Evaluation of the implementation and effectiveness of safeguarding interventions for partners of Porticus

KEY LEARNINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Background

The family foundation Porticus, established in 1995, is dedicated to contributing towards a just and sustainable future where human dignity can flourish. Porticus engages local and global partners to tackle root causes of problems in the areas of education, society, faith and climate, to create societies and systems that work for everyone. Porticus' work is realized by approximately 200 employees across 13 offices who currently manage grants with 1500 partner organizations in more than 90 countries.

Porticus considers the safeguarding of children and adults at risk of violence, abuse and exploitation as a core part of Porticus' work. All partner organizations are required to meet specific minimum safeguarding requirements, including having a safeguarding policy reflecting abuse prevention as well as response to concerns and disclosures when they arise, operational procedures to implement the policy and a governance structure that ensures accountability to safeguarding practice. The extent to which partner organizations meet the minimum safeguarding requirements is assessed by Porticus' grant managers using established work instructions (including checklists) to review the partner organization's self-evaluation and policy documents. A positive judgement is required for grantmaking. Porticus' safeguarding support is complemented by their Child Protection Portfolio which funds efforts to strengthen the protective environment and response services in targeted communities.

In June 2021, Porticus engaged Maestral International's team of safeguarding, child protection and evaluation experts to conduct an evaluation of the safeguarding support provided by Porticus to their partners.

Safeguarding: steps taken by an organization to prevent and respond to violence, abuse and exploitation of children and adults at risk. It includes having a policy, Code of Conduct and supporting guidance in place and the knowledge, skills and capacity to implement safeguarding and respond to concerns and disclosures when they arise.

Safeguarding implementation: putting into action the safeguarding steps that are outlined in the policy, Code of Conduct and other safeguarding guidance.

Purpose of the evaluation

The purpose of the evaluation was for Porticus to gain a deeper understanding of the relevance and effectiveness of its efforts in, and prioritization of, safeguarding in all its grants.

The evaluation thus focused on the following topics: the relevance to partners of Porticus' safeguarding requirements, the effectiveness of support provided, partner capacity to develop and implement safeguarding and the extent to which safeguarding is 'embedded'.

Evaluation methodology

Porticus' Safeguarding Theory of Change (ToC) informed the development of the evaluation framework which served as a guide for the design and method of this evaluation.

The Maestral team applied a theory-based, iterative, mixed-methods approach. Both primary and secondary data were analyzed. Secondary data analysis involved desk review of Porticus' safeguarding support guidance and associated tools as well as a sample of partner's safeguarding policies. Primary data included quantitative and qualitative data. Quantitative data collection involved the administration of two online surveys:

one among Porticus staff and one among representatives and staff of partner organizations, to gain an understanding of respondents' perspectives of safeguarding, how safeguarding is promoted and supported within the organization, and how safeguarding concerns and disclosures are handled. A total of 71 Porticus staff and 516 partner staff (from 244 organizations) participated in the online surveys. Qualitative data collection involved 37 key informant interviews to gain the perceptions of relevance and effectiveness of Porticus' safeguarding efforts from a select number of respondents including 18 Porticus staff and safeguarding consultants, four members of Porticus' Leadership Team, Porticus' Head of Risk, and 14 partner organization representatives.

Key findings of the evaluation

Perceived relevance of safeguarding efforts among partner organizations

Overall, partners said they find Porticus safeguarding requirements and support relevant and useful. However, while Porticus partners generally consider that safeguarding is important, the relevance of developing and implementing safeguarding depends on whether they have contact with children and/or adults-at-risk or not. Also, in many regions, safeguarding is a new term which is not widely understood or considered relevant. In some regions, safeguarding support involved a lot of attention to risk assessment, which substantially increased partner's awareness of the importance of safeguarding and recognition that everyone has a responsibility in keeping children and adults safe from abuse, which, in turn, is now driving efforts to develop and implement safeguarding policies.

The degree of freedom that Porticus gives to partners with regard to the approach they take to developing safeguarding is valued. However, this results in a heterogeneity of safeguarding documents and partner training activities. Additionally, partner safeguarding policies and associated codes of conduct do not always fully meet Porticus standards.

Effectiveness of the safeguarding support provided by Porticus

The basic structure for supporting safeguarding is in place at Porticus and management is considered to find safeguarding important. However safeguarding practice within Porticus is not obvious. Regarding safeguarding support to partners, there are challenges with staff time, capacity and resources. Porticus staff also frequently express a lack of confidence in knowing how far their safeguarding support can and should go. While the Maestral team found that Porticus' resource documents are rigorous and help Porticus staff, adjustments are needed, such as providing a simplified step-by-step guide to implement the safeguarding resource documents.

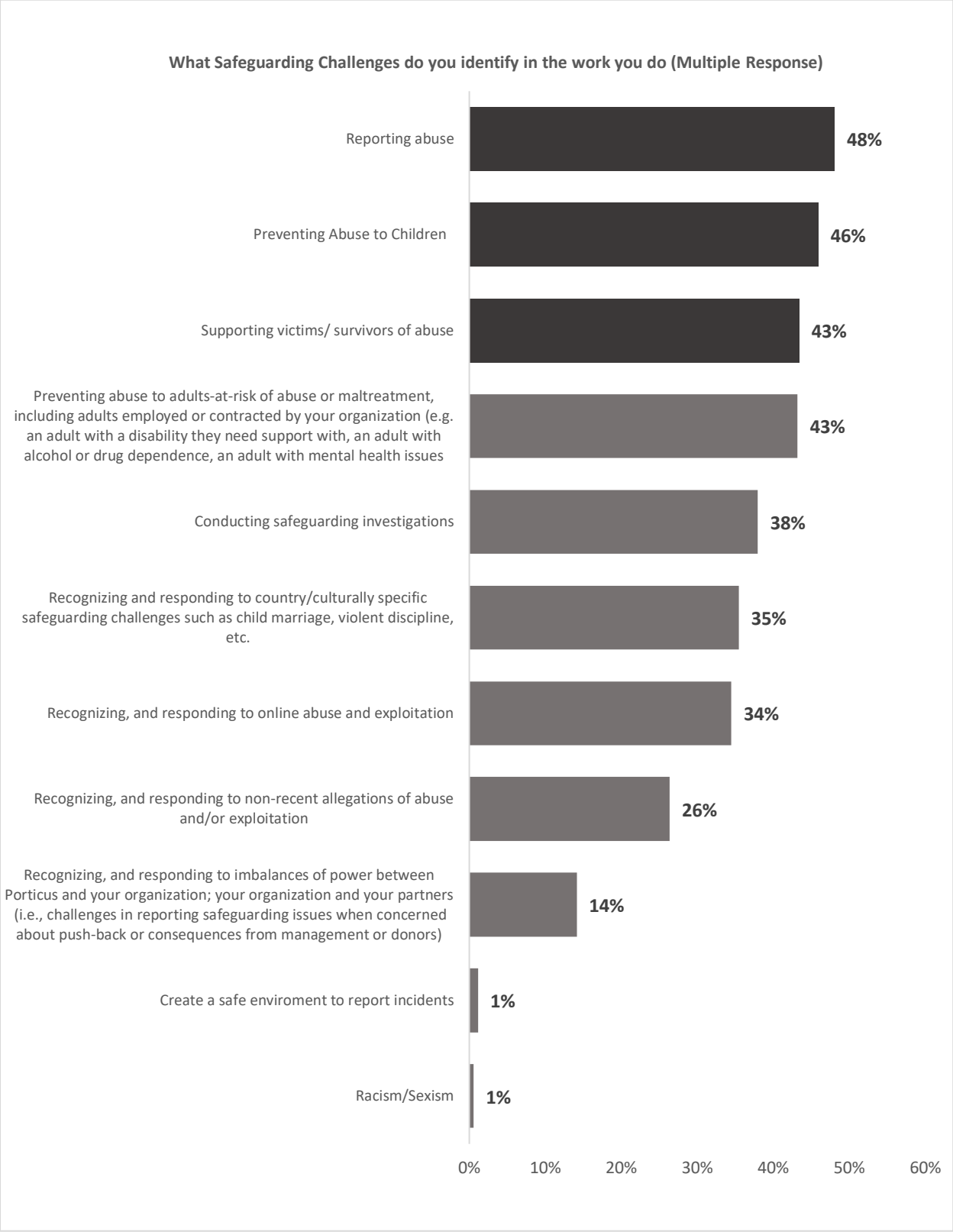
Both respondents from partners and Porticus indicate that the availability of a budget for safeguarding support (consultancy and training) is considered of eminent importance.

Currently the only systematic quantitative metric for Porticus to monitor whether safeguarding is being implemented consists of data on the number of incidents reported by partners to Porticus. However, concerns were raised regarding the lack of such reported data.

Partner capacity to implement safeguarding

Whilst there were many good examples shared of partners safeguarding effectively, the implementation of safeguarding is often reported to be a challenge for partners (see graphic on next page). Specific concerns were highlighted with regard to ensuring reporting procedures are user-friendly and operational and that an appropriate response is provided in the event of a safeguarding incident. This is an issue of knowledge, skills, resources and available services. Partners highlighted the need for training and for peer-to-peer learning opportunities.

Graph 1. Challenges faced in implementing safeguarding



Source: Porticus Partner Survey

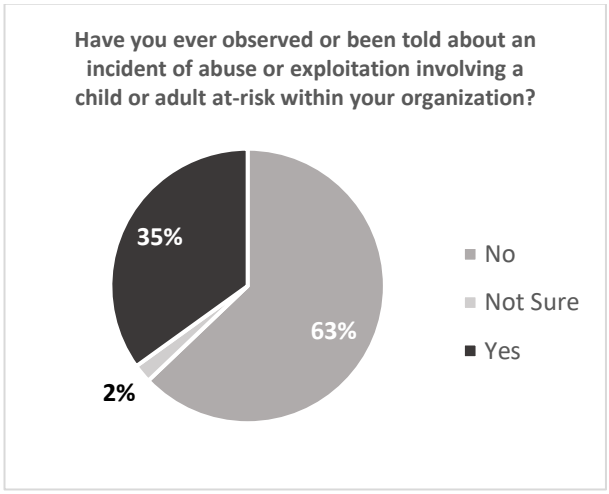
Safeguarding implementation

Almost all (98%) of partner staff reported knowing about their safeguarding policy and code of conduct. However, only 85% of partner staff reported having sufficient knowledge and skills to implement the policy, which aligns with the 83% who reported having received a safeguarding training. While these numbers may seem high, the goal should be that 100% of staff know about the policy and report feeling they have sufficient safeguarding knowledge and skills to ensure their role in implementation. This points to the need for additional capacity building with partners.

The examination of a sample of partners' safeguarding policies showed that there is a wide heterogeneity in their length, content and level of detail (see graphic on page 5). While some policies are adequate or excellent, many policies would be improved by including more specific safeguarding tools (e.g., user-friendly reporting mechanisms, reference check guidance) and reporting templates (e.g., standardized incident reporting form, informed consent form, photography/video consent form), and including safe recruitment procedures and job descriptions.

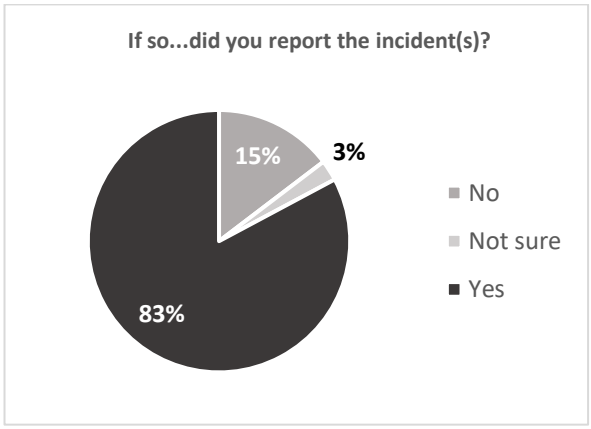
Reasons given for the under-reporting of safeguarding incidents include a lack of partner awareness of the requirement to report serious incidents to Porticus and the perception that partner reporting mechanisms are insufficiently user-friendly, trusted or even known by staff and program beneficiaries. In addition, it is not clear if there is a common interpretation of what 'serious incidents' would consist of, especially across cultural contexts where incidents may be defined and interpreted differently.

Graph 2. Partner staff observed/told about SG incidents



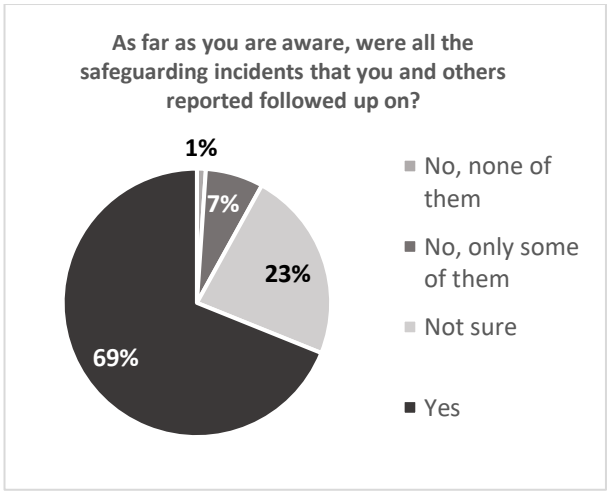
Source: Porticus Partner Survey

Graph 3. Incident reported by partner staff



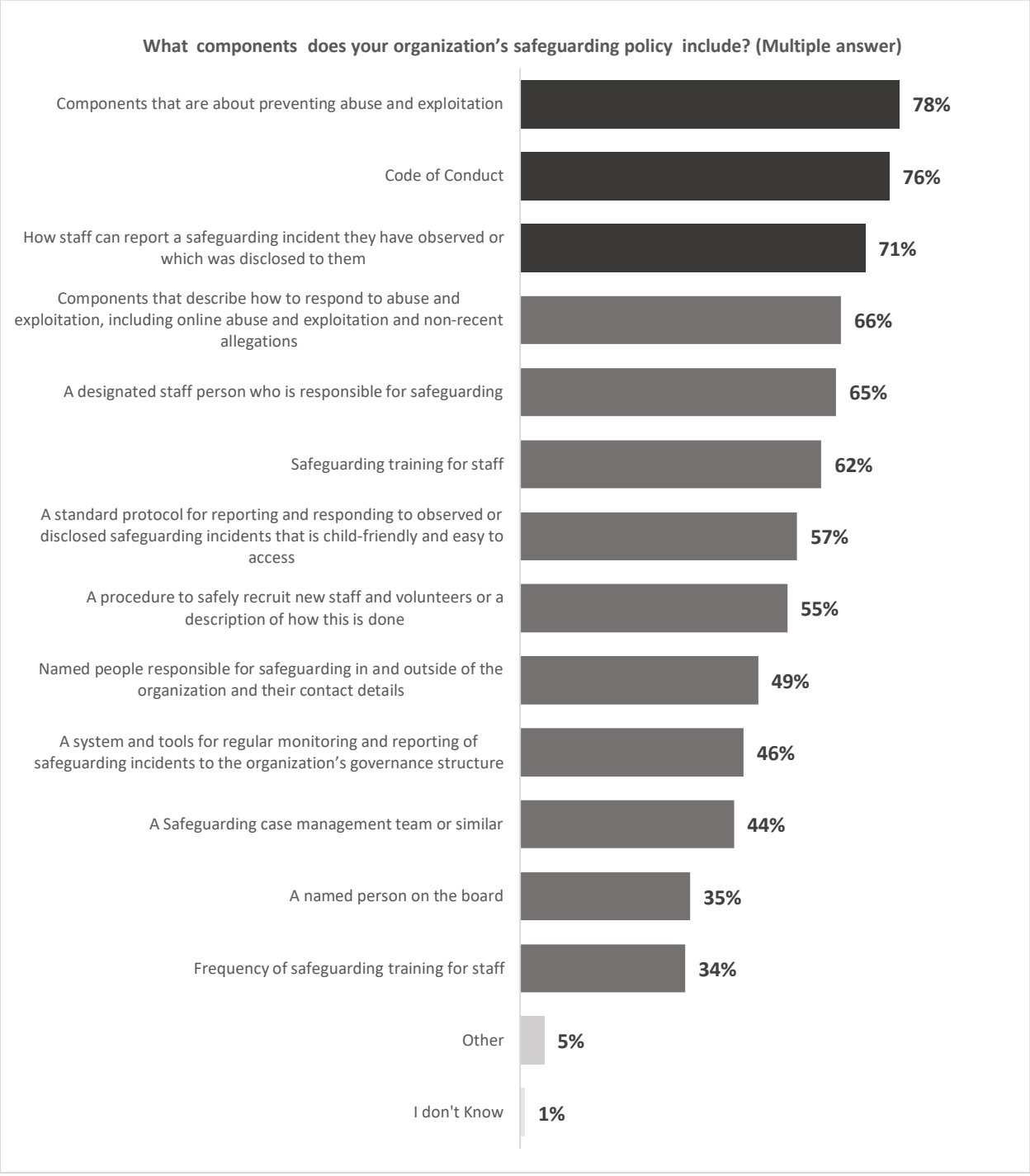
Source: Porticus Partner Survey

Graph 4. Number of incidents that are followed up



Source: Porticus Partner Survey

Graph 5. Components included in partner's safeguarding policies, as reported by partners



Source: Porticus Partner Survey

In country contexts where safeguarding is not (yet) commonly practiced, there may be a greater need for investments supporting effective safeguarding implementation than in countries where safeguarding is already more mainstreamed. The experience gained in some regions where safeguarding support initially focused on risk assessment, generating awareness, recognition and understanding of safeguarding, and partners then taking ownership of the safeguarding agenda, is a good example of the usefulness of such investments.

Extent to which safeguarding is embedded

While several partners are still in the initial stages of implementing their safeguarding policy, making it too early to assess whether safeguarding is 'embedded' within their organization, many key informants outlined robust safeguarding practices, including safe recruitment processes and the development of a safeguarding culture being driven by leadership. However, overall, safeguarding policies do not seem to be systematically reviewed, updated or considered as "living documents". The reported lack of user-friendly safeguarding incident reporting mechanisms and lack of monitoring data are also indications of limited 'embedding' of safeguarding.

Graph 6. Extent to which partner organizations 'live and breathe' safeguarding



Source: Porticus Partner Survey

Early results

Porticus currently monitors safeguarding implementation by tracking reported incidents and observing/examining how partners implement safeguarding, largely through site visits, which have been severely impacted during COVID-19. The absence of more standardized monitoring, however, makes it difficult for Porticus and partners to routinely monitor progress in implementing safeguarding. It does not appear that data on safeguarding is actively being used to strengthen safeguarding. However, a few promising practices were identified, specifically with regard to partners establishing regular and structured times to discuss incidents internally (e.g. annual or quarterly meetings, depending on how many incidents are being reported).

Recommendations

The following overarching recommendations are provided for addressing the safeguarding support challenges that were identified through this evaluation. They fall into two categories: recommendations for strengthening partners' safeguarding, and recommendations for strengthening Porticus staff safeguarding skills, knowledge and capacity.

Recommendations are also provided for safeguarding monitoring and evaluation and for the Theory of Change that guides Porticus' safeguarding approach.

Recommendations for strengthening partners' safeguarding

Partners require more guidance and support from Porticus on how to implement safeguarding in practice. This includes:

- Minimum standards and expected components of safeguarding policies;
- A standard set of safeguarding resources be provided to all Porticus partners (glossary, guidance, templates, monitoring and evaluation guidance and tools);
- Signposting to existing guidance and tools;

- More opportunities for peer-to-peer learning and networking between partners;
- Access to a dedicated budget line for safeguarding support;
- Increased knowledge of safeguarding reporting, monitoring and evaluation mechanisms, including standard indicators.

Recommendations to increase the effectiveness of Porticus' safeguarding support efforts

It is recommended that Porticus have:

- Clear guidance on what should/not be in a safeguarding policy and training on how to identify issues. This requires everyone who has contact with grantees to have basic safeguarding knowledge and specific training or guidance on spotting concerns in policies.
- A standardized approach that allows Porticus to monitor and support implementation including:
    - Access to a safeguarding budget to support implementation;
    - Review of safeguarding policies every three years at a minimum;
    - Monitoring and evaluation - including a safeguarding monitoring and evaluation framework with standard indicators;
    - Clear mandatory reporting to Porticus of serious safeguarding incidents and a clear definition of what constitutes a serious incident;
    - Requirement for partners to send in a safeguarding report including case types and numbers on an annual basis;
    - Tools and guidance that support partner safeguarding including a risk assessment template, job aids etc.
- A clear approach to handling concerns and disclosures that occur in partner organizations that enables a speedy, high quality response which is monitored by central office to ensure consistency across the regions (whilst taking into account national requirements such as mandatory/non-mandatory reporting).
- Clear and transparent internal processes for prevention and response to safeguarding within Porticus to role model best practice to partners.
- A trained, knowledgeable safeguarding and case management group including senior leadership so that all prevention and response approaches are viewed through the lens of safeguarding as a priority (over risk, data protection, etc.).

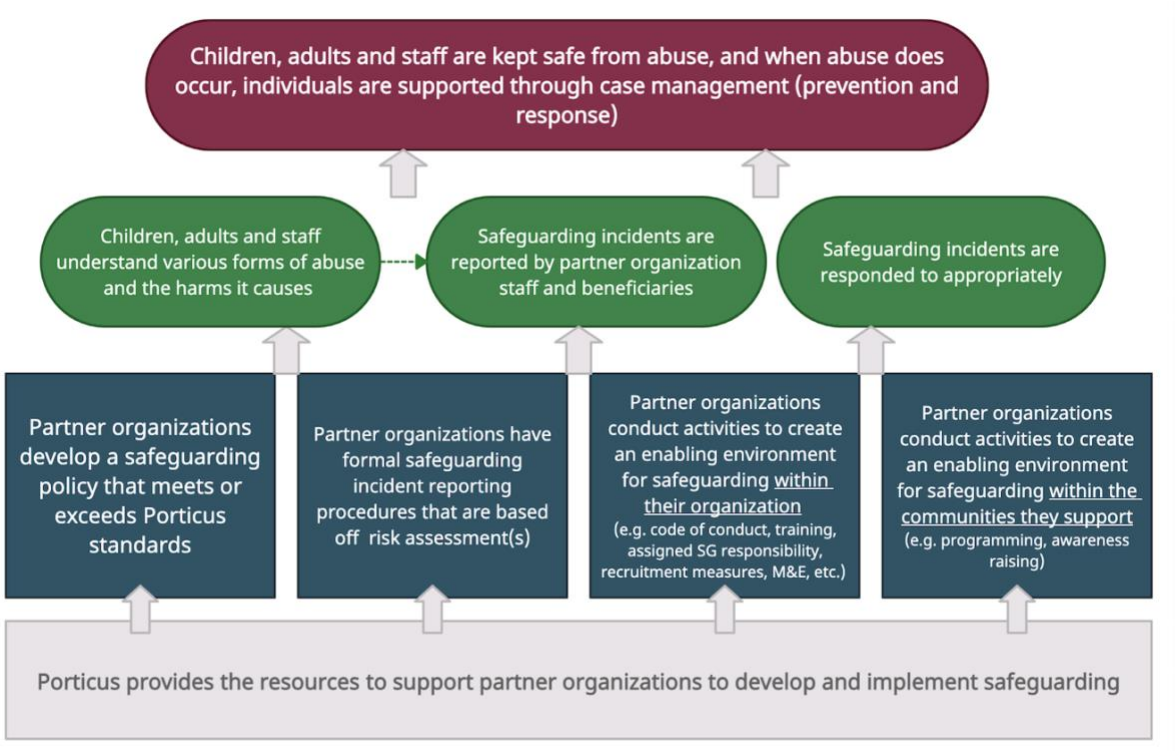
Recommendations regarding safeguarding monitoring and evaluation

It is recommended to accompany the suggested Theory of Change with a safeguarding monitoring and evaluation framework, including standard indicators and indicator reference sheets defining each indicator, explaining how the indicator should be interpreted and where to obtain the indicator data. It is recommended to develop the monitoring and evaluation framework through a participatory process involving all DSOs to ensure their buy-in, and with a sample of grantee organizations to build off of already-existing reporting. Indicators could include process measures to better track partner organizations' ongoing safeguarding efforts. Examples of such indicators include:

- % of partner organizations that have developed a safeguarding policy that includes both preventing and responding to violence, abuse and exploitation
- % of partner organizations that have developed a safeguarding Code of Conduct for their organization
- % of partner organizations that have conducted a safeguarding risk assessment within the last 3 years
- % of partner organizations that have a designated staff person responsible for safeguarding

- % of partner organizations that have developed a procedure to safely recruit new staff and volunteers
- % of partner organizations that provide a safeguarding training to their staff, interns and volunteers at least twice per year
- % of partner organizations that provide safeguarding training to all new staff, volunteers and interns within the first three months of engagement with the organization
- Number of partner organization staff trained in safeguarding, by length of training, frequency, and face-to-face or online
- Number of safeguarding incidents, by status (e.g. not addressed, being followed-up internally, being followed-up externally, closed)
- % of partner organizations that developed a system and tools for regular monitoring and reporting of safeguarding incidents to their governance structure
- % of partner organizations that regularly (i.e. quarterly) review safeguarding monitoring reports within their organization
- % of partner organizations that have reviewed their safeguarding policy within the last 3 years.

Recommended Theory of Change to guide Porticus' support for safeguarding



In conclusion, this evaluation found that Porticus is dedicated to and interested in ensuring safeguarding is effective across the partners it supports. For five years now, Porticus has dedicated energy to emphasizing the importance of safeguarding. However comprehensively addressing safeguarding across all Porticus partners requires additional and continuous investments in staffing, capacity building, development of additional tools, raising awareness and monitoring its implementation.