



STANDING ORDER 16: PROTECTION FOR MINORS AND VULNERABLE PERSONS AGAINST ABUSE

INTRODUCTION

The Standing Order number 16 outlines the commitment of the world community, *Christian Life Community*, to safeguarding and protection of minors and vulnerable persons. SO16 is authored and approved by the World Executive Council on December 2019. This presents two approaches for ensuring the protection of minors and vulnerable persons:

- 1- by articulating its own pathways of protection, reporting, and review at the world community level; and
- 2- by providing guidelines to all full member national communities in their own creation of child protection policies.

The articulation of this policy is our response to the urgency and universality of the need to protect minors and vulnerable persons against abuse.

OVERVIEW

I – BASIS

Standing Order 16 adheres to the following standards in the protection of minors and vulnerable persons:

1. The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child

Article 3.1. In all actions concerning children, whether undertaken by public or private social welfare institutions, courts of law, administrative authorities or legislative bodies, the best interests of the child shall be a primary consideration.

Article 19.1. States Parties shall take all appropriate legislative, administrative, social and educational measures to protect the child from all forms of physical or mental violence, injury or abuse, neglect or negligent treatment, maltreatment or exploitation, including sexual abuse, while in the care of parent(s), legal guardian(s) or any other person who has the care of the child.

Article 19.2. Such protective measures should, as appropriate, include effective procedures for the establishment of social programmes to provide necessary support for the child and for those who have the care of the child, as well as for other forms of prevention and for identification, reporting, referral, investigation, treatment and follow-up of instances of child maltreatment described heretofore, and, as appropriate, for judicial involvement.

2. Apostolic Letter Issued “Motu Proprio” by the Supreme Pontiff Francis “On the Protection of Minors and Vulnerable Persons”¹

“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 proclaim throughout the world. Christ himself, in fact, has entrusted us with the care and protection of the weakest and defenceless: *“whoever receives one child such as this in my name receives me”* (Mt 18:5). Therefore, we all have the duty to welcome openheartedly minors and vulnerable persons and to create a safe environment for them, with their interests as a priority. This requires a continuous and profound conversion, in which personal holiness and moral commitment come together to promote the credibility of the Gospel proclamation and to renew the educational mission of the Church.”

3. Apostolic Letter Issued “Motu Proprio” by the Supreme Pontiff Francis “As A Loving Mother”²

“The Church loves all her children like a loving mother, but cares for all and protects with a special affection those who are smallest and defenseless. This is the duty that Christ himself entrusted to the entire Christian community as a whole. Aware of this, the Church is especially vigilant in protecting children and vulnerable adults.”

II: DEFINITION OF TERMS

1. Abuse – may refer to sexual, psychological, spiritual, and material abuse. “Abuse is part of a dynamic of power, supremacy, and domination over one or more persons who are in a situation of existential vulnerability and dependence: this can be due to age, circumstances of life or personal needs”³.
 - a. Sexual abuse – World Health Organization defines child sexual abuse as “the involvement of a child or an adolescent in sexual activity that he or she does not fully comprehend and is unable to give informed consent to, or for which the child or adolescent is not developmentally prepared and cannot give consent, or that which violates the laws or social taboos of society”⁴.
 - b. Psychological or emotional abuse – may refer to persistent verbal attacks on the minors or vulnerable persons; humiliation, isolation, or intimidation.

¹ Francis. (2019). On the Protection of Minors and Vulnerable Persons [Apostolic Letter issued Motu Proprio]. https://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/motu_proprio/documents/papa-francesco-motu-proprio-20190326_latutela-deiminori.html

² Francis. (2016). As a Loving Mother [Apostolic Letter issued Motu Proprio]. https://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/apost_letters/documents/papa-francesco_lettera-ap_20160604_come-una-madre-amorevole.html

³ Dr Linda Ghisoni, Dicastery for Laity, Family and Life. (13 June 2019). Sexual Abuse: for a Shared Ecclesial Responsibility. <http://www.laityfamilylife.va/content/dam/laityfamilylife/Eventi/Incontro%20Associazioni%20e%20Movimenti%2013giu2019/5.%20Conference%20Prof.%20Ghisoni%20ENG.pdf> p. 6.

⁴ World Health Organisation. (2017). Responding to children and adolescents who have been sexually abused: WHO Clinical Guidelines. <https://www.who.int/reproductivehealth/publications/violence/clinical-response-csa/en/> p. vii.

- c. Spiritual or conscience abuse – any exploitation of the vulnerability of the person to manipulate his or her conscience.
 - d. Financial and material abuse – may refer to any theft or misuse of vulnerable persons' money, property, or resources. Common forms of financial abuse are misuse by others of a vulnerable person's property, other financial benefits, or undue pressure to change wills (e.g. the elderly). It is also financial abuse to incite a vulnerable person to carry out any of these things on another individual's behalf.
2. Minor – anyone under the full age of legal responsibility.
 3. Vulnerable persons – refer to anyone belonging to any disadvantaged groups, or anyone who by reason of disability, age, gender, social and economic status, or illness, and the context they are in may be unable to take care of or to protect him or herself against abuse, harm, or exploitation.

Section I: PURPOSE, SCOPE, and PRINCIPLES

Purpose

The purpose of SO16 is to ensure a healthy, safe, and positive environment for children, young people, and vulnerable persons who may be part of any initiative organised and implemented by the CLC. This initiative may range from formation, to apostolic, to communal in nature. This also includes all children of CLC members who may be present as active participants, observers, or guests. SO16 provides guidance to the world community's approach to the safeguarding and protection of minors and vulnerable persons.

Scope

Standing Order 16 applies to Full Member National Communities. With due consideration given to its appropriate and relevant context, as stated in their own Minors and Vulnerable Persons Protection Policy through the care of its National Executive Council or its national leadership structure.

Principles

1. As a Lay Ignatian Community, we recognise that safeguarding and protection of minors and vulnerable persons is one of our moral obligations.
2. It is our responsibility to provide space for dialogue and positive environments for everyone who may be part of CLC initiatives.
3. It is our commitment to carry out transparent, honest, and open relationships in all our engagements.
4. We believe that everyone is entitled to equal treatment, thus we give importance to keep minors and vulnerable persons safe.
5. It is our commitment to provide appropriate, relevant, and timely interventions for any suspected abuse and direct the person to the proper channels for assistance and resolution (as provided by member National Communities).

Section II: Pathways – how to protect children and minors against abuse

1. Safeguarding Core Group at the World Community level

A Safeguarding Group in the World Executive Council is created, composed of the Executive Secretary, President, and one Consultor.

The Safeguarding Core Group is responsible for the implementation, supervision, and monitoring of Standing Order 16. It is also the subsidiary point of contact for escalating reports from national communities concerning abuse on the minors and vulnerable persons, especially if there is no adequate reaction from the National leadership and in cases of conflict of interests at the national level.

2. Identification of possible abuse

Principles

We recognise the challenge in identifying abuse, especially since abuse can take many forms. We have written clear indicators that may be used to identify if a minor or a vulnerable person is being abused or may be susceptible to being abused.

The members of the World Executive Council, staff of the World Secretariat, and members of the national leadership structures must feel safe, comfortable, and supported in order to have the confidence to respond and report any suspected abuse.

It is important to keep an open mind, in order to refrain from making hasty conclusions, dispensing unfair judgments, and biased decisions.

It is important to know that any suspicion of abuse or signs of potential of abuse must be reported to the Safeguarding Core Group.

Indicators of potential abuse⁵

Physical signs: unexplained injuries, signs of severe or long-term bruising, injuries inconsistent with the person's lifestyle, unusual or excessive itching, genital injuries, sexually transmitted diseases;

Behavioral concerns: age-inappropriate sexual interest or play, fear of a certain person or place, wariness of adults, eating disorders, disengagement or neediness, aggression;

Emotional and psychological abuse/neglect: sleep problems, poor self-esteem, obsessive behavior, inability to cope in social situations, sadness/loneliness and evidence of self-harm;

⁵ The following indicators are not comprehensive. See UNHCR. (2009). Action for the Rights of Children (ARC) Critical Issues: Abuse and Exploitation. <https://www.unhcr.org/protection/children/3bb81aea4/action-rights-children-arc-critical-issues-abuse-exploitation.html>

Financial and material abuse: having unusual difficulty with finances, unexplained lack of money, inability to maintain lifestyle, overly-protective of money and/or things they own, unexplained inability to pay bills.

The child or vulnerable person talking about things that indicate abuse (sometimes called an allegation or disclosure).

3. Reporting and Responding to suspected abuse⁶

If there is suspicion or disclosure of abuse, it is important to respond to the immediate needs of the minors and vulnerable persons. Check if he or she is in immediate danger, if so, he or she needs an immediate response such as: contacting local authorities or the police, or to take him or her to the hospital if appropriate. The Designated Safeguarding Lead (Core Group) of the national/local community must be informed of any actions, events, incidents that take place.

If the needs of the person in the suspected or reported abuse is not immediate, the person who suspects or who receives reports that an abuse has taken place may consult the Designated Safeguarding Lead (Core Group) of the national/local community. The Core Group then decides the next steps, i.e. contacting local authorities, clarifying next steps and contacting the appropriate agencies that may provide long-term support to the abused.

In cases where initiatives are done in partnership with other institutions / groups, coordination with said institution is important to ensure due consideration is given to its existing safeguarding policies.

All actions taken must be recorded by the Core Group.

Section III: Guidelines for National Communities

It is recommended that all full member National Communities come up with their own Minor and Vulnerable Persons Protection Policy, appropriate and relevant to their own particular context.

Below are helpful tips in the creation of the said policy:

1. Preparation

As you go through the process of writing the policies and identifying procedures, you may consider the following points in your preparations:

Potential Risks – what are the potential risks to minors and vulnerable persons in your own local settings, such as locations or venues of meetings and events; staff, volunteers, visitors, among others.

⁶ See Chart in the Annex

Recruitment Processes – how do you conduct the recruitment process for your office, events, and other special initiatives? have safer recruitment processes been identified to avoid unsuitable persons from gaining access to minors and the vulnerable?

Procedures to address risks – do you have guidelines in capturing, using, and sharing of images and videos?

Procedures for reporting and addressing them – what could be essential procedures needed to be in place to respond to concerns and allegations raised by members of the national community, by staff, or anyone associated by the community. Note that national legislation may enforce immediate reporting in some circumstances, especially when minors are involved.

Guidelines for community – how would you communicate the safeguarding mechanisms and ensure it is understood and implemented by all members and concerned people? Would you have available orientations and handouts to help orient the community?

2. Initial considerations

Governance

Clear lines of reporting and responsible persons must be identified for the over-all lead of the safeguarding in the national community. A person responsible for monitoring may be identified in every setting or initiative. Identification of a national safeguarding team and local safeguarding team might be necessary.

Role of the Safeguarding Person / Team

Are the roles of the Safeguarding team or lead person clearly drawn out? Are they easy to understand and implement?

3. Writing a Safeguarding Policy and Procedure

The Policy may be a 1 to 2-page document that includes the following:

- Identification of the purpose and scope of the policies
- Procedures in hiring and recruitment of staff
- Responding to allegations and timely reporting to civil authorities.

4. Communication of the Safeguarding and Protection policy

What is the communication plan for the presentation of the policy to the members, how do you encourage participation, and how are consultations being implemented?

5. Implementation and evaluation

How do you intend to build and keep a safe place for the minors and vulnerable persons, do you have a Training Program in place? How will you conduct and promote Information Session? Will you provide Handbook and Materials as resources for the members of your community?

ANNEX

CHART: REPORTING AND RESPONDING TO SUSPECTED ABUSE

