Protecting Local Aid Workers in Mozambique

Policy insights from the International Conference on the Protection of Humanitarian Aid Workers, Brussels

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SUMMARY

Local and national aid workers carry most of the risk in humanitarian response, and yet they receive the least protection. Mozambique is no exception. Globally, in 2025, 97% of aid workers killed, injured or abducted were national staff.

MLHCP, which brings together more than 160 local and national organisations, asks for three things:

1. **Protection requires risk sharing.** Every partnership that hands risk to a local organisation should also fund its security and give its staff the same post-incident support as international staff.
2. **No impunity.** Every attack on a local aid worker in Mozambique should be documented to a standard that can support an independent investigation.
3. **Mozambique as a pilot.** Humanitarian leadership and donors should back up this to make them standard practices

1,187
aid workers killed, injured, kidnapped or detained worldwide in 2025, a record year

97%
of those killed, injured or abducted were national staff

€3.5m
mobilised by the EU in 2026 for aid worker safety through Protect Aid Workers

Why now

The first International Conference on the Protection of Humanitarian Aid Workers was held in Brussels on 15–16 October 2026. It was convened by the European Commission and the Irish Presidency of the EU Council and supported by IFRC and Protect Aid Workers. MLHCP spoke on the East Africa panel on behalf of local and national organisations in Mozambique.

It is the right moment to turn what was said in Brussels into commitments in Cabo Delgado and other parts of northern Mozambique, where local organisations deliver most of the response and their staff face most of the risk.

What we heard in Brussels

The conference made one point repeatedly: violence against aid workers has reached record levels, and it falls mostly on local staff.

- **Scale.** In 2025, 1,187 aid workers were killed, injured, kidnapped or arbitrarily detained, a record year. 97% of those killed, injured or abducted were national staff.

- **The UN humanitarian chief's three asks.** Tom Fletcher, Emergency Relief Coordinator, remembered the more than 1,000 aid workers killed in the last three years and called these attacks an attack on the heart of humanity. He asked member states to use their diplomatic and economic influence, for independent and credible investigations with those responsible brought to justice, and for funding for aid worker safety.
- **Risk transfer.** In the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) session, an international NGO acknowledged that local actors are more exposed than international staff, yet are still the ones sent to the front line. Panellists agreed that most discussion stays on the problem and too little on what organisations are doing about it.
- **Accountability.** The Palestine Red Crescent Society argued that neutrality and justice cannot be separated: aid workers will not work freely while those who attack them walk free.
- **Funding.** The EU has mobilised €3.5 million in 2026 for aid worker safety through the Protect Aid Workers initiative, covering protection measures, post-incident assistance and legal support.

What this means in Cabo Delgado

In Cabo Delgado, international staff can be relocated when threats rise, but local aid workers usually stay. They live in the communities they serve and keep working when others withdraw.

- **Attacks disrupt aid.** In May 2024, attacks by non-state armed groups targeted aid workers, and agencies pulled staff out of Macomia (World Vision). In May 2025, a humanitarian truck was looted on the N380 in Mocímboa da Praia, and an international NGO suspended distributions in Macomia and moved two international staff to Pemba (OCHA Access Snapshot, May 2025).
- **Relocation is not an equal right.** International staff are moved to safety when there is insecurity, whereas local staff often have no evacuation plan, insurance or post-incident support.
- **Support exists but is not reaching local actors.** Protect Aid Workers offers protection, post-incident and legal support, but as of September 2026 it had received yet a requests for support from Mozambique. Its materials are currently translated in Portuguese, and awareness among MLHCP member organisations is likely to increase.
- **Incidents go unrecorded.** Many attacks on local staff are not documented in a way that could support an investigation. Without evidence, there is no accountability.

Key messages

1	**There is no humanitarian response without local aid workers.**
2	**Handing over risk without resources is risk transfer, not localisation.**
3	**Neutrality and justice go together.**
4	**Less talk about the problem, more action.**

Our asks

Each actor can make one concrete change within the next 12 months.

Who	What we ask
Humanitarian leadership	Put the protection of local aid workers on the agenda of national and provincial humanitarian coordination meetings in Maputo, Pemba and Nampula, and make sure incident reporting covers local staff.
Donors	Require a funded security line and duty of care for local partners in all donor agreements.
International partners (UN agencies and international NGOs)	Include local partners in security briefings, risk assessments and evacuation planning. Give their staff the same post-incident support as your own, and report what share of partner budgets goes to security.

What MLHCP will do

MLHCP will use its network of more than 160 organisations to make protection practical for local aid workers.

- **Raise awareness.** Keep reminding members about Protect Aid Workers and make sure the information reaches field staff, not only senior management.
- **Make support accessible.** Work with Protect Aid Workers on Portuguese materials and a simple referral route for members.
- **Build the evidence.** Help members record attacks on their staff in a consistent way that can support investigation and advocacy.
- **Agree the pilot.** Work with members, international partners and donors to agree the pilot's standards.

Sources

- International Conference on the Protection of Humanitarian Aid Workers
- European Commission: EU hosts first international conference on protecting aid workers
- OCHA: Mozambique Access Snapshot, Cabo Delgado, May 2025
- World Vision Mozambique on attacks targeting aid workers, May 2024
- Notes from the conference sessions, 15–16 October 2026