



Institutional Policy

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# Child protection policy

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Operations Division  
2007–Updated 2019

IP | 02





On 24 January 2018, Handicap International's global movement became Humanity & Inclusion. The Federation, which runs projects in around sixty countries, is now working under the operating names of "Humanity & Inclusion", "Handicap International" or "Atlas Logistique". Any document with the letterhead "Humanity & Inclusion" applies de facto to Atlas Logistique and Handicap International teams.



## Child Protection Policy

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# 1

## Introduction

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### 1.1 Why this child protection policy

It is the duty of Humanity & Inclusion (HI) to protect all children participating in or impacted by its activities. In its mandate, a special focus is placed on children with disabilities.

**Although children with disabilities have the same rights as other children, they can be more vulnerable as they are often discriminated against, ill-treated, forgotten or isolated. In many countries, they are not empowered or respected and have very few life prospects.**

HI promotes the right of children with disabilities to develop their full potential, attend school, have their say and take part in mainstream society. HI considers that children with disabilities have the right to protection and to live and prosper within their own family and community.

### 1.2 Scope of application

Everyone working with children has a basic duty of attention toward them. HI as an institution and all those working with HI must recognise the risks to children and assume responsibility for

keeping them safe. In order to protect children from abuse and exploitation, HI, its staff and its partners must at all times conduct themselves with the highest levels of professionalism and integrity and always act in the best interests of the child.

This policy aims to protect children from intentional and non-intentional harm or abuse. It applies to HI as an institution and to all those collaborating with HI, and notably people having signed a permanent or fixed-term employment contract with HI, family members accompanying international staff, trustees, consultants, interns, voluntary workers or international volunteers, service providers and partners. For people placed under HI's responsibility (people having signed a permanent or fixed-term employment contract with HI, family members accompanying international staff, trustees, interns, voluntary workers or international volunteers and people invited onto HI's premises or programmes), this policy applies to all situations, professional or otherwise, during and outside working hours. It is HI's responsibility to ensure that everyone is informed of the existence and content of this child protection policy.

Broader child protection issues arising outside the organisation will be dealt with through HI's programme and project activities.

This update of HI's Child Protection Policy was approved by the Directorate in December 2018.

# 2

## Definitions

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### 2.1 Child

A child is defined as a person below the age of 18.

### 2.2 Child abuse

Child abuse is a general term covering all forms of physical and/or emotional ill-treatment, sexual assault, neglect or negligent treatment or 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.

### 2.3 Physical abuse

The actual or likely physical injury to a child or failure to prevent physical injury or suffering to a child.

### 2.4 Emotional abuse

The notion of emotional abuse includes verbal abuse, discrimination and psychological maltreatment. It refers to the actual or likely adverse effects on the emotional and behavioural development of a child caused by persistent or severe emotional ill-treatment or rejection.

### 2.5 Sexual abuse

Sexual abuse refers to actual or threatened physical intrusion of a sexual nature, whether by force or under unequal or coercive conditions.

### 2.6 Neglect

Neglect refers to any act of omission or failure to provide, whether deliberate or otherwise, that compromises the health, security and development of a child, with due consideration to context, resources and circumstances. It refers to the on-going incapacity to satisfy the basic physical and/or psychological needs of the child resulting in a high risk of serious physical and cognitive disorders.

### 2.7 Child labour

Child labour is regulated by such instruments as the International Labour Organization's Minimum Age Convention (N° 138) which sets the following age limits:

- The minimum age for admission to employment shall not be less than the age of completion of compulsory schooling and, in any case, shall not be less than **15 years**.
- The minimum age for admission to any type of employment or work which by its nature or the circumstances in which it is carried out is likely to jeopardise the health,

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## Policy statement: Preventing abuse

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### 3.1 General principles

HI commits to a set of principles that derive from the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child and its optional protocols:

- All children have equal rights to protection from abuse and exploitation;
- Everyone has a responsibility to protect and support children and to always act in the best interests of the child;
- Organisations have a duty to protect the children they encounter when implementing their activities. They must take all necessary steps to provide the children with the care and support they need and contribute towards a protective environment.
- Children are actors in their own protection and development, which does not exempt parents and educators from their responsibilities.

HI is committed to the protection and promotion of children's rights and reaffirms its policy of zero tolerance of any form of child abuse. Our Code of Conduct: Prevention of abuse and

safety or moral of young persons, shall not be less than **18 years**. This age-limit may be reduced to **16 years**, on condition that the health, safety and morals of the young person concerned are fully protected and that young persons have received adequate specific instruction or vocational training.

In HI's Child Protection policy, child labour refers to the employment and work of children below the age of 15.

HI is extremely vigilant with regard to this age limit in order, amongst other things, to preserve children's access to schooling and vocational training. Furthermore, and with due regard to national legislation, HI is careful to employ people over the age of 18 and encourages all those working in collaboration with HI to do likewise.

### 2.8 Participation by children in light work

This refers to children's participation in economic activity that does not negatively affect their health and development or interfere with their education. No economic activity is allowed for children under 12 (International Labour Organization, Convention 138).

safeguarding sets forth the “expected behaviours and practices constituting the organisation’s minimum standards and actions to be avoided”.

↳ See Code of conduct: Prevention of abuse and safeguarding

HI encourages the creation of dedicated spaces where children on the programme can raise safeguarding issues.

## 3.2 Awareness

HI undertakes to raise the awareness of all those with whom it is in collaboration (see point 1 of this policy) and to ensure their understanding of the principles and provisions of this policy, as well as of the whistleblowing and monitoring procedures in place.

Awareness-raising will notably include:

- Information for the above-mentioned persons on:
  - The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (1989) and its optional protocols which constitute the frame of reference of our child protection policy. These texts can be consulted on HI’s intranet.
  - HI’s guidelines on the use of social networks by its employees which notably specify that prior consent must be obtained from children, their families and the communities for the use of any images and that this use must respect the dignity of the children concerned.

↳ See the Social network policy: Guidelines for the use of social media by HI employees and volunteers

- Strict prohibition of owning or consulting child pornographic material.
- Specific awareness-raising of the following:
  - Children with disabilities have the same rights as other children and must be treated with dignity, respect, sensitivity and equity.
  - Gender-related vulnerabilities with regard to child protection.
  - Community-based programmes contribute to HI’s commitments by helping to ensure that children with disabilities have access to education, are not victims of forced labour and are given a voice.

## 3.3 Safeguarding

During the implementation of HI’s activities, evaluations of the risks covered by this policy will be conducted as required. A risk mitigation strategy including safeguarding measures has been developed and integrated into the implementation of activities involving or having an impact on children so that the risk for children is minimised and the commitment to “Do No Harm” is respected.

HI undertakes to include these safeguarding measures in its communication with its partners,

with an emphasis on children with disabilities on account of their vulnerability.

HI ensures that its partners incorporate the notion of "Do No Harm" in their interventions.

## 4

### Implementation and procedures

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#### 4.1 Recruitment, selection and induction

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Before starting work with HI, each candidate shall undertake a secured recruitment process and submit to background checks.

Anyone having signed a permanent or fixed-term employment contract with HI, accompanying family members, trustees, consultants, as well as interns, international volunteers and voluntary workers engaged by HI shall be informed of this child protection policy. HI's Code of Conduct also contains a clause concerning respect for children's right to be protected from abuse.

The employment contract contains a clause stipulating that the employee undertakes to comply with this child protection policy.

#### 4.2 Whistleblowing procedure

In the event that suspicions or denunciation of abuse or neglect are reported, the following procedure applies:

- The person initially informed of the abuse shall:
  - Either inform the on-site safeguarding focal point,
  - Or the [Regional] Programme Director / Country Manager,
  - Or use the whistleblowing mechanism consultable on HI's internet and intranet sites.

If the abuse has been committed by a [Regional] Programme Director / Country Manager, the person concerned shall:

- Either inform the Operations Division Director,
  - Or use the whistleblowing mechanism consultable on HI's internet and intranet sites.
- If the person accused is an employee, he or she shall be immediately suspended until the allegations have been investigated and appropriate measures taken. In other cases, HI shall immediately prohibit access to its premises, materials and activities until the allegations have been investigated and appropriate measures taken. HI shall, if necessary, ask its partners to suspend or remove the person accused until the



allegations have been investigated and appropriate measures taken.

- Disciplinary measures are taken against the HI employee in accordance with the gravity of the misconduct and applicable provisions, notably the law applicable to the contract and internal rules of procedure.  
For the same reasons, HI will officially request the partner organisation to take appropriate measures with the accused person.
- In any case, should a member of its local or international staff be accused, HI shall not obstruct local legislation and shall take all necessary steps to ensure fair judicial proceedings.
- Any false, malicious or contemptuous statements made against a person having signed a permanent or fixed-term contract with HI or against family members accompanying international staff, trustees, consultants, interns, voluntary workers or international volunteers, engaged by HI, shall be investigated and the appropriate measures taken, including disciplinary measures.

## 4.3 Confidentiality

In all matters relating to this policy, the obligation of confidentiality must be respected. Therefore no information provided by children and/or other individuals about any form of child abuse shall be made public without the prior consent of the child /his or her parents / his or her legal guardian and/or the person reporting this abuse.

The children (and their families) must be kept fully informed at all times of the process underway for handling the incident and of its outcome.

Concerns, allegations or disclosures shall be reported in writing. Reports shall be as precise as possible, giving an exact account of what happened, how it happened etc. and including the sequence of events and all subsequent actions taken. All reports shall be kept under lock and key and access to them shall be restricted to the [Regional] Programme Director / Country Manager, under HQ supervision (Geographical Division Directors and Human Resources Director). Any transfer of information (either verbal or electronic) shall be done in such a way as to guarantee confidentiality.

Should the allegation concern staff from another organisation, the [Regional] Programme Director / Country Manager shall decide how to approach the issue with the organisation concerned

before reporting it to a third party, and with due regard to local legislation.

## 4.4 Procedure with partners

HI shall not enter into a partnership agreement with organisations whose staff or members are liable to commit acts of abuse against children, as described in section 2 of this policy. Any proven allegations of such practices shall result in the termination of the partnership agreement unless the partner commits to and effectively ensures a radical change in behaviour.

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## Monitoring / Evaluation

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Policy and practices are monitored permanently.

The [Regional] Programme Director / Country Manager is responsible for information on policy and practice, as well as for monitoring all matters relating to abuse within the HI network and for reporting them to the Safeguarding Policies Officer, Operations Director and Human Resources Director at HQ.



## Other documents concerning child protection

Humanity & Inclusion. Code of conduct: Prevention of abuse and safeguarding. Lyon: Humanity & Inclusion, January 2018

Humanity & Inclusion. Protection of beneficiaires from sexual exploitation, abuse and harassment. Lyon: Humanity & Inclusion, 2011, Updated 2019

Humanity & Inclusion. Reporting suspicions on fraud and abuse. Lyon: Humanity & Inclusion, June 2018

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## Child protection policy

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This paper presents HI's approach to child protection. It provides a policy framework and defines prevention and response mechanisms.

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