

Solidar Suisse Child Protection Policy

"Child Safeguarding is the responsibility that organisations have to make sure their staff, operations, and programmes do no harm to children, that is that they do not expose children to the risk of harm and abuse, and that any concerns the organisation has about children's safety within the communities in which they work, are reported to the appropriate authorities "

(Keeping Children Safe Coalition – www.keepingchildrensafe.org.uk)

This policy has been inspired by child protection policies from our long-standing partner organisation Group Development Pakistan <https://www.facebook.com/GroupDevelopmentPakistan/> as well as the child protection policy of Terre des hommes, a leading Swiss relief organisation (<https://www.tdh.ch/en/media-library/documents/child-safeguarding-policy>).

1. Purpose of the policy

This Child Protection Policy serves to ensure that all children who directly or indirectly come in contact with Solidar Suisse's activities are protected, that their well-being is promoted and that Solidar Suisse's actions do not cause any harm to children. The necessary measures will be implemented on three levels: at the Solidar Suisse' headquarters (HQ) in Zurich, within the Coordination Offices (COOFs) in focus countries but also in the framework of collaboration with partner organisations. The measures include both **preventative** actions to minimise the chances of harm occurring, and **responsive** actions to ensure that incidents which may happen are appropriately handled. **Safeguarding** implies a wider duty of care towards children rather than just upholding their right to protection (as defined in the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, 1989) – but it is primarily concerned with harm and wellbeing, rather than with the promotion and protection of child rights generally.

The organisation is guided by the **framework of international and national laws and policies** regarding human rights and safeguarding such as the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child and by the professional demands of best practice.

Solidar Suisse considers all forms of abuse towards children to be unacceptable, and recognises that it has a duty to safeguard children – that is to keep them safe, promote their wellbeing and protect them from abuse and harm. Neglect, physical, psychological/emotional and sexual violence are the main forms of abuse.

A child is any human under the age of 18 as stipulated by the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, 1989.

As part of our Child Protection Policy, it is a requirement that all staff (including paid employees, consultants and interns), whether full or part time, agree to abide by the Child Protection Policy and specifically to agree to work in accordance with the **Guidelines outlined in chapter 4** which sets out responsibilities for safeguarding children and expected behaviour of staff.

Any form of unacceptable behaviour which breaches the Guidelines must be reported. In the case of situations which are not covered by the Guidelines, Solidar Suisse expects its representatives to apply common sense whilst focusing on the “*child’s best interests*”.

The successful implementation of the Child Safeguarding Policy is based on the individual and shared responsibility of all Solidar Suisse representatives including staff. Solidar Suisse will seek to ensure that partner organisations’ programmes also comply with international child safeguarding standards.

2. Solidar’s key principles of child safeguarding

(Chapters 2 and 3 with courtesy Terre des hommes, <https://www.tdh.ch/en/media-library/documents/child-safeguarding-policy>)

1. **All children have equal rights to protection** and to have their wellbeing and participation promoted. All Solidar Suisse staff must respect and promote children’s rights. Above all, they must protect the right of each child to live in safety, without risk of abuse or exploitation and must act, at all times, in the child’s *best interests*.
2. The organisation rejects all forms of abuse and exploitation suffered by children, and seeks to ensure that throughout its work it commits to its policies, practices and procedures that are consistent with the best interests and the protection of the child at all times. Solidar Suisse will not tolerate any form of abuse and will take all necessary measures to implement the Child Safeguarding Policy. All actions regarding child safeguarding must be taken in the best interest of children. This includes an understanding that in all our programmes and activities we must ensure that we respect children’s rights and **do not cause harm**.
3. The organisation believes that its employees, and all those whom it may employ, or all those over whom it has any authority and influence, must demonstrate behavior that is not simply consistent with protocols and legislation, but also with an appropriate set of personal and professional standards. Everybody thus has a responsibility for safeguarding. **This policy is mandatory for all those who work for or on behalf of Solidar Suisse**, including staff, volunteers and partners. Although training, advice and support will be provided, everyone should actively participate so that they can carry out their responsibilities towards safeguarding children.
4. The organisation understands that the best protection for children is prevention and is committed to protecting children. It understands the nature and risks of child abuse and has an open and aware culture. We work in a **transparent and open way** where child safeguarding is made a priority, recognising that situations of abuse and harm are able to flourish when staff, volunteers, partners, children, families and community members do not feel able to raise their concerns.
5. Any suspected violation or any actual violation of the current Guidelines must be reported immediately to the supervisor or the Solidar Suisse Child Safeguarding Focal Point. Confidentiality will be maintained throughout the entire procedure. **All reports** of concern regarding the safety and protection of a child **will be taken seriously**. Where necessary, appropriate steps will be taken to protect the child and to take action against the alleged perpetrator. This may include referrals to law enforcement and child protection agencies. In relation to allegations against staff, volunteers and partners, action may also include the suspension or termination of engagement or any type of cooperation.
6. No single organisation is able to safeguard children by working in isolation, and therefore we will **work with other organisations, agencies** (such as state departments and ministries with a mandate to protect children) **and groups** as necessary and appropriate.

7. We maintain **confidentiality** and do not disclose personal details of those involved in child protection concerns, including the names of those raising concerns unless it is necessary to pass on information to ensure that a child is protected (for example where a child may need specialist services or where a criminal offence may have been committed).
8. We **raise awareness and influence others** on the importance of safeguarding children, using our policy and procedures as a way of both highlighting our commitment and also of explaining our values. We will share our policy and procedures with others, and be open to feedback regarding its application and relevance.
9. There is no one specific way of safeguarding children and promoting their rights. Solutions to protecting children need to reflect the culture and operating environment and the nature of activities being undertaken. However, culture can never be used as an excuse for abuse. While country delegations can propose amendments and modifications of the procedures, this must be done within the framework of requirements set down within this policy. It is not acceptable for a reduced level of safeguarding to be offered.

3. Ethic rules for communications including usage of child images

1. **Respect** the Child Safeguarding Policy and its procedure.
2. Make sure that the **safety of the child** will not be compromised if one disseminates images of his or her home, community or environment.
3. **Be accompanied** by an employee of Solidar Suisse while doing a report (video, photo, etc.).
4. **Obtain permission** from the child and the person who is responsible for looking after him or her.
5. Ensure that the child does not pose in any **inappropriate manner** (sexual connotations etc.).
6. Do not take or publish photos of children who are completely **naked or dressed inappropriately**. Images of children which are exploitative or offensive must not be used.
7. Always respect the children's dignity. Do not represent the children as **victims** (weak, desperate etc.). Images should present children in a 'positive way'. Similarly stories about children should aim to report not only the negative aspects of children's lives, but also their strengths rather than sensationalising the child's experience.
8. Taking pictures or videos is reserved for **strictly professional use**. Unofficial photographs must not be posted in social media sites or uploaded on personal pages.
9. Never indicate in the files any **information** that could endanger the child victim of abuse (title, metadata, captions etc.). When publishing/distributing photos, images, stories etc., personal information must be removed to ensure privacy (i.e. names and addresses must not be included and if necessary other identifying features such as school name should also be omitted).
10. Only use photos available for **public use** (verified and validated by an official country representative and the person in charge of visual communication).

4. Practical implementation of child protection in programmes and Guidelines

(Chapters 4 and 5 with courtesy Group Development Pakistan)

4.1 Obligations of Solidar staff

a) Valuing Children:

- Strive to understand children within the local context in which they live and, perhaps, work.
- Work with children in the spirit of cooperation and partnership based on mutual trust and respect.
- Work with children in ways that enhance their capacities and capabilities and develop their potential.
- Treat children positively, with respect, and recognize them as individuals with specific needs and rights.
- Value the views of children and take them seriously.
- Wait for physically appropriate physical contact such as holding hands, to be initiated by the child.

b. Avoiding Risks:

- Take care to be aware of situations (e.g. wartime, busy traffic in the vicinity, crowded area etc.) that may present risks and manage these.
- Plan and organize the work and the workplace so as to minimize risks to children.
- Ensure visibility to others when working with children whenever possible.
- Create and maintain a non-defensive attitude and an open culture in which to discuss any issues or concerns.
- Foster a culture of mutual accountability so that any potentially abusive behavior can be challenged.
- Develop a culture where children can talk about their contacts with staff and others openly and can raise issues and concerns.
- Respect each child's boundaries and help them be aware of their rights as well as helping them to know what they can do in difficult situations.
- Be aware of the power balance between an adult and child, and avoid taking any advantage this may provide.
- Be aware of the potential for peer pressure and avoid placing children in high-risk peer situations (e.g. unsupervised mixing of older and younger children).

4.2 Children's rights

Protecting Their Rights:

- Listen to and give careful consideration to the views of the children.
- Provide and encourage the maximum number of opportunities where children may participate in decision-making regarding them.
- Promote and safeguard the welfare and development of children so that they can achieve their full potential.
- Ensure that children play a role in their own development with health, safety, well-being and their best interest considered of paramount importance.
- Identify the needs of children and meet them within the context of a family wherever possible.

4.3 Protecting children

a. Appropriate Behavior:

- The organisation must empower children through the promotion and raising awareness of children's rights.
- Avoid situations where children are isolated or left in the company of a single employee in an area where they cannot be observed.
- Challenge poor practice and recognize potential pitfalls that might lead to child abuse.
- Ensure visibility, whenever possible, with children and apply the two adult rules or arrange a suitable alternative.
- Make children aware of acceptable and unacceptable behavior with others.
- Discuss openly with children about their contacts and relationships with the organisation's staff.
- Discuss issues of concern with children and explain how to raise concerns
- Identify and avoid compromising and/or vulnerable situations which might lead to accusations.
- Ensure that when making images of children (photos, videos, etc.) that they are respectful and children are adequately clothed and are not posing in sexually suggestive ways.
- Remember that someone else may misinterpret your actions, no matter how well intentioned.

b. Inappropriate Behavior:

- Do not spend excessive time alone with children away from others unless directed to do so by a health and safety specialist (psychologist, doctor, physiotherapist etc.) or a senior officer.
- Do not take children to a private residence other than their own for any period of time (especially when they will be alone with you) and never sleep in the same room as a child you are working with.
- Never hit or otherwise physically assault or physically abuse children.
- Do not develop relationships (i.e. physical/sexual relations, employing a child etc.) with children that could in any way be deemed exploitative or abusive.
- Never act in ways that might be abusive or may place a child at risk of abuse.
- Never do things of a personal nature that they can do for themselves (i.e. change their clothes, shower them etc.)
- Never condone, or participate in, behavior of children that is illegal, unsafe or abusive (i.e. acting in ways intended to shame, humiliate, belittle or degrade children).
- Never discriminate against, show different treatment, or favor particular children to the exclusion of others.
- Do not use language, make suggestions, offer advice or behave physically, in a manner that is inappropriate, offensive, abusive or sexually provocative.
- Avoid being drawn into attention-seeking behavior, such as tantrums and crushes.
- Do not allow children to engage in sexually provocative games with each other.
- Do not trivialize or exaggerate child abuse and neglect issues.
- Do not rely on just the organisation's good name to protect you.
- Do not believe that something dangerous could never happen to you, always be prepared.

5. Reporting child protection incidents

Any incident concerning violation of this policy and its guidelines must be reported.

Annex 1 describes reporting and referral requirements, depending on cause and perpetrator. Solidar Suisse. All concerns raised, whether from internal or external sources, will be taken seriously.

6. Dealing with allegations and sanctions

In the case of **allegations against employees**, the following steps are taken:

- If a disclosure of abuse takes place in which the alleged abuser is a member of the organisation's staff, or the incident has taken place on the organisation's premises or in connection with the organisation's activities, the organisation will inform the statutory authorities. If a suspicion is expressed, the organisation will undertake a risk assessment and then take appropriate action, which may involve contacting statutory authorities.
- If a member of staff is the subject of an allegation of child abuse, that staff member will be asked to take leave from his/her duties on full pay until an investigation has been completed. It should be made clear that suspension does not imply guilt, but rather protects all parties whilst an investigation is undertaken.
- If an allegation of child abuse is made involving a member of the organisation's staff, this allegation, together with a record of the investigation undertaken and the outcome, will be recorded in their personnel files. Confidentiality regarding these records will be scrupulously maintained and information will only be released to the Supervisor of the staff member concerned or to those in positions of authority externally who have reason to need it for the protection of children.

In the case of **allegations against the organisation**, the procedure is different:

- If an incident of child abuse takes place in connection with the organisation or any of the organisation's activities, the organisation undertakes to provide support for the alleged victims and the alleged abuser whilst an investigation is carried out. The organisation will also seek to ensure that any continuing support needed after a situation has been resolved is made available.
- If a member of the organisation's staff or anyone closely associated with the organisation's work, in some recognizable capacity, is found to have committed acts in relation to children which are criminal or which contravene in a serious way the principles and standards set out in this policy, the organisation will take disciplinary action and/or any other action which may be appropriate to the circumstances.

7. In-house organisation

One staff permanently serves as child protection focal point. She/he reports all cases of suspicion or actual incidents to the head of international programmes.

8. Annex:

Annex 1: Flowchart for managing cases of child abuse (next page)

Annex : Decision-making flowchart

