

INTERNATIONAL NEEDS AUSTRALIA

Board of Directors Policy

Title: 3.13 Policy on Child Protection

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INA's Child Protection Policy and Procedures must be reviewed no later than 26th April 2026

Policy

International Needs Australia (INA) is committed to protecting the rights of children, safeguarding the welfare of children, and adopting a zero-tolerance approach to child exploitation or abuse. INA is committed to abiding by all contractual, implementing, and monitoring compliance requirements and obligations as stipulated in DFAT's Child Protection Policy at all levels of INA's organisation and inclusive at all levels of INA's partner organisations.

The policy is further supported and implemented through the processes, policies, and procedures outlined in the INA Program Procedures Manual.

Scope

This Child Protection Policy applies to Board members, staff, consultants, contractors, volunteers, donors, guests, and representatives of INA (from here on, referred to in this policy as 'all parties'). INA's partners must have Child Protection Policies that align and comply with this policy. This policy always applies across all jurisdictions and is not limited to work activities.

Section 1. Purpose

1.1 Introduction

INA believes that child protection is both a corporate and an individual responsibility. Every person who is engaged and performs any activity on behalf of INA must ensure they are aware of their duties and obligations to prevent, detect, and report child abuse and exploitation and share the responsibility and duty of care to protect the children and families we serve.

The purpose of this policy is to protect children from any form of exploitation, including sexual, physical, or emotional abuse. This policy aims to create and maintain protective environments for children in the delivery of all INA's activities, including its community education and overseas aid programs. INA requires all parties to actively participate in building and maintaining a safe environment for children. Every individual or organisation that works with children under an INA-

funded activity has an obligation to protect children from exploitation and abuse. All partners implementing INA-funded activities must have, maintain, and monitor the implementation of a Child Protection Policy compliant with this INA's policy.

1.2 Legal Framework

INA has a duty of care to ensure the safety of children involved and impacted in our work. Children have the right to be protected from abuse, and there are laws in most countries to protect children and bring child abusers to justice. While in certain countries in which INA and its partners work, the judicial system may be considered under-resourced in acting promptly on charges, this should not deter all parties (or partner personnel) from adhering to the Child Protection Policy.

The policy aims to prevent child abuse of all children that come into contact with INA's personnel or partner organisations program personnel and to prevent any perpetrators from accessing children associated with INA's programs and INA's partner programs.

Moreover, INA upholds the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (1989), in particular Article 19, which states, '*State Parties shall protect the child [1] from all forms of physical and mental violence, injury or abuse, neglect, maltreatment or exploitation, including sexual abuse*'.

In accordance with the Convention on the Rights of the Child, a child is defined for the purposes of this policy as a human being below the age of 18 years unless, under the law applicable to the child, the majority is attained earlier.

As a signatory to the ACFID Code of Conduct and a non-government organisation with full DFAT accreditation, INA also takes seriously the requirement that we have appropriate policies and procedures to promote the safety and wellbeing of all children accessing or associated with our services and programs.

INA adheres to all relevant laws and legislation in both Australia and foreign countries regarding child exploitation. This includes *Division 272 of the Criminal Code (Cth)*, which focuses on child sex offenses committed outside of Australia by Australian citizens and permanent residents, ranging from possessing child pornography and child abuse material to engaging in sexual activity with children under the age of 16. It is also an offense to encourage or benefit from these types of offenses or do an act preparatory to committing a child sex tourism offense.

1.3 Defining Abuse

Abuse of children involves many different forms of ill-treatment. The term 'abuse' does not exclusively comprise sexual abuse but any form of physical or emotional abuse, including neglect.

In this context:

- *Sexual abuse* signifies forcing or enticing a child to take part in or have any form of association with/exposure to sexual activities, whether or not the child is aware of what is happening.
- *Physical abuse* means a deliberate bodily injury or the wilful or neglectful failure to prevent bodily injury or suffering.
- *Emotional abuse* can be defined as the persistent emotional ill-treatment of a child, thus causing adverse effects on the child's emotional development.
- *Neglect* refers to the persistent failure to meet a child's physical and/or psychological needs, likely to result in harm to a child's health and development.

INA has therefore adopted the following definition drafted by the World Health Organisation (WHO) Consultation on Child Abuse Prevention:

"Child abuse or maltreatment constitutes all forms of physical and/or emotional ill-treatment, sexual abuse, neglect or negligent treatment or commercial or other exploitation, resulting in actual or potential harm to the child's health, survival, development or dignity in the context of a relationship of responsibility, trust or power."
(WHO, 1999)

Section 2: Commitment and Code of Conduct

2.1 Commitment

Any form of abuse or neglect causes harm to the child's physical and mental health, survival, development, or dignity. INA affirms its commitment to oppose all forms of child abuse and to continuously strengthen our child protection processes to mitigate the risk of abuse within our programs.

INA commits to:

- Continuously develop, implement, and review guidelines and practices that support the protection of children.
- Network with partners and other Non-Government Organisations to increase awareness and support for the protection of children.
- Screen and provide orientation information to all individuals and groups visiting projects funded by INA, including all parties.
- Advocate for the protection of children from all forms of exploitation, especially sexual exploitation.
- Be vigilant in protecting confidential information about children and their families in INA-funded projects and preventing unauthorised direct contact with children.
- Share responsibility for child protection with implementing partners.
- Employ a zero-tolerance approach to child exploitation and abuse.
- Recognise the best interests of the child.

- Implement risk assessment frameworks at both organisational and project levels which include consideration of Child Protection risks and plans to mitigate these.
- Demonstrate our responsibility to and respect for children by using appropriate language and being sensitive in our communications that involve them.
- When photographing or filming a child or using children's images for work-related purposes, always seek written consent from the parents or guardians.
- Ensure thorough recruitment and screening processes, which include criminal record and 'Working with Children' Checks, and verbal referee checks, prior to the engagement of all staff and volunteers who may be in contact with children through INA.
- Have a documented internal procedure for handling complaints and reports related to child exploitation and abuse, including notification to relevant law enforcement agencies as appropriate.
- Ensure Child Protection training and yearly refresher training for relevant personnel, particularly upon induction and prior to overseas visits.
- Not permit a person to work with or visit children if they pose an unacceptable risk to children's safety or wellbeing.
- No abuse of alcohol, drugs, or other substances in the presence of children.
- Include a provision in all employment contracts that INA reserves the right to dismiss the team member or volunteer should he/she breach INA's Child Protection Code of Conduct.
- Apply Child Protection Policy and Procedures equally in all situations, whether emergency or development.
- Monitor internal and external compliance with this policy.

2.2 Code of Conduct

The INA Child Protection Code of Conduct is one of the core elements of our policy to protect children and applies to interaction with all people under the age of 18 years. The Child Protection Code of Conduct clearly defines the standards, rights, and responsibilities of all stakeholders.

INA's Child Protection Code of Conduct follows a threefold approach to protecting:

1. Children from abuse
2. INA staff, volunteers, Board members, supporters, and representatives against false allegations and
3. INA against falling victim to infiltration.

Consequently, the Child Protection Code of Conduct states those behaviours which are acceptable and those which are not when working or associating with children. All INA staff members, contractors, Board members, regular volunteers, field visitors, and partners implementing INA-funded activities must sign the Child Protection Code of Conduct (or a suitable local equivalent).

Section 3: Ethical Principles

- All parties are obligated to report any suspected or alleged breaches of the CPCC, either in Australia or overseas, to the CEO or Board Chair.
- The dignity and rights of every child are to be respected in every circumstance.
- In interviewing and reporting on children, special attention is paid to each child's right to privacy and confidentiality, to have their opinions heard, to participate in decisions affecting them, and to be protected from harm and retribution, including the potential of harm and retribution.
- The best interests of each child are to be protected over any other consideration, including cultural practices, advocacy for children's issues, and the promotion of child rights.
- Special needs of certain children will be supported, including e.g. indigenous children, stigmatised children, children with disability, etc., but the child's rights will be prioritized.

Section 4: Reporting

The following requirements apply in relation to the reporting of suspected abuse or a suspected breach of the Child Protection Code of Conduct:

1. All parties and implementing partners are required to immediately notify INA's Chief Executive Officer if any person working on, volunteering on, or visiting INA-funded activities is accused/suspected of, charged with, arrested for, or convicted of criminal offenses relating to child exploitation and abuse. This can be done verbally or in writing to the INA Chief Executive Officer. All parties are responsible for complying with laws and legislation regarding mandatory reporting requirements, including the Victorian Child Safe Standards, in areas where we work.
2. The INA Board authorises the INA Chief Executive Officer to receive such reports. The INA Chief Executive Officer must notify the Board of all allegations of child abuse within 24 hours of receipt. In the event that the allegation relates to the INA Chief Executive Officer, the Chair of the Board of INA shall be the person immediately notified.
3. All parties and implementing partners are required to immediately notify the relevant partner Chief Executive Officer if any partner personnel/ /volunteer/visitor working on or visiting the partner organisation's activities is accused/suspected of, charged with, arrested for, or convicted of criminal offenses relating to child exploitation and abuse. Other partner organisation donors, supporters, and visitors are encouraged to follow similar protocols. In the event that the allegation relates to the partner organisation Chief Executive Officer, the Chair of the Board of the partner organisation shall be the person immediately notified.

4. If the report is made in relation to a DFAT-funded project, the CEO or an appointed INA staff member must immediately notify DFAT by contacting childwelfare@dfat.gov.au.
5. Any person making such a report should NOT:
 - Notify the person to whom the claim or allegation relates.
 - Seek to independently investigate or substantiate the claim prior to making any notification. The emphasis is on immediate and mandatory reporting.
6. The responsibility to follow up on the report and to liaise with relevant investigating authorities rests with the INA CEO (where the accused is sent from or associated with INA) or the partner CEO (where the accused is not transmitted from or associated with INA). Alternatively, such responsibility lies with the Chair of the INA Board or the partner organisation, as the case may be.

Cross references

- [1] United Nations Convention of the Rights of the Child, adopted November 1989, entry into force September 1990 and amended and entered into force November 2002
- Policy 3.10 Policy on Visits to Sponsored Children/Projects
- Policy 3.18 Policy on Prevention of Sexual Exploitation, Abuse & Harassment
- INA Program Procedures Manual