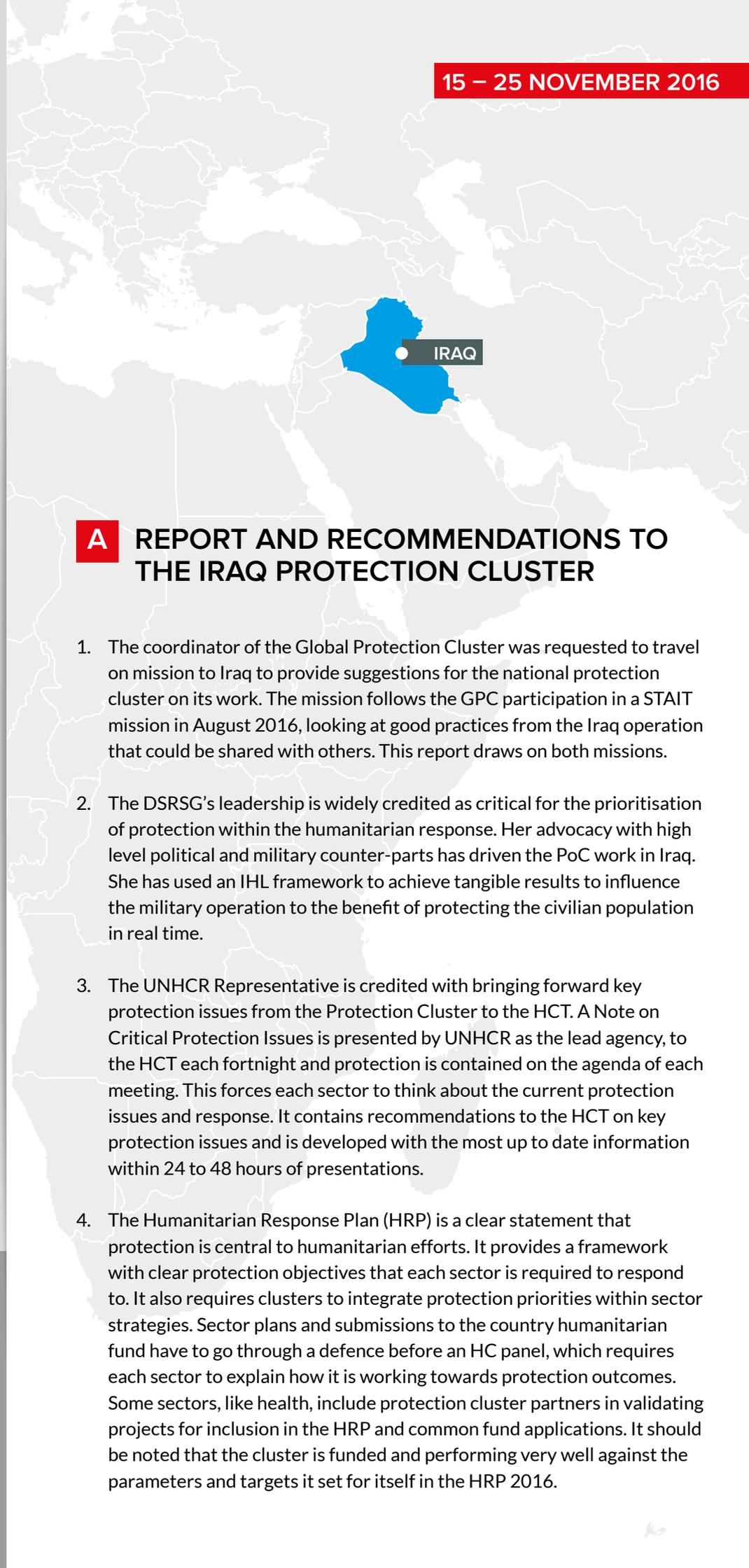




Global Protection Cluster

MISSION REPORT IRAQ

**A**

REPORT AND RECOMMENDATIONS TO THE IRAQ PROTECTION CLUSTER

1. The coordinator of the Global Protection Cluster was requested to travel on mission to Iraq to provide suggestions for the national protection cluster on its work. The mission follows the GPC participation in a STAIT mission in August 2016, looking at good practices from the Iraq operation that could be shared with others. This report draws on both missions.
2. The DSRSG's leadership is widely credited as critical for the prioritisation of protection within the humanitarian response. Her advocacy with high level political and military counter-parts has driven the PoC work in Iraq. She has used an IHL framework to achieve tangible results to influence the military operation to the benefit of protecting the civilian population in real time.
3. The UNHCR Representative is credited with bringing forward key protection issues from the Protection Cluster to the HCT. A Note on Critical Protection Issues is presented by UNHCR as the lead agency, to the HCT each fortnight and protection is contained on the agenda of each meeting. This forces each sector to think about the current protection issues and response. It contains recommendations to the HCT on key protection issues and is developed with the most up to date information within 24 to 48 hours of presentations.
4. The Humanitarian Response Plan (HRP) is a clear statement that protection is central to humanitarian efforts. It provides a framework with clear protection objectives that each sector is required to respond to. It also requires clusters to integrate protection priorities within sector strategies. Sector plans and submissions to the country humanitarian fund have to go through a defence before an HC panel, which requires each sector to explain how it is working towards protection outcomes. Some sectors, like health, include protection cluster partners in validating projects for inclusion in the HRP and common fund applications. It should be noted that the cluster is funded and performing very well against the parameters and targets it set for itself in the HRP 2016.

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5. As the centrality of protection is clear in the HRP, funding mechanisms include protection priorities, e.g. the country humanitarian fund. The complexity of the crisis is matched by a complicated coordination architecture in Iraq, overseen by a dynamic DSRSG, who demands cogent and real-time analysis of the situation.
6. There is a constant risk of the undermining of humanitarian principles in a highly charged and politicised environment, with pressure to compromise protection standards in the rollout of a military campaign against Da'esh. It should be noted that the cluster is often asked to perform a role that should normally be carried out by the human rights actors (e.g. monitoring and reporting on protection of civilians).
7. A focus on sub-national coordination as the way to ensure delivery of protection services is an effective method of working. Concerted articulation of the delivery of protection services at the sub-national level must be done to highlight the operational focus of the protection cluster over and beyond advocacy and standardsetting.
8. Other good practices include that the Cash Working Group is integrating protection issues into its work. Cash-Based Interventions and livelihoods represent an important method of addressing protection problems which transcend sectors. They also provide flexibility and promote dignity in the response by providing families with a means to address what is uppermost in their minds, be it eviction for non-payment of rent or buying medicines for an elderly family member.
9. The Food Security cluster is picking up protection issues at food distribution points, which is a first-line response, and referring them to the Protection Cluster. The Call Centre is also picking up on trends in issues, including protection. Efforts to strengthen operational follow up on referrals are underway.
10. The deployment of the Rapid Protection Assessment tool is identifying issues quickly after an event and these issues are useful for other clusters as they set the pace for immediate identification of protection needs and appropriate responses, especially relevant in a charged and swiftly shifting protection environment. The Protection Monitoring Tool is another good example and indicative of close engagement of the various protection stakeholders in the cluster in real time response.
11. The independence of the protection cluster is key to its credibility and ability to provide objective guidance to partners; the cluster places great emphasis on increasing the coherence and responsiveness of the overall coordination effort by holding frequent SAG meetings and empowering SAG members to guide the cluster's work.
12. There are, however, gaps in the cluster's work, which I see as the narrative, focus, approach and inclusiveness of the cluster. My recommendations are as follows:
 - a. **Define the narrative:** the cluster needs to trace the outlines of the protection crisis in Iraq more sharply and say what the priorities are. To do this, the information being collected from various sources needs to be processed, analysed and produced in digestible form more regularly. The generation of information and analysis for external consumption needs to be more dynamic but, beyond that, the cluster needs to be clear about what the important issues at stake are: for example, what is the cluster's analysis of suggestions (see HRW report) that the conduct of military operations is a form of ethnic cleansing. The GPC is posting the external updates that we are sent but can assist with greater dissemination of the Iraq protection cluster's key concerns.
 - b. **Focus:** there is a lot of discussion at the moment about the screening of people fleeing to safety and the standards to be applied and how humanitarians should engage. This is a helpful discussion to have and I would suggest it might be stronger by including more of the evidence prompting concerns about the screening and by providing more operational inputs to implement recommendations. I might also suggest that the discussion needs to be brought to a timely end, even if only interim operational guidance is issued. However, beyond this issue there is the larger concern about the conduct of hostilities in the Mosul operation, the principle of distinction

and the obligation to protect civilians from the effect of hostilities. In human rights terms, the right to life is the principal protection concern at present. One of the related areas of concern is the slow advance of the Iraqi and Kurdish (and other) forces into Mosul as they meet stiff resistance, the running out of weapons and ammunition, and the pressure placed upon these forces to make progress. The protection cluster needs to be raising the alarm about the conduct of hostilities -including ERWs- and providing regular briefing, based on information collected from IDPs themselves (easily accessed in camps) as well as other sources. I recommend closer cooperation with CIMCORD colleagues, including joint missions with the cluster and briefing of the cluster by CIMCORD, in order to collect information and inhere their analysis of the situation.

- c. **Operations:** there is a perception, perhaps misplaced, that the cluster is not operational enough. I believe my first two recommendations will go some way to changing that perception but I would also recommend a more outgoing approach, perhaps by bunching up meetings in Baghdad and Erbil and allowing more time for coordinators and participants in the cluster to get out into the field.
- d. Finally, I see a need to ensure that the cluster is more **inclusive** in its participation, particularly of local agencies. Simple changes, such as time-tabling meetings, translating documents, interpretation at meetings, having a website and social media feeds in local languages will go some way to increase participation. This is important for ensuring that any advice given by the cluster is based on context.