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Syrian Legal Development Programme
البرنامج السوري للتطوير القانوني



HUMAN RIGHTS DUE DILIGENCE TOOL FOR HUMANITARIAN AND DEVELOPMENT PROJECT IN NORTHWEST SYRIA





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The Tool was produced by:

The Human Rights and Business Unit at The Syrian Legal Development Programme (SLDP)

A non-aligned and non-governmental organization established in 2013 - registered in the UK in 2014 - to respond to complex human rights matters triggered by the Syrian conflict that erupted in 2011, through the utilization of international law. SLDP has a highly qualified team of Syrian and international researchers and analysts in various aspects of international law, who enjoys a unique skill set and a comprehensive understanding of the Syrian political and strategic dynamics at the local, regional, and international levels with strong access to the ground and to policymakers. The Human Rights & Business Unit's mandate is to increase the ability of Syrian CSOs and duty bearers, including State actors, policy makers, businesses, INGOs, and UN agencies, to indicate, highlight, and influence accountability measures against entities and businesses involved in human rights abuses in Syria.

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List of Acronyms

AANE	Autonomous Administration of North and East Syria
AAP	Accountability to Affected Populations
ANSA	Armed Non-State Actor
CEDAW	Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women
CESCR	Committee on Economic, Social, and Cultural Rights (UN)
CIHL	Customary International Humanitarian Law
CPMS	Child Protection Minimum Standards
CRC	Convention on the Rights of the Child
CRPD	Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities
HLP	Housing, Land and Property
HRBA	Human Rights-Based Approach
HRDD	Human Rights Due Diligence
HTS	Hayat Tahrir al-Sham
IAC	International Armed Conflict
IASC	Inter-Agency Standing Committee (UN)
ICCPR	International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights
ICESCR	International Covenant on Economic, Social, and Cultural Rights
ICRC	International Committee of the Red Cross
IDP	Internally Displaced Person
IHL	International Humanitarian Law
IHRL	International Human Rights Law
ILO	International Labour Organization
INGO	International Non-Governmental Organization
LNGO	Local Non-Governmental Organisation
NGO	Non-Governmental Organization
NIAC	Non-International Armed Conflict
OCHA	Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (UN)
OHCHR	Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (UN)
PCM	Project Cycle Management
PSEAH	Protection from Sexual Exploitation and Abuse and Harassment
PTSD	Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder
R2HE	Right to a clean, healthy, and sustainable environment
SDF	Syrian Democratic Forces
SNA	Syrian National Army
UDHR	Universal Declaration of Human Rights
UNCAT	United Nations Convention against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
UNGA	United Nations General Assembly
UNGPs	United Nations Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights
UNHCR	United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees
WASH	WASHWater, Sanitation, and Hygiene

Executive Summary

The complex conditions in Northwest Syria increase the likelihood of human rights infringement in humanitarian operations. Challenges related to funding, scale and size of operations, limitations imposed by de facto authorities, and limited knowledge of human rights frameworks, among others, heighten the risk of human rights abuses in the region. This is further highlighted in the emergency response that followed the Syria-Türkiye earthquake in 2023, in addition to the 14 year conflict and its impact on the region and the population.

Human rights challenges include Housing, Land and Property (HLP) rights abuses, environmental harm, health risks, and operational and security implications with direct impact on the lives of partner communities.

Humanitarian operations in Northwest Syria are governed by international law, namely international humanitarian law (IHL) and international human rights law (IHRL). These operations are also shaped by humanitarian principles, such as the 'Do No Harm' and Accountability to Affected Populations (AAP) frameworks.

Humanitarian non-governmental organizations (NGOs) may inadvertently infringe human rights by causing, contributing, or being directly linked to violations or abuses against individuals and communities.

In a context like Northwest Syria, humanitarian NGOs should adopt a more rigorous approach to Human Rights Due Diligence (HRDD), known as heightened HRDD. Unlike standard HRDD, heightened HRDD involves a more thorough risk assessment as well as a context-specific analysis to prevent severe human rights impacts.

Integrating a heightened HRDD process in humanitarian operations will help in preventing human rights abuses in the region, as well as the exacerbation of conflict dynamics. The process is composed of four stages: 1) identifying and assessing risks; 2) integrating findings and taking action; 3) monitoring and tracking impact; and 4) communicating and being accountable.

The HRDD Tool developed in this report is built on extensive desk research, interviews, experts consultations, and a validation workshop which collected feedback from a number of humanitarian NGOs.

Given the time limitation to develop the Tool, the research focused on five main sectors of humanitarian operations in Northwest Syria: Protection, Shelter, water, sanitation, and hygiene (WASH), Education, and Healthcare. However, the results could be applied to the wider humanitarian operations, with a potential to integrate new findings in the developed Tool.

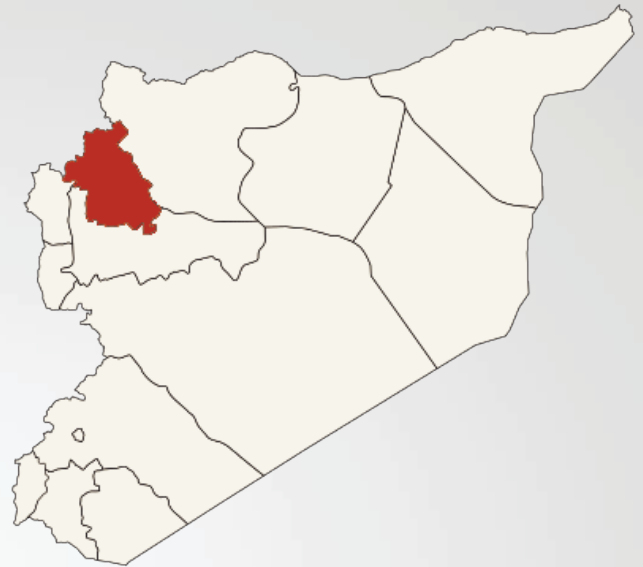
The Tool raises awareness of a range of civil, political, economic, and social rights that are at risk during humanitarian operations in the five targeted sectors. It also includes sections introducing key humanitarian protections and principles that are relevant to the delivery of aid.

The Tool integrates the HRDD process in the humanitarian Project Cycle Management (PCM) to ensure the prevention of human rights abuses at every stage of the project.

To facilitate using the Tool, the Matrix is available on

<https://sldp-humanitarianhrddtool.com/hrdd-tool/>

The PCM is composed of five stages: assessment, design, implementation, monitoring and evaluation, and exit and transition. In this tool, each stage is equipped with risk assessment questions and indicators upon which a plan should be built to prevent potential or actual human rights abuses.



Key Recommendations



For Humanitarian NGOs

- Integrate the HRDD Tool systematically across all PCM phases, ensuring human rights considerations inform each decision point.
- Create dedicated mechanisms for meaningful participation of affected populations, particularly focusing on women, children, elderly, persons with disabilities, and internally displaced persons.
- Regularly review and update human rights risk assessments to reflect the dynamic context of Northwest Syria.
- Build staff capacity through structured training on human rights principles, protection mainstreaming, and practical application of the HRDD Tool.
- Document and share evidence-based practices and lessons learned through established humanitarian coordination mechanisms.



For Donor Engagement

- Support the ongoing efforts to localise humanitarian response. Strengthening local organisations enhances the impact of humanitarian action and promotes its long term effectiveness.
- Use the HRDD Tool's assessment to demonstrate to donors the interconnected nature of human rights challenges and the need for comprehensive funding. Comprehensive funding should approach the project as a part of a wider context and response and accommodate the necessary considerations, like those relevant to protection of human rights, even if they fall outside the scope of the project proper.
- Present evidence-based analysis showing how funding restrictions impact critical human rights outcomes, within each project, especially in essential services like WASH, shelter, and protection
- Advocate for long term, sustainable and flexible funding that enables organizations to address both immediate and long-term human rights considerations. This is very relevant to adapt project's funding to the continuously changing realities of a conflict zone.



For Implementation

- Establishing and meaningfully activating rights-based monitoring systems that track both positive and negative human rights impacts
- Design and meaningfully implement culturally appropriate feedback mechanisms that are accessible to all community groups
- Develop context-specific contingency plans that address emerging human rights risks
- Strengthen partnerships with local organizations to enhance community-based human rights monitoring
- Ensure human rights considerations are explicitly integrated into project documentation, including proposals, reports, and evaluations on different levels including partners i.e. NGOs, INGOs and donors.

Introduction



The landscape in Northwest Syria remains a very complex operational environment for humanitarian non-governmental organizations (NGOs).¹ The very emergence of this particular region as a geographical target for humanitarian operations is indicative of the challenging context humanitarians are forced to navigate, and the inherent risks that permeate it. The earthquakes in Syria and Türkiye in 2023 added additional pressure on the region's humanitarian response and demonstrated the need for an improved approach that addresses the human rights impacts of humanitarian operations.

Over a decade of armed conflict has seen a devastating combination of atrocities, mass displacement, geographical and political fragmentation, foreign interference and occupation, and natural disasters—all of which has left millions of Syrians reliant on humanitarian assistance for basic survival, affirming the critical role aid actors play in this context.² This context also increases the risk of widespread human rights abuses.

Considering this complex terrain, a principled, human rights-based approach to humanitarian assistance is a legal imperative. Humanitarian operations can inadvertently contribute to infringements of human rights or prolong vulnerabilities if assessments of risks, such as legal, social, and environmental ones, are not undertaken or consistently analyzed. The success of humanitarian operations is undermined by a reduced overall strategic planning, especially by the donors to these operations. A continuously reduced funding for humanitarian response in Northwest Syria

imposes limitations on the implemented projects and could increase adverse risks to human rights.³ Potential harms to the human rights of affected communities may carry detrimental consequences not only in the short-term, but in the medium- and long-term as well.

To ensure that humanitarian operations do not unintentionally exacerbate harm or conflict dynamics, the integration of a heightened version of Human Rights Due Diligence (HRDD) throughout the project cycle is essential.⁴ The tool produced in this report is designed to support the mainstreaming of a human rights lens during humanitarian project planning and implementation, assist humanitarians in their assessments of potential adverse human rights impacts in their operations, and to equip them with a solid understanding of relevant international law and human rights frameworks to their work. In doing so, it guides humanitarian NGOs through the application of heightened HRDD. This rigorous human rights assessment is not meant to add further restrictions to the complex humanitarian response in Northwest Syria, or add more checklist requirements to humanitarian programmes. Instead, it seeks to support humanitarian NGOs in ensuring that their operations respect human rights and in further enhancing the support provided to local communities. The Tool also aims to provide humanitarian NGOs with the required legal knowledge to further facilitate the application of HRDD throughout their project cycles. It should be noted that reference to 'human rights' throughout the document and the Tool does not exclusively refer to IHRL. It also includes protections and prohibitions under the relevant and interlinked international law frameworks, namely IHL.

Who is the tool for?

The Human Rights Due Diligence (HRDD) Tool for Northwest Syria aims to facilitate the holistic consideration of human rights risks throughout the project cycle of humanitarian interventions relevant to the five sectors studied in this project. It seeks to ensure that human rights considerations are embedded in the planning, implementation, and assessment of humanitarian programming in the region. While some elements of the Human Rights-Based Approach (HRBA) have been integrated into the Tool, it is important to recognize that HRBA is a distinct, albeit complementary, framework to HRDD. The latter is a risk management process aimed at preventing and addressing adverse human rights impacts directly or indirectly linked to an organization's activities. In contrast, HRBA is a framework that prioritizes integrating human rights principles to empower rights holders and enhance accountability in policy making and programmes. While the Tool is grounded in the HRDD framework, HRBA principles are nevertheless pertinent to the implementation of HRDD's core components.

This tool aims to raise awareness and enhance the capacities of humanitarian actors to: identify and mitigate potential and actual human rights risks early on; ensure or reinforce that interventions help realize human rights; strengthen accountability to affected populations; and enhance the effectiveness and sustainability of humanitarian interventions in Northwest Syria.

Additionally, the HRDD Tool serves as a powerful advocacy instrument, enabling humanitarian NGOs to engage with donors more effectively. By providing a comprehensive and systematic approach to human rights integration, the tool can be used to demonstrate the critical importance of strategic, holistic, and rights-based programming. This can help make a compelling case for more targeted funding for key projects that address multiple human rights dimensions simultaneously, potentially leading to more sustainable and impactful interventions in Northwest Syria.

It is important to note that this tool is not intended to add an additional burden to NGOs already operating in challenging conditions. Instead, it is designed to aid organizations in identifying potential risks and making informed decisions on how to proceed with their interventions. The HRDD Tool aims to streamline existing processes and provide a structured framework for considerations that many organizations are already addressing in various ways.

Furthermore, this tool is meant to highlight to donors and the international community the necessity for strategic, comprehensive interventions rather than fragmented approaches. It underscores the interconnected nature of human rights issues in Northwest Syria and the need for holistic solutions. However, the effective application of this tool relies on proper support from donors, including flexibility in funding arrangements and recognition of the complex, long-term nature of rights-based humanitarian work.

By using this tool, humanitarian actors can enhance their ability to:



Identify and address potential human rights risks and impacts of their interventions.



Make informed decisions about human rights considerations throughout the project cycle.



Strengthen accountability to affected populations through systematic rights-based analysis.



Document and track human rights considerations in humanitarian programming.

In the context of Northwest Syria, special attention should be given to:

Ensuring meaningful participation of marginalized groups, including women, children, displaced persons, and other vulnerable populations.

Addressing discrimination in access to humanitarian assistance, particularly in light of the fragmented political and economic conditions that exacerbate inequalities.

Empowering local communities to claim their rights while navigating complex power dynamics and local governance structures.

Recognizing and addressing conflict-related human rights abuses perpetrated by different parties to the conflict, ensuring that interventions are sensitive to these abuses and do not inadvertently exacerbate existing tensions.

Taking into account the impact of de facto authorities and informal power structures on humanitarian access, service delivery, and protection risks.

Methodology

This Tool addresses the issue of HRDD in humanitarian operations in Northwest Syria. It brings together international law and humanitarian expertise to provide an in-depth analysis that aims to support the operations of humanitarian NGOs in Northwest Syria.

The Tool consists primarily of three sections:



The legal section provides an overview of the international legal frameworks, including international humanitarian law and international human rights law, that govern key human rights issues that may arise in humanitarian operations in Northwest Syria, mainly the territories outside the control of the Syrian government. It also addresses the legal responsibility of humanitarian NGOs to respect international law and human rights.

The desk research phase of the project mapped out the available literature on the impact of humanitarian operations on human rights in the region in the past decade. Available work focusses primarily on the issue of HLP rights violations and the protection from sexual exploitation and abuse and sexual harassment (PSEAH) in humanitarian settings. The issue of HLP rights has become increasingly a point of focus given the mass displacement into and out of the region during the years of the conflict. Tools such as the 'Housing, Land and Property Rights in Shelter: Due Diligence Guidelines (Shelter Cluster)' were developed to encourage humanitarian NGOs to avoid infringing on HLP rights in their projects.⁵

However, in order to provide a more comprehensive HRDD Tool, the literature review was supplemented with six interviews with leading Syrian NGOs in the Northwest who also have a wide expertise in the field. The interviews helped to identify the parameters of a sample to study and on which to build the tool. The sample includes examining a number of possible human rights risks including: HLP rights, PSEAH, rights linked to harm to the environment, health and education related rights, children rights, and issues related to discrimination and community engagement. These issues were investigated in five sectors: Shelter, Protection, Healthcare, Education, and WASH.

The data collection phase relied on the results of a questionnaire addressing the issues previously identified in the mentioned five sectors. The questionnaire was developed by an expert of humanitarian operations in Northwest Syria and received replies from 10 NGOs working in northwest Syria. The results formed the base of the HRDD Tool. The survey covered various aspects of human rights considerations in humanitarian work, including organizational policies, accountability mechanisms, inclusion practices, and sector-specific concerns. It remains limited by its small size: four INGOs and six LNGOs. The surveyed organisations are among the largest operating in northwest Syria and they cover the previously mentioned sectors of humanitarian operations. In addition, self-reported data remains subject to bias.

Additionally, the outcome of a validation workshop held in November 2024, contributed to the HRDD Tool's further development and refinement.

The workshop served to



ensure a common understanding of the international legal framework applicable in Northwest Syria



discuss key human rights issues that humanitarian organizations face while planning and implementing projects in the region;



identify existing mitigation strategies;



present, test, and collect feedback on the HRDD Tool.

A total of 21 representatives from 15 humanitarian organizations operating in Northwest Syria participated in the workshop.⁶ The majority of participants (13 out of 15) reported being active in the protection sector, while eight organizations are involved in healthcare, eight in education, eight in shelter, and six in WASH. In addition, the validation workshop highlighted the importance of the food security sector, which is added to the Tool next to the already mentioned 5 sectors.

The workshop attendees recommended creating a user friendly website to accommodate the Tool and the Matrix. The website is available at <https://sldp-humanitarianhrddtool.com/hrdd-tool/>

Key Human Rights Gaps



The analysis of the questionnaire results and the outcome of the validation workshop helped to identify the gaps in considering human rights in the project cycle highlighting the potential violations or risks to these rights in the context of humanitarian activities in Northwest Syria. Addressing these gaps would contribute to preventing human rights abuses in humanitarian assistance, ensuring that interventions not only meet immediate needs but also respect human rights and contribute to their protection and fulfillment.

Gaps were identified in addressing potential risks to various human rights in the cycle of humanitarian projects. Rights to health, education and adequate housing require more comprehensive integration of measures that guarantee equal access without discrimination. At the same time, these measures should be sensitive to HLP rights concerns and environmental impact. Other rights at risk include the right to life and security, rights to information and participation, right to legal identity, and the right to effective remedy. Other critical issues identified by participants in the validation workshop, particularly by those involved in the protection, education, and healthcare sectors, include protection from sexual violence, early marriage, and the recruitment of child soldiers, as well as the use of means and methods of warfare that are indiscriminate or that cause unnecessary suffering.

Human Rights Due Diligence (HRDD) in Syria

01 What is Human Rights Due Diligence?

HRDD is a proactive process to identify, prevent, mitigate, and address potential human rights risks that may arise during project design and implementation. The process should include assessing the actual and potential adverse human rights impacts of humanitarian activities, acting upon the findings, tracking responses, and communicating how impacts are addressed.⁷ In this way, HRDD acts as a safeguard to ensure that humanitarian efforts align with international human rights standards, fostering an approach that is accountable, transparent, and rights-centred.

In conflict-affected settings, such as Northwest Syria, humanitarian NGOs should undertake a heightened version of HRDD (i.e. Heightened HRDD) to better understand the impacts of their activities on conflict dynamics. Heightened HRDD strengthens the understanding of the context where humanitarian NGOs operate and ensures that their activities do not contribute to violence, reinforce existing inequalities, or create new vulnerabilities. This can be achieved by identifying flash points, potential triggers, or the drivers of the conflict.⁸

In essence, heightened HRDD entails a rigorous approach to identifying both potential and actual impacts on individuals' human rights and on the broader conflict context. This approach is grounded in the principle of proportionality: as the risk level increases, the complexity and depth of due diligence processes must correspondingly intensify. Therefore, due diligence measures should be elevated in conflict-affected areas, where the risk of severe human rights abuses, i.e. war crimes and crimes against humanity, is significantly heightened. This ensures that all actions are proportionate to the specific challenges and risks of these environments, aiming to prevent, mitigate, and address adverse impacts effectively.

HRDD is not a one and done process, nor is it a checklist activity. It is an ongoing process that requires constant vigilance, particularly in a region experiencing volatility and instability.⁹ In these settings, human rights risks may evolve with time, and prevention and mitigation measures will have to be adjusted accordingly. It is also important to note that HRDD will vary in complexity with the size of the organization and the nature and context of its operations.

02

Why is HRDD necessary in humanitarian operations in Northwest Syria?

HRDD is critical in humanitarian operations in Northwest Syria due to the complex interplay of conflict, governance challenges, and the involvement of multiple actors. These critical conditions originated from the grave human rights violations committed in Syria, mostly but not solely by the Syrian government, since 2011.¹² Northwest Syria has been one of the most affected regions in the ongoing Syrian conflict, where various factions, including non-state armed groups, international actors, and local de facto governments, operate in a fragmented environment. These dynamics present significant risks of human rights violations, necessitating careful HRDD to ensure that humanitarian efforts do not exacerbate existing vulnerabilities or unintentionally support perpetrators of abuses.

One of the primary reasons HRDD is necessary is to mitigate the risk of human rights abuses in a highly volatile region. Armed groups and factions tend to variably control access to humanitarian aid, and without proper due diligence, there is a risk that aid could be diverted to support these groups, prolonging the conflict or contributing to further violations.

HRDD could help humanitarian NGOs navigate these complex conditions and ensure that humanitarian projects are implemented in a manner that is as compliant as possible with international human rights and humanitarian law standards. Another crucial aspect of HRDD in Northwest Syria relates to the protection of civilians. The region is home to millions of displaced people who face a range of risks, including targeted violence, forced displacement, and inadequate access to essential services like healthcare and education.¹³ By implementing HRDD, humanitarian NGOs can better assess the risks to these vulnerable populations and tailor their interventions to avoid contributing to further harm. This includes taking steps to ensure that aid distribution does not reinforce discriminatory practices or marginalize particular communities, especially in areas where ethnic or sectarian tensions are high.

Furthermore, HRDD is essential for maintaining the neutrality and legitimacy of humanitarian operations. In conflict zones like Northwest Syria, humanitarian NGOs are often viewed with suspicion by different parties to the conflict, while facing at the same time varying levels of pressure from these authorities to comply with their policies or agendas. A robust HRDD framework allows these organizations to demonstrate that they are operating in compliance with international human rights and humanitarian law, which can help build trust with local communities and minimize the risks of becoming targets of violence themselves.

Additionally, HRDD helps in ensuring accountability and transparency, which are critical in complex emergencies. Given the multiplicity of actors involved in humanitarian operations—ranging from international NGOs to local partners and private contractors—there is a need for strong oversight mechanisms. HRDD processes involve continuous monitoring, evaluation, and reporting, which ensures that all actors involved are adhering to human rights standards. This not only protects the beneficiaries but also safeguards the reputation and operational viability of humanitarian NGOs by ensuring that they are not implicated in human rights abuses.

03

What are the challenges in implementing HRDD in humanitarian operations in Northwest Syria?

The call for implementing HRDD in humanitarian operations in Northwest Syria does not deny the grave challenges to its implementation. The conditions in the region are very complex as a result of the conflict. The region is controlled by different de facto authorities, divided between Hayat Tahrir al-Sham (HTS) and the Syrian National Army (SNA). Reports emerge regularly of human rights abuses committed by these two groups.¹⁴ They are also accused of attempting to control the flow of humanitarian aid and humanitarian projects in their territories.¹⁵

In addition, Türkiye has an unparalleled influence over the region throughout its politics and economy. Syria's northern neighbor controls all the border crossings that allow the flow of goods and people into Northwest Syria, including the humanitarian operations. The Turkish military is also positioned within Syria across the frontlines with the Syrian government and its allies.¹⁶

Despite the deescalation of military hostilities across Syria since 2020, Northwest Syria remains subject to aerial bombardment and waves of shelling by the Syrian government and its Russian allies. The targets of these campaigns are often civilian populations who are the beneficiaries of humanitarian aid.¹⁷ Humanitarian NGOs, such as the White Helmets, and their projects were also regularly targeted by the government and its allies.¹⁸

Other factors that influence humanitarian operations include the global political and economic conditions, such as the wars in Ukraine and Gaza or even Covid 19 crisis, that led to the reduction of funds dedicated to humanitarian operations in the region, despite the persistence of humanitarian aid needs.¹⁹

The peculiar situation in Northwest Syria has a compounded impact on human rights conditions. This is reflected in challenges that are cross-sectional and can be summarized, if not comprehensively, as follows:

HLP Rights Challenges

Displacement and Lack of documentation:

Northwest Syria has experienced massive displacement due to conflict, with many people losing access to their homes and land. This makes it difficult to ensure fair distribution of aid and to ensure IDPs ability to return to their homes, as displaced people often lack access to civil and HLP-related documentation. The NRC emphasized that HLP rights and access to civil documentation are critical needs for IDPs in northwest Syria, because the absence of such documentation not only hampers aid distribution but also affects individuals' ability to return to their homes or claim compensation for lost property.²⁰

Informal Settlements:

Many displaced people live in informal settlements with no legal recognition or security of tenure. Humanitarian operations might face legal implications regarding how to assist these populations without inadvertently reinforcing illegal or unjust land acquisitions or distributions. Over the past years, Turkish NGOs and development agencies built tens of thousands of cinder block residences in northwestern Syria, a significant share of these housing units, built under the guise of humanitarian aid, have benefitted military factions and local elites rather than the civilian population as a whole.²¹

Reconstruction and Property Disputes:

When humanitarian NGOs support reconstruction or shelter projects, they must ensure that they are not contributing to illegitimate land grabs or violating the rights of displaced people to return to their homes. For example, some reports suggested that the construction of housing projects in Afrin may have contributed to forced demographic change in the area. These reports focus in particular on the role of some charities in funding reconstruction efforts on lands in Afrin owned by displaced Kurdish residents.²² In this context, HRDD must carefully navigate HLP disputes to avoid complicity in wrongful dispossession.

Environmental risks

Degradation of Natural Resources:

The ongoing conflict has resulted in severe environmental degradation in Northwest Syria, including the over-exploitation of resources like water and deforestation for firewood. Humanitarian actors face the challenge of ensuring that their activities do not contribute to environmental harm while trying to meet urgent needs. For instance, providing water and sanitation services while maintaining water availability and preserving soil health is a challenging task.²³ Effective HRDD provides humanitarian actors with the tools to mitigate this challenge.

Waste Management:

Humanitarian operations, especially in densely populated camps, can generate significant waste. Poorly managed waste disposal can lead to contamination of water supplies and soil, exacerbating health issues and further degrading the environment.²⁴ Effective HRDD requires careful consideration of the environmental impact of humanitarian actions to avoid long-term harm to the population.

Climate Vulnerability:

Climate change adds another layer of complexity to humanitarian work in Northwest Syria, where millions of internally displaced people live in vulnerable conditions. The region is increasingly prone to extreme weather events like floods and droughts, which destroy makeshift shelters, contaminate water sources, disrupt food supplies, and strain already limited humanitarian resources. Droughts reduce agricultural productivity, worsening food insecurity, while floods damage infrastructure and hinder aid delivery.²⁵ Humanitarian actors must integrate climate risk assessments into their planning by selecting flood-resistant locations for camps, improving water management, and promoting sustainable agricultural practices. Addressing climate risks is essential for both immediate response and long-term resilience, preventing further environmental degradation and protecting vulnerable populations from escalating crises.

Health Issues

Lack of Medical Infrastructure:

Years of conflict have destroyed much of the medical infrastructure in Northwest Syria. Hospitals have been a prime and consistent target of aerial bombing. As of 2021, hospitals in Syria were hit more than 400 times.²⁶ Ensuring HRDD in this context means addressing the health impacts of aid delivery, particularly in a context where health services are often under-resourced or non-existent. Humanitarian operations might inadvertently strain local resources, leaving residents without access to basic healthcare services.²⁷

WASH:

The humanitarian community provides clean water and sanitation, but these systems are often under pressure, leading to outbreaks of waterborne diseases.²⁸ Poor hygiene and sanitation practices in camps and informal settlements can exacerbate the spread of diseases like cholera, making HRDD crucial in ensuring health standards are met without causing additional harm. HRDD supports the prevention of human rights abuses by holding the organisations accountable to affected populations throughout the project cycle by continuously monitoring its human rights impact.

Mental Health:

The conflict has led to widespread trauma and mental health issues, including post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), anxiety, and depression.²⁹ Humanitarian actors often struggle to integrate mental health services into their operations, but HRDD requires addressing the psychosocial impact of aid distribution and ensuring that interventions are sensitive to these mental health challenges.

Operational and Security Constraints

Access and Safety:

The ongoing conflict severely restricts humanitarian access in many areas. Security concerns limit the ability of humanitarian agencies to conduct thorough assessments of the potential human rights impacts of their operations.

Coordination and Oversight:

The complex landscape of actors, including local militias, international NGOs, and de facto authorities, complicates the implementation of a coordinated HRDD approach. Ensuring that all actors respect human rights standards is challenging, especially when there is limited accountability or oversight in conflict zones like Northwest Syria.

Funding Constraints:

Limited funding also poses a significant challenge. Implementing HRDD requires resources for monitoring, evaluating, and mitigating risks. However, many humanitarian operations in Syria are underfunded, which limits their ability to prioritize human rights issues, particularly in areas like HLP rights or environmental sustainability.³⁰

Legal Implications

Non-State Actors:

Northwest Syria is under the control of non-state actors with differing views on governance and human rights. This complicates the implementation of HRDD, as humanitarian agencies must navigate working with these groups while ensuring they do not become complicit in human rights abuses, including forced displacement or property confiscation.

Local Power Dynamics:

de facto authorities or military factions might seek to exploit humanitarian operations for personal or political gain.³¹ This raises the risk that aid might be manipulated or diverted, further marginalizing vulnerable populations. HRDD requires careful power mapping to ensure that aid distribution is fair and does not reinforce inequality or oppression.

04

Do humanitarian actors have a responsibility to respect IHRL & IHL?

International law, which in this context encompasses IHRL and IHL, primarily addresses states. States have the primary responsibility under international law to respect, protect, and fulfill human rights. However, and in addition to states and their armed forces,³² international law also provides for the responsibility of non-state actors, including armed groups and businesses.³³ By the very nature of humanitarian action and assistance, humanitarian NGO workers bear a responsibility to respect human rights.³⁴ Most notably, their proximity to and relationship with vulnerable, affected communities place them in a unique position to affect their rights in either a positive or detrimental manner.

The objective of humanitarians to alleviate suffering and protect lives is one that is primarily anchored in IHRL and IHL. The source of humanitarians' responsibility to respect these frameworks derives from several instruments.

● International humanitarian law

IHL is the branch of international law that regulates armed conflicts.³⁵ The law aims to prevent unnecessary human suffering and preserve the core values of human dignity by protecting those who do not, or no longer participate, in hostilities and restricting the means and methods of warfare. In doing so, the law defines permissible conduct, particularly in relation to persons affected by conflict, and seeks to regulate the conduct of belligerents. IHL also provides legal obligations regarding humanitarian assistance in armed conflict.

Humanitarian NGOs, for instance, play a fundamental role in safeguarding assistance.³⁶ This duty of protection rests not only with the parties to the conflict, but also with the impartial humanitarian organizations active in armed conflict settings. In order to fulfill the 'do no harm' principle, humanitarian NGOs must not only consider and alleviate any adverse impacts of their interventions but should also adhere to specific IHL principles.³⁷

IHL provides that humanitarian organizations may offer their services to civilians as well as persons who are no longer engaged in the hostilities, safeguarding their lives and dignity.³⁸ Humanitarian organizations ought to operate in line with the principle of impartiality.³⁹ Additionally, relief action must be humanitarian in nature and must be conducted without any adverse distinction.⁴⁰ Moreover, humanitarian organizations must ensure that these supplies are strictly for civilian use and not diverted to military efforts.⁴¹

● International human rights law

Under both hard and soft law instruments, humanitarian NGO workers have a responsibility to respect human rights. Pursuant to Article 5(1) of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR),⁴² the obligation to refrain from engaging in activities that destroy the rights and freedoms recognized in the Covenant extends to non-state actors, including individuals, groups, and organizations. This clearly sets out the responsibility of humanitarians to respect human rights and refrain from inflicting harm thereto. A number of soft law instruments, further, address the activities of NGOs, including, for example, the UN Guiding Principles on Internal Displacement,⁴³ which identify rights relevant to the protection of persons from forced displacement and to their protection and assistance during displacement. Moreover, the Joint Background Paper by the OHCHR and UNHCR on 'The Protection of Human Rights in Humanitarian Crises' identifies principal concerns relating to the protection of human rights in humanitarian responses.⁴⁴

A key soft law instrument in this respect is the UN Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights (UNGPs),⁴⁵ an authoritative text outlining business responsibility to respect human rights. While the UNGPs chiefly address the responsibilities of businesses, its principles are adaptable and arguably apply to humanitarian NGOs. This is due to the nature of humanitarian NGOs' operations and processes, that in some instances mirror that of businesses.⁴⁶ This is particularly reflected in their contractual relationships with businesses in delivering projects and services.⁴⁷ NGOs should therefore implement HRDD across their operations and internal processes, including their procurement and contracting practices, pursuant to the UNGPs, across administrative procedures and cluster operations. NGOs should also assess the human rights impacts of their activities and act on findings,⁴⁸ engage in meaningful consultations with potentially affected groups and other relevant stakeholders,⁴⁹ as well as in remedial processes.⁵⁰

05 What are the relevant international legal frameworks that humanitarian NGOs have a responsibility to respect?

As discussed above, humanitarian workers and organizations have a responsibility to respect international law, including IHRL and IHL. Failing to comply with these international standards not only risks potential legal liability but can also limit access to affected communities.⁵¹ Equally important, violations of human rights and humanitarian principles, along with environmental harm, directly impact the communities that humanitarians aim to support, potentially reversing progress and undermining the very goals of humanitarian operations. A solid understanding of the applicable international legal frameworks is essential for rights-based and risk-informed decision-making, particularly in complex conflict-affected settings.

While IHL serves as the primary legal framework governing conduct during armed conflicts, IHRL remains applicable in these contexts as well.⁵² Both bodies of law must be respected by actors operating within conflict-affected contexts.

This section outlines the relevant international legal frameworks that actors in the humanitarian field should respect.

● International Human Rights Law

01

Economic & Social Rights

02

Civil & Political Rights

“All human beings are born free and equal in dignity and rights”

– Article 1 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights⁵³

International human rights law is primarily enshrined in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR),⁵⁴ the International Covenant on Economic, Social, and Cultural Rights (ICESCR),⁵⁵ and the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR),⁵⁶ collectively referred to as the International Bill of Rights. The recognition of rights may also come about through UN Human Rights Council Resolutions,⁵⁷ and UN General Assembly Resolutions.⁵⁸

IHRL traditionally divides human rights into two ‘sets’: economic, social, and cultural rights on the one hand, and civil and political rights on the other. The former category includes, for example, the right to health and the right to adequate housing, while the latter encompasses the right to life and the right to equality and non-discrimination. All human rights, however, are interdependent and indivisible—this is a fundamental principle underpinning IHRL. In other words, one set of rights cannot be fully enjoyed without the other. If one is deprived of the right to food, for instance, one cannot fully enjoy the right to life; the deprivation of an economic and social right results in the deprivation of a civil and political right. Conversely, one’s right to freedom from inhuman or degrading treatment may be infringed by the denial of their right to water and sanitation. As such, in the design and implementation of any humanitarian operation, it is important to examine the multifaceted ways in which partner communities’ human rights may be impacted. Below is an outline of some of the most relevant human rights norms for aid organizations:

01

Economic & Social Rights

The right to an adequate standard of living

The right to adequate food

The right to adequate housing

Right to own property

Right to water and sanitation

Right to health

Right to development

Right to education

Protection from child marriage

Protection from child labour

Right to a clean, healthy, and sustainable environment

The right to an adequate standard of living

(ICESCR Art. 11)

includes, but is not limited to, the rights to:

- adequate food
- adequate housing

The right to adequate food

The human right to adequate food is crucial for the enjoyment of all rights.⁵⁹ The UN Committee on Economic, Social, and Cultural Rights (CESCR) affirmed that the right to adequate food is “indivisibly linked to the inherent dignity of the human person and is indispensable for the fulfillment of other human rights”.⁶⁰ This right is realized, according to the CESCR, “when every man, woman, and child, alone or in community with others, have physical and economic access at all times to adequate food or means for its procurement”.⁶¹ As such, the right to adequate food should not be interpreted restrictively by equating it with a minimum number of calories or nutrients.⁶²

The core content of the right to adequate food comprises:⁶³

- The availability of food in a quantity and quality sufficient to satisfy the dietary needs of individuals, free from adverse substances, and acceptable within a given culture;
- The accessibility of such food in ways that are sustainable and that do not interfere with the enjoyment of other human rights

The right to adequate food may be impacted by environmental damage and degradation. For example, destroying agricultural land impairs the enjoyment of the right to food, especially for land users. Humanitarian NGOs may infringe on this right by, for example, building shelters or residential complexes on agricultural land.

The right to adequate housing

The human right to adequate housing is also essential for the enjoyment of all rights, including the right to work, health, and education.

The right to housing should not be interpreted in a narrow or restrictive sense which confines it simply to, for instance, a roof over one's head.⁶⁴ Rather, the right should be interpreted expansively to mean the right to live somewhere in security, peace and dignity. This is on the basis that "the inherent dignity of the human person" is a fundamental premise from which the rights of the Covenant derive.⁶⁵

Relatedly, the concept of adequacy is a central component of this right. As both the Commission on Human Settlements and the Global Strategy for Shelter to the Year 2000 have elaborated: "Adequate shelter means...adequate privacy, adequate space, adequate security, adequate lighting and ventilation, [and] adequate basic infrastructure".⁶⁶ Adequacy also comprises the possession of "a degree of security of tenure which guarantees legal protection against forced eviction, harassment and other threats".⁶⁷

The provision of shelter per se, therefore, may not meet the standards of the right to adequate housing. This may particularly be the case in IDP camps, which are often overcrowded and dilapidated.⁶⁸ This in turn may negatively impact safety and sanitation, for example, affecting in particular women and girls.

Right to own property

(Art. 17 UDHR, Art. 15(2) and 16(1)(h) CEDAW, Art. 12(5) of CRPD)

The right to property is inherently linked to other human rights, including the right to equality and non-discrimination. Pursuant to the UDHR:

- Everyone has the right to own property alone as well as in association with others.
- No one shall be arbitrarily deprived of his property.⁶⁹

Under the Convention on the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women, women enjoy "equal rights to conclude contracts and to administer property and shall treat them equally in all stages of procedure in courts and tribunals".⁷⁰ The Convention also stipulates that women shall be ensured, on the basis of equality of men and women, the same rights as their spouses with respect to "the ownership, acquisition, management, administration, enjoyment and disposition of property".⁷¹

Women's rights to property are essential for realizing their rights to equality and to an adequate standard of living, among many other rights.⁷² The realization of these rights supports their independence and autonomy, and enables them to provide for their families. Denial of these rights has major implications for women's enjoyment of the right to equality, health, food, housing, water, among others.

Persons with disabilities are also accorded specific protections with respect to their rights to property. Under the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, the equal right of persons with disabilities to own or inherit property and to control their own financial affairs must be ensured.⁷³ Persons with disabilities must also be protected against arbitrary deprivations of their property.⁷⁴

Further, Principle 21(3) of the UN Guiding Principles on Internal Displacement states: "Property and possessions left behind by internally displaced persons should be protected against destruction and arbitrary and illegal appropriation, occupation or use".⁷⁵ The right to property may inadvertently be abused in cases of land requisition for the purposes of building shelters, particularly when proper human rights due diligence is not carried out to ascertain property ownership.

Right to water and sanitation

(Art. 11(1) ICESCR/UNGA Res 64/292)

The human right to water is enshrined in Article 11(1) of the ICESCR.⁷⁶ Although the provision lacks an explicit reference to water, the CESCR has elaborated that "the right to water clearly falls within the category of guarantees essential for securing an adequate standard of living, particularly since it is one of the most fundamental conditions for survival".⁷⁷ The human rights to water and sanitation were also recognized by the UN General Assembly in Resolution 64/292 "as a human right that is essential for the full enjoyment of life and all human rights".⁷⁸

As the CESCR expounded, the "human right to water entitles everyone to sufficient, safe, acceptable, physically accessible and affordable water for personal and domestic uses".⁷⁹ The right to water encompasses "the right to be free from arbitrary disconnections or contamination of water supplies".⁸⁰

When it comes to low quality IDP housing, for example, there is a high risk of water scarcity resulting from these projects.⁸¹ This is due to the fact that the demands of construction place significant pressure on water resources in areas that already suffer from water shortages, further impairing affected communities' right to adequate water and sanitation.

Right to health

(Art. 12 ICESCR; Art. 25 CRPD)

Article 12 of the ICESCR enshrines the right to the highest attainable standard of physical and mental health, as is conducive to living a life in dignity, is fundamentally connected to all other human rights. Persons with disabilities, pursuant to Article 25 of the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD), are also entitled to the enjoyment of the highest attainable standard of health without discrimination on the basis of disability.⁸²

The CESCR explains that this right should not be understood simply as the right to be healthy.⁸³ Rather, it contains freedoms and entitlements, encompassing a broad spectrum of socio-economic factors that create conditions for individuals to lead healthy lives. This right also includes essential determinants of health, such as access to food and nutrition, housing, safe drinking water, proper sanitation, healthy working conditions, and a healthy environment.⁸⁴

According to the CESCR, “[t]he freedoms include the right to control one’s health and body, including sexual and reproductive freedom, and the right to be free from interference, such as the right to be free from non-consensual medical treatment. By contrast, the entitlements include the right to a system of health protection which provides equality of opportunity for people to enjoy the highest attainable level of health.”⁸⁵

Health facilities, goods, and services must be accessible to all, especially the most vulnerable or marginalized groups, without discrimination.⁸⁶ “All health facilities, goods, and services must be respectful of medical ethics and culturally appropriate.”⁸⁷ In other words, they must be respectful of the culture of individuals, minorities, and communities, sensitive to gender and life-cycle requirements, as well as respectful of confidentiality.⁸⁸

Furthermore, health facilities, goods and services must also be scientifically and medically appropriate and of good quality.⁸⁹ This requires, inter alia, skilled medical personnel, scientifically approved and unexpired drugs and hospital equipment, safe and potable water, and adequate sanitation.⁹⁰

Humanitarian NGOs risk abusing the right to health by, for example, providing low quality healthcare, medical partiality, or inequitably distributing medicines or vaccines. The right to health may also be adversely impacted by environmental harm, which may be posed by inadequate sewage systems or unsustainable waste disposal practices. IDPs living in formal and informal settlements risk contracting infectious diseases due to the lack of operational wastewater networks.⁹¹

Right to development

(Art. 1(1) ICESCR/ICCPR)

Both Articles 1(1) of the ICCPR and the ICESCR respectively state: “All peoples have the right of self-determination. By virtue of that right they freely determine their political status and freely pursue their economic, social and cultural development.”⁹²

The 1986 Declaration on the Right to Development further affirms that the right to development is “an inalienable human right by virtue of which every human person and all peoples are entitled to participate in, contribute to, and enjoy economic, social, cultural and political development.”⁹³

The UN Special Rapporteur on the right to development has elaborated that the right comprises three elements and four facets.⁹⁴ The three elements are the ability of human beings to “participate in”, “contribute to”, and “enjoy” the right to development. The four facets are: economic, social, cultural, and political development. Pursuing these four facets together provides a pathway to realizing all human rights and fundamental freedoms. In addition, one can derive four overarching principles of the right to development from the 1986 Declaration and other relevant instruments: self-determination, intersectionality, intergenerational equity and fair distribution.⁹⁵

Environmental degradation poses considerable risks to the enjoyment of the right to development by depleting resources critical for livelihoods and sustainable growth. In Syria, years of conflict have exacerbated environmental damage, with widespread deforestation, contamination of water sources, and the destruction of agricultural land, limiting recovery and sustainable development. These issues disproportionately affect displaced communities, whose reliance on natural resources for income and sustenance is vital, further entrenching poverty and inequality. Additionally, climate change impacts, such as prolonged droughts, intensify these challenges, hindering the country's ability to rebuild equitably.

As such, the 1992 Rio Declaration on Environment and Development states that individuals and communities should have appropriate access to information concerning the environment, as well as the opportunity to participate in decision-making processes.⁹⁶ Actors who produce information about humanitarian or early recovery projects should provide that information transparently.

Causing or contributing to environmental harm and degradation poses serious risks to the human right to development. These environmental harms compromise the ability of affected communities to achieve sustainable livelihoods, access clean water, and maintain agricultural practices. Humanitarian actors should ensure that their activities do not exacerbate these risks by, for instance, carrying out environmental impact assessments as part of the HRDD process.

Right to education

(Art. 13 ICESCR/Art. 28 CRC)

Education is both a human right in itself,⁹⁷ and an integral means of realizing other human rights.⁹⁸

Education has the power to lift marginalized groups out of poverty, equip them with the necessary tools to secure their livelihoods, and foster their participation in their communities.⁹⁹ It plays a key role in empowering women, safeguarding children from exploitative and hazardous labour and sexual exploitation, and promoting human rights.¹⁰⁰

To ensure this right is upheld, education must meet four key standards: availability, accessibility, acceptability, and adaptability.¹⁰¹ Educational facilities must be available and equipped with trained teachers and basic resources. Access must be guaranteed for all, including marginalized and displaced groups, ensuring safety and inclusion.¹⁰² Education must be culturally relevant, trauma-sensitive, and of good quality, while remaining adaptable to the changing needs of affected populations. Moreover, education should be free from discrimination and responsive to the diverse needs of students and their communities. Importantly, parents and guardians have the right to ensure their children's education aligns with their moral and religious convictions, as long as educational programmes remain unbiased and respectful of diverse beliefs.¹⁰³

This right may be unintentionally infringed upon by, for example, delivering educational programmes which fail to accommodate the needs of children with disabilities, such as by not equipping schools with ramps or accessible material. Failing to ensure cultural relevance and sensitivity in educational material may also constitute a failure to respect the right to education. Similarly, making educational programmes inaccessible to displaced populations in remote, rural areas may also infringe on the right to education. This may particularly be the case for girls in such areas who are unable to make long journeys owing to security concerns.

Protection from child marriage

(Art. 16 and 34 CRC; Art. 16(2) CEDAW)

Children have the right to be protected from marriage. Child marriage constitutes a violation of multiple human rights, including the right to education and health. Article 16 of the Convention on the Rights of the Child emphasizes the right of children to be free from arbitrary or unlawful interferences with their privacy, family, home or correspondence, which must be interpreted to include early marriage.¹⁰⁴ Article 34 of the CRC obliges states to take steps to prevent sexual exploitation, which is often linked to child marriage.¹⁰⁵ CEDAW's Article 16(2) calls for a minimum marriage age to protect women and girls from early marriages.¹⁰⁶

Humanitarian NGOs may inadvertently infringe upon the protection of children from early marriage by either directly supporting harmful practices, such as facilitating dowries or marriage arrangements, or indirectly neglecting to address cultural norms that perpetuate child marriage. Without safeguards and culturally sensitive programming, NGOs may fail to challenge child marriage within the communities they serve or even collaborate with local authorities who condone it, further legitimizing the practice. To mitigate this, NGOs must implement child protection measures and ensure gender-sensitive programming.

Protection from child labour

(ICESCR Art. 10(3); Art. 32 CRC)

Children have the right to be protected from child labour,¹⁰⁷ that is to say, from “economic exploitation and from performing any work that is likely to be hazardous or to interfere with the child's education, or to be harmful to the child's health or physical, mental, spiritual, moral or social development”, as per the Convention on the Rights of the Child.¹⁰⁸

Child labour obstructs the fulfilment of a child's right to education, health, play (among other rights), endangers their mental, emotional, and physical welfare, and interferes with their development on multiple levels in the short- and long-term.¹⁰⁹ This includes hindering their educational progress and adversely affecting their future livelihood opportunities.

Humanitarian NGOs may inadvertently infringe upon this protection in cases of failure to properly vet third parties they are in a contractual relationship with, such as in the context of procurement. Humanitarian NGOs must conduct robust HRDD to ensure that their suppliers and partners are not implicated in child labour practices.

Right to a clean, healthy, and sustainable environment

(UNGA Res 76/300)

The right to a clean, healthy, and sustainable environment (R2HE) was formally recognized by the UN Human Rights Council in 2021,¹¹⁰ and the UN General Assembly in 2022.¹¹¹

As regards the scope and content of R2HE, the substantive elements include:¹¹²



clean air;



access to safe water and adequate sanitation;



non-toxic environments in which to live, work, study and play;



a safe and stable climate;



healthy and sustainably produced food;



healthy biodiversity and ecosystems.

The procedural elements of R2HE include:¹¹³



access to information;



the right to participate in decision-making;



access to justice and effective remedies, including the secure exercise of these rights free from reprisals and retaliation.

The international recognition of R2HE raises the profile of environmental protection and underscores the relationship between the environment and human rights; human rights and the environment are interdependent, and a clean, healthy, and sustainable environment is necessary for the full enjoyment of a wide range of human rights.¹¹⁴

Humanitarian NGOs should ensure respect for this right by identifying and preventing risks posed to the environment by their activities across sectors, including in shelter, health, and WASH.

02

Civil & Political Rights

Right to life

Right to equality and non-discrimination

Right to freedom of movement

Right to private and family life

Freedom from torture ...

Right to legal identity

Right of access to information

Right to an effective remedy

Right to life

(Art. 6 ICCPR/Art. 6 CRC/UDHR Art. 3)

The ICCPR states: "Every human being has the inherent right to life. This right shall be protected by law. No one shall be arbitrarily deprived of his life".¹¹⁵ The protection of the right to life is a prerequisite for the enjoyment of all other human rights.¹¹⁶

The right to life is “the supreme right from which no derogation is permitted, even in situations of armed conflict”.¹¹⁷

While IHL is the primary legal framework governing situations of armed conflict, international human rights law continues to apply in these settings.¹¹⁸ As the UN Human Rights Committee, the body responsible for interpreting and monitoring adherence to the ICCPR, explained, “both spheres of law are complementary, not mutually exclusive”.¹¹⁹

Consequently, the use of lethal force that is authorized, regulated, and compliant with IHL is, in principle, not considered arbitrary within the framework of Article 6 of the ICCPR. However, practices that are inconsistent - such as targeting civilians and civilian objects, conducting indiscriminate attacks, the use of human shields and failing to implement adequate precautions to prevent collateral death of civilians - violate Article 6 of the Covenant.

The right to life is inextricably linked to all other rights. It does not simply refer to the right to be alive, but rather the right to live a life in dignity, as envisioned by the UDHR and other international human rights instruments. Consider, for example, the deprivation of an individual of adequate water and sanitation, adequate housing, adequate food, and quality healthcare and education. Such an individual cannot plausibly be regarded as enjoying the right to life, as he or she is denied all the essentials for a dignified life. As such, abuses of other rights may in turn infringe on the right to life.

Humanitarians may inadvertently infringe on the right to life in several ways, typically through actions or inactions that unintentionally put partner communities at risk. Some examples include:

- Distribution of food or medical supplies that are expired, contaminated, or unsafe.
- Paying little to no regard to the needs of vulnerable groups, such as women, the elderly, or persons with disabilities. This may jeopardize their lives in the context of domestic violence in relation to educational programmes, or in the context of inadequate shelters with respect to persons with disabilities and the elderly.
- Adopting procedures, such as stringent screening, vetting or complex registration processes, or security protocols, that inadvertently restrict or prevent access to lifesaving services.
- A delayed response to emergencies—whether due to bureaucratic obstacles or logistical challenges—can significantly worsen suffering and lead to preventable loss of life. For instance, delays in delivering medical assistance can facilitate the spread of diseases, ultimately resulting in increased mortality rates.
- Degrading the environment through waste mismanagement or improper handling of hazardous materials. This may pose long-term harm on the health and welfare of affected communities, and potentially lead to fatal health crises.

Right to equality and non-discrimination

(Art. 1 and 2 UDHR/Art. 3 ICCPR/Art. 26 ICCPR/Art. 1 CEDAW/Art. 5, 6, 7 CRPD)

The rights to equality and non-discrimination are the cornerstones of IHRL. Inherently connected with human dignity, they are fundamental to all human rights norms and principles. In its articles 1 and 2, the UDHR proclaims that everyone is equal in dignity and rights, and condemns discrimination on several grounds,¹²⁰ as does the ICCPR.¹²¹

The Human Rights Committee has defined “discrimination” as any distinction, exclusion, restriction or preference which is based on any ground such as race, colour, sex, language, religion, political or other opinion, national or social origin, property, birth or other status, and which has the purpose or effect of nullifying or impairing the recognition, enjoyment or exercise by all persons, on an equal footing, of all rights and freedoms.¹²²

Certain groups are more vulnerable to discrimination than others, namely women and persons with disabilities. The Convention on the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) defines discrimination against women as “...any distinction, exclusion or restriction made on the basis of sex which has the effect or purpose of impairing or nullifying the recognition, enjoyment or exercise by women, irrespective of their marital status, on a basis of equality of men and women, of human rights and fundamental freedoms in the political, economic, social, cultural, civil or any other field.”¹²³

The CRPD enshrines protections for persons with disabilities, including through explicit provisions pertaining to women, girls, and children.

Article 5 mandates that all people, regardless of disability, are entitled to equal protection and benefit of the law without discrimination.¹²⁴ Humanitarians must be mindful not to exclude persons with disabilities from receiving aid, services, or protection, and should ensure reasonable accommodations are provided. This could mean offering accessible shelters, medical care, or ensuring that communication methods are adapted for those with hearing or visual impairments.

When it comes to women and girls with disabilities, Article 6 highlights their vulnerability to multiple forms of discrimination.¹²⁵ Humanitarian NGOs should take specific measures to protect them, ensuring that aid distribution, safety protocols, and empowerment programmes do not further marginalize them or undermine their safety.

Article 7 places special emphasis on children with disabilities, requiring that their best interests be prioritized.¹²⁶ Humanitarians should, to the extent possible, ensure that children with disabilities are given equal opportunities to access education, healthcare, and psychosocial support.

The Committee on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities asserted that outdated approaches to disability, such as charity or medical models, are incompatible with the CRPD.¹²⁷ These perspectives fail to recognize individuals with disabilities as full rights holders, and often perpetuate harmful stereotypes and stigmas.¹²⁸

The Committee also identifies four main forms of discrimination, which can occur individually or simultaneously:¹²⁹

Direct discrimination

occurs when, in a similar situation, persons with disabilities are treated less favourably than other persons because of a different personal status in a similar situation for a reason related to a prohibited ground, such as disability. This form of discrimination includes detrimental acts or omissions based on prohibited grounds where there is no comparable similar situation.

Indirect discrimination

means that policies or practices appear neutral at face value but have a disproportionate negative impact on a person with a disability. It occurs when an opportunity that appears accessible in reality excludes certain persons owing to the fact that their status does not allow them to benefit from the opportunity itself.

Denial of reasonable accommodation

constitutes discrimination if the necessary and appropriate modification and adjustments are denied and are needed to ensure the equal enjoyment or exercise of a human right or fundamental freedom. Not accepting an accompanying person or refusing to otherwise accommodate a person with a disability are examples of denial of reasonable accommodation;

Harassment

is a form of discrimination when unwanted conduct related to disability or other prohibited grounds takes place with the purpose or effect of violating the dignity of a person and of creating an intimidating, hostile, degrading, humiliating, or offensive environment. It can happen through actions or words that have the effect of perpetuating the difference and oppression of persons with disabilities.

Right to freedom of movement

(Art. 12 ICCPR/Art. 13 UDHR)

Article 12(1) of the ICCPR mandates the right to liberty of movement, ensuring that everyone lawfully within a state's territory can move freely within it.¹³⁰ Article 12(2), further, establishes that everyone shall be free to leave any country, including their own.¹³¹

Freedom of movement is an “indispensable condition for the free development of a person”, the Human Rights Committee explains.¹³² Article 12(1) entitles all persons to move from one place to another, as well as to establish themselves in a place of their choice.¹³³ The enjoyment of this right is independent of any particular purpose or reason for the person wanting to move or to stay in a place.¹³⁴

The rights guaranteed in this provision must be protected from both public and private interference.¹³⁵ This means that non-state actors, such as private citizens, humanitarian NGOs, and businesses, should respect the right to freedom of movement. For example, the right of women to move freely and choose their residence must not be made subject to the decision of another person, either by law or practice. Article 15 of CEDAW establishes that men and women shall have equal rights in legal matters related to movement.¹³⁶

The Human Rights Committee further affirmed that the right to reside in a place of one’s choice within the territory includes protection against all forms of forced internal displacement.¹³⁷ Article 12 also precludes preventing the entry or stay of persons in a certain part of the territory.¹³⁸

Article 12(3) provides for exceptional circumstances in which rights under Articles 12(1) and 12(2) may be restricted.¹³⁹ This provision authorizes the State to restrict these rights on the grounds of national security, public order, public health or morals, and the rights and freedoms of others. However, and in line with Article 4(1) of the ICCPR, the application of restrictions needs to be consistent with the other rights guaranteed in the ICCPR and with the fundamental principles of equality and non-discrimination. Article 26 of the ICCPR, for instance, enshrines the right to equality before the law, guaranteeing that all individuals are entitled to legal protections without discrimination.¹⁴⁰ Restricting the rights enshrined in Article 12, paragraphs 1 and 2 on the basis of ethnicity, sex, language, religion, political or other opinion, or other similar status, would therefore be in violation of the Covenant.¹⁴¹

Humanitarian NGOs should ensure that their operations are not posing restrictions on individuals’ and communities’ right to freedom of movement, nor are their activities or programmes condoning or reinforcing restrictions on anyone’s movements. This is particularly pertinent in relation to women. NGOs must also verify that any third parties with whom they are engaged, such as ANSAs, businesses, or other NGOs, are not involved in any such practices.

Right to private and family life

(Art. 17 and 23 ICCPR)

The ICCPR provides protection for family and privacy in two of its articles: Article 17 protects individuals from arbitrary or unlawful interference with their privacy and from unlawful attacks on their honor and reputation.¹⁴² It stipulates that everyone has a right to the protection of the law against such interferences or attacks. Article 23 recognizes the family as a unit that is deserving of protection by society and the state.¹⁴³

In the view of the Human Rights Committee, Article 17 must be guaranteed against all interferences and attacks, whether they emanate from State authorities or from natural or legal persons.¹⁴⁴ The Committee deems the term “unlawful” interference to mean any interference that is not envisaged by the law, “...which itself must comply with the provisions, aims and objectives of the Covenant”.¹⁴⁵ Any such law must comply with the provisions, aims, and objectives of the ICCPR.¹⁴⁶ In this regard, it is important to acknowledge that “arbitrary interference” can also extend to interference provided for under the law.¹⁴⁷

Article 17 also affords protection to personal honour and reputation. The Human Rights Committee underscores that provision must be made for everyone effectively to be able to protect him or herself against any unlawful attacks that do occur, and to provide for effective remedy against those responsible accordingly.¹⁴⁸

With regard to privacy, “every individual should have the right to ascertain in an intelligible form, whether, and if so, what personal data is stored in automatic data files, and for what purposes”, in the Human Rights Committee’s view.¹⁴⁹ The Committee makes clear that every individual should also be able to ascertain which public authorities, private individuals or bodies control or may control their files.¹⁵⁰ If any files contain incorrect personal data or have been collected or processed contrary to the legal provisions, every individual should have the right to request rectification or elimination.¹⁵¹ Humanitarian NGOs should ensure that their data collection protocols protect the rights of data subjects.

Equally relevant in relation to the right to privacy is the enjoyment of privacy in the context of housing and shelter. NGOs should ensure that such accommodations respect residents’ right to privacy, including but not limited to the provision of a sufficient number of rooms and restroom facilities according to the number of residents.

Freedom from torture or cruel, inhuman, or degrading treatment or punishment

(Art. 7 ICCPR)

The prohibition of torture or cruel, inhuman, or degrading treatment or punishment is found in the Convention on the Rights of the Child,¹⁵² the International Convention on the Protection of the Rights of All Migrant Workers and Members of their Families,¹⁵³ the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities,¹⁵⁴ the ICCPR,¹⁵⁵ and the Convention Against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment (UNCAT).¹⁵⁶ The purpose of the prohibition is to protect the inherent dignity of the individual.

Article 7 of the ICCPR states: "No one shall be subjected to torture or to cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment".¹⁵⁷

The Article proscribes three types of behaviour. A person may not be subjected to:



Torture



Treatment or punishment which is cruel and inhuman



Treatment or punishment which is degrading.

This means that the prohibition contained in Article 7 of the ICCPR may still be violated if the torture threshold is not met, by, for instance, the perpetration of degrading treatment.

Article 7 of the ICCPR states: "No one shall be subjected to torture or to cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment".

The UNCAT defines torture as: ¹⁵⁸

any act by which severe pain or suffering, whether physical or mental, is intentionally inflicted on a person for such purposes as obtaining from him or a third person information or a confession, punishing him for an act he or a third person has committed or is suspected of having committed, or intimidating or coercing him or a third person, or for any reason based on discrimination of any kind, when such pain or suffering is inflicted by or at the instigation of or with the consent or acquiescence of a public official or other person acting in an official capacity. It does not include pain or suffering arising only from, inherent in or incidental to lawful sanctions.

Inhuman treatment or punishment is treatment which causes intense physical or mental suffering. Degrading treatment refers to treatment that is extremely humiliating and undignified.¹⁵⁹

Inhuman or degrading treatment could include:

- **serious physical assault.**
- **serious physical or psychological abuse in a health or care setting.**
- **threatening to torture someone, if the threat is real and immediate.**

The prohibition relates not only to acts that cause physical pain, but also to acts that cause mental suffering to the victim.¹⁶⁰

The prohibition of torture, cruel, inhuman, or degrading punishment is absolute, meaning that it is a non-derogable right.¹⁶¹ It is also a peremptory norm of international law (or 'jus cogens' norm), meaning it is an international legal norm from which no derogation is permitted. Furthermore, the commission of torture itself constitutes a stand-alone international crime.

Humanitarian NGOs must ensure that neither their operations, services, nor contractual partners are directly or indirectly involved in violating the prohibition against torture and other forms of cruel, inhuman, or degrading treatment. Such abuses may occur by providing inadequate or substandard medical care, for instance, under duress or without informed consent. Forced treatment or failure to address pain or trauma in humanitarian settings can amount to degrading treatment. This would also include the lack of or subpar treatment of detainees, or individuals with opposing political views to the governing bodies. Abuses may also manifest by neglecting the needs of vulnerable groups, such as persons with disabilities, women, or children, particularly when shelters are overcrowded and lack sanitation facilities. Failure to implement and uphold protection measures to prevent or address exploitation and abuse may also result in violating the prohibition on torture, cruel, inhuman, or degrading treatment.

Right to legal identity

(Art. 7 CRC/Art. 16 ICCPR/Art. 15. UDHR)

The right to legal identity is enshrined in numerous human rights instruments. Article 7 of the CRC stipulates that children have the right to a nationality, as well as to be registered after birth.¹⁶² Article 16 of the ICCPR enshrines the right to recognition as a person before the law.¹⁶³ Further, the UDHR's Article 15 stipulates that everyone has the right to nationality.¹⁶⁴

The enjoyment of legal identity and recognition as a person before the law is fundamental to the enjoyment of all human rights. But for such recognition, rights holders may not be able to assert their rights under international human rights instruments.¹⁶⁵ This right is also intrinsically tied to the inherent dignity of the human person from which all human rights stem.

Humanitarian NGOs may unintentionally infringe upon individuals' right to legal identity through oversight in registration processes, such as failing to prioritize documentation for displaced individuals. This failure can restrict access to critical services, such as shelter, education, or healthcare, for undocumented people, particularly in the context of programmes that inadvertently marginalize these individuals or communities. For example, in both the shelter and education sectors, NGOs might design programmes that exclude those without pre-existing documentation, reinforcing their exclusion from essential services and from participating in public life.

To mitigate these risks, NGOs must



Integrate legal identity support into their programmes



Adopt inclusive policies that ensure no one is excluded based on their documentation status.



Ensuring that all displaced children and families are properly registered



Coordinating with civil registration authorities



Monitoring partnerships to guarantee equitable access to services

By prioritizing legal identity and taking proactive steps to facilitate access, humanitarian NGOs can safeguard individuals' right to nationality and recognition before the law, in line with international human rights standards.

Right of access to information

(Art. 19 ICCPR/Art 19 UDHR)

Article 19 of the ICCPR enshrines the right to freedom of expression, and stipulates that this right shall include "freedom to seek, receive and impart information and ideas of all kinds".¹⁶⁶

The right of access to information is a fundamental element of the right to freedom of expression. It refers, in part, to the general right of the public to have access to information of public interest from a variety of sources. It also applies towards international organizations, such as the United Nations.¹⁶⁷ The right arguably also applies to humanitarian NGOs due to the nature of their operations and their ability to impact communities.

The right of access to information can serve as a bulwark against abusive practices and policies that affect people's and the environment's welfare. Humanitarian NGOs can respect this right by ensuring information is accessible to individuals and communities, establishing communication channels, and enabling the participation of affected communities in the provision of feedback on planned projects or activities.

Right to an effective remedy

(Art 8 UDHR; Art. 2(3) ICCPR; Art. 14 UNCAT)

A cornerstone of IHRL, the right to an effective remedy ensures that individuals who have suffered violations of their rights are able to access redress.¹⁶⁸ Article 2(3) of the ICCPR mandates that states must provide effective remedies to those whose rights have been violated.¹⁶⁹ This includes providing access to competent authorities, a fair trial, and compensation where necessary. Similarly, Article 14 of UNCAT ensures that victims of torture and ill-treatment have the right to an effective remedy, which includes the right to an impartial investigation, the ability to obtain compensation, and the right to reparation.¹⁷⁰ Article 8 of the UDHR reinforces the principle that access to remedy is a fundamental human right.¹⁷¹

Humanitarian NGOs may infringe on the right to an effective remedy by not providing adequate avenues for partner communities to seek redress for violations of their rights. For instance, NGOs might fail to ensure that individuals have access to judicial or non-judicial mechanisms to address grievances related to aid distribution, shelter, or protection. Without proper complaint mechanisms, those affected by human rights abuses may have no recourse for accountability.

In some cases, NGOs may also inadvertently support the perpetuation of injustice by failing to address discrimination or exclusion within their programmes. For example, in cases where aid is allocated based on criteria that exclude certain vulnerable groups (e.g., undocumented individuals), these affected persons may be denied access to remedy. Additionally, partnerships with local authorities or militias that have been involved in rights violations could further limit avenues for grievance redress for beneficiaries. As highlighted in the UN Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights, ensuring access to effective remedy requires comprehensive grievance mechanisms that are accessible, transparent, and independent, which humanitarian NGOs should prioritize.¹⁷²

● International Humanitarian Law

It is essential for humanitarian NGOs operating in Northwest Syria to understand the relevant IHL framework of norms and rules. A comprehensive understanding of this body of law will equip workers in this field with the necessary tools to navigate a complex legal and humanitarian terrain. Such an understanding is critical for humanitarians not only to ensure that they themselves adhere to IHL standards, but also to clarify the obligations that de facto authorities and other parties to the conflict in Northwest Syria must uphold under IHL. This will assist humanitarians in making risk-informed decisions that comply with IHL. It may also empower them to seek greater support from donors to this end.

As noted above, humanitarian aid efforts should be carried out in an impartial manner, without discrimination and prioritized according to need.

This section outlines the key IHL norms that are relevant to humanitarian operations in Northwest Syria. It comprises provisions that are applicable to international armed conflicts (IACs) as well as non-international armed conflicts (NIACs), as well as customary IHL (CIHL) norms that bind all states and non-state armed groups. The Geneva Conventions of 1949,¹⁷³ and Additional Protocol I,¹⁷⁴ regulate IACs, while common Article 3 to the Geneva Conventions of 1949 and Additional Protocol II,¹⁷⁵ apply during NIACs. Given the multiplicity of actors involved in the Syrian conflict and the multifaceted nature of it, the situation in Northwest Syria may encompass parallel IACs and NIACs simultaneously, rendering the following norms applicable.

Principles of distinction, proportionality, and precaution

The principles of distinction, proportionality, and precaution are cardinal rules of IHL that govern and restrict the means and methods of warfare during IACs and NIACs.¹⁷⁶ These core principles aim to minimize harm to civilians and civilian objects by requiring the parties to the conflict to distinguish, at all times, between civilians and combatants (the principle of distinction).¹⁷⁷ Attacks may only be directed against combatants and military objectives.¹⁷⁸ Attacks must not be directed against civilians or civilian objects.¹⁷⁹ Objects indispensable to the survival of the civilian population, and which include agricultural lands, water installations, and livestock, should be protected from attacks, destruction, or removal.¹⁸⁰ In the conduct of military operations, constant care shall be taken to spare the civilian population and civilian objects (principle of precautions in attack).¹⁸¹ Each party to the conflict must take all feasible precautions in selecting means and methods of warfare to prevent, or at least minimize, incidental loss of civilian life, injury to civilians, and damage to civilian objects.¹⁸² The principle of proportionality prohibits attacks on legitimate military targets if they are expected to result in excessive incidental loss of civilian life, injuries to civilians, or damage to civilian objects in relation to the anticipated concrete and direct military advantage.¹⁸³ In this regard, parties to the conflict must refrain from using weapons, projectiles, materials, or methods of warfare designed to cause excessive injury or unnecessary suffering.¹⁸⁴ IHL prohibits the use of chemical weapons during IACs and NIACs.¹⁸⁵ Moreover, IHL prohibits the use of starvation as a method of warfare.¹⁸⁶

Access for Humanitarian Relief

Humanitarian relief personnel must be respected and protected.¹⁸⁷ Parties to the conflict must permit and facilitate the rapid and unrestricted passage of impartial humanitarian relief for civilians in need, while retaining their right to exercise control.¹⁸⁸ IHL provides that relief activities shall be conducted "...subject to the consent of the High Contracting Party concerned."¹⁸⁹ This requirement, however, does not grant unrestricted authority to deny the passage of aid.¹⁹⁰ More specifically, a state that is unable or unwilling to meet the essential needs of its civilian population is required to accept offers for impartial humanitarian assistance.¹⁹¹ Refusing such offers, when civilian needs remain unmet, is considered arbitrary and unlawful.¹⁹²

Humanitarian relief operations should reach civilians in need without delay. This rule emphasizes the centrality of impartiality in humanitarian work, and seeks to ensure that relief is provided based on need alone and without discrimination.¹⁹³

Freedom of Movement of Humanitarian Relief Personnel

Parties to the conflict must allow authorized humanitarian relief personnel the freedom of movement necessary for their functions, restricting it only in cases of imperative military necessity.¹⁹⁴ This ensures aid operations can proceed while balancing military requirements.

All parties to the conflict must assist relief personnel in their mission, with movement restrictions only in case of imperative military necessity. In addition to ensuring freedom of movement, this rule places a responsibility on the parties to the conflict to actively assist humanitarian personnel. This includes helping them navigate challenges in reaching affected populations.¹⁹⁵ The "imperative military necessity" clause seeks to prevent restrictions on humanitarian workers' movement which are not temporary and exceptional.¹⁹⁶

The Act of Displacement

IHL prohibits the forcible transfer or deportation of protected persons. Only in cases related to the security of the population or imperative military reasons can total or partial evacuations take place.¹⁹⁷ Article 49 of Geneva Convention IV provides that persons who were evacuated due to these reasons ought to be transferred back to their homes as soon as the hostilities in their areas have ceased. This limits the use of forced evacuations and seeks to ensure that 1) displacement is not permanent; and 2) individuals can return to their homes as soon as it is safe. Moreover, the Article prohibits the occupying power from deporting or transferring its own population into the territory that it occupies. The right of displaced persons to voluntarily return to their homes or places of habitual residence once the reasons for their displacement are resolved is a norm of customary IHL, applicable during IACs and NIACs.¹⁹⁸

Humanitarian NGOs should ensure that their operations do not prevent displaced persons from returning to their homes or places of habitual residence. This may manifest in a situation where educational facilities or housing units are built on the lands of displaced persons, or where NGOs are directly linked to third parties who are involved in the seizure or demolition of homes of IDPs.

Treatment of Displaced Persons

Parties to the armed conflict are mandated to take all possible measures, ensuring that displaced civilians are received under satisfactory conditions of shelter, hygiene, health, safety and nutrition.¹⁹⁹ In this process, members of the same family should not be separated.²⁰⁰ This is a customary norm of IHL that is applicable during IACs and NIACs.²⁰¹ Regardless of the type of conflict that they are caught in, the special needs of women, children, the elderly, and people with disabilities must be respected.²⁰²

Humanitarians should commit to ensuring that living conditions are dignified and that assistance is provided to best meet the needs of protected persons, including those living in vulnerable conditions as well as those who are socially excluded.

HLP Rights

In the conduct of their military operations, parties to the conflict shall spare civilian objects. They should also refrain from destroying or seizing the property of an adversary.²⁰³ The destruction or appropriation of protected property, i.e. medical establishments and transport, may constitute a grave breach under the Geneva Conventions.²⁰⁴ IHL also prohibits pillage, which is associated with the appropriation of individual property for private or personal use and not out of military necessity.²⁰⁵ In conflict situations, women and children are disproportionately impacted by HLP violations. For women, such violations can heighten their exposure to gender-based violence, exploitation, and discrimination.²⁰⁶ Children, particularly those orphaned or separated from their families as a result of the conflict, are at increased risk of exploitation and recruitment by non-state armed groups when their HLP rights are violated.²⁰⁷ During IACs and NIACs, belligerents must also respect the property rights of displaced persons.²⁰⁸

Humanitarian actors shall take steps to ensure that their initiatives are in line with IHL's protections. More concretely, humanitarians should respect property, including that of displaced persons, and conduct due diligence for HLP in every stage of a project.

Non-Discrimination

Parties to the conflict should afford protected persons with the protections that IHL mandates and without adverse distinction based on race, colour, sex, language, religion or belief, political or other opinion, national or social origin, wealth, birth or other status, or on any other similar criteria.²⁰⁹ Adverse distinction is not only understood to constitute discriminatory acts but also omissions, requiring parties to the conflict to consider the consequences of their policies on protected persons.²¹⁰

Humanitarian efforts must reflect the prohibition on discrimination by providing aid and assistance impartially to all affected civilians.

Humane treatment

This rule seeks to ensure that civilians and combatants who are no longer fighting (*hors de combat*) are treated with humanity and dignity. Torture, abuse, violations of due process rights, and degrading treatment are strictly prohibited.²¹¹ The obligation of humane treatment also prohibits rape or any form of sexual violence or indecent assault.²¹² This principle extends to all protected persons, who should be treated with respect to their honour, family rights, and religious practices.²¹³ The requirement for humane treatment covers various groups affected by conflict, including wounded or sick members of the armed forces, who are entitled to medical care and protection.²¹⁴ Similarly, parties to the conflict are obligated to treat prisoners of war with humanity, ensuring their safety, health, and well-being.²¹⁵

Humanitarian workers must ensure they do not inadvertently support environments where such abuses occur, and conduct thorough due diligence on third parties before partnering with them.

Recruitment of Child Soldiers

IHL prohibits the recruitment of children into armed forces or armed groups.²¹⁶ No child under the age of 15 shall be enlisted in armed forces or groups, nor engaged in hostilities.²¹⁷ When recruiting individuals aged 15 to 18, Parties to the conflict shall make every effort to prioritize the oldest within this age group.²¹⁸

Humanitarian NGOs must avoid inadvertently enabling environments where such abuses occur and should perform comprehensive due diligence on third parties prior to partnering with them.

Access to health care

Medical personnel assigned exclusively to medical duties must be respected and protected in all circumstances. This protection is forfeited if they engage in acts harmful to the enemy outside their humanitarian functions.²¹⁹ Similarly, medical units and medical transports assigned solely for medical purposes must be respected and protected,²²⁰ with the loss of such protection occurring only if they are misused for harmful acts against the enemy.²²¹ Parties to the conflict are prohibited from punishing individuals for performing medical duties that adhere to medical ethics or compelling them to act contrary to these ethics.²²²

IHL prohibits attacks on medical personnel, as well as objects displaying the distinctive emblems of the Geneva Conventions, in compliance with international law.²²³ Parties to the conflict are explicitly forbidden from directing attacks against zones established to shelter the wounded, the sick, and civilians from the effects of hostilities.²²⁴

Humanitarian NGOs are encouraged to ensure that all medical personnel, units, and transports are clearly marked with distinctive emblems. Those who do not make use of these emblems do not forfeit their protection under IHL. They should also ensure all staff members' adherence to medical ethics, as well as ensure that health care services are provided in an impartial manner, without discrimination and prioritized according to urgency.

Protection of the Natural Environment

Unless required by military necessity, parties to the conflict shall refrain from directing attacks against the natural environment.²²⁵ It is prohibited to carry out attacks against military objectives if the expected incidental harm to the natural environment would be excessive in relation to the anticipated concrete and direct military advantage.²²⁶ Parties to the conflict must consider the protection and preservation of the environment when selecting means and methods of warfare.²²⁷ Accordingly, they ought to refrain from using methods or means of warfare that are expected to cause widespread, long-term, and severe environmental damage.²²⁸ Additionally, parties to the conflict are prohibited from deliberately destroying the natural environment as a form of a weapon.²²⁹

06 Humanitarian principles

"[A]ll humanitarian actors share responsibility for ensuring that activities in each cluster and other areas of the humanitarian response are carried out with "a protection lens". Each of the Cluster Working Groups and Cluster Leads are responsible for ensuring that... activities carried out under their cluster responsibility do not lead to or perpetuate discrimination, abuse, violence, neglect or exploitation".^{230 231}

IHRL and IHL standards offer a foundation for principled and rights-based engagement in humanitarian operations. These international legal frameworks establish the legal basis for the protection of individuals during crises, while humanitarian principles translate these obligations into practice by guiding humanitarian assistance in a neutral, impartial, and humane manner. Together, this tapestry of norms and standards ensure that humanitarian actors uphold respect for human dignity, avoid harm, and provide assistance in a way that respects and reinforces the rights and protections guaranteed under international law. Adherence to the norms enshrined in these frameworks may also serve to strengthen the credibility and effectiveness of humanitarian NGOs.

Humanitarian principles are the ethical and operational foundations of humanitarian action globally. Outlined in instruments such as UN General Assembly Resolution 46/182,²³² the Code of Conduct for the Red Cross and NGOs,²³³ the Sphere Handbook,²³⁴ the Core Humanitarian Standard on Quality and Accountability,²³⁵ and the Grand Bargain.²³⁶ These principles enshrine a commitment to act as impartially as possible, based on human need alone, to ensure that humanitarian assistance is provided without discrimination to all those in need, and that the essential elements of relief are fulfilled. Adherence to these principles enables humanitarian organizations to maintain access to affected populations, reduce operational risks, preserve human dignity, and engage with various stakeholders in a principled manner.²³⁷

While humanitarian principles stand as independent foundational elements of humanitarian action, humanitarian actors simultaneously carry obligations that may overlap with IHL and IHRL frameworks.

These four founding principles – humanity, neutrality, impartiality, and independence – are widely known and endorsed by the United Nations General Assembly.²³⁸ They guide humanitarian agencies to help those most in need, and seek to protect and fulfill the dignity of human beings in grave distress and danger:



Humanity:
in helping victims of war or natural disasters, protecting life and health and ensuring respect for human beings.²³⁹



Neutrality:
Staying neutral in war or abstaining from political, racial, religious or ideological controversy.²⁴⁰


Impartiality:

Providing aid solely based on need, without discrimination.²⁴¹


Independence:

Maintaining autonomy from political, economic, military, or other non-humanitarian objectives.²⁴²

These principles, by guiding action, can help humanitarian actors navigate complex and volatile contexts. While they exist independently of other frameworks, humanitarian actors may simultaneously need to respect both these principles and their obligations under human rights standards and IHL frameworks in humanitarian action.²⁴³

● 'Do No Harm' framework:

The 'Do No Harm' principle serves as a fundamental ethical framework in humanitarian action that recognizes humanitarian interventions can inadvertently cause harm even while intending to help.²⁴⁴ This framework acknowledges that aid is not neutral in conflict settings - it becomes part of the context and can either strengthen or weaken local dynamics.²⁴⁵

The framework requires humanitarian actors to:



Conduct thorough contextual analysis before and during interventions



Identify and analyze:

- Factors that divide communities or create tensions
- Elements that connect communities and support peace
- How aid programs interact with these factors



Continuously assess program impacts and adjust interventions accordingly.²⁴⁶

Through this systematic approach, organizations can better anticipate, prevent, and minimize potential negative consequences of humanitarian assistance while maximizing positive impacts on affected communities.²⁴⁷

Applying the 'Do No Harm' approach to the work in Northwest Syria not only aligns with humanitarian actors' responsibility to respect IHRL and IHL standards and implement Heightened HRDD, but it also better positions humanitarian NGOs to deliver aid effectively while also avoiding harmful consequences.

● Accountability to Affected Populations

Accountability to Affected Populations (AAP) – which in humanitarian settings is defined as “an active commitment by humanitarian actors to use power responsibly by taking account of, giving account to, and being held to account by the people they seek to assist”, views the power discrepancy between donors and aid beneficiaries as a problem to be addressed.²⁴⁸ It grounds itself in the idea that those who receive or benefit from humanitarian aid should play a meaningful role in the way they are assisted, within the limits imposed by an emergency, and should be able to defend their interests and rights.

Central to this is the Collective AAP Framework developed by the Inter-Agency Standing Committee (IASC) to guide humanitarian actors to implement AAP principles across the various cycles of their projects. The framework states that humanitarian actors should “seek out, hear, and act upon the voices and priorities of affected communities.”²⁴⁹

Key elements of AAP include

- **inter alia, enabling meaningful participation of affected communities in decision-making processes**
- **providing transparent and timely information to communities,**
- **gathering feedback through accessible mechanisms.**

In Northwest Syria, implementing AAP principles is particularly crucial given the complex and protracted nature of the crisis. Humanitarian NGOs should strive to integrate AAP throughout their project cycles, ensuring that affected populations have a voice in the decisions that impact their lives and that assistance is delivered in a manner that respects their rights and dignity.

07 Humanitarian NGOs involvement in human rights abuses and violations of IHL

The UNGPs, which arguably apply to humanitarian NGOs, describe the scope of the responsibility to respect human rights through the following three categories of involvement in human rights abuses:

Causation

An organization may cause human rights abuses where its activities (its actions or omissions) affect the ability of an individual or a group to enjoy a human right.²⁵⁰

For example, if an NGO builds housing, educational, or WASH facilities on the lands of displaced persons, they would be directly causing a human rights abuse - namely of housing, land, and property (HLP) rights.

In WASH, humanitarian NGOs can also directly cause human rights abuses by installing water and sanitation infrastructure without adequate oversight, leading to contamination and the outbreaks of disease. NGOs working in the health sector may cause human rights abuses by providing negligent medical treatment.

Contribution

An organization may contribute to human rights abuses through its own activities (actions or omissions), either directly alongside other entities, or through third parties (government, armed group, other organizations, or businesses).²⁵¹

For example, an armed non-state actor (ANSA) may set out to build housing units on lands of ethnic minorities, ultimately resulting in demographic engineering and displacement of local communities. Humanitarian NGOs who offer their services in the form of building these shelters may be unaware of the effect of this project on the human rights of the affected communities, but would nevertheless be contributing to human rights abuses.

Humanitarian NGOs working in WASH may contribute to human rights abuses by partnering with businesses that exploit water resources for profit and drive shortages for local communities, violating their right to water. In the education sector, humanitarian NGOs can contribute to discrimination if they support education programmes that exclude girls, children with disabilities, displaced children, or children from certain ethnic or religious groups due to local policies or biases. If an NGO supplies textbooks, school meals, or other goods or services in a way that benefits armed groups or authorities engaged in abuses, it may also contribute to sustaining conflict dynamics. NGOs may also contribute to human rights abuses if, for instance, they establish IDP camps without sufficient safeguards against PSEAH, enabling perpetrators, including humanitarian staff, to commit violations.

Direct Link

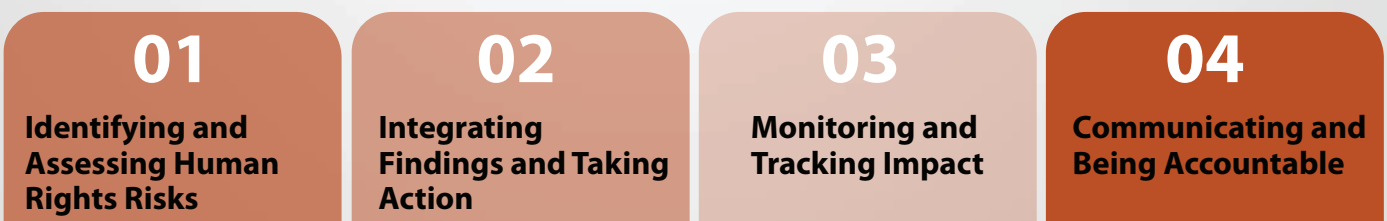
Responsibility can also arise for the human rights abuses of a third party, even if the organization has not caused or contributed to such abuses. Direct linkage refers to a situation where there is a direct link between the operations, activities, or services of an organization and the human rights abuses committed by an entity, including other organizations, businesses, and state and non-state actors, with which it has a business relationship.²⁵²

For example, direct linkage could manifest in a situation where an NGO procures building material from a company that avails itself of child labour.

Additionally, if an NGO rents office spaces, warehouses, or distribution centres from entities who acquired such properties through pillage or forced displacement, that NGO would be directly linked to violations of HLP rights. In a similar vein, if an NGO provides food or medical aid through local intermediaries with ties to abusive regimes or ANSAs, and those actors divert or distribute aid discriminatorily, the NGO is directly linked to those violations.

08 What are the steps involved in the HRDD process?

The following four components should be at the core of any HRDD process:



01 Identifying and Assessing Human Rights Risks

Identifying and assessing actual or potential adverse conflict and human rights impacts that the organization may cause or contribute to through its own activities, or which may be directly linked to its operations, activities, or projects.

Humanitarian NGOs must recognize the risks that their activities might inadvertently cause to the detriment of the human rights of partner communities. This step involves:

Mapping risks:

Identify potential human rights risks, such as, for example, unintentionally infringing HLP rights or causing environmental harm. This step also includes identifying risks that might infringe upon the ability of humanitarian NGOs to undertake humanitarian relief operations in an impartial manner, based on need, and without adverse distinction.

Context analysis:

Understand the operational environment of Northwest Syria, including the actors involved, the conflict dynamics, and the needs of vulnerable groups such as women, children, the elderly, persons with disabilities, and IDPs.²⁵³

Analyzing conflict dynamics:

Understand how humanitarian activities may affect local power structures, exacerbate tensions, or alter the balance of power among the de facto authorities or community leaders.

Community engagement:

Engage with affected communities to understand their concerns, vulnerabilities, and expectations to ensure no group is overlooked.

02 Integrating Findings and Taking Action

Acting on the findings from risk and impact assessments across relevant functions and organization processes. More specifically, if the organization is causing or at risk of causing adverse impact, it should take steps to cease or prevent it.

If the organization is contributing or at risk of contributing to adverse impact, it should take steps to cease or prevent its contribution and use leverage to mitigate the remaining impact. If the organization has not contributed to the impact, but that impact is actually or potentially directly linked to its operations, it should take steps to gain and use leverage to prevent and mitigate the impact, to the greatest extent possible.

After identifying risks, these insights must be incorporated into the design and implementation of the humanitarian operations. This step involves:

Developing prevention strategies:

Adopt adequate policies, for example on safeguarding and non-discrimination. Implement processes and adjust programmes to prevent or mitigate identified risks.

Adopting rights-based approaches:

Integrate human rights into programme design, ensuring that activities and projects are participatory, inclusive, and respectful of human rights.

Conflict-sensitive decision-making:

Ensure that decision-making at every level integrates an understanding of how humanitarian activities might influence conflict dynamics.

Internal alignment:

Ensure that all team members, from field workers to decision-makers, are aware of the risks and mitigation strategies. This should include training on the new policies adopted as well as on human rights standards.

03 Monitoring and Tracking Impact

Tracking the effectiveness of measures and processes to address adverse conflict and human rights risks or impacts to understand if they are working.

It is essential to monitor the effectiveness of the measures adopted in Stage 2 of the HRDD process to ensure that human rights are effectively safeguarded. This step involves:

Setting indicators:

Develop measurable indicators to track whether human rights are being respected and whether risks are being effectively mitigated.

Receiving feedback:

Maintain open channels of communication with affected communities, regularly gathering feedback on the impact of humanitarian activities.

Adjusting as needed:

Be prepared to modify operations in response to new risks or challenges identified through monitoring.

04 Communicating and Being Accountable

Communicating on how risks or impacts are being addressed and showing stakeholders (in particular, affected stakeholders) that there are adequate policies and processes in place to safeguard human rights in practice.

Transparency and accountability are crucial to ensuring that human rights are respected. Humanitarian NGOs must openly communicate how they are addressing human rights impacts. This step involves:

Reporting to stakeholders:

Share findings with donors, affected populations, and local partners about how risks are being managed.

Establishing grievance or feedback mechanisms:

Ensure that affected populations have accessible ways to raise concerns and grievances about aid operations.

Learning and improving:

Use feedback and lessons learned to improve future operations and enhance human rights protection.

09 Project Cycle Management (PCM)

Project Cycle Management (PCM) is a comprehensive framework designed to guide programming through programmatic processes and methods with a view to strengthening humanitarian action in terms of both quality and accountability.²⁵⁴ PCM provides a structured approach to project management where the various phases are complementary and interdependent. Therefore, the PCM represents a perfect template to apply the HRDD cycle as discussed earlier.”

The PCM typically consists of five core steps:

01

Initial (Understanding the context) phase:

This initial phase involves gathering and analyzing information about the operational environment, including political, economic, social, and cultural factors.²⁵⁵ It sets the foundation for all subsequent decisions and actions.

Assessing and analyzing the situation:

This step involves a detailed examination of the specific issues, needs, and opportunities within the project's scope. It includes stakeholder analysis, problem analysis, and the identification of objectives.²⁵⁶

03

Planning programme response:

Based on the analysis, this phase involves developing a comprehensive project plan, including objectives, activities, resources, timelines, and indicators for monitoring and evaluation.²⁵⁷

02

Evaluating and learning from experience:

The final phase involves assessing the project's outcomes and impacts, identifying lessons learned, and using these insights to inform future programming.²⁵⁹

04

Implementing and monitoring response:

This phase involves carrying out planned activities while continuously monitoring progress against established indicators. It requires regular data collection, analysis, and reporting to inform decision-making.²⁵⁸

05

Each of these phases is interconnected, forming a cycle that promotes continuous learning and improvement. The PCM approach emphasizes the importance of stakeholder participation throughout the project lifecycle, ensuring that interventions are relevant, effective, and sustainable.²⁶⁰

In the context of human rights-based programming, PCM provides a structured framework for integrating human rights principles and standards at every stage of the project cycle. This integration ensures that human rights considerations are not an afterthought but are central to project design, implementation, and evaluation.²⁶¹ By systematically applying PCM principles, organizations can enhance their ability to deliver effective, rights-based humanitarian interventions that address root causes of problems and contribute to sustainable development outcomes.^{262 263}

● Human Rights Due Diligence (HRDD) Tool for Humanitarian and Development Projects in Northwest Syria

HRDD Tool Structure

The HRDD Tool Structure is designed to align with the Project Cycle Management (PCM) framework. This structure ensures a comprehensive integration of human rights considerations in humanitarian interventions in Northwest Syria, with a particular focus on Housing, Land, and Property (HLP) rights, environmental impact on human rights and gender equality. The tool applies the four stages of HRDD to each phase of the PCM as explained below. However, this remains subject to the project's context and the nature of the project. Applying the HRDD process to each phase may also create actionable steps to be integrated in the following phases.

01

Assessment (Situation Analysis) Phase

This phase focuses on understanding the context and conducting a comprehensive human rights analysis. Key components include:

- **Situational analysis, including specific HLP rights assessment and gender analysis.**
- **Stakeholder identification and mapping, with emphasis on marginalized groups.**
- **Environmental and climate change impact assessment.**
- **Conflict sensitivity analysis.**
- **Child protection and PSEAH risk assessment.²⁶⁴**
- **Supply chain mapping for human rights risks.**
- **Food security and nutrition assessment, including cultural and religious considerations.**
- **Health service access assessment, including gender-specific needs.**

According to the OHCHR, this phase should "identify and address the root causes of human rights violations and discrimination patterns".²⁶⁵ The assessment should consider recommendations from international human rights mechanisms and local context-specific issues.

Applying HRDD steps to this phase requires the organizations to select relevant assessments according to the specific nature of their project. The goal is not to impose additional assessments but to ensure that critical human rights-related assessments are conducted where necessary. This approach ensures that teams are aware of key risks and can make informed decisions on how to address them. By focusing on assessments directly linked to human rights risks, organizations can avoid fragmented approaches and ensure their interventions are strategic and comprehensive.

As described earlier, the HRDD process includes 4 steps: assessment, integrating action, monitoring, and communication and being accountable. To benefit from the tool, an organisation would rely on the questions and indicators laid out in the Tool to assess the level of risk to human rights in its planned project. This is followed by integrating actionable steps to prevent or mitigate these risks, and monitor the application of the action plan. The final step or HRDD requires the organisation to communicate the results to relevant stakeholders and, therefore, be accountable for its plan.

02

Design (Planning) Phase

This phase involves integrating human rights principles into the project's logical framework. Key elements include:

- **Developing comprehensive non-discrimination policies.**
- **Designing inclusive labour rights policies.**
- **Establishing data protection measures, particularly for vulnerable groups.**
- **Incorporating environmental sustainability and climate change adaptation considerations.**
- **Developing safeguarding measures, especially for women and children.**
- **Planning for meaningful consultation with affected populations.**
- **Integrating HLP rights considerations in shelter/infrastructure projects.**
- **Designing culturally appropriate and accessible feedback mechanisms.**

According to the SPHERE Standards, "[t]he design should explicitly address patterns of discrimination and inequality, targeting the most marginalized groups".²⁶⁶

In a similar fashion to the previous phase of the project, the HRDD process is applied here relying on the relevant questions and indicators laid out in the annexed Tool. The assessment is then followed by the same stages: integrating action, monitoring, and communication and being accountable. This phase could include actionable steps from the previous stage assessment. It could also propose actionable steps to be integrated in the following phases of the project.

03

Implementation Phase

This phase focuses on operationalizing human rights principles throughout project activities. Key aspects include:

- **Continuous human rights monitoring, including HLP rights and gender-specific indicators**
- **Capacity building for both rights-holders and duty-bearers on human rights issues**
- **Establishing and maintaining accessible, gender-sensitive feedback mechanisms**
- **Practicing adaptive management based on human rights monitoring findings**
- **Implementing measures to ensure safe education access, including for girls**
- **Ongoing consultation with affected populations**
- **Systematic tracking of vulnerable groups' access to services**

Here as well, the HRDD process is applied relying on the relevant questions and indicators as laid out in the attached Tool. Actionable steps from previous stages assessments could be included.

04

Monitoring and Evaluation Phase

This phase involves assessing the project's impact on human rights. Key components include:

- **Developing specific human rights indicators, including those related to HLP rights and gender equality**
- **Ensuring participatory M&E processes that include vulnerable groups**
- **Collecting disaggregated data, particularly by gender, age, and disability status**
- **Conducting comprehensive human rights impact assessments**
- **Monitoring education quality, including gender-specific considerations**
- **Evaluating the effectiveness of feedback mechanisms**

The OHCHR stresses the importance of using human rights indicators to measure progress and impact, ensuring that "no one is left behind" in the humanitarian response.²⁶⁷

Here as well, the HRDD process is applied relying on the relevant questions and indicators as laid out in the attached Tool. Actionable steps from previous stages assessments could be included.

05

Exit and Transition Phase

This phase focuses on ensuring the sustainability of human rights gains. Key elements include:

- **Developing an exit strategy that considers potential human rights implications of project closure**
- **Assessing the long-term sustainability of human rights gains, including HLP rights and gender equality improvements**
- **Building local capacities for continued human rights monitoring**
- **Ensuring effective knowledge transfer on human rights issues to local partners**
- **Conducting a final environmental rights assessment**
- **Planning for responsible transition of procurement relationships**

As is the case in previous phases, HRDD steps are implemented in this stage as well.

● Example on How to apply HRDD

A food distribution NGO planning an intervention in an IDP camp in Idlib governorate could apply the stages of the HRDD process as follows:

Identifying and Assessing Human Rights Risks

The organisation could

1. Conduct a detailed conflict analysis, mapping control zones of armed groups and potential flashpoints that will affect the pattern of delivery of aid;
2. Evaluate the risk that aid funding might be diverted by local armed groups or de facto authorities to support human rights abuses;
3. Engage with women, the elderly, persons with disabilities, and other groups to identify specific risks and needs;
4. Consider how the project would alter power relations within the locality, in favour of one class over another;
5. Assess possible environmental issues related to food packing and waste disposal in the camp.

Integrating Findings and Taking Action

Based on the assessment findings, the organization could

1. Design selection criteria for beneficiaries that are transparent and which prioritise the most vulnerable while also ensuring adherence to non-discrimination principles;
2. Introduce rigorous vetting procedures for local partners and suppliers to ensure that they are not inadvertently funding or supporting actors complicit in or responsible for human rights violations or international crimes;
3. Provide training to all staff on safeguarding policies and human rights standards, ensuring alignment and awareness across the organization;
4. Make distribution points and times safe and accessible for all, especially women, the elderly, and persons with disabilities;
5. Incorporate environmental mitigation measures such as the use of biodegradable packaging in lieu of traditional plastics, and a waste management plan.

Monitoring and Tracking Impact

To monitor the effectiveness of these measures, organizations could:

1. Develop specific, measurable indicators such as
 - a. Percentage of beneficiaries disaggregated by assessed levels of need, with the proportion of beneficiaries from different ethnic or religious groups within each need category;
 - b. Number of reported incidents of aid diversion or discrimination;
 - c. Quantity of waste properly managed or recycled;
2. Create a confidential feedback line to elicit continual beneficiary feedback.
3. Conduct regular post-distribution monitoring visits which involve women, the elderly, children, and persons with disabilities;
4. Conduct monthly coordination meetings with other humanitarian actors in the area to share lessons learned, and adapt strategies to changing dynamics of the conflict;
5. Establish a community-based monitoring system to enable rights holders to report subpar conditions or practices.

Communicating and Being Accountable

To ensure transparency and accountability, humanitarian NGOs could

1. Organise community meetings in the IDP camp on a regular basis to discuss project updates and how feedback is being managed;
2. Use local communication channels, such as community radio or WhatsApp groups, to share information about the food distribution process and how to access the grievance mechanism;
3. Publish monthly Arabic-language reports detailing the project's human rights impact assessments, mitigation measures, and outcomes; =
4. Set up a community oversight committee to monitor food distribution and address complaints (i.e. with representation from groups inside camp);
5. Commission locally-based human rights NGOs to conduct assessments of the project's human rights impacts.

● HRDD Tool Matrix

The HRDD Tool is a structured framework designed to support humanitarian organizations in integrating Human Rights Due Diligence (HRDD) into their operations in Northwest Syria. It provides detailed guidance across the five stages of Project Cycle Management (PCM): Assessment, Design, Implementation, Monitoring and Evaluation, and Exit and Transition. The Tool is tailored to address the complex human rights risks associated with humanitarian interventions in conflict-affected settings.

Description of Tool Matrix Columns

The Tool Matrix is organized into several columns, each serving a specific purpose to facilitate the integration of HRDD into humanitarian programming.

01 PCM Stage: This column identifies the specific stage of the project cycle, such as Assessment, Design, Implementation, Monitoring and Evaluation, or Exit and Transition. By clearly delineating each project stage, this column ensures that human rights considerations are systematically addressed throughout the entire project lifecycle. It provides a structured approach for integrating HRDD at every critical point in the humanitarian intervention, promoting a comprehensive and proactive stance on human rights protection.

02 Code: A unique identifier for each human rights consideration, facilitating easy reference and tracking.

03 Category: This is to identify whether this risk is found across multiple humanitarian sectors or whether it is specific to certain sectors. It is either cross-cutting or sector (e.g. Shelter or WASH) specific.

04 Subcategory: This helps to identify the specific programme under each sector.

05 Key Human Rights Risks: This column lists potential human rights risks specific to each PCM stage and sector of intervention, such as discrimination in aid distribution, violations of housing rights, or risks to children's education. By explicitly outlining the human rights risks associated with each project stage, this column enables humanitarian actors to anticipate and prepare for potential challenges. It serves as an early warning system, allowing organizations to develop targeted strategies to prevent or mitigate these risks before they materialize.

06 Indicators: This column suggests measurable indicators to track compliance with human rights standards and evaluate the effectiveness of mitigation measures, such as the percentage of affected population consulted, or the number of complaints received and addressed. By providing clear, quantifiable metrics, this column facilitates ongoing monitoring and evaluation of human rights impacts. It enables organizations to assess the effectiveness of their interventions, identify areas for improvement, and demonstrate accountability to stakeholders and affected communities.

07

Risk Assessment Questions: This column offers targeted questions to assess the likelihood and impact of identified human rights risks, such as "Have we consulted with all affected groups, including marginalized populations?" or "What measures are in place to ensure non-discrimination in aid distribution?". These questions guide users in conducting thorough risk assessments by prompting them to consider relevant factors and scenarios. They encourage a deeper analysis of potential human rights impacts, fostering a more nuanced understanding of the operational context and its challenges.

08

Considerations: This column provides additional context-specific factors and nuances to be taken into account when assessing risks and planning interventions, such as local power dynamics or cultural sensitivities. These considerations enhance the tool's relevance to the complex environment of Northwest Syria. They ensure that risk assessments and mitigation strategies are tailored to local realities, promoting more effective and culturally sensitive humanitarian interventions.

09

Reference: This column includes a list of relevant international law and humanitarian frameworks.

How to use the Tool

A step-by-step instructions on how to use the tool are listed below:

01

Understand the Tool's Structure

- Familiarize yourself with the PCM stages and sector-specific sections of the Tool.
- Review the included risk assessment questions, indicators, and mitigation measures.

02

Identify Relevant Sections

Determine which PCM stage(s) and sector(s) are applicable to your project.

03

Conduct Risk Assessments

- Use the provided questions to identify potential human rights risks associated with your activities.
- Pay special attention to heightened risks such as HLP violations, environmental harm, or exclusion of vulnerable groups.

04

Plan Mitigation Measures

Based on identified risks, select appropriate mitigation strategies from the Tool or adapt them to your context.

05**Incorporate Findings into Project Design**

Integrate risk assessments and mitigation plans into project proposals, budgets, and operational plans.

06**Monitor Progress**

- Utilize the indicators provided in the Tool to track compliance with human rights standards throughout project implementation.
- Regularly revisit risk assessments to address emerging issues.

07**Engage Stakeholders**

- Collaborate with affected communities, local partners, and other stakeholders to ensure inclusivity and accountability.
- Use feedback mechanisms to refine your approach.

08**Document Actions Taken**

- Maintain records of assessments conducted, decisions made, and actions implemented for accountability purposes.
- Share lessons learned with donors and coordination mechanisms.

09**Adapt as Needed**

Adjust your approach based on changing conditions or new insights from monitoring activities

10**Promote Advocacy Efforts**

Leverage findings from the HRDD process to advocate for sustainable funding and strategic partnerships with donors.

Conclusion

The HRDD Tool for Northwest Syria provides a comprehensive framework for integrating human rights considerations into humanitarian interventions. By systematically applying this tool, organizations can enhance their human rights due diligence, ensure more effective and rights-based interventions, and ultimately contribute to the protection and promotion of human rights in Northwest Syria.

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- ⁷⁹CESCR (n 73) [2].
- ⁸⁰Ibid [10].
- ⁸¹See, e.g., SLDP, Business Responsibility Towards the Environment and Human Rights in Syria, (2024), P. 18-20, available at <https://shorturl.at/WZfC3>
- ⁸²CRPD (n 69) Art. 25.
- ⁸³CESCR General Comment No 14: The Right to the Highest Attainable Standard of Health (Art 12), (11 August 2000), UN Doc E/C.12/2000/4 [8], available at <https://www.refworld.org/legal/general/cescr/2000/en/36991>
- ⁸⁴Ibid [4].
- ⁸⁵Ibid [8].
- ⁸⁶Ibid [12(b)].
- ⁸⁷Ibid [12(c)].
- ⁸⁸Ibid.
- ⁸⁹Ibid [12(d)].
- ⁹⁰Ibid.
- ⁹¹See, e.g. PAX, Thirst for Peace: War and Water Security Challenges along the Orontes River in Syria, (2024), available at https://paxforpeace.nl/wp-content/uploads/sites/2/2024/11/PAX_report_Thirst-for-Peace_2024.pdf
- ⁹²ICCPR (n 38) Art. 1(1); ICESCR (n) Art. 1(1).
- ⁹³UNGA, Declaration on the Right to Development, (4 December 1986), UN Doc A/RES/41/128, Art. 1, available at <https://www.ohchr.org/en/instruments-mechanisms/instruments/declaration-right-development>
- ⁹⁴UN Human Rights Council, The Role of Business in Realizing the Right to Development: Report of the Special Rapporteur on the Right to Development, (8 June 2022), UN Doc A/HRC/48/60 [12-13], available at <https://www.ohchr.org/en/documents/thematic-reports/a78160-role-business-realizing-right-development-report-special>
- ⁹⁵Ibid.
- ⁹⁶UN Conference on Environment and Development, Rio Declaration on Environment and Development, (14 June 1992), UN Doc A/CONF.151/26 (Vol II), available at <https://www.un.org/en/development/desa/population/theme/environment>
- ⁹⁷ICESCR (n 51) Art. 13; Convention on the Rights of the Child, (20 November 1989), 1577 UNTS 3 (CRC), Art. 28.
- ⁹⁸CESCR General Comment No 13: The Right to Education (Art 13), (8 December 1999), UN Doc E/C.12/1999/10 [1], available at <https://www.refworld.org/legal/general/cescr/1999/en/37937>
- ⁹⁹Ibid.
- ¹⁰⁰Ibid.
- ¹⁰¹Ibid [6].
- ¹⁰²Ibid.
- ¹⁰³ICESCR (n 51) Art. 13(3); CESCR (n 94) [28].
- ¹⁰⁴CRC (n 93) Art. 16.
- ¹⁰⁵Ibid, Art. 34.
- ¹⁰⁶CEDAW (n 119) Art. 16(2).

¹⁰⁷ICESCR (n 51) Art. 10(3).

¹⁰⁸CRC (n 93) Art. 32; see also International Labour Organization (ILO), Convention No. 138: Minimum Age Convention, (26 June 1973), 1015 UNTS 297; and International Labour Organization (ILO), Convention No. 182: Worst Forms of Child Labour Convention, (17 June 1999), 2133 UNTS 161.

¹⁰⁹See, e.g., Delphine Boutin and Marine Jouvin, Child Labour Consequences on Education and Health: A Review of Evidence and Knowledge Gaps, (2022), available at <https://hal.science/hal-03896700v1/file/BSE_BxWP2022_14_Boutin.pdf>.

¹¹⁰UN Human Rights Council, Resolution 48/13: The human right to a clean, healthy and sustainable environment, (8 October 2021), UN Doc A/HRC/RES/48/13.

¹¹¹UNGA Res 76/300, The human right to a clean, healthy and sustainable environment, (28 July 2022), UN Doc A/RES/76/300.

¹¹²OHCHR, UNEP, UNDP, 'What is the Right to a Healthy Environment? Information Note', (2023) P. 9, available at <<https://www.undp.org/sites/g/files/zskgke326/files/2023-01/UNDP-UNEP-UNHCHR-What-is-the-Right-to-a-Healthy-Environment.pdf>>

¹¹³Ibid.

¹¹⁴See SLDP (n 77) p. 8.

¹¹⁵ICCPR (n 38) Art. 6.

¹¹⁶The right to life is also enshrined in Art. 3 of the UDHR (n 49) and Art. 6 of the CRC (n 93).

¹¹⁷Human Rights Committee, General Comment No. 36: The Right to Life, (3 September 2019), UN Doc CCPR/C/GC/36 [2], available at <<https://documents.un.org/doc/undoc/gen/g19/261/15/pdf/g1926115.pdf>>; States can derogate from certain human rights obligations in times of emergency. This is provided that their measures are non-discriminatory, specific, and justified by the exigencies of the situation. See, Art. 4(1) of the ICCPR (n 38).

¹¹⁸See ICJ Wall Advisory Opinion (n 48).

¹¹⁹Human Rights Committee (n 114) [64].

¹²⁰UDHR (n 49) Art. 1 and 2.

¹²¹ICCPR (n 38) Art. 3 and 26.

¹²²Human Rights Committee, General Comment No. 18: Non-Discrimination, (10 November 1989), UN Doc CCPR/C/21/Rev.1/Add.1 [1], available at <<https://www.refworld.org/legal/general/hrc/1989/en/6268>>

¹²³Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women, (18 December 1979), 1249 UNTS 13 (CEDAW), Art. 1.

¹²⁴CRPD (n 69) Art. 5.

¹²⁵Ibid, Art. 6.

¹²⁶Ibid, Art. 7.

¹²⁷Committee on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, General Comment No. 6 on equality and non-discrimination, (26 April 2018), UN Doc CRPD/C/GC/6 [2], available at <https://shorturl.at/FRx6Q>

¹²⁸Ibid.

¹²⁹Ibid [18].

¹³⁰CCPR (n 38) Art. 12(1).

¹³¹Ibid, Art. 12(2).

¹³²Human Rights Committee, General Comment No. 27: Article 12 (Freedom of movement), (2 November 1999), UN Doc CCPR/C/21/Rev.1/Add.9 [1], available at <<https://www.refworld.org/legal/general/hrc/1999/en/46752>>

¹³³Ibid [5].

¹³⁴Ibid.

¹³⁵Ibid [6].

¹³⁶CEDAW (n 119) Art. 15.

¹³⁷Human Rights Committee (n 128) [7].

¹³⁸Ibid.

¹³⁹Ibid [11].

¹⁴⁰ICCPR (38) Art. 26.

¹⁴¹Human Rights Committee (n 128) [18].

¹⁴²ICCPR (n 38) Art. 17.

¹⁴³Ibid, Art. 23.

¹⁴⁴Human Rights Committee, General Comment No. 16: Article 17 (Right to Privacy) The Right to Respect of Privacy, Family, Home and Correspondence, and Protection of Honour and Reputation, (8 April 1988) [1], available at <<https://www.refworld.org/legal/general/hrc/1988/en/27539>>

¹⁴⁵Ibid [3].

¹⁴⁶Ibid.

¹⁴⁷Ibid [4].

¹⁴⁸Ibid [11].

¹⁴⁹Ibid [10].

¹⁵⁰Ibid.

¹⁵¹Ibid.

¹⁵²CRC (n 93) Art. 37(a).

¹⁵³International Convention on the Protection of the Rights of All Migrant Workers and Members of their Families, (18 December 1990), 2220 UNTS 3, Art. 10.

¹⁵⁴CRPD (n 69) Art. 15.

¹⁵⁵ICCPR (n 38) Art. 7.

¹⁵⁶Convention Against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment, (10 December 1984), (UNCAT)1465 UNTS 85.

¹⁵⁷ICCPR (n 38) Art. 7.

¹⁵⁸UNCAT (n 152) Art. 1(1).

¹⁵⁹See, e.g. Equality and Human Rights Commission, Article 3: Freedom from Torture and Inhuman or Degrading Treatment, (2016), available at <https://shorturl.at/G7nwg>

¹⁶⁰Human Rights Committee, General Comment No. 20: Article 7 (Prohibition of Torture, or Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment), (10 March 1992) [5], available at <https://www.refworld.org/legal/general/hrc/1992/en/11086>

¹⁶¹The absolute and non-derogable status of the prohibition against torture extends to acts of torture committed by non-state actors.

¹⁶²CRC (n 93) Art. 7.

¹⁶³ICCPR (n 38) Art. 16.

¹⁶⁴UDHR (n 49) Art. 15.

¹⁶⁵See, e.g., Taylor PM, 'Article 16: Recognition as a Person Before the Law', in A Commentary on the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights: The UN Human Rights Committee's Monitoring of ICCPR Rights (Cambridge University Press, 2020) P. 445-457.

¹⁶⁶ICCPR (n 38) Art. 19.

¹⁶⁷OHCHR, Freedom of opinion and expression, 2013 thematic report to the Human Rights Council of the Special Rapporteur on freedom of opinion and expression, Fact sheet, available at https://www.ohchr.org/sites/default/files/Documents/Issues/Expression/Factsheet_5.pdf

¹⁶⁸See generally Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights, Basic Principles and Guidelines on the Right to a Remedy and Reparation, (OHCHR 2005), available at <https://www.ohchr.org/en/instruments-mechanisms/instruments/basic-principles-and-guidelines-right-remedy-and-reparation>

¹⁶⁹ICCPR (n 38) Art. 2(3).

¹⁷⁰UNCAT (n 152) Art. 14.

¹⁷¹UDHR (n 49) Art. 8.

¹⁷²UNGPs (n 6) Principle 31.

¹⁷³See common Article 2 to the Geneva Conventions; Geneva Convention for the Amelioration of the Condition of the Wounded and Sick in Armed Forces in the Field, (12 August 1949), 75 UNTS 31 (GC I); Geneva Convention for the Amelioration of the Condition of Wounded, Sick and Shipwrecked Members of Armed Forces at Sea, (12 August 1949), 75 UNTS 85 (GC II); Geneva Convention relative to the Treatment of Prisoners of War, (12 August 1949), 75 UNTS 135 (GC III); Geneva Convention relative to the Protection of Civilian Persons in Time of War, (12 August 1949), 75 UNTS 287 (GC IV).

¹⁷⁴Protocol Additional to the Geneva Conventions of 12 August 1949, and relating to the Protection of Victims of International Armed Conflicts ('Additional Protocol I'), (8 June 1977), 1125 UNTS 3, Article 1.

¹⁷⁵Protocol Additional to the Geneva Conventions of 12 August 1949, relating to the Protection of Victims of Non-International Armed Conflicts ('Additional Protocol II'), (8 June 1977), 1125 UNTS 609, Article 1.

¹⁷⁶Jean-Marie Henckaerts and Louise Doswald-Beck, ICRC, Customary International Humanitarian Law: Volume 1: Rules, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), Rules 1, 14, and 15.

¹⁷⁷Article 50 of Additional Protocol I (n 171) defines the civilian population as individuals who are not combatants, emphasizing that in cases of doubt, a person should be presumed to be a civilian. Article 4 of Geneva Convention III (n 169) defines combatants as members of armed forces, militias, resistance movements meeting specific criteria, and local inhabitants resisting invasion. Non-combatants are those who do not or no longer participate in hostilities, including members of armed forces who have surrendered or are incapacitated due to sickness, wounds, detention, or other reasons, as outlined in Common Article 3 of the Geneva Conventions.

¹⁷⁸According to Article 52 of Additional Protocol I (n 170), military objectives are defined as objects that contribute effectively to military action based on their nature, location, purpose, or use, and whose destruction, capture, or neutralization provides a clear military advantage. Conversely, objects that are civilian in nature are not considered military objectives and will be presumed to be civilian even in cases of uncertainty.

¹⁷⁹Common Article 3 to the Geneva Conventions (n 169) prohibits violence against civilians, persons taking no active part in the hostilities, and persons placed hors de combat. Per Article 51 of Additional Protocol I (n 170) and Article 13 of Additional Protocol II (n 171), civilians and the civilian population must not be targeted in attacks.

¹⁸⁰Article 54 of Additional Protocol I (n 170) and Article 14 of Additional Protocol II (n 171).

¹⁸¹Article 57(1) of Additional Protocol I (n 170).

¹⁸²CIHL (n 172) Rule 17.

¹⁸³Article 51(5)(b) of Additional Protocol I (170).

¹⁸⁴Article 35 of Additional Protocol I (n 170) and CIHL (n 172) Rule 70; See also Protocol for the Prohibition of the Use in War of Asphyxiating, Poisonous or Other Gases, and of Bacteriological Methods of Warfare, (Geneva, 17 June 1925)

¹⁸⁵CIHL (n 172) Rule 74; See also the 1993 Chemical Weapons Convention, to which the Syrian government is a State Party.

¹⁸⁶CIHL (n 172) Rule 53.

¹⁸⁷See, Article 71(2) of Additional Protocol I (n 170) and CIHL Rule 31 (n 172) applicable during IACs and NIACs.

¹⁸⁸See, Common Article 3(2) (n 169), Article 70 of Additional Protocol I (n 170), Article 18 of Additional Protocol II (n 171), and CIHL Rule 55 (n 172) applicable during IACs and NIACs.

¹⁸⁹See, Article 18(2) of Additional Protocol II (n 171) and Article 70(1) of Additional Protocol I (n 170); Customary IHL provides for the obligation of parties to international and non-international armed conflicts to "...allow and facilitate rapid and unimpeded passage of humanitarian relief for civilians in need, which is impartial in character and conducted without any adverse distinction, subject to their right of control." See CIHL (n 172) Rule 55.

¹⁹⁰Requiring consent does not grant the parties full discretion. If the population's survival is at risk, and a humanitarian organization that meets standards of impartiality and non-discrimination can provide aid, relief efforts must proceed. See, International Committee of the Red Cross, Commentary on Protocol Additional to the Geneva Conventions of 12 August 1949, and relating to the Protection of Victims of Non-International Armed Conflicts (Protocol II), Geneva, 1987, Article 18, P. 4885-4888, available at <https://ihl-databases.icrc.org/en/ihl-treaties/apii-1977/article-18/commentary/1987?activeTab=>> and Commentary on Protocol Additional to the Geneva Conventions of 12 August 1949, and relating to the Protection of Victims of International Armed Conflicts (Protocol I), Geneva, 1987, Article 70, P. 2805-2808, available at <https://ihl-databases.icrc.org/en/ihl-treaties/api-1977/article-70/commentary/1987?activeTab=>>; See also UN Security Council, Resolution 2139 (2014) UN Doc S/RES/2139 (22 February 2014).

¹⁹¹International Committee of the Red Cross, Commentary of 2020 on Geneva Convention III, (ICRC 2020), P. 874-875, available at <https://ihl-databases.icrc.org/en/ihl-treaties/gciii-1949/article-3/commentary/2020?activeTab=>>

¹⁹²Diakonia International Humanitarian Law Centre, Protection of the Civilian Population: Humanitarian Assistance and Access in Armed Conflict, (June 2023), P. 17, available at <https://apidiakoniase.cdn.triggerfish.cloud/uploads/sites/2/2023/08/Humanitarian-Assistance-Report-FINAL.pdf>

- ¹⁹³International Committee of the Red Cross, Commentary of 1987 on Additional Protocol I to the Geneva Conventions (ICRC 1987) P. 2802, available at <https://ihl-databases.icrc.org/en/ihl-treaties/api-1977/article-70/commentary/1987>
- ¹⁹⁴See Article 71(3) of Additional Protocol I (n 170), CIHL (n 172) Rule 56 applicable during IACs and NIACs.
- ¹⁹⁵[ICRC Commentary of 1987 (n 189) [2892].
- ¹⁹⁶Ibid [2896].
- ¹⁹⁷Article 49 of Geneva Convention IV (n 169).
- ¹⁹⁸CIHL (n 172) Rule 132.
- ¹⁹⁹Ibid; Article 17 of Additional Protocol II (n 171).
- ²⁰⁰Article 49 of Geneva Convention IV (n 169)
- ²⁰¹CIHL (n 172) Rule 131.
- ²⁰²See CIHL (n 172) Rules 134, 135, 138; Common Article 3 (n 172) mandates the fundamental obligation of humane treatment for civilians, persons taking no active part in the hostilities, and those placed hors de combat. Parties to the conflict must treat protected persons with humanity and "...never...as less than fellow human beings and their inherent dignity must be upheld and protected." This is irrespective of their race, colour, religion or faith, sex, birth or wealth, or any other similar criteria. Additionally, humane treatment is context-specific, considering factors like environment, condition, and background. Recognizing differing impacts of conflict on women, men, girls, and boys enhances understanding of humane treatment under Common Article 3. See, ICRC Commentary of 2020 (n 187) [587] and [591].
- ²⁰³CIHL (n 172) Rule 50; In the context of belligerent occupation, parties to the conflict ought to respect and refrain from confiscating private property, except where destruction or seizure is required by imperative military necessity. If private property is seized, it must be restored, and appropriate compensation provided once peace is reestablished. See CIHL (n 172) Rule 51.
- ²⁰⁴See Article 50 of Geneva Convention I (n 169), Article 51 of Geneva Convention II (n 169), and Article 147 of Geneva Convention IV (n 169).
- ²⁰⁵CIHL (n 172) Rule 52.
- ²⁰⁶Diakonia International Humanitarian Law Centre, The Protection of Housing, Land, and Property (HLP) in Armed Conflict, (May 2024), P. 13, available at https://apidiakoniase.cdn.triggerfish.cloud/uploads/sites/2/2024/06/240607_HLP_Protection_EN_.pdf
- ²⁰⁷Ibid, P. 14
- ²⁰⁸CIHL (n 172) Rule 133; See also Principle 21(3) of the Guiding Principles on Internal Displacement (n 72): "Property and possessions left behind by internally displaced persons should be protected against destruction and arbitrary and illegal appropriation, occupation or use."
- ²⁰⁹CIHL (n 172) Rule 88; See also ICRC Commentary of 2020 (n 187) [605]: "As is evident from the addition of the concluding phrase 'or any other similar criteria', this list is not exhaustive but only illustrative. Adverse distinction founded on other grounds, such as age, state of health, level of education or family connections of a [protected] person...would therefore equally be prohibited."
- ²¹⁰See ICRC Commentary of 2020 (n 187) [609].
- ²¹¹See Common Article 3 (n 169), Article 4 of Additional Protocol II (n 171), and CIHL (n 172) Rules 87, 90, and 100.
- ²¹²See Common Article 3 (n 169), Article 4(2)(e) of Additional Protocol II (n 171), and CIHL (n 172) Rule 93.
- ²¹³Article 27 of Geneva Convention IV (n 169).
- ²¹⁴Article 12 of Geneva Convention I (n 169).
- ²¹⁵Article 13 of Geneva Convention III (n 169); Prisoners of war include members of the armed forces as well as members of militias or volunteers that form part of these forces and who have fallen into the power of the enemy. They also include members of organized resistance movements, inhabitants of non-occupied territory who take up arms to resist the invading forces, persons who accompany the armed forces, such as war correspondents and military aircraft crews. See Article 4 of Geneva Convention III (n 169).
- ²¹⁶CIHL (n 172) Rule 136.
- ²¹⁷See Article 77(2) of Additional Protocol I (n 170) and Article 4(3)(c) of Additional Protocol II (n 171).
- ²¹⁸See Article 77(2) of Additional Protocol I (n 170).
- ²¹⁹CIHL (n 172) Rule 25 applicable during IACs and NIACs.
- ²²⁰Medical units encompass both permanent facilities, such as hospitals, laboratories, and equipment depots, as well as mobile units, including field hospitals, first aid posts, and ambulances. Medical transports refer to any land vehicle, ship, or aircraft designated for the transportation of medical supplies or for transporting the wounded, sick, or shipwrecked individuals. See [4711] and [4712] of the ICRC Commentary of 1987 (n 189).
- ²²¹CIHL (n 172) Rules 28 and 29 applicable during IACs and NIACs.
- ²²²CIHL (n 172) Rule 26 applicable during IACs and NIACs.
- ²²³CIHL (n 172) Rule 30 applicable during IACs and NIACs.
- ²²⁴CIHL (n 172) Rule 35 applicable during IACs and NIACs.
- ²²⁵CIHL (n 172) Rule 43.
- ²²⁶Ibid.
- ²²⁷CIHL (n 172) Rule 44 applicable during IACs and is argued to apply during NIACs.
- ²²⁸CIHL (n 172) Rule 45 applicable during IACs and is argued to apply during NIACs.
- ²²⁹Ibid.
- ²³⁰The humanitarian coordination system in Northwest Syria operates through specialized clusters, each focusing on specific sectors such as Health, Food Security, Protection, WASH (Water, Sanitation and Hygiene), Education, and Shelter. Each cluster is led by designated UN agencies or international NGOs that coordinate the humanitarian response within their respective sectors. For example, WHO typically leads the Health cluster, while UNICEF often leads Education and WASH clusters. These clusters meet regularly to coordinate activities, share information, and ensure effective humanitarian response delivery.
- ²³¹Inter-Agency Standing Committee Working Group, 'Progress Report' (IASC WG 2005).
- ²³²UNOCHA, UNGA Res 46/182, Strengthening of the coordination of humanitarian emergency assistance of the United Nations, (1991), available at https://www.unocha.org/sites/unocha/files/dms/Documents/120402_OOM-46182_eng.pdf

- ²³³For more information: IFRC, Code of Conduct for the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement and NGOs in Disaster Relief, (1994), available at <https://www.ifrc.org/document/code-conduct-international-red-cross-and-red-crescent-movement-and-ngos-disaster-relief>
- ²³⁴For more information, see Sphere, The Sphere Handbook, (2018), available at <https://spherestandards.org/handbook/>
- ²³⁵For more information, see Core Humanitarian Standard, Core Humanitarian Standard On Quality And Accountability, (2024), available at https://www.corehumanitarianstandard.org/files/ugd/e57c40_f8ca250a7bd04282b4f2e4e810daf5fc.pdf
- ²³⁶For more information, see The Grand Bargain, The Grand Bargain (Official Website), available at <https://interagencystandingcommittee.org/grand-bargain>
- ²³⁷Kate Mackintosh, The Principles of Humanitarian Action in International Humanitarian Law, (2000), available at <https://www.cmi.no/file/1865-The-Principles-of-Humanitarian-Action-in-International-Humanitarian-Law.pdf>
- ²³⁸UNOCHA, UNGA Res 46/182, Strengthening of the coordination of humanitarian emergency assistance of the United Nations, (1991), available at https://www.unocha.org/sites/unocha/files/dms/Documents/120402_OOM-46182_eng.pdf; OCHA, OCHA on Message: Humanitarian Principles, (2022), available at <https://www.unocha.org/publications/report/world/ocha-message-humanitarian-principles-enar>
- ²³⁹International Committee of the Red Cross, The Fundamental Principles of the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement, (2015), available at <https://shorturl.at/JJv3S>
- ²⁴⁰See, e.g., Hans Haug, 'Neutrality as a Fundamental Principle of the Red Cross' in Humanity for All: The International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement, (Henry Dunant Institute/Paul Haupt Publishers, Berne/Stuttgart/Vienna, 1993) P. 461-464.
- ²⁴¹International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies, Code of Conduct for the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement and NGOs in Disaster Relief, (1994), available at <https://www.ifrc.org/document/code-conduct-international-red-cross-and-red-crescent-movement-and-ngos-disaster-relief>
- ²⁴²ED Schenkenberg, The Challenges of Principled Humanitarian Assistance, (2016) 97, International Review of the Red Cross 295.
- ²⁴³Committing to humanitarian principles, especially neutrality, could be challenging in conflicts where humanitarian aid is politicized and weaponized. For more see: Zainab Moallin, Leen Fouad and Dustin Barter, Navigating neutrality, relief and rights in Ethiopia, Myanmar, Syria and Guatemala, (January 2025), available at https://media.odi.org/documents/HPG_report-Trocaire_final_j3iyJap.pdf
- ²⁴⁴Mary Anderson, Do No Harm: How Aid Can Support Peace Or War, (Lynne Rienner Publishers 1999).
- ²⁴⁵CDA Collaborative Learning Projects, The "Do No Harm" Framework for Analyzing the Impact of Assistance on Conflict: A Handbook, (2004), available at <https://shorturl.at/RjFIt>
- ²⁴⁶Mary Anderson and Peter Woodrow, Rising from the Ashes: Development Strategies in Times of Disaster, (Lynne Rienner Publishers, 1998).
- ²⁴⁷Marshall Wallace, From Principle to Practice: A User's Guide to Do No Harm, (2015), available at <https://www.principletopractice.org/wordpress/from-principle-to-practice/>
- ²⁴⁸International Organization for Migration, Accountability to Affected Populations Framework, (2019), available at <https://shorturl.at/t1KSq>
- ²⁴⁹Inter-Agency Standing Committee, The Inter-Agency Standing Committee, available at <https://interagencystandingcommittee.org/the-inter-agency-standing-committee>
- ²⁵⁰UNGPs (n 6) Principle 13: "The responsibility to respect human rights requires that business enterprises: (a) Avoid causing or contributing to adverse human rights impacts through their own activities, and address such impacts when they occur; (b) Seek to prevent or mitigate adverse human rights impacts that are directly linked to their operations, products or services by their business relationships, even if they have not contributed to those impacts."
- ²⁵¹ibid.
- ²⁵²ibid.
- ²⁵³This term is not intended to endorse or encourage the stigmatization of inherent vulnerability based on gender, religion or faith, race, or any other status. In this tool, vulnerability is understood in its specific context and discussed to highlight the structural and tangible discrimination faced by these groups, which serves as a key factor contributing to the disproportionate impact of human rights violations.
- ²⁵⁴Alliance for Child Protection in Humanitarian Action, Minimum Standards for Child Protection in Humanitarian Action, (2019), available at <https://alliancecpha.org/en/>
- ²⁵⁵European Commission, Project Cycle Management Guidelines, (2004), available at <https://shorturl.at/COIhA>
- ²⁵⁶Rachel Blackman, Project Cycle Management, (2003), available at <https://www.pm4dev.com/resources/manuals-and-guidelines/124-project-cycle-management-tearfund/file.html>
- ²⁵⁷Greta Jensen, The Logical Framework Approach: Project Planning & Management, (2012), available at <https://www.pm4dev.com/resources/documents-and-articles/99-logical-framework-approach-sida/file.html>
- ²⁵⁸Stephen Biggs and Sally Smith, A Paradox of Learning in Project Cycle Management and the Role of Organizational Culture, (2003), available at <https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/abs/pii/S0305750X03001438>
- ²⁵⁹Oliver Bakewell and Anne Garbutt, The Use and Abuse of the Logical Framework Approach, (2005), available at http://pdf2.hegoa.efaber.net/entry/content/909/the_use_and_abuse_SIDA.pdf
- ²⁶⁰Project Cycle Management (n 250).
- ²⁶¹OHCHR, Frequently Asked Questions on a Human Rights-Based Approach to Development Cooperation, (2006), available at <https://unsdg.un.org/resources/frequently-asked-questions-human-rights-based-approach-development-cooperation>
- ²⁶²UNDP, Handbook on Planning, Monitoring and Evaluating for Development Results, (2009), available at <https://mandguidelines.iom.int/sites/g/files/tmzbdl2306/files/2023-03/pme-handbook.pdf>
- ²⁶³Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) are a set of 17 interconnected global objectives established by the United Nations in 2015 as a universal blueprint to achieve a more sustainable future for all by 2030. These goals serve as a framework for addressing global challenges including poverty, inequality, climate change, environmental degradation, peace, and justice.

²⁶⁴For more information on PSEAH awareness in NW Syria see UNHCR, PSEAH Factsheet in Syria, (2023), available at <https://data.unhcr.org/en/documents/details/109795>

²⁶⁵OHCHR, Frequently Asked Questions on a Human Rights-Based Approach to Development Cooperation, (2006), available at <https://unsdg.un.org/resources/frequently-asked-questions-human-rights-based-approach-development-cooperation>

²⁶⁶Sphere Association, The Sphere Handbook: Humanitarian Charter and Minimum Standards in Humanitarian Response, (4th edn, 2018), available at <https://spherestandards.org/handbook/>

²⁶⁷OHCHR, Human Rights Indicators: A Guide to Measurement and Implementation, (HR/PUB/12/5, 2012), available at https://www.ohchr.org/sites/default/files/documents/issues/HRIIndicators/AGuideMeasurementImplementationCover_en.pdf

Tool Matrix

PCM Phase

1. Assessment (Situation Analysis)

The Tool could also be found at

<https://sldp-humanitarianhrddtool.com/hrdd-tool/>

Code	Rights/ Protections	Category	Subcategory	Indicator	Question	Considerations	Reference
1.1	Right to life; Right to equality and non-discrimination; Right to a clean, healthy, and sustainable environment; Freedom from torture, or cruel, inhuman, or degrading treatment or punishment; Right to an adequate standard of living.	Cross-Cutting	Protection	Proportion of project target areas where comprehensive human rights risks are identified and analyzed, with risks categorized by severity level (high/medium/low) and affected population groups	How comprehensive is the conflict analysis for Northwest Syria, including potential human rights impacts?	Assess power structures, identify vulnerable groups (e.g., IDPs, religious minorities), analyze potential rights violations (e.g., arbitrary detention, forced displacement), and evaluate environmental impacts of conflict (e.g., destruction of infrastructure, contamination of water sources).	UDHR Art. 1, 2; ICCPR Art. 6, 3, 26; ICESCR Art. 11; CRC Art. 6; UNCAT Art. 1, 16; UNGA Res 76/300; IHL's principles of distinction, humane treatment, and of non-discrimination, CIHL Rules 28, 29, 43, 50, 52, 55, 56, 93, 100, 131, 132, 133, and 136; SPHERE Protection Principles.
1.2	Right to life; Freedom from torture, or cruel, inhuman, or degrading treatment or punishment; Freedom of movement	Sector Specific	Protection	Percentage of project target areas with protection risk mapping completed, including clearly identified threat levels and vulnerable groups	What specific protection risks have been identified in Northwest Syria?	Assess security threats from ongoing conflict, restrictions on freedom of movement due to checkpoints and frontlines, risks of forced displacement from military operations, prevalence of arbitrary detention by various armed groups, and instances of torture or ill-treatment in detention facilities.	ICCPR Art. 6, 7, 9, 12; UNCAT Art. 1, 16; IHL's principle of humane treatment and CIHL Rules 56, 93, and 129; SPHERE Protection Principles
1.3	Right to equality and non-discrimination	Cross-Cutting	Do No Harm	Number of barriers to service access identified per vulnerable group (women, elderly, disabled, minorities) with corresponding severity rating	How thoroughly have the needs and risks unique to vulnerable groups in Northwest Syria been assessed?	Identify specific vulnerabilities of IDPs (e.g., lack of documentation, such as birth certificates or national IDs, which restricts access to healthcare and education; multiple displacements, as seen in Northwest Syria, where families are repeatedly uprooted due to conflict), ethnic/religious minorities (e.g., discrimination in aid distribution, such as Kurdish communities being deprioritized in humanitarian assistance; targeted violence), and persons with disabilities (e.g., lack of accessible services, such as WASH facilities unsuitable for those with mobility challenges in IDP camps; limited access to assistive devices, leaving many unable to navigate rough terrain) that prevent these groups from accessing aid.	CEDAW, CRC, CRPD, ICESCR Art. 2, 3; IHL's principles of non-discrimination and of impartiality and CIHL Rules 134, 135, and 138; SPHERE Core Standards,
1.4	Right to equality and non-discrimination	Cross-Cutting	Gender, Equality and Inclusion	Percentage of female beneficiaries reporting barriers to accessing services	How comprehensive is the gender analysis for Northwest Syria?	Examine gender roles in the context of displacement and conflict, assess GBV risks (e.g., early marriage in IDP camps), evaluate women's participation in decision-making processes, and analyze gender-specific barriers to accessing services (e.g., lack of female healthcare providers).	CEDAW, UNSCR 1325; IHL's principles of humane treatment and non-discrimination and CIHL Rule 134; IASC Gender Handbook,

1.5	Right to own property; Right to adequate housing	Sector Specific	Shelter/HLP	Number of active HLP disputes affecting project implementation areas, categorized by type and severity	How thoroughly have Housing, Land and Property (HLP) rights issues been assessed in Northwest Syria?	Investigate land ownership disputes arising from multiple displacements, assess risks of forced evictions in areas under different control, document property destruction or seizure due to conflict, and identify documentation issues preventing persons, including IDPs and other vulnerable groups, from claiming property rights.	UDHR Art. 17; CEDAW Art.15, 16; CRPD Art. 12; ICESCR Art. 11(1); IHL's principle of distinction and IHL's prohibition of pillage, CIHL Rules 50, 51, 52, and 133; Pinheiro Principles; NRC Housing, Land and Property Rights
1.6	Right to equality and non-discrimination	Cross-Cutting	Protection	Percentage of undocumented persons who are unable to access aid	How comprehensive is the assessment of civil documentation needs in Northwest Syria?	Evaluate the extent of missing documentation due to displacement or conflict, assess how lack of documents impacts access to services (e.g., education, healthcare), and analyze restrictions on freedom of movement due to checkpoint systems requiring specific documentation.	UDHR Art. 6, ICCPR Art. 3, 26; IHL's principles of humane treatment and of non-discrimination and CIHL Rule 55; UNHCR Emergency Handbook
1.7	Right to education; Protection from child labour; Protection from recruitment or participation of children in hostilities	Sector Specific	Child Protection	Percentage of children in target area exposed to specific protection risks, categorized by risk type and age group	How thorough is the child protection risk assessment for Northwest Syria?	Assess risks of family separation during displacement, evaluate the prevalence of child recruitment by armed groups, analyze barriers to education access in conflict-affected areas, and investigate child labour risks in IDP camps and host communities.	ICESCR Art. 10(3), 13; CRC Art. 19, 28, 32, 38; IHL's principles of humane treatment and non-discrimination and CIHL Rules 131 and 136; Child Protection Minimum Standards (CPMS)
1.8	Right to a clean, healthy, and sustainable environment; Right to development; Right to health	Cross-Cutting	Environmental Protection	Number of identified environmental risks with potential human rights impacts, ranked by severity and likelihood	How comprehensive is the environmental impact assessment for Northwest Syria?	Evaluate resource depletion (e.g., water resources in IDP camps), assess waste management challenges in areas with damaged infrastructure, analyze pollution risks from conflict-related activities. Evaluate damage to the natural environment due to hostilities.	UNGA Res 76/300, ICESCR Art. 1(1),12; ICCPR Art 1(1); IHL's principles of distinction, proportionality, and precaution and CIHL Rules 43, 44, and 45; SPHERE Environmental Standards
1.9	Right to health	Sector Specific	Health	Percentage of identified MHPSS cases assessed to determine needs, barriers to support, and potential intervention strategies, categorized by type of required intervention	How thorough is the Mental Health and Psychosocial Support (MHPSS) needs assessment for Northwest Syria?	Assess prevalence of trauma related to conflict and displacement, evaluate availability and capacity of MHPSS services in different areas, analyze cultural attitudes towards mental health that may affect service uptake, and identify integration needs with other humanitarian sectors.	ICESCR Art. 12, CRPD Art. 25; IHL's principle of non-discrimination and CIHL Rule 55; IASC MHPSS Guidelines
1.10	Right to development	Cross-Cutting	AAP	Percentage of service gaps identified and analyzed to determine capacity-building needs and opportunities, categorized by sector	How comprehensive is the assessment of local capacity and resources in Northwest Syria?	Evaluate the capacity of local NGOs operating in different areas of control, assess community structures that can support humanitarian response, identify available skills within displaced and host communities, and analyze resource gaps that may hinder effective response.	ICESCR Art. 1(1), ICCPR Art. 1(1); CHS Commitment 3

1.11	Right of access to information	Cross-Cutting	AAP	Percentage of target population with access to critical information through diverse channels, assessed monthly and disaggregated by demographic groups	How thorough is the assessment of information needs and access in Northwest Syria?	Examine primary information sources used by different communities, assess literacy rates among displaced and host populations, identify language barriers (e.g., Kurdish-speaking minorities), and evaluate access to technology for information dissemination in different areas.	ICCPR Art. 19, UDHR Art. 19; IHL's principle of non-discrimination and impartiality; CIHL Rule 55; SPHERE Core Standard 4
1.12	Right to an adequate standard of living (food)	Sector Specific	Food Security	Percentage of food-insecure households receiving targeted assistance, measured monthly and categorized by intervention type and impact on food security status	How comprehensive is the food security assessment for Northwest Syria?	Analyze market access challenges due to conflict lines and checkpoints, assess impact of economic crisis and currency depreciation on food prices, evaluate local food availability in different areas of control, consider cultural food preferences of diverse communities, and assess religious requirements (e.g., halal food) in aid provision, gather information on percentage of food-insecure households receiving targeted assistance.	ICESCR Art. 11(1); IHL's principles of humane treatment and of non-discrimination; SPHERE Food Security Standards
1.13	Right to water and sanitation	Sector Specific	WASH	Percentage of WASH facilities assessed to identify gaps in meeting minimum safety and adequacy standards, with findings categorized by facility type.	How thorough is the assessment of WASH needs and barriers in IDP settlements across Northwest Syria?	Evaluate water availability in different IDP settlements, considering seasonal variations and conflict-related infrastructure damage. Assess sanitation infrastructure in formal and informal camps, analyze gender-specific WASH needs (e.g., menstrual hygiene management), and evaluate environmental impact of current WASH practices on scarce water resources.	ICESCR Art. 11(1), 12; IHL's principles of humane treatment and non-discrimination and CIHL Rules 134, 135 and 138; UNGA Res 64/292; SPHERE WASH Standards;
1.14	Right to private and family life	Sector Specific	Protection	Percentage of separated families identified and assessed to determine their needs, barriers to reunification, and appropriate support options.	How comprehensive is the assessment of family separation risks in Northwest Syria?	Analyze displacement patterns that may lead to family separation, assess documentation issues that prevent family reunification across conflict lines, evaluate the situation of unaccompanied minors in IDP camps, and assess the capacity and challenges of existing family tracing mechanisms in the complex political landscape.	ICCPR Art. 17, 23; CIHL Rule 131; CPMS Standard 13
1.15	Right to life	Cross-Cutting	Do No Harm	Percentage of high-risk areas identified and assessed to determine vulnerabilities, threats, and the need for civilian protection measures	How comprehensive is the assessment of risks related to chemical weapons use and siege tactics in Northwest Syria?	Evaluate the prevalence of chemical weapons attacks in the region, assess the capacity of local health facilities to respond to such attacks, analyze the impact of siege tactics on civilian access to essential goods and services, and identify vulnerable populations at heightened risk.	IHL's principles of distinction, precaution, and proportionality and CIHL Rules 53, 70 and 74; Geneva Protocol 1925; Chemical Weapons Convention; UNSC Res 2139.

1.16	Protection from child marriage; Protection from child labour; Right to education; Protection from forced recruitment or participation of children in hostilities	Sector Specific	Child Protection	Percentage of identified child protection cases analyzed to determine the type of violation, priority needs, and appropriate intervention strategies	How thorough is the assessment of child recruitment by armed groups and early marriage practices in Northwest Syria?	Analyze patterns of child recruitment, including push and pull factors, assess the prevalence of early marriage among displaced populations, evaluate the impact on children's access to education, and identify community-based protection mechanisms.	CRC Art. 38; CEDAW Art. 16; CIHL Rules 136 and 137; CPMS Standard 12
1.17	Right to a clean, healthy, and sustainable environment; Right to health; Right to development	Cross-Cutting	Environmental Protection	Number of identified environmental hotspots evaluated for potential risks and mitigation strategies, with an emphasis on anticipated impacts on affected populations.	How comprehensive is the assessment of environmental rights and impacts in Northwest Syria, considering the protracted nature of the conflict?	Evaluate long-term environmental degradation due to conflict, assess the impact of displacement on natural resources, analyze climate change vulnerabilities specific to the region, and identify opportunities for sustainable resource management in humanitarian programming.	ICESCR Art. 1, 12; ICCPR Art. 1(1); UNGA Res 76/300; CIHL Rules 43, 44, and 45; UNEP Environmental Peacebuilding principles; SPHERE Environmental Standards

2. Design (Planning)

Code	Rights/ Protections	Category	Subcategory	Indicator	Question	Considerations	Reference
2.1	Right to freedom of movement	Sector Specific	Protection	Percentage of high-priority protection risks with implemented and monitored mitigation measures, evaluated regularly for effectiveness	How does the project design address specific protection risks identified in Northwest Syria?	Develop measures to address arbitrary detention risks, create strategies to mitigate forced recruitment, especially of youth. Plan interventions to address restrictions on freedom of movement due to checkpoints.	ICCPR 12; UDHR Art. 13; SPHERE Protection Principles
2.2	Right to equality and non-discrimination	Cross-Cutting	Gender, Equality and Inclusion	Percentage of vulnerable individuals experiencing reduced barriers or enhanced availability and quality of services following the implementation of targeted support measures, assessed semi-annually through structured feedback and service utilization data.	How comprehensively does the project design incorporate support for vulnerable groups in Northwest Syria?	Include tailored assistance for female-headed households, considering their increased economic vulnerability. Design accessibility measures for persons with disabilities, accounting for the challenging terrain and damaged infrastructure. Develop special protections for unaccompanied minors, addressing risks of exploitation and recruitment. Plan targeted support for the elderly, including elderly IDPs, considering their specific health and mobility needs in displacement contexts.	UDHR Art. 6, ICCPR Art. 3, 16 26; CRPD Art. 11; CEDAW; IHL's principles of humane treatment, non-discrimination, and impartiality; CIHL Rules 134 and 138; SPHERE Core Standards

2.3	Right to equality and non-discrimination	Cross-Cutting	Gender, Equality and Inclusion	Percentage of staff and partners trained on and implementing non-discrimination protocols, assessed quarterly through spot checks and beneficiary feedback	How does the project design ensure non-discrimination in service provision across Northwest Syria?	Plan for equitable access across different ethnic groups, considering historical tensions and current power dynamics. Develop measures to prevent discrimination based on political affiliation, particularly in areas with competing governance structures. Design strategies to reach marginalized communities, including those in remote or besieged areas.	UDHR Art. 6, ICCPR Art. 3, 16 26; IHL's principles of humane treatment, non-discrimination, and impartiality; CIHL Rule 53; SPHERE Core Standard 1
2.4	Right to own property; Right to adequate housing	Cross-Cutting	AAP	Percentage of undocumented beneficiaries successfully accessing services through alternative verification methods, tracked monthly by service type	How does the project design address civil documentation issues specific to Northwest Syria?	Include support for obtaining or replacing lost documents, design alternative verification methods for accessing services, plan advocacy strategies with de facto authorities on documentation issues.	UDHR Art. 6, 17; ICESCR Art. 11(1); CEDAW Art. 15, 16; CRPD Art. 12; CIHL Rules 50, 51 (applicable in the context of belligerent occupation), 52, and 133; UNHCR Emergency Handbook
2.5	Right to equality and non-discrimination	Sector Specific	Protection	Percentage reduction in reported GBV incidents following implementation of risk mitigation measures, assessed quarterly in project locations	How comprehensively does the project design address GBV risks in Northwest Syria?	Plan for safe spaces for women and girls, considering the increased risks in displacement settings. Design GBV response services adapted to the local context, including cultural sensitivities and access challenges. Develop community-based protection mechanisms, leveraging existing social structures. Create male engagement strategies to address root causes of GBV in the context of conflict and displacement.	CEDAW; UNSCR 1325; IHL's principles of humane treatment and of non-discrimination and CIHL Rules 104 (pertaining to respect of convictions and religious practices), 131, and 134; IASC GBV Guidelines
2.6	Right to education; Protection from child labour; Protection from recruitment or participation of children in hostilities	Sector Specific	Child Protection	Percentage of project components with fully implemented and monitored child protection measures, evaluated quarterly for effectiveness	How thoroughly are child protection measures integrated into the project design for Northwest Syria?	Include education in emergencies programming, addressing the high rates of out-of-school children. Design family reunification services, considering the complexities of cross-line and cross-border tracing. Plan psychosocial support for children affected by conflict, addressing trauma and stress. Develop prevention strategies for child recruitment, considering the proximity to armed groups in many areas.	ICESCR Art. 13; CRC Art. 19, 28, 32, 38; IHL's principles of humane treatment and of non-discrimination; CIHL Rules 135, 136, and 137; CPMS; INEE Minimum Standards
2.7	Freedom from torture, or cruel, inhuman, or degrading treatment or punishment; Right to an adequate standard of living; Protection from child labour; Protection from recruitment or involvement of children in hostilities	Cross-Cutting	Do No Harm	Percentage of suppliers meeting human rights compliance standards, assessed annually through third-party audits	How does the procurement plan address human rights risks specific to Northwest Syria?	Design vetting processes for suppliers, checking for links to armed groups or sanctioned entities. Conduct due diligence on land acquisition for project sites, considering the complex property rights issues in conflict-affected areas. Ensure labour rights compliance in local hiring, addressing risks of exploitation in a context of limited economic opportunities.	ICCPR Art. 7; UNCAT; ICESCR Art. 10(3) and Art. 11(1); CRC Art. 32; UDHR Art. 17; IHL's principles of humane treatment and non-discrimination and CIHL Rules 50, 51 (applicable in the context of belligerent occupation), 52, 90, 135, 136 and 137; UN Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights; CHS Commitment 7; SPHERE Core Standards

2.8	Right to own property; Right to adequate housing	Sector Specific	Shelter/HLP	Percentage of HLP-related disputes successfully resolved through project-supported mechanisms, tracked monthly and categorized by type of dispute	How comprehensively are HLP rights considerations integrated into the project design for Northwest Syria?	Plan support for IDPs in securing tenure rights, design mechanisms to address property disputes, and develop safeguards against forced evictions.	UDHR Art. 17; CEDAW Art. 15, 16; CRPD Art. 12; ICESCR Art. 11(1); CIHL Rules 50, 51 (applicable in the context of belligerent occupation), 52, and 133; Pinheiro Principles;; NRC Housing, Land and Property Rights
2.9	Right of access to information	Cross-Cutting	AAP	Percentage of community feedback leading to documented project adaptations, analyzed monthly and disaggregated by feedback type and source	How will affected populations be meaningfully consulted throughout the project cycle in Northwest Syria?	Design regular community feedback mechanisms, considering access and security challenges in different areas. Develop inclusive participation strategies that account for power dynamics and marginalized groups. Plan conflict-sensitive consultation methods that do not exacerbate tensions between host communities and IDPs or between different ethnic or political groups.	ICCPR Art. 19; UDHR Art. 19; IHL's principles of non-discrimination and impartiality; CIHL Rule 55; CHS Commitment 4
2.10	Right to a clean, healthy, and sustainable environment; Right to health; Right to development	Sector Specific	Environmental Protection	Percentage reduction in negative environmental impacts following implementation of mitigation measures, assessed bi-annually through environmental audits	How comprehensively does the project design address environmental impacts in Northwest Syria?	Plan for sustainable water resource management, considering the strain on resources due to displacement and conflict. Design waste management solutions for IDP camps, addressing the environmental and health risks of improper disposal. Develop energy-efficient shelter solutions, considering the limited electricity supply in many areas. Plan for environmental impact assessments that account for the cumulative effects of prolonged conflict and displacement.	UNGA Res 76/300; ICESCR Art. 1(1), 12; CIHL Rule 131; SPHERE Environmental Standards
2.11	Freedom from torture, or cruel, inhuman, or degrading treatment or punishment; Protection from child labour; Protection from recruitment or involvement of children in hostilities	Cross-Cutting	Do No Harm	Percentage of suppliers demonstrating improved human rights compliance after implementation of contractual checkpoints, evaluated annually	How comprehensive is the plan for ongoing human rights monitoring of suppliers in Northwest Syria?	Design regular audit processes for local partners, considering the challenges of operating in a complex and changing environment. Develop human rights clauses for contracts that address the specific risks in Northwest Syria. Plan capacity building on human rights for suppliers, focusing on the most relevant issues in the local context.	ICCPR Art. 7; UNCAT; ICESCR Art. 10(3); CRC Art. 32; IHL's principles of humane treatment and of non-discrimination and CIHL Rules 90, 135, 136 and 137; UN Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights; CHS Commitment 7; SPHERE Core Standards
2.12	Right to adequate food	Sector Specific	Food Security	Percentage of beneficiaries reporting improved food security without increased protection risks, measured quarterly through household surveys	How does the project design ensure food security in Northwest Syria?	Plan for a diverse food basket that reflects local preferences and addresses nutritional needs. Design support for local agriculture, considering the impact of conflict on farming practices and land access. Develop cash/voucher programs adapted to local market conditions and inflation rates. Plan nutrition interventions for vulnerable groups, addressing the specific challenges of malnutrition in a protracted crisis.	ICESCR Art. 11; CIHL Rule 104; SPHERE Food Security Standards

2.13	Right to water and sanitation; Right to health	Sector Specific	WASH	Percentage of users reporting increased safety and dignity when using WASH facilities, assessed quarterly through gender-disaggregated surveys	How comprehensively are WASH services designed to meet needs in Northwest Syria?	Plan water trucking for underserved areas, design sanitation solutions for informal settlements, develop hygiene promotion adapted to local practices and beliefs.	ICESCR Art. 11(1), 12; IHL's principles of humane treatment and of non-discrimination; CIHL Rules 131, 134, 135 and 138; UNGA Res 64/292; SPHERE WASH Standards
2.14	Right to education; Protection from child labour	Sector Specific	Education	Percentage increase in school attendance rates following implementation of safety and accessibility measures, tracked monthly and disaggregated by gender and disability status	How does the project design ensure safe education access in Northwest Syria?	Plan mobile or home-based learning options, addressing the risks of targeted attacks on schools. Design catch-up classes for out-of-school children, considering the years of education lost due to conflict. Develop teacher training on psychosocial support, addressing the trauma experienced by both educators and students. Plan school rehabilitation with safety features, considering the risks of unexploded ordnance and potential airstrikes.	CRC Art. 28, 29; IHL's principles of humane treatment and of non-discrimination; CIHL Rules 135 and 138; ICESCR Art. 10(3), 13; INEE Minimum Standards
2.15	Right to health	Sector Specific	Health	Percentage of target population reporting improved access to essential health services after strategy implementation, evaluated semi-annually	How comprehensively are health services designed to overcome barriers in Northwest Syria?	Plan for mobile clinics to reach remote areas, considering the destruction of health infrastructure and security risks. Design telemedicine options to provide specialist care in areas lacking qualified personnel. Develop support programs for local health workers, addressing the brain drain caused by conflict. Plan for the integration of mental health services, considering the high prevalence of trauma and stress disorders. Ensure cultural and religious sensitivity in service provision, particularly regarding gender norms in healthcare access.	ICESCR Art. 12; IHL's principles of humane treatment, non-discrimination, and impartiality; CIHL Rules 25, 26, 28, 29, 30 134, 135, and 138; SPHERE Health Standards
2.16	Right to equality and non-discrimination	Cross-Cutting	Gender, Equality and Inclusion	Percentage increase in women's income and economic participation following implementation of empowerment measures, assessed annually	How comprehensively does the project design incorporate gender-sensitive planning beyond GBV prevention?	Include measures to promote women's economic empowerment, such as vocational training programs, microfinance initiatives, and support for women-led businesses. Design strategies to ensure women's meaningful participation in leadership roles and community governance structures. Consider quotas for women's representation in project committees and develop leadership training programs.	CEDAW Art. 3, 7, 11; IHL's principles of humane treatment and non-discrimination; CIHL Rule 134; UNSCR 1325; SPHERE Core Standards
2.17	Right to an effective remedy	Cross-Cutting	AAP	Percentage of advocacy engagements resulting in documented improvements in human rights practices by local authorities, tracked quarterly	How does the project design account for the human rights obligations of de facto authorities, particularly regarding justice and reparations?	Consider strategies for engaging with de facto authorities on human rights issues, plan for advocacy on access to justice for victims of violations, design support mechanisms for documentation of abuses, and develop approaches for promoting accountability within the constraints of the operational context.	UDHR Art. 8; ICCPR Art. 2; CIHL Rule 139; UN Basic Principles on the Right to a Remedy and Reparation
2.18	Multiple rights	Cross-Cutting	Protection	Percentage of project outcomes meeting or exceeding adapted Sphere standards, evaluated annually through third-party assessments	How comprehensively does the project design incorporate existing humanitarian standards familiar to organizations operating in Northwest Syria?	Ensure alignment with Sphere Standards, Core Humanitarian Standards, and sector-specific guidelines (e.g., INEE Minimum Standards for Education). Consider how these standards can be adapted to the specific context of Northwest Syria while maintaining their core principles.	Sphere Handbook; Core Humanitarian Standard; INEE Minimum Standards; IASC Guidelines

Code	Rights/ Protections	Category	Subcategory	Indicator	Question	Considerations	Reference
3.1	Right to health	Sector Specific	Health	Percentage of high-priority protection risks with mitigation measures implemented and effectiveness monitored quarterly, aiming for 80% coverage within 6 months	How effectively is MHPSS being integrated across sectors in Northwest Syria?	Implement MHPSS training for frontline workers across sectors. Establish referral pathways between MHPSS services and other humanitarian interventions. Monitor the uptake and effectiveness of integrated MHPSS services, adapting approaches based on community feedback and cultural considerations.	ICESCR Art. 12; IHL's principles of humane treatment and non-discrimination; CIHL 134, 135, and 138; IASC MHPSS Guidelines
3.2	Right to equality and non-discrimination	Cross-Cutting	Gender, Equality and Inclusion	Percentage of identified vulnerable individuals accessing at least one tailored support service within 30 days, disaggregated by group (e.g., women, children, disabled), with a target of 75% coverage	How comprehensively are support measures for vulnerable groups being implemented in Northwest Syria, including safety considerations in shelters?	Track service accessibility for specific groups (e.g., female-headed households, persons with disabilities, elderly IDPs). Assess the effectiveness of special assistance provision (e.g., targeted aid for unaccompanied minors). Evaluate feedback mechanisms' responsiveness to vulnerable groups' needs. Monitor adaptation of services to meet changing needs. Ensure safety measures in shelters address gender-based violence risks and accessibility for persons with disabilities.	CRPD Art. 11; CEDAW; ICESCR Art. 2, 3; UDHR Art. 1, 2, 3; ICCPR Art. 26; IHL's principles of humane treatment and non-discrimination; CIHL Rules 55, 131, 134, 135, and 138; SPHERE Core Standards
3.3	Right to equality and non-discrimination	Cross-Cutting	AAP	Percentage of beneficiaries reporting non-discriminatory access to services, measured monthly through surveys, aiming for 90% positive responses across all demographic groups	How effectively are services being provided without discrimination based on displacement status, ethnicity, or political affiliation in Northwest Syria?	Ensure equal access to services across different ethnic groups and political affiliations, particularly in areas with diverse populations or changing control. Implement and monitor fair distribution mechanisms that prevent favoritism or exclusion. Maintain transparent selection criteria for aid recipients and communicate these clearly to affected populations.	ICCPR Art. 26; ICESCR Art. 2; UDHR Art. 2; IHL's principles of humane treatment, non-discrimination, and impartiality; CIHL Rules 55, 131, 134, 135, and 138; SPHERE Core Standard 1
3.4	Right to equality and non-discrimination	Cross-Cutting	Protection	Percentage of undocumented individuals successfully accessing services through alternative verification methods, tracked monthly, with a target of 70% access rate within 3 months	How comprehensively are measures being implemented to assist beneficiaries lacking civil documentation in Northwest Syria?	Implement alternative verification methods that allow undocumented individuals to access services. Conduct advocacy with de facto authorities on documentation issues, considering the complex political landscape. Provide legal assistance referrals for those facing documentation challenges. Consider the specific needs of IDPs who may have lost documents during multiple displacements.	UDHR Art. 6; ICCPR Art. 16; IHL's principles of humane treatment and non-discrimination; CIHL Rules 55, 56, and 131; UNHCR Emergency Handbook
3.5	Right to equality and non-discrimination; Freedom from torture or cruel, inhuman, or degrading treatment or punishment	Sector Specific	Protection	Percentage of reported GBV cases receiving response services within 72 hours, tracked weekly, aiming for 85% response rate	How effectively are GBV prevention and response measures being implemented in Northwest Syria?	Establish and maintain safe reporting mechanisms adapted to the local context. Ensure functional referral pathways that consider the fragmented health system. Provide regular staff training on GBV prevention and response, including cultural sensitivity. Implement community-based protection mechanisms that engage local leaders. Develop and implement male engagement strategies to address root causes of GBV.	UNCAT; ICCPR Art. 7; CEDAW; UNSCR 1325; ICESCR Art. 3; IHL's principles of humane treatment and non-discrimination; CIHL Rules 93 and 134; IASC GBV Guidelines

3.6	Right to education, Protection from child labour	Sector Specific	Child Protection	Number of children benefiting from child protection measures, disaggregated by type of intervention (e.g., education, psychosocial support)	How comprehensively are child protection measures being mainstreamed across activities in Northwest Syria, including safety in shelters?	Establish safe spaces in shelters and community areas, implement family separation prevention measures, ensure access to education, including alternative learning programs.	ICESCR Art. 10(3), 13; CRC Art. 28, 32, 38; ICESCR Art. 10; IHL's principles of humane treatment and non-discrimination; CIHL Rules 131 and 135; CPMS
3.7	Right to an adequate standard of living; Protection from child labour	Cross-Cutting	Do No Harm	Percentage of new suppliers to undergo human rights vetting before contract approval, with annual re-assessments of existing suppliers	How thoroughly have suppliers entering the tender been vetted against the risk of human rights abuses in the context of Northwest Syria?	Conduct thorough vetting of suppliers' connections to de facto authorities or armed groups known for human rights violations. Investigate any involvement in HLP rights violations, particularly in areas with frequent property disputes. Check for use of child labour in the supply chain, considering the economic pressures on families in the region. Assess any support to human rights abuses through financial or material donations to parties to the conflict.	ICCPR Art. 7; UNCAT; ICESCR Art. 10(3); CRC Art. 32; IHL's principles of humane treatment, non-discrimination, and impartiality; CIHL Rules 50, 51, 52, 133; UN Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights; CHS Commitment 7; SPHERE Core Standards
3.8	Right to own property; Right to adequate housing	Sector Specific	Shelter/HLP	Number of HLP rights violations addressed through project mechanisms, with documented outcomes	How effectively is the system for monitoring HLP rights throughout project implementation functioning in Northwest Syria?	Ensure a monitoring system is established at project start that considers the complex property rights situation in NW Syria. Implement a mechanism to address HLP issues as they arise, including disputes related to multiple displacements or destruction of property records. Document trends in HLP violations and their impact on project implementation.	UDHR Art. 17; ICESCR Art. 11(1); CEDAW Art. 15, 16; CRPD Art. 12; IHL's principles of humane treatment and non-discrimination; CIHL Rules 50, 51, 52, 133, 134, 135, and 138; Pinheiro Principles; NRC Housing, Land and Property Rights
3.9	Right of access to information	Cross-Cutting	AAP	Frequency and quality of community consultations conducted, with participation rates disaggregated by gender and vulnerability status	How comprehensively is the process for ongoing consultation with affected populations being implemented during project implementation in Northwest Syria?	Conduct regular feedback sessions that are accessible and safe for all groups, including women and marginalized communities. Implement mechanisms to incorporate community input into project adjustments, considering the rapidly changing context. Document how consultation informs project decisions and communicate this back to the community. Ensure consultation methods are conflict-sensitive and do not exacerbate local tensions.	ICCPR Art. 19; UDHR Art. 19; IHL's principles of humane treatment and non-discrimination; CHS Commitment 4
3.10	Right to a clean, healthy, and sustainable environment; Right to health; Right to development	Cross-Cutting	Environmental Protection	Percentage of projects with documented environmental impact assessments and mitigation plans that are regularly updated and adapted to local conditions.	How effectively are environmental impacts being monitored and mitigated in Northwest Syria?	Monitor waste management practices, particularly in IDP camps with limited infrastructure. Track resource consumption, especially water usage in water-scarce areas. Assess environmental damage from project activities and conflict-related factors. Evaluate the effectiveness of mitigation measures, adapting them to the changing local context. Consider long-term environmental sustainability in all interventions.	UNGA Res 76/300; ICESCR Art. 1, 12; ICCPR Art. 1; IHL's principles of humane treatment and non-discrimination; CIHL Rules 131, 134, 135, and 138; SPHERE Environmental Standards

3.11	Right to a clean, healthy, and sustainable environment; Right to health; Right to development	Cross-Cutting	Do No Harm	Number of IDP camps implementing waste management and resource consumption tracking systems, with quarterly reports on environmental impact mitigation.	How effectively are environmental impacts being monitored and mitigated in Northwest Syria?	Monitor waste management practices, particularly in IDP camps, track resource consumption, especially water usage in water-scarce areas, implement and adapt mitigation measures to the changing local context.	UNGA Res 76/300; ICESCR Art. 1, 12; SPHERE Environmental Standards
3.12	Right to adequate food	Sector Specific	Food Security	Percentage of food distribution points with established complaint mechanisms and documented adaptations to food baskets based on community feedback and nutritional assessments.	How effectively are food security interventions being implemented with protection considerations specific to Northwest Syria?	Ensure safe access routes for food distribution, considering conflict dynamics and checkpoint issues. Implement fair distribution mechanisms that prevent exploitation by local power holders. Establish robust complaint mechanisms accessible to all groups. Regularly assess and adapt food baskets to meet local preferences and nutritional needs. Consider cash/voucher programs where markets are functional.	ICESCR Art. 11; IHL's principles of humane treatment, non-discrimination, and impartiality; CIHL Rules 131, 134, 135, and 138; SPHERE Food Security Standards
3.13	Right to water and sanitation	Sector Specific	WASH	Percentage of WASH facilities with gender-sensitive designs and community-based maintenance systems, with biannual feedback collection from users	How comprehensively are WASH services being implemented with protection considerations in Northwest Syria?	Monitor safe access to WASH facilities, particularly for women and girls. Ensure gender sensitivity in facility design and placement. Implement community-based maintenance systems to ensure sustainability. Regularly collect and respond to community feedback on WASH services. Assess and mitigate environmental impacts of WASH interventions, particularly in water-scarce areas.	ICESCR Art. 11, 12; IHL's principles of humane treatment and non-discrimination; CIHL Rules 131, 134, 135, and 138; UNGA Res 64/292; SPHERE WASH Standards
3.14	Right to education	Sector Specific	Education	Percentage of schools implementing safety measures, including transportation safety protocols and documentation assistance programs, specifically addressing barriers for girls' education.	How effectively are measures being implemented to ensure safe education access in Northwest Syria, with specific considerations for girls' safety and participation?	Implement transportation safety measures, considering risks of attacks on schools. Ensure school protection measures are in place, including early warning systems and safe rooms. Address documentation barriers that prevent school enrollment, particularly for IDPs. Maintain education quality standards despite challenging circumstances. Address specific risks and barriers for girls' education, including early marriage, lack of female teachers, and cultural barriers. Implement measures to prevent and respond to sexual harassment or exploitation in educational settings.	CRC Art. 28, 29; CEDAW Art. 10; IHL's principles of distinction, humane treatment, and non-discrimination; CIHL Rules 131 and 135; ICESCR Art. 13; INEE Minimum Standards
3.15	Right to health	Sector Specific	Health	Percentage of health facilities conducting regular assessments of access barriers, including cost and cultural sensitivity, with integration of mental health services into primary healthcare.	How comprehensively is the monitoring of health service access barriers being conducted in Northwest Syria?	Regularly assess physical accessibility of health services, considering conflict-related movement restrictions. Monitor cost barriers to healthcare, including informal fees or transport costs. Evaluate quality of care across different types of health facilities. Assess integration of mental health and psychosocial support services into primary healthcare. Ensure cultural sensitivity in service provision, particularly regarding gender norms in healthcare access.	ICESCR Art. 12; IHL's principles of humane treatment and non-discrimination; CIHL Rules 55, 56, 134, 135, and 138; SPHERE Health Standards

3.16	Right to adequate housing; Right to private and family life; Right to water and sanitation	Cross-Cutting	Shelter	Percentage of constructed shelters meeting comprehensive standards: minimum Sphere requirements (3.5m ² per person), verified HLP documentation, functional protection measures (insulation, waterproofing, ventilation), and accessibility features for persons with disabilities - measured through monthly technical and documentation assessments.	How effectively are adequate housing standards being monitored and implemented in shelter interventions while ensuring proper documentation and environmental considerations in Northwest Syria?	Begin by verifying proper HLP documentation for all construction sites, engaging legal experts when necessary to resolve land disputes. Monitor adherence to minimum Sphere standards, particularly the 3.5m ² covered living space per person requirement. Ensure shelters provide adequate protection from weather conditions through proper insulation, waterproofing, and ventilation systems. Design must incorporate cultural sensitivity and privacy considerations, including separate spaces for families. Include specific adaptations for persons with disabilities, such as accessible entrances and facilities. Conduct environmental impact assessments before construction and implement mitigation measures throughout the project cycle. Establish community feedback mechanisms to monitor satisfaction with shelter conditions and respond to concerns. Regular technical assessments should verify structural integrity and maintenance needs. Consider long-term sustainability and transition planning, including capacity building for local maintenance.	ICESCR Article 11(1); ICCPR Art. 17, 23; IHL's principles of humane treatment and non-discrimination; CIHL Rules 50, 51, 52, 131, 134, 135, and 138; SPHERE Shelter and Settlement Standards UN Guiding Principles on Internal Displacement UNHCR Emergency Handbook Pinheiro Principles
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4. Monitoring and Evaluation

Code	Rights/ Protections	Category	Subcategory	Indicator	Question	Considerations	Reference
4.1	Right to life	Sector Specific	Protection	Percentage of protection risks successfully mitigated as verified through monitoring data, with quarterly assessments and trend analysis	How comprehensively are protection risks specific to Northwest Syria being systematically monitored?	Assess security incidents, access restrictions, and forced displacement patterns. Evaluate the effectiveness of risk reduction measures. Consider the impact of changing conflict dynamics on civilian protection.	ICCPR Art. 6; UDHR Art. 3; IHL's principles of humane treatment, non-discrimination, and impartiality; CIHL Rules 55 and 56; SPHERE Protection Principles
4.2	Right to private & family life	Cross-Cutting	Do No Harm	Percentage increase in service access for vulnerable groups, measured semi-annually and disaggregated by group type	How effectively is data being collected in a conflict-sensitive and protection-mainstreamed manner in Northwest Syria?	Implement robust data protection protocols considering the sensitive nature of information in conflict zones. Ensure safe data sharing practices between humanitarian actors, taking into account the fragmented control of territory. Obtain informed consent from beneficiaries, explaining potential risks in the local context. Maintain strict confidentiality measures to protect individuals from retaliation by armed groups or authorities.	ICCPR Art. 17, 23; SPHERE Protection Principles
4.3	Right to equality and non-discrimination	Cross-Cutting	AAP	Percentage of beneficiaries reporting satisfaction with non-discriminatory service delivery, assessed through monthly surveys with a target of 90% satisfaction rate	How thoroughly is there systematic tracking of vulnerable groups' access to services in Northwest Syria?	Track access patterns for female-headed households, persons with disabilities, older people, IDPs in informal settlements, women, children, and ethnic/religious minorities. Consider specific barriers such as lack of documentation, movement restrictions, and discrimination by local authorities. Assess the impact of conflict dynamics on service accessibility for different groups.	UDHR Art. 6, ICCPR Art. 3, 16 26; IHL's principle of non-discrimination; CIHL Rules 131, 134, 135, and 138; SPHERE Protection Standards

4.4	Right of access to information	Cross-Cutting	AAP	Percentage of service access cases enabled by alternative verification methods, tracked monthly with a target of 80% successful access rate	How accessible and effective are feedback and complaints mechanisms focused on human rights violations for all groups in Northwest Syria?	Ensure multiple channels for reporting rights violations, considering limited internet access and security concerns. Provide options in local languages and dialects. Implement gender-sensitive approaches, recognizing cultural barriers for women. Establish clear procedures for addressing human rights-related complaints, with safeguards against retaliation. Consider the challenges of operating across areas controlled by different actors.	ICCPR Art. 19; UDHR Art. 19; IHL's principle of non-discrimination; CIHL Rule 134; SPHERE Core Standards
4.5	Multiple rights	Cross-Cutting	Protection Mainstreaming	Conduct comprehensive human rights impact assessments for all of project activities bi-annually, with action plans developed within 30 days of assessment	How comprehensive is the systematic documentation of human rights impacts in Northwest Syria?	Document protection incidents, including attacks on civilians and civilian infrastructure. Record cases of denied humanitarian access. Track discrimination cases, particularly against IDPs or ethnic minorities. Assess positive impacts of humanitarian interventions on rights enjoyment. Identify unintended negative consequences of aid delivery on local dynamics. Consider the challenges of documentation in areas with limited access.	UDHR Art. 6, ICCPR Art. 3, 16 26; IHL's principles of distinction, humane treatment, non-discrimination, and impartiality; CIHL Rules 28, 35, 50, 55, and 56; CHS Commitment 5
4.6	Right to own property; Right to adequate housing	Sector Specific	Shelter/HLP	Number of resolved HLP disputes through established project mechanisms	How effectively are Housing, Land and Property (HLP) rights being systematically monitored and evaluated in Northwest Syria?	Establish HLP-specific feedback channels, document trends in HLP violations and their impact on return prospects for IDPs, integrate HLP-related questions in implementation monitoring.	UDHR Art. 6, 17; ICESCR Art. 11(1), 16; CIHL Rules 50, 51, 52, and 133; ICESCR CEDAW Art. 15, 16; CRPD Art. 12; OHCHR Guidelines; SPHERE Core Standards
4.7	Right of access to information	Cross-Cutting	AAP	Number of monitoring reports incorporating documented community feedback, disaggregated by age, gender, and vulnerability status, with evidence of implemented changes based on feedback	How meaningfully are affected populations involved in project monitoring and evaluation in Northwest Syria?	Implement community-based monitoring mechanisms, adapting to local power structures and security constraints. Use participatory evaluation methods that are culturally appropriate and conflict-sensitive. Document how community feedback influences project outcomes, ensuring transparency in decision-making. Ensure inclusion of marginalized groups in monitoring processes, overcoming barriers to participation.	ICCPR Art. 19; UDHR Art. 19; Pinheiro Principles; IHL's principles of impartiality and non-discrimination; CIHL Rules 134, 135, and 138; SPHERE Shelter and Settlement Standards
4.8	Freedom from torture, or cruel, inhuman, or degrading treatment or punishment; Protection from child labour	Cross-Cutting	Do No Harm	Number of suppliers audited for human rights compliance within the last 12 months, with results documented and improvement plans implemented where necessary.	How comprehensive is the ongoing monitoring of suppliers' human rights compliance in Northwest Syria?	Monitor adherence to supplier code of conduct, considering the challenges of operating in a conflict zone. Track reports of rights violations in suppliers' operations or supply chains. Monitor changes in ownership or management that might affect human rights compliance. Regularly update conflict of interest declarations, considering the complex local power dynamics. Assess any connections between suppliers and armed groups or sanctioned entities.	ICCPR Art. 7; UNCAT; ICESCR Art. 10(3); CRC Art. 32; IHL's principles of humane treatment and non-discrimination; CIHL Rule 90; UN Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights; CHS Commitment 7; SPHERE Core Standards
4.9	Right to equality and non-discrimination	Sector Specific	Protection	Percentage of community feedback cases addressed and resolved	How effectively are protection outcomes being measured in Northwest Syria?	Evaluate how specific protection risks have been addressed, such as reduction in civilian casualties or improved safety in IDP camps. Assess improvements in humanitarian access to hard-to-reach areas. Analyze community feedback on protection interventions. Identify any unintended impacts of protection activities on conflict dynamics. Measure long-term effects on rights enjoyment, considering the protracted nature of the crisis.	IHL's principle of impartiality; CIHL Rules 55, 56, and 131

4.10	Right to equality and non-discrimination	Cross-Cutting	Gender, Equality and Inclusion	Conduct bi-annual impact assessments on identified vulnerable groups, with action plans developed within 1 month to address negative impacts	How comprehensively is the impact on vulnerable groups being assessed in Northwest Syria?	Assess improvements in service access for specific vulnerable groups, such as increased school enrollment for girls or improved healthcare access for persons with disabilities. Evaluate participation levels of marginalized groups in community decision-making. Analyze satisfaction rates with humanitarian assistance among different vulnerable populations. Identify remaining barriers to full rights enjoyment, considering the ongoing conflict context.	UDHR Art. 1, 2; ICCPR Art. 2; IHL's principles of impartiality and non-discrimination; CIHL Rules 134, 135, and 138; CHS Commitment 7; SPHERE Protection Principles
4.11	Right to adequate food	Sector Specific	Food Security	Monitor 95% of food assistance recipients monthly for access and usage, with adjustments made within 14 days for identified issues	How effective are the systems to monitor equitable access to food assistance in Northwest Syria?	Monitor market price fluctuations, considering the impact of conflict on local economies. Assess distribution equity across different areas, including hard-to-reach locations. Consider the impact of sieges or access restrictions on food security.	ICESCR Art. 11; IHL's principles of distinction and impartiality; CIHL Rules 53, 54, 55, and 56; SPHERE Food Security Standards SPHERE Core Standards
4.12	Right to water and sanitation	Sector Specific	WASH	Conduct weekly WASH access monitoring in all IDP settlements, aiming for 90% of settlements meeting minimum standards within 3 months	How comprehensive is the systematic monitoring of WASH access in IDP settlements across Northwest Syria?	Track water quality and quantity, considering the strain on resources due to displacement. Assess the functionality and safety of gender-sensitive WASH facilities. Monitor environmental impact of WASH interventions, particularly in water-scarce areas. Evaluate maintenance needs and community capacity for upkeep. Consider the specific WASH needs of persons with disabilities in camp settings.	ICESCR Art. 11; IHL's principles of impartiality, humane treatment, and non-discrimination; CIHL Rules 131, 134, 135, and 138; UNGA Res 64/292; SPHERE WASH Standards;
4.13	Right to health	Sector Specific	Health	Identify and address at least 5 major health service access barriers per quarter, with solutions implemented within 60 days of identification	How thoroughly are health service access barriers being monitored in Northwest Syria?	Assess physical accessibility of health services, considering conflict-related movement restrictions and damage to infrastructure. Monitor cost barriers to healthcare, including informal fees or transport costs. Evaluate quality of care across different types of health facilities, including mobile clinics. Assess integration of mental health and psychosocial support services into primary healthcare. Ensure cultural sensitivity in service provision, particularly regarding gender norms in healthcare access.	ICESCR Art. 12; IHL's principles of impartiality, non-discrimination, humane treatment and distinction; CIHL Rules 25, 26, 28, and 29, 55, 56, 134, 135, and 138.
4.14	Right to education	Sector Specific	Education	Conduct monthly education quality monitoring visits to all supported facilities, with improvement plans developed within 14 days for underperforming sites	How comprehensive is the systematic monitoring of education quality in Northwest Syria, including specific considerations for girls?	Monitor learning outcomes, considering the challenges of education in conflict settings. Assess teacher qualifications and support needs. Evaluate curriculum relevance and appropriateness for the local context. Monitor safety of learning environments, including protection from attacks on schools. Assess gender-specific barriers and risks to education, such as early marriage or lack of female teachers. Evaluate inclusive teaching practices, particularly for children with disabilities and from minority groups.	CRC Art. 28, 29; ICESCR Art. 13; CEDAW Art. 10; IHL's principle of distinction; CIHL Rules 7, 11, and 135; INEE Minimum Standards

4.15	Right to adequate Housing; Right to private and family life; Right to water and sanitation	Sector Specific	Shelter	Percentage of shelter projects meeting quality standards through: beneficiary satisfaction surveys (privacy, cultural appropriateness, accessibility), environmental impact compliance, and successful accommodation of vulnerable groups' needs - verified through quarterly monitoring assessments and disaggregated by gender and vulnerability status.	How effectively are shelter interventions ensuring adequate housing standards, environmental sustainability, and accessibility for persons with disabilities in Northwest Syria?	Shelter interventions must adhere to comprehensive standards to ensure they provide more than just basic protection. This involves ensuring that all shelters meet minimum Sphere standards for living space, privacy, and protection against environmental elements like cold, damp, and heat. It is crucial to verify Housing, Land, and Property (HLP) documentation to prevent disputes and ensure legal clarity. Environmental impact assessments should be conducted before construction, with mitigation measures implemented to minimize adverse effects. Shelters must be accessible to persons with disabilities, requiring timely modifications when needed. Regular monitoring should include community feedback mechanisms to assess satisfaction with privacy and cultural appropriateness. These efforts collectively aim to uphold the dignity and rights of displaced populations while promoting long-term sustainability and integration within local communities.	ICESCR Article 11(1); ICCPR Art. 17, 23; IHL's principles of humane treatment and non-discrimination; CIHL Rules 133, 134, 135, and 138; SPHERE Shelter and Settlement Standards UN Guiding Principles on Internal Displacement; UNHCR Emergency Handbook Pinheiro Principles
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5. Exit and Transition

Code	Rights/ Protections	Category	Subcategory	Indicator	Question	Considerations	Reference
5.1	Right to life; Right to equality and non-discrimination	Cross-Cutting	AAP	Percentage of project activities with successful handover to local stakeholders, with 90% target completion rate within the final quarter of the project	How comprehensive is the sustainability planning for the exit and transition phase in Northwest Syria?	Develop exit strategies that empower local communities and institutions, plan for gradual handover of services to local actors or authorities, assess long-term impact of interventions on community resilience.	UDHR Art. 1, 2; ICCPR Art. 6, 3, 26; CRC Art. 6; CHS Commitment 4; SPHERE Core Standards
5.2	Right to equality and non-discrimination	Cross-Cutting	AAP	Percentage of local partners demonstrating improved capacity in sustainable project management, assessed through pre- and post-training evaluations with a target of 75% improvement	How thoroughly is capacity building for transition being planned and implemented in Northwest Syria?	Identify and strengthen local partners for sustainable service delivery, develop training programs for local staff and community leaders, plan for knowledge transfer to ensure continuity of essential services.	UDHR Art. 1, 2; ICCPR Art. 6, 3, 26; CRC Art. 6; ICESCR Art. 2; CHS Commitment 3; SPHERE Core Standards
5.3	Multiple rights	Cross-Cutting	Do No Harm	Percentage of beneficiaries reporting sustained access to services 6 months post-project, with a target of 80% sustained access rate	How comprehensively is conflict sensitivity being addressed in the transition planning for Northwest Syria?	Assess potential impact of exit on local power dynamics and conflict, develop strategies to mitigate risks of renewed tensions or rights violations, plan for ongoing monitoring of human rights situation post-exit.	ICESCR Art. 10, 11, 12, 19; ICCPR Art. 6; UDHR Art. 3; Do No Harm Principles; SPHERE Protection Principles

5.4	Right to equality and non-discrimination	Sector Specific	Protection	Percentage of target communities with at least one established and functioning rights protection initiative 3 months post-project, aiming for 70% coverage	How effectively are long-term rights protection measures being integrated into the exit strategy for Northwest Syria?	Establish mechanisms for continued human rights monitoring after project end, develop advocacy strategies for ongoing protection of vulnerable groups, plan for long-term support to civil society and human rights defenders.	UDHR Art. 1, 2; ICCPR Art. 6, 3, 26; CRC Art. 6; CHS Commitment 7; SPHERE Core Standards
5.5	Multiple rights	Cross-Cutting	Protection	Document 100% of identified ongoing rights concerns, with action plans developed for 80% within 30 days of project closure	How thorough is the documentation of ongoing rights concerns in Northwest Syria?	Document unresolved protection cases, ensuring sensitive information is securely stored. Identify continuing risks, particularly for vulnerable groups like IDPs, women, and minorities. Provide detailed mitigation recommendations that consider the complex political and security landscape. Include lessons learned on rights protection in the specific context of NW Syria to inform future interventions.	IHL's principles of humane treatment and non-discrimination; CIHL Rules 131, 134, 135, and 138; SPHERE Protection Principles; OHCHR Manual on Human Rights Monitoring; IASC Operational Guidelines on Human Rights and Natural Disasters
5.6	Multiple rights	Sector Specific	Protection	Percentage of project infrastructure maintained by local authorities 1 year post-handover, with a target of 85% functionality rate	How comprehensive are the measures to protect rights during sudden emergencies in Northwest Syria?	Develop rapid response mechanisms that can function in areas with limited access. Ensure protection mainstreaming across all emergency response sectors. Prioritize vulnerable groups in emergency planning, considering the specific risks faced by women, children, and persons with disabilities in the NW Syria context. Develop rights-based emergency protocols that can be quickly activated in case of sudden changes in conflict dynamics.	IHL's principles of humane treatment, non-discrimination, and impartiality; CIHL Rules 55, 56, 134, 135, and 138; SPHERE Core Standards; IASC Guidelines on the Protection of Internally Displaced Persons
5.7	Multiple rights	Sector Specific	Food Security	Number of lessons learned documented and shared with humanitarian community	How robust are the plans to ensure continuity of essential services during emergencies in Northwest Syria?	Identify and prepare backup service providers, considering the potential for rapid changes in territorial control. Develop alternative delivery methods that can function under siege-like conditions. Preposition emergency resources in strategic locations, accounting for potential access constraints. Implement rights-based prioritization in emergency service provision to ensure the most vulnerable are not left behind.	IHL's principles of impartiality, humane treatment, and non-discrimination; CIHL Rules 55 and 56; CHS Commitment 2; ICESCR Art. 2, 11(1), 12; SPHERE Core Standards
5.8	Right to equality and non-discrimination	Cross-Cutting	AAP	Percentage of beneficiaries reporting improved resilience post-project	How thoroughly do contingency plans incorporate human rights considerations specific to Northwest Syria?	Address protection needs that may arise from sudden displacement or changes in conflict dynamics. Ensure plans for maintaining access to basic services under various scenarios of territorial control. Develop special measures for vulnerable groups, considering the heightened risks for women, children, and minorities in times of crisis. Incorporate non-discrimination principles in all contingency planning.	IHL's principles of impartiality and non-discrimination; CIHL Rules 134, 135, and 138; SPHERE Humanitarian Charter and Minimum Standards; ICCPR Art. 26; IASC Guidelines on Inclusion of Persons with Disabilities in Humanitarian Action

5.9	Right of access to information	Cross-Cutting	AAP	Number of local organizations demonstrating enhanced capacity in rights-based programming	How meaningfully have affected populations been consulted in developing the exit strategy for Northwest Syria?	Gather community input on sustainability measures, considering diverse perspectives from host communities and IDPs. Obtain feedback on handover plans, ensuring representation from marginalized groups. Document how community concerns are addressed in the exit strategy, with particular attention to protection risks and service continuity. Ensure consultation methods are conflict-sensitive and do not exacerbate local tensions.	CIHL Rule 131; CHS Commitment 4; SPHERE Core Standards; ICCPR Art. 19; IASC Accountability to Affected Populations Commitments
5.10	Multiple rights	Cross-Cutting	Do No Harm	Percentage of project activities successfully transitioned to local ownership	How comprehensive is the plan for responsible transition of procurement relationships in Northwest Syria?	Develop detailed handover plans for supplier relationships, considering the complex business environment in NW Syria. Transfer due diligence information securely, protecting sensitive data about local partners. Provide capacity building for local partners on responsible procurement, focusing on human rights and conflict sensitivity. Address any outstanding human rights issues with suppliers before exit, ensuring no unresolved violations are left behind.	UN Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights; OECD Due Diligence Guidance for Responsible Business Conduct; CHS Commitment 9
5.11	Multiple rights	Sector Specific	Protection	Number of sustainable community-led initiatives established through project support	How effectively are protection services transitioning in Northwest Syria?	Develop comprehensive case management transfer plans, considering the fragmented protection actor landscape. Establish clear referral pathways that account for changing areas of control and access constraints. Provide targeted capacity support to local protection actors, focusing on both technical skills and ethical considerations. Ensure secure handover of sensitive documentation, protecting beneficiaries from potential retaliation.	SPHERE Protection Standards
5.12	Right to equality and non-discrimination	Cross-Cutting	Gender, Equality and Inclusion	Percentage of environmental protection measures maintained by community post-project	How sustainable are inclusion measures post-exit in Northwest Syria?	Assess local capacity to maintain inclusive practices, considering potential resource constraints. Evaluate the availability of resources for continued support to vulnerable groups. Foster community ownership of inclusion initiatives, adapting to local cultural contexts. Identify ongoing support needs, particularly for persons with disabilities, women, and marginalized groups. Develop long-term accessibility plans that can be maintained in a resource-constrained environment.	CRPD Art. 9, 19, CEDAW Art. 3; IHL's principles of impartiality and non-discrimination; CIHL Rules 134, 135, and 138; SPHERE Standards
5.13	Right to adequate food	Sector Specific	Food Security	Number of functional feedback mechanisms maintained by local stakeholders	How comprehensive are the measures to ensure sustainable food security post-exit in Northwest Syria?	Develop strategies for ongoing local market support, considering the impact of conflict on trade routes and agricultural production. Build community capacity in sustainable agriculture and food storage techniques. Establish alternative supply chains that can function under various conflict scenarios. Implement vulnerability reduction strategies, focusing on households most at risk of food insecurity due to displacement or loss of livelihoods.	ICESCR Art. 11(1); SPHERE Food Security Standards

5.14	Right to water and sanitation	Sector Specific	WASH	Percentage of protection mainstreaming measures integrated into local systems	How robust is the plan for sustainable WASH service delivery post-exit in Northwest Syria?	Build local maintenance capacity for WASH infrastructure, considering the challenges of accessing spare parts and technical expertise. Ensure availability of essential spare parts, accounting for potential supply chain disruptions. Establish community management structures for WASH facilities, adapting to local governance realities. Prioritize environmental sustainability in WASH solutions, considering the water scarcity issues in NW Syria.	ICESCR Art. 11(1), 12; CIHL Rules 131, 134, 135, and 138; UNGA Res 64/292, SPHERE WASH Standards
5.15	Right to health	Sector Specific	Health	Number of community members trained in rights-based approaches maintaining active roles	How comprehensive are the measures to ensure continued health service access post-exit in Northwest Syria?	Develop detailed service handover plans, considering the fragmented health system and potential gaps in coverage. Build local capacity in both clinical skills and health system management. Ensure sustainability of medical supply chains, accounting for potential border closures or access restrictions. Maintain referral systems for specialized care, considering cross-line and cross-border options. Prioritize the integration of mental health services into primary healthcare, addressing the long-term psychological impacts of conflict.	ICESCR Art. 12; IHL's principles of impartiality and non-discrimination; IHL's principles of impartiality and non-discrimination; CIHL Rules 55, 56, 134, 135, and 138.
5.16	Right to equality and non-discrimination	Cross-Cutting	Protection	Number of documented human rights lessons learned and best practices shared	How comprehensive is the plan to transfer knowledge and skills related to cross-cutting themes to local partners and communities?	Develop training programs for local organizations on gender-sensitive programming, protection mainstreaming, and environmental sustainability. Establish community-led committees to continue addressing cross-cutting issues post-exit. Create mentorship programs pairing international and local staff to ensure knowledge transfer. Develop context-specific guidance materials on maintaining progress in cross-cutting areas.	CHS Commitment 3, 4; SPHERE Core Standards
5.17	Right to a clean, healthy, and sustainable environment	Cross-Cutting	Environmental Protection	Percentage of project activities with documented positive human rights impacts	How robust are the measures to ensure environmental sustainability of interventions post-exit?	Develop local environmental management plans that can be maintained with limited resources. Train community members on sustainable resource management practices. Establish partnerships with local environmental organizations for ongoing monitoring and support. Ensure all infrastructure projects incorporate long-term environmental considerations.	UNGA Res 76/300; SPHERE Environmental Standards



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