window that's been opened by the earthquake itself and that huge pressure on what was the role of the UN agencies to, you know, to do on supporting this very small and catastrophic area with the new and nearly besieged area from, from all of, yani [[what I mean to say is]] from all of their surroundings, you know, I think this, this was this, ah, the window that has been opened and they will, - they started to very, very frequently use it [[[for visits]]] (...).
97	R: Okay, so you think it opened and that the reasons why the UN staff did not visit Syria frequently is not related to other reasons? (...). Like, not related, I mean, not, not related to for example security reasons, or to being afraid of HTS, for example that they could abduct people, or –
98	P1: No. We know very, very, very well that they have [[[the UN]]] [[coordination mechanisms]] that are [[sometimes getting very close to coordination with armed groups]] and, you know they [[[UN agencies]]] actually were the responsible ones even for the protection and the safety and security for others not for themselves only. So, I don’t think that it was the risk issue [[[why they did not visit NWS before the earthquake at all]]]. It was about discussing the mandate itself. It was about their role – is it their role or is it not their role. And that’s a bit difficult for a[n] excuse for not visiting, yani [[[you see what I mean to say, right?]]] – (laughing)
99	R: Yeah. Well, (laughing), well I don't want to put my opinion in here actually. Anyways, it is the first time that I actually hear about the, you know, the mandate being that kind of an issue. But then, all of what you say, I mean, ultimately this means then that when we think about the, the first hundred days [[[actually: hours]]], if I understand you correctly, you would question why the UN itself has been so much of a target for negative accusations in the first hundred hours after the earthquake? (...). I think, because, I mean, I remember there

	were a lot of people that would publicly say ‘hey where is the UN and where are the internationals’ but then again while this is the focus I think that a lot of people were pointing at, you are saying that, if I understand well, at the same time the kind of local, the, you know, the Salvation Government and let's say the kind of a local, I mean, how do you describe it, local, quasi-governmental –
100	P1: Authorities. Yes.
101	R: Authorities, right, why are they not being addressed in that kind of a negative talk. So why are they [[[local quasi-state authorities]]] not blamed for the lack of support, but the internationals are?
102	P1: Yes. And I think there's an easy answer for this. I think it's because the bigger you have an as an expectation from the more you get annoyed [[[the higher your expectation the more you get annoyed]]] and you experience accusations for - –; it's just like any humanitarian, no, human feelings for people. So, for example, when I know you are, you are my wife for example, or you are my mother or you are my sister you are my relative and you are the rich relative that I have and I have a cousin who is not living very well, you know, and when I am in a bad situation I will be expecting more from you, like more efficient support than others, so it's the same thing with the UN here. (.)
103	R: You mean because I have more resources and I'm the one who's better off you would expect me to do more because I have the means to do more?
104	P1: Yes, exactly. And that’s what I mean for the UN.
105	R: Okay. (...). Yeah, this might make sense.
106	P1: Yeah, so this is the easy answer and there's the very hard answer. And here we are having all of this conspiracy theory inside when - you see that, you know, for Syrians, I mean, they have never reached the point to believe who are –; who and how they are supported from, the - entities or the - global community, ah I mean, the international community, the ones that are supporting the revolution and their - raise [[[upraising]]] against the government, against Assad, so the UN agencies, they have been in the picture very early already, like, in 2016, to be in, like, actually conducting an agenda to supporting Assad themselves. (laughing)
107	R: Well, maybe there are some point you can make in this direction. Like, reasons why people might claim this. That there is a connection, right? I mean, in terms of what people might say. But so, - - you think that already before the earthquake the trust and views vis-à-vis the United Nations in Northwest Syria were not really great?
108	P1: Unfortunately, yes. (.).
109	R: And your own? (.). I mean, do you recollect, I mean, how do you remember that you thought about the UN yourself before the earthquake? (...)
110	P1: I didn't actually have a different view before the earthquake. Yani [[What I mean to say is that]], I believe that it is the UN agencies themselves, as - the organizations or as an institution being built upon an agreement that happened like 50, 60, 80 years ago, after World War 2, putting in place only governments and controls for all of their decisions, you know, and putting under - this non-transparent and non- (umm), what do you call it? (umm), [[[cursing in Arabic]]] ah, non-accounted, non-responsible accounted, or non-accounted system, no – what I mean is that there is no accountability in the system, you know, there's no way of finding accountability towards any of the employees working in any rank of the UN agencies, you know. It's built a very corrupted environment. (...). There is a huge amount of corruption inside, like in the institutions like the UN agencies. This is my viewpoint before the earthquake until now.
111	R: Ah. Okay. And (.). What do you mean by corruption? (...). Just to for me to understand.
112	P1: Corruption is, you know, the - environment inside their own agencies starting from the employment, I mean, the employing itself of people that they, I mean, that are not checked, I mean, their employment is not being based on - - – how can I say it – they don't earn it by their, for example, their background or for the experiences they have. It's only by a system that you cannot know how. It’s by a system with, not relatives but more like, using connections, like, you know what I mean, there is a word I don’t remember, (umm), (.)
113	R: Like, favouritism? You think?

114	P1: Sorry, what?
115	R: Favouritism? // I think what you are describing to me sounds very much like favouritism, so this is –
116	P1: // – Yes, yes, exactly. Favouritism.
117	R: // So, you mean, if I understand well you mean connections that help people get some special treatment but that goes beyond family ties, it's like –
118	P1: // Yes, yes exactly. Favouritism is what I was searching for. Exactly. It's like, where you have things that come from, like, relatives and friends of - political people being - appointed more than any regular people, you know. It's just like a government, a corrupted government [[[speaking about favouritism, here in connection to the UN]]]. Like for us in - Syria, we are very familiar with this, you know: in organization trees and in high ranks, it's always that those positions are only for people like those being favouritized [[[subjects to favouritism]]]. So it's starting with the employment process itself and ending on all of the decisions being made for, for example, spending, programming or planning supporting: they are all - - - under the pressure of having no clear - - accountability mechanisms, - - no transparency, like responsibility for this [[[any such decisions taken]]], you know. (…)
119	R: So that means, actually, we are shifting to an individual level now, right? (.) We are not looking at the UN as an institution? (…) So, am I getting you right that you are saying that within the UN, even at the level of individual employees, I mean, staff members, there is no accountability mechanism? (.) Is that what you're saying?
120	P1: Yes exactly.
121	R: Okay, thank you. Go ahead.
122	P1: No, so yes. This is what can be considered as a conspiracy theory, or whatever, but at the end of the day, I think that, you know, now there are research papers, articles in journals that are published about the system and how corrupt it is inside the UN agencies. Especially for our case in Syria they were like, even numbers that you know –. Do you remember that paper that was published by Mohammad Katoub [[[a Syrian doctor active in the Syrian humanitarian context, who published a number of renown articles and reports, including to the UNSC]]]? There was information about the divisions that happened in Damascus office from UN agencies by WHO and UNICEF and maybe other UN agencies I think, so (umm), these were evidence-based accounts about how corrupted those agencies are. (…)
123	R: Okay, so that - basically means, like -, what you are saying is that we - could question if the UN is actually responsible, or, maybe saying it differently, (.) acting in a way in which they would be held accountable for their actions, I mean, as an organization or at – individual levels, and this also concerns how they respond in - - a disaster situation as the one that - we went through, right? (.) Do I understand this correctly?
124	P1: Yes, yes, exactly. (…)
125	R: I'm –. So, I mean, let me see if I get this whole point correctly then, because the way I understand you is still that your point is more on that individual level of saying that the trust [[[in the UN]]] is not there because the trust cannot be with the people that are employed in the UN because there is no transparency and there is nobody who's being held accountable for their individual actions, or let's say, actually remembering the publications you mentioned, actually I think there is a little bit of accountability still, no? At least I remember that the head of the WHO in Damascus was – fired, right? (.) Because of the corruption surrounding her? (.) But in general, so, what you are saying is is that it's because there is no transparency and so because people are recruited based on their ties to other influential people? (.) That's the main reason why you distrust the - organization itself, if I understand well?
126	P1: Yes, you are describing it much better than I could. But still, I think the issue is that there - is a system that can be - -, so, yani [[[what I mean to say is that]]] there is - - a system where they - know their responsibilities and they know - what's the mechanisms that they have to follow, for example, to file a complaint or to follow [up] on a complaint or something like this, but inside this system, it is very, very bureaucratic, very politicised, like, (.) let's say that you cannot achieve easily that – let's take the example of [[a former coordinator of one of the UN Clusters in Gaziantep who was engaged in this position for several years]]. [[[This person was]]] fighting the - - [[…]] biggest 5 or 6 [[.]] organizations [[represented in that

	Cluster]], I mean, local [[.]] organizations, because - [[this Cluster Coordinator]] didn't like them and [[.]] didn't like the way that they were - - - taking decisions on behalf of - - - the field itself. You remember this issue, right? (.)
127	R: [[Yes]] [[[There were several instances in the past years that UN Cluster coordinators' opinions clashed with those of Syrian/ diaspora NGO representatives in the Cluster]]]
128	P1: [[Okay]]. So the real - - - root of the problem, I mean, when - - [[this Cluster Coordinator]] - went to monopolise the resources and monopolise the decisions being made for [[this Coordinator]] and - away from the Cluster mechanism itself, and the TORs itself, you know, and [[this Coordinator]] (.) intentionally (.) stopped [[a well-established way of ensuring local participation and shared decision making in the Cluster]], you know. And even when the biggest local NGOs went to - - [[this Coordinator's]] bosses [[...]] and - complained - - about [[this person]] - and even after they [[[senior UN officials]]] came to Gaziantep - and - investigated the situation, you know, what happened at the at the end of the day? [[The person]] still is - level five [[…]] coordinator elsewhere, not being touched ever, you know, and [[this Coordinator]] might even come back to Gaziantep one day, in some level, or maybe for the next WHO office inside Azaz for example. (…)
129	R: (With a smile) Is that something you would be afraid of happening?
130	P1: Oh, yes, (with a smile). I would not only be afraid, I'd be terrified if that's happening. (…)
131	R: Okay. (.) You know, it's - actually a very interesting perspective - . I didn't think about that before, I mean, like, this - kind of a very personal and very individually related perspective on the UN that you are sharing with me. So it's not about this big organization that sits somewhere in Geneva and New York and is politically oriented and acting, but it's really also about the individuals who are taking actions and supporting - positively or negatively, in your point of view, right?
132	P1: It's exactly this way. Yes. Because - - as an organization, I don't think that the UN agencies, like, a huge organization, they don't have the mechanisms to control - - all of those missions and offices and the people, the staff members that they have, so, it's up to - the persons, the individuals themselves. So, you sometimes see [[people with a for the Participant well intentioned and positive influence]] for example inside the UN agencies, and [in] other times you will see [[people like this Coordinator and others with a for the Participant ill-intentioned and negative influence]]. So it's this kind of corruption in the organization, (umm) the institute, that I'm trying to describe. (…)
133	R: I have one question here, which is about what has surprised you the most in the - - - way in which the UN acted in the immediate, like, the 72 to 100 hours of the immediate earthquake disaster response. We already spoke about this a bit earlier, like, that - the UN did not enter northwest Syria for the first 72 to 100 hours, right? That there were no convoys, no nothing, and that there was a huge discussion about opening other access points than Bab Al-Hawa [[[the main humanitarian border crossing between Türkiye and Northwest Syria]]] and mandate issue and legal issues and, - - that there was no external support provided basically to northwest in the entire first period. Is that (.) in your point of view (.) then also more related to the persons at the individual level of taking the decisions to not to not cross in? (.) Like, does this also depend on individuals rather than the organization as such to enter or rather negotiate with - - - - the (.) formal government of Syria?
134	P1: (Umm), so, I think - - yes - and on top of that there is the - issue for the actual - -mandate itself. For example, the - offices of the UN agencies that exist in Turkey at this time, they are responsible for the northwest Syria humanitarian response, you know. So the mandate for them is, basically, it is an emergency mandate for them because of the war that happened. But I think they [[[the UN]]] have another mechanism for - much more, like, efficient forms of response for an emergency, like, of a disaster emergency, you know. So, I mean a disaster like earthquakes, or volcanoes, or for tsunamis or things like this. So they, you know, they have a lot of experience in this, a lot of experience that goes beyond what - - actually exists, I mean, what was used here, you know. For – example, if you remember WHO says or, yani [[[what I mean to say is that]]] they claimed that they have mobilised a convoy in the first 48 hours. What happened, you know, was that these vehicles were what WHO office in Gaziantep had, like, planned, for three months (.) yani [[[what I mean to say is that]]], at least three months before the earthquake. So this is one of the supply line support convoys that's being planned from three months ago, you know? Because also the Turkish government, at

	the day of disaster, collapsed. Like, their systems collapsed, you know, so from the north, (umm) I mean, from the northern border, they were unable to – submit, so, to deliver this convoy.
135	R: What you're talking about is the first pre-scheduled six convoys that were entering on, I think, the 9th of February, right? Or around the 10th at least? (.) I think, yes so the ones that were entering after the first 72 hours but that were very close to this period, to the end, I mean, // basically the first ones that entered after the earthquake, right?
136	P1: // Yes, yes. I think, yes.
137	R: Like, I'm just asking so that we do not, like, after five months, now, confuse things. So, we're talking about the same convoys, right?
138	P1: Yes, yes. Exactly.
139	R: Okay. But then, that means, you're saying that also the Turkish government has not been able to let them in because the system collapsed at their end as well? Do you think that opening additional border crossings would have been an option there earlier to make, I mean, to improve this situation?
140	P1: I don't know exactly if they - needed a cross-border resolution. The issue is this: We, I, believe that this cross-border resolution is a big lie from them. (…)
141	R: Go ahead.
142	P1: Yeah, I did. I did find this situation once when I was working in supply chain management. [[I have some experience in this domain]]. You know, when we were working in besieged areas like in - Douma [[[a district close to the capital Damascus that was for a long time held by Syrian opposition forces and besieged by the formal government of Syria]]], for example, for - years of having no access, not any way to deliver any kind of aid for them, I read lots of resources from WFP how the UN agencies usually send convoys, like, through the air. They have planes that are dropping aid to those kinds of besieged areas, you know. So I was always wondering and asking these questions, upsetting all the colleagues from UN agencies at that time. I asked them why doesn't our WHO Office in Gaziantep do this what they do anywhere else [[[provide aid to hard-to-reach areas by any means, even if by plane]]]? I told them: Do the same for these people. I mean, it's not about the - political lie, that about having access through a [cross-border] resolution. This issue [[being constrained by the cross-border resolution]] is - - a very big lie for everyone and they know it's a lie themselves.
143	R: Do they?
144	P1: At the end of and they know. Yes. And they act as if they don't know. But they know.
145	R: So actually, your point then is that this cross-border resolution and all of these half a year advocacy needs for keeping the Bab Al-Hawa crossing open is actually not necessarily for the humanitarian response to Northwest Syria. Is that how you want me to understand your point?
146	P1: Yes. Exactly. As as you mentioned. Just, I am not an expert at this level of politics and the international law. I'm not an expert, but I know that and I know that there are also various kinds of reports that have been discussed and issued by experts, like, some colleagues from American and other foreign institutions, they have put [together] some evidence that international law is not actually needed. So they don't need this resolution to have this cross-border aid.
147	R: So - basically you - are saying that there are alternative interpretations and the UN has so far opted to go for the one that is not actually necessarily then?
148	P1: And it [[how the cross-border resolution decision is being interpreted and its possible non-renewal approached]] will be again linked with - my theory about the individuals themselves. What we discussed before. So, for example in in 2022, when we started, yani [[[what I mean to say is that]]] that when we - heard the - first - - - day that we will not have the renewal of the decision [[[the UNSC cross-border resolution]]] itself. Different - UN agencies behaved very differently. You know, the UNFPA, for example, and the - - OCHA, they immediately send messages to their partners that they will immediately stop all of their funds and - projects funded from themselves, while others just went running around in circles, giving no

	answers, you know? So this is also about individuals being interpreting - –. I mean, interpreting what's their opinion about their own internal mechanisms.
149	R: Okay. And basically, as you said, it's, for you again, related to individual decisions and not to kind of an organizational big apparatus with a - systematic response? (…)
150	P1: Exactly. (…)
151	R: Very interesting. I am –. Yeah, so I - have a couple of shorter questions still, if you still have –. - - think we - would be done in like 6-7 minutes if - you still have energy because it's already been quite long. But yeah, it's so valuable, you know, for me to hear these things from your perspective. Maybe, so maybe we can just focus for a moment on - the concrete changes that you see that UN has - now done. The UN, in which ever way you like, being viewed more broadly as an organization or, if you say, on the level, I mean, for the individuals behind it: What changes do you see have happened with regards to the UN's conduct since the earthquake until today in the way in which the UN entities are engaging in - northwest Syria. (…). You already mentioned the increased presence and visits. I think that's a very important point, right? (.) So that's - –
152	P1: I think this is the only change that I have witnessed [[[the increased UN presence and visits in NWS]]]. Because - other changes that like, for example, (…) the type of, like, you know, (…) strategic allocations, strategic goals of allocations is now, you know, redirected to emergency responses, you know, but it's been like bouncing [back and forth], from time to time in northwest Syria. It's not a very, very substantial change that happened. The - - - decision of (umm) downsizing the amounts of projects under [UN]OCHA toward the new mechanism of AFNS, the new mechanism (.) –
153	R: // I am not familiar with this [[[AFNS: Aid Fund for Northern Syria]]]. What is this about?
154	P1: They // Ah, it's (.), if you remember, it was called NSAF [[[National Social Aid Fund]]]? And later then it was renamed and it is now called AFNS: The alternative fund for the northwest region of Syria. That's what is being supported by the British, I mean the UK, and others. This [now] is being, like –. I think, yes, its their first allocation now that came right after the earthquake itself. It's their first - - - round of contracting. But it's not related to the earthquake itself. I think for the earthquake itself, you know, when they started, also this - – was planned years ago. The phasing out of OCHA and UN emergency response for northwest Syria as they were, like, preparing for the political solution to be - - done in 2021, I think. After the elections, I mean, the "elections" (sarcastic, transporting doubt about the fair use of the word elections here) of the shah [[[the Syrian presidency in this case]]]
155	R: The (.) "elections" (repeating sarcastic pronunciation in confirmation) in Syria. Yeah and –?
156	P1: (Distracted for a moment) Yes, but nothing happened. Just like, – (…) (Umm). (Smiling).
157	R: (Smiling) Yeah. Go ahead. Go ahead. Nothing happened and?
158	P1: This is just like years and years of like, nothing will happen. No political solution.
159	R: Yeah, but how? Like, I mean, this is, (umm), okay. (.) Let's - maybe differentiate. (.) We have these activities that we're describing now, right? Like the - changes in actual activities of the UN, in terms of what's being done by – the UN its different entities. So you're saying, if I understand well, that basically the only thing that you're aware that has changed is increased - physical presence, increased visits, to Northwest Syria? Of UN representatives and staff members there? And that there is a change in the mechanisms of funding, like, the use of the alternative funds being provided to the region, but that - - does not necessarily have to be connected to the earthquake, is this right? (…) And like that's –
160	P1: Exactly. Maybe (…) - a slight change toward like, I also - - see a slight change of the strategic objectives of the allocations itself that comes from SCHF [[[Syria cross-border humanitarian fund]]] toward more emergency based projects because - - before the earthquake, I think, it was like more and more being developed for an early recovery response, more than an emergency response, but I think just after the earthquake they have this returned back down to the emergency, so there is a slight change in strategic goals also, yes.
161	R: Yeah, -. Okay. That, - - actually also makes sense. (.) So that's – (.) (checking and taking notes and thinking out load) activity-based mostly (.) and a little bit (.) kind of (.) also a bit goals and objectives- based

	because you're - saying that the objectives of the UN and its entities before the earthquake were more related to early recovery and stabilisation I think, right?
162	P1: Exactly, but it was bouncing [back and forth] as you remember, it was bouncing [back and forth] [[[allocations for emergency and early recovery respectively]]]. Depending – (.), depending on //
163	R: Depending on what happened, you mean?
164	P1: Yeah (smiling).
165	R: Yeah (laughing with a strong sarcastic touch). Well, like, it's basically, like, you have this crisis with the [Assad's] military forces, halfway taking over, and then all of a sudden you have a Corona pandemic, and then all of all of a sudden you have an earthquake?
166	P1: And you remember the M4-M5 issue [[[the Syrian formal government's operation in 2019/2020 to take control of the main highways in the north, M4 and M5, and their intersection close to the city of Marrat al-Numan]]], (.) they - have taken over the top 50 kilometres of the M5 (laughing with the same, strong sarcastic touch).
167	R: // M5, M4, you mean the - - - main - - highways, basically in - the South of northwest Syria?
168	P1: // The access roads, exactly. Connecting (.) Damascus to Turkey and everything else. And the Russians and the Turkish are being friends for a while and then being enemies for another while, you know (…).
169	R: Yeah. (ah, ah). So, okay, like this being, like, you mean, these developments, this is also influencing how much of a response for emergency and stabilisation and early recovery it would - be about but then?
170	P1: Exactly. Yeah. Yeah. This was bouncing [back and forth] into this. (.)
171	R: Any other –; any direct changes that you would see then related to this, I mean anything that - you would find interesting? (…) Maybe, I mean, maybe not only for the UN? (.) Also, I mean I saw a couple of pictures of Assad being welcomed very warmly back to the to the Arab League, for example, in the same period? (.) Or maybe related to that in northwest Syria the response was not that great? (.) Or also that hostilities are continuing, (.) even at an increased rate, I think, if that's my – (.) - - - correct piece of information that I have. Anything that you would find (umm) valuable to highlight as a change on the entire context, if you want to share.
172	P1: (Distracted for a moment) Unfortunately, I'm not - - (.) recalling the - - – (.) I do remember the issue that even [[influential people in the Participant's closer social circle]] talked about (.): this political earthquake, how they [[[representatives of states who started normalizing ties with the Assad regime after the earthquake]]] managed to (.) - normalise back the relations with Assad. But I'm not recalling the details about, I mean, what was behind this, but from also a [personal] perspective of an unpolitical guy, who doesn't understand politics and these kinds of things (laughing), like (laughing) (.), even when - - I read articles of [[influential people in Participant's circle]], I don't easily understand what's - - being – (.); what they are talking - about, yes. But I - think that this also went – back, yani, [[[what I mean to say is that]]] it [[[the normalizing of relations with the Assad regime]]] was planned years before the earthquake and they [[[representatives of states who started normalizing ties with the Assad regime after the earthquake]]] find - - it, like, a very (.) suitable moment to - put into practice now, exactly.
173	R: So you think it's basically all being prepared for a long time and it was already kind of looming, and now comes the situation and people take it as - - - the occasion to open up and conducting them?
174	P1: They [[[representatives of states who started normalizing ties with the Assad regime after the earthquake]]] saw - - very legitimate, let's say, a very, from their perspective, very legitimate reason to - say that: "we cannot abandon Assad anymore", (ah), not Assad [himself], I mean, "we cannot abandon the people under - the regime's control anymore. They have a disaster; they have losses of lives. So we have to support them. We have to open the airports. We have to come back to the embassies and things like that." But again, I'm sorry. From my perspective it's a big lie. They were - - planning for this a long time ago. They were not expecting, of course, an earthquake to happen. But they were like planning for, yani [[[I mean]]], you know –, you remember we had like the scenarios that there will be a huge movement in - - the military (ah) – (.) operations, on the north, (.) on the northern line where Turkey will start to push toward the east (…) against the Americans and this will, like, create the final (.) last period bullet of the war. You know?

175	R: You mean, between Kobane and the Spring Peace area?
176	P1: Exactly. There was like a scenario being (.) expected or (…) being in - - - - all of our - documents, you know, - talking about this last bullet of war that will (.) change everything?
177	R: Everything?
178	P1: // And - how was it - - - being discussed (.) among the big three, the Russians and then the - - Americans and (.) involving the Turks and Iranians and - - then I think that was the prepared, yani [[I mean]] – that was the preparation point of having this change, until the earthquake happened, you know. But the earthquake happened and made it easier for them not to have this bullet and start the - implementing the plan of normalising back toward the (…) Assad's government (.) and control for the whole of Syria (.) and they are starting to (.) – you remember, the – (.) Very recently, this resolution, the Security Council meetings for the renewing of the – (…) - cross-border resolution (.)
179	R: // Which, according to you then, is not even necessary, right?
180	P1: // You saw what happened? ----- (…)
181	R: I am not sure if I would know what you mean. But yeah, I am following.
182	P1: I mean, - - that we have – (.). We are now facing a new era of the agreement –, [I mean] of the UN Council agreeing on - the - what they call the - suggestion of the Syrian Government. They have – (.) - - withdrawn all of the papers where the Syrian government actually [is] giving the access for the UN agencies from Bab Al-Hawa themselves. They [the Syrian formal Government under Assad] are now announcing that they permit UN agencies to access for - humanitarian aid, but with coordination with [the] Damascus government and not by coordinating with the - - Salvation Government [[[the quasi-governmental entity established by Hayat Tahrir Al-Sham (HTS), the dominant armed non-state actor in Northwest Syria/ Idlib, mentioned earlier in this conversiation]]] or for the interim government [[[the Syrian Coalition's version of an interim governance system for opposition-held Syria]]] and other, between brackets, (smiling, with a sarcastic undertone) other "terrorist organizations".
183	R: Like (.) (smiling, with a sarcastic undertone) [[the non-governmental organizations active in northwest Syria, such as the big health-centric organization Participant 1 is working for]]? [[[for the Assad government, every organization that engages in opposition-held Syria and aids those who it considers its enemies are typically regarded as terrorist organizations]]]
184	P1: Exactly (laughing), like [[the organization the Participant is working for]]; (laughing, clearly sarcastic) the biggest terrorist organization of them all. (.)
185	R: But that – also is it like, just for me - - to point back to the discussion we had earlier, is that also something that has changed in the cause of the earthquake then or has that been before so?
186	P1: Exactly. It's [[[that GoS gained control over xb-permissions]]] - - because it was the window was opened after the - - earthquake. When - - ? Griffiths (.) went down and he said –. (.) went to Damascus, [and] he - - said he met with Assad, and Assad promised that he [[[Assad]]] will give him [[[Martin Griffiths, representing the UN]]] the - Bab Al-Salame [border] cross[ing] for responding to [the] earthquake. And this was the point where everything has changed. You know, now - we are facing the - huge change of - the political agenda of - the UN agencies. Accepting back the government of Syria's control over all of the (.) – those territories.
187	R: Wow, that's –. (.) But that's a huge change. In addition, like, on the one hand side, you have the very positive change of the UN being more present in northwest Syria, which could even be understood as a bit of a security guarantee at some point, right? So because you have all of these UN people around all the time. Maybe there is less kind of a push for any - military aggressions or something. But like I'm - - just putting this on the (.), like (.), neither you nor I are political scholars, right? (smiling).
188	P1: I will tell you why. (.) I will tell you why. Let me tell you, so: it was earlier and very long time planned for. Because before the earthquake, for - let's say it was [[about half a year ago]]. It was in June 2022. Me and colleagues inside Syria, we had personnel that was [formerly] employed by one of those UN agenc[y] offices [[…]] [[So, by an office of a UN agency]]. One of the employees for [[this UN agency]] office, he [[was talking about the same UN agency's]] office of Damascus. It was currently at that time, in June, it was like 8 months before - - - the - - earthquake. They were currently (.) – they were [[discussing ideas to]] have UN offices

	inside northern Syria, in Idlib, [[…]] linked to [the] Damascus UN offices. (.) You see? (.) [[…]] (explaining this with shocked facial expressions) (…).
189	R: (Reacting carefully) I (…) can see that there is distrust there.
190	P1: [[Researcher]]. Eight months before; eight months before the earthquake!
191	R: So, so. So basically you're saying that the [now increased] presence of the UN is not necessarily out of good humanitarian interest [due to the earthquake response needs], but also kind of (…) normalising (.) – ?
192	P1: Accomplishing the political agenda. Exactly. (.) The political agenda overall. And this is very, yani [[[what I mean to say is that]]] this is very, yani [[[I mean]]], expected. I think that it's very, very naïve not to expect this [[[that the UN would follow the political agenda of state actors]]] because we remember back again that all of the system, the UN agencies are built on an agreement, [an] international agreement of (.) governments, to - establish this institution, right?
193	R: Yeah (…), but that - would also mean in a way or another, that whatever the UN does, –
194	P1: Exactly // [[…]] (external interruption) (…) [[…]]
195	R: [[Okay, we are getting over time, even though we are both enjoying having this conversation]]. Let me - - put it down to two more questions and maybe one if you have anything else then to share. (.) One, now, for also thinking about behavioural changes of representatives of the UN. So, (.) so far, we talked about activities of the organization [[[the UN]]]. And - maybe goals and targets that would have changed due to the earthquake. Is there also a change that you see in the behaviour of how UN - members of staff are reacting in a way or another? (…)
196	P1: It will be linked back for my - theory of individuals, you know? So it's –. I cannot like judge on - - a collaborative or a holistic change of - the staff themselves. (.) I know several people from the UN agencies themselves that are acting hugely on their own intentions of helping, you know, people inside Syria while others doesn't (swearing) care about anything. Anything, (laughing with a sarcastic undertone) but for their salaries and their vacations and their, you know – unfortunately this is it.
197	R: So, no change basically from before in that regard? (…)
198	P1: Nothing has changed. (…)
199	R: Okay (.)
200	P1: Nothing has changed. (.)
201	R: But I - had this - as you also quoted him before, this tweet from Martin Griffiths. He was - - writing (reading from a piece of paper): I'm "At the Turkey Syria border today." That's from - the 10th of February. "We have so far failed to the people in northwest Syria. They rightly feel abandoned. Looking for international help that hasn't arrived. My duty and our obligation is to correct this failure as fast as we can. That's my focus now." (.) What do you think about it? (.) Now in retrospect? Do you think the UN did something in this line? (…) And do you do you think that (.) they are on track for this goal as well?
202	P1: I think yes. Yes. Because it – (.) it was a moment of for this guy, I think, it was a moment of having the light all of the sudden in - his face, I think. So, yes, I believe that anyone can have this, you know, an inside soul awakening. For a moment. And the thing that happened that they did - - - follow on this (.) visits and continuous trying to connect with the - - ground itself as a response for this claim that Martin made for this moment. You know?
203	R: Yeah. So you think it's sincere? (.) It's honest? (.) And maybe even something that - legitimises, maybe even the UN's actions in the period after the - earthquake in comparison to before? (…)
204	P1: Yes, but then again, it's not - - an organised response. It's not a mechanism[-based] response for me, I didn't see that. I mean maybe. I'm - also not aware if there - is some kind of, like, the Earthquake Working Groups or Task Force that's been established to respond, yes. But (.) I - don't think that they are anymore (.) effective, yani [[[I mean]]], more than the - real ones, the real mechanisms that exist.

205	R: Okay. (.) Okay. (…). Last question, linked to this though. [[]] […]. From your point of view, what does the UN need to do to remedy the past? (…)
206	P1: The have to – (umm). (…)
207	R: (Smiling. Sarcastic) Easiest questions at the last point, of course.
208	P1: (Laughing) (Umm). But - - it - will be the silliest answer from my side, I think.
209	R: (Laughing) Maybe it's even introduced in this way, no? It's asking for a silly answer, I think.
210	P1: Yes. (.) I think (…) - - the UN agencies need to (.) – What do you call to - stop down themselves? (…)
211	R: To stop down? (…) Umm. To to step down? // To stop? // (Laughing) To leave?
212	P1: Stepping back, once, to – // you know, to turn off themselves.
213	R: What do you mean?
214	P1: Turn off.
215	R: So: "stop your operations? Stop your presence in the region? Leave us?"
216	P1: No, no, not - this. The - whole mechanism. (…)
217	R: Okay? (..)
218	P1: The whole mechanism has to be (.) - - dismissed, you know. (.)
219	R: Okay. (.) Okay?
220	P1: And having a new. A new way of, like, institutions. For - holding these global responsibilities. (.)
221	R: OK, so basically we need to get rid of the UN and replace it by something else? //
222	P1: // Exactly, but at least quite another – [kind of institution]. //
223	R: // And unless that is done, there is no way in which the UN would ever be viewed as a legitimate institution to enter, to act in this - - –, [I mean], on the humanitarian level, on the development level, on the peace level or all of this together?
224	P1: All of those together, all of their mandates together, because - - - as long as they [[[the UN]]] are acting and behaving from the perspective of the governments, (…) of the countries that they are (.) - - representing, they will never be independent enough to - achieve any development or humanitarian or political [goals], maybe political [ones], yes. Let's keep them political. I think that this is their - most important role. As a political mechanism or umbrella to control the world and this will be, like, never ending before a Third World War comes (.), you know, but for humanitarian and development, I think, they have to – (…)
225	R: Give up their mandates? //
226	Participant // To find another - - - - solution for this.
227	R: Okay (.). Without any involvement of anything related to the UN because you're saying that they have in the end of the day, always a political agenda?
228	P1: Exactly. I think - - - - this is the approach that if we are having it in (.) northwest Syria, it is very, very (…) –; a very clever one. When we wanted - - - to switch to a non-UN mechanism, the - humanitarian and the - - fund[ing] institutions; the - institutions of funds, they created this NSAF [[[National Social Aid Fund, as referred to earlier by Participant 1 (page 14)]]], now the AFNS [[Aid Fund for Northern Syria, as referred to earlier by Participant 1 (page 14)]] mechanism, you know, so I think we - - - – (…). (Umm) the (.) fund[-providing] community (.), the . funding communities and - the international NGOs, they can have an alternative mechanism of supporting with aid and humanitarian and development mechanisms worldwide, not only for Syria.
229	R: Okay, that basically is an invitation to other governments and donors to work outside of the UN system for development and humanitarian responses?

230	P1: And even to – (.) establish actually a system. It's not only working from outside because we know that they - do have another [mechanism/ system] – , (.) they do work from outside the UN agencies. But I think it's better now to - think about establishing another mechanism of institutional, (.) [I mean, another] international mechanism, to work out all of their collective, you know, pooling funds and (.) –
231	R: Yeah, so, without being on a state-based level, (.) without being governmental?
232	P1: being political yes. Politicised on all these different issues.
233	R: Shukran katir [[[Thank you very much]]]. Thank you. (.) I'm going to – (…). I'm going to stop the recording first now. One hour and twenty minutes. Okay. [unless you have anything further to add?]
234	P1: [No, no. I have to leave also].
235	**Summary of post-recording conversation**
236	Briefly asking how Participant 1 feels, asking for feedback with the response being that it was nice but also very long. Next step is producing the transcript, sending it back to Participant 1 to check and approve it, and by then, Participant 1 should also formally sign the so far only verbally accepted Consent Form.

Transcript P1 (2)

1	R: Okay, so jumping into (.) the beautiful follow up questions. I'm gonna read it out to you this time. So if you remember, last time we spoke about your perception of the UN's conduct and its legitimacy in Northwest Syria, particularly related to the earthquake then. But then 1.5 months ago, the UN Security Council did not renew the cross-border resolution in Northwest Syria via Turkey. Question number one: "Can you tell me, in your words, what actually happened there?
2	P2: (…) A political trap. (...) Is the (.) - word 'trap' is (uhm) (.), I don't know if it's –; [if] it can define the (.) - - meaning that I wanted to describe. I mean, it's a 'fakhkh' [[[trap]]]. No - - in Arabic, it's called 'fakhkh', trap. It's a trap.
3	R: So what do you mean by that?
4	P2: So, (uhm) (laughing), I mean that, (.) at the at the UN Security Council, they were like playing cards (...) and the Syrian government give them [[[the UNSC]]] the biggest slap in their face (.) ever, (.) making themselves [[[the formal government of Syria]]] clever, yani [[[that is]]], pretending to be clever - - , more clever than them [[[the members of the UNSC]]]; (.) and tell them that they - don't need a cross-border resolution and they can use the border as long as they can (.) (uhm) coordinate with them and (uhm) (.) facilitate all the –; all - of their support to Northwest Syria through SARC, (.) the Syrian Red Crescent]]]. So they [[[the UN]]] were trapped in a political situation.
5	R: They is now (.) the UN?
6	P2: The UN. (.) Very, very simply, this is what it - was, yani [[[what I mean to say is]]], perceived by myself. (…)
7	R: Okay. And (uhm) what exactly happened or changed since then with regards to cross-border aid and the UN's conduct in the region? (…)
8	P2: I think there was like a, almost three months or four maybe, of a freezing. No - - whatever, yani [[[I am missing the word]]], what should they do? They were, like, shocked with this. (.) I don't know, I - cannot imagine that the whole UN mechanisms and agencies, I mean, at the, if you remember, we defined that the UN are an (.) - entities from [] states, you know. So, they are representing - - the states themselves, and their - own political governments and expertise and –; like this. So I'm - really asking (.), this is my–; for myself the question: They –; were they [[[the UN]]] like, (.) yani [[[I mean]]], surprised by this? And they - were never, like, planned for this kind of (uhm) (.) moment where the Syrian government will tell them that they are allowed and they don't know what to do anymore? So they were like freezing. They – just, as as usual (uhm), not as usual, as unexpected from the UN, they don't know how to deal with this kind of (uhm) new situation. And even - the humanitarian convoys - also was (.) frozed at the border. (.) Shouts from inside [[[Northwest Syria]]], the people that [were] in need for the (.) - - aids for the –; from the - food aids and the baskets started to raise more and more (...), until, I think, the –(.); I don't know how [to] even describe it in English in words, the magic solution that Salvation Government offered for them: To (uhm) –; they - established (uhm) a – centre (.), or they established a committee called the –(.); calling themselves the Humanitarian Syrian Council or Humanitarian Syrian –; I don't really remember the name, I can bring it for you. Nobody knows at that time what, who are they? But (uhm) at the end, we discovered that this is a Salvation Government-related entity, that they can coordinate with the UN to facilitate the - aids through Bab Al-Hawa. (.) It took them, like, four to five months to restart their convoys again.
9	R: But I don't understand why is the problem there then? Because, if it's just a switch from the Security Council mandate to the Syrian regime, saying, okay, you can come in. What's the difference? Why did it change at all?
10	P2: The difference [is] that, because Damascus put terms on their agreement that they should coordinate all of the aids through Damascus themselves. // So the UN agencies that wanted to, for example, send any convoys through Bab Al-Hawa, they have to send all of these lists, amounts, details for Damascus, and I think that they have to share also a lot of information about (uhm) the - type of beneficiaries that they want to and the type of parties and partners that they want to distribute this through, because the second term [demanded by the formal Syrian government is] that they have to facilitate all of these humanitarian works through only SARC, (.) the Syrian Red Crescent. (…) So, they [[[the UN]]] they cannot do it [[[accept the terms of this proposed solution to continue the cross-border aid]]], because at that time also, you know, the

	Bab Al-Hawa –; I don't know how – clever they thought themselves, the Damascus government, because they have no authority over Bab Al-Hawa itself. // You know, the authority is the – (uhm) – de-facto authority of Hayat Tahrir Al-Sham. Only that exists under Bab Al-Hawa. (.) And the - second vicious circle that they [[[the UN]]] faced, because, they [[[the UN]]] cannot go directly with the –(.); with negotiations with Hayat Tahrir Al-Sham.
11	R: // ok // (hm-mmm) // The UN cannot go with direct negotiations?
12	P2: The UN. Yeah. (.) Yeah, I mean, regarding - crossing [the] border from Turkey to Syria (.) // they cannot directly coordinate this. So maybe (laughing) someones whispered in the ears of Al-Julani [[[the head of HTS]]], the –; telling them: “Make and council, all that humanitarian aid council, to coordinate (laughing) and we will coordinate with this council. //
13	R: // Yeah. // Okay.
14	P2: And this is what happened. Yes (joint laughing). (...) I don't know. I imagine sometimes that there is under tables much more of these eyes there, you know. Maybe they are coordinating with Damascus? Maybe Hayat Tahrir Al-Sham themselves are coordinating with Damascus? Sometimes we we hear this, you know? But this is politics, I mean, you can never know the truth. (…)
15	R: Yeah? Interesting. (.) Question number 3: in how far does this affect your opinion about the UN and its conduct at large in the region? This is also maybe related a bit to the question of legitimacy, right? So: is what they doing the right, appropriate ,fair? (.) With they, I mean the UN.
16	P2: (...) It's –; I - - think that it didn’t (uhm) really differs [[[changes]]] my opinion regarding them, (.) because I still see - them as - the same from previously, yani [[[I mean]]] (.) (uhm) (...), they - are still (.) supplying the - –, a huge amount of, yani [[[what I mean to say is]]], of the the humanitarian funds, because they are receiving it from the states that they are representing, and (uhm) we still don't know how we can replace their (.) very stupid mechanisms of doing this, their - - businesses through politics and states, you know? So no – - nothing changed actually. Nothing changed.
17	R: Is it a confirmation of what you thought before?
18	P2: (...) Yeah! Exactly!
19	R: Okay. (Joint laughing). (.) So just reinforcing the opinion that you already shared with me last time. Very good. (joint laughing).
20	P2: Yes.
21	R: Okay, last question: is there anything else you would like to add.
22	P2: This is the easiest question that, if you want to talk more for another 10 minutes, you can talk (laughing).
23	R: (Joint laughing) No, I'm meaning it actually, seriously (with a smile), even though I say it with a - - smile. The thing is that I, of course, I'm not entirely sure if I'm asking the right questions. So this is the opportunity for you and people who actually know what's happening to tell me (laughing), but it –//
24	P2: // I asked myself if I can, yani ,[[[I mean]]], today, when I'm driving back home and I'm remembering that I have the appointment at 8:00 with [[you, researcher]]. I - was having in mind: what - could be the added top four questions and if I really know what are the answers, so I was wondering: do we know exactly what's happening about the UN resolution? Because, you know, for me in - –; previously [[[in the last professional position]]], I could have said that I attended the meetings with [[several high-level coordination platforms, with many]] seniors, I mean with –; from the UN agencies. Recently, I'm not, you know, so I'm still in touch around with friends that they are - - themselves attending, and talking about what's happening. (.) But today I was, like, also discussing with one of the –; and without saying names, yani [[[I mean]]], one of the staff of [[a UN agency]], for example, asking him about: “Do you think that [[the UN agency you are working for]] have any plans? Or shared with you any plans for - their next (uhm) year in Syria?” We are any kind of contracting them to the end of 2023, a contract that ends [[in]] December 2023. (.) So, I asked him: “Do they have any plans? Do you believe that there are plans for the next year?” (With a smile): He said: “No. Obviously they don't. And if they have”, and he's referring to a senior management of (uhm) his (uhm) organization, “they will never share it with us!”. (...) He's talking about, yani [[[I mean]]], the level of even

	senior management in their their office in Turkey, you know. They [[[the local staff of the UN agency]]] - will never know. So actually, yes, I'm asking, I'm - wondering if - you can rely on - answering questions, but you - kind of research is like, more (uhm) of an opinion, thoughts; it's not (ah) touching of what the humanitarian, like, yani [[[what I mean to say is]]] staff or humanitarian actors are thinking about what's happening, but it doesn't really uncover facts, you know?
25	R: No, that's true. It's about perceptions of legitimacy. That's another topic, yeah.
26	P2: Yeah. Yes (uhm), do you think that it - - - will be ever feasible to touch on reality of truth? Facts about what's really happening (.) there in the UN (.) // world?
27	R: I I think in retrospect you can now see what's happening and then in five years, maybe you can sit down and you can compare, you know, so you can compare what was shared, what did people expect, what did people share? (Uhm) and then you can evaluate retrospectively what happened. Yeah, but not now. What do you think?
28	P2: No, but I mean - - can you really know what happened, yani [[[I mean]]], as a fact not as - - - a perception of what's being happening? You know, for example, when they were sitting at their – meeting (.), putting the - - papers on what's the suggestions, you know, what's the - - pen holder was, like, trying to suggest a - twelve months for two cross-border [[[access points]]]. This was the, I - don't remember who was the –; Holland I think? (.)
29	R: (Hm) Could be.
30	P2: And - - first - veto comes from Russia, and then (.) the Americans interfered. This - is what you heard in the news, I mean. But what really happened? What really, really happened? What was the real, yani [[[I mean]]], talks and - decision being made under the table or in the closed rooms? Can we ever know this? (Uhm) in the future?
31	R: (With a smile) Are you asking me? (Laughing) You have much more insights, like, I wouldn't, like, I mean, you're - –; (with a smile) the way you're asking this is that you're expecting a "no", is it?
32	P2: Yeah, I'm expecting a "no", yes, I'm expecting a "no". I'm - - really wondering if we can ever (...), I - –//
33	R: // If somebody would have ever told us the true and just the very true from the moment in which it was true (laughing)?
34	P2: You remember - -, I am sorry, are we finished [[[...]]]? //
35	R: // (Indicating 'yes') I am going to switch the recording off.

Transcript P2 (1)

1	R: I'm gonna start recording just audio. And as we said, you already signed the consent form. Actually, you're the only person so far who signed it before, so since you signed it already: you gave me the permission to record it. OK, so, go ahead with that [[[speaking about the UN's interventions and changes in connection with the earthquake]]], and then later on, we can maybe also walk through a couple of questions that I have prepared, but if you already have something in your mind that relates to my topic now, please go ahead.
2	P2: Now, as you know, I mean, I'm - still the current chair [[of several NGO coordination platforms and steering committees with relevance for Northwest Syria]]. And (.) as I explained earlier, in the previous forms, one of the founding member of [[a central coordination platform for NGOs in this context]] in 2013. I mean, 2012/2013. That's when we had no coordination mechanism at all. So [[this NGO coordination platform]] was the only way we had for this. (…). (Uhm), you mentioned–, you talked about the UN's presence. So, the UN's presence was only –; (uhm) the permission was only granted after the earthquake. It was granted after the 'Golden handshake' between Martin Griffiths (.) and Assad. And, (uhm), I think if it wasn't for that golden handshake, we wouldn't have lost the resolution in my view, so [] that made a negative impact in our view, as the NGO community.
3	R: OK, that was when again, sorry when was that again? //
4	P2: // (Uhm), That was on the 18th of – No, I think on the 16th of February or the 10th of February, ah sorry. Just soon after the earthquake - -.
5	R: // OK, so basically it was on the the the visit with which Martin Griffiths paid to Assad.
6	P2: // It was on the 6th of February. They [[[the UN]]] had to convince him to open up more - - crossings
7	R: // Okay. Okay. Thank you for the clarification.
8	P2: // Yes and I think, - - - that [[[permission was granted to open additional border crossings]]] was on the 18th of February. Because it's - coming to an end [[[the resolution]]] on the 19th of August.
9	R: Okay.
10	P2: The permission. This is when - Assad allowed the UN officially to have two additional border crossing, which is Al Ra'ee and Dar al-Salame (.), and also to allow the UN to go inside Syria and allow the UN's presence. So that's why it's like (?). When we talk about the UN presence, there was a lot of tension because the UN decided: "Okay, now we can go in. We want to establish a presence in northwest Syria." And this is when the tension started between the NGO community and the UN.
11	R: Oh yeah? I didn't know that there were tensions, but let me - - take a note so that you can explain this later. Go ahead first please.
12	P2: Okay, the tension was we thought –, we always called for UN presence as in protection by presence. And they never - - honoured that interaction by persons, and they were never willing to go in. Because you remember when – you [[[researcher]]] were [[working in the Syrian context before]], we always had our facilities being bombed and they [[[unclear here two whom this 'they' refers]]] would just deny it. And you say: "look, if only the UN were here, they would come immediately and verify [it]." But now, because Assad told them [the UN] "you could come in", and they just decided to go in, we said: "no". (.) We want to have a clear ToR [[[Terms of Refence]]] and there was a huge argument between [[[a group of representatives, me included]]], on behalf of the NGO-community, and few other colleagues and the UN agencies. So it was a tension between us. And they [[members of the UN]] thought, "okay, so why are you objecting now? Do you have anything to hide?" We said "no, we don't have anything to hide. We are fully transparent and we know there are third party monitors. We know there are secret reports that are being drafted in the field. So we don't have anything [to hide], but we don't want you [[[the UN]]] to be present in - northwest Syria unless we have the clear theory in terms of the reporting mechanisms. If we lose the cross-border [access/ resolution-based permission to operate cross-border from Turkey], who are these guys reporting to? Are they going to report to Damascus? And then are they going to be doing crossline missions from Damascus to this space that's –, I think they were talking about Sarmada and Azaz [[[both important cities and hubs for humanitarian interventions in Northwest Syria]]]. So this means Damascus will have control. This means there will be information sharing. This would mean, (uhm) the decision-making would be in Damascus, so this is where

	the objection came, and this is where the tension came. [It] took us a few months to clear the air between us and the UN, and it took me 6.5 hours of meeting with a Syria UN official who came to me and us as a group and said: "Look, we need to talk.". And we as a group, to us, he said: “oh, I thought you talk socially here”. And we said “No, we talk business here”. And then he was opening all of his papers, he said: “Look, you objected to the UN’s presence”. And I said: “Yes, and I still object to the UN’s presence. Because there's no clear ToR [[[Terms of Reference]]]. I don't have one [[[clear ToR]]]. So I said: “Well, I’m not going to give you –“, sorry, “we are not going to give you permission to start unless you have a security or a reporting mechanism.” So this is –, this really poured directly to Martin Griffiths. "As for now you [[[the UN representative]]] report to Martin Griffith, but what happens in the future?". So these sort of things where the tension was in the UN presence. Now that we had the better clarity, we said to the UN: “we are happy to have a focus group discussion. A small group of people or experts (.) (uhm) that could be 5 from the NGO side and then three or four from the UN side and we can draft the ToR”. Or we can tell the UN what cannot be done and what can be done: “You go ahead. And then you draft the ToR and then you come back to us.”. So this is on the UN presence. (…). (Uhm), has the UN’s behaviour changed? (.) I think it has. I think we are more talking to each other, but there was a lot of disappointment with the UN and - again with the earthquake, (…) (uhm), there was a huge tension, there was a huge hatred to the UN. (.)
13	R: Yes. (.) Especially I - think you're referring to the first, especially to the first days of immediate response, right? I – saw - - these comments everywhere, but please go ahead.
14	P2: Exactly. Exactly.
15	R: What - - is your impression on those critical response days, let's say on the 1st 100 hours maybe?
16	P2: The - - 1st 100 hours. I mean, luckily, I mean, I keep saying (uhm), luckily, I mean, fortunately, (.) luckily I left Turkey two days earlier, just before the earthquake and I was [[outside of the affected region when it happened]]. And I think it worked really well because I managed to take over the management of [[my organization from outside the region]], given that the [[other senior people were in Turkey and Syria]]. [[…]] [[so the senior staff all were there and I myself was not, and]] I thought: “Oh, I wish I was there with the people. I wish I was there with my staff. I wish I was there (.) to help, maybe with the rubble removal or anything. But then it was okay. It worked well (.) because I also managed to - do the coordination with the UN [[from outside the affected region and in close coordination with our staff]] (…). What I want to make clear is: we have two different issues. We have the UN (.) at the global level and that's where we have issues, and it's the UN at the global level that let us down. The UN at the global level failed maybe to do air drops (.) or aid, yeah. We don't want to blame the UN in Gaziantep because they were in the same boat as - - everyone else. They were seeking safety and shelters and what not. From the first day the UN met me, saying, look [[Participant]], as the chair of [[important coordination platforms]], we need to coordinate. And I also have a seat at [[other important coordination platforms with relevance for the context of Northwest Syria, including UN-led fora]]. We then used to have three meetings a day. So the first one would be at 8:00 in the morning [[Turkish time, and the last one sometime in the evening]] So you just wake up and attend the meetings. [[…]]
17	R: Just for me [[clarifying some of the abbreviations used for some of these platforms]]. Yeah, okay, cool.
18	P2: So [[for example]] [[…]] the ICCG [[[internal cluster coordination]]], […] formed an emergency task force [[between established platforms and UN agencies in the region]] and [[made sure there would also be]] daily meetings with the other clusters, whoever could attend. So things were happening in the right direction (.) at - that level. (…) Now, of course, people were blaming the UN, were not happy, and the UN [[[staff in Gaziantep]]] took it personally. These colleagues felt offended: “Oh, you are criticising the UN? We are working. We are displaced. We are still operational. You should not be criticising us” [[[the UN]]].
19	R: You mean the ones in Gaziantep?
20	P2: Yes. So they - took it as if we were criticizing them [[[personally]]].
21	R: OK.
22	P2: And at the same time, not everyone was involved in this operation. Because again, as I said, the border was closed between Syria and Turkey. It's not closed because of the UN or because of the NGOs. Literally, the road network inside Turkey was devastated. Damaged. And those officials manning the border from the Turkish side, they all left. And they all went to Hatay to look for their families. So you can't –. There's literally,

	there's no way you can cross the border from Turkey. [[…]]. So now with the - - expectations from the UN: when we look at the individuals, we're not really aware of the mechanisms, how it works. We expected aid to be dropped. We expected the UN to have some support. I think one of the shocking issues was the UN had prepositioned supplies in regime-held areas and to the contrary, we never had anything in our area, in the northwest. There were some people saying at some point that: “yes, we had some supplies positioned”, but no, these were for programmes that were allocated. (Uhm) [[My organization]] looked after the WHO supply chain a few days before the earthquake we brought in a lot of supplies. But these again we had prepositioned. So I mean it's for programmes for UOSSM [[[a large humanitarian/health organization active in Northwest Syria]]], and for SAMS [[[another humanitarian/ health organization active in Northwest Syria]]] and for other NGOs. So immediately, (.) what we did is: we opened our warehouse and within 11 hours of the earthquake, everything was distributed.
23	R: Wow.
24	P2: So we handed out everything. (.) So the warehouse was empty within 11 hours.
25	R: Regardless of where they were from and what they were for?
26	P2: Yes, exactly. So we - gave it [[[our stocks of supply in NWS]]] to everyone, (.) who needed it. So that was a good one. So that's on the UN’s inside [[[as they allowed these programme-bound, earmarked supplies to be used this way without bureaucratic hassles in the situation]]], but we thought: “okay, we can't use the airports in Turkey. The Assad regime have not announced the state of emergency, (.) therefore, no aid agency can cross the border. There was a lot of misunderstanding in terms of the search and rescue. There is a body with the UN, like, (.) I can't remember what they're called. They came and supported in Turkey, but they've not gone inside Syria.
27	R: Ah (trying to think of some names), (…) but it's the Turkish earthquake, or disaster response, organization basically then? Or do you mean a UN entity?
28	P2: No, a UN entity.
29	R: OK, I haven't -. I don’t know either then.
30	P2: Ah, okay. So it's a UN entity. They’ve only gone into Turkey. At the same time, you also had issues, I mean, for me, it's like, I was talking to [[a foreign office with in Europe with which I have close ties]] twice a day. So we talked in the morning and then also we talked in the evening. So this was where, where my job was. It was to coordinate and send emails to everyone in the NGOs and just say, look, I kind of, like, minimised the e-mail and the communication, just for emergency. So I would e-mail them and if you have any issues then let me know, because the donors are reaching out to me directly and they wanted to know what issues we have as NGOs. [[[…]]] Yeah. So yes, that's what’s with the UN. I think it's the overall system, the –. It's not only the UN because again, when I was talking to the [[foreign office in Europe with which I have close ties]], I had a lot of friends, (uhm) doctor friends saying look, we would love to go from [[our basis abroad]] and join the search and rescue and the [[foreign office]] said: “yeah, I mean, speak to the search or rescue here, as in the firefighters, they organising a mission.”. But their mission was only to Hatay.
31	R: Okay.
32	P2: And I said, look, we want to cross the border and [[my organization]] is - happy to facilitate. And they said no, we're not going to do it and we don't approve it, we don't authorise it.
33	R: That's the UN not authorising it? Or the [[foreign office]]?
34	P2: No, even - the [[foreign government with which foreign office I have been in contact with so closely and have a lot of ties]]. Yeah. So this is where another - issue where we felt we'd be let down.
35	R: Okay.
36	P2: So you've [[[we've]]] been let down by the Foreign Office, by the UN, but as a global one, as a - - system, which is when we try to clarify it, we said: “look, we don't have any issues with Gaziantep. We have issues with the global system.” But it took some time to clear the air.

37	R: Yeah, but now -, that you had that conversation, I guess with UN members of the Gaziantep UN mission, right? So now, do you think they understood the frustration you had, and you were able to explain it?
38	P2: One of the talks was with [[a specific UN entity]]. [[…]]. They – said: “just be careful because there is a - tension with the UN”. I said: “look, there was tension. But we cleared the air”. They said: “no, this is more recent.” And the UN said: “we're gonna - - retaliate against the NGOs; against the Syrian NGO's in particular for being critical and vocal against the UN”. And I said: “no, this is not true”, but I tried to defend and I tried to explain. And in my view, I think we did a good job at [[[one of the NGO coordination platforms I am involved in]]], by explaining where the tension is. Where the issues are. So this is why you're getting a message; you're getting conflicted messages how some of the UN are thinking. Like, “we want to revenge or retaliate against the NGOs”. But we feel like, we kind of like to smooth things out.
39	R: OK. But your overall, let me - - summarise and you tell me if I understood this correctly?
40	P2: Yes.
41	R: So basically, you're saying that within the first 100 days, the UN failed to respond entirely, and that's the only response came after what you called the golden handshake between Griffiths and Assad.
42	P2: That's not 100, you mean 100 hours.
43	R: Ah yes, of course, exactly. After, so, basically in the first 100 hours, there was nothing really coming from the UN at the global level except for maybe for example, giving you permission to use your - supplies that you have had yourselves in northwest Syria, right? So there was nothing about bringing it from - outside, but giving you a bit of leeway to be more flexible inside what is available immediately.
44	P2: Yes.
45	R: But the problem itself is more with the UN as a system on a global level. Basically on the political end even if understand you correctly – //
46	P2: // Yes
47	R: // And not with the specific humanitarian mission of the UN in Gaziantep, so they - basically were doing their - job as much as – (.) (uhm), best they could, and they were themselves affected, and were not able to provide anything beyond what they basically were managing with their own hands in the region.
48	P2: Exactly. And – //
49	R: // Okay.
50	P2: // Adding to it another limitation, (uhm): There was no money at all. The fund, yeah (.), so (.), we had so many pledges, but that was only a few days afterwards. Now for the money to reach the UN, and then the UN would send it to their partners, I think that wasn't before a week before we were able to write proposals. When you look at the proposals, it doesn't matter even when you look at the –, I'm gonna say NGO community, I'm not gonna say Syrian or INGOs, for all of us, there was literally no supplies to buy in Turkey. And the priority was for them to meet their local market or local needs. When you look at Turkey, I think, I thought at some point there were 9 million people affected, somebody said: “no, more, I think we are region of 20 million people affected by the earthquake”. (Uhm). Which is why, if we were going to buy any supplies from Turkey to ship over to Syria, there are no roads network. I mean, you know, the roads from Gaziantep and to Adana [[[two cities in the south of Turkey, usually it would take about 1 to 2 hours by car to get from one place to the other]]], it would take about seven hours.”
51	R: Yeah, yeah.
52	P2: In to do - - a night journey. I' m sorry for bringing back memories.
53	R: No, no, not at all. Yeah.
54	P2: But - - it's a 90 minute journey that takes 7 hours and - the roads are not safe. So, never mind, you know, how to send a truck from Mersin, which is where normally supplies are, to (uhm) Gaziantep, or to Hatay, to ship across. So this was another limitation. (…) The –
55	R: // Okay, but a limitation that was outside of the UN's hands, right? //

56	P2: // Yeah.
57	R: // So that basically it's a limitation that affects the Northwest itself and the UN would not have been able to do anything about it. At least not immediately, right?
58	P2: Yeah.
59	R: Okay (.), I'm just asking so that we are sure that I understand correctly.
60	P2: Yeah. So for us, we thought: "okay, the UN normally, I mean they would say, let's buy supplies from Dubai. If - we had the donors chipping in money immediately to NRC or to IOM and then IOM would buy [[needed equipment in the sector in which my organization is operating]] immediately from Dubai. And then the UN plane would land in Manbij airport, which is the to the South [[in Syria]]. And then that's it. We have access to supplies. [But this is not what happened. And] This is where they failed us. This is where the global system fails. (…). The other limitation is when they –. When we had the competition amongst the Syrian NGO's, I mean, sorry, I mean the NGOs responding on the ground (.), this is where I felt (.) there was a lot of duplication.
61	R: Okay, you mean?
62	P2: So, in this moment [[[a bit later, when there was room for NGO-based interventions]]], all the NGOs wanted to show that they are responding in Afrin, in Jenderis [[[at times written: Dschindires]]] and in Harim on various issues. We all wanted to respond there [[[in these particularly affected areas in NWS]]] I think in part so we can update our social media. And to show we were there, we have done that. How many times the same beneficiaries received aid from us? As in - - numerous times. And you know, there was a lot of duplication. So we - failed here and this is where the UN came and: "Oh, if only we had field (…) – (uhm), I mean area-based coordination, ABC. If only you allowed us to have ABC, "area-based coordination", we would have been able to coordinate in Harim, in Jenderis, in Afrin and (.) in various areas. And we would have stopped the duplication, but this is –, so, our response was: "Okay, give me clear ToR or for it. And then we can approve it. We can - - be up for it". (…) (Uhm) We only gave them the blessing, or (.) the "go ahead" last month, when we had the Continuity Planning Workshop. And we said: "Okay, now that we are in a better position, we are happy to raise our hand and just say 'yes', we are happy for you to go with ABC. And they went ahead with it. (.) So – //
63	R: // So, (.) sorry. Area-based coordination then involves also the presence of the UN inside Northwest Syria?
64	P2: // Yes. Exactly. That would involve the UN, yeah. And, uh –
65	R: // Okay.
66	P2: (Uhm). Now, what the UN also said is, they have an internal issue amongst themselves. Because when you talk about [[entities such as UN]] OCHA, so, OCHA for example heavily, relies on the clusters to feedback to them. And [[if representatives of such an entity]] say the - clusters are not feeding back in - good - time. So, some clusters would feedback in two days, others they would feedback in 15 days. This is when the information would be outdated. So that's why [[such entities]] said: "Okay, we want to establish our own mechanism." And [[now, in the past weeks, we established ways to have more direct feedback lines between NGO representatives and such UN entities, so as to improve our collaboration]]
67	R: In addition to the clusters?
68	P2: In addition, yes.
69	R: So basically you're - -shortening the feedback cycles, but the clusters still feedback into the system, but you have [[these direct ties between NGO representatives and UN entities]] on top to speed things up. Is that correct?
70	P2: Yes. Correct. [[…]] So we keep it with Clusters as they are. But such UN entities would fail otherwise. So they would say, "Yes, we need information". So this is where the tension is between the UN agencies. This is where the competition is happening. (.) Uh, so, if you have any – (.) and questions so far? Maybe you can ask?

71	R: Yeah, yeah (uhm). So no until here it's - very interesting to me, because all of these –, I mean, for example, I was expecting that things would be difficult in terms of coordination between the UN and the - NGOs. But I was not aware about - this level of tension. It makes sense (.), now that you're explaining it, thank you.
72	P2: Yeah, and there was also, you know, when I said earlier, the NGOs were competing with each other. We would receive some funding in the UK, or in Germany or wherever. But we would need the funds immediately in Syria. But the only way we can do it is either via [[[a system for making financial transactions]]] from [[abroad]] or via the bank accounts in Turkey and then use the PTT mechanism [[[the formal Turkish post-linked banking system]]]. Now the PTT mechanism was (uhm), you know, non-operational.
73	R: So you say you were down to one option then?
74	P2: Yes, so, you only have one option, which is the Hawala one. But, Hawala can only be used by, let's say, a handful of organizations, [[typically the larger ones with registrations not only in Turkey but also abroad]], because we have accounts in [the UK and elsewhere]. But we cannot - - use the Hawala from – Turkey, because that would be a violation of the Turkish law, you know, so you would not be allowed (.) [to do this]. //
75	R: // Yeah, I think I remember that they introduced new provisions around this in (…) 2020 or something, right?.
76	P2: // Yeah. So, but now the PTT was non-operational [[[in the immediate post-earthquake period]]]. [[[The physical transportation of]]] Aid was slightly affected [[[in the immediate post-earthquake period]]]. But there was no way for them to transport money from Turkey to [Northwest] Syria. I mean, they always transport them via, you know, through the road [[[Northwest Syria, since 2020, also used the Turkish Lira, largely in replacement of the Syrian Pound]]]. So they were unable to transport money for, I think, about 10 days. So that's one of the challenges as well.
77	R: How did you solve that? (…). Well, I mean for you, you had the Hawala, but other organizations did not. Not that many did, right? Like, there must have been additional limitations through this, no? (…)
78	P2: It was solved by time. And it was solved by fixing the price against the dollar or the euro. So we would go to certain suppliers, I mean, with our normal suppliers and say: “look, I mean, give me what you have and then I'll pay you later”. So this is where the trust came - into place. But yeah, I mean, 10 days later, yes, we were able to buy.
79	R: But immediately you were not.
80	P2: Immediately, no. We were not.
81	R: So - the first 10 critical days, or let's say as before, the first 100 hours remained critical in all these circumstances with all of these issues that you just mentioned?
82	P2: Yes, and – when you talk about the 6th of February, so when you’re talking about the first week of the month, most people just did not receive their salaries yet. I mean, the January salary. [[[linked to payment delays at donor level, there often are delays in the payment of salaries in the NGO sector as well, so that employees often wait for a week or even longer until they receive their monthly payments]]] //
83	R: // A very important note.
84	P2: // So you often either pay it [[[the salaries, speaking from the employer’s perspective here]]] in January or you pay it the first week of the following month. So there was a need for us to - speed up the - release of salaries. I'm talking about the NGOs in general. So this was another challenge: the people were displaced in the South, in Syria, in the same way as in Turkey, but they don't have money to go and pay for rented accommodation. Like in Turkey, when people could go to a hotel in Ankara or somewhere else. So this was a challenge as well. But it took some time to be aware of this and to be cleared. Basically, it took the time until NGOs were able to use the PTT again and were able to send money in.
85	R: Yeah, uhm (.). I'm –, (uhm), I'm I mean, on the one hand side, all of this is evidently (.) it's - - detrimental. It - - kind of really creates a devastating image of what kind of a situation people in northwest Syria must have

	been in. Basically not being able to receive aid from outside and having all of these limitations around them in addition. But that also means, that's what I'm - - hearing between the lines from you, is that there was a lot of work and a lot of challenges in need to be tackled. And a lot of this work in this people was done with direct involvement of the NGOs, like yours? The UN, in your narration so far, has not played much of a role so far, has it?
86	P2: Yes, everything was away from the UN. Because what happened is, I think, a good number of NGOs were fortunate enough to have a strong field team, who were just like: "let's go". When I talk about [[my organization]], we have [[somewhere between 500 and 100]] staff in Turkey, [[the majority]] of them are in Gaziantep. So the Gaziantep staff, you know, maybe about [[70 – 80 percent of them]], you know, I think, they were emotionally (…) exhausted (.). But we managed to get the senior management to sit under one roof, and we were working on proposals whenever we can and they were working, but they - gave delegation to the field staff, so the field staff were running and - responding. (Uhm) we even gave them waivers in terms of procurement, because if you don't buy any supplies, any available supplies on the market there, then within five minutes the price would go up or supplies would - diminish. So there was a need for us to act quickly, so that's why we immediately gave them waivers to go and then just buy. Now, this was risky, financially and programmatically (.) [[[referring to having given permission to the field staff of the organization to use earmarked, i.e. otherwise dedicated funds and resources in the emergency situation without having necessarily received the okay from the donors]]]
87	R: Okay, uhm, (.) so for clarification, (uhm), what you're implying is, as far as I understand, is that the people who are in the field would not basically go beyond usual restrictions, usual kinds of rules that they would otherwise have to obey based on your organization's and regulations and rules? (.) So you - would basically need to give them these waivers in order for them not to feel that they're doing something wrong, but that you say, like: "guys, this is an emergency. You have the full spectrum of options to just act in the way you feel it's good, it's good for the situation?
88	P2: Yeah.
89	R: Okay.
90	P2: I mean to - be clear, the - rules are to have three quotations. I mean, okay, we're gonna buy, you know, over 500 Euro, or, I mean, 500 USD, so the - policy would state you need 3 quotations. Or if it's over 5,000 USD then we're talking about going through a tender.
91	R: Yeah. So basically you were saying to them: "guys, we know what the rules usually are. There is no way in which we would ask you now to follow these rules". But that also implies that your feeling was that, on the one hand, in the field, even in an emergency situation, people would otherwise still try to follow the rules. If you don't give them a way. //
92	P2: Yes.
93	R: Okay, that's interesting. Thank you for clarifying.
94	P2: So we just said: "Go ahead and do direct procurement. So the minute you found some supplies, go ahead and buy".
95	R: But that also means basically that you're shifting the - - - focus of action the - kind of the - - - power of decision making directly to the ground.
96	P2: Correct, yes.
97	R: Okay. Okay.
98	P2: Which was good but, I think, this also created a problem because the individuals who have some money inside Syria, they had no access, they were unable to buy it. Because as NGOs we have a better buying power, and we can - - reach out to suppliers and we can pay higher prices. But individuals who - - happen to have some money, they felt like, oh, they can't buy anything.
99	R: So, you mean, as NGOs you're crowding out private supplies and private purchases by NGO based-purchases?

100	P2: Yeah
101	R: Okay, I understand. Interesting reflection, but you still had to do it, right? And you would distribute these products then on your end for free, I suppose?
102	P2: Of course, for free. Yes.
103	R: So that again is kind of diminishing individuals' problems then later. Maybe for those people who would then be able to receive it at least.
104	P2: It's the same people who would feel like: "well, I don't want to take anything for free. There are more, many more needy people."
105	R: Okay, I understand. Yeah.
106	P2: Yeah. So for them, it's like, okay, so dilemma they want to take because they are - - in need, but they feel like, yes, we still have the money, but we - can't find anything, because the NGOs bought everything.
107	R: Well, it's – (.). Such a chain of action and reaction. But thank you for being so reflective about it. (…) And that also means then if we look into this situation overall now again, who, like, you already mentioned the NGOs without the UN being really involved, at least - - let's say in the first 100 hours. If you were to describe the actors, individuals or organizations that were the most heavily involved in northwest Syria in the direct response overall, Who would that be? (…) Which actors would come to your mind? (…)
108	P2: As in (…) NGOs?
109	R: As in NGOs, yes, but also as in whoever. (…) Like, (.) as in you already basically said that individuals had a lot more decision-making power than usual within your organization, they could be some. Be it individuals being part of your NGO and other NGOs, but also maybe, maybe groups, maybe organizations at large, whoever comes to your mind.
110	P2: Well, I can't mention names as in "these were, these were not so much", because I mean, a lot of organizations were responding. Yeah, but I (.) //
111	R: // That's true.
112	P2: I mean, when you look at Violet for example. They were doing an amazing job. I mean, they already have a search and rescue team. But then again, when I do self-reflection and self-criticism, they were faced with issues from the White Helmets. Because the White Helmets said: "No. This [[conducting search and rescue missions]] is not your mandate. This is our mandate". Okay. So the White Helmets thought they are competing now. But it's not about competition. You know, at some point there was a partnership between Violet and the White Helmets for search and rescue operations. But now, all of a sudden, everyone wants to be at the frontline of the news.
113	R: Okay, that's a point that is new for me. I haven't yet talked to either people from the White Helmets or Violet, so maybe now this point comes a bit unexpected for me.
114	P2: Yeah, well, I am an outsider here, so I can talk.
115	R: Yeah.
116	P2: You know, we don't do search and rescue. It's not our mandate. But I know at some point, even when - we were doing, sorry, I mean, even when NGOs thought about the rubbel removal, the White Helmets would came forward and say: "no, this is our mandate. Nobody should – touch it". And then we had to go and speak to [[a senior representative of the White Helmets]] and say: "[[dear]], you know, you can't just take all the rubble removal. It's rehabilitation and reconstruction. It's not reconstruction, but rehabilitation, or (.) recovery. And it's the mandate of a good number of NGOs. (…) So you should not be criticising other NGOs for doing rubble removal as well. I mean, sorry [[we ourselves of course]] we not doing any rubble removal, but those who were doing removal were criticized by - the White Helmets. [[…]]. So yeah, that's all on the supplies, recovery and rubble removal.
117	R: Any - other actor that you thought was really performing extremely well or extremely bad, maybe even, like, (.) // go, go ahead.

118	P2: // Yeah. Yeah so, when the –. After the first week of the earthquake, this was when there was so much tension against the UN. And the UN came to me saying: “Oh how - can we stop the tension?” And I said: “You need to go down to Syria. You need to go and do a visit”. But they said: “Oh, is it safe?”. There was so –, there's so much tension. I said: “No, no, no. Our people, the minute you go down on the ground, they might appear as if they are shouting, but they're not shouting at you, they are shouting in frustration. But they would love to see you.”. They said: “Are you sure [[.]]?”, I mean, this was in terms of safety. And I said: “Yes. Yes. Just go for it. And trust me, nothing would happen in terms of safety ones”. So they went and they came in the following day to me saying: “Oh, thank you for that. That went really well”. And this encouraged the UN to do more visits.
119	R: Oh wow.
120	P2: [[…]]. So, so yes, the UN made the - visits, and they went inside to see the - - beneficiaries. However, I think this was when some of the issues started coming to light. In terms of the AAP: Accountability to affected population. [[…]]. They [[[UN members of staff]]] - - met with beneficiaries in the field, and it's often beneficiaries who said: “No, we've not seen any aid. Nobody has come to rescue. Nobody came to help.” (…). Which is a disaster sometimes because they, (uhm), the - NGOs are responding, but they're responding in a way, you know, we have limited supplies or availability or - aid. So of course you're gonna be with, you know, you're gonna end up with people saying “no, we've not received any aid”. And you also have the same people who would say: “No, I've not - -received anything”, but they already received [something]. So they would say “We've not received anything” so they can get more (…) . Or they will say: “It wasn't enough”. So various negative things, and the UN came back an said: “Oh okay. It looked like our partners, the NGO community, were lying to us all the time. About aid and - these things”. People would also say in the field: “Oh well, if - you know somebody working for [[an NGO]], then, of course, they're gonna give you aid. But if you don't know anyone in [[the NGO]], you know, so we are not going to receive aid”, for example. So these sorts of claims and allegations were damaging for the NGO community. Because, you know, the NGO community, we do a thorough needs assessment. We do evaluations; evaluation and monitoring. So this is when we had to clarify it to the UN and say: “look we do give (…) neutrally or - we do and give based on a needs assessment and we don't favour anyone”. (Uh), but yeah –. But yes, it - - took some time to clarify between the UN and us.
121	R: So that also impacted your relationship? (.) “Your” meaning plural here. The NGOs relationship with the United Nations.
122	P2: Yeah, yeah.
123	R: OK. (Uhm), I mean you went through a lot right? In that situation, everyone's trying to do their best, and then you have all of these problems coming up and having to be solved. But is there - - now - - —. I mean, now it's been almost six months since (.) the earthquake happened. If you now (.) look back on a macro scale, right? (…) And - you already mentioned the frustration that was there against the UN and even - though the frustration was maybe more a cry for help - - - and for attention because people felt let down as what you mentioned now? But, (.) did the - - UN change anything that’s really significant? (…) So, is there anything that is really different since, let's say, - this critical immediate earthquake response period even from before? (…) You already mentioned the direct presence in Syria. The increased presence, right? So is there anything else? (…)
124	P2: I think that's the only change so far. In terms of funding, there was no change. In terms of –, (uhm), one of the huge challenge was the duty of care [[[in general, but here particularly related to the earthquake situation]]].
125	R: Okay?
126	P2: The duty of care (.), we (.)– , it was agreed by the HLG [[[Humanitarian Liaison Group]]] in 2019. And yeah, or, let’s say it was like a minimum standard. But when it came for us asking for support with the duty of care, no one paid.
127	R: I remember the discussion back then, yeah [[…]] //
128	P2: // Yeah, it was. It was only the [[a specific UN entity]], saying (.), well, it took them some time, but as in few weeks, but then the [[specific UN entity's]] head of office thought: “Look, I'm going to - - - - make this decision and I'm going to pay it”. And it was [[a senior representative of the specific UN entity]], who said to

	me the other day that “I [[[the representative]]] was in trouble for it. But I don't care. I did what's right at the time, and I don't care about what the regional office says. So it's at the regional office. They're - rejecting it and they're not paying it, but it's - those involved in the response. They're happy to do it”. [[Other UN entities]] said: “No, I don't see why we should be paying it. They should not be paid”. The SCHF, they said: “Okay, I think after two or three days, if you have any saving in your budget, then go ahead. You can reallocate funds as a duty of care”.
129	R: This is speaking now after the earthquake.
130	P2: After the crisis, yes.
131	R: Okay, so this is now the change that you see, that actually happened. [Are you saying] it improved?
132	P2: Yes (.). Not a dramatic improvement, but there is some, let's call it, “progress”, not an improvement (laughing).
133	R: Very nice way of putting it then (laughing). [[…]] So you say you see a bit of improvement, but nothing that changed in this regard dramatically?
134	P2: Yes (.), because again, we should not be just criticising the UN. We need to criticise the donors. As with how many donors approved it [[[minimum duty of care provisions for humanitarian workers in this context]]], they all talk about it. But when it came to honouring it, no one paid it. Literally no one, I mean, even the [[foreign office in Europe that I have close ties with that I already mentioned earlier]], we're having a twice-a-day call and they've not paid it. Yeah. Again, there was a challenge between the national NGOs and the INGOs because, you know, when we receive funding from the INGOs, they always insist on us having policies. And then when we put our policies and present them to the INGOs, no one paid it [[[duty of care provisions]]]. So this is another issue. So my issue is with - - with the INGOs, with the grant holders. (…) So that's on the duty of care.
135	R: And the UN would not be an entity that could establish standards and push for an agreement? (…)
136	P2: No. (…) Because they had the minimum standard. And that's what we were trying to push the UN for, it’s like: “Okay, we have a minimum standard at least. Let's meet it”. And the UN always said: “Okay, let's - look at also more at [[different larger NGOs’]] policy and then we can honour it”. But nobody did. So that's where the issues are.
137	R: But then at least the earthquake response aftermath, let's say, had some positive impact on duty of care discussions?
138	P2: Yeah. And on the duty of care, there was also a lot of tension, because the practise by [[my organization]] is different from Care (International), is different from Save the Children. One of the Syrian NGOs, they took all the senior managers, they put them in a bus, and they took them to Ankara. And - they - - - - - rented a hotel for them. Some others, they sent them to Mersin, and they also put them in accommodation. And this was the tension between the senior management and the local, (uhm), I mean, the normal staff. And - of course it wasn’t a good one [[[a good move]]]. But when you speak to the NGOs, they've done it in good faith because the senior managers actually are writing the proposals and writing the programmes, and they are also managing the field staff. So we kind of, like, we look after our senior managers, so we can carry on responding and then we leave our normal staff to seek safety. But this was misunderstood at the time. (.) And that's why we - saw a lot of shift of staff leaving the national NGOs or Syrian NGOs to work for INGOs. Because they thought: “Oh, Care [International] paid $2,000 and IRC paid $2,500 per staff. (.) Plus accommodation. So it was a much better treatment”. So this is where, again, another tension happened.
139	R: I can see that, yes.
140	P2: So that's on the duty of care.
141	R: But anything, anything else, I mean talking about actions. I also, – (.) I saw the quote from Martin Griffiths when he was visiting the border, – //
142	P2: // Okay

143	R: He was - -, I mean you you're more aware of this than anyone I'm sure anyways, (.), he was saying that (.), I'm quoting: (.) “at the Türkiye- Syria border today. We have so far failed the people in northwest Syria. They rightly feel abandoned, looking for international help that hasn't arrived. My duty and our obligation is to correct this failure as fast as we can. That's my focus now.” (.) That's what he said on 12th January //
144	P2: True, but he was – //
145	R: // In a tweet.
146	P2: // Which was deleted a few days later.
147	R: // Oh, was it?
148	P2: Yeah. If you look for the tweet now, it's deleted.
149	R: I'm going to check that. (.) Well, I remember how I came across it immediately in the situation and I found it afterwards, but maybe you are right. I am not involved on a daily level anymore, so I guess maybe I don’t know. I know nothing now. //
150	P2: // You know. You know, –
151	R: // So, I'm putting it in front of you to just tell me what you think, but I already feel like you know a lot of things that I don't know. So please go ahead.
152	P2: // Okay.
153	R: I would have asked you, for example, if you think that this is an objective, that the UN really kind of pursues in any way, and if you think that it was meant honestly. But by your reaction I'm already getting a sense around it (laughing). // No, no, so let’s keep this subject very open. Take it as I just told you, very open.
154	P2: OK, I - - need to come back later to OPR as well, which is operational peer review. But I'm going to talk to you about Martin's visit now.
155	R: Hit me with your thoughts. Okay.
156	P2: I think Martin came on the eighth. Was it? Or was it on the 10th? I can't remember.
157	R: I, hang. Hang on (checking notes). I have it here.
158	P2: Is this in my calendar?
159	R: So this one, the tweet itself is from the 12th of February.
160	P2: Okay. That makes sense.
161	R: But didn’t he, I think, he was in Damascus as well, maybe before that. If I'm not mistaken. This is like I – //
162	P2: Both on the 11th. On the 11th of February, Martin was in –. Ohh no. Yeah, he - - was.
163	R: I don't want to confuse this either.
164	P2: Okay. Yeah, he - was meant to be in Damascus on the 12th. But he changed his schedule [[which I remember was linked with some rescheduling of meetings I was invited for as well]].
165	R: Ah ok. Yeah.
166	P2: And so Martin flew immediately, directly to Ankara, and they took the military helicopter (.) to Maraş [[[abbreviation for: Kahramanmaraş, a city in Turkey that was severely affected by the earthquake]]]. And then he said: “you come to me”. You as in (.) selected NGO leaders.
167	R: Okay (.). To Maraş?
168	P2: Yes, to Maraş. Yes, [[there was a small group of representatives who were invited]], and I was one of [[them]].

169	R: Okay.
170	P2: So I thought: “Okay, fine”. I'm sorry, I mean, fair - enough [[[to meet Marting Griffiths in Maraş]]]. I represent [[our NGO and am also active on several relevant advocacy and representation platforms]], I should attend. And then I got a threatening message from [[other Syrian NGOs]] saying: “No, don't attend. He [[[Martin Griffiths]]] should come to us in Gaziantep. We should not be going to Maraş. Gaziantep is also affected. If he is going to talk about Syria then he should be here”. And I thought: Okay, (.) honestly, I was - - on the phone till 3:00 in the morning [[… involved in]] negotiating between the Syrian NGOs and the UN. So the Syrian NGOs said “No. Full stop”. And I [[initially pushed for participating there to represent the Syrian NGOs and Syrian needs as well, but the Syrian NGOs made clear to me that this would be against their interests. In their view, I would not be representing them if I went]]. So I sent an apology to the UN. [[…]] My constituency is more important. They - don't want me to attend so I can't. And then Martin thought: “Okay, interesting. So what's happening?”. So this is where they told Martin the issues with the Syrians. So Martin contacted Damascus, saying: “Look, I'm going to delay coming in. I'm going to organise a face-to-face meeting with the Syrian NGOs and then he took another military helicopter from Maraş or from Ankara to Gaziantep to come and meet with the Syrian NGOs. And that's when [[I addressed him in my speech saying]]: “look, I'm sorry we could not - - - meet yesterday. We had issues with it. [[…]] And Martin was understanding. So that was on the - - (.) 12th. On Sunday the 12th of February, the meeting with Martin. Interestingly, [[months later had another opportunity to speak with him about what happened here]] and he was understanding. I said: “look, Martin, apologies. You know, there was a lot of tension at the time”, and of course he knows. Everyone was stressed, so he - was understanding. Now here's the thing with the tweet [[[the one by Martin Griffiths posted on 12th February]]]. It created a lot of issues with the UN because he said: “we” (.), so, the UN, “failed the people of Syria”. And that's why he was made to delete the tweet.
171	R: Really? I – (.) didn't know that it was deleted. (.) Okay, go ahead please.
172	P2: So put a note and go and check. Yeah, so I think it was deleted. Because it was–, it felt like: Okay, it's not fair on - the UN and this is when we said look, we're not talking about the UN as in the Gaziantep hub. We even had issues saying: “Look. When we talk about the UN, the Whole of Syria one [[[in this case, the Whole of Syria, WoS, refers to the UN’s approach to intervene in Syria under one joint framework with different hubs for different parts of the country]]], we talk about the (…) RCHC, the Regional Coordinator, sorry, the Resident Coordinator and Humanitarian Coordinator based in Damascus. We thought he would have the balls to cross the border (.), sorry, to cross the line [[[the demarcation line Damascus-controlled Syria and opposition-controlled Syria]]] and go to northwest of Syria (.), since he's responsible for all of Syria (.), or come and fly to Gaziantep. I mean, they have the means maybe to fly him in, even in a private jet or private, maybe, helicopter or military helicopter. So he could have been flown into – (.)affected areas and meet with us. Still (.) –. We also had issues with [[another high-level UN representative involved in the UN’s regional humanitarian coordination]]. He never opened his mouth, and he never came to visit us (.). At the time, it was the time when we had no DRHC, no Deputy Regional Humanitarian Coordinator [[[supposed to be based in Gaziantep]]], so this position was vacant (.). And it would have made sense for - [[[the RHC based in Amman]]] to leave Amman and come and meet us in Gaziantep, or for the position of the RHC itself to be Gaziantep. So this is where the tension is. And this is what we made clear. Now let's make it clear, I mean, with [[the Regional Humanitarian Coordinator]], he’s –(.); we are on good terms. Me and him, we always take photos and selfies and then and just post them on the internet. And he would be like: “Oh, look. I managed to - get concessions from the NGOs and I would say no, that's not concessions. It's - - (.) cooperation. But yes, I mean in terms of [[the Regional Humanitarian Coordinator]], or DRHC, he is not well liked and this is where we have issues with the UN. (Uhm) yeah (.), you know, after following any emergency, six months after any emergency, the ERC, the Emergency Relief Coordinator, Martin Griffiths, would call for an OPR (…), an Operational Peer Review.
173	R: That's what you mentioned before, the Operational Peer Review. Okay.
174	P2: So, this now already took place.
175	R: Okay, it already took place.
176	P2: And I joined [[several of the sessions as I am active in several platforms for representation]] so far.
177	R: Does “so far” mean it's still ongoing and there might be more meetings coming?

178	P2: Yes. No. No more meetings like this. We're just waiting for the report to be published.
179	R: Okay.
180	P2: With the OPR we said: “Look, you [[[the UN]]] come into review and we don't want any negative comments or criticism of the Gaziantep hub, because we did everything we can. Yeah? Everything we should and we can do. And that's what we did.” They said: “No, no, it's not going to be criticism”. We said: “Look, if we're gonna be criticised then we criticise the whole UN system”. And they were understanding. So we mentioned [[...]] the current RCSC [[...]]. And we said: “Look, we're not happy with the position as in not coming to see us. So they let us down. We're not happy how we had to ask Martin to come and visit us, otherwise he would not have had any plans on coming to visit us. And it felt like, the UN [representatives in Gaziantep], they did not have the courage to ask Martin to come down and visit us. Because the minute we said to Martin: “No, no, you have to come and visit us”, he said (in positive and easy-going tone): “Yeah, fine. I'll come down and visit you”. So it looked like (.) our colleagues [at the UN in Gaziantep] we were communicating with, were not passing the message on to Martin. Even though we have direct communication with Martin, but we felt: “No, we need to respect the system. And not bypassing the OCHA Head of Office or the DRHC”. And there was no DRHC a t the time anyway (.) because it was vacant. So yes, this is where we are.
181	R: Okay. I mean. I'm also then curious what's in the report. Do you think that they will transparently reflect about the lessons learned and what went right? What went wrong overall? Also with a view on how the UN itself intervened?
182	P2: Yes, it will definitely. Because the - meetings also involve Damascus, and they also involve Amman (.). And this is when we criticised the - UN system, I mean, the Whole of Syria, or not having pre-positioned supplies in Northwest. But they can't just, like, blame it on funding. It's like, they only have funding for emergency or regular programming, but they don't have funding for prepositioning supplies, so they kind of, like, push it back onto the donors. Now, the - survey they – sent, it was a quite a wide survey and when you answer it, they kind of like mix everything together between the, for example between the HLG and the NGOs and, let’s say, it wasn't the right one. It was in the right format for us. (…)
183	R: (Hm.) (.). Maybe – (.), nevertheless it will be valuable no? So I - hope at least that there is some reflection. Do you do think, when - you compare the situation now with Northwest Syria, (.) and of course you already mentioned all of these limitations that were in place and not entirely in the hands of the UN to - - - do anything differently, (.) Do you think that the UN could have done more? (…) And should have done more, maybe, for Northwest Syria? (…)
184	P2: Definitely. (.) Definitely. I think I talked about air drops previously and if they were not happy to - - drop in Manbidj, then, surely, they could have dropped [aid] in Damascus airport and just used road transport.
185	R: There were no air drops.
186	P2: Yeah! They said: “Oh, well, we had issues with the HTS or Nusra [[[main armed extremist group controlling large parts of Northwest Syria]]], the Salvation Government [[[HTS’ quasi-governmental entity]]] not allowing any supplies. But the minute you have some supplies dropping in Damascus just to say: “Look, I mean, this is the UN. It's nothing to do with Damascus, I think - - should have put some extra pressure on Damascus, on Assad. The minute civilians see that there were supplies being brought from outside, I don't know where from, HTS cannot block any crossline supplies. They would have to open the gate and just say: “Yeah, you come in”. Yeah, so they should not be simply blaming HTS.
187	R: And from the perspective of waiting to open the other border crossings, is there anything that you would have expected that could have been handled differently? (…) I mean, correct me if I'm wrong here, right? But as far as I understood from you, the road system in Turkey was really damaged. That is particularly affecting Bab Al-Hawa. The other border crossings though, I think, were in a better shape and more accessible, I think. Is that - - - - right? (…)
188	P2: Yes, that that is right (.). But there were no supplies in Turkey. (…)
189	R: So it would not have made a change [[to open other border crossings earlier]] and it was completely fine that they went to Damascus and asked - - - - Assad - for permission even? Is that - - something that you would say didn't really play a role?

190	P2: We feel like, okay, I mean, we have to respect international law. And that's why they [[[the UN]]] had to seek permission from Damascus. But for us it was–. They [[[the UN]]] kept pushing us as NGOs. It's like: “Oh, we should utilise the additional two border crossings” and we said: “Look, they mean nothing for us, we don't use the humanitarian routes, we use the commercial routes”.
191	R: (Hmm).
192	P2: And I contract suppliers and say: “Look. I want these items to be delivered in - this warehouse - - - - in Northwest Syria or the north. And I don't care which border crossing they use. And it's cheaper for me to use the commercial one than the humanitarian because I don't pay KDV.
193	R: KDV?
194	P2: This is the VAT.
195	R: Okay.
196	P2: Value added tax as in the 8 percent or 18 percent. Now it's 20 percent.
197	R: Okay.
198	P2: And if - I'm going to use the humanitarian route via TRC, Turkish Red Crescent, or via the UN, I am subject to pay extra tax. If I use the commercial route, then no, I'm saving 18 to 20%. (…) So that's why I said: “No, we're not going to use it and we will not utilise it.”
199	R: Okay (.), okay (…). So what I'm getting out of this is that there was room for more action on part of the UN and there should have been more action in your point of view //
200	P2: // Globally, yeah.
201	R: // But with regards to the discussion that was really kind of everywhere (.), the discussion about opening new border crossing and so on and so forth, that was actually not immediately relevant in this situation because of the lack of –,
202	P2: // Supplies. Yes.
203	R: But then, you said in the beginning that the(.) - - the UN was establishing more presence inside Northwest Syria with these [[[additional]]] border crossings [[[that were then opened in the week after the earthquake]]], but that if they were being closed again at some point in the future that this would actually could fire back at your–, I mean, at the Gaziantep based decision making processes around the UN and - the cross-border aid, right? Is that the connection that I'm getting to the beginning? That you - mentioned? [[[note: this is connected to the first part of the conversation, see page 3, on the point that the UN after the earthquake had an interest to cross the border to northwest Syria after not having been present for more than a decade]]].
204	P2: Yeah. However, we're trying to - split the UN presence from the Security Council resolution.
205	R: Okay, that sounds like something that is a bit more complicated than just saying we tried.
206	P2: Yeah, because the UN presence it was A) at the - - discretion of the Syrian regime. So they said: “Okay, you can - - cross the border inside Syria and have a look. (Uhm) (.), and apparently it was always there. The permission was always there. Hence, they crossed from Bab Al-Hawa to - the northwest.
207	R: Yeah. Okay.
208	P2: And when [[a senior representative of UN OCHA]] visited Gaziantep, he said to [[the senior staff of UN OCHA in Gaziantep]]]: “I'm really hoping you're coordinating with the Syrian government [about the visits to Northwest Syria], informing them. [[They]] said: “No?!”. He said: “Oh my God. You should do”. As in, this this conditional. You can't just assume there's permission. You need to inform them of your visits”. So even that, you know, they have the permission of the Security Council, and have the permission of Assad, they still have to inform the government [of Syria] of each visit.
209	R: Okay. (…)

210	P2: Yeah. (…)
211	R: Well I think –, I have a lot of material now, but let me - - ask you two more questions and then just as a wrap up also a bit of just very, very brief personal background notes, so that I can later on relate that to the interview. Interview?; I would call it a conversation. So, just in reflection of your opinion about the UN today, including on their legitimacy to intervene in the way they're intervening in northwest Syria today and before the earthquake: Is there any change, any difference in your opinion? (…) About the UN as a whole? (…)
212	P2: No, not at all. No. It's – only the ABC; it's only the area-based coordination, which will be taking place. But we're still drafting the ToR for this. We're still drafting in ToR of like, okay, we're already coordinating in Gaziantep. You [[[anyone at the UN who is involved in the setting up the ABC]]] should be speaking to - our colleagues [[[at the UN]]] in Gaziantep - and not [[[directly]]] involve the Syria staff. It's often when you talk to the NGOs, I give minimum information to my field staff. I mean, it's like, they don't need to know too much details about the donor funding and various challenges. So that's why we kind of, like, keep the coordination in Gaziantep, but not the field one. So now that they want to talk to our staff, you can go and talk to them, but depending on what? As long as they keep it to who's doing what and where, then yeah, that's fine. But if you want to talk to them more about the cross-border issue, then you should come back to us [[the NGO senior management and coordination teams in Gaziantep]].
213	R: Yeah. So that that means basically for you, if I understand correctly, the –; that the UN is established, and has this coordination mechanism and the capacities, et cetera, that they're offering is a given. And it existed before and after, and basically it's not like you hated the UN before or whatever, you accepted the system that is there, and that is - kind of (.) right //
214	P2: // Yeah.
215	R: // And - - now, you basically are just manoeuvring around the, - - the smaller details of what - this means for your interaction with them [[[the representatives at the UN involved in decision-making on Syria]]]?
216	P2: Yeah, correct. Yeah.
217	R: Thank you. [[…]] Okay, last question
218	P2: OK, ask you the question then I have a follow up about risk management units.
219	R: How can the UN remedy the past? (smiling) [[…]]
220	P2: Okay (distracted for a moment), so /…)
221	R: I know it's a heavy question, at least depending on how much you want to go into, but: how do you think the UN can remedy the past?
222	P2: (Uhm). (…) I think we're already working on it. But, there - - are no issues in Gaziantep and - the issues remain with the Whole of Syria. And this is when - we had the OPR, the Operational Peer Review, we insisted on putting, I mean, we have issues with the Whole of Syria and we need to review it. And they said Martin would not accept it.
223	R: You mean, the Whole of Syria in this case, specifically that it's the - - - decisions being made mostly in in Damascus? That's the problem?
224	P2: The decision-making or decision sharing between [[[the UN coordination offices in]]] Damascus and Amman.
225	R: Okay.
226	P2: Yeah? We said to them [[[the UN during the OPR]]]: "Amman failed us. Nobody from Amman came to Gaziantep". So yes, this - is when they failed us. This is when they've not done anything. [[[The UN in]]] Damascus has also failed us by - not coming to the northwest. So look it felt like, yes, we are totally separate when in fact they see it as a Whole of Syria. So no, this is not a Whole of Syria. We are calling for, I mean to remedy, we're calling for a separation of the job. [As for] the - DRHC, the Deputy Regional Humanitarian Coordinator, we're saying this should be in - the Northwest, the [Regional] Humanitarian Coordinator. Yeah, and we're also talking to Martin to say: "Look, the guy is already reporting to you. David Carden". He's only reporting to Martin. And - - we might as well just split the post.

227	R: Okay?
228	P2: Stop it. Stop it from being (uhm) under - Amman. And keep it separate.
229	R: Which also implies that you would believe that there is not the best of interest being represented from Damascus and from Amman for northeast Syria?
230	P2: Yes
231	R: And with respective consequences also for the future of the coordination, right?
232	P2: Yes
233	R: So you would - - see these three parts, or let's say, three and a half parts as very separate actually already and not as a Whole of Syria anymore.
234	P2: Yeah. When we talk about the SSG, the strategic steering group, and that's based in Amman, and that's the UN at regional level, they kind of, like, hardly have any idea about what's happening in the Northwest, but they're making strategic decisions there. So this is why we say: “we don't want these strategic decisions to be made in Amman. You need to empower the Gaziantep colleagues, (.) the UN heads of missions, and they would make these strategic decisions. So we're trying to - push for a review of the SSG and give more - - authority to the HLG, the Humanitarian Leadership Group. So this is part of what we are asking for, and this is how we can (.) forgive the UN.
235	R: Okay. Very interesting. (.) Very interesting point. (.) (Uhm) Just very quick on you as a person because we kind of slipped that, we directly started into our conversation. (.)Can you just within like 5 small sentences, talk a bit about who you are and what you do and what your organization does and so on, so that I can connect it to the interview later on?
236	P2: Of course. I'm [[Participant B]] and the co-founder and country director/ regional director [[one of the larger humanitarian-focused NGOs active in Northwest Syria]]. [[…]] I'm [[a Syrian national I also have the nationality of a European country, so I am also a member of the Syrian diaspora abroad. I am involved in several relevant coordination and advocacy platforms and also represent the Syrian NGO community and humanitarian actors in several ways through these platforms and coordination groups, including vis-à-vis UN entities]].
237	R: [[These platforms are based in?]]
238	P2: In Gaziantep. So yes, [[besides other additional advisory functions here and there]], this is who I am.
239	R: How much - - time, you roughly per month, do you spend in Gaziantep or in the region?
240	P2: In brief. In Gaziantep has spent two weeks every month. So half of my time in the region and then the rest of it [[in different places abroad]].
241	R: Okay. And you, I – suppose you do not really visit Northwest Syria frequently, do you?
242	P2: No, I used to (.) (uhm) and – (.) (uhm), but (.) it's not safe for me personally.
243	R: Yeah. No, that is not surprising for me. And you have close contact to your [[members of staff all the time, aye?]]
244	P2: Yeah, so at [[my organization]], we took the decision to keep me outside [of Syria physically] so I can talk freely [[[the concern here is with members of armed groups mostly]]]. But [[my fellow senior colleagues are]] regularly inside Syria [[…]] but for me, because I have strong views on certain bodies inside Syria, they said: “No, don't be there”.
245	R: Which is maybe also helpful for me to be able to speak with you so openly (smiling).
246	P2: Yeah. (Laughing).
247	R: Thank you for this. (.) I think you also had a follow up still? So that for me that's - super fine. I have got so much.

248	P2: OK, good. One of the - - new entities [[[at the UN]]] that's been formed is the Risk Management Unit. The Risk Management Unit, they look at the aid diversion, they look at various issues of concern to the NGOs and –. //
249	R: // (repeating) Risk Management Unit. This is at the UN or this is separate of the UN?
250	P2: This is at the UN, and the Head [[[of the Risk Management Unit]]] she reports to the DRHC.
251	R: Okay. Okay.
252	P2: And this one looks at various issues, so they look at GBV [[[gender-based violence]]], they look at PSEA (protection from sexual exploitation and abuse) cases, they look at aid diversion. (.) They look at access issues. (.)
253	R: I think I heard about the diversion part at some point. But I'm - not sure if I'm confusing it.
254	P2: No, this was this. They also touch on it at the APP, they Accountability to Affected Populations. They–. This is when beneficiaries say: “Oh, there is aid diversion”, and we say: “Look, there's no aid diversion”. When you talk about the diversion you need to have evidence about it. (…)
255	R: Yeah.
256	P2: So yes, this - - is a new unit as well. It’s been there for almost a year and [[coordination platforms such as the Syrian NGO forum are]] heavily involved as an advisory function in the Risk Management Unit. Yeah.
257	R: Is there the NGO forum– (.), are there now any changes in the way they're interacting with the UN then with this Risk Management Unit and so on and so forth? So is there new other new topics that they’re dealing with at present?
258	P2: (Uhm), [[…]] there [[is involvement by]] the NGO Forum; there is the IOM Head of Office and the UNHCR Head of Office.
259	R: Okay.
260	P2: So between us plus the plus the DRC, [[these are involved]] in the Risk Management Unit.
261	R: [[Interesting additional point to close with]] Yeah. I'm really (.), I'm really glad you were able to make some time for me today. Actually, with all of the stuff that you're having on your plate right now.
262	P2: No worry. Anytime.
263	R: Thank you. And if anything else pops up in your mind, don't hesitate to just kind of, you know, I know that you'll be on a holiday, but maybe even in two or three weeks, if there is something that strikes your mind. I'm - happy to hear about it.
264	P2: [[…]] Have fun and good to see you again.

Transcript P3 (2)

1	R: Good evening. As discussed, here are the questions for following up on our last conversation and the new developments around the vetoed cross-border resolution. I'll number them through, so you can maybe simply answer each directly with a voice note or text, whatever is easier for you, whenever you have a moment. I'm also going to record the questions by voice note, just to make it nicer (more like an actual conversation): Last time we spoke about your perception of the UN's conduct and it's legitimacy in NWS, particularly related to the earthquake. About one month ago, the UN Security Council did not renew the cross-border resolution to NWS via Turkey. (1) can you tell me, in your words, what actually happened there?
2	P3: Hello, [[researcher]], how are you? (Uhm) Yes, for your question about the (uhm) - - border resolution and what happened exactly: as you know, (uhm) the the decision for renewal as a cross-border, it wasn't (uhm) agreed between on actors in Security Council. And what happened exactly: the Syrian government and the Syrian regime (uhm) send a message that they accept to cross the convoys from Turkey to Syria [[[accept that the convoys cross the border]]], UN convoys, regarding [[[because of]]] the earthquake and because the situation is difficult and what –. (.) And yes, the acceptance [[[was this time granted]]] from regime side, not from the UN or from the Security Council. And regarding this decision, the local authority in Northwest Syria, Health Directorates and all independent and not-independents institutions on the ground, they refused [to] receive (uhm) the - humanitarian aid through crossline and through (uhm) the decision of - - regime. And also, the local authority, I - mean the main local control, authority, on the ground also refused to receive the humanitarian (uhm) aid from (uhm) - Turkey or from other area based on the decision of Syrian government or Syrian regime. So it what happened - -, but after this (.), I think, still a new decision and start (uhm) –; maybe I - will answer in the next question.
3	R: (2) What has happened/ changed since then with regards to cross-border aid and the UN's conduct in the region?
4	P3: For your (uhm) second question, you know, the border decision, it was till June 2023 cross Bab Al-Hawa and Bab Al-Salama. (Uhm) (.) But from June till now, in Bab Al-Hawa is it closed, because the decision, or the–; yes, the decision date finished in June, and after the (uhm) acceptance of regime to cross-border from Bab–; not Bab Al-Hawa, (.) Bab Al-Sama and Bab Sarray. These two border in the area which (uhm) yani [[[what I mean to say is that]]] can be considered as influence area of Turkish authority, or Turkish government. Bab Al-Hawa is now closed for (uhm) UN convoys, from June till now, and after the acceptance of the Syrian government, only to Bab Al-Salame and Array. And after the negotiation between UN and (uhm) the –; some of local authority, military local authority on the ground, (uhm) they [[[the UN]]] accept to (uhm) - transfer the convoys from Turkey to Syria only through Bab Al-Salame and Array. (.) And now - , this - decision [will be] till November 2023. After this date, we [don't] know what's the decision regarding (uhm) cross-border humanitarian aid. (...) Also, regarding the second - question, we, till now, not [[...]] know, or [it's] not clear for us what's the future of cross-border humanitarian relief, or humanitarian aid, and we [[do not]] know what the decision will be after (uhm) end of the last decision in November.
5	R: And (3) in how far does this (the non-renewal of the cross border resolution and the UN's conduct that you relate to this more broadly, if you like) affect your point of view about the UN and it's conduct at large?
6	P3: You know, not renewal [[[the non-renewal]]] of cross-border resolution decision, it will affect, yes, of course, negatively (.) on UN agencies, maybe intervention and UN behaviour, because, you know, all the mechanism of of response to opposition area will be different and will change. And, you know, the cross-border [approach has been] working in - Turkey from 2013, and this, all clusters, I - mean Health Cluster, Protection Cluster, Shelter and other (.) clusters related to UN agencies, which under all organizations coordinate and cooperate to respond to all (uhm) needs in - Northwest Syria and (uhm) - for the crisis also, for epidemics or for the earthquake in last time, between Turkey and Syria. So, not renewal [[[the non-renewal]]] of - - this decision of course will - affect on UN. And (uhm) - this decision, I [[do not]] know if we can consider (.), or we can consider the political (uhm) relation between the state and if they agreed on - the cross-border renewal or not, and it will be also related to the acceptance of the local authority of the new mechanism of – support, or new mechanism of humanitarian response, humanitarian action, especially regarding the UN agencies and - you know, if - (uhm) the - (uhm) renewal of resolution cross-border will not be achieved or conducted, the mechanism will be, maybe, through the cross line, if this [is] accepted by the local authority. And I [don't] know if (uhm) the UN agencies can manage the response on the ground in the field, and if they will (uhm) supervise or implement the response in Northwest Syria in opposition area

	where HTS and National Army [] (uhm) control. And I - also –; we observed on the ground (uhm) that the UN agencies, from the beginning of the earthquake, started visits to Syria and their coordination not with the –; (.) their [[[UN agencies']]] - - - - coordination [was] with the - small local association on the ground and their visits not totally coordinated with the organization[s], big organizations or big partners. And they visit facilities, they visited (uhm) some areas affected by earthquake, (uhm) or the big facilities on the ground, as maybe, I mean, hospitals, big hospitals and the big health facilities. So I think something it prep–, yani [[[I mean]]], they started to prepare, started to establish inside Syria, and [there are] some rumours about [that] they decided to open offices, one in Sarmada and one in Azaz. Sarmada, it [is] in the area which [is] controlled by HTS, and Azaz area [is] controlled by National Army, so related to Interim Syrian Government. And you know, (uhm) and Sarmada [is] in the area where HTS and Salvation Government control. So I - - - see from my opinion on –; that in the future, or the after - November, the (uhm) new mechanism will be (uhm) - - implemented and they will start a new mechanism, especially after the –(uhm), their visits to Syria and they show that they are on the ground. And it will –(.); They [[[the UN]]] will coordinate with the whole of Syria in Damascus, (uhm) but it - also need the acceptance of local authority to cross the (uhm) - convoys from regime area to (.) - opposition area cross lines. So, (uhm) maybe from Manbij, it's related to National Army, maybe, and from (uhm) - crossline area in Idlib.
7	R: (4) how so?
8	P3: The answer included in the third answer on the third answer, so (laughing) you can find the answers inside.
9	R: (5) is there anything else you would like to add?
10	P3: (Uhm), I want to add, regarding your question, that the border resolution the 1st and the last, affected or damaged by - this decision the population in inside Syria was affected. The population regarding [[[in]]] Idlib and all other area, especially after the earthquake, after the epidemics, after (.) the conflict also impacted on the population. And the - people not - care about what's about, what's the political issues. They care now about their needs (.) for education, (.) their needs for health and their essential need for safe and security and secure their life and life of their children, so they not care about from where the humanitarian aids can come. They - need sustainability and they need (uhm) security of their life and their children. They hope, and they like to give their children (uhm) a very best and a very good education, very good health, very good food, very good (uhm) environment for their life, where they can (uhm) - - their children grow [up] in - good environment and, you know, as if - this kind of services can be provided by the UN agencies, it - linked with - their needs, with their lives, especially for I - mentioned before, health and and education, and they need this support. School support, teachers support, all (uhm) - services regarding the education. And also regarding the health. And - this needs, as you know, 12 years of conflict, with an earthquake with an epidemics and cholera or -COVID-19 outbreak, so (.) they need, in the end of - - all, need their essential (uhm) yani [[[what I mean to say is]]] needs and rights, (uhm) because this is their right. (.) They have [a] right to - - - take or receive optimal kind of health services and education and other (uhm) - services regarding the their lives. (...) If you have any additional clarification, please don't hesitate to contact me and you can ask and I can reply. Thank you.

Transcript P3 (1)

1	R: So, as what you can read on the Consent form, my reseach topic is about in how far you perceive that the UN has changed its conduct before, during, and after the earthquake. That's the rough topic. We can go broad. It's basically so that I want to listen. I want to hear your perspective and your thoughts. If you feel there is something that goes more in that direction or that direction, whichever thing you find relevant. I have a set of questions of course. But basically the idea is that you determine where we go and I'll listen. [[…]] So maybe let's start by you briefly telling me a bit more about yourself: Like, who you are, what type of work you do, generally, all of the things that you find are - - important to know about you.
2	P3: Okay, first of all, thank you for your invitation and it my pleasure to - be part of this survey or questionnaire or studying and to give my - opinion about the context. Regarding your - research, I am [[Participant]], I am a pharmacist, (uhm), a Syrian pharmacist with a master's degree in political science [[…]]. I started working in [the] humanitarian sector since 2011 as medical coordinator […] in [[a governorate in Northern Syria]] and then I started working in 2012 with [[one of the larger Syrian health and humanitarian-focused organizations]]. [[Over the past years, I worked in different positions for the organization, at times outside of it as well, and gradually built my career and mainly supervised the staff inside Syria. Today I am a senior member of staff of the organization I originally joined ten years ago. While Syria is my main field of work and attachment, I also have some responsibilities outside of the Syrian context by now, like for example in Ukraine but also further afield in response to disasters and crises]]. I live now in Gaziantep. I have my family, my wife and [[]] children and [am] working in [the] humanitarian sector, and I try to do my best for as the people in need around the world.
3	R: Is this also your key motivation? The part that you're playing for other people, or (.) what is the key motivation that you have in in doing your work, already for such a long time?
4	P3: Of course, you know, first of - my motivation [is] to stay and to implement my - experience in [the] health sector to help people in - responding to their (uhm) needs. As you know, everything [that is] related to life [and] related to health of people, (uhm) (…) it's very –, my - - - my pleasure and I - - love [to] work in this sector, especially when I feel that I give the people the opportunity (uhm) to - - [live] in safe condition[s], especially when I - with my colleagues and with my organization, try to help people during (uhm) our work and through conducting our services in (uhm) - around the world. First of all, (uhm), yani [[[what I mean to say is]]], [it is my] motivation that I love to - be in this place to help people, especially, [as] I am also affected by the crisis. So this opportunity given to me, I - - think [is] one of my duties and roles to stand and to support people and - be with them. (.) Yeah.
5	R: Very nice. And I mean, you already mentioned services, you mentioned [[your organization]]. Would you mind just in a brief way to describe what [[the organization you're working for]] does, (.) and maybe just explain what kind of an organization it is?
6	P3: Yes, [[my organization is an]] organization [that] works in [the] humanitarian sector. Especially our focus [is] on health services. So we [are] working in primary and secondary healthcare and protection, nutrition, and mental health and sometimes we have participation in some relief activities regarding the crisis, especially in the time of – escalation, in the time of forced displacement, so, sometimes you know [for] some relief - - - activities it is very important to implement with your health. But in - - - general we are [a] health organization and our - - - action is medical activities inside Syria.
7	R: Yeah.
8	P3: And also we have international interventions in some countries, [that is] crisis and conflict countries, as I mentioned before, [[for example in]] Ukraine [[but also many others]].
9	R: Yeah, I think you [[even studied abroad for a time, didn't you? I remember there was a connection, no?]]
10	P3: Yes, I studied [[abroad]] and moved back to Syria and continued my work in - pharmacy after that, yes.
11	R: So basically, even before all of what is happening happened, you already had a very strong connection to [[more than the Syrian context?]]
12	P3: Yes, and my - motivation [is to] - work for [[both the Syrian and Ukrainian context]] because I know the country, I know the people [[[of Ukraine]]]. I know also they are very nice people, and they are very good people, and they love the life, and they are Syrians also [[[referring to Ukrainian people here,

	metaphorically]]]. They suffered [from] the same - conditions, the same circumstances and the same, also weapons and the same (.) feelings on - the civilians, so it - - was my first reason to start work there and I know that they are –, - - - need our experience in Syria because, you know, especially how to deal with the injuries and patients. Especially as we have this experience in Syria, so to transfer this experience to - - [[other people]] it was my - - - - - motivation, my first motivation and reason to work.
13	R: Very nice. (.) I also remember though that in the past, you also very frequently went into Syria. You knew basically every single person you would meet on the way from Gaziantep to [[the frontline areas]]. Is that still the case, or are you not visiting as frequently anymore?
14	P3: No, no, no. I visit Syria all the time, because also my family, Mama and my brother, my brothers, I have [[many]] brothers and sisters, so you know, so all - they [are] based inside Syria and northwest Syria and they live there and I visit them. And also, I [am] still working and visiting our activities and our projects and especially some sessions, some workshops regarding humanitarian action, humanitarian principles, some training regarding security and negotiations and how to deal with all the things related to - - humanitarian action. Yes, I [am] still working, just a week ago [I] was in Syria, so I still go there a lot. //
15	R: // So – (smiling, laughing) you're splitting yourself now between –, before it was between Gaziantep and Syria maybe 50:50? And now you have [[other countries]] on top of that. Is that about how I can understand it?
16	P3: (Smiling, laughing) And now about–, maybe we can say 80 percent between Gaziantep and around the world and 15 percent of my work inside Syria, so you know.
17	R: And the visiting of the family on top of that?
18	P3: Family and also sometimes related to - my work some supervision, some capacity building for our staff and awareness sessions for our staff also.
19	R: (Huh).
20	P3: Yeah.
21	R: Well, that brings us to– (smiling, laughing). Thank you for this very nice background, for this kind of a profile. It's really–, it's very, very nice. Thank you. (.) I'm–. Which brings me already back to my topic and also I - would say into the last touch points that we had, which is related to what happened six months ago, almost, (.) the earthquake situation. So just kind of as a starting - - base, I - haven't been to Gaziantep since the earthquake, as you know. I would love to come back at some point, also to, (.) kind of, you know, make peace with myself and, like, digest a bit and see you, see other people and say hello again. (.) But it the situation – (…). How is the situation today in Gaziantep and maybe even also in northwest Syria?
22	P3: Yes, for Gaziantep, the situation is very good. Especially, you know, after, you know, [the] first one, the first months, I mean, [in] March and April, the situation, it was not very good because, you know, [there were] still some aftershocks, earthquakes, and this [did] not give to people the - guarantee to - - stay in their homes. And many of - - - -, more than 55 percent of people, they evacuated to some surrounding cities, as Aksaray, Kayseri [[[cities in central Turkey]]], some of them to Trapzon, to Istanbul, Ankara and to Konya and other cities, some of them visit from time to time, (.) visited Gaziantep to see how [are] the people here. The situation [got] better and better after the opening of the institutions here in in Gaziantep, banks and the governmental institutions, after - evaluation [of the buildings] and exam, the evalution that this home can go to destruction and this home you can live [in], you know, the evaluation of the houses, after the engineering committee gave this //
23	R: // You - mean, what the Turkish Government basically arranged for you?
24	P3: // Yes, yes. It - was about two or three times. The first one not considered because it was very fast and not with modern devices and they returned and – repeat[ed] the evaluation, and after this evaluation, many [] families still return[ed] and especially, you know, after the institutions they start[ed] working, and after the schools they start[ed] working and receive[d] the student[s] with some security procedures. Some people, you know, the fear and the - consideration of fear and the impact of–, the mental impact on some families [did] not allow them to return - - - home. You know, my - - children, they [did] not accept[] to live - inside the home after three - months, they still [slept] in the car and [would] come home during the day to take some

	things, to go to [the] toilet, to wash, and everything else and they stay[ed] in the in the car because they're not, yani [[[what I mean to say it]]] feel[ing] safe. After - - - - April, yani [[[or maybe]]] the beginning of - May, most [] people returned to Gaziantep and not all the - - - - original people [[[who lived in Gaziantep before]]], which are the host community, you know, there are some, not visitors, new - people came from Antakya, from Hatay, from İslahiye [[[all cities in the South of Türkiye disproportionately hit by the earthquake]]]. Because you, know İslahiye and other places were destroyed totally. And also [in] Maraş, more than 80 percent of - homes were destroyed, so they moved to Gaziantep, the bigger city here. And they have good opportunities to work, and it's close to their cities. So they came to here. Now the situation is very good. But you know, the economic status here - - - - especially in Gaziantep is very bad, as the prices [are] very high and have increased at lot. It's not acceptable prices, you know. Now for the homes, it's four times more than the - prices before the earthquake, because, you know, many [] people are rent[ing] homes here and [there are] no more homes to - - - rent. The prices in [the] market and others [] affect negatively on the people. But about the earthquake, still, the situation is stable and calm. But (.) it's today -, today it happened one earthquake at 5.5. Yes. Yes. Today in [the] morning, at 8:15 AM.
25	R: What?! I didn't know! 5.5.?! So you felt it!?
26	P3: Yes, we [felt] this. Yes, yes, yes. Before I [went] to - - - work and my family woke up, they felt it and the lamps move[d] up and down, (.) it was felt. And - - usually– (.). But the situation is still good. People have adapted to the situation and they– (.), you know, are good.
27	R: So they are not as afraid anymore as they were after February 6th?
28	P3: No, no, no. Yeah, no, the situation is good. (.) For Northwest Syria, the situation also, still, yani [[what I mean to say is that]], [it's] better than before, but you know, some families [who] they lost their homes, they [are] still in - - tents and (uhm) (.), they prefer to live in tents more than homes. Because, you know, [there are] not very [well-]built building[s], so they prefer to live in tents. But, anyway, the situation is good. But still, also that the economic - - [situation] affects [] Syria and [] Turkey.
29	R: So it's the same?
30	P3: Yes, you know, [there are] no incomes and the reducing of funding–, [] the reducing of humanitarian aid and all related reason[s] also affect [] the population inside Syria. And also the - - returning people from Turkey to Syria affects the population still more, and bigger. And, you know, all those people return to Syria without any work, and yes, you know, sometimes the level of crime is increased.
31	R: I'm not - - really - - - familiar with how many people moved back, or, were moved back let's say, both, I think it is happening right? So, when you say so many people are back in Syria now: How many people– ?
32	P3: You know, thousands, thousands of people, you know, before [the] elections [[[in Türkiye]]] and after.
33	R: Okay
34	P3: You know, those, I mean, [who] illegally live here in Turkey, and some of them [do] not have all - the documents and all the paper[s] which they need as personal documents to - stay in Turkey.
35	R: So no, Kimlik [[[Turkish ID card]]], no nothing, you mean?
36	P3: Yes, yes. So you know, the[re is a] plan to evacuate, no - - to return more than one million [] – Syrian[s] during this - year.
37	R: Okay. [[...]].
38	P3: Okay. [[...]].
39	R: // Okay. I'm–; are there any other things for northwest Syria that you think are specifically more difficult?
40	P3: Yes, you know, yes. Maybe, I - spoke about the earthquake. You know, [[researcher]], [also] the COVID-19, when [it] started, COVID-19 [has] very negatively impact[ed] [] - the health system. As you know, the health system already collapsed after the regime [took] control on South of Idlib or Maarat an-Numan and in northern Hama [[[two sub-regions and a major city previously under the control of non-governmental forces which the formal government of Syria took over again in early 2020]]], and more than 75 [] medical facilities, hospitals, primary health centres and other facilities controlled by - - the regime and –, the health system

	lost [a lot] of infrastructure and all the people move to [the] north. And so now, [we have] the same number of people, but a [smaller] number of facilities, health facilities and. And this number of people with this number of health facilities is not - –; the people cannot reach [] - all services they need in Northwest Syria. Especially, you know, the difference between the fund[s] in - - - Idlib countryside, (uhm), [the] countryside of Idlib and North Aleppo I mean, the [] Euphrates Shield and the Olive Branch [areas] [[[Syrian territory in the North under Turkish control, respectively named after Turkish military operations]]], [.] there is a difference between the two areas. And you know, the reducing of – funds, also - - - - many [] organizations [[[humanitarian-focused NGOs]]] [are] not in, yani [[[what I mean to say is]]], full capacity working. Some of - [the] [[[here: donor or, in terms of funding, contractually leading]]] organizations only support salaries for staff, some of them support only operational cost, some of them reduce[d] the number of beneficiaries during the, you know, during COVID-19. It all affects also on the funds. Because the COVID-19 affect[s] on all the world and all the governments. So the strategy after - COVID-19 and also the strategy after [the beginning of the] Ukrainian war also, some of [the donor] organization[s] changed their strategy and changed the percent of - intervention in - - Syria, so all this affect[s] [] the people with - this economic - status and – situation, and [there are] no incomes (.). And this all [[[lower funding, increased needs]]] affect[s] [] the people on the ground. And also (uh; uh) [there is a] cholera outbreak and - - [it] also affect[s] [] the - people. And then came the earthquake, you know. Three crises one after the other: COVID-19 and then cholera and earthquake, and with the conflict condition[s], all this affect in the in the end [] the people[‘s] [lives]. [They have an effect] on the border, humanitarian - convoys, [they] affect the infrastructure. Also, the acceptance of people - to stay in Syria or in Turkey. Also, some of them still now they're thinking about emmigration to - Europe or - - other countries, and also some [] people, you know, this mental shock, yani [[[you know]]] and - - - the impact of - - [the] earthquake and COVID-19, because many [] people lost their loved ones and they lost relatives and–. Because you know, for me, I - lost about 26 of my - relatives, my family. So, many [] people, not only for [[me]], for all people in northwest Syria, some of them lost a brother or a sister, some - [] families lost all the family. So it was different over all, the earthquake, it was different [than] all [other] crises. You know, this number of people, thousands of people lost their life and passed away during the earthquake. It [is] not similar to COVID-19, not similar to barrel bomb[s], not similar to chemical weapons. It–, especially, you know, you - are in - very complicated circumstances and people they [are] waiting [to be safed] and after the earthquake everything [was] still different. Also the perspective of - - people about their life, about the future, [they are] not now thinking not about anything. Because, you know, they already lost the hope and after the earthquake they –, it affected [] the people, now [they are] looking, some people they [are] not, you know, they are–, in their face[s] [there] is not life, yani [[you know]], you see that people, they are, (uh), they [are like dead] but they are walking and work, but only to – stay, to care about their families, about their children sometimes- Especially also for education, and you know that the education– , now speak not as [[me, the]] humanitarian worker and - - as health worker and as working [[in the humanitarian sector]], but [as me, as a] Syrian and I know the - people how they live and how the situation [is] and how they need, especially when I contact with my family, with my - my relatives, with my friends, with my colleagues, with our people on the ground and during my visits, during my, also, during my research I - - conduct and research about [[a medical topic]] and all my interviews - where with [] people with – disabilities. About 20 [] people I met with [them], every - one of them have [their] own history about his life during the conflict, how they lost their legs, how they lost their feeling, how they lost some, you know, disabilities. They [are] very, very complicated. So, so now I'm speaking about the people, how they live and what–, how that–, there [is the] impact of disaster, crisis, conflict on their [lives]. And you know how they are looking to others. Now they're looking for - - the other people, how they look to Syrians, they - have the right to live? They have [a] right - to have [a] life? To receive services? To receive? [To] live in [a] safe place, how the International community [is] looking to Syrians and how the organizations–, it is their right to take this kind of - humanitarian aid or not? And what’s their rights? The people [do] not - - know what’s their rights on the ground. The others must give to them. So this kind, you know, of - life without education, without a new or opportunity, are - - you know, the early recovery and recovery, - - nothing is clear for the future for them. So yes, this - kind of some of - - - what I can speak about the people in northwest Syria. Yeah. (.)
41	R: (Summarizing, repeating) So the – earthquake (.), basically, was unparalleled and completely different than anything that had happened before; but still, it was especially bad because it was hitting the region in Northwest Syria, the people in northwest Syria, and also in the Turkish neighbouring region, after all these years, more than a decade of - continuous crisis with COVID, with the conflict, with all of that?

42	P3: (Hm)., yes, yes, of course. (.) And you know, after the earthquake, they [did] not observe[] the suitable response from - - - all the–. It - - - wasn't as they expect[ed] after the earthquake. They - thought that maybe the world will stand [with them] and will support them in this crisis, but it was [the] opposite, yeah.
43	R: (Summarizing, repeating) So you're saying that you - feel that northwest Syria and the people inside were left alone? (.) And that they feel as well that they were - - - - not supported as they should have been?
44	P3: Yes, of course.
45	R: (Summarizing, repeating) So even though they do not, maybe, know their rights, their human rights, their like what they - - should be asking for, they still felt that somebody should have come and helped them more than what they received?
46	P3: Yes, because you know, they heard about news that the support will come to Northwest Syria, some of organizations, some of UN agencies, it will be–. But, you know, in - the results you cannot–, you're looking to what? Some kind of some shelter, some food baskets? Some health and medical support and enough? And yes, [] this kind of - - response is not acceptable by [[[for these]]] people. They're not - - - looking because, you know, twelve years of - conflict. They learned that and they know that (hmmm) the number of - - maybe supporters, or the people [who] can support or entities [who] can support them is limited, especially after many [] reasons and circumstances, especially during the earthquake [[[reference to reasons and conditions mentioned earlier but not limited to them: such as protracted conflict, COVID-19, Cholera outbreak(s), now the earthquake]]].
47	R: Yeah. (…) When you - - think about, let's say the immediate response period like the - period in which people can still be saved your life, right? So the first, I don't know, 72 to 100 hours, maybe. Who? Who do you think? // Who do you think –. // Ah, go ahead. //
48	P3: // You know, know that. // The response in immediate response, it was by local organization[s], by the people themselves, by [the] Civil Defence, because you know– //
49	R: // The Civil Defence is The White helmets, right? // It's the same?
50	P3: // The White Helmets. // Yes. [So] why the White Helmets? Because the White Helmets play a very good role; a great role in saving life[s], in - searching about people under [the] rubble and - - transferring the injur[ed ones] to the hospitals and–. You know what the problem was? Because, you know, the humanitarian workers themselves [were] impacted by the earthquake also. You know, because the affected area in North Syria, I mean, it was the border area from Harim, Salqin, to Bab al-Hawa to Ad-Dana, Sarmada and Dar Taizzah, Jinderes [[[also written: Djinderes]]] and Afrin [[[all Syrian cities in the border region to Turkey]]]. And here is [where] the most [] humanitarian workers – [are], here. They live here, so - - they're affected by the earthquake and their families [are] also affected by the earthquake, you know? So how to work and how to respond to - the - people and [at] the same time they need this support for their family? And you know, when you compare []: you work for your family response, for your family, or [the] response for the people. This kind of option [is] limited, or - - - - [there may only be] one option [which is to] stay with your family because you know, fear, and sometimes, some of them need to save lives. Some of [the] workers, they lost their whole–, all of their families during their shift in - - hospitals or in White Helmets' centres or during their work. They returned to their homes, they found the - home destroyed and no family, no, no, no–; nobody's here. And - you know [in] the - - first days, it was a huge number of patients transferred to hospital[s]. Doctors worked more than 72 hours without stopping, because, you know, [the] number of patients received by the hospital, especially Bab Al-Hawa Hospital, a private hospital, Al Andalus Hospital, [] [which is] close to [the] affected area [[[the hospital]]]. (uhm) (.) The referral system also all [the] time [is] transferring the patient[s] and injur[ed] from - the affected area to hospital[s] and during this, you know what? The reason for - - this [s] because, you know, the affected area, Turkey and Syria, all the border area from the Turkish side [was] destroyed also, and affected by the earthquake: Antakya [[[the Arabic name for Hatay]]], Reyhanli, Kilis and Gaziantep and Şanlıurfa [[[all Turkish cities in the border region to Syria]]]. (Uhm), the border closed and - they suspended (uhm) [the pathways for] crossing from Turkey to Syria during the earthquake because all [the] area [was] affected and, during the crisis the border [was] affected because they cannot control [it], and [at] the same time, - most of [the] hospitals [in] this area [were] destroyed [by] it [[[the earthquake]]] in Syria and [at the] Turkish side, as the number of people affected [was] very huge, you know, more than 70,000 of people [have] died in - - Turkey also, so transferring patient[s] and injured to Turkey, it was impossible. And - the hospital capacity and the number of doctors and specialists [in Syria] not enough

	to respond to all patients and [at] the same time. The people [were] without houses, they need[ed] shelters, they need[ed] - food. So working in all sectors on all levels of - humanitarian response. And - you know, after three days of - - of [the] earthquake, till, yani [[[what I mean to say is, until]]] some of convoys came to - - - Syria and these convoys are not –. [They are] regular, yani [[[I mean]]], regular convoys, [] not [for] emergency response. It was only the convoys [for] which [it was planned] already [that] they will come, but the closure of [the] border prevent [them from] crossing [the] border. So [at this moment then] they continue[d], but it was not as [a] response to the earthquake, and (.) you know, after - two weeks not - anything came. Some of - - humanitarian aid, which [was] in warehouses inside Syria [earmarked] for UN agencies, for some organizations, they [were] used by all local NGOs and INGOs, and also by the UN agencies. But all these [is] regular humanitarian aid, for food basket or shelters, right? Not more than 10 percent of response, yani [[[what I mean to say is]]] to - - the people. And - - - you know, and also entering the humanitarian convoys, it was –, they accept[ed] –, they request[ed] the approval of [the] Syrian government to enter - inside Syria and after the - disclosure of UN agencies that they are coming to Syria after the regime's approval, what [do] we see on the ground? What [do] we see on the ground? We see that UN agencies, after 12 years of conflict, they come inside Syria; [the] affected areas, and start visiting the people, and visiting the affected area, and visiting - - some hospitals or what? What prevent[ed] them to come before? What kind of reasons? You know, the people only [] saw the UN agencies on the ground in 2011, when [there was] some of - violence [on part] of regime forces [against] the people in Khan Shaykhun [[[a city in southern Idlib, initially under the control of non-government forces and since 2017 back under the control of the formal Government of Syria]]], and in some areas in Homs (City). And [there, some] investigators from UN agency [came] to see it, the– . (.) I - - speak now about the rebel and opposition area which are not controlled by regime. Only in 2011, they [[[the people inside Syria]]] saw them [[[UN officials]]] on the ground. After 12 years (.), after the earthquake, they [are now] still coming every day from Killis, from Bab Al-Salama, from Bab al-Hawa [[[from all directions that are possible; also implying: into all areas of what is referred to as "Northwest Syria", meaning regardless of the factions that controls the crossings and sub-regions]]]. Their cars come and go inside Syria without any fear. They before spoke that: "[Northwest Syria is] No safe place to go. [There is] No guarantee to save, to protect themselves from terrorism or from – (uhm) - - military group[s] on the ground". But they came and they visited and stayed there and met with local organization[s], with local entities on the ground, and they, now they have regular - visits on the ground and - you know –. (.) But anyways (.) it [does]not affect on - the – volume, or the amount of humanitarian aid coming to – Syria. It [did] not affect it, [it] still is as it–. Still, as this change [[[that UN officials now are present inside Syria]]], you know, we [don't] know why.(.) (Uh), before they [did] not come, we as Syrian[s], when we - as Syrian[s] when we speak, why in 12 years of - - conflict, when the displacement from Aleppo, [the] displacement from Damascus, from Al-Ghouta, from Homs, from Dara'a. When thousands of people more than you know during the military operation in - South of Idlib, north of Hama, more than 950,000 of people displaced from this area from Marrat Al-Numaan, Kafranbel, Hama, Raffah, and no UN agencies [were] there and - - - you know, the investigations about chemical attacks also, when the chemical attack on Khan Shaikun (.), Sarin (.) and other chemical attacks on Kafr Zita (.), a chemical attack on (uhm) - Binnish and Germin, we (do) not see– , yes, UN agencies [came] to Bab Al-Hawa border only and they returned before. Now they are come and go. And we heard about they decided to open some offices inside Syria, and, do you look, you know, we are speaking about some media and some - news - - - television and (uhm) - - - in news channels, [they are] speaking about 2 approach[es] from UN agencies. Some of them, we will start to work inside Syria, coordination from inside Syria. Some of them no, [but] from Damascus. Some of them no, [but] from Gaziantep and when you ask and when you meet some people: "How (do) you enter to Syria after the earthquake"? Some of them answer you that after the approval of the Syrian government, some of them (answer) no, because we have a right to come and to make [] evaluation[s] and assessment[s] [of the] need[s] inside - Syria. (Uhm). (.) But anyway, the level of - support, maybe we can say, or the (.), maybe we can speak about the (.), yani [[[what I mean to say is]]] the amount of - support coming from the UN agencies is not as expected from [the] people. We thought that it will be different, especially during the earthquake, but it [is] not, not - if we compare - with other response [[[in other countries]]]. It's – It is - nothing. So, yet I will– .
51	R: (Uhm)
52	P3: Look, I - like if you have any – questions (smiling), you need to go, to point directly. Maybe it will be [easier] to summarise my thoughts.

53	R: (Smiling) It's actually really funny because you gave me so much already, and when I look on my (.), kind of, notes, the question that I would have asked, I'm just like, yeah, you answered that, yeah (laughing), you answered that, you answered that.
54	P3: (Aha) (laughing). Good!
55	R: Really nice, but I think that's also because–, that's also why I wanted to, kind of, basically try to listen more than guide you through the questions I had. (.) Because that also tells me that my questions are relevant, right? So without asking you specifically, you already went in those ways. It's perfect.
56	P3: No problem. I can. But - if you have some questions (so that I can) - give you the comprehensive answer about your questions. But as I understood your topic and the - approach. So I (am) speaking (about) - - what I know and maybe I - consider that it's what you - - need to know about.
57	R: It's perfect. Otherwise I would also stop you. But maybe - I can ask a couple of follow up questions on the ones that you already answered for me?
58	P3: Yes. No problem (.)
59	R: So, on the one hand side, I think what you were mentioning is that there is a (.) - - - - definite change that you're perceiving in the way that the UN is acting today in comparison to before the earthquake (.) in terms of the frequency of visiting northwest Syria in person, and even (that the UN is) thinking about opening fixed structures like offices there? So basically to really have a - constant presence?
60	P3: Yeah, you know [researcher], also they [[[the UN]]] [was] already there before the earthquake. Some warehouses for one of [the UN] organization[s], (uhm) WFP, they have warehouses and some of [the] convoys come crossline from regime area[s]. And during the earthquake, some [] - convoys came crossline from Damascus side, and this [gave the] opportunity to [the Syrian] regime to coordinate with the local –, not local entities [but I mean] with - the local authorities on the ground during the sending [of] this kind of convoys to north northwest Syria. And you know, the regime found this opportunity to - - gain legitimacy in the crisis time as that he [[[Assad]]] stands behind the people in northwest Syria, and they give these solutions and give the support to the convoy[s] and they can ensure these convoys to reach to Northwest Syria. And you know, but, in the same time, UN agencies, I think, yani [[[what I mean to say is that]]] as after the earthquake, they gained opportunity to - see more, because you know, they search[ed] about legal (approval) and not only legitimacy, also because the Syrian government. [] Before the earthquake they cannot visit because it will be illegal (.), it [is] not –; there [is] no[] approval from the regime. So after the earthquake they [[[the UN]]] came, and saw if they can work or not. Especially, you know, they [[[the UN]]] know that maybe the[re will be issues with the] renewal of – [the] cross-border [aid work] and the cross-border resolution, so if they will work crossline, so they need some offices inside Syria [in the] opposition area to coordinate with Damascus and receive and manage their activities in their hands on the ground. And it was clear when they start communication with some small committees on the ground, with some organization[s] or institutions [that are] very small, not registered in Turkey [[[meaning, there are no organizational ties that would require the UN to involve the larger NGOs and/or their main offices in Gaziantep in decision-making processes, but they could circumvent them to an extent this way]]]. Any organization[s], [] local organizations. They start, sit with them, and ask, and take some statistics from their side. Also, [they engage in] coordination with the local authority on the ground directly. You know, (UN)OCHA [has] the right to sit with - all military or civilian or any entities on the ground. But after the earthquake they visited [] Idlib, Harim, more–, many cities [] in Northwest Syria. And [there are] some - - plans [that] they shared with some organization[s] and we heard about this [[[the plans]]] and some of - our colleagues spoke about, [there is] the plan to open[] two offices, one in Azaz and one in Sarmada [[[both central hubs in Northwest Syria for the coordination and distribution of humanitarian aid]]]. And this [is] new -. Before we [did] not hear[] about this and we [did] not expect that (UN)OCHA or (other) UN agencies can enter inside Syria and Northwest Syria and have this kind of offices. Only after the earthquake. (Uhm) - yes. And now, you know, I think all this as (a measure for) preparedness, yani [[[what I mean to say is]]] to prepare [] the next phase of conflict after the earthquake. Maybe they consider that there [is going to be] no renewal of – [the] cross-border resolution, so it [[[the UN]]] has a [] plan [B] to - start interfer[ing] inside Syria through these offices and using this opportunity. Yes (.)
61	R: So you're - saying, on the one hand side that (.) there is a change and that there is more presence of the UN, which might (.) actually in the first moment sound like a positive change; but then there is – (.);

	somehow there is a twist behind it for you? There is something in this that is maybe also of a political nature?
62	P3: You know, maybe [] positive in - - [another way], when the UN agencies come to [the] field and see [the] needs of [the] people on the ground, and when they - visit markets, and visit villages, and see the infrastructure and see the people, and see the schools, see the children, woman[] and others. And when they see how [is] the projects' implementation, and when they see how the suffering–, how people [are] suffering from the - conflict, our condition of life, intense, or in - these small homes, yani [[[I mean]]] [the ones that] they built–, [that were] built by some organizations on they ground. It's very good because, you know, before, we [did] not have evidence, you know, we [did] not have evidence, [only what was] reported to us, [they, that is the UN, did] not see by [there] own eyes. Now they [[[the UN]]] have [their own people] as witnesses on the ground and they observed all on the ground. This, and thanks god, [there is] no - escalation now, and no bombardment. Yes, some on the frontline, yes, [there are] some clashes, [there is] some bombardment in Jizr ash-Shugoor and - other but – now, they [[[the UN]]] - –; when they see the people on the ground, yes, (.) because, you know, some considered [that] all the people [who] live in Northwest Syria they are terrorists. Sometimes [they see] that HTS control[ls] all area and [that it is] very difficult to work there and [that there is] interference [in] all activities and this kind of obstacles and [] burden[s] and some challenges and difficulties. When they (.) visited many cities on - the ground and feel it [[[the cities/ the ground]]] and see, it maybe changes the political (uhm) - - - - position and on the humanitarian [response] maybe in the future. Maybe we now [do] not feel the - positivity of these visits; the positivity of - UN agencies present on - the ground, in the field. Maybe in the future [it] will help, but for now, you know, [there is] no difference on the ground, and - you know (…), I [don't] - - know, also after the regime's acceptance (uhm) to provide and to (uhm) accept and the opening of Bab Al-Hawa border, and Bab al-Salam (uhm) without - - - (uhm) the cross-border resolution, it, you know, put all, you know, question marks (laughing) on how - - - this [can be]? But you know? He [[[Assad]]] asked [for the] coordination with [the] Syrian Red Crescent (.) //
63	R: // Ah, with the SARC(?)
64	P3: // You know this kind of, okay, we allow all the work from UN agenc[ies] from Turkey, [and the] entering of convoys from – Turkey, but about coordination, [this] will be only with [the] Red Crescent in Syria. So, you know, yes, this [is] complicated. //
65	R: // But why? Why do you think this is? Why do you think they asked for the coordination with the SARC?
66	P3: (Uhm) because, you know, it gives to the regime full control on all Syria.
67	R: Okay.
68	P3: Full control [], as he [[[Assad]]] [has] the right to manage [the] humanitarian response in Syria. So all the humanitarian response will be through (.) Damascus (.), not through Turkey. [The] entrance of convoys, okay, from Turkey, but coordination, statistics, implementation, it will be by SARC, but not by - local organization[s] and other[s]. And you know, the - fear about the next step, after–, if we [are] looking to localization, you know, maybe if (uhm) now the regime will ask to make [a] registration for this [[[speaking of any Northwest Syria-based]]] organization in Damascus, I [don't] know, if you remember in Dara'a and Al-Quneitra [[[two governorates in the South of Syria, previously strongholds of the opposition but taken over again by the formal Government of Syria in mid-2018]]], when some organization[s] asked to work there after the regime [took] control with, you know, [the] agreement between Russia and [the] regime that the regime will not interfere (.)//
69	R: // For a couple of years at least, aye?
70	P3: And all points will be by Russia, the regime [did] not accept[] [it] and - - told all organizations that they are terrorist[s]. And I [[[meaning Assad]]]- cannot accept their registration in Damascus. Because so now, if the regime [does] not accept [the] working of international and national NGOs in - - northwest Syria, and if he [[[Assad]]] takes the legitimis[ed] control, or Syria, or the work of - - the response of UN agencies from Damascus, so all grants conducted by UN agencies, it will not go to [] those organizations not registered in - Damascus. You know, as these maybe conditional agreements [that] will be with the registration. If you will not have [a] registration in Damascus, you will not have [the] opportunity to register on the allocations by UN

	agencies. So the [] implementation will be limited to SARC and some small organization[s] working on [the] regime area and controlled by also the regime. (.)//
71	R: // Okay, okay, let me let me try - - - summarise what you said. Just to check if I understood this correctly (…). So, you're basically saying that the increased presence of the UN after the earthquake, which [] has never happened before and before, you don't even know why the UN has never been around, right? //
72	P3: // Yes
73	R: So basically there–, let's - take that as a - - second question for follow up, why like that. But the increased presence that you see now, and there may be even the rumours of that the UN is opening offices, are going to open offices inside northwest Syria, may be a preparation for the next phase of the conflict, (.) which would see a diversion of all aid flows not going through Damascus [[[Gaziantep]]] in terms of coordination of the UN anymore, but be redirected through Damascus for the Whole of Syria, as it always was supposed to be kind of, right? (.)
74	P3: Yeah.
75	R: And so even if (.) the UN keeps up the image that things are still going through Turkey, as for example with the convoys and things, (.) the approval would go through Damascus and only Damascus would be able to decide who gets the funds, who - - gets to implement their activities, (.) in whichever part of Syria, (.) and the regime, as you called it, Assad would basically use the SARC as his vehicle–; as his coordination mechanism or organization for the whole country.
76	P3: Yes. Yes, exactly. And you know the influence - of – [the] regime on this SARC, especially, you know, many of – [the] incidents recorded [on] the interference of regime in[volved] SARC activities. In Al-Ghouta and - in (uhm) the convoys (uhm) sent [] to - - Al-Ghouta, to the people. When the regime withdr[e]w some - instruments and some surgical–; [they] [took away] the - - surgical instruments from the convoys, only sent some of dressing, some of some–, so we (.)[[[the narrative here is that SARC and the formal Government of Syria have publicly appeared in various critical moments to be working extremely closely together]]] //
77	R: // I remember.
78	P3: // So if we [do] not give that, the regime, or [the] Syrian Government will - - have–, they have discrimination and the - - distribution of - - of humanitarian aid, I mean, health and food and vaccine and other help, it will not [be] conducted very (uhm), yani [[[what I mean to say is]]], (uhm) good. If the regime and if the SARC will implement this on the ground, and you know, the people–. (.) Not all people understand who [are] the UN agencies, not all people understand. And not all people, yani [[what I mean is]], maybe I can say 80 percent of [the] people [do] not understand what the role of UN agencies [is] and what kind of – (uhm) - - response they can do, and what is their [the UN agencies'] role on the ground. They [do] not [know the] - - - difference between INGOs [and] UN agencies. (…) 20 percent of to the people with some [education], some knowledge, some worker[s] [] - - - working in [the] humanitarian sector, they understood this. But many [] people are (.)–, more than 80 percent [do] not understand what's the role of UN agenc[ies]. Now, when you're speaking about [the] [cross-]border resolution, they think that the - border will close for all organization[s] and no aid will come from Turkey. And - this – [is] [] [the] understanding of some–, of - many people. They [do] not understand that UN agencies, the convoys [are only] coming from UN agencies to Northwest Syria. But at the same time, many of them [[[people in Northwest Syria]]] know that the suspension of - - UN agencies' work from Turkey will affect also on other organization[s] interfering in - Northwest Syria because, you know, many of [the] organization[s] [operating inside Syria] interfere and respond, but only because UN agenc[ies] [are] there. Because you know, the coordination mechanism of [the] UN [is] still working good, especially [the] health cluster, especially [UN]OCHA and [the] [] Access Working Group, which ensure[s] and [] - - can help with negotiation[s] on the ground, especially, you know, [as] still there [is a] military operations, (uhm), authorit[ies] [which is] [] sanctioned and listed. So the presence of UN agencies and this coordination mechanism, (.) yani [[[what I mean to point out here is]]], (.) [even] if [it is in place] without any [actual provision of] aid, it will help with the coordination and help with - this kind of supervision [] on the humanitarian response in Northwest Syria. (.) And also, you know, the people [are] thinking about if [the] UN agencies will not work from Turkey and if [instead] from Damascus, the vaccination and the routine vaccines, how will [they] come from Damascus or from Turkey, even from Damascus? [How] we can know that this vaccine is effective or not? How? How [can] we know that? No, there are no[] virus[es] or no[] kind of - you know–? Because they [[[the people]]] [do] not have this trust in –

	[the] regime and–. Because the regime [conducted many incidents] and they know that, [the is] no guarantee from [the] regime's side to provide good drugs, good vaccine[s], good food from their side. [The is] no - - guarantee for this. (.) Yes.
79	R: Ah you–, you're basically then implying that the UN is at present allowing more and more space for the regime to be more active and more coordinating and more in power? Also on humanitarian actions in the future?
80	P3: Of course. if - the presence, if - the Gaziantep hub close[s] and only in Northwest Syria [there are] offices for UN agenc[ies], it has, you know, representative[s] of - - the UN in Damascus. They [the offices] will not_, [they will] only [be] implementer[s] of [] [the UN in Damascus] –. You know, I [don't] know if we can say [that any of this is] positive or negative. I [don't] know. Maybe for the future it will be positive. You know, if we're thinking, now, you know, as in Yemen, as [an] example in – Sana'a, there [are the] health cluster and all clusters, but some clusters [are] in Aden. In Aden, these sub-clusters coordinate with these [[clusters]] but the - management is where? In Sana'a. But these offices, sometimes when they share right statistics and real situation [updates], sometimes they can gain - - good support, but they have to speak, because, you know, if they will not speak, [if they] only implement - - - it will not - change anything. It will be as [the] regime–, (uhm) [the] Syrian government implement[s], but if they will ask us, okay, in Northwest Syria [there are] 5 million [] people. So these 5 millions need in [the] health sector this amount, in shelter this amount, in food security this amount, in WASH, et cetera. So if they [[[the UN offices about which there are rumours that the UN has plans to establish in Northwest Syria]]] will work with this strong and with this, yani [[[I mean]]], I think, if they will speak, yani [[[I mean]]], if they [[[the UN offices and those in charge of the humanitarian representation of Northwest Syria's]]] will [] hear the voices of [the] people, It will be positive, but if [they are] only [an] implementor [[[that is, top-down instructed from Damascus]]] without any reporting [about] what happened on the ground, and [if they] [[[the offices/ the representatives of the UN for Northwest Syria]]] do] not speak[] about the - things in the real name [[[about what is happening on the ground and the situation as it/they really are]]], it will be [a] negative impact on the people, on in the field. (.)
81	R: Yeah (thinking, taking notes). (…) Okay. I have a couple more, kind of related questions, but I also don't want to overstretch our time. So, let me jump into this one (.): You already mentioned (.) that the UN did not really pay any visits or anything before the earthquake to Northwest Syria (.)
82	P3: (Distracted for a second). Sorry, can you repeat your question or your comment? // Sorry I– (received a call)
83	R: Yeah, of course (smiling). // I know, it's fine. It's fine. I noticed it. (.) // What I said is that I have a couple, ah few questions left at my end (.)
84	P3: Okay.
85	R: But I also don't want to overstretch our time, right? So it's getting quite late (.) at your end more than at mine. (…). You already said that the UN did not really do much about being inside Northwest Syria before the earthquake, but at the same time you also said that you do really see value in them being around, you know? So, (.) like being around also in Gaziantep with the coordination mechanism, with the capacities that they can offer et cetera. So that's kind of vital on the one hand side and on the other hand side I'm sensing a bit that you would say they could have done more before. My question is: What did you think about the UN's actions, and behaviour, and even about their goals before the earthquake?
86	P3: (Uhm). You know I - - cannot evaluate all UN agencies and what kind of intervention[s] [they have] and what's their goals. But you know all - - - the projects provided by UN agencies [they are] regarding [the] [cross-]border resolution, (uhm) [the] Security Council resolution. So if [the cross-border resolution is adapted for another] three months [] so the projects [have a duration of] three months. [] If [it is] six months, yani [[[what I mean is]]] [if] the renewal [[[of the cross-border resolution]]] [is] six months, the projects will be six months. [] If one year, the projects would [be] limited to one year. This kind of support, this kind of project [does] not help the people. Because you know, you - [] - cannot build your strategy regarding this kind of - - support. Because you know, if you - - [are] looking to [the] recovery phase of - - conflict with this kind of support, you will not build any recovery. [Stability] and – the - continuance of - your response on the ground, it [is] related to how many years, now if we [are] speaking about some institutional donors has maybe EU and the BMZ and GIZ, they change their strategies. They now build their response for 2025. Speaking about three years in the future, not only about six months or one year. UN agencies [are] still

	speaking about three months and six months. And this kind of emergency response, you know now, yes, we need emergency response, but at the same time, the people need recovery, early recovery, and this kind of activities [[[for (early) recovery]]] related to early recovery [] must be–, yani, (.) the implementation must be through the civil entities on the ground, not through the regime, not through [the] Syrian government. And you know, now for education, the people will wait for more than 10 years more? You know - now some children cannot say their names. Sometimes they cannot [calculate] 1 + 1, they [don't] know what [is] the result[]. Sometimes they [don't] know anything about the education, about - solving this problem and this kind–. So the 5 million [] people [in] Northwest Syria need this kind of response which help[s] them to–, you know, when you look [at] your children, when you're looking to the poeple around, you need some knowledge [for] the people and - this kind of - projects. Yes. (.) UN agencies–. When you're speaking about UN agencies, you're speaking about emergency only. (.) About emergency. 12 years you're speaking about - emergency. But this kind of emergency [is] also not enough. Not enough. And - if we compare with the need and the response it [does] not suit each other. I [don't] know, you know? And also the percent of - support coming for 5 million–, yani [[[look]]], if you're looking to a location [under the control of the] Syrian government, [in] governmental area, and [to] Northwest, it's not, yani–? [[you know what I mean, no? (with a bit of frustration in the voice)]] If you compare this, you know, if - - we [are] speaking about the geographical [extension], yes, [the] regime control[s] [a] bigger share of Syria. But if we still speak about the population, now in [the] regime area, [it's] not more than eight million and in - - - - [the] north about 12 million. So 5 million (in Northwest) and (uhm) (…) I include[ing] Northeast Syria [] about 6 million, and the other [[[the rest of the pre-20122 Syrian population being]]] in Lebanon, in Jordan, in Turkey, in Germany, in Europe and other [locations]. So if you divide the population in this [[[the UN's]]] allocation[s], It - must be different at - the real [[[in reality]]] on the on the ground. So we will [don't] know what [are] the criteria of – allocation[s] for - this this area. (Uhm), so, - you know this – [is] kind of – thoughts, yani [[[this is what I wanted to point out]]].
87	R: (Repeating, summarizing with reading notes) So you – mean - - - that the UN is–; somehow it's there, it's doing something (.), but all of what they're doing is for emergency response, not for dealing with long-term issues such as education (.)and what they're doing– //
88	P3: // Yes.
89	R: // I'm just repeating to check if I understand correctly (.). What – they [[[the UN]]] are doing in emergency response is also (.) not enough to really (.) serve the people who are in need in Northwest Syria. What do you– (uhm) you also mentioned something earlier–; you mentioned accountability in a way or another. You - said, for example, that there was nobody visiting northwest Syria even when the chemical attacks came, et cetera. Is that also something // that you would feel that the UN should have done?
90	P3: Yes, yes. That's because, you know, I spoke about 12 years of conflict and many [] incidents have [happened], and they need investigation, and [they] need observation from UN agencies, and the condition before and (.)–. All entities and organization[s] invited OCHA and other organization[s] to enter inside Syria (.), and the people also ask[ed] UN agenc[ies] to come and they told [them]: "We can protect you. Please come and see us. See what [is the] the impact of [the] chemical attacks, what's - - the - impact of destruction of hospitals, destruction of cities and all - these kind of attacks on the ground". But you know: No. No - - - - visits to - Syria. Only after the earthquake it changed. I [don't] know, maybe -, you know, because the regime before [did] not - give approval [to] Gaziantep hub, yani [[[I mean]]], before, so they respect maybe–, respect the law of Syria. "We will not enter to – Syria, because maybe the regime will make accountability in front of - - - (uhm) [the] Security Council, or in front–; I [don't] know who, especially, you know, Russia and others, they are member[s] of – (the UN Security Council), so - it - may be [a] complicated issue. And, but - - anyway. (.) Also, you know [[researcher]], the political position and the political (uhm) consideration also affects [] [the] UN agencies' response in– inside Syria, you know, and some – (uhm) governments which they have membership - –; they are member[s] of - UN agencies, they – have [a] good relationship with the regime, and they have their consideration and they speak about [that] the Syrian government can manage the humanitarian field and – they [[[the formal Government of Syria]]] can manage all - - of Syria's (.) response. (.) Yes. But anyway, the - - fund[s] reduced more and more during the last (period), because after the five year[s] of response it is still different, and year after year [it] is reducing, reducing, reducing. So it – very – [much] affect[s] on– (.), but anyway - -, they [[[the UN/ UN agencies]]] have [a] positive role - - but we cannot–, I mean, because we [do] not have any accountability tools to - - to use. Especially if we're speaking about [us] as [the] people [] in northwest Syria, not as organization[s]. And also organization[s] [do] not have any rights and any tools to make accountability to any entity intervening in - Northwest Syria. And (smiling

	with a touch of frustration) these - - - decision[s] [are] bigger than organization[s] and bigger than all entities there [[[in Northwest Syria]]]. Yes. (.)
91	R: So, on the one hand, like you say, you need them for the coordination capacity, for all of the funds that they still provide? On the other side is not enough. And yes, you can only hope that the UN stays because that still has a positive impact, but somehow still there is room for improvement actually, if there were options for the UN to do a better job, is that // how I'm understanding it right?
92	P3: // Yes, yes, especially for the next phase of conflict as I mentioned. And now, all (actors active in Northwest Syria) focus on early recovery, and I know many of – [the] organizations, especially international organizations, their business in Northwest (uhm) [is] linked with presence of UN agencies. So they have [a] decision: “if UN agencies work, we will work. If not, we will not.” So, you know, this - consideration.
93	R: Yeah. (.) I - have a quote from–, you will know this– , it's from Martin Griffiths, who was visiting the Syrian border after the earthquake. I think (.) (checking notes) it was on the 11th or 12th of February.
94	P3: (Aha). (Nodding). (hm).
95	R: So he is, basically, the - humanitarian emergency coordinator of the UN and he was–, he tweeted, I’m – quoting. (.) I'm quoting: "At the Türkiye-Syria border today. We have so far failed the people in northwest Syria. They rightly feel abandoned, looking for international help that hasn't arrived. My duty and our obligation is to correct this failure as fast as we can. That's my focus now.” (…) What do you think (.) about (…) this - statement?
96	P3: You know when [[[such representatives]]] - - they speak, yes, maybe he speak[s] about the reality of the - - response of UN agenc[ies] and he spoke about the real, right thing on - - the ground. But you know, I – (.) maybe, you know, the statements–, what [is it that] - the statements can affect [in terms of] the - action on the ground? Many [] statements [are] right, but if you come to implementation it's different. “Ok, I - - saw, okay, we - couldn't help the people”, but what? - - What's the next? What's the next? What I measure is the statement’s [] effect on the response? If the statements [are], whatever you speak, but [do] not [have an] effect on the situation on the ground, it’s not, yani [[[you know]]] – it [ ] [does not have] [any] benefit; it [has] zero benefit. (.) Okay, maybe–
97	R: Well, this one [[[this statement]]] - - is now six months ago. (.) So you would say that you do not see any– anything that was really done (.) to (.) (gesticulating quotation marks) “correct this failure as fast as we can”?
98	P3: But you know, maybe some - response but it[‘s] not - - - - as [what would have been] required and not as [what] the people [were] looking for, yes. (.)
99	R: What are the people looking for? What should that–, (.) That's maybe the next question. And then I only have one more. But what - - would it be that the people are looking for? What should the UN have done?
100	P3: You know, maybe we can speak about the cancer now, about the cancer. You know the situation now in Northwest Syria, 3,020 patients [are] in emergency [who] need physical and immunological treatment of cancer. (.) And after, you know, the earthquake, these case[s] transferring to Turkey is very low number of cases [[[there are only few cases that are being transferred to Turkey. Cross-border transferrals between Syria and Turkey (and back) have, however, been (limited) general practice for people who require special treatment for years]]]. And this load on the health system inside Syria, so, now you [are] on the ground, when you're not seeing any kind of help to those people, they need drugs as for cancer, and they [do] not have [a] specialised centre for heart disease, and they [would have] not found on the ground chronic disease centre, and they not have radiological device[s] for - cancer disease, when you see now the lack of - - - treatment on the ground, the lack of devices, so the health system, I speak now, sorry, I speak about [the] health system because I work[] in health system, but also the people focus on health - - you know, food, they [do] not focus mainly, but on health. Now, you know, [there is] no[] specialised hospital for children from zero, or from A-Z, you know, yes, not only for delivery, not for occupation, [there is] no specialised hospital for children. They–, I, when I - need some services for for children, specialised services, I must visit more than 10 hospital[s] to find out where I can treat my - children? Or maybe sometimes I need to transfer to Turkey, so, if the people [are] looking [what is there]: health system not, education not, and food security not and shelter, (uhm) yani [[[what I mean here is]]] good building[s] for living, not. On the ground, they're looking to kind of - - life which respect[s] their humanity. Yani [[[That is]]], for a human. It's not different

	between when [there is a] conflict or when [there is an] earthquake or any natural disaster or conflict - -. So, yani [[[you see]]] the expectation[s] [are many] but - you know, what they can say [[[what can they say]]]? What they can say [[[what can they say]]] in this matter - - -?
101	R: Yeah. So – basically what you're saying is that you would expect the UN– (.) maybe not just the UN, but the UN maybe as a key actor to take action (…) to (.) give people a human life, (uhm), in human dignity. And not just do something superficial?
102	P3: Yes, of course. Respect their dignity. yes.
103	R: Okay. And that - is what you would also see as what Martin Griffiths would have needed to see after the earthquake? To respond in a way that gives people human dignity?
104	P3: Yes, but it [was] not - - achieved. Not, yani [[[what I mean to say is]]] nothing (.) is, yani [[[I mean]]], you can't see yani [[[I mean]]] if you compare with what [he was] speaking [about] and what [happened] on the ground, [there is] not – anything (.) implemented. //
105	R: Nothing? (.) So basically, - there is a statement // and there is no change?
106	P3: // Yes, yes. The best statement, only. Nothing –//
107	R: No change in action, no change in goals?(.) What about [the] behaviour of individual UN Members that you have met? (…)
108	P3: You know every-one of them speak[s] about, as I mentioned before, they have two - - opinion[s]. First of all, [they are] speaking about implementation from Damascus and [that] it must be (.) And the others [are] speaking about still working from (.) Turkey, and this, you know, this - confusion between the UN members, it give[s] you [the feeling/the confirmation] that [there is] no planning, no strategic planning for the future and they [do] not have, yani [[[what I mean to say is that]]], one image about the future of interfering inside - - Northwest Syria. (.) Yeah.
109	R: That means, you would say, there is no consistency at the UN as an entity, but (.) there are a lot of different individuals who have their own points of view and think (…) // in this way? //
110	P3: // Yes, yes, of course.
111	R: So it's difficult to– //
112	P3: // And you know, the coordination, also some platforms [are] now established. And some platforms, if they prepare themselves to work in the future after UN agencies, so this kind of - - - coordination mechanism also start[s] to change - -. Especially after the (uhm) – (.) news about the non-renewal of [the] [cross-]border resolution and about the interference of– (.), the intervention of UN agencies from Damascus and from (the) Whole of Syria, so, you know, [there is] no clear vision, no clear - - picture. The future of - - (uhm) humanitarian, (uhm) humanitarian response for UN agenc[ies], members they never know. Individuals they never know what's the next step. (.) I - think that. Because many of meetings; many of statements, it [[[they are]]] different from one to another. (…).
113	R: Very interesting. (…) Then I give you my last question and then I relieve you (smiling, laughing).
114	P3: Okay. No worries.
115	R: But it's not– (.), it's a very broad one and it's not made to be very easy. But you'll - have it because you already spoke about it here and there. (.) The last question is: what would the UN need to do in the future to remedy the past? (…)
116	P3: Ah. (…)
117	R: Remedy is like, to make good for the past.
118	P3: Hmmm. (.)
119	R: What does the UN need to do to make good for all the mistakes they made in the past, basically, (uh) speaking about Northwest Syria of course.

120	P3: From - - - opinion? Or what they must do?
121	R: Of course, from - your perspective, if you could– //
122	P3: // Perspective and what? What they – (.), just do to, yani [[[what I mean to say is]]] to (.)–//
123	R: To be good. // (Ah), say again?
124	P3: To give us a good picture about them?
125	R: Let's say for the UN to be legitimate, to be perceived as legitimate in Northwest Syria. // You could say it this way, yes.
126	P3: I think - - if they will (uhm) - speak and will transfer and will hear the voices of [the] people on the ground - - - and they, if they speak in, yani [[[I mean]]], as people are [yani], as the need on the ground and as they speak. And if they (uhm) will be any good way [for them to be] witnesses about what's happening on the ground, and maybe if they, I [don't] know how to explain it - - -, but (uh) (.), but anyway, as I mentioned before, UN agenc[ies] played good role in the–, after 2014 till maybe - 2020, and after this, after some further resolutions that changed, but I think if UN agenc[ies] stay as, yani [[[what I mean is]]], neutral -, and without, I think, political background and political motivations, it - will be (uhm), yani [[[I mean]]] [they will] achieve their role. Especially when they - start working with people and - implement the projects as is needed, not as they like. You know, some of [the] projects, [they are] not as the need[s] on the ground. Because, okay, there are some allocation[s] to protection; okay, let's implement [] protection. Sometimes some allocation for mental health. Okay, let's implement this. When they implement what is required on the ground, I think they will be in the right way. (…)
127	R: That means, putting the UN upside down, making them work bottom-up only without pre-allocations, without pre-clustering allocations? And that also means, separating the political arm of the UN and the humanitarian –; basically, maybe, if I understand you correctly, right? Basically saying: we need a humanitarian UN and - a political whatever else? But if the UN is going to be perceived as legitimate in Northwest Syria, if they want to make up for the mistakes they made in the past, then they have to be entirely humanitarian and not political at all? (.)
128	P3: Yes, of course. As you–. exactly. Exactly, yes. (.)
129	R: That's a very nice closure, actually. Like, welcome UN and good luck for the future (joint laughing). (.) Okay, I'll stop the recording.
130	P3: (Laughing) You know, yes, anyway -, you know some - of – [the] services, some of [the] activities cannot be done only by the UN, only by them. So it's very important [for the] future of Syria, yani [[[I mean]]], with the war and after the war, [when] the - war is finished. So [] Syria need[s] the UN agencies. But when they play their right role and, as you mentioned, [when] they divide [] the political and the humanitarian, and work as - - required.
131	R: Okay (.). I'll stop the recording now.
132	P3: Okay.

Transcript P4 (1)

1	R: Ready to go? Okay, then let's start by you telling me a little bit more about yourself. (…)
2	P4: [[…]] I'm a Syrian woman from northwest Syria, from Idlib. [[Some years ago I was able to move]] cross-border to Turkey after, like, the conflict between the regime (uhm) and the other, like, parties rise up in 2015 in my area, so we [came] here. After that (uhm), I started to, like, let's say to enter into the interventions, (.) or the humanitarian intervention in Northwest Syria, to know about these intervention[s], like in local organizations and other organizations, you know, the whole [NGO intervention-driven] situation in Northwest Syria. So this is it. (.) I have to talk about my academy now, just like that? I don't know.
3	R: I think - - that would be very interesting. Yes. And [[Participant D]], you can say names and everything, I will pseudonymize them, right? So you can basically just have a conversation with me. I will make sure that everything is getting out of the record, that is names and specifications and stuff. Nothing will. So be very

	open. You can talk about anything that you want, but yeah, I think your academic background is interesting. And maybe also you could tell me how you first got involved in this in the humanitarian sector both of this.
4	P4: Yeah, I have a master's degree in [[engineering, which I obtained from a university in the northern part of Syria]]. My first intervention with the humanitarian response was [[several years ago]] with a local organization, [which] works to, like, to provide the assistance for refugees [[…]] like livelihood sector, also like education and (uhm) health (uhm) assistance in [[mainly in the South of Turkey]]. After that I moved to another organization, which work[ed] primarily in Northwest Syria. We [were] working as a remote, like, management from Gaziantep, in, like, interventions with the health sector, also, and food security, now, with the nutrition, more, this is the whole situation, actually.
5	R: And [[…]] what was your position and the organization that you worked for during the earthquake, and also still after [[…]]?
6	P4: Previously, during the earthquake, I was working with a local organization [[…]] which is like [[…]] [a] humanitarian relief [[…]] [[organization with a close connection to IOM]] and I worked with this organization [[for not fully two years]] [[…]] and my position, like, I [] [had] many position[s] with [them], [[gradually levelling up in terms of responsibility and seniority, all related to project management]]. [[I recently, after the earthquake, left them for another organization]]
7	R: And what is - - - –; what motivates you the most in your work?
8	P4: Well, what motivate what? Sorry?
9	R: What - - motivates you to stay in the - - humanitarian sector, in your work?
10	P4: Actually, the most important thing is that (uhm) I can (.), in Turkey, (.) if I change, like, this sector, I feel that I'm far away from my culture (.), from my (uhm) community. When I stay in the humanitarian response, I - like that I'm still linked to Syria. I know about Syria. I know about the people inside Syria. So that's the most important thing for me actually. (…)
11	R: Very nice. (.) Thank you. (.) All right, then let's jump into my actual topic, which is (.) around, like, (.) which is related to the earthquake situation and to the UN. Maybe as a starting question: I mean, now it's been six months already, almost, since the earthquake happened.
12	P4: Yes.
13	R: What - do you think is the situation like today? Is it–; has everything calmed down again? (.) (Uhm) Has it normalised again? (.) What's the situation around you at present? (…)
14	P4: (Uhm) Let's say, (.) I think it came back, like, to a normal situation. And taking into consideration [] that the most important thing right now for the humanitarian response in Syria [] is the [cross-border] resolution - decision from the UN right now. All, like, all organizations [are] waiting for this decision to improve the intervention or to maybe keep their intervention inside Syria, and I think, I don't know if you hear[d] that some organizations start to reduce their fund to Northwest Syria, like the WFP. Actually, all people know that WFP reduced their fund for Syria. And now as they (uhm) start to intervene in FSL [[[Food Security and Livelihoods]]] and nutrition sector in Northwest Syria, now, for example, previously they were, like, distribut[ing] food assistance for beneficiar[ies] more than [] 150,000 households in Northwest Syria. More than that actually, I think. But now–; previously, each month, they provided this assistance. Now they've cut it like, one month, like, once each two months [[[instead of every month, they now provide these services every second month only]]]. (.) I don't know if you got the idea. //
15	R: // So basically they provide half of what they provided before?
16	P4: // Yes. Yes, yes, yes. This is a big issue actually, and [] [it has] like, a big, let's say, result [[[effect]]] in Northwest Syria. Because they cover a lot of the area in Northwest Syria by first assistance, which is, as you know, basic assistance for the beneficiar[ies] (.), or for the vulnerable[] people. (…)
17	R: Okay. (…)
18	P4: I think, I just passed (.), or maybe it got away from our talking point. //
19	R: // No, no. It's - - –;

20	P4: Actually now I think (uhm) for - let's say, for Jenderis, talk about like Jenderis, which is a most–; or the [] area [that] was [most] affected by [the] earthquake. (Uhm) Now, according to the cluster, (uhm) cluster analyses, they said that there are–; there is an overcover[age] for this area. As I understand from [the] FSL cluster, they, (uhm) as you know, once they shared with us like, a gap analysis, like, [an] analysis for the situation in Northwest Syria. This area, actually, which is the most affected by the earthquake, now, is over–; there is an overlapping in coverage in the assistance in this area. (Uhm) [An]other thing, I think there's some - kind of a go[ing back] to the normal situation in Northwest Syria. This is - - merely, [[researcher]], as I said, this is merely my point of view, maybe. (.)
21	R: (Smiling) I'm only interested in your point of view.
22	P4: (Smiling) Thank you. (.) Okay, so I think so. This this is the situation. (…)
23	R: And, like (.), this is exactly why we're talking, right? So you - can only share with me what you know. There is no statistical office or something that would be able to tell me, yes, your answer is the same as 99.9% of other people or so. This is not what I want, right? (smiling, laughing)
24	P4: Yeah (smiling).
25	R: I would rather want to hear different narratives, different stories, different perceptions. So that's perfect (smiling).
26	P4: Yeah, yeah (smiling, laughing). (…)
27	R: (Uhm) (…) How is it - - - in your professional context? (…) I mean, during the - earthquake, (.) I'm pretty sure that you were overwhelmed with work and that you were facing a couple of difficulties as well. Do you want to talk about that and then also reflect on how far that has changed by now again?
28	P4: Actually, during the earthquake we [] [were] like forever working [[[working around the clock without any break]]] because we [had] to prepare a lot (.), starting from concept notes, from the budget, from the contact with the other organization[s] or the donor[s], the same organization, (uhm) (.) then through the implementation; we have, like, some difficult[ies here] because, as you know, this is an–, this is a disaster in - - the area and (uhm) we can't (uhm), or we have, like, workers on the ground, their family [being] affected by the earthquake. So we have, like, a lag. And the humanitarian workers here, we have to respond to our employee[s] or to other[s]. In this situation, it was very difficult for us. In - that time, actually, (uhm) in my previous organization [[[herein referring to the employer during the earthquake response period]]], they were a great team, worked to provide this assistance for beneficiaries, try[ing] to, like, provide, first of all, starting from the shelter to food basket[s], to NFI [[[non-food item]]] kids for (uhm) those who (uhm) lost their (uhm) (.) let's say, homes in Northwest Syria. (Uhm) this is at the beginning, let's say. After that, we involved in other situation like to (uhm), like to - remove the rubbles, for example, try to find (uhm) like (uhm) shelter. All of the things. I'm not sure. I can specify that, or if you want or need more specif[ying], I think of that.
29	R: I can - - - - hear that you got–; your organization got involved in a lot of things.
30	P4: Yes.
31	R: In everything that was needed, right? (.) Basically?
32	P4: Yeah, yeah. Yes. Starting from food basket to shelter to–, after that, as I said, remove the rubble, to assist our – employee[s] also to coordinate with AFAD [[[the Turkish emergency prevention and response authority]]], which is [a] very difficult situation in Northwest Syria in the area where Turkey has authority [[[referring to formally Syrian territory under Turkish control, such as Afrin/ Euphrates Shield area]]]. So we have to coordinate with AFAD, which is a kind of Turkish authority on the ground.
33	R: Do you think that there was a difference between the Turkish authorities-managed northwest of Syria and the rest?
34	P4: Yes, absolutely. There's a difference between the two areas, starting from coordination, which is most important here. Let's say AFAD had in, like, they don't have, like, [] organised data for example. Till now, we actually have [a] problem, or let's say (.), yes, [a] problem in - coordination with them because they provide us, like, [] [with] locations, we go to the these location[s], we find another organization that is already implementing there and, you know, we have this complex situation till now actually. (.) //

35	R: // Is this area not part of the cluster approach?
36	P4: // No, what?
37	R: // Is this area not part of the cluster - approach?
38	P4: [it is] part of the cluster, but actually, because it's under the Turkish authority, [the is] no implementing anywhere without their, like, permission.
39	R: Okay.
40	P4: Which is good. They should - - –; this is good. There's no problem with us. But actually, you have to make– (.); to organise your data to know where we are going, what - we are working here. That's the problem. They don't have any organised [data] for their work. For their data, actually every employee can give you an opinion and this is the big issue actually in in this area. And as I said, like, in specific location[s] after the earthquake, like Jenderis, all organization[s] go to this city, to this area and provide their assistance, so that we have an overlapping here. This is the whole [[[this is everything]]]. This is actually in Danaa, like, it's complicated to some kind [[[somehow]]], as you know. Because of HT-(uhm)-C (using the English name appearing not to be sure) [[[Hayyat Tahrir Al-Sham, HTS; which is the dominant armed group controlling the area. The group is listed as an Islamist-extremist group, sanctioned by the UNSC and several governments as a terrorist group with ties to ISIS/ AL-Quida/ Nusrah]]], I think they said. Yeah, it's complicated.
41	R: You mean HTS? 'Hayyat Tahrir al-Sham'?
42	P4: // Yeah. (Uhm), what?
43	R: // 'Hayyat Tahrir Al-Sham'? // I am not very good at pronouncing it, but you mean - - HTS, right? You mean 'Hayyat Tahrir al-Sham, HTS?
44	P4: // (Uh) Yes. I mean that. Hayyat Tahrir. Yes, yes, yes, yes. This is [what I mean] (laughing).
45	R: Okay (laughing) that's my Arabic pronunciation. You know, I'm doing my best (laughing)
46	P4: (Laughing). So, (uhm) (.), but actually there is some like kind of organised [situation/ process] in - - Danaa.
47	R: Okay? (.)
48	P4: For example // yeah.
49	R: // Okay. But that - - means basically - - that in the Turkish - - - area, maybe things were more affected?
50	P4: Yeah, yeah. It's–; they're more affected, especially in there is a lot of, like, (uhm) (.) destroyed building[s] in this area.
51	R: Yeah, and–; but you think that the coordination in Idlib governorate [[[which includes Danaa]]], it's in the rest of the northwest of Syria was better, maybe?
52	P4: (Uh) Yes, kind of as I said, because AFAD, they have had– (.); they still are not organised.
53	R: Yeah.
54	P4: Maybe they will be in the future. Yeah, yeah, yeah.
55	R: (Uhm) [[Participant D]], when you said now "we" in this section, did you mean your old organization?
56	P4: Yes, right, [] my old organization. [[…]]
57	R: [[…]]. If you - - - - look at the big picture on northwest Syria as a whole for the time in which, let's say, for the critical response period (.), the 1st 72 to maybe 100 hours after the earthquake, (uhm) which actors do you think were involved and most crucial in (.) the response to northwest Syria?
58	P4: (Uhm) at that time, as I said before, that UN agenc[ies] were not involved in the intervention. There was a lot of need to enter this area and intervention, (.) or provide their assistance to Northwest Syria. I don't know - - - about the - reason. (.) Maybe because already Turkish – area[s] here [were] also in - the same

	disaster. So I'm not sure about that. But actually, there was, like, a delay in the intervention in Northwest Syria at that time. //
59	R: // For the UN entities, you mean?
60	P4: // Especially for UN. Especially for UN agency and so on. (…)
61	R: And (.) who else was, like–; I mean, (.) if the UN was not engaged, actually there are two questions that I have: who - was engaged, who was there? Was there any, any organizations or even individual people that you would want to highlight? //
62	P4: Like - , (.) we have previously [had] a private fund [[…]] so we have like an international NGO [that was] involved in the response for northwest Syria. (…)
63	R: What about local organizations?
64	P4: This is like– (.). Local organizations, they can't do anything without the fund. This fund [[[referring to the one mentioned before]]] [was] provided to us [[from non-Western donor countries and INGOs outside of the UN system]] to the local (actors), because the local, as I said, they don't have their own fund. They can't. (.) They can't do anything without another fund.
65	R: Okay. (.) And what about - -, let's say, community-based support? (…) Do you - - know anything about that?
66	P4: Community, you know (.)?
67	R: (.) Like, from the people to people. Basically neighbour–neighbour–; neighbourhood help, like, individuals helping one another. Is this because somebody needed to help, you know? So the question for me is, who was it if not the UN?
68	P4: (Uhm) As I know, (.) people provide[d] assistance for their relatives and neighbourhood as much as they can. As you know, (uhm) Northwest Syria is already, like, a poor - area. Also, there - are not, like, for example, let's talk about, for example, to save the people under the rubble. We don't have, like, the - -, (.) how we can say? (.) the mechanism to do that for, like, a big, like, for example–; //
69	R: // Do you mean the machines?
70	P4: // What?
71	R: Big machines?
72	P4: Yeah! Machine. (.) We don't have like big machine[s]. We try to–; all people try to do that [[[remove the rubble to save people underneath]]] with their hands actually. So they can't. We don't–; (.). We don't have the, like, the (uhm) main - - items to - start this. (…)
73	R: Yeah, makes sense. A lot.
74	P4: Also they are poor – areas, so they can't provide each other with, like, (uhm) money for, or - - gathering [[[collecting]]] money for example and provide this money for people who [are] affected by the earthquake. No. I know they try their best, but actually this is the situation. (…)
75	R: Yeah. (…) When you - - think about this entire, let's say, immediate – post-earthquake situation, (.) what do you think about the way in which the UN (.) acted?
76	P4: About the UN?! (…) We can't be satisfied.
77	R: Yeah, so (laughing with a slight touch of sarcasm,). I'm going write down: “We were not satisfied” (taking notes) (…).
78	P4: (Oh), (.) I know we have to, like, to separate the political things and the humanitarian and they are already like, have like a political thing. I don't know. Actually, we don't fight.
79	R: If you - - think about, let's - - try, as you said, let's try to separate the humanitarian part from the political part. If you - - only look at the humanitarian part in the first hundred hours, of course it's–; or let's say, in the

	very–; in the immediate period after the earthquake, more broadly, what is it that you were not satisfied with? (…)
80	P4: The whole, the whole situation! [[Researcher]], they [[[the UN]]] didn't do anything (.) at the beginning of the – catastrophe (.) inside Syria. You know, maybe two, three days, after that we, the Northwest of Syria, we still didn't receive anything from them. And there's no-one of them who, like, talk[ed] to [the] media and explain[ed] that. Just we don't [[[didn't]]] receive the - assistance and the people under the rubble. This is the situation, so we don't satisfy [[[we are not satisfied]]]. (…)
81	R: Okay. (…). And (.) you said already that you feel that there is a bit of a mix between politics and humanitarian in this case?
82	P4: Yes.
83	R: When you look at it from a, from a political perspective (.), what - is it that you're not satisfied with there? (.)
84	P4: About the UN? (.)
85	R: Yes.
86	P4: Like, I think they [[[the UN]]], like, provide some (.) push to (uhm) transfer the - - - assistance to Damascus. (.) Well, I don't know, but actually I feel like that they try to push this to this situation. (…)
87	R: How - do you - - - connect this with the earthquake? (.) Like, why do you think that way? (…)
88	P4: (Uhm) During the earthquake? Actually I don't know. I don't know [how] can explain that - - - -. (Uhm) (…). I don't know how I can explain that. (…)
89	R: Maybe in general? What - - makes you think that they are pushing to get (.) everything to Damascus?
90	P4: I think they [[[the UN]]] - - - - try to keep[] a point to enter their assistance from, or through Damascus. (speaking from the perspective of the UN): "So we - can't provide, or - we will not provide the assistance to you [[[people inside Northwest Syria]]] cross-border. We have to, like, move it to Damascus." Like a 'push point'? (.) I think, I don't know. (…) Like, I don't know how to explain that. I need to - open my translation (laughing). (…)
91	R: (Mutual laughing) Go ahead, go ahead. Okay (searching for the translation of what Participant is meaning to say on the laptop). (…) [[…]]
92	P4: [[…]] "Pressure point" I think?
93	R: [[…]] Okay, so, what did you want to say with "pressure point"?
94	P4: Like, as I said, (uhm) (.) we will not provide the–; (.) I think, they [[[the UN]]] think that, if they didn't provide assistance through the cross-border [mechanism], so it could be, like, good for people in Northwest Syria to receive the assistance through Damascus. So it's going to be like a normal situation for them, which [it] is not.
95	R: OK. Do you think that this is (.), well, I don't want to put words in your mouth, but how do you evaluate (…) this (.) attempt, if this is true. Do you think it's good that it should go through Damascus?
96	P4: No! No, no, no.
97	R: 'Leesh' [[[Why]]]? Why not? (…)
98	P4: Because Damascus, you know, all people know, the regime, they will put their hand in everything. Even in the assistance, they will control that [the] assistance could go to this area, not to this area; (.) for those people, not for those people. Which is a big problem. (…)
99	R: Okay. (.) And you think the UN would accept that? (…)
100	P4: I think, I say, like, yes. [The UN is] going to accept that. (…)

101	R: Okay. (.) Okay. That's a very interesting point actually. (.) When I think about the UN's legitimacy in the UN's role in the context of northwest Syria, and you're basically saying that (uhm) (.) you - - think that there is a connection between the UN wanting to hand over part of their responsibilities, at least, to Damascus, does this also–; like, is the connection between the UN and - Damascus also something that you think affects the UN's legitimacy itself? (…)
102	P4: (Hmmm). (.) You mean the humanitarian principle–?//
103	R: Like -, today; yes, like -; if you think that the UN wants to give more priority, more responsibilities to - Damascus in the future, does this affect how much you trust and value the UN as an - - entity on its - - own?
104	P4: (Ah) Actually yes. (.) Yeah. And another time, I think they [[[the UN]]] - do that (uhm), in their point of view, that this [] can close the idea between the two parties. (…) So they can (uhm) put pressure to, like, to end the conflict in this situation. I think they think like this. But if we do, like, if we do to remove, or let's say, to transfer the assistance to Damascus, so then after that there will be a contact between Damascus and between the other parties [so] that we close the point between them. To finally, maybe, find [a] solution for the - - the conflict in Northwest Syria. I think they think that. I don't know. (.)
105	R: What do you think about it? (…)
106	P4: I (…), [[researcher]], I - can't. Because people, (uhm) as a person who lost a lot during the last period. So, I'm not like, open for any –; (smiling with a tough of frustration). This is not–; (uhm) what I have to - say, but actually, I'm not open to, like, - accept the regime. (.) I can't. (…) I can't. (…) Most of [the] people in Northwest Syria, they can't. (…) We lost a lot. (.) And, we can, actually, under - - (uhm), like, - [the] condition [] [that] the regime go[es], (…) Al-Assad go[es], (…) we can. (…) Like, close (uhm) two parties [[[be one united party (country) again]]], (.) and do something for the future of Syria. (Uhm), with the regime, we can't. (.) For me, I can't. I will never get back to Syria with this regime. I can't. (…) I - lost my future, I lost my home, I lost my whole property, I lost a lot, so I can't. My relatives, (.) I don't know (speaking with a doubtful, questioning undertone). (.) For me, I can't. (…)
107	R: (very long break). (Uhm). (…). And (.) (uhm) (…). Do you - - think, (…) that's a very difficult ending sentence now for me to ask the next question (smiling, laughing mildly to make fun of the difficulty faced in responding to this in any way, yet with a lot of respect for that what was shared by Participant). I don't know what to say, [participant], it's–;
108	P4: Okay.
109	R: Yeah, it's a - - good reminder for me as well [[…]] how much of a personal - story there is in there. (.) Thank you for sharing this.
110	P4: Okay. Go ahead (smiling, laughing mildly). There's no problem.
111	R: (Mutual laughing, respectfully) Do you - - think - - that there was something like this also in - -; or; (.) no! (.) Let's - just skip that part– (looking at question guide). Let's move on and let's reflect about the next stage, actually. (Uhm) because - you already said that you were not very happy with - the UN. You were "not satisfied" you said very politically correct, with the UN; (.) with the UN's actions during the earthquake response, because basically they "didn't do anything" you said (.). (Uhm), (.) Did you notice that the UN changed anything in terms of their objectives, (.) in terms of their - actions, or the behaviour of their staff (.), (uhm), since the earthquake? (…)
112	P4: You mean, (.) (uhm), after the earthquake, then? (.)
113	R: Yeah.
114	P4: (Uhm) During the earthquake and after the earthquake? (…)
115	R: Yeah. (.) Like anything that changed that you may have noticed. Exactly. (…)
116	P4: (Uhm). No, actually there is–; they still provide the same assistance as before the earthquake. The same project[s] [are] ongoing right now. The - main topic right now, as I said, [is] the [cross-border] resolution decision, which affects [the situation] after that [[[the earthquake]]], but before that all their projects are ongoing. They didn't cut anything. But during the earthquake, [it] was a problem. (…)

117	R: Okay. (.) And now they are operating then, as far as I understand you correctly, //
118	P4: // As usual.
119	R: // As before the earthquake?
120	P4: // As usual. (.) They [are] still working at the same project[s] which [] [were] already ongoing.
121	R: Okay.
122	P4: Yes. So this is the point.
123	R: Okay. So also in terms of their goals, there is no change that you would have noticed? (…)
124	P4: (Uhm) No. As I said, just for the [cross-border] resolution decision, after that they cut some of their fund, especially WFP, (uhm) UNICEF, and other things [[[other UN agencies]]]. (…)
125	R: What about, (uhm), maybe the behaviour of the representatives? Is there any change that you would have noticed from before the earthquake to today? (.)
126	P4: You mean, the UN worker[s]?
127	R: (Nodding; hmmm). I mean, anyone who is representing or who is part of the UN, if they are more friendly or if they are–; I don't know; if - - there is anything that is different now. (.)
128	P4: Actually, I don't know, like, closely, because it has been a while since I met some of them or know about some of them, because I'm now far away from [the] UN project[s] let's say. So, no, I don't know.
129	R: And even in the humanitarian direct involvement in northwest Syria, there is no change?
130	P4: No, no. That no. They didn't change, [[researcher]], just their response in northwest Syria and the earthquake was unsatisfied. Actually, (.) they are the same before and after. (…), I think. There is no change before and after [the earthquake]. During [the earthquake], this is a problem. (.) The same project[s] [that existed] [] before the earthquake now [] [are] ongoing, [] [are] extended.
131	R: Okay. (.) What - do you think about the UN before the earthquake? (.) Like, if you say during the earthquake it was a problem (.) //
132	P4: // Hmm (nodding)
133	R: // And now and before it's the same. What - do you think about the UN and before and now then?
134	P4: Before the earthquake?
135	R: Yes. (.)
136	R: They were working good and provid[ed] assistance. Normally they have big project[s] inside Syria, through WFP and also IOM, so they have a lot of projects. So it – was good.
137	R: Yeah? (.) And the - good projects– //
138	P4: Yes and we asked about that, [[researcher]], before, and till–, right now, we are satisfied. Actually, just the problem was in - the earthquake, which is big problem, because they didn't respon[d] immediately. (…)
139	R: Okay. So before, whatever the UN did in any way, it was okay before the earthquake and it's okay now. But during the earthquake (uhm) it was not okay.
140	P4: Yes. (.) Yeah, yeah. Not Okay. And right now, as I said, they like, think about the new things or the new, let's say, decision; after the [cross-border] resolution decision. I'm not sure about that because they cut some of the fund.
141	R: Okay, so maybe it will become–; (.) there will be some changes after the resolution?
142	P4: Yes! I think - - that it will be big. //
143	R: // So the earthquake is not the breaking moment, but the resolution decision is a breaking moment.

144	P4: Yes! Right now, I think, the most important thing [is] the resolution decision. (.)
145	R: When is the resolution decision?
146	P4: I'm not sure I think this month should be (uhm), I'm not sure, actually. […] I - didn't, like, follow up this situation after - - - I left my last organization because it was a local one, so it will affect a lot. Now [[in my current scope of work there is]] almost no effect. So I don't follow up with the resolution actually.
147	R: Yeah, that's true. (…) That's true. (…)
148	P4: But, actually, there's some condition to accept the, like, to extend this decision or to, like, to let the humanitarian assistance [] cross-border [] inside Syria. Some condition, like, to; – I'm not sure; to let some (uhm) (.), maybe Iranian or Russian to let them start to go to Northwest Syria. I'm not sure, actually. I'm not sure about that. Okay.
149	R: No, even if it's rumours it's fine, right? //
150	P4: // Yeah. So.
151	R: So if you're - - - - hearing these stories, that this is what is being negotiated, then that's –//
152	P4: // Yeah, so - you know, Russia [] [has] like their veto, all the time. And you know, that's all. We'll see what's going to be in the next period.
153	R: But they - did allow two additional border crossings after the earthquake, right?
154	P4: Don't allow? What?
155	R: They – allowed–; the regime allowed two additional border crossings. To open after the earthquake, to help with their supplies? No.
156	P4: I'm not sure about that. Actually now I think I'm - not sure about that, [[researcher]]. Actually, I got like a message from [a] cluster that the regime, maybe provide[d] his permission to (.) allow [] other organization to provide assistance cross-border (.) from Bab Al-Hawa I think. I am not sure about that. I heard a little, but I am not sure about that (smiling with a touch of discomfort, indicating a preference for changing the topic).
157	R: Okay (smiling). So you didn't hear about anything that is going through Al Bab's border crossing at present or other (.) - border crossings?
158	P4: No, no, no.
159	R: Okay.
160	P4: I haven't.
161	R: I have a–; I have something very interesting that I found on Twitter. (Uhm). //
162	P4: // OK.
163	R: It's a quote I'm going to read out to you. I'm sure that you've heard about this before. This is by Martin Griffiths, who is the, kind of, the head of all the humanitarian divisions of the UN. //
164	P4: // Yes. Okay
165	R: And he visited - - - northwest Syria's border; basically he visited Bab Al-Hawa on the Sunday after the earthquake. Okay?
166	P4: (Ah), okay.
167	R: When he was there, he wrote this (mimicking quotation marks): "At the Türkiye-Syria border today (.). We have so far failed the people in Northwest Syria. (.) They rightly feel abandoned, looking for international help that hasn't arrived. My duty and our obligation is to correct this failure as fast as we can. That's my focus now.". This is about six months ago. //
168	P4: // Yeah, I - remember that. I remember that. And I remember - - what [] he sai[d].

169	R: // Yeah? What did you think then when you read it?
170	P4: (Uhm). (Ufff), I don't know. (.) Actually. But they [[[the UN]]] know that they are, (uhm), like they didn't respon[d] as much as they could [] [have]. (.) They know that. This is the more important thing (.). The people in Northwest Syria just see that. They know that. The UN agency know that. (…)
171	R: Do you think he's honest? (…)
172	P4: Yeah. (.) (laughing with a touch of insecurity, as if not being sure what the question is intended for)
173	R: Yeah? (.) So when he says that they–; that he wants to “correct - - this failure as fast as we can” (.) // and so on//
174	P4: (Ha!) No, no, no, [[[by saing that M. Griffiths is honest]]] I'm not talking about that, I'm talking about that he is–; that they are like [a] failure to (.) provide the assistan[ce], but if they, like, provide or like, improve it, no. (…) I don't think so.
175	R: They didn't? Or you think they already didn't really mean to?
176	P4: No, no. For earthquake no.
177	R: Nothing.
178	P4: No. (…). Even [[[neither]]] during the earthquake after it. I’m talking again, [[researcher]], for the earthquake response, not for the regular intervention for the UN agency in Northwest Syria.
179	R: Yeah. (.) So basically there is a statement by one of the highest UN humanitarian officers and he promised that things would change, but there are no changes.
180	P4: Yeah, it's not. It was not enough.
181	R: Okay. But generally speaking, you're not unhappy with the UN itself. You are okay with the UN and in the normal response? (.)
182	P4: Yeah, till now, yeah. (.)
183	R: And you think that the UN should have done more during the earthquake response period.
184	P4: Yes, yes, yes. Absolutely. (.) Absolutely. Because it's like, if it’s vulnerable to people rise up, so the need become more and more bigger. So they need to, like, provide more assistance, more things to northwest Syria.
185	R: Yeah. (.) Okay. (…) What about the future? How do you think the UN will engage in northwest Syria from now on?
186	P4: This is depend[ing] on the (smiling) resolution (laughing).
187	R: Okay, so basically even with the resolution it’s the way they operated before. (…)
188	P4: How?
189	R: It’s always with the resolutions, right? So for every resolution they make own programming? Or do you think there is a change now?
190	P4: Like a contingency plan and other thing[s] we did for the next six months and, I don't know, but actually, for example, [[researcher]], even [if] the resolution decision [is] like extended for the next six months, WFP already cut their fund for north northwest Syria, for example. UNICEF also they have some cut[s]. I think for the nutrition thing, I think, I'm not sure, but I think that because the WFP and UNICEF are the main responsible [actors] for the supplies; suppliers supplementary - - - related to malnutrition in northwest Syria. There's no other organization [that] can provide that. (.) So (.) I don't know.
191	R: Do you think that the resolution will be renewed in a way?
192	P4: I think it will be renewed; I think. (.) Yeah, I think.
193	R: Okay, so the UN will basically then be able to continue as before?

194	P4: Yes, yes. After cutting - the fund (laughing; both smiling)
195	R: And - that's – okay you think? This is what the UN needs to do and that's enough what they're doing?
196	P4: If they're cutting [the fund] or still cutting downs [further] that's not enough.
197	R: Okay. So they - are cutting too much?
198	P4: Starting from this month, actually, or I think, [the] previous month, [the] UN office[s] started cutting I think. So (.) - that's not enough. Actually. It's not enough for the beneficiar[ies], for the people in Northwest Syria. (…)
199	R: (Hmm). (.) I have (looking at notes, counting) one, (.) two (…); two more questions if you want?
200	P4: Actually, go ahead.
201	R: If you now reflect about everything that we talked about now, you and I. (.) What's in your point of view– (.); or how do you think people in northwest Syria view this in your point of view? (…)
202	P4: Review?
203	R: How is the opinion of the general, broader population in northwest Syria about the UN (.) before, during and after the earthquake? What do you think?
204	P4: (Ah); Like, before the earthquake, I am not say[ing] that they [[[the people in NWS]]] [are] completely satisfy[ied], but there was a big assistance in northwest Syria. (.) So it covered a lot of needs. (.) So I think there was, like, a satisfaction[] from the people, especially, for example, for the programme of the WFP, which is a big programme that provide[s] the assistance related to nutrition and food security. During the earthquake, they [[[the people in NWS]]] absolutely didn't satisfy [[[what they did was not sufficient/ they did not do enough to satisfy the needs]]]. (Uhm), after that, and because of the resolution, and after the cutting of the fund related to Northwest Syria, I think we will start, like, to listen about unsatisfy [[[dissatisfaction]]], starting from this month, like, or (uhm) let's say, from the previous month. Like, many people, they don't satisfy about the assistance from the UN [[[they are not satisfied]]]. (…) Why am I talking about the WFP? As I said because It's a big factor in Northwest Syria. (…)
205	R: Yeah. (.). (Uhm), cool. Then I only have one question left and for me usually it's the–; the harder questions come at the end, not at the beginning, right? (smiling, mutual laughing) (.) (Uhm), In your words, what would the UN need to do in the future to remedy the past? (…)
206	P4: (hmmm). (smiling, thinking)
207	R: (Laughing; unmistakably sarcastic) A very easy question (…).
208	P4: (Laughing) (…) (uhm) (…) I don't know how I can say that (.), but actually they have to raise effort (.) to provide the assistance to the need[y] people. (…).
209	R: Such as, for example? (…)
210	P4: (Hmm) You mean about the assistance or what?
211	R: Yeah, like how? How do you - - manage that? (.) What is it concretely that the UN would need to do to remedy the past? (…)
212	P4: (Uhm) (…) It -, I don't know (.), actually. (…)
213	R: It's a very difficult question (laughing).
214	P4: Just a bit. (Uhm) I - have to - - - be like, a head of [the] UN (mutual laughing) for this question. Because sometimes, I believe, [[researcher]], this question, sometimes, there's maybe factors I can't see [] from my position. Other people can see it more than me. (…)
215	R: You think so? (.) I think you see things that they don't – see, so I think –//
216	P4: I know that. I know that [[researcher]]. But actually, sometimes when - you have, like, an over–; for example, I'm - right now focusing, for example in Idlib, other people maybe focus on Idlib and Aleppo, so

	their point of view maybe differ[s] from mine. They have other aspects, they have other like, priorit[ies], I don't know.
217	R: Yeah (.) This is why I'm talking to a lot of people (smiling; laughing).
218	P4: We have to respect that. But actually they (the UN) have to raise their effort[s] - for Northwest Syria, not cutting the funds. Especially now, we [are] still in a conflict situation. We didn't find any solution for the problem of the conflict between the regime and other parties in Northwest Syria. (…) We don't have, like, sustainability and we - can't start to think about this sustainability in Northwest Syria for people in [the] whole situation. (…) I don't know. I think so (smiling).
219	R: Yeah, okay. I mean, it's - a difficult question, right? (.) So it's made for - being open and vague. (Uhm) is there anything else that you would like to share with me? Anything else that you just want to add? That has been on your mind somehow–; but you - haven't covered yet? (…)
220	P4: No (thinking). (.) No. There's nothing.
221	P4: Tamam [[[okay]]]. Then I'll close the recording now, one second.

Transcript P5 (1)

1	R: Let's start by you telling me a bit more about yourself. (.) Who are you?
2	P5: Okay, I, yeah. Okay, my name is [[Participant]] and I'm a Syrian. I have been–. (.) I've studied, I have a master in [[business studies and several years of experience in the private sector]] before I moved to Turkey. After the Syrian revolution, where I was able and this is what I wish to, be near my country [] this is where I got involved in the, let's say, humanitarian (.) and civil society sector, (.) to be able to support the Syrian people (uhm) affected by the Syrian war. So this is very, very briefly (smiling).
3	R: How did you get involved in the in the first place? Like, what was your entry - step? (…)
4	P5: Well (.), [[I was living outside of the region and]] [[…]] through connections with with my relatives [[…]] I managed to go there and of course [[my relatives and friends were as well]] deeply engaged in the Syrian revolution and so yes, I liked what I did, but I tried to find a good way to support from the experience and the knowledge I have, by managing the programmes and projects there, so I got involved in [[administrative and managerial roles]].
5	R: Cool. [[I know you're currently moving places, but this is a very, very recent development. For how long have you lived in Gaziantep by now altogether?]] //
6	P5: // Seven years.
7	R: // And what's your current organization doing and what's your position there?
8	P5: Okay. //
9	R: // Or let's say - - - what's your role there? //
10	P5: For the past seven years I've - - - lived in Turkey, (.) in Gaziantep specifically. This is where most of the NGOs, INGOs have offices there. Being near to the Syrian Turkish borders. And (uhm) for the last three years I've been working with [[an organization that focuses on supporting women and their roles in the Syrian context, not merely in a humanitarian sence but much more in a development/ civil society sense]]. [[…]] [[I am working in programmes]], so part of my work is to run and manage the projects running inside Syria, for supporting–; more or most of our projects is for supporting the Syrian women in Syria and in neighbouring countries, but mainly it is inside Syria [[…]] in the Northwest. And, as you know, this is the area for the Syrian opposition, it's controlled by the Syrian opposition. (Uhm). And another side of my work is on fundraising (.) and finding new funds and (.) contacting, communicating with partners and donors, and (.) making new partnerships. And what else? So yeah, [this is it] so far. (.)
11	R: So yeah. How - often do you - - on average contact your colleagues inside northwest Syria? (…)
12	P5: Well, (.) you mean our team on the ground? (…)
13	R: Yeah.
14	P5: (Uhm), I, like, let's say, I try as much as I can. Before I moved, before the earthquake, I had like, let's say, every week or two I have some meetings with them, but they have a direct channel with me to contact me whenever they wish. And (.) there's, like, because I don't have the time [] and [because of] the hierarchy in the organization, I take all the updates from [[the responsible colleagues in a coordinated manner]].
15	R: On the ground?
16	P5: Yeah.
17	R: So that means you're basically their support system in the back (smiling)?
18	P5: Yeah. I'm - - but I'm always in, let's say, keeping updated about the situation there and (uhm) of course (.) very much aware of the Syrian context, (.) which is continuously changing since the revolution. (.) Because the areas there (.) are displaced at this time, (.) this area is controlled by blah blah blah and the second it's taken by another (uhm) (…)
19	R: Actor?

20	P5: Controlling authority or, let's say. (.) So I keep updated all the time. (…) And again, with the safety and security officers inside, on the ground, I'm in, like, on daily contact.
21	R: Yeah. And then you have the donor contact and your managerial contacts as well, right?
22	P5: Yes. (.) Yes, donors and partners, whether we are working together or receiving funds from.
23	R: Yeah, yeah. Yeah., perfect. (.) Okay, you already mentioned the earthquake, and I told you we were going to go into that as well today. I'm–; whenever there is a question you don't feel comfortable answering, just you know, like, tell me.
24	P5: Sure.
25	R: But I would like to (uhm) I would like to go back with you now to the situation where the earthquake happened. (…)
26	P5: Yes
27	R: (Uhm) I'll leave the room very open, so whatever comes to your mind, you just–; you can just share
28	P5: Okay.
29	R: But when you - - think about the earthquake happening, what–; how did the situation unfold for you and your colleagues and your team? Maybe also your family if you want (.). (Umh) what […] happened?
30	P5: Yes, Okay. When the earthquake started, of course, the affected areas are South Turkey and North Syria. This is in Turkey, in Gaziantep, and this is where our office is. And in northwest Syria, this is [where] our [[project locations and facilities]] are. So literally, all our team [] was affected and their families. So (uhm), myself and the office, which–; we had to be evacuated from Gaziantep and actually, not mentally and since we were not stable and we had to move to different cities, some to Ankara, some to Istanbul, some to Mersin, and - so to other safer places. For, let's say, at least one and a half month, until people started to go back to Gaziantep and - all the services went back again to the–; in the country, like water and electricity and gas, because they needed heating (…), as it was winter. So, plus mentally, they were not ready to work, so we did not. Actually, lucky us, we had our team inside Europe, they (uhm) - managed to first communicate with all the donors and partners and [to] say that for this time we will be carrying over the communication because our team[s] are not ready and they were affected. But–; and the first stage of work or response, what they have done is to respond to the team and their families. So this is what they have done [] at [] first - - - . Our team [here] meaning our office inside Turkey and our team in the centres plus the–; we - do support women-led initiatives in the North [of Syria]. And these were included in this stage. We considered them as our team also and we supported them. Financially and some of them who needed to be evacuated, we assisted them in transportation or renting or paying rents for other things. So this was the first stage. The second stage is responding to the community affected inside Turkey and inside Syria. (Uhm). (…) So we took some time. (…) Myself, I went back to work (.) by April. (.) //
31	R: // Yeah, and the earthquake was on 6th of February.
32	P5: // Before that I didn't have–; I was - - not ready. // I was not ready. //
33	R: One and a half months to two months you needed to (…)–
34	P5: At least, yes. This is where I told them, okay. I'm–; (.) I can say I'm awake now and I can go back to work, because they needed us (uhm) (.) in Turkey; our team in Turkey, they needed us to respond to the community and, of course, our team, we cannot respond without our teams there. (.) So (uhm) (.) what they have done is amazing. And during that time we have received massive amounts of funds, let's say, - but mainly to respond to the community. And in some areas that was good, because we needed funding definitely for [them], and for other areas we were restricted. (.) (Uhm) (.) for example, a lot of funds came [with the conditions being]: "okay, no, we cannot. Your – team[s] are not counted. You have to respond only to community.". So we faced some challenges [] [with] those restrictions. Or some - of the partners said: "Yes, but you have to distribute kits, dignity kits, infant kits, whatever. But (uhm) for example, you cannot distribute cash", although what (.) mainly people needed at that time is cash. They had to pay bills, they have to buy stuff because some of the people have left their houses and some of them have lost their houses and some of them needed some construction to do some maintenance or rehabilitation for these

	houses to go back to. So, (.) some partners, they were not–; they don't have that sensitivity. So these - - are the types of challenges that we had. And we made more effort to try [to] convince them and, say, to show them what is essential now, what's the real[] need now. (Uhm), but yeah, some of them would be flexible with us and a lot of them no. (.)
35	R: What happened to the ones who were not?
36	P5: Okay, they need us to distribute kits. Okay, we will go and distribute kits. We will buy kids and distribute them and we will go deep to other camps and to father camps and to find some affected people who are in need and we would distribute, but this also–. And we will look. We will try to (.) do the communication [] with other partners [who] are a bit flexible. (.) Okay. for example, even for those who want to distribute kits [[[imitating to speak as one of them]]]: "okay, you have to distribute, let's say 1000 kits here.". Yes, but there is distribution costs and we have the warehouse and we have staff that we need to pay. To do so. And [[[imitating such donors response]]]: "no, you can spend only 7 percent (.) out of that on the other cost [[[the support cost such as the warehouse, overhead and related costs mentioned]]]. So (.), (uhm) (.) we wouldn't say no, (.) but we would spend from these from the other flexible donors, let's say.
37	R: Yeah. (.) It's actually very interesting. //
38	P5: // But we have - worked it out, yeah. We worked it out. And after so many months, let's say, for example, it's not easy because it's not - - somewhere that you go to a warehouse, buy things and distribute them. This is not how it goes. You have to go on a procurement (uhm) procedure and you have to make purchase orders and that all this, so this takes time. You have to do vetting for the suppliers and – (.) new funds came, and we have to vetting - - - again for our staff. So (.) and we hired some (uhm) teams for the response. Again we have to do vetting for them before we pay them. And, so, this [] were the difficulties that we had (.). So, the procurement and distribution took longer than we have expected and sometimes, after five months or six months from the earthquake, it sometimes it doesn't make sense to go and distribute dignity kits now. It made more sense in the first and second month, but not after six months. (.) And they said no, the agreement would say (uhm) (.) to distribute dignity kits so you have to distribute to distribute dignity kits (speaking with a touch of disbelieve and disapproval). (.) So they don't have that rationale.
39	R: Okay. So, you're basically saying that (uhm), all of this bureaucracy was still there even though you were in a crisis situation // and people were not that flexible with you?
40	P5: // Absolutely // People were –? (…)
41	R: [people were] not that flexible with you? (.) // Like some were and some not?
42	P5: Not not - all of them. Some of them were. And some not. Even some partners, INGOs, who have taken different funds from different donors, they said: "Okay, look, this fund is more restricted. This fund we are flexible because it's our own money and this fund it comes from another government, so we have–; they have their own restrictions and guidelines and we have to follow and comply with [these so] you have to spend that much by this time (.), (uhm) by August, you have to spend 30 percent of this grant, and buy [this and] that, so they were more restricted. So this type of bureaucracy, [is what] we - - found. Some of them would [find it difficult to arrange with] that what we distributed as [[the women-centric organization that we are]] is a bit different from other [organizations]. We are not [merely] humanitarian and we - - don't call it a basket or–. (.) We call it dignity kits and these are–; have some–. We went and it's a bit expensive because we want to find what really women need at that at that stage. (.) They would need clothes, underwear, (uhm) (.) what's it, pads, even for girls (…) and (uhm) (.) hijab, cover. We have to support them. This is, we don't interfere, but we have to - secure that for them. This is their, her need, and we have to secure that so our kits would - contain all these. (.) Of course and other issues, but we - insist that to fulfil those needs for women, (.) that some of the parties said no, this is too expensive [for] baskets. (Imitating to speak in reply): "Okay, what do you suggest?" (imitating the response): "Other organizations are distributing a kit of $20.". (…) "But it is, our kit is more expensive, because this is what it contains, you have all the contents and you have purchase orders and we follow all the procurement procedures under them, so (…) we and the suppliers are vetted, our staff are vetted. (.) So, well, we see from our perspective that these are the needs of the woman at this stage and we will (.) - - - insist to have it, we insist (uhm) (.) to distribute such. So (.) // this is what we found.
43	R: Besides these kits, I have actually two follow up questions immediately. If you're - - good.

44	P5: Yeah.
45	R: And besides, like you – now explained the kits and that was part of the response, right? (.) And if we look only at the very first five to seven days, the critical kind of life saving period: Was there anything that you did besides what you now explained for securing and safeguarding your own team members as your organization? That's question one and the second– //
46	P5: Okay.
47	R: If you allow. If you - - remember, (.) if you think back to these very first days, the very first critical days of the response in northwest Syria: (uhm) who were in your point of view the most important actors, be they individuals or organizations, just generally, (.) what - happened in the immediate response basically? (…)
48	P5: Just a second (interrupted for a moment). Yes, I'm back. Okay, the first few days or more, actually, our team inside Turkey, we were all - - ourselves affected so, (.) to be honest, there are some things that I cannot remember and I was not able to do any[thing], even communication with partners who were (uhm) calling me because I was the point of contact for most of the partners (uhm) and – donors. So (uhm) either to (uhm) personally, to make sure that (imitating people working for partner and donor organizations): "are you okay and your family? Your team? Everyone is okay?", or to provide - - - any–; say that: "we are ready, we can support you. We are financially, (uhm)–; we would like to financially support you and other things." So, this [is] what happened at the first few days, but what I could myself do is only to say that: "we are fine but we are unable to communicate. Please contact our Europe office.". (Uhm) Because we were out of battery most of the time, on the move and (uhm) I need to save some–; my mobile and charger. And mentally (.), I was not ready to do any communication. (…) (Uhm). I lost your questions.
49	R: The second, like, that– exactly. But that's–, so [[your organization]] then really focused on–; also the team in Europe focused on, kind of, (.) telling people: "all is good. We're managing. We will get back to you at some point.". Right? If I understand– //
50	P5: // The team there [[[in Europe]]], what they have done good is, they started communicating and emailing all our partners saying that: "We have, in our team, [we] [] [are] facing 'da da da da da', and this is the case there, and we are collecting funds, we are fundraising now to support our team at the first stage, (.) inside Turkey and Syria and the second stage to respond to the community.
51	R: But then -, basically that's the immediate if we only think of the immediate (uhm) situation, // [[your organization]] would have been focused on communicating and getting things stable and not conflused //
52	P5: Yes. That was the immediate– //
53	R: // So there was not any kind of, as you're not a humanitarian organization anyways, right? But there was – not any kind of – //
54	P5: Communicating, (uhm), (.) most - - efforts are done for evacuating the team.
55	R: Yeah. The team. Okay– //
56	P5: Buy transportation and they, from Europe - , they were contacting [] Airbnb or so to rent places for the team. And provide transportation and 'da da', and of course they use their (.) core funds, let's say, until they managed to collect some funds. And they started the fundraising also, so that was very helpful.
57	R: Yeah.
58	P5: And more, they started to prepare for psychosocial support. (…)
59	R: (Hm-hmmm; nodding).
60	P5: They prepared programmes and for the team and their children (.) and their families. I remember after one week in Istanbul and, for example, they evacuated some of the team [] [to] Ankara and some of the team [] [to] Istanbul, so they - - made an open day for the team. To gather there, to (uhm)– (.). That was very nice. That was something that [was] very much emotional and (uhm) [for which the team was] very (.) thankful. So they prepared an open day for the whole families to sit there and say: "Yes, you are out. Are you out?". And it was very emotional. It was very good. So they - also (.), what I want to say, they cared about the mental health of the staff. //

61	R: // Of the team (.) and their families. Yeah. (.) Very impressive. And then the dignity kids and any other responses started later, I guess, right? // So not in the first place or– //
62	P5: // Yes. After they made sure that our team is back to work. So, somewhere in March, (.) let's say, some of the teams started to go back and they were able to do something, let's say to perform some tasks. (…) So the second stage for the people who are ready to go back to work, is to our - services for the emergency response, where distributing kits and cash, distribution of cash, and also PS [[[psychosocial support]]] sessions. (Interrupted for a moment) [[…]]
63	R: Okay, so, your - actual response for the communities started - later when the team was basically settled again //
64	P5: Yes, the team and their families. When they were back settled and the people are able to go back to work. Basically, as I mentioned, but–; and the - started a programme to support for PS [[[psychosocial support]]] sessions for the team and their families and the community.
65	R: Okay, so first the team and then the communities. Okay. Let's - take a step back from - your own work and think about the - second question that I have for you: think about the immediate crisis response period. The first five to seven days after the earthquake in northwest Syria. What - do you think? Which organizations, be it individuals or organizations actually, which actors were the most important that engaged in the immediate period - - - for life saving support?
66	P5: Okay. (uhm) the immediate response, although the earthquake was–; (uhm) has - affected Turkey and Syria, but the response was very much different in the two places, although there is, like, only borders between them. (.) Inside Turkey, they opened for the international teams for rescue, for digging, search and rescue teams to come in (uhm), and although, still, it was too late. And (uhm)– but inside Syria, they didn't allow any (.), either search and rescue teams or heavy vehicles to – pass. (.) Or aid. Aid support to pass for the first at least five days.
67	R: Who is they? They who didn't allow.
68	P5: The Turkish authorities and the Syrian regime. Because the UN and international (uhm) donors, or (uhm), humanitarian actors at crisis (.), that are through crisis, they can, they communicate directly with the Syrian regime (.) and they (uhm) (.) - pass the aid to them. And of course, they [[[the regime]]] will not pass it to the opposition areas.
69	R: Okay.
70	P5: They have–. Yeah, this is the one issue. The second thing, for example, I remember UN and the representatives, I think they asked for their permission?! (.) To the Syrian regime; permission to assist or support the (uhm) - - opposition area, the northwest of Syria, and that is, that's a failure.
71	R: Why do you think this –; Why do they–; why do you think they would have done that? (.) To ask for permission?
72	P5: Because, you know how the UN goes. They say that if they - - - communicate with governments. (.)
73	R: Yeah.
74	P5: And the opposition - it's not a government. I would not consider it as a government. So they either take the permission of (.) - the Syrian regime, and this is what they officially still recognise.
75	R: Okay. So you say it's wrong? (.)
76	P5: Absolutely. It's wrong.
77	R: Why - - do you think it's wrong?
78	P5: Because in such a catastrophe, (uhm) there should be some guidelines saying that at the first place you have to worry about the (uhm) human beings. You are - - - - (.) there is human rights that you have to worry about rather than the bureaucratic issues and politics and so. At such time of a catastrophe happening, you should worry about the people inside and then to worry about what's allowed and what's not allowed, eligible or not eligible (.). (Uhm), so, (.) the first thing they didn't, (uhm)– what people at the first days for five

	days, what they will really need is the (.) search and rescue teams. This is what they really require. They need - - the heavy vehicles (.) (uhm) to do that. And still, even in Turkey, it - was a bit late. But they didn't (uhm) act at the first night. It took them [] a day or two [] for the international teams to get there, and when there [] [are] lives under the ground or–; they need - - a fast action, quick - action, this is what they really need. But they think that, (.) the people at the Syrian opposition, (.) [what they] had is the experience. (.) Of the White Helmet (uhm), the Civil Defence [[[both refer to the same organization and group]]]. They had this, because they've spent years in the Syrian revolution where they were (.) destroyed buildings and they have to dig and rescue people. So by years they had that experience where the Turkish– (.) where the (.) people inside Turkey did they didn't had. (.) And still they needed vehicles; they needed fuel for these vehicles to work; they needed (uhm) aid; first aid at hospitals and so on. So (.) -, I've talked, maybe I – lost - - the answer // maybe and I go on. //
79	R: Well, it's - –; I'm - following. No - - you're perfectly–; I would - - stop you otherwise, if – it was going, like, no, you were perfectly spot on, the question was– //
80	P5: // Yeah, okay. So maybe we say if there was a response, the response was very late. And rescue teams were not allowed inside (uhm) opposition areas, but they were allowed to the areas with the Syrian regime, for example, Latakia and Aleppo. But not the northwest, and to Turkey. To Hatay and–, Turkey, yes. But so that was a failure.
81	R: So opposition-held northwest Syria was not included (.) // in the response.
82	P5: No, they were not - - included (.) and that was a failure.
83	R: Okay. Do you - - see any reason, or (.) any way for the UN, as you mentioned that you also suspect (uhm) expect them to - be the main player, who was not able to then respond, (.) do you think–; do you see any way of justifying this on their part? (Uhm) From their - - (.) part?
84	P5: They (.) can (.); I - think the (.) - - guidelines are (.), they, at such a time of catastrophic or such events happening, they should be –; have guidelines; they have the guidelines of human rights comes first. Human lives are important. But hey did not comply with that. (.) There should be some, (uhm) (.) but (.) - they have their own, still, I'm not sure how to name it, limit restrictions or so to follow, (.) (uhm) bureaucratic work to follow (.), or comply with. (.) But at such catastrophic area they shouldn't–; they should have their rescue teams on the move straight away, not to wait for approvals and permits, and so. For sure they - should expect that the Syrian regime would block the - - response to opposition areas. (..) This is (…) this is expected. But, (uhm), they did not. They should have, (uhm) some, I'm not sure how to–; what's the right name for that, but to say “no” at such catastrophic times. The - - team should be–; the response teams should be on the move and not wait to approvals or permits.
85	R: Okay. So you think that the actions they took in that situation were not (mimicking quotation marks) “legitimate”? We're not right? We're not good? // Were not appropriate?
86	P5: They were - - not. They were not. // No, they were not. It's nonsense. It doesn't make sense to wait for (.) (uhm) (.) approval from the enemy, let's say, to help. If I want to simplify the situation, they're asking the enemy to allow us to support your enemy. They will not allow it. (…)
87	R: Does this - - – //; go ahead - -.
88	P5: But. // But - - you [[[immitating to speak to the UN]]] being (.), as working in [the] humanitarian field, you should work that better, I mean. (…)
89	R: Thank you.
90	P5: You’re welcome.
91	R: This –; does this way of interfering (.) or engaging in the earthquake situation (.), does this affect the way you think about the UN? (…)
92	P5: Absolutely. (…). Absolutely.
93	R: In what way? (…)

94	P5: At least me being, (uhm), [[dealing in my professional context with things such as grants, or also partner and donor relations]], for example, I would, if I am to compare whether to take a fund from the UN or take a fund from another donor, I would - - go to the other (.); less restricted(.); who would allow me to do what I really have to do. What they really need on the ground rather than (uhm) (.) follow what the donor wants. (.)
95	R: Okay. So you think the UN would not–; is not in in line with what is actually needed?
96	P5: No. (.) No.
97	R: 'Leesh'? [[[Why?]]] (…)
98	P5: Because they follow special agendas, and this is quite (uhm) known, because, (uhm), they are still supporting the Syrian regime; they are still having their offices inside Damascus and they are still supporting the Syrian regime areas, and at the end (speaking as if speaking to the UN): "you are supporting a regime who is (uhm) (.) - - - has done war crimes, and there is a lot of proofs, and there's a lot of (.) (…) (.) courts saying that and (uhm) verifying that, but you [[[the UN]]] are still supporting that. That's because of your agendas.". (.) They have special agendas to support them. (Mixing speaking as if answering from the UN's side and Participant's own perspective): We want that–; they [[[the UN]]] want them [[[the regime]]] back and they want them to stay there. (…) It's all politics, so (…)–.
99	R: So the UN would not be on top of your list of partner and donor relations because they follow their own agenda. Is that how I'm understanding it? And they don't necessarily pay attention to what is really needed in your point of view in northwest Syria (.) on the ground?
100	P5: Yes.
101	R: Okay.
102	P5: Yes, I would go to the more flexible donor.
103	R: Okay. (.) Like? (.) (Smiling) just for me to get a get a grasp on–; (.) // if you have an example.
104	P5: No. It's different. // It's different. (…) It's different. (.) For example, the US donors, and it's different from what field. For example, for us [[as a women-centric organization]], the US donors are much more flexible with us. (Uhm), this is first, and (uhm), maybe in other sectors they are more restricted and (uhm) they–; but in [[our field of work]], I find the US donors are more flexible (.), and (.) - - the British (.), also the UK.
105	R: Yeah. This–; so basically you're saying –//
106	P5: I was–// Yeah, I was surprised actually, but [[our experiences generally supports this]]. (Speaking from the perspective of such a donor): "Just tell us what's the real need and you are flexible to move budget lines from two reallocations, and so and so, change the area and (.) // so it was sharp.
107	R: And you don't have– // With the United Nations, you don't have this with the UN entities?
108	P5: M-m (negating; shaking head)
109	R: No? How does it go with them? //
110	P5: // No, no. There is not much flexibility. //
111	R: // So the UN comes in with their ideas and you can say "Yes" or "no"? (…)
112	P5: (Uhm), they come[] with–; no, this is (.)–. Okay. No. We agree, for example, to support [[a certain facility or project]]. Okay. We will support this [[facility or project]] and we will, let's say, we are supporting a [[certain project that fulfils the needs of women in NWS long-term and with an eye on self-empowerment and sustainability]]. Okay, good. (.) (uhm), (.) this is what we agreed on. This is what we–; the agreement says, or the contract says, but at the implementation, (.) if any change occurred on the ground, they are not–. It's very difficult to obtain an approval [to change anything].
113	R: Yeah. Okay.
114	P5: To change location. Or (speaking from the perspective of the own organization in a hypothetical request to change a contract): "Okay, fine, we are–; not maybe there is–; we are–; there is a camp in here next to us,

	but it follows [[[is part of]]] the other districts.”. But (imitating speaking from the perspective of a contracting UN agency): “No, we have signed to provide services to this district. So you cannot.”. (Imitating a response to the UN by the own organization): “But it's very nearby and they are in need.”. But (imitating a response by the UN agency): “No, you are changing area and it's not allowed.”. // You need–; yeah // But they – need; no they would not. //
115	R: Okay. // So // Yeah, what I'm getting --- from you is on the one hand side, you're saying the UN has their own–; correct me if I'm–; like; I'm trying to repeat, so that I know that I understood be correctly.
116	P5: Yeah, please.
117	R: (Uhm) So, on the one hand side, you're saying that the UN is following their own agenda and that they’re not necessarily having the best of interest necessarily for your region, which is one of the reasons why you may not put them on top of your list of working together with them? On the other side, you also said that (uhm), they are not flexible enough in terms of an institution? So that's not even, like, it's not only the agenda that they have, but also the lack of flexibility to changing, right? // But that–; this part for me means that maybe there is fund that is going in the right direction, of kind of, meeting people’s needs.
118	P5: // Yes // Of course, there is fund going sometimes [in the] right direction, but if that's, (uhm) what I'm saying [is] that there is no flexibility if changes happen[], and no question how it goes. There is always changes happen[ing] when you are implementing projects. Always, in all projects, because we are not in a stable (uhm) field. The - working inside Syria is on –(.), it’s continuing changes, so (uhm)–.
119	R: Yeah. // So it's basically // two points right?
120	P5: // For example in the earthquake. We have another fund from [[another multi-state donor source]]
121	R: // What kind of [[fund]]?
122	P5: // Yeah, from the [[source]] - - - . Right.
123	R: // What - [[kind of fund]]?
124	R: // Yeah - - - all, good - . Is it what, humanitarian or development?
125	P5: // Because there are too many. (Uhm) it’s [[a programme of a multi-state donor entity]]
126	R: Ah, it’s the resilience one. Yeah - . (Smiling). So, in - the earthquake situation, you have one more example with [[this kind of fund and donor]]?
127	P5: We stopped the services for one and a half months [[[during the earthquake, because of donor rigidity]]]!
128	R: ‘Leesh’? [[[why?]]
129	P5: Because the [[project facilities]], we have to do some rehabilitation in the - - - - building itself and the teams. We’re not ready, but?! They – were not flexible with us to extend–; to have a cost extension.
130	R: [[This donor?]] Why?
131	P5: There is–. They were not flexible with us.
132	R: Okay.
133	P5: They said: “No, a cost extension is not (uhm) approved”, and just last week they approved on a no-cost extension. Still, even for a no-cost extension, just now after so many (uhm) pressure, let's say, they have approved on a no cost extension because they were fixed [in] that: “No, we have to end our project at this stage, so we have to end it by end of [the] year.”.
134	R: Okay.
135	P5: OK, fine. We are supporting some initiatives who want to establish [[their own projects to be more sustainable in the future]]. (Speaking from the perspective of the other multi-state donor): “Yeah, Okay, we are giving them grants, small grants, to start an initiative, activities, whatever”. Yeah. Or to start or create [[project facilities]] but they cannot buy chairs and tables with that.

136	R: (Smiling) (…) Yeah. (.) I'm - getting your point. (laughing)
137	P5: But you are approving with and–; but the agreement says: “We are supporting them to start their [[project facilities]], like, what does it mean, [[this type of project facility]]. It's something [[that entails a certain degree of feeling comfortable]]. At least they need chairs to sit. They need somewhere comfortable. Just the logic is: “No, we cannot approve any purchase of chairs.”. (.) That was shocking. That was shocking to me. So this kind of things–. //
138	R: Yeah, but you–, then [[this multi-state donor entity]], like maybe some other donors and also the UN, they are not flexible enough to actually be in line with the situation on the ground? And I'm imagining, though, if you allow me that question, (uhm) that this is something that would have been before the earthquake as well?
139	P5: (interrupted for a second) Okay.
140	R: Perfect. So I'm - imagining that these things that you're describing now in terms of the, like, of agenda fitting or, let's say, that they have their own agenda and are political as well as that they are not flexible, right? Both of these I think are points, which are very valid, but that have also been in place before the earthquake already, so there is no change there. Is there - - anything that you feel– //
141	P5: Yes, there is no change there, but they [[[donors in general, including but not limited to the UN]]] should change. But we still need the UN. And we still, we cannot say to this fund: “No, we cannot. We don't want your fund.”. It's not a matter of funding only, because we need (uhm)–; we need–; we know how important is the UN. And we need the advocacy. To advocate for (uhm) our rights, for the (.)–, no matter what (.), let - me, working [[for a women-centric organization]], we need to advocate for the rights of the–; for the women rights (.) inside Syria and (uhm) how to support it; how - to get their voices reach[] [] the - - international (uhm) (.) (argh) (da, da, da, da, da; thinking loudly in search for a specific term) what? (…). To the international events or (.) forums (.) and this is something we need to reach through the UN. For advocacy issues and purposes, we need them.
142	R: Yeah - -. (.) I - see what you mean. But is there any, like, just - to not forget the point; I want to move on as well, but //
143	P5: // Okay.
144	R: Just, because you said that your opinion was affected by the way the UN engaged during the earthquake, right? Is there anything, doesn't have to, but is there anything that you would say kind of opened your eyes, or was even worse than whatever you expected before the earthquake from the UN in terms of this kind of (tone strongly suggests that the following are meant as examples) lack of flexibility or their own agenda of kind of following things (uhm), that has impacted your opinion about the UN even more? (…)
145	P5: Impacted my opinion: No. Because I know how are they, once they [] [have] (.) (uhm) (.) opened their offices back in Damascus and operating from there (.), it's quite clear what's their [[[the UN’s]]] agenda. //
146	R: // So maybe that underlines it more? Is it that - it was more visible even? (.) Or no?
147	P5: It was definitely more visible. Because I couldn't expect in such a time.
148	R: Okay?
149	P5: It's not a war, it's - [a] catastrophe. The - - - response should (.) have been more considering, let's say, or (.), and (.), but no (.). No. After a week they managed to (uhm) pass some (.) aid support, let's say, through the Turkish - - - (uhm) border. But not through the regime.
150	R: Okay. Well, if - anything still comes to your mind on that, just like – // exactly.
151	P5: // Yeah, I will let you know.
152	R: But I - - think you already said it before. I just wanted to follow up on that (uhm) because I also have this very beautiful quote. You mentioned that there was a representative from the UN before and I think you couldn't really connect it. Let's see if this one is maybe the one that you meant.

153	P5: Because it stopped maybe. After few days, they, because I remember, I'm not sure if it's official or not official, but I remember that after a few days he said, (.) I can't remember the name, but (uhm) he said that we have failed! //
154	R: // Exactly, exactly. I think I –//
155	P5: // We have failed to respond to the people.
156	R: Okay, so I think I have this quote with me, and I wanted to ask you (.) first of all about what you think about it generally, maybe even remembering the situation when he posted it. (.) And second, what you think about it from today, like six months after. So, Martin Griffiths is the name, he's the // - - -
157	P5: OK, I can't remember.
158	R: [He's the] coordinator for humanitarian action or affairs, and he visited Bab Al-Hawa, I think, he visited the border region.
159	P5: Turkey. Yes.
160	R: Also the–; yeah. Basically he visited the border between Turkey and and Syria. So I think he went inside for, like, a bit at least // on - the Sunday.
161	P5: They can [enter Syria]. They can, yes. [[[for non-UN foreign nationals, permits to enter Syria are typically not granted; yet, also UN representatives' field visits have been rare]]]
162	R: So the earthquake was on Monday and then six days later he visited. And he posted this, I'll read it out to you. (Uhm) posted–; he tweeted, he tweeted this
163	P5: OK. Yeah, yeah.
164	R: (Reading Martin Griffiths' tweet aloud): "I'm at the Türkiye-Syria border today. We have so far failed the people in Northwest Syria. They rightly feel abandoned, looking for international help that hasn't arrived. My duty and our obligation is to correct this failure as we as fast as we can. That's my focus now." (.) That's the tweet that he posted one week after the earthquake.
165	P5: Okay, that's good thing to post, but I don't–; I'm not sure if he has managed to correct that or not that; I doubt [it]. (…) I doubt [it], because even, I think, even him, who has moved as a human in front of such a catastrophe [that] happened to the people, that he still, I don't think, he still has the power to change the decisions // when it comes to government decisions?
166	R: You think he is acting as an individual then, and not as a representative of the of the UN?
167	P5: Yeah. (.) Yes (with y long "y", highlighting the thought process of whether to agree or not), somehow.
168	R: Okay?
169	P5: But I don't think he has the power, the– enough power to change.
170	R: Okay? Anything else that comes to your mind?
171	P5: Because the–; you see the results until now. Mm (negating).
172	R: Nothing changed?
173	P5: Not even, not even through Turkey, they couldn't–. They have their offices inside Turkey, and they have their offices inside Damascus. And they didn't - - (uhm) have the power to change decisions there, not even through Turkey they managed to enter any heavy vehicles. (.) They needed that. But no. The Civil Defence were the only actors for rescue at that time (.) inside Syria. Whereas inside Turkey, they have had - - other international teams coming from all over the world. (…)
174	R: Okay. (.) Did you, like, I mean, did you see any other changes in the way in which the UN engaged in northwest Syria after the earthquake? Anything that changed since then? (…)
175	P5: I don't think so. From my point of view, I couldn't–; I couldn't see it.

176	R: So I've heard and read that they increased the number of visits to Northwest Syria. (.) I don't know if you - - heard about this or have any– //.
177	P5: // Not really, no.
178	R: Okay. And I heard that they // increased the funds. //
179	P5: What, visits for monitoring and so? (.) They increased the fund. Absolutely. (.) (Uhm) They increased the funds, yes. But, how these funds are (uhm) assisting the people, this is the way they should (uhm); they should get it (.), care more about. For example, the - need is changed; the - people have moved; there is a lot of (.)–; inside Syria, there is a lot of people who have moved to [one] place and another and the distribution of service[s] there and the response is not fair. (…) There is a lot of people who [] went back to Syria from Turkey and they are not now able to go back. This is not an issue, but the issue is, they–, most of them, they have no papers.
180	R: Okay?
181	P5: And they have no registrations and they have no, let's say, authority. They cannot go back to the Syrian regime to obtain any legal papers, and (uhm) (.) these are the needs that–; the real needs now. The needs have changed. (.)
182	R: Why did they go back to Syria? (.) Would you - - mind expanding on that?
183	P5: A lot of them–; they open–; there is a lot of people in the–; because, you know, in - the - (.) the north of Turkey and - especially where the earthquake happened, (.) there's a lot of Syrians [who] are based there. There are a lot of Syrians who lost their houses and rather than going to the North, Istanbul, Ankara and other places, rent – place[s] or find a place which went very, very high (uhm) cost; it was very costly at that time; it was very expensive; they would go back to Syria to stay at some–, and the Turkish people, they opened the borders for people who want[] to go back to Syria. They went. (.) They would find somewhere to stay at relatives, friends or even, I don't know, (uhm) or rent somewhere maybe cheaper (.) and some of [those] people returned to Turkey [again by now] and a lot of them did not. (.)
184	R: Okay. So you think that there is a need that is unaddressed at present. And as - - far as I'm getting you correctly, you see a role for the UN to intervene there as well? (…)
185	P5: Yes. (.)
186	R: And they are not? (…)
187	P5: Not that I have heard of.
188	R: Okay. Anything else that comes to your mind? This is a very important, I think, very interesting point // I've not heard about this before.
189	P5: // I think the needs they should be–; I worry about the facilitating their needs if they have their own relations with the Syrian regime, they [the UN] should have–; they should find a way to for only helping the people to have their legal papers done. (.) (Uhm) The HLP [[[housing, land and property rights]]], the (uhm) (.) the housing and properties and land, there is a lot of people who have (uhm) (.)–; facing those difficulties. They have houses here and there and they cannot (uhm) obtain–; or they cannot, visit [[[access]]] the legal (uhm) papers. Some of their–; (uhm) they have–; there have been violations from different parties. Some from the Turkish authorities like Afrin and so have taken the (uhm) properties of other people and kick them out and the same happened with the Syrian regime and there is a lot of people in the northwest, they have houses in Aleppo or in Damascus that they cannot reach, and they cannot access, they cannot benefit from and they cannot, sometimes, even (uhm) prove that it's their own properties. I think, (uhm) efforts in the coming phase–; [relevant actors] [[[unclear if UN specifically/ as well or in general]]] should pay more attention to these needs, to these rights.
190	R: Okay. What - do you think–? Do you have any thoughts about the cross-border resolution issue?
191	P5: The cross-border resolution, (uhm) because, you know, when–; at the recent time that I've been moving and not following up very much with the news and because–; and the last thing that [I heard is], Russia has succeeded in not extending the (uhm) (.) law, the resolution. And as I know from my team on the ground

	there - is some borders [at which] it's now difficult, more difficult now to pass (uhm) goods and things from the - - borders. And I'm not sure now if it's absolutely closed or not and what's the status right now. I'm not really sure.
192	R: Fair enough. Fair enough.
193	P5: But (.) yani [[[what I mean is]]], this will add more challenges on our work and on the people inside Syria. Because this is (.), again, the Syrian regime will - block any (uhm) (.) support to the opposition area (.) and this is expected. And if Turkey borders is closed (.). I don't know how it will happen [[[I don't know what will happen]]]. People will still manage to pass things here and there, but still, it will be more difficult, more expensive, more costly for them.
194	R: Okay. Maybe we can also even take this point in the back of our minds. I'm as–; of course you've not been involved so super deep now in this - - recent weeks (uhm) if you have any additional thoughts, maybe I'll just ask you next week, in like a short message and you can - - think about it with me together. It's not, it's not–; I was just, like, thinking about it and asking you.
195	P5: Okay.
196	R: (Uhm) I have two more questions and (uhm) //
197	P5: Tell me.
198	R: The first one being now completely different from what we discussed so far with the earthquake connection directly: (Uhm) What did you think about the UN and their role and intervention in northwest Syria before the earthquake? (.)
199	P5: Before the earthquake, it was (uhm), it was - - good. And if they just–; it was good and (.) if they add just (.) more flexibility and less (.) constraints to the implementation, it would be much better. If they can use–; if they are really, let's say, honest with their (.) - - , let's say, (uhm) what they say (…)–. I can't find the word.
200	R: Agenda? (.) Goals? // Objectives?
201	P5: // If they're honest with their goals, let's say, to help the people, to assist the people in–; during–; in crisis areas and defending the human rights and so on, so they [[[the UN]]] - can use the–; they can use their relation and communication to put more pressure on the other parties, like the Syrian regime or Turkey and other countries, and advocate more towards the rights of the (.) Syrian people.
202	R: [[[brief interruption]]]. But what - I'm hearing there is that you, you're - saying maybe these goals are necessarily what (uhm) (.) they are, like, that they're not really transparent and honest about their goals?
203	P5: (with a high voice and pace) Some–; You don't feel, like, okay, if you are with the human rights and you are against the violation that's happening in the Northwest and the world and the people who are (uhm) (.) affected to the bombardment or to the–; or not having all these rights, but you go at the same time and open your offices and make–; and maintain your relationships with the (uhm) with the (searching for the word), what is it? Why can't I hear my own words today? (mutual smiling, laughing). With the - - party, who is (uhm) (.) - - - - doing those violations? (…) What does that mean?! (…). So, I don't know. But as I said, it's essential to keep (.) - - those channels [[[accessible through the UN]]]. It's essential to use those channels for us and to use the events and the international platforms and forums that they [[[the UN]]] are (.) - - creating to let their voices reach all over. (…)
204	R: Yeah. (.) You said, so basically, you're saying that in comparison to the earthquake situation the UN did a, - – ; was - good before, (uhm) but would you - - still be able to give me an example or a couple of examples of what exactly they did that you think was good before the earthquake? (…)
205	P5: Okay, there are programmes in (.), let's say, the - funds and programmes in supporting the – (uhm) - - the education inside the crisis areas, to support for (uhm) child protection and gender–; supporting gender protection, GBV and–; they have a lot of problems. The same as other (uhm) donors, and (.) - in terms of advocacy, of course they have assisted the Syrian people to let their voices reach [[[be heard internationally]]] and their needs reach and–. So (.), that was good and (.)–; I lost it.

206	R: Okay, with programming, you mean, (uhm) I mean, with programming, you mean funding or you mean other things as well?
207	P5: Funding. All projects and the funding, whether it was supporting the initiatives and the civil society inside those areas.
208	R: Yeah. And you mean funding and anything else like the, I think, you briefly mentioned something around coordination, but I don't want to push you into that if you don't meant to say that.
209	P5: Yes, when we are working on advocacy, we (.)–; or anyone who's working on advocacy, we have to use the channels of the UN. We have to use the (uhm) events they are (.) holding all over the year and it's - really helpful and they are facilitating those channels for us.
210	R: Okay. And with advocacy, you mean specifically for your area of work or more general?
211	P5: More general, whether it was for (uhm) any civil society, any humanitarian needs, or (.) - any other rights.
212	R: Okay. (.) Anything else that you can think of (.) before the earthquake that the UN did good, or maybe also in terms of behaviour, goals, whatever? (Uhm) just to close that point as well. (.)
213	P5: (Uhm) (.) I think [[[in our area of work]]], especially that terms, or those, the gender-based issues, it was not that familiar in our society before that [[[before the beginning of the Syrian conflict and the arrival of the UN/ the start of their interventions]]] and they have played a good role in - - (.) defending the - women's rights and all other (uhm), I don't like to use that word, (uhm) (…), bad or any other (searching for a good term) (.), I don't like to use volatile, but // any time that any groups of people who are not reading their rights.
214	R: You mean vulnerable?
215	P5: Vulnerable, but I don't like to use it. // I'm trying to find another word, // I don't like this word.
216	R: // Disadvantaged, maybe // socially disadvantaged?
217	P5: Maybe. Yes, yes. So, they [[[the UN]]] have played [a] good role in - making those (uhm) [[[feminist/ women rights-centric]]] perspectives familiar to the society there [[[in Northwest Syria]]] and in strengthening the civil society work because before [the] war, before the revolution and war inside Syria, we don't–; we didn't have any NGO's. We didn't have any civil society actors. It was not allowed; it was always forbidden. And we didn't have any other parties inside Syria. So the civil society work was not there until the war and they [[[the UN]]] - - played a good role in - - bringing those definitions and (uhm) - this understanding to the people and the importance of the civil work [] to the society.
218	R: So you're describing actually a lot of very positive effects that the UN brought to the context. (.) //
219	P5: Yes.
220	R: And now after the earthquake there were negative things coming up on top of that?
221	P5: The response was negative // in my point of view.
222	R: Okay.
223	P5: The response towards the–, to the earthquake was not (.) reaching to the (.) least expectations, let's say.
224	R: And now (smiling) I have a very small additional question before I give you my last one //
225	P5: // (Smiling) Way, way. Get me.
226	R: Just - because it's so, you're now describing the whole, kind of, bandwidth for me, the whole kind of spectrum of opinions and things about the UN. If you would summarise your opinion (.) of the UN (.) in maybe one or two sentences across all of this, like before, during and after the earthquake today, what–; how do you think about the UN as of now? (…)
227	P5: It's confusing (pronounced with a touch of frustration while mutually smiling, laughing) (.). Because, as I mentioned, it's not [] transparent when you are - - - - supporting, we are (.) (uhm) supporting the (.) NGOs and the localization and the INGOs and still you are, still, at the same time (uhm) (.) not (searching for a

	word) (uhm), you don't have faith in - them after those many years and (.) there is no transparency [that] I can see. Sometimes–; it is confusing for me. Sometimes you (imitating to speak from the perspective of the UN): “Come on” [[[as in agreeing to something we would actually hesitate to]]], and we say: “No. Our vision is to da, da, da ,da” and then [[[reflecting of the results of working with the UN; ‘you’ herein referring to the participant/ the own organization]]] you come at the same time and see those agendas [[[perceived to be followed by the UN]]] working and you [[[referring to the participant/ the own organization/ work]]] are not really helping. (Imitating to confront the UN in response): “Okay, you [the UN] are - - giving funds to support the people [] inside the Northwest [of] Syria and, at the same time, you go and you are supporting (.) the Syrian regime, who is the -reason for this war, the other party (laughing with a clear touch of frustration and questioning the justification for this). How come? (.) For me myself, I - find it's - (.) (uhm) not [] transparent, and this is absolutely (.) not considerable. (.) I don't know. (Uhm) the only - - - let's say, reason for that would be different agendas.
228	R: Okay. So you don't trust that they have the right agenda // for your context?
229	P5: M-m (negating; agreeing with statement)
230	R: Okay. They follow their own agenda as far as I understand from you?
231	P5: Of course.
232	R: Okay. (.) Last question (smiling). I'm not saying it's the easiest one, but I - - - like it, because, (.) yeah (.)–
233	P5: Okay.
234	R: What, in your words: what would the UN need to do in the future to remedy the past? (Reacting to puzzled face) You know, remedy is like ‘to make good for’.
235	P5: Okay. (…) In another word, maybe, wishes or recommendations? (.) // Wishes, let me say wishes. // I wish.
236	R: // Somehow, yes, but // it's really hard. It's really, very–// All of the problems that they [[[the UN]]] created or everything that you - think they didn't really perform well in in the past, whatever that means. What does the UN do to not make the same mistakes again as in the past?
237	P5: // Okay //
238	R: // Yeah. So, yes, let’s say it's wishes. //
239	P5: // Yes, I really–; wish for them (.) to consider the new needs on the ground (.) and (uhm) be more realistic towards the–; and have trust in the local Syrian organizations. (Uhm) (…) To support them in the right way, to support the real need on the for the people, as I see it, as I said, like, (imitating to speak to the UN): “You have to rather than following or restrict them [[[local NGOs]]] or frame them in - different projects they want [] to do.”
240	R: Okay, interesting. So, one last follow-up, if you allow me?
241	P5: Hmm (nodding)
242	R: So you–; does that mean that you don't think that they [[[the UN]]] trust entirely the Syrian organizations and that they, (uhm), yeah? Maybe just that? (.)
243	P5: Not really. Not really. They do–; they had–; I - - have attended many–; but that was for (thinking of something concrete)–; you know. Okay, they - , like, the - , what they say, the– (…). In Arabic we say “model [[[follow]]] the - trend”.
244	R: Okay?
245	P5: The trend now is - the localization and the support [that]; at the same time they–; most of the calls [[[for project funding application by the UN]]] when they open they need the main applicant to be, for example, based in da da or to have–. They put that (uhm) restriction and conditions; terms and conditions, so okay (imitating to speak to the UN): “You are saying you want–; you are supporting the localization, okay, (smiling with a clear touch of frustration and disbelieve) go, really support them. Don't put so many (uhm) (.) terms and conditions that they cannot comply [with].” (…)

246	R: Okay, so basically you're saying that there is a–; that there is a difference in treatment between the UN and Syrian organizations and others? Yeah?
247	P5: Yeah, of course!? They (.)–. Mainly the - main applicant [[[for a funding application]]] has to be an INGO!
248	R: Okay.
249	P5: And they [[[INGOs]]] are not really the real implementers on the ground, so, what's happening? (Imitating to speak to the UN): “Okay, you are having workshops and workshops on localization” and [say]: “We want to - support the localization and enhance the localization”, at the same time, “when you - - - - open a call, you ask for you–; give it to (.) an INGO to - - be the–; to take the lead?!”.
250	R: And you think this is not right? Not appropriate?
251	P5: Not appropriate, but (.) the good thing in the recent calls, what - I see; (.) but not necessarily–; not the UN calls (reflecting that point the articipant wanted to make doesn’t fit actually).
252	R: (smiling, laughing)
253	P5: They [[[other entities’ calls for project applications]]] have restricted a percentage, like, okay, fine, the main applicant, all the leads, should be an INGO, but the lead cannot have more than 40 percent of the grant. (.) (joint smiling; laughing) That's - nice! Because usually they are taking 60 to 70 percent (.) //
254	R: // That's, yeah–. Okay
255	P5: // Of the grants and the real implementers, they [[[INGOs]]] would give them [[[real implementers/ local NGOs]]], like 40 percent.
256	R: Interesting. That, // I mean, that brings us back to the funding part.
257	P5: // Funding, yes.
258	R: [[[Funding]]] Which also is part of treatment, right? But do you - - also think that there is a difference in terms of the way of treatment and behaviour towards the Syrian people and Syrian organizations and the trust that they have for you and your– or the - kind of organizations that you - work with? (Uhm) (…) I'm just following up because I find it really interesting. You're the first person who's telling me this. (…)
259	P5: (Interrupted for a moment) Yeah, (…) just repeat the last, because I wanted to say something and then– //
260	R: // Like is there - - a difference in in the way they behave towards Syrian organizations that you notice in comparison to others?
261	P5: (Uhm) (…), sometimes, yes. //
262	R: Other than just the funding I mean.
263	P5: Yes, it's a very small example, the–; Not all– (.); no, no. (.) Yes, sometimes it is because they, let's say, (uhm) a Syrian NGO, they know what a [[[local]]] NGO has facing for the paperwork and having paper licences and the very limited fund they [[[local NGOs]]] have all the time. For example, they cannot do an audit every year, or they don't have at least three years audit from now, because [of] different licencing, they–; and this this is suffering for them in Turkey (.); whether in Turkey or other - - - neighbouring countries. So, (imitating to speak to a donor) and you come and you put that condition, you can (imitating to speak from the perspective of the donor): “We cannot fund you unless you have [] three year audit - report[s], three annual audit[s]” and (.) (imitating to reply to the donor): “Okay, fine. (.) You want to support them [[[local NGOs]]]. Let them at least make it a one year. And see how the performance [is] going. Yeah, or (.) - you can, let's say, (.) (uhm) because we as (.) - an NGO, we always have difficulty in - securing a core fund for us, if you–; we don't have equal fund, how can we make audits every year?!” (.) So they [[[donors who put such requirements]]] should be more consider[ate] about that.”.
264	R: (Smiling) So, but who does that mean you think that they have a justification for why they – they’re not (uhm) treating (.) Syrian NGOs the same way as INGOs, and //what does this do to your opinion?

265	P5: // Yeah, they still– // they don't trust that we have the ability and the capacity to manage as a team–; as a main–; as the leader.
266	R: So it's a capacity (.) thing?
267	P5: Yeah.
268	R: It's operational, basically, it's not necessarily anything else? How - does this shape your opinion about the UN if you feel like you're being treated like that? (.) It's the last - follow up question to my question, I really find it exciting that you're mentioning this point.
269	P5: Again, please?
270	R: How - does this - - affect your opinion about the UN as well? If you feel that you're being treated always like this and that the UN is not able to change? (.) Apparently? (Uhm) Or is it just like the standard and 'khalas' [[[end of the story]]]?
271	P5: It's the same feeling. This is what we have and (…) we - need them. (…)
272	R: You need them, but they're not perfect?
273	P5: We need–. No one is perfect. Everyone has his own agenda. If you are - - talking about governments (…).
274	R: And the UN. (.)
275	P5: Yes. (…)
276	R: 'Shukran gazilan' [[[thank you very much]]] (smiling). (.)
277	P5: You're welcome (smiling). (.)
278	R: I'm going to stop the recording in a second, unless you have anything else that you really want to tell me now.
279	P5: I think I'm fine.
280	R: Good. Me too (joint laughing).

Transcript P6 (1)

1	R: Okay. Then I would, say let's start by something rather easy. I'–. Maybe you–, (.) we we start by you telling me a bit more about yourself. Who are you? Who am I talking to?
2	P6: Okay, so my name is [[Participant]]. I – work– . I studied general medicine and I graduated [[before the revolution]]. Then I started [] a postgraduation specialty [but] due to the war in Syria (uhm), I had to leave my country because, obviously, my political opinion was against the government. So I travelled to –, I'm living right now as a refugee in Turkey, where I work since 2014 in [the] NGO sector[], in humanitarian basically. So, I worked with the local NGOs, with the also INGO and with giving them either full-time employment or consultancies. My - main - positions, the positions that I- - took [] [were] mainly related to [the] health sector, but (uhm), for example, I used to be also the health [] programmes manager for one multi-sector organization and then with [an INGO as well]. I used to be a programmes advisor for - - Turkey and Northwest Syria, and then I used to be also programmes quality advisor. So I got advisory role[s], yeah. And as I informed you, [[researcher]], I'm [[continuously working on my expertise, which also includes advanced studies an area related to global health management and academic connections to Europe]]. (.)
3	R: And [[…]] you've also been working–, how many hours [] have you actually been working with [[one of the local/diaspora organizations founded by Syrian doctors active in Northwest Syria]] and since when?
4	P6: [] 1.5 year[s] [ago] I started working with [[my organization]] [[]]. I was [[in the peak times working the same amount as a typical full-time position in Europe, plus the weekends, while being professionally involved in other organizations and educational activities meanwhile]]. [[…]]
5	R: [So], more than a full-time position effectively?
6	P6: Yes, yes, because. Because there are a lot of things to be done, (uhm) really, [[researcher]], and everything is connected to each other, it is linked to each other and you – cannot–. [[…]]
7	R: Do you - - think this maybe already goes a bit into my main topic? Do you think that - amount of hours was also connected to the unexpected (.) disaster response needs that were caused by the by the earthquake? (.) Or is that unrelated? (.)
8	P6: It was related in the first three months after the - earthquake. Here, I'm speaking about February, March, April. But after that, no, it's related to our organization. [[…]] In the first 2-3 months we used to work a lot because we need[ed] to respond to - the earthquake in several months.
9	R: That basically means the focus of your work was entirely directed, I guess, towards northwest Syria?
10	P6: (nodding)
11	R: And the team was working around the clock basically there as well?
12	P6: Yes
13	R: So it's not just you then who worked so many hours between February, March, April, I guess? It's the whole team then, is it?
14	P6: It's everyone. It's almost everyone [[researcher]] because this is something you need–. In the first 72 hours, we were not really–. (.) (Uhm), I, we took three days to gather ourselves because we were in the streets. (.) Normally, yani [[I mean]]–, the first responders became - - victims after the earthquake. But after 72 hours, for example, I - managed to take my - family away from - Gaziantep. So we - - work[ed] a lot, so everyone, even the field team, because there are a lot of people they are in the streets, people under the rubble, people under–. (.) So we tried our best, really, we were receiving a lot of shipments (…), we were also doing a lot of mobile clinics' consultations, so we had to work a lot.
15	R: (.) Thank you for sharing that. (.) Okay. It must have been a really, really hard period and, like, thinking - - from today, it's been six months now, basically, right? So, about six months since the earthquake, have things calmed down again? Are things normalising? (…)
16	P6: Speaking about northwest of Syria, yes.
17	R: Yes, particularly, yes. But if there is, again, if there is anything that you would want to share, even if it's not directly related, you can. (.)

18	P6: Because the earthquake is always southern Turkey and Northwest Syria. (Uhm), for Northwest Syria, I think yes, we are normalised again. For Turkey, it is not the same situation because there are a lot of reconstruction works [] going on. But for Syria, yes, we are normalised again. I think we are now in the–, we started the second phase, which is the - midterm response, but I'm not sure that anyone is aware about it. Because (uhm) (.) everyone was focusing on the emergency response, but nobody really is investing time or efforts for the midterm, so the midterm response it came like our–; other routine activities as [] humanitarians from Northwest [] Syria. And this is one of the problems, because the midterm, and I hope, not also the long term, you can see it only on the papers, but you cannot see it on the - - field.
19	R: Okay. What do you mean by that? Like, what do you - - - mean by what you don't see (uhm) in the field?
20	P6: I mean, if you will go to any organization, you will see that they have, like, we have three phases. We have the, (uhm) - response phases, but all of us, we have done great in in the emergency. Of course, there are a lot of lessons learned to be taken out from that even for the UN. But for the midterm you cannot see that. For the midterm you cannot see that. You will see it on the paper, but when you will ask the organization: “Okay, good. You are speaking about reconstructing the hospital or rehabilitating the hospital. Have you done it?”, “No.”. “You are speaking about reinforcing your infrastructure by a lot of medical equipment, you are doing that?”. “No.”. So? And that's for the several reasons actually, [[researcher]]. But in general we are not that much fully oriented, neither from the UN nor from the local NGOs or INGOs about the importance of the midterm response.
21	R: Okay. (.) Yeah. (.) (Uhm) let's go - - maybe first back into the first 72 to let's say 100 hours. I think that's basically the - immediate - - period, right?
22	P6: Yes. (.)
23	R: I mean you already said that you had your 72 hours. Of course you were also yourself affected, you had your family around, et cetera. If we look now to Northwest Syria specifically for the first 72 to 100 hours. What do you - - - remember from a professional or even personal memory? What happened in the first 72 to 100 hours in Northwest Syria? (..)
24	P6: The (first) 72 hours we were taught, really, what we have learned from the entire conflict. As [] Syrians. Because what happened really, it was extraordinary from our local efforts. We were - - isolated completely. Completely isolated. (…) The entire–, (uhm), our only access actually was toward Turkey. But Turkey, the entire southern governorates were damaged. No roads. And I mean, the gates are closed. And (uhm), the UN is really–, they did not respond that much fast. So we were completely (uhm), having our own efforts. And it showed really–, and I think it was helpful to us, because this is something that we have - - seen, the number of casualties in northwest Syria in relation to the number of the people, it was less than Turkey. It's not because we are, really–, we have better buildings. We have worse buildings than Turkey. But we have–, we have [a] simple[r] system than Turkey. Because in Turkey I've seen [with] my [own] eyes people [who] were waiting [for] the government to come, the AFAD [[[Türkiye’s disaster response agency]]] or whatever. But from the–, after five minutes of stopping the earthquake [[[five minutes after the first earthquake stopped shaking the ground]]], people started to dig for the people in Jenderis and in other [places]. Because they know that there is no government [that] is going to come and help them. The Civil Defence [[[the White Helmets]]] because they - - are not linked to any government, they - responded in the first half an hour and this helped us a lot.
25	R: The Civil Defence is the While Helmets, right?
26	P6: The White Helmets, yes. (.) And this helped us a lot, [[researcher]], and - - (uhm), we managed to reduce the number of casualties because of that. Because of that, [it was the] people response rather than to be [the] NGOs response or - UN response. Our local NGOs they started to respond in the first–, (.) after 24 hours. Because the centrality of our local NGOs, where the decision-making [is] coming from Gaziantep, and the people in Gaziantep were in the streets. So we [[[the part of the NGOs based in Gaziantep]]], - - took at least 24 hours to start doing something. So the people and the Civil Defence, really, they played a huge role in the first 24 hours. (…) And (uhm) after that, until one week maybe, but in the first 72 hours we [[[(local) NGOs active in Northwest Syria]]] were completely alone. (.) The first convoy [of the] UN, I guess it - came after ten days, seven days, ten days, something like that. Which was - - not understandable at all. And which –. But what happened, [[researcher]], [is] that after the 72 hours, we started to have [a] lack of our supplies. Because again, one of the mistakes of the (sarcastic) ‘great’ UN [was] that they did not–, they were (.)–

27	R: (laughing) You know that sarcasm is very difficult to be transcribed, right?
28	P6: (laughing) Ah, yes.
29	R: I will try. Okay, sorry. Go ahead. The 'great' UN –
30	P6: (Uhm), okay. One of the - - - mistakes–, I cannot say mistakes, but malpractices of [the] UN–, this is the 4.+ million population area and we are in the middle of the conflict. But still we notice[d] that our suppl[ies] [] that [] existed in the local NGOs supplied by the UN agencies is only enough for one week. (…) Yes -. It was one–; it was enough for one week. After one week, we started to say to ourselves, we can survive for one more week as - - - health centres, but not more than that. So let's say two weeks. (…) And it was –, and - this is one of the lessons learned, I was always raising my voice like: "look, guys, we need more supplies to be - - based in - - Northwest Syria. Why you are - - - waiting for something to happen and then you will send for us those supplies? I know that the scenario that, what happened (.), I hope that it will not be repeated, but at least [we need to see that now] it happened. Where two big earthquakes attacked the south of Turkey and it cut our arteries toward the only country that we have an open border toward. So at least (.) ensure that we have good stocks in - our - our warehouses. So, for any kind of emergencies, yani [[[what I mean to say is]]], God forbid it, but if there is any political or something change here in Turkey, the same scenario, we will have it [[[the additional supplies]]]. So this is one of the–, really, the - situation that happened in the - - - week - - at least. (…)
31	R: This also sounds like at least what - - seems to be very close to your direct - memory. (.) Thank you for sharing that. You mentioned - - the White Helmets, or the Civil Defence, and individuals are basically members of communities' self-health - mechanisms as maybe the most crucial contributors. And a couple of, let's say, a couple of failures of the – UN-led system in the immediate response. (Uhm) Is there anything else when you think directly about the UN and the UN's performance in the first 100 hours that comes to your mind? (.) Or is it basically the kind of lack of – (.); so what you mentioned already is there is the lack of supplies located in inside Northwest Syria basically as a kind of disaster preparedness (uhm) issue. And that the convoys only came days after the earthquake. So these points are, I think, what you mentioned, right? Is there anything else? (…)
32	P6: [[Researcher]], I will, (uhm)–; I used to raise a lot in my voice against [the] UN and a lot. But during the earthquake I [had] a lot of things really that I raised in front of them and still I'm raising [them]. Because it needs to be so. For example, there is their - - emergency - interference into the big tragedy that happened. Usually it is–; it goes under UNDARC or (…) SARGA (.), I guess, it was called something like that. But because of the political situation, the General Secretary or his deputy, they did not deploy any–, you know–, of their team or any UN SARGA [[[probably referring to UNDRR, the lead UN agency for the coordination of disaster risk reduction]]] team. So we were left completely [alone] to search and to rescue our - - friends and then, maybe [in the] first week or second week he met our president?! Bashar al-Assad in Damascus. And then, at that moment, they [[[the formal Government of Syria]]] – gave, like, them a permission to go inside. But at that moment they did not go inside, but they only sent supplies because the rescue operations were - finished. So this is one of the points and this is the decision coming from the General Secretary, or the deputy. So why it was delayed, I cannot understand. For example, if there will be any earthquake or any natural disaster that [] will happen in one country where the government really cannot, is not - - - effective, the UN will be able to deploy their teams in the first 48 hours (.) even without taking any permission from anyone. But in that case, they took the permission and they waited. And - - it's something I could - - not understand. So first, so this is one of the problems. Another problem that - I can mention [is] the coordination itself. The humanitarian system [after] the reform of 2005 depends solely upon the cluster mechanism. (.) All - - the clusters they are in the hub of Gaziantep. When Gaziantep was affected, so the UN left the city and they went to something, to Ankara, whatever, (.) which I understand. They - to secure their - families, their friends, whatever. But it left us, at least for one week, without a coordination mechanism where we all as [] local NGOs, we - rely on the coordination mechanism (.). And this is one of the problems really where the UN could not help us at the golden hours that we need help in, [[researcher]]. So this something - - - also we can–, I can add. Another thing I can - - add [is] the UN system itself, the humanitarian system, it is really (.) very slow. The decision-making process in the UN itself, and I'm speaking right now about the UN, is much slower than [at] the INGOs, and it's much slower than the local NGOs. (.) Right? For that reason, you can see that a lot of shipments came from the international NGOs until we find the shipment coming from the UN. (Uhm) similar for the for the activities, for the mobile clinics, for the rescue teams, for - - everything. Because it goes into a kind of –, a decision-making process which is very, very

	long and [] it ends in one of the regional offices, either in Cairo or in Copenhagen, for example, in WHO, where, really, you need at least for one decision, you need–, you see at least 10 people or 12 people to be involved in that decision. And, really, and at the - - crisis, like what happened in - the earthquake (.), (uhm) (.) time was - - - a huge factor (.). Time was a huge factor(.). so this is another - point that I mentioned. Programme-wise (…) again, - one of the main limitations of - the UN [is] that this is a kind of a political body. If we say yes, if we say you now, this is a political body. The General Assembly, this is - - the member states. And for [] areas, and - I think this is, I do not know, but this is what I believe (.), for [] areas that it is out of the control of the government, they do not see it (.). Or they see it, but they try to avoid it (.). Because they do not want to have, like, problems with the member state, with the Damascus government. So always it [[[the UN system]]] gives us that always everything is linked to Damascus. Everything is linked to Damascus. What happened, for example, in February [[[after the earthquake]]]? Okay, good. They [[[the UN]]] send a lot of shipments after huge criticism against them in the first week or 15 days. Even Guterres came to the area. But they started to send shipments, but what other [[[else]]] than shipments? (As if speaking to the UN) "You are our last resort in many things. You are our last resort in in health. You are our last resort in WASH as a UNICEF. You are our last resort in - - - camp management. You are–. (.) What are your programmes [[[in response to the earthquake]]]? And here (.) they just start, because at that moment–, yeah (.), after we they finished on their shipments, whatever, now we are in March [[[in Participant's story telling]]] and they said clearly, they sat together. I - was not in that meeting, I do not know if it happened at all, but at least I know that they are thinking in that process and they said it in their meetings (reproducing what was reportedly said by the UN): "Look guys, we have in June this renewal of the resolution for the cross-border. So we are not able to have, like, [] new programmes for you until we know that the June resolution is going to [go through]. Because if that resolution will not be renewed, we cannot work in Syria.". (.). And they started to hand over their - - - programmes toward the international NGOs. For example, the EWARN for [the] health sector, it was under WHO. Now it is under World Vision. You see how the political; it– (stressing this point with evident frustration) everything is political, really, and everything is political. So it was - - - - a disaster (.). Another point in the coordination, [[researcher]]. Suddenly, the entire world put again Syria in– (…), so this is about coordination, but in another way. So, I spoke about the importance of the coordination and the level of the activity, but look [at] also the problems of the coordination that [the] UN is leading. (…) Suddenly, [[researcher]] the entire world focused on Syria again. After being the trend [[[the centre]]] of the humanitarian context for many years, we became number 7, number 8 after [the] Yemeni, Ukrainian [wars], I do not know how many countries are there. But suddenly, after these two earthquakes [in] Turkey and Syria, we became–, that region became again trend. [[Researcher]]! You cannot imagine the amount of assistance that the world showed to us. Because, really, they showed what is the essence of humanity, which we thank all of them about it, really. And this is one of the moments that really, I always tell my friends, when they say: "nobody is working to [support] us. Nobody."; "No, no. This is one of the moments that we see how the world is appreciating– (.) how - - the world is trying to help other people that they are really in a big crisis.". (.)What happened, because there is no government, we do not have good governance in inside (Northwest) Syria. And the UN, the coordination rule is not - - active, [there is] a lot of overlapping, a lot of a lot of supplies that really is not needed, a lot of –(.), and this is a waste of money. Yani [[[what I mean to say is]]], I mean, guys, why we are not speaking to the German Government, to the French Government, to the Romanian government, to the Greek Government, to any government in the world, telling them: "Please(.), before sending, let us know, and this is the list of - - our needs?". We received items, really, that it is - - not needed, it is expired. (…) It's expired. (.) It is the rule of whom to filter all of that? (.) It is the role of whom? (.) It is either the role of the government, local government or it is the role of the UN. Our government is weak [[[speaking about the "Interim Government"]]]. Almost we do not have [a] government, and another government in - Idlib, it's classified. (.) Nobody is working with it.
33	R: You mean the Salvation Government? (.) Basically HTS?
34	P6: Yes, because it's classified. So we do not work with it. But for the other government, the interim government is almost not existing. Now the UN, what is the role of [the] UN here?
35	R: Okay. I see.
36	P6: Another problem happened (.), which we could not understand really why? - - Why all of that is happening?
37	R: Yeah. Did you? // Did you feel – //

38	P6: // I spoke - - a lot. But yani [[you know]], I'm trying to - explain to you what's going on.
39	R: You're giving me a lot. You know that? (.) Like, I - didn't even want to stop you because it was really valuable already. It's incredible how much - - - is in your brain on that topic. (uhm) (.) Do you think, (.) because you - mentioned two things that I – thought, maybe I have a follow up on a question for you. (.) You mentioned that, (uhm) the UN waited for the approval of (.) Assad for opening additional cross–, like, border crossings, (.) and also for the permission to enter. Do you mean (.) that this (.) slowed down and was not appropriate for the response to the situation (.) because the UN is biased strictly towards the regime in Damascus? Or, (.) do you think it's a general problem that they relate them to member states, or state based, formal sovereign - states, basically in general? So not just - the Assad regime in Syria, but generally. So - a structural problem at the UN?
40	P6: I cannot say that they are biased, although we have some evidence that they were biased, but we cannot say that they are biased. But I think it's structural problem. When Guterres [was] visiting–, (ah), not Guterres (.), what was his name? (.)
41	R: Martin Griffiths?
42	P6: (Ah). Griffiths, yeah. (.) When he [was] visiting Assad and tracking the permission, this is a structural problem. It's not - - –; but of course, there is a bias. There is a bias, but, I do not know if that if that is going to help you in - your research, but it's not related to the earthquake itself, but it's related to the UN itself, (.) and how they - practise in my country. (…) For example, [the] UN is pushing for [the] Whole of Syria mechanism. [The] UN is pushing their - main office for the country, they are in Damascus, where we believe that the Damascus government is really putting huge pressure and making like a lot of influence over them because they are hosting them. I think only the IOM is not there. WFP is working completely from there. (Uhm), and it's affecting it [[[the UN agencies operating with their main offices in Damascus]]] - by - - always pushing through the crossline mechanism, whatever. It's [also] affecting it [[[the UN agencies]]] in another way. Okay, now the question [is] how the Syrian Government is putting influence over the UN? (…) By two - - ways. At least I know the two – ways (..), or no, by three ways. The first way, I mentioned it, [[researcher]], (.) which is the structural problem. Syria, for example, [] is a World Health Assembly member. The Government of Syria's Health Ministry. They are [a] member of the World Health Assembly. But–, so this is the first way. The second way [is] the geographical location of their main offices inside–, for the country, for the affected country, in the - - areas of the government, is affected in any place, because they need to take the - - - permission of - the government and even the system. For example, in the health cluster, next to the coordinator, who will be an expat, you will see next to him, to the right to him, he will be the Minister of Health, or [a] representative of [the] Ministry of Health. So the system itself shows it gives a huge possibility. But [there also is] another way. Let's imagine right now, [[researcher]], you are going–, this is the third way how they [[[the formal Government of Syria]]] are affecting the UN. Let's imagine [[researcher]], right now you are–, you have been selected–, you are working with (…) the WFP, the WHO, UNFPA, UNICEF, whatever and you were selected to go to Damascus. You were [the] manager in line said: "Okay, [[researcher]], you will be our head of mission in Damascus, or country representative in - Damascus and you will go there. Do you know that the regime will not give you [a] visa? [[…]] Not anyone [[from Germany or other countries like Germany]] will [get] a visa.
43	R: Okay.
44	P6: But you–, but let - us imagine that you have a colleague from Bangladesh or from India. They [[[the formal Government of Syria]]] will give [them] visa. There is something in you [[[at the level of individuals]]] and it's called vulnerability of the citizenship. They know that those people coming from certain countries, they are vulnerable in their - - citizenship and they are really vulnerable in the - - UN mechanism itself. They do, they do not prefer to have a - head of missions or like, the management staff in their offices in Damascus, coming from Western countries. But they - would prefer [them] to come either from their alliance countries, Russia, Iran, India, I do not know, or from like poor countries, because they know that those employees, they are–, they take care a lot about their position rather than - about - - confronting the regime, or - trying to - - ensure the policy of the UN going on in the correct way, or whatever. So this is another way. [[…]] So that's the situation [[researcher]]. (.) So that the situation with the - - UN. And this is how they–, how the regime is influencing the UN–, for that reason. If you think that we are fully humanitarian, you are - - wrong and the UN is playing a huge role in really putting us into that, a kind of political war with the regime, about the number of the beneficiaries, about the services, about the shipments coming crossline, cross-

	border, about the - amount of the fund coming out of the 2.3 billion last year, how much the regime should take and how much we should take. And the HNO [[[humanitarian needs overview]]], the HRP [[[humanitarian response plan]]]. You know that (.) last year, we worked without HRP because the regime would not - - approve the HRP? (.)
45	R: The humanitarian response plan?
46	P6: Yeah.
47	R: I didn't know that, no. (.) I didn't know.
48	P6: And the - - UN - - - implemented one year completely without having [an] HRP for the country. Because the regime did not approve the HRP. (…) And the UN is playing that role. They are playing the role, [a] very passive role, really, in that situation. That's it. (...)
49	R: So you mean (.), basically (.), with this account (.), you mean that you have an - - - entity that is supposed to be humanitarian (.), to - lead on the humanitarian action in northwest Syria, (.) however, that is in terms of the decision making entirely under the influence of the Assad government, which, basically (.) is opposing the northwest of Syria. So (.) kind of [this is] giving leeway more to - - the rival, (.) to the - - opposing faction for determining what humanitarian action can be provided and what not.
50	P6: I would agree with the entire sentence without completely.
51	R: Again, okay, not completely, but to a–?
52	P6: To a big, to a significant [degree], yes, yes. Not completely, because still - we have, for example IOM. And IOM, it's - - kind of [a] Western UN agency where always the - Americans and the French will be on the head that. (.) They are always–. They do not have the office in in Damascus and they always try - - object to what the Damascus government is trying to do, or maybe not object but at least to be on the other side of the beneficiaries, but for the other agencies, I, yani [[what I mean to say is]], if they are not collaborating with the regime, at least they are trying their best custom to avoid confronting the regime. By giving a lot of agreements or: “Yes, yes yes to everything”.
53	R: Okay. Do you think this affects the UN's– or (.), let's - put it the other way around. Do you think that this effects how people in northwest Syria view the UN also from a legitimacy point of view?
54	P6: Completely. Completely. (…) Yani [[Look]], [[researcher]] I'm Syrian, right. (.) Now [[[as a Syrian]]], I do not think that the - UN has huge legitimacy in my country. (…) One hundred times we told them: “guys, why you are not going in?”. They went in only for - several visits, occasions after - - - what happened at the earthquake, just to show themselves between the camps. But why you are not in? Why we do not have, like, an office in Azaz, or in Sarmada, or in - - Idlib [[[three larger cities and also the central hubs in NWS for coordinating and operating humanitarian assistance]]]? This is really hampering your - - - work. We want you to be in!”. (.) What is the legitimacy of [the] UN? And by the way, there were a lot of critics, that it makes Martin Griffiths to - - - - apologise, telling: “Look guys we have done (.) some of the mistakes”. But (.) again, it takes me to put [a] huge question here, [[researcher]] (…). I think one of the problems in our entire context is the accountability work. This is the limitation from our side as [] local NGOs. (.) Also the INGOs they have their own issues regarding accountability. But [the] UN itself has a huge (.) huge accountability issue. (…).
55	R: So basically saying, (.) that there is nobody to hold them [[[the UN]]] accountable for what they do? (.)
56	P6: Exactly! (.) Exactly! Yani [[[what I mean is]]], so now, nobody–. (.) Yeah. (.) There is [a] word that always, (.) it - - - makes, like - a good [[[opportunity to]]] escape for - - - everyone in our humanitarian [work]: “Lessons learned”. Okay, but who is accountable to what happened? Who's accountable for delaying the shipments, at least for 10 days or 15 days? Who is accountable for that? How [do] you show your accountability without saying “I apologise” to the beneficiaries? (…).
57	R: Well (…). I - - - have Martin Griffiths' statement here. (Uhm). Do you want - - - (.)–. I would like to read it out again. And just you tell me what you think about it today? And maybe if you remember what you thought when it came out? I mean, he was the only one who really said something at the time, was he? (…)

58	P6: We had to address–, coming from WHO–, we had a lot of head[s] of office, head[s] of UN agencies coming, but I think Martin Griffiths is the only one that his statement was that much circulated publicly, and– (…)
59	R: (…) (Ah). (.) So, what he said was, (uhm) I think this is from the 12th of February, which would be 6 days–, it would be the Sunday after the --- earthquake, after the double–, heavy earthquake. So basically one week - - later, which means after the first 72 hours, right? (.) He said (quoting): “I am at the Turkey, Syria border today. We have so far failed the people in northwest Syria. They rightly feel abandoned, looking for international help that hasn't arrived. My duty and our obligation is to correct this as fast as we can. That's my focus now.”. (…) What do you think about it? Either remembering what you thought about it back then, or what you think about today. (…)
60	P6: (Hmmm). I think at that moment he was - - absorbing the critics coming over the UN. By saying: “Okay, we will do something.” But really I need to (…), like, we need to see what he has done. (.) What he has done?
61	R: You think there was no change since then? (…)
62	P6: Other than the regular routine activities that [the] UN is doing? Nothing I guess. No. (.) I do not believe [so]. No. They increased the - - stocks [[[the supplies stored in warehouses in NWS]]] after we - - - said [so]. They - - sent a lot of shipments inside Syria. (.) They restore[d] their coordination mechanism. (.) But at the end, (speaking as if speaking to the UN): “please tell me, (.) [for] how many out of those people who[se] [] homes were destroyed, you [] created for them new homes? (.) Tell me how many PT [[[physio therapy]]] centres for the people they habitated to - - give–, to have, like, a physical rehabilitation, you have?”. Maybe I cannot see them. Maybe they are there, but I cannot see them. Maybe I do not know. But I really, I - would like, really, to have like - - an open question to Mr. Martin Griffiths (.): “Who is accountable to what happened? (.) And what you have done?”. (…).
63	R: (…) Okay. (…) I will see if I can quote that. (.) Maybe there would be a response at some point? (...) I wish - - (.) but anyways, no, let's not go into speculation now. Thank you for sharing this and already until here. (…) So if you - - - really think about actions, behaviour–, maybe the behaviour of the members of the UN, did you see any changes in the way they behave towards people who are affected? (…) If it's not actions, I mean, is there anything else? Anything else that you feel or that you think there was a change since the earthquake? (…). It doesn't have to be, right?
64	P6: I think - - nothing. (.) Yani [[what I means is]] I do not want to say that they are not doing anything. They are doing their routine - activities. And again, after April or May, starting from May, they started to be paralysed again because of this renewal of the of the cross-border resolution.
65	R: Okay.
66	P6: Really, we (hm)–. I do not want to–, but I can give you, like, an example. (.). We have in [[our organization]] - -, like a partnership with one–, with [[an entity that]] ,for example, [[…]] that really–, they do not care a lot about the resolution itself, because they do not have an office inside Damascus or something. Or their, at least, attitude towards the government of Syria is different from other NGOs, but still they are saying: let us see what will happen for the resolution. So everyone was really–. (.) Before two months of any renewal of the resolution, they [[[UN agencies]]] will be paralysed and, by the way, the regime knows that. The Russians, they know that. And that's why they are renewing only for six months. (…) Because they know that, okay, now six months, it means that two of them [the] UN will be completely out, because they will be paralysed. They do not have [any other options] in their catalogue if they [[[the formal Government of Syria through their allies]]] will stop the resolution, what we [[[the UN]]] will do other than to go into Damascus and try to hand over some of their programmes toward the INGOs? (.)
67	R: Hmmm (taking note)
68	P6: This is creating huge mess, by the way. (…) The structure, the mechanism that they work [in], it doesn't support my area, northwest of Syria. (.) It doesn't see it. //
69	R: So that also, like–. // Sorry, go ahead. I didn't. Want to interrupt you.
70	P6: No, no, no. Please - - go ahead. (.)

71	R: That - like for me– (.), trying to understand, that - means also, even with regards to the cross-border resolution, you gave me three points before how Assad, how the regime controls the UN, right? Now we have a fourth point with the cross-border resolution and the acceptance of - access I think? (.) f you agree? (…) (Uhm)?
72	P6: Yes. (.) Yes, and this was like a political trick. Because the regime came in – July, [on] 10th of July, I guess. Yeah, 10th of July. They said: "Look, guys, we do not need any more [renewals of the] resolution. I [[[Assad]]] give the permission for six months for the all (.)–. For the cross-border there is no need and if one–, if the state member [[[of the UN, which territory is concerned by a resolution]]]–, if the central government in Damascus, is telling that we are giving permission, there is no need for the resolution. We were saying: "Look – guys, [] we want to work under the umbrella of the Security Council and under the UN. Being away [from] that umbrella will put us in the jeopardy and under the mercy of the central [government in] Damascus, and after six months, they will renew it or they will not renew that that permission. (.)So it's the problem. //
73	R: // So you're saying that there is a change since the earthquake, in the way in which the UN conducts its actions in northwest Syria, but it's - not necessarily a positive change? (.) It's that - Damascus is taking more authority of directly intervening, giving permission to cross-border aid? // (.) And the UN is accepting it.
74	P6: Yes. (.) (uhm). I would not link it to - - - the earthquake, by the way. I - –; it's - kind of our - - political dynamics. So it's not linked that much to the earthquake, but I think it's a good trick, a good political trick coming from the regime where the UN should be the main entity to advocate against it, in order to ensure that, okay, what is the mechanism of the cross-border? It secures to us [an] independent, impartial, (.) not biased route of humanitarian aid to the - - people in in in need. This is, by the way, what I said right now, this is the - - - - mission of [the] UN, yes? The UN should advocate against it. But [the] UN is not advocating against it. The UN is not telling that it's - a problem to have–, to - be under the mercy of the central government in Damascus (.) in renewing the permission every six months. (…)
75	R: Okay (taking note). (…)
76	P6: We need [a] better role of the UN saying: "no, we do not want". But what we see is - - that [this] role [is] coming from (.) Western countries, (uhm), governments like the US, Germany, [the] French, but not from the UN.(…)
77	R: Okay. (.) So – basically (.), what you're saying is (.) that the UN, with all of the stuff that they're doing from humanitarian over to development over to - peace negotiations and political stuff, and all of the like–, it's a huge institution, right? It's a huge organization. But what you're saying is that in terms of the humanitarian action, they are failing to actually accomplish their mission in Northwest Syria? (…)
78	P6: Partially failing, yes. (.) And they have a huge–; they are not advocating [for] the needs of the people.
79	R: They're not?
80	P6: No! (.) No! (.) They are not advocating [for] the needs of the people at the level of the big picture. They are advocating [for] the needs of the people at the level of the sector, but not at the level of the big picture. Yani [[You know what?]], you can listen [to] some of [the] WHO or speaking about the importance of primary health care. But what is the biggest picture? The biggest picture [is] humanitarian aid towards Syria [[[at large]]]? It's not about primary health care. Primary Health Care it's a programme for one UN agency in one sector. But what about the big picture? You cannot see advocacy toward it. They are trying to avoid any advocacy because they will say that this is political, and we do not want to be a part of this political negotiations - or political game or whatever. (.) which I understand, but in somehow, it is really affecting [us], because right now, you have two options. One option will put you–, will give you (uhm) (…) humanitarian aid to the entire population of Syria. The entire population of Syria, in a good manner, in a decent and respected [manner], ensuring their [[[aid-dependent people's]]] dignity with impartial, independent [provision of aid]. And another option, at least 4.5 million, as I wouldn't say, also the people in the Northeast (.), they will be - - - [put] under the mercy of the government who is attacking them (.), displacing them (.), (uhm), putting them in the condition[s] that they are [in] right now. (…). Who–? (.). Who will–? (.) Who - needs–? (…). Okay (.), this is– (.); now I'm - putting those two scenarios in - front of Martin Griffiths, or Antonio Guterres. Which scenario will go? (.) Certainly, as a human, he will not go with the second scenario. But as a UN, he cannot advocate toward that. And as the UN, he might go to the [second] scenario, (uhm), to the - -

	scenario of the crossline (…). Because this is the scenario where [[[that]]] the structure of [the] UN knows and respect.
81	R: You mean, the sovereign government, being, the central coordination–? //
82	P6: // Exactly. (.) // Exactly. Exactly.
83	R: Despite (.) or, regardless of whatever (.) this government does in terms of its actions?
84	P6: Exactly. exactly. And this is, this is (.) huge. This is– (…). We can see that it going to affect a lot [[[We can see already that this has a huge impact]]]. We have seen it already. We have seen [the] UN failing last year at the level of the HNO, HRP. (.). […]. For example, we have seen [the] UN failing for HNAP now, which is [the] Humanitarian Needs Assessment (.) Programme. We had the human–, HNAP, which was the - - main source of information for the entire - - - Syria, providing all the numbers that all the NGOs and UN agencies [provide]. But because the - government of Syria is not accepting the HNAP numbers, the UN decided to stop the programme?! (.) And why they do not want that programme? Because they want that programme to come from the 4 W's [[[Who is doing What, Where and When (4W), which is a central tool used by the UN and other humanitarian actors to coordinate relief efforts]]]. (.) And for [the] four W's, there is no verification for the numbers coming [[[being reported by participating actors]]]. And the regime and the Russians, they - - sat around the table and they said that, like: "look guys, we have 16 million. There's 4 million [in Northwest Syria]]. In Northeast, they have 3 million. So we need to distribute the money, (uhm) the fund coming to Syria, accordingly. But it is not the situation. The fund should go to the people in need. Maybe the regime they have more people in need than northwest of Syria, so you need to take more money, but if it is the opposite case, we need to see, we need to give the opposite [amounts]. That's why the numbers of HNAP were - always helping us to know exactly what's going on. Now we are– (.), we are really upset. We have a blurred vision without the numbers of - the HNAP and the HNAP was a programme where– (.), was a UN programme. But because of the pressure coming from the - - -, they - - - said we will stop it.
85	R: Okay (taking note). (…). Do you think–, (.) this is more, like, a legitimacy question again, but (.) do you think that because of the proximity –; at least in terms of these decisions, like what you said now with the HNAP and - - other things that we mentioned before; do you think that the UN's legitimacy also suffers in Northwest Syria because they always go with the regime, apparently? (.) Always being, like, they – appear (.) to tend to be influenced by the regime and the regime itself, of course, has a very negative, (uhm), a negative association for the people who live in Northwest Syria? (…)
86	P6: I think– (.). (Uhm) (…)
87	R: Maybe it's a difficult question. (…)I can also paraphrase it (.)f you want?
88	P6: This is a difficult question, but let me just– and, no, it's not difficult. I - - want to be fair with them [[the UN]], but at the same time I want to really to - - - speak and to be fair; (.) to speak what is going on. (.) The UN gets its legitimacy from three aspects: From the fund that they provide; from the actions they do, which is mainly the coordination. And from the governance they provide, (.) or the - - - link to - the governance they provide. (Uhm) (.) At least for northwest of Syria, (.) I can say - - - that they are partially legitimate because they still providing some fund where it makes the entire humanitarian and local NGOs needing[] to work with them. And they provide coordination mechanisms, coordination clusters, they are leading it, so, it means that also they [do something here for] the local NGOs, so they are getting their legitimacy from those two points. But - - what about the governance itself? I think they are not (.), they are not legitimate to – have–; neither for us, nor for the regime itself. They do not have that, yani [[[I mean]]]–, (.) neither in northeast of Syria. I think that, (uhm), I think that [the] UN [[[with regards to the governance aspect]]] has not done anything valuable [for] us toward, in - case of legitimacy, and I believe [it is] the same for the - - - (.) central Damascus - - government. They [[[the central Damascus government]]] see they [[[the UN]]] have both negative role–, or not negative role, [a] passive role about being, like, a kind of a channel (.), and like, kind of a channel that they need to pass through [for] achieving what they want politically. While from our side, we see them as a hurdle that we–, it [[[the UN and its system]]] always existed and whenever they want to take an action, they take it for the side of the regime, rather than to be at the side [of] the people in the northwest of Syria. (…)
89	R: Thank you for the clarification, that's really insightful. (…) (Uhm), (.) (checking notes). (Uhm), when you look–, I mean,– (.) there are some more smaller questions, not like the big ones, (.) I think we - ,like, you

	covered them without me even asking them specifically. So it's really nice (smiling, mutually laughing). When you - - look at the– UN before the earthquake, most of what we discussed I think is the UN in general anyways, I am– (.); is there anything else that you would want to address (.) in terms of the UN's actions, the UN's goals, the UN's justifications, (.) maybe even for the actions that they're taking in northwest Syria, that you find are - right, are good? (…)
90	P6: I think (.), okay. Let's put right now the practises away, the presence of [the] UN in our life, it is essential. (…)
91	R: Okay (asking for more detail)?
92	P6: What makes, really, what makes the - role of the UN really questionable [are] their practises. (.) But as an idea of having [the] UN in our lives as a people affected by a crisis (.) is something very important. (…) So let us see, let - us agree about that. And the next point I want to say is that, (.) they played a huge role to be honest. But they played a huge role because they were (…), they were the only entity that it is legitimate to do coordination. If that coordination will be done by Syrians, maybe, I do not know, maybe it will be worse. Maybe it will be better. I do not know. Really. But, here I - raise the question in front of - the UN: "What you have done for localization? (.) Yani [[I mean]], now [on the] 10th of July, [imagine] the regime did not give us permission and - - Russians keep doing vetoes. "Who will do the - - - coordination next day? (.) We do not have, like, a Syrian entity to do the coordination. Where is the localization here? (…) Until now, we depend upon your money. Where is the localization of empowering the Syrian entities and the Syrian people? Where is that? Until now we have an issue regarding the governance in the health sector. I am speaking as a part of [the] health sector. Yani [[you see what I mean, don't you?]]. If anytime I see, right now, Martin Griffiths or Antonio Gutierrez, I'll tell him: "Thank you." (.) A huge thank you. Wallah [[[I swear to God/ I truly mean it]]]. (Speaking as if speaking to (the representatives of) the UN): "But if, (.) God forbid, (.) that a car will - hit you, as [the] UN entirely, (.) hit you, UN. How we can survive? (.) What is the alternative? (.) What is the alternative? (…). And - really, here it puts - - us into, like, a very funny, very, very funny question. When they were sat around the table and they said: "We need to have a alternative, (.) I'm speaking about the sector. (.) You know, [[researcher]], what was the alternative? (.) Giving their programmes to INGOs! (…)
93	R: Okay? (…)
94	P6: With all respect to INGOs, (.) but, (speaking as if speaking to INGOs): "do you think that - what you are doing is not against your - - agreement in the Grand Summit in Istanbul in 2015? And the localization principle? (.) Why you are not empowering us as a Syrians? At the end, this is my country. This is not the country of the German and the Italian and the, and the French and the - - US. (.) This is my country. Why you are not empowering me to have - - the lead [on] those programmes directly? Why you are not linking me to your donors? As a Syrian? Why [do] I need always, like, this patriarch[al] role of the UN over us as Syrians? (.) Making - - yourself as a father to us. Why, yani [[[I don't see the reason here]]]? (.) Okay, you are - - our father, you need to protect us. You are not protecting us. You are not empowering us. Yeah, I feel like myself, really, like I am [] an orphan [in an] orphan centre and you are the (.) - principle of [the] orphan centre. You job is only to give me [] food to eat, to feed me, and then to leave me. How to–, how - I will raise, This is not your business?!" (…) I think they need to have like a clear vision. And this is one of their problems, their localization framework. Their - perspective toward localization is different from UN [entity] to UN [entity]. "They do not have a localization framework in the entire UN for the - - (.)– Syria. (.) Now you can go and ask each one of the UN [entitie]s. Ask them what does, (.) what does it mean, "localization" for you? (…) You will listen one answer about the definition, but after the definition of the localization, everyone has a different vision about localization. And who is affected by that? (.) Us as a Syrians?! (…). Wallah [[[I swear to God/ I truly mean it]]]. (…) It's simpl[e]. […]
95	R: Oh wow. (.) That's a powerful way of putting this that I would actually (.) love to (.) just let it stand there. (…) I do - - see what you just said, so beautifully connected to what you said earlier. You remember, when we talked about the earthquake itself (.) on the–, between the 72 hours and 100 hours, the first ones, (.) you said that (.) you felt that the UN in Gaziantep, the coordination mechanism, the capacities that the UN usually provides, was not there all of a sudden because the UN itself was affected so much themselves in Gaziantep. (.) So that kind of plays hand in hand with what you're (.) just saying now, doesn't it? (.) So you - do see the value of the UN's work in terms of providing that mechanism for coordination and–, et cetera et cetera. (..) As a very, like, as you said (smiling): "partially legitimate" before. But then, when it's not there,

	which happened during the earthquake as well, (uhm)– (.) then - what? (…) Is that what I'm–, interpreting correctly? That there is a connection actually between (mimicking quotation marks) “the UN is incredibly needed. We can't do anything without them in terms of that capacity really as organizations, as kind of a macro-level, overall approach. But is it then that that's okay? (.) And that - this is good? (.) For the UN to be there? (.) To fill that role, on the one hand side?. (.) Or is it actually “not okay, because the UN should actually be put in a position to enable others to take that role away from them? (…) Is that what I'm - understanding from what you said?
96	P6: This is completely correct. (.) I think. After 10 years of having that role, I think we need–, they need a little bit to have a transition period and shifting that - role toward the Syrians. And at least, yani [[[I mean]]] supervising it, but not to - implement it directly. (.) We need to, really, (.) to - - be more effective for our country. (.) Because it really, [[researcher]], it - affects everything. (.) It - affects the programme (.). Yani [[[I mean]]], (uhm), again, it's a question about accountability. (.) Do you know that most of the UN, really, they - go into, they - open the catalogues? (…) They come with a catalogue. (.) They open the catalogue and they do exactly what is in the catalogue. (.) If the Syrians will be [involved] in that operation in a better way, because the clusters, it is more, like, a kind of good gathering to share information. But if the Syrians are [involved] more in that, I think more customization, more, better customization will happen to those catalogues that the - - UN is coming [with] and - - providing to us. The best example for that, [[researcher]] is - capacity building. (.) Do you know how many times we were trained for non-communicable diseases?!
97	R: I (…) can imagine (…) […] go ahead.
98	P6: I can - - tell you. (…) I can tell you. Every time a new health officer, expat, [is] coming to WHO - - in the position of capacity building expert. //
99	R: // You mean by the UN? You would be trained by the UN? // Yeah, go ahead.
100	P6: By the WHO - - - . They - will again come and repeat exactly what is in the catalogue. (Speaking as if speaking to the UN): “Wallah [[[I swear to God/ I truly mean it]]] enough. (.) Yani [[[it is so clear that]]], we are saturated. (.) We need more advanced trainings. (.) Take us to another point. Take us to another level. (.) This is our right.” (...) And this - , really, you see it in the capacity building. The level of the advance[ment]. When you come to them, they will–, (.) I see, because the - person will say like: “Look guys, this is the catalogue.”. “Okay, but this is the catalogue for L3.”. “But you are L3”. (With a touch of frustration) “Tamam [[[Okay]]], we are L3, but we are L3 for a long time. We do not have L3A, L3B, L3C. Take us to another level, yani [[[I mean]]], please (.) take us to another level.”. (…)
101	R: I – (.) I see the point you're making. (.) So basically you're receiving a lot of capacity building for something that you already have capacity enough for?
102	P6: Thank you. (.) Take us to another level. (.) Take us into another level in the capacity building, in the programming, take us–, in the coordination. Take us to another level. Wallah [[[I swear to God/ I truly mean it]]] I know we are tired. Me, myself [[for some years now]] I'm not attending [[cluster meetings regularly anymore]] because I know what - will be in it. (.) There is nothing. There is no use of being there. (.) Same information, same agenda since 2018-2019, although the guys in the coordination team, they are great, but the system is not allowing them [to do things differently]. “Humanitarian, humanitarian, humanitarian.”. “Tamam [[[okay]]]! (.) You are speaking about early recovery. Let us do some early recovery for help, enough for [only] humanitarian. (.) Let us see how we can go to toward development.”. Until now [[researcher]], there are a lot of questions. Okay, now we have–, (.) I'm speaking a lot, but this is the last thing. (.)
103	R: I'm - very much enjoying it. Go ahead please. I’m not going to stop you.
104	P6: This is the last thing. The Health Cluster, tamam [[[okay]]]? (.) We raise - - - 4 W's for [the] Health Cluster on [a] monthly basis. All the - - [UN] partner organizations. And we cover almost all the partner organizations. 99.5 percent[] of the entire health plan, because 0.5 it comes from other, like, funds coming from the gulf or from - - [an] irregular way. So we covered the entire health plan. Please, raise this question to WHO. Or to [the] cluster coordination team: “do we have more disease analysis reports? (…) After - 10 years, [] do not [we] deserve, as a Syrians, to know what - kind of diseases we have? (…) We need such kind of report for planning. I need to plan for the future. I need to know exactly what are the prevalences of the diseases that are in my community. Until now, wallah [[[I swear to God/ I truly mean it]]]–, I am - - a

	doctor working in the health sector. I open SPHERE [[[referring to a widely used handbook of humanitarian principles and minimum standards in four life-saving areas]]], I open international standards. I take prevalence is coming from international standards, but how much it's - close to the reality (.) in my country? I do not know. “Where is our money? What is the impact of your–”; ask them about impact studies! (.) Zero. (.) “What is the impact of the fund you are putting?” Ask them this question, to any UN: “what is the impact of your intervention for the earthquake?” He [[[whomever you ask at the UN]]] can say for you [[[refer you to]]] newspapers. (…) books, he will say. But there is nothing written. Tell him [[[whomever you ask at the UN]]]: “share with me any impact study”. (.) None. (…)
105	R: Okay (…). I - didn't think about that, but I'll take a note on that as well. (.) Who - in the UN–, or maybe–, let's, no–, hang on. Let's first close this – part (checking notes). Because I think you've already - - covered so much. It's incredible. I knew it would be good to speak with you, and you’re just basically convincing me that that - - was the perfect, right, - - - moment (smiling). (.) Just one short question about something you said before and then I have one final question. Because you already, kind of, said what you would want the UN to do now in the future. Like, to what I’m - - understanding is: to do more about what you - - would describe as localization; to do more about accountability; to do more about studying the impact and taking evidence-based programming decisions, right? (…) (Uhm) What do you think will the UN do? (.) Do you think they will go into that direction? (.) Or do you think they will (…) do something else?
106	P6: I think there are three challenges here. As I mentioned: the political challenge, the structural challenge and the mentality challenge. You need (.) - - - - a reform. Another reform, other than the 2005 [one] for the entire Cluster Coordination and humanitarian mechanisms. (.) This is mentality. (…) People are working for almost 20 years on that mechanism. (.) They cannot change it. Everyone is criticising it, but nobody [is] daring to go and to change it. (…) And they have a structural issue as - I said to you: they do not recognise us, as an area[] out of the control of the central government. (…) Yes. (.) And as we said, the accountability issue: you cannot question anyone of the UN, although they have the greatest feedback response mechanism on the paper, but nobody's accountable. Nobody's accountable, accountable for anything. Ask them. Ask any question to any head of office here in Gaziantep: “What are the three mistakes that you have done in the last three months?” You will not be able to mention that. (…)
107	R: So the future of the UN, in your point of view, is not going to be much different than the past? (.)
108	P6: I do not think that it would be different, (.) but I believe in the accumulative and - the collective efforts. I think my - - - voice in addition to the voices of another people from all over the world, in other contexts, trying to make–, (.) to do something, (.) to - - advocate for changing the role of [the] UN in one point, all these accumulative efforts is going to do something. But in the near future I do not think that–; nothing will be changed. (…)
109	R: Okay. Then my last, very, very open question. I'm going to–, I'm excited how you how you're going to take that (smiling): In your words, what would the UN need to do in the future to remedy the past? (…)
110	P6: To be - - open. (…) Transparent. (…) And to speak the language of the people that they serve, rather than the language of the governments that they [are] form[ed by]. (…)
111	R: So they are at present not open, not transparent and they do not speak the language of the people (.) that they serve?
112	P6: If you will listen [to] all the UN, you will see that they do not speak the language of the people they serve. (…)
113	R: That’s –; it's a very powerful ending of our conversation. (…) Is there anything else you just want to share? Still, anything that you still have in your mind, and you feel - that's missing? (…)
114	P6: (Hmm). I do not know really, [[researcher]], but I am always open to any question [that] might - - rise through your analysis of my - discussion with you. So please let me know if you have, like, extra questions or any clarifications for – anything, then I can provide. (.) But right now. I do not–, (.) I do not think [so]. (.)
115	R: I think that's a very good idea (smiling). That's a very good kind of a final part then. yeah, of course. Like, I'm going to transcribe everything that we that we share today with one another and I'm going to send it to you. And I think, as what you mentioned, usually, when I'm writing down things and then I notice like hang on, there was something, it's not entirely clear to me. It was clear to me today, but maybe it's not clear to me

	when I look at it again, I'm going to ask you again. [[…]] So, bear with me and whenever I'm ready, I'm going to share [the transcript] with you and I'm going to ask you maybe a couple of follow up questions. So then we can discuss that again.
116	P6: Anytime, [[researcher]]. And thank you for your time and [] thank you for your questions and [] sorry if I spoke a lot. I tried to–. (.) Thank you. Thank you very much. Thank you. Very much.
117	R: We'll stop the recording. One second.

Transcript P6 (2)

1	R: Good evening. As discussed, here are the questions for following up on our last conversation and the new developments around the vetoed cross-border resolution. I'll number them through, so you can maybe simply answer each directly with a voice note or text, whatever is easier for you, whenever you have a moment. I'm also going to record the questions by voice note, just to make it nicer (more like an actual conversation):Last time we spoke about your perception of the UN's conduct and it's legitimacy in NWS, particularly related to the earthquake. About one month ago, the UN Security Council did not renew the cross-border resolution to NWS via Turkey. (1) can you tell me, in your words, what actually happened there?
2	P6: [[Researcher]], it is really hard to describe what is happening. (.) I cannot remember [if] it was 9th of July or 11th of July. I think there was a veto from Russia in on 9th of July on the continuation of the cross-border operations, (uhm), humanitarian cross-border operations and renewing the - - - decision. Then later, I guess, on 11th, the Syrian government, they played very tricky game [[[they played games/ they tricked everyone]]] and they – said: "We do agree to - use the Bab Al-Hawa and Bab Al-Salame [border crossings] to send the relief and the supplies, the items toward humanitarian support to the northwest of Syria. (.) It was not the –; actually, it was a kind of political maneuver, where really the Western countries supporting the (.) (uhm) renewal decision, they found in it as a kind of exit of a real problem with the Russians, giving veto for such kind of renewal, and they were not able, really, to resist in the - - lights of the talk of Mr. Martin Griffith, as I remember, with the government [of Syria], where they ensured that - they will not be – (.); that there will be, like, kind of independency for the UN agencies in their operations in northwest of Syria. (.) Everyone was maybe not happy, but they were, all of them, they were convinced that this is the best way in order to avoid the diplomatic battle again in the Security Council. And (uhm) to be honest, I believe completely that this is - - –; came by the blessing of the UN for such kind of – decision. At the end, the Syrian government, they just agreed (uhm) to for six months, (.) six months permission, to use the - border gates in the northern Syria (uhm) to reach to almost 4.5 million (uhm) IDPs and host communities in the northwest of Syria. (.) (Uhm) from our [local/senior humanitarian aid professionals] side, we did not really –(.); we were not happy. We did not agree. We condemned that. We tried to - stop it. We try to really push the Western countries as much as we can in order to stay on their position about renewing the cross-border resolution, but it was not helpful, [[researcher]]. I do not know why, but it was not helpful. (.) (Uhm) (.) We have huge concerns, to be honest, about this permission of the regime regarding the - humanitarian supply line, because there were no details in that permission, so we do not know. And always, we say, that the devil is (uhm) - really in (uhm) in between the - details. And that's what we just faced almost one month later, when the regime was –(.); started to speak to the UN that we want to have the SARC, the Syrian Arab Red Crescent, (uhm) to be there and to do like a kind of monitoring - on the shipments coming toward northwest of Syria, where we also said that it is not possible because we believe SARC is not neutral and they are biased or something like that. So it –(.); I'm sorry, it was very long record, but in a few words, that's what's happening exactly.
3	R: (2) What has happened/ changed since then with regards to cross-border aid and the UN's conduct in the region?
4	P6: (Uhm) [[Researcher]], I believe, yani [[[I mean]]], the - new approach or the new mechanism is really changing everything, because now, we started to see the UN more coordinating with the Salvation Government [[[the quasi-governmental entity established by HTS, the dominant armed group in large parts of NWS, listed as an extremist Islamist and terrorist group by the UN]]], for example, especially through something which is called (.) (uhm) the - - Humanitarian Coordination Bureau. It's called in Arabic 'Maktab Tansirku Insani', so I just tried, which is, tried to translate it exactly from Arabic to English, which is affiliated to Salvation Government, to something which is called the political - Affair Ministry, where that's really (uhm) –. By the way, you know, it was really strange because now we can see more and more coordination

	between the UN agencies and the Salvation Government and the Regime. And I, I believe from my side, that there is a kind of very high level of coordination between those three entities, in order to - secure more and more (uhm), to ensure that this mechanism and that permission is used very well. (Uhm) We started to see more - supplies coming, especially in the last one week. (Uhm) A lot of supplies are coming inside, which is something that (.) I believe it is good, it's good to at the end, but it also reflects, maybe, that some of those supplies might be like a stock in case of the regime after six months they will not - - - renew the decision again, or renew the permission again. (.) So, in general, this is the situation and - to be honest - - - (uhm) everyone here is really –(.); we were trying to speak a lot with the UN representatives here, and also to do like a kind of advocacy, saying: "Guys, why do you need the permission of the regime, (uhm) government, to go inside Syria? You can bypass that easily.". But again, this is, I think, that this is a kind of political game, political battle, where the Russians, really, they are doing, they played in the favor of the regime by doing a lot of vetoes, and I think, the UN, they do not want also, to lose part of their operations from Damascus. (.) But in at the end, it will jeopardize the entire UN operations because, (uhm), slightly, it's becoming more and more controlled by the UN, by, sorry, by the Syrian regime, government, and now after six months, they need to beg, this time to the regime and give them more and more, (.) how to say, (uhm) advantages that they did not give in the first time. So, in the first time the - –; as I told, you the – permission, (uhm) the decision was - without details, but the regime was always insisting that they – need, like, a kind of monitoring system from their side. I think in the - next time this will be changed completely, I do not know how the UN is going to - react toward that (.), (uhm), especially in the - - - light that we [the humanitarian actors active in Northwest Syria] will not allow. We do not allow and we will not allow (uhm), Syrian civil society organizations from the regime side, for example, SARC, to be a kind of monitoring party over the humanitarian operations and UN operations inside [Northwest] Syria. (.) So now really, what is funny [is] that the regime is pushing and putting more and more pressure over the UN by telling them [[[the UN]]], like: "Look guys, we want to send our people to - check if your operations are good or not good", and they [[[the UN]]] are trying always to share the information and to - present to the Syrian regime, like: "Look, we are respecting your decision, we are trying our best and we are improving the coordination with you.". So, I think, right now, really, the - UN they are in a place where they are justifying themselves again and again and again and again (uhm) the Syrian regime mainly and to the Salvation Government in the second place.
5	R: (3) in how far does this (the non-renewal of the cross border resolution and the UN's conduct that you relate to this more broadly, if you like) affect your point of view about the UN and it's conduct at large? (4) how so?
6	P6: I - think I just answered part of that question in the in the second voice (uhm) message, but still, (uhm), [[researcher]], people, they - - started to really, to lose the - faith (uhm) - - - in the UN here. (Uhm) We believe that the UN is more used –; (uhm) they are more and more under the diplomatic pressures (uhm), diplomatic pressure and there are more and more (uhm) under the load of (uhm) the member state, (uhm) of their (uhm) General Assembly, which Syria supported by – the representative in - –; the permanent representative country, which is Russia in the Security Council. (.) So we started to lose the faith in them. To be honest, they are trying their best as well, to justify themselves in front of us. That's why they are speaking about a kind of field hub (.) in –; inside Syria. And they tried right now –; they are trying right now to assess having like a kind of UN zone in (uhm), especially in Idlib, where they need to be under the protection of the Salvation Government. (.) And all of that, really, is part of a bigger question (.) to the UN, where [the] majority of their programs, of their interventions, their plans, they are, it is six months and not more than that, and even if they are planning for 12 months, always it comes with that, like: "Look guys. It might stop, but might we not be able to - work again? We will find a way, but still we are under this pressure of renewing the permission from the Syrian government or not.". (.) So, this is in -, (.) if I understood your - question correctly, I think this is how it's affecting [in] my point of view. And I think it's [that] there are good number of the people that they think that they UN, UN failed us as a (.) Syrians in this part of Syria.
7	R: (5) is there anything else you would like to add?
8	P6: Yani [[I mean]] (.), I cannot say really here [that] there is something more to add, but again: (.) We are tired (.), to be honest. We are tired of UN saying always "We call that the humanitarian will not be affected by the political and military context and whatever blah blah, blah blah blah.". But again, we see that the humanitarian sector is one card that several entities, they play in it, Salvation Government, Syrian government, regime government I mean, UN agencies, Western countries, the government of Turkey, they all, they use this card as a kind of a pressure card, or a card of leverage. But some entities, they use it in a - - more bold way than the others, but I believe that everyone is using that (uhm) the humanitarian card in a

bad way. (Uhm) nobody really is (uhm) caring about the beneficiaries. And the best, and easily, I can say, that: Look to the Humanitarian Needs Overview in the last three years and you will see how much the [[[number of]]] people in need they are increasing in Syria a year after year, which is really not understood unless those humanitarian aids, (.) either they are aid diverted or they are not used in a proper way, or they are not real, or uh they are without a clear planning or a good planning and design, which makes them always to be diverted or (.) not reaching to the people in a correct way. (.) I think UN needs to answer this question: Why the number of people in need increasing year after year, although in the last three years we did not have a major operation, military operations, at least in northwest of Syria? They need to answer that. And I do not know if they have this answer. What is the impact of their (uhm) millions and millions, (.) billions of – items (uhm) of support that they provide to the northwest of Syria? (…) I think, they [[[the UN]]] try their best to - say that: "Look, we are neutral, we keep our neutrality", and to be honest, they do so. But, (uhm), sometimes (uhm), neutrality toward the political changes, the (uhm) - political dynamics, it's - affecting more and more people than helping them, so, (uhm) –. In one time, I think, they shouldn't be neutral regarding the political dynamics If it's going to affect the lives of four million population. (.) They always say that: "we are transparent", and I think they are not transparent anymore. Because, I believe, really, [[researcher]], that (uhm) they are not discussing with us the details, they are not (uhm) trying to keep (uhm) or hide a lot of (uhm) conditions that the - regime might (uhm) - asking them, and trying to really (uhm), how to say? (.), to twist the truth in order not to - exaggerate the political (uhm) situation in Syria, which is again not good, because right now, they do not have like a clear picture; or at least, if they have a clear picture, they are not sharing it with us (.) about what will be the next steps, what will be the role of (uhm) the Syrian government regime, in the humanitarian shipments coming, at which level (uhm) they are involved - - - in - specifying where it needs to go and in which way, and all of that. And also, the monitoring process, sharing the information, all of that. So, I think –; also about the transparency. (.) Again, (coughing), sorry, again, [[researcher]], I think, and I believe also as well that they have a great issue regarding the planning. (Uhm), I can understand that we are in a very difficult and complicated (uhm) context where planning is not really (.) (uhm) something easy always to do, but again, I need - - like a clear answer (imitating to address the UN): "What is your exit plan?" (.) I - need to know, after six months, is what will happen if the regime, for example, will say: "no"? So, this is another point. (Uhm) (.), I think, and also I believe as well, that (uhm) being not biased, or being (.) impartial in one place is affecting a lot as well the - - population in the Northwest of (uhm) Syria through - (uhm) - many - - issues, they were [[[would be]]] easy - - - being –; will be able to - bypass the necessity of the renewal of the cross-border resolution. There are a lot of mechanisms in UN and that they can activate, but they are not activating it, saying so: "Look guys, we are - - impartial, we are (uhm) - - not biased to any type, to any side", but again, they are losing more and more (uhm) of their ability and their power to change the lives of millions in the northwest of Syria. (.) So, [[researcher]], I really –; I do not know, to be honest, how much (uhm) - - their image is changing (uhm) toward us, but their - image and also our view of point is always change, it is not that much good regarding the UN at several levels, due to several questions that they cannot answer us.

Transcript P7 (1)

1	R: Let us start by you telling me a bit more about yourself. (.) Who are you?
2	P7: Yeah, (uhm) I am [[Participant]], I am a pharmacist. (Uhm) I started working in the Syrian crisis because I'm Syrian [[about a decade ago]]. I [[first worked in health facilities and later on for Syrian NGOs, where I worked in different positions with technical and increasingly more managerial responsibilities. I have close professional ties with several organizations and workers in the field of emergency response, search and rescue, health and mental health, nutrition, and protection sectors with an overall focus on humanitarian action, but also some involvement in long-term programming and collaborative efforts in the field of development cooperation.]]. That's it. Maybe, (uhm) before the Syrian crisis, I know nothing about the work in the humanitarian context. Everything I learned [was] during the same crisis. (Uh), I was so lucky to attend a lot of capacity building–, trainings, maybe. I [[was even able to travel abroad for some time get a formal diploma in relevant fields]]. It was very helpful [[for a combined advanced technical and managerial, governance-focused role]]. And that's it. [[…]]
3	P7: [[…]] (Uhm), do you want to tell me a bit more about how you first got involved in the - - sector? Your first experience into - the humanitarian sector?
4	R: Yeah, because I (…) [[I am from Idlib governorate]]. And when the - crisis started, a lot of people– (.), or all people, (.) they face difficulties to - access [- -] basic services. (.) Health, education, everything, (.) shelter,

	(.) everything. So, because I'm [a] pharmacist, and through discussion with some of my colleagues in Idlib [[governorate]], [[…]] decided to establish [a] hospital [[specialized to support a very vulnerable group especially in rural areas]]. It was [my] first work in - the public [] or the humanitarian [[sector and I, from the beginning, had managerial responsibilities that I fulfilled for several years. We managed to get funding for this hospital and much of what we established largely still exists today. It is operated by one of the larger Syrian NGOs]]. Which is good. Then, through communication with some of my friends, [[I learnt about a vacancy in a project management-related position at a Syrian NGO, which would allow me to see other parts of my country for the first time, and I applied]] For me, it was very interesting, so I started working [[in the coordination of their projects. The exchange with people from other parts of my country was]] very amazing for me. And I - - - said that I can deliver–, or - I can help more people through this work. More than when I'm a worker in [an] administrative role in our hospital in one specific area. So I started working [[…]], attending training processes, or [technical] capacity building, […] worked after that as [a] [[…]] manager, [[…]] supervised [[ever larger teams, and have now experience in a similar capacity in several organizations and sectors, with health and my technical background being my anchor points]].
5	P7: It is a very impressive scope of work that you already had, actually. [[…]]. (…) (Uhm) You - relocated to Gaziantep at some point, (.) do you remember when that was?
6	R: Yes, I think that was in (…) 2015. I was based in [[different places in Turkey with my family]]. [[…]] In 2015, I moved to Gaziantep because [[…]] all of the INGOs, the Syrian NGOs, the UN agencies' offices are based in Gaziantep. So (.) since that time (.) I'm based in Gaziantep. (.) (Ah), and crossing the border to Syria (.), also
7	R: Yeah (.), that would have been my next question actually. (.) How - often do you nowadays cross into northwest Syria? (.) And also, maybe, also generally, how would you describe your level of contact with people inside on a daily basis?
8	P7: Yes. (.) Actually, because [[I have for years and in different organizations been responsible for programming decisions and oversight over the implementation of]] activities [] inside Syria, so I have to be in touch with them through field visits and through daily communication. Right now, every month - - I [spend] one week inside [] Syria. (.) Before joining the [[my current organization]], also, [at a minimum] every two months I [] do field visits inside Syria to visit the - - - - [] facilities inside Syria and to have–, to be in direct communication with (uhm) our team and the local–, and the other stakeholders, yani [[[what I mean is]]] the health actors (.), for example, (.) the people, the key individuals in the communities, the other partners inside Syria. (…)
9	R: Okay. (…) Perfect, thank you. (Uhm), I would - - now take you into the main topic of my - - thesis project, which is basically the connection between earthquake and the United Nations: It's been six months now already, even if both you and I can maybe not imagine that it's six months since the earthquake took place(…). (Uhm), from your professional capacity with a focus in northwest Syria, what do you remember (.) happening (.) in the first, let's say, in the first critical moments, (.) the first critical 72 to 100 hours of response in northwest Syria? (…) If that helps you, maybe the focus could be on who did what? Which actors were involved? (.) But generally whatever comes to your mind.
10	P7: Yeah, (uhm). Actually, the earthquake, it's something new for - - everyone in Northwest of Syria. (Uhm) because [[I am closely involved with several organizations inside Syria, including the organization that leads the search and rescue missions in the region, the White Helmets or The Syria Defence, which scope of work is]] to respond to the people, (uhm) to conduct search and rescue activities. (.) (Uhm) when the earthquake happened the - - - White Helmets team, they start[ed] responding to the people everywhere, because [they] have right now 3,000 staff inside Syria-. They - have access to all– (uhm), to every community in northwest of Syria. To every community. It's–, for [[the White Helmets]], those are core staff [[[they are not just project-based employees. They are permanent members of staff]]]. [[The White Helmets]] can't cover part of the - area and leave the - rest of the areas without services. For example, without conducting firefighting services or search and rescue services or other services. So because this is our (speaking from the perspective of being closely involved with the White Helmets) duty and no-one can conduct in our services, we, - - - - [are] working in every community across northwest of Syria. [] [And the White Helmets] are working on and conducting search and rescue activities from the beginning, from the - - first day from 2014 until now, as White Helmets or as Syria Civil Defence. But [usually,] it's that our operations [are] a response to military escalations. If there is a, yani [[[what I mean is that]]] targeting for this area, so we have–, (.) maybe there's -

	- one or two buildings that collapsed. We have to respond to those buildings or to this area specific area. But in the earthquake, the - disaster was very big. (…) Cities. (.) [[The White Helmets]] need to respond in - the whole city or more than one city. In Jenderis, Harim, Salqin [[[all of which are disproportionately affected cities in Northwest Syria]]] and other small towns and villages. (…) So, (.) it was shocking for everyone. No-one, and even the Syrian Civil Defence [[[which is another name for the White Helmets]]] was not ready to respond to such huge disaster. (Uhm) (.) But we (speaking from the perspective of being closely involved with the White Helmets) tried to use all of our resources to respond to the people. In the first 72 hours, all responses, or operations were conducted through local efforts. I'm talking about the - - - - resources that the Syria Civil Defence has, and the other NGOs and other partners they have. [There was] no support from any party out[side] of this area. We– (.), (uhm), yani [[no, I mean to say]] the - - people, (.) I - remember that the - - health facilities, they start[ed] asking [] for medical supplies, because all of us, they start[ed] using the stock that we have, previously [[[in stock]]], but (.) it was not a planned to be added to such to such a - disaster. Even for [[the White Helmets]], before that, [[the White Helmets]] had some strategic stock of fuel for [[their]] vehicles. Because the - consumption - - of the - fuel became maybe then times more than the - - - average before that, [[they]] - consumed the whole stock with in the first three days and [[…]] were about to stop [[their]] vehicles, because [[there is no]] fuel. But, how [[the key actors, like the White Helmets, engaged in the response]] survived in that time? The - - solidarity of the local communities. The private sector. The - - other NGOs. The people, they start[ed] giving [[the key actors of the critical response]] all resources they have. The private sector, they came to [[the White Helmets]] and they gave [[…]] their heavy vehicles with the drivers, with the staff and asked [[…]] to use it to respond to the people. They gave [[…]] fuel. So (.) [[the White Helmets and similar actors]] succeeded to survive. (.) Unfortunately, in that time, yani [[[I mean]]], we [[[people involved in the humanitarian response in Northwest Syria]]] - - didn't see any response (.) or - effective response from the UN agencies. (…)
11	R: That would have been my next question. I love how you're anticipating me. Go ahead.
12	P7: (Laughing) Yeah. Because, yani [[[what I mean to say is]]], it's - –; I have two points here. It's about the preparedness, number 1; and the response, number two. I think the UN agencies, they have long experience in responding to different crises, natural or other crises, or - - military crises, or other disasters. So they know how to respond to earthquake, to volcano, to everything. (.) So I think one of their duties, because they have experience to prepare the people even before the earthquake. (Uhm) (.) Everyone knows that, maybe it's potential to - - - face earthquakes in this area. It's not something so, yani [[[what I mean to say is]]], unexpected. (Uhm), so (.) I don't know why [it is] that this topic or the - preparedness to such kind of responses (uhm) was not part of the - objectives of the UN agencies? Number two: the response. I know that the UN agencies, they don't have heavy vehicles in - - Gaziantep and they can't share it with us. They don't have, but they have medical supplies. They have access to (uhm) shelter items or food security, or–, a lot of items. So? Three, four, five days? Nothing. (…) No single (uhm) container or shipment from the agencies. (.) They were waiting for the approval of Bashar al-Assad to - allow them to – use [[[cross]]] the - borders. So this is the - second question mark for us. (…)
13	R: The response? (.) Yeah. What do you - - - think about that - - they - waited for the permission from (uhm) Damascus?
14	P7: I don't know. (.) For us, I think, first of all, they [[[the UN]]] were shocked with the earthquake also. But waiting for the approval from Damascus, the I think it's - - –. I can't have [[[think of]]] a justification for - it. I can't have any - - –(.); I don't know how to explain. (.) The main question mark for us [is this; that] the whole borders [[[those across which access is required to enter NWS]]] are not under the control of the Syrian– - - - Damascus, or the Syrian regime. (.) They are under the control of the opposition forces. And the - Turkish authorities, they mentioned that we will facilitate [] any shipment [that] will go to Syria. And some of the - - - maybe, donors or countries they sent shipments, like Qatar, maybe Saudi Arabia. They sent the shipment to - - Syria. They used Bab al-Salame border [crossing]. So, (.) I think, (uhm) (.), there is no justification for [the] UN. And or there is no excuse for [the] UN for not responding to this huge catastrophe. (…)
15	R: You mean, within the first (.) 72 to 100 hours?
16	P7: Yes. yes.
17	R: Okay.

18	P7: And (.) you know, we [[[the key NGOs working inside Syria and involved in the immediate response]]], we tried–, turning to everyone: the UN agencies, the - - states, the donors to help to respond to - –; to help us and to respond to this devastating catastrophe [.]. (.) But no one helped us. And even when the UN agencies they start[ed] conducting field visit[s] to inside Syria, (.) we were so happy, (.) actually. [[All the NGOs were so happy, also the White Helmets]]. That they start going to inside Syria; to be in touch directly with the people inside Syria. But they, (.) I think, (.) visited Northwest Syria more than ten times. No (…)–. [[Until now, the White Helmets and other actors as well have been]] waiting for one time, just to communicate (.), [[for the UN to]] communicate with [[the]] team. And since [[it is organizations such as the White Helmets who]] are the first responders for such kind of disasters, (.) also–, it was also for us [a] question mark why they didn't ask the White Helmets to - - - (uhm) the Syrian veterans to have a meeting with their staff, [[for example facilitated by organizations like the White Helmets in their locations]]. Every time, we see that [[these long-established organizations have the suitable infrastructure and]] are ready to - - share it with everyone, to have [a] better response, to have better services, to conduct better services to the beneficiaries. (.) So (.) right now, they–, I think, the situation [is] somehow–; the - relationship between [[some key organizations whose activities and operations are critical for the response in such situations inside Syria]] and the UN agencies is better. I thought–, maybe after this kind of escalation with them right now, (uhm) we have, both of us, we - - have different communication. They visited [[the White Helmets']] offices in Gaziantep, and they said that they will visit [[their]] offices inside Syria. [[The White Helmets also]] are part - of the - - –; [] are [a] member in - different - - - clusters and technical working groups. [[We all]] are trying to share our information with everyone. [[We all]] believe that the clusters [are a] very important mechanism of coordination. (.) It's very important for the Syrian crisis. (.) Because of that, [[everyone, including the White Helmets]] participate in it, and we try to share everything with all partners. (…)
19	R: And this - escalation, how long ago is that? (.) That with the UN? (.)
20	P7: I (uhm), I don't remember exactly. But from the first day of the earthquake and maybe about ten days or two weeks after (.). Because even when they start (uhm) (.) sending shipments to inside Syria, (…) the (.) - - shipments are not [a] response to the earthquake. It's something [] not the top priorities for the people in - that time. So [[the White Helmets and their network of supporters, me included]] also tried to - - - –; (.) continue[] [[their]] advocacy for pushing the UN agencies and the other countries to improve their response to the earthquake. (.)
21	R: Do you think it worked? (.)
22	P7: Yes. I think part of [[the]] donors [[supporting the humanitarian response in Northwest Syria already longer term]], or maybe new donors [[…]], they responded. One of the donors, they sent [] [a] good amount of money without [even] having [a] proposal, just [an] agreement. And just [a] kind of framework: "use it in earthquake response, fuel, rubble removal, anything related to the - - - - - - response to the earthquake, you can use it". A lot of donors, they start[ed] allocating fund[s] for us, but maybe the - - - - - best impact [was] achieved through [] advocacy campaigns. The - - - solidarity from the local communities inside Syria and from the Syrians in the diaspora (uhm), worldwide. (.) The main support for us, I'm talking about the fund, [came] from the individuals worldwide.
23	R: Aye. Very - interesting. (.)
24	P7: More - - - than - - - the states.
25	R: Very, very interesting. (.) But yeah, (.) it makes sense of course. (…) (Uhm) (.) you mentioned that the UN visited (uhm) the border the week after the - earthquake. (.)
26	P7: Yes. (.)
27	R: I actually have the - tweet from Martin Griffiths here. (.) I want to read it out to you to ask you what you think about it. Maybe–; I'm sure you already know it, (huh)? (.) And maybe you even know what you thought about it then? (.) So, he was tweeting: "at the Türkiye-Syria border today. We have so far failed the people in northwest Syria. They rightly feel abandoned, looking for international help that hasn't arrived. My duty and our obligation is to correct this failure as fast as we can. That's my focus now.". (.) I'm sure that you read this before?
28	P7: Yes. Yes. Everyone, actually. For us [[those engaged in the humanitarian in Northwest Syria]] he was courage [[[very couragous]]] somehow, to - say that in that time. It's okay for us, which is - - good, that they

	admit that they failed the people in Northwest Syria. (Uhm) (…) so, (uhm) (.) maybe after that they start–; the - - - UN teams - , they start[ed] conducting field visits. (Uhm) Every few days there is a field visit inside Syria, visiting the local councils, the - - - the Syrian NGOs in the field, the - - camps, (.) (uhm) (…) the – everywhere. Even they conducted the meeting, I think, it was very interesting, to have a meeting between, (.) I forgot the UN agency, with one of the ministries of the Salvation Government [[[linked to Hay'at Tahrir al-Sham (HTS), the dominant armed group in the region, which is considered an Islamic extremist and terrorist group by various governments and sanctioned by the UNSC since 2018]]] in Idlib. So, it was very interesting to have [a] photo [with] the UN vehicles in front of one of the ministries of the Salvation Government. (.) So they tried to have communication with all stakeholders to maybe facilitate the - - - implementing the responses. (.) Which is good.
29	R: So that's a direct change then? (.) Something that changed in the UN's conduct after the earthquake? (.)
30	P7: Yeah, (uhm) (.) (Some non-verbally expressed hesitation to agree with this fully). Unfortunately, I believe the changes were too late. Because first of all (uhm), as you know (uhm), the cross-border resolution, maybe, will not be renewed. They are –//
31	R: // This is speaking from now in the future?
32	P7: Yeah.
33	R: Okay.
34	P7: Yeah. And maybe one of our concerns [is] that maybe their field visits were to see how to (uhm) conduct crossline operations. Because in that time, they start[ed] speaking about [] establishing [] two offices for the UN inside Syria.
35	R: Okay?
36	P7: So for us, it's very welcome to have offices inside Syria for the for UN agencies, but [only] if their offices are linked to Gaziantep hub. (.), to support the cross-border resolution operations, not to be maybe logistic offices to support the cross direct operations, because– //
37	R: Cross line (.). Crossline operations? (.) You said– //
38	P7: Yeah. Crossline operations. Yes. (.) Yes. (.) So and they talked about this idea for weeks, but right now nothing happened and no-one is talking about it. I don't know because maybe they are waiting for the - final decision about the cross-border resolution renewal or something like that. (Uhm) I said that - their - - movement somehow, were too late. (…) (uhm) I don't know that–; will [] they - - enter [] [[[Northwest]]] Syria? They–; their- - - visits – [] - inside Syria, for example, didn't help in the advocacy for renewing the cross-border resolution. Their staff, they saw [] the - - - - suffering of the people in the field, inside [[[Northwest]]] Syria, and they visited the camps, they visited the hospitals, the - - other public facilities (uhm) (…) and maybe, I don't know. We - - expected that they will share this information [] and [that] they will advocate in better way for renewing the cross-border resolution. But? (.) Nothing happened in this domain. (…)
39	R: Okay. (…) Are there any - other things that you would (.) say (.) there is a change in (.) what the UN did since the earthquake in comparison to before? (…)
40	P7: (Uhm) actually (.), maybe one of the positive things [is] that they are– (.); right now they [[[the UN]]] are open to - have [a] better or higher level of communication and the relationship with [[some civil society actors and humanitarian responders inside Syria. For sure with the White Helmets as of now]]. In the past, I mean, since years [ago], every time [[such organizations tried to]] be active member[s] in the in [relevant] Cluster[s]. For example, in [some relevant] Cluster[s] [[such organizations usually]] are observers, observer member[s] not active member[s] and [[they have and expressed an interest to be more actively involved and to be considered seriously in the UN-coordinated Clusters but were not granted such a role. This concerns the Clusters where the respective organizations have a specific expertise and role to play. Like organizations that work in health in the Health Cluster and the White Helmets in the Early Recovery Cluster maybe. But actually, also in the Health Cluster. Think about it, in the case of the While Helmets, for example, which I see myself very closely involved with, out of 250 ambulances in northeast of Syria they operate half. They also have a lot of other centres and operate other critical infrastructure in Northwest Syria, at times as the sole service provider, which includes firefighting, search and rescue activities and a lot of safe spaces

	and centres dedicated to the protection of women and girls. Yet they have always been observers and not active members in the Clusters and are therefore not systematically consulted when certain interventions are being designed and conducted. This is very strange and it's from the Cluster's side that key organizations are not involved properly I fear. If they were to involve them, they would surely come to different solutions and approaches. Alone in the earthquake situation I remember how the Early Recovery Cluster estimated three times more cubic metres of rubble that would need to be removed that the specialized organization for this, the White Helmets in this case. They are the specialists. They deal with rubble removal as their core activity. But the Early Recovery Cluster did not ask them nor depended on their figures. And in the end as well, it is these specialized organizations that do the bulk of the work then, not other partners of the Cluster. So why are they not active members in the Clusters where they have their expertise? So what I see now is that there is a positive change at least when it comes to communication with these specialized organizations and the UN Clusters]]: right now they start [] sharing information with [[one another]], start being more active in the Clusters and the technical working groups and they start asking us more. For example [[they now take into account our expertise, established structures and capacities in Northwest Syria, for which I can give you various very detailed example. Yet, still, at times they also do not listen as it would be good, for example, they still funded another UN-partner organization recently for conducting activities that we had informed the UN in the Cluster about that this area of post-earthquake work was so well advanced that there was no need for any additional action in this field of work.]] So this domain was almost finished. And we were surprised. [[…]] And that organization - came to us and asked us to help them - in this, because they - - couldn't find [[a way to actually conduct this activity at this moment anymore]]. (.)
41	R: Oh wow. (.)
42	P7: So? (…) [[I recently heard about another example in which the UN gave funds to an organization and they were not able to do what they had agreed in their project contract with the UN related to supporting the rubble removal in Northwest Syria, as the While Helmets and their staff and volunteers had already]] removed the rubble from one of the communities to a landfill. After that, one of the NGOs, they got funded to implement a rubbel project, but there [was] no rubble, so they went to the landfill, they removed the rubble from this area to another area. (.) (mutual laughing with a touch of disbelief as well as frustration). Just to implement this project. (.) For us, it's [a] catastrophe because we are wasting the - - limited resources we have. (.) There is a lot of other services [that] need to be funded. So, this is maybe one of the points [[that my organization and fellow professional humanitarian workers try to]] highlight with the donors, with the UN agencies, and with everyone.
43	R: Okay? Is there a specific reason why the White Helmets are not an active member in the Cluster?
44	P7: Politics. It's politics! (answering with a light smile) It's not–; they [[the UN]] didn't say it formally. (With a strong touch of sarcasm) It's not that they sent an email to the Civil Defence [[[the White Helmets]]] and say that it's politics; to change [] [their] membership to be an active member because of politics. No. But in - (uhm) (.) yani [[[what I mean to say is]]] informal discussions or communication with them, they said that it's sometimes - not our [[[the UN's Cluster coordination team in Gaziantep]]] decision. It's (.) maybe, because - there is objection from Russia against this? From other countries against this? (Uhm) (.) But in the meantime [[the White Helmets]] are active in in the Early Recovery Cluster but [] not in the Health Cluster, [] not in the WASH cluster, [] not in the CCM cluster. In the Mine Action Cluster [] [the White Helmets] are the main–, the only service provider related to [] unexploded ordinances [[…]] but [] [they] are not active in - - the Mine Action Cluster. (laughing with a touch of frustration and disbelief) I don't know why.
45	R: Okay. (.) But you you're saying that at least there is, since the earthquake, an improvement in the communication with the UN?
46	P7: Yes.
47	R: In all the clusters?
48	P7: Yes. Yes, (uhm) actually in the last meeting [[that I am aware of]] in the Health Cluster, [[the UN cluster coordination team visited the White Helmets' office in Gaziantep and had a]] very positive meeting with them, [[including about changing their status to be an active member in the health cluster, so let us see what will happen next. I think there is an idea about having a follow-up meeting on the subject soon. This is at

	least what senior members of the WHO [[[the UN agency coordinating the health cluster]]] have signalled to me]], to improve the relationship between the White Helmets and the - - UN (.); (ah), the Health Cluster.
49	R: Very interesting (.). Would you - - you think (.)–; I mean, I have - - one question, which goes a little bit into probing into this, which is about changes specifically in terms of goals, actions or behaviour, so it differentiates a bit there. Do you think this is more a change now in actions and behaviour, or even maybe in goals of the UN? Since the earthquake? (…)
50	P7: I don't. I can't–. I don't know (.). Maybe I can say that there is the changes on the level of the objectives. Because, (uhm) (…) yani [[[what I mean to say is that]]], and if they will go or they will not, [I mean] the - - - UN, and the Security Council will not renew the cross-border resolution, (uhm) (.) then the Northwest of Syria will face a catastrophe. Maybe on the - - level of the individuals, the UN staff, (.) they understand, right now, they understand the situation inside [[[Northwest]]] Syria better. But maybe it's not their decision to decide or –; I don't know if they have the - - authority or the influence to advocate more, for – the cross-border resolution on the level of the individuals, maybe there - - is, I don't know, sympathy with the Syrian people in - - the area, in Northwest. But on the level of our objectives or actions (.) until now, nothing has changed. (.)
51	R: Okay. (.) If you think about the UN and your opinion about the UN before the earthquake; I mean (.), it evidently affects what you think about the UN today. (.)
52	P7: Yes. (with a smile)
53	R: So, would you mind sharing with me: What - did you think about the UN before the earthquake?
54	P7: I think before and (uhm) after the earthquake, I think, (.) I still believe that the UN they have [a] very important role. No-one can play the same role. (.) In general. I'm talking about the coordination, about the technical capacity and technical support they have and they can deliver to - - - the local partners. I'm talking about the advocacy with the donors, with everyone. Those three main domains. No-one, I think, can have the same capacity. (.) Also, the legal framework (.), or the legal coverage. No other [entity]–; everyone knows that the - UN, they have [a] very strong legal coverage. No-one can maybe ask them: “why you have communication with this de-facto authority, which - - is classified as [a] terrorist group?” (.) It's part of their regulations and SOPs [[[standard operating procedures]]], but if [an] INGO, or Syrian partner will have maybe such kind of communication just to facilitate the work, maybe we - - - - - are not protected like the UN. So, because of that, we believe in the importance of the cross-border resolution; of having [an] active [UN] hub in Gaziantep. (…) The clusters, (uh), (…) if - - - - we will lose the - - - - impact of the - coordination of the clusters, we will have–; the - - situation will be more complex and difficult. In light of decreasing of the – fund, a lot of Syrian NGOs will lose their access to fund[s]. (Uhm) Maybe the overlap–; (.) we will find that - - - - there is no kind of equality in in the distribution of the services in Northwest of Syria. So, we - believe in - the importance of the role of the UN agencies. (…) This is from my point of view. I believe that this role is important before and after the earthquake. (…) During the earthquake, maybe, they should have done (smiling with a strong touch of sarcasm) a bit more.
55	R: A bit? (smiling, probing into the sarcastic tone)
56	P7: (Laughing) Exactly. Yes. Yes, yes.
57	R: A bit is a bit; so a bit right? It's always difficult later on to transcribe the sarcasm (laughing, making fun of the situation). Maybe we should use our words more directly (mutual laughing). (.) (Uhm), (.) you mentioned the cross-border resolution issue a couple of times already, and it's also connected to why the UN may seem to have needed or insisted on the permission of the–; of Damascus to enter northwest Syria in the first place right? During the earthquake? So basically the cross-border issue is the main thing that I am perceiving you’re referring to–//.
58	P7: //Yes.
59	R: What do you think is going to happen in the future on that? And what do you think is the UN's responsibility or role with regards to - solving this cross-border resolution issue? (…)
60	P7: (Uh), I – think; we believe that the cross-border resolution, (uhm) sooner or later (.) will not be renewed. (.) Maybe, if they will have agreement, maybe they will renew it for additional six months, but (uhm) not

	more than that. (…) (Uhm), the people in northwest of Syria will suffer a lot (.), because they will (uhm)–; a lot of Syrian NGOs will be closed as NGOs, because they depend - - - on the UN agencies fund. Mainly. (.) That means that a lot of employees will lose their salaries. (.) That means a lot of families here in Turkey and inside Syria will lose their income. (.) Okay, this is number 1. Number 2 [concerns] (uhm) mainly the food security. A lot of people, mainly in the camps inside Syria, they succeeded to survive until now because they receive food baskets, for example. Maybe every month or every two months, but (uhm) they will lose this access for sure. Maybe (.) - not a hundred percent, but at least most of the - food baskets will not be accessible for [] most of the people in Northwest of Syria. The - access to the (uhm) other (uhm) basic services, the health services, the education, the shelter, they (uhm) will (uhm) (.) the people will suffer, (.) because of lack of access to those services. I - - don't know why (uhm) the UN they can't (uhm) push to - - move the - - - permission of renewing the cross-border resolution from the Security Council to the–, I don't know if we can call it the General Assembly in the UN?
61	R: Yeah?
62	P7: So legally they can do it. I don't know why, maybe because of politics. (.) Maybe because we are not isolated from other crises worldwide. (.) Because maybe if the - [member] states of the UN will insist to renew the cross-border resolution outside of the Security Council and will enforce this decision, maybe Russia will ask to have [the] cross-border resolution in Ukraine through Russia. I don't know. But (uhm) legally, or based on the - - UN regulations, there [are] solutions -. They can use it. Why don't - they want to use it? I don't know. (.)
63	R: (Hmm). (.) That's an interesting point. And you're also kind of highlighting (.) that there seems to be a mix, maybe, between humanitarian action and politics. Is that what I'm understanding correctly?
64	P7: Yeah, yeah, yeah. Actually, I heard from one of the UN agency staff, he said that the - humanitarian aid is 90 percent politics and 10 percent humanitarian. (.)
65	R: (Hmm).
66	P7: So, (.) because they receive funds from [member] states and, yani [[[I mean]]], I think it's clear. (…) It's not an–; when they speak about the humanitarian principles or - - –; these principles, (.) I think, it's not applicable for them.
67	R: Okay?
68	P7: We [[[the UN's local humanitarian partner organizations]]] are better in – applying and to be committed to those principles more than them [[[the UN]]]. (…)
69	R: Does this, generally speaking, (.) but also in this specific regard (.); does this affect your perception of the UN's legitimacy to operate in northwest Syria? (…) Or to engage in the context as a whole, as a political and humanitarian entity? (…)
70	P7: (Uhm) actually, we always–, we - are advocating for maintaining the - existence of the UN in the - area in the Northwest of Syria, the Gaziantep hub, the cross-border resolution, (.) even (.) (uhm)–, yani [[you know]], because we witnessed a lot of experiences related to crossline operations in the past. For example, in Al-Ghouta, this area was besieged by regime forces. Right now there is the – Hadalan and Rukban camp near to the Jordanian (uhm) (.) border. In one of the workshops I attended with the WHO, the discussion was about the crossline operations. To have hybrid intervention. //
71	R: // To Southern Syria?
72	P7: Yeah. To have hybrid intervention: cross-border and cross line at the same time. (Uhm) when he start[ed] asking us: "What's your opinion as a Syrian organization in Northwest? What's your concerns?" I asked [[a senior member]] of the WHO office here: "Are you talking about one way crossline or two ways?". He laughed and he asked me: "Do you want to send humanitarian aid from Idlib or from Northwest to regime-controlled areas?" (Imitating a disbelieving tone). I said: "Why not? Because, you see, I have relatives and friends in - the other areas and this is Syria for me. (.) Can you help us in this? (.) If you can, it's okay." (.). He said nothing. I asked him: "Can you help us if we want to send something to Rukban camp?". He said nothing. So it's one way crossline. They want to control the humanitarian aid. I'm talking about the

	regime and their allies. So, (uhm), I don't know if I answered your question (.) , but (.), always we believe that (.) – //
73	R: Do you–// Do you mean that, you think the UN is with them on this line? (.) So basically, are you saying that Damascus wants to control the humanitarian aid //
74	P7: Yes.
75	R: And the UN is supporting this idea?
76	P7: It's–. I don't know if the UN staff they have [an] option or they can decide in this. (.) (Uhm) Because they may notice that part of their staff here they - - - believe that those people in northwest of Syria will be damaged if the cross-border resolution will not be renewed. And they, maybe individually, they agree with us. But they can do nothing. I - don't know if the UN agencies are able to do that, but because maybe it's politics, they can do nothing. They know that the – crossline operation will not have the same impact in comparison with the cross-border operation. So, I can't say that as individuals they support this. Maybe part of them, they - support this, it's easier for them to deal with the, (uhm) somehow government [[[speaking about the GoS]]], but part of them, they as individuals, they know it's not the correct decision. (…)
77	R: Yeah. (.) Do you think this hampers the UN's legitimacy in, like, perceived from a northwest Syria point of view?
78	P7: (Distracted for a moment) Sorry?
79	R: Do you think that this, let's say, connection (.) that they have with the sovereign state, or let's say with the - - - - state actor, do you think that this affects negatively on their legitimacy in Northwest Syria as an entity? (.) Like, the UN as a whole?
80	P7: I - - don't know actually I. Can't support this idea or be against it- I don't know. I have to think about it (laughing).
81	R: (Laughing) Good. (.) It's - - - a nasty question. I actually only have one more because you already answered all of the other ones, which is just great. Thank you. (Laughing)
82	P7: Great. Good (Laughing)
83	R: But this last one is not the easiest, aye? So, [[…]] in your words, what would the UN need to do in the future to remedy the past?
84	P7: To (what)?
85	R: (…) To remedy the past. (.) So, to make good for the past.
86	P7: (Uhm. Ah; wow) (.). I don't know. Maybe in general they have to - - find a way to minimise or to decrease the influence of the politics on their work. They are responsible to conduct responses, neutral responses, to - - the whole people in need everywhere. This is, I think, their main responsibility. But if they will keep working like this, (uhm), (.) they will lose their influence. And they have to learn from the earthquake, (uhm) disaster, to work on the preparedness; on readiness before facing the–, - - - such kind of disasters. Maybe we will in – the - - coming period, we will face [another] outbreak; we will face [another] natural disaster. We can't wait to have - - - reaction. We have to be–; we need to be proactive, not reactive. And they have to be [so]. Because they have the experience. They know how to think, how to organise disaster management. (Uhm) they have to work with the active, specialised local partners. (.) And they have to empower the local communities. [[Many local NGOs, the White Helmets included, focus more and more on having]] projects or programmes [] [that] engage the communities in [] [their] work to have better partnerships with the local communities, with the syndicates, with the private - sector, with the - local institutions in our work. Because we (speaking from the perspective of local NGO members) can implement better responses and the UN, if they work with the local communities, they will have better impact. (…)
87	R: Thank you. (…) (Uhm), I have nothing more. If you have anything still in your mind that you want to share, –? (…)
88	P7: (Uhm) I–, (uhm), right now in Northwest of Syria, if right now the cross-border resolution will not be renewed, you know that there is a[n] alternative mechanism of managing the fund, (.) ANFS. The old name

	was NSAF. (Uhm) (.), the fund manager is Adam Smith [[[a global advisory company headquartered in the UK]]]. I think it's somehow, it's, yani [[what I mean to say is that]], (uhm) an alternative option to be ready to the - period after not renewing the cross-border resolution [[[ready to be availed when/ in case the resolution is not renewed]]], but I – talked, (uhm), we discussed that internally, and we agree that it's not about managing the fund. [It's] about being [a] platform for coordination, leading the coordination, (uhm) supporting the - - local partners regarding to the coordination and to support the localization. (…) In Northwest of Syria and in other areas of Syria.
89	R: Okay, so (.) the alternative fund, what's the name? Now, let me - - write it down.
90	P7: The - fund manager is Adam Smith
91	R: (Writing, repeating) Adam Smith. Yeah, but it's basically, (.) it's a - - fund outside of the UN system? For Northwest Syria? So it– , but it doesn't, it can't be– // It it needs to go– //
92	P7: // It's– // They can't actually–; unfortunately they can't secure the same amount of fund. (.) (Uhm) We don't believe that they can cover more than 40 percent of the fund, which was secured by the UN agencies or maybe.
93	R: Yeah. Okay. I see that this is a problem. But even if they could, how– (.) who would - - allow, so, the legal crossing of the border for supplies, for goods, et cetera, without the UN system can, is there any mechanism that can simply say you can cross the border no matter what? Yes?
94	P7: Yes, actually not all the - - goods are shipped to inside Syria through – Bab Al-Hawa using the cross-border resolution. A lot of the shipments go through other borders using the trade (.) –.
95	R: The commercial route?
96	P7: Yes, the commercial, yes. (.) And there is kind of good collaboration from the Turkish - authority in this domain. For them it's okay for - - the shipment [of] humanitarian aid to go inside Syria through the other border [crossing]s. They have, I think, [an]other four or five border [crossing]s, Al-Salame, R'aib, Hannaan, and I think, Jarabulus and Tal Abiyat. Thouse borders are used by the - - NGOs. For example, when we procure medical supplies, we agree with the supplier that we will receive - those items or goods inside Syria, so he or she–, the - - - supplier they managed this - - transportation of goods to inside Syria, (.) so //
97	R: // Okay, that means the Turkish authorities on the one hand side and whoever has the control of the other side, agree to just let it go?
98	P7: Yes, yes.
99	R: And the Adam Smith had its alternative fund is, basically, they say (imitating to speak as Adam Smith): "we will not insist that you use the humanitarian channels as the UN would, but you can - - go through this kind of maybe somehow borderline legal mechanism and we will accept this."?
100	P7: Yes, yeah, yeah.
101	R: Okay, good.
102	P7: Yes, yes. Actually, and (.) moreover – //
103	R: // This is new for me, by the way. Thank you for explaining it.
104	P7: Yeah. Actually, [] moreover, the - - UN agencies, they start[ed] [the] handover process with INGOs. For example, the Health Cluster for, (ah) sorry, the WHO, they start handing over the–; some (.) domains (.) (uhm), (.) or some files to IRC. IRC will take the - –; will be the lead of the health sector in northwest of Syria. There is, I think, five INGOs. They will work with the UN agencies on the handover process.
105	R: (Nodding) (Mhmmm)
106	P7: (Uhm) And some of the donors, the institutions, (uhm) the – governments [[[donor countries]]], I think, (uhm), we heard that they informed the UN agencies that–; and I think you heard about when USA -, they said: "we will not give fund to UN agencies to be used through Damascus hub."?
107	R: (Nodding) (Mhmmm)

108	P7: So they [[[the US government]]] will, I think, send, (uhm) yani [[I mean]], allocate funds through the INGOs and maybe through the ANFS.
109	R: So through Adam Smith. (.)
110	P7: Yes. Adam Smith. (.)
111	R: But then - this is not the problem. I - thought this was a problem, thank you for clarifying this. I'm–; So this–; then the - - funds is on one card, right? (.) The funds and the legal - - acceptance to get things inside and outside. (.) But your main concern then is the coordination capacity that is missing if the UN leaves the sector. Leaves the–
112	P7: Yeah. Coordination -, the Technical capacity they have, and the advocacy.
113	R: Okay.
114	P7: Having, yani [[[I mean]]] the existence of [the] UN in this area (uhm) make[s] the - advocacy easier for - - the–; any need for this - - area. But once they will go, or - - - will not be active through the cross-border resolution, the advocacy will be maybe more difficult. (Uhm) so the advocacy, the technical capacity they have and the coordination.
115	R: And what would this mean then, for the peace processes which are also led by the UN?
116	P7: The peace process? (reacting with a bit of confusion)
117	R: Yes
118	P7: (Argh). (.) Yani– [[[oh wow, I don't know what to say to this]]]
119	R: Like, yani [[[you know]]], there was a constitutional committee once upon a time, I think? (smiling, speaking with a touch of sarcasm).
120	P7: I don't know. We will see. (.) If we - can say that 90 percent of the humanitarian aid is affected by politics, the - peacebuilding process is 100 percent (uhm; smiling) politics.
121	R: So?
122	P7: So (.)–
123	R: Maybe–; does it - - help the UN then if they withdraw from northwest Syria? With the cross-border resolution being not renewed, do you think that they - will actually have a stake then in the in the peace process, (uhm) in leading the political negotiations? (…)
124	P7: I think, maybe [the] UN they are always–; even the - - [UN member] states, the - different states, they need the UN to be existent. Maybe to use them. Sometimes. So, I think always they - will be existent in a way or another, but (uhm) they will not be the - main player in this [[[the peace process]]], or one of the main player[s] in this way.
125	R: Tamam [[[okay]]], very interesting. Thank you. I'm going to stop the recording now. One second.

Transcript P8 (1)

1	R: So, maybe you can start by (.) telling me about about yourself, who you are, what - you work, (.) a little bit of background so that I can connect it later on to the interview.
2	P8: Alright. So, it will be a Q&A [[[question and answer]]] thing or just open conversation?
3	R: It will be as open as you like. I have some guidance questions, but usually I felt that I do not really need them, so (.) go ahead.
4	P8: Alright. (…) (Uhm), okay, first of all, I'm [[Participant]], [[I have a mental health background and have both studied and worked for a significant time in this field, most of the time so far with a local/diaspora organization on the context of Northwest Syria. Over the years, I have assumed both purely medical/ technical roles as well as, increasingly, managerial responsibilities as well, however mostly as a mix. Furthermore, with the UN-coordinated cluster approach in which my organization is a member, I have

	attended cluster meetings for years. I have gotten to understand the UN's way of working cross-border in Northwest Syria very well and have myself been closely involved in the coordination mechanisms and activities where my technical field of experience and expertise is concerned.]] (…) (Uhm), shall I proceed?
5	R: If - you like. Otherwise I would have, I would just want to ask if you can briefly describe what [[your organization]] is, (uhm) what - kind of an organization it is, (uhm) - maybe also how you (.) first got involved in in the sector?
6	P8: Okay. (Uhm) [[My organization]] basically is a medical organization operating in Northwest of Syria, with different kind[s] of response modalities [[including primary to tertiary healthcare and mental health; yet, the organization also conducts other supportive and related programmes and activities and does not limit itself to the health sector only]]. We - - are responding since - a while now, since 2017, with different kind of projects, (.) coordinating, of course, with other stakeholders, other local stakeholders like Idlib Health Directorate or whatever other semi-governmental entities [there are] in the field, and also, we are active members in the humanitarian cluster[s], sub-cluster[s], working group[s], and now we can count tens of them, now by 2023. We are [a] fund-based [[[publicly funded by grants/ donor-dependend]]] organization so we always seek fund and we have this worry that this project will be extended, that won't be fully covered, and these kind of things. We are always trying to [[[financially]]] survive and keep providing whatever we are doing to the people. (.) This is one thing. On the other hand, we have close coordination with the UN agencies, whether as implementing [partner] project-wise, as we're receiving directly from - different kind of UN, such as OCHA, WHO, UNICEF. On the other hand, of course, we are coordinating with them via the clusters. [UN] Clusters are the - only platforms (.), and I will explain why I'm saying only: they are the only platforms who are responsible [in] both [the] two pillars in the response: coordination and technical support. Because (.) in the northwest of Syria context, unfortunately, there - are no (uhm) clear or real governmental entities, like ministries of health or whatever other governmental entities that are (.) involved in the response, so still, UN agencies and the civil society organizations (uhm) are the main actors in the ground in the Northwest of Syria. Of course there are some semi-governmental [entities], but they are not really effective as the usual governmental [ones] in other crises, like Ukraine and Pakistan, or whatever, other countries facing crisis situation[s], this is what makes [the] northwest of Syria context really unique, (.) more complicated (.) and problematic (.), because (.), you know, fully or totally counting on UN agencies and civil society organization[s] is not really the - best option for - countries with crises. And we – were trying to, as local NGOs, (uhm) to - create or build some central bodies, a way of NGOs, like (uhm) SIG [[[the Syrian Interim Government, a coalition of Syrian opposition groups largely supported by Western governments]]] or what's so called, the 'Vaccine Syrian immunisation – group" or "vaccination", or "HIS", "health information system" or "Directorate". We tried to create such entities to - –; thinking that, in the future, they might take over the whole thing and start in the early recovery phase, but unfortunately, we are facing a lot of challenges doing this. Always the – fund[ing] part [[[lack of funding for such endeavours]]], or partners are not really interested anymore or supporting such entities. Also, since 2020, we - are - –; we were trying to push ourselves to the early recovery phase, but then COVID-19 came back to emergency response again and then an earthquake and then cholera, so we - are facing a lot of different nature-made, man-made, I don't know, fund-made crises (.) dragging us down again to the emergency response, starting from [] scratch to (.) - - figure out what's going on and how to respond again. (.) This is in general. (.) // Describing the situation.
7	R: Yeah. () // Yeah. (…) And you've been working for [[your organization]] for how long now?
8	P8: For me, [[several]] [] years. I stopped counting. I started [[years ago working in the field in a mental health project, and gradually moved up to now assume senior-level management roles]]. [[…]] [[With our organization also growing and even expanding to other contexts outside of Syria, we are building on such local expertise that we have developed over more than a decade now. There are countries we have in mind where to go and support now, even though Syria will remain the cornerstone of our work]]. We really [have become] experts, I would say, in emergency response. So, we have, (uhm) and with emergency response, I mean, I believe that it's our - main asset. We know how to respond in different kind of sectors, (.) so we will try to transfer this experience to other context[s]. [[However, these developments are all still in the making, so I can hardly say much more than this at this point.]] //
9	R: Very nice. // (.) [[…]]

10	P8: [[…]]. Believe me, working in Northwest Syria is like [a] double-fulltime job. You wouldn't be able to think of other contexts and try to respond. But [] [on] the other hand, at least I feel that being, (uhm) I mean, being an expert in [the] Northwest of Syria response, in such a very complicated situation, makes any response in other contexts like as a walk in the park or something. That's my impression now. Because every other context, they have way other–, like, (.) they have resources, they have [a] better situation than ourselves. We tried this in [[another country recently where there is a state that has the supreme authority over the response]], like, for example [[in this context]], they have helicopters as ambulances. Wow. I mean, it's really good. (Laughing). (.) We - dreamed to have a helicopter (.) //.
11	R: // –a helicopter for whatever (joint laughing).
12	P8: Yeah. (…). And they have [their] Ministry of Health, they have plans already in place (.) // not like us.
13	R: They have a government.
14	P8: Yeah, they have the government, they have [a] military! The military is with them, [the] military forces, not against them. Like, (.) the way it goes in Northwest of Syria. So I really feel like in vain(?). Those people, of course, they are facing a very shitty situation. Everywhere in the world. But I feel comparing our [[[Northwest Syria's]]] situation with other situations, I feel a bit in in vain(?) with those people that means, you should be grateful, you have very, very good resources comparing with outside. (.)
15	R: Very interesting point I think.
16	P8: Of course, human resources, everything, infrastructure. That has been speaking now, (uhm) Northwest of Syria accounts five million population [[[has a population of five million]]], like one psychiatrist, like ten gynaecologists, like two paediatricians, really we - have [a] [] lack, [] [a] shortage in everything [[…]].
17	R: [[abridged for protecting internal and personal information with no link to research interests. In a nutshell exchange of perceptions on how different contexts are in terms of humanitarian response, refugee rights and integration, and the like. Comparing Northwest Syria to other contexts.]]
18	P8: [[....]] So, [it's the] same with the crisis, [the] same with Northwest of Syria. I mean, we were - - - on our own, but as, again, civil society, organizations and whoever, even international NGOs, we needed to survive, because there - are no governments, again, in place, no system, no nothing. Kind of the same situation. That's why we are really experts, like, we - - started from the scratch, trying to find our way over, and we - did a lot of mistakes and then learned about the sorts of mistakes. Nobody is guiding you through your response. And it happens again in Northwest of Syria, this module of (.) being empowered by yourself, by learning, self-learning. So that's how I describe it. Personally.
19	R: [[Abridged: talking about shared experiences in the past]]
20	P8: [[Abridged: talking about shared experiences in the past and how things have evolved since]]
21	R: [[I find your context-specific expertise on the context of Northwest Syria today]] very impressive. So, I mean, with that point, I can go right into my question– (uhm), one of the questions that I have here, because, you mentioned now, basically, Northwest Syria having been on its own, without a government, without a system-based approach outside of the UN, and not being with any actual platform for coordination and response at all. And how was that in your point of view in the earthquake situation? How did Northwest Syria act (.) in the situation when they were – hit (.) by the earthquake? (…) Maybe (.): Who were the main actors? Who were the main response heroes? If you want so (.).
22	P8: I would say; again, (.) [this is] another funny thing about this response. I mean, spread-wise [[[in terms of coverage]]] local NGOs [were] way bigger than international NGOs in Northwest of Syria. Like, I would mention here SAMS [[[the Syrian-American Medical Society]]], for instance, (.) UOSSM [[[Union of Medical Care and Relief Organizations]]], (.) also others. Comparing them with, like, international [ones], like IRC [[[International Rescue Committee]]] or Relief International or whatever. (Uhm) (.), now they [[[the large local/diaspora NGOs such as SAMS or UOSSM]]] are bigger, more experienced than the international NGOs. And the thing is here, (.) weirdly, sometimes (uhm) international NGOs, which I believe [] they're supposed to support their partners, when they have implementing partners, not just give them the money to respond. They should support. That's what I thought. Support them in the very means of our, like, organizational development, wherever, other [areas], because, again, as a local [organization], we were

	trying to learn by ourselves. So, at some point the international NGOs themselves weren't competitive. At some point. (.) And this, (uhm) (.) as it turned out, again, some of them, not all of them, they were learning by having this partnership with local NGOs, building their own capacity, but not, I wouldn't say, building capacity, [rather] being more aware of the context, more aware how to respond to such, and then started to directly implement by themselves rather than keep supporting those local NGOs, which is really weird (laughing with a sarcastic undertone expressing disbelieve, disapproval, ill manner) //
23	R: // So it's - - // 'de-localization', you mean? It's the other way around? So they didn't–; They (INGOs) became more local? (.) and– (joint laughing)
24	P8: And even–// Yeah, yeah. // Exactly. And they used that. I felt, like, we were being used, like, when we received this support fund or whatever, (uhm) after one year of being responding or implementing partner, they asked you to share your tools, your - activities, supervision mechanisms, data, everything. Which is normal. They are the donor, you know, donors have huge authorities in northwest of Syria. (.) We have this misunderstanding, being donor. However, so, after a while, (uhm) they are using your tools, using your, other–, mindset, using your way of thinking in the Northwest of Syria. And then they started to directly implement by themselves, using their assets, because they - –; I mean, normally, they are more, more capacitated than [local organizations]. They are international NGOs. They already have tools and everything. But understanding a complicated situation like Northwest of Syria (.) is something they [[[INGOs]]] are needed to - be involved with locals first. If you are planning to then implement by yourself. (.) This is what happened, like, in the in the first five to six years. Unfortunately, it didn't work with them. Even after doing that, they're still limited in their response and we – [[[speaking from the perspective of a local/ diaspora organization]]] are now more spreading [[[growing in size; scope]]], comparing with them. This is one thing. Regarding, I mean, here international NGOs, how - it went with some of them. Some of them, no, they were really supportive. They really tried to empower you. They don't have [] greedy, I don't know, plans to – implement them by themselves or take the whole fund for themselves. No. They keep providing whatever support you might require; capacity building, whatever, to–; so they - in their mind, they wanted to, at some point, it's clearly like that, they will (uhm) hand over everything to you [[[is in]]]: Now you are okay, you can implement by yourselves. Some of them went // in this way, others no. They were really not that ethical, I would say. So (.) this is regarding international NGOs now.
25	R: [Organizations which] really do that? Yeah. // And then just to - - – //, because, in connection with the earthquake, that means, if I understand you correctly, that the presence of local NGOs (.) in the moment in which that additional disaster happened now, (.) was much higher (.) // than the presence of INGOs, and making also basically the local NGOs, much more important for the response than the INGOs. And you're - basically saying that the capacity of local NGOs, (uhm) at that point, now, let's say, after years and years of crisis, right? After years of conflict, that the - local NGOs, as you call them, are now much more capable of responding in general in comparison, even to INGOs // , because you learn from them, but also, actually, they tried to take away the localised secrets from you. // So the good ones, the good INGOs that work with local NGOs, actually, played a good role for - - bringing capacity, or for allowing people, (.) or people and organizations, to grow // so that those local organizations are now the - - backbone, probably, of the response. Is that - - what I'm - - understanding? //
26	R: // Yeah // Yeah // (Hmm; nodding) // Yeah // Yeah //
27	P8: Exactly. And again, out of my psychology background, I can (uhm) (.) give you an example, like, as individuals, it's normal when you are in a new context, (.) (uhm) you need community leaders. For so many reasons, because all of the response should be community-based response with engagement and inclusion and everything. (.) So as individuals we - target community leaders, like maybe school – principal[s], whatever. Sometimes a woman, like, (?) in some streets, she is a committee leader. However, we need those people to first understand the situation. By then, second, use their influence for - our plans and response and services, among other reasons. So, which is normal, that's how it went organizational wise. Internationals, they - saw us at some point as community leaders, as local NGOs. We are aware of the context. And speaking of the context, by the way, (uhm) I would divide it into 2/ 3 sub-context categories: Context of the society, I mean here traditions, you know, as – Syrians. And then (.) context of the crisis itself. Because the Syrian crisis is complicated and (uhm), believe me, not, maybe you are aware or familiar what's going on in Syria, but it's not that it doesn't apply for others. People think it's [a] civil war, or other[s] think that it's [a] terrorist situation. No, no. So, we are aware of the crisis (.) context, not only the traditions of the -

	- community, and of course the language, which is the third part. So, being familiar with all of those things, we were the community leaders in the in the organizations' community. // I mean, in the population. //
28	R: // Of course. // okay.
29	P8: So, but we were at the same - - place we - - were naïve. I still remember myself. (.). I mean, here, naive in terms of this systemized response. Like, developing proposals, I still remember myself when (.) my manager [[…]] told me: "Please give me give me a proposal or something.". I said: "What? What is that?". It was in 2014. "What do you mean by proposal?" (joint laughing; pause). We were that naïve I mean. But still we have those assets of being familiar with the context. Now, after 10 years, this long journey of self-learning, building our capacity, having diplomas, people went out to study something and then come back, et cetera. Now we have both assets: we have the experience, the–(.) at some point academic, sometimes, experience, and now we're still familiar with the context. This–; that's when we went competitive now with the international (uhm) NGOs. (…)
30	R: So you're (.) seeing - - the competition between you, like, between [[…]] your organization and INGOs. You see the competition between other, bigger, larger, more developed local NGOs and international NGOs even today? Okay. (.) (Uhm) Okay, that's – impressive actually (with a smile). Nice. Very nice - -. I mean, of course I remember [[some instances that we both are aware of that I would see as a confirmation of this, too.]]
31	P8: [[Yes, but even in the these examples that you are thinking of now, these entities may also still belong to the]] second category: the ones who really try to empower you and support you.
32	R: Of course - - [[…]]
33	P8: [[…]] Well, [[researcher]], believe me, I - don't–; I - - really don't know the reasons, I mean here [[what you just mentioned is but one example]]. But, (.) one of the factors, like, imagine yourself, me claiming that I know how to speak Deutsch [[[German in German language]]] or German. I think that. And you, as someone who's native, who can really speak Deutch or German, (.) (uhm) and you don't know where to start to convince me that you are really not able to speak this language, because you - can see me as arrogant, like: "No, I can look at this word like I can pronounce this, I can pronounce that.". And you feel: "Wow. (.) It's [a] long journey for this person; (.) ignorant person (.) (joint laughin), to really first know his limitation.". Because when we started to - learn things, we thought: "Oh, yeah, we are the experts, we know everything", and (laughing) (uhm) - you really–; you feel, really, it's helpless to - - - convince those people: "No, you are still very limited and you have no idea about the things you don't know.". (Uhm) So you just start to smile to us: "Okay, okay, you are good.". Because (joint laughing) it's really devastating to – come–; so yeah, we went through this, this arrogance part, at some point as a local NGO and then the reality show[ed] us how limited we are. And this, and how - - [there are] dozens of things we – need [so as] to claim that we are experts.
34	R: [[in a personal, semi-private tone speaking about that researcher also sees a change in academia here: introducing the "local turn"; recommending the recent publications of Severine Autesserre]]
35	P8: I'm totally with you, but one of the things–; I told you we are familiar with the context. So one of the things I'm familiar with is the – culture. I mean, we need the culture of standardisation, like being systemized. Yeah, random, we have a lot of good, maybe, effects. We - have the determination and everything, but we–this culture of being standards-systemized, internationals are way better. They have [a] history. And they - learn themselves their way to be systemized-standardised, following the book protocols and those things, this culture, still there, by the way, is this "Why do–(.); Why should I follow this protocol?! Look, I - just missed a lot of things and it's still - working. This is the culture we need to change here.
36	R: "Mumkin –" [[[Maybe -]]]. But then -, let's take that culture. Take the–; let's take the UN's culture and way of working. And let's not - - now go into the earthquake directly or anything. Let's reflect about how things have been (.) in the period since the beginning of the crisis in Syria and the earthquake. (.) Basically, before (.) - the last disaster. What do you think (.) about the United Nations and their way of engaging in northwest Syria (.) in terms of, for example, in terms of their actions, in terms of their goals, objectives, in terms of the behaviour of their representatives, their staff? (.) What's your general impression of what the UN's role in northwest Syria has been (.) between 2011 and 2022? // I think it links really well to what we already discussed, so you don't have to repeat if // [so], but, yeah, perfect.

37	P8: // Okay. // Well, in the beginning we - - didn't have a clear idea about the UN[‘s] role. (.) So, when we - - - to deal with UN agencies, in the beginning, there - were no clusters; no clusters in the very beginning. There were some locals (.) trying to do their things on their own way and very random[], sometimes harmful way. So (uhm) (.), that's when the UN agencies started to interfere, (.) started to build or create those platforms, what’s so-called, now, Clusters; sector-based clusters between health and other sectors. And we [[local NOGs/ locals]] started, it was at the beginning, very - good for us, again, with the lack of whatever [[[governmental; overall responsible]]] entity (.) UN agencies gives you, the feeling of legitimacy. Like, now (uhm) (.) they are sending us–; or still, they are even sometimes more important than governments. Like, we felt like that. Now we - can legitimise what we are doing because it's already recognised by WHO, for instance. (.) //
38	R: (.) // (uhm), okay, sorry. Just - for me to understand correctly, that means you as an NGO or as individuals working in a - - way–; working with the UN, gave you legitimacy // because you followed an internationally - renown and recognised institution like the UN.
39	P8: // Yes. // Exactly. I mean– //
40	R: // Perfect. OK. // Thank you for the clarification.
41	P8: // Worldwide, // yeah, worldwide, [the] UN is more recognised than your [[any single]] government, for instance. So we needed this and we still need it, by the way. (Uhm) With the absence of any kind of accreditation and recognition of anything in Northwest of Syria, there is no such entity [that] provides such a thing. (.) Now we (uhm)–; that's why we are counting on UN agencies to legitimise what are we doing and we’re - really overdoing this now. (.) Now you can hear (.) in any meetings, (.) if you receive any criticism, the only thing you should do [is to say]: “No, it's recognised by the WHO.” Everybody will shut up (…) (uhm) or recognise, or it's already been shared. I mean, here not only activities or protocols, (.) anything, like need assessment, whatever, secondary data, (imitating to speak in any such meeting): “Ah, it's based on HRO, so it's right. It's clear. No (.), no questioning here.”. This is (.) because of our extreme need to [[[for]]] legitimacy here. We’re really overdoing this now. We don't question anything (.) [the] UN, (.) this side, at some level. Other levels, no, you know, we have troubles with them sometimes. Now when we started to be [the] experts, we really, (.) it's–; it doesn't make sense (.), this newsletter or whatever (.), bulletins maybe; but back then, no, we - saw them, we look[ed] up to the UN agencies in the beginning, because our need to [[[for]]] legitimacy. This is one thing. So, [] through those clusters as, again, the only platforms who were responsible [] [for] the response, coordination-wise, technical support-wise as well, we started to (uhm) - use this platform; (.) to utilise this platform to really– and use their–; those platforms provide provided us with the tools. (.) Again, another good thing happened, like, this: “That you should do need assessment[s].”. All of those terms were new to us (.). (Uhm), “You should do this. You should first do (.) (uhm) focus group discussions, surveys, …” All of those terminology: “Wow, it's good.”. We started to - agree on that and back then, life was easy response-wise, like you don't have to have very complicated proposals, it's 1-2 pages and they give you the farm. In the very beginning, that’s how it went. Six months projects; one-year projects; urgent response projects. (.) (Uhm), with time (.) (uhm), one of–(.); of course, one of [] those platforms, cluster[s] is collecting data. Collecting data, - - reports, data, and taking or having decisions based on those data. So here - [is] when the regular allocations [[[for funding projects]]] started. (.) UN OCHA just started to have approximately two allocations per year, (uhm) I mean (uhm), per year based on the results of the collected reports and data. Four-W's [[[a tool/ work sheet for sharing basic project information]]] (uhm), all of those things, (uhm) now it's maybe familiar, or not even familiar: It's simple to us. We learned in the beginning by this platform. So, in the beginning it went so well. Coordination-wise, technical support-wise, legitimacy-wise, standardisation-wise, and - other things. (Uhm) With time, (.) I would say (.) by the beginning of 2016/ 2017 and on, (.) (uhm) (…) I'm not sure if they changed or us, being more insightful or something (smiling), so we started [to feel] that there's something - wrong here. (Uhm) (…) I mean, there is this distance between them, I mean here UN agencies, and what's really going on in the - - ground, in the field. (Uhm) (.) It's not really efficient enough to - have allocation for this sector, or that based on this result, which is not really reflect[ing] the situation. (.) This is one thing. And then, with time, we started to feel this, I mean, politicalizing of the – situation. Like, it's crystal clear that people need shelter, or crystal clear that people need[] basic needs. I mean, here, NFI [[[non-food items]]] or whatever, it's crystal, I mean, it's so much obvious. And then you, - - - g[et] surprised that we should do, whatever, [distribute] hygiene kits here, and really invest a huge amount of money for things [that] are not really [a] priority. It's crystal clear it's not [a] priority. (Uhm) here there are two factors, I believe: First of all (uhm), the, I wouldn't say, “fake”, [but rather] the not really (.) reliable (.) data. (.) NGOs report to the clusters, because we don't–(.); this is one

	thing I told you: Standardisation and being professional, like, really provid[ing] clear data for your four-Ws or whatever report. But locals started to - send reports that reflect[] that we are doing everything, we are experts, thinking that it will help you to (uhm)–; it will impress your partner that you are wow, very good. But this data (uhm) actually caused some harm to - - their [[[the UN's]]] decisions in the beginning. That if you - - had a look on the data in 2018 or 2018, between 18 and 19, it shows that there is no health need now anymore in (uhm)–; it's covered, fully covered. Like, millions of beneficiaries, millions of consultations, millions of whatever functional good PHCs [[[primary healthcare centres]]], which is not true. This is one factor. (.) The other factor, (.) I'm not sure of this other factor, it's my impression. They [[[the UN]]] don't listen. (Imitating to speak in representation of the UN to data-providing NGOs, with a smile and a touch of irony): "OK, we found out that - - - - please don't rely on this data. (.) Either try to clean this data or change whatever the means you are collecting this data." (imitating to speak to the responsible representative at the UN): "Really, build the capacity of these people [[[those working for implementing partners requested to report data]]], how to really do those–, such reports. Four-W's is not an excel sheet. Four-W's is something which should be really systemized how to fill such reports, since you are taking decisions out of those reports. This is one thing. (.) Second thing: please listen to - our priorities. I'm telling you as a local NGO, there is this need, there's that need. I mean fuck the reports.". I'm telling you, I have evidence: I have my own database [that tells me] that I need this medication or I need this service; I need to–(.) whatever. They [[[the UN]]] don't listen. And between–; once in a while, (.) the last allocation [was] (raising the voice and with an expression of disbelieve in the voice) focusing in education and early recovery?! (.) After [the] earthquake?! (with a tone that calls the UN's reason and the righteousness of their supposedly evidence-based funding decisions into account). (Imitating to speak to the UN): "You want to focus on education and early recovery? What the fuck?! I mean, (.) (uhm) so, who, I mean, who reported this to you? Who - - is the one who reported these needs to you. To - do this (uhm)–(.) //
42	R: // as a priority.
43	P8: Yeah! (.) The thing is now (…) (uhm) (.), sometimes, (.) they listen. I don't know if it's out of–; they listen. Sometimes they change this in the response. Like, the allocation before that, yeah it was [a] lifesaving allocation: priority to lifesaving secondary healthcare, which is good. So this inconsistency (.) of their (the UN's) decision-making way (.) put us in a weird situation with UN agencies (.) and especially now, after the earthquake, I would say earthquake, it–; I won't do a lot of blames, but it was the first nature-made disaster to us [[[Northwest Syria]]]. It really differs -; [it's] way different than the war-made [ones], because, [researcher], that you have a shelling here or bombardment there, it's one place. But at the very moment that 5,000,000s, including everybody, even aid workers and every single inch in every single body, were affected at the same time. It really was very, very new to us. How to deal with such a situation? And (with a smile) I mean by "us": "us" and the UN agencies. (.) (Uhm) At the - - first week, for myself, I was with a lot of others, of course, living in a car, for instance, or sometimes in - some park here or there, but (again, with a smile, laughing) we didn't hear from the cluster in the very first seven days. Which it really made it weird. Like usually the clusters, like, they call for an urgent meeting or something to start planning or whatever, so–. (.) (Uhm) it showed–; (.) the earthquake showed that we - have good, now, experience to deal with our own situation. Away of [[[from]]] the clusters. Because local NGOs, by themselves, directly, I mean here after hours started to do what's so-called mobile clinic–; urgent mobile clinic, [which] include medics, include physicians, midwives, VSWs and others, and that you go to the sites where the most affected places, and responded by themselves. After a while, I mean here maybe six days or something, yeah, the - health clusters started to do their own urgent meetings, and then starting to do the plans, using the mobile clinics as the priority now. The mobile clinic which already was the first thing occurred to the local NGOs. So it was good. I mean adopting this kind of response and then again giving - this response this legitimacy again: "Based on WHO, you should do this". But now again, using–; overdoing this. So, (uhm), this is one thing. So, the not - being familiar with how to deal with such situation actually applied on all of us, international, UN and locals. This is one thing. And ourselves we are already affected. Maybe [the] coordinator of [the] health cluster were in - a car somewhere. He doesn't have time to do any meeting. Again, I'm not giving the blaming, (.) but it showed that we as the locals can, in a way, at some level, to some extent, handle ourselves and coordinate and start to respond to such situations. We learned to do this. This is one thing. (.) But now the bureaucracy, again, because some clusters, okay, now we - urgently respond, the first we divided–, not we, the clusters, ourselves divided our response in two steps, "phases": the urgent phases, like the emergency response, here I mean the rescue works, rescue teams and the urgent sections in hospitals, because it was really huge mass casualties (.) they - - - have ever experienced, like, again, if you are a hospital, you might receive a–; in - a car accidents in the street, or some bomb–; shelling or bombing,

	okay, some tens of people. But not hundreds. It was really very, very huge. (Uhm) I still remember one of our doctors in some hospital, (.) he just faint[ed] out after three days without sleeping, because there is no time. You are receiving hundreds of casualties and– to deal with. So–//.
44	R: // And it's cold. // People are afraid to go back even if they have a home, because the - aftershocks continue all of that right? // So, but three days of working straight is a lot of time working straight as a medical doctor.
45	P8: // Yes. // Yes. // Yeah. // Of course. And the thing is, what differs here between the earthquake and other (.) war - crisis, the thing is yourself is affected. You might be lost somebody [[[You may have lost somebody]]] or your place at least, and still working. This is the thing here. The difference here. (Uhm), nobody, like, were safe after the earthquake. And - the minimum, he [[[referring here to anyone]]] - was been through a traumatic situation, this is the minimum. And then you can go, like, you have lost somebody from your friends, your colleagues, your family, your place. And still, but you have to work. You are in a rescue team or whatever, you are in a medical team in this hospital or that. It was really huge; huge stress back then to all of us. How to deal with such situation? So, and then the UN agencies started to do planning. Now, but (with a slightly sarcastic undertone) in the way of the UN agencies, we should do [a] rapid need assessment, then more in-depth need assessment and then blah blah blah, an then–, and time is passing. Nothing is only just excel sheet here and excel sheet there; meeting here, meeting there; discussing here discussion there. And time is passing. To the extent, that in some sub-clusters, I would say, I won't give name[s], (.) (uhm) to be - - really precise, five days ago, in the last week, we finished the urgent response plan for the earthquake (with a deeply sarcastic undertone, expressing that such matters should hardly be believed to be possible, even be outrageous but that have become normalized over time). We just finished it. After now seven months. Like, people started to recover or something, so when we finally finished it, (uhm) I couldn't help to say that: “So, okay, what to do with this plan now? After we finish[ed] it and really invest[ed in it], that having experts from around the world, from Canada, from blah blah blah. Okay, now we have the plan. What to do with it? I mean, the need is really different now.”. They said: “Okay, we can use it as DRR [disaster risk reduction]”. You know, always this fancy abbreviations and what - is this DRR? “Ah, disaster (uhm) // reduction– (.); Disaster Risk Reduction. // Now you can have it as a standard for a new NGO for the next disaster.
46	R: What is DRR? // disaster response–? // Ah, okay.
47	P8: Ohh, we spent seven months– //
48	R: // (Laughing) Very good to always have protocols and standards, Right? (Joint laughing), Sorry, go ahead.
49	P8: Really, with we - spent seven months (.) to come up with this tool, (.) which we won't need now. So?
50	R: For the next earthquake.
51	P8: Yeah. For the next, whatever, natural disaster. Now we have DRR! You know, and again, they started, I mean, they - will ask you: “do you have the DRR in your policy? Where's your DRR?” Again, this legitimacy part that whatever the products they do, you will be responsible to really adopt. Otherwise you are singing out of the hub. (Mutual laughing). Yeah.
52	R: I'm trying to (with a smile), like, I'm also trying to think how I can put all this, this sarcasm into the transcript so that I can still analyse it, not on– (joint laughing), but it's–; let–; leave it to be my problem. Then I'm - - I know what we mean when we talk about it. (.) Okay, go ahead.
53	P8: Everything to tell you, [[researcher]], maybe I was biased now. I couldn't help to be biased and only mention negative things. //
54	R: You have to be you. You should tell me your opinion, you don't have to be the expert that just gives me a neutral opinion; I don't believe in neutral opinions, I don't think they exist. You always have an opinion.
55	P8: In a way, yeah. Yeah, so, but still, the thing is, after all what I just mentioned, (uhm) the - relation between–; you know in Facebook, you have those options: “married”, “single”, “it's complicated”. (Joint laughing). It's an option. So: “It's complicated”, the relation between us and UN agencies. You cannot just simply describe it. Because we need each other, they cannot survive without us in a way, and we cannot, still, survive without them, especially in Northwest of Syria with the absence of governmental entities. We

	[[[local NGOs]]] will be, like, lost without them [[[the UN agencies]]]. So, this relation is really complicated. (.) We need those platforms. (.) We cannot work without them. And, in a way that it has some negative effect on – the whole thing in the response, but still, without it, especially now, you–; I think you are following what's going on in the Security Council?! [[[about two weeks before the interview, Russia had vetoed the renewal of the cross-border resolution. This had provided the basis for the UN's operations in Northwest Syria cross-border from Turkey. As there were other temporary measures for humanitarian cross-border access in place in response to the earthquake and the negotiations at the UNSC continued after the veto, nobody really knew what to expect for the future of the cross-border response]]] I mean, (uhm) for the cross-border response, Russia did this veto and we need to discuss burden because if you do some calculation, 50 percent, 50 percent!, of the response is by UN agencies. I mean here, fund-wise. 50% of the fund, especially in health, in health, even more, in health, more than 70 percent, is based on UN agency fund. So, other 30 percent by, you name it, GIZ, BHA and others. So it really will be disaster if they just go away. This is one thing and second thing, (…) having UN agencies in our crisis, especially in our crisis, now legitimacy-wise is not only for activities and protocols and wherever, political-wise, because they give you the recognition that you–; there is something called Northwest of Syria. (.) And by the way, they give us this name. It used to be Northern Syria. And then Northwest of Syria. They give you this territories name and by time it became a real places in your mind. We don't say now "Idlib" or, whatever, "Aleppo", we say Northwest of Syria, it's now a place called–. All those things are given by UN agencies. And the Security Council, the international community listen to UN agencies. Now it's official, there is something called Northwest of Syria. It's official that there is a need. Official, I mean, international-wise. There is a need for cross-bording [[[cross-border aid]]]. If we close those cross-bording [[[cross-border access for humanitarian aid through Turkey]]], especially Bab Al-Hawa [[[the main and before the earthquake for a long time only remaining (humanitarian) border crossing between Turkey and Northwest Syria]]], I don't know, thousands of people will be without medication, without healthcare, without other services. So–//
56	R: // I think in that case the UN would say that they would provide services cross line, huh? Instead? Through Damascus, if I'm understanding // the debate–//
57	P8: Even worse // Yeah, yeah. Even worse. Now we - should go back to the ones we already fled from to receive support. (…). See how it's really complicated [[[the relationship between local NGOs in Northwest Syria and the UN]]]? We cannot just say: "We don't want you, UN agencies, we can handle ourselves.". We cannot say that. Political-wise, resources-wise, everything about it. So, we need to always, you know, again, the complication, it's complicated this relation, (uhm) you cannot live with them [[[the UN]]]. You cannot live without them. That's how – (joint laughing) it works with UN agencies, yeah.
58	R: Yeah, very, very interesting point. (.) Points actually, it's a very–; you're giving me a very nice picture of this kind of a relationship that you're in. (.) What I –; what I find interesting: how (uhm) - much you're differentiating between local and the UN as if you have two poles, right? So, as if you have something that is the UN and INGOs, so basically, there's an all international kind of a construct, and then you have the local, the local NGOs, right? // Would you (.) just try to explain to me in one sentence; it's more of a side question just because it's so prominent in the way you're describing things, (uhm): What does it mean for you to be local as an NGO? Is this also something, maybe, as a name, that the UN even gave organizations? (.) When they first came?
59	P8: // Yeah. // Well. (Uh), I don't–; it's a debate to me, that–; this clear definition, what we mean by local, international, UN. I mean, (smiling in a way that suggests that this is not the first time this question is to be contemplated), I would, which is, you already have experience in organizational development-wise, the locals have low capacity on their policies, they need to improve, you know. You still remember, [[researcher]], when [[organizations such as mine]] started to think to approach [[larger multi-state aid donors directly]] and we found out, wow, we are way to [[[from]]] approach, we are not even close. Because of a lot of. Infrastructure and assets and policies and a lot of other things–//
60	R: Is this, so, you mean we're not being close because we're local? Which kind of puts local together with the lack of capacity in - standardised international terms?
61	P8: Yeah, this is one factor [that] makes you a local: the capacity. Your organizational capacity. And low scores when - they do OCAs, organizational assessment capacity, or capacity assessment. (Uhm) (.) but the capacity here, I mean not necessarily the technical ones, your structure, organograms, policies, everything. // Finance, HR and - so on. This is one thing that makes you a local. This is one thing. Other things:

	geographical-wise you are local, you–; the whole thing belongs to the community of the crisis itself, is–; local slash Syrians- We are a Syrian NGO, like // Yemeni NGO or whatever.
62	R: // Yeah. // So, so–// Of course, but would that, like, on the first point you already, like, I have–; it's just so interesting because we always have these debates and I feel like it never comes to a hold. So, but you're saying basically that Syrian, being Syrian, means being local. But would that then imply that a person who is feeling local and locally driven and emotionally attached to northwest Syria and is from Idlib is as local as maybe Assad himself? So would - the regime have the same the same claim to actually localization and would basically be able to say, because I'm Assad because I'm the President of Syria, I have the right to intervene in Northwest Syria because I'm local and I understand better the context. Or is there a difference for you?
63	P8: I believe so. For certain, for certain, like, us and the - regime are locals, we belong to the same country. Already, geographical-wise we are local.
64	R: What about // people in the in the–//
65	P8: // That doesn't make you have the right. It's something else. I mean, that's why we should have other criteria, (uhm) I mean, we - shouldn't mix being local and having the right to respond; is something else. I mean, one of the things, like local, you should be local to be familiar with the context, but you should be transparent, you should be have the ethics, you should have a lot of other things to give you the right to–. For instance, if you give, whatever you give to the regime, I believe no beneficiary will see anything, like, they - - won't use this support efficiently. You know, they might be used to - - do some Christmas stall or whatever category they are doing now. I mean, there are other (uhm) - factors, other conditions, other criteria, to give you the right to–, not just “I'm local (.), so I have the right”. That’s my point.
66	R: Yeah, Okay. Okay, I understand. So, basically, just because somebody is local or not, it does not entail a certain entitlement.
67	P8: Yeah.
68	R: Okay, okay. That's interesting and–; but (.) - you said something very nice. And then I switch back to my topic, but it's just, it's – me, I can't help it (joint laughing). Because you before said that nowadays you have the impression that actually the local NGOs have more capacity of intervening in the context than international NGO's. So basically, and if you say that there is a lack of capacity at the local NGO level and that - is kind of a criteria that makes them being local, then that has changed by now, hasn't it? // So 13 years ago, maybe, those local NGOs were maybe not on the same level of administrative and bureaucratic capacity, but today they are? So, does that now mean that you're not local anymore? Or das that mean you’re more than local?
69	P8: // Yeah // Well, (.) just to explain this point. Now the local NGOs, in northwest Syria mean, like, for instance, [[my organization]] has now, I don’t know, [[tens of]] health facilities, [[which makes it among the largest NGOs, much larger than INGOs in this aspect]] in the whole area. So, I mean, horizontally, we are way bigger than other international NGOs. We - can handle all of those, like, thousands of employees, tens of facilities, we have the capacity now, easily, to - establish and proceed and operate. But vertically, we still need the capacity how to, maybe, develop. How to establish a new programme, how to–. This capacity, theoretically, International NGOs they’re – still–; they are better, especially now. (Uhm) it started to–; actually I have [a] dejà vu. Do you remember how I explained how naïve we were - - - in the 2012/2013? In emergency response? Now we are facing kind of the same for early recovery and development. So it's a new terminology for us. What do you mean by sustained, early recovery, development, restructuring? What do you mean by that - ? Shall - we have like 5 years, months or something? See, it's the same maybe, you know, again. So here comes again the international NGOs [that] are the experts in this. (Uhm) they know better than you, but in emergency response, no, there's no way to - compete now with local NGOs. The emergency, establishing facilities and service provision, there - is no comparison. That's why [[a key institutional donor which used to provide funding typically through INGOs as intermediaries]], directly now [is] contracting with local NGOs. (.) I mean, here, [[this donor]], you know [[this donor]] // we have the contract. Now if you remember [[one of our facilities]] is directly funded by [[this donor]]
70	R: Yeah, yeah okay. I’m going to check it out.

71	P8: Yeah. So - again, the emergency-wise, yes, I can say, we don't need anything from international NGOs, capacity building-wise. But this new era we are now (.), not facing, being pushed to face, like, you - should be in early recovery face. But I'm not. But you should be in it, because again, politicization: having early recovery is really helpful to maybe international community to - get rid of the whole crisis part now and declare Syria is in this phase. (.) Maybe there are other economical situations? I don't–; I wouldn't say I don't care, but it's not my focus now. But however, if you are not speaking early recovery, again, you are (.) out of the herd, again, in UN agencies, in international NGOs, so– //
72	R: // Okay.
73	P8: And now we are not really experts in this. (.) Again, we are facing the same situation. So we need support in this, we need to build our capacity. How to be part of the next phase in - - Northwest of Syria.
74	R: Very interesting point. (Uhm) okay, going back to the earthquake, you said before that basically the - key point of why the UN is so important as a partner, like, is kind of a need, even if it's a hate-love relationship, right? So you need one another. You don't like one another necessarily in every situation, but you, meaning local NGOs and the UN, and even maybe INGOs need one another. (Uhm; uhm) You said that the - most important point they are fulfilling is that they are acting (.) in - the vacuum of that there is no actual government, no actual government coordination body that other countries might have, but northwest Syria doesn't. (.) If you look at the earthquake situation, (uhm) would you have expected the UN kind of fulfilling this quasi-governmental, or (.) kind of–; in the absence of - - - governmental organization (uhm) role, would you have expected the UN to do more? During the, let's say, especially during the critical life-saving period? Like the immediate 72 – 100 hours of the earthquake? (.)
75	P8: In the immediate 24 hours? (Uhm)–//
76	R: Like in the first week. // In the first week, basically. Yeah.
77	P8: The UN, I mean // Yeah, yeah, yeah. // But the UN directly, as clusters, you know they didn't do anything. But the projects are funded by UN. Yeah, this is their contribution that we are already partners with WHO, so we use their mobile clinics to – respond. This is that how it worked in the first five days. // But (uhm) still, UN agencies gives you the recognition in a way, you cannot get rid of it [the UN]. I mean now, if you propose to (.) GIZ, (.) DHA, (.) whatever other big institutional donor, they ask you to have endorsement letter by (.) // the cluster, so.
78	R: Yeah // –the UN, okay.
79	P8: You cannot just proceed without their endorsement. Their recognition. Where is your code? If you're in that, for instance, there is a need to have a PHC clinic in somewhere, so first question - - they ask is this: Does this facility has a code in HERAMS? (.) HERAMS is, you know?
80	R: Yeah, it's the health–. Yeah, I know, the – (.) response system. Yeah. Yeah.
81	P8: The only thing. Yeah. So (imitating to speak from an institutional donor's perspective): "if you don't have a code in HERAMS, we cannot–. We are sorry, we cannot support this facility or this hospital, no matter how it's supported, yeah. So that again, the way, the legitimacy problem, because if we have a government, like in Ukraine, they give legitimacy. Even they - control the UN. Like here in Turkey, the same, when the response in refugees // the government control[s] the UN and tell[s] them [[[the UN]]] what to do, // not the other way around. But here no. Since with the absence of this [[[a government]]], whatever ECHO [[[the European Commission's European Civil Protection and Humanitarian Aid Operations]]] DHA, those huge institutional donors, they - need to see you recognised by // UN agencies. Otherwise they will feel worried.
82	R: // Yeah. // Yeah. // the UN. // Okay, so that means the UN's codes, the UN–; like, being part of the UN system gives you the legitimacy to act, but that - then also means–, because, what you said is that you used the mobile clinics they provided. You basically, the local NGOs and maybe also the community leaders and people who were kind of able, the doctors themselves who were inside Northwest Syria in that moment, they kind of intervened on their own, without the UN giving them directions or something.
83	P8: (Hmm; nodding)
84	R: But it's because you are part of the UN system and you have your experience and your long-term partnership with the UN, you kind of, then, yourself fulfilled the government–, the - supposedly government's

	role in the crisis, not the UN itself, but because you're part of the system, there is somehow legitimacy for you to be active and respond // even if the UN is not directing you to do so in the in the in the direct sense.
85	P8: // Yeah. // Yep.
86	R: Okay. And - do–. Would you have expected the UN to do more in this situation or was it okay this way? (…)
87	P8: Now they are–; they are confused now with this news of: are we going to proceed with this cross-bording [[[cross-border aid operations]]]or not? [[[referring to the vetoed resolution in the UNSC and pending decision for the UN's future role in the context]]] And what I noticed, I mean, the huge part of UN agency is the coordination. They [[[the UN]]] are the kings of coordination. They are not coordinating with - each other, like, we have this plan, I mean, cross-bording-wise [[[concerning the cross-border aid response]]]. WHO, they were trying to do phase out and hand over to international NGOs, like–; UNFPA, they have - - very different plans. (Imitating to speak to the UN agencies): "Come on, guys. You are all, you are UN. You should give us same feedback. What are we going to do to deal with this situation? Cross-border? Crossline? Ah, we are now discussing. It's been two years?!" Every time they started to advocate to extend this cross-bording [[[the cross-border response mechanism]]], you feel, you see clearly the - confusion. (Uhm) which is really weird, understood [[[understandable]]] and weird, because, again, the Syrian crisis is very complicated. Even now, Joe Biden, if you ask Joe Biden what - will happen in Syria and in two months since I had no fucking idea you're still discussing this, we're still discussing that. Okay, I – can, (imitating to speak to UN representatives): "Guys, you shouldn't - - share your confusion with us, because we're already worried. (.) And we are counting on you [[[the UN]]] that you represent the international community. You are giving us legitimacy. Now this confusion make[s] us–; make[s] things worse, because, you know, the survival mode will be up and then people start to - survive by themselves. I mean here, NGOs. The - –. Now people are more competitive, for instance, because it's not clear (.) what will happen, for instance. So, (uhm) this is one thing, yeah, so, and still there is no official (.), even plan!? I mean, there's no contingency plan yet. (Uhm) like if the cross-bording [[[the cross-border response]]] will have reports and advocacy messages, okay, but what will we do? (Imitating to speak to the UN agencies): "You [the UN] are responsible.". Actually, it happened in the Northeast of Syria. Out of the sudden they just shut down the clusters and just left without any notice. So they have previous experiences in this (uhm) situation. (.) And - this is my last update about Northeast // but maybe they can get back now. But, however, it happened, it happened with no notice. They said: "Okay, bye-bye, guys. // See you later". And UN just left. //
88	R: //I am–. // I'm not familiar, no. // So there is nothing anymore now in Northeast Syria?
89	P8: // For instance, so–//
90	R: You're saying like this - –; there was, I mean, I think there was no cluster, there was something like a working group at least or something, right? (.) So there was a sub-cluster, // basically Damascus was the lead and then they had basically just kind of a branch office or something, no? (…)
91	P8: Yeah, yeah, yeah. // Something like that.
92	R: // And now, they're 'khalas' [[[end of the story/ finished]]]? Like, nothing?
93	P8: They were, in Northeast [Syria], back then, there were two UN representatives, (.) cluster or whatever working group, for the regime-controlled area in Northeast. //. Other - for non-governmental areas or also called non-[?]. So this - non-governmental area is shut down. (.) No UN agencies there. (.)
94	R: // Yeah. // Well, (uhm) that's what happens if you're out for 1.5 years [[[here referring to researcher; having been working on the Syrian context before, then left for academia]]]. You don't know. Like, I had no idea. Wow. So basically–.
95	P8: Even myself, I'm // not following with the Northeast. But I still remember one of the complaints.
96	R: // Yeah, but that gives you a bad feeling, right? If - you see that // this can happen?
97	P8: Yeah, they - just left. //

98	R: // Is - this what you're saying? That basically because you saw what - is happening in Northwest and Northeast? Even If it's not true, like, the idea that this is possible kind of undermines the UN's–, (.) I don't know, like I don't want to always call it legitimacy, but it kind of overshadows then, if I understand you correctly, the reliability on the UN as a quasi-governmental partner or as a governmental replacement? (…)
99	P8: (Hmm, nodding). Exactly. This is the only choice we have still. (.) With no whatsoever thinking of investing in those semi-governmental entities. And I still remember in 2017 (.), when the political situation was in a different place now, they were just believing, if you remember, [[someone with influence among local NGOs and the UN alike]] started to think of the governance [[[of Syria overall]]], having directories everywhere in - - South and - - //- he received support.
100	R: // (smiling) in eight governorates.
101	P8: Really. Support by GIZ, and –; and they invested in this, out of a sudden, out of some political reasons, they stopped doing this now and only support NGOs for this emergency response, hitting the way as it is until we see the political situation. So we pay the price for this.
102	R: Yeah, yeah, I understand. (.) Okay, I'm. I have two more, actually, smaller questions, and then I have one final for a general kind of a reflection. (.) (Uhm) there was the (uhm) health coordinator of the UN who visited the border I think a week after the earthquake, (uhm) Martin Griffiths. (.) He wrote on Twitter, and I'm quoting (uhm): “I am at the Türkiye-Syria border today. We have so far failed the people in Northwest Syria. They rightly feel abandoned, looking for international help that hasn't arrived. My duty and our obligation is to correct this failure as fast as we can. That's my focus now.”. (.) What do you think about?
103	P8: All right.
104	R: I'm just giving you the statement and let you - - - –//.
105	P8: // Luckily–; luckily for him, I know what happened behind the scenes. (.) // Unluckily for him.
106	R: Okay? (.) What happened behind the scenes? // If you want to share how, like –; okay.
107	P8: I'm - not in his mind. Yeah, I'm not in his mind. Maybe he's honest at this moment. Maybe he's just–, because anybody has (.) at the minimum a sense of humanity. If - he or she goes to Northwest of Syria, they will feel really bad and shit. Seeing those children in the streets, you know, camps, it's really very, very fucking shitty situation there. (.) So, maybe he - was honest. It is a moment of truth before doing this to meet, I won’t claim the otherwise, but (.) now this is a common language. It happens always before the Security Council take[s] [a] decision or the – cross-bording situation. This is–; might be one of the factors, or the motives to do now such statements. (.) Just to convince people that the situation is shit there and we keep, we should keep [the cross-border mechanism active]. This is the complication of the relationship. So, (.) (uhm) let's imagine, I said the first option: he might be honest. Okay, now the second option: maybe [he] is not, just faking it just for to advocate for the cross-border so they (.) can (.) stick (.) being responsible and receive the support (.) and (uhm) (.) keeping the situation as it is under. This is another thing. (.) Now, (.) I won't mention names, but (uhm) some of the HQ people from some UN agencies also, like one week ago, went cross-bording [[[crossed the border from Türkiye]]] and just went to Syria with one of my friends. (.) And just starting, have a look on their projects first, then camps, you know. So - when they came back, my friend [[.]] told me the following [[…]]. Wow. And they have the ability of talking things, (uhm) (.) I mean. My - - - friend [[…]] felt really bad about this child here, this girl there, [[.]] really felt very bad for it. (.) With the same UN person (.) who was with [[my friend]]. But when they came back to [the] car to go to another site, [[the other UN person who was with my friend]] just changed the - - whole look on her face, and then [[]] told [[my friend]], (imitating to show something on a phone): “Look, look, this is [[something that shows the beautiful private life I have in Geneva, this is who I am outside of this context here]], and”–; wow?! How could you turn now, talk–?! Yeah. You were just being affected, like 1-3 minutes ago. (Uhm) And [[the other UN staff members]] always say, please–; the only thing [[the person]] was interested to have pictures. Pictures, pictures, pictures. (Uhm) give me this picture behind and the - –; this shitty camp behind me, for instance. Picture with this child, which clearly she - didn't have [] [a] bath since months. And give me picture with this girl. Give me that and then they took those pictures, use them in very different ways. Some of the ways are, very emotional tweet maybe in Twitter, other ways to - - do some fund[raising] or whatever. So, really, I don't trust these emotional statements (.) // at all. // Not because of what my friend told me. But it won't do anything good for us. I don't need your (uhm) sympathy now. We never needed this sympathy. We

	need even being empathetic, or at least being supportive. Otherwise, because you are in [a] decision-making position, you are not just my friend, so and you - could do things about it, not just doing emotional tweets. However, again, I won't question his or her emotions in this tweet, but this is my - point of view on this.
108	R: // Okay. // Yeah. // Yeah. Do you think–(.); that's the last question from my set of things that I have–; did you notice any actual changes (.) in (.) the, be it the actions, the goals or the even the behaviour of people working for the UN that you have met in comparison, before and after the earthquake? Like, is there a change in actions? (…)
109	P8: Well, me being silent, thinking of something, (…) means that: no (huh, with a smile). Because I'm trying to–; before the earthquake, they are kind of the same after the earthquake, with (.), as I told you the confusion, of this cross-bording [[whether they will be able, an in which way, to continue operating cross-border through Türkiye in Northwest Syria]]; confusion and decision-making, confusion and postponing; confusion on –//
110	R: So the confusion is more? But is that related to the earthquake or is this // related to the cross-border?
111	P8: // No, I don't think so.
112	R: Yeah. Okay, so nothing directly because he's [[[Martin Griffiths in his statement]]] basically saying that he is looking into doing something or changing something or basically correcting the situation as it was, whatever that might mean. I'm not going to interpret his statement, right? But the way I'm reading this, I would expect something to change after he went, you know? But you - don't see any changes happening?
113	P8: No, I don't think so. Even UN agencies, after all, they - are linked in the political system in a way. I mean, (.) now we are after 12 years of crisis, people [are] still in camps. And we still have the official, the only official answer for them to have some decent shelter project. No, we don't want to change the demography of the Syrian community. Fuck the demography. People are dying in the (sustences?). It's been now 12 years. So, again, [the] political situation is - controlling the whole thing.
114	R: Yeah, very true. (.) Then I give you my last question. The easiest one of them all, of course. The easiest one always comes at the end.
115	P8: Okay.
116	R: In your words: what would the UN need to do in the future to remedy the past? (.) (Joint laughing) I love your reactions. (…)
117	P8: (Uhm) (…) I feel like, now, I don't know. What should they do? (.) Listen more, being more close to the people, more than (.), I mean, meetings (.) doesn't give you the clear picture, four-W's, what they will use and whatever other tools they are using. You should be more close and take real decisions that really include or engage the community and the real needs in the field or the ground. (…) And my wish now, from them [[[the UN]]], because, again, they [[[the UN]]] are still our only - platform that give[s] us [[[the people of Northwest Syria]]] the legitimacy being people, I mean, not only for response, because (.) if the things [[[the UN entities with their resources and locus of decision-making]]] are–; went all to the regime, it will be disaster (.) lifesaving-wise (.) and response-wise. (Imitating to speak to the UN): "We still need you. Whatever you did to us, but we still need you.". So actually, it belongs to the same, which I started with: "So please act out of the needs, out of the real priority.". (…)
118	R: Very beautiful end sentence. Do you think that they would be able to restore a bit of their legitimacy with this?
119	P8: Well, it's not their own, not only their decision to make. Again, [the] political, is has something to do here, but at least do the right advocacy on this. Forget about yourself, about your position, about whatever. They have a lot of conflicts. It's toxic. Again, it's just quoting from a lot from my friends working in UN. (.) And that they have all of them this thinking coming, we have [a] toxic - environment in our office. Competitors, you know, blah blah blah, (.) and - really it's not the right time now to be toxic in your office and they are trying to think of people or whatever. Your job. Just do your job. This is [it] actually, forget about everything I said, please, do your job. (.) That's it. (laughing)
120	R: 'Tamam' [[[Okay]]]. I'm going to stop the recording here. One second.

121	P8: Okay.

Transcript P9 (1)

1	R: So (.), yeah, maybe let's start. What's - your name? (Uhm) What do you do? Where do you work? What's your–; (.) Just - tell me a bit about yourself.
2	P9: I am [[Participant I]]. I am from the Idlib countryside. I [[have a professional health background]]. (.) I have been working in the Northwest of Syria from 2015. (.) I was working [[in both professional health and managerial capacities]] in many hospitals (.) in the countryside of Idlib and [[close-by areas in Syria]]. Sometimes I was medical manager from some hospital to another hospital. [[Recently, I was appointed to take on a high-level position to manage and advance Northwest Syria's health governance system, which is my current role]].
3	R: (with a smile) 'Mabrook' [[[congratulations]]].
4	P9: I have been [[in my new position now]] for about one year [[...]]. (.) (uhm) Besides this work [[...]], I still working [[in my medical profession on weekends]] (with a smile).
5	R: (Smiling) So you – have –; (.) You - work six days a week? Or seven? // (joint laughing) (.). What about your family? They don't see you?
6	P9: // Seven. Yes. // (joint laughing with a touch of irony). Don't ask me. Sometimes I - don't see them for ten days, maybe more. (.) [[This is also connected to me frequently moving between places, including Syria and Turkey, while they have their home in Turkey nowadays]].
7	R: They they are in [[one of the larger cties in the South of Turkey]]?
8	P9: No. In [[another city in Turkey]].
9	R: (Mm-hmm; nodding).
10	P9: So I go to Syria in my work, I return to [[the place where my family lives]] maybe one or two days in - the 10 days (.) and return, et cetera. Or I come to [[other places in Turkey that I need to visit sometimes]]. (.)
11	R: So you –//
12	P9: // When the earthquake happened, they [[[the family]]] were [[not with me]], but they are okay, 'alhumdullelah' [[[thank God]]].
13	R: Yeah, I think [[the whole region]] (expressing sadness and compassion) –; (.) I - was lucky that I was in Gaziantep, I think, but [[this region]], (.) I saw pictures in the morning –(.).
14	P9: Yes. (.) It - was so bad. (.) But 'alhumdullelah' [[thank God]] they are okay.
15	R: And they were happy that you (with a smile) were okay as well maybe? Because Syria also took a lot of damage, right?
16	P9: Of course. (...) (Uhm), through the earthquake (uhm) (.) in February, (.) I - [was] still in the [[...]] office (.) at night, (.) at evening, morning, all the time. (.) Or in the hospitals. We still in this state for about one month. We eat and sleep in our office. Because the big (uhm) crisis, because of the big number of (uhm) patients, of ill people, and what we need to do to help these - people? (Uhm) This is general information. If you are –; if you want to talk about UN, (uhm), according to my (.) work in [[different capacities in the health sector, including]] many hospitals, which were supported by more than one NGO and different donors, (.) I think after 2020 (uhm) the UN and all UN agencies (uhm) start to make Syria (uhm) it's not in their priorities, (.) because there is other wars and other countries that need help[] or humanitarian aid. And maybe they - - need to tell us, that it is [a] long war and long crisis, and we get bor[ed] from Syrian people. Maybe. So, in 2020, 2021 and 2022, (.) (uhm) the support [] decrease[d], and many sectors, health sectors, shelter, WASH [[[Water, Sanitation and Hygiene]]], et cetera. And we have other big problems, especially in health sector. (Uhm) sometimes, we don't have normal saline serum [[[a mixture of sodium chloride (salt) and water used, among others, for cleaning wounds; one of the supposedly most basic items to be found in health facilities]]] in our hospitals. We don't have (serang?). We don't have (uhm) (.) a lot of drugs, consumables, the patients have to pay everything. We –; everything we can do for patients is the operations or any service but without

	any drugs, without any consumables (.); the –(.); or facilities, or et cetera, were in bad state. And we can't do anything, we told them, and many meetings with donors, with WHO Health Cluster that we need drugs, we need the drugs for ICU [[[Intensive Care Units]]], we need drugs for children, we need drugs for - - (uhm) (.); for example, for scabies, we don't have. (.) And you know more than 1,300,000 people [live in] in camps, and you know what they – need. (.) (Uhm) that's about health. About another things, humanitarian aids, and another things, I think it - was more –(.); or worst, was worse than health. This state [[[These bad conditions]]] continue[d] to the earthquake. And a lot of donors tell us in the beginning of 2023, that "we will decrease all our funds for 'Siri' [[[Syria]]]." . Maybe 30 percent, 40 percent, et cetera. Like, (uhm) maybe [[some UN entities that provide funding, several other INGOs and state donor agencies]]. (.) A lot of donors. (…) (Uhm) when the earthquake happened, imagine that the electricity turned off because it was from a Hatay, from Turkey. (.) (Uhm) many of our hospitals can't work, because we don't have electricity and we don't have fuel for generators. (.) [[There are organizations that have some stocks of fuel in Northwest Syria. Idlib Health Directorate, for example had]] about 12,000 liters of fuel. In the first two or three hours after the earthquake, [[all of this fuel was sent]] for the hospitals in the damaged area like Harem, Salquin. They have some hospitals and primary healthcare centers. [[All of the fuel we could get our hands on we sent]] to them, to start to work. The number of patients was very, very, very, very big. Imagine that General Harem Hospital received through five days, 220,000 patients.
17	R: Oh wow. (.) // I did not know that.
18	P9: // Yes. (.) All of [[the]] medical staff, doctors, technicians, nurses still in their hospitals for seven or eight days. In continuance (.) // without any rest.
19	R: // With no sleep? Oh God.
20	P9: Yes, because we can't send any patient to Turkey, we don't have any other choices -. All of [[the]] hospitals and centers [[in Northwest Syria]] working very hard, but the number of patients and crises is more than our –(.) (uhm) (…) //
21	R: Capacity?
22	P9: Capacity. Yes. (.)
23	R: (With a smile) A good word always, to use.
24	P9: (Laughing). (Uhm) the first seven days, we didn't receive anything (.) // from UN
25	R: (Not being sure to have understood correctly): The first - - how many days you say?
26	P9: Seven -. Yes
27	R: Okay, so basically when the UN says there is a critical period for disaster response, that's the first week, let's say, (.) // there - was nothing - -. //
28	P9: // Yes. // Nothing. (.) Nothing –//
29	R: // At least not from outside.
30	P9: // (Uhm) maybe some, (uhm) (.)- places from Turkey to White Helmets to help them in their working, but about drugs, consumables, (uhm) medical devices? Nothing. One week we didn't receive anything. In the 7th day [[there was]] a meet[ing] with Martin Griffiths. (…)
31	R: (Hm-mmm, nodding). (.) On Sunday?
32	P9: In [[a place close to the Syrian-Turkish border]]. Yes. (.) Imagine, in the 7th day, he told [[us]] (reproducing Martin Griffiths' statements): "Send to us what you need. Send to us your - - - needs. (With a smile expressing ridicule and disbelieve that this request could possibly be meant seriously at this late stage in the response). Send us your - needs.". (.) I - was angry [[…]]. (In response to Griffiths): "In the 7th day[] you asked me to send my needs and the crisis and - all the people who - will die, died, and who will stay, stayed and we are finish[ed].". (…) (Uhm) in the 8th or 9th day, some aids enter. (Uhm) General aids and some of them medical, but it's not especially for earthquake. It (uhm) has to enter to Syria before the earthquake, so it's scheduled before the earthquake.

33	R: (Hm-mmm; nodding)
34	P9: After that, (.) they will –; or they [[[the UN]]] sent some humanitarian aids, medical aid, but I think that [was] after the 10 days, so we will not, (.) or we don't care more about this because (.) it's finished [[[the critical lifesaving period]]]. (…) About the most important thing [that] help[ed] us with the earthquake: the missions from Qatar, Saudi Arabia, from (uhm) Syrian doctors from Germany, from UK. These missions help us because they did some specialized operations for our patients, in neurosurgery and cardiac surgery and (uhm) (.) [in] general -, some operations. And they [[[the doctors who came on these missions]]] see our facilities. Then they see the real photograph [[[picture]]] about our area and our facilities and they see in their eyes what we need. (.) And what we need, frankly, not as other donors or NGOs. I think those people help us [more] than - - - other NGOs or UN agencies. (.)
35	R: So they were not –; there was no connection between these missions and the UN? (…)
36	P9: I think no, because most of them [were] Syrian people. (.) They came as volunteers. (.) And until now, we receive missions from [[various organizations in different countries and parts of the world]] et cetera. (.) (Giving the impression of being a bit concerned about possibly having forgotten to name others or these in particular): We need to remember, because the beginning, you (?)–//
37	R: //No, no, all good - -. I may anyways have to. When you put names, I sometimes will anonymize them. So, I basically, I will say some entities and missions. Now, I will maybe not say names when I translate and transcribe it, so nobody can say you - said this, you know, so (with a smile) that's not possible.
38	P9: Okay, okay (with a smile) it's better, yes. (…) Now, as I told you, (uhm) they think, as UN agencies, they think the emergency state went [[[is over]]] and we will return [to] the state before the earthquake, all of donors told us that: "In 2024 we will decrease our donations and support from (uhm) for health sector in northwest of Syria.". (.)
39	R: And you think this is what they are going to do now? (…)
40	P9: In 2024. (…)
41	R: I (uhm) (.) read, when - Martin Griffiths came to - the border on - Sunday after the earthquake //, I read that he tweeted (.); I have the tweet here (.). If you want to hear it, because I find it very interesting (.). // He tweeted, I'm sure you saw this. I'm sure - - you know this tweet. He said: "I'm at the Türkiye-Syria border today. We have so far failed the people in Northwest Syria. They rightly feel abandoned, looking for international help that hasn't arrived. My duty and our obligation is to correct this failure as fast as we can. That's my focus now.". (…) // What do you think about it? Or yeah // just tell me.
42	P9: // (Hm-mmm; nodding); // Yes. // Yes. I have seen this, and read it, in the - - same day, on Sunday, yes. (.) (Uhm) (.) It's nothing for us. (.) And he apologized from me and [[other people who are my friends and like-minded senior representatives in the health and humanitarian field in NWS]]. He apologized but what - – ? It's [[[His]]] apology, what will [it] help us? (…)
43	R: So you think it's just words and there is no action? (…)
44	P9: Not – really. But the - - - golden time in this big crises, I think, [is] in the first three to five days. And this time go away. So they had –; they sent some medical consumables and drugs and maybe some small devices, but it's later. It didn't help the patients from earthquake. Maybe it helps us nowadays, or any other patients, but in the in the golden time they didn't - - send anything. And their reasons were that (uhm): "because of the borders, and because of the (uhm) Assad regime government, and because –.". I don't know. I told him that in - this crisis, you have to - pass any - - - bureaucratic reasons. It's crisis. Where is the humanitarian if you want to stay, to take the permission from Assad regime or any another country? (.) (Expressing powerlessness along the lines of "what can we do?!", implying questioning the UN's true dedication to the humanitarian principles): So?! (…)
45	R: What did he say? (…)
46	P9: In my opinion there is - - no real reasons for this delay[]. (…)
47	R: Okay? And you - think (uhm) that the UN should have done more in the first three to five days and after?

48	P9: Of course! (.) Of course (with a tone expressing disappointment).
49	R: For example? What do you think?
50	P9: They have to pass [[[find a way to get around/ ignore]]] (.); they have to pass all reasons because it's [a] crisis. It's [a] bad earthquake. We - haven't seen this maybe [in] more than 100 or 200 years (.) in this area. (…)
51	R: Okay.
52	P9: We have lost about - (uhm) (.) 5,000 people in the northwest, and Syrian people in - Turkey about (.), maybe more than 10,000s, and we don't know the real number until now?! (…)
53	R: (…) Yeah.
54	P9: (Laughing with a strong touch of sarcasm): In every crisis and everywhere in the world you have to lost [[[lose]]] Syrian[s]. (Laughing, crying, evoking an impression of being in an exceptional situation worldwide, while also linking it somewhat to a higher force having a plan, a vision for own ethnic group): We don't know why. (.)
55	R: Well, it – was (.) - - very, very hard 10 years already in Syria. You have the conflict, then you have (.) COVID, then you have - the earthquake, like, everything. // One crisis // after - another.
56	P9: // Yes. // Yes. // And not - any conflict. We are in conflict with - Assad regime and Iran and Russia, and (.) we don't know. (…) Nobody - in - our area in the Northwest of Syria, nobody (uhm), haven't or don't [lost] from his family one or two - - person.
57	R: During the earthquake? Or in general?
58	P9: (…) Yes. For me - - I have lost [[siblings and a parent]].
59	R: I'm sorry to hear it.
60	P9: In bombing from Assad regime. (…) And we don't know about future. (…)
61	R: Okay. (.) Okay. (…) Let me - - turn back into something, maybe - more – positive and more, let's say, more productive, or more hands on, because I know - - the spirit of [[your organization]] (with a smile) and I know that everybody who is working there is (uhm) having their hands on - things wherever they can (.) //: If it was not the UN that helped Northwest Syria during the first critical period in the crisis, (.) who were the main actors that that helped? (.) That helped the people who were suffering and affected? //
62	P9: // Yeah. // In in the first period in our revolution or conflict, they [[the UN]] help us a lot. We know that. And they give a lot of (uhm) money and the humanitarian aids in general for Syrian people (.) in conflict, cities and area // but –.
63	R: // You mean the UN? The UN?
64	P9: // Yes. UN. //
65	R: // So, - // they did a good job at first? //
66	P9: // But I think that –. // Yes. But I think, yani [[[what I mean to say is]]], it's not the real help. (Uhm) you can do another thing better. Like, when Assad regime use chemical weapons. They (uhm) –; or we, as doctors in the Northwest of Syria, we came to Turkey, Gaziantep and Hatay, and did a big training for chemical weapons and response for these weapons, and - - for more than one year, about, maybe, more than 100 doctors [[[took these trainings]]]. Why we - deal with the result? Why we - cannot deal with the cause? (…) As the UN (.) can deal with the cause, with Assad regime. (.) Yes? (.)
67	R: It's - a good question.
68	P9: Because, he [[[Assad]]] is a criminal. (…)
69	R: Do you - - think –//

70	P9: // I think (.) the better, or the best thing (.) for Syrian people (.) from the beginning (.) to solve this political problem, and maybe Assad go away or another solution, I don't know. (.) It's (uhm) better than give humanitarian aid or money or fund (.) for hospitals and for camps and shelter and WASH et cetera. (.) But (uhm) what's the – ; but who – will –; who would be another solution?(.) (Uhm) In the beginning, if there is not the UN, maybe our cons–(.); our NGOs maybe can help sometimes, maybe our (.) councils inside Syria (.) maybe can help.
71	R: And - during the earthquake? How was it there?
72	P9: I think - - - - because you [[[researcher]]] are working –; because you were working with the Syrian people for five years (.), you know that Syrian people help us in anything. And the - - biggest example is the earthquake. Every people in our area go to the rubbles and help each other to take the people from under the rubbles. (Uhm) we are very emotional people, very emotional humans, and in this thing, we were, I think, in my opinion, we were best to face this crisis than Turkey. In spite of Turkey it's big country and they have a big number of (uhm) white helmes [[[civil defence]]], a big number of police and army and - devices, et cetera. But I think we work better than [them], especially in the first three days. (…)
73	R: (…) (Hm-mmm) (…) Because?
74	P9: Because we as brothers. (.) We were working as brothers in all societies [[[across all parts of society]]]. (…)
75	R: But that - means, what you're saying is, if I understand correctly, (.) that the main actors, the - most important actors during the earthquake are - the individuals, are the community members, are the people, (.) not the big institutions or (.) other, like, an NGO, but the - people themselves? (.)
76	P9: In the first three days, yes. (.) Yes. NGOs and any other institution, maybe after four or five days they start to working, start to work. But [in] the first three days it was all of them. Help in money, devices, (uhm) cars, (.) drugs from pharmacies from (.) any people, or any person in the Northwest of Syria give what he have or what he has for another people under rubbles who have –; who were patient or so. (…)
77	R: Okay. Yeah. (…) And when you - - now think from today, like, it's been six months now since the earthquake, did you see any changes that the UN made in the way in which they intervene or they engage in northwest Syria? (.)
78	P9: Yes, it's better [than] before this [[[before the earthquake]]]. (.)
79	R: Yeah?
80	P9: Because they (uhm) - returned to focus in this area. (.) They sought another political donors to help Syrian anymore. As I told you, they sent big humanitarian aids. It's better than the –; before the earthquake, so it's –; now it's better. Yes. But we will not receive (uhm) the real - - needs. According to our assessment, we (uhm) need more drugs, consumables, especially devices. Most of our devices in the hospitals or facilities, (uhm) they didn't work because most of them [are from] before the revolution, before 2011. So, we need a big number of new devices in our facilities. It's the most important thing. In other hand, (uhm) our health workers have a good experience (.) to deal with crisis and a big number of patients, but we need instrument[s], new devices, need drugs. And all the missions which visited us told me this thinking. That we have a good experience for helpers, (uhm) health workers. But we need the instrument[s]. (…)
81	R: Ah. (.) This is - - the health sector and the humanitarian need. You said before that the main problem is Assad. (.) And then you would hope the UN could basically solve the bigger problem, which is that there is a conflict. (.)
82	P9: Of course.
83	R: Do you think that the UN should engage more on the political level? Or should they maybe be more focused only on humanitarian, for example? (.)
84	P9: I think there is (.) a good relation between UN and political level. (.)
85	R: (Asking to repeat unintelligible) Between the UN and what?
86	P9: Political level. (…)

87	R: So, it's all politics (with a smile)? (…)
88	P9: (With a smile): Yes. (Joint laughing). This is (?)
89	R: Which is what? Sorry, I can't hear. Can –; maybe you can put the laptop a little bit closer?
90	P9: (Uhm) I think, there is good relations between UN agencies and (members?) //, where is Russia and the USA and the British. //
91	R: // (trying to understand) 'measures'? [[[that what was said was 'members' became clear instantly then from the examples given]]] // Okay. (.) So, you think that the UN could - do more to solve the conflict? Or –? (…)
92	P9: If they want. (…)
93	R: (with a smile) If they want? Yeah? (Joint laughing)
94	P9: (With a smile) If they want they can.
95	Researcher You think they don't want (laughing)? (…)
96	P9: I don't know (with a smile).
97	R: Okay (laughing). (…) But –; because my question is –//
98	P9: // The - - last visit of [[a UN representative]] with [[a UN agency]], he visited us in Idlib, in Bab Al-Hawa.
99	R: Who was that?
100	P9: [[A senior representative of a UN agency]]. He visited us in Bab Al-Hawa [[…]]. After (uhm) more than one hour of meeting and (uhm) talking about our priorities and our need assessment and our gaps in health sector, in the last [part] of the meeting, he told us one thing: "We have been helping Syrian people more than 12 years, and we see as [[this UN agency]], you have to solve your political problem with Assad regime and return to one country, then you will not need our aids.". (laughing out loud with a clear expression of disbelief, ridicule). (…) // That's [[this representative]] (laughing).
101	R: // What did you say - - - ?
102	P9: I told [[the representative]] (.) (laughing): "If you want us to receive aids from Assad regime from crossline, we will not receive it."
103	R: Ah. (.) No? No way? (with a smile)
104	P9: Of course. I told [[the representative]] that.
105	R: Do you think the UN wants this? (.) To make things go via Damascus? (.) Yeah?
106	P9: Of course. (.)
107	R: Le'esh? (why?) //
108	P9: // They want. (…) Because they [[[the UN]]] - want to - return the Assad regime to the (.) (uhm) level global. (…)
109	R: Okay?
110	P9: They want him [[[Assad]]] to return to the (uhm) –; to the real point they want.
111	R: So, they want back to (.) have one government and one country and khalas [[done/ end of the story]]? (…) Why?
112	P9: Yes
113	R: Ah hang on (online meeting briefly interrupted). Asif [[[I apoligize]]] (laughing) [[…]]
114	P9: Don't worry. Okay. Yes, they want him to return the first and last president for this country and one government for all [the] country. (…)

115	R: Mumkin [[[Maybe]]]. (…) But - why? Why do - - - think they want that? (.)
116	P9: It's political. (Laughing)
117	R: (Joint laughing) Okay. But then it's always political –(online meeting nterrupted; participants disconnected for several minutes; joining back again; making fun of the situation a bit [[[abridged]]]). So, you - think the - UN will want to have one government? Doesn't, maybe, even matter who, but they want one government // to have stability maybe? Something like this? //
118	P9: // Yes, yes. // In our meetings with UN agencies, or with most of global donors, they told us that: "You have to make one government. You have to return to one country, (uhm) without limits [[[internal borders]]] inside Syria.". We know that it's better for us - - and we - prefer that. We need to have one country and one government, but without Assad regime. (…) We really want that and need that, but without Assad regime (.) how can I deal with government or with this regime who killed [[several members of my direct family]]? I can't. I will be like them, dead people, or I will have to travel - - - to Europe, to any - - - country. I can't deal with them. I can't live with them. (…) So we - don't mind one government and one country, but without this regime only. (…)
119	R: Do you think the UN understands this? (…) The people maybe? The people who are working in the UN? (…)
120	P9: Approximately 70% I think no.
121	R: 70 percent no?
122	P9: Yes. (…)
123	R: How about the UN people in Gaziantep? Do you think they understand it? (.)
124	P9: Yes.
125	R: Mia mia [[[100 percent]]]?
126	P9: Because, yes (.); because they knew a lot of Syrian people and they entered to Syria, to the Northwest, and they see the real society, the real photography [[picture]] of this area and they have met a lot of Syrian people inside Syria. So I think they know. (…)
127	R: OK. And how about the UN people in - Damascus, do you think they - understand it as well? (…) // No? //
128	P9: // (Shaking head) // Because - - they are seeing the one picture [[[only one perspective]]]. They don't see it, another picture. (…)
129	R: Okay.
130	P9: And they are hearing from the regime (…), which he [[Assad]] is –(.); which is lying in - everything. In everything [he] is lying. (…)
131	R: Okay, so - the UN, maybe, is (uhm) (…). Well, do - you think that you –; the people in Northwest Syria and the UN have the same agenda, the same goal then? (self-evident, hence self-answered) No. What do - - (..) you think do the people in northwest Syria think about the UN? (…) // (With a smile) Yeah, I know it's difficult questions, I think. //
132	P9: // (appearing to be thinking hard) // (…) (With a smile) Most of our people don't like them [[[the UN]]]. // Because they - ; maybe they [[[people in NWS]]] (uhm) think that UN people, they are another picture from regime.
133	R: // Yeah? // Okay.
134	P9: All of people know this (uhm) - point I told you, that UN agencies and global donors and big countries like USA, like British et cetera, they can solve our problem in maybe 10 minutes. And they don't want. So they don't like them. (.)
135	R: Okay. Because they - do not help more than providing some humanitarian aid?
136	P9: Yes.

137	R: Do they [[[people in NWS]]] - - understand that they there is a lot of humanitarian aid coming from the UN and from other donors?
138	P9: Yes (with a touch of frustration) but (uhm) –// No problem
139	R: //They don't trust them?
140	P9: Of course.
141	R: Okay. What do you think about the future? Do you think it will be better? (.) Or –(…), I mean the UN in Northwest Syria? And maybe the relation between the UN and Northwest Syria?
142	P9: In my opinion (.), I am optimistic sometimes (.) and I think it will be better, but (with a smile) not because of the UN. (.) Because [of] the global issues: the war between Russia and Ukraine (.) and another wars and another problems. As you see, in many countries around the world. So, I think we will find our solution and someday we will (…) - - go to another cities and all of Syria will be free (.) with our people. (…)
143	R: It's a very nice, very nice final statement, actually (smiling). I have one more question (laughing): if you want, // but it's - not an easy one (joint laughing) //
144	P9: // Okay. // Okay.
145	R: In in your words, what would the UN need to do in the future to remedy the past? Remedy is like (uhm) make good - - for the past. (…) (joint laughing) (…)
146	P9: (Laughing) It's so hard. (…) (joint laughing). In (uhm) small –; or–; in small words: They have to be really humanitarian. (…)
147	R: Which means?
148	P9: Not as - - (uhm) (…) (uhm) - - only workers. (…) You have to be –; they [[[the UN]]] have to be humanitarian in their hearts (.) and their works. They have to help us, as I told you, in the real cause, to solve this [[[that the country is dominated by a criminal, Assad]]] problem from the beginning. Then, after that, we will not need any help from anybody, we will –; we can construct our building[s], ours country without any help. (…) In our hands only. (…)
149	R: So the UN needs to do (…) just a little bit more to be really humanitarian, not political? (…) At least (.) in this –; because before you said they are a bit political and they need to be political in one way, but they –//; if they –; so - if they say "We are humanitarian", they have to be really humanitarian and not just say it. Not just // this, like, talking – like this //
150	P9: // Yes. // Yes. I want to say some –// I want to say a sentence but, (.) forgive me // They have to deal with us (.) (uhm) like Ukrainian people. (…). Yes?
151	R: // Always. // (…) (With a smile): It's your words. I can't (judge?). But (.) in what way? But how? What do you mean, they have to deal with you like Ukraine – people? (…)
152	P9: As - all of us have seen from the beginning [of the] war between Ukraine and Russia, (uhm) the refugees from Ukraine, all of countries receive them. (Uhm) a big offer of humanitarian aids and (uhm) a big of helps for any people from Ukraine. (.) And (uhm), but, (…) it's very different from Syrian people. (...) // I think you know that.
153	R: // So you mean –// Yeah, I do (laughing). I also need - to understand what –; if you and I mean the same, but you mean that (uhm) - maybe Ukrainian people, you think, received more help as individuals // and (uhm) as a society? What do you think is the difference between Syrians and Ukrainians then? //
154	P9: // Yes. // We don't have (uhm) blue eyes (laughing, giving the impression that it's obvious while it is maybe not okay to say it as clearly as this).
155	R: You think? (with a smile). 'Khalas`[[[That's all]]], that's it? (Joint laughing)
156	P9: (Laughing) Of course, no. (smiling while also giving the impression of being a bit diffident now), It's joking.

157	R: That that would basically mean that - the UN and a lot of other countries are a bit racist, huh? (.) Mumkin [[[maybe]]]?
158	P9: I think maybe, ‘mumkin’ [[[maybe]]]
159	R: (repeating, with a smile) ‘mumkin’?
160	P9: And maybe because – [of the] long time of our war. (Uhm) and sometimes because of the big number of Syrian refugees for all countries around the world. (…) Maybe. (.) But as you know, I don't know if you know or not, (uhm) now most of Syrians cannot travel (…) from Turkey to any - - country. Our passport didn't work in any another country. So we are in the big prison. Maybe in the northwest of Syria or in Turkey, it's [a] big prison. Only. (.) For me (…) I cannot go to (.) many meetings in - in Belgium and Germany and the USA, because I have Syrian passport, I don't have another passport. And another hand, (.) or another hand, Ukraine people, they can travel to anywhere, any country. (…) There is –; there are many difference[s], but the causes [[[the reasons for the different treatment]]] I don't know. (…)
161	R: Tamam. (.) So, you say the UN (.) and maybe not just the UN then, maybe also other - donors, other countries (.), they can only (.) correct the past if they treat everybody the same way? (.)
162	P9: Yes.
163	R: Is that - - (with a smile) what I’m understanding?
164	P9: (Laughing) Yes.
165	R: I think that’s a very nice closing sentence actually. I will stop the recording, if –//; or hang on! Do you - - have anything else that you want to say? Any–; anything else that you want to share? (…)
166	P9: // Okay // (…) We - want to be free from this regime to return to our real and normal life. (…) That's all.
167	R: That - really is a nice closing sentence. Thank you. I'm going to stop the recording now.

Transcript P9 (2)

1	R: Good evening. As discussed, here are the questions for following up on our last conversation and the new developments around the vetoed cross-border resolution. I’ll number them through, so you can maybe simply answer each directly with a voice note or text, whatever is easier for you, whenever you have a moment. I’m also going to record the questions by voice note, just to make it nicer (more like an actual conversation): Last time we spoke about your perception of the UN’s conduct and its legitimacy in NWS, particularly related to the earthquake. About one month ago, the UN Security Council did not renew the cross-border resolution to NWS via Turkey. (1) can you tell me, in your words, what actually happened there?
2	P9: Hello [[researcher]], how are you? (...) About the cross-border [resolution] (.) (uhm), [the] UN Security Council didn't renew it. We are talking there is bad effects (.) on [the] population in general in the northwest of Syria, and especially in the health sector, on the health sector. (.) Now (.) we have about 10 hospitals without support from two or three months, without support, and until now, we didn't have any solution for them. (.) All the medical staff in these hospitals and the PHC's [[[Primary Healthcare Centers]]] [are] working as volunteers, and until now we are waiting. And if the Security Council will renew the cross-border resolution according to the agree[ment] of Assad regime, we didn't (.) need (.) this (.) solution. (...) We - don't need this solution, we don't need this agree[ment] and this (.) (uhm) humanitarian aid. (...) (Uhm) this is about health sector. On shelter and WASH and another sector there is bad effects of course, but I don't know (uhm) what it (uhm) is (.) in general. (...) Yes, the (uhm) effect of this thing, yes, it has a large (.) effects or bad effects. (...) Most of the health facilities, which are supported by UN agencies, will (uhm) stop. (.) I want to add something, It's my opinion: I think it's [a] good option, or good solution, for this problem, that we have to take this permission (.) to renew the cross-border (.) - - - - - resolution via Turkey, it has to go out of UN Security Council to - the UN in general [[[the UN General Assembly]]] without veto. Or it has to be under humanitarian aid in conflict area without any (uhm) things, or without any (...) UN agencies, without any governments, et cetera. because it's [a] humanitarian (.) (uhm) problem.
3	R: What has happened/ changed since then with regards to cross-border aid and the UN’s conduct in the region?

4	P9: If this decision of cross-border resolution will not (uhm) continue, we will see bad effects in the future, maybe, (...) on the SIG, I mean immunisation. (...) Especially in the spread of outbreaks like cholera and COVID (.) and normal immunisation. (...) (uhm) there is a bad effects on, especially on [the] population in camps - -. We have about 1.3 million people in camps in the Northwest of Syria. We will see a bad effects in general in [the] health sector, especially after the earthquake, because (.) the referral system to Turkey stopped except [for] some special cases like cancer and maybe cardiology or (parons?), who can until now, who can send some cases to Turkey. If this resolution will not continue, there is (uhm) some solutions (.) by donors, who they establish AFNS [[[Aid Fund for Northwest Syria]]], which will be the the second solution for UN agencies or WHO or OCHA. (.) According to this institution, AFNS, the donors will put their money in this institution and (.) after that, we will take the priorities from inside [Syria] and (.)we will (uhm) send this money to NGOs or I NGOs to make this project inside Syria. But this solution maybe takes some time to start. (.) (Uhm)I can tell you an example for these health facilities who are not supporting the because of the cross-border resolution (.) and maybe our staff work as a volunteer 2, 3, 4 until maybe 6 months, but after that they can't continue, because everyone have a family and you need (.) money to still alive is with –; who is with his family. So, if the cross-border resolution will not continue, or the UN Security Council will not renew it, we will have a bad effects in general for the population, in general in health and WASH and (.) shelter, in many sectors. (Uhm) and we will have a bad effects on the health worker[s] especially. (…)
5	R: (3) in how far does this (the non-renewal of the cross border resolution and the UN's conduct that you relate to this more broadly, if you like) affect your point of view about the UN and it's conduct at large? (4) how so?
6	P9: I will feel free and tell you my (mildly laughing) - opinion, but I think it's the opinion of most population here in northwest Syria, more than 5 million now. As you know, our –(.); or you don't know maybe, our context [is] very complicated, (.) because we have many governments, we have many armies, and Idlib [is] different sometimes to the north of Aleppo; and [the] Northwest [is] different from Northeast, from Assad regime area, from (.) et cetera. (...) So, I think the cross-border resolution, it's not solution. (.) Humanitarian aid it's not solution. (.) Travel to Turkey or to Europe, it's not solution. We need a real solution. From UN. From every country in this world. We have to (.) solve our main problem, which is the Assad and its regime. And I mean what I say. It's regime because he is (.) [an] animal not a human, he is [a] criminal. So, everything we are working on it and to need this humanitarian aid or another thing, only we need our political decision from UN Council, Security Council (.), to put this criminal out of Syria and we will solve all the problems alone without any aid, (.) without anybody, and we can reestablish our society and reestablish our country without anybody and any other (.) agency. (.) So, everything we are working on, it's temporary and it's not (.) the main solution for our problem.
7	R: (5) is there anything else you would like to add?
8	P9: Sorry, [[researcher]], maybe I talk a lot (laughing), forgive me. If you want anything other, I'm ready. Thank you and bye-bye.

Transcript P10 (1)

1	R: So maybe let's briefly start by you telling me a bit more about yourself. (.) Who are you?
2	P10: (Interrupted for a second) I am sorry. Yes, I am [[participant]], I am a pharmacist, graduate from Aleppo University [[about twenty years ago]]. I work in the humanitarian [] context from the beginning of the Syrian revolution. I (…) contributed [[…]] for more than seven years [[to establishing and strengthening health governance in Northwest of Syria in the absense of the Syrian government]]. (Uhm), [[I was closely involved in the management of Idlib Health Directorate and have also gained several years of experience by today with several health and humanitarian organizations working in Northwest Syria]]. Yes.
3	R: Very impressive.
4	P10: Also, I am [[continously advancing my public health knowledge through academic online courses at a university abroad]], yes.
5	R: Were you [[already part of the group of people who began engaging in rebuilding and strengthening health governance in Northwest Syria when these initiatives first started]]?
6	P10: Yes, yes, yes [[…]].

7	R: [[…]] Very impressive - -. Okay, cool. (.) And what was your motivation to join [[this sector]]? (…) I mean [[…]] why did you–; what was your motivation? Just out of curiosity. To join them? (…)
8	P10: Thank you.
9	R: All right. Then (…), and you - -live in [[a city in Northwest Syria]], right? You live in [[a city in Northwest Syria]] with your family?
10	P10: Yes. (.) Yes, yes.
11	R: Do you - - –//
12	P10: Now in [[a city in Northwest Syria]], yes.
13	R: Do you have a permission to also cross into - Turkey? Or are you always in [[Northwest Syria]]?
14	P10: Yeah, yeah, yeah. I – have [a] permission and regularly, time to time, I go to Turkey, because my salary (.) maybe go[es] to my bank account in Turkey, so I go regularly and attend some meeting, some training in Turkey. I have two or three border mission[s]. (Uhm) Yes. The mission[s] [[[establishments of the organization Participant is working for]]] - - in [[several places at border crossings between Syria and Türkiye]]
15	R: And [[does your organization also have an]] office in Gaziantep or somewhere? (…)
16	P10: Yes.
17	R: So that's, basically, you have people who are working for the same organization in Turkey and in Syria, so you // work together?
18	P10: Yeah - - - - - -.
19	R: Okay, cool. (Uhm) I wanted to ask you a bit about the situation around the earthquake. (Uhm) if any of this is getting too personal or to - -, like, if you don't want to talk about it, you just tell me, right?
20	P10: Yeah.
21	R: So, (uhm) when - the earthquake happened, (uhm) what do you remember, who was in northwest Syria (uhm) the actors that were mostly - involved in - the response? In the immediate period when the earthquake happened? (…)
22	P10: Yes, yes (nodding; indicating that the question is well understood). (…) (Uhm) I think, (.) in the first four or five or seven days, (.) the most involved in the response or where, (uhm) the first one was Civil Defence (.), White Helmets I mean. Yes. And the second was the private sector. I mean, people and (uhm) some (uhm) companies (uhm) in the private sectors. Yes.
23	R: What - did they do? (.) Like the // (.) people?
24	P10: // So - - - - - the, as you know, the situation was devastating and a lot of building [] were destroyed in this earthquake. So [the] Civil Defence [[[the White Helmets]]] hasn't - - enough (uhm) instruments or vehicles, heavy vehicles, to pull up victims from the rubbles, so as a private sectors, I mean companies, were having a lot of these heavy vehicles, (uhm) so they contributed (uhm) in this response, or rescuing process. If you don't understand me, please tell me because my language is not very good (laughing).
25	R: Your English is perfect. I understand everything (smiling).
26	P10: Yeah.
27	R: The same - - the other way around, huh. I I sometimes speak very fast. (.) And you just need to say stop, stop.
28	P10: Yes, yes, you–. - - Yeah - -. I will do. Of course, if I don't understand anything (laughing). Yes.
29	R: 'Tamam' [[[okay, good]]]. Were you, (uhm), you were in [[Northwest Syria]] when the earthquake happened?

30	P10: Yes, I - - - was in Idlib city in the five layers [[[5th floor]]] (.) // in the building. Yes
31	R: // Floor?
32	P10: When we woke up from the earthquake, I (uhm) didn't move from my bed (laughing) [[...]] just saying ‘ya allah, ya allah’ [[[praying]]]. Plus, it was very heavy. Yeah, and long. Long time. I - thought that was very long time shaking us heavily and I was hearing big sounds from above and in my [a]partment, (ah, uhm), my flat, and in the ground. It is very terrible (.), yes. (.) [[(abridged: describing personal memories during the earthquake; heavy quake and aftershocks, cold temperatures, returning to flat to gather things, taking care of family, being outside in the streets, exhausted, no safe place to go really for days, finding ways to support family and getting egaged in supporting immediate response to the earthquake)]].
33	R: [[(abridged: researcher's own presence in Gaziantep during earthquake, shared experience with cold temperatures, running outside, returning to flat to gather things, being outside in the street, trying to get some sleep while aftershocks continued, finding shelter for next days)]].
34	P10: [[On the day of the earthquake during the afternoon I eventually had a moment when]] I slept for two hours and woke up through start my walk in (uhm) rescuing and spotting fuel and medical consumables for (uhm) affected hospital in [[a city nearby]].
35	R: Oh, so you started working immediately to help? After–; in the afternoon?
36	P10: Yeah - -. (.) Yes, I - started my - - work in the humanitarian and (uhm) – (.) it's rooting medical consumables. At the same time– (uhm) same day [[my family was still in the flat, but members of the extended family came and took them to an emergency shelter]].[[(abridged: staying in the emergency shelter for more than a week, overcrowded, limited space, emergency conditions. All still with a smile)]]
37	R: // [[(abdridged: asking about duration of stay in shelter;)]]. When did you - - - get a feeling for how bad this earthquake was? (.) Like, when did you notice that it was really, really bad, not just a little bit because your flat, I think, if I see right your flat, it's still standing, right? So nothing happened. // The same thing with the flat where I was, like, everything was okay. So we were the lucky ones. But when did you - - - understand that so many people died in this earthquake? (.)
38	P10: Yes, after - leaving my flat and, downstairs to the street, there's - was no electricity, no internet, and the people in the street (uhm) beside us, there was one building. This building was destroyed from the earthquake and they told us two persons were [[[had]]] died in this building. This building, why it fall – down? Because the Russian war plane attack[ed] this building I think 40 years ago and destroyed a big part from this building. Other parts were–; was destroyed from this earthquake? This in this–; in Idlib. The news were coming now, time to time, said huge number of building[s] in Harem and Saraquin and Jenderis [[[other cities in Northwest Syria nearby]]], because when I go back–; when I went back to my flat, I have solar reception in my flat, I switched on the electricity and the Internet. So I know that huge number and died people and destroyed building[s] in (uhm) other region[s], but in Idlib City, there, I think, one or three – building[s] only [were] destroyed. Partly, not completely. But this building, I - told you, it was because [a] Russian warplane attacked it. So it's–; okay.
39	R: Okay.
40	P10: But - - [in the] afternoon, when I went to [[several affected]] hospital[s], and it's [for] this reason [that] I saw that destroyed in– myself -. (.) Yeah. So it - was very terrible, yes. But from the first hour, the news – came–; coming time to time, yes.
41	R: Okay. And in – this, now, in this situation, who were the first and most important people or organizations or actors generally (uhm) who helped? (…)
42	P10: (Uhm) organization? //
43	R: ‘Mumkin [[[Maybe]]], yani [[[I mean]]] ‘nas’ [[[persons]]], ‘insan’ [[[person]]], any–//
44	P10: Yeah - - - - . I - - - - - - - remember that (.) I will [[[was]]] added for [[[to a]]] Whatsapp group (uhm) created by (uhm) WHO (uhm) team (uhm) to organise or to coordinate the assistance inside Syria. So I think (uhm) via WhatsApp group (uhm) there - - were now–(.) (uhm) private or (uhm) teams, (uhm) volunteer–; voluntary teams, I think, they started to help. It's called (uhm) Dulana initiative, yeah, (.) (uhm) Dulana - team.

	It is a voluntary (uhm)–; so we started to purchase all medical - consumables from the (uhm) private warehouses. So also I hurried up and called these warehouses and purchased two cars of medical consumables. When I arrived [[in the first location]], I remember that it was [[in the early afternoon]], so I took a picture or photo from this assistance and sent it to (uhm) WHO (uhm) WhatsApp group. It was [[one of the first]] picture[s] (uhm) from (uhm) [an] organization [that] arrived, because, as you know, organization (uhm; uhm) need (uhm) policies, procedures to purchase, so I - took the green light from my management [[abroad]] to act as you want. So I purchased without money (joint laughing).
45	R: You paid - - yourself and you told them basically? What, like, you took your money, and you went, and you said: “I will buy” and then they gave you // back the money? //
46	P10: //No money, no money, // No money. It–; he was my friend, the warehouse owner, so I called him via WhatsApp: “I need, as you - - have [[[whatever you have]]] from medical consumables and will pay to you later.”. So he agreed. Because he is from Syria and he wants to help also (.) to distribute (.) because he didn't (.) (uhm) (.) prevent me (joint laughing).
47	R: So -; you - basically asked (.) your organization, your management [[abroad]] (.)–// if you (uhm) can buy medical consumables, “I will buy now, and you pay in the future”? // And they said: “Okay, khalas, yalla, go” [[Okay, done, go, go]]? //
48	P10: // Yes, yes, yes. // Yeah, yeah. // Yes, actually, not me I called. They called me to – make sure - - - that I’m good and my family. //
49	R: // Oh, of course.
50	P10: So after – (uhm) making sure my safety, he told me: “What do you think? What do you want?”. So I told him I want to purchase everything, medical consumables and [slout?]. And the - second step, I will purchase diesel fuel to – [[[for]]] the affected hospital, yes.
51	R: And they said: Okay, go, do whatever it takes?
52	P10: Okay. Yeah. Yes - -.
53	R: Wow, that's very, very good, huh? Because then you can go, and you can actually do something (…). Okay, so - –//
54	P10: Yes, I -did - -.
55	R: But that means–; you said, if I understood you correctly, that you went to buy medical consumables [[in the early afternoon]]? (.) So after the second earthquake? After you slept? Yeah?
56	P10: [[Researcher]], [[in the early afternoon]] to distribute but the - purchasing process was as the early morning, I think it was [[at least before noon]], took two hours to–; from–; because his warehouse was in the camps area [[.]]. I think at [[a location close to]] Sarmada [[[another city in Northwest Syria and major hub for humanitarian action and supplies]]], so it needs one or two hours to arrive to Idlib. So my assistant arrived [in] Idlib, I think, (uhm) [[just after noon]] and [went] directly to [[the designated hospital to be supported]] and arrived [[in the early afternoon at the centre]].
57	R: Okay. So basically, on the first day, you made sure your family is safe, then you slept for two hours, and then you already had your medical consumables purchased and you were // - - already involved. Okay. And you–?
58	P10: Yes. // Yes and - - I tried to - prepare my car but I can't. So I let it in the street and went (joint laughing).
59	R: And you said, you - think you were the only–, [[among the first]] organization[s] basically? That went to the person and bought - consumables?
60	P10: I think, I think [[…]] [[yes, among those who]] would plan, (.) the organization I mean, but Dulana–?; Dulana [[[the volunteer group introduced earlier]]] [was active] before me. // Yeah, yeah.
61	R: The volunteers? Yeah. Perfect. //
62	P10: Dulana was volunteer team (uhm) -, and he– [[[the leader of the volunteer group]]]; they didn’t need permission from other guys, so - he is a manager and he has money, so he purchased directly and started

	(uhm) to use medical consumables. I – remember, I know (uhm) him - - -. (uhm). We have a WhatsApp group for all hospitals (uhm) inside (uhm) in Northwest Syria: Who wants medical consumables? Who wants (uhm) to (uhm) - serums? So he - - was (uhm) responding to anyone in need, yes.
63	R: Okay, so individuals and volunteers first. (.)
64	P10: Yes.
65	R: Maybe even individuals who work for organizations, but worked as individuals and helped? And then you and some other organizations, who were - - basically just moving in and saying: “Okay, we have the leverage now, we have, okay, we have green light. We can go and now support as well.”?
66	P10: Yes. This assistance, which I talked about, was for medical (uhm) - - sector, or health sector.
67	R: What about other sectors?
68	P10: You - - - - understand me, that for other sectors (.), to help the victims, there was the Civil – Defence [[[the White Helmets]]], from the first time, yes.
69	R: Immediately?
70	P10: Yeah - -. And - by the sectors I–; as I mentioned, who started to –; trying–; to try hear - - parents, children or relatives, yes.
71	R: Okay. And you said that the WhatsApp group–; you were added to a WhatsApp group, and the WhatsApp group was opened by WHO?
72	P10: Yeah - - - - .
73	R: Immediately on the first day? // It's - interesting how so far nobody else told me this.
74	P10: // Yes. It is–. // Sorry, [[researcher]]?
75	R: (With a smile) So far, you're the first person who are telling me about this // WHO WhatsApp group. So WHO (.), I – think, in Gaziantep maybe? or somewhere? // They - knew we need coordination and so they opened - - a WhatsApp group? // And they put everybody in (with a smile)? //
76	P10: Yeah. // Yes, yes, Gaziantep. // Yeah // Yeah. // Yeah. I - was added to this WhatsApp group (uhm) by my manager in Turkey, because as you want– (uhm) as you know, all the team in Turkey left Gaziantep to Ankara and other [places], so I stay[ed] alone in – the field.
77	R: That was a lot of responsibility, huh?
78	P10: (With a smile) Yes.
79	R: So, you coordinated everything?
80	P10: Yeah, (uhm) Yes. (.) Not (uhm) - the assistance. Only the - most difficult issue was to go to media and (uhm)– other channels because my management [[abroad]] (uhm) (.) announced my Skype and (uhm) WhatsApp number to CNN, CBC, BBC and other, so all of them want to talk with me. (.) Yes.
81	R: Wow.
82	P10: Everyday I was staying to 12:00 PM in the day work[ing] in the field and at night to talk (uhm) to the media. (.)
83	R: So you - basically were –//
84	P10: // And just to update my–; to update our HQ and the management, what happened, what we - - - did, what's the situation. So it was very, very difficult five days. (…)
85	R: Oh, I can imagine! (.) I went to Ankara, like, after one week, first one week in Gaziantep and then one week later I went with a bus to Ankara. I think –//
86	P10: You stay one week? After the earthquake?

87	R: Yeah, but –//
88	P10: Why (with a smile and a bit of surprise)? My team in Gaziantep, from the first day they left.
89	R: 'Yani' [[[Well]]], I mean, because, I don't have a car. I mean, 'sayara' [[[car]]]?!
90	P10: (Ohh)
91	R: And it was –(.); Nothing was–(.); everything was closed. So how, like, do you think I'm going, like, (?). No–(.) (with a smile).
92	P10: Yes, yes, I know, I know. But also, more - secure. (.) (briefly interrupted)
93	R: Actually, it was good. So we went to a museum, (uhm) Müsesi? Yeah? And we stayed. We didn't go to the flat. We had a place where we could sleep on the floor. It was cold, but the situation was better I think, than in the tents. Better than in the camps. (.) And I also think you know, I worked for Syria for so long, and I was always good, you know, I was always in an office or in Germany or in Turkey. And I think for me, this was the moment when I, when I had all my colleagues with me, who knew and who were good (briefly interrupted); and I, you know, I - had the best people around me that I could have, you know, like with - all these medical people who would be so, like: "Yeah, yeah. You'll be good. You'll be good.". I said okay. You know (joint laughing), so it was - - nice actually. No, no, hang on. It was not nice. It was not nice. It was–; but I was good, right?
94	P10: I appreciate it. I appreciate it.
95	R: But then I saw all of these pictures and - videos from - the collapsed buildings and Hatay and I think in Jarabulus and (uhm) not, I'm not sure Jarabulus.
96	P10: Not – Jarablus. Jenderis.
97	R: Jenderis, exactly. (.) Jenderis, and I think - - that was the moment when I really started to feel uncomfortable because I was good, right? Most of the people that were close to me were with me or were good. But, like, I saw so many people who were so much more affected and that was very hard. Actually, how - was that for you? Did you have the same? Like, you were in Idlib, so you were kind of, maybe, better? (.) // But when you saw the pictures? And you work in the humanitarian sector. Did you have the feeling that you need to do more and more and more?
98	P10: // Yeah. // Yes. (Uh) actually (uhm), you can't (uhm) (.) know your feelings in these times. You - - must work and the same time you see the victims and (uhm) I can't explain my feelings in that time. But (uhm) my family and (uhm) - - people who - still under rubbles and (uhm) hospital, who - stop many of feelings. So, you - will encourage yourself and work, to help as you can. And who, who became as victims, (?) they did, but you can do for the survivors. (…)
99	R: Yeah. (.) Okay. (Uhm) Then I would like to ask you a couple of questions –// (briefly interrupted) [[…]]
100	P10: [[…]]
101	R: When you - - remember the situation, (.) do you –; (ah) let me ask you this way: What was the first action besides now this WhatsApp group from the WHO, what was the first activity from the United Nations that you remember? When did they become active in Northwest Syria? (…).
102	P10: (…) (Uhm) actually, they didn't act anything at the first seven days. Anything. I - - remember we stayed (uhm) about seven days without any assistance from the world, or, I mean, from the (uhm) global or the UN. (Uhm) Just – some (uhm) mission, medical mission, arrived to Syria, without any instrument, without any equipment, without any gadgets. So, I think (uhm) at the first one week, no any assistance entered to inside Syria. So, we - struggle alone. I - - - (uhm) told this and I am sure about this. We struggled alone. Our victims stayed many days under rubble without assistance, without–; we haven't instrument, we haven't any vehicles or (uhm) instrument to - pull up our victims from the rubbles. So, they died (…) because they haven't –. They (uhm) didn't replacing more and more, under the rubble. (…)
103	R: OK. So, you think–//
104	P10: //We were - - listening [[[hearing]]] them, struggling, but we can't do anything.

105	R: So you - ; do - you think that the UN could have done more? In these first seven days? (.) Or should have done more? (…)
106	P10: In the first days?
107	R: Yeah
108	P10: In other sectors, [[researcher]], you know, maybe the planes, the assistance may be transferred or transported by - planes not to cross the border and not to (uhm), so we - - - saw many – earthquakes around the world. The first - - first day the assistants are coming and (uhm) (.) timely, but inside [Northwest] Syria I - didn't saw; (uhm) I didn't see, sorry. I didn't see anything from the UN and other countries. (.) So they can - - (uhm) help in many ways, but, I think, it was for political issues. This is my opinion. (…)
109	R: Yeah (taking notes). So, if I understand you correctly, I will just repeat and you say if I understood right, kay?
110	P10: Okay.
111	R: You're - saying that (uhm) (.) when you look at the situation with the earthquake and other situations around the world, when there is an earthquake, the UN is there on the next day. (.) // But for northwest Syria, that's not the case. So somehow –//.
112	P10: // Yes. // (Hm) Yes, there was - - - any–; there wasn't any response from the UN. (.) Not the next day or third day or forth day. (…). For the first one week after the earthquake. So, what [do] we do in the assistance after one week?! All the victims will be dead. So, yeah, we need the assistance timely (.) to - - - help the victims. I mean, to - survivors, to - –; yeah.
113	R: So – you'd actually say, right, (briefly interrupted) (.), just tell me if I understand you well, you're - saying that the help is really needed in the very first 1, 2, 3, 4, 5 days and in this period, the UN and maybe other countries as well, should have done more. They should have done something immediately. (.) Which you - would say (uhm) is also because you can see it, whenever something happens somewhere else, they are there, just - now, they - were not there. (.) So why it's - - the question that is behind this, right? So somehow this doesn't add up. This doesn't make sense (.) for you. Why - were the UN people not - there? Earlier?
114	P10: (Briefly interrupted) (Uhm) You're –. Sorry, [[researcher]], repeat your question: why the UN was delayed in this assistance? (.) // Yeah? // Your question? //
115	R: // I think - - that's the question, right? // Yeah. So the question everybody has maybe? Why was the UN // not there?
116	P10: // Yeah, yeah, yeah. // I don't know. I - - said - - I think it was for political issues, but I don't [know] why. This is - - their role. But they¬¬–; what they - delayed; they (uhm) told us (uhm) for the logistic issues and the - cross-border. And I - think this is not accurate. But they delayed for, this is between us, for political issues, not more. (…) If you - - saw in the (uhm) Syrian (.) or (uhm) Syrian region controlled (uhm) under (uhm) the Assad regime, all the countries, Arab and other countries sent the planes of assistance and the UN also, (.) but there was no disaster in this –; earthquake in the in that region. The devastating earthquake was in - - the (uhm) – close to the cross-border, (uhm) Turkey cross-border region, in Jenderis, in Harem, in Salquin, in Atarib, yeah. (.) But no assistance came to this area, unfortunately.
117	R: Why - do you think there is such a difference? (.) What is it that makes (.) Damascus different from (.) Idlib? (…)
118	P10: (Laughing with a touch of frustration) This under control under [the] opposition (.) and the other under the control of Assad. (.) // Yeah, they - - - - help the criminal man. // Assad regime. //
119	R: // So do you think the UN is working more with – Assad? // 'Shoo?' [[[What?]]] // (Ah), tamam [[[okay]]]. Thank you (laughing).
120	P10: Tamam? (joint laughing)
121	R: 'Yani. Ana la–//(?)' [[[Well, I am not –//(?)]]]

122	P10: [The Assad regime] who killed thousands of children by - using chemical weapons -. (uhm) They want to help him [[[Assad]]] to stay (laughing in frustration, ridicule). This is all of these reasons for political issues.
123	R: So - you think the UN is working closer with the Assad (.) (uhm) –?//
124	P10: // Yeah, okay, of course!
125	R: // Then - with Northwest Syria? Yeah?
126	P10: Yeah, yeah, yeah. Okay. Of course!
127	R: Do you - - think this is - - right? Do you think this is good for the UN? (…)
128	P10: No. (Uhm) Now - - the UN [is] trying to - enter their assistance (uhm) across (uhm) - - (.) // Bab Al-Hawa. (Uhm) cross-border, controlled - by Assad regime. I - don't know why. (.) They –//
129	R: // Cross line? // Okay, yeah. // What? Like, they cross from Bab Al-Hawa and then?
130	P10: [[Researcher]], just a moment, yes (distracted for about a minute) [[…]] Yeah, return back to your question.
131	R: No. So - you were saying that the UN is helping more Assad than Northwest Syria, right? // Even you said that, even - though they - bombarded children with chemical weapons, but still they want him to stay. This is what you –(.); what I think you said, right?
132	P10: // Yes, yes // yes.
133	R: But then you said that they are now trying to (.) support the sector through Bab Al-Hawa, but controlled by the regime. I don't understand what you mean. Like, how?
134	P10: Yeah, yeah, yes. (…) (Uhm) When the (…) Security Council failed to (uhm) expand the permission, as you know, from Bab Al-Hawa, the Assad regime said: “I can allow to the UN to enter their - assistance from the border, cross-border.”. This is (uhm), if (uhm) it was done, it will be under control from Assad regime and (uhm) as a gift of (uhm) Assad to the Northwest Syria people, (.) who are displaced - there and killed (.), him [[[he/ Assad]]] there killed them. This gift from Assad regime to the UN to allow them to enter their assistance (uhm) through Bab Al-Hawa. Now you understand me, yes?
135	R: Yes, yes, I do. I do. But the cross-border resolution, did they already say no, it will not continue? Maybe it's –; it–; are they still discussing?
136	P10: The Security Council failed to expand the permission, because Russian and Chinese used their veto, I think // and they want to (uhm) intercept from across line, not through cross-border. So now it is closed. Just two border, not officially, I - think, Bab-Salame and Ar-Ray.
137	R: You mean the commercial ones? Not the humanitarian, the commercial routes?
138	P10: Yeah (.). Yeah, yes, yes. But in front of UN assistance, it is closed, Bab Al-Hawa. (.) So, Assad regime (uhm) (.) call the UN: “I can” and now –. It [[[The border crossing and region]]] is not controlled under Assad regime?! (.) It’s under us (laughing while expressing frustration and disbelief), but (ah), this [are] political issues. I don't understand a lot (uhm) of the political issues.
139	R: I don't either (joint laughing), but, I mean (mimicking ‘what can we do?’). (Uhm) So -, but do you think that it's–; it makes sense that the UN needs permission to cross the border with Assad or with the UN Security Council?
140	P10: They - - - are respect men. They - didn't enter any assistance without permission. (…)
141	R: So, this is good?
142	P10: No. So - they [[[the UN]]] need permission [[[for cross-border aid operations]]]. I think - - (uhm) when they - can –; when they want, they will enter (uhm) anything. But (uhm) they don't want.
143	R: They don't want, no? (.)
144	P10: They don't help. (…) //

145	R: // That's interesting.
146	P10: // They can - - go to the (.) general society [[[assembly]]], United Nation and (uhm) take permission, but they didn't - - ; they don't do this. I don't know why. (…)
147	R: Okay. Well, that's interesting, because, if I understand well (.), (uhm)you said that the UN was also saying they were not able to help in the first 5, 6, 7 days because of logistical issues and because of the border crossing permission that they didn't have. So –//
148	P10: No, no. Not - - - the permission. (Uhm) the permission was (uhm) taken in that time, but they (uhm) – called; the cross-border was closed, and the Turkey authority closed the cross-border in front of –. But the Turkish authorities said: "No, it is open to assistance. It is –; it was closed for commercial issues, but (uhm) for assistance they can cross anytime. (.) After, [[researcher]], they – (uhm) –; to - - - prove their - - delay, after one week, (.) one week, they entered I - think about 14, only 14, vehicles of assistance. (Uhm) I - remember the (uhm) media teams took pictures for these 14 vehicles. It was stored in Gaziantep or Turkey, (uhm) not for –; not specialized for, or not, like, for earthquake, it was stored before the earthquake and to show to the northwest or to the world that they are working, they are helping, (uhm) 14 vehicles for Northwest Syria.
149	R: That was the first - - assistance that you got? // From the UN?
150	P10: // Yeah, yeah. It's, if I - - am accurate, or if I am right, it (uhm) were; it was 14 vehicles. I think it was 14 only.
151	R: Yeah. Okay. (Uhm) (.) Do you think that - this kind of non-intervention of the UN is any - way justified for – (.) any other reasons than political reasons, as you said? (.)
152	P10: This is [a] difficult question (joint laughing). No. No - - any justification for this. But why? I don't know. You must ask the UN why you are –. They - will tell you: "No, no. We are –; we we're not delayed. We organised. We controlled. We - - –. (.)
153	R: Interesting. (Uhm(I remember, (uhm) and I - have a quotation here, (uhm): one week after the earthquake, there was a visit of the UN (uhm) Relief Coordinator, of Martin Griffith. He came to Northwest Syria, to the border, right? And he tweeted, I would like to read the –//
154	P10: (Briefly interrupted) (Uhm) Sorry, sorry. I didn't hear you well.
155	R: (Ah) sorry (.). (With a smile) Exactly this is what you have to do: to say stop. (.) So - one week after the earthquake, there was a representative from the United Nations (.), was coming to the border, to Bab Al-Hawa I think. // And his name is Martin Griffiths. I'm sure you heard his name before. And he tweeted, I will read this to you, he tweeted (mimicking quotation marks): "I am at the Türkiye-Syria border today. We have so far failed the people in northwest Syria. They rightly feel abandoned, looking for international help that has not arrived. My duty and our obligation is to correct this failure as fast as we can. That's my focus now.". (.) That's what he tweeted one week after the - earthquake. Did you read this before?
156	P10: // Yes. // Yes.
157	R: What do you think about it?
158	P10: I think it - - was not right. Because (uhm) after one week of the earthquake, this part of his speak [[[speech]]], one after week [[[one week after]]], it is a very long time to help after the earthquake. You must - - - be ready at the first day. Not after one week. So, what you will help? After one week? Yeah (.)
159	R: Good question.
160	P10: That's -; the second issue, (uhm) I - - remember, the Turkish authorities said (uhm) we can enter anything from our borders, but, I think it was some (uhm) issues in the roads to Bab Al-Hawa. Because - the earthquake destroyed the roads, and the Turkish authorities directly treated by (?) and other to - - - arrive [at] the cross border [[[border crossing/ to make the way free for cross-border operations to Syria]]].
161	R: So it's the UN? But maybe it's also on the Turkish side? (…)

162	P10: (Uhm) and, [[researcher]], the UN assistance, to know about their help, it was (uhm), as I mentioned, it was stored - in the –; Gaziantep. It not directly came from (uhm) around the world or (uhm) UN offices around the world. They can (uhm) bring a lot of assistance through - planes and other ways to – help. As they do in their - job. (.) So this (uhm) (.) 14 vehicle[s], they took some pictures after one week to - - testify, for themselves, (.) so (imitating to speak on behalf of the UN): “We're not delaying, but Turkish authorities prevented us to cross the border”. Yeah. They went, yes? (…)
163	R: (With a smile) ‘mumkin’ (maybe).
164	P10: (Repeating with a smile) ‘mumkin’ (maybe)
165	R: Maybe yes, maybe. So you base –//
166	P10: Okay, okay. What they did? [[[What did they do?]]] What? My question: what they did after opening the cross-border [[[the border crossing]]]? (…)
167	R: That's my question to you (with a smile). You tell me, what did they do - - - -? Did they do –//
168	P10: //This is for the UN. What they - - - - helped after the earthquake?
169	R: You didn’t see anything?
170	P10: I - - think it was very, very limited and (.) consumables, I think, some medicines, they didn't send (uhm) vehicles to - move the rubbles. (Uhm) They didn't send (uhm) medical equipment to prepare (uhm) to equip the ICUs [[[intensive care units]]] to –(...). But actually, after the earthquake, the fund became good (smiling), to be honest (laughing).
171	R: So, there's more funding?
172	P10: (Laughing) Yeah. Because, as you know, most of donors or (uhm)–; send money to - - help. But these projects, after the earthquake, [were] mental health project[s], shelter project[s]. It's good. Good. But not to life saving.
173	R: Not in the - - first seven days.
174	P10: When I –. Yeah, yeah. When - we talk, this assistance - - to save life - -, saving for peoples, not for the other community or mental health issues. It is good, but [what] we were need[ing], (.) it's timely assistance. In the first day, yes.
175	R: And there was nothing? (.)
176	P10: Yeah, yeah. The first week where there was anything. (…)
177	R: When you - - now think about (.) on the one hand side, the tweet from Martin Griffiths that I just told you, right? He is saying that they want to correct this failure. (.) (Uhm) now - moving to today, like, now it's been more than six months since the earthquake, do you see any changes in the way in which the UN is engaging in Northwest Syria? (.) You - already mentioned that there is more money, huh (with a smile)? But maybe - there is more? Is there more how the UN has changed in the end?
178	P10: Yes, the money - - or the fund, which I mentioned it, it increased a little bit after the earthquake. It wasn't - - from the UN. I mean, other donors, not the UN.
179	R: Not the UN?
180	P10: I think, [the]UN (uhm) maybe donated some projects. (Uhm) Mental health project and other. But, (uhm) as you know, day after day, the fund inside Syria is decreasing and (uhm) (.) month to month you may see this big organization decrease 30 percent of their staff or the their fund. UN, (uhm) WFP decreased their assistance from big baskets, food basket, to small.
181	R: Before the earthquake? (.) Or?
182	P10: (Uhm) (.) Yeah, yeah, they - are engineering in (.) // decreasing the basket. //
183	R: // So general? (.) // So every - year a little bit?

184	P10: Yeah. Yeah, yeah, yeah, yes, yes.
185	R: OK. And then the earthquake came and then it grew again. Or no?
186	P10: Yeah. (.) After the earthquake (uhm) it was six months, we received a lot of assistance. Various assistance. But after these six months, I think (uhm) we are coming back to the (uhm) after –(.), to the before the - before the earthquake (uhm) situation.
187	R: Okay. So, no long-term change, only (uhm) temporary change.
188	P10: No - - - - -. Just six months. (.) They (uhm) spent (uhm) a lot of dollars [on] assistance and (uhm) (.) they stopped, (.) maybe (…) month after month, not stopped directly, but all – (uhm) organization groups who took a project for the earthquake, they stopped after six months. (…)
189	R: Okay. So basically you're saying you're now more or less where you were before the earthquake? (…) // No long-term difference? //
190	P10: // Yes. // Yes.
191	R: Is there anything else? Anything else that you can think of (.) that is now –; or that that changed with the UN after these first seven days after the –; so, after the first critical lifesaving period? (.) Anything else that changed in the UN's way of intervening, or maybe in the behaviour of people that work for the UN and any other activities that you - - see have changed?
192	P10: I think that no. No any - - done activities, I mean lifesaving, lifesaving or critical (uhm) activity. But they spent, I think, fund for the mental health issues project. And some mobile clinic (uhm) consumables, not – a critical issues.
193	R: Yeah, but –; okay. Somebody told me (.) that they - are visiting more often since the earthquake.
194	P10: Oh! Okay (reacting initially in a way that might have suggested opposition to this claim; instead it turned out to be rather approving yet in a sarcastic manner, expressing doubt about the meaningfulness of such visits in terms of real change as well as their purpose) All of them visited the –//
195	R: I don't know - - - No, it's from another person, huh? I don't know.
196	P10: That's true [[[that UN representatives visit more often]]]. And then took pictures and photos.
197	R: Yeah. So they are coming more often, but they are not doing anything you think?
198	P10: This is the best issues: all of (uhm) UN members and other (uhm) global institutes came to inside Syria and took some photos, pictures and go out (laughing).
199	R: So, there is a change, but (.) I –; like it's very difficult, yeah.
200	P10: [[Researcher]], don't share the information with others (laughing).
201	R: You're not the first person who is saying it. You're not the only person who's saying it, and you know I will anonymize everything. So, no, khalas, like, I will not tell anyone [[[that it comes from you; double-checked and approved with transcript (participant check) after]]]. But that means you - see there is a change, because people are coming more often?
202	P10: Yes (laughing), and take some photos and (uhm) –.
203	R: So, you don't think that it's a good activity? //
204	P10: // Before - the earthquake, they were - - not - coming to inside Syria. But after the earthquake, I saw a lot of UN members, WHO and other agenc[ies], all of them entered, my god, and took some photos and –(…).
205	R: And khalas [[[that's it]]] (with a smile)? (.)
206	P10: And khalas [[[that's it]]] (joint laughing) (…).
207	R: So, //

208	P10: // (imitating the situation of UN representatives arriving at a location in Northwest Syria): 'Yatik al Afia' [[[May God give you health and all the good things/ a rather polite way of greeting as well as saying good-bye, including in formal occasions]]], you know –(.)//
209	R: Tamam [[[okay]]]. Yeah - - . Like nothing happened.
210	P10: Yeah.
211	R: Yeah. So, okay, so you don't think that this is helpful? (.) That they [[[UN representatives]]] are coming more often? (.)
212	P10: No! (.) Just visit to - (uhm) – prove that (imitating the perspective of UN representatives visiting): "we are here, we're at the field, we are feel[ing] in your suffering, (.) we are (.) seeing your suffering, and (.) Assalamu alaikum [[['peace be upon you'/ a way of greeting and saying good-bye]]].
213	R: (Laughing) Okay. (.) Okay. Is there anything else that you noticed that is different today? (.) Since the earthquake? With the UN, or maybe also with other actors, anything that's really different in the way in which –? //
214	P10: Actually - , I - - told you (.) the general situation before the earthquake was very, very bad and (uhm) the fund[ing] was very limited, but after the earthquake increased and most of [the] hospital[s] were funded and supported. But I think (.) after the six months, after the earthquake, we are (uhm) coming back to the (uhm) - same situation as before the earthquake.
215	R: So, you think now it's going - down.
216	P10: Yeah, yeah. Six months you can the highest, or the top; and you came in (uhm) downstairs. (…)
217	R: Okay. So, do you think the UN should be doing more? (.) Now?
218	P10: (asking for repetition) should be - - ?
219	R: Should be doing more, yeah?
220	P10: No, no, no. No, no, no, no.
221	R: They <u>were</u> not? (.)
222	P10: (…) (Uhm) Just now they are doing nothing because they (uhm) - justify the cross-border is closed in front of the UN agency and maybe (uhm) they plan to transfer the fund to other, you know, to other (uhm) organization; big or international organization, this is their plan. NSAF [[[Northwest Syria Alternative Fund]]], AFNS [[[Aid Fund for Northwest Syria]]] and other internationals. But (uhm) their fund is very limited and (uhm) not good for this (uhm) situations. For example - -, [[researcher]], as you know, you are related and worked in Syrian circles. Most of fund is coming from the International, not the UN. // I think the UN - assistance is very, very, very limited. Not good. So (uhm) you can see (uhm) USAid, DHA, GIZ, DFID, ECHO, these [are] the main donors to the Syrian sectors. If one of these donors stop, you will see the (.) disaster. But the –; if [the] UN stop their assistance, no change in the situation, because their - fund is very limited.
223	R: Okay? So, does that mean that the only thing that UN is doing, that you think is good, that they are doing is the fund? (.) Or is [[[are]]] there other things that - is actually good that the UN is doing it? (…)
224	P10: Again? (.) Please repeat.
225	R: So, because you're saying (uhm) - - - I totally understood what you said, right? And the question I have is: (Uhm) you said, basically for me, that the UN, the only good thing they do is to give fund. (.) Very limited fund. Is there anything else that you think the UN is important for? Like anything that they are doing that is also important?
226	P10: Yeah. Yeah, yeah, yeah. Yes, there is - - other activity. WHO is (uhm) - doing well in organization, opening calls and the technical work in the group. (Uhm) Yes, I mean technically for (uhm) - the health sectors.
227	R: So technically you mean it's good because they have experts who can say: "Yes, this is good, this is –//"

228	P10: Yeah, yeah, yeah. Protocols. Training. (Uhm) Yeah - - to practise policies. Yeah.
229	R: Yeah, okay? So, it's on the one hand side, we have the fund. (.) And then we have this organization, coordination, (uhm) expertise, so there is something more that is good that the UN is there. (…)
230	P10: But their - fund is very limited, [[researcher]], // to line under this [[[to underline this point]]].
231	R: // So, fund is so important. Okay (with a smile). So the fund is so important. More important than the expertise, the coordination, the organization. That's the important thing?
232	P10: Yes, yes, yes.
233	R: Okay. Any anything else that you think is important for the UN to be there? (.) (with a smile) I'm - just asking right? If (responding to mimicking) 'khalas' [[nothing more]]? No? Nothing?
234	P10: (With a smile) That's enough. Enough. (.) 'Khalas' (laughing).
235	R: Just the coordination? (With a smile) okay. I have two more questions. (…)
236	P10: Two?
237	R: Yeah. (.) One is difficult, one is easy (laughing). (.) The easy one first?
238	P10: Yes. (.) As you want. I will answer the two (joint laughing).
239	R: It's - just because I'm trying to understand your perspective // about the UN and how the UN works in Northwest Syria. I want to understand: What did you think about the UN before the earthquake?
240	P10: //Yes. // Before the earthquake (.) ?
241	R: Generally. (.) What did they do? A good job? Do you think they had good goals for Northwest Syria? Were they honest? Did you trust them? Like these things? Just very general. (.)
242	P10: To be honest with you, I think the UN (uhm) job before the earthquake, as - - their job after the earthquake. Two [[[Both]]] of them bad and not good. Yeah. After the - - earthquake it (uhm); the fund and the health sector situation was very bad. I think we - - arrived to (uhm) 12 hospitals which stopped because [there was] no fund. This is after (uhm) [the] earthquake. And no consumables, no - medicines, no - fund. But after the earthquake the situation became better, but not according [[[due]]] to the UN's activity. (…) They [[[the UN]]] did some, but not at the (.) high level, or what we expect or (uhm) –. Not - a lot of thing[s] we think they - must done and do [[[must do; would have been obligated to do]]].
243	R: So they didn't do –// (.) they - // you think they –//?
244	P10: You under –// you understand me? //
245	R: I – think. So, I'm trying to repeat, okay? // You tell me what you're saying is that they were bad before. // And they were bad after the earthquake. They were very bad during the earthquake, right? So, it was like, it was bad, very bad and bad. //
246	P10: // Yes. // Yes. // Yes, yes. //
247	R: // And you - think that they could do more, but they are not doing it. (.) // And we don't know why.
248	P10: // Yes. // Yeah, yeah, yeah. Yes, that. (.) Just [one] correction. After the earthquake, the general situation, the fund and the assistance, became better, (bigger, bigger?) as American, (bigger) than before the earthquake. But this (uhm) was not done by the UN.
249	R: It's done by the –// it's done by other donors.
250	P10: // Yeah? // Yeah, yeah.
251	R: Okay. (.) Okay, then then I will ask you the more difficult one (with a smile).
252	P10: Yeah.

253	R: What does the UN need to do, in your point of view, to remedy the past? (.) Remedy, ‘yani’ [[[what it means is]]], ‘to make good for everything bad before’ (smiling, jointly).
254	P10: Yeah, yeah (appearing a bit puzzled) (…)
255	R: That’s like: what do they have to do to be a good UN? (…)
256	P10: They must be (uhm) transparent with us: what they can do and what they can can't do. This is [the] first point. (…) And second, to (uhm) make sure that no (uhm) shortage or lack of medicine, consumables, and (.) to provide us with the (uhm) most needed services, health services. You know, in the past period, more than two or three thousand[s] of cancer patient[s] struggling inside Syria without treatment, we haven't any - treatment centre for cancer patient[s]. We have any (uhm) centre (uhm), cardiac (uhm) surgical centre for - - - - patients who have issues, so, (.) Turkey, day after day, close the borders (uhm) make difficult difficulties, challenges in front of the patients inside Syria, and no treatment in Turkish hospitals [[[under usual circumstances, patients with advanced medical needs may receive treatment in Turkey]]]. So, it's saying when so the best and (uhm) make [that] the bad is good [[[become a good UN]]], they [[the UN]] will provide us with the needed equipment to - treat our patient[s] inside Syria. As you know, we are closed in, Assad regime in the behind us and Turkey - in front of. So we can’t go [to] other places. (…)
257	R: So (.) the UN needs to come and help you more? (…)
258	P10: Yeah, yeah, yeah, yeah.
259	R: And they [[[the UN]]] are not transparent with you at present you think?
260	P10: No! (…) No, they - - - (uhm) (.) provide us with some project not needed, (.) some as, I'm - sorry for this but, we - - - need –; (.) the most needed project, (.) not GBV [[[gender-based violence]]] project and (uhm) other project, I - - can't talk about this, but they [[[the UN]]] (uhm) force us to implement some projects not needed inside Syria.
261	R: Okay? So you think they - - –//
262	P10: They’re [[[The UN]]] - - - focusing also - on some project related to their vision, not (.) for the needs.
263	R: (Hmm). And you don't –; you think - - their vision is not the same as the vision that Northwest Syria should have? (.) Sometimes?
264	P10: Of course, of course. (.) Of course, their - vision, maybe not at the same of needs or they - may focus on a part of their vision. (laughing with a touch of frustration).
265	R: Tamam [[[Okay]]]. (.) Okay! Thank you. (.) Is there anything else that you still want to say after 1:15:00 talking to me (laughing)? Anything, anything you still want to want to say? (Joint laughing) (.). Otherwise, I'll stop the recording. (…) Khalas [[[done]]] (with a smile)?
266	P10: Yes (with a smile). Khalas [[[done]]].
267	R: I’ll stop the recording. // Tamam [[[Okay]]], I’ll stop the recording.
268	P10: // Saccha wheena [[[health to you]]] (with a smile)