



Global Protection Forum

In the Hour of Need: Advancing Prevention and Proactive Protection



SUMMARY REPORT

23rd October – 2nd November 2023 | Online Event

Introduction

From the 23 October to 2 November 2023 the Global Protection Cluster (GPC), its Strategic Advisory Group and Areas of Responsibility organized the Global Protection Forum with the theme In the Hour of Need: Advancing Prevention and Proactive Protection. The Forum is dedicated to the broader constituency of the GPC and designed to foster dialogue on current protection priorities, discuss emerging issues and present new evidence and good practices on a chosen theme across Protection Cluster operations. The Forum included an opening ceremony, six core sessions and two side events. The Forum presented an opportunity to showcase frontline work and also hear from local voices. Registration numbers reached over 4100 people from 143 different countries. In total, more than 2,112 unique participations were recorded.

Simultaneous interpretation in French, Spanish and Arabic was instrumental to ensure active participation of field colleagues and local actors. This reflects more diversity in registrations and participation in terms of region and organisation type than ever before – a strong sign that the forum is designed for and with colleagues and practitioners from the field.

The Forum focused on (i) strengthening understanding across the protection sector with regards to current trends, approaches and learnings surrounding the thematic focus and (ii) identifying and advancing needed shifts in behaviours, practices and policies that will enable a system-wide and strengthened approach to said thematic focus for a diverse range of protection actors.

Thematic Focus – [In the Hour of Need: Advancing Prevention and Proactive Protection](#)

This theme focused on the range of protection approaches and interventions being advanced by protection actors in support of prevention of and response to violence, conflict, and human rights abuses. This includes the efforts of protection actors to prevent harm and mitigate further protection risks, as well as the responsive actions taken amidst violence and civilian harm. This theme aimed to highlight the role of Protection Clusters and actors during the 'hour of need' for communities affected by crises, unpack emerging challenges and advance sharing of promising practices that respond to the risks and needs experienced by diverse populations.



Amidst growing levels of conflict and violence globally, the Global Protection Forum served to highlight the roles and approaches of protection actors in ensuring preventative and responsive interventions that drive protection outcomes for affected communities. The Forum in 2023 provided a space for the protection community to move away from a ‘process-orientated’ approach and instead focus on protection-centered actions, impact, and outcomes amidst the response phase to humanitarian crises. A sharper focus on preventing protection risks from the outset and ensuring timely, accountable, and locally driven protection response is increasingly critical in the current context of spiraling numbers of people in need, limited resources and need to do protection work differently.



GLOBAL PROTECTION FORUM

IN THE HOUR OF NEED:

ADVANCING PREVENTION AND PROACTIVE PROTECTION

OCTOBER

CEST

23

Monday

OPENING CEREMONY

14:00 - 15:00

WHY PREVENTION AND PROACTIVE PROTECTION MATTER: THE ROLE OF PROTECTION ACTORS BEFORE AND DURING THE 'HOUR OF NEED'

24

Tuesday

CIVILIANS PAY THE HIGHEST PRICE: PROTECTION CENTERED HEALTH INTERVENTIONS TO REDUCE THE RISK AND THE IMPACT OF ATTACKS AGAINST HEALTH CARE

14:00 - 15:30

International Rescue Committee, Global Health Cluster, WHO, ICRC

This session demonstrates how protection-centered health interventions are key to preventing and reducing civilian harm from attacks against health care. It will show how promising practices from Syria, oPt and Nigeria are applicable to all humanitarian services in providing broader lessons for collective action to protect civilians exposed to the horrors of conflict.

25

Wednesday

HOUSING, LAND AND PROPERTY RIGHTS AS PROACTIVE PROTECTION: CUSTOM, CLIMATE AND COMMUNITY

14:00 - 15:30

Global Housing, Land and Property Area of Responsibility

Much of our work is in customary settings. What does this mean for Housing Land and Property rights? This session is an opportunity to consider how securing HLP rights in customary contexts – including working with customary HLP actors and communities – can reduce harm and mitigate protection risks related to safe, secure and dignified shelter and housing.

26

Thursday

COMMUNITY-LED APPROACHES TO ADVANCE PREVENTION AND PROACTIVE PROTECTION

14:00 - 15:30

Norwegian Refugee Council, Oxfam, GADHOP DR Congo

This session presents an opportunity to discuss how communities can and do protect themselves and how community-led actions can contribute to achieving protection outcomes, including violence prevention. It aims to strengthen the understanding of these proactive protection approaches by showcasing examples of how communities across countries, cultures and conflicts have protected themselves in armed conflict and other situations of violence.

CET

30

Monday

ROUNDTABLE DISCUSSION: ENSURING AGE, GENDER, DISABILITY AND DIVERSITY IN PREVENTIVE AND RESPONSIVE ACTIONS

14:00 - 15:30

Humanity & Inclusion, CARE Afghanistan, Gender in Humanitarian Aid Afghanistan, Somali Livelihood Initiative and Disability Organisation, Asia Pacific Gender in Humanitarian Action Working Group, CARE Asia

Inclusion is a fundamental cross-cutting element of all prevention and proactive protection efforts. This expert roundtable will explore approaches and best practices in ensuring age, gender, disability and diversity perspectives in preventive and immediate responses to the risks and needs experienced by diverse populations.

31

Tuesday

ACTING BEFORE THE HOUR OF NEED: PREVENTION OF HARM TO CHILDREN IN HUMANITARIAN SETTINGS

10:00 - 11:30

Global Child Protection Area of Responsibility, Alliance for Child Protection in Humanitarian Action, Street Child UK

The session contributes to the necessary mind shift to recognise primary prevention as a critical element of humanitarian action. It will discuss where the sector is in the implementation of primary prevention work, including challenges met by child protection actors and key steps taken in understanding the root causes of harm and developing theories of change to address them.

NOVEMBER

01 INNOVATION CORNER: BEST PRACTICES, TOOLS, AND EMERGING RESEARCH

Wednesday This interactive marketplace showcases innovative approaches to prevention and proactive protection, split into two rounds of breakout room presentations:

10:00 - 10:45

Durable Solutions: The Role of Women and Youth in Ending Protracted Displacement among Conflicting Communities in Somalia, The Case of Hirshabele
Relief and Development Concern International, Somalia

The Missing Link in Advancing GBV Prevention and Proactive Protection of Women in South Sudan
Coalition for Humanity, South Sudan

Explosive Hazard Management First Responder Training
United Nations Mine Action Service, Iraq

A Vicious Cycle: Climate Change, Protection of Civilians and the UN Mission in South Sudan (UNMISS)
Center for Civilians in Conflict

Embedding Diverse Sexual Orientation, Gender Identity, Gender Expression and Sex Characteristics (SOGIESC) Considerations in Humanitarian Response
International Rescue Committee and Edge Effect

10:45 - 11:30

How Local Actors are Driving Protection Outcomes Amidst Crises
Community In Need Aid, South Sudan

In the Hour of Need: Why we Should All be Prioritizing Child Marriage and How to Do It?
Plan International, Save the Children

Building on Pre-Existing Community Coping Mechanisms for Mental Health and Psychosocial Support
Global Child Protection Area of Responsibility

Denial of Access to Information and Disinformation: How to Integrate those Protection Risks in our Protection Analysis and Program Design?
Internews

Cultural Norms in South Sudan: GBV Prevention and Responses
Human Aid for Community Organisation, South Sudan

Spotlight on Anti-Trafficking in Humanitarian Action
GPC Task Team on Anti-Trafficking

01 PROACTIVE ENGAGEMENT WITH ARMED ACTORS TO REDUCE VIOLENCE AND PROTECT CIVILIANS

14:00 - 15:30

Wednesday **Humanitarian Policy Group / Overseas Development Institute, Nonviolent Peaceforce**

This session explores ways that conflict affected civilians engage with armed actors to protect themselves. It will consider different forms of engagement with armed actors to enhance their responsiveness to community protection needs, reduce violence within their ranks, or support unarmed civilian protection efforts. It will discuss the implications for protection and peace actors, and opportunities to strengthen complementarity between humanitarian and peace action.

02 PROTECTING CIVILIANS FROM THE USE OF EXPLOSIVE WEAPONS IN POPULATED AREAS: SUPPORTING NATIONAL ACTION

14:00 - 15:30

Thursday **UNOCHA, UNHCR, Article 36, ICRC**

This session focuses on preventing the use of explosive weapons in populated areas given the recently adopted Political Declaration on Strengthening the Protection of Civilians from the Humanitarian Consequences Arising from the Use of Explosive Weapons in Populated Areas and the Protection Cluster's role in supporting its implementation. It speaks to the humanitarian impacts of EWIPA use as witnessed by protection actors on the ground, including for humanitarian access.



Register for all online sessions [here!](#)

Interpretation: Spanish, French and Arabic



Summary of Global Protection Forum Session 1

Contributors: IRC, Global Health Cluster, ICRC, WHO

From Ukraine to Afghanistan to Yemen and Sudan and most recently in Gaza, civilians continue to pay the highest price when critical civilian infrastructure, such as education or health care, are under attack. Across Cluster operations, attacks against health care are a grave threat to everyone living in areas affected by conflict. The impact of the attacks on health care workers and facilities are simply devastating.

It is clear that not all Governments and armed actors are able, or willing, to comply with their obligation under international law to protect health care. Communities have played a significant role to ensure the protection of health care, as do civil society networks and local actors. Where there are gaps, humanitarian protection and health teams have implemented protection centered health interventions to help reduce the impact. The Syria Protection Cluster, the Health Cluster, UNIDOR and IRC in South Sudan, ICRC in Colombia, and WHO in Yemen spoke to the collaboration between health and protection teams, and what it takes to prevent and mitigate impacts of attacks on health care.

The promising practices shared during the session included the use of existing monitoring and reporting mechanisms on attacks on healthcare (for instance the [WHO SSA, Government led mechanisms](#) and the [Safeguarding Health in Conflict Coalition](#)), community-led, governmental and interagency early warning mechanisms, engagement and confidential dialogue with armed groups on the legal framework related to the protection of healthcare, and contingency planning to mitigate risks towards healthcare exposed to attacks and security threats. The different speakers also outlined the challenges, and what still needs to be done by humanitarian and protection actors to urgently to strengthen the collective response:

- More data sharing and joint analysis between health and protection actors to facilitate a common and evidence-based understanding of the issues.
- Stronger collaboration between health and protection for joint action to help to reduce violence and respond to the needs of health workers and communities.
- Increased resources to end violence and reduce the impact of this violence on health workers and communities.

This issue cannot be addressed by just one actor alone. Sustained partnerships between national and international NGOs, UN Agencies, ICRC, as well as between Protection and Health actors and constant engagement with those affected, wider communities, national authorities and donors are essential. The [Joint Operational Framework](#) established by the Health and Protection Cluster is an example of a vehicle for such collaboration.

Summary of Global Protection Forum Session 2

Contributors: Housing, Land and Property Area of Responsibility (HLP AoR) of the Global Protection Cluster, United Nations Human Settlements Programme (UN-Habitat), Norwegian Refugee Council (NRC), Global Land Tool Network (GLTN), Humanitarian and Development Consortium (HDC), United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), Uganda Community Based Association for Women and Children Welfare (UCOBAC).

Housing, Land and Property (HLP) rights have their origins in international human rights law and the right to adequate housing. However, whilst laws are important, HLP also involves practices, customs and attitudes that revolve around the full spectrum of rights to public and private housing, land and property.

Much of our work is in customary settings – what does this mean for Housing, Land and Property rights? In these settings, different land tenure systems co-exist within a country, each with their own legal framework, legal authority over rights and legitimacy to resolve disputes. How then do we adapt our approaches to increasing people’s security of tenure; ensuring that the rules and arrangements that make it possible for people to live on their land and use their property work well for the most vulnerable?

Safeguarding HLP rights in customary settings can be part of proactive and preventative approaches that reduce harm and mitigate protection risks related to safe, secure and dignified shelter and housing, and access to land for food, agriculture and livelihoods.

Actors and activists from operations, policy and donor perspectives, including those working on development and peace, focused on exploring the value and significance of customary HLP actors in the allocation and management of housing, land and properties, for the protection of ecosystems and indigenous communities as part of this.

Climate change increasingly results in the displacement of local communities. Local communities living in customary settings have an increasingly important role to play in the mitigation of climate risks for the proactive protection of people and livelihoods.

Further efforts are needed to integrate HLP into thinking on prevention and proactive protection, and to do so in collaboration with nexus and solutions-oriented actors. Speakers advocated for this by reflecting on the benefits of a community-based approach, ensuring the development of management strategies that are context-specific, socially acceptable, and ecologically sound, leading to long-term sustainability. Positive examples from field operations illustrated how to address this gap.

In Afghanistan’s informal settlements, approaches that integrate HLP and climate, and put the community at the centre, have had positive impacts increasing tenure security and climate resilience. Securing HLP rights helps mitigate climate vulnerability by increasing household and settlement-level investment in climate-resilient housing and infrastructure.

In Uganda, the escalating menace of land degradation in rural areas called for a comprehensive climate change strategy that incorporates climate change interventions, such as wetland wise use planning, with the registration of land rights to tackle the ecological

concerns and provide a robust solution for securing communal access points to natural resources.

In South Sudan, the HLP AoR has supported capacity development of communities on climate change and environment, including preventive actions such as flood mitigation strategies within the context of HLP. Awareness creation and information sessions aimed at encouraging communities to move to higher ground during the rainy season. Speakers also emphasised the importance of integrated approaches and synergies, working hand in hand with actors from clusters such as Shelter and Food Security.

In Honduras, the protection of HLP rights by registering abandoned land and property is part of a strategy for preventing conflict and promoting longer-term solutions to forced displacement.

Across all these cases, careful planning and coordination is key – developing the right relationships to collaborate across clusters, sectors and different legal systems. Understanding the context is a crucial part of this process, as part of due diligence efforts to identify the relevant laws, rules, community approaches and impact of efforts on HLP.

Overall, the session helped foster greater understanding and connection across clusters, sectors, operations and perspectives. This fits into wider efforts by the HLP AoR following requests from operational colleagues for more resources on working in customary HLP contexts, which should lead to hybrid and evolving frameworks on HLP.

Summary of Global Protection Forum Session 3

Contributors: Norwegian Refugee Council, Oxfam, AGED Burkina Faso, SIDA, READO Somalia, Apoyar Colombia, The Tenth of April Ukraine, GADHOP DR Congo, Global Protection Cluster.

Emphasis has also often been placed on the role of external actors to provide support and assistance to affected communities when duty bearers are failing in their responsibility to protect.

However, the capacities of communities themselves in actively contributing to their own protection has often been less understood and less visible – not always appearing as part of formal funding strategies and response plans across the humanitarian sector, but nevertheless playing a vital role in supporting protection outcomes for those faced with crisis.

Over the past number of years this is however starting to shift, and protection actors have been seeking to really build on and advance the participation and leadership of communities. Local actors and communities must play a more prominent role in protection efforts to effectively reduce protection risks. A truly inclusive, community-led response is crucial.

Community-led approaches offer a pathway for advancing prevention and response to protection risks by giving control of decisions and resources to community groups as agents of their own protection. Many community-based protection actors are the ones with the needed contextual knowledge, the relationships of trust with parties to the conflict and community members, as well as the proximity and access needed to support the protection in some of the most difficult operating environments.

In Ukraine, communities on the ground were the first one to deliver humanitarian assistance, organise evacuation, and welcome people in shelters. In Somalia, READO are documenting behaviour change in the community, with local leaders advocating to support a rights-based approach, and an increasing focus on addressing GBV. In DR Congo, information to the population on their rights during raising awareness sessions are organised with together with communities. Maps of services available are shared with communities, that can be used in case of protection needs.

Community and local actors cannot and should not always have to do it alone and the broader sector, including international protection actors and allies, must support greater risk management and risk-sharing, amplifying, and accelerating impacts, as well as ensuring needed funding and resources are dedicated not only to response but also to preventing harm before it happens.

Summary of Global Protection Forum Session 4

Contributors: Global Child Protection Area of Responsibility, The Alliance for Child Protection in Humanitarian Action, Plan International, Street Child UK, UNICEF, DG ECHO, and the German Federal Foreign Office.

Prevention plays a critical role in child protection in humanitarian action. This session highlighted the importance of the lens shift required to effectively protect children from the devastating impact of humanitarian crises, conflict, and violence, stressing that much of this harm is preventable. Anticipatory action is also key in addressing the root causes of harm to children. UNICEF's [Child Protection Strategy](#) for 2020-2030 places a strong emphasis on prevention. There is considerable focus on secondary and tertiary prevention, for example through case management, rather than primary prevention and we need to add this lens to our work to effectively prevent harm to children. Further investment in preventing harm to children at the population or sub-population level, in addition to responsive actions, is needed for humanitarians to fulfill their ethical duty to prevent harm when possible, to uphold the rights, including the best interests, of the child and to potentially be more cost-effective in our programming.

The Alliance for Child Protection in Humanitarian Action shared their increasing body of work to develop tools, build awareness, and generate evidence, to support the uptake and prioritisation of the Primary Prevention Approach as a critical element of child protection across humanitarian action. This includes the development of core resources such as the '[Primary Prevention Framework for Child Protection in Humanitarian Action](#)' and '[Identifying and Ranking Risk and Protective Factors: A Brief Guide](#)' amongst others.

Plan International shared experience in piloting a primary prevention framework in South Sudan, highlighting the participatory approach adopted, the development of a monitoring plan, and the identification of key risk and protective factors in South Sudan and Niger.

Street Child UK emphasized the importance of engaging local organizations and understanding the root causes of violence and highlighted the significance of research into prevention mechanisms and the need to incorporate these strategies into ongoing and future programs. We cannot do prevention work without the community. They need to lead the assessment of the protection risks and the protective factors. We need to make the engagement meaningful. Community-based protection should not be only project-design, but should be part of a broader prevention strategy.

Donors also stressed the importance of evidence-based research, multi-sectoral approaches, and community involvement, also emphasizing the need for a continuum of care and sustained interventions in prevention. They also reflected on the challenges faced in engaging in prevention due to the short funding cycle.

Furthermore, discussions emphasized the need for systemic changes in the way humanitarian work is done, stressing the importance of integration, coordination, and early prevention across the protection spectrum. Donors highlighted the need to implement prevention

through capacity strengthening. They also flagged the importance of including children and young people in accountability procedures and creating safe spaces for their participation.

The session concluded with a focus on strengthening collaboration with other sectors on prevention and the importance of using language that facilitates cross-sectoral engagement. The participants agreed that prevention is a crucial element of child protection and broader humanitarian action, and that further efforts are needed to integrate preventive measures into humanitarian programs and policies.

Key takeaways from the session:

- Prevention is a critical component of child protection in humanitarian action.
- A coordinated multi-sectoral approach is essential for effective prevention, particularly primary prevention.
- Investing in evidence generation is crucial to support the uptake of prevention approaches.
- Systemic changes are needed in the way humanitarian work is done to prioritize primary prevention.
- Collaboration with other sectors is vital for strengthening prevention efforts.

Summary of Global Protection Forum Session 5

Speakers: Overseas Development Institute, Nonviolent Peaceforce, Norwegian Refugee Council, SIDA.

How do affected civilians engage with armed actors to protect themselves? This session considered different forms of proactive engagement with armed actors to enhance their responsiveness to community protection needs, reduce violence within their ranks, or support unarmed civilian protection efforts. It demystified the engagement with armed actors as an impossible feat or a compromise to one's security. Discussions reflected on the implications for protection and peace actors, and opportunities to strengthen complementarity between humanitarian and peace action.

Speakers from South Sudan highlighted the risks faced by youth, including forced involvement in criminal activities and lack of access to education, as well as the distrust between the community and the police. However, positive developments were also noted, such as the successful application of a strategy for dialogue and trust-building, and the formation of a community leadership for peace and stability, including Nonviolent Peaceforce's efforts to engage with the youth, build trust, promote peacebuilding activities, and train the police on unarmed civilian protection.

NRC shared experience with humanitarian mediation efforts in CAR, emphasizing the importance of sustained efforts in strengthening community capacities in mediation and conflict resolution. A [new ODI case study report](#) finds that communities in CAR often exercise considerable influence over armed groups. The report highlights that too often external interventions, including those from humanitarian protection actors, undermine and frustrate these community-level efforts. This calls for approaches that aim to reduce and prevent violence to build on existing community action and agency. To do this effectively, the report recommends the humanitarian protection actors work more in complementarity with peace actors and learn from their practice.

The importance of creativity, experimentation, and learning from each other in addressing complex issues related to violence was emphasised. Overall, speakers highlighted the need for continued learning from the practitioners in the field, highlighting the importance of community-based protection, prevention of violence, and multi-year financing for effective humanitarian response. There is a need for a more coordinated effort between humanitarian, peacebuilding, and human rights actors to achieve common protection outcomes.

Summary of Global Protection Forum Session 6

Speakers: OCHA, UNHCR, Article 36, Norwegian People's Aid, ICRC, Civilian Impact Monitoring Project in Yemen, Iraqi lawyer, IDP and explosive weapons survivor.

As underlined by the [UN Secretary-General](#), the use of explosive weapons in populated areas (EWIPA) is a major cause of civilian harm in armed conflict. Nearly 90% of victims are civilians. Explosive weapons also damage or destroy civilian infrastructure, with reverberating effects on essential services such as water, sanitation, electricity and healthcare. Victims and survivors of explosive weapons can face longer-term challenges of disabilities and trauma. The devastating effects of the use of explosive weapons in populated areas are seen currently in Gaza, and have been documented in Ukraine, Iraq, Yemen, Syria and across many other contexts.

An ICRC [study](#) found that the use of EWIPA is a recurring feature of contemporary armed conflicts, and a major cause of civilian harm. In addition, it has serious implications under international humanitarian law. The study found that while civilian harm in urban warfare has many causes and compounding factors, a lot will come down to the choice and use of weapons and tactics by the parties to the conflict. Information collected for the study and other sources clearly point to a pattern of grave civilian harm when heavy explosive weapons are used in cities and other populated areas. The ICRC study concludes that a policy of avoidance with regards to the use of heavy explosive weapons is necessary and possible and provides many recommendations in this regard.

In a milestone achievement, on 18 November 2022, States adopted the EWIPA Political Declaration, which has been endorsed by 83 States. The declaration includes a commitment to adopt and implement policies and practices to avoid civilian harm, including by restricting or refraining from the use of explosive weapons in populated areas, where such weapons may be expected to cause civilian harm. The panel underlined that implementing the declaration now is paramount. The panel also spoke to the importance for more states to endorse the political declaration. Protection actors can play a key role in supporting its universalization and implementation.

Speakers highlighted the humanitarian impacts of EWIPA use as witnessed by protection actors on the ground, including for humanitarian access, and the importance of working with communities to mitigate the risk of this harm. Insights were also shared on mechanisms like the Civilian Impact Monitoring Project in Yemen that are serving to provide an operational picture to inform humanitarian programming, victim assistance and response in as close to real time as possible. Additionally, they serve as valuable tools for advocacy and trend analysis.

The Norwegian People's Aid shared examples of effective preparedness and protection strategies to raise awareness and help civilians protect themselves when explosive weapons are used. For example, utilizing social media platforms to disseminate safety messages during conflicts. Collaborating with local organizations has proven to be highly effective in empowering civilians with the tools and knowledge they need to be better prepared and protected against the use of explosive weapons.

The panel concluded with a poignant testimony from a who has personally endured forced displacement and disability as a result of explosive weapons use in Iraq. The speaker welcomed the adoption of the EWIPA Political Declaration and expressed hope for a transformative shift away from the current approach. His expectation is that the declaration will go beyond its initial steps and make substantial progress in significantly reducing harm to civilians.

Key resources:

- [Political Declaration on Strengthening the Protection of Civilians from the Humanitarian Consequences Arising from the Use of Explosive Weapons in Populated Areas](#), 18 November 2022
- [Report of the UN Secretary-General on the Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict](#), 12 May 2023
- [Protecting civilians from the use of explosive weapons](#), INEW Briefing note, May 2023
- [Implementing the political declaration on explosive weapons in populated areas: questions and answers](#) October 2023
- [ICRC report: Civilians in populated areas must be protected against explosive weapons](#), 2022
- CIMP methodology <https://civilianimpactmonitoring.org/methodology>, October 2023
- CIMP thematic report on the impact of armed violence on civilians in different Yemeni cities https://civilianimpactmonitoring.org/onewebmedia/20210131_CIMP%20Thematic%2005_Cities.pdf,