

Safeguarding Children and programme participants REPORT FY2023

As an organisation that upholds human rights and believes in the inherent dignity of people in all their diversity, Plan International's foremost priority is the safety and protection of the children and programme participants we work with. Nothing trumps this.

Plan International recognises that violence is prevalent throughout the world and in all societies. Some children and adults are at greater risk of violence due to intersecting identities, for example, due to their gender, sexual orientation, ethnic origin, disability, age or illness.

We have a Global Safeguarding Policy, which covers the prevention of sexual harassment, exploitation and abuse (PSHEA) of children and programme participants we work with. This policy outlines how we uphold our commitments to providing a safe, protective and supportive environment for children and young people in all their diversity.

We are fully committed to:

- *Creating a safe and inclusive culture that allows children, programme participants, staff, associates and visitors to thrive and feel secure while engaging with Plan International; and supports people to understand, exercise their rights and report any concerns. We promote the active involvement of children and programme participants in their own protection.*
- *Addressing the drivers of gender inequality and unequal power relations that can lead to harm and violence, including sexual harassment, sexual exploitation and sexual abuse (SHEA) through gender responsive intersectional safeguarding of all children and programme participants from all forms of violence by staff, associates and visitors.*
- *Strengthening, cultivating and sharing the capacity of all staff, associates and visitors so they understand, and are supported in meeting, their safeguarding roles, responsibilities, and their duty to do no harm. We take positive action to prevent anyone who might be a risk to children and programme participants from becoming involved with us.*
- *Promoting child and programme participant safe practices, approaches, interventions and environments which respect, recognise and respond to the specific safeguarding needs and the different protection risks faced by children and programme participants based on their gender and other identities. We will challenge and do not tolerate inequality, discrimination or exclusion.*
- *Encouraging, facilitating and receiving all reports related to safeguarding or SHEA concerns. We are committed to ensuring appropriate, adequate and accessible mechanisms for reporting are in place for staff, associates, children, programme participants and communities at large.*
- *Responding in a timely, effective, safe, comprehensive, procedurally fair and confidential manner to all Safeguarding complaints, allegations and incidents, ensuring victims'/survivors' perspectives, voices and best interests are central to any efforts to prevent and respond to any safeguarding concern and providing necessary support to victims/survivors. We have zero tolerance to inaction on safeguarding and SHEA reports.*

Our policy is underpinned by the principles of:

1. **Indisputable rights:** All children under 18 years have equal rights to protection from all forms of violence as declared in Article 19 of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child. In addition, the Universal Declaration of Human Rights recognises fundamental human rights, the dignity, worth and equal rights of people at any age.
2. **Zero tolerance for inaction:** Plan International believes that any form of violence is unacceptable and inaction on reports of any safeguarding concern will not be tolerated.
3. **Survivor-centred:** All decisions and actions in response to safeguarding concerns and allegations and breaches of this policy will be survivor-centred.
4. **Equality and inclusion:** Plan International recognises that imbalances in power and gender and social inequality are key drivers for violence and SHEA.
5. **Shared responsibility:** All staff, associates and visitors have a responsibility to prevent harm, violence and SHEA, and must take their safeguarding responsibilities seriously.
6. **Open and accountable:** We are committed to openness and transparency. Our leaders will set clear expectations and take personal and organisational responsibility to create safe and inclusive environments to ensure a culture of equity and inclusion.

Our Safeguarding and PSHEA framework promotes a holistic approach which requires:

- Provision of core guidelines and tools for implementation.
- Creation of a culture of awareness for staff, associates, and the children and programme participants that we work with and their families.
- Building the safeguarding and PSHEA 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 programme participants.
- Ensuring all are aware of how and where to report safeguarding and SHEA concerns.
- Application of safe recruitment and engagement processes.
- Inclusion of safeguarding and PSHEA in our risk management processes.
- Identification of managerial and staff responsibilities for ensuring the implementation of safeguarding and PSHEA.
- Having in place a set of standards which guide the embedding of safeguarding and PSHEA in all aspects of our work.
- Regular monitoring and evaluation of safeguarding and PSHEA measures to ensure their effectiveness, including audits involving staff, associates, children and programme participants we work with on their awareness of and attitude towards safeguarding and PSHEA.
- Ensuring visible and committed leaders who role model our values and principles related to safeguarding and PSHEA.



Significant progress has continued to be made in safeguarding and PSHEA initiatives started in FY2022 and others which started in FY2023 which focus on strengthening safeguarding and the prevention of sexual harassment, exploitation, and abuse (PSHEA) measures and interventions within the Federation, enhancing that capacity of our staff and our associates in these areas and ensuring awareness raising with the children, programme participants and communities we work with/in.

Key highlights

- **Operational Plan 2023 to 2027:** The Operational Plan was finalised and endorsed by the Leadership Team in FY2023. This operational plan has three distinct themes:
 - Safe Culture
 - Safe Programmes and Interventions
 - Safe Reporting

These themes complement the safeguarding implementation standards and other safeguarding thematic areas of work. The Operational Plan has informed the central safeguarding initiatives undertaken this financial year.

- **Safeguarding standards:** Late FY2023 saw the review and revision the safeguarding standards and other key documents and materials (such as the Global Safeguarding Reporting and Responding Guidelines and Safeguarding Essentials course materials) begin. Consultations were held across the Federation with a cross-section of respondents to inform the review. Following these consultations, a second draft was presented to the Safeguarding Technical Expert and Resource Mobilisation Group for their review. The final draft of the standards is underway, and the final standards are due FY2024/25.
- **Preventing Sexual Harassment Exploitation and Abuse (PSHEA) Policy revised and strengthened:** In FY2023 the PSHEA Policy was strengthened to mirror the comprehensiveness of our Global Safeguarding Policy. The PSHEA Policy has, therefore, been revised to include Intersectionality, a PSHEA specific Code of Conduct, general guidelines for implementing the policy, (all of which are covered in the Global Safeguarding Policy) and refers to the Inter-Agency Standing Committee (IASC) Six Core Principles relating to SEA.
- **Masculinities for Prevention of Violence including PSHEA Module:** This module was finalised and in FY2023 the first Training of Trainers (TOTs) was successfully conducted in the Latin America region and is currently being cascaded by this cadre of trainers. Three more TOTs are planned for FY2024 in our other regions.
- **Strengthening our Safeguarding and Case management investigation pool:** In FY2023 two Safeguarding/SHEA Allegation Investigation and Case Management workshops were delivered. The workshops continue to be strengthened to ensure continued alignment with sector standards.
- **Power, Privilege and Bias workshops for Leaders:** There has been a substantial increase in the provision of these workshops. They are now available for all leaders every six months and regularly to all other staff. This workshop (consisting of 5 sessions) has also become a mandatory element of the Safeguarding Foundation workshop. Late FY2023 saw the start of the development of the second edition of the workshop and the self-directed eLearning versions of sessions 1 and 2, where participants can choose to end their learning. Sessions 3 to 5 will always remain as facilitated sessions and open to e-learning participants who wish to continue learning. FY2024 will see the piloting and the finalisation of the e-learning modules which will be available in Arabic, English, French, Portuguese and Spanish to all staff and partners.
- **Strengthening safeguarding - with an intersectional lens - in our programming and influencing interventions:** In FY2023, we actively scaled up this important initiative by providing virtual workshops in all regions. FY2024 will see these workshops enhanced; they will even more actively promote the requirement for safeguarding to be implemented in programmes and influencing interventions using an inclusion and intersectional lens. TOTs are planned for late FY2024 early FY2025.
- **The Disability Inclusive Safeguarding addendum** is now disseminated to all offices and the training programme now part of our standard workshop and available on Plan Academy.
- In FY2023 a pre-final draft of the **Diverse SOGIESC (sexual orientations, gender identities, gender expressions and sex characteristics) Inclusive Safeguarding in Programming addendum** was developed, and this will be piloted in FY2024 via a training programme.
- **2nd edition of our Safeguarding Foundation Training Toolkit ‘The 5 Ps Model – Helping Plan’s people become Active protectors of Children and Program Participants in all their diversity:** In FY2023 this Safeguarding Foundation Training Toolkit began production. It seeks to take participants on a journey of self-reflection of theirs’ and the wider society’s’ perspectives on children and young people of various diverse identities, their personal values and attitudes and what this might mean for safeguarding, to understanding abuse and what needs to be in place within an organisation in relation to safeguarding children and programme participants as well as the technical implementation of the safeguarding policy. The toolkit will be finalised in FY2024 with TOTs taking place in all regions.
- **Dignity, Representation and Safeguarding in Communications Guidelines** were finalised in FY2023. They are fully supportive of Plan International’s Safeguarding Policy ensuring our media and communication interventions take place in a manner that is safe, respectful and inclusive (bearing in mind power, privilege and bias thinking) and uphold our anti-racism commitment and principles
- **Safe Culture Assessment Tool:** FY2023 saw the initiation of the production of the Safe Culture Assessment Tool. This tool supports Plan International’s commitment to ensuring a safe culture, which is open, welcoming, inclusive, respectful, and fair for all, irrespective of any individual differences/identities. The Safe Culture Assessment Tool aims to help leaders and staff to better identify the norms, values, and behaviours necessary to promote a sense of psychological safety amongst both personnel and programme participants in their offices. The tool is for use by both Safeguarding and Workplace. Piloting of this tool will start mid FY2024.
- **Safe Partnership Tool:** In FY2023, this tool was revised in collaboration with the with Global Programmes and Operations team and socialised by the departments. In FY2024 the tool will be used to ensure safeguarding due diligence for all new partnerships
- **Safeguarding/PSHEA learning events:** Safeguarding webinars and training were provided to over 207,000 staff, partners, programme participants and volunteers (all regions).

SAFEGUARDING CHILDREN AND PROGRAMME INCIDENT REPORT FY2023

Safeguarding, as defined by our policy, is the responsibility we bear to protect children and young people - ensuring that no child or programme participant is subject to any form of harm because of their association with Plan International.

This includes ensuring that their contact with us and those associated with us is safe, and that where there are concerns over a child or programme participant's welfare, appropriate and timely action is taken to address the concern.

Plan International has a dedicated global policy on safeguarding and a related Preventing Sexual Harassment Exploitation and Abuse (PSHEA) policy which sets our standards and procedures for keeping children and programme participants safe. This includes the preventive, response and referral measures we implement, and mechanisms to deal with safeguarding and PSHEA breaches.

It is critical that safeguarding (including SHEA) incidents and their reporting are understood in the appropriate context. Plan International has more than **10,000 staff** in the more than **80 countries** where we are active. In **fiscal year 2023 (1 July 2022 to 30 June 2023)**, Plan International was active in over 67,000 communities and our programmes benefited over 22 million girls and more than 19 million boys worldwide.

A lack of reported safeguarding/SHEA cases, or a very low number, would be a significant concern as this can indicate underreporting, or that individuals are hesitant or fearful to report incidents. The reporting and subsequent response to cases serves as crucial indicators that our systems are effective, and that individuals feel confident in reporting any breaches.

For children and programme participants, and their families affected by safeguarding and PSHEA breaches, Plan International provides support sensitive to their needs and circumstances and ensures a survivor-centred and trauma-informed approach. For example, this includes taking their wishes seriously and into consideration and supporting them to access services that provide medical, psychosocial and other support.

During fiscal year 2023, Plan International managed 128 safeguarding incidents involving individuals associated with the organisation. This includes staff members, representatives of partner organisations, community volunteers, consultants and sponsors.

Of the 128 incidents:

- 21 incidents were found not to be safeguarding breaches.
- 12 incidents were confirmed as sexual exploitation and abuse as defined by our policy. These involved four Plan International staff and eight 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.
- Five incidents were confirmed as sexual harassment as defined by our policy. These involved one Plan International staff and four 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.
- 13 cases of criminal SHEA allegations are under external investigation with local authorities. The cases involved two staff and 11 associates. In all these cases, engagements with the alleged staff or associates were terminated on the grounds of non-criminal policy breaches or risks emerging irrespective of the pending police investigation.
- 64 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 (34 cases) or poor implementation of procedures which could have led to the harm of a child or programme participant but resulted in no harm (30 cases). These cases involved a total of 13 staff, 44 Associates and seven procedure failings perpetrated at a departmental level. 25 cases resulted in the termination of engagement of the individuals involved. In the remaining cases, formal warnings were given and/or gaps in operations were addressed and additional safeguarding measures put in place where required.
- Eight cases were deemed inconclusive¹. This consisted of four cases of SHEA Allegations (involving three staff and one associate) and four cases of other inappropriate conduct (involving one staff and two associates). Two cases resulted in termination of engagement, and the remaining cases resulted in warnings and/or ongoing monitoring of behaviour through observation and appraisal.
- Five cases were still under investigation and are thus open at the time of this report. This related to two cases of sexual exploitation and abuse allegedly perpetrated by associates,

¹ *Inconclusive cases are those cases for which there was insufficient / unclear evidence/information to make a decision regarding the allegation investigated.*

one case of other inappropriate conduct allegedly perpetrated by an associate and two cases of alleged poor implementation of procedures which could have led to harm.

Plan International places a strong emphasis on accountability and transparency when addressing incidents involving staff members. There have been no instances of repeated incidents with the same staff, indicating a high tolerance level. Immediate termination is the standard consequence for most offences, except for cases where a warning is issued. If an individual with a prior warning is involved in another incident, they are promptly dismissed. The rarity of second incidents underscores the seriousness with which warnings are regarded, ensuring that individuals with prior misconduct are swiftly removed from the organisation to prevent further harm.

As a standard practice, Plan International carries out internal investigation or review in each case to identify and address any gaps in safeguarding.

In addition, a detailed analysis of incidents dealt with under the policy is carried out every six months to ensure an analysis and understanding of key trends, risks, issues and emerging challenges and putting in place actions needed to address them / reduce risks. These reports provide the basis for an annual report on incidents and safeguarding/PSHEA progress which is then submitted to our Members Assembly for review before circulation to all Directors and Safeguarding Focal Points in the Federation.

Due to their sensitive nature, we provide details of individuals' safeguarding cases to the appropriate authorities only.

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