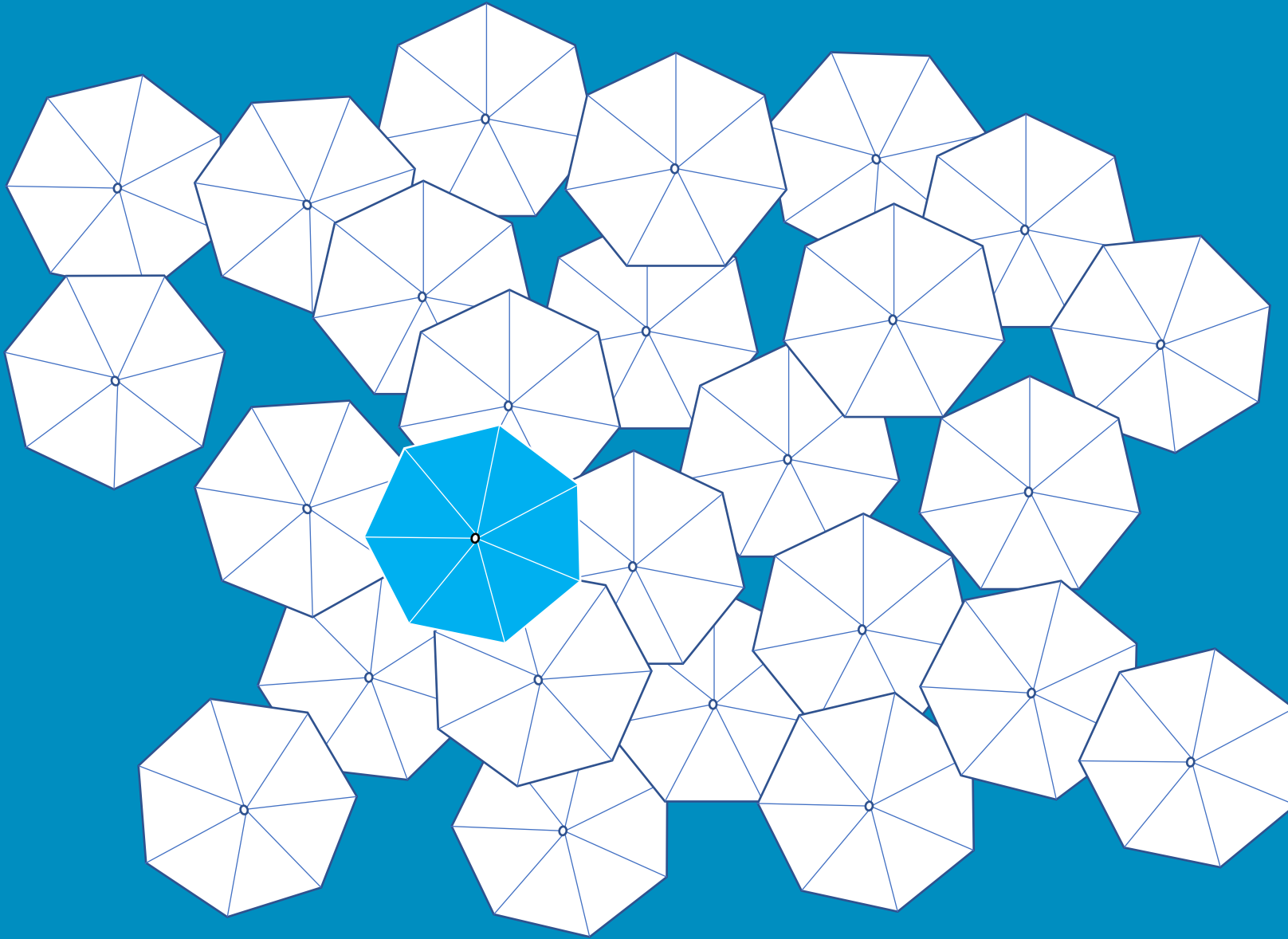


United Nations Agenda for Protection

Strengthening the ability of the United Nations System
to protect people through their human rights



February 2024

Agenda for Protection

A common undertaking of the United Nations System on the imperative to protect people in times of crisis – and beyond

The UN Protection Pledge

The United Nations stands for a world in which **all human beings enjoy the full protection of their human rights without discrimination**. No one should be left unprotected.

This vision of protection through respect for human rights is enshrined in the United Nations Charter and the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, and established by international human rights law, and international humanitarian and refugee law where applicable.

The United Nations System, on its own, cannot make this vision a reality: **Member States bear primary responsibility for protection**. But **we have a duty to use our mandates, resources, and authority to encourage and support those responsible for protection to do what is required**.

To this end, in this seventy-fifth anniversary year of the Universal Declaration, we, the departments, agencies, funds and programmes of the United Nations System, **pledge to do everything we can, in times of crisis and beyond, to ensure that people are protected through enjoyment of their human rights, by working with those responsible for protection to prevent human rights violations, to respond promptly and effectively when violations occur, and to mitigate harm**.

Geneva, 26 February 2024

Our Approach to implementing this Pledge [Executive Summary]

Protection is achieved in practice when we reduce the risks and harms threatening human life, liberty or dignity. We work with multiple stakeholders to achieve **concrete protection outcomes** for people in need of protection. Our approach to protection is based on the following:

- **Protection puts people, and their needs, at the centre of the work of the United Nations:** We place people at the centre of our protection response. We recognize that people have different experiences, capacities and protection needs, shaped by age, gender and diversity, that must be understood and addressed with sensitivity. People need to be heard and participate in shaping and delivering holistic and durable solutions. When necessary, the UN must use its voice to amplify the voice of those in need of protection, so that they are heard, and advocate for their rights. We must do no harm. We engage with all duty-bearers to encourage them to abide by their international legal obligations and we help people to claim their human rights.
- **People are protected through their human rights:** Our concept of protection is grounded in international human rights law and, where applicable, humanitarian and refugee law. Protection must be universal: we recognize that protection comes from enjoying the full spectrum of universal human rights: civil, cultural, economic, political, and social, without discrimination. We aim to ensure that everyone is protected to the maximum extent possible through enjoyment of their human rights. We recognize that human rights and dignity will never be realized until gender equality is realized, and all women and girls fully enjoy their human rights. Protection in practice aims to achieve concrete protection outcomes, the result of activities undertaken to address imminent risks and harms threatening human life, liberty or dignity. We engage with all duty-bearers so that they abide by their international legal obligations, and we help people to claim their human rights. We support local solutions involving those most affected.
- **Protection underpins everything the United Nations does:** As the UN system, we have a stake in ensuring people are protected because this reinforces all UN mandates and ensures our actions are effective and appropriate. We understand that when people are left unprotected, it undermines sustainable peace and development and can exacerbate humanitarian need. We address risks and threats comprehensively, leading to more durable solutions, contributing to better peace, development and humanitarian outcomes, and ensuring that no one is left behind. We recognize that protection is intrinsic to the realization of the right to development and the right to a clean, healthy and sustainable environment. We are nimble in times of crisis and emergency, mobilizing our resources and capacities to ensure that protection is prioritized. Protection is central to the UN's work, and human rights are central to protection.
- **Prevention is the best form of protection:** The best way to protect people is to avert the things that threaten them in the first place and to address the root causes that perpetuate situations at risk. We work as much as possible to prevent protection crises before they begin. We act early to identify and address protection risks. We do not wait for the crisis to take hold before responding but we anticipate and prepare ourselves to meet protection challenges whenever and wherever they might occur. We work, alongside the authorities, with communities and local actors to promote local initiatives to mitigate risk and build resilience. And we promote accountability as a way to address what went wrong and prevent it recurring in the future

- **Protection is a continuing responsibility:** Protection must always be the **priority** for the United Nations. Protection should be woven into the fabric of the UN, informing UN action before, during and after crises. It requires all pillars of the United Nations to work together to ensure **continuity of protection** in all contexts at all times. Protection support needs to be sustained as we transition from one mode of engagement to another, moving into crises as well as in post-crisis recovery and sustaining peace.
- **Protection is a collective responsibility:** We work **collectively** towards the common objective of protecting people through their human rights. Protection requires every part of the United Nations System to play its part, working together, to support Member States as the primary duty-bearers and other responsible parties.

This approach requires that, in each context, all parts of the United Nations System share a **common vision** of what protection entails and of our protection responsibilities, and develop a **common understanding** of protection risks and challenges in any context. Where such risks and challenges exist, it requires that we respond practically and effectively, raising protection concerns with a **coherent voice** with those best placed to ensure protection, and offering solutions through **coherent action**. Through engagement and advocacy, the UN must amplify the voice to those most in need of protection.

Correspondingly, all parts of the United Nations System, at headquarters and the field, must proactively:

1. Exercise **leadership for protection of people**, ensuring that their protection remains a priority for all actors at all times in all contexts in accordance with the common vision of protection;
2. Develop a **shared analysis** of the diverse protection risks and challenges – real or potential - that people experience in any given context and the range of options to respond to them; and then, as appropriate,
3. Advocate with and on behalf of those in need of protection, support their efforts to claim their rights and engage with those responsible for protection to encourage them meet their obligations through effective collective protection **advocacy**; and
4. Work together to **deliver** a full range of protection support services to those in need of protection, informed by the priorities identified by the people affected.

The Agenda for Protection does not prescribe how each United Nations entity should put this approach into operation – we all work in different contexts, to different mandates and with different capacities. Colleagues in the field, when leading on protection, must be able to rely on the unequivocal support of headquarters in this task. Colleagues at Headquarters have a clear role in exercising leadership, developing shared analysis, advocating for and delivering protection outcomes, alongside field colleagues.

We expect to be held to account for our plans and actions under this Pledge and the accompanying Agenda for Protection. We learn from our mistakes and work continuously to strengthen our capacities to offer protection wherever we can. Progress towards achieving this Pledge will be continuously reviewed and supported through dedicated support capacity, under the overall guidance of the Secretary-General, led by the High Commissioner for Human Rights and supported by all other United Nations entities.

United Nations Agenda for Protection

Strengthening the United Nations ability to help protect people through their human rights

The imperative to protect people in times of crisis – and beyond: what the world expects from the United Nations

From its origins, the United Nations has been called upon to protect populations from different threats, in times of conflict and times of peace. The UN stands for a world in which all human beings enjoy the full protection of their human rights without discrimination. No one should be left unprotected. Member States bear primary responsibility for protection and are accountable through intergovernmental processes. But the United Nations System has a duty to use its mandates, resources, and authority to encourage and support those responsible for protection to do what is required. Every United Nations actor understands, and is committed, through this Agenda for Protection, to playing its part in meeting the protection imperative.

People around the world expect the United Nations to do everything possible to protect them from harm. In 2020, as part of the UN75 [Global Listening Exercise](#), people in all 193 Member States said that ensuring respect for human rights was among their top three long-term priorities and expectations for the UN. Protecting children and young people, and protecting vulnerable groups in conflict settings, were considered particularly important.

“The peoples have to be at the centre of all our efforts. Particular attention must be given to people in vulnerable situations. Humanitarian access to those in need of assistance must be granted without obstacle or delay and in line with the humanitarian principles. We are guided by the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and international human rights treaties and instruments and will ensure the human rights and fundamental freedoms of everyone.”

UN75 Declaration ([A/RES/75/1](#))

Protecting people through their human rights is enshrined in the UN Charter and established by [international human rights law](#) as well as international humanitarian and refugee law where applicable. These norms underline the primary responsibility of States to provide protection and to be held accountable when protection fails.

Since its founding, an array of norms, tools and capabilities have been developed to help States to protect people and their rights in times of crisis and beyond. From supporting peaceful conflict resolution, helping negotiate peace agreements and ceasefires and deploying peacekeeping missions, to coordinating comprehensive humanitarian responses to disasters and conflict, the world has come to expect the UN to work proactively with States and other responsible actors to ensure people’s lives, dignity and well-being are protected. The [Sustainable Development Goals](#), underpinned by human rights, aim to ensure no-one is left behind and contribute more broadly to protection. Human rights form a [critical foundation for sustaining peace](#).

Yet we need to recognize that, in places like Rwanda, Srebrenica, Sri Lanka and Myanmar, we have not consistently been able to meet these expectations and may not have done everything possible to protect people, with disastrous consequences for people's lives. This has undermined the UN's reputation and legitimacy.

The responsibility of Member States – and the need for accountability when States fail to provide protection – is the cornerstone of the United Nations protection system. It is for Member States, working within the intergovernmental processes of the United Nations and other regional organizations, to examine their record and develop ways to strengthen their protection capacities. Our Common Agenda provides a timely opportunity for such a reflection.

However, this Agenda for Protection is not directed towards Member States. Instead, under the Secretary-General's leadership, it seeks to strengthen how the United Nations System, working through the Secretariat and the agencies, funds and programmes, internally responds to the **protection imperative**. The Agenda seeks to mark a sea change in the way that protection is addressed collectively within the UN, building on a series of initiatives in recent decades.

The "[Petrie Report](#)", reviewing UN action in Sri Lanka from 2007 to 2009, found cultural challenges hindered the willingness of UN staff to stand up for the rights of the people they were mandated to assist, and favoured UNHQ engagement based on what staff perceived Member States wanted to hear rather than what they needed to know. The UN framework for field action was designed around a development rather than a conflict response, despite agreement "that peace, development and the protection of basic rights are deeply intertwined and mutually reinforcing and [...] must be tackled together". It found a "systemic failure" to respond adequately to early warnings and the evolving situation because there was no sense of shared responsibility for human rights violations, and other

weaknesses including incoherent internal crisis management, coordination and oversight structures, and field staff with insufficient seniority, experience or support to deal adequately with the challenges. The [Human Rights Up Front](#) (HRUF) initiative sought to address these challenges, both culturally and structurally within the UN System's internal response structures.

Since then, other changes in internal UN structures, including the advent of the [Executive Committee](#) (and Deputies Committee), the internal [Prevention Platform](#) (incorporating the Regional Monthly Reviews initiated under HRUF), and the reform of the UN Development System with an enhanced role for the Resident Coordinator and a strengthened Common Country Analysis, have put in place many elements required for a more coherent protection response capability. Yet the [Rosenthal Report](#), reviewing UN action in Myanmar to 2018, reminded us that more needs to be done if the UN is to meet expectations in its response to human rights and protection crises.

In 2020, the Secretary-General launched his [Call to Action for Human Rights](#), promoting a transformative solutions-orientated vision of human rights. It says that human rights must be considered fully in all UN decision-making, operations and institutional commitments. Underpinned by gender equality, it aims to strengthen UN leadership on human rights, to make the human rights system responsive and innovative in confronting global challenges, and to enhance synergies between human rights and all UN pillars. It asserts that **human rights are the responsibility of each and every United Nations actor and that a culture of human rights must permeate everything we do, at country, regional and headquarters levels**. It commits the UN to enhancing its organizational culture, building on HRUF and the Rosenthal report, that emphasize prevention, protection and human rights in our awareness, decision-making and programming at field, regional and headquarters levels. And it pledges continued engagement with the Security

Council and creatively use the full spectrum of other tools and channels, including leverage with others, to raise awareness, prevent crisis and protect people effectively.

The United Nations needs to strengthen its approach to protection, in the face of traditional threats of violence, conflict and disasters, but also emerging threats such as growing inequalities, digital transformation, and the existential threat of climate change. We have yet to fully comprehend the likely impact of these developments on protection.

This Agenda for Protection sets out the general contours of a system-wide United Nations approach to protection: to deliver concrete interventions and impact for those most in need of protection; and to focus on preserving human dignity, preventing human rights violations and responding promptly and effectively when such violations occur. It is underpinned by a common understanding of the centrality of protection, based on full respect for international human rights and, where applicable, humanitarian and refugee law. As universal norms, human rights should provide universal protection to all human beings. The Agenda aims to ensure that everyone is protected to the maximum extent possible through enjoyment of their human rights everywhere, always, but especially in times of crisis.

The Agenda for Protection has three components: a Protection Pledge, which sets out in concise terms what the UN aims to achieve; the present internal Policy Brief, which elaborates in more detail how the UN intends to achieve its aims; and a standing support capacity, or Protection Support Hub, designed to accompany implementation of the Agenda and ensure that the UN works continuously together to meet its pledge.

The Agenda is built around six principles that underpin a common UN vision of, and approach to, protection:

1. Protection puts **people at the centre** of UN action.
2. Protection derives from **all human rights** together, universally enjoyed.
3. Protection is inherent to the UN's aims, for **sustainable peace and development**.
4. The best form of protection is **prevention**.
5. Protection is a **continuing responsibility** of the UN system.
6. Protection is a **collective responsibility** of the UN system.

The **universality of protection** underpins each of these principles, aiming to ensure that all human beings are protected to the maximum extent possible at all times in all contexts. All six principles are central to the Agenda, such that the order in which they are discussed below should not be taken as indicative of relative importance.

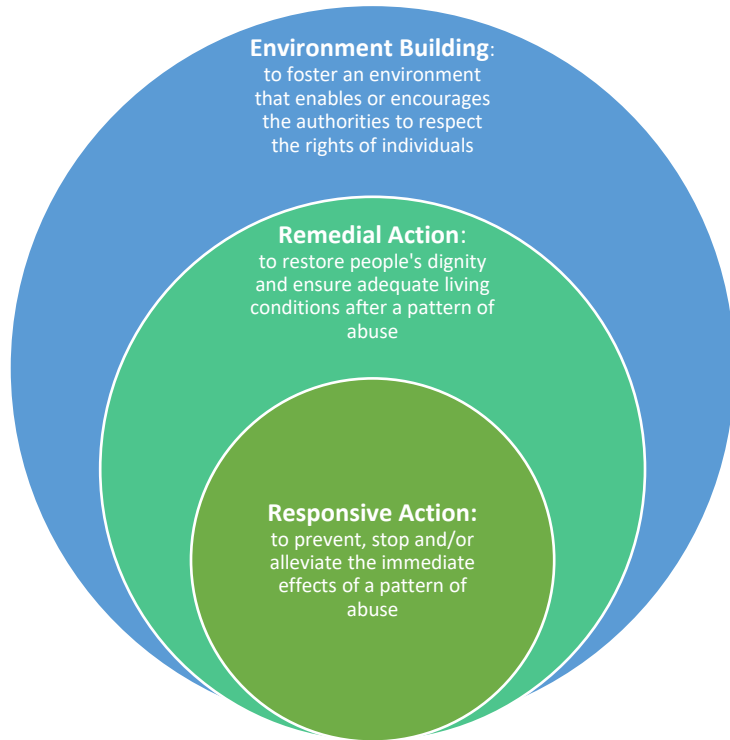
The recommendations of the recent independent [review of the IASC Policy on Protection in Humanitarian Action](#) are complementary to this Agenda for Protection; their implementation would strengthen its implementation.

Six principles underpinning the Agenda for Protection

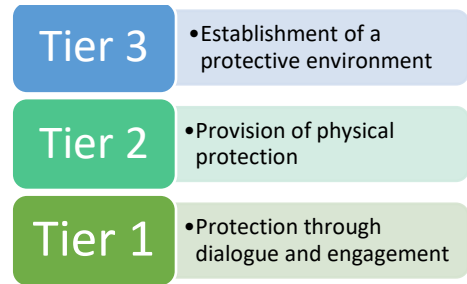


Various conceptual frameworks used by the UN compared

Egg Model for Protection in Humanitarian Action

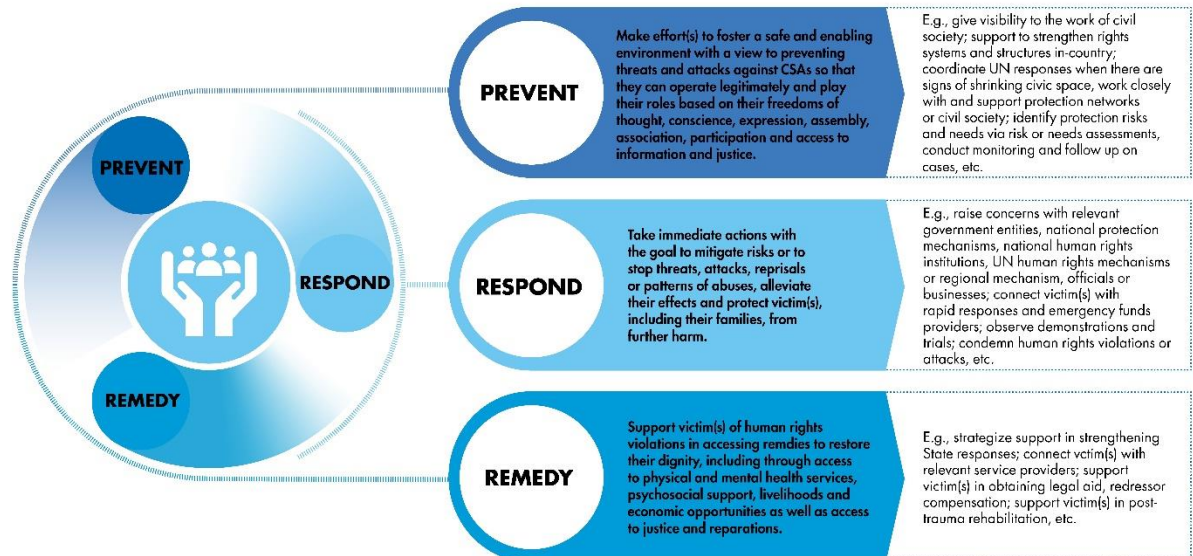


Three-tier Model for Protection of Civilians in peacekeeping



Protection Circle

This illustrates the different activities that the UN may undertake to protect civil society actors.



Protection puts people, their rights and their needs, at the centre of the UN's work

We place people at the centre of our protection response. We recognize that people have different experiences, capacities and protection needs, shaped by age, gender and diversity, that must be understood and addressed with sensitivity. People need to be heard and participate in shaping and delivering holistic and durable solutions. When necessary, the UN must use its voice to amplify the voice of those in need of protection, so that they are heard, and advocate for their rights. We must do no harm. We engage with all duty-bearers to encourage them to abide by their international legal obligations and we help people to claim their human rights.

People must be at the centre of our protection response. People's voices must be heard. The Agenda for Protection puts people's needs and concerns, in their most acute and urgent form, at the centre of the UN's work. Protection leads us to prioritize the situation of the most marginalized people in society, ensuring that no one is left behind. It requires us to have a more inclusive understanding of the realities on the ground, taking into account age, gender and other intersecting factors that shape differently the protection risks and needs of people and ensure that our actions respond to these differences.

Putting people at the centre means that we need to analyse power relations within the wider socio-cultural, economic, political, and environmental context to understand how these affect and shape differently the experiences of women and girls, men and boys, and people with diverse gender identities. It means that we need to deepen our understanding of the complex ways in which social identities (age, disability, race, ethnicity, etc.) overlap and create compounding experiences of discrimination.

Putting people at the centre means that we must ensure full and meaningful participation by all those affected, including women, children, minorities and indigenous peoples, refugees and displaced persons, migrants, people with disabilities, and others, in shaping and implementing the UN's protection work. The UN should promote and support locally-led approaches to

protection, including developing the capacity of local actors. Protection solutions with strong leadership from affected communities, local front-line responders and other local actors ensures better protection. Accountability to affected people (AAP) is widely used in the humanitarian community to refer to the commitments and mechanisms in place to ensure that communities are meaningfully and continuously involved in decisions that directly impact their lives. AAP should apply across the UN pillars.

During an active crisis, human rights protection ensures the UN responds to the immediate threats and harms faced by those caught up in conflict or other disasters. But a preventive and holistic approach to protection requires that we also address longer-term structural risks and root causes. And to identify and address these we need a participatory and inclusive approach. We need to learn to listen better to what people have to say, involve people in shaping the protection response, and support local community-led initiatives and solutions. Indeed, depending on the situation and the threats encountered, empowering people to claim their rights and protect themselves can be an effective and sustainable approach to protection.

Civic space, and the role of civil society in raising and addressing human rights protection concerns, needs to be part of the UN's protection approach. Free and meaningful participation is a key enabler of sustainable peace and develop-

ment, as envisioned by SDG 16. National human rights institutions play a key role in this regard as a bridge between government and civil society. The UN has a responsibility to help to protect human rights defenders and other civil society actors when they are threatened.

This is even more so when those advocating for human rights by engaging with the UN face reprisals and intimidation. The UN – and especially its human rights bodies and mechanisms – relies on the cooperation of individuals and groups who provide on-the-ground information, alert the UN system to evolving situations, and push for appropriate action to be taken. When those engaging with the UN face intimidation, threats, imprisonment and worse for doing so, we all lose, and the UN’s credibility is damaged. The [Assistant Secretary-General for Human Rights](#) leads efforts to combat such reprisals.

The Secretary-General has highlighted the specific gendered threats and challenges being faced by women human rights defenders and

has asserted that their protection is a collective moral responsibility for the UN. This Agenda for Protection encompasses the [Secretary-General’s recommendations](#) to the UN system to support women human rights defenders in conflict settings and beyond.

The principle of Do No Harm applies to this Agenda for Protection. It is understood that harm can result from inaction as well as from misplaced action – and that actions can have unintended negative consequences. We must be attentive to the consequences of our actions and inaction. In this regard, a critical component is safeguarding individuals from sexual exploitation and abuse (SEA). This requires a strong prevention and accountability framework for SEA, encompassing a range of preventative and responsive measures to ensure the dignity, safety, and well-being of all persons, we are mandated to protect, especially the most vulnerable and marginalized. The [Secretary-General’s strict zero tolerance policy on SEA](#) is an inherent part of this Agenda for Protection.

People are protected through their human rights

Our concept of protection is grounded in international human rights law – and where applicable humanitarian and refugee law. Protection must be universal: we recognize that protection comes from enjoying the full spectrum of universal human rights: civil, cultural, economic, political, and social, without discrimination. We aim to ensure that everyone is protected to the maximum extent possible through enjoyment of their human rights. We recognize that human rights and dignity will never be realized until gender equality is realized, and all women and girls fully enjoy their human rights. Protection in practice aims to achieve concrete protection outcomes, the result of activities undertaken to address imminent risks and harms threatening human life, liberty or dignity. We engage with all duty-bearers so that they abide by their international legal obligations, and we help people to claim their human rights. We support local solutions involving those most affected.

The UN uses multiple existing protection definitions and frameworks, tailored to the multiplicity of protection mandates and actors and the varied contexts in which we work. This is both a strength and a weakness: it provides many resources for addressing protection concerns but with a risk that key concerns may get lost in the complexity and fall through the cracks.

All existing definitions and frameworks remain valid under this Agenda for Protection. The Agenda sits at the apex of the UN's protection structures, serving to unify UN action and complement existing protection frameworks such as the [IASC Protection Policy](#) and the [protection policies that guide peacekeeping operations](#). It does not propose to replace, or prescribe changes to, existing structures but does aim to ensure protection efforts are better aligned and create a more conducive environment in which existing protection mandates can operate more effectively, supported by the whole UN system.

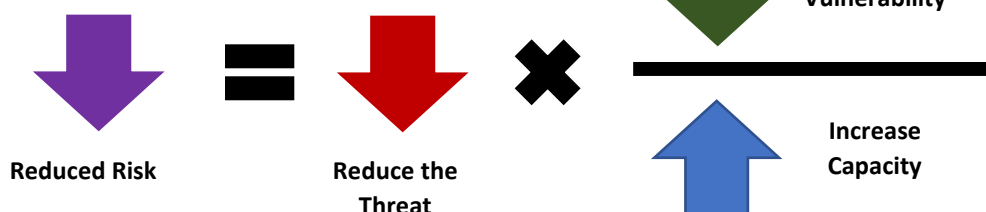
in the UN, protection as a term encompasses many different concepts. This Agenda for Protection is framed by a concept of protection firmly rooted in universal human rights and focused on the protective outcome of UN actions in terms of saving lives, protecting people from violence or harm, and ensuring their integrity, liberty and dignity as a person. We speak of “protecting through human rights”, because human rights

are not abstract concepts to be protected in isolation – and protecting a right in law does not guarantee that people will enjoy its protective effect in practice. The focus must be on the human being and the protective effect that derives from that person enjoying all of their rights.

Human rights protection does not refer to a specific tool or approach but rather refers to a desired outcome — where rights are acknowledged, respected and fulfilled by those under a duty to do so, and as a result of which human life and integrity is protected, and dignity and freedom enhanced. **Human rights protection results when, through specific actions, individuals who otherwise would be at risk or subject to deprivation of their rights, are able to fully exercise them.** It is based on international law, and necessarily focuses on both immediate responses where people are threatened, and on longer term work to build and strengthen laws, infrastructures, capabilities and institutions that protect rights — within States and at the regional and global levels. Protection understood in terms of concrete outcomes for individuals ensures that the work carried out by the United Nations is targeted at **achieving real impact**.

This understanding applies in any context, but for the purposes of this Agenda for Protection, the main focus is on situations of imminent risk or threat. At the same time, where our analysis

Protection Risk Equation



indicates a risk at an early stage, it is incumbent on us to try to address it.

Protection action should focus on reducing risks and monitoring should measure this reduction so that protection is understood as an outcome. The IASC Protection Policy states:

“A response or activity is considered to have a protection outcome when the risk to affected persons is reduced. The reduction of risks, meanwhile, occurs when threats and vulnerability are minimized and, at the same time, the capacity of affected persons is enhanced. Protection outcomes are the result of changes in behaviour, attitudes, policies, knowledge and practices on the part of relevant stakeholders.”

This approach can be applied in all contexts, including development contexts, where protection risks may not be imminent but where a prevention focus requires risks to be addressed in line with the Secretary-General’s [prevention vision](#).

The Agenda for Protection asserts that protection must always be a UN priority, but it comes into action most prominently when concrete risks are identified, or actual threats materialize. Whereas the Call to Action sensitizes all UN actors to the general need to integrate human rights into their work, **the Agenda for Protection requires concrete action to be taken in response to risks or threats to people.**

The room for engagement with relevant actors is largest, and the range of solutions greatest, when the threats are not yet fully apparent. Early

engagement is essential. Paradoxically, the imperative to protect is greatest as the crisis intensifies – and less easy for responsible parties to ignore – just when the room for engagement is shrinking. This presents a dilemma for UN field staff. The Agenda for Protection encourages early engagement, in a preventive mode. Wait-and-see is not an acceptable course of action.

We use applicable international law to assess protection risks, including the threat of violence, and to understand and address the most pressing needs and aspirations of all people. We recognize that protection comes from enjoying the

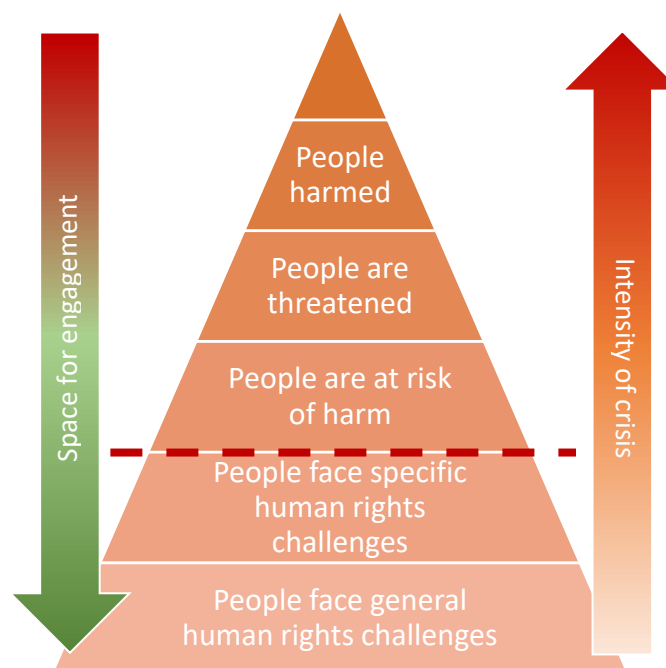


Figure 1: Act early: the imperative to act increases as the space for engagement decreases. The dotted red line shows where a crisis starts to become imminent, and the Agenda for Protection becomes more active.

full spectrum of universal human rights – civil, cultural, economic, political, and social – without discrimination. Human rights are universal, indivisible, inter-related and interdependent, and their protective effect is maximized when all people have access to all of their rights. Whilst international human rights law applies at all times in all situations, other bodies of international law, such as international humanitarian and refugee law, may apply in certain situations, strengthening legal protections.

Universal protection requires that full gender equality be realized, and women and girls fully enjoy their human rights. The Agenda for Protection compels the UN system to address the power structures that perpetuate violence, including systemic and inter-related discrimination against women and girls and strive to eliminate violence against women and girls in all spheres. Manifestations of violence – physical, psychological, and structural – whether in times of conflict or at any time, are human rights violations. Seeking to end all forms of violence is a core part of the UN mandate and essential to achieve the aims of the Agenda for Protection. The UN has a proud history of confronting violence, including violence against children, gender-based violence, and conflict-related sexual violence, and has specialised mandates aimed at eliminating these.

Addressing discrimination in all its forms is crucial to ensure the universality of protection, guaranteeing that all human beings, including those most marginalized or in vulnerable situations, are empowered to claim their rights. Protection requires us to look at [intersectionality](#), using an [age, gender and diversity lens](#) to understand how people experience violations differently and how they can be protected. Women, children, youth, older persons, persons with disabilities, those belonging to national, ethnic, religious or linguistic minorities or indigenous groups, persons impacted due to their actual or perceived profile or social group, in addition to

migrants, refugees, displaced and stateless persons, people in detention or institutionalized settings, and civilians at large may be at greater risk of targeted or indiscriminate attacks.

Analysing the full range of human rights, how they inter-relate and how they link to the wider risk of conflict or crisis is key to assessing protection risk from a wider prevention perspective. Human rights violations are widely recognized as indicators of the risk of wider conflict or crisis. Discrimination, inequality and violations of women’s human rights such as gender-based violence, are powerful indicators of risk of violent conflict. So are violations of the rights of children, minorities, indigenous peoples, and other groups in vulnerable or marginalized situations.

A distinction is sometimes drawn between civil and political rights and economic, social and cultural rights which disregards the indivisibility, inter-dependence and inter-relatedness of rights. Conflict is often viewed in terms of violations of civil and political rights, in particular how the use of force impacts on human life and liberty. Yet violations of [economic, social and cultural rights \(ESCRs\)](#), aggravated by inequalities and discrimination, can lead to an imminent threat to life or risk of harm and can be important indicators of people’s ability to withstand the disruption to their lives caused by crisis. ESCRs can point to deeper structural risk factors within society, which if left unaddressed may lead to conflict and violence. But equally, certain civil and political rights, especially those related to participation and the maintenance of [civic space](#), enable people to raise their grievances and ensure that their economic, social and cultural rights and needs are being addressed.

A holistic human rights risk analysis, which looks at the full spectrum of human rights and integrates an intersectional age-gender-diversity lens, is the best way to assess protection risk – and indeed the risks of wider conflict or crisis.

Protection underpins everything the United Nations does

As the UN system, we have a stake in ensuring people are protected because this reinforces all UN mandates and ensures our actions are effective and appropriate. We understand that when people are left unprotected, it undermines sustainable peace and development and can exacerbate humanitarian need. We address risks and threats comprehensively, leading to more durable solutions, contributing to better peace, development and humanitarian outcomes, and ensuring that no one is left behind. We recognize that protection is intrinsic to the realization of the right to development and the right to a clean, healthy and sustainable environment. We are nimble in times of crisis and emergency, mobilizing our resources and capacities to ensure that protection is prioritized. Protection is central to the UN's work, and human rights are central to protection.

Successive secretaries-general have restated that neither peace nor development are possible without respect for human rights. Human rights-based protection is an essential prerequisite for the UN to achieve all of its mandated objectives with a focus on improving people's lives.

Human rights and protection inevitably pose challenges for UN actors on the ground. Whilst human rights themselves are not inherently controversial – they after all represent the universal aspirations of all human beings and their promotion is a core purpose of the United Nations – violations of human rights, particularly where they are widespread, systematic and a matter of deliberate policy, are amongst the most difficult matters that UN personnel are required to address. But they cannot be left unaddressed.

The task becomes even greater when part of a preventive approach: it is hard to deny well-documented evidence of actual ongoing violations of human rights, but hypothetical discussion of protection “risks” may receive short shrift from the relevant authorities if they do not agree with our analysis.

As noted above, past reviews of UN action identified a cultural tendency amongst some UN staff, when faced with human rights violations, to view the need to raise them with the relevant authorities as a responsibility that is in tension with the need to retain government support to deliver humanitarian or development assistance. Yet, as

the experience in Sri Lanka showed, failure to address the core protection issues at play ultimately undermines the broader assistance effort, resulting in harm to people and a “systemic failure” to protect. A similar tension is often perceived with regard to maintaining access for political engagement, negotiation, and mediation, although [practice](#) has shown that engagement on human rights can actually open up space for dialogue and problem-solving.

This Agenda for Protection requires all parts of the UN to work proactively to ensure people are protected through their human rights. This requirement is not in opposition to the UN's other mandates, but rather it is a prerequisite to achieving those mandates. How many times has the UN seen its long-term efforts to support development swept away by a sudden but preventable protection crisis? The deeper and more destructive the crisis for people, the deeper the wounds will be and the longer it will take to recover in terms of both sustainable peace and development. **The cost of doing nothing may be immeasurably greater than the difficulty of trying to do something to help.**

The same cost-benefit applies to Member States who bear the primary responsibility for protection and are best placed to address protection issues. It is in the interests of Member States to address human rights protection concerns as early as possible. There is a well-documented

correlation between a society's enjoyment of and commitment to human rights – including non-discrimination and gender equality – and its resilience to crisis. The Secretary-General has challenged the [false dichotomy](#) between sovereignty and human rights:

“Human rights and sovereignty go hand-in-hand. The promotion of human rights strengthens states and societies, thereby reinforcing sovereignty. And the best defenders of human rights are well-functioning sovereign states”.

We need to develop a more robust and forward-leaning narrative for our human rights advocacy which is not apologetic about core United Nations Charter values. We need to engage creatively with the Security Council, the General Assembly and the Human Rights Council to forge consensus for effective international responses to protection crises. The Universal Periodic Review (UPR) has proved a useful tool to open up space for dialogue on protection risks and proposing solutions.

Unaddressed grievances, including human rights violations, have been shown to be a major cause

of violent conflict ([Pathways for Peace](#)). There is a direct link therefore between the Agenda for Protection and the Secretary-General's Prevention Vision, which similarly requires all parts of the UN to prioritize prevention to guarantee progress towards the SDGs. Avoiding violent conflict and its frequent precursors – protest, social unrest and instability – is in the interests of all governments and reinforces their commitments to achieving sustainable peace and development.

But the primary reason to prioritize protection is because people's lives matter. All human beings have the right to life, liberty and security of person. They have a right to be free from discrimination and treated equally. Their development and security needs are reflected in the full range of human rights to which they are all entitled. A focus on human rights, and especially protection risks, is the best way to achieve the people-centred United Nations that Our Common Agenda aspires to because human rights are all about people. Human rights are not abstract notions – they only make sense when attached to human beings and a focus on them leads us directly to the most pressing needs and concerns that people have.

The best form of protection is prevention

The best way to protect people is to avert the things that threaten them in the first place and to address the root causes that perpetuate situations at risk. We work as much as possible to prevent protection crises before they begin. We act early to identify and address protection risks. We do not wait for the crisis to take hold before responding but we anticipate and prepare ourselves to meet protection challenges whenever and wherever they might occur. We work, alongside the authorities, with communities and local actors to promote local initiatives to mitigate risk and build resilience. And we promote accountability as a way to address what went wrong and prevent it recurring in the future.

As mentioned, prevention and protection go hand-in-hand. The best way to protect people is to avert the things that threaten them in the first place and tackle the root causes of protection vulnerabilities and risk. Human rights provide a means to identify and address root causes as well as ensure immediate protection in crisis.

UN actors should assess protection risks and be prepared, with the right tools in place, to work with governments and other national actors to address these before a crisis hits. If we wait to respond, it may already be too late. In situations where national authorities are unable or unwilling to respond, protection concerns should be brought to the attention of the appropriate UN bodies or mechanisms.

During crises, prevention often means mitigating the worst effects of the crisis on people and helping to ensure that the crisis does not worsen. It also means working to halt human rights violations where they are occurring or reoccurring and helping to create the right conditions for protection to be sustained and expanded: actions to foster a protective environment in which rights are respected and individuals protected.

Prevention also applies during post-crisis recovery. Learning the lessons from our past protection work and working to ensure that protection risks and threats do not resurface in the future is a core part of our protection approach, ensuring that protection and peace are sustainable.

UN protection frameworks place emphasis on addressing the broader environmental aspects of protection. The operational concept in the [DPO Protection of Civilians Policy](#) for peacekeeping operations includes a third tier aimed at establishing a protective environment. The [IASC Protection Policy](#) similarly promotes remedial and environment-building actions alongside immediate responsive action. These broader contextual approaches need to unify the development, humanitarian, peace and human rights actors across all contexts. The [Framework for the Prevention of Conflict-Related Sexual Violence](#) emphasizes the elimination of gender inequality as a fundamental crosscutting aspect of prevention of conflict-related sexual violence.

Regional Monthly Reviews

The Regional Monthly Reviews – originally established under HRUF – are a key mechanism in the Secretary-General’s prevention platform through which UNHQ can support field colleagues in assessing risks and gaps and designing solutions through engagement across the different levels of the UN. Where field colleagues face difficulties in addressing protection risks on the ground, the RMRs can help to bring wider political engagement to bear as well as additional resources and capacities. Multi-dimensional risk analysis can align country-level analysis (CCAs/HNOs) with the RMR risk analysis framework. The RMR risk areas are already cross-referenced with SDGs and can be similarly cross-referenced with human rights.

Protection is a continuing responsibility

Protection must always be a priority for the United Nations. Protection should be woven into the fabric of the UN, informing UN action before, during and after crises. It requires all pillars of the United Nations to work together to ensure continuity of protection, in all contexts, at all times. Protection support needs to be sustained as we transition from one mode of engagement to another, moving into crises as well as in post-crisis recovery and sustaining peace.

Some of the UN's protection frameworks and mandates apply in specific contexts. The concept of protection of civilians has arisen in situations of armed conflict during which international humanitarian law is applicable – although international human rights standards continue to apply. The centrality of protection in humanitarian action applies principally in situations where humanitarian assistance has been deployed, either in situations of conflict or after disasters, both natural and caused by human action. These mandates are often reactive, working to protect people when a crisis has already begun.

In the vast majority of countries where the UN has field operations, the UN footprint is designed principally to deliver development cooperation. At the time of writing, there are 132 UN Country Teams deployed around the world, alongside 32 Humanitarian Country Teams and 12 peacekeeping missions. Six peacekeeping missions operate under a POC mandate from the Security Council. In most cases therefore, protection risks and challenges will need to be addressed, at least in the early stages, by development actors, assisted by human rights actors. Even where peace operations or humanitarians are deployed, development actors have an important role to play.

In many countries, the UN has no operational presence. Many serious protection concerns, including people on the move, trafficking and modern forms of slavery, are cross-border or trans-regional issues requiring coordinated action between multiple UN entities in different countries. Universality of protection suggests that the UN should be raising protection

concerns and seeking solutions even where we are not the strongest actor. There are 41 special political missions, some with regional mandates, who can support political engagement and many other UN entities maintain regional presences. OHCHR maintains an expanding network of regional presences which include capacity to analyse regional risk factors and engage in UNCTs as non-resident members. UNDP's regional hubs similarly have a role of play at the regional level.

Protection risks and challenges can occur in any country at any time. The COVID-19 pandemic demonstrated how human rights and protection crises can emerge rapidly and unexpectedly, affect multiple countries and roll back hard-won human rights gains, including gender equality. It also showed how a public health crisis could quickly escalate into a fully-blown [human rights crisis](#) with wide-ranging protection implications. The ongoing climate emergency is likely to see the sudden onset of crises with protection implications becoming more frequent in coming years.

The imperative to protect applies at all times, everywhere along the development, humanitarian and peace nexus. We need to be prepared and equipped to meet protection challenges wherever and whenever they may arise. We cannot afford for protection to fall between the cracks when human lives are at stake.

Preparedness means that any UN actor in any situation should be sensitive to the risk that protection challenges may emerge and aware that the UN may be expected to respond if necessary. Everyone should be familiar with the UN toolbox for protection and aware of where they can turn

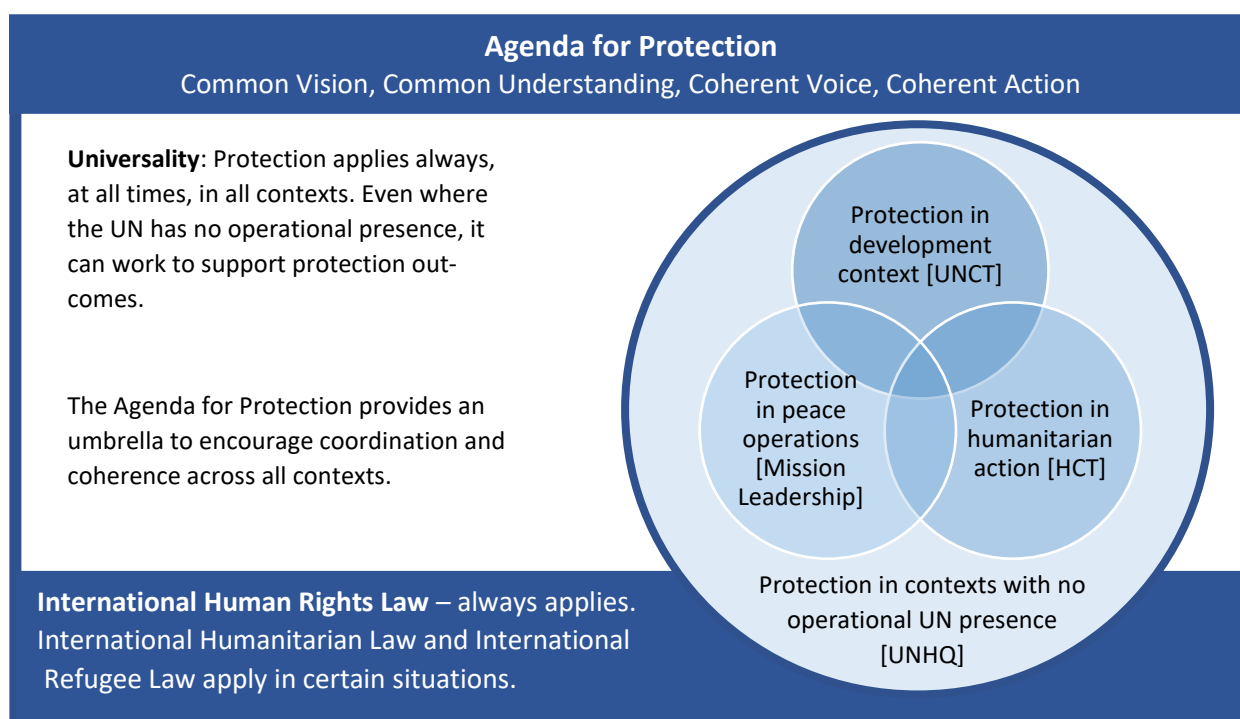
to for assistance, including from the regional and headquarters levels. We need to invest in our protection, prevention and preparedness systems before we are called on to respond.

Where a protection crisis is active and deepening, more response capacities may need to be deployed, with in the mode of engagement shifting between development, humanitarian, human rights, and peacekeeping actors. The UN needs to be nimbler in deploying human rights protection capacities in a timely manner, through lighter, innovative forms of multidisciplinary deployment including remote support. It is essential that those on the ground work in a coordinated way: UNCTs, HCTs and peace operations, starting with the leadership, need to talk to each other, analyse, plan and implement together. This requirement closely correlates to the ‘humanitarian-development-peace nexus’, which focuses on the need to address coherently people’s vulnerability before, during and after crises.

When a crisis appears to be easing, the international footprint in a country can reduce rapidly,

sometimes prematurely, leaving a continuing risk of a resumption of protection concerns. For instance, the drawdown or withdrawal of a large peacekeeping operation with a POC mandate, or the deactivation of a Protection Cluster, may significantly increase protection risks, especially if underlying root causes have not been addressed. Continuity of protection requires attention to be paid to the need for sustained support on protection during any transition in the UN footprint on the ground. Human rights should inform transition planning and human rights protection support should accompany any transition process, shifting from protection response to preventive protection actions or *vice versa*, as appropriate.

In contrast to some other bodies of law, the international human rights legal framework always applies – both in situations of armed conflict and in times of peace. Assessing protection risk through a human rights and gender lens, as part of UN analytical and planning processes reinforces continuity of protection, helping to identify and respond to risks early on and to reduce the chances of recidivism.



Protection is a collective responsibility: everyone must play their part

Member States clearly bear primary responsibility for protection. In certain circumstances, other non-state actors may also bear responsibility. The United Nations has a duty to use its mandate, resources, and authority to encourage and support those responsible for protection to play their part. Protection requires every part of the United Nations, working together, to support Member States and other responsible parties, in the common objective of protecting people through human rights. Protection is a collective responsibility of all United Nations actors.

All Member States have assumed international legal obligations to protect and promote human rights by choosing to become parties to human rights treaties. In 2005, Member States, in [General Assembly Resolution 60/1](#) affirmed “the responsibilities of all States, in conformity with the Charter, to respect human rights and fundamental freedoms for all, without distinction of any kind”. Non-state actors, notably non-state armed groups parties to conflict, may also bear protection responsibilities. The Agenda for Protection aims to strengthen the position of the United Nations System to support Member States and other responsible parties to ensure that people are protected. The entire UN system – in the field and at Headquarters – have a part to play in this endeavour.

Some United Nations entities have clear protection mandates. Pre-eminent amongst these is OHCHR, the UN Human Rights Office led by the High Commissioner for Human Rights with a robust and wide-ranging global mandate to protect and promote human rights.

The principle of [international protection](#) guarantees protection by the international community to individuals or groups who are outside their own country, who are unable to return because they would be at risk there, and whose own country is unable or unwilling to protect them. UNHCR, the UN Refugee Agency, is mandated to protect asylum-seekers, refugees, returnees, stateless persons, and, under certain circumstances, internally displaced persons. The

[Guiding Principles on Internal Displacement](#) identify rights and guarantees relevant for IDP protection. The [Secretary-General’s Action Agenda on Internal Displacement](#) aims to ensure a coordinated and coherent UN response to better protect and assist IDPs.

Entities, such as UN Women, UNICEF, IOM and UNWRA, have mandates that support certain protection priorities. The UN has created various specific mandates, for example on [prevention of genocide](#), on [children and armed conflict](#) or protection of [children from violence](#). The Women Peace and Security Agenda includes a specific pillar on protection of women’s and girls’ rights during and after conflict, including the [sexual violence in conflict mandate](#), and protection of women human rights defenders. The Security Council regularly mandates peacekeeping operations to undertake actions to [protect civilians](#) from the imminent threat of physical violence and has developed robust [language on the protection of civilians in armed conflict](#). These mandates reinforce existing protections afforded by UN standard-setting and promotion activities.

In humanitarian settings, the concept of the [centrality of protection](#) has been a key driver of coordinated action on protection. The [IASC Policy on Protection in Humanitarian Action](#) seeks to reinforce complementary roles, mandates, and expertise of all relevant humanitarian actors, including those outside the UN System, emphasizing collective approaches to protection risks and challenges to achieve collective outcomes.

Some UN specialized agencies, such as UNESCO and WHO, have human rights goals embedded in their mandates. Other UN entities, due to their diverse mandates, offer particular, sometimes over-looked, entry points that, as part of a collective UN strategy, can move forward the UN's protection engagement. The Secretary-General's Call to Action asserts that human rights are the responsibility of every UN actor and must permeate everything we do.

As part of this Agenda for Protection, every UN entity should reflect on how protection relates to their mandate and what they need to put in place to respond to protection challenges arising in the context of their work. Some UN entities have developed human rights or protection policies or standards for their organization, a good practice that others may wish to emulate. OHCHR can support entities in this regard. The IASC Action Plan for Centrality of Protection suggests complementary actions to strengthen robust and effective leadership and accountability.

The High Commissioner for Human Rights has the overarching responsibility, under the direction and authority of the Secretary-General, to coordinate human rights activities throughout the UN system ([A/RES/48/141](#), para.4).

No part of the UN System, acting alone, can adequately address the protection challenges that arise when States and other responsible actors are unable or unwilling to act. At the same time, all parts of the System, without exemption, do have a role to play. Protection is a collective system-wide responsibility, working under the common vision and understanding of what protection requires in practice on the ground.

This Agenda for Protection aims to provide an overarching framework, under which UN development, humanitarian, political and peace-building actors, together with specialized protection mandates, work in a coordinated way under a shared strategy to deliver consistent protection outcomes.

Dedicated protection support and advice

[Human Rights Advisors](#) (HRAs), deployed in both Resident Coordinator's Offices and Humanitarian Coordinator's Offices, support the integration of human rights into UN field programming. HRAs can provide local analysis and advice on protection risks and responses, including how to use human rights mechanisms as part of a protection or advocacy strategy.

[Child Protection Advisors](#) are specialized staff deployed in certain UN field missions to help them fulfil the child protection mandate. [Women Protection Advisors](#) similarly help missions and UNCTs to prevent and respond to conflict-related sexual violence. **Gender Advisors** are deployed to guide and assist field staff in analysing the gendered dimensions of their work and designing gender-responsive intervention in all substantive and operational areas, including protection responsibilities.

Protection of Civilians (POC) Advisors and POC focal points support Mission leadership in POC analysis, planning and response and coordinate POC mandate implementation, including liaison and engagement with the UNCT and humanitarian protection actors, including the protection cluster.

[Protection Clusters](#) support Humanitarian Country Teams with analysis and programming on protection, while dedicated [Senior Protection Advisors](#) can be deployed under the inter-agency **ProCap** mechanism to assist leadership with addressing critical protection concerns through high-level advocacy and operations. The [Global Protection Cluster](#) supports protection in humanitarian action.

Specialized support to UN field operations does not undermine the broader responsibility of all parts of the UN presence to address protection concerns.

Operationalising the Agenda for Protection in practice:

Common vision, common understanding. Coherent voice, coherent response

All parts of the United Nations System need to share the common vision of protection set out in this policy brief and develop a common understanding of protection risks and challenges in each context. This requires leadership and a shared framework of analysis. Where protection risks and challenges exist, the UN needs to respond practically and effectively. We need to voice protection concerns strategically and coherently with those best placed to ensure protection. And we need to offer solutions as part of a coherent response. UN advocacy amplifies the voice of those most in need of protection.

Whilst Member States bear primary responsibility for human rights protection, the UN has the authority and the standing to ensure that protection risks and challenges are being recognized and addressed. The UN, both in the field and at headquarters, needs to exercise leadership for protection, ensuring that protection is prioritized in the UN's engagement and activities.

Leadership starts internally. The Secretary-General, by launching his Call to Action and this Agenda for Protection, has signalled that protecting people through their human rights must be a top priority in UN action. This imposes a weighty responsibility on UN staff on the ground where action needs to translate into concrete protection outcomes. But it also requires leadership at headquarters, within the Secretariat and within agencies, funds and programmes, to demonstrate clear support for UN field staff in responding to the protection risks and challenges. It also requires the political will to engage to end the situation causing the protection risks. The Agenda for Protection must provide a cast iron guarantee from headquarters to the field that "we have your back covered", because addressing protection is implicit in the vision contained in the Charter and inherent to all UN mandates.

The Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights is the principal United Nations entity responsible for ensuring that human rights are promoted and protected, including by playing an

active role in preventing human rights violations, engaging with Member States and coordinating the human rights protection activities throughout the United Nations system. OHCHR will take a leading role in supporting this Agenda for Protection, in collaboration with other UN protection mandates. Yet all UN entities will have to step up to ensure that protection is prioritized throughout the UN's work.

Leadership requires that the UN shares a **common vision** for the UN's protection role, ensuring that risks and threats are placed on the agenda and are discussed with regularity. At country level, the senior UN officials, whether the Resident Coordinator, Humanitarian Coordinator or Special Representative, or a combination of these, are empowered to take the lead in this effort, ensuring protection is always on the agenda. Protection needs to be a **standing agenda item** in the regular meetings of every Country Team, even when protection risks seem minimal. Heads of agencies, funds and programmes within country teams share the responsibility so that protection remains a collective and continuing responsibility of the entire UN presence as part of a common vision of protection.

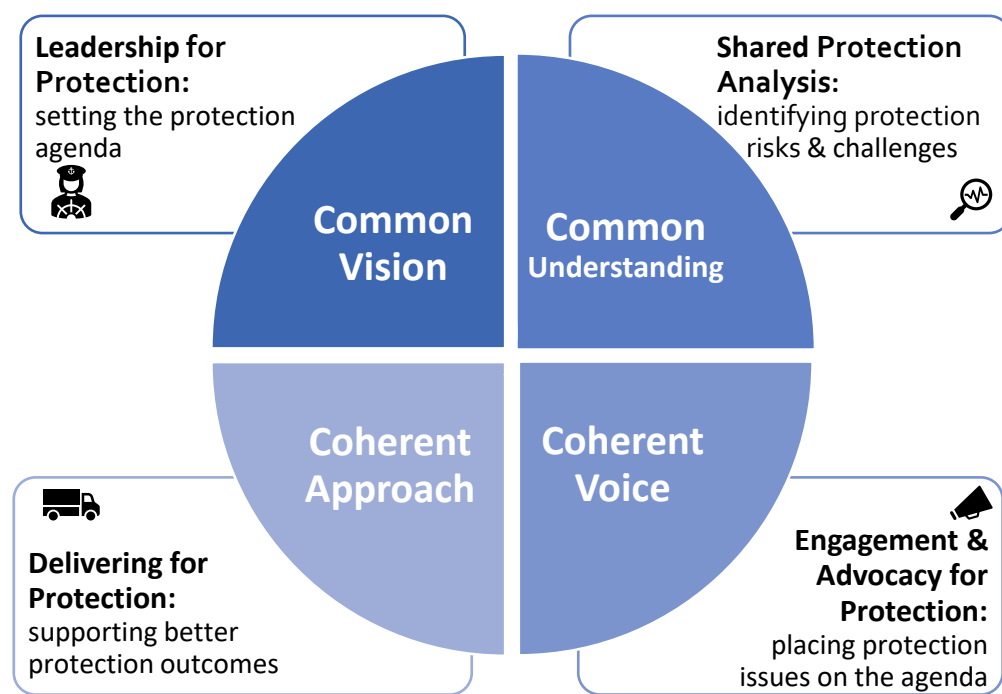
A **common understanding** of protection risks, threats and challenges requires that UN actors have a **shared analysis** of the key protection risks and challenges in any given context and what can be done to respond to them. The UN needs to document protection risks and challenges

through reliable, coherent and disaggregated data collecting and evidence gathering. Its shared analysis should identify patterns and trends and should consider the differentiated protection risks and challenges facing various rights-holders. UN personnel in the field are confronted with a bewildering array of analytical frameworks, including some which are directly relevant to assessing protection risks. Whilst some consolidation of the guidance would be in order, UN actors should make use of the tools for multi-dimensional risk assessment, [conflict sensitivity](#), [gender-responsive conflict analysis](#), assessing [risk of atrocity crimes](#), and [prevention of sexual exploitation and abuse](#).

In the context of development cooperation, the **Common Country Analysis** (CCA) includes multi-dimensional risk analysis which should be identifying protection risks, even if it may be hard to address those risks directly in the Cooperation Framework. The internal Regional Monthly Review (RMR) Risk Framework provides a useful way to seek headquarters support to develop strategies to address protection risks through

the RMR. It can also be used as a framework for multi-dimensional analysis at country level and enable regular and a more standardised, data-driven approach to assessing protection risks. Headquarters, through the UN Operations and Crisis Centre (UNOCC) can support field settings in establishing this kind of standardised approach to risk assessment, which encourages HQ and the field to have a shared understanding of the risks, makes it easier for the field to communicate concerns to Headquarters and enables the system to assess protection risks comparatively across regions and globally.

In humanitarian settings, the **Humanitarian Needs Overview** (HNO) should provide a shared understanding of the impact and evolution of a crisis and inform response planning, including on protection. Efforts have been made to improve the way protection has been addressed within HNOs and Humanitarian Response Plans (HRPs) and by HCTs, including by setting out a protection analysis, prioritising protection and including it in strategic objectives. The recent [IASC Protection Policy Review](#) found “a lack of



Four areas of engagement under the Agenda for Protection

comprehensive protection analysis, either at the local or national level, has been a significant barrier to taking collective action to address key risks as envisaged under the Protection Policy.” It is recommended that humanitarian responses should be based on a comprehensive assessment of risks of violence, coercion, deliberate deprivation and other violations rather than on responding to needs.

As protection requires a collective response, a shared analysis across the full range of actors on the ground – human rights, development, humanitarian and peace and security – is the best way to ensure the response is coherent. CCAs, HNOs and mission planning documents should share a common analysis of protection risks and threats, alongside other risks and factors, preferably through a coherent framework of analysis, so that joint, coordinated or complementary responses can be designed and implemented.

Where protection risks or threats are identified at the field level, it is incumbent on senior UN officials to seek to address these as soon as possible coherently and strategically. In the first instance, this means raising concerns directly with those bearing primary protection responsibility: government authorities or other responsible parties. Political engagement is mandatory, based on a candid assessment of the protection reality, if the objectives of this Agenda are to be met. In some situations, the UN Country Team can act on its own, while in other situations the most appropriate response may be to channel information to other parts of the UN system, notably to the High Commissioner and the Secretary-General himself, for further action.

Political engagement requires strong coordination between the field and headquarters levels so that the UN has a **coherent voice**. The range of UN and other human rights mechanisms can provide useful entry points for **engagement** with authorities, both to raise concerns and provide technical assistance for solutions. Outcomes of

the UPR can open up space for engagement. Engagement with regional organizations, and their mechanisms, is important. If or when those bearing primary responsibility for protection are unable or unwilling to respond, the UN should work to overcome obstacles or seek solutions through international cooperation with the active support of leadership at headquarters.

C2A Country Dialogues

The Country Dialogues on human rights initiated under the Call to Action can provide a valuable forum through which the UN system at country level can reach a common understanding and analysis of the human rights situation in the country, with the aim of identifying critical needs and gaps, and potential protection risks and threats. Based on this common understanding, the dialogues are designed to identify a whole of system strategic response, leveraging the different mandates and capacities across the UN system. These RC/HC/SRSG-led dialogues are designed to be adaptable to the specific context and provide an opportunity for a coherent and coordinated response to critical human rights issues. The regular dialogues can be a useful starting point for the UN system in country to identify protection risks and threats and if relevant develop a UN system response in line with the vision of this Agenda of Protection.

Advocacy is the way in which the UN can amplify the voice to those in need of protection. Advocacy, in the first instance, does not automatically mean speaking out publicly: discreet diplomacy, good offices and political engagement with the authorities may sometimes provide a better chance to get issues addressed. But public advocacy is part of the UN’s protection toolbox and can be effective when used strategically and sequentially. We need to work in concert with all influential actors to ensure that those best placed to influence the situation are engaged. Human rights mechanisms and mandates play a

in drawing attention to protection concerns and engaging with responsible authorities to address them. We must continue to engage with the Security Council, the General Assembly and the Human Rights Council by regularly providing human rights analysis and information on current and potential human rights and humanitarian crises and work to build international consensus to ensure that people are protected.

Advocacy goes hand-in-hand with **response**. In some contexts, the UN may have considerable capacity to provide direct protection assistance, especially in the context of Security Council-mandated peacekeeping missions. In others, it may have limited room to deliver concrete protection outcomes on its own, necessitating strategies in partnership with other actors, including national and local actors. Making full use of the

human rights ecosystem, including the UPR, human rights bodies and mechanisms, is also key.

UN field presences may need to develop additional capacities to support the response to protection challenges, including the delivery of protection services. The Agenda for Protection does not prescribe how each United Nations entity should put this approach into operation – we all work in different contexts, under different mandates and with different capacities.

While colleagues in the field have the lead in implementing this Agenda in their own context, they must be able to rely on the unequivocal support of headquarters in this task. Colleagues at Headquarters have a clear role in exercising leadership, developing shared analysis, advocating for and delivering protection outcomes, alongside field colleagues.

Minimum requirements for implementing the Agenda for Protection in the field

- Protection must be a **standing agenda** item for all UNCTs, HCTs and mission leadership meetings, with clear decision-making processes established and pursued.
- **Human rights protection risks and threats must jointly and regularly be assessed** as part of the UN's country-level analysis on an ongoing basis, using the RMR Risk Framework to anchor a multi-dimensional approach. UNCTs, HCTs and missions must use this analysis to articulate shared protection priorities and commit to achieving desired protection outcomes, with related monitoring and assessment frameworks in place to track progress.
- Protection risks or threats identified **must be pursued** by the UN through a range of strategies, including political engagement, advocacy, referral to HQ and/or international human rights mechanisms, and partnership with local and national actors.
- Development, humanitarian, peace and human rights actors must coordinate their protection efforts at the field level under this common vision, preferably working to the same operational plan with clear benchmarks and measurement frameworks in place.
- Senior UN officials in the field and other senior-level positions should have clear performance assessment linked to their leadership on protection.
- Headquarters must follow protection risks and threats. It must **ensure field colleagues are supported, politically and operationally**, so that protection can be prioritized. Clear decision points with accountability must be established in response to any protection risk, threat or challenge.
- In contexts, where the UN has no significant operational presence, protection risk must be assessed on a continual basis at headquarters/regional level and appropriate protection responses developed, including through engagement, advocacy and good offices.
- Engage meaningfully with diverse groups in affected communities at all stages of the programming cycle: needs assessment, planning, implementation, monitoring and review.

We expect to be held to account for our protection work.

We expect to be held to account for our plans and actions under this Agenda for Protection. We learn from our mistakes and work continuously to strengthen our capacities to offer protection wherever we can. Progress in achieving this Agenda for Protection will be continuously reviewed and supported through a dedicated support capacity: the Protection Support Hub.

This Agenda for Protection has no value if we are not prepared to be held to account for what we say we want to do in it. This is not the first initiative aimed at strengthening the UN's protection work. As already noted, despite considerable improvements in recent years, the UN continues to fall short in many situations where expectations are high that the UN could and should do more to help to protect people.

At the same time, we need to manage expectations and not promise more than we can realistically achieve. We need to be humble and acknowledge that in many situations we are not best placed to achieve the protection outcomes we would desire. In many situations, the UN does not have a substantial presence. We recognize the primary protection responsibility of States and we know that local, national and international actors are often better able to effect positive change on the ground.

Achieving the outcomes that this Agenda for Protection envisages requires UN leadership to step up. Senior leadership sets the tone for UN engagement and signals to all UN staff what is expected of them. Senior UN field staff are at the forefront but must be able to rely on the backing of leadership at their headquarters.

Dealing with protection challenges on the ground is no easy task, especially for actors whose primary responsibilities relate to other areas of expertise. It is recognised that field staff may fall short of the mark not because of unwillingness to act, but because they do not know what to do in the face of difficult and unfamiliar

challenges. Faced with other pressing priorities, often imposed on them by headquarters, field staff are overburdened and often cornered into a reactive wait-and-see stance. The complexity of the UN's human rights and protection mechanisms and approaches does not make the task any easier. Nor does the plethora of wordy guidance notes provide field colleagues with easy access to practical advice. Political engagement on difficult issues can be complex and requires strong support from HQ-level decision-making.

A fresh approach is proposed based on ensuring that field colleagues get the support they need in real time and that leadership across the UN assumes greater responsibility for protection. The Agenda for Protection will therefore establish a Protection Support Hub, designed to assist with implementation of the Agenda before, during and after crisis. It would provide a first-instance resource to Resident Coordinators and other senior UN officials on the ground seeking guidance on protection challenges.

In a prevention mode, before a crisis, the Support Hub would direct field staff to or help to develop training, early warning, preparedness and risk analysis activities so that they are better able to anticipate and prepare for potential and differentiated protection challenges. It would refer colleagues in need of advice or support to existing protection support capacities, as necessary, and in the process develop a strong understanding of what works and where gaps exist.

During a crisis, it would provide first-instance guidance and advice, as well as referrals to

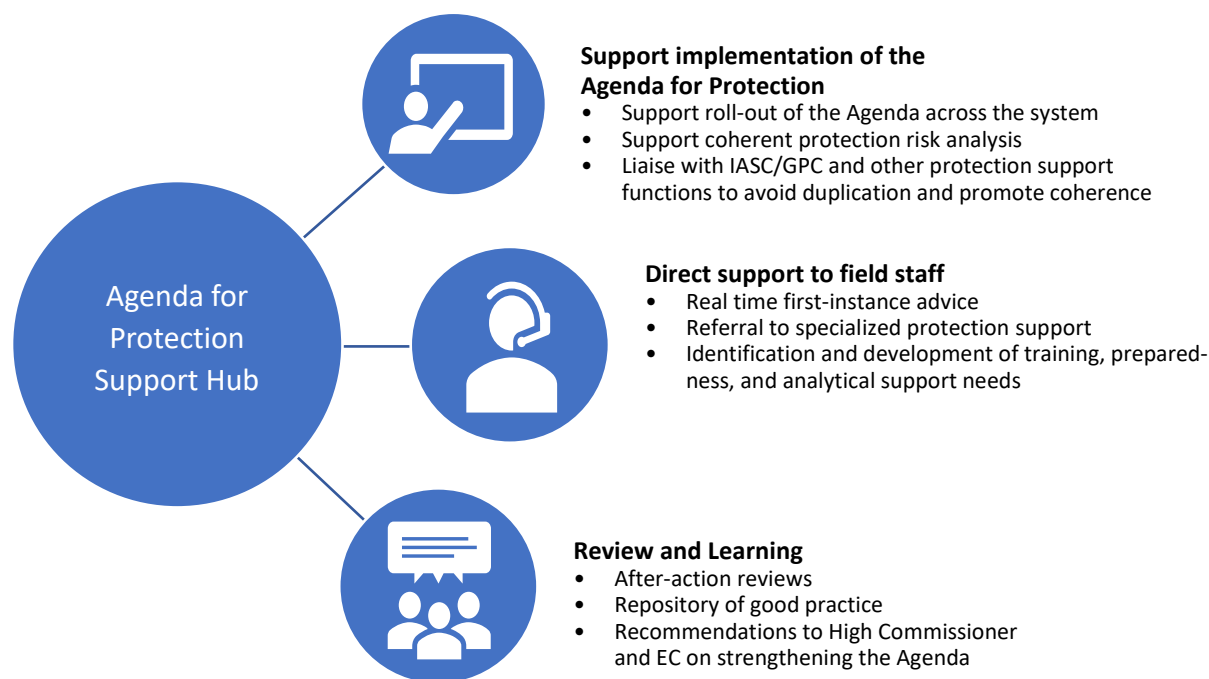
relevant protection capacities and mandates to assist in dealing with protection issues. This capacity would work in complement to, and without prejudice to, existing support capacity provided by the humanitarian system through the Global Protection Cluster and ProCap, as well as protection capacities linked to different UN mandates.

The success of the Agenda for Protection requires the UN to do a better job in gathering examples of what works in practice. It is time for the UN to move away from the past practice of initiating ad-hoc post-facto reviews of protection shortcomings, such as the ones that focused on UN action in Sri Lanka and Myanmar, and switch to a more proactive, forward-looking commitment to continuous monitoring and learning on how to deliver protection effectively on the ground. The support hub would therefore also provide a dedicated structure for recording good practice, through procedures to monitor implementation of the Agenda for Protection, identify

gaps and weak points, and undertake after-action reviews, enabling a more systematic understanding of protection successes and challenges to be built up over time.

OHCHR, under the overall guidance of the High Commissioner for Human Rights, will develop the Protection Support Hub concept, in close collaboration with other UN entities. Entities will be encouraged to second specialised staff to the Hub as appropriate. The Hub will be designed to ensure strong and timely support to the field through a regional structure as well as close coordination with headquarters-level leadership and decision-making.

The High Commissioner for Human Rights will report to the Executive Committee on the status of implementation of the Agenda for Protection on an annual basis. UN entities will be encouraged to report on steps taken to implement the Agenda in accordance with their individual mandates.



Examples of the Agenda for Protection in practice *(not prescriptive)*

	Early Warning & Preparedness	Immediate Threat	Actual Crisis
<i>Leadership (Common Vision)</i>	RC/HC makes protection a standing agenda item in UNCT/HCT meetings, proactively identifying in all contexts protection issues and responding. RC/HC assesses preparedness for potential protection challenges, develops analytical and response capacity, staff training, etc. UN engages regularly with local actors, including communities and civil society, to develop partnerships to address any protection issues that may arise.	RC/HC/DSRSG/SRSG brings vision and strategic direction in support of protection, ensures that any threat is recognized by all UN entities on the ground and coordinates an appropriate response; keeps UN HQ informed and requests assistance as appropriate.	UN system leadership coordinates the UN's protection response on the ground and manages expectations of what the UN can and cannot do. UN footprint on the ground is assessed and adjusted as the crisis develops.
<i>Shared Analysis (Common Understanding)</i>	UN presence develops a common protection risk and opportunity analysis, anchored in the CCA, HNO and the analytical framework of the ISF, identifying concrete protection risks and threats to diverse groups and ways to address them. Assessment of risk is regular, multi-dimensional, data driven and forward-looking, anticipating risks and taking into account shifting factors. C2A Country Dialogues can be used to discuss protection risks in the local context.	Rapid risk and opportunity analysis to identify options for engagement that could be incorporated into a protection strategy, identifying clear roles and responsibilities. Additional analytical resources may be required including remote monitoring capacities or capacity and skills support from HQ to help the field enhance its analytical capabilities.	RC/HC/DSRSG/SRSG leads the continuing review of protection risks and needs, potential for escalation of the situation and anticipation of future risks.
<i>Advocacy (Coherent Voice)</i>	UN presence plans on how to raise risks with competent authorities. Some risks may be able to be addressed through country-level planning and programming tools, such as the UNSDCF, HRP or ISF; others may require a protection advocacy/political engagement strategy. Strategic engagement with human rights mechanisms can support the outcome. Any risk must be addressed in some way. Risks may be raised in UN inputs to UPR, treaty body reviews and special procedures.	The UN on the ground: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Alerts regional and HQ levels as appropriate • Engages with national authorities and other relevant actors. • Engages with full range of relevant partners. • Considers the full range of UN voices as part of an advocacy strategy. The UN at headquarters provides full backing to field efforts.	UN presence advocates with responsible parties to ensure critical protection needs are being addressed, in coordination with UNHQs. UNHQ robustly supports advocacy. Advocacy includes quiet diplomacy, taking into account perceptions and expectations.
<i>Delivery (Coherent Response)</i>	UN field programming, including development programming, is designed/adjusted to respond to protection risks and needs. RMR can be used to generate consensus on risks and to discuss and agree preventive action. UN presence engages with national authorities, and with UN at regional and HQ levels (as required) on prevention and preparedness, utilizing on the UN's protection toolkit.	HQ, through an emergency DC/EC discussion, can offer additional support, including to identify (i) relevant tools from the UN protection toolbox, (ii) advocacy and (iii) potential capacities	Review protection gaps and whether additional resources (funding, capacities, surge expertise) are required. Use the EC/DC to seek support.

