

Child Safeguarding

Policies and Procedures



**Assoċjazzjoni
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Local Councils' Association Malta

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INTRODUCTION

The Local Councils' Association (LCA) takes its safeguarding very seriously. As an Association, we are committed to ensuring that every child enjoys the benefit of a protective and safe environment in which their rights and safety are respected. This is the reason why the Association has developed and integrated the highest requirements according to international standards and current best practices based on the United Nations Convention of the Rights of the Child; values, rights and framework.

As we strive to do in ensuring the safety of children in our projects, it is equally important to promote awareness of children's rights and child protection within the Association. Therefore, as an employee, consultant, mentor, volunteer, intern or representative of the Association, we have a responsibility to keep the children we meet safe from harm and to report and respond to any harm or abuse effectively when it occurs.

This document aims to act as a guide to managing day-to-day activities with children giving particular attention to their safety all throughout.

To work at the Local Councils' Association is to commit to its values and principles to uphold, respect and ensure children's rights from every individual in the foundation.



POLICY

Our Commitment - Our Values and Principles

Child abuse is a global reality, hence why this Child Safeguarding Policy was drafted to make sure that everyone engaged with or on behalf of the Association is committed to the safeguarding of children and their rights.

Safeguarding of children and young people is what every organisation working with or for children needs to put at the heart of everything they do. Such organizations must ensure that their staff, operations, and programmes do not bring harm to children – ensuring that no child is exposed to abuse, and that any concerns about children’s safety are reported to the appropriate authorities.

The Child Safeguarding Policy includes preventive measures to prevent from incidents which may harm children, and responsive actions to ensure that all incidents are handled appropriately in a professional and timely manner. LCA has zero tolerance against any form of child abuse.

Purpose of this Policy

The aim of this policy and procedures is to regulate how we work as an Association so that the children with which we come into contact (directly or indirectly) are safeguarded.



Definition of Safeguarding

“Child safeguarding is the responsibility that organizations have to make sure their staff, operations and programs do not harm to children, that is they do not expose children to the risk of harm and abuse, and that any concerns the organization has about children’s safety within communities in which they work, are reported to the appropriate authorities”.

(Keeping Children Safe Coalition – www.keepingchildrensafe.org.uk)

Safeguarding implies a wider and deeper duty of care towards children rather than just upholding their right to protection as defined in the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, 1989.



OUR PRINCIPLES

1. All children have **EQUAL RIGHTS** to protection.
2. All actions regarding child safeguarding **MUST** be taken in the best interest of children.
3. **EVERYBODY** has a responsibility to safeguarding. This policy is **MANDOTARY** for all those who work for or on behalf of the Local Councils' Association.
4. The Local Councils' Association will meet its commitment to safeguard children by:
 - a. **Create Awareness** – ensuring that all staff and others are aware and informed of the problem of child abuse and the risks to children.
 - b. **Report** – ensuring that all staff and others are clear on what steps to take where concerns arise.
 - c. **Prevention** – ensuring that through awareness, training and good practice, staff and others minimize the risks to children.
 - d. **Responding** – ensuring that action is taken to support and protect children where concerns arise.



To achieve the standards of commitment the Local Councils' Association will ensure that:

1. A child is anyone under the age of 18 as per the definition in the UNCRC.
2. All children irrespective of their gender, faith, race, culture, ability, and sexuality have the same rights.
3. All children's rights need to be protected.
4. Children's views and opinions are to be taken seriously.
5. Children need to be protected from any harm or type of abuse. Everyone has the responsibility to protect children.
6. Child abuse includes all form of physical, sexual, emotional, online abuse and neglect.
7. All actions need to be taken in the best interest of the child.
8. Children should know about their rights to understand abuse and report it.
9. Personal data of children cannot be disclosed to third parties unless the information is needed to ensure the protection of the child (in accordance with mandatory reporting).



HUMAN RESOURCES

This section sets out the specific obligations and responsibilities for all adults working with/for the Local Councils' Association

1. **It is IMPORTANT for all staff and others in contact with children to:**
 - 1.1 Be aware of children's rights and the problem of child abuse.
 - 1.2 Are clear on the process of reporting and procedures in the case of abuse.
 - 1.3 Prevent abuse and harm from happening through awareness and good practices.
 - 1.4 Act in a professional and timely manner.
 - 1.5 Take any concerns raised seriously and ensure the protection of the victims.
 - 1.6 Plan and organize the work and the workplace to minimize risks.

2. **It is important for the LCA to:**
 - 2.1 Ensures that Child Safeguarding runs across the whole organization.
 - 2.2 Establish an effective reporting structure.
 - 2.3 Empower children by discussing with them their rights, what is acceptable and unacceptable and what they can do if there is a problem.
 - 2.4 All projects which fall under the remit of LCA must be designed with the best interest of the child in mind to minimize the risk of harm and abuse.
 - 2.5 To work closely with all stakeholders including parents, guardians to ensure the protection of children.
 - 2.6 Follow up as necessary once an incident is reported.
 - 2.7 ENSURE this policy is mandatory for anyone working with and for the LCA including staff, volunteers, partners, interns, summer workers, occasional volunteers and visitors.
 - 2.8 All staff are required to abide by the Code of Conduct.
 - 2.9 While training on the policy regarding responsibilities and duty of care (particular to specific roles) will be provided, all adults have the responsibility to seek further clarification and advice where and when they are not clear of what is expected of them.
 - 2.10 Anyone working with and for the Association need to be aware of any situation which might harm children and how to manage them.
 - 2.11 It is the responsibility of the staff to keep the children safe from harm, report and take action when abuse occurs.
 - 2.12 Ensure that a sense of accountability exists between staff so that poor practice or potential abusive behavior does not go unchallenged

Staff and others MUST NEVER:

- 3.1 Spend excessive time alone with children away from others.
At least two adults should be together when conducting sessions or activities with children.
- 3.2 Hit or otherwise physically assault or physically abuse children.
- 3.3 They must refrain from any behavior that might be interpreted as poor practice or to be potentially abusive such as abusive, offensive or inappropriate language; behave in an inappropriate manner; leaving children unsupervised; shame, humiliate or discriminate between children.
- 3.4 Give their personal contact details to the children.
 - a. Take children to your home, especially where they will be alone.
 - b. Use language, make suggestions or offer advice which is inappropriate, offensive or abusive.
 - c. Behave physically in a manner which is inappropriate or sexually provocative.
 - d. Have a child or children with whom they are working with to stay overnight at their home unsupervised.
 - e. Sleep in the same room or bed as a child with whom they are working with.

The Local Councils' Association MUST avoid actions or behavior that could be interpreted as poor practice or potentially abusive by ensuring:

- 4.1 Professionals, stakeholders and journalists must be aware of this policy and adhere to it while working with or on behalf of the Association.
- 4.2 All members of staff and people working with the Association must be aware of the safeguarding policy including an understanding of their responsibilities.
- 4.3 A copy of the safeguarding policy must be explained and provided to all employees on engagement, and must be duly signed.





RECRUITMENT

- 5.1 All staff within LCA need to accept and commit to adhere to the safeguarding policy.
- 5.2 Clear Job descriptions to be developed including a clear statement about the organization's commitment to safeguarding children when advertising the job role.
- 5.3 Ask for information about previous employment.
- 5.4 All interviews should include:
 - a. A discussion on Child Safeguarding.
 - b. The candidate's understanding of this and,
 - c. The organization's commitment.



PROCEDURES

Education, Training, Advice, Support and Awareness

- 6.1 Within their probationary period, all staff must be given guidance as the Child Safeguarding Policy and their responsibilities towards safeguarding children. Volunteers should also be included in such training.
- 6.2 Staff and volunteers must be given the opportunity for regular updates on safeguarding children either formally through training which is to be provided by the Safeguarding Team or an equivalent team working on safeguarding children or informally through discussion or team meetings.
- 6.3 Staff working directly with children should have additional specialist training regarding child wellbeing, protection and safety of children.
- 6.4 Records must be kept of all training/guidance meetings conducted with the date and list of attendees.
- 6.5 Where support or advice is sought regarding child safeguarding this must be taken seriously. At no point seeking advice should be considered indicative of someone lacking capacity or knowledge.
- 6.6 Special consideration must be given on how to raise awareness with children about policy and ways in which they can keep themselves safer.
- 6.7 Staff and all stakeholders working with/for the Local Councils' Association should be made aware of the Child Safeguarding Policy and how to report a concern.
- 6.8 Support needs to be offered to the children, staff and others who in any way are involved and effected by any case of harm and abuse.



Child Safeguarding Focal Point

- 7.1 Appoint a Child Safeguarding coordinator and a sub-coordinator. The role of the coordinator and sub-coordinator is to provide a point of contact, and to advice, support and assist in the implementation of the Child Safeguarding Policy.
- 7.2 The role of the Focal Point should be assigned to an employee with child protection/safeguarding knowledge.
- 7.3 Specific duties include:
 - a. To act as the main point of contact within the Association for child safeguarding.
 - b. To ensure that staff and partners are aware of the Child Safeguarding Policy and their responsibilities under it by providing training and guidance.
 - c. To advice and support staff and partners with the implementation of the safeguarding policy including risk assessments.
 - d. Ensure that the safeguarding policy and the Associations' commitment to children's rights is made known to all.
 - e. To act as first point of contact for concerns regarding child protection incidents and to raise those concerns to the Senior
 - f. Manger as appropriate.
 - g. To follow up incidents until all cases are closed.
 - h. Keep an accurate record of any incidents.

It must be noted that the Child safeguarding coordinator is not the only person responsible – the responsibility rests with all employees.

In case of emergency and the members of the Safeguarding Team are away and cannot assist, the point of reference is always the President and the Executive Secretary of the Local Councils' Association.



Organizing activities and events (Physical)

- 8.1 Activities and events being organized need to be safe for children. A project risk assessment shall be carried out as part of the project cycle (situation assessment; program design; monitoring and evaluation).
- 8.2 The safeguarding coordinator or their sub-coordinator needs to be informed and be present.
- 8.3 The children need to be aware who the safeguarding officer is. A brief meeting to explain ground rules and guidelines need to be held prior to the start of the event.
 - a. Necessary consent forms need to be collected for each participating child.
 - b. Children who do not wish to continue participating at any time during the activity/event can do without any consequence.
- 8.4 Children should be given the information pack about an activity and/or event in a child-friendly language.
- 8.5 Consent should be sought from both:
 - a. Legal guardian/s and,
 - b. Children.
- 8.6 Children who do not wish to continue participating at any time during the activity/event can do so, without any consequence.



Organizing activities and events online

- 9.1 Activities and events being organized need to be safe for children. Activities organized online should ONLY be carried out on social media platforms that are SAFE for children. All safety precautions should be taken for each meeting/project/activity.
- 9.2 The safeguarding coordinator or their sub-coordinator needs to be informed and present.
- 9.3 The children need to be aware who the safeguarding officer is:
 - a. Safeguarding guidelines need to be made clear before the start of the event.
 - b. Necessary consent forms need to be collected for each participating child.
 - c. Children who do not wish to continue participating at any time during the activity/event can do so, without any consequence.
- 9.4 Safeguarding team members should ensure that sufficient guidance is provided to staff and others about the appropriate use of technology including internet, mobile phones and social media.
- 9.5 Filters and blocking software should be installed to ensure that unsuitable/offensive sites cannot be downloaded.
- 9.6 In the event that offensive material or unsolicited messages/chats are received, these must be passed on the Child Safeguarding Focal Point or their delegate, who must report to the local agency working to improve internet safety.
- 9.7 In the event that offensive material is received or downloaded accidentally and a report is made to the local law enforcement authority, the material must not be sent with the referral. Guidance should be sought from the local law enforcement authority as to how to arrange for images to be transferred appropriately.
- 9.8 IT equipment is provided by the Local Councils' Association for business purposes and its use is subject to the Safeguarding Policy.
- 9.9 The use of IT equipment and technology resources for private purpose is allowed provided that this does not stop employees from carrying out their professional duty and that the reputation and image of the Local Councils' Association is at no point prejudiced.
- 9.10 While the privacy of staff is respected, this is not guaranteed. If there is a suspicion that IT equipment had been used to access for example child pornography online, the Association reserves the right to access private files on the said IT equipment used.

Conducting visits with children in schools or with other organized groups

- 10.1 Activity being organized needs to be safe for children and age appropriate.
- 10.2 It must be made clear that the teacher/adult in charge of the group need to be present during the activity and is responsible for the children.
- 10.3 Necessary consent forms need to be collected for each participating child.
- 10.4 Children who do not wish to continue participating at any time during the activity/event can do so, without any consequence.

Travelling with children

- 11.1 Children under the age of 14 years need to be accompanied by a legal guardian as well as an LCA employee when travelling abroad. The Legal Guardian is responsible for the child throughout the trip.
- 11.2 Children over the age of 14 years can travel with an LCA employee as their accompanying adult.
- 11.3 Necessary forms need to be filled and consent and signatures obtained from the child and the legal guardian.
- 11.4 It is prohibited for the employee/adult to share a room or a bed with the child.
- 11.5 The employee travelling with a child over the age of 14 years is to establish ground rules with the child prior to travelling. These ground rules are to be communicated to the legal guardian/s for their approval. Failure to obey these ground rules might result in that child to not be allowed to travel again on behalf of LCA in the future.





Communication and Media

The 10 Ethical Rules regarding the use of images and footage used by the Local Councils' Association:

- 12.1 Respect the Child Safeguarding Policy and its procedure.
- 12.2 Make sure that the safety of the child is **PRIORITY**. At no point this can be compromised if one disseminates images of their home, community environment.
- 12.3 A member of the LCA Team needs to accompany the child while doing a report/video/photo.
- 12.4 Ensure that the child is **INFORMED** about the meeting/project/event and consent in writing is given by both the guardian and the child respectively.
- 12.5 Always respect the child's dignity.
- 12.6 Taking pictures or videos is reserved **STRICTLY** for professional use **ONLY**.
- 12.7 Member from the safeguarding team needs to explain to journalists and other media personnel that they need to respect and adhere to the safeguarding policy of the Association.
- 12.8 Privacy of children is to be always ensured.
- 12.9 The children can decide not to participate at any time without any consequence.
- 12.10 Only use photos available for public use. Photos should be validated by a member of the safeguarding team and the person in charge of visual communication within the Association.





Reporting Procedure and mechanism

Reporting

- 13.1 All staff and others, have a duty to report concerns, including both specific reports and unconfirmed concerns, regarding child abuse, sexual exploitation and any other protection concern using the established reporting procedure.
- 13.2 When a child protection/safeguarding concern is brought to your attention – ACT on your concerns. If in doubt, speak out. Keep in mind that every action should be:
 - a. Child-centred. The protection of children is the most important consideration.
 - b. Time counts. Ensure timely, effective, confidential, and appropriate responses to child safeguarding issues.
 - c. Taken seriously, and necessary action needs to be taken in a professional and timely manner.
 - d. Record the incident using the exact words provided by the child AND NOT according to one's interpretation.
 - e. Information should ONLY be passed on to either the safeguarding focal point or their delegates or designated individuals and/or the authorities involved. Everyone MUST ENSURE confidentiality and always respect the dignity and safety of children.



Procedure and Mechanism – different scenarios

Harm to self or others

- 13.3 ACT INFORM and ENSURE the safeguarding focal person KNOW if the child has disclosed or observation of child's behaviour which is:
- Harm to self (self-harm, suicidal ideation, use of illegal substance or other).
 - Harm by others (any kind of abuse: physical. Neglect, sexual, violence, sharing or trafficking of illegal substance, bullying, cyber bullying or other).
 - Harm to others (any kind of abuse: sexual, physical, violence, sharing or trafficking or illegal substances, bullying, cyberbullying or other).

Make sure the child is safe.

Make sure the child is NOT LEFT unattended.

- You stay with the child your colleague calls the

Safeguarding Officer.

If there is imminent danger call:

112 (Malta Police Force 24/7)

179 (Agenzija Appogg 24/7)

Disclosure of explicit abuse happening at school

- 13.6 The person who receives disclosure from child, refers the case to the Safeguarding Focal Person or their delegate.
- 13.7 In some cases, the Safeguarding Focal Person may consult with the MFWS Supervisor and decide to file a report to the Police and a copy to the Child Safety Services Malta. Referral form needs to be filled on same day of disclosure.

Child Safety Services (CSS)

Service Manager, Education Psycho-Social Services,
Triq Fra Gaetano Pace Forno, Il-Ħamrun HMR 1100

2598 3497 / 2598 3400

studentservices.mede@gov.mt

<https://eduservices.gov.mt/en/education-psycho-social-services/child-safety-services-css>

Missing Children

Call **116000** only in case of missing children
(Malta Police Force)

Disclosure of explicit abuse happening away from the activity

13.8 The person who receives disclosure from the child, refers the case to the LCA Safeguarding Focal Person or their delegate.

13.9 In some cases, the Safeguarding Focal Person may consult with the LCA President and decide to file a report with the Child Protection Services – Foundation for Social Welfare Services.

Child Protection Services (CPS)

Call **179**

<https://fsws.gov.mt/en/Pages/FSWS%20Forms/report-abuse-child-abuse.aspx>





Reporting Concerns

- 14 Concerns and reports may be received from several sources as highlighted earlier. All concerns are to be taken seriously and should be passed in the first instance to the LCA Safeguarding Focal Point. Where concerns are raised by staff and volunteers about other staff, volunteers and partners, if there is malicious intent, are to be directed to the LCA Executive Secretary.

Monitoring and Review

- 15 The LCA President and the Executive Secretary has the overall responsibility for the Child Safeguarding Policy. Annually, the Safeguarding Team shall conduct a self-assessment of safeguarding and its implementation. This would help to keep the good practice and identify, address and update any gaps.

This policy will be reviewed on a regular basis, but not more than every 3 years. Reviews will include feedback from staff members, volunteers, children and their families and others.

Last review: April 2023

Next Review: April 2026

References

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