



ACFIN Child Protection Policy

Disclaimer

This ACFIN child protection policy forms the basis of the organization's working practices in relation to the issue of child protection. This policy shall be included in the staff handbooks of each of the ACFIN Headquarters and field missions and be applied to all personnel subject to any local legal requirements of such offices.

This policy is for guidance purposes only and does not impose any obligation on AAH to take any action or make any omission in respect of the policy's contents. The policy does not form part of any contract of employment or engagement, but has been created to act as a guide for AAH and its employees. AAH may need to alter its approach to the issues set out in the policy due to the nature of the circumstances or resources reasonably available to it at any given time.

Introduction

ACFIN is an international non-governmental organization that has been at the forefront of the fight against Hunger, working with some of the world's most vulnerable people since 1979.

It is both a fundamental belief and duty of the organization to focus on the prevention of child abuse and exploitation, whilst also advocating child protection in all that we do.

Abuse of children and vulnerable people occurs in many different forms throughout all communities and cultures. As an organization we find our work often takes place in environments where people might be considered to be at their most vulnerable, due to poverty, conflict, displacement and an inability to access basic human rights. These environments and circumstances can augment the vulnerability of children increasing the opportunities for abuse to occur. Within the populations most commonly working with the organization, a significant number of the beneficiaries are children under the age of 18 who are the focus of this policy.

As a member of the international Nongovernmental community ACFIN recognizes its responsibility to protect children, its employees, representatives and the organization at large from those who may use its work to assist them in the abuse and exploitation of children.

This policy is divided into two parts; being a statement of intent and the associated mandatory procedures which assist and guide ACFIN Representatives in identifying and dealing with any concerns that arise which bring into question the safeguarding of children who come into contact with representatives of our organization.

The Procedures are separated into two sections, the first of which deals with the prevention of child abuse, whilst the second specifies how to identify and deal with potential cases of abuse taking place at the hands of ACFIN Representatives.



ACFIN values and principles

These represent the core values and principles of our work with children, where their welfare is fundamental to our work

- Strive to understand and respect children within the local context in which they live.
- All types of child abuse or exploitation are unacceptable.
- All children regardless of gender, disability, ethnicity, social background, religious belief, or political view are equal.
- All of ACFIN Representatives will endorse an environment of respect and trust with children recognizing them as individuals in their own right.
- All concerns and allegations of child abuse will be taken seriously by all ACFIN Representatives and responded to appropriately.
- All relevant concerns expressed by children will be taken seriously by ACFIN representatives.
- ACFIN will work in partnership with parents / caregivers, other organizations and professionals to ensure the safety of children.

This policy is applicable to all employees engaged by the ACF network, including expatriates, volunteers, national, and Headquarters staff, consultants, students, local partnership organizations, board members, and any other person who represents or is invited by our organization ("**ACFIN Representatives**").'

All ACFIN offices will adhere to this policy, ensuring that it is translated into the local language in each of our countries of operation.

The policy and procedures will, where necessary, be adapted to ensure they meet the legal requirements of the country of operation and to ensure its validity in the context of local practices and circumstances. It will be made available to all ACFIN Representatives, donors and beneficiaries.

ACFIN Subcontracted Partners (e.g. local NGOs) must also comply fully with the minimum standards as set out in this policy.

This policy will be placed on all ACF network websites, applicable recruitment materials and other appropriate media.

This policy is further divided into the following sections:

- 1) Definitions of abuse
- 2) ACFIN and child protection
- 3) Confidentiality
- 4) Accusations involving other Agencies or Organizations
- 5) Concerns when not at work
- 6) Historical abuse



1) Definitions of abuse

Child The 1989 Convention on the Rights of the Child defines a child as “every human being below the age of 18 years unless under the law applicable to the child majority is attained earlier”¹

ACFIN will consider a child to be any individual under the age of 18, said to the extent that the law of the country in which the operation is taking place defines such as older than 18 years of age, in which case such older age shall be considered the threshold.

Abuse takes place in many different forms. The term “child abuse” is used in this policy to cover Physical abuse, neglect, sexual abuse, and or emotional abuse, or exploitation. Further definitions of these forms of abuse can be found in the procedures of this policy

Child Protection as used in this policy refers to the actions and the behaviors of the organization and the ACFIN Representatives taken to ensure prevention of abuse or exploitation of a child or children.

2) ACFIN and child protection

The aim of ACFIN is to prevent child abuse taking place at the hands of any ACFIN Representative whilst additionally taking steps to ensure that all concerns and allegations of any abuse are taken seriously and investigated thoroughly.

ACFIN will ensure safeguarding children through Recruitment and Selection activities, Code of Conduct, Training, Storage of images and information pertaining to children, Raising Awareness of child protection to ACFIN Representatives and through the implementation of the procedures laid out in this policy throughout the network of missions and Headquarters.

Guidelines setting out both appropriate behavior and situations in which ACFIN Representatives should be vigilant and alert to their own behavior (in order to avoid situations where they may be falsely accused of inappropriate behavior) are attached in the procedures.

The responsibility for the drafting and updating of this policy lies with the ACFIN International Human Resources Directors. It has been approved by the International Executive Committee. The policy will be reviewed on an "as needs basis". The responsibility of the execution of this policy is the local Country Director and Headquarters Human Resources Directors.

It is the responsibility of all Country Directors within ACFIN to ensure that the policy is applied to the operations for which they are responsible and to ensure all ACFIN Representatives under their supervision understand the policy and are aware of their responsibilities within it.

¹ Article 19, Convention on the Rights of the Child, 20 November 1989.

1. States Parties shall take all appropriate legislative, administrative, social and educational measures to protect the child from all forms of physical or mental violence, injury or abuse, neglect or negligent treatment, maltreatment or exploitation, including sexual abuse, while in the care of parent(s), legal guardian(s) or any other person who has the care of the child.

2. Such protective measures should, as appropriate, include effective procedures for the establishment of social programs to provide necessary support for the child and for those who have the care of the child, as well as for other forms of prevention and for identification, reporting, referral, investigation, treatment and follow-up of instances of child maltreatment described heretofore, and, as appropriate, for judicial involvement.



ACFIN beneficiaries (including children) will be made aware of this policy and their right to be protected from abuse.

All ACFIN employees and volunteers will receive training in child protection and awareness at a level appropriate to their responsibilities.

All work settings in ACFIN should take all steps necessary to promote safe environments for children. Representatives must feel able to raise concerns with their managers.

If a Country Director fails to respond to staff concerns regarding child protection, the employee must be aware of their ability to and feel free to contact the Human Resources Director of the Managing Headquarters, without fear of adverse consequence.

ACFIN should encourage an atmosphere in which children feel safe to share their fears and problems with ACFIN Representatives. Further information and guidance is set out in the identification section of the Procedures.

In keeping with the appropriate UN Conventions and practices, ACFIN will not prevent children under the age of 16 from speaking to the media, if it is felt to be in their best interest to do so.

If as a result of conducting an interview with the media, it is felt that the child/young person needs any form of emotional support, they will have access to a suitably qualified ACFIN employee.

3) Confidentiality

There is a clear need for information concerning children to be kept confidential, except regarding medical care interests, to the fullest extent possible. This right is extended to any information pertaining to a person being accused of an act, which they may or may not have committed. Individuals have a right to expect privacy and there is a need for sensitive information to be handled carefully and in compliance with the legal obligations of the relevant jurisdiction.

The preservation of confidentiality cannot, however, be considered to override the principle of a child's welfare, or best interest being the paramount consideration.

ACFIN understands that respecting confidentiality is essential if Representatives are to feel sufficiently confident in reporting concerns and subsequent allegations. Therefore ACFIN has taken into consideration the rights a Representative may have to confidentiality but also wishes to encourage and provide a supportive environment in which they operate for both the Representative and any effected children.

It is important that all ACFIN Representatives are supported in developing a clear understanding of the necessary and appropriate boundaries of confidentiality, so that they in turn can communicate this clearly to the children.

ACFIN Representatives should be careful not to give the impression that anything and everything a child tells them can be kept confidential, unless it is in the child's best interest.

Before passing on information about a person, thought must always be given to whether the transmission of such personal information is compatible with the relevant local Human Rights legislation, any relevant Data Protection legislation and any common law duty of confidence to the original provider of such



information. This applies particularly to information that is proposed to be distributed without the permission of the user/data subject.

Any decision regarding a breach of confidentiality, together with reasons for doing so, must be accurately recorded on file and countersigned by the Country Director, Head of Human Resources or Executive Director of the managing Headquarters.

Information is shared within ACFIN only on a “need to know” basis. This means that only those who would be involved in supporting the ACFIN Representative or the child in relation to accountability and support in decision making would be informed. Such information would not be made available to other ACFIN Representatives if they are not directly involved in the issue.

It should be noted however, that information will occasionally need to be shared with other staff within the organization (for example, the ACFIN Human Resources Directors, or Executive Directors of the organization).

Complaints or incidents involving, ACFIN Representatives should always be recorded. The recording of incidents, together with actions taken and those planned for leaves a "trail" that can help to support further allegations (whether they are proven to be true or otherwise).

ACFIN has a whistle-blowing procedure for the eventuality of an allegation of child abuse by any ACFIN Representative.

This procedure is in place to ensure that all allegations are handled in a consistent and supportive manner for both the accused and the complainant. Further information on the recommended recording actions can be found in the Procedures.

ACFIN Representatives must be made aware that alleged abuse to children may be discussed between ACFIN and the police (*a strategy discussion made at Headquarters level*) before any action is taken. It may be a criminal offence in the country of operation and an official investigation may need to take place by the police alongside that undertaken by ACFIN. This may also be instigated by ACFIN (for example in a situation where the police legal powers may be needed to ensure the protection of the child).

If there is a strategy discussion leading to an agreed joint investigation with the police it is very important that both organizations progress in agreement with each other to ensure that both the child' and the employee's rights to protection and justice are respected.

Save as otherwise described above, disciplinary procedures will be invoked if confidentiality is broken.

4) Accusations involving other agencies and organizations

If a child gives information that indicates that they or others are a “child in need of protection” through the action or inaction of others from another agency or organization this information cannot be kept confidential.

In such situations where an ACFIN Representative has concerns regarding a situation of potential abuse by the member of another agency, they may need to refer to the Child Protection procedures of such relevant agency. In these situations, it would be appropriate to follow the procedures of the agency with whom such individual is engaged. If this situation is not solved by whistle-blowing through the relevant agency's own procedures, the ACFIN Representative must immediately approach their Country Director for support.

5) Concerns when not at work





If the ACFIN Representative becomes aware of an abusive incident or behavior outside of their role with ACFIN, then in regards to the abuse of a child at the hands of a child's career, parent, or other member of the public should discuss their suspicions with their Country Director, Human Resources Director, or Executive Director of the managing Headquarters. The intention is that the ACFIN representative will be urged to seek child protection agencies in the vicinity of the mission and contact the police.

6) Historical abuse

All allegations of historical abuse and matters concerning allegations of historical abuse, (those which have happened in the past) must be channeled directly to the Human Resources Director or Executive Director of the Managing Headquarters, who will ensure that they are dealt with in accordance with ACFIN child protection policy and its procedures.

