



WOMEN & YOUTH INITIATIVE FOR CLIMATE ACTION
AND RESILIENT ENVIRONMENT

Safeguarding Policy

Protecting Children, Adults, and Communities
Across All WY-ICARE Programmes

Document Reference: WY-ICARE-SAFE-2026-001

Version: 1.0

Effective Date: 22 March 2026

Review Date: 22 March 2027

Classification: Board-Approved Policy Document

Governing Body: Board of Trustees

ALIGNED WITH THE UN SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT GOALS

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Women and Youth Initiative for Climate Action and Resilient Environment (WY-ICARE) is fully committed to safeguarding the welfare of all children, young people, and vulnerable adults who come into contact with our organisation, programmes, partners, and personnel. We recognise that exposure to climate change, environmental degradation, displacement, and poverty heightens vulnerability to exploitation, abuse, and harm.

WY-ICARE maintains a zero-tolerance stance towards all forms of sexual exploitation, sexual abuse, sexual harassment (SEA/SH), child abuse, bullying, discrimination, trafficking, forced labour, gender-based violence (GBV), and any conduct that compromises the dignity, safety, or well-being of programme beneficiaries, staff, volunteers, or community members.

Board Commitment

The Board of Trustees of WY-ICARE assumes ultimate accountability for the implementation, resourcing, and enforcement of this Safeguarding Policy. All board members, executive leadership, staff, volunteers, consultants, and partner organisations are bound by the standards set forth herein.

This policy aligns with the **UN Convention on the Rights of the Child**, the **Nigeria Child Rights Act 2003**, **USAID safeguarding standards**, **FCDO guidance on PSEAH**, and the **INGO Accountability Charter**. WY-ICARE treats safeguarding as a non-negotiable organisational priority embedded in all operational and strategic decisions.

This policy serves the following purposes:

1. **Protect** children, young people, and vulnerable adults from all forms of harm, abuse, exploitation, and neglect across all WY-ICARE programmes, activities, and partnerships.
2. **Prevent** safeguarding incidents through robust risk assessment, safe recruitment practices, comprehensive training, and clear behavioural standards.
3. **Respond** effectively and promptly to any safeguarding concern, allegation, or incident through structured reporting, investigation, and disciplinary mechanisms.
4. **Promote** a culture of safeguarding awareness, accountability, and transparency throughout the organisation and among all stakeholders.
5. **Comply** with Nigerian statutory requirements and international best practices in safeguarding, child protection, and PSEAH.
6. **Empower** beneficiaries, staff, and communities to recognise, report, and challenge unsafe practices without fear of retaliation.

This policy applies to all individuals and entities associated with WY-ICARE, including but not limited to:

Category	Specific Coverage
Personnel	All board members, executive directors, staff (full-time and part-time), consultants, contractors, interns, and volunteers
Programmes	All WY-ICARE-operated programmes: Climate Action, GSSF, WASH, CTYSAFE, Public Health, Youth Development, Women Empowerment, Tree Plantation, IDP Response, and MCHI
Beneficiaries	All children (persons under 18), young people, women, IDPs, persons with disabilities, and other vulnerable groups participating in or receiving services from WY-ICARE
Partners	All partner organisations, subcontractors, grantees, and implementing agencies working on behalf of or in collaboration with WY-ICARE
Geography	All programme locations across Northern Nigeria (Kaduna, Kano, Katsina, Jigawa, Zamfara, Sokoto, Kebbi, Borno) and any future expansion areas
Contexts	Office premises, field activities, community engagements, training sessions, online/digital interactions, travel, accommodation, and social events

All safeguarding activities at WY-ICARE are guided by the following core principles:

4.1 Child-Centred Approach

The best interests of the child are paramount in all decisions and actions. WY-ICARE recognises that children in climate-vulnerable and conflict-affected communities face compounded risks and require differentiated protection.

4.2 Do No Harm

Every programme intervention must be assessed for potential safeguarding risks before implementation. WY-ICARE commits to identifying and mitigating unintended negative consequences of its activities.

4.3 Zero Tolerance

WY-ICARE will not tolerate sexual exploitation, abuse, harassment, child abuse, discrimination, or any conduct that violates this policy. Violations will result in immediate disciplinary action, up to and including termination, legal prosecution, and referral to law enforcement.

4.4 Confidentiality

All safeguarding reports and investigations will be handled with strict confidentiality, limited to those with a legitimate need to know, while balancing transparency with the rights and safety of all parties.

4.5 Non-Discrimination

Safeguarding protections apply equally regardless of age, gender, ethnicity, religion, disability, displacement status, or any other characteristic. WY-ICARE is committed to inclusive safeguarding.

4.6 Empowerment and Participation

Beneficiaries, particularly children and young people, will be meaningfully consulted in the design, implementation, and review of safeguarding measures relevant to their protection.

4.7 Accountability

Clear lines of accountability exist from the Board of Trustees through to field-level staff. Safeguarding is a shared responsibility, and every individual has a duty to act.

For the purposes of this policy, the following terms are defined:

Term	Definition
Safeguarding	All measures taken to protect children and vulnerable adults from harm, abuse, exploitation, and neglect
Child	Any person below the age of 18 years, as defined by the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child and the Nigeria Child Rights Act 2003
Vulnerable Adult	Any person aged 18 or over who is or may be unable to take care of themselves or protect themselves from significant harm or exploitation due to age, disability, illness, displacement, or circumstance
Sexual Exploitation	Any actual or attempted abuse of a position of vulnerability, differential power, or trust for sexual purposes, including profiting monetarily, socially, or politically from the sexual exploitation of another
Sexual Abuse	Actual or threatened physical intrusion of a sexual nature, whether by force or under unequal or coercive conditions
Sexual Harassment	Any unwelcome conduct of a sexual nature that might reasonably be expected or be perceived to cause offence or humiliation
Child Abuse	All forms of physical abuse, emotional abuse, sexual abuse, neglect, and exploitation of a child
GBV	Gender-Based Violence: any harmful act directed at an individual based on their gender, including sexual violence, domestic violence, trafficking, forced marriage, and harmful traditional practices
Beneficiary	Any individual or community group that receives services, participates in programmes, or otherwise engages with WY-ICARE activities
Staff	All persons employed by or formally representing WY-ICARE, including board members, executives, employees, consultants, contractors, interns, and volunteers

All WY-ICARE personnel are required to adhere to the following Code of Conduct. This code establishes minimum standards of behaviour and applies at all times during association with WY-ICARE.

6.1 Standards of Behaviour

- Treat all beneficiaries, colleagues, and community members with dignity, respect, and professionalism at all times.
- Never use language, make suggestions, or offer rewards in return for sexual favours.
- Never engage in sexual activity with any person under the age of 18, regardless of the age of majority or consent locally.
- Never engage in sexual activity with beneficiaries, as this constitutes abuse of power and trust.
- Ensure all interactions with children are transparent, accountable, and in the presence of another adult where possible.
- Respect the physical and emotional boundaries of all individuals, particularly children and vulnerable adults.
- Report any safeguarding concern immediately through the designated channels.
- Maintain professional boundaries in all digital communications with beneficiaries and colleagues.
- Obtain informed consent from beneficiaries (and their guardians for children under 18) before collecting, using, or sharing their personal information, images, or stories.

6.2 Zero-Tolerance Prohibitions

The following conduct is strictly prohibited and will result in immediate disciplinary action:

- **Sexual Exploitation and Abuse (SEA):** Any sexual activity with beneficiaries, including exchange of goods, services, or assistance for sex.
- **Sexual Harassment (SH):** Unwelcome sexual advances, requests for sexual favours, or other verbal or physical conduct of a sexual nature.
- **Child Abuse:** Physical abuse, emotional abuse, sexual abuse, neglect, or exploitation of any child.
- **Bullying and Intimidation:** Repeated, unreasonable behaviour directed towards a person or group that creates a risk to health and safety.
- **Trafficking:** The recruitment, transportation, transfer, harbouring, or receipt of persons by means of threat, force, coercion, or deception for the purpose of exploitation.
- **Forced Labour:** All work or service exacted from any person under the menace of any penalty and for which the person has not offered themselves voluntarily.
- **Gender-Based Violence (GBV):** Any act that results in or is likely to result in physical, sexual, or psychological harm or suffering based on gender.
- **Physical and Emotional Abuse:** Any non-accidental physical injury or pattern of emotional maltreatment causing harm to a person's wellbeing.
- **Financial Exploitation:** The illegal or improper use of a person's funds, property, or resources.
- **Discrimination:** Unfair or prejudicial treatment of individuals or groups based on protected characteristics including age, gender, ethnicity, religion, disability, or displacement status.

WY-ICARE recognises that children participating in our programmes, particularly in climate-vulnerable and conflict-affected communities in Northern Nigeria, face heightened risks. This section establishes specific standards for child protection.

7.1 Child Protection Standards

- **Safe Programming:** All WY-ICARE programmes involving children must undergo a child safeguarding risk assessment prior to implementation. Risk assessments must be reviewed and updated every six months.
- **Safe Environments:** All programme venues, offices, and field locations must be safe, accessible, and free from hazards. Separate and appropriate sanitation facilities must be provided for children.
- **Supervision Ratios:** Minimum adult-to-child supervision ratios must be maintained: 1:10 for children aged 5-12, and 1:15 for young people aged 13-17.
- **One-to-One Contact:** One-to-one interactions between staff and children should be avoided where possible. Where necessary, they must occur in visible, open spaces with another adult present or nearby.
- **Transportation:** Children must never be transported alone by a single staff member. At least two adults must be present when transporting children.
- **Communication:** All communication with children must be professional, transparent, and accountable. Private digital communication with children is prohibited.
- **Photography and Media:** Written consent from a parent or guardian must be obtained before photographing, filming, or recording any child. Images must not identify children by name or location.
- **Visitor Protocol:** All visitors to WY-ICARE programmes involving children must be accompanied at all times and must undergo a safeguarding briefing.

7.2 Risk Assessment for Children

WY-ICARE requires that all programmes conduct a child safeguarding risk assessment using the organisation's standard risk assessment tool. Key risk factors include:

- Physical environment hazards (unsafe buildings, inadequate sanitation)
- Personnel risks (inadequate vetting, insufficient training)
- Community context (prevalence of harmful practices, conflict, displacement)

- Programme-specific risks (residential activities, travel, digital engagement)
- Cultural and gender-specific vulnerabilities

PREVENTION OF SEXUAL EXPLOITATION, ABUSE, AND HARASSMENT (PSEAH)

WY-ICARE is committed to preventing sexual exploitation, abuse, and harassment in all forms across its programmes and operations. This commitment extends to all personnel, partners, and stakeholders.

8.1 PSEAH Standards

- **Beneficiary-Staff Relationships:** Sexual relationships between WY-ICARE personnel and programme beneficiaries are prohibited regardless of perceived consent, as they constitute an inherent abuse of power.
- **Power Dynamics:** Staff must be aware of power imbalances and ensure their conduct does not exploit the vulnerability of beneficiaries.
- **Consent:** The existence of consent cannot be assumed in situations of unequal power. Staff must not rely on perceived consent as a defence against allegations of sexual exploitation or abuse.
- **Partners:** All partner organisations must sign a PSEAH compliance agreement and demonstrate adherence to equivalent safeguarding standards.
- **Reporting:** PSEAH concerns must be reported through the same channels as all safeguarding concerns (see Section 10).

8.2 PSEAH Risk Mitigation

- Gender-sensitive programme design and implementation
- Safe and accessible reporting mechanisms for women and girls
- Female staff presence in all field activities involving women and girls
- Safe and private spaces for confidential consultations
- Community awareness-raising on rights and reporting channels

WY-ICARE implements rigorous safe recruitment procedures to ensure that all personnel are suitable to work with children, young people, and vulnerable adults.

9.1 Recruitment Procedures

- **Job Descriptions:** All job descriptions and role profiles must reference WY-ICARE's safeguarding policy and code of conduct.
- **Application Screening:** All applications must be screened for gaps in employment history, undisclosed criminal convictions, and references that raise safeguarding concerns.
- **Reference Checks:** A minimum of two professional references must be obtained for all new staff, with specific questions asked about the candidate's suitability to work with children and vulnerable adults.
- **Identity Verification:** Original identity documents must be verified and copies retained on file.
- **Qualification Verification:** All claimed professional qualifications must be verified with the issuing institution.
- **Police Clearance:** All staff working directly with children must obtain a police clearance certificate. For international staff, equivalent clearance from their country of origin is required.
- **Safeguarding Interview Questions:** All interviews must include safeguarding-specific questions to assess the candidate's understanding of and commitment to child protection.

9.2 Probation and Ongoing Vetting

- All new staff undergo a probation period of not less than three months.
- Safeguarding training is mandatory within the first two weeks of employment.
- All staff must reconfirm their understanding of and commitment to this policy annually.
- Police clearance certificates must be renewed every two years.

WY-ICARE provides multiple, accessible, and safe channels for reporting safeguarding concerns. Reporting a concern is a duty, not a choice.

10.1 Internal Reporting Channels

Six Reporting Mechanisms

1. **Designated Safeguarding Officer (DSO):** The primary point of contact for all safeguarding concerns. The DSO is trained to receive, record, and manage safeguarding reports confidentially.
2. **Executive Director:** Reports can be made directly to the Executive Director, particularly where the concern involves the DSO or senior staff.
3. **Email:** Safeguarding concerns can be reported via email to safeguarding@wyicare.org. This mailbox is monitored by the DSO and Board Safeguarding Lead.
4. **Confidential Hotline:** A dedicated telephone hotline (+234 803 353 1583) is available during office hours for urgent safeguarding concerns.
5. **Suggestion Box:** Physical suggestion boxes are placed at all WY-ICARE offices and programme locations for anonymous written reports.
6. **Anonymous Reporting Platform:** An anonymous online reporting form is accessible via the WY-ICARE website for those who wish to report without revealing their identity.

10.2 External Reporting

In cases where internal reporting is inappropriate or the concern involves senior leadership, reports may be made to:

- The **Board of Trustees Safeguarding Lead** (contact via the Board Chair at board@wyicare.org)
- **Nigeria Police Force** (for criminal matters)
- **National Agency for the Prohibition of Trafficking in Persons (NAPTIP)**
- **Ministry of Women Affairs and Social Development** (state-level)
- **Donor safeguarding focal points** (where funding conditions require)

All staff are required to report safeguarding concerns within 24 hours of becoming aware of them.
Failure to report is a disciplinary offence.

WY-ICARE commits to conducting all safeguarding investigations promptly, fairly, thoroughly, and with due regard for the safety and rights of all parties.

11.1 Eight-Step Investigation Process

Step	Action	Responsible	Timeline
1. Receipt	Report received and logged securely. Initial assessment of risk and urgency conducted.	DSO	Within 24 hours
2. Triage	Report classified by severity. Immediate safety measures implemented if required.	DSO + ED	Within 48 hours
3. Notification	Board Safeguarding Lead and relevant authorities notified. External agencies engaged if criminal matter.	ED	Within 72 hours
4. Appointment	Investigation team appointed. Investigator must be independent and trained.	Board	Within 5 days
5. Investigation	Evidence gathered through interviews, document review, and site visits. All parties given fair hearing.	Investigator	Within 15 days
6. Analysis	Evidence assessed against the balance of probabilities. Findings documented.	Investigator	Within 20 days
7. Decision	Findings presented to Board. Disciplinary or remedial action determined.	Board	Within 25 days
8. Action & Review	Disciplinary action implemented. Lessons learned documented. Policy updated if needed.	DSO + ED	Within 30 days

11.2 Investigation Principles

- The safety and welfare of the victim/survivor is the paramount consideration at all times.
- The accused is presumed innocent until findings are concluded.
- Both the complainant and the accused have the right to be treated with dignity and respect.
- Investigations will be conducted with cultural sensitivity while maintaining international standards.

- Where criminal conduct is suspected, the matter will be referred to the Nigeria Police Force.
- All investigation records will be stored securely and retained for a minimum of seven years.

WY-ICARE handles all safeguarding information with the utmost confidentiality and in compliance with the Nigeria Data Protection Regulation 2019 and international best practices.

12.1 Confidentiality Standards

- All safeguarding reports will be treated as strictly confidential and shared only on a need-to-know basis.
- Information will be shared with external agencies (police, social services) only where there is a legal obligation or where the safety of a child or vulnerable adult is at immediate risk.
- The identity of whistleblowers will be protected to the fullest extent possible.
- All records will be stored securely, with access limited to authorised personnel.
- Anonymous reports will be taken seriously and investigated to the extent possible without the reporter's identity.

12.2 Data Retention

- Safeguarding incident records: minimum of 7 years
- Investigation records: minimum of 7 years after case closure
- Staff safeguarding training records: duration of employment plus 3 years
- Beneficiary consent forms: duration of programme plus 3 years

WY-ICARE is committed to protecting individuals who report safeguarding concerns in good faith. Retaliation against whistleblowers is strictly prohibited.

13.1 Protection Measures

- **Non-Retaliation:** No staff member who reports a safeguarding concern in good faith will suffer retaliation, harassment, or victimisation.
- **Anonymous Reporting:** The anonymous reporting platform ensures that individuals can raise concerns without revealing their identity.
- **External Escalation:** Where internal reporting channels are not accessible or appropriate, concerns can be reported directly to the Board of Trustees.
- **Support:** Whistleblowers will be offered appropriate support throughout the investigation process.

13.2 Malicious Allegations

While WY-ICARE encourages reporting, it recognises that false or malicious allegations can cause significant harm. Where an investigation determines that an allegation was made maliciously, disciplinary action may be taken against the reporter.

ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES

Clear accountability for safeguarding exists at every level of WY-ICARE's governance and management structure.

Role	Safeguarding Responsibilities
Board of Trustees	Ultimate accountability for safeguarding policy and practice; appoints Board Safeguarding Lead; reviews safeguarding reports quarterly; ensures adequate resourcing of safeguarding functions
Board Safeguarding Lead	Champions safeguarding at board level; oversees investigation of serious incidents; ensures policy compliance; liaises with external authorities on safeguarding matters
Executive Director	Day-to-day leadership of safeguarding; ensures implementation of policy across all programmes; appoints and supervises the DSO; reports to the board on safeguarding matters
Designated Safeguarding Officer (DSO)	First point of contact for all safeguarding concerns; maintains safeguarding records; delivers training; conducts risk assessments; coordinates investigations; maintains the safeguarding reporting system
Programme Managers	Ensure safeguarding measures are embedded in programme design and delivery; report safeguarding concerns promptly; ensure staff under their supervision are trained and compliant
All Staff & Volunteers	Adhere to the code of conduct; complete mandatory safeguarding training; report concerns within 24 hours; maintain professional boundaries; participate in safeguarding reviews

TRAINING AND CAPACITY BUILDING

WY-ICARE recognises that effective safeguarding depends on a well-trained and knowledgeable workforce. All personnel must receive safeguarding training appropriate to their role.

15.1 Mandatory Training Requirements

Audience			Training Content	Frequency
All Staff & Volunteers			Safeguarding awareness, code of conduct, reporting procedures, recognising signs of abuse	Induction + Annual refresher
Staff Working with Children			Child protection standards, safe programming, child-centred approaches, communication with children	Induction + Bi-annual refresher
Programme Managers			Safeguarding risk assessment, incident management, partner safeguarding compliance, reporting to donors	Annual
DSO			Advanced safeguarding, investigation techniques, trauma-informed practice, legal framework	Annual + External courses
Board Members			Board safeguarding responsibilities, strategic oversight, handling serious incidents	Annual

15.2 Community Awareness

WY-ICARE commits to raising community awareness of safeguarding rights and reporting channels through programme activities, community meetings, and printed materials in local languages.

WY-ICARE integrates safeguarding risk management into its broader organisational risk management framework.

16.1 Risk Assessment Process

- All new programmes must undergo a safeguarding risk assessment prior to implementation.
- Existing programmes must have their safeguarding risk assessments reviewed every six months.
- Risk assessments must consider the specific vulnerabilities of the beneficiary population, the programme context, and the personnel involved.
- Risk ratings (low, medium, high, critical) must be assigned, with mitigating measures documented for each identified risk.
- High and critical risks must be escalated to the Executive Director and Board Safeguarding Lead.

16.2 Common Safeguarding Risks in WY-ICARE Context

Risk Category	Specific Risk	Mitigation
Environmental	Unsafe programme venues, inadequate sanitation, extreme weather	Venue inspections, contingency planning, climate adaptation
Personnel	Inadequate vetting, untrained staff, poor supervision	Safe recruitment, mandatory training, supervision ratios
Community	Harmful traditional practices, conflict, displacement, poverty	Community engagement, gender-sensitive design, Do No Harm analysis
Digital	Online exploitation, data breaches, inappropriate digital contact	Digital safeguarding policy, secure data systems, communication protocols
Partner	Partner non-compliance, inadequate partner safeguarding capacity	Partner assessments, compliance agreements, capacity building

WY-ICARE is committed to continuous improvement in safeguarding practice through regular monitoring and systematic policy review.

17.1 Monitoring Arrangements

- **Quarterly Reports:** The DSO will submit a safeguarding report to the Board every quarter, covering incidents reported, investigations conducted, training delivered, and emerging risks.
- **Annual Audit:** An annual safeguarding audit will be conducted by an independent reviewer to assess compliance with this policy and identify areas for improvement.
- **Spot Checks:** Unannounced spot checks of programme locations may be conducted to verify safeguarding practices.
- **Beneficiary Feedback:** Safeguarding questions will be included in all programme feedback mechanisms.

17.2 Policy Review

- This policy will be reviewed annually by the Board of Trustees, or sooner if required by legislative changes, significant incidents, or donor requirements.
- All staff will be consulted during the policy review process.
- Any amendments to this policy must be approved by the Board of Trustees.

BREACH AND DISCIPLINARY ACTION

Violations of this Safeguarding Policy will result in disciplinary action proportionate to the severity of the breach.

18.1 Disciplinary Framework

Severity	Examples	Sanction
Minor	Failing to complete mandatory training on time; minor boundary issues	Written warning; mandatory additional training; monitoring period
Moderate	Breaching the code of conduct; inadequate supervision; failure to report a concern	Final written warning; suspension pending investigation; re-assignment
Severe	Sexual exploitation or abuse; physical abuse of a child; trafficking; GBV	Summary dismissal; referral to law enforcement; blacklisting from sector

18.2 Criminal Matters

Where a safeguarding breach constitutes a criminal offence, WY-ICARE will report the matter to the Nigeria Police Force and cooperate fully with any criminal investigation. WY-ICARE will also suspend the individual pending the outcome of the investigation.

18.3 Partner Consequences

Partner organisations that breach this policy will be subject to partnership review, potential termination of the partnership agreement, and reporting to relevant donor agencies and sector bodies.

This Safeguarding Policy must be read in conjunction with the following WY-ICARE policy documents:

- **Child Protection Policy** (WY-ICARE-CPP-2026-001) — Detailed procedures for protecting children in WY-ICARE programmes
- **Anti-Fraud and Anti-Corruption Policy** (WY-ICARE-AFC-2026-001) — Standards for preventing fraud, corruption, and financial misconduct
- **Procurement Policy** (WY-ICARE-PRO-2026-001) — Transparent procurement procedures and ethical supplier standards
- **Code of Conduct** (WY-ICARE-COC-2026-001) — Comprehensive behavioural standards for all personnel
- **Data Protection Policy** — Standards for the collection, storage, and use of personal data
- **Gender Policy** — Commitments to gender equality and protection from gender-based harm
- **Complaints and Feedback Policy** — Mechanisms for beneficiaries and stakeholders to raise concerns

This Safeguarding Policy has been reviewed and approved by the Board of Trustees of Women and Youth Initiative for Climate Action and Resilient Environment.

Document Authorisation

Document Reference: WY-ICARE-SAFE-2026-001

Version: 1.0

Approved by: Board of Trustees, WY-ICARE

Date of Approval: 22 March 2026

Effective Date: 22 March 2026

Review Date: 22 March 2027

Next Review: Annual

Signed:

Humaira Bala Na'iya

Founder and Executive Chairperson

Women and Youth Initiative for Climate Action and Resilient Environment

Ibrahim Mohammed

Co-Founder, Executive Vice Chair and Chief Strategy Officer

Women and Youth Initiative for Climate Action and Resilient Environment

WOMEN & YOUTH INITIATIVE FOR CLIMATE ACTION AND RESILIENT ENVIRONMENT

CAC IT No. 9431203 · TIN: 2621864168647 · SCUML: SC 191404622

Head Office: No. 11 Ammsco Plaza, Race Course Road, Kaduna North, Kaduna State

Branch: No. 21 Guda Abdullahi Road, Farm Centre Road, Kano

admin@wyicare.org · info@wyicare.org · www.wyicare.org

+234 803 353 1583 · +234 703 681 6826



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