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SAFE TO LEARN Governance Structure

2026 Update

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OVERVIEW

This document summarizes Safe to Learn's governance structure, including the membership, functions, roles, responsibilities, accountabilities, and workflows of the decision-making bodies – the Advisory Board and Partners Committee.

The rules of procedure were adopted by the Senior Officials of the Safe to Learn partners on 25 March 2022. It was subsequently updated in November 2023 (previous version) to reflect structural changes and the evolving role of the Advisory Board.

In March 2026, in line with the end of the two-year term of the sitting Advisory Board of the Safe to Learn, and in alignment with the process of developing a new Safe to Learn Strategy covering 2026-2028, the Safe to Learn Secretariat embarked on a brief review of the document to ensure this document remains accurate, relevant and fit for purpose to support the new cohort of Advisory Board members and the delivery of the new STL Strategy. This 2026 version of the document therefore reflects changes including: a) addition of a section to clarify and recognize the role of the Safe to Learn Secretariat in support of the governance bodies; b) adjustments to the composition of the Advisory Board and a unified and simplified member selection process; and, c) elaborate with details where gaps have been identified.

This document is intended to be a living instrument and may be updated as needed to reflect the evolving structure and priorities of the Safe to Learn coalition. All previous versions of this document are archived by the Safe to Learn Secretariat. Any substantive adjustments to the Governance Framework will be reviewed by the Partners Committee, and approved by the Advisory Board, before going into effect.



1. SAFE TO LEARN PARTNERSHIP

1.1 Safe to Learn Global Initiative

The Safe to Learn global initiative aims to embed violence prevention within education systems globally, so that all girls and boys everywhere are safe to learn. It was created in 2019 to accelerate progress to prevent violence in and through schools through the collective and individual actions of its members.

1.2 Safe to Learn Coalition

A group of nineteen partners from the Education, Violence Prevention, Health, and Child Protection fields form the Safe to Learn coalition and jointly develop the Safe to Learn global initiative. Safe to Learn partners include: Civil Society Forum to End Violence Against Children; Coalition for Good Schools; Education Cannot Wait (ECW); Education International; Global Affairs Canada; Global Business Coalition for Education; Global Coalition to Protect Education from Attack; Global Partnership for Education; Global Partnership to End Violence Against Children; Office of the UN Special Representative to the Secretary-General on Violence Against Children; Safe Online; Together for Girls; UK Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office (FCDO); UNESCO; UNGEI; UNICEF; What Works to Prevent Violence Against Women and Girls; World Bank; World Health Organization.

1.3 Joining the Coalition

New partners can join the global initiative by submitting a request and a short proposal for membership to the Safe to Learn Secretariat. The proposal should demonstrate the value add of joining the coalition, which will be presented to the STL partnership on a non-objection basis following initial review and approval by the Secretariat. Potential members must have a mandate and vision which reflects and contributes towards Safe to Learn's mission and Call to Action. In addition, potential members must express commitment towards prioritizing preventing violence in and through schools in their programming and activities. Potential members need to also agree to follow these rules of procedure and nominate at least one representative to contribute to the Safe to Learn Partners Committee. The new partner's membership of Safe to Learn is immediately effective once the Safe to Learn Partners Committee has approved it by a majority vote. The logo of the new partner is added to all Safe to Learn communications following the guidance on use of logos for the Safe to Learn initiative.¹

1.4 Departure from Safe to Learn

If a partner chooses to leave the initiative, the Head of the partner organization needs to formally notify the Safe to Learn Advisory Board of this decision. Once acknowledged by the Advisory Board, the organization's departure is immediate, and all logos are removed from all Safe to Learn communications developed and/or published after departure. Any ongoing engagements or commitments that the departing partner organization has with the coalition partners at the time of withdrawal will be concluded or transitioned in coordination with the Secretariat, as appropriate.

1.5 Rights and Responsibilities

All Safe to Learn partners agree to co-shape the initiative and therefore have an equal voice and vote within the initiative. Partners can call for special meetings of the Partners' Committee (please see below) to discuss a specific issue relevant to the initiative.

All Safe to Learn partners commit to the Safe to Learn mission to prevent violence in, around and through

¹ [Safe to Learn Brand Guidelines 2026](#)

schools and ensure all children have access to safe learning environments wherever and however they learn. Responsibilities include:

- a) To encourage their own partners/counterparts, and/or give priority to embedding violence prevention and response in their education programming whenever relevant;
- b) To actively contribute to Safe to Learn's development, in particular through the implementation of the Safe to Learn strategy and programming framework. Partners commit to participating quarterly in Partner Committee meetings and/or (if relevant) participating in and contributing to activities through the task forces.
- c) To appoint one or two representatives to contribute to the Partners Committee's work. In the case of two representatives, where possible, experience of violence prevention and/or education is required. In case a partner decides to appoint only one representative, a combination of skills and experience in education and violence prevention is highly encouraged.
- d) To provide relevant and current information and data to implement, monitor and evaluate the collective work of the initiative, including its strategy.

1.6 Sister Organizations

Sister organizations have a special relationship with the Safe to Learn global initiative as they share similar values and objectives. Safe to Learn and sister organizations work together to agree on priorities for the field and join forces on specific activities at country, regional, or global levels. Current sister organizations include (but are not limited to): Together for Girls, the End Violence Lab at Edinburgh University, the INSPIRE Working Group, CPC Learning Network at Columbia University, Innocenti Office of Research, the Malala Fund, as well as organizations involved in preventing and responding to violence in and through school working with Safe to Learn partners at country level.

1.7 UNICEF

In September 2022, the Safe to Learn Advisory Board decided to transition Safe to Learn to an education sector partner to ensure the future and sustainability of the initiative and to put violence prevention and response more firmly on the education agenda globally and in countries. Following a comprehensive criterium based voting process, Safe to Learn transitioned from being managed by the Global Partnership to End Violence Against Children to UNICEF, as of April 2023. UNICEF is a founding member of Safe to Learn and has played a critical role in its development. The Safe to Learn Secretariat now sits within the UNICEF Global Education Practice, working closely with both the child protection and health global practices, as well as gender and social and behavior change teams, to ensure cross-sectoral collaboration globally. Management of the Safe to Learn Secretariat and coordination of the implementation of Safe to Learn interventions by coalition partners, is undertaken by UNICEF. Appointments follow standard UNICEF recruitment and hiring procedures.

The Global Director of Education at UNICEF is a Safe to Learn Advisory Board member and is accountable for delivering on Safe to Learn. The Global Director of Child Protection and the Global Lead for Social and Behaviour Change will be invited to participate as 'observers' of the Advisory Board to ensure continuity and synergies across UNICEF.

2. SAFE TO LEARN GOVERNANCE STRUCTURE

2.1 Safe to Learn Secretariat, Partners Committee, and the Advisory Board

Safe to Learn sits within UNICEF Global Education Practice. The Safe to Learn governance structure includes two bodies: the Safe to Learn Advisory Board, and the Safe to Learn Partners Committee. Both parties are permanent yet meet at different frequencies.

The STL Secretariat supports the two governing bodies: The Partner Committee and the Advisory Board.

2.2 Objectives of Safe to Learn Governance Structure

The overall governance structure is designed to:

- a) enable the Safe to Learn global initiative to function in an agile manner through a streamlined structure,
- b) respect the identity and voice of each partner while ensuring effective decision making and implementation processes,
- c) ensure Safe to Learn is always at the forefront of the field to challenge practices and reach its objectives to ensure all girls and boys, in all their diversity, everywhere are safe to learn,
- d) expand the reach and visibility of Safe to Learn as an initiative focusing on both the global and the country levels, and
- e) ensure Safe to Learn and its programmes are financed to ensure the sustainability and delivery of the initiative.

3. SAFE TO LEARN SECRETARIAT

3.1 Composition

The Secretariat is led by the Safe to Learn Programme Manager serving as the Head of Secretariat. The Safe to Learn initiative includes a small team of UNICEF technical experts supporting Safe to Learn's operations and programmes.

3.2 Responsibilities of the Safe to Learn Secretariat

The Safe to Learn Secretariat is responsible for the coordination of day-to-day operations of the Safe to Learn initiative, including support to the coalition and its governing bodies.

The Secretariat will consult the Partners Committee, as appropriate, on major strategic initiatives and matters with significant implications for coalition priorities.

The Secretariat will seek Advisory Board guidance on matters with significant strategic, reputational, or partnership implications, such as design of the Safe to Learn Strategy. The Secretariat is responsible for:

- **Coordination and strategic alignment:** Ensures effective coordination and strategic alignment between coalition partners to deliver on Safe to Learn's Strategy and facilitates collaboration across

workstreams.

- **Governance Support:** Supports the Partner Committee and the Advisory Board in their deliberations and decision-making processes through convening partners, setting agendas, organizing meetings, documenting decisions, and ensuring follow-up on agreed actions.
- **Management of operations:** Leads planning, budgeting, resource allocation, partnerships, and implementation, in collaboration with partners and in accordance with the governance framework.
- **Technical Assistance:** provides technical assistance to governments in line with the Safe to Learn Call to Action and technical package, in collaboration with partners.
- **Monitoring and Reporting:** Monitors progress against agreed priorities and provide updates to governance bodies to support decision making.
- **External Engagement and Advocacy:** Supports the external positioning of the initiative by facilitating advocacy, partnerships, and engagement with key stakeholders.
- **Knowledge Management and Learning:** Ensures appropriate documentation and record-keeping of governance processes, decisions, and key outputs to support transparency and accountability; and promotes knowledge generation, learning, and dissemination of evidence and good practices across the initiative and its partners.



4. SAFE TO LEARN ADVISORY BOARD

4.1 Composition

The Safe to Learn Advisory Board has 10 members, composed of a balanced number of members from the Safe to Learn partners, recognized personalities, and influential champions in the field, as well as high-level representatives relevant for the agenda on ending violence in schools.

The Advisory Board seats are allocated as follows:

- **One seat is reserved for UNICEF**, with representation at the level of the Global Director of Education.
- **5 seats** reserved for from Safe to Learn coalition **partner organizations**.
- **4 seats** reserved for **influential figures and champions** advancing the Safe to Learn mission and vision, including representatives from civil society, youth and survivor communities, the teaching profession, and other relevant constituencies.

Among the members, two will serve as **Co-Chairs** to lead the Advisory Board, ensure effective functioning, and support strategic direction.

All Advisory Board members represent the diversity of Safe to Learn both in terms of organizations and fields (education, child protection, health, social and behavior change, and gender). The composition of the Advisory Board will represent the global reach of Safe to Learn with members from countries with different levels of income, ensuring that voices from the Global South are well represented. Finally, Advisory Board members represent and adhere to the gender and inclusion principles of the Safe to Learn initiative.

The Head Safe to Learn Secretariat and staff who coordinate Advisory Board meetings, act as 'Facilitator'. Similarly, the Global Director of Child Protection and the Global Lead for Social and Behaviour Change at UNICEF will be invited to participate as 'observers' of the Advisory Board. This means they do not retain the right to vote on decisions but may engage in the deliberations of the Advisory Board.

4.2 Advisory Board Membership

Advisory Board membership is nominative. Advisory Board members are selected for their own achievements and dedication to the field and cannot be automatically replaced. If an Advisory Board member cannot be present for imperative reasons at an Advisory Board meeting, he or she can either send their contribution in writing or propose a representative who will convey their contribution. However, only present Advisory Board members can vote. If an Advisory Board member changes organization during his/her mandate, an election is organized to fill the vacant seat.

Membership in seats reserved for the Safe to Learn coalition partners entails representation based on organizational commitment and distinctive added value, and as such, members serve in their organizational capacity. Members are expected to engage at a senior level, bringing strategic perspective and decision-influencing authority within their organizations, distinct from the technical and working-level engagement of the Partners Committee. Membership in seats allocated for influential figures and champions is based on individual capacity in addition to affiliations and professional networks.

4.3 Selection of Advisory Board Members

The process to select a new cohort of Advisory Board members entails the following:

- **Announcement by the Safe to Learn Secretariat:** The Safe to Learn Secretariat announces a call for expression of interest and/or nominations and recommendations for Advisory Board seats reserved for partners. This call will be shared with all the coalition partners. In the same call for nominations, the Secretariat will provide the option to nominate the candidate for the position of co-chair. The call will be open for 10 business days.
- **Receiving nominations:** Coalition partners can either nominate senior officials from their organization or provide recommendations for influential figures with whom they are familiar and/or affiliated, for the STL Secretariat's consideration. Partners are welcome to nominate more than one candidate for recommendation. Partner organizations that have not previously served on the Advisory Board are encouraged to nominate representatives, to ensure that all partners have an equal chance to engage. Repeat membership is not allowed. In the same expression of interest or nomination of candidates, partners could indicate consideration for position of co-chair.
- **Elections for partner seats:** A list of nominated candidates for membership will be collected by the Safe to Learn Secretariat. The full list will serve as the basis for electronic elections. Electronic elections will be held by the Safe to Learn Secretariat, using a simple design. Each partner organization will be able to rank the candidates in the list. Each organization in the coalition can vote once only but can select multiple candidates by ranking them as their first choice, second choice, and so on. Elections will be open for three days, after which the STL Secretariat will close the election and prepare the results. The first top-ranked partner nominees make up the final selection for members in the partners seats. The selected candidates will be informed via email, receive the Governance Framework for reference, and will be asked to confirm their candidacy within one week of election results. If either candidate declines, the invitation will be extended in order of ranking to the next eligible candidate.
- **Selection of champions** will be based on recommendations by the Head of the Safe to Learn Secretariat. Partners are given the opportunity to make recommendations to the STL Secretariat.
- **Final list** of members will be communicated within maximum two weeks after the elections. This announcement formalizes the new Advisory Board and sets the start of the members' term.
- **Co-chairs** of the Advisory Board are selected among the members. Co-chairs are selected by the Advisory Board members once established.

Advisory Board chairs must commit to chairing two Advisory Board meetings a year and act as an advocate and spokesperson for Safe to Learn in at least two (2) external meetings or high-level events annually. The Advisory Board Co-Chairs will also meet with the Head of the Safe to Learn Secretariat on a quarterly basis to ensure alignment and coordination.

4.4 Term of Advisory Board Members

Members of the Advisory Board serve a two-year term, to be renewed once. This term-limited election-based mechanism is designed to ensure: (i) transparency of the process, (ii) commitment of Advisory Board members who need to accept the conditions when presenting their candidacy, (iii) equal vote of all Safe to Learn partners who all elect their peers to represent the initiative at the Advisory Board, and (iv) rotation within Safe to Learn partners, so all have a chance to sit on the Advisory Board when term renewals happen.

Upon completion of the term, membership concludes and the Secretariat initiates a new selection process for the subsequent Advisory Board composition. In exceptional circumstances, the term of the Advisory Board may be extended for a limited period to ensure continuity and a smooth transition to the newly

constituted Board. Similarly, specific members, including Co-Chairs, may be requested to continue in their role, where feasible, until a successor is appointed to ensure continuity. Member organizations that wish to withdraw prior to the end of their term shall provide written notice to the Secretariat. Upon receipt, the Secretariat will initiate the process for replacement in accordance with the agreed selection procedures.

4.5 Responsibilities of the Advisory Board Members

Safe to Learn Advisory Board members commit to advocating for the initiative, dedicating time, and influence to serve Safe to Learn and its mission, and support key activities related to Safe to Learn advocacy and resource mobilization. Advisory Board members commit to attending each Advisory Board meeting unless there is an imperative reason, which needs to be communicated to the STL Secretariat and other Advisory Board members at least 10 days prior to the meeting. In addition, Safe to Learn Advisory Board members:

- a) Provide strategic vision, making recommendations based on the field's needs and comparative advantages of the Safe to Learn global initiative and its partners;
- b) Support strategic advocacy and resource mobilization efforts for STL, including participating in key events, bilateral meetings, engaging personal and professional networks as needed;
- c) Provide oversight and strategic guidance on STL strategic plans.

The Advisory Board does not exercise operational or financial decision-making authority over the planning and budgeting of the Safe to Learn Secretariat. Responsibility for day-to-day management of the operations of the Secretariat, including budgeting and resource allocation, rests with UNICEF.

4.6 Decision Making and Voting

Decisions will be taken by consensus of the Advisory Board members. Each Advisory Board member has one vote. If consensus is not met, decisions will be taken by majority rule.

Decisions of the Advisory Board are taken during Advisory Board meetings convened by the Secretariat or as required, through written consultation (e.g., via email). Voting rights are reserved for members who participate in the decision-making process, either through attendance, formal representation, or written submission. Members may abstain from a decision; abstentions are recorded and count towards quorum but do not constitute a vote in favor or against the decision. Silence or non-response shall not be interpreted as consent or endorsement.

Decisions of the Advisory Board will be documented by the Secretariat and shared with all the Advisory Board members for no-objection, with a request for responses within one week (or shorter in case of extraordinary meetings). The decisions become binding for immediate effect and action upon the final receipt of no-objection.

4.7 Ethics and Conflict of Interest

Advisory Board members must uphold the principles and standards set out in the UN Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights, UNICEF's Safeguarding policies, and procedures, including the Policy on Conduct Promoting the Protection and Safeguarding of Children and the Strategy to Prevent and Response to Sexual Exploitation and Abuse and Sexual Harassment. Each Advisory Board member has a duty to disclose actual, potential, and perceived conflicts of interest they may have in relation to Safe to Learn, its partners or any items on meeting agendas, to ensure the Safe to Learn Advisory Board follows the highest ethical standards in terms of potential financial, personal and/or intellectual conflict of interest.

4.8 Frequency and Location of Advisory Board Meetings

The Safe to Learn Advisory Board meets twice a year, either in person or virtually. Exceptional meetings can

be held at the request of one or more Advisory Board members and/or the majority of the Partners Committee representatives. All members of the Advisory Board can make a request for additional meetings for consideration by the Advisory Board co-chairs.

Advisory Board Meetings are convened by the Safe to Learn Secretariat, with invitations sent at least two weeks in advance. The invitations include a proposed date and time, as well as the agenda of the upcoming meeting, and any supporting materials that inform the deliberations of the Advisory Board meeting. The Advisory Board members are requested to RSVP within two weeks of receipt of the invitations. The meeting will be held at the proposed date and time, upon confirmation of participation of majority of members (at least 6 members including 1 co-chair). Outcomes of the meeting will be documented and shared with the Advisory Board members within one week of the meeting.

4.9 Quorum

A quorum is required for decision-making and is constituted by a simple majority (half plus one) of the total membership. In addition, at least one of the two co-chairs must be in attendance for a quorum to be reached.

In exceptional circumstances, an extraordinary meeting may be convened – without the quorum requirement – in addition to written deliberation and vote by absent members. These include extraordinary circumstances that require time-sensitive and urgent decision making. In such cases, the Advisory Board Co-Chairs will determine the best approach for an immediate decision-making process.

4.10 Language

The working language of the Advisory Board is English. Documents for the meetings will be provided in English. The Advisory Board may decide to translate certain documents into other languages.



5. PARTNERS COMMITTEE

5.1 Composition

The Partners Committee is composed of representatives from all Safe to Learn coalition partner organizations. The Partners Committee operates at a technical and working level, distinct from the strategic and advisory role of the Advisory Board. All Safe to Learn partners agree to appoint a representative working in and/or with operational experience in Education, Child Protection, Health, or Social and Behaviour Change. Partners can be represented by one or two representatives. There is no term limit for the partners' representatives in the Partners Committee. Representatives of partner organizations in the Safe to Learn Partners Committee are experts in their field and technically contribute to shape the Safe to Learn global initiative. All representatives are appointed by their own organization, which agrees to include Safe to Learn in their respective work programme.

5.2 Frequency of Meetings and Time Commitment

The Safe to Learn Partners Committee meets on a quarterly basis as a full group. During these sessions, progress against the Safe to Learn strategy is assessed and strategic as well as operational issues are discussed. Partners' updates and strategic partners' information are also shared during the quarterly meetings to ensure flow of communication and identification of synergies among partners. Updates can also be shared in writing through the Secretariat in between quarterly meetings. These quarterly meetings last up to two hours. Detailed minutes produced by the Secretariat are sent to all partners within one week following the meeting. All partners agree to prioritize quarterly committee meetings so that the full Safe to Learn coalition is able to discuss and agree on common achievements and next steps for the STL global initiative. The meetings are recorded unless a partner requests the contrary. In that case, the partner needs to provide an explanation. Recorded meetings can be shared within each partner organization.

5.3 Role of the Partner Committee

The Partners Committee serves not only as a technical and advisory forum, but also as a platform for strategic coordination, exchange of good practice and lessons learned, identification of synergies, and collaboration among partners in support of the Safe to Learn Strategy.

The Partner Committee is responsible for:

- a) Actively participating in the Partner Committee meetings and contributing to the advancement of the Safe to Learn agenda, including through advocacy and communications, programming and technical expertise, research and evidence building, funding and partnership.
- b) Contributing to the development, implementation, and refinement of the Safe to Learn Strategy as a joint vision and roadmap for collective action, including but not limited to contributing to Thematic Task Forces to implement the STL Strategy.
- c) Advocating for and highlighting Safe to Learn and the agenda on ending violence in, around and through schools through their networks and platforms.
- d) Facilitating coordination among partners, including exchange of strategic information, sharing lessons learned and good practices, and identifying synergies and opportunities for collaboration.
- e) Ensuring the sustainability of the STL Secretariat, including, where appropriate, contributing to identifying joint resource mobilization opportunities.

- f) Validating the agenda for Safe to Learn Advisory Board Meetings and providing strategic inputs on matters proposed for Advisory Board deliberation. This ensures that Advisory Board discussions and decisions consider inputs and suggestions from all Safe to Learn partners. The Secretariat drafts the agenda based on Partners Committee discussions and/or additional ad hoc partners consultation.

6. TASK FORCES

6.1 Task Forces Composition

The Safe to Learn Partners Committee delegates the implementation of key areas of the STL Strategy to Task Forces. Task Forces include 5-6 partners that express interest and volunteer to be part and/or lead a specific thematic Task Force. Task Forces are designed to enhance the efficiency and effective delivery of specific parts of the STL Strategy. The list of Task Forces is open and can evolve as per the STL global initiative needs. Examples of Task Forces include Monitoring and Evaluation, Gender and Inclusion, and Global Advocacy and country engagement. The Secretariat and STL partners propose Task Forces, and the Partners Committee sets them up. Other task forces can be developed and can meet at frequencies that work for them.

Task Force members do not have decision making authority beyond matters directly related to the deliverables of the Task Force. Task Forces will not receive additional resources and/or external capacity; instead, they will leverage the resources and capacity of the partners represented.

6.2 Frequency of Task Force meetings

Task Forces are in charge of delivering the STL Strategy. They receive delegation of power from other partners to achieve a specific objective. A partner and/or the Secretariat can lead Task Forces. The Secretariat ensures coordination, coherence, and continuity between Task Forces.

6.3 Duration of Task Forces

Task Forces are task and timebound. In other words, they exist until the defined goal has been reached. Partners who volunteer to contribute and/or lead a Task Force agree to enable their representative to dedicate time to the completion of the Task Force objective. The Task Forces' final products are recognized as a joint contribution and presented to the Partners Committee for endorsement. Endorsement can be tacit if no partners react in a jointly defined timeframe.

END OF DOCUMENT

MORE INFORMATION

Visit www.safetolearncoalition.org

Contact Gemma Wilson-Clark, Head of Safe to Learn Secretariat,
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