

AUSTRALIAN DOCTORS FOR AFRICA	
Policy:	CHILD SAFEGUARDING
	Date last approved: 05/2024
	Date of next review: 05/2027
Approved by: Board	

1 RATIONALE

ADFA considers safeguarding children in all contexts to be of paramount importance, which informs the development of this policy. It is also an ACFID requirement for ADFA to have a child safeguarding policy in place and ADFA endorses the requirement. This is in keeping with the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (1989) and the guiding principle of sharing responsibility for child protection.

This policy reflects the minimum professional standard expected by ADFA staff, Board, volunteers, partners and contractors when dealing with children in the communities within which we work and provides a framework for managing and reducing risks of child abuse or harm in the context of ADFA's work.

The policy provides guidelines to protect children from any form of harm, particularly arising from child abuse, exploitation, neglect, or ill-treatment.

2 SCOPE

This policy applies to all ADFA Board Members, staff and volunteers, including medical and other ADFA organisational volunteers. It also applies to ADFA partners and contractors and individuals related to ADFA's international medical missions including observers or partners. Jointly all of the above groups will be referred to as ADFA personnel.

3 DEFINITIONS

Child abuse: includes physical, emotional, sexual abuse, neglect or ill-treatment.

Child exploitation: using or grooming a child for profit, labour, sexual gratification, or some other personal or financial advantage.

Child: any child or young person under the age of 18 years.

4 GUIDING PRINCIPLES

ADFA is committed to the safety, protection and wellbeing of all children, and acknowledges that children are present in all communities in all countries where we work, and deserve our particular protection not merely where they interact with our projects. ADFA will prevent a person from working with children if they pose a risk to children and are committed to immediately reporting breaches to Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (DFAT) in the cases where DFAT funding is involved.

This policy outlines ADFA's commitment to maintaining child protection standards and procedures for ADFA activities and includes the following principles:

4.1 Zero Tolerance of Child Exploitation and Abuse

ADFA has a zero-tolerance approach to child exploitation and abuse. Such action attracts criminal, civil and disciplinary sanctions. ADFA works to minimise the risks of child exploitation and abuse associated with delivering ADFA activities and trains its personnel on their child safeguarding obligations.

ADFA will not knowingly engage, directly or indirectly, anyone who poses an unacceptable risk to children. ADFA will not fund any individual or organisation that does not meet its child safeguarding compliance standards in their operations and activities.

4.2 Assess and Manage Child Protection Risk and Impact

ADFA takes a risk based approach to child safeguarding. While it is not possible to eliminate all risks of child exploitation and abuse, careful management can identify, mitigate, manage or reduce the risks to children that may be associated with ADFA activities. These risks are identified during initial risk assessments and are managed for the duration of the activity.

4.3 Sharing Responsibility for Child Safeguarding

To effectively manage risks to children, ADFA requires the commitment, support and cooperation of all personnel and associates who help to deliver programs administered by ADFA. They must comply with this policy in addition to all applicable laws of the jurisdiction in which the program is taking place, and will be held accountable through contracts, audits and spot checks.

4.4 Procedural Fairness

In making decisions that may affect a person's rights or interests, ADFA abides by the principles of natural justice and procedural fairness. Our partners are also expected to adhere to these principles when responding to concerns or allegations of child exploitation and abuse.

4.5 Recognition of the Best Interest of the Child

Australia is a signatory to the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child, and ADFA is committed to upholding those rights under the convention. ADFA recognises that some children, such as those with disability and children living in areas impacted by disasters, are particularly vulnerable. In all actions concerning children, the best interests of the child shall be a primary consideration.

5 IMPLEMENTATION OF THIS POLICY

ADFA recognises that where contact with children is identified in delivery of its programs, the following minimum responses are required:

- undertake a **risk assessment** of each activity to identify and manage risks to children in reference to DFAT's minimum child protection standards
- undertake **training** in child protection awareness with all ADFA personnel
- establish clear **internal reporting** mechanisms
- if DFAT funding is involved, **immediately report** any suspected or alleged instances of child abuse, exploitation, harm or child protection policy non-compliance to the Conduct and Ethics Unit via childwelfare@dfat.gov.au.

As such, ADFA will prioritise the following procedures in the implementation of its programs.

5.1 Risk Assessment

All programs and projects are required to complete a child safeguarding risk assessment, assessing all potential child safeguarding risks within the program/project before commencement of any activities. The risk assessment includes actions and recommendations that are to be put in place to minimise or remove any risks to children and these (and any emerging risks) are actively monitored throughout the activity/program cycle. Dependent upon the level of risk identified, ADFA will ensure the implementation of minimum standards, including ACFID Code of Conduct and DFAT's minimum child protection standards to manage the risk. The risk assessment is completed by the relevant program personnel and reviewed by the CEO.

5.2 Training

ADFA is committed to providing regular training to all personnel regarding child safeguarding with a particular focus on international development contexts, to ensure that personnel are fully aware of their responsibilities to protect children and how to report concerns or allegations about child exploitation and abuse or policy noncompliance. Initial training will be provided to new personnel during induction and includes a discussion regarding the individual's responsibility to build and maintain a child safe organisation, how to make a child safeguarding report, and what is considered appropriate behaviour when interacting with children or child sensitive material.

Refresher training will be undertaken every 3 years and other periodic training on specific safeguarding topics will be undertaken as deemed necessary.

All volunteers involved in activities where contact with children is identified, are required to complete safeguarding training prior to deployment.

The Board is required to undertake safeguarding training, and to understand and support all policies and procedures implemented by ADFA, The Chair of the Board understands and accepts responsibilities under this policy to be a contact point for reporting of allegations of misconduct, and procedures for dealing with such reports.

ADFA will work to strengthen the child safeguarding capacity and understanding of partners which may involve awareness raising as well as discussion and review of child safeguarding implementation. (*See section 6 Engaging with Partners below.*)

Community members and in-country partners with whom ADFA works will be provided with information about how to report any child safety or other concerns about ADFA volunteers and representatives.

5.3 Recruiting and Screening of Staff, Board Members and Volunteers

ADFA is committed to using robust child safe recruitment, selection and screening practices with the aim of recruiting the safest and most suitable personnel. ADFA will not knowingly engage, directly or indirectly, anyone who poses an unacceptable risk to children.

ADFA's employment contracts and volunteer agreements contain provisions for suspension or transfer to other duties of any staff or volunteer who is under investigation and provisions to dismiss any staff or volunteer after an investigation where a breach of policy has been confirmed.

The following child safe recruitment and screening procedures are used, and detailed implementation guidelines are provided in the ADFA Child Safeguarding Procedures:

5.3.1 Police Checks: A criminal record check must be obtained for any individual engaging in ADFA's programs; this includes staff, volunteers, consultants, Board members and/or family members accompanying a volunteer overseas.

5.3.2 Working With Children Check (WWCC): For medical volunteers a WWCC is mandatory where available (dependent upon the jurisdiction of volunteer's usual residence).

5.3.3 Reference Checks: Character reference checks that include child safeguarding questions are mandatory for all personnel engaging in ADFA's activities.

5.3.4 Interviews: Child safe behaviour-based questions will be asked of all individuals (paid or unpaid) who will be working with ADFA. All individuals (paid or unpaid) who will be working with ADFA, will be requested to disclose whether they have been charged with child exploitation offences.

5.3.5 Code of Conduct - Prior to engagement, all individuals (paid or unpaid) must read and abide by the ADFA Safeguarding Code of Conduct. The code provides clear guidance to personnel, volunteers about ways to minimise risk to children and make clear the standards of behaviour and practice required of them at all times when they are in contact with children. This includes the use of visual images. Individuals must commit to, sign and return the Safeguarding Code of Conduct.

5.4 Reporting Child Safeguarding Concerns

It is mandatory for all those under the scope of this policy to report to ADFA any witnessed, suspected or alleged incidents of child abuse, exploitation or any Child Safeguarding Policy non-compliance by ADFA personnel.

When overseas, child abuse reports should be made to the nominated team leader or other ADFA representative, who will escalate the complaint to ADFA's CEO or Chair. ADFA representatives include local staff, local consultants and partners, who are able to communicate in local language with community members, and facilitate access to reporting mechanisms.

Reports can be raised by anyone (including but not limited to program beneficiaries), including children, parents, guardians, carers, partners, ADFA personnel, members of the public, etc. Reports should be made directly to senior ADFA representatives in country, the ADFA CEO (ceo@ausdocafrica.org), or the Chair of the Board, in person, via email: chair@ausdocafrica.org, or by telephone: +61 8 6478 8951.

Reports can also be made in **writing** to:

Chief Executive Officer or Chair of the Board
Australian Doctors for Africa
Suite 1, 219 Onslow Road
SHENTON PARK WA 6008

Alternatively, a complaint can be made directly to ACFID. ADFA is committed to working according to the standard required by the Code of Conduct of ACFID, and a complaint can be made against any ACFID member when it is believed that they have breached the Code. The independent Code of Conduct Committee (CCC) is responsible for receiving, managing and investigating complaints against ACFID members. The full procedure for this is outlined on the ACFID website (<https://acfid.asn.au/code-of-conduct/complaints/>) and also on the ADFA website at <https://ausdocafrica.org/complaints/>. Complaints can be lodged via the following means:

Website: ACFID Code Committee at <http://www.acfid.asn.au/code-of-conduct/complaints>

Email: Chair, ACFID Code of Conduct Committee at code@acfid.asn.au.

Post: Chair, ACFID Code of Conduct Committee c/- ACFID, Private Bag 3, Deakin ACT 2600 (such complaints should be marked 'confidential').

All complaints regarding child safeguarding issues will be treated seriously, confidentially and immediately with due regards for the rights of the child, the notifier and the accused person/s.

Internal reporting procedures are outlined in the Child Safeguarding Procedure, which also contains the Child Safety Incident Form, which is to be forwarded to the ADFA CEO or Chair of the Board.

ADFA will immediately report any suspected or alleged instances of child abuse, exploitation, harm or child protection policy non-compliance to the DFAT Conduct and Ethics Unit via childwelfare@dfat.gov.au where DFAT funds are involved.

6 ENGAGING WITH PARTNERS

Prior to entering into a formal agreement with a new partner, ADFA must undertake the following:

- an assessment of partner child safeguarding capacity; and
- a child safeguarding risk assessment.

All documented agreements with partners must include agreed child safeguarding measures and responsibilities, including agreed reporting pathways. ADFA actively monitors the implementation of agreed child safeguarding measures and obligations with our partners on an ongoing basis.

ADFA partners share the responsibility for identifying, reducing and monitoring child safeguarding risks to children benefitting from and in contact with ADFA programs.

6.1 Non-government Partners

Non-government partner organisations are required to maintain their own child safeguarding policy. Where such partner's do not have an existing Child Safeguarding Policy or if their policy does not provide equivalent safeguards, they will be required to sign onto and comply with the ADFA Child Safeguarding Policy until they have developed/revised their own. Training and support will be provided to allow partner organisations to ensure understanding and or to improve their practices.

6.2 Government Partners

ADFA acknowledges that where an implementing partner is a government department of the partner country, ADFA is unable to require that they are bound by this policy. However, ADFA commits to actively working with these partners to heighten awareness of child safeguarding standards and or local legislative requirements. Partner agreements and MOUs will include summaries of and links to ADFA's Child Safeguarding and other relevant policies, to ensure that government partners are aware of ADFA staff and volunteer obligations under this policy.

7 REFERENCES

7.1 Related Legislation/Standards

- Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade's Child Protection Policy (Jan 2018)
- United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (1989)
- ACFID's Code of Conduct (June 2017, revised 2019)

7.2 Associated Documents

- ADFA Codes of Conduct
- ADFA Policy – Complaints Handling
- ADFA Policy – Prevention of Sexual Abuse, Exploitation and Harassment
- ADFA Policy – Overseas Medical Assignments
- ADFA Procedure – Child Safeguarding

Established: August 2011

Reviewed: February 2013; October 2016; March 2019; August 2021, April 2024