

## CHILD PROTECTION CODE OF CONDUCT IN FELM PROJECTS

*This Code of Conduct is created to help the partner organisation and FELM staff overseas to take better into account the welfare and safety of children in their work, including project planning and management. Together with the Ethical Principles of FELM, this Code of Conduct aims at providing practical guidance on what is acceptable when working with children.*

*These guidelines/ code of conduct apply to all staff, volunteers (henceforth referred to as the staff) and any other parties who come into contact with children, i.e. persons under the age of 18, in FELM projects. The children also need to be introduced to their rights. A FELM representative will assist the local partner in applying the child protection principles in their own work.*

*Child protection is one of the four themes which run throughout the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, which went into effect in September 1990. 193 countries have ratified the Convention and have included it in their own laws.*

### 1. PURPOSE OF THE CODE OF CONDUCT

**The purpose of this code of conduct is**

- to raise awareness of the rights of the children;
- to increase commitment to child protection;
- to protect children from abuse and exploitation;
- to propose good practices to minimise risks and inappropriate behaviour promptly and systematically;
- to serve as a tool for partners to create their respective child protection guidelines/policies in order to address specific child protection concerns in their own socio-cultural environments and legal frameworks;
- to serve as a practical tool for the supervisors to introduce child protection issues to the staff;
- to protect staff from false accusations and allegations.

### 2. OBLIGATIONS OF THE STAFF AND MANAGEMENT

*Children are minors and therefore it is the adults' responsibility to safeguard a physically and mentally healthy environment for the children to grow, play and study in. Adults act as role models to children and therefore it is their duty to create a work environment of trust, openness and mutual accountability among the staff and between the staff and the children.*

**All the staff commit to**

- opposing all forms of child exploitation and child abuse (including physical, mental, neglect, sexual and spiritual abuse);
- giving respect and dignity to all children associated with the work of FELM or its partners;
- keeping children's best interests in mind when planning activities and dealing with them;
- ensuring that a culture of openness exists to raise concerns to be discussed;
- ensuring that a sense of accountability exists between staff so that poor practices or potentially abusive behavior does not go unchallenged;
- soliciting children to express their opinions and views especially on issues which affect their daily lives;
- involving children without discrimination or exclusion on the basis of gender, disability, social status, ethnic, political or religious background;
- protecting children from inappropriate behaviour (e.g. exclusion from the group, verbal, physical or sexual abuse) or bullying of other children;
- ensuring that no child is asked to work or perform favors in return for assistance or participation; refraining from smoking in classrooms and offices when there are children present in order not to harm children's health; refraining from drinking alcohol or using any other intoxicating substances during office hours;
- teaching children to assess what is acceptable and unacceptable both in staff behavior and in their own dealings with other children and staff;
- discussing with children their rights and explaining what to do if something occurs;
- reporting any suspected or witnessed misconduct or abusive behavior without delay.

**In project planning and management, the supervisory staff commit to minimising risks through**

- making all staff aware of the Child Protection Code of Conduct and making sure that all staff sign a statement to say that they have read the policy, will respect it and understand the consequences in case of inappropriate behaviour;
- showing professionalism in the selection of project staff (personal qualities and conduct);

- developing child protection guidelines and/or a code of conduct;
- organising staff training to raise awareness of health, safety and child protection issues;
- setting up appropriate procedures for reporting potential abuse or suspect of abuse;
- taking appropriate disciplinary action when there is evidence of abuse (immediate suspension from duties, dismissal, legal action, etc.);
- paying special attention to the physical safety of the environment in order to avoid natural or manufactured hazards. For example: adequate health and safety conditions include high construction standards (secure windows and staircases, safe electric appliances and wiring, marked fire escapes and fire equipment, etc.). Buildings and grounds where children reside, study or play, should not have direct access to open water or dangerous earth formations, roads with heavy traffic, construction sites, etc.

### 3. COMMUNICATION AND REPORTING

*In the communication regarding FELM's work it is important to respect the dignity and human rights as well as the cultural and religious identity of all people, children included. The communication and reports must be based on facts and not rely on second-hand interpretation.*

#### **When reporting or publishing material on children, the staff must:**

- Obtain the compulsory consent of the child and his/her parents or carers before taking photographs and images;
- Protect the safety and privacy of children and their families by not using their images and names without explicit consent, and by not using them in any way which reveals their identity or location;
- Photographs and other visual material should not show children as helpless victims or in otherwise negative or inappropriate connections. Rather, visual material shall emphasise the potential and strengths of the people involved and of communities to develop their own lives;
- Ensure that the children are adequately dressed in photographs and images and they are not represented in poses that could be interpreted as sexually suggestive.

#### 4. GUIDELINES FOR PROPER BEHAVIOUR

*Children need protection from psychological, emotional or physical abuse, including sexual abuse.*

*Maintaining high standards of personal and professional conduct is a prerequisite for working in projects with children. When working with children, it is essential to minimise situations which may induce inappropriate behaviour or which can be misinterpreted as such by a third party. Professionalism includes zero tolerance for any abusive behavior.*

**Good precautionary guidelines are to:**

- arrange at least two adults to supervise all children's activities. In mixed groups, there should preferably be one male and one female supervisor;
- obtain permission from the local project supervisor before bringing outside visitors to the community/project site with children;
- arrange meetings with a single child in a public place or accompanied by another adult, in the daytime only;
- avoid discrimination against, showing differential treatment, or favouring particular children to the exclusion of others;
- let the children perform personal functions themselves when they are capable of it (washing and dressing etc.).

**The staff must:**

- never develop relationships with children which could in any way be deemed exploitative or abusive;
- never abuse their power or position of authority to obtain personal gain from children or their parents;
- never use language, make suggestions or offer advice which are inappropriate, offensive or abusive;
- never act in ways intended to shame, humiliate, belittle or degrade children, or otherwise perpetrate any form of emotional abuse;
- never hit or otherwise physically assault or abuse children;
- never behave physically in a manner which is inappropriate or sexually provocative (culturally inappropriate kissing, hugging, or touching of a child);
- never sleep in the same room or bed with the child whom they are working with;

- never develop physical/sexual relationships with children;
- never condone, or participate in activities which are illegal, unsafe or abusive.

This is not an exhaustive or exclusive list. The principle is that staff should avoid actions or behaviour which may constitute poor practice or potentially abusive behaviour.

## 5. ACTIONS TO TAKE IF YOU WITNESS ABUSE OR POTENTIAL ABUSE

*Abusive behaviour can be very difficult to bring forward, but for the sake of the child's welfare, it is crucial to take any suspected or witnessed abuse seriously. The sooner any abuse or potential abuse is reported and examined, the less damage is caused to the child or to the community. It is also important to keep the reported information confidential so as not to unduly harm the people involved.*

If a child's behaviour or stories give indications of abuse, the project staff needs to record the incident in as much detail as possible (the child's exact wordings and behaviour, etc.). Therefore, setting up a system, e.g. the Child Protection Reporting System, needs to be part of the project planning. The recorded information must be kept strictly confidential.

The staff needs to make sure that the child is protected from subsequent abuse. It is important to discuss the incident with the child and reassure the child that he/she is not guilty of any inappropriate behaviour. If there is substantial evidence of physical/sexual abuse, the child needs immediate medical attention. The person involved in the abuse must be suspended from his/her duties until the incident has been thoroughly examined.

### 5.1 Reporting

The reporting mechanism prevents child abuse and strengthens the organizations' accountability. The reporting mechanism also acts as part of FELM's child protection work and supports its risk management mechanism.

Local partners of FELM shall notify the FELM management (regional/headquarters) if the subject of concern (the abuser) is a member of FELM staff. FELM employees and volunteers in most cases shall raise the concern with their line manager or supervisor. If the direct line manager is the subject of concern, they should speak or write to a more senior manager inside FELM's organisation. The regional director (or possibly other staff member) is obligated to report each reported suspicion to the FELM headquarters in Helsinki.

If the subject of concern is a member of a partner organisation, the reporter of the incident shall inform any FELM staff member.

All information will be handled with high confidentiality. The reporter of the incident will be provided follow-up during the process of investigation. It is also possible for everyone to report anonymously through link placed in FELM's homepage: [www.suomenlahetyssaaja.fi/ls\\_en/](http://www.suomenlahetyssaaja.fi/ls_en/).

Reporting child abuse or otherwise unethical practices can include the following areas:

- Your name and organisation?
- What happened?
- When and where did it happen?
- Who was involved? Who else might have been involved?
- Which partner organisation/project/country?
- Any supporting documentation?
- Who else might have information on the case?
- How does your allegation relate to FELM?
- Have you taken any other action in relation to this case?

## 5.2 Investigation

All reported information will be investigated. Further actions are taken based on investigation. Reported data and evidence of reported incidents must be protected and only be available for those who need the information to carry out their duties.

The following guidance is intended to help those (in FELM staff) receiving information to react properly to safeguard the interests of all parties involved.

- Write down the facts you have heard in as much detail as possible. Start making written notes of all subsequent developments in the case;
- Keep the information as confidential as possible (“need to know” basis only). You cannot be sure who is involved;
- Consider the risks from different people’s point of view. Protect both the reporter of the incident, the suspect(s) and the victim(s) until some clarity about the case can emerge;
- Contact the respective FELM Unit at the Helsinki headquarters in order to negotiate the appropriate actions to take;
- Contact the management of the partner organisation if needed;
- Consider contacting competent persons outside the organisations (lawyer, social worker);

- Secure the evidence and prevent further losses: protect all possible documents (photos), make sure evidence is left untouched and isolated, and secure that further losses will not occur;
- Draft an interview list for persons working with or near the subject(s) of concern or victim(s), to be used in an investigation;
- Inform those bringing the issue to your attention that their message has been received and that action is being taken, without forgetting confidentiality;
- Work with your respective unit on how to inform the affected donors and the media (if needed) in Finland. All decisions concerning contacting affected donors and media are to be made at the FELM Communication Department and Domestic Department;
- Plan for learning from the issue within FELM, to mitigate the risk of something similar happening elsewhere.

### 5.3 Disciplinary measures

Concerns and suspicions should not be the basis for disciplinary action before a proper investigation is conducted.

If disciplinary action with a FELM employee is required, his/her supervisor will have a discussion with the employee, giving the employee a possibility to express his/her view on the subject (Finnish Labour Legislation 7:2, 8:1). When criminal actions are suspected FELM will contact the police.

The partner organisation is responsible for decisions concerning their own staff members, although in many cases mutual considerations might be necessary. When criminal actions are suspected, FELM requires the partner organisation to contact the local authorities. Depending on the case, FELM might use reported data for future decision-making.

If the investigation shows incidences of child abuse or unethical actions inside the cooperation abroad, the following actions must be taken:

- A date is set by which the conditions for further support must be met;
- A plan will be prepared and implemented to support the victim(s), including physical and mental aftercare and judicial support.

Also the following actions may be taken:

- A criminal proceeding takes place;
- In severe cases, the partnership with the partner organisation may be finished temporarily or conclusively.

**Statement of Commitment to the FELM Code of Conduct for Child Protection**

I \_\_\_\_\_, have read and understood the guidelines outlined in this Code of Conduct. I commit myself to implementing the guidelines and understand that breaching these guidelines may result to the termination of my work contract and/or to a formal punishment.