

Safe Distributions: Guidelines for Reducing Risks in NFI and Food Distributions

Distributing immediate, lifesaving assistance is one of the most urgent actions in an emergency response and can significantly improve the safety and wellbeing of individuals. Non-Food Item (NFI) and Food Security actors can help reduce and mitigate protection risks to individuals and communities when conducting distributions. All distributions must ensure that beneficiaries can safely access distributions with dignity and without harm or discrimination. Moreover, NFI and Food Security actors must act to support the most vulnerable groups and maintain accountability by involving and empowering beneficiaries in planning, implementation and monitoring. This document provides guidance on how partners can mainstream protection into distributions in Iraq.

Issues of concern as identified by NFI, Food Security and Protection partners in Iraq:

- Ongoing conflict and safety of distribution, including tension with host community
- Sexual exploitation and abuse (SEA), including harassment, against women and girls by distributors and male beneficiaries while queuing and before/after distributions; for ex. requiring women and girls to exchange allotted or additional NFIs/food for sexual favors or other acts.
- Difficult access for women, unaccompanied children, elderly, people with disabilities (PWD)
- Restricted movement of certain groups (child- and female-headed households, PWD), far distances to distribution point, long wait times, and lack of transportation, especially for heavy goods
- Unclear criteria for beneficiary selection
- Quality of kit based on item durability, quantity, nutritional value, ration size, duration kit will last
- Male PDS cardholders depriving female family members of goods as punishment; not allowing IDPs with missing PDS card to benefit from full PDS ration; or families separated from PDS cardholders
- Ensuring equal treatment and appropriate distribution to beneficiaries within a site
- Considering gender roles and responsibilities in accordance to cultural context
- NGO staff, distributors, military actors or local leaders denying assistance to certain groups of individuals (e.g., families perceived to be affiliated with ISIL)

Common actions recommended by NFI, Food Security and Protection partners in Iraq:

Safety, security and crowd control:	
1.	Prior to a distribution, make sure that distribution sites and routes to/from distribution sites are free from explosive hazards by consulting security forces, local authorities and mine action organizations
2.	Security forces should not be involved in distribution or beneficiary selection. Distributions must not inadvertently empower or strengthen the position of armed groups or other actors. If they need to be present, brief them beforehand on the process and, if demanded, assign small roles away from beneficiaries & agree not to use weapons/sticks/Tasers as crowd control
3.	Communicate before and during distribution with local officials/leaders and the community about your role, procedures, criteria and shortages to avoid causing conflict and tension between the community and other NGOs working in the areas after you leave
4.	Prioritize human life over assistance: Designate one staff at each site responsible for security decisions and tell staff/volunteers to leave if insecurity or attack during distributions; regularly report incidents
5.	Establish multiple distribution sites to avoid creating crowds and beneficiaries crossing conflict lines or travelling long distances; choose locations with shading, sex-segregated toilets, drinking water and functional health facilities nearby
6.	Locate distribution points away from crowded areas such as markets, hospitals. Do not use a women's center or child-friendly space as distribution points; however, they can be useful sources of information to monitor if distributions are reaching the most vulnerable groups
7.	Establish multiple storage sites to enable quick distributions
8.	Map routes to/from distribution sites to see if safe for women and children and easily traveled by PWD (e.g., pathways/roads that are firm, smooth and not slippery with min. 1.5m width)
9.	Consider house-to-house or tent-to-tent distributions with female staff present or transportation support for people who are unable to leave their homes or have movement limitations (e.g., PWD, elderly, pregnant women, female- and child-headed households)
10.	Ensure items/containers are size, weight and shape that women, children, PWD, etc. can carry

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11. Have separate queues for males & females for both registration & distribution, using guide ropes & signs; have separate Priority Line that helps at-risk groups first: PWDs, sick, elderly, pregnant women, unaccompanied children, parents with infants, female- & child-headed households
12. Allow clear space between people waiting and the stacks of commodities; have clear walking space from distribution point for those who have already received commodities
13. Provide seats for pregnant women, PWD, elderly, etc. who cannot stand queuing for long periods
14. Use clear signs in local language with large font, contrasting colors and symbols/drawings

Staffing and monitoring:

1. Recruit male and female volunteers who are respected in the community and independent of armed groups. Do not employ children (under 18 years old)
2. Employ female staff, including as: registration officers, drivers, distribution officers, tally clerks, monitors and managers. Have female staff talk to and be available for women and girls during the distribution and listen to their concerns. Make distribution staff visible with hats, vests and other visibility materials
3. Train staff on Do No Harm, protection from SEA (PSEA), and child safeguarding; and sign and adhere to code of conduct that respect and uphold the rights of beneficiaries and PSEA
4. Set up communication and complaints mechanisms or desks that are clearly marked; for ex. feedback desks, face-to-face interviews with beneficiaries, including women and children
5. Before, seek info about other service providers in the area & brief staff in case beneficiaries express need for other assistance to which staff can refer them (health, GBV, child prot., legal)
6. Have teams on ground to monitor distributions and respond quickly and fairly to safety concerns including coercion, intimidation, cheating, violence, or exploitation, including actions perpetrated by project staff
7. Have senior staff regularly review complaints and ensure immediate response and investigations to avoid further abuse, including repeated abuse or intimidation of beneficiaries
8. Inform community of their entitlements (i.e., assistance is free and doesn't require favors, access or sex in return) and encourage them to report complaints to trained monitoring staff or to IDP Information Center if they have phones. Print and affix [PSEA posters](#) around distribution site.
9. If taking photos for public information purposes or social media, refer to the [media guidelines](#)

Registration and consultation:

1. Register all adult women in families with multiple wives as main recipients of goods/food, so second wives and their children are not excluded
2. Register children who are heads of household, unaccompanied or separated in their own names
3. Protect beneficiary lists and ensure they have only necessary information to avoid traceability. Apply data sharing agreements for lists if they need to be shared with other humanitarian partners. Password protect soft copies of lists and keep hard copies in locked cabinets
4. Work with local GBV, Child Protection and/or general Protection teams to help ensure equitable access to services (incl. documentation). Avoid targeting GBV survivors or blanket categories of children (e.g., 'separated children' or 'children formerly with armed groups'). Instead, use criteria based on vulnerability to abuse, exploitation and violence
5. Consult beneficiaries, especially women and girls, in sex-segregated focus groups using same-sex facilitators about their specific needs, sufficient quantities and appropriate materials; include items related to women and girls' specific roles, such as cooking (e.g., pots, pans, fuel), child or elder care (e.g., soap, cloth). We recommend that dignity kits are distributed based on family size as larger families have more women and girls where one kit is insufficient (e.g., for sanitary pads): for example, **1 family X 6 members X 51% female = ~3 dignity kits per family on average.**
6. During post-distribution follow-up, understand how women, children and other groups accessed the distributed goods and their feedback on the process and materials/food/needs
7. Choose distribution times, durations & places by consulting with women, men & children and their daily activities (domestic duties, school times); distributions during daylight hours allow safe travel home

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Additional Recommendations for Front-Line and Emergency Distributions:

Note: These distributions assume that recipients reside within the distribution area and are not traveling onward toward mustering points, screening sites, and displacement locations

1. Carefully consider your organization's staffing capacity and resources to do front-line distributions. It is recommended that organizations conduct a protection risk assessment prior to a front-line distribution activity, that a protection officer is embedded within the distribution teams, and that distribution staff are briefed on heat stroke and related symptoms. Ensure that bottled water is available for recipients.
2. Coordinate and communicate with security forces (e.g., local police, military) to ensure access to a distribution location. To the extent possible, avoid the use of military or police escorts to the distribution site or at least coordinate an escort break-off point away from the distribution site so as to ensure the neutrality of the distribution organization.
3. To ensure credibility and continued cooperation, organizations should do exactly as they agreed with security forces during the planning phase of the distribution. Failure to do this will affect all organizations' access and will potentially affect the distribution operations themselves.
4. For security reasons, to the extent possible, only share distribution information with security forces and aid recipients or representatives (e.g., Mukhtar).
5. Conduct distributions in locations that are secure and have sufficient space to perform a hand wand metal detection check of recipients. Ideal sites are indoors (e.g., a warehouse), at least 700m from sniper range, and/or provide building cover so as to avoid mortar attacks, unmanned aerial vehicle (drone) attacks, indirect fire, and open-air sightlines for snipers. Avoid congested roads and military roads.
6. Alternatively, for the safety of aid distribution staff and to shorten the duration of a distribution in any one static location, consider mobile distribution modalities. One successful modality involves community leaders driving small trucks (Bongos) to locations outside of mortar range, collecting a small distribution load, and then returning to an area of distribution with staff members from the distribution organization.
7. Conduct distributions directly to recipients off the back of a supply truck only if the distribution location is indoors and/or provides building cover, and if distribution lines are tightly managed. While this modality minimizes time on the ground, if it is not done correctly, it can be a target for attack, can endanger recipients and aid workers due to overcrowding, can impede access to aid for women, children and persons with specific needs, and is not a dignified modality of distribution.

When a child is found alone at a distribution site: Do not immediately remove the child. Ask the child who they are with and where this person may be. Consider that girls may prefer speaking to female staff or that the child may feel uncomfortable speaking to you if the child thinks those around her/him are risks or threats. Ask people around the child if they know anything about the child and if the child may be separated from family or unaccompanied, as the parents may return shortly. For babies and young children who do not know their names and places of origin or children with disabilities, ask adults and older children around them whether they know the child or their family and where the group came from, before moving the child from the area (unless it is unsafe to keep a child there). If confirmed the child is alone, immediately contact a Child Protection actor.

Video by Global Shelter Cluster on distributions, with Arabic subtitles: <https://youtu.be/9kdOBNmdQnw>

This guidance is based and built on partners' experience in Iraq and the following resources:

- Child Protection Working Group. *Minimum Standards for Child Protection in Humanitarian Action* (2012), pg. 208 - 213. https://www.unicef.org/iran/Minimum_standards_for_child_protection_in_humanitarian_action.pdf
- Food Security Cluster - Whole of Syria Jordan hub. *Mainstreaming Protection in Food Security Sector* (2016). <http://fscluster.org/programme-quality-working-group/document/protection-mainstreaming-checklist>.
- Global Shelter Cluster. *Good Shelter Programming: Tools to Reduce the Risk of GBV in Shelter Programmes* (2016). http://sheltercluster.org/sites/default/files/docs/gbvtoolkit-trial_edition-web_version.pdf.
- Inter-Agency Standing Committee (IASC). *Guidelines for Integrating Gender-Based Violence Interventions in Humanitarian Action: Reducing risk, promoting resilience and aiding recovery* (2015). www.gbvguidelines.org.
- Global Protection Cluster. *Shelter Programs and FSL: Tips for Protection Mainstreaming* (2014). <http://www.globalprotectioncluster.org/en/areas-of-responsibility/protection-mainstreaming.html>.