

Overview of the Workshop on Internalization of the Centrality of Protection

18 -19 November 2024 | Rome, Italy

Background This workshop was conceived to support the 2023 IASC Action Plan's commitment for organizations to work on internalizing the Centrality of Protection. It brought together 17 IASC members—UN agencies, international NGOs, and the Red Cross Red Crescent Movement—who have taken steps toward internalization. It was co-hosted by InterAction, FAO, and WFP. Representatives from the **Protection Donor Group** joined online on the second day, sharing their efforts on internalization and discussing collaboration opportunities.

Main discussion points and conclusions

- There is still **confusion regarding the definition** of the Centrality of Protection and what is required to implement it. Similarly, the long-standing failure to understand the 'lifesaving' nature of protection compared to material assistance is still a barrier to achieving organization-wide prioritization.
- **Senior leadership's persistent failure to treat the Centrality of Protection as a priority** is a critical barrier to internalization in terms of direction from leadership, the generation of institutional buy-in, and the establishment of internal policies, operational changes, and budgetary changes.
- Ensuring senior leaders treat the Centrality of Protection as an organizational priority requires both external **accountability** and **incentivization**. Two key incentivization measures were identified: 1) external pressures, including peer pressure on senior leaders, and 2) clear expectations from donors, including proposals and reporting requirements.
- **Risk tolerance** of an organization and senior leaders is an important but perhaps under-recognized factor needed to realize the Centrality of Protection in operations. This includes: 1) hesitancy of organizations to engage authorities on behaviour changes necessary for reducing protection risks in case a backlash jeopardizes operational access; 2) unwillingness to adhere to collective protection 'redlines' if this may compromise assistance delivery. The importance of RC/HC leadership in navigating redline situations was highlighted.
- To effectively internalize the Centrality of Protection, staff within any given organization must **understand how protection risk reduction relates to their existing mandate or activities**. Finding the right 'hook' and (non-technical) language internally can help build buy-in. The best sequencing of policy and practical efforts to embed the Centrality of Protection depends on the individual organization and its institutional culture and structure.
- **Sharing expertise, knowledge, lessons, and capacities between organizations** is an important way of 1) helping to drive change and 2) minimizing resource use and duplication in constrained environments.
- Donors face similar challenges to those faced by humanitarian organizations in advancing the internalization of CoP. **Donors expressed interest in identifying opportunities for collaboration and reinforcing mutual learning between donors and humanitarian organizations.**

Recommendations for IASC Member Organizations

- **Nominate a senior point person** to champion and help drive the uptake of the Centrality of Protection within the organization. (This should be at the deputy level or something similar. Technical-level focal points are critical in supporting senior leadership but do not possess the authority to drive these institutional changes forward.)
- **Set clear expectations and timelines** for incorporating the Centrality of Protection into organizational systems and structures (e.g., organizational policy, capacity strengthening, reporting, and M&E), and implement accountability mechanisms to track progress across the organization.
- **Coordinate and collaborate regularly with the Protection Donor Group** to ensure CoP is prioritized and resourced appropriately at the organizational, country, and system levels