

# Child Protection Policy

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COMDU.IT

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## 1.0 Overview

comdu.it (the “organisation”) values the safety and protection of children in the communities in which it operates. The organisation comes into contact or impact children in one of two ways:

1. The organisation undertakes projects targeted towards child beneficiaries who are severely affected by a lack of access to education, lack of engagement in meaningful activities and a limited sense of belonging or contribution to their community.
2. Children may also be indirect beneficiaries simply by their relationship to other the direct beneficiaries of projects.

Given this context, and as set out further in the Child Protection Policy (the “Policy”), the organisation adopts a risk-based approach to the management of child protection in its activities.

However, as an overriding principle that guides all of its activities, the organisation acknowledges that its responsibility to ensure the safety of children is paramount and adopts a zero-tolerance approach to child exploitation or abuse.

## 2.0 Commitment to Child Protection

The organisation is committed to the safety and wellbeing of children and to protecting them from abuse and exploitation.

The organisation believes child protection is best safeguarded by embedding child protection values in our organisational culture and by ensuring those values permeate into individual conduct.

The organisation will do this by:

1. Ensuring child safety risks are taken into consideration when implementing a project;
2. Providing guidelines for appropriate behavior when visiting project sites;
3. Requiring each individual who works for, or represents the organisation, to commit and adhere to the *Child Protection Code of Conduct* (the “Code”);
4. Requiring each implementing NGO partner to adopt and adhere to the organisation’s child protection values as stated in this policy;
5. Providing a clear mechanism for reporting suspected abuses; and
6. Ensuring the message is clear throughout the organisation and with our NGO partners that the organisation does not tolerate child exploitation and abuse.

## 3.0 Guiding Principles

The organisation does not tolerate child abuse or exploitation in any form.

This policy is guided by the principles enunciated in the:

- UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (1989), ratified by Canada.
- The starting point of the Policy is article 19 of the Convention on the Rights of the Child, which states: *“State Parties shall... protect the child from all forms of physical and mental violence, injury and abuse, neglect or negligent treatment, maltreatment or exploitation, including sexual abuse...”*

#### **4.0 Scope**

For the purposes of this policy, a child is a person is under 18 years of age.

The policy applies to all projects implemented by the organisation, and governs the conduct of:

- Employees, including supervisors and managers;
- Volunteers;
- Directors and other Board members;
- Any other representatives of the organisation, such as consultants, photographers, and persons attending project;
- Project sites; and
- Employees of local partners involved in the organisation’s projects.

#### **5.0 Definitions and Terms**

- **Physical abuse:** Physical abuse occurs when a person uses or threatens to use physical force against a child that results in harm to the child. Physical abuse includes shoving, hitting, slapping, shaking, throwing, punching, kicking, biting, burning, strangling and poisoning.
- **Emotional abuse:** Emotional abuse occurs when inappropriate verbal or symbolic acts are carried out towards a child, or where there is a pattern of failure over time to provide a child with adequate non-physical nurture and emotional support. Such acts are likely to damage a child’s self-esteem or social competence and include ridiculing, intimidating, threatening or isolating the child.
- **Sexual abuse:** Sexual abuse is the use of a child for sexual stimulation or gratification by an adult or significantly older child or adolescent.
- **Neglect:** Neglect is the intentional withholding from a child the basic necessities of life, such as clothing, shelter and supervision to the extent that the child’s health and development are at risk.

#### **6.0 Child Safety Risk Management**

During the design phase, the organisational member in charge of the program (typically the Program Manager or the Founding Chair) must identify any risks to child safety arising out of the implementation of a project at the risk management phase of Project Due Diligence.

As noted above, the organisation adopts a risk-based approach to the management of child protection in its projects. In undertaking its Project Due Diligence, it first seeks to resolve whether the program or activity will involve potential contact with children, impact on children or work with children. If the answer is yes, the

organisation must undertake a thorough assessment of child protection risk, the outcomes of which are documented in the Project Appraisal. This is not only incorporated in Project Implementation Plan but also all ongoing monitoring and evaluation of programs and activities.

The source of the risk is to be described as 'Child Safety'. Examples of specific risks that might be relevant to a project include:

- Unaccompanied children attend project sites during the project implementation;
- Children of beneficiaries are left unsupervised due to parents/guardians' involvement in the project; and
- Visitors to the project sites acting on behalf of the organisation take photographs of children without their guardian's knowledge and/or permission

Risk mitigation strategies should be adopted to respond to the risks identified.

As a minimum, the strategies should include a requirement that:

1. All employees, volunteers, directors, and representatives attending the project site have signed and committed to the Code.
2. Implementing local partner employees who will be working on the project site must provide confirmation that they will adhere to their own Code, which must align with comdu.it's Code, or if the implementing local partner does not have any such code, its relevant employees are to sign and adhere to the comdu.it's Code.
3. Project employees should ensure that children are not permitted to be present on project sites without an accompanying parent or guardian.

Where it is determined that there is no impact or contact with children, the minimum standards and guidelines for conduct set out in this policy will not apply.

## **7.0 Visiting Project Sites**

In line with its risk-based approach, the organisation will ensure reasonable precautions are taken to protect children if any employees, directors, volunteers or representatives (including those of the local partner) are likely to come into contact with children during any site visits or in carrying out any of its activities. It does by ensuring its employees, directors, volunteers and representatives adhere to the following guidelines:

1. Organisational employees and representatives must conduct themselves with the utmost professionalism and integrity at all times. Visitors must not physically injure or threaten to injure a child, emotionally abuse or sexually abuse a child.
2. Visits to project sites must be arranged through the organisation. Unauthorized visits are when a person visits a community directly or requests access from the local partner, bypassing the organisation. If that occurs, the local partner must notify the organisation and manage the person according to the guidelines outlined in the Policy.
3. In preparation for the visit, visitors will be provided with a copy of the Policy and Code will be given information regarding appropriate behavior during the visits.
4. Organisational employees and/or local partner employees must accompany other visitors to the project sites at all times. Visitors must not spend time with a child of a beneficiary unsupervised.
5. Any gifts, contributions or correspondence to or with beneficiaries or their children must be facilitated through and screened by the local partner.

6. Inappropriate or suspicious behavior of visitors towards any child must be addressed immediately. The organisation's or implementing local partner employees accompanying the visitor must seek assistance of their supervisor and follow the guidelines established in this policy for managing and reporting suspected child abuse.

## **8.0 Conduct of Local Partners**

The organisation's local partners are also required to adhere to the child protection values outlined in the Policy.

This is to be monitored by the organisation's Program Manager through the Organisational Due Diligence process during which the Program Manager:

1. Must request and review a copy of the local partner's Child Protection Policy (or equivalent) and Code to ensure it aligns with comdu.it's child protection guidelines outlined in this policy.
2. If no such policy or code is in place, provide a copy of comdu.it's Policy and Code to the local partner and obtain their agreement to abide by the policy and code. As a minimum, the local partner employees who will be present on project sites must sign the organisation's if they have not already signed their own organisation's Child Protection Code of Conduct.

## **9.0 Recruitment**

The organisation follows strict guidelines in the recruitment of employees, directors, volunteers, and other representatives to ensure candidates do not pose a child safety risk. These guidelines are implemented in the interviewing of candidates, reference checks and candidate pre-screening. The organisation will not employ or engage any person if they pose an unacceptable risk to children.

Candidates are also provided with a copy of this policy, and asked to disclose any relevant information regarding child safety.

## **10.0 Background Checks in Resident Country**

The organisation will adopt a risk-based approach in considering which employees, directors, volunteers or representatives undertaking child related services or being in contact with children will be required to submit to a 'Vulnerable Sector Screening'. In particular, if such checks are not available to employees or volunteers (e.g. employees, volunteers, directors, and other representatives from overseas jurisdictions), the organisation will consider alternative means of ensuring appropriate background checks are undertaken.

## **11.0 Background Checks in Project Country**

All employees of project partners directly involved programs and activities that involve potential contact with children or impact on children as determined in the Project Due Diligence Phase will be subject to appropriate background and reference checks to mitigate the child protection risk posed by that program or activity. The extent of the risk posed by the program or activity will determine the level of background and reference checks that the organisation will undertake (or require its local partner undertake) on the project partner

employees involved in the delivery of that program or activity. This nature of the background checks will be determined on a project by project basis.

## **12.0 Use of Visual Images and Written Publications**

The organisation understands and is committed to portraying children in a positive manner in all its marketing and communication materials.

The organisation will at all times:

- Portray children in a dignified and respectful manner and not as vulnerable or submissive;
- Ensure that photographs, films of children and website publications respect and are in the best interest of the child;
- Assess and endeavor to comply with local traditions or restrictions for reproducing personal images before photographing or filming a child;
- Obtain informed consent from the child and their parent/guardian before photographing or filming a child. As part of this, the organisation must explain how the photograph or film will be used;
- Ensure children are adequately clothed and not presented in any way that could be seen as sexually suggestive;
- Ensure images are honest representations of the context and the facts; and
- Ensure file labels, meta data or text descriptions do not reveal identifying information about a child when sending images electronically or publishing images in any form.

Local partners are also required to portray children in a respectful, appropriate and consensual way. These principles and the guidelines for conduct are outlined in the Code.

## **13.0 Child Abuse Reporting Mechanism**

The organisation will take all reasonable steps to prevent child abuse and to hold accountable those who abuse children.

The mechanism for reporting, investigating and resolving complaints of child abuse is as follows:

1. Reporting:
  - a. Any incident, belief or suspicion of sexual or physical abuse (past or present) by the organisation's employee, director, volunteer, consultant, or other representative must be reported immediately to the Founding Chair. If the report relates to conduct of the Founding Chair, the incident will be reported to the Company Secretary.
  - b. The organisation's employee, volunteer, director, or other representative who receives the complaint or disclosure regarding suspected abuse must, as soon as possible, fully document the complaint including the time, place and witnesses to the incident.
2. Investigation:
  - a. The person complained against is to be stood down while the investigation takes place.
  - b. The investigation must not pre-determine guilt or innocence. The person complained against is entitled to a fair and just process.

- c. Allegations should not be discussed with other people until all issues have been considered and a decision made by the Founding Chair, or other person who is delegated to fulfill the task such as a Child Safeguarding and Protection Officer.
  - d. The family of the child should be informed of the allegation and the action proposed. They should be consulted where possible on the process to be followed.
3. Decision:
  - a. Following the investigation, the Founding Chair is to make a decision as to whether to terminate the tenure of the person complained against, whether to report the incident to law enforcement agencies (see below), whether further investigation is required or whether the findings of the investigation have satisfied the Founding Chair that the complaint is not founded.
  - b. The organisation will not retain any person in a role if the investigation shows that they pose an unacceptable risk to children.
  - c. The decision made should be documented and filed.
4. Reporting to law enforcement agencies:
  - a. If the incident is alleged to have occurred in Australia, the Chief Executive Officer may contact the police, depending on the nature of the incident, to investigate the allegation.
  - b. All allegations of actual physical or sexual assault as defined in this policy must be reported to the police (whether in resident or project country), whether or not the victim has consented to the matter being reported.
5. Confidentiality:
  - a. All cases of child abuse are to be handled with utmost care and confidentiality to protect the wellbeing of the child concerned. The name or identify of the child and his or her family must not be disclosed to any person outside the organisation and may only be documented in the confidential investigation report.
  - b. Investigation reports and decisions are to be marked confidential and are not to be released to any third party other than law enforcement agencies if required to assist with their investigations.

## **14.0 Communicating This Policy**

This policy is published on the organisation's website ([www.comdu.it](http://www.comdu.it)) and provided to all employees, volunteers, directors, consultants and other representatives, and local partners.

## **15.0 External: Legislative and Regulatory Framework**

- United Nations *Convention on the Rights of the Child* (1989).

## **Appendix – Child Protection Code of Conduct**

I, \_\_\_\_\_, acknowledge that I have read and understood comdu.it's Child Protection Policy and agree that in the course of my involvement with comdu.it, whether as employee, volunteer, director, or other representative, I must:

- Treat children with respect regardless of race, colour, gender, language, religions, political or other opinion, national, ethnic or social origin, property, disability, birth or other status.
- Not use language or behavior towards children that is inappropriate, harassing, abusive, sexually provocative, demeaning or culturally inappropriate.
- Not engage children under the age of 18 in any form of sexual intercourse or sexual activity, including paying for sexual services or act.
- Wherever possible, ensure that another adult is present when working in the proximity of children not invite unaccompanied children into my accommodation, unless they are at immediate risk of injury or in physical danger.
- Not sleep close to unsupervised children unless absolutely necessary.
- Use any computers, mobile phones, video cameras, cameras or social media appropriately and never to exploit or harass children or access child exploitation material through any medium.
- Not use physical punishment on children.
- Not hire children for domestic or other labour which is inappropriate given their age or developmental stage, which interferes with their time available for education and recreational activities, or which places them at significant risk of injury.
- Comply with all relevant resident and project country's legislation, including labour laws in relation to child labour.
- Immediately report concerns or allegations of child exploitation and abuse and policy non-compliance in accordance with appropriate procedures.
- Immediately disclose all charges, convictions and other outcomes of an offence, which occurred before or occurs during my association with comdu.it that relate to child exploitation and abuse.

When photographing or filming a child or using children's images for comdu.it, I must:

- Assess and endeavor to comply with local traditions or restrictions for reproducing personal images before photographing or filming a child.
- Obtain informed consent from the child and their parent/guardian before photographing or filming a child. As part of this I must explain how the photograph or film will be used.
- Ensure photographs and video footage present children in a dignified and respectful manner and not in a vulnerable or submissive manner. Children should be adequately clothed and not presented in any way that could be seen as sexually suggestive.
- Ensure images are honest representations of the context and the facts.
- Ensure file labels, meta data or text descriptions do not reveal identifying information about a child when sending images electronically or publishing images in any form.

**I understand that the onus is on me, as a person associated with comdu.it to use common sense and avoid actions or behaviours that could be construed as child exploitation and abuse.**

Signed: \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

## Document Control

<b>Last Reviewed</b>	<b>Prepared By</b>	<b>Reviewed By</b>	<b>Approved by</b>	<b>Next Review</b>
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