

# Inclusive Safeguarding

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## Inclusive Safeguarding

**Cover picture: © Subhash Sharma/Sightsavers 2017**

**Caption: 27 Feb 2017 - New Delhi - INDIA.**

“Young women with visual impairments get ready to demonstrate their Self defence & Judo Skills at an Event in Delhi.”

Women and girls with disabilities are at a much higher risk of violence and abuse than their peers. Recently in the news there have been cases of young visually impaired girls being raped and sexually abused in India.

As part of empowering and developing the skills of young visually impaired girls, Sightsavers is piloting an adolescent health programme to enable them to respond to real life situations in positive and responsive ways. As part of this Sightsavers is training visually impaired girls in self-defence. Many of the girls, who come from economically underprivileged backgrounds, have gone on to win medals in the National Blind and Deaf Judo Championships and a few want to go on to teach other girls with disabilities in the arts of self-defence.

## Abbreviations and acronyms

CHS	Core Humanitarian Standard
CPWG	Child Protection Working Group
CRPD	Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities
DFID	Department for International Development
DPO	Disabled Persons Organisation (organisation of persons with disabilities)
DFAT	Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade
IASC	Inter-Agency Standing Committee
IDDC	International Disability and Development Consortium
KCS	Keep Children Safe
NSPCC	National Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children
SDG	Sustainable Development Goals
SEAH	Sexual exploitation, abuse and harassment
UNCRC	United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child
WHO	World Health Organization

## Introduction

IDDC and its members aim to promote inclusive development, which means ensuring that all people are fully included and can actively participate in development processes and activities. One area which the consortium has highlighted as an area which should be made more inclusive is the development of safeguarding policies and practices.

Studies by the World Health Organization (WHO), the National Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children (NSPCC) and others show that Children and Adults with Disabilities face a higher risk of all types of abuse, neglect and harm, when compared with their peers without disabilities. What is more, women with disabilities are 10 times more likely to be victims of sexual violence than their non-disabled peers.<sup>1</sup> A report published by the WHO (2012), indicated that Children with Disabilities “are 3.7 times more likely to be victims of violence than children without disabilities.”<sup>2</sup> The same study (WHO, 2012) also showed that children with disabilities are 2.9 times more likely to be victims of sexual violence, so face an increased risk when compared to their peers.<sup>3</sup>

Not only do studies show that children and adults with disabilities face higher risks of abuse, they are also less likely to disclose their abuse; and this is across a range of disabilities (Hershkowitz et al, 2007a; Sullivan and Knutson, 2000).<sup>4</sup> Reasons for this lower level of disclosure include: reduced opportunity to report; limited education on their rights and definitions of abuse; unmet or lack of understanding around their communication needs.

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<sup>1</sup> FCI Programme for Management Sciences for Health & UNFPA. (2016), *We Decide Young Persons with Disabilities: Equal Rights and a Life Free of Violence*.

[https://www.msh.org/sites/msh.org/files/we\\_decide\\_infographic.pdf](https://www.msh.org/sites/msh.org/files/we_decide_infographic.pdf) [online]

<sup>2</sup> Hughes K, Bellis MA, Jones L, Wood S, Bates G, Eckley L, McCoy E, Mikton C, Shakespeare T, Officer A. (2012), Prevalence and risk of violence against adults with disabilities: a systematic review and meta-analysis of observational studies. *Lancet*; doi:10.1016/S0410-6736(11)61851-5.

[https://www.who.int/disabilities/publications/violence\\_children\\_lancet.pdf?ua=1](https://www.who.int/disabilities/publications/violence_children_lancet.pdf?ua=1) [online].

<sup>3</sup> World Health Organisation (2012), Review on Violence against adults and children with disabilities, <https://www.who.int/disabilities/violence/en/> [online].

<sup>4</sup> Sullivan, P and Knutson J (2000), *Key messages from research on identifying and responding to disclosures of child sexual abuse*. Pp.4 [online] NSPCC (2019) [http://www.nspcc.org.uk/inform/research/briefings/disabledchildren\\_and\\_vulnerable\\_adultsandabuse\\_wda48224.html](http://www.nspcc.org.uk/inform/research/briefings/disabledchildren_and_vulnerable_adultsandabuse_wda48224.html) [online].

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Parents, educators and caregivers may choose not to educate children or young adults with disabilities about sexuality and personal safety strategies in order to “protect” them, this means that individuals may not have the vocabulary to describe abuse or feel empowered to say no when someone does try to exploit or abuse them.<sup>5</sup> They are also more likely than others to exhibit nonverbal behaviours as signs of adverse experience, particularly where they are unable to communicate verbally with others. It is important that these behaviours are recognised as communicative and interpreted as far as possible, and not simply attributed to the child’s impairment (Taylor et al, 2015).<sup>6</sup>

As part of DFID’s commitment to the global goals on sustainable development, to leave no one behind (2019), they have committed to prioritise the interests of the world’s most vulnerable.<sup>7</sup> This includes listening and responding to the voices of those left furthest behind, such as people with disabilities (both adults and children). The international community is becoming increasingly aware of the risks posed to people with disabilities when compared to their peers without disabilities and this is reflected in the UN Convention of the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (2006), and the development of national policies to safeguard people with disabilities from discrimination.

For decades, the international development, aid and humanitarian sectors have developed and implemented various high-quality standards of safeguarding in order to protect beneficiaries from violence and abuse, including Sexual Exploitation, Abuse and Harassment (SEAH). These sector-based efforts have been driven by several international instruments, most notably the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child, 1987 (UNCRC). These have been bolstered by guidance such as the Inter-Agency Standing Committee (IASC) principles on preventing and responding to

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<sup>5</sup> SafePlace: Domestic violence and Sexual Assault Survival Centre & Kid & National Resource Centre of Domestic Violence (2002), *TeenSAFE: An Abuse Prevention Program for Youth with Disabilities*. [https://vawnet.org/sites/default/files/materials/files/2016-09/NRC\\_KTSafe-full.pdf](https://vawnet.org/sites/default/files/materials/files/2016-09/NRC_KTSafe-full.pdf) [online].

<sup>6</sup> Taylor et al. (2015), *Key messages from research on identifying and responding to disclosures of child sexual abuse*. [online] <https://www.csacentre.org.uk/index.cfm/?api/render/file/?method=inline&fileID=7C7BB562-DB13-4C7E-B8C21D04920D6AEF> [online]

<sup>7</sup> Department for International Development (2019) *Leaving no one behind, Our promise*. <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/leaving-no-one-behind-our-promise/leaving-no-one-behind-our-promise> [online].

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SEAH, Keeping Children Safe (KCS) International's Child Safeguarding Standards (both established following the 2001 'West Africa Scandal'), Core Humanitarian Standards (CHS), Child Protection Working Group (CPWG) Minimum Standards for Child Protection in Humanitarian Action and InterAction NGO Standards; to name but a few. Despite significant work in this area, to date these standards, fail to address or clarify the specific challenges and approaches required to fully protect children, youth or adults with disabilities.

Given the increased risk faced by persons with disabilities we believe it is our organisational duty to ensure that safeguarding policies be created in consultation with people with disabilities, in order to reflect their experiences, provide inclusive mechanisms for disclosure and mitigate any previously unidentified risks. At IDDC we commit to leave no one behind, which is why we believe safeguarding policies and processes should be made both inclusive and accessible.

Recent revelations in 2018 concerning both the systemic and historical abuse of beneficiaries across development, aid and humanitarian organisations, including of children, has once more galvanised the sector to assess failings and the urgent improvements required to effectively implement best practice safeguarding standards. The 2018 London Safeguarding Summit" has acted as an initial platform through which global commitments have been made across major international donors and by NGOs to collectively improve safeguarding standards. As our sector has a renewed focus on safeguarding, disability focused organisations and DPO's have an obligation to ensure reformed standards and practices for effective safeguarding are fully disability inclusive.

At the same time, current trends in our sector have seen an increased focus and investment in disability inclusion across mainstream humanitarian and development organisations. As a result, and for the first time, there is a global commitment to achieving inclusion, as outlined in the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), DFID Disability Framework (more recently, DFID Disability Strategy) and through the Global Disability Summit held in the UK in 2018. As disability mainstreaming becomes more commonplace across development programmatic delivery it is likely these groups will be increasingly exposed to risk by our programmes and those that run them and therefore a pressing need for robust safeguarding practices that protect and include children, youth and adults with disabilities for practitioners across the sector.

## Safeguarding People with Disabilities

According to the World Health Organization (2019), factors which place people with disabilities at higher risk of violence include stigma, discrimination, and lack of knowledge about disability, as well as a lack of social support for those who care for or support them. Placement of people with disabilities in institutions also increases their vulnerability to violence. In these settings and elsewhere, people with communication impairments are hampered in their ability to disclose abusive experiences when appropriate adaptations to their form of communication are absent.<sup>8</sup>

IDDC aims to identify social, physical barriers and institutional barriers, which put persons with disabilities at higher risk, work collaboratively with our partners to remove these barriers and minimise the risk posed to adults and children with disabilities.

IDDC and its members are committed to the key principles of safeguarding that should underpin all safeguarding functions, actions and decisions, as set out by the CHS Alliance, IASC, Keeping Children Safe, DfID enhanced Due Diligence and Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade. These principles are relevant for the safeguarding of both children and adults with disabilities.

### Empowerment

IDDC acknowledges that enabling People with Disabilities to fully understand and fight for their own rights is fundamental when ensuring their protection. According to MENCAP (2019) People with Disabilities are not provided with the same sexual education as their peers. This lack of empowerment contributes to Girls with Disabilities being 4 times more likely to be sexually assaulted as many will not even be aware that what is happening to them is abuse. IDDC believes that People with Disabilities have the right to a full social and sexual education.

IDDC also recognises that People with Disabilities should have equal access to law and justice and that without concerted efforts to ensure People with

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<sup>8</sup> World Health Organization. (2019) *Violence against adults and children with disabilities*. <https://www.who.int/disabilities/violence/en/> [online].

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Disabilities are included and empowered through the justice system they will never be fully protected.

Finally, IDDC calls for a central role for People with Disabilities in defining the ways in which they feel safe and identifying the ways in which they wish to be protected. People with Disabilities should be asked directly what barriers and risks exist in relation to their protection and included in decision around their own safeguarding. The systems we use should be in accessible and appropriate formats to facilitate this. Children with Disability should also be consulted with child friendly and accessible adaptations made where needed, this includes making reasonable accommodation or adjustments, *thereby* providing all necessary support to children with intellectual disabilities so that they can fully participate in activities with their peers. Such adjustments include making provision to accommodate those who support these children, such as guides and assistants.

### **Prevention. It is better to take action before harm occurs.**

IDDC and its members will adopt a risk-based approach to identifying the specific risks for girls, boys, women and men with disabilities and appropriately mitigate them. When identifying these risks organisations should be clear that safeguarding policies aim to protect individuals from all forms of emotional and physical harm, which can take place at an institutional level, in society, workplaces and home environments. It is essential that safeguarding risk assessments feature the situations and experiences of children and adults with disabilities, such as extra care needs when toileting, dressing and bathing, to ensure our mitigation strategies are inclusive and effective.

It is important to be proactively aware of power imbalances that are more likely to occur for People with Disabilities. For example, those in a where evidence has shown formal care relationships can commonly lead to an abuse of power and to abuse.

### **Proportionality. The least intrusive response appropriate to the risk presented.**

IDDC supports a 'do no harm' approach whilst ensuring the People with Disabilities are protected from abuse. Protecting People with Disabilities is complex and stigma, increased levels of poverty, a lack of key medical and care services can sometimes mean that interventions meant to protect a

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Person with Disabilities can put them at risk of further harm. IDDC recognises that responding proportionality to safeguarding incidents concerning People with Disabilities will differ from usual practice and that when working with adults and children with disabilities an individualised response that considers broader well-being is crucial.

IDDC acknowledges that to 'do no harm' and ensure proportionality in our responses to concerns relating to People with Disabilities we need a survivor-led approach, where action taken responds to and respects the wishes of the survivor and therefore is more likely to be in their best interest.

### **Protection. Support and representation for people with disabilities.**

IDDC and its members work with partner organisations to promote representation of People with Disabilities in development processes and activities, including children with disabilities. By ensuring the voices of People with Disabilities are heard and reflected at all levels of decision-making, we will be able to ensure safeguarding policies, processes and reporting mechanisms, such as reporting forms meet their needs. Our aim is to leave no one behind. We aim to achieve better representation of People with Disabilities themselves in discussion about these matters, through training and advocacy activities in line with the CRPD.

### **Partnership. Local solutions through services working with their communities.**

IDDC works with Disabled People's Organisations at a national, regional and local level to ensure our programmes are proportionate and meet the needs of the individuals where we work. IDDC believes in respectful partnership with DPOs and recognises that the needs of individuals vary depending on their disability, gender, race, nationality etc. We believe communities have a vital part to play in preventing, detecting and reporting neglect and abuse. Many of our member organisations also collaborate with National Ministries to advocate for more accessible and inclusive national policies. People with Disabilities can be more isolated, with fewer opportunities to disclose abuse and reporting mechanisms often do not adapt their processes for the full range of communication needs that people use. We wish to work with our partners to address this. Beneficiary engagement at the design phase and throughout the project cycle is essential to ensuring our work meets the needs of children and adults with disabilities. Special attention should be

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given to ensure the voices of organisations for women with disabilities are heard and that they are better represented by all Disabled Persons Organisations. Our safeguarding practices should be led by and informed by persons with disabilities, including children. This in turn will help us meet our aim, to leave no-one behind.

### **Accountability. Accountability and transparency in delivering safeguarding.**

IDDC believes all safeguarding policies should be informed by the experiences of survivors, incident management should always involve keeping the survivors informed and providing them with feedback mechanisms. Safeguarding policies should be live documents, informed by the experiences of survivors in accessible formats, suitable for the child or adult in each case. In the case of People with Disabilities, it is vital that we recognise the fact that they may have fewer opportunities to disclose abuse and engage with support services, due to their increased isolation and dependency on carers such as; family members or staff at residential facilities, who are familiar to the individual and may not be suspected of inappropriate behaviour. Accountability and transparency processes must be designed with all key stakeholders at the table, including children and adults with disabilities, to ensure these processes are accessible for and accountable to all.

# Recommendations

The purpose of this document is to ensure nobody is left behind and that the voices and experiences of people with disabilities are included in safeguarding policy design and implementation. In order to achieve this it is important to involve a diverse range of people with disabilities, thereby acknowledging the different risks posed to children compared to adults and to those with different disabilities. What is more, special attention should be given to the needs and experiences of girls and women with disabilities, who as we have previously outlined, are at higher risk of various forms of violence. For example, the mitigation measures which should be in place to reduce the risks posed to someone who is visually impaired and requires assistance to navigate their environments compared to someone who is deaf and needs an interpreter to communicate, are not the same.

In order to achieve a fully inclusive approach to safeguarding IDDC members encourage all organisations to review the recommendations below and action them, where appropriate, so that people with disabilities can actively participate in this vital component of inclusive development.

## Structural level interventions

- Support the creation of policies, processes and reporting mechanisms in consultation with communities/beneficiaries, which should always include adults and children with disabilities.
- Raise awareness at government and institutional levels of the higher risks and rates of abuse for people with disabilities, to encourage action
- Advocate for national and international government structures to deinstitutionalise services for adults and children with disabilities, increase education of service providers and the public to ensure adults and children with disabilities can fully engage in the community, with a focus on education and the labour market. This in turn should increase social inclusion and reduce stigma.
- Ensure our policies and resources are accessible in a range of formats and encourage our partners to do the same. This includes easyread/pictorial/symbol or sign based modes of feedback and reporting mechanisms.
- Engage people with disabilities as stakeholders and partners in all activities to address structural barriers.

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- Ensure a gender sensitive approach is taken to address gender inequalities during all structural level interventions.

## Community level

- Engage communities, through local leaders, to dispel stigma around People with Disabilities.
- Work with the Ministries of Health, Education and Social services (or their equivalents) to identify barriers faced by People with Disabilities and design solutions together. People with Disabilities should be engaged in training for service providers, such as schools, hospitals and legal systems about disability broadly but also specifically about increased risks of exclusion, abuse, violence and neglect of children and adults with disabilities. The increased risks for women and girls and those with severe and multiple impairments should be highlighted.

## With people with disabilities themselves and their families

- Design inclusive projects with People with Disabilities to ensure they are able to fully participate in their communities. This includes removing barriers to education and the labour market and social participation in all communities, activities and events
- Work with adults and children with disabilities to increase their confidence in protecting themselves and recognising and reporting any adverse experiences to a trusted person.
- Map risks and barriers faced by girls, boys, women and men with Disabilities and work with them to map mitigations to meet their needs. This work should involve people with a range of disabilities, as the risks faced by people will vary depending on their disability; this should be reflected in any mapping and risk identification exercises.

## Full members

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## Associate members

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