



Ethiopia Protection Cluster



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# **ETHIOPIA PROTECTION CLUSTER**

## **STRATEGY 2026 – 2028**



**"Everyone in Ethiopia, especially those affected by conflict, disasters, and climate change, is protected, resilient, and supported through timely and accessible protection services. Communities should experience reduced exposure to violence, exploitation, and exclusion, empowered with greater resilience."**

## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The mission of the Ethiopia National Protection Cluster and its Technical Working Groups (TWGs) is to reinforce a protective environment in Ethiopia, ensuring the safeguarding of people, respect of their rights, and the finding of solutions in accordance with international law. We aim to guarantee a well-coordinated, effective, and principled approach to protection preparedness and response, with protection as the centre of in all humanitarian action and acknowledged as essential in the nexus of development and peace.

This strategy encompasses and is informed by the work and the strategic directions of Child Protection, Gender-Based Violence, Mine Action, and Housing, Land and Property. The strategy forms the basis of the Cluster's coordinated response to the complex protection crisis in Ethiopia. It provides direction to the membership of the Protection Cluster and the wider humanitarian community.

It is informed and guided by the [Global Protection Cluster Strategic Framework 2020-2024](#), [the 2013 IASC Statement on the Centrality of Protection in Humanitarian Action](#), and the [Guiding Principles on Internal Displacement](#), [IASC policy on Protection in Humanitarian Action](#).

The strategy prioritizes strengthening coordinated protection responses in high-risk areas, reinforcing national and community-based protection systems, enhancing evidence-based advocacy, and promoting safe, voluntary, and sustainable durable solutions. It aims to balance immediate response with prevention and longer-term systems strengthening.

## PROTECTION CONTEXT AND PREVAILING RISKS

Ethiopia continues to experience a complex and protracted protection crisis, shaped by decades of political and ethnic tensions, recurrent conflict and climatic shocks. The reappearance of violent intercommunal and insurgent conflict across multiple regions have created persistent instability, with overlapping crises that undermine civilian protection and obstruct durable solutions for millions of displaced people. Vulnerable groups, including older persons, persons with disabilities, and women and children are disproportionately affected, facing heightened risks of exclusion, exploitation, and barriers to access critical humanitarian assistance.

In **Amhara**, escalating conflict and ongoing emergency measures have driven large-scale displacement and heightened protection risks. In **Oromia**, sustained military operations and intercommunal tensions continue to cause widespread displacement and strain services. In **Tigray**, despite the cessation of major hostilities, fragile security conditions and unresolved territorial issues persist, limiting durable solutions for IDPs. In **Somali Region**, recurrent drought alongside border and communal tensions remains the primary driver of displacement. In **Gambella**, cross-border violence, intercommunal conflict, and natural hazards continue to trigger instability and displacement. In **Benishangul-Gumuz**, armed group activity and unresolved political and intercommunal grievances fuel ongoing insecurity and periodic displacement. In **South Ethiopia**, governance changes, intercommunal violence, and natural disasters have created volatile conditions and repeated displacement. In **Afar**, the combined impacts of past conflict, climate shocks, and border tensions continue to drive chronic displacement and hinder sustainable returns.

Across all of these regions, protection risks are shaped by a combination of political marginalization, military operations in response to dissent, weak accountability mechanisms, and community-level grievances that remain largely unresolved. The proliferation of arms, fragmentation of armed groups, and weakened civilian infrastructure contribute to the widespread impunity and deepening humanitarian needs. These factors exacerbate vulnerabilities to violence, exploitation, and restricted access to essential services, including protection.



**Attacks on civilians and civilian infrastructure** continue to threaten lives, disrupt access to essential services, and force people into unstable environments where safety cannot be guaranteed. These attacks undermine community resilience, contribute to prolonged displacement, and heighten fear among affected populations. Civilians also face **unlawful impediments to freedom of movement**, including physical barriers, checkpoints, and social or administrative restrictions that block safe access to services. Such limitations often result in involuntary displacement and exacerbate vulnerabilities, particularly for those lacking documentation or legal protection. **Discrimination and stigmatization, including denial of resources, opportunities, services, and humanitarian assistance**, further compound risks, disproportionately affecting people based on displacement status, age, gender, disability, or ethnicity.

**Gender-based violence**, including child, early, and forced marriage, remains widespread, with insecurity and the breakdown of community safety nets exposing women and girls to heightened threats of physical, sexual, psychological, and economic harm. **Child and forced family separation** continues to undermine traditional protection networks, leaving children, older persons, and other dependents especially vulnerable to exploitation, recruitment, school dropout, and other serious harms that erode the capacity of families and communities to stay intact.

In addition to conflict-related displacement, climate-induced floods and droughts continue to drive widespread, cyclical humanitarian needs and severe food insecurity across affected regions of Ethiopia. At the same time, high inflation and volatile prices are eroding household purchasing power, forcing many vulnerable families to adopt harmful coping strategies to survive.

Last but not least, **humanitarian access remains** constrained in conflict-affected areas due to insecurity, bureaucratic impediments, and damaged infrastructure. Fragmented security dynamics, limited peace agreement implementation, and recurring climate hazards continue to disrupt aid operations and hinder safe, voluntary, and dignified returns for displaced communities.

#### **CLUSTER COORDINATION STRUCTURE:**

1. At the national level the Protection Cluster overseeing the cluster architecture from Addis Ababa is led by **UNHCR** and co-lead by the **Danish Refugee Council**.
2. Under Ethiopia's new disaster and humanitarian coordination proclamation, the Cluster is positioned firmly within a **government-led architecture** that emphasizes national ownership and accountability. At the national level, the Protection Cluster operates in joint leadership with the Ministry of Women and Social Affairs with an oversight of Disaster Risk Management Commission (DRMC).
3. At the sub-national level, there are currently **8 regional-level Clusters** present in key displacement and high-risk locations. Regional cluster engagements are embedded within **Regional Bureaus** (BoWSA, BoSAR or BoWCA).
4. A **joint Strategic Advisory Group** at the national level, inclusive of TWG representatives, provides oversight of emerging issues and provides checks and balances for the running of the Cluster.
5. The Cluster oversees five different **Technical Working Groups** namely GBV, Child Protection, HLP, Mine Action, and General Protection (managed by the National Protection Cluster). Mechanisms will be strengthened to ensure systematic coordination across TWGs, to address overlapping risks and ensure integrated responses.
6. The National Protection Cluster is supported by an **Inclusion Specialist** who advises on inclusive programming and works closely with PSEA, AAP, and Gender focal points to ensure coordinated and mainstreamed approaches.
7. The National Protection Cluster Coordination Team participates in **Humanitarian Country Team** meetings both as an observer, as well as with regular presentations on protection advocacy.



## PROTECTION CLUSTER OBJECTIVES

**Five overarching objectives** with tailored sub-areas of focus guide collective efforts across the Protection Cluster and TWGs. The cluster prioritizes objectives based on criteria that includes; relevance of an intervention to the Cluster's role, capacity, and mandate, gravity of need, and the context in Ethiopia at the time of strategy development.

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### **Strategic Objective 1: Strengthen access to quality, equitable, inclusive and coordinated protection services.**

*Access to essential protection services is vital to reducing harm and supporting recovery in vulnerable populations. Coordinated delivery ensures that interventions are efficient, complementary, and responsive to the specific needs of different groups.*

#### **Ensure timely, coordinated, and equitable access to essential protection services**

- ◆ Prioritize underserved and hard-to-reach areas through mobile and community-based service models.
- ◆ Promote equitable access by addressing barriers related to gender, disability, age, language, and geographic location, as well as landmine and ERW contamination.
- ◆ Strengthen referral pathways to ensure safe, confidential, and timely access to specialized services.

#### **Improve quality and coverage of frontline service provision**

- ◆ Strengthen community-based protection mechanisms as first-line responders.
- ◆ Ensure appropriate staffing levels and technical expertise in locations with high protection needs.

#### **Institutionalize survivor-centered and rights-based approaches**

- ◆ Ensure all CP, GBV, and MA interventions adhere to survivor-centered principles, including confidentiality, informed consent, safety, and non-discrimination.
- ◆ Promote dignity, agency, and meaningful participation of affected individuals in service design and delivery.
- ◆ Integrate psychosocial support and legal assistance into protection responses where appropriate.

#### **Promote integrated, cross-sectoral protection outcomes**

- ◆ Link protection services with cash assistance, shelter, health, education, WASH, and livelihoods interventions to address underlying vulnerabilities.
- ◆ Strengthen protection mainstreaming across sectors to reduce exposure to harm.
- ◆ Ensure protection monitoring informs sectoral programming adjustments.
- ◆ Support multi-sector case conferencing for complex cases requiring holistic interventions.
- ◆ Ensure inclusion of PSEA awareness raising and training in all protection services.

#### **Advocate for safe access and civilian displacement environments**

- ◆ Advocate for the preservation of the civilian and humanitarian character of IDP sites.
- ◆ Support site governance structures that enhance safety, accountability, and community participation.
- ◆ Advocate for the safety and security of frontline service providers operating in high-risk environments.

#### **Expected Outcomes**

- ✓ Affected populations have equitable and timely access to coordinated, high-quality protection services.
- ✓ Referral pathways are functional, confidential, and survivor-centered.
- ✓ Persons with specific needs experience improved safety and inclusion.
- ✓ Displacement sites and service delivery environments are safer and uphold humanitarian principles.

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**Strategic Objective 2: Ensure that IDPs, returnees, and affected communities achieve safe, dignified, and sustainable durable solutions through rights-based, conflict-sensitive, and resilience-oriented approaches integrated into national and local development frameworks.**

*Durable solutions require a comprehensive approach that addresses the root causes of displacement and fosters long-term stability. Integrating conflict-sensitive and resilience-oriented strategies helps communities rebuild livelihoods and social cohesion. This will be supported by the Protection Cluster and partners through the following areas of focus:*

**Promote voluntary, informed, and context-specific durable solutions**

- ◆ Ensure returns, local integration, or relocation are voluntary, safe, and based on informed decision-making.
- ◆ Integrate AGD-sensitive approaches into all durable solutions programming.
- ◆ Ensure AAP mechanisms feed into decisions on return, relocation or integration.
- ◆ Align durable solutions planning with multi-sectoral interventions (livelihoods, shelter, WASH, education, health) to address barriers to sustainability.
- ◆ Conduct regular protection risk analyses to ensure solutions do not expose populations to renewed harm, including secondary displacement.
- ◆ Ensure safety from landmines and ERW as a prerequisite for return, integration, or relocation through coordinated mine action and risk mitigation.

**Strengthen social cohesion, conflict prevention, and resilience**

- ◆ Support community reconciliation initiatives and dialogue platforms that rebuild trust between displaced and host communities.
- ◆ Promote transitional justice and community-based dispute resolution mechanisms.
- ◆ Integrate conflict sensitivity across solutions programming to prevent exacerbating tensions.
- ◆ Strengthen early warning and early action systems to mitigate risks of renewed displacement.
- ◆ Advance mine action and explosive remnants of war clearance as part of resilience and recovery efforts, removing physical and psychological reminders of war.

**Secure housing, land, property (HLP) rights and legal documentation**

- ◆ Facilitate access to civil documentation (ID cards, birth certificates, land certificates) necessary for accessing services and exercising rights.
- ◆ Strengthen HLP restitution and dispute resolution mechanisms.
- ◆ Advocate for policies that protect tenure security for returnees and locally integrating populations.
- ◆ Support legal aid and awareness campaigns on HLP rights, particularly for women and marginalized groups.
- ◆ Promote collaboration between customary and formal justice systems where applicable.

**Expand partnerships within national and local development frameworks**

- ◆ Engage development actors and international financial institutions to bridge hum.-development gaps.
- ◆ Foster private sector engagement to expand livelihood opportunities and economic reintegration.
- ◆ Promote localization by strengthening the leadership of national NGOs and community-based organizations in durable solutions processes.

**Expected Outcomes**

- ✓ IDPs and returnees make voluntary, informed decisions regarding their preferred durable solution.
- ✓ Durable solutions processes reduce protection risks and prevent renewed displacement.
- ✓ Housing, land, property rights, and civil documentation barriers are systematically addressed.
- ✓ Social cohesion and conflict mitigation mechanisms contribute to long-term stability.
- ✓ Durable solutions are embedded within national development systems and supported by multi-stakeholder partnerships.
- ✓ Affected communities actively shape and monitor durable solutions interventions.



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### **Strategic Objective 3: Strengthen the capacity of government, partners, and communities to design and implement protection programming that ensures the safety, dignity, and inclusivity of affected populations.**

*Building the skills and knowledge of all actors is critical to delivering consistent, inclusive, and effective programming in an environment of increased Government ownership of protection work. Empowered communities and strengthened institutions enhance sustainability and responsiveness.*

#### **Enhance government leadership and technical capacity**

- ◆ Strengthen government capacity in protection coordination at national and sub-national levels.
- ◆ Provide technical support on inclusive humanitarian response, protection mainstreaming, and durable solutions frameworks.
- ◆ Build institutional capacity in data collection, analysis, protection monitoring, and information management systems.
- ◆ Support development and implementation of accountability mechanisms aligned with international protection standards, including AAP principles, community feedback management and participatory monitoring.

#### **Empower communities and Community Care Coalitions**

- ◆ Strengthen community-based protection mechanisms to identify, prevent, mitigate, and respond to protection risks.
- ◆ Build the capacity of Community Care Coalitions and representative groups to participate meaningfully in planning, implementation, and monitoring processes.
- ◆ Promote inclusive community leadership structures that reflect AGD and diversity considerations.

#### **Build partner capacity for inclusive, people-centered programming**

- ◆ Provide mentoring on protection principles, inclusive programming, and rights-based approaches.
- ◆ Strengthen partner capacity in case management, referral systems, HLP, child protection, GBV prevention and response, and other technical areas.
- ◆ Enhance coordination skills and inter-agency collaboration at cluster and sub-cluster levels.
- ◆ Support partners in developing evidence-based proposals and resource mobilization strategies.
- ◆ Promote localization by strengthening national NGOs and community-based organizations as key protection actors.

#### **Expected Outcomes**

- ✓ Government institutions demonstrate improved leadership and technical capacity in protection coordination and programming.
- ✓ Communities actively identify and address protection risks and influence decision-making processes.
- ✓ Humanitarian and development partners deliver higher-quality, inclusive, and accountable protection programming.
- ✓ Protection systems are progressively institutionalized within national frameworks.
- ✓ Capacity-building efforts contribute to sustainable, nexus-oriented approaches that bridge humanitarian response and long-term development.

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**Strategic Objective 4: Strengthen comprehensive protection data systems to support evidence-based analysis, informed decision-making, and effective response.**

*Accurate and timely data is the foundation for evidence-based protection programming and resource allocation. Harmonized information systems allow stakeholders to identify trends, monitor risks, and prioritize interventions effectively.*

**Harmonize and strengthen protection data collection and management**

- ◆ Develop and implement standardized tools for protection risk analysis, service mapping, and capacity mapping.
- ◆ Ensure consistent use of sex-, age-, and disability-disaggregated data (SADD) and inclusion of other diversity markers.
- ◆ Strengthen dedicated IM support within sub-national structures and Government counterparts.
- ◆ Improve data quality assurance mechanisms, including verification protocols and ethical data management standards.
- ◆ Promote secure data storage and responsible data-sharing practices.
- ◆ Develop harmonized outcome and impact indicators aligned with global protection standards.

**Integrate protection into multi-sectoral and displacement tracking systems**

- ◆ Collaborate with EDRMC and other multi-sectoral assessment systems to strengthen protection indicators within broader datasets.
- ◆ Advocate for systematic inclusion of protection risk questions in joint needs assessments.
- ◆ Promote interoperability between protection data systems and other sectoral IM platforms.
- ◆ Ensure protection analysis informs pooled fund allocations and durable solutions frameworks.

**Build technical capacity in data collection, analysis, and use**

- ◆ Provide training to government counterparts, partners, and community actors on ethical data collection, risk analysis, and interpretation.
- ◆ Strengthen capacity in protection monitoring methodologies and evidence-based programming.
- ◆ Develop guidance on cash-for-protection programming, incl. risk analysis and monitoring frameworks.
- ◆ Promote community-based data collection mechanisms that enhance ownership and accountability.

**Systematize protection monitoring and feedback mechanisms**

- ◆ Standardize protection monitoring tools and update SOPs to ensure coherence across partners and geographic areas.
- ◆ Establish regular protection trend analysis and reporting cycles at national and sub-national levels.
- ◆ Integrate PSEA, gender, age, disability inclusion and AAP elements in protection monitoring tools.
- ◆ Include women-led organizations, older persons' associations, and organizations of persons with disabilities in protection monitoring design, data collection and validation.

**Expected Outcomes**

- ✓ Protection actors generate timely, high-quality, and disaggregated data that informs programming and advocacy.
- ✓ Protection risks and service gaps are systematically identified and addressed.
- ✓ Government and partners demonstrate improved capacity in data analysis and evidence-based planning.
- ✓ Monitoring systems track outcomes and inform adaptive programming.
- ✓ Resource allocation is increasingly guided by standardized, data-driven prioritization.



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**Strategic Objective 5: Strengthen inclusive and rights-based advocacy and communication channels that amplify the voices of affected populations, inform joint advocacy with key stakeholders across technical areas of expertise, and support resource mobilization.**

*Effective advocacy and communication are essential to ensure protection priorities are understood and acted upon by stakeholders. Strengthening these mechanisms also builds trust with communities and ensures their perspectives inform decision-making. This will be supported by the Protection Cluster and partners through the following areas of focus:*

**Develop and disseminate evidence-based information products**

- ◆ Produce regular data-driven reports, dashboards, infographics, and briefings that highlight protection trends, gaps, and community perspectives.
- ◆ Ensure products are tailored for different audiences, incl. donors, HCT and pooled fund managers.
- ◆ Systematically integrate community-generated data and feedback into advocacy materials to ensure affected population's perspectives shape decision making.

**Promote a rights-based approach and empower communities**

- ◆ Support platforms for affected populations, including IDPs with specific needs and their representatives, to voice their priorities and participate in decision-making processes.
- ◆ Integrate awareness raising for communities on their rights and available advocacy channels.
- ◆ Document and amplify community testimonies to inform policy and resource allocation.

**Mainstream Protection and Accountability to Affected Populations (AAP) across sectors**

- ◆ Ensure Protection and AAP principles are systematically integrated into sectoral strategies and activities.
- ◆ Participate in inter-cluster coordination mechanisms (ICCG, HCT, cluster-level fora) to advocate for protection priorities and influence joint planning.
- ◆ Monitor compliance with protection standards and provide technical guidance to sectors on inclusive programming.

**Maintain inclusive communication channels and advocacy materials**

- ◆ Design and distribute communication materials that are accessible, culturally sensitive, and in local languages.
- ◆ Utilize multiple communication platforms, including community radio, SMS alerts, and in-person forums, to reach marginalized groups.
- ◆ Establish two-way communication mechanisms that allow communities to provide feedback, report concerns, and influence advocacy priorities.

**Expected Outcomes:**

- ✓ Protection priorities are widely understood and addressed by donors, authorities, and humanitarian actors.
- ✓ Affected populations, particularly vulnerable groups, are empowered to participate meaningfully in advocacy and decision-making.
- ✓ Evidence-based advocacy contributes to more effective resource mobilization and programmatic responses.
- ✓ Coordination mechanisms and sectoral responses are strengthened through mainstreamed Protection and AAP principles.
- ✓ Trust between communities, protection actors, and other stakeholders is increased through transparent, inclusive communication.



## KEY PRINCIPLES GUIDING THE INTERVENTIONS

The Protection Cluster's strategy adheres to key protection principles to ensure a comprehensive and effective approach including but not limited to:

- ◆ **Do No Harm:** Ensure that humanitarian actions do not inadvertently cause harm to affected populations and actively work to minimize unintended negative consequences.
- ◆ **Non-Discrimination and Impartiality:** Provide assistance and protection based solely on need, without discrimination based on ethnicity, gender, religion, disability, age, or other status.
- ◆ **People-Centered Approach:** Engage affected communities meaningfully in decision-making processes, recognizing their agency and empowering them to contribute to their own protection and well-being.
- ◆ **Gender Sensitivity:** Address the distinct protection risks and needs of different genders, promote gender equality, and prevent and respond to gender-based violence.
- ◆ **Prevention of Sexual Exploitation and Abuse (PSEA):** Implement robust measures to prevent, mitigate, and respond to sexual exploitation and abuse by humanitarian actors, ensuring safe and confidential reporting mechanisms that are tailored to community preferences.
- ◆ **Protection Mainstreaming:** Integrate protection principles across all sectors by ensuring safety, dignity, meaningful access, accountability, and participation in all humanitarian interventions.
- ◆ **Accountability to Affected Populations (AAP):** Establish transparent, accessible, and responsive feedback and complaints mechanisms to ensure interventions align with agreed standards and community priorities, with AAP mainstreamed across all interventions.
- ◆ **Human Rights-Based Approach:** Align protection efforts with international human rights standards, promote dignity and fundamental rights, and support accountability of duty-bearers.
- ◆ **Best Interests of the Child:** Prioritize the best interests of children in all protection activities, recognizing their specific vulnerabilities and capacities.
- ◆ **Conflict Sensitivity:** Design and implement protection activities with a strong understanding of conflict dynamics to avoid exacerbating tensions and to contribute to social cohesion where possible.
- ◆ **Localisation:** Strengthen the leadership, capacity, and meaningful participation of local and national actors in protection responses, promoting sustainable and contextually grounded approaches. Commit to ensuring that local NGOs and community-based organizations play a central role in coordination, with targets for them to co-lead sub-national clusters and technical working groups.

## MONITORING AND EVALUATION

To ensure accountability and constant learning, the Cluster will use several tools to monitor, evaluate and learn, and provide timely and accurate information on the scope of Protection Cluster interventions. The impact will be measured through the following tools:

- a) **Field Monitoring Visits:** The Cluster will conduct monitoring visits to provide technical oversight, feedback and assess the quality of the PC activities.
- b) **Cluster Coordination Performance Monitoring:** The Cluster will review the level of satisfaction of partners and the performance of the Cluster based on 6 core functions of the clusters by conducting a performance monitoring survey annually.
- c) **Strategic Review:** PC will undertake mid-term and end-term review to evaluate the achievements and assess lessons learnt for the 2026 - 2028 strategy.



To track progress with the implementation of this strategic plan, the Protection Cluster coordination team is required to present an annual update and review to the Strategic Advisory Group in the last quarter of each year. This annual review will include indicator tracking for progress achieved, lessons learnt, challenges and recommendations.

## RISK MITIGATION

Risks to the Protection Cluster are identified through consultations with co-leads, Technical Working Groups, and the SAG, as well as counterparts at global level. The SAG is able to regularly review risks and mitigation measures, ensuring that coordination remains flexible, evidence-based, and responsive despite access challenges or operational and funding constraints. The Cluster recognises the following risks as particularly relevant for the operating environment in the implementation period of this Strategy:

- ◆ **Restrictions on access** or **regulatory changes** could limit the Cluster's ability to coordinate with partners, advocate for protection priorities, and effectively influence response planning.
- ◆ **Insecurity, localized conflict, or shifting operational environments** could disrupt service delivery, delay durable solutions processes, and increase protection risks for affected populations.
- ◆ **Climate-related shocks** and **natural hazards** could trigger new displacement, compound vulnerabilities, and strain existing response capacities.
- ◆ **Delays or gaps in protection data collection**, analysis, or information-sharing may hinder evidence-based decision-making and timely response prioritization.
- ◆ **Insufficient or unpredictable funding** could constrain the scale, coverage, and sustainability of protection programming.

## ANNEXES

1. MoU Protection Cluster Coordination 2025-2027 - DRC & UNHCR
2. Cluster Simplification and Adapting In-Country Coordination
3. Protection Cluster Organigramme