



Safeguarding/ PSEA

Policy & Procedures

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SAFEGUARDING

I. Introduction of SPRING COMMUNITIES

Spring Communities is a Burundian civil society organization established during a time when the youth were grappling with uncertainty due to a lack of opportunities, exacerbated poverty, and rising unemployment. SPRING COMMUNITIES was officially recognized by ministerial decree number 530/785 on June 3, 2013.

Our vision is "A happy community for all and by all.", **Our mission** is to "Improve the social and economic status of marginalized communities by enhancing their livelihoods for a more resilient community."

We firmly believe that every community has its own strengths and assets, which are essential for improving their livelihoods. One of the primary objectives of SPRING COMMUNITIES is to ensure that every youth has access to quality education and is protected. Through our education programs, SPRING COMMUNITIES supports vulnerable youth and those at risk by facilitating their social and educational reintegration.

Safeguarding and Protection

What SPRING COMMUNITIES does to ensure that its programs, operations and people do no harm children and adults at risk who interact with the organization.

II. Purpose and scope of the safeguarding policy

To achieve this mission, SPRING COMMUNITIES is committed to addressing the deep roots of vulnerability through its programs and to including safeguarding in all its interventions in vulnerable communities and in relationships between SPRING COMMUNITIES employees.



Our approach is people-centered, in line with the humanitarian commitment to foster accountability to affected populations. This commitment is built around four key, that mutually reinforcing areas of action: **prevention, reporting, response and learning**, SPRING COMMUNITIES is also committed to safeguarding by ensuring that its staff, anyone engaged with or on behalf of Spring communities, its operations and programs do no harm to children, young people and vulnerable adults, and do not expose them to abuse or exploitation.

Building on the implementation of safeguarding and related policies, SPRING COMMUNITIES aims to strengthen its capacity as a program-delivering organization that embraces "do no harm" as a core principle protection against Sexual exploitation and abuse (PSEA) are ethically unacceptable acts by personnel working in community . All members of spring communities have a responsibility to ensure PSEA by those who help. SPRING COMMUNITIES has a zero-tolerance policy towards sexual exploitation and abuse by its staff and affiliated personnel, **in accordance with the United Nations Secretary-General's bulletin ¹**.

¹(ST/SGB/2003/13)" [United Nations Secretary-General's bulletin entitled "Special measures for protection from sexual exploitation and sexual abuse in 2003 (ST/SGB/2003/13)]

SPRING COMMUNITIES' safeguarding policy is guided by the international and national legal framework that protects children, youth and adults at risk such as:

- Circulaire of October 9, 2003 entitled "Special measures for protection from sexual exploitation and sexual abuse".
- Legal framework guaranteed by national, regional and international human rights law.

a) Key definitions.

Safeguarding: Organizational policies, procedures and practices to ensure that its personnel, programs and operations do no harm, expose to harm people who provide, benefit from or interact with their programs and operations.

Protection: What the organization does externally in the external environment to ensure that the community/environment in which it operates is safe for children and adults at risk.

Vulnerability: Being in a position of powerlessness or less power. It refers to the state of being, disadvantaged and exposed (at risk) to the possibility of being abused.

Abuse: Anything that individuals or institutions do or fail to do that directly or indirectly harms children and adults at risk, or reduces their prospects for safe and healthy development.

Sexual exploitation and abuse (SEA) "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 pecuniarily, socially, or politically from the sexual exploitation of another. "Sexual abuse" refers to actual or threatened physical harm of a sexual nature which may occur by force or in situations of inequality, or under coercive conditions. This includes non-contact and online sexual abuse and exploitation.

Zero tolerance: *all forms of sexual exploitation and abuse are prohibited and constitute serious misconduct, justifying the opening of disciplinary proceedings, which may ultimately lead to summary dismissal or termination of contract².*

SPRING COMMUNITIES recognizes 5 categories of abuse:

- **Physical abuse**—inflicting physical pain/injuries
- **Sexual abuse** – forced or induced sexual acts (contact and non-contact that the person does not understand, is deceived into, or does not want to consent to)
- **Neglect** – passive neglect to protect from harm and/or refusal/failure to meet basic needs
- **Emotional abuse** – humiliating/degrading treatment that affects one's feelings
- **Exploitation** – involves a gain (social, economic, sexual) for the abuser

b) Risk Analysis in the Organization

There are many risks within an organization: operational risks, legal violations, embezzlement etc.

For a risk to be a safeguarding risk, it must be associated with the possibility of abuse (physical, sexual, neglect, emotional abuse, and exploitation) involving a person in contact with the organization or working in the context of the organization.

The risk analysis identifies risks related to safeguarding and the necessary mitigation measures for managing cases. Risk analysis and self-assessment tools highlight the importance of implementing or updating safeguarding policies to prevent any form of abuse.

²United Nations Glossary of Sexual Exploitation and Abuse 2017

III. Preventive strategies

a) Code of conduct

SPRING COMMUNITIES prohibits and enforces a zero-tolerance policy regarding sexual exploitation and abuse, or harassment of program participants. **Sexual exploitation and abuse constitute serious misconduct and are therefore grounds for disciplinary action, including summary dismissal³.**

b) Guidelines for partner organizations.

Information on protection from sexual exploitation and abuse, and sexual harassment for children/adults must be shared with partners prior to project implementation to ensure that the programs or project being implemented do no harm children and young people.

The partner organization must enter into clear and consistent agreements with SPRING COMMUNITIES specifically relating to safeguarding and protection obligations.

Spring communities' staff have an obligation to create and maintain an environment that prevents sexual exploitation and abuse and promotes the implementation of their code of conduct. Managers at all levels have a particular responsibility to support and design systems that preserve this environment.⁴

c) Guidelines for project visitors

People visiting the organization and our projects must comply with all the above procedures and policies. Visitors to our projects must make contact with the program coordinators before each field trip so that they can be briefed on our principles regarding behavior during activities with beneficiaries.



d) Guidelines for the media/journalists, researchers, evaluators, etc.

Media: The portrayal of children and vulnerable people in images is a fundamental element of SPRING COMMUNITIES' communications. Depending on the context and culture of our country, we strive to maintain a more positive image of vulnerable people, while retaining an affective dimension in our publications on social networks and in our media campaigns. The media must respect our communication strategy and present a consent form for image-taking, or use the SPRING COMMUNITIES consent form.

e) Guidelines for subcontractors.

Any person contracted to work with or on behalf of SPRING COMMUNITIES must formally agree to sign up to the PSEA codes of conduct and beneficiary protection policies. SPRING COMMUNITIES does not tolerate exploitation or abuse of children or vulnerable adults by subcontractors.

Specific wording has been designed to be included in contracts with consultants and service providers. This wording can be found in the code of conduct.

³Inter-Agency Standing Committee (IASC) Six Fundamental Principles on Sexual Exploitation and Abuse 2019

This contract language confirms that **SPRING COMMUNITIES prohibits and applies a zero-tolerance policy regarding sexual exploitation and abuse of program participants and staff. Any finding of prohibited behavior, including the actions described above, by anyone working for or on behalf of SPRING COMMUNITIES will result in disciplinary action up to and including end of contract**

In the context of contracts with suppliers, this must be included as a precondition for the conclusion of any contract if the supplier is in direct contact with participants in SPRING COMMUNITIES programs as a result of his work.

III.1 Human resources standards

SPRING COMMUNITIES Includes references to the code of conduct and related policies in the recruitment process including vacancy announcements, job descriptions, interview questions, and reference checks for sexual misconduct. Attaches signed code of conduct to all contracts issued.

- **Induction process:** for new staff, interns, volunteers and visitors. An explanation and orientation session is provided on the safeguards and protection measures implemented by SPRING COMMUNITIES, and also explains the information-sharing and complaint-management mechanism.
- **For all staff:** SPRING COMMUNITIES staff must certify that they have read and understood, without constraint, the provisions of the code of conduct and the safeguarding/PEAS policy. The child protection policy. Staff must sign a copy of the code of conduct. People hired by SPRING COMMUNITIES must also understand and respect the SPRING COMMUNITIES employee handbook.
- **Volunteer program:** After the various stages of volunteer selection, there is the Presentation and transmission of documents specific to the organization. The volunteer must respect all policies referring to protection against sexual exploitation and abuse.

- **Capacity building:** Developing core safeguarding skills linked to performance of all managers; SPRING COMMUNITIES encourages cultural change through strong leadership, organizational accountability and improved human resources processes. Mutual capacity development and exchange of lessons learned is planned each year by staff trained in safeguarding implementation and safeguarding capacity building provided by our partners. All structures put in place by SPRING COMMUNITIES in the areas of intervention must guarantee a supportive environment

IV. Compliance with SPRING COMMUNITIES policies:

All new board members, staff, volunteers and visitors must sign a Safeguarding Policy and SPRING COMMUNITIES Participant Protection Policies, the declaration must state the following:

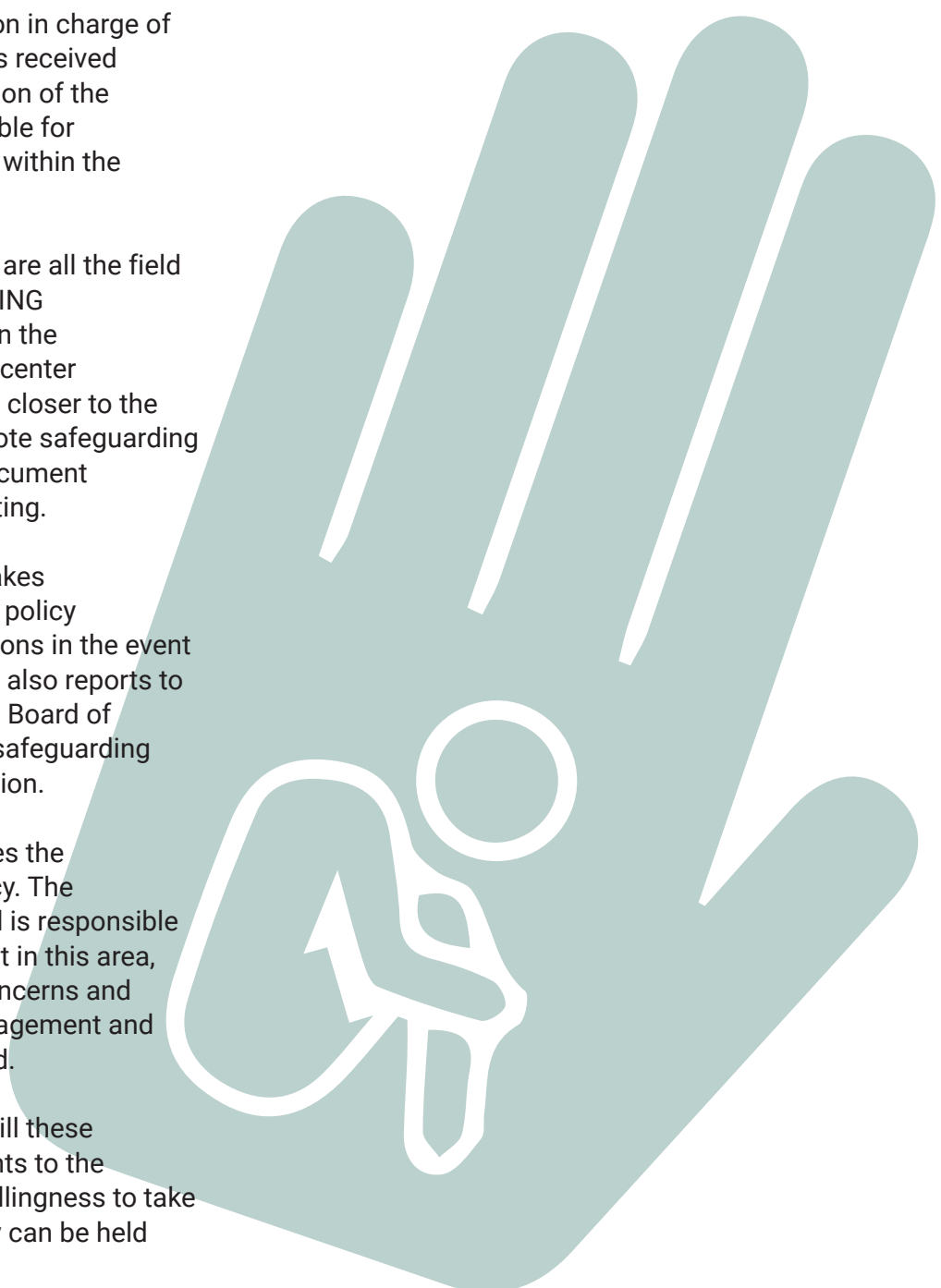
I declare that I have read and fully understand the SPRING COMMUNITIES Code of Conduct and its policies. I undertake to respect safeguarding provisions, not to abuse children and adults at risk and to report any form of abuse of which I may be aware or suspect".

I understand that failure to comply with the principles contained in the SPRING COMMUNITIES Code of Conduct and policies may result in disciplinary action or dismissal and, where appropriate, civil or criminal proceedings against me.

V. Safeguarding structure

- **Safeguard committee:** the safeguard committee is made up of the PSEA focal point, the psychosocial assistance officer and the human resources officer.
- **PSEA focal point:** the person in charge of PSEA is the person who has received training in the implementation of the safeguarde and is responsible for accountability and learning within the organization.
- **Safeguarding field agents:** are all the field agents responsible for SPRING COMMUNITIES structures in the intervention zones (artistic center the Inspiration Hubs, based closer to the community and they promote safeguarding at this level; receive and document concerns and ensure reporting.
- **The Executive Director:** makes management decisions on policy implementation and sanctions in the event of policy violations, he/she also reports to stakeholders; including the Board of Directors and partners on safeguarding issues within the organization.
- **Board of Directors:** oversees the implementation of the policy. The Vice-Chairman of the Board is responsible for supporting management in this area, and for receiving appeal concerns and those involving senior management and staff for action by the Board.

The people designated to fill these positions sign endorsements to the contract indicating their willingness to take on these roles, so that they can be held accountable.



PROTECTION

What the organization does in the external environment to ensure that the community environment in which it operates is safe for children and adults at risk.

1. Program Participant protection Policy / PSEA

A program participant is an individual associated with SPRING COMMUNITIES programs:

- Beneficiaries of programs implemented by SPRING COMMUNITIES
- Members of the communities in which SPRING COMMUNITIES works
- People employed or contracted by SPRING COMMUNITIES whether they are national or international, full or part time, subcontractors, interns, or volunteers, or any person actively involved in the programs of SPRING COMMUNITIES or its partner organizations.

For SPRING COMMUNITIES, any sexual relationship between persons providing humanitarian aid and protection and a person receiving such aid and protection, which involves abuse of rank or position is prohibited. Such relationships undermine the credibility and integrity of humanitarian aid work⁵.

2. Sexual exploitation and abuse (SEA)

Sexual exploitation and abuse (SEA) "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 actual or threatened physical harm of a sexual nature, which may occur by force, or in situations of inequality, or under coercive conditions. This includes non-contact and online sexual abuse and exploitation. SPRING COMMUNITIES remains deeply convinced that all forms of abuse of power and exploitation are incompatible with human dignity for all people, international legal norms and standards, and the organization's core values.

The exchange of money, employment, goods or services for sex, including sexual favors or other forms of humiliating, degrading or exploitative behavior, is prohibited. This concerns any exchange for assistance due to beneficiaries⁶.

All staff as well as all persons engaged by SPRING COMMUNITIES and persons visiting SPRING COMMUNITIES program sites must respect the rights and dignity of the children, families and local communities with whom we work and/or with whom we are in contact and must always act in the best interests of said children, families and communities.

Any sexual activity with children (individuals under the age of 18) is prohibited, regardless of the local legal age of majority or consent. Ignorance of the child's actual age cannot be claimed as a defense to such conduct.

SPRING COMMUNITIES believes that staff should work in a way that recognizes and respects local customs and culture. However, culture should not be used as an excuse or reason for prohibited behaviour. SPRING COMMUNITIES will not accept the use of respect for local culture as a justification for supporting or failing to report harmful practices.

⁵ IASC's Six Fundamental Principles on Sexual Exploitation and Abuse

⁶ IASC's Six Fundamental Principles on Sexual Exploitation and Abuse

3. Preventive measures to reduce cases of abuse

SPRING COMMUNITIES staff must be aware of the power relationships that may exist within the communities in which we operate, and of the relationships between SPRING COMMUNITIES staff and other program participants, particularly beneficiaries.

Abuse of power is often at the root of incidents of harassment, exploitation and other forms of prohibited behavior. The following measures are designed to reduce the risk of abuse. It is therefore the responsibility of program coordinators to ensure that these measures are taken and that they resolve the situation of all program participants, especially children:

- The electronic sharing, duplication, and distribution of the policy to all SPRING COMMUNITIES staff and service providers.
- Organize awareness/training sessions on sexual exploitation and abuse for staff, services, and beneficiaries.
- Implement a background check system for PSEA for all recruitments. SPRING COMMUNITIES considers providing inaccurate or incomplete information regarding acts of sexual exploitation or abuse as misconduct. Therefore, SPRING COMMUNITIES reserves the right to withdraw any job offer or end any contractual engagement if it finds that the candidate has provided false information regarding a conviction for acts of sexual exploitation or abuse.
- Ensure, as far as possible, gender parity within teams for all positions and at all levels of responsibility, both in main offices and auxiliary offices.
- Ensure that no staff member can create a situation where they are perceived as exclusively responsible for the allocation of benefits.
- Ensure that no staff member can create a situation where they are perceived as solely responsible for the allocation of benefits.

- Designate a committee within each program to train all staff members and raise awareness among all program participants about the content of this policy and the SPRING COMMUNITIES Code of Conduct.
- Make beneficiaries aware that they are entitled to assistance and clear messages regarding the implementation of projects and activities.
- Require all SPRING COMMUNITIES staff and service providers to sign a PSEA code of conduct.
- Establish information sharing and complaint management mechanisms within SPRING COMMUNITIES structures in intervention areas.
- Have beneficiaries and program participants sign a consent form for the publication of images.
- SPRING COMMUNITIES does not offer services or donations to beneficiaries in exchange for compensation.
- SPRING COMMUNITIES does not accept bribes, payments, gifts, or sexual favors from beneficiaries.

All SPRING COMMUNITIES staff, subcontractors, suppliers, beneficiaries, and visitors to the programs must be informed and agree to comply with the requirements of this policy.

4. Reporting Mechanisms

Reporting mechanisms enable the organization to promptly become aware of any PSEA cases that arise and protect the whistleblower from any risk through the mechanism used within the association. SPRING COMMUNITIES also provides a specific reporting mechanism for children, which is included in SPRING COMMUNITIES' child protection policy.

When a staff member senses or suspects an act of sexual exploitation or abuse by a colleague, regardless of the colleague's employer, they must report such concerns through the established reporting mechanisms of the organization [**Six Core Principles of the Inter-Agency Standing Committee (IASC) on Sexual Exploitation and Abuse 2019**].

Reports are transmitted to the investigation and response team within 24 hours of receipt to decide on the course of action. A response must be given to the victim/survivor or witness within 24 hours, indicating that the complaint is being processed.

Priority must be given to the victim/survivor of SEA acts, and a referral system must be used so the person can receive immediate assistance, including medical, legal, and psychosocial support.

SPRING COMMUNITIES trains all members of its structures who are in contact with beneficiaries on the implementation of information sharing and complaint management mechanisms within the structures.

SPRING COMMUNITIES posts accountability messages in all its offices and structures. These posters specify the confidential means of reporting cases (phone number, address, email, contact person).

- Send an email to easspringco@gmail.com
- Call or send a message to the confidential hotlines: +257 79 525 546 / +257 69 55 52 41
- Report to the designated PAES focal points appointed by SPRING COMMUNITIES
- Submit written complaints or comments in the suggestion boxes at the Community Education Center or the SPRING COMMUNITIES office (not for urgent matters)
- Present yourself in person at the SPRING COMMUNITIES office at Rohero, INSS arter, Unesco Street No. 3

5. INFORMATION ESCALATION PROCESS

How different staff members should report incidents

Reporting mechanisms enable the organization to promptly become aware of any PSEA cases that arise and protect the whistleblower from any risk through the mechanism used within the association. SPRING COMMUNITIES also provides a specific reporting mechanism for children, which is included in SPRING COMMUNITIES' child protection policy.

5.1. General Staff

- Staff willing to report an PSEAcase: Express your concerns using one of the designated channels or speak to the general management or your direct manager.
- Staff receiving a complaint from another staff member: Report the incident yourself if you witnessed or were impacted by it. Reporting as a witness can help reduce the stress experienced by the person who suffered the incident.
- Staff members can report incidents via the designated channels or by speaking to their department head.
- If you believe that the staff member or others are at risk of harm due to another staff member's conduct, consider reporting the situation to the highest hierarchical level (director or their representative) or seek help from the focal point to do so.

5.2. Reporting PSEA Allegations by the Community

If you are unsure whether to report the behavior, contact a focal point. Discuss your concerns with the designated focal point. If it is a credible allegation or suspicious behavior involving serious misconduct, the focal point is required to report it to the investigation and response teams. However, during the information escalation process and preparation of the next steps, the focal point will always consider the informant's and the victim's/survivor's concerns regarding their personal safety and well-being.

5.3. Managers

Managers must report incidents via one of the designated channels and inform the informant of their duty to report. Managers are obligated to forward all sensitive complaints, particularly those concerning PSEA, within 24 hours using one of the designated channels. Sometimes, individuals may inadvertently or unknowingly report issues to managers during discussions about other concerns. Managers have the obligation, especially if the person reporting the issue is the victim of the allegation, to pass the information to senior staff, who will decide on the best course of action. If members of the investigation team are involved, they must be excluded from any further information exchanges.

5.4. Designated Reporting Channels

- Focal Point/Staff Trained in Sensitive Investigations (if available): The PSEA focal point specialist is likely the most relevant reporting channel. Individuals who are unsure or hesitant about making a report can approach the focal point, who is specially trained to identify which situations need to be reported to senior staff and followed up on. The focal points can provide guidance to the person about the process if there are concerns.
- Static Channel: The chosen static reporting channel should be regularly monitored by the focal point or another representative from the response team (a member of the HR department) to ensure that reports are forwarded within 24 hours of receipt to the investigation and response team for decision-making on the next steps. These static channels can include an email address (easspringco@gmail.com) or a suggestion box. This is a specific channel for staff to report concerns. Staff reports should only be viewed by the focal points or HR.

5.5. Investigations and sanctions

In making decisions on the investigation process, the nature of the abuse will be included with the following criteria: violation of the organization's code of conduct or national criminal law, reliability of where the allegation comes from, availability of hard evidence and the risk to the survivor associated with the investigation process. Subsequently, an investigation sheet explaining the rationale for the course of action, must be available see appendix.

SPRING COMMUNITIES recruits experienced, impartial and trained investigators who are qualified to deal with cases requiring a high level of sensitivity and confidentiality. Investigators may be provided by the relevant partner or refer to Burundi's pool of trained PSEA investigators. International investigators must have an interpreter, to facilitate exchanges and, if possible, be familiar with local laws.

If necessary, it will be necessary to agree with the investigators from the outset on the scope of the investigation, coordination and communication processes (e.g. regular checks with managers), deliverables and deadlines, contingency plans and other key aspects of the investigation. For staff protection cases, the organization must identify and manage conflicts of interest by verifying that staff and external experts involved in the investigation do not have personal or professional relationships with the survivor, witnesses, complainants/whistleblowers or alleged perpetrator or have a vested interest in the outcome of the investigation, which may compromise their objectivity.

If SPRING COMMUNITIES has knowledge of such a conflict of interest, it must immediately remove the person concerned from the case, prevent them from further contact with all parties involved in the case and ask them to agree in writing to keep information about the case confidential. Manage information sharing and communications to protect those directly involved as well as the integrity of the process. This involves:

Providing adequate protection and other support to survivors, witnesses, complainants/whistleblowers and alleged perpetrators (as part of their duty of care to staff) throughout the investigation process, as necessary. SPRING COMMUNITIES has a partnership with a planned unrestricted budget that can be used in the event of an investigation to tailor support to the specific needs and wishes of each individual (taking into account age, gender, abilities, other factors) and offer adequate support, working closely with protection actors and those providing services to survivors and others. A risk assessment must be carried out by investigators within 24hrs of the start of the investigation to provide accurate details of the response for each person involved in the investigation.

If criminal acts have been committed against participants in our program, violate human rights or contravene the principles contained in this document, the organization will take immediate action appropriate to the circumstances and respond to the need for support of those involved.

Staff or persons working on behalf of SPRING	Disciplinary measures up to and including dismissal
Volunteers	Disciplinary measures up to and including end of employment
Subcontractors	Contract end
Visitors to SPRING COMMUNITIES	Appropriate measures, up to and including suspension of visit

In the case of an allegation involving a criminal offense, the staff member who is the subject of the complaint must be informed that, in addition to disciplinary measures, the investigation may be reported to the relevant authorities for further investigation. SPRING COMMUNITIES' representatives will inform their funders about any ongoing projects for which incidents are reported.

5.6. Referral measures

Following a rapid needs assessment, a referral system and flexible mechanism that safely connects SAE survivors to relevant support services, such as medical and psychosocial care, legal and judicial support, and economic support, must be initiated immediately.

As part of the referral process, Spring Communities implements an internal process for referring survivors' cases, including the need to propose the list of available services and respect the survivor's choice. Internal follow-up and; zero tolerance and immediate consequences for the alleged perpetrator due to their work (e.g. suspension); assistance to survivors and others; and communication with relevant parties, partners and others. SPRING COMMUNITIES makes external referrals where necessary to other structures with expertise in victim care. In the event of an PSEA all other actions are suspended to ensure a referral within 48 hours of the incident. For all referred cases, a confidential file is set up and the survivor receives a follow-up to ensure that he or she has benefited from the appropriate service before the file is closed.

For survivor protection cases, SPRING COMMUNITIES staff members are required and obliged to keep documents confidential and to follow up appropriately with the referred person/child.

"Information regarding violence experienced by a child must be collected, used, shared, and retained with utmost confidentiality. To achieve this, such information must be:

- 1) Collected confidentially during interviews.
- 2) Communicated in accordance with local laws and policies, only to individuals who require this information, and with prior permission from the child and/or the person responsible for the child, etc.

- 3) Securely retained. In contexts where service providers are legally obligated to report cases of sexual violence against children to local authorities, procedures regarding mandatory reporting must be explained to children and caregivers at the outset of service provision. Furthermore, there are limits to the principle of confidentiality when the health or safety of the child is at stake.

Manage information sharing and communications to protect the individuals directly involved as well as the integrity of the process. This involves: "Providing adequate protection and other support to survivors, witnesses, complainants/reporters, and alleged perpetrators (within their duty of care towards staff) throughout various processes including referral, if necessary. SPRING COMMUNITIES must tailor their support to the specific needs and wishes of each individual (taking into account age, gender, abilities, among other factors) to provide adequate support, working closely with protection actors and those providing services to survivors and others."



VI. Policy Review

This safeguarding policy came into effect on September 8th, 2022 after approval by the SPRING COMMUNITIES executive committee. It underwent revision on June 12th, 2023 using the Harmonized Implementation Tool for the assessment of UN executing partners' organizational PSAE capacity, in line with the organization's progress towards a safe environment and risk analysis. Given that situations, dynamics, relationships, and thus risks, may change over time, risk assessment is an ongoing process.

SPRING COMMUNITIES staff and other stakeholders certify their adherence to these principles by signing the code of conduct for preventing sexual abuse and exploitation."



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