

CONTEXT

On 31 March 2025, non-state armed groups launched a series of attacks against several villages in Ancuabe district, Cabo Delgado province. These attacks provoked the displacement of reportedly almost 15,000 people as of 16 April.*

On 17 April, UNHCR conducted a Rapid Protection Assessment among the displaced. UNHCR Protection staff interviewed **28 key informants (KIs)**, mostly IDPs, half of whom were displaced after the recent attacks. Also, **9 focus group discussions (FGDs)** were conducted separately with different demographic groups, including adult women (ages 18–60), elderly women, adult men, and young people, allowing for gender- and age-specific perspectives to emerge. The KIs and FGDs were carried out in the IDP sites of Natove, Marokani and Nanjua A, and in the host communities of Naputa and Nanjua.

Ancuabe district - Protection Assessment locations



The boundaries and names shown and the designations used on this map do not imply official endorsement or acceptance by the United Nations.
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Focus group discussion with displaced women in the village of Naputa, Ancuabe district. UNHCR/17 April 2025.

PROTECTION INCIDENTS DURING THE ATTACKS AND WHILE FLEEING

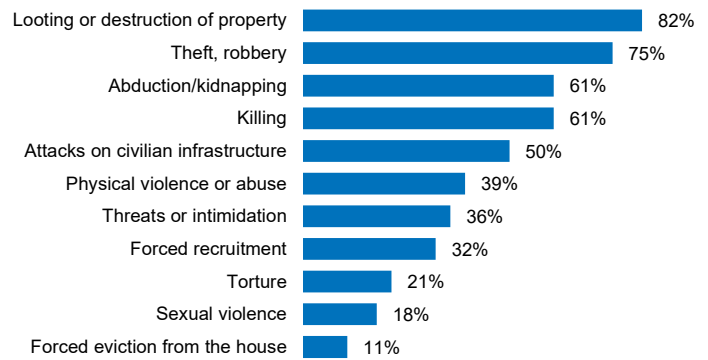
During the attack:

- The majority of respondents fled from villages attacked on 31 March 2025, including Nkole, Nonia, Muela, Ngura, Miegane, and other villages in Ancuabe district.
- All the newly arrived IDPs mentioned having **fled following an actual direct armed attack** of their village by non-state armed groups.

*IOM-DTM Movement Alert 132, 18 April 2025.

- The attacks involved **looting, burning houses, abductions, and targeted killings.**
- Attackers entered at night, demanded money, shot at civilians, and set homes on fire. Those unable to pay were at risk of kidnapping. In multiple accounts, community members spoke of ransoms up to 10,000 meticaís (\$150) being demanded, often under the threat of death or abduction.
- Infrastructure was destroyed to demonstrate presence and instill fear in the population.
- These incidents such as kidnappings and murders in the villages have caused significant trauma among the population, who also reported the recruitment of young people.

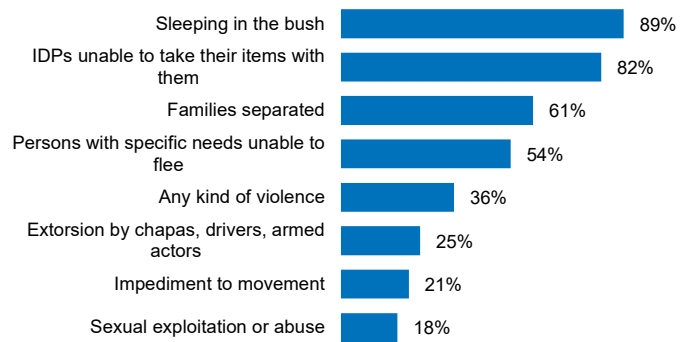
Protection incidents in place of origin before fleeing



During the flight:

- **Many fled on foot in the middle of the night, without belongings or preparation,** having no other option but to take shelter in the bush.
- **Elderly persons and individuals with disabilities were frequently left behind,** as families were unable to support their evacuation under pressure. Though many of these individuals were reportedly spared by armed actors, they remain isolated and at heightened risk, underscoring both the exclusion these groups face and the lack of inclusive preparedness and evacuation mechanisms.

Situations encountered during flight



Repeated displacements:

- Displacement is not a new experience for the affected population. More than half of the newly arrived IDPs experienced multiple displacements. **Several had fled three or even four times.** These repeated displacements have impacted the mental health of the displaced people, especially the youth, causing a deep sense of fatigue, instability, and persistent fear of future attacks.
- **There are pendular movements,** where families temporarily relocate to nearby safer areas and then return to their places of origin as soon as they perceive improved security.

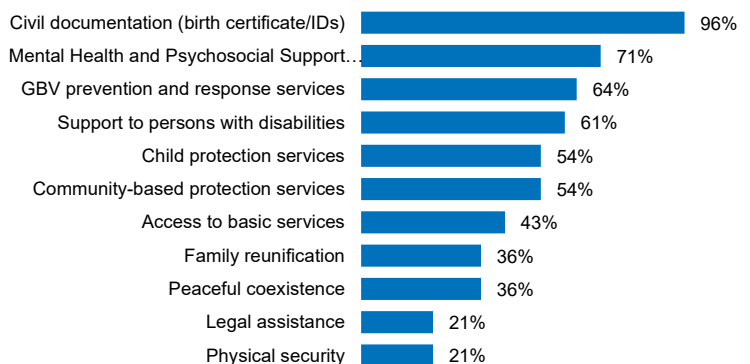
“How many times are we going to have to leave everything behind?”

(head of a household in Natove - had to flee twice to survive)

PROTECTION NEEDS AND RISKS IN AREAS OF DISPLACEMENT

- The protection needs are urgent and complex, with five priority issues consistently emerging across key informant interviews and focus group discussions: **civil documentation, mental health and psychosocial support, gender-based violence (GBV) prevention and response, support for persons with disabilities, and child protection.**
- The loss or absence of **civil documentation** was a major concern raised across all groups, which can be explained by the precipitation under which the civilians fled their villages, particularly as it affects access to aid, healthcare, education, and family reunification.

Main protection needs in the area of displacement



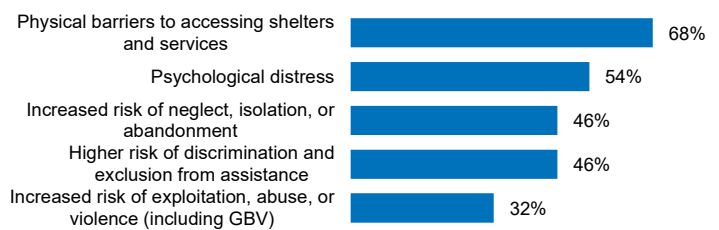
- The **psychological impact** of displacement is high, with displaced people experiencing pervasive distress, anxiety, and emotional exhaustion, especially among children, women, and those who have been repeatedly displaced.
- **GBV risks** were heavily underscored, with FGDs detailing sexual violence during flight, harassment in overcrowded shelters, and domestic abuse aggravated by a lack of privacy and rising tensions.
- As a result of these protection gaps, 70% of interviewees reported awareness of different **harmful coping mechanisms**, such as the use of drugs and alcohol, begging, and, in the case of children, dropping out of school.

Protection risks faced by specific population groups:

The assessment highlighted significant risks particularly for persons with disabilities, the elderly, children, especially girls. These groups are among the most vulnerable in displacement situations, often encountering severe accessibility constraints and heightened protection risks. The findings underscore the urgent need for tailored assistance and improved support mechanisms to ensure their safety and well-being.

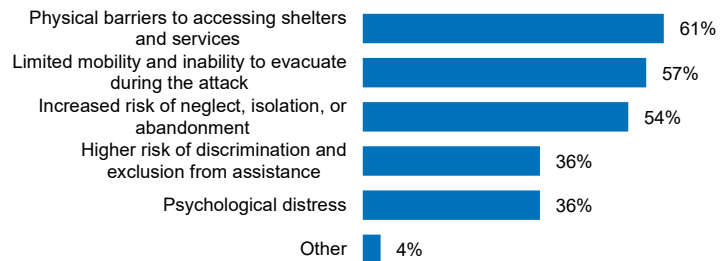
- **Persons with disabilities** face serious **accessibility constraints**, especially in accessing shelters and services. In several displacement sites, persons with disabilities are unable to move independently, depend entirely on family or neighbours to meet their basic needs, and often risk being excluded from aid distributions due to mobility challenges or a lack of visibility in registration processes.

Key protection risks faced by people with disabilities in the area of displacement



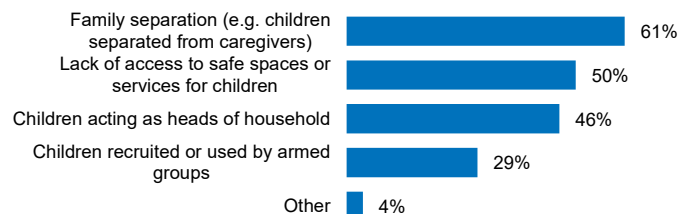
- **Elderly persons** face heightened protection risks, including **social isolation, neglect, emotional distress, and lack of access to basic services**, often due to their restricted mobility, absence of family support, and inadequate specialized assistance, resulting in them being overlooked and inadequately served by the current humanitarian efforts. In some locations, elderly individuals were found sleeping outdoors without shelter or support. This often occurred because they had been separated from their families during flight or could not navigate the displacement environment alone.

Key protection risks faced by the elderly that have occurred or increased as a result of the attacks



- **Children** are facing specific protection risks, including **family separation**, lack of access to safe spaces for identification, case management, and awareness activities with children, as well as children acting as heads of households. Concrete examples of these risks include accounts of children being separated from caregivers during flight. In some instances, children were taken in by unrelated adults or left unsupervised in overcrowded shelters.

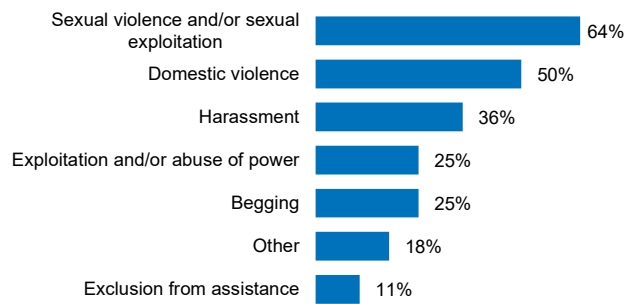
Key protection risks faced by children in the area of displacement



- In addition to the interruption of learning, children are experiencing **significant emotional and psychological strain**, with limited psychosocial support available. The prolonged absence of stability and routine, combined with exposure to traumatic events, contributes to behavioural changes and signs of distress among children.
- As families struggle to meet basic needs, there is an increased reliance on harmful coping mechanisms.

- Specific protection risks faced by **women and girls** include lack of privacy, **increasing risks of harassment and sexual assault**. Unrelated men and women are forced to share the same sleeping spaces, often without privacy or secure access to latrines as shelters in the IDP sites were built several years ago without considering these arrangements, and because host communities receive displaced people in their homes and shelters are becoming overcrowded.
- Women also reported instances of sexual violence, including rape during flight and in displacement sites, as well as domestic violence exacerbated by alcohol use and the stress of displacement. Emotional abuse and coercion were also commonly described, particularly in contexts of extreme poverty and dependence.
- **Pregnant women face additional risks**, including lack of access to maternal health services.

Key protection risks faced by women and girls in the area of displacement



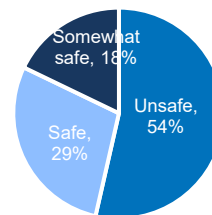
“My husband is very nervous, we lost our machamba, I’m afraid of what he might do to me”

(Displaced woman in Naputa)

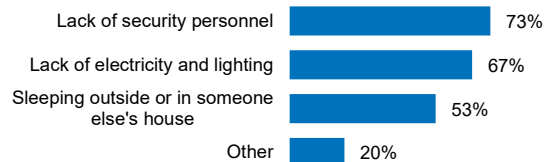
Perception of safety in area of displacement:

- The perceptions of safety are mixed and reveal significant protection concerns.
- Over half of key informants stated that displaced individuals feel unsafe in the IDP sites such as Natove or host communities such as Naputa where they are currently staying.
- Among those who reported feeling unsafe, the leading reasons included **lack of security personnel, lack of lighting and electricity, and sleeping in someone else’s house**.
- Many participants reported sleeping outdoors, such as under trees, due to overcrowded shelters, in houses and on verandas of host communities, which increases their exposure to theft, harassment, and violence, especially at night. Women specifically emphasized the lack of privacy and the danger of sharing spaces with unrelated men, reinforcing the perception of insecurity within displacement settings.
- Women and youth expressed specific fear that **nearby insurgent activity** could lead to renewed violence in or around the sites. In one of the interviews in Naputa, it was mentioned that six NSAG members were seen passing through the village next to the host community where they are sheltered.

Do people feel safe in the IDP site or host community where they staying now?



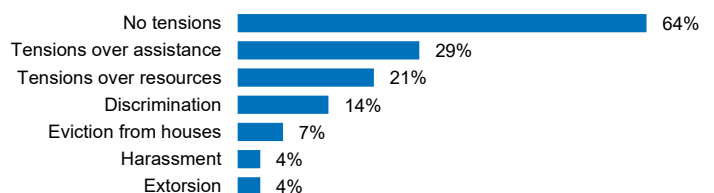
If not, what makes them feel unsafe?



Social cohesion:

- The majority mentioned no tensions between the displaced population and the local community. However, one-third of key informants observed tensions between communities, primarily driven by competition for assistance, tensions over resources, and discrimination.
- For instance, displaced youth in Natove reported being barred from using communal water sources, and women describing frustration over being excluded from aid registration lists.

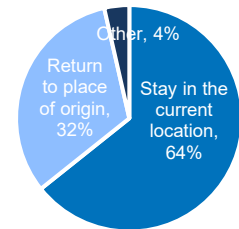
Are there any tensions between the newly arrived people with the host community or other IDPs? If so, over what?



Future intentions:

- Overall, the **prevailing intention among displaced persons in Ancuabe is to stay in their current locations.**
- Major impediments to return include imminent protection risks such as attacks and trauma caused by flight, the lack of essential services such as healthcare, education, and access to clean water.
- Another recurring message from discussions with affected individuals is their intention to wait for official communication or assurance from the government before making any decisions about returning.

Intentions for the future



ONGOING ACTIVITIES

- **UNHCR has already started to respond on the ground.**
- **GBV and PSEA activities** were conducted for women from the Ncoti community.
- **Mental health and psychosocial support (MHPSS)** was provided by UNHCR in Nanjua A and Marokani sites, particularly to women who exhibited significant nervousness and anxiety due to their experiences.

However, more needs to be done, together with the authorities as well as actors of the Protection Clusters and other Clusters, who have also started responding on the ground.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Integrate protection in shelter arrangements and improve safety in displacement areas

- Enhance privacy at the shelters in IDP sites.
- Increase lighting and security presence, to reduce exposure to night-time risks and violence.

Enhance mental health and psychosocial support

- Train outreach workers to provide basic psychological first aid and offer psychosocial support to children in safe spaces and schools.

Restore access to civil documentation

- Deploy mobile teams to issue/reissue IDs, prioritizing women, youth, and unaccompanied or separated children to facilitate access to assistance and services.

Protect children at risk

- Scale up child protection mechanisms, including identification of unaccompanied and separated children, family tracing services, and prevent harmful coping strategies through safe learning and recreational activities.

Support persons with disabilities and elderly

- Identify individuals with mobility or functional challenges and refer them to receive prioritized aid and accessible services at site level.

Address community tensions early

- Promote unhindered access to distribution and engage both displaced and host communities in dialogue to reduce tensions over water, food, and registration.

Clarify return conditions

- Communicate clearly and regularly that return is voluntary; monitor pressure to return and coordinate with authorities to ensure safe, informed decisions.