Red Cross in the Americas: Ready to make emergency operations inclusive and gender-responsive

Protection, Gender, Inclusion and Community Engagement (PGIE) in Emergencies

Emergency situations exacerbate existing gender inequalities and increase the incidence of sexual and gender-based violence (SGBV), violence against children, and human trafficking, among other protection risks. The Red Cross Movement integrates standards for protection, gender and inclusion (PGI) as cross-cutting themes, in recognition of the distinct needs and risks that people of all gender identities, ages, abilities, and backgrounds face during emergencies. To complement this, the Canadian Red Cross integrates strong community engagement and accountability (CEA) processes in all its programming. These collective efforts to holistically integrate the specific needs of marginalized persons in emergencies into one area of focus is called protection, gender, inclusion, and community engagement and accountability (PGIE).

How Canada Helps Ensure Everyone is Included

The Canadian Red Cross has supported the Red Cross National Societies of the Dominican Republic, Haiti, Honduras, Jamaica, and Nicaragua to integrate PGIE in their disaster management systems, trainings, policies, and strategies with specialized technical accompaniment through the Capacity Building for Emergency Response in the Americas (CERA) initiative. Further, through the Strengthening Global Emergency Response (SGER) project, the Canadian Red Cross built the capacity of the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies (IFRC) Disaster and Crisis Unit in Panama to integrate gender and diversity into emergency operations throughout the Americas region by developing practical PGIE tools and guidance that align with global standards.

CERA

Often, when disasters strike, the local Red Cross will be the first on the ground providing critical support to affected communities. As such, capacity strengthening for local Red Cross responders is essential for locally-led humanitarian response. The five-year CERA initiative supports National Societies in the Dominican Republic, Haiti, Honduras, Jamaica, and Nicaragua to better prepare for, respond to, and recover from crisis situations so that they can lead their own humanitarian response efforts.

SGER

SGER supports the Canadian Red Cross and the broader International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement to ensure that qualified humanitarian experts can be quickly deployed to support emergency operations around the world. The five-year project also supports and strengthens the Movement’s regional and global humanitarian response systems which are called upon to accompany and reinforce response efforts of individual National Societies when a humanitarian crisis overwhelms local capacities.

CERA and SGER are made possible thanks to financial support from the Government of Canada.
Accompaniment for Impact

Canadian Red Cross technical advisors accompanied the CERA National Societies and IFRC to identify needs and opportunities for PGIE integration in their emergency preparedness and response systems and institutional structures. The approach included several steps:

- Organizing a regional forum in 2016 to raise awareness and collect good practices, opportunities, and lessons learned related to PGIE.
- Assessing PGIE capacities and priorities through document review and discussions with National Societies.
- Supporting the creation of National Society-led technical working groups to integrate PGIE into existing systems and processes.
- Including National Society and IFRC leadership in trainings and activities to build political will.
- Prioritizing local ownership of the process to promote sustainability and continuity.
- Adapting the PGIE approach to established in-country disaster risk management systems.
- Engaging local gender and protection organizations.

By the numbers

CERA has trained 760 people (417F/343M) in 40 trainings and workshops that integrated PGIE; 109 (83F/26M) people were trained in the Americas region through 4 SGER-supported trainings.

- 41 National Society policies, procedures, and tools integrating PGIE were developed through CRC support.
- Gender focal points have been designated in 3 National Societies (Dominican Republic, Honduras, and Nicaragua).
- CRC supported 4 regional fora in the Americas and 2 webinars on PGIE.
- With CRC support, National Societies developed or strengthened associations with 6 local gender and protection organizations.
- SGER supported 23 gender trainings globally, and also supports the Surge Optimisation process which is working to ensure that regional and global delegates are deployed based on their competencies, including in PGIE.

Spotlight On Jamaica: Meeting a Need

The Jamaica Red Cross (JRC) established its National Psychosocial Support Team, composed of highly qualified psychologists, psychiatrists, counsellors, nurses, and clinical social workers, in 2004. This team plays a leading role in providing PSS within the JRC and in other National Societies in the Caribbean and many members are part of the IFRC’s PSS Reference Centre roster.

During the CERA project, JRC’s PSS focal point and other members of the team identified that their training program had gaps in the area of PGIE and expressed a desire to deepen their knowledge and practice in the areas of child protection, gender-based violence, and attention to people with disabilities.

Canadian Red Cross Support

Through CERA, JRC held a training of trainers (ToT) for PSS master trainers through which nine instructors were certified (7F/2M). The session focused on several areas of PGIE integration including PSS and gender-based violence, using PSS to promote social inclusion for people with disabilities, and providing PSS during flooding emergencies. Participants spoke highly of their learnings and the impact on their work:

“Before, we always mentioned [PGIE], we always pointed it out, but there is a need for us to be more deliberate rather than just make a passing mention.”

“The training allowed us to focus on issues we were aware of but may have worked on intuitively rather than with a well-prepared perspective.”

“I feel I have a much more complete and holistic understanding of psychosocial support. We need to be able to include this information into what we know already.”

Since the session, the master trainer team has begun the process of adapting JRC’s PSS training curriculum to mainstream PGIE.

“Since the session, we have held meetings as a group on how to integrate cross-cutting themes into the current manual. We are thinking of how we can add more examples relevant to our context and how we can integrate the cross-cutting themes in a more deliberate way. We are working to bring together a team of three or four persons to rewrite the manual and once we test the training in Jamaica, we would like to seek support from the IFRC PSS Reference Centre in Denmark to use the training at the regional level.”

The group is also prioritizing training other PSS facilitators in PGIE before they hold future training activities. As the JRC trainers take the lead in mainstreaming PGIE into their PSS trainings, the impact will be seen in the increased relevance of service provided, especially to children and people with disabilities. Because PSS volunteers play a key role in violence prevention and child protection in JRC shelters, this is an important step taken by the JRC to ensure that the distinct needs and risks that different persons face in emergency settings are addressed. Since JRC also has a leading role in supporting PSS in the Caribbean, improving the incorporation of PGIE in their PSS curriculum will have an impact at both the national and sub-regional level.

Our Impact

Red Cross staff and volunteers now have enhanced knowledge and skills to consider the diverse needs of all people when planning for and responding to disasters. The integration of PGIE into national training modules and the certification of 91 Trainers of Trainers (41F/50M) ensures that the National Societies will continue building the capacity of their volunteers in years to come.
Our Impact

- Designated gender focal points and drafted Gender and Diversity Policies which provide a roadmap for building more gender-responsive organizations (Dominican Republic, Honduras, Nicaragua).
- Inclusion of gender and diversity considerations in National Society Response Plans for the first time (Dominican Republic, Haiti, Jamaica, Nicaragua).
- Development of a checklist with guidelines for incorporating PGIE within Emergency Response Plans which is now part of the IFRC’s toolbox for supporting National Societies in the Americas.
- Investments in dormitories for male and female responders to have a dignified place to rest during responses (Nicaragua). According to a female emergency responder, “before, there was resistance, now I am seeing more acceptance for the integration of women [in emergency response].”
- Changed approach to emergency operations. For example, a PGIE instructor trained through CERA in Haiti noted, “before, we did not think of it but now when we are planning an intervention, we will consider these things. For example, if we were setting up toilets, we would consider if women would feel safe using them at night.”
- New or strengthened relationships with local gender and protection organizations through CERA activities (Dominican Republic, Honduras, Jamaica).
- PSS teams sensitized in gender, diversity, and child protection provided gender-sensitive support to affected communities and volunteers working in recent civil unrest operations (Honduras, Nicaragua).
- Gender and diversity integrated into induction courses for volunteers and delivered by local gender champions (Honduras, Nicaragua).
- Spotlights on Honduras:
  - Meeting a Need
    While the Honduran Red Cross (HRC) has long served people in situations of vulnerability, there was no clear institutional policy regarding the organization’s approach to integrating gender and diversity into emergency preparedness and response activities. Before CERA, there was some misunderstanding around gender and diversity including, in some cases, the perspective that the purpose of considering gender in policies and programming is to prioritize women over men. According to HRC’s gender focal point, technical support had been provided on violence prevention and mitigation issues through various projects, but the recognition of gender and diversity was adopted which prioritized women over men. According to the gender focal point, the HRC “still has a lot of work to do” to sensitize all staff and volunteers regarding integrating gender and diversity was adopted which prioritized women over men. According to HRC’s gender focal point, technical support had been provided on violence prevention and mitigation issues through various projects, but the recognition of gender and diversity was adopted which prioritized women over men. According to the gender focal point, the HRC “still has a lot of work to do” to sensitize all staff and volunteers regarding integrating gender and diversity was adopted which prioritized gender and diversity into emergency preparedness and response activities.

Canadian Red Cross Support

With Canadian Red Cross support, a new approach to integrating gender and diversity was adopted which prioritized conversations with key National Society staff, including leadership. Through three CERA PGIE trainings, HRC staff and volunteers, including senior leadership, gained a better understanding of gender and diversity. Participants learned that integrating gender and diversity into programs and operations does not prioritize women over men, but rather seeks to ensure that the National Society is responsive to the diverse needs of different groups.

Integrating Gender and Diversity at the HRC

Following the training, the National Society launched a consultative process and taskforce to develop the Gender and Diversity Policy. The taskforce was able to work with local feminist organizations in Honduras that support survivors of sexual and gender-based violence. Today, the HRC has a completed Gender and Diversity Policy which is currently being reviewed by the Board of Directors for formal approval. The policy was developed by National Society representatives through extensive consultations and complements the HRC’s Violence Prevention, Mitigation, and Response Policy and Implementation Plan.

According to the gender focal point, the HRC “still has a lot of work to do” to sensitize all staff and volunteers regarding the gender policy and to integrate the policy throughout the National Society’s operations. The National Society has already taken concrete steps towards building awareness. Training in gender and diversity is now required as part of the basic curriculum for all volunteers. Some volunteers who were trained through CERA or who have prior expertise are supporting the implementation of these trainings. The connections developed with key women’s organizations in Honduras is expected to enable a referral mechanism in emergencies, especially in cases of SGBV which would make National Society response more effective and relevant.

In addition, these organizations, with their expertise and knowledge of the local context, could serve as a long-term source of technical support and knowledge sharing to help the National Society with further mainstreaming of gender and diversity in emergencies.

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Increased consideration of PGIE in emergencies was evident when IFRC mobilized a Canadian Red Cross technical advisor as a Regional Intervention Team (RIT) member during the response to the eruption of the Volcan de Fuego in Guatemala in June 2018. As part of this deployment, this gender expert trained shelter volunteers on PGIE, provided guidance to the National Society’s gender and protection focal point, and conducted technical evaluations of active shelters to identify protection risks and recommend how to make the operation more gender-responsive. In addition, the Surge Optimisation process supported through SGER continues to build and integrate PGIE competencies which will encourage other regions to follow a similar path.

Changing Minds to Make Disaster Response Systems Work for Everyone

Changing Attitudes to Gender and Diversity in Emergencies at the Regional Level

Through SGER, the Canadian Red Cross provided technical support on gender and diversity to the IFRC’s Disaster and Crisis Unit in Panama. Now, the Unit has integrated PGIE considerations, especially related to gender and diversity, into key documents that are used to support emergency response operations in the Americas. For example, the Unit now has gender and diversity indicators that are included in Red Cross Movement international funding mechanisms such as the Disaster Relief Emergency Fund (DREF) and Emergency Appeals, allowing the IFRC to monitor whether operations are considering the diverse needs of crisis-affected individuals. Through Canadian Red Cross support, the Unit has also developed key tools such as easy-to-use guides for implementing PGIE in Emergency Plans of Action and preventing SGBV in emergencies. Moving forward, the Unit plans to utilize these key tools to make future responses more gender-responsive.
Moving forward

As a result of CERA and SGER, the Red Cross in the Americas has improved knowledge and capacity to lead gender-responsive emergency operations that consider gender, diversity, inclusion, protection, and community engagement and accountability. Changed attitudes have developed a commitment within the National Societies and IFRC to continue building awareness and integrating these themes in humanitarian action.

“We cannot create safe spaces without considering gender and diversity... we need to adapt training methodologies to integrate cross-cutting themes and add simulations to have volunteers practice.”

-National Society manager, Jamaica

“It is significant that we are talking about gender. In the most recent workshops and meetings that I have participated in, it is always said that ‘we need to include gender in the projects; it has to be included as a cross-cutting issue.’ When we are recruiting new staff for our projects, we ask the question ‘for you, who is the most vulnerable population?’”

-National Society staff member, Honduras

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