

# **Commitments to strengthen safeguarding measures against sexual exploitation, abuse and sexual harassment in the development finance sector**

British International Investment (BII) is the UK's development finance institution. Our mission is to support the building of businesses throughout Africa and South Asia, to create jobs and make a lasting difference to people's lives in some of the world's poorest places. As a development finance institution, BII provides patient, impact driven capital to companies in the private sector through a range of different investment products. The type of investment provided shapes the relationship and influence that BII can have over the operations of the investment client; for example, depending on whether the investment is debt or equity or if the investment is provided directly by BII or via intermediaries such as fund managers and financial institutions.

BII is committed to supporting the rights of all people to seek, obtain and hold work without harassment and will not permit or condone harassment or abusive practices towards or by its employees, contractors, suppliers, or any persons visiting the BII's offices. These expectations also apply to BII's investees, their employees, clients and contractors and the communities associated with the investment.

BII has a zero tolerance to sexual exploitation, abuse or harassment within its operations or within its direct or intermediated investments. In responding to an incident of sexual exploitation, abuse or harassment, ensuring the victim is safe from further harm and that appropriate support is available to them remains the focus of our response. We will also work with our investment clients, be they private sector companies or fund managers, to identify opportunities to strengthen safeguarding measures, which includes the prevention of sexual exploitation, abuse and harassment, within the company.

We recognise the value of diversity in all aspects of life, particularly within developing economies and we support a range of initiatives to improve gender equality, women's economic empowerment and diversity within BII and our investment clients. We recognise that sexual exploitation, abuse and sexual harassment are intrinsically linked to power imbalances. We also recognise the need to address these through prevention and better response when it does occur,

and in line with the UK's Department for International Development's initiative, therefore commit to making progress through these four strategic shifts:

**Strategic shift 1: Ensure support for victims and whistle-blowers, enhance accountability and transparency, strengthen reporting and tackle impunity.**

BII will:

1. Maintain its victim-centred approach which focuses upon ensuring victims are free from further harm and support is provided to them when feasible.
2. Ensure that BII and its investment clients maintain whistleblower and staff grievance mechanisms which enable the reporting of sexual exploitation, abuse or harassment relating to the workplace and provide protection and freedom from retaliation for the people who speak up about incidents.
3. Continue to monitor guidance and best practice about staff grievance and whistleblower mechanisms and implement advances as appropriate to ensure the most appropriate mechanisms for BII and its investment clients.

**Strategic shift 2: Incentivise cultural change through strong leadership, organisational accountability and better human resource processes.**

BII will:

4. Appoint a board member to oversee BII's safeguarding measures and to drive BII's safeguarding agenda, while stressing that the responsibility for safeguarding rests with everyone in the company. The member will report to the board annually and provide a summary of safeguarding issues and activities.
5. Work to improve the gender balance at senior management level within BII recognising the importance and value of a diverse and inclusive workforce.
6. Implement BII's gender strategy with a view to advancing diversity and inclusion through its priority themes which include supporting women's leadership, improving women's job quality, promoting access to finance and applying a gender sensitive lens to the products and services we invest in.

7. Support the work of TheBoardroom Africa ([www.theboardroomafrica.com](http://www.theboardroomafrica.com)) to strengthen female representation amongst company boards across our investment portfolio.

**Strategic shift 3: Strong adherence to international standards and best practice.**

BII will:

8. Require safeguarding measures relating to exploitation, intimidation and harassment especially in regard to women, as set out in the IFC Performance Standards to be implemented by investment clients.
9. In the next 12 months, undertake a human rights focused review of BII's processes and practices in line with the UN Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights to implement the UN's 'Protect, Respect, Remedy' framework to address the risk of adversely impacting human rights through BII's practices and processes. Drawing upon the International Bill of Human Rights and the principles concerning fundamental rights set out in the International Labour Organization's Declaration on Fundamental Principles and rights at work, this will include protecting the rights of people to be free from sexual exploitation and abuse and sexual harassment.

**Strategic shift 4: Strengthen organisational capacity and capability across the international aid sector, including building the capability of implementing partners to meet the minimum standard.**

BII will:

10. Develop in conjunction with other partners including IFC and EBRD safeguarding guidance that aims to promote better practices in BIIs markets and geographies and which will specifically consider risk to employees and local communities, and the role that investors in private sector companies can play in assessing, managing and reducing sexual exploitation and abuse and sexual harassment. This guidance will focus on international standards (such as the IFC Performance Standards) which have wide utility for investors in BIIs markets and will therefore have potential wider uptake beyond the DFI community.
11. Strengthen BII's training to fund managers on the implementation of the relevant Performance Standards which provide protective measures regarding exploitation, intimidation and harassment especially in relation to women, for employees of fund portfolio companies.

12. Provide guidance and training to BII investment staff on the identification of risk flags of sexual exploitation and abuse and sexual harassment within investment clients, particularly those operating within high risk sectors such as education, healthcare and low skilled labour-intensive industries.

### **Next steps**

We will continue to regularly engage with other development finance institutions on safeguarding to strengthen the approach to implementing safeguarding measures within investment clients.

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