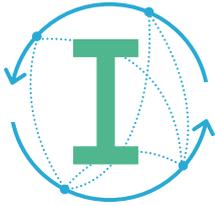




**THE REGIONAL
SAFE SPACES
NETWORK
IN THE AMERICAS**
LESSONS LEARNED
SUSTAINABILITY
& RECOMMENDATIONS



REGIONAL SAFE SPACES NETWORK (RSSN) LESSONS LEARNED JUNE 2018

AMERICAS REGION

In recent years¹, the region has witnessed a dramatic increase in the number of asylum-seekers particularly from the **North of Central America (hereinafter “NCA”)** and **Venezuela** moving in all directions across borders.

RSSN

The Network includes more than 50 members: UNHCR, UNFPA, IOM, national institutions, civil society, faith-based organizations, and community volunteers working on **SGBV, child protection and human rights** in NCA, Venezuela and neighboring countries.

AGE, GENDER, DIVERSITY (AGD)² & SURVIVOR-CENTERED APPROACH³, CHILD’S BEST INTERESTS PRINCIPLE⁴:

The RSSN aims to **improve disclosure⁵** of serious protection incidents, reaching out to the most **vulnerable individuals** and ensuring **delivery of quality services** along the displacement cycle⁶.



PROJECT OVERVIEW

In 2016, the Child Protection & SGBV team of the Regional Legal Unit (RLU) in the Americas developed the Regional Safe Spaces Network (RSSN) strategy to improve access to services for survivors of sexual and gender-based violence (SGBV), children at risk, people with diverse sexual orientation and gender identity, people with disabilities, indigenous population and other vulnerable individuals at every phase of the displacement cycle throughout the Americas.

1. Refer to 2018 data <https://data2.unhcr.org/en/situations/vensit>

2. Refer to UNHCR Policy on Age, Gender and Diversity, 8 March 2018. Available at: <http://www.unhcr.org/protection/women/5aa13c0c7/policy-age-gender-diversity-accountability-2018.html>

3. Respecting the interest and wishes of the survivor, child or other person of concern; ensuring their right to confidentiality while prioritizing their safety; providing services and support without any discrimination on any grounds

4. UNHCR Guidelines on Determining the Best Interests of the Child (2008) <http://www.unhcr.org/4566b16b2.pdf>

5. Disclosure is when an individual approaches a case manager or service provider and tells them what happened with him/her. He or she may disclose his/her experience to a trusted family member or friend.

6. The “displacement cycle” refers to four phases of displacement (origin, transit, destination, return).

The RSSN was established in 2017. The Network prioritized the North of Central America (NCA), Venezuela and neighboring countries to address the needs of displaced populations fleeing violence and persecution. At present the RSSN has more than 50 members including UN and non-UN agencies, civil society, faith-based organizations, national institutions and community-volunteer networks working in seven countries in the Americas (Mexico, Guatemala, Costa Rica, Venezuela, Colombia, Peru and Chile). It is expected that the Network will continue to expand to other countries following trends in displacement.

A Safe Space is a kind of physical or mobile⁷ space, where groups or individuals can feel “safe,” build social networks, express and entertain themselves while receiving information and accessing protection and assistance services in accordance with the age, gender and diversity approach, the survivor-centered approach, and the child’s best interests principle.

The personnel in Safe Spaces are aware of SGBV, child protection, and humanitarian principles. They must treat survivors of SGBV, children and vulnerable people in a non-discriminatory manner, with respect and compassion in order to facilitate disclosure of SGBV incidents and other violations of human rights.

Members of the **Network coordinate their responses in order to provide safe and confidential case management and referrals to specialized services.** They also conduct community outreach or awareness-raising activities in a harmonized and coordinated manner with refugees, asylum-seekers, internally displaced people (IDPs), returnees, people on the move, stateless and other persons who may need international protection.

ESSENTIAL PACKAGE OF SERVICES

- **SGBV/Child Protection case management for adults and children, including best interest procedures;**
- **Mental health and psychosocial support (MHPSS);**
- **Medical or health services, in particular sexual and reproductive health services and Clinical Management of Rape (CMR);**
- **Legal assistance to access justice and other legal procedures;**
- **Safety: in shelters or through community-based solutions;**
- **Family tracing and reunification;**
- **Alternative care arrangements.**

7. Such mobile services could offer to meet women and girls, or men and boys where they are, rather than requiring them to travel to a fixed location. Mobile health clinics, outreach and group counselling in remote areas are good examples of such as services. In the NCA, UNHCR and partners coordinate with the education and community centers in gang-controlled areas to support protection delivery.



OBJECTIVES OF THE NETWORK

The RSSN in the Americas draws on experiences from the work of existing networks in the region, prioritizing cooperation with different actors and community members. The Network focuses on three main objectives:

- a. **Outreach with vulnerable people:** The RSSN provides information to women and girls, and men and boys of diverse background and facilitates disclosure of SGBV and other serious violations of human rights to ensure access to protection services along the displacement cycle. The Network also promotes the empowerment of survivors and people at risk, while respecting the principle of confidentiality and the wishes of the affected individuals.
- b. **Case Management (CM) & Multi-sectoral services (Essential Package) across borders:** UN agencies, civil society organizations, faith-based organizations, government institutions, and community-volunteer networks work together to facilitate access and harmonize services across countries for SGBV survivors, children at risk, and other vulnerable persons. The Network ensures a continuum of protection during ongoing cycles of displacement.
- c. **Information Management (IM):** The safety and security of people of concern and service providers are priorities of the RSSN. When managing personal information, e.g. via service mapping, data collection and dissemination, the highest protection standards for security and protection must be standardized across different service delivery methods and programme planning phases.



ACTIVITIES

MAPPING OF SAFE SPACES' SERVICES AND REFERRAL⁸ PATHWAYS

A focused mapping of Safe Spaces related services adhering to basic humanitarian principles⁹ commenced with Mexico, Guatemala, Costa Rica, Colombia and Venezuela. Working with a diverse range of partners in these countries, they identified gaps in service provision and strengthened coordination around referral pathways for different profiles of persons of concern.

8. Referrals means linking survivors, children or other persons of concern to other services, providing information about the case to a different partner or unit and on a need-to-know basis. For more information, refer to workshop PowerPoint and handouts available in the RSSN Toolkit.

9. Based on principles of humanity, impartiality, neutrality and independence found in the International humanitarian law, taken up by the United Nations in General Assembly Resolutions 46/182 and 58/114.

From this alliance, both a physical and an online map showing the geographical location of each service as well as which organizations offer multiple services among the five countries were developed in order to facilitate referrals in the surrounding geographical area and particularly along the transit routes across countries.

CROSS-BORDER COORDINATION

The RSSN ensures coordination between safe spaces at local and national levels. Its core members worked in close consultation with all other members that are spread across different locations to develop standards, tools, and policies. The resulting Terms of Reference (ToR) establishes the main objectives and interventions of the Network and outlines the roles of the different members. Additionally, a regional plan of action guides the implementation towards contextualized work plans. Tools for advocacy, capacity building, and information management were also developed jointly to increase the quality and impact of services.

SETTING MINIMUM STANDARDS: THE RSSN SELF-AUDIT CHECK-LIST

The Network developed a set of minimum standards and the RSSN self-audit checklist to measure their implementation. The standards relate to service provision approaches, human resources, information and case management, and accountability to the population served. The checklist helps track changes in local, national and the RSSN over time. The members of the RSSN engaged in a joint audit and compiled the outcomes of individual organizations into a regional self-evaluation. The progress and gaps identified were used to develop a work plan targeting capacity development, awareness raising, case and information management.

DEVELOPMENT OF PROTECTION TOOLS, GUIDANCE AND TRAINING MATERIALS

The SGBV and Child Protection Case Management and Information Management (hereinafter “SGBV/CP CM/IM”) Toolkit assembles several tools in one place for use by UNHCR and its partners. The toolkit includes the SGBV/CP case management and information management workshop tools, the RSSN self-audit checklist, an online service mapping, a research on SGBV disclosure in forced displacement, and a Regional Information Sharing Protocol (RISP) template. This toolkit will be further developed and updated as the Network expands its work.

CAPACITY BUILDING

The RSSN is supported by the UNHCR’s RLU SGBV/CP team in San Jose, Costa Rica. The team provides capacity building, technical support and guidance on global and regional protection standards and RSSN tools to the members of the Network. In total, 474 staff of RSSN member organizations were trained on SGBV/CP principles and RSSN tools in the Americas Region from July 2017 to July 2018.



RSSN MEMBERS

UNHCR operations in Mexico, Guatemala, Costa Rica, Colombia, Venezuela, Peru and Chile have established the Regional Safe Spaces Network in coordination with implementing and operational partners to provide specialized services to SGBV survivors, children at risk and other vulnerable individuals of diverse backgrounds. The RSSN comprises civil society organizations, community volunteer networks, faith-based organizations, government institutions and UN agencies as members or allies to the RSSN to ensure linking survivors, children at risk, and vulnerable people to life-saving services. To date more than 50 organizations are members by the RSSN.



LESSONS LEARNED

■ USING A PHASED APPROACH:

At the beginning it was more effective to concentrate the use of precious human and financial resources on the capacity and quality of a few services, rather than trying to involve all the actors and services available in a particular geographic zone. This allows for a quicker roll out of the project, evaluation, and planning for next phases.

■ CROSS-BORDER COORDINATION:

Depending on the wishes of survivors, children at risk, and other vulnerable people, services should be made readily available across borders in accordance with agreed standards. Coordinated RSSN discussions around multi-country case management and referral pathways should consider the availability and quality of services within and across borders when applicable.

■ AVAILABILITY OF AN ESSENTIAL PACKAGE OF SERVICES TO SURVIVORS, CHILDREN AT RISK, AND OTHER VULNERABLE PEOPLE:

In order to provide survivors, children at risk, and other vulnerable populations with information as part of the SGBV/Child Protection Case Management (hereinafter "SGBV/CP CM") process, capacity building for case managers should include compiled information on available services along common transit routes across countries. When a necessary service is not along the transit route, the case manager should be prepared with information on a location providing that service. To provide the same standards to all people in need, members of the network are trained on the implementation of the agreed standards and tools, which are in line with UNHCR and IASC protection principles.

■ COMPLAINT AND FEEDBACK MECHANISMS:

Forced displacement exposes refugees and people on the move to serious protection and exploitation related risks. Agencies and service providers in the NCA, Venezuela and neighboring countries have identified that the heightened risk of sexual exploitation and abuse for women, girls, boys and LGBTI people are due to increasing vulnerabilities, and the limitations in accessing services and assistance. Safe spaces providing services in border areas and along the displacement cycle should exercise particular caution to ensure the accessibility of complaint and feedback mechanisms for all individuals in accordance with the AGD approach.

- **SGBV/CHILD PROTECTION CASE MANAGEMENT (SGBV/CP CM) VS. SERVICE PROVISION:** Continue to emphasize SGBV/CP CM as distinct from specific service provisions. SGBV/CP CM is a collaborative and structured method for providing help to survivors of SGBV, children at risk and vulnerable people from diverse backgrounds. It involves an organization taking the responsibility to ensure that the affected individuals are informed of all options available to them and that protection risks and issues are identified and followed up in a coordinated manner by relevant actors and service providers. Effective CM and service provision will involve the development and implementation of inter-agency SOPs and referral pathways¹⁰.

■ SGBV/CP INFORMATION MANAGEMENT (SGBV/CP IM):

Continue to emphasize SGBV/CP CM as a distinct process from SGBV/CP IM although the two are interrelated. SGBV/CP CM involves actual protection delivery and service provision while IM is the process of documenting the information and interventions related to the case to track progress and facilitate follow up between UNHCR, partners, civil society organizations, faith-based organizations, government institutions and communities. Effective CM and IM will involve the development of inter-agency referrals and information sharing protocols as well as capacity building interventions.

■ SGBV/CP CM & IM CAPACITY BUILDING:

These related concepts and tools outlined below need to be included in any capacity building dedicated to SGBV/CP CM and IM (including proGres v4 SGBV¹¹ and CP modules):

- Age, gender and diversity approach;
- Survivor-Centred approach;
- The Child's Best Interests Principle;
- Informed Consent of the survivor/other person of concern; informed assent for children;
- Confidentiality of information;
- Data Protection Measures;
- SGBV/CP IM tools;
- RSSN Toolkit;
- Inter-Agency coordination.

10. Adapted from the Interagency Gender-based Violence Case Management Guidelines 2017

11. The 6 core types in the SGBV module in ProGres V4 coincide with the classification of incidents established in the GBVIMS.

■ SELF-CARE:

Be sure to emphasize the importance of consistently implementing self-care in interventions offering strategies and tools to staff through capacity building and learning events.

■ USER ACCESS RIGHTS TO PROGRES V4 SGBV AND CP MODULES:

These are granted after approval from the ranking Protection Officer in an operation in accordance with the Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs). Only the SGBV/CP case worker opening the case and their supervisor/case manager will be able to view the protection case record. System restrictions for SGBV and CP module must be considered when granting user access rights.

■ LANGUAGE OF TRAINING:

If resources allow, simultaneous interpretation of any training event is important in the Americas to ensure full participation of RSSN members coming from different sub-regions (English, Spanish, and Portuguese). Some training sessions may need to include English phrases and translations to better correlate the training session with the tools to be used in practice. For example, although proGres v4 is being translated, UNHCR and RSSN members currently using the system will require information in English to effectively navigate and utilize the existing proGres modules until the Spanish translation is complete. During face-to-face sessions simultaneous interpretation is offered to facilitate discussions. Translations of training modules are also prioritized.

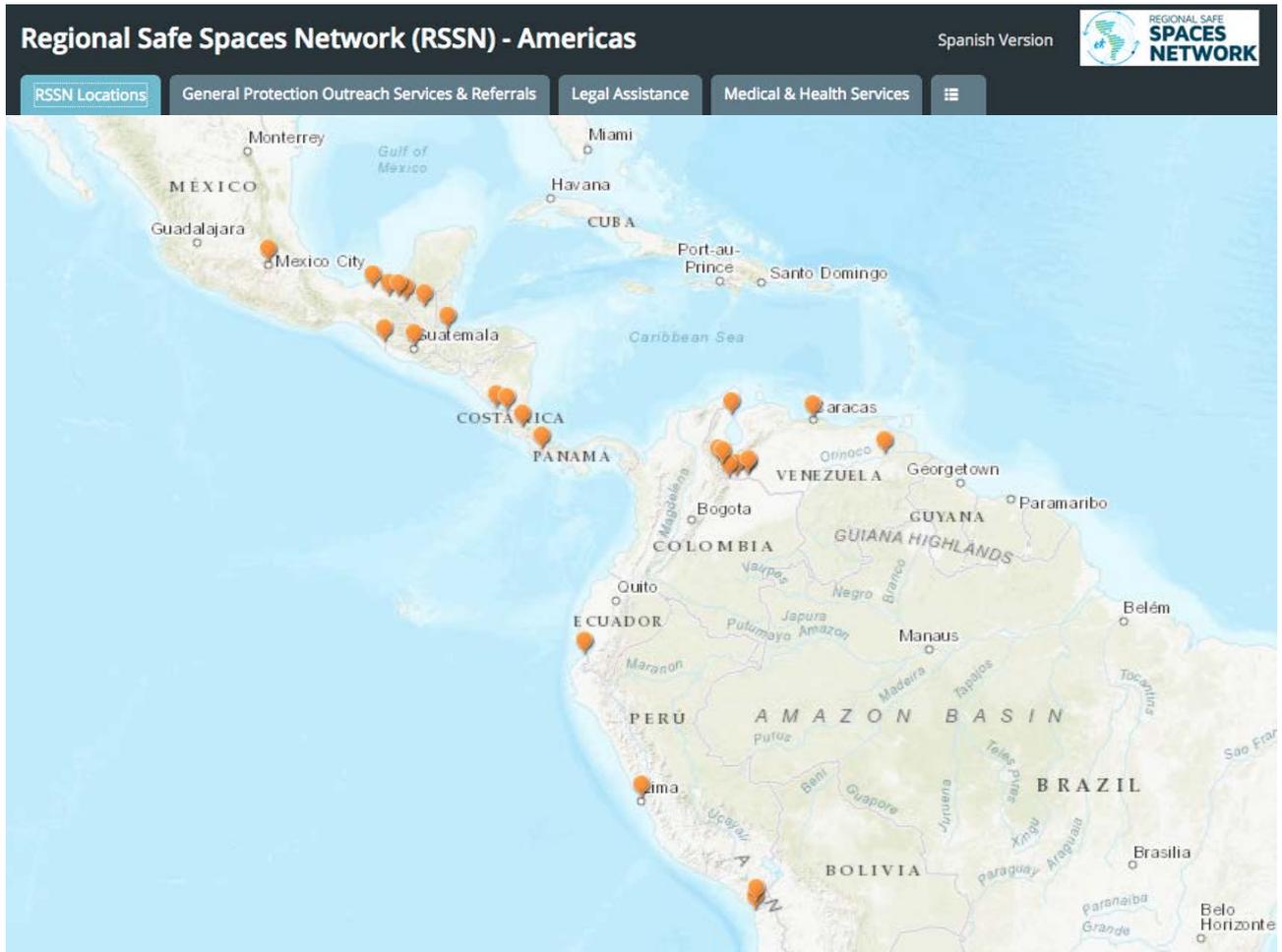


POTENTIAL RISKS and MITIGATION STRATEGIES

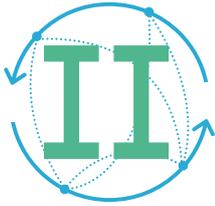
In the context of forced displacement reaching most vulnerable people is extremely challenging, particularly when working with fast moving populations. Building trust, facilitating disclosure and offering services in a safe and ethical manner is sometimes hindered by the presence of armed groups, gangs and traffickers. Limited resources and capacity of individual service providers exacerbate these risks. Some risk mitigations strategies include:

- A research on SGBV disclosure in forced displacement conducted in Mexico and Guatemala with the support of the Human Rights Center of the University of Berkeley. The research includes a reflection on types of disclosure and strategies to ensure access to support by survivors, children at risk, and other persons of concern as well as several sample tools to help implement them. The full text of the research it is included in the RSSN toolkit.

- The various types of standards applied across multiple actors tends to complicate the guarantee of equal access for individuals in need of protection. The RSSN self-audit checklist developed and agreed by members of the Network helps first responders to measure their progress in the implementation of Safe Spaces for all refugees and other displaced population.
- Data protection measures are put in place and regularly reviewed to protect survivors, children at risk, and other vulnerable population, their families and communities, as well as service providers. Examples include the use of codes in place of the names of survivors, children, or other persons of concern and installation of locking file cabinets to store separately any details regarding a case from any identifying information that could be linked to a survivor of serious human rights violations such as SGBV.
- The RSSN will continue to promote the most efficient referrals to services available to any survivors, children at risk, and vulnerable people across countries, but also ensuring that an array of options for other service providers exist nearby in order to reduce the risk of stigma that may be associated with being linked to any one specific service provider.
- The RSSN will continue to support the establishment of enhanced complaint and feedback mechanisms in order to prevent the risk of and to respond to possible incidents of Sexual Exploitation and Abuse (SEA) and other forms of exploitation, abuse and misconduct perpetrated by service providers. Feedback mechanisms will also be an essential part of any community-based protection strategy to ensure relevance and quality of the programme implemented through the active engagement of the community.
- Members of the Network can independently determine whether they would like to be included in any public visibility materials on the RSSN such as a public mapping of service locations.
- Communities and national institutions are engaged from the beginning to ensure required contextualization and the implementation of effective risk mitigation strategies.
- Maintaining an internal online and offline map that is available to only RSSN members will widen the network of available services that can be shared while simultaneously allowing discretion on the visibility of specific services (i.e. safe shelters, LGBTI-friendly services, etc.)
- The implementation of a Regional Information Sharing Protocol (RISP) will facilitate inter-agency and multi-country case management as well as joint evidence-based programme planning.



To access the online map, please visit: <https://arcg.is/0TvXnn>
A version in Spanish is also available: click the hyperlink in the upper-right corner on the site "Spanish Version".



REGIONAL SAFE SPACES NETWORK: SUSTAINABILITY AND RECOMMENDATIONS



SUSTAINABILITY PLAN

CATEGORY	SUSTAINABILITY ELEMENTS
PARTNERSHIPS	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A phased approach to the project is used to coordinate protection delivery with civil society organizations, faith-based organizations, government institutions, UN agencies and communities. • Partners that are likely to continue providing SGBV/CP case management services are consulted regarding their capacity related to information management and their interest in engaging in Network activities with their current staff. • The RSSN focuses on current members with capacity and will slowly expand to include other interested actors and institutions depending on geographic area and service coverage.
ORGANIZATIONAL CAPACITY	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • National level focal points for the RSSN receive continued technical support from the RLU in the form of RSSN presentation, training materials, regional training opportunities and missions based on available regional level funding.
EVALUATION	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Through mixed methods of evaluation, various elements of the project will be considered, including self-evaluation of Safe Spaces conducted by members, capacity-building assessments, safety audits and review of key indicators.
ADAPTATION	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Allow for varied levels of engagement within the Network, recognizing that not all members and institutions will be able to move forward at the same time with different speeds. • Even though many training materials and SGBV/CP CM/IM tools are standardized, flexibility is built into the Network with adapted and contextualized training events.

<p>MANAGERIAL AND INSTITUTIONAL SUPPORT</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The RLU SGBV/CP in the Americas Bureau takes the lead to provide regular updates and ensure support for the RSSN as a regional best practice. • The initiative counts with the support of the UNHCR’s Division of International Protection (DIP), the Americas Bureau Director and other Senior Managers. • The RSSN was developed in the context of the implementation of the Brazil Declaration and Plan of Action 2014¹², and the New York Declaration 2016¹³. • The RSSN is a strategy embedded in the Comprehensive Refugee Response Framework (MIRPS¹⁴ in Spanish) • UNHCR country operations that are members of the RSSN leverage their relationships with government counterparts to organize capacity building opportunities for personnel in key institutions.
<p>FUNDING STABILITY</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The RSSN uses existing country and regional budgets. • The RSSN counts with additional support from the DIP and the Americas Bureau. • UNHCR operations work with members at national level within the range of their planned programs to negotiate the best use of available funds for the greatest impact on persons of concern.
<p>COMMUNICATIONS</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Coordination around communication within the RSSN is centralized at the regional level by the Coordinators of the RSSN located in the RLU that guide the types of documents produced. • Webinars, emails and briefing notes on the RSSN are produced at regional level and shared with the RSSN focal points in UNHCR at national and field levels for further distribution of information to partners and government officials.
<p>STRATEGIC PLANNING</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The multi-year planning cycle of the RSSN has a 3-year span. • Annual reviews of activities to date allow for a re-alignment of resources at the start of each budget cycle.

12. Brazil Declaration and Plan of Action <http://www.acnur.org/cartagena30/en/brazil-declaration-and-plan-of-action/>

13. New York Declaration for Refugees and Migrants <http://www.unhcr.org/new-york-declaration-for-refugees-and-migrants.html>

14. Marco Integral para la Protección y Soluciones <http://www.acnur.org/marco-integral-regional-para-la-proteccion-y-soluciones-mirps.html>



RECOMMENDATIONS

- A flexible approach to protection (SGBV/CP) case management adapted for the Americas Region is required to address the challenges in quality service provision presented by a quickly moving population of concern. This includes improving coordination around cross-border referrals and transfers¹⁵ of cases to ensure a continuum of protection along the displacement cycle, by increasing access to the Essential Package of services for SGBV survivors, children at risk and other vulnerable people.
- Due to high staff turnover in the region and limited resources in the RSSN, the Network should designate a focal point and back up person that oversees capacity building opportunities to ensure the sustainability of the RSSN.
- In order to maximize accessibility, dissemination, and promotion of the RSSN standards and tools, the RSSN Toolkit should be developed in both English and Spanish.
- RSSN members should reach out to operations interested in joining the RSSN by promoting the use of the SGBV and CP Information Management (CP/SGBV IM) Toolkit that includes forms, checklists, and protocols to help operations align with regional and global SGBV and CP IM standards.
- Include both Spanish and English terminology in SGBV Incident Classification and Specific Needs Codes training sessions in the Americas to correspond with terms found in proGres v4 (currently in English with Spanish translation efforts underway). Portuguese materials should also be developed.
- Note that not all actors and members will be in a position to move forward at the same time in each phase of the project. Continue to include a balance between UNHCR and member focal points from all operations within the RSSN when planning capacity building opportunities and to allot an appropriate amount of time for regional tools to be adapted for proper use within organizations.
- Ensure that development and implementation of the Regional Information Sharing Protocol (RISP) in the Americas will promote global standards related to SGBV/CP information management for protection delivery and evidence-based program planning.

15. Transferring: handing over the case to another case management agency or a different unit within the same agency; ownership of case is transferred. Refer to Workshop PowerPoint for more information.



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