



Institutional Policy

Child protection policy

Federal Executive Division
2007



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Disabled children have the same rights as all children. However, they can be all the most vulnerable because they are often invisible, isolated, discriminated against and abused in a variety of ways. They lack power, respect and life prospects all over the world.

Handicap International promotes the rights of disabled children to develop their potential, get an education, have a say, and take part in mainstream society. Handicap International believes that disabled children have the rights to protection, to live and prosper in their own family and community.

Everyone working with children has a basic duty of attention toward them. Handicap International, its staff and its partners must recognize the risks to children and the responsibilities to keep them safe. If children are to be protected from abuse and exploitation Handicap International, its staff and its partners must conduct themselves with the highest levels of professionalism and integrity at all times.

The present policy aims at protecting children from intentional and non intentional harm or abuse. It applies both to Handicap international, as an organization, and individuals (local and expatriates) associated with Handicap International towards children in their care. Handicap International will also pay a specific attention to the conduct of its partners regarding child dignity.

Broader child protection concerns outside the organization should be dealt with through programme and project activities.

1.

Policy statement: preventing abuses

1.1

General principles

At Handicap International we are committed to a set of principles that derive from the UN Convention on the Rights of a Child:

- All children have equal rights to protection from abuse and exploitation.
- Everyone has a responsibility to support the care and protection of children.
- Organisations have a duty of attention to children they and their representatives work close to. They have to do their best to provide the children receive the care and support they need.
- Children are actors in their own protection and development, which does not exempt parents and educators from their responsibilities.

Handicap International is committed to the rights of children and will not tolerate or accept any form of child abuse. Our Internal regulations state that:

“The employee must show respect and consideration towards his/her contacts (beneficiaries, partners, colleagues...), with particular attention for people in vulnerable situations. In no circumstances should he/she commit an act or adopt behaviour liable to injure one of his/her contacts either physically or psychologically, or cause him/her harm of any sort.

The employee should respect and promote respect for the fundamental principles contained in:

- *the international conventions concerning child labour, prostitution and people trafficking, and also the traffic of drugs or psychotropic substances [...];*
- *the child protection policy implemented by the association, including in particular that owning or consulting child pornographic materials is strictly forbidden.*

If he/she observes any breach in these principles or behavior liable to contribute towards any of the crimes cited above, he/she should inform the Field Program Director/ Head of Mission immediately so that appropriate sanctions may be applied.

As an employee of a humanitarian organisation, he/she is also required to guard against any abuse of authority. In no circumstances should he/she profit from his/her situation in order to divert assistance from its final destination or obtain favors of any nature (notably sexual).”

Handicap International encourages the creation of dedicated spaces to allow children in the program to raise issues regarding their safety.



1.2

Awareness

Handicap International is committed to raising awareness amongst its staff and its partners so they understand the principles, policy, reporting, and monitoring framework of the Child Protection Policy.

Staff at Handicap International are informed about the Child Protection Policy and if there is a breach of policy, staff are aware of the disciplinary procedures that would follow.

Staff at Handicap International are informed that owning or consulting child pornographic materials is strictly forbidden.

Staff at Handicap International are informed about the UN Convention of the Rights of the Child and this forms the basis for our staff policy regarding the issue of child protection.

Staff at Handicap International are informed that gender sensitiveness is essential when addressing child protection issue.

Staff at Handicap International are aware that all disabled children have equal rights to be treated with dignity, respect, sensitivity and fairness.

Staff are also aware that community programs strongly emphasize the commitment we make to ensuring all disabled children attend school, that they are not forced into child labor and that they have an opportunity to be heard.

Handicap International ensures that its implementing partners are informed about that policy.

1.3

Prevention

To minimize the risks to children, Handicap International is committed to include in all awareness raising programs, including communication towards partners, regular discussion on preventive measures with a specific attention to disabled children because of their vulnerable situation.

1.4

Reporting

Handicap International is committed to ensuring staff are clear about the reporting procedures included in this document.

1.5

Responding

Handicap International is committed to ensuring correct actions are taken to support and protect children in accordance with this policy.

1.6

Definitions of child abuse and neglect

Child abuse is a general term and made up of all forms of physical and or/emotional ill treatment, sexual assault, neglect or negligent treatment or 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.

Physical abuse

The actual or likely physical injury to a child, or failure to prevent physical injury or suffering to a child. This may include, burning, hitting, punching, shaking, kicking, or beating a child. The worker may not have intended to hurt the child, however the injury is not an accident. It may have been the result of over-discipline or physical punishment that is inappropriate to the child's age.

Emotional abuse

Also known as: verbal abuse, mental abuse, discrimination, forlornness and psychological maltreatment. This refers to the actual or likely adverse effect on the emotional and behavioral development of children caused by persistent or severe emotional ill treatment or rejection. This can include health providers/ rehabilitation workers using extreme and or bizarre forms of punishment, such as confinement in a dark room



or being tied to a chair for long periods of time or threatening or terrorizing a child or the tremendous promises beyond capacity. Less severe behavior, but just as harmful is mocking, using insulting names for a child, or blaming.

Sexual abuse

This refers to inappropriate sexual behavior between a child and an adult who is in a relationship of responsibility, trust or power. It includes fondling a child's genitals, making the child fondle the adult's genitals, intercourse, rape, sodomy, exhibitionism, sexual exploitation, child prostitution and pornography.

Child labor

Child labor includes full-time work done by children under 15 years of age that prevents them from going to school (getting an education), or that is dangerous to their health (*International Labor Organization, Convention 138*). Child labor is permitted from 15 years old, except for activities that could in any way undermine health or morals of the child. Handicap International will be very cautious concerning this limit of age, and, in full respect of national legislations, will nevertheless urge its staff to contract with people over 18.

Child work

Children's participation in economic activity - that does not negatively affect their health and development or interfere with education. No economic activity is allowed for children under 12 (*International Labor Organization, Convention 138*).

2.

Provisions

2.1

Recruitment, selection, induction

All new staff employed on a permanent/part time/temporary contract at Handicap International will be made aware of this policy during the briefing/training period, and/or at any other appropriate occasion. Internal regulations of Handicap international contain a statement concerning their respect of children's rights to protection from abuse.

The job contract will contain a clause requiring the staff member to agree not to get involved in any form of child abuse and to protect children from abuse throughout the course of their work.

inform the headquarters, in order the issue is addressed. If the staff member's immediate manager is undertaking the abuse, the staff member must take their concerns to the Field Program Director/Head of Mission (or the Desk Officer if the Field Program Director/Head of Mission is undertaking the abuse).

- The accused can be immediately suspended to allow time for an investigation and decisions on appropriate actions. Following investigations, a written statement concerning the decisions and a justification will be issued by the Field Program Director/Head of Mission to the accused. According to the gravity of the offence, the staff member will be punished by: warning followed by professional counseling; or strong written statement followed by a period of close supervision; or dismissal. In the most serious cases, the Executive Director's Office will set up a sanction commission devoted to determine the appropriate sanction and possibly explore the relevant possibility of seeking the advice of any relevant person or specialized organization.
- Handicap International will not, in any way, obstruct legislation, and will join forces to ensure a fair process in case one of its staff, whether local or international, would be accused.

2.2

Procedure in case of breach of the policy

When concerns or an allegation of abuse or neglect are raised by a child, parents, family members, caregivers, staff, volunteers or consultants, the following procedure is required.

- The staff member who initially was made aware of the abuse must report this directly to its immediate manager/team leader/supervisor. This immediate supervisor will then discuss with the Field Program Director/Head of Mission who will

- Any intentional false accusation made against a staff member to damage her/his reputation will be subject to investigation and disciplinary action.

2.3

Confidentiality

In all matters relating to this policy, it is essential to respect the duty of confidentiality. This means no information offered by children and/or other individuals about any form of child abuse should be made public without their prior approval and only through the Field Program Director/Head of Mission.

At all times we will ensure that the children (and their families) are kept fully informed of the process involved for managing this incident and the outcomes.

Concerns, allegations or disclosure will be recorded in writing. Recordings will be as precise as possible, giving an exact account of what happened, how it happened etc. This will also include the sequence of events and all subsequent actions taken. All records will be securely locked and access will be restricted by the Field Program Director/Head of Mission, under the control of the Headquarters (Desk officer and Human Resources Division). At all times the transfer

of information (either verbally or electronically) must be done in such a way that confidentiality is maintained.

In case the allegation regards a staff from another organization, Handicap International Field Program Director/Head of Mission will decide how to raise the issue with the organization involved before considering reporting to a third part.

2.4

Relations with partners

Handicap International will not contract in any partnership with organizations which staff or members may commit abuses on children, as described in § 1.6. Established information revealing such practices would lead Handicap International to interrupt the partnership unless a radical change in behavior is ensured and recorded.

3.

Monitoring

Policy and practices are monitored permanently.

The Field Program Director/Head of Mission is responsible for information about policy and practice, and for monitoring all matters relating to abuse within the organization and reporting to the Headquarters (Desk officer and Human Resources Division).





In the same collection

- **IP:** Mission, scope of activity, principles of intervention, charter and visual identity
- **IP 02:** Gender Policy (2007)
- **IP 03:** Protection of beneficiaries from sexual exploitation and abuse (2011)
- **IP 04:** Policy and mechanisms for the prevention of, and fight against, bribery (2012)
- **IP 05:** Tackling the risk: Safety and Security Policy (2012)

Photo credits

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This paper presents Handicap International's approach to child protection. It provides a policy framework and defines prevention and response mechanisms.

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