



# **Child Protection and Safeguarding Policy**

## Purpose and Introduction

Species Saviour Initiative (SSI) is committed to protecting the rights, dignity, and safety of children in all aspects of our work. Guided by our core value of **respect for all individuals**, SSI upholds child safeguarding as a fundamental obligation in conservation and community engagement.

SSI abides by **Somali child protection laws, host country regulations (where applicable), and international standards**—always applying whichever provides the greatest protection for children. This policy builds on SSI's **Code of Conduct**, and complements our **Anti-Trafficking and Illegal Wildlife Trade Policy** and our **Prevention of Sexual Exploitation, Abuse, and Harassment (PSEAH) Policy**.

Our conservation work often brings us into direct or indirect contact with children, whether through community-based projects, awareness campaigns, or education initiatives. Therefore, integrating child protection and safeguarding into project planning, implementation, and monitoring is **critical** to ensuring children are never harmed through our operations.

Where SSI implements **donor-funded projects**, we will also comply with the child safeguarding standards of those donors, if they are stricter than SSI's own policy.

## Scope

This Policy applies to:

- **SSI Staff:** all employees, interns, fellows, volunteers, and official representatives of SSI.
- **SSI Partners:** grantees, contractors, suppliers, consultants, and their employees, sub-grantees, and representatives engaged by SSI.

It applies to **all contexts where children may be directly or indirectly affected** by SSI's activities, including conservation projects, education and awareness programs, peacebuilding initiatives, and community livelihood work.

## Our Principles in Action

SSI is committed to building an environment where any concerns about child safety can be raised, investigated, and addressed without fear of retaliation. **Transparency, accountability, and proactive prevention** guide our safeguarding commitments.

### 1. Awareness

- All SSI Staff and Partners will be trained on this Policy, their responsibilities, and how to report concerns.
- Policy acknowledgment is required from all staff and included in agreements with all partners.

## 2. Prevention

- SSI will never employ children under the age of 18.
- Projects involving children must establish clear safeguarding procedures and risk-mitigation measures.
- Recruitment for SSI staff and project teams will include **reference checks, background checks (where possible), and behavior-based interviews.**
- SSI applies a **risk-based safeguarding approach**, meaning that activities with higher exposure to children will include stronger protective measures, such as child protection plans, targeted training, and closer monitoring.

## 3. Responding

- SSI will act **swiftly and appropriately** in all cases of suspected or reported child abuse.
- Actions will prioritize the **best interests, safety, and well-being of the child**, including psychosocial and medical support where necessary.
- SSI will investigate promptly, take disciplinary or contractual action against perpetrators, and cooperate with **Somali authorities and/or donors** as required.

## Implementation

The purpose of SSI's Child Protection and Safeguarding Policy is to **protect the best interests of children** and ensure that all SSI operations, staff, and partners uphold the highest standards of child safety.

All SSI Staff and Delivery Partners who may come into contact with children must ensure that **all interactions are respectful, protective, and appropriate.**

### Prohibited Behaviors

SSI Staff and Partners may not:

- Use inappropriate, harassing, abusive, sexually provocative, or culturally insensitive language or behavior towards or in the presence of children.
- Condone, ignore, or participate in behavior with children that is **illegal, unsafe, exploitative, or abusive** (including harmful traditional practices).
- Shame, humiliate, belittle, or emotionally abuse a child.
- Spend excessive or unsupervised time alone with children, especially in private spaces, vehicles, or secluded areas, without parental/guardian consent.
- Invite unaccompanied children into private residences unless the child is at **immediate risk of harm** and requires urgent protection.
- Sleep in close proximity to children who are not family members, unless unavoidable (e.g., due to space constraints) and with appropriate supervision and consent.
- Engage in **physical punishment, physical assault, or any form of sexualized behavior** with or towards children.
- Exploit children for **labor, domestic work, or sexual purposes**, including practices common in fragile or conflict-affected settings.

- Provide gifts, money, or favors to individual children in ways that create favoritism or exploitation.
- Take or distribute images, recordings, or personal information of children without **informed consent** from a parent/guardian and ensuring their dignity is protected.
- Be under the influence of **alcohol or drugs** while responsible for children or engaged in SSI activities involving children.

## Reporting Requirements and Procedure

SSI is committed to ensuring that any concerns regarding child abuse, exploitation, or safeguarding violations are reported **immediately and addressed appropriately**.

### Who Must Report

- All **SSI Staff, volunteers, and Delivery Partners** are required to report any concerns, suspicions, or allegations of child abuse.
- Reports may come from **direct observation, a child's disclosure, or information shared by a third party**.

### How to Report

- Concerns must be reported directly to SSI's **Child Safeguarding Focal Point** or through SSI's **grievance mechanism**.
- Reports can also be made **confidentially** via SSI's designated safeguarding email or hotline (to be established and clearly shared with all stakeholders).
- In Somalia, where formal child protection services may be limited, SSI will work with **trusted local authorities, community elders, women's groups, and child protection NGOs** to respond appropriately.

### Investigation and Response

- SSI will ensure that **all reports are taken seriously** and investigated in a **timely, safe, and sensitive manner**.
- The **best interests of the child** will always be the priority.
- Where appropriate and with consent of the child (or their guardian), SSI will make referrals to:
  - Local authorities (police, social services, or ministry offices),
  - Community-based child protection committees,
  - Partner organizations providing psychosocial, legal, or medical support.

### Confidentiality and Protection from Retaliation

- Every effort will be made to protect the **privacy and dignity** of the child, reporter, and accused party.
- Retaliation against anyone who reports in **good faith** is strictly prohibited.

## Consequences of Policy Violations

SSI takes all breaches of this Child Safeguarding Policy with the utmost seriousness. Any violation will result in **immediate and proportionate action**, which may include disciplinary, contractual, or legal measures.

### For SSI Staff and Volunteers

- Verbal or written warnings.
- Mandatory retraining on safeguarding procedures.
- Suspension or reassignment pending investigation.
- Termination of employment or volunteer engagement.
- Referral to law enforcement or relevant Somali authorities if criminal activity is suspected.

### For Delivery Partners, Contractors, and Suppliers

- Corrective or remedial actions required by SSI.
- Suspension of funding, contract, or partnership.
- Immediate termination of agreements if violations are confirmed.
- Blacklisting from future SSI projects and partnerships.

### For Community Partners and Participants

- Removal from SSI-supported programs or activities.
- Reporting to community-based protection committees or local authorities.

SSI reserves the right to take **additional actions** as necessary to ensure the **safety and protection of children**.

## Definitions

- **Child:** Any person under the age of **18 years**, in line with the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child and Somali child protection frameworks.
- **Child Safeguarding:** The set of policies, procedures, and practices that SSI adopts to protect children from harm, abuse, neglect, exploitation, or violence in any activity connected to our programs.
- **Child Abuse:** Any action or failure to act that results in harm, potential harm, or threat of harm to a child. This includes:
  - *Physical abuse:* Inflicting bodily harm.
  - *Emotional abuse:* Persistent criticism, humiliation, or rejection that affects a child's emotional development.
  - *Sexual abuse:* Involving a child in sexual activities, whether physical or non-physical.
  - *Neglect:* Failure to provide adequate food, shelter, healthcare, protection, or supervision.
- **Exploitation:** Using a child for labor, domestic work, illegal trade (including in wildlife or natural resources), or any activity that benefits others at the expense of the child's safety, well-being, or rights.

- **Child Protection Incident:** Any concern, allegation, or evidence that a child connected to SSI's programs or operations may have been harmed, abused, or put at risk.
- **Delivery Partner:** Any grantee, contractor, consultant, supplier, community group, or implementing partner working with or supported by SSI.
- **Safeguarding Focal Point:** The designated SSI staff member responsible for receiving, documenting, and escalating child protection concerns in line with SSI's safeguarding procedures.