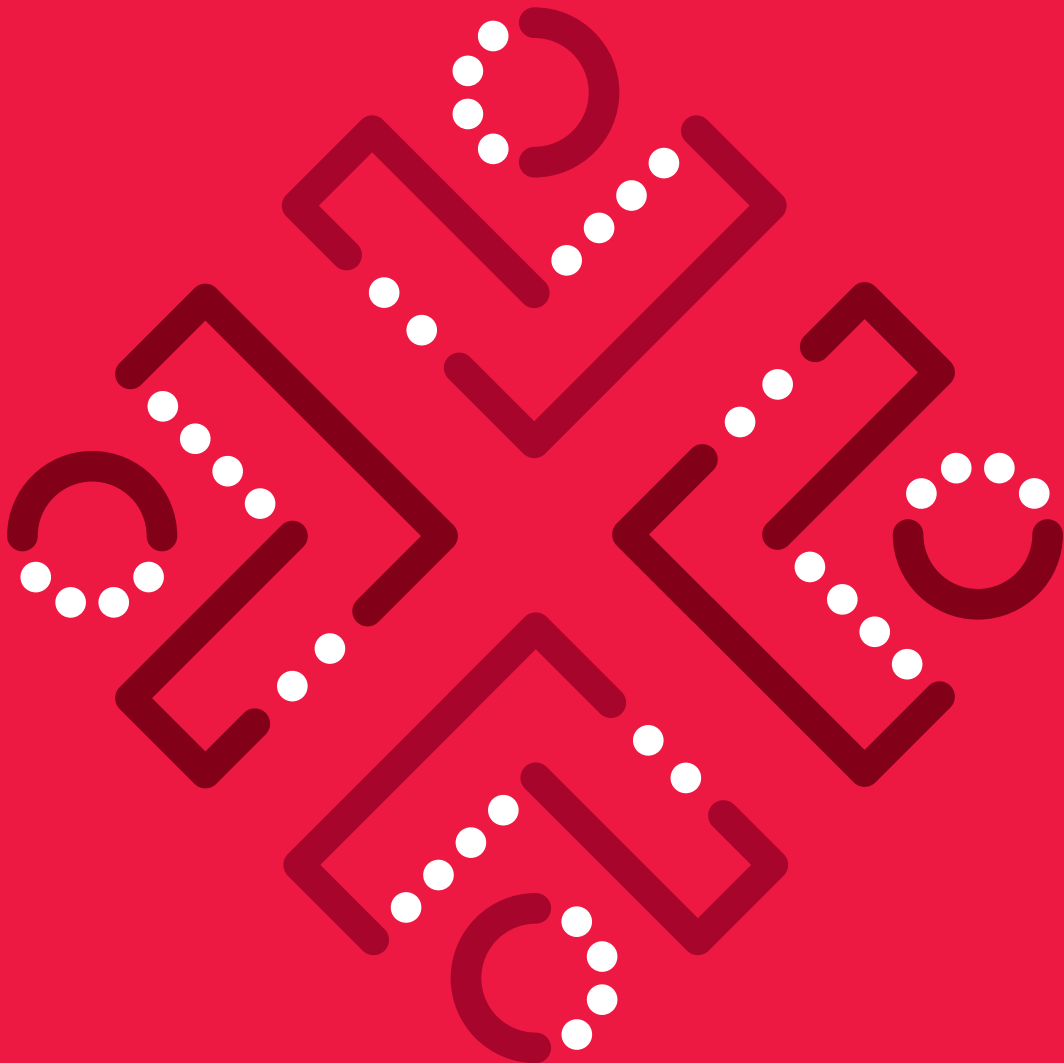




# Our commitment to change in safeguarding



Our approach to tackling sexual exploitation,  
abuse and sexual harassment in the aid sector



# Introducing our approach to putting people first

The mission of civil society organisations undertaking international development and humanitarian work is to build a fairer world, free from poverty, inequality and injustice. This defines who we are and makes our sector unique.

Central to that mission is respect for the safety, wellbeing and rights of the communities we seek to serve – wherever they are in the world and whatever the humanitarian or development challenges. Respect means that we will not tolerate sexual exploitation, abuse or harassment in any form, and that we are committed to putting the voices, rights and support of victims and survivors at the heart of our approach.

Sexual exploitation, abuse and harassment are fundamentally about gender inequality and power imbalance, and a profound effort will be needed if we are to ensure systemic and lasting cultural change. This change will be rooted in respecting and upholding the rights of the people we aim to serve, our partners, our staff, volunteers and trustees.

In doing so, civil society organisations will ensure that they implement the highest standards on safeguarding, built around a survivor-centred approach and an organisational culture that aims to prevent abuse in the first place, but which responds quickly and thoroughly when it does happen. The additional risks associated with humanitarian interventions in conflict-afflicted, fragile states need particular recognition and distinctive approaches.

Many organisations have well-developed safeguarding approaches in place and our work over the last few months builds on that established good practice. However, driving up the consistency and quality of our practice across the board requires collective action and sector-wide solutions. This is what the commitments and related actions set out below aim to achieve.

We welcome the leadership the UK government has shown on this issue and hope to see continued support as the civil society sector drives this agenda forwards. We are committed to working with colleagues in the domestic charity sectors, governments, donors, academics, multilaterals, the private sector and communities to combat sexual exploitation, abuse and sexual harassment in all its forms.

Every link in the chain of international development and humanitarian assistance must be strong and consistent when it comes to safeguarding and we will play an integral part in ensuring that happens. This can only be achieved in collaboration with our local partners, whose knowledge and expertise is vital to understanding the different contexts and norms in the countries where we work, and to developing relevant safeguarding responses which protect individuals from harm.

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# We are driving change in four key areas of safeguarding\*:



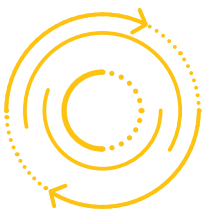
## Survivor support and enhanced accountability

We will support survivors, victims and whistleblowers, enhance accountability and transparency, strengthen reporting and tackle impunity.



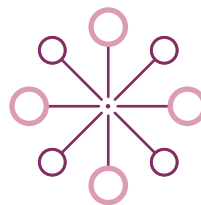
## Minimum standards

We will agree minimum standards and ensure we and our partners meet them.



## Cultural change

We will incentivise cultural change through strong leadership, organisational accountability and better human resource processes.



## Organisational capacity and capability

We will strengthen organisational capacity and capability, including building the capability of implementing partners to meet the minimum standards.

\* Aligned to the Department for International Development's (DFID) four strategic shifts



# Our commitments to change



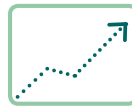
## Survivor support and enhanced accountability



**1.** We protect the dignity and safety of the people our work serves, respecting their voice, agency and choices, while upholding the universal right to be protected from harm.



**2.** We ensure victims and survivors of safeguarding breaches are at the heart of our safeguarding response.



**3.** We are transparent about our activities; we will monitor progress and will publicly demonstrate our ongoing efforts to improve safeguarding practice.



**4.** We work towards consistent, rigorous reporting and complaints processes that are gender-sensitive and survivor-centred, so that the people we serve, our partners, staff, volunteers and trustees have confidence that we deal with alleged incidents swiftly and comprehensively.



## Cultural change



**5.** Our boards and senior leaders drive behaviours and attitudes throughout our organisations, leading by example to nurture a strong safeguarding culture that addresses structural inequalities based on gender, ethnicity, socio-economic status, sexuality and age.



**6.** We collaborate within and beyond our sector to improve employment practice, including background checking, to minimise opportunities for perpetrators' access to our sector and to reduce their ability to move between organisations.



## Minimum standards



**7.** We apply established good practices and meet recognised international safeguarding standards, working with others to ensure they are inclusive and relevant.



**8.** We work with government, donors, businesses, global civil society networks, local partners and UK charities to advance consistent and high-quality safeguarding practice worldwide.



**9.** We ensure our safeguarding policies and practices address the needs of vulnerable groups, including the different approaches needed to protect those at risk by their identity or circumstances, including women, children and disabled people.



## Organisational capacity and capability



**10.** We improve safeguarding capabilities by building the awareness and skills of our staff, volunteers and trustees, while sharing solutions and expertise so the whole sector can do better.



**11.** We strive towards more equal relationships between organisations delivering and receiving aid, where the local expertise of in-country partners is respected, and we share responsibility for high-quality programme delivery and keeping people safe.



**12.** We will test and scale innovative technology solutions as a sector to strengthen safeguarding practice.



## Our approach to change

To meet these commitments, we as organisations will work individually and collectively through sector-wide solutions to deliver systemic change.

Our collective approach has been coordinated by Bond, the UK network for more than 420 international development and humanitarian organisations. Bond's members work in more than 200 countries worldwide towards the goal of eliminating poverty, inequality and injustice.

Civil society organisations have been reviewing their approach to safeguarding and improving their policies, procedures and practices. This individual action is essential to preventing sexual exploitation, abuse, harassment and bullying. Each organisation must ensure that incidents are dealt with promptly and robustly as they arise.

The actions below set out our approaches to improve the quality and consistency of our collective safeguarding practices. Some of the examples below demonstrate practical short or medium-term actions already underway. Others are about transforming our ways of working and organisational culture over the long term and will take time. Some actions apply to the whole sector, while others provide examples of work by individual organisations.

Implementation of these commitments will differ within organisations, depending on context, scope and remit. The proposed solutions need to be adaptable to the diverse global contexts in which we work, including rapid response emergencies, and to acknowledge the realities of local resource and capacity constraints.

Comprehensively implementing and sustaining these approaches is a long-term task that requires continuous effort and also resources, which we look to donors to provide. We will share the good practice that has long existed in many charities, acknowledging that this needs to be embedded more consistently across the sector.

We note that increasing our efforts to protect people from harm and ensure people feel able to raise concerns is likely to lead to an increase in reporting in the short term. This is a sign that the system is being strengthened and we expect to see fewer incidents as a result in the longer term.

**The 34 actions that follow each fall under our 12 commitments to change. Further details of each action can be found in the next section of this document. These commitments will become part of the [Bond Charter](#), which forms the common vision, purpose, values and principles of the Bond network.**



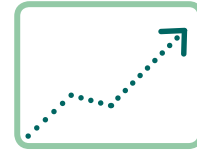
## 1. Protecting the dignity and safety of the people our work serves

- Build contextually and culturally relevant feedback mechanisms into programme design and delivery, using the set of [principles on designing and running accountable feedback](#).<sup>1</sup>
- Share findings from a pilot on how community feedback can be used at different stages of decision-making.<sup>2</sup>
- Continue to explore developing a participation hub with DFID and other donors to ensure workable feedback mechanisms are used widely and effectively.<sup>3</sup>



## 2. Ensuring victims and survivors are central to our safeguarding response

- Explore options for joint support services in-country for survivors of sexual exploitation and abuse, including recognising the value of survivor advocates in organisations.<sup>4</sup>
- Collate and share resources on survivor support approaches and use learning from survivor experiences to continuously improve safeguarding support.<sup>5</sup>



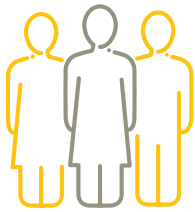
## 3. Being transparent and sharing progress

- Disclose all safeguarding concerns and incidents to the appropriate regulatory bodies.<sup>6</sup>
- Track and report on changes to our policies and practices over time within organisations and explore a means of monitoring sector progress as a whole.<sup>7</sup>
- Carry out an annual survey with Bond members to analyse the investment and resources that Bond members put into safeguarding, and share findings.<sup>8</sup>



## 4. Rigorous and inclusive reporting and complaints processes

- Develop and use a toolkit on good practice in reporting and complaints mechanisms, based on the safety, protection and support of survivors and whistle-blowers.<sup>9</sup>
- Standardise sector practice on reporting safeguarding results to the Charity Commission and the public by implementing revised guidance on annual reports. Call for an increase in the capacity of the Commission to monitor incidents and support improvement.<sup>10</sup>



## 5. Driving cultural change and addressing structural inequalities from the top

- Commit our leaders and organisations to a shared and understood standard of behaviour, which challenges cultures conducive to abuses, and hold them to account against this standard.<sup>11</sup>
- Identify areas where further research on the drivers for sexual exploitation and abuse in different cultural contexts would be beneficial, and work with DFID and across the sector to commission and learn from this research.
- Develop diagnostic and benchmarking tools that support organisations to assess organisational culture against indicators of an effective safeguarding culture.<sup>12</sup>
- Share resources, toolkits and frameworks on working towards equitable, gender-just organisations, and implement good practice to change organisational culture and the inappropriate exercise of power.<sup>13</sup>
- Develop and act in accordance with good practice guidance on governance to improve and standardise practice across the sector.<sup>14</sup>



## 6. Collaborating to improve employment practice

- Develop a consistent approach to referencing across the sector, providing guidance on what recruiting organisations should ask for and what referees should disclose, including guidance and legal opinion on how to handle the range of jurisdictions and legal frameworks within which we work.<sup>15</sup>
- Review the scope and definitions of regulated activity under UK legislation and develop proposals to government on a wider definition of regulated activity for employees working in key humanitarian and development roles, to improve pre-employment background checking through the Disclosure and Barring Service.<sup>16</sup>
- Collaborate with government and key agencies to ensure that an appropriate level of background checking can be carried out globally.<sup>17</sup>





## 7. Applying internationally-recognised standards and practices

- Adopt and adhere to recognised safeguarding standards as relevant to our organisations.<sup>18</sup>
- Review and update our organisational safeguarding policies, including taking a risk management approach in-line with good practice, to minimise the likelihood of safeguarding breaches.<sup>19</sup>



## 8. Collaborating with other sectors to advance global safeguarding practice

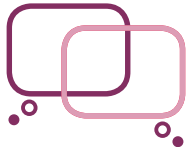
- Engage with and provide feedback to DFID and other donors, the UN and the private sector to align approaches and help ensure due diligence and other harmonisation efforts are fit for purpose in diverse contexts.<sup>20</sup>
- Continue to collaborate with UK voluntary sector bodies and the Charity Commission to ensure alignment where possible with UK charities and established good safeguarding practice from health, social care and child protection.<sup>21</sup>

- Through Bond, collaborate with peer civil society networks and global platforms to help strengthen local civil society organisations' safeguarding responses and capabilities.<sup>22</sup>
- Help our partners to meet minimum standards by sharing policies, training materials and supporting their implementation.



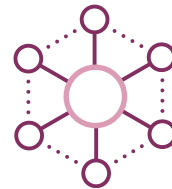
## 9. Ensuring policies and practices address vulnerable groups' needs

- Recognise and implement the different approaches needed to protect vulnerable groups such as children and people with disabilities.<sup>23</sup>



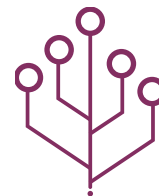
## 10. Improving and sharing expertise of staff, volunteers and trustees

- Convene four UK NGO working groups on safeguarding, who have analysed current challenges and proposed possible solutions in four thematic areas: accountability to the people we work with, organisational culture, the employment cycle and reporting.<sup>24</sup>
- Build on established good practice (including from the UK charity sector), ensuring resources, templates, policies and procedures are widely shared across organisations of all sizes, and regularly update guidance and signposting on Bond website.<sup>25</sup>
- Enable access to training on good safeguarding practice that responds sensitively to the specific power dynamics and legal frameworks of the places we are working in.<sup>26</sup>
- Develop a consortium of partners and secure resources for a universal, accredited, self-guided online course on safeguarding.<sup>27</sup>
- Come together as a sector at events and workshops to share learning and expertise, and establish an online community of practice to enable the ongoing exchange of ideas, case studies, experiences (positive and negative) and good practice.<sup>28</sup>



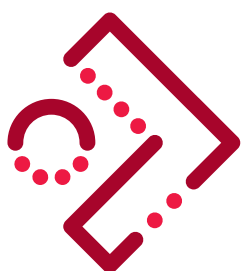
## 11. Equal relationships between organisations delivering and receiving aid

- Support improved local understanding of the dynamics surrounding gender, diversity and unequal power relations to reduce the risk of potential exploitation and abuse.<sup>29</sup>
- Support partner-led initiatives to strengthen their safeguarding practice.<sup>30</sup>



## 12. Testing and scaling innovative technology solutions

- Explore how passporting or aid worker registers could be developed to enhance vetting and rapid mobilisation of aid workers for humanitarian interventions, using blockchain or other innovative technologies.<sup>31</sup>
- Collaborate with innovators and technology providers to test and potentially scale applications which could enhance the efficiency, reliability or effectiveness of safeguarding in our sector.<sup>32</sup>



## Further details of actions

Below are further details and timescales for the actions outlined in our approach to change. These were updated in October 2020 to reflect progress since the commitments were first made.

1. [Eight principles for building trust through feedback](#) published by Bond Feedback and Accountability Learning Group in September 2018.

2. DEC pilot in Bangladesh has been completed and the report on [Feedback utilization in the Rohingya response](#) has been published.

3. Without dedicated funding to create a participation hub, this working group has engaged with the new Safeguarding Resource and Support hub to increase participation. Oxfam has published research on "Factors Influencing Misconduct Reporting" in three countries (Ghana, Iraq, Myanmar) as well as a meta-analysis across all countries, to understand barriers and preferences related to reporting.

4. Bond has engaged with members on in-country safeguarding support services and provides an [online space for members](#) to upload and share mappings of in-country support services.

5. Bond collates and shares resources on website on survivor support approaches and learning on an ongoing basis. In April 2020, Bond published a case study on "Adopting a survivor led approach", to further share learning.

6. Initial assurances provided to DFID in February/ March 2018. Bond signposts to [regulators' requirements](#) on website and engages with Charity Commission on updates to guidance.

7. Bond carried out the 3rd annual safeguarding survey in July and August 2020 to track changes to policy and practice of organisations. Bond continues as part of the DFID cross-sector steering group (CSSG) and contributes to explore ways of monitoring sector progress as a whole.

8. 3rd annual survey carried out in July and August 2020.

9. Report-handling resources published in August 2019. This includes a toolkit, case studies and definitions.

10. [Good practice guide for trustees](#) published in April 2019.

11. Leadership tool has been finalised and is being developed into a digital resource for publication in late 2020.

12. Culture indicators have been finalised and are being developed into a digital resource for publication in late 2020.

13. Bond collates and shares resources on its website, and signposts equitable, gender-just organisations on an ongoing basis.

14. [Good practice guide for trustees](#) published in April 2019.

15. [Inter-Agency Misconduct Disclosure Scheme](#) is operational. Bond is encouraging and facilitating members to sign up to the scheme. In 2019, 2,600 checks were conducted, 36 people were not employed as a result of information shared.

16. NGO working group has supported work on improved background checking through the disclosure barring service (DBS), by sharing examples of roles that are currently not regulated activity. Further engagement with the Home Office and DBS is required for progressing this.

17. INTERPOL pilot project Soteria was launched in 2019 and aims to stop perpetrators of sexual exploitation, abuse and harassment from working in the aid sector by establishing a new level of cooperation between law enforcement agencies and non-governmental organisations operating internationally.

18. Such as Keeping Children Safe International Child Safeguarding Standards, the Core Humanitarian Standard on Quality and Accountability and Inter-Agency Standing Committee Six Core Principles Relating the Sexual Exploitation and Abuse. Bond is signposting to [relevant standards on website](#).

19. Individual organisations have reviewed and updated their policies and practice as shown in Bond member surveys carried out in July 2018, April 2019 and September 2019

20. Bond convenes the Funding and Commercial Contracts working groups to feed back on the new code of conduct for grants/contracts and due diligence approaches and is engaging with DFID's Better Delivery Department.

21. Bond continues to regularly update DCMS, NCVO and ACEVO on progress of the international NGO sector's work and engages with Charity Commission on updates to guidance.

22. Bond has run joint webinars with Concord and Forus in September 2018. Bond, together with Forus, has set up a working group of national sector platforms working on safeguarding to foster collaboration and share experiences. The working group organises regular webinars and shares guidance, tools and resources on a shared online space.

23. Upholding the Convention on the Rights of the Child and the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities. Bond provides engagement opportunities for members to share knowledge and learning on needs of vulnerable groups and intersectionality, for example, in a breakout session at the 2019 Bond Safeguarding for Development Conference or by organising a cross-Bond group meeting on safeguarding, involving the Child Rights Working Group, the Disability and Development group and others.

24. Cross-sector working groups were established in March 2018. Where work is ongoing, Bond members remain actively engaged in driving forward proposed solutions.

25. Bond collates and shares resources through signposts on website on an ongoing basis.

26. Bond signposts to specialist training providers on website and [provides training](#) on Good Safeguarding Practice, Managing Investigations and Safeguarding governance for boards.

Bond has provided safeguarding training to almost 900 individuals from over 280 organisations.

27. [Safeguarding Essentials online course](#) has been launched in November 2019.

28. Bond provides opportunities for members to come together and share learning on an ongoing basis and the Bond [Safeguarding Group](#) meets regularly. Recent events and workshops included a large, sector-wide Safeguarding for Development Conference in December 2019 and regular safeguarding group webinars.

29. Bond and NGO members have engaged with FCDO on challenges around working effectively with partner organisations on safeguarding.

30. Partner-led solutions are essential for improvements in safeguarding to be relevant to their context and sustained. Bond and members have developed a change statement on "Safeguarding in successful partnerships", conveying how the sector needs to move away from one-way relationships and initiate a mindset shift about working with partners. Bond is also signposting to partner-led initiatives, such as the [South2South Network](#).

31. Several NGOs are part of a steering group to develop an Aid Worker Passport that will make it harder for perpetrators to move around the sector undetected, whilst providing those who conduct themselves appropriately with evidence of their identity and previous good conduct. Legal review and feedback process has been concluded.

32. Current options being explored include an app to verify DBS checks, and Radius, a safe platform for facilitated dialogue with vulnerable communities, developed by On Our Radar.



Bond is the UK network for organisations working in international development.

We unite and support a diverse network of over 400 civil society organisations to help eradicate global poverty, inequality and injustice.

Find out more at [bond.org.uk](http://bond.org.uk)

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