

## Guidance note – Environment and Protection<sup>1</sup>, RMRP 2021

*This guidance note has been developed for the RMRP 2021. Guidance is limited to the context of the region and this emergency. The note is not intended to cover all protection-related interventions or all human mobility emergencies anywhere in the world. Where protection interventions overlap with those of other sectors, guidance for those sectors should also be reviewed.*

Environmental factors can be causes or drivers of humanitarian needs for people on the move and host communities. The environment can be affected by the protection sector response to those needs. Those impacts can be mitigated, and the protection sector response can also be an entry point for low-cost and simple ways to improve environmental management. It is important to consider four ways in which environment relates to the sector:

- How environmental situations affect humanitarian needs related to protection and vulnerability to protection risks;
- How the activities of the protection sector can generate environmental impacts if not carefully designed;
- Environment and environmental management may offer opportunities for protection actors to achieve their goals;
- How the protection sector can generate environmental benefits and enhancements through activities that the sector would generally develop anyway, and how these benefits can also contribute to sustainable development and protection.

The Do No Harm principle includes the avoidance of current or future situations which could put populations at risk. The unintended consequences of programming without considering the environmental impacts of the humanitarian response or of the mass movement of people can include increased risks and environmental impacts for which refugees and migrants are blamed, contributing to xenophobia and possible violence. Conversely, an emergency is an opportunity to address underlying environmental issues and use environmental mainstreaming for positive change rather than just damage mitigation. Environmental mainstreaming relates to doing no harm, reducing risk and considering possible conflict flashpoints. As such, environmental mainstreaming across other humanitarian sectors is a means to achieve protection goals and facilitate a comprehensive approach to humanitarian needs and enjoying rights.

*Given the synergy between protection and integration sectors related to transition to durable solutions, protection agencies may wish to familiarise themselves with the integration sector guidance note, circulated through integration sector platforms. Where the protection response involves material aid (kits), the shelter and NFI guidance note provides more information on NFIs. Interventions aimed at fomenting community cohesion and integration may also be considered as protection interventions, although these are addressed in the integration sector guidance note.*

### **Environmental situations and protection needs:**

Some of the most acute protection situation related to environment in Latin America and the Caribbean arise from continuation of modern slavery. Latin America accounts for an estimated 11% of the total population of modern slaves, although only Brazil legally recognises the existence of the phenomenon<sup>2</sup>. In Brazil, the charcoal industry has long been associated with modern slavery,

---

<sup>1</sup> <https://ehaconnect.org/clusters/protection/>

<sup>2</sup> <https://latinamericanperspectives.com/modern-slavery-and-human-trafficking-in-latin-america/>

notably in Pará and Maranhao states which are now destinations for displaced Venezuelans (notably indigenous Venezuelans). Deforestation patterns typically indicate charcoal related slavery, which tends to follow the waves of deforestation and may be a useful proxy indicator for vulnerability<sup>3</sup>. However, the situation is not limited to Brazil, even if Brazil is the most well-known example. Deforestation for cattle ranching, mining and sugar production are other environmental economies associated with modern slavery in Latin America. Illicit crops and illegal mining financing armed actors are also associated with slavery-like conditions in Colombia and Ecuador and with a probable expansion of the situation into remote parts of Guyana as armed actors expand their presence in the neighbouring Orinoco Mining Arc inside Venezuela. Seed nurseries in Argentina have also been associated with economic coercion and conditions similar to modern slavery<sup>4</sup>. While modern slavery in the region predates the Venezuela refugee and migrant situation, people on the move are even more vulnerable to enslavement than members of host communities, given their lack of local roots. These situations are closely related to the interests of the smuggling and human trafficking subsector.

Indigenous Venezuelans also become exposed to protection risks when the response fails to cater for their energy needs. This results in people being forced to forage for wood, crossing private land and exposed to attacks, violence and snake bites. Most displaced indigenous Venezuelans are already semi-urbanised and familiar with technology such as cooking on gas, meaning that failure to provide for their energy needs results in both protection risks and stereotyping (sometimes known as “exoticising the other”).

Different environmental behaviours can lead to Venezuelan populations being targeted by xenophobia. Lack of knowledge about local waste management, littering or recycling practices, access to or use of water and management of wastewater can all contribute to stereotypes about “dirty migrants” which then feed populism, xenophobia and violence. Addressing these issues in awareness-raising and sensitisation with newly arrived refugees and migrants can help them integrate and reduce some of the behaviours that become attached to stereotyping narratives. These orientations can contribute to mitigation of protection risks.

Housing, land and property rights are fundamentally environmental rights since they usually relate to access to and control over natural resources. This is clear in the case of land, although other natural resources make that land / property viable. For example, polluted water sources make a piece of land not viable for habitation and therefore violates HLP-related rights. GBV can also be a means by which to control and restrict access to land and natural resources, fundamentally motivated by environmental and HLP concerns<sup>5</sup>.

#### **Environmental impacts of the protection sector response:**

**Material support:** Given that most protection sector responses focus on provision of information, case management or connecting people with other aspects of response, the environmental impact of the protection sector is relatively limited. However, where the protection sector response includes distribution of NFIs, kits and other items, consider that although importing NFIs is often considered environmentally more damaging than local purchases, this is only true when the quality of the locally procured items is just as good. Where locally procured items have a shorter usable life,

<sup>3</sup> <https://www.aljazeera.com/programmes/slavery21stcenturyevil/2011/10/20111010114656316634.html>

<sup>4</sup> <https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/abs/10.1177/0094582X17699909>

<sup>5</sup> <https://portals.iucn.org/library/sites/library/files/documents/2020-002-En.pdf>



this results in increased amounts of waste, which is often not recyclable or compostable. Assessments of options for NFI distribution should consider the quality of items and the local potential for recycling or environmentally appropriate disposal.

Even quality items will eventually need to be disposed of, and these costs are often not considered, resulting in problems for environmental and public health. For example, used mattresses may need to be incinerated, even more so in the case of mattresses used for COVID-19 cases. Their life can be extended if the outer fabric of the mattress is impermeable. Aim to reuse / repurpose NFIs when they reach the end of their intended life, so long as COVID-19 risk can be minimised. There should be a collection and disposal / reuse plan for NFIs from the time of procurement.

Cash support: Likewise, although transferring cash in itself may have limited environmental impacts, the environmental impacts associated with cash relate to the behaviour that the money may incentivise and the environmental impacts of the decisions that people take as a result of being cash beneficiaries. Without careful checks, this can lead to humanitarian agency cash being spent on substandard accommodation and beneficiaries being effectively trapped in overcrowded, damp or polluting lodgings. Rent support interventions can be developed with environmental criteria, to ensure that cash is spent on accommodation which is fit for human habitation and which minimises environmental impact (for example, sewage and water leaks, location of waste collections, access to community waste-management services, access to appropriate energy to avoid use of wood or charcoal and associated deforestation, etc). This issue is addressed in guidance developed on environment and the shelter / NFI sector. Generic checklists can be developed to screen for this purpose.

CBI programmes can generate environmental impacts such as increased waste generation, deforestation or through acquiring tools to perform livelihood activities associated with environmental damage. On the other hand, CBI programmes can be designed to include training to directly generate and/or stimulate positive environmental impacts, supporting entrepreneurial activities, for example in gardening, recycling and other sectors of positive environmental impact. Consider participatory consultation processes when designing CBI programmes, which can also provide information on potential uses of cash and its environmental consequences.

Given that many protection interventions are developed by other sectors, this list is not exhaustive. The guidance notes developed for other sectors may provide additional information.

**Opportunities to strengthen protection through environmental management:**

Probably the most efficient way to strengthen protection through environmental management is via the interventions of other sectors and the ways by which those interventions can positively impact the environment and therefore reduce protection risks. For example, when the protection sector detects a pattern of protection violations associated with unsatisfied energy needs and develops interventions with the shelter and NFI sector to address people's energy needs, vulnerability to the identified protection risk is reduced. In this case, protection can act as a surveillance mechanism, but should then ensure that other sectors develop interventions to address the identified situation. The protection sector may also be able to work with the food security and integration sectors to ensure prioritisation of people at risk of falling into illicit environmental economies, where there is evidence that this is occurring. In this way, protection can work with other sectors to address environment and by doing so, improve the protection context. The



protection sector can develop surveillance mechanisms to identify environment / protection situations best resolved by the actions of other sectors and ensure follow-up by those sectors through intersector coordination, advice and support.

**Generating environmental benefits / enhancements through the protection response:**

Psychosocial support: Basic environmental management activities can have enormous psychosocial benefits, in terms of providing people with a sense of control over their environment, normality and peace. They can also be useful educational tools or provide means by which survivors of protection violations can begin to express themselves. Activities such as gardening, managing allotments and similar can have therapeutic and environmental benefits. Depending on the age group concerned, these may also form a starting point for new livelihoods and economic self-sufficiency.

Child-friendly spaces and informal education: Include environmental health messages in awareness-raising, life skills and informal education. Depending on the context and age-group, it may also be appropriate to raise awareness of child protection risks such as child-labour or trafficking related to illegal environmental economies, to allow older children to reduce their exposure to risks. Preschool education offers an opportunity to introduce environmental themes to younger children. These can be associated with self-protection (regarding environmental health, hygiene and similar) and also issues related to environmental behaviour, such as waste management (sorting and separation) and recycling. Environmental activities such as recycling of packaging materials for art projects and incentivising the reuse of materials that otherwise would be wasted can be developed while also highlighting the importance of being seen to be caring for the environment and showing that environmental stereotypes about refugees and migrants are false. These activities may also be integrated into child-friendly spaces, working together with the education sector.

Institutional capacity-building: Work with authorities to raise awareness of illicit environmental economies and protection risks. The same authorities may also be able to mobilise support to ensure that other sectors address protection risks, for example those related to energy / fuel, food security or water. Integrating non-traditional actors such as environmental authorities or NGOs in the design and delivery of institutional strengthening activities may help to raise awareness of these neglected dimensions of protection.

Community mobilisation: Communities can play a critical role in identifying and addressing issues related to environment and protection risks. Involve people from the refugee, migrant and host communities who may be affected by environmental impacts or may have important information that may help us to avoid new or worsened protection risks related to the environment. This information can also help to feed longer-term environmental management activities when channelled to appropriate authorities. These groups can provide local information and traditional knowledge, and they can help design management measures that will be acceptable in the wider community. Facilitating community consultation and community mobilisation to address the environmental dimensions of the response also generates additional benefits in community environmental governance and accountability to affected populations at minimal cost.

**Groups of particular concern:**

Although no group is immune from protection concerns related to environment, in the context of the regional refugee and migrant emergency, there are some groups likely more vulnerable to these situations than others.

Indigenous Venezuelans are likely to be more exposed to violence due to charcoal gathering wherever their energy needs are not satisfied by other means. Indigenous Venezuelans and marginalised indigenous populations in transit and destination countries are also more likely to be exposed to smuggling and trafficking related to illicit environmental economies, especially charcoal production, illicit crops and mining. This may be more likely in Brazil, Colombia and Guyana, although potentially could also extend to Peru and Ecuador, given high levels of illegal mining in those countries. Charcoal production and heavy labour in mining is more likely to affect men.

Children and young people are more likely to be at risk of child labour, smuggling and trafficking related to illicit crops and mining, since there are a greater diversity of tasks which can be adapted to people of different physical sizes and levels of strength, as well as additional tasks related to food provision, acting as porters, mules or in sexual exploitation in the context of mines.

Women may be at greater risk of GBV and sexual exploitation related to agricultural livelihoods, such as fisheries or agriculture, or related to access to and control of natural resources such as land and water. They may also be forced into sexual exploitation at the service of people involved in illegal mining.

**From whom can you receive support?**

Regional: Dan Stothart, UN Environment (Panama City) <a href="mailto:dan.stothart@un.org">dan.stothart@un.org</a>	Brazil: Fabiano Sartori, UNHCR / UNEP (Boa Vista) <a href="mailto:sartorid@unhcr.org">sartorid@unhcr.org</a>	Colombia: Volker Sitta, UNHCR / SDC (Bogota) <a href="mailto:sitta@unhcr.org">sitta@unhcr.org</a>
--	---	--