



Global Protection Cluster

Strategic Advisory Group

Terms of Reference

November 2025

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1. Preamble

The Global Protection Cluster (GPC) brings together local, national and international actors advancing the protection of communities affected by humanitarian crises around the world. It is mandated by the Inter-Agency Standing Committee (IASC), led by the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), and governed by a Strategic Advisory Group (SAG). The GPC is coordinated by a Global Coordinator and serviced by a multi-partner operational team (hereafter referred to the “GPC Operations Cell”).

The SAG is the main body for the strategic governance and direction of the GPC. The SAG embodies a culture of shared and collective leadership and accountability, and ensures the inclusive, participatory, and accountable governance of the GPC.

In line with the consolidation of the Protection Cluster¹, the following Terms of Reference (ToR) lay out the purpose, functions, membership and ways of working of the SAG. They reflect the consolidation of the Protection Cluster and Areas of Responsibility (AoR)² into one Protection Cluster, ensuring representation of the full breadth of protection partners and issues within the new structure, including Child Protection (CP), Gender-Based Violence (GBV), Mine Action (MA), Housing, Land and Property (HLP) and other relevant areas.

¹ In line with decisions from the IASC Principals meeting of 17 June. See also, Emergency Relief Coordinator message of 19 June: <https://www.unocha.org/news/un-relief-chief-pushes-humanitarian-system-even-more-rooted-communities-we-serve>

² Areas of Responsibility: Child Protection; Gender-Based Violence, Mine Action, and Housing, Land and Property. Note that HLP is expected to merge into a new cluster combining Camp Coordination and Camp Management (CCCM), Shelter and HLP. During and after the merger, HLP will however remain an important area of engagement for the GPC.

These ToR should be reviewed regularly to ensure that they remain relevant or be accordingly adapted³.

2. Roles and Responsibilities

The GPC Strategic Advisory Group provides advice and guidance on the strategic direction of the Global Protection Cluster, including its Strategic Framework, priorities and workplans.

In support to the GPC Operations Cell, the SAG assumes the following roles and responsibilities:

1. Advise on the global strategic priorities for the GPC. Oversee the development, endorse and support the implementation, monitoring and reporting on the GPC Strategic Frameworks and related workplans⁴, ensuring participatory and inclusive processes.
2. Provide leadership and strategic advice to the GPC to elevate operational, advocacy and policy engagement on protection, to operationalize the 2016 IASC Protection Policy – including in coordination with the Community of Practice on Centrality of Protection and other key allies – and protection-related recommendations from peer-reviews and humanitarian mechanisms such as the Emergency Directors Group, to enhance engagement and advance implementation of collaborative frameworks with other clusters and in IASC, I/GCCG and other interagency platforms and processes, and to promote strategic engagement with human rights, nexus, peace, development and/or private sector actors as relevant.
3. Advocate for the space and prioritization of protection in humanitarian action and in reform processes such as the Humanitarian Reset and UN 80. Provide strategic support for the consolidation of the Protection Cluster, both at global and country level, including related localization efforts, fostering harmonized and collective efforts and ensuring the visibility and engagement across specialized areas of protection. The SAG should support regular reviews to assess the space for and prioritization of protection in humanitarian action, and the state of advocacy, funding and/or quality of programming across the protection sector, including in the specialized areas of CP, GBV and MA.
4. Advise on and support the mobilization of human, technical and financial resources for collective operational support to country operations and engagement in global processes to advance protection outcomes, with attention to equitable access for local actors.
5. Support the operationalization of policy, operational guidance and foundational standard-setting products⁵ to advance understanding, application and learning in protection responses at country level, reflecting the differentiated needs, approaches and commitments across all areas of protection, and endorse specific / selected global products pertaining to the GPC mandate only when endorsement for such products is required for consistency with the GPC Strategic Framework and associated workplans.
6. Advise on and support the organisation of flagship events including the annual Global Protection Forum and protection coordinators' conference, as well as ad-hoc events on specific country situations and thematic issues that require specific attention.
7. Advise and decide on the activation and deactivation of bodies aimed at supporting the GPC Operations Cell, including working groups and task teams, endorse their Terms of Reference and workplans, and monitor progress against planned objectives.

³ At minima, aligning with the SAG election cycle (i.e. every 2 years). The SAG can propose more regular reviews if considered critical.

⁴ Note that a light review of the current Strategic Framework of GPC shall be conducted in line with the consolidation of the Protection Cluster, including integrating existing strategies of the areas of responsibility. Similarly, the 2025-26 workplan of the SAG should be revised/updated or replaced in 2026.

⁵ This includes but is not limited to supporting the implementation of foundational standards such as the [Child Protection Minimum Standards](#) and the [GBV Minimum Standards](#) and Guidelines developed by standard-setting bodies outside of the GPC such as the Alliance for Child Protection in Humanitarian Action, as well as the various guidance, toolkits and frameworks, such as the [Protection Analytical Framework](#), developed by the GPC Operations Cell, SAG members and partners.

3. Membership and Composition

Membership is open to (local and international) non-governmental / civil society organizations, networks / alliances, and United Nations entities actively engaged in protection work (at operational, advocacy and/or policy level). Membership is open to non-protection actors, providing they can demonstrate their commitments and contributions to advancing protection outcomes and have institutional protection focal points.

Organizations can be granted observer status⁶. Observers are invited to participate in all SAG meetings and related processes but do not take part in processes requiring endorsement.

The SAG is composed of 20 members and 3 Observers:

1 GPC Global Coordinator (Permanent member and chair) ⁷
5 UN agencies, including: • UNHCR as the Protection Cluster Lead Agency (Permanent member) • UNICEF as global Provider of Last Resort for Child Protection (Permanent member) • UNFPA as global Provider of Last Resort for Gender-Based Violence (Permanent member) • 2 additional UN agencies (Rotating members)⁸
10 NGOs (Rotating members), including one to be elected as SAG co-chair: • 5 International NGOs • 5 National / Local NGOs (including women-led, youth-led, IDP-led, persons with disabilities and other relevant organizations)
2 Networks / Alliances (Rotating members)
2 country Protection Cluster coordinator / coordination team members (Rotating members)
3 Observers: <i>International Committee of the Red Cross, OCHA and CCCM/Shelter/HLP Cluster</i> ⁹ .

The SAG composition should ensure a balanced representation of the different types of protection actors and expertise (including child protection, gender-based violence and mine action), as well as regional distribution. This is to ensure that the SAG reflects the full breadth of protection and the diversity of the protection community, maximizing its relevance and effectiveness.

4. Mandate, commitment and accountability

Representation

Each SAG member organization will nominate one senior staff (i.e. staff with min. 10 years' experience in the field of protection¹⁰) as their main representative, and an alternate who can step in when the main representative is unable to attend or engage in SAG meetings / processes.

Mandate length

Elected members serve a (2) two-year mandate as volunteers contributing their time and expertise without compensation or advantage. Rotational members can be re-elected once.

⁶ In line with the Terms and Definitions document (2023) of the Global Cluster Coordination Group, observers are national or international organizations which may engage but do not formally participate in clusters due their mandate or independent nature of their functioning, as well as entities which are not operational in protection but can bring a unique perspective or expertise.

⁷ The GPC coordinator will be supported by the Deputy Coordinator and the leads for Child Protection, Gender-Based Violence and Mine Action within the consolidated Protection Cluster, who are also invited to attend the SAG meetings.

⁸ Expertise and capacity to represent the Mine Action community and the UN Inter-Agency Coordination Group on Mine Action (IACG-MA) will be considered among the UN rotating members.

⁹ HLP focal point / technical lead within the new cluster merging Shelter, Camp Coordination and Camp Management, and Housing, Land and Property (final name of the cluster pending) to ensure continued efforts on protection-related aspects of HLP.

¹⁰ This applies for international organisations / entities, while more flexibility shall be given to representatives of local and national organisations.

Expectations and conditions

Members are expected to commit to an average of 1 day per month to meet SAG responsibilities (including meeting attendance and regular contributions).

Membership is conditional on attending and actively participating in all meetings as well as regular and timely contribution to the work of the SAG and the GPC. SAG members are expected to consult internally and/or within their networks / constituencies in preparation for their SAG engagement.

The SAG may suspend or remove a member in the case of repeated or critical failure to carry out the above (by consensus, or if needed, through a vote). SAG members may also resign from the SAG by providing a 2-month written notice to the GPC Coordinator. In such cases, the GPC Operations Cell will proceed with a call for expression of interest and the election of a new member.

Accountability

SAG members are accountable to the roles and responsibilities detailed in section 2 above. SAG members are also accountable to their own constituencies and as such, should actively seek to consult with, represent the views of and report back to their constituencies.

Upon being elected, SAG members shall sign a no conflict-of-interest statement to ensure that they perform their tasks in accordance with the GPC core principles.

Support for elected local / national organizations

International members of the SAG and the GPC Operations Cell commit to provide adequate support to the national / local members to facilitate and enhance their participation. Specific actions and support shall be defined upon appointment of the SAG.

5. Eligibility and Election

Eligibility criteria

Organizations wishing to become members of the SAG must demonstrate operational, advocacy or policy engagement to advance protection outcomes in country operations, including as Humanitarian Programme Cycle partner, and/or at the global level (directly or through its membership).

Organizations' demonstrated leadership and/or participation in strategic initiatives, such the humanitarian-peace-development nexus, durable solutions for internally displaced persons and localization of humanitarian action will be considered as added value.

Selection committee

The Selection Committee consists of the GPC Global Coordinator and the current co-chair of the SAG. In line with the consolidation of the Protection Cluster, the Selection Committee will consult with UNHCR as Cluster Lead Agency and UNICEF, UNFPA and UNMAS as the global Providers of Last Resort for CP, GBV and MA to ensure a balanced selection of members.

Standard Operating Procedures

Standard Operating Procedures for the election and selection process are available in the annex.

Election of the SAG co-chair

Only NGO members (local, national and international) are eligible to co-chair the SAG. NGO members can present their interest to co-chair upon being elected. The selection will be based on a vote among SAG NGO members at the first regular SAG meeting, with the decision announced during the meeting. The co-chair serves a 2-year mandate, as other SAG members. Following the

conclusion of their mandate, the co-chair will remain a SAG member for one additional term (i.e. not subject to election) to promote continuity and support the incoming co-chair.

6. Ways of working

Chairing and secretariat

The SAG is chaired by the GPC Global Coordinator and is co-chaired by an NGO member. The co-chairs provide oversight and leadership of the SAG, lead preparations for and conduct meetings, and foster collaboration among SAG members, and with relevant external actors.

The GPC Deputy Coordinator, with support of the GPC Operations Cell, ensures the Secretariat functions of the SAG, including technical, organizational and administrative support.

Meetings

Regular SAG meetings shall take place at minima on a quarterly basis, with the annual plan of meetings disseminated at the start of the year. Regular meeting agendas and documents shall be shared 10 days prior to the meeting. Each regular meeting is expected to last for two (2) hours.

Regular SAG meetings focus on strategic discussions and action points. Progress on action points should be reported on at the next SAG meeting. Ad-hoc/extra-ordinary meetings may be called upon request from a SAG member or by the co-chairs. Non-SAG members may be invited by the SAG co-chairs to participate in and/or present during meetings, providing they add specific value to discussions relating to agenda items.

Quorum for participation in regular SAG meetings will be 75% of the members. Ad-hoc/extra-ordinary meetings do not require quorum.

An annual/biennial retreat (depending on financial resources) shall take place within the 2-year mandate of the SAG. Dates and length for the retreat should be indicated at least 6 months in advance to SAG members, in order to facilitate preparations and any travel arrangements.

Endorsement processes

The SAG is an advisory body but is also expected to endorse / decide on matters of strategic significance – specifically the Strategic Frameworks, workplans and priorities of the GPC – as well as governance issues of importance to the functioning of the GPC. In such cases, the primary mode of decision-making for the SAG is consensus (providing quorum for participation is reached). Only in exceptional circumstances, the SAG may resort to direct voting, using the simple majority rule, with each member having an equal voting right (observers do not vote).

Information sharing

To facilitate regular information sharing between SAG members and to ensure meetings can focus on strategic discussions and actions, the GPC Operations Cell shall share written updates on most salient developments on a regular basis with the SAG members (and any other relevant entity identified by the SAG).

Languages

English proficiency is required as the primary working language of the SAG. All members shall be able to understand and read in English. Efforts will be made to facilitate interpretation in other languages during regular SAG meetings, and where possible, translation of official documents, to facilitate participation and engagement of local actors.

7. Bodies supporting the GPC

The SAG is responsible for the activation (and deactivation) of bodies (e.g. working groups, task teams, communities of practice) aimed at supporting the efforts and the work of the GPC Operations Cell and SAG.

To ensure a streamlined global structure, the SAG ensures that these bodies are established based on needs, priorities and requests emanating from country operations.

Further details are available in Annex 2.

Annex 1. Standard Operating Procedures for the election of the Strategic Advisory Group

1. Call for Expressions of Interest (EOI)

The GPC Operations Cell will send a Call for Expressions of Interest (EOI) to the Global Protection Cluster members and all other relevant actors to encourage applications for SAG membership.

The submissions of EOI by interested parties must be formally signed / endorsed by the organization.

The EOI should be less than 3 pages and should detail the following:

- Their interest in becoming a SAG member,
- Demonstrating fulfilment of the eligibility criteria,
- What they would bring to the SAG,
- Highlighting their contributions to the GPC and/or AoRs so far (if applicable),
- Presenting their planned contributions for the duration of their term (i.e. 2 years), including possible technical, human or financial resources,
- Mentioning who will be their representative and alternate in the SAG,
- Highlighting if they apply as an organisation with expertise in a specific workstream within protection (e.g. child protection, gender-based violence, mine action, others).

Any EOI received past the set deadline, incomplete, or without formal signature will be rejected.

Only organizations fulfilling the eligibility criteria will be confirmed by the GPC Selection Committee as eligible candidates for the assessment.

NB: the outgoing NGO co-chair organization is automatically retained as a SAG member for one more term to promote continuity and support the incoming co-chair. They are not required to submit an EOI.

2. Eligibility

Membership is open to organizations. Only non-governmental / civil society organizations, networks / alliances, and United Nations entities may apply for membership of the SAG. Membership is open to non-protection actors, providing that they can demonstrate their commitments / contributions to advancing protection outcomes and have institutional protection focal points.

Organizations applying for membership of the SAG must demonstrate operational, advocacy or policy engagement to advance protection outcomes in country operations, including as Humanitarian Programme Cycle partner, and/or at the global level (directly or through its membership).

3. Review of Expressions of Interest and Selection of Members

The review and selection process are led by the GPC Selection Committee.

Selection Committee

The Selection Committee consists of the GPC Global Coordinator and the current co-chair of the SAG. In line with the consolidation of the Protection Cluster, the Selection Committee will consult with UNHCR as Cluster Lead Agency, and with UNICEF, UNFPA and UNMAS as global Providers of Last Resort for CP, GBV and MA to ensure a balanced selection of members.

Principles for selection

The selection of the new SAG members will be based on the following principles:

- Strength of the Eol submission of the candidate organizations
- Ensuring a balanced representation between the type of actors and presence, and engagement at global, regional and local levels
- Ensuring a balanced representation based on the technical expertise (including in specialized areas of protection including child protection, gender-based violence and mine action), value-add and complementarity between members
- Ensuring a diversity between operational, advocacy or policy engagement on advancing protection outcomes

4. Timeline

- The GPC launches the Call of Expression of Interest (Eol). Interested partners send their applications. [3 weeks]
- The GPC Selection Committee, in consultation with UNHCR, UNICEF, UNFPA and UNMAS, reviews the list of applying organizations and establish the consensus list of selected candidate organizations. [2 weeks]
- The GPC Coordinator share the list of selected members to the SAG for information and sends a global message to announce the new SAG members. Separate messages are sent to all non-selected members.
- First meeting of the new SAG [Within 45 days of the announcement of the election results]

Annex 2. Bodies supporting the GPC

The SAG is responsible for the activation (and deactivation) of bodies (e.g. working groups, task teams, communities of practice) aimed at supporting the efforts and the work of the GPC Operations Cell and SAG.

To ensure a streamlined global structure, the SAG ensures that these bodies are established based on needs, priorities and requests emanating from country operations.

Role

These bodies are expected to provide support to the GPC Operations Cell and SAG with strategic operational, advocacy and policy engagement, developing policy, guidance and tools, providing capacity support to field protection clusters, and with any other tasks deemed strategic or critical to the SAG. Their establishment and focus should align with the objectives of the GPC Strategic Frameworks and contribute to the outputs / outcomes of the GPC workplans.

Activation and deactivation

All bodies are established by / activated upon endorsement from the SAG.

SAG members, as well as non-SAG members protection actors, can submit a request for the activation of a body, accompanied by a concept note, clearly specifying how the establishment of the body responds to the needs, priorities and requests from field operations and how this body complements and collaborates with the GPC Operations Cell and all other GPC related bodies. Requests must be made to the GPC Coordinator and SAG co-chair, who are responsible to present it to the SAG for discussion and decision.

All bodies must be considered as time bound by default. Formal deactivation of bodies will be taken by the SAG (during meetings or in writing) and communicated by the GPC Operations Cell.

Types of Bodies and Accountability

Two main types of bodies are considered:

- a. Bodies that are activated to support critical, core functions of the GPC and/or achieve specific tasks (e.g. working groups, task teams, etc.) in line with the GPC Strategic Frameworks and workplans. These bodies have specific Terms of Reference and workplans that are validated by the SAG and must report to the SAG on a quarterly basis. Their continuation or deactivation is contingent on their time-bound nature and ability to deliver on their objectives to respond to the needs, priorities and requests emanating from country operations.
- b. Communities of Practice which are established to foster exchange and learning on specific issues, focusing on information-sharing and peer-learning, distinct from the specific action / output orientation of the other bodies mentioned above. These bodies have specific Terms of Reference validated by the SAG but do not need to develop workplans. Communities of Practice must report to and be reviewed by the SAG on an annual basis, to ensure they continue to add value to the GPC and its constituency.

Membership and Ways of Working

Membership and ways of working for each of the body are to be defined by specific Terms of Reference, with the guidance and support of the GPC Operations Cell.

Each body is led by one or more organisations, which is/are responsible and accountable for delivering on identified objectives, and reporting to the SAG on behalf of the group/body.

Any products produced by the different bodies and aimed at being shared with external audiences shall be brought to the SAG for final endorsement.