

## Protection Mainstreaming Key Elements & safe distributions (Reducing Protection Risks in in-kind Distributions)

The Humanitarian Community's approach to protection mainstreaming focuses on four key elements:

- 1. Prioritizing the safety and dignity of beneficiaries and avoid causing harm:** Concern for the safety and dignity of individuals and avoiding causing further harm is central to mainstreaming protection. The safety of beneficiaries should be the primary consideration in humanitarian action. But being safe is not enough if people do not have their dignity: people need to feel valued, have a sense of self-respect and feel they have some control over their lives. Prioritizing safety and dignity can also help to prevent or minimize the possible unintended negative effects that our interventions can cause for beneficiaries.
- 2. Ensuring meaningful access to assistance and services:** Recognized as a crucial component of all humanitarian interventions, we all must seek to ensure that people have a meaningful opportunity to attain their rights by accessing available services and assistance. Conflict and divisions within society often emerge from discrimination resulting in individuals or groups being unable to access services. Barriers to access can exist in different forms, including logistical and social/cultural factors, insecurity and a lack of information on available assistance and services.
- 3. Accountability:** Setting-up appropriate mechanisms through which affected populations can measure the adequacy of interventions, and address concerns and complaints. Mechanisms for collecting feedback should use a combination of channels. Channels include *active channels*, where client perspectives are deliberately and systematically solicited (such as focus groups); *reactive channels*, where beneficiaries have more control over when and how they share perspectives (such as complaint lines); and finally, '*open channels*' where feedback is solicited in an ad hoc manner, through ongoing interaction during implementation.
- 4. Participation and empowerment:** The humanitarian community should strive to put affected populations at the center of decision-making processes that affect their lives so that services are choice-driven and people-focused. Special attention should also be paid to ensuring the participation of, and consultation with, the most at-risk and/or marginalized members of society whose voices may not otherwise be heard. Humanitarian programming should also seek to support the development of self-protection capacities and assist people to claim their rights, including (not exclusively) the rights to shelter, food, water and sanitation, health, and education.

# Protection Mainstreaming Key Elements & safe distributions (Reducing Protection Risks in in-kind Distributions)

## Safe Distributions:

Distributing of humanitarian assistance is one of the most important elements during the humanitarian response and can significantly improve the safety and wellbeing of individuals. Non-Food Item, Food Security, WASH, health, Education, Nutrition and Protection actors can help reduce and mitigate protection risks to individuals and communities when conducting distributions of assistance (food and nonfood items). All distributions must ensure that beneficiaries can safely access distributions with dignity and without harm or discrimination. Moreover, humanitarian actors must act to support the most vulnerable groups and maintain accountability by involving and empowering beneficiaries in planning, implementation and monitoring. This document provides guidance on how partners can mainstream protection into distributions of assistance in Syria including during the earthquake emergency response

## *Issues of concern as identified by humanitarian partners in Syria:*

### Safety

- Safety of distribution including tension among host community, IDPs, returnees and refugees.
- Sexual exploitation and abuse (SEA), including harassment against affected people, by distributors and male beneficiaries while queuing and before/after distributions; for example, requiring affected people to exchange allotted or additional assistance for sexual favors or other acts, with women and girls, as well as other at-risk groups being particularly vulnerable to abuse.
- Women and girls may also face protection risks, including the risk of harassment and abuse, when travelling to/from distribution points or/and when registering their names for accessing assistance.

### Access

- Difficulty in accessing distributions for women, unaccompanied children, survivors of GBV, elderly, people with disabilities (PWD), and their caregivers including mental health disorders.
- Restricted movement of groups (specifically child-and female-headed households, PWDs, elderly), far distances to distribution point, long wait times, and free/safe transportation to reach distribution points, especially for heavy goods.
- Restricted movement of persons who do not have legal documents (civil documentation) and fear arrest/being turned down at checkpoints.

### Equality and Non-discrimination

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- Unclear criteria for beneficiary selection amongst humanitarian partners (and possible duplication).
- Persons with disabilities and their needs are often not identified in assessments, resulting in their exclusion from criteria for beneficiary selection and thus preventing equal access to assistance.
- Humanitarian items delivered in a way that cannot be easily carried by recipients in terms of weight and dimensions.
- No equal treatment and appropriate distribution to beneficiaries within a site and in urban settings.
- No Consideration for gender roles and responsibilities in accordance to cultural context (such as no female staff in distributions).
- NGO staff, distributors, military actors or local leaders denying assistance to certain groups of individuals due to discrimination.

### Common actions recommended by the protection sector in Syria:

#### 1. *Safety and security and crowd control*

- Prior to a distribution, make sure that distribution sites and routes to/from distribution sites are free from explosive hazards by consulting security experts, local authorities and mine organizations
- Security personal should not be involved in distribution or beneficiary selection. Distributions must not inadvertently empower or strengthen the position of armed groups or other actors. If they need to be present, brief them beforehand on the process and, if demanded, assign small roles away from beneficiaries & agree not to use weapons/sticks/ as crowd control
- Communicate before and during distribution with local officials/leaders and the community about your role, procedures, criteria and shortages to avoid causing conflict and tension between the community and other partners working in the areas after providing assistance
- **If possible**, establish multiple distribution sites to avoid creating crowds and beneficiaries crossing conflict lines or travelling long distances; choose locations with shading, sex-segregated toilets, drinking water and functional health facilities nearby
- Locate distribution points away from crowded areas such as markets, hospitals. Do not use a women's center or child-friendly space as distribution points; however, they can be useful sources of information to monitor if distributions are reaching the most vulnerable groups

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- If possible, establish multiple storage sites to enable quick distribution
- Map routes to/from distribution sites to see if safe for women and children and easily traveled by PWD (e.g., pathways/roads that are firm, if community has available transportation to the distribution sites, etc..)
- Consider **house-to-house or tent-to-tent** distributions with female staff present or transportation support for people who are unable to leave their homes or have movement limitations (e.g., PWD, elderly, pregnant women, female- and child-headed households)
- Have separate queues for males & females for both registration & distribution, using guide ropes & signs; have separate Priority Line that helps at-risk groups first: PWDs, sick, elderly, pregnant women, unaccompanied children, parents with infants, female- & child-headed households
- Provide seats for pregnant women, PWD, elderly, etc. who cannot stand queuing for long periods
- Use clear signs in local language with large font, contrasting colors and symbols/drawings

### 2. *Staffing, monitoring and communication with communities:*

- Recruit male and female volunteers who are respected in the community and independent of armed groups. Do not employ children (under 18 years old)
- Employ female staff, including as: registration officers, drivers, distribution officers, tally clerks, monitors and managers. Have female staff talk to and be available for women and girls during the distribution and listen to their concerns. Make distribution staff visible with hats, vests and other visibility materials
- Train staff on Do No Harm, protection from SEA (PSEA), and child safeguarding; and sign and adhere to code of conduct that respect and uphold the rights of beneficiaries and PSEA
- Set up communication and complaints mechanisms or desks that are clearly marked; for ex. feedback desks, face-to-face interviews with beneficiaries, including women and children
- Before, seek info about other service providers in the area & brief staff in case beneficiaries express need for other assistance to which staff can refer them (health, GBV, child protection, legal)

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- Have teams on ground to monitor distributions and respond quickly and fairly to safety concerns including coercion, intimidation, cheating, violence, or exploitation, including actions perpetrated by project staff
- Have senior staff regularly review complaints and ensure immediate response and investigations to avoid further abuse, including repeated abuse or intimidation of beneficiaries
- Inform community of their entitlements (i.e., assistance is free and doesn't require favors, access or sex in return) and encourage them to report complaints to trained monitoring staff or to IDP Information Center if they have phones. Print and affix **PSEA posters** around distribution site.
- If taking photos for public information purposes or social media, please sure to have to have consent from beneficiaries and children parents

### 3. *Registration<sup>1</sup>, targeting and consultation*

- Protect beneficiary lists and ensure they have only necessary information to avoid traceability. Apply data sharing agreements for lists if they need to be shared with other humanitarian partners. Passwords protect soft copies of lists and keep hard copies in locked cabinets
- Work with local GBV, Child Protection and/or general Protection teams to help ensure equitable access to services (incl. documentation). Avoid targeting GBV survivors or blanket categories of children (e.g., 'separated children' or 'children formerly with armed groups'). Instead, use criteria based on vulnerability to abuse, exploitation and violence
- Ensure coordination with the relevant sectors to avoid duplication and address gaps
- Consult beneficiaries, especially women and girls, in sex-segregated focus groups using same-sex facilitators about their specific needs, sufficient quantities and appropriate materials; include items related to women and girls' specific roles, such as cooking (e.g., pots, pans, fuel), child or elder care (e.g., soap, cloth). Ensure women and girls with different types of disabilities, and/or their caregivers, are included in these focus groups to highlight their specific needs.
- Systematically identify disability using a tool such as the [Washington Group Questions](#) and include disability in targeting criteria, looking at intersectionality for individuals identified as having a disability; factors such as age, gender, medical condition, presence/absence of a caregiver, specific needs have an impact on the level of risk/number and types of barriers a person with disability will face

<sup>1</sup> In case partners have direct access to beneficiaries and allowed to register from local authorities

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- During post-distribution follow-up, understand how women, children and other groups accessed the distributed goods and their feedback on the process and materials/food/needs
- Choose distribution times, durations & places by consulting with women, men & children and their daily activities (domestic duties, school times); distributions during daylight hours allow safe travel home

### 4. Health Precautions for Distributions during COVID-19

- It is mandatory that all staff regularly use hand sanitation and follow general hygiene practices
- Ensure that a hand washing point is supplied with appropriate quantities and qualities of water and soap (include a poster that depicts the WHO recommended hand washing steps).
- Instruct beneficiaries to maintain a distance of 1.5 meters at all points during distributions.
- Directly provide beneficiaries exhibiting any respiratory symptoms with a facemask.
- There should be no physical contact between staff distributing, and beneficiaries or between beneficiaries.
- When feasible, use a contactless thermometer to do temperature checks before approaching the collection-site (if a beneficiary presents high temperature, they must be directed to the sheltered/covered area and referred to health services).
- A bottle of hand sanitizer gel (containing more than 60% alcohol) should be placed on the tarpaulin/table for beneficiaries to use before taking the distribution item.
- Staff should place the distribution item on the tarpaulin/table at the distribution point and step back, permitting the beneficiary to collect the distribution item.
- Beneficiaries are immediately to be directed to exit the collection-site and encouraged to depart the distribution site.
- On completion of distribution, ensure that the distribution point (room/ area/ tarpaulin) is swept clean (with water and regular detergent) and then sprayed with disinfectant (0.5% chlorine solution). Once dry, the tarpaulin should be folded away for storage/transportation. The broom may be used again after cleaning to remove any debris and then bleach spraying.
- When community to and from the distribution site, there should be maximum two persons inside each vehicle.

**When a child is found alone at a distribution site:** Do not immediately remove the child. Ask the child who they are with and where this person may be. Consider that girls may prefer speaking to female staff or that the child may feel uncomfortable speaking to you if the child thinks those around her/him are risks or threats. Ask people around the

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child if they know anything about the child and if the child may be separated from family or unaccompanied, as the parents may return shortly. For babies and young children who do not know their names and places of origin or children with disabilities, ask adults and older children around them whether they know the child or their family and where the group came from, before moving the child from the area (unless it is unsafe to keep a child there). If confirmed the child is alone, immediately contact a Child Protection actor.

### Other resources

- [Video by Global Shelter Cluster on distributions, with Arabic subtitles](#)
- [Protection mainstreaming by Global Protection Cluster, with Arabic Subtitles](#)
- [Preventing Sexual Exploitation and Abuse in Humanitarian Action](#), Arabic)
- [Accountability to the affected populations, Food and security cluster. Arabic subtitles](#)