

Safeguarding Lessons Learned:

Considerations for practitioners in fragile contexts and emergency responses

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Introduction

World Vision International conducted a Lessons Learned process to identify strengths and areas for improvement in safeguarding, particularly in programmes located in fragile contexts or during emergency responses. Discussions focused on safeguarding prevention, risk mitigation, reporting, proactive detection of violations and response to allegations.

The process took place from March to May 2021 and, following interviews with and surveys of World Vision staff based in different departments and offices, and conversations with stakeholders, culminated in an internal virtual workshop.

Participants validated findings, refined and prioritised recommendations, and developed implementation plans around three core themes for improvement and innovation:

- safeguarding risk mitigation in emergency response;
- proactive detection of safeguarding violations; and
- confidentiality and information management.

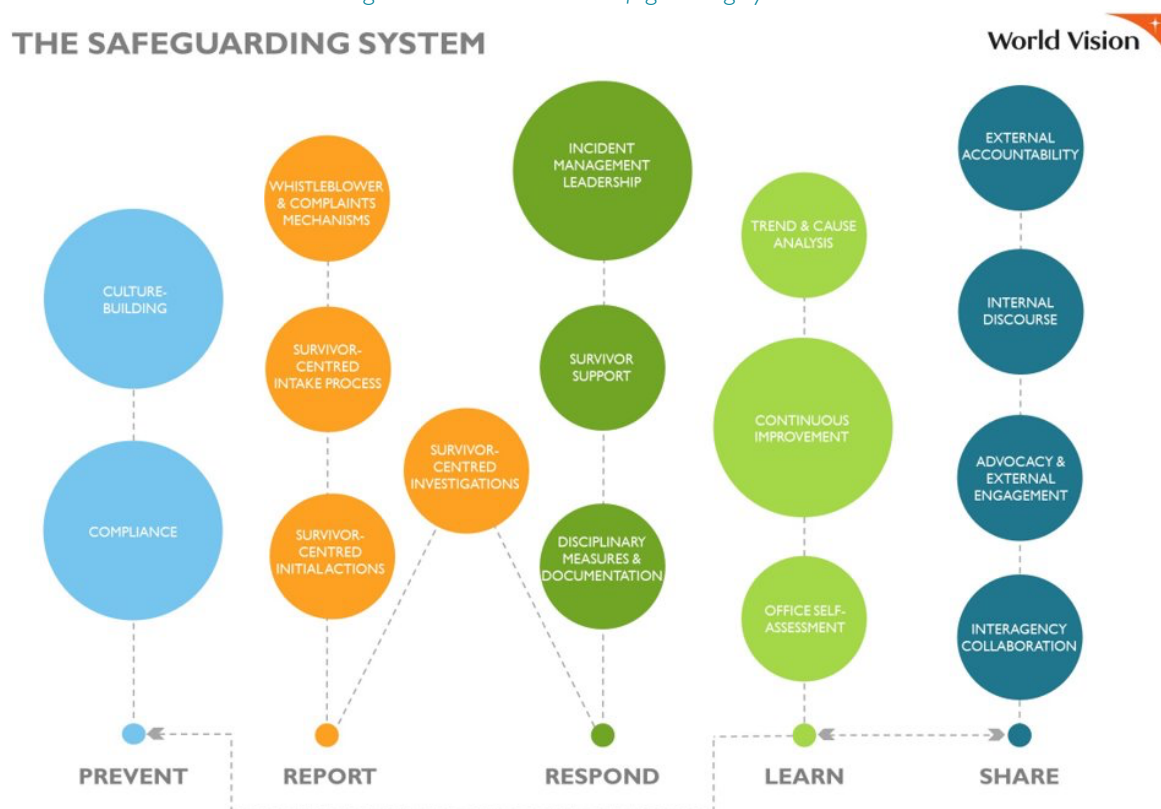
The recommendations are considered in addition to existing practices. This document does not detail all the existing practices and requirements in place for prevention, reporting, and response to safeguarding violations.

This report has been prepared for practioners, peers, and donors outside of World Vision, with language that can be applicable to most emergency responses or programming in fragile contexts.

Safeguarding at World Vision addresses the prevention, reporting, and response to any allegations or actual incidents of exploitation, abuse, or harm committed by World Vision staff or affiliates against any child anywhere, or any adult living where World Vision has a programming presence.

It includes sexual exploitation and sexual abuse (SEA) as well as other forms of harm committed by World Vision staff or affiliates (see <https://www.wvi.org/accountability/publication/child-and-adult-safeguarding-policy>: Child and Adult Safeguarding Policy for full definitions).

Figure 1: World Vision's safeguarding system



SEA in Haiti, #MeToo, and increased safeguarding rigour

Sexual and gender-based violence is a global issue linked to entrenched societal gender and power dynamics and is not isolated to any single context or programme. In 2018, the allegations of a cover-up of SEA in Haiti and a viral, global social movement against sexual abuse and harassment prompted World Vision and donors to review and revise protection standards.

The shocking and serious nature of sexual exploitation and abuse allegations has resulted in significant media exposure, which both increases attention on the subject, bringing allegations to light that might have otherwise been missed, while potentially complicating investigations into allegations.

Within World Vision, the result was the introduction of the Child and Adult Safeguarding policy (wvi.org/safeguarding), which grew from the Child Protection Standards in place since 2000, and Code of Conduct provisions in place since 2003 concerning sexual exploitation and abuse of beneficiaries, and brought them together into one overarching policy. This has meant that:

- World Vision's global safeguarding systems, policies and protocols for training, recruitment and onboarding standards are perceived by staff as highly sophisticated and aligned with industry best practice, and include specific practices like background checks on staff, partners and affiliates, requiring signatures on the policy by all World Vision affiliated people, including casual labourers, and annual mandatory online training.
- World Vision has protocols in place for incident management of safeguarding allegations which outline the roles of different local and oversight functions. The WVI Safeguarding Unit oversees all Level 3 cases (allegations or incidents of harm against children or adult members of the community where WV works). See Annex for World Vision's process map on incident management.
- World Vision is also a signatory to the Standing Committee for Humanitarian Response's Misconduct Disclosure Scheme, which has been fully implemented at international levels while investment is being made to adapt to varied national employment law in all regional and national offices.
- Since the introduction of the Child and Adult Safeguarding policy, World Vision has implemented double-validated annual safeguarding self-assessments (Safeguarding Update Report) for all World Vision offices to track continuous improvement as well as highlight and address gaps in implementation.
- Safeguarding considerations have also been included in a number of internal and external audits, including a safeguarding-specific global internal audit that considered data from more than 40 offices and the CHS independent-verification process.
- Regional safeguarding leads have a mandate to follow up on audit findings to address weaknesses.
- Donors also are conducting more safeguarding due diligence assessments and accountability. They have more highly prioritised safeguarding over the last five years and introduced additional scrutiny to procedures for donor funding allocations, though funding to meet these standards is often not adequately reflected in budgets even in well-resourced humanitarian responses.

The WVI Safeguarding Unit housed under World Vision's Child Protection and Participation Global Lead oversees incident management while promoting prevention and risk mitigation efforts throughout the WV Partnership.

Safeguarding in emergency response and fragile context settings

Humanitarian operating environments are often highly complex. Though specifics vary, challenges faced by World Vision include formal military action and attacks on civilians and humanitarian workers. In insecure zones, retaliation and reprisal including extrajudicial killing may be a risk for staff participating in or leading investigations into wrongdoing.

Often, weak judicial systems, limited government control and a lack of social and support services contribute to a culture of impunity. In fragile contexts, high rates of poverty exacerbate vulnerability, while communities affected by rapid-onset disasters may find themselves plunged into poverty or otherwise find their resilience and coping mechanisms negatively impacted.

Varied national employment laws may hinder the sector's efforts to limit mobility of subjects of complaint who seek employment in other humanitarian agencies.¹

The unique time pressures and the short-term, inflexible nature of grant funding in emergency response may result in the de-prioritisation of safeguarding prevention, mitigation and reporting and detection measures.

Promising practices, recommendations, and innovations to strengthen safeguarding at World Vision

Workshop participants considered findings and recommendations sourced from 28 subject matter experts, in addition to core documentation, for internal incident management and investigation, external engagement and coordination during investigations, and prevention and detection of safeguarding incidents.

Recommendations made by key informants and workshop participants targeted improvement of:

1. Safeguarding risk mitigation in fragile contexts and emergency response
2. Proactive detection of safeguarding violations in locations of under-reporting
3. Confidentiality and information management during incident management

These recommendations are provided in their entirety below.

They are targeted toward safeguarding and disaster management practitioners, as well as leadership, at all levels of the organisation.

TOP TEN Recommendations for Immediate Planning and Action

The ten recommendations prioritised by participants for immediate planning and action were:

Safeguarding risk mitigation in emergency response

1. Include specific safeguarding activities/personnel in programmatic guidance for emergency response
2. Develop safeguarding menu/guidance for proposal development in order to have sufficient funding for necessary safeguarding activities/personnel
3. Ensure contextually appropriate, face-to-face training campaign among staff and volunteers has taken place in rapid onset emergency contexts
4. Require translation into multiple operating languages for safeguarding awareness-raising posters/brochures

Proactive detection of safeguarding violations as part of wider efforts to tackle under-reporting

5. Expand role of field-facing and community engagement staff, including monitoring, evaluation, accountability and learning (MEAL), to include safeguarding detection and so enable reporting
6. Collaborate with survivor-focused partners/service providers to conduct outreach and therefore create more opportunities for communities to report safeguarding violations
7. Conduct proactive targeted enquiries in locations with expected underreporting to draw out reports of safeguarding violations

Information management and confidentiality during incident management

8. Document and communicate clear principles, protocols and office focal points (including funding offices managing donor communications) for information sharing and knowledge management during safeguarding incident management

¹ For example, laws designed to protect workers' rights may inadvertently prevent the free flow of information on sexual misconduct between past and potential employers

9. Include post-investigation community engagement, which may or may not include outcome notification per a survivor-centred approach to be contextualised on a case-by-case basis
10. Develop Safeguarding Incident Management Team responsibility assignment (RASCI) matrix and individual terms of reference for investigation team members and contextualise as part of incident management planning processes

Complete Set of Practices, Recommendations and Innovations

The complete set of recommendations are provided here for leaders and safeguarding practitioners to consider for their local context. They are not all appropriate for all operating environments.

Many of these recommendations are already implemented in some programmes around the world, in whole or in part; these recommendations assume they should be consistently applied where appropriate.

Leaders and practitioners are encouraged to adapt, test, and communicate results of using the recommendations below.

1. Recommendations for Prevention, Mitigation and Detection

To prevent harm and detect violations in order to respond swiftly and appropriately

1.1 Build an Organisation-Wide Safeguarding Culture and Address Staff Behaviour

- 1.1.1. Continue to share messaging from the top that the organisation has a culture and policy of zero tolerance for sexual exploitation and abuse (SEA) and considers it unacceptable behaviour at any level
- 1.1.2. Promote awareness among leaders that increased reporting is a sign that systems are working. Combat the mistaken belief that reporting is a bad sign in order to support strong, level-headed crisis and incident management
- 1.1.3. Evaluate uptake and impact of online safeguarding training. Provide meaningful face-to-face opportunities to reinforce online training.
- 1.1.4. Conduct Safeguarding Awareness Weeks and other leadership-led conversations at regular intervals, including when senior leadership team members and safeguarding focal points visit field offices. Remember to place emphasis on the need to report even unconfirmed information.
- 1.1.5. Include safeguarding in emergency response programming guidance to guard against its de-prioritisation, thereby ensuring that safeguarding is considered in staff structure and initial planning.
- 1.1.6. Include safeguarding training responsibilities in HR job descriptions, including during onboarding of new staff
- 1.1.7. Intensify gender, equity and social inclusion (GESI) efforts across the board and particularly at field level to increase number of women in leadership/managerial positions. Identify talent and engage in targeted capacity building of women leaders.
- 1.1.8. Include safeguarding in line management/supervisory key performance indicators (KPIs)
- 1.1.9. Make safeguarding an essential leadership competency: include safeguarding in leadership job descriptions at local and response levels
- 1.1.10. Explicitly include safeguarding in decision-making processes: treat and handle safeguarding as an integrated part of Risk Management; include safeguarding risk assessment in Go No Go decision-making processes
- 1.1.11. Engage faith leaders as safeguarding champions to build awareness among communities and staff and reduce taboos and misconceptions about safeguarding and faith

- 1.1.12. Require at least two staff to participate in casual/day labourer list management at all times to prevent manipulation

1.2 Ensure Sufficient Funding and Staffing for Safeguarding

Intentional planning and inclusion of safeguarding resources are necessary to fulfil requirements.

- 1.2.1 Use or advocate for (national) emergency preparedness and response funds to achieve minimum safeguarding standards from the earliest days of emergency response
- 1.2.2 Ensure safeguarding activities and costs are included in proposal development and budgets
- 1.2.3 Appoint a safeguarding focal point who speaks the local language and preferably can serve in the role at least over the medium term
- 1.2.4 In fragile contexts and countries at higher risk of disaster, invest in full-time safeguarding staff at national and sub-national levels, rather than focal points

1.3 Enable Reporting, including through Proactively Detecting Violations

Even in a stable environment with strong rule of law, more than 80% of sexual offences are never reported to authorities.²

- 1.3.1 Ensure that World Vision's accountability minimum standards are implemented across the organisation's programming portfolio and that implementation is monitored. These standards make central the need for communities to be informed and understand what standards of behaviour to expect from staff. They also ensure that communities are consulted on which complaints mechanisms are most appropriate for their context. Click here for [World Vision's Programme Accountability Framework](#).
- 1.3.2 Expand role of field-facing and community engagement staff, including Monitoring, Evaluation, Accountability and Learning, to include safeguarding detection, such as posing specific safeguarding questions during focus group discussions with the community that can elicit reporting.
- 1.3.3 Flag instances of little or no reporting to determine whether World Vision should conduct proactive targeted enquiries to detect and enable reporting of safeguarding violations
- 1.3.4 Identify and collaborate with survivor-focused partners/service providers to conduct detection outreach and so enable communities to report safeguarding violations.
- 1.3.5 Identify moments in the child sponsorship programme cycle for proactive detection/discussion on safeguarding violations
- 1.3.6 Ensure field data collection "moments" (e.g., focus group discussions) include support staff (drivers, cleaners, cooks, etc.), volunteers, and day labourers and include safeguarding issues
- 1.3.7 Introduce 'spot checks' and field visits (e.g., at help desks, with community leaders) to ensure fulfilment of safeguarding focal point and field responsibilities
- 1.3.8 Set up and/or participate in interagency teams that engage the community, talk about safeguarding, ask if violations took place
- 1.3.9 Request safeguarding 'peer review' or 'health check' of programming from third parties (e.g., health clusters, protection clusters, GBV clusters, PSEA networks, local ministries)

² UK Office for National Statistics. [Sexual offences in England and Wales overview: Year ending March 2020](#)

- 1.3.10 Flag media enquiries and stories on SEA in programming locations in order to scope need for further detection efforts

2. Recommendations for Internal Incident Management and Investigation

To ensure incident management is effective, survivor-centred, timely and well-coordinated internally

2.1 Apply a Survivor-Centred Approach

World Vision is committed to applying a survivor-centred approach where their preferences, rights, and well-being are considered first in any incident management.

- 2.1.1 Respect confidentiality and establish a strict “need to know” protocol to protect survivor anonymity and dignity
- 2.1.2 Wherever possible³, investigators should respect survivors’ wishes, including seeking consent to participate and on interview location and modality, interviewer and language
- 2.1.3 Design sensitive interview questionnaires to prevent witnesses from being asked or required to self-identify as survivors
- 2.1.4 Identify available counselling, medical care, leave and transportation support to survivors and witnesses to be deployed on a case-by-case basis to survivors and affected staff upon request, ideally building upon the local office Safeguarding Incident Preparedness Plan. Share a practical list of services, rather than only a referral contact, when offering support to increase uptake
- 2.1.5 To assure confidentiality:
 - Allocate budget for rental of non-World Vision office space for remote interviews (as needed) and the purchase of SIMs, temporary phones and lockable filing cabinets during planning processes
 - Require the local HR Director to complete any necessary HR processes stemming from the investigation and disallow delegation in order to preserve the “need to know” principle
 - Where Fleet *must* be involved in investigation team transportation due to insecurity, limit their “door to door” visibility and use mixed methods of transportation where possible

2.2 Respond with Agility and Speed

- 2.2.1 Develop and apply safeguarding incident management protocols, which include escalation criteria and defined deadlines to convene crisis and/or incident management teams (CMTs and IMTs), to develop and share reactive risk communications and for various steps of the investigative process. See Annex for World Vision’s process map on incident management.
- 2.2.2 Convene IMTs daily or near-daily during planning and investigation team deployment phases to plan, share information and troubleshoot

2.3 Investigate with Quality and Expertise

³ This qualification is included as some survivors have requested activities that are beyond the scope of World Vision’s abilities or which contravene local law.

- 2.3.1 Staff an investigation team that is gender- and language-diverse
- 2.3.2 Include staff in a virtual investigative team when safeguarding-trained investigators are not available to be in-country
- 2.3.3 Diversify data collection methods to include document review, interviews, and anonymous submissions (e.g., Ethics Point, SMS)
- 2.3.4 Engage the fraud and other types of misconduct investigators to provide additional capacity and expertise, particularly around documentary rigour when needed during complex investigations
- 2.3.5 Establish a formal roster of safeguarding investigators from across the organisation and psychosocial support specialists with minimum qualification training⁴ and security training requirements. Supervisors of staff on this roster should be prepared to release staff from duties when called.
- 2.3.6 Conduct remote training and coaching as part of investigation planning, including on how to identify potential survivors among witnesses that may not self-identify, where the investigation team is experienced but not certified
- 2.3.7 Formalise an internal safeguarding community of practice to transparently share learnings, successes, challenges and opportunities and identify capacity
- 2.3.8 Standardise Safeguarding IMT responsibility assignment (RASCI) matrix and individual terms of reference for investigation team members, and contextualise as part of incident management planning processes to strengthen deliverable management
- 2.3.9 Appoint an investigation team member responsible for information management, including documentation management in an incident management database such as Navex EthicsPoint, to quickly parse investigation findings and share information
- 2.3.10 Include project management in safeguarding core competencies to support effective coordination and results delivery during incident management
- 2.3.11 Collaborate with the Core Humanitarian Standard (CHS) Alliance on the ongoing establishment of a peer network (e.g., International NGOs) of safeguarding investigators for investigation and detection to promote greater external accountability and coordinate on best practice

2.4 Be Accountable to Communities and Staff

- 2.4.1 Include post-investigation community engagement, which may or may not include outcome notification in line with a survivor-centred approach in order to rebuild trust, encourage future reporting and promote a strong safeguarding culture
- 2.4.2 Develop different information sharing scenarios/protocols for low vs. high profile incidents

2.5 Promote Safety and Resilience during Incident Management

- 2.5.1 Clearly define protection measures for witnesses, survivors and investigators participating in investigations in insecure contexts
- 2.5.2 Identify backstops and succession plans for IMT and investigation team members in case the incident or investigation lasts longer than two weeks
- 2.5.3 Conduct a rapid assessment of investigation team security to support investigative team selection

⁴ For example, the CHS Alliance announced in March 2021 the introduction of an [investigation qualification training scheme](#) on which World Vision is advising.

3. Recommendations for External Engagement and Coordination

To appropriately communicate with external audiences and ensure coordination with the humanitarian industry

3.1 Speak Out with One Voice

- 3.1.1 Develop common reactive messaging guidance and distribute rapidly to comms leads throughout the Partnership in order to speak with one voice for incidents with high external visibility
- 3.1.2 Where possible, reference an investigation, survivor-centred approach and intention to carry out disciplinary measures where allegations are substantiated. The term “zero tolerance” has sometimes been misunderstood by the general public to mean “nothing will go wrong”, an impossible threshold to meet given the inherent safeguarding risks associated with implementing humanitarian and development programmes
- 3.1.3 Ensure the media engagement strategy at the onset of incident management is managed through a survivor-centred approach to protect the integrity of the investigation
- 3.1.4 Do not repurpose or combine messaging intended for specific audiences (e.g., external media guidance, donor official notifications and others) for other audiences (e.g., boards, senior leadership), as the nature of the information they need varies.

3.2 Manage Relationships

- 3.2.1 Document and communicate clear principles, protocols and focal points for information sharing and knowledge management during safeguarding incident management to uphold survivors’ dignity and protect the integrity of the investigation
- 3.2.2 Consider appointment a funding office staff to the IMT as a donor/funding focal point to strengthen the timing and quality of information sharing for incidents with high external visibility
- 3.2.3 Secure internal Legal and global-level approval before sharing information externally to uphold confidentiality and minimise risk
- 3.2.4 Include safeguarding in advocacy strategies with donors, multilateral partners, and interagency groups, including input to donor safeguarding requirements to avoid “requirements” that are unreasonable in an investigation scenario
- 3.2.5 Consider how staff participating in the humanitarian architecture, including cluster meetings, should be equipped when planning communication to donors
- 3.2.6 Empower local leadership to carry out careful, approved donor engagement at national level in addition to global engagement at HQ level
- 3.2.7 Revise global-level safeguarding policy and protocols to be explicit about board briefings – what, when and by whom – during ongoing incidents to alleviate anxiety and reduce inappropriate information sharing

Conclusion

The findings and recommendations presented in this report are being made available so practitioners can champion and implement them in their programming. Doing so will help to ensure World Vision applies best practice locally and commits to innovations to mitigate harmful acts threatening the well-being of children and adults most vulnerable to and affected by disaster and conflict.

An external version of this report is available for sharing with partners and peers.

List of abbreviations

CHS	Core Humanitarian Standard
CMT	Crisis management team
EMS	Emergency management system
ERM	Enterprise risk management
GBV	Gender-based violence
GC	Global centre
GESI	Gender, equity and social inclusion
GIU	Global Internal Investigation Unit
HEAT	Hostile environment awareness training
IMT	Incident management team
(I)NGO	(International) non-governmental organisation
JDPDQ	Job description/position description questionnaire
MEAL	Monitoring, evaluation, accountability and learning
NO	National office
(P)SEA	(Protection against) sexual exploitation and abuse
RASCI	Responsible, accountable, supporting, consulting, informed
RO	Regional office
WV(I)	World Vision (International)

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