IRC Women’s Protection and Empowerment (WPE) Learning Brief
Irish Aid GBV Strategic Partnership 2023

Featuring highlights from IRC’s partners working to deliver Women’s Protection and Empowerment programming across the world.
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Image on cover: adolescent girls in the Democratic Republic of Congo participating in Girl Shine programming in April 2023
Introduction

This learning brief was created through the Women’s Protection and Empowerment (WPE) Irish Aid-International Rescue Committee (IRC) GBV Strategic Partnership which focuses on **responding effectively and with accountability to women and girls experiencing gender-based violence (GBV) in humanitarian settings.**

The purpose of this learning brief is to share reflections and updates from global and regional WPE learning fora. At the start of the Strategic Partnership with Irish Aid, the Learning Forum only engaged a small group of WPE team members in East Africa who were directly engaged in Irish Aid funded WPE programming. Since 2017, WPE colleagues from more and more countries have attended from across the world. In 2023, we reached WPE teams and partners from 36 countries across Asia, the Middle East, Africa, Europe and Latin America through a three-day workshop held in Nairobi, Kenya.
The IRC’s WPE programmes and partners reach women and girls in 45 countries across Asia, Africa, the Middle East, Latin America, Europe and the United States.

The IRC is grateful to Irish Aid for their continued support of this strategic partnership which began in 2014 and has been extended until 2024. The partnership supports a breadth of critically-needed WPE activities. These include:

- acute emergency WPE response funds,
- long-term transformative WPE programming in protracted crises in East Africa,
- WPE policy and advocacy, and
- shared learning spaces between WPE teams across the world.

The IRC’s 2022-2024 partnership has a renewed commitment to strengthen partnership with women-led and women’s rights organisations and networks. This learning brief is dedicated to our partners, and to sharing learnings and reflections on strengthening the IRC’s feminist partnership work. This year, we are pleased to highlight more of the 100-plus women-led and women’s rights organisations working in partnership with the IRC to deliver WPE programming across the world.
According to IRC’s annual statistics, from Oct 2021 to September 2022, WPE programming reached:

- **43,814 women and girl survivors of GBV** with case management support. The IRC trains and supervises WPE case workers from staff, partners and the local community to provide quality case management support as the foundation of our programming.

- **5,727 survivors of sexual violence** with clinical care. 69% sought help within 72 hours of their assault. WPE, health teams and partners continue to work closely together to deliver this lifesaving, quality care to sexual violence and intimate partner violence survivors in line with WHO guidance.

- **177,404 women and girls** who attended focused Women Rise psychosocial support sessions. The Women Rise approach supports a range of psychosocial support activities and includes a group approach to promote psychosocial support and wellbeing for women.

- **494,182 times** internally displaced people (IDP), refugee and host community women and girls who visited Women and Girls' Safe Spaces (WGSS) in 2022. In the WGSS they accessed support, built and re-built social networks, and organised women and girl-led movements to influence the communities around them.

- **35,494 girls** (93% of girls registered) who completed Girl Shine life skills sessions. This demonstrated the continued popularity and demand for life skills activities for adolescent girls in WGSS. 1,092 staff members and young women mentors were trained to facilitate Girl Shine.
20,644 service providers who were trained on GBV core concepts and response.
80,142 women and girls who accessed support through mobile WPE services.
159,948 at-risk women and girls who received dignity kits, and 37,848 women and girls who received cash assistance.
4,937 women who participated in EASH savings groups and small businesses for women, and discussion groups for women and their male partners to promote equal decision making at home. Discussion groups like these mitigate the risk of intimate partner violence when women participate in economic empowerment activities.

1,135,748 women and 579,860 men who participated in GBV awareness raising activities (1,715,608 in total). 113,650 women and 81,192 men participated in SASA! or SASA! Together community activist-led activities aiming to improve knowledge and change attitudes and behaviours to prevent violence against women and girls and promote gender equality.

“To have the opportunity to meet with colleagues from all regions and be able to have open conversations/exchanges with them. The participation of local partners is also one of the highlights.”

WPE programme team colleague

WPE Learning Forum highlights

In early May 2023, 80 WPE country programme team, partner organisation, and technical team colleagues took part in a three-day WPE Learning Forum in Nairobi. They came from 36 countries across Asia, Africa, the Middle East, Europe, North and South America. The event was organised by the WPE technical team within the Violence Prevention and Response Technical Unit (VPRU).

The theme of the Learning Forum was feminist partnership and movement building. Over half of participants co-facilitated sessions to share learning from WPE programming across the world. Topics explored at the Learning Forum were prioritised by WPE country programme teams and included feminist partnership, Women and Girls’ Safe Spaces (WGSS) and networks, women’s economic empowerment, access to justice, and technology-facilitated GBV.

“The discussion that resonated with me the most was the one about feminist partnership and the importance of allowing local partners to contribute their perspectives.”

WPE programme team colleague
WPE teams also requested space to meet in regional groups to strategise together and dig into regionally-specific WPE programming learning. The Learning Forum was attended by WPE team members from 36 countries who mostly funded their own participation, as well as WPE programme teams and partner organisations from East Africa, and VPRU team members funded by Irish Aid. The event was opened by Inah Kaloga, the Senior Director of the VPRU which houses WPE, Child Protection and Protection Rule of Law technical teams. Simultaneous interpretation between French, Spanish and English was provided for each session, and facilitators presented in French, Spanish and English which strengthened the inclusive and global atmosphere.

“Meeting and learning from colleagues and partners! I also loved the ‘gamified’ learning sessions.”

Violence Prevention and Response Technical Unit (VPRU) participant

WPE Learning Forum participant feedback resulting from being asked to describe the WPE Learning Forum in one word
**Evaluation feedback:** 100% of the WPE Learning Forum evaluation survey respondents said the Learning Forum was informative and they enjoyed the event. 98% said they would use what they learned in their day-to-day work. 92% said they thought the timekeeping was good and that the interpretation met their needs. 97% said they were able to hear from other colleagues about their experiences and learning, and 89% said the Learning Forum allowed them to share their own experiences and learning with others. 62% thought the Learning Forum left enough time for conversations and side meetings with colleagues. Many participants noted that they would share information from the Learning Forum with their wider WPE colleagues when they returned to their programme teams.

Recommendations from participants for the design of the 2024 WPE Learning Forum included extending the forum to four or five days, spending longer on each topic, reducing the number of topics, and sharing evidence and stories of change from different locations.
Feminist partnership principles

The IRC’s Women’s and Girls’ Protection and Empowerment programming, policy and advocacy efforts purposefully adopt a feminist, women’s rights-based, movement-building approach to addressing GBV against diverse women and girls in humanitarian crises. Only through feminist partnership with women and girl-led community-based groups, organisations and networks can the IRC successfully be a part of effective response and prevention of GBV, and the empowerment of diverse women and girls. Within the IRC, the WPE team aims to promote and role model feminist approaches to partnership which respect and resource women and girl-led and women’s and girls’ rights groups and organisations to address GBV in each crisis.

PARTNERSHIP SPOTLIGHT:

ADPARE is an NGO in Romania that was founded in 2003 to assist survivors of human trafficking, intimate partner violence, adults with mental health problems, and other marginalised populations. The IRC Serbia supported the project, ‘Valeria: The Path from Vulnerability to Empowerment’ which empowered refugee women, girls, and other at-risk individuals, enhancing their emotional wellbeing and facilitating their integration into Romanian society.

A WPE mobile safe space with our partner Pastoral Social de Movilidad Humana in Ipiales, Colombia, 2023

ADPARE led psychosocial support and fitness sessions, 2023

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The following feminist partnership principles were developed by the IRC and women’s rights networks from across the world in 2017. They continue to guide the WPE partnership today.

Common foundation: We are driven by feminism and activism, and we hold those central to our work together.

Transformation: We work together to shift power and resources to local women and girls’ organisations to lead action in emergencies.

Independence: We respect the autonomy and perspective of each member.

Transparency: We are honest and open in our communications with each other.

Mutual accountability: We are accountable to women and girls. We deliver on our commitments to each other and contribute to collective action.

Ownership and sustainability: We consider all members as equal owners, each with a voice and a role to play in determining our direction and our priorities.

Curiosity: We seek to learn, capture best practice, adapt our approaches, and evolve our work.

Solidarity: We are fuelled by our commitment to end injustice and violence against women and girls.

Influence: We demand that women and girls powerfully participate in humanitarian funding, strategies and policies.

PARTNERSHIP SPOTLIGHT:
Association for Liberty and Equality of Gender (ALEG) is an NGO in Romania founded in 2004 which works to prevent violence against women and promote gender equality. ALEG provides counselling and psychological support, training, advocacy, and lobbying. The ‘Strengthen capacity for gender-sensitive psychosocial support of Ukrainian refugees’ project, supported by the IRC Serbia, provided psychosocial support to Ukrainian women and children refugees in Transylvania.

PARTECIPAZIONE SPOTLIGHT:
ALEG is an NGO in Romania founded in 2004 which works to prevent violence against women and promote gender equality. ALEG provides counselling and psychological support, training, advocacy, and lobbying. The ‘Strengthen capacity for gender-sensitive psychosocial support of Ukrainian refugees’ project, supported by the IRC Serbia, provided psychosocial support to Ukrainian women and children refugees in Transylvania.

ALEG led dance activity for adolescent girls, 2023
Policy and feminist partnership

Since the start of the current Irish Aid-IRC GBV Strategic Partnership, policy and advocacy efforts supported by Irish Aid have focused on funding for GBV prevention and response, with particular emphasis on if and how local women-led and women’s rights organisations are funded by the humanitarian system.


Not only did each report shed light on additional areas of information about funding, but they also provided specific policy change recommendations for actors across the humanitarian system. With these recommendations, the IRC and partners were able to use these reports in advocacy efforts. For instance, the IRC, alongside the Foreign, Commonwealth & Development Office (FCDO) and the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA), leads the [Call to Action on Protection from Gender-Based Violence in Emergencies](#) Funding Task Team which has spurred high-level attention from the Inter-Agency Standing Committee (IASC) and action on tracking GBV funding.

Because of these commitments, the Financial Tracking Service (FTS) has launched sector-specific pages, with the [GBV sub-sector having the first page ever](#). Because of these improvements, we can now say with certainty that, in contexts monitored by the FTS, GBV prevention and response is not only low, but disproportionately low when compared to other sectors. FTS is also able to give information on trends over time and is therefore able to show that funding has actually decreased in 2022 and 2023, after a high in 2021 (potentially due to COVID-19).

**Total: USD 1.01 billion**

- **27%** to National/sub-national NGOs (USD 268 million)
- **3.5%** to WROs/WLOs (USD 35.8 million)

Source: OCHA Country-Based Pooled Funds 2021 in Review
This information was not available without heavy investment, however now that we have it, it gives us a better understanding of the sector and it also allows us to advocate for better decision making.

In 2023, the WPE policy report *Why Wait? How the Humanitarian System Can Better Fund Women-Led and Women’s Rights Organisations* was developed by the IRC and Development Initiatives. It set out to interrogate the challenges and opportunities for national, regional and community-based women rights and women-led organisations to access international humanitarian funding to deliver GBV prevention and response activities in emergencies. As donors who fund humanitarian action often struggle to fund small organisations directly, they choose instead to contribute to pooled funding mechanisms which are increasingly aimed at funding local response actors. This report analysed the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (UN OCHA) country-based pooled funds, since these are the biggest funds in the most comprehensive public database.

During the preparation and dissemination of this report, the IRC aimed to improve and deepen our ways of working in partnership with feminist organisations. IRC WPE country programme teams helped to engage women-led and women’s rights organisations and activists across the DRC, Ukraine and Afghanistan in the development of the report. These organisations included the Afghan Unique Development Organisation, Provincial Women’s Network Paktia, Women for Afghan Women, Negina Yari, ABCom (Action pour le Bien Être Communautaire), Filston Maliba at Umoja in Action, NGO Girls, and Gender Bureau. The report sought insights and reflections from members of these organisations through key informant interviews and discussed the data findings in country-specific roundtables. The IRC then held a validation workshop across all three countries to engage women’s rights organisations and activists in the interpretation of the data gathered and the development of priority recommendations to strengthen the country-based pooled funding mechanism.
The IRC prepared country-specific memos in French, Ukrainian, Dari and Pashto. The IRC engaged all organisations to seek informed consent on how they would like to be acknowledged and whether they would like to be contacted for joint advocacy opportunities. Most participating women-led and women's rights organisations chose to be visibly acknowledged in the report and were interested in joint activities. In the dissemination of the report, the IRC sought out opportunities to have joint presentations with participating women-led and women's rights organisations. For example, Ukrainian organisations joined the IRC for our Why Wait? WPE podcast and delivered a joint presentation to a Ukrainian advocacy working group on localisation. Afghan organisations joined a briefing with the Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office (FCDO) and the bi-annual meeting of the country-based pooled funding working group that took place in Geneva in June.

“Connecting with colleagues and learning more about the diverse contexts in which our country programmes work.”

Violence Prevention and Response Technical Unit (VPRU) participant

PARTNERSHIP SPOTLIGHT: Pastoralist Girls Initiative (PGI) is an indigenous NGO based in Garissa Country, Kenya. PGI works with a wide range of stakeholders to empower women and girls from the pastoralist communities to help them achieve their potential and improve the quality of their lives and those of the entire community. PGI works with girls to develop their leadership skills and empower them to address any challenges that may affect their development including early marriages, genital mutilation, and education amongst others. Under the Irish Aid GBV Strategic Partnership, PGI supports women and girls through mobile WGSS, Girl Shine, EA$E, and livelihood skills training. PGI also supports women and girls to lead safety audits and advocacy campaigns to reduce the risk of GBV in their communities and to work to transform social norms through EMAP.
Funding and feminist partnership

As part of the WPE Learning Forum, the IRC’s partnership, finance and WPE technical teams prioritised an analysis of how WPE programme resources were used to fund local organisations and deliver GBV prevention and response activities. The analysis found that in 2022, the IRC used 25% of its financial resources for WPE programming to resource partner organisations, however only half of this funding (12%) reached local organisations. As part of Strategy 100, and in line with the Grand Bargain international agreements, the IRC has committed to increasing the funding that’s reaching local organisations to 25% by 2024.

The Learning Forum aimed to equip WPE teams with skills to increase funding to local organisations through feminist partnership and movement building. The Learning Forum brought together teams with a strong history of partnership with feminist organisations and, in particular, with community-based organisation-led WPE programming. There are also areas of the world where an IRC direct service provision approach remains dominant, and teams were keen to learn from each other to help them shift to transformative partnership approaches with local actors and advance the IRC’s partnership journey and ambition.

“The collaborative environment, it was also inclusive. Congratulations to the team for their very thoughtful approach in putting this together.”

Violence Prevention and Response Technical Unit (VPRU) participant

PARTNERSHIP SPOTLIGHT:
Tujiuke Bakenyezi is a community-based organisation that exists to promote the autonomy of women and girls in Gatumba communities in Burundi. Tujiuke Bakenyezi aims to raise the social and economic status of Gatumba women and girls by working to strengthen their skills. Activities include experience-sharing and social cohesion, and raising awareness of GBV among women, girls and their communities.

WPE partner CBO Tujiuke Bakenyezi to women and girls affected by the floods that hit the Gatumba area in 2023
Organisations who participated in the feminist partnership-focused sessions shared recommendations and guidance with the IRC. The recommendations included the importance of adapting partnership modalities based on the size and operational capacity of the local organisation, and the fact that partners who initially receive smaller cash grants appreciate an increase in financial support over time to match their growing operation. Partners highlighted the struggles they faced as a result of the IRC’s requirements to pay by results and on receipt of financial reporting, and the limited availability of core funding to support partner operations. A space was created for partners to talk directly to the Irish Aid donor representative present at the Learning Forum without an IRC presence. This ensured that partners could directly address and advocate for their priority issues. Many of the partner’s recommendations are addressed in the revised PEERS approach (see below).

To strengthen our feminist partnership programming, WPE teams and partners who participated in the Learning Forum were trained on the use of simple cash transfers by the IRC partnership team. Using the IRC’s cash standard operating procedures in each country, simple cash transfers of up to 10,000 USD can be provided to local women’s groups and organisations to sustain their grassroots activities. This is not a formal sub-granting type process, but a more flexible cash transfer process, which allows the IRC to support informal local groups and community-based organisations (CBOs) without requiring formalised operational policies and procedures to be in place. This cash transfer process, alongside operational and technical capacity building, has been proven to make a critical contribution to women and girls’ movement building in the development of community-based organisation-led WPE programming in many contexts.
Capturing this programmatic history of community-based organisation-led WPE programming is the focus of the second Irish Aid GBV Strategic Partnership funded workshop this year. This learning workshop will bring together CBO and NGO partners from across Irish Aid funded countries (Burundi, Ethiopia, Kenya, South Sudan and Somalia) as well as from the DRC, Sierra Leone, Liberia, Thailand and Myanmar who have extensive experience in supporting over 20 years of CBO-led WPE programming.

Save Somali Women and Children (SSWC) engage displaced women and girls in WGSS activities funded by Irish Aid, Somalia, 2023

PARTNERSHIP SPOTLIGHT:
**Almanar Voluntary Organization** is a women-led NGO in Sudan which supports women and girls in conflict affected communities (internally displaced, returnees, South Sudanese receiving communities). Almanar builds quality programmes using a community-focused, participatory capacity building approach. Their aim is to improve governance and the free exercise of rights, increase access to basic services, enable community development, and build an active civil society that will further reinforce sustainable development and conflict mitigation. Almanar conducts campaigns on GBV, provides psychosocial support, and runs women centres with awareness, life skills and vocational training sessions for women and girls.

Almanar support activity for women, 2022
Chapter 1. PEERS and partnership in IRC
An overview of IRC's PEER System, Strategy 100 partnership ambition, and partnership principles.

Chapter 2. Ambition, structure, and staffing for effective partnerships
Fundamental building blocks for partnership success for CRRD and RAI management teams.

Chapter 3. Determining the program modality
Determining IRC’s role based on how we can best support local actors and systems.

Chapter 4. Building strategic partnerships
Developing principled, long-term partnerships that share power and resources and elevate the knowledge and expertise of each partner.

Chapter 5. Collaborative risk management
Working collaboratively to mitigate material risks to our ability to deliver safe and effective programs together.

Chapter 6. Designing together
Maximizing collaboration with partners in strategy and program design to leverage the knowledge and expertise of each partner.

Chapter 7. The partnership agreement
Selecting the agreement type and terms that produce the best outcomes.

Chapter 8. Partnership project collaboration, accountability, and results
Maximizing collaboration in project management.

Chapter 9. Capacity sharing
A process of mutual learning that enables partners to expand the impact and scale of the response.
Strategic partnership with women-led organisations

To further strengthen feminist partnership, the IRC’s partnership team trained WPE Learning Forum participants in the IRC’s new strategic partnership approach. Strategic partnerships with women-led organisations are being prioritised at the IRC, and WPE teams were encouraged to engage senior leaders in each country to build equal and transformative partnerships with WPE partners. Strategic partnerships create space for local organisations and the IRC to meet and agree on areas of work and ways of working outside of the busy business development and sub-granting partnership agreement processes. Strategic partnership agreements outline short and long-term partnership and programmatic objectives and include the following areas of collaboration.

**Collaboration on governance and strategy:**

- Promoting participation in each other’s strategic decision-making processes.
- Regular senior management meetings.
- Annual partnership health check processes, including on power dynamics, shared decision making and capacity sharing.

**Collaboration on programme design and business development:**

- Developing high-level joint programme design concepts, incorporating a shared commitment to promote client-centred programmes.
- Exploring joint business development for appropriate opportunities, including discussion about collaboration on any relevant call for proposals.
- Seeking to maximise the flexibility and duration of project funding and full cost recovery for partners.

**Capacity sharing:**

- Learning from each other in prioritised areas.
- Sharing technical and operational tools and learning resources with each other as is feasible and useful.

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GBVIMS+ training with IRC, CREW and HACO staff who are funded by Irish Aid to deliver GBV prevention and response services in South Sudan, 2023

IRC Women’s Protection and Empowerment (WPE) Learning Brief
The IRC became a signatory and contributor to the Pledge for Change which aims to re-imagine the role of international NGOs in the global humanitarian and development aid system. The IRC and other international NGOs committed to collaborate together with Global South leaders “to build a stronger aid ecosystem based on the principles of solidarity, humility, self-determination, and equality by focusing on three core changes: equitable partnerships, authentic storytelling and influencing wider change”.

The IRC is also in a growing global strategic partnership with NEAR, a movement of local and national civil society organisations from the Global South with a bold ambition – to reshape the top-down humanitarian and development aid system to one that is locally driven and owned.

2023 saw the launch of The Partnership Excellence for Equality and Results System (PEERS) 2023 which was developed through a whole-of-organisation process, then released and operationalised in 2023. PEERS was shaped by an external equality review led by Degan Ali and based on in-depth engagement with more than 50 local partners and over 200 members of staff from Asia, Africa, the Middle East, Europe, the US and Latin America, and across the organisation.
Partnerships within the IRC are guided by the following updated principles:

**Equality:** we partner as equals, based on mutual respect, and we respect each other’s mandate, independence and expertise.

**Complementarity:** we promote the strengths and comparative advantages of each partner to achieve better outcomes working together than we can working separately.

**Mutuality:** we recognise that each partner benefits from the partnership in a way that is meaningful and beneficial to them, as well as to the objectives of the partnership.

**Solidarity:** we recognise our shared interests, objectives and values, and we support each other to address challenges.

**Results-orientation:** we always make decisions together based on what will contribute to the best outcomes for people impacted by crises.

**Humility:** we recognise the opportunities to learn from each other, and we understand that we each have strengths and limits, and that we all make mistakes.

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**Women and Girls’ Safe Spaces (WGSS) and feminist partnership**

WGSS are a critical pillar of feminist movement building and partnership with local communities in the delivery of GBV prevention and response activities in humanitarian crises. WGSS support access to GBV response services in a safe, confidential manner which centres on the experiences and needs of diverse women and girls. Beyond GBV services, WGSS are both physical structures where women and girls can gather safely, and also the embodiment of women and adolescent girls’ empowerment. The critical components for empowerment, sustainability, and movement building within the WGSS are women and girls’ leadership and collective ownership. The WGSS are not meant to be owned or led by NGOs or INGOs, but rather by the diverse women and girls who are participating in the WGSS – the very people who breathe life into them.

World Menstrual Hygiene Day at a WGSS in collaboration with a volunteering gynaecologist, Libya, May 2023
Leadership and ownership of WGSS must be intentional from the outset. WPE staff must understand that WGSS are meant to be owned and led by women and girls in the community. At the WPE Learning Forum, promising practices were shared for inspiration. They illustrated how women and girls in communities around the world decide on what WGSS ownership looks like and means to them. A panel discussion was held with WPE experts sharing lessons from WGSS programming in Liberia, Syria, Thailand, and the DRC.
The panel highlighted different methods for women and girls’ ownership of the WGSS.

In the DRC, the WGSS have evolved over time to be community-based organisations (CBOs). Women oversee the CBO that runs the WGSS. Over time, the IRC supported the now-CBOs in how to apply for grant money and set up organisationally and sustainably. This method truly shifted power to women-led CBOs. A lesson learned was to have a rotating leadership to avoid potentially recreating harmful power structures.

In Liberia, the WGSS have activities led by women and adolescent girls from the community. Advisory committees run the WGSS. The WGSS are further linked through a network whereby they meet and discuss issues. If an individual WGSS has a deficit in expertise, a WGSS in another location will offer temporary staffing support.

In Syria, women and girls continually provide feedback to mobile teams. This ensures that the programming reflects their needs. Women and adolescent girls also support the mobile team in conducting activities and creating a safe temporary place for all women and girls to attend sessions.

In one area of Thailand, a women-led CBO runs activities through its office which has become a WGSS over time. In another area, women and older adolescent girls have determined the types of committees and programmes they wanted to see in the WGSS. Leaders in the WGSS are grounded in sharing and balancing power.

PARTNERSHIP SPOTLIGHT:
Social Action for Development (SAD) is a non-profit organisation in Burundi which promotes economic empowerment, GBV prevention and response, child protection, education, entrepreneurship, and health services for women and children. SAD supports solidarity groups to make a contribution to the community in order to reduce and prevent GBV and to care for women and girl survivors of GBV. SAD also distributes dignity kits.
To help track ownership and leadership, indicators have been made to help measure the success of the WGSS for sustainability and women and girls' leadership in the WGSS. These indicators can be found in the Women and Girls Safe Space Toolkit. The measurement ‘% of WGSS activities led by women and girls from the community' helps teams to evaluate whether their WGSS are moving towards ownership by the women and girls accessing the WGSS.

A WGSS offers Arabic classes and psychosocial support groups for refugee women and girls in Tunaydbah Refugee Camp, Sudan, 2023

“\textit{What I enjoyed the most was meeting people from different parts of the world and hearing panellists’ experiences on WPE interventions. I also like the session with my region to discuss the interventions and challenges in Latin America.}”

WPE programme team colleague

PARTNERSHIP SPOTLIGHT: \textbf{Zireenza Support Foundation (ZSF)} is an NGO established in 2017 in Adamawa State, Nigeria to respond to the socio-economic problems in different villages. ZSF is working to help victims of the insurgency in Northeast Nigeria. It aims to reach neglected women and children at grassroots level and find opportunities for dignified restoration and sustainable development. ZSF promotes the empowerment and self-determination of communities to enable them to solve their own socio-economic problems.

Distribution of Non-Food Items in Yelwa Community, Adamawa State, Nigeria, June 2023
Women's economic empowerment and feminist partnership

The IRC’s Economic Recovery and Development (ERD) and WPE teams co-facilitated a session at the Learning Forum to generate cross-learning across sectors on women’s economic empowerment strategies. The session explored how the IRC and partners reach diverse women and girls and how we are partnering with women-led CBOs to strengthen the sustainability and empowerment of our women’s economic empowerment activities. The session created recommendations to build on the successes and opportunities for WPE and ERD to work more closely together and inform each other’s programming.

PARTNERSHIP SPOTLIGHT:
Action Femme Sourdès (AFS), which translates as ‘Deaf Women Action’, is a non-profit association in North Kivu, the DRC. AFS campaigns for the rights of people with disabilities, particularly those who are hearing impaired. AFS supports survivors of violence and exclusion at both the family level and in the community. The IRC WPE programme partners with AFS to implement emergency WPE activities. AFS leads Girl Shine activities with girls aged between ten and 19 years old in Bulengo.

A women’s group shares out savings, Hawa Badalo Waya, Chad, 2023

Edutainment session with displaced girls in the Bulengo camp, DRC 2023
Violence against women and girls (VAWG) prevention and feminist partnership

At the WPE Learning Forum, WPE teams and partners spent a morning delving into the IRC's approaches to preventing violence against women and girls (VAWG). Sessions included interactive quizzes, presentations to promote uptake of the Safe@Home approach (a collaboration between WPE and Child Protection teams) and group discussions on Engaging Men Through Accountable Practice (EMAP) and SASA! Together. These discussions were led by a WPE technical advisor and country programme experts who shared their knowledge with colleagues who were not yet using the approaches. A clear theory of VAWG underpins all three approaches which are each based on the understanding of violence against women and girls as a system of oppression and as a tool to ensure women and girls' continued subordinate status in a patriarchal society.
All three of these violence prevention approaches are implemented by WPE teams and partners across the world:

- **Engaging Men Through Accountable Practice (EMAP):** A VAWG prevention approach targeting change among men. This approach centres on the voices of women and girls in communities through a framework of accountable practice. EMAP will soon be updated with new content to engage boys in accountable practice, and with additional content for social behaviour and communication change activities.

- **SASA! Together:** A community mobilisation approach developed by Raising Voices. This approach works across the community ecosystem to mobilise local activists to end violence against women.

- **Safe@Home:** A co-occurring intimate partner violence and child maltreatment prevention approach that engages with women, men and children. This approach also aims to address violence against women and girls with disabilities and older women.

**What have we learned?**

Sequencing EMAP and SASA! Together leads to deepened community engagement by first working with men on individual behaviour change to support them to become future SASA! Together activists. While VAWG prevention interventions may take longer, they can be adapted for emergency settings and delivered through innovative methodologies such as video or phone-based support, as occurred during the 2020 emergency in Myanmar.

“I loved the global experience and stories of women and girls responding to crisis at the frontline of prevention and response. I felt that organisations at the frontline are facing similar challenges but was surprised to learn new and innovative approaches being applied in the different context. I was excited to learn that we are making real progress in our programmes through application of tested methodologies like SASA! and EMAP.”

WPE programme team colleague
Engaging men to prevent VAWG is important, but reaching boys before their ideas and expectations about gender norms are solidified is equally critical. An additional component for EMAP is being developed that will engage boys in accountable practice. This will be launched in 2024. WPE and Child Protection teams have pooled their expertise in working with adolescent girls and boys to further strengthen the EMAP for boys’ innovation that was originally developed in Liberia. The Engaging Boys in Accountable Practice approach requires quality GBV response, and it requires Child Protection services to be present before engaging boys in gender transformative programming. The approach connects with the IRC’s flagship Girl Shine approach to ensure girls are engaged first in gender transformative, psychosocial support and life skills building programming before informing EMAP for boys.

In the same way as women’s groups continue to meet throughout EMAP programming with men, girls’ groups will meet in steering committees and smaller groups to provide feedback on activities with boys and enable WPE teams to address any unintended harm created by the VAWG prevention programming. By engaging young and older adolescent boys in gender transformative VAWG prevention programming, the WPE team hopes to advance the protection and empowerment of adolescent girls in humanitarian crises.

Speech bubble: Stay tuned for an EMAP Plus updated resource in 2024!
SASA! Together
The IRC’s WPE technical team has continued to partner with Raising Voices in the third year of the SASA! Together global capacity sharing initiative. The IRC, Norwegian Church Aid, and UNHCR focal points have been trained and coached online and in person from 2021 to 2023 to support quality implementation of SASA! Together in humanitarian contexts across Asia and Africa. In April 2023, six IRC WPE technical advisors for Africa, Asia and the Middle East were trained by Raising Voices in Kampala with the support of the Irish Aid GBV Strategic Partnership.

GBV and technology
As part of the WPE Learning Forum, participants learned about technology-facilitated GBV against women and girls. Technology-facilitated GBV is a broad term and includes technologies that are both online and offline. According to the UN Human Rights Council it includes “any act of GBV against women that is committed, assisted or aggravated in part or fully by the use of information communication technologies (ICT), such as mobile phones and smartphones, the internet, social media platforms or email”. A study conducted by the Economist Intelligence Unit in 2021 found that, globally, 38% of women with internet access have personally experienced online violence and, globally, 85% of women have witnessed online violence being perpetrated against another woman. According to a study conducted by Plan International among young women and girls from 31 countries worldwide, the higher and more frequent use of social media by younger generations increases exposure to technology-facilitated GBV. Still, there remains a significant lack of research, data collection and analysis of technology-facilitated GBV in humanitarian settings.

“Good organisation allowed everyone to be at the same level of understanding of the themes addressed despite the different languages. This is where I also appreciated the role well played by the interpreters.”
WPE programme team colleague
GBV perpetrated using digital tools and platforms is not a separate phenomenon to wider GBV. It is part of the continuum of multiple, recurring and interrelated forms of GBV against women and girls that occur throughout women’s and girls’ lives. Technology-facilitated GBV does not stay online. It has profound, lasting and severe impacts on women and girls. It includes a wide range of behaviours and acts perpetrated by intimate partners, acquaintances, strangers, and institutions. The motivations behind the perpetration of acts of technology-facilitated GBV differ, but commonly include seeking to humiliate, intimidate or cause fear, retribution or embarrassment. Motivations also include wanting to coerce, control or exploit women and girls. Examples include threats, harassment, stalking (or cyberstalking), image-based abuse (including image-based sexual abuse), impersonation, and many more. The GBV AoR Help Desk identified promising strategies to address technology-facilitated GBV, including building women and girls’ digital and technology literacy, safety and security. VPRU has launched the Safe Space to Learn Digital Literacy Curriculum which aims to strengthen women and girls’ digital literacy and is available for piloting. Please contact your WPE technical advisor for more information.
WPE innovation updates

The IRC’s VPRU advances Child Protection, Protection Rule of Law and WPE programme innovation, learning, policy and advocacy through global, multi-country projects. The VPRU is currently implementing the WPE innovation projects below.

**Rollout and Engagement with National GBV Actors on GBV Minimum Standards in Emergencies (RE-ENGAGE)**
Funded by BHA, the GBV Minimum Standards Project (2021 to 2023) aims to leverage existing coordination mechanisms and networks to engage diverse GBV actors to learn about and use the GBVAOR’s Minimum Standards. RE-ENGAGE has supported 150 participants from 100 organisations in Asia, East Africa, and Latin America through a virtual learning series.

A GBV Minimum Standards Contextualisation workshop, Juba, South Sudan, 2023
New online Interagency GBV Minimum Standards learning products!

- The GBV Minimum Standards app is available in Arabic, English, French, and Spanish and can be downloaded through Google Play and the App Store.
- The GBV Minimum Standards podcast is available in English, Arabic, French, and Spanish.
- The GBV Minimum Standards e-learning course is available on Kaya.

In 2023, the project successfully supported South Sudan GBV actors to assess their programming using the GBV Minimum Standards contextualisation tool. A contextualisation workshop will be taking place in Myanmar in November 2023 and a global Training of Trainers for women-led and women's rights organisations will be held in October 2023.

Transform

TRANSFORM is a three-year VPRU BHA-funded programme (2022-2025) that aims to develop mechanisms for humanitarian organisations to systematically embed diverse Sexual Orientation, Gender Identity and Expression, and Sex Characteristics (SOGIESC) considerations into conflict and displacement response. The IRC and Edge Effect have partnered to develop and socialise new approaches to community-based response, organisational development, coordination, and standardisation in the humanitarian sector and architecture. TRANSFORM is being implemented in El Salvador, Ukraine, and a third disaster context is currently being finalised. As part of the activities in El Salvador, TRANSFORM will assess diverse SOGIESC inclusion in the IRC’s WPE WGSS programming through a Rapid Assessment Tool. This tool offers a structured process for assessing and strengthening the overall programming capability of WGSS to be inclusive of women and girls with diverse SOGIESC. This assessment is designed as a collaborative process in which three local Salvadoran diverse SOGIESC CSOs – AMATE, ASPIDH, and Colectiva Feminista – alongside the IRC El Salvador assess inclusion in the programme. The tool has the additional purpose of challenging dominant power relations in the aid sector by emphasising accountability to people with diverse SOGIESC, locally-led processes, and decolonisation. Following these activities, the IRC will have a new invaluable insight into diverse SOGIESC inclusion in WGSS programming.

A GBV Minimum Standards Contextualisation Workshop, South Sudan, 2023
IGNITE! Inspiring Girls and Grassroots Networks for Inclusive and Transformative Education.

IRC is leading the IGNITE consortium in partnership with the Doria Feminist Fund, the Partnership for African Social and Governance Research (PASGR) and Urgent Action Fund-Africa (UAF-A) funded by the French Development Agency (AFD).

Striving to be rooted in sustainable and locally-driven approaches, the project aims to support feminist CSOs through capacity strengthening and funding to advance gender-transformative education while empowering marginalised adolescent girls. Through grant-making and collaborative capacity strengthening in organisational and technical areas including research and advocacy, the IGNITE Consortium will support local feminist and youth-led CSOs to address the gender norms that hinder adolescent girls in and through education. IGNITE will run from 2023 to 2026 and cover Cameroon, the DRC, Ethiopia, Jordan, Lebanon and Nigeria.
Girl Shine Learning
VPRU continues to prioritise Adolescent Girls Protection and Empowerment programming through its flagship approach, Girl Shine. Girl Shine engages girls, their female and male caregivers, service providers and communities to promote attitudes and behaviours that support girls’ future health, education, wellbeing and safety. Girl Shine strengthens WPE programming to ensure an adolescent girl-friendly approach to engaging girls and meeting their needs is at the heart of WPE activities. In 2023, a Girl Shine community of practice was established in English, Arabic, French and Spanish for WPE teams and partners. The community of practice covers the Girl Shine related topics that have been prioritised by members and offers Girl Shine champions from across the globe the time to connect and share experiences. Topics to date have included early marriage, monitoring and evaluation (M&E), adolescent sexual and reproductive health, and sustainability. Ask your WPE technical advisor to join the Girl Shine community of practice. In addition, a Girl Shine Learning Agenda was developed to guide research and programmatic learning in 2024. The learning agenda includes strengthened M&E collection and analysis, cost analysis, planning for an impact evaluation, evidence reviews and in-depth collection of practitioner learning from the last five years of Girl Shine programming. An advisory group has been formed of 15 Girl Shine experts from WPE country programmes and technical teams to guide the process forward.

PARTNERSHIP SPOTLIGHT:
Fondation Stamm is a Burundian humanitarian organisation that was founded in 1999 with the aim of helping war-displaced people, refugees, returnees, and at-risk women and children. Its mission is to protect and defend women and children’s rights, to fight for education and health care for all, and to develop a fair and sustainable economy based on solidarity, mutual aid, food security, the financial inclusion of women, and the safeguarding of the ecosystem.

Photo: Entrepreneurship training for members of the Gatumba solidarity groups, Burundi, 2023
EMAP PLUS

Another exciting VPRU WPE project funded by USAID’s Bureau for Population, Refugees and Migration (BPRM) is the update of our renowned EMAP approach. Over the last decade of implementation, WPE teams across the world have generated learning and innovation which has been captured through this project to strengthen the approach.

Key improvements include a stronger accountability mechanism to women and girls, the engagement of women spouses of men participants, and the addition of groups with adolescent girls and boys. The improvements also include a new social behaviour communication change component which aims to reinforce change within the lives of the men and boy participants through the contextualised use of technology. This approach has been informed by child protection expertise in working with adolescent boys, as well as WPE programming with adolescent girls through our wonderful Girl Shine approach. Bringing together these strengths will help us influence a new generation of women and men during the formative years of their adolescence to promote gender equality, nonviolence and allyship between boys and girls. Workshops have been carried out this year to train WPE teams and partner organisations to transition from EMAP to the updated EMAP PLUS approach.

What’s new in EMAP PLUS?

**Guidance**

- Updated Introductory, Implementation, and Training Guides and materials
- Stronger accountability mechanisms, including women’s and adolescent girls’ steering committees
- An improved monitoring, evaluation and learning approach

**Resources for women and men**

- Two new sessions for women’s groups
- Information sessions for women partners of men’s group members
- Optional Listening and Gender Dialogue sessions for women and men’s group members

**Resources for adolescent girls and boys**

- Accountability and listening sessions with adolescent girls who have graduated Girl Shine
- A 30-session curriculum for adolescent boys
- Information sessions for women and men caregivers of adolescent boys’ group members
Research into Sexual and Reproductive Health (SRH) and WPE integrated programming

VPRU is currently investing in research funded by BHA on the intersection of GBV and SRH rights through user-centred design research with the IRC’s research and innovation labs in Pakistan and South Sudan. This research will capture women’s preferences for integrated GBV-SRH service provision across diverse contexts to inform future programming between GBV and SRH actors. In 2023, Pakistan and South Sudan were selected for this project and human-centred design consultants were hired in each location. Research pre-tests were designed and carried out, and women and girls were recruited as research participants. The human-centred design approach included storytelling sessions and illustrations which were developed and used in data collection. The data is now being transcribed and analysed and local (Pakistan/South Sudan) and global service provider interviews are being undertaken. This project will share research findings in 2024.
Recommendations

The following recommendations have been captured and shared with the aim of strengthening feminist partnership approaches within IRC’s WPE and the wider GBV practitioner community:

1. The IRC’s WPE teams can play a key role in achieving the IRC’s commitment to prioritise strategic partnerships with women-led organisations as part of Strategy 100.

2. The IRC’s WPE teams should continue to reflect on and strengthen their own partnership work. They should create space for organisations to feedback regularly on the health and equity of partnership ways of working and resourcing.

3. The feminist partnership principles articulated in partnership with WPE and women’s rights actors, and reflected in the IRC’s updated partnership approach, should be actively upheld by WPE teams.

4. The IRC’s WPE teams that engage mainly in direct service provision should prioritise learning from other WPE teams and partners in their region and across the world who have decades of feminist movement-building and partnership experience.

5. The IRC’s WPE teams have a responsibility at national and sub-national levels to actively support the participation and leadership of local women-led and women’s rights organisations in the GBV subcluster system. They also have a responsibility to support their access to influence within the humanitarian system and their access to pooled funding.
The IRC’s WPE teams and partners should continue to prioritise an empowerment-based approach to running Women and Girls Safe Spaces (WGSS) from the start of an emergency. This empowerment, community-based approach to establishing and sustaining WPE programmes, ensures internally displaced, refugee and host community women and girls are leaders in implementing WGSS activities, including GBV response, prevention and empowerment activities.

This community-led approach to WGSS and WPE programming can be the foundation for further movement building. WPE teams who adopt this localised approach to GBV programming can help catalyse the formation of women and girl-led CBOs by linking together women and girls’ safe space leadership groups or steering committees into networks of refugee and internally displaced women and girls.

The IRC’s WPE teams can utilise the IRC’s cash Standard Operating Procedures to provide cash transfers of up to 10,000 USD to resource women and girls’ formal and informal groups and organisations to implement GBV prevention and response activities. This has proven to be an effective approach to movement building and, for interested women-led CBOs and groups, an important first step towards accessing more substantial resourcing.

The IRC’s WPE, partnership, monitoring and evaluation, grants and finance teams can work together to support local women-led and women’s rights organisations who wish to develop the operational and technical capacity needed to secure pooled and wider funding.
The IRC Africa’s WPE teams need to prioritise partnership activities as Africa holds the largest regional portfolio of WPE programming and has the smallest proportion of funding reaching local organisations delivering WPE programming.

Africa-based WPE teams need to share knowledge across borders from protracted and recovery contexts. For example, the DRC, Sierra Leone and Liberia have well-established feminist partnership and movement-building approaches, and these could inform refugee humanitarian response contexts elsewhere in the continent.

The IRC’s Violence Prevention and Response Unit (VPRU) needs to increase funding to local organisations and establish strategic partnership with local organisations as part of its WPE innovation and learning activities.

The IRC should advocate with donors to scale up resourcing for existing feminist funds that have women-led and women’s rights organisation friendly processes and practices so that feminist funds can increase grant-making in humanitarian contexts.

Accountability to women and girls must be strengthened within WPE programming and across GBV prevention, response and empowerment activities. Feminist partnership principles offer a way to ground WPE programming in local women’s and girls’ movements and build long-term sustainable WPE programming approaches.

Reaching diverse women and girls requires ongoing self-reflection and proactive partnership with social justice movements, including with disability, SOGEISC and older age rights actors, to strengthen the intersection approach to WPE programming.
The International Rescue Committee (IRC) helps people affected by humanitarian crises—including the climate crisis—to survive, recover and rebuild their lives. Founded at the call of Albert Einstein in 1933, the IRC is now at work in over 40 crisis-affected countries as well as communities throughout Europe and the Americas. We deliver lasting impact by providing health care, helping children learn, and empowering individuals and communities to become self-reliant, always seeking to address the inequalities facing women and girls.

Rescue.org