



Learning Mission IRAQ
The Centrality of Protection
 Protection at the heart of Iraq's response

There are a multitude of armed groups engaged in Iraq's protracted armed conflict, including an international aerial support operation. Protection concerns range from collective punishment, torture, and summary executions, to access to safety, freedom of movement, arbitrary detention, and the protection of women and girls. Humanitarian actors work hard but struggle to access populations in need of assistance and protection, especially in active conflict areas. The interagency response is led by the Humanitarian Coordinator with the support of the Humanitarian Country Team. The Protection Cluster is co-led by UNHCR and the Danish Refugee Council at the national level, with four sub-national coordination hubs.

Practical steps for senior humanitarian leaders to put the centrality of protection into practice

- The Humanitarian Coordinator and Head of the Cluster Lead Agency demonstrates clear leadership for protection in their statements and actions.
- Put in place a Humanitarian Country Team protection strategy prioritising 2–3 of the most acute issues agreed with Humanitarian Country Team members.
- Ensure that the Humanitarian Response Plan includes clear protection objectives that each sector must respond to, and encourage cross cluster validation.
- Have protection as a standing item on the Humanitarian Country Team agenda supported by a Critical Protection Issues (CPI) Note detailing follow up actions.
- Ensure sufficient seniority of National Protection Cluster Coordinators (P5) for Level 3 emergencies and integrated mission contexts.
- Seek NGO Co-Coordinators to strengthen clusters and promote engagement with national and local NGOs.
- Promote division of work between the National Protection Cluster and sub-national sectors: the national level takes on broader system and advocacy concerns whilst the sub-national focus on operations.
- Consider utilisation of a Rapid Protection Assessment Tool across clusters with focal points in field locations.

Leadership on protection in the HCT, the HRP, funding and operations

Empowered leadership:

1. The Humanitarian Coordinator actively promotes protection at the centre of the response through her clear statements, direct support to the cluster and influence on the HRP process.
2. As the Agency Lead, UNHCR provides the protection cluster with support and proactive leadership in the HCT.
3. The UNHCR, and the Danish Refugee Council as the co-lead, are sufficiently senior to support expected high level advocacy and operations in an L3 context.
4. Having an NGO co-cluster coordinator supports a broad based, inclusive cluster engagement.

Protection is central to the Humanitarian Country Team:

The Humanitarian Country Team has a Strategic Protection framework which commits Humanitarian Country Team members to key areas. This includes centering protection at the heart of the Humanitarian Response Plan and ensuring protection sensitive advocacy and interventions.

1. Each fortnight, the Cluster Lead Agency presents a Critical Protection Issues Note covering current protection issues.
2. The Note is prepared by the Cluster Coordinators with input from each sector. Preparation of the Note compels the sectors to look at protection issues.
3. The Note concludes with recommended actions that can be taken by the Humanitarian Country Team. It contains up to date information (relevant to within 48 hours of presentation).

Protection is central to the Humanitarian Response Plan and funding modalities:

1. The Humanitarian Response Plan includes a foundational statement emphasising the centrality of protection to the humanitarian response. The Humanitarian Response Plan provides a framework with clear protection objectives that each sector must respond to, compelling clusters to integrate protection priorities within sector strategies.
2. A number of clusters include protection partners who validate projects for inclusion in the Humanitarian Response Plan and common fund applications. The Cluster also has designated focal points for each cluster (as well as Cash and the Rapid Response Coordinating bodies). The focal points attend cluster meetings and lead collaboration on joint initiatives.
3. As protection is clearly set out in the Humanitarian Response Plan, the funding mechanisms include protection priorities. Each cluster must defend their sector plans and submissions to the Iraq humanitarian fund in front of a stakeholder' panel. During the defense, each cluster must explain how partners will work towards protection outcomes.

Protection is central to operations:

1. The division of work between the national protection cluster coordinators and sub-national sectors is clearly defined. The national level focuses on the broader system wide and advocacy concerns, whilst the sub-national coordination hubs focus on ensuring the delivery of protection services.
2. Making use of the Rapid Protection Assessment tool enables actors to identify key protection concerns after an event in the field (within 72 hours). It is a tool supported by focal points in field locations, linked to the clusters.

Potential next steps for the Iraq response

- Highlight more the delivery of protection services at the sub-national level to promote understanding of the protection cluster's focus on operational response in addition to advocacy and standard-setting.
- Revamp the HCT protection framework so that there are three clear protection concerns that the HCT is prioritising. The concerns should be linked to the reporting in the Critical Protection Issues Note presented each fortnight.
- Consider detailing targeted follow up actions by specific HCT representatives in the Critical Protection Issues Note.
- Ensure a working system, including adequate capacity to follow-up on protection related referrals made by other clusters and the Call Centre.
- Engage with cash-based interventions and livelihoods as an important method for addressing protection concerns across sectors. Cash provides flexibility and promotes dignity in the response by providing families with a means to address what is uppermost in their minds, be it eviction for non-payment of rent or buying medicines for an elderly family member.