

Digital Defenders Partnership Code of Conduct



Hivos
people unlimited

INTRODUCTION

The Digital Defenders Partnership's (DDP) vision is of an open internet, free from threats to expression, association, assembly, privacy, and other fundamental rights, especially in repressive and transitional environments. Our mission is to provide a holistic response to digital threats, and create resilient and sustainable networks of support to human rights defenders and activists. To this end, DDP provides emergency response and sustainable protection funding, strengthens rapid response and local protection networks, increases trainers' capacities through our field building efforts, and contributes to long-term organisational safety through accompaniments to civil society organisations committed to human rights.

DDP seeks to develop an organisational culture that reflects our mission, vision and values. In daily life and in our relationships with donors, partners, grantees, consultants and other stakeholders, DDP employees and representatives aim to give practical application to our values and to act with the highest possible integrity.

DDP is a programme hosted by the international non-governmental organisation Hivos. The [Hivos safeguarding policy](#) is part of the contract that each DDP team member, partner, donor or consultant signs. The DDP Code of Conduct complements the Hivos safeguarding policy, while being more specifically aligned to DDP's values and principles.



THE CODE OF CONDUCT

This Code of Conduct outlines the expectations of employees and representatives of DDP, including Hivos employees and those who may be contracted as remote consultants or via an implementation partner. In fulfilling their responsibilities, DDP employees and representatives are expected to comply with this Code of Conduct, as well as with all applicable laws and regulations. This Code of Conduct applies to all DDP spaces, including all events and social gatherings, whether online or offline.

This Code of Conduct also presents complaints procedures in place at DDP, namely, the Hivos External Complaints Procedure and the Hivos Whistleblowing Procedure. Donors, partners, grantees, consultants and other stakeholders are invited and encouraged to use these mechanisms if DDP members do not comply with the Code of Conduct.

DDP employees and representatives are responsible for knowing the Code of Conduct, and for abiding by the values and principles detailed below.

DDP VALUES AND PRINCIPLES

DDP takes a people-centered and Do No Harm approach in the protection of human rights and human rights defenders, focusing on our core values of equity, diversity, collaboration, integrity, confidentiality, and openness. We remain accountable by communicating the outcomes of our work to each other and to all those with whom we work. We are committed to creating real change and effective outcomes in our support of human rights defenders. We adhere to the following values when conducting our work:

Human Rights: Human rights is the fundamental discourse within which our work is carried out. Our understanding of human rights is critical, intersectional, feminist, and environmentalist; it goes beyond human rights as law. We believe that the emancipatory potential of human rights lies in its appropriation, contestation and continued elaboration by human rights defenders.

People-centered: For us, the well-being, autonomy, empowerment and dignity of the people we work for and with are of the utmost importance. In all our activities and engagements, we want to create safe and respectful spaces where people can engage the personal and the political, and feel safe and empowered in doing this.

Do No Harm: We understand that our programmes are not neutral in the contexts within which they are implemented, which are invariably characterised by injustice and conflict in various forms. We aim to prevent or limit unintended negative outcomes through context analyses and programme impact analyses, and promote unity, reconciliation and justice.

Equity: We are committed to a feminist and intersectional approach as the epistemological basis for our analyses and the development of our programmes. Our approach to digital security and the overall protection of human rights defenders is developed through a lens which seeks to make visible the various layers of structural and discursive discrimination based on gender identity and expression, sexual orientation, race identity, ethnicity, geography, language, culture, religion, caste, socioeconomic status, employment, age, dis/ability, and neuro(a)typicality, among other things.

Diversity: We believe in the importance of diversity and inclusivity, in our networks, teams, ideas and approaches. We work in a way that fosters non-discrimination, free expression, participation and equality.

Collaboration: We have a strong commitment towards fostering solidarity, connection, cooperation and a sense of community in our convening spaces. We understand that epistemic violence and injustice are often barriers to true collaboration. We value different knowledges, aim to decentre dominant discourses, and encourage the inclusion of marginal modes of knowledge production and consumption.

Integrity: We are committed to transparency and accountability in all projects, outcomes, and decision making processes. We will document and share useful information with others, and strive to establish fair and just processes in all relationships with donors, partners, grantees, consultants and other stakeholders.

Confidentiality: We commit to handling all incoming information responsibly, and protect it against inadvertent disclosure to unauthorised parties. Any remote coordination or online initiatives will happen through secure channels that run on free and open source software, and commercial or proprietary tools will be avoided as much as possible, especially if they have a history of violating users' privacy.

Openness: We value curiosity, innovation, and adventurousness, and welcome reflective learning across our individual and collective work.



DDP employees and representatives will be accountable to each other and to our stakeholders, by:

- Treating others—both within and beyond our workplace—equally, fairly, and with respect, dignity, courtesy, consideration and empathy.
- Respecting and valuing personal and professional diversity, and maintaining an environment that is free from any form of discrimination, harassment, bullying, vilification, victimisation and/or verbal or physical aggression and violence, and treatment that reinforces stereotypes based on gender or other attributes.
- Being inclusive, sharing appropriate information and communicating openly and honestly with each other.
- Protecting and promoting our own and others' wellbeing and safety, including not using alcohol and other drugs in a way that imperils the health or wellbeing of others, undermines or negatively impacts DDP's operations, or compromises productivity or morale in the workplace.
- Drawing attention to ways in which each other's behaviour is, or could be perceived to be, contrary to agreed appropriate conduct.
- Abiding by Hivos and DDP's Complaints Procedures (see 'Undesirable Behaviour Policy and Procedure' section) and this Code of Conduct at all times, knowing that if we commit a breach we may be required to undergo training, counselling, and/or disciplinary procedures, which may include warnings or dismissal in serious cases.
- Promptly reporting any breaches that we become aware of.

DDP employees and representatives will be transparent in our actions, by:

- Maintaining independence from governments, donors and other groups in determining our strategic priorities, policies and recommendations.
- Declaring any potential or apparent conflicts between our personal interests and our duty to act in the best interests of DDP, and following managers' directions as to the most appropriate course of action.

Additionally, DDP employees and representatives commit not to behave in undesirable ways, as outlined in the undesirable behaviour policy.



UNDESIRABLE BEHAVIOUR POLICY

DDP is committed to providing a safe environment for all, that is free from any form of discrimination, harassment, bullying, vilification, victimisation and/or verbal or physical aggression and violence. In particular, DDP does not tolerate discrimination and harassment on the basis of gender identity and expression, sexual orientation, race identity, ethnicity, geography, language, culture, religion, caste, socioeconomic status, employment, age, dis/ability, and neuro(a)typicality. Whether in person or online, DDP holds these expectations of its employees and representatives, and will address undesirable behaviour brought to its attention.

We place the voices, rights, and support of victims and survivors at the heart of our approach, and prioritise marginalised people's safety over privileged people's comfort.

Our team will not act on complaints regarding:

- Reverse '-ism's', including 'reverse racism', 'reverse sexism', and 'cisphobia'.
- Reasonable communication of boundaries, such as, "Leave me alone", "Go away", or "I am not discussing this with you."
- Communicating in an 'uncongenial' tone.
- Criticism of racist, sexist, cissexist, or otherwise oppressive behavior or assumptions.

We have included further definitions and examples of undesirable behavior in the Annex.



EXTERNAL COMPLAINTS MECHANISMS

DDP Donors, partners, grantees, consultants and other stakeholders who experience undesirable behaviour from DDP employees or representatives are invited to report this behaviour as per the Hivos External Complaints Procedure or the Hivos Whistleblowing Procedure.

The Hivos Complaints Procedure is designed to deal with undesirable behavior—including (sexual) harassment, bullying and retaliatory actions—by Hivos and DDP employees, implementing organisations, and related service providers and their employees.

If you do not want Hivos to know about your complaint, you can use the Whistleblowing Procedure, which is designed for anonymous reporting.

External Complaints Procedure

To file a complaint, please email your complaint to your DDP/Hivos contact, copying in complaints@hivos.org. If you do not have or cannot use your contact at DDP/Hivos, or if you wish to make a general complaint, you can email complaints@hivos.org directly.

In your complaint, please include the following information:

- Description of complaint
- Description of how and when the complaint arose
- Your name, telephone number and/or email address
- Your relationship to DDP (e.g., donor, partner, grantee-partner, supplier or other stakeholder)

If the complaint concerns inappropriate behavior, such as sexual harassment, it will be forwarded to an external confidential counselor, who will contact you directly. The responsibilities of the confidential counselor are:

- Checking if the complainant is in need of mental or physical support, and if so, arranging for this;
- Giving advice on how to start a complaints procedure (formally or informally); and
- Providing guidance on the complaints procedure.

The Hivos team in charge of reviewing complaints will assess what the proper response should be. In making this assessment, the team will consider whether the undesirable behaviour is severe or pervasive enough to create a work environment that a person would consider intimidating, hostile or abusive. When assessing whether undesirable behaviour is severe or pervasive, consideration is given to the following factors:

- Frequency;
- Severity;
- Whether the behaviour was physically threatening or humiliating;
- The effect on the employee's psychological well-being; and
- Whether the individual that is being reported on has more power than the reporting individual.

Hivos only accepts complaints submitted within six months of the event's occurrence. Within two weeks, you will receive written confirmation of receipt, and information about next steps. If you are not satisfied with the response, you may resubmit the complaint to the head of the department concerned, copying in complaints@hivos.org. If you are still not satisfied, you may escalate the matter to higher Hivos management levels. If the issue cannot be resolved by Hivos, you can turn to the [Partos Complaints Committee](#).

All personal details of the complainant are handled and recorded with care and confidentiality, according to Dutch privacy laws.

Whistleblowing Procedure

Hivos set up the [Hivos Whistleblowing Procedure](#) to deal with (anonymous) reports of fraud, corruption, and other integrity issues regarding Hivos, Hivos employees, our implementing organisations, consultants, and related service providers and their employees. The Whistleblowing Procedure is meant to address cases of misconduct that you have witnessed or have certain knowledge of, but which may not personally affect you. You may also use the Hivos Whistleblowing Procedure if you are personally affected but wish to stay anonymous. In this case, an external confidential counselor will contact you. Hivos makes use of an independent external service, SeeHearSpeakUp, which lets you report your concerns anonymously.

How to report? Reporting can be done in three ways:

- Calling SeeHearSpeakUp;
- Using [the online reporting tool](#); or
- Emailing report@seehearspeakup.co.uk.



ANNEX | DEFINITIONS AND EXAMPLES



Definition of Terms

Aggression and violence: Events in which an individual is harassed, threatened, or physically or mentally attacked.

Bullying: All forms of intimidating behaviour of one or more individuals directed against another individual or group who cannot defend themselves against this behaviour. The following are non-exhaustive examples of behaviour which could be considered bullying:

- Aggressive and intimidating conduct;
- Abusive, insulting or offensive language or comments;
- Belittling or humiliating comments;
- Victimisation;
- Spreading malicious rumours;
- Practical jokes, initiation or hazing;
- Exclusion from work-related events;
- Withholding information that is vital for effective work performance;
- Unreasonable work expectations, such as setting unreasonable deadlines, constantly changing deadlines, or setting tasks that are unreasonably beneath or beyond a person's skill level; and
- Denying access to information, supervision, consultation, or resources to the detriment of the employee or representative.



Bullying does not include reasonable management—which includes setting reasonable performance goals, transferring an employee or representative for operational reasons, implementing organisational changes or restructuring, and taking disciplinary action including suspension or termination of employment/engagement—or differences of opinion and disagreements in the workplace generally.

Discrimination: Unfair or unequal treatment which makes distinctions between individuals or groups so as to disadvantage some and advantage others, on the basis of one or more individual or group attributes, or imputed characteristics or stereotypes. Discrimination can be direct, as when individuals or groups are unfavourably treated, or indirect, as when seemingly neutral policies or practices in actuality unfairly disadvantage certain groups. DDP does not tolerate discrimination on any grounds, including gender identity and expression, sexual orientation, race identity, ethnicity, geography, language, culture, religion, caste, socioeconomic status, employment, age, dis/ability, and neuro(a)typicality.

Harassment: Conduct which has the purpose or effect of violating another person's dignity and creating an intimidating, hostile, degrading, humiliating, or offensive environment for another. It includes uninvited, unwelcome behaviour, which a reasonable person could anticipate would create

intimidation, humiliation, or offence for others in those particular circumstances. Harassment may also constitute sexual harassment. Examples of harassment include:

- Uninvited and unwelcome physical contact, verbal comments, electronic contact, jokes, and propositions;
- The display of offensive material, including lewd gestures;
- Ostracism by an individual or group;
- Mockery through ridicule, name-calling, or insulting or dismissive gestures;
- Denigrating another person by means of rumour based on hearsay;
- Not providing information critical to a person's ability to do their job; and
- Other behaviour that creates an unpleasant work environment.

Victimisation: Subjecting or threatening to subject another to any detriment. It includes the unfavourable treatment of another because they have made a complaint about aggression, bullying, discrimination or harassment.

Vilification: Speech or writing that is disparaging, defaming, or abusive to another person or group.

Other Examples of Undesirable Behaviour

- Offensive comments which reinforce social structures of domination and/or are related to gender identity and expression, sexual orientation, race identity, ethnicity, geography, language, culture, religion, caste, socioeconomic status, employment, age, dis/ability, and neuro(a)typicality.
- Offensive comments and flamewars about other people's choices of recommended practices, skills, procedures and tools.
- Unwelcome comments regarding a person's lifestyle choices and practices, including those related to food, health, parenting, drugs, and employment.
- Deliberate misgendering or use of 'dead' or rejected names.
- Deliberate "outing" of any aspect of a person's identity without their consent.
- Deliberate intimidation.
- Threats of violence.
- Incitement of violence towards any individual, including encouraging a person to commit suicide or to engage in self-harm.
- Drugging food or drink.
- Pattern of inappropriate social contact, such as requesting/assuming inappropriate levels of intimacy with others.
- Unwelcome physical contact and simulated physical contact, such as through textual description, like "hug" or "backrub".
- Unwelcome sexual attention.
- Gratuitous or off-topic sexual images or behavior in spaces where they're not appropriate.



- Engaging in image-based sexual abuse, which includes the non-consensual production and distribution of intimate images, the sexualised alteration of public images, and threats to carry out the above.
- Harassing photography or recording, including logging online activity for harassment purposes.
- Sustained disruption of discussion, talks or other events.
- Continued communication after requests to cease.
- Stalking.
- Violating the privacy policy of an event.
- Publishing another person's private information, such as physical or electronic addresses, without explicit permission.
- Publication of private communication without permission.
- Enlisting the help of others, whether in person or online, in order to harass, attack, or otherwise target someone else.
- Gaslighting, a form of psychological abuse where a person or group makes someone question their sanity, perception of reality, or memories.
- Advocating for or encouraging any of the above behavior.



CREDITS

This Code of Conduct has been adapted from different Codes of Conduct and complaint procedures, such as the Hivos internal and external complaints procedure, the [Mama Cash Code of Conduct](#), the [Front Line Defenders' Safeguarding Policy](#) and the [RaReNet Code of Practice](#). The anti-harassment policy is based on the example policy from the [Geek Feminism Wiki](#) by the Geek Feminism community, and the [Code Of Conduct Generator](#). We offer our thanks to all who paved the way.