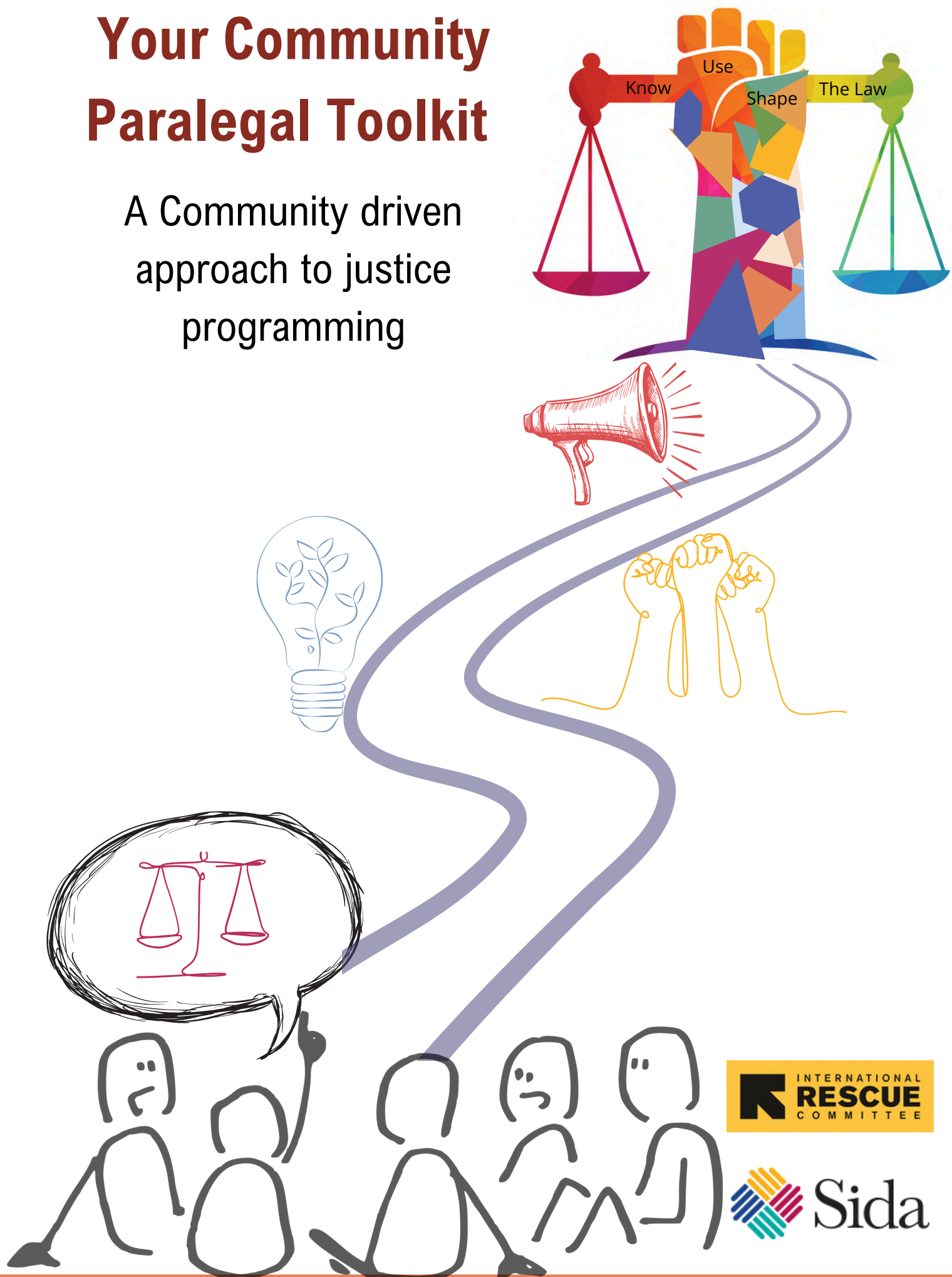
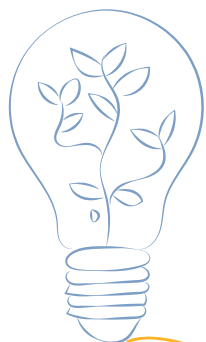


Your Community Paralegal Toolkit

A Community driven
approach to justice
programming



Know



Shape



The Law

Use



Sida



Global Protection Cluster

This product was made possible thanks to the generous support of the Swedish people through the Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency (SIDA). The content is the responsibility of IRC and does not necessarily reflect the views of SIDA or Swedish government.

This product was endorsed by the GPC after a careful review and validation process.

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This guidance has been developed following a detailed desk review on existing resources and aim at providing a global , standardized approach towards building community based paralegal programming. It is your step-by-step practical guide on how to build a safe, inclusive and qualitative community paralegal program, explaining the approach, necessary strategic thinkings, highlighting the skills and competencies that community paralegals require; and how paralegals can support communities to know, use and shape the law. This toolkit is designed for use by all stakeholders operating in humanitarian, peace and development contexts in developing a community based paralegal programming in a given setting.

This version has been developed following an iterative user-centered process and piloted in 2024/2025 by IRC. The pilot was conducted in IRC country operations in Iraq, South Sudan, Mali, and grounded into previous successful experiences in Cameroon and Uganda.

We thank all contributors who have made this grounded, collaborative toolkit become a reality.

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ACRONYMS

ADR – Alternative Dispute Resolution

A2J: Access To Justice

CBP: Community Based Protection

CBO : Community Based Organization

CSO: Civil Society Organization

CIJ: Customary and Informal Justice

CP: Child Protection

DRC: Danish Refugee Council

ERD: Economic Recovery and Development

GBV: Gender Based Violence

GPC: Global Protection Cluster

HLP: Housing, land, and property

IDP: Internally Displaced Persons

IRC: International Rescue Committee

LAAP : Legal Aid Analysis Framework

LASNET: Legal Aid Service Providers Network

MHPSS : Mental Health and Psychosocial Support

NRC: Norwegian Refugee Council

PAF: Protection Analytical Framework

PFA: Psychological First Aid

PRoL: Protection and Rule of Law

PWD: People with Disabilities

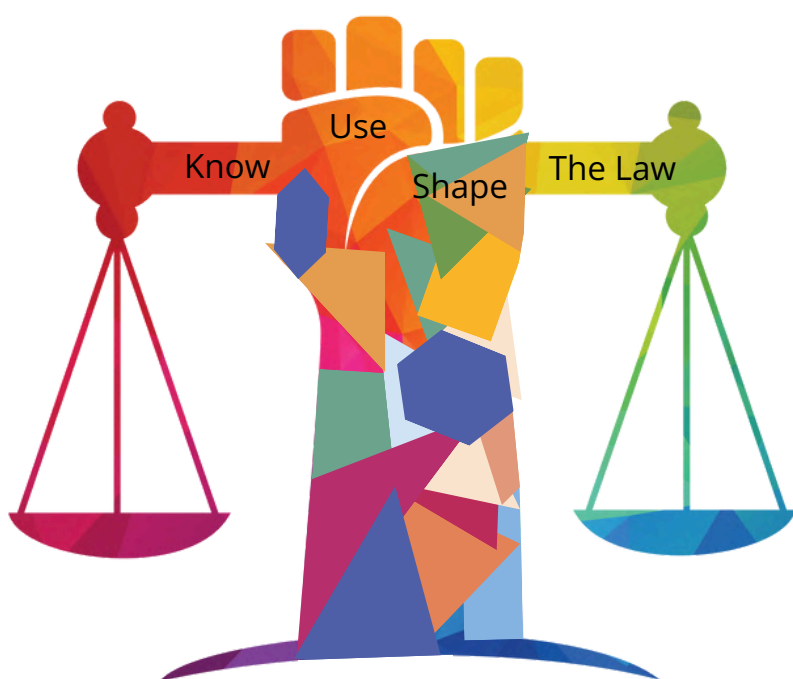
SIDA: Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency

TU: Technical Unit

WPE: Women's Protection and Empowerment

INTRODUCTION

In times of crisis, legal protection, and access to justice of affected populations – whether to informal or formal justice systems – is often deprioritized. Access to justice is frequently considered a development issue or a very sensitive type of programming. During crisis, particularly those characterized with rights violations, there are often perceptions by humanitarian actors that the existing systems may not be of interest or even harmful to victims of violence, and can reinforce discrimination, inequality, and practices of violence. In addition, crises response operations tend to be biased on which justice systems they should or shouldn't engage with, often excluding informal justice systems (traditional/customary/religious courts), which tend in practice to resist better to crises.



The paralegal approach is one the International Rescue Committee's (IRC) signature approach in times of crisis to enhance access to justice and sustainably work on legal protection of affected population. It has been part of the access to justice component of the Protection and Rule of Law (PRoL) programming for the past decade without being streamlined. Given the observed sustainable impact on communities the IRC in partnership with Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency (SIDA) decided to scale up the approach and develop an operational toolkit for protection stakeholders to design and implement this approach when relevant.

This toolkit draws on the findings and recommendations of the IRC Country Programs, which have already implemented this approach. The project followed a down up vision, scaling up best practices from humanitarian settings.

CONTENTS

Step 1

UNDERSTAND THE PARALEGAL APPROACH & DEFINE MY APPROACH

This step consists of ensuring time is allocated for a contextualized design of your approach. Every context has its specificities, and it is critical to consider these before launching any paralegal intervention.



- Justice system analysis
- Risk analysis matrix
- Select your local partner tool
- Sustainability Tool
- The paralegal ToRs



Step 2

DEVELOP & FACILITATE MY TRAINING CONTENT

This second step focuses on preparing the material necessary to empower the paralegals. As every legal context varies it is important to feed the paralegal training with contextualized knowledge and competencies for them to sustainably support their communities.

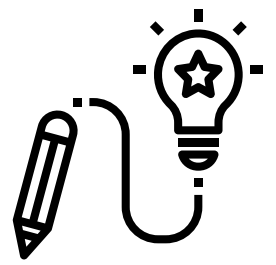


- Structure of training curriculum
- Technical content templates
- KNOW the law training modules
- USE the law training modules
- SHAPE the law training modules



Step 1

UNDERSTAND & DEFINE MY PARALEGAL APPROACH



This step consists of ensuring time is allocated for a contextualized design of your approach. Every context has its specificities, and it is critical to consider these before launching any paralegal intervention.

01

What is a paralegal approach ?

02

Why design a paralegal approach?

03

Who can design a paralegal approach?

04

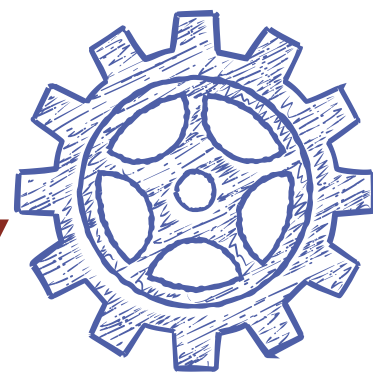
Guiding principles of a paralegal approach

05

Checklist for comprehensive paralegal strategies

Step 1: Tools

UNDERSTAND & DEFINE MY PARALEGAL APPROACH



Justice system analysis

Part 1 : Description of legal framework

Part 3 : In-depth legal analysis per risk

Part 4 : Your Access to justice strategy

[Toolkit available here](#)

Risk analysis matrix

Use the Risk analysis matrix and methodology tool to ensure that your approach is safe for the community paralegal, beneficiaries, your organization and staff and that your expected results will likely be achieved.

[Matrix available here](#)

Select my local partner(s)

Paralegals sometimes already exist, and this is important to work with existing local organization/structure/mechanisms. This assessment form will help you decide whether you build on existing structure or justify if you decide to not partner

[Checklist available here](#)

Paralegals ToRs

Present/develop with local authorities and communities. It is important to contextualize ToRs for paralegals to be able to identify them, explain to community members/leaders what the approach is about etc.

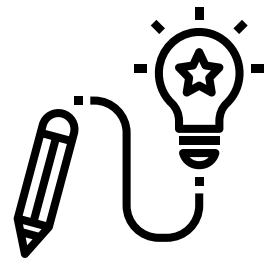
[ToRs to adapt here](#)

Sustainability Tool

A Guide to facilitate a conversation with paralegals and design exit strategy.

[Tool available here](#)

UNDERSTAND & DEFINE MY PARALEGAL APPROACH



What is a paralegal approach?

The term "paralegal" refers to a person who is not a qualified or licensed lawyer, but one who has been equipped with specific legal knowledge to help communities know, use, and shape the law to exercise their rights, resolve disputes, and improve their social and economic wellbeing. They differ from conventional paralegals in that their primary role is not to assist a lawyer, but to work directly with the people, institutions, and actors in the communities they serve.

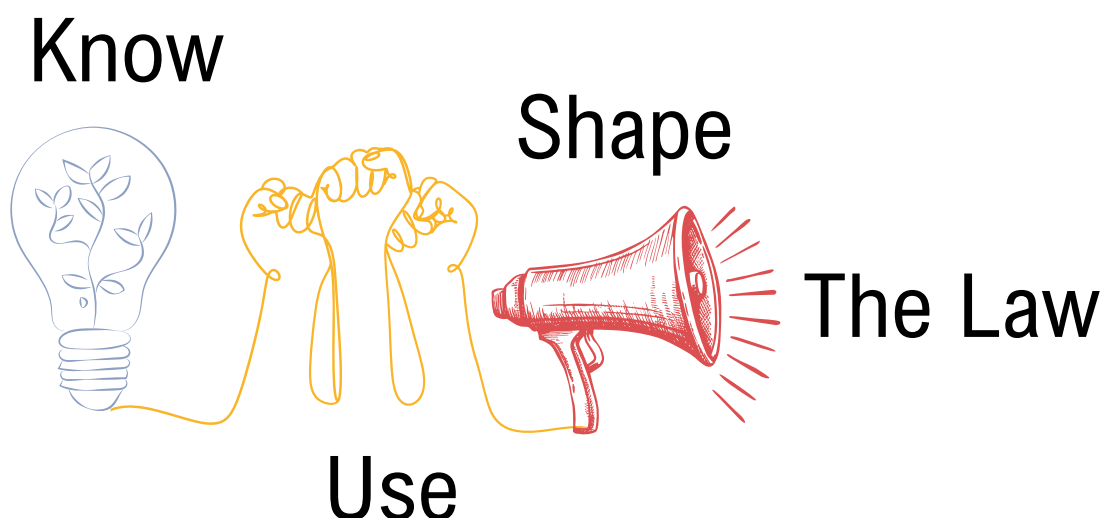
A paralegal approach to access to justice and legal protection puts legal empowerment at the center of interventions choosing to transfer the power of the law to community members for them to ultimately provide legal services to their communities.

Know, Use and Shape the Law elements to legal protection.

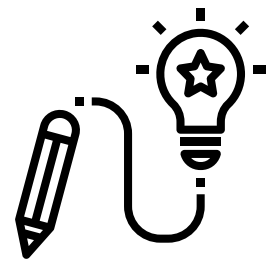
The IRC articulates access to justice programming around three key paths to legal protection. For someone to be equipped he/she needs to know his/her rights (**KNOW the Law**), to use legal services (**USE the Law**) but also to advocate for better legal frameworks and norms (**SHAPE the Law**). The paralegal approach follows the same paths to change.

What is legal empowerment?

Legal empowerment is about making the law accessible, putting the power of the law in people's hands. It is a process that builds the capacity of people to know the law, use the law and shape the law. All of us can follow this path, one does not need a legal background.



Why design a paralegal approach?

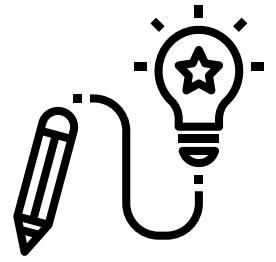


A paralegal approach plays a very crucial role in enhancing access to justice for communities as it:

- Brings the law closer to people by offering a solution within the community. Paralegals are based within the communities.
- Establishes relationships of trust with people since paralegals are from the same community. They are more accessible and approachable, and knowledgeable of community power dynamics and how to navigate them, with a sound understanding of the social and cultural norms.
- Relies on paralegals who are well equipped to explain complex laws and legal procedures in a way that individuals can understand.
- Relies on paralegals providing affordable and cost-effective services. They traditionally do not charge for their services.
- Helps people obtain remedies quickly without having to resort to protracted formal justice mechanisms.
- Provides legal empowerment for communities, through helping people understand their rights and how to claim them. Paralegals support clients to solve current problems and leave them in a stronger position to solve similar future problems by themselves.
- Provides holistic legal and other service, including MHPSS and livelihood needs, through referral to other service providers.
- Bridges the gap between formal, informal, and customary justice mechanisms as they have knowledge of both the law and of local customs and informal norms and policies.



Who can design a paralegal approach?



This toolkit is designed for any protection stakeholders willing to enhance legal protection and access to justice for affected populations in their intervention locations.

IRC strongly recommends ensuring legal skills are part of your organization and your project approach to effectively design and implement quality paralegal programming but encourages any protection stakeholder to explore such approach.

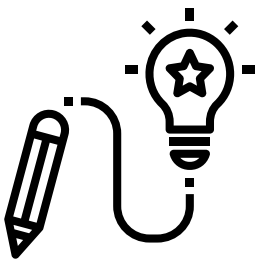
WHY DO I NEED LEGAL SKILLS?

Legal skills and knowledge are essential to lead this approach successfully as most of the approach relies on creating and adapting legal training content, provide detailed legal training using your justice system analysis content and support community paralegal to understand and provide legal support to paralegal when handling new and/or complex cases.

WHAT LEVEL OF LEGAL SKILLS DO I NEED?

Ideally the minimum level required is to be a legal officer with around 5 years legal experience in the country, legal studies and background and a good understanding of the realities for the communities in terms of accessing justice, barriers faced and actual implementation of laws and ways to obtain justice (i.e : informal and traditional justice systems ect..)

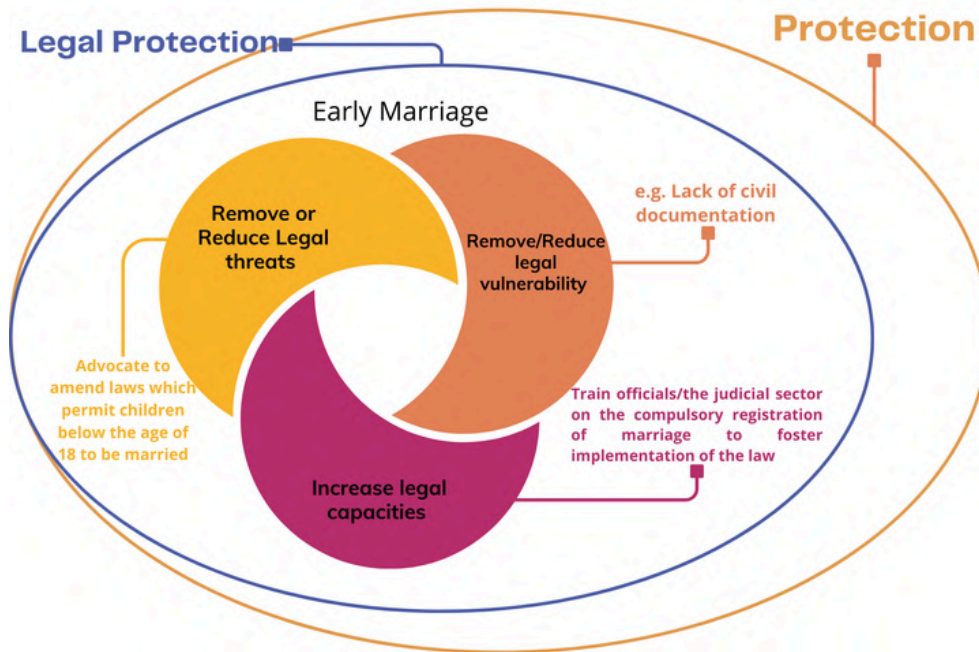




Guiding principles for paralegal approach

Legal Protection is Core to Protection work

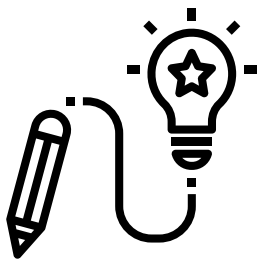
The first - obvious - principle is the relationship between legal protection and protection overall. The IRC considers legal protection as one key element of the broader protection. It is impossible to achieve a holistic protection of affected population without considering legal protection elements (see the diagram with the early marriage example).



Legal protection is therefore part of any protection analysis which should be conducted before undertaking any A2J programming. You should refer to the Legal Analysis Toolkit (*See Tool 1*) to be used to undertake a legal analysis in your context. To avoid siloed intervention, collaborate with protection colleagues in all expertise area to solidify your understanding of the protection environment. The results of your analysis will highly influence the design of the paralegal approach. e.g. I chose a gender related transformative outcome to the paralegal model as Gender Based Violence (GBV) are grounded in patriarchal norms rooted in the legal framework.

Know, Use & Shape the Law Approach

The IRC articulates access to justice programming around three key paths to legal protection. For someone to be equipped he/she needs to know his/her rights (KNOW the Law), to use legal services (USE the Law) but also to advocate for better legal frameworks and norms (SHAPE the Law). The paralegal approach follows the same paths to change.



The IRC's vision of change paths to legal protection follows a threefold approach: Know, Use and Shape the law. This way of approaching legal protection is highlighted in the Power 1 theory of change which focuses on safety of population through legal empowerment.



People are able to access justice and exercise their rights



KNOW the Law

Demand and access Justice



USE the Law

Access legal assistance & Justice services



SHAPE the Law

Work towards a protective justice system

The paralegal approach enables to work on the three paths with community members. The phases around which the toolkit is structured echoes these three elements which needs to be progressively mastered by paralegals at knowledge but also competency level.

Embiased Engagement

An embiased engagement means that the stakeholders or part of the justice system to interact with are guided by the results of a legal analysis and not prejudices on “what works or do not work” according to you. You might be engaging with justice stakeholders from the informal and/or formal justice system, supporting a locally owned and supported approach.

Sustainability

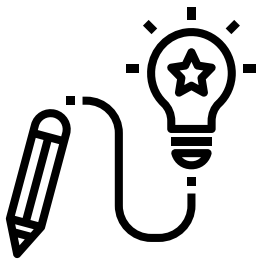
Sustainability is core to paralegal approach. It should be explored from the onset of the project through local partnership or developing a community grassroot approach. But also reflect about conditions of exit strategy.

Community at Center

The paralegal approach is a way to implement Community Based Protection (CBP) programming. Rather than focusing on activities, or outputs, CBP focuses on empowering and supporting communities to secure their rights and safety. Community-based approaches to protection offer a different model to traditional humanitarian approaches:

- They engage people in contextualizing protection risk analyses, designing and implementing responses to protection issues prioritized by communities.
- They reinforce the value of communities' resilience capacity and resources, while providing resources and building capacity where gaps exist.

It means allocating the right time to develop right competencies with communities and continuously consult and engage with the local communities.



Checklist for comprehensive paralegal Strategies



Step 2

DEVELOP & FACILITATE MY TRAINING CONTENT



This second step focuses on preparing the material necessary to empower and train the paralegals. As every legal context varies it is important to feed the paralegal training with contextualized knowledge and competencies for them to sustainably support their communities.

01

Skills & Competencies by level of training

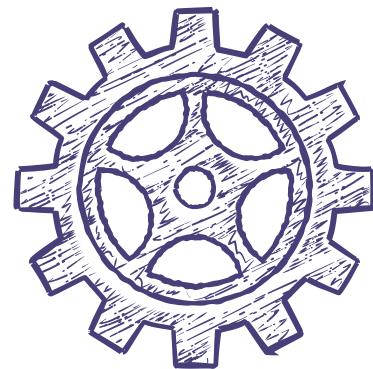
02

The development process



Step 2: Tools

DEVELOP & FACILITATE MY TRAINING CONTENT



Structure of Training Curriculum

The IRC developed a template to ease the process and provide you the minimum topics you should cover if you want to build a solid paralegal system with communities. Some topics are already prepared others need to be developed by your country programs' teams as this relates to national legal framework.

[Adapt here](#)

KNOW THE LAW TRAINING Modules

You will find all the content for the first phase of training for the paralegals. All the necessary format is available - Word, PPT and Memos to give to the paralegal at the end of the training sessions.

[Consult here](#)

Templates for technical content to develop

You will find templates for Word, PPT and Memo you will need to develop at national level. Indeed some modules need to be develop as per the national legal framework.

[Adapt here](#)

USE THE LAW TRAINING Modules

You will find all the content for the second phase of training for the paralegals. All the necessary format is available - Word, PPT and Memos to give to the paralegal at the end of the training sessions.

[Consult here](#)

SHAPE THE LAW TRAINING Modules

You will find all the content for the last phase of training for the paralegals. All the necessary format is available - Word, PPT and Memos to give to the paralegal at the end of the training sessions.

[Consult here](#)

DEVELOP & FACILITATE MY TRAINING CONTENT



Skills & Competencies by level of training

The core of the IRC paralegal approach is to provide capacity building to community members for them to progressively being equipped as paralegals within their communities. This is a mid/long term investment to transfer skills and competencies in a sustainable manner.

Designing a paralegal approach requires therefore to invest in developing a contextualized and appropriate training curriculum matching community members priority needs in terms of legal knowledge and skills.

Legal Protection Paths	Categories	Competencies & Skills	Level I	Level II	Level III
KNOW THE LAW	Understand key concepts Module 1 & 2	Understand legal empowerment approach	X		
		Understand role of community paralegal	X		
	Legal awareness Module 3	Legal awareness -door to door	X		
		Legal awareness -community session	X		
		Organize community training	X		
		Reporting your awareness session (tools)	X		
	Safe referral Module 4	Legal service mapping and network	X		
		Safe legal referral	X		

Legal Protection Paths	Categories	Competencies & Skills	Level I	Level II	Level III
USE THE LAW	Administrative skills Module 1	Organize your file and client information	X		
		Working Meeting	X		
		Planning & prioritization	X		
		Respect principle in practice – confidentiality.	X		
	Communication & coordination Module 2	Individual interview with client – Legal Case management techniques and tools	X		
		Coordination – Build your network	X		
USE THE LAW	Legal counseling and legal assistance Module 2	Individual legal advice	X		
		Accompaniment & translation		X	
		Filling legal document		X	
		Legal representation in informal justice setting (CIJ)		X	
		Mediation			X
		Support legal representation by lawyer			X
	Reporting Module 1& 2	Follow up		X	
		Fill your database		X	
		Reporting		X	



Legal Protection Paths	Categories	Competencies & Skills	Level I	Level II	Level III
SHAPE THE LAW	Legal Monitoring Module 1	Monitoring legal needs and barriers to access justice (Formal & informal)		X	
		Monitoring in detention settings		X	
		Monitoring of justice proceedings & systems (i.e: court monitoring...)		X	
	Mediation & conflict resolution Module 2	Mediation/conflict resolutions (CIJ)	X		
		Individual case mediation (formal law)			X
	Justice system strengthening Module 3	Organizing and mobilization to demand your rights			X
		Training and capacity building for justice actors (formal & informal)			X
		Advocacy towards formal& informal justice			X
	Reporting <i>All modules</i>	Following up on your advocacy & reporting progress			X

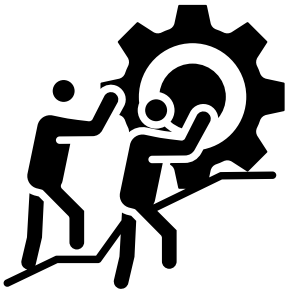
The Development Process

Keep in mind three key steps to develop your training manual:

- **ALIGN** the training structure with the results of your legal analysis.
- Develop the **TECHNICAL CONTENT** to adapt.
- Finally develop the **MEMOs** to print and hand over the community paralegal after the training.

You can develop a work-plan per phase and develop the curriculum progressively but do not underestimate the level of effort. Make sure the staffs with legal background are on board and 100% dedicated to support development of curriculum, allocate at least a month to the development of all resources to ensure quality.





LINK WITH THE LEGAL ANALYSIS

The paralegal approach needs to be grounded in a solid understanding of the legal landscape of your intervention context. The first step is therefore to conduct a legal analysis with a focus on the legal component of prioritized protection risk. The results should guide your discussion with paralegals to prioritize protection risks and legal topics to develop throughout the training curriculum.

THE STRUCTURE OF THE TRAINING CURRICULUM

To ease the process the training curriculum structure has already been developed by the technical unit. The structure is articulated around two axes:

- The skills and competencies modules and sessions which are standards for any country program and already developed by the technical unit. You should still review and adapt, should there be content not appropriate to your context (i.e: Detention monitoring)
- The technical content to be developed at country program level as it relates to the national legal framework.

The technical content will all be taken from your legal analysis – the structure proposed for the technical content modules have been aligned with content and structures of the legal analysis guidance per risk.

The legal analysis will give you all information to ensure the structure of your training curriculum is aligned.

ALIGN PRIORITY PROTECTION RISKS

Cover the same protection risks as prioritized at the end of the legal analysis process for consistency and impact. Your Protection program should work together on addressing the same protection risk to not dilute impact. It means that in the absence of a legal analysis you should look for the latest protection analysis and choose the same priority risks.

The objective of the training curriculum is to equip paralegal with skills and knowledge for them to decrease threat(s), vulnerabilities and increase capacities to address priority protection risks. The structure and content of your training curriculum always need to follow this simple prerequisite for impact.



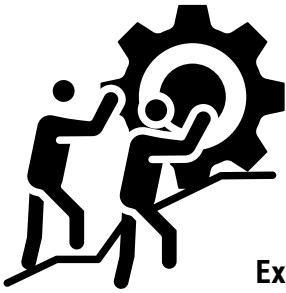
IDENTIFY LEADS AND PARTNERS BY TOPICS

To be efficient as this is a huge lift make sure you assigned staffs to key legal topics for them to develop key resources by topic. IRC strongly recommends identifying:

- Legal Topics or Risk leads.
- Key counterparts to consult.

Example of workplan

Topic(s)/Protection Risks	Lead	Partner	Checklist
Arbitrary arrest and detention	Legal Officer	<p>Child protection case worker</p> <p><i>*High number of cases of children detainees/in contact with the law</i></p>	<p>I have discussed with counterparts and have the full picture of the protection risk.</p> <p>I am familiar with the results of the legal analysis on the protection risk/topic.</p> <p>I developed the technical content in Word.</p> <p>I validated with Management/TU</p> <p>I developed the matching PPT for the training with paralegal.</p>
		<p>PRoL Manager</p> <p><i>*many arbitrary arrests and detention compound with extrajudicial killings</i></p>	<p>I developed the matching memo to give paralegals at the end of the training</p>



DEVELOP THE TECHNICAL CONTENT TO ADAPT

For each prioritized topic in the training curriculum structure, you will have to develop the “technical content to adapt”.

Example of technical content to adapt in the structure

INTERMEDIATE TRAINING - USE THE LAW				
Modules & Sessions			Status	Status
USE THE LAW	Module 1	Administrative competencies for a community paralegal Session 8.1: Organizational skill Session 8.2: Compliance and Ethical Considerations Session 8.3: Organizing meetings and communication	Final	Word PPT
	Module 2	Providing Legal Case Management Session 9.1: Understand legal case management Session 9.2: Communication skills for individual legal interviews Session 9.3: Plan for legal solutions	Final	Word PPT
Technical content – to adapt	Module X	Introduction to family right Session 10.1: Key civil status documentation Session 10.2: Marriage certificate Session 10.3: Death certificate Session 10.4: Divorce, separation, and child custody	To be developed by Country team	To be developed
	Module X	Risk in focus Number 1 – to adapt Session 11.1: What is ... Session 11.2: Why is it important? Session 11.3: Legal framework and process Session 11.4: Concrete actions to improve access to justice	To be developed by Country team	To be developed
	Module X	Risk in focus Number 2 – to adapt Session 12.1: What is ... Session 12.2: Why is it important? Session 12.3: Legal framework and process Session 12.4: Concrete actions to improve access to justice	To be developed by Country team	To be developed

For each module you will have to create three formats:

- The WORD format of the training for the trainers. it will be your guide with all details.
- The PPT for the paralegal training days.
- The MEMOs which are the resources to give to the paralegals at the end of the facilitation of each training module.

You will find templates for each format in the toolbox:

- WORD Template
- PPT Template
- MEMOs Template

Building a Paralegal Training Curriculum

The Roadmap



Align Training Structure with Legal Analysis

- Get familiar with training structure
- Identify and include priority risks resulting from legal analysis
- Identify leads by topic

Develop technical content to adapt

- Develop WORD technical content as per structure
- Develop corresponding PPT
- Develop corresponding Memos

Facilitate trainings !

- Get familiar and contextualize the skills and competencies modules.
- Make sure to read the Word guidance for each module.
- Familiarize with the PPT content, exercises and hand out as well as tools and to prepare the session as guided.
- Some minimal contextualization might be needed depending of your focus.

