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INTERNAL PROTECTION MANUAL

EHRDC

1 JANUARY 2022

1. INTRODUCTION/BACKGROUND

As HRDs are on the frontline defending other people's rights, they often find themselves facing difficult situations such as hostile work environment, intimidation, trumped-up charges, arrest and detention, psychosocial challenges, smear campaigns, unpredictable political environment, and restrictive laws. Sometimes these risks are unavoidable; other times, they are the result of a lack of awareness of digital and physical security.

According to the 1989, United Nations Declaration on Human Rights, Defenders of human rights defenders are "individuals, groups and associations contributing to the effective elimination of all violations of human rights and fundamental freedoms of people and individuals." Human rights defenders seek the promotion and protection of all human rights for everyone and persistently hold on to human rights principles even if they operate inconvenient situations. The human rights defenders also include civil society actors who may not openly claim to be human rights defenders, such as journalists' environmental activists, development, and human rights actors. In particular, women, human right defenders (WHRDs) are all women and girls working on women rights issue and people of all genders who work to promote gender equality. Though the Declaration on Human Rights Defenders stresses that the state is primarily responsible for protecting human rights defenders, realities show that some states have been a perpetrator of violence's. HRDs face threatened by both state and non-state actors. Hence, an independent body who can provide protection for HRDs is crucial. Accordingly, the Centre works to ensure safety, security, and wellbeing of Human Rights Defenders (HRDs) and engages with HRDs to enhance their capacity in physical and digital security and risk management and providing protection. The protection the centre provides can be generally divided in to two major categories, preventive and responsive. Responsive/Reactive is a security intervention that is important when HRDs are under direct threats. This manual mainly deals with reactive protection mechanisms when HRDs are at risk. It deals with each protection cycle step by step and provides guidance of how protection can be provided to HRDS.

2. Protection Mechanisms

■ Preventive measures-core mechanisms- Prevention is an essential act in human rights work. Something preventable might end up messing up a lot and bring unnecessary costs. Hence, it is vital to work on preventive methods such as capacity building training and technical support to HRDS and H.R. organizations.

■ Responsive/Reactive mechanisms- this is emergency protection when threats and risks on HRDS materialize, or there is a high probability that it will materialize. A responsive mechanism is all about a prompt response to minimize the damage that a certain security issue brings. Risks and threats can materialize in different ways, so the responsive mechanism depends on the type of each problem. The following are emergency responses that an HRD can get.

- Short term relocation: an HRD might face a risk of being illegally detained, or there might be situations where the physical safety of an HRD is at stake. So, depending on the specific circumstance, a short-term relocation of the HRD to a safer place is one of the responses. Depending on the specificities and capacity, this includes both internal relocation and external relocation.

- Emergency grant/ personal/ family: emergency grant is provided for an HRD who faces financial difficulty as a result of their human rights work. For instance, if a human rights organization is closed due to the human rights advocacy or activities they do, this will leave the staff with a financial problem. Or suppose an individual human rights defender is fired or suspended from her/his work due to the human rights activities one performs. In that case, this is also a case where the need for an emergency grant necessitates. In some cases, emergency grants can also be provided for HRDs in the case of temporary relocations.

- Medical support: HRDs face detention and are usually exposed to different health risks. In worst cases, they might face physical attacks; hence, medical support can be provided if an HRD needs medical attention due to such incidents.

- Legal aid: HRDs face harassment, detention, torture, defamation, suspension from their employment, denial of freedom of movement and difficulty in obtaining legal recognition for their associations. Hence, legal aid or, in some cases, hiring advocates to help on the legal issue can be an emergency response.

- Psychological support: HRDs work in stressful environments as they attend to the human rights of people. In addition, the work-related risks also give them traumatic

experiences. In this case, it is important to support HRDs with relevant Psychological support.
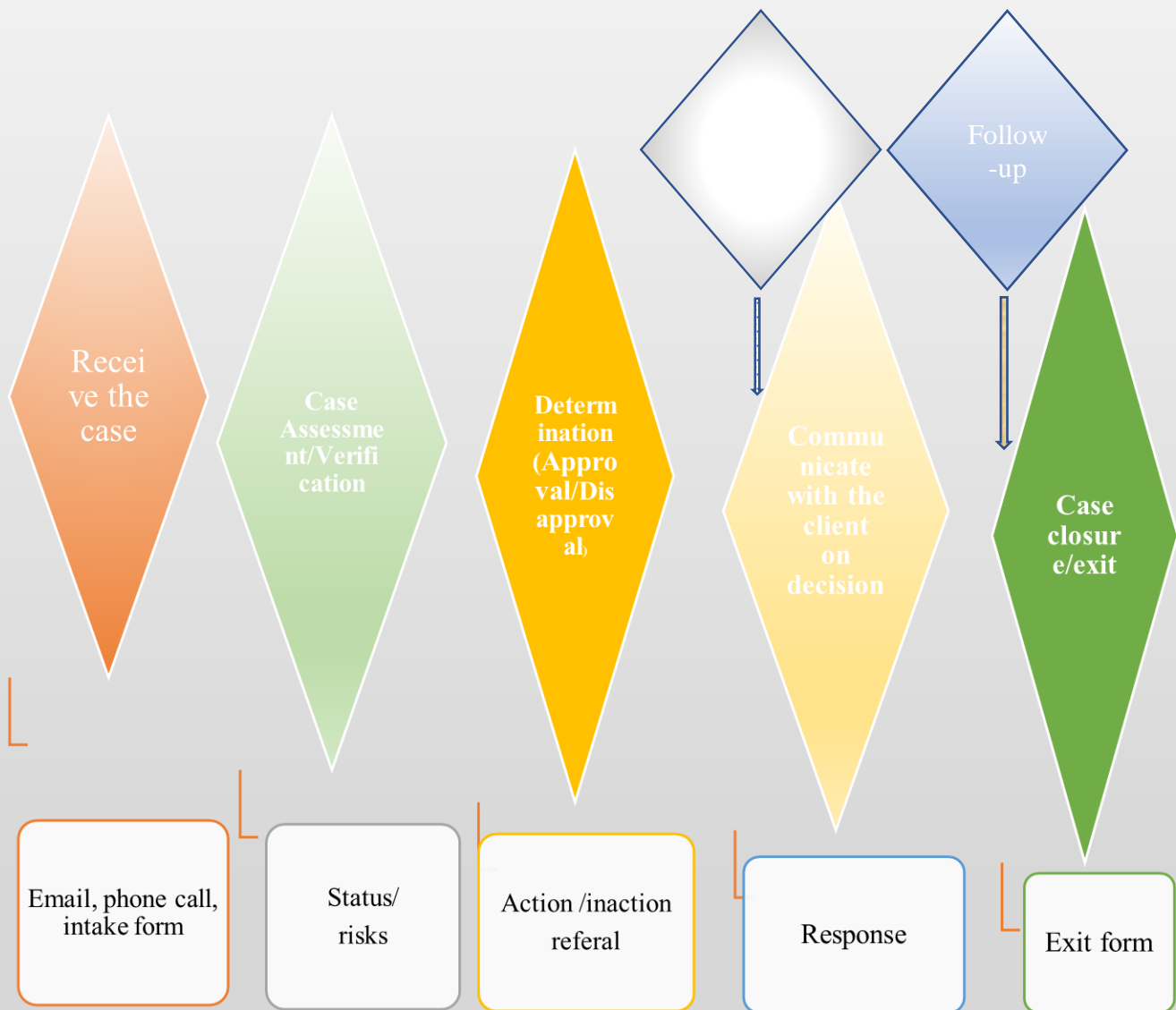
3. Principles of protection

- TIMELY COMMUNICATION : in protection work, the promptness of our réponses and communication with an HDR is vital. A timely response can save an HRD, just as a late response might put an HRD at risk.

- CLEAR AND CONCISE COMMUNICATION : It is important to make sure that our communication with HRDs is clear and concise. An information gap might give the wrong impression and will lead to wrong expectations from HRDs.

- SECURITY AND SAFETY-BASED INTERVENTION: any kind of protection intervention needs to put security and safety first. This includes both the safety and security of the HRD and the protection officer in charge of the case.

- DO NO HARM! Our protection work should not in any way result in further harm to HRDs and others involved.

- PRIVACY: Do not disclose information on applicants and beneficiaries to third parties.

- DIVERSITY AND INCLUSION: HRD needs and characteristics are diverse. We should address their needs based on an open mind.

- INTEGRITY: Operate with integrity. Respect others and approach things in a fair way and with objectivity.

- COMMITMENT AND PROFESSIONALISM: Communicate with HRDs with professionalism. Show your commitment to assessing the applicant's situation in the best way possible. Choose the right words when you are to communicate perhaps negative news to HRDs.

- HOSPITALITY: Welcome HRDs and make them comfortable by creating a safe space and making them feel in a way that makes them feel understood and valued.

- SENSITIVITY – GENDER AND CULTURE in particular: Approach things with a sensitive lens, especially taking into account gender and culture.

- PERATE IN A HOLISTIC AND COLLABORATIVE WAY: Thrive to provide support in a holistic way by making sure that psycho-social and wellbeing elements, mentorship etc., are all taken into account.

- DO NO HARM: Whatever actions we take on, we should never put the HRD at further risk.

- **NON-DISCRIMINATION:** Operating with equality and equity by treating all applicants and beneficiaries in an equal way.
- **DIPLOMACY:** whether loud or soft, operate with diplomacy based on understanding the specific context.
- **HUMANITY:** Treating applicants in a human way, not like machines.

4. Protection Department at EHRDC

The EHRDC has a protection department, which in addition to employing the preventive protection mechanisms such as capacity buildings and technical support for HRDs, handles cases of HRDs who are already at risk. The protection department deals with case management, including receiving, assessing, coordinating, analyzing, referring and providing services. The protection officer in charge of a protection request handles the whole process in the protection cycle.

5. Protection Cycle

Receive the case	Case Assessment/Verification	Determination (Approval/Disapproval)	Communicate with the client on decision	Follow-up	Case closure/exit
Email, phone call, intake form	Status/ risks	Action /inaction referal	Response		Exit form

5.1.   Receiving case (to be completed within 24 hours)

A case can be received in different ways at the HRDs convenience. The situation of the HRD determines how they can communicate their cases with the protection team. So, varied methods should be set. A case can be received through a phone call, email, and online form or with a physical interview with the HRD. Yet intake form is mandatory, and it should include all information about the case.

INTAKE FORM: An intake form is a formal form that contains information needed from a protection applicant as part of a request assessment which is then utilized to verify and assess the request. An intake form shall include the following:

- Name of the applicant and the organization working with.
- Biodata of the applicant
- Details about the human rights work undertaken
- Details about threats received supported by evidence – where available (photos, medical documents, Police statement…)
- Time and Location where the incident took place
- Type of intervention requested
- References to verify the information provided (Contacts of National and International H.R.s organizations)
- Support received from other organizations if any
- Recommendation letter from other HRD or H.R. organizations (where applicable)

COMMUNICATION/SAFETY: all protection requests shall be communicated in the most secure way, and protection officers need to follow all security protocols. The protection officer has to receive protection requests through **protection email, a phone that is secured and/or an online system well secured.** In addition, protection officers should at all times put in place all physical and digital security measures to protect the HRD at risk and the organization.

Physical security and Digital Security: communication with HRDs at risk shall be done in a safe and secure place taking into consideration the status of HRD, and in case of digital communication, the use of secure internet shall be made sure and safer applications should be used for all communication, especially HRDs protection request.

5.2. Case Verification/Assessment (48-72 hours)

Assessment Criteria:

The criterion for eligibility is examined based on the contextualized and universal definition of an HRD. This enables the extension of protection to individual HRDs or those experiencing harm in the course of their work in a Human Rights organization. The assessment should majorly assess 2 major issues

1. Is the individual an HRD? (Assessment based on the DECLARTION ON HUMAN RIGHT DEFENDERS)

2. Did the HRD face risks in the course of current human rights work or previous one?

Also, it is important to analyse the intake form and answer the 5W questions regarding what, how, why, when and where the security incident happened.

Protection Committee:

Three types of committee can be utilized for assessment and verification of protection request

1. EHRDC protection committee: in case of common protection cases and when enough information is available protection officers can analyse the protection request and verify the issue.

2. Urgent protection committee: urgent protection committee can be set up by the protection officer in charge based on a specific case which needs special focus. It can be composed of HRDs who know the local context and trusted CSOs who can provide information.

3. Regular protection committee: in this case identified HRDs and CSOs can be permanent members of a regular protection committee. Regular protection committee with the protection officer in charge makes verification of the cases presented for support.

   What could go wrong in case assessment?

   - Difficulty in the determination of HRD status due to mixed information
   - Fabricated cases
   - Pressure as the nature of protection requests usually is urgent
   - Hight expectation from HRDs
   - HRDs seeking double support

5.3. Determination (within 24 hours)

Where the status of the HRD has been verified as such, the next step is to decide on action/inaction/referral of the case.

ACTION: once the team has verified the case, it is important to determine what type of support to be provided and how. Intake forms usually ask if the HRD has specific needs for support; however, not every case can be dealt with as per the request of the HRD, and sometimes the suggestion of the protection officer might be the better option. Hence, the type of support, which can be relocation support, emergency grant, psychological support, legal aid, medical support and so on, is to be determined at this stage based on the assessment of the case, the need of the HRD and suggestion of the protection officer.

Consideration of vulnerabilities: In the determination of the type and level of support provided, consideration should be given to the special needs of vulnerable groups such as women, the disabled, the elderly and those with intersectional vulnerabilities.

INACTION: after the assessment of the case, the protection team might decide that the case can not be entertained by the department. This can be due to the capacity and scope of the centre or the ineligibility of the person who made the protection request. The person might not qualify to be an HRD, or the presented security threat might not qualify as such.

REFERRAL: some protection requests might not fit into the protection scope of the centre yet might fit into mandates to other CSOs or organizations. Hence, those cases should be referred to the relevant body and followed up.

N.B. Each decision should be approved by the Executive director of the centre.

What could go wrong in case determination?

- Challenge to determine cases because of changing trends in the threats and strategies of attack on HRDs
- Delayed and limited resources
- HRDs approaching donors directly. By-passing protection services providers
- Denying deserving cases and vice-versa
- Loss of credibility/legitimacy of the program

5.4. Documentation

In each case of action/inaction/referral, a clear explanation should be provided, and a minute of discussion should be kept. s

Assessment/ verification: results of the assessment, including the criteria of assessment, should be kept. The type of evidence reviewed and individuals involved in the assessment should be recorded.

Action: the type of action, the reason for action and notes for further action should be duly compiled and kept. In case of each support, the HRD should sign a clear contract setting the terms and conditions of the support. And that should be documented as part of the case.

Inaction: a reason for inaction, including an area of concern, should be recorded.

Referral: referral records should be kept, including when those cases are secondarily referred to other organizations.

5.5. Communication (Immediately)

Communication regarding any of the decisions above should be clear. If support is provided, the extent of support and terms to the support should be communicated clearly. Similarly, if the case is declined, it is equally important to clearly communicate the reason for the denial, including by referring to the assessment of criteria. Also, if the case is referred, the applicant should be informed of the reason and the contact information of the organization they are referred to.

What could go wrong during communication?

- Being misunderstood
- Misquoting and counteraccusations

5.6. Intervention/Follow-up

Once the decision has been communicated with the applicant, the case should be followed up depending on the decision. If a decision has been made to support the HRD, the process of support should be followed up depending on the type of support.

Short term relocation: if a decision has been made to relocate the HRD. The condition of the HRD should be followed up until safety is ensured.

Emergency grant: if for different reasons, an emergency grant is provided for the HRD, financial status should be followed up when an important financial report can be asked from the HRD.

Legal aid: if legal aid is provided or if an advocate is hired for an HRD, the case should be followed and documented.

Medical support: if medical support is provided for an HRD either by paying hospital bills or providing money, the health status of the HRD should be followed and documented.

Psychological support: if psychological support is provided either by staff or experts, the status of the HRD should be similarly followed up and documented.

What could go wrong during intervention and follow-up?

- ■ Dependency
- ■ Lack of sustainability

5.7.   Case closure

This is where the whole process of the protection cycle ends. By this stage, the decision that has been made is already put to practice. Hence, a narration of the process of support until up-to-date status should be documented, and the case should be closed by indicating the result of the support provided. When important exit form should be filled by the HRD.