



## PROTECTING CHILDREN AND VULNERABLE PEOPLE 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

This policy has been designed by and for IBC and will be adopted by the Network Committee. In its commitment to protect children and vulnerable people in all dealings with internal and external partners, IBC will include a clause in its Project Partnership Contracts with Member Organizations. Furthermore, IBC will share the policy with its partners and members and encourage the adoption of a similar policy at the local level.

The IBC commits to the general principles of Keeping Children Safe:

- *All children have equal rights to protection from harm.*
- *Everybody has a responsibility to support the protection of children.*
- *Organisations have a duty of care to children with whom they work, are in contact with, or who are affected by their work and operations.*
- *If organisations work with partners they have a responsibility to help partners meet the minimum requirements on protection.*
- *All actions on child safeguarding are taken in the best interests of the child, which are paramount.*



Keeping Children Safe represents a commitment by those working in this sector to ensure that their organisations “do no harm” and that they meet the responsibilities set out in the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child to protect children from all forms of abuse, neglect, exploitation and violence.

## **Objectives**

- State the commitment of the IBC to the policy of protecting children and vulnerable people and the prevention of abuse, exploitation and neglect.
- Set out procedures that must be followed by the IBC and all of their stakeholders.
- Ensure that all IBC representatives know their responsibilities in protecting children and vulnerable people from harm.

## **Areas of Application**

In IBC activities, IBC will develop a strategy on how to achieve values for respect, diversity and inclusion among the following four areas of application.

### **IBC contracted partners and support recipients**

- Work with our contracted partners to design and adapt our services to eliminate harm wherever possible.
- Promote and explain the rationale for the do no harm policy.
- Take into account that interventions can have intended or unintended influence on conflicts.
- Partners are responsible for developing the local complaint mechanisms and inform beneficiaries of IBC complaints procedure and opportunities for raising concerns and complaints.
- Work with partners to design and adapt our services to promote the do no harm approach.

### **IBC employees and volunteers**

- Setting standards of acceptable behaviour for all employees and volunteers
- Recruit, train and develop employees and volunteers on merit and sign code of conduct.
- Adopt employment policies and practices that reinforce our vision and promote IBC as an exemplar with an inclusive and engaged culture that especially protects children and vulnerable people.
- Ensure that complaint mechanisms for reporting are accessible. Where a complaint is substantiated in whole or in part, appropriate disciplinary action will be taken.



### **IBC members and donors**

- Work with our MO's to design and adapt our services to protect children and vulnerable people wherever possible.
- Work with our donors and networking partners so that we have a like-minded approach of safeguarding children and vulnerable people.
- Work with our MO's to design and adapt our services to protect children and vulnerable people wherever possible.
- All IBC arranged member organisation and donor events require participant 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 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.

### **Complaints Procedure**

IBC seeks to provide a safe environment through which stakeholders can voice a concern, without fear of reprisal or unfair treatment (Non-retaliation/ whistleblowing principle). 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. Complaints can be made in **English or in French** by filling in an online form, by e-mail, phone, in person, or by post. IBC website contains details of how to complain, including a sample complaints letter format. IBC implements a fast-track process for dealing with complaints about SEA and other gross misconduct issues.

IBC Secretariat

Complaints

Lindenrain 5a

3012 Bern, Switzerland

Tel.: +41 31 301 9804

Email: [complaints@internationalbluecross.org](mailto:complaints@internationalbluecross.org)

Webpage: [www.internationalbluecross.org](http://www.internationalbluecross.org)



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.

IBC is committed to responding to all complaints and concerns of abuse in English or in French. IBC has responsibility for this work, and carries out investigations, and delivers support to survivors of and victims according to the [IBC complaints policy](#). IBC will communicate the preliminary outcome of an investigation 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.

Any investigation may result in disciplinary hearings and disciplinary action. Thereby, IBC applies the disciplinary guidelines of ACAS (Advisory, Conciliation and Arbitration Service) 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>).

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) using the IBC Complaints procedure as explained above. For a more detailed overview of the good practice on handling complaints we adapt the [ACT Alliance Complaints Procedure \(2016\)](#). Its guidelines are the basis for our process (<https://actalliance.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/11/Complaints-and-Investigation-Guidelines-July-2010-1.pdf>).

## 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.

This policy is valid from: January 7<sup>th</sup> 2019, updated 15.3.2024

Signed:

  
Reinhard Jahn  
President IBC

  
Anne Babb  
General Secretary IBC