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Rosmary Yaure, and her son Leon, who recently returned home to San Cristobal after years of displacement.

Protection Field Coordination Toolkit

Chapter 5: Centrality of Protection



Global Protection Cluster

Chapter 5: Centrality of Protection

Overview

This chapter contains:

- An explanation of the Centrality of Protection, and the Protection Cluster's responsibilities in supporting its implementation.
- An explanation of the difference between protection mainstreaming, protection integration and the centrality of protection.
- IASC processes in terms of engagement and support to implement the Centrality of Protection.
- HCT Benchmarks for the implementation of the IASC Policy on Protection.

In October 2016, the Inter-Agency Standing Committee (IASC) adopted its [Policy on Protection in Humanitarian Action](#). The policy defines the centrality of protection in humanitarian action, as well as the process for its implementation at country level. In doing so, it seeks to reinforce complementary roles, mandates and expertise of all relevant actors. Specifically, the policy emphasizes an IASC commitment to prioritize protection and contribute to collective protection outcomes.

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5.1 Core Concepts and Principles

In a [Statement](#) issued in December 2013, the Principals of the Inter-Agency Standing Committee (IASC) affirmed that all humanitarian actors have a responsibility to place protection at the centre of humanitarian action. The IASC has committed to a systemwide and comprehensive response to conflict and disasters. This response is driven by the needs and perspectives of affected persons, with protection at its core.

The IASC [Policy on Protection in Humanitarian Action](#) outlines measures on how humanitarian actors can collectively take this forward. HC/RCs and members of HCTs are expected to work together as senior leaders to address the most critical protection concerns in-country.

One of the recommended tools to operationalise Centrality of Protection is a HCT Protection Strategy. This strategy can facilitate HCT members to operationalise Centrality of Protection by clearly articulating the main priorities and responsibilities of HCT members. As the HC and HCT members often have access to influential stakeholders they are also well placed to engage in public and private advocacy on the critical protection issues. Advocacy efforts by the HC and HCT to reduce protection risks can be outlined as part of the HCT Protection Strategy or be part of HCT advocacy strategies.

The HC/RCs and HCTs are responsible for ensuring that protection is prioritised in operations, mainstreamed across the clusters, and that decisions regarding the humanitarian response are informed by strong protection analysis. While it is not the role of the HCT to directly undertake these activities, it is responsible for ensuring that they happen.

Protection Outcomes

A response or activity is considered to have a protection outcome when the risk to affected persons is reduced. The reduction of risks, meanwhile, occurs when threats and vulnerability are minimized and, at the same time, the capacity of affected persons is enhanced. Protection outcomes are the result of changes in behaviour, attitudes, policies, knowledge and practices on the part of relevant stakeholders.

IASC Policy on Protection in Humanitarian Action, 2016

Centrality of Protection means protection leadership, coordination and engagement for more strategic and aligned responses as part of system-wide responsibility, to achieve ‘protection outcomes.’ It is required for the most critical protection concerns and when it is not likely that a single agency or type of activity can comprehensively reduce the risk. Complementarity with other actors, including development and peace actors, and working with a variety of sectors and disciplines - sometimes at different levels of a response – is essential to reduce risks.

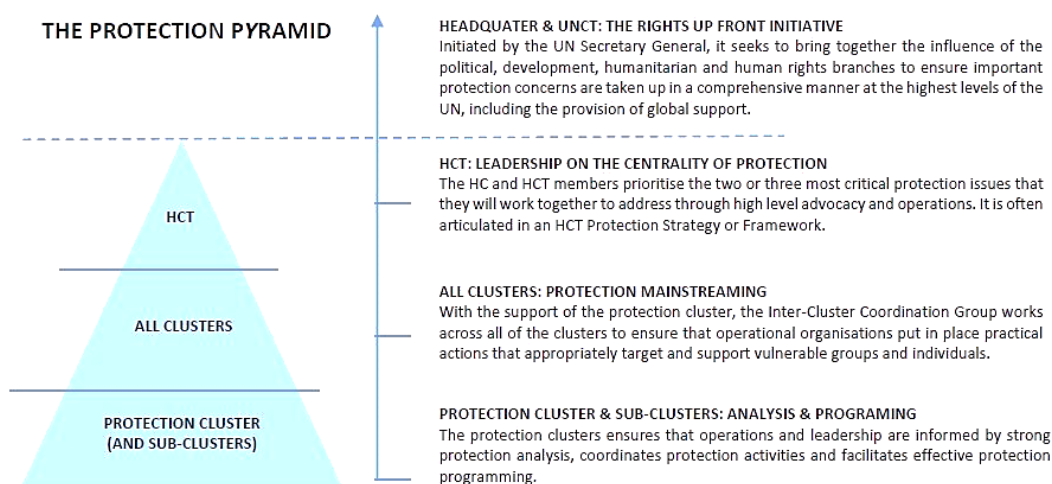
Mainstreaming protection is an element of the ‘Centrality of Protection’ and is a practical, efficient, and effective means to maximize the protective impact of humanitarian programming. Through the incorporation of protection principles into the response, humanitarian actors can ensure that their activities target the most vulnerable, enhance safety, dignity, and promote and protect the rights of the beneficiaries without contributing to or perpetuating discrimination, abuse, violence, neglect and exploitation.

Integrated protection programming refers to the collaborative efforts between different sectors, organizations and actors with the shared objective to protect people from violations of their rights, including violence, coercion, deprivation, and discrimination, through sector specific work. It can support the system-wide commitment to the centrality of protection as different actors work together as part of a multi-sector humanitarian response. The approach includes activities such as joint assessments and analysis, coordinated response strategies, shared advocacy initiatives, and collective resource mobilization.

Despite some challenges of programming for protection outcomes, there are examples of integrated protection programmes by other sectors/clusters and good practices by humanitarian organisations that promote the use of protection risk analysis as the basis for their multi-sector interventions, often in parallel to needs assessment.

The Protection Pyramid

The Protection Pyramid is a useful visual guide to understand the accountability framework for Centrality of Protection. It outlines the roles and responsibilities at a global and country level.



5.2 Role of the Protection Cluster

The Protection Cluster is often asked to take a leading support role in the development and implementation of Centrality of Protection. Some key actions that the HC/RC and HCT should request from the Protection Cluster, the ICCG, and other clusters/sectors, include:

- Ensure that protection response activities are prioritized and funded.
- Ensure that the voices of affected people are heard and guide protection analysis, programming and HCT decisions.
- Ensure that the Protection Cluster compiles comprehensive protection analysis that details the main protection threats, risks, vulnerabilities to inform decisions and programming.
- Task the ICCG to ensure that protection mainstreaming is implemented across clusters and that clear protection objectives are included in the Humanitarian Response Plan (HRP) that each sector must respond to.

Minimum Responsibilities of a Protection Cluster

The Protection Cluster has specific responsibilities within the Centrality of Protection approach, that must be carried out in all contexts.

- Ensure protection mainstreaming is regularly discussed at the inter-cluster and HCT level.
- Provide protection mainstreaming guidance and support training for clusters and partners.
- Provide up to date data and analysis of protection risks.
- Ensured that the protection analysis/narrative informs the humanitarian response planning, sector/cluster response strategies and funding strategies for mechanisms such as Country-Based Pooled Funds and CERF.

Protection Clusters and HCT Protection Strategies

The specific role of the Protection Cluster in the development and implementation of the HCT Protection Strategy varies country by country. In some cases, Protection Clusters have been tasked by the HCT to lead the process, whereas in others the cluster plays a support role. It is expected that a Protection Cluster:

- Advocates for Centrality of Protection in their country operation and promotes the use of a targeted HCT Protection Strategy.
- Shares updated information and analysis on the main protection threats, risks, vulnerabilities.
- Supports the implementation of a HCT Protection Strategy, including any specific Protection Cluster actions.
- Shares good practices from other operations.

Drawing on GPC Support

Centrality of Protection is a collective responsibility, and country clusters can draw on global level support to advocate for the development and implementation of collective protection approaches.

- The GPC has a collection of HCT Protection strategies that can be shared for inspiration.
- The GPC can present the *Benchmarks for HCT Collective Implementation of the IASC Policy on Protection* to the HCT.
- The GPC can promote advocacy efforts on protection related issues.
- The GPC can link the national cluster with the Centrality of Protection community of practice – particularly where there are any concerns or need for immediate action.

5.3 IASC Processes and Procedures

Engagement and Support to Implement the Centrality of Protection (CoP)

As a follow-up to the 2022 [Independent Review of the Implementation of the IASC Protection Policy](#), the IASC Centrality of Protection Action Plan (2023-2025) was endorsed by the principals and sets out key actions for strengthening systemwide centrality of protection.

1. Delivering collectively on agreed and prioritized protection outcomes.
2. Strengthening accountability of and support to humanitarian leadership (HCs and HCTs) to give priority to protection as an objective and an outcome central to humanitarian action.
3. Strengthening protection analysis - with inputs and priorities from affected people - to inform collective priorities, common response plans and concrete actions, including protection advocacy and humanitarian diplomacy efforts.
4. Working with parties to the conflict, peace and development actors, local/national actors and affected people, including through knowledge exchange, to achieve protection outcomes.

A set of benchmarks were developed to assist HCTs to operationalise their Centrality of Protection responsibilities. The HCT Benchmarks are designed to help HCTs to identify and reduce protection risks. The benchmarks focus on 1) Analysis of protection risks and prioritization; 2) Response planning and implementation to achieve protection outcomes; 3) Monitoring, learning and evaluation of the protection action plan.

5.4 HCT Benchmarks for Implementation of CoP

The HCT Benchmark document does not prescribe which actors and entities support the HCT with the development and implementation of HCT Protection Strategies. This will be agreed in the operations considering available capacities and resources. However, while the Protection Cluster does not lead on the implementation of Centrality of Protection, it is a key partner in establishing the framework of risk prioritization and supporting the protection response planning and response monitoring. The Protection Cluster is an important interlocutor for the HCT in identifying roadblocks to, and opportunities in, the successful country level implementation of a Centrality of Protection response.

The following are some of the actions carried out by the Protection Cluster that supports the collective implementation of the HCT Benchmarks:

Benchmark 1. Analysis and Prioritization.	The Protection Cluster contributes to the collective protection risk analysis and supports the risk prioritization exercise to ensure it is evidence-based and in accordance with the priorities of the affected population.
Protection Cluster Actions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Protection Cluster identifies and monitors protection risks on a regular basis. The trends and findings related to these protection risks are presented at the HCT and reported in: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Protection Analysis Updates • Global Protection Updates • Protection Severity and PiN • People exposed to protection risks

- The protection monitoring and analysis identifies the most critical protection risks and measures the severity of risks and informs on IHL/HR violations, including the JIAF 2.0 Outcome Indicator on IHL/HR violations.
- This risk identification can facilitate a HCT prioritization exercise.
- The risk identification and severity also inform the HNRP – to ensure coherence of protection analysis.

Benchmark 2. Response Planning & Implementation

The Protection Cluster provides direct assistance to affected populations, supports local actors and assists in the development of plans and strategies that aim to achieve interim and longer-term protection outcomes, including through risk identification, analysis and advocacy.

Protection Cluster Actions

- **Identifying actions that can reduce protection risks** such as: providing assistance that reduces exposure to violence; influencing duty bearers' behaviour towards affected people; supporting communities' engagement with duty bearers to claim their rights.
- **Providing advice to the HCT on avenues for advocacy to respond to protection risks, IHL and IHRL violations** such as private/confidential engagement with regional and international human rights mechanisms; negotiations with duty-bearers; providing legal advice on improving national protection systems; advising on the engagement with UN missions, peace and security actors.
- **Carrying out global public advocacy and private diplomacy activities** - thematic campaigns (e.g. roundtable discussions, events, reports etc.); Member state engagement, lobby trips to capitals; engagement with Human Rights mechanisms.
- **Engage with and provide technical support to local and national partners**, including to women and youth-led organizations, to strengthen their leadership in protection action to mitigate protection risks

Benchmark 3. Monitoring the reduction of protection risks

The Protection Cluster monitors protection risk trends and the risks severity levels at sub-national level in cluster operations.

Protection Cluster Actions

As noted under benchmark 1:

- The Protection Cluster monitors protection risks and risk severity levels based on information provided by the affected population and other actors.
- The Protection Cluster coordinates and presents to the ICCGs and HCT regular updates on protection risks to support the integration of protection in programmes and response plans.
- The Protection Cluster contributes to the development of indicators that are integrated in the HPC process to monitor actions to reduce protection risks.

5.5 Key Resources and Tools

Title	Type	Language	Year
IASC Statement on the Centrality of Protection in Humanitarian Action	Statement	ENG , FRA , ARA	2013
IASC Policy on Protection in Humanitarian Action	Policy Document	ENG , FRA , ARA , ESP	2016
Independent Review of the Implementation of the IASC Protection Policy	Review	ENG , FRA , ESP , ARA , RUS	2022
IASC Centrality of Protection Action Plan 2023-2025	Action Plan	ENG	2024
IASC Report: The Centrality of Protection in Humanitarian Action 2022	Annual Report	ENG	2023
GPC Provisional Guidance Note on HCT Protection Strategy	Guidance Document	ENG , ESP , FRA	2016
The Centrality of Protection: Practical Steps for Humanitarian Coordinators and Humanitarian Country Teams	Guidance Document	ENG	2016
The Centrality of Protection: Questions and Answers	FAQs	ENG	<i>Due to be updated 2025</i>
Benchmarks for HCT Collective Implementation of the IASC Policy	Guidance Document	ENG <i>Upon Request</i>	-
Examples of HCT Protection Strategies	Strategy	ENG <i>Upon Request</i>	-

Protection Field Coordination Toolkit – Overview of Chapters

Visit the [main toolkit landing page](#) or navigate directly to the chapters below to access more resources and information on the Protection Cluster's role in the following areas:

Protection Field Coordination Toolkit – Overview of Chapters

Chapter 1: Humanitarian Coordination Overview

- Coordination models for internal displacement, refugee response and mixed situations
- Cluster Activation Criteria and Processes

Chapter 2: Humanitarian Programme Cycle

- Elements / Principles of the HPC and the Role of the Cluster
- Flash Appeals and Pooled Funds
- Integration cross-cutting issues and the Centrality of Protection into the HPC

Chapter 3: Internal Displacement

- Internal displacement and the needs of IDPs.
- Legal frameworks and displacement

Chapter 4: Protection in Armed Conflict

- International Law/Principles
- Humanitarian protection and Protection of Civilians (PoC).
- Humanitarian Civil-Military Coordination

Chapter 5: Centrality of Protection

- The Protection Cluster's responsibilities in CoP
- The difference between mainstreaming, integration and the centrality of protection.
- IASC processes and HCT benchmarks

Chapter 6: Climate, Disaster, and Sudden Onset Emergencies

- Terminology and definitions in climate and disasters.
- Responding to sudden onset emergencies
- Actions that can be taken after a sudden onset shock (day 1-5)
- Climate and disaster preparedness and response.

Chapter 7: Durable Solutions

- Global frameworks guiding Durable Solutions
- Supporting durable solutions at strategic and operational levels.
- The GPC Durable Solutions Guidance for Protection Clusters

Chapter 8: Cluster Transition, Deactivation and Reform

- Criteria for cluster deactivation and transition
- Transition processes
- Humanitarian reform initiatives
- Area-based coordination

Chapter 9: Advocacy and Communication

- Developing advocacy strategies and action plans
- Preparing briefings to ICCG/HCT and engaging donors
- Leveraging human rights mechanisms
- Communication products and media engagement

Chapter 10: Data Responsibility and Safe Information Management

- Principles of data safeguarding, management and sharing
- Data responsibility in humanitarian action
- Safe and effective data handling

Chapter 11: Cross-Cutting Issues

- Age, Gender, Diversity and Disability Inclusion
- MHPSS
- AAP
- PSEA
- Protection Mainstreaming

Chapter 12: Understanding Protection Programmatic Approaches and Interventions

- Locally Led Responses
- Community Based Protection
- Case Management
- Service Mapping and Referrals
- Legal Aid, Law and Policy
- Cash and Protection
- Humanitarian Negotiations
- Anti-Trafficking
- Mobile and Rapid Protection Responses