

# Global Protection Cluster Mission Report

## Democratic Republic of the Congo, September 2021

*The Global Protection Cluster (GPC) conducted a mission to support the National Protection Cluster in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) and raise awareness on the ongoing protection crisis. The mission met with people affected by the crisis, authorities, NGO fora, local organisations, INGOs and UN Agencies, Protection Cluster and Areas of Responsibility (AoR) and their Lead Agencies, OCHA, Intercluster groups, humanitarian-development-peace nexus group, Member States and Donor Group, Humanitarian Coordinator and Deputy Coordinator.*

### **Context**

**The DRC faces a protection crisis**, fuelled by ethnic conflicts and exploitation of natural resources. The crisis took a new downwards twist in 2020 due to a resurgence of armed conflict, systemic breach of international humanitarian law, human rights abuses, epidemics and their socio-economic impact and a volcano eruption in Goma.

**In 2021, 20 million people are in need of humanitarian assistance and protection**, with more than 5.2 million internally displaced persons. Human rights violations (killings, looting, abductions, injuries, extortion and rape) as well as the loss of crops and livestock from conflict are driving the massive displacement. Humanitarians recorded 1,200 civilian deaths and over 25,000 rights abuses this year. These tip-of-the-iceberg figures show that violations of IHL have increased despite an “*état de siège*” to counter armed groups abuses.

**Protection risks are colossal:** attacks on civilians and civilian infrastructures; human rights abuses including systemic gender-based violence; trafficking of children for armed groups, forced labour, child marriage and slavery; widespread trauma; lack of access to legal rights including for properties; increasing spread of explosives.

**The lack of basics like shelter, access to health, food and education is punishing affected populations on the triple.** Once due to the need for these basics, twice as families are forced towards harmful practices and thrice as survivors can't get assistance due to the stigma or lack of services – often both.

### **Observations and general recommendations**

**Protection response is limited in size and scope and requires a serious readjustment.** With 20 million people in need and limited resources, the protection response in country is largely covering very basic activities. We need a quantum and quality leap in protection response in areas that remain a big gap. These include (i) protection of civilians, (ii) trafficking, (iii) comprehensive child protection and GBV holistic response, (iv) mine action, (v) disability and elderly inclusion, (vi) housing land and property, (vii) MHPSS and (viii) legal assistance.

**Sustaining a strong protection narrative requires a comprehensive collective communication plan that is sustained by strong predictable analysis.** For this purpose, we recommend (i) a joint effort by the protection cluster leading agencies to define a joint protection communication plan, (ii) the cluster to have a tri-monthly in-depth National Protection Update based on the globally endorsed Protection Analysis Framework.

**There are political opportunities to strengthen work with local authorities and civil society.** We recommend that the cluster (i) defines criteria for cluster membership, (ii) defines a clear capacity building action plan per geographic area for the members and local authorities including humanitarian law and protection trainings with armed groups, (iii) builds on the subnational level co-coordination of the cluster by local NGOs and strengthen local leadership.

**With MONUSCO transition and withdrawal and Inter Agency Standing Committee peer-to-peer review, there is an opportunity to bring together the existing protection frameworks in country and lighten the coordination.** We recommend (i) that the Humanitarian Country Team (HCT) undertakes a mapping and rationalisation of who is responsible for what in protection work, (ii) transition out the working groups that cover core cluster functions such as the protection mainstreaming working group, and core HCT functions such as the HCT protection strategy working group and responsiblise the core structure to deliver on its functions, (iii) redirect the Humanitarian

Programme Cycle to a multiyear project-based approach that would allow agencies to have comprehensive multiyear programmes as opposed to short-term projects and allocations that take a lot of processing time.

**Make sure protection is essential in local development plans.** In the Kasai, Tanganyika and other provinces, local development plans are being designed with little concerted input from protection partners. The protection cluster and humanitarian actors in general should engage, submit all required analysis, and follow up to ensure core areas are covered including mine action, disability and elderly inclusion, housing land and property, mental health and psychosocial support and legal assistance.

## ***Specific Recommendations to the Protection Cluster***

A new momentum is being built up in protection coordination with new staff arriving in country, a new Deputy Humanitarian Coordinator with strong protection agenda and a clear call from all humanitarian clusters to strengthen centrality of protection and protection mainstreaming. Here is a proposed road map to reinvigorate protection coordination:

1. **Strengthen protection leadership:** The lead agencies of the cluster, including the AoRs, have agreed to strengthen their leadership of the cluster. This will materialise specifically through:
  - a. Joint session with the heads of agencies to agree on their role and concrete joint action and follow it up through quarterly meetings;
  - b. Agreement on joint communication and advocacy plan;
  - c. Regular presentation at the HCT on protection issues channelled to them in a quality way from the teams on the ground and the cluster coordinators in Kinshasa;
  - d. Reactivate the protection cluster Strategic Advisory Group (SAG) with strategic senior participation at deputy head or head of organisations and agencies level;
  - e. Activate a robust Housing, Land and Property (HLP) AoR that looks at the issue across sectors and improves interaction between humanitarian, peace and development actors;
  - f. Actively mobilise and advocate for programmes for the areas of: HLP, MA, MHPSS, legal assistance, community-based protection, disability inclusion and youth.
2. **Ensure basics are in place:** The cluster needs to continue building the foundations. The focus should be on:
  - a. Continue harmonising protection monitoring to get to a point of a single common data collection tool and common report (finalise system in 2021);
  - b. Ensure more regular and stronger protection analysis in HCT meeting and other fora, align with the Protection Analytical Framework and produce a comprehensive in-depth analysis at least four times a year (produce first in 2021);
  - c. Harmonise referral pathways building on the existing GBV and CP system (finalise system in 2021)
  - d. Continue with regular (every 6 weeks) communication and briefings with donors and diplomats (starting in 2021).
3. **Strengthen shared leadership and nationalisation of the cluster** through:
  - a. Stronger and systematic representation and capacity building to local actors and authorities, especially in coordination, case management, safe and ethical data collection and analysis (2021);
  - b. Ensuring we are getting closer to 25% of HRP submissions for 2022 to local actors (2021);
  - c. Strengthening the focus on nexus and durable solutions and actively conduct humanitarian diplomacy;
  - d. Continued co-ordination of the cluster with focus on localisation and mainstreaming with the ambition of having this role filled by a national actor by 2023/2024.
4. **Strengthen the cluster and AoRs dedicated coordination and information management staffing** by:
  - a. Upgrading the seniority of the national cluster coordinator profile;
  - b. Strengthen sub-national coordination given the size and complexity of the emergency;
  - c. Improving communication amongst cluster subgroups and AoRs;
  - d. Support the national cluster coordinator with dedicated information management and analysis capacity.