



OFFICE OF THE SPECIAL REPRESENTATIVE OF THE SECRETARY-GENERAL ON
VIOLENCE AGAINST CHILDREN

Child Safeguarding Policy

1. INTRODUCTION

1.1. Mandate of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General on Violence against Children

The Special Representative of the Secretary-General (SRSG) on Violence against Children is a global, independent advocate for the prevention and elimination of all forms of violence against children.

The mandate of the SRSG promotes a vision of a world where all children can grow up free from violence, leaving no child behind. The work of the SRSG is anchored in the Convention on the Rights of the Child, its Optional Protocols and the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.

1.2. Purpose

The Child Safeguarding Policy of the Office of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General on Violence against Children (OSRSG VAC) aims to:

- prevent any form of violence or harm to children arising from the activities of the OSRSG VAC
- ensure that the OSRSG VAC takes appropriate action when a child safeguarding concern comes to its attention.

1.3. Principles

In implementing this policy, the OSRSG VAC shall ensure that it:

- respects the dignity of all children, especially child victims or survivors of violence

- does no harm to children
- avoids all forms of discrimination
- adopts an inclusive approach that is sensitive to the situation of more vulnerable or marginalized children
- acts in the best interests of children
- respects children's privacy and personal information
- respects the evolving capacity and agency of children
- respects children's right to be heard and their right to freedom of expression
- works in partnership with others to keep children safe.

1.4. Scope and definitions

This policy applies to all staff, consultants, interns and volunteers working at the OSRSG VAC.

It covers all OSRSG VAC activities and interactions with children. These activities include but are not limited to:

- meetings, consultations, campaigns or events hosted by the OSRSG VAC in whatever format or location
- the preparation of OSRSG VAC publications and communications material
- gathering images or videos of children, audio recordings, written submissions or other personal information
- online or in-person communications with children.

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

A child safeguarding concern is any situation or behaviour that places a child at risk or that has the potential to harm a child, whether online or in person. This can include physical, sexual or emotional abuse, neglect, or exploitation.¹

A child safeguarding concern that may involve misconduct by UN personnel or other breach of UN rules shall be addressed immediately through existing conduct and discipline channels.

UN personnel have specific responsibilities to report cases of sexual exploitation and abuse perpetrated by UN personnel, in line with the Secretary-General's Bulletin on special measures for protection from sexual exploitation and sexual abuse ([ST/SGB/2003/13](#)).

1.5.Roles and responsibilities

Everyone has an active role to play in creating a safe and empowering environment for all children.

All OSRSG VAC staff, consultants, interns and volunteers at shall:

- read and comply with this policy and the Code of Conduct of the OSRSG VAC (see Annex 1)
- refer any child safeguarding concerns arising in the context of the work of the OSRSG VAC to the Child Safeguarding Focal Point.

The Child Safeguarding Focal Point or alternate shall:

- deliver periodic training to the team on this policy
- keep the Child Safeguarding Policy and procedures under review and suggest amendments where necessary
- communicate to the team any changes made to the policy
- consult with other colleagues on child safeguarding concerns as needed and recommend appropriate action to the SRSG.

¹ For an overview of different forms of violence, see the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child's General comment No. 13 (2011): The right of the child to freedom from all forms of violence ([CRC/C/GC/13](#))

The SRSG shall:

- approve the Child Safeguarding Policy and any amendments made to it
- designate the Child Safeguarding Focal Point and an alternate.

2. PREVENTING HARM AND MITIGATING RISK

2.1. Induction, training and support

The OSRSG VAC shall provide a copy of this Child Safeguarding Policy to all new staff, consultants, interns and volunteers, all of whom shall be requested to affirm in writing that they agree to abide by this policy and the Code of Conduct (see Annex 1).

The OSRSG VAC shall include child safeguarding in the induction training of all new team members. It will also provide annual training on child safeguarding to staff, consultants, interns and volunteers.

The Child Safeguarding Focal Point and alternate shall be available to provide advice and support to colleagues on an ongoing basis regarding the implementation of the policy.

2.2. Activities involving children

The OSRSG VAC carries out diverse activities that may include the direct involvement of children and/or contact with them. This includes children's participation in meetings, consultations and campaigns – both online and offline – and children's contributions to the publications and communication materials produced by the OSRSG VAC.

In planning such activities, the OSRSG VAC shall consider:

- the nature of the OSRSG VAC's contact with or access to children
- the nature of the information OSRSG VAC accesses or gathers, including personal information, photos, videos, text and audio recordings
- whether participation in the activity may have harmful consequences or lead to intimidation, reprisals, or the fear of such
- whether some children may face additional vulnerabilities and require specific measures to ensure their safe participation in the activity.

See Annex 2 for the safeguarding checklist.

The OSRSG VAC shall create a safe environment for children's involvement in activities it organizes by mitigating any specific risks identified, and by ensuring the following:

- Children's contributions, images and other personal information shall be presumed to be confidential unless the OSRSG VAC has received written consent for the use of such material or information as part of its activities (see Annex 3 for a template consent form).
- The OSRSG VAC shall refrain from sharing children's personally identifiable information, such as their full name, postal address, name of their school, email address, phone number and details for their social media accounts.
- The OSRSG VAC shall not undertake any activities or produce any written, visual or audio content that exploits children, stigmatizes them or exposes them to harm.
- At public events where children are involved and in which other parties participate, the OSRSG VAC will remind all participants of the need to respect children's privacy and protect them from harm, for example in relation to other parties taking photographs or sharing details of the event on social media.
- During online events that involve children, the OSRSG VAC shall consider the use of technical tools and methods of interaction to keep children safe, including:
 - using the event registration function to identify participants under the age of 18
 - sharing safeguarding information and the Code of Conduct before the event and reminding participants of the main points at the start of the event
 - inviting children to display their first names only on the online platform
 - reminding children not to share any personally identifiable information
 - disabling the chat function and/or video for participants under the age of 18
 - filtering questions through a moderator.
- The OSRSG VAC shall comply with the [United Nations Personal Data Protection and Privacy Principles](#) in relation to all personal data shared by children during the course of its activities. These principles include fair and legitimate processing; using data only for a specified purpose; proportionality and necessity; retention only for specified purpose; accuracy; confidentiality; security, transparency; and accountability.

- Where relevant, the OSRSG VAC and/or partner organizations shall create a list of emergency contact numbers for each child taking part in the activity and make sure this is easily available to the staff, consultants, interns, volunteers or others who are responsible for the child.

The OSRSG VAC shall provide comprehensive information to children on their involvement in its activities (including through preparatory meetings, where appropriate). This information shall include:

- the purpose of the activity
- how the activity will work, particularly if the event is public, filmed, webcast, photographed or recorded for further dissemination
- how children's inputs will be used, and particularly the implications of sharing images, audio, text and other material online
- details of who will be in the audience or otherwise participating in the event
- how the OSRSG VAC will follow up and provide feedback on the outputs and impact of the activity.

Child safeguarding is also a key component of the information the OSRSG VAC should provide about the activity. The OSRSG VAC shall inform children, parents/legal guardians and/or the organization facilitating the participation of children in the activity about:

- the child's right to be protected from harm while participating in the activity
- how the OSRSG VAC and its partners should interact with children, in line with OSRSG VAC's this Safeguarding Policy and its Code of Conduct
- how children can keep themselves and others safe during the activity
- where and how children can seek support if the content of the activity may be triggering or upsetting, including through local referral or support mechanisms (e.g. helplines)
- where and how children can report their child safeguarding concerns, including the name and contact details for the team member from the OSRSG VAC or partner organization who is acting as the Child Safeguarding Focal Point for the event

This information will be conveyed in a child-friendly way and adapted as necessary for the age, communication needs and background of the children.

When children are taking part directly in events or activities run by the OSRSG VAC, the OSRSG VAC shall ensure that it obtains the full, informed and written consent of children and their parent/legal guardian. Children and their parent/legal guardian shall be able to withdraw their consent at any time.

The OSRSG VAC sometimes engages partners to support or assist with activities that involve children directly. Unless such partners already have equivalent procedures in place, the OSRSG VAC shall require partners to abide by its Child Safeguarding Policy and Code of Conduct, and shall reflect this requirement in any related terms of reference, memoranda of understanding or other agreements, as appropriate.

2.3. Interacting with children

When communicating directly with a child in person or online, members of the team should ensure that:

- their communication is respectful and professional
- their language is sensitive to the age, gender, communication needs and background of the child
- a child is never humiliated or demeaned
- at least one other adult – such as another team member or parent – is present during the interaction (if in person) or included in the communication (if it is online).
- only official email or social media accounts are used
- messaging services that require the use of personal phone numbers are avoided, if possible. If it is deemed necessary to contact a child by these means, at least one other adult should be included in the communication.

3. RESPONDING TO CHILD SAFEGUARDING CONCERNS

3.1. Referral to the Child Safeguarding Focal Point and immediate follow-up

Staff members, consultants, interns and volunteers may have a child safeguarding concern as a result of:

- a child's disclosure of violence, abuse or exploitation
- their own observations on interacting with a child
- information or material shared by another party, including other children.

When an OSRSG VAC team member has a child safeguarding concern, the team member should refer the information to the Child Safeguarding Focal Point or alternate. The team member should make a careful note of all relevant details but it is not their role to investigate a child safeguarding concern or to probe for additional information.

Where an OSRSG VAC team member receives a disclosure directly from a child, it is important to reassure the child that they have done the right thing in sharing the information and that abuse is never their fault. The OSRSG VAC team member should indicate that the OSRSG VAC will need to share the information with someone who will be able to help. It is important that the team member never promises a child that they will keep their disclosure secret. In addition, the team member should not raise unrealistic expectations about what the OSRSG VAC can do.

The Child Safeguarding Focal Point or alternate will then bring the matter immediately to the attention of the SRSG with a recommendation for action. The recommendation will consider:

- any immediate or imminent threat of harm to the child
- the need to inform the child's parents/legal guardians and connect them to support services, where it is safe to do so
- the need to inform another organization if the concern relates to an accompanying adult, staff member or non-staff personnel of that organization

- whether referral to national law enforcement or child protection authorities would be appropriate and in the best interests of the child.

3.2. Child safeguarding concerns that may involve staff misconduct

If the child safeguarding concern may involve staff misconduct or other breach of UN rules, it should be addressed immediately through existing conduct and discipline channels.

3.3. Child safeguarding concerns that involve OSRSG VAC team members

If the child safeguarding concern relates to the acts or omissions of the Child Safeguarding Focal Point or alternate, OSRSG VAC team members should bring the matter directly to the attention of the SRSG. If the child safeguarding concern relates to the acts or omission of the SRSG, OSRSG VAC team members should seek external advice from the Office of Internal Oversight Services.

3.4. Records and information sharing

The Child Safeguarding Focal Point or alternate shall record the details of all child safeguarding concerns that are brought to their attention.

The Child Safeguarding Focal Point and alternate shall ensure the confidentiality and security of any sensitive information related to child safeguarding concerns, in line with the United Nations Personal Data Protection and Privacy Principles. The OSRSG VAC shall only share such information on a strictly need-to-know basis or when children are at risk of harm.

Where appropriate, the OSRSG VAC shall keep the child and their parent/legal guardian informed of all action taken in response to the child safeguarding concern.

4. MONITORING AND REVIEW

This policy shall be kept under continuous review and the Child Safeguarding Focal Point shall recommend any necessary amendments to the SRSG.

The policy shall be updated no more than one year from the most recent update.

Last update: 20 December 2023

Next review: 20 December 2024

ANNEX 1

Code of conduct

All staff, consultants, interns and partners working for or with OSRSG VAC have a role to play in keeping children safe.

In agreeing to abide by this Code of Conduct, you are committing to the following.

I will:

- act in line with OSRSG VAC's child safeguarding policy and procedures
- respect the rights, privacy and dignity of children
- respect the diverse backgrounds and needs of children, without making any prejudicial assumptions about them
- be aware of and demonstrate appropriate personal and professional boundaries
- respect the evolving capacity, views and agency of children
- value and take children's contributions seriously, actively involving them in the planning of activities wherever possible
- communicate with children in a way that is sensitive to their age, gender, communication needs and background
- ensure that when preparing an activity with children, they understand the goal of the activity, what to expect, how their input will be used and how OSRSG VAC will follow up and provide feedback
- ensure that OSRSG VAC has obtained the full, informed consent of children and their parents/caregivers for participation in OSRSG VAC activities
- give my full attention to the children I am working with and respect their choices about how they wish to contribute
- challenge unacceptable behaviour and respond to any child safeguarding concerns promptly, in line with OSRSG VAC's child safeguarding policy and procedures.

I will not:

- engage in any unlawful activity with or in relation to a child
- engage in any activity that is likely to harm a child
- discriminate against any child or their family members
- be alone with a child unnecessarily
- arrange personal contact, including online contact, with children I am working with for any purpose that is not related to the activities of the OSRSG VAC
- raise children's expectations inappropriately regarding the role and work of the OSRSG VAC
- use inappropriate language or engage in inappropriate behaviour in the presence of children, or show or provide children with access to inappropriate images or material
- disclose personal or sensitive information about a child, including images of the child, unless the child and their parent/legal guardian consent or unless I am required to do so by the policy and procedure of the OSRSG VAC on reporting
- ignore or disregard any suspected or disclosed child harm or abuse.

ANNEX 2

Safeguarding checklist for the planning of an OSRSG VAC event or activity

- Conduct an assessment of specific safeguarding risks for the event/activity and identify any necessary mitigation measures.
- Provide a comprehensive briefing to children on the event/activity, including on how to keep themselves and others safe.
- Obtain consent in writing from children and parents/caregivers for participation.
- Obtain agreement in writing from partners assisting the OSRSG VAC with the event to abide by its Child Safeguarding Policy and Code of Conduct, unless partners already have equivalent procedures in place.
- Where relevant, create a list of emergency contact numbers for each child taking part in the activity and a list of local support or reporting mechanisms to which children can be referred if necessary.
- Ensure children are aware of the name and contact details of the Child Safeguarding Focal Point for the event from the OSRSG VAC or partner organization.
- Announce and implement safeguarding measures during the event (using appropriate and respectful language; only showing first names; not sharing identifying information; disabling/modifying chat function; etc.).
- Forward any child safeguarding concerns that arise during the event promptly to the OSRSG VAC Child Safeguarding Focal Point or alternate (if they are not already acting as the safeguarding focal point for the event).
- Provide feedback on the outputs and impact of the activity to the children who participated.

ANNEX 3

Template Consent Form

Thank you for your interest in [name of project]. If you have any questions about the document describing the project or this consent form, please let us know by emailing [include srsg-vac@un.org and contact email for focal point]

[Briefly outline the project activity]

We will only use [identify nature of material] for its intended purposes, as set out in the description of this project. Consent can be withdrawn at any time if you are not happy about [identify nature of material] being used any more, for any reason.

To be completed by the parent or guardian:

I confirm that I am the parent / legal guardian of:

Name of child:

Country:

Age of child:

By submitting this form:

1. I confirm that I consent to my child submitting [identify nature of material] being developed by the Office of the Special Representative of the UN Secretary-General on Violence against Children (OSRSG VAC).
2. I agree that the OSRSG VAC may use [identify nature of material] for the purposes set out in the description of the project
3. I have spoken with my child about this project and grant permission for the release of [identify nature of material] on their behalf
4. I allow [limited details, such as first name] to be displayed with along with [identify nature of material].

My name:

Relationship to the child:

My phone number or contact e-mail:

Signature:

Date:

To be completed by the child taking part in this activity:

Please fill in your name, signature and the date below if you:

1. understand why we are gathering **[identify nature of material]**
2. are happy to take part in this project
3. agree that **[identify nature of material]** can be used as set out in the description of the project.

Your name:

Signature:

Date: