

Reporting Safeguarding Incidents: Good practices

At the beginning of 2018, International Civil Society Organisations (ICSOs) were hit by a safeguarding crisis. Several organisations were involved in media scandals where information on safeguarding incidents surfaced. This situation shed light on the fact that organisations were underreporting these and in several cases transparency and accountability was scant or non-existent.

Since then, organizations have made a significant push to become more transparent and thus publish more timely, comprehensive and useful information with the purpose of providing an overview of the number of incidents reported to an organisation. Organisations are not only working to disclose the number of cases but to provide additional information that gives an overview of the situation, how it was dealt with, and what has been learned.

It is in this context that this document has the purpose of identifying ICSOs' good practices when it comes to disclosing safeguarding incidents and making these public through organisations' websites and/or through accountability reports. The purpose of the exercise is not only to identify good practices with regard to transparency but also to identify what type of information is useful for any person to understand how an organisation is handling these issues. This is not only about closing the cases; it also has to do with using the information to make the necessary institutional changes to prevent future incidents from happening.

The information and examples of good practices presented in this report were drawn from the websites of Accountable Now's members and through internet searches on safeguarding and transparency that helped to expand the search to include other non-member organisations.

Through these sources, a set of best practices were derived. This involved a process of first determining what the common practices are and then seeking to find instances where organisations are exceeding these common practices through innovative ways to move towards greater accountability and transparency on safeguarding.

Common Practice

When reviewing ICSOs' websites, their annual and accountability reports – such as Accountable Now's reporting framework – we identified that every organisation reviewed is disclosing top level figures. Organisations share **the number of complaints that they have received** and these are **divided by internal and external** complaints. Interestingly, there are some organisations who mention that they didn't receive complaints; however, they acknowledge that that this is perhaps related to an ineffective complaints mechanism.

Focusing on publishing only the number of complaints, although positive because it demonstrates that organisations acknowledge publicly that these cases exist, does not provide enough information to assess the seriousness of the situation, nor how the organisation is dealing with these cases. Questions like:

- What type of cases did the organisation receive?
- Where did these occur?
- How many cases were unsubstantiated and how many resulted in dismissals?
- How many are still open?
- How is the organisation using these cases to strengthen their processes?

cannot be answered. This is a case where being transparent can actually play against the organisation because figures on their own can be easily misinterpreted. In this case, organisations lack focusing on the comprehensiveness and timeliness of the information.

Good Practice

A good practice refers to the actions undertaken by organisations that go beyond common practice. This means that organisations make an effort to provide information that is useful, comprehensive and timely.

When reviewing organisations' websites and reports, we can identify that a significant number of organisations are going beyond providing top level numbers to disclosing more comprehensive information that provides a good overview of the types of cases that an organisation has had to deal with. In this regard, organisations are disclosing, at an aggregated level (rather than for individual cases, as this could compromise confidentiality):

- an **overview of the most common issues/topics received through complaints**. This allows people to understand the level of importance or severity of the complaint.
- **where the complaints were received**, national, regional or international levels. This information allows to pinpoint where the organisation might need to review processes and procedures.
- **How (type of action taken) and where complaints were resolved (national or international level)**. This information gives people the certainty that cases are taken seriously, that they are being dealt with. Finally, knowing where cases are resolved allows people to see if national and regional level offices have the capacity to deal with these situation, while at the same time giving people comfort in the sense that the secretariat or HQ can always intervene.
- **Information is updated on a yearly basis**. This allows people to compare number of cases from year to year.

Best Practice

When it comes to best practices, these are practices that only a handful of organisations are carrying out. These are exemplary practices that provide a thorough, comprehensive and useful overview of not only the number and type of cases and how the organisation is dealing with them, but also now they are using the information to strengthen their practices to prevent incidents from recurring.

In this category we can mention four organisations: Oxfam International, Educo, World Vision International and SOS Children's Villages International.

[Educo](#) provides information about feedback and complaints received, including lessons learned, and this information is compiled in an **Annual Complaints and Feedback Report** (this will be available on Educo's website soon). The report shares an overview of complaints and feedback received in 2018 from internal and external stakeholders, the channel they were submitted via, and key themes.

[SOS Children's Villages International](#) have used their accountability report to include a comprehensive overview of the complaints that the Secretariat has received including from 6 piloting member associations. The figures are classified by category and topic. In addition, they include a comprehensive overview of staff to child abuse incidents which is also broken down by category. Information on other type of issues is not provided; however, SOS publishes an [Annual Corruption Case Report](#) that is publicly available on their website. Furthermore, since 2018, they also publish an [Annual Child Safeguarding Report](#).

When it comes to [World Vision International](#) they publish detailed information on the complaints that they receive relating to child safeguarding, adult safeguarding, and financial loss incidents. This information includes the number of reports made, how many of these were substantiated, the perpetrators' affiliation with World Vision, and the action taken in response to substantiated cases. Complaints relating to programme effectiveness are dealt with by individual offices, and there is therefore no centralised overview of complaints available. Statistics from their whistleblower hotline are also provided.

Finally, when it comes to best practices it is important to look at [Oxfam's 10-Point Action Plan](#) website. In February 2018, a UK newspaper reported on a case of sexual misconduct by Oxfam GB aid workers. In response, Oxfam apologized and acknowledged its failure to put in place the right steps, processes and culture to protect the people it was created to serve and its own staff and volunteers. With the purpose of strengthening their safeguarding policies and practices and to transform their institutional culture, they launched a 10-Point Action Plan. Their website allows any stakeholder to follow progress on these points.

What makes the website interesting to assess is that it not only focuses on transparency and disclosing key information around incidents, it also provides an overview of what Oxfam has done to learn from this unfortunate situation and turn things around. In regards to the type of information that is disclosed, we can mention the following:

- Number of cases
- Reported and closed
- Type of complaint
- Type of survivor (adult, child, beneficiary, community member, staff, etc)
- Type of perpetrator (community member, beneficiary, volunteer, among others)
- Type of action taken (disciplinary action, dismissals, not enough evidence, etc.)

Disclosing this information is in line with their [open reporting](#) of safeguarding cases approach.

Another important feature of this website is that they have included the amount of resources invested to implement new safeguarding practices and culture change. It also includes information on the amount of trainings and workshops provided to staff on safeguarding. Finally, it has reflections on lessons learned and they are using this as an opportunity to learn and share with peers.

This website is by far the most comprehensive when it comes to information. Something that is lacking is the timeliness. Data has not been updated since May and it would be desirable to update it on a quarterly basis so that people can track progress.

Recommendations

If your organisation is striving to improve its approach to safeguarding and embed Dynamic Accountability into its operations, the following recommendations and good practices can help you do things differently and in many ways better than what we are observing in the sector. On your website feature:

- Overview of the most common issues/topics received through complaints.
- where the complaints were received: national or international, in which country and by organisation.
- How complaints were resolved: type of action taken
- Where complaints were resolved: national or international
- Information should be updated on a quarterly basis.

In addition, to go beyond the good practice, it is recommended to close the feedback loop and provide the following information:

- Overview of how the information was used
- What lessons were learned (do we need to invest more on trainings, do we need to give more trainings, did we have to revise our trainings and if so, how)
- What are we doing to prevent these cases

It is important to mention that this document and recommendations is limited in scope and only focuses on the type of information that should be disclosed on the website so that this is useful, comprehensive and timely for any person who wishes to know if and how many cases have surfaced.

If your organisation wants to take this work even further, there are other areas that would need to be assessed to develop a standard on safeguarding that can be piloted within organisations and shared with the sector. To do so, within your organisation you would need to discuss:

- What do our current complaints mechanisms look like?
- How are we handling complaints (internal and external)?
- What are best practices when it comes to effective complaints mechanisms? (I.e. mechanism, process, etc.).
- How can we best encourage people, communities, young people and staff to submit complaints?
- How can we take this work forward within all levels of the organisation taking into consideration different particularities and approaches?

For any questions, issues or need for clarification or if you would like to discuss this document with Accountable Now, please contact Rocio Moreno Lopez at rmlopez@accountablenow.org.