

Whole of Syria
HUMANITARIAN STRATEGY FOR PROTECTION¹
Endorsed by the Strategic Steering Group in October 2015

INTRODUCTION

The conflict in Syria has entered its fifth year. A political solution is wanting. Violations and abuses in disregard of international humanitarian and human rights law continue to occur with total impunity in an atmosphere of widespread insecurity. Over 220,000 people have been killed and over one million injured as a result of the continuous use of means and methods of warfare that violate the basic tenets of IHL. Humanitarian needs in Syria have reached a record high. The coping mechanisms of internally displaced people (IDPs) and host communities are all but exhausted. The 2015 SRP indicates there are 12.2 million people in need of humanitarian assistance in Syria, including 7.6 million IDPs and more than 5.6 million children. In addition there are some 4.8 million people with acute assistance and protection needs in hard to reach and besieged locations.

It is imperative that a humanitarian response in Syria affords the most vulnerable within the population effective protection. The Guiding Principles on Internal Displacement and the Protection Principles incorporated into the Sphere Project guide the humanitarian protection response. The IASC statement on the Centrality of Protection seeks to ensure all humanitarian actors put protection at the fore of their work.² It states:

“At the field level, the responsibility for placing protection at the centre of international humanitarian action rests with Humanitarian Coordinators, Humanitarian Country Teams, and all Cluster Coordinators. Protection Clusters play a crucial role in supporting humanitarian actors to develop protection strategies, including to mainstream protection throughout all sectors and to coordinate specialised protection services for affected populations.”

The Centrality of Protection recognizes the complementary nature of the different mandates and roles of humanitarian actors and agencies. Protecting people in need inside Syria necessarily requires collaboration between humanitarian, human rights, political, and development actors. The SSG members aim to ensure that the overall humanitarian response remains coherent while respecting organizational mandates and approaches. The SSG members will collectively contribute to protection outcomes while recognising that achieving them is both an individual and a joint responsibility.

Members of all Sectors have the responsibility to implement this Protection Strategy under the leadership of the SSG, with the Protection Sector providing technical guidance. The Syria context requires humanitarian actors to ensure the principles of complementarity and subsidiarity are inherent in their Whole of Syria (WoS) approach.³ This applies also to the implementation of this strategy that will need to be tailored to the specific needs prevailing in each operational context.

UNDERLYING PRINCIPLES

Humanitarian actors share a common objective: to alleviate suffering and protect lives, livelihoods and people’s dignity. The objective is anchored in international human rights, humanitarian and

¹ The IASC definition of protection is as follows: “all activities aimed at obtaining full respect for the rights of the individual in accordance with the letter and the spirit of the relevant bodies of law (i.e. human rights law, humanitarian law and refugee law)”.

² IASC Principals Statement on the Centrality of Protection (2013)

³ SSG TOR, March 2015

Recognising that there is a need to de-politicise humanitarian assistance, the SSG re-emphasises the need to adhere to the humanitarian imperatives of humanity, neutrality, independence and impartiality and “do no harm” in all aspects of humanitarian action, to ensure a more effective protection of people in humanitarian crises.

refugee law. Humanitarian responses, in general, are intended to address acute cases of violations of these standards.⁴

a. Protection-oriented planning and programming

Recognising that provision of assistance may impact negatively on communities and worsen the effects of the conflict, humanitarian actors will respect the principle of “do no harm”, ensure that assistance is provided in a manner that prevents or minimizes risk and threats to persons seeking assistance, and focus on the most vulnerable civilians, especially women and children. Humanitarian actors must not inadvertently do harm, and therefore must anticipate actions that may draw civilians towards conflict areas, damage the protective environment or provoke tensions within communities or between communities that are already in conflict.

b. Humanitarian space and access

It is the responsibility of all parties to the conflict to facilitate humanitarian action and access to affected populations, and to protect humanitarian organizations. Humanitarian organizations have the right to provide assistance, to ensure the affected population’s right to receive assistance, and to deliver assistance in accordance with international humanitarian law and humanitarian principles.

c. Equality and non-discrimination in the context of neutral humanitarian action

The sole purpose of humanitarian assistance is to protect and assist conflict-affected populations, whoever they are and wherever they may be, without discrimination. Humanitarian action must not be determined by which party to the conflict controls a given location, and must not discriminate, reinforce or create inequalities among affected civilians.

d. Accountability to affected populations

Within their respective mandates, humanitarian actors are accountable to affected communities and base their action on participatory approaches that can allow people to have an active role in the decision making processes that affect them. This includes ensuring the participation of women, older persons, adolescents and children as well as other persons with specific protection needs. Humanitarian actors must also communicate in a transparent manner about their activities and consult with communities and their leaders on decisions that affect them, while also respecting the confidentiality of personal information.

SSG PROTECTION VISION

a. Enjoyment of Rights

The SSG protection vision is that displaced persons and other civilians in Syria are protected: are able to enjoy their rights, including the right to move freely in safety and dignity, and can live their lives without being targeted or discriminated against by warring parties. The SSG members encourage protection activities and programmes that alleviate the consequences of conflict and violence and ensure adequate treatment for all those in need; secure access to, and increase access for affected people; protect vulnerable groups, including victims of human rights abuses and increase their resilience; strengthen local capacities to protect people and deliver services and improve treatment of those whose freedom of movement is restricted. The SSG members commit to ensuring that the

⁴ OHCHR UNHCR joint paper on the Protection of Human rights in Humanitarian Crises

humanitarian operations do not compromise populations' protective environment and enjoyment of rights.

b. Complementary Roles to Ensure Protection

All members of the SSG are concerned with the protection of civilians and undertake complementary activities even though they have different mandates and operational approaches. Protection of civilians under threat of physical violence lies at the core of the RHC/HC mandate and is given priority in decisions on the use of its resources.

This strategy intends to complement other ongoing protection related work on Syria, notably the work within the scope of the Human Rights Up Front initiative, but is not a substitute for it.⁵

c. Exchange of information

Exchange of information including information on early warning planning and response, as well as geographical and thematic response prioritization is imperative. SSG will undertake consultations as appropriate regarding respective strategies, action plans and thematic guidelines on issues of mutual relevance in order to identify, reduce and prevent violence against civilians, including GBV, child recruitment and forced recruitment of adults into armed groups, while respecting current guidelines on coordination and information sharing protocols and principles of confidentiality. Risk mitigation measures should be put in place to preserve the safety and security of sources of information, particularly victims, witnesses and local civil society actors.

The SSG aims to foster and sustain a constructive relationship between human rights, political, development and humanitarian actors and to strengthen existing coordination mechanisms on protection of civilians, while preserving humanitarian space and principles. The SSG commits to advocate on protection as reflected in the prioritization of activities. This will require consultation and interaction, including regarding the implementation of the UNSC mandated Monitoring and Reporting Mechanism (MRM) on grave violations against children, and the Monitoring, Analysis and Reporting Arrangements (MARA) on conflict related sexual violence.

ANALYSIS OF THE PROTECTION SITUATION IN SYRIA

The situation in Syria is characterized by the absence of effective protection for a significant number of civilians in Syria. The current situation continues to expose civilians to human rights and IHL violations and abuses, some of which may amount to war crimes and crimes against humanity, often targeting people based on their ethnicity, religion or place of origin. Extrajudicial killings, enforced disappearances, rape and other acts of sexual violence, arbitrary arrests and detention, targeted attacks against civilians not taking part in hostilities, grave violations against children (including recruitments, killing and maiming, sexual violence, abductions), violence aimed at spreading terror among the civilian population and attacks on hospitals and schools have been widely documented.

The conflict has been characterized by the destruction of civilian property, including houses, hospitals, schools and markets; arbitrary restrictions on movement; the blocking of access to goods and services; and the looting and destruction of humanitarian property by all parties to the conflict. The conflict has become more complex with numerous formal and informal armed groups splintering and shifting alliances resulting in higher levels of civilian casualties than in past years. As a result of targeted

⁵ Within the frame of the HRUF, the Inter-Agency Task Force (IATF) on Syria has developed a system wide Protection Strategy for Syria integrating the complementary strategies of DPA, OHCHR and humanitarian protection. The SSG strategy, builds on the Damascus HCT Strategy (endorsed February 2015), which formed the humanitarian element and, should be read in conjunction with the IATF Strategy on Syria.

violence against civilians, many people have faced multiple displacements and are exposed to multiple protection threats, especially when they move in areas with several or changing front lines. Humanitarian actors have been prohibited from accessing population in need in several locations while civilians are prohibited from leaving, resulting in desperate living conditions and, in some cases, avoidable deaths. Civilians have been arbitrarily detained by government forces and unlawfully abducted, deprived of their liberty or enslaved by members of armed groups, often forced to survive under dire humanitarian conditions and left them vulnerable to mistreatment often tantamount to torture, including sexual violence. Massive International Humanitarian Law violations and Human rights abuses are reported in areas under the control of ISIL, which remain mostly out of reach for humanitarian actors. There is widespread impunity for even the most serious violations and abuses across the country.

The impact of prolonged conflict has negatively impacted on the effectiveness of existing protection mechanisms including social and family protection networks and community-based structures. It has increased the vulnerability of specific groups – notably, multiple displaced, children and adolescents, women and girls, the elderly, people with disabilities, conflict-affected Palestine refugees, other refugees and third country nationals including migrant workers - by creating greater protection risks. Since the conflict began grave child rights violations have been systematically documented. Women have been targeted by old and new types of violence including Jihad al-nikah and enslavement, which have not been known in the recent history of Syria.

STRATEGIC PRIORITIES

Protection actors in Hubs are at different stages in their development of Protection strategies, approaches and activities because different forces are at play in each operational Hub. The SSG recognises that it is necessary for one Hub (Amman) to be adaptive and evolutionary in its approach while others can be more focused on specific protection outcomes (Gaziantep) or undertake regular renewal of the strategies developed over the years (Damascus). The SSG protection strategy outlines the over-arching objectives across hubs and identifies actions that will contribute to these objectives.

The three protection priorities, outlined below, provide a clear focus for protection activities and include ensuring preparedness⁶ for any future displacements. These priorities provide guidance for humanitarian actors and national and local authorities.

The SSG encourages each Hub to develop protection mechanisms and structures in accordance with established IASC and GPC (including AoR) guidance that will:

- Ensure an integrated response;
- Identify gaps in response and seek to find solutions through referrals to the appropriate Sector;
- Provide a forum for protection concerns to be raised and linked to humanitarian responses and other appropriate mechanisms;
- Ensure critical protection concerns identified by humanitarian actors are referred to the Protection Cluster and AoRs for specialist response;
- Liaise with relevant local authorities and government as appropriate.

The Work Plan (Annex I) details lead responsibility for the overall implementation and critical actions under each of the Protection Priorities below. It also serves to operationalize the Protection Strategy and will be used to achieve the SSG's protection vision and objectives. Each objective includes a number of activities and indicators that can be monitored and measured.

⁶This document should provide guidance when contingency planning and developing preparedness plans.

PRIORITY ONE - Create and sustain a protective environment and enhance protection through encouraging respect for IHL and HRL and mitigating protection risks through advocacy.

To gain insight into the main protection needs and vulnerabilities of the affected population the SSG members encourage:

a. Joint assessments, in particular for IDPs, for the purpose of a more targeted humanitarian response aimed at meeting protection needs and to strengthen evidence-based advocacy at all levels and with different stakeholders. The principle of independent humanitarian assessments (including post distribution) with civilian populations should be upheld. Assessments must, to the extent possible, rely on participatory approaches. Sectors and Hubs will agree on protocols to facilitate information sharing between sectors where possible to enable a deeper analysis and targeted advocacy to ensure protection needs are met.

b. Development of a mechanism that gathers information on IDPs including: location, humanitarian situation and protection needs and tracks movement to the extent possible and with the objective of ensuring an appropriate and targeted response.

c. Monitoring of the protection situation of IDPs and conflict affected civilians, especially those who have suffered physical or psychological harm resulting directly from the conflict, to inform decision making for the provision of appropriate humanitarian responses. The SSG notes that protection monitoring is distinguished from human rights monitoring and is linked to the availability of resources and appropriate responses in the humanitarian response.⁷ It is imperative that those who have special needs and those who are most vulnerable are identified and prioritised. Available avenues to assist this process of identification include:

1. Vulnerable Categories: a 4-page guide from the Protection Sector to assist in all phases of programming: i) assessment; ii) designing response; iii) sharing information; iv) during implementation. (Annex III)
2. The Ministry of Social Affairs or similar counterpart can be approached for information on individuals in specific geographic locations who are vulnerable.
3. Municipality authorities can advise on vulnerable persons in the locality.
4. In collective centres, vulnerable persons identified by NGO or other UN protection team.

d. Awareness-raising on international humanitarian and human rights law and humanitarian and protection principles that reaches a wide group of stakeholders. Awareness-raising will complement protection advocacy by fostering the necessary understanding and sense of accountability of all the stakeholders.

e. Development of policy papers on humanitarian evacuations, safe zones/buffer zones, IDP returns, informed by GPC and other appropriate guidance. Define decision-making processes and lines of authority for interaction with non-humanitarian actors in development of such policies. Guidance will be based upon protection principles that will ensure minimum standards as well as effective communication and information sharing including with the affected communities and providing special measures for persons with specific needs.

⁷ Specifically mandated institutions including the Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic, OHCHR and the MRM are responsible for documenting violations of international humanitarian law and human rights in Syria and have the requisite expertise.

f. All strategic planning exercises, including contingency planning, sector strategies and localised strategies should reflect potential protection risks and mitigating measures.

Advocacy priorities identified for the WoS are articulated in the SSG Protection Advocacy Plan (Annex II).

PRIORITY TWO - Increase access to protection responses for the most vulnerable and people with specific needs giving particular emphasis to child protection and gender-based violence (GBV) prevention and response.

The SSG members encourage prioritization of:

- a. A collaborative approach involving relevant Sectors that will increase protection services in accessible areas of Syria to mitigate the consequences of the crisis and foster peace, reconciliation and resilience.
- b. The development of community support mechanisms, particularly for child protection, GBV prevention and response and risk education on explosive weapons.
- c. Expanding psychosocial support services through static and mobile child and adolescent friendly spaces; increasing community based protection activities to better reach the most vulnerable groups in areas deemed safe and those residing in geographically hard to reach areas; raising awareness on child recruitment and child rights; providing comprehensive services to boys and girls at risk and survivors of violence; establishing and developing existing case management systems and referral mechanisms; mainstreaming the Minimum Standards for Child Protection in Humanitarian Action and enhancing capacity of child protection actors.
- d. Given that women and adolescent girls are disproportionately affected by slavery and sexual violence due to forced displacement, family separation, lack of basic structural and societal protections, and the limited availability of and safe access to services will require innovative protection responses. Key activities, when access permits, will include the expansion of activities related to the prevention and response of gender-based violence (GBV) including safety audits; creation of safe spaces for women; psychosocial support services; case management; establishment and development of GBV referral pathways; PSS and CMR trainings for health workers; livelihood activities for survivors and support for reintegration of survivors into their communities.
- e. Access to all appropriate civil documents necessary for the enjoyment and exercise of rights, including widows and orphans, who may need support with custody and inheritance matters. The SSG encourages all humanitarian actors to ensure IDPs are supported so that they can access appropriate documents. Humanitarian actors should ensure that IDPs are aware of the documents they require and where they can access assistance in legal matters. Where possible the SSG encourages the development of complaints mechanisms so people have an avenue to raise programme or protection concerns. Such mechanism should be designed to ensure accessibility by all members of the community.

PRIORITY THREE - Strengthen capacities of local actors to assess, analyze and respond to the protection needs of affected populations and mainstreaming protection across the humanitarian

The SSG encourages the humanitarian community to strengthen the capacities of local actors, including those at risk, by developing their understanding of the humanitarian principles of humanity, impartiality, neutrality, independence and 'do no harm' and basic principles of international humanitarian and human rights law. Staff and volunteers must have an opportunity to access protection mainstreaming training with a practical focus on their programmes to ensure an understanding not only of the protection principles but also on how to integrate them in their daily work. Staff have a responsibility to report to the Protection Sector leads any serious protection concerns that require a separate protection response through their organisation or agency.

The SSG is committed to the Prevention of Sexual Exploitation and Abuse (PSEA). All necessary measures will be taken to ensure response mechanisms, including telephone hotlines, are in place and actions will be taken in response to complaints of sexual exploitation and abuse of affected communities by staff of humanitarian actors.

Protection sector members should ensure where possible the participation of IDPs and the wider community when planning protection responses to encourage the empowerment of IDPs. Meaningful participation and informed engagement programmes should reach out to all IDPs including boys and girls, women and men, older persons and persons with disabilities. Information relating to assistance and related matters should be proactively distributed to ensure communities and in particular vulnerable persons are aware of their entitlements and options. Humanitarian organisations must ensure that IDPs and people in host communities are fully informed and that information is accessible to all in user friendly formats. Support should be provided to vulnerable persons to ensure they are included in any assistance process.

Annex I: Protection Strategy Action Plan

This Action Plan lists the core activities that will be undertaken by relevant humanitarian actors to fulfill the protection vision of the SSG and achieve the objectives of the Protection Strategy.

Protection Priorities

- 1) Create and sustain a protective environment and enhance protection through encouraging respect for IHL and HRL and mitigating protection risks through advocacy.
- 2) Increase access to protection responses for the most vulnerable and people with specific needs, giving particular emphasis to child protection and gender-based violence (GBV) prevention and response.
- 3) Strengthen capacities of local actors to assess, analyze and respond to the protection needs of affected populations and mainstreaming protection across the humanitarian response.

Key Activities	Progress Indicators	Lead	Participants
Objective 1:			
1.1 Increase engagement with parties to the conflict, stressing the need to protect civilians and comply with basic principles of international humanitarian law, reaffirming that authorities have the primary responsibility for the security, safety and well-being of civilians and displaced persons across the country.	<p>Number and nature of actions taken by the parties to the conflict to address violations of IH and HR law and the Guiding principles on IDPs;</p> <p>Number of times protection issues are raised with parties to the conflict by the international humanitarian, political and human rights actors</p> <p>Parties to the conflict response to advocacy</p> <p>Action Plans signed to address specific child rights violations (MRM framework)</p> <p>Public commitments made by parties related to PoC issues, including specific measures to protect children</p>	RHC/HC/ DRHC/ OSE	HCT/ HLG Member States, relevant international humanitarian, political and Human rights actors and NGOs.
1.2 Raise key protection issues and trends with leadership of warring parties and other relevant stakeholders with a view to resolving issues.	Advocacy messages related to protection are distributed and have measurable impact.	HC / RHC / DRHC Action alone or together depending on the nature of the message.	3 Pillars (humanitarian, political and Human rights) protection agencies, protections sectors and HRAs

1.3 Monitor, report and respond to grave violations against children (UNSC mandated MRM)	Quarterly reports produced on reported grave violations against children. Outcomes of meetings with Inter-Ministerial Committee in Damascus Progress in engagement with AOGs (measured against a set of agreed upon benchmarks)	HC and UNICEF, RHC	Protection Sector/Sub-sectors, UNICEF, UN MRM lead agencies, HRAs, INGOs, NGOs
1.4 Advocate for access to affected population in besieged areas, hard to reach areas	Number of visits to areas identified Number of locations raised to government and AOG and responded to	HC, OSE	OCHA, Lead protection agencies
1.5 Consult regularly on strategies, action plans and thematic guidelines on action related to the protection of civilians, GBV, child protection, etc.	Number of strategies and other relevant documentation developed that incorporate key protection principles and best practices related to protection	RHC/ HC/ UNFPA	OSE, UNHCR, UNICEF, WHO, UNFPA, Protection Sector, CP/GBV sub-sectors, HRAs
1.6 Advocate with parties to the conflict to ensure freedom of movement	Number of displaced persons who are able to move to access safety/ assistance and / or return in safety and dignity to the residence of their choice Increased measures (awareness raising, information campaigns, etc.) to ensure the movement of displaced persons is voluntary, safe, dignified, and through informed consent	HC/ DRHC/ UNHCR	Lead protection agencies and protection sector
1.7 Assist Office of the Special Envoy	Respond to requests for assistance during Geneva Consultations on Safety and Protection and on de-escalation of conflict, IHL, HRL, access and Protection	RHC	Lead protection agencies and protection sector and HRAs
Objective 2: Increase access to protection responses for the most vulnerable and people with specific needs, giving particular emphasis to child protection and gender-based violence (GBV) prevention and response.			
2.1 Increase capacity to prevent and respond to GBV through multi-sector service	Increase in number of locations with multi-sector services for GBV prevention and response	UNFPA	Health Sector, GBV sub-sector

providers including psychosocial, medical, case management, etc.	Number of multi-sector services meeting minimum standards of quality		
2.2 Strengthen community based systems for preventing and responding to separation of children from families, recruitment of children, physical violence against children, and for providing psychosocial support services for children affected by the conflict.	Increased capacity of communities to prevent separation of children from their families, protect children from physical injuries, recruitment, and to provide psychosocial support services	UNICEF	Child protection Sub-sector
2.3 Promote access to civil documentation to facilitate freedom of movement and access to services	Number of people provided with legal advice and counseling on documentation issues. Number of protection assessments conducted to identify obstacles to accessing civil documentation and mechanisms established for follow up	UNHCR	HC, Protection Sector
2.4 Integrate IDP choices into the humanitarian response and analyze interventions that affect freedom of movement and enjoyment of rights	Increased information is available on freedom of movement including obstacles and constraints which inform interventions/assistance	UNHCR	All Sector Leads and members
2.5 Develop actions and interventions based on humanitarian-protection analysis to support early recovery, in consultation with IDPs, local population and authorities	Actions are implemented for achieving access to humanitarian assistance, based on the finding of protection monitoring and other relevant assessments Regular discussions held with development actors on interventions, including rehabilitation of basic infrastructure and services	UNHCR, UNDP	HC, DRHC, HCT, HLG
2.6 Collect baseline data on potential areas of movement and identify key obstacles and constraints, in particular for vulnerable groups (youth, women, children, elderly)	More information and analyses are available on relevant issues, including safety, security and access to services including for vulnerable groups in key areas Number of profiling exercises of at-risk populations conducted	CCCM Sector	UNHCR, IOM

2.7 Mitigate safety risks for displaced and conflict affected civilians by removing ERW/ UXO/ landmines, and providing risk education	Areas of movement, return or local integration continue to be cleared and become safe for the movement and return of displaced civilians Number of people receiving Risk Education	RHC/ DRHC	UNMAS, UNICEF, Protection Sector, Mine Action sub-sector, Parties to the conflict
Objective 3: Strengthen capacities of local actors to assess, analyze and respond to the protection needs of affected populations and mainstreaming protection across the humanitarian response.			
3.1 Facilitate an understanding of protection mainstreaming and support operationalization of protection mainstreaming	Four sectors are targeted (FSL, Health, NFI/Shelter and WASH) for protection mainstreaming pilot project Conduct assessment of protection mainstreaming programs/initiatives and establish measures and systems to ensure protection is mainstreamed in the humanitarian response Development of sector specific checklists and protection mainstreaming tools Number of trainings on protection mainstreaming (including CP and GBV)	RHC, HC, DRHC, Lead Sector Agencies, OCHA	Protection Sector, UNHCR, OCHA, ProCap
3.2 Engage, support and invest in national civil society organizations that are working with affected populations and providing direct protection services	At least 30% increase/diversification in funding to strengthen the institutional capacity of national NGOs working directly with affected populations and providing protection services	Sector Lead Agency	Donors
3.3 Improve sharing of information on protection issues and trends across the country among sectors for incorporation into their respective programming in appropriate circumstances	Number of analytical, situational or contextual protection reports shared with the sectors and humanitarian field sites Number of forums where protection information is shared sector-wide at the country level	Protection Sector, including GBV and child protection sub-sectors	Lead protection agencies, INGOs, NGOs and HRAs
3.4 Set up mechanisms to ensure feedback, including	An Accountability to Affected Populations Framework (AAP)	HC/ RHC	OCHA, Sector Leads, Protection

<p>complaints, from the affected populations</p>	<p>is operationalized following and AAP mapping exercise</p> <p>HRP review reports include a community accountability component</p> <p>HCT includes consultations with affected populations in its field visits and findings of the consultations in its reports</p>		<p>Sector, lead protection Agencies and partners</p>
<p>3.5 Advocate with 3 Pillars (political, humanitarian and Human Rights) to develop a comprehensive information sharing protocol regarding alleged incidents of human rights violations and abuses, particularly in relation to individual protection cases, recognizing established principles and good practice, including “do no harm”</p>	<p>Advocacy conducted to encourage SSG to develop information sharing protocol on alleged human rights violations and abuses particularly in relation to individual protection cases</p>	<p>HC/RHC</p>	<p>3 Pillars, Lead Protection agencies, protection Sector and INGOs and NGOs</p>

Annex II: SSG Protection Advocacy Strategy

This strategy is linked to the overall Strategic Response plan and SSG protection strategy. Stressing the importance of the centrality of protection, (and the complementary Rights Up Front initiative).⁸ The advocacy strategy is informed by the twin principles of raising attention about the protection needs of civilians affected by the conflict in Syria and prioritising and addressing these needs to improve the effectiveness of assistance and other response interventions to ensure the most vulnerable are reached. The SSG protection advocacy strategy prioritises clear and measurable actions that can be taken by the SSG and operational actors. For structural suggestions on how to improve protection advocacy, see Annex III.

1. The SSG endorses this document for the following purposes:
 - a. To provide a basis for the SSG's advocacy with stakeholders on the protection of persons affected by the conflict within Syria.
 - b. To provide principles and a foundation for the SSG when providing humanitarian assistance, including engagement with local authorities and parties to the conflict.
 - c. To influence parties to the conflict and other stakeholders to adopt practices and policies that ensures the protection of persons affected by the conflict according to international human rights and humanitarian law.
2. The SSG has identified the following advocacy areas as cross cutting themes to improve the protective environment within Syria, under the framework of Objective 1 of the protection strategy:⁹

PRIORITY ONE - Create and sustain a protective environment and enhance protection through encouraging respect for IHL and HRL and mitigating protection risks through advocacy.

Advocacy in order to contribute to the ending of:

- Targeted and indiscriminate attacks against civilians and causing damage to civilian objects and infrastructure, including medical facilities, schools, market places, are ended
- Denial of civilians' ability to access basic services such as food, water, healthcare as a method of warfare including the use of besiegement; Barriers undermining the ability of civilians to safely access services and humanitarian assistance and make voluntary decisions to leave areas of high risk.
- Sexual violence especially in detention and at checkpoints, and stigma and marginalization faced by survivors
- Lack of access to civil documentation

3. Below is a brief description of each protection priority area followed by a set of advocacy messages and recommendations to the parties to the conflict, national and local authorities, the international donor community as well as domestic and international humanitarian organizations.

⁸ Centrality of Protection is complementary to and distinct from Rights Up Front. The latter is a UN initiative largely pertaining to UN own practices and conduct in the wake of the 'Sri Lanka Report.' The Centrality of Protection is a more expansive framework that explores the complementary roles and responsibilities among humanitarian actors to contribute to protection outcomes; that identifies and makes use of all available tools to effectively protect those affected by humanitarian crises.

⁹ Recognising that advocacy efforts on the crisis in Syria have been on going, this document also seeks to better encapsulate and support these efforts. This strategy does not exclude advocacy efforts that members of the SSG and other organisations/agencies take on outside of this document.

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Targeted and indiscriminate attacks against civilians and causing damage to civilian objects and infrastructure, including medical facilities, schools, market places, are ended 	
Context	<p>With needs in Syria at a record high, it has been conservatively estimated that 220,000 people have been killed and over one million injured in a war entering its fifth year. The harm experienced by the civilian population has been amplified by the recorded deliberate and indiscriminate attacks by parties to the conflict against civilians, including the Government of Syria, militia groups and other non-State armed actors. These include the use of banned weapons – chemical and incendiary shells, cluster munitions, and antipersonnel landmines – and weapons that are indiscriminate when used in populated areas – such as rockets, heavy artillery, fuel-air explosives and, notably the increased use of ‘barrel bombs.’ There are credible concerns that parties to the conflict are deliberately targeting facilities and areas that have high civilian numbers within them or are of vital community importance, such as markets, hospitals and schools. These attacks significantly increase the likelihood of civilian death and injury, as well as create long-term damage to community resilience strategies five years into a conflict.</p> <p>Customary international humanitarian law prohibits attacks targeting the civilian population, individual civilians, or civilian objects, and prohibits indiscriminate attacks. Civilians can only be targeted when and for such time in which they are directly participating in hostilities. Expected harm to the civilian population must be proportional to the anticipated military gain, and all feasible precautions must be taken to protect civilians in attacks. Customary international humanitarian law also explicitly forbids the targeting of objects indispensable to the survival of the civilian population, and the use of indiscriminate weapons or weapons that will cause superfluous suffering.</p>
Suggested priority messages	<p>Government of Syria</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> End deliberate attacks on civilian and civilian objects such as hospitals, schools and market places. End the use of imprecise explosive weapons and indiscriminate attacks in civilian areas. Ensure that any sieges imposed by government forces do not result in the denial of civilian access to basic services such as food, water, health care; allow civilians who wish to leave areas of high risk to do so. Release women and minors from detention and put in place mechanisms to reduce women’s risk of SGBV at other areas where high risk is reported, e.g. at checkpoints. <p>Non-State Armed Actors</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> End deliberate attacks on civilian and civilian objects such as hospitals, schools and market places and end indiscriminate attacks in civilian areas. Protect the civilian population and civilian objects under de facto control including by avoiding to the extent feasible locating military assets and infrastructure within or near densely populated areas

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • End the forced recruitment of children <p>International Community</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The full and unequivocal implementation of Security Council Resolution 2139 (2014) is a matter of utmost imperative. • Refrain from providing material and military support that enables parties to the conflict to continue to engage in conflict. • Wherever possible, use your leverage over the parties to the conflict to encourage them to comply with IHL/IHRL (including in regard to concerns raised above).
Actions Required	<p>1) Document (where community permits) presence of schools, hospitals and markets to enable appropriate tracking of destruction.</p> <p>2) Establish commitments by parties to the conflict to refrain from targeting civilian infrastructure (including hospitals, schools and markets).</p> <p>3) Negotiate with local armed actors to de-militarise civilian infrastructure and public spaces (including hospitals, schools and markets) and to end recruitment of children.</p> <p>4) Arrange for transparent debate at different levels within the humanitarian community on the costs and benefits of engage in public advocacy on issues of concern/ best ways to strategically engage in advocacy (while also bearing in mind concerns regarding risks of loss of access to affected persons that may result from increased advocacy).</p> <p>5) Facilitate discussions among small group of key actors on efforts taken/progress made to non-publicly engage with parties to the conflict on protection concerns; this coordination need not be public or minuted.</p> <p>6) Development of guidance to RHC, HC and DRHC on when to engage in public and private advocacy on issues of concern and with who etc.</p>
Evidence required for more effective advocacy	<p>1) Systematic documentation and reporting of incidents of attacks on civilian infrastructure, in particular hospitals, schools and markets.</p> <p>2) Analysis of the impact of destruction of civilian infrastructure on livelihoods and protective strategies of civilian populations.</p>
Denial of civilians' ability to access basic services such as food, water, healthcare as a method of warfare including the use of besiegement; Barriers undermining the ability of civilians to safely access services and humanitarian assistance and make voluntary decisions to leave areas of high risk.	
Context	<p>More than 4.6 million people live in locations classified by the UN as 'hard to reach areas' (where they are prevented from accessing humanitarian aid). The Government of Syria and ISIL trap over 440,000 of these in besieged towns and cities. The food and medical situation in these areas significantly erodes the protective environment. Populations who move in search of safety and assistance are forced to cross frontlines and checkpoints to try and flee to other locations. The targeting of men of 'fighting age' who try to move to other locations has been reported by human rights organisations.</p>

	<p>Parties to the conflict have on numerous occasions blocked humanitarian actors from reaching communities, effectively depriving millions of people who are living within Syria of safe access to humanitarian services and assistance. The assistance that is provided is far short of that required to cover basic needs, particularly in winter when needs significantly increase. Interference at a localised level by different armed groups continues to be a source of concern for the humanitarian community. Attempts to influence humanitarian operations (staff recruitment and services), temporary confiscation of goods, harassment at checkpoints, demand for movement taxes have been commonplace.</p> <p>In areas controlled by armed groups, such as ISIL, demands to segregate NGO offices by gender have also been reported. In the absence of a political solution a number of proposals are being considered for safeguarding civilians and increasing humanitarian space. This has included a variety of measures from ceasefires (freezing front lines in limited geographic areas), buffer zones, and eventually no fly zones. While each may bring benefits to civilian populations, humanitarians are also concerned about the respective risks of partial interventions without political track commitments by parties to the conflict.</p> <p>Forced displacement is a violation of IHL unless the security of the civilians involved or imperative military reasons so demand. Civilians should never be forcibly displaced into areas where they will be at greater risk of attack.</p> <p>In April 2015, (former) Emergency Response Coordinator Valarie Amos called on the Security Council to mandate a fact-finding mission to look specifically at the situation in besieged communities and to mandate the negotiation of humanitarian pauses and days of tranquillity.</p> <p>On 22 February 2014, the UN Security Council (UNSC) unanimously approved Resolution 2139 (2014), demanding "that all parties, in particular the Syrian authorities, promptly allow rapid, safe and unhindered humanitarian access for UN humanitarian agencies and their implementing partners, including across conflict lines and across borders." According to customary international humanitarian law, all parties to the conflict must ensure the freedom of movement of authorized humanitarian relief personnel essential to the exercise of their functions. Only in case of imperative military necessity may their movements be temporarily restricted.</p>
<p>Suggested messages</p>	<p>Government of Syria</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ensure prompt lifting of sieges throughout Syria to allow freedom of movement, including for the delivery of humanitarian aid and medical care to reach all people in need in line with Security Council Resolution 2139 (2014) and Security Council Resolution 2165 (2014). • Respect the principle of impartiality to ensure the safe movement of humanitarian personnel and cargo to besieged and hard to reach areas. • Emphasising the principle of impartiality, the humanitarian community remains committed to providing assistance to all people in need Syria, regardless of political affiliation, religion or geography in accordance with humanitarian principles.

	<p>Non-State Armed Actors</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • End deliberate attacks on civilian and civilian objects such as hospitals, schools and market places. • End the use of imprecise explosive weapons in civilian areas. • Reduce checkpoints in civilian areas. • Emphasising the principle of impartiality, the humanitarian community remains committed to providing assistance to all people in need Syria, regardless of political affiliation, religion or geography in accordance with humanitarian principles. <p>International Community</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Member States with influence should further engage to allow access to besieged areas and hard to reach areas. • Regional actors should continue commitment to allow civilians to move across borders to access humanitarian assistance and safety. • The broader international community needs to do more to support regional countries that have absorbed very large numbers of refugees, removing financial burdens that may prompt forced returns. • Support efforts of human rights actors to build the capacity of Syrian human rights organisations that are documenting violations of IHL and IHRL.
Actions Required	<p>1) Engagement with Government of Syria and armed opposition groups to allow access to besieged areas.</p> <p>2) Monitor duration of besiegement, conduct assessments and identify assistance capacity for besieged and hard to reach areas.</p> <p>3) Re (establish) ground rules on humanitarian assistance and principles with the parties to the conflict, including at the local level.</p>
Evidence required for more effective advocacy	<p>1) Systematic tracking and reporting of denial, by parties to the conflict and local authorities, of humanitarian actors reaching communities.</p> <p>2) Monitoring and tracking of population movements, including reported restrictions (monitoring and tracking system required).</p> <p>2) Assessment by Humanitarian and Human Rights actors of the impact of deprivation of assistance (access required).</p>
People within Syria can access civil documentation.	
Context	<p>Access to civil documentation requires the approval of state authorities within Syria, which effectively deprives those who reside in opposition(s) controlled areas, or who otherwise do not feel safe interacting with Government offices, access to civil documentation. This also includes nationality documents, birth, marriage and death certificates. Documentation can significantly affect the ability of populations to ensure safe movement around Syria and cross-borders. Those people who do have nationality documents also face risks in opposition(s) areas as they can be presumed ‘Government/Regime’ supporters.</p> <p>Property and land rights have been significantly undermined by confiscation</p>

	<p>or destruction of land ownership documents.</p> <p>The restricted access to civil documents has had a significant impact for populations who have been forced to become refugees in neighbouring countries. People who have expired nationality documents, or who never held these documents in the first place, are now at risk of statelessness.</p>
Suggested messages	<p>Government of Syria</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Continue and strengthen systems which support persons entitled to Syrian civil documentation to access these documents, including remotely. • Facilitate the movement of civilian population and their access to documentation; facilitate free movement of people in cases without documentation in urgent humanitarian cases. • Refrain from seizing land and other properties. <p>Non-State Armed Actors</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Allow the free movement of the civilian population throughout Syria, including cross-line, regardless of documentation. • Refrain from seizing land and other properties. <p>International Community</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Support long term planning for durable solutions of those affected by the Syrian crisis, including documentation, restitution and accountability efforts.
Actions Required	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1) Engage with the Government of Syria to support remote access to appropriate civil documents. 2) Map obstacles to accessing civil documentation, including birth and marriage certificates.
Evidence required for more effective advocacy	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1) Monitor incidents of denial of civil documentation. 2) Document and report number of refugees who are considered stateless.

Annex III: Ensuring coherent and regular protection advocacy on the effects of conflict on the civilian population inside Syria

In order to enable the SSG to effectively address protection issues and challenges facing the civilian population inside Syria and recognising the need and importance for strengthened *humanitarian protection advocacy*,¹⁰ Annex III builds on the themes identified in the protection strategy and identifies how protection advocacy can be developed and taken forward effectively by the SSG. Linked to realizing Objective 1 of the protection strategy, to **create and sustain a protective environment and enhance protection through encouraging respect for IHL and HRL and mitigating protection risks through advocacy**, the following steps can support sustained and quality advocacy from the SSG.

Key Activities	Progress Indicators	Lead	Participants
Objective 1: Centrality of Protection (including Rights Up Front) adopted and promoted			
1) All mandate holders report on violations of international law, including destruction of humanitarian assets.	# Reports on MRM violations made available	HC/RHC	RHC, HC, DRHC
	# Reports on targeting of humanitarian workers and assets by parties to the conflict	OCHA	OHCHR
	# Special procedures documenting HR violations within Syria	OHCHR	WoS sector coordinators
2) Feedback to SSG members and HCT/HLG on on-going advocacy	Increased awareness on activities and priorities of SSG on advocacy issues	UNICEF	OCHA
3) Promote awareness of the humanitarian protection context in Syria			
4) Establish OHCHR presence to support RUF initiatives	# Reports on key protection issues and themes produced and disseminated		
	# Flash updates on areas of high risk of conflict/displacement		

¹⁰ Humanitarian protection advocacy is distinct from other advocacy efforts including political and legal on the Syria Crisis. Humanitarian Protection is the effort to protect the fundamental well-being (including safety and dignity) of *individuals* and *communities* caught up in certain conflicts or “man-made” emergencies in the immediate term. This distinguishes it from longer-term objectives such as political resolution and/or accountability.

	# HR advisors to promote and guide the Rights Up Front agenda		
Objective 2: Common advocacy priorities identified and shared			
1) Hub level messages developed and circulated prior to SSG meeting. 2) SSG to identify common priorities across hubs, including de-conflict contradicting positions	# SSG joint advocacy messages produced and available # RHC/HC/DRHC advocacy messages produced and available #talking points/messages produced and available	HC/RHC SSG Protection Sector	HCT Damascus HLG CBTF NGO Consortia SSG/ISCCG
Objective 3: Framework for humanitarian action established			
# Analysis provided of key discussion themes including safe zones, buffer zones, no fly zones, IDP returns, evacuation and ceasefires. # Shared definition of “besieged” and “hard to reach” areas developed and updated # Commitments made to protection and gender mainstreaming in humanitarian action	# Whole of Syria analysis of context, and contingency planning documents Standard operating definition for besieged and hard to reach areas available Monitoring of progress gender and protection relevant advocacy engaged in by SSG.	HC/RHC SSG	HCT Damascus HLG CBTF NGO Consortia SSG/ISCCG