

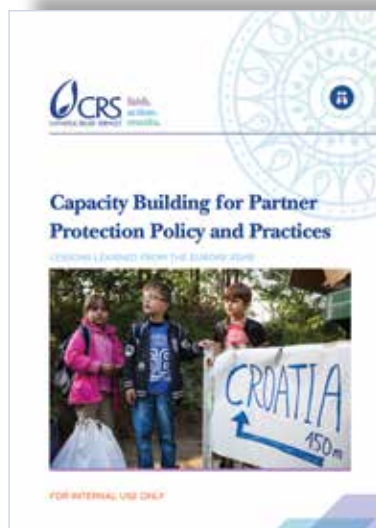


Capacity Building for Partner Protection Policy and Practices

LESSONS LEARNED FROM THE EUROPE ZONE



FOR INTERNAL USE ONLY



COVER

Thousands of people—like these siblings from Syria—have fled countries in northern Africa, the Middle East and central Asia, to seek asylum in Europe. As CRS and its partners respond to the refugee and migrant crisis, CRS aims to build the capacity of its partners to protect project beneficiaries. This document was created as part of the Europe Zone’s learning agenda, to understand what lessons CRS can draw from supporting its partners to roll out their own protection policies in concert with the CRS Code of Conduct and Protection Policy. *Photo by Andrew McConnell for CRS.*



Catholic Relief Services is the official international humanitarian agency of the United States Catholic community. CRS’ relief and development work is accomplished through programs of emergency response, HIV, health, agriculture, education, microfinance and peacebuilding. CRS eases suffering and provides assistance to people in need in more than 100 countries, without regard to race, religion or nationality.

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Acronyms

CP	country program
CRS	Catholic Relief Services
DFID	Department for International Development
FYROM	Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia
HR	human resources
KII	key informant interview
LOE	level of effort
NGO	nongovernmental organization
MEAL	monitoring, evaluation, accountability and learning
SAFERR	Shelter and Access for Empowerment and Risk Reduction
SOP	standard operating procedure
TA	technical adviser



INTRODUCTION

This document was created as part of the Europe Zone’s learning agenda, to understand **what lessons CRS can draw from supporting partners to roll out their own protection policies** in concert with the CRS Code of Conduct and Protection Policy. The Europe Zone staff recognize that supporting partners to strengthen their protection policies and practices is a long-term effort. As this is an ongoing process, this document is the first in a series of internal learning papers on this topic. To inform the lessons learned at this stage, two international staff members conducted a desk review of relevant documents and semi-structured key informant interviews (KIIs) with five CRS staff members based in the CRS Belgrade office, one CRS staff member based in the CRS Athens office and three Serbian partner organizations, including seven partner staff. Interviews with these key informants focused on their experience and involvement in partner protection policy capacity building through the Shelter and Access for Empowerment and Risk Reduction, or SAFERR, project.

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Supporting partners to strengthen their protection policies and practices is a long-term effort.
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THE PROGRAM

CRS’ SAFERR project was a 12-month comprehensive emergency protection program funded by the UK Department for International Development (DFID). The project provided assistance along the Western Balkans migration route, across Greece, Albania, the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia (FYROM), Bulgaria and Serbia, with an overall project goal that *vulnerable refugees and migrants live a safe and dignified life* with services designed to increase the safety and protection of the most vulnerable refugees, especially women and girls. The SAFERR project included 10 local partners (some of which were longer-term CRS partners and some that were new) of varying size and capacity. One partner was selected for its focus on and expertise in protection, while the others were specialists in other sectors (e.g. cash transfers, medical services, etc.) with limited protection experience.

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Newly arrived migrants in Serbia wait in line for assistance.
Photo by Kira Horvath for CRS.

THE CHALLENGE

Shortly before this program began, CRS had launched and started to roll out an updated agency [Protection Policy for Children and Vulnerable Adults](#), with a package of new tools to support partners in developing or improving their own protection policies. However, the CRS policy *“only requires CRS to ensure the existence of an adequate policy in its partner organization; it does not require CRS to ensure implementation of the policy or existence of any other protection procedures.”*¹ The CRS policy does, however, require partners to *“report suspected cases of abuse or exploitation to CRS if the case is either within a CRS project or involves a CRS staff member or affiliate”*² and requires CRS to meet donor requirements should they be more stringent than CRS’ policy.

With the roll out of the new CRS Protection Policy, CRS headquarters launched a one-hour online orientation video on the policy for all staff to view. However, the video is focused on CRS internal policy and does not include guidance on support to partners. Besides viewing the orientation video, none of the staff in the Europe Zone had been formally trained on the new CRS Protection Policy, or on the use of the new partner capacity building tools.

Given the protection focus and scale of the SAFERR project, the need for technical expertise in protection was identified during project start-up. However, given that the team was implementing an emergency response, it took some months to assess existing partner capacity, organize technical adviser (TA) visits and move forward on supporting partners in adopting the policies and practices necessary to create a culture of protection. A few CRS key informants recognized in hindsight that this could have taken place earlier in the project cycle.

¹ [CRS Protection Policy Roll Out to Partners](#). Page 2 (2016)
² [CRS Protection Policy Roll Out to Partners](#). Page 1 (2016)

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WHAT CRS EUROPE ZONE DID

Before the SAFERR project, the CRS senior management team took many key steps early on that paved the way for working with partners to strengthen their approach to protection. First and foremost, **CRS had established mutually respectful and trusting relationships** with all partners upholding CRS guiding principles prior to the emergency and throughout the emergency response. All CRS and partner staff interviewed agreed that this was a necessary precondition to effectively introducing and/or strengthening existing organizational protection policies and systems, which often have significant and sometimes sensitive implications. Following the CRS Protection Policy rollout, **the CRS team immediately translated all the new Protection Policy documents into local languages.** Partners participating in the KIIs unanimously agreed that comparing CRS policy documents to their own policies was very helpful and even the well-established, protection-focused NGO in Serbia found areas for improvement through this comparison.

CRS also approached the Protection Policy as one component of larger partner capacity building efforts. **The Europe Zone team incorporated elements of the Country Program Checklist for Partner Protection Policy Towards Children and Vulnerable Adults into their existing partner capacity assessment tool.**

The concept and basic principles of protection mainstreaming were also introduced to partners and staff during the project design phase of SAFERR, as well as during the midterm reflection. Protection mainstreaming includes core elements of the CRS Protection Policy (staff conduct, feedback mechanisms, protection risk analysis, mapping services and referrals, and information sharing with the affected community.)

The Europe Zone brought in an international staff member with protection expertise to be based in Belgrade with 50 percent LOE dedicated to the SAFERR project, working together with a national staff protection officer whose primary focus was to train and support CRS and partner staff on protection mainstreaming. All partners interviewed felt it was important to ensure that technical staff designing or leading trainings understood the work of CRS and its partners and the operating environment, particularly as they related to protection issues and risks, as well as relevant laws, protection services and coordination bodies. A CRS key informant reported that this was best achieved through ample field exposure prior to designing trainings. **This enabled trainers to ensure training materials and support were contextualized and as immediately relevant as possible.**

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Partners participating in the key informant interviews unanimously agreed that comparing CRS policy documents to their own policies was very helpful.
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The partner training approach and steps taken by the protection TA can be found in [here](#). All partners interviewed were very satisfied with the quality and content of the trainings provided. A key feature of this approach that was valued by CRS staff and partners was **having a preliminary one-and-a-half day training with partner senior management** during which they were introduced to the overall concepts of protection mainstreaming and participated in **organizational self-assessments** to reflect on their level of adherence to each component of protection mainstreaming. CRS and partner key informants directly involved in this felt that the assessment results allowed them to recognize their areas of strength, and commit to action plans to improve the areas where they were weaker. The participating consortium partners all commented that, given their close working relationship within the SAFERR project, they did not feel constrained in sharing openly their organizational weaknesses.

Engaging, interactive activities

All partners interviewed really appreciated that the CRS training sessions were interactive and engaging. One popular training session included the game “*Who Wants to Be a Millionaire?*” with realistic examples and scenarios tailored to the context and programs that partners were implementing (e.g. shelter, cash, etc.). This introduced in a memorable way serious and sensitive issues related to staff or volunteer misconduct.

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WHAT HAPPENED AS A RESULT

All partner key informants said they had gained a deeper understanding of protection policy practices through a holistic protection mainstreaming framework. **They reported that they had bridged the administrative and practical aspects of the Protection Policy and Code of Conduct and were taking the necessary steps to put them into practice.** The partners have expressed and/or demonstrated the following results to date, as reported by the CRS and partner staff interviewed:

- **Partner leadership have demonstrated strong buy-in** to the process through their openness and honesty with CRS; active participation of staff at all levels; and continued commitment to the ongoing process of strengthening their organizations' protection-related practices. Partners also noted that while they were receiving funding from a range of donors and INGOs, no other partner had provided this type of capacity building support.
- **Partners have protection policies formally in place** (and, where relevant, approved by governing boards) **that surpass CRS minimum standards**, including official staff codes of conduct. Partners who participated in the CRS facilitator training now have the in-house capacity to conduct staff trainings on their own protection policy and code of conduct. As a result, partner staff have participated in in-person trainings, and partners are working to schedule regular refresher trainings. Some partners said they now had regular internal meetings to discuss issues related to their protection policy and felt confident they could identify appropriate solutions and take the necessary action. CRS experience in the Europe Zone has showed that awareness and capacity building support is also needed for national Caritas partners. Despite formal adoption of Caritas Internationalis policies, the Caritas partners do not necessarily have trained field staff with an increased awareness of their organization's protection policies or improved practices.
- The two non-protection-focused partner key informants expressed their appreciation for having a local specialized protection partner on the consortium. The protection partner was able to provide trainings on protection and **allowed for strong referral systems among the partners** to be established. Most key informants felt there was very strong coordination overall with the local cluster and other coordinating bodies.

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"A donor from a different project told us we had to include a protection officer in our staffing plan. Before CRS supported us and introduced the concept of protection mainstreaming, we had no idea what a [person in a] position like this would do. Now we have no doubt."
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Director, CRS partner

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- While the majority of SAFERR partner staff and volunteers were from the host communities and initially were **unfamiliar with the culture, language and other sensitive considerations** of the diverse nationalities that made up the newly arrived migrant and refugee populations, partners successfully navigated these dynamics ensuring that staff and volunteer training and hiring was culturally responsive to beneficiary protection needs.
- Partners have staff with clear roles and responsibilities related to the protection policy implementation. They also have action plans developed with guidance from CRS that they are actively working to complete. **The demand for technical assistance related to completing these action plans is now largely coming from partners to CRS.**
- The components of protection mainstreaming identified by all partners and CRS staff interviewed as being the **largest and most resource-intensive challenges** with direct impact on protection policy implementation are:
 - **Internal reporting and investigation systems**
 - **Safe feedback mechanisms** that are accessible to all beneficiaries. These areas have strong implications for organizational structure, and can be challenging to execute in contexts where beneficiary populations are diverse, and are transiting or stationary at different points in the response.

CRS key informants recognized that a one-size-fits-all approach was not effective and that tailored support with significant accompaniment was required for partners to achieve these components. These two areas are the primary focus of CRS' ongoing capacity building support efforts for the Europe Zone partners.

APPLICATION	NUMBER	LANGUAGE
WhatsApp	+30 694 451 4441	Arabic, French, English
	+30 694 071 6099	Farsi, Dari, Kurdish, Turkish, Urdu, Punjabi, Greek, English
Viber	+30 694 451 4441	Arabic, French, English
	+30 694 071 6099	Farsi, Dari, Kurdish, Turkish, Urdu, Punjabi, Greek, English

This chart shows the CRS-run feedback and information hotline numbers and the 10 languages available to respond to beneficiaries in Greece.

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Staff and volunteer training and hiring was culturally responsive to beneficiary protection needs.

Feedback hotline and standard operating procedures

In Greece, CRS manages a national hotline for beneficiaries to provide feedback and receive information related to humanitarian assistance delivered by different actors. MEAL staff play a critical role in receiving sensitive information related to the conduct of CRS staff, our Caritas partners, and other humanitarian actors, and have been trained to manage it.

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LESSONS LEARNED

Starting before the emergency response phase: Most of the actions noted above took place after the acute emergency phase had subsided. Key informants regretted that the protection mainstreaming trainings and the partner protection policy rollout had not started earlier, as this caused significant delays and some challenges during the emergency response period (elaborated further below).

Partner human resources staff: Key informants also learned that capacity building strategies related to the protection policies must include heavy coordination and engagement from both programming teams and administrative staff, especially HR departments. In fact, a few key informants said that most of their HR staff did not have the full complement of expertise needed to execute the HR side of protection policies (e.g. analyzing local labor law and supporting internal reporting and investigation systems.)

Prioritization in emergencies: While protection mainstreaming is applicable to all types of programming, key informants said that emergencies posed new and immediate protection risks for both affected communities and partners. Most key informants felt the protection mainstreaming approach outlined above took significant time and resources, which was not deemed feasible during the acute emergency response phase. Some key lessons learned based on the emergency context of SAFERR are:

- **Prioritizing high-risk areas of exposure first:** Because the trainings from CRS did not start until after the acute emergency phase, and because they focused on developing understanding and buy-in of a holistic protection mainstreaming approach, half of the key informants recognized in retrospect that there were some high-risk areas that they had not addressed adequately in time (e.g. internal reporting mechanisms not in place, feedback mechanisms not accessible to the affected population, etc.).
- **Staffing up:** Emergencies, such as the migrant crisis in the Balkans and Mediterranean, often require partners to staff up quickly, which poses significant risks. Several key informants felt in retrospect that they would have benefited from immediate support on how to best vet and conduct background checks on new staff and volunteers. This would have meant that partners needed more time to conduct appropriate recruitment and orientation (and CRS may also have needed more capacity to provide this support to our partners).

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Key informants regretted that the protection mainstreaming trainings and the partner protection policy rollout had not started earlier.

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Protection risks of staffing up quickly

In Serbia, partners said during KII that they were under significant pressure to staff up quickly to be able to respond to beneficiary needs. One partner was working in border areas where there were major influxes of migrants and local residents were reportedly involved in people smuggling. Partners had limited time to properly vet and train new staff on their code of conduct. With hindsight, more emphasis could have been put on this protection risk earlier on in the crisis. And CRS could have provided support to the partner regarding new staff recruitment.

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Partners would have also benefited from support for training new staff and volunteers on the CRS and partner protection policies and codes of conduct and ensuring that the latter were signed and understood before interacting with members of affected communities.

- **Protection-focused NGO capacity stretched:** While key informants agreed that it was highly beneficial to have a protection-focused partner as part of the consortium, they noted that its capacity was stretched in the acute emergency phase, especially as referrals increased due to the other partners' greater awareness of protection issues. Because of this heightened demand, they themselves were in need of additional technical and financial resources.



Migrants make their way toward the Greek-Macedonian border near Idomeni, northern Greece. *Photo courtesy of Matthieu Alexandre/Caritas Internationalis*

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The capacity of the protection-focused partner was stretched in the acute emergency phase, especially as referrals increased due to the other partners' greater awareness of protection issues.

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RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on this learning, the below CRS internal protection practices at the CP level should be reinforced:



All CRS and partner staff need to have a common understanding on the core components of the CRS Protection Policy and Code of Conduct.

Some key informants said that this was likely to be most effective with in-country trainings that were interactive and built on context-specific examples. The one-hour CRS orientation video, which is only available in three languages, did not prove to be sufficient for all CRS staff to fully understand the Protection Policy, their roles and responsibilities in the SAFERR operating context, or the partners' obligations.



All CRS staff need to know who to report to.

Given the wide geographic coverage, and multiple operating languages and management structures within the Europe Zone, CRS key informants had different understandings of alternative "official" reporting focal points for partners other than the country representative (e.g. head of office, chief of party or country manager).



CRS should be very clear with partners about what the expectations are on sharing any reports of abuse.

While SAFERR partner agreements included a signed CRS Code of Conduct, two partner key informants said the Code of Conduct language was not well understood, and therefore the obligation to report protection incidents to CRS was not understood. Partner agreements, along with discussions and trainings of partner staff, should leave no doubt regarding the partners' obligation to share with CRS any report of abuse by partner staff, volunteers and other humanitarian workers in a CRS-supported project or that involves a CRS staff member, and how they should go about doing so (e.g. what to report, who to report to, and how to share the information).

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