



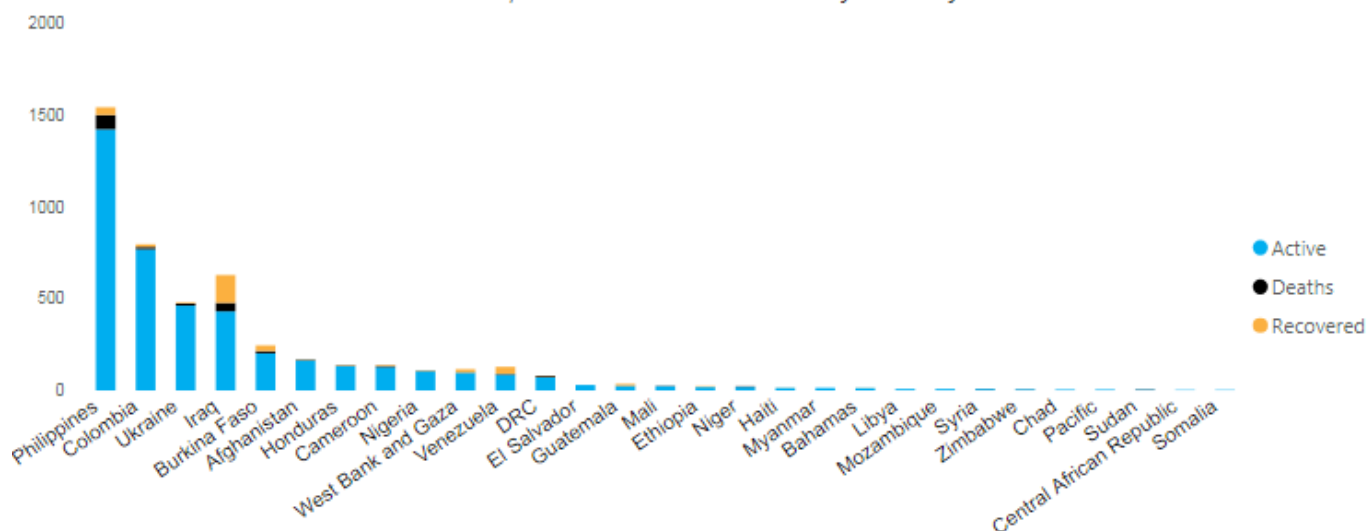
# COVID-19 Protection Risks and Responses

## Situation Report – as of 30 March 2020

This Situation Report covers operational updates in countries where the Protection Cluster/Sector is active.

**4818** Confirmed  
**4288** Active  
**196** Deaths  
**334** Recovered

Active, Deaths and Recovered by Country



### I- Key messages and developments

In operations where Protection Clusters are active, over 4500 COVID-19 cases and 114 COVID-19 deaths have been recorded. There is a high likelihood of underreporting of cases due to weak health and monitoring systems in place. The trend is worrying as numbers have more than doubled in the last week.

In a bid to protect millions of people in some of the most vulnerable communities, the UN issued a USD 2 Bn global appeal to combat COVID-19. To launch the plan, OCHA released USD 60 Mio from the Central Emergency Relief Fund and Country Based Pooled Funds have allocated USD 3 Mio. The global appeal aims to protect, assist and advocate for people “vulnerable to the pandemic”.

In almost all our operations, Governments have taken COVID-19 measures, including movement restrictions. Operationally, this is having an impact on staff movement, delivery and access to services.

Protection Clusters are advocating on behalf of persons at higher risk, actively engaging in COVID-19 response coordination, monitoring the situation, re-examining existing services and assessing the need for new programmes.

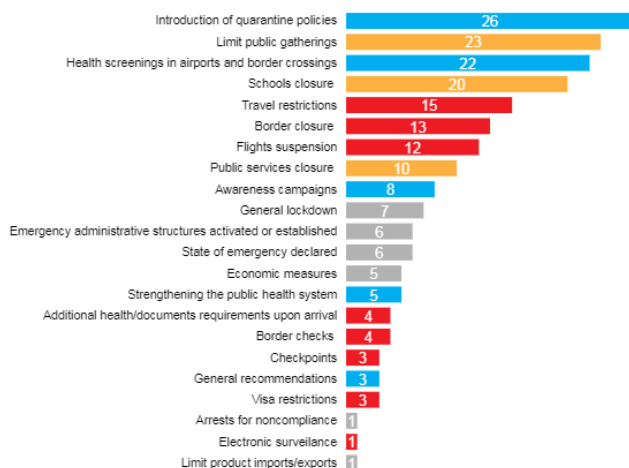
Our operations are monitoring protection risks resulting from COVID-19. These include social exclusion, discrimination, abuse of power, lack of access to services, family and child separation, physical and sexual violence, forced recruitment and labor as well as physical distress and mental health.



Protection Clusters are conducting business continuity plans, reviewing partnerships and delivery modalities. This will result in the revision of existing Humanitarian Response Plans for protection.

Measures where the Protection Cluster is active, include the following, as reported by ACAPS:

Number of Countries Using a Specific Measures



## II- Emerging Trends: Protection Risks and Challenges

Field operations are reporting on trends and risks. Major areas of concern are:

**Social exclusion and discrimination:** Women, elderly, adolescents, youth and children, minorities and persons with disabilities are at risk of socio-economic marginalization. Challenges include tackling discrimination, social exclusion and stigma. In many operations such as Niger, Ukraine, Somalia, Iraq and the Americas, community mobilization is ongoing. However, discrimination fueled by existing tensions remain.

**Conflict escalation in zones at risk of COVID-19:** Despite the call from the UN Secretary General for a global cease fire, conflicts are still active in many parts of the world. The stalemate around Idlib in Syria is an example of communities at risk of both bombs and COVID-19, and the Lake Chad province has been declared an ‘active combat’ zone, with civilians asked to leave.

**Abuse of power:** Due to the COVID-19 crisis, individual and community protection capacities may be disrupted. In Cameroon and Burkina Faso, community support to displaced persons risk being substantially reduced.

**Lack of Access to Health Services:** Access to health care and services for IDPs is a challenge. Weak public services are compounded by malnutrition and inadequate water and sanitation facilities. In Myanmar, reduced access to health clinics for Rohingyas is reported. In Ukraine, access is a challenge for persons close to the ‘contact line’. In Cameroon, a reduction in the capacity to access civil/social documentation, such as birth certificates, is expected.

**Restrictions on Freedom of Movement:** Many operations are experiencing access restrictions and limited freedom of movement, both for the population of concern and humanitarian actors. In NE Nigeria, the government has enforced a ban on visitors to the camps. In Ukraine, all official crossing points between the GCA and NGCA have been closed, and this may lead to family separation.

**Physical and Sexual Violence:** There is a heightened risk of sexual and gender-based violence (SGBV), such as assault, exploitation, negative coping mechanisms, intimate partner violence and other forms of physical and domestic violence. In Somalia, reprisals and violence against individuals and communities represent a protection risk.

**Family and Child Separation:** School closures and movement restrictions may increase protection risks for children. It may lead to additional psychosocial distress and increase food insecurity for those relying on feeding at school facilities. Children outside of family care, such as street children, children on the move, and children in institutions or detention centers, children engaging in child labor, or associated with armed groups, are particularly vulnerable.

**Forced Recruitment and Labor:** Children who become internally displaced as a result of disasters, conflict and an emergency are at a higher risk of recruitment by armed forces or groups. This can result from reduced social protection, negative coping mechanisms or discrimination. In the Americas, there is a risk of forced recruitment and forced labor in relation to IDP children.



**Physical distress:** Mental health and psychosocial support is of particular importance in any emergency, including during pandemics. In Cameroon, for example, there is a concern about IDPs in relation to mental health issues such as depression, anxiety, and post-traumatic stress disorder.

### III- Operational Response

Operational impact of COVID-19 on protection response are twofold: (i) new risks and needs are emerging due to the health and socio-economic impact of the spread, (ii) existing protection programmes and services are disrupted and require adaptation. Main operational challenges include:

- Acceleration of conflicts
- Limited access to persons of concern
- Difficulty in effective monitoring and identifying required interventions
- Difficulty in countering stigmatization and discrimination
- Disruption of service delivery and community centers
- Major obstacles in following up on individual cases and alternative care systems
- Operational slow down to adapt to the new realities
- Lack of resource flexibility; limiting possibilities to adapt

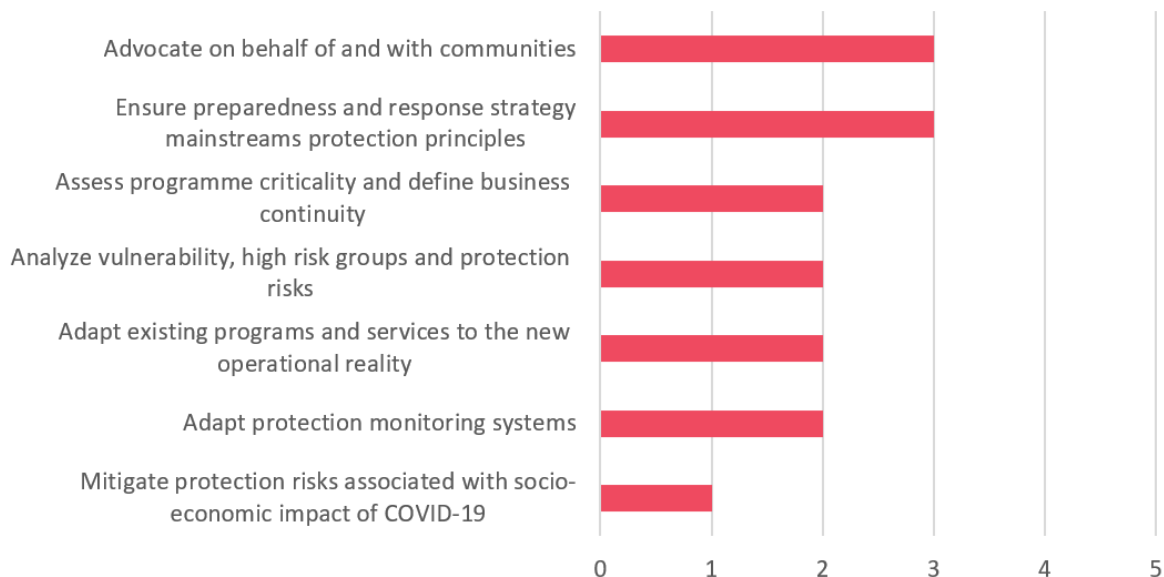
### What are the National Protection Clusters doing?

National clusters are preparing response plans and also working to **ensure that protection is mainstreamed in overall response plans**. In many operations, such as Niger, Nigeria, Yemen and Somalia, the implementation of these plans, in contexts of preexisting communal tensions, discrimination and accelerating conflict, will be severely tested in the coming period. Almost all clusters have initiated **advocacy campaigns** and some national protection clusters **systematically monitor protection risks and incidents related to COVID-19**. This often requires adapting existing systems to remote and contactless ones. Monitoring would be followed by **analysis**, effectively disseminated for the use of governmental, humanitarian and development actors.

Protection Clusters have initiated criticality assessments to define which programmes need to be:

- terminated, as they are no longer feasible
- continued, but adapted
- scaled up
- set up and implemented

### Immediate Actions (Ranking out of 5)



## How is the Global Protection Cluster supporting operations?

The GPC is focusing on sharing practices, tools and programmes across operations and supporting national Protection Clusters to ensure their response is predictable and reliable.

- **Stepped up communications with field operations:** joint weekly operational exchange for national clusters, per region.
- **Accelerated field-to-field communications** including dedicated channels of communication for field coordinators and co-coordinators, a revitalisation of the protection community of practice, as well as running a

help desk and actively sharing tools and examples through an online repository.

- **Optimised use of the Strategic Advisory Group**, benefiting from the diverse membership and their respective expert areas of response, and actively supporting all inter-cluster and inter-agency efforts.
- **Guided national clusters through an operational advisory note** to aid and bring predictability to the field response.
- **Initiated a live protection trends dashboard**, which aims to inform partners and to effectively illustrate the spread of COVID-19 in our operations, as well as operational obstacles and protection risks.

For more information or queries, please contact the GPC COVID/19 lead, Deputy Global Coordinator, Sofia Khetib-Grundy [khetibgr@unhcr.org](mailto:khetibgr@unhcr.org).

The Global Protection Cluster is a network of NGOs, international organizations and UN agencies, engaged in protection work in humanitarian crises including armed conflict, climate change related and natural disaster. The GPC ensures well-coordinated, effective and principled protection preparedness and responses, and that protection is at the core of all humanitarian action and recognized as essential in any nexus with development and peace. The GPC unites members, partners and communities working on the full gamut of protection activities, including in four specialized Areas of Responsibility (AoRs): Child Protection, Gender-Based Violence (GBV), Housing, Land and Property and Mine Action. The GPC contributes to and benefits from the broader IASC system.

