



Written Submission - Review on the future of all forms of UN peace operations

New York: 15 August 2025

I. Background/Context

This submission is based on a research report authored by Oxfam and a joint research report commissioned by NRC, CIVIC and the Global Protection Cluster.

The [Oxfam](#) research paper “[Seen but not Heard: Community Voices on Peacekeeping in CAR, DRC, Mali and South Sudan](#)” provides insight to communities’ perspectives on the protection of civilians, the role of peacekeeping operations and other security and protection structures in the Central African Republic, the Democratic Republic of Congo, Mali and South Sudan. It puts forward their messages and recommendations for improved protection and increased alignment of PKOs’ work with their priorities and aspirations. The study relies primarily on primary data obtained through focus group discussions with concerned communities.

This submission also draws on research commissioned by the [Norwegian Refugee Council](#) (NRC), the [Center for Civilians in Conflict](#) (CIVIC) and the [Global Protection Cluster](#) (GPC) in 2025 on [Protection after UN Peacekeeping Mission Departures: Considerations for Protection Actors Navigating Capacity Gaps](#). The research provides a comprehensive overview of the protection capacities impacted by UN Peacekeeping Mission departures and some of the relevant considerations for protection actors and allies with both the policy and practice dimensions of supporting the continuity of protection during and after such withdrawals. The research and publication were made possible thanks to the support of Switzerland’s Federal Department of Foreign Affairs.

Both research pieces conclude that there is a crucial need for:

- **Increased community involvement and engagement throughout all the phases - maintaining people's protection at the heart of the UN peace operation aims, actions and outcomes.**
- **Increased focus on community-led protection mechanisms and support to those.**
- **Inclusive planning and decision-making on exit strategies and withdrawal plans from the onset - including involvement of different actors and building of partnerships.**

II. Please see our responses to the guidance questions below:

Elaborated Analysis: UN Peacekeeping Operations

I. What are the main challenges confronting peace operations now and in the future?

As stated in both research reports the UN peacekeeping is experiencing a crisis of legitimacy and confidence. The NRC, CIVIC and the GPC found that: “UN peacekeeping is experiencing a crisis of confidence. Though conflict levels have nearly doubled in the past five years, some UN member states, including host countries, appear to be questioning peacekeeping as a tool to manage conflict. The UN Security Council has not authorized a new peacekeeping mission in more than a decade, and missions are being forced to leave countries due to

political or budgetary pressures, even as conflict and violence against civilians persist at high levels. This reality has prompted a need for new thinking about how protection is managed in the context of mission departures.”

Adding to that, Oxfam’s research emphasizes that the crisis of legitimacy starts with the communities, explaining that “there is a considerable gap between the UN PKO mandates and action and the expectations of local populations. PKOs have generally not succeeded in building a relationship of trust with the civilian population”.

Some of the most important protection-related challenges confronting peace operations now and in the future, as surfaced in our recent research initiatives, includes:

Protection Cliff

One of the most pressing issues is the 'protection cliff' that occurs following the withdrawal of UN peacekeeping missions. When missions are leaving, often in contexts still plagued by violence, they take with them critical infrastructure, funding, and capacities. This includes capacities related to physical protection, human rights, political engagement and logistics-related assets and services that a range of humanitarian, including protection actors, rely on. As a result, civilians are left more exposed to violence, particularly in areas where non-state actors or abusive state forces operate with impunity, with weak or absent systems for sustaining protection responsibilities and monitoring.

To date, withdrawals, and the pronounced loss of important protection capacities have often occurred amidst escalating levels of violence and ongoing threats. In recent instances, host states have requested the withdrawal of a given mission but there remains an absence of clear readiness and ability by national duty bearers to take on related responsibilities.¹ Communities are left vulnerable as protection and human rights support weaken, coordination mechanisms dissolve, and key channels for higher-level political engagement become more limited. Rising conflict and insecurity level, coupled with the loss of direct and indirect protection related capacities, further strain the ability of remaining actors to respond effectively. Protection actors also point to many instances where they were brought into mission transition processes very late or ineffectively, exacerbating protection response and coordination gaps.²

Key protection capacities affected by UN mission withdrawals that were examined as part of the NRC, CIVIC, and GPC research include:

- Physical protection
- Early warning
- Community engagement
- Political engagement
- Protection strategy and coordination
- Human rights
- Mine action
- Disarmament, demobilization and reintegration
- Rule of law
- Security, logistics and access services
- Cross-cutting protection considerations related to funding, capacities and integrated planning during withdrawals

Distrust and loss of legitimacy

¹ Please see the NRC, CIVIC and GPC research for a comprehensive perspective on the wide range of protection capacities that are impacted by UN Mission withdrawals.

² NRC, CIVIC, GPC. “Protection after UN Peacekeeping Mission Departures: Considerations for Protection Actors Navigating Capacity Gaps”, 2025.

The Oxfam research, based on testimony from over 1,600 civilians in CAR, DRC, Mali, and South Sudan, found widespread distrust and frustration with peacekeeping missions. Civilians described missions as being physically and psychologically distant: “MINUSCA is detached from the population... they are not close to the people who need protection,” said a woman from Bangui, CAR.³ In DRC, MONUSCO’s dual role as a peacekeeper and combatant blurred its identity, causing community confusion and suspicion. In Mali, civilians saw MINUSMA as passive and lacking the mandate or will to challenge armed groups. Similarly, in South Sudan, although UNMISS created Protection of Civilians (PoC) sites, many community members felt excluded from decision-making and misunderstood the mission’s purpose.

There is a growing trend of governments rejecting UN presence such as in Mali and the DRC citing sovereignty concerns and a lack of effectiveness. This signals a critical loss of legitimacy for PKOs in the eyes of both the public and political elites. This crisis of confidence in UN peacekeeping has been further exacerbated in some contexts by premature and politically motivated withdrawals amid ongoing violence and rejection by host governments, even when civilians remain at risk.⁴ “The withdrawal of MONUSCO is politicized, as is their mandate. We have always been underinformed about the question of MONUSCO” – A man from Musienene, North Kivu, Democratic Republic of Congo.⁵

Bureaucratic Rigidity

Compounding these operational shortcomings during a UN Mission lifespan and withdrawal process are bureaucratic rigidity and institutional inertia. “Burdensome and bureaucratic procedures hamper the efficiency and rapidity of the PKO’s response, especially in moments of crisis”.⁶ This sentiment is aggravated by the view expressed by the communities. For example, consulted communities in DRC said that the MONUSCO operates in a bureaucratic, top-down manner, often prioritizing relations with state institutions over direct community engagement. Additionally, language and cultural barriers prevent meaningful engagement, further diminishing trust and understanding.

2. How could UN peace operations adapt in response to current and future challenges?

To respond effectively to a rapidly changing global security environment, which is witnessing an increase of attacks against civilians by state and non-state armed actors, UN Peace Operations must adapt both structurally and relationally.

Protection integrated into the design process

Structurally, missions should embed protection into the core of their strategies, from the initial establishment of mandates through deployment and withdrawal. “Protection planning should begin at mission inception and continue through transition and withdrawal”.⁷ This entails designing strategies and supports that help ensure the continuity of protection for civilian populations affected by conflict, including community-based and community/civilian-led efforts.

Meaningful community engagement

From a community engagement perspective, Oxfam’s community consultation highlights the sense of alienation experienced by many and the overall disconnect between the PKOs and the communities they are meant to serve. Participants in DRC, CAR, and Mali reported that peacekeepers rarely engaged in dialogue or clearly explained mandates. “Let them tell us what they have come to do here, because I do not understand why

³ Oxfam. “Seen but not Heard: Community Voices on Peacekeeping in CAR, DRC, Mali and South Sudan”, 2025.

⁴ NRC, CIVIC, GPC, 2025.

⁵ Oxfam, 2025.

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ NRC, CIVIC, GPC, 2025.

MINUSCA is here,” said an IDP woman in Bria, CAR.⁸ Engagement must go beyond symbolic gestures and include participatory planning, joint reviews, and local feedback mechanisms.

Furthermore, trust can only be rebuilt by investing in people who can interpret and translate not only language but also intent and culture. Oxfam emphasizes the need for “community liaison officers with deep local knowledge and language skills”. These officers serve as bridges between the mission and the host community.

Sustaining local protection mechanisms during transitions

Technological infrastructure like DRC’s Community Alert Networks must be maintained during transitions. The failure to sustain such systems after MONUSCO’s departure left local actors without tools to manage threats, highlighting the urgent need to advocate for UN-wide transition strategies that mainstream civilian-led and community-based protection, invest in national protection capacity, and strengthen coordination with local actors. This includes the deliberate transfer of protection responsibilities through negotiated task delegation and capacity-building for host authorities.

Recommendations:

Protection and Transition Planning

- Initiate transition and exit planning early, with dedicated resources, clear data handover protocols, and sustained UN or partner presence after mission withdrawal.
- Expand and sustain community-led early warning systems with technical and financial support, while ensuring specific linkages to relevant response capacities (both with the PK Mission itself and relevant national/local systems),
- Support local protection efforts as complementary to international action, including protection committees, mediation bodies, and initiatives that promote inter-community dialogue and conflict prevention.
- Strengthen crisis response capacity to ensure timely and effective interventions and transparently communicate outcomes to affected communities.

Community Engagement and Local Capacity Building

- Institutionalize regular and meaningful community engagement, especially with women, youth, and marginalized groups, throughout planning, decision-making, and implementation.
- Train, deploy and fund local community liaison officer positions with strong language skills and cultural understanding to strengthen communication, clarify mandates, and build trust. These liaison officers should be prioritized in terms of sustaining their roles during and after UN mission withdrawals.
- Train local police and civil authorities to reinforce national protection systems and ensure sustainable security.
- Ensure that a national human rights institution is fully equipped to effectively monitor the situation.

Mandate, Resources, and Host-State Cooperation

- Ensure mandates are carefully defined, with a focus on achieving protection outcomes and maintaining protection at the centre throughout, through multiple mechanisms grounded in community leadership and national capacities, matched with adequate funding, personnel, and logistical support;
- From the outset and throughout the lifespan of a mission, work to build and sustain community legitimacy and involvement through ongoing communication, engagement and collaboration

Gender and Accountability

⁸ Oxfam, 2025.

- Ensure that women are involved in the design and implementation of peacekeeping operations to reflect the diversity of needs, priorities and aspirations, while supporting efforts to reduce gender imbalance in peacebuilding.
- Promote the systematic adoption of a gender lens grounded in sex, age, and diversity-disaggregated data, and informed by an understanding of the distinct protection risks faced by women, men, boys, girls, and LGBTQI individuals. This approach should guide all aspects of mission planning, implementation, and evaluation to make protection truly gender responsive. (including the implementation of the Security Council Resolution 1325).⁹
- Ensure resources are put towards critical civilian roles within PK missions related to protection, gender and inclusion and that these capacities are maintained during and after withdrawals, including within UNCTs.
- Implement robust accountability mechanisms to investigate and prosecute misconduct, including sexual exploitation and abuse, and end impunity associated with peacekeeper immunity.

Child Protection (based on specific contributions from the Alliance for Child Protection in Humanitarian Action)¹⁰

- Missions must make the protection of children in armed conflict a core priority, explicitly reflected in their mandates and grounded in international human rights and humanitarian law. This includes resourcing and staffing dedicated child protection expertise, supporting the implementation of the Children and Armed Conflict agenda, including the Monitoring and Reporting Mechanism, and maintaining robust measures to prevent sexual exploitation and abuse with survivor-centered responses to allegations.
- Child protection and gender-based violence prevention and response must be embedded in all operational decisions, activities, and processes, guided by a Do No Harm approach. Missions should provide mandatory pre-deployment and in-mission training on child protection, GBV, safeguarding, and PSEA for all personnel, deploy dedicated gender and child protection experts, and secure sufficient resources for advisers, safeguarding measures, and community-based protection mechanisms.
- Missions must be fully prepared to prevent and respond to the recruitment and use of children in armed conflict, including those associated with armed groups designated as terrorist organizations. This requires facilitating safe and timely access for these children to reach protective services, particularly in remote or insecure areas, and ending their criminalization or punitive treatment. Peacekeepers should leverage their political influence and security presence to negotiate releases, support the development and implementation of action plans, and apply international standards such as the Vancouver Principles to strengthen training, planning, and operational practice. Clear rules of engagement and codes of conduct must recognize children as victims first and foremost, with robust referral mechanisms to ensure their swift and safe transfer to child protection actors. Peacekeeping missions, working closely with child protection actors, should lead or support negotiations for the handover of children, assessing comparative advantages and risks, and ensuring handover protocols are in place and align with best practice to safeguard the rights, safety, and wellbeing of all affected children.
- **Child protection capacity must be safeguarded during mission transitions and withdrawals:** Early planning must ensure the responsible transfer of child protection functions to the UN Country

⁹ Resolution 1325 called on all international peace and security actors to take explicit account of the needs and priorities of women and girls when implementing peace agreements, to understand the role of women in peacebuilding and to measure the impact of conflict on women and children.

¹⁰ These recommendations draw on the technical expertise of the Alliance for Child Protection in Humanitarian Action and its members, particularly emerging findings from the study “Collaboration between peacekeeping and child protection actors for the prevention of child recruitment, facilitation of release and reintegration of children” conducted by UNICEF and Plan International on behalf of the Alliance in Mali, the Democratic Republic of Congo, Central African Republic, and South Sudan, with funding from Global Affairs Canada.

Team and relevant actors, maintaining the Monitoring and Reporting Mechanism at full capacity and keeping child protection high on the political agenda. Adequate resources and established protocols should guarantee the continued safe referral of children to protection services and prevent gaps in prevention, monitoring, and response.

3. What could UN peace operations be expected and mandated to do in the future?

There is a clear opportunity, brought to the forefront by current patterns of escalating protection risks and conflicts and recent instances of PK Mission withdrawal, to reconceptualize Future UN peacekeeping operations need to be reconceptualized, emphasizing community engagement and inclusion, and support for local and national protection mechanisms to build sustainable protection and peace infrastructure and enhance community resilience. Mandates should prioritize long-term, sustainable protection through capacity development rather than solely relying on force deployment. This approach includes capacitating and resourcing civilian protection actors, supporting localized dispute resolution, and strengthening early warning and response networks. Such strategies better equip communities to protect themselves, including even after UN withdrawal.

Challenges such as politically driven or premature withdrawals, lack of host-state cooperation, weak national protection systems, and missions operating without sufficient legitimacy or support, undermine the mission's effectiveness and work.

Oxfam's research found that communities consistently want PKOs to engage and support local peacebuilding efforts. In South Sudan, UNMISS protection sites were viewed positively, yet respondents emphasized the importance of community ownership. "UNMISS has been so impactful... providing shelter and protection to women, the elderly, and children," said a civil society representative from Pibor.

However, communities also expressed frustration over being excluded from defining what protection means to them. In DRC, a woman in South Kivu said: "We expected MONUSCO to attack the local armed groups... but that has not been the case". This disconnect between expectations and mandate realities must be addressed through participatory mandate design.¹¹

Future mandates should also promote political inclusion, especially of women, youth, and displaced persons. At the moment, consultation and consideration of women's voices are too often excluded from decision-making.¹²

Recommendations:

- Redesign PKO mandates to include the prioritization and resourcing of community-based protection, mediation, and peacebuilding, especially in contexts with low state legitimacy.
- Institutionalize inclusive governance and national ownership through principled engagement and collaboration with local actors.
- Shift from short-term stabilization toward building sustainable national protection capacities.
- Foster strong, partnerships with local NGOs, civil society, and humanitarian actors to ensure sustained and coordinated protection coverage.
- For donor states to ensure flexible, longer-term funding and the ability to scale operations in response to evolving needs.
- Develop realistic, phased exit strategies grounded in host-state cooperation and local readiness.

¹¹ Ibid.

¹² Ibid.

4. Under what conditions are UN operations least likely to be effective in achieving their objectives?

UN Missions have been and continue to be under enormous pressure: “Missions are being forced to leave countries due to political or budgetary pressures, even as conflict and violence against civilians persist at high levels”.¹³ In Mali and DRC, host governments demanded mission withdrawals while threats to civilians remained acute, showing a stark disconnect between political decisions and ground realities. Ultimately, if there is a lack of willingness by host states to accept or continue with the mandates of UN peace operations, they cannot be established or continue to operate.

When peacekeeping missions are established, mandates are often overly ambitious given the lack of commensurate resources. In such situations, missions inevitably fall short. “Inflated PKO mandates without proportionate resources, capacity and means,” leave missions like MONUSCO and MINUSMA unable to meet protection expectations.¹⁴ This undermines not only mission performance but also credibility.

Importantly, when communities feel excluded or betrayed by peacekeepers, trust evaporates. There is widespread frustration with missions that failed to respond during crises or that communicated poorly. In Mali, one resident said: “MINUSMA did not have a robust mandate to fight the terrorists,” expressing a desire for more direct protection that the mandate did not allow

15

Lastly, rushed and uncoordinated transitions cause institutional memory loss and protection gaps. This is clearly illustrated in DRC: “None of the approximately 30 community liaison assistants were retained... only a few were hired sporadically due to lack of funding”.¹⁶ When mission staff, data systems, and relationships are lost, the ability of humanitarian and civil society actors to respond plummets.

5. What could be the role of partnerships in future UN peace operations?

The first and most important partner remains communities and affected individuals.

UN Peace Operations cannot operate effectively in isolation; they must collaborate with, work through, and alongside local, national, and regional actors. Strategic and equitable partnerships are vital for the success and sustainability of peacekeeping efforts.

From the community perspective, Oxfam’s research highlights a strong demand for genuine partnership. “Civil society and local actors should be treated as strategic partners, not implementation instruments.”¹⁷ Many local and community actors expressed concern that they were being used instrumentally rather than included meaningfully in decision-making.

Where partnerships have been successful such as through joint patrols or community alert systems the results have been more sustainable and locally accepted. Unfortunately, in many cases, local actors are sidelined due to language barriers, resource constraints, or security risks. This limits legitimacy and capacity, ultimately undermining mission effectiveness.

¹³ NRC, CIVIC, GPC, 2025.

¹⁴ Oxfam, 2025.

¹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶ NRC, CIVIC, GPC, 2025.

¹⁷ Oxfam 2025.

Regional organizations like the AU and ECOWAS can add political leverage and legitimacy, but “subregional organizations lag behind the AU in developing protection policies,” and they require technical and operational support from the UN.¹⁸

Partnerships involving local NGOs, civil society, the UN Country Team, and regional organizations are not optional, they form the foundation of post-mission protection strategies. However, these partnerships often face challenges such as unclear roles, short-term funding, and insufficient integration into strategic planning.

Partnerships are essential for ensuring continuity, including partnership with states where feasible to ensure the obligation towards protection is fulfilled. Employing community-led approaches, localized coordination, and shared ownership of protection strategies to reinforce national and UN capacities are all key. Challenges include aligning mandates across actors, clarifying roles after mission completion, and addressing funding, infrastructure, and data gaps that emerge once UN peacekeepers withdraw.

Recommendations:

- Establish clear, shared protection strategies with defined roles for local, national, and regional actors, UN peacekeeping missions and UN/international actors.
- Provide sustained funding and capacity-building support to local NGOs and civil society groups.
- Integrate community-based organizations into peacekeeping planning, monitoring, and evaluation from the outset.
- Collaborate with regional bodies like the AU and others to develop joint protection doctrines and operational frameworks.
- Conduct stakeholder and community mechanism mapping as part of transition planning, led by the Protection Cluster in coordination with the mission, to identify existing local protection structures and their capacities. Use this mapping to strengthen coordination, avoid duplication, and inform a joint UNCT-HCT protection strategy that leverages the strengths of humanitarian, development, human rights, and peacebuilding actors. Simultaneously, support national systems including government, traditional, and civil society actors to take on protection responsibilities, and encourage the signing of agreements (e.g. MoUs) to maintain independent human rights monitoring post-mission.
- Integrate local systems into transition planning by mapping existing community protection mechanisms and assessing their functionality and coordination potential. This process ideally co-led by the Protection Cluster and the mission should guide post-withdrawal engagement by protection actors and inform national protection strategies. Where appropriate, develop a joint protection strategy between the Humanitarian Country Team and UN Country Team to ensure continuity and complementarity across humanitarian, development, human rights, and peacebuilding efforts.
- To preserve independent human rights monitoring after mission exit, encourage host governments to sign Memoranda of Understanding with OHCHR. Strengthen national institutions, traditional leadership, and civil society to take on long-term protection roles, including coordination, early warning, and response.

// ENDS //

¹⁸ Oxfam, NRC, CIVIC, GPC, 2025.