

Leadership Safeguarding Charter

Commitment to cultivate a safeguarding
culture in the Irish humanitarian
and development sector

dóchas

The Irish Association
of Non-Governmental
Development Organisations



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“ Safeguarding is the responsibility of organisations to ensure that their people, operations and programmes do no harm to the individuals they work to support, and do not expose them to abuse or exploitation. It includes ensuring we protect our staff from harm and inappropriate behaviour such as sexual harassment in the workplace. ”



Context

Leaders of Ireland's international development and humanitarian NGOs are dedicated to building a world where justice, equality, solidarity and respect for human rights prevail. Organisations are responsible for ensuring that their staff, operations and programmes do no harm to the individuals they work to support, and do not expose them to abuse or exploitation. This includes physical, emotional and sexual harassment, exploitation and abuse by staff and volunteers as well as safeguarding risks caused by programme planning and execution. We must also ensure that we protect our staff from harm and inappropriate behaviour such as sexual harassment in the workplace. Dóchas members will implement strong and effective safeguarding measures to enable them to deliver programmes and activities of the highest quality and respond appropriately when harm occurs.

Vision

Dóchas members are committed to upholding the highest standards of good practice and governance in safeguarding by continually enhancing their policies and processes. Leaders also have a responsibility to foster a culture of safeguarding within their organisations. The attitudes, values and behaviours demonstrated by leaders are crucial for establishing an effective, enduring and positive safeguarding culture. While we, as Dóchas members, are independent organisations with our own decision-making processes, priorities and approaches, we will endeavour to lead change throughout the sector by sharing principles and behaviours that promote a strong safeguarding culture.

We are committed to ongoing learning to improve our understanding and application of the principles, behaviours and actions that support such a culture.



Our principles



- 1 Do No Harm.** We take our responsibility to avoid causing harm very seriously. Our work is based on the principle of providing relevant assistance and capacity strengthening in a manner that anticipates and aims to minimise any risk of harm during the process.
- 2 Zero Tolerance.** We take a zero-tolerance approach to all forms of exploitation or abuse, especially sexual misconduct, as well as to inaction or retaliation against those who report complaints or provide testimony.
- 3 Safeguarding Is Everyone's Responsibility.** While acknowledging our role as leaders, we also understand that safeguarding is not the sole responsibility of any individual. It is a collective responsibility shared among all stakeholders in the sector. We will persist in prioritising safeguarding across our organisations.
- 4 Personal Responsibility.** Each individual within our organisations is responsible for protecting the people we help and those involved in our work, including staff, volunteers and associated personnel. We take responsibility for making sure our organisations are safe and that we have effective safeguarding measures in place.
- 5 Inclusivity.** We strive to establish an inclusive environment that values diversity. We encourage and advocate for equality, diversity and inclusion across our organisations to ensure that

everyone involved with them experiences a psychologically safe working environment, regardless of their identity.

- 6 Identifying Power and Privilege.** We recognise the influence of power and privilege within and among our organisations, partners, and the communities we work with. We aim to ensure that power is identified and utilised positively, while opportunities to exploit positions of power are reduced.

- 7 Listening.** We value the perspectives and voices of the individuals we work to support. We aim to move beyond mere compliance practices and to embrace dialogue, active listening and learning to facilitate positive change.

- 8 A Responsive and Survivor-Centred Approach.** We encourage individuals to speak up and endeavour to show through our actions that every incident or allegation is taken seriously, and each case swiftly addressed with proper procedures. Our priority is to support survivors, respecting their rights and dignity while seeking appropriate justice in line with international safeguarding standards.¹

- 9 Confidentiality.** We recognise the importance of confidentiality and the need to limit who can access and share information. Maintaining confidentiality encourages witnesses to feel comfortable sharing their experiences and helps build trust in the system and the organisation.

¹ Such as InterAction's 'Core Standards for Survivor-Centred Support of Sexual Exploitation, Abuse and Harassment'



Our commitments

We pledge to exhibit leadership behaviours that show we are committed to safeguarding principles and advocate the implementation of organisational actions that align with international standards to foster positive safeguarding cultures.¹

¹ The Core Humanitarian Standard on Quality and Accountability or Keeping Children Safe is recognised as a good assessment tool within the sector.



Leadership behaviours

- Clearly communicate safeguarding policies and procedures to staff, volunteers, partners and stakeholders using suitable opportunities, language and methods.
 - Foster collaboration among staff, volunteers, partners and stakeholders to strengthen safeguarding practices.
 - Display behaviours that reflect dignity, respect, equality, openness, a willingness to acknowledge mistakes and zero tolerance for abuse or exploitation.
 - Empower staff to challenge behaviours, practices or programming that perpetuate misuse of power and could lead to instances or situations of abuse or exploitation.
 - Cultivate open environments where individuals can comfortably voice their concerns through safe, clear, context-specific and accessible channels.
 - Ensure our organisation's safeguarding policy aligns with the principles of this Charter.
 - Promote diversity within the organisation, acknowledging our own conscious and unconscious biases and creating an environment where others feel comfortable doing the same.
- Apply standards and measures consistently.
 - Offer and seek honest, timely and constructive feedback from relevant staff.
 - Promote the principles, behaviours and actions of the Dóchas Safeguarding Charter with partners and stakeholders.



Organisational actions



- Conduct safeguarding risk assessments and take subsequent risk mitigation measures in our operations.
- Create opportunities and allocate resources for staff, volunteers, partners and stakeholders to contribute to safeguarding policies and practices through safe-space discussions and confidential feedback mechanisms.
- Acknowledge the strain that safeguarding responsibilities can place on those with specific roles in this area and commit to providing them with adequate support. This may include professional supervision, well-being initiatives and psychosocial support.
- Implement and enhance existing mechanisms to ensure clarity among staff, volunteers, partners and stakeholders regarding organisations' expected behaviours. This includes raising awareness about codes of conduct, integrating safeguarding into performance management processes and offering robust, mandatory safeguarding training.
- Strengthen reporting and response systems and processes to ensure that the individuals and communities we aim to assist feel empowered and trust organisations enough to raise concerns, report abuse, provide feedback and receive information on the outcomes of their complaints.
- Commit to continuous review, learning and improvement of organisational reporting and response systems and processes.
- Where appropriate and safe, involve survivors in case reviews and safeguarding learning reviews.
- Enhance whistle-blower protection within organisational culture to ensure that it is safe for people to speak up about concerns of harm, exploitation and abuse. Leaders should welcome the voicing of such concerns as part of a positive safeguarding culture and put protections in place for those who have the courage to provide testimony.
- Establish clear safeguarding expectations with mutual accountability and responsibility, resourced and incorporated within partnership agreements. This includes outlining how partners can support and learn from each other to implement good practice specific to their context.
- Include safeguarding as a standing agenda item in board, executive and management team meetings at regular intervals, at least quarterly.



Our accountability



We, as the Dóchas network, commit to following this Charter by:

- Participating in an annual meeting of sector leaders for shared dialogue on implementing and strengthening safeguarding culture, systems and practices
- Sharing research findings to help organisations improve their safeguarding response
- Supporting members to share experiences, practices and materials
- Making sure our organisations have sufficient resources to implement the principles, behaviours and actions outlined in this Charter
- Reviewing and renewing this commitment every three years.





Photo credits

Cover image: A member of the H'mong community in Vietnam, at 15 Chu successfully negotiated her way out of early child marriage. Pictured later as part of Plan International Champions of Change Club, she now encourages others with her story. Credit: Vu Quang (2023).

Page 2/3: A women's bicycle race in northern Burkina Faso to celebrate International Women's Day. Christian Aid has been working in the Sahel region of Africa since the 1970s. Credit: Amy Sheppey/Christian Aid (2018).

Page 4: Women collect water in Uganda, where GOAL, alongside partners such as Charity:Water, works to increase access to safe water in rural communities by facilitating construction of freshwater access points in the north and south-east. Credit: Charity: Water.

Page 5: Aleisar Arana Morales, a member of the indigenous Xinka people in Guatemala. His community in San Rafael las Flores is being pushed further into poverty by mining activities on the land. Credit: Simone Dalmasso/ Trócaire (2023).

Page 7: Adunya Kalemwu, pictured as part of a savings and credit cooperative facilitated by Self Help Africa in Oromia, Ethiopia. Credit: Clare Keogh (2012).

Page 8: Asha Vicky, a South Sudanese refugee in the Imvepi settlement in Northern Uganda and single mother of two, gathers vegetables in the fields at 6am before selling in the market. Asha is part of an Oxfam livelihoods project. Credit: Hans Bach /Oxfam (2023).

Page 10: After the devastating impact of Cyclone Bulbul, 2019, Kokoli Aulia from Satkhira, Bangladesh, receives training in crab-farming and cash support from Christian Aid's local partner Nowabenki Gonomukhi Foundation. Credit: Adam Haggarty/Christian Aid (2019).

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