

Agora Association - Child Protection Policy

Introduction

Agora is committed to implement the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child in its work with children as an integral part of its own actions and to be vigilant towards any form of child abuse.

Child abuse can be exploitation, physical abuse, emotional abuse, neglect or sexual abuse:

Physical abuse: Physical abuse occurs when a person purposefully injures or threatens to injure a child/young person. This may take the form of slapping, punching, shaking, kicking, burning, shoving or grabbing. The injury may take the form of bruises, cuts, burns or fractures.

Emotional abuse: Emotional abuse is a chronic attack on a child/young person's self-esteem. It can take the form of name calling, threatening, ridiculing, intimidating or isolating the child/young person. Neglect is the failure to provide the child/young person with the basic necessities of life, such as food, clothing, shelter and supervision to the extent that the child/young person's health and development are at risk.

Child sexual abuse: Sexual abuse is when a child/young person is used by an older or bigger child, adolescent or adult for his or her own or another's sexual stimulation or gratification, or economic gain.

Exploitation: Exploitation refers to the use of children for someone else's advantage, gratification or profit often resulting in unjust, cruel, and harmful treatment of the child. There are two main forms of child exploitation that are recognised:

Sexual exploitation: the abuse of a position of vulnerability, differential power, or trust for sexual purposes: this includes profiting monetarily, socially or politically from the exploitation of another as well as personal sexual gratification.

Economic exploitation: the use of a child in work or other activities for the benefit of others. This includes, but is not limited to, child labour. Economic exploitation implies the idea of a certain gain or profit through the production, distribution and consumption of goods and services. The material interest has an impact on the economy of a certain unit, be it the state, the community or the family.

To safeguard the well-being of children, Agora has developed the following child-protection-principles and a corresponding code of conduct, which all individuals and organizations working with Agora undertake to adhere before commencing the activity or cooperation.

I. Statement of Responsibility

This policy statement affirms Agora's commitment to the welfare of children/young people and their protection from abuse and exploitation. Agora recognises that the abuse and exploitation of children/young people happens in all countries and societies across the world. All child abuse involves the violation of children's/young people's rights.

Child abuse is never acceptable and a commitment to children's/young people's rights in general also means a commitment to safeguard the children/young people with whom Agora is in contact. Agora will not permit a person to work with children/young people if that person poses an unacceptable risk to children's/young people's safety or wellbeing. All staff are responsible for promoting children's/young people's rights and championing the protection of children/young people. Management is responsible for the implementation of this policy and ensuring that all parties comply with the Child Protection Code of Conduct.

Particular management responsibilities as set out in this policy include building child/young person protection awareness, advocacy, rigorous recruitment and selection practices, training, and responding appropriately to allegations.

II. Frame of reference

- Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) – UN General Assembly, 1989 and its optional protocols¹

III. Principle

This policy is informed by a set of principles that derive from the UN Convention on the Rights of a Child/Young Person:

- All children/young people have equal rights to protection from abuse and exploitation.
- The well-being of the child must be unconditionally protected and is to be taken as highest priority in all processes.
- The work of Agora is oriented on the recognition of children's rights, needs and interests as guiding principle; the participation of children shall be supported and promoted.
- All children/young people should be encouraged to fulfil their potential and inequalities should be challenged.
- Everybody has a responsibility to support the care and protection of children/young people.
- Children and adolescents must be treated respectfully; humiliating, degrading or any other psychologically harmful conduct, as well as violence or any other physically harmful conduct and all forms of discrimination are invariably prohibited and will not be tolerated under any circumstances.
- Agora's partners have a responsibility to meet minimum standards of protection for the children/young people in their programmes.

IV. Code of Conduct

All representatives of Agora commit themselves to:

- Feel responsible for creating a culture of openness and mutual responsibility in the workplace. This is a prerequisite to prevent cases of abuse and to detect threats at an early stage. To take responsibility for one's own and the behavior of colleagues and to act in accordance with the best interests of the child; Failure to do so may be considered equivalent to an active action.
- Contribute to the development of a safe and trustfully environment, that positively affects the childrens' development and promote the children to express their concerns and desires, respectively ensure that every child is actually given the chance to do so.
- Take children's desires, interests and needs seriously and respect and foster their self-autonomy and their own decisions (e.g. do not accompany children to the toilet if not required and/or explicitly asked for)
- Treat all children equitably, respectfully, and free of prejudice. Avoid favoritism and keep personal relationships with the children within adequate limits.

¹ (1) Optional Protocol on the Involvement of Children in Armed Conflict and (2) Optional Protocol on the Sale of Children, Child Prostitution and Child Pornography

- Interact with the children in a culturally appropriate way, inform oneself accordingly and be sensitive towards the children's individual situation.
- Recognize personal boundaries of a child.
- Be aware of the adequacy of body-contact.
- Refrain from any behavior that could harm children mentally, physically or in other manner.
- Regardless of the child's consent, refrain from any sexual or other lewd acts.
- Not condone or participate in the harmful behavior of other adults or children.
- Protect children from dangerous or exploitative situations.
- Preserve the personality right of the child: handle personal information confidentially. Do not take photos, publish personal data or media or pass these to third parties.
- Pay attention that anyone interacting with children complies with this code-of-conduct and always acts in the best interest of the child; Contact the responsible person in case of suspicion of its violation regardless of its weight.
- Take on responsibility towards the children's well-being as top priority.

V. Action Statement

Agora will meet its commitment to safeguard children/young people through the following means:

Awareness: Ensure that all staff, volunteers and others are aware of the problem of child abuse and the risks to children/young people.

Prevention: Ensure, through awareness and personal and professional conduct, that staff and others minimise the risk to children/young people.

Pictures, images, or other likenesses of children/young people and/or information related to children/young people that could compromise their care and protection will not be made available through any form of communication media, metadata, or text descriptions. Images with corresponding text which may identify a child must be removed. Images of children/young people require informed consent from the child and parent or guardian before photographing or filming a child/young person and published and should not be accompanied by detailed information relating to their place of residence. Images should always portray children/young people in a dignified manner.

Reporting: Ensure that staff and others have clear steps to follow where concerns arise regarding the safety of children/young people. Confidentiality is crucial to a fair and effective reporting procedure. It is unacceptable and potentially defamatory for concerns of child abuse (and abusers) to be spread throughout the organisation rather than being directed through a formal complaints process. All participants must understand the importance of following the set reporting lines when concerns arise. Confidentiality protects the child/young person, the person notifying, the respondent, and the organisation, and ensures a fair and proper process.

Responding: Ensure that action is taken, without denying procedural fairness principles to the accused, to support and protect children/young people where concerns arise regarding possible abuse.

In order that the above standards of reporting and responding are met, Agora will ensure that it:

- takes seriously any concerns raised;
- takes positive steps to ensure the protection of children/young people who are the subject of any concerns;
- supports children/young people, staff, or other adults who raise concerns or who are the subject of concerns;

- acts appropriately and effectively in instigating or co-operating with any subsequent process of investigation;

Agora will not tolerate any form of coercion, intimidation, reprisal or retaliation against any staff member, volunteer, or consultant who reports any form of abuse or exploitation, provides any information or other assistance in an investigation.

VI. Measures

- The selection of persons working with children takes place with special forbearance; Basic requirement for working with children is previous experience in this or a comparable field.
- Before commencing, individuals and organizations working with or having contact with children within the project will be briefed profoundly by the centers' psychologist. This introduction will go above explaining the code-of-conduct, containing also pedagogic and psychological aspects. Additionally, all people working in the center will be requested to acquire further knowledge regarding background information such as aspects of cultural sensitivity and the particular situation (of children) of the target group. Preparation-material will be provided.
- Before commencing, this document must be signed in person and filed with a certificate of good conduct or, if not available, with a signed self-declaration.
- The psychologist as competent authority (or a representative) will always be either present in the center or reachable at any time. All persons working within the center are requested to communicate openly and directly. Regular consultation and evaluation within the team should ensure early identification of abusive behavior.

VII. Procedure in suspected cases

- Suspected cases of abuse of children, regardless of their weight, are to be reported to the competent authority (psychologist). Affected persons shall not be addressed directly under no circumstance.
- Project-internal communication and consultation (explicitly carried out by the psychologist and the social-protection manager) for the first investigation of the case, and possibly subsequent dialogue with affected persons (only if considered to be to cause any harm) will be carried out.
- Measures to protect children are taken early; if the suspicion of abuse is hardened, all necessary steps will be taken to ensure adequate protection of the children. The enforcement of an adequate protection-mechanism will be supervised by the social-protection manager in constant consultation with the psychologist.
- In cases of reasonable suspicion, harmful persons will be suspended (from the work with children) immediately; If regarding the cooperation with an institution, NGO or group, the collaboration will be dismissed.
- In particularly severe cases, the person concerned will be prohibited from accessing the center. The effective enforcement of such ban will be ensured by a security system installed in the entrance area.