



# Integration of Protection, Gender, and Inclusion and Safeguarding

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**EXECUTIVE SUMMARY AND  
RECOMMENDATIONS FROM THE LESSONS  
LEARNED REPORT: UKRAINE AND  
IMPACTED COUNTRIES OPERATION**

**International Federation of Red Cross  
and Red Crescent Societies (IFRC)**

Regional Office for Europe and Central Asia

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# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This Lessons Learned report evaluates the integration of Protection, Gender, and Inclusion (PGI) and Safeguarding within the RCRC Movement response to the Ukraine and impacted countries crisis, primarily from the perspective of PGI and Safeguarding experts and focal points from across the Red Cross Red Crescent Movement. The IFRC, along with Host National Societies (HNS) and Partner National Societies (PNS), faced immense challenges in scaling up PGI and Safeguarding efforts amid one of Europe's most complex humanitarian crises. Key findings highlight both the significant progress made and the critical gaps that remain in effectively mainstreaming PGI and Safeguarding into emergency operations.

The report identifies initial barriers, including limited awareness and lack of formal systems, tools, and institutional policies across National Societies, which impeded early PGI and Safeguarding implementation. The establishment of PGI focal points, targeted trainings, and dedicated PGI funding were instrumental in overcoming these challenges. Additionally, collaborative efforts through the Ukraine and Impacted Countries PGI and Safeguarding Advisory Group helped foster technical support and coordination across Movement partners, which further strengthened the response.

However, substantial gaps remain in Safeguarding and PGI institutionalisation, particularly in National Society capacity building, policy development, and long-term funding strategies. Challenges such as high staff turnover, limited dedicated PGI resources, and socio-cultural barriers also constrained consistent PGI integration. These issues underscore the need for IFRC and Movement partners to invest in sustainable, well-resourced frameworks that prioritise PGI and Safeguarding from the outset of operations.

Recommendations in this report include ensuring that PGI and Safeguarding are embedded in emergency response planning, establishing clearer accountability structures, and creating dedicated funding mechanisms to support long-term PGI

roles. By addressing these needs, IFRC and its partners can build a more inclusive, accountable, and effective humanitarian response network that better safeguards vulnerable populations and meets evolving operational demands.

## Call to Action

It is critical that the strong recommendations in this report lead to immediate and transparent action. The RCRC Movement must commit to implementing these recommendations, ensuring accountability by making progress visible and public. By doing so, stakeholders will not only demonstrate a principled approach to humanitarian action but will also strengthen trust and ensure the safety and inclusion of vulnerable populations in current and future operations. Evaluation is only as impactful as the actions it inspires—let this report be the foundation for meaningful, measurable change.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

### Top Recommendations Validated During Lessons Learned Workshop

#### Recruit the Right People with Strong Soft Skills for PGI Roles

The Movement should focus on recruiting proactive, engaging individuals with the right skill sets, supported by clear job descriptions and HR oversight. Recommendations include establishing **guidelines for both hard and soft skills**, enhancing retention through motivation strategies, and providing development pathways and ongoing training.

Movement actors should focus on recruiting PGI Delegates who “don't just point out the challenges, but who offer practical solutions that can be integrated into operations”. It was recommended to **deploy more PGI personnel** in emergency operations.

#### Advocate and Mobilise Resources for the Creation and Sustainability of NS PGI and Safeguarding Focal Point Roles

It has been recognised that, ideally, each National Society should have PGI and Safeguarding focal points, with defined job descriptions and shared

best practices for PGI and Safeguarding integration..

Advocating for PGI and Safeguarding to be included in strategic plans and ensuring **long-term funding for focal point** positions will also help to improve sustained progress on key priority areas.

It was suggested by multiple stakeholders that each NS should have **multiple dedicated PGI and Safeguarding focal points** at HQ, management, and branch level to reduce the impact of frequent staff turnover.

### **Strengthen Managerial Knowledge and Accountability for PGI and Safeguarding**

Operations Managers from IFRC and PNSs must receive enhanced training to fully understand and embrace their Safeguarding obligations, enabling them to act as facilitators of PGI integration. Integration of these expectations into **performance evaluations with tangible consequences for non-compliance**. Job descriptions and performance reviews for management and staff should include clear Safeguarding performance indicators.

Further, establishing clear links between regional and country-level risk registers is crucial to ensure specific Safeguarding risks are identified and managed at all levels, with clear accountability assigned to individuals for addressing these risks.

### **Make PGI and Safeguarding Knowledge Mandatory for Deployments**

Similar to Security, Safeguarding and PGI responsibilities should be **included in the job descriptions of all delegates**. To operationalise this, SOPs and checklists tailored to specific roles should be developed. Trainings on PGI and Safeguarding must be strengthened and integrated into existing programs, such as IMPACT, HEAT, MOT, and **sector-specific trainings**.

### **Mandatory Inclusion and Early Integration of PGI and Safeguarding in Emergency Operations**

PGI and Safeguarding must be treated as essential components of all emergency operations. They should be **integrated into operational strategies**

**and preparedness plans** from the outset, avoiding reactive approaches that are less effective. Institutionalising PGI and Safeguarding during peacetime is critical.

A systematic approach is essential, incorporating PGI and Safeguarding standards into **sectoral SOPs and operational strategies**. KPIs and monitoring systems should track adherence to these standards, while Emergency Appeals must include dedicated budgets with earmarked funding for PGI and Safeguarding activities.

Collaboration with PGI focal points during program and project planning is essential to meet and exceed minimum standards. **Regional Protection Mapping** exercises should also be conducted regularly to improve understanding of PGI risks, systems, and practices within the region.

## **Human Resources and Staffing**

### **Strengthen Human Resources and Capacity Building**

The Movement should incorporate PGI and Safeguarding objectives into all job descriptions and performance reviews, along with creating **checklists and SOPs for different profiles**. Expanding HR accountability, training sectoral leads, and integrating PGI and Safeguarding into planning processes will foster a more robust approach to PGI and Safeguarding.

**Training should extend beyond headquarters to branch levels.**

**A focus on recruiting more staff (technical advisors) with sector-specific skills** in PGI and Safeguarding.

It should be a **non-negotiable to deploy PGI staff** from the beginning of an operation (surge phase) and have them stay throughout the whole operation.

## **Commitment, Accountability, and Institutionalisation**

### **Strengthen Leadership Commitment and Advocacy for PGI and Safeguarding**

**A Safeguarding leadership conference**, organised with the participation of IFRC, ICRC, PNSs, and

willing HNSs, can serve as a platform for leaders to demonstrate their commitment and engage in dialogue on overcoming challenges in adopting these principles.

Safeguarding can be effectively advanced by leveraging a risk-management perspective, which positions it as a vital organisational responsibility tied to mitigating operational, reputational, and financial risks. Leadership should be provided with **practical examples and evidence** of its successful implementation.

### **Clarify the Role of Safeguarding and Accountability in Organisational Structures**

While PGI and Safeguarding share overlapping goals, they are distinct components that require **separate strategies and responsibilities**. Misconceptions that strong PGI implementation automatically addresses Safeguarding must be addressed through greater clarity and education.

## **Communication, Language, and Culture**

### **Refine Messaging and Remove Barriers to Understanding PGI and Safeguarding**

International Movement actors together with HNSs must develop clear, **audience-specific messaging** that resonates both internally and externally. Communication strategies should focus on contextualising these concepts, and presenting them in relatable terms rather than abstract or overly technical frameworks.

**Drawing on existing good practices** and using them as entry points for discussions can make these principles more relatable and accessible.

### **Foster Collaborative and Solution-Oriented Communication Among Movement Actors**

To improve the integration of PGI and Safeguarding, Movement actors must adopt a more collaborative and solutions-oriented approach when engaging with HNSs. International actors should focus on **solving problems alongside HNSs**, seeking input on how best to provide support, and avoiding a top-down or overly critical "colonial" attitude.

## **Knowledge and Understanding**

### **Develop a Stronger Common Understanding of PGI and Safeguarding, Starting with the Basics**

It was recommended that, generally, the IFRC and network members need to work more to create a common understanding of PGI and Safeguarding.

There also appears to be a need to have further discussion within the IFRC Network on **whether PGI and Safeguarding should be connected** and addressed as similar concepts with similar approaches **or if they should be addressed separately**, with unique profiles and associated SOPs.

### **Explore Learning Opportunities through Developing and Implementing Pilot PGI Programs, based on Existing Capacities**

Developing pilot PGI programs and seed funding, **tailored to the existing activities and capacities of HNS**, would provide strong, practical, hands-on opportunities to increase knowledge and understanding of key concepts and standards.

### **Offer More Frequent Trainings in Multiple Languages**

Repeating introductory and advanced PGI trainings regularly in multiple languages, in order to raise awareness and refresh staff and volunteers' knowledge and understanding of key PGI and Safeguarding concepts and standards was promoted as a beneficial idea.

More frequent and tailored trainings and **simulation exercises for Safeguarding** (especially Safeguarding in emergencies) should be developed and resourced.

Furthermore, IFRC learning platform modules should be translated into more languages.

### **Increase Attention, Support for, and Understanding of Specialised Protection**

More information and focus are needed on specialised protection such as Child Protection and GBV, as it's not clear what IFRC's perspective is on these topics. In the Ukraine operation, attention on specialised services was lacking. IFRC should

prioritise this more and provide technical support, ensuring that NSs have specialised protection staff and other resources.

### **Create More, and Earlier Opportunities to Learn, Reflect, and Share Knowledge**

**Lessons learned exercises** should also happen at the national level, in addition to regional exercises, in order to see what could be improved. The transfer and retention of knowledge should be considered as a top priority across the Movement.

Strengthening **communities of practice, such as the PGI Network for Europe and Central Asia**, and creating contextualised toolkits for emergencies will support National Societies in learning from each other and applying insights effectively.

Participants also emphasised that IFRC and PNS should help to facilitate more opportunities for **peer-to-peer exchanges** and support between HNSs.

## **Resources and Funding**

### **Enhance Long-Term Sustainable Funding for PGI and Safeguarding**

Budgets and funding models for PGI and Safeguarding need to become more sustainable. Budgets should include **clear provisions for maintaining PGI and Safeguarding efforts** at both regional and country levels beyond the operational timeframe.

Applying **principles of localisation** is critical. IFRC, ICRC, and PNS should focus on building capacity at the local level rather than allocating substantial resources to international staff.

Ensuring a **dedicated percentage of operational budgets** is set aside for PGI and Safeguarding will help institutionalise these practices.

Earmarking funding for PGI and Safeguarding in emergency appeals and National Society budgets has proven effective.

It was further noted, that the IFRC should put a stronger focus on supporting NSs to **develop resource mobilisation plans** for sustaining core programs and positions.

National Societies that have not yet applied for the **Capacity Building Fund** should be encouraged to do so.

### **Develop more Quality and Evidence-Based Funding Requests**

Highlighting **real-world examples** of how PGI and Safeguarding initiatives have led to positive outcomes can resonate with donors and stakeholders, showcasing the tangible benefits of these efforts.

Adopting a **risk appetite graduation model** can also serve as a compelling tool to advocate for Safeguarding funding.

Risk assessment findings and corresponding action points should be systematically monitored to identify gaps and resource needs. These insights can be used to craft funding requests that address specific risks, justify the allocation of resources, and ensure that PGI and Safeguarding efforts are evidence-driven and targeted where they are needed most.

## **Coordination**

### **Increase Coordination and Collaboration with External Actors and Authorities**

Improving coordination with organisations outside the Movement would be beneficial for strengthening PGI and Safeguarding capacities, resources, and knowledge for NSs.

**Engaging with other organisations** and specialised agencies, particularly those focused on Safeguarding, gender-based violence, and child protection, would be especially useful. Developing stronger coordination with state actors is equally important.

### **Improve Movement Coordination**

Increasing the frequency of PGI network meetings and facilitating the **sharing of lessons learned from the start of operations** would enable Movement actors to collectively reflect on challenges create more peer-to-peer learning opportunities.

**Centralised coordination mechanisms** related to PGI and Safeguarding between Movement actors,

National Society headquarters, and regional branches should be established.

Delegates should engage not only with headquarters staff but also with **branch-level** representatives.

A **joint IFRC-ICRC training curriculum** on PGI and protection, along with consistent messaging to clarify differences between specialised protection and PGI, should be developed.

## Mainstreaming

### Create a Unified Approach and Practical Steps for Sectoral Integration

Workshop participants emphasised the need for **follow-up discussions** or workshops on practical ways to operationalise PGI and prepare sector leads for incorporating it into programming effectively.

### Mainstream through Youth Engagement: Youth as Change Agents

The active engagement of youth (staff and volunteers) can play a key role in mainstreaming PGI, as they are often more innovative and adaptable than older colleagues. Younger people more often see the need for change and the cross-cutting nature of PGI in improving RC programs and services (rather than a 'threat' or tool for criticism).

**Establishing PGI youth focal points** has proven very successful.

### Use Child Safeguarding as an Entry Point

While presenting Safeguarding in the context of risk often resonates with leadership, messaging around Safeguarding children seems to resonate more broadly, making it an effective starting point for gaining support from NSs.

## Tools, Systems, and Procedures

### Systematise the Practise of Conducting PGI and Safeguarding Self-Assessment Exercises

Conducting these self-assessment exercises should be more widely and systematically used and could also be adopted by the IFRC when establishing a longer-term presence in countries or as a broader part of its NSD support plans.

## Support National Societies to Develop Centralised Systems for Identification and Investigation of Safeguarding and Integrity Issues

One of the main areas of support from Movement partners should be to support NSs to establish centralised systems for the identification and mitigation of Safeguarding and integrity issues. Participants noted that these systems would be highly beneficial to helping them to **identify existing gaps and mitigate inappropriate actions**, ensuring a consistent and accountable approach to addressing Safeguarding concerns.

### Develop Practical Tools for Enhancing PGI Capacities

The creation and dissemination of PGI and Safeguarding **checklists, guidance notes, case studies**, instructional materials, communications materials, and other practical tools was highlighted as an urgent need by most participants.

### Leverage Data and Evidence for Advocacy and Decision Making

Leveraging technology and data to support decision-making is crucial. **Safeguarding statistics** and evaluation data should be used to inform transparent, data-driven decisions.

### Improve Communication and Advocacy

The need to improve **how we communicate the impact** of PGI and Safeguarding through case studies, donor/Federation-Wide reporting, and externally was also raised. Conversely, the Movement should improve on demonstrating and communicating the impact and risks of NOT integrating PGI and Safeguarding practices and standards into the systems and operations of NSs.