

Ranger Professionalization Toolbox Notes

◇ CONDITIONS ◇

CONDUCT ◇ COMPETENCIES



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ABOUT THIS NOTE

This note is part of the **Ranger Professionalization Toolbox Series on Conditions, Conduct, and Competencies**. The toolbox notes are intended as a practical resource for those involved in managing, supporting, or investing in rangers. By providing a brief overview of available tools and illustrative case studies of their application, they aim to facilitate further adoption and replication of solutions to strengthen the ranger profession.

Conditions focus on the employment, safety, and working environments that enable rangers to operate effectively, ethically, and with dignity. This note presents practical standards and tools to strengthen ranger employment, well-being, and institutional support.

Conditions are closely linked to both **Conduct** and **Competencies**: Safe and fair working environments enable rangers to follow codes of conduct in practice and provide the foundation for building and retaining skills. This note should be used to identify gaps in ranger working conditions and apply priority improvements, alongside complementary actions on conduct and capacity.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

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1.

THE BASICS

Rangers are the custodians of protected and conserved areas, often working in remote, dangerous, and politically sensitive environments. Yet globally, ranger employment and working conditions remain inadequate. Many rangers lack formal contracts, receive low or irregular pay, work excessive hours, or are deployed without appropriate equipment, insurance, or legal protection. They are frequently exposed to violence, disease, extreme weather, and psychological stress with limited institutional support. Poor working conditions undermine ranger effectiveness, morale, and retention; place lives at

risk; weaken conservation outcomes; and expose employers to legal, ethical, and reputational risk. Ensuring decent employment and working conditions is a practical and legal (see [ILO](#) fundamental principles and rights at work) requirement and delivers benefits beyond individual well-being. It reduces turnover, improves performance, and lowers legal and reputational risk for employers. It strengthens trust and professionalism in ranger-community relationships and provides assurance to donors and partners.

THE NEED

1. Ranger employment is often insecure or informal. In many countries, rangers work without written contracts or clear terms of employment, leaving them vulnerable to exploitation, political interference, and loss of basic rights such as leave, pensions, or grievance mechanisms.
2. Pay, benefits, and working hours are frequently inadequate. Low wages, delayed salaries, and lack of overtime compensation force many rangers to rely on secondary income, undermining professionalism and increasing vulnerability to corruption.
3. Occupational health and safety risks are high. Rangers routinely tackle organized crime, land use conflicts, dangerous wildlife, disease, and extreme weather. Many lack appropriate equipment, insurance, compensation, or post-incident support. Chronic stress, trauma exposure, and isolation are common, yet access to psychosocial support and adequate rest remains limited, contributing to burnout and long-term harm.
4. Equality and equity in ranger employment remain weak. Ranger workforces are overwhelmingly male, with women often facing discrimination, unsafe working environments, and limited career progression. This restricts the talent pool and weakens workforce resilience and effectiveness.

Findings from the first global [State of the Ranger Report \(2024\)](#) by the International Ranger Federation (IRF) show that 37 percent of rangers report pay insufficient to meet basic needs, 11 percent report pay below minimum wage, 47 percent lack adequate resources to do their jobs, and 65 percent of employers consider ranger numbers insufficient.

SOLUTIONS

Improved working conditions are consistently identified by rangers as a top priority. The IRF [World Ranger Action Plan](#) recognizes conditions as a core pillar of ranger professionalism, while donors increasingly seek assurance that conservation outcomes are not achieved at the expense of ranger safety and rights.

Clear, internationally agreed standards for ranger employment and working conditions provide a foundation for professionalism, safety, equity, and

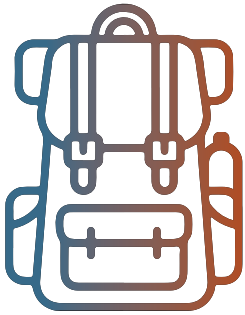
accountability. They clarify minimum expectations for employers while giving rangers a reference point for their rights and protections. Decent work principles can be translated into practical, assessable elements that employers can implement and monitor over time. Doing so recognizes that ranger performance, integrity, and resilience depend on employment security, safety, well-being, and institutional support, and that training and ethical standards cannot compensate for unsafe or exploitative conditions.



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2.

THE TOOLBOX



- ▶ GLOBAL STANDARD FOR RANGER EMPLOYMENT AND WORKING CONDITIONS
- ▶ SAFEGUARDING THE RIGHTS AND WELL-BEING OF RANGERS
- ▶ A GUIDE TO THE KEY HUMAN RIGHTS RANGERS HOLD
- ▶ PRINCIPLES ON EQUITY, EQUALITY AND RIGHTS IN THE RANGER WORKFORCE
- ▶ TOWARDS GENDER EQUALITY IN THE RANGER WORKFORCE

GLOBAL STANDARD FOR RANGER EMPLOYMENT AND WORKING CONDITIONS

The IRF [Global Standard for Ranger Employment and Working Conditions](#) sets out minimum requirements for the fair, safe, and professional employment of rangers. It defines acceptable employment practice across the full employment cycle, from recruitment to retirement, and applies to all ranger employers (state, private, community, and Indigenous). For the first time, ranger working conditions have been defined in a format typical of International Labour Standards. The standards set a global baseline below which ranger employment should not fall.

The Global Standard focuses on outcomes rather than prescribing identical systems, allowing flexibility while establishing clear minimum requirements. It provides a shared global reference for governments,

employers, donors, and rangers, enabling systematic improvement rather than ad hoc responses. Key elements include

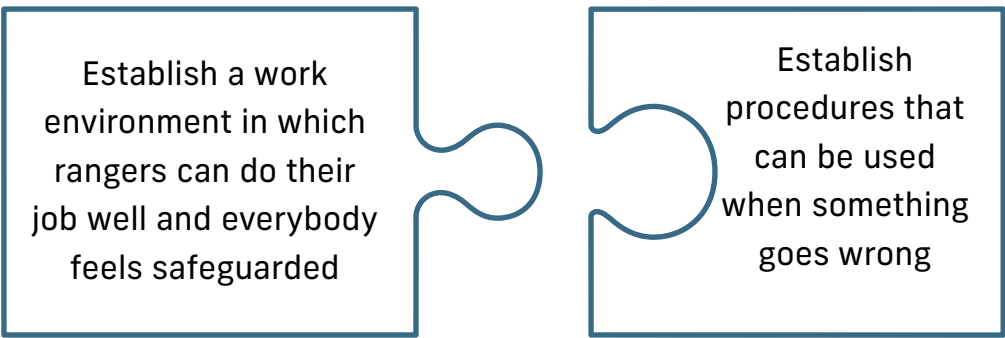
- ▶ Guidance on training;
- ▶ Legal employment, rights, and contracts;
- ▶ Fair pay, benefits, working hours, and leave;
- ▶ Harassment and discrimination safeguards;
- ▶ Accommodation, equipment, and subsistence;
- ▶ Safety, health, and well-being;
- ▶ Insurance and compensation;
- ▶ Labor inspections; and
- ▶ Social security.

SAFEGUARDING THE RIGHTS AND WELL-BEING OF RANGERS

[Part 1: Principles](#) sets out a human rights-based framework for protecting ranger rights, dignity, safety, and welfare. It defines core principles (for example, clear mandates, non-discrimination, due process, well-being, integrity, and respectful collaboration) that employers and partners should uphold to ensure rangers are safe, supported, and effective. The document sets out a list of principles to help establish

(i) proactive measures to avoid or, where this is impossible, minimize situations in which rangers or people they come into contact with may not be safeguarded and (ii) reactive mitigating measures to address situations in which rangers or people they come into contact with did not feel safeguarded (Figure 1).

Figure 1: The two-pronged approach applied in the Safeguarding Principles for Rangers



Source: Adapted from Iraola et al. (2022).

Ten principles are defined to safeguard rangers and people they come into contact with, built around a human rights-based approach (Figure 2). Principles include ensuring that rangers have a clear mandate and role, respect codes of [conduct](#), and are supported through due process and access to remedy, as well as good employment conditions. The principles can

be adapted and institutionalized by organizations supporting rangers, employing rangers, or working with rangers in any other capacity. They should be tailored to different geographic circumstances before being integrated into existing organizational procedures and safeguards systems.

Figure 2: The 10 Safeguarding Principles for Rangers, with a human rights-based approach at the center



Source: Adapted from Iraola et al. (2022).

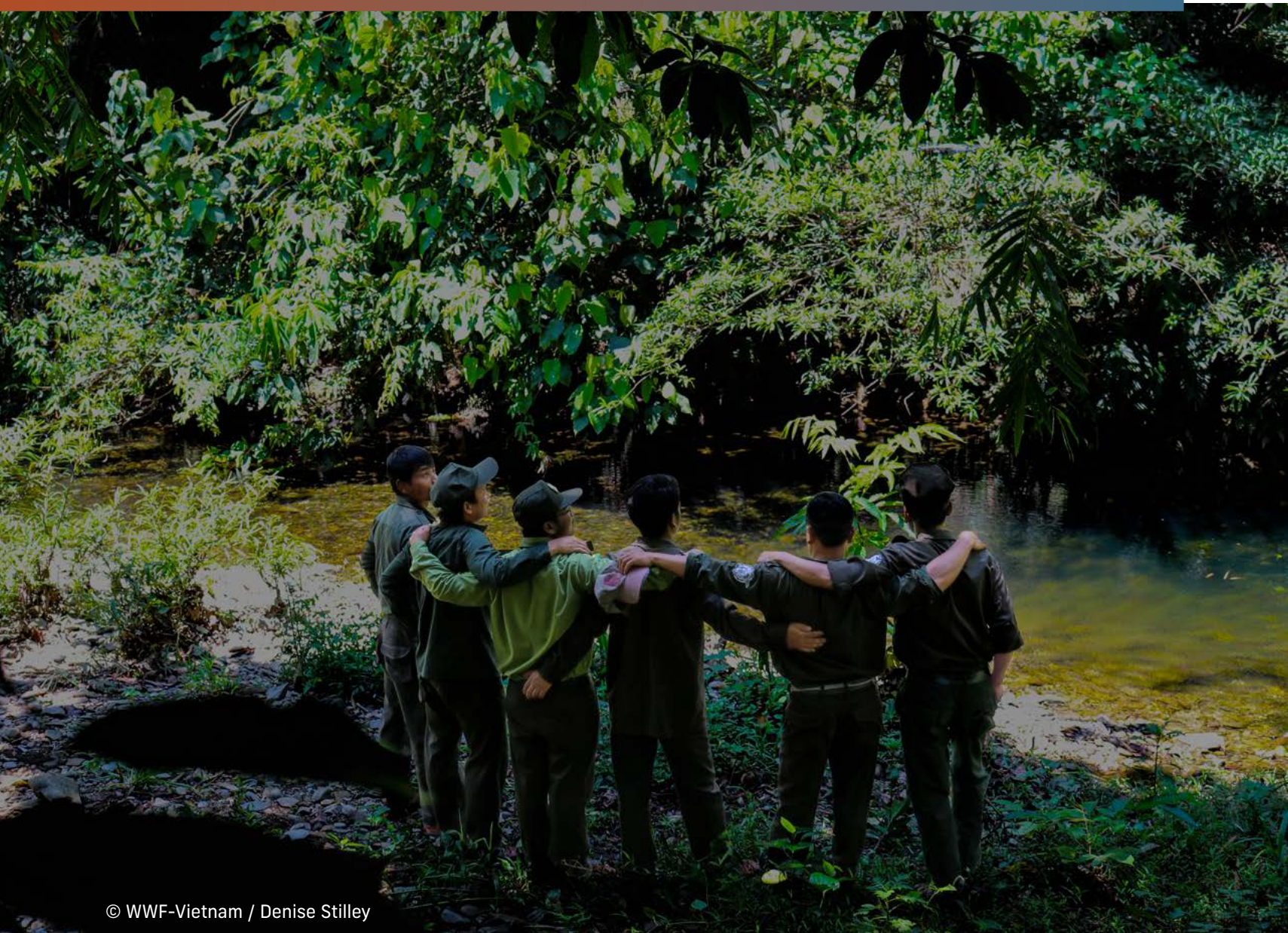
[Part 2: Guidance and Tools](#) turns the principles into suggested activities with practical tools (for example, a template with draft generic language for a safeguarding policy) to help organizations implement the principles in workplace systems. It includes a

checklist and adaptable template planning tool to help users review the suggested activities, identify the most urgent activities for immediate implementation, and assign other activities for medium- or long-term implementation.

A GUIDE TO THE KEY HUMAN RIGHTS RANGERS HOLD

This [Guide](#) highlights the fundamental human rights that apply to rangers while performing their duties. The guide outlines key protections such as the right to life, freedom from discrimination, dignity at work, freedom of expression and association, privacy, liberty and security, and the right to a fair trial, which are grounded in the principles of the Universal

Declaration of Human Rights. Designed for rangers, managers, and the organizations that employ them, the document serves as a practical awareness tool to support ethical employment practices, strengthen accountability, and reinforce the professionalization of the global ranger workforce.



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PRINCIPLES ON EQUITY, EQUALITY AND RIGHTS IN THE RANGER WORKFORCE

[Principles on Equity, Equality and Rights in the Ranger Workforce](#) provide guidance for strengthening fairness, inclusion, and human rights. The document outlines a series of principles to foster workplace conditions and collaboration that promote equity, equality, and rights, which can be adapted to local contexts and adopted by protected and conserved

area management authorities and institutions supporting rangers. The principles aim to support employers to eliminate discrimination; promote equal opportunity in hiring, pay, promotion, and training; and establish inclusive workplace cultures through transparent policies, grievance mechanisms, and accessibility.

TOWARDS GENDER EQUALITY IN THE RANGER WORKFORCE

Employing more female rangers strengthens conservation outcomes and workforce resilience. Evidence shows women enhance community engagement, intelligence gathering, and conflict resolution while diversifying skills and perspectives. [Towards Gender Equality in the Ranger Workforce](#) summarizes global research showing that women comprise, on average, only 3–11 percent of rangers worldwide. Drawing on survey data and expert input, it identifies key barriers and offers practical recommendations to recruit, retain, and support women rangers.

High-priority actions include collaborative discussions on the structural challenges that limit gender equality, development of supportive policy foundations including zero tolerance for sexual harassment and violence, conduct of gender audits, establishment of gender-disaggregated databases, delivery of gender equality training, and improvement of ranger conditions and supplies, including addressing deficiencies in ranger support that hinder gender equality.



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3.



IMPLEMENTATION

The Global Standard for Ranger Employment and Working Conditions is designed as an improvement tool rather than a static compliance mechanism. The Safeguarding the Rights and Well-being of Rangers Principles and Guidance and Tools reports help ranger employers translate rights-based principles into workplace policies and practices that strengthen safety, accountability, fairness, and workforce well-being. The Principles on Equity, Equality and Rights help ranger employers to embed equity, equality, and rights into governance, culture, and practice. The Towards Gender Equality report provides concrete recommendations and steps for ranger employers wanting to improve equality. These tools can be applied incrementally across diverse contexts.

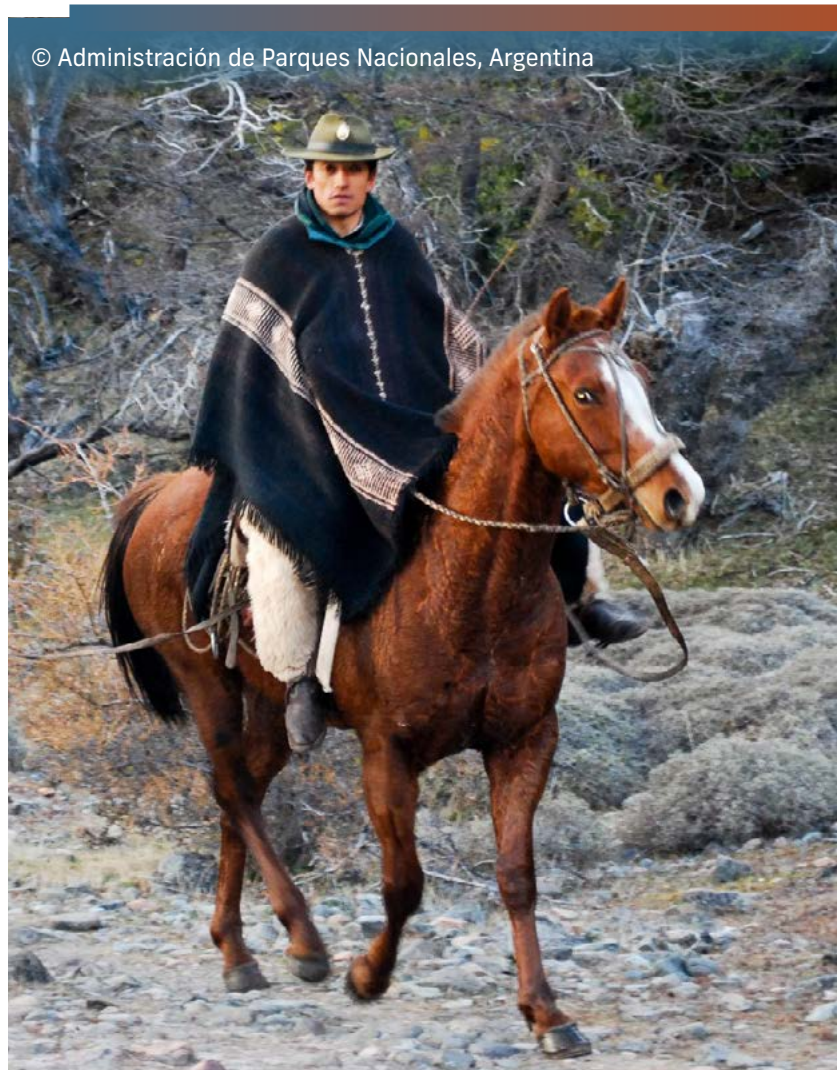
Key uses include

- ▶ Benchmarking current employment practices against international norms;
- ▶ Identifying priority gaps and risks in ranger safety and welfare;
- ▶ Guiding reforms to contracts, pay structures, and HR systems;
- ▶ Informing donor safeguards and funding conditions;
- ▶ Supporting dialogue between rangers, employers, and authorities;
- ▶ Embedding equity, equality, and rights principles into organizational policy and practice;
- ▶ Assessing Indigenous ranger representation and inclusion gaps in workforces;
- ▶ Assessing gender representation and inclusion gaps in workforces;

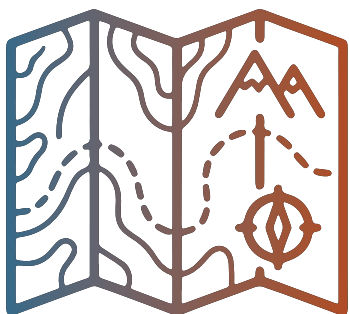
- ▶ Informing inclusive and gender-responsive HR and recruitment strategies to attract, retain, and advance women rangers and Indigenous rangers; and
- ▶ Strengthening prevention and response to discrimination, exclusion, and abuse.

These uses help employers translate research into practical workforce strengthening actions. Transparency around progress should be prioritized, recognizing that reform often takes time.

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APPLICATION EXAMPLES



Strengthening ranger employment and working conditions in India

At Kaziranga National Park, the Assam Forest Department piloted the Global Standard for Ranger Employment and Working Conditions to strengthen ranger welfare. Authorities at Kaziranga used the IRF global policy parameters to benchmark their existing systems and adapt internal practices on gender sensitization, peer support, and community engagement—areas which were self-identified by the park as needing improvement. The pilot demonstrates how the Global Standard can be locally adapted to turn global commitments into practical improvements in ranger welfare and professionalism. At Kaziranga, the Global Standard has helped translate international principles into concrete actions on the ground. It is strengthening legal recognition of rangers, advancing equality, inclusivity, and diversity, and improving well-being and institutional support. At the same time, it is clarifying Kaziranga National Park's responsibilities as an employer, reinforcing accountability and creating a more professional and supportive environment for its staff.

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Collective bargaining agreement for rangers in Argentina

In Argentina, the government recently signed the [first collective labour agreement](#) for rangers, marking a historic advance after decades without a sector-specific contract. The agreement strengthens regulations on working conditions and introduces improved salary structures benefiting the more than 500 rangers working across Argentina's national protected area system. It establishes clearer career pathways and promotion systems and provides additional compensation for career progressions. This example strengthens the rights and working conditions of rangers by embedding clear labor rights, fair pay, career progression, and negotiated protections into ranger employment structures. It also advances fair employment conditions and gender equality. The agreement followed several years of negotiation involving the Ministry of Environment and Sustainable Development, the Ministry of Labor, Employment and Social Security, the National Parks Administration, and the ranger union.

Strengthening social security and income protection for rangers in Mozambique

The [National Administration of Conservation Areas](#) (ANAC; *Administração Nacional das Áreas de Conservação*) in Mozambique has been implementing ongoing efforts to strengthen professional conditions for rangers. With support from the Global Wildlife Program and partners, ANAC completed a nationwide labor survey of its ranger inspection force, gathering critical data on employment status and benefits. This has informed a coordinated process with the National Institute of Social Security, the Ministry of Labour, and other ministries to [register rangers in the national social security system](#) and begin retroactive compensation for those previously injured in their duties. This initiative enhances employment security, income protection, and long-term retirement pathways for rangers. By harmonizing contracts, social protection, and workforce structure, Mozambique is taking concrete steps toward decent work standards that improve ranger well-being and professional stability.

Improving ranger workforce conditions in Colombia and Peru

Colombia and Peru are two of the most dangerous countries to be a ranger, where, along with tough physical conditions, rangers face armed criminal gangs, including guerrilla group dissidents in Colombia. Some Peruvian rangers have a price on their head. The 2024 Park Ranger Corps Law [31991](#) in Peru recognizes protected area rangers as a special labor regime, with agreed rights, duties, and functions. The new law recognizes the protection of natural heritage as an essential public service for achieving national biodiversity and climate action goals. The law has [increased salaries](#), with extra incentives for rangers working in border and remote regions, and established insurance cover for rangers, including health cover, life insurance, and insurance on work-related risks. This has led to the professionalization of the park ranger career, established professional development pathways, and reaffirmed conditions of safety and institutional support. Across the border, a [draft law](#) in Colombia aims to improve recognition of and conditions for rangers, lowering the retirement age, increasing insurance cover, and linking career advancement to practical skills.



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Establishing women's ranger workforces in Indonesia

Indonesia has established multiple women's ranger workforces, strengthening gender equality within protected area management and addressing structural barriers faced by women rangers, including lack of visibility, limited career pathways, and weak peer support. A major development was the creation of the first community-based women's ranger unit in a national park, established under the Global Wildlife Program by the Ministry of Environment and Forestry. The 15-member Women Forest Rangers Community Partners group (*Perempuan Inspiratif Mitra Polisi Kehutanan*) plays a key role in community engagement, biodiversity monitoring, and enforcement of protected area rules at the Bogani Nani Wartabone National Park in Sulawesi. Because women rangers work in the areas they are from, communities are more open to reporting suspicious activities and working together with national park authorities to conserve wildlife. This effort was inspired by Zimbabwe's female rangers at a Global Wildlife Program conference, demonstrating the power of cross-country learning. Replication has since extended to species-focused efforts such as the Cacatua Ranger Women, established to protect the critically endangered yellow-crested cockatoo in the Moyo Satonda National Park in West Nusa Tenggara province.



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Convening national discussions for women rangers in Ecuador and Paraguay

Both Ecuador and Paraguay have convened their first national meetings for women rangers, creating space to strengthen networks, promote leadership, and identify the specific challenges faced by women working in protected and conserved areas. In Paraguay, a 2022 [national meeting](#) brought together women rangers from across the country in a two-day workshop organized by the Ministry of Environment and Sustainable Development. Similarly, in 2024, Ecuador held its first national [meeting of women rangers](#), convened by the Ministry of Environment, Water, and Ecological Transition. Both events provided a space for women rangers to share experiences, discuss workplace realities, and propose collective responses, contributing to improved understanding of gender-specific barriers and opportunities within the ranger workforce. Participants explored regulatory and institutional protocols to address workplace discrimination, harassment, and violence against women, and emphasized the need for safe, inclusive work environments. In Ecuador, the process led to a [manifesto](#) calling for greater recognition of women's contributions to conservation, leadership opportunities, and inclusive policies.

Establishing a national ranger association to advocate for better working conditions in Georgia

Established in 2019, the Georgian Ranger Association represents and supports rangers across Georgia's protected area system, addressing the previous lack of professional representation for frontline conservation staff. Its creation aligns with global efforts promoted by the IRF to strengthen national ranger bodies. The association's aims include improving professional recognition, providing peer support and networking, and advocating for better working conditions. Establishing the [Georgian Ranger Association](#) focused on partnerships and capacity building, including a twinning arrangement with the British Countryside Management Association, enabling knowledge exchange and training opportunities to support the fledgling professional body. Early achievements include raising the national profile of rangers, creating a unified advocacy platform, and strengthening links with international ranger networks. The case demonstrates how a recently established association can quickly enhance professional identity and collaboration, contributing to more effective protected area management.

Increasing numbers of Indigenous rangers in Australia

The [Indigenous Rangers Program](#) of the National Indigenous Australian Agency assists First Nations people in managing *Country*¹ according to Traditional Owners' objectives. A structured, multiyear process is increasing protected area workforce capacity while strengthening community outcomes across Indigenous Protected Areas. With a budget commitment of US\$0.9 billion from 2021 to 2028, the government aims to double Indigenous ranger numbers by 2030. Nearly 200 projects have been funded, creating over 1,500 Indigenous ranger positions, with half earmarked for First Nations women to improve gender parity and promote a more diverse workforce. Rangers are recruited, trained, and deployed to manage cultural burning, biodiversity monitoring, invasive species control, and habitat restoration across Indigenous Protected Areas and Country, blending traditional ecological knowledge with contemporary conservation science.



Building a more inclusive workforce with Indigenous rangers in Peru

The National Service of State Protected Natural Areas, the national authority responsible for the management and conservation of the national protected area system, has been consolidating a participatory management model that increasingly integrates Indigenous Peoples and volunteer rangers into governance. Through contracts signed with the Management Contract Executors in the Communal Reserves, indigenous organizations co-manage the protected areas, actively engaging in planning, monitoring, control, sustainable use, and strategic decision-making. Within this framework, community rangers (Indigenous Park Rangers) integrate traditional knowledge with technical tools for monitoring, control, and adaptive management. Their participation builds a more diverse and inclusive workforce, strengthens management effectiveness in remote areas, and reinforces the social legitimacy of the protected areas system.

¹ Country is a term used by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples to describe a living system of land, waters, and cultural-spiritual relationships.

Strengthening mental health support systems for rangers in the United Kingdom

Rangers can suffer severe mental health problems because of their job. Impacts can range from feelings of isolation to stress caused by interacting with awkward or aggressive visitors or people undergoing some kind of crisis, to the extreme pressures faced by rangers when they or their families are affected by physical violence. In the UK, the National Trust, a charity which is also one of the largest landowners in the country, has set up a Mental Health First Aider program where staff can get professional training in dealing with mental health issues among both the public and their own colleagues. Mental Health First Aiders are trained, share a dedicated online space, and have monthly meetings to swap experiences. All interactions with people seeking help are anonymous. While ‘first aid’ is important, rangers also often need advice about where to access follow-up support.

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Insuring rangers across Africa against injury and death

Globally, an average of two rangers die each week in the line of duty. Rangers and their families often face threats from poachers and criminal networks, while injuries, disability, or death can leave households in severe financial hardship. Many rangers work in countries where there is little or no access to health or life insurance. To address this gap, the Game Rangers Association of Africa (GRAA), in partnership with SATIB insurance brokers, launched [RangerProtect](#) in 2016—the first dedicated insurance scheme for wildlife rangers. A separate initiative established by [ForRangers](#) and supported by Save the Rhino International began providing life insurance to approximately 1,800 African rangers in 2018. In 2024, Tusk Trust partnered with GRAA to launch the [Ranger Welfare and Standards Initiative](#). Announced by HRH The Prince of Wales at the United for Wildlife Global Summit, the initiative aims to dramatically expand access to affordable accident, medical evacuation, and life insurance for rangers. Backed by a consortium of Tusk donors and matched by The Royal Foundation over five years, the initiative seeks to improve ranger welfare while strengthening professionalism and leadership development across the sector. To date, more than 6,500 rangers have benefitted from RangerProtect cover, with a target of enrolling at least 10,000 by 2030. Reflecting the initiative's success, ForRangers transitioned its beneficiaries to RangerProtect in 2025. At approximately US\$50 per ranger per year, the scheme provides an affordable and scalable model.

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ABOUT THE PARTNER ORGANIZATIONS



The Global Wildlife Program (GWP) is a Global Environment Facility-funded, World Bank Group-led program to combat illegal and unsustainable wildlife trade, promote wildlife-based economies and jobs, and enable human-wildlife coexistence. It brings together 38 countries across Africa, Asia, and Latin America and the Caribbean to strengthen transboundary collaboration and scale up knowledge exchange and replication of solutions across countries and regions.



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The International Ranger Federation (IRF) was founded in 1992 and is a worldwide, non-profit membership-based organization, established to develop, advance, and promote the ranger profession. The IRF recognizes rangers and protected and conserved area workers, whether state, regional, communal, Indigenous, or private, as essential on-the-ground planetary health professionals that are responsible for safeguarding nature, cultural and historical heritage, and protecting the rights and well-being of present and future generations. The IRF is the standard-bearer for the ranger profession globally and the voice of ranger associations and rangers everywhere.



The Universal Ranger Support Alliance (URSA) is a global coalition of leading conservation organizations united to strengthen the IRF and champion the role of rangers worldwide. The URSA purpose is to elevate rangers as essential frontline conservation professionals to ensure that they are recognized, respected, and represented fairly across the globe. Through their collective strength, URSA reinforces IRF's leadership and capacity and helps include rangers' voices and priorities into international conversations and policy frameworks.



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