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CHILD SAFEGUARDING POLICY

CSP



Organismo Non Governativo - Onlus • Promosso dal CNOS - Centro Nazionale Opere Salesiane Accreditato presso ECOSOC con Special Consultive Status • Associato al DBN - Don Bosco Network

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Foreword

This *Child Safeguarding Policy* integrates the Organizational Model based on the D. Lgs. 231/2001 and VIS Code of Conduct (CoC) and develops and expands art. 3 of the COC where on this topic it is foreseen that:

VIS has a "zero tolerance" policy about people abuse and exploitation, in particular children and the beneficiaries of their interventions. VIS is committed to ensuring that all its workers and collaborators, guests, assignees, suppliers, sub-contractors and implementing partners operate in respect and protection of fundamental rights and human dignity. For this, the following constitute fundamental and mandatory principles:

- i. Sexual abuse and exploitation in any way perpetrated by humanitarian workers constitute profoundly serious acts of misconduct and by themselves constitute grounds for ending the employment relationship. Furthermore, these acts must be reported to the competent authorities, both local and international, so that perpetrators are prosecuted and sanctioned.
- ii. Performing sexual acts on children and young people (i.e. individuals under the age of 18) is prohibited regardless of which is considered "age of majority" or "age of consent" at local level. The inaccurate belief about the age of a child/youth does not constitute a defence. As regards Italian citizens, it is noted that sexual activity performed on children is punished by law regardless of the country in which the crime is committed.

This Policy has as main purpose the prevention and contrast of any behaviour ascribable not only to the specific cases of sexual abuse and exploitation, but also to sexual or moral harassment, to forms of mobbing and coercion, as well as to any behaviour harming the dignity and honour of the person. Furthermore, the measures envisaged by the Policy are intended to protect even the most vulnerable and unprotected subjects, such as children with disabilities, and the so-called "young adults", i.e. individuals even over the age of 18 but who still show - due to their young age - marked characteristics of vulnerability.

1. Introduction

This document endorses and strengthens VIS commitment, as CSO, to take care of children and youth, to protect them from all forms of danger and abuse. Their safety is a priority for VIS, and VIS considers child protection, the promotion of the well-being and the rights of children as the basis of all its work and interventions.

This Policy will be applied to all actions and interventions realized by VIS or implemented in VIS name, in Italy and in all countries where VIS is present with its expat and local staff, i.e. through our local partners.

Objectives of the *Child Safeguarding Policy*: the main purpose of this Policy and the relevant procedures is to regulate VIS way of operating so that children with whom the organization comes into contact (directly or indirectly) are always protected.

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In addition, this document will

- Guide the implementation of VIS programmes and/or institutional activities to avoid harming children;
- Support VIS field offices, groups of volunteers and partners in applying and promoting at local level this Policy. Complementary and/or supplementary documents and tools for the implementation of this Policy are included in the bibliography and in the Annexes.

Despite having developed this *Child Safeguarding Policy* as an all-inclusive as possible document, in some cases, issues not foreseen or fully regulated by this Policy and related procedures may be encountered. In such situations, it is necessary to contact the Program Director (DIRPR) at Rome Headquarters for further information and clarification.

Definition of "safeguarding": Child Safeguarding (protection of children and youth) is the responsibility adopted by the organizations to ensure that their staff, partners and other stakeholders, as well as programs and other institutional activities, in no way cause harm to children. In other words, it configures the guarantee not to expose children and young people to any form of risk or abuse and to report to the competent authorities any worrying situation relating to the protection of children and young people of the communities and target groups and in the countries where they operate¹.

The responsibility of the organizations includes both **preventive actions** aimed at reducing as much as possible the chances of harming, and **actions of response to an event/accident** to ensure that it is managed in the most appropriate way

The concept of *Safeguarding* implies a wider responsibility towards children than the one envisaged by the protection of the rights of protection as defined in the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child. The commitment of the organizations must focus primarily on the dangers and well-being of children and not specifically on the promotion and protection of their rights in general.

Principles upon which VIS *Child Safeguarding Policy* is based: VIS Policy revolves around some fundamental principles and values:

- I. The protection of their rights and the fulfilment of their needs (wellbeing in its integral meaning) must be guaranteed to all children, with no discrimination.
- II. All actions adopted for child protection must answer to the best interest of the child. This implies the respect of child rights in all programs and activities implemented by VIS.
- III. Every person has a duty to help to ensure child protection. This Policy is **mandatory** for all those who work directly for or on behalf of VIS: staff, volunteers, members, main stakeholders, and partners.
- IV. VIS operates in a transparent way and is open to listening. VIS considers child protection as a priority and recognizes that situations of risk and abuse develop more easily where staff members,

¹ Definition based on the one adopted by the Keeping Children Safe Coalition, an international network operating for the adoption of Child Safequarding international standards. **www.keepingchildrensafe.org.uk**

volunteers, partners, children and young people, families and communities do not feel free and able of expressing their concerns or reporting any eventual occurrence that has taken place.

All communication associated with child protection situations must be taken into consideration. If ٧. necessary, all required measures to protect the child and intervene against alleged perpetrators must be taken. Such action might also include lawsuits/complaints to the judicial authority or other institutions dealing with child protection. In the case these charges refer to staff members, Pagina 13 volunteers and partners, eventual countermeasures may include suspension, end of the employment relationship or any kind of collaboration.

- VI. No organization, working alone, could guarantee an appropriate child protection network. For this reason, VIS collaborates in this domain with the other CSOs, public institutions and other organizations in the territory.
- VII. In the respect of privacy, no personal information will be disseminated regarding those who are involved in events/occurrences connected with child protection or of those who will report/denounce facts, unless it is necessary to quarantee the full protection of children.
- VIII. VIS operates to sensitize and stimulate all counterparts about the importance of child protection, implementing the Policy and procedures and showing VIS commitment and values. VIS will share its official documents with the other institutions and will be open to receiving feedback on their correct application by our organization.
 - IX. VIS operates in the respect of child protection international and national legislation.
 - Χ. There is no one sole child protection and children rights promotion method. The solutions and the means for the protection of children must reflect the culture and customs of the environment and of the context within which one is intervening together with the nature of the activities being implemented. However, in no way cultural differences or specific situations connected with the local context can ever be used to justify any form of abuse.
 - XI. Finally, every amendment or integration of the Child Safeguarding Policy can be adopted to increase and not reduce the protection level foreseen.

2. Policy application areas and prevention actions

2.1 Involved human resources and specific focus

The Child Safeguarding Policy applies to all those working with VIS or collaborating in any capacity with the organization. At the time when the employment or collaboration relationship starts, even if pro bono, the person accepts and signs the terms and responsibilities set out in this Policy. All staff (employees, collaborators, consultants, and volunteers) are in fact obliged to sign and respect the CoC as an essential condition for their collaboration with VIS.

In the event that the information provided by VIS about the responsibilities and duties inherent to the protection of children is not sufficiently clear or gives rise to doubts about behaviours to be adopted and cases to be solved, it will be the obligation of the person to ask for explanations and clarifications in this regard.

In the case of breach of this Policy and, therefore, of the provisions set out in the CoC and Organizational Model 231/2001, the Supervisory Body (SB) will evaluate the case based on the type of behaviour, the rules violated and the possible damage. The SB will communicate to the Executive Committee (EC) the outcomes, for the appropriate and/or necessary measures to be adopted, up to ending the work contract or the collaboration and reporting to the competent judicial and/or institutional authorities

² To be noted that also the whistleblowing procedure foreseen by VIS CoC guarantees anonymity and protects those reporting occurrences connected with abuse situations.

The *Child Safeguarding Policy*, with the aim of protecting the children, considers as main focus the moments and the occasions of contact and closeness with children, adolescents and adults working and/or collaborating with VIS. It should be noted that the behaviour of these subjects also falls within the application range of this Policy even if perpetrated outside of work.

2.2 Training and awareness raising

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VIS staff must receive within three months from starting their work or collaboration an *ad hoc* training on this Policy. In order to create a robust awareness and knowledge of the subject, staff awareness raising activities must be constant over time and repeated every year, through meetings and/or updating seminars, to be delivered in ordinary sessions and/or through the online training centre. The organization, if necessary, will make use of external trainers to deepen specific issues.

In particular, all staff will be trained on how to report/inform about behaviours harmful to the safety of children and behaviours and facts which, although not manifestly violating their rights, are such as to produce risk, suspicion, apprehension and/or concern.

This information and procedures must be easily understandable and therefore adapted to be relevant to the socio-cultural and linguistic context. A clear and concise text must be written in the local language and distributed to staff and volunteers.

2.3 "Child friendly" recruitment

Staff recruitment is a fundamental moment to reduce the risk of child rights violations through a set of preventive measures that allow to evaluate the suitability of those joining the organization, for a work/professional role, volunteering activities or any collaboration implemented for any other reason.

The Human Resources Office (HRO) evaluates on one side the suitability of the staff to implement the activities in particularly fragile contexts and on the other hand the capacity to prevent and contrast behaviours and abuses on children that might occur. For this reason, during the selection phase an accurate analysis of references indicated by the staff is carried out and/or of those that can be indirectly deduced from the training and professional life of the candidates. The topic of child protection is analysed and faced during the interview to carry out an evaluation of the feeling of the candidates about the issue of child abuse and violence.

Selection criteria and procedures adopted at the Headquarters by the HRO, aimed at the prevention of the behaviours envisaged in the present Policy, must be followed also in local staff recruitment in the country offices. To this purpose, the HRO at the Headquarters will give to the country offices, and to the Country Representative (CR) indications and instructions in this regard.

Finally, staff and collaborators are obliged to submit and sign a self-declaration attesting the absence of previous cases of harassment and/or abuse of children, involvement in cases of sexual exploitation of minors, as well as take on the obligation to comply with the "zero tolerance" principle established by VIS CoC and this Policy.

2.4 Role and activities of the Child Safeguarding Focal Point

The Child Safeguarding Focal Point (CSFP - child-safe-focal-point@volint.it) is a college of at least three women who with different engagements operate at VIS Headquarters. This mechanism appointed by the EC coordinates, advises, supports, and assists the staff at Headquarters and the field offices in implementing child protection policies.

The CSFP must not be considered as the only actor responsible for child protection as this responsibility is cross-cutting and involves – in various capacities and with different characteristics, all members of the organization, at management, administrative and operative levels. The final direct responsibility for the

implementation of safeguarding actions within the countries lies with the CR who must coordinate, to this end, with the CSFP.

2.5 Partner

VIS always takes due consideration of the capability of its partners to work with children and youth and, Pagina | 5 therefore, verifies that they have and implement their own policy for child protection and safeguarding. In all partnerships, strong attention must be paid to issues relating to the protection of children. As a good practice, a specific reference to the Policies and child protection measures adopted by VIS and the partners must always be included in partnership agreements and contracts, with the related provision of joint and mutual commitment to respect their contents. These contents must be explicitly specified through a special attachment or through a link or cloud referral from which the documents can be downloaded.

Partnerships are also an opportunity to raise the awareness of the public on the need for child protection institutional policies. Therefore, all members and stakeholders of a temporary partnership/consortium, if the conditions allow it, and taking into consideration the responsibility and actions implemented, should receive training, orientation, and support in child protection actions.

In the event that doubts arise concerning the safety and protection of minors in relation to a partner, it is necessary to report the suspicious facts to the SB (odv@volint.it), also through the whistleblowing procedure and to submit the outcomes of the preliminary inquest and investigation to the EC for the adoption of the most appropriate measures. The EC can forward these findings to the competent authorities and will also have to evaluate the opportunity to defer the partnership, including through the involvement of the Shareholders' Assembly. The decision to continue or suspend the partnership must also take into account the concrete and prompt reaction of the partner and its commitment to really face the difficult situation, giving priority to the best interest of the child, responding consistently to the indications received about the management of the situation and implementing training and orientation activities.

2.6 Volunteers and occasional visitors/guests

All volunteers, collaborators and occasional visitors/quests involved in VIS institutional activities, official and non-official, must know and understand the principles and contents of the present Policy accepting its terms and conditions before being included in project activities and country offices.

It is the responsibility of VIS staff involved in the incorporation and in the activities to ensure that volunteers, collaborators, and occasional visitors/quests are adequately informed and supervised during their stay. All volunteers, collaborators and occasional visitors/quests must always be accompanied by VIS staff members and under no circumstance should they be left unattended with children, unless there are clear reasons for this, circumstances/conditions useful to mitigate the risks and, in any case, subject to the explicit authorization of the CR. Before granting such permission, the CR must make sure that the occasional visitor/quest does not pose a risk to children.

2.7 Communication and relationship with media

The use/abuse of images of children and young people has become extremely important and widespread both on traditional and social media. Children and young people are often stereotypically represented, as powerless victims of abuse, conflict, and poverty.

Consistently with and in addition to the current "Communication & visibility" procedures and in compliance with the privacy rules and policies, VIS communication strategies, including those used for fundraising, comply with the principles of ethical and respectful communication of the dignity of people and minors in particular; in accordance with these principles, children who belong to vulnerable groups and

their problems can find space in the media as long as they are presented as human beings to whom their inviolable dignity is recognized.

For this, VIS undertakes to:

a. **Seek consent**: communication materials must be collected in the respect of the culture, community and context involved. Before taking pictures or recording videos of people and, in particular, children and before requesting personal information, it is necessary to obtain their consent or the one of the family/custodian. No video-photographic material can be collected and utilized without the consent of the involved people.

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- b. Supervise media visiting projects and their interviews with children: international and local staff undertake to adopt appropriate behaviour during interviews with children. The same indications are relevant to third parties, such as journalists, video crews, testimonials, communicators, etc. who can visit the projects in the field but always under VIS responsibility.
- c. **Depict children in a respectful way:** always represent children as subjects with recognized value and not vice versa as "objects". Particular attention must be paid to the most vulnerable groups of children: children with disabilities, sick, refugees or migrants, belonging to minorities, etc.
- d. **Respect privacy:** any information or detail that might make it possible to identify a child or put him/her at risk should not be used.
- e. Show children in dignified way: avoid taking pictures or recording videos of naked or posing children that can be interpreted as sexually explicit. Reject and prohibit the use and dissemination of any pornographic, erotic, or noticeably obscene image.
- f. Contextualize the images and make a truthful use of them: provide the public with elements that present the context in a wider way to allow the public to understand its relative complexity. Do not distort or manipulate reality, for example through post-production or misleading clippings, asking people to perform unusual actions for them or, again, representing exceptional situations as if they were common.
- g. **Use a balanced approach:** where possible, make every effort to find a "balance" between positive and negative images to represent the different aspects of a situation. Do not forget to show how much local populations work to support themselves even in difficult situations.
- h. Create an appropriate video-photographic archive: all images and videos will be saved in an appropriate digital archive at Headquarters. The information documenting the life of the child/children and the photographs showing them (including information saved on computers) will be kept safely. Access to the archive must be limited to those who use it for their work and in any case according to a procedure respectful of privacy.

2.8 Project planning, drafting and implementation

VIS is engaged in *child-safe* project planning and implementation. Therefore, child protection must be an aspect taken into consideration in each project drafting phase, also in the programmes that are not included in the *child-protection* sector. For this reason, some key actions are specified here bellow to be adopted to guarantee that the programmes will be however *child-safe*:

- An evaluation is carried out on each project to determine the potential risks for the children. These
 risks may derive from the nature of the activities (work with children) or from the way they are drafted
 (when faced with activities that present risky components for children). See on this point the following
 table useful for detecting the risk degree.
- In the case of medium or high risk, a specific risk assessment is carried out during the planning/elaboration of the intervention to identify actual risks and dangers for the children, also relying on consultations involving the community and the children themselves, to better understand the perceived security issues and risks. The assessments focus on relevant data regarding the

conditions of childhood in a country or area, including: already active community protection mechanisms; stakeholders involved in the protection of children (both as sources of information, as complementary actors or with whom to coordinate); legal, social welfare and child protection agreements; organizational capacity, etc.

 Depending on the outcomes of the risk-assessment, risk-management strategies must be drafted to minimize the risks deriving from the implementation of programmes in terms of children risk.

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- In the case in which concluding the assessment too many risks are identified, and such risks cannot be reduced or mitigated, the project must not be developed or implemented.
- The specific actions necessary for the full implementation of the child protection measures are included in the project operational plan, including the adoption of a referral system to another service/actor for the needs not covered by the project. In addition, also the necessary human and financial resources are guaranteed.

LOW 1	No contact with children	
2	Contact with children	"Contact with children" means being involved in an activity or having a position implying o may imply to be near to children, because of the type of work or because of the nature of the work environment. This include situations with physical contact, direct contact, oral, written, or electronic communication.
MEDIUM	Examples:	 Written and oral communication (including electronic communication directed to a child). Visiting a structure – i.e. schools, medical or residential structures – offering services for children. Any community consultation (data collection, poll, training) involving children. Health programmes.
	Working with children	"Working with children" means being involved in an activity with minors, where contact is meant as a normal component of the activity and not an accidental occasion. The risk of exploitation and abuse of the child generally increases with the rate of recurrence of the contact, reason for which "working with children" implies a major risk than having only contacts.
HIGH 3	Examples:	Activities or services for children: Residential care - hospitality services for children. Child protection services. Services for children with disabilities. Services within structures of the juvenile justice system. Childcare services. Educational or sports services for children. Health services and access to sexual and reproductive health. Psychological and child support services. Emergency response and humanitarian assistance to children and families.

3. Response actions to child protection violations

3.1 Reporting

In accordance with the whistleblowing system, which establishes the right and duty of VIS staff members Pagina | 8 of reporting any violation of the CoC they know about or suspect, the Child Safeguarding Policy - CSP regulates the reporting/information process of problems related to child protection.

The recipients of this Policy have the right and duty to report any violation of its contents, any circumstance in which children and youth are or may be at risk of abuse and situations of which they come to know about at the workplace and/or during the performance of their duties and/or during their relationship - established in any capacity – with VIS.

It is also VIS responsibility to adopt and implement, in all the countries in which it operates, a system for handling complaints and feedback to allow the communities involved in the activities, projects and programs to report problems relating to child protection. In this sense, VIS CRM Policy constitutes a fundamental tool for information and treatment of the cases covered by this Policy.

The CoC, the Organizational Model 231/2001 and VIS procedures establish, both for institutional activities in Italy and for programs conducted in partner countries:

- subjects liable of reporting: staff, collaborators, volunteers, beneficiaries and other stakeholders have the right / duty to report, enjoying the right to confidentiality and non-retaliation;
- timing necessary to ensure the rapid activation of those in charge, the immediate start of the investigations by the SB, the adoption of the measures and provisions necessary to deal with the case, including the victim's protection measures;
- reporting mechanisms. i.e. methods and tools accessible both internally and externally to inform about the problematic case; in this regard, the e-mail account odv@volint.it is to be noted, which acknowledges the reports forwarded directly, also anonymously, to the SB. The SB is the end point for reporting which concern the cases considered by this Policy; as specified, the right/duty of disclosure is assigned to all staff and stakeholders of the organization and, for this reason, the case may be reported to the SB directly or indirectly by third parties who have come to know about it;
- the methods of adequate archiving of all documentation for the purpose of protecting personal and sensitive data.

3.2 Response

VIS guarantees that:

- Any problem concerning child protection or any charge of abuse is promptly taken in charge and that the inquest and investigation are conducted up to the closure of the case. The complainants and the victims have the right to receive feedback on the developments and the outcomes of their case;
- Cases of suspected violation of the protection of the children are managed by competent people and the investigations are conducted and shared among several persons;
- Maximum confidentiality is respected in all phases of the investigations and information/results will be shared only in case of functional needs to complete the procedure.

The protection and safety of the children and young people must be guaranteed throughout the entire management process of the case; in deciding on a case of suspicion, alleged or proven abuse, absolute priority must be given to the best interests of the child. VIS ensures that the assessment of the risks faced by children is carried out promptly, and that every decision and consequent action is taken without delay.

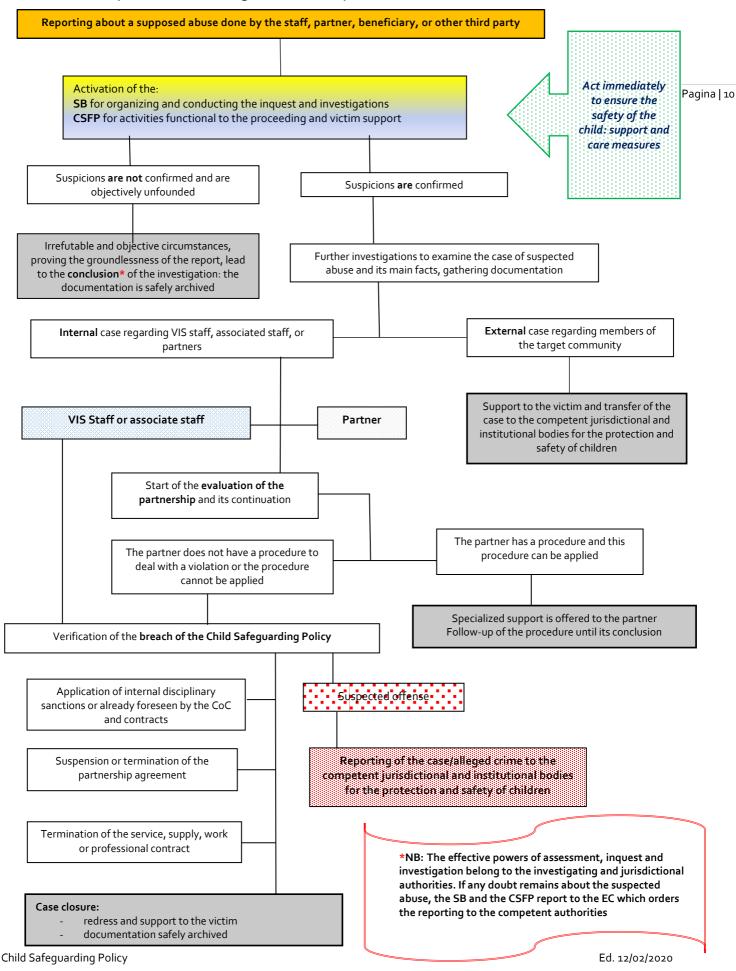
Individuals accused of violating this Policy must have the opportunity to report their version of the facts. If the accusation is confirmed, all appropriate disciplinary measures must be taken, including the immediate termination of the employment contract and, where required, a legal action against the person who committed the abuse, in compliance with applicable standards, must be initiated.

In the event that, at the end of the investigation, it appears that the report was intentionally false or made for personal interest, the most appropriate disciplinary measures will be taken by the EC against the Pagina | 9 person who made the accusation, up to the complaint, if the conditions exist, to the competent authorities.

VIS is committed to ensuring that every child who is actually a victim of violence on behalf of its staff members or of the associate staff (including partners), will have access to psychological support, medical treatment and legal assistance, defining such support case by case and considering the degree of the violation.

A complete documentation of the cases must be kept in safe and protected archives, both in the country offices and at the Headquarters. The CSFP maintains a database of all cases and prepares a report on child protection violations to be shared yearly with the EC.

3.3 Standard-procedure for management of child protection violation



3.4 Policy accountability, monitoring and revision

All VIS and staff members are responsible for ensuring that this Policy and related procedures are applied. The Program Director (DIRPR) and the Administrative and Personnel Director (DIRAP), on mandate from the EC, are responsible for the implementation of the *Child Safeguarding Policy* at a general level. At subsequent levels, Desk Officers, Regional Program Coordinators and Country Representatives are responsible for implementation in their areas of competence and in each country office.

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VIS will have to carry out every year, preferably when starting the activities after the summer break, a self-assessment on the application of this Policy to monitor the process to guarantee child protection, to organize and schedule the activities useful for its implementation and for identifying any areas for improvement that must be included in the annual programming. The DIRPR coordinates, using the CSFP, these self-evaluation and reprogramming activities.

This Policy can be updated on an ongoing basis during its enforcement and - in any case - must be carefully reviewed at least every 5 years. This activity will be coordinated by the DIRPR assisted by CSFP and must be carried out through a participatory process involving the main stakeholders of the organization and the country offices. If necessary, assessments and revisions may also be carried out in collaboration with external actors, specialized on the topic or specular to VIS.

4. Glossary

Child or Children: Pursuant to the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (art. 1), a child is understood to be any human being under the age of eighteen, unless he/she has reached maturity beforehand by virtue of the relevant legislation.

Beneficiary: any individual who, within a development or humanitarian aid project, receives goods or services pro bono or is however recipient of activities and outputs aimed at this.

Partner: organizations and social entities promoting, funding, and/or implementing activities in collaboration with VIS.

Staff: employees and collaborators contracted by VIS in Italy and abroad, volunteers in the Civil Service or Peace Corps Volunteers, trainees, researchers, medium and long-term free volunteers, and anyone who is otherwise in a collaboration relationship with the organization.

Occasional visitor/guest-collaborator: anyone who comes into contact with VIS on an occasional basis and/or for a specific objective (campaign, specific action, press mission, consultancy, etc.). The occasional visitor/guest must fall under the supervision and responsibility of the staff in charge of his/her insertion, who has the duty to inform him/her about the provisions of the CoC and the related protection policies.

Victim: anyone who has undergone acts amenable to the behaviours covered by this Policy.

Whistleblower: individual connected to VIS or one of its partners or involved in any capacity in the activities of the organisation who, having become aware of one of the behaviours covered by this Policy, reports the fact to another colleague, superior, CSFP or directly to the SB.

5. Annexes

- A. Human Resources: Terms of reference (ToRs) for the selection of VIS staff based on child-friendly criteria and samples of the self-certification.
- B. Guide for collaborators and occasional/temporary visitors

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- C. Guide-lines and Informed consent
- D. Fundamental ToRs of the Child Safeguarding Focal Point
- E. Keeping Children Safe (KCS):
 - E.1 The International Child Safeguarding Standards ... and how to implement them, 2020.
 - E.2 Developing Child Safeguarding Policy and Procedures. A Facilitator's Guide, 2014.
- F. Other Annexes [F.1, F.2, F.3,...] useful for Policy implementation: *templates* for reporting and/or event detection, specific guidelines, plans for training and/or awareness raising activities, samples of information and awareness raising tools, etc.

6. Essential bibliography

- Understanding Child Safeguarding Facilitator's Guide (2014)
 http://www.keepingchildrensafe.org.uk/resources/understanding-child -safeguarding-facilitators-guide
- Developing Child Safeguarding Policy and Procedures Facilitator's Guide (2014)
 http://www.keepingchildrensafe.org.uk/resources/developing-child-safeguarding-policy- and-procedures-facilitators-guide.
- The Child Protection Working Group (2013), Minimum Standard for Child Protection in Humanitarian
 Action https://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/ Minimum-standards-for-child-protection-in-humanitarian-action.pdf
- UN Committee on the Rights of the Child, Convention on the Rights of the Child (2011), General comment
 No. 13 The right of the child to freedom from all forms of violence
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