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## NRC EVALUATION REPORT

# Multi-Country Evaluation of NRC's Protection from Violence Core Competency

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## Acronyms

|       |                                                                      |
|-------|----------------------------------------------------------------------|
| ALA   | Asia and Latin America (regional grouping)                           |
| APM   | Area Programme Manager                                               |
| CAR   | Central African Republic                                             |
| CBO   | Community Based Organisation                                         |
| CBP   | Community-Based Protection                                           |
| CBPN  | Community-Based Protection Network                                   |
| CC    | Core Competency                                                      |
| CMS   | Case Management Services                                             |
| CO    | Country Office                                                       |
| CP    | Child Protection                                                     |
| CSP   | Civilian Self-Protection                                             |
| CSO   | Civil Society Organisation                                           |
| CWA   | Central and West Africa (region)                                     |
| CWARO | Central and West Africa Regional Office                              |
| DRC   | Democratic Republic of the Congo                                     |
| EA&Y  | East Africa and Yemen (region)                                       |
| ECHO  | European Civil Protection and Humanitarian Aid Operations (EU donor) |
| ERC   | Emergency Relief Coordinator                                         |
| ESARO | Eastern and Southern Africa Regional Office                          |
| EU    | European Union                                                       |
| FGD   | Focus Group Discussion                                               |
| GBV   | Gender Based Violence                                                |
| GORS  | Global Output and Outcome Reporting System                           |
| GPC   | Global Protection Cluster                                            |
| H2R   | Hard-to-Reach                                                        |
| HCT   | Humanitarian Country Team                                            |
| HNO   | Humanitarian Needs Overview                                          |
| HO    | Head Office                                                          |
| HPG   | Humanitarian Policy Group                                            |
| HR    | Human Rights                                                         |
| HRP   | Humanitarian Response Plan                                           |
| HRR   | Humanitarian Response Review                                         |
| HSS   | Humanitarian Safety and Security                                     |
| IASC  | Inter-Agency Standing Committee                                      |
| ICLA  | Information, Counselling and Legal Assistance                        |
| ICRC  | International Committee of the Red Cross                             |
| IDP   | Internally Displaced Person                                          |
| IHL   | International Humanitarian Law                                       |
| IHRL  | International Human Rights Law                                       |
| IM    | Information Management                                               |
| INGO  | International Non-Governmental Organisation                          |
| IPA   | Individual Protection Assistance                                     |
| IRS   | Individual Response Services                                         |
| IS    | Individual Services                                                  |
| IT    | Information Technology                                               |
| JAC   | Junta de Acción Comunal / Community Action Board (Colombia)          |
| KII   | Key Informant Interview                                              |
| LARO  | Latin America Regional Office                                        |
| MEAL  | Monitoring, Evaluation and Learning                                  |
| MEAL  | Monitoring, Evaluation, Accountability and Learning                  |
| MENA  | Middle East and North Africa (region)                                |



|        |                                                          |
|--------|----------------------------------------------------------|
| MENARO | Middle East and North Africa Regional Office             |
| MIRE+  | Multi-sectoral Integrated Response Consortium (Colombia) |
| MPCA   | Multi-Purpose Cash Assistance                            |
| NGO    | Non-Governmental Organisation                            |
| NRC    | Norwegian Refugee Council                                |
| OHCHR  | Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights         |
| OPAG   | Operational Policy and Advocacy Group                    |
| PA     | Palestinian Authority                                    |
| PCM    | Protection Case Management                               |
| PDM    | Post-Distribution Monitoring                             |
| PFA    | Psychosocial First Aid                                   |
| PfV    | Protection from Violence                                 |
| PSP    | Psychosocial Support Programme                           |
| PSS    | Psychosocial Support Services                            |
| PwD    | Person with Disability                                   |
| SIP    | Safe and Inclusive Programming                           |
| SO     | Strategic Objective                                      |
| SOP    | Standard Operating Procedure                             |
| SRA    | Strategic Results Area                                   |
| ToC    | Theory of Change                                         |
| ToR    | Terms of Reference                                       |
| UDOC   | Urban Displacement of Communities                        |
| UNHCR  | United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees            |
| UNICEF | United Nations Children's Fund                           |
| VfM    | Value for Money                                          |
| WASH   | Water, Sanitation and Hygiene                            |





# 1 Executive Summary

## 1.1 Introduction and background

**In January 2022, the Norwegian Refugee Council (NRC) introduced the Protection from Violence (PfV) Core Competency (CC).** This builds on NRC's commitment to humanitarian protection in its programming, policy and advocacy work. NRC is currently entering its next strategy period and the findings from this evaluation will help inform PfV programming and its learning agenda.

PfV consists of three major strands. Civilian Self Protection (CSP), a community based and highly participatory programme aimed at reducing and mitigating risks, Individual Response Services (IRS) that encompasses case management and Individual Protection Assistance (IPA) (often emergency cash transfers).

And thought leadership, focused on protection risk analysis and support to coordination. Until quite recently PfV also included site management. In total 29 countries carry out one or more of these PfV activities, showing steady progress since its inception.

## 1.2 Method

**The evaluation has focused largely on the perspectives of people involved in PfV programming or in receipt of PfV services.** Five country case studies formed the basis for the analysis, with three – South Sudan, Syria and Palestine - carried out in person by the core evaluation team, one – Colombia – carried out by a national consultant and one – Myanmar – carried out remotely. In addition, there was an extensive review of previous lessons learned exercises and literature generally, as well as a handful of key informant interviews (KIIs) with HO staff.

The country based research used participatory and qualitative enquiry, employing a mix of outcome harvesting focus group discussions, structured participatory research and KIIs. In total, 219 people from CSP groups were interviewed across four countries (and 11 locations) as well as 58 people from NRC, partners and those in receipt of individual services.

## 1.3 Findings

**The evaluation has found that the PfV core competency is making a meaningful contribution to protection in the contexts examined.** Moreover, it is highly appreciated and valued by people involved in the civilian self protection groups, who credit the work with helping them reduce risks and build social cohesion. It has the added benefit of building strong bonds of trust between communities and NRC.

**In the majority of cases, PfV is not addressing the structural drivers of violence.** This can happen at a local level through mediation, and the evaluation team documented this in South Sudan. For the most part however, the causes of violence are macro and political and beyond the influence of communities and the groups that represent them.

**Where PfV is having a tangible and measurable impact is in reducing harm from violence.** It does this either through mitigating risk – for instance helping communities anticipate and avoid attacks – or through responding faster to the impacts, for instance through basic first aid or emergency response teams. Protective measures such as fences and gates can help in certain contexts, as can innovative measures such as Palestinians learning Hebrew in highly contested Hebron, helping them communicate better with soldiers.

**IRS are equally having a significant and measurable impact.** In Palestine people rated psychosocial support services (PSS) as the most important intervention received, valuing it more than material inputs. In both South Sudan and Colombia, the evaluation documented cases where



emergency cash had helped people avoid potential destitution as a result of displacement, and in Palestine IPA had been used to protect dwellings and homesteads from settler attacks. IPA showed the greatest variation in both conceptualisation and application. In Myanmar it is a front line response to displacement. In Colombia and South Sudan an economic bridge for extremely vulnerable people, and in Palestine targeted at physical protective actions.

**Whilst the evaluation found good examples of IRS work in all the case study countries, there is a gap when – as in South Sudan – IPA and case management are designed to help people access services that are no longer there.** Grants for transport to medical facilities, for instance, are an excellent IPA intervention until funding cuts mean that clinics are shuttered and there is no longer medical care in the region. Using IPA for emergency economic assistance also makes sense in terms of its definition, but in the absence of any other safety net this can easily start to serve the same purpose as other forms of cash assistance. Using the learning from this evaluation and other exercises can help focus IPA and case management. Combining with CSP work can, at best, enhance protection by connecting group and individual interventions.

**This is also the case in terms of PfV linkages to other CCs. This is most obvious in its overlap with Information, Counselling and Legal Assistance (ICLA).** Where the two combine in areas of mutual competence, the outcomes and impact can be enhanced. Being able to refer people to ICLA in Palestine as part of case management or being able to teach CSP groups their rights in Colombia or Palestine enhanced their protection further. This is not an argument for merging the two – there is distinctive work that both do well and is different – but more a case for the best integration possible. CSP groups can also help with more general community prioritisation – something if done well that could help target other NRC interventions such as shelter and Water, Sanitation and Hygiene (WASH). The evaluation saw this in South Sudan, something that could easily be expanded.

**Whilst the evaluation has seen concrete examples of protection outcomes in each of the country case studies, the teams have struggled to communicate the value of the PfV work to donors and all internal stakeholders. Partly this may be due to its relative newness.** The work is still evolving making it difficult to categorise. Results take time to materialise. In Palestine the most successful and cohesive groups were two years old, suggesting it needs patience to see the best outcomes. However, the community based, participatory and often ‘soft’ nature of the impact of PfV also makes it harder to report on in an NRC system that has traditionally measured material assistance. As outlined above, communities are extremely positive about the CSP work. They value the social cohesion they believe it brings; they value the dignity and empowerment that a demand led NRC engagement is perceived to bring (and see it as different to other aid interventions); and they value the skills and organisational ability it gives them to respond to threats. However, counting and reporting on this is quite different to counting and reporting on distributions of shelter kits or even cash distributions. There are small community cash grants, and IRS interventions, but these numbers can look quite small compared to assistance programmes. Finding a more representative way to showcase this work is an important next step for the organisation.

**There are good pockets of work underway in terms of measurement. In South Sudan the case management system seemed effective and easy to replicate.** It was able to give good information and show trends over time, an important link to the thought leadership work. The rich material generated by participatory risk analyses and community plans is not captured and aggregated to a reporting level. This can generate the types of stories that bring the work to life and would interest donors. Moreover, this approach can easily be extended into community based monitoring and evaluation, giving a powerful method for demonstrating outcomes and impact. This should be an area for investment in the next strategy and should be supported by the global Monitoring, Evaluation and Learning (MEAL) team so that it can be incorporated into the Global Output and Outcome Reporting System (GORS).

The evaluation did not examine NRC’s work in supporting the protection cluster. However, it is clear that the deep roots this type of work generates in communities, and the trust built over time, is extremely valuable in helping with strategic level protection analysis. This can give NRC an authoritative voice in protection forums, reinforcing a virtuous cycle whereby NRC can elevate community voices, helping work focus on their real needs, building trust further, enhancing NRCs role in protection and humanitarian work generally.



## 1.4 Conclusion

**The protection from violence core competency has come a long way in a relatively short amount of time.** This evaluation has documented good examples of protection outcomes and the highly positive feedback from communities and staff on the ways of working.

The evaluation has found that:

- 1. There is strong evidence that NRC's protection from violence work reduces harm.** This happens via two pathways. The first is preventative community groups using early warning systems, mediation and simple protective measures can prevent violence from occurring or lessen its impact. Individual assistance that helps people move (for instance to avoid forced recruitment) can also work in this way. The second pathway is in terms of response to the impact of violence, for instance through community first aid, search and rescue and better connections to other groups that perform these functions.
- 2. There is good evidence that individual protection services can help people recover from the impact of violence, or at least to mitigate some of the worst effects.** There are a range of outcomes the evaluation has documented, ranging from PSS in Palestine that is helping people cope with the pressures of settler violence, to economic recovery after displacement in Myanmar and Colombia.
- 3. Evidence gathered for the evaluation confirms the causal pathways hypothesised in the theories of change (ToCs) for the PfV CC.** Training, mentoring and accompanying community groups, and helping them develop plans for their own protection can – with some small resources – enhance their capacities to implement simple protective measures and strategies. The right kinds of individual services – case management, cash, PSS, legal – can reinforce community protection strategies and can help with recovery.
- 4. Communities enthusiastically embrace this way of working, and over time strong bonds of trust are built.** This can have positive effects on access.
- 5. Nevertheless, NRC and PfV cannot on their own address the underlying drivers of violence, which in all of the contexts examined were structural and national in nature.** Some local tensions can be reduced via CSP interventions, but resolution relies on a wider set of actors.
- 6. NRC is making good progress in terms of tools, codification of best practice, measurement and learning.** As the programme continues to mature, this work will be important to ensuring both quality and coverage.
- 7. There are important efficiency measures that can be taken to ensure PfV and ICLA can be resourced.** The evaluation concludes there is not a strong argument for merging as the work is often different, skills needed can be different and the ICLA brand is strong and well recognised. Nevertheless, there is strong overlap in some areas and it will be important to avoid duplication and over-staffing where this is the case.





## 2 Background

In January 2022, NRC introduced the PfV CC. This CC builds on NRC's commitment to humanitarian protection in its programming, policy and advocacy work. NRC is currently entering its next strategy period and the findings from this evaluation will help inform PfV programming and its learning agenda going forward.

### 2.1 Protection in the humanitarian community

Protection as a key part of humanitarian work has grown in significance and scale over the last four decades. Initially, the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) and the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) held the protection mandates to protect civilians. By 1989, this mandate was extended to the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) to protect children's rights to live free from violence, abuse and exploitation and in 1993, the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) was mandated to promote and protect the enjoyment and full realisation of rights as per international human rights laws (IHRs). At the same time, in the 1990s, there were a number of international non-governmental organisations (INGOs) who started to take the concept of protection seriously such as NRC, World Vision, Oxfam and Search for Common Ground.<sup>i</sup> However, it was not until the late 1990s, following an ICRC series of workshops in 1996, that the Inter-Agency Standing Committee (IASC) and ICRC approved a shared definition of protection, which had an emphasis on legal protection and rights:

*... all activities aimed at obtaining full respect for the rights of the individual in accordance with the letter and the spirit of the relevant bodies of law (i.e. HR law, IHL, refugee law).<sup>ii</sup>*

In 2005, the Humanitarian Response Review (HRR) commissioned by the Emergency Relief Coordinator (ERC) highlighted systematic issues in relation to protection. For example, it noted that those agencies without a protection specific mandate had very few staff with a protection focus. More broadly, it argued that across the humanitarian system there was a lack of understanding of what protection meant and a failure to take responsibility for internally displaced persons (IDPs).<sup>iii</sup> Yet by the 2010s, protection was considered by many as a catch all term, arguably not helped by the sweeping IASC definition.<sup>iv</sup> Some describe this as the 'protection paradox' where 'the conception of protection is broad enough to fit an array of approaches and activities' but at the same time 'refers to a specific set of activities, often designed for particular groups'.<sup>v</sup>

In 2013, the IASC Principal's Statement on the Centrality of Protection put protection considerations central to humanitarian action and decision-making. This was followed by the IASC Policy on Protection in Humanitarian Action in 2016 that positioned protection as the responsibility of the wider system – a collective rather than a technical sectoral responsibility – and an outcome rather than an activity. More recently, the Independent Review of the Implementation of the IASC Protection Policy found that there is a lack of commitment to protection – to put it 'at the core of humanitarian action' – and a lack of understanding of how to work collectively to reduce risks for vulnerable people into practical action.<sup>vi</sup> The review also argued that protection should be seen as an approach or outcome rather than a technical intervention and that 'Approaches to protection remain predominantly focused on outputs related to responding to needs, rather than outcomes and impact focused on reducing risks'.<sup>vii</sup>

**There has also been criticism at the 'mismatch between the rhetoric and reality of protection, particularly for local actors'.**<sup>viii</sup> Some argue that humanitarian actors may advocate for the protection of civilians, create false expectations, and fail to fulfil them. Equally, with community-based or self-protection strategies, similar criticism has been levelled at the failure of humanitarian actors to support these local approaches grounded in contextual knowledge, whilst also maintaining an understanding of broader protection trends and threats in particular crises.<sup>ix</sup>





In recent years there has been a notable shift from a state-centric view of protection in humanitarian action to more proactive protection approaches. In part, this shift has been informed by debates around localisation and decolonisation which call into question unequal power dynamics and the importance and knowledge of local actors.<sup>x</sup> Where protection strategies once looked to influence or change the behaviour of state or non-state actors to civilians, they now focus on the agency of communities and lived realities.<sup>xi</sup> There is an acknowledgement that local protection strategies 'are neither exclusively positive or negative, but instead highlight the differential risk that people face in conflict'.<sup>xii</sup> With community-driven approaches, NRC, like other organisations, places a focus on identifying protection risks (rather than needs), such as risks of violence, coercion and deliberate deprivation, to improve protection outcomes.

## 3 Protection from Violence Core Competency

### 3.1 NRC's development of the PfV CC

**NRC has shown its commitment to protection as a 'foundational element' of its programming, policy and advocacy.**<sup>xiii</sup> Internally and externally, it is recognised for its specialised services such as its ICLA CC and camp management. Whilst NRC does not have a specific mandate for protection, externally, it has been seen as an actor in the sector with its advocacy work and its co-leadership with UNHCR of the Protection Cluster, and its involvement in Humanitarian Country Teams (HCTs) and the Operational Policy and Advocacy Group (OPAG). NRC has also worked with Oxfam to support the Global Protection Cluster (GPC) to set up a Task Force on Community-Led Protection. This has led to the inclusion of CSP in humanitarian needs overviews (HNOs), humanitarian response plans (HRPs), and pooled fund processes. Alongside this, they have championed local leadership of the GPC working group.<sup>xiv</sup>

NRC's approach to protection has three key elements:

- Collective humanitarian protection outcomes achieved through a commitment to the Centrality of Protection.
- Safe and Inclusive programming (SIP) or often referred by other organisations as protection mainstreaming. This forms a key component of programming quality and accountability.
- Protection as a specialised response that requires technical expertise and refers to activities aimed at ensuring freedom from violence and the full respect of rights in accordance with international human rights, humanitarian, and refugee law as well as addressing the risks and consequences of violence, abuse, coercion and deliberate deprivation.

Since 2016, NRC's broader approach to protection has been documented in its Protection Policy. In 2017, NRC's Programme Policy highlighted the importance of its specialised protection work noting that NRC mainstreams protection across its CC programming and also carries out standalone protection programmes to address unmet protection needs and gaps.<sup>xv</sup> In the 2018-2021 strategy period, NRC integrated protection more broadly into its programmatic work and piloted new approaches. With the push to 'do more'<sup>xvi</sup> in 2021 NRC defined protection as one of its eight global strategic sub-objectives and created a PfV CC, which was formally launched in January 2022,<sup>xvii</sup> with a particular focus on displacement caused by armed conflict. PfV was also included as a core competency in the Response Policy (2022). PfV has since been removed as a Strategic Objective in the upcoming Global Strategy. Some argue the reason for this is to reduce the number of objectives,<sup>xviii</sup> while others note that PfV has been institutionalised across NRC and therefore no longer required in the strategy.<sup>xix</sup>

NRC's focus on PfV as opposed to protection is deliberate to encourage more emphasis on risk rather than vulnerability. Its overall aim is to reduce the risk of violence and harm and/or mitigate its impact.<sup>xx</sup> Such proactive protection also places emphasis on preventing, interrupting or reducing violence.<sup>xxi</sup>



NRC's focus on PfV as opposed to protection is deliberate to encourage more emphasis on risk rather than vulnerability. Its overall aim is to reduce the risk of violence and harm and/or mitigate its impact.<sup>xx</sup> Such proactive protection also places emphasis on preventing, interrupting or reducing violence.<sup>xxi</sup>

## 3.2 Scope and coverage of PfV CC

The PfV CC currently addresses the following pillars/Strategic Results Areas (SRAs):

- Community Safety and Violence Prevention – it covers both humanitarian mediation and support to CSP.
- Individual Services (IS) – IPA (cash, psychological first aid, protective accompaniment that is one-off or timebound) and protection case management services (CMS) (more comprehensive service in which multiple forms of assistance are coordinated through a case plan and supported through a trained case manager).
- Thought leadership – to changes both in the humanitarian sector as well as with local actors and duty bearers. This includes protection monitoring, leadership roles in humanitarian protection coordination systems and global and national policy mechanisms.

Until 2025, site management was also a pillar, but this has now been moved to the Shelter and Settlements CC as per the recommendation in the formative review.<sup>xxii</sup> It included activities such as formal and informal site coordination, community engagement and urban displacement of communities (UDOC).

Overall, there appears to be geographic alignment within the SRAs with “regional championing” an intentional approach when establishing the PfV CC. For example, the Central and West Africa (CWA) region has done a lot of work on humanitarian mediation,<sup>xxiii</sup> Asia and Latin America (ALA) focuses on civilian self-protection and UDOC, the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) has an emphasis on case management and individual protection assistance, and East Africa and Yemen (EA&Y) on protection coordination, monitoring and analysis<sup>xxiv</sup>. However, there are countries that are also engaging in other programme components such as South Sudan and Sudan which are carrying out protection case management (PCM), IPA, and CSP. And Palestine, which has active programmes in all components except humanitarian mediation in 2025.

Below is a table which gives an overview of the number of countries carrying out PfV programme components in 2026 compared to mid-year 2025.

**Table 1:** Number of Countries Carrying Out PfV Programme Components in 2026 compared with mid-year 2025\*

|                  | PfV Programme Components                   |                                            |                                            |                                |                                |                                            |
|------------------|--------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------|--------------------------------|--------------------------------|--------------------------------------------|
|                  | Protection case management                 | Individual protection assistance           | Civilian self-protection                   | Humanitarian Mediation         | Site Management                | Protection monitoring                      |
| No. of Countries | 22                                         | 29                                         | 21 (with 3 labelled CBP)                   | 2 (plus 1 recently closed)     | 10 (plus 2 recently closed)    | 20                                         |
|                  | Increase of 1 since mid-year 2025 baseline | Increase of 1 since mid-year 2025 baseline | Increase of 1 since mid-year 2025 baseline | Same as mid-year 2025 baseline | Same as mid-year 2025 baseline | Decrease of 2 since mid-year 2025 baseline |

\* Top line facts (note this is countries not Country Offices, so includes separately all Latin American countries as well as Syria).

As this evaluation has a particular focus on CSP and IPA, the following table provides a breakdown of available base line data for mid-2025 per country where these activities are taking place. Data remained the same at time of writing report (March 2026).



**Table 2:** Number of Communities Carrying out CSP Components in 2025

| Country                                                      | Number of Communities |
|--------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------|
| <b>Eastern and Southern Africa Regional Office (ESARO)</b>   |                       |
| South Sudan                                                  | 4                     |
| Sudan                                                        | 21                    |
| Uganda                                                       | 2                     |
| <b>Middle East and North Africa Regional Office (MENARO)</b> |                       |
| Palestine                                                    | 19                    |
| Iraq                                                         | 4                     |
| Syria                                                        | 2                     |
| <b>Central and West Africa Regional Office (CWARO)</b>       |                       |
| Mali                                                         | 22                    |
| CAR                                                          | 8                     |
| Burkina Faso                                                 | 4                     |
| <b>Latin America Regional Office (LARO)</b>                  |                       |
| Colombia*                                                    | 44                    |
| Honduras                                                     | 1                     |
| Ecuador                                                      | 3                     |
| Venezuela                                                    | 8                     |
| <b>Europe and Asia (EurAsia)</b>                             |                       |
| Afghanistan                                                  | 37                    |
| Myanmar                                                      | 4                     |
| Ukraine                                                      | 22                    |
| Bangladesh                                                   | 2                     |

\* It is also important to note that as the structure of CSP can be quite different from place to place, Country Offices self-define communities. Both scope and reach should be interpreted with these limitations in mind.

**Source:** CSP Community Update for 2025



Table 3 provides an overview of the IPA caseload for 2025, obtained from GORS data.



**Table 3:** Number of individuals with IPA cases opened, 2025

| Category                                   | Cash  | PFA  | In-kind | Accompaniment |
|--------------------------------------------|-------|------|---------|---------------|
| Number of individuals globally receiving** | 32507 | 7419 | 13393   | 2724          |
| Number of countries delivering             | 22    | 10   | 12      | 7             |

\*\* Some participants received more than one form of IPA and these numbers are per modality, and therefore do not account for overlap

### 3.3 Theory of Change

The PfV CC has a number of discreet and interlinked ToCs (reproduced below). The overall desired impact is:

- People affected by displacement enjoy their right to freedom from violence, coercion and deliberate deprivation

The long term outcomes are:

- Safety restored (for at risk/ affected individuals)
- And (variously)
- Violence prevented
- Protection risks reduced
- Communities recover from violence

There are a number of mandatory outcome and output indicators for CSP and IPA which revolve around community safety strategies developed and implemented and disputes being resolved. For IPA, the mandatory indicators are exclusively output oriented, looking at how many people received cash assistance and the number of referrals.





Figure 1: Community Safety and Violence Prevention ToC for 2026

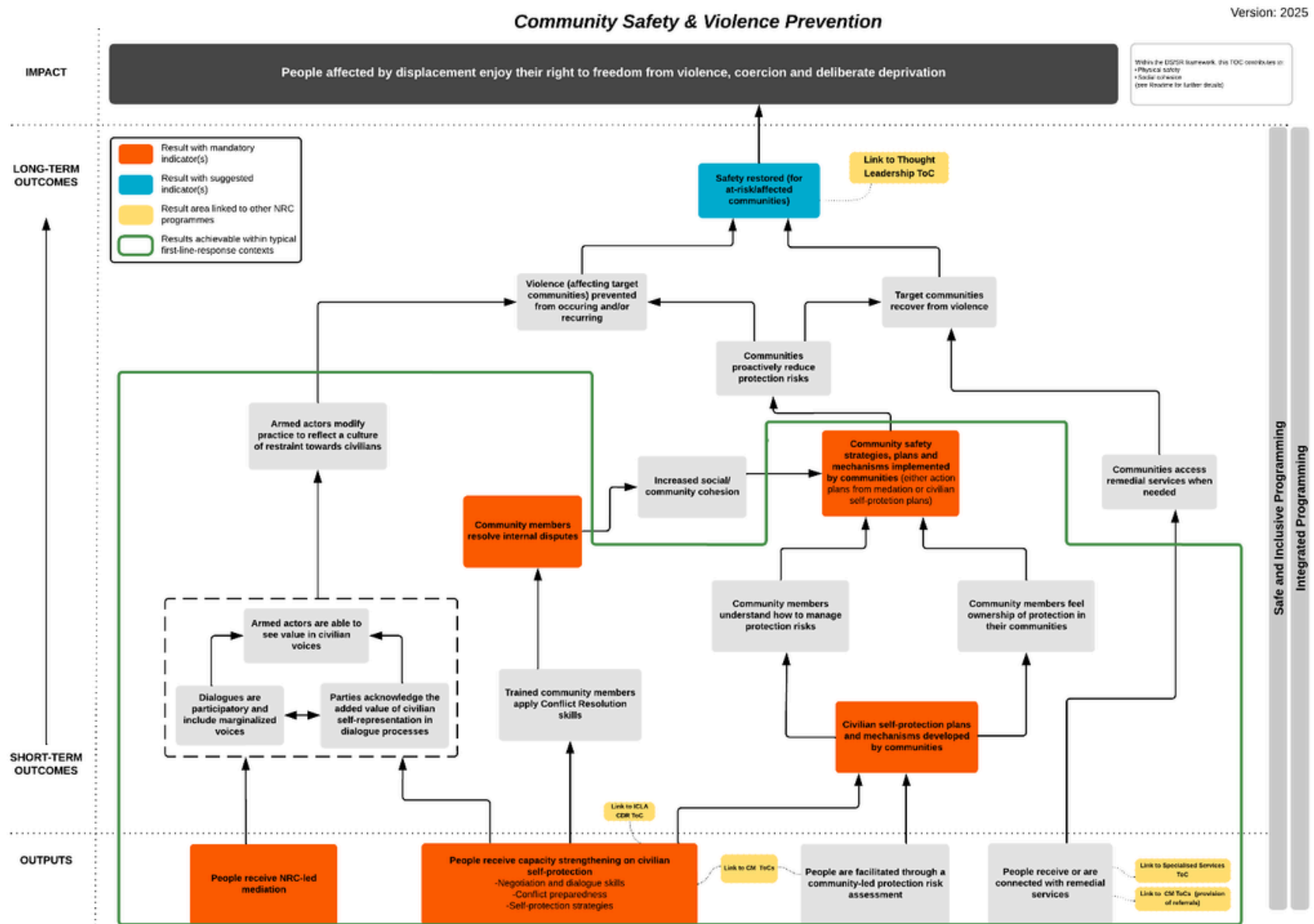
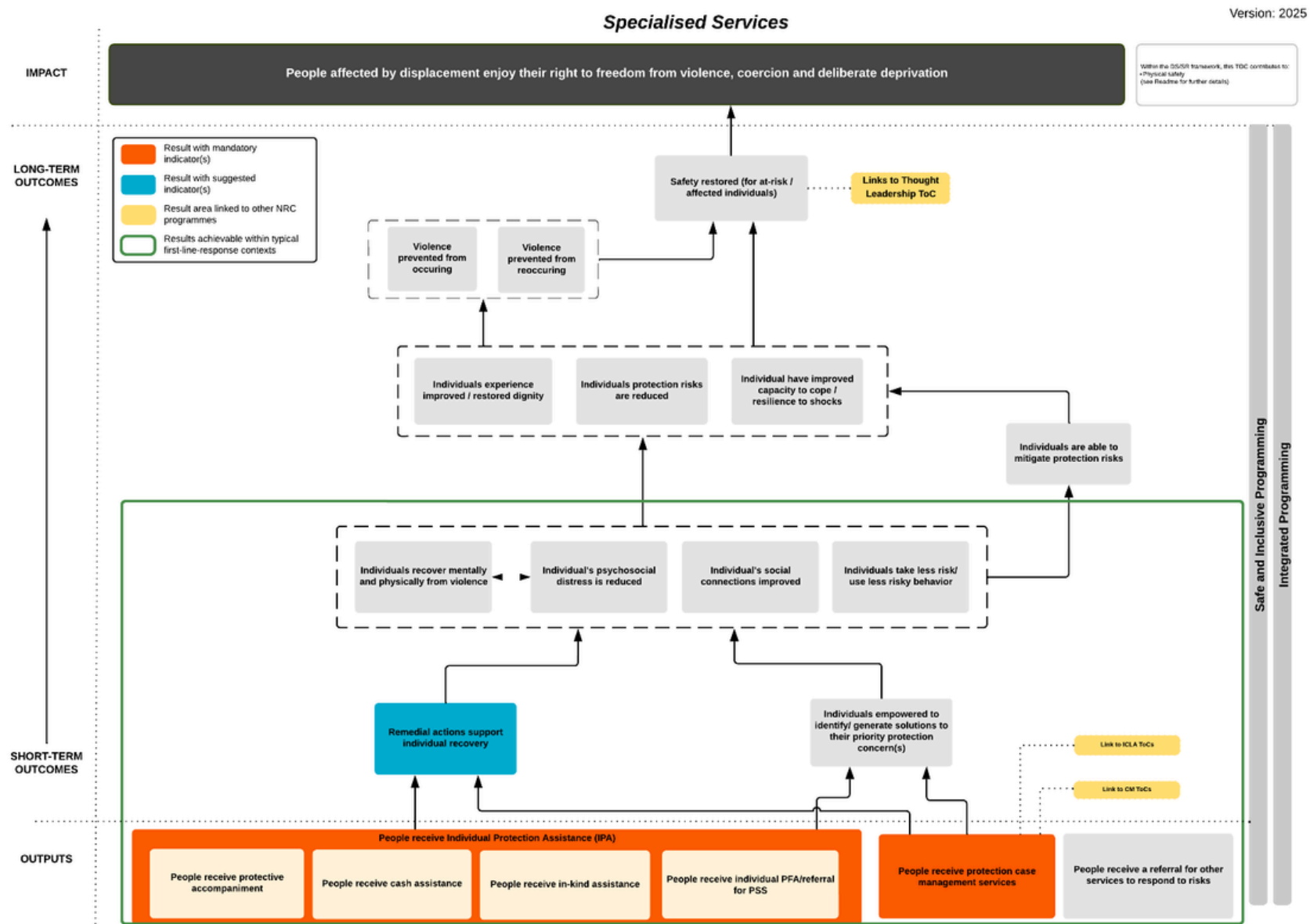




Figure 2: Specialised Services ToC for 2026



## 4 Purpose of the evaluation

The purpose of this evaluation is to generate rigorous, actionable evidence on the outcomes and impacts of NRC's PfV programming, with a focus on CSP and IPA.

The evaluation:

1. centralises protection outcomes;
2. uses participatory approaches;
3. aims to assist NRC as well as sector-wide learning.

### 4.1 Evaluation scope

As NRC looks to expand its investment in PfV as one of its CCs, this evaluation sought to assist that process by critically assessing how effectively these interventions reduce protection risks and contribute to safer, more dignified lives for displaced populations. As outlined above, the PfV CC currently has three main strands of programming – community safety and violence prevention (which includes CSP and humanitarian mediation), individual services (including IPA) and thought leadership. The evaluation focused primarily on the areas of CSP and IPA but considered other elements of PfV (thought leadership and case management) as they related to the two primary areas of focus. As will be discussed below, the evaluation also notes linkages to other NRC protection activities such as ICLA (and how they work together), although not necessarily within the scope of the evaluation.

### 4.2 Evaluation audience

The findings of the evaluation will inform internal strategic planning and broader sectoral learning on what works in violence prevention and protection programming. The audience will therefore be senior policy makers in NRC, technical staff and practitioners, country representatives and senior programme staff and protection specialists in the wider humanitarian sector.

## 5 Methodology

The evaluation was theory-based and used participatory tools and an outcome harvesting method. It used both inductive and deductive approaches to account for the full scope of PfV interventions, to gather data along a logic chain that examined response and protection outcomes as well as trying to understand the context in which programmes are operating.

In practical terms, this means that the evaluation gathered data against the logic chain outlined in figure 3 below. Outcome harvesting compliments this by expressly not looking for specified outcomes but rather letting communities tell the evaluation what they perceived these to be. That then allows for good triangulation of the evidence coming from both approaches.

Data collection included document reviews, KIIs, field observation, participatory workshops with affected populations, and validation with relevant partners and stakeholders.

### 5.1 Theory of change and evaluative framework

The PfV CC has a number of ToCs, one for each distinct area of programming. These ToCs have a





unifying impact statement and a number of common longer term outcomes.

Crudely, this could be represented as shown in figure 3.

Figure 3: Logic Chain



**The evaluation used this logic chain as the framework to analyse the PfV CC, as well as to examine the more detailed ToCs.**

The evaluation used Outcome Harvesting, based largely in participatory, qualitative primary data gathering to determine outcomes and where possible impact.

The main distinction between Outcome Harvesting and other evaluative methods is that it does not focus on evaluating a series of predetermined goals or objectives but instead gathers evidence on what, if anything, has changed and then assess how an intervention may or may not have contributed towards that change. As such, outcomes may or may not have been the intended ones according to the ToC. This approach is particularly relevant for assessing CSP and IPA interventions, where linear results chains and predefined indicators often fail to capture the full scope of change.

Outcome Harvesting begins by identifying observable changes in behaviours, relationships, practices, or systems - such as shifts in community protection strategies or improved individual safety - and then works backward to assess how (if at all) NRC's programming contributed to those changes. This method supports the proposed evaluation's emphasis on outcomes over outputs and enables the collection of both intended and unintended results across diverse contexts.

Through stakeholder engagement at multiple levels - including field staff, partners, and affected communities - Outcome Harvesting helped to generate grounded, actionable insights to inform NRC's future programming, advocacy, and strategic planning.

By combining these two analytical frameworks (which can be thought of as 'top down' and 'bottom up' or deductive/ inductive) the evaluation was able to respond to a specific learning need identified by NRC: the limited availability of high-quality impact-focused evidence across the PfV portfolio.

**While previous learning efforts have provided valuable insights into programme design and implementation, one of the core aims of this evaluation was to consolidate that evidence and build a clearer understanding of causal pathways to protection outcomes.** The evaluation therefore placed a particular emphasis on surfacing enabling conditions, success factors, and lessons learned across diverse contexts, to guide scale-up and adaptation.

**Table 4:** Lessons learned from previous NRC PfV learning exercises

| Overall Lessons Learned                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                     |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                              |
|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Ukraine – Overall lessons learned                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                           | Ukraine - Lessons learned CSP                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                |
| <p>After two years of significant organisational challenges, NRC is now delivering a small-scale PfV response across all Area Offices. The breadth of proposed activities has been overly broad, and recruiting sufficient staff has proved very difficult. Priority should shift to activities most directly addressing protection-from-violence risks over broader vulnerability criteria.</p>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                            | <p><b>Strengths</b><br/>Growing staff technical knowledge, strong motivation, and trust-based community relationships are key assets. Context-specific design grounded in Protection Risk Analysis underpins programme effectiveness. Priority areas: developing a holistic response for evacuees (IPA, ICLA, multi-purpose cash assistance (MPCA)); exploring synergies with Shelter and Education interventions; and strengthening an inter-Core Competencies referral system.</p> <p><b>Weaknesses &amp; Recommended Actions</b><br/>Awareness-raising – internal, external, and donor – has been insufficient, and several systems impede CSP responses. Documentation of the Protection Risk Analysis is an urgent gap. Actions:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Continue capacity building for PfV staff; leverage coordination fora to advance Proactive Protection.</li> <li>• Review implementing partnerships approach; support flexible funding mechanisms (mini-grants, community-led projects); strengthen information management for referrals and programme analysis.</li> </ul> |
| Myanmar – Overall lessons learned                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                           | Myanmar - Lessons learned CSP                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                |
| <p><b>Local Recruitment</b><br/>Hiring local staff brings invaluable contextual knowledge, enabling more context-sensitive activities.</p> <p><b>Referral Pathways</b><br/>Greater intentionality in establishing external referral pathways is essential to build a more protective environment and complementarity across humanitarian actors.</p> <p><b>Standardised Systems</b><br/>Standardised referral systems and regular service mapping would improve coordination and clarify the roles of protection teams and hotline staff.</p> <p><b>Admin &amp; Information</b><br/>Streamlined procurement, faster decision-making, and improved HSS authorisations are critical for emergency response. Strengthened information management systems – including incident monitoring – would enhance NRC’s capacity to track service provision across regions.</p> <p><b>Advocacy</b><br/>Focus group discussions (FGDs) consistently highlighted the need to proactively engage authorities with less internal reluctance, supported by Advocacy, Hard-to-Reach (H2R), and Humanitarian Access teams.</p> | <p><b>Successes</b><br/>Community mobilisers were crucial in identifying risks, gathering information, and facilitating awareness campaigns, enabling effective NRC responses when access was restricted. Their roles could be expanded to case management in hard-to-reach areas. Training local staff proved instrumental in navigating access restrictions. Collaboration with local NGOs and community based organisations (CBOs) strengthened delivery, extended outreach, enhanced information sharing, and improved access negotiation with authorities.</p> <p><b>Challenges &amp; Solutions</b><br/>Post-2021 military takeover instability caused frequent access restrictions. The team adapted through local partnerships and remote management, though not always sufficiently. Community leader engagement in complex – leaders can act as facilitators or barriers depending on their relationships with communities and authorities.</p>                                                                                                                                                     |



## Overall Lessons Learned

### Nigeria - Overall lessons learned

#### Data Management & Effectiveness

Gaps in NRC's GORS – reporting inconsistencies, misalignment between activities and achievement, and absence of outcome monitoring – limited effectiveness assessment. Key lessons: streamline financial/logistical processes; pursue multi-sectoral coordination; adopt client-centred approaches; link protection, shelter, and livelihoods.

#### Recommended actions

Enhance SOP flexibility with emergency waivers; digitise PCM forms and centralise IPA/PCM database with PDM; develop Gender Based Violence (GBV)/Child Protection (CP) rapid response mechanisms; revise staffing structures with tiered capacity-building; advocate for expanded funding; implement integration matrices with APM-led cross-competency collaboration.

### Nigeria - Lessons learned IPA

#### Identification – Successes

- CBPNs and trained community leaders actively facilitated and improved identification.
- Staff demonstrated competence in identifying eligible cases.

#### Identification – Challenges

- GBV/CP cases identified but no actors present to address them.
- Vulnerabilities linked to poverty complicated identification and response.

#### Provision of Assistance – Successes

- Pre-positioned in-kind items enabled timely responses.
- IPA filled service gaps and mitigated forced eviction.
- Assistance successfully mitigated or reduced protection risks.

#### Provision of Assistance – Challenges

- Cash assistance delayed by internal financial procedures and Nigeria's temporary cashless policy.
- IPA and referral databases need strengthening to better capture outcomes.

#### Monitoring – Challenges

- No systematic monitoring framework; PDM not conducted for IPAs, limiting process learning.

### Moldova - Lessons learned IPA

NRC Moldova delivers IPA through Cash for Protection, Facilitated Referral, and Psychological First Aid. Cash for Protection must not be used to procure in-kind assistance. From 2024, in-kind assistance is no longer appropriate for the Moldovan context; cash is the only authorised IPA modality under the NRC Moldova PfV Strategy. Previous PfV pilots found in-kind delivery led to implementation delays, inadequate targeting, and participant refusal of generic items. Cash for Protection affords participants greater timeliness, flexibility, and dignity.

### Colombia - Lessons Learned CSP

#### Strengths

- Rights-based, differentiated, territorial approach; alignment with public policy frameworks.
- Strong Community Committees; autonomous rights management; adequate resource allocation (49% staff / 41% activities).
- Proactive monitoring; effective multidisciplinary coordination; adequate staff training; community empowerment and high trust in NRC.

#### Weaknesses

- Lack of explicit Planning Matrix assumptions; reliance on external stakeholders; overspending on admin costs.
- No structured approach to documenting lessons learned; limited entrepreneurship training.

#### Opportunities

- Strengthening civil society organisations (CSOs); scalability of model; private sector and international partnerships; process standardisation.
- Coordination with social organisations; advocacy for public policies; improved communication strategies.

#### Threats

- Institutional weakness; slow adoption of local financial mechanisms; economic uncertainty.
- Logistical challenges in remote areas; armed conflict; limited community political participation.



Given both the nature of protection risks themselves, and NRC's broader orientation towards protection, the evaluation placed emphasis on "participatory approaches," meaning attempts to include affected populations in (operationally) identifying and responding to protection risks need (evaluatively) including affected populations as co-evaluators.

The evaluation also collected evidence through document review (especially other reviews and evaluations), monitoring, evaluation and learning (MEAL) data and KIIs on each step in the logic chain and the detailed ToCs to determine the degree to which observed outcomes have been achieved via NRC programming.

## 5.2 Evaluation questions

The evaluation questions as set out in the terms of reference (ToR) combine high level enquiry into overall outcomes and impact with quite specific questions about organisational practice and processes. Whilst the questions themselves have been retained in the evaluation matrix, the general questions have been re-ordered to reflect a hierarchy of evidence. Thus, the matrix starts with questions relating to overall outcomes and impact and moves onto programme design, coherence, adaptability and capacities. In addition, the team added an additional question on evidence and learning and an additional sub-question relating to wider linkages to NRC protection work.

## 5.3 Methods

### 5.3.1 Desk review

A thorough desk review formed the foundation of the evaluation methodology. Some 97 documents were reviewed from the NRC sharepoint library (NRC's PfV strategy and guidance materials, country-level project documentation, the CSP Toolkit, previous learning exercises, global monitoring data, and relevant donor reports), in addition to a library of academic papers. NRC colleagues in country also provided additional documentation that the evaluation team reviewed.

The desk review provided critical contextual grounding for each selected country, helping to frame the evaluation within the broader protection landscape and identify key factors such as conflict dynamics, displacement trends, and existing community protection mechanisms. It also supported an initial mapping of CSP and IPA implementation across contexts, to inform sampling decisions and helped shape lines of inquiry for primary data collection. From the desk review, the evaluation team prepared a synthesis table of findings from previously commissioned learning exercises and programme reviews. See table four above.

### 5.3.2 Key informant interviews

**The evaluation carried out 58 KIIs, including 9 NRC staff at HO, 28 NRC staff at country level; 11 IPA recipients and 10 local partners or government.**

Interview guides were developed to ensure alignment with the evaluation questions and sensitivity to local contexts. The evaluation also used a 'snowball' approach to target other key informants not initially on the list.

During the inception phase the evaluation team carried out six KIIs with NRC staff as well as a meeting with the steering committee.

### 5.3.3 Country case studies and sampling strategy

A key element of the evaluation was the focus on country case studies which provided the main primary data underpinning the findings. There were five country case studies:

- **Evaluation team carried out in-country:** Syria and South Sudan
- **Evaluation team unable to travel so carried out by national consultant:** Colombia
- **Combination of evaluation team member and local consultant:** Palestine
- **Fully remote:** Myanmar

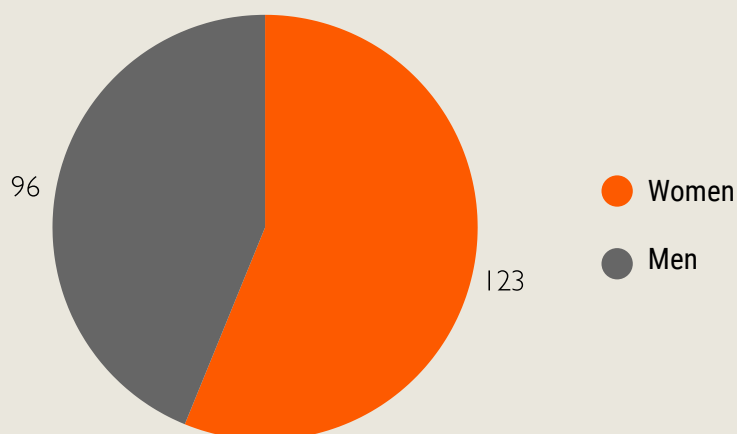




These choice of country case studies provided good geographical and typology coverage. Palestine and Myanmar are in the middle of intense conflict and protection challenges; Syria is moving into a post-conflict stage and both Colombia and South Sudan are in an uneasy phase of post and pre-conflict. All represent different protection risks and challenges for communities and individuals, and varying degrees of access and programming possibilities for NRC.

**Figure 4: Number of CSP participants interviewed**

**219 CSP participants were interviewed for the evaluation across 4 countries**



The evaluation conducted focus groups or participatory workshops with 219 people in four countries across 11 locations. The following table provides a breakdown of sites visited per country and number of activities carried out.

**Table 5: Sites visited per country and activities carried out**

| Country     | Modality  | Site                 | No of KIIs  | No of FGDs                                                                           | No of Participatory Workshops                                               |
|-------------|-----------|----------------------|-------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| South Sudan | In person |                      | 3 NRC Staff |                                                                                      |                                                                             |
|             |           | Wedwiel refugee camp |             | 24 men (5 Persons with disability (PWD); all war inflicted) 24 women (over two days) |                                                                             |
|             |           | Maluakon             |             |                                                                                      |                                                                             |
|             |           | Madhol               |             | 10 men (2 PwD); 10 Women                                                             |                                                                             |
| Syria       | In person | Al-Hawari camp       | 3           |                                                                                      | 2 participatory workshops: 15 women, 10 men (incl. 2 PWD, 3 over age of 50) |
|             |           | Kiftin village       |             |                                                                                      | 2 participatory workshops: c.10 women, 10 men                               |

| Country   | Modality            | Site               | No of KIs                                                                   | No of FGDs                                                                                                                                       | No of Participatory Workshops                                                                                                                                  |
|-----------|---------------------|--------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Palestine | In person           | Ramallah           | 8 NRC staff, 2 local partners                                               |                                                                                                                                                  |                                                                                                                                                                |
|           |                     | Hebron             | 4 IPA recipients                                                            | 4 with CSP Committees; 17 women & 21 men                                                                                                         |                                                                                                                                                                |
|           |                     | Nablus             | 3 IPA recipients                                                            | 2 with CSP Committees; 10 men & 12 women                                                                                                         |                                                                                                                                                                |
|           |                     | Tulkarm            | 2 IPA recipients                                                            | 2 with CSP Committees; 7 women & 13 men                                                                                                          |                                                                                                                                                                |
| Colombia  | National consultant |                    | 3 NRC staff                                                                 |                                                                                                                                                  |                                                                                                                                                                |
|           |                     | Norte de Santander | 4 – 3 women, 1 man (includes 1 NRC staff, 1 official, and 2 IPA recipients) | One with officials from the Municipal Ombudsman's Office of Cucuta – 2 women and 1 man One with members (4) of two Community Action Boards (JAC) | One with 18 women (1 young woman, 1 older adult, 16 adults) from different municipalities in Catatumbo; 8 women were displaced                                 |
|           |                     | Chocó              | 2 NRC staff                                                                 |                                                                                                                                                  | Two participatory workshops with members of three Indigenous associations – one with women (10 between ages of 21-25), one with men (8 between ages of 22-50). |
| Myanmar   | Remote              |                    | 9                                                                           |                                                                                                                                                  |                                                                                                                                                                |



### 5.3.4 Participatory workshops

The evaluation employed a standardised suite of participatory research tools in Colombia, Syria and South Sudan (locations where it was feasible to do so). In other locations, with time or access limitations, we deployed more standard FGDs focused on protection outcomes. These were designed to move beyond conventional FGDs by actively engaging affected communities in the evaluation process itself, enabling participants, particularly those from marginalised groups, to articulate their experiences, identify protection risks, and contribute to developing practical recommendations. The methodological flow was specifically designed for outcome-orientation, moving from broad exploratory narratives to focused inquiry.

The workshops did not place limitations on what constitutes a “protection risk.” Instead, the activities sought to broadly understand how the community understands the cause, consequence, and various responses to protection open to them. Within that understanding, the evaluation team sought to locate where NRC’s PfV activities might fit (or not).

Workshops were divided by gender to allow for comparison between responses and to ensure safe space for discussion of sensitive topics.

#### *Rivers of Life*

The opening tool in each workshop, Rivers of Life invited participants to draw and narrate their life trajectories as a river, using width, colour, and direction to represent periods of stability, crisis, displacement, and recovery. The exercise served a dual purpose: it generated rich biographical data on the cumulative nature of violence and displacement, while also establishing trust and emotional safety within the group before moving to more analytical tools. As detailed in the findings section, in Syria, for instance, women’s rivers began as wide and colourful passages before breaking into darker, fragmented sections representing siege, flight, and loss. In South Sudan, the exercise

revealed how IPA assistance had marked a turning point in several women’s narratives, with rivers showing a slight upward trajectory after receiving support.

**Figure 5:** River of Life, Colombia



### **Safety Mapping**

Participants collectively drew maps of their communities, camps, or settlements, marking safe and unsafe locations, routes, and times of day. This spatial analysis revealed how protection risks were shaped by physical geography, darkness, abandoned structures, exposed routes, distance to water points, as well as social dynamics such as the presence of strangers, weak policing, and gendered patterns of movement.

### **Problem and Solution Trees**

This tool asked participants to identify a priority protection risk and trace its root causes (the ‘roots’) and consequences (the ‘branches’), before identifying potential solutions. The exercise enabled communities to articulate the structural drivers of violence, poverty, weak governance, aid inequity, rather than only describing symptoms. It also generated practical, community-defined strategies for risk mitigation. In Colombia, the tool was adapted as a “Protection Tree,” helping women from Catatumbo better conceptualise and name the protection risks they experience, including risks they had not previously labelled, such as psychological abuse. This allowed us to locate where PfV activities fit within community-defined solutions (do they resolve root causes or do they deal with symptoms).

### **Protection Matrix with Ranking**

The final analytical tool asked participants to list protection threats and, for each, identify who is most vulnerable, the consequences, existing capacities, and both positive and negative coping strategies. Participants then ranked threats by priority through a voting or consensus process. This produced structured, comparable data across sites and gender groups. In South Sudan, for example, eight protection matrices were completed across three locations, revealing consistent prioritisation



of theft, GBV, hunger, and discrimination, while also surfacing how negative coping strategies, such as joining armed groups, forced marriage, or revenge, were themselves generating further protection risks.

### 5.3.5 Analysis

**The evaluation team analysed the data manually without coding software as the primary data was manageable without the need to use software. However, in line with coded theory, the team manually extracted key excerpts and added to a master document as a form of coding.** Periodically, between fieldwork trips, the evaluation team held meetings to discuss emerging findings and any adaptations to methodology required. After all data collection was complete, the evaluation team held a debrief meeting with the Global Director Programme Development and Core Competencies to provide an overview of findings.

### 5.3.6 Challenges/limitations

**The timeline for the evaluation was relatively tight, but the evaluation team managed to travel to three countries (Syria, South Sudan and Palestine) and work with a national consultant to conduct in-person field work in Colombia.** Initially, the evaluation team was supposed to travel to Iraq rather than Syria, and time was spent discussing arrangements for that field trip.<sup>xxv</sup> In the end, however, it was not feasible and the team quickly pivoted to Syria, with political and security developments in country enabling the evaluation team to travel. PfV is a difficult and sensitive subject to talk about. People may be reluctant for fear of stigma or recrimination to talk openly about their experiences. Such issues may have limited attendance at participatory workshops.

The Myanmar case study was conducted remotely, which necessitated the use of translation services when engaging with NRC project partners. This at times constrained the natural flow of conversation. The combination of remote interviews and translation made evaluation-type interviews extremely challenging. Additionally, while the evaluation team had intended to conduct FGDs with clients benefiting from NRC PfV services, this proved unfeasible given the remote nature of the engagement and the timeframe.

### 5.3.7 Quality assurance and ethics

**The evaluation team ensured independence and integrity throughout all stages of the evaluation. Confidentiality was ensured throughout, and the evaluation team worked closely with the Steering Committee to adhere to quality assurance standards.** Evaluating protection is complicated by the sensitivity of protection information. Not only are there constraints on gathering data during the programme cycle, but collecting additional data for evaluative purposes can increase exposure to risk of individuals, communities, humanitarian actors and evaluators. Importantly, it is imperative to do no harm and acknowledge that people who have suffered trauma may be unwilling or unable to discuss their experiences with evaluators. The evaluation team ensured an ethically robust approach to data collection, storage and analysis. We worked closely with NRC colleagues to ensure that sensitive cases are handled delicately, and referral pathways identified. Informed consent was always sought and explained with reassurance that declining to participate would have no bearing on services provided.





## 6 Findings

This section outlines our primary findings. As detailed in Section 5, it draws on primary qualitative data collected via in-depth participatory research workshops, FGDs, KIIs, and field observation across five country case studies: South Sudan, Syria, Palestine (West Bank), Colombia, and Myanmar. In total, the evaluation engaged over 270 individuals across all data collection modalities.

Findings are grounded thematically around NRC's PfV CC structure, and in-line with the main evaluation questions:

- **Section 6.1:** addresses overall findings relating to PfV as a CC within NRC.
- **Sections 6.2 and 6.3:** examines the two primary programme pillars under evaluation: CSP and IPA.
- **Section 6.4:** analyses the linkages between PfV and other NRC programming, including ICLA and other CCs.
- **Section 6.5:** addresses monitoring, evidence, learning, and staffing.

As detailed in section 5, findings were analysed using a theory-based approach, assessing findings against the PfV ToC and its intended causal pathways. The analytic framework also builds on our outcome-harvesting methodology, identifying changes reported by affected communities and triangulating these against NRC staff perceptions, documentary evidence, and direct field observation.

### 6.1 Theory of change and evaluative framework



#### Relevant Evaluation Questions

- What impacts and outcomes (intended or not) were achieved? Do they align with NRC global ToCs?
- To what extent do programme activities align with NRC's global ToCs? What are the main causal pathways towards achieving outcomes?
- What enables success, and what lessons can be drawn for future programming and the PfV strategy?
- Did the programmes target displacement-affected people with significant protection risks instead of vulnerability-based targeting? Were there groups of people who could have benefited from the programmes who were not targeted?
- Were the programmes designed to address specific protection risks found in protection risk analysis?
- Did NRC adapt programming during implementation? Did this improve the programming? Should these adaptations be considered for future programming?

#### 6.1.1 Overview

**The evaluation found that the PfV CC is making a meaningful contribution to protection in the contexts examined.** PfV reached approximately 686,000 people in 2023 across 38 countries, and 421,000 in 2024 across a comparable number of country offices. Across all country case studies,

affected populations reported that NRC's PfV programming had strengthened their capacity to identify, anticipate, and respond to particular protection risks. Moreover, there is robust qualitative data from this evaluation that people do, in general, feel safer because of NRC interventions.

**The formation of community groups, and the demand driven ways of working with them, creates a strong bond of trust with NRC.** It is much valued and highly useful as an entry point for other relationships. Investment in community groups can also enhance social cohesion, strengthening trust and relationships within communities, which in-turn had likely protection outcomes. Even exposure to accompanied planning processes can be very beneficial to communities, especially those under pressure of fragmentation as a result of violence and crisis. There is robust evidence for this in case studies for this evaluation, as well as lessons learned exercises in Ukraine, Nigeria, Myanmar and Colombia.

**NRC's PfV programming is grounded in the protection risk equation, which is a powerful tool for communicating what PfV seeks to address.** The equation analyses risk as a function of three components: the threat (a human activity resulting in violence, coercion or deliberate deprivation), vulnerability (the circumstances that diminish a person's ability to withstand that threat), and capacity (the resources and capabilities available to cope with or mitigate it). Risk is reduced by acting on any or all three.

**In practice, PfV's strongest and most consistent contributions are on the vulnerability and capacity sides of the equation, reducing exposure and strengthening the ability of individuals and communities to anticipate, avoid or recover from harm.** Threat reduction, while central to the CSP model's design (which explicitly categorises community strategies by their effect on threats, including prevention, avoidance, mitigation and cessation), is naturally harder to achieve.

Humanitarian mediation offers the closest approximation of direct threat reduction, and there are examples of community mediation contributing to de-escalation across the portfolio. But the threats themselves, whether settler violence, military operations, armed group activity or intercommunal conflict are produced through broader structural factors. This does not mean PfV is not preventing risks; risk reduction is occurring through all three pathways. It does mean that the component of the equation with the greatest potential to interrupt cycles of violence – threat reduction – is also the one where gains are most context-dependent and hardest to sustain.

**There are several pathways by which this is happening.** Risks are mitigated and harm reduced by:

1. evading or avoiding attacks,
2. using defensive measures to prevent attacks,
3. using knowledge of rights or law to prevent attacks or minimise the level of threat,
4. dealing with some of the impacts of attacks more effectively (medical issues, damage).

Harm from violence is reduced and mitigated via both preventive and responsive measures. This is part of the original design of the PfV CC and the two main strands – CSP and IRS speak to these two approaches.

**However, PfV's two primary programme pillars, CSP and IPA, operate according to fundamentally different logics, and the evaluation found that their effectiveness is shaped by differing conditions.** In its ideal form, IPA would function as, essentially, a reactive modality: it responds, in short, to individuals and households experiencing sudden acute protection risks. Whereas CSP is more anticipatory. CSP, again in an ideal form, would act in an anticipatory manner, empowering communities to mitigate protection risks themselves. Where CSP was implemented, communities across the evaluation's case studies consistently described improvements in collective organisation, preparedness, and confidence in dealing with incidents of violence.

**IPA success is enabled where it acts as a bridge between the immediate moment of individual crisis and a functioning support system.** But in contexts where the wider aid system is in retreat or rapid decline, as is best illustrated here by South Sudan and Myanmar, and to varying degrees in Syria and parts of Colombia, IPA operates in something of a vacuum. IPA might get an individual to a local clinic, but onward referrals are made to services that no longer function; or patients are told to travel to hospitals they cannot reach; and the gap between what IPA can provide and what affected people need will likely grow wider as the aid system around it contracts. This



generates a fundamental paradox of IPA: it is often needed most where the conditions for its effectiveness are *weakest*.

**CSP is most successful when it builds on what communities either already do themselves or wish to do themselves.** NRC can and does play a welcome role of convenor, or in strengthening existing mechanisms. In several locations, behavioural changes attributable to PfV interventions were directly observable, including the formation of walking groups for women, community-led night patrols, whistle-alarm systems for refugee camps, and structured mediation mechanisms.

**Figure 6: Rivers of Life, South Sudan**



**CSP is most successful when it builds on what communities either already do themselves or wish to do themselves.** NRC can and does play a welcome role of convenor, or in strengthening existing mechanisms. In several locations, behavioural changes attributable to PfV interventions were directly observable, including the formation of walking groups for women, community-led night patrols, whistle-alarm systems for refugee camps, and structured mediation mechanisms.

**As might be expected, the evaluation found IPA outcomes are most visible at the level of immediate coping, rather than at the level of structural violence reduction.** Across Palestine, Syria, South Sudan, Colombia, and Myanmar, participants were clear that the frequency and severity of violence driven by conflict, occupation, armed group activity, and displacement had not diminished because of IPA programming. This is not a critique of IPA, in and of itself, but underscoring its limits in broader contexts of systemic malfunction and retreat.

**The evaluation's findings also aligned closely with the programme's ToC,** where it positions improved community safety strategies and reduced protection risks as intermediate outcomes, recognising that the desired long-term impact of people enjoying their right to freedom from violence depends on broader systemic change.

**The evaluation suggests that this framing is both realistic and appropriate.** PfV's value proposition is strongest when understood as a contribution to protection outcomes, rather than a mechanism for structural transformation.

Finally, the evaluation finds the PfV work is well aligned with NRC's overall vision and ambition 2030. CSP work is directly of relevance to making people safer, regaining control and being self-reliant. Individual services work at their best is about quickly accessing services.

**Figure 7:** Rivers of Life, Colombia *[if you don't go with us, there will be consequences]*



### 6.1.2 The challenge of defining PfV

Although there has been good progress since the formative review, there is still work to be done to define and communicate PfV, both internally and externally to affected populations, donors and other partners. The inception phase interviews identified this as an ongoing issue, and the evaluation research confirmed that conceptual ambiguity continues to shape how PfV is understood and positioned. This was also highlighted in lessons learned exercises in Ukraine and Colombia.

The 'distinctiveness' of PfV, and particularly the CSP work, could be a major asset to NRC in attracting support for the CC. However, this is not 'cutting through' to country leadership systematically, perhaps because the outputs and outcomes are complex to explain, and quantify, compared to more traditional and better understood programming. Partly this is simply a matter of its newness. ICLA is no less complex, it has just had more time to establish and refine its ways of working and reporting quantitatively. Better measurement and better information flows on successes and challenges will surely help de-mystify the work.

**PfV's deliberate focus on protection risks arising from violence, coercion, and deliberate deprivation, rather than on broader vulnerabilities, is conceptually sound and distinguishes it from generalised humanitarian assistance.** However, in practice, this distinction is frequently blurred and difficult for affected populations and staff to understand.

In South Sudan, for example, there were concerns around the distinctions between IPA and social assistance cash transfers, and the problem of filling gaps left by the withdrawal of other agencies in health, shelter, or basic services. These concerns are mirrored across country offices.



In Colombia, staff noted that PfV must constantly justify its actions and relevance compared with other CCs, and that the programme is held to a higher standard of evidence than other areas of NRC's work.

In Syria, the evaluation team noted complications in translating “violence” into Arabic [unf]. When the team introduced themselves as the “Protection from Violence” they had to emphasise that violence encompasses multiple forms of harm and not just physical attack.

Many acknowledged that, on the ground, conditions have sometimes led teams to replicate existing approaches focused on vulnerabilities rather than protection risks, particularly where staff capacity for a risk-based approach was limited.

**These challenges do not mean there is a fundamental flaw in PfV activities.** In fact, variability in how PfV is understood and applied across contexts is, in many respects, a strength. The evaluation found NRC's ability to adapt PfV programming to local realities, whether focused on settler violence in Palestine, armed group dynamics in Colombia, intercommunal tensions in South Sudan, or displacement-related insecurity in Syria, to be one of its most valued characteristics. Communities and partners consistently praised NRC for its contextual sensitivity, responsiveness and the knowledge of local staff. However, this adaptability also no doubt creates challenges for building a coherent institutional identity for PfV and for communicating its added value to external audiences.

### 6.1.3 Institutional Positioning and Internal Dynamics

**PfV's institutional positioning within NRC remains a source of tension.** Multiple informants across country offices and at the global level described a structural imbalance between PfV and NRC's more established CCs, particularly ICLA. In all of the case study countries, staff observed that ICLA's long institutional history and strong reputation meant that PfV was often perceived as the smaller, newer, and less proven programme, operating with lower budgets and under greater scrutiny (as previously discussed). Senior staff in multiple countries expressed the view that legal protection and PfV should together form the foundation of NRC's work, with other CCs articulated around that purpose. However, others felt that these are distinct but interlinked areas of intervention. To crudely simplify the distinction, ICLA is to “law” as PfV is to “social work.”

**This evaluation finds that whilst there are strong connections and significant overlap between PfV and ICLA, the case for merging them is weak.** ICLA is a strong brand and continues to attract a good level of support. PfV is still growing and evolving and has significant potential. In the meantime, ways should be found to connect the two CCs for the greatest impact. The main argument for merging the two stems from funding challenges, where maintaining separate teams, who could perform the same function, is a cost burden, and that combining staff delivering information, counselling, and case management across legal and protection concerns would improve cost-effectiveness. Such a merger could also allow CSP to incorporate legal rights awareness directly. This does not necessarily demand a merger but ways of working closely together and task-sharing where possible.

**Where PfV has achieved greater visibility and impact, many noted that has often been driven by strong individual leadership, and interest, at the country office level rather than by systematised institutional support.** This creates a dependency on individual champions and makes progress vulnerable to staff turnover. The evaluation notes that NRC has taken steps to address this, including through the commissioning of this evaluation and the development of global guidance, but that further institutional investment will be needed to ensure that PfV's position within NRC's protection architecture is secure and sustainable.



**Figure 8:** Community Replication, Colombia



#### 6.1.4 Risk-Based versus Vulnerability-Based Approaches

The evaluation examined whether PfV programmes target displacement-affected people with significant protection risks, as distinct from vulnerability-based targeting. The evidence suggests a mixed picture. In Palestine, targeting was clearly risk-based, with CSP committees established in areas facing recurrent settler violence, military incursions, and severe movement restrictions. In South Sudan, PfV interventions were concentrated in locations with active displacement and intercommunal tension. In Colombia, programming responded to specific risks including forced displacement, forced recruitment, threats against community leaders, and gender-based violence in areas controlled by armed groups.<sup>xxvi</sup>

However, the evaluation also found instances where the boundary between risk-based and vulnerability-based targeting was less clear. In South Sudan, the withdrawal of other humanitarian actors has created pressure for PfV to respond to a wider range of needs, including those more accurately described as service gaps rather than protection risks. Across all cases, communities themselves articulated the interconnection between poverty, lack of basic services, and protection risks with considerable clarity. While this does not invalidate PfV's risk-based approach, it highlights the challenge of maintaining a focused protection lens in contexts of generalised deprivation and systemic collapse.

What was striking across all field sites was how rarely participants themselves framed their protection concerns in terms of immediate violence. When asked to identify and rank threats through participatory exercises, communities consistently foregrounded poverty, hunger, lack of healthcare, inadequate shelter, unemployment, and the absence of basic services. These are, in other words, conditions that would sit squarely within a vulnerability framework rather than the imminent-risk-from-violence lens that defines PfV's conceptual boundary. At the same time, these threats do constitute protection risks and thus fall within a broader programmatic scope.

In South Sudan, the protection matrices produced during participatory workshops listed poverty, lack of water, and poor shelter alongside robbery and GBV, with poverty consistently ranked as the root cause. As one participant in South Sudan summarised: “poverty is the source of it all.”





### 6.1.5 Adaptation During Implementation

**The evaluation found strong evidence of programme adaptation during implementation across all country contexts.** In Palestine, NRC adapted training content to respond to evolving legal realities, including military orders affecting Area C communities. In Colombia, the MIRE+ Response Consortium was activated following the mass displacement in Catatumbo in early 2025, demonstrating the capacity for rapid, coordinated response. In South Sudan, PfV teams adjusted their approach to address emerging tensions between refugee and host communities, including through joint CSP committees that brought together previously divided groups. In Syria, the evaluation team noted that CSP had not yet launched at the time of fieldwork but that programme design was being shaped by the specific protection dynamics identified through field assessment.

Also in Colombia, in Chocó, CSP programming was adapted to the specific realities of displaced Indigenous populations (Embera and Wounaan) settled near Quibdó. Women from three Indigenous associations participated in a women's empowerment component within the protection project. Through this engagement, they reported gaining the ability to identify different forms of violence, i.e. economic, physical, psychological, verbal, harassment, and exploitation, and to better understand referral pathways. They valued the community replication component most highly, as it enabled them to share protection knowledge with other women. NRC also supported their participation in artisanal livelihood fairs, which demonstrated to the women that they could generate their own income independently. Indigenous men described how CSP had helped each of the three associations better document their organisational trajectory and understand the legal pathways available to petition for relocation, a priority for displaced Indigenous communities who seek relocation rather than return. Each association already had a court ruling in its favour but no progress on implementation; CSP supported them in preparing to present their cases jointly to authorities.

These adaptations were widely perceived by both staff and communities as improving programming quality and relevance. Several represent innovations that warrant consideration for future programming, including the integration of protection-by-presence strategies in Colombia, joint refugee-host community CSP structures in South Sudan, and the use of Hebrew language training as a practical protection tool in Palestine.



## 6.2 Civilian Self-Protection

### Relevant Evaluation Questions

- What strategies did the communities targeted in CSP programmes develop to reduce their protection risks? How did NRC influence or contribute to those strategies?
- Did NRC contribute to an enabling environment for communities to carry out their action plans for protection risk reduction? What more could NRC do?
- How did communities use protection risk analysis to influence their action plans and interventions? Did NRC effectively support this process?

CSP emerged across three country case studies (South Sudan, Colombia and Palestine) as PfV's most distinctive programme component. Communities, staff, and partners identified CSP as the area where NRC's approach is most differentiated from other protection actors and where the clearest evidence of positive change was observed. The evaluation finds that CSP has produced visible and meaningful outcomes in community organisation, collective agency, and risk mitigation, although these gains are unevenly distributed and face sustainability challenges. GORS



data shows that 12,612 individuals received CSP training, coaching, or mentoring in 2023, rising substantially to 34,263 in 2024, across 19 country offices before declining to 19,753.<sup>xxvii</sup>

### 6.2.1 Community Strategies for Protection Risk Reduction

**Communities targeted in CSP programmes developed concrete, context-specific protection strategies to reduce protection risks, combining existing local capacities with new skills and organisational structures introduced through NRC's CSP programming.** Across all contexts, these strategies reflected a blend of pre-existing coping mechanisms with new competencies and organisational forms facilitated by NRC.

In South Sudan, where 440 individuals received CSP training in 2024 and two-thirds of communities were implementing CSP strategies, and 25 more than the target in 2025. CSP committees in Wedwiel refugee camp developed whistle-blowing systems that serve as collective early-warning mechanisms against nighttime theft and intrusion. Women formed walking groups for water collection and market visits to reduce exposure to GBV. In Maluakon, CSP facilitated the development of shared maintenance schedules for water points, reducing fights over access between host and returnee households. In Madhol, CSP committees assumed a central role in mediating land disputes and tensions around aid distribution between returnee and host communities, with participants reporting that disputes are now resolved peacefully through mediation rather than escalating into violence.<sup>xxviii</sup>

In Wedwiel refugee camp, women participants described a telling episode through their rivers of life exercise. Refugees had been cutting trees for firewood. But in the host community, trees are believed to bring the rain. When a drought followed, host community members blamed the refugees for causing it. The accusation crystallised a set of wider resentments about resource competition and environmental degradation. The CSP committee mediated and helped resolve the dispute. This led to better social cohesion.

In Palestine, which reached 7,876 PfV participants in 2024, CSP committees established structured early-warning and rapid communication systems, particularly through WhatsApp groups that enable real-time information-sharing during incidents.<sup>xxix</sup> In Hebron, committees developed clearly defined roles for incident response, including designated focal points for documentation, referral, and communication with NRC social workers. In areas such as H2 and Masafer Yatta, where communities face recurrent settler violence and military operations, CSP structures were described as playing a critical role in organising collective responses and reducing the chaos and panic that previously characterised incident response.

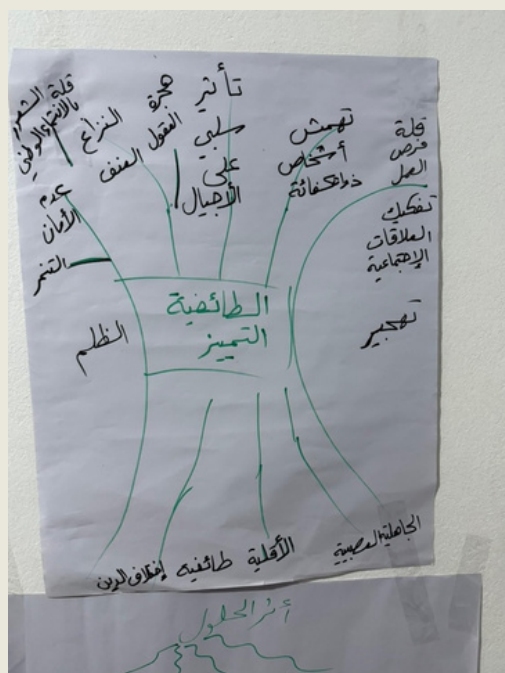
Participants in the evaluation focus groups noted that, while settler attacks, military incursions, and camp confrontations have not decreased, CSP means that communities now know who to call, who documents, and who contacts the social worker. Hebrew language training was ranked as particularly impactful, giving communities the ability to engage with settlers and soldiers during incidents. The outcome was not in the level of violence, but in communities' capacity to respond to it.

In Colombia, where 9,841 individuals received CSP training and mentoring in 2024, CSP programming supported existing community organisations such as the Madres del Catatumbo in developing more structured approaches to risk identification, referral pathway mapping, and community replication of protection knowledge. Indigenous communities in Chocó described how CSP had strengthened the role of the Indigenous Guard – a civilian non-violent group – and enhanced understanding of legal pathways for protection. Community Action Boards in Cucuta reported that CSP had clarified leadership roles, strengthened social cohesion, and improved understanding of participatory methodologies and legal participation mechanisms.<sup>xxx</sup>

In Syria, while CSP had not yet formally launched at the time of fieldwork, the participatory assessment conducted by the evaluation team at Al-Hawari Camp and Kiftin village confirmed that communities had independently developed certain coping strategies that aligned with CSP principles, including collective mobility, informal surveillance, and reliance on family and religious networks. The protection risks identified, including theft, kidnapping, exploitation, and discrimination, pointed clearly toward the relevance of a structured CSP intervention in these contexts.



**Figure 10: Problem Tree [Sectarian Discrimination], Syria**



## 6.2.2 NRC's Contribution to an Enabling Environment

The evaluation concludes that NRC has contributed meaningfully to an enabling environment for CSP, and it is possible to identify several interconnected mechanisms through which this contribution operates.

First, NRC provides structured training that introduces new competencies, including first aid, documentation, legal awareness, and in Palestine, Hebrew language skills. These trainings were consistently identified as among the most significant contributions of the programme. Second, NRC facilitates the establishment of organisational structures, including committees with defined roles and responsibilities, communication protocols, and referral linkages. Third, NRC's continued engagement and follow-up build trust and reinforces the credibility of CSP structures within communities. Fourth, NRC links CSP committees to broader protection systems, including case management, legal assistance, and advocacy channels.

A particularly important finding concerns the quality of NRC staff engagement. Across all country contexts, communities and partners praised NRC staff for working directly with them, and for demonstrating contextual sensitivity, and for maintaining consistent, respectful engagement over time.

NRC, in short, has a strong brand, which is key for its convening power where CSP is concerned, for example, with tension mitigation. In South Sudan, participants in the evaluation workshops all expressed strong trust in NRC, with several saying they wished all humanitarian organisations operated as NRC does. In Colombia, communities valued the pedagogical approach of NRC staff and the emphasis on building community capacity rather than simply delivering services. In Palestine, NRC's responsiveness during security incidents and willingness to adapt support to evolving conditions were highlighted as critical enabling factors.

## 6.2.3 Community Use of Protection Risk Analysis

Communities used participatory protection risk analysis as a central input to their action plans, and the evaluation finds that NRC effectively supported this process. Participatory risk analysis emerged as a core strength of the CSP approach. Across all country studies, communities demonstrated a sophisticated understanding of the threats they face, the groups most affected, existing capacities, and both positive and negative coping strategies. The protection matrices developed through this evaluation's participatory workshops in Colombia, South Sudan and Syria confirmed a nuanced community analysis of the interconnections between poverty, service gaps, environmental hazards, gender dynamics, and interpersonal violence.

However, and as stated above, the evaluation also identified a gap between the quality of **community risk analysis and the scope of response that PfV can offer.**

In South Sudan, communities clearly articulated that the root causes of their protection risks lay in poverty, lack of basic services, and the collapse of governance systems. These are issues that not only go beyond what PfV can address but also broader 'lifesaving' humanitarian assistance, with its short-term supply-driven project cycles.

Figure 11: Community Mapping, Syria



In Syria, women at Al-Hawari Camp consistently identified the destruction of their homes and inability to return as the singular source of their protection risks.

In Colombia, communities recognised that the structural presence of armed groups and illicit economies fundamentally shapes their protection environment.

These findings underscore the importance of managing expectations about what CSP can achieve and of strengthening linkages between PfV and broader humanitarian and development programming.

**This gap also points to an opportunity: the CSP committees and community structures that NRC has helped to establish can, in practice, function also as community organising platforms, and not merely protection mechanisms.** They convene people, build trust across social divides, develop shared analysis of local conditions, and generate plans for collective action. These are precisely the capacities that the humanitarian system has long struggled to foster: genuine community-led structures with the legitimacy and local knowledge to shape responses. If NRC were to recognise and invest in this broader potential, CSP communities could become entry points for a bigger fundamental shift, from crisis response toward locally-led recovery, linking protection analysis to shelter, livelihoods, education, and governance programming within and beyond NRC. Indeed, in an aid landscape increasingly characterised by shrinking resources and growing scepticism about top-down delivery, the participatory infrastructure that CSP builds may prove to be among PfV's most consequential and transferable contributions: a working model of what community-driven humanitarian response could look like.

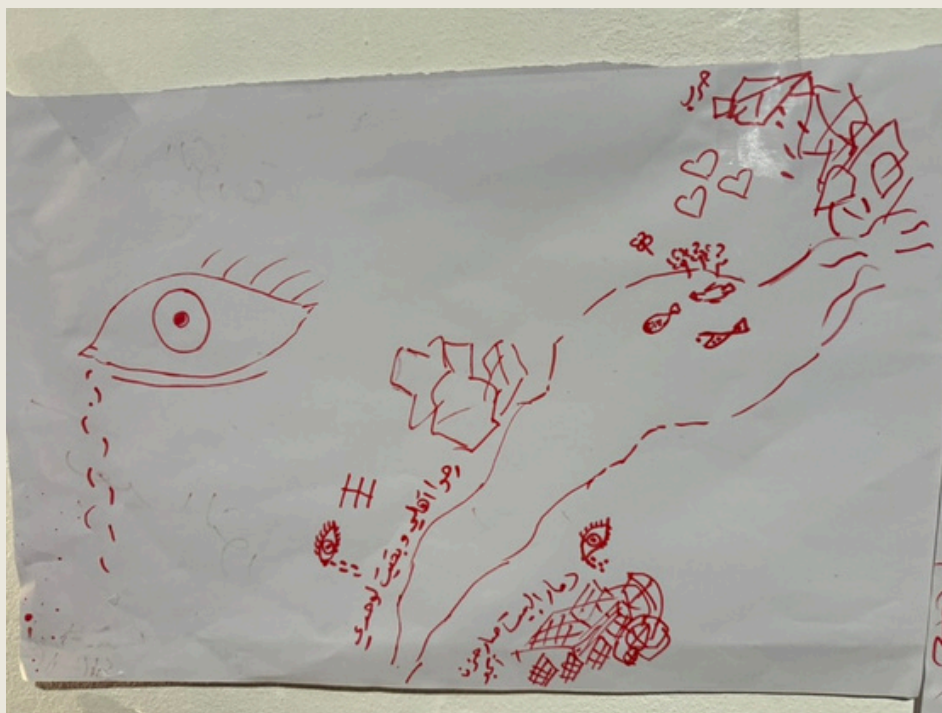
#### 6.2.4 Behavioural Change and Social Cohesion

**One of the most significant cross-cutting findings of the evaluation were outcomes concerning behavioural change associated with CSP programming.** In South Sudan, refugee and host community leaders began holding joint meetings through CSP committees to resolve disputes, reducing physical altercations and restoring communication after years of mistrust. Youth volunteers initiated night patrols. Women formed collective mobility groups. Local chiefs began referring disputes to CSP committees before taking action, indicating increased trust in community-based conflict resolution.





Figure 12: River of Life, Syria



In Palestine, the shift from individual, reactive responses to coordinated, collective action was consistently identified as a key outcome. CSP committees reported moving from confusion and panic during incidents to structured responses with clearly assigned roles. Indeed, another key outcome was social cohesion strengthening through shared training experiences and regular committee engagement, with participants describing the development of a collective identity around protection responsibilities.

In Colombia, CSP strengthened social cohesion within and across community organisations, improved recognition of community leadership, and enhanced understanding of participatory mechanisms. Indigenous women in Chocó described gaining awareness of different forms of violence and developing the confidence to conduct community replications of protection knowledge. The Madres del Catatumbo reported that CSP had helped them conceptualise and name protection risks that they had previously experienced but could not articulate, including psychological abuse.

Given that most members of this organisation are “searching women” (of the forcibly disappeared), CSP helped them realise that some of their ways of acting were putting them at risk, so they amended their behaviour. Similarly, the DENUso organisation identified that they have a significant weakness in their physical infrastructure: they lack a fence to prevent access to the safe house where they often receive people fleeing armed actors. Through CSP, both organisations pointed out that they improved their learning about risks; the actors they can rely on (mapping); mechanisms for information systematisation; prepared themselves to share what they know with other peers (community replications); and gained greater clarity about the legal mechanisms and protection referral pathways available to them.

Moreover, in the two communities where they work with Community Action Boards, the recovery of sports spaces and common meeting places (community halls) allowed children and youth to spend time together under supervision of the wider community, thus helping to reduce the risk of forced recruitment to armed groups.

In the Asovpich community, women noted that the restoration of the water supply house reduced risk and increased safety as they no longer have to walk long distances to access potable water, reducing the risk of GBV and forced recruitment. They also mentioned a decrease in health risks:





‘there are fewer children with rashes and skin diseases’, as well as more spaces for social interaction and for children to play.

All organisations mentioned strengthened social ties. Women especially highlighted the importance of knowing that they are not alone, and that they can count on immediate support such as leaving the territory if they are at risk, accessing food, and finding shelter. They also said that working together with NRC allows them to have a clearer understanding of referral pathways, to build alliances with institutions and organisations, and to achieve greater visibility for their work, which in many cases translates into increased security.

These behavioural changes are significant. They represent shifts in how communities relate to each other and to protection risks, rather than simply improvements in knowledge or access to resources. While these are still relatively early days, the findings do suggest that CSP is functioning as intended within the ToC: strengthening community-level protective capacities, fostering collective agency, and enabling integrated protection responses.

## 6.2.5 Sustainability of CSP

**The sustainability of CSP gains is a critical question that the evaluation examined across all country contexts. Again, there is a mixed picture here.** On the positive side, CSP has generated strong community ownership in several locations, particularly in Palestine's Hebron governorate and in South Sudan's Wedwiel and Maluakon communities. Where CSP committees have clearly defined leadership structures, regular engagement practices, and recognised community roles, sustainability prospects appear stronger. Embedded communication systems, particularly structured WhatsApp groups in Palestine, provide infrastructure that can function independently of NRC engagement.

**In Palestine there were several factors that influenced sustainability.** The duration that a group had been together was important, with the southern groups far more cohesive and likely to endure after two years together, than the northern groups who had only formed relatively recently. Formal linkages to other community structures were also important – for instance village committees, popular committees in the camps and local government (Palestinian Authority). Having experienced leadership also seemed to be a factor, although the sample size is small.

**However, the evaluation identified several significant sustainability risks.** Volunteer fatigue emerged as a cross-cutting concern across Palestine, South Sudan, and Colombia. CSP committee members operate without financial compensation, often in high-stress environments with repeated exposure to violence and crisis. In Palestine, participants described the cumulative psychological burden of handling protection risks without structured support.

**The Colombia evidence sharpened this sustainability concern.** The two Community Action Boards in Cucuta that had completed the CSP process one year earlier expressed gratitude and interest in NRC returning, but acknowledged they had not carried out further community replications or applied the training strategies provided since the project ended. This was compounded by a rapidly changing protection environment: the mass displacement from Catatumbo had brought dozens of new arrivals to their communities, the emergence of drones carrying improvised explosive devices had altered the risk landscape, and forced recruitment and kidnapping had intensified. As one participant from the María Paula community put it: ‘there needs to be an update of the risk assessment because things have changed a lot’.

**The escalating security environment, particularly in Palestine and Colombia, constrains operational space and increases personal risk for committee members.** Limited formal recognition mechanisms, such as the absence of badges, vests, or official identification in Palestine, reduce credibility and complicate engagement during sensitive situations. Resource dependence on NRC for referrals, case management linkages, and operational support means that committees may struggle to function independently if external engagement decreases.

**These findings point toward the need for a deliberate sustainability strategy.** This might include modest but targeted investments in psychosocial support for volunteers, formalisation of committee structures through written ToR and standard operating procedures, provision of basic operational resources, and development of cross-community exchange and learning mechanisms.



## 6.3 Individual Protection Assistance

### Evaluation Questions

- How did NRC use protection risk analysis to identify and target people for IPA? Was that targeting effective?
- Did we use the right form of IPA?
- How did individuals use IPA to reduce their protection risks? What did NRC do to support this? What more could NRC do to improve its support to individuals and households?
- Are there examples of IPA integrated into other sectors or core competencies? How has this influenced outcomes?

**IPA is the second major programme pillar examined by this evaluation.** IPA provides targeted support to individuals and households facing acute protection risks, primarily through cash assistance, psychosocial first aid (PFA), protective accompaniment, and referrals. Across the programme globally, approximately 24,400 individuals received IPA cash in 2023, rising to 38,200 in 2024, with total cash disbursements of approximately USD 1.5 million in 2023 and USD 2.6 million in 2024.<sup>xxx</sup>

The evaluation finds that IPA delivers meaningful but modest protection outcomes, with its effectiveness shaped significantly by the availability of other services where needed, and the broader contextual environment in which it operates.

#### 6.3.1 Targeting and Use of Protection Risk Analysis

**NRC's use of protection risk analysis to identify and target people for IPA was generally effective.** The evidence shows that IPA targeting succeeds in reaching individuals facing acute protection risks, though maintaining a clear boundary between risk-based and vulnerability-based targeting remains challenging. In South Sudan, IPA recipients included survivors of violence, persons with disabilities resulting from the conflict in Sudan, and households facing severe livelihood pressures linked to displacement.

GORS data shows that South Sudan opened 1,875 IPA cases in 2024, distributed cash to 2,480 individuals (USD 256,000), and provided PFA to 7,665 individuals.<sup>xxx</sup>

In Palestine, where 2,144 IPA cases were opened in 2024 and cash transfers totalling USD 139,000 were distributed, IPA was integrated with case management and CSP referrals, enabling community committees to serve as entry points for identifying individuals in need of immediate support.<sup>xxx</sup> In Colombia, case management begins with a situation assessment followed by participatory development of an action plan, with internal referrals to other NRC competencies and external referrals as needed.

However, the evaluation also noted challenges in IPA targeting. In South Sudan, the sheer scale of need and the collapse of other services creates pressure for IPA to function as a general cash transfer rather than a targeted protection intervention. The gap between protection-risk-based targeting and the broader humanitarian needs of the population is a recurring tension. In Colombia, the evaluation found contrasting outcomes from IPA cash assistance, ranging from a case where a woman successfully used the grant to secure housing and start a small business, to a case where a man used the funds to purchase a motorcycle that was neither useful for work nor a sound investment, ultimately leaving him in greater debt.

Targeting highlights a paradox of humanitarian geography. Global NRC data from 2025 showed that IDPs (48.8%) and host communities (22.3%) formed the largest share of project participants,



followed by refugees (15.4%) and returnees (10.3%).

These figures prompt an important question in the context of protection programming. IDPs and refugees alike tend to move towards areas of comparative safety, and it is in those areas that services largely cluster. The communities where PfV demonstrates its strongest results may not, therefore, be those where protection needs are most acute.

This is not a dilemma unique to PfV or to NRC; it reflects a broader structural force within humanitarian action itself. But it is particularly magnified in contexts with significant numbers of both IDPs and refugees, and where, in those contexts, more funding being allotted to refugees. In those settings, shaped both by overlapping external wars and internal conflicts, NRC staff worried that IDPs might be in harder-to-reach areas are experiencing more severe protection threats, yet they remain less visible. Because protection data is largely generated where humanitarian programming already exists, the system risks producing a self-reinforcing picture: needs appear manageable precisely because the most acute contexts go unmonitored.

Yet CSP, given its sustained and participatory nature, would be difficult to operationalise in highly volatile settings. Recognising this, NRC is currently exploring how it might be adapted for harder-to-reach and emergency contexts. Some programming does already operate in active conflict areas, particularly IPA in Myanmar.

### 6.3.2 Forms of IPA and Their Effectiveness

**The forms of IPA provided were generally appropriate to the contexts examined, suggesting that NRC is largely using the right modalities, though with important caveats.** Assistance was valued by recipients for the autonomy it provides. In South Sudan, small grants and materials for housing repairs improved dignity and security: participants described being able to close the door and sleep after receiving roofing materials and padlocks. These solutions aligned with the participatory research the evaluation team conducted with participants, showing IPA was leading to distinct and desired protection outcomes.

In Colombia, where 768 individuals received IPA cash in 2024 (totalling USD 131,000), NRC staff describe themselves as operating on a trust-based model, providing cash without monitoring expenditure or requiring proof of purchase.<sup>xxxiv</sup> This is of course true for all cash-based IPA.

NRC's good-faith approach assumes that recipients will use funds to address their protection needs, and in many cases this assumption holds. However, the absence of follow-up monitoring means that outcomes vary and are sometimes measured only through satisfaction surveys. In Colombia, NRC protection staff raised the concern that cash delivery modalities need to better account for potential extortion dynamics present in operating areas such as Chocó, where multiple extortion cases (not involving IPA) have been documented. This is a contextual risk consideration for how IPA cash is delivered rather than evidence that programme funds have been diverted, but it underlines the need for delivery approaches that do not inadvertently increase recipients' exposure to predatory actors.

### 6.3.3 How Individuals Use IPA to Reduce Protection Risks

**As might be expected, how individuals used IPA to reduce protection risks varied considerably across country case studies.** Individuals and households used IPA primarily to restore basic physical security and access essential services, with the most commonly reported uses being shelter repair, emergency healthcare, and safe relocation.

In South Sudan, IPA was used to repair shelters, improving physical security and reducing household tensions. But IPA also enabled more than physical repair. One woman, a returnee widowed due to conflict in Sudan and left destitute upon arrival, used her IPA cash grant to buy a bulk quantity of nuts from the local market. She processed them into nut paste, sold it, reinvested the proceeds in more stock, and has since established a small but sustainable income source. This case demonstrated what becomes possible when a modest, well-timed intervention meets individual resourcefulness. IPA did not resolve her structural vulnerability, but it provided the minimum capital needed to move beyond destitution to survival.



As already mentioned, in South Sudan IPA also supported access to healthcare, though follow-up treatment often depended on referral systems that were not functioning effectively. This problem deserves closer attention, because it illustrates a structural failure that IPA cannot bridge (nor be expected to bridge). South Sudan's medical infrastructure is heavily centralised in Juba, where the only facilities capable of advanced treatment are located. For people living in states like Northern Bahr el Ghazal, reaching the capital would require travelling hundreds of kilometres on roads that are often impassable and through areas where insecurity is routine. In practice, the only realistic option is to fly, and commercial flights cost far more than most displaced households earn in a year.

IPA can fund transport to a local clinic. The clinic examines the patient, confirms what everyone already knows (the condition requires surgery), and issues a referral to Juba. But then there is no mechanism to get the patient there and no funding to cover the cost.

The evaluation team met individuals living with injuries sustained months or years earlier, stuck in a limbo between an initial medical referral and treatment. One man the team met, for example, had dislocated his shoulder while fleeing aerial bombardment in Sudan. By the time he reached South Sudan, the joint had fused. He now requires surgery that only Juba can provide. IPA enabled him to reach a doctor in the nearest town, who referred him onward. He cannot get to Juba. He lives in chronic pain, carrying a referral letter, which he showed the team in desperation, emphasising he has no way to act on it. The pain and injury also mean he is not economically active. His case was not exceptional, where other humanitarian agencies continue to withdraw and scale back in South Sudan, longer standing challenges (such as service centralisation) are likely to worsen.

**Figure 13: Safety Map, South Sudan**



In Palestine, IPA was integrated into a broader concept of IRS, including case management, cash transfers, PSS, legal services, and dignity kits depending on their assessed needs. The layered approach, linking immediate material support with ongoing case management and legal assistance, was identified as particularly effective. It is also worth noting that in Palestine cash transfers were almost exclusively used for directly protective measures such as fences, gates, doors and reinforced windows (and rebuilding these if damaged in attacks).

In Colombia, illustrative cases demonstrated the range of outcomes. For example, In Norte de Santander, a family fled the Catatumbo subregion when their teenage son faced imminent forced recruitment by armed groups. Blanca, the mother, smuggled him out at dawn hidden under blankets. She had already been displaced once before, in 1999. After being referred to NRC through a local association, she received PSS, a shelter kit, and cash assistance through IPA. She used the money to rent a room and start a small empanada business. Six months later, she was still running the business and had reunited with her son.

IPA supported safe relocation for individuals facing immediate threats, provided emergency accommodation, and enabled access to health services.

However, the evaluation also notes that without systematic post-distribution monitoring or follow-up evaluation, the actual protection outcomes of IPA cash assistance remain difficult to document.





## 6.4 Linkages with Other Programming

### Evaluation Questions

- What was the interplay between different components of PfV at the CO level (including advocacy and case management)? How does PfV combine with other elements of NRC protection work, i.e. ICLA?
- Are there examples of IPA integrated into other sectors or core competencies? How has this influenced outcomes?

The evaluation also examined the interplay between different components of PfV at the country office level, including advocacy and case management, and how PfV combines with other elements of NRC protection work, particularly ICLA.

#### 6.4.1 Integration of CSP and Individual Services

**The integration of CSP and Individual Services creates a more effective and comprehensive protection response than either component operating in isolation, and the interplay between these two programme pillars is strongest where deliberate coordination mechanisms exist.**

In Palestine, the linkage between CSP committees and case management was identified as particularly valuable. CSP committees serve as accessible, trusted entry points for individuals needing specialised support, enabling structured referrals to psychosocial, legal, and material assistance. Having a range of individual services that could be offered was also significant, meaning CSP committees were not just seen as gatekeepers for cash handouts, but as a way of accessing help more broadly. Individuals could approach the CSP committee who would then either try and help within the community or refer them to the NRC case worker, CSP committees could suggest referral as an option to people who were struggling. As elsewhere NRC case workers could also connect people to other service providers if appropriate.

In Colombia, training on rights and legal protection mechanisms is highly valued. One Venezuelan migrant woman highlighted that, thanks to the guidance received, she was able to secure access to education for her 10-year-old son; another was able to obtain healthcare for her daughter, who required costly procedures.

This layered approach enhanced both the timeliness and appropriateness of referrals while strengthening community trust in the protection system. In South Sudan, the combination of CSP's community-level engagement with IPA's targeted individual support built both material security and psychological safety, demonstrating how targeted assistance can reinforce social cohesion. However, the degree of integration varies significantly across contexts.

#### 6.4.2 PfV and ICLA

**The relationship between PfV and ICLA emerges as one of the most consequential institutional dynamics for the future of NRC's protection work.** ICLA is one of NRC's most widely recognised CCs, with a strong reputation among communities and partners. The evaluation found that where PfV and ICLA work together effectively, the results are powerful. In Palestine, where 66 individuals received PCM and 1,939 received PFA in 2024, the integration of CSP with ICLA legal support likely enhanced the credibility and the practical impact of community-level protection mechanisms. Documentation of incidents strengthened advocacy, and legal awareness training improved communities' ability to navigate complex regulatory environments, including military orders in Area C. The two working together could be thought of as a Venn diagram, with both ICLA and PfV carrying out work specific to their CC, but enhancing impact powerfully where they overlap.



In Colombia, staff described the development of an integrated conceptual framework between ICLA and PfV, with the aim of creating not only a programmatic roadmap but also an operational one, clarifying who enters the territory first, who does what, and how the combined response creates impact. The paired intervention approach, where protection and legal assistance are provided jointly, was highlighted as a genuine exercise in understanding and addressing cases from a joint perspective.

Despite these positive examples, the evaluation confirms that the relationship between PfV and ICLA remains structurally imbalanced in many contexts. PfV staff perceive that ICLA, as NRC's most traditional area of expertise, is not willing to be positioned under a broader protection umbrella, creating internal tensions.

There was also a sense that while PfV operates with smaller budgets, it is also under constant scrutiny regarding its work and relevance, despite reaching nearly 686,000 individuals globally in 2023 and over 420,000 in 2024 across 32 country offices, conditions that, it was argued, other CCs do not face to the same degree.

### 6.4.3 Linkages with Other Core Competencies

**Beyond ICLA, the evaluation found varying degrees of integration between PfV and other NRC CCs.** In South Sudan, the WASH/Shelter team reported using PfV data as a practical indicator when prioritising shelter distributions, giving preference to households identified by PfV staff as facing high protection risks. Similar interactions between teams were reported in Syria. However, this coordination appeared to be largely ad hoc and dependent on individual relationships rather than systematic joint planning. In Colombia, staff highlighted that PfV has strengthened the idea of an integrated response to crises, with different competencies working more efficiently and in a coordinated manner. In Chocó, the construction of a sports field to prevent children from playing in a dangerous river, and the refurbishment of a water supply system that eliminated the need for women to travel to unsafe locations, demonstrated practical examples of cross-competency collaboration that produced protection outcomes.

The evaluation notes that PfV's protection-by-presence strategy, particularly well-developed in Colombia, has broader benefits for NRC's programming. Regular field presence builds community trust and enables contextual understanding that benefits all CCs. This also emerged strongly from lessons learned exercises in Nigeria, Ukraine and Myanmar. Several informants argued that protection should serve as the overarching framework for NRC's operations, with PfV and ICLA together forming the foundation around which other programming is organised. While this vision has not yet been realised, the evidence from this evaluation supports the principle that protection integration strengthens overall programme quality and outcomes.

## 6.5 Monitoring, Evidence, Learning, and Capacity

### Evaluation Questions

- Is the current NRC monitoring, evidence and learning system configured to best capture PfV programming outcomes and impact? Which, if any, changes would be needed to best capture PfV programme outcomes and impact?
- Are we equipping our teams with the right capacities?

#### 6.5.1 Monitoring and Evidence Systems

**The evaluation finds that NRC's current monitoring, evidence, and learning systems are not optimally configured to capture PfV programming outcomes and impact.** This finding is



consistent across country contexts and is reinforced by global-level informants who identified evidence generation as one of the central challenges facing PfV.

NRC's quantitative reporting system (GORS) captures headline indicators such as the number of individuals reached, referrals made, and cash assistance delivered. While these output-level metrics are useful for accountability and reporting, they do not adequately capture the complexity of PfV outcomes.

Staff in South Sudan observed that GORS provides useful totals but lacks nuance and cannot portray the complexity or impact of protection work. For IPA, the mandatory GORS indicators track outputs: cases opened (9,100 across 16 countries in 2024), cases closed (6,500), cash distributed (USD 2.6 million across 24 countries), PFA recipients (17,300 across 19 countries), and protective accompaniment (3,700 individuals).

The mandatory outcome and output indicators for CSP revolve around community safety strategies developed and the percentage of communities reporting disputes resolved, while IPA indicators are exclusively output-oriented. This means that critical dimensions of change, including shifts in community capacity, improved safety perceptions, strengthened social cohesion, and behavioural change, remain largely invisible within this quantitative framework.

**Figure 14:** River of Life, South Sudan



Outcomes in terms of safety and perception of safety could be measured through community evaluation. This type of data gathering would fit well with the participatory approach already in use by PfV. Communities could develop indicators alongside their protection plans and then routinely monitor these for NRC. This would provide a rich body of evidence and would be a far more compelling dataset on outcomes for donors and senior leadership. There is already a body of good practice in community-based indicators for protection that could be adopted and adapted.

This would not require additional resource, as it could be integrated into the CSP planning process. In simple terms it would be another column in the final plan. At appropriate time intervals – perhaps twice a year, a simple review of the indicators could be conducted during a planned community meeting, and the results recorded. This outcome data would be of immediate use at a country office level. Some further work would be needed to determine what could then be aggregated and ‘plugged into’ global systems.



**NRC does not have a universal approach to case management IM, with each country team developing its own system.** Those systems are now being developed at country office level according to recent global guidance models. A more systematic approach to case management would be an asset to global MEAL data.

The evaluation team saw good systems that had been developed and it is worth flagging here the South Sudan information management system developed by the IM Manager in consultation with the PfV lead. This SharePoint-based platform provided a centralised casework database that tracks demographic information, disability data, protection risks, threats, vulnerabilities, coping capacities, referrals, and assistance provided. A two-step approval process and strict data-protection protocols ensure accountability. Field staff use data dashboards to track and reflect on protection trends in real time, increasing accountability and the quality of reporting. It also allowed the teams to see a

visual representation of this success. Indeed, this system has transformed accuracy and data quality, enabling the programme for the first time to visualise case trends geographically and temporally.

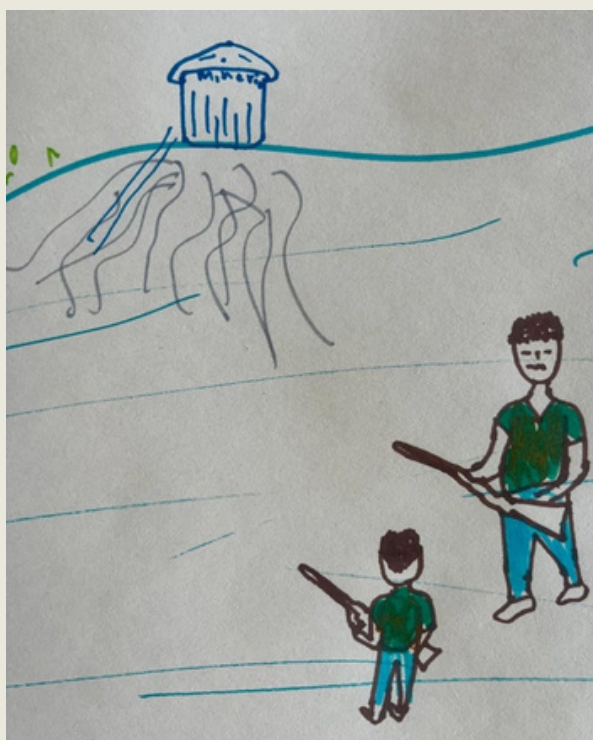
Such a system cannot easily capture the outcomes of CSP activities, which are relational and collective. IPA lends itself more readily to data; CSP is very hard to monitor. However, even this very good system captured only what happens, but not why it happens. Understanding the drivers behind protection incidents, such as unemployment, ethnic tension, or aid-related resentment, still depends on qualitative methods and on knowledge that, as the South Sudan IM Manager noted, lives in the heads of the local PfV teams. Investing in a system that could capture this richer explanatory data would require resources but would likely lead to improved downward accountability and quality programming.

A related challenge concerns the fit between PCM tools and acute crisis contexts. In Myanmar, NRC staff reported a challenge with cases that are being opened for protection concerns, such as forced disappearance of a family member, where there is no realistic prospect of swift resolution. These cases remain open for months because existing guidance does not provide clear criteria for when to close a case such as this, in which the underlying protection violation is ongoing but beyond the caseworker's influence. The result is growing caseloads with low measured achievement rates, which in turn erodes donor confidence in the programme's effectiveness.

In the Global Protection Case Management Lesson's Learned report on Yemen, NRC encountered a similar dilemma during its PCM rollout: staff identified enforced disappearance and abduction cases as prevalent but felt ill-equipped to handle them, and the country office ultimately decided to exclude certain categories of sensitive cases from its PCM scope on safety grounds.<sup>xxxvii</sup> The broader implication is that the global case management toolkit would benefit from more explicit guidance on scoping, triage, and closure in acute crisis settings, where the question is not whether a protection concern exists, but what a caseworker can realistically do to reduce risk within a bounded timeframe. Without this, programmes risk taking on cases that cannot produce measurable outcomes, with consequences for both staff wellbeing and, potentially, credibility with donors.



**Figure 15:** Community Mapping, Water Pollution and Illegal Mining, Colombia





## 6.5.2 The Challenge of Demonstrating Impact

**A cross-cutting finding is the tension between institutional pressure to demonstrate value for money (VfM) and scale, and the nature of PfV programming, which is often deliberately small, targeted, and produces results that are difficult to quantify.** As already stated above, staff across multiple countries described a perception that PfV is required to demonstrate many more results than other areas of expertise and that the programme must constantly justify its actions and relevance.

A focus on numeric reporting, due to donor driven demands, inevitably creates an asymmetry where quantitatively oriented CCs can more easily demonstrate their contribution through reach figures and output data.

Analysis of the mandatory indicator framework confirms this asymmetry: of the mandatory PfV indicators for the Community Safety ToC, outcome-level measures are limited to the number of communities implementing CSP strategies and the proportion reporting disputes resolved. For Specialised Services (IPA), mandatory indicators are exclusively output-oriented, tracking cases opened, cases closed, cash distributed, and recipients, with no mandatory outcome-level measurement, while PfV's most significant achievements, including, via CSP, community empowerment, behavioural change, and strengthened social cohesion, are harder to communicate within existing reporting frameworks.

Whilst this is currently the case, the evaluation acknowledges that there is work ongoing to introduce both qualitative methods and better focus on outcomes. PfV is a new CC, and the global learning team is still learning how best to support and analyse. This is a sector wide challenge, and in many ways NRC is ahead of the curve in trying to evolve.

In Myanmar, NRC lost funding in part because the donor judged PfV programming to be too slow, too expensive, and insufficiently cost-effective in terms of cost per beneficiary. This suggests that the challenge is not only about finding better ways to communicate impact but also about programme design and efficiency. Where a full team is deployed to support a single CSP community over six months, the cost per participant will inevitably be high relative to other interventions, and donors operating under VfM frameworks might struggle to justify continued investment. The implication is twofold: PfV needs measurement tools that can capture qualitative and relational outcomes more convincingly – and NRC is investing in precisely this – but it also needs to examine whether current delivery models can reach more people without sacrificing the depth of engagement that makes CSP effective.

**The evaluation notes that this is not a problem unique to NRC but reflects a broader challenge across the humanitarian protection sector.** The Independent Review of the Implementation of the IASC Protection Policy similarly found that approaches to protection remain predominantly focused on outputs related to responding to needs rather than outcomes and impact focused on reducing risks.<sup>xxxviii</sup>

However, the evaluation suggests that NRC is working hard to develop more sophisticated approaches to capturing and communicating PfV outcomes, building on innovations such as participatory action research methodologies. A newly commissioned piece of work on how such approaches might be practically incorporated into the global system is welcome in this regard.

## 6.5.3 Staffing and Capacity

**The skills needed for effective PfV programming are distinct from those of conventional humanitarian work.** They depend on capacities closer to those of social workers, mediators, and community organisers, including the ability to facilitate engagements, handle sensitive case work, build trust with communities over time, and analyse protection dynamics with nuance and contextual sensitivity. These skills are not widely available within the humanitarian sector as a whole, which, in relation to the above points, has tended to favour quantitative skills.

**Across all country contexts, the evaluation found that the quality of PfV outcomes was closely correlated with the quality, experience, and stability of PfV staff.** Where field teams were led by staff with long institutional experience, programme depth and community trust were



noticeably stronger. Where staff were newer or less experienced, outcomes were more uneven. In several locations, small but committed teams were described as operating quietly and pragmatically, maintaining quality engagement despite extremely challenging conditions, but on budgets and at staffing levels that stretched them well beyond their intended scope.

Staff wellbeing emerged as an important concern across all contexts. In Palestine, there are clearly very high emotional demands of handling protection cases in high-risk environments. In Colombia, informants recommended improving mental health practices for PfV staff, noting that mental health strain is high with few caregiver-care strategies in place. The evaluation suggests that investment in staff capacity, retention, and wellbeing is essential for the sustained quality and impact of PfV programming.

#### 6.5.4 Learning and Knowledge Management

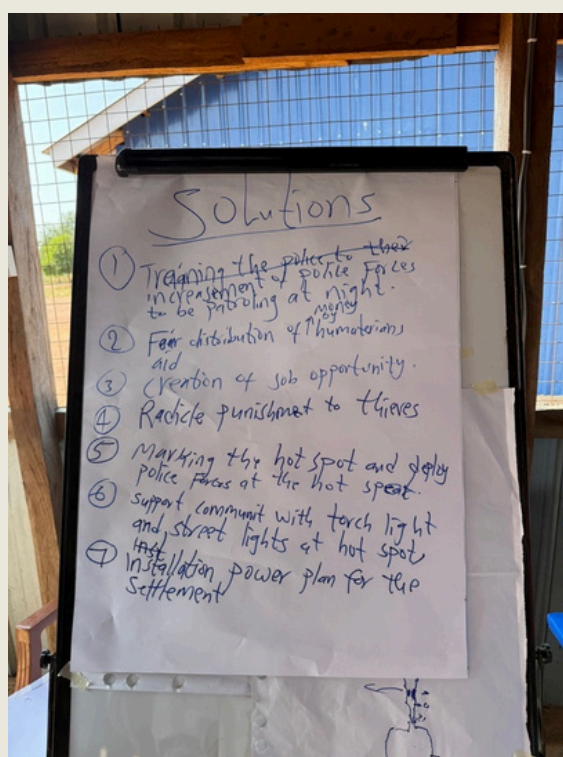
**PfV programming generates substantial learning at the field level, but this learning is not systematically captured, shared, or used to inform programme development across contexts.** Much of the most valuable knowledge about what works in community-based protection exists in the tacit knowledge of field staff – “in their heads” – and is lost when individuals move on. More could be likely done with structured learning mechanisms, including cross-country exchanges, systematic documentation of innovations and adaptations, and regular reflection processes.

Indeed, several informants called for greater pedagogy and learning within NRC regarding protection issues, including clearer communication about what PfV does, how it differs from other forms of protection programming, and how its outcomes should be understood and communicated.

The confusion between PfV and SIP, the difficulty of communicating PfV's added value to donors, and the perception among other CC teams that PfV's activities are insufficiently tangible all point toward the need for a more deliberate and strategic approach to internal and external communication about PfV.



**Figure 16:** Community Solutions, South Sudan



## 7 Conclusions

The NRC PfV CC has come a long way in a relatively short amount of time. This evaluation catalogues a vibrant portfolio of work that both mitigates violence and is embraced enthusiastically by communities. Feedback from staff working on PfV is extremely positive, as is the feedback about the staff working on PfV, who are deeply appreciated by those they work on behalf of.

The hugely positive reception for the work by affected communities suggests there is considerable room for the PfV CC to continue to grow and expand. It has the potential to be a very valuable contribution to humanitarian action in many of the contexts in which NRC works.

### *Causal pathways*

This evaluation documents robust evidence of protection outcomes in the country case studies that were examined. Many of the CSP groups reported feeling safer, more cohesive as a community, and having better skills and organisation for dealing with threat of violence. IRS – case management and IPA (cash) – helped reinforce these outcomes, and in many cases led to positive outcomes for the individuals in receipt of services.

The evidence in this evaluation shows a strong causal pathway from CSP and IPA outputs through short term outcomes to some long-term outcomes.

Specifically, the evaluation saw evidence in every country case study of community self-protection plans and saw these at various stages of implementation (depending on the time the programme had been running). In Palestine, Colombia and South Sudan some groups had existed for two years or more and had implemented their plans. In Syria, Myanmar and some newer areas of the West Bank, groups were either getting going or at earlier stages of implementation.

For those groups that had fully implemented plans there were strong examples of violence reduced or mitigated. In South Sudan and Palestine, early warning networks (whistles and WhatsApp groups) meant people could either avoid or prevent attacks. In South Sudan and Colombia, negotiations locally with either neighbours or armed groups had reduced tensions or allowed people to return home. In Palestine language skills training allowed people to negotiate with soldiers for greater movement.

Evidence clearly demonstrates that if people are provided with training, modest resources and planning support, then they can develop, adopt and implement strategies that reduce harm and mitigate potential violence.

This has partially led to the long-term outcome that people enjoy some freedom from violence and coercion, although as much of the violence is driven by factors outside of the control of communities, this is not guaranteed. Thus, the assumption that working with communities to achieve freedom from violence only partially holds true. Structural causes of violence are beyond the remit of PfV interventions.

The evaluation also saw a strong casual pathway between individual protection services and recovery from violence. This took several forms. IPA grants helped people rebuild damaged property in Palestine, cope with immediate displacement in Myanmar, avoid recruitment in Colombia and establish a livelihood after fleeing. In Palestine, the psychosocial work also helped both community groups and individuals recover from violent incidents.

Both the CSP work and the Individual Protection Services helped build community cohesion, something that was observed in multiple community and individual interviews across the case studies.

Evidence demonstrates that if people are provided with a range of individual services, tailored to their context, then they can recover from violent episodes, if the violence has ceased or significantly reduced. Even in situations of ongoing violence such as Palestine, the PfV work helps people recover and, in the process, become more resilient.



## Funding and measurement

PfV has struggled in places to secure funding in the way that more traditional humanitarian work does not. This is because 1) donors do not see protection work as life saving and therefore have traditionally seen it as a second order priority and 2) it is more difficult to demonstrate 'results' in the way that is traditionally recognised. These two issues are connected – a compelling demonstration of results is likely to attract more funding, or at the very least provide better material for advocacy.

The PfV work cannot address structural causes of violence at the macro level. It can help with community disputes and tensions, and it can help communities and individuals better protect themselves. This is harder to capture than tallying outputs associated with distributions, but it can have a similar or even greater impact. The trust built between NRC and the communities it serves is considerable with this way of working and suggests deep appreciation.

Finding better ways to represent the work, both internally and externally is a strategic goal for the PfV CC in the next few years. There are also technical adjustments that can be made to better focus the work and maximise effectiveness. The work with CSP groups is being done well, and lessons should continue to be shared amongst countries on the best planning tools, levels and focus of community grants, the minimum duration for groups to start functioning effectively, how to ensure links to other community and local level governance structures and the right sorts of profiles for participants.

NRC can and should capitalise on the good work done so far in establishing the PfV CC. It should be better linked to other CCs, building on the trust and goodwill it creates with communities.

In summary:

- 1. There is strong evidence that NRC's PfV work reduces harm. This happens via two pathways.** The first is preventative community groups using early warning systems, mediation and simple protective measures can prevent violence from occurring or lessen its impact. Individual assistance that helps people move (for instance to avoid forced recruitment) can also work in this way. The second pathway is in terms of response to the impact of violence, for instance through community first aid, search and rescue and better connections to other groups that perform these functions.
- 2. There is good evidence that individual protection responses can help people recover from the impact of violence, or at least to mitigate some of the worst effects.** There are a range of outcomes the evaluation has documented, ranging from PSS in Palestine that is helping people cope with the pressures of settler violence, to economic recovery after displacement in Myanmar and Colombia.
- 3. Evidence gathered for the evaluation confirms the casual pathways hypothesised in the ToCs for the PfV CC.** Training, mentoring and accompanying community groups, and helping them develop plans for their own protection can – with some small resources – enhance their capacities to implement simple protective measures and strategies. The right kinds of individual services – case management, cash, PSS, legal – can reinforce community protection strategies and can help with recovery.
- 4. Communities enthusiastically embrace this way of working, and over time strong bonds of trust are built.** This can have positive effects on access.
- 5. Nevertheless, NRC and PfV cannot on their own address the underlying drivers of violence, which in all of the contexts examined were structural and national in nature.** Some local tensions can be reduced via CSP interventions, but resolution relies on a wider set of actors.
- 6. NRC is making good progress in terms of tools, codification of best practice, measurement and learning.** As the programme continues to mature, this work will be important to ensuring both quality and coverage.
- 7. There are important efficiency measures that can be taken to ensure PfV and ICLA can be resourced.** The evaluation concludes there is not a strong argument for merging as the work is often different, skills needed can be different and the ICLA brand is strong and well recognised. Nevertheless, there is strong overlap in some areas and it will be important to avoid duplication





and over-staffing where this is the case. Joint information sharing and communication sessions is an easy place to start with such efficiencies.

## 8 NRC PfV Evaluation Recommendation Areas

| Recommendation area                                            | Ref. | Recommendation                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                  | Team/s                                                  |
|----------------------------------------------------------------|------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------|
| <b>Recommendation area 1: Strategy and thought leadership</b>  | 1.1  | Continue with and strengthen the risk based approach.                                                                                                                                                                                                           | PfV CC global team. PfV country teams. Country offices. |
|                                                                | 1.2  | Identify risks that NRC cannot reduce but are critical to reducing harm (key assumptions in ToC). Document referral gaps as a result of aid cuts and withdrawal of other aid actors. Develop core advocacy strategies for reducing these risks.                 | Country offices.                                        |
| <b>Recommendation area 2: Programme approaches and quality</b> | 2.1  | Increase PSP / PSS with a view to it becoming a standard part of case management. Learn from NRC education work where possible.                                                                                                                                 | PfV CC global team. PfV country teams. country offices. |
|                                                                | 2.2  | Continue to increase the library of good practice. Consolidate learning to date on the use of participatory tools for planning and prioritisation. Expand into other relevant areas of work.                                                                    |                                                         |
|                                                                | 2.3  | Codify learning on the right mix of participants in groups, length of time for success, linkages to other institutions and agencies, community groups.                                                                                                          | PfV CC global team.                                     |
|                                                                | 2.4  | Develop easy to use, short guidance notes on why IPA should be used and how it is different to other forms of cash assistance. Draw on case studies from existing programmes as easy to understand examples where possible.                                     | PfV CC global team.                                     |
|                                                                | 2.5  | Build a simple inventory of distinctive uses for IPA as a way of demonstrating practical conceptual clarity (what it is and what it isn't). Consider different types of IPA – “emergency”, “referral”, “protective” as an easy to use menu for country offices. | PfV CC global team. PfV country teams. Country offices. |
|                                                                | 2.6  | Invest in PCM IT systems with a view to some standard elements, where possible using easy to access off the shelf software and simple processes.                                                                                                                | PfV CC global team.                                     |
| <b>Recommendation area 3: Evidence and measurement</b>         | 3.1  | Introduce a well evidenced and representative measure of indirect as well as direct beneficiaries of CSP programmes.                                                                                                                                            | Global PfV CC team Global MEAL team                     |
|                                                                | 3.2  | Update assumptions in the ToCs. Evaluation has strong evidence that outputs are achieving medium and longer term outcomes, but impact is contingent on wider context.                                                                                           | Global MEAL team Global PfV CC team                     |
|                                                                | 3.3  | Introduce easy to use community based indicators within CSP plans that can help country programmes iterate and course correct.                                                                                                                                  | Country offices Global PfV CC team                      |
|                                                                | 3.4  | Use work to date, forthcoming consultancy and material from community based indicators to inform analysis of PfV outcomes at a global level.                                                                                                                    | Global MEAL team                                        |
|                                                                | 3.5  | Prioritise the collection and analysis of impact stories, primarily through case studies. These should be recorded routinely as part of ongoing monitoring and after action reviews.                                                                            | Country offices + PfV teams                             |



| Recommendation area                                             | Ref. | Recommendation                                                                                                                                                                                                                | Team/s                                    |
|-----------------------------------------------------------------|------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------|
| <b>Recommendation area 4: Fundraising</b>                       | 4.1  | Work with Sweden and Norway to understand how they need evidence of outcomes and effectiveness presented. Use this evaluation as basis of series of briefings to showcase the increasing relevance of NRC PfV work.           | Global PfV CC team                        |
|                                                                 | 4.2  | Target EU as potential strategic donor for investment in PfV work, combining their interest in community based solutions, protection and access.                                                                              | Global PfV CC team                        |
| <b>Recommendation area 5: Internal coherence and efficiency</b> | 5.1  | Pilot joint information and awareness sessions between ICLA and PfV teams that maximise human resources (i.e. working towards efficiency gains for both teams, especially in newer programmes).                               | Global PfV CC team<br>Global ICLA CC team |
|                                                                 | 5.2  | Accelerate the use of joint funding proposals between PfV and ICLA building on the distinctiveness of both brands.                                                                                                            | Global PfV CC team<br>Global ICLA CC team |
|                                                                 | 5.3  | Explore the use of PfV community groups as a wider entry point to NRC services generally. So, where groups prioritise actions that are undertaken by other NRC teams (shelter, education), find simple ways to make linkages. | Country offices + PfV teams               |
|                                                                 | 5.4  | Explore the use of PfV community groups (CSP groups) in the facilitation of humanitarian access where this is feasible and where access is challenging.                                                                       | Country offices + PfV teams               |



- <sup>i</sup> Kirk, T.; Pendle, N. and Vasilyeva, A. (2024) 'Humanitarian protection activities and the safety of strangers in the DRC, Syria and South Sudan', Global Policy 00: 1-17. doi/10.1111/1758-5899.13378
- <sup>ii</sup> IASC (1999) Protection of Internally Displaced Persons, Inter-Agency Standing Committee Policy Paper, December 1999, New York: 4.
- <sup>iii</sup> Adinolfi, C.; Bassiouni, D.; Lauritzsen, H. F. and Williams, H. R. (2005) Humanitarian Response Review, New York and Geneva: Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs.
- <sup>iv</sup> Niland, N.; Polastro, R.; Donini, A. and Lee, A. (2015) Independent Whole of System Review of Protection in the Context of Humanitarian Action, Oslo: NRC, IASC, Global Protection Cluster.
- <sup>v</sup> Fast, L. (2018) Crossing Boundaries in Protecting Civilians: Mapping Actors, Insights and Conceptual Spaces, London: Overseas Development Institute: 3.
- <sup>vi</sup> Cocking, J.; Davies, G.; Finney, N.; Lilly, D.; McGoldrick, J. and Spencer, A. (2022) Independent Review of the Implementation of the IASC Protection Policy, HPG Commissioned Report. London: Overseas Development Institute: 3.
- <sup>vii</sup> Cocking, J.; Davies, G.; Finney, N.; Lilly, D.; McGoldrick, J. and Spencer, A. (2022) Independent Review of the Implementation of the IASC Protection Policy, HPG Commissioned Report. London: Overseas Development Institute: 5.
- <sup>viii</sup> Fast, L. (2018) Crossing Boundaries in Protecting Civilians: Mapping Actors, Insights and Conceptual Spaces, London: Overseas Development Institute: 4.
- <sup>ix</sup> Niland, N.; Polastro, R.; Donini, A. and Lee, A. (2015) Independent Whole of System Review of Protection in the Context of Humanitarian Action, Oslo: NRC, IASC, Global Protection Cluster.
- <sup>x</sup> ICRC (2024) Professional Standards for Protection Work, Fourth Edition, 2024, Geneva: ICRC.
- <sup>xi</sup> NRC (2023a) Lessons Learned Report: Proactive Protection of Civilians in Humanitarian Contexts, Belgium Ministry of Foreign Affairs.
- <sup>xii</sup> Fast, L. (2018) Crossing Boundaries in Protecting Civilians: Mapping Actors, Insights and Conceptual Spaces, London: Overseas Development Institute: 6.
- <sup>xiii</sup> NRC (2022) Global Strategy 2022-2025: SO8. Protection programming to make people safer and reduce risks from conflict and violence, Oslo: NRC: 4.
- <sup>xiv</sup> NRC (2023b) Belgian Ministry of Foreign Affairs / AB 54 52.35.60.83 – PJ/2021/07: Final Report.
- <sup>xv</sup> NRC (2017) Programme Policy, Oslo: NRC.
- <sup>xvi</sup> NRC (2022) Global Strategy 2022-2025: SO8. Protection programming to make people safer and reduce risks from conflict and violence, Oslo: NRC: 4.
- <sup>xvii</sup> Cocking, J. (2024) Protection from Violence: Formative Review, Final Report, 12 September 2024.
- <sup>xviii</sup> Cocking, J. (2024) Protection from Violence: Formative Review, Final Report, 12 September 2024.
- <sup>xix</sup> Inception phase KII.
- <sup>xx</sup> NRC (2022) Global Strategy 2022-2025: SO8. Protection programming to make people safer and reduce risks from conflict and violence, Oslo: NRC.
- <sup>xxi</sup> Cocking, J. (2024) Protection from Violence: Formative Review, Final Report, 12 September 2024.
- <sup>xxii</sup> Cocking, J. (2024) Protection from Violence: Formative Review, Final Report, 12 September 2024.
- <sup>xxiii</sup> At the time of writing, humanitarian mediation is mainly focused on the CWA region.
- <sup>xxiv</sup> Regional offices have subsequently become regional teams. These are Asia and Latin America (ALAR), Central and Eastern Europe (CEE), Central and West Africa (CWA), East and Southern Africa (ESA) and Middle East and North Africa (MENA).
- <sup>xxv</sup> In the inception phase Iraq had been chosen as a country case study. However, it was difficult to secure an appropriate visa to carry out fieldwork and NRC's operation was coming to an end. It was therefore decided that Syria should replace Iraq as a case study, given geographic focus.
- <sup>xxvi</sup> Indigenous women identified the following risks associated with the presence of armed groups: confinement, displacement, threats and intimidation, forced recruitment, risk from crossfire, water contamination due to mining, deforestation and crop fumigation. River contamination is a critical issue for them: it affects livelihoods because they cannot fish; health, because there have been outbreaks of infections, malaria, and diarrhoea; and safety, because in order to access clean water they must travel far distances, and the routes are dangerous. They



also identified risks such as cultural uprooting (young people do not want to speak the language and lack access to quality education, and women are lured by armed actors, Afro-descendants and “paisas” — people from the coffee-growing region — who take them out of the territory), malnutrition, GBV, prostitution, and abuse of drugs and alcoholic beverages.

Men identified the main risks armed actors generate as displacement, restrictions on movement (mobility is prohibited after 6:00 p.m.), threats, dispossession, confinement, and water contamination. They also identified other risks, including limited access to health services and no access to public services due to the illegality of the territory; cultural and territorial uprooting (loss of traditional medicine, language, dress, joy, and livelihoods); loss of food security; recruitment of minors; and violence against women.

<sup>xxvii</sup> GORS indicator GL-P801/V: Number of individuals receiving training, coaching, or mentoring on civilian self-protection techniques and approaches. Actual totals: 12,612 (2023), 34,263 (2024).

<sup>xxviii</sup> GORS data for South Sudan, 2024. GL-P801/V: 440 individuals trained (target 361). GL-PB103/V: 66.67% of communities implementing CSP strategies (target 100%).

<sup>xxix</sup> GORS data for Palestine, 2024. GL-PX1: 7,876 total PfV participants (target 6,360).

<sup>xxx</sup> GORS data for Colombia, 2024. GL-P801/V: 9,841 individuals receiving CSP training (against a target of 9,884).

<sup>xxxi</sup> GORS data, 2023–2025. Cash recipients: GL-P901/S (24,425 in 2023; 38,186 in 2024). Total cash value: GL-P903/S (USD 1,498,334 in 2023; USD 2,601,976 in 2024). PFA recipients: GL-P141/S (10,683 in 2023; 17,274 in 2024). Protective accompaniment: GL-P101/S (3,657 in 2024).

<sup>xxxii</sup> GORS data for South Sudan, 2024. GL-P103/S: 1,875 IPA cases opened; GL-P901/S: 2,480 individuals receiving cash; GL-P903/S: USD 256,233 distributed; GL-P141/S: 7,665 PFA recipients.

<sup>xxxiii</sup> GORS data for Palestine, 2024. GL-P103/S: 2,144 IPA cases opened; GL-P903/S: USD 139,008 distributed.

<sup>xxxiv</sup> GORS data for Colombia, 2024. GL-P901/S: 768 individuals receiving cash (target 761); GL-P903/S: USD 130,625 distributed (target USD 132,825).

<sup>xxxv</sup> See recent NRC report on linkages between ICLA and PfV in Syria and Iraq. NRC (2025) Measuring of the Long-Term Outcomes of Integrated ICLA and PfV Services in Iraq and Syria, NRC.

<sup>xxxvi</sup> GORS data for Palestine, 2024. GL-P151/S: 66 individuals receiving protection case management; GL-P141/S: 1,939 PFA recipients.

<sup>xxxvii</sup> NRC (2024) Global Protection Case Management Initiative: Lessons Learned Report, October 2024, Yemen Country Office.

<sup>xxxviii</sup> Cocking, J.; Davies, G.; Finney, N.; Lilly, D.; McGoldrick, J. and Spencer, A. (2022) Independent Review of the Implementation of the IASC Protection Policy, HPG Commissioned Report. London: Overseas Development Institute.







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