



GRUPPI SOLIDARIETÀ INTERNAZIONALE

Guidelines for minors' protection policies

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1. INTRODUCTION

GSI ITALIA is a ONG founded in 1997 dedicated to international cooperation and local solidarity. It focuses on training and raising awareness about development and underdevelopment, promoting human rights, especially of children and women, and combating poverty and injustice. It supports immigrants with reception and support measures, and engages in active citizenship and youth education. It also operates at the international level with development and distance support projects in communities in the Global South.

The Association is dedicated to international cooperation and solidarity, aiming to bridge the imbalance between North and South through research, innovation and training. It promotes peaceful coexistence between cultures, equal opportunities, social justice, environmental protection and civil rights. It sends volunteers to support ethical development and finance projects and work for European citizenship and social and cultural integration in Europe.

OBJECTIVE AND PURPOSE OF THE DOCUMENT

GSI ITALIA recognizes the vulnerability of minors and the existence of abuse against them in multiple forms at the global level. This document has been created to formalise GSI ITALIA's commitment to recognise and respect the rights of minors, as well as protect them from any form of violence and abuse.

GSI ITALIA's policy aims to promote the well-being of minors and protect them from dangers. In particular, it aims to create a safe environment for children, enabling to identify, report and respond to reports of alleged abuse or maltreatment.

AIM OF THE DOCUMENT AND ADDRESSEES

The purpose of this document is to define the **fundamental principles, standards of behaviour** and **procedures** that will allow to build a safe environment for children and adolescents in all activities and situations in which minors are involved, both during specific interventions and in other relevant circumstances.

FIELDS OF POLICY APPLICATION

The present policy applies to:

- To all the staff of GSI ITALIA, hired under contract of any nature; and to volunteers, wherever they work on behalf of the association.;
- To staff and representatives of Partners and any other individual, group or organisation that have a formal and contractual relationship with GSI Italia, unless the Partners apply to their own child protection policy, agreed with GSI Italia;
- To journalists, photographers, testimonials and, in any case, to anyone who comes into contact with GSI Italia and its projects;

2. REGULATORY REFERENCES

GSI Italia bases its work on the UN Convention on the rights of children and adolescents, committing to protect minors from abuse and exploitation, in line with **Article 19** of the Convention.

The organisation is also dedicated to promoting the **four fundamental Principles** of the Convention: non-discrimination, best interests of the child, right to life and development, and freedom of expression (Arts. 2, 3, 6, 12).

In addition, GSI ITALIA follows the **three optional Protocols** of the Convention on the rights of the child and is committed to ensuring safe practices to protect children from all kinds of violence and exploitation, applying these standards to all staff and collaborators involved in its projects.

GSI ITALIA undertakes the commitment to promote safe practices for minors and protect them from violence, abuse, negligence and exploitation of any kind.

GSI ITALIA implements preventive measures and will intervene against anyone within the organization who abuses a minor. To this end, it cooperates with parents, guardians, communities and professionals in the sector.

3. DEFINITIONS

MINOR The United Nations Convention (Art. 1) defines “minor” any individual under the age of 18.

CHILD PROTECTION includes all actions to protect them from risks and damage.

PROTECTION OF MINORS it refers to policies and procedures to guarantee their safety and development.

CHILD ABUSE It may be physical, sexual and emotional, caused intentionally or through negligence.

PHYSICAL ABUSE It includes any act that could cause physical harm to a child, including the misuse of medicines.

SEXUAL ABUSE Sexual abuse includes acts in which a child is forced to participate in sexual activities, which may take place either physically or online, and which do not always involve physical contact.

PSYCHOLOGICAL/EMOTIONAL ABUSE L'abuso Psychological-emotional abuse includes harmful behaviour such as humiliation and intimidation, which can negatively influence a child's mental development.

CARELESSNESS/LACK OF TREATMENT La Carelessness is the failure to meet a child's basic needs, which can also result from situations of poverty.

EXPLOITATION/SEXUAL EXPLOITATION Lo Child exploitation is the use of children for personal or financial gain, often in exchange for necessary or desired goods or services. This can include commercial and sexual exploitation and it can occur both offline and online. Unequal power dynamics are central to this phenomenon, which can take various forms of abuse. Children, due to their vulnerability, are particularly at risk of being exploited.

4. FUNDAMENTAL PRINCIPLES

ZERO TOLLERANCE FOR CHILD ABUSE

GSI ITALIA is firm in its commitment to protect children from all forms of abuse. It will not knowingly involve anyone who may pose a threat to children or adolescents.

NON DISCRIMINATION

GSI ITALIA, regardless of any difference in nationality, culture, ethnicity, gender, sexual orientation, religious or political belief, socio-economic status, family or criminal background, physical or mental health, is firmly committed to ensuring the safety of minors during all its operations.

'DO NO HARM'

GSI ITALIA adopts the principle of "Do No Harm" as the basis for its activities. This principle stresses the importance of avoiding causing harm when taking actions or decisions. In the context of humanitarian and aid organisations, the principle "Do No Harm" implies that activities should be designed and implemented in such a way as to minimise risks and not cause harm to those involved. This includes both the negative effects that might result from the action itself and those that might result from inaction or failure to provide aid.

In summary, the "Do No Harm" principle requires a careful and responsible assessment of the consequences of our actions, with the aim of protecting and benefiting the people involved.

PARTICIPATION OF MINORS

It is essential that every minor can understand their own rights and responsibilities. They have to know how to report concerns regarding violations of their rights, without fear of intimidation.

RESPONSIBILITY AND TRANSPARENCY

GSI ITALIA is committed to ensuring the implementation of and compliance with the principles expressed in this document, constantly monitoring implementation and regularly reviewing the document based on the feedback received. In the event of a complaint of alleged abuse, GSI ITALIA acts promptly, respecting the reporting procedures and tracking the necessary information. Every complaint is handled with the utmost seriousness and confidentiality.

RESPONSIBILITY SHARING

If GSI ITALIA cooperates with partner institutions or organisations that do not have their own protection of minors policy, it will ensure that they adhere to this document and respect the rules during the whole period of intervention.

DATA PROTECTION AND PRIVACY

GSI ITALIA staff must maintain privacy and follow data management processes, such as data collection, storage, transmission and destruction. The information may only be shared, when it is necessary. However, in some cases, information sharing may be required for the good of the individual or at the request of legal authorities.

CAPACITY-BUILDING

GSI ITALIA actively works to strengthen the capacities of families, communities, teachers, health and social workers, medical staff and others who come into contact with children and vulnerable adults.

This occurs when during their institutional interventions. The objective is to improve the ability to recognise abuse behaviour promptly and to implement appropriate responses.

5. STAFF RULES OF CONDUCT

Oltre In addition to the rules of the Code of Ethics and Conduct, GSI ITALIA staff and collaborators must comply with the **standards of behaviour** (acceptable and unacceptable) when coming into contact with minors.

ACCEPTABLE

- Prioritising the safeguarding and protection of minors.
- Treat everyone with respect, avoiding discrimination.
- Report suspected cases of abuse or concerns for the well-being of minors.
- Plan activities while reducing risks for minors.
- Avoid inappropriate physical contact.
- Be careful to language and behaviour.
- Listen and respect the views of children and adolescents.
- Always respect professional boundaries.

UNACCEPTABLE

- Intimidate, threaten or physically abuse a minor in any way, such as hitting, slapping or pushing.
- Spend time alone with a minor in secluded areas where one cannot be continuously observed by others.
- Engage in sexual relations or relationships with children under the age of 18, regardless of whether they give consent or not. Even if it was deemed acceptable according to local custom, mistaken belief or error as to age does not constitute a defence.

- Hiring a minor for work or activities that endanger his or her physical and psychological well-being or reduce the time available for educational and recreational activities.
- Give Give preferential or exclusive treatment to a minor, such as offering excessive gifts.
- Use degrading and offensive language, gestures, comments or provocative or culturally inappropriate behaviour.
- Invite a minor to one's residence or private places, such as the cinema or restaurant, unless a parent or a guardian is present.
- Carry a minor alone in the car, unless a parent or a guardian is present.

In addition, the Organisation's commitment to the protection of each individual extends beyond working hours. Therefore, actions that contravene the fundamental principles outlined in this document will be considered a violation of the same.

Finally, it is important to remember that, despite good intentions, an individual's actions may be misunderstood due to cultural differences or local laws.

6. PREVENTION

GSI ITALIA is committed to creating and maintaining an environment in which the well-being of minors is promoted and respected.

AWARENESS

The document must be made known to all the staff, volunteers, suppliers, beneficiary communities and their representatives. Every employee and collaborator of GSI ITALIA receives the document upon conclusion of the contract. It is emphasized the importance of raising awareness of different cultural realities, in particular children and adolescents, on reporting procedures for child abuse.

TRAINING

The staff must read and understand this policy. GSI ITALIA is committed to conducting regular courses to inform, raise awareness and improve the ability to prevent and deal with situations related to the protection of minors. Local projects offices must organise courses and workshops on the protection of minors and protection from sexual exploitation, abuse and harassment.

RISK ANALYSIS

- It is not possible to completely eliminate all risks for the minors, but GSI ITALIA is committed to minimising them.
- Before start-up and throughout the project cycle, evaluations and monitoring are carried out to ensure that all activities are in line with the fundamental principles expressed in the document.
- The safeguard policies adopted by third parties involved in the implementation of GSI ITALIA'S institutional interventions are carefully examined before entering into a partnership agreement. This is done to ensure that all parties involved are committed in favor of the protection of minors.

VISITORS

- Visitors to GSI ITALIA programmes must always comply with the standards expressed in the document and in the Code of Ethics and Conduct adopted by the Organisation.
- All visitors are required to know and understand the regulations and the Code of Ethics and Conduct before their visit.
- Children's visitors, within the distance support programs, must comply with a number of specific rules when visiting a minor.

SAFEGUARDING FOCAL POINT

GSI ITALIA has designated a contact person for the safeguard – Safeguarding Focal Point – with the task of supervising the implementation of this document. The Safeguarding Focal Point (SFP) is a staff member with specific professional competences, in charge of guaranteeing the application of the principles expressed in the document and the correct implementation of the relative dispositions and the correct implementation of the relevant provisions. He is a key figure within the organisation to guarantee the protection and safety of children and vulnerable persons. He is able to manage and analyse

safeguarding issues, situations of exploitation, abuse or harassment, is in charge of receiving reports and following up/taking the necessary measures to safeguard and protect the minor. This is how he operates:

Role and responsibilities:

- If The SFP acts as a **contact point** for protection issues.
- He **advises, supports and assists** the organisation in implementing the **child protection policy** and associated procedures.
- He responds to cases of violence and abuse, ensuring an **adequate response**.

Specific activities

- **Awareness:** he promotes awareness on child protection among staff and partners.
- **Prevention:** he collaborates with the employees to integrate protection into programmes and activities.
- **Reporting and Response:** he receives reports and manages cases of violation.
- **Monitoring and Review:** he evaluates the effectiveness of the protection measures.
- **Required Competences:**
- The SFP must fully understand its role and the competences required.
- The organisation must provide adequate training and support to the SFP.

SAFE PROGRAMMING

It is vital that all activities are carefully planned and implemented, taking into account the risks and potential threats to minors, and seeking to minimise them. GSI ITALIA takes proactive measures at every stage of the implementation of its projects to avoid inadvertently causing damage, while simultaneously seeking to maximise and disseminate best practices.

SAFE SELECTION

GSI ITALIA is committed to ensuring that potential new employees or collaborators are subjected to scrupulous screening to identify any risks that the individual might pose to minors, in accordance with the content of this document.

Interview:

- During the interview, specific questions are asked to identify any risks of exploitation, abuse or harassment of minors.

Checking References:

- Applicants must provide references from their previous employers.
- These references are evaluated to determine the candidate's suitability to work with children.

Declaration Model:

- New employees must sign a Declaration Form (contained in Annex I). By this signature, they confirm suitability to work with children and declare that they are not involved in any past issues related to exploitation, abuse or harassment of children.

Criminal Record:

- Depending on the sensitivity of the role, candidates may be required to submit a criminal record certificate.

These procedures help to guarantee a safe environment for minors and to prevent risk situations.

INFORMED CONSENT

Below, there are the main features of the informed consent concerning the acquisition of images and videos depicting minors:

- **Volunteer:** Consent must be voluntary, guaranteeing minors and their parents or guardians the full freedom to choose to give or withhold consent. They should not be forced to further explain the reason for the denial, and this decision should not have any negative consequences on their possibility of having access to aid.

- **Unequivocal:** Consent must be expressed explicitly and unequivocally. It must not be implied or implicit.
- **Informed:** Minors and their parents or guardians must be informed about the purposes and use of images or videos captured. This information must be provided in a comprehensible language, age-appropriate and free of technical terms that are difficult to understand.

SOCIAL MEDIA

GSI ITALIA is committed to ensuring that its social media platforms are used safely and that no sensitive information about minors, which could reveal their identity or compromise their safety, is shared when publishing images or stories in the field.

All GSI ITALIA staff must exercise utmost caution when posting work-related information on their private social accounts. It is forbidden for staff to interact with beneficiaries via any social media platform.

The protection of minors and the confidentiality of information are fundamental priorities for GSI ITALIA, which works to ensure a safe and respectful environment.

IMAGES AND WRITTEN CONTENT

Consent for photographing, filming or interviewing minors must be obtained from parents or legal guardians. In addition, the consent of the minor himself should be sought in advance, considering its understanding skills. It is important to provide information on how the material will be used, the purposes, the storage of the information and the duration.

Some guidelines concerning minors include:

- Always **portray** minors in a dignified and respectful manner, avoiding discrimination.

- **Use** only the names of minors when strictly necessary, avoiding the use of their real names, with the exception of Distant Support Programmes.
- **Ensure** that at least two adults are present when working with children.

GSI ITALIA undertakes not to disclose images, videos or interviews/stories of minors that could reveal identifiable information. This also applies to the Distance Support Programmes which follow a special protocol for the use of images and personal information concerning children.

7. REPORTS AND REPLIES

RECOGNIZE AN ABUSE

Child abuse is a sensitive and important issue. It is often, unfortunately, not detected because it can be difficult to recognise that a child is at risk or has been a victim. Sometimes children or young people may not even be aware that they have been abused. Here are some signs that, alone or in combination, may be indicators of possible abuse, neglect or violence:

- **Behavioural changes:** if a minor shows sudden changes in behaviour, such as becoming more introverted, aggressive or anxious, this could be sign of abuse.
- **Physical signs:** bruises, scratches, burns or unexplained injuries may be indicators of physical abuse.
- **Emotional changes:** minors who suddenly become sad, depressed or show excessive fear and anxiety may be victims of abuse.
- **School problems:** suddenly poor school performance or changes in academic performance may be sign of discomfort or abuse.
- **Social isolation:** if a minor withdraws from friends or family, it could be a sign of abuse.
- **Inappropriate sexual behaviour:** minors showing age inappropriate sexual knowledge or behaviour may have been exposed to abusive situations.

- **Fear of a specific individual:** if a minor manifests fear or avoidance of a specific person, it could be a sign of abuse by that person.

The indicators do not necessarily imply abuse or mistreatment. Sometimes, in fact, they result from events that do not involve abuse (e.g. parental divorce, a bereavement, the arrival of a new sibling, etc.).

THE DUTY TO REPORT

GSI ITALIA staff, including volunteers and other addressees of this document, has the duty to report any fear, suspicion or act of which they become aware, relating to situations of exploitation, abuse or harassment perpetrated against minors.

The report must be made in accordance with the procedures described in the reporting procedures. Any report made by GSI ITALIA staff will be investigated, following which appropriate actions will be taken. GSI ITALIA will provide support to the complainant and guarantee confidentiality.

Anyone who has concerns about the well-being of a child can make their own report;

- It is mandatory to report any case, even alleged, of abuse perpetrated against minors;
- Reports must be made without delay, and in any case as soon as possible;
- Any report must be communicated to Safeguarding Focal Point, which will forward the incident report form to the Board of Directors whenever a problem is raised.

The reports must be sent by e-mail to info@gsitalia.org or, alternatively, by letter sent to the address Dott. Antonio Loiacono, via Bazzanese, 73, 06049 Bazzano inferiore, Spoleto (PG).

Consultation is restricted only to members of the Board of Directors.

It should be emphasised that the presence of Safeguarding Focal Point, by virtue of its professional skills, represents an additional guarantee on the functioning and application of the current document.

- Reports can be made verbally, in person, by e-mail to the Safeguarding Focal Point. Whatever form of communication is chosen, confidentiality and discretion must always be guaranteed (for example, in case of telephone reporting, it must be ensured that no one can hear what is being reported).

Once an alleged abuse is reported, the Safeguarding Focal Point will fill in the appropriate form and forward it to the Board of Directors, which will carry out formal disciplinary proceedings if the facts reported are actually encountered.

Note that all reports are considered allegations until proven otherwise, so privacy must be maintained by all parties involved during the reporting and in the following procedures.

INTERNAL ABUSE ALLEGATIONS

If allegations are made against a member of the association, a volunteer or a collaborator of GSI ITALIA, the matter must be raised directly with the Safeguarding Focal Point; if this is not possible, the person who makes the report should contact the most direct line manager.

EXTERNAL ABUSE ALLEGATIONS

If the alleged offender has no affiliation with GSI ITALIA, it is essential to immediately communicate the allegations to the local authorities. In this case, it is essential to follow the "Do Not Harm" principle and consider exclusively the interest of the child involved.

HISTORICAL ABUSE ALLEGATIONS

Whether the abuse is recent or past, there are no constraints and/or time limits for the report.

OBSTACLES TO REPORTING ABUSE

GSI ITALIA understands that reporting suspected cases of child abuse can be difficult for various reasons. Concerns regarding wrongdoing, aggravation of the situation for the victim or fear of retaliation are understandable. However, GSI ITALIA addresses every complaint with the utmost seriousness and strongly encourages people to immediately report suspected cases of exploitation, abuse or harassment. The safety and well-being of minors must always be the top priority.

UNFOUNDED ALLEGATIONS

In the case of a complaint made in good faith, where the facts recalled are not then actually found during the investigation, no action will be taken against the complainant. It is important that people feel free to report suspicions without fear of negative consequences with acting in good faith.

However, if an accusation is deliberately false, unfounded, misleading or motivated solely by malicious intent, the most appropriate legal action will be taken against the complainant in bad faith. The truthfulness and integrity of reports are crucial to ensure the safety and well-being of minors and overall justice.

PROTECTION FROM RETALIATION

GSI ITALIA does not tolerate hostile behaviour or initiatives towards anyone who raises doubts about child abuse. Any threatening or intimidating action, verbal or physical, will be investigated, which could lead to disciplinary action or even dismissal of the employee for retaliation.

INFORMING THE SURVIVOR

In addition to offering full support and protection to the survivor, his or her family members or guardians, they will be provided with information on a regular basis, in relation to their capacity of discernment, on the progress of the investigation and will be informed of the details of the outcome.

8. RESPONSABILITY

Regardless of his or her position and the type of relationship that binds him or her to GSI ITALIA, each member of the organisation is required to adhere to the contents of this documents at all times, even outside working hours and during periods of leave. Moreover, all **staff** must sign the Declaration Form, Annex I, when concluding the contract.

Those **responsible** at all levels have the task of promoting knowledge and understanding of this document among all staff, including volunteers. They must ensure that everyone acquires the necessary skills to ensure the application of and compliance with this document. Furthermore, they have the task of promoting good practices to create and maintain an environment in which everyone feels free to submit reports without fear of retaliation.

All staff members and volunteers must understand, promote and apply the contents on the document in their work. In situations where allegations or reports of abuse are raised, it is crucial that staff and volunteers follow procedures scrupulously.

9. IMPLEMENTATION, MONITORING AND REVIEW OF THIS POLICY

GSI ITALIA actively encourages feedback from staff, communities and stakeholders to improve and consolidate existing procedures. To this end, it provides an internal communication channel to share suggestions and improvements related to this document. To send suggestions, you can write to the e-mail address: info@gsitalia.org

This document is subject to periodic revisions, at least one every five years, by the Board of Directors.

ANNEX I – SELF-DECLARATION FORM

I, the undersigned, _____

(*block letters*) I hereby declare that

- I have read and fully understood the Protection of minors policy
- Will responsibly adhere to what is prescribed in this document
- I have communicated to GSI ITALIA all the information that may cause concern for the protection of minors in relation to my suitability for work, volunteering or counselling
- I will inform GSI if any changes could be a cause of concern for child protection, and I will ask for advice from those responsible for this issue
- I am aware that any false statements or failure to provide information are considered serious faults.

Signature

Date

Declaration received from (*print and signature*)

Date
