



Cuso International Code of Conduct for Preventing and Responding to Sexual Violence - April 2020

Leadership message

Cuso International is a development organization that works with poor, vulnerable and marginalized people, mainly women and girls to eradicate poverty and inequality. Our Code of Conduct seeks to maintain and enhance public confidence in the integrity of Cuso International and our volunteers, interns, staff, managers, board members and subcontractors.

The objective of this document is to articulate our shared commitment to preventing sexual violence in our organization and our programs by defining a framework for the way we carry out our work and to set out our expectations. However, to be effective the Code of conduct needs to be translated into actions. Identifying gaps between policies and practices and working to close them are paramount.

Cuso International is also a signatory to the [Canadian Council of International Cooperation \(CCIC\) Leaders' Pledge](#), and has notably committed to:

- Establishing a culture of zero tolerance of sexual misconduct in all the work that we do,
- Improving our collective ability to recognize and tackle power imbalances and gender inequalities that can enable sexual misconduct,
- Aiming to create work environments free from sexual misconduct within our organization,
- Benefiting from each other's experiences and strengths, identifying joint solutions, and by sharing and building knowledge and capacity around **survivor/victim centred approaches**.

In recent literature covering sexual violence prevention, organizational culture has been defined both as a key factor of the problem and as part of the solution. To create cultural change, it is essential that everyone actively address issues contributing to sexual violence.

Guiding Principles

Cuso International recognizes that sexual violence, notably sexual exploitation and sexual abuse, violate universally recognized international legal norms and standards. We deliver projects and programs grounded in a human rights framework.

Sexual violence is rooted in power imbalances, notably in gender inequalities. We will operate within international legal norms, Canadian laws as well as the national laws in the countries in which we work. We will engage partners in a dialogue on basis of discrimination (i.e. sexual orientation, gender identity), as defined by the Canadian legal framework.



Zero-tolerance means that inaction towards sexual violence is unacceptable. Appropriate disciplinary action will be taken against the perpetrator following an investigation process. Sexual violence can be grounds for dismissal.

In recent literature on the prevention of sexual violence, organizational culture has been defined both as a key driver of the problem and as part of the solution. We therefore decided to address risks of sexual violence by engaging personnel, partners, volunteers and other program stakeholders on these issues.

Cuso International will focus on consent to raise awareness on issues of sexual violence. As such,

- sexual activities with the absence of consent will be considered as an assault’;
- the absence of “no” is not a synonym of consent;
- consent can be withdrawn at any time;
- obtaining “consent” when an individual is impaired or threatened is not a valid consent.

During investigations, Cuso International will,

- protect the rights of both the complainant and the respondent;
- ensure we take factual, fair and uphold confidentiality measures;
- maintain Independence between investigation process and provision of assistance;
- recognize the importance of identifying competent, skilled and experience individuals to run investigations which may be internal or external.

When responding to sexual violence, Cuso International:

- Will use a Survivor Centered-Approach by giving the control over the decision-making process to the survivor following an incident.
- Under certain circumstances, may reclaim decision-making authority. Depending on the laws and legal obligations related to sexual violence in each country of activities, Cuso International might not be able to provide the flexibility required by the survivor.
- May also reclaim decision making authority, if the survivor’s choice places them or others at risk of further harm. Being transparent about these limitations mitigate risks of revictimization. In such cases, survivors may feel less in control, but the focus of the approach is ultimately on their recovery and health and on the protection of others.

Our Shared Responsibilities in Upholding This Code

Individual Responsibilities

Volunteers, interns, staff, managers, board members and subcontractors must:

- Familiarize themselves with this Code of Conduct and uphold it.
- Make every reasonable effort to ensure and maintain an environment free of sexual violence.



- Raise concerns regarding risks or possibilities of sexual violence.
- Report incidents of sexual violence.
- Treat any information related to sexual violence with utmost confidentiality and share related information only on a “need-to-know” basis, i.e. only with designated relevant parties.

Managers’, Heads of Programs, Country Directors’ Responsibilities (Managers)

Managers have a key role to play and bear added responsibilities to:

- Ensure volunteers, interns, staff and subcontractors under their supervision are informed, understand, sign and comply with the Code of Conduct.
- Ensure training on sexual violence is provided.
- Set example for appropriate behaviours.
- Address concerns and respond to incidents and disclosures according to organizational standards.
- Protect individuals from retaliation.
- Use appropriate sanctions when lack of compliance is established,
- Ensuring that every partner organization either signs this Code, develop or have their own Code of Conduct that is aligned with ours.

Organizational Leadership Responsibilities

The Chief Executive Officer and the Management Team are expected to ensure every effort is being made to prevent sexual violence from occurring, and verify that an adequate response and protective measures are implemented once they become aware of an incident by:

- Ensuring sufficient human and financial resources are available for the organization to follow through on its commitment,
- Ensuring the implementation of best practices in recruitment and onboarding in accordance with the Code of Conduct,
- Ensuring that all volunteers, interns, employees, managers and subcontractors understand, sign and comply with the Code of Conduct,
- Ensuring protection from retaliation to individuals raising concerns or reporting incidents,
- Ensuring performance management to mitigate against the occurrence of sexual violence, including taking corrective action when needed,
- Review the Code of Conduct and its implementation on a regular basis and as is needed.

Our Commitment to Our Colleagues

At Cuso International we foster a healthy work environment.

You Uphold the Code of Conduct When you:



- ✓ Treat everyone with respect, not infringing on somebody else's rights,
- ✓ Discourage jokes or comments that are sexist, racist, heterosexist, ableist, etc.
- ✓ Respect the confidentiality of anyone involved in a complaint,
- ✓ Co-operate in the investigation of complaints and the efforts to resolve them.

You Should Avoid:

- ✗ Condescending or disrespectful behavior, including derogatory messages, e-mails or comments on social media,
- ✗ Any form of sexual violence, including sharing sexually explicit materials without consent,
- ✗ Trivialising sexual violence notably by:
 1. supporting myths and stereotypes around consent (e.g. once consent is given it cannot be removed, alcohol is useful to obtain consent, etc.)
 2. denying or playing down sexual violence (e.g. "Boys will be boys" or "the culture is different here",)
 3. making survivors responsible for being assaulted (e.g. a young person going out alone is, asking for it, women wearing short skirts are partly responsible, etc.)
 4. supporting myths and stereotypes around assault (e.g. people lie about being assaulted, false accusations are very common, etc.)

You Should Raise Concern:

- ✓ When suspecting possible violations of this Code of Conduct.
- ✓ When noticing risk factors in the workplace or in programs, including but not limited to:
 - acceptance of rape myths (e.g. "all men do this"),
 - strong bias against groups or individuals (e.g. remarks, jokes or banter that are crude, treating subordinates with disrespects, demeaning comments towards beneficiaries),
 - acceptance of coarsened social discourse outside the workplace (e.g. increasingly heated discussions of current events happening within or outside the workplace),
 - minimization of other forms of misconduct such as bullying,
 - substance abuse or encouraging alcohol consumption (e.g. excessive alcohol consumption at a work-related event).



Our Commitments to our Partners and the Communities We Serve

Sexual violence is a considerable barrier to sustainable development and to the meaningful participation of individuals, and particularly women. Our responsibility is to reduce risks of sexual exploitation and abuse for our partners and the communities we serve.

You Uphold our Commitments When you:

- ✓ Treat partners and community members with respect and dignity,
- ✓ Exercise special care to protect children against sexual exploitation and abuse,
- ✓ Recognize and acknowledge some of the power dynamics at play within our working relationships and stay alert to these realities (e.g. acknowledge your own privilege and bias and how it might influence your work, avoid reinforcing power dynamics)
- ✓ Build trust and recognize partners' strengths and contribution,
- ✓ Engage partners in a dialogue around sexual violence, sharing best practices, lessons learned and tools on a yearly basis.

You Should Avoid:

- ✗ Pursuing services from sex workers, regardless of the local and national laws of the country of mission.
- ✗ Sexual activities with children (persons under the age of 18) and vulnerable adults¹ regardless of the local age of consent². Ignorance or mistaken belief in the age of the child or the status of the vulnerable adult cannot constitute a defence.
- ✗ Any action that would suggest or imply that a sexual act might be demanded as a condition for engaging in offered programs and services.
- ✗ Exchanging money, employment, lodging, goods or services for sex, including sexual favours or other forms of humiliating, degrading or exploitative behaviour. This includes the exchange for services to which program participants are entitled.
- ✗ Having a romantic or sexual relationship with an ultimate recipient or partners' staff since they are based on inherently unequal power dynamics.

You Should Raise Concern:

- ✓ When suspecting possible violations of this Code of Conduct,
- ✓ When noticing risk factors of sexual violence:
 - Acceptance of rape myths (e.g. "all men do this"),

¹ Vulnerable adults are defined as: those aged over 18 years and who are unable to take care of themselves/protect themselves from harm or exploitation.

² Local and national laws of the country where programs are implemented.

- Strong bias against groups or individuals (e.g. remarks, jokes or banter that are crude, treating subordinates with disrespects, demeaning comments towards beneficiaries),
- Minimization of other forms of misconduct such as bullying,
- Substance abuse or encouraging alcohol consumption (e.g. excessive alcohol consumption at a work-related event),
- Hostility, demeaning attitudes or objectification.

Reporting: You Should report:

- ✓ Unwanted, inappropriate or disrespectful sexual advances or harassment,
- ✓ Bullying, perceived threats, intimidation, verbal or physical outrages,
- ✓ Hostility to individuals due to race, religion, gender, gender identity, gender expression, sexual orientation, disability or other characteristic protected by law.
- ✓ Incidents of sexual violence or situations that threaten the safety, security or wellbeing.
- ✓ Sexual Abuse of Children.

Other relevant policies and organizational documents:

1. Child Protection Policy and Code of Conduct
2. Prevention of Workplace Harassment and Discrimination Policy and Program
3. Prevention of Workplace Violence
4. Safety and Security Policy and Procedures
5. Confidentiality and Conflict of Interest policy
6. Whistleblowing Policy
7. Employee Policies and Procedures
8. Volunteer Handbook



Declaration of Adherence

I understand that I can significantly contribute to risk mitigation and prevention of sexual violence by translating this Code of Conduct into actions in my work.

I understand that I must uphold our collective commitments to colleagues, partners and the communities we serve by adhering to the standards of behaviour outlined in the Code of Conduct.

I, undersigned, _____, hereby declare that I have read, understood, and will comply with this Code of Conduct.

I understand that breach of any provision of the Code may result in disciplinary action up to and including termination of my employment or a contract with Cuso International

NAME:

SIGNATURE:

DATE: