



REPUBLIC OF MOZAMBIQUE | Cabo Delgado Province

Protection Analysis Update

Rising conflict-induced protection risks amid climate shocks and electoral violence

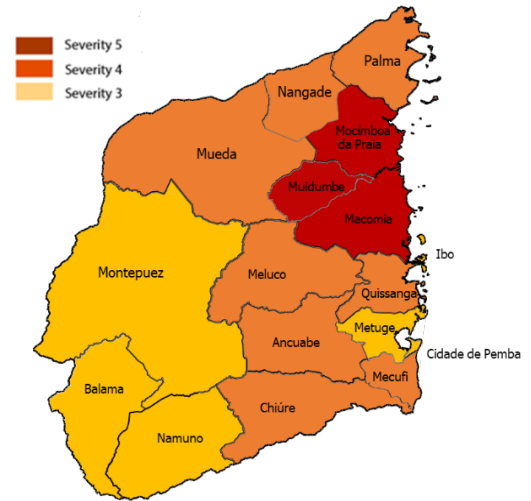
JANUARY 2025

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Throughout 2023, Cabo Delgado experienced a sustained decrease in violence perpetrated by non-state armed groups (NSAGs), with the majority of their attacks targeting military forces. However, since December 2023 and throughout 2024, **the conflict dynamics have drastically changed, not only in the regularity and intensity of attacks, but also in the NSAGs *modus operandi*, increasingly targeting civilians and civilian infrastructure.** NSAGs also strengthened and expanded in new territories, increasing their operational capacities, including the increased use of improvised explosive devices (IEDs). The withdrawal of Southern African Development Community Mission (SAMIM) in 2024 coincided with significant challenges in delivering humanitarian and protection responses, largely due to escalating violence and insecurity caused by NSAGs. Over 716,878 people have been displaced due to attacks and fighting. Furthermore, the number and vulnerability of people in need, including IDPs and returnees, has increased by Cyclone Chido which hit northern Mozambique on 15 December 2024, affecting more than 300,000 individuals in Cabo Delgado.

The overall protection environment in Cabo Delgado requires continuous protection assessment and analysis and the establishment of an early-warning system to mitigate the risks and subside adequate response. It is important to note that both violence and cyclones have caused a state of psychological trauma and distress within the populations.

The present Protection Analysis Update does not replace the previous [Protection Analysis Update published in January 2023](#), as many risks detailed in the latter report remain relevant and have not been fully addressed due to the scale of needs during the past year. This report addresses the most severe protection risks identified by the Protection Cluster in 2024.



818,527
People in Need
and at-risk

408,233
People targeted

Men (48%)	Women (52%)	Children (57%)
195,951	212,281	232,692
Adults (38%)	Older people (5%)	People with disability (15%)
155,128	20,412	73,482

PROTECTION RISKS

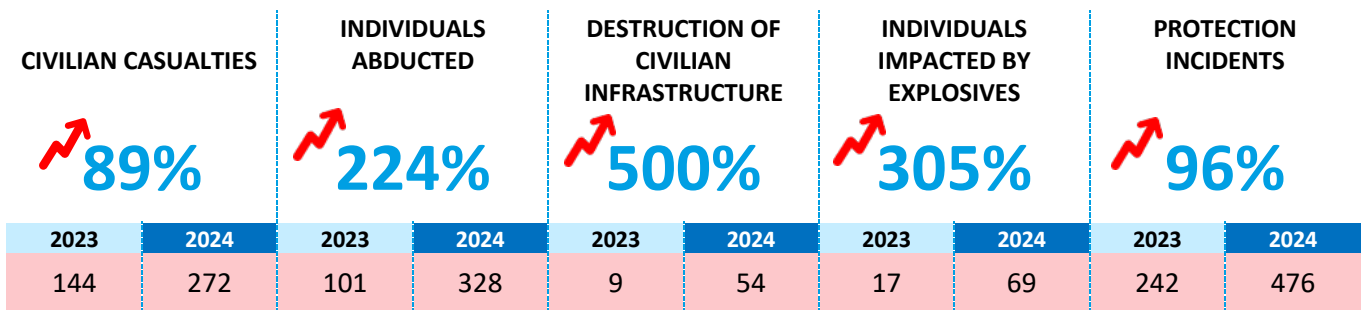
1. Attacks on civilians, unlawful killings and attacks on protected civilian objects
2. Abduction of civilians, use, recruitment and association of children in armed forces and groups
3. Gender-based violence, conflict-related sexual violence and sexual exploitation and abuse
4. Forced evictions, illegal expropriation, and persistent land disputes driven by insecure tenure
5. Impediments and restrictions to access legal civil documentation

URGENT ACTION NEEDED

Amidst the continued conflict in Cabo Delgado and protection risks, it is of utmost importance to:

- Ensure the protection of the civilian population, including by organizing a high-ranking mission of the national authorities to Pemba and acting on clear recommendations to address the risks and needs identified.
- Expand the area of coverage and means of communication with communities on protection risk reduction and prevention (i.e. radio, pamphlets, community theatre, school curriculum etc.), especially on child protection, GBV, SEA, explosive ordnance risk education, conflict and disaster preparedness, and durable solutions.
- Work towards a stronger monitoring system of protection incidents, taking due regard to groups in situation of vulnerability, that would include a reliable verification methodology, which would ultimately support engagement with authorities and advocacy for the benefit of protection outcomes.

CONTEXT



The above numbers provide the percentage increase in protection incidents between 2023 and 2024. Sources of information include INSO, ACLED and UNHCR's Protection Monitoring.

Mozambique has been affected by internal displacement as a result of disasters, exacerbated by the adverse effects of climate change, resource extraction projects and armed conflict. Since 2017, Cabo Delgado has been the epicentre of a conflict resulting from attacks perpetrated by NSAGs. Property has been lost; villages, settlements, and public infrastructure have been destroyed. The availability of basic services has become even more limited. Civil administration has been severely impacted and over a million people have been forcibly displaced within Cabo Delgado and towards other districts and provinces of Mozambique. Through 2024, the NSAGs have been at their most active since the 2021 Palma attack. Following the announcement of the results from the general presidential elections that took place on October 9th, 2024, there have been tensions and incidents of violence throughout Mozambique, including in Cabo Delgado. This situation affected humanitarian capacity to deliver effectively from November to December 2024.

WORRYING INTENSIFICATION OF CONFLICT DYNAMICS

Cabo Delgado province experienced a significant escalation of NSAG violence throughout 2024, with attacks spread across the districts in the south, centre, and north of the province. Although Cabo Delgado experienced a sustained decrease in violence perpetrated by non-state armed groups (NSAGs) during 2023, with the majority of their attacks targeting military forces, the situation in 2024 was characterized by an increase of attacks perpetrated by NSAGs on civilians and civilian infrastructure. The attacks from NSAGs resulted in numerous civilian casualties and abductions among the civilian population, the destruction of private property (houses and commercial shops) and public property (offices, schools, hospitals, and markets), as well as religious infrastructure. The most affected by violence were the districts of Ancuabe, Chiure, Quissanga, Macomia, Mocímboa da Praia, and Muidumbe. The attacks resulted in 716,878 persons forcibly displaced in 2024 according to [DTM-IOM](#).

The [operational withdrawal of the SAMIM](#) in July 2024 and subsequent handover to Mozambiquan security forces has impacted military deterrence to the threat of NSAGs in central and northern districts (Nangade, Muidumbe, and Macomia) and limited the capacity to counter the threat of NSAGs. Meanwhile, some troops from the Southern African Development Community (SADC) countries remained and the Rwandan Defence Force is strengthening its presence as per bilateral agreement with the Mozambican Government.

NSAGs have strengthened their hold and expanded their control, employing diverse tactics. Their increased ability to move throughout the Cabo Delgado province has enhanced their footprint along the coast and key southern districts, such as Ancuabe, Chiure, and Mecufi. Conflict escalation comes with increasing propaganda by the NSAGs through their media outlet, *Al Naba*, revealing the intent to continue operating in Mozambique and likely facilitating the recruitment of new fighters, including children. The evolving dynamics of the conflict in early 2024, including NSAGs capacity to deploy explosive ordnances targeting civilians, the recruitment, abduction and use of children in hostilities, and the expansion of NSAG activities to southern districts, is concerning.

Comparing the last semester of 2023 and the first semester of 2024, the data shows a 2,300% increase in protection incidents, 933% increase in destruction of civilian property, 300% increase in civilian fatalities due to explosive ordnances, and an alarming rise in grave violations against children (400%). Protection incidents include abduction, theft, torture, killing, severe limitations to freedom of movement, sexual and physical assault, sexual slavery, sexual exploitation and abuse (SEA), gender-based violence (GBV), conflict-related sexual violence (CRSV), physical, mental, sexual and psychological violence, alleged forced disappearances, recruitment and use of children, arbitrary arrests and detention, destruction and looting of homes and

property, among others. GBV risks, especially Conflict-related sexual violence (CRSV) are also increasing due to the conflict dynamics, further displacement and the limited access to basic services. The crisis in Cabo Delgado is multifaceted, characterized not only by displacement and material deprivation but also by profound psychological distress. The relentless cycle of violence, displacement, and uncertainty takes a heavy toll on individuals and communities, exacerbating anxiety, and distress. Children are victims and witnesses of traumatic scenes of violence and parents grieve lost loved ones while facing uncertainties about the future.

CLIMATE DISASTER EXACERBATING PROTECTION RISKS AND NEEDS

On 15 December 2024, Tropical Cyclone Chido made landfall in the district of Mecufi, Cabo Delgado Province. The cyclone brought destructive winds of up to 120 km/h and torrential rains exceeding 250 mm within 24 hours, causing widespread devastation across northern Mozambique. The provinces of Cabo Delgado, Nampula, and Niassa were severely impacted. According to the National Institute for Disaster Management and Risk Reduction (INGD), as of 31 December, **453,971 people/ 90,513 families** (84,900 men, 96,897 women, 138,343 girls and 133,831 boys) have been affected, with 120 deaths and 868 injured. Over 102,000 homes have been destroyed or partially damaged, alongside critical infrastructure such as schools, health facilities and water systems

The cyclone's aftermath has exacerbated pre-existing vulnerabilities in Cabo Delgado, which continues to grapple with conflict-related displacement and a cholera outbreak. In Mecufi and Chiure districts in Cabo Delgado, the damage is near total, with 100% of homes affected and health services rendered inoperable ([Cyclone Chido Flash Update, FAO, Dec. 2024](#)).

The cyclone's impact on protection has been devastating, with thousands of individuals hosted for a short period in overcrowded and not always suitable accommodation centers, sleeping out in the open and or relying on other community members. In such an informal setup, the most vulnerable families and individuals risk not being visible to humanitarian actors, face discriminatory treatment and GBV from other community members. Reports indicate high levels of distress among the displaced population; the overcrowded condition in accommodation centers also exacerbate the occurrence of gender-based violence; people affected by the cyclone report having lost their civil documentation as a consequence of the disaster, hindering their access to services, family reunification processes, freedom of movement and exposure to abuse from armed actors in a province already heavily affected by a conflict. Community-based support structures have been negatively impacted, leaving the most vulnerable without support networks and further exacerbating their vulnerability. These include children, women heads of households, persons with disabilities, older people, among others. ([Protection Cluster's Flash Update no. 1 – Cyclone Chido, Dec. 2024](#), [Protection Cluster's Flash Update no. 2 – Cyclone Chido, Jan. 2025](#)).

The risk of waterborne diseases, particularly cholera, is heightened by the destruction of water and sanitation infrastructure. Disrupted communication and power networks are further hampering the humanitarian response efforts. With more than 80% of Mozambicans relying on agriculture for their food and income, urgent action is needed to support affected households in rebuilding their lives. With the severe impact on IDPs' livelihoods, harmful coping mechanisms, including petty theft, begging, or survival sex, are likely to be exacerbated by the disaster.

PROTECTION RISKS

RISK 1 Attacks on civilian and other unlawful killings and attacks on civilian objects

The continued armed conflict in Cabo Delgado has intensified protection risks, with a significant shift in conflict dynamics exacerbating concerns over the protection of civilians and civilian infrastructure. Non-State Armed Groups (NSAGs) have perpetrated a surge in protection incidents, including armed attacks, increased use of explosive devices, conflict-related sexual violence ([SG-annual report 2023](#)), recruitment and use of children in hostilities, abductions, and extortion. The consequences of these actions have resulted in a rise in civilian casualties and widespread destruction of civilian infrastructure. During the first semester of 2024, at least 460 protection incidents were reported, marking an 2,300% increase compared to the 20 incidents recorded during the last semester of 2023 ([UNHCR Protection Monitoring, 2024](#)). The number of civilian casualties has also been reported to be on the rise, with 125 civilian casualties reported during the first semester of 2024 compared to 32 in the last semester of 2023 ([ACLED](#)). The number of grave violations, including killing and maiming, is four times higher than in the first half of 2024 (January to June) compared to the same period in 2023 according to [UNICEF's 2024 Mid-Year SitRep](#).

The most exposed districts to protection incidents are Chiúre and Macomia, which faced major attacks lasting several continuous days by NSAGs and have been predominantly impacted by threats to civilian populations and infrastructure. These attacks on civilians resulted in important protection needs and concerns as more fully elaborated in Protection Cluster's Flash Updates (Chiure – [Flash Update no. 1](#); [Flash Update no. 2](#), and [Protection Cluster's meeting following Macomia attack](#)). The key protection incidents include the destruction of civilian infrastructure (77%), killings (15%), and theft (4%) ([UNHCR Protection Monitoring 2024](#)).

In addition, Macomia, Mocimboa da Praia, and Muidumbe districts have been particularly affected by the increased use of explosive devices. NSAGs reportedly used primitive Improvised Explosive Devices (IEDs) occasionally throughout the conflict in Cabo Delgado. However, since 2023, NSAGs improved their technical expertise and sophistication in the manufacturing of IEDs. Recent reports have identified the use of remote-controlled detonations, showing an increase of technical capacities from NSAGs. In 2024, the number of civilian fatalities has tripled between the second semester of 2023 and the first semester of 2024. Similarly, from January to August 2024, 92% of the recorded fatalities resulting from explosive ordnance incidents were civilians while 87% of incidents affected civilians ([Protection Cluster's Presentation, September 2024](#)).

As per *Humanity & Inclusion's* community assessment regarding knowledge, behaviour and practices from the community, it became clear that children, peasants/farmers (*camponeses*) and traditional healers (*curandeiros*) are the population groups most at risk from IEDs and ERW/UXO. In this vein, 61% of the civilian fatalities in 2024 were children and other incidents affected community members while accessing their agricultural land [Protection Cluster Report on Explosive Hazards of June 2024](#).

The targeting of civilian infrastructure, particularly education and health facilities, in Cabo Delgado has led to widespread disruption of essential services. According to the [UNICEF Mid-Year Report 2024](#), 24 schools have been destroyed or damaged, and nearly 151 educational facilities have closed ([IMPACT, school disruption in 2024](#)), depriving 48,408 children of learning opportunities ([UNICEF Humanitarian Report 2024](#)). In the health sector, 14% of facilities are fully damaged, and 5% are non-functional, severely restricting access to medical care. In Quissanga and Macomia districts, approximately 200,000 people are without healthcare access ([Health Cluster Bulletin, October 2024](#)). These disruptions, compounded by the spillover of conflict and the continued return of internally displaced persons (IDPs) to high-risk areas, have heightened vulnerabilities, particularly among children and other at-risk groups, further deepening the humanitarian crisis.

Disproportionate targeting of civilians and civilian objects has led to massive displacement, which in turn has severely disrupted community-based structures. Strained resources in host areas have fueled inter-community tensions, while displacement and violence have caused widespread psychological trauma, as further reported by Protection Cluster's Flash Updates (Chiure – [Flash Update no. 1](#); [Flash Update no. 2](#), and [Protection Cluster's meeting following Macomia attack](#)). Vulnerable groups, including women, children, and older people, face heightened risks such as GBV, forced recruitment, abuse and neglect. Limited services and marginalization further exacerbate vulnerabilities, deepening the social and psycho-social impact on affected populations, and further exposing them to risks including sexual exploitation and abuse. The Ministry lacks

specialized institutional capacity to offer psychosocial support in cases of severe trauma suffered by internally displaced persons ([Report of the Special Rapporteur on the human rights of internally displaced persons](#), July 2024). The ongoing violence has left deep scars not only on the physical landscape but also on the minds of its people. Amid this turmoil, mental health and psychosocial support emerge as essential pillars of resilience and recovery.

The Protection Cluster in, close collaboration with the *National Institute of Disaster Management*, the Mozambican police forces and District authorities jointly developed awareness-raising messages addressed to communities focused on conflict preparedness and protection. Building on the efforts made by local authorities to prevent further consequences of attacks by NSAGs on local population, the National Institute of Disaster Management facilitated a dialogue with armed forces and the Protection Cluster to address the situation related to explosive hazards and move forward with an action plan. Discussions are still ongoing to keep working towards the protection of civilians.

RISK 2

Abduction of civilians, recruitment, use and association of children in armed forces and groups

In line with the deterioration of conflict dynamics, Cabo Delgado saw a heavy spike in the number of people abducted in 2024. During the last semester of 2023: 11 persons were abducted vs. 37 persons in the first semester of 2024. This represents a 336% increase in the number of people abducted. In July and August only, 80 people were abducted. The main profiles at risk are farmers and fishermen, for looting, recruitment and interrogation purposes ([ACLED](#)).

Women and girls who have been kidnapped by the NSAGs are forced into (early) marriage or used as sex slaves, sometimes being held captive for several years. During 2024, the data shows that 42% of the [Multi-Sectorial Needs Assessment](#) respondents feel the risk of abduction of women and girls has increased in Muidumbe, 20% in Metuge, 13% in Mueda. Unfortunately, due to lack of access to the areas that are controlled by NSAGs, the situation and treatment of abducted women and children remain unclear. Some women and girls, including their children, upon release may be investigated for alleged links to NSAGs. They furthermore may face stigmatization and rejection from their communities upon their return, as further explained through the first-hand testimonies gathered by UNHCR from women and girls released from NSAG captivity ([Supporting one another, survivors of sexual violence in northern Mozambique begin to heal](#), UNHCR, Nov. 2024). These women and girls remain at risk of continued long-term health and psychological impacts, as reminded by the Secretary General ([Secretary General's Conflict-Related Sexual Violence report](#) (April 2024, par. 12).

Regarding the release of persons who were forcibly recruited or those who joined the armed groups by themselves, the authorities have been adopting an amnesty approach that still lacks a legal framework, meaning that ex-combatants are invited, through public statements, distributions of pamphlets and community sessions, to surrender. Should NSAG surrender, they would be pardoned and would be able reintegrate into their communities, without further prosecution ([Governo intensifica campanhas de sensibilização em Cabo Delgado](#), August 10 2023; VOA Português: [Cabo Delgado: Nyusi concede "indulto" a mais de 60 suspeitos terroristas](#), September 21 2022; E-Global Noticias em português: [Moçambique: Comandante Geral da PRM apela ao regresso e reintegração de terroristas](#), May 17 2022; AA: [Mozambique's President says Palma rid of terrorists, President Nyusi offers amnesty to those who have joined ranks of Daesh/ISIS](#), April 2021.)

The last public statement by the authorities in this regard took place on September 25th 2024, where President Nyusi claimed that 182 ex-combatants had surrendered to the Mozambican authorities and had been reintegrated into their communities as a result of a counter-propaganda programme approved by the Mozambican Defence and Security Forces ([Mozambique: At least 182 insurgents surrender to armed forces – president](#), Club of Mozambique, Sep. 2024). Experts, including the Provincial Judicial Court of Cabo Delgado, have, however, expressed concern over the authorities' unwritten policy and have called for the need to adopt a consensual, in-depth policy that would be developed through community engagement and participation. The Center for Democracy and Development (*Centro para Democracia e Desenvolvimento* - CDD) has also raised concerns ([Perdão presidencial aos supostos terroristas constitui uma grave violação do princípio da separação de poderes](#), CDD, 2022).

The Special Rapporteur on Human Rights of IDPs also raised concerns following her visit Special Rapporteur over the Presidential pardon of some perceived or actual members of non-State armed groups that had surrendered their weapons, with assurances of pardon and reintegration into their communities. She stressed the need for a transparent and inclusive transitional justice measures, involving community discussions to promote social cohesion and reconciliation that would

ensure the protection of victims' human rights, including truth, justice, reparation, rehabilitation and non-recurrence guarantees ([Report of the Special Rapporteur on the human rights of internally displaced persons](#), July 2024).

The Protection Cluster has received reports that victims/survivors of violations committed by former NSAGs have expressed their fear and re-traumatisation with this approach, since they are sharing the same environment with their perpetrators, especially in Palma, Nangade, Mueda and Mocimboa da Praia. Members of the communities are reportedly concerned about their security and live with a sentiment of impunity. On the other hand, ex-combatants and their families are suffering from stigmatization from the communities who reject their presence in society. The reintegration programme of the ex-combatants and their families is unclear and raises concerns. The Protection Cluster supports the position of the need to develop a robust policy for the reintegration of ex-combatants with the meaningful participation of the community, while ensuring access to justice for victims and survivors as a key factor towards peace, reconstruction and resilience.

Access to justice for internally displaced persons, including legal aid for critical protection services, has been severely limited. Existing disparities in access to legal aid, fear of retaliation when reporting or denouncing cases, lengthy judicial processes and insufficiently prompt investigation have exacerbated feelings of injustice and mistrust in the administration of justice. In response, community and informal justice mechanisms have been reinstated at internally displaced persons' sites. However, such mechanisms lack due process and cannot fully replace formal justice systems, particularly regarding serious human rights violations ([Report of the Special Rapporteur on the human rights of internally displaced persons](#), July 2024).

The number of grave violations, including abductions and the recruitment and use of children as soldiers, has increased by 400% from January to June 2024 alone, compared to the 2023 statistics, according to UNICEF's 2024 Mid-Year SitRep. This surge underscores the urgent need to address the profound impact of conflict on children and its long-lasting repercussions on society. As per the Child Protection AoR, NSAGs are the main perpetrators of abduction, recruitment and use, killing and maiming of children in Cabo Delgado. The Secretary General report for 2023 states that 153 grave violations against 108 children (42 boys, 61 girls) were verified to have been recruited and used by NSAGs in support roles, such as porters and spies and combatant roles ([Secretary-General Annual Report on Children and Armed Conflict](#), June 2024). The latter reports the recruitment and use of 40 children (18 boys, 22 girls) by NSAGs and the abduction of 92 children (52 girls, 40 boys) by armed groups, mostly for the purposes of recruitment and use (40) and sexual violence (4).

According to the data collected and verified by the Child Rights Monitoring (CRM) Working Group, Mocimboa da Praia hosts the highest number of Children Associated with Armed Forces and Armed Groups (CAFAAG) and has had one of the highest trends in abduction, recruitment and use of children; Palma hosts the highest number of CAFAAG seeking reintegration services. Macomia and Quissanga also report a high number of CAFAAG and high numbers of missing/abducted children. In Chiure, following the multiple days of attacks this district experiences, consultations with caregivers and child protection practitioners revealed several cases of abduction of children by non-state armed groups (NSAG). Similarly, five days after the attacks on Chiure, families reported the disappearance of children, mainly girls. Child Protection AoR partners reported 154 missing children after the Chiure attack ([Child Protection AoR Flash Update](#), March 2024) which brought the attention of international press ([Mozambique jihadist attacks: Fears for 70 missing children](#), BBC, March 2024). There is an acute need for mental health and psychosocial support services, in particular among children, who have been victims of grave human rights violations and who lack specialized services for their rescue, release and reintegration into communities, as further confirmed by the Special Rapporteur on Human Rights of IDPs following her mission report issued in July 2024 ([Report of the Special Rapporteur on the human rights of internally displaced persons](#), July 2024).

The government of Mozambique, through close collaboration with the UN, has been working on a Handover Protocol for the Transfer of Children Associated with Armed Forces and Armed Groups (CAAFAG) that is pending finalization. On another side, from January to August 2024, 554 children associated with armed forces and armed groups were identified and assisted with reintegration support by the Child Protection AoR in Cabo Delgado and efforts are made to reintegrate them in their families and communities with the provision of access to mental-health and psychosocial support services and life skills activities (Child Protection AoR, 2023).

RISK 3

Gender-based violence (GBV), Conflict-related sexual violence (CRSV) and Sexual Exploitation and Abuse (SEA)

Frequent conflicts and instability in Cabo Delgado exacerbated the pre-existing patterns of violence and discrimination against women and girls, exposing them to heightened risks of GBV and other harmful practices. Women and girls suffer disproportionately from GBV and violations of fundamental rights due to conflict, insecurity, increased displacement, forced relocations and returns, lack of livelihood opportunities, limited coverage of community-based GBV awareness, as well as limited access to response services.

Since 2017, there have been several reports of allegations of violations – especially **conflict-related sexual violence (CRSV)** – by parties to the conflict. A critical challenge in preventing and responding to these reports, is the absence of consistent, reliable data collection and analysis mechanisms regarding CRSV and the impact of conflict on previous tendencies and dynamics, as reported by the Secretary General ([Secretary General's Conflict-Related Sexual Violence report](#) (April 2024)). Worth reminding that CRSV not only affects women and girls, but that it also targets men and boys to dehumanize them and purposefully provoke shame. According to [UNHCR's partners GBV Safety Audits](#), violence perpetrated during conflict against men and boys is often of a punitive type, intended to shame, emasculate, or degrade the victim, and as a result, it is highly underreported.

Despite challenges regarding CRSV data, the [GBV AoR partners](#) have identified patterns of violence committed by parties to the conflict. There have been widespread reports of sexual harassment, sexual violence, and other forms of sexual misconduct by belligerents towards civilians, which in some cases lead to unwanted pregnancies particularly affecting teenage girls. These are often a result of the risks highlighted above. For instance, verified sexual violence against 12 girls, was attributed to the Mozambique Defence Armed Forces (5), NSAGs (4) and the Rapid Intervention Unit of the police (3) as per the [Secretary-General Annual Report on Children and Armed Conflict](#) from June 2024.

UNHCR's first-hand testimonies gathered from survivors provide intimate insights of the stories of 3 women who suffered **Conflict-Related Sexual Violence (CRSV)**. ([Supporting one another, survivors of sexual violence in northern Mozambique begin to heal](#), UNHCR, Nov. 2024). These stories exemplify some of the multiple forms of abuse and exploitation that women and girls endure, which include forced labor either as domestic servants or working in fields to attend the NSAGs crops in addition to sexual violence and human trafficking. Unfortunately, lack of accountability creates a climate of fear, further empowering perpetrators ([UNHCR, 2024](#)).

In line with the exacerbation of **GBV risks** in conflict settings, the number of people in need of urgent GBV response services increased from 475,143 persons in 2023 to 558,000 in 2024 (HNRP [2023](#) and [2024](#)). In Mozambique, gender-based violence (GBV) is highly prevalent with 35% of ever-married women aged 15-49 experiencing physical, emotional, or sexual violence from their husband or intimate partner, 68% agreeing that wife beating can be justified ([Mozambique 2022 -2023 Demographic Health survey report](#), May 2024). Girls, especially adolescents, are disproportionately affected by GBV. For instance, women and girls account for over 97% of survivors seeking services. However, the number of women and girls accessing multi-sectoral GBV services remains low due to factors such as fear of stigma, access to and low availability of services ([UNHCR GBV Snapshot](#), October 2024). Particularly, older women, adolescent girls, and women and girls living with disabilities face additional risks and challenges in this unstable environment. GBV incidents against men and boys were also recorded, though highly underreported. It should not be forgotten that Cabo Delgado, as well as other regions of Mozambique, host many large-scale excavation projects in the mining and gas industry. A recent article published builds on empirical research and highlights the violations that may be linked to such projects, including many of the different types of GBV against women and girls, such as sexual abuse, forced and early marriages, early pregnancies, transactional or 'survival sex', and sexual exploitation in mining and excavation areas. While these projects do provide some economic employment opportunities to local populations, it is hardly justifiable that these dynamics continue to prevail ([Domination, Collaboration and Conflict in Cabo Delgado's History of Extractivism](#), Rural Observatory Institute, 2024).

As per [field assessments](#) conducted by GBV AoR partners, survivors **lack access to quality specialized life-saving GBV services**, such as the Clinical Management of Rape (CMR), psycho-social support (PSS), GBV case management, legal aid, and confidential referral mechanisms. This is due to limited confidential service availability, lack of awareness, fear of stigma, and weak referral systems compounded by disruption of services and limited access to community feedback mechanisms adapted to the survivor's needs in conflict-affected districts, such as Macomia and Quissanga. Additionally, the lack of access to essential sexual and reproductive health (SRH) services in conflict zones further heightens health risks. Many survivors do not receive

timely medical treatment, which is critical for preventing sexually transmitted infections (STIs), including HIV, and for managing post-rape care. Data shows that 75% of women and girls have no access to specialized and comprehensive GBV services in Macomia, Quissanga, Mocimboa Da Praia, while 60% of women and girls feel that the risk of violence has increased in their communities according to the 2024's [Multi-Sectorial Needs Assessment](#) and the [GBV AoR 2025 HNO Narrative report](#). [GBV safety Audits](#) conducted in IDP sites in Mueda, Palma, Pemba, Ancuabe, Chiure, Metuge, and Montepuez by GBV AoR partners, have shown that women and adolescent girls are most at risk of GBV due to challenges experienced during displacement.

Moreover, in a context with limited opportunities and dire humanitarian conditions, girls faced heightened risk of **forced and early marriage** due to the lack of livelihoods. Survival sex and sex work are also relied upon as harmful coping mechanisms in the absence of sustainable livelihoods, further exposing individuals to physical and psychological harm, exploitation and health risks, including sexually transmitted infections and unintended pregnancies. For instance, 42.3% of respondents replied that child, early, and forced marriage increased in their community by identifying this as a growing risk ([Multi-Sectorial Needs Assessment](#)). The [UNHCR Protection Monitoring](#) identified 120 cases of families forced to agree to marry their daughters off due to their vulnerable socio-economic situation. Further, Cabo Delgado has been identified as the Province with the highest rate of adolescent pregnancy and the second highest rate of child marriage ([Gender and Power Analysis of Child Marriage in Cabo Delgado](#), Save the Children, June 2024). Moreover, due to a lack of resources, 42.3% of female-headed households withdrew their children from school ([GBV safety Audits, 2024](#)), which increases their burden of care work and the exposure of girls and adolescent women to gender-based violence in their families and communities. Likewise, women and girls must walk long distances to get food assistance and to access water points, which also implies facing protection risks such as gender-based violence and animal attacks. Gender and protection measures to address these issues should be considered in food security and WASH assistance.

Aligned with the lack of livelihoods opportunities and the deep reliance of affected populations over humanitarian aid, risks related to **sexual exploitation and abuse (SEA)** remain among the most prevalent protection concerns in Cabo Delgado, disproportionately affecting women and girls. The ongoing conflict and mass displacement have left individuals in a state of acute vulnerability, particularly within internally displaced populations (IDPs) and host communities. The increasing demand for humanitarian assistance, coupled with severe poverty caused by displacement, creates a combination of dependency of members of the affected populations on humanitarian aid which leads to increased SEA risks. These risks are often driven by structural inequalities, the breakdown of community protection mechanisms and the normalization of transactional exchanges, such as the exchange of sexual favors to access aid and basic services.

Field reports highlight abuses of power, where community leaders, aid workers, and other figures in authority, exploit their positions to demand favours in return for access to aid distribution. This not only deepens the cycle of exploitation but also undermines the trust by communities and the integrity of assistance, discouraging vulnerable groups from seeking help when needed.

RISK 4

Forced evictions, illegal expropriation, and persistent land disputes driven by insecure tenure.

Housing, Land and Property (HLP) challenges lie at the heart of displacement, return, and recovery processes in the region, and hinders displaced people's and returnees' ability to reach a durable solution. Community members reside in informal urban or rural settlements without registration or land titles (*Right to Use and Exploit from the Land – DUAT*), without protection of their land and housing rights. This leads to significant insecurity in land tenure as informal housing lacks formal legal recognition. Furthermore, the *DUAT* acquisition process, as outlined in the Land Act, is both expensive and time-consuming.

Although resolution 19/2011 mandates the establishment of disaster insurance mechanisms and the national housing policy and Law No. 10/2020 provide asset protections for displaced populations during natural disasters, such protections do not extend to people displaced by armed conflicts, therefore there are no mechanisms for recognizing and protecting property rights to abandoned land and providing restitution or compensation in cases of displacement. IDPs, constituting a significant portion of the population in Cabo Delgado, face staggering obstacles, with 88% lacking formal land tenure documents ([UNHCR's Protection Monitoring](#)). The lack of civil documentation, absence of tenure security, destruction of infrastructure, and loss of ownership increases the vulnerability of affected populations to forced evictions, illegal occupation, illegal

expropriation, and persistent land disputes. Many displaced families rely on agriculture for survival, yet they struggle to access fertile land due to competition with host communities and restrictions imposed by local authorities. Allocated plots are often too small to sustain the family or are prohibitively far from where they live. In return areas, widespread destruction of housing and property further hinders the ability of returned populations to reintegrate.

Reports of illegal land seizures, particularly in resource-rich areas, have risen sharply, displacing communities further and fuelling tensions. These challenges have a cascading impact on displacement and return processes. Restrictions on land access impede IDPs' integration into host communities, often fostering social tensions and potential conflict. Land disputes between IDPs and host communities risk escalating into violence, further destabilizing the region ([Impact of the five-year conflict in Cabo Delgado](#), ACAPS 2023). Addressing these HLP challenges is not only critical for the recovery of displaced populations and key for their achievement of a durable solution, but also for ensuring long-term stability and peace in Cabo Delgado. The HLP AoR response strategy incorporates gender-sensitive approaches, ensuring that female-headed households, older persons, and individuals with disabilities are prioritized in access to HLP services.

Female-headed households are disproportionately affected, as they face compounded barriers to land access, limiting their ability to rebuild their lives and livelihoods. The Land Act No. 19/1997 regulates land access and DUATs and allows for the legalization of customary land rights. If discriminatory customary practices conflict with the Constitution, the latter prevails. Despite constitutional and legal guarantees of gender equality and non-discrimination, women in Mozambique often face insecure land rights. Oversight of customary authorities is lacking and many women in rural areas are unaware of their rights or of legal avenues for enforcement ([Report of the Special Rapporteur on the human rights of internally displaced persons](#), July 2024).

RISK 5 Impediments and restrictions to access legal civil documentation

In terms of civil documentation, [UNHCR Protection Monitoring](#) indicated that 41% of returnees and IDPs declared not possessing any form of civil documentation. The districts of Chiure, Mecufi, Metuge, Muidumbe and Nangade had a higher proportion of respondents without documentation compared to other areas. Considering the current numbers of 541,400 returnees and 553,265 IDPs, and the fact that 41% lack civil documentation, it can be inferred that approximately 448,808 individuals are still in need of civil documentation. Most respondents without documentation, 83%, reported that their documents were lost or destroyed when they fled, while 17% stated they had never had civil documentation. When broken down by gender, substantially more women lack civil documentation (58%) than men (42%).

Some obstacles in obtaining civil documentation result from complex systemic and regulatory factors, such as administrative fees, prolonged procedural timelines, and the absence of decentralized service providers, which create significant challenges for affected communities, limiting their ability to access legal identity. This restriction on documentation limits access to healthcare, education, employment, and humanitarian aid, while also heightening their exposure to harassment, extortion, and sexual exploitation, particularly for women and girls.

While efforts exist to facilitate access to documentation, gaps in implementation and outreach have left many IDPs and returnees struggling to navigate complex and costly procedures. As per the Special Rapporteur mission report, during discussions with internally displaced persons, accessibility to civil documentation emerged as a critical concern ([Report of the Special Rapporteur on the human rights of internally displaced persons](#), July 2024). Furthermore, the lack of documentation is a substantial factor hindering freedom of movement, making people more susceptible to harassment, extortion and exploitation (Chiure – [Flash Update no. 1](#); [Flash Update no. 2](#)). Specifically, women and girls have reported being exposed to the risk of sexual harassment and assault at checkpoints and roadblocks, being particularly vulnerable when lacking ID cards or when their belongings are searched ([Mozambique: Rebuilding lives in Cabo Delgado](#)).

The lack of civil documentation has also been identified as a risk factor for Sexual Exploitation and Abuse (SEA), as it increases individuals' reliance on local leaders who provide identification forms that can be used to access aid ([Mozambique SEA Risk Matrix](#), 2023). The focus-group discussions with affected communities highlighted several protection issues related to the lack of civil documentation ([UNHCR Protection Monitoring](#)). Members of the communities emphasized the need for more support in obtaining birth certificates, noting that for children above five years old, fees are often charged for issuing these documents. For those who do not have a birth certificate, they cannot obtain an ID card (the birth certificate is a prerequisite).

Although efforts have been made by both humanitarian and development actors to address the issue through mobile legal clinics conducted jointly with the government, the continuous displacement of the population hinders the potential to achieve a sustainable impact.

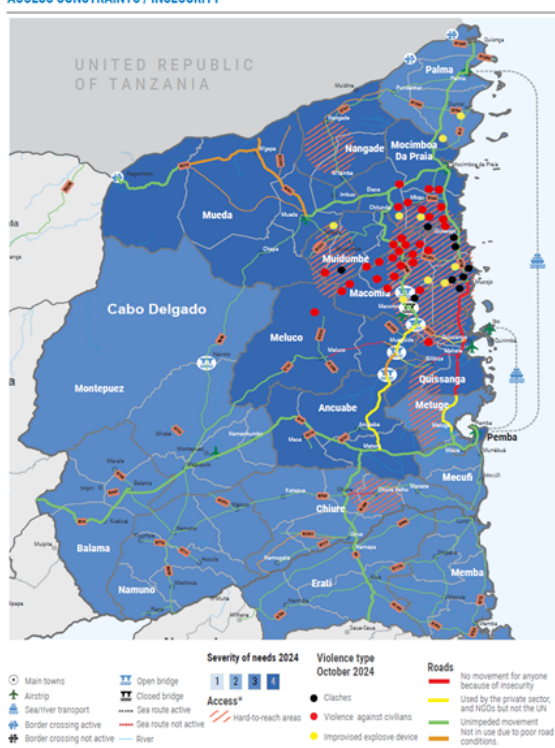
RESPONSE

PROGRESS MADE ON PROTECTION

The Protection Cluster engaged with actors with experience in Mine Action, to respond and expand explosive ordnance risk education, victim assistance and advocacy for the protection of civilians, including conflict-sensitive key messages for communities. As of November 2024, GBV AoR reached 316,305 people through prevention, risk mitigation, and response activities with less than 25% of funding received. In 2024, the HLP AoR supported 17,000 people through legal assistance, information sharing, and capacity-building initiatives. The Child Protection AoR successfully established, jointly with DPGCAS, a Working Group on Community Child Protection Committees to harmonize tools and approaches. On Protection of Civilians continuous engagement of HCT, AHCT and donors has been a priority to present concerns and advocate for active intervention.

ACCESS-RELATED CHALLENGES AND ACTIONS

ACCESS CONSTRAINTS / INSECURITY



Increased NSAGs violence, operational constraints, and targeted attacks on civilians and humanitarians are hindering humanitarian efforts and access. NSAGs' effective strategies to win the favor of the population, including through the delivery of assistance, has contributed to the reduction of community acceptance of humanitarian organisations. The districts most affected by violence were Chiure, Quissanga, Macomia, Mocimboa da Praia, and Muidumbe. The attacks led to the suspension of humanitarian activities and movement restrictions in some areas for prolonged periods and the situation compromises humanitarian acceptance and access, with incidents targeting relief operations. The use of IEDs by NSAGs poses a growing threat to road movement in the central districts of Cabo Delgado. In addition, the rainy season greatly affects humanitarian access, with some routes at risk of becoming impassable due to deteriorating road and bridge conditions. Cyclone Chido caused widespread devastation in December 2024 in districts in need of humanitarian assistance and protection services, further complicating access to affected communities. The ongoing political crisis has further compounded barriers to access, as previously mentioned in this document.

CRITICAL GAPS IN FUNDING AND POPULATION REACHED

Low funding levels, with 29.6% of the 2024 Humanitarian Needs and Response Plan (HNRP) funded, resulted in assistance gaps exacerbating the reliance on risky coping mechanisms. Out of 48.7 million required for planned protection activities, only 21% funding was provided in 2024 for planned protection activities.

RECOMMENDATIONS

In the period covered by this analysis, urgent action is required to tackle the identified risks, and to increase the support and access of affected communities to rights. Gender-based violence, sexual exploitation and abuse as well as CRSV, extensive impact of explosive devices over civilian population and child rights violations need attention. To tackle the identified risks, the Protection Cluster and partners consider the following actions are necessary to avoid further harmful consequences for members of the affected populations and to strengthen the protection environment.

RISK 1 Attacks on civilian and other unlawful killings and attacks on civilian objects

GOVERNMENT

- Take measures to improve understanding and observance of rights of civilians and ensuring accountability for abuses committed by agents in a position of power; strengthen confidential complaint mechanisms and referral pathways to promptly and effectively address complaints and provide necessary support, protection and reparations
- Expand the area of coverage and means of communication with communities on protection risks reduction and prevention (i.e. radio, pamphlets, community theatre, school curriculum etc.), especially on explosive ordnance risk education and conflict preparedness.
- Establish a referral pathway for partners and communities to report any suspected Improvised Explosive Devices, Explosive Remnants of War, Unexploded Ordnance so as to enable the demining actors to take appropriate action and response.
- Provide training and capacity-building activities to defence and security forces on standards relating to human rights and international humanitarian law.
- Ensure that all actions above are informed by an awareness of the increased vulnerability of people with disabilities, older people, women and children at risk, and other people with specific needs.

HUMANITARIAN COMMUNITY

- Expand the area of coverage and means of communication with communities on protection risk reduction and prevention (i.e. radio, pamphlets, community theatre, school curriculum etc.), especially on child protection, GBV, SEA, protection of people with disabilities, explosive ordnance risk education, conflict and disaster preparedness, and durable solutions.
- Support government initiatives related to protection of civilians, with special measures taken for people with disabilities, older people, women and children at risk, and other people with specific needs, including explosive ordnance clearance and risk education, trust and confidence building activities.
- Extend necessary support for capacity building of the national human rights commission and expansion of its presence.

RISK 2 Abduction of civilian, recruitment, use and association of children in armed forces and groups

GOVERNMENT

- Offer the basic conditions of access to justice to affected populations, including access to statutory legal system but also to community-based dispute resolution mechanisms within the Mozambican legal framework, so as to promote social cohesion within communities.
- Adopt a robust and community-oriented policy or national plan to appropriately address the reintegration of ex-combatants, while ensuring access to justice and reparation for victims and survivors as a way to promote peace and resilience.
- Expedite the finalization of the Handover Protocol for the Transfer of Children Associated with Armed Forces and Armed Groups (CAAFAG) through collaboration with the UN. While the protocol is being finalized, maintain strong coordination among stakeholders, including security forces and civilian actors, to facilitate the proper handover of children to appropriate protection services and ensure effective reintegration.

HUMANITARIAN AND DEVELOPMENT COMMUNITY

- Leverage the provision of legal services through the provision of legal information, legal counselling and advice, legal assistance as well as legal representation before courts, tailored to the needs of the community and individuals, including

though local partnerships with local Universities, Human Rights defenders and the Institute for Sponsorship and Legal Assistance as a local asset.

- Build the capacities of displaced individuals and communities through awareness raising sessions on access to justice and on their right to seek an effective remedy for human rights violations in relation to the armed conflict.
- Build the capacities of the Justice systems (formal and informal) through material support (e.g. office space or equipment, telecommunications, vehicles, fuel, staff incentives), managerial support (e.g. planning, coordination), or training (e.g. human rights, standards of professional conduct).
- Support efforts to finalize the Handover Protocol for the Transfer of Children Associated with Armed Forces and Armed Groups (CAAFAG) by collaborating closely with the UN and government counterparts. In the interim, humanitarian actors should strengthen to ensure that children are safely transferred to appropriate protection services and supported during reintegration.

RISK 3 Gender-based violence (GBV)

GOVERNMENT

- Adopt a comprehensive legal and policy framework to address the situation of survivors of conflict-related sexual violence, many of whom remain in displacement, including by providing reparation through a comprehensive, inclusive and survivor-centred programme.
- Improve access to justice for GBV survivors and work closely with the *Provincial Directorate of Gender, Children and Social Action* to develop and implement an SOP to ensure perpetrators, including military personnel, will be held accountable.
- Build the capacities of Justice institutions and legal aid service providers in the relevant legal framework regarding GBV, CRSV and the survivor-centered approach.
- Ensure comprehensive sexuality education, prioritizing internally displaced out-of-school adolescents, to tackle teenage pregnancies and child marriage and ensure that community-based legal assistance provides awareness of child marriage issues and that mechanisms are in place to report and promptly respond to suspected or confirmed cases.
- Prioritize capacity-building initiatives on GBV addressed to military and law enforcement forces in Mozambique.
- Expand the focused awareness-raising interventions on conflict-related sexual violence, early and child marriage and PSEA in fragile and conflict settings and advocate for strengthening prevention and response.

HUMANITARIAN ACTORS

- Increase investment in livelihood interventions for women and girls to address harmful coping mechanisms and ease the reintegration of GBV survivors.
- Strengthen robust accountability mechanisms, such as confidential and accessible reporting channels, survivor support services, and a zero-tolerance policy on SEA within humanitarian operations.
- Enhance the monitoring of CRSV cases, including through joint verification missions, in due regard of the safety and will of the survivors, in order to foster advocacy activities as well as access to justice and services for the survivors.

RISK 4 Insecure tenure leading to forced evictions, illegal expropriation, and persistent land disputes

GOVERNMENT

- Prevent illegal land seizures, occupations, expropriations, and forced evictions by enforcing land use regulations and holding perpetrators accountable, particularly in resource-rich regions.
- Allocate sufficiently large and productive land for cultivation to displaced populations and returnees, ensuring that these allocations do not exacerbate tensions with host communities by duly informing and involving the host community and ensuring legal access to the land.
- Facilitate inclusive decision-making processes at the community level, ensuring that women, people with disabilities, older people, and marginalized groups participate in land and property rights discussions.
- Issue DUATs to displaced people in protracted displacement whose intention is to remain and locally integrate.
- Strengthen legal and regulatory frameworks governing the extractive industry to ensure that they adequately protect the rights of affected communities, including provisions related to land rights, compensation and resettlement.
- Conduct “due diligence” processes with host communities whose land is lent to displaced people, verifying land ownership, accurately informing them of the situation of displaced people, and managing their expectations

DONORS

- Prioritize funding for HLP interventions, particularly those addressing land tenure security, community land titling, and legal aid programs, including through the provision of training and resources for entities offering legal aid and expertise to deal with cases arising from land issues in both resettlement and host communities.
- Ensure that funding allocations are inclusive and target gender-sensitive programming that supports women and vulnerable groups.

HUMANITARIAN ACTORS

- Support capacity-building initiatives for local authorities and community leaders to enhance their ability to address land-related challenges effectively.
- Invest in sustainable land use practices and agricultural inputs to reduce competition over fertile land and promote self-reliance among displaced populations.
- Collaborate with local authorities and host communities to address tensions over land use, promoting coexistence and mutual understanding through dialogue and awareness campaigns.
- Organizing awareness-raising sessions to educate communities about their Housing, Land, and Property (HLP) rights and the critical significance of tenure security.
- Support HLP Civil Society Organizations and leverage their expertise considering their well-established track record of supporting displaced, host and returnee communities.
- Support authorities in the ability to provide land titles (DUATs) to affected people. When the ability to provide individual DUATs is hindered, employ the “secure-enough” HLP approach by supporting *collective* land tenure security measures through demarcations for Association DUATs and delimitations for community Official Certificates.
- Ensure people with disabilities, older people, women and children at risk, and other people with specific needs have equal access to secure HLP.

RISK 5 Impediments and restrictions to access civil documentation

GOVERNMENT

- Ensure that internally displaced persons have access to civil documentation, including simplified procedures for issuing essential documentation and the use of alternative forms of evidence, and simplify administrative requirements.
- Ensure that *Provincial Justice and Labour Services* (SPJT) notary publics (*conservadores*) embedded in the different civil documentation caravans have more flexibility and are empowered to certify birth.
- Work to address Structural changes towards addressing and tackling specific profiling and negative treatment of individuals without documentation in checkpoints.
- Ensure people with disabilities, older people, women and children at risk, and other people with specific needs have fair access to civil documentation.

HUMANITARIAN ACTORS

- Raise awareness among displaced communities to sensitize them to the need and importance of always carrying their civil documentation, ensuring people with disabilities, older people, women and children at risk, and other people with specific needs are reached.
- Organize tailored campaigns and information sessions for IDPs to make them aware of their civil documentation rights.

OTHER

GOVERNMENT AND HUMANITARIAN ACTORS

- Humanitarian actors and government authorities need to readjust their targeting modality for humanitarian assistance, (i) assisting the population wherever they have chosen to seek safety and protection, and (ii) including comprehensive responses targeting those living in urban & rural host communities, where more than 50% of the displaced population in Cabo Delgado reside.
- Addressing the situation of IDPs in urban areas still requires much greater and more systematic attention from the humanitarian community and government authorities.

Methodology

The analysis has been based on both quantitative and qualitative data from existing secondary data sources, protection assessments, UNHCR's Protection monitoring, child-right monitoring data, GBVIMS, the MSNA and reports covering events from January 2024, including data from key protection monitoring tools. In addition, in September 2024, the Protection Cluster jointly with the Gender Based Violence (GBV) AoR, the Child Protection (CP) AoR and the Housing, Land and Property (HLP) AoR organized a Protection Analysis Workshop. The workshop was based on the Protection Analysis Framework and counted with the participation of 46 partners (DPGCAS, SPAS, INGD, the Procuradoria (Attorney General), *Agencia de Desenvolvimento Economico Local de Cabo Delgado* (ADEL), ADRA, *Associação de Mães Unidas pela luta da Pessoa com Deficiência* (AMUPD), *Associação Provincial de Desenvolvimento Sustentável de Cabo Delgado* (APDS), APROCOSO, ASBIM, AVSI, CARE, Caritas Mozambique, CEDES, *Centro de Apoio Psicossocial* (CAP), CUAMM, Girls Child Rights (GCR), Helpcode, Humanity and Inclusion, iMMAP, IOM, IsraAID, *Jos Consultoria*, JRS, NPA, NRC, Muleide, OCHA, OHCHR, Plan International, PROMURA, REPSSI, Save the Children, Street Child, *Universidade Católica de Moçambique* (UCM), UNDP, UNFPA, UNHCR, UNICEF, UN Women, We World GVC, WFP, as well as the MHPSS, Community-Engagement and Accountability to Affected Populations and Disability Working Groups).

Limitations

Data available in Cabo Delgado is predominantly limited to areas that are currently accessible by humanitarian actors. Areas in Nangade, Macomia, Meluco, Muidumbe are currently underserved due to access, security and funding constraints. The Protection Cluster has participated in inter-cluster rapid assessment missions to these areas to analyse protection risks and needs.



For further information please contact:

- Eduardo Burmeister (Protection Cluster Coordinator) – burmeister@unhcr.org
- Roberta Pelizzoli (Protection Cluster Co-coordinator for Cabo Delgado) – roberta.pelizzoli@helpcode.org
- Paul Miki L Seng Du (Child Protection AoR Coordinator) – pmlsengdu@unicef.org
- Tesfaye Barge (Gender-Based Violence AoR Coordinator) – barge@unfpa.org
- Deiliany Lazara De Souza (House, Land and Property AoR coordinator) – desouza@unhcr.org
- Zuneid Soares (House, Land and Property AoR Co-coordinator) – zuneid.soares@nrc.no

The Protection Cluster acknowledges the important contributions of Aline Fautsch (fautsch@unhcr.org), Protection Cluster Coordinator in Cabo Delgado in 2024, who led the completion, research and analysis of this report, as well as the significant support from the SAG in revising and contributing to the content of this update.

For more information on the work of Mozambique Protection Cluster: [Mozambique: Protection | ReliefWeb Response](#)