

# Child Protection Policy - ISCOS

## Introduction

ISCOS is a non-governmental organization (NGO) founded in 1983 by CISL. Our mission is to promote international cooperation actions and projects based on the principles of solidarity, social justice, human dignity, and peace. Our main focus is promoting decent work and access to health and education, so we work to prevent child labour and to promote the children's rights. It is also our responsibility to minimize any inadvertent harm caused by our organizational activities.

Therefore, it is crucial to prioritize the safety of children in our staff, operations, and programs, ensuring the prevention of harm and the avoidance of any risk of abuse. We must promptly report any concerns regarding children's safety in the communities we work to the appropriate authorities.

The governing body of our organization has approved this policy, which applies to all staff and collaborators, both in Italy and in our foreign locations. We integrate child protection measures into our organization's systems and processes to suit the diverse national and local contexts in which we operate.

## Principles and values:

This policy reflects the rights of children to protection from abuse and exploitation as outlined in the United Nations Convention of the Rights of the Child (UNCRC). In accordance with the **General principles** defined in the Child Safeguarding Standards, we believe that:

- All children have equal rights to protection from harm. In accordance with the Convention, we are committed to respecting and ensuring the rights set forth in it to every child without discrimination of any kind, regardless of race, colour, sex, language, religion, political or other opinions, national, ethnic or social origin, property, disability, birth or other status of the child or of the child's parents or legal guardians.
- It is the responsibility of everyone to support the protection of children
- We have the duty to take care of the children we work with, come into contact with, or who are affected by our work and operations
- If we work with partners, we have a responsibility to help partners meet the minimum requirements for protection
- All actions regarding child safeguarding are taken in the best interests of the child, which are paramount.

In defending children's rights, we also follow other **humanitarian sector standards** to strive to ensure that our programmes, personnel and operations do no harm. These include:

- The Minimum Standards for Child Protection in Humanitarian Action (CPMS), 2012, CPWG;
- The 2010 HAP Standard in Accountability and Quality Management, 2010, HAP International;
- The Sphere Handbook - Humanitarian Charter and Minimum Standards in Humanitarian Response, 2011, Sphere Project;
- Code of Good Practice in the Management and Support of aid personnel, 2003, People in Aid.

We strictly enforce a **zero-tolerance policy** towards any form of exploitation or abuse of children. This policy applies to all individuals associated with our organization, prohibiting such behaviour both within and outside the workplace.

In fact, the **ISCOS Code of Ethics** states that the duties of employees, collaborators, volunteers, seconded workers include respecting the fundamental rights of the individual, with particular reference to those of

minors, and avoiding all forms of discrimination. It is also forbidden for all operators to employ underage workers, engage in any form of harassment, and have sexual relations with minors.

#### Definitions:

Children can be abused in so many ways depending on the context and culture. Definitions of “child” and “child abuse” may differ according to national and cultural understandings. However, while child safeguarding measures should consider local culture, the definition of a child and what constitutes abuse is clearly defined in global and regional standards and frameworks, and must be universally applied.

**Child:** any person under the age of 18, regardless of local ‘majority’ legal definition (Art.1 of United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child – UNCRC).

**Abuses:** the range of acts, intentional or unintentional, that harm children that causes or has a high probability of causing harm to the child's health, survival, development or dignity. The main categories of abuse are defined by the World Health Organisation as:

1. Physical abuse: Actual or potential physical harm perpetrated by another person, adult or child;
2. Sexual abuse: Forcing or enticing a child to take part in sexual activities that he or she does not fully understand and has little choice in consenting to;
3. Child sexual exploitation: A form of sexual abuse that involves children being engaged in any sexual activity in exchange for money, gifts, food, accommodation, affection, status, or anything else that they or their family needs;
4. Neglect and negligent treatment: a persistent failure to meet a child's basic physical and/or psychological needs, which is likely to result in serious impairment of a child's healthy physical, spiritual, moral and mental development;
5. Emotional abuse: Persistent emotional maltreatment that impacts a child's emotional development;
6. Commercial exploitation: Exploiting a child in work or other activities for the benefit of others and to the detriment of the child's physical or mental health, education, moral or social-emotional development.

#### Our commitments:

**Establishing child-safe projects and programs.** Irrespective of the work's objective, all projects and programs must be designed to minimize the risk of harm to children they may encounter or influence directly or indirectly. A child-safe initiative must make sure that it considers the surroundings, context, and influence (intentional or not) on the kids and communities it works with. For this, where relevant, a rigorous social and environmental impact assessment must be carried out, including a child safety impact assessment. Measures to protect children are integrated into current procedures and frameworks (strategic planning, budgeting, recruitment, programme cycle management, performance management, procurement, partner agreements and management systems etc.).

**Organizing safe events and activities for children.** When planning activities, it is crucial to consider various factors to mitigate risks. These include:

- a. Understanding that engagement of children in such activities is not always welcomed by the family or community;
- b. Ensuring that particular care is taken to ensure preventative measures are put in place to safeguard children if activities or events are to take place in unfamiliar places and outside family care;
- c. Even when activities are not directly aimed at children, but at mothers for example, we must always have the child's safety in mind;
- d. Developing partnerships with families and communities that are appropriate to support our work on safeguarding;

- e. Engaging partners, including donors, local NGOs, government, contractors, and suppliers that agree to the commitment to keep children safe.

**Social media.** It is crucial to reduce the chance that inaccurate information, stories, and visual representations of children (through photos, videos, or social media) may be used. Some good practices we put into practice are:

- a. Images of children must not show them undressed or in inappropriate poses;
- b. Details attached to images and included in stories must not allow that child to be traced to his or her home or community;
- c. Distinctive buildings, street signs or landmarks should not be included in an image if they identify where a child lives or works;
- d. Geotagging of images should be disabled when taking photographs;
- e. Ensure the photographer/journalist/translator employed has been properly vetted and reference checked;
- f. Make sure we have permission from children and their parents/carers to take their image and use their information.

**Recruitment processes.** At interviews, candidates are warned of the binding nature of this Policy, the Procedures and the fact that they apply outside the work environment as well as inside. All interviews should include a discussion on child safeguarding, the candidate's understanding of this and the organisation's commitment.

#### Responsibilities:

Key staff is designated at different levels as "focal points":

- 1. *Management Level:*
  - a. The President ensures that all personnel understand and comply with this Policy and its Principles. She/he remains responsible for the Policy and its progressive implementation
- 2. *Operational Level:*
  - a. Desk Officers in Italy and Country Representatives abroad. The Country Representatives are responsible for making sure that the child safeguarding measures are integrated throughout the local procedures and respected by all staff. The role of the Representatives is to minimise risks and deal appropriately with concerns and incidents that occur. Additionally, he/she offers advice and support to the designated Focal Points in case of doubts or incidents.

#### Reporting abuse procedure:

In the event of a concern or complaint, the local level should determine the reporting process, seeking advice and guidance to ensure that reporting harm and/or abuse does not further endanger or make children and their families vulnerable.

The general procedure for reporting and handling suspected child abuse is defined here:

- 1. If it is a concern regarding **abuse outside the organization:**
  - a. It will be up to the Representative to report the case to the formal authorities or, where they are weak or corrupt, to organisations that are able to deal with cases appropriately;
  - b. The country representative monitors the activities undertaken by the authorities.
- 2. If the concern pertains to the **behaviour of staff, associates, or partners:**
  - a. If the concern needs reporting to local/national authorities, it will then be up to the Representative to report the case to the formal authorities or, where they are weak or corrupt, to organisations that are able to deal with cases appropriately;

- b. The country representative monitors the activities undertaken by the authorities;
- c. Any breach of the contents of this Policy by a staff member must be reported to the Desk Officers, the ISCOS President and the Executive Board;
- d. ISCOS, in order to protect its image and assets, reserves the right to take the necessary measures both in legal terms and in terms of sanctions, as provided for in the ISCOS regulations on labour relations.

Monitoring:

We **regularly monitor** the implementation of child safeguarding policies and procedures. At the operational level, national focal points oversee the monitoring, while the appointed focal point of the Executive Board handles the management-level monitoring. Anyone can report any criticism of the abuse reporting procedure to the Focal Point on the field at any time. Active monitoring means routinely examining to make sure that this Policy is being followed and protections are functioning. Moreover, **lessons learned** from the practical experience of this policy inform its review and changes to child protection measures.

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