Global Protection Cluster

High-Level Humanitarian Donors Briefing Note: The State of Protection in 2025

This briefing note informs the Global Protection Cluster (GPC) Annual Donor Meeting on 09 December 2025, offering a timely opportunity to reflect on emerging protection trends. It summarises the main developments observed in 2025, providing a shared analysis of the most severe protection risks facing communities across Protection Cluster operations. The note aims to support donors and Member States in aligning political, financial and operational support with realities on the ground. This year's context is shaped by two major shifts: the deepening of protection risks in large-scale conflicts and protracted crises – from Gaza, Sudan and eastern DRC to Myanmar, Ukraine and multiple contexts across the Sahel and the Americas – and the restructuring of the humanitarian system under the Humanitarian Reset, which prioritises life-saving outcomes and simplified coordination amid significant funding cuts.

1. Global Protection Trends

The global protection landscape in 2025 is marked by a scale and severity of civilian harm that surpasses previous years. According to the Global Protection Update of October 2025, **an estimated 395 million people in 23 countries are exposed to protection risks** (including 254 million in Africa, 78 million in Asia, 28 million in the Americas, 20 million in MENA and 15 million in Ukraine). This number reflects individuals and communities facing direct, often life-threatening threats from violence, coercion and deliberate deprivation. The estimate is based on extensive monitoring of protection risks at subnational level undertaken by Protection Clusters, complemented by 24 national and subnational Protection Analysis Updates published in 2025.

The analysis confirms that the most severe and recurrent protection risks include **attacks on civilians and civilian infrastructure, abductions, arbitrary detentions, severe movement restrictions and forced displacement**, all driven by conflicts and by the growing disregard for and violations of international humanitarian and human rights law and the lack of accountability for it. **Gender-based violence, impediments to and denial of legal identity, and intensifying psychosocial distress**, compounded by the **denial of essential services and opportunities,** are consistently reported at severe levels, further highlighting the impact of these risks on crisis-affected individuals. Harm to civilians is increasingly heightened by social, psychological, and economic threats that extend beyond physical dangers. These are driven by societal norms, misinformation, and failures within legal systems, exploiting vulnerabilities such as social exclusion, limited awareness of rights, and economic instability.

This year's trends show clearer, **group-specific patterns of harm**: for example, men and boys remain heavily affected by abductions and illegal detention, while children face persistent risks of family separation and forced recruitment (especially boys). Women and girls continue to be disproportionately impacted, with early and forced marriage and other gender-based harms. These patterns highlight an increased stratification of protection risks that requires targeted responses.

The **Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC), Myanmar, the occupied Palestinian territory (oPt - Gaza & West Bank), Sudan, and Ukraine** face the most extreme situations. This year, the deterioration was most visible in **Gaza**, where the crisis has deepened into famine amid continued bombardment and the destruction of civilian infrastructure and lives. In **Sudan**, particularly in **El Fasher**, civilians remained trapped in siege-like conditions for more than 500 days followed by horrendous rapes, killings and other abuses. In the **eastern DRC**, the rapid escalation of the M23 offensive in January resulted in the capture of

Goma and Bukavu within three weeks, the killing of an estimated 3,000 people, and the displacement of over one million additional people, bringing total internal displacement to 6.4 million. **Myanmar** continues to experience widespread rights violations, with more than 19,900 people arrested since the 2021 coup and 7,100 still in detention, including humanitarian workers. In **Mozambique**, escalation of attacks on civilians and civilian objects, and destruction of property has led in recent weeks to forced displacement of nearly 100.000 people. The number of people displaced by gang violence in **Haiti** doubled from September 2025 to October 2026, while killings, kidnapping and sexual violence are being used as tactics to extort and terrorize communities.

Other crises reflect a similar pattern of risk concentration. In **Venezuela,** the collapse of public institutions, combined with extreme economic decline is driving families into negative coping mechanisms such as child marriage, child labour and trafficking. Across **the Sahel and the Lake Chad Basin**, armed group activity, forced recruitment, displacement, sexual violence and denial of services continue to dominate the protection landscape, while growing insecurity further constrains humanitarian access.

A coordinated subnational analysis by the Protection Cluster and partners covering 2,673 administrative areas in 23 countries, shows that in every country assessed, many communities are living in areas where multiple severe or extreme protection risks overlap. **All countries in the analysis have at least one area facing combined severe or extreme protection risks.** Overall, **32% of all assessed areas across the 23 countries face extreme or severe levels of violence, coercion and deprivation**. For example, in Afghanistan, some districts are exposed to eleven severe or extreme risks at the same time, similar to fifty-eight communes in Burkina Faso. South Sudan, Niger, Somalia, Myanmar and Colombia see overlapping patterns of violence, deprivation and limited access leaving populations with almost no protective options. Given the current humanitarian context – marked by significant service gaps and limited response capacity – it is essential to identify specific geographic areas where the combination of violence, coercion, and deliberate deprivation is not only acute and harmful, but at clear risk of further escalation.

This situation is highly worrying and leads to further deterioration when communities are hit by **natural hazards or the impacts of climate change**. In areas where protection risks already overlap, contingency planning and preparedness are extremely difficult, and natural hazards become far more devastating, creating new protection risks, and increasing humanitarian needs. Recent examples include severe flooding in South Sudan, Nigeria, Venezuela and earthquakes in Myanmar and Afghanistan[1], which have displaced large populations, exposed them to heightened protection risks (19.9 million in Myanmar and 1.2 million in Afghanistan), disrupted essential services and worsened pre-existing vulnerabilities. In these contexts, individuals face the combined effects of environmental hazards, conflict and exclusion – an interaction that greatly increases the risks of exploitation, violence, loss of property and family separation.

Protection risks remain high in countries experiencing accelerated transition, where changes in humanitarian presence and programming create additional vulnerabilities. In Cameroon, the Far North, Southwest and Northwest regions face high levels of abductions, kidnappings, unlawful detentions and killings. In Colombia, an estimated 167 municipalities face at least four of the 15 protection risks at severe or extreme levels. In Nigeria, 11 Local Government Area (LGAs) face a similar combination of risks. Across several operations (Afghanistan, DRC, Syria) **massive return movements** have occurred – sometimes under adverse circumstances – underscoring the critical need for sustained protection support to ensure that people can return in safety, dignity, and with their rights upheld.

Emerging protection challenges are increasingly shaped by both deliberate tactics of harm and rapid technological change. In several crises, the **weaponization of food, the use of famine as a method of**

[1] GPC Predictive Analysis of People Exposed to Protection Risks in Areas Affected by the Earthquake in Afghanistan. Available here

warfare, and siege tactics are being employed to exert control over civilian populations, cutting off access to essential goods and services and exacerbating vulnerabilities. The continued, and at times increasing, **use of rape and sexual violence as a weapon of war** to exert power and control, deny and destroy the lives and dignity of women, children and also men remain worrying. At the same time, **technology is transforming the protection landscape**: while digital tools can improve early warning, communication, and access to assistance, they also introduce risks such as surveillance, data exploitation, misinformation, technology facilitated violence, and exclusion of those without digital access. Together, these dynamics demand adapted protection strategies that address both intentional deprivation and the evolving digital threats facing affected communities. **The use of new methods of warfare – particularly drones –** by state forces, armed groups, and gangs is outpacing existing prevention, protection, and response capacities, creating new and poorly regulated risk environments for civilians. The **use of explosive weapons in populated areas** is only adding to an already dire situation. The rapid concentration of humanitarian assistance in a limited number of locations, combined with widespread service reductions, is **shifting disproportionate responsibility and risk onto local NGOs and frontline actors** – often without the resources, security guarantees, or institutional support required to operate safely and effectively.

Together, these trends point to a global protection environment where conflict-driven risks, discrimination, deliberate deprivation and institutional collapse increasingly overlap. The deterioration is widespread, multi-dimensional and advancing faster than the humanitarian architecture, even after the Reset, can adapt to. Large segments of the population are now directly exposed to severe violence, coercion and deprivation, driven by the flagrant disregard and violations of IHL and human rights law and lack of accountability for it. These harms are further compounded by discriminatory norms, misinformation, weak legal systems, limited awareness about rights and economic instability.

2. Protection in the Context of the Humanitarian Reset

The Humanitarian Reset, announced in March 2025, represents a system-wide effort to reform humanitarian action, improve efficiency and sharpen the focus on life-saving activities. For the protection community and in light of the protection situation across the globe, the Reset has reinforced a core message: most humanitarian crises are fundamentally protection crises – stemming from repeated violations of international humanitarian and human rights law, attacks on civilians and civilian infrastructure, deliberate deprivation and systemic exclusion.

The Reset is taking place amid historic funding cuts that threaten the continued delivery of essential protection services. In 2024, protection actors received US$1.9 billion (53% of the US$3.6 billion required). By 30th November 2025, the **Protection Cluster and its AoRs have received 34% of its US$3.5 billion requirement, with projected shortfalls of up to 66% across major crises**.

Funding received for protection does not exceed 40% of the funding requirements in 27 of the 33 tracked HNRPs, Flash Appeals and other appeals, or about 82% of them. Of the US$ 1.16 billion in protection funding that has been generously provided by donors, more than half has gone to 5 crises, including Ukraine, Afghanistan, Sudan, Syria and the occupied Palestinian territory. While we can only acknowledge this tremendous support, this also means that financial resources for protection are not necessarily evenly distributed across crises. For instance, emergencies in Ethiopia, Mozambique, Myanmar, and Haiti have particularly large protection funding gaps (less than 25% funded), while several protracted crises remain chronically underfunded (Somalia, Yemen, the Sahel and the Americas). The **10 most underfunded protection crises** this year are El Salvador, Mali, Myanmar, Niger, Honduras, Guatemala, Mozambique, Somalia, Venezuela, Haiti[2].

[2] See Annex 1 – Funding Analysis per Protection Cluster operations

The **hyper-prioritisation exercise** launched in June 2025 provides a stark illustration of this growing gap between needs and available resources. Across all operations, 168 million people were identified as in need of protection; however, only 24.7 million people – 14.7% of the total – could be prioritised under the hyper-prioritised plans. This left 143.3 million people unreached, despite high levels of exposure to harm. Meeting the protection needs of even this reduced caseload required US$1.2 billion in urgently mobilised resources.

Funding gaps are growing faster and becoming larger – but they are not new. Protection actors have long adapted and worked together to keep the most critical services going. What is different and more worrying this year is **the impact these gaps are having on how protection is delivered**. Protection programmes were forced to scale down or stop altogether in multiple countries, increasing the risk of exposure to violence and exploitation. A shrinking humanitarian footprint is also weakening early warning and protection monitoring in many contexts, shifting away from prevention. Loss of experienced protection staff has weakened survivor-centered care and the delivery of specialized services. If funding pressures continue, reduced protection presence on the ground will mean more violations undetected, delays in critical response, and greater exposure of civilians to escalating threats. Women-led and survivor-led organisations were disproportionally impacted by the funding cuts and report shrinking civic space and growing operational constraints. The closure of Women and Girls Safe Spaces and Child Friendly Spaces, case management and other essential services is already happening in numerous operations, eroding hard-won gains in CP and GBV prevention and response and community led engagement.

Meanwhile, the Reset is accelerating the **transition of humanitarian coordination structures** in countries such as Cameroon, Colombia, Eritrea, Iraq, Libya, Nigeria, Pakistan and Zimbabwe. Careful planning and adequate resourcing are needed to mitigate protection gaps in contexts where national systems have limited capacity to take on these responsibilities. Centrality of Protection is a collective responsibility throughout the transition process and planning must be grounded in a robust protection analysis that systematically consider remaining protection risks and resulting needs that may be exacerbated by, or result from, changes to the coordination of the humanitarian response, and population groups at risk of being left behind.

Once again, this year showed that **collective advocacy and coordinated action** are essential to keep protection at the centre of the humanitarian response. Despite challenges along the way, our collective efforts have kept protection prioritized across all humanitarian needs and response plans, a testimony of our shared commitment to the protection of affected populations. But the momentum must be maintained. Continued support from Member States and the wider humanitarian system is needed to ensure protection is structurally embedded in inter-agency planning and backed by a common narrative. What is still missing is a truly integrated humanitarian–development approach, stronger coordination at all levels, and the systematic use of protection risk analysis to guide decisions and reduce risks.

Within this context, to achieve the Humanitarian Reset intended outcomes, protection must be recognised, resourced and supported as central to life-saving action. Without this recognition, the narrowing of the humanitarian response footprint risks amplifying the very protection risks the Reset seeks to address.

3. Recommendations to Donors and Member States

- **Uphold international law and demand protection of civilians**. Member States should press all parties to immediately cease violations of international humanitarian and human rights law, including combating impunity and holding those responsible for violation accountable. This includes preventing forced displacement, siege-like situations, attacks on civilians and civilian infrastructure, conflict-

related sexual violence, child recruitment and the use of explosive weapons in populated areas. They should ensure communities retain access to essential services, resources, and assistance.

- **Maintain strong, predictable, multi-year protection financing for prevention and response services**. While we fully support short-term prioritisation efforts, those must be complemented with a sustained approach to support prevention, risk reduction, and the continuity of critical protection services, which are essential to save lives, reduce humanitarian needs and longer-term exposure to protection risks.
- **Invest in local protection mechanisms.** Sustaining protection requires long-term support to community-based structures, women-led and survivor-led organisations, organisations of persons with disabilities, and other frontline actors. Donors should provide flexible, multi-year funding that enables these organisations to operate safely, maintain services, and participate in coordination and decision-making.
- **Address structural drivers of protection risks.** Protection outcomes cannot be achieved through humanitarian action alone. Donors and Member States should advocate for formal linkages between Humanitarian Response Plans and Sustainable Development Cooperation Frameworks, embedding protection-risk reduction and measurable outcomes as accountability benchmarks across financing, reporting, and oversight mechanisms, and ensuring protection risk analysis and conflict prevention systematically informs diplomatic, peacebuilding, and development decision-making.
- **Strengthen the centrality of protection in humanitarian diplomacy and coordination.** Donor and Member State representatives should work closely with protection actors to ensure that protection considerations shape humanitarian policies, high-level negotiations, and operational planning. Protection risks reduction must remain a core objective across inter-agency coordination mechanisms, leadership and pooled funding decisions, and transition processes.

Annex 1 – Funding Analysis per Protection Cluster operations (OCHA FTS, 03 December 2025)

Country	Plan Type	TOTAL REQUIREMENTS (US$)	TOTAL FUNDED (US$)	PERCENTAGE FUNDED
Bangladesh*	Other	2.1 M	0.0 M	0%
Viet Nam*	Other	1.7 M	0.02 M	1%
Malawi	Flash Appeal	0.4 M	0.02 M	5%
Mozambique Tropical Cyclone	Flash Appeal	21.4 M	1.8 M	8%
El Salvador	HNRP	32.5 M	3.0 M	9%
Mali	HNRP	102.2 M	9.9 M	10%
Zimbabwe	Flash Appeal	2.7 M	0.3 M	10%
Myanmar	HNRP	168.4 M	26.0 M	15%
Niger	HNRP	156.9 M	24.4 M	16%
Honduras	HNRP	41.4 M	7.1 M	17%
Guatemala	HNRP	49.2 M	8.5 M	17%
Mozambique	HNRP	38.7 M	6.9 M	18%
Somalia	HNRP	156.7 M	28.9 M	18%
Venezuela	HNRP	107.6 M	20.6 M	19%
Haiti	HNRP	106.1 M	22.0 M	21%
Ethiopia	HNRP	236 M	51.5 M	22%
Burkina Faso	HNRP	115.0 M	25.4 M	22%
Yemen	HNRP	170.9 M	41.3 M	24%
Colombia	HNRP	115.5 M	28.1 M	24%
Nigeria	HNRP	57.2 M	14.3 M	25%
Mozambique Drought	Flash Appeal	2.9 M	0.8 M	26%
Occupied Palestinian Territory	Flash Appeal	275.7 M	90.8 M	33%
Central African Republic	HNRP	29.6 M	10.4 M	35%
Democratic Republic of the Congo	HNRP	177.4 M	62.6 M	35%
Cameroon	HNRP	44.0 M	15.8 M	36%
Syrian Arab Republic	Flash Appeal	253.7 M	98.3 M	39%
Sudan	HNRP	275.8 M	110.1 M	40%
Lebanon*	Flash Appeal	27.0 M	13.7 M	51%
South Sudan	HNRP	81.4 M	41.8 M	51%
Zambia	Flash Appeal	1.7 M	0.9 M	52%
Ukraine	HNRP	445.2 M	261.7 M	59%
Chad	HNRP	17.6 M	11.9 M	67%
Afghanistan	HNRP	149.4 M	118.6 M	79%
Philippines	Other	0.2 M	1.6 M	674%
Total		**3.46 B**	**1.16 B**	**34%**

**There are no active Protection Clusters in these operations, but a flash appeal with a protection element has been published.*