

## **Child rights organizations in Asia and the Child Rights Coalition Asia call on the Asian Development Bank to include child rights and protection in its safeguarding policy**

The Asian Development Bank (ADB) is reviewing its 2009 *Safeguard Policy Statement*. This is a crucial opportunity for the ADB to strengthen its support for developing member countries and private sector clients to manage the evolving social and environmental risks facing millions of children in Asia.

As international NGOs working on child rights and together with the Child Rights Coalition Asia, we applaud the ADB's interest in reviewing its safeguarding policy and appreciate the consultation process through which civil society organizations are given space to contribute to the review. We urge the ADB to intentionally include the perspectives of boys and girls in the process, by facilitating their meaningful engagement, and thus, promoting the rights and protection of all boys and girls.

In April 2022, we submitted an advocacy brief to the ADB with concrete suggestions to improve the safeguarding policy under review. We strongly recommend that ADB should include children's rights deliberately into the new safeguarding policy document. The undersigned organizations believe child safeguarding is everybody's responsibility. The safety and interest of the child should always be a priority for any development or humanitarian intervention funded and supported by ADB.

Child safeguarding is an organization's responsibility to make sure staff, operations, and programmes do no harm to children, and they do not expose children to the risk of harm and abuse. Any concerns an organization has about children's safety within the communities in which they work should be reported and referred to the appropriate authorities<sup>1</sup>.

The risks children in Asia face today require even more engagement and solidarity of all government, non-governmental and private sector partners. The Asia-Pacific region is home to around half of the world's children, with 620 million living in South Asia and 545 million in East Asia and the Pacific. More than half of the world's 1.1 billion girls can be found in Asia.<sup>2</sup>

Violence and exploitation of children is acute across Asia-Pacific. Estimates across the region find:

- **17-35% of low-income children are subject to physical violence;**
- **11-22% of girls experience sexual and gender based violence;**
- **Up to 40% of children are emotionally neglected or abused;**
- **Nearly 1 in 10 children are engaged in child labour.**

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<sup>1</sup> Child Safeguarding Standards and how to implement them, Keeping children safe; available at [https://ec.europa.eu/info/sites/default/files/standards\\_child\\_protection\\_kcsc\\_en\\_1.pdf](https://ec.europa.eu/info/sites/default/files/standards_child_protection_kcsc_en_1.pdf)

<sup>2</sup> Fry, D. (2016). *Preventing violence against children and how this contributes to building stronger economies*. Kuala Lumpur: Government of Malaysia and the United Nations Children's Fund. Page 3. Available at [https://www.unicef.org/eapro/Preventing\\_Violence.pdf](https://www.unicef.org/eapro/Preventing_Violence.pdf)

In our submission to the ADB, we have addressed child rights under seven important and urgent thematic areas that correspond to the chapters of the ADB safeguarding policy review:

**1. Climate change, pollution prevention and environmental standards**

Addressing the climate crisis is more than an environmental issue. Climate change exacerbates the inequality and discrimination experienced by marginalized children.

We urge ADB to:

- **Respect children’s rights, including girls’, to a healthy environment and including their rights to be heard and participate in relation to business decisions or future climate change adaptation and mitigation strategies.**

**2. Grievance redress mechanism (GRM)**

Children’s access to accountability mechanisms of the ADB is critical as this provides safe spaces where children can report, express views and opinions without fear.

We call on the ADB to:

- **Include children’s rights sensitivity and responsiveness in the definition/criteria of “meaningful consultation” in its *Safeguard Policy Statement*.**

**3. Oversight structures and implementation arrangements**

Oversight structures for child safeguarding encourage states to move forward effectively in fulfilling children's rights.

Hence, we urge the ADB to promote greater accountability among member countries for ensuring child rights by:

- **Appointing an oversight body/structure responsible for ensuring the development, implementation, and periodic review of child safeguarding statements, considering children’s rights and gender equality principles and in accordance with local laws of each recipient country;**
- **Partnering with children’s rights organizations in strengthening its child safeguarding policy.**

**4. Country safeguarding systems**

Encouraging borrower countries to introduce policies, practices, legal frameworks and institutions to ensure child rights should be a key in any development agenda.

In order to assure this, we urge the ADB to:

- **Conduct a context analysis or a child safeguarding self-assessment/audit to identify both formal and informal child safeguarding systems and their capacities in areas where the ADB is working, and how these may be impacted, positively or negatively, by the planned programmes;**
- **Mobilize and build capacities of detected functions and structures to ensure effectiveness of existing local (country) reporting and referral systems for child safeguarding.**

#### **5. Staffing and human resources**

The ADB's obligation, responsibility and/or expectations towards its staff and associates on child safeguarding should be clearly documented and communicated.

In view of this we recommend the ADB to:

- **Ensure child safeguarding is a mandatory section of human resource systems and policies and ensure periodical internal reflection, analysis and cross-team collaboration for learning and sharing;**
- **Appoint an appropriate designated person/s at different levels to act as a child safeguarding focal point to receive and manage any child safeguarding concerns and subsequent inquiries/investigations and referrals;**
- **Ensure donors, partners and individual supporters acknowledge and agree to a commitment to keep children safe as a binding aspect of their partnership.**

#### **6. Labour and working conditions/ organization culture**

The impact of environmental, social and governance (ESG) factors is increasingly important for investors and companies. Therefore, it is important to include the safety and protection of children when carrying out a rigorous social and environment impact assessment.

We urge the ADB to:

- **Commit and exercise child safeguarding practices across all ADB projects and programmes to ensure they 'do no harm' to infants, children and adolescents, including health, environment and child labour.**

#### **7. Digital environment**

*"Technology offers tools to learn, play, connect and contribute to solving some of the world's greatest challenges. But digital safety harms remain a threat to these possibilities."*

— Courtney Gregoire, Chief Digital Safety Officer, Microsoft

Digital safety is crucial for the ADB as a leading social development organization. We therefore encourage the ADB to:

- **Lead by example by demonstrating its commitment, representation and collaboration with relevant regional bodies to maximize online safety for children and young people.**

Together with Governments, the ADB and other NGOs, the undersigned child-rights organisations and the Child Rights Coalition Asia are committed to Ending Violence Against Children (EVAC) as enshrined in Sustainable Development Goal 16.2. The end of abuse, exploitation, trafficking and all forms of violence and torture against children is an urgent need and a pre-condition to ensuring that other targets focused on children can be met. This requires the collaboration of all actors in development.

Thank you.