

SAFEGUARDING CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE REPORT FY2021

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.

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.

Plan International continues its drive to achieve lasting cultural and behavioural change to truly uphold its safeguarding commitment to 'do no harm' and work in alignment with Plan International's intersectional feminist principles.

Highlights of significant areas of work undertaken in FY2021 to strengthen safeguarding include:

Improving our safeguarding and safe and inclusive culture

- **In-depth workshops on the Exploration of Power, Privilege and Bias and the impact on a Safe Culture and Upholding our Safeguarding Commitments.** These continue to be rolled out with sessions held for leaderships across the organisation.

Plan International has obtained a level of recognition for these workshops and particularly the application of an intersectional feminist lens. As a result, the organisation has been called upon to offer topic specific sessions/taster sessions to some of our peers in the sector.

- **The completion of anti-racism specific modules** accompanied by an **Anti-Racism Courageous Conversations Toolkit**. These were developed in response to the call of ensuring a safe culture from the perspective of race. The module and toolkit provide all staff members with space to discuss and understand race-related issues and the impact on a safe and inclusive work environment, engagements, and programme and service delivery, as well as a supportive resource to help address and challenge race-related issues.
- **The 5 yearly global survey on safeguarding**, which this year surveyed views on our safeguarding culture and interventions from an intersectional perspective was released. The survey targeted staff and programme participants. Results are currently being analysed and will be released in the second half of FY22

Improving technical implementation of our safeguarding commitments

- Our Safeguarding Foundation workshop was converted for virtual delivery and refresher trainings offered.
- Our global guidance on online safety was revised and strengthened to address gaps.
- We initiated the development of a mobile application which will provide *on-the-go* safeguarding learning for staff, partner organisations and other associates.
- We undertook intensive socialisation and support to our programming countries on ensuring safe programming and influencing delivery, effective safeguarding risk assessments, embedding safeguarding in security and sponsorship activities.

Strengthening Preventing Sexual harassment, Exploitation and Abuse (PSHEA) and Safeguarding in Emergency Response:

- PSHEA training materials were developed and updated, and webinars and workshops delivered.
- We initiated the development of a PSHEA essentials modules which will be a mandatory induction module for all staff and direct associates.
- PSHEA checklists and guidance in emergencies were developed and published, strengthening safeguarding prevention and reporting measures in all our emergency response work.

The above interventions contributed to strengthening our capacity and understanding, ensuring we are doing what we can 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 FY2021

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 more than **10,000 staff** in the more than **75 countries** where the organisation is active. In **fiscal year 2021 (1 July 2020 to 30 June 2021)**, Plan International was active in over 60,000 communities and 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 2021, Plan International managed 97 safeguarding incidents involving individuals associated with the organisation. This includes staff members, representatives of partner organisations, community volunteers, consultants and sponsors.

Of the 97 incidents:

- 18 incidents were found not to be safeguarding breaches.
- 13 incidents were confirmed as sexual exploitation and abuse as defined by our policy. These involved two Plan International staff and 11 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.
- Seven incidents were confirmed as sexual harassment as defined by our policy. These involved one Plan International staff and six 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 except in one instance where the survivor exercised her legal right to not report and ask for non-reporting by Plan International.
- 35 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 (12 cases involving six Plan International staff and six associates) or poor implementation of procedures which could have led to the harm of a child or programme participant but resulted in no harm (23 cases). 12 cases resulted in the termination of engagement of the individuals involved. Four of these cases were significant enough to be reported to the local authorities. In the remaining cases, formal warnings were given and/or gaps in operations were addressed and additional safeguarding measures put in place where required.
- Seven incidents were designated as inconclusive. These are cases for which there was insufficient/unclear evidence/information to make a decision regarding the allegations investigated. These involved two cases of sexual exploitation and abuse as defined by our policy and allegedly perpetrated by two Plan International associates, two cases of sexual harassment as defined by our policy and allegedly perpetrated by two Plan International staff and three cases of policy breach relating to poor execution of procedures which could have resulted in harm.
- 17 cases were still under investigation and are thus open at the time of this report. This related to 15 cases of other inappropriate conduct allegedly perpetrated by staff (7) and associates (8) and two cases of alleged poor implementation of procedures which could have led to harm.

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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