Policy and Guidelines for the Protection of Children and Vulnerable Adults

Introduction

This ***Policy and Guidelines for the Protection of Children and Vulnerable Adults*** is to ensure that all possible steps are taken in order to protect from harm any children or vulnerable adults participating in our projects or events. These procedures and policies will be incorporated into our agreements with project partners and sub-grantees.

Pax Christi International’s Policy for the Protection of Children and Vulnerable Adults expresses our commitment to create a safe environment for children and vulnerable adults and, in line with their rights under the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child[[1]](#footnote-1) and other human rights conventions and agreements to prevent their physical, sexual or emotional abuse . The Pax Christi Fund for Peace abides by Pax Christi International policies for the Protection of Children and Vulnerable Adults.

Pax Christi International is committed to ensuring that our staff activities and programs do no harm to children or vulnerable adults, that they do not expose children or vulnerable adults to the risk of harm and abuse and that any concerns the organization has about children’s safety within the communities in which we work, are reported to the appropriate authorities.

The guidelines that follow clarify the procedures for the follow-up and reporting of possible abuse. This policy is obligatory for of all staff, consultants, contractors, volunteers, Board Members and project partners of Pax Christi International. To the extent appropriate, the Pax Christi Fund for Peace will follow the guidelines adopted by Pax Christi International.

The key principles underpinning this policy are:

1. The child and vulnerable adult’s welfare is, and always must be, the paramount consideration.
2. Everyone has a right to be protected from abuse.
3. All suspicions and allegations of abuse will be taken seriously and responded to swiftly and appropriately.

Guidelines for Implementation of Policy: Protection of Children and Vulnerable Adults

Designated Safeguarding Officer (DSO)

The role of the Designated Safeguarding Office (DSO) is a point of reference for allegations of abuse, as well as managing the policies and trainings for Pax Christi International staff and follow-up on the review process for the policy. Any member of the Pax Christi Fund for Peace Board will serve as a point of reference for allegations of abuse if approached to so serve.

Definitions of harm[[2]](#footnote-2)  
It is difficult to define “harm” to children and vulnerable adults because they can be abused in so many ways depending on the context and culture. They may be abused in a family, an institution, community or faith setting, or via social media/internet. They may be harmed by an adult or adults or another child or children. There are also practices such as female genital mutilation (FGM), forced or early marriage that cause significant harm to children and vulnerable adults.

The following definitions can be used as a guide:

**Physical abuse:** actual or potential physical harm perpetrated by another person, adult or child. it may involve hitting, shaking, poisoning, drowning and burning. Physical harm may also be caused when a parent or caregiver 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, which may involve befriending children, gaining their trust, and subjecting them to drugs and alcohol. 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.

Child sexual exploitation manifests in different ways. It can involve an older perpetrator exercising financial, emotional or physical control over a young person. It can involve peers manipulating or forcing victims into sexual activity, sometimes within gangs and in gang-affected neighborhoods. It may also involve opportunistic or organized networks of perpetrators who profit financially from trafficking young victims between different locations to engage in sexual activity with multiple men.

**Neglect and negligent treatment:** allowing for context, resources and circumstances, neglect and negligent treatment refers to a persistent failure to meet a child’s basic physical and/or psychological needs, which is likely to result in serious impairment of a child’s healthy physical, spiritual, moral and mental development. It includes the failure to properly supervise and protect children from harm and provide for nutrition, shelter and safe living/working conditions. It may also involve maternal neglect during pregnancy as a result of drug or alcohol misuse and the neglect and ill treatment of a disabled child.

**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.

Reporting and follow-up procedures

If there are concerns about the welfare of a child or vulnerable adult in these situations:

* If you become aware, through your own observations or through a third party, of possible abuse occurring at events.
* If a child or vulnerable adult informs you directly that he/she is concerned about someone’s behavior towards them.

You should:

* React calmly so as not to frighten the child or vulnerable adult
* Tell him/her that they are not to blame and are right in telling you.
* Take what he/she is saying seriously
* Ensure the safety of the child or vulnerable adult
* If he/she requires immediate medical attention, take him/her to the hospital or call an ambulance, inform the doctors of your concerns and ensure that they are aware that this is a child protection issue.
* *Avoid leading the child or vulnerable adult with questions and keep any questions to the absolute minimum necessary to ensure a clear understanding of what has been said.*
* Reassure the child or vulnerable adult but do not make promises of confidentiality or outcome which might not be feasible in the light of subsequent developments.
* Depending on the situation, parents/caregivers may be consulted – if you are unsure – consult with the relevant authorities first.
* Use the proforma in appendix to record all information

***Remember to REFER, not to investigate any suspicions or allegations about abuse***

**Please also bear the following in mind:**

* Make a full record of what has been said, heard and/or seen as soon as possible.
* Report the concerns to the person in charge or designated person immediately (DSO, unless the concern is about the person in charge (see below).
* Confidentiality should be maintained on a strictly ‘need to know’ basis and relevant documents stored in a secure location.
* Please remember that it can be more difficult for some children or vulnerable adults to disclose abuse than for others. Children or vulnerable adults from ethnic minorities may have regularly experienced racism which may lead them to believe ‘white people’, including those in authority roles, do not really care about their well-being. They may feel they have good reason to question whether your response will be any different.
* Disabled children and vulnerable adults will have to overcome additional barriers before feeling they can disclose abuse. They may rely on the abuser for their daily care and not know of alternative sources of care or residence. The abuse may be the only attention/affection they have experienced. There may be communication difficulties and they will almost certainly have to overcome prejudices which block our willingness to believe they may be abused or to use their medical condition to explain away indicators which in an able-bodied child would concern us.
* Pax Christi International will support anyone who, in good faith, reports his or her concern that a colleague is, or may be, abusing a child or vulnerable adult.

1. https://www.unicef.org.uk/what-we-do/un-convention-child-rights/  
    [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. “Child Safeguarding Standards and how to implement them”, *Keeping Children Safe*, pg. 5 [↑](#footnote-ref-2)