

Protecting children against violence – Kindernothilfe guidelines on reporting from projects

Background

In every country and in every society, children are affected by physical, psychological/emotional and sexual violence as well as exploitation and neglect. As a child rights organisation, Kindernothilfe bears particular responsibility in this area. On the one hand, within the scope of its work throughout the world, it has a responsibility to reinforce children's rights and improve their development chances. On the other, Kindernothilfe and its partner organisations themselves are exposed to an increased risk of being used by potential perpetrators of violence to gain access to children. For several years now, Kindernothilfe has been intensifying its efforts to protect children against violence in its projects and raise public awareness for the issue of child protection.

As a child rights organisation, Kindernothilfe has particular responsibility towards the children in the projects and programmes it supports. Thus, its overriding priority is to guarantee the well-being, protection and safety of children in all projects at all times. That is why Kindernothilfe introduced an institutional child protection policy

As Kindernothilfe, we expressly welcome and support journalists reporting on our work in Germany and overseas, since the documentation of the living realities of the children in our projects make a major contribution to achieving our goal of realising child rights worldwide.

In order to guarantee the protection of children also within the context of reporting, we kindly ask you to sign our guidelines for project visitors and communication standards and orient your work towards these. We assume that you will perform your work in compliance with the German Press Code and the principles of the International Federation of Journalists; our communication standards are guidelines to help address the particular challenges of reporting on children, who find themselves in circumstances that can often be

precarious. We would also like to offer you a number of practical recommendations to help you produce successful reports.

General guidelines for project visits:

- We kindly ask you not to interfere in project matters and avoid conflicts with, or complaints from, project staff. As a rule, you should also refuse any request for money.
- The Child Protection guidelines of the respective partner organisations are to be observed without fail and signed accordingly. Please observe all other possible project rules during the course of your visit. We would be pleased to discuss any critical observations or experiences you may want to share with us on your return to Germany.
- Your project visit should be accommodated to the normal day-to-day routine of the children in the projects to ensure that the visit does not disturb others in the project. We ask you to accept and respect the wishes of local project staff.
- Smoking or consuming alcoholic beverages in the project or in the presence of children is forbidden.
- When visiting families, you should be aware of the local social customs and practices. Feel free to seek the advice of project staff before such visits.
- Respect the culture and religious affiliation of the children and refrain from exerting any influence.
- When you have contact with children, we ask to you abide by the "two adult rule", i.e. ensure that, in personal encounters with a child, e.g. in discussions, at events and interviews, etc., another adult is present at all times or is within sight or earshot; this satisfies the project partner's duty of care legal obligation; outside of the project context, you must not undertake any activities with children from the project.

Communication standards:

- Ensure that all media content, for which you are responsible, is based on the principles of respect and equality and preserves the dignity of the person

depicted at all times.

- Present children as distinct personalities with many different facets and potential and avoid reducing them to the role of victim or any other stereotype.
- Before producing media content, please inform the children concerned as well as their legal guardians, in an understandable manner, of its purpose and use.
- If you intend taking photographs of, or filming, people – especially children – this is not possible without the prior approval of the project management and the written declaration of consent from the legal guardian and the child. Furthermore, if you wish to use photographic material obtained outside the project in a Kindernothilfe context, you must first obtain the written consent of the child concerned and his/her legal guardian.
- Respect the privacy of all people involved in the project and in the project context.
- Always use pseudonyms for children, unless publishing a child's name is expressly in his/her best interest and where explicit consent to do so has been given by the child and his/her legal guardian or caregiver. Where possible, allow children to participate in the selection of the pseudonym.
- When producing audio and visual material, please pay particular attention to the background and surroundings to ensure that this does not lead to a child being identified or put at risk.
- Do not photograph or film any unclothed children or children in situations of extreme suffering.
- Any portrayal of a child's living situation must take account of his/her social, cultural and economic surroundings and the complexity of the development situation

Measures to protect children at particular risk in communication

With regards to public media coverage of children at particular risk, supplementary protective measures are to be used, since many of these children could be at great risk of being subjected to stigmatisation or further violence. Children at particular risk include:

- children, who are victims of sexual or other forms of violence;
- children, who are victims of sexual or other forms of violence;
- children, who have been accused of, or have committed, a criminal offence;
- children, who were (forced to be) involved in armed conflict;
- child asylum seekers, refugees or internally displaced children;
- traumatised children (following natural disasters, armed conflict etc.).

In such cases, the journalist concerned must work with Kindernothilfe and the local project management to assess the respective risk associated with the media content and its publication, and adapt his/her presentation on the basis of the following scale of risk:

Risk level 1: Low Risk

Faces and information about the location may be published, children can be referred to with their first name or a pseudonym. This would be the case, for example, with respect to educational work with children in Germany.

Risk level 2: Medium Risk

Faces and vague information about the location may be published. Children are given pseudonyms. This is normally the case with respect to reporting on children in projects supported by Kindernothilfe.

Risk level 3: High Risk

Faces must not be identifiable. Information about locations must be changed. This would be the case with respect to working with children at particular risk.

The categorisation of children in this scale of risk depends on several factors that have to be identified on a case-by-case basis. Where there is any doubt, the decisive factor must always be the best interest of the child. In particular contexts, for example, people with HIV are subjected to discrimination and social exclusion. Any reporting in this context could lead to a child being stigmatised and, thereby, cause long-term harm.

The nature of publication is also a key factor in determining the risk level. Today, virtually every article from the whole range of media is now available online. Because of the global reach of the internet, a local newspaper article in Germany can, under certain circumstances, pose a real danger to a child in an overseas project.

In principle, before the publication of any material, an assessment must be made of the potential risk to the well-being of the child.

Practical recommendations for successful reporting

Preparing the project visit

Please bear in mind that a project visit is only possible and permissible when it is planned and implemented in close co-operation with Kindernothilfe. Before journalists travel out to projects, Kindernothilfe co-ordinates the schedule and location of project visits and, in consultation with editors, is happy to research potential interviewees.

Preparing on the ground

- Seek dialogue with project management with regard to the specific child protection challenges.
- Inform the children and/or their legal guardians about the scope and purpose of your visit. In precarious circumstances, in particular, it is important that the children and their families are aware of what is going to be done with texts, photographs, videos and sound recordings. Your duty to provide information includes an explanation about each individual's right to their own image.
- Give the children a short explanation of the tech-

niques you are going to use. This is often something new for children, who are not familiar with the operational methods and possible applications.

- Find or create spaces, in which the child can feel safe and comfortable.

Interviewing children

- Look for an appropriate, child-friendly start to your discussion.
- Ensure that the child feels comfortable at all times during the discussion and that he/she trusts you. It is worth remembering that an interpreter, who may have to be called in, can fulfil the role of trusted confidant.
- The number of reporters, photographers and camera team members should be kept to a minimum during any discussion, so that the child can speak without being afraid or feeling under pressure. The use of an interpreter could also play a vital role in this respect.
- Please take account of the age of the child concerned and adapt the language you use and your questions accordingly.
- Avoid direct questions, which may provoke psychological pain or a traumatic response – talk in advance to the project management about what the child is able to cope with.
- Please bear in mind that children often use non-verbal means to express themselves, for example drawing.

Photographing and filming children²⁵

- Allocate sufficient production time for the children and create a pleasant, child-friendly atmosphere.
- Please take the child's responses seriously and communicate with him/her during production.
- Never publish images of a dying child. The photographer/cameraman also has particular responsibility with regard to photographing or filming children, who are seriously injured.
- Special care must be taken when using clip-on microphones. It may be necessary for a person trusted by the child to attach/remove the microphone.

- Call a halt to the shooting after an appropriate amount of time and remember to thank the child.
- Children, who are not the focus of your reporting, can also sometimes be curious about, and interested in, your work. You should also give consideration to them in your work, to avoid any feelings of envy or disappointment. Giving them some of your time, e.g. filming or photographing them and subsequently showing them the results, is a good way of dealing with children. Please bear in mind, however, that this material may not be published.

Using the material

Production

Please present the children as distinct multi-faceted personalities – who, with great energy, perseverance and creativity, deal with their situation – and not, in the first instance, as objects of our compassion. Even when children's day-to-day lives are marked by extreme poverty and/or violence, they are still distinct individuals with their own dreams and wishes. You must never reduce children to the role of victim or stigmatise them.

Publication

Please bear in mind that once information has been published, it is difficult to subsequently retract it. We, therefore, ask you to be particularly careful when selecting publication channels. Do not endanger Kindernothilfe's partner organisations or hinder project work by publicly disclosing confidential (background) information.

Availability

Use blocking notes etc. to ensure that archived information and photographs, which may not be published, are protected accordingly. If you are in any doubt and you have no direct influence on archiving material or where staff responsible for archiving are not available to respond to enquiries on a regular basis, you can black out entire pictures or parts of them.

With my signature, I confirm that I have read and understood the guidelines concerning interaction with children within the scope of reporting on projects in co-operation with Kindernothilfe, and confirm that I will act in accordance with them. Furthermore, I will respond immediately to all misgivings, allegations and incidents and directly bring them to the attention of Kindernothilfe.

Please return the signed Code of Conduct to your point of contact in Kindernothilfe's press department.

Name:

Adress:

Place, Date:

Signature: