

# LESSON 8:

## INTEGRATE PROTECTION ACROSS DROUGHT RESPONSE

**Protection risks increase during drought, particularly through family separation, mobility, reduced access to essential services and harmful coping strategies.**

**Responses must integrate protection analysis across sectors and strengthen community-based, inclusive systems that reduce risks and prevent harm.**

Drought heightens protection risks as households adopt strategies that involve separation, migration and difficult trade-offs. Male migration for work (common in drought-affected pastoral and rural settings) increases the vulnerability of women- and child-headed households and weakens informal safety networks. Split households and mobile populations face specific risks along migration routes, where services are limited or inaccessible.

As livelihoods collapse and displacement rises, coping strategies can increase the risks of GBV, early marriage, child labour and exploitation, especially for adolescents. Reduced access to water forces women and girls to travel longer distances, increasing their exposure to harassment and violence, while household stress linked to food insecurity and economic strain can heighten domestic violence and other forms of abuse. School closures or pressure to withdraw children from education during drought further increase risks for girls and boys, who lose safe spaces and protective structures. Older people and persons with disabilities who already face existing exclusion may find migrating extremely difficult or even be left behind, reducing their access to basic needs.

The centrality of protection means safeguarding rights and reducing risks must be systematically integrated across all sectors. Building protection risk analysis into programme design early; ensuring safe spaces, referral systems, accessible and survivor-centred services; and coordinating with specialised actors helps ensure services reduce, rather than exacerbate, risks. Protection responses should prioritise community-based mechanisms (including women's organisations, youth groups and organisations of persons with disabilities) with targeted outreach and support for informal safety networks. Community trust, accountability and inclusive communication are central to preventing unintended harm.

Number of documents contributing to the lessons: 22

Average evidence scores of all documents contributing to the lessons: 3.6

Median evidence strength of documents contributing to the lessons: 73%

## RECOMMENDATIONS

- Humanitarian actors should integrate protection risk analysis across all stages of drought preparedness, response and recovery, rather than treating protection as a standalone or secondary concern. This will ensure that services and assistance reduce rather than exacerbate protection risks for different groups.
- Humanitarian actors should ensure that sectoral programmes – including food security, WASH, livelihoods, health and cash assistance – are designed and implemented in ways that minimise protection risks and promote safety and dignity.
- Humanitarian actors should strengthen gender-sensitive and age-appropriate approaches to protection, including measures to mitigate risks of GBV, child labour, early marriage, family separation during drought and other harmful coping strategies.
- Humanitarian actors should ensure that programmes are accessible to persons with disabilities and older people, including through adapted delivery mechanisms, accessible infrastructure and inclusive communication.
- Humanitarian actors and donors should invest in context-specific protection analysis and staff capacity to support effective protection mainstreaming across drought responses, including through strengthening locally led protection systems.
- Humanitarian actors should establish or strengthen accessible, safe and trusted feedback and complaints mechanisms that enable people affected by drought to report protection concerns and influence programme adaptation.
- Humanitarian, development and government actors should coordinate to address protection risks linked to displacement, competition over resources and access constraints in drought-affected areas.