



ANNUAL CHILD SAFETY STATEMENT 2024

The Department of Home Affairs (the Department) including the Australian Border Force (ABF) takes child safety and wellbeing seriously, and we continue to strengthen and build a child-safe organisation where all staff have a responsibility to protect and safeguard children. The Department has zero tolerance for child abuse and exploitation, and any allegations and concerns for the safety of children are treated seriously. Our commitment to child safety is detailed in our Child Safeguarding Framework (the Framework) which is tailored to our operating context and aligns with the requirements and standards of the Commonwealth Child Safe Framework (CCSF) and the National Principles for Child Safe Organisations. Consistent with the CCSF, the Department also imposes child safety requirements on funded third party organisations through written agreements.

Our annual child safeguarding risk and assurance cycle continues to be the main mechanism to identify and assess the Department's compliance with the CCSF. The cycle consists of several activities to assure that programs, activities, policies, procedures, and environments support and promote child safeguarding. This includes assessing existing and emerging risks, and identifying and monitoring mitigation strategies. The current overall risk rating is medium. This rating is based on the potential consequences combined with the residual likelihood that Departmental staff and funded third parties may not comply with the requirements of the Framework and controls that identify, manage and mitigate these risks.

A range of Departmental staff, contracted service providers and grant recipients, work in roles that engage, relate to or have an impact on children in a number of ways, including:

- Case management services and support services
- Managing transit through borders and ports
- Client facing and information services
- Enforcement activities including investigations, field operations and immigration compliance
- Visa and citizenship programs
- Unaccompanied Humanitarian Minor (UHM) program
- Settlement programs

The Department's Framework sets out the overarching approach to mitigating risk and preventing harm to children who interact with the Department's functions, underpinned by policy, procedural documents and training to support both staff and stakeholders. The Department has a dedicated section responsible for driving a child safe culture by building organisational capability, empowering staff in relation to their child safeguarding obligations, and providing advice on child-related matters. The section serves as a mandatory consultation point for business areas in relation to policies, procedures, and procurement. It also leads the annual risk and assurance cycle, which in 2024 was revised to support and monitor compliance, including through an internal stakeholder engagement strategy. This has increased engagement and awareness of child-safeguarding and child-related risks across the Department. The Department continues to improve child-focused complaints mechanisms in conjunction with practical ways to promote child-focused complaints handling within business areas.

The Department also continues to strengthen its mitigation controls including updating the Department's Risk Management Policy and risk assessment tool. The Risk Management Policy states that the Department has the lowest tolerance for failure to protect children from harm, and that all reasonable actions must be undertaken to safeguard their wellbeing and to reduce such risks.

As part of ongoing efforts to ensure a preventative, proactive and participatory approach to safeguarding children and enabling better child safe outcomes, the Department undertook a wide range of child safety initiatives in 2023-2024:

- Internal communication campaigns:
 - National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Children's Day
 - National Child Protection Week, based on the theme Every conversation matters (led by the National Association for Prevention of Child Abuse and Neglect), to raise awareness of child safeguarding in the Department with an emphasis on the requirements for all staff to protect children from abuse and/or harm and ensure their wellbeing.
 - All Staff webinar with the National Children's Commissioner to celebrate National Children's Week.
- Updated Child Safeguarding SharePoint page to keep staff informed of child safeguarding matters and as a central point to access child safeguarding policies, procedures and standard operating procedures.
- Staff survey: Keeping Children Safe and Well, providing further insight into staff understanding of their child-safeguarding obligations and improving organisational capability in handling child-related matters.
- Child safeguarding webinars for staff including on Child Trafficking and Navigating Australia's Child Safe Legislation.
- Child safeguarding training and information sessions on child safeguarding.
- Inaugural audit regarding Working with Children Checks.
- Ongoing review of child safeguarding procedural instructions to ensure they continue to be fit-for-purpose.

The Department recognises that it is our collective responsibility to uphold Australia's domestic legal framework and international obligations relating to children. We remain committed to fostering a culture of continuous improvement to ensure the ongoing protection, safety and wellbeing of children.