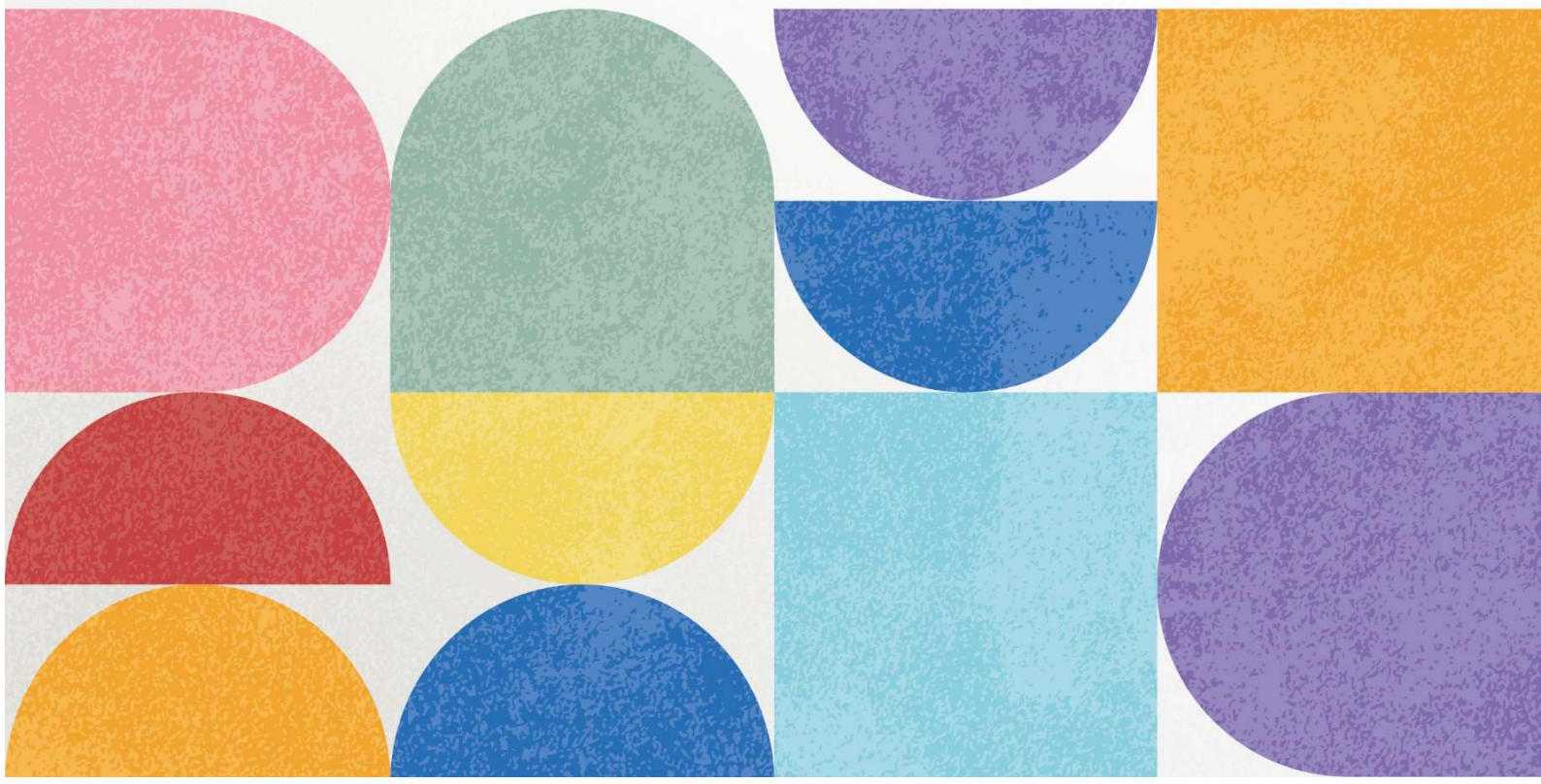


Child Protection Policy

Cáritas Coimbra

January 2025



Leaf

Child Protection Policy, Cáritas Diocesana de Coimbra

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"The protection of minors and vulnerable persons is an integral part of the Gospel message that the Church and all its members are called to spread throughout the world. Christ himself has entrusted to us the care and protection of the least and most defenceless: "He who receives this child in my name receives me" (Mt 18:5). For this reason, we all have a duty to welcome minors and vulnerable people generously and to create a safe environment for them, giving priority to their interests. This calls for a continuous and profound conversion, in which personal holiness and moral care can contribute to promoting the credibility of the Gospel proclamation and renewing the Church's educational mission."

Pope Francis

Apostolic Letter "Motu Proprio" of the Supreme Pontiff Francis (March 2019)¹

¹ https://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/pt/motu_proprio/documents/papa-francesco-motu-proprio-20190326_latutela-deiminori.html

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1. Introduction

Cáritas Coimbra, hereinafter referred to as CDC, is a Private Institution of Social Solidarity that supports communities in the social, health, education and pastoral areas, in five districts of the Central region. With the mission of being an instrument of the Church, in the Diocese of Coimbra, the CDC aims to be a reference for the quality and ability to be a pioneer in the services it provides to the community, in a close, reflective and sustainable way.

Implemented since the 1950s, the CDC has always sought to monitor and respond, in a subsidiary manner, to the problems of the communities, using a methodology that favors dialogue, cooperation and networking. Currently, it focuses its intervention on the search for innovative and economically sustainable strategies, which allow quality responses, appropriate to emerging needs, maintaining the commitment to humanism, professionalism and technical and scientific rigor.

Aware of its social responsibility, the CDC has, over time, developed its action in order to privilege people, families and social groups in situations of vulnerability, currently having more than 120 social responses in the geographical area of the Diocese of Coimbra. It covers the following main areas, among other projects of a more specific nature:

- education (childhood, free time activities);
- Health (Outpatient, Inpatient);
- Social Action, Family and Community (Children and Young People at Risk, Elderly, HIV/AIDS);
- drug addiction and homeless people (community intervention);
- Social and community support (Community Centers; Social Support Center)
- Services – Training, Rehabilitation Clinic and Laundry;
- Volunteering;
- Pastoral Action.

The dimension of the CRC's action and its nature are an expression of the social responsibility that it has internalized over the last five decades and allow it to be a dynamic and transformative reference for the whole of society in favor of the common good.

2. Child Protection Policy

2.1 Objectives

This child protection policy aims to define guidelines and procedures for the internal policy for the protection of children and young people that are related to the organic structure of the CDC. It describes a series of principles and standards of conduct that will be implemented and that aim to reduce the exposure of children and young people to risk and danger. It is intended to:

1. **Guarantee children and young people the right to be protected from all forms of violence, mistreatment and abuse**, in all types of actions developed by the CDC.
2. **Protect all people who contribute to the actions developed by the CRC**, establishing a commitment to explicit guidelines, in order to ensure that all employees and volunteers have clear information about their roles and responsibilities;
3. Ensure that employees and volunteers adopt **procedures and work methodologies** aligned with the **mission, values and objectives** of the CDC;
4. Apply **the rights and principles of the Convention on the Rights of the Child** to all children and young people, without exception, and take positive steps to promote their rights;
5. Always take into account the **best interests of the child** in all decisions that concern him/her;
6. Ensure that CDC provides staff and volunteers **with adequate training and skills development opportunities** to ensure the protection of children and youth.

By defining a Child Protection Policy, the CRC undertakes to promote the rights of the child in all actions and projects involving their involvement. The CRC undertakes to respect and guarantee the principles enshrined in the Declaration of the Rights of the Child (United Nations General Assembly, 1959), the Convention on the Rights of the Child (approved by the United Nations in 1989 and ratified by Portugal on 21 September 1990), Article 21 of the Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union (ratified by the Treaty of Lisbon in 2009), the principles enshrined in Article 2 of the Treaty on European Union (TEU), in the European Union Strategy on the Rights of the Child (European Union, 2021), in the Constitution of the Portuguese Republic in its VII Revision of 2005, in the Law on the Protection of Children and Young People in Danger (Law No. 26/2018), in the Law on the Protection of Personal Data (Law No. 58/2019), as well as the recommendations of the United Nations and the Council of Europe to Member States on the protection of children and the promotion of their rights.

The United Nations states: "There is no universally accepted definition of the age group of young people. For statistical purposes, the United Nations, without prejudice to any other definitions made by Member States, defines "youth" as an age group of people between 15 and 24 years of age²." This definition was endorsed by the General Assembly in Resolution 36/28 of 1981 and all United Nations statistics on youth are based on this definition. This implies that "children" should be considered as the group composed of people under 14 years of age. However, Article 1 of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child defines "children" as the group of persons up to the age

² <https://unric.org/pt/juventude/>

of 18. A broader age range was defined to ensure protection that is more transversal to this age group.

The CDC adopts the age group of 0 to 23 years in its Child Protection Policy.

2.2 Statement of Commitment

CDC is committed to promoting and caring for the rights of children and young people and is therefore committed to:

- to promote the **best interests of children and young people and to protect their rights**, in accordance with the Convention on the Rights of the Child and all relevant national and European legislation;
- ensure that all children and young people are **treated in a dignified and appropriate manner**, in all their aspects of action;
- create a **safe environment** for all children and young people, throughout the organization;
- ensure that all adults who come into contact with children and young people have a **responsibility to** ensure that their rights are respected and that they act in accordance with the CDC's Child Protection Policy;
- ensuring the right of children and young people to be **protected** from abuse, mistreatment and neglect;
- ensure that all employees and volunteers are **sensitized** and supported for the development and application of this Child Protection Policy;
- promote and implement appropriate procedures **to protect and promote the rights of children and young people**;
- **continuously monitor and review** the Child Protection Policy;
- Have up-to-date information on **data protection, confidentiality, information sharing** and other legal issues that may have an impact on the protection of children and young people. Also have information specifically aimed at children and young people about their rights, as well as guidance and support available;
- Collaborate with national and international organizations for the **protection of children and young people** and the promotion of their rights;
- Ensure that staff and volunteers, as well as partner organisations and other stakeholders, are aware of this document and adopt the appropriate methodologies and procedures for the needs of children and young people.

2.3 Guiding principles

Based on the Child Protection Policy, and with reference to the documents and legislation identified above, the CDC undertakes to adopt the following principles:

- **Best interests of children and young people**

All the work developed by the CDC must be based on an intervention that meets the primary interests and rights of children and young people.

- **Consideration of children and young people as subjects of rights and capacities**

Each child and young person has skills that must be valued and reinforced by CDC employees and volunteers, in order to build, together with adults, the system of protection and promotion of their rights.

- **Duty of protection**

Families, society and the State must ensure, as an absolute priority, that no child or young person is a victim of abandonment, neglect, discrimination, exploitation, abuse, violence, harm, cruelty or oppression.

- **Respect for differences and non-discrimination**

The protection of children and young people must be ensured, regardless of their national, ethnic-cultural or social origin, skin colour, sex, language, political choice or religion of the child and/or his or her family. All children, young people and families must be respected, in accordance with the principle of non-discrimination. The CDC should establish a positive relationship, based on mutual trust, respect and acceptance, with children and young people.

- **Participation and information**

Children, young people and families should be heard and informed about the entire intervention, through the use of various communication methods and strategies. Active methods should be used in which children/young people can actively participate and express their opinion. This strategy allows children/young people to improve the conditions for the exercise of their citizenship.

- **Respect for privacy and privacy**

All interventions must be carried out with respect for the intimacy, right to image and privacy of children and young people, who have the right to a relationship of trust and confidentiality of all information and identification elements concerning them. Children, young people and families should be informed of the need to collect information. They must give their consent to the collection of personal data and its use.

Ethically, a breach of confidentiality is admitted when:

- (a) Serious physical and psychological harm to an identifiable and specific person is highly likely;
- b) There is a real benefit resulting from this breach of confidentiality.

- **Consent**

Intervention with children and young people is carried out on the basis of their free will and consent, as well as with the authorization of their parents or legal representatives.

- **Right to information**

All children and young people must be informed of their rights and duties, so it is essential to ensure the right to self-determination, that is, the ability and autonomy that children/young people have to decide about themselves.

- **Collaboration with families**

The work between CDC teams and families is essential for planning strategies and possible solutions together. It is important to value families, taking into account their specific needs and motivations, in order to enhance their potential.

- **Interdisciplinarity and intersectoriality**

CDC's intervention with children and young people is carried out based on an interdisciplinary and intersectoral collaborative work model, ensuring physical, psychological, family and social well-being.

- **Networking**

The CDC's intervention is guided by collaboration, signing of protocols, integration in networks and programs, with entities from the public, private and social economy sectors of a national and international nature, aiming to deepen effective intervention strategies with the central objective of ensuring, in a concerted manner, the protection of children and young people.

2.4 Contact with children and young people:

Direct contact:

- Employees and volunteers who collaborate with the CDC may be in the physical presence of a child or young person, within the scope of the organization's work, in occasional or regular contact, whether in the short, medium or long term;
- This contact may involve clinical/care services, residential care, capacity building, information and education (including peer education) in and out of school or in community settings.
- Direct contact may also involve project/site visits and participation in conferences at local, national, regional and international levels.

Indirect contact:

- Indirect contact includes adults who have access to information about children, young people in the context of the organization's work, such as names, locations (addresses or projects), photographs and case studies.

2.5 Prohibited behaviours:

For the protection of children and young people, the Child Protection Policy establishes clear guidelines on prohibited behaviors to ensure the safety and well-being of minors. Here are some examples of behaviors that are considered prohibited:

- **Physical abuse:**
Any form of physical violence, such as hitting, pushing, assaulting, or any act that causes pain or injury.
- **Psychological Abuse:**
Behaviors that cause emotional harm, such as humiliation, intimidation, threats, rejection, or isolation.
- **Sexual abuse:**
Any sexual interaction or sexual suggestion with children and young people.
Displaying sexual content or inappropriate conversations.
- **Negligence:**
Lack of proper supervision, putting children at risk.
Ignoring children's basic health, safety, and well-being needs, including physical, emotional, and educational needs.
- **Discrimination:**
Treating children or young people unequally or unfairly on the basis of race, gender, sexual orientation, religion, disability or any other characteristic.
Making comments or jokes that could be considered offensive or discriminatory.
- **Exposure to inappropriate content:**
Exposing children and young people to sexually suggestive, violent or offensive material or behaviour.
- **Manipulation or Coercion:**
Using power or influence to manipulate or coerce a child or young person to do something against their will.
- **Privacy Violation:**
Invading the child's privacy, such as reading their personal messages or listening to their conversations without consent.
Not respecting their personal boundaries and private spaces.
- **Inappropriate use of technology:**
Using digital means to harass, intimidate or exploit children and young people.
Sharing personal information or photos of children and young people without consent.
- **Lack of supervision:**
Leaving children and young people unsupervised in situations that may be potentially dangerous.
- **Lack of transparency:**
Do not report or conceal suspicious behavior or incidents of abuse.

- **Lack of professionalism:**
Mixing personal relationships with professional responsibilities.
Not maintaining a professional posture in all interactions with children and young people.

3 Implementation of policies and procedures

All employees, volunteers and members of the Governing Bodies, who have contact with children and young people, within the scope of the actions developed by the CRC, must promote the protection and respect for the rights of children and young people and ensure the implementation of the CRC's Child Protection Policy, adopting the following principles:

- To guarantee the rights provided for in the Convention on the Rights of the Child to all children, without discrimination of any kind, regardless of the colour, sex, language, culture, ethnicity, religion, political or other opinion of the child, his or her parents or legal representatives, or any other status;
- To report any concerns, suspicions or situations of violation of the rights of children and young people;
- Respect the privacy of children and young people, not disclose personal data and behave in a way that does not put children and young people at risk;
- Adopt appropriate language and behaviors that are sensitive to the age, capacity and context of children and young people;
- Not to use information or images of children without the written consent of parents, legal representatives or guardians (in the case of children and young people under the age of 18).³ Children, young people and families should be informed of the need to collect internal communication policies and training and support for employees, volunteers and interns

With a view to an adequate implementation of the Child Protection Policy, the CDC promotes its dissemination through internal communication channels. CDC provides initial and continuing training on practices to protect and promote the rights of children and youth.

3.1 Implementation and enforcement

- All people who collaborate with the CDC (professionals, volunteers and interns) and have contact with children and young people, will have to present at the admission stage and annually, their criminal record (as referred to in Law 113/2009), which will be filed in a separate file at the CDC headquarters;
- All people who collaborate with the CDC (professionals, volunteers and interns) should benefit from training and/or awareness actions on the Child Protection Policy and the Rights of the Child;

³ Doc.15 Cáritas_Consentimento Smaller Image

- This document should also be translated into English, for consultation by more people and, in particular, for sharing in international partnerships.

It is essential that all employees, volunteers, and members of the organization are aware of the behaviors to avoid and commit to following the CDC Child Protection Policy. The protection of children and young people must be a priority.

3.2 Procedures

Denunciation

- Any person who suspects or becomes aware that, in the performance of his or her duties, unacceptable or illegal behaviour which harms or may endanger a child or young person has a duty to report it and to cooperate in any disciplinary or investigative proceedings initiated by the competent authorities.
- You can report the complaint through the CDC Whistleblowing Channel, which is on the official website of the institution <https://canaldenuncia.caritascoimbra.pt/#/>, within a maximum of 5 business days. This channel guarantees the integrity and preservation of the complaint, the confidentiality of the identity and the anonymity of the whistleblowers.
- Protection will be guaranteed to whistleblowers, who cannot be harmed in any way, and anonymity will be guaranteed until the accusation is filed.
- If they suspect or become aware of a public crime, such as domestic violence, sexual exploitation, or abuse of a child, CDC will take steps to report it to the appropriate authorities.
- Any of these procedures must respect the right to privacy and the guarantee that the action will be done with the informed consent of the legal representatives.

Infractions

- Whenever Cáritas Diocesana de Coimbra becomes aware of non-compliance with the provisions of this Child Protection Policy, and in the event that the offender is a collaborator and, therefore, subject to the disciplinary power of Cáritas Diocesana de Coimbra, the respective disciplinary proceedings will be initiated, starting within 60 (sixty) days following the one in which the Board of Directors of the Institution, with disciplinary power, becomes aware of the infraction, under the terms of paragraph 2 of article 329 of the Labour Code.
- The initiation of disciplinary proceedings does not affect the civil, administrative or criminal liability that may occur in relation to any addressees of this Child Protection Policy who pronounce on infractions that correspond to them.

3.3 Monitoring and review

The CRC should review the Child Protection Policy whenever relevant changes are made to national legislation or when the monitoring of its implementation so recommends. It is up to the CDC Board of Directors to approve any and all changes to this document.

4 Final Provisions

Validity and disclosure

This Child Protection Policy enters into force on the date approved by the Board of Directors of Cáritas Diocesana de Coimbra and its dissemination by the other recipients.

This Child Protection Policy will be available on the website of Cáritas Diocesana de Coimbra <https://caritascoimbra.pt/> and on the intranet portal, <https://sou.caritascoimbra.pt/>.