



Protection Messages for Global Leadership AFGHANISTAN

Updated November 2021

The following messages reflect priority protection gaps in Afghanistan, which need urgent action by senior leadership at regional and global levels. Please refer to the [Afghanistan Protection Analysis Update \(PAU\)](#) for comprehensive protection risk analysis and national-level recommendations.

Operational Context

The situation for people in the country was grave prior to the Taliban takeover in August 2021, with nearly half the population - 18.4 million people - already in need of humanitarian assistance. There are well-founded fears the compounding humanitarian and human rights crises will further worsen in the coming months as the impacts of drought, plunging winter temperatures, repressive policies and the prolonged collapse of key services grow. Serious human rights abuses are being consistently reported and deeply gendered restrictions are driving particularly acute protection risks and violations for women and girls. The estimated [5.5 million](#) people displaced across Afghanistan and the more than 1 million undocumented Afghans who returned to the country during January – October 2021 are also experiencing severe risks while struggling to access basic services and protection. A staggering one half of Afghanistan's population is expected to face [acute food insecurity](#) from November and 97% of the population of Afghanistan could be living in [poverty](#) by mid-2022. As documented in the latest PAU, an increase in negative coping mechanisms by households is evident, including rising household debt, early and forced marriage, child labour and irregular migration --drawing clear links between the staggering economic crisis and deepening protection risks.

Key Messages in Summary

1. Endorse and fully operationalize a common position that female aid workers should be free to carry out their professional responsibilities, including travel and engagement with communities.
2. In light of the creation of a new mandate for the Special Rapporteur on Afghanistan, enable and resource complementary mechanisms to support monitoring and reporting on the human rights situation.
3. Echoing the clear calls from protection, human rights and civil society actors in Afghanistan, provide urgently needed flexible, sustained and direct support to frontline NGOs and humanitarian organizations to enable scaled-up programming that integrates protection and meets the rapidly growing emergency needs of people.
4. Act on and implement commitments to women's protection, participation, and rights, including through stand-alone programming for women and girls, GBV prevention and response and protection measures for women human rights defenders.
5. Continue to build on and support best practices forged by national organizations in engaging with de facto authorities in a principled manner, supporting humanitarian access, staff and operational safety, protection by presence and influencing efforts.

Key Messages in Detail

1. For humanitarian leadership globally to endorse, reinforce with their teams and support through advocacy a common position that female aid workers at all levels must be allowed to safely carry out their professional responsibilities, including the ability to travel for work and engage with communities. This position should be clearly vocalized through a range of channels, including via public and private messaging and in shared documents such as the Joint Operating Principles for Afghanistan. The importance of ensuring the safety of female humanitarian and human rights workers and securing their full participation and leadership in response efforts, must consistently be at the absolute forefront of all UN, national and international NGO, donor and Member State messaging and engagement.

- The diverse roles that women have been playing in humanitarian and human rights work in the country is crucial to principled and effective responses¹. Data collection, analysis, needs assessments, accountability mechanisms and services provided will not be appropriately gender-sensitive if women are barred from such work. If women humanitarians are unable to work, response efforts will be based on a biased assessment of the situation and thus not meet the needs of women and girls across the country. The importance of the participation of female aid workers applies to all sectors involved in the delivery of humanitarian aid.

2. In light of the creation of a new special procedures mandate for the Special Rapporteur on Afghanistan, urgent advocacy and action is needed with regards to securing complementary, robust and adequately resourced mechanisms to further support monitoring and reporting on the human rights situation in Afghanistan. An immediate step in this direction should include a well-resourced human rights component in UNAMA after March 2022. In parallel, stepping up coordinated engagement by other Special Procedures mandate holders, with related resourcing, is necessary.

- The gravity of the situation on the ground necessitates enhanced capacities for human rights monitoring and advocacy, accompanied by protection services to enable safe implementation of these activities. At the same time, there is a concerning gap in detailed monitoring and reporting linked to Afghan media organizations and journalists, human rights defenders and human rights organizations which are operating at significantly reduced capacity and face severe threats to their safety. Obtaining a comprehensive picture of the human rights situation that can support humanitarian, protection and human rights actors in responding to the needs of the civilian population must be prioritized and addressed. Understanding the complementary roles that national and international actors can play in light of current risks is essential to this.

3. Act on the clear call from diverse protection, human rights and civil society actors in Afghanistan for the international community to provide flexible, sustained and direct support to frontline NGOs to enable scaled up protection monitoring and diverse programming that integrates protection and meets the growing emergency needs of vulnerable Afghan populations. This should include much needed adaptive funding for critical operational and programmatic needs, in line with the Humanitarian Response Plan and new realities on the ground. Technical support is also urgently needed, including with remote management techniques, risk management and enhanced physical, digital and data security systems. Complementary advocacy on protection issues is a further critical area for international support.

¹ NGO brief note *“Principled Humanitarian Action – Afghanistan, Ensuring Access for Female Humanitarian Worker”*

- The UN's [Flash Appeal](#) for Afghanistan, which presents a strategic response to new emerging needs, alongside unmet needs in the [2021 Humanitarian Response Plan](#), is 50% funded. The Protection Cluster's financial appeal for Afghanistan is only 40% funded, out of a total US\$ 114,5 million required, as of the end of September. Amidst spiraling humanitarian needs and acute protection risks, adequately resourced protection monitoring and calibrated protection and humanitarian response efforts, with local and national actors in the lead, are a necessity. Flexibility in terms of timelines and implementation modalities are critical in light of the rapidly changing context. At a bare minimum, Member States must provide sufficient funding for humanitarian assistance in Afghanistan, ensuring protection efforts are central, both as integrated and standalone elements, and adequately resourced.

4. Member States and donors must act on their commitments to women's protection, participation and rights, including through stand-alone programming for women and girls, adequately resourced GBV prevention and response and protection measures for women human rights defenders. Member States must also engage de facto authorities, holding them accountable to their own commitments for inclusive governance with women and ethnic and religious communities represented. Advocating for equal access to basic services for women, men, girls and boys as well as for adherence to global standards for the full, equal and meaningful participation of women in decision making are further critical elements. This is in line with all UN Security Council resolutions on women, peace and security.

- Advocacy and programming in support of inclusive and equal access to basic services for women and girls is vital. Access to education for all is a human right and it cannot wait.
- Member States must take concrete measures to support the protection of women human rights defenders, civil society leaders, journalists, teachers, humanitarian workers, judges and prosecutors, whether inside or outside Afghanistan, and such measures should include the expansion of [complementary pathways](#), in addition to resettlement and asylum systems.

5. Continue to build on best practices forged by national protection and civil society organizations in working with de facto authorities in a principled manner. Learning the lessons from the past, maintaining engagement is critical to maintaining the safety of aid operations and staff, being able to exercise influence regarding respect for humanitarian and human rights law, negotiating for humanitarian access and supporting response efforts of national/local organizations.

- As highlighted in the PAU, there is a concerning increase in the number of incidents involving threats and violence against humanitarian personnel, assets and facilities while many organizations have not yet been able to fully resume their operations across the country. Such trends underline the imperative of ensuring consistent engagement with local and national authorities to support humanitarian access to allow the unimpeded passage of humanitarian assistance to populations in need, enable protection by presence, support the resumption of activities by women staff and projects benefiting women and girls, and the establishment of clear processes for humanitarian organizations to safely operate in Afghanistan.

Methodological note: These messages have been compiled by the GPC Advocacy and Human Rights Engagement Task Teams based on engagement with a range of national and global humanitarian protection and human rights allies active in Afghanistan, existing advocacy documents as well as ongoing analysis, including the Protection Analysis Update (PAU) by the Protection Cluster in Afghanistan.