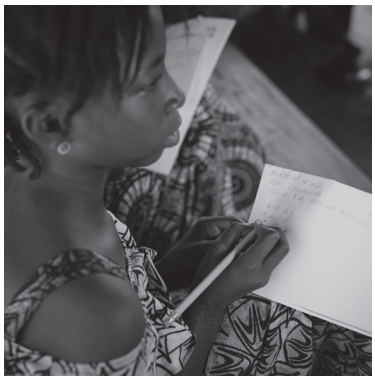
03

Girls' Education Challenge

UKaid from the British people

PORTFOLIO IN PRACTICE

JULY 2023



Protection is possible: Ensuring high safeguarding standards across a portfolio

The GEC 'Portfolio in Practice' series consolidates best practice and lessons learned regarding how to drive performance across a complex and diverse portfolio of projects. This knowledge and experience come from the GEC Fund Manager, a team drawn from a consortium of organisations, who manage the GEC portfolio of 41 projects across 17 countries on behalf of the UK Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office (FCDO).

This series is aimed at individuals and organisations (including Fund Managers, INGOs, donors, foundations and consultants) involved in managing large portfolios. The briefs provide practical guidance on how to set up technical, operational and managerial systems or tools to ensure that a large and diverse set of projects effectively delivers for girls. They also provide reflections on successes, challenges and lessons learned.

Introduction: The challenge of ensuring safeguarding across a diverse portfolio of projects and contexts

The Girls' Education Challenge (GEC) aims to improve educational opportunities for the world's most marginalised girls. It is comprised of a portfolio of 41 projects with over 30 implementing partners that range from international NGOs to consultancy organisations and grassroots, community-based organisations. These implementing partners not only work directly with vulnerable girls, communities and education system actors, but they also operate in 17 different countries in Africa and Asia – a number of which are high-risk environments that include conflict-affected situations. Safeguarding is the prevention of, mitigation of and response to violence, exploitation, abuse and harassment, which occurs due to structural and hierarchical power inequality and the abuse of that inequality by individuals or entities through action or inaction (Protection is Possible, 2021). Given the vulnerability of girls and the increased need to ensure their safety, particularly in fragile contexts, a focus on safeguarding has been essential.

This focus was brought into sharp relief after two notable safeguarding breaches within the wider aid sector in 2018. As a result, the GEC Fund Manager proactively set about reviewing, revising and implementing a comprehensive approach to ensure even more rigorous safeguarding scrutiny and compliance across the portfolio of projects. This revised approach was launched as the GEC Safeguarding Operating Model in 2019 and has remained in place to date.[1]

This Safeguarding Operating Model ensures that implementing partners meet the GEC 14 Minimum Standards (see the next section for details), which require a thorough assessment of their progress against the Standards. These assessments uncovered significant diversity in the quality and implementation of safeguarding policies, practices, procedures and levels of investment across the portfolio. For example, large international NGOs often provided significant levels of safeguarding support and oversight by headquarter teams. However, smaller, grassroots NGOs often had little to no in-house safeguarding expertise, or access to external support. This resulted in different approaches to safeguarding, varying levels of data collection and lack of a cohesive set of measures to effectively gauge progress (*see Box 1 for further examples*).

This Portfolio in Practice brief elaborates on the Fund Manager's comprehensive safeguarding approach, how it was implemented, lessons learned and the important results it yielded. These results include projects' ability to meet the 14 Minimum Standards which led to their strengthened ability to effectively protect girls from violence, exploitation and abuse. This outcome is not only significant in and of itself, but it also lays the foundation for safer programming and improved learning outcomes for girls.

"Given the vulnerability of girls and the increased need to ensure their safety, particularly in fragile contexts, a focus on safeguarding has been essential."

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Box 1: The implications of different safeguarding approaches and capabilities

1. Disparate / divergent views on what safeguarding meant
2. Varied progress regarding capacity to meet safeguarding standards
3. Under-reporting in high-risk projects
4. Lack of consistency in safeguarding action plans, as implementing partners designed their own in different ways, based on their own analysis
5. No way to easily collate data, track progress and compare capacity

The Girls' Education Challenge (GEC) is the UK Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office's (FCDO) 12-year, £855 million Global Fund which aims to improve the educational opportunities of the world's most marginalised girls. The GEC is comprised of two types of projects: 1) GEC-Transition (GEC-T) projects, which work within schools and support girls most at-risk of dropping out; and 2) Leave No Girl Behind (LNGB) projects, which target highly marginalised girls who have already dropped out or who have never been able to enrol in school.

[1] To explore the GEC Safeguarding Operating Model in greater depth, please refer to the full version of the *'Protection is Possible'* Paper here. All of the tools and templates discussed in this brief can be found in this document.

An overview of the GEC Safeguarding Operating Model

The GEC's Safeguarding Operating Model aims to help implementing partners meet the GEC 14 Minimum Standards for safeguarding. These Standards were originally adapted from the Keeping Children Safe Standards and, in 2018, they were expanded to merge FCDO's six areas of safeguarding due diligence. **The GEC 14 Minimum Safeguarding Standards include:**[2]

Safeguarding

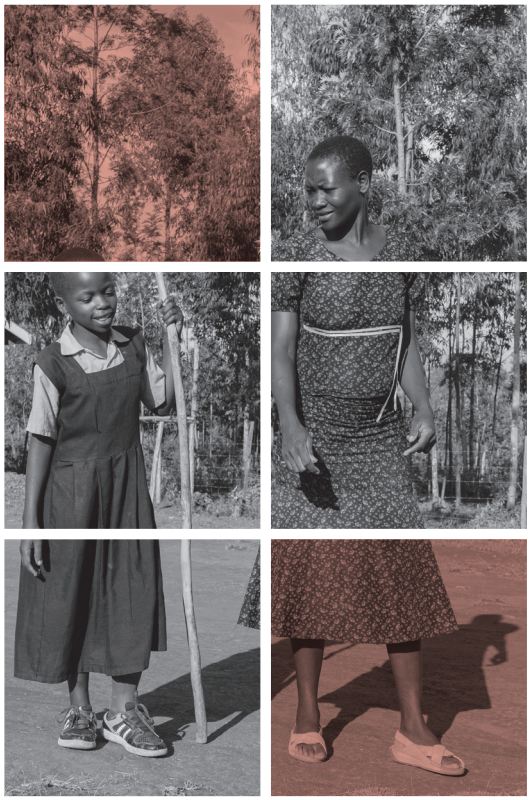
Standard 1 (Core): All organisations receiving GEC funding must have either an overarching/combined safeguarding policy or a combination of relevant policies which address bullying, sexual harassment and abuse targeted at girls and others working with implementing partners as well as project staff, including adults at risk and partner staff.

Standard 2 (Core): All organisations must have a separate child safeguarding policy which addresses all forms of sexual, physical and emotional violence towards children.

Whistleblowing

Standard 3: All organisations must have comprehensive systems for escalating and managing concerns and complaints. These must include a whistleblowing mechanism available to girls and others working with implementing partners as well as project staff without reprisal.

Standard 4 (Core): A clear handling framework to respond appropriately to all concerns and support the survivor of violence must also be in place.



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Human resources

Standard 5: All organisations must have a human resources system which includes effective management of recruitment, vetting and performance management. Vetting must include adequate screening and assessment of individuals that will have direct contact with children.

Standard 6 (Core): All staff, contractors, volunteers and other representatives of the organisation must have at least a mandatory induction when they start and annual refresher training on the organisation's safeguarding policy (or bundle of policies), child safeguarding policy and whistleblowing.

Risk management

Standard 7: All organisations must have a comprehensive and effective risk management framework in place which includes reference to both safeguarding and a detailed risk register for the project. The risk register must include reference to safeguarding risks, including those for children.

Standard 8: Each organisation must have procedures in place to make sure that safeguarding processes and standards are also upheld for any partner, contractor or supplier they work with.

Code of Conduct

Standard 9: Each organisation needs to have a Code of Conduct which is applicable both inside and outside of working hours. This needs to set out the ethics and behaviour expected of all parties.

Standard 10: Specific behaviour protocols must be in place outlining appropriate and inappropriate behaviour of adults towards children (and children to children).

Governance and Accountability

Standard 11: Effective governance and accountability standards must be in place within all organisations with the Board holding ultimate responsibility for safeguarding.

Standard 12 (Core): Designated safeguarding officers must be found at different levels including at least at senior level in the country office and at the Board level.

Standard 13: There are clear guidelines for monitoring and overseeing implementation of the policy (policies).

Standard 14: All safeguarding incidents and allegations must be reported to the GEC Safeguarding Team within 24 hours.

[2] Core Standards are prioritised and not meeting core standards may result in implementing partners being delayed in implementation or phasing their implementation so that higher risk activities are delayed.

In order to ensure that all 41 GEC projects were meeting these standards, the Fund Manager's Safeguarding Operating Model included five main areas of work:

1. Audit	• Implementing partner self-assessments against the GEC 14 Minimum Standards. • The Fund Manager Safeguarding Team review of these self-assessment, polices, practice and procedures to develop a Safeguarding Action Plan, which detailed actions needed to meet the Standards. • Time-bound Special Conditions for projects at risk of not making adequate progress on their Safeguarding Action Plans. In some cases, these special conditions meant that implementing partners had to pause implementation until the action was completed to the required standard. These decisions were risk assessed and regularly reviewed and discussed with the implementing partner.
2. Capacity development	• One-to-one discussions and mentoring sessions. • Review meetings. • Thematic webinars. • Technical in-country support visits in order to build capacity to meet the Minimum Standards.
3. Mainstreaming	• The Fund Manager Safeguarding Team undertook reviews and strengthened the Fund Manager's own policies, practices and procedures. • Building capacity within the Fund Manager to mainstream safeguarding into every part of the programme. • Identification and development of Fund Manager Safeguarding Champions who monitor risks and work closely with implementing partners.
4. Case management	• An online reporting system for implementing partners to log and escalate incidents, and for the Fund Manager to track and analyse trends in reporting. • Fund Manager oversight of implementing partners' handling of safeguarding cases and provision of support when needed.
5. Monitoring standards	• Development of tools for technical specialists and non-specialists to standardise safeguarding practices and to develop robust programme-level monitoring to ensure continued compliance with the Minimum Standards. • Ongoing tracking of actions followed the Safeguarding Action Plan phase to ensure implementing partners continued to meet the Minimum Standards. • Safeguarding considerations were embedded into ongoing Fund Manager activity such as Review and Adaptation meetings and Annual Reviews.

Implementing these five areas of work required a cooperative relationship with projects in order to be a productive and helpful 'critical friend'. This allowed for more in-depth discussion and constructive criticism between the Fund Manager 'critical friend' and project staff, particularly when feedback was given (*see Figure 1*).

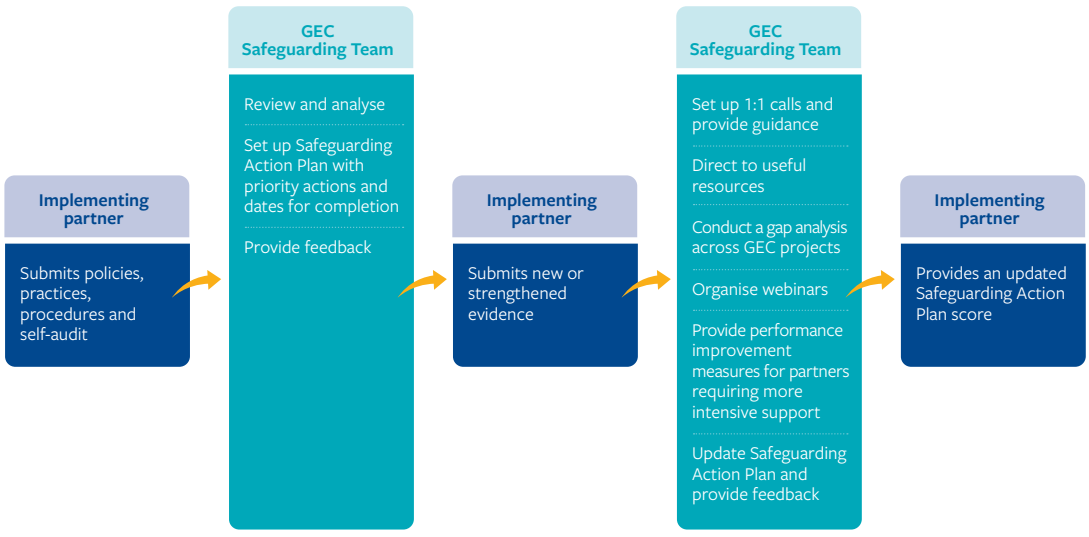

Figure 1: What it takes from a GEC Safeguarding Team perspective

Raising Safeguarding Compliance Levels

By the end of 2020, all GEC partners had successfully adopted a new, comprehensive approach to safeguarding. Technical support and oversight by the Fund Manager Safeguarding Team emphasised quality over a more traditional due diligence approach. 'Meaningful compliance' meant that implementing partners were assessed on the content of their safeguarding policies, practices and procedures rather than simply having them in place. Overall, the operationalisation of the GEC's Safeguarding Operating Model led to greater prioritisation of safeguarding by implementing partners, culture change within their day-to-day work, more competent case handling and, as a result, delivery of safer programming for girls and staff.[3]

In addition to these outcomes, a multiplier effect also occurred as a result of the model and tools being taken up by external actors or through other projects implemented by GEC implementing partners (*see Figure 2*). For example, the ACTED's Closing the Gap project in Pakistan prompted government interest in the rollout and scale up of their safeguarding action plan, which resulted in consultations for strengthening community-based feedback mechanisms and prospective capacity building of relevant government officials. PEAS's GEARR project in Uganda used policies and processes from their GEC Safeguarding Action Plan and have integrated these into other PEAS global programmes (*see following case study*). Viva and CRANE's project, also based in Uganda, delivered training to the Public Prosecution Service on safeguarding awareness and child psychology in case management. They have also been commissioned to deliver training to family court magistrates and judges nationwide.

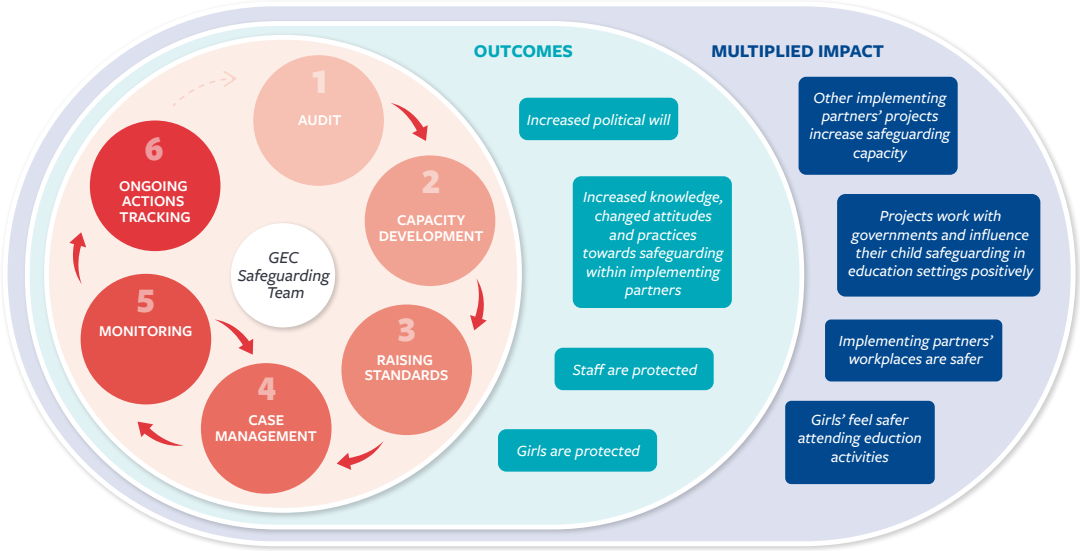

Figure 2: The GEC's Safeguarding Operating Model

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[3] Click here for a comprehensive case study of the safeguarding improvements and lessons learned from the Save the Children's Realise Project (Reussite et Epanouissement via l'Apprentissage L'Insertion au System Educatif) in the Democratic Republic of Congo from 2017-2021.

Case study: Integrating the GEC Safeguarding Operating Model into all of PEAS' global programming

After working with the GEC, Promoting Equality in African Schools (PEAS) adapted and incorporated many of the GEC's safeguarding and child protection policies and guidelines into their Standard School Operating Model (SSOM) thereby ensuring safeguarding is institutionalised not only within its project schools in Uganda, but mainstreamed across all of PEAS global programmes. This includes 36 PEAS schools and over 250 partner schools impacting over 150,000 students.

Sustainability has been embedded in the model, by ensuring schools have sufficient case-handling capacity and referral mapping information, thereby ensuring this knowledge is retained within the school even after a programme is closed. Regular audits and reviews by the school ensure continuous monitoring of safeguarding arrangements which inform a regular programme of training and lessons learned exercises for teaching staff. PEAS can intervene and offer additional support for schools with low scores in a particular area or if schools request additional targeted support.

PEAS noted that embedding the GEC safeguarding standards into their SSOM across all their schools has:

- provided clarity on what PEAS approach to safeguarding involves and sets out expectations for schools
- brought together PEAS policies and guidelines to form a set of good practice standards, which can be utilised as a package and is easier for schools to understand and apply
- created a shared understanding of the activities that need to be carried out at the school level to achieve safer schools
- enabled a better understanding of the network's and schools' strengths in safeguarding and where they need to focus improvements to keep all students safe
- enabled learners to provide feedback and express their views on what makes a safer school.

Midline and Endline Evaluations highlight that the SSOM has led to improved safeguarding arrangements within schools, better learning outcomes, and improved community perception of child protection. Teachers reported that the child protection and safeguarding policies and training are one of the most valuable activities implemented by PEAS and that safeguarding is a particular way that PEAS students benefit differently from students attending other schools.

© PEAS

Results from strengthening safeguarding across the GEC portfolio

As a result of implementing the Safeguarding Operating Model, the proportion of GEC implementing partners meeting the 14 Safeguarding Minimum Standards went from 30% in 2019 to 98% at the end of 2020. 2,460 separate actions were taken to address gaps across the 41 GEC implementing partners' policies, practices and procedures. Actions included:

- writing or redrafting entire safeguarding policies
- setting up appropriate and accessible reporting and accountability mechanisms
- facilitating positive discipline training for classroom teachers
- redrafting codes of conduct and safer recruitment protocols.

By 2021, 100% percent of implementing partners had achieved compliance with the Minimum Standards. In 2023, GEC implementing partners have continued to maintain full compliance with the minimum standards and have made good progress at going beyond the basic level of compliance.

> By 2021, every GEC implementing partner had achieved complete attainment of the 14 Safeguarding Minimum Standards.

> In 2023 all implementing partners have maintained full compliance.

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Additional key achievements

1. Greater prioritisation of safeguarding

Higher standards set by the Fund Manager and increased levels of support and scrutiny meant that implementing partners responded and dedicated more internal resources to make improvements within agreed timescales. This resulted in prioritisation of safeguarding work within a structured and time-bound approach.

2. A standardised approach

Standardised tools and resources were developed and shared between implementing partners and government entities, and with the sector more widely. This helped inspire good practice and address internal gaps in knowledge and resources for implementing partners, notably for smaller organisations with limited resources. It also promoted a consistency of approach across the GEC and contributed to sector knowledge sharing and learning.

3. Alignment with other internal processes

To improve efficiency and avoid duplication, the safeguarding model was integrated and aligned with other Fund Manager operational and technical processes. For example, during RAMs and Annual Reviews and during the closure phase, safeguarding was embedded as a key consideration within these processes. This sent a consistent message to projects that safeguarding is a high priority and fully integrated into all Fund Manager decision making.

4. Embedding of a safer case handling and survivor-centred approach

A positive shift in practice occurred as implementing partners worked hard to put in place practical arrangements to ensure better, safer handling of safeguarding reports and a survivor-centred approach. This included producing and/or strengthening investigation and survivor-centred standard operating procedures, maintaining a detailed register of all safeguarding reports, establishing relationships with local protection networks and actors, undertaking service mapping to ensure safe referrals and equipping staff to conduct investigations through capacity-building training.

5. Increased case reporting

There was a 341% increase in the reporting of incidents from 2018 to 2020, with extensive support provided to projects to help them respond appropriately. This remarkable rise in case reporting is a positive indicator that individuals felt safe and supported in coming forward and speaking up. This relates to the specific requirement to create and manage child-friendly reporting mechanisms and referral pathways, and to the wider safeguarding strengthening efforts that took place across all GEC projects.

6. Safe programming

Central to the GEC approach was building protective environments in which the programme could be safely implemented through careful risk management. Comprehensive risk assessments of project activities were therefore routinely conducted, accounting for range of safeguarding risks including corporal punishment, grooming and sexual exploitation, abuse and harassment. Risk mitigation measures were put in place by projects with additional safeguards for children who were particularly vulnerable to harm. Do No Harm processes were in place throughout the project management cycle and monitored closely through existing risk management processes and regular senior oversight.

7. Implementation of conflict-sensitive approaches

There was an increased ability to deliver responsive safeguarding in projects operating in conflict-affected countries. Enhanced technical support was provided to projects to help them conduct in-depth risk analysis, including safeguarding risks, in their operating context. The risk analysis was used to ground and inform prioritisation decisions, and to focus and direct interventions towards addressing the risks. Essential adjustments were then made to ensure that the work was responsive and realistic such as reviewing the suitability of reporting channels and referral pathways and redirecting all management of existing and new cases to regional or HQ level to reduce risk to country teams.

8. An effective COVID-19 response

The strong safeguarding foundations laid before 2020 enabled a safer and more effective COVID-19 response. Before the pandemic, GEC projects already had solid networks with girls and safeguarding reporting mechanisms were in place. Without this, they would have struggled to safely scale up activities or work on higher risk activities while maintaining protections. Projects used their existing networks to ensure girls were safe. They adapted rapidly, ensuring materials (such as hygiene kits and learning materials) were distributed safely, and increased their communication with girls and their communities on safeguarding and protection.

9. Increased mainstreaming

The holistic nature of the GEC Minimum Standards and the need to adopt a 'whole of organisation' approach contributed to increased mainstreaming of safeguarding. The embedding of safeguarding as 'business as usual' across GEC projects materialised in several ways. This included more contextualised and intensive safeguarding training, cascaded across entire staff teams irrespective of role, the delivery of targeted training aimed at senior management including Board level, and the integration of safeguarding into risk-assessment processes and mitigation action planning.

10. A deterrence effect

The GEC Safeguarding Operating Model was designed to prevent abuse from occurring and to deter predatory offenders from seeking opportunities to work on the GEC programme. Projects have shared credible anecdotal evidence confirming that deterrence has been a positive outcome. They have reported that safer recruitment measures like having an interview question that draws out people's attitudes and values, reference checks, criminal records checks, and requiring new starters to attend safeguarding training and sign up to a code of conduct, all discourage misconduct and promote accountability. Projects also shared that having robust safeguarding systems in place enabled them to act more swiftly in relation to individuals who were found to pose a risk. For example, quicker internal disciplinary action taken, decisive dismissal decisions, individuals classified as ineligible for re-hire and held to account outside of the organisation.

11. Multiplying impact

As a result of aligning their policies and practices to the GEC's Safeguarding Operating Model, implementing partners have changed or added to their global safeguarding policies. There have also been shifts in understanding and replication of elements of the safeguarding action planning process within their organisations. This means that the impact of the GEC's safeguarding work will have had wider impacts on the ways of working (now and in the future) across numerous organisations.

Governments have adopted tools and approaches that will have a long-term effect on global, regional and national implementation of safeguarding frameworks, going well beyond the GEC itself.

It is clear that the results gleaned from the GEC Safeguarding Operating Model added a great deal of value at the project level, portfolio level and across the wider sector. The following section elaborates on this further, by discussing the level of investment needed in order to generate such value.

The Safeguarding Operating Model – a value for money perspective

Providing a meaningful assessment of the Safeguarding Operating Model's value for money (VfM) proposition goes beyond the analysis of costs. Although important, other factors to consider include the efficiency of its implementation, the degree of its application to and use with projects, and most importantly, the intangible results that it has produced for children, families and communities as well as projects across the portfolio.

The development of the Safeguarding Operating Model involved a number of steps from conceptualisation, revisions to and finalisation of the standards, which included reviewing the project self-audit findings and having clear justifications for the revisions. The Safeguarding Action Plan templates and guidance notes were then developed, accompanied by webinars. A crucial part of this was to ensure meaningful consultations with projects and FCDO with the aim to ensure GEC projects prioritised the safety and welfare of children. All of these efforts aimed to maximise the relevance, acceptability and effectiveness of the model and entailed approximately 30 working days for a senior technical expert to complete.[4] This represents a one-off cost that can be amortised when spread over the 41 projects in the portfolio, and the number of years it is utilised. Value for money was further generated by the fact that this Safeguarding Operating Model is now a global public good, available for any organisation to adapt and use as appropriate.[5]

It is important to note that in addition to developing the model, there were also costs associated with *implementing* the Safeguarding Operating Model for both the Fund Manager and the projects. Generally speaking, the level of investment needed for Fund Manager implementation are contingent on a number of factors. These include:

1. projects' contextual risk level (i.e. the likelihood of infractions occurring increases in fragile contexts)
2. projects' safeguarding technical and operational capacity
3. the vulnerability and level of risk of the children and young people being supported. For example, learners with disabilities, internally displaced persons or refugee affected children may experience increased risk and would likely require additional resources to effectively mitigate these risks
4. donor and fund manager risk appetite
5. the overall budget envelope

"Getting safeguarding right from the start is important and means that there is less effort in trying to retrofit and roll out policy and practice changes once the project delivery has begun."

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[4] We have not provided actual costs as these will vary over time and context. Fund managers and projects should use the number of days provided and type of staff specified to calculate their own relevant costs.

[5] For those interested in using these tools, templates and guidance for their own purposes, these development costs have already been borne by the GEC, unless time is invested in adaptation.

The table below outlines two types of implementation that are guided by the above factors: comprehensive and basic. The GEC implemented the former as its portfolio contained a number of projects operating in fragile and conflict-affected contexts with vulnerable young people, which presented high levels of safeguarding risks. There are portfolios that may not include such high-risk contexts for learners, which are implemented by partners with high technical capacity in safeguarding. In such cases, a basic implementation of the Safeguarding Operating Model may suffice. However, if the programme works directly with children and young people, this by default is high risk and the basic level of implementation set out below would be insufficient.

Safeguarding Operating Model	Comprehensive implementation	Basic implementation
Considerations for use	• Contextual risk is high • Implementing partner capacity is low • Project participants' vulnerability is high • Risk appetite is low • Budget is made available	• Contextual risk is low • Implementing partner capacity is high • Project participants' vulnerability is low • Risk appetite is high • Budget envelope is low (or unable to be increased)
Audit implementation	• Assessment of all projects in portfolio • Intensive support provided for all projects within the portfolio	• Assessment of all projects in portfolio • Prioritised support for the projects that posed the highest level of risk
Capacity development	• Capacity development (one-to-one meetings and webinars) with all of the projects	• Targeted capacity development (one-to-one meetings and discussions) with the most high-risk projects
Main-streaming	• Ongoing training and bite-size learning opportunities for internal Fund Manager colleagues • Identification of Safeguarding Champions to influence and promote a culture of safeguarding • Embedding safeguarding across all Fund Manager processes and decision-making protocols	• Minimum annual training refresher training for internal Fund Manager colleagues
Case management	• Cases across the portfolio reported and logged via online system • In-depth case triage and technical support provided for each reported case • Emphasis on lessons learned to inform and shape ongoing improvement to programme delivery • Maintain regular case progression meetings and correspondence with the donor	• Cases across the portfolio reported to Fund Manager via email and tracked • Basic triage and advice on incident handling for most serious cases • Fund Manager follow up on the most high-risk categories
Monitoring standards	• Targeted monitoring and support visits for 100% of the projects • Ongoing follow-up of actions arising from monitoring work	• Targeted monitoring and support visits for high-risk projects

It is imperative that decisions are based on the specifics of the projects within a portfolio and the type of activities to be delivered. There is no 'one-size-fits-all'. A fund manager will need to consider this in the early stages of the project's inception.[6]

The amount of investment needed by a project to operationalise the safeguarding standards, tools, action plan etc., also varies depending on the context, level of risk and technical capacity of its staff. This level of investment/effort is also greater within the first two-thirds of the project cycle. For example, in the Team Girl Malawi project, implemented by Link Education International, upfront investments were made for providing safeguarding training for all staff and target groups, psychosocial counselling for girls, community outreach, reporting systems review, and case management and follow-up, amongst others. In the latter third of the project, the level of effort reduced as changes in attitudes and behaviour came to fruition amongst target groups and fewer cases were raised. Taken as an average, the project invested the full time equivalent of 5 days for a senior staff member, per month, over the course of the project.

Overall, the investment in the operationalisation of the Safeguarding Operating Model for both the Fund Manager and projects, paired with the significant effects it has had on the girls participating in the projects, along with the results and wider impact that has been had within the sector, clearly represents good value for money.

[6] See here for more information on how the GEC approached exposure and exogenous risks may be helpful to inform the early stages of early budget planning for safeguarding.

Making the Safeguarding Operating Model work for you

The Safeguarding Operating Model can be adapted for use in different sectors across various contexts, and while it is particularly relevant for organisations or individuals who are overseeing a portfolio of projects, the tools and approaches can also be used with individual projects.

Below are recommendations for those who are interested in adapting the Safeguarding Operating Model for their own use:

1. Set a firm foundation

- **Encourage early resourcing:** Implementing partners that allocated dedicated safeguarding resources early made more timely improvement in their capacity to meet the GEC Safeguarding Minimum Standards.
- **Support project design:** While the Safeguarding Action Plan template was designed for use throughout project implementation, it can also be useful at the design stage to help teams ensure the Minimum Standards are met from the outset. Getting safeguarding right from the start is important and means that there is less effort in trying to retrofit and roll out policy and practice changes once the project delivery has begun.
- **Provide support and oversight:** Rapid and meaningful improvement can be more effectively delivered where there is support and oversight of implementing partners, combined with active accountability. Keep the breadth and depth of quality assurance consistent with clear feedback given to maintain momentum.
- **Promote pragmatic phasing of activities:** This helped implementing partners to prioritise actions which had the most impact on the safety of girls and develop tailored approaches. This meant that projects made resources available to meet the standards and had a clear roadmap to success.
- **Attainment of core standards during the inception phase, prior to delivery:** Requiring implementing partners to 'front load' or put in place core standards prior to implementation yielded positive results.

2. Work closely with implementing partners

- **Ensure stability of the safeguarding team:** For the GEC, this enabled the implementing partners to develop consistent and collaborative relationships with the Safeguarding Team. This also enabled the Safeguarding Team to develop a more in-depth understanding of the projects.
- **Provide time-bound oversight and technical support:** Implementing partners were less likely to prioritise safeguarding without time-bound oversight and technical support.
- **Be a critical friend:** Implementing partners required guidance and support to achieve meaningful compliance. Provide written feedback on their policies, practices and procedures. Hold frequent one-to-one calls to share concrete examples, models and resources, and to discuss challenges and solutions.
- **Maintain a risk-based approach:** It is important to prioritise support to implementing partners that work directly with girls or have higher risk activities such as cash disbursements or distribution of educational materials or work with children in boarding schools.
- **Develop mutual trust:** Good working relationships strengthen trust and open dialogue. Establishing a mutually respectful relationship will allow for more in-depth discussions, constructive feedback and encourage growth and awareness.
- **Undertake regular monitoring:** It was recognised that once projects had attained all the Minimum Standards, periodic monitoring of ongoing actions by the Fund Manager was required to consolidate work and to ensure forward momentum and continued compliance.

3. Build on early success and stay committed to learning

- **Increase reporting and safeguarding case management:** Supporting implementing partners through one-to-one consultations on each case helped them to appropriately handle incidents and ensure the wellbeing of the survivors was at the centre of all decision-making. The use of a bespoke online platform allowed for detailed case tracking and analysis across projects and enabled the GEC Safeguarding Team to identify trends which could be useful to implementing partners and to girls.
- **Use lessons learned from case handling to inform programme improvements:** Lessons learned through case management have to be integrated into implementing partners' Safeguarding Action Plans to ensure any gaps identified through case management are filled.

"The Safeguarding Operating Model can be adapted for use in different sectors across various contexts."

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