CENTER FOR CIVILIANS IN CONFLICT
RECOGNIZE. PREVENT. PROTECT. AMEND.

Protection of Civilians at the Heart of Norway's Future Development Cooperation

Submission by Center for Civilians in Conflict (CIVIC) to Norway's Minister of International Development, August 2026

Key Recommendation: Norway should make the Protection of Civilians a core objective of its development cooperation in countries affected by armed conflict, recognizing civilian safety as a prerequisite for sustainable peace, stability and development.

Protection of Civilians as a Strategic Consideration for Project *Vendepunkt*

Project *Vendepunkt* provides Norway with an opportunity to build on its longstanding leadership in humanitarian action, peace diplomacy and international humanitarian law while adapting its development cooperation to a changing international environment.

Protecting civilians is not only an ethical imperative consistent with Norway's values; **civilian safety is a strategic prerequisite for peace, stability and prosperity.** Where civilians remain exposed to violence, displacement and destruction, humanitarian needs increase, institutions weaken, social cohesion deteriorates and prospects for sustainable peace and development diminish. Failure to protect civilians can therefore undermine Norway's wider humanitarian, development, diplomatic and peace investments.

Civilian protection as a foundation for sustainable development

Today's conflicts are increasingly protracted, urbanized and fragmented. Civilians face harm from explosive weapons, attacks on essential infrastructure, displacement, restrictions on humanitarian access, abuses by state and non-state armed actors, and evolving methods and technologies of warfare.

Humanitarian assistance saves lives but cannot by itself change the behaviours and decisions that generate civilian harm. Peace processes that fail to address violence against civilian's risk undermining their legitimacy and sustainability. Likewise, development investments—from schools and hospitals to infrastructure, livelihoods and public services—cannot achieve their intended impact where civilians remain unsafe or essential infrastructure is repeatedly damaged or destroyed.

In conflict-affected settings, the policies and practices of security and defence actors are also critical: **they can protect or endanger civilians, preserve or disrupt essential services, and strengthen or undermine the public trust on which recovery and development depend.** Sustained engagement with these actors, informed by the experiences and priorities of affected communities, can help translate commitments to civilian protection into changes in policy and operational practice.

PoC therefore provides a framework for connecting Norway's humanitarian, development, diplomatic and peace efforts around a common objective: **creating the conditions in which civilians are safer and sustainable peace and development can take hold.** This does not require establishing PoC as a separate policy area, but rather applying a protection lens across Norway's existing international engagement.

Building on Norway's comparative advantage

Norway is particularly well positioned to pursue such an approach. Its longstanding engagement in humanitarian action, peace mediation, development cooperation, humanitarian diplomacy and international humanitarian law gives it credibility with governments, humanitarian organizations, civil society and, where appropriate, parties to conflict.

Norway also benefits from a strong ecosystem of humanitarian and development organizations, research institutions and operational mechanisms such as NORCAP. Together, these provide the field presence, expertise, evidence and relationships necessary to connect policy and diplomacy with practical improvements in civilian protection.

Humanitarian diplomacy is particularly important in translating these assets into protection outcomes. Sustained dialogue with conflict parties, governments and other actors with influence over hostilities can help preserve humanitarian access, promote respect for international humanitarian law, address emerging protection risks and encourage concrete changes in policies and practices that reduce civilian harm.

Combined with investments in community-based protection, civilian harm mitigation, engagement with state and non-state armed actors and locally led protection efforts, this can help connect the experiences and priorities of conflict-affected communities with the actors whose decisions determine their safety.

Recommendations for Project Vendepunkt

1. Make Protection of Civilians a cross-cutting objective of Norwegian development cooperation in conflict-affected settings.

Integrate a PoC lens across relevant humanitarian, development, peace and diplomatic strategies and investments. Where civilian harm threatens Norway's wider objectives, country strategies and relevant programmes should include appropriate protection objectives, activities, resources, safeguards and indicators, linking Norwegian investments more systematically to improved civilian safety.

2. Use Norway's diplomatic and humanitarian influence more systematically to achieve protection outcomes.

Strengthen humanitarian diplomacy and engagement with state and non-state actors to promote respect for international humanitarian law, preserve humanitarian access, influence behaviour affecting civilian safety, and advance practical measures to prevent and mitigate civilian harm. This should include supporting sustained, locally informed engagement between conflict-affected communities, civilian authorities and security actors where their decisions and practices directly affect civilian protection.

3. Establish a practical framework for translating PoC commitments into measurable protection outcomes.

Develop cross-government guidance for ministries, embassies and implementing partners on integrating PoC into country strategies, programming, diplomacy and partnerships. Success should be assessed through changes in policy, practice and civilian safety—not simply through activities such as trainings and dialogues or the adoption of policies themselves. Relevant indicators could assess whether civilian priorities influence decisions, whether actors change and implement policies and operational practices, whether essential services and infrastructure are better protected, and ultimately whether risks to civilians are reduced.