

# Child Protection Policy

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# GEA Coop

GEA is a non-profit Social Cooperative founded in 2004 in Padua. Its main goal is to promote and support processes of integration and active citizenship of vulnerable groups such as minors, migrant women, migrant families and communities, in the area of Veneto region.

GEA has developed a solid experience in writing and managing EU funded projects (LLP, Europe for Citizens, European Fund for Third Country Nationals Integration...). GEA cooperates with regional and local public authorities in the field of social inclusion and sport (Municipalities and Veneto Region), schools, social organizations working with families, local grassroots sport clubs and associations.

At regional level, GEA is member of the regional consortium Consorzio Veneto Insieme, that gathers 41 social non-profit organizations in Veneto Region that work with vulnerable and disadvantaged groups, including families with social and economic difficulties, families with members with disabilities, migrant background, that will be contacted to disseminate the project and take part in the local activities.

At national level, GEA is a member of OXFAM Italia NGO, full member of the international NGOs network of OXFAM. GEA is a full member and represented in the national board of Consorzio Nazionale Idee In Rete, gathering more than 250 social organizations in 14 regions, also working on sport and social inclusion, volunteering and activities from disadvantaged groups.

For further information please contact:

<http://www.geacoop.org/>

# Main GEA's Activities

## **DESIGN AND PROJECT MANAGEMENT**

GEA has gained solid experience in local, national and European planning either in the social, educational and social-health fields. The participatory construction of an inclusive and multicultural society is the lens through which we review programmes and calls for proposals and through which we build local and international partnerships.

The projects GEA worked on and in which it is currently working as lead or partner institution, are mainly financed by public institutions and programmes in Italy (F.A.M.I. - Fondo asilo migrazione e integrazione - of the Ministry of the Interior, Cassa Ammende of the Ministry of Justice, EELL, public and private foundations, Fondi otto per mille...) and public institutions and EU programmes (Erasmus, Europe for Citizens, Justice...).

## **WELCOMING AND SOCIAL INCLUSION**

GEA is involved directly and with network partnerships, in the widespread welcoming and accompaniment of vulnerable people and families, such as migrants seeking international protection, including victims of intentional violence and/or trafficking, single-parent families leaving the welcoming system, people admitted to alternative measures to detention and/or end of sentence.

We respond to the challenges - personal and contextual - that arise in the pathway to social inclusion: legal aspects, employment and social integration, housing autonomy, education and training, psycho-educational support, training and awareness-raising of the operators and citizens involved. The activities are built on current and evolving needs and requirements of the beneficiaries.

# Main GEA's Activities

## **LINGUISTIC AND CULTURAL MEDIATION AND INTERCULTURAL COUNSELLING**

Since 2001, the linguistic and cultural mediation and counselling action carried out by GEA, contributes in reducing the possible misunderstandings that may arise between non-Italian speaking citizens and service operators especially when there is difficulty in expressing and listening adequately to the vital needs that are conveyed in care and educational relationships.

Interventions aim at facilitating the communication between the operators of public services - primarily social, health, school and reception services - and the migrant family/person accessing them.

Interventions support the care and therapeutic relationship between professionals and patients, promoting an effective understanding and compliance in health structures, and more generally awareness and prevention on issues of health, care and well-being of individuals and groups, with particular attention to vulnerable individuals and groups.

Interventions support the school-family-pupil relationship (especially if newly arrived) for the reception, insertion and L2 learning, the management of emerging criticalities in coordination with social and health services in the maternal-child area and child protection.

Interventions support the relationship of guests in welcoming and international protection programmes with offices and services responsible for assessing asylum and protection requests at all stages. When the request is accepted, support is extended to all processes of inclusion and socio-occupational integration, up to autonomy. Specific programmes are addressed at prisoners at the end of their sentences, leaving for social reintegration.

# Main GEA's Activities

## **TRAINING AND ORGANISATIONAL CONSULTING**

GEA supports the changes introduced and the necessary innovation required by the re-configuration of society and services in relation to the demographic and migration ongoing processes, with training and organisational consultancy.

We design and deliver capacity-building and training courses for operational and managerial staff of social and health services, schools and other local public services. Gea offers organisational consulting and administrative support services for the reorganisation/management of cooperative and association structures, projects, productive realities and migrant entrepreneurship.

# Foreword

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Gea Coop. Sociale has an important mission: it has to promote and implement integration and active citizenship processes of migrant people, with specific attention to families, communities, women, youth and vulnerable groups. It is engaged in promoting social change. And only a clear and consistent policy can fight, prevent, and promote within society.

In particular, in all our projects involving children, we are committed to ensuring that each child enjoys the benefit of a protective environment in which their rights are respected. This is the reason we consistently revise our guidelines concerning children's rights, incorporating the most stringent requirements in accordance with international standards and contemporary best practices. With this objective in mind, we have formulated the 'Child Protection Policy,' which we aspire to implement across all the other activities within our organization.

Addressing the prevention of abuse and providing guidance on responding to suspected abuse, this policy is designed to serve as a manual for overseeing daily activities with children.

Therefore, specific attention is dedicated, for instance, to the recruitment of staff, the integration of social media, and the adoption of new reporting and communication tools.

Recognizing the tangible risk to children's well-being, we are steadfast in our commitment to widely disseminate our Child Protection Policy. This commitment extends not only internally but also to partner organizations representing children with whom we collaborate. In the event of abuse or suspected abuse, our guiding principle mandates an immediate and professional response in compliance with prevailing legislation.

The present Child Protection Policy incorporates a new code of conduct to be signed by all Gea coop collaborators (including employees, temporary staff, and volunteers).

We firmly believe that the consistent application of this policy represents the most effective means of guaranteeing that all children receive the necessary protection to which they are entitled.



# The aim of Child Protection Policy

Child Protection Policy of GEA constitutes a framework of rules, standards and guidelines intended to:

1. promote an understanding among all employees and collaborators about the critical importance of taking proactive measures to safeguard children from abuse.
2. clearly delineate the responsibilities of specific individuals in ensuring the safety of children under the care of the Gea Coop.
3. promptly intervene when there is suspicion of child abuse or a direct threat to their health and well-being.
4. define educational, preventive, and intervention measures aimed at maintaining a secure environment for children.
5. cultivate within the organization a work culture centered on children's rights and continual learning.



# A glossary of basic information

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# 1. Definition of child and rights of child

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Child: the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) defines a "child" as "any person below the age of 18 years, unless under the law applicable to the child, the age of majority is attained earlier".

The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child provides an international framework outlining children's rights to:

1. protection from abuse and neglect (article 19);
2. discrimination (article 2);
3. different forms of exploitation (articles 32-36);
4. special consideration is given to children deprived of parental care (article 20);
5. refugee children (article 22);
6. children at risk of developing a drug habit (article 33);
7. children who are deprived of their liberty (article 37, 40);
8. children in situations of armed conflict (article 38, 40).

## 2. Definition of Child Abuse

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The World Health Organization defines child maltreatment as all forms of physical and/or emotional ill-treatment, sexual abuse, neglect or negligent treatment or commercial or other exploitation, resulting in actual or potential harm to the child's health, survival, development or dignity in the context of a relationship of responsibility, trust or power (Butchart et al., 2006).

According to Government of the Netherlands there are five general types of child abuse:

- **Physical abuse:** this could include actions such as striking, shaking, throwing, burning or scalding, drowning, suffocating, or any other means of inflicting physical harm upon a child. Physical harm may also arise when a parent or caregiver pretends to exhibit symptoms of illness or deliberately induces ill health in a child under their care.
- **Emotional or psychological abuse:** the enduring emotional mistreatment of a child, resulting in significant and prolonged impacts on the child's emotional development. This form of abuse may encompass actions that communicate to children that they are devoid of worth and love, deemed inadequate, or valued solely in relation to meeting the needs of another person. Additionally, emotional abuse can involve imposing expectations on children that are either inappropriate for their age or developmental stage, or consistently causing them to feel frightened or endangered. Emotional abuse is inherent to all forms of ill-treatment of a child, even though it may also occur independently.
- **Physical neglect:** the child does not receive the care and nurturing that it needs;
- **Emotional or psychological neglect:** continuous lack of positive attention for the child. Ignoring the child's need for love, warmth and security. This category also covers cases in which children are witnesses to violence between their parents or caregivers;
- **Sexual abuse:** these activities may encompass physical contact, involving both penetrative acts (e.g., rape) and non-penetrative acts. Non-contact activities may also be involved, such as engaging children in the viewing or creation of pornographic materials, observing sexual activities, or encouraging children to exhibit sexually inappropriate behavior.

# Principles underpinning our Child Protection Policy

1

The welfare of children is the primary concern: all measures concerning child safeguarding must prioritize the best interests of children. This entails a commitment to ensuring, in all our programs and activities, the respect for children's rights and the prevention of harm.

2

All children have equal rights to protection and to have their wellbeing and participation promoted: all children, whatever their age, culture, disability, gender, language, racial origin, socio-economic status, religious belief and/or sexual identity have the right to protection from all forms of harm and abuse.

3

Child protection is everyone's responsibility: everyone has a responsibility for ensuring the safety and well-being of individuals. This policy is obligatory for anyone associated with Gea coop, encompassing employees, volunteers, and partners. While training, guidance, and assistance will be made available, active engagement is expected from all parties to effectively fulfill their obligations in safeguarding children.

4

Recognizing that safeguarding children cannot be achieved in isolation: we will collaborate with other organizations, agencies (including state departments and ministries mandated to protect children), relevant groups, parents and careers to promote the welfare, health and development of children.

5

We strive to promote awareness and inspire others about the significance of safeguarding children. Our policy and procedures serve not only to underscore our commitment but also to articulate our values. We are committed to sharing these guidelines with others and welcome feedback on their implementation and relevance.

6

We operate within the parameters of both international and national laws and policies pertaining to safeguarding.

7

We uphold confidentiality and refrain from disclosing personal information about individuals involved in child protection concerns, including the identities of those expressing concerns. However, information may be shared when necessary to ensure the protection of a child, such as when specialized services are required or in cases where a criminal offense may have occurred.

## Code of Conduct

- Promote the health and welfare of children by providing opportunities for them to take part in project's activities safely (sport sessions);
- Respect and promote the rights, wishes and feelings of children;
- Promote and implement appropriate procedures to safeguard the well-being of children and protect them from abuse;
- Recruit, train, support and supervise its staff, members and volunteers to adopt best practice to safeguard and protect children from abuse and to reduce risk to themselves;
- Require staff, members and volunteers to adopt and abide by this Child Protection Policy and these procedures;
- Respond to any allegations of misconduct or abuse of children in line with this Policy and these procedures as well as implementing, where appropriate, the relevant disciplinary and appeals procedures;
- Observe guidelines issued by local Child Protection Committees for the protection of children;
- Regularly monitor and evaluate the implementation of this Policy and these procedures.

# Recruitment and introduction of new employees

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The GEA coop is dedicated to selecting individuals with the right skills and competencies who share our commitment to the principles of Child Protection Policy, particularly the right to protection against abuse. Prospective employees, volunteers, trainees, everyone who collaborates, are required to submit their resumes and references. During the interview, conducted by two GEA coop representatives, the focus is on assessing candidates' knowledge and competencies while addressing any gaps in their employment or education.

Before the start of the collaboration, volunteers or trainees or employees or candidates must provide necessary legal documents, including a clean criminal record certificate covering offenses related to sexual freedom, morality, crimes against minors, and any ongoing criminal proceedings involving them. It is important to consider that for all new members of the cooperative, regardless of whether they are volunteers or employees, a background check and criminal record check are conducted.

Upon joining the GEA coop, all new employees and collaborators are expected to familiarize themselves with the Child Protection Policy, employment bylaws, regulations for upholding children's rights, and principles for safeguarding and processing personal data within the organization. Confirmation of understanding and commitment is signified by the employee's signature on a relevant statement appended to the employment contract.

The same rules apply to external workers.



## Intervention in cases of suspected child abuse

All employees and collaborators of the Gea coop act for the purpose of protecting children against abuse. Every suspected case of child abuse, both in internal activities and in external activities, is treated seriously and investigated, whether reported by a child, caregiver, professional or employee/collaborator and no matter if suspected abuse was perpetrated by another child, caregiver, professional or employee/collaborator.

In the case of suspected crime or threat to the child's interest, employees immediately undertake legal intervention.

The decision to intervene is made by a team made up of: the reporting employee, coordinator of the relevant program (this role is assigned to specific employees based on the projects), expert in protecting children against abuse appointed by the coordinator. In Gea Coop the expert in protecting children against abuse is Marco Baldini. His role is that of vice president, member of the board of directors, and expert in mediation and counseling. Marco Baldini has been involved in cultural linguistic mediation in the social health and educational context since 2005. He obtained the title of professional counselor in 2009 and has been involved in family mediation since 2012 at the Paduan center for systemic relational family therapy. Currently, he is undergoing training for restorative justice and criminal mediation.

Moreover, the decision to intervene must be reported to the Management Board. Further forms of intervention will be agreed upon in accordance with the Board and the selected team.

The selected team consists of Memè Miriam and Haxhiaj Ina. Memè Miriam is graduated in International Relations, experienced in working as teacher and trainer with disadvantaged targets such as young incarcerated mothers and their children, young and adult migrants, Refugee children who are victims of neglect or abuse, migrant and refugee women. Ina Haxhiaj is graduated in social service sciences, she has worked in the field of integration of migrants, support for legal and health assistance, human rights, protection of children and adolescents, promotion of gender equality, women's empowerment and development of transversal skills.

At the same time, employees offer help and support to the child and non-offending caregivers. If the child's health or life are in imminent danger, an employee learning of the situation intervenes without delay, by immediately informing proper Police unit by phone and by fax about direct threat or damage to health and life of a child. All activities undertaken in the course of the intervention are documented. If despite the support the client suffers serious damage to health or loses life, GEA coop Management Board initiates the procedure of Serious Incident Analysis to make sure all available support options were employed and to draw conclusions for future operation.



# Media and communication



This section explores the necessary steps to integrate safeguarding measures into media activities:

- Respect the Child Protection Policy and its procedure.
- Ensure that sharing images of a child's home, community, or environment does not compromise the child's safety.
- Request the presence of a GEA coop employee as a companion during the process of creating a report, whether it involves video, photography, or other mediums.
- Secure consent from both the child and the responsible caregiver before proceeding.
- Guarantee that the child does not engage in any inappropriate poses, including those with sexual connotations.
- Refrain from capturing or sharing photos of children who are entirely unclothed or dressed inappropriately. Avoid using images of children that may be exploitative or offensive.

# Media and communication



This section explores the necessary steps to integrate safeguarding measures into media activities:

- Uphold the dignity of children at all times. Avoid portraying them as victims, steering clear of depictions that suggest weakness or desperation. Images should showcase children in a positive light, and stories about them should strive to highlight not only the challenges they face but also their strengths, rather than sensationalizing their experiences.
- Photography and videography are exclusively intended for professional purposes. GEA coop staff, volunteers, and visitors are welcomed to 'like' and 'share' officially approved photographs on GEA coop's official websites and social media platforms, like Facebook. This practice allows authorized photos to be disseminated more widely across personal social media accounts. Unofficial photographs should not be shared or uploaded on personal pages.
- Refrain from incorporating any details in files that could compromise the privacy and safety of a child who is a victim of abuse, including titles, metadata, and captions. When sharing or disseminating photos, images, stories, etc., make sure to eliminate personal information to protect privacy. This includes omitting names, addresses, and, when required, other identifying features such as school names.

# Review of the Policy and its Procedure

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The review must change:

- in accordance with changes in legislation and guidance on the protection of children or following any changes within GEA Coop. Sociale;
- following any issues or concerns raised about the protection of children within GEA Coop. Sociale;
- in all other circumstances, at least every three years.

Employees are required to stay updated on changes to the child protection policy, through the cooperative's website and through refresher courses and training.

## Complaints and accountability

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All complaints regarding these guidelines or their non-compliance, have to be addressed to GEA Coop. Sociale here represented by Fabio Rizzi, President and legal representative ([info@geacoop.org](mailto:info@geacoop.org)), and will be responded to immediately and with the highest priority.

GEA Coop. Sociale staff and volunteers are expected to respect this Policy.

GEA Coop. Sociale reviewed and approved this Children Protection Policy.

# Bibliography & Sitography

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<https://geacoop.org/it>

SIGNATURE



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