



Islamic Relief Worldwide

Orphan Sponsorship Policy

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Islamic Relief Worldwide

Orphan Sponsorship Policy

Definitions

Donor: A person who gives something, usually money, for charity or worthy cause.

Gift in-Kind: A type of charitable giving in which goods and services are given instead of money. Goods and services provided should be those beneficial to the family, such as food, clothing, shelter, health etc.

Orphan: According to Islamic tradition, an orphan is a child who has no father. The child will remain an orphan until the age of maturity/understanding.

Sponsorship maybe taken into consideration in other situations, in which the father is unable or unwilling to support the family, based on a case by case basis. For example, where the father is in jail indefinitely or has separated from the mother and children and not financially supporting.

Child: In line with the UN Convention for the Rights of the Child (CRC) of which nearly all countries are signatories, IRW has extended this classification to define a child as any human being under the age of 18.

Due to Islamic Relief's humanitarian mandate and based on our extensive experience with the communities with which we work, we include children who have a father whose whereabouts has been unknown for two years or more, or one year for refugees and internally displaced people.

Poverty: According to the United Nations, poverty is the inability to have choices and opportunities, a violation of human dignity. It means the lack of basic capacity to participate effectively in society. It means not having enough to feed and clothe a family, being unable to access education or healthcare, not having assets from which to generate a dignified living, and not having access to credit. It means insecurity, powerlessness and the exclusion of individuals, households and communities. It means susceptibility to violence, and it often implies living in marginal or fragile environments, without access to clean water or sanitation. (UN Statement, June 1998 – signed by the heads of all UN agencies).

Selection Criteria: Choosing beneficiaries eligible for the programme based on an agreed criterion, usually after a target area or community has been identified.

Sponsor: A donor who supports a specific beneficiary through giving money, often regularly.

Sponsorship: A type of fundraising in which an organisation associates a sponsor with a child (or people) living in poverty. The sponsor receives updates on the ways in which their support is benefiting the recipient(s).

'Sponsored child' or 'the child': In this document refers to the child supported by the sponsor.

'Sponsored family' or 'the family': In this document refers to the family of the sponsored child.

'The Programme': In this document refers to the Sponsorship Programme.

<p>Introduction</p>
<p>Initiated in 1986, the Orphan Sponsorship Programme (OSP) is one of Islamic Relief’s longest running programmes. It makes it possible for tens of thousands of children to receive sponsorship from a donor. The programme serves children in many countries across Asia, Africa, the Middle East and Eastern Europe.</p> <p>This document outlines the policy statement, objectives and principles of the sponsorship programme as developed and implemented by Islamic Relief Worldwide (IRW).</p>
<p>Context</p>
<p>Inspired by the Islamic faith and guided by our values, Islamic Relief Worldwide envisages a caring world where communities are empowered, social obligations are fulfilled, and people respond as one to the suffering of others.</p> <p>Orphaned children, having lost their father (or both parents) - often a key source of support and protection - are one of the most vulnerable groups in society. Of the estimated 140 million orphans¹ around the world, most live with a surviving parent, grandparent, or other extended family members. However, there remains an increased risk of becoming marginalised, destitute, or exploited.</p> <p>Islamic and humanitarian motivations have seen Islamic Relief’s donor communities across the globe drive the development of the OSP. The sponsorship programme supports two of Islamic Relief’s four 2017-2021 global strategy goals – ‘Empowering local communities to emerge from poverty and vulnerability’ and ‘Mobilising people and funds to support our work’ – and is underpinned by a vision of engaging and working with young people to deliver the 2030 agenda.⁰²</p>
<p>Purpose of the Policy</p>
<p>The policy aims to establish an effective, accountable, and transparent framework for the sponsorship programme and to ensure that all concerned stakeholders:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • have a clear understanding of the principles, guidelines, and parameters for the programme • are able to provide guidance to all those working directly or indirectly with the programme • understand our obligations toward sponsored families and our donors, as well as their expectations
<p>Policy Statement</p>
<p>We believe that child sponsorship enhances the quality of life and socio-economic welfare of children affected by poverty, preserves their dignity, and develops their resilience to cope with future challenges in their lives.</p>
<p>Scope</p>
<p>This policy applies to all entities and offices that operate under IRW’s management. It should be viewed as a best practice benchmark and minimum standard for IRW sponsorship programmes.</p> <p>The policy is primarily for any Islamic Relief member of staff connected with the sponsorship programme at IRW, the field offices that implement the programme, implementing field partners and the Partners who provide funding for the programme.</p>

Other Islamic Relief personnel may refer to this policy to inform work on issues related to the OSP, such as Programmes, Finance, Audit and MEAL.

Programme Driver

What is the faith-based imperative?

Numerous sayings of the Prophet Muhammad (ﷺ), peace and blessings be upon him, highlight the importance of caring for orphans. For example: *“The one who cares for an orphan and me will be together in Paradise like this,” and he held his two fingers together to illustrate*” (Related in Sahih al-Bukhari).

In the Quran the word ‘orphan’ is also mentioned over twenty times, highlighting their special status, their rights within Islam and the importance of treating them with care and ensuring their inclusion within the community. The Prophet (ﷺ) himself grew up as an orphan. Faith-based principles are therefore one of the main drivers of the sponsorship programme, in which we are enabling sponsors to fulfil an Islamic duty and/or moral need to support orphans. Since its inception in 1986, Islamic Relief’s orphans programme has been driven by our donors.

Programme Objectives

The programme supports the wellbeing of sponsored children of all ages and abilities and their families by financing and supporting programmes to give them access to education, health, nutrition, protection and shelter, as well as sustainable livelihoods for their families.

The programme should enhance the overall quality of life and wellbeing of sponsored children and their families by:

- improving access to basic/or better quality education
- improving awareness and adoption of a healthier lifestyle and environment
- promoting the psychological and spiritual wellbeing of the families
- promoting child protection and a securer and safer home environment for children
- improving economic wellbeing through diversified livelihood opportunities and employability skills for the children and their guardians

Programme Principles

a. Target group

The target group for the orphan sponsorship programme is primarily focusing on orphans and their families, where usually the father (or occasionally the mother) has passed away or has been absent for two years or more (one year in cases of refugees/conflict areas) - and where there is risk of exploitation or harm due to poverty.

The sponsorship programme is aimed at vulnerable children of all ages and abilities and their families, whose living standards prior to sponsorship generally lie well below the community average.

Islamic Relief sponsors children regardless of race, gender, religion, or ethnicity, if they meet the requirements set out in the programme selection criteria.

Children should be of a maximum age of 16 ~~17~~ and those with greater need must be prioritised when registering for the programme. Field offices may set a lower maximum age if they prefer. Sponsorship can continue past the age of 18 up to the age of 24 if the child is in higher education or if the child has medical needs which require the sponsorship to continue.

Children with special needs (e.g. a disability) must be prioritised for sponsorship and provided with extra support for example, through personal follow up and referrals to local support services as required.

Children who are identified for sponsorship are usually within a family home, living with their mother or extended family members such as aunts, uncles, or grandparents.

A significant change in the situation of the child and their family (such as change of location, marriage, household income, etc.) may result in the sponsorship eligibility being reviewed and possibly ceasing. In all cases, the IRW OCW Department and the sponsor must be notified of the change and may decide if they want to continue with the sponsorship.

b. Institutions

It is important to remember that when operating in varying and challenging context we have a duty of care towards all, those we affect directly through our work but also the wider community. Children of all ages and abilities in these communities are most at risk of violence, abuse and exploitation, particularly those that have no parental and guardian care, which results in them being placed in orphanages. Unfortunately, some orphanages do not have the expertise, safeguards or protection measures in place to take care of children appropriately, thus violating a number of child rights, and exposing them to further risk of violence and harm.

Islamic Relief does not:

- Sponsor in orphanages
- Operate orphanages
- Refer children to orphanages
- Partner with orphanages

Islamic Relief does:

- Provide educational resources
- Building capacity

Islamic Relief may facilitate the reintegration of individual children from temporary care to a parent or a relative and then sponsor the child with more rigorous overview and safeguarding measures in place. Where sponsored orphans are unable to continue residing in their family home, as a final resort, Islamic Relief may refer children to local child protection services, who should identify extended family members who may be able to take care of the orphan. A thorough assessment should be carried out on the new carer/guardian and close monitoring and follow up undertaken by the field office. The Islamic Relief Office/ local implementing partner should advocate on behalf of the child to ensure they are not referred to orphanages or any other institutions for upbringing.

c. Selection Criteria

The selection of children eligible for sponsorship must be carried out in a way that is objective, clear and participatory. The selection criteria must be shared with the people living in the catchment area, in line with Islamic Relief's accountability framework. The selection criteria will consider various factors, such as the child's vulnerability, health, family size, household income and assets owned, type and condition of shelter, etc.

For a child to qualify for sponsorship, the guardian must provide official proof of the child's birth, the parent(s) death certificate, and an official form of ID. Where official documents are absent, other forms of

certified assurances regarding the status of the father and the age of the child are provided by authorised people such as the local authorities, community leaders or committees can be used

An approved scoring criterion must be used when selecting individual children for sponsorship. Families must be re-assessed at least every three years.

Two children per family can be sponsored at the discretion of the Field Office, regardless of the size of the family. Any additional sponsorships subject to special needs will require approval from the OCW department at IRW.

The selection of children for sponsorship must not discriminate based on race, religion, colour, age, gender or disability.

d. Target Areas

The sponsorship programme will take place in areas of stability, where Islamic Relief is able to carry out monitoring and evaluation effectively and safely. The following factors should be considered for the target area:

- whether the target group constitutes the most vulnerable people in that community
- whether the area has minimum number of beneficiaries required for the programme to be viable

Extension of the sponsorship programme to new areas or to regions/districts that are less stable must strictly be approved by the OCW department at IRW.

e. Sponsorship Agreement

There must be a formal agreement between Islamic Relief and the sponsored child's guardian. The agreement must stipulate the guardian's rights and obligations towards the child within the programme and in line with Islamic Relief's Complaints Policy. It should outline the complaints procedure and the contact information of the complaint's procedure focal person.

If the guardian changes during the sponsorship, a new agreement will need to be signed.

f. Payments

- Payments must be made directly to the child's guardian by a banking channel or electronic transfer where these are available. The office must obtain confirmation from the bank or payment company that the funds have been deposited. If no confirmation is received where cash or in kind is provided, then the guardian must confirm receipt of funds (or gifts in-kind) to the field office before the next payment can be made.
- Any deduction from the sponsorship payments by the Field Office/LIP, which are intended to be used for savings or gifts in-kind, such as food items, training or social activities, will need to be authorised by the OCW department at IRW. Savings carried out by the family using their own bank accounts do not need IRW approval.
- Transfer of sponsorship funds from IRW to the Field will be made on a regular basis (e.g. at the end of a quarter) on condition that payments have been received from the Funding Partners on time (e.g. for that quarter). IRW may temporarily delay a transfer if there are insufficient funds available. In these circumstances IRW will make every effort to ensure that the sponsored children/families are not adversely affected. Furthermore, IRW may restrict the Funding Partner access to the Alyateem System, if there is a significant delay in payments received. Prior notice will be given prior to any restriction taking place.
- Payments transferred to the caregivers must be given at the best available market exchange rate. Any exchange gains should also be given to the sponsored family.

g. Ending of Sponsorship

The Sponsorship will end either by a termination or a cancellation as defined below:

Termination is where the child no longer meets the sponsorship criteria, or the criteria cannot be verified due to recurrent lack of co-operation by the recipients. The sponsorship will cease with immediate effect. In addition, other criteria, not limited to the list, will also apply to termination:

- the sponsored child is absent from the stated address for at least three months and we are unable to trace the whereabouts of the child
- the sponsored child moves to an area outside the programme's geographic area
- the sponsored child marries, thereby becoming the dependent of/or responsible for their spouse
- the child or guardian participates in illegal/criminal activity as deemed by local law
- the death of the sponsored child
- the reappearance of the father who had been missing and whereabouts unknown

If the child's guardian remarries then the circumstances of the child will need to be re-assessed to check if they are still eligible for sponsorship.

Where there is evidence of a relative abusing a sponsored child, sponsorship will be provided in-kind or through other non-monetary means, to ensure the child continues to receive the full benefit of sponsorship. Direct funding to the family will cease until a formal investigation is completed and measures have been put in place to ensure the safety of the child. The abuser will be reported to the local authorities, please refer to the IRW Child Protection/Safeguarding Policy for further guidance.

Families have the right to appeal any sponsorship that is terminated, within 10 days of being notified.

Cancellation: When payments to a sponsored child are stopped by the sponsoring donor or by the funding partner. In such cases, the child should be guaranteed three months sponsorship from the cancelling funding partner, unless another donor sponsors the cancelled orphan during that period.

h. Commitment to stakeholders

Islamic Relief will work with all participants of the Sponsorship Programme with a commitment to transparency and in line with the organisation's values. We will endeavour to offer the highest level of service to all stakeholders, including sponsors, sponsored children and their families, and to all Islamic Relief employees. Wherever possible, we will take a consultative and participatory approach at all stages of the programme, including design, implementation, evaluation, review and improvement.

i. The Child, Family and Community

Islamic Relief will always endeavour to uphold the dignity of all families and fulfil the rights of children in accordance with our values. This will be underpinned by our safeguarding and complaints policies and procedures.

The family will be provided with funds (cash or gifts in-kind) to empower them to meet their basic needs such as food, shelter and education. Attention must be made to the child's education.

Where possible, Islamic Relief will implement supplementary programmes which will further support the orphan families in terms of livelihoods, water, sanitation, hygiene and health. Attention must be made to improving livelihood opportunities for families.

Islamic Relief will monitor the well-being and protection needs of children through on-going communication and home visits and regular awareness sessions by the care worker team. Those children deemed most in need or high risk will be observed more closely and more frequently and offered added support as and when appropriate.

Where needed, sponsored families will be provided support to enable them to access public services, such as health and education, social protection, safety net schemes and helped to open bank accounts.

The programme must ensure all children within a family benefit from the sponsorship. All the children must be treated equally by IR staff, if other children cannot benefit from sponsorship then they should themselves be registered within the programme for sponsorship. Although individual reports on the sponsored child are required, attention to other children in the family should be given when home visits are carried out.

Any significant changes to the circumstances of the sponsored child (e.g. change of location, marriage, financial status, etc.) must be recorded by the field office and conveyed to the funding partner at the earliest opportunity.

Islamic Relief staff and volunteers will act according to the organisation's Code of Conduct, Child Protection Policy and Safeguarding Policy.

j. The Sponsor and Supporter Community

Islamic Relief recognises the vital role played by sponsors in this programme. It is important that we are accountable and transparent with our donors by providing regular and reliable information and progress reports on the children and families they are sponsoring.

Sponsors must be made aware that their funds will go to support all the family and not just to one individual. Any additional gifts sent by the sponsor to the orphan must take this into account.

Marketing and fundraising of the sponsorship programme must be done with responsibility, integrity and fairness.

The promotion of the programme and the way children are chosen for sponsors must be done in a way that does not discriminate based on race, religion, colour, gender, age and disability.

The information on the child and their family that can be shared with potential sponsors must be limited to protect the dignity, privacy and safety of the family, such as not providing the full name of the child.

Images for fundraising or marketing purposes must be used in a way that does not reveal the whereabouts of the child and consent should be obtained.

The location of the child's home or their contact details must not be disclosed to the sponsor or anyone not directly related to the sponsorship, even if the child has left the programme.

Direct communication between the sponsor and the sponsored child will be very limited and must follow the programme communication guidelines.

Anyone who wishes to meet with their sponsored orphan and their families must be screened by the funding partners before any meeting take place. A visit by the sponsor to the home of the sponsored children is not permitted. Meetings must take place at a location away from the orphan's home or via telephone or an online chat service such as Skype. Islamic Relief cannot guarantee any visits to take place and reserve the right to deny any such communication and visit requests. For any visit which does take place, the communication procedure as outlined in the operations manual must be followed.

Sponsors must not make attempts to contact or communicate with the child or the family through their own channels or any form of social media.

Sponsors must be made aware of Islamic Relief’s Safeguarding Policies (especially those related to children).

Any significant changes to the circumstances of the sponsored child and family must be conveyed to the donor via the funding partner at the earliest opportunity.

Donors must be informed from the outset that the sponsorship programme may be reviewed over the course of their sponsorship to improve it in terms of its design, inputs, deliverables, objectives and impact.

Donors must be made aware that the cost of sponsoring a child may rise over the course of the sponsorship.

Donor must be made aware that Islamic Relief may cancel their sponsorship if they do not comply with the programme policies and procedures or if they display behaviour towards Islamic Relief staff that is deemed inappropriate or fail to disclose any criminal activity or safeguarding allegations made against them.

Implementation

The sponsorship programme is implemented by Islamic Relief directly or through a screened local partner. A dedicated team will regularly monitor the wellbeing of the family and the sponsored children. They will ensure that payments to the sponsored families are being used for the intended purposes. The team will also prepare and submit progress reports for the sponsor.

If the programme is implemented by a local partner, then Islamic Relief will monitor the programme and provide support where required, via the MEAL and Internal Audit teams, as well as the local Field Office. Regular random visits should also be made by the local field office, to ensure compliance and adherence to Islamic Relief policies.

Compliance

The sponsorship programme must comply with all relevant IRW (and country office) policies, systems and procedures including but not limited to child protection, safeguarding, finance, screening, HR and partnerships with local NGOs.

The sponsorship programme must meet the specific requirements highlighted in this Policy and any accompanying procedures and processes, with a level of quality that is acceptable and in line with Islamic Relief’s quality management system.

The internal audit function of Islamic Relief will monitor the level of adherence to the processes and procedures of the sponsorship programme. This could be through onsite or remote audits by regional or IRW Internal Audit personnel.

Islamic Relief’s MEAL team will monitor and evaluate the sponsorship programme to assess if the programme is meeting its goals and having the desired impact.

Record Keeping and Data Protection

Islamic Relief is committed to protecting the privacy and confidentiality of all individuals involved in the sponsorship programme including children, their families and guardians, and donors. As such, any personal data collected for administering the sponsorship programme will be strictly processed (stored, used and

disposed) in accordance with this policy, Islamic Relief's Archiving and Record Management Policy and relevant data protection and privacy related legislation.

Child Protection and Safeguarding

Islamic Relief has zero tolerance to any form of harm, abuse and violence faced by the beneficiaries it supports. Children are particularly at risk from cheap labour, hazardous working conditions, FGM/C (Female Genital Mutilation/Cutting), domestic violence and sexual abuse and exploitation.

Islamic Relief is committed to protecting children from economic exploitation and from performing any work that is likely to be hazardous or interfere with the child's education or which is harmful to the child's physical, mental and spiritual wellbeing or moral and social development.

Islamic Relief is committed to protecting the security, safety, privacy and dignity of all children and their families engaged in our programmes.

All staff members entrusted to work with the sponsorship programme must undergo strict background checks, which they must pass to be employed by Islamic Relief. Volunteers who work with the programme will also need background checks.

All staff members working with the sponsorship programme, especially care workers and key volunteers must receive child safeguarding training before commencing their role. They should also receive refresher training at least once every two years.

Islamic Relief staff and volunteers must not spend any time alone with children who are not related to them, even when visiting children in their homes for monitoring purposes.

Any type of intimate or romantic relationship, including sexual activities, between Islamic Relief staff and sponsored children or their family members or relatives is strictly prohibited and would be classed as gross misconduct which would lead to dismissal.

Furthermore, any type of intimate or romantic relationship, including sexual activities, between Islamic Relief staff and other people related to Islamic Relief such as volunteers, other staff, any representatives or people associated with Islamic Relief activities, must be disclosed to the organisation so it can be ascertained if there is a potential or actual conflict of interest and/or policies being breached.

Failure to disclose such relationships may result in further actions taken against that individual, in line with IR's safeguarding policies and relevant local and international laws.

Please refer to Islamic Relief's Safeguarding Policy and Child Protection Policy for further guidance on issues related to safeguarding and protection.

Complaints

Islamic Relief is accountable to our supporters and beneficiaries. Safeguarding is an area of importance. We take very seriously our responsibility to protect our beneficiaries, young and vulnerable people from harm, abuse, violence and exploitation. The abuse of power is taken extremely seriously resulting in disciplinary action or dismissal.

Any complaints made by an orphan or guardian must be documented and investigated according to the official Islamic Relief complaints policy and procedure.

The complaints procedure must be made available to all orphan staff, volunteers and the families/relatives supported by the programme. Families supported by the programme should have a clear understanding of the complaint's procedure and mechanisms through regular awareness sessions.

Misconduct

All employed staff working with the Sponsorship Programme must comply with the terms of this policy. Any failure to do so may lead to disciplinary action and could result in suspension or dismissal.

The line manager and the department manager or Country Director with the assistance of the OCW Department (IRW) and the relevant HR personnel, will determine the severity of the misconduct.

Related Documents

This policy is for all IR stakeholders and partners involved with the sponsorship programme. It should be used in conjunction with other policies and procedure documents where further information and guidance about a specific area of work can be found. These include but are not limited to:

- OSP Operations Manual
- IRW Child Protection Policy (including any local variations)
- IRW Complaints Policy and procedure (Including local variations)
- PSEA Policy
- Scope and Remit of the OSP in Country Office
- Archive and Record Management Policy
- Security Policy and procedures
- HR Policies and procedures (including any local variations)
- Finance Policy and procedures (including any local variations)
- IRW Standard Partnership Process
- Islamic Relief Code of Conduct

Please use the latest version of these documents, available from IRW. Additional related documents may also be added over time.

Policy Review

This policy should be reviewed at least every two years with any key changes to be approved by the Policy Review Committee at IRW

Responsibilities	
Responsibility	Person/Dept. responsible
Developing the OSP Policy	Orphans & Child Welfare Manager
Maintaining and reviewing the OSP Policy	Orphans & Child Welfare Manager
Implementing the OSP Policy	Orphans & Child Welfare Department & Orphans & Child Welfare field office heads
Approval required	Board of Directors

ⁱ https://www.unicef.org/media/media_45279.html

⁰² The High-level Political Forum on Sustainable Development is the central UN platform for the follow-up and review of the **2030 Agenda** for Sustainable Development adopted at the United Nations Sustainable Development Summit on 25 September 2015. This Agenda is a plan of action for people, planet and prosperity. <https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/>