



## Complaint Policy

### Introduction

International Blue Cross (IBC) has a mission to prevent, treat and reduce substance use, abuse and dependency among the most vulnerable people around the world. Headquartered in Bern Switzerland, IBC is an international actor in the field of development cooperation and serves as the umbrella organization for its national member organizations. IBC has no regional offices but works with in-country partners.

The members are independent, non-political and non-denominational Christian associations that form a network to assist marginalised populations and people harmed by, or at risk to be harmed by, alcohol and drugs.

As a global organisation, IBC also implements international development cooperation programmes in the field of substance abuse in line with the United Nations 2030 Agenda. Project activities are run in grass roots settings in various locations and include alcohol and drug prevention, treatment and counselling for people with substance abuse problems, as well as international policy advice and lobbying.

The seven core values of the International Blue Cross are: love, solidarity, excellence, respect, empowerment, inclusiveness and good governance.

### Purpose

IBC recognizes its responsibility to address the wellbeing and protection of communities with whom it works. IBC provides this complaint mechanism for stakeholders to raise a concern or complaint about the work of IBC. IBC learns from all situations in order to strive for high quality and continuous improvement in IBC's humanitarian, development and advocacy work.

All IBC staff, volunteers, contracted parties and Network Committee members have a personal responsibility to ensure that they are aware of, understand and apply the IBC Code of Conduct including the IBC Complaints Policy. IBC is responsible for complaints that it receives against its staff, volunteers and contracted parties in relation to a breach of the IBC Code of Conduct. If a submitted complaint is not within the scope of IBC to respond, the complainant will receive a notification.

### Objectives

This policy clarifies the roles, responsibilities and timeframes of complaint handling, and provides clear policy guidance for responding to and resolving complaints. IBC aims to act in a transparent and accountable manner, and strives to operate a high quality organisation.



The following should be achieved through the Complaint Policy and Procedure:

- set out roles, responsibilities and timeframes on handling of complaints, and provide clear policy guidance for responding to and resolving complaints;
- ensure a consistent mechanism to hold IBC staff, volunteers and contracted parties accountable in terms of their behaviour and compliance with IBC standards and policies;
- provide a mechanism for stakeholders to raise a concern or complaint about the work of IBC;
- ensure that IBC learns from all situations in order to strive for high quality and continuous improvement in IBC's humanitarian, development and advocacy work;
- recognise, promote and protect IBC stakeholder rights, including the right to raise a concern and/or complaint about breaches, or non-compliance;

### **Sensitive complaints**

IBC regards any complaint relating to corruption, sexual abuse, or any other form of exploitation and abuse as sensitive. Our complaint procedures ensure that all information relating to complaints is handled confidentially, and that they have a priority.

### **Non-retaliation (whistleblowing principle)**

IBC seeks to provide a safe environment through which stakeholders can voice a concern, without fear of reprisal or unfair treatment. IBC aims to ensure that complaints are addressed fairly, appropriately, and in a timely manner. IBC is committed to ensuring that people are able to raise reasonable concerns:

- without any risk of losing their employment or entitlements or suffering any form of retribution in the community or workplace;
- knowing that harassment or victimisation will not arise from raising a genuine concern – and if it does, to know that IBC will deal with it as a disciplinary action under the appropriate procedure;
- knowing that complaints will be addressed in a confidential manner.

All complaints are handled under IBC complaints procedure that is guided by ACAS Code of Practice (ACAS: Advisory, Conciliation and Arbitration Service, (<http://www.acas.org.uk/media/pdf/f/m/Acas-Code-of-Practice-1-on-disciplinary-and-grievance-procedures.pdf>) and guidelines for small organisations and ACT Alliance Complaints Procedure (2016). (ACT: Action by Churches Together)

### **Anonymous complaint**

IBC encourages all complainants to give their contact details. This enables a better investigation of the complaint. However, IBC understands that in certain exceptional cases this is not possible. For this reason, anonymous complaints are also investigated in the best possible way.



### **Staff grievances**

Staff grievances should be discussed, in the first place, with one's own manager. When this is not possible, or the manager is the subject of the grievance, a grievance can be submitted through this system; it will be handled according to IBC grievance procedure (<http://www.acas.org.uk/media/pdf/f/m/Acas-Code-of-Practice-1-on-disciplinary-and-grievance-procedures.pdf>).

### **Limitations**

Internal employment-related conditions, such as salary level, performance evaluations, working area etc., will not be handled within this system; rather they should be discussed with one's own manager. In cases where the issue concerns decisions made by the manager, the IBC staff grievance procedure (ACAS model) is used.

### **False accusations**

IBC operates under the assumption that all complaints are made in good faith and are not motivated by intent for personal gain, personal interest or a grudge. If a false accusation is made, it will be subject to disciplinary action.

### **Complaints Procedure**

The IBC Complaints Procedure is summarised below. For a more detailed overview of the best practice on handling complaints, we adapt the ACT Alliance Complaints Procedure, 2016 (<https://actalliance.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/11/Complaints-and-Investigation-Guidelines-July-2010-1.pdf>). Its guidelines are the basis for our process.

These instructions will apply to the handling of complaints unless they are in conflict with compulsory Swiss legislation in which case IBC complies with mandatory legislation. The Swiss law supplements the complaint procedure as necessary for handling the complaint.

### **When to complain**

A complaint should be lodged ideally as soon as possible after the complainant becomes aware of the concern, in order to maximise the effectiveness of any potential investigation. However, IBC is willing to accept complaints at any time.

### **How to complain**

Complaints can be made in **English** or in **French** by filling in an online form, by e-mail, phone, post, or in person. IBC website contains details about how to complain, including a sample complaints letter format.

IBC Secretariat

Complaints

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### **Confirmation of receipt of complaint**

The complainant shall receive confirmation of receipt of the complaint, within 5 working days after IBC receives the complaint. The email, letter or phone call should give the following information:

- when and how the complaint was received;
- how the IBC has responded to the complaint so far and what it will do next;
- the name of the focal point or person responsible for the complaint;
- the person to contact with questions or feedback.

### **Investigating a complaint**

Not all complaints need a formal investigation process. Some complaints can be resolved to the complainant's satisfaction through two-way communication between the complainant and the person who received the complaint. The IBC secretariat must decide if the allegation warrants an investigation.

#### **The investigation steps**

A preliminary investigation phase should be considered in order to analyse the appropriateness and risks of a full investigation. In the case of a full investigation, the relevant parties will be interviewed, and a record of each interview is signed by both parties-interviewer and interviewee. Each person is eligible to be accompanied by a support person who has no right to speak and must sign to keep all information strictly confidential. Order of interviews is as follows:

- i) Complainant
- ii) Survivor(s) of violation, if different from the complainant
- iii) Other witnesses
- iv) Subject of Complaint.

#### **Feedback on investigation outcome**

IBC acknowledges the complaint within 5 working days and implements a fast-track process for dealing with complaints about sexual abuse (SEA) and other gross misconduct and criminal issues.

IBC will communicate the preliminary outcome of an investigation in **English** or in **French** to the complainant(s), where possible, within 60 days after acknowledgment of the complaint. In complex or exceptional cases, the investigation period may take longer. The complainant(s) will, however, be informed if the investigation timeframe is extended due to circumstances beyond IBC's control. The complainant will not receive details of the investigation but will be informed of the outcome of the investigation.



Possible outcomes include that the complaint:

- was substantiated and referred to management for a decision on discipline;
- was not substantiated due to insufficient or unclear evidence;
- was not substantiated due to sufficient evidence to clear the subject of the complaint or to establish a malicious complaint.

### **Disciplinary action**

Any investigation may result in disciplinary hearings and disciplinary action. Thereby, IBC applies the disciplinary guidelines of ACAS and the national employment law. Allegation of gross misconduct will result in immediate suspension of this person from work until investigation is concluded. Gross misconduct includes issues such as corruption, sexual or any other form of exploitation, violence, abuse and criminal acts (<http://www.acas.org.uk/media/pdf/f/m/Acas-Code-of-Practice-1-on-disciplinary-and-grievance-procedures.pdf>).

### **Appeal process**

If the complainant(s) or Subject(s) of Complaint does not accept the outcome of the investigation, he/she/it/they can appeal the decision to the Network Committee (NC) in **English** or in **French**. A letter requesting an appeal should be addressed to the General Secretary, who in turn will inform the Network Committee. If the General Secretary is implicated in the case, then the appeal letter can be directed to the moderator of the NC. Members of the Network Committee who may have been part of the investigation must not be involved in the appeal process. The Network Committee should aim to convene the appeal meeting within 30 days of the request for appeal. The meeting will enable the complaint to be heard again. The Network Committee will then make a decision about appropriate action required to resolve the situation. The decision will be communicated, where possible, in writing within 10 days of the meeting. The decision of the Network Committee is final.

### **Areas of Application**

In our activities, we will develop a strategy on how to achieve our values for respect, diversity and inclusion as follows.

### **IBC Contracted partners and support recipients**

- Work with our contracted partners to design and adapt our services to open opportunity for feedback and complaints.
- Partners are responsible to develop the local complaint mechanisms and inform beneficiaries of IBC complaints procedure, and opportunities for raising concerns and complaints.
- IBC should assist the partner to ascertain its obligations under local law to refer the matter to the police, or other statutory authorities for criminal investigation, if necessary.



- Where appropriate, IBC should work with the partner to address the issue through an appropriate independent investigation. If the outcome is that abuse has occurred, ongoing work with the partner cannot involve the individual(s) concerned.
- If there is reason to believe that an allegation of abuse has been dealt with inappropriately by a partner, then they risk withdrawal of funding or ending the relationship (including networks and consortia).
- Provide basic emergency assistance to victims.
- Encourage reporting of all concerns.

### **IBC employees and volunteers**

- Adopt employment policies and practices that reinforce our vision and promote IBC as an exemplar with an inclusive and engaged culture that enables feedback and complaints. All staff, volunteers sign the IBC code of conduct to adhere to this policy.
- Recruit, train and develop employees on merit and sign code of conduct that include commitment to this policy.
- Ensure that complaint and whistleblowing are accessible. Where a complaint is substantiated in whole or in part, appropriate disciplinary action will be taken.
- Staff members are aware of their obligation to report misconduct and are aware that they are protected from retaliation
- Supervision and performance appraisals include adherence to code of conduct and participation in trainings

### **IBC members and donors**

- Work with our donors and members so that we have a consistent approach.
- Inform members and donors of their opportunity to provide feedback and complaints.
- IBC will inform all their independent member organisations of the policy.
- All IBC arranged member organisation and donor events require commitment to adhering to this policy.

### **The community**

- Cooperate and work with relevant partners to help promote social, environmental and economic well-being in a cohesive and inclusive manner and provide structures for handling feedback and complaints.
- Communities IBC works with are fully aware of the expected behavior of the organisation's staff, including organisational commitments made on the prevention of sexual exploitation and abuse.
- Communities we work with know how to complain if these commitments are not met.
- Appropriate awareness-raising tools and approaches are used with communities, which are relevant to age, language and capacity.

### **Responsibilities**







The Network Committee (NC) is the driving force behind this policy and its members are informed of all logged complaints without confidential details. NC provides the **secretariat** with the assistance to drive the IBC strategy, statutes and vision. All IBC employees are responsible for upholding, respecting and acting in accordance with this policy and two-yearly signing that they have updated their knowledge on the topic.

Management provides direction, training and support to ensure employees and contracted partners understand their responsibilities and can apply this policy in their areas of work. The **Code of Conduct** states that it is the duty and the responsibility of all managers, employees and IBC representatives **to report** in line with this policy any suspicions or incidences of inappropriate behavior. IBC arranges case-by-case support for victims. Victims have access to medical and psychological support. **Survivors and victims** can choose if and when they would like to take up the support options available to them.

### Policy Review


This policy will be reviewed every 4 years, or as necessary. IBC will review the operation of this policy in consultation with the NC, employees and other stakeholders, where appropriate, in light of changing best practice and the law, amending the policy where required. IBC will take into account any lessons learned from handling complaints and to take into consideration any feedback received. IBC secretariat staff is responsible for the effective implementation of this policy in all IBC work.

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Signed

  
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