



ACFID Child Safeguarding Learning Review

Commissioned by ACFID's Child Rights Community
of Practice Child Safeguarding sub-group





Acknowledgments

This research and report were commissioned by the Australian Council for International Development (ACFID) Child Rights and Safeguarding Community of Practice, Child Safeguarding sub-group to document the collective learnings from our sector's child safeguarding journey.

Special thanks to Sophie Seck, Fiona Williams, Uma Komalan, Belinda Lauria and Emily Moreton for their leadership, expertise, and support.

The Learning Review Team consisted of Jo Thomson, Belinda Lucas and Anna Walker from Learning4Development Pty Ltd (L4D). L4D would like to thank all those who contributed to this research, particularly those who participated in interviews, focus group discussions, and completed the survey. A particular thank-you to partners in Southeast Asia and the Pacific for their time and valuable contributions.

L4D would like to acknowledge the traditional custodians of the lands on which this knowledge was shared and pay our respects to elders past, present and emerging.



Support Services

This report does not contain details of any specific child safeguarding incidents. If you have been impacted by or are concerned about anything in this report, there are services and resources that are available to help.

Australia:
Lifeline 24 Hour Counselling [13 11 14](tel:131114)
Beyond Blue [1300 22 46 36](tel:1300224636)
Sane Australia [1800 18 7263](tel:1800187263)

PNG:
1-Tok Kaunselin Helpim Lain [715 08000](tel:71508000)

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About this Learning Review

The Child Safeguarding sub-group of the Australian Council for International Development (ACFID) Child Rights Community of Practice (CoP) identified the need to draw on the collective experience of ACFID members and in-country partners about what the sector has learnt in the past decade of promoting child safeguarding practices. What do we know works? What are organisations finding challenging? How do we test or measure the effectiveness of our child safeguarding policies and measures?

This research is an opportunity to consolidate the sector's experiences and leverage its collective learning to inform future sectoral strategies and practice on safeguarding. As Australian NGOs develop and implement prevention of sexual exploitation, abuse and harassment (PSEAH) policies and practices, we have an opportunity to reflect on what has worked well in child safeguarding, and what could be done differently or more effectively for PSEAH.

In collaboration with the Child Safeguarding subgroup, Learning4Development (L4D) developed a participatory methodology, which included a sector-wide survey, key informant interviews and focus group discussions. We spoke to people at all levels of organisations, across many different operational areas. In addition to learning from child safeguarding focal points in organisations, we also learnt from staff in human resources, communications, program management, and operations to have a fuller view of what child safeguarding looks like across a diverse sector. The review also sought the views of other stakeholders and actors, including DFAT, the Australian Charities and Not for Profit Commission (ACNC), and globally from BOND, InterAction, and the Core Humanitarian Standard (CHS) Alliance.

The objectives of the review were to:

- Map the diverse organisational approaches to implementing child safeguarding policies and how these have evolved over time to strengthen practice in child safeguarding within ACFID membership and in country partners.
- Identify the key enablers and barriers to child safeguarding and how these can inform organisational strategies for PSEAH practice.
- Understand what strategies increase the effectiveness of child safeguarding practice and why.
- Document how organisations have adapted their safeguarding practices during crises such as the COVID-19 pandemic and the key learnings for the future.

The report is structured across L4D's child safeguarding domains of practice — a framework to conceptualise how different elements of safeguarding work together to effectively safeguard children (or adults) through prevention and response. These domains include:



Organisational Culture



Safe Programming



Human Resources



Complaints and Investigations



Partnership and Coordination

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What is Child Safeguarding?

This research and report use the ACFID definitions of child safeguarding and child protection.

Child Safeguarding

Child safeguarding is everything that an organisation does through its actions, policies and procedures, to create and maintain protective environments for children to protect them from exploitation and abuse of all kinds. At its most basic, safeguarding is the prevention of physical, sexual and emotional abuse and maltreatment by staff, volunteers and other people associated with the organisation. Child safeguarding efforts by organisations include codes of conduct, child safeguarding policies, training, risk assessments, child-safe recruitment, and any other preventative measures. We think of child safeguarding as the umbrella term for keeping children safe.

Child Protection

Child protection is the term used to describe the responsibilities and activities undertaken to prevent or stop children being abused or maltreated. Child protection includes the actions taken to respond to a particular risk or concern about a particular child. Despite the preventive measures taken through child safeguarding, protection concerns about a child may still appear.

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Child Safeguarding Domains of Practice

This research and the findings are structured around L4D's Child Safeguarding Domains of Practice.

There are numerous standards for safeguarding used globally by UN agencies, NGOs, and donors. Although conceptualised differently, there is a reasonable degree of alignment between standards, generally presenting similar practices and requirements.

L4D's Domains of Practice provide a simple and intuitive approach to organising safeguarding principles and practices across five commonly-used operational domains. They are not presented in any order of priority, as all domains are interrelated and must be in place to provide an integrated and comprehensive approach to safeguarding.

The domains cover:

- organisational culture;
- safe programming;
- human resources;
- complaints and investigations;
- and partnership and coordination.

The analysis of data from the survey, focus group discussions, interviews and this report are organised around these domains. Each section of the report provides an overview of good practice standards for the domain, shares the findings from the review for the domain, and provides an analysis of responses from participants.



Organisational Culture

An organisation where child abuse or harm is not tolerated, established through leadership, role modelling, accountability and investment of resources.



Safe Programming

A 'do no harm' approach that seeks to analyse contexts and design programs that do not create or exacerbate risks for children.



Human Resources

Recruitment, screening, induction, training and performance management systems that ensure the integrity of personnel.



Complaints and Investigations

Accessible and safe complaints mechanisms and investigations processes that prioritise the safety and wishes of survivors and caregivers.



Partnership and Coordination

Ensuring localised and strengths-based approaches and sharing knowledge and resources.

Figure 1 Learning4Development Safeguarding Domains of Practice, Thomson and Lucas (2019)

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Approach and Methodology

L4D adopted a human-centred, strengths-based inquiry methodology in collaboration with the ACFID Child Safeguarding subgroup of the Child Rights and Safeguarding CoP.

The data, findings and analysis presented in this report reflect the results of an online survey, focus group discussions (FGDs) and key informant interviews (KIIs) with ACFID Members, their partners and other stakeholders in Australia and globally. The findings also reflect the experience and analysis of the authors and the ACFID Child Safeguarding subgroup.

Survey

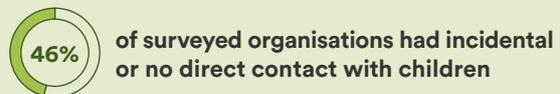
The survey's human-centred inquiry methodology sought to understand staff experiences of the enablers and barriers to child safeguarding practices. The survey focused on practice and direct experience, not on compliance, and asked respondents to share the most meaningful changes they had seen in their work on child safeguarding. We measured confidence levels across each domain of practice, and asked respondents to reflect on their experiences adapting their practice to COVID-19 and how it aligned with their work on Preventing Sexual Exploitation, Abuse and Harassment (PSEAH). The survey methodology included confidence scales and open-ended questions, and was completely anonymised to encourage respondents to answer candidly.

A draft tool was developed by L4D and tested by the CoP review team. Their feedback informed the final version of the survey. Please refer to Annex A for the survey Tool.

The online survey was open for submissions for six weeks in August-September 2021. There were 61 respondents from ACFID member organisations and partner organisations. The survey was voluntary, publicly available online and shared widely.

Who took the survey?

- 15 representatives of partners of ACFID member organisations*
- 46 representatives of ACFID member organisations*
- 11 members of senior leadership
- 24 program managers
- 14 program personnel



40% of respondents were child safeguarding focal points



* To protect confidentiality and encourage candour, the survey was anonymised.

Focus Group Discussions

Four focus groups met virtually to validate and explore the findings of the survey responses and key informant interviews. This brought ACFID members and partners together to reflect on the survey results and to test and validate preliminary findings from the survey. The discussions took place on 24 September, 5 October, 6 October and 7 October 2021. The two-hour meetings were facilitated by the review team and included representatives from an open sample of small and larger organisations, Australian and other country offices in Asia and the Pacific, faith-based organisations and international NGOs. Information shared by respondents in these focus group discussions has been deidentified in this report.

Please refer to Annex B for the focus group guiding questions.

Key Informant Interviews

Interviews with a small sample of ACFID members and their partners included child protection focal points who were able to outline their organisational approaches to implementing child safeguarding policies and how these have evolved over time to strengthen child safeguarding practices of ACFID membership and in-country partners. Our team also spoke to experts at CHS Alliance, BOND, InterAction and the Australian Charities and Not-for-profits Commission (ACNC) who provided domestic and international perspectives on trends in child safeguarding and PSEAH practice.

Please refer to Annex C for the guiding questions which informed the interviews.

Analysis and Presentation of Findings

Questions and lines of inquiry in the survey were structured around the Objectives of the Learning Review and the five child safeguarding domains of practice. The FGDs and KIIs were used to test and validate the findings/results of the survey. The Review's overall findings and analysis, presented in Section 5 of the report, are structured around the domains of practice to mirror the research and to align with common operational areas in most organisations.

As per the Objectives of the Learning Review:

- The organisational approaches to implementing child safeguarding policies and how these have evolved over time to strengthen practice in child safeguarding within ACFID membership and in country partners formed the basis of the data collection through targeted questions in the survey and guiding questions in the FGDs and KIIs. These practices are referenced throughout the Section 5 and Section 6 of the report where relevant.
- For each domain of practice, the key enablers and barriers to effective child safeguarding practice identified through the research are presented in Section 5 of this report.
- The key enablers and analysis of findings in Section 5, capture the strategies that increase effectiveness of child safeguarding practices, adopted or observed by ACFID Members and other respondents.
- Findings in regards to adaptations and learnings in response to the COVID -19 were very limited but where identified are noted under the relevant domain in Section 5.
- Learnings from child safeguarding practice that can inform organisational strategies for PSEAH practice are outlined in Section 6.



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Results and Analysis

The survey collected data from ACFID Members and their partners relating to perceptions and evidence of practice. The perceptions (or lived experiences) of respondents are captured throughout Section 5 as ‘confidence levels’. The key enablers and key barriers are drawn from the evidence of practice from respondents and other Australian and international practitioners, donors and peak bodies. The analysis of findings draws on all of the above and the experience of Child Safeguarding subgroup and the authors.

5.1 Organisational Culture

About this domain

Organisational culture plays a vital role in creating an enabling environment where child abuse or harm is unacceptable and not tolerated. Good organisational culture is established and sustained through governing bodies and leadership teams communicating their commitment to child safeguarding, role modelling the expected behaviour of staff, being accountable for safeguarding children and investing in the human resources and systems required to ensure the protection of children.

Perceptions of Respondents



91% of respondents were confident that their organisational culture was promoting child safeguarding.



81% of respondents were confident that Boards were aware of their child safeguarding responsibilities.

Key Enablers and Barriers

KEY ENABLERS TO EFFECTIVE PRACTICE



- Leadership and Boards with extensive experience and active engagement in safeguarding.
- Collaboration and training across all areas of the organisation.
- DFAT’s focus and contractual and compliance requirements on child protection.
- Child protection focal points/staff with designated responsibilities are important and useful in building a child-centred and safeguarding culture.
- Consistent and firm scheduling of trainings and refresher trainings.
- Providing forums for staff discussion of child safeguarding.

KEY BARRIERS TO EFFECTIVE PRACTICE



- Working with partners on implementing minimum standards in a contextually-sensitive way.
- Inability to travel due to COVID-19.
- Cost and lack of human resources.
- Explaining why child safeguarding is important with partners as it is sometimes viewed only as an additional compliance burden.
- Lack of dedicated resources.

Analysis of Findings

Board engagement:

Board members with experience and investment in child safeguarding can significantly impact organisational culture. Setting safeguarding as a standing Board agenda item and scheduling regular presentations from safeguarding focal points to the Board are effective ways to ensure 360 engagement on safeguarding.

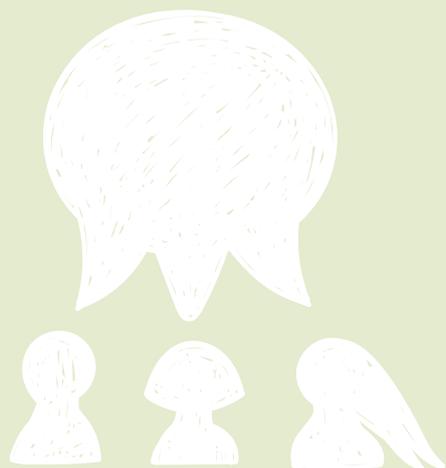
Engagement by Senior leadership:

Championing of child safeguarding by senior leaders and mainstreaming of child safeguarding into organisational decision making processes (including resource allocation decisions) is critical to building an organisational culture that promotes child safeguarding. Membership of senior leadership in child safeguarding working groups can send powerful signals to staff and partners and produced tangible benefits, including better resourcing for focal points and use of good practices resources from other organisations.

Whole of organisation approach:

Respondents had high confidence levels (91%) that their organisational culture promotes child safeguarding. There was consensus that a whole-of-organisation approach was needed to approach safeguarding as a team and that this approach increases effectiveness. The shared responsibility for different aspects of practice across multiple operational areas, creates a 'whole of organisation' commitment and good level of awareness and understanding across most key areas of organisations. This shared responsibility fosters stronger organisational culture. Contextualising safeguarding work into broader organisational standards (e.g. Catholic Professional Standards) was seen to be helpful, as a way to align mission and culture and to engage at an organisational level.

Culture is about more than compliance. Intentional culture-setting against harm, harassment, discrimination, abuse of power, bullying and abuse of all kinds is key to establishing an enabling environment for safeguarding.



Child Safeguarding Focal Points:

Child safeguarding focal points were seen as key to effective practice and need to be supported with adequate resourcing. Like senior leadership (or when focal points are senior leaders) focal points can champion child safeguarding and drive or lead more effective practices through leading training, facilitating conversations, providing good practice resources and acting as a contact point for incidents or concerns.

It is important that the focal point role isn't an 'add-on' and has a clear terms of reference, time and resource allocation and that focal points have direct access to senior management and leadership. The relationships of the focal points are key. Creating a network of focal points in different regions can be a real asset, particularly to bridge different experience levels. Shared responsibility is still important though — responsibilities for child safeguarding shouldn't fall solely to the focal points — senior leadership, Board members, and staff in every function (human resources, program management, communications, etc.) must mainstream safeguarding in their work to create a whole-of-organisation approach and culture.

Deep understanding of risk factors:

A good understanding by senior leadership and other key staff of child protection risk factors and that their programs can create and exacerbate risks for children is critical to moving from a compliance focus to a good practice approach. This deeper understanding has been achieved where organisations have specialist expertise and where they have invested in training and awareness raising. This has contributed to stronger organisational commitment to good practice.

Training and awareness raising:

A common theme that was evident across all domains of practice was the importance of training and awareness raising to build deeper understanding of child safeguarding risk factors and mitigation measures. Systematic scheduling of trainings at set times such as on induction and regular refresher training was seen as critical. Leveraging external resources, including ACFID trainings and engaging external expert consultants enabled organisations to harness or build their own capacities and also served to signal the importance of the issue. Integrating child safeguarding trainings and discussions into whole-of-organisation meetings, events and digital spaces was also seen as an effective way to increase awareness and visibility. The opposite of all of these features was also true so where organisations have not invested in awareness raising, training, specialist staff or dedicated roles, organisational culture that supports a commitment to child safeguarding is weaker and more likely to engender a limited compliance focus.

Providing a formal forum for staff to discuss child safeguarding and what it looks like in their role or work (i.e. specific issues that emerged during the COVID-19 pandemic in a particular setting) was also an effective strategy to deepen safeguarding awareness.

Adequate resourcing:

Without adequate resourcing, safeguarding commitments by leaders were seen as “lip service”. Resourcing is a telling proxy for organisational commitment. Staff reflected that even where the leadership of organisations were engaged in child safeguarding, the commitment is only seen to be ‘real’ once resources are allocated.

Organisations dependent on volunteers and organisations with informal partnerships identified specific challenges with those modalities:

In general, there is demand for external trainings and for more training opportunities for partners, particularly for training by local providers. The donor drive towards safeguarding was seen by some in the survey to create a tension between being seen to “tick the boxes” in a compliance-focused approach and working towards meaningful change. Respondents noted that discussion around safeguarding seemed hollow if not supported by direct funding. Some respondents noticed that it is difficult to convince staff and volunteers who are not working directly with children that child safeguarding was something that they needed to be involved with. There is further work to be done to help staff and partners understand that working with communities means that organisations are interacting with children.

Working with partners on establishing a shared culture of child safeguarding was seen as a key challenge, particularly during COVID-19:

17% of respondents saw the greatest challenge to organisational culture being either their partners’ organisational cultures or “disparities in partners’ practices.” COVID-19 was seen to have exacerbated this, with lack of in-person training due to travel restrictions seen as hindering efforts to work with partners on establishing a shared culture of child safeguarding.



Moving from compliance towards good practice:

DFAT and ACFID’s focus on compliance has undoubtedly driven organisational change within organisations and continues to be a key driver of compliance which is also fostering good practice. The compliance imperative from DFAT and ACFID is seen as a major and positive driver for child safeguarding within organisations. Compliance with DFAT’s Child Protection requirements (nine minimum standards and accreditation) and ACFID’s Code of Conduct requirements, demands inputs from multiple operational areas across organisations and this contributed to good practice rather than being limited to a compliance approach, which in turn contributes to effectiveness.

DFAT’s nine minimum standards and ACFID’s Code of Conduct:

DFAT’s nine minimum standards and ACFID’s Code of Conduct have served well to provide structure and focus for organisations to implement practices which require commitments across multiple operational areas, which has fostered a ‘whole-of-organisation’ culture and commitment. Policy approval and Board reporting and risk oversight requirements ensure the Board and senior leadership are engaged; staff recruitment practices ensure human resources functions are involved; program level risk assessment requires the inputs and understanding by program and partner staff; and choice and use of images engages communications and fundraising staff. In addition, training requirements across all these operational areas and staff and with partners, has ensured that child protection and safeguarding has stayed ‘top of mind’ and required investment of resources from organisations over many years. Compliance with DFAT and ACFID requirements demands inputs from multiple operational areas across organisations and this increases effectiveness.

This continued focus and investment, albeit predominantly or initially driven by DFAT compliance requirements, has continued to build awareness and understanding within organisations which has also provided an important ongoing driver of good practice to protect children. This was most evident in organisations that invested in contextualised training for staff and partners on a regular basis which served to increase knowledge and skills and also to keep the issue ‘front of mind’. A particular strength for some organisations was investing in specialist staff such as safeguarding focal points and where these roles had additional experience and knowledge, not just an additional job title. Across other domains too, the importance of strong awareness and understanding was seen as critical to better practice, especially in regards to safe programming, risk management and working with partners.

What can ACFID Members do to increase effectiveness?

- Ensure safeguarding and other policies that address the underlying causes such as gender equality, social inclusion, diversity, are well socialised amongst leadership and staff.
- Ensure diversity amongst governing body members and senior leadership to set the tone that all voices are important and will be listened to.
- Invest in increasing the child safeguarding and PSEAH knowledge and understanding of Board, senior leadership — this should include: their accountability obligations (to affected people, donors, partners and staff); risk factors for children and adults (posed by context, program design and partner practices); effective risk mitigation measures; the range of reporting/complaints mechanisms and investigations processes.
- Ensure that policy and verbal commitments are accompanied by adequate levels of resourcing/funding for technical expertise including safeguarding focused roles, staff positions, budgets for training of staff and partners, time for good vulnerability and contextual analysis, risk assessment, program design and monitoring.
- Invest in increasing the child safeguarding and PSEAH knowledge and understanding of staff and partners through regular training — this should include: their accountability obligations (to affected people, donors, partners and staff); how to ensure a child and survivor/victim centred approach that protects and supports; risk factors for children and adults (posed by context, program design and partner practices); effective risk mitigation measures; the range of reporting/complaints mechanisms and investigations processes.
- Communication of commitments and modelling of behaviours by senior leadership at regular points such as through newsletters, email communications, verbal presentations etc.
- Visible publications outlining safeguarding commitments such as posters in offices and at project sites.

What did Child Safeguarding Focal Points say...

Child safeguarding focal points were more confident than the average respondent that the time and resources invested in child safeguarding has led to meaningful change. 90% of child safeguarding focal points reported that they had seen meaningful change in child safeguarding and all child safeguarding respondents surveyed reported that they were confident that their organisations' cultures promoted child safeguarding.

One child safeguarding focal point reflected that the major challenge was that child safeguarding "is not a direct priority" because the organisation is not child-focussed. Another respondent had noticed that "staff don't see the need for it!", and another found that it was difficult to engage teams who did not see their connection to child safeguarding, particularly for functional teams (communications, fundraising, etc.) or for experienced consultants or volunteers who had already completed training for previous engagements.

Child safeguarding focal points were slightly less confident than the average respondent in the board's awareness of their responsibilities in child safeguarding and risks (75% compared to 79% overall).

Respondents also highlighted some challenges faced by child safeguarding focal points, including uncompetitive salary packages, high stress levels and low levels of support from leadership in some cases.

76% of child safeguarding focal points said that their organisations allocated sufficient resources to child safeguarding. The three key drivers of this, according to survey respondents, those interviewed and focus group attendees, have been the compliance imperative driven by DFAT and ACFID, the involvement of senior leadership and boards, and the role of child safeguarding focal points and specialists pushing a whole-of-organisation (mainstreamed) approach.

"Having a dedicated focal point is helpful, but often the size of this commitment has been underestimated and the burden falls on top of an existing workload."

5.2 Safe Programming

About this domain

Safe Programming is an approach that seeks to ensure that programs designed by humanitarian and development organisations do not create or exacerbate risks for the children in the communities they seek to support (or minimise this to the extent possible). This can also be described as a ‘do no harm’ approach. Examples of programs that can create or exacerbate risks for child safeguarding could be setting up water points or WASH facilities at a school in unsafe areas, or allowing outside visitors to communities to have unsupervised access to children. In these examples, the program could increase the risks to children in the community and in programs.

Key Enablers and Barriers

KEY ENABLERS TO EFFECTIVE PRACTICE



- Providing specific tools for risk assessments which explicitly address child safeguarding, and scheduling review of these assessments so that they are continually and consistently updated. This was most effective when risk assessment tools were embedded in mandatory processes, rather than being undertaken as an extra or ‘add-on’ process.
- Building risk assessment capability of staff in-country.
- Consulting with caregivers and children to identify risks.
- Appointing a child protection focal point responsible for each (or for all) programs.
- Undertaking project appraisals and all monitoring, evaluation and learning activities which include explicit child safeguarding questions or lines of inquiry.
- Incorporating a “two person rule” in all contact with children in program designs.
- Ongoing training.

In relation to working with partners:

- Providing funding to partners earmarked specifically for child safeguarding.
- Capacity assessments which include assessments of partners’ policies and procedures.
- Project appraisals which include safeguarding questions.
- Making child safeguarding a requirement before any work commences with partners. This was considered more effective than “fixing it later.”

Perceptions of Respondents

78%

78% of respondents were confident that field/program staff understand child safeguarding risks.

81%

81% of respondents were confident that programs prevent and mitigate child safeguarding risks.

KEY BARRIERS TO EFFECTIVE PRACTICE



- Remote monitoring of programs, particularly of partner programs.
- Local cultural norms can hinder safeguarding focus and efforts e.g. local problems much more serious than worrying about informed consent for a photograph, physical punishment of children seen as normal, child marriage normalised etc.
- Cultural differences impact on appropriateness of reporting procedures — reluctance to report concerns to authorities, reporting a suspicion is not normal practice, concerns about authorities being corrupt.
- Integrity checks for personnel are not as strong in partner countries.
- Child abuse or protection issues within country contexts are very complex with multiple issues at play such as mental health, cultural norms, displacement, drug abuse.
- Language barriers.
- Donor compliance focus rather than deep understanding and risk management. “High stakes” compliance (i.e. loss of funds) seen as an incentive to perform shallow risk assessments and to underreport risks.

Analysis of Findings

Do no harm approach:

The 'do no harm' principle is a helpful lens through which to identify the risks that a program could inadvertently create, even if the organisation has no direct contact with children. Safe programming can be achieved by ensuring that program designs are informed by thorough context, stakeholder and risk assessments, including consideration of the particular vulnerabilities or risks for children. Program designs and monitoring can then consider unintended negative impacts to ensure that the risks are addressed in program implementation and monitoring. Beyond risk management, programs can also seek to reduce power imbalances and advance gender equality, thereby tackling some of the underlying causes of abuse or harm.

Understanding risk factors:

Programs are not risk-neutral. Programs often create or exacerbate risks for children, even if they are not working directly with children. Some respondents felt that safe programming was not applicable to them because they do not work directly with children. This is a common mistake.

Undertaking comprehensive child safeguarding risk assessments relies on project staff having a sound understanding of power imbalances, vulnerabilities, risk factors and appropriate mitigation measures and that their programs can create or exacerbate risks. These are specialised skills that are developed over time and usually through iterative face to face training and mentoring. In working towards good practice, risk assessments can be undertaken by local staff, who know the local context and can therefore nuance risk identification and mitigation measures that are appropriate to local culture, language and other practices.

Focused risk assessment:

Consideration of child safeguarding in program design through specifically focused risk assessment is now reasonably well-established practice, although the quality of this practice remains variable. There is a general observation that risk assessments are often undertaken 'mechanically' and somewhat superficially, with identified risks and mitigation strategies often being generic rather than responsive to specific project contexts and designs.

Risk assessments are significantly more useful when they involve an explicit or dedicated focus on child protection and safeguarding, are context specific and are undertaken by staff with a strong understanding of child protection risks and mitigation measures. Assessment of contextual risks and risks that are created or exacerbated by program interventions, must be periodically reassessed.

Regular monitoring:

Safe programming relies on the regular monitoring of changes to the context, vulnerabilities of populations and changes to risk. Respondents indicated that this is an area that is often overlooked. While project monitoring tools and templates may prompt an assessment of risk, ongoing risk assessment is rarely undertaken during project implementation in a structured or systematic way. This can become a significant issue when projects have long tenure and contexts or interactions with communities change overtime, and where risk assessments are not comprehensively reviewed and refreshed. Organisations reported that embedding child safeguarding into monitoring, evaluation and learning processes helped to address this issue and deepen risk analysis.

For ACFID Members it is a particular challenge monitoring the safe programming approaches of partners, particularly for smaller organisations that may not undertake such frequent field visits. This has obviously been exacerbated throughout the COVID-19 pandemic with travel restrictions for Australian NGOs and also for partners within their own countries.

"We had designed a skills training program for youth to take place in a particular outdoor area in Vanuatu. However, it wasn't until our local partner advised us that the place we had chosen was a location that was often frequented by 'trouble' that we found a safer location. They also told us that it would be risky for the youth to walk home in the dark, so we organised a mini-van to drop them home after the training."



Differing child safeguarding ‘norms’:

Interview respondents reflected on the challenge of identifying and addressing child safeguarding risks in contexts where some forms of child abuse and neglect were normalised. For example, child labour is common in many countries; hitting children in school contexts may be considered acceptable discipline in some settings; early marriage for girls may be culturally acceptable; and girls leaving school prematurely to help with domestic duties may also be considered normal. It is important to take the time to work through these issues with local staff, who may not prioritise or share the same understanding of children’s rights. Safe programming can also depend on working with local communities and institutions to change accepted cultural practices that place children at risk. For example, in supporting teachers’ skills development, it may also be necessary to address classroom discipline management.

Remote oversight:

Organisations are not confident that they have sufficient visibility of their partners’ programming practices in child safeguarding. This has been amplified by COVID-19 and restrictions on field visits. Organisations know what they want to do in their own programs to make programs safer for children, but they are concerned that they do not have sufficient oversight in their partners’ programming or in what happens in communities that they work with. This challenge or barrier has been exacerbated by travel restrictions during the COVID-19 pandemic. However as restrictions have continued, some organisations noted that they were becoming more effective at working remotely with partners to monitor and improve practice in ways that may not have been supported prior to COVID. For example some organisations are designing and implementing e-learning and other on line training and practice sharing opportunities while others noted investing more in locally engaged specialists.

Scope of responsibility:

Respondents identified that staff are sometimes confused about whether they are responsible for addressing all local child protection issues, or whether they are only responsible for ensuring that their programs and staff do not create or exacerbate risks for children. There are different approaches taken to this within the sector. For example, there are some organisations for whom child protection is a principal objective and whose programming therefore seeks to create protective environments for children.

Resourcing:

Safe programming is not cost neutral, and respondents expressed concern that funds are not specifically allocated for child safeguarding. There are significant systems and human resourcing implications and budget requirements to effectively implement safe programming procedures. This is often the case within organisations where the leadership has not sufficiently engaged in understanding the risk factors and importance of child safeguarding good practice, as distinct from compliance. It is challenging that although DFAT has stringent child safeguarding expectations (and other donors with safeguarding more broadly) there was not the same level of commitment to dedicated donor funding to promote child safeguarding good practice.

Digital safeguarding of children:

Digital safeguarding of children is an emerging area of child safeguarding practice. This was evident in how organisations have adapted their safe programming to COVID-19 and the shift to online modes of engagement with children and other community members. Digital safeguarding can also include data protection and standards for data collection, which include informed consent and privacy protection.

Informed consent:

Informed consent can be a useful conversation starter with partners on child safeguarding, but in some instances has also been seen as ‘irrelevant’ by partners who are dealing with serious or complex harm or abuse issues such as displacement, physical punishment, early marriage, homelessness, mental illness and substance abuse.

What can ACFID Members do to increase effectiveness?

- **Undertake thorough and targeted context, stakeholder and risk assessments, including consideration of the particular vulnerabilities or risks for children and other affected people that may be at risk of SEAH.**
- **Undertake these processes jointly with partners to ensure deep local contextual understanding, and to provide support for partners.**
- **Review program designs with a targeted safeguarding lens to question whether the design or its implementation will create or exacerbate risks for children or for SEAH.**
- **Ensure that regular monitoring processes include a targeted safeguarding lens or prompts to consider changing vulnerabilities, risks or unintended negative impacts.**
- **Beyond risk management, programs can also seek to reduce power imbalances and advance gender equality, thereby tackling some of the root causes of abuse or harm.**

5.3 Human Resources

About this domain

An organisation's human resource policies, systems and processes play a major role in actively preventing and mitigating safeguarding risks to children. This is achieved through strong recruitment, screening, induction, training, and performance management processes, all of which combined promote the integrity of staff and minimise the risk of hiring offenders or higher risk people.

Perceptions of Respondents

91%

91% of respondents were confident that HR practices create child safe organisations.

Key Enablers and Barriers

KEY ENABLERS TO EFFECTIVE PRACTICE



- Integrity and police checks and targeted questions at interviews.
- Training on child protection and risks for staff on induction and ongoing.
- Make child safeguarding 'real' in trainings by using scenario-based training and ensuring that it covers day-to-day scenarios. It is important that training includes how to recognise child protection concerns as well as reporting mechanisms.
- Mainstreaming safeguarding into all HR processes including performance appraisals and ensuring that work on safeguarding and contributions to safeguarding are recognised and rewarded in performance appraisals.
- Including safeguarding experience (or experience working with children, or in social work) as criteria in recruitment for program roles to boost technical capacity of teams.

KEY BARRIERS TO EFFECTIVE PRACTICE



- Police checks for partners because of challenges with police in many countries.
- Lack of cross-cultural understanding, so child safeguarding is not seen as a priority.
- Variation in levels of understanding and focus across different operational areas of organisation i.e. program staff have stronger focus and understanding.
- Skills of interviewers in picking up concerning signals or signs.
- Coordination across different parts of an organisation and with partners.
- Rapid recruitment, working with partners, and complaints and investigations mechanisms in humanitarian and emergency settings.



Analysis of Findings

Recruitment, screening and training of staff is a particular area of strength for ACFID Members:

Child safe recruitment and screening practices are well established and a particular strength of organisations. Survey respondents reported a very high degree of confidence in HR systems, and this was confirmed through interviews and focus group discussions. The main value of recruitment and screening processes was seen to be as a deterrent and to communicating and establishing the organisation's values and commitments to child safeguarding and therefore as an important contributor to organisational culture.

The HR component of the survey was the area where the diversity of ACFID members was the most apparent. Some organisations have large HR teams, and others do not have dedicated HR personnel, with recruitment and other HR functions being performed by program staff. HR was also the domain where respondents were most concerned that the efforts were (or were perceived to be) 'box-ticking' – there were high levels of awareness of what was good practice in HR, but less confidence that it is effective.

There is a risk that those conducting interviews or reference checks do not have the necessary skills or knowledge to recognise warning signs or inappropriate responses to targeted questions.

Shared responsibility for child safeguarding across organisation:

In larger organisations, the domestic human resources functions can be larger and better resourced than the international program teams. Respondents said that this load could be better shared across the organisation, rather than falling exclusively on HR or international programming teams.

Variability of safe recruitment systems:

The variability of recruitment, screening, onboarding and performance management between permanent staff and contractors is seen as a significant risk, especially in humanitarian settings where rapid recruitment may be a feature.

Detection of offenders:

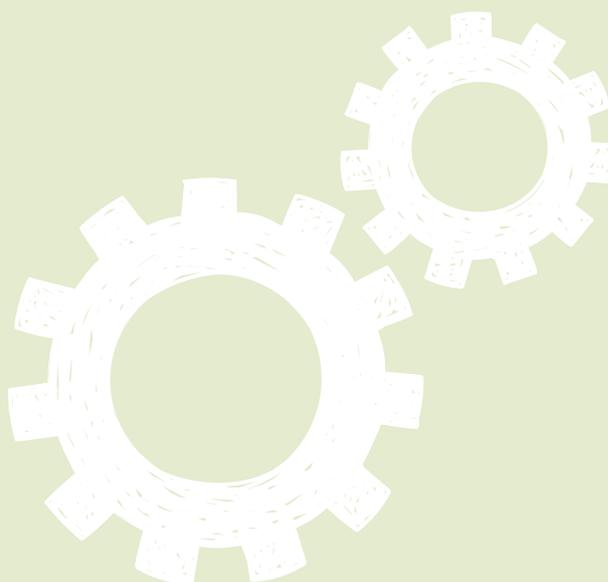
While there appears to be high confidence in the consistent application of recruitment and screening practices, there was less confidence in the efficacy of these practices to actually detect and screen out offenders. Concerns were consistently noted with the efficacy of criminal record checks in Australia and in partner countries. In Australia, these checks were not seen as a significant contributor to ensuring the integrity of new staff given that only formal convictions are noted in criminal record checks, rather than suspicions, accusations or investigations, and these are only recorded for a point in time. Working with Children Checks were seen as more useful in this regard. Nevertheless, police and criminal record checks can also provide important warning signals such as a history of violent offences, assault, fraud etc. Only one organisation reported a specific example where their interview and referee screening processes had identified and rejected an offender.

Reliability of screening checks in partner countries:

Criminal records checks (or equivalent) in partner countries pose numerous challenges including unreliability of information and risks related to corrupt police or other services and privacy risks for the candidates.

Humanitarian response:

Recruitment was seen as particularly challenging in humanitarian and emergency settings due to the compressed period between finding a candidate and hiring them. Some organisations reported that their solutions to this included rehiring known people, specialised safeguarding staff within recruitment teams, and working through existing partners (and existing staff) to minimise emergency recruitment.



“From a programming perspective, a lot of organisations still have a tendency to look at child safeguarding as a “HR issue”, when strengthening safeguarding practices is only possible with concerted efforts within and across programs and partners. If you analyse safeguarding resourcing within organisations, it isn’t uncommon that safeguarding roles are located in HR teams. I strongly feel that while HR departments have a role to play in establishing safe recruitment, screening practices, coordinating induction and training for staff and responding to safeguarding incident reports, organisations need to recognise and adequately resource program safeguarding functions.”

What can ACFID Members do to increase effectiveness?

- Ensure organisational commitments to diversity and inclusion are well socialised and practiced to create a culture that respects and is informed by diverse views and perspectives.
- Ensure recruitment practices include clear signals to the organisation’s commitments such as direct reference to safeguarding in job advertisement, job descriptions, website and other public materials.
- Provide good training for staff conducting interviews so they are comfortable asking targeted safeguarding questions and can recognise warning signs in applicants. This requires a good degree of knowledge and comfort with the content area.
- Undertake police or criminal records checks and look for signals of other misconduct that may increase the safeguarding risks.
- Undertake Working with Children Checks. These and the police checks can act as a deterrent and also provide a strong message of the organisation’s commitments.
- Setting clear expectations of expected behaviours through a Code of Conduct, which explicitly covers prohibited behaviours.
- Provide induction and regular refresher training to all personnel on the organisation’s values and how to prevent, recognise and respond to safeguarding violations.
- Clearly communicate staff obligations to report misconduct, the available reporting mechanisms, and the organisation’s whistle blower policy protections.
- Ensure that supervision and performance appraisals for staff include discussions on the level of understanding of child safeguarding, adherence to a code of conduct and participation in safeguarding trainings.

5.4 Complaints and Investigations

About this domain

Establishing an organisational culture that welcomes and takes complaints seriously is fundamental to child safeguarding.

This requires organisations to:

- establish accessible, safe, child-friendly and confidential mechanisms to receive reports of incidents or complaints;
- communicate complaints mechanisms and investigations procedures to staff, partners and community members and children;
- manage, investigate and respond to complaints in ways that builds the trust of users;
- prioritises the safety and wishes of the children survivors and their caregivers.

Perceptions of Respondents

80%

80% of respondents were confident that staff know their reporting and investigations process.

74%

74% of respondents were confident that staff and partners would report an incident or concern.

46%

46% of respondents were confident that children or carers can access a reporting mechanism and would report.

85%

85% of respondents have confidence in the integrity of their investigations process.

22%

Only 22% of respondents had seen an increase in reporting.

Key Enablers and Barriers

KEY ENABLERS TO EFFECTIVE PRACTICE



- Complaints mechanisms which are locally contextualised, simple, accessible, child focused and build on existing trusted mechanisms.
- Providing multiple options for reporting.
- Proactively seeking reports or concerns through the use of feedback processes or committees such as parent groups.

KEY BARRIERS TO EFFECTIVE PRACTICE



- Lack of reports.
- Lack of trained investigators — there is significant concern that organisations do not have adequately trained investigators.
- Reluctance to report due to fear — fear of creating greater risk to children or their family, fear of authorities, fear of losing funding.
- Uncertainty about scope of responsibility to report.
- Concerns about reporting to local authorities acted as a deterrent.
- Complaints and investigations were identified as particularly challenging in a humanitarian setting, as complaints were more likely to be received through unofficial channels in a crisis setting.

Analysis of Findings

Receipt of reports or complaints:

Nearly 80% of organisations have not seen any increase in the number of reports since launching their child safeguarding policy (only 22% of organisations reported an increase in complaints). Most organisations do not feel that they are receiving “enough” complaints, with several commenting that their organisations had never received a child safeguarding complaint or concern.

The lowest reported level of confidence across the entire survey was that a child and/or their caregivers can access and would report a suspected/alleged child protection incident to their organisation. Only 46% were ‘quite confident’ or ‘very confident’ that this would happen — half the confidence levels in other domains.

A range of factors have contributed to low reporting rates. Staff, volunteers and partners may be unwilling to report concerns due to the fear of losing funding. Cultural factors such as suspicion of authorities may not be conducive to reporting. There is a general lack of knowledge and confidence in regards to designing and implementing community based complaints mechanisms which may mean that reporting channels are not contextually appropriate or accessible.

Effective complaints mechanisms:

The most effective complaints mechanisms provide multiple options for reporting and include existing and trusted support structures or people such as health workers, teachers, doulas, community or church leaders or representatives or just other women. These can be supplemented with complaints boxes, email addresses, phone numbers etc, but the experience internationally has demonstrated that trust and therefore use of these externally created options is very low. Options for reporting should include anonymous, digital, and person-to-person reporting. Incorporating reporting into general feedback mechanisms (rather than safeguarding-specific channels) facilitated reporting as linking it to less sensitive areas for feedback made it easier or less threatening to use the channels. Two suggestions stood out as particularly effective ways to boost engagement with reporting mechanisms without significant cost. Firstly, one organisation shared that they assigned an external reviewer from a different country to any complaint that it received, to minimise the risk that reports may be dismissed too early. A respondent from another organisation shared that they “translate” reporting processes and materials into digestible, child-friendly formats to make it more accessible.

Barriers to Reporting:

Experience internationally has demonstrated that the fear and consequences of reporting exceeds the perceived benefits and therefore leads to very low reporting rates. The significant sensitivities and risks faced by someone reporting an incident can be extreme, including the risk of further harm or even death. There is a fear of the consequences of mandatory reporting at all levels i.e. from partners to NGOs and from NGOs to donors. For example, if a staff person has a suspicion that a behaviour they’ve seen isn’t quite right but doesn’t have conclusive evidence, they may be cautious about reporting as they know this will lead to an investigation and could damage an innocent person’s reputation and damage working relationships. Alternatively, they may have seen a colleague over-step a boundary but not commit serious misconduct and are fearful of the consequence of reporting an indiscretion.

Lack of trust in reporting and investigation mechanisms also creates a significant barrier to reporting. In the case of a serious incident, reporting that is not managed carefully can increase risks for the victim/survivor, the person reporting, their family, and the person accused of an incident. This reinforces the importance of reporting mechanisms being designed in close consultation with children and caregivers, to ensure that the mechanism is accessible and safe.

The fear of jeopardising funding has been exacerbated by the punitive response of donors to the Oxfam Haiti incident. Organisations may be inclined to undertake an internal investigation to establish whether there has been an incident or to resolve an incident before reporting to a donor, because they fear the reputational and funding consequences that might result from reporting an incident. This appears to be somewhat mitigated in Australia because there is a sense that DFAT takes a cooperative and constructive approach to case management, but there is still hesitancy to report among a number of ACFID Members.

These concerns about the consequences of reporting, prompts the critical need for reports to be managed with sensitivity and proportionality.

Experience internationally has demonstrated that the fear and consequences of reporting exceeds the perceived benefits and therefore leads to very low reporting rates. The significant sensitivities and risks faced by someone reporting an incident can be extreme, including the risk of further harm or even death.

Conducting Investigations:

The capacity to undertake investigations was a significant area of concern. In general, there was a concern that the staff responsible for investigations may not have sufficient specialisation or training. Organisations expressed a desire to outsource the investigations function to specialist investigators but were concerned about resources and also about where to find these services. One respondent from a small organisation expressed concern that it can be difficult to find a “neutral” investigator in a small team. Others expressed a desire for more training in this area.

Australian organisations felt they did not have adequate visibility of partners’ investigations practices. There was also a recurring concern that too many reports were not formally investigated as they were not considered sufficiently “serious” within in-country contexts.

There is often a tension between transparency, confidentiality and organisational reputation. Information sharing between organisations and providing updates to those who lodge complaints is difficult, but respondents also recognise that transparency and demonstrating that action is taken is important to encourage reporting.



What can ACFID Members do to increase effectiveness?

- **Consult with partners and affected people to identify mechanisms that they will trust and use — this is the basis of community based complaints mechanisms.**
- **Taking a strengths based approach using locally embedded, trusted mechanisms such as existing community groups or committees, church or other leadership or representatives, doulas, health workers, teachers or just other trusted women.**
- **Have well-publicised, simple and clearly promoted feedback mechanisms promoted on websites, on posters in offices and at project sites, in policies, in trainings and inductions, etc.**
- **Ensure multiple channels for reporting so that there are options that may suit different people and different contexts and needs- these could include anonymous and non-public reporting options such as a hotline, digital reporting options such as email and SMS, complaints boxes, designated people that can be contacted by these means or face to face when they visit communities. In-person and one-to-one reporting options are important, including a female member of staff.**
- **Proactively seek feedback within safe and trusted forums — this may elicit a report or just discussion that could provide important warning signals which could then be explored privately.**
- **Link safeguarding reporting to broader or general feedback mechanisms.**
- **Have trained focal points to receive reports and trained investigators, with training and experience in child-focused complaints and investigations processes and in interviewing children.**
- **Ensure timely responses so people feel they have been heard. Provide support and feedback to those who used the complaints mechanism so that they feel support and can see action has been taken.**
- **Policies translated into local language and into one-pager posters in child-friendly language.**
- **Ensuring confidentiality (or limiting sharing of information) through carefully designed report handling and investigations procedures and ensuring these ‘safe’ features are well communicated to potential users.**
- **Have an established ‘incident management panel’ or equivalent who meet immediately after an organisation receives a complaint to determine risk factors and how to proceed in a victim/survivor-centred, child-focused way.**
- **Engage child protection experts in country through partners and other NGOs.**

5.5 Partnerships and Coordination

About this domain

Coordination and partnership are fundamental to effective humanitarian and development work. Working with partners is the primary implementation model for ACFID Members.

This means that ACFID Members and their partners need to work together to meet international standards for child safeguarding, in ways that are contextually appropriate and build on local systems and strengths. A significant aspect of managing child safeguarding risk and building good practice is understanding the practices and capacities of partner organisations and providing technical and financial support to strengthen their practices. The sharing of information, learning and knowledge between partners can contribute to good practice and improve the outcomes and contextual appropriateness of a response.

Perceptions of Respondents



81% of respondents were confident that their approaches to working with partners was safeguarding children.



86% of partners felt that they received enough support from Australian partners to develop their policies and practices in child safeguarding.

Key Enablers and Barriers

KEY ENABLERS TO EFFECTIVE PRACTICE



- Where processes are locally developed, informed and owned, safeguarding outcomes are improved.
- Providing direct support to partners — training, funding for positions, help with their own policy development.
- Providing training in local language.
- Undertaking joint risk assessments which helps the process to be locally informed and provides mentoring.
- Strengths based approaches which build on existing local mechanisms and knowledge.
- Establishing child safeguarding expectations and communication in partner agreements and during initial due diligence.
- Engaging local experts.
- Resourcing is seen as critical. Paid focal points in partner organisations or a dedicated focal point in a program team.

KEY BARRIERS TO EFFECTIVE PRACTICE



- Language and cultural barriers and differences between countries and partners.
- The balance between compliance and good practice — the focus is more on compliance and partners feel the burden of this.
- Resources to support partners and resources of partners such as staff skills and funds to implement what is needed.
- Difficult to make safeguarding a priority with partners in a crisis, and mainstreaming safeguarding and familiarising all stakeholders with policies and procedures in a short timeframe is challenging.

Analysis of Findings

The burden on partners:

Overwhelmingly, respondents noted that the greatest burden in terms of compliance and good practice was carried by partners and that resourcing did not always adequately support this. Australian organisations felt their approaches to working with partners and country offices were effective, and that investment of resources in partner and country office staff knowledge and skills was vital, however success in this regards was quite varied. In-country staff felt the burden of responsibility for child safeguarding practices but did not always receive the resources or support they needed. This could be improved through additional resources for specialised staff and for paid focal points within partner organisations, and mentoring or accompaniments for processes such as program design and risk assessment.

Support for partners:

Financial and technical support for country offices and partners is key to the effectiveness of their practices. Partners and country offices would value and benefit from additional resources for specialised staff and focal points, and mentoring or accompaniments for processes such as program design and risk assessment.

Although 81% of respondents said they were confident that their organisations' approaches to working with partners effectively safeguards children, narrative responses to the survey and discussion revealed that how to most effectively engage with partners was an area the sector is still actively trying to reflect on and improve. Across every domain of practice, respondents were concerned that they did not have sufficient visibility to be confident that their partners were meeting organisational child safeguarding standards. Although there was a general sentiment that respondents wanted to improve their coordination with partners, many were unsure on what more they could do.

Relationships are key. Many of the most meaningful changes in child safeguarding overall were achieved through strong collaboration with partners, including policy development, training and implementation by local organisations and working closely with community members.

Coordination and collaboration:

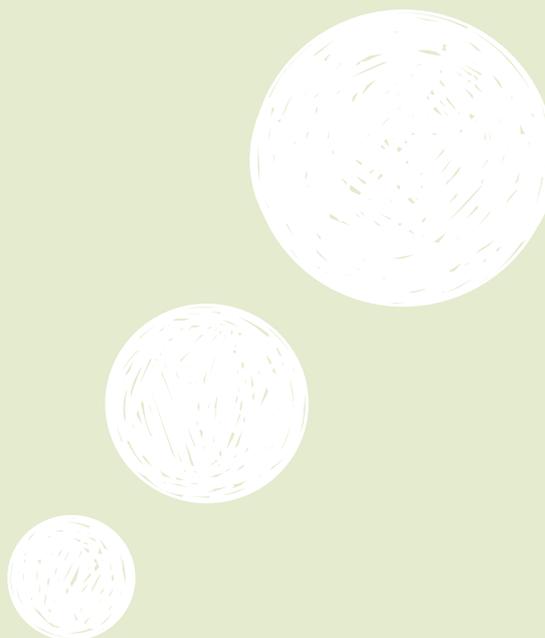
There is strong and consistent interest for greater coordination and collaboration across the sector — respondents are eager to learn from other organisations. They are also eager to network their partners and to work with local networks to improve their safeguarding practices, but they are not sure where to start. Similarly, ACFID members reported that they found local experts to be most effective, but identifying and utilising this expertise was challenging.

Localisation of practices:

Local contextualisation of policies, procedures, training content, risks assessment and complaints mechanisms were seen as critical to good practice and effectiveness. Respondents spoke of the importance of a deep understanding of existing trusted communications and reporting mechanisms, in other words, taking a strengths based approach and building on or utilising local people or structures.

Humanitarian response:

The central challenge to safeguarding children in humanitarian and emergency contexts is the rapid response time. It is challenging to conduct pre-deployment trainings, establish processes and procedures with partners, and commit to the same standards of due diligence when responding to a crisis.



“Some partners have found it extremely difficult to balance the requirements that we have of them (ACFID, DFAT etc) and the requirements that their own governments have. Striking the balance between ‘donor compliance’ and good practice with pressures donor compliance always weighing down promoting good practice.”

What did in-country partners say...

Although 86% of partners felt that they received enough support from Australian partners to develop their policies and practices in child safeguarding, freeform responses expressed concerns about resourcing levels and levels of cultural competence and contextual understanding from Australia-based organisations.

Country office staff from a small sample of organisations were involved in focus group discussions. The importance of the local contextualisation of safeguarding practices across program design, risk assessment and management, HR practices, training, and the design and implementation of complaints/reporting mechanisms was seen as critical to effectiveness.

Survey respondents noted that partners and country offices feel the greatest burden for compliance and implementation. This was verified with Australian staff who recognised that the aspects of practice undertaken in Australia are really limited to policy and procedure development and monitoring of compliance, while the actual implementation of risk assessment, program implementation, design and implementation of complaints mechanisms, response to incidents and affected children, all happens in-country and by partners. Therefore it is the partner or country office staff who carry the greatest burden of responsibility and management.

What partners told us about working with ACFID members — Is there anything that Australian partners could do to support you to make child safeguarding more effective?

“Providing more resources for on the ground/in community activities for safeguarding, and not just focus all the time on compliance to DFAT. Because it is bigger than DFAT and can have a great positive impact in the community”

What ACFID members told us about working with partners

“People who have not lived in or been in close contact with [us] find it hard to understand how to contextualise CP and PSEAH concepts. So while we can do all the ‘office compliance’ activities and they are good at that [...] they can be a bit of a challenge having great ideas from Africa for example that do not fit the Pacific context.”

What can ACFID Members do to increase effectiveness?

- Engage in mutual processes with partners to understand each other’s values, capacities, understandings and approaches to safeguarding. This needs to be done in a deep way to really understand and respond to partners’ values, contextual and cultural influences etc.
- Show respect for partners deep knowledge of local context and culture and how it intersects with safeguarding risks and responses.
- Introduce safeguarding good practice to partners at the commencement of partnerships or programs.
- Allocate dedicated resources — technical support, people and funds — to support partners in strengthening their understanding of safeguarding and their practices.
- Undertake processes such as risk assessment together with partners.
- Support or ensure partners are networked with other entities working with safeguarding in their countries to facilitate discourse and sharing of resources.
- Support or ensure partners are well linked in with international safeguarding standards such as those promoted by the CHS, UNICEF, DFAT, ACFID etc.

6

Lessons for PSEAH Practice

Perceptions of Respondents



95% of respondents recognised the synergies between PSEAH and child safeguarding policies and practice.



The remaining 5% said that they were completely distinct and did not see overlap.



Key Enablers and Barriers

KEY ENABLERS FOR PSEAH PRACTICE



- Good policy overlap with child safeguarding and PSEAH, so the two policy areas can be combined.
- The key areas of synergy that enabled combining resources or practices were: complaints and investigations mechanisms, shared staff positions such as focal points/officers, having an umbrella safeguarding policy, recruitment and screening procedures for personnel, risk assessments, and codes of conduct.

KEY BARRIERS OR RISKS TO PSEAH PRACTICE



- Risk that combining child safeguarding and PSEAH will hide the unique risks and responses required for children.
- PSEAH is very new for partners so it will take time — lots of training needed with partners in PSEAH.

Analysis of Findings

95% of survey respondents recognised the synergies between PSEAH and child safeguarding policies and practice. The remaining 5% said that they were completely distinct and did not see overlap.

Australia's extensive experience with child safeguarding has undoubtedly positioned ACFID members well to respond to the drive for effective PSEAH practice. Australian organisations are well progressed with awareness raising and socialisation of risk factors, mitigation measures and minimum standards for PSEAH, directly because of their work over many years with child safeguarding. This was an advantage that organisations globally did not share when PSEAH became a more prominent requirement in 2018. In the UK, the US and in Europe, NGOs and peak bodies have been racing to develop standards of practice and supporting resources such as training programs. Australian organisations have been able to capitalise on their long term work in child safeguarding, with PSEAH initiatives being a fairly natural extension of their safeguarding work with their own staff, Boards and with partners. However the additional requirements for PSEAH are an even heavier burden for partners already feeling the weight of child safeguarding responsibilities.

While recognising the serious consequences of SEAH for victim/survivors and reputation of organisations and therefore demonstrating strong commitment to PSEAH, ACFID members have also expressed concern with the increased compliance and good practice burden being placed upon them with the new and increased PSEAH requirements. For smaller agencies this was noted as being 'overwhelming' with significant concerns for their ability to resource the new requirements and to support their partners. For larger agencies this sense of being overburdened was less pronounced perhaps because they tend to be more engaged in the international discourse with PSEAH, have better access to training and other resources through their networks and have more resources to support PSEAH practice of partners.

There are commonly two approaches that organisations have taken to PSEAH and child safeguarding. The first is to integrate PSEAH and child safeguarding under an inclusive safeguarding umbrella, with the two areas sharing an overarching policy architecture, focal points, training, etc. The second is to treat PSEAH and child safeguarding separately, with separate policies, focal points, trainings, etc. Out of pragmatism and acknowledgment of the sector's diversity, DFAT and ACFID have consistently encouraged organisations to take an approach to child safeguarding and PSEAH that suits their organisation best.

Internationally, peak bodies and NGOs have tended to take a broader 'safeguarding of vulnerable people' approach with a predominant focus on PSEAH and no explicit focus on broader harm to children. As this approach gains traction and demands investment of resources for international NGOs or with partners that smaller ACFID members may work with, there is likely to be less appetite for a dedicated child safeguarding focus. In Australia there is a well-founded fear that combining the two areas will erode the momentum gained for child safeguarding and will hide or mask the unique approaches and skills required to address child-specific risks or incidents. Existing resourcing will most likely be stretched across both areas.

There are some 'easy' areas of overlap that have allowed for some quick efficiencies. The most obvious is human resources with recruitment, screening, onboarding, and performance management systems that can expand across safeguarding more broadly. Other areas of practice such as training, risk analysis, program design, and complaints and investigations mechanisms also have areas of overlap that organisations have been able to expand to cover PSEAH. Other aspects of practice however require more specialised approaches and knowledge. For example, the risk factors in contexts and programs for PSEAH need to be specifically understood to enable safe programming, complaints and reporting mechanisms can mostly be shared however specialised and different investigations skills are required for children or victims/survivors of SEAH. As noted in earlier section of this report, the skills of investigators is an area of weakness in the sector that requires significant additional resourcing and investment.

Some organisations were concerned that taking a more general 'safeguarding' approach would mask the important differences between child safeguarding and PSEAH, such as the highly specialised approaches and skills needed to support children and could minimise the relevance or consideration of the unique risks and issues that children face globally. Respondents also saw clearly communicating these differences in scope and application as a key challenge.



7

ACFID — a Key Enabler

ACFID Support

ACFID's support has been a key enabler in its members' child safeguarding work. ACFID members feel well supported by ACFID and value the support they have received.

Survey respondents and focus group participants were interested in learning more from other ACFID organisations on what they have found to work. The sector is eager to learn more about what works and how to improve. There is substantial interest in learning from other organisations in their experiences and for ACFID to provide trainings, including annual refresher training on child-safe reporting mechanisms, training for partner staff, regular inductions for new safeguarding focal points, and trainings on complaints and investigations mechanisms.

There is also demand within the sector for child safeguarding networks on a country by country basis, which could provide training and other support in-country, and also for country-specific resources and information sharing.

“ACFID has been quite a proactive peak body in the area of child safeguarding. Moving forward, it will be good to see ongoing support from ACFID to both the Child Rights and Safeguarding CoPs. This survey is a great initiative. Hope they do more to facilitate similar learning initiatives.”

We asked respondents what additional support from ACFID they would find most useful, and they responded:

Additional ACFID support requested

1. Learning from other ACFID organisations

There is appetite from ACFID members to learn from each other, particularly from organisations in similar positions to them (i.e. small organisation to be able to learn from an organisation with similar resources) or from child-focused, larger organisations who may be able to share new ideas. ACFID, and its Communities of Practice, could play a role in facilitating an ongoing conversation.

Respondents were interested in ACFID-facilitated knowledge sharing opportunities about what works best in specific contexts and minimum standard guidance when working with local governments.

Knowledge sharing, even within the CoPs, may be limited by the materials (policies, procedures, etc.) member organisations were willing/able to share with each other.

Transparency in safeguarding is a challenge for the sector, and ACFID brokering increased information sharing as a trusted mediator could play a powerful role in reducing inefficiencies.

2. Trainings

There is substantial demand for specific types of training, including:

- Periodic orientations/inductions for new safeguarding focal points.
- Regular refresher trainings.
- Trainings for partner staff, including in languages other than English.
- Trainings targeted at organisations not working directly with children.
- Trainings on investigation standards, and specifically how to manage investigations of incidents that occur in partner countries/programs.
- Trainings on the development of community-based feedback and complaints mechanisms.
- Training on how to support partner organisations to develop their own policies.

3. Databases and written resources

There is a need for a consolidated list of child safeguarding experts and child safeguarding organisations in specific countries and locations to help ACFID members recruit consultants, perhaps like the Resource and Support Hub's [Safeguarding Consultants Directory](#) (UK) and a database of child safeguarding networks and training suppliers by state/district in each country across Asia Pacific.

Examples of risk assessment tools or templates would be useful.

4. Policy review support

Respondents requested support from ACFID in developing an umbrella safeguarding policy.

5. Liaising with DFAT and reporting back to ACFID members

Respondents also requested information from ACFID about the future of DFAT's Child Protection and PSEAH policies, and whether these will be combined or will share similar risk assessment structures. One respondent also asked for DFAT to bring its assessments and minimum standards from PSEAH across into Child Protection.



Annexures

Annex A: Survey Questionnaire



ACFID Child Safeguarding Survey Question Outline

This survey has been initiated by the Child Safeguarding subgroup of ACFID’s Child Rights and Safeguarding Communities of Practice to document the collective learning from our sector’s child safeguarding journey. We are thankful for the funding support from ACFID.

It’s been over a decade since DFAT (then AusAID) released its Child Protection Policy and child safeguarding became a major sector-wide focus for Australian NGOs and their partners. We have all been working hard over these years to ensure our programs are safer for children. We’d love to hear your reflections on that journey, what works, what progress we’ve made, what we’ve learnt and what we could do better to safeguard children in the years ahead. We’re also hoping that the learnings from our child safeguarding experiences can help to strengthen and accelerate our prevention of sexual exploitation, abuse and harassment (PSEAH) journey. In addition to this survey, we’ll be conducting focus group discussions and some interviews for a deeper dive. The findings from this survey and focus group discussions will be presented in a report that ACFID will share with the sector to promote further learning and momentum on the sector’s safeguarding journey.

Structure of the Survey: the child safeguarding domains

We’ve been thinking about child safeguarding (and PSEAH) practice in relation to the various ‘domains of practice’ that are common within most organisations. You can see these outlined in the diagram. The survey will ask you a few questions about each of these domains — your thoughts and experiences in safeguarding practices in areas like organisational culture and commitment, safe programming, human resources, complaints and investigations, etc.

You may notice that we use the language ‘*child safeguarding*’ and ‘*child protection*’ throughout this survey. When we refer to ‘*child safeguarding*’, we are referring to the policies, procedures and practices that an organisation has to ensure children are safe. When we refer to ‘*child protection*’, we are referring to the act of protecting children who are at risk of or suffering from harm, abuse or exploitation through protective systems and mechanisms initiated by a range of state, non-state and community actors. We’re going to start with some big picture questions about how much you think has changed in child safeguarding, how effective you think it’s been, and what you’ve learnt.

The questions are of a general nature about your practice and lessons learned and will not ask you to recount personal experiences or specific cases. Please do not use this survey to disclose specific child safeguarding concerns. If you have any child safeguarding concerns, we’d encourage you to report these through your organisation’s established reporting channels so that you receive the support you need and your concerns can be handled appropriately.



If you have any accessibility requirements or if you’d like any help completing the survey or have any questions, please email us at hello@l4d.com.au, and we’d be more than happy to help.



If you need other support, please refer to the contacts listed below to access support services in Australia and Papua New Guinea. If you are in another country, please also reach out to local support services.

Australia:
Lifeline 24 Hour Counselling [13 11 14](tel:131114)
Beyond Blue [1300 22 46 36](tel:1300224636)
Sane Australia [1800 18 7263](tel:1800187263)

PNG:
1-Tok Kaunselin Helpim Lain [715 08000](tel:71508000)

Questionnaire

Do you work for an ACFID member organisation or for a partner organisation?

- ACFID member organisation
- Partner organisation
- Neither

How much does your organisation work with children?

- Our programs have no contact with children (e.g. we do policy work with governments)
- Our programs only involve incidental contact with children (e.g. we work with adults or in communities)
- Our programs often work directly with children (e.g. we work in schools and in areas of child development)

What kind of role do you play within your organisation? Choose as many options as you like.

- Program/project personnel
- Consultant/adviser
- Child protection/safeguarding officer /focal person
- Marketing/Communications
- Operations
- Human Resources
- Senior leadership
- Child safeguarding focal point
- PSEAH focal point
- Program management

What are the most meaningful changes you've seen an organisation make in child safeguarding?

These could be examples from your own work and organisation, from previous work or from work you've seen.



Questionnaire

Organisational culture and commitment

- What level of confidence do you have that your organisation's culture promotes child safeguarding?
- How confident are you in your board's awareness of their responsibilities in child safeguarding and risks?
- Do you feel as if your organisation allocates sufficient resources to its child safeguarding practices?
- Do you think that the resources and time your organisation has invested in child safeguarding led to meaningful change?
- What has helped your organisation build an organisational culture which supports child safeguarding?
- Have there been any particular challenges in building an organisational culture which supports child safeguarding?

Safe programming

- How confident are you that your programs prevent and mitigate risks for children?
- How confident are you that field and program staff understand child protection risk factors?
- What practices have you seen or used that are most effective in ensuring programs are safe for children?
- What are the key challenges your organisation experiences in making sure that programs are safe for children?

Human resources

- What level of confidence do you have in your organisation's human resource practices to create a child-safe organisation?
- What human resource practices have you seen that are most effective in creating child-safe organisations?
- Have there been any particular challenges in implementing human resource practices that create child-safe organisations?

Complaints and investigations

- How confident are you that staff, volunteers or partners would report a suspected or alleged child safeguarding/protection incident to your organisation?
- How confident are you that children and/or their caregivers can access and would report a suspected or alleged child protection incident to your organisation?
- How confident are you that staff know what will happen if a report is made by them or an allegation is made against them?
- How confident are you in the integrity of your organisation's investigations process?
- We know that child abuse occurs in all contexts, and that an increase in reports can indicate that the reporting systems are working. Have you seen an increase in reporting in your organisation?
- Which complaints and investigations processes have you seen that are most effective in creating child safe organisations?
- What are the key challenges your organisation experiences in receiving complaints, managing investigations and reporting child protection cases to authorities?

Coordination and partnership

- How confident are you that your organisation's approach to working with partners is effective in protecting children?
- What partnership approaches have you seen or used with your partners that are most effective in addressing child safeguarding?
- What are the key challenges your organisation faces in working with partners on child safeguarding?
- To what extent does your organisation coordinate or collaborate with child protection networks and/or local child-focused organisations on child safeguarding?

Questionnaire

Final Questions for Partners

- Do you feel you have received enough support from your Australian partners to develop child protection/safeguarding policy and practices?
- Did you feel the development of your child protection/safeguarding policy with your Australian partner was a collaborative process?
- Is there anything that Australian partners could do to support you to make child safeguarding more effective?

We'd love to know more about your context.

- Have you experienced contextual challenges in developing and implementing child safeguarding policies and procedures, for example inconsistencies between international child safeguarding standards and local laws?
- Have you been able to incorporate good practice child safeguarding measures that already existed within your organisation, into the development of your child safeguarding policy? If not, what has prevented this?
- Is there anything else you'd like to tell us about ensuring child safeguarding is relevant to your context?

In some of our work with members on PSEAH, we've heard that child safeguarding has provided a foundation for some of their PSEAH policy and practice.

- What's your experience of this — do you see much overlap in implementation of child safeguarding and PSEAH policies?
- Thinking through the domains of child safeguarding practice, are there any synergies with or potential challenges in developing PSEAH practices?

Does your organisation work in humanitarian responses?

- Yes
- No

We know that in humanitarian and emergency settings, the risks to children increase and the operating context is more challenging. We'd like to learn about your organisation's experience in child safeguarding in these settings.

What particular challenges do you face in applying child safeguarding measures in humanitarian settings in the areas of:

- Human Resources (i.e. safe recruitment processes, thorough induction and training, etc)
- Safe Programming (i.e. making sure programs are safe for children in humanitarian settings)
- Complaints and Investigations (i.e. making sure complaints mechanisms are known and accessible, undertaking investigations, etc)
- Partnerships and Coordination (i.e. supporting partners to develop their own child safeguarding measures)

Is there anything you were hoping to tell us today that we haven't asked?

Please feel free to share any additional information on earlier answers if you'd like.

To submit your survey, please 'enter' until you see a big 'thank you' appear.

Questionnaire

Final Questions for ANGOs

- Have you received ACFID support or guidance in child safeguarding?
- Is there any additional support you would like to receive from ACFID?

In some of our work with members on PSEAH, we've heard that child safeguarding has provided a foundation for some of their PSEAH policy and practice.

- What's your experience of this — do you see much overlap in implementation of child safeguarding and PSEAH policies?
- Thinking through the domains of child safeguarding practice, are there any synergies with or potential challenges in developing PSEAH practices?

Does your organisation work in humanitarian responses?

- Yes
- No

We know that in humanitarian and emergency settings, the risks to children increase and the operating context is more challenging. We'd like to learn about your organisation's experience in child safeguarding in these settings.

What particular challenges do you face in applying child safeguarding measures in humanitarian settings in the areas of:

- Human Resources (i.e. safe recruitment processes, thorough induction and training, etc)
- Safe Programming (i.e. making sure programs are safe for children in humanitarian settings)
- Complaints and Investigations (i.e. making sure complaints mechanisms are known and accessible, undertaking investigations, etc)
- Partnerships and Coordination (i.e. supporting partners to develop their own child safeguarding measures)

Is there anything you were hoping to tell us today that we haven't asked?

Please feel free to share any additional information on earlier answers if you'd like.

To submit your survey, please 'enter' until you see a big 'thank you' appear.



Annex B: Focus Groups and Key Informant Interviews

Focus Groups

Group 1:

Australian NGO ACFID Members — Family Planning NSW, Act for Peace, Australian Volunteers International, Educating the Future, and independent consultant.

Group 2:

Australian NGO ACFID Members and in country office representatives — Save the children Australia, Australian Himalayan Foundation, UNICEF, Marie Stopes International Australia, Tear Fund, Royal Australian College of Surgeons, ADRA, Good Return and Oxfam.

Group 3:

In-Country Office representatives of ACFID Members — Habitat for Humanity Cambodia.

Group 4:

Australian NGO ACFID Members — Caritas, Act for Peace, IWDA.

Key Informant Interviews

Jason Brown

Australian Humanitarian Partnership Support Unit

Liam Sharp

Australian Humanitarian Partnership Support Unit

Fiona Williams

AVI

Franziska Schwarz

Bond UK

Kate Eversteyn

Save the Children Australia

Toni Hunt

DFAT

Uma Komalan

Salvation Army

Sophie Seck

ACFID

Meriwether Beatty

InterAction

Coline Rapneau

CHS Alliance

Shashike Gamage

Plan International

Belinda Lauria

Anglican Overseas Aid

James Bennet

Australian Charities and Not-for-profits Commission



Annex C: Guiding Questions for FGDs and KIIs

Organisational Culture

- **Enablers:** What human resource practices have you seen that are most effective in creating child-safe organisations?
- **Challenges:** Have there been any particular challenges in implementing human resource practices that create child-safe organisations?

Safe Programming

- **Enablers:** What human resource practices have you seen that are most effective in creating child-safe organisations?
- **Challenges:** Have there been any particular challenges in implementing human resource practices that create child-safe organisations?

Human Resources

- **Enablers:** What human resource practices have you seen that are most effective in creating child-safe organisations?
- **Challenges:** Have there been any particular challenges in implementing human resource practices that create child-safe organisations?

Complaints and Investigations

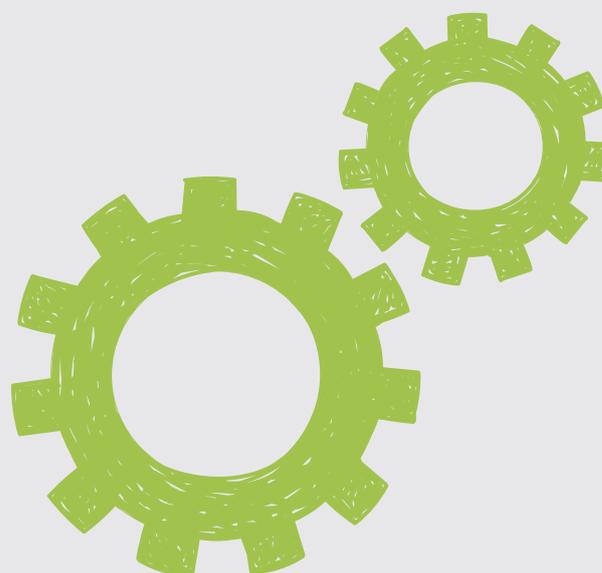
- **Enablers:** Which complaints and investigations processes have you seen that are most effective in creating child safe organisations?
- **Challenges:** What are the key challenges your organisation experiences in receiving complaints, managing investigations and reporting child protection cases to authorities?

Coordination and Partnership

- **Enablers:** What partnership approaches have you seen or used with your partners that are most effective in addressing child safeguarding?
- **Enablers:** To what extent does your organization coordinate or collaborate with child protection networks and/or local child-focused organisations on child safeguarding?
- **Challenges:** What are the key challenges your organisation faces in working with partners on child safeguarding?

Lessons from Child Safeguarding for PSEAH

- Do you see much overlap in implementation of child safeguarding and PSEAH policies?
- Thinking through the domains of child safeguarding practice, are there any synergies with or potential challenges in developing PSEAH practices?



Thank you

