



## **Organization Earth's Child Protection Policy**

Organization Earth fully recognizes and takes into consideration the fundamental rights of every child, as indicated at the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC). Organization Earth works towards the best of children's interest by designing, monitoring and evaluating effective interventions and programs.

### **Scope of the Child Protection Policy**

The present document sets out Organization Earth's Child Protection Policy and Procedures:

- Acknowledges the right of every child in safety
- Ensures that the organization undertakes its responsibilities regarding protection of children and will respond to any concern raised appropriately.
- Dictates the principles and procedures for the support of Board, Staff, Volunteers, Interns, External Contractors, Associates and Partners in their practice. Specifically, the organization shall ensure that the actions of any adult in the context of the work carried out by Organization Earth are transparent and safeguard and promote the welfare, safety and security of all children. Therefore, this policy is structured to ensure that the procedures to protect children and to report any concerns about their welfare to the appropriate authorities, shall be followed.

### **Key Principles**

Organization Earth's commitment to ensuring the fulfillment of children's rights is structured around the following principles.

#### **1) Equal treatment (Non-Discrimination):**

Children's rights apply to all children without discrimination of any kind, irrespective of the child's or his/her parent's or legal guardian's race, color, sex, language, religion, political or other opinion, national, ethnic or social origin, property, disability, birth, sexual orientation, gender identity, or other status.

#### **2) Best interests of the child:**

In all actions concerning children, the best interests of the child shall be a primary consideration. The term "best interests" broadly describes the well-being of a child. Such well-being is determined by a variety of individual circumstances, such as the age, the level of maturity of the child, the presence or absence of parents, the child's environment and experiences.

#### **3) Right to life and development:**

Children have an inherent right to life and to protection from violence, abuse, exploitation and neglect. Their right to development should be interpreted in its broadest sense, covering but not limited to the child's physical, mental, spiritual, moral, psychological, intellectual and social development.

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#### 4) The right to be heard:

Children should be involved in decision-making at individual, organization and policy level. They should be informed of and empowered to understand and enjoy their rights in full. They should be included in every procedure regarding their personal situation and they should be informed of the procedure to be followed where there is a situation concerning them.

#### 5) Do not harm principle:

Organization Earth shall strive against and minimize any harm that may be caused inadvertently to children as a result of its activities.

#### 6) Transparency and accountability:

Transparency and accountability shall transcend any action taken by Organization Earth in order to ensure that any harmful behavior or practice shall be addressed and challenged appropriately.

#### 7) Privacy:

All processing of personal data of children, including but not limited to communication and media activities, should be conducted in line with the relevant EU and national legislation in force.

#### Definitions

- A “child” as defined in Article 1 of the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC), is “every human being below the age of 18 years unless, under the law applicable to the child, majority is attained earlier”.
- “Unaccompanied children” (also called “unaccompanied minors”) are children who have been separated from both parents and other relatives and are not being cared for by an adult who, by law or custom, is responsible for them.
- “Separated children” are children separated from both parents, or from their previous legal or customary primary caregiver, but not necessarily from other relatives. These may, therefore, include children accompanied by other adult family members.
- “Orphans” are children both of whose parents are known to be dead. In some countries, however, a child who has lost one parent is also called an orphan.
- Youth are those belonging to the age group 15 to 25 years (in line with main provisions of Greek legislation)

#### Defining “harm”

- Physical abuse: actual or potential physical harm perpetrated by another person, adult or child. Physical harm may also be caused when a parent or carer fabricates the symptoms of, or deliberately induces illness in a child.
- Sexual abuse: forcing or enticing a child to take part in sexual activities that he or she does not fully understand and has little choice in consenting to. This may



include, but is not limited to, rape, oral sex, penetration, or non-penetrative acts such as masturbation, kissing, rubbing and touching. It may also include involving children in looking at, or producing sexual images, watching sexual activities and encouraging children to behave in sexually inappropriate ways.

- Child sexual exploitation: a form of sexual abuse that involves children being engaged in any sexual activity in exchange for money, gifts, food, accommodation, affection, status, or anything else that they or their family needs. It usually involves a child being manipulated or coerced. The abusive relationship between victim and perpetrator involves an imbalance of power where the victim's options are limited. It is a form of abuse that can be misunderstood by children and adults as consensual.
- Emotional abuse: persistent emotional maltreatment that impacts on a child's emotional development. Emotionally abusive acts include restriction of movement, degrading, humiliating, bullying (including cyber bullying), and threatening, scaring, discriminating, ridiculing or other non-physical forms of hostile or rejecting treatment.
- Commercial exploitation: exploiting a child in work or other activities for the benefit of others and to the detriment of the child's physical or mental health, education, moral or social-emotional development. It includes, but is not limited to, child labor.

#### Child Protection Policy's procedural implementation

Organization Earth's staff must ensure that all individuals involved in activities with children sign a commitment to adhere to the principles and procedures outlined in this policy. In particular, all individuals participating in Organization Earth's projects and activities involving children or minors must consider and consent to the following guidelines for conduct.

##### 1. Code of conduct for individuals involved in Organization Earth's activities

Individuals participating in activities (by any capacity, and by any relation contractual or not e.g. Board, Staff, Volunteers, Interns, External Contractors, Associates and Partners) involving or concerning children must:

- Respect all relevant laws concerning the protection of children in the country where the activity takes place;
- Respect all relevant European and international framework concerning the protection of children;
- Observe the principles outlined in this policy;
- Inform children of their rights in a way fit for their age/cultural background/maturity, including by identifying the person, authority or service where to seek advice/complaint in case of problem;
- Be conscious of perception and appearance in their language, actions and relationships with children; their behavior should demonstrate respect for children and their rights;

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- Guarantee that all physical contact with children is appropriate in the relevant cultural contexts;
- Encourage children to discuss their contact with staff or others and to raise any relevant concerns;
- Take action as required by the present policy when they become aware or suspect that a child has experienced or is experiencing abuse (see section VII);
- Cooperate with child protection related investigations (internal and external) and take steps to make available any documentation or other information necessary for the completion of the investigation.

It is forbidden that adults participating in activities involving or concerning children:

- Spend time alone with children away from others;
- Take children to their home under any circumstance;
- Engage in any contact between children beneficiaries and Organization Earth Board members, Staff, Associates, Interns, Volunteers, External Contractors, outside the premises of the organization or of events/activities organized by Organization Earth.
- Use any physical form of punishment on a child;
- Discriminate against, show different treatment towards, or favor particular children to the exclusion of others;
- Expose children to hazardous conditions;
- Violate any of the children's rights (e.g. their right to privacy, to information and to participate in decisions concerning them, their right to life and development).

#### 1. Proper use of images of children

When developing and using photos or videos featuring children involved in Organization Earth's activities and projects, the following principles should be respected

- Permission (informed consent) must always be sought from the children themselves before taking images. The organization must acquire informed consent of the child, the child's guardian, and/or the institution responsible for the child, before using any photo or video for any purpose. The purpose of children's depiction in photos or videos should be made clear to the consent giver.
- Personal and physical information that could be used to identify the location of a child within a country and potentially put them at risk must not be used in any form of communication for general or public purposes.
- Information about children's lives and images of children (including information stored on a computer) must be kept in secure files with limited access. Access to such files should be strictly limited to those who need to use them during the course of their work.
- Images of children should portray the children in a dignified and respectful manner fit for their age and cultural and religious background.

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## 1. Recruitment Procedures

As a condition for working with Organization Earth the following are required:

1. Acceptance and commitment to the Child Protection Policy and Code of Conduct for working with children by signing an attestation of adherence to the Child Protection Policy principles and procedures.
2. The candidates may bring criminal record documents.
3. All recruitment interviews should include a discussion on child safeguarding and protection policy.

Any Board Member, Staff, Volunteers, Interns, External Contractors, Associates and Partners who has direct contact with children in his/her work will be fully informed of Organization Earth's Child Protection Policy and the Code of Conduct hereby.

Partnerships with individuals or other institutions (contracting and sub-contracting) shall not be in contrast with the scope and principles of this Policy and there will be a systematic checking towards this.

Contracts and memoranda of agreement for partnership delivery work will include clear minimum requirements, arrangements for safeguarding and non-compliance procedures.

### Reporting Procedures

All Staff, Volunteers, Interns, External Contractors, Associates and Partners should be alert to signs that may suggest a child is in need of help. Everyone who works with and engages with Organization Earth has a responsibility to ensure that children are protected. The reporting procedure is made widely available to ensure that everyone has sufficient knowledge and understanding of the steps that need to be taken regarding the safety of children and other witnesses. Further, at meetings and activities where children are directly involved, children will be informed about Organization Earth's safeguarding policy, code of conduct, and the existence of the child protection focal person and complaints mechanism in a child-friendly manner.

Once a concern about mistreatment/abuse arises at Organization Earth, the organization establishes a special process regarding the stages of reporting safeguarding issues and concerns. This process refers to the immediate actions that shall be taken in case of safeguarding concerns.

In cases where:

- A child may disclose abuse or give reason to suspect that they or another child are being abused or at risk of significant harm
- A parent or other adult may raise a concern about either their own or another child
- A member of staff or volunteer may be suspected of abusing/exploiting a child
- Anyone acting for or employed by Organization Earth has reason to believe that a child is suffering or likely to suffer harm.

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## 1. Method of Reporting

All witnessed, suspected or alleged violations of Organization Earth's Child Protection Policy will be immediately reported in reporting forms which shall include:

- Position of the referring person
- Personal information of the referring person (name, age, gender, address)
- Personal information of the child (name, age, gender, address)
- Date, time & location of the alleged incident
- Short description of the alleged incident
- Time when the alleged incident came to his/her knowledge
- What is his/her relationship to the child
- Personal observations
- Any other relevant information

## 2. Contact with concerned persons:

If the concern refers to a child or vulnerable young adult, the family/parents/guardian of the child shall be contacted on the matter provided that they exist.

## 3. Assessment and decision making:

The principal contact – referral person shall try to figure out what has happened and establish the facts in the most objective and immediate manner possible. After assessing the reported concern, he/she submits his/her conclusions and suggestions to Organization Earth board.

## Disclosure of Abuse by a Child

If a child shares information with an Organization Earth staff member or volunteer about being abused, mistreated or in danger, but requests that such information is not passed on to others, the following steps should be followed:

- The child should be informed that it may not be possible to protect his/her confidentiality and that the matter might be discussed internally at Organization Earth
- The staff member or volunteer should make all efforts to help the child understand the need for seeking appropriate help
- If it is felt that the child is at risk of significant harm, it will be necessary to refer the matter to the Public Prosecutor for Minors and the competent Social Services, thereby breaching the child's confidentiality. However, the child should be informed as fully as possible of what action has been taken and why.

If a child discloses significant harm, the staff member or volunteer should listen carefully, giving the child time and attention and providing interpretation when there is such a need. The child is never to blame in situations of abuse and should be reassured that they have

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done nothing wrong, either in relation to the abuse or in reporting it. The aim is to facilitate the disclosure (but not to cross-examine) in order to determine whether there is real cause for concern. The responsibility for undertaking any investigation lies with the competent authorities (Public Prosecutor for Minors, competent Police Departments, and Social Services). The child must be informed, as soon as possible, about any action being taken on their behalf and what is likely to happen. If there is no immediate danger, it is advisable to give the child time to fully understand what action is being pursued and the reasons for it before proceeding.

Reference to competent authorities:

In case of serious maltreatment/harm/abuse concerns or allegations, Organization Earth Board shall report it to the competent local authority and ask for advice. The advice given shall be followed. Depending on the case, it may initiate judicial proceedings and/or other disciplinary process.

Disciplinary process

Where concerns exist about the conduct of Organization Earth Staff, Volunteers, Interns, External Contractors, Associates and Partners in relation to Child protection and/or where there has been a breach of the Child Protection Policy, this will be investigated under this policy by consideration of referral to statutory authorities for criminal investigation under the law of the country in which they work; and/or by Organization Earth in accordance with disciplinary procedures.

In case a legitimate concern about suspected child abuse is raised but proves to be unfounded on investigation, no action will be taken against the reporter. However, appropriate sanctions will be applied in cases of false and malicious accusations of child abuse.

#### Implementation, monitoring and review

The Board of Organization Earth is ultimately accountable for this policy and responsible for its implementation. Monitoring of abidance by and respect for this policy is made through the mandatory tracking of Organization Earth's Code of Conduct. All members of Organization Earth shall cooperatively ensure monitoring. The need for reviewing will be regularly examined every two years and/or when there are changes in the relevant legislation and/or as a result of any other significant change in the field of child protection.

Alexis Galinos  
Executive Director

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