

“WHEN ONLY CERTAIN VOICES ARE HEARD, PROTECTION BECOMES PARTIAL”

UNLOCKING PROTECTION THROUGH **GENDER-RESPONSIVE** COMMUNITY-BASED PROTECTION



Photo by Dmytro Vasyliiev

KEY FINDINGS

Across **Mali, Somalia, Ukraine** and **Yemen**, CIVIC’s research shows that community-based protection mechanisms that exclude or marginalise women, youth and other groups produce weaker protection outcomes for everyone. Inclusive protection is not a gender equality add-on. It is a **protection effectiveness imperative**.

134

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WHY GENDER-RESPONSIVE CBP MATTERS

Community-based protection (CBP) efforts can mirror the inequalities of the societies in which they operate. When protection forums are dominated by men, or when women’s concerns are deprioritized or siloed as “women’s issues,” protection becomes partial — not for lack of intention, but for lack of diverse perspective.

When women participate meaningfully in CBP mechanisms, communities identify more risks, reach more survivors, strengthen early warning networks and develop more effective responses. The evidence is specific, not abstract.

“**Protection cannot be gender-blind. If it is, then half the population remains unprotected.**”

National NGO official, Somalia

➤ SOMALIA



Women CBP actors were the first to identify that women-headed households in Horseed IDP camp were being evicted at three times the rate of others because they lacked male relatives to negotiate with landlords. Their documentation led to government action and influenced national eviction guidelines.

➤ UKRAINE



Women in community protection groups identified that emergency shelters were not stocked for women’s or children’s needs — no hygiene supplies, no baby equipment, no child-friendly spaces. Their intervention changed this.

READ THE REPORT



GENDER-RESPONSIVE DOES NOT MEAN WOMEN ONLY

This research challenges the assumption that gender-responsive protection means prioritizing women over men. In several contexts, men face acute and disproportionate risks that effective CBP must also address.

60%

Of adult civilian casualties in Ukraine are men — shaped by mobility norms, not weapons targeting.

MALI & SOMALIA

Young men face arbitrary detention, forced recruitment and extrajudicial killing based on their profile as males of combatant age.

When men are detained, killed or recruited, women are often left as sole heads of households, adding layers of vulnerability to already precarious situations. Gender-responsive protection means understanding how conflict harms women, men, girls and boys differently, and designing responses that address all of these realities together.

➤ SOMALIA



Women and men in CIVIC-supported community protection groups collaborated to stop militia harassment at water points in an IDP camp. Women built trust with survivors; men accompanied them to the police. Within two weeks, the harassment stopped. Neither could have achieved this alone.



Photo by Arioua Delafontaine/Euro Queen Union



Photo by saved Foundation

➤ YEMEN



Women in CIVIC-supported community protection groups experienced harassment and extortion at military checkpoints. They reported their concerns to female CPG members, who enlisted male colleagues to engage military officials directly. Together, they successfully advocated for the deployment of women officers at checkpoints and the establishment of women-only spaces for searches. Neither the women nor the men could have achieved this without the other.

INTERSECTIONALITY: GENDER IS NOT THE ONLY BARRIER

Gender shapes protection risk, but it does not operate alone. Age, disability, displacement status, clan or ethnic identity and economic status compound and interact to determine who is most excluded from protection forums and most exposed to harm.

In Somalia, a CBP activist put it plainly: “A young woman from a minority clan in an IDP camp faces far more barriers than an older man from a dominant clan living in the centre of town.” In Ukraine, veteran status, disability and gender interact to shape both authority and vulnerability. In Mali and Yemen, girls’ lower rates of literacy and education compound their exclusion from protection forums.

Protection mechanisms that address only one dimension of exclusion risk reproducing others. Effective CBP must account for the full range of intersecting identities — not just gender in isolation.

INCLUSION DOES NOT HAPPEN BY ITSELF

Community-based protection mechanisms often replicate the inequalities of the societies in which they operate. Women are frequently under-represented in leadership roles, sidelined in mixed-gender forums, or confined to speaking only about issues deemed “women’s issues.” Youth, displaced persons and persons with disabilities face similar barriers.

“The growing economic role of women from conflict has not resulted in inclusion in decision-making forums. Their contributions remain undervalued in formal leadership and governance spaces.”

NGO official, Yemen

Effective CBP requires deliberate action: setting participation thresholds, establishing women-only spaces where communities want them, removing practical barriers like transport and caregiving, and training both community actors and security forces on gender. Inclusion is not simply about who is present in the room — it is about whose perspectives shape protection priorities and responses.



Photo by: Hana Haza'a/UN Photo

LOCAL SOLUTION NEEDS INSTITUTIONAL SUPPORT

Community protection actors across all four contexts were clear: local successes rarely scale or endure without institutional support, political will and sustained funding. Women’s advocacy in Somalia changed national eviction guidelines — but comparable efforts in Yemen stalled because women remain excluded from formal decision-making at the national level.

Gender-responsive CBP is therefore not only a local participation issue. It requires donors to fund flexibly and long-term, governments to close legislative gaps, and security actors to engage women as legitimate interlocutors — not just as beneficiaries. Community-led solutions can only become lasting protection outcomes when they are connected to the institutions that hold power.