



GPC 2026 Protection Series –
Mainstreaming: The Protection Mainstreaming Toolkit,
Working Across Sectors to mainstream child protection,
and reducing GBV risks

Tuesday 29 September 2026



Protection Mainstreaming

What?

The process of incorporating protection principles and promoting **safety** and **dignity**, **meaningful access**, **participation** and **accountability** in humanitarian aid. It focuses not on what we do (the product) but rather on how we do it (the process).

Why?

Mainstreaming protection ensures that the protective impact of aid programming is maximized, without contributing to or perpetuating harm.

Who?

All humanitarian actors have a responsibility to mainstream protection across the humanitarian response.

Four Key Principles



1

**Prioritise safety,
dignity and avoid
causing harm**



2

**Ensure meaningful
access to services**



3

**Set-up
accountability
mechanisms**



4

**Support the
participation and
engagement of
affected populations**

Safety and Dignity

Prioritize safety & dignity, and avoid causing harm

Prevent and minimize as much as possible any unintended negative effects of your intervention which can increase people's vulnerability to both physical and psychosocial risks.

Examples:

- A new settlement layout avoids placing latrines far from shelters, particularly for women and girls, reducing exposure to sexual violence or harassment at night.
- When establishing a health centre, the programme considers relevant cultural and religious practices such as privacy for women and men, availability of female staff for certain consultations, taking prayer times into account when scheduling activities.
- Personal or sensitive information is collected, stored and shared only when necessary and with appropriate safeguards.

Meaningful Access

Meaningful Access

Arrange for people's access to assistance and services – in proportion to need and without any barriers. Pay special attention to individuals and groups who may be particularly vulnerable or have difficulty accessing assistance and services.

Examples:

- A Child-Friendly Space renovated its premises to accommodate the needs of children with disabilities and adapted its activities to their needs.
- A mobile clinic schedules services at times accessible to women who have care responsibilities.
- Information about assistance is provided in the languages spoken by different displaced communities, including through verbal communication for people with low literacy.

Accountability

Accountability

Set-up appropriate mechanisms through which affected populations can measure the adequacy of interventions, and address concerns and complaints.

Examples:

- Before a cash programme starts, people are informed about who is eligible, how much they will receive, when they will receive it, and whom they can contact if something goes wrong.
- A community centre provides several feedback channels (hotline, suggestion box and confidential in-person reporting) so that people can choose the safest option. Specific mechanisms to handle SEA/safeguarding issues.
- An organization established and worked with child-led monitoring groups and committees to monitor activities and provide feedback.

Participation and Empowerment

Participation and Empowerment

Support the development of self-protection capacities and assist people to claim their rights, including – not exclusively – the rights to shelter, food, water and sanitation, health, and education.

Examples:

- Instead of deciding the location of water points solely with technical staff, the programme consults women, men, older people, adolescents and people with disabilities about where they feel safe accessing water.
- A livelihoods programme asks affected communities what types of support they actually want rather than assuming that a predetermined vocational training programme is appropriate.

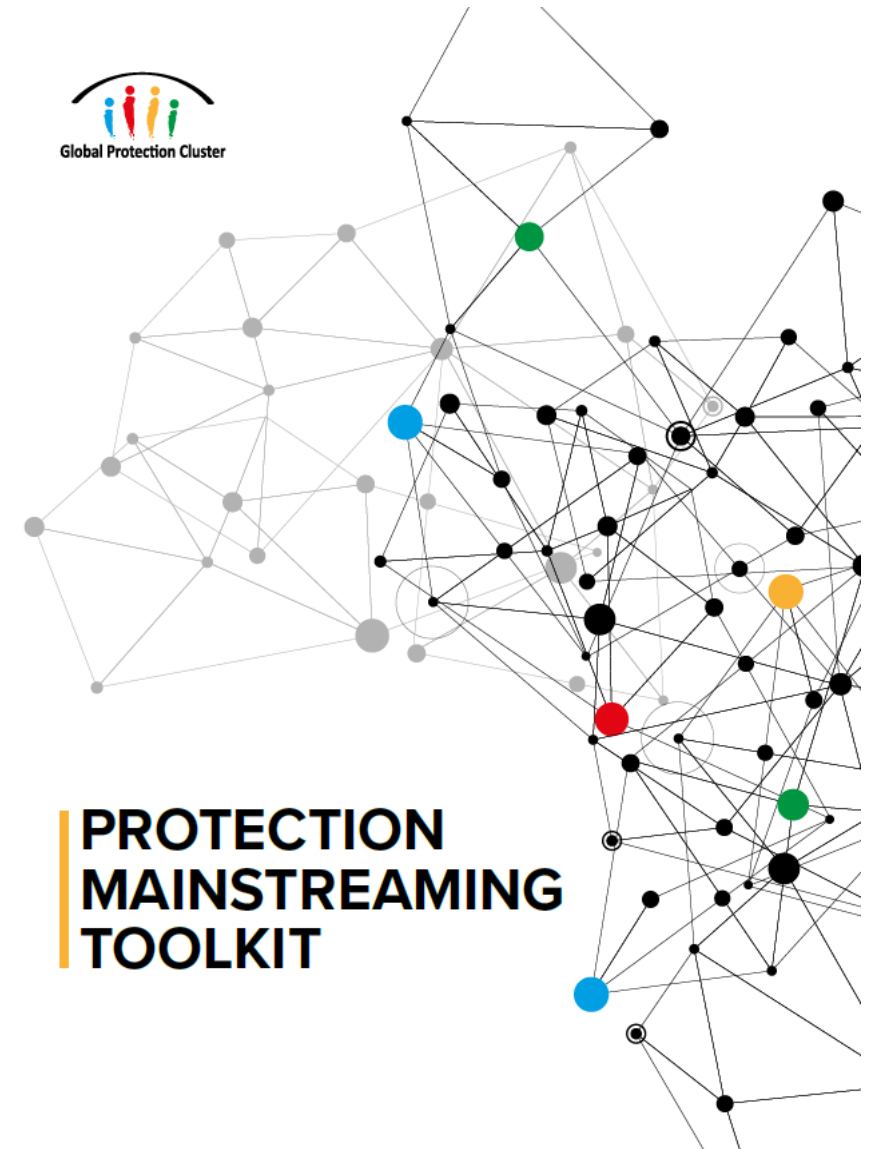
Common issues and challenges or misconceptions

- **“Everyone’s responsibility” can become “no one’s responsibility”** – unclear ownership for ensuring mainstreaming actually happens.
- **Mainstreaming gets diluted across multiple cross-cutting priorities** – protection, gender, disability inclusion, AAP, PSEA, environment, etc. can collectively create “mainstreaming fatigue”.
- **Different understandings of what “mainstreaming” means** – different terminology used (i.e safe and good programming, risk reduction, do no harm) may indicate different approach.
- **Mainstreaming sometimes becomes a tick-box exercise** – references to protection are included in proposals and plans, but are not meaningfully reflected in implementation, monitoring or outcomes.
- **Mainstreaming during rapid/emergency response** – teams may feel there is insufficient time or information to integrate cross-cutting considerations when speed is prioritised.
- **Mainstreaming without resources** – expectations are high, but there may be no dedicated budget, staff time, training or technical capacity to deliver it.

Protection Mainstreaming Toolkit (2018)

The Toolkit is designed to practically assist humanitarian workers to mainstream protection at the *individual* programme or project level as well as at the *collective* strategic and coordination level.

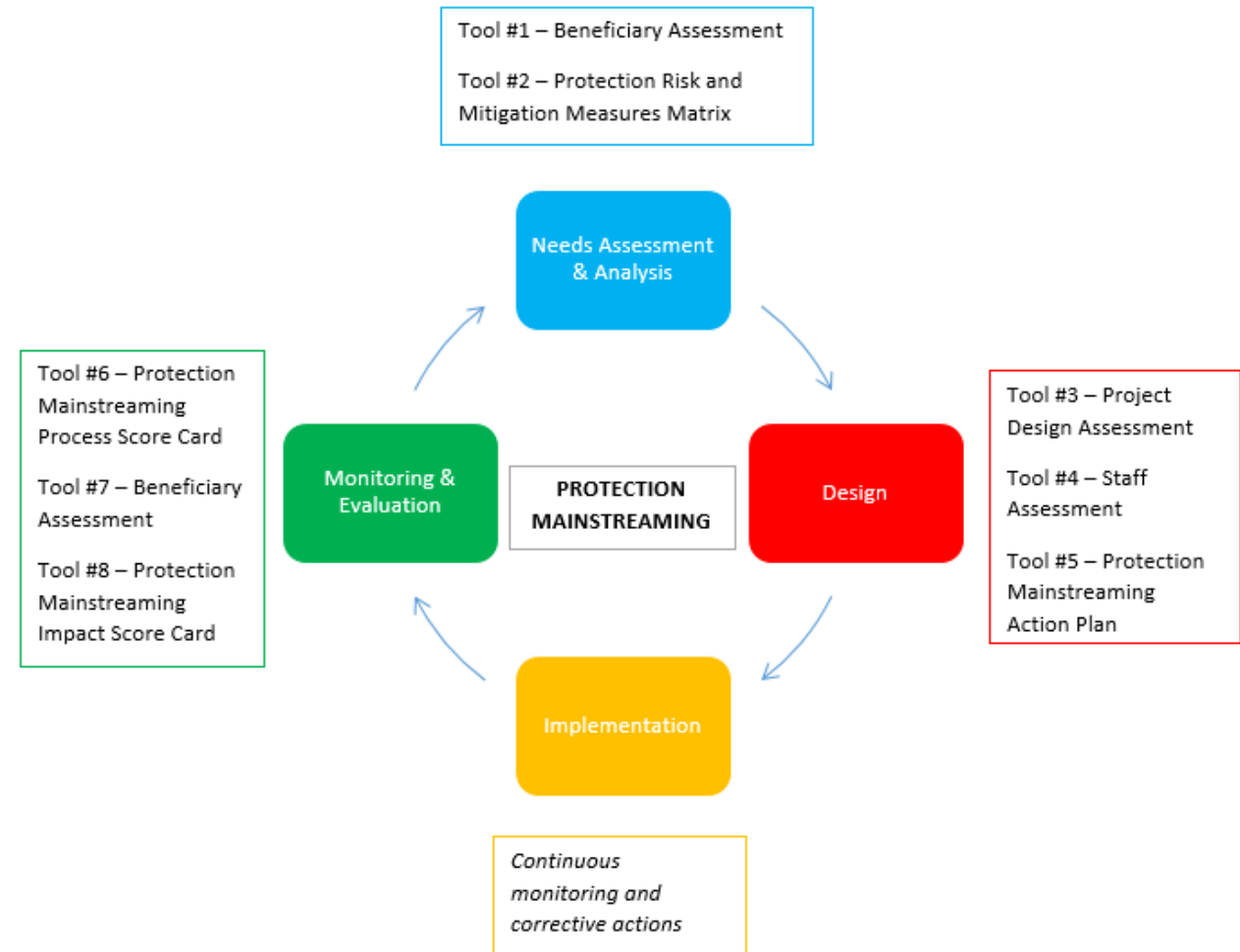
- The Toolkit targets **coordination structures** (e.g. Clusters, Inter-Cluster Coordination Groups) by providing the tools to mainstream protection into cluster strategies and throughout the Humanitarian Programme Cycle (HPC).
- It also targets **operational partners** with the tools to mainstream protection into their organisational procedures and programmes.



Protection Mainstreaming in the Project Cycle

The Toolkit includes a series of tools to enable humanitarian actors to:

- To identify and address protection risks that can be caused, perpetuated, or addressed by their sector of intervention.
- To design programmes aligned with protection mainstreaming principles.
- To plan and implement protection mainstreaming activities.
- To monitor whether protection mainstreaming is taking place and evaluate the impact of their protection mainstreaming actions on affected populations.

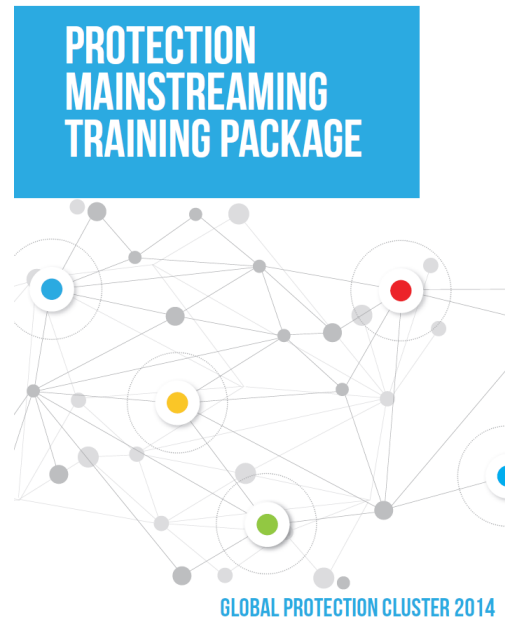


Specific Tools

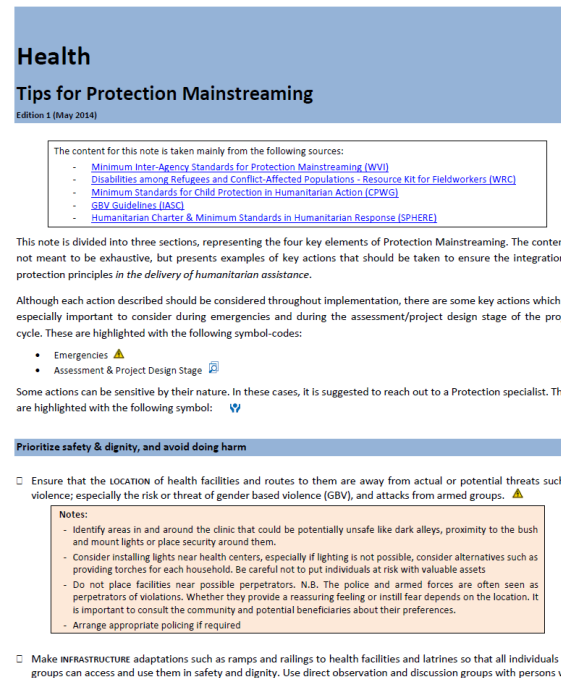
#	Tools and Guidance	Purpose
1	Beneficiary Assessment (FGD, KII)	Template gather affected populations perception of protection risks and potential mitigation measures
2	Risk Matrix and Mitigation Measures	Template to present protection risks identified and the prevention and mitigations measures validated by the affected communities
3	Project Design Assessment	Assessment to score the alignment of a new project with the key protection mainstreaming principles
4	Staff Assessment	Assessment to evaluate staff knowledge and skillset on protection mainstreaming
5	Protection Mainstreaming Action Plan	Template for planning and reporting on protection mainstreaming activities
6	Protection Mainstreaming Monitoring Indicators	List of suggested process and impact indicators to monitor protection mainstreaming
7	Protection Mainstreaming Monitoring Score Card	Score Card to assess the level to which the organisation has followed the steps to effectively mainstream protection

Additional Resources

The Global Protection Cluster maintains a Support Package which includes:



A Protection Mainstreaming Training Package, available in ENG, FR, SPA, AR



Sector-Specific Checklists for Education, WASH, Shelter, FSL



Protection Mainstreaming Video, with subtitles in FR, SPA, AR