

## Sending and serving safely

Understanding the challenges of  
safeguarding children and young  
people in international Christian work

A research study commissioned by thirtyone:eight and undertaken by the University of Chester



## About us

Trusted for over 40 years, Thirtyone:eight is the UK's only award-winning independent Christian safeguarding charity which helps individuals, organisations, charities, faith and community groups to protect vulnerable people from abuse. Our vision is a world where every child and adult can feel, and be, safe, and to achieve this vision we work together with a network of thousands of organisations across the UK and overseas helping them to create safer places. We provide training, consultancy, DBS checks, a safeguarding helpline, and international safeguarding support to make sure everyone is equipped and empowered with the tools they need. We are leading experts in safeguarding, working with government to inform legislation and promoting high standards in safeguarding practice.

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## Foreword

Children around the world have a fundamental right to be protected from all forms of abuse. These rights are enshrined in the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC).

When a UK based organisation sends someone to work or serve overseas, the expectation is that all appropriate measures will have been put in place to vet the suitability of those individuals and to make their working practice as safe as possible both for themselves and the people they are working with. Sadly, this hasn't always been the case.

Recently, headlines which have highlighted poor practice by some organisations working with children in the context of their international charitable activities, have alerted society to the need that this work should not be free from scrutiny. Following revelations of several high-profile charities who have rightly come under fire for causing harm by letting their safeguarding practices slip, this research is both timely and critical in helping us understand the complexity of such work.

International Christian work (commonly referred to as overseas mission) is a long-held traditional practice for many churches and faith-based organisations across cultural divides and the diversity of different faiths, denominations and theological perspectives. The positive contribution that this makes to people's lives and society around the world is well-documented.

What we have sought to do with this research is to give a voice to the experience of those working on the frontline of international Christian work so that we can learn, respond, and develop the most appropriate ways and methods of supporting them and filling any gaps in practice.

Through this report we give some clear recommendations which we hope will be a valuable resource for anyone preparing to travel abroad to work with children, and for the organisations and agencies that send and support them.

At thirtyone:eight we are passionate about supporting all those working with vulnerable people. Our vision is a world where every child and adult can feel, and be, safe. The international Christian context is both a unique and challenging situation, but it's our prayer that together, we can see that vision become a reality as we continue to impact the lives of children overseas for good.

**Claudia Bell**

Head of Learning & Influence



**“Through this report we give some clear recommendations which we hope will be a valuable resource for anyone preparing to travel abroad to work with children, and for the organisations and agencies that send them.”**

## Recommendations

In the School of Psychology at the University of Chester we seek to design rigorous research which has impact.

We have a history of working in partnership with organisations to help develop understanding and knowledge that can underpin evidence-based developments. Leading this research study is commensurate with our commitment to the community and to the safeguarding of children and young people. With little previous research in this area, we hope the findings from this exploratory study will enable the further development of safeguarding policy in International Christian Work and provide a foundation for organisations to work together to develop best practice. We also hope it will facilitate organisations and individuals in reflecting on their knowledge of culture, diversity and their own practice in International work. It is pleasing to see positive examples of good practice in the data, and it is important that we continue to work together to address areas that the research identified as needing further consideration.

**Dr Lisa Oakley and Professor Moira Lafferty**

School of Psychology at the University of Chester



**It is of paramount importance that all those who work overseas with children and young people have their safety at the centre of their engagement.**

As Chair of the International Development Committee, I am acutely aware there remain difficulties in this area. Abuse, harassment and exploitation of aid recipients by some frontline aid workers continues despite significant efforts to prevent this. The work that takes place around the world in some of the most challenging locations presents significant risks for organisations, workers and particularly for local communities and aid recipients. Those organisations and individuals that engage in this work must do all they can to ensure the contextual vulnerabilities and risks are understood and mitigated through the development of effective and culturally competent practice. These practices must be embedded in robust processes and procedures that enable the highest levels of clarity and accountability. This must all be done in collaboration with local communities organisations are there to serve.

Thirtyone:eight are uniquely placed to understand the issues of safeguarding in international work with children where there is a Christian faith basis. I am hugely encouraged that they have collaborated with the University of Chester to undertake this exploratory study into this under-researched area. As far as we know, this is the first such study to address this vital area of support that churches and other faith-based organisations contribute to the global humanitarian development effort.

The recommendations that this research have produced should be considered by all organisations who are engaged in international work with children and young people; whether this is short or longer term. I look forward to seeing the developments in training and other resources that might follow this study and encourage all relevant organisations to play their part in further improving the safeguarding of children and young people worldwide.

**Sarah Champion MP**

Chair of the International Development Select Committee

## Executive summary

As the UK's only independent Christian Safeguarding charity working with churches and faith-based organisations, for over 40 years we've seen requests for our specialist help, advice and guidance in the area of safeguarding in international Christian work (ICW) grow exponentially in recent months.

This growth has necessitated us to further develop our support and as with any new service that we develop, we always base it on the latest understandings, statistics and research available.

What we have found in the area of ICW however, was that there is very limited knowledge as to what the needs are, particularly for sending organisations (including Churches and Christian Charities/NGOs), for individuals serving with these organisations, and for Christian organisations supporting partners overseas.

As a result, we sought to respond to the need for good quality empirical research, by commissioning Dr Lisa Oakley and Professor Moira Lafferty from the School of Psychology at the University of Chester to undertake an exploratory piece of research into safeguarding in international Christian work (ICW). The findings provide a valuable foundation on which to further develop safeguarding policy and practice in this area.

This study was exploratory in nature and employed a questionnaire to explore the experiences of those agencies who support individual's resident in the UK to engage in ICW and the experiences of the individuals who engage in ICW. 72 participants completed the online survey (which included representatives from 39 organisations/agencies) which asked a series of closed questions related to safeguarding in ICW.

**It's important to highlight that the responses contained much evidence of good practice, awareness of the importance of safeguarding and provision of training and support for those engaged in this work.**

69% of agencies/organisations stated they had a written child safeguarding/protection policy that includes a section for those going overseas who will be in contact with children and young people, 74% stated they provided ongoing child safeguarding support when individuals were overseas, and 86% stated that they prepared individuals to address child safeguarding/protection concerns that could arise overseas. This is certainly an encouraging picture.

The results from individuals engaged in ICW (or in the past three years) showed a slightly different picture however and highlights the difference between policy and process, and the challenging reality of implementing these in practice on the ground. 44% of individuals stated they underwent recruitment processes when they applied to go on ICW, 56% stated their organisation had a child protection/safeguarding policy that covered working with children and young people in ICW, 31% stated they were provided with child safeguarding training, and 47% felt the organisation had helped to prepare them for any child safeguarding/protection concerns that could arise.

42% of individuals reported they had encountered child safeguarding/protection issues they had not been prepared for, and 62% of those previously engaged in ICW reported that they were not provided with an opportunity to debrief.

The major safeguarding challenges in ICW that were identified by the participants were:

- Cultural differences in awareness and understandings of child safeguarding/ protection
- The need to work in a culturally sensitive way
- Issues around boundaries and legislation
- The need for safeguarding procedures and oversight

- Challenges associated with partnership working
- safeguarding of individuals engaged in ICW

Participants in the research proposed a number of key areas that any future training should seek to cover. This includes content around:

- Cultural differences and cultural sensitivity
- Preparation
- Policies, procedures and Indicators
- Awareness of safeguarding in host country
- Legislation

The answers provided by organisations showed an awareness of the challenges of safeguarding in the international context and provided some detailed reflection upon these. The major challenge seems to be implementing good safeguarding practice in a context of different cultural understandings whilst guarding against an ethnocentric mindset. Whilst this raises some critical points it also demonstrates awareness and engagement with safeguarding from agencies and organisations supporting those undertaking ICW.

In many ways, the responses from individuals who are or have been engaged in ICW reflect those from organisations and agencies. However, there were more comments on differences in understandings of child safeguarding and especially reflections on locations in which there is limited or no equivalent understanding to the UK context workers are from.

The findings demonstrate some good practice but that further materials, support and training will enhance safeguarding children and young people in ICW and those who engage in this work.

## Recommendations for improving practice and developing support

**Recommendation 1:** Faith settings and other organisations which support individuals in International Christian Work with children and young people should ensure they are safely recruiting all those they are sending.

**Recommendation 2:** Cultural competence in safeguarding should be specifically addressed by faith settings and other sending organisations as part of an individual's preparation for International Christian Work including when and how to report concerns

**Recommendation 3:** Specific training which sufficiently prepares individuals for international Christian work with children and young people should be developed and made easily accessible for organisations to offer to individuals before they undertake any work.

**Recommendation 4:** Faith settings and other sending organisations who support individuals in International Christian work should provide an opportunity for all workers to debrief on their experiences.

**Recommendation 5:** A range of specific tools and resources should be developed and made accessible to support smaller faith settings and sending organisations (such as individual churches) to help them recruit safely, support and equip individuals who engage with ICW through them

**Recommendation 6:** An awareness campaign aimed at sending organisations reminding them of the importance of safer recruitment and safer working practices should be developed to make this a common feature of all International Christian Work.



# 1

## Background and method

### Background

Recently, as a charity, we have seen requests for our help and support in the area of safeguarding in international work grow exponentially. This growth has necessitated us to further develop our support in this area and as with any new service that we develop, we always seek to base it on the latest understandings, statistics and research available.

The researchers found however, that there is very limited knowledge as to what the needs are particularly for sending organisations (including Churches and Christian Charities/NGOs), for individuals serving with these organisations and for Christian organisations supporting partners overseas.

A review of literature shows that this is a significantly under researched area, with a lack of good quality empirical research. Literature that does exist tends to focus on two main areas – reports of non-recent cases of abuse of missionary children (Courtright & Hearit, 2002) and recent cases of abuse by those in mission situations overseas (these tend to be news reports, Cape Times, 2014; Guardian, 2008). Critically, there is limited empirical work which considers safeguarding and abuse of indigenous children or how to work with global partners to develop safer cultures.

“Existing research suggests there is now a “call to the global Christian Church to prevent and treat child abuse.”

The literature that exists often reviews past cases and demonstrates significant mistakes that have been made in international child protection around missionary work. These include a history of protecting the reputation of the institution above the safety and protection of the child, failing to report child abuse and devaluing children (Vieth et al., 2012). Further, there has been a resistance to admitting that abuse has occurred in missionary settings (Courtright & Hearit, 2002).

Often cases of abuse in youth-serving organisations have been slowly investigated and processes applied inconsistently, with staff ill equipped to respond (Boyle, 2014). Boyle reflects that often organisations are in response mode, responding to incidences of abuse that occur, rather than introducing proactive strategies to reduce the risk. Positively, there are examples of robust policy development in the area of international mission, with organisations such as Global Connections, Plan International and the Better Care Network all having comprehensive policies. Vieth et al. (2012, p323) suggest there is now a “call to the global Christian Church to prevent and treat child abuse”.

Both larger and smaller missions, charities and NGOs are becoming more aware of the importance of developing good safeguarding policies and procedures and are seeking advice and support to do this well, but what is not clear is how such policies work in practice.

As a result, we’ve sought to respond to the need for good quality empirical research in this area, by commissioning Dr Lisa Oakley and Professor Moira Lafferty from the School of Psychology at the University of Chester to conduct an exploratory piece of research. The research question for this study was *“What are the current challenges for safeguarding children and young people in international Christian work?”*

## Method

This study was exploratory in nature and employed a questionnaire built on online surveys to explore the experiences of those agencies who support individual's resident in the UK to engage in ICW and the experiences of the individuals who engage in ICW.

The inclusion criteria of 'resident in the UK' is important for this initial study. This focus was chosen because Thirtyone:eight work predominantly with UK based organisations and charities to deliver safeguarding training within this context. Further, as there is so little work currently, it was important to build a foundational understanding from which to develop further work.

The questionnaire was constructed to allow an initial exploration of this topic area and to cover key issues highlighted by past case reviews in this area. The survey questions were about the nature of ICW, safeguarding training, policy and practice and some of the challenges for those engaged with ICW. The questionnaire phase has also recruited participants for a proposed second stage, which could involve semi-structured interviews to explore issues arising from the first stage of the study in further depth.

## Ethics

The research was provided with ethical approval from the School of Psychology Ethics Committee at the University of Chester in June 2019. Ethical issues were carefully considered. Informed consent was obtained through providing an information sheet at the start of the survey and participants were asked to indicate they had read and understood this, and they consented to take part in the research. At the end of the survey participants were asked to confirm they consented to their data and anonymous quotes being included. All participants answered yes to these questions. All data has been anonymised prior to analysis to protect participants. Contact details for sources of support, including the Thirtyone:eight safeguarding helpline were provided to participants at the end of the survey. Participants were asked not to use the survey to report cases of abuse but were given alternative pathways for reporting. No participants disclosed cases of abuse within the survey.

## Analysis

Descriptive statistics were used to report findings on the closed questions. Braun and Clarke's (2006) model of thematic analysis was employed on the open text data to identify key messages and themes in respondents' answers.

## Participants

Participants were recruited through an invitation sent out to all organisations holding an active membership with Thirtyone:eight and through adverts on social media platforms (e.g. Facebook and Twitter). The survey was open from 1 September 2019 to 5 December 2019.

72 participants completed the online survey. The survey was divided into two sections. The first category was for sending organisations who support individuals who engage in ICW (of which there were 39 participants). The second category was for individuals who were (or had been in the past three years) engaged in ICW (of which there were 33 participants). These numbers should be taken into consideration when interpreting the findings. A full breakdown of participant demographics is detailed in the Appendices (See Appendix 1).



## The Findings

### 2.1 Responses

Participants were asked a series of closed questions. The responses to these questions are detailed below under the many themes that were covered. The abbreviation ICW has been used throughout in place of the term International Christian Work.

#### Policy

The research showed that most organisations working in ICW do have a safeguarding policy that covers this area of their work. 69.2% (n=27) of organisations surveyed stated that they had a safeguarding/child protection policy that included a section for those going overseas who would be in contact with children or young people. 56% (n=18) of individuals who had been or who were engaged in ICW stated that their organisation had a policy. However, there was a feeling that although policies were in place, that they weren't always specific to ICW *"the general points apply to overseas but it's not explicit"*, or that the existence of a policy may not be being effectively communicated to workers as 12.5% (n=4) of individuals said they did not know if their organisation had a policy *"I am not aware of any safeguarding policies held by the church we were working with"*.

#### Recruitment Process

The findings suggest the need for enhanced awareness of safer recruitment processes for those engaging in ICW. Only 44% (n=14) of individuals surveyed stated that they underwent some form of recruitment processes when they applied to go on ICW, with 40% (n=13) of individuals stating that they did not and 16% (n=5) answering in the other category. *"There was no application process as we are independent missionaries commended by our church, we are however affiliated with an organisation which processed enhanced disclosures for us both"*

#### Preparation

The responses around preparation suggest that organisations and agencies feel that they do prepare individuals for safeguarding concerns with 86% (n=33) of organisations stating that they prepared individuals to address child safeguarding/protection concerns that could arise overseas. However, the response from individual participants showed that only 47% felt the organisation had helped them prepare for any safeguarding/protection concerns that could arise. The findings also suggest the need for specific training for those engaging in ICW especially through Churches or Christian charities as only 31% (n=10) of individuals said they had received training. *"We have general safeguarding training at Church but nothing specific when we went on this trip."* There also appears to be the need to raise awareness of codes of conduct for those engaging in ICW as only 45% (n=14) of participants said they had been asked to sign a code of conduct.

### Raising safeguarding/child protection concerns

Responding organisations said that they were confident that the individuals they support in ICW were aware of how to raise concerns with 80% (n=31) of organisations stating that individuals who went overseas through their organisation were clear about how to raise a safeguarding concern. All of the individuals currently engaged in ICW stated that they knew how to raise a safeguarding or child protection concern and 18 of those previously engaged with ICW agreed that they knew how to raise a concern. Three of the six individuals currently on ICW said that they had encountered some form of safeguarding issue that they did not feel prepared for whilst 41% (n=11) of those previously on ICW had encountered issues they hadn't felt prepared for. *"I was upset and worried sometimes at what I saw and what I should do about it"* Overall, this is a relatively positive picture, however the findings illustrate that organisations could be doing more to monitor how confident individuals are in raising safeguarding concerns.

### Raising concerns about workers

82% (n=32) of organisations stated that they had a clear procedure for raising child safeguarding/protection concerns about an individual who has gone overseas through their organisations. One participant raised the challenges associated with raising concerns about other workers, *"It is a bit of a family and so everyone just wants to get along and not raise any issues and you don't know the people you are working with anyway"*. Again, it is positive that there are procedures in place but there is some room for development to equip all organisations to develop a clear procedure and facilitate those going abroad to raise issues where appropriate.

### Ongoing safeguarding support

Most organisations indicated that they do offer some form of ongoing support to individuals when they are overseas with 74.4% (n=29) of organisations stating they provided ongoing child safeguarding/protection support. Of the six individuals currently on ICW five agreed that they have access to child safeguarding/protection support while overseas, however just 34% (n=9) of those previously engaged in ICW stated that they had access to support. 46% (n=12) of the individuals surveyed said that they didn't have access to support which meant in some cases they were left *"not knowing who to talk to if you are concerned"*. These findings suggest the need to develop further safeguarding support for individuals engaged in ICW whilst overseas.

### Debrief

The responses demonstrate that organisations are providing opportunities for workers to debrief with 62% (n=24) of organisations saying that individuals returning from being overseas would have a debrief including the opportunity to raise child safeguarding/protection concerns. However, only 27% of individuals previously engaged in ICW stated that they were offered a debrief when they returned home in which they could raise child protection/safeguarding issues. 62% (n=16) of individuals stated they were not provided with this opportunity, and the remaining participants chose the other category one of which stated that it was sometimes offered but not on each return to the UK. These findings clearly detail that this is again an area where there should be development.

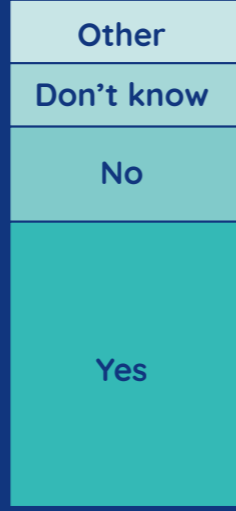
**"I was upset and worried sometimes at what I saw and what I should do about it."**



# Responses

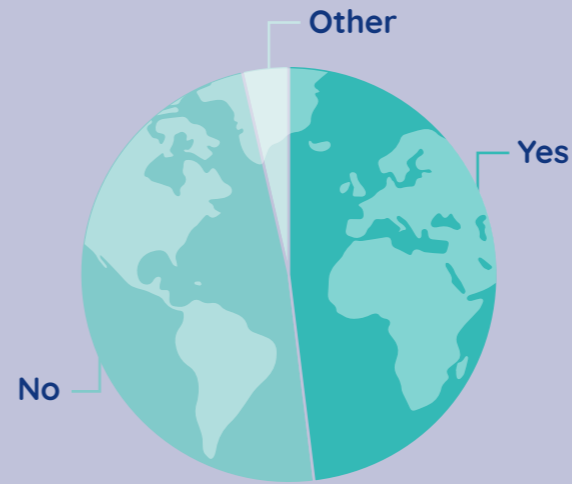
**70%**

of organisations had a written safeguarding/child protection policy that included a section for working overseas

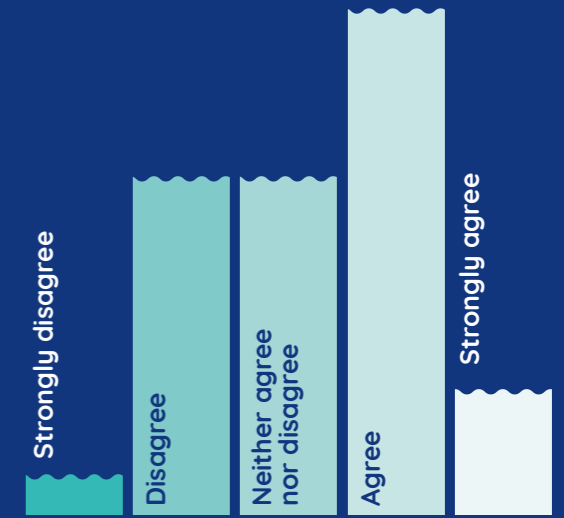


**56%**

of people said their organisations has a child protection/safeguarding policy that covers working with children and young people in ICW



**14 out of 32** people were asked to sign up to a code of conduct before going overseas



Before they went overseas people felt their organisation/agency helped them prepare for any safeguarding/protection concerns that could arise



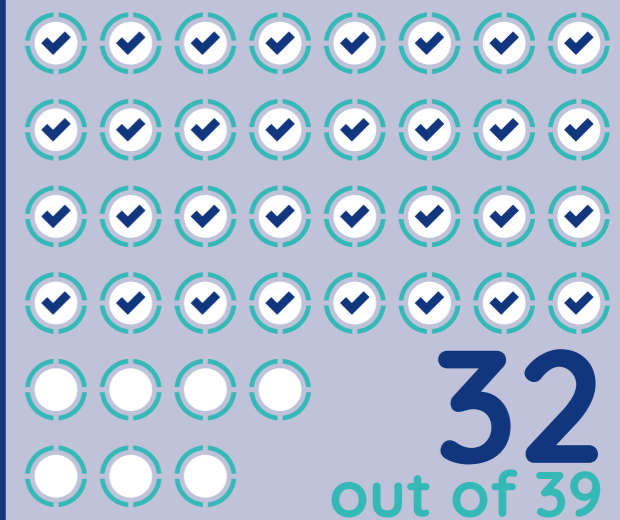
**14 out of 32**

people said that when they applied to go on ICW the recruitment process included child safeguarding/protection measures

**80%** of organisations felt individuals overseas are clear about how to raise a child safeguarding/protection concern



**57%** of people when overseas felt they knew how to raise a child safeguarding/protection concern

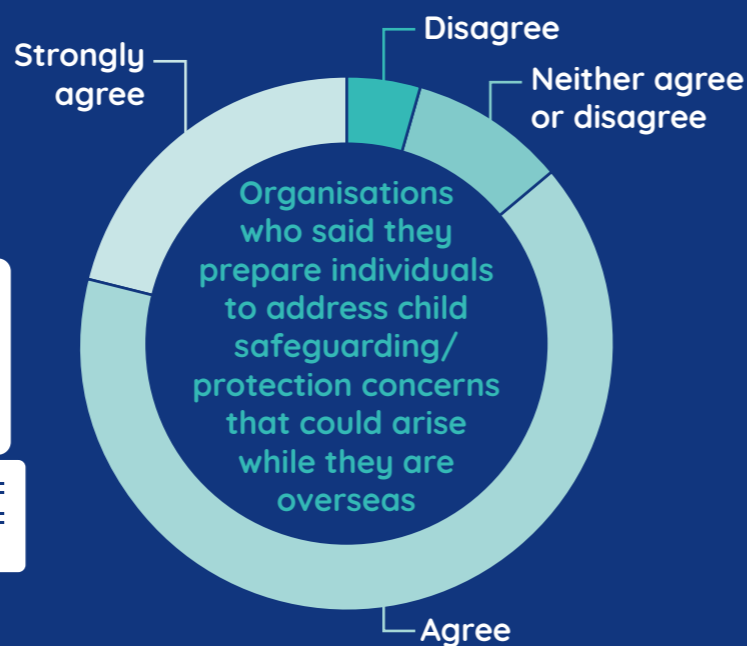


**32 out of 39**

of organisations agreed or strongly agreed they had a clear procedure in place for raising a child safeguarding/protection concern about an individual who has gone overseas though their organisation

**10 out of 32**

people said that they were provided with child safeguarding/protection training



**29 out of 39** of organisations provided ongoing child safeguarding/protection support when individuals are overseas

**62%** of organisations agreed or strongly agreed that they provide a debrief for each individual, on return from being overseas

## 2.2 Safeguarding Challenges

Participants identified a variety of challenges associated with safeguarding in ICW. These themes are discussed here in order of prevalence and with supporting quotes taken from the survey responses. These are represented diagrammatically in the Appendices (See Appendix 2)

### Cultural Differences

The major theme identified under challenges for safeguarding in ICW was cultural differences in understandings and awareness of safeguarding/child protection and practices in international contexts.

There were many comments about differences between UK perspectives on safeguarding children and those held in other contexts. Some Participants talked about how cultural differences meant *'different mindsets, viewpoints and way of life'*. Many of the people responding gave examples from their own experience such as in one context where the trafficking of children was perceived to be *"condoned by parents"*.

Participants reflected upon different perceptions or limited knowledge of child safeguarding in countries they worked in. There was recognition that children were cared for but awareness of safeguarding was different. *"While there was a real care for children, and a lot of good work was done among them, I'm not sure safeguarding – as we see it in the UK – is something that is particularly thought about"*.

Different cultural understandings of safeguarding and practices were reported to create complexities in the procedures in place for raising concerns in the international context. In light of these cultural differences some participants suggested that understandings, procedures and regulations around safeguarding in the UK can be perceived negatively in the international context and lead to negative perceptions of those engaged in ICW. *"Different views on child protection – so what one person thinks is an issue isn't seen as this in another culture – so I saw children being treated in a way we wouldn't say is acceptable but it was culturally"*.

There was recognition that teams might include individuals from a variety of their own cultural contexts and that this can add to the range of views on safeguarding and cultural practices. There was also recognition of the need to ensure workers reflected on their own positionality when engaging in ICW and seeking to influence safeguarding practice.

Individuals raised the issue of how to address cultural differences in safeguarding and how to influence understandings.

### Boundaries

In addition to cultural differences, participants also discussed differences in personal and professional boundaries. There was recognition that in seeking to impose boundaries workers could be misunderstood. *"Personally, it can be difficult to maintain barriers that put you above reproach without offending hospitality"*. There was also reflection that, in seeking to help, individuals might ignore or minimise the importance of boundaries when engaged in ICW. One participant noted that, in seeking to help, safeguarding checks and considerations may be minimised. *"It is easier to maintain agreed boundaries in the UK when expectations of staff, volunteers and parents are similar. However, in Malawi that isn't always the case, for example children are often not accompanied by adults, leading to situation where a child comes to you for help or assistance and you are alone"*. One participant noted that in seeking to help, safeguarding checks and considerations may be minimised, *"The feeling is usually that it's wonderful that we are sending all these teams as opposed to we need to scrutinise more carefully who is going and what are the rules and standards of the organisation"*.

**“Personally, it can be difficult to maintain barriers that put you above reproach without offending hospitality.”**



### Legislation

There was discussion of different laws and their implementation. *"What is the law regarding child protection in the nation you are working in. Does it even exist... If so, you need to know what it is and how it works"*, One participant commented on finding it difficult to ascertain the law in their context. *"Whilst the laws can be in place, the implementation of them can be very different"*.

### Cultural sensitivity/competence

Participants recognised the need to be culturally sensitive in working in the international context and the implications of a 'western mindset' in interpreting behaviours. There was a concern that those engaging in ICW should not operate out of an ethnocentric or superior mindset and seek to avoid a *"West knows best"* frame of reference.

Participants discussed the importance and responsibility of being culturally aware. *"It's on you as a missionary to understand the place you are going to, read up, get prepared and ensure you know, be culturally aware, you are going to them!"*. One of the biggest safeguarding challenges discussed were specific practices that could be deemed to be culturally acceptable. The most commonly reported was physical punishment of children. *"Different cultures have different views on what is accepted in terms of punishment"*

The importance of working in partnership to ensure both cultural sensitivity and good safeguarding practice was highlighted, however there was recognition that adopting cultural competence alongside best practice in safeguarding is complex and can be challenging.

### Safeguarding Procedures and Oversight

Participants reflected upon the need for clear safeguarding procedure and oversight when working in the international context. They noted the need for, and challenges associated with developing policy that works effectively. *"UK organisations may have policies in place to show their concern for child protection, but they may be very difficult to apply in the culture where someone is working"*.

Operating safer recruitment processes locally and internationally was seen as an integral part of effective procedures. Accountability and compliance of workers was also seen to be an important element of safeguarding processes and the need to learn from individuals who live and work in that context. *"It is difficult for someone to understand the differences in culture who has not lived in that place, so it is important that the person who is in the field is listened to and supported appropriately"*.

In addition to safeguarding children and young people participants noted that safeguarding practice would also protect those engaged in ICW. There was a call for experienced individuals to be available to discuss concerns with. Again, the challenges of embedding safeguarding in the international context were noted.

One participant also discussed the challenges associated with raising concerns about other workers (or whistleblowing). Linked to this concern was a reflection on short-term teams and how the Christian picture of a family could work against effective safeguarding practice.

### Challenges of partnership working

An integral element of developing effective safeguarding processes and procedures is effective partnership working. *“How to work with and challenge partner agencies on safeguarding issues when they don't see there is an issue”*. Participants noted the importance of this and also some of the challenges associated with partnership working such as overseeing safeguarding when projects are run by national partners. There was awareness in the responses of the need not to reinforce western privilege whilst also being able to discuss safeguarding *“Sharing the need for safeguarding, due diligence without being paternal and colonial in stating what others must do to satisfy our needs”*.

### Safeguarding those engaged in the work

The main focus of the responses provided were directed at safeguarding children and young people in ICW. However, the safeguarding of those working in the international context (including children of workers) was also noted. *“A lot of my experiences over the years have left me distressed or very uncomfortable. On one occasion I saw a child who was diagnosed with special needs and no one wanted her – I felt dreadful returning to my own children with all they had – I think that much more care needs to be taken of people who go overseas”*.

Participants reflected upon the challenges of ensuring those engaged in ICW were safeguarded as a number commented on the emotional impact of this work. Participants suggested that UK organisations needed to take more responsibility for safeguarding workers and this could be achieved through effective preparation. A lack of preparation was reported to leave individuals vulnerable. *“UK organisations should really ensure that safeguarding is appropriate with their host organisations overseas before sending workers out there. Rather than starting the mission work and later getting to the safeguarding support”*.

It is important to note that participants did raise examples of good practice with one commenting *“I felt 100% safe the whole time I was there”*.

## 2.3 Training needs identified

Participants made a range of suggestions for topics to include in an international safeguarding training module. These themes are discussed below in order of prevalence and with supporting quotes taken from the survey responses. These are represented diagrammatically in the Appendices (See Appendix 3)

### Cultural differences and cultural sensitivity/competence

One of the key messages that came through from the research was the need for any training to enhance cultural competence and address cultural differences in safeguarding and perceptions of practices but to do this in a manner which was sensitive to cultural contexts and did not reinforce privilege or ethnocentricity. *“It should be tailored to include what may be different about customs and cultures that they are visiting”*.

The responses state the importance of training to address implementing culturally competent safeguarding practice in the local international context. One participant noted that it was important to recognise in training that safeguarding concerns could relate to workers and their children and some of these may arise from cultural differences in backgrounds of those in teams. *“Good education in cultural differences and ideas on how to respond to them”*.

Participants reflected that training might include consideration of how to influence practice, and that it should include a theological and personal element. Another factor that is related to cultural competence is the need for specific training, not an adaptation of UK models. *“Not just the standard requirements that include issues in the UK but also differences in cultures, laws and perhaps even a theological, ethical angle – and our own response”*.

### Preparation

Throughout the discussion of training was a theme of preparing individuals for ICW. Participants suggested they needed clear expectations. *“Not being fully prepared for what we would encounter – going through Church I think it was assumed the normal child protection training was enough but it wasn't”*.

There was also a comment that training was needed to help churches to *“better prepare people”*. One individual noted that there should be space built in for organisations, including Churches to help the individual to really consider if engaging with ICW is right for them. One participant also reflected upon the need to consider training for children and young people. *“Sending orgs will often also send volunteers. As an individual worker it is impossible to be confident that suitable checks and training were done, and we are not afforded the time to do in-depth orientation upon arrival”*.

Participants did note that good practice in this area does already exist and pointed to training already in place.

### Policies Procedures and Indicators

There was a particular focus on the need for clarity in reporting and referring. Organisational respondents suggested that any training module should include information on indicators of abuse and policies and procedures for response and referral. There was a clear sense that training should consider how workers can determine if behaviour witnessed constitutes a safeguarding concern. *“The role of culture and cultural diversity and their impact on understanding abuse as well as clear reporting lines in terms of child protection”*.

A number of responses emphasised the need for clarity in safeguarding procedure and policy. Individual participants discussed the importance of training including simple information about indicators of abuse, policy and procedure that worked effectively in the local context and balancing cultural sensitivity with a commitment to safeguarding. The issue of thresholds of abuse was raised by participants and seen to be an important topic to cover in training.

“Not being fully prepared for what we would encounter – going through Church I think it was assumed the normal child protection training was enough but it wasn't.”



The research also showed that training on reporting and referring needs to include considerations of the international context and complexities that this may cause. *“How to report concerns”, “who to contact with concerns when abroad”* There were specific comments on the role of ICW in developing a safeguarding culture. Again there was recognition of the need to safeguard workers and that this should be an element of international safeguarding training *“Same as in UK. Plus local orientation that covers both local processes and law, and discussion about how to manage concerns in the specific country and culture where the person is or is going”*.

Again, participants noted the importance of knowing when and how to refer and being assured of what action would follow. Alongside these issues participants suggested training should include discussion of safer recruitment, the need for compliance to policy and procedure, the inclusion of a debrief, and consideration of self-protection and support for workers. *“Advice in how to raise suspicions in some countries safely”, “How to implement child protection/safeguarding policies in countries or regions when this is not seen as important”*.

### Awareness of safeguarding in host country

Participants discussed the importance of those engaging with ICW to be prepared by developing an understanding of safeguarding awareness, cultural practices and legislation in the host country. *“In relation to safeguarding in general and some specific training in relation from the host organisation to prepare volunteers as to the challenges in that particular region”*.

Again, the need to balance good practice with cultural sensitivity was noted. One participant suggested it might be helpful for individuals to have opportunities to talk to others with knowledge of the context. *“Other countries often have widely differing policies and practices in relation to safeguarding. Short term mission teams are usually totally unaware of what the policies are in the country they visit”*.

This knowledge prior to embarking on ICW could provide a forum from which to develop discussions ahead of commencement of placement and is a responsibility of those embarking on international work. *“As a minimum being aware of the approach to safeguarding in the host country and thinking through beforehand – potentially in discussions with host churches / partner groups – how any issues will be handled”*.

### Legislation

Participants noted the importance of being aware of the law in the context they would be working in and how to raise concerns *“knowledge of national rules and laws regarding child protection, knowledge of where to report concerns”*.

## 2.4 Challenges Working with Host Organisations

Participants did comment upon some challenges of working with host organisations, which are explored here. However, it is important to note that some participants stated that they had not encountered any challenges. Importantly, others noted good practice by host organisations *“In my two weeks, I was with a team and we were well supported daily, with time to reflect and feedback”*.

### Cultural Differences

This is a repeated theme throughout the responses in the survey. As with previous questions cultural differences in understandings of safeguarding, practice and legislation were the key challenges reported in working with host organisations. These differences led to challenges for workers in defining abuse and raising concerns. *“Belief that everything is a domestic issue best solved by the family without intervention”, “Very friendly but they didn’t recognise somethings we were concerned about as issues”*.

They also led to challenges associated with implementing policy *“You can have clear safeguarding policies in place, but they are often only as good as the ability to put them into practice in the context in which you are working”*. Different understandings and legislation can also lead to referrals not being actioned. *“We tried reporting an incident, but it was dismissed by the local social services as not being important as it involved an older and a younger child and not an adult”*.

## 2.5 Challenges Working with Sending Organisations

There were examples of good practice provided by participants who were supported by sending organisations. *“I did feel very supported and valued by the sending organisation and they kept in contact loads before I went, I felt part of their organisation, even though I was only going for two short trips with them. Also, organisations do a lot on very little budget, which is very important to note. Small organisations are really making a difference in some settings”*.

### Cultural Differences

Again, the key theme was cultural differences but, in this section, answers were often reflective of the level of knowledge of the sending organisations about the safeguarding culture and realities of the host country. *“Sending organisations can have little awareness of the on-the-ground realities, which don’t fit well into easy boxes of European safeguarding norms”*. Again, answers reflected the difficulty in implementing policy. *“While obvious abuse is totally unacceptable and needs action there may be difficulties in interpreting the organisations policies and adapting it to that areas setting. E.g. A child may not have enough food, health care or not in school because the parents can’t afford it”*.

### Preparation

One participant reflected that going through the Church meant that she was not fully prepared or trained. *“Not being fully prepared for what we would encounter – going through Church I think it was assumed the normal child protection training was enough but it wasn’t”*. Another commented upon being unsure if suitable checks or training had occurred, *“Sending orgs will often also send volunteers. As an individual worker it is impossible to be confident that suitable checks and training were done, and we are not afforded the time to do in-depth orientation upon arrival”*.

### Monitoring and supervision

One participant commented that it was difficult for sending organisations to ensure accountability when individuals were overseas. *“Monitoring of workers in the field may be difficult”*. Another reflected on the difficulty of remote supervision *“It’s a challenge to implement and receive remote supervision”*.

## Conclusions and Recommendations

### Conclusions

The answers provided by organisations showed an awareness of the challenges of safeguarding in the international context and provided some detailed reflection upon these. The major challenges were identified as: cultural differences; cultural sensitivity/competence; the need for safeguarding procedure, policy and oversight; effective partnership working; and the importance of safeguarding those engaged in ICW and their families. The major challenge seems to be implementing good safeguarding practice in a context of different cultural understandings whilst guarding against an ethnocentric mindset. Whilst this raises some critical points it also demonstrates awareness and engagement with safeguarding from agencies and organisations supporting those undertaking ICW.

The responses from individuals who are, or have been engaged in ICW, in many ways reflect that from organisations and agencies. However, there were more comments on differences in understandings of child safeguarding and especially reflections on locations in which there is limited or no equivalent parallel to the UK context where workers are from. Further, participants raised the challenges of specific cultural practices, the need for safeguarding procedure and reporting pathways and the challenge of safeguarding workers when overseas.

Participants were clear about the need for training to prepare individuals for ICW. Again, this is positive as individuals were aware of the importance of safeguarding and the need to be fully equipped for ICW. The participants provided a range of suggestions for a training program. The key elements would be: cultural competence, awareness and sensitivity; identifying safeguarding concerns; indicators of abuse and thresholds; clear procedures and policies, especially around referral; consideration of the challenges of safeguarding in the international context and safeguarding workers; include policies, procedures and indicators; consideration of cultural differences; and awareness of safeguarding in the host country, together with local legislation.

Overall there were comments on good practice from host and sending organisations. The theme of cultural differences in safeguarding awareness continued. The responses to these questions again suggest the need for detailed preparation and on the ground support and monitoring. These issues may be especially pertinent for small organisations and churches or Christian organisations who support those engaged in ICW but for whom this may not be their main activity and therefore may not have the infrastructure to fully support an individual.

Overall there is evidence of safeguarding processes and procedures and equipping of individuals engaging in ICW, however, there is also some inconsistency and areas for development in order to fully equip individuals to work safely and to be able to report safeguarding concerns as part of their ICW

The findings demonstrate some good practice but that further materials, support and training will enhance safeguarding children and young in ICW and those who engage in this work. Further work may be needed to more fully prepare individuals for child safeguarding/protection concerns that they may encounter.



## Recommendations

**Recommendation 1: Faith settings and other sending organisations which support individuals in International Christian Work with children and young people should ensure they are safely recruiting all those they are sending.** The findings indicate the need for an enhanced awareness of the safer recruitment processes for those engaging in ICW whether it be for short or more longer-term mission placements. The policies, procedures and tools necessary for safer recruitment, including relevant background checks need to be accessible, affordable and relevant to smaller organisations and those working in faith settings.

**Recommendation 2: Cultural competence in safeguarding and child protection should be specifically addressed by Faith settings and other sending organisations as part of an individual's preparation for International Christian Work including when and how to report concerns.** There is a clear need to more fully prepare individuals for child protection concerns that they may encounter when working abroad and to develop an awareness of safeguarding procedures in the local contexts in which individuals may be working. Any difference between UK and the local context should be addressed as well as the legislative and cultural implications. Resources should be developed and made available to organisations to enable them to do this on a country by country basis so they can easily and affordably make this available to individuals.

**Recommendation 3: Specific training which sufficiently prepares individuals for international Christian work with children and young people should be developed and made easily accessible for organisations to offer to individuals before they undertake any work.** Any training which is developed should include information around the indicators of abuse, policies and procedures (especially around referral), a consideration of cultural differences and awareness of safeguarding in the host country, together with local legislation, and advice on safeguarding workers. Training should be developed that specifically meets the needs of local churches or smaller organisations who may support people on a more infrequent or informal basis.

**Recommendation 4: Faith settings and other sending organisations who support individuals in International Christian work should provide an opportunity for all workers to debrief on their experiences.** Organisations should ensure that a formal debrief opportunity is offered for all those returning from International Christian work no matter how long they have been away and within an appropriate timescale. This should always include the opportunity to raise any safeguarding concerns. Debriefs should be conducted by someone who is appropriately equipped to do so, so that any issues can be properly identified and addressed. Resources should be developed to provide smaller organisations with the relevant tools to do this effectively.

**Recommendation 5: A range of specific tools and resources should be developed and made accessible to support smaller faith settings and sending organisations (such as individual churches) to help them recruit safely, support and equip individuals who engage with ICW through them.** The research identified that smaller organisations who support individuals to engage in International Christian work on an infrequent basis or who may not have the infrastructure, resource or budget to invest in creating the appropriate level of support from scratch, would benefit from having access to a range of tools and resources that allow them to easily and affordably implement the necessary policy and procedures to effectively safeguard their workers and those they are working with.

**Recommendation 6: An awareness campaign aimed at sending organisations reminding them of the importance of safer recruitment and safer working practices should be developed to make this a common feature of all International Christian Work.** It would appear, from the research, that a campaign which highlights and reminds organisations of the importance of safer recruitment and safer working practices could be a helpful first step in seeing positive change in this area. The importance of background checks as well as some form of support in helping people decide if ICW is right for them. This should make clear the role that supporting organisations like churches can play, when they may not be the 'sending' organisation, but who may be supporting the individual in understanding their motives for engaging in ICW.



# Appendices

## Appendix 1: Participant demographics

72 participants completed an online survey asking about safeguarding and ICW. The survey was divided into two sections.

The first was for **sending organisations** who support individuals who engage in ICW, there were 39 participants in this category 14 of these were mission agencies or organisations, 13 were churches and 12 were Christian based charities. These numbers should be taken into consideration when interpreting the findings.

The organisations supported individuals to work in a wide range of locations across the world including countries in Africa, India, Europe and Asia. Some participants listed countries, but many listed the number of countries or continents. When asked to identify the most common roles individuals undertook through them a range of roles were listed. The most common roles being work with children and young people including education and teaching, Christian teaching and leadership, community and development work and medical or health related roles.

The second route of the survey was for **individuals** who were (or had been in the last 3 years) engaged in ICW. There were 33 participants from this category, of these 6 are currently engaged in ICW, 2 of these are working through an organisation, 3 through a Church and 1 through a Christian based charity.

Of the 6 participants currently engaged in ICW 2 identified as male and 4 as female. The average age of these participants ranged from 34 to 60 with the average age being 41 years. The time period of their current placement ranged between 3 weeks and 16 years. Their total length of time engaged in ICW ranged between 7 months and 16 years. The countries these respondents listed as working in or having worked in were – Uganda, Malawi, Ghana, Botswana, South Africa, Zimbabwe, Kenya, Liberia, Sierra Leone, Cote de Voire, Brazil and DRC. However, some stated they had worked in other countries in addition to those listed. The roles undertaken currently include leadership roles in theological/ church organisations and community work and activities and education with children and young people.

27 participants had previously been engaged in ICW in the past 3 years. 26 answered the question asking them to identify in what capacity they were undertaking this role, 1 of these was working on their own, 5 through an organisation, 10 through a Church and 9 through a Christian based charity and one respondent ticked the other category and explained they were invited through a long-standing relationship with a pastor in Romania. 20 identified as female and 7 as male. The age range was 29 – 67 years with the average age being 50 years. The time period they had engaged in their last placement ranged between 5 days to 4 years and 7 months with only 7 participants going for longer than 2 weeks, hence most were engaged with short-term trips. The total length of time they had engaged in ICW ranged from 1 week to 31 years. The most recent roles undertaken include a focus on activities and education with children and young people, with some taking part in Christian teaching and evangelism roles or labelling their role as 'missionary' and two in medical or health roles. Countries participants had conducted these roles in were, Belgium Mozambique, Zimbabwe (4), Uganda (6), Tanzania (2), Bulgaria, Moldova, Vietnam, Myanmar, Thailand, Hungary, Estonia, Switzerland, Croatia, Spain, Latvia and, Ukraine (3), Chad, Romania (3), Malawi (2), Zambia (2), Kenya (3), Bosnia, Ethiopia, Morocco, Philippines, Mozambique

## Appendix 2: Safeguarding challenges identified in ICW

Figure 1 – Sending organisations

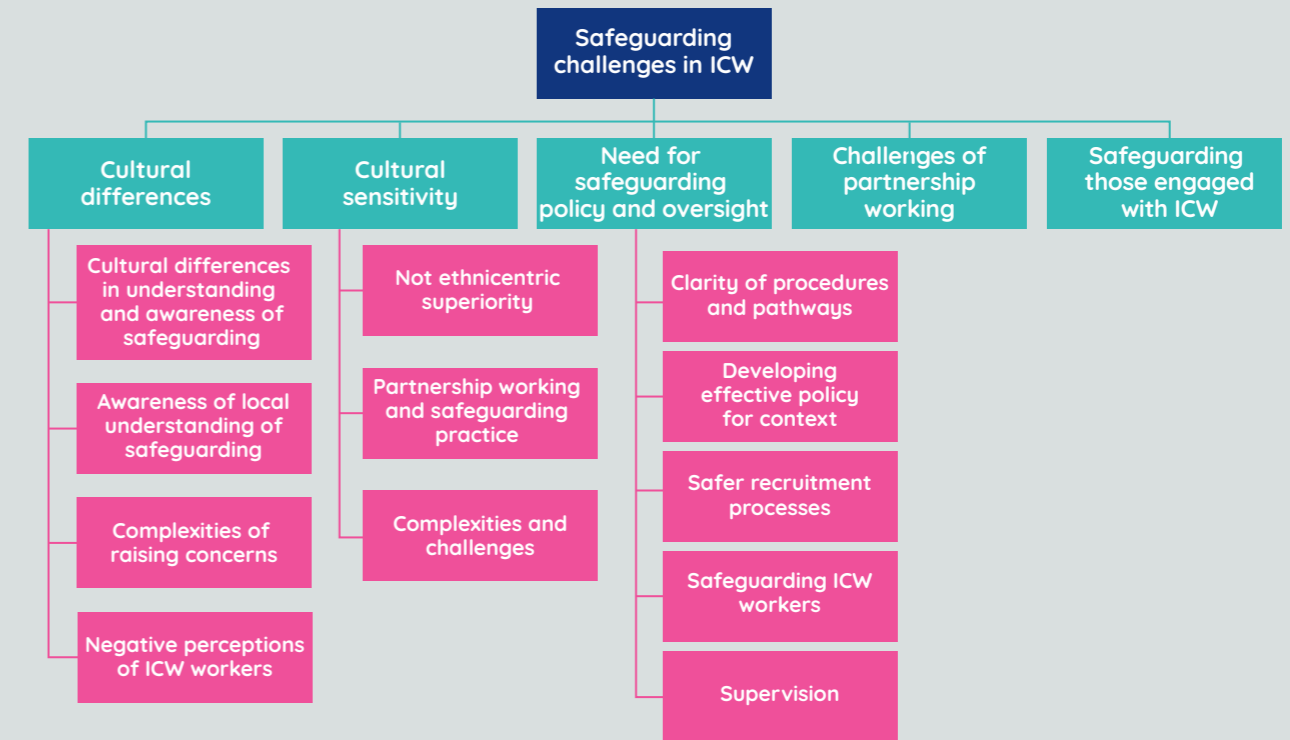
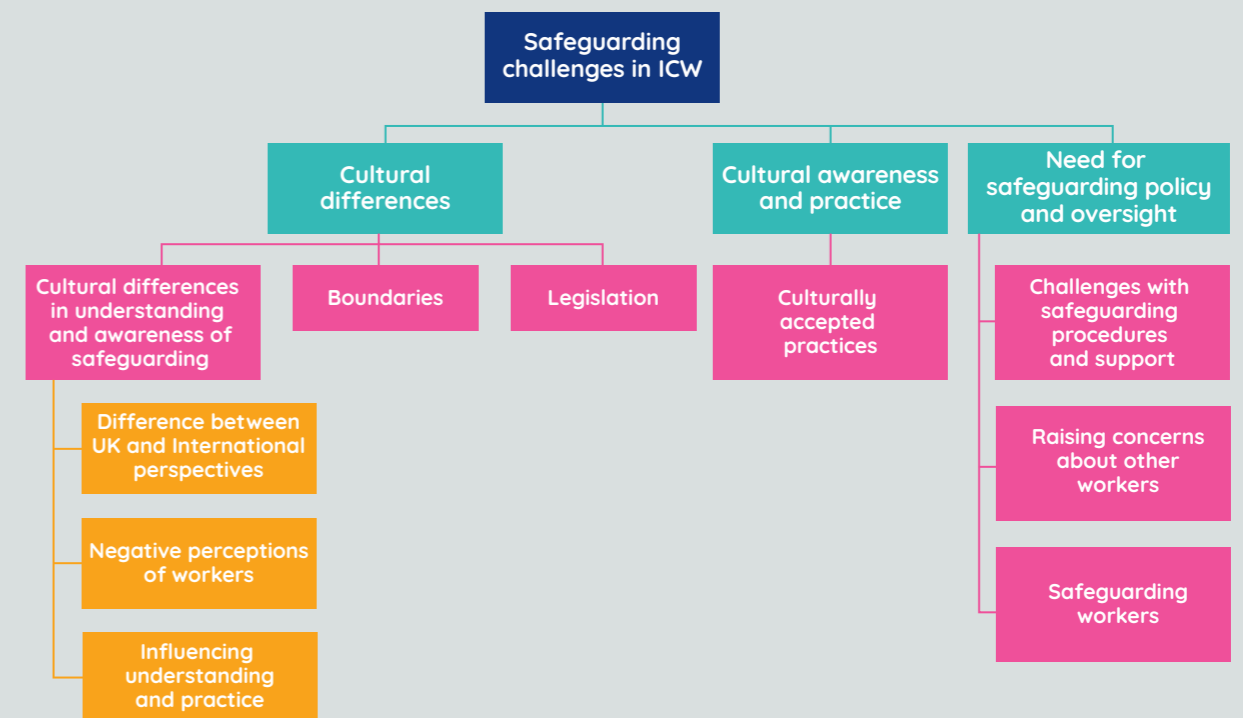


Figure 2 – Those who are or have been engaged in ICW



Appendix 3: Proposed contents of international safeguarding training

Figure 3 – Sending organisations

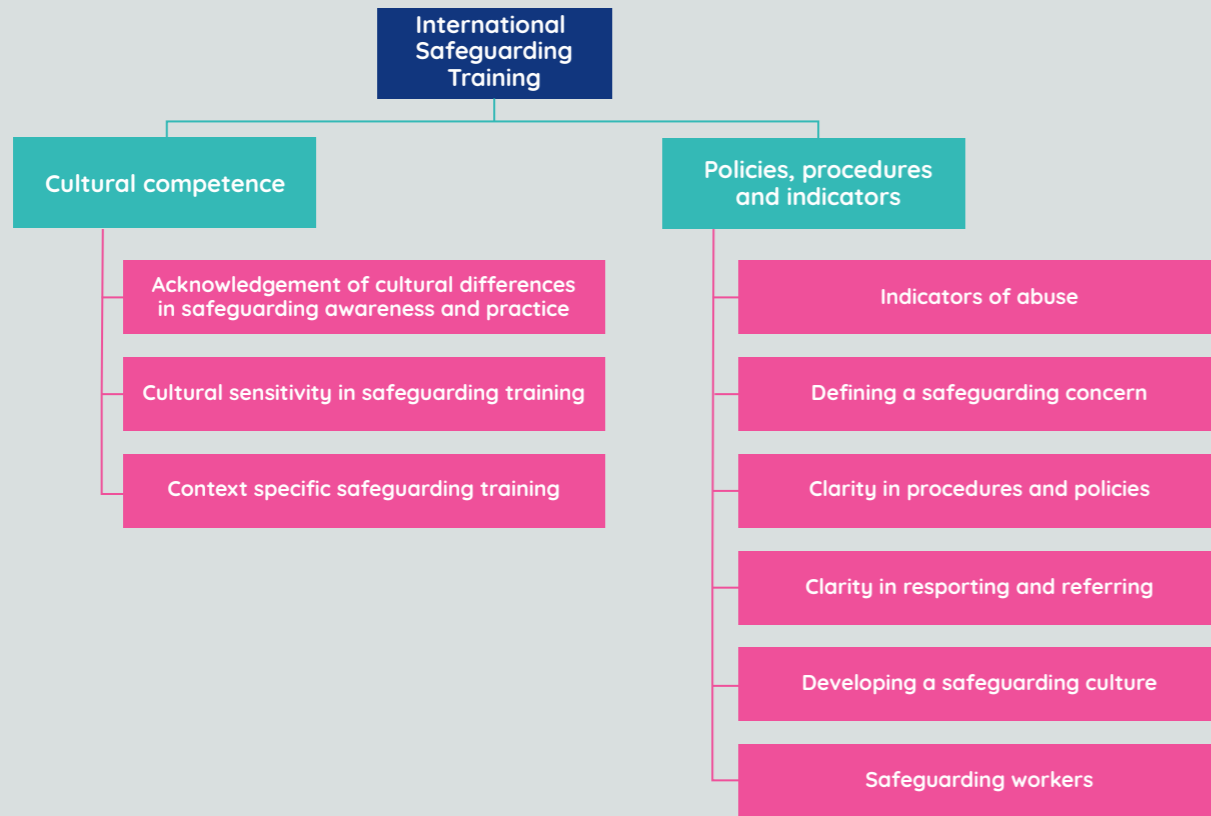
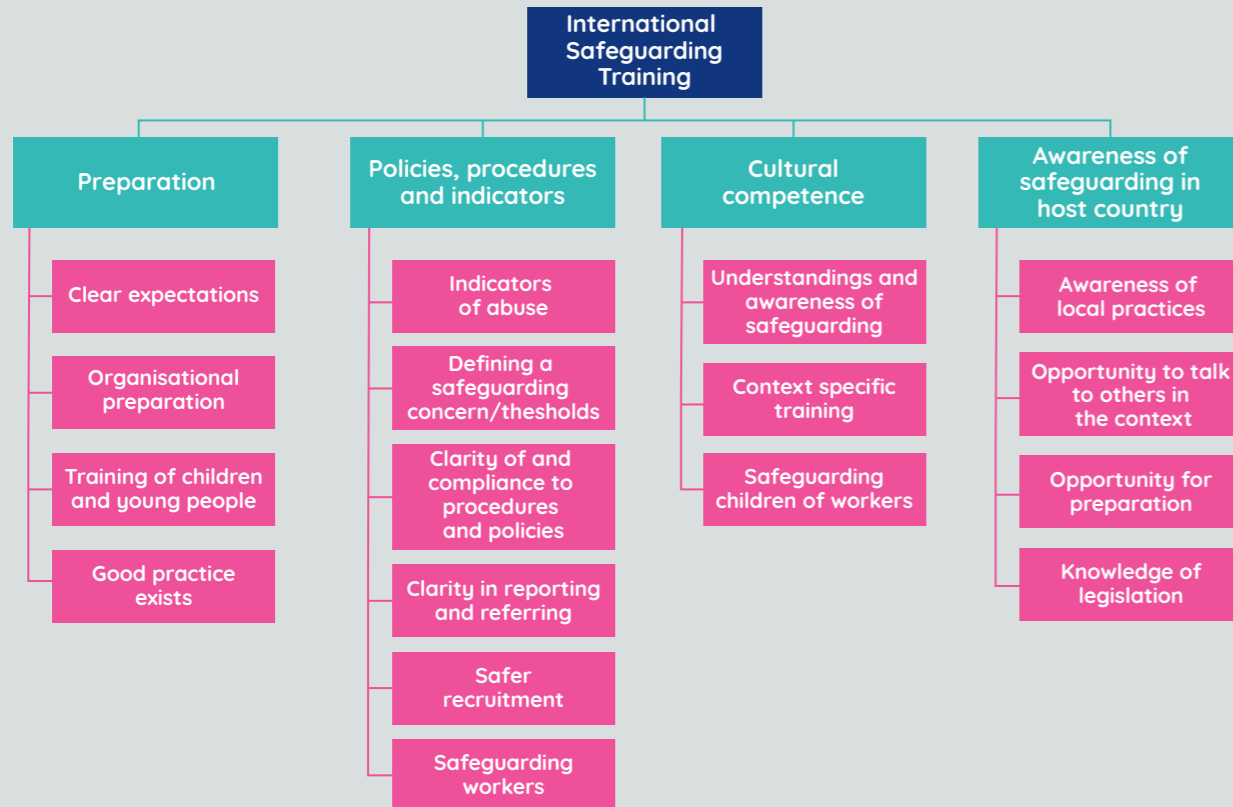


Figure 4 – Those who are or have been engaged in ICW





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