



Accountability System for the Protection of Civilians

Joint Mission-Level Assessment Tools: Joint Protection Teams, Joint Assessment Missions, and Joint Evidence-Gathering Teams

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SUMMARY

Peacekeeping missions mandated to protect civilians have a variety of tools at their disposal to assess the mission's response to protection of civilians (POC) incidents, establish facts, circumstances, and responsibility, and gradually improve protection strategies. In particular, some missions have developed joint assessment processes, teams, or platforms that can look into POC concerns or POC incidents. This factsheet considers, in particular, joint protection teams (JPTs), joint evidence-gathering teams (JETs), and joint assessment missions (JAMs). These tools can serve as the initial response to serious occurrences or incidents and inform decisions by senior mission leaders, and indirectly the Secretariat, about whether to activate other tools such as boards of inquiry or special investigations.

Joint protection teams (JPTs) are ad hoc, multidisciplinary teams composed of different experts in the mission such as human rights, civil affairs, child protection, gender, political affairs, or disarmament, demobilization, and reintegration (DDR) officers. They can also include the military and police component, as well as state officials and humanitarian partners. JPTs were initially developed by the UN Organization Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (MONUC) (later the UN Organization Stabilization Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, or MONUSCO), following the failure of the mission's troops to prevent and respond to the massacre in Kiwanja in 2008. The mission recognized the need to deploy multidisciplinary teams, with members from different sections bringing different protection-related skill sets, to support the military component in assessing protection needs. The mission formalized the use of JPTs through a dedicated JPT unit embedded in the human rights section of MONUSCO, and the tool has since been used by other missions. JPTs are regularly deployed to hotspots to assess the political, security, human rights, and humanitarian situation and to support the military in devising protection strategies. They are deployed to high-risk areas and interact with the population; take stock of and analyze the security situation; and develop comprehensive protection recommendations, plans, and responses.¹

Joint evidence-gathering teams (JETs) are small teams, roughly consisting of three to eight civilian and military staff, that are deployed to the field following an operation or an incident to collect information and investigate and document violations.² They were developed by MONUSCO as a flexible tool to be quickly deployed to secure evidence after a specific incident, offering a leaner and lighter alternative to boards of inquiry.

¹ Namie Di Razza, "Reframing the Protection of Civilians Paradigm for UN Peace Operations," International Peace Institute, November 2017.

² Center for Civilians in Conflict, "From Mandate to Mission: Mitigating Civilian Harm in UN Peacekeeping Operations in the DRC," 2016.

They were used to assess accusations of civilian harm following MONUSCO's offensive operations.

Joint assessment missions (JAMs) are multidisciplinary, interagency humanitarian needs assessments. They are usually composed of staff from a mission's civilian sections and from other humanitarian or development actors. With the assistance of a mission's civil affairs section, they assess and recommend responses to protection, humanitarian, or development needs.³ JAMs can also refer more generally to multidimensional teams that a mission sets up to assess a particular situation.

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RELEVANCE TO THE PROTECTION OF CIVILIANS

JETs, JPTs, and JAMs are not accountability mechanisms per se, as their primary purpose is to inform the mission's activities through the assessment of the situation. However, as critical tools for assessing POC incidents and threats at the mission level, they can also be used to look into the mission's effectiveness and make recommendations to guide and improve mission activities, including through corrective measures. JPTs are explicitly POC tools, as they contribute to developing plans to respond to protection concerns in high-risk areas, while JETs deploy after an incident occurs to establish the facts. JAMs have a broad application and have been used to assess protection concerns and identify the responses needed.

Examples

MONUSCO regularly deploys JPTs to protection hotspots. For example, in 2012, the mission deployed JPTs to Remeka and Katoyi after receiving reports of intercommunal violence. The team recommended sending military standard combat deployments to both villages, and this recommendation was endorsed by the Senior Management Group on Protection. The presence of South African and Uruguayan units for a few weeks, coupled with mediation activities, contributed to the de-escalation of tensions. JPTs can also examine the effectiveness of the local protection plans developed by the mission and recommend adjustments.

JETs have been used by MONUSCO to assess areas where incidents have occurred. For example, a JET was sent after MONUSCO troops failed to intervene in Kamanyola in 2018 when civilians were killed by Congolese armed forces. Another JET was sent to Beni in 2019 following attacks against MONUSCO's base by demonstrators criticizing the mission's inability to protect civilians.

JAMs have also been mentioned several times in the secretary-general's reports on MONUSCO, often in the context of humanitarian assessments (which led, for example, to the mission setting up new community alert networks).

³ MONUSCO, "Protection of Civilians and Protection Tools," available at <https://monusco.unmissions.org/en/protection-civilians-and-protection-tools>.

The UN Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in the Central African Republic (MINUSCA), UN Mission in South Sudan (UNMISS), African Union–UN Hybrid Operation in Darfur (UNAMID), and UN Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in Mali (MINUSMA) have also used their own version of JPTs or multidisciplinary assessment teams to look into POC incidents and their mission's POC failures.

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RULES, GUIDELINES, AND METHODOLOGY

Governing rules

Given that these investigations vary from mission to mission and are deployed depending on the purview of mission leadership and the occurrence being investigated or assessed, there are no system-wide guidelines or procedures. Each mission generally develops its own standard operating procedures and ad hoc guidelines.

However, the recently developed POC handbook has included references to JPTs and JAMs, as well as to MINUSCA's terms of reference on JPTs as a guiding document in its annexes. The handbook defines JPTs as

multi-disciplinary teams deployed to hotspots to analyse protection needs and recommend preventive and responsive interventions to address them. JPTs are comprised of mission civilian, police and military components and possibly, state officials and/or humanitarian agencies. The teams deploy to a location where civilians may be at risk to provide detailed analysis on the threats to civilians in the area and to support comprehensive activities to protect civilians by all components. In particular, a JPT provides analysis on political, security and social dynamics in an area, particularly to identify threats of violence and communities at risk and to propose recommendations for appropriate protection strategies through Community Protection Plans... establishing early warning mechanisms, including [community alert networks], to enable rapid response; establishing coordination mechanisms with local authorities or communities; and addressing specific protection needs, including protection against sexual violence and grave violations against children. JPTs can also work with the military and police components to develop appropriate risk mitigation measures for the conduct of military and police operations.⁴

The handbook defines JAMs as

a protection field visit usually consisting of mission civilian personnel and members of the United Nations Country Team (UNCT) or relevant NGOs. Where appropriate, government authorities may also be included. Similar to a JPT, the purpose of a JAM is to jointly conduct an assessment

⁴ UN DPO, "The Protection of Civilians in United Nations Peacekeeping Handbook," 2020.

to identify threats, inform responses to threats, improve relations with local communities, lower tensions and enhance early warning. A JAM will also consider the humanitarian situation.⁵

JETs were developed by MONUSCO as a mission-based tool to collect evidence and establish responsibility, particularly in relation to civilian harm in the context of the mission's offensive operations.

Process and functioning

JPTs are usually coordinated by the POC unit or the civil affairs or human rights sections. The purpose of a JPT is "to identify threats, inform responses to threats, build ties and improve relations between the mission and local communities, lower tensions and enhance early warning." The JPT should serve "to combine civilian and uniformed personnel capabilities to enhance the mission's capacity to protect." JPTs are generally deployed after hotspots are identified, and different components and sections are convened to define specific terms of reference for the given JPT. In particular, its members have to determine the objectives of the mission, including whether they are strategic, preventive, or reactive, as well as the mission's roles, responsibilities, and logistical arrangements.

A JPT uses various sources to get a comprehensive understanding of the situation before it departs, and once in the area, it interacts with local communities and authorities, and the mission's nearest military presence to analyze local protection dynamics. As the basis of its assessment, the JPT can work with mission military commanders to develop or adapt community protection plans and establish community alert networks and early-warning mechanisms. It can also "engage with local authorities and armed actors on the ground to promote respect for human rights and mitigation of harm to civilians." Upon its return, the JPT makes concrete recommendations to the mission leadership and lists actions needed at the local and national levels to improve POC in the area.⁶

JAMs follow a similar methodology, in coordination with humanitarian and development actors.

JETs can be deployed immediately after an incident (usually within one week). A JET is activated by MONUSCO's chief of staff and senior legal adviser. JETs are composed of experts from different sections of a mission. They usually do not make recommendations, only establishing facts and responsibilities.

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ Ibid.

While JPTs, JAMs, and JETs have overlapping scopes and objectives, each mission may employ a different tool under different circumstances. These tools vary across missions and are largely ad hoc, even if mission headquarters has sought to disseminate best practices and systematize their use to some extent (in particular through the development of the POC handbook, which provides guidance on the use of JPTs and JAMs). JPTs and JETs, in particular, are quite flexible and allow missions to enhance proactive and reactive action to improve POC, providing lighter alternatives to formalized tools like boards of inquiry.

While they can all be used after a specific POC incident, JPTs and JAMs are also preventive tools that can be used to inform a mission's protection plans and responses. While JETs were initially conceived to assess allegations of civilian harm, they are now also used to assess a broader set of incidents, including POC incidents or failures.


These joint tools can also be used as an initial investigation before more formal tools, such as boards of inquiry or special investigations, are deployed. In establishing facts and needs and making recommendations for protection plans, they can carry a lot of weight, leading to changes in activities and improving POC.

Timing

Regular process	X	JPTs and JAMs could be used to evaluate protection and humanitarian needs on a regular basis
Extraordinary measure after incident	X	JETs, JPTs, and JAMs can be deployed after single incidents.

Actors and answerability structure

JETs, JPTs, and JAMs are mission-owned tools that can establish facts and circumstances, provide recommendations after an incident, or identify an area that may face high levels of protection and security risks. They can assess other actors, including those that may have perpetrated crimes, and the response of mission personnel.

 Held accountable by	Individuals	Unit			Mission	Secretariat	Contributing countries	Security Council/ 5 th Committee	Member states	Population	Other
		Military	Police	Civilian							
Individuals					X						
Unit/ section/ component	Military				X						
	Police				X						
	Civilian				X						
Mission					X						
Secretariat											
Contributing countries					X						
Member states											
Security Council/ 5th Committee											

Scope and objective

Each mission-driven tool encapsulates an overlapping but distinct area of accountability. JETs and JPTs can establish facts, circumstances, and responsibility and contribute to tracking performance.

Collect best practices and lessons learned	X	Over the course of their assessment, JPTs, JAMS, and JETs can document lessons learned and best practices.
Track performance	X	JPTs and JETs can contribute to the assessment of the mission's performance in implementing POC.
Establish facts and circumstances	X	JETs serve to gather information and evidence, including forensic evidence, with the intent of establishing facts and circumstances. JPTs can also establish facts and circumstances.
Establish responsibility	X	JETs seek to establish and document facts and circumstances and can review orders and actions undertaken. JPTs can also establish responsibility.
Identify structural and systemic issues	X	JPTs, in having to devise protection plans, may identify structural and systemic issues related to protection. JAMS can also identify systemic issues in protection and humanitarian responses. JETs can highlight structural factors that contributed to an incident.

Type of accountability

These joint mechanisms can contribute to performance accountability. They provide organizational tools to establish facts and responsibility and make recommendations to improve POC plans and responses.

Outcome

Learn	Disseminate and integrate internally	X	JPTs and JAMS provide internal recommendations to strengthen protection plans and responses. JETs establish facts and responsibility to inform further action and changes in planning and operations.
	Account for publicly		The activities of JAMS, JETs, and JPTs are mostly internal but can be referred to in the secretary-general's public reports. However, the actual reports for JETs, JAMS, and JPTs remain internal and are only shared publicly in exceptional cases.
Correct	Improve internal processes	X	JPTs and JAMS provide internal recommendations to strengthen protection plans and responses. JET reports are analyzed and disseminated to the special representative of the secretary-general, who reviews them and

			can in theory use them to improve internal processes, though their actual impact remains unclear.
	Inform the selection of personnel		
Sanction	Recommend sanctions		
	Establish incentives		

Independence and impartiality

JPTs, JAMs, and JETs are composed of mission personnel, which may limit their independence and impartiality. However, the “joint” nature of these teams enables each component to participate, which can lead to relatively balanced assessments.

Inclusivity

Given the “joint” character of these tools, civilian, police, and military components can take part in JPTs, JAMs, and JETs. JAMs can also include humanitarian and development actors, and JPTs are encouraged to include state officials and other protection partners when circumstances allow it.

Transparency

All these mission-based tools are internal. In exceptional circumstances, however, findings can be shared outside the mission.

Follow-up mechanisms

Possible follow-up mechanisms	X	Depending on the findings of the joint assessment and the evidence documented, the mission may undertake follow-up action such as assisting civilians on the ground post-incident or deploying troops. For example, the Protection Working Group and the Senior Management Group on Protection generally review recommendations made by JPTs.
Available enforcement measures		
Transmissibility to other mechanisms	X	Information gathered by mission-owned joint investigations can be used by special investigations. ⁷ Joint investigations can also serve as the initial investigation prior to the launch of a board of inquiry. ⁸

⁷ UN DPO, “Guidelines: Special Investigations,” January 2020.

⁸ UN Department of Operational Support, “Standard Operating Procedure: Boards of Inquiry,” June 2020.