

SOS CHILDREN'S VILLAGES STATEMENT ON PREVENTION AND PROTECTION AGAINST SEXUAL HARASSMENT, EXPLOITATION AND ABUSE (PSHEA)

OUR COMMITMENT

SOS Children's Villages strives to do everything in its power to provide a safe environment for our workforce and all children and adults with whom we work. This means ensuring they are free from sexual harassment, exploitation and abuse arising from the misconduct of employees, partners and volunteers. This includes efforts to protect the rights of young adults in our care or who are supported through our programmes, adults in the communities where we work, and employees. This commitment is grounded in our organisation's values – Accountability, Commitment, Courage, and Trust – which are embedded across the federation.

SOS Children's Villages has no tolerance for any form of sexual harassment, abuse and exploitation. We promptly investigate and will respond to all such allegations. Any person found to have violated our relevant policies, including our code of conduct, will face consequences, which includes dismissal from employment and referral to legal authorities where applicable.

All complaints of sexual harassment, exploitation or abuse will be taken seriously and treated with respect and in confidence. We strive to create an environment in which victims feel free to come forward to raise concerns and allegations. We follow up on concerns and allegations and ensure that rights of victims as well as those accused shall be respected.

BACKGROUND

Our commitment to the prevention and protection against sexual harassment, exploitation and abuse – a set of issues commonly grouped together and referred to as PSHEA – is guided by globally accepted human rights frameworks and articulated in our own organisational policies.

International frameworks include the UN Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (General Recommendations 12 and 19), the Beijing Platform for Action, the UN Sustainable Development Goals, and the UN Secretary-General's Bulletin on Special Measures for Protection from Sexual Exploitation and Abuse. Taken together, these constitute a body of principles and commitments that reflect the seriousness of the challenge and the obligations of governments and other organisations to take responsibility in preventing and responding to sexual harassment, exploitation and abuse.

SOS Children's Villages' commitment to PSHEA is articulated in a number of existing policies:

- [The Child Protection Policy](#) clearly outlines the awareness, prevention, reporting and responding measures we put in place to ensure the safeguarding of children from all forms of abuse, including sexual abuse.
- The [SOS Gender Equality Policy](#) confirms that we “practise zero tolerance of all forms of abuse based on gender within the organisation, including violence and sexual harassment, and for this we have clear reporting and responding procedures” (page 10) and in particular to “strive to boost the empowerment of SOS mothers, aunts and assistants” (page 5).
- The [Code of Conduct](#) demands that staff “...will not take part in any form of discrimination, harassment, or abuse (physical, sexual or verbal), intimidation or exploitation, or in any other way infringe the rights of others” (page 5). It also says that “I will not exchange money, employment, goods, favours or services for sex, including sexual favours or other forms of

humiliating, degrading or exploitative behaviour. This includes any exchange of SOS services that are due to participants in the SOS programme” (page 5).

- Our [Inclusion Policy](#) says that “Children with disabilities are four times more likely to be neglected and physically abused and over three times more likely to be emotionally abused than other children. Often their lives are not treated as of equal value with others” (Lansdown, 2001).

MOVING FORWARD

Notwithstanding these substantial efforts to date, SOS Children’s Villages is not immune to incidents of sexual harassment, exploitation and abuse, given the high-risk nature of our work, and we recognise we must be ever-vigilant to refine policies and strengthen efforts.

The International Senate of SOS Children’s Villages calls for the federation to critically reflect and ensure that the appropriate measures are put in place to prevent sexual harassment, exploitation and abuse from happening and to operate a policy of no tolerance for any form of sexual harassment, exploitation or abuse of any person, anywhere in our sphere of influence. This includes children or young adults in our care, vulnerable adults in the communities where we work, and our own workforce.

Moving forward, our efforts will include the following.

1. Update the Code of Conduct to strengthen and focus language and to include important aspects of conduct which had not been addressed previously/in the current version or are not visible enough.
2. Explore the feasibility of developing a holistic safeguarding policy in which PSHEA topics are integrated. This should include a definition of what constitutes sexual harassment, exploitation or abuse – which will be widely disseminated to the workforce and made easily accessible to individuals within and outside of the organisation. It will also clearly state the responsibilities of all to ensure that the workplace and our programmes in communities around the world are free from sexual harassment, exploitation and abuse and to discourage and report unacceptable behaviour of employees and associates.
3. Develop a proposal on how to best structure and resource the implementation of PSHEA aspects of a holistic safeguarding policy, building on what is already in place for integrity and child safeguarding. This should include:
 - Developing clear procedures in line with international standards on how such incidents are reported, investigated and responded to; we aim to establish a safe and respectful environment for victims to report misconduct as well as for those who are accused. This also includes all necessary support by SOS for victims after the investigation is concluded.
 - Steps to ensure awareness and prevention, providing mandatory training on PSHEA topics and ensuring everyone throughout the organisation is aware of risks and how to respond if incidents happen.
 - Measures to improve monitoring across the federation, recognising its importance to ensure widespread and consistent implementation.