

Protection of Civilians Week 2026

Strengthening Protection of Civilians in Conflict: Country Spotlights & Recommendations

BACKGROUND

Protection is at the heart of the Danish Refugee Council's (DRC) mandate, which centers around responding to violence, coercion, and deliberate deprivation that threatens the lives and dignity of affected people. DRC firmly believes that protection must remain central to all humanitarian action, in line with the system-wide IASC commitment on the centrality of protection. Protection risks drive displacement and other humanitarian needs, and the absence of robust protection interventions in humanitarian crises has had devastating consequences, including protracted forced displacement, family separation, gender-based violence, and repeated violations of International Humanitarian Law. As humanitarian funding levels decrease globally and respect for international norms is increasingly undermined, ensuring strong and substantive support for protection must remain a top priority.

In this brief, DRC focuses on key protection risks in Lebanon, Occupied Palestinian Territory, Sudan, and the Democratic Republic of Congo and proposes global and context-specific recommendations to Member States to strengthen protection of civilians, including actionable steps to reverse the erosion of international law and the impunity enjoyed by its worst violators. Most data cited in this brief stem from regular DRC Protection Monitoring and Victim Assistance reports, as well as [DRC's Global Displacement Forecast](#), which are hyperlinked throughout and can be shared upon request.

Over the past year, in the four protection crises highlighted in this brief, DRC has observed a severe escalation of protection risks for civilians in conflict. While access constraints, funding gaps, and lack of duty-bearer capacity all contribute to these risks, underlying them all is a persistent erosion of respect for and compliance with International Humanitarian Law (IHL), disarmament treaties, and normative frameworks protecting civilians in conflict, alongside limited accountability for serious violations.

GLOBAL RECOMMENDATIONS

1. **Ensure protection remains a core component of humanitarian action**, to proactively reduce the impact of humanitarian shocks on, and produce better outcomes for, affected populations. DRC strongly urges that, in addition to addressing material needs, all discussions of humanitarian priorities include mitigating, preventing, and responding to protection risks, and that all parties to conflict ensure affected populations have access to protection.
2. **End impunity for violations of IHL and disarmament treaties.** DRC urges all parties to armed conflict to respect IHL, including by distinguishing between civilians and combatants, refraining from disproportionate or indiscriminate attacks, and protecting humanitarian personnel and assets. Disarmament treaties and norms – including the Anti-Personnel Mine Ban Convention, Convention on Cluster Munitions, and Explosive Weapons in Populated Areas Declaration – must also be upheld, as their disregard causes severe harm to individuals

and communities, contributes to displacement, and prevents returns. Member States and UN entities must strengthen compliance and accountability pathways, including by supporting independent monitoring and evidence preservation, enabling safe reporting by affected communities, and ensuring access to remedies for victims.

3. **Demand unimpeded humanitarian access**, including hard-to-reach displacement sites and the entry of essential items required for humanitarian response, and ensure the uninterrupted operation and registration of international and national NGOs. Address systematic obstruction and, in some contexts, deliberate weaponisation of humanitarian access, including administrative restrictions, movement constraints, and interference in operations that restrict predictable and principled humanitarian action.
4. **Include the voices of affected populations in their own protection**. Member States should redouble efforts to more substantively include and strengthen the agency of conflict-and-displacement-affected populations, including women and those from marginalised groups, in protection decisions and recovery planning.
5. **Provide flexible, multi-year funding for integrated protection programming**, including MPHSS, Victim Assistance, GBV prevention and response, child protection, legal aid, case management, EORE, and livelihoods, ensuring the inclusion of local civil society organisations, women-led organisations, and legal aid providers who are leading the protection response.

COUNTRY SPOTLIGHTS

Lebanon

Key protection risks

The recent re-escalation of conflict in Lebanon at the beginning of March has triggered mass displacement, with more than 1.2 million people displaced since the escalation and over one million people remaining internally displaced. According to the Disaster Risk Management Unit, as of 12 May, the crisis has resulted in 2,883 fatalities, 8,787 injuries, more than 292,000 cross-border movements to Syria, and 14,113 hostile incidents since 2 March. This is not the result of an unforeseen natural disaster, but of a man-made crisis that continues to force civilians into an impossible choice between death, destruction, and displacement.

On 16 April, a ten-day ceasefire was agreed between Israel and Lebanon. This was extended by three weeks on 24 April, and by 45 days on 15th May. While these are positive steps, they remain insufficient. According to the Ministry of Health, despite the ceasefire extension, violations have continued and hostilities have increased, including around 50 airstrikes in southern Lebanon on 2 May, killing at least 41 people, and an attack on Beirut's southern suburbs on 6 May. Based on data from the Disaster Risk Management Unit, an initial fall in collective shelter numbers after the ceasefire (from around 141,000 to 117,000) quickly reversed, showing cyclical and secondary displacement rather than safe, durable returns. Ground operations and demolition of civilian infrastructure continue in southern Lebanon in areas that received widespread evacuation orders between March-April 2026. With Israel announcing a 'yellow line,' returning populations face a state of uncertainty and risk. Additionally, families from southern Lebanon are increasingly worried about continued occupation and demolition of their villages – similar to tactics used by Israel in Gaza – leaving them with little possibility of return and nothing to return to. Previous ceasefire arrangements, including that of November 2024, were

repeatedly violated approximately 10,000 times by Israel and roughly five times by Hezbollah, underscoring the urgent need for a sustained and enforced cessation of hostilities.

Conditions in collective shelters across the country remain critically inadequate. Overcrowding, lack of water, heating, and sanitation facilities are exposing displaced populations to significant protection risks. In particular, women and girls face heightened risks of gender-based violence due to lack of privacy and safe spaces.

Outside shelters, families face increasing risks of eviction, homelessness, and secondary displacement. According to protection monitoring data by DRC and its partners, one quarter of households reported eviction threats, with 25% resulting in actual evictions, disproportionately affecting Syrian households. These patterns are increasing exposure to exploitation, including forced displacement, unsafe living arrangements, and limited access to justice, particularly for already vulnerable populations.

Children are also disproportionately affected. With public schools and many other technical colleges repurposed as shelters in March and limited access to remote learning, many are falling behind, increasing risks of child labour and long-term developmental impacts. Based on DRC's Protection Monitoring report in March, children (boys and girls) being out of school was the main risk reported by 86% of key informants speaking on behalf of migrant communities, with all highlighting that those without birth registration or civil documentation were more at risk.

The increasing strain on communities is heightening the risk of internal tensions and potential conflict, a dynamic that cannot be overlooked. According to DRC's Protection Monitoring Report in March, 10% of households reported recently facing tension in their communities. Primarily, tensions were reported with local authorities (45%) and members of the host community (40%). The absence of sufficient preventive action raises serious concerns about the adequacy of the current international response.

In addition, protection risks are particularly acute for IDPs living outside collective shelters, as well as for refugees, migrants, persons with disabilities, LGBTQI+ individuals, detainees, and communities in hard-to-reach areas. Unsafe movement, loss of documentation, rental discrimination, informal gatekeeping, and limited access to assistance are increasing exposure to exploitation, exclusion, and further displacement. [Attacks on healthcare and civilian infrastructure](#), including damaged hospitals, PHCCs, bridges, fuel stations, water systems, and agricultural land, are also compounding civilian harm and constraining humanitarian access.

Recommendations

1. Use all available diplomatic mechanisms to urgently **transform the temporary ceasefire into a sustained and durable ceasefire** that is implemented in practice and ensure compliance to prevent further loss of civilian life.
2. **Prioritise safe, voluntary, and dignified return**, ensuring that conditions are in place for civilians to return without exposure to unexploded ordnance, insecurity, or lack of essential services.
3. **Call for the removal of operational constraints on humanitarian response**, including delays in coordination, access restrictions, and the absence of key programming frameworks.

4. Take immediate steps to support Lebanon in ratifying the Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court to **ensure full adherence to and accountability under IHL**, including the protection of civilians, civilian infrastructure, and humanitarian personnel, and address patterns of violations that are undermining humanitarian operations.
5. **Urgently review and suspend arms transfers to Israel and Hezbollah**, particularly where there is a clear risk of their use in violations of International Humanitarian Law. Continued provision of military support risks contributing to civilian harm and undermining international legal obligations.

Occupied Palestinian Territory

Key protection risks

Following two years of devastating conflict since the attacks of 7 October 2023, humanitarian conditions in the Occupied Palestinian Territory have exponentially deteriorated. The war has resulted in over [72,000 Palestinian fatalities](#) and more than [170,000 injuries](#) in Gaza. At the same time, in the West Bank, over 1,000 Palestinians have been killed by Israeli forces and settlers since October 2023. Despite a fragile ceasefire between Israel and Hamas, brokered by the United States, which took effect on 9 October 2025, Israeli airstrikes and military operations continue – in clear violation of the ceasefire – resulting in further civilian casualties, including women and children. According to the MoH, [over 800 Palestinians have been killed and 1,940 injured](#) since the ceasefire entered into force.

Major protection risks for civilians in Gaza and the West Bank continue to be [safety and security](#), forced displacement, barriers to freedom of movement, and barriers to access humanitarian assistance. Predictable and foreseeable civilian harm continues – of the total casualties, civilians account for [89-97% of explosive weapon casualties](#). Structural coverage for protection-sensitive assistance design is insufficient or non-existent. Up to 60% of IDP sites remain unattended or severely underserved, not only due to access constraints but also severe funding gaps. Regarding longer-term protection consequences, there is a [significant gap in services available to victims](#) of explosive ordinance in Gaza with 56% of victims likely to live with permanent impairment, 66% can no longer work, and 81% have reported income loss.

Key protection issues identified by DRC's programmes are direct exposure to armed violence despite the ceasefire, either through deliberate or indiscriminate targeting of civilians and civilian infrastructure (including bombing, shelling, and small arms fire), protection risks in displacement including undignified living conditions, lack of privacy for women, girls, and young boys, violence within the family due to mental toll (including IPV), and exposure to ERW and all other compounding and associated risks.

Overall, the scale of the protection crisis in the Occupied Palestinian Territory is staggering, with [3.62 million people in need](#) across the area. In the West Bank, more than [40,000 Palestinians](#) have been displaced due to Israeli military operations, demolitions, and settler violence. In Gaza, the conflict has caused an unprecedented level of destruction, displacing 90% of the population and setting back development by an [estimated 77 years](#). Key infrastructure has been decimated, the health system has collapsed, and the entire population faces food insecurity, and acute malnutrition threatens the most vulnerable. As a result of the conflict and its devastating toll on civilians and civilian infrastructure, Gaza is rapidly approaching a near complete societal breakdown.

Recommendations

1. Use the diplomatic, political, economic, and legal tools at the disposal of Member States to **ensure respect for International Humanitarian and Human Rights Law**, with an urgent focus on demanding accountability for violations of International Humanitarian Law, particularly the principles of distinction and proportionality, for example by halting arms transfers where there is a clear risk of IHL violation.
2. **Recognise ongoing practices** (besiegement, food deprivation, destruction of civilian infrastructure, sexual violence, settler violence, home incursions, movement restrictions, and containment zones for distribution schemes) **as drivers of forcible displacement** and link them to diplomatic responses and refrain from funding or endorsing approaches that isolate or confine displaced civilians.
3. **Restrict or refrain from the use of explosive weapons in populated areas**, in line with EWIPA commitments.
4. **Support principled humanitarian coordination** and stand strong against any efforts towards militarisation or privatisation of distribution schemes as seen in the context of Gaza.
5. **Remove political and administrative barriers** to medical evacuation and specialised care.

Sudan

Key protection risks

Entering the fourth year into the conflict, civilians continue to bear the brunt of hostilities, with entrenched frontlines across Darfur, Kordofan, Khartoum, and renewed escalation in Blue Nile. The conflict has generated the [world's largest displacement crisis](#), with millions repeatedly displaced and exposed to violence during displacement routes, and arriving in locations where minimum safety, dignity and assistance conditions are not in place. Recent escalations, particularly in Darfur, Kordofan and Blue Nile, demonstrate a clear deterioration in the conduct of hostilities. This follows months of encirclement, deprivation and restricted movement, culminating in mass civilian casualties and large-scale displacement. Widespread reports are growing of serious violations of international humanitarian law, including killings, sexual violence, arbitrary detention, and attacks on civilians attempting to flee.

Across Sudan, [civilians face overlapping risks](#): direct and indiscriminate attacks, use of explosive weapons in populated areas and resulting destruction of civilian infrastructure, obstruction of humanitarian assistance and movement restrictions, arbitrary detention, family separation, child recruitment, GBV/CRSV, and explosive ordnance contamination. Protection Cluster analysis identified attacks on civilians, discriminatory denial of resources and assistance, GBV, explosive ordnance, and recruitment and use of children as priority risks requiring urgent action.

Humanitarian access remains one of the central barriers to civilian protection. Bureaucratic impediments, insecurity, drone attacks on humanitarian convoys, roadblocks, looting, and denial of relief continue to prevent life-saving assistance from reaching those most at risk. Access constraints are not only operational obstacles; in several locations they are directly contributing to starvation, preventable death, exposure to violence, and exclusion from protection services.

[Women and girls face extreme risks](#) of GBV and CRSV, including during attacks, displacement, checkpoint movement, detention, and in unsafe displacement sites lacking lighting, privacy, safe sanitation and available multi-sectorial support services and functioning referral pathways. Children

face grave violations, including killing and maiming, recruitment and use, exploitation, abduction, family separation, child labour, denial of education, and psychosocial distress.

Explosive ordnance contamination is expanding due to the use of heavy weapons, drones, shelling, and renewed fighting in urban and rural areas. EO risks are obstructing safe return, movement, farming, access to services, and humanitarian delivery, while children and returnees moving into unfamiliar contaminated areas face particular danger with an increased number of OR victims.

Livelihood opportunities remain scarce, with many relying on unstable casual labour and women engaged in domestic work or small income generating activities that have dwindled since the war began. Although markets remain somewhat operational, economic instability, security risks, and currency depreciation have caused volatile commodity prices, further limiting access to essentials and commodities, leaving many dependent on humanitarian aid.

Persons with disabilities face major barriers to safety, displacement and access to services. Many are unable to flee during violence or reach safe locations, and displacement often places them in environments that are not adapted to their needs, further limiting access to food, healthcare, and support. Women and girls with disabilities are especially vulnerable to violence and discrimination. Access to healthcare is critically limited and worsened with health facilities now partially or fully non-functional. Rehabilitation services are scarce, leaving many without support to regain independence, and those with severe limitations are the most excluded from care.

Recommendations

1. Use all diplomatic leverage to prevent further mass atrocity crimes **and ensure compliance with International Humanitarian Law**. Member States should urgently intensify coordinated diplomatic and political pressure on all parties to halt attacks on civilians and civilian objects, the use of explosive weapons in populated areas, siege tactics, sexual violence, and denial of humanitarian assistance, while ensuring the protection of displacement routes and safe passage for civilians wishing to flee.
2. **Address entrenched impunity driving violations**. Member States should recognise ongoing violations in Sudan as being enabled by persistent impunity. Coordinated action is required to ensure that perpetrators of serious violations face consequences, including through targeted measures, diplomatic pressure, and support to accountability mechanisms including the Fact-Finding Mission on Sudan and investing in documentation and evidence preservation. Ending impunity must be treated as a central pillar of civilian protection, not a parallel track.
3. **Scale up protection services**, including for women and children Increase support for GBV and child protection services, including case management, safe spaces, MHPSS, family tracing and reunification, and prevention of child recruitment and exploitation.

Democratic Republic of Congo

Key protection risks

For decades, the absence or weakness of state authority, rampant impunity, and competition for control of mineral-rich territory have enabled the proliferation of armed groups and the systematic targeting of civilians across Eastern DR Congo. What distinguishes the current moment is not the persistence of violence but the simultaneous erosion of structural layers that have historically

provided even partial civilian protection: the peacekeeping presence, humanitarian access, GBV response systems, and systems to support the Children Associated with Armed Forces and Armed Groups Task Force. Displaced populations face continued targeting in and around sites, secondary displacement is endemic, and the conditions for voluntary, safe, and dignified return do not exist in many areas of origin.

Between January and September 2025, the UN documented over [81,000 rapes](#), a 31.5% increase compared to the same period in 2024. Sexual violence is being used as a weapon of war by virtually all parties in a climate of near total impunity. The response system is collapsing at exactly the moment it is most needed: by mid-2025, only [23% of GBV interventions were funded](#), down from 48% in 2022, while USAID funding cuts have [eliminated access to post-exposure prophylaxis \(PEP\) kits](#) in areas where they are most urgently required. Violence attributed to the ADF, including burning houses and kidnapping and murder of civilians has massively increased in 2026; the group is responsible for 30% of all documented protection incidents in Ituri. In May 2026, [displaced persons from Plaine Savo formally petitioned](#) a visiting UN humanitarian team, demanding the relocation of national armed forces, the replacement of MONUSCO personnel accused of complicity with armed actors, and urgent humanitarian assistance. A ceasefire agreement with the CRP entering into force on 15 May represents a potential inflection point, though its implications for civilian protection and humanitarian access in affected areas remain to be seen.

The MONUSCO transition is the third structural trend shaping the protection environment, and the one with the longest horizon. The mission's December 2025 mandate renewal extended its presence to December 2026 but effectively placed it on an explicit drawdown pathway, limiting operations to North Kivu and Ituri and making any redeployment to South Kivu conditional on security notifications. The Global Protection Cluster warned ahead of South Kivu's disengagement in 2024 that [acts of violence against civilians were likely to worsen](#) with MONUSCO's departure, a prediction that has been borne out by monitoring data. MONUSCO's withdrawal also risks hollowing out functions such as human rights monitoring and verification, community alert networks, and physical protection provided by MONUSCO's troops, with no apparent successor.

Underlying all these trends is an accountability deficit that functions as an active driver of harm rather than merely its background condition. The [2025 HRC Fact-Finding Mission](#) concluded that all parties in North and South Kivu have perpetrated violations potentially amounting to war crimes and crimes against humanity.

Recommendations

1. **Reassert the civilian and humanitarian character of IDP sites**, consistent with the assessment of the crisis as a non-international armed conflict, and applicability of IHL. The systematic targeting of displacement sites by armed actors must be named and addressed as an IHL violation, not as a security issue. The formal demands issued by displaced persons at Plaine Savo in May 2026 for FARDC removal and MONUSCO accountability should be treated as a protection indicator in their own right.
2. **Support the government of the DR Congo** in protecting civilians by committing to a conditions-based, consultative MONUSCO transition. Any further drawdown should be determined by protection conditions on the ground, rather than political timelines. Transition planning must explicitly provide for the continuity of human rights monitoring, community alert

networks, and civilian refuge functions that MONUSCO currently performs and for which no successor capacity exists.

3. **Ensure effective prevention and response to GBV.** The suppression of GBV reporting in M23/AFC areas, the collapse of PEP kit supply chains, and the funding-driven reduction in GBV programming have together created a system in which sexual violence can be committed without consequence and survivors cannot access support or care. Member States must urgently restore funding for GBV response, press actors to permit humanitarian programming, and support accountability mechanisms.
4. **Reverse the collapse of protection funding.** The reduction of GBV and Child Protection funding effectively dismantles the protection response. Member States must urgently restore and increase flexible, multi-year funding for protection monitoring, GBV and child protection case management, mine action, and individual protection assistance in eastern DR Congo, with particular attention to areas where MONUSCO's withdrawal has removed other protection infrastructure.