

SAFEGUARDING CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE REPORT FY2020

Violence against children has no place in our world, and certainly not among those who serve the most vulnerable. As a child rights organisation, our foremost priority is protection of children and young people we work with. Nothing trumps this.

Anne-Birgitte Albrechtsen, CEO Plan International

Plan International has a zero-tolerance policy towards violence against children and young people¹ by our staff, associates and visitors. We are fully committed to providing a safe, protective and supportive environment for all children and young people, and promoting their welfare, regardless of gender, ethnicity, sexual orientation and other differences.

Our **Global Policy on Safeguarding Children and Young People**, and the procedures and training that support its implementation, ensure:

- our staff, associates and visitors understand their responsibilities for safeguarding children and young people, and that they are skilled and confident in meeting these responsibilities and engaging positively with children and young people;
- we have robust procedures in place to prevent, report and deal with the safeguarding incidents which arise due to the actions/behaviour of our staff, associates and visitors;
- we actively prevent unintended harm to children and young people caused either directly or indirectly by our work; and
- children and young people we work with are aware of our responsibilities to prevent and respond to any harm to them arising from the actions and behaviours of our staff, associates and visitors and the routes for reporting such incidents.

Our **framework for keeping children and young people safe and protected** ensures a holistic approach to safeguarding children and young people. The framework requires:

- provision of core guidelines and tools for implementation;
- creation of a culture of awareness for staff, associates, and the children and young people that we work with and their families;
- building the safeguarding capacity of staff and associates including ensuring that they are aware of the problem and risks of violence, including sexual violence and exploitation, of children and young people;
- ensuring all are aware of how and where to report safeguarding concerns;
- application of strict child and youth safe recruitment processes,
- inclusion of safeguarding in our risk management processes;
- identification of managerial and staff responsibilities for ensuring the implementation of safeguarding,
- having in place a set of standards which guide the embedding of safeguarding in all aspects of our work
- regular monitoring and evaluation of safeguarding measures to ensure their effectiveness, including audits involving staff, associates, children and young people we work with on their awareness of and attitude towards safeguarding; and
- ensuring visible and committed leaders who role model our values and principles related to safeguarding children and young people



¹ The term 'children and young people' includes girls, boys and children and young people of other gender identities. 'Children' refers to those aged below 18 years. 'Young people' refers to those aged 18 to 24 years as well as to 'children' aged 15 to 17 years.

As in the previous year, in FY2020 Plan International continued to prioritise improving its safeguarding culture as an approach to achieving long term sustainable cultural and behaviour change so as to truly uphold our safeguarding commitment to 'do no harm', an approach which aligns with intersectional feminist principles.

Plan International's workshop on '**Exploring Power, Privilege and Bias** and the impact on a Safe Culture' began in 2016, principally to address the issues of abuse of power and privilege and the impact implicit bias has on our safeguarding culture and particularly on programme participants and staff (in all their diversity – be it gender, race, sexual orientation, age, etc.). The workshop also endeavours to ensure a lived experience of feeling safe with Plan International and improve the manner in which reports are received and dealt with. No individual, irrespective of their identity, should ever feel unsafe, excluded or disrespected in engaging or working with us or our organisation.

The importance of the workshops became even more significant in 2020 in light of events in the external environment¹. These events led to a global focus on racial justice, instigating many to question how the International Aid Sector continues to maintain and uphold white supremacy (power, privilege and bias) in its structure, interventions and operations.

As a result, the Plan International focused on significantly revising the workshops so as to trigger and encourage a deeper reflection and understanding of the dynamics and impacts of power, privilege and bias allowing for the setting of 'statements of intent' for personal change and the development of action plans to address implications for areas of work.

Furthermore, to respond to the call of ensuring a safe culture from the perspective of race, in FY2021, Plan International undertook the development of **Anti-Racism specific modules** accompanied by an **Anti-Racism Courageous Conversations Toolkit** which aims to provide all staff members with a supportive resource that will help them to address and challenge race-related issues.

In FY2021 the next 5 yearly global survey on Safeguarding will be released and survey views on our safeguarding culture and interventions from an intersectional perspective. As per previous surveys, stakeholder groups to be targeted are staff and the young people and programme participants we work with.

Other initiatives - such as the continued socialisation of our revised standards and safe programming and influencing tools – continue or have been developed to improve safeguarding in Plan International as part of our ongoing work and in response to the key issues emerging from case management. The most significant of these initiatives developed are:

- New guidance on 'Safety on online Platforms' for our offices. Since the COVID-19 pandemic, online engagement with children and young people has risen dramatically, so we developed this guidance. It is also being used by a number of other organisations in the sector
- New guidance on 'Embedding Safeguarding in Monitoring, Evaluation, Research and Learning (MERL) activities'
- Our revised Global Guidelines on Carrying out Administrative investigations – so as to strengthen our survivor-centred approaches
- The development and release of our Preventing Sexual Harassment, Exploitation and Abuse (PSHEA) Policy, which provides a clear, unified and explicit stance on PSHEA and the accompanying training packages (these were finalised in FY2021)
- A range of safeguarding guidance and checklists so as to ensure the embedding of safeguarding in the COVID-19 pandemic response

The above interventions contribute strongly to our capacity and understanding and ensure we are doing what we can under safeguarding to provide children, programme participants, staff and associates who engage with us a lived experience that is safe, respectful and inclusive.

SAFEGUARDING CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE INCIDENT REPORT FY2020

Safeguarding, as defined by our policy, is the responsibility we bear to protect children and young people - ensuring that no child or young person is subject to any form of harm as a result of their association with the organisation.

This includes ensuring that their contact with us and those associated with us is safe. And where there are concerns over a child or young person's welfare, or where a child or young person has been subject to violence, appropriate and timely actions are taken to address the concern.

Plan International has a dedicated global policy on safeguarding which sets the standards and procedures for keeping children and young people safe and protected. This includes the preventive, response and referral measures we implement, and mechanisms to deal with safeguarding breaches.

It is critical that safeguarding incidents and their reporting are understood in the appropriate context. Plan International has close to **10,000 staff** in the more than **75 countries** where the organisation is active. In **fiscal year 2020 (1 July 2019 to 30 June 2020)** alone our programmes benefited over 26 million girls and more than 24 million boys worldwide.

Zero or low safeguarding cases would be a huge cause for concern as reporting of cases and response to them indicate that the systems in place are working and people feel confident to report breaches. A robust safeguarding system and high awareness about reporting are pivotal to a zero-tolerance approach to all forms of exploitation and abuse.

For children and young people, and their families affected by safeguarding breaches, Plan International provides support sensitive to their needs and circumstances. For example, this includes supporting victims to access services that provide medical, psychosocial and other support.

During fiscal year 2020, Plan International managed 88 safeguarding incidents involving individuals associated with the organisation. This includes staff members, representatives of partner organisations, community volunteers, consultants and sponsors.

Of the 88 incidents:

- 13 incidents were found not to be safeguarding breaches.
- 10 incidents were confirmed as sexual exploitation and abuse as defined by our policy. These involved six Plan International staff and four associates. In all instances, the cases were referred to the authorities for investigation and engagement of the individuals involved with Plan International or the implementing partner was terminated.
- 12 incidents were confirmed as sexual harassment as defined by our policy. These involved two Plan International staff and ten associates. In all cases, the perpetrators were dismissed, or the engagement of associate terminated. All instances of criminal sexual harassment were referred to the authorities for investigation.
- 40 cases involved other inappropriate conduct such as neglect, physical violence, emotional abuse and other safeguarding policy breaches such as unsupervised/inappropriate contact or communication with children. These involved nine Plan International staff and 31 associates. 11 cases resulted in the termination of engagement of the individuals involved. Five of these cases were significant enough to be reported to the local authorities. Another 13 resulted in termination of the engagement of staff or associate. In the remaining cases, formal warnings were given and/or gaps in operations were addressed and additional safeguarding measures put in place where required.
- 13 cases involving other inappropriate conduct perpetrated by staff (2) and associates (11) were still under investigation and are thus open at the time of this report.

As a standard practice, Plan International carries out internal investigation or review in each case to identify and address any gaps in safeguarding. Due to their sensitive nature, we provide details of individuals' safeguarding cases to the appropriate authorities only.

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