

FY 20 Safeguarding Report

At Catholic Relief Services (CRS), we take the safeguarding of those in our care very seriously. We also recognize that increased transparency around the reporting of such cases has become more important than ever to maintain the trust and confidence of those we work with and those who support our mission so generously and resolutely.

As a Catholic organization, our mission is rooted in protecting and upholding the dignity of every person, a cornerstone of just and thriving communities. Our faith knows no bounds when it comes to addressing poverty and injustice around the world and requires a zero-tolerance approach to our work and partnerships, and to safeguarding those who put their trust in us. It is in this spirit that CRS is releasing its first public, annual report on Safeguarding.

WHAT IS SAFEGUARDING?

CRS defines *Safeguarding* as the responsibility that all organizations have to ensure that their staff and programs honor and protect the rights and dignity of all people – especially children and vulnerable adults – to live free from abuse and harm. This responsibility is codified in CRS’ Policy on Safeguarding. The policy sets clear standards for CRS staff, Board Members, affiliates (volunteers, interns, and visitors), and those with whom we work – implementing partners, suppliers, and service providers – regarding their obligations to respect all people and to actively prevent harassment, abuse, and exploitation, including all forms of sexual misconduct and human trafficking. The persons included in the scope of this policy are obligated to protect those who work for us, those with whom we work, and those whom we serve.

CRS’ APPROACH TO SAFEGUARDING

CRS’ approach to Safeguarding is characterized by:

- Zero-tolerance to inaction, which means that all allegations of harassment, abuse, and exploitation are taken seriously, assessed, and addressed as appropriate. Credible allegations of safeguarding policy violations are investigated, and appropriate and proportionate action is taken when violations have occurred.
- Being survivor-centered, meaning CRS strives to be responsive to a survivor’s needs and preferences first and foremost, seeking to protect survivors from stigma, discrimination, retaliation, or other harmful consequences.

CRS SAFEGUARDING STATISTICS

CRS works in 114 countries with 6,700 staff and over 2,000 partners around the world. During fiscal year 2020 (October 1, 2019 – September 30, 2020), CRS received 66 reports of potential safeguarding policy violations of which 44 were assessed as credible and investigated. The 44 investigated allegations were classified as follows:

- 19 allegations of workplace harassment (10 sexual harassment and 9 harassment or bullying)
- 17 allegations of exploitation and abuse of program participants or other relatively vulnerable persons (9 sexual exploitation and abuse and 8 non-sexual exploitation and abuse)
- 8 other safeguarding policy allegations, including failure to report, malicious reporting, retaliation, investigation outside of protocol.

At the end of the fiscal year, 32 out of 44 investigations were completed while the remaining 12 were ongoing. Of the 32 completed investigations, 19 were substantiated and resulted in nine (9) employment/contract terminations, one (1) resignation, and eight (8) other disciplinary measures, including but not limited to verbal and written warnings. One (1) case was addressed through corrective action (training and coaching). The outcomes of the remaining investigations (13) were unsubstantiated or inconclusive, resulting in one or more corrective actions to strengthen safeguarding knowledge and address behaviors.

STRATEGIC SAFEGUARDING INVESTMENTS

In addition to updating its safeguarding policy in 2020, CRS made strategic investments in priority areas identified as critical to operationalizing the policy and protecting staff, partners, and those we serve from harm. This included training staff on policy requirements and reporting channels, raising awareness of safeguarding requirements among partners, and developing new procedures and guidance for receiving and managing allegations and investigations. As a result of these efforts, reports of safeguarding allegations increased in 2020.

Based on industry lessons learned, CRS expects a continued rise in reports as staff, partners, suppliers, and project participants become more aware of CRS' safeguarding policy and channels through which they can report violations and concerns. CRS has already, and will continue to, strengthen its capacity to investigate and respond to safeguarding reports. At the same time, CRS will also continue to invest in bolstering safeguards within its programs and operating systems with the aim of preventing harassment, abuse, and exploitation from occurring.

CRS' commitment is further outlined in the [InterAction CEO Pledge](#), of which CRS is a signatory.



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