



Child Safeguarding Policy

April 2021

1. Purpose

Concern's Vision Statement is of "a world where no-one lives in poverty, fear or oppression; where all have access to a decent standard of living and the opportunities and choices essential to a long, healthy and creative life; a world where everyone is treated with dignity and respect".

To achieve this vision, and our mission "to help people living in extreme poverty achieve major improvements in their lives which last and spread without ongoing support from Concern", actions to safeguard the wellbeing of men, women, boys and girls and prevent harm, abuse or exploitation, irrespective of ability, ethnicity, faith, gender, sexuality or culture are essential. Concern acknowledges that certain groups, such as children (individuals under 18 years of age) and women are at greater risk of abuse, harassment, and physical or sexual violence. Concern believes that children deserve particular protection given their potential vulnerability to specific risks. Children have strengths, capabilities and resilience, but their age, developmental stage, level of dependency, status, and lack of power and position in communities, mean that they are more susceptible to violence, abuse and exploitation. Some groups of children, e.g. those with disabilities, may be even more vulnerable.

The safeguarding of children is a key element of the Concern Code of Conduct and its associated policies²³, and this policy must be read and understood in conjunction with those documents and seen within the existing organisational policy framework that includes those documents, HR policies and manuals, and the Equality Policy. It seeks to ensure that Concern staff and programmes integrate robust mechanisms to prevent and mitigate the risk of harm to and abuse of children. It also seeks to ensure that any issues in relation to the safeguarding of children are reported and managed in an appropriate manner. Upon recruitment, all staff must agree to adhere to the organisational policy framework and procedures on safeguarding programme participants, including this policy.²⁴

2. Definitions

While all relevant definitions related to safeguarding programme participants can be found in **Annex 1**, the key definitions applicable in relation to child safeguarding are as follows:

Children: Concern defines a child as anyone under the age of 18 years, regardless of local custom, or the age of majority or consent locally.

²³ The Programme Participant Protection Policy, the Child Safeguarding Policy and the Anti-Trafficking in Persons Policy – all from April 2021.

²⁴ In relation to screening of staff, referees of candidates that may be working directly with children will be asked questions directly relating to their suitability in relation to child safeguarding standards, and all appropriate checks will be carried out to ensure suitability and compliance with the relevant standards.

Child Abuse: ‘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’²⁵. The definition highlights five subtypes of maltreatment: physical abuse, emotional abuse, neglect, sexual abuse and commercial or other exploitation of a child.

In all aspects of our work, Concern seeks to promote the key principles of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, specifically:

- guaranteeing, without any form of discrimination, the rights of children
- considering the best interests of children in all actions relating to them
- recognising the right to life, survival and development of each child
- reflecting children’s views in matters affecting them

3. Scope

As with the Concern Code of Conduct and its associated policies, this policy applies to **all Concern staff** and to those working for and on behalf of Concern, including:

- staff of Concern’s partner organisations and anyone working on their behalf, such as consultants, contractors, volunteers, interns, or any person actively involved in Concern’s programmes
- people engaged by Concern such as consultants, contractors, volunteers, interns, or any person actively involved in Concern’s programmes
- visitors to Concern’s offices or programmes and accompanying dependants of international staff²⁶

4. Organisational commitments

The prevention of and response to the risk of harm, exploitation and abuse of children, either directly or indirectly, require a variety of measures²⁷ to be implemented by different functions across the organisation, including exercising caution with regard to the use of images and identifying information that could lead to increased harm to children.²⁸ Ultimately, these combined measures should lead to:

- a better **understanding** of the risks facing children and the mitigating actions that should be taken to address these
- the necessary staff **behaviour**, knowledge and skills required to protect children
- **actions** in all aspects of the programme cycle being designed and delivered in a way that ensures that the best interests of children are being considered
- communities being **aware of relevant safeguarding policies** and **knowing how to complain** in the event of any infringement of them
- the establishment of a safe **system** of reporting and management in the event of child safeguarding issues being raised

²⁵ <http://www.who.int/mediacentre/factsheets/fs150/en/>.

²⁶ In the event of an allegation of a breach of this policy by an accompanying dependant of an international staff member, the allegation will be investigated and the country programme management team, in consultation with the Regional Director and the HR Director, may take action up to and including the removal of accompanied status in relation to that individual, and the referral of the matter to the national authorities. Those employed or engaged by international staff to work in a Concern house (cook, housekeeper, gardener, etc.) or to work for the international staff member or his/her accompanying dependants (translator, driver, teacher, etc.) are also protected by this policy, despite the fact that they are not Concern staff. Concern staff are responsible for informing anyone they employ about the content of the Concern Code of Conduct and its associated policies.

²⁷ These measures are outlined in the accompanying annex on roles and responsibilities within Concern Worldwide.

²⁸ In relation to the use of images of children, parental or caregiver consent is required, and gathering identifying information about children is particularly sensitive (i.e. it is imperative that a child cannot be located using information associated with an image). For detailed guidance, see the [Illustrative Guide to the Dóchas Code of Conduct on Images and Messages](#), especially Section 6 on Child Protection.

5. The duty to report

This policy specifically outlines Concern's position on child safeguarding, but should be considered in conjunction with the Concern Code of Conduct and its associated policies. **It is the responsibility of all senior management at field and head office levels to ensure that all Concern staff, personnel from partner agencies, consultants, contractors, beneficiaries, and visitors to Concern programmes are acquainted with and agree to adhere to the requirements of this policy.**

Each country programme team must ensure that they are meeting all necessary legal requirements of the country in which they operate in relation to child safeguarding. All concerns related to the welfare of a child, or information about an incident or suspected incident of abuse of children involving staff from Concern or a partner organisation should be reported in accordance with the reporting requirements and procedures in force in that country. In conjunction with the Concern Code of Conduct and its associated policies, each country programme team must ensure that all staff are aware of the identity of the safeguarding focal point and relevant internal reporting procedures and external referral pathways.

The reporting of a concern may result in a confidential, thorough and prompt investigation. Such investigations may reduce the level of concern or lead to the realisation that further action is necessary. People reporting possible violations and/or involved in such investigations – including the subject of the complaint – must be protected against any form of intimidation, threats, reprisal or retaliation resulting from the alleged incident.

Any intentionally false, malicious or vexatious statement, misrepresentation or accusation against another staff member or third party will be considered gross misconduct and will result in disciplinary action up to and including dismissal.

6. Consequences of misconduct

If acts have been committed in relation to our programme participants that are criminal, infringe individual's rights, or contravene the principles contained in this statement or the Concern Code of Conduct and its associated policies, **Concern will take immediate action appropriate to the circumstances and will address the support needs of those involved.** In the event of an allegation that involves a criminal offence, the subject of complaint should be informed that, in addition to disciplinary action, the investigation may be reported to the appropriate legal authorities for further investigation. Disciplinary action may include the following measures for different individuals:

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| <i>Staff or those working for or on behalf of Concern</i> | disciplinary action up to and including dismissal |
| <i>Volunteers</i> | action up to and including termination of appointment |
| <i>Staff of partner organisations, or those working for or on behalf of these organisations</i> | action up to and including the withdrawal of funding or support and/or the termination of partnership agreements |
| <i>Contractors/Consultants</i> | termination of contract |
| <i>Visitors to Concern</i> | appropriate action up to and including suspension of support for the visit |

Any action taken will be **in accordance with Concern's policies and procedures and informed by national legislation.** Depending on the nature and circumstances of the case, Concern will involve the appropriate authorities, including the Charity Commissioners, to ensure the protection of all programme participants and the transparency of our safeguarding processes.