PREVENTION OF SEXUAL EXPLOITATION AND ABUSE

Overview

RECIPROCITAS is a Canadian international development organization focusing on creating local Mutual Aid groups, raising and broadening the skills level of the Mutual Aid Group members, and increasing civic engagement, solidarity, and reciprocity among citizens living in poverty and social exclusions conditions.

We are committed to providing financial participation incentive to self-help groups with a view to building and sustaining civic engagement, solidarity, and reciprocity among vulnerable citizens. We oppose all forms of sexual violence and any abuse of power regardless of age, gender, sexuality, sexual orientation, disability, religion, or ethnic origin.

We do not tolerate sexual harassment, sexual exploitation, or sexual abuse from directors, employees, volunteers, consultants, partners, mutual aid group members or facilitators or any other representatives delivering or associated with the delivery of our programs.

We are committed to responding and preventing sexual harassment, sexual exploitation, sexual abuse, and ensuring that effective action occurs when such incidents happen.

We are committed to supporting survivors and improving protection capacity and reporting.

Purpose

This policy establishes RECIPROCITAS's approach to preventing and addressing sexual harassment, sexual exploitation and sexual abuse. It is anchored in the U.N. Secretary-General's bulletin on protection from sexual exploitation and abuse with the purport of establishing and supporting our commitment to preventing and ensuring effective action when violations occur.

Scope

This policy applies without exception to all RECIPROCITAS employees, volunteers, consultants, directors, partners, mutual aid group members, mutual aid group facilitators, or other representatives associated with delivering our programs. This policy is in full force during and outside regular working hours. This policy applies wherever RECIPROCITAS operates. Where it contravenes local legislation, local legislation prevails. However, RECIPROCITAS policy always applies if it is stricter than local legislation.

Definition

RECIPROCITAS adopts and follows the U.N. definitions as follows.

* Sexual exploitation refers to any actual or attempted abuse of a position of vulnerability, differential power, or trust for sexual purposes, including, but not limited to, profiting monetarily, socially, or politically from the sexual exploitation of another.
* Sexual abuse refers to an actual or threatened physical intrusion of a sexual nature, whether by force or under unequal or coercive conditions.
* Sexual activity with children (persons under 18) is prohibited regardless of the age of majority or age of consent locally. Not knowing or mistaking the age of a child is not a defence.

RECIPROCITAS aligns its code of conduct with the Inter-Agency Standing Committee's six core principles relating to sexual exploitation and abuse and the accompanying eight minimum operating standards.

1. "Sexual exploitation and abuse by humanitarian workers constitute acts of gross misconduct and are therefore grounds for termination of employment.
2. Sexual activity with children (persons under 18) is prohibited regardless of the age of majority or age of consent locally. Mistaken belief regarding the age of a child is not a defense.
3. Exchange money, employment, goods, or services for sex, including sexual favors or other forms of humiliating, degrading, or exploitative behavior. This includes the exchange of assistance that is due to beneficiaries.
4. Any sexual relationship between those providing humanitarian assistance and protection and a person benefitting from such humanitarian aid and protection that involves improper use of rank or position is prohibited. Such relationships undermine the credibility and integrity of humanitarian aid work.
5. Where a humanitarian worker develops concerns or suspicions regarding sexual abuse or exploitation by a fellow worker, whether in the same agency or not, they must report such problems via established agency reporting mechanisms.
6. Humanitarian workers are obliged to create and maintain an environment that prevents sexual exploitation and abuse and promotes their code of conduct. Managers at all levels have particular responsibilities to support and develop systems which maintain this environment."

Policy

Directors, employees, volunteers, consultants, mutual aid group members, mutual aid group facilitators, anyone representing RECIPROCITAS should have:

* No sexual contact with children under the age of 18 (mistaken belief of age being no defense)
* No transactional sexual contact with RECIPROCITAS beneficiaries, clients, or staff of RECIPROCITAS partners

Employees, volunteers, consultants, mutual aid group members, mutual aid group facilitators are obligated to report all people or incidents they believe contravene it.

RECIPROCITAS directors and managers must ensure that allegations of sexual exploitation and abuse are investigated, and appropriate disciplinary measures are taken.

RECIPROCITAS must also provide appropriate assistance to staff members victims of sexual exploitation and abuse, ensuring appropriate investigation and disciplinary measures.

Responsibilities

Directors, employees, volunteers, mutual aid groups, mutual aid facilitators and anyone who participates in the delivery of RECIPROCITAS programs must report incidences of sexual exploitation and abuse perpetrated by anyone within RECIPROCITAS. Directors and mutual aid group facilitators, in particular, are responsible for creating and maintaining an environment in which employees, volunteers, and consultants and mutual aid members know what RECIPROCITAS expects with what pertains to sexual harassment, sexual exploitation and sexual abuse.

Partners

RECIPROCITAS is clear that any partnerships with other organizations for the delivery of its programs are based on mutual respect of its overarching principles, values, and beliefs, which are reciprocity, solidarity, integrity, and respect along with its policy on prevention of sexual harassment, sexual exploitation and abuse.

When RECIPROCITAS facilitators assess partner capacity to participate in or carry out projects. RECIPROCITAS facilitators should refer and apply this policy on sexual exploitation and abuse to evaluate the partner's ability to meet RECIPROCITAS requirements in upholding and defending this policy.

Reporting

Complaints from people external to RECIPROCITAS will be dealt with through the most senior local mutual aid group facilitator, with support from the supervising director at headquarters.

An investigation can take place no matter how long ago an incident occurred and whether the alleged victim wishes to take an active part.

Investigations

RECIPROCITAS will investigate allegations of sexual exploitation and abuse involving its staff, mutual aid groups, mutual aid group facilitators, volunteers, consultants, and partners in a timely and professional manner.

These investigations are an internal administrative process and may or may not involve the police or judiciary. Investigations are conducted so that RECIPROCITAS can gather information concerning the incidents and the consequences thereof and to take the most appropriate decisions.

After appropriate investigation, RECIPROCITAS may alert the appropriate authorities when the following criteria are met:

* A crime has taken place;
* The victim agrees to;
* Confidentiality can be ensured;
* There is assurance that the victim will not be subject to further abuse, disrespect, or violence; and
* The safety of participants and colleagues are assured.

RECIPROCITAS assigns a high priority to the safety of participants and colleagues and will not disclose its response or the actions resulting from any information provided or reported.

RECIPROCITAS will not tolerate intentional misreporting of information. Anyone doing misreporting of information is subject to disciplinary action. RECIPROCITAS reserves the right to act or not to act on any information provided or reported.

Victim Assistance

RECIPROCITAS will carry out investigations to take appropriate disciplinary actions. RECIPROCITAS is committed to provide victims of sexual exploitation and abuse immediate support as necessary,

Consequences

* Employees who violate RECIPROCITAS's policy on sexual harassment, exploitation and abuse will be subject to disciplinary action that may result in dismissal.
* Mutual aid group members and facilitators and any volunteer will have their relationship with RECIPROCITAS terminated.
* Consultants will have their contract ended.

Partners must disclose to RECIPROCITAS any breach of this policy and the expectations expressed in partnership documentation in that regard and must commit to conduct appropriate investigations whenever an incident emerges. Failure to do so may result in the cooperation being withdrawn, and their relationship with RECIPROCITAS may be terminated

Training and Learning

RECIPROCITAS will ensure awareness of our policy and our overarching principles and values during orientation for all new and existing mutual aid group members, mutual aid group facilitators and staff. Following any changes or updates to the existing policy, further training will be provided.

RECIPROCITAS will keep a record of incident reports with a view to study and understand levels and trends.

**Related Reference Documents**

The Inter-Agency Standing Committee's six core principles

1. Sexual exploitation and abuse by humanitarian workers constitute acts of gross misconduct and are therefore grounds for termination of employment.

2. Sexual activity with children (persons under the age of 18) is prohibited regardless of the age of majority or age of consent locally. Mistaken belief in the age of a child is not a defense.

3. Exchange of money, employment, goods, or services for sex, including sexual favors or other forms of humiliating, degrading, or exploitative behavior, is prohibited. This includes the exchange of assistance that is due to clients [beneficiaries].

4. Sexual relationships between humanitarian workers and beneficiaries are strongly discouraged since they are based on inherently unequal power dynamics. Such relationships undermine the credibility and integrity of humanitarian aid work.

5. Where a humanitarian worker develops concerns or suspicions regarding sexual abuse or exploitation by a fellow worker, whether in the same agency or not, s/he must report such concerns via established agency reporting mechanisms.

6. Humanitarian workers are obliged to create and maintain an environment that prevents sexual exploitation and abuse and promotes the implementation of their codes of conduct. Managers at all levels have a particular responsibility to support and develop systems that maintain this environment.

How to Report Guidelines

If you have decided to make a report, we ask that you provide your name and contact information to better assess the allegations and follow up with you in addressing your concerns. Suppose you choose not to provide your name or contact information. In that case, you may file your report anonymously, but note that anonymous reports are suspect as they have more significant potential for abuse and may be subject to legal limitations. Please be sure to include the following information with your complaint:

* All facts describing the alleged event, issue, or matter;
* The name and title of each person involved.
* Dates, times, frequency, and locations.
* Facts relevant to urgency; and
* Documentation, witnesses, or other evidence available to support the allegation, including any laws or policies believed to be breached.

You can use the Notice of an Occurrence Form provided as an appendix to this document to report an incidence.

For suspected or alleged sexual exploitation or abuse, the staff is required to report to the most senior local MUTUAL AID GROUP facilitator or assigned headquarter Program Manager. In addition, all employees who receive such a complaint must notify the headquarter supervising director as soon as possible for guidance and next steps.

In exceptional cases where a person has been discouraged from reporting to their local manager or may fear for their group membership or well-being, the [ethics@reciprocitas.org](mailto:ethics@reciprocitas.org) email is available to bypass those normal channels confidentially. The Executive Director will process all emails sent to this address at RECIPROCITAS's offices in Gatineau, Canada.

Suppose a person reporting to you is at risk of immediate harm, danger, or threat because of RECIPROCITAS staff or programs. In that case, you should work to find an immediate safety solution for the person reporting.

1. First, contact the senior local RECIPROCITAS mutual aid group facilitator.
2. Then, as soon as possible, report this information to the Executive Director at [ethics@reciprocitas.org](mailto:ethics@reciprocitas.org).

**Party or Witness– Written Notification**

Please fill out the form on the back of this page concerning the sexual harassment, exploitation and abuse occurrence to the best of your ability. Before filling out the form, please review the definitions provided below. Further, if a written notice cannot be provided, you may also notify the employer or designated recipient verbally.

If this is an anonymous complaint, you are *not* required to fill in your first and last name on the form. However, if the name or identity of the principal party to the occurrence is not provided in the form or cannot be determined, the employer or designated recipient will take no further action.

**Instructions for Employer or Designated Recipient – Oral Notification**

If the principal party or witness wishes to make an oral notification, please ask the principal party or witness to provide information concerning each of the fields in the form on the back of this page. If the witness wishes to remain anonymous, do not record their first and last name. Before filling out the form please make sure to read to the principal party or witness the following definitions.

**Definitions**

* Sexual exploitation refers to any actual or attempted abuse of a position of vulnerability, differential power, or trust for sexual purposes, including, but not limited to, profiting monetarily, socially, or politically from the sexual exploitation of another.
* Sexual abuse refers to an actual or threatened physical intrusion of a sexual nature, whether by force or under unequal or coercive conditions.
* Sexual activity with children (persons under 18) is prohibited regardless of the age of majority or age of consent locally. Not knowing or mistaking the age of a child is not a defence.

**Remote working:** Call the police and notify your immediate supervisor when it is safe to do so.

**Notice of an Occurrence of sexual exploitation and abuse**

|  |
| --- |
| **First and Last Name:**  If this is an anonymous notice do not provide below your first and last name. |
| **Date(s) of the Occurrence(s):**  Please indicate below the date(s) on which you experienced or witnessed the occurrence(s). |
| **Parties Involved:**  Please provide below the name(s) or a detailed description of the parties involved in the occurrence as well as their positions in relation to each other if known (i.e., employee/employee, employee/supervisor, mutual aid group member/mutual aid group member, mutual aid group member/mutual aid group facilitator, etc.). Note if the name or identity of the principal party to the occurrence is not provided in the form, or cannot be determined, the employer or designated recipient will take no further action. |
| **Details of the Occurrence(s):**  Please provide below a detailed description of the occurrence(s) and include the applicable dates, if known. Feel free to attach other supporting documents |