

Care to Engage

ICYE's Policy on Safeguarding Children



International Cultural Youth Exchange

ICYE

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Introduction

In every country and society, violence against children in all their diversity is both common and widespread. Across all stages of childhood and in diverse settings, children are affected by different kinds of physical, sexual and emotional forms of violence and abuse.¹ It is estimated that “one billion children globally experience some form of emotional, physical or sexual violence every year; and one child dies as a result of violence every five minutes”.² Worldwide, around 300 million children between the ages of 2 and 4 are regularly subjected to violent discipline by their caregivers and more than 30% of students aged 13-15 experience bullying.³

Especially at risk are excluded groups of children who are often stigmatised, denied their rights, opportunities, resources and full participation in the society in which they live due to stereotypes, prejudices and harmful social norms, e.g. children from ethnic minority groups, street children, LGBTIQA+⁴ youth. For example, children and adolescents with disabilities “are 3 to 4 times more likely to experience physical and sexual violence and neglect than other children”.⁵ The number of unreported cases of violence against children is probably much higher, as many incidents are never made public, or only after long delays.

1 UNICEF (2017), A Familiar Face: Violence in the lives of children and adolescents. Page 6

2 <https://sdgs.un.org/topics/violence-against-children>

3 <https://www.unicef.org/protection/violence-against-children>

4 LGBTIQA+ stands for different sexual orientations: lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, intersex, queer/questioning, asexual and others

5 <https://violenceagainstchildren.un.org/content/children-disabilities>

All children have a right to be protected from violence and abuse. ICYE is not an organisation focusing specifically on child protection, but on organising international volunteering. Still, as around 50% of ICYE volunteers work in a variety of children's projects, safeguarding children is an important element of our work. We are therefore committed to preventing all forms of violence against or abuse of children that could occur through our volunteer programmes and our work in general. This applies to all children participating in our host projects as well as those living in the host families. We are aware of the different contexts ICYE works in and the challenges around child safeguarding, but we do share the same overall commitment to protecting children in all their diversity from harm and respecting their rights.

Most countries already have criminal and civil laws protecting children and prosecuting those who violate those rights. Globally, the UN [Convention on the Rights of the Child](#) (CRC) along with its Optional Protocols⁶ form a comprehensive system to protect the rights of all children. Along these there are regional conventions, like the [African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of Children](#) or the [European Convention on the Exercise of Children's Rights](#), and child rights mechanisms, like the [Inter-American Special Rapporteur on Children](#). For ICYE, the CRC is the moral and legal foundation of our commitment to work with our different stakeholders to protect children and ensure their well-being.

In this policy, ICYE describes how we are addressing safeguarding children in our work and the minimum standards all our members are committed to uphold.⁷

6 Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on the involvement of children in armed conflict⁴, „Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on the Sale of Children, Child Prostitution and Child Pornography“, and “Optional Protocol on the Individual Complaints Procedure“

7 When developing our own Safeguarding Children Policy we were greatly inspired by the [Protection Children against Violence - The Child Protection Policy of Kindernothilfe](#) which helped us a lot in formulating our own policy.

Goal and Purpose

In line with our vision, mission and values and in order to reduce the risk of violence and abuse of children in the framework of international volunteering, including avoiding any negative impact of our activities on children, ICYE is committed to creating safe environments for them. ICYE is also committed to building awareness and the necessary skills on this issue amongst our own and partners' staff as well as our volunteers and host projects. We acknowledge that everyone working or engaging with ICYE has a responsibility to ensure that the children we work or are in contact with are kept from harm.

The purpose of this policy therefore is to ensure that:

- everyone related to ICYE (staff/co-workers, partners, volunteers, host families, host projects) knows of their responsibility to keep children safe from violence and abuse and has the skills and confidence to meet this responsibility,
- the necessary measures, procedures and structures to ensure the safeguarding of children in all their diversity are in place - including a transparent complaint/referral mechanism in line with our code of conduct for ICYE member organisations, host projects, host families and our volunteers,
- the children ICYE works with know of this policy, our commitment to prevent and respond to any actions or behaviour that might cause them harm and our mechanisms for reporting, and;
- all our communication and media work reflects our principles on safeguarding children.

Scope

The Safeguarding Children Policy applies to all ICYE staff, board members, co-workers, host projects, host families, volunteers, and project visitors affiliated to ICYE. The policy sets the minimum global standards for the ICYE Federation and its members, the National Committees (NC), as well as the ICYE International Office (IO).

Declaration of Commitment

ICYE as a Federation with all our members, is committed to

- treat all children irrespective of their gender, skin colour, religion, nationality, ethnicity, age, ability, sexual orientation, socio-economic status or political views with respect and value them equally,
- take all children's beliefs and concerns seriously and foster their personal growth,
- support staff, co-workers, volunteers and host projects/ host families in their safeguarding responsibilities and train them on how concerns and potential cases need to be reported in a transparent fashion (while ensuring the safety of the affected children) and how abuse cases and the abusers should be dealt with,
- have transparent and up to date case management and referral mechanisms in place to be able to respond effectively and quickly to any reported case,
- train the Safeguarding Children Officers across the Federation to have the necessary skills to comply with case management and reporting,

- ensure that safeguarding is part of the volunteering cycle (regarding the selection, preparation and placement of the volunteers, the selection and preparation of host projects and host families),
- ensure that any media or communication content produced or circulated by anyone related to ICYE maintains children's dignity and protects their identity - this includes handling personal information (such as their address) with care and requiring this of third parties who receive information about children from ICYE,
- raise awareness with stakeholders and those connected to ICYE work, as to how to interact appropriately with children,
- ensure that all persons who visit projects which involve children on behalf of ICYE (e.g. board members, co-workers, volunteers, interns, consultants, media) will have been informed about ICYE's Policy "Care to Engage" and signed the Code of Conduct prior to embarking on any work and/or visit,
- ensure that hiring and recruitment procedures take into account safeguarding issues and that all new employees are trained on the safeguarding policy,
- report in our annual review report on the number and types of cases reported to ICYE.

National Committees (NC) are closely working and collaborating with host projects to ensure that children are kept safe. For ICYE it is therefore important that host projects working with or for children are committed to:

- strengthen all children in their rights and protect them from sexual, emotional or physical violence and abuse as well as neglect,

- create a safe environment for all children (irrespective of their gender, skin colour, religion, nationality, ethnicity, age, ability, sexual orientation, socio-economic status or political views) in which their rights are respected and where they are valued equally,
- meaningfully involve all children in the measures affecting them and to take into consideration their practical and strategic interests in planning and implementing project activities,
- develop, implement and comply with suitable instruments and mechanisms in the areas of safeguarding, prevention, case management and monitoring.

Roles and Responsibilities

The ICYE Policy “Care to Engage” commits every ICYE staff, board member and co-worker (mentors, coordinators, volunteers working for the NC, including returnees) to:

- comply with the ICYE Policy "Care to Engage", adhere to our principles both at work and outside work and display high standards of professional behaviour at all times, thereby protecting ICYE’s reputation,
- be responsible for observing and spreading awareness of the ICYE Policy “Care to Engage” in their work environment,
- act according to the best interest of the child, treat all children in a manner which is respectful to their rights, integrity and dignity and value them equally, irrespective of any attribute that might make them susceptible to discrimination or stigmatisation, like e.g. their gender, skin colour, religion, nationality, ethnicity, age, ability, sexual orientation, socio-economic status or political views,

- recognize every child as an autonomous human being and uphold their human dignity,
- take children's beliefs and concerns seriously and foster their personal growth,
- contribute to creating a safe, nurturing and empowering environment for all children where they feel valued, respected and safe,
- meaningfully engage children in their own protection,
- respond immediately to any concerns, allegations and incidents and to notify the ICYE Safeguarding Children Officer without delay,
- report potential cases of violence and abuse and to respond appropriately and immediately in the event of violence pursuant to the ICYE Policy "Care to Engage" requirements,
- take care that the volunteers, host families and host projects respect safeguarding measures and hold all of them (volunteers, host families, host projects) accountable,
- support volunteers, host families and host projects in ensuring that disciplinary measures for children are free of violence and humiliation and work with them on how to interact appropriately with children,
- ensure that all persons who visit host families or host projects which involve children on behalf of ICYE (e.g. board members, other co-workers, friends and family of the volunteers, interns, consultants, media) will have been informed about ICYE Policy "Care to Engage" and signed the Code of Conduct prior to embarking on any work and/or visit,
- respect the privacy and confidentiality of children and not disclose any information that identifies them,

- make sure that any media or communication content that is produced or circulated maintains the child's dignity and protects the child's identity - this includes handling sensitive information (such as their name, address etc) with care and requiring this of third parties who receive information about children from ICYE.

Case Management

ICYE takes all reports of violence or abuse against children seriously and has a transparent case management system in place. All reported cases and complaints will be investigated. Allegations against staff and co-workers are followed up with the same rigour as reports of cases of abuse or violence in host projects/families. Everyone who is the subject of an allegation has the right to have their case dealt with fairly and quickly and with the necessary respect. All those who report cases will be protected and not discriminated against in any way. Persons reporting a case will be able to express their views and opinions without intimidation.

Every case is documented by the Safeguarding Children Officer who will submit a report with anonymised cases each year to the IO for the annual review report.

Sanctions and Disciplinary Measures

The aim of the policy is to protect all victims while also maintaining a professional approach in following up on each potential case:

If **ICYE staff, co-workers or board members** are accused of any act of violence against children as described in this policy and the accusation is confirmed, the NC will take disciplinary actions in line with this policy and the country's legislation.

If **representatives or staff of a host project or members of a host family** are accused of any act of violence against children as described in this policy, the NC should suspend the cooperation with either host project or host family pending investigation. Depending on the outcome of the investigation, the NC will explain in writing to the IO and BoM their decision regarding the cooperation with the host project or host family. In the case that the accusation is confirmed and relevant under national criminal law, the NC will work together with the national authorities as necessary.

In the event a **volunteer** is accused of having committed any act of violence against children as described in this policy, ICYE should remove them from the host project and/or host family pending investigation. During this time, both hosting and sending NC will share the potential extra costs for lodging and food during this time. In the event the volunteer is allowed to continue with the project or stay in the host family, then the hosting NC has to explain their decision to the sending NC and the IO. In the case that the accusation is confirmed, volunteers will have to pay back the incurred costs during the investigation process and any costs related to the volunteer's departure. Volunteers have to be clear that they might face legal or other consequences as stipulated in the host country.

Other more transformational measures like educational activities or restorative justice will be explored on an individual case basis.

Corporal Punishment

According to the global [Initiative to End Corporal Punishment](#), corporal punishment⁸ is experienced by children worldwide on a daily basis and is the most common form of violence against children. Corporal punishment involves physical as well as non-physical punishment to discipline a child. This causes pain, humiliation, fear and violates children's rights, including their right to human dignity and physical integrity.

87% of children worldwide are not fully protected by their country's law against all forms of corporal punishment.⁹ This means that in many ICYE member countries, corporal punishment is still an accepted practice and children are not treated as autonomous persons with dignity and intrinsic worth. ICYE is committed to raise awareness of this common form of violence to ensure children's safety. Our long-term goal is that only positive forms of discipline are practiced in our host projects and host families: "Real discipline is not based on force. It grows from understanding, mutual respect, tolerance, and two way effective communication."¹⁰

8 "...this mostly involves hitting ("smacking", "slapping", "spanking") children with the hand or with an implement (a whip, stick, belt, shoe, wooden spoon, or similar) but it can also involve, for example, kicking, shaking or throwing children, scratching, pinching, biting, pulling hair or boxing ears, forcing children to stay in uncomfortable positions, burning, scalding or forced ingestion (for example, washing children's mouths out with soap or forcing them to swallow hot spices). Non-physical forms of punishment that are cruel and degrading [...] include, for example, punishment which belittles, humiliates, denigrates, scapegoats, threatens, scares or ridicules the child." <https://endcorporalpunishment.org/introduction/>

9 <https://endcorporalpunishment.org/countdown/>

10 <https://endcorporalpunishment.org/faqs/>

Children in Orphanages

It is estimated that approximately eight million children live in orphanages¹¹ – most of these still have families who could take care of them. Reasons for families to leave their children with institutional care include poverty, disability, abandonment, stigmatization and discrimination. They are often exposed to violence, exploitation and abuse.

UNICEF strongly advises against the placement of unqualified volunteers in orphanages.¹² We are aware that volunteering not only normalises access to vulnerable children but can also contribute to creating a demand for children to be in orphanages. Most volunteers have very good intentions and want to protect children from harm, but are unaware that their stay can cause emotional stress, attachment disorders and a sense of abandonment for the children living in orphanages.

For these reasons, ICYE will revise our ethics around placing volunteers in orphanages. Our long-term goal is that no ICYE volunteers will work in orphanages.

Monitoring

ICYE recognises the importance of monitoring the implementation of this policy. The Federation will ensure that data on how it is used and whether or not it is effective is collected.

This will be done through regular surveys as well as an annual report from each NC for the global review report of the ICYE Federation on the number of incidents, how they were dealt with, and any recommendations made to the ICYE BoM and IO.

11 <https://rethinkorphanages.org/problem-orphanages/facts-and-figures-about-orphanage-tourism>

12 <https://www.unicef.org/rosa/what-we-do/child-protection/volunteering-orphanages>

Additionally, the ICYE Secretary General will meet at least every two years (before each GA) with a small Safeguarding Children Task Force – made up of 1 representative of the BoM and 4 NC representatives, one from each of the four regions (Africa, Americas, Asia- Pacific, Europe) to revise the implementation of the Safeguarding Children Policy, decide on the need for staff training and revise the cases related to child safeguarding. The results from the meeting will be presented and discussed during the GA.

Glossary

Case Management: refers in this policy to the collaborative process of coordinating the response and related services which help to address safeguarding cases and which are necessary to define the required steps in an appropriate, systematic and timely manner, through direct support and/or referrals, appropriate communication and documentation.

Child: is defined in line with CRC, Article 1 as any person under the age of 18 years.¹³

Child abuse: "Child abuse or maltreatment constitutes all forms of physical and/or emotional ill-treatment, sexual abuse, neglect or negligent treatment or commercial or other exploitation, resulting in actual or potential harm to the child's health, survival, development or dignity in the context of a relationship of responsibility, trust or power."¹⁴

Five main categories of child abuse are taken into account in this policy:

- *Physical abuse* – the actual or potential physical harm to a child or a failure to live up to the responsibility to protect a child from physical injury.
- *Sexual abuse* – all forms of sexual harassment and violence, whether actual or threatened, including all forms of sexual activities such as socially taboo touching, intercourse, etc.,

¹³ https://www.unicef.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2010/05/UNCRC_united_nations_convention_on_the_rights_of_the_child.pdf

¹⁴ World Health Organization (2006), Preventing child maltreatment: A guide to taking action and generating evidence. Retrieved from <https://aifs.gov.au/resources/policy-and-practice-papers/what-child-abuse-and-neglect>

as well as activities that do not involve physical contact, such as showing the child pornographic material.

- **Emotional abuse** – comprises the failure to provide an environment suitable for fostering the age-appropriate and psycho-social development of the child as well as persistent or serious verbal abuse, humiliation or rejection that negatively impact the child's spiritual and behavioural development.
- **Exploitation** – refers to having the child perform activities – whether commercial or not – for the sole benefit of a third party. The child performs for the benefit of a third party. These activities include exploitative child labour and child prostitution as well as any other activity that leads to the economic exploitation of the child, which is to the disadvantage of the child's physical or mental welfare, which prevents the child from receiving an education or damages the child's moral and psycho-social development.
- **Neglect** – begins as soon as a child is denied the basic foundations for psycho-social development, including that relating to health, nutrition, clothing, shelter, education, etc.

Child protection: is defined in this policy as ICYE's overall responsibility to protect children from harm.

Co-worker: refers to individuals supporting ICYE activities on a voluntary or external basis, e.g. mentors, collaborators, interns and returnees.

Host family: refers to a group of individuals who accommodate ICYE Volunteers for the duration of their international volunteer service.

Host projects: are local organisations where volunteers practice their voluntary work.

Safeguarding: refers to all institutional and organisational measures, policies, procedures and practices which are in place to protect children from harm. This includes ensuring that their participation in our projects is safe and that appropriate and timely actions are taken in case a child suffers violence or abuse.

Safeguarding Children Officer: refers to any person elected or nominated to serve as focal point for an NC concerning any safeguarding issues related to children, especially dealing with cases of violence or abuse against children as reported to or witnessed by ICYE.

Staff: refers to any employee of a National Committee.

Two adult rule: requires that no visitors are allowed to spend time alone with a child, but that an ICYE or host project representative are present at all times. This is a measure to ensure the protection of the children and to reduce the risk of inappropriate behaviour towards them.

Volunteers: are participants in ICYE's volunteer programmes.

Volunteerism/Volunteering: is defined according to the UN General Assembly, as “a wide range of activities, including traditional forms of mutual aid and self-help, formal service delivery and other forms of civic participation, undertaken of free will, for the general public good and where monetary reward is not the principal motivating factor.”¹⁵ Voluntary work can be done informally or formally, in the local, national or international context. In this policy paper, the ICYE Federation refers as volunteerism/ volunteering especially to all forms of volunteer work, which take place in the form of international exchange and where the core of the activity is community work instead of tourism.

15 Resolution adopted in the 56. session of the UN General Assembly, Agenda Item 108: “56/38. Recommendations on support for volunteering”. Annex I.1, see <https://undocs.org/en/A/RES/56/38>

Voluntourism: describes a certain form of tourism where volunteering has been included by the tourism industry to cater a specific target group interested in social work. Being mostly profit orientated, voluntourism usually offers very little pedagogical support or preparation of the participants and is not promoting mutual learning. Based in the interests of the customers and not the need of the community or host project, there is usually no selection process to analyse whether the person volunteering brings the necessary qualification and motivation. All this can lead to people in the projects being exploited or to harm being done to children and vulnerable populations.

Abbreviations

BoM	Board of Managers
CRC	Convention on the Rights of the Child
GA	General Assembly
ICYE	International Cultural Youth Exchange
IO	International Office
LGBTIQA+	lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, intersex, queer/ questioning, asexual and others
NC	National Committee
UN	United Nations
UNICEF	United Nations Children's Fund

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