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## IASC Operational Policy and Advocacy Group (OPAG) - Emergency Directors Group (EDG)

### Virtual Meeting

26 April 2022

### SUMMARY RECORD

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#### INTRODUCTION

The Operational Policy and Advocacy Group (OPAG) of the Inter-Agency Standing Committee (IASC) convened on 26 April to discuss the findings and recommendations of the IASC commissioned independent “Review of the implementation of the IASC Protection Policy,” hereafter the Protection Policy Review.

In his introductory remarks, OPAG co-Chair, Mr. Geir Olav Lisle, welcomed the OPAG and EDG members and representatives of the independent Review Team. He noted the independent review has been conducted by the Humanitarian Policy Group (HPG) at ODI. The draft findings were circulated for comments within the IASC, and the review’s recommendations were developed in coordination with IASC members. He thanked the review team for their efforts in consulting with IASC members; he also thanked IASC members for their active engagement.

Today’s meeting was an opportunity to discuss the findings, conclusions, and recommendations of the report. The IASC Principals are envisaged to consider the Review’s findings and recommendations and follow up action.

Mr. Lisle noted that the Centrality of Protection had been an IASC priority since its founding, as affirmed in the Whole of System Review of Protection in the Context of Humanitarian Action in 2016, the IASC Protection Policy of 2016 and IASC Principals had recently decided to maintain Centrality of Protection as a priority for the 2022-2023. While the Protection Policy Review report highlights the centrality of protection to the work of the IASC and its members, it also highlights challenges and shows that more needs to be done to ensure that protection is better understood, prioritised and funded.

#### PRESENTATION OF THE INDEPENDENT REVIEW OF THE IMPLEMENTATION OF THE IASC PROTECTION POLICY

Ms. Bernadette Raymonde Castel and Ms. Erin Weir, co-Chairs of the IASC Task Force 1 on Centrality of Protection introduced the presentation of the Protection Policy Review report, noting that they were proud to see the importance of the Centrality of Protection reaffirmed. The Independent Review Team, Jamie McGoldrick, Ms. Jane Cocking, Mr. Damian Lilly and Ms. Gemma Davies presented the Protection Policy Review report. Ms. Cocking and Ms. Davies highlighted the report’s key finding that more needs to be done to effectively ensure protection as a system-wide responsibility and priority. The Protection Policy Review had identified barriers and blockages and made recommendations for how the humanitarian system could address them and bring about real change as the protection risks of ongoing crisis are significant. They noted that this review builds upon an Independent Whole of System Review of Protection in the Context of Humanitarian Action in 2016, which had as its backdrop the Sri Lanka conflict in 2009. The current review took place as similar crises were unfolding in Ethiopia, Ukraine, Afghanistan and Myanmar, which highlighted the urgent need for collective action, without which the system

would once again leave people at risk of harm. They noted that the review reflected input of 700 people who had participated in the review process, including feedback from IASC members. The Protection Policy Review report is planned to be presented to IASC principals and the IASC was expected to agree a management response to guide future action. The review team then presented the six key findings and associated recommendations of the report.

### **1) Conceptual Clarity**

Ms. Cocking noted a key finding of the Report was that humanitarian actors and stakeholders were unclear on the definition of protection. This flowed through to structures, activities, and actors' expectations of each other. It was necessary to ensure rigorous conceptual clarity and clear practical direction on how to translate the ambition of collective approaches towards reducing risks into practice action. In particular, to distinguish between protection as a system-wide strategic goal and protection as a technical sector designed to contribute to the strategic goal.

#### Recommendation:

The Protection Policy Review recommends a small but diverse working group convened by the ERC should develop a succinct, operationally-focused overview of what protection as an outcome entails applicable for all humanitarian actors and how they can contribute to this strategic goal. Ms. Cocking noted that this should not be a new definition or guideline but rather an operationally focused "guiding light".

#### Discussion:

Over the course of the ensuing discussion, members affirmed the need for greater conceptual clarity and that a muddled understanding of the Centrality of Protection had at times hindered its implementation. IASC members requested further clarity on the proposed working group, some highlighting the existence of the Centrality of Protection Task Force under OPAG, which would be the appropriate body to support, however expressed general support for this recommendation. UNFPA noted that it had monitored GBV at the outcome level and would welcome participation in the proposed working group.

### **2) Robust Leadership and Accountability**

A second finding of the Protection Policy Review was that there was a lack of commitment to and prioritisation of protection across the humanitarian sector, which was compounded by a lack of robust leadership and accountability for ensuring protection is at the core of any humanitarian response. Leaders at country level needed to better understand protection and must feel more confident that they are backed and supported by their organisations and global leadership if they took the risk of taking a strong position on protection. In addition, the humanitarian system currently lacks clear accountability mechanisms and benchmarks. For humanitarians to take on a lower risk threshold, member states and donors must play a key role.

#### Recommendation:

Concerted action was required to support risk taking by field leadership and on the institutional level when it is in the best interests of affected populations. The Protection Policy Review recommends that an accountability mechanism is developed, and that Humanitarian Coordinators (HCs) and country-based heads of agencies are supported and held to account for demonstrating what they have done to promote protection. The Protection

Policy Review calls upon Member States to provide political backing to support humanitarian leaders to adopt robust approaches to protection.

Discussion:

Over the course of the ensuing discussion, members affirmed the need for greater accountability and HC-level and HCT engagement on protection. Some members highlighted that capacity building should focus on leadership and raising awareness of leadership's role in strengthening protection as well as expectations placed on them. It was noted that the greatest crises often present the greatest challenges to leadership and require HCs to take risks to ensure protection. The Member States' support was needed to empower HCs to take risks to ensure protection when host governments challenge protection programming. Members stated that double hatted HCs can no longer be considered independent.

Mr. McGoldrick stated that the role of the Review Team was to make suggestions, rather than formulate a way forward, which would be discussed by the IASC Principals. He agreed that the role of the HC and HCT were difficult, and that system leadership had responsibility to support them when they took risks to ensure protection of populations at risk. He noted that heads of agencies and the Secretary-General could do more to speak up and support HC and HCTs. The proposed accountability framework would be an important tool to help a better understanding of the role of senior leadership, headquarters and external actors, including in supporting HCs and HCTs when they take risks to adopt more robust approaches to protection.

### **3) Collective Responsibility**

Mr. Lilly noted that the Protection Policy Review found that protection had not yet become a system-wide collective responsibility central to humanitarian action as had been intended by the Protection Policy in 2016. There needed to be a recommitment to this collective responsibility and agreement on how to achieve impact.

Recommendation:

The Review Team recommended that all humanitarian organizations demonstrate their commitment to protection by integrating it into their organisational policies, strategies, priorities and work plans. Humanitarian Country Teams (HCTs) should no longer be required to produce HCT Protection Strategies which has become a checkbox exercise. Instead, they should be required to agree a maximum of two to three protection priorities, and actions to address these should be embedded in HCT workplans and Humanitarian Response Plans (HRPs).

In addition, the role of specialist support around protection should be clarified. The Review Team recommended a system-wide responsibility for providing standardized, dedicated, longer-term specialist support around protection for HCs and HCTs.

Discussion:

Over the course of the ensuing discussion, members affirmed the need for greater collective responsibility and high-level engagement across the humanitarian sector in order to build system-wide ownership and provide clarity of direction. Some members pointed out that protection advisors were often already in place, however more needed to be done to ensure their advice was heeded, requesting practical recommendations on how to bring this forward. Other members also expressed doubt regarding the need to de-link such advisors from clusters. Concern was expressed with regard to the recommendation that the ProCap Project be phased out, noting that

the Project aims to deliver on the strategic support to HCs and HCTs that the review highlights as a key priority. Furthermore, it was noted that there had been an increased demand/request of Humanitarian Coordinators for ProCap Advisers as well as reforms of the Project, which addressed the ad hoc nature of the support offered in the past. The Review Team clarified the recommendation was not intended to shift resources away from protection but rather to ensure sustained protection capacity at the strategic level was offered. As such, a proposal was made to reframe the recommendation to reflect the importance of providing more sustainable strategic protection capacity and support to field leadership

#### **4) Simplification of the Protection architecture**

Another key finding of the report was that the protection architecture had become overly complicated and complex and process oriented, requiring a greater focus on operational issues.

##### Recommendation:

The Review Team recommended that the protection architecture be reformed with a view to simplifying and streamlining it while maintaining its technical, operational support and coordination function. They recommended that the protection cluster be reformed so that it focused on its core functions related to information sharing, technical support and operational coordination within the sector rather than system-wide support on protection. They further called upon donors to promote and fund this reform process and to hold IASC agencies to account for delivery of this simplified architecture.

##### Discussion:

Several members expressed concern or disagreement with the suggested reform of the protection cluster alone, in particular with reevaluating its role and relegating it to a technical role; some members observed that rather than focus on one cluster alone, this could be linked to broader review of the humanitarian architecture. UNHCR noted it would be happy to work with the Global Protection Cluster and other colleagues to review its functionality, while noting disagreement with labeling or limiting the cluster as only 'technical'. UNFPA stressed the need to include gender and GBV in protection in order to ensure a more holistic view of protection and adequate consideration of gender. The Review Team emphasized that the report was a clarion call for simplification with a recommendation to provide standardized, dedicated, technical support for protection.

#### **5) Protection as an outcome**

Ms. Davies noted that the report found that protection was still not conceived as an outcome that humanitarian actors can collectively address, but rather as a set of activities.

##### Recommendation:

The Protection Policy Review recommends steps to ensure protection action focuses on reducing risks. All humanitarian actors should be encouraged and supported to design their humanitarian responses based on a comprehensive assessment of risks to violence, coercion and deliberate deprivation rather than focus on responding to needs. In addition, the report recommends that all actors establish monitoring approaches to measure this reduction of risks. The annual GPC Centrality of Protection Review report is recommended to be

transitioned into an IASC product, which would consolidate monitoring in line with the proposed accountability mechanism.

Discussion:

Some members supported this recommendation, noting it was an important aspect of mainstreaming protection, and offered lessons from GBV risk assessment conducted in Sudan and Syria. UNHCR stated it would be happy to elevate the GPC's annual Centrality of Protection Review to OPAG this year, and explore co-leading with broader IASC engagement, more importantly HCs and operational agencies of the HCTs.

**6) Inclusive approach**

An additional key finding of the report was that as protection challenges are multifaceted, a more inclusive approach was needed that brought in a wider range of local and international actors, including beyond the humanitarian system.

Recommendation:

The Protection Policy Review recommends a more inclusive approach in order to effect fundamental behaviour change and build trust to normalise collective ways of working between the international humanitarian community, local and national actors, and among humanitarian, human rights, development, and peacebuilding actors. Humanitarian actors should include and invest in local, community- and area-based approaches to protection.

Discussion:

Members expressed support for a more inclusive approach, which they noted reinforced the related goal of localization. Local actors emphasized that the report highlights the need for localization of protection efforts and the need to involve local actors in protection activities. The involvement of local actors in the humanitarian, recovery and rehabilitation operations helps strengthening the resilience of vulnerable groups.

**DISCUSSION**

In the ensuing discussion, members expressed support for the Protection Policy Review, its findings and recommendations, and that they would support taking forward recommendations' implementation, which was deemed imperative. Some members also expressed their gratitude that their feedback had been reflected in the report, while others noted that as an independent review, their feedback was not reflected and there remain areas of disagreement concerning certain segments of the Report. It was noted that the Report did not shy away from putting a spotlight on existing problems with regard to protection. Several members noted that the crises in Ethiopia, Ukraine, Myanmar, and Afghanistan mentioned by the Review Team all posed significant protection challenges that required being addressed, requiring engagement at the HC as well as the cluster level. Members noted that OPAG should strongly recommend follow up action on the review's findings by the IASC agreeing a management response plan that identifies clear and timed future action, as set out in the Protection Policy Review Terms of Reference.

Lastly, members noted that protection remains a disproportionately underfunded sector, and that funding the recommendations and reforms outlined in the Report should come in addition to and not at the expense of prioritizing funding for life-saving specialized protection services.

The Review Team emphasized the review's objective of encouraging systemic change to achieve meaningful protection outcomes. Mr. McGoldrick noted that for this reason the review honed in on specific actors and recommendations, which, however, require management support, political will, the participation and a longer-term commitment of IASC members and actors outside of the IASC. Mr. McGoldrick stressed the importance for IASC Principals to review and endorse the report and of IASC members acting on the report's findings and recommendations and building upon the work being done under the accountability to affected people and Agenda for Protection initiatives. Ms. Cocking highlighted the importance of making the response to the Report specific, actionable and time bound, and conducting a progress review every six months.

In conclusion, it was requested that the review team adjusts the Protection Policy Review's findings and recommendations in light of OPAG's discussion, before submitting it to the IASC. Members were urged to own the review and its recommendations and support their implementation.

## **ACTION POINTS**

1. Update the key findings and recommendations of the independent review to reflect feedback of OPAG/ EDG ahead of submission to the IASC Principals [**Review Team**]
2. Subject to the IASC Principals decision, develop a Management Response Plan laying out the steps that will be taken to implement the agreed upon recommendations and review progress on a regular basis [**IASC Task Force 1 on Centrality of Protection**]

**ANNEX: PARTICIPANTS LIST**

<b>OPAG Co-Chair</b>	Mr. Geir Olav Lisle, Deputy Secretary-General, NRC
<b>Chair of the EDG</b>	Ms. Ghada Eltahir Mudawi
<b>FAO</b>	Ms. Marta Bruno
<b>ICRC</b>	Ms. Filipa Schmitz Guinote
<b>ICVA</b>	Ms. Mirela Shuteriqi
<b>ICVA – ACBAR</b>	Ms. Lisa K. Piper
<b>ICVA – COAST</b>	Mr. Rezaul Karim Chowdhury
<b>ICVA – FRD</b>	Mr. Azmat Khan
<b>ICVA – IMC</b>	Ms. Mary Pack
<b>IFRC</b>	Mr. Frank Mohrhauer
<b>InterAction – CRS</b>	Ms. Emily Wei
<b>InterAction</b>	Mr. Julien Schopp
<b>InterAction – Global Communities</b>	Ms. Pia Wanek
<b>IOM</b>	Ms. Tristan Burnett
<b>OCHA</b>	Mr. Ramesh Rajasingham
<b>OHCHR</b>	Mr. Roberto Ricci
<b>Save the Children</b>	Mr Nicholas Finney
<b>SCHR – Christian Aid</b>	Mr. Michael Mosselmans
<b>SR on HR of IDPs</b>	Ms. Kim Mancini
<b>UNDP</b>	Mr. Peter Batchelor
<b>UNFPA</b>	Mr. Max Diana
<b>UNHCR</b>	Ms. Annika Sandlund
<b>UNHCR</b>	Ms. Eva Garcia Bouzas
<b>UNICEF</b>	Mr. Grant Leaity
<b>WFP</b>	Mr. Gian Carlo Cirri
<b>WFP</b>	Ms. Amelia Stewart
<b>WHO</b>	Mr. Kevin Ousman
<b>World Bank</b>	Ms. Maria Dimitraou
<b>IASC secretariat</b>	Ms. Mervat Shelbaya

Presenters:

Co-Chair IASC Task Force 1 on Centrality of Protection	Ms. Bernadette Raymonde Castel
Co-Chair IASC Task Force 1 on Centrality of Protection	Ms. Erin Weir
Lead, Independent External Review Team	Mr. Jamie McGoldrick
Independent External Review Team	Ms. Jane Cocking
Independent External Review Team	Mr. Damian Lilly
Independent External Review Team	Ms. Gemma Davies