



Gender Equality and Social Inclusion (GESI) Policy

Organisation: Right to Life Human Rights Centre (R2L)

Effective Date: 1 September 2025

Related Policies: *Organisation's Gender Policy drafted in 2016, Protection from Sexual Exploitation and Abuse (PSEA) Policy, HR & Administrative Manual.*

1. Policy Statement

Right to Life Human Rights Centre (R2L) recognises that our mission to protect human rights, combat torture, and support victims of police violence cannot be achieved without addressing the systemic inequalities that marginalised groups face.

While our 2016 Gender Policy established a commitment to equality between men and women, R2L now adopts a **Gender Equality and Social Inclusion (GESI)** approach. This policy acknowledges that individuals are discriminated against not only based on gender but also due to **ethnicity, caste, religion, disability, age, sexual orientation, and economic status**.

R2L commits to:

1. Ensuring that our internal organisational culture promotes diversity, equity, and safety for all staff.
2. Designing programs that actively include and empower the most marginalised victims of human rights violations.
3. Maintaining a "Zero Tolerance" environment for discrimination, harassment, and abuse, in strict alignment with our standalone **PSEA Policy**.

2. Scope of Application

This policy applies to all individuals acting on behalf of R2L, consistent with the scope of our PSEA Policy:

- **Internal Stakeholders:** Board of Directors, Senior Management, permanent and contract staff, and volunteers.
- **External Stakeholders:** Consultants, partners, vendors, and contractors representing R2L.
- **Program Participants:** The policy guides our interaction with all beneficiaries, particularly victims of torture, families of the disappeared, and human rights defenders.

3. Key Definitions

To ensure a shared understanding among all staff, R2L adopts the following definitions:

3.1. Gender: Gender refers to the socially constructed roles, behaviours, activities, and attributes that a given society considers appropriate for men, women, and non-binary individuals. It is different from "sex," which is biological. R2L acknowledges that gender norms can result in specific vulnerabilities for men (e.g., targeted police violence) and women (e.g., economic dependency after a spouse's detention).

3.2. Social Inclusion: The process of improving the terms on which individuals and groups take part in society, improving the ability, opportunity, and dignity of those disadvantaged based on their identity. For R2L, this explicitly includes ethnic and religious minorities (Tamil/Muslim communities), the urban poor, and persons with disabilities.

3.3. Intersectionality: An approach that recognises how different aspects of a person's identity overlap to create unique experiences of discrimination. *Example: A Tamil woman with a disability faces different barriers to justice than a Sinhalese man.* R2L programs must analyse and address these overlapping layers of disadvantage.

3.4. Sexual Orientation, Gender Identity, and Expression (SOGIE): R2L respects the rights of all individuals regardless of who they love or how they identify. We recognise that LGBTQI+ individuals are often disproportionately targeted for harassment and torture, and we advocate for their equal protection under the law.

3.5. Protection from Sexual Exploitation and Abuse (PSEA) refers to measures taken to protect vulnerable people from sexual exploitation and abuse by our own staff or associated personnel.

- Note: All definitions and protocols regarding SEA are governed exclusively by the R2L PSEA Policy.

4. Guiding Principles

4.1. Do No Harm & Safety First In all our interventions especially with survivors of torture we prioritise the physical and psychological safety of the individual. We ensure our actions do not increase the risk of harm to victims or staff.

4.2. Substantive Equality (Equity) We treat everyone with equal respect, but we treat them *differently* according to their needs to achieve equal outcomes. This means allocating extra resources (e.g., sign language interpretation, safe transport) to those who face higher barriers to participation.

4.3. Zero Tolerance for Discrimination R2L maintains zero tolerance for any form of discrimination or harassment within the workplace or in field operations. All staff are obligated to report such behaviour.

Part 2: Institutional GESI Commitments (Internal)

R2L commits to creating an inclusive workplace where all staff, regardless of gender, ethnicity, or ability, have equal opportunities to thrive.

2.1. Inclusive Recruitment and Representation

- **Merit with Affirmative Action:** R2L recruits based on merit, skills, and alignment with organisational values. However, where two candidates are equally qualified, priority will be given to candidates from underrepresented groups (women, ethnic minorities, persons with disabilities).
- **Leadership Targets:** We acknowledge that women and minorities are often underrepresented in decision-making roles. R2L commits to specific targets to increase its representation on the Board of Directors and Senior Management.
- **Panel Diversity:** All interview panels for staff recruitment must include at least one woman or a representative from a minority group to minimise unconscious bias.

2.2. Work-Life Balance and Care Responsibilities

- **Parental Leave:** Recognising that caregiving is a shared responsibility, R2L provides:
 - **Maternity Leave:** 84 working days for female employees per live birth.
 - **Paternity/Partner Leave:** 5 working days for male employees or secondary caregivers to support their partners.
 - *Note: R2L supports the "Shared Care" model and encourages male staff to utilise their full leave entitlement.*
- **Nursing Breaks:** Female employees are entitled to a nursing break until the child is six months old, as per statutory requirements.
- **Flexible Work:** To support staff with caregiving duties (children, elderly parents, or sick family members), R2L offers flexible working hours or remote work options upon request, provided it does not disrupt core operations.

2.3. Workplace Safety and Dignity

- **Safe Transport:** R2L prioritises staff safety. If female staff are required to work late or travel at night for organisational duties, R2L will provide safe transport facilities or reimburse secure travel costs.
- **Internal Harassment:** R2L maintains **Zero Tolerance** for sexual harassment or bullying within the workplace. Internal grievances regarding staff-on-staff harassment are handled confidentially under the HR Manual, while grievances regarding staff-on-beneficiary conduct are handled under the **PSEA Policy**.
- **Alcohol-Free Environment:** To ensure safety and professional conduct, the consumption of alcohol is strictly prohibited within office premises or during field assignments.

2.4. Reasonable Accommodation for Disabilities

- R2L commits to making "Reasonable Accommodations" for staff with physical or psychosocial disabilities. This may include modifying workspaces, providing assistive software, or adjusting work schedules to facilitate medical appointments.

Part 3: Programmatic GESI Commitments (External)

R2L ensures that our external programs advocacy, legal aid, and victim support actively address the specific needs of marginalised groups.

3.1. GESI Analysis in Project Design

- **Mandatory Analysis:** No project shall be designed without a preliminary GESI Analysis. We must ask: *How does this human rights violation affect men, women, and minorities differently?*
- **Consultation:** Needs assessments must include separate consultations with women and men to ensure female voices are not silenced by community power dynamics.

3.2. Inclusive Implementation Strategies

- **Working with Men & Masculinities:** Recognising that the majority of torture victims are male, R2L integrates "Positive Masculinity" into psychosocial support¹. We help male survivors process trauma without resorting to violence or substance abuse, breaking the cycle of trauma that often impacts their wives and families.
- **Support for Women Human Rights Defenders (WHRDs):** We recognise that women activists face unique threats (e.g., sexualized slander, online harassment). R2L advocacy strategies will include specific protection protocols for WHRDs.
- **Accessibility:** All R2L training venues and legal aid clinics will be selected based on physical accessibility for persons with disabilities and the elderly.
- **Language Justice:** R2L ensures that key materials and helplines are available in both Sinhala and Tamil to ensure minority communities have equal access to justice.

3.3. Monitoring, Evaluation, and Learning (MEL)

- **Disaggregated Data:** All program reporting must present data disaggregated by **Sex, Age, Ethnicity, and Disability (SADDD)**.
- **GESI Indicators:** Every project logframe must include at least one GESI-specific indicator (e.g., *"Percentage of female victims who report feeling safe accessing the legal clinic"*).
- **Adaptive Management:** If monitoring data reveals that a specific group (e.g., women or Muslims) is not accessing our services, the program strategy will be adapted immediately to address the barrier.

¹ **Positive Masculinity in Psychosocial Support:** An approach that encourages men to adopt healthy, non-violent behaviours by challenging rigid gender norms that equate emotional vulnerability with weakness. For male survivors of torture, this intervention validates their trauma and promotes help-seeking as a form of strength rather than a failure of manhood. By fostering emotional resilience and open communication, R2L aims to prevent negative coping mechanisms, such as substance abuse or displacement of aggression onto family members, thereby breaking the cycle of trauma and safeguarding the well-being of women and children in the survivor's household.

3.4. Gender-Responsive Budgeting

- **Dedicated Allocation:** To ensure these commitments are real, R2L will allocate a specific percentage of program budgets (e.g., 3-5%) for GESI-related costs.
- **Eligible Costs:** This budget can be used for childcare services during training, sign language interpreters, travel companions for female participants, or psychosocial support for victims of Gender-Based Violence (GBV).

Part 4: Implementation, Accountability & Safeguarding Linkage

To ensure this policy moves beyond paper to practice, R2L establishes the following mechanisms for accountability, capacity building, and grievance handling.

4.1. Roles and Responsibilities

- **Board of Directors:** Responsible for approving the GESI Policy and reviewing the organisation's progress towards gender parity and inclusion targets annually.
- **Executive Director:** Accountable for the overall implementation of the policy, ensuring that adequate financial and human resources are allocated for GESI initiatives.
- **GESI Focal Point:** A designated staff member (who may also serve as the PSEA Coordinator) tasked with:
 - Advising project teams on GESI mainstreaming during proposal writing.
 - Organising staff training.
 - Monitoring the "Gender Climate" within the office.
- **All Staff:** Responsible for adhering to the Code of Conduct, participating in training, and reporting any incidents of discrimination.

4.2. Capacity Building and Training

- **Induction:** All new staff, volunteers, and consultants must read and sign the GESI Policy and the PSEA Policy upon joining.
- **Annual Training:** R2L will conduct mandatory annual refresher training. This will cover:
 - *GESI Concepts:* Understanding intersectionality, power dynamics, and positive masculinity.
 - *PSEA Compliance:* Reviewing the "Zero Tolerance" protocols and reporting channels.
- **Partner Support:** When working with smaller Community-Based Organisations (CBOs), R2L will support them in developing their own basic gender and safeguarding policies.

4.3. Linkage to PSEA and Safeguarding

- **Distinction:** This GESI Policy governs issues of *inclusion, equity, and non-discrimination*. The **Protection from Sexual Exploitation and Abuse (PSEA) Policy** governs issues of *sexual misconduct and abuse*.
- **Reporting Mechanisms:**
 - **Incidents of Discrimination:** Complaints regarding gender discrimination (e.g., unfair hiring, wage gaps, exclusion from meetings) should be reported to the **HR Manager** or **GESI Focal Point**.
 - **Incidents of Sexual Exploitation/Abuse:** Must be reported immediately via the specific channels outlined in the **PSEA Policy** (Executive Director or PSEA Coordinator).
- **Disciplinary Action:** Violation of GESI principles (e.g., using derogatory language) will result in administrative disciplinary action. Violation of PSEA standards (e.g., sexual activity with a beneficiary) will result in severe sanctions, up to and including summary dismissal and legal referral.

4.4. Networking and Advocacy

- R2L will actively participate in national and regional networks advocating for Gender Justice and Women's Rights.
- We commit to withdrawing from any network or partnership where the partner organisation demonstrates a persistent disregard for gender equality or safeguarding principles.

4.5. Policy Review

- This policy is a living document. It will be reviewed every **three years** or sooner if there are significant changes in the national legal framework or donor requirements.