

Safeguarding children and programme participants report FY2024

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 is fully committed to providing a safe, protective and supportive environment for all children and all programme participants, irrespective of age, and in all their diversity with their welfare as the paramount consideration.

Furthermore, we maintain a clear and explicit stance on the Prevention of Sexual Harassment, Exploitation and Abuse (PSHEA) against any child, programme participant, members of a community where Plan International works, staff, associate, or visitor who all have a right to report any concerns, allegations or suspicions of Sexual Harassment, Exploitation and Abuse (SHEA)¹.

Through our Global Safeguarding Policy and associated policies, such as the PII Preventing Sexual Harassment, Exploitation and Abuse Policy (PSHEA), we strive to make sure our safeguarding and PSHEA commitments are met and our principles, values and practices are demonstrated consistently across all parts of the organisation.

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 proactive 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 associated with 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' and/or survivors' perspectives, voices and best interests are central to any efforts to prevent and respond to any safeguarding concern and providing necessary support. We have zero tolerance for inaction on safeguarding and SHEA reports.*

¹ Note that Workplace PSHEA (i.e. staff on staff SHEA) sits under the remit of the People and Culture (P&C) Employee Relations department. This aspect of PSHEA is not covered under the Safeguarding and PSHEA implementation standards and interventions nor reported under Safeguarding. Workplace SHEA issues and PSHEA interventions are reported on under the People and Culture umbrella.

Our policy is underpinned by the principles of:

1. **Indisputable rights:** All children under 18 years of age 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 promote 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.



Plan International remains fully committed to providing a safe, protective and supportive environment for all children and all programme participants, irrespective of age, and in all their diversity. Everyone has the right to a safe, respectful, inclusive, harm-free environment. Our organisation, working with some of the most vulnerable individuals, is committed to undertaking every effort to continuously improve our safeguarding and PSHEA practices and culture

Key highlights of initiatives undertaken in FY2024 include

I. Strengthening implementation of Safeguarding and PSHEA

- The **revised Safeguarding and PSHEA manual and standards (3rd edition) were finalised and launched**, including explicit PSHEA elements, streamlined indicators and clarity on roles and responsibilities for implementation. The revised standards formed part of the management standards against which countries assessed themselves.
- The **2nd edition of the safeguarding foundation training toolkit**, "The 5 Ps Model," was completed and launched to support consistent policy implementation.

II. Strengthening Safeguarding and SHEA culture including general awareness and prevention

- The drive to strengthen the PSHEA culture at Plan International continues through various initiatives like the **Safeguarding and PSHEA Foundation workshops**, the **Safeguarding and PSHEA for Leaders** and the **Masculinities for PSHEA workshops**.
- The first two sessions of the five-session **Power, Privilege, and Bias (PPB) Workshop** are now available as self-paced, self-directed e-learning modules. These are now prerequisites for many safe culture discussions and in person PPB workshops which have aided deeper reflection and mindset change.
- A **Safe Culture Assessment Tool** was piloted in eight countries aiding the promotion of psychological safety for staff and programme participants.

III. Strengthening Safeguarding and PSHEA in Partnerships

- Promoted the use of partner due diligence and safeguarding/PSHEA assessment tools.
- Resocialised the partnerships contract template which requires the inclusion of safeguarding/PSHEA requirements.
- Responded to partner support requests which included workshops on safeguarding fundamentals, embedding safeguarding in programming, and safeguarding and security.
- The development of Safeguarding and PSHEA guidance and templates for Consortia Partnerships, will start in FY2025

IV. Strengthening Safeguarding and PSHEA in Programmes and Interventions

- **Increased in-country** and virtual training, walk throughs and **support on safe programming approaches** including disability and diverse SOGEISC inclusive safeguarding.
- Started the **development of safe programming markers** to track the embedding of safeguarding and PSHEA in programming and influencing interventions.
- Completed and launched the 3rd edition of our **Safe Events Guidance** which includes strengthened guidance on risk assessment, chaperone selection and inclusive youth selection and engagement.
- Committed to the **development of child and youth-friendly Safeguarding and PSHEA communications pack** for Country Offices to use, which will standardise practice and ensure quality.

V. Reporting Safeguarding and PSHEA to Donors

- All SHEA cases, with the exception of staff on staff/peer agency staff SHEA, are managed by the Global Safeguarding and PSHEA Unit. The exceptions sit under the remit of the People and Culture Department Employee Relations Unit. Regardless of the remit under which case management sits, the Global Safeguarding and PSHEA Unit leads on presentations and reports to donors.

VI. Safeguarding and PSHEA in Sponsorship

- Global Sponsorship Unit led initiatives which will positively impact safeguarding and PSHEA in sponsorship. This includes phasing out post-graduation contact and piloting the exchange of first names only.

VII. Other key initiatives.

- **Investigation guidelines and workshops strengthened** to ensure increased understanding of survivor centred and trauma informed approaches. A self-paced e-learning module on trauma-informed approaches will be developed in FY2025.
- **Dignity, Representation, and Safeguarding in Communications Guidelines** socialised and promoted.
- Safeguarding and PSHEA training and awareness raising sessions reached over 325,000 individuals (staff, programme participants, partners, community members, volunteers etc) in FY2024 (a 57% increase from FY2023).

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 details 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 83 countries** where we are active. In **fiscal year 2024 (1 July 2023 to 30 June 2024)**, Plan International was active in over 64,000 communities and our programmes benefited over 23 million girls and more than 20 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 is crucial indicators that our systems are effective, and that individuals feel confident in reporting suspected 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 2024, Plan International managed 163 safeguarding incidents involving individuals associated with the organisation. This includes staff members, representatives of partner organisations, community volunteers, consultants, and sponsors.

Of the 163 incidents:

- 24 incidents were found not to be safeguarding breaches.
- 16 incidents were confirmed as sexual exploitation and abuse as defined by our policy. These involved two Plan International staff and 14 associates.
- Seven incidents were confirmed as sexual harassment as defined by our policy. These involved three Plan International staff and four associates.

In four of the confirmed SHEA cases, staff were dismissed, or the engagement of the associate terminated. In one case, the alleged perpetrator absconded before the case was closed and in two cases, formal warnings were issued. Unless indicated otherwise, criminal incidents were reported to the relevant authorities. Where cases are still under investigation by the authorities, staff or associates were dismissed based on non-criminal breaches of our own PSHEA policy, or internal investigation findings which uphold the breach based on the balance of probability.

- There were 101 cases were confirmed as other inappropriate conduct such as neglect, physical violence or emotional abuse (19 cases) and other safeguarding policy breaches such as unsupervised/inappropriate contact or communication with children or poor implementation of procedures which could have led to the harm of a child or programme participant, but resulted in no harm (82 cases). These cases involved a total of 10 staff, 70 associates, and 21 procedure failings perpetrated at a departmental level. There are 51 cases that 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 inconclusive². This consisted of three cases of SHEA Allegations (involving one staff and two associates) and five cases of other inappropriate conduct (involving three staff and two associates). Two cases resulted in termination of engagement, one case was significant enough to warrant reporting to the authorities; the remaining cases resulted in warnings and/or ongoing monitoring of behaviour through observation and appraisal.
- Seven cases were still under investigation and are thus open at the time of this report. This related to four cases of non-criminal sexual exploitation and abuse allegedly involving three staff and one associate, 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.

² *Inconclusive cases are those cases for which there was insufficient and/or unclear evidence/information to make a decision regarding the allegation investigated.*

- At the end of FY2023, five cases were under investigation – these are now closed. These included two criminal sexual exploitation and abuse cases involving two associates, one case of criminal inappropriate conduct involving an associate, and two cases of procedural failures that could have harmed a child or participants. Criminal cases were reported to the authorities and resulted in dismissals. Procedure failings resulted in warnings.

Incidents were managed according to local procedures, which include internal investigations, support for survivors, reporters and witnesses as needed. In some instances, this also included support for alleged perpetrators where allegations were not upheld, scaling up protection programming, and conducting safeguarding and PSHEA reviews.

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 and 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 across Plan International.

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