

## Protecting People in the Midst of Famine:

# Responding to Urgent Risks in the Horn of Africa

*The drought in the Horn of Africa, together with the conflict in Somalia, is causing critical protection risks with some 12.4 million people affected in the region. Before the onset of the drought Somalis were facing serious threats to their physical safety as a result of decades of conflict. Today, as the impact of the drought intensifies, women and children in the sub-region become even more vulnerable to physical threats and attack as they search for food, water and access to medical care. Straining to find the basic necessities of life, families risk separation.*

*While the shelter, health and nutritional needs of the population must be addressed, the acute protection risks faced by the drought-affected population are often life-threatening and must receive urgent attention.*

## Main protection concerns

- **12.4 million people are affected by the drought** in Kenya, Ethiopia, Somalia and Djibouti. The critical protection risks include forced displacement, family separation, sexual violence and abuse, early marriage of girls and lack of access to basic services. If not urgently and properly addressed, these risks may become life-threatening for people whether displaced by the crisis or remaining in their home areas.
- Due to the enormity of the crisis, insufficient assistance is available to fully meet the needs of the affected population. **Shortages are disproportionately affecting the weakest and most vulnerable people.**
- Large numbers of people, especially inside Somalia, are moving in search of assistance and temporarily settle alongside existing communities, many of whom are themselves struggling as a consequence of the drought. In Somalia, for example, an additional **100,000 people have been displaced to Mogadishu** over the past two months, joining over 350,000 persons previously displaced. The **IDPs live side by side with the urban poor** in precarious conditions thereby overstressing meagre resources.
- The drought related crisis in Somalia is unfolding in the context of an armed conflict that has plagued the country for two decades. With the onset of the drought, **pre-existing protection problems**, such as exposure to hostilities, family separation, forced displacement, sexual violence, forced recruitment and other serious human rights violations have been compounded by severe food insecurity across the country.
- **Physical insecurity** remains a pressing protection concern in Somalia, with a high level of civilian casualties, particularly children. Threats to the civilian population include indiscriminate attacks, arbitrary arrest, detention and instances where parties to the conflict prevent civilians from accessing safer areas.
- **Humanitarian access** to some of the worst drought-affected areas in Somalia by relief workers remains limited due to the ongoing conflict and security threats against them.
- Across the drought-affected region, in recent weeks, there has been an **increase in the numbers of unaccompanied or separated children**. When families move or members of a family leave in search of pasture or assistance, children may be left without a caregiver or inadvertently separated from their families. Older children are often sent in search of food and other basic necessities. Without a caregiver, children are at heightened risk of **exploitation, trafficking, and recruitment** by armed groups. With schools closing and children unable to attend, their safety and social development are jeopardised.
- Throughout the drought-affected countries in the Horn of Africa, an alarming number of women and children experience **sexual violence** which, if survived, leaves deep physical and psychological scars. Scarce resources increase the risk of **sexual exploitation and abuse**, particularly of women, girls and boys. Families and individuals searching for food, water and other basic commodities are vulnerable to people who exploit them for sex in exchange for such necessities.

# In order to address these urgent risks, protection actors need support to do the following:

- Ensure that **needs assessments** have a strong protection dimension and that affected populations fully **participate** in these assessments.
- Ensure that protection issues arising from both conflict and drought are adequately taken into account in **inter-agency needs assessments**.
- Scale up and strengthen the **Protection Monitoring Network and Population Movement Tracking** in Somalia.
- Engage, sensitise and collaborate closely with **local authorities and traditional leaders**.
- Scale up **child protection programmes**, including strengthening Monitoring and Reporting Mechanisms, child friendly spaces and psychosocial support for children and families.
- Strengthen **family tracing** activities.
- Scale up **sexual and gender-based violence prevention and response** activities and work with other sectors to ensure that comprehensive post rape care, age appropriate psychosocial support, shelter services, as well as distribution of hygiene and dignity kits are available to survivors.
- Ensure that all collected **data is disaggregated** by sex and age to ensure a more comprehensive understanding of protection risks and to better inform programming.
- Identify vulnerabilities and specific needs among the affected population and establish **referral mechanisms** for their inclusion in livelihoods, health, food, education, nutrition and other assistance programmes.
- Advocate for a strong **protection component in assistance programmes** implemented by other sectors to ensure that vulnerable groups and persons with special needs are prioritised.
- Scale up **livelihood programming** as a means of mitigating protection risks.
- Advocate with all actors for the **free and safe movement** of people as they attempt to access assistance.
- Support advocacy efforts with armed groups to enhance **compliance with international humanitarian and human rights law** and provide humanitarian agencies with **safe and unimpeded access** to affected populations

## Did You Know?

**UNHCR is the global cluster lead agency of the Global Protection Cluster.**

The Global Protection Cluster is a coordination and collaboration platform comprising, on the basis of principles of partnership, non-governmental organisations, United Nations humanitarian, human rights and development agencies as well as other relevant international organisations.<sup>1</sup>

The Global Protection Cluster includes five (5) Areas of Responsibility which are led by Focal Point Agencies:

**Rule of Law and Justice** (UNDP/OHCHR); **Prevention of and Response to Gender-Based Violence** (UNFPA/UNICEF); **Child Protection** (UNICEF); **Mine Action** (UNMAS); and **Land, Housing and Property Rights** (UN HABITAT).

<sup>1</sup> The Global Protection Cluster is chaired by the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees. Participants, amongst others, include: Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights, United Nations Children's Fund, United Nations Development Programme, United Nations Human Settlements Programme, United Nations Population Fund, United Nations Mine Action Service, United Nations Relief and Works Agency, World Food Programme, Office of the Special Rapporteur on the Human Rights of Internally Displaced Persons, International Organisation for Migration, Concern Worldwide, Danish Refugee Council, Human Rights Watch, Interaction, International Catholic Migration Commission, International Council of Voluntary Agencies, International Rescue Committee, Jesuit Refugee Service, Women's Commission for Refugee Women and Children, Norwegian Refugee Council/Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre, Oxfam, Save the Children Alliance, Steering Committee for Humanitarian Response, Terre des Hommes, World Vision International. The International Committee of the Red Cross participates as an observer.

