

# SPAIN

IFRC Integration and Inclusion Framework

## PROTECTION SPANISH RED CROSS

For people who may have fled violence or persecution, the first priority is safety for themselves and their loved ones. As set out in the Integration and Inclusion Framework, Protection is a fundamental priority running throughout all Red Cross Red Crescent Migration activities. National Societies have a crucial role to play in ensuring people are not exposed to further risks of violence, exploitation, or discrimination in their new countries.

Without the basic foundation of safety, dignity, and protection from all kinds of violence, integration is impossible. National Societies have both a mandate and a responsibility to ensure everybody they work with, including migrants of all kinds, are treated fairly, with respect, and protected from further harm.

Our mission is to prevent and alleviate human suffering wherever it may be found, to protect life and health and ensure respect for the human being. In doing so, it is essential to 'do no harm' and to mainstream protection across all activities. As an integral part of this mission, we seek to ensure that people in need or at risk enjoy the protection they are entitled to under existing legal frameworks, international, regional and domestic law. This includes the special protection that certain categories of people, such as refugees, are entitled to.

 **IFRC**

 **Cruz Roja Española**

## Summary

The Spanish Red Cross has made Protection a core part of its work with migrants, refugees, and asylum seekers. Working with the Spanish government's Ministry of Inclusion, Social Security and Migration, UNHCR, and others, the Society has contributed to the development of a national Protocol for Prevention and Response to Violence Against Women, which has sought to harmonize efforts to address Sexual and Gender Based Violence (SGBV) across the country.

Equipping practitioners with clear definitions, tools, and procedures for identifying risks, assessing cases, and informing responses, the protocol establishes clear referral pathways, and consistent processes.

In addition, training for staff, not only on the protocol, but on protection and the identification and prevention of SGBV more broadly, has helped embed and mainstream awareness and adoption of protection principles throughout the National Society.



### Protection Risks

For refugees, asylum seekers, and people migrating of all kinds, protection risks – including the threat of Sexual and Gender Based Violence (SGBV) – can be acute. People may find themselves in situations where they

are dependent on others for transport, housing, income, and information.

This dependence, combined with language barriers, lack of social networks, unfamiliarity with local cultural norms and laws, and possible fear of engaging with official agencies, can make it hard for people to seek help or even to recognise that abuse is happening in the first place. "People simply cannot integrate if they don't feel safe," says Verónica Juanes Vaquero, a psychologist and local SGBV protocol focal point for the region of Salamanca. "If people are suffering, it is incredibly hard for them to manage the rest of their life, especially if they don't feel safe at home."

The Spanish Red Cross is a leading partner within Spain's International Protection Programme, working alongside the Ministry of Inclusion, Social Security and Migration to support asylum seekers and refugees. The programme offers a wide range of services including housing, language learning, psychological support, and legal assistance. The Society has worked with the Ministry and other partners to develop a national SGBV protocol to set out consistent processes for the reporting and management of all SGBV cases within the programme.

TIP



**Trainings, particularly on cultural awareness and the importance of a survivor-centred approach, are key.**

Finalised in 2022, the protocol supports organisations to detect incidents and coordinate effectively, and ensures that survivors are able to reliably access consistent, effective, dignified assistance, in the event of an SGBV case being reported. "We are lucky in Spain because the Government and the Ministry we work closest with are very engaged with the issue of SGBV," explains Eva Molina Uruñuela, the Spanish Red Cross national SGBV focal point for the International Protection Programme. "To the extent that the protocol is sponsored by the government, and that it is a national standard across NGOs."

By establishing shared standards and common processes, the protocol not only improves individual safety but also strengthens the wider system of integration. People who feel safe are better able to attend to other elements of their lives such as learning a language, seeking employment, or engaging in community life – ensuring people's safety creates a foundation for long-term integration.

### KHADIJA\*

Khadija fled persecution in Morocco and arrived in Spain in 2023. The SGBV protocol was triggered after she was assaulted by her partner.

"The Red Cross really helped me a lot.

There are two staff in particular who helped me, generally I don't trust anybody, but these people I can always talk to if I have a problem, I can tell them everything. Their support gave me strength and now I feel more independent and I can do things for myself.

I was in a very bad way, but now a lot has changed for me, When I first arrived, it felt like I couldn't do anything for myself, but now I can speak Spanish, I am more independent, and the psychological support from the Red Cross has really helped too."

*\*Name has been changed.*

## National Protocol

The journey towards a national protocol began in 2021 when the Spanish Red Cross introduced formal internal guidance for detecting and responding to SGBV cases in its own programmes. This provided an initial structure for Red Cross teams, as well as inspiration for the subsequent nationwide protocol.

“The Ministry of Inclusion and Migration was very interested in providing a protocol for all the NGOs working with asylum seekers and refugees,” Eva says. “They asked us for support to draft a protocol together with the Ministry, UNHCR and other NGOs.”

The resulting protocol is specifically tailored to the realities of asylum seekers and refugees. A person’s legal status plays a critical role in determining what options are available in SGBV cases – the housing choices or relocation options that the Red Cross can offer will depend on what stage of the asylum process someone is at. “People in the asylum system have certain rights, but they don’t enjoy the full legal protections that apply to all citizens,” Eva explains. “So, it’s important that the protocol is specific for people in the International Protection Programme.”

At the heart of the protocol is a network of trained focal points, working on the ground across the country, who feed into counterparts at regional and national levels. At all levels, these focal points are existing Red Cross staff members who take on the role as a complement to their regular duties “Setting up the network of focal

TIP



**Making the protocol reporting structure and process as clear and simple as possible helps internal buy-in and support.**

points in the beginning was a challenge because it adds workload” Eva says. “Despite this potential barrier, recruitment has been successful, since we aim at selecting individuals with a genuine interest in SGBV work, and many of the new focal points are able to apply valuable expertise from their existing roles, such as in psychology, law, or social work”

When a suspected case of SGBV is identified, the local focal point reports it up the chain to the regional level, and then to headquarters. Together, they ensure the correct steps are followed and that all actions respect the principles of safety, consent, and survivor-led decision-making. “Even though we have a protocol, each case is unique,” says Eva. “The person must make informed decisions, and we never pressure them into anything they don’t want to do”



## ISABEL\*

Isabel\* and her ex-partner fled Guatemala to escape persecution due to their sexuality. While staying in Red Cross housing, it was identified that Isabel was suffering physical and psychological violence from her then-partner.

"I didn't really know about the Red Cross before I came to Spain, but they have really helped me through everything. I had support from them all the time and never felt alone – it always felt like someone was there for me, supporting me.

It had a big impact; it gave me the opportunity to leave, I didn't have to stay where I was, and they helped me get out of that situation. They helped me find a place to live and to become independent, helped me with psychological support and legal assistance, and supported me in my decisions.

I don't know what would have happened without them, but now everything has changed, my life is completely different. I have a new partner, she is completely different, and we are married, and we have a baby together.

I am still shy, but I feel more confident and independent, I can go out on my own, I have my driving license and I am working.

The process the Red Cross had in place to help when they saw I was in trouble has made a huge difference to my life."

*\*Name has been changed.*

TIP



**Although SGBV focal point responsibilities are in addition to people's regular duties, careful recruitment from within the International Protection programme has been effective in securing people with an interest and expertise in this area of work, who bring existing, complimentary skills.**

This flexibility is balanced with speed when urgent action is needed. For example, if someone's safety is at immediate risk, the protocol provides a clear process to relocate them to safe accommodation without delay if necessary.

Describing the support she received from the Red Cross when she was in an abusive relationship, Isabel (not her real name) says: "It had a big impact; it gave me the opportunity to leave, I didn't have to stay where I was, and they helped me get out of that situation. They helped me find a place to live and to become independent, helped me with psychological support and legal assistance, and supported me in my decisions. The process the Red Cross had in place to help when they saw I was in trouble has made a huge difference to my life."

Leadership from the Ministry has been central to the protocol's success: because adoption is mandatory for all agencies involved in the International Protection Programme, with a responsibility to report on its implementation and performance twice each year, there is strong motivation to ensure the protocol is effectively implemented across the board.



### Local Delivery

While the national framework sets out the process, its real impact is seen at the local level, where staff and volunteers work directly with people affected by SGBV. In Navarra, a region in northern Spain, Eduardo Aretxaga

Alonso coordinates services for around 400 people under international protection, housed across 12 locations managed by the Red Cross and supported by a team of 50 staff and 300 volunteers.

"The national protocol establishes a structure with focal points throughout the organization," Eduardo explains. "There's a reference person at the national level in our HQ, then other focal points with responsibility for supporting at regional levels, and then people responsible in each of the housing facilities we have."

This structure means that every facility has at least one trained person responsible for administering the protocol. A social worker, for example, might also serve as the local focal point, providing a clear resource for other staff.

When someone first enters the International Protection Programme, they undergo initial interviews with social workers, psychologists, and legal specialists. These interviews create early opportunities to identify risks or indicators of SGBV. "It could be something that is said explicitly, or it could be less obvious," Eduardo says. "Our people are trained to look for possible indicators and risk factors."

**TIP**

**Prioritisation of Protection and SGBV within the National Society, and training for all staff on the topics, has created a broad base of awareness, and understanding of the steps to follow when the protocol is triggered.**

If a concern arises, it is formally registered and reported through the protocol. All decisions, however, remain with the survivor. “We inform the person of what we have observed, or the concerns we may have, of the options that are open to them, and how we could assist if they

would like us to,” Eduardo says. “But ultimately it is up to them the pathway they would like to follow.”

This could lead to discreet interventions, such as regular check-ins, or more urgent actions, including immediate relocation to safe housing, but at every stage the choice remains with survivors.

“A lot of the women we see do not feel in control of their lives,” Veronica says. “It’s important we do not force them to do anything they don’t want to do, and avoid, in a way, becoming perpetrators ourselves.” It’s an approach that is essential for building and maintaining trust.

“The Red Cross really helped me a lot,” says Khadija (not her real name) who arrived in Spain from North Africa, and was supported after she was assaulted by her partner. “There are two staff in particular who helped me, generally I don’t trust anybody, but these people I can always talk to if I have a problem, I can tell them everything. Their support gave me strength and now I feel more independent, and I can do things for myself.



**TIP**

**Close coordination with the government and other partners has been important in establishing a consistent national SGBV protocol, however an internal Red Cross protocol was set up prior to the National version and contributed to it. It is still effective to have an internal Red Cross SGBV protocol even if a national version together with government is not possible.**

### Simpler Process

The protocol makes life simpler and more consistent for Red Cross staff, who have a clear reporting process for any concerns: “If I see something I might be worried about, I don’t really have to think ‘what should I do?’” Eduardo explains. “I just inform the designated focal point and then the process takes over.”

Training is central to this. All staff receive basic training on SGBV and detection, while focal points undergo

specialised sessions on the protocol. “Early detection is really the goal,” Veronica explains. “Abuse isn’t always physical – there are many indicators if you know to look for them.”

Cultural mediators also play a vital role in this work, bridging gaps between different cultures. “One of the biggest challenges is managing cultural differences,” Eduardo says. “We have a team of cultural mediators from all over the world to help us better relate and engage with the people we work with.”

### Challenges

Rolling out the protocol has brought significant benefits but also challenges. The potential additional workload of the focal point roles, initially raised concerns about sustainability. However, by recruiting people with a genuine interest, the network has thrived, with diverse professional backgrounds contributing to its strength.

“The biggest challenge is aligning our work on SGBV with societal values, while ensuring that the existing laws support and protect everyone involved,” says Eva.

Training and awareness-raising are essential to address biases and build understanding of the wide variety of cultural norms that staff encounter within the programme.

Increased awareness of non-physical forms of violence and abuse is also critical. “Over time of using the protocol, there are some gaps,” says Veronica. “An updated version is being prepared – for example, the current protocol

## HIGHLIGHTS

The national SGBV protocol adopted by the Spanish government, National Society and other partners engaged in the International Protection Programme provides a consistent, comprehensive framework which has proven effective in identifying and responding to SGBV cases.

Leadership from and close relationships with the Ministry of Inclusion, Social Security and Migration, enabled the development and compulsory adoption of the same protocol by all agencies, supporting clarity, consistency and coordination between organizations for how sensitive and potentially complex cases should be handled.

The protocol created a clear reporting and coordination structure for SGBV cases within the Spanish Red Cross and while there were concerns over the potential additional workload for focal points, clarification of the process for handling SGBV cases was welcomed by managers.

The protocol has been tailored specifically to the context of asylum seekers and refugees in Spain, taking into account potential impacts of people’s legal status and cultural issues.

doesn't have guidance on abuse within same sex relationships and is missing quite a few aspects relating to LGBTQ+, so that is something we are adding in".

By keeping the protocol's reporting structures clear and simple, recognising the role of issues like housing and employment in reducing survivors' dependence on abusers, maintaining ongoing coordination with government and partners, and extending SGBV awareness training to all staff, the Spanish Red Cross has taken concrete steps to improve early detection, ensure a survivor-centred approach, and make sure those experiencing SGBV can access the support they need.

## Reassurance and Safety

"Red Cross staff are now much more aware of SGBV," says Eva. "They can identify signs of violence, understand that it goes beyond physical abuse, and know the proper steps to report any cases they detect."

While for regional coordinators, like Eduardo, the protocol provides reassurance and structure: "SGBV is a very challenging, complicated issue to deal with," he says. "The protocol makes sure that cases are handled correctly and consistently, and that people receive the support they need."

For survivors, it provides clear options and safe pathways: "When you see people that have come through

it and who are flourishing, it makes me so happy," says Veronica. "Implementing the protocol helps us to detect cases and provide a safer environment for people at risk."

The protocol also demonstrates how protection work underpins integration: "Without protection and a sense of safety, it's extremely difficult for anybody to move on," Eva explains. "People can't focus on learning the language, finding work, or engaging in community life if they don't feel safe"

TIP



**Once a protocol is established it's important to continue coordination efforts, to ensure ongoing consistency of application, and support continual improvement and development to address gaps and emerging issues.**

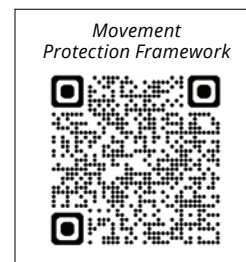
## Contacts and Links

To learn more about Spanish Red Cross SGBV Protocol, contact Eva Molina Uruñuela at [emolinau@cruzroja.es](mailto:emolinau@cruzroja.es) or visit the [Spanish Red Cross Website](#).

Contact the IFRC's Regional Migration, Protection and Accountability Lead for Europe and Central Asia Raquel Fernandez Gibaja at [raquel.gibaja@ifrc.org](mailto:raquel.gibaja@ifrc.org) or learn more at the following IFRC webpages:

### Spanish Red Cross

### IFRC Contacts



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The IFRC Integration and Inclusion Framework is a practical tool to help National Societies plan, deliver, and monitor activities supporting the integration and inclusion of people who have migrated.

Rooted in humanitarian principles, the Framework focuses on addressing barriers and tackling vulnerabilities, drawing on the experience and expertise of the global Red Cross Red Crescent network to support activities that foster dignity, safety, and social cohesion.

This case study is one in a series of ten, illustrating the key elements set out under the Framework's four pillars with examples from National Societies across the IFRC Region of Europe.

### Social Cultural Integration and Inclusion

Orientation and Information – *Lithuania*  
 Language Knowledge – *Bulgaria*  
 Social Connections – *Denmark*

### Socio-Economic Integration and Inclusion

Employment – *Latvia*  
 Housing – *North Macedonia*  
 Education – *Hungary*

### Wellbeing and Protection

Health – *Montenegro*  
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