UNHCR The UN Refugee Agency | EMERGENCY HANDBOOK

Protection Cluster

31 January 2024

Key points

- Contact the Global Protection Cluster Ops Cell within the Division of International Protection in UNHCR as soon as there is an indication that cluster activation will be discussed. Ensure the Protection Cluster is well-run, structured, staffed and capacitated at national and sub-national levels (at minimum, a protection cluster coordinator and information management officer for the Protection Cluster and its Areas of Responsibilities (AoRs)
- Ensure coherence of action with the Areas of Responsibilities (AoRs) in coordination with their respective lead agencies, as well as with other clusters, in particular the UNHCR-led Shelter and CCCM clusters i.e., work to implement the UNHCR tri-cluster approach. Ensure the response always meets minimum standards
- Act as provider of last resort. This means that, where necessary, and depending on access, security and availability of funding, UNHCR as the cluster lead, must be ready to ensure the provision of services required to fulfil crucial gaps identified by the cluster and reflected in the HC-led Humanitarian Response Plan. Acting as provider of last resort similarly applies to the AoRs for their respective areas
- Ensure accountability to the crisis affected persons and communities and the Humanitarian coordinator on behalf of the Cluster. Ensure the voices of crisis affected persons and communities are heard, predictably and consistently
- Promote the Centrality of Protection in the overall humanitarian action and on the pursuit of solutions by providing regular collective protection analysis briefings to Humanitarian County Teams (HCTs), at the inter-cluster level and to donors to ensure that protection risks and resulting needs of affected populations drive humanitarian strategies, advocacy and response plans; and by engaging and supporting other clusters in mainstreaming and integrating protection in their own analysis, strategies, and response and services. Assist the Resident/Humanitarian Coordinator (RC-HC) in preparing the HCT’s Protection Strategy. Lead the cluster effort on nexus with development, peace, and security actors

1. Overview

The mission of protection clusters is to ensure well-coordinated, effective, and principled preparedness actions and responses, and that protection is at the core of all humanitarian actions and recognized as essential in any nexus with development and peace action to achieve solutions. Through such coordination, people are better protected in humanitarian crises and their rights respected and solutions found in accordance with international law. The protection cluster includes ‘areas of responsibilities' that are attributed to UNFPA for gender-based violence (GBV), to UNICEF for child protection, to UNMAS for mine action, and to NRC and UN-Habitat for housing, land and property (HLP). Recognizing that protection is central to the purpose of any humanitarian response, the protection cluster advises and provides continuous analyses of protection risks to the Humanitarian Coordinator (HC) and HCT, and works with all clusters to strengthen protection and rights-based responses.

Values and principles of the protection cluster include: 1) affected persons are at the centre and meaningfully participating in protection activities. Preparedness action and response are driven by the diversity of people affected by crises to whom we are accountable; 2) we are committed to humanitarian and protection principles, gender equality and inclusion; 3) field priorities guide our action while we embrace and respond to the diversity of our membership, from local to global actors; 4) we are forward-looking and readily adaptable to address growing and emerging protection challenges.

2. Relevance for emergency operations

IASC Clusters are created when existing coordination mechanisms are overwhelmed or constrained in their ability to respond to identified needs in line with humanitarian principles, which frequently occurs in emergencies. Clusters are activated as part of an international emergency response, in situations of internal displacement and natural disasters, based on an analysis of humanitarian needs, existing coordination mechanisms and capacity on the ground. Clusters are a temporary coordination solution and efforts should be made as soon as appropriate and possible to hand over coordination to the relevant authorities. Within the inter-agency humanitarian architecture, UNHCR is the lead agency for Protection, Camp Coordination and Camp Management (CCCM) and Shelter clusters for non-refugee humanitarian crises, including for internal displacement in conflict situations. Final arrangements at country-level should be dictated by operational circumstances, including the presence and capacity of protection actors. The three Clusters are complementary and can jointly increase the protection dividends and rationalize UNHCR programming. Our responsibilities and accountabilities in leadership and coordination require dedicated cluster coordination capacities which should be planned for accordingly.

UNHCR should recommend the activation of protection clusters when there are protection risks and needs and the government requires additional capacity for coordination of protection-related responses. According to the UNHCR Policy on Emergency Preparedness and Response (2023), in situations of conflict, UNHCR leads the Protection Cluster from the start of the emergency and leads or co-leads inter-agency efforts on AAP and participate in or (co-) lead PSEA. In cases of

natural hazard-induced internal displacement, UNHCR assesses its capacity for operational response and cluster leadership, based on an adequate UNHCR in-country presence and in consultation with the government and other humanitarian actors as appropriate. If UNHCR is already leading the cluster for a conflict-induced emergency when a natural hazard event occurs, that leadership must be maintained. For cluster activation and cluster transition and deactivation, see IASC Reference Module for Cluster Coordination at Country Level.

3. Main guidance

In refugee situations, the clusters do not apply, and the response is coordinated within the framework of the Refugee Coordination Model (RCM). In mixed settings, the Joint UNHCR and OCHA Note on Mixed Situations: Coordination in Practice applies.

Support service delivery	1. Establish appropriate coordination platforms and mechanisms for the Cluster and its AoRs, which may include Strategic Advisory Groups (SAGs) and key technical working groups (TWG) 2. Ensure appropriate participation of national/local actors in coordination structure 3. Adopt Terms of Reference (ToR) and disseminate with operational partners 4. Develop an annual calendar and roadmap/workplan	1. Update the 3W/5W data on a monthly basis 2. Address duplication of action and take action on critical challenges & response delays or gaps 3. Update GPC data on a quarterly basis	1. Update the mapping of service providers on a regular basis 2. Adopt and disseminate referral minimum standards 3. Sensitize humanitarian actors on minimum standards on safe and appropriate referrals

Inform HCT strategic decision-making	1. Conduct information landscape review 2. Set up appropriate mechanisms to collect/gather data on key indicators 3. Establish information sharing protocols	1. Establish collective analysis WG 2. Consolidate and analyse quarterly Protection data and information 3. Produce Protection Analysis Updates (PAU) by identifying protections risks and providing recommendations	1. Identify and collect data for Joint and Inter-sectoral Analysis Framework (JIAF) & sectoral HNO strategic needs indicators 2. Define severity mapping & People in Need (PiN) 3. Organize regional and national workshops for collective risks and needs analysis 4. Draft Humanitarian Needs Overview (HNO) narrative
Plan and implement Cluster strategies	1. Contribute to the Humanitarian Response Plan (HRP) 2. Develop a multi-year Protection Cluster strategy 3. Contribute to the HCT Protection Strategy	1. Contribute to the HCT Protection Strategy 2. Ensure the Centrality of Protection in the HRP and other strategic planning processes 3. Engage with human rights, development, and peace/security actors (nexus) 4. Engage in the Protection of Civilians (PoC) and/or durable solution strategies (nexus)	1. Engage donors 2. Contribute to County-based Pooled Funds (CBPF) allocations 3. Contribute to the Central Emergency Response Fund (CERF)

Monitor and evaluate the response	1. Monitor response progress monthly/quarterly (5W) 2. Monitor funding monthly/quarterly 3. Monitor program and service quality (field visits, peer-2-peer visits, etc)	1. Identify priorities for training and capacity building for partners on sector standards 2. Sensitize partners on Code of Conduct (CoC), PSEA, Child Safeguarding, and AAP 3. Train partners on safe and appropriate referrals and Psychological First Aid (PFA) 4. Train protection cluster and other cluster partners on protection mainstreaming/integration	1. Sensitize and engage cluster partners on the Cluster Coordination Performance Monitoring (CCPM) 2. Organize CCPM workshop with partners to review achievements and discuss survey results 3. Adopt CCPM report and action plan 4. Monitor coordination action plan and keep GPC data up to date

Build national capacity	1. Integrate prevention and preparedness in the HRP 2. Develop specific preparedness/contingency plans (armed violence, disaster, health emergency) 3. Building local capacity and preparedness 4. Ensuring the centrality of protection in preparedness and contingency planning	1. Build on existing national/local coordination structures and strategies whenever possible and appropriate 2. Ensure Cluster SAG and strategic review panels (HRP, Pooled Funds) include NNGOs 3. Promote local authorities and NNGO leadership or co-coordination of the cluster and its AoRs at national or subnational level when and where appropriate 4. 25% of Protection & AoR funding dedicated to NNGOs through direct funding, with Pooled Funds prioritized for NNGOs whenever possible 5. Promote partnerships between international and local actors, including trough HRP and Pooled Fund projects, and in engagement with donors 6. Promote community-led programming	

Support robust advocacy	1. Map advocacy priorities and capacity across cluster partners 2. Develop a collective advocacy strategy and action plan with clear priorities, objectives, targets, actions and leads 3. Develop, update and disseminate key collective messages/talking points to be used by cluster partners 4. Set up a collective advocacy WG to coordinate advocacy actions from partners, and develop and implement the Cluster’s advocacy strategy based on the Cluster SAG instructions and oversight 5. Contribute to HCT advocacy actions to address acute protection risks	1. Brief the Inter-cluster Coordination Group (ICCG)/HCT at least quarterly 2. Brief donors at least quarterly 3. Brief the UNHCR Rep/Senior Management Group (SMG) at least quarterly 4. Contribute to the UN Peace Operation mandates/Group of Experts	1. Identify communication priorities 2. Cultivate relationship with media 3. Update regularly GPC website operation page

AAP/Protection mainstreaming	1. Train protection partners on protection mainstreaming principles 2. Engage OCHA to ensure concrete protection mainstreaming requirements in HRP and Pooled Fund projects – including through clearly identified resources 3. Train/Sensitize cluster partners on protection mainstreaming principles and requirements prior to HRP and Pooled Fund projects submissions 4. Engage and support (key) clusters to ensure protection mainstreaming and integration in their strategy and programs 5. Centrality of protection, AAP, AGD, human rights, PoC, Durable Solutions mainstreamed	1. Coordinate with OCHA and PSEA network to vet all cluster partners to ensure they have policies and trained their (protection) staff on CoC, PSEA, and Child Safeguarding 2. Support capacity building of partners to ensure they have the policies in place and capacity to implement them 3. Ensure partners are cleared and eligible for HRP and Pooled Funds as per OCHA's Humanitarian Funding Unit (HFU) standards	1. Engage interagency WG on AAP, Communication with Communities (CWC), Risk Communication and Community Engagement (RCCE) 2. Coordinate partners approaches on RCCE 3. Coordinate partners approaches on Complaints and Feedback Mechanisms (CFMs) in line with applicable standards
Leadership and resources	1. Activating the Cluster 2. Deactivation/Transition strategy	1. Establish effective leadership and governance of the Cluster 2. Recruit required coordination staff 3. Budget for Cluster coordination	1. Capacity-building of coordination teams

Through the GPC Operations Cell, protection clusters at national level can access additional support through the Interagency Protection Support Desk and through emergency deployment rosters from UNHCR and stand-by partners. Support missions can be requested for short-term assistance on strategy development, capacity building, and specific programmatic or advocacy activities. UNHCR and the GPC, through its global network, can also provide targeted capacity building and resources, for example on IDP law and policy and on protection information management. Finally, protection clusters can access tools and guidance through the GPC web portal.

Post emergency phase

In situations of sudden-onset emergency, the review of cluster coordination architecture,

transition and de-activation should take place within three months to ensure it is fit for purpose. The HC/HCT should ensure that clusters have developed an outline of a transition or de-activation strategy at 90 days after activation. In protracted crisis situations, the review should be done annually. More regular reviews are required if strategic response plans are revised to reflect changes in the humanitarian context. Where possible, reviews should be completed before the start of new strategic planning cycles. For cluster transition and deactivation, see IASC Reference Module for Cluster Coordination at Country Level.

Checklist

- Core Functions of a Protection Cluster at Country Level (see, Field Coordination Package | Global Protection Cluster and IASC Reference Module for Cluster Coordination at Country Level)

4. Standards

Protection risks analysis and monitoring

The GPC and Protection Clusters regularly monitor and provide analysis on most critical protection risks. The GPC and its AoRs agreed on 15 standard protection risks to report against across emergency crises. These include:

1) Abduction, kidnapping, enforced disappearance, arbitrary or unlawful arrest and/or detention;

2) Attacks on civilians and other unlawful killings, and attacks on civilian objects;

3) Child and forced family separation;

4) Child, early or forced marriage;

5) Discrimination and stigmatization, denial of resources, opportunities, services and/or humanitarian access;

6) Disinformation and denial of access to information;

7) Forced recruitment, and association of children in armed forces and groups;

8) Gender-based violence;

9) Impediments and/or restrictions to access to legal identity, remedies and justice;

10) Presence of mines and other explosive ordnance;

11) Psychological/emotional abuse or inflicted distress;

12) Theft, extortion, forced eviction or destruction of personal property;

13) Torture or cruel, inhuman, degrading treatment or punishment;

14) Trafficking in persons, forced labour or slavery-like practices;

15) Unlawful impediments or restrictions to freedom of movement, siege and forced disappearance.

Dedicated guidance on agreed protection risks definitions is available here, and additional guidance and standards on protection analysis is available here.

Protection cluster severity of needs, people affected, in need and targeted

Protection Clusters contribute to the Humanitarian Project Cycle (HPC), on a yearly basis, by providing a comprehensive needs analysis based on 'severity of protection needs'. The analysis and severity of needs guides the calculation of People in Need (PiN), which is one of the key deliverables for the Humanitarian Needs Overview (HNO).

At the Humanitarian Response Plan (HRP) stage, the Protection Cluster provides a narrative on its sectoral response, indicating how the latter contributes to the collective response to achieve the strategic objectives of the HRP. People targeted is one of the key deliverables of the HRP, which should be derived from the response capacity on the ground, physical access, etc. The HRP details the financial requirements and an overview of the monitoring objectives.

The Protection Cluster uses a set of standards such as the Protection Cluster methodology on severity/people in need and intersectoral analysis. These guidelines, together with the suggested list of indicators for need analysis, are available at HPC Guidance | Global Protection Cluster, and updated regularly.

Common Framework of Analysis for Protection Sector

The Global Protection Cluster, AoRs and Partners have endorsed a common Protection Analytical Framework (PAF). The PAF provides the common approach to organize data and information for robust, context-specific protection analysis. The PAF guides Protection Clusters and partners' identification of most critical protection risks, to inform the identification of actions, resulting critical needs and dedicated advocacy efforts. The PAF guidance includes 1) an Introduction; 2) Specific tools; and 3) Guidance on the analysis process. The GPC provides regular updates on methodologies and tools here.

Protection Clusters, with the support of their AoRs, coordinate continuous joint-analysis. These processes inform strategy, planning and the Protection Clusters contribution to the Humanitarian Project Cycle. The analysis is regularly provided through Protection Analysis Updates (PAUs) which inform the Protection Cluster contribution to the overall analysis of HNOs and are used for the coordination of joint actions with protection partners and AoRs. The GPC has developed: 1) Standard formats and samples; 2) Annotated guidance, 3) A tutorial on protection risks analysis; and 4) A repository of PAUs published by operations.

A Protection Risk Analysis Training Package and an Introduction to Protection Analysis course have been developed with the support of the GPC Information and Analysis Working Group.

Annexes

GPC, Protection in a Climate of Change Strategic Framework 2020-2024

Guidance Package for UNHCR's Engagement in Situations of Internal Displacement, 2019

IASC, Policy on Protection in Humanitarian Action, 2016

IASC, Reference Module for Cluster Coordination at Country Level, 2015

Joint UNHCR OCHA Note on Mixed Situations, Coordination in Practice, 2014

5. Learning and field practices

Protection Analytical Framework - Global Protection Cluster

Protection Risks - Global Protection Cluster

Specialisation Programme on Protection Coordination - International Institute o...

6. Links

Global Protection Cluster Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs Inter-Agency Standing Committee

7. Main contacts

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