

Direct Aid

Child Protection Policy



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Background

Child abuse is a widespread issue that affects children and adolescents globally. It encompasses physical, sexual, and emotional abuse and neglect. Fortunately, it is largely preventable. Children and adolescents are vulnerable to exploitation, abuse, violence, and neglect in various settings, such as families, communities, institutions, organizations, and private and public places. This can occur due to different circumstances involving a range of individuals, including conference delegates, support staff, and ancillary personnel. To safeguard the well-being of children and adolescents during their participation in Direct Aid, a Child Protection Policy has been created.

1. Introduction

At Direct Aid, we recognize the critical importance of safeguarding the rights and well-being of children. As an organization dedicated to providing assistance and support to vulnerable communities, we are committed to ensuring that children under our care are protected from all forms of abuse, neglect, and harm. This Child Protection Policy serves as our guiding framework to create a safe and nurturing environment for every child we encounter.

This policy is aligned with international standards and guidelines, particularly the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC). We acknowledge that child protection is a shared responsibility, involving not only our organization but also the communities, partners, and stakeholders with whom we collaborate. Together, we can create a protective environment that empowers children, enables their participation, and safeguards their rights.

Through the implementation of this Child Protection Policy, we aim to ensure that every child we encounter is safe, nurtured, and allowed to thrive. We are committed to continuous improvement, regular training, and ongoing monitoring to ensure the effectiveness and relevance of our child protection measures.

2. Purpose

The purpose of this child protection policy is to ensure the safety, well-being, and protection of all children who come into contact with our organization during the delivery of direct aid. We are committed to creating a safe and nurturing environment that promotes the physical, emotional, and mental development of children in need. This policy aims to prevent and respond to any form of child abuse, neglect, exploitation, or harm that may occur within the scope of our direct aid activities. By implementing this policy, we seek to uphold the rights of children, empower them to thrive, and establish a culture of accountability, transparency, and continuous improvement in our child protection practices. Our ultimate purpose is to safeguard the best interests of every child we serve, providing them with the necessary support, care, and protection to break the cycle of vulnerability and create a brighter future.

3. Scope

As a network-approved policy, the Child Protection Policy applies to:

1. This child protection policy applies to all activities and programs carried out by our organization, both within our home country and in any other country where we operate or provide direct aid.
2. This policy applies to all children who come into contact with our organization, regardless of their age, gender, nationality, ethnicity, or any other characteristic. It covers children who are recipients of our direct aid, participate in our programs, or are in any way impacted by our activities.
3. All Direct Aid Staff and volunteers: This policy extends to all staff members, volunteers, and contractors associated with our organization, irrespective of their role or level of contact with children. It is their responsibility to adhere to the principles and guidelines outlined in this policy.
4. This policy also applies to any partner organizations, contractors, or other stakeholders who collaborate with our organization in the delivery of direct aid. We expect them to align with and adhere to the child protection standards and procedures outlined in this policy.
5. This policy covers all activities and interactions involving children, including but not limited to direct aid provision, educational programs, healthcare services, recreational activities, counseling and support services, and any other direct or indirect engagement with children.

4. Definitions:

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- **Child:** Any individual who is below the age of eighteen (18) years, as defined by the Convention on the Rights of the Child.

- **Child Rights:** Children have the entitlement to "life, survival, and development," where development encompasses physical, emotional, cognitive, social, and cultural growth.

- **Child Safeguarding:** The policies, procedures, and practices implemented to protect children who come into contact with Direct Aid and all individuals associated with our work from any kind of harm, abuse, or exploitation. It is the responsibility of all personnel to incorporate these measures at the operational level to ensure that Direct Aid is a safe organization for children.

- **Child Protection:** The prevention and response to significant harm, abuse, neglect, exploitation, and violence against children. Child Protection programming refers to initiatives and actions designed to safeguard children from all types of violence. This includes integrating child protection into all thematic areas of programming to create protective environments for children in the community.

- **Child Abuse:** Child abuse involves the violation of children's rights and includes various forms of violence against them, such as physical, emotional, and sexual abuse, neglect, family violence, sexual exploitation, abduction, trafficking (including for sexual purposes), involvement of a child in online child sexual exploitation, and child labor as defined below.

- **Physical Abuse** refers to any deliberate act of causing harm or the threat of harm to a child. This can include various forms of physical violence such as pushing, hitting, slapping, shaking, throwing, punching, kicking, biting, burning, strangling, and poisoning. It also encompasses harmful cultural practices that may alter a child's physicality and lead to distress, harm, or long-term health consequences.

- **Neglect** occurs when a child is persistently deprived of necessities, such as clean water, food, shelter, sanitation, or proper supervision and care, to an extent that puts their health and development at risk.

- **Emotional Abuse** involves a continuous attack on a child's self-esteem. This can manifest through various means, including name-calling, threatening, ridiculing, shaming, intimidating, or isolating the child.

- **Child Sexual Abuse** refers to instances where a child is exploited by another child, adolescent, or adult for their own sexual stimulation or gratification. It encompasses both contact and non-contact activities, including exposing a child to online child sexual exploitation material or taking sexually exploitative images of children.

- **Family violence** encompasses verbal, physical, sexual, or emotional violence that occurs within the household or family. This type of violence is witnessed by the child regularly.

Child Labor refers to work that deprives children of their childhood, potential, and dignity, while also being harmful to their physical and mental development. It encompasses work that is

mentally, physically, socially, or morally dangerous and interferes with their education and leisure time. In its most severe forms, child labor involves children being enslaved, separated from their families, and exposed to serious hazards and illnesses.

Child Trafficking involves any involvement in the recruitment, transportation, or receipt of children for exploitation, using threats, force, or other forms of coercion. This includes the abuse of power.

Military use of Children occurs when children are engaged in or exposed to military activities, such as serving as soldiers or being used as human shields.

Contact with Children refers to working in a role or position that involves or may involve direct (including online) or indirect contact with children, such as using children's images. This can be specified in the job description or can occur as a result of performing the position, such as coming into contact with children while working in communities.

Working with Children means being involved in an activity with a child where contact with the child would reasonably be expected as a normal part of the activity and is not incidental. This includes both paid and unpaid work, including volunteering.

5. Principles and standards

To uphold the Direct Aid Operating Principle of advocating for the basic rights of the individuals it serves and empowering them to express their own needs and concerns, this Policy establishes a supplementary set of principles to guide our child safeguarding efforts. These principles encompass the following:

5.1 Prioritizing the Child's Best Interests

When making decisions or addressing concerns related to a child's safety or well-being, our primary focus will be on what is in the child's best interests. Direct Aid recognizes that children have the right to actively participate in matters that affect them, make choices, and have a voice that can influence decisions. We aim to involve children in decision-making whenever possible, taking into account how those decisions may impact them. While there may be instances where adults must make decisions on behalf of children to protect them from harm, the child's best interests will always be at the forefront of those decisions. If this policy is violated and harm occurs, Direct Aid is committed to listening to the child's wishes and taking appropriate action. In certain situations, confidentiality may be breached if it is necessary to share information to protect the child from harm, based on a risk analysis.

5.2 Strict Stance Against Child Abuse and Exploitation

Direct Aid maintains a zero-tolerance approach towards child abuse and exploitation. We actively work to prevent such incidents and respond promptly and effectively when they occur.

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Our organization provides support to survivors and holds those responsible for harm and unacceptable behavior accountable. We ensure that all individuals associated with our work have access to information on how to report concerns or allegations of child exploitation, abuse, or any other breaches of this policy. Immediate action will be taken upon receiving any suspected breach report. Direct Aid is committed to not engaging personnel who pose a risk to children's safety or well-being in direct or indirect contact with children or the communities we work with.

5.3 Confidentiality

Direct Aid is dedicated to maintaining confidentiality when sharing sensitive information related to reported child safeguarding incidents. Any information that may identify individuals will only be disclosed after careful consideration of the safety of the child, witnesses, or subjects of the complaint, as well as to protect the integrity of any ongoing investigations.

5.4 Commitment to Good Practice

Direct Aid is committed to fostering a safe organizational culture where all individuals served by and working for Direct Aid feel empowered to demand non-discriminatory and respectful behavior from one another. Poor behavior will not be tolerated, and the abuse of power is strictly prohibited. Safeguarding children within Direct Aid's work is a shared responsibility, and it must be integrated into every aspect of our operations. All employees of Direct Aid are expected to adhere to good practice standards. Direct Aid's Safeguarding advisors and teams continually strive to provide the best service and advice possible, staying informed about sectoral and general best practices in Child Safeguarding. Direct Aid welcomes feedback, embraces continuous learning, and seeks improvement to ensure that safeguarding children remains at the core of our work.

5.5 Approach to Risk Management

Direct Aid acknowledges its responsibility to provide protective environments for children in all its operations and activities. To prevent the risk of child abuse, exploitation, or harm, Direct Aid will proactively identify, monitor, and mitigate child safeguarding risks in the assessment of its operations as well as partner operations. The adoption of a risk management approach does not lessen Direct Aid's zero-tolerance stance towards policy breaches. Child safeguarding considerations are expected to be integrated into program planning and ongoing activities.

5.6 Accountability and Transparency

Direct Aid is committed to enhancing its child safeguarding systems to ensure accountability to children, their families, and the communities it serves. Clear roles and responsibilities for child safeguarding will be assigned to staff members to effectively embed child-safe practices across

all programs, operations, and activities. Direct Aid will cultivate a transparent organizational culture that openly addresses safeguarding issues while adhering to privacy regulations and legal frameworks. Any concerns or issues related to child safeguarding or poor practice can be raised and discussed within this framework.

5.7 Responsibility shared among all stakeholders

Direct Aid recognizes that child safeguarding is a collective responsibility, which means that the effective implementation of safeguarding measures relies on everyone involved in our work having access to and understanding of this policy and guidance for its proper implementation. Individuals must comprehend their responsibilities and be committed to upholding the principles of child safeguarding. Direct Aid is committed to providing regular training on Child Safeguarding to all individuals working on behalf of the organization with children and vulnerable populations. Additionally, those with specific roles will receive further training that aligns with their responsibilities. Direct Aid will also ensure that partner organizations involved in our work have appropriate child safeguarding measures in place to meet the minimum standards outlined in this Policy.

6. Breaches of the Child Protection Policy

In the event of a breach of the Child Protection Policy, Direct Aid is committed to taking swift and appropriate actions to ensure the safety and well-being of children. Breaches will be thoroughly investigated, and may lead to an immediate suspension may be implemented pending further investigation. Our priority is to provide support and care to the child or children affected, ensuring they have access to necessary services and counseling. If the breach involves criminal activities or serious violations, Direct Aid will report the incident to the relevant authorities. Disciplinary procedures will be followed, which may include verbal or written warnings, suspension, termination of employment or volunteer position, or other appropriate disciplinary measures. Direct Aid will cooperate fully with any external investigations or legal proceedings related to the breach, providing all necessary information and support. Continuous monitoring and supervision will be implemented to ensure ongoing compliance with the Child Protection Policy and to prevent future breaches, including regular audits, risk assessments, and performance evaluations.

7. Examples of the child protection violation but not limited to:

- Physical abuse or assault towards children is strictly prohibited.

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- Engaging in any form of sexual activity or relationships with individuals under 18 years of age is strictly forbidden, regardless of local age of consent or customs. Mistaken belief in a child's age is not considered a defense.
- Developing relationships with children that could be deemed exploitative or abusive is not allowed.
- Any actions that could potentially be abusive or put a child at risk of abuse are strictly prohibited.
- Using language that is inappropriate, offensive, or abusive, as well as making suggestive remarks or offering inappropriate advice, is strictly forbidden. This includes verbal, emotional, and psychological abuse of children.
- Engaging in physically or verbally inappropriate or sexually provocative behavior is strictly prohibited.
- Direct Aid Representatives must not allow children they are working with to stay overnight at their home unsupervised unless exceptional circumstances apply and prior permission has been obtained from a line manager.
- Sleeping in the same room or bed with a child they are working with is strictly prohibited.
- Performing personal tasks for children that they are capable of doing themselves is discouraged.
- Condoning or participating in behavior by children that is illegal, unsafe, or abusive is unacceptable.
- Acting in ways intended to shame, humiliate, belittle, or degrade children, or perpetrate any form of emotional abuse, is strictly prohibited.
- Discriminating against or showing unfair differential treatment or favoritism towards particular children to the exclusion of others is not allowed.
- Spending excessive time alone with children and away from others in a manner that could be interpreted as inappropriate is discouraged.
- Exposing a child to inappropriate images, films, and websites, including pornography and extreme violence, is strictly prohibited.
- Placing themselves in a position where they are vulnerable to allegations of misconduct is strongly discouraged.
- Hiring children for domestic or other labor that is inappropriate given their age or developmental stage is not allowed.

8. Implementing procedures

8.1 Reporting mechanism for the breaches of child safeguarding

Direct Aid has established various internal mechanisms to facilitate the reporting of misconduct and concerns under our Whistleblowing Policy. It is encouraged that all individuals associated with our organization utilize these channels to ensure that any wrongdoing, misconduct, or

unethical behavior is promptly addressed. Below are the steps involved in reporting misconduct through our established internal mechanisms:

1. **An Accountable individual** within a country office such as the Line manager, human resources manager, head of the office, or a Safeguarding Focal Point appointed to receive sensitive reports
2. **Confidential Hotline:** A confidential hotline is a dedicated phone number that whistleblowers can call to report their concerns. Hotlines are typically operated by a third-party provider to ensure anonymity and confidentiality. Whistleblowers can provide details about their concerns and provide any supporting evidence.
3. **Email Reporting:** Organizations may have a dedicated email address where whistleblowers can send their reports. This method allows for a written record of the report and can accommodate more detailed information or attachments such as documents or images.
<https://direct-aid.org/cms/contact-us-ar/>
4. **Online Reporting Platforms:** Some organizations provide secure web-based platforms or portals where individuals can submit their whistleblower reports. These platforms often have built-in encryption and security measures to protect the whistleblower

9. Prevention

At Direct Aid, our top priority is the safety and well-being of the children we serve. We are fully committed to preventing any harm, abuse, or exploitation of children under our care. To achieve this, we have implemented a range of preventive measures designed to create a safe and secure environment for all children:

1. **Creating a Safe Environment:**
Direct Aid focuses on establishing clear guidelines and policies that prioritize the safety and well-being of children in all our programs and activities.
2. **Recruitment and Selection:**
Direct Aid recognizes the critical importance of having the right individuals working with children. That's why we have stringent recruitment and selection procedures in place. We carefully screen and evaluate all candidates to ensure that they are not only qualified but also genuinely committed to child protection. Background checks, interviews, reference checks, and criminal records checks are some of the steps we take to verify the suitability of candidates.
3. **Training and Awareness:**
We provide comprehensive training on child protection and safeguarding to all our staff members, volunteers, and partners involved in our programs. Through this training, we aim to equip them with the necessary skills and understanding to identify signs of potential abuse, maintain appropriate boundaries, and respond to any concerns in a timely and effective manner.

4. Reporting Mechanisms:

We have established clear and confidential procedures for reporting any concerns or suspicions of child abuse, neglect, or exploitation.

5. Regular Review and Improvement:

We are committed to continuously reviewing and improving our child protection policy to ensure its effectiveness. We regularly evaluate our practices, learn from our experiences, and stay updated with the latest research and legal requirements. And actively seek input from relevant stakeholders to ensure that our policy remains relevant, responsive, and aligned with the specific context and settings in which we operate.

we strive to create a safe and nurturing environment where children can thrive, grow, and reach their full potential.

10. Annex



Acknowledgment Form

I _____ acknowledge that I have received, read, and understood the Child Protection Policy of Direct Aid. I understand that it is my responsibility to adhere to the principles and guidelines outlined in this policy, PSEA Policy, and DA's Code of Conduct to ensure the safety and well-being of children involved in our organization's activities.

By signing this form, I commit to:

1. Familiarize myself with the Child Protection Policy and associated procedures.
2. Following the protocols and procedures when working with children or vulnerable populations.
3. Reporting any concerns or incidents related to child protection promptly and appropriately.
4. Respecting the rights and dignity of children, ensuring a safe and inclusive environment free from abuse or exploitation.
5. Participating in required training or awareness programs on child protection.
6. Supporting and contributing to the continuous improvement of our child protection practices.

I understand that DA is Zero-tolerance for any breach of the Child Protection Policy, PSEA Policy, and Code of Conduct that may result in disciplinary action, up to termination of my association with the organization.

Name: _____

Signature: _____