

Participatory Protection & Inclusion Risk Analysis

Practitioner's guide



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About this guide

This guide provides an overview of the Participatory Protection & Inclusion Risk Analysis methodology – a light-weight, participatory approach to assessing programmatic risks.

The methodology, first developed in 2022, has been used by Search for Common Ground across a number of countries, including the Central African Republic, Burundi, Kenya, Lebanon, Mali, Nigeria and South Sudan. It draws on the methodology and lessons from the [Intersectional Rapid Gender and Protection Analysis](#) tool, developed by IREX, Search for Common Ground, and Abaad for the Youth Excel consortium.

The Participatory Protection & Inclusion Risk Analysis methodology was developed by Maya Arnaout, Rachel Walsh Taza and Sölvi Karlsson. This guide was published in 2025.

Cover photo: Participants in a Participatory Protection & Inclusion Risk Analysis.

1. Background

What is a participatory protection and inclusion risk analysis?

A Participatory Protection & Inclusion Risk Analysis is a process aimed at mapping key risks to participants' protection, wellbeing, and equitable inclusion within a project or program, in a participatory manner. It also identifies existing capacities and resources. This guide outlines the purpose, importance, methodology, and other considerations involved in conducting a successful Participatory Protection & Inclusion Risk Analysis. It also provides a number of template tools to make the process easier to adapt and implement.

A Participatory Protection & Inclusion Risk Analysis **acknowledges that programs, people, and operations may potentially bring harm to participants**. Therefore, it aims to **understand these risks to reduce their likelihood and impact**. Areas of risk to consider encompass the profile of participants, staff/affiliates, program activities and approaches, program context, communication channels, and more.

A Participatory Protection & Inclusion Risk Analysis can take place either in-person or online. When the analysis is carried out in person, it can take the form of a small workshop. When it is carried out online, it can be useful to use deliberative technology tools to help facilitate the discussion.

Why is it important?

Organisations implementing programming have a **duty of care** towards their participants. In order to be successful, programs need to be designed and implemented in a manner which is **conflict sensitive**.

Fulfilling the duty of care and being conflict sensitive require a thorough understanding of both participation and inclusion-related risks. Using a participatory analysis to understand these risks has several significant benefits:

- *Identifying and addressing blind spots:* A participatory analysis draws forward different viewpoints, recognising that perceptions of risks and protection issues may differ between adults, youth, INGOs, and youth organizations. This helps program teams understand participants' realities and ensure that program design and implementation reflects this.
- *Encouraging participants to think of the resources available to them:* Going through the exercise can bridge awareness gaps for participants as they often are aware of risks they face but may not have considered protection mechanisms and available resources.
- *Building resilience:* Active participation improves resilience and empowers participants. As such, a participatory identification of risks may itself be a step toward addressing some of the potential risks of a program.

The findings of a Participatory Protection & Inclusion Risk Analysis should inform the program team about potential issues and gaps that may arise during project implementation, and enable them to proactively address these issues.

Who leads this exercise?

The Participatory Protection & Inclusion Risk Analysis exercise is typically led by the staff of an organization implementing programs. Ideally, this should be somebody experienced in facilitating interactive dialogues. In some contexts, an external facilitator may conduct the analysis, if budget allows. This can help reduce potential risks related to assumptions and bias from project staff.

For youth-focused programs in particular, and where time and budget permits, youth-led focus group discussions, key informant interviews, and analysis can offer a greater level of ownership and leadership for young people of the analysis and actions agreed on. See Search for Common Ground's guidance note on [Supporting the Design and Implementation of Youth-led Research Projects](#) for more information on youth-led research.

When should it be conducted?

It is recommended to initiate the analysis at the beginning of the project, before any program activities commence. Before launching other program activities, engage participants, and potentially also other relevant stakeholders (e.g., parents, community leaders, school administrators, religious leaders), in this analysis.

Periodic refreshers are encouraged throughout the project's lifecycle, but they don't need to be as exhaustive as the initial analysis. These refreshers will ensure that the identified risks are up to date and are helpful in addressing any new risks that may have arisen.

If you are currently in the midst of implementing your project and are keen on conducting a Participatory Protection & Inclusion Risk Analysis, you may want to consider combining a group discussion with a workshop, training session, or meeting that you are already planning.

2. Methodology

Step 1: Prepare

Determine who leads the process

A Participatory Protection & Inclusion Risk Analysis can be conducted either through a *participant-led method*, such as youth-led research, or it can be carried out through a *process led by an organization's staff, volunteers or consultants*.

The choice between these approaches depends on available resources and the intended scope of the exercise. A participant-led method is likely to be more expensive to implement, but may also lead to more meaningful findings than an organization-led process. Both approaches can be appropriate.

What is youth-led research?

“Youth-led research is a youth engagement strategy. It is a programmatic approach that can engage youth in peacebuilding, teach them leadership skills, and help them build relationships with members of their community. [...] Youth-led research is a powerful tool for youth empowerment and engagement, and high-quality youth-led research requires adult supervision and guidance throughout the process. This support should not diminish or infringe upon young people’s leadership throughout the project, but should instead monitor and support the quality of research efforts.”

From: *Supporting the Design and Implementation of Youth-Led Research Projects*, a guidance note on youth-led research

Determine who needs to be engaged

Start by identifying the different identity groups your program is or will be working with (e.g., young girls, young boys, people with disabilities, IDPs, persons previously associated with armed groups) to determine who should be involved in the analysis. Once you have identified the different groups who you will need to engage, consider different data collection methods.

1. **Focus Group Discussions (FGD):** Gather participants for group discussions to explore various perspectives and experiences. As a minimum, you should always aim to conduct a focus-group discussion with a sample of the projects’ participants or potential participants. These could take place either in person or online, depending on the context.
2. **Key Informant Interviews (KII):** You may choose to conduct one-on-one interviews with individuals, to supplement insights gained from FGDs. KIIs can be a way to engage potential participants from identity groups experiencing exclusion who might be at risk if their identity were more widely known or who can’t speak freely in a

group. When using a participant-led approach, such as youth-led research, KIs can also be a useful way for participants to build links to other community members (for example parents, teachers, or traditional leaders) by including them in the analysis.

3. **Desk Research:** Utilize existing literature and data to enhance your understanding of the context and inform some of the potential actions you may want to take. Desk research can help avoid repeating work which has already been done, and reduce the risk of “blind spots” by bringing up topics which may be missed in FGDs or KIs.

At this stage, you should also determine when and how often your analysis and action plan should be revisited.

Adapt the tools

Template tools for Focus Group Discussions, Key Informant Interviews and Protection and Inclusion Action Plans are provided in section 3 of this guide. Use these templates as a starting point, adapting them to your context, the stakeholders you plan to engage as well as the objectives and scope of your exercise.

Ensure alignment between the budget and intentions

Ensure you have an adequate budget based on the decisions you have made on the research scope. At the same time, make sure you have resources available to act on protection or inclusion measures that may come out of the analysis. It is best to include the appropriate budget allocations at the program design stage. In some cases, the analysis may fall under the budget for a baseline study.

Step 2: Collect and analyze

Once you have completed your preparations, engage the identified stakeholders through the specific data collection methods you have decided to use (see section 3 of this guide). At a minimum this should include a Focus Group Discussion with the project participants, or a sample thereof, but this may also include other stakeholders and other data collection methods.

Engage the identified stakeholders in a meaningful discussion, encouraging them to openly share their experiences and ideas. Ask the stakeholders you are engaging to reflect on the risks faced by individuals involved in the program. You can make use of the tools provided in section 3 to structure your conversations.

Once stakeholders have identified key risks, ask them to indicate which risks are the most likely to occur, and which ones are likely to have the greatest impact on the project and its participants. You should also ask them to reflect on how they currently address these risks and what measures should be taken to mitigate or manage the most likely and the most high-impact risks.

Thoroughly document all findings while safeguarding participant anonymity to respect their privacy.

Make sure to set up a *feedback response mechanism* to communicate the analysis findings with the participants once the action plan is completed. This ensures transparency and keeps participants informed of the outcomes.

Step 3: Action planning

Once you have completed your data collection and initial analysis, organize a reflection meeting with your team to talk about the findings. Use this reflection meeting to discuss necessary adjustments required for ensuring a safe and inclusive environment during your project implementation.

The goal of this meeting is to develop a *Protection and Inclusion Action Plan*. In this plan, outline the specific actions that need to be taken, assign responsibilities, define success criteria, and establish methods for tracking progress. If feasible, validate this plan with project participants through a discussion or review.

Finally, remember to revisit your analysis with participants at key points during project implementation, for example during a mid-term review, or when a significant change in context occurs. This may uncover additional risks which were previously not foreseen, reveal if some risks are no longer relevant, and form the ongoing validity of previous findings.

Additional considerations to ensure a successful and inclusive analysis:

- Recognize that some groups may not feel safe or comfortable speaking up in front of others. Consider separate sessions for different demographic or identity groups to create a safe and confidential environment.
- At the beginning of any discussion, set clear expectations regarding what your organization can and cannot do to address identified risks.
- Develop tools and approaches that are age-appropriate. When working with younger participants, you may want to use simple language and more visual approaches such as body mapping, drawings, and storytelling.
- Involve parents and guardians in the process when working with children or adolescents, ensuring their consent and active participation. You could include key informant interviews with the parents and guardians as part of the exercise.
- Employ visual tools like flipcharts, slides, and problem/solution trees to convey complex information and facilitate discussions.
- And finally, seize the opportunity to emphasize strengths and benefits alongside risks during the analysis, and use this review and seek feedback on your organization's Safeguarding policy and reporting process.

3. Tools

Data collection

Focus Group Discussions

A focus group discussion (FGD) can be a good way to gather insights from a group of people, and is the most fundamental data collection method for a participatory protection and inclusion risk analysis.

If you are implementing the analysis through an organization-led process, as opposed to one led by the participants themselves, you should conduct one or more focus group discussions with potential participants in the communities you intend to work in before the project starts and/or with the projects' participants at the start of the project. If the analysis is a participant-led process, encourage participants to identify key groups within their communities to engage in focus group discussions.

Depending on the context of the project, it may be necessary to organize separate focus group discussions for different groups of participants, for example based on gender or religious identity, to ensure participants feel comfortable speaking freely. It is also important to be mindful of security concerns posed by the discussion itself, and that in some cases participation in a focus group discussion may expose participants to risks which can make it difficult to speak openly.

Key Informant Interviews

Key informant interviews (KIs) are typically less critical for a participatory protection and inclusion risk analysis than focus group discussions. They can nevertheless be useful to supplement information collected through focus group discussions.

KIs can be a good way to reach out to people for whom participation in a FGD may be difficult. In particular, this applies to people with marginalized or excluded identities for whom it may pose a risk to be publicly associated with the identity in question. Depending on the context, this could for example be related to religious identity or sexual orientation.

KIs can also be a way to reach people who might have valuable insights but might not form part of an identity or community group which can be brought together for a focus group discussion. This could include parents, teachers, traditional leaders, and local officials. Interviewing such stakeholders can be particularly useful when the process has been led by participants themselves. In this case, key informant interviews can have the additional purpose of building ties between the project and key stakeholders.

Structuring FGDs or KIs

At the start of an FGD or KI, it is important to start by introducing yourself to the participants, explaining the purpose of the focus group discussion, outlining the anticipated discussion flow, and sharing what will be done with the outcomes. Following a general introduction, you

can use the discussion guide provided below to structure the session and make sure all key topics are covered. Feel free to add additional questions as relevant based on your context.

Example: Hello, everyone. My name is ... , and I am a member of the [project title] team. Today, I will be facilitating our discussion. Thank you all for being here. The purpose of our discussion today is to gain insights into any potential risks related to your protection you may encounter while participating in our project. Together, we aim to identify these challenges, explore available resources and support, and ensure that your input remains confidential unless specified otherwise. This is a safe and open space, so let's collaborate to ensure a smooth and productive conversation.

Discussion guide:

A	INCLUSION
1	What are key identity groups which you are aware of in [project location]? (Make a list)
2	Are people from these different groups participating in this project?
3	If one specific group is not significantly present in the activities, ask the following: → Why do you think this particular group is not participating as much as the others? → What challenges and risks might this group be facing within the community compared to other groups? What do you believe is the cause of these challenges? Please explain why. → What challenges and risks might this group be facing when trying to engage with the project? What do you believe is the cause of these challenges? Please explain.
B	PROTECTION RISKS IDENTIFICATION
4	Risks related to your participation in the program (risks associated with participation in our program) → What would make you feel safe participating in this program? → What would make you feel uncomfortable or unsafe participating in this program? What might cause you to feel that way? Additional guiding question: Have you encountered any form of mistreatment, harassment or threats to your safety as a result of your participation in previous programs/activities, including those led by our organization? <i>Note to facilitators: It may be good to highlight existing Feedback Response Mechanisms when discussing participants' negative past experiences.</i>

5	Risks related to the project team (risks that the implementing organization or partners can pose on participants) → Have you encountered any challenging or uncomfortable situations in your interactions with project implementers in the past? If so, what were they? And how did you address them? This could include our organization's staff and our partner staff, but also others. → What <i>could</i> our organization's staff or partner staff do which might make you feel uncomfortable or unsafe participating in this program?
6	Risks related to operations and logistics (risks associated with the program context, location of activities, timing, facilities) → What risks related to the area where our activities will take place might you encounter due to your involvement and increased visibility? (For example: Arrests, persecution, harassment, surveillance, or threats.) → How well do the facilities for the activities suit your needs? Do they pose any risks? → How well does the timing of the activities suit your needs? Does it pose any risks?
C	ANALYSIS OF THE PROTECTION RISKS <i>See assessment matrix below for a template you can use during this section of the FGD</i>
7	Facilitator: Recap the risks which have been mentioned. Then ask: → Which risks do you consider to be three most likely to occur? → Which risks do you consider to be the three most harmful? → What could be done to reduce risks you have identified as most likely or most harmful?
D	RESOURCE MAPPING
8	What opportunities, measures, resources or organizations are you aware of in your communities to address the risks we have just discussed? Do you feel safe and able to make use of these, if applicable? Consider: → Resources available within the community → Organizations or institutions which have already been set up to address these risks → Established protection or risk mitigation measures and processes <i>Note to facilitators: It may be good to mention referral pathways which have been established and which are available to participants.</i>
9	What would you expect [the implementing organization] to do to address the risks we have just discussed?

Risk assessment

Once you have worked with participants to identify potential risks, you can guide a participatory assessment of the likelihood and potential severity of the risks they have identified. This exercise can be integrated into a FGD or KII and should address risks related to both protection and inclusion. There are multiple ways to conduct this assessment. One of the options is to use an assessment matrix based on the one below.

You could ask participants to assess each risk on a scale of 1-5, or ask participants to identify the three most likely and most severe risks (*see section C of FGD guide above*). For an in-person group exercise it may be best to use a flipchart for this. You could also consider other ways of representing likelihood and severity, such as having each participant in a group identify the two most likely and the two most potentially severe (essentially voting on which risks are most important to respond to) or using simple drawings such as similes.

Once participants have determined which risks are the most likely or the most potentially severe, you can discuss with them potential mitigation actions for the highest ranked risks. This can be used as the basis of your protection and inclusion action plan.

Risks identified <i>[indicative examples included]</i>	Likelihood of happening scale of 1-5	Severity of impact scale of 1-5	Potential mitigation actions for highest ranked risks
Violence in project location puts participants at risk			
Minority language groups do not participate due to language barriers			
Etc.			

Protection and inclusion action plan

Following participatory identification and analysis of risks, a core team should be tasked with developing an action plan responding to the risks identified. In most cases, the action plan will be developed by the project implementation team. At times it may be more appropriate for the action plan to be developed by other persons or groups, for example if the project includes a youth council or stakeholder committee which is actively engaged in overseeing the project.

You can use the below template as a basis for your protection and inclusion action plan. Note that this plan will need to be revised at key moments during the project implementation period.

Actions needed <i>[indicative examples included]</i>	By when?	Who is responsible?	How will we know we have succeeded, and how will we track or monitor progress?
Designate a focal point for inclusion on the project team	October	Project manager	Check in during October project team meeting
Train team on how to report any protection or inclusion concerns	November	Protection and inclusion focal point	Include training in project monitoring sheet
Etc.			