Outcome report
Stock-Take on the IASC Protection Policy and the Centrality of Protection[1]

Priority Actions for the Centrality of Protection in Humanitarian Action

Invest in effective leadership for protection outcomes

- *To reaffirm and reinforce their commitment to ensuring the centrality of protection in humanitarian action, request that the IASC Principals examine and report on their individual agency's efforts to support collective protection outcomes and strengthen the accountability framework of Humanitarian Coordinators and Humanitarian Country Teams.*

- *Recognizing the complexity and wide-ranging scope of the role of Humanitarian Coordinators (HCs), invest in building expert teams to work with HCs as well as incentives and rewards to encourage HCs to take on difficult issues.* The movement of RC/HC reporting lines to the UN Secretary-General presents an opportunity to ensure the UN system recognizes and supports HCs as they maneuver complex global dynamics and address the needs of vulnerable people.

- *Keep affected people – and the risks they face – at the center of response strategies, from design and planning to implementation and evaluation.* The priority actions required by affected people should additionally define global policy processes, including on internal displacement, the Grand Bargain, good humanitarian donorship, and Security Council decisions.

- *Foster and promote open, flexible, and inclusive environments within and between agencies, clusters, HCTs, and other structures.* Leaders should cultivate inclusive environments where staff are empowered to ask questions and admit challenges, and technical sectors feel comfortable asking for help from protection actors.

- *Broaden engagement and collaboration beyond the humanitarian system, including development and peacebuilding actors, to work collectively in solving complicated protection problems.* There is a critical need to understand the capacities and potential contributions of non-humanitarian actors in order to coordinate and ensure protection issues are addressed in their interventions.

Stimulate analysis, learning and enhanced skill sets for collective protection outcomes

- *Promote, build, and resource skills and capacities necessary for humanitarian actors to contribute to protection outcomes,* including: data collection and information management, continuous analysis, adaptive management, international humanitarian and human rights law, engagement with parties to conflict, effective advocacy, and strategic thinking.

- *Collect, capture, and disseminate good practice related to ways of working, skills and competencies, and strategic thinking for protection outcomes.* Examples could include: prioritization exercises, engagement with parties to conflict, effective advocacy strategies, leadership styles, etc. Additionally, *document and disseminate specific experiences and success factors of developing humanitarian country team (HCT) protection strategies.*

- *Hold peer exchanges at country and global levels to share information, good practice, and lessons learned, and capture these lessons for wide dissemination*. These exchanges should occur at multiple levels and could be linked to the Peer-to-Peer mechanism. For example, dedicated and scenario-based discussions for HCs to consider the unique role of humanitarian leadership for protection; or peer visits for protection cluster coordinators to other contexts.

---

[1] On 14-15 October 2018, the co-chairs of the Centrality of Protection Task Team, OCHA and InterAction, supported the Global Protection Cluster (GPC) to convene a workshop to take stock of implementation of the IASC Policy on Protection in Humanitarian Action (2016) and the IASC Principals Statement on the Centrality of Protection in Humanitarian Action (2013). Complementing a global survey and several peer exchanges, the workshop sought to review diverse experiences and observations on the degree to which protection is central to humanitarian action, identify future actions to better achieve protection outcomes, and support effective implementation of the Protection Policy. The stock-take took place in Amman, Jordan, and brought together around 45 practitioners from diverse agencies and country contexts, as well as a mix of policy and programming focus. Participants included protection experts but also shelter, health, food security, and general humanitarian managers. Several humanitarian coordinators (HCs) also attended various sessions. Highlights from the pre-stock-take survey and peer exchanges can be seen in the "*IASC Protection Policy: Field Practices Note*".

Background

In 2016, the Inter-Agency Standing Committee (IASC) adopted the IASC Policy on Protection in Humanitarian Action as a means of operationalizing the 2013 Inter-Agency Standing Committee (IASC) Principals statement on the Centrality of Protection. The Centrality of Protection statement emphasized a collective responsibility to place protection at the core of all humanitarian action. In turn, the Protection Policy of 2016 defines how centrality of protection should be implemented at a country level through collective mobilization of expertise, capacity, and resources toward protection outcomes; it also represents a commitment to those served by humanitarian action and a way for the community to hold itself accountable. As protection issues are the cause of greatest suffering in the world, it is essential that the broadest possible community comes together to find innovative and sustainable solutions.

> *"We still need to have a cultural shift within the system and leadership to understand what the Centrality of Protection is and what it means."*
> Participant comment

Key themes

Throughout the workshop, many key issues emerged as both challenges and opportunities to effective implementation of the IASC protection policy:

Working collectively to achieve protection outcomes

Participants noted that protection is the core organizing principle for humanitarian response in some specific contexts, such as past refugee and/or displacement situations, in time-bound actions like humanitarian evacuations from besieged locations in Syria, and the mobilization ahead of the military operation in Mosul. In order to make protection a core organizing principle in more contexts, it seems greater specificity on definitions and meaning is needed on what constitutes a protection outcome. Greater specificity with regard to the protection outcome being pursued, and how outcomes will be manifested and measured, would allow more actors to actively contribute as and if relevant.

Collective analysis for protection outcomes

Two years since the adoption of the IASC Protection Policy, it is clear that the humanitarian community has yet to come to terms with the practical implications of approaching protection as an outcome, not just a series of checklist activities. Working towards protection outcome requires timely, context-specific analysis of risks and strategic thinking about what is to be achieved in the short, medium, and long term, with defined intermediary steps and benchmarks to reach the overall goal. This analysis should be informed by the expertise of a range of actors. In order to conduct a joint analysis, streamlined and cohesive criteria for vulnerability and needs are required across all sectors, as most

> *"Protection outcomes take longer and require forward thinking and adaptive approaches to implementation which necessitates a change in mindset compared to how we operate today."*
> Participant comment

criteria are established on a sector basis. The Protection Cluster, its sub-clusters, or lead agencies can contract an anthropologist or economist to conduct a study highlighting issues not brought out in traditional protection analysis, thereby strengthening the contextual understanding. Criteria should also be broadened to include more nuanced indicators of vulnerability, such as structural discrimination and exclusion, which is currently being tested in Somalia's Centrality of Protection Strategy. One way to ensure the terminology used for analysis and planning is inclusive could be to facilitate the process from the perspective of a non-protection or even non-humanitarian actor, and therefore consider the centrality of protection from a different vantage point.

Protection outcomes might be expressed at an individual, case management level; at the level of a population sub-group with common vulnerabilities in relation to a certain threat; or at an aggregate level for a large and

diverse vulnerable population suffering a common threat or series of threats. The actions required to achieve these outcomes require separate, distinctive skill sets, but in each instance protection outcomes need to be broken into component parts and specific timeframes in order to effectively track progress. Measuring incremental progress in this way, while simultaneously monitoring the risk factors that the intervention seeks to address, also allows for course-correction and adaptation in the midst of an intervention.[2]

> *"The best way to build consensus is look at things as they are, foster synergies, and make things interact with each other beyond the framing of a single agency."*
> Participant comment

Information sharing
One of the most significant constraints to the development of collective outcomes is data sharing, as agencies and specific sectors hesitate to share data for numerous reasons, including: security concerns, perceptions that controlling information leads to better funding results; concerns that some types of information reflect negatively on the agency (such as an indication of poor performance); uncertainty about how information will be used; concerns that sensitive data will be handled appropriately by others; protectiveness of sources; and a lack of understanding of professional standards for data sharing. Overcoming this culture of mistrust requires dedicated and consistent efforts to change individual and organizational approaches and mindsets. It will also necessitate technical adaptations, such as utilization of common data indicators as a means of streamlining information sharing.[3] Donors could encourage agencies to work toward collective outcomes by funding outcome-oriented programming, and related ways of working.

Contribution of multiple actors to protection outcomes
Developing collective protection outcomes also requires ensuring that a diverse group of relevant individuals are involved throughout the process, especially the affected population, in accordance with the particular context-specific protection risk being addressed. Without systematic consultation with local communities and actors during a protection analysis, humanitarian actors risk being disconnected from reality, not addressing the priority concerns of affected people, developing inappropriate programming, and potentially weakening or even destroying existing capacities within the community.

> **Example of good practice**
> In a process initiated by cluster coordinators at the country level, several clusters in Yemen (including protection, health, WASH, and nutrition) developed a common vulnerability matrix in order to target specific populations and locations with a minimum package of assistance from each cluster.

Based on the desired outcome and in order to make the most of opportunities to address challenging protection issues, it is be necessary to map the range of actors at various levels whose capacities are needed to contribute to a protection outcome; this mapping should include governments and other duty-bearers. Non-humanitarian actors may not understand their potential role, or even be aware that they can contribute, to help achieve protection outcomes, so it is important to appreciate the range of capacities, resources, experience, relationships, and expertise of each actor, community, or network in order to develop innovative solutions. In situations transitioning from active to protracted conflict, a lack of clear process or understanding of priorities can exacerbate or lead to new protection risks, so it is essential to comprehend the context and range of actors present. For the most critical protection issues requiring multi-disciplinary, multi-sectoral, high-level attention and a unified approach, the HCT may be best placed to act, with the support of the protection cluster and other sectors.

---

[2] For more on this topic, see "Managing Protection Strategies," Chapter 2 of the "*Professional Standards for Protection Work*", found here: https://professionalstandards.icrc.org/

[3] For information about data protection and privacy, see the "*Professional Standards for Protection Work*", Chapter 6: "Managing data and information for protection outcomes." here: https://professionalstandards.icrc.org/. Another resource is the Protection Information Management (PIM) website, found here: http://pim.guide/

A shift away from "institutional mandate sovereignty" is also needed, so that any actor can approach protection without organizations or individuals feeling threatened or proprietary about how issues are discussed. Rather than being the sole actors responsible, protection clusters can enable others to take collective action by acting as a resource for other sectors and in-country leadership. This collaboration works well when protection clusters act as a resource, rather than as a watchdog that critiques how protection is discussed and addressed. The contribution of technical sectors to protection outcomes must be recognized and their protection instincts encouraged and documented.[4] All actors should see protection as their responsibility, not just that of the protection cluster or UNHCR as cluster lead agency. Technical sectors can contribute at both operational and strategic levels, by ensuring that programs take protection risks into account, such as the Protection Risk Assessments in Syria, and using targeted technical assistance to achieve protection outcomes. Additionally, there is a need for greater coherence in the myriad ongoing processes and tools, such as durable solutions, "new ways of working," Human Rights Up Front, UN Human Rights Due Diligence Policy, HCT protection strategies, the Grand Bargain, the sustainable development goals, the double- and triple-nexus, and countering/preventing violent extremism.

Incentivizing contribution to collective protection outcomes
Building staff or organizational capacity to achieve collective protection outcomes is not enough if there is no willingness to collaborate and share responsibility and information. Incentives should be cultivated to encourage collaboration and measures to which agencies and individuals are held, possibly related to funding, individual career paths, individual and agency reputations, or capturing cluster contributions to protection outcomes. While there is limited formal accountability within the humanitarian system, heads of agencies are still accountable to their staff and all humanitarian actors are accountable to the populations they serve. One option could be to develop indicators for tracking protection outcomes that also include measures of cooperative behavior, such as how agencies share information or support or contribute to joint analysis and programming. Achieving protection outcomes does not necessarily require that action be channeled only through formal processes and coordination architectures. Where relevant, individuals and agencies may initiate collective action without all activities having to come under the coordination of the formal architecture, whilst avoiding the risk of creating parallel structures and duplicating action that reinforces collective responsibility and accountability. Collection and dissemination of experiences of collaborative efforts to achieve protection outcomes may also provide examples of how these approaches can work. Donors could incentivize and promote collective protection outcomes by soliciting proposals for joint and multi-sectoral analysis, planning, and programming and prioritizing funding for collective action.

Example of good practice
During the Mosul operation, the embedding of UN civil-military advisors directly within Iraqi military units proved exceptionally helpful for developing a battle plan centered on the protection of civilians.

Skills, capacities, and competencies of humanitarian actors
A number of context-specific social, technical, and analytical skills are necessary for effective humanitarian action and the types of protection concerns to be addressed, including at different stages of a crisis. For example, in Iraq and northeast Syria the de-facto detention of people perceived to be affiliated with ISIS raise concerns about governance and the rule of law, transitional justice, and durable solutions for displaced people. While the government of Iraq recognized the importance of protection during the Mosul offensive, thus creating leverage to influence the conduct of their military operations,[5] it may

---

[4] See the recently revised Sphere Standards for more about protection as a cross-cutting issue, to which technical sectors can contribute; found here: https://www.spherestandards.org/

[5] For more details about the Mosul military operation, including lessons for contingency planning for the protection of civilians, see InterAction and the Center for Civilians in Conflict, "*Protection of Civilians in Mosul: Identifying Lessons for Contingency Planning*,"

not see the issues of perceived ISIS-affiliation in the same way, due to public pressures and the need to secure its authority. Given these challenges, and as a basis for identifying the requisite skillsets, it is important to understand the context, the problem to be addressed, and the relationships necessary to confront the problem.

Other skills or capacities noted by workshop participants as critical for achieving protection outcomes were: communication, especially for conveying complex ideas in a straightforward and clear manner; data collection and analysis for various purposes, including for understanding motivations and characteristics of parties to conflict, conducting joint protection risk analysis, and triangulating information from a variety of sources; leadership; strategic thinking; openness to learning and adaptation; dialogue and negotiation with political actors, including armed forces; civil-military engagement for protection; and good understanding of IHL, human rights law, and other legal frameworks. For contexts where IHL does not apply, or where armed actors are not receptive to messages about legal frameworks, humanitarians may need to consider other ways to frame issues related to the protection of civilians, for example, drawing on other normative sources or reasoning. This entails another set of distinct skills. On an individual or organizational level, certain capacities are necessary to effectively engage parties to conflict to influence their conduct, such as: analytical ability to understand the motivations, hierarchy, influence points, and dynamics of a specific armed force; negotiation skills; analysis of trends based on a credible evidence base; civil-military coordination; and a clear strategy for engagement.

Role of leadership at country and global levels

The 2013 IASC Principals Statement on the centrality of protection places responsibility for protection with all actors in the humanitarian system and highlights unique roles of HCs, HCTs, and clusters at the country level to mobilize appropriate action on protection concerns; however, translating this guidance into operations remains inconsistent and difficult. While protection may be a significant focus of the HC and/or HCT in some contexts, individual personalities play a significant role in whether and how issues are taken up for collective action. Where HCs do not practice empowered leadership on protection, it could be due to a number of factors, including: lack of confidence and understanding about what protection means and how to tackle critical problems, a fear of overstepping or stating something inaccurate about protection, or a perception that protection is disabling for humanitarian action or "too political" for engagement with senior government officials.

> *"The role of the HC is to recognize the difficulty of leading discussions, recognize the diversity of opinions, but lead those discussions anyway."*
> Participant comment

As part of a clear analysis of protection issues and opportunities to address them, HCs and HCTs should take up the most critical issues which their particular leverage, expertise, and relationships may be able to influence. For example, given the high levels of civilian harm occurring in military operations in multiple conflicts, a critical role for HCs and HCTs includes reminding parties to conflict of their obligations under IHL and calling on other states to exercise their influence to help ensure the civilian population is respected and protected through bilateral diplomatic engagement. HCs should also mobilize actors within and beyond the humanitarian system, including international human rights mechanisms, for a more concerted effort pressing member states to encourage the parties to conflict to fulfill their obligations. This requires that HCs maintain strategic relationships through diplomatic channels and reflect on how best to leverage influence. In these complex and dire situations, HCs are often isolated and not supported in a manner commensurate to the scale of the challenge; therefore this critical HC role necessitates investment on the part of the wider humanitarian system.

October 2017, found here: https://www.interaction.org/document/protection-civilians-mosul-identifying-lessons-contingency-planning

> *"We said, 'not on our watch again' after Sri Lanka, but now we have the Rohingya situation. How to make sure this doesn't happen a third time? How can this community ensure other leaders are willing to take on challenging issues?"*
> Participant comment

More generally, HCs and HCTs have a unique role to play in fostering open and flexible environments for creativity, collective thinking and action, and transparent decision-making. While total consensus is often not possible, it is important for analysis, strategy development, and decision-making processes to be inclusive and accessible in order to facilitate buy-in from a wide variety of stakeholders. Where an overemphasis is placed on wide consultations, slowing down the response, HCs can assume a lead decision-making role to ensure the highest principles of protection are maintained and that agreed actions are not based on the lowest common denominator. In managing these conversations, HCs should recognize the diversity of opinions and perspectives, and the improbability of reaching consensus. Peer exchanges between HCs, with space for sharing experience and good practice, could be helpful for facilitating greater understanding across contexts.[6]

> *"Protection should not be siloed in the Protection Cluster. It needs to be an organizing tenet of the HCT and beyond... That was the idea behind the HCT protection strategies. It was meant to develop a vision with a nuanced role for various actors. It is the process to develop the strategy that is important – bring people together to discuss and identify common problems – not the end product in itself. To be effective, HCT protection strategies need to be internalized to have a real impact on the way people are doing business."*
> Participant comment

Cluster coordinators and leads can also play a leadership role to initiate collaboration and collective action by actively reaching out across sectors and sharing information, for example, through regular Critical Protection Issues Notes to the HCT. Country leadership, both of inter-agency structures and individual agencies, should also think strategically about the resources, capacities, and relationships necessary to achieve protection outcomes, and prioritize accordingly. Heads of agencies should be responsible for ensuring staff understand the centrality of protection and allow for flexibility in operations, beyond organizational mandates.

At the global level, participants sense there is insufficient collective urgency and accountability for critical protection issues, especially on protracted situations like Syria, where structures like the UN Security Council are so politicized that effectiveness is limited. At a headquarters level, cluster lead agencies should clearly emphasize the need to work collectively toward protection outcomes. Similarly, the IASC Principals, as the most senior representatives for the humanitarian system, should play a lead role to ensure attention is placed on protection issues at appropriate levels and collective action for protection outcomes prioritized within their own agencies. Global level leadership and efforts are especially crucial on issues of IHL and human rights law compliance and the protection of civilians, where engagement and leverage with policymakers and political leadership of states may prove more useful than, or at least can complement and reinforce, advocacy at the country level. In these instances, it is important to note that advocacy can include public campaigns or private dialogue and engagement with key stakeholders, and leaders should think strategically about how to effectively utilize these approaches.

---

[6] The GPC reviews of the centrality of protection may also be helpful resources as the reports cover both contextual examples and broad thematic issues. The 2017 review can be found here: http://globalprotectioncluster.org/_assets/files/unhcr-cop_report-screen.pdf

Example of good practice

Example of good practice
Ahead of the Mosul operation in Iraq, a prioritization process led by the HC required sectors to refine and defend the most critical aspects of their programming, including demonstrable impact, which enabled the humanitarian community to narrow down, combine, and sequence interventions to those that would deploy available resources and capacities with the greatest impact.

Strategic thinking and prioritization

Closely linked to the role of in-country leadership is the importance of strategic thinking and prioritization to achieve protection outcomes. Many of the most complicated protection issues require short, medium, and long-term thinking and multi-disciplinary solutions and approaches, while including the affected population and keeping risks to which vulnerable people are exposed at the center of response strategies. The protection policy outlines ways of working for prioritization and strategy development, and examples can be drawn from previous experiences.

One option is for HCTs to develop protection strategies[7] focused on a few (one to three) specific and critical protection issues requiring a collective response.[8] Experience thus far is mixed, with some contexts producing strategies that are too broad to be truly actionable and others finding the process constructive and informative. [9] It is important that an HCT protection strategy goes beyond the strategy of the protection cluster, while remaining linked to the cluster's priorities and analysis, to reflect the unique role and leverage of the HCT to tackle specific aspects of protection issues. Especially where an issue necessitates a unified, multi-level, and strategic integration of sectors and actors for comprehensive solutions, HCT protection strategies can mobilize collective energy and attention beyond any one sector. Given the diversity of opinions and experiences related to the purpose and process of developing HCT protection strategies, a review of success factors from experiences in various contexts would be beneficial for many actors. Success factors could include: strong leadership and commitment to take on complex problems within the HCT as well as protection cluster, formal prioritization processes, robust protection and context analyses, and inter-agency buy-in. This collection and review of experience and examples should be disseminated widely and the success factors adapted by context.

Influencing state and non-state parties to conflict for protection outcomes

Participants noted that there is a need to be more creative, flexible, and realistic about humanitarians' capacity and ability to engage with state and non-state parties to conflict as a means of influencing their behavior to minimize civilian harm or address serious protection concerns. Humanitarian actors should first jointly identify the purpose of such engagement, then consider the methods and mechanisms to influence specific parties, including who should be involved at various times and how to frame messaging. Humanitarian actors should consider a range of options to influence parties' behavior, including non-Western

---

[7] The IASC Protection Policy does not require HCT protection strategies and, indeed, robustly cultivating the ways of working outlined in the Policy, for example information-sharing and integrated analysis, are the essential pre-conditions for effective collective action. In this regard, donor governments should refrain from making the disbursal of funds conditional on the existence of HCT protection strategies as this incentivizes simply producing more documents and undermines the cultivation of collaborative ways of working underlying high-quality strategies for collective protection outcomes.

[8] See the GPC provisional guidance note on HCT protection strategies for more information, here: http://globalprotectioncluster.org/_assets/files/news_and_publications/hct-protection-strategies-provisional-guidance-final-september-2016.pdf

[9] Dedicated resources, such as Inter-Agency Stand-by Protection Capacity (ProCap) advisors, provide short-term support to HC/HCTs for the development of HCT protection strategies, yet implementation without the additional support has not been consistent. More information about the ProCap project can be found here: https://www.humanitarianresponse.info/en/coordination/procap

traditions, use creative approaches and strategic entry points, such as local religious leaders, understand a group's motivations, and avoid sending mixed messages. [10]

Traditionally, coaxing and condemning (or "naming and shaming") are one of the basic methods for influencing parties' conduct, but are generally applied on an ad-hoc basis rather than systematically coordinated. [11] Various tools, mechanisms, or specialized positions, based on a credible evidence base, can prove helpful in influencing parties' behavior in conflict. These may include civilian casualty tracking; a mutually-agreed concept of operations (con-ops) such as that employed in the Mosul operation; human rights monitoring and reporting, including by OHCHR, such as the monitoring and reporting mechanism (MRM) on grave child rights violations in situations of armed conflict; and positions like that of special rapporteurs and other Special Representatives to the Secretary General (SRSG). It is not expected that humanitarian agencies will conduct human rights investigations or verify specific incidents of civilian harm, but rather analyze and communicate trends of civilian harm and damage to civilian infrastructure, drawing correlations between parties' behavior and detrimental impacts on civilian life.

Examples of good practice

- During the Iraqi and Coalition effort to remove ISIS from Fallujah, humanitarian leaders appealed to Prime Minister Abadi to intervene to assist the 40,000 civilians held by ISIS in the city. Due to these concerns raised by humanitarians and in spite of disagreement from the U.S.-led Coalition, the Prime Minister ordered a halt in the assault in order to prevent the deaths of thousands of civilians, effectively suspending offensive operations by the world's largest military force.

- In the Mosul military operation, a fatwa issued by Ayatollah Sistani (the most senior figure for Iraqi Shi'a) declaring protection for prisoners of war and civilians proved useful in some engagement with Shi'a militia.

- In Syria, humanitarian actors used data from the Children and Armed Conflict (CAAC) Monitoring and Reporting Mechanism (MRM) to persuade representatives of the Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF) to cease recruitment of children into their ranks. Actors involved noted this change was achieved by presenting clear asks backed up by evidence.

Importance of a strong evidence base

One of the most consistent themes emerging from discussions about achieving protection outcomes is the crucial importance of establishing and maintaining a strong evidence base for all activities. Information and evidence underpin analysis of risks, development of strategies, mobilization of relevant actors, prioritization of interventions, decision-making, application of principles, public advocacy, and private dialogue. As previously noted, actors should cultivate a culture of trust for information sharing and utilize the experience and resources of a range of actors to build a base of evidence. All humanitarian actors should also seek to align information collection and analysis with integrated protection analysis needs. For example, public health and food security data may be essential to explain the consequences of destruction of infrastructure occurring in military operations in order to encourage changes in military conduct, or detailed understanding of the link between food insecurity and gender-based violence may be essential to reduce the risk of GBV. In addition, the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) should be encouraged to expand its operational presence to provide important human rights monitoring, analysis, tracking, and

---

[10] See also IASC Protection Policy Annex I: Normative Framework, which includes information about IHL, IHRL, refugee law, and traditional, social, and cultural norms; found here:
https://interagencystandingcommittee.org/system/files/iasc_policy_on_protection_in_humanitarian_action_0.pdf

[11] For more information about how different actors work to influence the conduct of state and non-state parties to conflict, see the Center for Civilians in Conflict, Center for Strategic and International Studies, and InterAction, "*The Protection of Civilians in U.S. Partnered Operations*," found here:
https://www.interaction.org/sites/default/files/the_protection_of_civilians_in_u.s._partnered_operations_october_2018_low.pdf

documentation that can then be used for humanitarian interventions, including advocacy, and analysis in critical contexts. OHCHR can also facilitate engagement with international human rights mechanisms such as the Human Rights Council and Special Rapporteurs, as well as domestic human rights actors.

Perhaps the most apparent connection is between a strong evidence base and advocacy for protection, whether through direct engagement with parties to conflict, private dialogue, or public messaging. Credible, reliable, and independent information can make it impossible for parties to conflict, and those who support them, to ignore the human suffering resulting from their actions or inaction. The cannot say they did not know. Analysis and information also bolster recognition of opportunities and understanding of various actors' motivations, internal dynamics, and characteristics, and therefore their key leverage points.

Despite the importance of a credible and independent evidence base, actors should not allow the collection of information to become an end in itself and surpass action – it is critical to avoid "analysis paralysis." Humanitarian actors often have enough evidence to act in some form – and develop their analysis in an ongoing way while adapting their intervention – but there is a tendency to focus on the constant need for more information rather than decisively moving forward. For programming, advocacy, and engagement with parties to conflict and diverse actors, humanitarians should not let the perfect be the enemy of the "good enough."

Principled and pragmatic approaches

The humanitarian principles contribute to humanitarians' acceptance with different stakeholders, including affected communities, and therefore enable humanitarian action in general. It is critical that humanitarian principles are understood as pragmatic tools to navigate the complexity of armed conflict, and used to inform decision-making about humanitarian operations and strategies to address protection concerns, including how to relate to other actors in the operating context.[12] Neutrality impacts on other humanitarian principles, for example, when state armed forces are party to the conflict and seek to exercise control over humanitarian operations within its borders. For example, the Nigerian government is directly involved in coordination structures and regulates where humanitarian actors can work, including by requiring humanitarians' use of armed escorts in certain areas, thus undermining the independence and impartiality of the response, creating a perception of humanitarian actors' alignment with the military objectives of the Nigerian armed forces. This may put civilians, including humanitarian workers, at risk. In contrast, during the operation to drive ISIS from the city of Mosul in Iraq, private sector medical companies provided front line trauma care because no traditional humanitarian health provider felt it was appropriate or safe to co-locate with the Iraqi military forces.[13]

Different actors, including within the humanitarian community, may also possess varying concepts as to what constitutes a principled approach. It is essential to think about how decisions made in the present will set a precedent in current operations, and for future contexts, and thus consider mitigating measures. Decisions with implications for adherence to principles should be communicated transparently to relevant stakeholders. This applies especially to the idea of "red lines," where the humanitarian community delineates a critical situation at which point further activity will cease. When red lines are not observed humanitarians feel they lose credibility, both with affected populations and political actors. One suggestion is to stop thinking in terms of "red lines" and rather consider the acceptable residual risk of moving beyond principles

---

[12] See Chapter 1 of the Professional Standards for Protection, "Overarching Principles in Protection Work," found here: https://professionalstandards.icrc.org/

[13] For more information about the provision of trauma health care during the Mosul operation, please see Johns Hopkins University's Center for Humanitarian Health report, "*The Mosul Trauma Response: A Case Study*," found here: http://hopkinshumanitarianhealth.org/assets/documents/Mosul_Report_FINAL_Feb_14_2018.pdf.

in order to provide critical assistance. Additionally, affected people should be included in decision-making about residual risk and possible actions to mitigate such risk.

> *"What is new, and a particular challenge to humanitarians, is the intensity with which the counterterrorism label has become almost universal – it's not just the state where you are operating that uses that label but it goes across the global level and seeps into the way donors and traditional political supporters think about humanitarian action."*
> Participant comment

Counter-terrorism restrictions
While not a new trend, counter-terrorism restrictions limit humanitarians' ability to access populations, negotiate with proscribed groups, and deliver assistance in volatile situations due to concerns about legal action or financial or reputational repercussions against their organizations. Some counter-terrorism restrictions come into tension with international humanitarian law (IHL), for example, in interfering with the provision of medical aid for wounded fighters. Governmental donor entities, while sometimes contributing to the problem by including restrictive counterterrorism clauses in funding agreements, have a role to play to ensure that restrictions intended to mitigate misuse of aid resources do not interfere with people's access to assistance, or undermine core provisions of international humanitarian law. Donor entities should help to constructively mediate between operational humanitarian agencies and policymakers to mitigate the impact of counterterror restrictions on humanitarian action. The HCT should serve as a constructive space for discussions about principles and practical approaches, as well as for information and evidence gathering regarding the impact of counterterrorism measures on operations, which can then be used for engagement with governments and donors.

Conclusion
Working collectively across sectors and approaches is necessary to address the most critical issues facing affected people in conflicts and disaster situations all over the world, but much needs to be done within organizations and the humanitarian system in order to achieve protection outcomes. A good next step would be to document and share information about past and recent experiences, lessons learned, and practical examples where collective action helped reduce protection risks. The humanitarian community also needs a culture shift toward promotion of collaboration, openness, flexibility, adaptability, and creativity. Realizing the centrality of protection and fully implementing the protection policy necessitates changes in the ways of working and attitudes of all humanitarian actors, at all levels.