

CHILD PROTECTION



POLICY FRAMEWORK

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The care of children as the most vulnerable people in any society has always been at the heart of Caritas work. We now wish to make that concern into a policy that protects children in our care. This policy is the result of a consultation with regional Caritas representatives, expert advisors and staff of the General Secretariat of Caritas Internationalis. The aim of the consultation was to seek ways to better protect our beneficiaries, especially children and young adults, and to give greater emphasis and commitment to the issue of protection. This policy was approved by the Executive Committee of Caritas Internationalis in November of 2003.

This policy will be used wherever Caritas members work together as a confederation, especially in our new mechanisms deployed in major emergencies. We highly recommend it to all 162 member organisations throughout the world as a minimum standard that can be adapted to local circumstances.

Duncan MacLaren
Secretary General
Vatican City, 2004
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INTRODUCTION

This document informs members of the minimum requirements for individual Child Protection policies of Caritas members as well as the steps to follow:

- Commitment to Caritas core values
- Code of conduct
- Definition of abuse

It also provides members with useful models:

- Steps for dealing with disclosures
- “What if?” – Reporting procedures and steps to follow in case of a problem
- Sample reporting form
- Simple *Dos* and *Don'ts*



Steps for Caritas Members

Caritas Internationals' vision and core values reflect a commitment to the rights and dignity of every human being, therefore the protection of children is a priority for all involved in the Caritas mission.

Any form of sexual or gender based violence or abuse constitutes a violation of the fundamental values of Caritas Internationals. Caritas members are urged to:

- Positively reaffirm their commitment to the values that guide and inspire the Caritas Confederation and accord a high priority to child protection.
- Adopt a code of conduct and ensure that all staff are fully aware of it and the sanctions for failing to respect it. Incorporate the code of conduct into recruitment, orientation and periodic special training programmes. Require staff to sign statements that they will abide by the code of conduct, stating clear disciplinary procedures and appropriate sanctions for any misconduct (*Annex 1*).
- Set in place, implement and regularly monitor procedures to protect children and young people, including recruitment practice, staff training and management responsibilities. This document provides basic minimum standards for those procedures.
- Complete as soon as possible reviews of policies, job descriptions, procedures, and training and assistance programmes to identify gaps and weaknesses that should be addressed to ensure the protection of children from sexual exploitation and abuse.
- Strengthen accountability mechanisms - including supervision, reporting, and disciplinary action - with a view to protecting the rights and confidentiality of both alleged victims and the accused, bringing justice and closure to incidents of exploitation.
- Create monitoring mechanisms to determine whether abuses are occurring, even in the absence of complaints.
- Communicate clearly to employees and beneficiaries the channels of reporting and the consequences of misconduct, as well as the consequences of complicity in and failure to report misconduct.
- Increase the access to and confidentiality of complaint mechanisms so that children are more likely to seek help when they feel at risk or have been exploited.
- Foster an environment of respect, trust and accountability so that children feel comfortable talking about their problems, employees respect children's boundaries, and adults and children are willing to challenge exploitative or abusive behaviour at an early stage.
- Increase the number of female staff members in field situations, particularly in activities that affect women and children, such as food distribution, health care, counselling, skills training and income-generating programmes.
- Increase the participation of women and children in the design and implementation of programmes affecting their rights and well-being, to ensure that assistance responds to their needs and that they are fully aware of services and recourse available to them.

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Recruitment Procedures

- All Caritas staff and volunteers should be familiar with and sign a written agreement to follow the Caritas Code of Conduct.
- All Caritas staff and volunteers should have clear job descriptions and roles, and clear management structures should be in place.
- Prior experience of working with children or young people should be explored during recruitment procedures for all applicants for positions within the Caritas Confederation, especially those that involve direct contact with young people (these positions may be referred to as 'identified posts').
- Where rapid recruitment is required and recruitment agencies employed, selection procedures of such agencies should be investigated.

How Caritas Will Act

If a member of staff is the subject of an allegation of child abuse and/or abuse of humanitarian aid, that staff member will be asked to take leave from their duties on full pay until an investigation has been completed.

It should be made clear that such suspension does not imply guilt, but rather protects all parties whilst an investigation is undertaken.

No action will be taken against staff or volunteers who report in good faith information indicating perceived misconduct.

Where it is established that abuse has taken place, the guilty party will be dismissed from their post immediately and the matter handed over to the police and social services.

Where it is established that abuse has not occurred, steps will be taken to sensitively reinstate the staff member without delay.

Dealing with Disclosures

Caritas recognises that disclosures (i.e., when a specific allegation of abuse is made against a named individual) and suspicions (i.e., when concern is expressed about abuse that may have taken place or be in prospect) should always be investigated and acted upon swiftly, making the welfare of children the paramount consideration (*Annex 2*).

Any information offered in confidence should be received on the basis that it will be shared with relevant people in authority: this might include a Caritas senior employee and/or, if appropriate, child protection personnel in statutory agencies. Parents or caregivers will also be informed if appropriate. Apart from this, confidentiality should be carefully observed.



If any member of staff or volunteer suspects abuse, or if a child or young person makes a disclosure, the following steps should be taken immediately:

- Report this to the designated senior manager
- Contact the appropriate social services department or police station

If a child or young person tells you they are being, or have been, abused:

- Accept what the child or young person says
- Take the alleged abuse seriously
- Reassure the child or young person that they have done the right thing by telling you
- Let them know you need to tell someone else. Do not promise total confidentiality
- Let the child or young person speak freely but do not press for information
- Let the child or young person know what you are going to do next and that you will let them know what happens
- Record carefully what you have heard while it is still fresh in your mind. Include the date and time of your conversation and any incident disclosed

Developing Child Protection Policies

The attached Core Statement (*Annex 3*) and Code of Conduct samples are for use in individual members' contexts, and provide information regarding the definition of abuse, and examples of good practice.

For the purposes of any policy, Caritas regards children and young people as those who are under the age of 18.

Ensuring Awareness and Prevention

- A commitment to child protection should be stated in appropriate organisational documents
- Members should ensure that all staff are aware of the child protection policy and have access to a copy. The induction programme for all staff should include an explanation of the policy. Relevant training should be provided for all staff if necessary
- Staff should know the identity and contact details of the relevant diocesan child protection office/person responsible (if applicable) and have contact details for statutory authorities including social services and the police
- All staff and volunteers are expected to follow the code of conduct produced by members
- Staff and volunteers should make every effort to avoid situations in which they are lone adults working with one or more children. If circumstances result in such a situation occurring, staff and volunteers should resolve it as soon as possible, and note it to their managers

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Conclusion

"The vision of Caritas Internationalis is a world in which the dignity of the human person, made in the image of God, is paramount."

(Strategic Plan, 1999 - 2003)

The Caritas Confederation acknowledges that the issue of child protection is a global challenge. Caritas clearly states that sexual exploitation and abuse represent a betrayal of trust as well as a devastating failure of protection.

Caritas members are committed to acting at all times in the best interests of children, women and all vulnerable people. Caritas shares the position of the Catholic Church that any Catholic agency should be an example of best practice in the issue of child protection, and Caritas members must adopt and implement policies and procedures to ensure this happens. This policy is a step towards addressing the issue. By introducing and implementing these procedures, Caritas members commit themselves to making the issue of protection a priority in every situation in which Caritas is present.

Responsibilities



Definition of Abuse

Abuse occurs when adults or other children hurt children or young people under the age of 18, either physically or in some other way. In the majority of cases, the abuser is someone the child or young person knows well, such as a parent, friend or relative.

There are four main kinds of abuse:

Physical abuse is actual or likely physical injury to a child, such as hitting, kicking or shaking, where there is definite knowledge, or reasonable suspicion, that the injury was inflicted or knowingly not prevented.

Emotional abuse is harm done by persistent or severe emotional ill-treatment or rejection, such as degrading punishments, threats, bullying, and not giving care and affection, resulting in adverse affects on the behaviour and emotional development of a child or young person.

Neglect occurs when basic needs such as food, warmth and medical care are not met, or when there is failure to protect a child from exposure to any kind of danger, resulting in serious impairment of a child's or young person's health or development.

Sexual abuse occurs if a child or young person is pressured or forced to take part in any kind of sexual activity, whether or not the child is aware of, or consents to, what is happening. Sexual abuse includes incest, rape and fondling. It may also include non-contact activities such as showing pornography or internet-based activity. Sexual abuse may involve siblings or other family members, or persons outside the family.

Abuse may be current or recent, or in some cases historical, i.e., an adult may disclose sexual abuse that took place when he/she was a child. Abuse may be carried out by adult men or women, or by siblings or other young people.

There are some groups of children and young people who are particularly vulnerable; children with disabilities are among these, and children from ethnic minority communities who may be particularly vulnerable if their communities suffer from discrimination. Children who are refugees, asylum seekers and children living in residential care are also among these groups. Abuse may also take place in families in which there is alcohol or drug abuse, domestic violence or mental health problems.