



WECF is fully committed to safeguarding the welfare of all children and young people. It recognizes its responsibility to take all reasonable steps to promote safe practice and to protect children from harm, abuse, and exploitation. This policy is complementary to WECF's other integrity policies and code of conduct, and in particular the WECF policy to prevent and address sexual exploitation and abuse.

Purpose and Principles

WECF does not tolerate any form of child abuse or exploitation. The purpose of this policy is to provide WECF with a procedure that prevents and deals with child abuse and exploitation witnessed, or conducted, by any staff or partner in relation to WECF's programmes and projects.

WECF acknowledges its duty to act appropriately to any allegations, reports, or suspicions of abuse. Paid staff, interns, volunteers, and partners will endeavour to work together to encourage the development of an ethos which embraces difference and diversity and respects the rights of children, young people and adults.

The organization believes that:

- The welfare of the child is paramount.
- All children, whatever their age, culture, disability, gender, language, racial origin, religious beliefs and/or sexual identity have the right to protection from abuse.
- All suspicions and allegations of abuse should be taken seriously and responded to swiftly and appropriately.
- All members and employees of the organization should be clear on how to respond appropriately.

Implementation of the policy

In implementing this child protection policy WECF International will:

- Communicate to all staff/partners their legal and moral responsibility to protect children and young people from harm, abuse, and exploitation.
- Communicate to all staff/partners their responsibility to work to the standards that are detailed in the [United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child \(1989\)](#) and the need to work at all times towards maintaining high standards of practice in protection of children.

- Encourages all staff/partners to understand their duty to report concerns that arise about a child or young person, or a colleague's conduct towards a child/young person, to WECF Integrity Officer.

Contacts of WECF's integrity officer, the integrity advisor in the Board of Trustees, the external whistle-blower point as well as the external person of trust can be found on the website of WECF.

Scope

The policy applies to all WECF staff and partners that work with, or receive funding, from WECF including:

- Board of Trustees
- Full and part-time staff
- Interns
- Volunteers
- Contractors
- Consultants, advisers, and contracted individuals
- Non-Government Organization (NGO), Civil society Organization (CSO) and contractor organizations who work with or receive sub-grants from WECF

External parties must also abide by their own relevant policies, international declarations, conventions, agreements, and domestic legal frameworks, which seek to protect children.

How WECF interacts with children

WECF in its current projects does not engage directly in any work that involves children. Despite this, the organization recognizes its responsibility to take all reasonable steps to promote safe practice and to protect children from harm, abuse, and exploitation.

Definition of a child

Any person under the physical age of 18 years.

Responsibilities

WECF staff/ partners must never act or make a decision alone where child abuse or exploitation is suspected. Child Protection is a State and Society responsibility. Decisions are made collectively or by those empowered to make specific decisions.

The role of WECF staff/partners in Child Protection¹:

- Report and record any incident of concern about child protection to the appropriate child protection agency.
- Promote a culture of openness exists amongst staff to enable any issues or concerns to be raised and discussed.
- Prevent poor practice or potentially abusive behaviour by WECF partners/staff does not go unchallenged.
- In the event WECF or its partners engage with work with children, the role of WECF staff/partners will also include:
 - Enable community and children become aware of and have easy access to reporting authorities and procedures for reporting concerns and complaints.
 - Develop working partnerships with community leaders and professionals with responsibility for child welfare and protection.
 - Parental or guardian consent is sought for any activity with a child and encourage parental participation in all activities involving children.
 - Parental or guardian consent is sought before taking any images or footage of children.
 - Parent or guardian understands the purpose of this activity and how the images or footage will be used.
 - Plan and organize the work and the workplace so as to eliminate risks to children.
 - Be aware of situations which may present risks and that these are supervised appropriately.
 - Staff are accountable for the welfare of children during activities.

The role and duty of WECF Board of Trustees is to support directors of the WECF offices through their Joint Advisory Committee (JAC) in performing the following activities that promotes Child Protection:

- Staff and partners are aware of, as well as have access to this WECF's Child protection policy.

¹ This role applies primarily to WECF work on programmes and projects. For child abuse and exploitation observed outside WECF work, staff and partners are encouraged to take needed action that include alerting the responsible authorities and child protection organizations.

- Staff and partners are aware of procedures for reporting concerns and their responsibilities in reporting, as indicated in this policy document.
- Be aware of the local law applying to child protection and the agencies responsible and enable all staff and partners working on such a project to be aware of these. This information will be documented by conducting a survey of local law with support from project manager at the commencement of a new project involving children.
- Apply procedures for reporting of and investigating suspected cases of abuse and exploitation of children as captured in WECF's code of conduct document.
- Disciplinary procedures are implemented for staff members found to have violated the Child Protection Policy, as captured this policy document as well as in WECF's code of conduct document.
- All staff are encouraged to be aware of how to recognize child abuse and exploitation and take appropriate action.
- Timely reporting of child protection risks and mitigation measures to the Board of Trustees.

To enable implementation of all the above mentioned activities, this Child Protection Policy is included in the Employee Handbook and shared with all new employees. As part of the hiring procedure, employees will be asked to sign a declaration of the policy stating that they have not been engaged in any child or sexual abuse or exploitation previously and are aware of WECF's Child Protection policy's existence and will abide/adhere to it. The declaration will be kept on the staff members file and may be referred to in legal proceedings if a staff member is found to be in breach of the policy.

Procedures

If WECF staff/partners are made aware of sensitive information concerning children, the following steps must be taken:

- Concerns must be reported immediately to the responsible manager and Integrity Officer
- Complaints may be submitted to **the external whistle-blower point as well as the external person of trust that can be found on the website of WECF**. Additionally, proper law enforcement should be notified. The contact details of the integrity persons and whistle-blower agency are found here: <https://www.wecf.org/integrity-policies/>
- Whenever a staff member of WECF has concerns of abuse or exploitation, detailed notes of circumstances and dialogue must be included in records and kept confidential. These records may be used as evidence to save a child from abuse and exploitation.

- Concerns that are evidenced by impairment of health, physical injury, sexual exploitation, criminal activity, or threats must be reported immediately to statutory child protection agencies or equivalent authorities.
- Any knowledge regarding partner/staff prior record of children-based activities which are questionable should be raised with the Director.

Any staff member found to be engaged in the following acts will be summarily dismissed:

- Inducing or coercing a child to engage in any sexual activity.
- Any commercially exploitative activities with the children including child labour or trafficking.
- Use of children's photographs for pornographic or other inappropriate use.
- Subjecting any child to torture or other cruel, inhuman, or degrading treatment or punishment.
- Mistreating or depriving the child in any way.
- Any staff of a partner organisation found to be engaged or suspected of being engaged in the above acts will be reported to the relevant authorities in their country of residence. Their names will be removed from any WECF related materials or directories.