

# PROACTIVE APPROACH FOR PROTECTION Resource Manual



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# INTRODUCTION

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## BACKGROUND

Armed conflicts and other situations of violence have intensified globally, reaching one of the highest levels in over a decade by the end of 2024, in both scope and lethality. As of 2025, more than 120 armed conflicts are ongoing worldwide<sup>1</sup>, with Gaza, Myanmar, Syria, Mexico, Nigeria, Brazil, Lebanon, Sudan, Cameroon, and Colombia among the most “extreme” settings<sup>2</sup>. Civilians caught in armed conflict face a broad and interlinked spectrum of protection risks ranging from death and injuries, sexual and gender-based violence, psychological/emotional abuse, theft, extortion or destruction of personal property, harassment, or hate speech<sup>3</sup>. In 2024 alone, the United Nations documented over 36,000 civilian deaths across 14 distinct armed conflicts<sup>4</sup>, and the use of explosive weapons in populated areas (EWIPA) caused 59,524 civilian casualties<sup>5</sup>.

Civilian protection, safety and security are constantly undermined by a persistent disregard for international humanitarian law (IHL), indiscriminate attacks and targeting of civilian infrastructures, the blurring of civilian/combatant categories, the lack of accountability and weak enforcement mechanisms<sup>6</sup>. Complex urban and remote warfare, the use of EWIPA, and their reverberating effects on infrastructures further deepen long-term protection risks of affected populations. Additionally, emerging digital threats and disinformation campaigns increasingly target civilians and humanitarian actors alike. Current crises often overlap, combining conflict, climate, and displacements. At the same time, the humanitarian sector is undergoing a crisis of legitimacy, intertwined with fragmented mandates and shrinking resources, leaving the system reactive and risk-averse, prioritizing “numbers reached”<sup>7</sup> over protection outcomes<sup>8</sup>. In this context, the disconnect is increasing between international and local understandings of protection, limiting meaningful participation of civilians in shaping protection strategies<sup>9</sup>. The need for proactive, preventive, and community-centered protection action, beyond reactive assistance and service provision, is consistently raised, including by affected communities themselves<sup>10</sup>. Yet in practice, it is not sufficiently implemented. Indeed, as highlighted by PAX, civilians perceive their priority for safety, freedom of movement without fear, along with the recognition of psychological and social harm<sup>11</sup> as often overlooked by international actors<sup>12</sup>. Ground Truth Solutions (GTS) further found that across conflict-affected contexts, populations consistently stress that insecurity, fear and trauma shape their daily decision-making. However,

<sup>1</sup> ICRC (2025) [The ICRC Annual Appeal](#).

<sup>2</sup> ACLED (2024) [Conflict Index](#).

<sup>3</sup> Global Protection Cluster, GPC (2021) [Protection Analytical Framework, Appendix 1 Concepts Matrix](#).

<sup>4</sup> United Nations (2024) [Report of the Secretary-General on the Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict \(S/2024/385\)](#).

<sup>5</sup> including 24,147 killed and 35,377 injured. AOAV (2025) [Explosive Violence Monitor 2024](#).

<sup>6</sup> ICRC (2024) [International humanitarian law and the challenges of contemporary armed conflicts](#)

<sup>7</sup> HPG (2025a) [Keeping protection paramount amidst a ‘humanitarian reset’](#).

<sup>8</sup> Blavatnik School of Government (2018) [Current challenges in protecting civilians in armed conflict](#); GPC (2024) [Global Protection Forum: Dilemmas and Opportunities in Humanitarian Frontline Responses](#); PAX (2021) [On civilian harm](#).

<sup>9</sup> Lee, A. (2025) [Breaking system inertia: why the humanitarian reset must prioritise civilian protection](#).

<sup>10</sup> HPG (2024) [Reducing violence and strengthening the protection of civilians](#).

<sup>11</sup> PAX, 2021) [On civilian harm](#).

<sup>12</sup> HPG (2025a).

these are reported to be insufficiently reflected in aid design, risk analysis and prioritization<sup>13</sup>. This raises a simple yet fundamental question: **“How can we be better at supporting the safety and security of affected populations”<sup>14</sup>, through more proactive and preventive approaches in contexts of armed conflict or other situations of violence?**

To respond, this manual looks at existing practices: identifying what works, why it works, and how these approaches can be meaningfully replicated.

Drawing on global and country resources, desk reviews, interviews and case studies, it aims to provide practitioners with a clear understanding of how different actors adopt proactive approaches to protection that helps civilians prepare for, mitigate, or reduce imminent risks of harm, whether in anticipation of violence, at its onset, or throughout armed conflict and other situations of violence.

## ABOUT THE RESOURCE MANUAL

### Objectives:

This resource manual was developed with a dual objective:

- It responds to research findings showing that guidance on proactive approaches for protection remains limited, scattered across multiple sources, and not consistently known among practitioners. By consolidating key tools and references into a single, accessible document, the manual seeks to **strengthen learning and improve the quality and consistency** of proactive practices.
- It aims to strengthen practitioners' awareness and understanding of proactive approaches to protection that integrate preparedness measures into everyday programming.

### Audience:

- ⇒ Protection practitioners, and any stakeholders<sup>15</sup> involved in protection activities in contexts of conflict or violence.
- ⇒ Communities implementing protection activities.
- ⇒ Students and academics.

**Note:** *This resource manual responds to a systemic challenge identified across contexts and sectors: the persistent gap between civilians' exposure to imminent violence and the humanitarian system's largely reactive, fragmented, and under-prepared protection responses. It is not intended as a sector-specific document, nor does it provide step-by-step guidance for the individual activities covered. The manual therefore focuses on how protection challenges manifest in practice, which proactive approaches have shown promise in reducing risks, and under what conditions they are most effective, drawing on a range of existing practices and experiences rather than promoting a single model or prescriptive approach.*

### Structure:

The manual is organized into two main components.

#### Protection practices

This first part presents a range of protection practices, with particular emphasis on activities that reinforce capacities and reduce vulnerabilities<sup>16</sup>.

For each activity, the manual outlines:

- its purpose and core components;
- the primary threats the activity seeks to address;
- the main actors involved in implementation;
- key considerations for community engagement and participation.

<sup>13</sup> GTS (2025) [What crisis affected communities need from a humanitarian reset](#).

<sup>14</sup> Jordan H. in GICHD (2025) [Protecting civilians in active conflict – NDMUN28](#).

<sup>15</sup> Including local authorities, civil protection mechanism...

<sup>16</sup> as outlined in the Protection Risk Equation, further explained in the [Overview sub-section](#).

It also provides a summary of preparedness considerations to strengthen proactive approaches, as well as activity-specific competencies. Core existing guidance, tools, and training materials are compiled for easy access. Examples of how each activity has been applied in practice are included, with a strong emphasis on the three main case studies included in this manual, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, the Philippines, and Ukraine. Each activity concludes with an overview of influencing factors and lessons learned.

### **What it takes to be proactive?**

The second part focuses on how practitioners can integrate a proactive approach across different protection practices. The research identified several minimum requirements for adopting a proactive approach for protection. For each requirement, the manual explains what it entails, its purpose, providing examples from various country contexts, and referring to key resources, tools, and guidance available. The section concludes with practical and strategic questions to help practitioners adopt proactive approaches.

**Note:** *This manual is intended to be a living document, updated regularly to incorporate lessons from new contexts and newly available resources.*

## METHODOLOGY

The methodology combined participatory consultation and evidence gathering. A virtual **launching workshop** (on July 29<sup>th</sup>, 2025) brought together key stakeholders to present the purpose and approach of the study and lay the foundations for engagement. Extensive **desk research** was conducted to review global and country-specific policies, guidance, training materials and case studies relevant to proactive approach and protection activities under the scope of the research. A **call for evidence**<sup>17</sup> was issued, resulting in 20 submissions, primarily tools, guidance and practical examples. Data collection took place remotely<sup>18</sup>. **Key informant interviews** (KIIs) were conducted with global specialists<sup>19</sup>, along with further KIIs and consultations with stakeholders working in the contexts of the Democratic Republic of the Congo<sup>20</sup>, the Philippines<sup>21</sup> and Ukraine<sup>22</sup> to inform the case studies. These interviews also allowed to gather additional resources from participating organizations, further enriching the research base.

Most interviews were carried out online, which, even though it allowed for efficient coordination with institutional actors, posed challenges for engaging with community members, as security and other access constraints prevented many from travelling to locations with internet access. Most interviews didn't require the support of interpreters, except for two in Ukrainian. Ethical considerations were upheld throughout, including informed consent, confidentiality, and the right to withdraw at any time.

<sup>17</sup> NORCAP (2025) [Call for evidence: Anticipatory Action for Conflict](#).

<sup>18</sup> Complemented by a short mission in Ukraine in July 2025 to attend the Protection Cluster Evacuation Workshop.

<sup>19</sup> Participating organizations at global level included: Anticipatory Action and Conflict Working Group (Climate Center), Anticipatory Action and Conflict Working Group (FAO), CIVIC, Geneva Call, Humanity & Inclusion, ICRC, Norwegian People's Aid, OCHA – CMCoord, PAX, Save the Children, START Network, Université de Genève.

<sup>20</sup> Participating organizations for the case study on the Democratic Republic of the Congo included: Academic author specialised in MONUSCO, ADIPD, CEDIER, Community members (via SOPROP), CONAFOHD RDC, FECONDE, GenCap, International Alert, Nonviolent Peaceforce, NORCAP, OCHA, Oxfam, Oxfam DRC, Protection Cluster, Search for Common Ground (SfCG), SOPROP, World Food Programme.

<sup>21</sup> Participating organizations for the case study on the Philippines included: Consortium of Bangsamoro Civil Society (CBCS) Philippines, Fondation Suisse de Déminage (FSD) Philippines, Geneva Call Philippines, Humanity & Inclusion (HI) Philippines, Mangungaya Mindanao, Inc. (MMI) Philippines, Nonviolent Peaceforce Philippines, Plan International Philippines, START Network Philippines, United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) Philippines, United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (UNOCHA) Philippines.

<sup>22</sup> Participating organizations for the case study on Ukraine included: Centre for Information Resilience Ukraine, CIVIC Ukraine, Martin Club, Mine Action Office at the Ministry of Economy Ukraine, Norwegian People's Aid Ukraine, OCHA-CMCoord Ukraine, Protection Cluster Ukraine (Evacuation Workshop), Relief Coordination Center (RCC), Ukrainian Deminers Association (UDA).

# ACRONYMS

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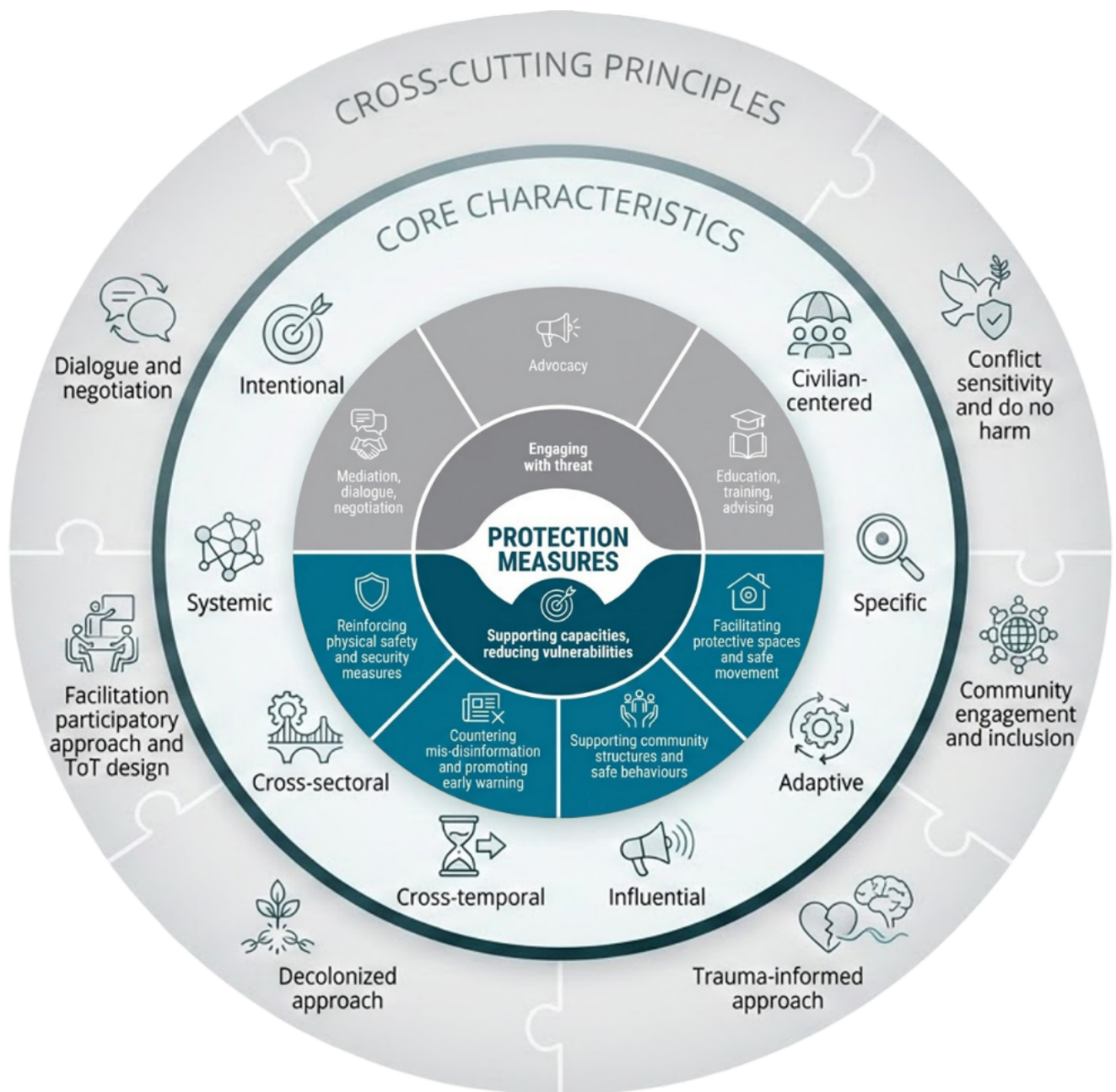
<b>AA</b>	Anticipatory Action
<b>ACLED</b>	Armed Conflict Location & Event Data Project
<b>AI</b>	Artificial Intelligence
<b>AOAV</b>	Action on Armed Violence
<b>BARMM</b>	Bangsamoro Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao
<b>CBRN</b>	Chemical, Biological, Radiological, Nuclear
<b>CDAC</b>	Communicating with Disaster-Affected Communities Network
<b>CEWARN</b>	Conflict Early Warning and Response Mechanism (IGAD unit)
<b>CEWS</b>	Conflict Early Warning System
<b>CIR</b>	Center for Information Resilience
<b>CIVIC</b>	Center for Civilians in Conflict
<b>CMCoord</b>	Civil-Military Coordination
<b>CPP</b>	Conflict Preparedness and Protection
<b>UNDPO</b>	United Nations Department of Peace Operations
<b>DRR</b>	Disaster Risk Reduction
<b>EOD</b>	Explosive Ordnance Disposal
<b>EO</b>	Explosive Ordnance
<b>EORE</b>	Explosive Ordnance Risk Education
<b>EWER</b>	Early Warning / Early Response
<b>EWIPA</b>	Explosive Weapons in Populated Areas
<b>GICHD</b>	Geneva International Centre for Humanitarian Demining
<b>GPC</b>	Global Protection Cluster
<b>HD</b>	Centre for Humanitarian Dialogue
<b>HI</b>	Humanity & Inclusion
<b>HPG</b>	Humanitarian Policy Group
<b>IASC</b>	Inter-Agency Standing Committee
<b>ICRC</b>	International Committee of the Red Cross
<b>IED</b>	Improvised Explosive Device
<b>IGAD</b>	Intergovernmental Authority on Development
<b>IHL</b>	International Humanitarian Law
<b>IMAS</b>	International Mine Action Standards
<b>IWMI</b>	International Water Management Institute
<b>L2GP</b>	Local2Global Protection
<b>MAG</b>	Mines Advisory Group

<b>MDH</b>	Misinformation, Disinformation, and Hate Speech
<b>MHPSS</b>	Mental Health and Psychosocial Support
<b>MINUSCA</b>	UN Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in the Central African Republic
<b>MONUSCO</b>	UN Organization Stabilization Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo
<b>NOHA</b>	Network on Humanitarian Action
<b>NP</b>	Nonviolent Peaceforce
<b>NPA</b>	Norwegian People's Aid
<b>NORCAP</b>	Norwegian Capacity (as part of NRC)
<b>NRC</b>	Norwegian Refugee Council
<b>NTS</b>	Non-Technical Survey
<b>ODI</b>	Overseas Development Institute
<b>OCHA</b>	United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs
<b>OSINT</b>	Open-Source Intelligence
<b>PALC</b>	Participatory Action Learning in Crises
<b>PoC</b>	Protection of Civilians
<b>RASB</b>	Risk Awareness and Safer Behaviour
<b>REAP</b>	Risk-Informed Early Action Partnership
<b>SCLR</b>	Survivor- and Community-Led Response
<b>SESU</b>	State Emergency Services of Ukraine
<b>SfCG</b>	Search for Common Ground
<b>SOP</b>	Standard Operating Procedure
<b>TNMA</b>	Technical Notes for Mine Action
<b>ToT</b>	Training of Trainer
<b>UCP</b>	Unarmed Civilian Protection
<b>UNDRR</b>	United Nations Office for Disaster Risk Reduction
<b>UNICEF</b>	United Nations Children's Fund
<b>UNMAS</b>	United Nations Mine Action Service
<b>UXO</b>	Unexploded Ordnance

# PROTECTION PRACTICES

## OVERVIEW

Figure 1. Protection measures, core characteristics and cross-cutting principles



## REDUCING PROTECTION RISKS FOR CIVILIANS

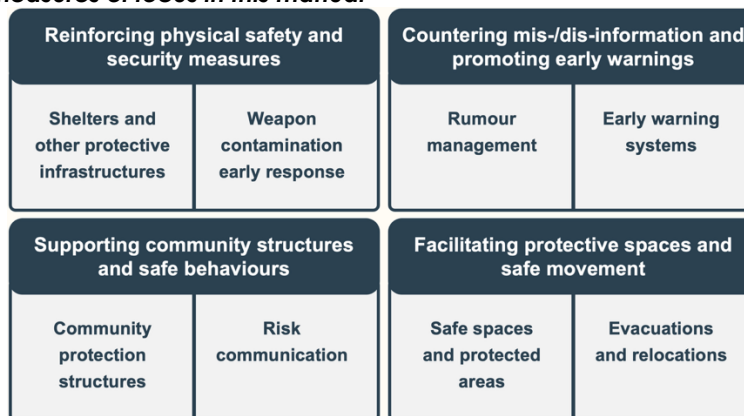
With a focus on protection from **harm, safety, and security**, this resource manual focuses on measures that seek to prevent, reduce, or mitigate violence and its worst consequences before or at the time they manifest<sup>23</sup>. To that effect, **protection** here should be understood as drawing from Nonviolent Peaceforce's (NP) definition of the term as "direct physical protection from imminent violence"<sup>24</sup> and the Humanitarian Policy Group's (HPG) evolving definition of 'protection from violence' as "reducing risks of violence and civilian harm through preventing, mitigating and responding to immediate risks of violence"<sup>25</sup>, thus narrowing the IASC definition<sup>26</sup> to actions directly reducing risks of violence.

Ongoing discussions on refocusing protection towards **reducing risks for civilians**<sup>27,28</sup> further shape this conceptual frame<sup>29</sup>, which draws on InterAction's protection risk equation:

$$\downarrow \textit{Protection Risk} = \downarrow \textit{Threats} \times \frac{\downarrow \textit{Vulnerabilities}}{\uparrow \textit{Capacities}}^{30}$$

Protection risks are best addressed through a combination of actions that decrease threats (from the source of violence), reduce vulnerabilities (such as the lack of community structures), and enhance capacities, for instance by increasing preparedness or self-protection mechanisms<sup>31</sup>. Given that the *Consortium for Civilian Safety and Security* otherwise has extensively explored approaches for engaging directly with threats<sup>32</sup>, this manual centers on practices supporting local **capacities** and addressing community **vulnerabilities** (cf. Figure 2).

**Figure 2. Protection measures of focus in this manual**



Additionally, reflecting the emphasis on preventive and community-centered protection over remedial<sup>33</sup> or reactive response<sup>34</sup>, the resource manual focuses on **proactive approaches** to protection practices<sup>35</sup>; acknowledging that some stakeholders, such as ICRC, NP or CIVIC, apply a protection definition

<sup>23</sup> GPC (2023) [Protection Conversation: Proactive Protection](#).

<sup>24</sup> Oldenhuis, H., Furnari, E., Carriere, R., Wagstrom, T., Frisch, A. and Duncan, M. - Nonviolent Peaceforce (2021) [Unarmed Civilian Protection: Strengthening civilian capacities to protect civilians against violence](#)

<sup>25</sup> HPG (2025b) Refocusing protection on reducing risks: Increasing civilian safety (forthcoming).

<sup>26</sup> i.e. "All activities aimed at ensuring full respect for the rights of the individual in accordance with the letter and the spirit of the relevant bodies of law, i.e. human rights law, international humanitarian law and refugee law. Human rights and humanitarian organizations must conduct these activities in an impartial manner (not on the basis of race, national or ethnic origin, language or gender)". IASC (2016) [IASC Policy on Protection in Humanitarian Action](#).

<sup>27</sup> HPG (2025b).

<sup>28</sup> As opposed to needs-based only. To that effect, it is worth mentioning the initiative by the Beyond Compliance Consortium, that combines both harm and needs, focusing both on perpetrators and how at-risk population perceive them, in order to "facilitate full(er) protection". [Beyond Compliance Consortium](#) project.

<sup>29</sup> Acknowledging that a broad range of otherwise existing conceptual frameworks that could have been used as a lens, including, but not limited to, the protection egg (cf. ICRC (2008) [ICRC Protection policy, Institutional Policy](#)), the effect typology on threats or the type of engagement with stakeholders (cf. Oxfam (2021) [Supporting Self-Protection](#))...

<sup>30</sup> GPC (2021) [Protection Analytical Framework](#).

<sup>31</sup> NORCAP/Lieberknecht, L., (n.d.) Community-based protection methods, proactive protection and reactive protection.

<sup>32</sup> HPG (2025c) [Armed actor engagement for protection](#); Grimaud, J. (2023) [Protecting civilians through humanitarian mediation](#).

<sup>33</sup> Per the protection egg (ICRC (2008))

<sup>34</sup> HPG (2025a).

<sup>35</sup> Also called 'proactive engagement' : "refers first of all to the need of being proactive for the sake of providing protection" (Oldenhuis et al., 2021).

and practices that already have this approach. With this dual orientation towards proactive practices and addressing communities' vulnerability and capacity, the manual is structured around a set of proactive measures aiming at protecting civilians from violence. It navigates operational realities and current knowledge to inform practical, context-specific interventions that reduce risks and strengthen protection to support those most at risk.

Another key aspect is the **imminence of the threat** and the limited time to deploy protection measures. While they require preparedness efforts, these actions are designed to be activated within a narrow window before violence occurs or at its earliest onset, when lead time is limited but action is still possible.

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### **Clarification on terminologies**

Given the scope defined above, the activities examined in the resource manual could fall under multiple existing umbrella concepts, including Early Warning Early Response (EWER) and Anticipatory Action (AA), in addition to "protection from violence".

- **EWER:** "collection and communication of information about a crisis, the analysis of that information, and the initial consideration of potential response options to the crisis, for the sake of preventing violence, reducing the impact of violence, and increasing the safety and security of civilians in tense situations of violent conflict"<sup>36</sup>.
- **AA:** "acting ahead of predicted hazardous events to prevent or reduce acute humanitarian impacts before they fully unfold. AA is often linked to pre-agreed financing and triggers, though in some cases refers to informal, forecast-based action without pre-established mechanisms"<sup>37</sup>.

Recognizing ongoing debates, tensions and overlap in terminology, particularly when applying proactive approaches to conflict and violence, this study uses the term '**protection**' throughout to refer to activities in scope. When distinguishing from protection falling under the IASC definition<sup>38</sup>, the term '**humanitarian protection**' will be used.

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### **Box 1. COMMON LEGAL FRAMEWORKS, MULTIPLE MANDATES**

Beyond the practices, civilian protection in armed conflict is grounded in core international frameworks, notably international humanitarian law. However, it is operationalized through a wide spectrum of actors with diverse mandates.

#### **Civilian protection international frameworks**

Civilian protection in armed conflict is grounded in the Geneva Conventions of 1949 and their 1977 Additional Protocols, which together form the cornerstone of international humanitarian law (IHL). The Fourth Geneva Convention, focused on the protection of civilians, established universal humanitarian standards to safeguard civilians under the control of a party to the conflict or an occupying power, prohibiting coercion, collective punishment, torture, and deportation, and affirming that military necessity can never override humanitarian obligations. It remains the foundation of modern protection frameworks, shaping customary law, subsequent treaties, and further normative frameworks<sup>39</sup>. Complementary legal frameworks, including international human rights law<sup>40</sup> (IHRL), international refugee law (IRL), and the UN Guiding Principles on Internal Displacement, extend protection beyond armed conflict, covering situations of peacetime, displacement, and crisis<sup>41</sup>. Together, these frameworks define the obligations of States and other actors to respect, protect, and fulfil the rights, safety, and dignity of civilians, prohibiting direct or indiscriminate attacks and ensuring access to safety, assistance, and justice. However, while civilian protection is firmly rooted in these international frameworks, its implementation does not depend solely on them. It also relies on the proactive actions, norms, and practices of communities, local authorities, and humanitarian actors who operationalize protection on the ground<sup>42</sup>.

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<sup>36</sup> Oldenhuis et al., (2021).

<sup>37</sup> REAP (2022) [Glossary of Early Action Terms](#).

<sup>38</sup> IASC (2016).

<sup>39</sup> ICRC (2025) [Geneva Convention \(IV\) on Civilians, 1949 – Commentary of 2025](#).

<sup>40</sup> United Nations OHCHR (n.d.) [Core International Human Rights Instruments and Their Monitoring Bodies](#).

<sup>41</sup> ICRC (2024) [Professional Standards for Protection Work 2024: Fourth Edition](#).

<sup>42</sup> Bradley, M. (2016) [Protecting civilians in war: The ICRC, UNHCR, and their limitations in internal armed conflicts](#).

### Clarifying the existing mandates

- Humanitarian protection mandate<sup>43</sup>: Endorsed by the IASC, humanitarian protection was defined as encompassing “all activities aimed at obtaining full respect for the rights of the individual in accordance with IHRL, IHL and IRL”<sup>44</sup>. Humanitarian protection focuses on preventing and responding to violations, restoring dignity, and ensuring safety through humanitarian action. It requires integrating protection across all assistance activities, applying the “do no harm” principle and upholding humanity, neutrality, impartiality, and independence. In doing so, humanitarian actors have committed to address immediate threats to civilians while promoting systemic respect for their rights.
- Protection of Civilians (PoC) mandate<sup>45</sup> : PoC was defined as a priority mandate under the UN system, grounded in the host State’s primary responsibility and a whole-of-mission approach integrating military, police, and civilian components. The existing PoC policy’s three-tiered concept, ‘prevent, protect, build’, links operational response with long-term environment-building. PoC interventions reinforce accountability for IHL violations, humanitarian access, and protection from explosive weapons, highlighting PoC as both an immediate operational duty and a potential strategic peacebuilding tool.<sup>46</sup>
- Peacebuilding mandate: The *UN General Assembly and Security Council twin resolutions A/RES/70/262 and S/RES/2282*<sup>47</sup> define peacebuilding as a continuous process “before, during and after conflict” aimed at addressing root causes, strengthening rule of law and governance, and ensuring inclusive participation. Overall peacebuilding focuses on reducing civilians’ exposure to future violence. It is fully integrated into the UN’s peace, development, and human rights pillars, ensuring that protection is not limited to crisis response but embedded in prevention, accountability, reconciliation, and long-term institutional resilience, including measures that may, over time, help to structurally prevent and reduce protection risks. *NB: While, in theory, peacebuilding is political while protection is grounded in neutrality, these approaches can be mutually reinforcing in practice. Strengthening collaboration and dialogue between humanitarian and peace actors helps ensure that both objectives translate into positive protection outcomes for civilians*<sup>48</sup>.
- Humanitarian mine action (HMA) mandate: HMA treaties<sup>49</sup> are explicitly humanitarian in purpose, designed to end the “suffering and casualties” caused by indiscriminate weapons. They protect civilians through prohibitions on use and transfer, clearance and marking of contaminated areas, and risk education to prevent harm. Victim assistance obligations further uphold dignity, inclusion, and rights-based recovery, linking to human rights and disability frameworks.

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### FOCUS - Civil-military cooperation (CIMIC) and coordination (CMCoord)

The main difference lies in the fact that CIMIC is a military, while CMCoord is a civilian mechanism. **CIMIC** refers to a “military joint function that integrates an understanding of civilian factors in the operating environment to enable civil–military interaction in support of military missions and strategic objectives across peacetime, crisis, and conflict”<sup>50</sup>. In contrast, UN **CMCoord** is the OCHA-based mechanism focusing on safeguarding humanitarian space, facilitating principled access, and ensuring safe dialogue between humanitarians and military actors, for example through humanitarian notification systems, negotiating access, and maintaining perception management grounded in neutrality and accountability to affected people<sup>51</sup>. As further detailed under the identified challenges below, engagement with armed actors can be a component that contributes to mitigating civilian harm, upholding IHL, and securing access, even when focusing on capacities and vulnerabilities. In today’s operational contexts, where political sensitivities, non-state armed groups, and the blurring of humanitarian and security agendas make interactions with threat actors unavoidable, effective CIMIC/CMCoord can become an enabler of protection outcomes while maintaining the distinction between military objectives and humanitarian/protection imperatives and enabling access.

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<sup>43</sup> ICRC (2024).

<sup>44</sup> Inter-Agency Standing Committee (2016) [IASC Policy on Protection in Humanitarian Action](#).

<sup>45</sup> United Nations DPO (2023) [Policy: The Protection of Civilians in United Nations Peacekeeping](#); OCHA (2024) [Policy Brief on the Security Council’s Consideration of the Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict \(2019–2023\)](#).

<sup>46</sup> While both humanitarian protection and PoC aim to prevent and respond to harm, humanitarian protection contributes to creating protective environments and reducing vulnerability, when PoC also addresses immediate threats to physical safety through security and political action.

<sup>47</sup> United Nations General Assembly and Security Council twin “peacebuilding resolutions” [A/RES/70/262](#) and [S/RES/2282](#) (2016).

<sup>48</sup> Geneva Peace Week (2025) [‘IHL and Humanitarian Action for Peace: Protecting People, Building Futures’](#).

<sup>49</sup> Convention on Cluster Munitions (2008); Convention on the Prohibition of the Use, Stockpiling, Production and Transfer of Anti-Personnel Mines and on Their Destruction (1997).

<sup>50</sup> CCOE (2025) [CIMIC Handbook](#), p.5, NATO agreed term.

<sup>51</sup> Kalu Institute (2021) [Dominique Gassauer: Civil military coordination in humanitarian settings](#).

### KEY CHARACTERISTICS FOR PROTECTION MEASURES <sup>52</sup>

In order to achieve lasting protection outcomes, reducing protection risks and meeting the needs of civilians facing violence, some parameters were identified for effective civilian protection actions. These reflect emerging lessons from diverse community-led, national, and international initiatives and point toward ways of making protection more proactive, responsive, and impactful. While not exhaustive or mutually exclusive, they offer a scalable and adaptable set of considerations that different actors can integrate and tailor across contexts to strengthen efforts aimed at reducing violence against civilians.

**Table 1. Key characteristics** (extracted from Gray et al, forthcoming)

Characteristic	Definition	Question
<b>Intentional</b>	Designed deliberately with dedicated resources to prevent, interrupt, or mitigate civilian harm and instances of violence, including as a key component of an emergency response.	<i>How are protection objectives identified and resourced?</i>
<b>Civilian-centred</b>	Led-by and grounded in the needs, wishes, and agency of conflict-affected civilians	<i>How are civilians engaged as protection actors themselves? How do civilians influence the intervention design and implementation?</i>
<b>Systemic</b>	All actors operating within a conflict are part of a conflict system - we can utilise these interconnections to respond to violence and provide support responsibly.	<i>How are entry points for protection action identified? How are different types of violence interconnected?</i>
<b>Cross Sectoral</b>	Practiced across the spectrum of civil society actors that are present in a conflict system, including at individual, community, national, and international levels; and across the divides of the humanitarian–development–peace and human rights nexus.	<i>How do different sectors work together to meet protection objectives? How is centrality of protection practiced?</i>
<b>Cross-temporal</b>	Practiced throughout different stages of violent conflict, including during early stages to prevent violence, during the crises to interrupt ongoing violence, and responsive to harm that has already occurred.	<i>How is protection integrated at different stages of conflict? How can prevention and peacebuilding occur during active conflict? How can direct protection responses be actioned in pre- and post-conflict settings?</i>
<b>Influential</b>	Actions can be taken that can inform and restrain armed actor violence against civilians.	<i>How are armed actors being engaged with, relationships built? How are these relations being used to encourage protection of civilians and to prevent violence?</i>
<b>Specific</b>	Identified risks are precise, time sensitive, and targeted. They are not generalized.	<i>What protection risk is X community, group or individual facing? Are these risks compounded by intersecting identities? Why, by whom, when, where, and who has influence over those individuals who are creating the risk?</i>
<b>Adaptive</b>	Reflects and responds to changing risks and realities.	<i>Are contextual shifts monitored continually? Do interventions change in response to contextual shifts? Do civilians guide these changes do to localised conflict analysis?</i>

<sup>52</sup> Gray, F., Jordan, H. and Corrado, M. (forthcoming) 'Revising protection: civilian-centred safety and security in an age of escalating harm'.

## CROSS-CUTTING PRINCIPLES

In addition to the core characteristics, some cross-cutting principles should be applied when implementing protection activities to further strengthen safe, ethical, and effective delivery of protection. The table 2 below provides a summary of the principles and what they involve in practice:

**Table 2 – Cross-cutting principles for protection activities and resources**

PRINCIPLES	RESOURCES 
<p><b>Conflict sensitivity and Do No Harm</b> commits protection actors to maintaining an ongoing understanding of conflict dynamics, anticipate how interventions may interact with them, and act to prevent harm while reinforcing positive effects. It involves regularly updating conflict analysis, monitoring risks, and adapting programming. This orientation ensures protection activities support locally led solutions instead of aggravating tensions. Integrating non-violent methodologies further enables actors to challenge violence through communication, dialogue, and collective action, helping uphold principled engagement in tense environments.</p>	<p>Conflict Sensitivity Consortium (2012) <a href="#">How to guide to conflict sensitivity</a>.            WeWorld and Peaceful Change Initiative (2022) <a href="#">Conflict Sensitivity Operational Toolkit: a practical approach</a>.            Centre for Nonviolent Action (2018) <a href="#">Nonviolence ! Peacebuilding Training Handbook</a>.</p>
<p><b>Community engagement and inclusion</b> emphasizes the need to address physical, informational, and attitudinal barriers that prevent persons with disabilities, children, and youth from safely and meaningfully accessing protection services. It encourages co-designing interventions with communities, adapting communication and delivery methods, and ensuring those most at risk shape protection activities.</p>	<p>UNICEF (2025) <a href="#">Disability inclusion – Frontline workers training</a>.</p>
<p><b>Trauma-informed approach</b> highlights the importance of recognizing the impacts of trauma on civilians and staff, and adapting interactions, communication, and activity design to promote safety, dignity, and emotional well-being. It prioritizes avoiding re-traumatization, offering choice and control, and responding with empathy. Applying this approach strengthens trust, participation, and overall well-being.</p>	<p>Family Safety Center (2015) <a href="#">Toolkit for Trauma-Informed Training Facilitation</a>.            Schell, D. (2022) <a href="#">Trauma-informed facilitation</a>.</p>
<p><b>Decolonized approach</b> challenges embedded power imbalances by ensuring affected communities' knowledge, priorities, and leadership guide protection work. It promotes contextually grounded, legitimate interventions that reinforce local agency rather than impose external assumptions.</p>	<p>De Bruin, W. and James, R. – INTRAC (2020) <a href="#">Global perspectives on decolonising capacity strengthening</a>.</p>
<p><b>Facilitation, participatory approaches, and ToT design</b> encourage a shift from one-way delivery to fostering shared learning, collective ownership, and peer-to-peer capacity strengthening. It supports needs assessment, co-design of learning experiences, and tailored training that enhances protection practice.</p>	<p>UNITAR (n.d.) <a href="#">Training of Trainers</a>.</p>
<p><b>Dialogue and negotiation</b> underscore the role of respectful, informed, and principled communication in managing access, consent, and safety in volatile environments. They support constructive engagement with stakeholders, including armed actors, help address blockages, and reduce risks for both affected populations and humanitarian personnel.</p>	<p>Frontline Negotiations CCHN (2021) <a href="#">CCHN Facilitator Handbook</a>.</p>

## PROTECTION MEASURES ARE INTERCONNECTED

Protection activities are inherently **interconnected**, each one either feeding into or leading from another, as shown in Table 3 below. They should not be viewed as isolated interventions but rather as **mutually reinforcing measures** whose relevance depends on context. In practice, these activities form a **flexible set of potential actions** that can be combined or sequenced according to the specific dynamics of violence, patterns of threat, and operational constraints. A **scenario-based approach** allows interventions to adapt to changing circumstances while remaining anchored in predefined thresholds. While the scope of this research focuses on a defined set of activities, it acknowledges that other complementary measures may also be relevant in certain contexts and may therefore create additional relationships within the protection framework.

**Table 3 – Protection activities cross-relational matrix**

Activities	Weapon contamination early response	Community protection structures and safety planning	Risk communication	Rumor management	Early warning systems	Safe spaces and protected areas	Evacuations and relocations
Shelters and other protective infrastructures	Selection of shelter should take into consideration potential EO contamination, same for the access to the shelter in case of emergency	CPS engage communities in mapping shelter needs, mobilize resources, organize shelter drills, and ensure accessibility for vulnerable groups.	RC delivers behavior guidance on when to shelter, what to bring, how to stockpile, and how long to stay.	Rumor tracking Identifies misinformation (e.g., "shelters are military targets.") and counters them with factual communication via trusted channels.	Trigger actual sheltering practice, as shelters effectiveness is directly dependent on timely warning to initiate protective actions	Safe areas can include security upgrades to fence off the area, but should not be directly targeted by deliberate, so shelters should not be relevant.	Decision between sheltering or evacuating. Sheltering can be a first step before launching evacuation.
Weapon contamination early response	-----	CPS report EO sightings, enabling WCER. WCER can train community focal points in safe reporting and should inform them of their activities	RC complements WCER by promoting safe behaviours to civilians, and reporting mechanisms.	Rumors on WCER can undermine WCER legitimacy. RM can track and addresses these narratives where relevant.	EO accidents recorded by WCER can feed into EMS as indicators.	EOD support can be provided by conducting assessment of the sites as part of the location selection.	EOD support to movement is directly linked through coordination for ensuring safe routes during evacuation with regards to EO contamination.
Community protection structures and safety planning	-----	-----	Capacity building can contain risk communication messaging. In turn CPS can become agent and focal point for the dissemination of risk communication.	RM builds on existing community protection structures and further strengthens local mechanisms and capacities to address those threats.	EMS can strengthen community protection structures, and CPS can feed information into and manage the EMS, and the related actions.	SSPA should consider existence and agency of CSPs, and involve them in the management. CSP should also coordinate with responsible agencies. SSPA can be integrated into CSP.	Evacuations should be informed by understanding community structures / capacities, and can be integrated into CSP. Self-organization can be part of the evacuation planning.
Risk communication	-----	-----	-----	RC can provide guidance on how to recognize and verify rumor, and how to safely behave in case of harmful rumors.	Closely linked to EMS, as there should be coherence between the safe behaviour messaging through risk communication and guidance provided by warning messages.	RC can be conducted in safe spaces and protected areas.	Evacuation protocols can be part of risk communication on safe behaviour, or when to decide to evacuate.
Rumor management	-----	-----	-----	-----	Rumors identified through an RM system can serve as an early warning signal of potential violence and/or protection risks, that could eventually trigger early intervention.	Rumor management can be about information on safe spaces and protected areas, to reduce potential protection and violence risks	Rumor management can be about information on evacuations and relocations. Rumor control can prevent panic when evacuating.
Early warning systems	-----	-----	-----	-----	-----	Warning messages delivered through EMS after activation can indicate the location of safe spaces upon evacuation. Decision to use safe areas can be triggered by the EMS as one of the early response.	Warning messages can indicate that it is relevant to proceed to evacuation. Evacuation can be triggered by the EMS as one of the early response.
Safe spaces and protected areas	-----	-----	-----	-----	-----	-----	They often serve as destinations for humanitarian evacuations. Evacuation can be a modality for facilitating safe movement to the safe area.

- Some activities act as **enablers** by providing alerts, technical expertise, or access, thus creating the operational conditions for other measures to work safely and effectively. Early warning systems can trigger early actions such as sheltering or evacuation, while weapon contamination early response support can enable implementation of protected areas and safe evacuation routes. Further to that, some proactive measures can follow a **phased sequence**: one precedes, triggers, or transitions into another as the situation escalates or deteriorates. Once communities are informed and organized, physical (shelters, safe spaces) and mobility-related (evacuation, relocations) protection measures can be used or implemented.
- Additionally, all activities include an **informational component**. For each activity, this requires establishing and strengthening communication channel, but also sharing information in advance to ensure that people can make informed decisions, when possible, in real time, as threats become imminent. Some activities focus primarily on information guiding safe behaviour (e.g. when to shelter or evacuate); others correct false or harmful information; or generate alerts that trigger protective action.
- Activities can **inform and support the operationalization** of other protection measures. For instance, support to community protection structures can strengthen early warning systems by feeding local observations into alert mechanisms, or they can coordinate group movements and evacuation drills. Some activities also help refine others, keeping protection efforts adaptive and evidence-driven. For instance, monitoring rumor trends or reports of rising tensions can prompt adjustments to early warning systems or trigger preparedness measures such as pre-positioning relief stocks or activating evacuation plans. Similarly, information shared by community protection structures, like alerts on displacement movements or local security incidents, can guide coordination efforts and inform updates to risk communication messages.

### KEY CONSIDERATIONS INFLUENCING DESIGN AND PLANNING OF PROTECTION INTERVENTIONS

To inform decision-making when shaping a protection intervention, and define combinations or sequencing of activities, some key considerations should be taken into account. They reflect how conflict dynamics, contextual factors, and operational realities affect the feasibility, design, and expected outcomes of the protection activities. The below list is indicative and intended to guide analysis and design of a proactive approach to protection and is not exhaustive of all dimensions that can influence protection intervention design.

#### **Conflict and threat factors:**

- Violence intensity refers to the degree and frequency of violence affecting civilians, including the scale of attacks and civilian casualties. It will directly shape whether protection efforts should prioritize preparedness and prevention, or must shift to immediate life-saving protection measures, while also influencing operational feasibility and access. For instance, evacuations and sheltering will typically be used in high-intensity environments<sup>53</sup>.
- Type(s) of violence are the specific means of harm civilians face (i.e. death or injury through attack by parties to the conflict, explosive ordnance contamination, abduction, kidnapping or enforced disappearance, hate speech...<sup>54</sup>). Each type presents distinct physical and behavioural risks, which determine which protection measures are most appropriate, or how existing activities should be adjusted. For example, rumor management may be most relevant in contexts affected by online harmful narratives, while risk communication topics should be adapted to the type of violence.
- Imminence of the threat assesses how soon civilians are likely to face direct harm, for instance based on community-defined indications of early warning. The imminence dimension will influence the timing and sequencing of the protection actions, how long in advance and how rapidly they should be implemented. Community safety planning can therefore tailor its early actions to either prevent or interrupt violence or reduce harm, depending on the assessed level of imminence.

<sup>53</sup> While no fixed threshold (i.e. number of casualties, number of attacks over a certain period, the extent of the period) has been set in IHL, the notion of "high intensity" may be understood operationally as violence that is systematic, frequent, of notable scale and sustained over time. Bradley, M. M. (2022) [Additional Protocol II: Elevating the minimum threshold of intensity?](#)

<sup>54</sup> GPC (2021) [Protection Analytical Framework, Appendix 1 'Concepts Matrix'](#).

### Contextual factors:

- **Geography** examines the spatial and environmental characteristics of the affected area, including population density, terrain and accessibility. This will influence both population's exposure patterns and mobility constraints. In high-density urban areas, the concentration of people forces protection measures to address large-scale needs in confined spaces and under disrupted mobility conditions. As a result, safe spaces such as schools or religious buildings may lack adequate protective features for large groups, especially if they have not benefited from prior security upgrades, and could still be damaged by blasts from nearby attacks.
- **Infrastructure context** refers to availability and functionality of essential services and infrastructures. Infrastructure conditions will affect the feasibility of protection measures. Sheltering will be a valid option in contexts where hardened structures are pre-existing, while planning of evacuations in remote areas might want to take a strong look at the limited transport options.
- **Governance context** captures the strength, legitimacy, capacity and willingness of local authorities to fulfil their protection obligations, and will directly determine who can lead, authorize or hinder protection activities. While integration within national systems tends to be more effective, in settings where governmental alert mechanisms are limited, early warning systems may rely on community-based or volunteer networks to collect and disseminate information, sometimes as part of, or in coordination with, national structures.

### Operational factors:

- **Level of preparedness required** evaluates the extent of advance planning, resources and training needed before a specific protection activity can be implemented. While all activities under the scope of this research require preparedness, the degree of preparedness will vary. Implementing protected areas will require extensive pre-planning and drills, while risk communication can, on some occasions, be activated quickly with minimal prior setup.
- **Cost** captures the financial investment required for a specific activity, including direct and indirect expenses such as materials, staffing, logistics, and ongoing maintenance, which will impact economic feasibility. Strengthening protection structures and safety planning might require lower financial inputs, with a focus on facilitation, training and local coordination, while sheltering and security upgrades of infrastructures will have higher operational costs and often rely on different or more substantial funding mechanisms.
- **Technical requirements** encompass both the complexity of expertise required and the extent to which external actors must be involved, highlighting potential operational dependencies and coordination needs with specialized organizations. For instance, weapon contamination early response will require specialized EOD capacity, assets and formal coordination.

## MOST COMMON FACTORS AFFECTING PROTECTION ACTIVITIES

Each protection measure faces its own activity-specific barriers and enablers. However, several influencing factors appeared across the research, including interviews, case studies, and contextual examples. This reveals systemic challenges and drivers that shape the feasibility and effectiveness of protective action. This overview highlights the main recurring dynamics influencing protection outcomes. Building on the proactive measures outlined in the manual, this introduction summarizes the main cross-cutting influences observed across the research and prepares the ground for further detail by activity in later sections.

### Common barriers:

**Political and institutional deprioritization of protection, coupled with limited willingness** count as one of the major barriers. Governments often deprioritize proactive measures, especially in peacetime, viewing investments in protection as politically or economically unpopular. Even where frameworks exist, weak coordination and competing agendas may undermine implementation. Political motives may obstruct action, as states withhold consent for safe zones or evacuations to preserve sovereignty or avoid perceptions of weakness.

#### Example:

During the 2014 **Central African Republic** evacuations, differing political positions and divided humanitarian leadership complicated rapid protection decision-making and life-saving protection efforts.<sup>55</sup>

In some cases, only credible deterrence, by "showing that we were allowed to use force if they did not abide by their own constitution"<sup>56</sup>, proved to be the most effective diplomatic and protective tool to unlock access and prevent harm without escalation.

<sup>55</sup> Barbelet, V. (2025) [Support to humanitarian evacuations, practice, guidance, research gaps and lessons](#); Barbelet, V., Ekomo Soignet, K. M. and Yidong, M. C. (2023) [Community engagement with armed actors in the Central African Republic](#).

<sup>56</sup> Interview dated 28/10/2025.

Another major barrier relates to **funding gaps and misaligned financing models**. Proactive approaches and protection measures struggle to gain traction within humanitarian systems dominated by short-term, reactive funding. The operational costs of protective infrastructure, such as shelter, often exceed available budgets, while the competition between humanitarian and development financing can limit proactive investment. Community-led protection initiatives and preparedness programs remain chronically underfunded, receiving only minimal and short-term support.

Example:

The Philippines case study (Torrecilla, 2025) highlights how the START Network has experimented with more adaptive funding mechanisms, which may further support protection initiatives in case of imminent threats to civilian safety.

Protection activities often face **restricted access and security constraints in active conflict**. Volatile environments, marked by insecurity, shifting frontlines, and damaged infrastructure often prevent protection teams from safely reaching affected areas or sustaining lifesaving interventions. In many contexts, communication blackouts and insecurity hinder coordination with communities, while individuals engaged in such activities often face intimidation or targeting by conflict parties, deterring participation.

Example:

In contexts such as **Libya, Iraq, and Gaza**, insecurity, movement restrictions, and limitations on equipment imports have made “it impossible to do any positive [weapon contamination early response]” during active hostilities<sup>57</sup>.

As one respondent highlighted “Access, definitely, is becoming more and more [of a challenge]. Also attacks on schools, school personnel, not having this idea of neutrality, either humanitarian actors, school personnel, etc., is becoming also more and more common”<sup>58</sup>.

Linked to security constraints, rapidly **evolving threat environments**, including changing weapon use and attack modalities, challenge the effectiveness of proactive measures. These shifting patterns create persistent technical uncertainty, emphasizing the need for flexible, iterative, and continuously updated systems.

“Emerging new threats such as the use of drones or white phosphorus and changing attack patterns require real-time adaptation of messages and methods”<sup>59</sup>.

Examples:

In **Somalia**, for instance, traditional explosive ordnance risk education approaches quickly became inadequate as IED designs evolved faster than information could be updated, forcing protection actors to innovate with context-specific, adaptive tools<sup>60</sup>.

Similarly, early warning and response systems in **West Africa** struggle to remain relevant amid fluid conflict dynamics. Static indicators failed to capture transitions between intercommunal violence, banditry, and extremism, reducing predictive accuracy<sup>61</sup>.

Effective implementation of protection activities is also often constrained by **data and information gaps, delays, and uncertainty in measurement**. In conflict settings, weak or inconsistent data flows undermine real-time decision-making and risk prioritization. Such persistent data gaps leading to timing failures create uncertainty, slow activation, and weaken the effectiveness of protection.

Examples:

As further detailed in the **DRC** case study (Fal-Dutra Santos, 2025), weak communications and fragmented reporting meant alerts often arrived after attacks had begun. Fragmented or poorly disaggregated information on civilian harm,

Early warning systems also struggle to identify reliable indicators, with alerts often triggered too late to enable proactive action. As one participant suggested, continuous representation within communities and at field level can sometimes fill this gap, where

<sup>57</sup> interview dated 07/10/2025.

<sup>58</sup> interview dated 08/10/2025.

<sup>59</sup> Humanity & Inclusion (2025) [Saving Lives in Conflicts: Risk Education and Conflict Preparedness to Protect Civilians in EWIPA Settings](#), p.50.

<sup>60</sup> Jones, A. (2017) [Do No Harm: The Challenge of Protecting Civilians from the IED Threat in South-Central Somalia](#).

<sup>61</sup> Haken, N., Taff Nasri, P. and Reece, N. (2024) [Linking Early Warning and Early Response Networks in West Africa](#).

protection risks, and risk-taking behaviors limits the ability to design targeted preparedness interventions and evidence-based risk communication.

*"something is happening right now, we make a call right away"*<sup>62</sup>.

During the **Mosul** military operations, humanitarian actors faced serious information gaps when field data from displaced populations failed to reach decision-makers promptly, delaying responses to urgent protection issues such as gender-based violence<sup>63</sup>.

Additionally, **silos, coordination gaps, and duplication** often confine cross-cutting, community-led protection initiatives within rigid institutional frameworks. This occurs both within the humanitarian system or within governmental or regional structures (cf. Philippines case study - Torrecilla, 2025), limiting opportunities for more integrated and proactive approaches. In active crises, coordination platforms are frequently disrupted, leaving actors without consistent mechanisms for information sharing or joint decision-making. The absence of interoperability across agencies leads to fragmented early warning or preparedness systems, with little alignment on triggers. **Legitimacy and neutrality** are often seen as fragile foundations in the implementation of protection activities. Proactive measures risk being undermined when perceived as politically biased or selectively applied, eroding community trust and cooperation, and, in some contexts, exposing civilians to potential retaliation. In contexts where protection operations appear to favor one party, their humanitarian intent can be questioned, undermining acceptance and access.

### Common enablers:

**Localization, community ownership, and trust** are central enablers of effective protection. When communities are empowered as active agents rather than passive recipients, proactive actions become more relevant, more context-specific, and sustainable. Local leadership and trusted networks enable timely information sharing, acceptance, and safe access for humanitarian actors, even in volatile environments. Centering civilian agency and investing in trusted local partnerships is therefore a key condition for scalable protection outcomes.

#### Examples:

In **Gaza**, for example, the Danish Refugee Council integrated explosive ordnance risk education (EORE)<sup>64</sup> into community-led site management by training local committees to deliver safety messages and manage daily risks. This approach built confidence, strengthened trust, and embedded safer practices within community structures<sup>65</sup>.

Additionally, as further explored in the **Philippines** case study (Torrecilla, 2025), the Ministry of Public Order and Safety coordinates the Bangsamoro EWER network, linking trained community monitors with local authorities across BARMM. These volunteers serve as credible messengers who detect, verify and communicate alerts, while fostering trust between civilians and authorities.

Similarly, CIVIC's community-based protection model in contexts such as **Mali** and **Ukraine** demonstrates how progressive localization allows humanitarian actors to *"fade into the background,"* as communities assume ownership and sustain proactive interventions themselves<sup>66</sup>.

When **coordination and collaborative platforms** function cohesively across humanitarian, civil, and military actors, they enhance situational awareness, reduce duplication, and ensure coherent protection strategies. Cross-sectoral collaboration between CSOs, INGOs, and UN agencies strengthens preparedness by combining analytical and logistical capacities.

#### Examples:

In **South Sudan**, the Protection of Civilians sites demonstrated how structured collaboration, through defined roles, joint planning, and formalized civil-military coordination, enabled coherent, context-specific protection actions<sup>67</sup>.

In **Nigeria**, CMCoord's facilitation of dialogue between the Protection Cluster and national armed forces allowed *"preparing both sides for the conversation so they could have a meeting that bore relatively positive fruit"*<sup>68</sup>.

<sup>62</sup> Interview dated 27/10/2025.

<sup>63</sup> CIVIC and InterAction (2017) [Protection of Civilians in Mosul: Identifying lessons for contingency planning](#).

<sup>64</sup> Cf. Risk Communication section for further information.

<sup>65</sup> DRC (2025) [Gaza: One response. Share impact - Integrating EORE in Site Management](#).

<sup>66</sup> interview dated 07/10/2025.

<sup>67</sup> Briggs, C., with contributions from Monaghan, L. (2017) [Protection of civilians sites: Lessons from South Sudan for future operations](#).

<sup>68</sup> interview dated 03/10/2025 and 06/10/2025.

Grounding proactive measures in **evidence-based and behaviourally informed research** ensures that interventions align with how people actually perceive, process, and act upon risks. By analysing the psychological, social, and environmental drivers of civilian decision-making process, practitioners can address barriers, thereby improving the adoption of safe practices.

**Examples:**

In **Gaza**, scenario-based EORE and CPP<sup>69</sup> messaging applied a social and behavior change lens to tailor communication to emotional and cognitive realities, using calming, factual narratives to reduce anxiety and counter normalization of risk<sup>70</sup>.

Similarly, urban evacuation planning in Galati (**Romania**), incorporating behavioural insights into risk perception and prior experience analysis improved the design of evacuation routes and shelter placement, ensuring plans reflected real human behaviour<sup>71</sup>.

**Proactive and continuous engagement** with at-risk populations allows protection actors to understand local realities, perceptions, and power dynamics before crises escalate, ensuring that interventions are both relevant and accepted. Equally, strong locally led community structures are a key enabler of such engagement. Volunteers and community committees play a key role in monitoring risks, raising alerts and taking early decisions with regards to activating protection measures, often in coordination with local authorities. Applying an information ecosystem approach, understood as working with the full range of formal and informal channels through which communities receive, share, and trust information, can foster adaptive, locally-led solutions. Together, these elements build both trust and contextual awareness.

Finally, **preparedness culture and proactive humanitarian access facilitation** are yet another powerful enabler for protection actions. The impact of shelters, early warning systems, and other protective infrastructures depends on community awareness and readiness to respond when threats arise. Regular drills, participatory planning, and locally embedded alert mechanisms help normalize protective behaviors and strengthen collective preparedness. At the same time, proactive humanitarian dialogue and negotiated acceptance with conflict parties enable safe, impartial access to implement preparedness measures.

<sup>69</sup> Explosive ordnance risk education (EORE) "refers to activities which seek to reduce the risk of injury from EO by raising awareness of women, girls, boys and men in accordance with their different vulnerabilities, roles and needs, and promoting behavioural change" - IMAS (2020) [IMAS 12.10: Explosive Ordnance Risk Education](#). Conflict preparedness and protection (CPP)'s definition is still under development, however the CPP sub-task team recently developed an initial common understanding as being "activities which mitigate the risk of harm from explosive weapons and other conflict-related risks, by raising awareness and promoting behavioural change regarding safety, preparedness and protection measures" - CPP Sub Task Team (2025) Meeting minutes from May 2025.

<sup>70</sup> Gaza Mine Action – Area of Responsibility (2024) Compiled Phased Scenario-Based EORE–CPP Messaging.

<sup>71</sup> Borowska-Stefańska, M., Grama, V., Masierek, E., Morar, C. and Wisniewski, S. (2025) [Evacuation planning in urban areas: A case study in Galati under military conflict conditions](#).

# CONFLICT EARLY WARNING SYSTEMS



## OVERVIEW

### What is it?

Mechanisms or networks that detect and communicate alerts of imminent violence. These systems may rely on verified alerts of attacks, hostile movements (e.g., nearby shelling) or other pre-identified and observable warning signs, that are reported, verified and disseminated through messaging applications, hotlines, SMS, community spotters and reporting networks or sirens. In practice, early warning is (or should be) closely linked to early response.

### Purpose

Ensure civilians receive timely and trusted warnings, triggering rapid and informed decision-making, and enabling them to either take preventive or protective actions.



## IN PRACTICE

### Focus – Distinguishing early warning and early warning system

**Conflict early warning systems (CEWS)** refer to the *broader architecture* used to anticipate and communicate conflict-related risks. They consist of proactive tools for comprehensive information gathering, risk assessment, and the formulation of warnings (Agutu, 2022). CEWS are designed to generate and disseminate timely and meaningful warning information that enables at-risk populations to prepare and act early enough to reduce harm or loss (IFRC, 2012). They rely on the regular collection and interpretation of conflict- or violence-related data, alongside other context-specific variables (Agutu, 2022).

**Conflict early warning** refers specifically to the *timely alert itself*, a message indicating an imminent threat of violence or attack, enabling individuals or communities to adopt preventive, mitigatory, or preparatory measures (Sweijts and Teer, 2022).

**Conflict early warning systems (CEWS)** encompass both '**last-mile**' approaches, which disseminate top-down threat information, and '**first-mile**' systems, which are people-centered and grounded in bottom-up reporting (Muggah and Whitlock, 2022). These systems function as core protection tools by enabling timely preventive action (interview dated 28/10/2025). Implementation generally begins with building **risk knowledge**, involving systematic exploration of conflict and violence threats, vulnerabilities, and local capacities across communities, at sub-national or national levels. The establishment of CEWS may include **vulnerability and capacity assessments** to establish risk baselines and identify priority threats (UNDRR and CIMA, 2024). CEWS then rely on **monitoring and analysis mechanisms**, in which agreed-upon qualitative and quantitative indicators, defined with at-risk populations, are tracked to detect signs of outbreak, escalation, or resurgence of violence. Such monitoring requires regular collection, verification, and interpretation of conflict-related data (IGAD, 2023). Based on these indicators, practitioners can develop **scenarios and activation protocols**, outlining preventive response options linked to specific thresholds (IGAD, 2023). Once a threshold is reached, the system shifts to **warning communication**, translating analytical findings into clear and understandable messages tailored to the needs of at-risk populations, and disseminated through channels pre-identified for their accessibility, reliability, and community preference (Ceasefire, 2021). In many contexts, the practical functioning of CEWS also depends on **trained community monitors**, who monitor local developments, use simple equipment such as radios or motorcycles to transmit alerts, and apply basic verification or triangulation to distinguish serious threats from irrelevant signals (interview dated 28/10/2025). Upon activation, CEWS should feed into **early response mechanisms** (though these are treated here separately from the warning function itself). CEWS are only as effective as the preventive and protection measures they trigger. To avoid leaving at-risk communities aware of impending threats but unable to act on it, warnings must be paired with clear, feasible, and locally accessible response measures, supported by reliable resources and decision-making mechanisms.

### Main threats the activity is protecting from:

- Escalation of tensions.
- Violence in populated areas, including communal and conflict-related attacks.

### Who implements it:

- Government authorities.
- Regional and international organizations.
- Civil society.
- Communities and networks.
- UN Peacekeeping missions.

**Communities' involvement:** Communities' involvement is not optional if CEWS are to be locally relevant, trusted and meaningfully leading to early responses by at-risk populations. Communities and civilians should act as **primary participants** in building risk knowledge and identifying which qualitative and quantitative indicators are relevant to their context (Ceasefire, 2021). They can also serve as **informants and data collectors**, verifying and reporting information as part of indicator and threshold monitoring (PIND, 2019). Communities can contribute directly to the **co-development of scenarios and the design of adapted warning messages**, ensuring that alerts are contextually grounded and actionable for at-risk populations (Leaning and Meier, 2008). Where communities are genuinely engaged, civilians often act as **co-decision makers in activating warnings**, determining when thresholds have been met and alerts should be disseminated.

Summary – How to prepare

- Conduct a proactive Enhanced Vulnerability and Capacity Assessment (EVCA)** at community level with community participation to identify priority threats, vulnerabilities, exposures, and existing capacities, and to define measures for addressing identified gaps.
- Establish or strengthen information infrastructures**, including systems for collecting, storing, analyzing, and transmitting early warning data in a safe and reliable manner.
- Develop warning messaging** by pre-defining clear, context-appropriate messages linked to the scenarios and thresholds identified during analysis.
- Build capacity for data collection, verification, reporting, and analysis**, ensuring community spotters and practitioners understand indicator tracking, basic triangulation, and safe information handling.
- Provide training on conflict sensitivity**, enabling actors to interpret data without exacerbating tensions, and, where relevant, strengthen skills in **conflict resolution and preventive action** when CEWS identify underlying conflict drivers.
- Pre-identify dissemination channels** based on accessibility, trust, redundancy, and community preference, anticipating disruptions and ensuring multiple methods of communication are available.
- Clarify roles and decision-making processes**, ensuring communities, civil society, and institutional actors understand who monitors, who verifies, who authorizes activation, and how warnings translate into preparedness or protective action.

Activity-specific competencies

- EVCA.
- Data collection, verification, and quality control.
- Alert and communication protocol design and dissemination.
- Mapping and information management



## RESOURCES

### Guidance:

GPPAC (2017) [Conflict Analysis Frameworks: Field guidelines and Procedures](#).  
 Oxfam (2021) [Early warning mechanisms: Tools and template](#).  
 Saferworld (n.d) [Training materials/toolkits on Conflict-Sensitive approaches to development, humanitarian assistance and peacebuilding](#).  
 Partnership Initiatives in the Niger Delta (PIND) (2019) [An Integrated Conflict Early Warning And Early Response System Manual For Data Collection And Analysis](#).  
 Protection Cluster Congo (n.d.) AlertBook, mécanisme de gestion intégrée des alertes précoces.  
 START Network (2023) [Conflict and displacement, Pre-alert guidance note](#).

### Not specifically for conflict:

IFRC (2012) [Community Early Warning Systems: Guiding Principles](#).

United Nations Office for Disaster Risk Reduction and CIMA Research Foundation (2024) [Handbook on the Use of Risk Knowledge for Multi-Hazard Early Warning Systems](#).  
 WHO (2022) [Early Warning, Alert and Response in Emergencies: An Operational Guide](#).

### Training materials:

Oldenhuis, H., with Furnari, E., Carriere, R., Wagstrom, T., Frisch, A., and Duncan, M. – Nonviolent Peaceforce (2021) [Unarmed civilian protection strengthening civilian capacities to protect civilians against violence](#).  
 Alert International – Réseau Kufitalia (2024) Formation sur le service Matokeo (EWS).

### Not specifically for conflict:

IFRC (2014) [Community Early Warning System Training toolkit](#).



## ACTIVITY IN CONTEXT

### Strengthening activation protocols through community simulations (Philippines)

In the Bangsamoro region, early warning systems are implemented through community monitors who report alerts via secure radio and messaging channels. They use early action protocols defining locally agreed triggers, and multi-level coordination with the Ministry of Public Order and Safety Early Warning and Early Response Center. Under the SUPREME BARMM initiative, actors conducted **simulations to test information flow, verification steps and activation thresholds in real time**. These simulations directly operationalize preparedness and activation-protocol as they translate abstract triggers into rehearsed decision pathways and strengthen collective understanding of when a warning becomes actionable. They also enhance inter-operability between community structures and authorities while reinforcing the central role of trusted local monitors, particularly women, in collecting and transmitting sensitive alerts.

For more information, check *Philippines Case Study* (Torrecilla, 2025).

### Inclusive community monitoring and verification system (Somalia)

In Jubaland and South West State, recurrent insecurity, GBV and clan-based violence require timely detection of threats affecting diverse and highly vulnerable populations. CEWS are implemented through a network of ~200 trained community 'champions' who collect incident data via smartphones, verify reports with partner organizations, and relay validated alerts to community structures and authorities. Those champions are **drawn from women's groups, youth, IDPs, minority clans and persons with disabilities**, broadening community reach and trust. Continuous data collection by diverse actors, cross-checked by local civil society and structured reporting improve the reliability of alerts and the visibility of risks affecting marginalized groups.

For more information, check Saferworld (2025) [Strengthening Early Warning, Early Response systems to address violence and conflict in Somalia](#).

### Linking multi-level early warning systems (West Africa)

Escalating violence in the Sahel and border regions has prompted the development of multiple Early Warning and Early Response systems operating at regional, national and community levels. These systems collect quantitative and qualitative conflict data, organize it around structured indicators and feed analysis to governments, civil society and other decision-makers. Regional mechanisms like ECOWARN provide broad situational awareness, while national and local systems generate more granular, context-specific alerts. A central feature of this approach is the deliberate **linkage of disparate systems into a "network of networks"**, enabling cross-validation of data and improved coverage where individual systems have gaps. This interoperability helps compensate for obsolete indicators, uneven data collection and limited access to remote or high-risk areas. However, ensuring analysis reaches stakeholders that have the authority and willingness to act remains a challenge. Strengthened relationships among peace and development actors support more timely and coordinated preventive action.

For more information, check Haken et al. (2024) [Linking Early Warning and Early Response Networks in West Africa](#).

### Strengthening analytical capacities for conflict prediction (South Sudan)

The national CEWS was implemented through dedicated structures tasked with collecting and analyzing conflict data in South Sudan to anticipate violence and inform prevention efforts, tracking key variables over time and generating alerts to guide peacebuilding actors and policymakers. These mechanisms supported dialogue initiatives and contributed to the broader peace process by providing timely assessments of conflict trajectories. A dedicated emphasis was put on **building analytical capacity**, including mapping root causes, identifying escalation triggers and integrating community and leadership perspectives into structured assessments. While this strengthened understanding of conflict dynamics, persistent gaps, such as limited resources, weak institutional coordination and delayed or inconsistent monitoring, sometimes reduced the impact of warnings.

For more information, check Agutu (2022) [Effectiveness of Conflict Early Warning System as a Framework for Conflict Prevention in Africa. Case Study of South Sudan](#).

### Community-defined indicators and localized threat detection (DRC)

In eastern DRC, CEWS are implemented through community protection structures and focal points who monitor threats, collect incident information and transmit alerts through local reporting channels. Rapid detection of early signs of violence at the community level is required due to persistent armed group activity, intercommunal tensions and weak state presence. These mechanisms are embedded in routine protection monitoring and feed directly into community safety planning. **Community-defined indicators are being used as part of the CEWS as signals of impending violence**, such as unusual youth mobilization, sudden presence of armed men, atypical weapons purchase or shifts in daily behaviours. These indicators used as CEWS triggers strengthen the sensitivity and relevance of alerts while reinforcing community ownership of the system. Although broader conflict dynamics can limit follow-up action, the integration of early warning into established community protection networks remains a key facilitator for timely threat identification.

*For more information, check DRC Case Study (Fal-Dutra Santos, 2025).*



## MAIN FACTORS AFFECTING THE ACTIVITY

### BARRIERS

- Political and institutional constraints, including limited political will, weak institutionalization, bureaucratic inertia, and competing priorities for decision-makers.
- Siloed operations and duplication of effort, driven by poor inter-agency coordination and / or disconnects among local, national and regional actors.
- Challenges in defining and maintaining reliable and updated conflict indicators.
- Delayed thresholds and poor system timeliness, resulting in reactive warnings.
- Security risks to monitors and community informants.
- Insufficient financial, human and technical resources.
- Persistent data gaps, particularly in remote areas or around sensitive issues.
- High mistrust of state or intelligence institutions, often rooted in historical abuses, undermining legitimacy, reporting and cooperation.
- Structural conflict drivers and chronic instability exceeding the preventive capacity of EWS.

### ENABLERS

- Strong engagement of civil society, local and community actors, leveraging their contextual knowledge, social networks, and credibility.
- Effective coordination across levels to harmonize data and enable joint analysis.
- High community trust and willingness to act on alerts, strengthened by inclusive participation and the use of trusted local intermediaries.
- Dedicated coordination structures providing organization, coherence and continuity.
- Use of secure and context-appropriate communication technologies.
- Integration of EWS into existing community protection mechanisms, reinforcing local ownership.
- Cross-validation, layered datasets, and transparent data management system, improving accuracy, filling data gaps and increasing trust.
- Political anchoring and institutional support, which legitimizes the system and facilitates access to decision-makers.
- Collaborative partnerships and capacity-building.



## MAIN LESSONS LEARNED

- ⇒ **CEWS should be contextualized and fully tailored to local social, political and conflict dynamics.** Generic systems or externally imposed indicators fail to capture how risks manifest in specific environments (Ceasefire, 2021).
- ⇒ **Civilian-centred design increases effectiveness.** Integrating civilian perspectives, and locally recognized triggers (DRC Case Study - Fal-Dutra Santos, 2025; Philippines Case Study - Torrecilla, 2025) ensures that warnings reach the most vulnerable, reflect real priorities, and strengthen decision-making processes that are grounded in lived risk (Ceasefire, 2021).
- ⇒ **CEWS could function best as part of a broader prevention and protection ecosystem**, minimizing duplication and providing a shared risk picture. It can, for instance, be embedded within interconnected local, national and regional structures (Castañeda, 2012; Ceasefire, 2021).

- ⇒ **Technology is an enabling tool but cannot replace local and contextual knowledge.** Advances in data availability, forecasting models and digital platforms expand analytical capacity, must support, but never replace, community interpretation and contextual understanding (Sweijs and Teer, 2022).
- ⇒ **Building civilian analytical capacity enhances resilience.** Supporting civilians to analyze threats, plan responses and engage in self-protection shifts them from passive recipients of alerts to active agents of anticipatory action (Agutu, 2022).
- ⇒ **The warning–response gap must be addressed** for CEWS to be effective. Multiple contexts show well-functioning alert systems but weak or absent response mechanisms. Early warning is limited if actions are not triggered or resourced (interviews dated 14/08/2025 and 20/08/2025). Simulations, structured early action protocols and trusted monitors strengthen readiness and can help reduce that gap.
- ⇒ **Information sensitivity and “do no harm” considerations are central in the establishment of CEWS.** Sharing early warning data can create political and personal risks. Safeguarding concerns and conflict-sensitivity must therefore shape data handling, dissemination and targeting (interview dated 06/08/2025).
- ⇒ **Embedding CEWS in state structures requires addressing legacies of abusive intelligence practices.** Inclusion of civil society in data collection and analysis shifts intelligence systems toward prevention. Political transitions threaten continuity unless systems are formally institutionalized.



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# RISK COMMUNICATION



## OVERVIEW

### What is it?

Proactive dissemination of clear, trusted, actionable information and guidance on existing contextual threats and safe behaviours to adopt for self and collective protection, including how to recognize warning signs of attack, presence of explosive ordnance hazards, when and how to shelter safely, avoid dangerous areas or evacuate.

### Purpose

Reduce the risk of harm before violence occurs or escalates, by strengthening preparedness and supporting informed decision-making, promoting safer behaviours and building readiness at individual and community levels for when risks emerge.



## IN PRACTICE

**Risk communication** encompasses a range of approaches that vary by threat type, mandate, and operational context, but all share a common focus on **raising awareness and fostering behavioural change** among at-risk populations. This includes:

- **Explosive Ordnance Risk Education (EORE)**, which seeks to reduce EO-related injuries through public information dissemination, education, and training tailored to the differentiated vulnerabilities and roles of women, men, girls, and boys (IMAS 12.10, 2020);
- **Conflict Preparedness and Protection (CPP)** messaging that addresses risks associated with explosive weapons in populated areas and other conflict-related threats (cf. detail in “Main threats the activity is protecting from”, CPP Sub-TT, 2025); and
- **Risk Awareness and Safer Behaviour (RASB)**, which covers a wider spectrum of weapon contamination and violence-related hazards, including CBRN risks, and extends beyond information provision to actively facilitating safer practices through integrated activities (ICRC, 2019).

Across these modalities, risk communication is understood as inherently tied to **human behaviour**, with practitioners emphasizing that people do not automatically adopt recommended actions, even when information is provided, due to diverse social, psychological, and environmental factors (interview dated 14/08/2025). For this reason, effective communication often relies on **participatory processes**, where communities identify the messages, focal points, and communication systems they need during conflict or attack scenarios. This may include civilian-led exercises to clarify locally relevant guidance (interview dated 08/10/2025). These efforts typically follow a project cycle similar to that of EORE (IMAS 12.10), as promoted by the GICHD, beginning with **planning and analysis** informed by assessments of risk-taking and safe behaviours, as well as conflict and threat analysis. This is followed by **message and material design**, including iterative testing and revision with target audiences; then **implementation** through public information dissemination, community liaison, and coordination mechanisms; and **ongoing monitoring and evaluation** to assess quality, outcomes, behavioural impacts, and lessons learned. Because operational environments and threat types vary widely, risk communication is necessarily adaptive, shaped by community input, contextual analysis, and continuous learning.

### **Focus – Distinguishing CEWS and risk communication**

While CEWS and risk communication are closely related and mutually reinforcing, they serve distinct functions. **CEWS** are primarily concerned with the systematic identification, monitoring, and analysis of conflict and violence risks, and with triggering warnings and decision-making processes linked to predefined thresholds and response options.

**Risk communication**, by contrast, focuses on how information about threats, risks, and protective actions is translated into messages that are disseminated, understood, and acted upon by at-risk populations, with the explicit aim of influencing behaviours and reducing harm.

Whereas CEWS seek to determine **when** a threat is emerging or escalating and **when** action should be activated, risk communication addresses **how** people perceive risks and **what practical actions** they can take to protect themselves.

**Main threats the activity is protecting from:**

- Explosive ordnance.
- Air- and ground-launched conventional and unconventional weapons, drone-delivered attacks, ground attacks involving explosives, SALW, or other non-explosive weapons, incendiary weapons.
- Other situations of violence
- CBRN hazards (RASB only).

**Who implements it:**

- Governments are the main responsible, often through National mine action authorities.
- Civil protection, where they exist.
- EORE/ CPP/RASB operators (ICRC and national societies, international and national NGOs).
- Civil Society Organisations
- Community focal points.

**Focus – Distinguishing explosive weapons and ordnance**

**Explosive weapons - EW** (HI, 2025): Explosive weapons are conventional weapons that detonate to affect an area with blast and fragmentation. There are many types of explosive weapons, including grenades, mortar bombs, artillery shells, aircraft bombs and missiles, and improvised explosive devices (IEDs). These weapons explode, killing and injuring people, or damaging vehicles and buildings, through the blast and fragmentation that an explosion creates around the point of detonation. Different types of explosive weapons may be delivered in different ways (some are thrown, others are fired from the ground or dropped from the air), and they may vary in the scale of effects that they create. There is a pattern of harm associated with explosive weapons in general, but the risk to civilians is most severe when the weapons have wide-area effects due to the wide destruction radius of the munition used, the inaccuracy of the delivery system, and/or the delivery of multiple munitions over a wide area. The use of these weapons in populated areas has been widely documented to increase the incidence of civilian deaths, injuries, psychological impact, environmental harm, and damage to civilian objects, including critical infrastructure necessary for essential services.

In many cases, the use of explosive weapons results in the presence of explosive ordnance (EO), munitions that have failed to explode or have been abandoned, and which continue to pose a threat long after hostilities have ended.

**Explosive ordnance - EO** (IMAS 04.10): interpreted as encompassing mine action's response to the following munitions: Mines, Cluster Munitions, Unexploded Ordnance, Abandoned Ordnance, Booby traps, Other devices (as defined by CCW APII), Improvised Explosive Devices\*

Note: Improvised Explosive Devices (IEDs) meeting the definition of mines, booby-traps or other devices fall under the scope of mine action, when their clearance is undertaken for humanitarian purposes and in areas where active hostilities have ceased.

**Communities' involvement:** Communities and civilians are at the heart of the process, contributing through **participatory planning and design** to help identify which risk communication activities are appropriate and relevant for their specific context (HI, 2017). They also engage in the **co-development and tailoring of messages and materials**, ensuring these are tested, understood, and accepted by the intended audiences (IMAS 12.10, 2020). Because risk communication should function as a **two-way process**, communities should provide continuous feedback on message clarity, relevance, and behavioural feasibility, enabling implementers to adjust approaches over time. However, in acute conflict emergencies, opportunities for such two-way communication may be more limited due to access constraints or heightened insecurity.

- ❑ **Pre-identify contexts at risk of conflict or violence and set up a conflict monitoring system**, establishing continuous monitoring of dynamics to anticipate emerging needs, with specific indicators that inform risk assessments and trigger timely activation of risk communication activities.
- ❑ **Pre-identify qualified human resources** capable of disseminating safe messaging, including staff from other sectors, and map **relevant dissemination channels**, considering how these channels may be disrupted during conflict.
- ❑ **Provide training** to personnel on technical content, communication skills, and behaviourally informed delivery methods to ensure effective and safe dissemination.
- ❑ **Develop pre-prepared safety messaging and materials**, designed for rapid adaptation and contextual tailoring during emergencies.
- ❑ **Create a contingency plan**, grounded in scenario-based planning, that includes tailored measures for hard-to-reach populations and groups facing communication barriers.

- Community liaison and engagement.
- EORE/ CPP/RASB safety technical messages.
- Training facilitation.
- Social and behaviour change communication.
- Message and material development.
- Media and digital communication



## RESOURCES

### Guidance:

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) (2014) [Crisis and Emergency Risk Communication: Crisis Communication Plans](#).

Dr. Pearce, J. (2025) [Communicating with Diverse Populations Before, During and After CBRN Events](#).

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International Mine Action Standard (IMAS) (2020), [IMAS 12.10: Explosive Ordnance Risk Education \(EORE\)](#).  
UNICEF (2008, First Edition) [Emergency Mine Risk Education Toolkit](#).

### Training materials:

GICHD (2023) [Advanced explosive ordnance risk education \(EORE\) e-learning course](#).

NPA (n.d.) Conflict preparedness and protection internal training.

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## ACTIVITY IN CONTEXT

### National leadership in coordinating conflict risk communication (Lebanon)

Escalating bombardments and mass displacement in southern Lebanon in 2023–2024 generated urgent protection needs that went beyond traditional EORE already implemented. The Lebanon Mine Action Center (LMAC) led a rapid shift toward a **combined EORE/ CPP approach**, conducting quick assessments, harmonizing messages on broader conflict risks, and accrediting adapted trainings for partners. Existing EORE teams were retrained and deployed with standardized, nationally approved materials to support safer behaviours during active hostilities. This approach demonstrated how **strong national leadership can drive rapid adaptation** of risk communication in response to evolving threats, ensuring coherence, credibility, and timely guidance to affected populations. By **integrating CPP within established national mine action**, the LMAC enabled faster, more coordinated protection measures even in the absence of pre-existing CPP frameworks.

For more information, check HI (2025) [Saving Lives in Conflicts: Risk Education and Conflict Preparedness to Protect Civilians in EWIPA Settings](#); GICHD (2025) [Protecting Civilians in Active Conflict – NDMUN28 Side Event](#).

#### Scenario-based and phased messaging for populations under bombardment (Gaza)

Amid continuous shelling and displacement, civilians in Gaza required immediate, practical guidance to reduce exposure to conflict-related risks. The Gaza Mine Action AoR developed **scenario-based EORE–CPP messages**, providing clear behavioural instructions for situations such as bombardment, crossfire, sheltering, and movement. Messages were tailored for different groups, including children and persons with disabilities, and disseminated through partners. The **phased messaging approach, designed for both active conflict and ceasefire periods** allowed partners to shift priorities as the context evolved. This approach reflects the need for context-specific risk communication, with the ability to take into consideration rapidly evolving conflict dynamics.

For more information, check Gaza MA AoR (2024) [Compiled Phased Scenario-Based EORE–CPP Messaging](#); HI (2025) [Saving Lives in Conflicts: Risk Education and Conflict Preparedness to Protect Civilians in EWIPA Settings](#).

#### Multi-threat and multi-channel risk communication (Ukraine)

The combination of shelling, EO contamination, drone attacks, and industrial risks in Ukraine created a need for integrated safety guidance for frontline communities. Various stakeholders, such as UDA, NPA, Martin Club, CIR implement **participatory, multi-threat risk communication sessions**, combining EORE and CPP guidance, delivered through interactive discussions. In many instances, community focal points have been trained through ToT to maintain message circulation, while digital channels (messaging apps, etc.) enable quick updates as threats evolve. This illustrates an **adaptive approach to changing tactics and hazard patterns**. It also highlights how **local focal points and digital dissemination** strengthen trust and continuity, despite existing message fatigue and rapid shifts in risks.

For more information, check Ukraine Case Study (Vara Ruiz, 2025).

#### Do-no-harm–focused risk communication in an IED-dominated environment (Somalia)

Frequent IED attacks along roads, in markets, and near checkpoints in south-central Somalia created additional risks for civilians, with high potential for retaliation by armed groups. There, risk communication focused on **basic situational awareness and safer movement**, providing guidance on recognizing suspicious behaviours or objects, avoiding predictable routines, and responding safely during and after explosions, without encouraging civilians to report devices or approach hazardous areas. Messaging was deliberately limited, applying a **do-no-harm principle**, framed mainly around personal safety drills, to avoid any perception that civilians were gathering intelligence for security forces. If safe channels and contextual understanding are not guaranteed, **limiting the scope of messaging can be itself a protective measure**.

For more information, check: Jones (2017) [Do No Harm: The Challenge of Protecting Civilians from the IED Threat in South-Central Somalia](#).



## MAIN FACTORS AFFECTING THE ACTIVITY

### BARRIERS

- Absence of international harmonized guidance for conflict related risk communication.
- Severe access constraints due to ongoing hostilities.
- Attacks on communication infrastructure leading to communication blackouts.
- High staff safety and security risks.
- Context sensitivity of risk communication, where messages may trigger political pushback, denial or fear, especially in highly politicised and controlled environments.

### ENABLERS

- Localization and strong local ownership.
- Leadership by national authorities, including formal integration of CPP/EORE into mine action structures.
- Preparedness and anticipatory approaches, using scenario-based planning that allows rapid adaptation of messages as conflict phases and threat patterns evolve.
- Evidence-based and behaviourally informed design.
- Harmonised inter-agency messaging, reducing contradictory guidance and enabling consistent communication across actors.

- Chronic data gaps, including fragmented or non-disaggregated information on civilian harm, evolving threats and risk-taking behaviors.
- Underfunding of risk communication and preparedness.
- Breakdown or suspension of coordination mechanisms.
- Multiple behavioural barriers to safe practices, including competing survival priorities, complacency, fatalism, trauma, denial, and limited availability of genuinely safe locations or movement options.
- Continuous emergence of new or complex types of threats.
- Messaging fatigue and normalization of risk.
- Cross-sectoral integration, where risk communication is linked with other humanitarian, protection, and peacebuilding activities.
- Collaborative partnerships, including INGOs, local NGOs, national services and mine action actors.
- High community demand for information in frontline or high-risk areas, creating receptive audiences.
- Flexible and crisis-responsive donor support.
- Use of digital and low-cost communication channels.
- Structured analytical frameworks and “do no harm” methodologies.



## MAIN LESSONS LEARNED

- ⇒ **Immediate deployment of risk communication emergency messaging is essential**, as waiting for full assessments or other mine-action activities can delay life-saving advice. Generic safety guidance must be disseminated early and **continuously adapted** as threat types, civilian behaviours and frontline conditions shift (ICRC, 2019; Vovk, 2024). Even ‘good enough’ CPP–EORE messaging can be lifesaving in fast-escalating crises (HI, 2025).
- ⇒ **Integrated EORE–CPP delivery reduces message fatigue** and reflects civilians’ simultaneous exposure to contamination, shelling, airstrikes and drone threats (HI, 2025). In extreme environments, this integration requires shifting from **location-based advice** (safe places) toward **behaviour-based and micro-protective actions** such as calming techniques, protective positioning and managing children’s fear (Gaza MA AoR, 2024).
- ⇒ **Risk communication must be participatory and behaviourally informed**, treating civilians as co-producers rather than passive recipients. Participatory design, iterative feedback, and behavioural monitoring ensure that content aligns with real survival strategies and facilitates adaptation as threats evolve (Ukraine Case Study - Vara Ruiz, 2025).
- ⇒ **Safety, security and wellbeing of frontline staff must be strengthened**, particularly in high-threat contexts. This includes enhanced security training, medical preparedness, and routine psychosocial support to sustain operations (HI, 2024; Vovk, 2024).
- ⇒ **Inclusion, accessibility and trauma sensitivity must be built into all messaging**, formats and dissemination approaches to reach those at highest risk (children, older persons, persons with disabilities, gendered-vulnerable groups) (Gaza MA AoR, 2024).
- ⇒ **Pre-crisis investment in community networks, focal points and trust is indispensable**. Strong community networks, for example community focal points, enable continuity of risk communication even when humanitarian access becomes impossible (HI, 2024).
- ⇒ **Scenario-based and phased risk communication harmonized frameworks increase coherence and adaptability**, especially where multiple organizations communicate simultaneously in order to maintain message consistency under rapidly shifting frontline, access and information constraints (Gaza MA AoR, 2024).
- ⇒ **In highly securitized or politically sensitive contexts, risk communication must follow strict “do no harm” analysis**, avoiding any implication that civilians should undertake roles resembling intelligence, reporting or spotting (Jones, 2017).
- ⇒ **Risk communication must be embedded within broader protection and humanitarian systems**, not treated as an isolated intervention. Multi-sectoral coordination, across humanitarian mine action, protection, health, education, communication units, civil–military teams is central for uptake across various complex crises.



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# COMMUNITY PROTECTION STRUCTURES & SAFETY PLANNING



## OVERVIEW

### What is it?

Collective organization and preparedness measures enabling civilians to better protect themselves from imminent threats. This includes reinforcing or establishing committees, peer networks, and volunteer groups focused on local safety and security, as well as practical planning tools such as evacuation drills, safety mapping, contingency plans, and local procedures.

### Purpose

Reinforce communities' capacity to anticipate, prevent and respond to protection risks, including during active conflict or sudden shifts in threat dynamics.



## IN PRACTICE

**Community protection structures and safety planning** draw on a range of **people-centered and localized methodologies** aimed at strengthening civilian safety and resilience in the face of imminent threats. Approaches often coexist and overlap, such as:

- **Community Protection Structures:** locally selected committees or networks that proactively address protection concerns (Oxfam, 2021a);
- **Survivor- and Community-Led Crisis Response (SCLR),** which enables collective self-help through locally driven crisis initiatives (Corbett et al., 2021);
- **Community self-protection** strategies adopted autonomously by individuals, households, or entire communities (Oxfam, 2021b);
- **Unarmed Civilian Protection (UCP),** which deploys trained civilians to reduce violence and reinforce local peace infrastructures (NP, 2022).

While there is no single operational model, these approaches generally follow a **participatory cycle**, beginning with **conflict and protection analysis** to identify threats, vulnerabilities, and existing capacities, followed by the **strengthening or creation of community groups** through inclusive processes and targeted capacity development (Oxfam, 2021a). Communities may then receive **resource transfers**, such as microgrants that enable rapid collective action and explicitly shift power and decision-making toward local actors (Corbett et al., 2021). Implementation typically remains community-led, with groups coordinating preparedness, early warning roles, and communication flows, such as identifying key messages, focal points for referrals, and procedures to activate during attacks (interview dated 08/10/2025). Additionally, monitoring and learning processes track progress based on community-defined criteria.

These participatory cycles also mirror broader **community security programming**, which moves from preparation and conflict analysis to problem prioritization, action planning, implementation, and iterative learning (Saferworld, 2014). Safety planning may include **community-led crisis or evacuation plans** that articulate shared procedures for escalation and response, accessible to all members and used for collective practice (interview dated 07/10/2025). Methodologies, like UCP, contribute through **proactive engagement in high-risk areas, relationship building** between civilians and armed actors, **capacity development** for violence prevention, and **monitoring**, including ceasefire observation and early warning/early response systems (Oldenhuis et al., 2021). Across all approaches, external actors often play a **supportive role**, enabling what communities are already doing or wish to do, bridging gaps in resources, organization, mapping, or technical know-how, rather than imposing external templates (interview dated 27/10/2025). As a result, community protection structures and safety planning tend to be highly adaptive, rooted in local agency, and shaped by context-specific threats, priorities, and capacities.

### Main threats the activity is protecting from:

- Violence by armed actors or groups, including resource-related conflicts, extortion, harassment, abuses...
- Sexual and gender-based violence (SGBV).

### Who implements it:

- Local actors and at-risk populations, as primary agents, taking various forms: self-help groups, community protection structures, CSOs, Participatory Action-Learning in Crises (PALC) groups...
- INGOs/LNGOs, acting as enablers and providing technical guidance, resources and connections (main INGOs identified include Oxfam, DRC, ICRC, SFCG, CIVIC, NP...).

**Communities' involvement:** Communities and civilians are not only participants but the **core drivers** of these approaches, reflecting the "primacy of local actors" (Oldenhuis et al., 2021). They engage in **active decision-making**, drawing on their own protection knowledge and lived experience to guide the identification of threats, priorities, and appropriate responses (Kirk et al., 2025). These activities are rooted in **civilian-to-civilian partnerships** (Oldenhuis et al., 2021) and rely on **co-creation and capacity exchange**, where communities jointly design, implement, and refine protection strategies while strengthening and refreshing relevant skills and knowledge through tailored capacity-building processes (GICHD, 2015).

Summary – How to prepare

- Conduct a comprehensive, collaborative conflict and context analysis**, led by community structures, to identify threats, vulnerabilities, existing self-protection strategies, and local capacities; determine whether external support provides genuine added value and what is required.
- Identify established community protection groups** (e.g., community protection structures, self-help groups, PALC groups) through inclusive, participatory processes to ensure broad representation and legitimacy.
- Develop plausible scenarios and contingency plans**, outlining agreed anticipatory actions, focal points, communication flows, and procedures in case of escalation or sudden deterioration.
- Identify needs, design and implement capacity development programmes**, focusing on co-created training to strengthen skills in early warning, negotiation, preparedness, safe movement, documentation, and nonviolent protection strategies.
- Clarify the roles of facilitating agencies**, ensuring technical guidance, resources, and connections are provided in ways that reinforce (and do not replace) local leadership.
- Set up mechanisms for ongoing learning and adaptation**, enabling communities to review what works, what should be improved, adjust plans, and incorporate new information into evolving safety strategies.

Activity-specific competencies

- Participatory conflict/context analysis and stakeholder mapping.
- Contingency and scenario-based planning.
- Training and capacity building design and facilitation.
- Community-based approach/programming.



## RESOURCES

### Guidance:

Diakonie (n.d.) [Locally Led Anticipatory Action / Guide and Toolkit](#).  
 HPG (2024) [Reducing violence and strengthening the protection of civilians through community dialogue with armed actors](#).  
 IFRC (2012) [Contingency Planning Guide](#)  
 Oxfam - Fal-Dutra Santos, R. (2021a) [From Participation to Leadership: A Resource Pack on Community-Based Protection](#).  
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 SaferWorld - Bennett, W. (2014) [Community Security Handbook](#).

### Training materials:

CIVIC (n.d) Protection Analysis Essentials – Internal training. Handicap International Philippines (2011) [Contingency plan training - Facilitator's Guidelines](#).  
 Local2Global Protection (2021) [Survivor and Community-Led Crisis Response \(sclr\) Short Course](#).  
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 Plan International Philippines (2024) Anticipatory action for conflict simulation exercise (collected through call for evidence)



## ACTIVITY IN CONTEXT

### Contingency planning and service mapping for rapid community protection (DRC)

In eastern DRC, communities facing recurrent armed confrontations and displacement rely on locally established protection structures to anticipate imminent threats. These structures develop contingency and protection plans, map essential services, and pre-agree protocols with authorities or service providers. Committees usually identify risks, assign responsibilities, and disseminate safety information through community channels to ensure people know where to go and how to act during alerts. In addition, they establish **pre-negotiated displacement protocols** as a proactive safety tool. In Mweso, for example, community structures secured an advance agreement with the hospital to receive civilians during clashes, enabling the population to displace safely and predictably when alerts were issued. In this case, contingency plans operationalize collective self-protection and help shift communities from individual improvisation to coordinated action.

*For more information, check DRC Case Study (Fal-Dutra Santos, 2025).*

### Phased contingency planning and early response (Philippines)

In BARMM and Mindanao, communities developed structured ways to anticipate and respond to imminent conflict-related threats, such as recurrent clan-related and land-related clashes, and sudden-onset of violence between armed groups. Community protection committees, village officials, and CSO networks jointly conducted risk mapping, developed contingency plans, and organized **simulation-based evacuation drills**. Some INGOs, such as HI and Plan International, supported their integration into local DRR plans and conflict-specific preparedness frameworks. Safety routes, focal points, and communication chains were defined, rehearsed, and aligned with municipal coordination mechanisms. They also adopted a **phased approach**, integrating emerging, readiness, and activation phases – closely tied to early warning triggers and anticipatory action.

*For more information, check Philippines Case Study (Torrecilla, 2025).*

### Needs-based training and community roadmaps for collective self-protection (Ukraine)

In frontline Ukrainian communities, civilians required practical, community-driven preparedness measures amid the escalation of violence. CIVIC supported the establishment of community protection groups through baseline entry surveys, a series of thematic community meetings and tailored trainings on crisis communication, evacuation, first aid, and stress management. Local authorities, educators, volunteers, and service providers jointly shaped these structures, ensuring relevance and broad participation. A central feature of CIVIC's approach is the **needs-based training model** and the development of **community "roadmaps"** detailing actionable steps, roles, and responsibilities during escalation. Communities selected training topics themselves, such as drones' awareness or step-by-step responses during attacks, ensuring sessions directly addressed identified protection gaps and reinforced existing capacities.

*For more information, check Ukraine Case Study (Vara Ruiz, 2025).*

### Balancing power and representation in community protection structures (Iraq)

In post-ISIS areas, communities faced complex security arrangements, contested returns, and limited ability to influence armed actors. Some protection actors established or supported community committees to identify risks, conduct protection training, and engage directly or indirectly with security forces around issues such as blocked returns, checkpoints, or civilian building occupation. These committees were often paired with mapping of local authorities, power holders, and community influencers to guide protection strategies. However, occasional **tensions between local power dynamics and inclusive representation** arose. Committees needed influential figures to engage armed actors effectively, yet these same leaders could exclude marginalized groups or obstruct protection needs (for example with the return of stigmatized families for their alleged affiliation with ISIS). More effective structures emerged where there was sufficient political space and committees were able to balance leverage with diversity, enabling concrete protection gains such as improved behaviour at checkpoints or vacating civilian buildings.

*For more information, check Steets (2023) [Three Key Lessons from Efforts to Strengthen Community Protection in Iraq](#).*



## MAIN FACTORS AFFECTING THE ACTIVITY

### BARRIERS

- Dominant international paradigms, including top-down protection frameworks, can undermine civilian agency and structures.
- Rigid aid architectures (clusters/sectors) may force holistic local protection practices into narrow categories.
- Chronic under-resourcing of local actors.
- Community fragmentation, limited trust, and internal power asymmetries that affect representation and collective decision-making.
- Operational barriers to implementing safety plans, including lack of transport, financial resources and logistical capacity.
- Risk of co-option of community protection structures by international humanitarian actors
- Risk of politicization of community protection structures, particularly in contested areas.
- Adoption of harmful or unsafe self-protection strategies (ex: reliance on armed groups; use of weapons for self-defense; enrolment in para-military groups or community defense committees, etc.).
- Gaps in conflict analysis, mediation and facilitation skills, which may limit effective implementation.
- Structural needs outside program scope, such as protective infrastructure, requiring separate funding mechanisms.
- Volatile conflict dynamics and the use of artillery and heavy weapons in populated areas, which can exceed what community-led measures alone can mitigate.
- Lack of sustained mentoring and long-term financial support.

### ENABLERS

- Strong civilian agency and meaningful delegation of decision-making power to community groups, creating local ownership, legitimacy and accountability.
- Dense relational networks at community level.
- Integrated, cross-sectoral approaches that move beyond cluster and aid architecture silos.
- High levels of transparency, both within communities and between communities and external actors.
- Inclusive and representative community structures, validated through mechanisms such as general assemblies.
- Locally defined risk indicators and threat perceptions.
- Flexible and anticipatory financing mechanisms, allowing timely activation of safety actions when conflict triggers occur.
- Supportive local authorities and available political space.
- Use of existing community structures and plans.
- Capacity-building and sustained training, which strengthens committees' ability to plan, negotiate and advocate.
- Recognised committee mandates, providing an institutional basis for collective action.
- Strong pre-established communication channels, mechanisms and focal points.



## MAIN LESSONS LEARNED

*NB: The below lessons learned were primarily identified by humanitarian actors seeking to support and strengthen community protection structures. They may differ from those specifically for organic community structures and practices.*

- ⇒ **Community ownership is the primary determinant of community protection structures relevance and sustainability.** Structures that are intrinsically motivated and rooted in local agency continue functioning even after external funding ends (Oxfam, 2021a). Furthermore, community protection structures emerging from locally defined needs retain greater legitimacy and operational continuity than structures introduced or imposed by external actors (Ukraine Case Study - Vara Ruiz, 2025).
- ⇒ **Programs must remain flexible, transparent, and participatory, adapting to evolving conflict dynamics and drawing on existing local knowledge.** Tailor-made training, co-created tools, and consultative strategy development enable community protection structures to remain contextually grounded (Saferworld, 2014; Oldenhuis et al., 2021).
- ⇒ **Community protection structures are most effective when proactive,** using coordination, communication and multi-layered relationships to shape the threat environment rather than simply react to it (Oldenhuis et al., 2021; DRC Case Study - Fal-Dutra Santos, 2025).
- ⇒ **Constructive engagement and cooperative relationships with armed actors – where safely possible – enhance long-term protection outcomes.** Negotiation capacity is a core component of community self-protection (Oldenhuis et al., 2021). Strengthened negotiation skills enables communities to influence

behaviour, defend rights and reduce threats without replacing the obligations of conflict parties (interview dated 10/09/2025). This aligns with evidence where committees monitor local peace agreements or engage in dialogue to limited or negotiated state security presence (interview dated 04/09/2025).

- ⇒ **Community protection structures must apply a combined risk management, do-no-harm, and conflict-sensitive approach**, ensuring safety planning does not expose people to new risks (Oxfam, 2009). This is particularly important where committees interact with armed actors, politically-sensitive contexts, or where self-protection initiatives might be misinterpreted as siding with one party (Steets, 2023).
- ⇒ **Community protection structures can provide critical civilian protection where state security is absent, but their capacity and influence have limits**. In contexts like South Sudan, local committees monitor flash-violence triggers and uphold micro-peace agreements. However, such committees remain fragile, often personality-dependent, and vulnerable to being overwhelmed when violence escalates (interview dated 04/09/2025).
- ⇒ **Community protection structures should complement, not replace, duty-bearer responsibilities**. There is a normative risk that community protection could be instrumentalised to shift responsibility away from conflict parties or the State (interview dated 27/10/2025).
- ⇒ **Sustainability and planned exit must be built in from the outset when community protection structures are externally supported**. Community protection structures are most durable when embedded within locally owned structures with clear pathways for complete handover (when relevant), rather than reliant on humanitarian presence (interview dated 10/09/2025).
- ⇒ **Where risks intersect, embedding conflict-related risks into multi-hazard or anticipatory systems broadens coordination and financing opportunities** (Philippines Case Study - Torrecilla, 2025).
- ⇒ **Community protection structures must be integrated into wider protection systems and existing civil-protection mechanisms, not operate as standalone structures**. Synergies between early warning, contingency planning, threat negotiation, advocacy and service mapping are essential to move from individual coping mechanisms to collective preventive action.



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# RUMOUR MANAGEMENT



## OVERVIEW

### What is it?

Identification, verification and response to harmful rumours, misinformation and disinformation, that can heighten protection risks, fuel violence and undermine safe behaviour. This includes systematically tracking unreliable sources and unverified information circulating among civilians and providing trusted, corrective messages through appropriate local channels.

### Purpose

Prevent violence and mitigate harm by ensuring that civilians have access to accurate, reliable information, from trusted media, thereby supporting informed decision-making and reducing risks linked to such information during conflict.



## IN PRACTICE

### Focus – Defining a rumour

A **rumour** is commonly understood as “unverified information that is transmitted from one person to others” (CDAC Network – Bugge, 2017). Rumours are characterised by the fact that the source of the information, and therefore its credibility, is often impossible to verify (Ayala, 2023). They frequently emerge as a natural response to uncertain or threatening situations, where people seek to make sense of rapidly changing events. Importantly, rumours are not inherently false: they may be true, false, or a mixture of both (CDAC Network – Bugge, 2017).

Rumours generally fall into three broad categories (CDAC Network – Bugge, 2017):

- **Wish rumours**, reflecting community hopes;
- **Fear rumours**, rooted in anxieties and often the most prevalent;
- **Hostility rumours**, reflecting threats or prejudices, often directed toward external groups.

Complementing this framing, some stakeholders, like ICRC, use the term “**harmful information**” to encompass misinformation, disinformation, and hate speech, defined as posts, content, or narratives that are false, misleading, or hateful, or that encourage violations of IHL, and have the potential to trigger harmful acts or contribute to harm against protected persons in conflict settings (van Solinge and Marelli, 2020; Ulbricht and Rizk, 2024).

**Rumour management** involves a structured yet adaptable process that usually begins with **identifying and collecting rumours** circulating within communities, including those emerging through in-person communication or digital spaces. Once identified, rumours are usually **verified through (systematic) fact-checking**, drawing on reliable and independent sources, triangulating information, and analyzing what triggered the rumour, whether misunderstanding, fear, political or economic motivations, or shifts in humanitarian programming. This diagnostic step helps address root causes and shapes an appropriate engagement strategy. Implementation then centers on **engaging communities with verified, factual information**, developing alternative narratives that are accurate, user-friendly, and attributed to trusted sources, and disseminating them through channels that communities rely on. Effective rumour management also requires maintaining dialogue to check comprehension, correct further distortions, and manage expectations (CDAC Network – Bugge, 2017; Internews, 2019). Actors increasingly use **categorisation systems** to distinguish rumours from verified facts, assessing both the credibility of the source and of the information itself, an area where humanitarian mechanisms still lack systematic practice (interview dated 28/10/2025). In some contexts, rumour management extends to **preventing digital harm**, with organisations supporting communities to recognize misinformation, unsafe online behaviour, and manipulated content, and to build skills to differentiate authentic from misleading digital materials (interview dated 13/10/2025). As a result, rumour management becomes both a communication practice and a protection measure, seeking to reduce confusion, mitigate harmful behaviours, enable and strengthen informed decision-making during crises.

**Main threats the activity is protecting from:**

- Physical violence and loss of life.
- Risk-taking behaviours.
- Denial or avoidance of essential services
- Erosion of trust and reputational harm.
- Psychological harm.
- Social and cultural harms.

**Who implements it:**

- Media development organizations and networks, such as CDAC, Internews...
- Journalists and media outlets.
- UN, INGOs and national NGOs.
- Governments in some cases.
- Communities and local actors, including CSOs, local media, community-based networks and community leaders.
- Academia, private sector.

**Communities' involvement:** Communities and civilians are deeply embedded in rumour management, serving both as information holders and active agents in verification and dissemination. When following Internews' people-centered methodology, activities are designed around **community views and concerns**, using open questions to let communities set the agenda (Internews, 2019). Civilians often serve as **community correspondents or liaison officers**, collecting daily rumours and feedback and building trust with affected populations (CDAC Network – Bugge, 2017; Internews, 2019). Rumour management systems can also rely on **existing or newly formed community networks**, such as women's groups, youth groups, or trained community ambassadors, to listen, verify, and circulate accurate information (CDAC Network – Bugg, 2017), complementing community protection structures (see further in [Community Protection Structures and Safety Planning](#)). Another core element of this approach is about strengthening community **resilience and agency** against harmful information by involving people in prevention, detection, and mitigation strategies, including through **media and digital literacy programming** (Ayala, 2023; Internews, 2019).

## Summary – How to prepare

- Conduct a contextual analysis** through an Information Ecosystem Assessment (IEA) or Information Needs Assessment (INA) to understand information flows, trusted sources, languages, communication channels, and information-related protection risks before designing the activity.
- Establish a rumour management mechanism in advance**, including a rumour log, database, and workflow for identifying, reporting, categorizing, and addressing rumours.
- Recruit and train staff and volunteers** in rumour-tracking methodology, safe communication practices, and protection principles, ensuring they can conduct risk assessments, triangulation of information and apply the “do no harm” principle.
- Proactively share accessible, verified and relevant information** to reduce information gaps that often trigger rumours, thereby anticipating and mitigating their spread.
- Map other actors working on rumour-related issues**, including government bodies, NGOs, and media, and review existing coordination structures to avoid duplication (or contradictory messaging) and strengthen collective planning.

## Activity-specific competencies

- Information ecosystem/needs assessment (qualitative methods).
- Open-source investigations (OSINT).
- Rumor tracking and verification systems.
- Coordination and stakeholder mapping.

**RESOURCES****Guidance:**

Aelbers, S., Cowlick, E., Echegut, F., Krivchenia, L., McCain, H., and Scott, I. – Internews (2023) [Information and Risks: A Protection Approach to Information Ecosystems](#).  
Bugge, J. – CDAC (2017) [Rumour Has It: A Practice Guide to Working with Rumours](#).

Fluck, V. L. – Internews (2019) [Managing Misinformation in a Humanitarian Context: Internews Rumour Tracking Methodology – How-to Guide](#).

**Training materials:**

Radio for Peacebuilding and Search for Common Ground (n.d.) [Rumour Management Manual: A Training Guide](#).



## ACTIVITY IN CONTEXT

### Strengthening community capacity to identify and address harmful speech (Nigeria)

Mercy Corps' YAFE app was developed in northern Nigeria, where conflicts over land and resources are frequently framed through ethnic and religious narratives amplified by online harmful speech. The pilot engaged 34 community, religious and youth leaders, training them to identify and report harmful content, use the app to share observations, and participate in a digital community of practice supported by "super-users", mirroring the importance of **bottom-up rumor tracking systems**, where community actors, not humanitarian agencies, serve as the primary sensors of harmful information. The activity was implemented **through trusted community intermediaries**, equipping local leaders with the digital literacy and analytical skills needed to recognize, classify and respond to dangerous narratives circulating online and offline. The pilot further shows that RM tools require continuous maintenance and user-friendly design to sustain engagement.

For more information, check Mercy Corps (2020) [Community Cohesion in a Digital Space: Lessons from YAFE Pilot Combating Dangerous Speech](#).

### Innovative tools to enable early warning for Harmful Narratives (Ukraine)

In Ukraine, coordinated disinformation campaigns undermine for example safe behaviour during evacuations and fuel fear. These campaigns are especially disseminated through Telegram and other digital channels. National institutions and specialized organizations such as the Center for Information Resilience monitor the information space using **AI-powered tools and structured OSINT methods** to detect emerging harmful narratives. By flagging early signs of malign campaigns, it supports local authorities to communicate verified messages through safer channels, using in this context the local authorities own webpage, but also Facebook and WhatsApp. These methods helped to shift from reactive debunking to **proactive, anticipatory monitoring**, by mapping narrative patterns, identifying malign actor networks, and treating repeated messaging as early signals of potential harm. Barriers such as reliance on vulnerable platforms (e.g., Telegram) and limited connectivity are partly mitigated by trusted horizontal networks and strengthened digital literacy among local actors.

For more information, check Ukraine Case Study (Vara Ruiz, 2025).

### Understanding the information ecosystem to anticipate harmful narratives (Sahel)

In the central Sahel, mislabeled videos, xenophobic rumours, and manipulated online content have repeatedly fueled tensions and triggered violence. Harmful narratives are spread through Facebook-as-browser use or private WhatsApp groups. In that context, Search for Common Ground maps concrete incidents where misinformation catalyzed attacks take place. By analyzing how content circulates, who produces it, and where amplification occurs, rumour management actors gain an **ecosystem-level picture** essential for any intervention. This approach also aligns with the need to identify **structural drivers** of vulnerability to rumors, such as low digital literacy and reliance on closed groups, which limit the effectiveness of classic fact-checking.

For more information, check Search for Common Ground (2022) [Conflict and the Online Space in the Sahel: Challenges and Recommendations](#).

### Community self-regulation against harmful speech (Kenya)

Rising online dangerous speech around elections and security incidents created risks of escalating tensions in Kenya, often along ethnic and religious lines. The *Umati* initiative monitored blogs, forums, Facebook and Twitter to identify, categorize, and flag dangerous speech, forwarding urgent risks to platforms such as [Uchaguzi](#) for rapid response. Monitoring combined manual analysis across seven languages with later efforts to automate detection through machine learning. Umati also documented **community-led protective mechanisms**, recognizing how Kenyan 'netizens' used "KoT (Kenyans on Twitter) cuffing", that is, ridiculing or rejecting inflammatory posts, to de-escalate harmful narratives, alongside humour, satire, and positive counter-messaging. These behaviours demonstrate that online communities can self-police and defuse emerging harmful speech when trusted, horizontal networks are active and digitally literate.

For more information, check GISF (2020) [Monitoring Online Dangerous Speech in Kenya: Insights from the Umati Project](#).



## MAIN FACTORS AFFECTING THE ACTIVITY

### BARRIERS

- High resource requirements for information-ecosystem analysis, including costly, labor-intensive frameworks and significant contextual/linguistic expertise.
- Low trust in humanitarian or official information.
- Restricted access to digital data, caused by social media platform limitations, restrictive regulatory environments or connectivity constraints.
- Massive volume, speed and amplification of rumours, fueled by social media dynamics and AI-generated content, overwhelm verification and response capacity.
- Difficulty linking online content to offline harm, due to multiple, interacting contributing factors.
- Low digital literacy and limited access to trusted news sources.
- Security risks and fear of reprisals, deterring civilians from reporting misinformation or correcting harmful narratives through official channels.

### ENABLERS

- Use of information-ecosystem approaches, allowing rumor management to be locally led, proactive and context-specific.
- Collaborative, multi-actor coordination, combining the agility and proximity of CSOs with the analytical capacity of INGOs, UN agencies, government institutions and media actors for joint planning, data-sharing and response.
- Capacity-building for local actors on media literacy, verification, rumor tracking and conflict-sensitive communication.
- Conflict-specific analysis frameworks.
- Medium to high social media penetration and active local engagement, enabling rapid information flow within communities.
- Trusted communication networks, which remain key channels for rapid rumor correction and targeted local messaging.
- Partnerships with digital platforms and civic initiatives.
- Local ownership of digital tools.
- Integration of AI-assisted verification and analytics, improving efficiency and scalability.



## MAIN LESSONS LEARNED

- ⇒ **Prioritise protection and avoid amplification**, by not repeating rumors verbatim. Responses must focus on clear, factual information to avoid reinforcing harmful narratives (CDAC Network – Bugg, 2017; Internews, 2019). All rumour management activities must be protection-sensitive, ensuring they do not generate unintended or secondary risks for affected populations (Internews, 2019).
- ⇒ **Trust is foundational to effective rumour management** and efforts must rely on sources trusted by communities, requiring humanitarian actors to maintain strict neutrality, particularly when countering politically motivated disinformation (CDAC Network – Bugg, 2017; Ayala, 2023). In conflict settings where humanitarian access and trust are limited, partnerships with local organisations and pre-existing community networks remain indispensable (Ayala, 2023; CDAC Network – Bugg, 2017).
- ⇒ **Balance rumour management with data protection** when addressing rumours, and interventions must be calibrated to avoid infringing on freedom of speech, privacy, or inadvertently encouraging censorship. Rumor-related data should be handled with rigorous data-protection and do-no-harm parameters (Ayala, 2023; Ulbricht and Rizk, 2024).
- ⇒ **Rumour management tools and messages must be continually adapted to local languages, cultures, political dynamics** and evolving information needs. Regular community assessments prevent reliance on outdated assumptions (Internews, 2019; Ayala, 2023). Top-down interventions often overlook local grievances or information behaviours, whereas bottom-up, locally driven approaches strengthen legitimacy and impact (Ayala, 2023; CDAC Network – Bugg, 2017).
- ⇒ **In certain contexts, rumors may reflect aid-system weaknesses**, as some originate from unclear aid processes or opaque decision-making, for example eligibility criteria. Addressing these systemic issues reduces rumor recurrence more effectively than reactive debunking (CDAC Network – Bugg, 2017).
- ⇒ **Rumour management systems must evolve from short-term, resource-constrained reactivity to more proactive approaches**, by mapping emerging digital threats, investing in media literacy, and strengthening local resilience. Fact-checking alone has limited influence in conflict environments. Comprehensive strategies must include community engagement, computer literacy initiatives, and broader ecosystem-level interventions (Ayala, 2023).

- ⇒ **Effective rumour management requires a holistic information-ecosystem approach that looks beyond fact-checking to platform dynamics**, literacy levels, trust patterns and closed-group communication. Because harmful narratives often circulate in private or encrypted spaces, rumour management systems must integrate community-level insights and trusted intermediaries rather than rely solely on open-source monitoring (SfCG, 2022).
- ⇒ **Embedding rumour management within a national information-security architecture**, supported by specialized institutions and AI/OSINT tools, enables systematic detection and response to harmful narratives. However, such top-down infrastructures must be complemented by trusted local channels and community media literacy, to ensure that verified information translates into safe behaviours and reduces exposure to risks (*Ukraine Case Study - Vara Ruiz, 2025*).



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# WEAPON CONTAMINATION EARLY RESPONSE



## OVERVIEW

### What is it?

Actions strictly focused on mitigating or removing the immediate risks from explosive ordnance during conflict (excluding longer-term disarmament and clearance efforts). Activities may include non-technical survey and temporary marking of hazardous areas, emergency explosive ordnance disposal (EOD) spot tasks (neutralizing specifically identified items), and EOD support to enable safe humanitarian access, assistance and evacuation.

### Purpose

Prevent civilian casualties from explosive ordnance, and enable safe movement, particularly for population on the move and humanitarian actors, by addressing the direct threat to life and physical integrity



## IN PRACTICE

**Weapon contamination early response** usually falls within the scope of **humanitarian mine action**, although in some contexts military actors may also undertake these activities. Weapon contamination early response typically focuses on **immediate threats**, emphasizing rapid identification, assessment, and removal or onsite destruction of explosive ordnance (ICRC, 2007). Core operational activities usually include:

- **EOD spot tasks:** often triggered by reports from communities or humanitarian organizations when a potentially hazardous item is encountered. EOD teams are deployed to assess and neutralize the threat, with **destruction in situ** (detonating a charge alongside the item) often preferred to avoid movement risks (GICHD, 2021). In complex environments such as dense urban areas or locations with secondary hazards, decisions on disposal methods require careful, context-specific risk balancing informed by technical expertise (ICRC, 2019).
- **Non-technical survey (NTS) and temporary marking:** teams gather evidence through community liaison, map suspected or confirmed hazardous areas based on community reports and conflict indicators and install warning signs recognizable to local populations (GICHD, 2014). Marking remains temporary while hostilities continue, and new EO contamination is still likely. NTS is usually closely linked with EORE and other risk communication efforts (see further in [Risk communication](#)).
- **EOD support to humanitarian convoys or evacuations:** this involves enabling safe movement by assessing, identifying, and removing immediate explosive threats along key routes (UNDPO, 2021), as seen in contexts where mine action actors fill gaps left by absent national authorities (interview dated 07/10/2025).
- **Support for debris management:** where EOD personnel conduct explosive hazard assessments and accompany debris operations to mitigate the risk of concealed items (Gaza DMWG, 2025a).

In situations where access is constrained, **remote or semi-remote community liaison** may be feeding information into weapon contamination early response operations, helping teams maintain situational awareness (interview dated 07/10/2025). Ultimately, most weapon contamination early response decisions, particularly regarding NTS, marking, and prioritization, are **highly context-dependent**, with practitioners repeatedly emphasizing that responses must be driven by the specific threat profile, operational access, and community communication channels rather than fixed procedures (interview dated 07/10/2025).

### Main threats the activity is protecting from:

- Explosive ordnance.
- Weapons and ammunition resulting from unstable or unsecured stockpiles.
- Small arms and light weapons (SALW).
- Nuclear, biological, and chemical hazards.

### Who implements it:

- Government and military authorities, including National Mine Action Authorities are usually the primary responsible actors.
- UNMAS/UNOPS, UNDP, and peacekeeping operations, with EOD capacity.
- Humanitarian mine action organizations/operators, when activities remain humanitarian in purpose, and aligned with humanitarian principles.

**Some technical definitions (IMAS 04.10):**

**Explosive ordnance disposal - EOD:** the detection, identification, evaluation, render safe, recovery and disposal of EO. EOD may be undertaken:

- As a routine part of mine clearance operations, upon discovery of EO;
- To dispose of EO discovered outside hazardous areas, (this may be a single item of EO, or a larger number inside a specific area); or
- To dispose of EO which has become hazardous by deterioration, damage or attempted destruction.

**Non-technical survey – NTS:** refers to the collection and analysis of data, without the use of technical interventions, about the presence, type, distribution and surrounding environment of explosive ordnance contamination, in order to define better where explosive ordnance contamination is present, and where it is not, and to support land release prioritisation and decision-making processes through the provision of evidence.

**EO marking:** emplacement of a measure or combination of measures, including EO signs, EO boundary markers and physical barriers, to indicate the location of a spot hazard or the boundary of a suspected or confirmed hazardous area to provide a clear warning of EO danger to civilians.

**Communities' involvement:** Communities and civilians play a central role by serving as the **primary users of reporting mechanisms** for explosive ordnance, making it essential that they are informed about how and where to report (GICHD, 2021). They are also key contributors to **community liaison during NTS**, providing information on suspected or confirmed contamination, local risk-taking behaviours, and area-specific priorities (GICHD, 2014). Finally, civilians should be **informed whenever weapon contamination early response activities are activated**, so they understand the nature of the response and any implications for their safety.

## Summary – How to prepare

- Pre-identify and prepare EOD personnel** and assets to ensure rapid mobilization and early response capacity, adjusting team size and composition to the anticipated level of contamination.
- Conduct an EOD threat assessment** to understand the nature of the threat, evaluate existing capabilities, and identify emerging patterns or high-risk areas.
- Set up an information management system** to support data collection, mapping, reporting, and operational coordination.
- Develop standard operating procedures (SOPs)** for the full range of relevant weapon contamination early response activities, including a dedicated **security SOP** tailored to conflict-affected environments.
- Establish community liaison mechanisms**, including the identification and training of community focal points on liaison, information sharing, risk education, survey, reporting, and operational support.
- Put in place robust security measures** appropriate to active conflict conditions to ensure safe access and movement of EOD personnel.

## Activity-specific competencies

- Explosive ordnance disposal.
- Community liaison – EORE and Reporting.
- Rapid deployment readiness.
- EO Contamination mapping and temporary marking.
- Information management (and geographic information systems - GIS)

**RESOURCES****Guidance:**

Gaza Debris Management Working Group (2025a) [Explosive Ordnance Risk Management for Debris Operations – Guidance Note](#).  
GICHD (2025) [Explosive Ordnance Guide for Ukraine](#).

**Training materials:**

UNICEF, GICHD (2009) [Community Liaison in Mine Action, a Training Manual](#).

UNDPO (2020) [Specialised Training Materials for United Nations Military Explosive Ordnance Disposal Unit for UN Peace Operations](#).

GICHD training catalogue, including [Information management](#) and IMSMA Trainings.



## ACTIVITY IN CONTEXT

### Risk-managed EOD support to debris operations (Gaza)

Amid unprecedented levels of conflict debris mixed with explosive ordnance, Gaza's operations require an immediate system to reduce EO risks so life-saving access and rubble removal could start. EOD actors conduct rapid Explosive Hazard Assessments, classify site risk, and provide on-call EOD support as debris is cleared and recycled. The Debris Management Framework developed adopted a **risk-managed approach**, acknowledging that EO cannot be fully excluded in such a dense, urban post-strike environment.

For more information, check the Gaza Debris Management Working Group (2025) [Explosive Ordnance Risk Management for Debris Operations – Guidance Note](#); Gaza Debris Management Working Group (2025) [Gaza Debris Management Framework](#); UNMAS (2025) [Ceasefire factsheet](#).

### Community-anchored early warning and rapid EOD response (Philippines)

In conflict-affected areas of Mindanao and BARMM, where armed violence, clan feuds, and a strong gun culture expose civilians to explosive ordnance risks, the system developed by FSD, government authorities, and state security actors responds to frequent, locally triggered EO risks. Through the system, rapid EOD deployments are coordinated, usually within 72 hours of a community report. Residents can alert barangay officials, who relay information through Joint Peace and Security Teams to a hotline, enabling spot tasks in remote and insecure areas. At the core of this system is a **community-based early warning model**, relying on 300 trained local volunteers and FSD staff. Their presence helps increase credible reporting, supports safe tasking, and keeps weapon contamination early response operational despite difficult terrain and linguistic diversity.

For more information, check the Philippines Case Study (Torrecilla, 2025).

### Adapting emergency EOD response to drones and constant aerial threats (Ukraine)

In Ukraine, where first-person view drone attacks are combined with deliberate "double-hit" strikes, emergency EOD system responds to rapidly changing explosive threats affecting civilians and responders. State Emergency Services (SESU) teams conduct nationwide EOD spot tasks triggered through the 101 hotline, while the National Police secure or mark items when SESU is prioritizing life-saving rescue after attacks. Additionally, stakeholders integrate drone-risk procedures into movement planning, and protective measures such as anti-drone nets being installed along high-risk routes. Weapon contamination early response activities in this context are constantly adapting **to evolving aerial strike tactics**, requiring responders to anticipate and manage both ground and airborne threats simultaneously. weapon contamination early response systems must evolve continuously when the threat environment changes faster than traditional preparedness models.

For more information, check Ukraine Case Study (Vara Ruiz, 2025).

### Remote, data-driven NTS to prioritize UXO hotspots (Syria)

Faced with ongoing UXO incidents and severe access, security, and political constraints, Syria requires ways to identify hazardous areas before physical survey is feasible. The Carter Center applied open-source investigation to estimate UXO loads by analyzing conflict event data, modelling munition use, and producing heatmaps of "high-UXO density locations". These remote NTS outputs guide where field teams should survey first once access allows. In such access-constrained contexts, **remote, data-driven prioritization** can function as an early mechanism, even without physical access.

For more information, check Stall et al. (2022) [Mapping Unexploded Ordnance in Syria: Harnessing the Power of Open-Source Information](#).



## MAIN FACTORS AFFECTING THE ACTIVITY

### BARRIERS

- Volatile security environment and ongoing hostilities restricting access and limiting movement.
- Continuous and dynamic contamination, combined with an evolving threat environment.
- Severe data gaps, including lack of accurate, up-to-date information and constrained on-ground verification.
- Urban operational complexity, including dense debris, deep-buried aircraft bombs, high metal contamination, and secondary hazards.
- Weak or non-existent reporting systems.
- Political sensitivities, where EOD operations may be perceived as aligned with one conflict party.
- Funding shortages and lack of dedicated standby financing.
- Regulatory and bureaucratic barriers leading to delays in importing EOD equipment.
- Insufficient operational capacity.

### ENABLERS

- Prepositioned EOD technical personnel and assets enabling rapid activation and deployment when access opens.
- Strong community liaison and acceptance mechanisms.
- Inter-agency and civil-military coordination structures, including formal working groups.
- Humanitarian dialogue with conflict parties, which can facilitate access.
- Integration with EORE activities, helping mitigate risk-taking behaviours.
- Effective national authorities coordinating EOD spot tasks, and mobilizing international mechanisms.
- Access to innovative solutions and open-source information enabling remote approaches.
- National EOD capacity and accumulated operational experience, allowing operational continuity and improved risk anticipation.



## MAIN LESSONS LEARNED

- ⇒ **Weapon contamination early response must remain strictly humanitarian and neutral**, particularly in asymmetric conflicts, to avoid perceptions of alignment with conflict parties and ensure continued acceptance (GICHD, 2021).
- ⇒ **When physical access is constrained, innovative remote approaches can provide actionable early prioritization.** Remote assessments enable risk-based planning and identification of hazardous areas, in non-accessible locations (Riza and Mathewson, 2024; Stall et al., 2022).
- ⇒ **Community engagement is one of the main components**, both for credible reporting and for safe implementation of weapon contamination early response activities (MAG, 2020). Local intermediaries strengthen reporting chains, ensure safer passage of information, and bridge trust gaps between communities and security actors, especially in low-trust settings like *(the Philippines Case Study - Torrecilla, 2025)*.
- ⇒ **Temporary marking must be treated as a risk-reduction tool**, and should not be assumed as inherently protective. Marking can unintentionally attract civilians, signal objects of value to armed actors, or be easily removed or altered, sometimes increasing risk rather than reducing it (interview dated 07/10/2025).
- ⇒ **Effective coordination structures are essential, especially where state authorities are absent or non-functional.** Experiences from acute crises highlight that weapon contamination early response benefits from a dedicated coordination body when no mine action authority exists (interview dated 07/10/2025).
- ⇒ **Rapid deployment has inherent limits and faster mobilization cannot fully compensate for active-conflict risk.** Weapon contamination early response actors must be realistic about acceptable threat thresholds and recognize that improvements to speed are constrained by the security risks (interview dated 07/10/2025).
- ⇒ **Weapon contamination early response must be embedded in iterative emergency response systems rather than treated as standalone**, especially under continuous or recurrent attack patterns (*Ukraine Case Study - Vara Ruiz, 2025*).
- ⇒ **Weapon contamination early response should strengthen early contamination data generation**, as early datasets enable route prioritization during movements, prevention of incidents, and support later humanitarian mine action activities.



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# SHELTERS AND OTHER PROTECTIVE INFRASTRUCTURES



## OVERVIEW

### What is it?

Shelters and other protective infrastructures: Construction of shelters, security upgrades and protective modifications to existing civilian infrastructure. Measures may include reinforcing windows and walls, installing fencing and fortifying compounds, and stockpiling and storage of essential supplies for sheltering. Shelters can take the form of internal safe rooms, separate above-the-ground shelters or underground shelters, and may be either single-use or repurposed multi-use spaces (i.e. classrooms, community facilities...).

### Purpose

Reduce exposure to imminent violence-related risks during conflict, including blast effects, shock waves, debris and collapsing infrastructures, and, where technically equipped, from chemical, biological and radiological hazards.



## IN PRACTICE

**Shelter and other protective infrastructures** may involve a combination of measures that vary by context but commonly integrate the **identification of suitable underground spaces, buildings, or safe rooms** that can offer a basic level of protection from explosive weapons (Smilowitz et al., 2006). Where feasible, actors may undertake **structural construction or reinforcement**, selecting materials such as reinforced concrete or building envelopes designed to absorb blast energy and withstand pressure effects (FOCP, 2023). In some settings, **passive security measures**, including the use of sandbags against walls and windows, are supported through material provision when appropriate for schools, hospitals, or other civilian facilities (interview dated 27/10/2025). Other contexts may draw on guidance that outlines required ground depths and structural configurations, and adapt them for community-led construction using earth or other basic materials when more sophisticated options are not available (interview dated 13/10/2025). Additional elements often include **environmental control**, such as reinforcing doors and windows and rearranging unsecured furniture to minimize secondary injury from blast-induced movement (Hansen et al., 2025). Once established, shelters typically require **regular maintenance**, along with **mapping and clear communication of shelter locations** to the population. Implementation is usually supported by **information sharing** on shelter characteristics, reinforcement options, and context-specific guidance on when and how civilians should take shelter (see further in [Risk communication](#)). These practices are often complemented by **early warning systems**, which help ensure civilians receive timely alerts indicating when sheltering measures should be activated.

### Main threats the activity is protecting from:

- Direct impacts from conventional and unconventional weapons.
- Blast effects.
- Falling debris and structural collapse.
- Nuclear, biological, and chemical hazards, when designed with appropriate NBC filtration systems cleaning contaminated outside air.

### Who implements it:

- Government authorities are usually the primary actors responsible for formal shelters
- Civil protection mechanisms, where they exist.
- Department of Defense and/or army.
- Self-organized community groups.
- Technical expertise is provided by engineers and architects.
- Building owners (for private shelters), medical organizations (for hospitals), school administrations.
- Peacebuilding and protection organizations.
- Supported by the education and shelter clusters in some contexts.

**Communities' involvement:** Communities and civilians are engaged primarily through **information sharing on sheltering guidance**, including preparedness messaging that encourages emergency planning, stockpiling essential supplies, and developing contingency strategies for imminent violence (CSC Dovidka, 2024; FOCP, 2023). Their involvement strengthens **community-level planning** for structural reinforcement and ongoing maintenance, especially in contexts where State systems are overstretched or unable to support these functions. **Households, CBOs, NGOs, and private enterprises** usually drive local planning, construction, fundraising, and sustained management. Civilians can further contribute by **participating in organized sheltering drills**, which enhance readiness and reinforce safe behaviours during attacks (Wei et al., 2020).

- ❑ **Conduct threat analysis** based on the specific types of weapons present in the context.
- ❑ **Select suitable shelter sites in advance**, ensuring proximity to the population expected to use them.
- ❑ **Map location of shelter locations and share the mapping with the population**, including whether the shelters are inclusive and accessible.
- ❑ **Develop a construction and reinforcement plan** with clear design criteria, integrating structural design requirements, human factors, internal environmental conditions, and accessibility for individuals with specific needs.
- ❑ **Implement construction or reinforcement works**, including structural upgrades, protective modifications to walls and windows, and the use of sandbags or concrete reinforcement materials.
- ❑ **Stockpile emergency supplies** sufficient for the required sheltering period, including food, water, sanitation items, first aid kits, blankets, communication devices (radios, phones), flashlights, and spare batteries.
- ❑ **Train the population** on emergency planning and conduct regular drills and exercises to familiarize civilians with sheltering procedures.

- Safe site selection and mapping. (geospatial analysis, inclusion/accessibility).
- Shelter engineering and inclusive design.
- Logistics and contingency stock management.
- Housing adaptations.



## RESOURCES

### Guidance:

FEMA (2006) [Safe Rooms and Shelters: Protecting People Against Terrorist Attacks](#).  
 FOCP Switzerland (2023) [Shelters: their purpose, construction and utilisation](#).  
 Save the Children (2024) [Safe Schools 2.0 Action Pack 3: Safer School Facilities](#).

Ukraine Shelter Cluster (2022) [NFI Family kits for bomb shelters](#).

Ukraine Child Protection AoR (2023) [Child friendly space guidance](#).

### Not specifically for conflict:

IFRC (2011) [Shelter safety handbook](#)



## ACTIVITY IN CONTEXT

### Community-led adaptation and accessibility of shelters (Ukraine)

The widespread use of explosive weapons and repeated shelling in Ukraine since the full-scale invasion, especially in urban and frontline areas, created an urgent need for accessible and reliable shelters to keep civilians safe. Shelters were implemented through a mix of upgraded basements, underground metro spaces, above-ground concrete or modular units, and household-level safe rooms. Communities, civil society groups and local networks play a central role in identifying, repairing, and maintaining shelters, while authorities integrated shelter requirements into schools and other essential services. A key aspect in Ukraine is the **strong community involvement**, which often compensates for gaps in formal infrastructure, especially in rural areas. Residents furnish basements, ensure access for vulnerable groups, and coordinate with authorities when humanitarian access is limited. Furthermore, **accessibility** audits by organizations like Fight for Right revealed widespread structural and accessibility barriers, reinforcing the need for binding technical standards. Monitoring and mapping tools, as well as cross-cluster coordination, were identified as enablers to ensure shelters are usable, accessible and safe.

*For more information, check Ukraine Case Study (Vara Ruiz, 2025).*

### Engineering and technical fortification of medical facilities (Syria)

Systematic airstrikes on health facilities during the conflict in Syria created an acute need for infrastructure capable of withstanding heavy blast impacts. Implementation centered on technically **engineered solutions**, including constructing fully underground hospitals, reinforcing basements with thick concrete, sandbags and multi-layer perimeter walls, and modifying building envelopes by removing or fortifying windows, reinforcing external walls, and restructuring internal layouts to reduce blast transmission. These measures enabled emergency medical services, such as operating theatres, to function safely even during active bombardment. However, implementation highlighted the **technical complexity and resource intensity** of such protective construction. Effective sheltering required precise engineering assessments, specialized material selection, and

tailored design criteria adapted to each site's structural weaknesses and threat profile. High costs and the need for expert-led construction were major constraints, yet the demonstrated protective effects, particularly the absence of reported staff fatalities inside fully underground facilities, underscore the importance of adhering to high technical standards in high-threat environments.

For more information, check *The Syria Campaign* (2017) [Saving Lives Underground: The Case for Underground Hospitals in Syria](#).

#### Household bunkers and safe rooms as community-led protection (Afghanistan)

Civilians in Kandahar, Kunduz, Baghlan and Nangarhar faced persistent armed clashes, with regular IED attacks and shifting frontlines, forcing them to seek ways to survive fighting occurring inside their own villages. In response, families constructed simple **household bunkers and safe rooms**, often dug into the ground or reinforced within existing homes, and those without such spaces sheltered in mosques instead. These structures were entirely community-built, using available materials and local labor, with no external engineering support. In contexts where formal protection systems are absent, these sheltering initiatives emerged **spontaneously as fully community-led**. Civilians pragmatically defined protection as the ability to keep themselves, their property, and their livelihoods safe, leading to low-cost, locally improvised sheltering solutions suited to their immediate needs. While effective in offering a basic refuge during intense fighting, these shelters faced major barriers, including the lack of technical guidance, limited resources, and continued exposure to harm when clashes occurred directly around homes. Yet, community cohesion and shared belief in local, self-devised protection measures served as key enablers, allowing rapid construction and widespread adoption.

For more information, check CIVIC (2016) [Saving Ourselves: Security Transition and Impact on Civilian Protection in Afghanistan](#).

#### Upgrading school compounds for conflict resilience (Nigeria)

Schools in conflict-affected northern states faced escalating attacks, abductions, and growing exposure to natural hazards, requiring urgent improvements to the physical safety of learning environments. **Minimum Standards for Safe Schools (MSSS) were developed and integrated into the national education system** to reduce children's exposure to violence and hazards. Implementation focused on security upgrades and protective modifications, such as securing perimeters with fencing and lockable gates, improving building safety (unobstructed pathways, functional toilets, ramps), and installing basic safety equipment such as fire extinguishers and CCTV cameras. These upgrades are carried out through government authorities, in collaboration with UNICEF and monitored using a dedicated MSSS assessment tool.

For more information, check UNICEF (2023) [Minimum Standards for Safe Schools in Nigeria](#).



## MAIN FACTORS AFFECTING THE ACTIVITY

### BARRIERS

- Low political prioritization of protective infrastructure in peacetime.
- High technical complexity, requiring engineering expertise, and material costs.
- Structural funding limitations due to the split between humanitarian and development financing.
- Rapidly evolving threat profiles, including changing munition types and adversary adaptation.
- Lack of baseline hardened infrastructures and structural integrity in many contexts.
- Inadequate accessibility and inclusion features.
- Recurrent damage from ongoing hostilities, which can lead to repeated reconstruction needs.
- Insufficient funding for maintenance.

### ENABLERS

- Availability of standards established by legal and policy frameworks.
- Strong local governance and leadership structures.
- Access to effective protective materials and construction solutions, including locally available.
- Community engagement and preparedness culture.
- Functional early warning systems that trigger timely sheltering during attacks.
- Strategic placement and multi-use facilities that increase cost-effectiveness and usability.
- Capacity to rehabilitate and availability of flexible funding for community protection initiatives.
- Information systems and mapping tools that inform communities about shelter locations.
- Accumulated conflict experience allowing context-specific strategies.



## MAIN LESSONS LEARNED

- ⇒ **Protective infrastructure is highly context-dependent.** The evidence of effectiveness primarily comes from high-resource settings where hardened structures and underground facilities already exist. In contrast, in low-resource environments, the feasibility and protective value of shelters remain less documented and may be characterized by limited engineering capacity, absence of pre-existing hardened structures, and constrained maintenance systems (Ukraine Case Study - Vara Ruiz, 2025; FOCP Switzerland, 2023).
- ⇒ **Despite high initial costs, hardened infrastructure is cost-effective over time**, as reinforced construction prevents repeated destruction and reduces long-term reconstruction needs (Fallon and Kieval, 2017). Comprehensive fortification dramatically reduced casualties and ensured operational continuity (The Syria Campaign, 2017).
- ⇒ **Regular maintenance and readiness protocols are indispensable**, ensuring equipment, supplies, and structural elements remain functional when attacks occur (FOCP, 2023). Continuous monitoring is also essential, as even upgraded shelters can be damaged by repeated shelling, as evidenced in Ukraine (Ukraine Case Study - Vara Ruiz, 2025).
- ⇒ **Extremely short warning-to-impact windows to take shelter**, often only 2–4 minutes, underscore that shelters must be **immediately accessible**, well-signed, and known to the population (FOCP, 2023; Shyshkin and Pankeieva, 2024).
- ⇒ **Cross-sector technical coordination is essential**, as protective infrastructure intersects engineering, EOD, community preparedness, and social services. Practitioners explicitly call for collective, expert-driven, cross-organizational design and evaluation (interview dated 13/10/2025).
- ⇒ **Protective infrastructure must be embedded in wider systems**, not treated as isolated assets. In some contexts, the safest shelters were embedded in health, education, and community systems (e.g., hospital, schools, metro stations, child-friendly spaces), ensuring predictable access and supervision (Ukraine Case Study - Vara Ruiz, 2025).
- ⇒ **Community engagement is a recurring determinant of shelter effectiveness**, especially in contexts where state systems are overstretched. Communities can help identify feasible shelter spaces, maintain accessibility, and ensure inclusion of vulnerable groups, including older persons and persons with disabilities (Ukraine Case Study - Vara Ruiz, 2025). Additionally, **locally driven protective infrastructure can emerge where state protection is weak**, with solutions that can be rapidly deployable and low-cost (CIVIC, 2016).
- ⇒ **National standards, laws and monitoring frameworks are essential for institutionalizing safe infrastructure** (Ukraine Case Study - Vara Ruiz, 2025; UNICEF, 2023).



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# EVACUATIONS AND RELOCATIONS



## OVERVIEW

### What is it?

Individual, group or mass relocation of civilians who are under significant and imminent threat in a conflict setting, to secondary locations where they can be more effectively protected. These can include organized humanitarian evacuations or civilian-led movements. The process encompasses preparedness, planning and information before movement; safe, organized and inclusive transport during relocation; and continued protection and basic assistance after arrival in the relocation sites.

### Purpose

Support civilian movement from areas where they face immediate harm, and enable them to reach more secure locations, while preserving voluntary decision-making and civilian character.



## IN PRACTICE

**Evacuations and relocations** encompass three main categories of activities (Barbelet, 2025; Chatam House – Gillard, 2024; NRC, 2016):

- **Evacuation under IHL:** These require parties to armed conflicts to relocate specific protected people, such as the wounded and sick members of armed forces or prisoners of war or strongly encourage the relocation of particularly vulnerable civilians in besieged or encircled areas.
- **Autonomous evacuations** (or self-evacuation): Situations where civilians move autonomously from areas affected by hostilities.
- **Humanitarian evacuations:** Situations where humanitarian organizations support the organized relocation of civilians.

*NB: None of these categories are encompassing compulsory evacuations.*

Evacuations usually unfold through a series of interconnected steps that vary by context but generally begin with a **risk analysis and specific needs assessment**, conducted through consultation with affected populations to understand threats, vulnerabilities, and support requirements (Protection Cluster Ukraine, 2024). Civilians must receive **clear and accessible information** on the evacuation process, associated risks, and the services available after movement. This enables them to make **informed decisions**, including whether to consent to evacuation or decide to stay (NRC, 2024; Protection Cluster Ukraine, 2024). Once needs and preferences are identified, actors can engage in **negotiations with parties to the conflict** to secure safe passage, guarantees, or operational conditions for movement (IOM, 2016). Planning then involves **transportation and logistics arrangements**, as well as ensuring the provision of essential services before, during, and after the evacuation, including assistance, shelter, health, and protection support (GPC, 2014). In certain contexts – particularly evacuations conducted under IHL – there may be a requirement to **verify the civilian character** of those being evacuated to ensure demilitarization. Humanitarian organizations do not conduct screening or remove weapons (Chatham House – Gillard, 2024). Implementation requires **careful monitoring of the evacuation movement**, ensuring adherence to agreed conditions and responding to emerging protection risks. After arrival, actors must support the **continuity of services and follow-up assistance**, maintaining protection monitoring and facilitating access to durable solutions (GPC, 2014).

### **Focus – Principles of humanitarian evacuations (extract Barbelet, 2025, adapted from UNHCR, 2016)**

- Using evacuations as a life-saving measure of last resort.
- Engaging meaningfully with communities at risk to ensure they have the information they require, and to assess risks and identify specific needs.
- Respecting the voluntary nature of the evacuation and ensuring informed consent.
- Preserving the civilian character of the evacuation.
- Enabling a multi-sectoral response.
- Selecting safe and secure relocation sites.
- Preserving family unity and mitigating the risk of family separation.

- Promoting the right to return once conditions to return are conducive.
- Mobilising support to ensure minimum standards and respect of humanitarian principles.
- Engaging in a holistic process requiring actions before, during and after evacuations.

#### Main threats the activity is protecting from:

- Imminent threats of violence or attack.
- Severe or protracted deprivation.
- Inability to move safely through a militarized or EO contaminated environment.

#### Who implements it:

- Government authorities, which are the primary responsible per IHL.
- ICRC, Protection cluster, UN agencies, INGOs and NGOs
- Local CSOs and volunteers network (in practice).
- Military and peacekeeping forces, in certain contexts.

**Communities' involvement:** Communities and civilians should be engaged throughout all phases of evacuations and relocations. Movements must remain **voluntary**, based on the **full and informed consent** of those affected, who require clear information on risks, conditions at the destination, and prospects for return (NRC, 2024). **Community committees are often the first actors to alert at-risk populations and initiate immediate movement** when violence erupts (interview dated 13/10/2025). Affected populations should be **actively consulted and involved** in assessment, planning, and movement procedures, including the identification of safe relocation sites (ICRC–InterAction, 2015). Civilian participation is also essential to identifying **specific needs and protection risks**, especially among vulnerable groups, ensuring tailored service provision (NRC, 2016). In some cases, evacuations or relocations are **initiated directly by communities themselves**, with humanitarian and state actors responding to community requests for assistance or safe passage.

#### Summary – How to prepare

- **Develop scenario-based contingency plans** that anticipate a multiple escalation scenarios and define evacuation or relocation as a *last resort* early response option, triggered only when remaining on site exposes civilians to greater harm.
- **Establish SOPs and agreed procedures in advance**, clearly defining responsibilities, decision-making authority, communication lines, and coordination mechanisms across government, humanitarian actors, and local partners.
- **Mobilize resources proactively**, including transport assets, staffing, medical supplies, personal protective equipment, fuel, and logistics capacity. Preparedness should include pre-arranged funding streams, contingency budgets, and **rapid disbursement mechanisms** to enable immediate activation.
- **Prepare information and awareness materials** explaining risks, early warning signals, potential triggers for evacuation, expected procedures, rights and entitlements, and available services, ensuring accessibility and tailoring to diverse audience and communication channels.
- **Build team readiness and capacity through regular testing and exercises**, including crisis communication rehearsals, coordination drills, crowd management practice, stress-handling simulations, and scenario-based tabletop exercises involving at-risk populations.

#### Activity-specific competencies

- Contingency and scenario-based planning, including drills and simulations.
- Protocol development.
- Logistics, rapid fund mobilization, and financial preparedness.
- Psychological first aid, first aid, safeguarding.
- Communication design and dissemination.
- Specific support for vulnerable groups



## RESOURCES

#### Guidance:

NRC (2016) [Considerations for planning mass evacuations of civilians in conflict settings](#).  
 NRC (2024) [Explainer : Evacuations](#).  
 UNHCR (2007) [Guidance note : Humanitarian Evacuations](#).  
 UNHCR (2016) [Humanitarian Evacuations in Violence and Armed Conflict](#).

#### Training materials:

CIVIC Ukraine (2025) [Evacuation simulation training](#). Oldenhuis, H., with Furnari, E., Carriere, R., Wagstrom, T., Frisch, A., and Duncan, M. – [Nonviolent Peaceforce \(2021\) Unarmed civilian protection strengthening civilian capacities to protect civilians against violence](#)



## ACTIVITY IN CONTEXT

### Phased and coordinated evacuation architecture (Ukraine)

In response to escalating hostilities and repeated civilian displacement from frontline and temporarily occupied areas, humanitarian stakeholders in Ukraine, supported by the Protection Cluster, established a **structured and principled civilian evacuation system** to ensure safe movement and sustained assistance for at-risk populations. This model follows a **before/during/after approach** to ensure evacuations are voluntary, dignified, and protective. Before evacuations, awareness on the process is provided to at-risk populations and evacuation simulations are organized to test coordination, and communication between authorities, emergency services, and communities. During evacuations, early warnings are disseminated to populations for activation, and transfer is implemented. When movement is ongoing, continuous protection monitoring is implemented, while psychological first aid and support for vulnerable groups are provided. After evacuation, immediate assistance and information are provided about rights and available services, and upon needs referrals are organized. Temporary accommodation is also provided at reception and transit centers. This multi-sectoral model ensures continuity of protection beyond movement and physical relocation.

For more information, check *Ukraine Case Study* (Vara Ruiz, 2025).

### Life-saving relocations as a measure of last resort (Central African Republic)

During the sectarian violence in 2013–2014, Muslim communities in western CAR became trapped in besieged enclaves facing imminent risk of mass killings. When other protection options had been exhausted, humanitarian actors, under the leadership of the Protection Cluster, organized escorted relocation convoys to safer areas. These Movements required negotiations, international military escorts, rapid logistical arrangements, and coordination across protection, operational and political actors, despite acute insecurity. This case illustrates how relocations can serve as a life-saving measures of last resort when on site civilian presence becomes untenable. In this context, strong humanitarian leadership enabled decisions in a politically sensitive environment.

For more information, check Zapater (2014) [Humanitarian evacuations in the Central African Republic](#).

### Community-led protection mechanisms enabling safer civilian movement (Myanmar)

In northern Myanmar, escalating armed clashes and widespread displacement have heightened the need for protective movement and organized community responses. Local structures, such as the Kachin Humanitarian Concern Committee and **village-based early warning–early response committees, coordinated population movements**, supported returns to relatively safer areas, and disseminated real-time alerts that inform decisions to relocate. These mechanisms relied on focal points who collect and verify incident reports, activate communication channels across villages, and guide households on when and how to move.

For more information, check *Creating Safer Space* (2025) [The Diffusion of Protection Norms and Practices in Kachin and Northern Shan, Myanmar](#).

### Negotiated safe routes during urban warfare (Iraq)

During counter-ISIS operations in cities such as Mosul, civilians faced acute threats from crossfire, snipers, IEDs and deliberate obstruction of movement by ISIS. Iraqi Security Forces implemented a range of evacuation-like measures, including disseminating warnings, **designating escape routes, coordinating movements with frontline units**, and clearing explosive ordnance along the routes designated for evacuation. These efforts were complemented by direct communication with civilians, guidance on safer movement practices, and negotiations through community leaders to secure temporary passage in some areas.

For more information, check CIVIC (2019) [Policies and Practices to Protect Civilians: Lessons from ISF Operations Against ISIS in Urban Areas](#).



## MAIN FACTORS AFFECTING THE ACTIVITY

### BARRIERS

- Insufficient dissemination and operationalization of guidance, leading to inconsistent practice and weak preparedness.
- Political resistance to evacuations, where armed actors may refuse corridors or impose conditions.
- Serious protection risks, including the possibility that evacuations or relocations are misappropriated in ways that facilitate forced demographic change or practices amounting to de facto ethnic cleansing.
- Underfunding across the evacuation chain, especially for preparedness.
- Low public awareness of evacuation procedures.
- Lack of safe routes and transport capacity, including EO-contaminated or armed-groups-controlled roads.
- Secondary protection risks during evacuation, requiring high standards across all movement phases.
- Unstructured or spontaneous population movements.
- Severe security constraints, including convoy attacks, looting, and threats to evacuated areas or relocation sites.
- Communication barriers and delays that affect timely evacuation.
- Insufficient inclusion and accessibility in evacuation planning.

### ENABLERS

- Proactive engagement and contextual analysis, enabling informed decision-making, early identification of risks, and trust-building.
- Strong inter-agency coordination, including clear role distribution and communication channels.
- Community trust and self-organization.
- High-level leadership and political backing.
- Local coordination bodies and networks.
- Context-appropriate early warning and alert systems that enhance real-time awareness and enable timely movement.
- Adaptive frontline practices, such as targeted communication, guidance on escape routes and tactical coordination with security forces to open temporary corridors.
- Negotiation and dialogue with local leaders and armed actors, which can secure short windows for safe passage.
- Cross-sector operational coordination, to guarantee protection throughout movement, support logistics and ensure inclusive evacuation arrangements.



## MAIN LESSONS LEARNED

- ⇒ **Effective evacuations require advance planning**, including predefined resources, trained staff, and clear operational arrangements to mitigate additional protection risks (GPC, 2014; Barbelet, 2025).
- ⇒ **Civilian preferences and information needs must drive evacuation practice**. Civilians must be fully informed of risks, options, and conditions throughout the process, and their expressed preferences should guide decision-making (NRC, 2016; Barbelet, 2025).
- ⇒ **Evacuations require leadership and ownership at the level of humanitarian response management**, not a single sector such as protection (Barbelet, 2025; Protection Cluster Ukraine, 2024).
- ⇒ **Protection during evacuations extends beyond movement**. Without sustained assistance at relocation sites, early and unsafe returns are likely to happen. Funding must cover the full process, from preparedness and transport to reception and long-term services (Barbelet, 2025).
- ⇒ **Systematic documentation of practices enhances learning**. Recording decisions, including “go/no-go” determinations, and compiling case studies supports more consistent, contextualized guidance and institutional learning (Barbelet, 2025).
- ⇒ **Evacuations are not always the only viable protection strategy**. Alternatives such as emergency mediation may allow communities to remain safely where they are (Barbelet, 2025).
- ⇒ **Movement negotiations must begin early and continue throughout the process**. Securing corridors or temporary passage requires early and sustained engagement with armed actors (interviews dated 03/10/2025 & 06/10/2025).
- ⇒ **Spontaneous movement patterns must be integrated into planning**. Civilians often self-evacuate before responders arrive. Effective planning should integrate spontaneous early movement behaviours, not only formal mechanisms (interview dated 20/08/2025).
- ⇒ **Formal coordination architectures help strengthen national systems**, by ensuring that institutions involved in evacuations have clear mandates, and the process are standardized. That being said, evacuations

must remain voluntary, non-discriminatory and principled. Continuity of protection and assistance post-relocation is essential to prevent new harms (Ukraine Case Study - Vara Ruiz, 2025).

- ⇒ **Urban warfare requires adaptive evacuation models.** When full convoy-based evacuations are impossible, facilitated escape routes and partial safe-passage arrangements remain life-saving but require tailored planning, communication and negotiation. Civilian perceptions of all armed actors must shape route and communication strategies (CIVIC, 2019).
- ⇒ **Anticipatory simulations improve readiness and inclusion.** Simulations strengthen activation protocols, communication flows, triggers and clarity in roles and responsibilities before displacement occurs.



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# SAFE SPACES AND PROTECTED AREAS



## OVERVIEW

### What is it?

Designated locations where civilians can temporarily gather or relocate during conflict or attacks to reduce exposure to violence. These may include specific types of infrastructure (schools, religious buildings, community structures), spaces dedicated for the protection of certain categories of population (women, children, persons with disabilities, etc....) or humanitarian-established protected areas and safe zones, when clearly identified, communicated, and managed.

### Purpose

Provide safe temporary refuge away from active threats, enabling civilians to maintain access to essential assistance and support while reducing the likelihood of direct harm.



## IN PRACTICE

**Focus – Clarifying terminologies and related framework** (Birnie and Welsh, 2018; Briggs, 2017; Chatham House - Gillard, 2024)

A range of terms are used to describe areas intended to shield civilians from the effects of conflict, including “**safe zones**,” “**safe havens**,” “**safe areas**,” “**buffer zones**,” or “**protected areas**”. While often used interchangeably in public discourse, these terms have distinct meanings and legal implications.

- **Protected zones** have a specific basis in international humanitarian law (IHL). They involve formalized arrangements grounded in IHL provisions and generally require the explicit consent of conflict belligerents. Classical forms include hospital zones and localities, as well as neutralized and demilitarized zones, which are geographically defined areas intended to remain free from military action.
- In contrast, some zones labelled as “**protected zones**” are not agreed by the parties to the conflict but are instead imposed or enforced by the UN Security Council. These arrangements draw inspiration from the Geneva Conventions’ concept of safety zones but do not meet IHL criteria and are sometimes described as “**secure humanitarian areas**”.
- A distinct model is represented by **protection of civilians (PoC) sites**, which emerge spontaneously when civilians seek refuge within or next to UN peacekeeping bases, such as in South Sudan. PoC sites are considered in extremis measures of last resort, created not through pre-negotiated agreements but through immediate operational necessity.

**Safe spaces and protected areas** are established through a sequence of context-specific steps that typically begin with **obtaining authorization or consent from belligerents**, once other protection measures have been exhausted (NRC, 2024). This process requires determining the **legal basis** for the zone, whether grounded in IHL or established through an enforced arrangement, and conducting a **protection risk analysis** to identify threats faced by civilians, access barriers, and the most appropriate safe space locations, ideally early in the conflict to maximize preventive effect (NRC, 2024; Birnie and Welsh, 2018). Once the rationale and location are defined, actors undertake **detailed planning and preparation**. This includes delimiting the geographic area, usually small, clearly bounded, distant from military objectives, and not positioned in areas of strategic significance, and estimating expected occupancy (Gillard, 2017). At this stage, parties formalize agreements (under IHL) or secure the necessary resources and mandates for enforced zones (NRC, 2024), while also developing contingency plans, response protocols, and operating procedures for protection and service delivery (Briggs, 2017). Establishing **coordination and governance arrangements**, including an appropriate management structure, enables effective oversight and operational cohesion (Briggs, 2017). Implementation involves establishing **security measures**, such as weapons-free policies, screening procedures, or even disarmament, demobilization, and reintegration (DDR) -related actions, while maintaining internal law and order, engaging and informing affected communities, and ensuring that assistance is delivered in line with humanitarian standards (Briggs, 2017). Finally, safe spaces and protected areas require a carefully planned

**exit strategy and pathway to durable solutions**, ensuring departures are voluntary, informed, safe, and dignified, and avoiding any premature returns while protection risks remain (Briggs, 2017).

**Main threats the activity is protecting from:**

- Exposure to hostilities, including attacks and shelling.
- Mass atrocity crimes.
- Forced displacement.
- Forced recruitment and abductions.

**Who implements it:**

- Belligerent parties (through formal agreement).
- Often supported by the ICRC.
- Can be enforced by multilateral intervention or third country forces or UN Peacekeeping forces.
- Sometimes supported by CMCoord mechanism.
- UNHCR with the coordination of various NGOs.

**Communities' involvement:** Communities and civilians should be considered as central to the functioning and legitimacy of safe spaces. **Movement into safe zones must be voluntary**, and civilians should receive clear and sufficient information to make an informed and autonomous decision about relocation (NRC, 2024). Within safe spaces, communities continue to rely on and further develop **self-protection mechanisms and coping strategies**, which humanitarian actors may support (UNHCR, 2021). Humanitarian workers and peacekeepers should **engage directly with communities** to understand perceptions, concerns, and existing protection practices. **Protection monitoring networks** inside the safe spaces help to identify changes in risks and capacities (UNHCR, 2021). Civilians may also contribute to **establishing criteria for relocation areas and site planning process**, ensuring that protection concerns and community priorities guide the design of safe spaces (UNHCR, 2021).

Summary – How to prepare

- Conduct early contingency planning**, anticipating that protected sites may emerge spontaneously or be formally requested. Prepare comprehensive plans to provide physical protection even when this falls outside existing mandates.
- Engage in proactive negotiation and community consultation**, working with communities, local forces, and – where relevant – international forces to shape context-specific protection arrangements and ensure community perspectives inform design and feasibility.
- Develop internal guidelines and mission-specific SOPs** to clarify roles, responsibilities, coordination arrangements, and links to humanitarian clusters.
- Train peacekeepers and UN police, where applicable**, using regular, scenario-based exercises to strengthen readiness for protection tasks and effective management of protected areas.
- Plan and resource appropriate security measures**, including weapons-free zones, reinforced perimeters, and screening procedures. Where necessary, develop early arrangements for DDR-related processes.
- Ensure humanitarian actor readiness**, including internal coordination, risk analysis, and clarification of organizational roles and limits should involvement in safe zones become necessary.
- Map safe spaces governance and coordination structures in advance**, identifying potential leads, decision-making bodies, civil-military coordination, and mechanisms for community participation.
- Pre-establish community engagement mechanisms**, ensuring channels exist to gather perspectives, assess concerns, and co-develop relocation criteria or protection measures with affected populations.

Activity-specific competencies

- International humanitarian law.
- Negotiation skills and advocacy.
- Access management for safety.
- SOP development and role clarification.
- Protection of civilians planning and inter-cluster coordination.



## RESOURCES

### Guidance:

Norwegian Refugee Council (NRC) (2024) [Explainer: Safe Zones](#).  
 UNDPO (2020) [The protection of civilians in UN peacekeeping](#).  
 UNHCR (2021) [UNHCR Toolkit: Humanitarian Protection in Armed Conflict](#).  
 OCHA (2020) [Guidance Note on OCHA CMCoord Support to Protection Outcomes](#).

HD (2006) - [Proactive Presence : Field strategies for civilian protection](#)

### Training materials:

UNDPO (2017) [Comprehensive Protection of Civilians for Military Units](#).



## ACTIVITY IN CONTEXT

### Strengthening safe spaces through legal frameworks and community negotiation (Philippines)

In conflict-affected areas of Mindanao, humanitarian and local actors support the establishment of community-managed safe spaces, including gun-free zones, negotiated "fighting boundaries", and women- and child-friendly spaces. These safe areas are implemented through community negotiation with armed actors, unarmed civilian protection accompaniment, and the activation of protected spaces mandated under BARMM and national legislation. These safe spaces are formalized through legal and policy frameworks such as the Bangsamoro Disaster Response Plan, the Children's Emergency Relief and Protection Act, and BARMM's IDP Law. They require authorities to ensure dignified, gender- and diversity-responsive protective environments. These measures are strengthened by community ownership, which enhances adherence to demilitarization commitments and reduces the risk of politicization.

*For more information, check Philippines Case Study (Torrecilla, 2025).*

### Community-led safe spaces and self-protection mechanisms (Cameroon)

Amid the pervasive attacks on civilians in the Northwest and Southwest regions, communities have had to rely on self-organized strategies to reduce exposure to violence. **Safe spaces are implemented informally through spontaneous relocation to perceived safer areas**, the use of communication networks for early warning, and community-based protection groups that coordinate sheltering, movement, and risk-mitigation practices. Local NGOs reinforce these efforts by facilitating training on security awareness, SGBV risk reduction, and collective decision-making. Safe spaces emerge as dynamic, community-defined protection practices rather than formally designated zones. Collective agency, family networks, and localized organizing efforts help sustain these protective environments despite limited external support. However, weakened social cohesion, intimidation by armed actors, and the inherent risks of such arrangements continue to constrain the scope and safety of these community-managed spaces.

*For more information, check Creating Safer Space (2025) [Exploring Unarmed Civilian Self-Protection in Cameroon's Anglophone Conflict](#).*

### Civilian character, security and governance measures in PoC sites (South Sudan)

Following widespread violence in 2013, civilians sought refuge within UNMISS bases, prompting the establishment of PoC sites as designated safe areas. These sites were implemented through strict perimeter security, with **weapons-free policies, screening procedures, and jointly managed humanitarian-peacekeeping arrangements** to maintain a protective environment. Over time, **internal governance structures** and ad hoc justice and security practices were introduced to address crime, resolve disputes, and preserve site safety. Maintaining the civilian character of protected areas requires robust demilitarization measures, clear security protocols, and tailored approaches to internal law and order.

*For more information, check Briggs (2017) [Protection of civilians sites: Lessons from South Sudan for future operations](#).*



## MAIN FACTORS AFFECTING THE ACTIVITY

### BARRIERS

- Political instrumentalization of protection, where states or international actors prioritize migration control, geopolitical leverage or political outcomes.
- Lack of consent from belligerents or states.
- Risk of escalation when zones are imposed without consent, heightening civilian exposure to retaliatory attacks.
- Non-binding nature of some safe spaces.
- Inability to obtain accurate, timely situational information.
- Secondary risks of drawing civilians toward perceived safe spaces.
- Limited resources, restricting the establishment, maintenance, and accessibility of dignified, gender- and diversity-sensitive safe spaces.
- Politicization and contestation of humanitarian spaces, which can compromise neutrality, restrict access and deter NGO or community presence.
- Mandate ambiguity and legal grey zones.
- Risks of militarization and erosion of civilian character.
- Overly site-centric responses, drawing attention and resources from equally urgent needs outside designated safe areas.
- Exclusion of vulnerable groups due to spontaneous, uncoordinated protective actions.

### ENABLERS

- Explicit consent for demilitarization and respect for protected areas.
- Credible enforcement capacity when consent is absent, and military capability to deter violations.
- Equitable burden-sharing mechanisms and operational support from the broader international community.
- Early establishment of safe areas, maximizing preventive impact on displacement patterns and enabling protective measures.
- Strategic location of safe areas around existing towns or functioning local economies.
- Robust national and regional normative frameworks, which clarify responsibilities and guide operationalization.
- Strong coordination platforms, including humanitarian clusters, regional teams and mission structures that align authorities, CSOs, peacekeeping components and humanitarian partners.
- Integration of community-driven protection mechanisms.
- Capacity-building and accompaniment.
- Mandated protection frameworks within peace operations, such as clear Protection of Civilians mandates, adapted technical guidelines, localized protection plans, and regular scenario-based training for troops and UN police.



## MAIN LESSONS LEARNED

- ⇒ **Safe areas can create a false sense of security**, leading displaced populations to neglect self-protection behaviours, and rely solely on peacekeepers – a reliance that can become fatal when armed protection fails and/or create false expectations (Briggs, 2017; UNHCR, 2021).
- ⇒ **Safe areas cannot replace the right to asylum**. Some States may misuse safe zones to justify border closures and frame them as an 'internal protection alternative', but protection inside safe areas is complementary to, not a substitute for, international asylum obligations (Ni Ghraíne, 2020).
- ⇒ **Respect of civilian character is strongest when boundaries are clearly defined, and demilitarization is strictly enforced**. Any hostile act launched from the zone risks turning it into a target (Birnie and Welsh, 2018; Chatam House – Gillard, 2024).
- ⇒ **Protection of safe areas requires appropriate resources**. Enforced safe areas require adequate peacekeeping and/or military capacity, including personnel or logistics. Under-resourced zones risk becoming ineffective and may fail to provide the intended safety (Chatam House – Gillard, 2024).
- ⇒ **Establishing a safe area must not lead to narratives that absolve conflict parties of obligations toward civilians outside the zone**. Humanitarians have to maintain equal attention to needs beyond its perimeter (NRC, 2024; UNHCR, 2021).
- ⇒ **Service provision in safe areas can be perceived as favoring parties to the conflict**, especially if residents are from opposition groups. Humanitarians must sustain an **independent protection analysis and strategy**, separate from UN missions, to avoid mandate conflicts and political influence (Briggs, 2017).
- ⇒ Closed sites require structured security procedures to maintain safety, address SGBV, prevent theft, manage intercommunal tensions, and uphold due process, ensuring law and order within the protected area (Gillard, 2017).

- ⇒ **Some “protected areas” emerge organically from population movements and conflict dynamics.** These enclave-like zones require context-specific engagement with communities, local and international actors, and/or forces (interview dated 28/10/2025).
- ⇒ **Protected sites can evolve into complex urban environments.** Over time, they may grow into de facto towns requiring sustained policing, administration, and management, particularly when armed actors attempt incursions (interview dated 28/10/2025).
- ⇒ **Clear criteria for exit must be defined from the outset,** and communicated transparently to affected populations, including what conditions would enable transition, handover or return (Briggs, 2017).
- ⇒ In case of responsibility handover to host authorities or armed actors, **transitions without guarantees risk to lead to source of harm** (Birnie and Welsh, 2018). Handover processes must preserve the civilian and humanitarian character of sites and mechanisms, including measures against militarization (UNHCR, 2021).



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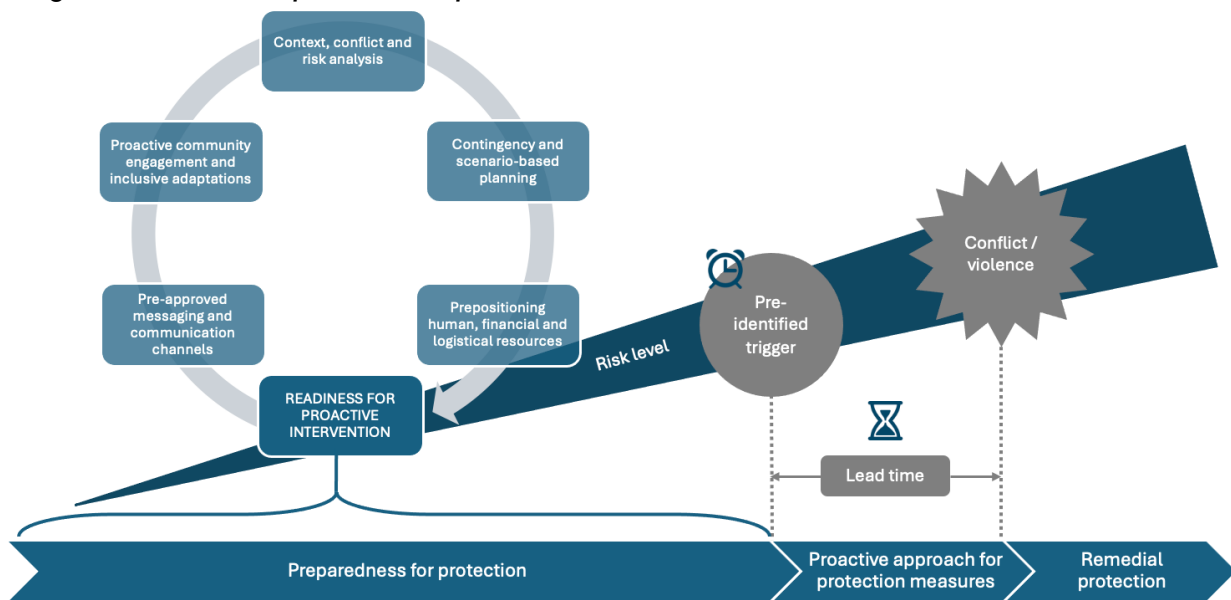
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# WHAT IT TAKES TO BE PROACTIVE?

## SOME MINIMUM REQUIREMENTS

In contexts where violence can escalate within minutes, adopting a **proactive way of working** is essential to shift from reaction to anticipation. Such approach also requires a normative shift in humanitarian thinking. Preparedness efforts outlined below are not merely about prepositioning aid for delivery after violence; rather, a proactive approach to protection seeks to prepare at-risk populations to act before or at the earliest onset of violence, thereby minimizing civilian exposure to harm. Preparedness is essential to enable early and coordinated action when signs of violence emerge. Established systems, resources, and protocols allow local authorities, communities and protection actors to act quickly and collectively. Readiness should extend beyond analysis and planning, to include decision-making processes, communication systems, and community engagement mechanisms. These elements reduce hesitation and delays during the crucial minutes, hours, days when threats materialize, enabling protective anticipatory actions before violence fully escalates.

**Figure 3 - Minimum requirements for proactive intervention<sup>72</sup>**



**Note:** Most resources in this section are not drawn specifically from the protection sector, as the shift toward a more proactive way of working within protection is still in its early stages. Anticipatory action practitioners, particularly those working in disaster risk reduction, have been producing strong evidence, guidance, and tools that support a wide range of proactive, early, and anticipatory interventions. As a result, several of the guidance materials included here originate from other sectors and may require careful adaptation to align with protection considerations and measures.

For more information, check the following links:

- The Anticipation Hub [website](#), in particular the [Anticipatory Action in Conflict Practitioners' Group](#).
- The Risk-informed Early Action Partnership (REAP) [Resources page](#).
- Climate Center, Anticipation Hub, IWMI, CGIAR (2025) [Toolkit for Anticipatory Action in Fragile, Conflict- and Violence-affected settings](#).

<sup>72</sup> Adapted from REAP (2025) [The REAP compendium of visualizations on early warning and early action](#) – Fig. 13, p. 27.

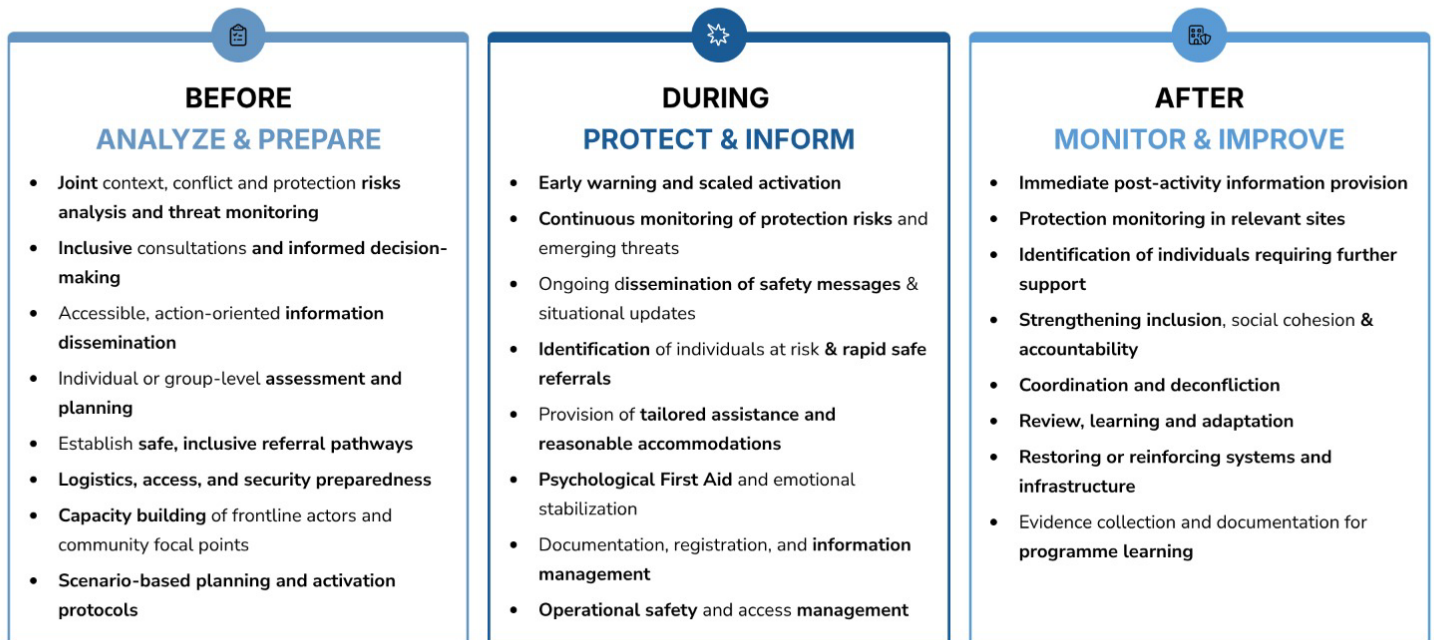
### Adopting a phased approach

A phased approach means that protection measures consider the “**before, during and after**” of conflict or attacks, rather than treating them as isolated action. Its purpose is to shift emphasis from reactive crisis response to more continuous readiness and resilience. By ensuring that civilians are informed, equipped, and supported ahead of threats, it reduces the need for last-minute action that is often risky, confusing, and less effective. It also helps authorities, humanitarian actors, and communities coordinate more systematically, strengthening their collective ability to anticipate harm, mitigate its impact, and sustain safety and security even after violence has occurred. This contributes to more timely and effective protection efforts, reducing preventable risks and improving outcomes.

- **The “Before”**, focuses on risk analysis, preparedness planning, community engagement, training, accessible information materials, and ensuring that people have the necessary resources to act in case of imminent violence, including shelter, transportation, information, assistive devices, or pre-identified safe evacuation routes.
- **The “During”**, supports rapid communication, tailored warnings, real-time guidance, and practical assistance that enable civilians to apply the protective measures they already know about.
- **The “After”**, ensures safe return or relocation options, psychosocial and material support, accountability follow-up, and learning processes that strengthen future preparedness.

Some protection measures already integrate this phased approach, such as [evacuations](#) and [conflict preparedness and protection](#).

**Figure 4 – A phased approach to protect civilians before / during / after conflict<sup>73</sup>**



<sup>73</sup> Adapted for all protection measure from Protection Cluster Ukraine (2024) [Guidance on humanitarian evacuations of civilians in Ukraine with special consideration for children](#).

## CONTEXT, CONFLICT AND RISK ANALYSIS

### What is it?

A systematic assessment of the environment by examining contextual conditions, understanding conflict drivers and actors across the conflict system, and identifying threats, vulnerabilities and capacities affecting civilians and protection activities. It combines context scanning, conflict mapping and risk evaluation to help anticipate how dynamics may evolve, how they may impact protection, and what measures are needed to operate safely and effectively in sensitive or insecure settings.

### Purpose

Understand how contextual, conflict and risk factors may affect civilians and activities. Enable early and evidence-based decisions-making before threats escalate.

### In practice

Protection risks are context-specific and vary according to conflict dynamics. Conducted iteratively, the process draws on community dialogue, protection assessments and conflict data. These inputs enable early detection of emerging threats, identification of who is most at risk and why, and the tailoring of conflict-sensitive, evidence-based protection measures that remain responsive as contexts evolve. Context, conflict and risk analysis involve maintaining a continuous, multi-source understanding of the political, socio-economic, environmental and informational landscape in which protection actors operate (FAO, 2019), recognizing that protection risks are highly context-specific and fluctuate with conflict dynamics. This requires systematically mapping the structures, historical grievances, and power relations that shape vulnerabilities and local resilience (DRC, 2020), while also analyzing the interests, behaviours, and relationships of state, non-state and community actors. This includes how their interactions produce dividers, connectors, and shifting patterns of violence (WFP, 2021).

Because risks materialize through both objective threats and perceived insecurity, analysis should also integrate community interpretations of danger and displacement triggers. As one practitioner observed: "We've been looking at how communities perceive risks and what factors lead to violence or displacement" (interview dated 06/08/2025). It also requires monitoring operational and programmatic risks, such as access constraints, politicization of aid, mis-/disinformation, and the potential for interventions to exacerbate tensions (ICRC, n.d.).

### Example

In Afghanistan, a conflict analysis conducted revealed that explosive ordnance contamination not only limited access to land but also fueled competition and violence over scarce resources. This insight prompted a proactive adjustment by integrating conflict mediation training into community safety planning, preventing new violence from emerging.

*For more information, check DRC (2022) [Promoting Community Resilience through the Humanitarian, Basic Needs, and Conflict Sensitivity Nexus](#).*



## RESOURCES

### Resources feeding the analysis:

ACLED - [Conflict Index](#).  
 ACLED - [Conflict Watchlist](#).  
 AOAV - [Explosive Violence Monitor](#).  
 CIVIC - [Protection of Civilians Trends Report](#).  
 ECP - [Alert ! Reports on conflicts, human rights and peacebuilding](#).  
 INEW - [Explosive Weapons Monitor](#).  
 Protection Cluster – [Protection Analysis Updates](#).

### Guidance:

DRC (2020) [Conflict Analysis Guidelines](#).  
 FAO (2019) [Guide to context analysis informing FAO decision-making: Approaches to working in fragile and conflict-affected contexts](#).  
 Global Protection Cluster (2024) [Protection Analytical Framework](#) and [Protection Analysis Training](#).  
 GSDRC (2017) [Conflict analysis, Topic Guide](#).  
 ICRC (n.d.) [Safer Access for all National Societies, I. Context and risk assessment](#).  
 WFP (2021) [Conflict Analysis and Conflict Sensitivity Risk Assessment](#).

## CONTINGENCY AND SCENARIO-BASED PLANNING

### What is it?

Proactive processes that assess how a crisis could unfold and prepare predefined responses accordingly. Different scenarios outline several plausible future developments by analyzing key drivers and potential impacts, while contingency planning turns these scenarios into concrete actions, specifying roles, resources, triggers and operational measures. Together, they enable timely, coordinated and adaptable protection responses when the situation changes.

### Purpose

Anticipate evolving threats and enable rapid protection responses by outlining possible actions in advance. Ensure actors can adapt quickly when risks emerge or escalate.

### In practice

Contingency and scenario-based planning builds on the context, conflict and risks analysis as an initial step, and need to be built in a participatory manner with affected communities. It involves systematically translating context-specific risks and conflict dynamics into concrete, time-bound, and actionable preparedness and response arrangements. Actors begin by examining plausible ways the situation may evolve, using structured scenario-building methods that identify key variables, drivers of change, and mini-scenarios, and then assess the likely humanitarian impacts on populations, access, and operational constraints (ACAPS, 2022).

Based on these scenarios, teams can define context-specific triggers of violence or deterioration and their impact, such as siege, bombardment, displacement surges, or shifts in conflict dynamics, and establish activation thresholds that signal when preparedness measures should transition into early action (WAHAFA, 2025). This process is inherently operational as practitioners articulate in advance the who, what, how and when of each protection measure to be implemented, map roles, resources, and decision points, and develop contingency plans that outline clear response options aligned with each scenario (IFRC, 2025). A practitioner emphasized that “a core component [of our anticipatory action] is likely going to be around scenario analysis and scenario building for conflict risk within a set geography over a set period and contingency plans associated with that” (interview dated 20/08/2025).

To minimize confusion and delays during the lead-time window, standard operating procedures should establish communication chains, fallback procedures, and decision-making protocols, ensuring that identified triggers and thresholds reliably activate pre-agreed preparedness and protection actions.

Finally, these plans should be regularly tested, through simulations, drills, and peer review, to ensure they are realistic, feasible, and consistent with actual resources and capacities, involving all relevant stakeholders. Equally, triggers and thresholds must be reviewed and adapted as the context evolves, ensuring that early action remains timely, proportionate, and responsive to shifting patterns of violence and risk.

### Examples

This approach was effectively demonstrated in The Philippines (Maguindanao Del Sur), where a simulation exercise used scenario-based triggers, such as reports from community monitors or drone sightings, to activate predefined protection protocols. Once triggered, the Local Disaster Risk Reduction and Management Council rapidly convened relevant agencies to organize targeted evacuations and delivery of essential medicine to vulnerable households. Such structured scenario planning enables protection actors to act swiftly, safely, and predictably at the onset of violence.

*For more information, check Plan International (2024) Anticipatory Action for armed conflict simulation exercise, Activity Report (collected through the call for evidence).*

As illustrated in the Ukraine case study, an emergency plan that is not tested through simulations often proves ineffective in practice. Regular drills and scenario exercises help refine plans, correct inconsistencies, and ensure that protection measures remain realistic and actionable under real-life conditions.

*For more information, check Ukraine Case Study (Vara Ruiz, 2025).*



### RESOURCES

ACAPS (2022) [Scenario building methodology: How to build scenarios in preparation for or during humanitarian crises.](#)

Cordova-Pozo and Rouwette (2023) [Types of scenario planning and their effectiveness: A review of reviews.](#)

IASC (2015) [Emergency Response Preparedness.](#)

IFRC (2025) [Contingency Planning Guide.](#)

INTRAC (2024) [Scenario planning.](#)

SPARC (2025) [Twelve ways to take anticipatory action to scale in conflicts and recurring crises.](#)

WAHAFA (2025) [Anticipatory Action in Complex Settings : WAHAFA Guidelines on Navigating AA, Conflict and Displacement.](#)

## Box 2. The potential and limits of conflict and violence forecasting supporting the proactive mindset

To act early and protect civilians effectively, humanitarian actors must be able to detect the onset of violence or conflict before escalation. As one interviewee observed, “Whenever we talk to people about anticipatory action and conflict, it’s one of the first questions we get: can we anticipate conflict?”<sup>74</sup>. Forecasting tools can support early detection, coordination, and preparedness by identifying rising risks and potential triggers for armed conflict<sup>75</sup>. In Danish Refugee Council’s anticipatory action pilot in Akobo, South Sudan<sup>76</sup>, a displacement prediction model (AHEAD) triggered early peace dialogues that helped de-escalate intercommunal tensions before displacement surged. Similarly, early warning forecasts in South Sudan<sup>77</sup> conducted decision-makers to postpone elections and reduce the risk of electoral violence. The predictive value of such tools is higher when quantitative models are combined with qualitative analysis and community-level monitoring<sup>78</sup>.

Forecasting accuracy depends on robust, regularly updated data, including timely conflict event data, socioeconomic indicators, and contextual covariates<sup>79</sup>; and on cross-sectoral collaboration for early action. However, forecasting models remain constrained by the unpredictability of human behavior, limited localization of macro-level models, and the challenge of linking analysis to operational decision-making<sup>80</sup>. Moreover, “the ‘black box’ nature of many predictive models masks causal relations,”<sup>81</sup> raising risks of bias and mistrust.

Ultimately, the value of conflict and violence forecasting lies not in precise prediction but in fostering, new, proactive ways of working. Scenario-based plans should integrate data-driven foresight with contextual judgment and inclusive community-informed analysis, as well as guarantee ethical safeguards. In a nutshell: “Conflict forecasting should be viewed as a dynamic and evolving discipline (...) developing tools that not only improve predictive accuracy but also build trust and support effective peacebuilding and humanitarian interventions”<sup>82</sup>.



### RESOURCES<sup>83</sup>

ACLED - [ACLED Conflict Alert System \(CAST\)](#)  
 Danish Refugee Council - [Anticipatory Humanitarian Action for Displacement \(AHEAD\) model](#)  
 Australian National University - [Atrocity Forecasting Project](#).  
 Intergovernmental Authority on Development (IGAD) - [Conflict Early Warning and Response Mechanism \(CEWARN\)](#).  
 Barcelona School of Economics - [ConflictForecast](#).  
 Simon-Skjoldt Center for the Prevention of Genocide, Dickey Center for International Understanding - [Early Warnings Project \(EWP\)](#).  
 Danish Refugee Council - [Foresight](#).

Disaster Risk Management Knowledge Centre (EUC) - [Global Conflict Risk Index \(GCRI\)](#).  
 Danish Refugee Council - [Pastoralist Insecurity \(SPIN\) Model](#).  
 Trinity College Dublin - [Patterns of Conflict Emergence \(PaCE\)](#).  
 PRI Oslo and Uppsala University, department of peace and conflict research - [Violence & Impacts Early-Warning System \(VIEWS\)](#).  
 World Resources Institute; IHE Delft; Deltares; Wetlands International; The Hague Centre for Strategic Studies (HCSS); International Alert - [Water, Peace and Security](#).

<sup>74</sup> interview dated 06/08/2025.

<sup>75</sup> Schincariol, T., Frank, H. and Chadefaux, T. (2025) [Accounting for Variability in Conflict Dynamics: A pattern-based predictive model](#).

<sup>76</sup> DRC (2025) Anticipatory Action for conflict-induced displacement in South Sudan, Assessment Report (collected through the call for evidence).

<sup>77</sup> Agutu, S.O. (2022) [Effectiveness of Conflict Early Warning System as a Framework for Conflict Prevention in Africa. Case Study of South Sudan](#).

<sup>78</sup> Schillinger, J. and Poan, E. (2025) Forecasting Tools and Anticipatory Action for the Humanitarian Impacts of Conflict: Scoping Review to inform Start Network’s Conflict Anticipatory Action Project (forthcoming); interview dated 20/08/2025.

<sup>79</sup> Croicu, M. (2025) [Forecasting battles. New machine learning methods for predicting armed conflict](#).

<sup>80</sup> Schincariol et al (2025); OCHA (2022) [Assessing the technical feasibility of conflict prediction for anticipatory action](#).

<sup>81</sup> Schillinger, J. and Poan, E. (2025).

<sup>82</sup> Schillinger, J. and Poan, E. (2025).

<sup>83</sup> Schillinger, J. and Poan, E. (2025).

## PREPOSITIONING HUMAN, FINANCIAL AND LOGISTICAL RESOURCES

### What is it?

Advance preparation and placement of essential people, funds and supplies needed to act quickly when a forecast hazard or crisis emerges. This includes having trained staff, securing pre-arranged financing, and pre-procuring and storing key items, transport and service contracts.

### Purpose

Ensure essential capacities are immediately available to enable rapid, safe and efficient activation of protective measures during lead time, rather than mobilized after the crisis occurs.

### In practice

One practitioner noted, “Communities often have shelter structures or basements but lack materials, so part of preparedness is pre-positioning the basic supplies for when violence escalates” (interview dated 07/10/2025). Anticipating resources required for the rapid implementation of protection measures is therefore essential.

Prepositioning human, financial, and logistical resources means deliberately arranging the people, funds, and materials needed for rapid protective action before violence escalates. This involves identifying and assigning key personnel, ensuring they are trained, equipped, and supported through surge frameworks, and establishing clear coordination and decision-making arrangements with humanitarian actors, authorities, and UN counterparts to avoid duplication, ensure complementarity, and enable timely activation of plans (IFRC, 2025). Another practitioner emphasized that “UN missions, humanitarians, and local authorities must agree in advance on who can declare an alert and activate contingency plans” (interview dated 10/09/2025), underscoring the value of predefined communication lines, shared and coordinated triggers, and agreed roles and responsibilities.

Additionally, financial preparedness focuses on securing flexible, pre-arranged resources, through contingency funds, triggerable anticipatory finance, framework agreements, or readiness budget lines, that can be rapidly disbursed and adapted as risks evolve. This reduces bureaucratic delays that often undermine early protective action (UNDRR, 2024).

Finally, logistical readiness requires maintaining forward-positioned stocks and services, including materials, non-food and food items, communication equipment, vehicles, and fuel, alongside warehousing, transport capacity, and procurement systems that can be activated immediately when thresholds are reached (Climate Centre, 2025).

### Examples

The experience from Kiunga, Lamu County, Kenya, illustrates how preparedness and prepositioning of humanitarian aid for service delivery are equally essential for effective protection. The County Government and partners strategically prepositioned non-food items (including shelter materials), food, medical supplies, mobile health clinics, and psychosocial support teams following alerts from early warning systems. When displacement occurred following renewed insecurity along the border, these prepositioned resources enabled an immediate response, allowing refugees to receive timely life-saving assistance, improving access to medical care, and strengthening trust between communities and local authorities.

*For more information, check Kupi Shee, S. (2024) Case study report: Community-centered humanitarian response in Lamu (collected through the call for evidence).*



## RESOURCES

Climate Center (2025) [Forecast-based Financing Practitioners Manual](#).

IASC (2015) [Emergency Response Preparedness](#).

IFRC (2025) [Contingency Planning Guide](#).

IGAD (2016) [CEWARN Protocol](#).

UNDRR (2023) [AA Best practices and guiding principles for financial protocols](#).

UNDRR (2024) [Anticipatory Finance. An introductory guide](#).

## PROACTIVE COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT AND INCLUSIVE ADAPTATIONS

### What is it?

Early and meaningful engagement of at-risk and marginalized community members in shaping preparedness, early warning, and early actions. This includes jointly identifying risks and priorities, ensuring communication and decision-making processes are accessible, and adapting plans and tools to the needs of diverse groups. Measures may involve participatory assessments, community-led design of alerts and actions, tailored information formats, and removal of social, physical or linguistic barriers.

### Purpose

Improve the effectiveness and inclusion of protection efforts by grounding decisions according to the risks and needs identified by communities, and by ensuring that diverse groups can participate, access information and take early actions.

### In practice

“Early action that’s not co-designed with affected people risks being irrelevant or unsafe” (interview dated 04/09/2025). Protection measures require systematically involving at-risk communities in shaping preparedness and proactive measures and plans. Because communities are the first to detect protection risks and best understand local dynamics, power structures, and behavioural drivers, practitioners must engage with them early and continuously across participatory preparedness processes, including risk analysis, prioritization, planning, early warning design, implementation, and review, in order to ensure that protective measures reflect lived realities rather than external assumptions (FAO, 2024).

This engagement entails creating structured opportunities for communities to articulate risks, test proposed measures, and participate in decision-making, moving along the spectrum from consultation to involvement, collaboration, and when feasible, community-led governance (Facilitating Power, 2020). Two-way communication systems, such as feedback channels, participatory assessments, community forums, and partnerships with trusted intermediaries, enable ongoing adjustment of plans as community perceptions, needs, or vulnerabilities evolve (RCCE Working Group, 2020). Inclusion, do no harm and conflict-sensitive approach must be embedded throughout the process. Preparedness activities should be designed to be accessible, culturally relevant, and safe, ensuring equitable participation and use by persons with disabilities, older people, children, migrants, minority groups, and others who may face structural barriers (Plan International UK, 2024). These practices foster trust, ownership, and increase the likelihood that communities will adopt protective behaviours when threats escalate, while reducing the risk that preparedness interventions or early response inadvertently create or exacerbate protection risks.

### Examples

In Somalia, both community engagement and inclusion contributed to stronger protection outcomes. Saferworld’s community-led Early Warning, Early Response system actively engaged marginalized groups, including women, youth, IDPs, and minority clans, through tailored communication and inclusive data sharing practices. Adapted radio broadcasts raised awareness among hard-to-reach IDPs living on the outskirts of Kismayo, encouraging them to start engaging with the EWER system. By increasing public confidence and participation, this early and inclusive engagement directly strengthened local protection outcomes.

For more information, check Saferworld (2025) [Strengthening Early Warning, Early Response systems to address violence and conflict in Somalia](#).



### RESOURCES

Facilitating Power (2020) [Spectrum of Community Engagement to Ownership](#).

FAO (2023) [Guidance Note on Community Engagement in Anticipatory Action](#).

FAO (2024) [Community engagement in anticipatory action - Compendium of experiences and good practices from focus countries](#).

Plan International UK (2024) [Protection, Gender and Inclusion in Anticipatory Action Guide and Toolkit](#).

RCCE Working Group (2020) [How to include marginalized and vulnerable people in RCCE](#).

## PRE-APPROVED MESSAGING AND COMMUNICATION

### What is it?

Prior preparation of clear, action-focused messages and the early selection of trusted, accessible communication channels for rapid use during crises. This involves pre-developing and testing message templates for likely risks and identifying the formal and informal medias most relied upon by different groups.

### Purpose

To ensure protective information can be delivered immediately, consistently and through multiple pathways to reach all at-risk populations.

### In practice

Because protection measures rely heavily on information, informational preparedness is a core requirement for proactive action. Information preparedness involves developing modular, scenario-based safety guidance, covering a wide range of potential conflict-related issues, so that material can be quickly adapted to evolving conditions without restarting an assessment and analysis cycle (CDC, 2014). Messages should be harmonized across agencies to prevent contradictory instructions from one stakeholder to another (HI, NPA and UDA, 2023), tailored to the linguistic, cultural, and accessibility needs of different groups (CDC, 2018), and pre-tested as much as possible with representative users to ensure clarity, feasibility, and relevance (UNICEF, 2008).

Such advance preparation is a prerequisite for any proactive approach for protection, as it enables actors to deploy life-saving warnings and guidance messages without waiting for drafting, translation, or internal/external validation during emergencies. As one practitioner explained, "We want to develop communication materials that can be used in emergency contexts, prioritizing safety posture, evacuation, and how to protect yourself in a building and outside a building" (interview dated 13/10/2025).

To ensure messages reach diverse audiences under potentially challenging conditions, actors should also map and test multiple dissemination media and channels, including radio, SMS, social media, community focal points, local authorities, partner networks, and in-person outreach. Channels should be selected for trust, accessibility, and redundancy in case of communication disruption (Akerkar, 2020).

Together, these measures allow for fast, synchronized, and credible communications capable of prompting timely protective behaviours even amid high-risk environments where seconds matter.

### Examples

An illustrative example comes from the Philippines Peace Process, where the Civilian Protection Component of the International Monitoring Team served as a pre-established and trusted communication mechanism. Its proactive structure, including an all-women contingent, enabled the rapid flow of protection information from communities and facilitated timely interventions to emerging violence, thereby demonstrating the life-saving value of ready-to-activate communication systems.

For more information, check Arnado, M.A.M. – *Humanitarian Dialogue* (2012) [Women's involvement in conflict early warning systems: Moving from rhetoric to reality in Mindanao](#).



### RESOURCES

Akerkar et al. (2020) [Early Warning for Early Action: Toward more behaviorally informed Early Warning Systems](#).  
Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) (2014) [Crisis and Emergency Risk Communication: Crisis Communication Plans](#).  
CDC (2018) [Crisis and Emergency Risk Communication: Messages and Audiences](#).

HI, NPA and UDA (2023) [Conflict Preparedness and Protection Messages in Ukraine](#).  
IGAD (2016) [CEWARN Protocol](#).  
REAP (2025) [The five components for effective early warning communication](#).  
UNICEF (2008) [Emergency Mine Risk Education Toolkit](#).

## ETHICAL AND STRATEGIC DILEMMAS WITH A PROACTIVE APPROACH FOR PROTECTION

Implementing a proactive approach to protection presents a series of intertwined ethical and strategic dilemmas that challenge traditional humanitarian logic, testing how far actors can anticipate harm without amplifying risks or undermining accountability.

### EVIDENCE DILEMMA

#### Demonstrating the impact of proactive approaches for protection

Demonstrating measurable impact of a proactive approach is a persistent difficulty. Organizations face increasing pressure to produce “proof of concept,” yet the evidence and lessons-learned base for protection, particularly in conflict settings, remains limited. This is confirmed by the observation from one practitioner: “*We can't really show a whole lot of proof of concept, we need the evidence*”<sup>84</sup>.

Unlike the climate-focused anticipatory action, where years of empirical validation support early action models, conflict-related protection lacks impact frameworks, indicators, and comparable datasets. This evidence gap undermines both donor confidence and institutional buy-in, leading to limited pilots and the persistence of reactive approaches. This challenge is compounded by a systemic tendency within the humanitarian sector towards privileging quantifiable metrics, at the expense of qualitative, contextual and community-defined evidence. Delayed or reduced violence, increased perceptions of safety or strengthened community agency do not translate easily into standardized quantitative indicators, despite being central to lived experiences of protection<sup>85</sup>. Furthermore, rigid, output-focused monitoring frameworks can prevent clarity related to meaning protection impacts, by prioritizing scale and reach over depth, process and other relational changes. Qualitative and combined methodologies, adopting a participatory approach could address such challenge<sup>86</sup>.

In some instances, despite anecdotal signs of reduced harm through early interventions, the absence of consistent evaluation criteria and trigger validation prevented CERF-supported pilots from establishing a convincing case for effectiveness<sup>87</sup>. Assessing the added value of proactive approaches is inherently challenging: comparable cases are limited and their impact on reducing harm is difficult to quantify. Because preventive actions aim to avert or lessen risks before they materialize, counterfactual attribution (“what would have happened without early action”) remains almost impossible, weakening financial support for proactive approaches and perpetuating a cycle of short-term remedial responses and underinvestment in preparedness.

### FINANCING ARCHITECTURE AND INCENTIVES

#### Why prevention loses

Beyond the evidence dilemma, the structural and political biases of the humanitarian financing system, consistently favor reactive response over proactive and preventive interventions. Donors continue to fund acute crisis response at rates three to five times higher than preparedness, while less than 3% of global aid supports pre-arranged finance and anticipatory measures<sup>88</sup>.

Despite evidence that early action is more cost-effective and reduces losses<sup>89</sup>, donor incentives reward short-term, visible results rather than long term risk reduction and prevention. Preparedness is also weakened by bureaucratic silos, classified as “too developmental” for humanitarian budgets and “too humanitarian” for development. Preparedness regularly “falls through the cracks,” with funding cycles and mandates preventing sustained investment: “*In Haiti, development donors remain reluctant to fund preparedness, seeing it as a humanitarian issue. (...) In Sudan, (...) agencies are forced to incorporate longer-term preparedness such as capacity-building and early warning into one-year cycles of humanitarian funding*”<sup>90</sup>. These systemic constraints result in a self-reinforcing cycle: prevention remains underfunded, fragmented, and administratively burdensome, while the system continues to pay more to react to harm than to prevent it.

<sup>84</sup> interview dated 06/08/2025.

<sup>85</sup> HPG (2024) [Reducing violence and strengthening the protection of civilians](#).

<sup>86</sup> In HPG (2024) [Reducing violence and strengthening the protection of civilians through community dialogue with armed actors](#), multiple methodologies were identified, see section “5.4.2. Qualitative and combined approaches to monitoring, evaluation, accountability and learning”.

<sup>87</sup> Pichon, F. – ODI (2019) [Anticipatory humanitarian action: what role for the CERF? Moving from rapid response to early action](#).

<sup>88</sup> REAP (2022) [Finance for Early Action: Tracking commitments, trends, challenges and opportunities](#).

<sup>89</sup> WFP (2025) [Saving lives, time and money: evidence from anticipatory action](#).

<sup>90</sup> Kellett, J. and Peters, K. – ODI (2014) Dare to Prepare: Taking Risk Seriously. Financing emergency preparedness: from fighting crisis to managing risk. p.94.

## PREDICTION UNDER UNCERTAINTY

### Lead time vs. reliability

The inherent uncertainty of forecasting conflict and violence adds another layer of complexity. Unlike environmental hazards, where DRR work have built on extensive experience and improved predictive models that are and widely used, conflict onset, escalation and impact remain difficult to anticipate, because man-made crises do not follow such predictable patterns (see box 2).

Decision-makers must therefore weigh acting early on uncertain signals against waiting for confirmation of harm, balancing the ethical and financial risks of acting “too soon” against the risks of missing a window for early action for protection. For environmental hazards, OCHA has managed this “trade-off between early warning lead times versus the reliability of those warnings”, through innovative mechanisms such as the Central Emergency Response Fund’s two-stage triggers that separate readiness from full-scale activation<sup>91</sup>. Yet, despite such innovation, most donors remain hesitant to release funds until certainty is achieved. *“Whatever you do will still be valuable if the event doesn’t hit, but in conflict, when we’re trying to make the same case, it’s harder”* noted one of the participants<sup>92</sup>. For this reason, it is challenging to apply a “no-regrets” principle to support preventive activities in conflict. Even in case of inaccurate forecasts trigger and implementation under false alarm, such “no-regrets” policy can lead to actions that strengthen systems and benefit at-risk communities<sup>93</sup>. Managing the tension between lead time and reliability requires reframing proactive approaches as “investments” where preparedness and flexible early action generate protective benefits even if predicted violence does not fully materialize.

## THE TWIN RISK

### Doing harm by acting early vs. doing harm by not acting

Finally, there are tensions arising between the risk of acting too soon and of acting too late. Early interventions, whether through shelters, evacuations, weapon contamination responses, or rumor management, can unintentionally increase other protection risks, provoke reprisals, or trigger premature displacement. Yet delaying or withholding action can predictably leave populations exposed to harm that could have been mitigated. The ethical challenge lies in explicitly weighing both forms of potential harm and designing safeguards to minimize each.

This tension also manifests in further burdening at-risk communities, in particular in the case of community-led protection models, while the protection responsibility ultimately falls under the State. In some cases, strengthening local agency can unintentionally shift risk and responsibility onto communities, exposing civilians without adequate protection or resources. *“We try to have the community protection committees talk to authorities, to the armed actors, but sometimes they take on too much, ultimately it’s not their job to mediate conflict, and it can be risky”*, as one practitioner explained<sup>94</sup>, while another added that empowering local partners for their own protection *“exposes them; it’s a very fragile balance”*<sup>95</sup>.

The *Inuka!* project in coastal Kenya further illustrates how community members tasked with preventing violent extremism ultimately faced suspicion and retaliation from both state and non-state actors<sup>96</sup>. Similar dynamics were also observed in the Philippines case study (Torrecilla, 2025). This discussion underscores the need for proactive strategies to balance timeliness with accountability, consent, and the principle of “do no harm”. It also highlights the importance of upholding the principle of distinction, as community members supporting civil-military coordination or protection activities may be perceived as parties to the conflict, thereby increasing their exposure to threats and retaliation.

<sup>91</sup> UNDRR (2023) [Anticipatory Action \(AA\): Best Practices and Guiding Principles for Financial Protocols of AA Fund](#), p.15.

<sup>92</sup> interview dated 20/08/2025.

<sup>93</sup> UNDRR (2024) [Anticipatory Finance: An Introductory Guide](#).

<sup>94</sup> interview dated 07/10/2025.

<sup>95</sup> interview dated 10/09/2025.

<sup>96</sup> Juma, S. Search for Common Ground (2018) [‘Inuka!’: Community-Led Security Approaches to Violent Extremism in Coastal Kenya](#).