

Edmund Rice Development  
**Complaints Handling Policy**



## **Preface**

### **Introduction to Edmund Rice Development (ERD) and our policies**

#### **About Edmund Rice Development**

Edmund Rice Development (ERD) is an international development organisation which works with development projects and their governing bodies to promote human rights and fullness of life for all, especially those made poor.

ERD is a registered charity in Ireland (Charitable Tax Exemption Number CHY18492; Registered Charity Number 20071004). ERD is also a company limited by guarantee (Company Number: 463400).

ERD is a member of Mísean Cara, the Irish faith-based missionary movement, and Dóchas, the Irish Association of Non-Governmental Development Organisations.

The role of Edmund Rice Development is to:

1. Support access to funding to maximise impact of development projects
2. Build capacity to govern, plan and manage impactful development projects
3. Enhance collaboration between Edmund Rice entities to achieve greater impact.

#### **ERD policy rationale (why we have policies)**

ERD is accountable to its beneficiaries (the individuals and communities who participate in ERD funded projects) and its donors and supporters.

- **Accountability to beneficiaries** - ERD is committed to working with partners to support sustainable, long-term solutions to the root causes of poverty and injustice.
- **Accountability to donors and supporters** - ERD must meet specific compliance requirements due to its status as a registered charity, a company limited by guarantee and a Member of Mísean Cara and Dóchas.

Therefore, ERD must be able to demonstrate that funds are used transparently and to the maximum effect, in line with international best practice. In order to achieve this, ERD has developed a series of policies and procedures to support accountability and compliance and all are available here:

<https://www.edmundricedevelopment.org/about/governance>

#### **ERD Policies and Procedures**

An ERD Policy is a statement of intent. It describes the requirements and standards which ERD has determined are necessary for the conduct of its work. The associated procedures describe the specific actions to implement the policy

ERD commits to being collaborative, transparent and accountable to all partners and stakeholders in development and execution of its Policies and Protocol.

#### **Compliance with ERD Policies**

All ERD Staff and Board Directors are bound to follow ERD Policy and to act consistently with the associated Procedures.

## Policy information

<b>Title</b>	Complaints Handling Policy
<b>Document Type</b>	Policy and Procedures
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<b>Distribution</b>	To all ERD personnel
<b>Responsibility for Compliance</b>	ERD Board
<b>Next Review</b>	January 2025
<b>Contact information</b>	For queries or comments related to this policy, please contact: Fiona Dowling, ERD Chief Executive: <a href="mailto:fdowling@edmundrice.org">fdowling@edmundrice.org</a> Further information available at <a href="http://www.edmundricedevelopment.org">www.edmundricedevelopment.org</a>
<b>ERD Complaints Handling officer</b>	Fiona Dowling, ERD Chief Executive: <a href="mailto:fdowling@edmundrice.org">fdowling@edmundrice.org</a>

## Glossary of terms

<b>Beneficiaries</b>	Children and adults who participate in ERD-funded development projects
<b>Edmund Rice Development Project</b>	An Edmund Rice Development Project is an entity under the governance of an ER Governing Body, and can comprise several sub-projects.
<b>ERD personnel</b>	Employees, board members, contractors, subcontractors, apprentices and trainees, work experience students, volunteers, employers and any other person who performs work for/or represents ERD.
<b>Governing Body</b>	The body who has ultimate responsibility for a development project or group of development projects and who holds the contract with the donor.
<b>Head of Development Project</b>	The person responsible for the day-to-day management of an Edmund Rice Development Project
<b>Project Personnel</b>	Employees, board members, contractors, subcontractors, apprentices and trainees, work experience students, volunteers, employers and any other person who performs work for/or represents ERD-funded development projects.
<b>Safeguarding</b>	Safeguarding means taking all reasonable steps to prevent harm, to protect people, especially children and vulnerable adults from that harm; and to respond appropriately when harm does occur. In the development and humanitarian sector, this term often applies to the safety and welfare of people involved in the delivery or receipt of development assistance or humanitarian aid.

## Related policies

1. ERD Employee Handbook and Code of Conduct
2. ERD Internal Safeguarding policy
3. ERD Internal Prevention of Sexual Exploitation Abuse and Harassment (PSEAH) Policy
4. ERD Anti-Fraud Policy

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## Policy overview

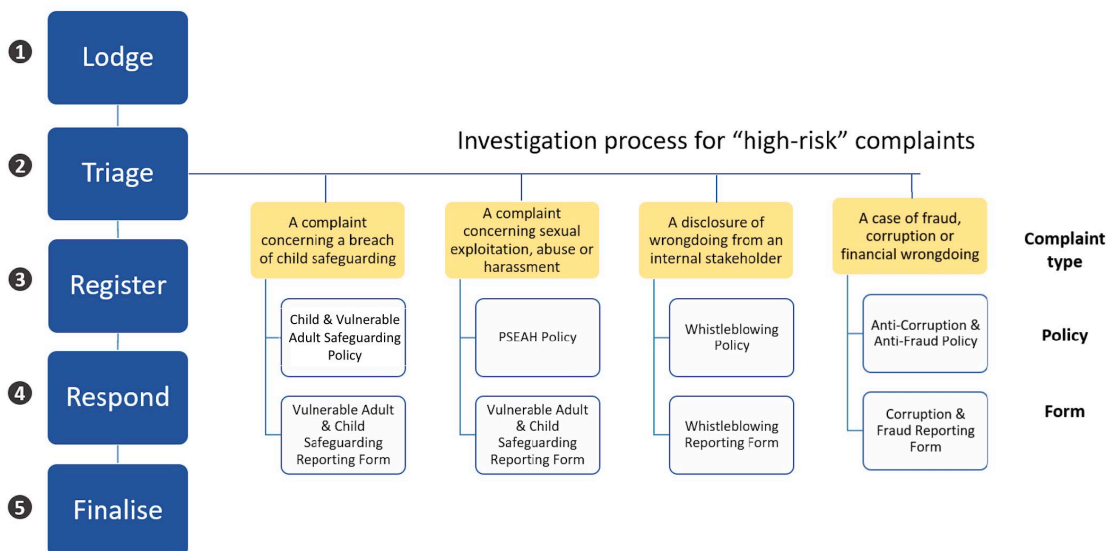
ERD is committed to being accountable and maintaining transparency. To achieve this, ERD is committed to enabling anyone who engages with ERD to provide feedback. This complaints policy is intended to be used by supporters, partners, beneficiaries and the public (individuals, companies or other entities).

The purpose of this policy is to:

- enable anyone who engages with ERD to bring to the attention of the ERD Chief Executive or Board, a complaint against the organisation or any individual(s) associated with it;
- provide protection for persons who bring forward a complaint;
- establish a documented investigation procedure that keeps a record of all complaints;
- establish a triage system for classifying the severity of complaints raised;
- provide appropriate referrals to complaints that fall outside the scope of this policy.

This policy sets out the five stages in ERD’s complaints handling process: **Lodge, Register, Triage, Investigate** and **Finalise**. Every complaint received by ERD will be processed through the first two stages: Lodge and Triage. Certain categories of ‘**high-risk complaints**’ (see below) warrant extra care and are referred to the procedures of other ERD policies. Complaints that are not deemed ‘high risk’ are processed through the next three stages: Register, Respond and Finalise stages.

## Complaints handling flowchart



**High-risk complaints** that require referral to policies other than this CHP include the following:

- For reports of child and vulnerable adult safeguarding incidents, ERD’s Child and Vulnerable Adults Safeguarding Policy applies
- For complaints of sexual exploitation, abuse or harassment (SEAH), ERD’s Prevention of Sexual Exploitation Abuse and Harassment (PSEAH) Policy applies
- For disclosures of wrongdoing originating from internal stakeholders, ERD’s Anti-Fraud Policy applies
- For cases of fraud, corruption or financial wrongdoing, ERD’s Anti-Fraud Policy applies.

## Defining 'Complaint' and 'Misconduct'

ERD defines a 'complaint' as an expression of dissatisfaction made to an organisation related to the organisation's work and which warrants a response.

Complaints may relate to reports of misconduct and in this policy 'misconduct' is classified as:

- corrupt conduct;
- a substantial mismanagement of ERD resources;
- a serious breach of ERD policy;
- conduct involving substantial risk to a child or children, vulnerable adult, public health or safety, or to the environment that would, if proved, constitute either a criminal offence or reasonable grounds for dismissing or terminating the services of a manager, staff member, or volunteer of ERD.

## Complaint handling principles

A person who believes that they have reasonable grounds for complaint will not be discriminated against in any way for making a complaint. ERD prioritises the rights and wishes of complainants over any other stakeholder involved in a complaint. ERD observes the following principles throughout the complaints handling process:

- **Accessibility:** To encourage complaint submission, ERD provides various avenues for complaints to be filed: online, via email and telephone, or in-person. Any additional needs of vulnerable stakeholders will be considered during the complaints handling process.
- **Impartiality:** If an individual makes a complaint, it will be investigated in a fair and impartial manner.
- **No victimisation:** ERD will ensure, to the best of its abilities, that a complainant will not be victimised.
- **Fairness:** The complaints management process will be respectful of all parties. If a complaint is made against an individual, they will be entitled to information about the complaint and given an opportunity to respond.
- **Confidentiality:** Complaints will remain confidential. The only people who have access to information about the complaint will be the parties involved in the complaint and the person investigating.
- **Good faith:** It is expected that complaints are made in good faith and are not vexatious or malicious.
- **Responsiveness:** Every effort will be made to finalise complaints within one month. Complainants will be advised if their matter cannot be finalised within this timeframe.

## Roles and Responsibilities within ERD

### Responsibilities of all ERD Staff

The responsibilities of Staff are as follows:

- Adhere to ERD's Complaints Handling Policy;
- Complete Complaints Handling Trainings as instructed by the ERD Complaints Handling Officer;
- Immediately notify ERD's Complaints Handling Officer of any lodged complaints;

### Responsibilities of ERD Complaints Handling Officer

These include those of all ERD staff as well as the following:

- create a Complaints Handling policy that complies with donor requirements and is updated when necessary;
- monitor compliance with the Policy and provide regular complaints handling training for staff;
- create and apply a triage process to classify complaints according to different risk levels;
- report to the ERD Board complaints that receive a risk level of high;
- inform relevant Donors of complaints that receive a risk level of high;
- investigate and resolve internally complaints allocated a risk level of low or medium;
- for complaints that fall outside the scope of this policy, make every effort to ensure that the complainant concerned is provided with the necessary means of safety and rehabilitation.

## Stage 1 Lodging Complaints

To ensure that all of ERD's stakeholders and members of the public have the ability to submit a complaint, ERD provides several communication avenues domestically and overseas.

The ERD Complaints Form can be obtained in the following ways:

- online on the ERD website: <https://www.edmundricedevelopment.org/about/governance>
- in person, by attending ERD's office: Edmund Rice House, North Richmond Street, Dublin 1, Ireland.
- by contacting the ERD Chief Executive: [fdowling@edmundrice.org](mailto:fdowling@edmundrice.org) or +353 86 818 6107

The Complaints Form is also included as an appendix to this policy.

When the Complaint's Form is completed it can be lodged as follows:

- **Via Email:** ERD Chief Executive, Fiona Dowling: [fdowling@edmundrice.org](mailto:fdowling@edmundrice.org)
- **Via Phone:** Office: +353 1 819 6782 or ERD Chief Executive: +353 86 818 6107
- **Via Post:** Mail to Complaints Handling Officer, Edmund Rice Development, Edmund Rice House, North Richmond Street, Dublin 1.
- **In-person:** Edmund Rice Development, Edmund Rice House, North Richmond Street, Dublin 1.

The ERD Chief Executive is usually the first person to receive the ER Complaints Form. Complaints can also be lodged to secondary contacts, including ERD Staff when the complaint concerns the Chief Executive.

## Stage 2 Triage system for classifying complaints

Once a complaint has been received, the ERD Chief Executive will apply the Complaints Triage Framework. The Framework is a tool that makes ERD's complaints assessment process impartial, transparent and responsive. The purpose of the framework is to:

- determine whether a complaint falls within or outside the scope of this policy.
- determine whether a complaint concerns a high-risk incident (issues of Child or Vulnerable Adult Safeguarding, PSEAH, whistleblowing or fraud).
- guide the ERD Chief Executive of the appropriate response to varying levels of risk;
- to ensure that urgent complaints are processed and addressed with greater immediacy than those that pose a lower risk.

### Complaints Triage Framework:

Risk Level	Guidelines	Example
Low	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Local issue to ERD office only</li><li>• No external implication</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• An internal complaint about office facilities</li></ul>
Medium	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Concerns a one-off breach of ERD policy</li><li>• Potential operational/financial implications</li><li>• Requires corrective action at an individual level</li><li>• No external implications</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• A supporter express dissatisfaction about an ERD external communication</li><li>•</li></ul>
High	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Concerns an ongoing breach of ERD policy</li><li>• The wellbeing or safety of a stakeholder could be at risk</li><li>• Poses operational / financial implications</li><li>• Requires corrective action at an organisational level</li><li>• Potential interest from external regulatory authorities</li><li>• Risk of reputational damage, adverse PR or media attention</li><li>• A complaint is lodged concerning: Safeguarding, PSEAH, Whistleblowing, Corruption or fraud</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• A complaint is made regarding a beneficiary's wellbeing or safety</li><li>• ERD is made aware of an ongoing breach of policy or Staff misconduct</li><li>• ERD is made aware of suspected fraud</li></ul>

**High-risk complaints** relating to Safeguarding, PSEAH or Fraud require immediate referral to the ERD policies as outlined in earlier flowchart.

### **Stage 3 Registering Complaints**

ERD maintains a register of all medium and high-risk complaints. This ensures that ERD's complaints handling process is transparent and enables continuous reflection and improvement.

An initial entry must be made into the register within 24 hours of the complaint being received. Entries must be continuously updated throughout the investigation process until the record is deemed closed.

The following must be recorded

- The date ERD were notified of the record.
- The nature of the record: complaint
- The parties involved (Complainants reserve the right to de-identify their complaints).
- A description of the issue.
- A description of the outcome.
- The name of the Staff Member who managed the record.
- The date the record was closed.
- Whether the record was referred to an external service.

### **Stage 4: Responding to Complaints**

#### **Responding to complaints with a medium risk level**

For complaints that have been allocated as medium risk, the process is conducted internally by the Chief Executive as follows:

- The complainant will be informed that their complaint is being handled. If the complainant has provided their contact details, ERD will provide them with updates throughout the investigation. The frequency and timeframe of such updates will vary depending on the nature of the complaint.
- The Chief Executive will investigate any allegations. If necessary, terms of Reference for an investigation will be drawn up to clarify the issues to be investigated and the scale of the investigation. This includes information that the Chief Executive may need to make a decision about how to ameliorate the conditions that led to the complaint.
- The Chief Executive will seek to hear from all relevant witnesses of the complaint. Where the complainant's safety is not jeopardised by doing so, the Chief Executive will require all relevant witnesses to complete their own copy of the ERD Complaints form.
- The Chief Executive will ensure the investigation is completed within a reasonable time depending on the circumstances and within no less than 90 days of the investigation commences, subject to extraordinary circumstances justifying extension beyond this time.

#### **Responding to complaints with a high level of risk**

The Chief Executive is required to notify the ERD Board of all complaints that have been allocated a risk level of high within 24 hours of the complaint having been received. The investigation process is then to be conducted by the ERD Board and the Chief Executive, with assistance from any other ERD Staff as required.

The Board will determine whether they deem the complaint to be genuine and warranting for further investigation. It may be necessary to gather more information before this decision is made.

The following steps are to be adhered to in the event that the ERD Board decides that an investigation of the received complaint is warranted:



- The Board will seek to clarify whether the complainant's immediate wellbeing or safety is secured. If they determine that this is not the case, they will work until they are satisfied that the complainant's wellbeing and safety has been safeguarded.
- The complainant will be informed that their complaint is being handled. If the complainant has provided their contact details, ERD will provide them with regular updates throughout the investigation procedure. The frequency and timeframe of such updates will vary depending on the subject matter of the disclosure.
- The Chief Executive or Board Chair will ensure that an investigation of the allegations is established and adequately resourced.
- Terms of Reference for the investigation will be drawn up to clarify the issues to be investigated and the scale of the investigation in proportion to the seriousness of the allegation(s). This includes information that the Board may need to make a decision about how to ameliorate the conditions that led to the complaint.
- The Board will seek to hear from all relevant witnesses of the complaint. Where the complainant's safety is not jeopardised by doing so, the Board will require witnesses to complete their own copy of the ERD Complaints form. Where further, detailed information is required, witnesses may be interviewed.
- The Board will ensure the investigation commences as soon as practical and is completed within a reasonable time depending on the circumstances and within no less than 90 days of the investigation commencing, subject to extraordinary circumstances justifying extension beyond this time.

During an investigation the following steps are to be adhered to in the interests of privacy protection:

- All information obtained will be properly secured to prevent unauthorised access and disclosure.
- Without the complainant's consent, ERD cannot disclose information that is likely to lead to the identification of the complainant as part of its investigation process,
- A complainant who makes an anonymous report may choose to remain anonymous while making a disclosure, during the investigation and after the investigation is finalised.
- A complainant can refuse to answer questions that they feel could reveal their identity at any time.

### **Responding to Complaints Deemed Unwarranted for Investigation**

Determining whether a complaint should be investigated is often not easy. Below are a limited number of cases where a complaint may be deemed unwarranted for investigation:

- If it is based on a misunderstanding or insufficient information it might be that the provision of clarifying information immediately satisfies the complainant and thus the complaint can be recorded as an inquiry.
- A complaint may be vexatious. A vexatious complaint may arise from time to time and refers to an allegation made without grounds or where it is not necessary/possible for the pursuit of a legitimate end. A vexatious complaint is made with the intention, or inevitable effect, of causing distress, trouble and annoyance to the person or body who has to deal with it.

The following steps are to be adhered to in the event that the ERD Board decides that an investigation of the received complaint **is not** warranted:

- The Chief Executive will contact the complainant informing them of the decision.
- The complainant will be informed that they may write to the ERD Board Chair if they are not satisfied with the outcome of the complaints handling process.

### **Stage 5 Finalising Complaints**

A report will be prepared for the Board when the investigation of a high risk complaint is complete. The report will include:

- a summary of the allegation(s);
- a statement of all relevant findings upon which conclusions were based;

- the conclusions reached, including the impact on ERD and any other affected parties;
- recommendations, based on the report's conclusions, to address any wrongdoing identified and any other matters that arose during the investigation;
- the Report will be provided to the complainant, including, if necessary, any applicable confidential stipulations.

## **Process if complainant is not satisfied with complaint handling**

If a complainant is not satisfied with the outcome of the complaints handling process, they may write to the ERD Board Chair at the ERD office. The Chair will consider what further action should be taken and inform the complainant accordingly.

ERD is regulated in Ireland by the Charity Regulatory Authority. Complaints can be made online at [www.charitiesregulatoryauthority.ie](http://www.charitiesregulatoryauthority.ie) or at Charities Regulator, 3 George's Dock, IFSC, Dublin 1, D01X5X0, Ireland

## **Policy Implementation**

ERD commits to ensuring that those who engage with ERD are made aware of the content of this policy.

### **Staff, organisational personnel and governing body members**

New employees and board members are informed in detail about this policy during their induction.

When changes to this Policy are made, updates will be shared with ERD employees and board members. New elements of the policy will be incorporated into future training processes, including Staff induction.

### **External Stakeholders**

This policy will be available to all stakeholders via ERD's website at:

<https://www.edmundriceddevelopment.org/about/governance/>

ERD will also publicise this policy at meetings and events with overseas partner in order to ensure that all stakeholders will be able to make a complaint under this policy.

## **Section 11 Policy Review**

The ERD Complaints Handling Policy will be reviewed every three years. The ERD Board of Directors have overall responsibility to ensure the review of the policy takes place. The ERD Complaints Handling Officer will manage the review of this policy, in consultation with ERD personnel, the Board and the governors of the projects with whom we work. Any changes made to the Policy must be approved by the ERD Board.

## ERD Complaints Form

*If this relates to child or vulnerable adult safeguarding, please refer to the ERD Safeguarding Policy and reporting forms.*

Date and time the incident occurred:	
Is this an ongoing incident?	
If yes, when did the incident start?	
Location where the incident occurred:	
Description of incident: <i>Provide as much specific detail as possible of what has occurred and how it has been dealt with to date</i>	
Other persons involved or witness to the incident: <i>Please provide the dates of birth (or estimated age) and contact details of other persons.</i>	
Has this incident been reported to anyone else?  If yes, who? Please include their relationship to you and contact details	
ERD prioritises the rights, needs, wishes and empowerments of complainants and will do all it can to protect your interests and wellbeing. By providing us with your contact details you will assist us in conducting an investigation. If you would prefer your name not to be used you have the right to remain anonymous.	
Do you wish to remain anonymous? <i>If no, please provide your contact details:</i>	
Name of person lodging complaint:	
Phone:	
Email:	
Signature:	

**Email** this form to: Fiona Dowling, ERD Chief Executive, Email: [fdowling@edmundrice.org](mailto:fdowling@edmundrice.org)

**Mail or Lodge in-person:** Complaints Handling Officer, Edmund Rice Development, Edmund Rice House, North Richmond Street, Dublin 1, Ireland.