Safeguarding for meaningful engagement with adolescent girls: tools and recommendations

The content of this guidance has been curated by Adolescent Girls Investment Plan (AGIP), with input from our members, adolescent girls, and industry peers and partners. It includes the outcomes of AGIP's Safeguarding workshop held on 11 October 2022.
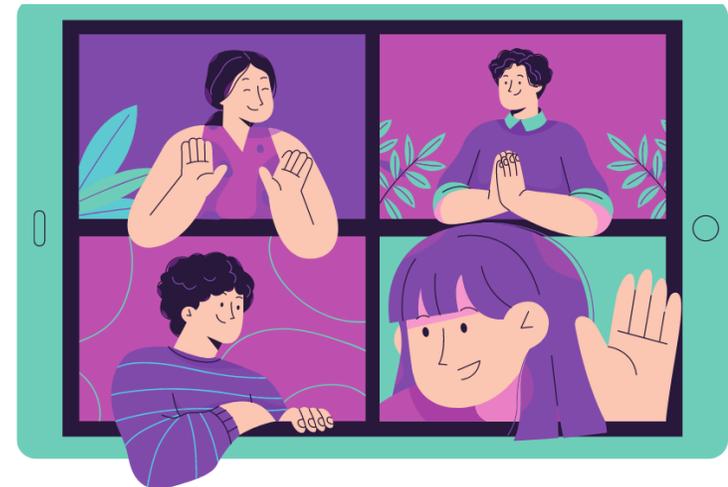
This is a living document, to be updated as we progress on our safeguarding and meaningful girl and youth engagement (MGYE) journey.

Version 01 – December 2022

Content

Safeguarding tools & recommendations

Summary: AGIP's Safeguarding Community of Practice

- On 11th October 2022, Adolescent Girls Investment Plan (AGIP) hosted an event titled **'Safeguarding for meaningful engagement with adolescent girls'** during the 24-Hour Virtual Forum organised by Plan International to celebrate International Day of the Girl 2022.

- This invite-only, multi-stakeholder event was designed to **highlight the need for strengthened safeguarding practices in the social development sector with respect to meaningful engagement with adolescent girls**. The multi-stakeholder workshop brought together adolescent girls, youth, development practitioners, girls' rights activists, allies, and funders to openly **discuss challenges, share experiences and best practices with the intention to collectively advance the existing safeguarding practices in the social development sector.**

- The event, attended by over 40 participants, included a multi-stakeholder panel representing the voices and experiences of adolescent girls, youth and global coalition working with adolescent girls, and safeguarding expert. This was followed by a brief presentation by AGIP on key aspects to strengthen safeguarding practices. The event also included breakout group discussions with each group having adolescent girls, youth, girl-centric organization, youth networks, girls' rights funders and other CSOs sharing their experiences, challenges, and recommendations on the gaps and solutions.

- **This summary report includes contributions made by the participants. We hope that the recommendations, stories, activism, and lived experiences of adolescent girls and girls' rights allies will continue to transform the safeguarding practices in the sector.**

1. AGIP's guidance: safeguarding process

TECHNOLOGICAL MEASURES

- **Stay up to date with the latest tech features** on any platform you are using – i.e., establishing a waiting room, disable 1-2-1 chat, ensure interpretation is provided where necessary
- **Assign a safeguarding focal point** at the beginning of each meeting and ensure their details are shared with all attendees
- Ensure all participants are familiar with **navigating the platform** – ideally provide a short demonstration

RISK ASSESSMENTS

- **Identify and map various risk types** that participants, especially adolescents, are exposed to
- **Design activities to mitigate any risks.** Avoid treating this as a tick-box exercise, and instead utilise this process as an opportunity to create a safe and enabling environment. **Discuss, review, and update your process continuously**
- **Where appropriate, include adolescents** in the process. But remember – the ultimate responsibility lies with the organisation!

COMMUNITY-BASED FOCAL POINT

- **Onboard an adult, community-based safeguarding focal point** to advise and contextualise **community-level risks and safety measures**
- Focal points also ensure that adolescent girls have **access to direct, need-based support** in their immediate realities, such as access to technology.
- Ensure **timely check-ins** with all focal points and **respect their opinions** – they know their community context best

REPORTING MECHANISMS

- Reporting mechanisms should be readily **available and accessible** to all participants
- All participants, especially adolescent girls, should be **aware of how to self-report**
- **Key information** should include whom to reach out to for support, the general process, and timeline of the reporting process
- **Confidentiality** is key!

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SAFEGUARDING POLICY

- Should be easily **accessible**, and inclusive of all **key information**, specifically on how **confidentiality** and safety will be ensured in the process, so that the policy becomes a tool for **informed consent**
- Should be regarded as **a tool to enable, not a barrier** and a go hand in hand with **a constantly evolving larger safeguarding process**
- Should **centre voice, choice, agency, safety, and well-being**

RISK AND RESPONSIBILITY SHARING

- **Clarity on duty of care:** all staff members are **aware on how risks and responsibilities are shared** to manage engagements safely and what to do in case a safety incident emerges
- **Dedicated knowledge and capacity** is key, for example by employing a designated safeguarding and/or youth engagement technical expert
- Remember: the ultimate safeguarding responsibility remains with the organisation

POWER SHARING

- **Co-creation** should be the foundation for any event discussing adolescent girls' lives. Where co-facilitation is not appropriate, **respectful facilitation** is key to balance power dynamics. Ensuring adolescent participation is given equal weighting is the minimum
- **Meaningful participation** is as core component to safeguarding When we expand from compliance to encompassing rights and wellbeing, we challenge power dynamics. Good safeguarding creates and empowering and enabling spaces

RESOURCE SHARING

- **Budget for appropriate financial support** to cover participant **honorariums** and enable **accessibility** (i.e., internet packages)
- Provide **non-financial support**, such as capacity strengthening and open conversations on well-being to foster meaningful engagement
- Offer additional non-financial resources such as **capacity strengthening, skills training, and networking opportunities** to support participation beyond the initial engagement

3. AGIP's guidance: safeguarding capacity

STAFF

- Staff members **are educated on and understand safeguarding policies and best-practices**
- Staff receive regular training on **identifying all forms of abuse, being and active bystander,** and **their role in the safeguarding process.** Staff are able to design and set up safe online spaces
- Staff continue to **reflect on and grow awareness of their own power, privilege, and biases, and how these reinforce or challenge existing inequalities** and harmful practices

ADOLESCENTS

- Adolescent girl **participants receive safeguarding briefings and trainings** to enhance their own knowledge, skills and capacities. This includes navigating digital spaces to ensure safe and informed engagement
- **Key resources**, such as the policy, process information and the reporting mechanism, **are accessible and explicitly shared**

TOOL

AGIP' Checklist: Safeguarding for Meaningful Engagement

This checklist contains several useful resources from the sector to learn and initiate action on each of elements mentioned before.

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Mila
*Adolescent Girl Leader,
Kosovo*

IDG for the last ten years has successfully proven that girl power is an excellent asset in transforming the world and I am proud of it. Our voices needs to be identified, recognised, and pushed forward because there is no inclusive future without adolescents.

What is the biggest challenge that you experience as an adolescent leader while engaging with safeguarding practices implemented by the organisations in the sector? What are your top 2 recommendations to make the safeguarding practices more useful and empowering for adolescents?

- <u>Lack of external validation and marginalisation</u> are key threats experienced by adolescent leaders

- <u>Adolescent engagement has been minimalised due to safeguarding practices</u> in comparison to youth engagement

- <u>Equal inclusion of adolescent voices</u> is important

- There needs to be <u>full accountability</u> with implementation of <u>safeguarding measures as a tool of security and not further marginalisation</u>

Nurat Wamaya
*Acting Executive Director -
Let Girls Learn Initiative (LGLI), Kenya*

While engaging with adolescent girls, we realise that there are times when safeguarding takes priority over consent. We work with girls who are at high risk like teenage mothers in rescue centres who have ongoing court cases. In such cases, we maintain very high standards of confidentiality and ensure no pictures, location, other information is disclosed to ensure that no external factors can hinder their court cases.

What are the top 2-3 safeguarding concerns for you when engaging with adolescent girls? How are you managing it?

- Focus on empowering young girls and eliminating barriers to their education

- Through our safeguarding processes, we have been able to stop various forms of abuse against adolescent girls

- Paying attention to the <u>cultural background</u> of the adolescents and ensuring ways protect their beliefs is an important part of the safeguarding process

- Many of our interventions include <u>bringing in the community leaders, guardians, and parents to ensure buy-in</u> so we can engage with the girls

- All <u>information sent out to girls via online channels is verified</u> for accuracy by our staff

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Pooja Singh
Youth Engagement Officer, AGIP

Since we only engaging with adolescent girls online, we do not have a full picture of their immediate offline realities and factors that enable or hinder their meaningful engagement with us. To address this issue, we have created a system of onboarding an adult, community-based safeguarding focal point with adolescent girls so that have better contextual understanding and can support the girls better in their immediate realities.

What are the top 2 challenges in ensuring girl's safety while working as a global coalition? How are you managing it?

As a global coalition, AGIP currently only works with adolescent girls online.

- Addressing the global-local divide by onboarding community-based safeguarding focal points who work directly with girls and can provide real-time, need-based support.

- Addressing online-offline divides by dedicating resources to community-based organisations who can support those girls who would otherwise not be able to access online opportunities.

- Adequately resourcing (monetary and non-monetary) young people to support accessibility, knowledge, and capacity strengthening as well as centre safety and wellbeing.

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Neesha Fakir
Global SHEA & Safeguarding Lead, ActionAid

We need to start treating different groups as agents of change and that includes adolescent girls. We are living in an era where we are shifting power to young people, and young people are at the forefront of global humanitarian responses. We need to remember as a sector that we need to be supportive of young people in calling out biases and challenging unequal power and our policies need to be tailored to that reality for young people.

How is safeguarding for adolescent girls different from the broader safeguarding practices in the sector? What are the top 2 things that girls' rights' allies, practitioners should be mindful of while engaging with adolescent girls?

- <u>Addressing different power imbalances</u> as sector is important for us. Important to note that there are different power imbalances affecting children, young people, and adolescent girls.

- <u>Young people and adolescent girls face different barriers to reporting.</u> Listening to adolescent girls as agents of change, understanding what their barriers to reporting are, dismantling those barriers and putting reporting mechanism that they can use

- <u>Language is a site of power abuse.</u> Existing policies in the sector need to be adolescent friendly deconstructed and developed by girls themselves. Important to contextualise safeguarding practices and ensure that we are using language that doesn't create power imbalances.

- <u>Start treating different groups as agents of change</u> that includes adolescent girls. Support young people in calling out biases and challenging unequal power and the policies needs to be tailored to that reality for young people

1. The fundamental of safeguarding is being able to understand and analyse risks. This **cannot be done without the people we are trying to protect**.

2. **How safeguarding is understood differs across the world**. It is important for safeguarding practices to be rooted in community and national contexts and lived experiences.

3. Safeguarding practices should include **wellbeing of both young people and staff members**. Staff members who directly manage safeguarding incidents also have safeguarding needs.

4. **Definitions of adolescence and youth vary across regions. S**afeguarding practices and support should be **founded in lived experiences** instead of the numeric parameter of under or over 18 years of age.

5. **Language around safeguarding needs to be simplified and redesigned with adolescent girls** and youth, keeping in mind **accessibility needs of people with disabilities**.

6. **Safeguarding requires budget**. Funders need to be made aware, proactively budget for safeguarding, and enable grantee partners to do the same.

7. It is important to recognize that there are **lots of stakeholders who have considerable control over adolescent girls' lives**. These stakeholders need to be included in conversations on safeguarding.

8. **Already available resources need to be made readily accessible** to enable more organisations to adopt meaningful safeguarding practices.

9. In addition to adolescent-friendly policy documents, **discussion spaces need to be organised to enable better understanding of safeguarding**. **Training spaces are also required for older adult stakeholders** to engage more mindfully with adolescent and young people.
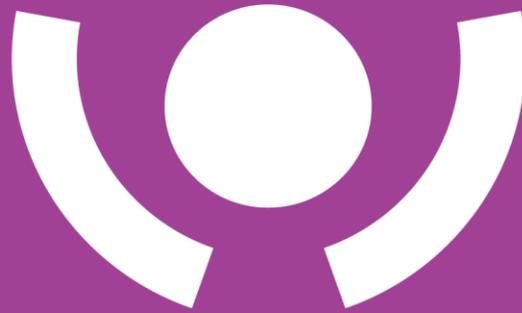
5. Next steps

At AGIP we are committed to continuous learning and evolution of our safeguarding processes and best practice guidance. Thus, this is an evolving document, which will be updated as we learn and grow.

If you are interested in joining AGIP's Community of Practice on Safeguarding or want to engage with AGIP in any other way, please contact Florah in the Secretariat.

For specific enquiries regarding safeguarding, please reach out to Pooja.

A big thank you to our panellists, participants, members, and everyone who has contributed to this document and the related events in any way. This is a truly collaborative effort.

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