

Gender Equality Policy

Promoting the principle of gender equality and combatting all forms of sexual exploitation, harassment and abuse

1. Introduction & Purpose:

SolidarityNow (SN) is committed to conducting its programming and operations in a way that safeguards and promotes gender equality, diversity and inclusion. Any activity that results or may result in any kind of harassment, bullying and/or abuse is strictly prohibited. Sexual harassment is not accepted under any circumstances. SN implements a zero-tolerance policy towards any form of ill treatment, sexual harassment or abuse and retains the right to take all necessary steps in cases of violations.

The present document describes policies and relevant procedures that regulate the organizations' operations, so that the principle of gender equality is applied throughout the organizations programmes and activities and so that no act of sexual harassment or abuse is tolerated or remains untreated.

Gender equality implies that the interests, needs and priorities of both women and men, whether employees or beneficiaries, are taken into consideration, thereby recognizing the diversity of different groups of women and men. Equality between women and men is seen both as a human rights issue and as a precondition for, and indicator of, sustainable people-centred development.

2. Definitions:

Abuse or maltreatment: refers to all forms of physical and/or emotional ill-treatment, sexual abuse, neglect or negligent treatment or commercial or other exploitation, resulting in actual or potential harm to a person's health, survival, development or dignity, in the context of a relationship of responsibility, trust or power.

Physical abuse: the intentional use of physical force against an individual that results in – or has a high likelihood of resulting in – harm for the individual's health, survival, development or dignity. It may involve hitting, shaking, throwing, poisoning, burning or scalding, drowning, suffocating or otherwise causing physical harm.

Emotional abuse: includes acts that have an adverse effect on the emotional health and development of a person. Such acts include restricting a person's movements, denigration, ridicule, threats and intimidation, discrimination, rejection and other non-physical forms of hostile treatment.

Sexual exploitation is defined as an actual or attempted abuse of someone's position of vulnerability (such as a person depending on you for survival, food rations, school, books, transport or other services), differential power or trust, to obtain sexual favours, including but not only, by offering money or other social, economic or political advantages. It includes trafficking and prostitution.

Sexual abuse means the actual or threatened physical intrusion of a sexual nature, whether by force or under unequal or coercive conditions. It includes sexual slavery, pornography, child abuse and sexual assault.

Sexual harassment affects personnel and is defined as any unwelcome conduct of a sexual nature that might reasonably be expected or be perceived to cause offence or humiliation. When such conduct interferes with work, is made a condition of employment or creates an intimidating, hostile or offensive work environment. Sexual harassment may occur in the workplace or in connection with work. While typically involving a pattern of conduct, sexual harassment may take the form of a single incident. In assessing whether the conduct causes offence, the perspective of the victim shall be considered.

3. How to implement the principle of Gender Equality:

Gender equality must be integrated in all aspects of organizational work, including recruitment, management, behaviour of staff, program design and implementation, communications and monitoring of activities.

SN is committed to do everything in its power and within its scope of work to ensure that gender equality is promoted and secured throughout its operations and that no harm, abuse, harassment and/or violence is caused by its operations or other organizational activities.

4. Gender Equality – In Practice:

A. Human Resources

The Gender Equality Policy applies to all those working for, with and/or on behalf of SN. This includes Board members, senior management, staff members, external consultants or advisors, interns and standing volunteers, regardless of their contractual relationship with the organization (full or part time, paid or unpaid). The Gender Equality Policy complements the SN Code of Conduct and SN Child Safeguarding Policy.

SN is an equal opportunity employer, meaning that it does not discriminate against any employee or job applicant because of race, color, religion, national origin, sex, physical or mental disability, or age.

- i. A clear statement about SN's commitment to promote gender equality and diversity should be included in all job vacancies advertised. Indicative phrasing as follows: *SN is an equal opportunity employer. Persons with disabilities and from vulnerable and disadvantaged groups are strongly encouraged to apply.*
- ii. SN provides unconscious bias training for recruiters, reviews language used in job openings and is aware of language biases in recommendation letters.
- iii. All new job openings are publicly advertised through SN's website.
- iv. SN applies the principle of equal treatment of men and women for work of equal value.
- v. SN uses a gender-neutral balanced scorecard approach to assessment of candidates.
- vi. Positions of responsibility are equally accessible to all SN staff, men and women.

- vii. SN recognizes the importance of work-life balance and takes every possible step to ensure it in practice.
- viii. All new employees are properly informed about their obligation to comply with SN Code of Conduct, as well as the present Gender Equality Policy and Child Safeguarding Policy during their induction week (first week of employment).
- ix. All staff members and standing volunteers will be given the opportunity to be regularly updated or reminded of SN's policies and procedures, incl. the present Gender Equality Policy, either formally, through relevant trainings and capacity building activities, or informally through team meetings and discussions with supervisors.

A copy of the Gender Equality policy should be made available and easily accessible to all staff members.

B. Programmes, incl. Data collection and monitoring

SN programmes and projects, along with their respective activities must take the gender dimension into consideration through considered use of language, design of outputs and outcomes and activities to be implemented. All SN's projects and activities ensure that both men and women are benefiting from them.

In particular, the Solidarity Centers apply an open-door policy according to which all people in need are welcomed indiscriminately – that is, regardless of nationality, origin, sexual orientation, religious or political beliefs etc. The only criterion is their vulnerability.

Gender equality policies and procedures will be subject to regular monitoring and evaluation to ensure proper actions are taken, to properly document any issues or concern and to channel lessons learned back into programming, either for better future design or for re-calibration of existing activities.

Gender equality policies, their existence or lack thereof, should be taken into consideration for partners identification purposes. When reaching out to partners, particularly for proposal development and potential future collaboration in projects, the project manager in charge needs to assess whether the partner in question is in alignment with SN Gender Equality Policy and overall philosophy as regards to gender equality.

SN applies an effective data collection and monitoring and evaluation system for all its programs. This includes the collection of information on the beneficiaries supported, the services provided and the outcomes achieved as a result of the project actions. Detailed sets of indicators are incorporated and reported on a regular basis. Disaggregated data, including on sex/gender, age, nationality and legal status are integrated across all programs and activities of SN.

C. Media & Communications

Gender equality is included in all SN media activities and communication materials.

- i. All staff members, associates, standing volunteers and interns must ensure that gender equality will not be in any way compromised by disseminating or publishing images, videos and/or content of them that does not respect one's dignity, gender and/or identity.
- ii. Communications department is responsible to proceed with arrangements so that media professionals reporting on SN work share SN's views on gender equality.
- iii. Communications department takes every possible measure to equally depict both men and women in SN's communications and dissemination activities.
- iv. SN does not take, disseminate or publish images in which women or men are naked, dressed inappropriately or pose in any inappropriate manner, e.g. sexual connotations.

SN retains the right to request by its staff, associates, standing volunteers and interns to take down content that violates its Gender Equality policy.

To avoid conflict, staff, associates, standing volunteers and visitors are strongly encouraged to share content published on official SN website or social media accounts (Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, LinkedIn, YouTube, Vimeo). By doing so, officially approved content is widely distributed via personal social media accounts.

5. Staff behaviour

Staff overall behaviour, both within and outside working hours, must be in alignment with SN philosophy, ethics and values. The principle of gender equality is shared by all, regardless of position or mandate.

Staff members must take necessary steps not to put themselves in a compromising position or at risk of being accused of inappropriate behaviour or discrimination based on gender.

Staff members must avoid discriminatory language.

6. Reporting

- i. SN takes every allegation of a violation of its Gender Equality Policy seriously. Anyone raising concerns or reporting an incident will be treated with respect and discretion.
- ii. Confidentiality is of utmost important when concerns are raised, or reports are made. However, promises should not be given, as confidentiality is not absolute. Information will be shared strictly on a need-to-know basis and as necessary in order to ensure that appropriate assistance is provided.
- iii. The reporting source can be indicatively any of the following: staff members, associates, volunteers, external partners, beneficiaries.

All cases where there is a potential, actual or suspected violation of the present Gender Equality Policy, the Child Safeguarding Policy or/and SN Code of Conduct by a member of staff or standing volunteer, are to be reported to the HR department.

The HR Officer will consult with the Director of HR and Finance and the General Manager and will provide a recommended course of action. Gross misconduct and relevant violations of SN Gender equality policy, Child Safeguarding Policy or/and its Code of Conduct qualify for justified termination of employment.

In cases where concerns were raised/reports made against an employee of a significant stakeholder, such as a donor or another (I)NGO, the respective Programme Coordinator and/or General Manager and Deputy General Manager must be informed. She/he is responsible to notify the stakeholder about the allegation, so that the stakeholder will initiate an internal investigation procedure. She/he will also request assurances that all appropriate measures have been taken for safer recruitment procedures on the stakeholder's behalf.

In cases where concerns are raised by SN staff about other SN staff, providing that there is no malicious intent, no punitive action will be taken against the person raising the concern or making the report. SN, in accordance with its zero-tolerance policy about sexual harassment, abuse and exploitation, implements a whistle-blowing policy that allows all staff members to safely raise their concerns or report such incidents in confidentiality. For this reason, staff members are provided with an alternative as described above, if for some reason they do not feel safe to report to their immediate supervisor or if the supervisor might somehow be involved in the reported violation. Staff members on the other hand assume responsibility to always raise concerns/report incidents in good faith, with no malicious intent.

In cases where the allegations could potentially result in serious reputational damages for SN, the Communications Manager must also be consulted, the minute such risks have been identified at senior management level.

7. Evaluation and Review

SN philosophy and values must be always reflected in practice.

All SN staff and everyone working with or on behalf of SN has a responsibility to promote gender equality and combat any form of discrimination based on gender. All concerns should be reported in accordance with procedures outlined in this document and no person should ever work under the assumption that someone else is responsible to report.

The present policy will be reviewed as often as required, and at least every three years, in order to remain relevant to context and reflect any significant change that may take place in relation to SN strategic priorities as well as to the applicable national and EU legal and regulatory framework.