### Frequently asked questions around Sphere and the Protection Principles

##### What are protection threats?

Threats to civilians’ safety and dignity are called protection threats. They include threats of violence, coercion and deliberate deprivation.

Violence, or the threat of violence, is a violation of civilians’ rights to physical integrity, but it also causes other violations by restricting people’s ability to meet their own needs (to access health services or exercise a subsistence activity, for example). Violence may lead to forced displacement within countries or across borders, creating internally displaced populations and refugees. Sexual violence is also a threat, especially for women.

Coercion is forcing someone to do something against his or her will. Coercion normally occurs when a person with greater control of and/or access to resources forces another person to do something against their will in order to gain access to those resources.

Deliberate deprivation is the purposeful restriction of access to resources. It also normally occurs when a person with greater power denies material or other resources (e.g. information or access) to someone who is more vulnerable.[[1]](#footnote-1)

##### What are the different levels of engagement of agencies in protection work?

Humanitarian actors can engage in protection work at a number of different levels:

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| Level of engagement | What does it mean? | Examples: |
| Stand-alone protection programming | Generally of considerable scale and scope, where protection is the primary objective. Such programmes tend to focus on one of the following core areas and are carried out by agencies with protection expertise (GBV prevention and response, Child protection, Housing, Land and Property, Mine Action, Rule of law and Justice). | Examples of ‘stand alone’ programmes include child-friendly spaces in camps; a GBV response that supports legal, medical, security and psychosocial services for survivors of GBV; or a family tracing and reunification programme. |
| Integrated protection | Where some specific protection activities or projects are integrated into larger programme. The overall programme objective will not usually relate to protection. | Typical ‘integrated’ activities might include community monitoring and reporting of protection threats; advocacy on protection; or the establishment of coordinated referral systems to link those in need with protection services. An Integrated Protection approach might have a small protection project focusing on rights awareness sessions as part of a larger WASH intervention, for example. |
| Protection as an approach (mainstream-ing) | Protection at this level focuses on how projects or programmes are delivered. This is essentially good quality programming. | The Global Protection Cluster (GPC) defines protection mainstreaming as the process of incorporating protection principles and promoting meaningful access, safety and dignity in all humanitarian aid. |

*Adapted from Trocaire Humanitarian Protection Handbook 2014, p.6*

##### To what does the expression ‘The well-fed dead’ refer?

The phrase ‘well-fed dead’ – taken from a New York Times report of 15th July 1992 on the war in Bosnia – has come to be widely used to reflect the protection concerns that civilians have in times of humanitarian crisis. The phrase indicates that it is simply not enough to distribute food, medicine, shelter, without also considering what protection and safety needs civilians may have. The international community now realises that we need to think beyond distribution alone – food will not keep civilians safe; water will not prevent rape or sexual violence.[[2]](#footnote-2)

##### What is the link between the expression ‘Do no harm’ and the Protection Principles?

The international community is now increasingly starting to recognise the potential negative impact of humanitarian aid on civilian safety; assistance may expose civilians to increased levels of danger if their safety and protection needs are not also considered (e.g. location of latrines; or organising distributions in a way that exacerbates inequalities). Continuing to provide relief assistance to people in crisis without addressing the deliberate acts of violence against them risks creating a situation where humanitarian orgs become, at best, part of the alibi for political inaction and, at worst, complicit in perpetuating a culture of impunity of abuses.

##### What is the limit to the type of protection provided by humanitarian stakeholders?

As James Darcy explains, the humanitarian system may be able to influence what happens, directly or indirectly, through advocacy or otherwise, but it would be a fallacy to think that if we humanitarian actors get it right then people would be safe. There is no system of protection that can actually protect people if the warring parties are not motivated to do so themselves.[[3]](#footnote-3)

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| Consult with different segments of the affected population when assessing positive and possible negative consequences of the overall response | Ensure your programme protects the rights of marginalised people | Put measures in place to reduce the risk of gender-based violence | Work with relevant authorities to secure lost documentation |
| Ensure that people don’t have to travel through dangerous zones to access assistance | Monitor access of the affected population to humanitarian assistance | Consider advocating for the rights of affected populations with relevant authorities and actors by reminding them of their obligations | Inform affected people of their entitlements within a given aid programme |
| Adapt the forms in which assistance is provided to lessen the risk of looting and consequent violence | Promote respect for relevant laws if assistance is denied to the affected population | Coordinate with relevant government authorities and specialised agencies on the removal of landmines and unexploded ordinances | Inform the affected population in a language and manner they can understand |
| Build IDP and refugee camps away from conflict areas | Construct safe spaces for people who have been victims of abuses such as rape or trafficking, while avoiding stigmatisation | Monitor institutions specifically protected under international humanitarian law such as schools and hospitals, and report attacks on them | Ensure that official documentation issued by authorities does not determine who is eligible for assistance from humanitarian organisations |
| Ensure the activities do not exacerbate existing divisions in the community | Ensure affected people do not need to have a special legal status in order to receive humanitarian assistance and be protected | Alert the relevant, political law enforcement and military actors to ongoing violations, so that military forces can stop the actual violations | Refer people seeking justice and compensation for loss of property to the agencies able to provide such support |
| Brief your staff on appropriate reporting of witnessed incidents or allegations | Ensure that the assistance you provide is based on need alone and in proportion to need | Ensure people are not forced to stay in or go to a place which is not their choice, such as a camp | Following attacks, gender-based violence and related problems, support access of people to appropriate healthcare and rehabilitation |
| Plan distribution of assistance in ways that minimise theft | When providing assistance to a particular group, such as displaced people in camps, ensure this focus is not at the detriment of another section of the affected population | Provide support to families and communities in their efforts to keep children safe | Support positive communal coping mechanisms such as burials, religious ceremonies and practices, as well as non-harmful cultural and social practices |
| Collect information on specific abuses and violations of rights only if its intended use is clear, and only if your agency has a protection mandate or the necessary capacity, skills, systems and protocols in place |  | Put in place standards and instruments that prevent and eradicate sexual exploitation and abuse |  |
|  |  | Teach people how to prevent children from becoming separated from their families |  |

| Principle 1 | Principle 2 | Principle 3 | Principle 4 |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Avoid exposing people to further harm as a result of your actions | Ensure people’s access to impartial assistance in proportion to need and without discrimination | Protect people from physical and psychological harm arising from violence and coercion | Assist people to claim their rights, access available remedies and recover from the effects of abuse |
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1. Church World Service (CWS) Protection Mainstreaming manual, 2012 edition [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. Helen Nic An Ri, Trocaire training pack on mainstreaming protection [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. Irin news: Interview with James Darcy, Research fellow, Humanitarian Policy Group of the Overseas Development Institute, [www.irinnews.org/in-depth/70567/31/united-kingdom-irin-interview-with-james-darcy](http://www.irinnews.org/in-depth/70567/31/united-kingdom-irin-interview-with-james-darcy) [↑](#footnote-ref-3)