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Left Behind

Protection Gaps Leaving Somalia's Displaced Exposed

In the first quarter of 2026, Somalia recorded more than half the number of protection risks reported in 2025, signalling a rapidly deteriorating protection environment. Reductions in funding and frontline capacity have significantly constrained the delivery of protection services, leaving displaced populations increasingly vulnerable.

Context

Somalia is facing a deepening humanitarian emergency driven by drought and conflict. Since January, 540,000 people have been displaced, adding to 3.3 million already internally displaced, many in informal settlements with limited access to protection or basic services.¹ Across Somalia, 6.5 million people are at risk of acute food insecurity.² These conditions are directly exacerbating protection risks, particularly for women, children, and marginalised groups. At the same time, reduced humanitarian coverage has weakened protection presence leaving displaced communities with less assistance.

Protection Gaps in 2026

The consequences of reduced humanitarian protection presence are increasingly visible. By early 2026, protection risks are rising sharply while communities report an almost complete absence of protection services.

Protection Risks are Escalating

Protection Risks are Accelerating: Over 10,000 protection risks were recorded in the first quarter of 2026, which is more than half of the 2025 total.³ This indicates a sharply increased rate of exposure for displaced communities to gender-based violence (GBV), denial of services, theft, and other threats.

Picture: Shukri Adan Hassan building a temporary shelter at Qaydar-adde displacement settlement for her and her six children.

¹ UNHCR and NRC, [Somalia Protection and Solutions Monitoring Network](#), accessed 29 April 2026.

² IPC, 2026, “[Somalia: Acute Food Insecurity Situation January 2026 and Projections for February to March 2026](#),” 24 February 2026.

³ UNHCR and NRC, [Somalia Protection and Solutions Monitoring Network](#), ‘Evolution of Protection Risks by Year’, accessed 13 April 2026.

"Leave alone food. Violence is one of the most difficult things we face."
Women in Wayamo IDP settlement in Baidoa estimate there are up to five GBV incidents per day.

Forced Evictions are Increasing: Evictions linked to inability to pay rent rose by nearly a third compared to 2024.⁴ Loss of humanitarian support has directly undermined IDPs' ability to pay rent necessary for safe shelters. In 2025, inability to pay rent accounted for 47% of all evictions, overtaking land development as the leading cause for the first time. At the same time, the reduction in protection capacity, including a 50% drop in HLP paralegals, has weakened mediation and prevention efforts.

Case Referrals Not Leading to Services: Community feedback data suggest a growing backlog of protection cases that have not received support: open cases increased from 59% in 2025 to 85% in 2026, while resolved cases fell from 23% to 5%.⁵ Reduction in humanitarian programming is the likely cause, but the trend raises serious concerns about our collective protection response.

"When are we going to remember food when we don't have somewhere to settle or feel safe? Where can we feel safe at night?"

*IDP in Wayamo
Settlement, Baidoa.*

Protection Services and Capacity Have Collapsed

Protection Services Collapse: Only 26% of previous protection services remain operational, with three-quarters reduced or shut down. Reductions or closure of specialised protection have been significant: referrals (53%), case management (67%), safe spaces (49%), mobile units and frontline monitors (56%), individual protection assistance (67%), financial, cash, or voucher assistance (56%), among other services.⁶

Frontline Protection Capacity Cut: Over 295 frontline staff were laid off, and 44 protection access points were closed, drastically reducing protection presence and services in IDP sites such as protection desks and community centres. On average humanitarian actors have cut protection staffing by 60%.⁷

Marginalised Populations: Women and girls, as well as minority groups, are considered the most vulnerable in the Somalia response. Cuts have disproportionately affected the protection positions that are critical in reaching the most vulnerable groups including: case management (89%), child protection (83%), GBV (78%), and community-based protection staff (61%).⁸

⁴ 84,406 people were evicted in 2025 due to inability to pay rent compared to 65,702 in 2024. This is 28.5% greater than the previous year.

Housing, Land & Property (HLP) Area of Responsibility (AoR), [Somalia Evictions Information Portal](#), accessed 20 April 2026.

⁵ In 2025, 59% remained open, 19% closed, and 23% of cases were resolved while in 2026 to date, 85% of cases are open, 10% are closed, and 5% are resolved. Note that UNHCR began data collection in July 2025. UNHCR, 2026, Community Feedback Analysis Dashboard – Somalia, accessed 27 April 2026.

⁶ Global Protection Cluster, 2026, *Protection Capacity Mapping Dashboard – Budget Cuts 2025*, Somalia, Global Protection Cluster, accessed 26 April 2026.

⁷ Ibid

⁸ Ibid

What Are Protection Risks in Somalia?

A protection risk in Somalia is any threat, vulnerability, or harmful condition that exposes individuals or communities to violence, coercion, exploitation, abuse, discrimination, or denial of access to rights, safety, assistance, and essential services. The types of risks displaced populations face in Somalia include discrimination and stigmatisation, GBV, psychological abuse, early and forced marriage, kidnapping, forced recruitment, and theft, among others.

In Somalia, the *Protection and Solutions Monitoring Network (PSMN)* monitors both protection through discussions with IDPs who describe violations that occurred and protection risks they face in their daily life. Based on experience in Somalia, 70% of protection risks will become a violation. Visit the [PSMN Dashboard](#) for updated data on protection.

Protection Response Coordination

Technical Capacity: Every actor in a humanitarian response is responsible for mainstreaming protection, but not all actors have the same degree of technical expertise in protection. Dedicated protection actors bring knowledge and experience in topics like GBV, Child Protection, HLP, and case management.

Accountability: Protection mainstreaming activities are undertaken by actors across all Clusters but are not reported to the Protection Cluster. This limits visibility on outcomes and constrains the ability to align efforts with priority protection risks.

"We lose our self-esteem from these attacks. Because I am the one providing for my family, I have no one to talk to. We are lacking frontline protection workers to feel heard." A female headed household in Wayamo Settlement, April 2026.

Resourcing Protection

The 2026 Humanitarian Needs and Response Plan (HNRP), shaped by severe funding cuts, reduced the targeted population by nearly 50% and concentrated assistance in 21 priority districts.⁹

As Somalia is grappling with acute food insecurity, the HCT outlined four priority Clusters for 2026 including Food Security and Livelihoods, Water and Sanitation, Nutrition, and Health with Protection as a *half* priority and an understanding that protection mainstreaming would be undertaken across all clusters.

In practice, this means that funding in Somalia is allocated among priority clusters, with the Protection Cluster receiving a smaller amount, reflecting the assumption that protection mainstreaming activities are funded directly in the other clusters. While this strategy supports an integrated response, it leaves limited funding for specialised protection services delivered by Protection Cluster actors.

The HCT's Centrality of Protection Strategy 2025–2026 outlines four mutually reinforcing pillars for protection in Somalia: mainstreaming, advocacy, integration,

⁹ OCHA, 2025, [Global Humanitarian Overview 2026](#), 8 December 2025.

“It is good to even been asked what we need. It’s a relief to even discuss our needs.” *IDPs in Wayamo settlement who travelled over 100 km to find help in Baidoa.*

and specialised services.¹⁰ Protection Cluster partners are responsible for delivering specialised services including case management, referrals, legal assistance, mine action, GBV and child protection services, HLP support, and community-based protection.

All forms of protection response are needed in Somalia, and all are complementary. However, current resourcing levels are insufficient to deliver specialised protection services at the scale required for the worsening situation.

Outlook for 2026

All indications for the year point to increasing needs with 300,000 further displacements predicted by June, bringing total new displacements to 800,000.¹¹ There is a widening gap where protection risks will continue to outpace response capacity. Without strengthened investment in protection, including specialised protection services, our collective response will continue to fail the people who need it most.

NRC recommendations:

To HCT and donors:

1. Protection must be recognised as a priority Cluster with resources aligned to the scale of needs.
2. Donors should immediately provide a minimum protection allocation that would allow protection actors to re-establish protection access points in high-displacement areas.
3. Establish mandatory reporting on protection mainstreaming to the Protection Cluster to ensure accountability and oversight.

To government and service providers including INGOs and NGOs:

1. Rebuild frontline protection capacity including caseworkers, outreach teams, and mobile protection services, to ensure presence in underserved areas.
2. Prioritise targeted protection services for women, girls, minority groups, and female-headed households.
3. Scale up community-based protection measures, including lighting, safe access to services, and risk mitigation in IDP settlements.

¹⁰ HCT, 2026, [SOMALIA Humanitarian Country Team: Centrality of Protection Strategy September 2025 - September 2026](#).

¹¹ IOM and DRC, 2026, [Somalia — Multi-hazard Displacement Projections — Q2 \(April–June\) 2026](#), accessed 19 April 2026.