

Global Protection Cluster Mission Report

Central African Republic, February 2022

The Global Protection Cluster (GPC) conducted a mission to support the National Protection Cluster in the Central African Republic. The mission was coordinated with the Global Cluster Coordinators Group. The mission met with people affected by the crisis, authorities, INGOs and NNGOs fora, local organisations, INGOs and UN Agencies, Protection Cluster and Areas of Responsibility (AoR) Lead Agencies, OCHA, Intercluster groups, Protection Cluster including AoRs and other working groups, Humanitarian Clusters, Minusca, Office of High Commissioner of Human Rights, Political Affairs and Protection of Civilians teams, Mental Health and Psychosocial Support Working Group, Donor Group and Humanitarian Coordinator.

Context

The Central African Republic faces a stubborn protection crisis. Civilians are victims and survivors to violations of international humanitarian law and human rights abuses committed by all parties to the conflict including armed opposition groups, the military and government security forces and associated armed national and international groups. These parties to the conflict have acted with impunity amidst deep state fragility.

The humanitarian operating context is unsafe outside the main city centres and displacement sites. Operational considerations are pulling humanitarian scenarios in different directions. On one hand the military advances of government forces are creating a sense of security among internally displaced people with a growing willingness to return. On the other hand, there are growing fears due to abusive behaviours from all parties to the conflict, growing trend of use of explosive ordinances, fears of evictions, and growing tensions between the government and the international community.

The conflict acceleration or turbulence depends on several dynamics: government and international bilateral forces pushed out of the armed groups out of the main towns and centres, yet the armed groups operational capacity remains; the creation of communities' self-defence groups; the transhumance season; sub national level upcoming elections in September and the nature of the growing targeted attacks on specific ethnic groups.

Violations are widespread and levels of sexual and gender-based violence are particularly shocking. Protection risks cover the full range of protection of civilians' matters including attacks on and killing of civilians, recruitment of children by armed groups, children dropping out of school, trafficking, family separations and child marriage. Legal documentations and access to justice is extremely limited. Trauma is rampant among communities.

Basic services are scarce and largely dependent on international organisations. People's access to basic services are highly constrained, reflecting limited state presence and functions. Communities are facing critical food shortages, the absence of medical centres beyond the ones run by international organisations in main towns/cities, limited schools and very limited economic and livelihoods opportunities. Mental health and psychosocial support is quasi-non-existent despite the high needs, including for children.

Observations and general recommendations

Overall humanitarian coordination is advanced and working both at national and subnational levels. Several achievements should be commended: Rapid Response Mechanism (RRM), Multiple data coordinated and shared data collection systems, integrated projects, accountability to affected population system, solid planning, and very good financing level against what is asked.

In CAR, Protection is central to humanitarian response and is considered essential beyond humanitarian interventions. The strong protection leadership from the humanitarian coordinator and humanitarian country team is evident both in technical aspects like planning and financing, integrated programming especially with health, education, shelter and camp management, rapid response mechanisms, cash and on overall political and advocacy levels.

NGOs are taking risks and showing a boundary-pushing attitude to serve people at risk and in need. This is especially true for reaching people living along insecure axis where checkpoints and looting of humanitarian-run mobile services is not uncommon. These mobile approaches require continued donor support.

Protection programmes and services require an urgent step up both in leadership, quality and quantity by the protection lead agencies and major protection actors in country. The level of planning and response needs to be commensurate to size of the needs. This is true for most protection services and particularly urgent for comprehensive GBV response including medical, psychosocial, legal, socio economic aspect and engagement with armed groups and communities for behaviour change.

Sustaining basic services especially health, water, shelter and food is key with a strong integration and mainstreaming of protection and should remain a priority focus for humanitarian responses.

Specific Recommendations to the Protection Cluster

The cluster is functioning well and needs to build on the basics in place and take operational coordination and collective protection advocacy to the next level.

1. **Evolve the current operational mapping (who is doing what where) to become a protection services quarterly gap analysis.** This will require the agreement on core protection services, mapping what is in place, identifying gaps and mobilising actors and donors to fill gaps (by March).
2. **Take monitoring and analysis to the next level:**
 - a. Benefit from all the regular existing analysis conducted both thematically and geographically and conduct an inclusive protection analysis following the Protection Analytical Framework and produce a National Protection Update (GPC will support - To be done by March).
 - b. Bring together the several monitoring systems by defining core protection questions to be operated by all existing systems and compiled in one cluster report once every two months (During Q2)
3. **Step up collective protection advocacy.**
 - a. Define core Protection Messages, key advocacy priorities and related actions agreed upon by the National protection Cluster SAG and with technical support from GPC advocacy team. To be updated on need basis. (GPC will support - By March)
 - b. Systematise the consolidation and channelling of subnational level alerts and advocacy asks to the Humanitarian Country Team, track follow up and identify other key advocacy targets to engage as relevant (GPC will support - By April).
 - c. Develop GBV advocacy priorities, including potential campaign targeted towards behaviour change amongst government forces and their allies, armed groups, and communities and potential policy-change push with respect to improved access to medical certificates for survivors (GPC will support - By April).
 - d. Pursue ongoing engagement with key political representatives and leverage technical support of the Law & Policy Task Team to advance draft IDP bill GPC will support - (Q1&2).
4. **Establish (i) operating standards for Community Based Protection services** in place, as an important modality that is already used by many organisations and needs to grow in presence, **(ii) key considerations in engaging with private armed groups to support protection access, (iii) support the step up of the MHPSS working group and the role of cluster in it** (by May).
5. **Define an operational guidance on internal displacement returns** with respect to protection principles in collaboration with the durable solutions working group. The cluster should be ready to support returns using community-based protection mechanisms in place (By April).

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