

Afghanistan Protection Coordination Group (PCG)

Terms of Reference

1. Introduction

The Protection Coordination Group (PCG) was formed under the new aid architecture for Afghanistan endorsed by the Humanitarian Country Team (HCT) and the United Nations Country Team+ (UNCT+) in February 2026. It consolidates protection coordination under one national platform while preserving specialized technical work through dedicated workstreams.

The PCG is the primary national coordination platform for protection in Afghanistan. It supports coordinated humanitarian protection action and Basic Human Needs (BHN)-linked protection risk reduction while advancing the Centrality of Protection (CoP) as a cross-cutting principle across humanitarian and BHN protection interventions. The PCG's unified structure does not merge or subordinate its humanitarian and BHN-linked functions. Nothing in the PCG's BHN-linked function shall limit or replace humanitarian protection coordination, protection advocacy, humanitarian access, or the ability of humanitarian actors to operate in accordance with humanitarian principles

The PCG operates in accordance with international humanitarian law, international human rights law and other relevant global policy and frameworks¹. The PCG implements its mandate through five specialized workstreams: Child Protection, Gender-Based Violence, Mine Action, Return and Reintegration, and Legal Assistance and Civil Documentation. These workstreams provide technical leadership, analysis and guidance within the unified PCG structure.

The PCG will maintain one consolidated Information Management Unit supporting the PCG and its workstreams. Information management will prioritize products that support coordination, analysis, advocacy and decision-making. Sensitive data will remain under appropriate technical control. CPIMS+, GBVIMS+ and any other sensitive datasets will not be merged or shared without agreed protocols, lawful basis, informed consent where required and do-no-harm review. PCG analysis should use aggregated and anonymized data whenever possible. **Annex I:** Information and data protection protocol.

2. Roles and responsibilities

The PCG performs two core coordination functions through one unified platform:

1. Humanitarian protection coordination, including the Protection Cluster function; and
2. BHN-linked protection coordination, with a focus on longer-term protection risk reduction, safe and equitable access and protection-sensitive programming, while complementing the humanitarian action.

2.1 Humanitarian protection coordination

Under this function the PCG performs the responsibilities of the Protection Cluster coordination mechanism in accordance with the IASC cluster approach and fulfills the 6+1 core cluster functions:

- Support service delivery in line with the Humanitarian Response Plan and strategic priorities and develop mechanisms to address duplication.

¹ The work of the PCG is guided by relevant global frameworks including: IASC Reference Module for Cluster Coordination at Country Level (2015), IASC Policy on Protection in Humanitarian Action (2016), IASC Protection Policy Aide-Memoire, Global Protection Cluster Strategy (2025-2030), IASC Commitments to Accountability to Affected People (AAP), Global Principles of Partnership (2007), IASC Guidance Note on the Humanitarian-Development-Peace Nexus, IASC Operational Guidance on Data Responsibility (2021), Global Protection Cluster Minimum Requirements for Effective Protection Coordination (2023) and Humanitarian Reset and Cluster Simplification guidance (2025).

- Contribute to the HC/HCT's strategic decision-making through protection assessment, analysis, and prioritization.
- Lead the planning and Implementation of Cluster strategies, developing sectoral plans, objectives, activities, and indicators that directly support the realization of the overall response's strategic objectives, applying and adhering to common national and global standards and guidelines.
- Lead the monitoring and evaluation of Cluster Performance in line with strategic objectives.
- Lead protection capacity strengthening in collaboration with humanitarian partners and other stakeholders.
- Lead protection advocacy on behalf of cluster members and affected people through identifying concerns and contributing key information and messages to relevant fora.
- Contribute to Accountability to Affected People through a coordinated approach to community engagement and participation, in alignment with the IASC Collective AAP Framework.

The consolidation of protection coordination does not de-prioritize Child Protection, Gender-Based Violence or Mine Action coordination efforts and visibility. These areas remain specialized workstreams with dedicated technical leadership, while contributing to one PCG strategy, workplan, analysis and advocacy approach.

2.2 Basic Human Needs-linked protection risk reduction

Under its BHN-linked function, the PCG supports humanitarian, BHN and development-oriented actors to reduce protection risks through longer-term programmatic interventions. The PCG will support shared principles, common objectives and a practical understanding of protection risk reduction. This includes:

- Advising UNCT+, PMT or equivalent United Nations Strategic Framework for Afghanistan (UNSFA) governance bodies on protection programme design, prioritization, partner selection and risk management;
- Coordinate protection monitoring, assessments, research and trend analysis to inform BHN protection programme decisions, advocacy and risk management.
- Promoting longer-term protection approaches such as community-based protection, empowerment, behaviour-change work, community action planning and strengthened referral systems across workstreams;
- Maintain consolidated 3W/5W mapping, referral pathways and analysis of coverage, gaps and duplication, while respecting confidentiality and data protection.
- Promote global standards, minimum protection standards, tools, and context-specific guidance for BHN-linked protection programming.
- Supporting evidence-based resource mobilization for protection risk reduction across BHN protection portfolios, while maintaining distinct humanitarian protection priorities and funding requirements with the humanitarian response architecture
- Capacity strengthening, peer learning, technical accompaniment and knowledge management across PCG members and workstreams.

In addition, the PCG advances Centrality of Protection by ensuring that protection risks, trends and underlying drivers inform collective decision-making across humanitarian and BHN engagement. It supports the HC/HCT, UNCT+, PMT and relevant coordination platforms to integrate protection into planning, prioritization, access discussions, resource allocation, advocacy and risk management. The overall responsibility for ensuring Centrality of Protection across the humanitarian response remains with the HC/HCT. The PCG provides technical, coordination and analytical support to enable that responsibility.

Protection advocacy and independence: The PCG will maintain the ability to identify, analyse and advocate on protection concerns independently of BHN programming priorities. Protection analysis and advocacy will not be limited to risks that can be addressed through available programmes, funding instruments or longer-term interventions. Engagement in BHN and development-oriented processes will not prevent or constrain the PCG from raising protection concerns through appropriate humanitarian coordination and advocacy channels.

3. Leadership, governance and accountability

The PCG is led by UNHCR as a lead Coordination agency and the Norwegian Refugee Council (NRC) as Co-Coordination agency. In terms of the role of Provider of Last Resort, within Afghanistan, UNHCR maintains the lead for protection (PoLR), while UNICEF for Child Protection, UNFPA for Gender-Based Violence, and UNMAS for Mine Action.

Co-coordination arrangements will follow the relevant memorandum of understanding and applicable IASC and Global Protection Cluster guidance. Any change in co-coordination arrangements will be managed through a transparent process involving the PCG Coordination Team and SAG.

The national PCG Coordination Team comprises the PCG Coordinators, Workstream Leads, Information Management Unit, and designated focal points for BHN-linked protection risk reduction and durable-solutions-related coordination. These members contribute relevant technical and operational perspectives and support linkages with BHN and durable-solutions structures.

3.1 Accountability framework

The PCG applies four complementary accountability lines:

- **Upward accountability for humanitarian protection coordination:** The PCG, through UNHCR as Cluster Lead Agency is accountable to the HC/HCT for humanitarian protection coordination, analysis, planning and advocacy. PCG will be represented in the HCT by CLA and Co-coordinating Agency. This accountability includes maintaining the independence of humanitarian protection analysis and advocacy and ensuring that humanitarian protection concerns can be raised through appropriate humanitarian channels irrespective of their compatibility with BHN programming priorities.
- **Upward accountability for BHN-linked protection advice:** The PCG provides protection analysis and technical advice to UNCT+, PMT or equivalent UNSFA governance bodies for BHN-linked programming but does not transfer humanitarian protection accountability to these bodies. Accountability in this area relates to the quality, timeliness and usefulness of PCG analysis, guidance and agreed deliverables, not to direct control of BHN funding or implementation.
- **Horizontal accountability among members:** PCG members, workstreams and national and sub-national coordination structures are accountable to one another for the collectively endorsed strategy, workplan, standards and agreed deliverables.
- **Accountability to affected people:** PCG members are expected to support meaningful participation, safe feedback and complaints mechanisms and programme adaptation based on affected people's views and protection priorities.

4. Strategic Advisory Group

The PCG will constitute one consolidated Strategic Advisory Group (SAG) to provide strategic guidance and support efficient decision-making. The SAG replaces separate protection and former Area of Responsibility advisory groups and reflects the diversity of protection actors and technical areas. The SAG will include representation from United Nations agencies, international NGOs, national NGOs, women-led organizations, OPDs, BHN-linked protection actors and, as observer, donor representation. BHN-linked protection actors represented in the SAG will contribute technical and operational perspectives,

programme evidence and analysis to inform PCG priorities, planning and recommendations, consistent with their respective mandates. Refer to PCG SAG ToRs for details - **Annex II**.

5. Membership

Participation in the PCG is open to all actors with a demonstrated interest and capacity in protection in the humanitarian and BHN pillars. National NGOs, women-led organizations and disability inclusion NGOs/networks along with OPDs will be explicitly included within PCG membership and workstreams. While membership will be open to all agencies, the PCG has categorized membership based on operational context, capacity and presence, and the need to enhance protection response. Refer to **Annex III** for details in membership and categories.

6. Meetings

The PCG will meet monthly. Ad hoc meetings may be convened for urgent protection issues, advocacy, analysis, planning or coordination needs. Minutes and action points will be circulated to members. Sensitive protection issues may be recorded in restricted notes where necessary to prevent harm. Workstreams will meet separately as required and report key issues, trends and recommendations to the PCG.

7. Sub-national coordination

In line with the endorsed aid architecture, regional PCGs will be established or maintained in priority regions based on severity of needs, partner presence and coordination capacity. Regional PCGs will interface with RTs, OCTs, clusters, sectors, Border Consortium sub-regional forums, BHN platforms and durable-solutions-related structures. Separate regional PCG terms of reference or ways of working may be developed, aligned with these national ToRs refer **Annex IV**.

8. Coordination with other structures

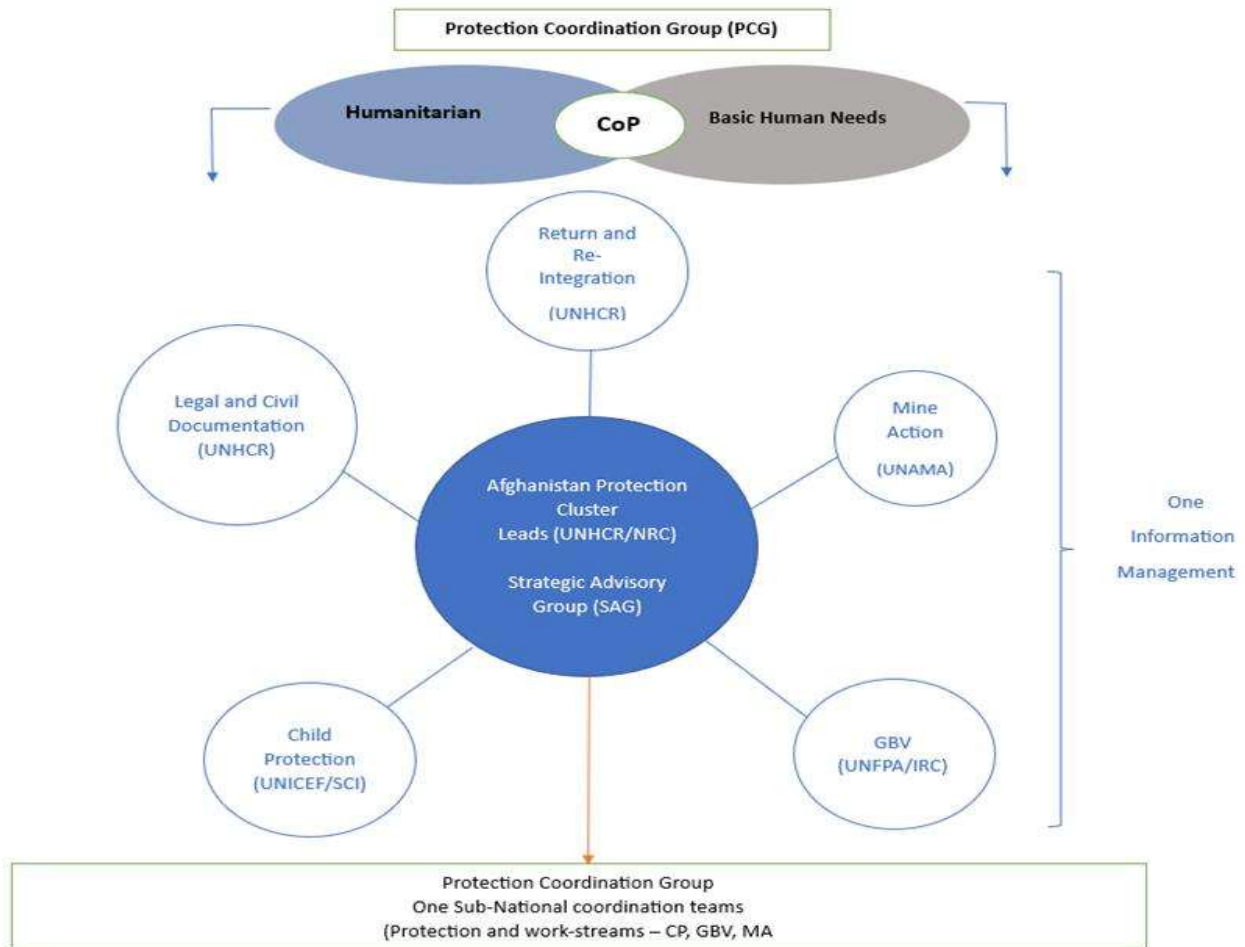
The PCG will coordinate with relevant humanitarian, BHN and durable-solutions-related structures—including the OCHA-led Inter-Cluster Coordination Team and other clusters, Access Working Group, Accountability and Inclusion Working Group, Gender Coordination Group, Protection from Sexual Exploitation and Abuse Network, Regional Teams, Operational Coordination Teams, national Border Consortium, National Durable Solutions Working Group, UNCT+, PMT and UNSFA governance bodies, donor coordination forums and other relevant thematic working groups—through agreed ways of working. These may include designated focal points, standing agenda items and shared analysis products, through which the PCG will routinely provide consolidated protection-risk analysis, trends and recommendations to relevant BHN, area-based, Joint Platform, Regional Team and UNSFA-related mechanisms. The frequency, format and follow-up arrangements will be agreed with the relevant mechanism, with due regard to confidentiality, data protection and do-no-harm principles.

The PCG will use existing coordination platforms wherever they can address an issue and will avoid creating parallel structures. Where an issue cuts across multiple structures, the PCG Coordination Team will, in consultation with the relevant actors, agree the most appropriate forum, focal point and follow-up route.

9. Review of the Terms of Reference

These Terms of Reference will be reviewed every two years or earlier if required due to changes in the operational context, aid architecture, coordination arrangements or partner feedback.

10. Structure



Annex I: Information and data protection protocol – link to be shared once the protocol is finalized.



PCG - SAG ToRs -
FINAL 31 Aug 2026.pdf

Annex II: SAG ToRs - link to be shared once ToRs finalized



Annex II - PCG
Membership.pdf

Annex III: Membership



Sub-National PCG
ToRs - FINAL 07 Sept

Annex IV: Sub-national PCG ToRs – link to be shared once ToRs finalized.

30 August 2026