GUIDANCE NOTE- PROTECTION CLUSTER TARGET PRIORITIZATION MATRIX FOR 2027 HPC

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Global Protection Cluster

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1. Introduction and Key Assumptions

The Protection Cluster Target Prioritization Matrix is designed to support evidence-based target setting at the location level by systematically combining information on humanitarian needs, population movements, operational access, partner presence, and existing response coverage. The tool provides a transparent and consistent approach for identifying priority locations and determining an indicative level of Population in Need (PiN) coverage that should be targeted through the Humanitarian Needs and Response Planning process.

The matrix brings together multiple datasets into a single prioritization framework. Each location is assigned a score based on a set of predefined indicators that reflect both the severity of protection needs and operational considerations affecting response delivery. The combined score generates a final priority classification ranging from Very Low Priority to Critical Priority. This priority classification is subsequently linked to a recommended percentage of PiN coverage, which can be used as the basis for target calculation. The maximum achievable score in the matrix is 8 points. The priority classification and corresponding coverage percentages are defined in the Lookup sheet. The tool structure and scoring criteria are documented within the workbook.

The Protection Cluster IMO will, at the outset, calculate Targets using the indicators (filters) on Access, Partner Presence, Total Reached, and Needs Severity. These results will serve as the baseline for target calculations by the specific response types (Gender-Based Violence, Child Protection, Mine Action, and Housing, Land and Property).

Where a PiN figure has been calculated for a specific response type, the respective IMO should use a copy of this tool, apply the same filters, and generate a Target caseload. This figure should be reflected within the Protection Cluster chapter of the HNRP.

It should be clearly noted that Target estimates for response type are sub-components of the overall Protection caseload. As such, these Target figures must not exceed the Protection Target for any given administrative area or population group, in order to ensure internal coherence of the analysis. The Protection Cluster IMO should conduct a final verification by location and population group before sharing the figures with OCHA.

2. Tool Structure

The first worksheet, titled Matrix, serves as the main analysis and calculation sheet. It contains administrative information, population figures, severity and PiN estimates, and the indicators (or filters) used to generate priority scores. Scores from each indicator are combined into a total score out of eight points. Based on the final score, each location is automatically assigned a priority category and a corresponding target coverage percentage.

The workbook consists of two worksheets. The second worksheet, titled Lookup, contains the prioritization matrix used to translate final priority classifications into target coverage percentages. The sheet establishes the relationship between severity levels, priority categories, and the proportion of PiN recommended for targeting. For example, locations classified as Severity 5 and Critical Priority are assigned a target coverage of 100 percent of PiN, while lower-priority locations receive progressively lower coverage percentages.

3. Methodology

The prioritization methodology combines indicators representing humanitarian access and operational response considerations. The approach recognizes that locations with high protection needs (high needs severity), limited assistance coverage, and restricted humanitarian presence may require greater prioritization during target setting.

Each location receives a score across three dimensions: access conditions, partner presence, and existing response coverage. The total score ranges from 0 to 8 points. Higher scores indicate locations that require greater prioritization for protection interventions. The resulting score is converted into one of five priority categories: Very Low Priority, Low Priority, Medium Priority, High Priority, or Critical Priority. The priority category is then cross-referenced with the severity level to determine the recommended percentage of PiN that should be targeted.

3.1. Indicator (filter) 1: Access Feasibility (Maximum Score: 5)

The access indicator measures the extent to which humanitarian actors can physically and operationally reach affected populations. Access conditions are categorized according to standardized classifications ranging from Very Low to Very High.

Scores are assigned based on the access category of each location. Locations with Very High and High access receive one-point, Substantial access receives two points, Moderate access receives three points, and Low access receives 4 points, and Very Low access receives five point. The indicator recognizes that response planning must balance humanitarian needs with the feasibility of delivering assistance and monitoring activities.

The formula used *=IF([@[Access feasability]]="Very High",1,IF([@[Access feasability]]="High",1,IF([@[Access feasability]]="Substantial",2,IF([@[Access feasability]]="Moderate",3,IF([@[Access feasability]]="Low",4,IF([@[Access feasability]]="Very Low",5))))))*. This formula converts the access feasibility category into a standardized score ranging from 1 to 5.

3.2. Indicator 2: Partner Presence (Maximum Score: 1)

The partner presence indicator assesses the availability of protection actors operating within a location. The indicator incorporates information from Protection Cluster partners as well as Child Protection, Gender-Based Violence, and Mine Action actors.

The purpose of this indicator is to highlight areas where humanitarian presence is limited. Locations with fewer partners are considered more underserved and therefore receive higher scores. Conversely, locations with a substantial operational presence receive lower scores. The indicator helps ensure that the prioritization process considers potential service gaps and geographical inequities in partner coverage.

The formula used is *=IF([@[OVERALL PARTNERS]]<=0,1,IF([@[OVERALL PARTNERS]]<6,0.5,IF([@[OVERALL PARTNERS]]<10,0,0)))*. This formula assigns higher scores to locations with limited or no partner presence. The objective is to highlight potentially underserved areas where protection actors have a minimal operational footprint.

3.3. Indicator 3: Existing Response Coverage (Maximum Score: 2)

The response coverage indicator measures the extent to which populations have already been reached through protection activities. The indicator aggregates reported reach across Protection, Child Protection, Gender-Based Violence, and Mine Action interventions and calculates overall coverage relative to Targeted.

Locations with little or no reported response coverage are considered 'neglected' locations and receive higher scores. Locations with moderate response receive intermediate scores, while locations where more than half of the Targeted (from previous year) have already been reached receive lower scores. This indicator ensures that targeting decisions are informed not only by the level of needs / severity but also by existing service provision and response gaps.

The formula used is *=IF([@[OVERALL REACHED]]>50%,0,IF([@[OVERALL REACHED]]>0%,1,2))*. This formula measures the extent of existing response coverage and prioritizes locations with lower reach. Areas where no beneficiaries have been reached receive the highest score, indicating potential response gaps.

3.4. Calculation of the Total Score

The final prioritization score is calculated by summing the individual scores assigned to the three operational indicators. These include the Access score, Partner Presence score, and 'Neglected' Location score based on response coverage.

The maximum achievable score is 8 points, comprising five points from the Access indicator, one point from Partner Presence, and two points from the Response Coverage indicator. Higher total scores indicate locations that face a combination of significant humanitarian pressures and operational considerations that justify increased prioritization for protection programming.

The formula used is *=SUM([@[IDP SCORE]],[@[ACCESS SCORE]],[@[PARTNER PRESENCE SCORE]],[@[''Neglected'' LOCATION SCORE (REACHED)]]).* This formula calculates the overall prioritization score by summing the IDP, Access, Partner Presence, and Response Coverage scores. The resulting score ranges from 0 to 10 and forms the basis for the final priority classification.

3.5. Priority Classification

The total score is translated into one of five priority categories. These categories provide a simplified interpretation of the results and facilitate comparison across locations. The priority categories are Very Low Priority, Low Priority, Medium Priority, High Priority, and Critical Priority.

Priority classifications should not be interpreted in isolation. Instead, they should be considered **together with the corresponding severity level** to determine the final target coverage percentage. This ensures that both the intensity of needs and operational realities are reflected in the target-setting process.

The formula used is *=IF([@[TOTAL SCORE]]>9,"Critical Priority",IF([@[TOTAL SCORE]]>7,"High Priority",IF([@[TOTAL SCORE]]>5,"Medium Priority",IF([@[TOTAL SCORE]]>3,"Low Priority","Very Low Priority"))))).* This formula translates the total score into one of five priority categories: Very Low, Low, Medium, High, or Critical Priority. Higher total scores correspond to higher levels of prioritization for targeting purposes.

3.6. Target Calculation

The final target is calculated by multiplying the location-level PiN by the target coverage percentage assigned through the lookup table. The coverage percentage is determined by the combination of severity level and priority category.

This approach allows higher proportions of PiN to be targeted in locations facing severe protection conditions and high prioritization scores, while lower target coverage percentages are applied in lower-severity or lower-priority locations. The methodology therefore provides a transparent and consistent mechanism for converting assessed needs into target figures that can support planning, resource allocation, and strategic decision-making.

The formula used is *=XLOOKUP([@[2026 - Final Severity of Needs]]&[@Priority],Lookup!A:A&Lookup!B:B,Lookup!C:C,0).* This formula uses the location's severity level and priority classification to retrieve the corresponding target coverage percentage from the Lookup sheet. The retrieved percentage is then applied to the PiN figure to calculate the final target.

3.7. Lookup worksheet

The Lookup sheet defines the relationship between a location's **needs severity level (which comes from the needs analysis stage)**, **priority classification**, and the corresponding **target coverage percentage of PiN**. The purpose of this sheet is to translate the results of the prioritization analysis into an indicative targeting percentage that can be applied consistently across all locations. Based on the combination of severity and priority, the tool automatically determines what proportion of the PiN population should be targeted for assistance.

The methodology assumes that locations with higher severity levels and higher priority classifications should receive a greater share of assistance. For example, a locality classified as **Severity 5 and Critical Priority** is assigned a target coverage of **100 percent of PiN**, reflecting the highest level of need and prioritization. In contrast, a **Severity 3 locality with Very Low Priority** is assigned a target coverage of only **5 percent of PiN**, reflecting comparatively lower needs and operational priority.

The lookup values create a graduated targeting approach in which target coverage increases as either severity or priority rises. This ensures that the final targets are driven not only by the size of the population in need, but also by the intensity of needs and the overall prioritization score generated by the matrix. By combining these factors, the tool promotes a transparent and evidence-based approach to target setting across all localities.

Severity	Priority	Coverage % of PiN)
5	Critical Priority	100%
5	High Priority	80%
5	Medium Priority	60%
5	Low Priority	40%
5	Very Low Priority	20%
4	Critical Priority	80%
4	High Priority	60%
4	Medium Priority	40%
4	Low Priority	20%
4	Very Low Priority	10%
3	Critical Priority	60%
3	High Priority	40%
3	Medium Priority	20%
3	Low Priority	10%
3	Very Low Priority	5%

The target coverage percentage retrieved from the Lookup sheet is multiplied by the locality-level PiN estimate to generate the final planning target. This allows target figures to be adjusted according to both humanitarian need and operational prioritization while maintaining consistency across the analysis.

3.8. Interpretation of Results

The outputs of the matrix should be interpreted as a planning and prioritization tool rather than an automatic decision-making mechanism. The results provide an objective starting point for discussions on targeting but should be complemented by contextual analysis, operational updates, partner consultations, and expert judgement where necessary. Changes in security conditions, population movements, funding availability, or emerging protection concerns may justify adjustments to targets that are not fully captured by the quantitative indicators included in the matrix.

The matrix is therefore intended to strengthen consistency and transparency in target setting while preserving the flexibility required for humanitarian decision-making.

4. How to Document Expert Judgement

Where necessary, an expert judgement mechanism may be applied to review and, where justified, adjust the priority classification or target coverage generated by the matrix. ***When undertaking expert review, users should consider the underlying severity, PiN, and, where available, the Protection Risk Severity Score as the primary reference points, as these form the foundation of the Protection Cluster's needs analysis and response planning.*** Any adjustment should be supported by contextual evidence and clearly documented through a concise justification to ensure transparency and consistency in the targeting process.