



IMPROVING SAFEGUARDING AND CULTURE AT OXFAM

October 2020 – March 2021

INTRODUCTION

A key priority since becoming Oxfam International's Executive Director in November 2020 has been to ensure the continuation of the organization's safeguarding improvements.

Oxfam has zero tolerance to inaction on sexual abuse, exploitation, and harassment. It goes against our values and everything we stand for. We will do all we can to prevent it from happening and tackle it rigorously when it does, enabled by strong processes of reporting, investigation and action. And we hold those responsible to account.

In the past six months, Oxfam upheld 19 complaints out of the 43 safeguarding investigations that demanded our action. We dismissed 8 staff, disciplined 4 and took non-disciplinary action against 7 more. We referred 2 people to external authorities and notified the personal records of another 2 who had resigned before we finished investigating.

As I write, Oxfam was named in recent media reports that described staff being involved in abuse of power and sexual misconduct in the Democratic Republic of Congo. We had already begun investigations into this matter some months before and they are on-going. We have dismissed three staff and notified the records of one other whose contract expired before the conclusion of the disciplinary process. These figures will be included in our next review period.

People who care about Oxfam will feel angry and disappointed and may wonder, what has changed? It saddens me to say that abuses of power will happen within Oxfam as they do in society in general. However, organizations like ours work with some of the most vulnerable and marginalized people, often in tremendously difficult environments of conflict and upheaval. This makes Oxfam's responsibility to protect them from further risk and harm even more important and acute.

We work very hard to prevent any form of abuse. However, in spite of all our efforts, we get things wrong – and when we do, we apologize. And we fix our mistakes. We are improving our systems. We are changing our culture. We are taking action. And we are, always and as our first and over-riding priority, supporting survivors and their wishes.

Much has changed within Oxfam. Since 2018, colleagues have worked very hard to strengthen our approach to safeguarding and culture change and address our past failings.

Two years ago, we received the findings of investigations done by the UK Charity Commission and an Independent Commission that we ourselves had set up. We used their findings to launch our own "Improving Safeguarding and Culture Plan" that demanded change in these four main areas:

1. Enhanced accountability and management of safeguarding investigations,
2. Safe and robust reporting,
3. Quality and accessible survivor assistance,
4. Transforming Oxfam's culture and ensuring that we live our values.



This is our latest report of progress against that plan in the six months to March 2021.

We are encouraged by the positive findings of an independent review, part of the verification of Oxfam GB's progress against its action plan towards the UK Charity Commission recommendations, that recognized the "enormous collective efforts that have resulted in substantial changes to the way Oxfam approaches safeguarding." In February 2020, the UK Charity Commission noted that we have taken "a more robust approach in dealing with subjects of concern and a more survivor-centred approach when addressing safeguarding concerns and allegations."

The Charity Commission also said, "effective safeguarding is a task that is never completed." Oxfam agrees. We will always have more to learn and more to do.

Finally, I want to strongly encourage anyone who has experienced or witnessed anything they believe to be misconduct, even if they are not sure, or if they are concerned about how a process has been handled, to report. Please use the independent reporting site, [Speak Up](#).

Gabriela Bucher
Executive Director
Oxfam International

PROGRESS UPDATES

This report covers Oxfam's progress from **October 2020 to March 2021** and planned improvements towards its Safeguarding and Culture Plan. The Plan continues to strengthen our safeguarding policies and procedures, our transformation of working cultures, and in aligning this across Oxfam's international confederation. The headlines are as follows:

Safeguarding

- **An online mandatory all staff safeguarding training (2 modules in 4 languages) has been rolled out.** Monthly completion rates are tracked, shared, and acted on to ensure all staff will do the training.
- **Additional online training for specific audiences is being developed and will be rolled out in the next reporting period.** These include training for Country Directors and other senior managers, and an in-depth course for Country Safeguarding Focal Points.
- **Risk assessment templates and guidance have been developed and rolled out to support countries to mitigate risks relating to safeguarding during their change processes.** Several countries that Oxfam works in are undergoing transition processes. As publicly communicated in May 2020, Oxfam is phasing out its physical presence in some countries, creating a number of regional clusters and adapting its presence in various countries to influencing hubs or affiliates.
- **Training webinars in different languages were held for staff across the confederation** on the Safeguarding Core Standards (11 webinars, 395 staff attended) and on the Safeguarding Case Management Standard Operating Procedures (4 webinars, 75 country management staff attended).
- **The One Oxfam PSEAH Policy was reviewed and improved.**



- **The One Oxfam Reporting Misconduct Standard Operating Procedure was reviewed and improved.**
- While safeguarding policies, training, and complaints mechanisms are key components of effective safeguarding, a holistic approach ensures that communities know their rights around safeguarding, and know how to make a safeguarding complaint. **Oxfam International, Habitat for Humanity International, WaterAid and the Rooftop design agency, with funding from InterAction, created a Community-based Safeguarding Visual Toolkit.** The open source, FREE, toolkit is adaptable and designed to assist humanitarian and development agencies to communicate key safeguarding messages, derived from the [\(IASC\) Six Core Principles Relating to Sexual Exploitation and Abuse](#), to the communities in which they and their partners work, helping to break down barriers of language, literacy, and accessibility.
- **Oxfam continues to play a key role in inter-agency coordination mechanisms including the Inter-Agency Standing Committee (IASC) at both the technical and Principle's level.** Further, Oxfam is involved in numerous other interagency initiatives at global, regional, and country level. This includes Digna, Interaction, Bond, and ACFID. In order to promote coordinated safeguarding response at country level, Oxfam is participating in country based PSEAH Networks

Program

- Oxfam supports millions of people in its humanitarian and development programs. Our "Safe Programming" approach recognises the potential for causing harm and identifies measures we can take in detecting, preventing and reducing risk. Safe Programming has been part of our humanitarian strategy since 2012 and we have re-doubled efforts to do so systemically, and strengthen our efforts. Since 2019, we have built our Safe Programming approach from 2,000 colleagues in 18 countries, including local humanitarian leaders, partners and local authorities. We have shaped new research, advocacy, tools and guidelines and monitoring-and-evaluation and have upskilled staff to become Safe Programming advocates and trainers to deepen and enhance our approach.
- **Safeguarding and protection is integrated as mandatory into all our program design.**
- **For all programs, Safe Programming risk assessments are required to identify actual and potential risks** of sexual exploitation and abuse, and actions in helping to prevent or mitigate them.
- **We carry out random program spot-checks each month**, including safeguarding risk, and have updated all our guidance on Safe Programming in humanitarian responses.
- **We continue on-line training sessions on Safe Programming** including with a new series of courses in English, French and Arabic from June–Sept 2021.
- **We have 12 new trainers in HECA region** – joining an existing pool of trainers there – and will carry out a "Training of Trainers" course in French in the next review cycle.
- **Oxfam's Global Humanitarian Team (GHT) plans to organize a webinar on 'principled humanitarian aid' for senior leaders.**
- **Oxfam has involved its partners in "Safe Programming" training;** around 40% of our participants in training courses are from NGO/CSO partners and local authorities.
- **We have completed two pilot projects in Mozambique and Burkina Faso that tested Safe Programming against a monitoring-evaluation-and-learning framework.**
- **Safe Programming now forms part of the job description and performance objectives of all GHT staff.**



Global case management system

- **Oxfam's Global Case Management System, set up in June 2020, for safeguarding, fraud and corruption misconduct is taken in operation within the reporting period at all affiliates.** Relevant safeguarding staff receive ongoing training on how to use the system. Since its rollout, minor improvements / debugging of a few technical issues have taken place. All Oxfam affiliates are now inputting their case data into the system.

HR and Culture

- **Care conversations were organized across the confederation.** The Culture team created spaces for conversations open to all staff across the confederation. These evolved into care conversations with teams such as the HECA regional platform and discussions in country directors' meetings. The care conversations will continue and focus more on specific team needs.
- **Oxfam Affiliates are conducting refresher training and dialogues to further embed the Code of Conduct.** A refresh of the Code of Conduct is planned for December 2021, followed by work to ensure consistent everyday application.
- **We are running a global staff survey in the next reporting period** for staff across the confederation to help further understand the experience of staff around areas such as, values and culture, diversity and inclusion, and misconduct. We will analyse the results, share them, and develop and implement action plans where improvement is required. The survey will be run on a regular two-year cycle and supplemented as needed by shorter pulse surveys.
- **The Oxfam International Executive Director participated in a panel discussion with other leaders in the sector to reflect on the strides made on increasing women representation in leadership positions within the sector.** The discussion was organized by Fair Share, an organization that is committed to support organizations monitor their progress on women representation in leadership.
- **To increase understanding on racism, the Diversity and Inclusion working group (a volunteer working group) launched the Racial Education Challenge.** The challenge has created awareness on topics ranging from white supremacy to the psychological impact of racism.
- **The Oxfam International Secretariat launched a Diversity Survey.** The survey results provide a snapshot of diversity at the Oxfam International Secretariat and will inform future decisions and actions on diversity, inclusion, and equity.
- **The Culture Community of Practice (with staff from across the confederation) drafted a Culture Vision Statement with pathways to achieve this.** This draft will be used in operational plans to improve Oxfam's culture and organizational Identity.

Gender Justice

- **Building an intersectional gender justice approach and 'being feminist in all we do' are at the heart of the Oxfam Global Strategic Framework.** We are working to advance this systemically throughout the confederation and all our work. Oxfam actively raised awareness in all its campaigns, in particular for the People's Vaccine, on the gender impact of the pandemic. We focused on women's economic empowerment, gender time differentials due to care responsibilities, gender-based violence, and access to decision making and voice.
- **The Oxfam Horizon Planning 2021-2023, setting out our two-year objectives towards our 2030 vision, includes Gender Justice as a key system and mainstreamed area for the**



confederation, including for the work at countries, regions, affiliates and Oxfam International.

- **We have achieved more synergies in the work of Gender Justice colleagues across the confederation through the Feminist Futures Magazine.**
- **Oxfam conducted a global rapid survey on impact of Covid on women's rights organizations (WROs) during the pandemic.** 220 organizations were consulted. The purpose was to understand the pandemic impact on WROs and ring the bell on the organizational crisis faced internationally by WROs and show our solidarity.
- **The confederation-wide Feminist Economic Transformation project has expanded with work in all regions and a diversity of partners.** This project started in 2020 to develop practical feminist proposals for economic transformation and recovery, centring intersectionality, care and the value of women's work and time.
- **Oxfam has worked internally and externally on the gender political economy of care, with gender and economic inequality implications.** Work has been advanced, offering part time and flexitime work always as possible for employees, facilitating internal conversations, and in shaping measurement tools for care work to optimize public policy, including the Care Policy Score Card, Care Principles and Care Barometer. We have worked on this with IWDF, ICRW (Asia), ALF, Ciudadania, Padare Men's Forum, Youth Alive Kenya, Ugandan Women's Network and the Women's Budget Group.
- **Oxfam participated in key international moments, including the Commission of the Status of Women 64,** on issues such as care in public policies for feminist futures, peace building, access of women to land or fair taxation.
- **Oxfam is implementing with the African Economic Research Consortium a project supported by IDRC on gendered COVID impact on livelihoods in Africa.**
- **Across various countries, Oxfam has taken action against intersectional patriarchal violence,** the rise of different forms of violence during Covid-19 (police brutality, violence against activists etc) and relationship to gender-based violence.

Governance

A new governance structure was approved in March 2020, that reflects our continued commitment to strengthening global balance and bringing diversity of voice to our governing bodies. There were some additional constitutional amendments proposed to provide clarity but this will not impact the governance reform and will be approved at the Board of Supervisors (BoS) meeting in June 2021. **A new International Board was appointed by the BoS in March 2021 and will start their role on 1 July 2021.** The BoS selection Committee intentionally appointed new board members to reflect the diversity of the Confederation and to strengthen the skills, knowledge and experience the governance oversight of the Oxfam 2030 Global Strategic Framework. The transition is being supported by a Governance Transition Group, composed of members of the current BoS (3), Executive Board (2) and Executive Leadership Team (2).

SAFEGUARDING DATA FOR PERIOD OCTOBER 2020 – MARCH 2021

Oxfam continues to encourage its approximately 8,500 staff, 50,000 volunteers, 3,800 partner organizations and millions of people it works with, in communities in 88 countries, to speak out and report concerns and incidents affecting them, even when the incident itself took place in the past. Oxfam has adopted commonly used definitions, including safeguarding terminology across the sector.

Cases reported for the period October 2020 – March 2021

The last case data report was for the period ending September 2020. For the period October 2020 to March 2021, a total of 112 cases were on the OI Safeguarding Register. This included 44



cases brought forward from the previous period and 68 cases that were registered during the reporting period. At the end of March 2021, 74 cases were closed, and 38 have been carried forward as open cases.

Closed Cases

Closed cases are those where an allegation has been reviewed, investigated where necessary, an outcome reached and acted upon. There are some closed cases which include instances where the case was not upheld or did not proceed because a survivor did not want to continue.

Between 1st October 2020 and 31st March 2021, Oxfam closed 74 global safeguarding cases (this included cases which had been registered and carried forward from the previous period, ending 30th September 2020).

Of the 74 closed cases, action (as outlined below) was taken in 43 cases. 25 were closed after a preliminary review. In 6 instances the complainant did not wish to go forward with actioning the complaint.

The outcomes of actions taken for the 43 actioned cases were:

- 19 cases upheld (44%) resulting in:
 - 8 dismissals
 - 4 disciplinary actions
 - 7 non-disciplinary actions e.g. training on safeguarding and code of conduct
- 10 cases were not upheld (23%)
 - 7 not upheld (i.e. were not substantiated)
 - 3 insufficient evidence
- 10 cases referred to other internal departments (e.g. HR or fraud); (23%)
- 2 cases were referred to external authorities (5%)
- 2 cases the persons resigned before the investigation could be completed - notification made in personal files, to be noted for referencing requests (5%)

The 74 closed cases included:

- 12 allegations of sexual abuse; (16%)
- 9 allegations of exploitation (including actions such as paying for sex); (12%)
- 32 allegations of sexual harassment; (44%)
- 9 allegations that involved children; (12%)
- 12 allegations of other internal reportable issues (such as bullying or other inappropriate conduct; sexual or romantic relationship against the code of conduct and conflict of interest policy); (16%)

A breakdown of the 74 closed cases show that the survivors (alleged)¹ was made up of:

- 7 Programme participants; (10%)
- 4 community members (not directly receiving Oxfam assistance); (5%)
- 22 Volunteers; (30%)
- 9 children; (12%),
- 18 Non managerial staff; (24%)
- 3 Managerial staff; (4%)
- 5 Partner personnel; (7%)
- 6 Others / unknown (8%)



Of the 74 closed cases, the Subject of Complaint (Alleged Perpetrator)¹ is made up of:

- 7 community members; (10%)
- 16 volunteers; (22%)
- 4 non-staff (contractors or consultants) (5%)
- 6 partner staff; (8%)
- 20 non-managerial staff; (27%)
- 14 managerial staff; (19%)
- 7 were unknown or undisclosed (9%)

Oxfam offers and provides support to survivors through all steps of the investigation, including from when an incident is reported, during and after the investigation of the case and even when an investigation does not take place. We tailor the support as needed, including the following services that the survivor can use at any time: counselling, health care and legal support as required and wherever available.

Open cases

At the end of March 2021, Oxfam continues to investigate 38 open cases.

As we continue our journey of improvement, we are likely to hear about more cases, rather than fewer. As the UK government recently stated: "in the short to medium-term, therefore, an increase in the number of concerns reported is likely to be a positive sign that reporting channels are working and that victims feel able to come forward."

Oxfam is committed to supporting survivors and takes a survivor centered approach. This means some investigations can take additional time to ensure that they are conducted safely and at a pace that survivors are comfortable with.

Oxfam is working hard to create a culture of zero tolerance for inaction. We continue to do all we can to prevent sexual misconduct, and to encourage people to come forward to report their concerns. This includes driving forward change to protect everyone who comes into contact with our personnel and operations; and improving knowledge and understanding of SG issues.

ENDS

¹ Closed cases include those where the allegation was not upheld, therefore we cannot consider all of them as victims or perpetrators... just alleged