

Frequently Asked Questions

The Help Localisation Facility, HLF: a locally led fund with and for civil society actors

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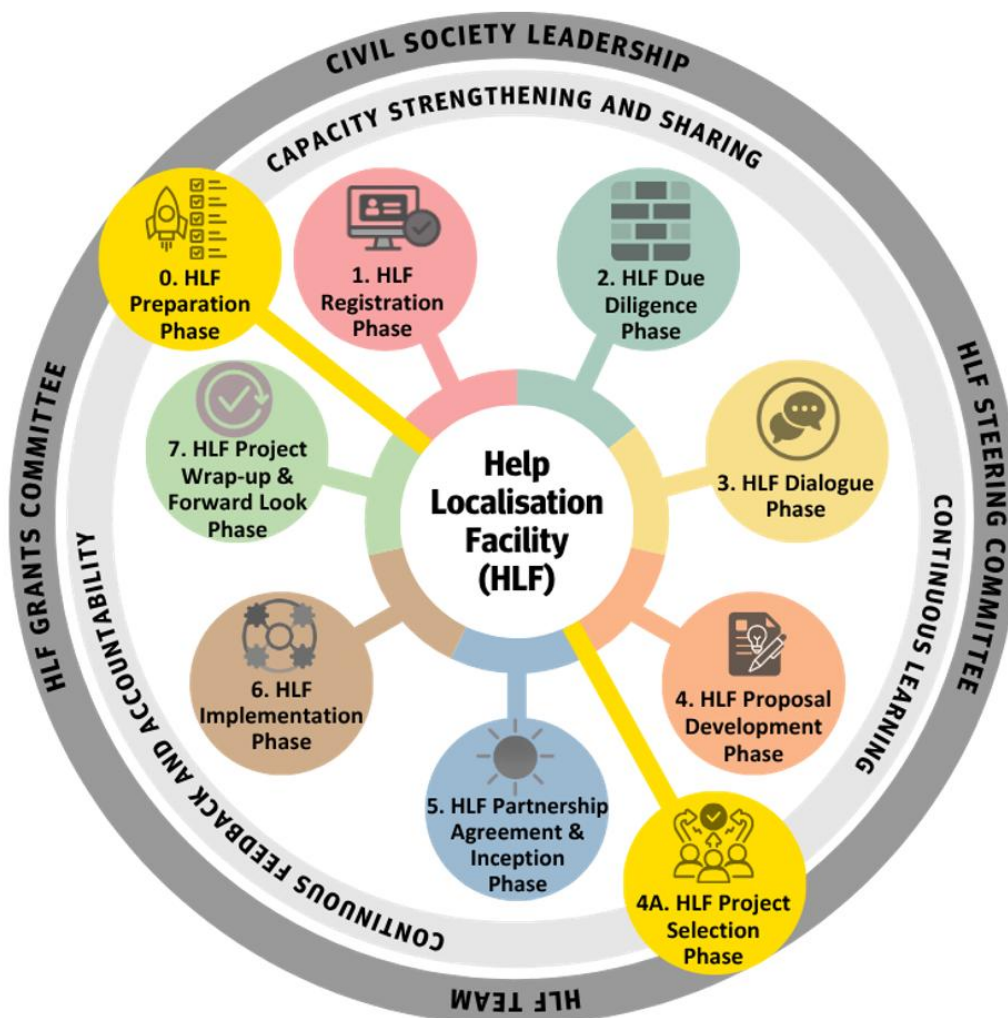
About the HLF

What is the Help Localisation Facility (HLF)?

The Help Localisation Facility (HLF) is a needs-based funding model for humanitarian assistance, led with and for civil society partners through equitable partnerships.

The HLF aims to make quality humanitarian funding more directly accessible to local and national actors, while reducing unnecessary administrative barriers and strengthening local leadership and decision-making. HLF Partners identify humanitarian needs and design and lead their own projects based on their knowledge, experience, and understanding of the communities and contexts in which they work.

HLF funding combines funding for humanitarian project activities with resources for indirect project support costs and, optionally, partner-led Organisational Capacity Strengthening (OCS).



What does “locally led” mean under the HLF?

For the HLF, locally led humanitarian action means that local and national actors have meaningful decision-making power over their own humanitarian priorities and projects, including how resources are used, how activities are implemented, and how learning informs future decisions. This includes organisational strengthening: OCS Funding is optional and partner-led, allowing HLF Partners to determine whether, how, in which areas, and to what extent they wish to invest in strengthening their organisation.

Localisation is therefore understood as an ongoing practice of shifting power, decision-making authority, and control over resources rather than simply involving local organisations in implementing projects designed by others.

Who makes decisions within the HLF?

The HLF uses a participatory governance model that brings civil society directly into HLF decision-making. Civil society representatives sit alongside other HLF stakeholders in two complementary bodies: the HLF Steering Committee, which provides strategic guidance and direction, and country-level HLF Grants Committees, which guide funding priorities and make funding decisions. This ensures that civil society is not only consulted but has a direct role in shaping HLF priorities and funding decisions.

The HLF Team facilitates these processes and manages the day-to-day operation of the HLF, while Help – Hilfe zur Selbsthilfe, as the hosting organisation, retains responsibility for ensuring compliance with applicable legal, contractual, financial, and donor requirements.

Eligibility and Funding

Who can apply for HLF funding?

The HLF funds local and national actors, including Civil Society Organisations (CSOs), Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs), and other non-profit, citizen-driven organisations that are from and operate in the country concerned.

Applicants must be independent, domestically registered non-profit organisations engaged in humanitarian action and committed to humanitarian principles. The HLF particularly encourages applications from diverse civil society actors, including but not limited to community-led, community-based, survivor-led, women-led, and women’s rights organisations.

A set of minimum eligibility requirements applies across the HLF. Additional eligibility criteria are defined for individual countries and funding rounds and specified in the relevant Call for Registration.

Are organisations affiliated with international organisations eligible?

The HLF is intended to directly resource independent local and national actors. Organisations that are branches, affiliates, chapters, franchises, or implementing arms of international organisations are therefore not eligible.

Participation in international or regional networks for knowledge exchange, advocacy, or strategic collaboration does not in itself make an organisation ineligible, provided that the organisation remains institutionally and operationally independent.

Can community-based or smaller organisations apply?

Yes, provided they meet the applicable minimum eligibility requirements. The HLF recognises that local and national actors differ considerably in size, experience, systems, and institutional maturity. Eligibility is not based on organisational size or level of professionalisation alone.

The HLF seeks to apply requirements proportionately and recognises documented practices where appropriate, rather than expecting every organisation to have highly developed formal systems from the outset.

Can organisations that have previously received funding from international organisations apply?

Yes. Previous funding from an international NGO, UN agency, donor, or other international actor does not in itself affect eligibility. What matters is that the applicant remains an independent local or national actor and meets the HLF eligibility requirements.

Can organisations apply individually or as a consortium?

Depending on the specific funding opportunity, organisations may be able to apply individually or as part of a consortium. Under the HLF, a consortium is a collaborative arrangement of up to three partners working towards a common goal with a shared vision and clearly defined roles.

The application modalities available, including whether consortium applications are possible, are specified in each Call for Registration.

What kind of humanitarian activities does the HLF fund?

The HLF provides needs-based humanitarian funding. Specific strategic priorities, geographic areas, target groups, grant sizes, and other relevant parameters are defined for each funding opportunity by the respective HLF Grants Committee, in which civil society representatives from the country have a decision-making role, ensuring that local perspectives directly shape funding priorities and decisions.

Within these parameters, applicants are expected to demonstrate humanitarian needs using credible and context-appropriate evidence, including their own knowledge, community consultations, needs assessments, service-delivery data, or other relevant sources.

How much funding is available?

Grant sizes and project durations are not fixed across the HLF. They depend on the country context, available funding, donor requirements, and the specific funding round.

The available grant sizes, project durations, financial eligibility thresholds, and application modalities are therefore set out in the relevant Call for Registration.

Funding Structure and Organisational Strengthening

What does an HLF grant include?

An HLF grant consists of different funding components:

- Project Funding supports direct humanitarian activities and project delivery.
- Organisational Capacity Strengthening (OCS) Funding is an optional component that can support partner-defined organisational strengthening priorities, allowing HLF Partners to determine whether, how, in which areas, and to what extent they wish to invest in strengthening their organisation.
- Project Support Costs (PSC) contribute to indirect and ongoing administrative costs associated with delivering the grant.

Every HLF grant includes Project Funding and PSC, while OCS Funding is optional. Across all three funding components, HLF Partners have flexibility to determine how available resources are used within the agreed funding framework and in line with their project and organisational priorities.

What is Organisational Capacity Strengthening (OCS) Funding?

OCS Funding is an optional, partner-led component of an HLF grant. HLF Partners determine whether, how, in which areas, and to what extent they wish to invest in strengthening their organisation, based on their own priorities rather than following a predefined capacity strengthening agenda.

OCS Funding may support targeted investments in organisational systems, skills, policies, processes, strategic development, or other areas that strengthen organisational resilience and the organisation's ability to deliver its humanitarian mission.

Organisational strengthening within the HLF is not limited to OCS Funding or to activities directly linked to an individual grant. Through the wider HLF+ approach, HLF Partners can also engage voluntarily in peer learning, collaborative problem-solving, and exchange around organisational, project-related, or strategic priorities that matter to them. These opportunities complement partner-led OCS Funding by creating spaces for partners to share expertise, learn from one another, and collectively explore challenges and solutions beyond the scope of an individual HLF grant.

The HLF does not understand capacity strengthening as a top-down transfer of knowledge or as a condition imposed on partners. It builds on organisations' existing strengths, expertise, and self-identified priorities.

Application and Selection

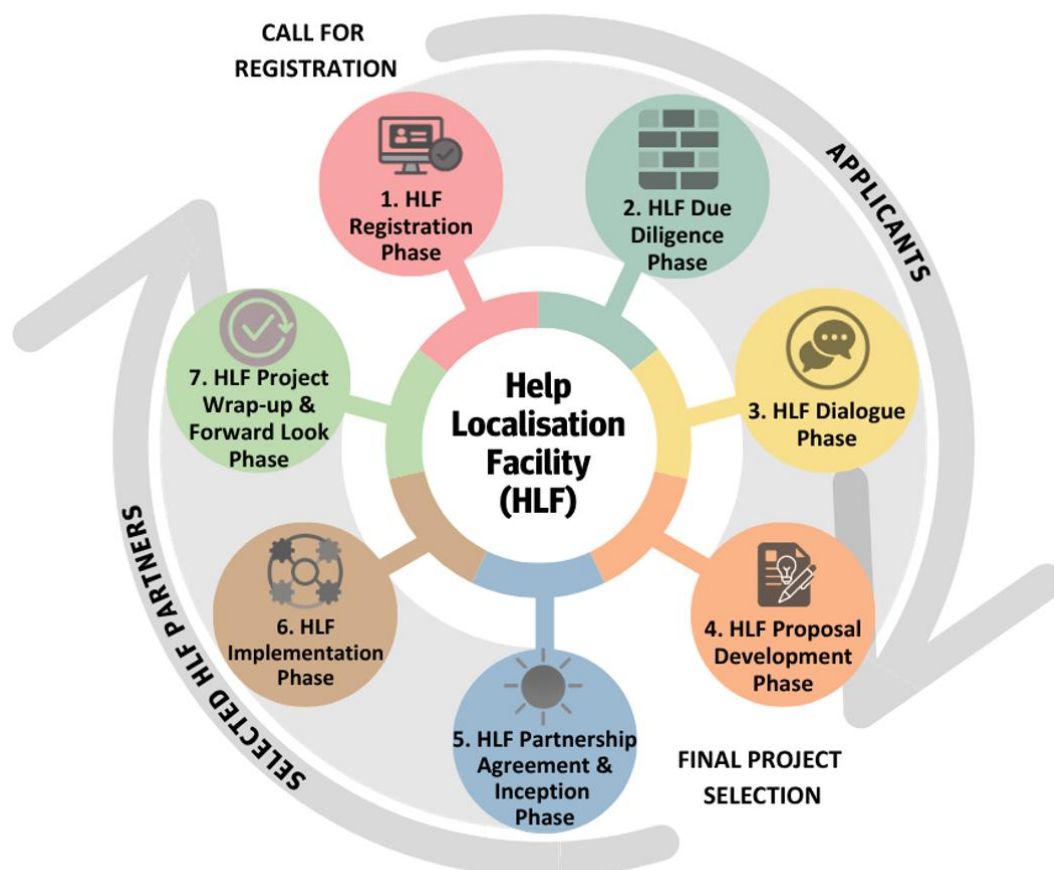
How does the HLF application and selection process work?

The HLF uses a phased application and selection process. Applicants move through four phases before a final funding decision:

1. HLF Registration Phase → 2. HLF Due Diligence Phase → 3. HLF Dialogue Phase → 4. HLF Proposal Development Phase

Organisations selected for funding by the respective HLF Grants Committee then continue through:
5. HLF Partnership Agreement and Inception Phase → 6. HLF Implementation and Capacity Strengthening Phase → 7. HLF Project Wrap-up and Forward Look Phase

Progression from one phase to the next is not automatic. Applicants are informed of the outcome at each stage. This phased approach is intended to avoid asking all interested organisations to invest time in developing full proposals at the beginning of the process. A full project proposal is only developed by organisations invited to the HLF Proposal Development Phase.



Is a full project proposal required when registering?

No. Registration is deliberately designed as a light-touch entry point. Applicants provide essential organisational information, information relevant to eligibility, and high-level information about their project idea.

A full project proposal is only developed by organisations invited to the later HLF Proposal Development Phase. The exact registration requirements are set out in the relevant Call for Registration.

What is HLF Due Diligence?

HLF Due Diligence is a proportionate, risk-based process used to understand an applicant's organisational systems, practices, and ability to manage humanitarian funding responsibly.

It covers areas such as governance, financial management and procurement, safeguarding, accountability, risk management, human resources, and relevant grant-management experience.

Due diligence is not an audit and is not based on an expectation of organisational perfection. Where gaps are identified, the HLF considers whether risks can be appropriately managed and whether agreed mitigation measures or organisational strengthening may be appropriate.

What is the HLF Dialogue Phase?

The HLF Dialogue Phase is a partnership-centred step that takes place before or alongside the development of a full proposal. It creates space for the applicant and HLF Team to develop a deeper mutual understanding of the organisation, its strengths and priorities, possible areas for organisational strengthening, and an initial humanitarian project idea.

The process starts with an organisational Self-Assessment, through which applicants reflect on key areas of their organisation, including their organisational vision and strategy, humanitarian programming, safeguarding and inclusion, MEAL, financial management, procurement, human resources, partnerships, communications, and governance. The organisation assesses its own strengths, practices, and areas it may wish to strengthen; the purpose is to support reflection and dialogue, rather than to rank organisations according to their organisational capacity.

The Self-Assessment then forms the basis for a bilateral Dialogue Meeting between the applicant and the HLF Team. Together, they discuss the organisation's reflections, explore self-identified organisational strengthening priorities, and may discuss the initial project idea and its fit with the relevant funding opportunity.

The Dialogue is designed as a two-way conversation and space for reflection, rather than a tick-box assessment or another written application exercise.

How are final funding decisions made?

Organisations invited to the HLF Proposal Development Phase develop a full proposal with guidance, templates, and structured feedback from the HLF Team.

Final proposals are anonymised before assessment to reduce conscious and unconscious bias. The HLF Grants Committee reviews and assesses the proposals and collectively makes the final funding decisions. Applicants are informed of the outcome and receive feedback, whether or not their project is selected for funding.

Working with the HLF

What can organisations expect if they become an HLF Partner?

Following selection, HLF Partners enter into the HLF Partnership Agreement and Inception Phase, during which the partnership is formalised, roles and expectations are aligned, and the partner and HLF Team prepare for project implementation. This includes finalising relevant project and operational arrangements and onboarding to core HLF systems and requirements.

During project implementation, HLF Partners lead their approved projects and remain in regular dialogue with the HLF Team. Project Funding supports direct humanitarian activities and project delivery, while Organisational Capacity Strengthening (OCS) Funding is an optional, partner-led component. Reporting, monitoring, financial management, procurement, MEAL, communication, and accountability requirements are designed to be proportionate while meeting applicable donor and compliance requirements.

Organisational strengthening within the HLF is not limited to OCS Funding or to activities directly linked to an individual grant. Through the wider HLF+ approach, HLF Partners can also engage voluntarily beyond their individual grants in peer learning, collaborative problem-solving, and exchange around organisational, project-related, or strategic priorities that matter to them. These opportunities complement partner-led OCS Funding by creating spaces for partners to share expertise, learn from one another, and collectively explore challenges and solutions beyond the scope of an individual HLF grant.

What happens if an organisation is not selected?

Not progressing to the next phase does not necessarily mean that an organisation has failed to meet HLF standards. The number of organisations that can proceed may also depend on available funding, the priorities of a particular funding round, and the number of eligible applicants.

The HLF aims to provide feedback at relevant stages so that organisations understand the outcome and can use the learning for future applications or partnerships.

Eligibility for future HLF funding opportunities depends on the requirements and available funding of future Calls for Registration.

Where can I find the requirements for a specific HLF funding opportunity?

This FAQ provides general information about the HLF. Specific requirements – including the country or geographic scope, funding priorities, available grant sizes and durations, financial thresholds, application modalities, deadlines, and any additional eligibility or selection criteria – are published in the relevant HLF Call for Registration.

Where a Call for Registration is open, applicants should refer to the current Call for Registration for the specific requirements applicable to that funding opportunity.

Still have questions?

For further information about the HLF, please consult the guidance provided with the relevant Call for Registration. Contact details for the relevant HLF Team are provided with each funding opportunity.