

RATIONALE

1. South Sudan remains a protection crisis with civilians subject to widespread and grave violations of their rights and limited access to life-saving services. The primary responsibility for the protection of civilians lies with the Government of the Republic of South Sudan and other *de facto* non-state authorities. In line with the IASC statement on the Centrality of Protection in Humanitarian Action, all humanitarian action must be aimed at enhancing the protection of affected and at-risk populations and ensuring that humanitarian operations do no harm. Protection is a central, shared responsibility of the senior leadership of the humanitarian response, and a priority area for which all members of the HCT are mutually accountable, as outlined in the 2018 HCT compact. The Centrality of Protection recognizes the complementarity of different mandates of humanitarian agencies and actors in working toward improving the protection for affected populations.
2. The HCT Protection Strategy articulates severe protection concerns affecting populations and that impact the humanitarian operation and provides the strategic guidance necessary for addressing these protection concerns through a coordinated and coherent, multi-sectoral multi-year approach to response and advocacy. The strategy is based on inputs from members of the HCT. Members of all sectors are responsible for the implementation and monitoring of the HCT Protection Strategy, and the Protection Cluster, with the GBV, Child Protection and Mine Action Sub-Clusters, has the responsibility to provide technical guidance for its operational implementation.
3. The strategy covers the period of two years reflecting the protracted nature of key protection concerns that necessitate a consistent and sustained approach and dedication of resource. The strategy also articulates emerging and critical protection priorities to be addressed, reviewed and updated annually or following critical developments in the protection environment. As such, the strategy will be a working document to address emerging and pressing protection concerns, requiring an immediate multi-sectoral response or high-level intervention by the HCT. A concise implementation plan that details critical priorities, geographic areas, and responsibilities as well as linkages and complementarities with other actors and initiatives can be found in Annex I.

A. KEY PROTECTION PRIORITIES

4. While the HCT recognizes that South Sudan has a multitude of serious protection concerns, the scope of this strategy narrows the focus to key priority areas that need a collective multi-sectoral approach to address. The HCT has identified the below as a collective responsibility and critical protection concern for urgent prioritization given the gravity of the impact on affected populations and the humanitarian operation and agrees to take measures to address it within a one year period:
 - Improved accountability of all humanitarian actors for the prevention of and response to sexual exploitation and abuse (SEA) and expansion of geographic coverage of SEA reporting mechanisms.
5. The HCT commits to a sustained integration of measures to address the following protection priorities over the two-year timeframe of the Protection Strategy:
 - Address critical protection concerns related to affected populations safe and dignified access to life-saving assistance taking into account specific risks and vulnerabilities due to age, gender, and diversity.
 - Contribute to the prevention, mitigation, or end of grave violations of international human rights law and international humanitarian law and provide for more robust mechanisms to provide assistance to survivors.
 - Contribute to the prevention of protracted displacement and depleted resilience of displaced populations and host communities through the creation of conditions conducive to durable solutions and enabling of informed, voluntary, safe and dignified durable solutions.
6. The HCT commits to strengthening collective responsibilities and underlying ways of working that support protection and are central to the implementation of this strategy:
 - Strengthened protection mainstreaming and identification of opportunities for appropriate protection integration, building on commitments in the Humanitarian Response Plan and Protection Cluster Strategy, to enable a principled and protection centered response, building collective approaches to the mitigation of protection risks and promotion of safe and meaningful access to services based on need and sensitive to different capacities and vulnerabilities, through an age, gender, and diversity (AGD) sensitive approach.
 - Strengthened accountability to affected populations to ensure that affected populations, with specific consideration of the most vulnerable or marginalized individuals or groups, have a central role throughout the humanitarian programme cycle in the identification and prioritization of needs, the design and implementation of interventions, and monitoring and evaluation.

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- Strengthened capacity of humanitarian actors, particularly national NGOs, to assess and analyse protection risks across sectors and individual and community coping mechanisms and resilience, adhering to appropriate protocols for safe and principled data collection and sharing.
- Strengthened advocacy on key protection concerns and identification of linkages with actors beyond the humanitarian community, including for adequate funding for interventions to support protection and commitments towards addressing the HCT's protection priorities.

B. CRITICAL PRIORITY: PREVENTION OF SEXUAL EXPLOITATION AND ABUSE

7. *Incidents of sexual exploitation and abuse (SEA) have grave impacts on affected individuals and communities, contravene humanitarian principles, and jeopardize the humanitarian response. Humanitarian actors – both UN and NGOs – must have mechanisms in place to prevent and respond to SEA and meet required minimum core humanitarian standards. Existing mechanisms for the prevention, reporting, and investigation of SEA need to establish stronger linkages between the UN and NGO communities.*
8. Approach:
- Develop or strengthen accountability measures for all humanitarian actors through protocols, process, and concrete action plans for PSEA. All humanitarian actors must demonstrate that PSEA systems that meet minimum humanitarian standards are in place, and that all staff have received appropriate sensitization on PSEA. Establish complementary approaches between the UN PSEA Task Force and PSEA systems within NGOs – with support of the NGO Forum.
 - Support national NGOs compliance in meeting minimum requirements to have internal mechanism in place or defined access to external, collective mechanisms to respond to allegations of SEA.
 - Ensure that the geographic coverage of PSEA measures is expanded and in place at all POC sites at a minimum with Community Based Complaints Mechanisms put in place with capacity to receive SEA complaints, appropriately handle confidential and sensitive information, ensure the safety of the survivor and complainant, and be accessible for affected populations, incorporating measures that are age, gender and diversity sensitive and appropriate for children.
 - Support funding for assistance to survivors of abuse to minimize immediate and longer-term harm.
 - Allocate adequate resources for community sensitization on SEA and awareness raising on reporting mechanisms. Ensure that PSEA measures meet PSEA minimum standards and are culturally appropriate and sensitive to the context in South Sudan and affected population.

C. PRIORITY 1: SAFE AND DIGNIFIED ACCESS TO LIFE-SAVING ASSISTANCE

9. *The capability of humanitarians to deliver life-saving assistance to affected populations is compromised by on-going insecurity attacks on and killing of humanitarian workers, denial of humanitarian access, and resource constraints. National NGOs face specific concerns that impact their ability to safely provide assistance. Challenges of access have resulted in the limitation of services to some affected areas and concentration of partners and affected populations. The safety and dignity of affected populations is increasingly compromised as they are exposed to protection risks while moving to and remaining in areas where assistance is available, including restricted freedom of movement and exposure to direct attacks, and heightened risk of GBV.*
10. Approach:
- Design an advocacy/engagement strategy with all parties to the conflict to uphold obligations for unhindered delivery of humanitarian assistance, particularly for national NGOs, and allow affected populations safe, dignified and unimpeded access to humanitarian assistance and basic services. Identify and seek to address gaps in the awareness, capacity and willingness of duty bearers to allow for meaningful access.
 - Prioritize humanitarian assistance based on the needs of affected populations, including IDPs, refugees, returnees, stateless populations, and host communities.
 - Support the critical analysis of protection risks resulting from humanitarian response in conflict affected areas, tendency towards concentrated delivery of assistance, and potential to reinforce of existing patterns of abuse and deprivation. Develop recommended standards, best practices, and criteria for safe and principled delivery of assistance in conflict-affected areas through mobile and static response modalities.

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- Strengthen multi-sectoral assessment and analysis to identify protection risks affected populations are exposed to in accessing humanitarian services, considering the dynamics resulting from age, gender and diversity. Ensure the standardized integration by all sectors of protection risks analysis, identification of mitigation measures, and systematic integration of AAP measures, including consultation with affected populations on the types of services needed and platforms for safe and dignified delivery of assistance, and provision of timely and relevant information on their rights and entitlements and roles and responsibilities of partners.
- Support the allocation of resources for more robust mobile protection capacity to support multi-sector assessments and responses, identify mitigation measures for protection risks, and provide specialized protection services for general protection, child protection, GBV and mine action in affected areas.
- Encourage projects to strengthen community based protection mechanisms and resilience for communities affected by the conflict to be empowered to address their priority protection and basic needs, particularly in areas with access challenges or lack of static humanitarian presence.

D. PRIORITY 2: CONTRIBUTE TO THE PREVENTION, MITIGATION, OR END OF GRAVE VIOLATIONS

11. *Parties to the conflict have often failed to meet their obligations under international law and protect civilian populations. Women, girls, men, and boys continue to be forcibly displaced, deliberately targeted, subject to conflict-related sexual violence, and forcibly recruited – including children. Access constraints result in a lack of reporting of grave violations, necessary for systematic analysis, and referral of survivors to life-saving services.*

12. Approach:

- Commit to developing a strategic approach to advocacy on protection through common messages on key protection concerns, advocating with parties to the conflict to abide by international humanitarian law, and reinforcing national advocacy efforts through engagement with regional and international stakeholders, as well as with local authorities. Identify targeted strategies for engagement employing any of these levels and the comparative advantages and leverage points of each constituency.
- Reinforce that all humanitarian actors have a responsibility to handle sensitive protection information appropriately, report protection concerns, and immediately bring critical protection concerns to the attention of the Protection Cluster for improved assessment and informed response.
- Ensure that individuals in need of specialized protection assistance are safely referred to available services, especially for cases of GBV and child protection, and support funding for prioritized interventions. Promote access to justice for survivors of violence through strengthened rule of law and promotion of human rights in customary law and traditional justice mechanisms.
- Strengthen commitment to the Real Time Accountability Partnership (R-TAP).
- Strengthen engagement with UNMISS on identifying strategic priorities for the protection of civilians and joint reporting mechanisms. Reinforce the SRSG framework on Children and Armed Conflict and the South Sudan Country Task Force Monitoring and Reporting.

E. PRIORITY 3: CONTRIBUTE TO THE PREVENTION OF PROTRACTED DISPLACEMENT

13. *Over one in three South Sudanese have been displaced by the conflict. The living conditions and security in areas of origins and displacement are deteriorating further with the expansion of the armed conflict and economic crisis, which outpace the capacity of the humanitarian response to reach and address the full scope of the growing humanitarian needs. As a result, conditions in many locations are unsustainable and undignified, particularly in the POC sites. Displacement is depleting the resources and coping mechanisms of both IDPs and host communities, decreasing individual and community resilience to shocks and increasing risks of multiple or protracted displacement.*

14. Approach:

- Support the creation or strengthening of national and field-level coordination mechanisms for a principled, coherent and coordinated rights-based approach in pursuit of durable solutions across the country, in accordance with existing HCT policy and guidance.
- Allocate resources to better position affected populations to find durable solutions when conditions are conducive, including interventions to improve the resilience of individuals and communities.

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- Improve coordination with UNMISS in identification of priority areas for mission presence or priority activities to prevent or mitigate displacement and to improve safety and security in areas of return, relocation or local integration.
- Advocate with the Government on their primary responsibility to provide protection and find durable solutions that are informed, voluntary, safe, and dignified for South Sudanese internally displaced persons and refugees. Support the Government to strengthen the legal framework through ascension to relevant international legal instruments, including the Kampala Convention and Refugee Convention.
- Identify appropriate areas for coordination and collaboration with development actors for increased sustainability of durable solutions in line with the New Way of Working.