

Community-Based Complaints Mechanisms (CBCM): Oxfam's Experience and Resources



CONTEXT

Oxfam is an international confederation working in 65 countries around the world. Among its focuses, the Oxfam network aims to end poverty and inequality, while ensuring water and sanitation for all, addressing food insecurity and climate change, responding to humanitarian emergencies, and focusing on gender justice and women's rights. Apart from such initiatives, Oxfam also aims to prevent sexual exploitation, sexual harassment, sexual abuse and child abuse.

Oxfam Canada ("OCA") has a zero-tolerance approach to inaction on sexual harassment, sexual exploitation, sexual abuse and child abuse (defined as safeguarding) in their organization. This means that they will do everything in their power to prevent it from happening, and rigorously address it each time it happens. All Oxfam Canada Board members, staff and related personnel (i.e. interns, contractors, partners, volunteers and other representatives working on behalf of OCA) have an obligation to be aware of,

understand and respect all applicable policies, including the Code of Conduct, as well as the right and responsibility to report any concern. OCA is committed to effectively addressing all concerns raised, ensuring the confidentiality of those raising a concern or involved in a complaint.

In partnership with Oxfam Canada, this Digna case study addresses the Inter-Agency Standing Committee (IASC) Minimum Operating Standards for PSEA around effective community-based complaints mechanisms (CBCM), including survivor assistance. The documents presented here showcase best practices and resources that other organizations can draw from when developing their own CBCM. These and more resources can be found on OCA's website, particularly on [this](#) and [this](#) section.

POLICIES, PROCEDURES, AND COMMUNITY-BASED COMPLAINTS MECHANISMS (CBCM)

Policies

[You will find all the updated policies here.](#)
[Click on Read more about Oxfam's safeguarding and related policies](#)

Oxfam Canada has diverse safeguarding policies currently in place. All these policies are intended to be used across the Oxfam confederation and should be applied in conjunction and as one holistic package. These are publicly available and can be used as model resources for organizations developing their own PSEA policies. The direct links and more details on Oxfam's documents are listed below.

[Oxfam Employee Code of Conduct](#) – This is Oxfam's joint code of conduct spanning the whole confederation's network. The rules and guidelines contained in this document provide a framework to regulate the conduct and undertaking of duties of all Oxfam employees, regardless of their location. The Code of Conduct also supports Oxfam in its role in implementing, monitoring and enforcing these standards. Moreover, the document references other Oxfam policies, including those related to Child Safeguarding, to the Prevention of Sexual Exploitation and Abuse (PSEA), to Equity and Diversity, and to Sexual Diversity and Gender Identity Rights. Some of these policies are detailed below, and others are available on [Oxfam Canada's website](#).

[Oxfam Policy on Protection from Sexual Exploitation and Abuse \(PSEA\)](#) – This is a global application policy, spanning Oxfam's

offices, employees and related personal across the world. The document highlights the organization's commitments to prevent sexual harassment, exploitation and abuse, principles and commitments, roles and responsibilities, and mechanisms for raising a complaint or concern. The policy also contains a list of definitions related to PSEA, as well as speak-up channels for reporting in multiple countries.

[Oxfam Digital Safeguarding](#) – This policy focuses on digital safeguarding by covering the digital spaces where Oxfam's work takes places, including email, social media platforms, websites and information and communications technology (ICT) equipment. The policy covers Oxfam's commitments, principles and expectations, and aims to ensure effective decision making and action in the case where SEA-related problems should arise.

[Oxfam Child Safeguarding Policy](#) – This policy focuses specifically on the safeguarding of children (persons under the age of 18) and their protection from all forms of violence and harm. It includes information on reporting and on the support of children who have suffered harm, as well as a list of definitions concerning the approach to child safeguarding, and of accepted behaviours towards/related to children.

[Oxfam Youth Safeguarding Policy](#) – Similar to the policy regarding the safeguarding of children, this policy focuses on the safeguarding of young persons, defined as those under the age of 25. It informs how work with youth should be conducted to ensure protection and safeguarding, and includes

information on support to survivors, and procedures to raise a complaint or concern. The policy also links to other useful resources.

Reporting Channels

At Oxfam and where the organization bases its work, diverse reporting channels are available at the community level. These include:

- Complaint boxes
- Safeguarding focal points
- Speak-up email
- Speak-up phone number
- Confidential counsellors, although these are not available in all operating countries
- [Speak-Up Web form](#) – This form is available in 9 languages and collects information around misconduct events and incident details. Individuals filling out the form also have the option of having their anonymity preserved, which is an important feature in PSEA documents.

Standard Operating Procedures

Standard Operating Procedures, or SOPs, are defined as a written set of instructions that can be followed as a step-by-step document for organizations to carry out effective work while also avoiding miscommunication. In the case of PSEA SOPs more specifically, such documents can include safeguarding procedures, a written guidance (e.g. code of conduct), specific trainings, procedures for reporting and responding to incidents, risk assessment and management, and mechanisms for monitoring and review.

Oxfam has two SOPs currently in place:

1. One Oxfam Misconduct reporting Standard Operating Procedure

The SOP for reporting misconduct aims to provide a uniform approach across the Confederation in terms of responsibilities, principles and timelines for reporting to partner affiliates and donors. This SOP provides guidance on:

- Principles for reporting. This will be applied in line with the existing principles approved in the current policies
- Roles and responsibilities
- Reporting content and timelines
- Sample reporting template

2. One Oxfam Safeguarding Case Management Standard Operating Procedure

This SOP aims to provide a straightforward explanation of the principles, roles and responsibilities, and step-by-step instructions for managing allegations of safeguarding misconduct from the point a report is received until the case is closed or handed to decision-makers for a disciplinary procedure. This SOP is comprised of the following sections:

- Guiding Principles for Safeguarding Case Management
- Roles and Responsibilities
- Safeguarding Case Management Steps
- Annex 1: Guidance on Case Management Steps
- Annex 2: Related Policies and Documents

Oxfam Safeguarding Core Standards

One Oxfam Safeguarding Core Standards summarizes the commitments and requirements outlined in One Oxfam Safeguarding Policies and other strategic documents. They outline the minimum requirements that Oxfam teams will work towards to establish an effective safeguarding system to fulfill Oxfam's internal and external obligations on Safeguarding, e.g. towards communities, donors and supporters.

The Core Standards support Oxfam's ambition of transforming organizational culture, to model its values as an organization and to prevent abuses of power that manifest as sexual exploitation and abuse and child abuse.

One Oxfam Safeguarding Core Standards are developed in line with the Minimum Operating Standards –Protection from Sexual Exploitation and Abuse by own Personnel (MOS-PSEA) developed by the Inter-Agency Standing Committee (IASC). These international standards form the basis of most donor policies on safeguarding.

1. A Safeguarding Plan is established



2. Trained Safeguarding Focal Points are present in all Oxfam offices



3. The Oxfam Code of Conduct is signed by all employees and related personnel



4. Safe recruitment and screening processes are in place



5. Regular and appropriate Safeguarding training is provided to all employees and related personnel



6. Safeguarding reporting and responding procedures are in place in all offices



7. Community based feedback and complaint mechanisms are established



8. Partners adhere to One Oxfam Safeguarding Policies and Safeguarding Core Standards



9. Safeguarding risk assessment and management practices are established



10. Procedures for handling images and personal information are established





Reporting Procedures and Process

In order to address incidents related to SEA, Oxfam follows specific procedures and processes. Several steps are taken after a complaint or reported incident is filed and received, including assessment, case management, outcome and closing. This resource entitled [How does the incident reporting process work?](#) outlines such steps, as follows:

1. Reported incident is filed
2. Assessment
3. Case management
4. Outcome
5. Closing

LESSONS LEARNED / RECOMMENDATIONS

- Community-based complaint mechanisms (CBCM) should always be designed through consultation with communities, to understand the barriers they may face concerning reporting sexual harassment, sexual abuse, sexual exploitation and child abuse.
- Consult the community on what feedback mechanisms are most appropriate and safe for them and provide more than one avenue for people to provide feedback.
- Document positive and negative feedback in a database and respond to communities on the issues they brought forward.

- Confidentiality, anonymity and other rights of the complainants should be respected.
- Culture and traditional methods of raising issues should be considered and incorporated into the complaint mechanism to ensure that the concerns of individuals from significantly different groups and subgroups are evaluated and considered. Communication around complaint mechanisms should be available in local languages and visuals.
- The focal points for the prevention of sexual harassment, exploitation and abuse (PSHEA) and child abuse should be trained and should have the capacity to receive complaints and respond to them.
- There should be two Safeguarding focal points to receive complaints. If not possible, then it is recommended the focal point should be a woman*, recognizing that the majority of SEA is perpetrated against women and girls, although not exclusively.

**Having multiple people who receive reports of SEA is important, to ensure that victims/survivors are comfortable reporting. It is important to ensure that those who receive complaints are empathetic and understanding of intersectionality and gender diversity, and act without prejudice. There should be multiple options for safeguarding focal points, inclusive of the diversity of gender identities (trans women, trans men, non-binary, cis women or cis men and other gender diversities) and other identity factors (i.e. ethnic groups, language, etc.) of potential complainants.*