

Child Protection Policy

Introduction

Anglican Overseas Aid (AOA) affirms the rights and obligations set out in the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child. This includes protecting children from harm, exploitation and abuse. AOA is committed to protecting the safety and wellbeing of children and upholds and employs the Australian Government's zero tolerance of child exploitation and abuse.

Through the identification and management of risks that may lead to harm of children, AOA aims to provide the safest possible environments for any children in the communities with whom it works. AOA mandates child-safe practices both within its own organisation and within those of its partners, to ensure children are experiencing no harm as a result of the organisation's work.

Purpose and Scope

The purpose of AOA's Child Protection Policy is:

- To protect children from harm, exploitation and abuse, by adopting a goal of children experiencing 'no harm' as a result of Anglican Overseas Aid's work, and zero tolerance of non-compliance.
- To explain to all of Anglican Overseas Aid's implementing partners their obligations and AOA's expectations when it comes to child protection, as well as mandatory requirements to ensure partner compliance.
- To outline Anglican Overseas Aid's obligations if a breach should occur, as well as how the organisation will afford staff and representatives procedural fairness in the advent of an allegation being received; and
- To have clear internal procedures in place that prevent and deter persons from working with children if they pose an unacceptable risk.

This Child Protection Policy applies to Partners, Board members, staff, contractors, and volunteers of AOA. The Policy also applies to supporters and prospective supporters visiting AOA programs. From here on, these groups will be collectively referred to in this policy as 'all parties'. Additionally, all of AOA's partners must have contextually relevant Child Protection Policies that uphold and comply with this policy. This policy is further supported and implemented through the processes, policies and procedures outlined in the AOA International Programs Handbook.

Compliance Frameworks

AOA 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*'.

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

AOA adheres to all relevant laws and legislation in both Australia and foreign countries regarding child abuse and exploitation. This includes the Crimes (Child Sex Tourism) Amendment Act 1994 and the Victorian Child Safe Standards 2016.

Guiding Principles

- All parties are required to report any suspicion of child abuse or exploitation. All allegations will be investigated in a fair and thorough manner. AOA believes in an open and transparent reporting process that fairly protects all those involved until a satisfactory resolution is reached.
- In interviewing and reporting on children special attention is to be 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 over cultural practices, advocacy for children's issues and the promotion of child rights.
- AOA is committed to providing equal protection to all children and will protect all children regardless of their nationality, culture, ethnicity, gender, religious or political beliefs, socio-economic status, family or criminal background or physical or mental health.

Implementation and Application

Risk Management Framework

Abuse and/or neglect causes harm to a child's well-being. AOA 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. AOA commits to implementing a comprehensive risk management approach to child protection through:

1. Employing a zero tolerance approach to child exploitation and abuse.
2. Advocating for the protection of children from all forms of exploitation, especially sexual exploitation.
3. Continuously developing, implementing and reviewing guidelines and practices that support the protection of children.
4. Networking with other Non-Government Organisations and domestic agencies for the purpose of increasing awareness and support for the protection of children.
5. Apply Child Protection Policy and Procedures equally in all situations, whether emergency or development.

6. Being vigilant in protecting confidential information about children and their families in AOA-funded projects and preventing unauthorised direct contact with children.
7. Use of images and personal information for promotion, fundraising and development education which ensures the privacy and safeguarding of children.
8. Sharing responsibility for child protection with implementing partners and ensuring partners have their own compliant policies in place and sufficient capacity for effective implementation.
9. Recognising the best interests of the child and demonstrating our responsibility to and respect for children through sensitivity in our communications that involve them in accordance with the ACFID Code.
10. Ensuring thorough recruitment and screening processes, which include criminal record and/or 'Working with Children Checks, targeted interview questions and verbal referee checks, prior to the engagement of all staff and volunteers who may be in contact with children through AOA.
11. Screening and providing orientation information to all individuals and groups visiting projects funded by AOA, including all parties.
12. Annual CP training is mandatory for all AOA staff, biennial training essential for all Board members. CP training during induction and prior to deployment on first field visit is mandatory. AOA will work with partners to contextualise training for their location.
13. Not permit a person to work with or visit children if they pose an unacceptable risk to children's safety or well-being.
14. Include a provision in all employment contracts that AOA reserves the right to dismiss the employee or volunteer should he/she breach AOA's Safeguarding Code of Conduct.
15. All allegations of child mistreatment or abuse, including any alleged breach of the SCoC or Child Protection policy non-compliance by AOA personnel in Australia or during field visits, will trigger an investigation. All investigations will be undertaken by an independent, external investigator.
16. Using fair and proper processes and procedures when making decisions that affect a person's rights, interests and reputation.
17. Monitor internal and external compliance with this policy and conduct a comprehensive review at least every 3 years.

Code of Conduct

The AOA Safeguarding Code of Conduct (SCoC) 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 SCoC clearly defines standards, rights and responsibilities of all stakeholders.

AOA's SCoC follows a threefold approach of protecting:

- Children from abuse,
- All parties against false allegations and
- AOA against falling victim to infiltration by offenders.

Consequently, the SCoC states those behaviours which are acceptable and those which are not when working or associating with children. All parties and partners implementing AOA funded activities must sign the SCoC (or a suitable local equivalent).

Reporting

It is mandatory for all parties associated with AOA to immediately report concerns, suspicions or allegations of child mistreatment or abuse, including any alleged breach of the SCoC or Child Protection policy non-compliance. Concerns may relate to a child or representative associated with the organisation or external to AOA's programs.

Overseas reports should be made to the AOA International Programs Manager or the AOA CEO. In-country reports (not related to AOA personnel) will trigger a risk assessment facilitated by AOA and the partner, with the option of contacting DFAT Post to ask for advice on who to access to investigate, this could be the police (if safe) or in-country consultants.

AOA will ensure the partner's complaints handling system is activated upon receipt of the allegation or report, with regular updates from the partner on the investigation process and outcome to ensure consistency with AOA's due processes and complaint handling principles. In Australia, reports should be made to the AOA CEO or to the AOA Board Chair.

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.

AOA will immediately report any suspected or alleged case of child exploitation, abuse, or policy non-compliance to DFAT by anyone within scope of this policy in connection with official duties or business with AOA where DFAT funding is involved.

If the allegation relates to a criminal matter, AOA is obliged to report to the relevant law enforcement authorities. Consequences of misconduct and non-compliance with the SCoC or Child Protection Policy include grounds for suspension during an investigation and provisions for termination upon conclusion of an investigation.

Definitions

AOA considers a child to be a person under the age of 18 years. AOA's Child Protection Policy relates to the protection of children, against mistreatment in the context of any AOA Australian or international program. Mistreatment includes all forms of physical abuse, emotional abuse, sexual abuse and/or neglect.

In this context:

1. 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. Any sexual activity with a child under the age of 18 is considered misconduct, and a form of sexual abuse.
2. Physical abuse means a deliberate physical injury or the willful or neglectful failure to prevent physical injury or suffering.
3. Emotional abuse can be defined as the persistent emotional ill-treatment of a child, thus causing adverse effects on the child's emotional development.
4. 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.