

**Differential effects of demographic characteristics of women affected by crisis on protection risk in emergencies – Findings from South Kivu Province of the Democratic Republic of Congo**

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**INTRODUCTION**

DRC is one of the countries prone to both natural and manmade disasters. There seems to be an agreement among various humanitarian actors that most humanitarian crises across the globe result from lack of disasters preparedness and those predominantly affected are poor people, especially women and children.

The humanitarian situation in the DRC is one of the most complicated in the world due to a combination of conflicts, disease outbreaks, persistent underdevelopment, and natural disasters. 19.6 million people were in need of protection and humanitarian aid in 2021 with 3.6 million kids suffering from severe malnutrition. Rising insecurity and natural catastrophes severely impacted people's ability to get and cultivate food. Outbreak of diseases and epidemics including COVID-19, cholera, measles, and the Ebola Virus Disease (EVD) worsened the problem. In the midst of COVID 19 in 2020, the Congolese government and humanitarian organizations worked together to contain two Ebola outbreaks, including the deadliest the nation had ever seen, which claimed more than 2,200 lives (OCHA, 2021).

It is important to note that the improvement of safety, well-being differential effects of demographic characteristics of women affected by crisis on protection risk in emergencies – Findings from South Kivu Province of the Democratic Republic of Congo and dignity for crisis-affected populations is critical in humanitarian assistance. This

entails actively putting fundamental protection obligations and principles to use in all facets of humanitarian action. According to PHPC (2012), the protection obligations and principles include i) don no harm ii) non-discrimination iii) contextualisation of the identification of the most vulnerable and their unique and specific needs paying attention to age, gender, disability, and other relevant aspects of diversity iv) safe and respectable access to essential services v) community participation, engagement and empowerment and iv) identifying and leveraging on existing positive community protection strategies/building local capabilities. In order to ensure the implementation of fundamental protection principles and obligations to humanitarian work across all sectors, protection is not just what is done but also how it is done.

Among the protection-related concerns that surface in emergencies are:

1. Child protection concerns (eg identifying and assisting separated and unaccompanied children)
2. Gender-based violence
3. Sexual exploitation and abuse
4. Protection of people with disabilities
5. Protection of people displaced by disaster

In responding to protection and humanitarian issues, persons of concern and their communities and groups are not always homogeneous due to demographic and geographical differences and context. Every decision on humanitarian assistance should consider the demographic characteristic of affected people as the basic element. Humanitarian assistance that complies with humanitarian principles should consider demographic characteristics of beneficiaries especially as one of the most contributing

factors in humanitarian programming and response. It is therefore important to understand their socio-economic composition to assess the nature and quality of their involvement at all levels (Schmidt et al, 1996). The demographic characteristics provide insights into the categories of persons of concern who are provided with timely information to make informed decisions on protection programming.

## **MOTIVATION AND METHODOLOGY**

This paper, therefore, draws attention and further understanding of the differential effects of demographic characteristics of women affected by crisis on their exposure to protection risk in emergencies in the South Kivu Province of the DRC. The paper is built on a conceptual model of demographic characteristics and women protection which establishes the relationship between the demographic characteristics of women and their exposure to protection risks. It also clearly defines the various demographic characteristics and types of protection risk within the area under study and their relationship.

The paper assesses how the demographic characteristics of women affected by crisis influence their risk exposure. It provides a practical definition of demographic characteristics of women affected by crisis as well as explaining protection risk of women in emergencies. It also assesses the differential effects of demographic characteristics of women affected by crisis on protection risks

The findings will enable humanitarian actors including communities to appreciate the influence of demographic characteristics of women affected by crisis on their exposure to protection risks. This will in effect provide insights in designing humanitarian

and protection programming that promote successful protection risk reduction strategies for women affected by crisis.

A systematic literature review of definitions of demographic characteristics of women, protection risks, and protection issues as it relates to women was undertaken. Primary information was also collected from 111 people in the Kabare and Fizi Territories of the DRC based on the conceptual framework of demographic characteristics of women and women protection risks modeled for this paper. The primary sources included the outcome of structured interviews with 4 relevant agencies, 77 representatives of women's groups, 16 community leaders, 12 representatives of youth groups, and 2 local authorities. Since the paper focused on the demographic characteristics of women and women protection risks, a deliberate attempt was made to get more female responses to provide substantial evidence. About 72% of respondents interviewed were female.

The Kabare Territory is a rural territory located in the far eastern Congo on the western shores of Lake Kivu. Fizi is also a territory of 22,000 km<sup>2</sup>, located in the South of South Kivu Province in the East of the Democratic Republic of Congo. It is an area with 9 large forest areas where the population lives mainly from agriculture and fishing. A realistic assessment of the current situation in the two territories is that while Kabare has achieved stability since 2003, there is still chronic violence, outbursts of acute violence, and a risk of more systematic and far-reaching conflict in the Fizi area. Table 1 indicates the gender dimension of respondents by territory.

Table 1: Gender dimension of respondents by territory

Territory	Male	%	Female	%	Total	%

South Kivu	31	28	80	72	111	100
Kabare	14	28	36	72	50	100
Fizi	17	28	44	72	61	100

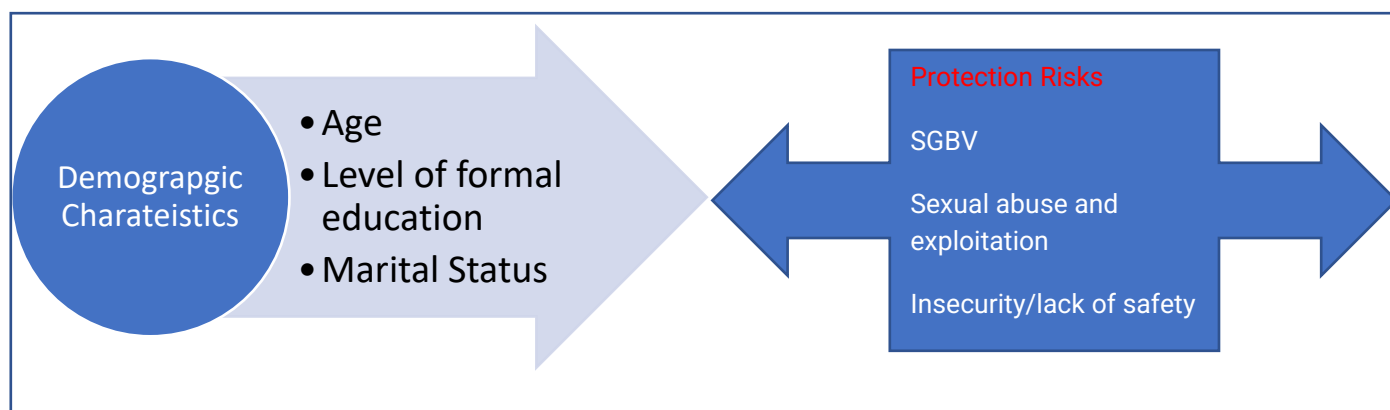
Source: Field data, 2020

This paper underscores the importance of understanding the gender dimensions of persons affected by crisis. In protracted situations, women assume new roles as heads of their households and their ability to develop coping strategies depends largely on their demographic characteristics and the geographic setting in which they live (Marnie, 2013). Descriptive analytical method was employed to analyze information collected to determine the appropriateness of demographic characteristics of women in influencing their exposure to protection risks. Some analyses were also carried out using linear regression in Stata version 11.

**WOMEN DEMOGRAPHIC CHARACTERISTIC AND PROTECTION MODEL**

The conceptual model depicts the demographic characteristics of women and their exposure to protection risks as shown in figure 1. The demographic characteristics of women in terms of age, level of formal education, and marital status to a greater extent moderate women's exposure to protection risks. The protection risks include SGBV, Sexual Abuse, and Insecurity/lack of safety. Colquitt and Zapata-Phelan (2007) argue that the contribution of a researcher in theory building may be at varying levels. An unexplored and unexplained construct or relationship, when developed through intuition and strengthened by experience can be a real contribution to knowledge.

Figure 1: Conceptual model of women demographic characteristics and protection



Source: Field data (2020)

## CONCEPTUAL DEFINITIONS

The paper reviewed the experiences of donors, INGOs, community members, and local actors on the understanding of protection and women protection in emergencies. It also reviewed the demographic characteristics of women affected by crisis. The dichotomy between the two has to do with how they relate in terms of exposure to protection risks.

## PROTECTION

Protection as an operational term includes all actions and inactions taken to ensure that a person's rights are fully upheld in accordance with human rights legislation, international humanitarian law (which is applicable in armed conflict), and refugee law. It is a process that ensures the promotion, respect and fulfilment of the human rights of persons regardless of race, age, sexual orientation and religion. States have the primary duty to protect those under their control. National authorities are in charge of offering aid and protection to individuals impacted in cases of man made and natural catastrophes. Humanitarian groups may in the event that national authorities or other conflict parties

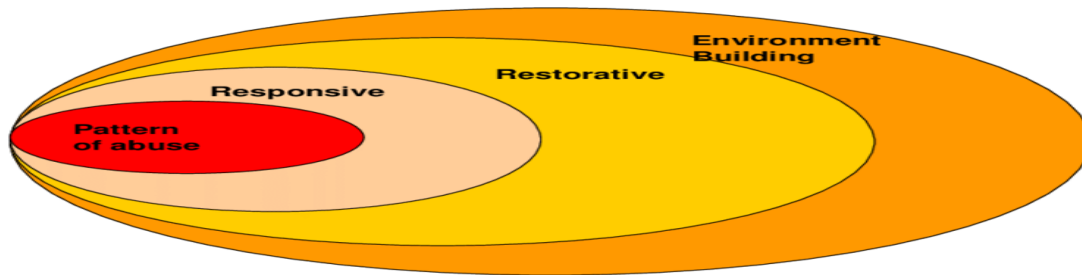
are unable or unwilling to fulfill these commitments, such as providing access to food, healthcare, and other essential services with the parties' consent assist the affected population. Additionally, such organizations may undertake advocacy to push the rights of the population and encourage the first duty-bearers to satisfy their obligations. Some humanitarian actors like the UNHCR have a selected "protection mandate" (OCHA, 2007).

Protection problems can be manifested in the form of discrimination, violence, abuse, exploitation, deliberate deprivation, or neglect of vulnerable individuals/groups within the affected population. Some of these problems may have existed within the community before the disaster and could increase with the shock and stress of the disaster. Others may arise as a consequence of how humanitarian assistance and emergency relief activities are designed and delivered (eg inappropriate, inaccessible, or unfair distributions). When humanitarian actors fail to engage with communities in identifying threats, vulnerabilities, and capacities and fail to research the risks related to their actions, harm may ultimately be caused. Any humanitarian action that is "protection-blind" can result in further harm, reinforce existing inequality and exclusion (PHPC, 2012).

An effective humanitarian response to reduce protection risk must be shaped and framed based on an analysis of threats and risks persons affected by crisis face. Humanitarian actors must take appropriate steps to attenuate threats and risks and make sure that their activities do not result in or perpetuate discrimination, abuse, neglect, and violence. The way assistance is delivered is a vital element of humanitarian programming and protection. In effect, food distribution points must not be sited in areas where women are exposed to protection risks (Sphere, 2018).

Where people are exposed to violence, coercion, and deprivation of basic goods and services during a humanitarian crisis, humanitarian organizations seek to reduce their vulnerability by responsive, restorative, and building environment actions as shown in figure 2.

Figure: 2 Egg Protection Model



Source: Susanne (2008)

- Undertaking responsive actions that aim to alleviate the immediate effects of violence and abuse, put a stop to its recurrence.
- Undertaking remedial action to make sure the supply of basic needs, restore dignity and ensure well-being and recovery through assistance and rehabilitation.
- Undertaking environment-building action that aims to make a social, cultural, institutional, and legal environment conducive to the respect for rights. Protection is often a significant concern in humanitarian crises especially in situations of conflict, violence and natural disasters.

## **WOMEN PROTECTION IN EMERGENCIES**

According to UN (2018), sexual violence is used as a tactic of war, terrorism, torture, and repression, including the targeting of victims based on their actual or perceived ethnic, religious, political, or clan affiliation. In many cases, the intent and



impact of such violence were to forcibly displace and disperse the targeted community, with corrosive effects on social cohesion. That alarming trend is common to a spread of otherwise diverse conflicts examined herein, including within the Central African Republic, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Iraq, Mali, Myanmar, Nigeria, Somalia, and South Sudan. In those cases, to varying degrees, the strategic nature of sexual violence was evident within the selective targeting of victims from specific ethnic, religious, or political groups, mirroring the fault lines of the broader conflict or crisis and, in some cases, within the explicit enactment of the nationalist or extremist ideologies espoused by the perpetrators.

Women, separated from their husbands by the conflict, find themselves being the breadwinners for their families, while also completing other necessary tasks, like fetching water and firewood, preparing food, and raising children. Many armed groups and militias prefer soft civilian targets to other armed men. To ensure their safety during displacement, women are forced to walk long distances on foot-many whilst pregnant or nursing a baby. Women and girls are more exposed to suffer sexual violence although there are cases of male victims. Sexual violence often takes extreme forms and regularly damages both the reproductive organs and therefore the excretory system, resulting in urinary and/or faecal incontinence. It is often perpetrated by armed men and lots of rapes involve numerous assailants with the victims sometimes dying from their injuries.

Figure 3: Violation and Response Mechanisms



Source: Susanne (2008)

Figure 3 shows how violations play out and respective preventive and response mechanisms. According to the UN (2018), since some rapists believe that raping an old woman absorbs her wisdom or that the person who rapes a baby purifies himself or rids himself of disease, perpetrators target age from some months to 80 years old. In the DRC, if a person knows his wife or partner has been raped, he will normally reject her. Her family will often also reject her. This suggests that even when treatment is available, many rape survivors hesitate to access it for fear of becoming social outcasts.

UNFPA (2019) observed that globally, humanitarian crises have triggered and exacerbated women protection issues like Gender-based Violence (GBV). In the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), humanitarian actors assist approximately 30,000 survivors per year. Reported cases include rape, sexual slavery, trafficking, forced/early marriage, intimate partner violence, and sexual exploitation and abuse. Abuse of power and gender inequalities further exacerbate the vulnerability of women and girls all forms of violence. As late as in 2019, the DRC continues to experience conflict, food insecurity, and epidemics, including an Ebola outbreak that started in August 2018. Consequently, people are obliged to escape their homes in search of food, health, and protection even if they are not forced by conflicts. Women and children among displaced and host communities are those most exposed to life-threatening forms of gender-based violence

(GBV). Though sexual violence is the most reported form of protection risks, many survivors are afraid to report rape or violence due to stigma and the fear of reprisal from perpetrators. The democratic transition is creating hope for the stabilization of the country despite the intense humanitarian crisis.

## **DEMOGRAPHIC CHARACTERISTICS**

Demographic characteristics are characteristics that describe differences in a society or structure based gender, age, occupation, level of education, religion, ethnicity, geographical location, class, and various other aspects of the population (Adam, 2021). It avoids stereotyping by generalizing a couple of group of individuals into one group. It also avoids a situation of taking one characteristic of a group or person and using that to define the what that person or group is. Avoiding stereotyping and totalizing are important because you can not assume everything about a person or group with only one demographic characteristic. Two or three characteristics can be important. The age of a person is important in how he or she consider investing his or her money, but so will the socio-economic level, career or profession, and even where the person lives. It is important to also note that demographic characteristics are created equal, and not all of them are important in every situation.

Demographic characteristics help to understand the conditions of persons affected by crisis. Examining and linking these characteristics to other variables of protection gives a really informative analysis. It can explain size, distribution, structure, and alter in population. Demographic characteristics relate to one another and each characteristic like age, legal status, and level of education may be a causal relationship that can not be separated.

## ***DIFFERENTIAL EFFECTS OF DEMOGRAPHIC CHARACTERISTICS OF WOMEN ON PROTECTION RISKS OF WOMEN IN EMERGENCIES.***

This section looks at the various effects of demographic characteristics of women on protection risk. The demographic characteristics under consideration include age, level of education, and marital status of women. The protection risk investigated based on the characteristics of women is SGBV, Sexual Abuse, and Safety.

### **LEVEL OF EDUCATION OF WOMEN AND PROTECTION RISK**

Regression results in table 2 reveal that women with basic and secondary school levels of education are not being exposed to gender-based violence at a probability of 54.3% at an insignificant level. However, this category of women has probabilities of 32.8% and 15.6% of being exposed to sexual abuse and insecurity at a 10% significance level. In effect, their level of education is not absolving them from being exposed to sexual abuse and insecurity. Further interactions with respondents reveal that women fall into the hands of armed groups during displacements and are used as sexual commodities. They are also forced to employ negative coping mechanisms to maintain their status as literates through commercial sex. For women with no formal education, they are exposed to gender-based violence, sexual abuse, and insecurity at probabilities of 34.6%, 57.4%, and 26.7%. This exposure is at significant levels with both gender-based violence and safety being 10% significance level and sexual abuse being 5% significance level. There is therefore enough evidence to say that these relationships exist. In effect, exposure to protection risks is positively correlated with no formal education. With no formal education, women are not able to critically analyze safe spots to avoid being sexually abused. No formal education also limits their opportunities to access alternative livelihood

sources to cater for themselves and their families during displacement. This increases their vulnerability to such protection risks.

Table 2: Regression Results on demographic characteristics of women and protection risks

demographic characteristics of women	Protection Risks		
	Gender-based violence	Sexual abuse	Safety
Age [16–25]	–0.2429 (0.220)	–0.6450** (0.011)	–0.2323 (0.434)
Age [26–30]	–0.4720** (0.016)	–0.6301*** (0.001)	–0.3542** (0.041)
Age [31–55]	0.7251*** (0.001)	0.8305*** (0.001)	–0.7333*** (0.002)
Education [Basic and secondary]	–0.5431 (0.321)	0.3275* (0.060)	0.1564* (0.088)
No education	0.3463* (0.071)	0.5743** (0.012)	0.2671* (0.089)
Married	0.2260	0.1325**	0.7232***

	(0.231)	(0.013)	(0.001)
Divorced and widow/widower	0.6500*** (0.000)	0.5421*** (0.002)	0.3126*** (0.000)
Diagnostics			
Number of observations	111	111	111
LR $\chi^2$	97.45	143.06	264.13
Prob > $\chi^2$	0.0000	0.0000	0.0000
Pseudo $R^2$	0.5251	0.6187	0.7875
Log likelihood	-103.513	-181.356	-160.121

Notes: \*, \*\* and \*\*\* respectively denotes significance at 10%, 5% and 1%. Values parenthesis ( ) are the  $p$ -values respectively. Control groups: Age is above 55 years; education is those above secondary level; marital status is single; cash transfer is those either conditional or unconditional; cash transfer threshold is between US\$10 – US\$40; adequacy is not adequate; payment method is electronic.

### **MARITAL STATUS OF WOMEN AND PROTECTION RISK**

Regression analysis was also conducted on those married and divorced and widow/widower to ascertain how marital status influences exposure to protection risk. Table 2 reveals that married women have probabilities of 22.6%, 13.1%, and 72.3% exposure to gender-based violence, sexual abuse, and insecurity. Married women's exposure to gender-based violence is accentuated by the fact that their husbands who

lose everything during displacement vent their frustrations on their families as a result of a lack of activity and livelihood opportunities in their new locations. Their wives are normally at the receiving end and must triple their roles as wives, mothers, and temporary breadwinners for the families. Their exposure to gender-based violence is however statistically insignificant. In effect, though there is a relationship between married people and their exposure to gender-based violence, there is no strong evidence to prove that the relationship exists. There is strong evidence that the relationship between married people and their exposure to sexual abuse and insecurity are statistically significant at 5%. Women and girls are exposed to all forms of risks by armed men. They do employ negative coping mechanisms including prostitution which further expose them to sexual exploitation, and abuses during and after displacement. Their husbands are recruited into armed groups and those who are unlucky are killed. Table 2 reveals that women who are divorced and widow/widowers have probabilities of exposure to gender-based violence, sexual abuse, and insecurity of 65%, 54.2%, and 31.2% respectively. These exposures are statistically significant at 5%. Their exposure to insecurity is less as compared to the other protection risks because they are not normally targeted for kidnapping and theft during displacement. Where they also live in their new locations however expose them to several risks including insecurity. Some recalcitrant men take advantage of their vulnerability in new locations to sexually abuse them. They experience gender-based violence in their host families as men in these families forcefully have sex with them or threaten to withdraw their support to them.

## **AGE OF WOMEN AND PROTECTION RISK**

The age of women has diverse effects on how it exposes women to protection risk. Regression results from table 2 reveal that there is an inverse relationship between the age of women and protection risk. Those within the age brackets of 16 to 25 years have probabilities of 24% and 65% of not being exposed to gender-based violence and sexual abuse respectively at a non-significant level. Women within the age brackets of 26 to 30 years have the probability of 47%, 63%, and 35% of not being exposed to GBV, sexual abuse, and insecurity at a statistically significant level. In effect, there is enough evidence to demonstrate that there is an inverse relationship between this category of age groups and their exposure to GBV, sexual abuse, and insecurity.

Women within the age brackets of 31 to 55 years, however, have 72.5%, 83%, and 73% probabilities of being exposed to gender-based violence, sexual abuse, and insecurity at a statistically significant level. There is enough evidence to therefore prove that there is a positive relationship between women within the age brackets of 31 to 55 and their exposure to GBV, sexual abuse, and insecurity. The non-exposure of the 16-25 age category to SGBV is however not significant. This means that though there is an inverse relationship between those in the age category 16 to 25 years and their exposure to gender-based violence, the relationship is statistically not significant.

It is important to note that the non-exposure of respondents within the age brackets of 26 to 30 to gender-based violence, sexual abuse, and insecurity is statistically significant at a 5% effect. This means that the inverse relationship is statistically significant. This is because people within this age category are in their active age and can protect themselves even if it means running for their lives. Women within the age brackets



of 31 to 55 years however are not exposed to insecurity by a probability of 73% at a significant level.

## ***CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS***

### **CONCLUSIONS**

Protection involves all activities aimed at ensuring full respect for the rights of the individual following human rights law, international humanitarian law (which applies in situations of armed conflict), and refugee law.

Protection problems can be manifested in the form of discrimination, violence, abuse, exploitation, deliberate deprivation, or neglect of vulnerable individuals/groups within the affected population.

Humanitarian crises trigger and exacerbate women's protection issues like Gender-based Violence (GBV).

Sexual violence is used as a tactic of war, terrorism, torture, and repression, including the targeting of victims based on their actual or perceived ethnic, religious, political, or clan affiliation.

Demographic characteristics help to appreciate the conditions of people affected by crisis. Examining and linking these characteristics to other variables of protection gives a very informative analysis.

Women with basic and secondary school levels of education are not exposed to gender-based violence at a probability of 54.3% at an insignificant level.

Women with basic and secondary school levels of education have probabilities of 32.8% and 15.6% of being exposed to sexual abuse and insecurity at a 10% significance

level. In effect, their level of education is not absolving them from being exposed to sexual abuse and insecurity.

Women with no formal education are exposed to gender-based violence, sexual abuse, and insecurity at probabilities of 34.6%, 57.4%, and 26.7%. This exposure is at significant levels with both gender-based violence and safety being 10% significance level and sexual abuse being 5% significance level.

Married women have probabilities of 22.6%, 13.1%, and 72.3% exposure to gender-based violence, sexual abuse, and insecurity. There is strong evidence that the relationship between married people and their exposure to sexual abuse and insecurity are statistically significant at 5%.

Women who are divorced and widows/widowers have probabilities of exposure to gender-based violence, sexual abuse, and insecurity of 65%, 54.2%, and 31.2% respectively.

Women within the age brackets of 16 to 25 years have probabilities of 24% and 65% of not being exposed to gender-based violence and sexual abuse respectively at a non-significant level.

Women within the age brackets of 26 to 30 years have the probabilities of 47%, 63%, and 35% of not being exposed to GBV, sexual abuse, and insecurity at a statistically significant level.

Women within the age brackets of 31 to 55 years, however, have 72.5%, 83%, and 73% probabilities of being exposed to gender-based violence, sexual abuse, and insecurity at a statistically significant level.

## **RECOMMENDATIONS**

Humanitarian actors should pay particular attention to the demographic characteristics of persons of concern in protection programming by linking their demographic characteristics to other variables of protection.

Humanitarian actors should work closely with community groups and women to develop a demographic structure of communities and establish how it moderates protection risks in the communities.

As protection problems can be manifested in various forms during humanitarian crisis, rapid needs assessment at the onset of humanitarian crisis conducted by humanitarian actors should provide adequate information on the various dimension of the protection problems.

Government should institute measures to track how humanitarian actors design their protection programmes to respond to the demographic characteristics of persons of concern.

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