

Sustaining Protection Under Pressure:

The Continuing Impact of Funding Cuts on Protection Programming in West and Central Africa

73.3% of WCA organisations reporting protection budget cuts	31.8% of organisations: protection disproportionately affected vs. other sectors <i>among those providing staffing data</i>	~55% median staffing loss among affected organisations <i>of protection workforce</i>	>76% most impacted protection activity regionally: <i>mental health & psychosocial support; protection monitoring, and information sharing</i>
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West and Central Africa specific findings from the Global Protection Cluster capacity mapping survey conducted in April 2026
(Respondent base: 258 organisations)

1. Overview

In mid-2025, the WCA Regional Protection Working Group issued an [advocacy note](#) documenting the alarming impact of humanitarian funding reductions on protection programming across West and Central Africa. This snapshot provides an update as of June 2026, drawing on a Global Protection Cluster (GPC)-led [survey](#) of 258 partner organisations in the region, complemented by operational reporting from national and international NGOs and UN agencies.

The findings confirm the very trajectory the 2025 note cautioned against. Budget cuts affecting protection activities were reported by **nearly three quarters of organisations** surveyed by the Global Protection Cluster in April/May 2026, above the global average of 69% in countries with active protection clusters. **The impact is not limited to one type of organizational adjustment: it combines scale of services, human resources, territorial reach, and direct engagement with affected communities.** The cumulative effect is no longer a funding gap: it is the progressive dismantling of a multi-layered protection response built over years of sustained investment, across a region where protection needs continue to grow.

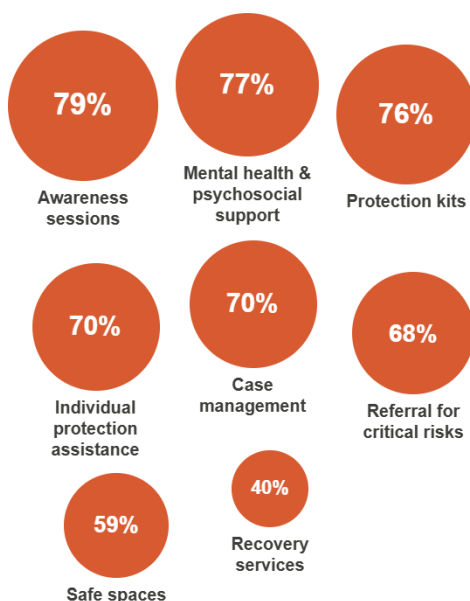
More than 24.3 million people across Burkina Faso, Chad, Mali, Niger, Cameroon's Far North, and northeast Nigeria [now require humanitarian assistance and protection](#), with 5.8 million forcibly displaced as of end-2025, a figure that has risen by 15 per cent among refugees and asylum-seekers in 2025 alone. Grave violations of international humanitarian law increased by over 30 per cent between 2024 and 2025 across the Sahel, and an estimated 9 million people require GBV assistance. Meanwhile the numbers of humanitarian organisations operating in the Central Sahel fell from 310 in 2024 to 232 in 2025 - a reduction of a quarter in a single year. Across the six Sahel HNRP countries, only 29.5 per cent of required funding had been secured by May 2026, the lowest level in a decade, compared to 52.1 per cent in 2024. Growing insecurity and displacement dynamics are driving increased protection needs across coastal countries. In northern border areas of Gulf of Guinea countries, increased violence, protection incidents and climate-related shocks in 2026 are exposing communities to heightened risks, increasing humanitarian needs and weakening community resilience among both displaced and host populations.

The human cost is already visible among communities across the region. Between January and April 2026, one in three people surveyed across the Central Sahel and Lake Chad Basin [reported](#) that their family had experienced a protection incident in the preceding months. The same erosion is playing out in the region's largest refugee crisis: as the conflict in neighboring Sudan entered its third year, over one million Sudanese refugees in Chad have seen [critical reductions in protection services and other life-saving assistance](#), including healthcare, shelter, water and food support.

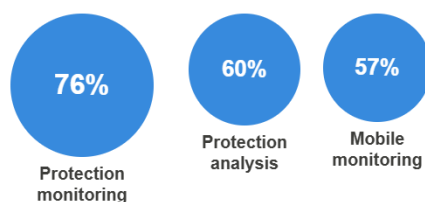
2. Impact on Protection Programming

Size and percentage show the share of organisations that reported cuts to specific activity.

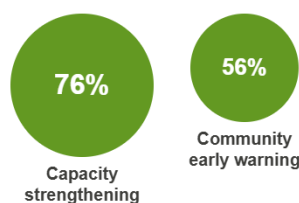
DIRECT SERVICES



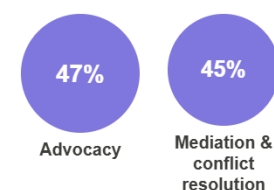
MONITORING & ANALYSIS



CAPACITY & PREVENTION



COORDINATION & ADVOCACY



Across the region, the most immediate losses are in the activities that directly reach survivors of violence, displaced populations, and individuals at acute risk, including children — leaving protection actors increasingly unable to identify and respond to, individual protection needs.

Source: GPC Survey, April 2026. Figures reflect the share of organisations that flagged each activity as affected.

Direct response to individuals at risk

Survivors and people at acute risk are losing the very pathways through which they are identified, assisted, and referred to as the most acute losses are in precisely the activities meant to reach them. Case management and Individual Protection Assistance have each been impacted in 70% of surveyed organisations. **The cumulative effect is a collapse of the continuum of care** as these pathways have been severed at multiple points simultaneously. Protection kits and essential items distribution has been affected in 76.2% of organisations, and mental health and psychosocial support, which is critical for survivors of violence, especially survivors of gender-based violence is the second most affected activity regionally. **The disruption of case management for unaccompanied and separated children, at a moment when displacement continues to drive family separation, exposes them to heightened risks of abuse and exploitation.** Recovery and reintegration services for children associated with armed forces have been disrupted in 40.3% of organisations, increasing risks of re-recruitment and long-term psychosocial harm.

SPOTLIGHT — GBV

Women and girls who have survived violence are being left without clinical care, psychosocial support, or a safe place to turn, as GBV programming is among the most heavily impacted services across all countries surveyed. The closure of safe spaces, one-stop centres, and mobile clinics is eliminating access to clinical management, psychosocial support, and referral for the most vulnerable women and girls.

In the Lake Chad Basin region, nearly every organisation reporting cuts flagged GBV services as affected (100% in Cameroon, 94% in Niger, 90% in Nigeria), signalling acute pressure on GBV services in a context already marked by chronic underfunding.

SPOTLIGHT — Child protection

Child protection is among the most impacted sub-sectors across the region. In Cameroon, every organisation reporting cuts flagged child protection as affected, with widespread disruption of case management and mental health and psychosocial support.

In Niger, child protection is the third most impacted activity nationally, compounding an already fragile response in a context of high displacement and limited local capacity.

Prevention and community systems

Communities are losing the safe places, information, and locally rooted support they rely on to keep themselves protected: community-based and community-led activities have been dramatically impacted across the Sahel and Lake Chad Basin, with rates reaching over 80% in Chad, Nigeria, Burkina Faso, Cameroon, and the CAR, and 77.8% in Niger. Targeted awareness and information sessions, which are impacted in 76% of organizations and reaching 93% in Chad, represent a direct loss of reach to communities on rights, risks, and available services. Women and girls' safe spaces and child-friendly spaces are affected in 60% of organisations regionally, with rates as high as 86.7% in Chad and 85.7% in Cameroon. In Chad's Ouaddaï and Wadi Fira regions alone, 8 of 38 Women and Girls Safe Spaces are at immediate risk of closure—for thousands of women and girls, the only place to access support, report abuse, and be referred to life-saving services. **Capacity strengthening, impacted in over three quarters of organisations, is eliminating the investment in local actors that underpins any durable protection response.**

SPOTLIGHT — Mine action

The capacity to document and address explosive ordnance contamination has eroded significantly despite continued Improvised Explosive Device (IED) use by armed groups in Burkina Faso, Cameroon, Mali, and Niger, leaving civilian populations in conflict-affected areas without risk education or victim assistance.

Mine action risk education capacity is now reported to be limited to CAR, DRC, and Nigeria, despite continued IED use across Burkina Faso, Cameroon, Mali, and Niger.

Monitoring, analysis, and advocacy

As monitoring weakens, the violence inflicted on communities becomes unreported, undetected, and unanswered. Protection monitoring and consultation activities have been impacted in 75% of organisations, with mobile monitoring mechanisms reduced in 57% and locally-led early warning mechanisms affected in 56.1%. As monitoring coverage contracts, **geographic areas and population groups become invisible to the protection system: incidents go unreported, trends go undetected, and the evidence base needed to trigger response disappears.** In Cameroon, 100% of impacted organisations flagged protection monitoring as affected; in CAR and Burkina Faso the rates reach 84.6% and 77.1% respectively. When community mediation and negotiation capacity is lost, people are left more exposed to the very violence these functions help prevent. These activities have been impacted less than direct service delivery (44% reduction), but their reduction carries disproportionate systemic risk for civilians. Intercommunity tensions, competition over resources, and stigmatization remain among the most commonly reported drivers of community fragility across the region. As these pressures intensify, the dismantling of mediation and conflict resolution capacity removes one of the few available tools to prevent localised tensions from escalating into violence.

3. Dismantling of the Protection System

Behind frontline service delivery lies an enabling architecture encompassing protection analysis, community-based prevention, early warning systems, and local and coordination capacity, that makes the entire response functional, context-specific, and sustainable. This architecture is being dismantled.

Protection analysis and information management

Protection analysis has been impacted in 60% of organisations. IM and analysis staff face a 50% reduction rate, with a net retention gap of –13.6 percentage points. The degradation of analytical capacity at this scale, affecting the evidence base for cluster decision-making, HNRP inputs, and advocacy, is occurring at precisely the moment when the response most needs to prioritise efficiently and make the case for resources. This also undermines effective decision-making grounded in the centrality of protection, as reduced analytical capacity

limits the ability to identify protection risks, prioritise responses, and ensure that protection considerations meaningfully inform humanitarian action.

Localization and capacity of national and local actors

Local and national actors (NNGOs, women-led organisations, and community-based organisations) constitute 60% of the WCA survey sample, reflecting their central role in the protection response. Their impact rates match or exceed those of international organisations. Women-led organisations are particularly at risk in contexts where they have the highest representation: in Burkina Faso, where women-led organisations account for 21% of survey respondents (the highest proportion in the region) the overall impact rate of 74.5% signals acute and specific risk to community-level women-led capacity. Capacity strengthening, the primary vehicle for sustaining local ownership, is impacted in 76.3% of organisations. The localization gains of the past decade are being eroded by a funding crisis that is hitting local actors both directly (through their own budget cuts) and indirectly, as they are expected to absorb cases and cover gaps left by departing international partners.

Coordination structure

The participation of local partners in protection coordination forums, already fragile, is further jeopardised as those partners lose capacity and operational presence. A weakened coordination structure at national, sub-national, and field levels affects critical functions such as service mapping, referral pathways, gap identification, and operational response planning. As a result, it reduces the collective ability to prioritise needs, track gaps, and to mount a coherent response.

4. Call to Action

The WCA region has crossed a threshold. This is no longer a manageable funding shortfall; it is a structural dismantling of the protection response at a moment of sustained and growing need. Civilians are increasingly exposed to harm while the systems meant to protect them are progressively weakening. As a result, the gap between risks and response capacity continues to widen.

The Regional Protection Working Group calls on donors, States, and humanitarian leadership to:

- **Sustain investment in protection as a distinct and essential sector, while using the Humanitarian Reset as an opportunity to align funding models with how protection actually works.** Protection cannot be assumed to be delivered through mainstreaming or absorbed by other sectors: survivor-centered case management, GBV response, child protection, and community-based early warning require dedicated staff and dedicated investment, particularly for the highest-impact interventions. What is needed is flexible, predictable, multi-year funding approaches that reflect the long-term, adaptive, and community-based nature of protection work. Sustained engagement, technical expertise, and the ability to respond to evolving risks cannot be built on short-term project cycles. At the same time, there is an opportunity to deepen protection integration across sectors, ensuring that food, health, shelter, and WASH actors systematically identify and refer protection risks as part of their own programming.
 - **Safeguard capacities of local and national actors.** Community-based, women-led organisations and national NGOs are the backbone of community-level protection; their loss is the hardest to reverse and the most damaging to long-term resilience and the localization agenda. This is an inflection point; and an opportunity to use regional mechanisms to scale up direct, flexible, multi-year financing to local and national actors, including women-led organisations, while strengthening their institutional capacity, coordination role, and leadership within protection coordination structures rather than treating their participation as a stopgap measure of last resort.
 - **Invest in protection monitoring and analysis even under severe resource constraints and use this moment of contraction to drive a more collaborative, interagency approach to data and analysis.** Without geographic coverage and analytical capacity, the protection system loses visibility into its own gaps and the evidentiary basis for advocacy, resource mobilization and ultimately, the capacity to effectively respond to the protection needs of the affected population. Monitoring is also the foundation on which the Centrality of Protection across the humanitarian response depends; it cannot be upheld where it cannot be measured.
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