



SolidarMed Guidelines

# Gender equality and Social Inclusion

(GESI)

## 1. Purpose and scope

These guidelines were developed and reviewed in an institutional, inclusive and consultative process. They build on SolidarMed's experience of health care provision in rural Africa and reflect the vision and values of our organisation. As guidance for action, they help us to better focus our work and target it towards disadvantaged groups, particularly women and girls. This policy document with open-ended validity defines the framework for our work.

## 2. SolidarMed key principles

At all times, we behave in a responsible and loyal manner to contribute to the successful implementation of SolidarMed programmes and projects and support the SolidarMed strategies and measures. We regularly reflect on our actions and behaviour and promote compliance with the ethical standards, values and the development approach of SolidarMed.

## 3. Definitions

**Gender equality** refers to the equal rights, responsibilities and opportunities of women, men, girls and boys. Gender equality implies that the interests, needs and priorities of all genders are taken into consideration, recognizing the diversity of different groups. Gender equality is not a women's issue but should concern and fully engage all genders while recognizing that neither all men nor all women are a homogenous group (source: UN Women).

**Under social inclusion or social justice** ("equity") SolidarMed understands an active process to balance the unequal opportunities of social groups. This is a process aimed at making opportunities to freely realize one's own potential in a fair way. The synonym "equal rights" is also used in this context.

SolidarMed strives to **reduce the disadvantages of specific groups** and promote equal access to medical services.

SolidarMed understands "**gender**" as a socially constructed definition of roles, behaviour and power relations between women and men. Gender roles are context/ time-specific and changeable. Our position is based on the recognition that women and men have equal rights to e.g. access health care services, information and education.

SolidarMed affirms the dignity rights, and wellbeing of all individuals, embracing and respecting the full spectrum of gender identities and sexual orientations.

## 4. Context

The **discrimination of certain groups** in the countries in which we are working is a fact. Women, elderly or disabled people, addicts, sex workers, nomads, migrant workers, people with stigmatising diseases or those living in absolute poverty: they all face situations of discrimination and disadvantage.

Illness often goes hand in hand with the experience of social discrimination, exclusion and powerlessness. The inequality in the countries in which we are operating is not only an individual tragedy, but also a social and economic obstacle to development.

The **specific discrimination of women and girls** is an important component of social injustice in many societies. Promoting social inclusion means supporting gender equality. Numerous studies have proven that the health of women and children is linked to female emancipation. Although there has been progress in recent decades, discrimination against women and girls is still widespread. However, men also may face inequalities that require consideration, for example with regard to reproductive health or addictions.

SolidarMed has opted for a **combined approach** to promote gender equality and social inclusion. Understanding of gender relations requires a broad understanding of the social and cultural context and power relations in the countries in which we work. We subscribe to the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development

and the Sustainable Development Goals, specifically 3, 4, and 10 (health, gender, social justice) and recognise that these are fundamentally related and conditional on each other.

We therefore recognise the following eight principles for our work, as described in detail below:

1. We target our interventions
2. We include marginalised groups
3. We recognise different needs
4. We pay attention to local culture
5. We develop and live common values in our partnerships
6. We shape policy dialogue
7. We apply these principles internally
8. We monitor our activities, learn from our experiences and improve

## 5. The principles of our work

### We target our interventions

We provide targeted and proactive support to disadvantaged and marginalized groups based on various strategic priorities. Individual projects can focus on one or more of these priorities, but the country programmes as a whole will ideally aim to address all of them. Wherever possible and where this makes sense, we complement our activities through cooperation with other organisations.

The following therefore applies to our programmes:

- We promote the prevention of disease, access to quality diagnosis and care of sick people regardless of their gender or social status. Women and girls are the main target groups in Reproductive Maternal Child and Adolescent Health. However, the participation of all genders plays a particularly important role in this area and promises a greater and longer lasting impact. This also decisively promotes the economic development of disadvantaged groups.
- We promote an understanding of stigmatizing diseases and thereby contribute to reducing the social exclusion of those affected.
- We support the development of human capital, especially for girls and young women, through better vocational education, training, professional development and job opportunities.
- We promote the participation of people and groups in shaping their health care and strengthening their communities, for example through civil society approaches.

### We include marginalised groups

We are committed to the inclusion of women, the poor and the disadvantaged and are aware that this requires a proactive approach.

The following therefore applies to our programmes:

- We carefully analyse the local context, identify disadvantaged marginalised groups and systematically ensure that they are included in our programmes and that our activities address their specific needs. We do this without excluding more affluent or less disadvantaged groups.
- Our programmes help to reduce structural disadvantages of certain groups following the principle of “leave no one behind”.

### We pay attention to local culture

Norms and stereotypes regarding identity and gender are widespread, deeply rooted and embedded in local culture. Promoting gender equality whilst respecting local culture is sometimes difficult to reconcile and can lead to tensions but it also offers the opportunity to engage in discussion and promote reflection.

The following therefore applies to our programmes:

- In our country programmes, we consider and promote gender equality at different levels and in different local and cultural contexts: individual, family, household, village, community, hospital, etc. This often means specific interventions in favour of women and girls.
- Even if existing cultural practices or beliefs conflict with our values, we work in a culturally sensitive and empathetic manner. We also support local organizations that share our values.
- We pursue culturally appropriate approaches and work with traditional leaders, religious and social (e.g. teachers) authorities to gain access to and trust of disadvantaged groups.
- We respect the dignity of women and men and firmly distance ourselves from gender-based violence.
- We promote exchange on the topic of social discrimination according to gender or other criteria.

### **We recognise different needs**

To achieve gender equality, it is important to understand the different needs of women, men, disadvantaged groups e.g. nomads, migrant workers, temporary workers, sex trade workers, people with substance use disorders, prisoners or people in absolute poverty. Social inclusion is only possible if the differing needs and opinions of different groups are heard and addressed.

The following therefore applies to our programmes:

- We support individuals of all gender identities because of the equal importance of diverse gender roles in family life, income or participation in civil society.
- We tailor our programmes to the differing needs of disadvantaged groups, because social injustice includes not only discrimination based on gender but also discrimination based on other characteristics.
- We work with people, organizations and partners who are open to questioning stereotypes. Individuals and groups who are inspiring and committed to tackling restrictive role patterns receive our support.

### **We develop and live common values in our partnerships**

As a rule, we implement our projects with and through partners. Values therefore play an important role in project implementation and in promoting gender equality. While the way we work with partners varies according to context and task, our experience also shows how important it is to build relationships beyond contractual agreements, guided by trust and based on shared values. Further, when selecting funding partners, we ensure that our values are fundamentally compatible.

The following therefore applies to our programmes:

- When selecting our partners, we select those with common values regarding social inclusion and equality between women and men.
- We support the learning activities of our partners on questions of gender equality or social inclusion.
- We also evaluate our collaboration with partners in the light of these guidelines. If there are too many divergences, we may decide to end a cooperation.
- We respect the guidelines of partners on "gender" and "social justice", but do not fall short of our own standards.

### **We shape policy dialogue**

SolidarMed is a Non-Governmental-Organization founded and rooted in Switzerland with significant local experience in the South. When conducting dialogue on health issues in the host countries, we are therefore aware of the relevance, but also the sensitivity, of issues relating to gender equality and social justice.

The following guiding principles therefore apply to our programmes:

- We conduct policy dialogue with our host countries in a technically competent manner. Our approach to questions of social inclusion is reserved, respectful and context sensitive. We take advantage of opportunities for dialogue.
- We also conduct policy dialogue through partners or in consortia.
- In Switzerland, we advocate for our values in cooperation with others, for example in platforms, professional partnerships and networks such as Medicus Mundi.

### **We apply these principles internally**

In addition to applying these principles in our collaboration with partners, SolidarMed strives to consistently implement these principles internally.

The following therefore applies to our programmes:

- We monitor the diversity of our employees and are committed to making the team as balanced as possible. Our aim is for women to make up at least 40% of senior and middle management and the Executive Board.
- Gender equality and social justice are fundamental principles in the structuring of our personnel and wage guidelines.
- We expect all employees to comply with and implement the GESI guidelines. Compliance and implementation are assessed as part of the annual performance reviews.
- We encourage employees to participate in gender and social inclusion training where appropriate.

### **We monitor our activities and learn from our experiences**

SolidarMed strives to monitor, document, process and report on our progress on matters of gender equality and social inclusion, and to learn from our experiences.

The following therefore applies to our programmes:

- To measure the results and impact of our programmes to promote equality and social inclusion, we collect specific and appropriate baseline and progress indicators in our programmes and projects.
- To better monitor gender equality outcomes, all our programme indicators are broken down by gender wherever possible.
- We allocate our resources in accordance with these principles. At the same time, we periodically evaluate our programmes and systematically document and report on our experiences.

## **6. Scope of application**

This Policy applies to all employees worldwide<sup>1</sup> in any contractual relationship with SolidarMed, including interns, volunteers, board members as well as implementing partners and service providers, at all times during their assignment with SolidarMed. This document is an integral part of any employment contract with SolidarMed.

All organizations with whom SolidarMed collaborates and has financial transactions are made aware of our relevant policies and regulations during partnership negotiations. The respective document is the Code of Conduct for Contracted Parties, which is a summary of the key elements of all SolidarMed Integrity Policies.

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<sup>1</sup> In Switzerland, the program countries or any other country

## 7. Reporting of Misconduct

Any violations of this Policy must be reported through the established reporting channels. Whistleblowers will be protected and must not suffer any retaliation for reporting concerns in good faith.

## 8. Policy management

- Policy approval date: September 2025
- Policy approved by: SolidarMed board
- Policy version: 2.0
- Policy language: English
- Policy review: Every 4 years
- Policy owner (in charge of conducting review, dissemination, training and learning): SolidarMed Integrity focal point