

Dóchas Safeguarding Code

Committing to lead a culture of safeguarding in the Irish humanitarian and development sector

Context

The leaders of Ireland's International development and humanitarian NGOs are committed to creating a world where justice, equality, solidarity and respect for human rights are the norm. This includes ensuring that those who work in and with our organisations,¹ and communities² and children with whom we work, are kept safe from all forms of violence, abuse and exploitation. We will do this through robust and effective approaches to safeguarding which, in turn, enable organisations to deliver programmes and activities of the highest standard.

Vision

Dóchas member organisations are committed to delivering the highest standards of good practise and governance. This includes building on the safeguarding policies, practices and standards that have been developed, ensuring that they are continuously strengthened and are being applied across our membership. Our collective learning and collaboration on safeguarding has also prompted us to recognise the importance of leadership within and between NGOs to create, promote and nurture a culture of safeguarding. The attitudes, values and behaviours demonstrated by us as senior leaders are critical to the establishment of a transformative, effective and, lasting culture of safeguarding. Whilst we remain, as Dóchas members, autonomous organisations with our own decision-making processes, priorities and approaches, we are articulating here a Code of Conduct, a commitment to leading change, through common principles and behaviours, to support the creation of stronger safeguarding cultures.

We are committed to continuous learning. This includes sharing learning and experience with one another and with other sector umbrella groups such as BOND and Interaction. We will keep our principles and commitments within this Code under review and will update and adapt as we move forward.

We will also ensure that those who support our work, such as donors, governments and the public understand why we are making these commitments, what they mean for how we work and the changes we are expecting as a result.

¹ Staff, volunteers, members of governance structures, consultants and other organisation representatives

² Communities has been used throughout the document to include adults in communities who are vulnerable or at risk of harm. In certain contexts, all adults in a given community might be considered vulnerable because of their particular circumstances

Our principles

- 1. Personal Responsibility.** *Be responsible, individually and collectively, for safeguarding our staff and those we work with, communities and children.* We will take responsibility for creating safe organisations and to ensure that all who come into contact with our work is safe.
- 2. Do No Harm.** *Take our responsibility to do no harm very seriously.* Our work is built on the foundation of providing relevant assistance and capacity building supports in a way that does not create any new or additional harm. We will ensure that this foundation remains to the fore in the work of our organisation.
- 3. Inclusivity.** *Create an inclusive organisational environment which celebrates diversity.* We will foster and promote greater diversity and inclusion within our workplaces so we can be confident that everyone working within, or with, our organisation is safe regardless of their identity.
- 4. Identifying power and privilege.** *Recognise the impact of power and privilege within our organisations and ensure that power is understood and used in a positive way in developing and supporting safe working environments.*
- 5. Listening.** *Listen to the views and opinions of different groups of staff, vulnerable adults, children, communities and stakeholders.* We need to enhance compliance to include conversation, listening and learning so we can bring about necessary change. We will create open cultures where people can freely express their concerns through clear and accessible channels.
- 6. Responsive and survivor-centred.** We will demonstrate through our actions that *every incident or allegation is important*, that every case is promptly investigated with due process, that we encourage people to speak up and our focus is on supporting the survivor as well as seeking justice.
- 7. Safeguarding is everyone's responsibility.** While recognising our responsibility as leaders, we also recognise that safeguarding is not the responsibility of any one person or even a group of people; it is a shared responsibility. We will continue to keep safeguarding as a key focus throughout our organisations thus encouraging staff to recognise this shared responsibility.

Our commitments

We are committed to exemplifying leadership behaviours that demonstrate we are upholding these principles and promoting organisational actions, in order to create and nurture safeguarding cultures.

Leadership behaviours

- Promote diversity within the organisation, recognising our own conscious and unconscious biases and creating a space for others to do the same.
- Role model the behaviours which demonstrate openness, encourage innovation, a willingness to acknowledge mistakes and share experience and learning.
- Empower staff to challenge behaviours, practices or programming that maintains a negative use of power and could lead to situations of abuse or exploitation.
- Create and encourage collaboration among staff and those we work with, to strengthen safeguarding practices.
- Clearly communicate Safeguarding policies and procedures to different groups of staff and stakeholders using appropriate opportunities, language and methodologies.
- Be consistent in the application of standards and measures.
- Provide, and elicit, honest, timely and constructive feedback to and from relevant staff.
- Give recognition to practices and behaviour which safeguard staff, children and communities and set standards for others to follow.

Organisational actions

- *Conduct analyses of where power lies within organisations*, where it has a potentially adverse impact on safeguarding staff, children and communities and how it can be transformed to enable a stronger safeguarding culture and practice.
- *Continue to create and promote more diverse and inclusive working environments* through a) clear diversity and inclusion policies, b) values driven recruitment and promotion processes (from Board to frontline staff), c) diversity and inclusion training and awareness raising, and d) more equitable partner and other stakeholder engagement practices.

- Create opportunities for *different groups of staff, children, communities and stakeholders* to inform *safeguarding policies and practices* through e.g. safe space discussions and confidential feedback mechanisms.
- *Introduce and strengthen existing mechanisms through which all staff and stakeholders can be clear on expected behaviours of the organisation*, for example, codes of conduct, incorporating safeguarding in performance management processes.
- Strengthen reporting and response systems and processes so that *different groups of staff, children and communities* are able, and confident, to *complain, report* or provide feedback and receive information on the outcomes of their complaints.
- Introduce a process for *reviewing organisational reporting and response systems* and processes.
- Create appropriate opportunities to *include survivors in case reviews and safeguarding learning reviews*.
- *Strengthen whistle-blower protection* with clear sanctions for retaliation against those speaking up and clear processes for dealing with knowingly false allegations.
- Have *clear safeguarding expectations agreed and signed off within partnership arrangements*, including how partners can support one another to implement good practice.
- Include *safeguarding as a standing agenda item* in Board and executive team meetings at reasonable intervals and at least quarterly.

Our accountability

We will be accountable to this Code of Conduct through the following:

- We commit to an annual meeting of leaders in the sector to discuss and share learning.
- We will agree to an annual reflection on progress in strengthening our safeguarding cultures, systems and practices.
- We will undertake collective research on barriers to speaking up and reporting concerns, the results of which will inform organisational responses.
- We will ensure support is available to members with less resources through sharing of experiences, practices and materials.
- We will review and re-commit to this Code on a three yearly basis.

September 2019