



International Standards & Regulations for ESD Professionals

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Raising the Bar for ESD Professionals Worldwide.

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International Standards and Regulations for Empowerment Self-Defense (ESD) Professionals

International Association of ESD Professionals

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Introduction

Empowerment Self-Defense (ESD) professionals worldwide share a mission of preventing and interrupting violence through empowerment-based self-defense training. With the growth of the ESD field as a global industry and movement, there is a need for unified standards of compliance to define professional conduct, competency, and accountability. This document serves as a comprehensive industry regulations framework tailored for ESD professionals, providing guidance to individual practitioners, certification and training providers, and oversight authorities. It integrates mandatory legal regulations with voluntary industry best practices, ensuring clarity in ethical obligations, safety standards, and credentialing requirements across diverse regions. The aim is to promote a well-recognized global standard of professionalism and competence for ESD instructors, trainers, program providers, researchers, and advocates. This guide also supports the Credentialing and Accreditation initiatives of the IAESDP by outlining the expectations for quality and integrity in ESD practice, thereby engendering public trust and safety in the field.

Purpose and Scope

Purpose: This document establishes an international compliance and standards framework for ESD professionals. It is designed to inform practitioners of their responsibilities, support organizations that certify or train ESD instructors, and provide clear reference points for agencies or authorities overseeing ESD programs. By consolidating ethics codes, competency standards, legal obligations, and accreditation criteria, the guide helps ensure that ESD services are delivered safely, ethically, and effectively worldwide. It also aids certifying bodies in aligning their credentialing programs with recognized standards, and helps external stakeholders (such as schools, NGOs, or government bodies) understand the professional benchmarks for ESD providers. This framework meets ISO 17024 and NCCA norms.

Scope: The standards in this guide are globally applicable to ESD professionals in various roles – including instructors, instructor-trainers, curriculum developers, program administrators, and allied professionals in violence prevention. It addresses the needs of:

- **Individual ESD Professionals and Organizations:** (e.g. instructors/practitioners, organizations, businesses, or programs that teach ESD) – outlining ethical conduct,

core competencies, curriculum guidelines, and continuing professional development expectations.

- **Training Providers:** (schools, organizations, or programs that train and certify ESD instructors) – detailing program accreditation standards, curriculum guidelines, and trainer qualifications.
- **Certifying Bodies:** (credentialing committees) – describing governance, impartiality, and processes for credentialing and upholding standards.
- **Oversight Authorities:** (regulatory agencies, educational institutions, funding bodies, etc.) – offering clarity on what constitutes compliant and credible ESD practice for evaluation or partnership purposes.

The guide provides *universal principles* and requirements in the main sections, while recognizing regional differences. Specific regulatory or cultural considerations for certain regions (e.g. U.S., EU, Asia-Pacific) are addressed in appendices. This structure allows local adaptation of the global standards without compromising the core values that define Empowerment Self-Defense internationally.

Definitions and Terminology

For the purpose of this document, the following key terms are defined:

- **Empowerment Self-Defense (ESD):** A holistic approach to personal safety that teaches tools to prevent, interrupt, and respond to violence (from verbal harassment to physical assault) with an emphasis on empowerment, consent, and social justice. ESD programs are geared toward those targeted for violence, fostering confidence and choice in how to respond to threats.
- **ESD Professional:** An individual who is trained to deliver ESD instruction or otherwise advance ESD practice. This includes ESD instructors/teachers, assistant instructors, trainers-of-trainers, curriculum developers, researchers, and advocates in the field of empowerment self-defense. An ESD Professional is distinguished by having specific competency in empowerment-based self-defense methods and a commitment to the field's ethical standards.
- **ESDP Credential:** The ESD Professional credential conferred by the International Association of ESD Professionals (IAESDP) upon candidates who meet the standard of competence and ethics by passing a credentialing examination. The ESDP credential signifies that an individual's practice aligns with core ESD principles and professional standards globally.

- **Accredited ESD Training Program:** A training or certification program for ESD instructors that has been formally evaluated and recognized (accredited) as meeting the standards set by the ESD Credentialing Committee (ECC). Accreditation ensures that a program adequately prepares instructors in line with the global ESD competencies and ethics, and operates with integrity and quality control.
- **ESD Credentialing Committee (ECC):** An independent policy-setting body that develops standards for credentialing ESD professionals and accrediting ESD instructor-training programs. The ECC follows internationally recognized guidelines for certification bodies such as ISO standards and the National Commission for Certifying Agencies (NCCA) standards to ensure fairness, validity, and impartiality in its certification and accreditation processes.
- **Code of Ethics (ESD):** A written set of guidelines outlining the ethical conduct expected of ESD professionals. In this context, there are two primary codes: the **IAESDP Code of Ethics** (developed by the association in 2022 as a formal ethics code for members and credential-holders) and the **ESD Community Code of Ethics** (a grassroots consensus document developed in 2021 by a broad group of ESD practitioners). Both codes share common values and principles, though they were created by different groups.
- **Oversight Authority:** Any official body or entity that has governance or evaluative oversight over ESD activities. This could include the IAESDP and its committees (for internal professional oversight), as well as external regulators or institutions such as educational authorities, employer organizations, or grant funding agencies that require compliance with certain standards.
- **Stakeholders:** Parties with an interest in the standardization of ESD. This includes ESD practitioners and organizations, the communities and students they serve, membership associations, insurance providers, and public institutions concerned with violence prevention and public safety.

Note: This document uses “**shall**” to indicate mandatory requirements (including legal regulations or binding standards) and “**should**” to indicate recommended or best practice guidelines for professional conduct.

Guiding Principles and Ethical Standards

At the heart of ESD industry standards is a strong ethical foundation. All ESD professionals are expected to conduct themselves according to core values of safety, dignity, and

empowerment, while actively cultivating inclusion, diversity, and accessibility in their practice. The ethical framework for ESD practice is organized around key responsibilities referred to as the *Five Pillars* of ESD ethics:

1. **Responsibility to Participants:** Prioritizing the well-being, safety, and autonomy of students/participants in ESD programs.
2. **Responsibility to Practice and Performance:** Maintaining high standards of competence, safety protocols, and quality in delivering ESD techniques and curricula.
3. **Responsibility to Colleagues:** Fostering respect, collaboration, and integrity in interactions with fellow ESD professionals.
4. **Responsibility to the Profession:** Upholding the reputation of the ESD field, advancing knowledge, and mentoring others while adhering to professional guidelines.
5. **Responsibility to Society:** Contributing to broader violence-prevention and social justice efforts, and engaging ethically with the community and societal frameworks.

Both the **IAESDP Code of Ethics** and the **ESD Community Code of Ethics** align closely with these pillars and principles. They each emphasize creating physically and emotionally safe learning environments, obtaining informed consent (especially regarding any physical contact in training), and preventing harm or abuse in all ESD activities. For example, *safety and consent* are paramount: instructors must ensure classes are free from harassment or coercion and that any physical techniques are taught with explicit student consent and with safeguards in place (e.g. “observable and interruptible” contact, per community standards). Both codes also strongly endorse inclusivity and respect for diversity. ESD professionals should welcome and support participants of all genders, sexual orientations, races, religions, body-types, and abilities, recognizing that those most targeted by violence (women, LGBTQ+ people, people of color, people with disabilities, etc.) must be centered and served without bias. Instructors are expected to use anti-discriminatory, anti-racist practices and ensure accessibility and cultural sensitivity in their teaching.

Another critical ethical tenet is confidentiality and privacy. Professionals are entrusted with personal stories and sensitive information from participants; both ethics codes mandate that identifying information, personal disclosures, and images of participants be kept confidential and protected, only shared with explicit consent and in line with local privacy laws. Additionally, clear professional boundaries must be maintained. ESD teachers hold a position of power relative to students, so any exploitative relationships or conflicts of interest are strictly forbidden. Romantic or sexual relationships with current

students are unethical, and even relationships with former students are cautioned or regulated by policy (requiring significant time gaps or additional scrutiny, especially if the student was a minor). Instructors must also refrain from using their influence for personal gain – for instance, not pressuring students into extra unpaid labor or financial arrangements, and not borrowing money from students or their families.

Integrity in business and financial practices forms another part of the ethical standards. ESD professionals should follow honest and fair practices: setting fair pricing, offering scholarships or sliding scales when possible to broaden access, and never exploiting students financially (e.g. students receiving fee waivers should not be singled out to “repay” with duties that other students don’t do). They are expected to comply with local employment and labor laws, provide fair wages if they employ others, and generally exhibit transparency and fairness in all financial dealings.

It is important to note that while the **IAESDP (Association) Code of Ethics** and the **ESD Community Code** may differ in tone and structure, they are mutually reinforcing. The Association’s Code, established as part of a formal professional body, is more structured and research-informed, and it includes additional language to meet requirements for diversity, equity, inclusion, impartiality, and legal compliance (as required by accrediting bodies like ISO and NCCA). The Community Code, by contrast, emerged from a grassroots collaboration of over 50 global practitioners; it is phrased in accessible, inclusive language and is designed for voluntary adoption by individuals and organizations. Despite these differences, the two codes share fundamental ethical commitments and are not in conflict. In fact, the IAESDP explicitly supports the Community Code and encourages professionals to uphold the longstanding high standards of practice developed in the ESD community over decades. Many principles – such as trauma-informed teaching, empowering student choice, anti-oppression, and maintaining clear boundaries – appear in both documents. Where the Association’s Code is more formal (with an eye toward enforceability and alignment with professional certification norms), the Community Code provides practical, socially conscious guidance; integrating both offers a comprehensive and accessible ethical guide for all ESD professionals.

In practice, adherence to the Code of Ethics (in either form, or both) is considered a cornerstone of professionalism in ESD. Ethical decision-making can be complex and context-dependent, so practitioners are urged to continuously reflect on these values and consult with peers or ethics committees when facing dilemmas. By following the guiding principles and standards above, ESD professionals not only “do no harm” but actively “do good” – creating empowering experiences for students, interacting with other instructors

with respect and accountability, and advancing the credibility and impact of the empowerment self-defense field.

Professional Competence and Training Standards

All ESD professionals must meet robust competency standards to ensure they can deliver safe, effective, and empowering training. The core competencies for ESD instructors have been defined through a rigorous, collaborative process by experts and the ESD Credentialing Committee. These competencies form the basis of the Association ESD Professional credentialing exam and delineate the essential knowledge, skills, and abilities every ESD instructor should possess.

Core Competency Domains: The body of knowledge for ESD professionals spans five broad domains (reflecting the five modules of the credentialing exam):

- 1. Emotional, Verbal, and Social Skills:** Understanding the purpose and unique approach of ESD, and mastering de-escalation and boundary-setting techniques. This includes communication skills (assertive body language, voice use), awareness of intuition and situational dynamics, methods for verbal negotiation or boundary enforcement, and addressing scenarios like harassment, grooming, or emotional manipulation. ESD professionals learn to teach participants how to use their voice, mind, and social strategies to prevent or defuse potential violence.
- 2. Physical Self-Defense Skills:** Proficiency in physical techniques and their appropriate use. Instructors must be able to demonstrate and teach effective physical defenses – strikes, releases, blocks, and escapes – and know when and how these techniques should be applied or avoided. They should emphasize that the goal of any physical action is to enable escape to safety, and they cover context and risk evaluation (when using force is warranted). Core physical competencies include common strikes (e.g. palm-heel strikes, elbows, knee strikes), defenses against grabs or holds (including strangulation defenses, releases from grabs, etc.), ground defense principles, and understanding which techniques are not recommended for safety reasons. Competence also means adapting physical instruction to students of varying abilities and body types, and correcting techniques to prevent injury.
- 3. Safety and Trauma-Informed Teaching Practices:** Ensuring physical and emotional safety in the learning environment is an essential competency. ESD professionals must know how to conduct classes with proper safety protocols: using safe warm-ups, appropriately utilizing protective equipment (pads, mats), and

supervising physical practice to prevent injuries. Equally important is emotional safety; instructors are trained in handling sensitive content (like discussions of past violence or trauma) with care, using content warnings, and facilitating exercises (such as role-plays) in a way that is empowering rather than triggering. They learn to recognize signs of trauma responses in participants and have plans to respond (e.g., pausing exercises, providing support or referrals). This domain includes being trauma-informed (aware of the prevalence of trauma and principles of trauma-sensitive teaching), maintaining an inclusive and supportive class atmosphere, and upholding consent at every stage (students may opt out of activities). In practice, an ESD class should model respect and safety: instructors demonstrate “safe” behavior (for instance, any physical contact is explained and agreed upon and is observable by others) and set clear ground rules that prohibit bullying, shaming, or any form of abuse within the class.

4. **Ethics and Social Change:** Understanding and modeling ethical conduct and situating ESD within a broader social context. Instructors are expected to be fluent in professional ethics (as outlined in the Codes of Ethics): they know the difference between personal morals and professional ethics, and the importance of having and following an ethics policy. This competency also involves a commitment to ongoing self-reflection and growth: recognizing one’s own biases and privileges, practicing cultural humility, and engaging with principles of inclusion and equity in the class. ESD professionals learn about issues like sexual harassment, child abuse and mandatory reporting laws, confidentiality protocols, and the handling of personal relationships or conflicts of interest in a professional setting. They also understand how ESD connects to social justice movements, for example, how gender-based violence and identity-based violence (racism, homophobia, etc.) impact their participants’ lives, and how ESD training can be a tool for empowerment and change. This domain encourages instructors to view themselves as part of a larger effort to challenge systemic violence and to advocate for safer communities (aligning with the “Responsibility to Society” pillar of ethics). It also covers the importance of evidence-based practice: staying informed on research about violence prevention and ESD efficacy.
5. **Classroom Management and Instructional Skills:** Practical teaching competencies to effectively run ESD sessions. ESD professionals are trained to design and adapt lesson plans for different audiences, manage class time and energy, and employ interactive teaching methods. Key skills include: creating structured yet flexible curricula, using scenarios and role-plays appropriately, managing co-teaching dynamics, and ensuring classes are engaging and inclusive for all participants. Instructors must understand concepts like scope of practice

(teaching within one's expertise), how to layer concepts progressively, and how to incorporate games or exercises that reinforce skills. They also learn the importance of record-keeping (documenting attendance, incidents, feedback) and have protocols for emergencies or incidents (such as reporting any injuries or disclosures of abuse). Classroom management extends to maintaining professionalism – being punctual, prepared, and modeling confidence and respect, as well as fostering body-positive and empowering atmospheres for students of all body types and backgrounds.

Recommended Training and Experience: While ESD professionals come from a variety of backgrounds (some from martial arts, some from education, social work, etc.), there are general recommendations for training and experience before one seeks professional credentialing. The IAESDP does not mandate a specific course or a minimum number of years of experience to become a credential candidate (to accommodate diverse paths and international contexts). However, it is recommended that aspiring ESD professionals have at least 100 hours combined of ESD-specific education/training AND teaching or assisting in ESD classes prior to taking the ESD Professional credentialing exam. Such education is best obtained under the mentorship or supervision of experienced ESD instructors and can be supplemented by independent study and practice teaching. Hands-on teaching experience (including leading or co-leading courses, assisting senior instructors, and managing groups of participants) is invaluable for developing confidence and practical skills. Additionally, familiarity with adjacent fields – e.g. some knowledge of martial arts or other self-defense systems, trauma counseling, gender studies, etc. – can be beneficial, though martial arts expertise is *not* required to be an ESD instructor. Ultimately, candidates should self-assess their readiness by reviewing the full scope of core competencies and using resources like the Credential Exam Handbook to identify any knowledge gaps.

Continuing Education: Professional competence is maintained and enhanced through ongoing learning. It is an industry standard (and a requirement for credential renewal) that ESD professionals pursue continuing education (CE) to stay current in best practices. The IAESDP's credential renewal cycle is every three years, meaning a credentialed ESD professional must engage in approved continuing education courses within each three-year period to renew their ESDP credential. Continuing education can include advanced training in ESD techniques, courses on related topics like trauma psychology or teaching methodologies, or other professional development relevant to violence prevention. The Association itself offers some CE courses (including on topics like ethics and business management for ESD instructors) and also recognizes courses by accredited ESD

providers in the broader community. This ensures that practitioners are always improving their skills and knowledge base, incorporating the latest research, and refining their teaching strategies for greater effectiveness.

By defining these competency domains and encouraging robust training and continuous learning, the ESD profession safeguards the quality of instruction delivered to the public. Practitioners are not only competent in self-defense techniques but are also skilled educators and empathetic facilitators. This comprehensive standard helps differentiate Empowerment Self-Defense from other forms of self-defense or martial arts by its focus on empowerment, trauma-informed methods, and social context.

Credentialing and Certification Requirements

One of the pillars of professionalizing the ESD field is the Credentialing Program for individual instructors. Credentialing provides a formal, portable recognition of an ESD professional's qualifications, akin to a certification or license in other industries. The International Association of ESD Professionals (IAESDP) administers a global credential known as the **ESD Professional (ESDP) Credential**, which signals that an individual has demonstrated the requisite competence, experience, and ethical commitment in the practice of empowerment self-defense. The credentialing initiative was developed through extensive research and consultation with the worldwide ESD community, following best practices for certification exams and professional standards.

Credentialing Process: To earn the ESDP credential, candidates must successfully complete a comprehensive Credentialing Exam that tests their knowledge and skills across the core competencies described above. The exam is typically modular, covering the range of topics across the five domains. The IAESDP offers the exam at scheduled intervals (for example, quarterly exam periods) and manages applications and administration accordingly. Candidates apply for an exam seat and, if accepted, undertake the exam during the specified period remotely via a proctored, cloud-based software.

Upon passing the exam, the candidate is awarded the ESDP Credential. This credential is more than a title, it represents that the instructor's practice is in alignment with the principles of ESD and that they have demonstrated professional competence, a commitment to violence prevention, and high ethical standards. In other words, a Credentialed ESD Professional has been vetted for both skill and integrity, distinguishing them within the self-defense and violence-prevention industry.

The credentialing program was inaugurated in 2022 as a multi-part initiative. It consists of:

- **Part 1: ESD Professional Credential:** Qualifying for and passing the Credentialing Exam, resulting in the issuance of the ESDP credential to successful candidates. IAESDP has established this exam to be a fair, valid measure of the core competencies, using psychometrically-sound development methods (in line with ISO/NCCA standards for certification exams). There are no strict prerequisites (any experienced ESD practitioner may apply), but recommended preparation is provided (see Professional Competence section). The Association may provide resources like an Exam Handbook, core competency outline, and study suggestions for candidates. The exam is typically offered multiple times per year on an application basis, and fees are tiered to ensure accessibility across different economic contexts.
- **Part 2: Continuing Education and Renewal:** ESDP credential-holders must renew their credential every three years to remain in good standing. Renewal involves completing a required number of continuing education units (CEUs) or approved professional development activities within each three-year cycle. This ensures that credentialed professionals stay up-to-date and continue to grow in their practice. The continuing education can be fulfilled by taking courses from accredited ESD providers or certain courses offered by the Association (for example, ethics refreshers, business management, or advanced instructional skills). The renewal process underscores the commitment to lifelong learning and quality maintenance in the profession.
- **Part 3: Accreditation of Training Providers:** The Accreditation component recognizes institutions or programs that train ESD instructors (often called train-the-trainer programs or ESD certification courses). Rather than the individual practitioner, this applies to organizations – for instance, an ESD curriculum offered by a nonprofit, or a certification course run by a network of instructors. The independent ESD Credentialing Committee (ECC) develops standards for such program accreditation, ensuring that these programs meet high quality benchmarks in curriculum, teaching methodology, assessment of students, and organizational policies. Programs that apply and meet these standards become Accredited ESD Certification Programs, meaning their graduates can be confident they were trained to an industry-approved level, and the programs themselves are recognized on the Association’s platform. (Accreditation is detailed more in the next section, but it forms a key part of the overall credentialing ecosystem by strengthening the training pipeline.)

- **Part 4: ESD Associate Credential:** To measure the standards and quality of the instructors coming out of training programs, the IAESDP has created an entry-level credential. The ESD Associate Credentialing Exam measures the competency and integrity of candidates who have finished training but may have little to no teaching experience, ensuring they can begin their ESD careers with an industry-backed credential. Qualifying for and passing the Associate Credentialing Exam results in the issuance of the ESD Associate (ESDA) credential to successful candidates. This exam has been developed with ESD professionals worldwide using psychometrically-sound development methods in line with ISO/NCCA standards for certification exams. Any ESD instructor who has completed a training program may apply. The Association may provide resources like an Exam Handbook, core competency outline, and study suggestions for candidates. The exam will be offered multiple times per year on an application basis, and fees are tiered to ensure accessibility across different economic contexts and are significantly lower than fees for the ESDP exam.

The governance of the credentialing process is carefully structured for impartiality and credibility. The Credentialing Advisory Committee or ECC operates at arm's length from the Association's membership and leadership, following rules set by international standardization bodies. In fact, the IAESDP's credentialing efforts adhere to requirements of the ISO/IEC 17024 standard for personnel certification bodies and the guidelines of the National Commission for Certifying Agencies (NCCA), which demand rigor, fairness, and avoidance of conflicts of interest. For example, the ECC includes subject matter experts, community representatives, and members of the public, and its policies ensure that no single organization, including the Association itself, can unduly influence the outcomes. Program content is established by practitioners and validated by community input and research according to transparent criteria. The IAESDP provides administrative support (e.g. exam application handling, technical infrastructure, and funding for the process) but does not interfere in exam development, accreditation decisions, or candidate evaluation to maintain equity and impartiality.

Ethical Conduct and Credential Maintenance: Holding the ESDP credential comes with the responsibility to uphold the ESD Code of Ethics and all standards in this guide on an ongoing basis. Credentialed professionals pledge to follow the IAESDP Code of Ethics (which, as noted, aligns with the broader ESD community ethics). Violations of ethical standards or professional misconduct can result in disciplinary action by the credentialing body, including possible revocation of the credential. The Association's code provides for a peer-review process to handle alleged ethics breaches, separate from any legal

proceedings. In practice, this means that if a complaint is raised about a credentialed ESD instructor – for example, a report of abusive behavior towards students or a serious safety negligence – the case can be reviewed by an ethics committee or review board within the Association, and if substantiated, the instructor could face sanctions such as required remediation, suspension, or loss of credential. This enforcement mechanism is essential to ensure the credential truly signifies ongoing adherence to high standards, not just one-time exam performance. It also provides an avenue of accountability to the public and oversight bodies, demonstrating that the ESD profession is capable of self-regulation in the interest of public safety.

In summary, the ESD Professional Credentialing process creates a credentialed workforce of ESD practitioners who have proven their competence and agreed to uphold a shared standard of ethics. For ESD professionals, obtaining a credential is a mark of distinction and commitment. For the public and partnering organizations, a credential offers a way to identify instructors who are qualified and trustworthy. And for the field at large, it helps unify a global standard, as credentials are the same across borders – an instructor in any country who holds the ESDP or ESDA has met the same criteria, which facilitates international recognition and cooperation in ESD initiatives. The credentialing program is therefore a cornerstone in professionalizing Empowerment Self-Defense as a discipline.

Accreditation of ESD Training Programs and Providers

In addition to individual credentials, the ESD industry maintains quality through the accreditation of training programs. Accreditation is a voluntary but rigorous process by which ESD instructor-training programs (sometimes called “certification courses” or “train-the-trainer” programs) are evaluated against established standards. The goal is to confirm that those who *teach the teachers* are themselves maintaining excellence, ensuring new instructors entering the field have been properly prepared and vetted.

Accreditation Standards: The standards for accrediting ESD training programs are set by the ESD Credentialing Committee (ECC), functioning independently under guidelines from ISO and NCCA. These standards likely cover areas such as:

- **Curriculum Content:** The program’s curriculum should comprehensively cover the core ESD competencies (technical skills, teaching methods, ethics, etc.) and reflect the current state of knowledge in the field. It must instill the values and principles outlined in this guide, including empowerment philosophy, trauma-informed approach, and cultural inclusivity.

- **Instructor Qualifications:** Those who lead or facilitate the trainer program must themselves be experienced and credentialed ESD professionals (or equivalently qualified). They should model the ethical standards and best practices expected of the profession.
- **Assessment of Candidates:** The program should have a robust method for assessing the trainees (future instructors) to ensure they have mastered the material. This could include written tests, practical demonstrations of teaching ability, simulations, etc. Assessments must be fair, valid, and aligned with the program's learning objectives.
- **Safety and Ethics Policies:** The training program must enforce safety protocols during training (since trainees will practice teaching and techniques with each other) and uphold the ESD Code of Ethics. This includes having policies for addressing any misconduct, providing a harassment-free learning environment, and ensuring any teaching practice by trainees is supervised for safety.
- **Administration and Impartiality:** The organization running the program should demonstrate sound administration; clear admissions criteria, non-discriminatory policies, record-keeping, and feedback mechanisms. If the program issues its own certificates to graduates, it should do so impartially and based on merit. Impartiality also means the program avoids conflicts of interest (e.g. not guaranteeing a certificate in exchange for donations, etc.) and is open to audit or review by the accrediting committee.
- **Alignment with Industry Guidelines:** The program's structure and content should align with industry-recognized frameworks for instructor training. Because the ECC's accreditation standards are informed by ISO/NCCA, they likely emphasize that the program follows a continuous improvement model, regularly updating curriculum based on new research or feedback, involving stakeholders in program development, and maintaining transparency.

When a program meets these requirements, it becomes an **Accredited ESD Certification Program** and is listed by the Association as such. This status signals to prospective instructor-trainees that the program is trustworthy and covers what they need to become competent ESD professionals. It also aids employers or partners in identifying quality training sources.

Accreditation Process: Programs typically must apply to the ECC for accreditation. This involves submitting detailed documentation (curricula, instructor resumes, policies, assessment tools, etc.) and undergoing a video review or observation. Accreditation might also entail site visits or virtual audits where committee members observe part of the

training or interview participants. Because the IAESDP itself is an industry association that offers programs, it has taken measures to keep the accreditation process independent. The ECC's rules *preclude influence from specific organizations*, including the Association, to maintain fairness. IAESDP's role is limited to support (technical, administrative, or minor funding), but it does not vote on or decide which programs get accredited. This separation ensures that whether an ESD program is run by an IAESDP member or a completely separate entity, it is judged by the same impartial criteria.

Once accredited, programs must uphold the standards and undergo periodic re-evaluation. Accreditation is time-limited (e.g. a 3-5 year period before renewal review) to ensure ongoing compliance. Accredited programs are authorized to use a special seal or designation in their marketing (indicating "Accredited by the International Association of ESD Professionals"). They also become part of the ecosystem supporting the credentialing process: for instance, continuing education courses offered by an accredited program are recognized for ESDP renewal.

Benefits and Oversight: The accreditation system benefits multiple stakeholders. For training organizations, it provides a clear target for program quality and an external validation of their efforts. For the public and employers, it offers assurance that instructors certified through an accredited program have learned in an environment meeting global standards. For the ESD field, it helps harmonize instructor training worldwide, so that an instructor certified in one country has comparable training to one certified elsewhere. The ECC monitors accredited programs for compliance and may address any complaints or issues (for example, if an accredited program were to violate ethical standards, it could lose accreditation).

In summary, accreditation is the mechanism by which the ESD profession extends its regulatory framework to organizations and ensures that the pipeline of new instructors remains strong and ethical. Coupled with individual credentialing, it creates a full circle: quality programs produce quality instructors, who then uphold standards in the field, all reinforcing the mission of violence prevention and empowerment through consistent, high-quality ESD education.

Mandatory Legal and Regulatory Compliance

ESD professionals must not only follow industry standards but also comply with all applicable laws and regulations in the jurisdictions where they operate. While ESD is a relatively new professional domain and thus not heavily regulated by specific statutes in

most countries, there are numerous general laws and regulatory considerations that ESD practitioners and organizations must heed. Below are key areas of legal compliance that are typically mandatory or non-negotiable. These represent baseline obligations—failing to meet them can result in legal liability or disqualification from practice, regardless of adherence to voluntary standards:

- **Health and Safety Regulations:** ESD instructors are responsible for the physical safety of their students during training sessions. They must comply with any local health and safety requirements for training facilities; for example, having safe training equipment, first aid kits, emergency action plans, and certified first aid/CPR training for instructors. Many jurisdictions require that any organized physical activity (especially with minors) have safety protocols and emergency preparedness in place. ESD classes should abide by these general safety laws such as maximum class sizes for safe supervision, facility occupancy limits, etc. If operating a physical studio, building and fire codes (e.g. clear exits, proper mats to prevent slips) must be followed. While these specifics vary, duty of care is a legal principle universally relevant, meaning instructors must take reasonable precautions to prevent foreseeable harm. This aligns with the ethical mandate of providing competent, sound instruction in a safe environment.
- **Child Protection and Mandatory Reporting:** Many ESD programs work with youth or vulnerable populations. In numerous countries (including the U.S. and many EU states), there are laws aimed at protecting minors that mandate background checks and vetting for anyone working in a position of trust with children. ESD professionals teaching minors should undergo the required criminal background checks (and periodically renew them) as required by law or local regulations. Additionally, instructors must be aware of mandatory reporting laws concerning abuse. If, in the course of their work, an instructor learns of a minor or other vulnerable person being abused, many jurisdictions legally require that instructor to report this to child protection services or authorities. The Code of Ethics reinforces this duty: it heightens the obligation to intervene or report abuse when vulnerable groups like children are involved. Therefore, ESD professionals should be trained on how to handle disclosures of abuse and know the reporting channels in their local area. Some regions may also require specific child safeguarding certifications or adherence to youth camp licensure regulations for organizations offering youth self-defense workshops. For example, in the U.S., the Safe Sport Act and related state laws require youth sports and training programs to implement abuse prevention training and policies; ESD programs for youth would fall under similar best practices if not legal mandates.

- **Background Checks and Instructor Licensing:** Even outside youth contexts, certain countries or local authorities might require a form of professional license or permit to offer self-defense instruction. In the absence of government licensing specific to ESD, this often falls under general business licensing (see below) or affiliation with recognized bodies. For instance, some areas treat self-defense instructors similar to martial arts instructors or fitness trainers, where registration or proof of certification can be needed. In a broad sense, it is advisable (and sometimes compulsory) for ESD instructors to hold a professional certification such as the ESDP credential or a recognized self-defense instructor certificate to establish legitimacy. In some areas, authorities may require instructors to show credentials to rent public facilities or obtain insurance. Always research local requirements: *e.g.* a city might require a permit for running classes in public parks, or a country might require foreign instructors to have work visas or local sponsorship when teaching ESD abroad.
- **Business Registration and Insurance:** Operating as an ESD trainer or running an ESD program typically constitutes a business or professional service. Thus, compliance with business laws is essential. This includes obtaining a general business license if required by your city/country for offering instructional services, paying relevant taxes, and following any zoning regulations for training locations (some areas restrict running classes out of residential properties without permits, for example). Alongside licensing, maintaining appropriate liability insurance is often effectively mandatory. While in many places insurance isn't enforced by law, it is required by practical necessity; venues often demand proof of liability insurance, and any serious program will carry it to protect against potential lawsuits. Liability insurance for ESD covers injuries that might occur during training or claims arising from the instruction. Additionally, if you employ staff or volunteers, local law may require worker's compensation insurance, and if you handle vehicles (*e.g.* driving to outreach sites), auto insurance rules apply. ESD organizations should also adhere to financial regulations, such as maintaining proper accounting, honoring consumer protection laws (truthful advertising, fair refund policies), and if operating as nonprofits, complying with charity laws.
- **Data Protection and Privacy Laws:** ESD professionals often collect personal data from participants (contact information, sometimes sensitive disclosures). In jurisdictions like the European Union, the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) imposes strict rules on collecting, storing, and using personal data. This means ESD organizations in or serving the EU must have consent forms, privacy notices, and secure data storage for participant information. Similarly, other regions have privacy laws (such as PIPEDA in Canada, various state laws in the U.S.,

etc.). Compliance requires keeping participant data confidential, using it only for stated purposes (e.g. class communication), and safeguarding it from breaches. This dovetails with the ethical standard of confidentiality, beyond being an ethical obligation, protecting participant privacy is a legal one. Posting photos or testimonials of students, for instance, should only be done with written consent. ESD instructors should be aware of regulations concerning minors' data as well (e.g. parental consent for minors, not sharing identifying details of minors publicly).

- **Anti-Discrimination and Employment Law:** Any ESD business or class open to the public must abide by anti-discrimination laws in hiring and in service provision. For example, laws often prohibit denying participation based on race, religion, gender, etc. ESD's ethos is inclusive, and legally this inclusion is supported by civil rights laws in many countries. If an ESD professional hires staff or collaborates with others, they become subject to labor laws; providing at least minimum wage, following regulations on working hours, and maintaining a harassment-free workplace. The IAESDP Code explicitly notes that ESD professionals should abide by local employment laws and provide fair compensation. In some countries, small operators may be exempt from some labor rules, but as soon as one is an employer or running larger programs, full compliance is required (e.g. paying social security contributions, not violating overtime rules, etc.). Also, some countries mandate professional indemnity or bonding in certain sectors; while not common for self-defense instructors, it's worth checking local professional requirements.
- **Intellectual Property and Training Materials:** When using curricula, scenarios, or materials that were developed by others (such as an ESD class curriculum), instructors should respect copyright and licensing laws. For example, if an accredited program has proprietary materials, a trainer should not illegally copy or distribute them beyond allowed use. Also, any media (videos, images) used in teaching should be properly licensed. While this is a more specific compliance area, it's important for maintaining professional integrity and avoiding legal disputes with content creators.
- **Use-of-Force and Self-Defense Laws:** While not a direct regulation on teaching, ESD professionals should have knowledge of the local self-defense laws (what is legally considered self-defense, what tools are legal, etc.) because they inform what can be responsibly taught. For instance, some countries have restrictions on teaching certain techniques deemed too dangerous, or on carrying self-defense tools like pepper spray or knives. An instructor who educates participants about self-defense should not encourage actions that would be illegal. Therefore, understanding the legal definitions of reasonable force and self-defense in one's

region is part of responsible, legally compliant instruction and can be an educational point in ESD curricula.

In fulfilling these mandatory compliance areas, ESD professionals demonstrate that they operate with accountability and legitimacy. It protects the participants by providing a safe and lawful service and protects the instructor/organization by reducing risk of legal penalties or harm to reputation. Oversight authorities and partnering organizations will specifically look for evidence of such compliance, e.g., does the instructor have a recent background check? Is there insurance coverage? Are privacy policies in place? This guide strongly advises all ESD entities to treat these legal requirements as the foundation on which the higher ideals of ESD are built.

Voluntary Industry Standards and Best Practices

Beyond the hard requirements of law and the broad mandates of ethics, the ESD professional community has developed a range of voluntary standards, guidelines, and best practices. These are not necessarily legally required, but they are strongly recommended to achieve excellence and uphold the spirit of Empowerment Self-Defense. Embracing these practices helps professionals exceed the minimum and truly align with the field's most progressive and effective approaches. Many of these guidelines arise from collective experience, research insights, and the "community code" of ESD developed over years. Below are key voluntary standards and recommended practices:

- **Trauma-Informed and Empowering Pedagogy:** ESD training should be delivered in a trauma-informed manner, even if not legally mandated. This means instructors proactively create an environment that is sensitive to trauma survivors: they offer opt-out choices for any activity, avoid unnecessarily graphic content, and use empowering language such as not victim-blaming and acknowledging the impact of trauma. A best practice is to establish *ground rules* or group agreements at the start of training that emphasize respect, confidentiality, and self-care (participants can step out if needed). Additionally, techniques like ensuring any physical demonstration or contact is *observable and interruptible by others* to prevent the isolation of a student are considered gold-standard. This guideline from the Community Code of Ethics is voluntarily adopted by many programs to promote transparency and safety in classes. In sum, even where not explicitly required, ESD professionals should consistently apply consent-based, student-centered teaching methods to maximize psychological safety and empowerment.

- **Cultural Competence and Inclusivity:** ESD professionals are encouraged to continually improve their cultural competence. This includes learning about and being respectful of the cultures and communities they serve, adapting examples and teaching styles to be relevant and inclusive. For instance, an instructor might learn key phrases in the local language when teaching abroad or incorporate scenarios that are culturally appropriate for a particular group while still reinforcing core principles. Voluntary standards here also mean actively welcoming marginalized groups, e.g. ensuring LGBTQ+ participants feel included by using gender-inclusive language, or ensuring venues are accessible to people with disabilities even if not legally compelled by a disability act. Anti-racist and anti-oppression practices are a crucial voluntary commitment: instructors should engage in ongoing learning about bias and systemic inequalities and strive to make their classes actively equitable (for example, by using diverse examples, addressing power dynamics openly, and challenging stereotypes). The ESD Community Code highlights using anti-racist language and acknowledging the role of colonialism and racism in systemic violence; while not every association mandates this explicitly, it is a best practice to integrate such perspectives into one's teaching.
- **Continual Professional Development:** In addition to mandatory continuing education for credential renewal, ESD professionals are encouraged to pursue learning opportunities above and beyond the minimum. This can include attending global ESD conferences, participating in webinars or idea exchanges, reading current research on violence prevention, and perhaps cross-training in complementary fields (e.g. conflict resolution, psychology, martial arts for additional perspective, etc.). A strong norm in the community is the idea of being a "lifelong learner." The Association's Code encourages professionals to stay updated with research-informed practices and even contribute to scholarly work. For example, an instructor might read the latest study on ESD program outcomes and adjust their curriculum based on findings or join a working group to develop better evaluation tools for ESD. This voluntary commitment to *professional growth* ensures that ESD practice does not become static or outdated.
- **Mentorship and Peer Collaboration:** ESD is a collegial field, and new instructors benefit greatly from mentorship by experienced instructors. It is recommended that programs establish mentorship opportunities and that seasoned professionals make themselves available to advise or coach newcomers. Likewise, peer review of one's teaching (such as inviting a colleague to observe a class and give feedback) is a valuable practice not required by any authority but extremely useful for maintaining quality. Many instructors also choose to join professional networks or associations (like IAESDP membership or regional groups) even if not required, to

gain access to resources, discussion forums, and support. This networking can improve consistency in standards across the field and combat isolation since many ESD instructors work as solo entrepreneurs.

- **Ethical Business Practices and Transparency:** While laws cover the basics, ESD professionals should hold themselves to higher standards in how they run their programs. For example, beyond legal requirements, best practices include: using sliding scale fees or scholarships generously to include those with limited ability to pay, reinforcing ESD’s mission of accessibility; being transparent about course content and outcomes, avoiding any exaggerated claims about what a short course can accomplish; and setting clear ethical policies for their businesses, such as a written code of conduct for staff, or a conflict-of-interest policy if they are in a position of authority. Some ESD organizations voluntarily adopt a “Survivor-centered approach” in their policies, meaning if any participant experiences harm or misconduct, the response is focused on the survivor’s needs and choices, which goes beyond what the law might strictly require. Additionally, many follow the guideline that if offering scholarships or free classes, those recipients should not be treated differently, such as no special chores or marketing exploits, than paying students, purely as an ethical courtesy and to avoid any semblance of exploitation.
- **Community Engagement and Advocacy:** ESD professionals are uniquely positioned as advocates for safer communities. Beyond teaching classes, a best practice is to engage in community education and advocacy. This could mean volunteering information sessions on ESD principles, partnering with local schools, women’s shelters, or youth groups to spread awareness, or advocating for policy changes like better school anti-bullying policies or legal protections for self-defense. The Association’s ethical guidelines talk about responsibility to society, which includes activities like contributing to violence prevention initiatives, supporting human rights, and participating in public discussions or campaigns related to ending violence. While not required, many ESD professionals choose to involve themselves in such efforts, seeing it as part of their role to address the root causes of violence and not just teach individual skills. This might also involve engaging with research studies, allowing one’s class data to be used in ESD research, or sharing success stories and challenges to build the case for ESD’s effectiveness globally.
- **Respecting Territorial Boundaries and Engaging in Professional Courtesy:** When working in a geographic area where another ESD instructor or program is already established, professionals are encouraged to proactively communicate with local colleagues in advance. This outreach fosters transparency, avoids misunderstandings, and can open opportunities for collaboration rather than

conflict. As such, communication with other ESD instructors and organizations should be grounded in principles of mindful and respectful dialogue, including truthfulness, non-defensive listening, and openness to shared solutions. ESD professionals strive to resolve tensions directly and in good faith, avoiding gossip, defamation, or competitive undercutting. When needed, a neutral facilitator can support conflict resolution. The goal is to promote harassment-free, inclusive, and cooperative environments among instructors. This professional courtesy honors the diverse approaches in the field, supports local community trust, and models the very de-escalation and empowerment skills we teach. Sharing universal principles, responsible citation of sources, and open acknowledgment of others' work further reinforces a collaborative culture.

- **Quality Assurance and Feedback:** Another voluntary practice is implementing internal quality assurance. For example, instructors can collect feedback from participants after courses through surveys or debrief circles to gauge what's working and what can be improved. Programs might voluntarily undergo external reviews or seek dual accreditation to continuously elevate their standards. Some ESD providers establish advisory committees including past students or community members to keep their training relevant and responsive. These steps go above minimum requirements and demonstrate a commitment to excellence and accountability to the community served.

By adhering to these voluntary standards, ESD professionals demonstrate a level of professionalism and care that builds trust with the public and stakeholders. These practices often differentiate truly exemplary programs. Oversight bodies and credentialing agencies encourage such measures, even if they do not audit them directly. In essence, the voluntary guidelines help ensure that ESD remains not just compliant, but compassionate, innovative, and community-driven – staying true to its empowerment philosophy.

Governance and Enforcement of Standards

To maintain the credibility and efficacy of these industry regulations, clear mechanisms of governance and enforcement are in place. Governance refers to how decisions about standards are made and updated, and enforcement refers to how compliance with standards is monitored and remedied.

Standards Governance: The primary steward of ESD professional standards at the global level is the International Association of ESD Professionals (IAESDP) along with its allied

committees (like the ECC). The IAESDP, being a membership-based industry association, has a governance structure that includes a Board of Directors with regional representation and various committees for specific tasks. Major decisions about industry standards – such as adopting a Code of Ethics, establishing core competencies, or adjusting credentialing processes – are often made through a combination of expert input and community feedback. For example, the development of the Code of Ethics involved intensive review of multiple professional codes and sources, with citations and input from global practitioners. The Core Competencies were created through ESD expert advisory councils and consultation with experts worldwide. The Credentialing Committee (ECC), as noted, operates under rules aligned with ISO/NCCA to ensure that standard-setting for exam content and accreditation criteria is impartial and in line with best practices. The IAESDP also solicits ongoing input from the ESD community via suggestion boxes or working groups to evolve these standards over time.

Updates to this regulations document or related policies are expected as the field grows. The governance approach is intended to be inclusive and transparent, balancing the formal requirements of being a professional body with the grassroots wisdom of practitioners. Notably, IAESDP's membership votes on major industry decisions, and there are policies to manage conflicts of interest given that board members or committee members may also run training businesses. This democratic and structured governance helps ensure the standards remain relevant, equitable, and broadly supported.

Enforcement and Compliance Monitoring: Having standards is only meaningful if there are ways to ensure people follow them. In the ESD professional realm, enforcement is primarily peer and organizationally driven, since there is not yet widespread government licensure for ESD instructors. Key enforcement mechanisms include:

- **Credential Maintenance and Disciplinary Action:** For those who are credentialed by IAESDP, adherence to the Code of Ethics is a condition of maintaining the Credential. IAESDP has the authority to investigate complaints against credential holders. If an ESD professional is reported to have violated ethical standards or demonstrated incompetence that endangers others, an Ethics Committee or Peer Review Panel can be convened. According to the Association's policy, alleged violations of the Code trigger a peer review process within the Association, separate from legal proceedings. The panel can review evidence, hear from the involved parties, and determine if a violation occurred. Possible outcomes range from recommendations for additional training to suspension or revocation of membership/credential. Importantly, while such internal proceedings do not carry the force of law (they cannot impose criminal penalties), they are insulated from

legal review to maintain autonomy. This means the Association can enforce standards in a professional context without needing a court's approval, though of course serious illegal conduct would be handled by authorities separately. This dual system, legal vs. professional accountability, is clearly delineated to protect due process in both realms.

- **Accreditation Oversight:** Accredited training programs similarly face oversight. The ECC may require annual reports or conduct periodic re-evaluations of accredited programs. If a program is found to be deviating from standards (for instance, an accredited organization is the subject of multiple serious complaints, or an audit finds they've watered down their curriculum), the ECC can place the program on probation or revoke accreditation. This provides quality control on the organizational level. The separation of the accreditation committee from the Association's leadership ensures that decisions are made based on standards and evidence, not politics. For example, if an accredited program were run by someone on the IAESDP Board, that program doesn't get a "free pass" – the ECC's independence ensures that even influential members must meet the same criteria as anyone else, avoiding favoritism.
- **Community Reporting and Self-Regulation:** The ESD community at large plays a role in upholding standards. Since many ESD professionals are interconnected through networks, conferences, and social media, information about unethical behavior or substandard practices can surface through the community. A strong professional culture encourages addressing such issues constructively: colleagues might approach a peer with concerns or bring matters to the Association if needed. The IAESDP provides contact points such as an ethics complaint form for reporting concerns. The IAESDP acknowledges that concerns like bias, favoritism, or conflicts of interest in the industry have been addressed by learning from other industries and setting up proper guidelines. The Association is aware of the pitfalls and is actively working to maintain trust through clear policies and responsiveness to member concerns.
- **Oversight by External Entities:** In some cases, enforcement comes from outside the profession. For instance, if an ESD program is part of a school curriculum, school administrators will observe classes and ensure they meet educational standards. If an instructor is contracted by a government grant, the granting agency may have monitoring and evaluation requirements. While these aren't enforcement of "ESD standards" per se, they can indirectly enforce quality (e.g., a school might drop an instructor who is not engaging students well or who breaches school rules). To facilitate clarity for such oversight, this document can be used by those authorities as a benchmark: for example, a university hiring an ESD trainer could

reference this guide to vet that the trainer follows recognized practices in safety and ethics.

- **Legal Enforcement:** Of course, if an ESD professional violates a law such as committing abuse, fraud, or negligence resulting in serious injury, legal enforcement steps in via law enforcement or civil litigation. This falls outside professional self-regulation and into the realm of law. The standards in this guide encourage compliance to avoid such situations, but in the unfortunate event they occur, the individual would face legal consequences just like any other citizen. The professional community would likely also respond (e.g., an instructor convicted of a violent crime would almost certainly lose any credentials or standing).

Impartiality and Fairness: A key governance principle is impartiality. The involvement of diverse stakeholders including members from different regions and unaffiliated experts in boards and committees helps prevent any one faction from dominating decisions. Policies like conflict-of-interest disclosures and recusal (e.g., one does not vote on a complaint about one's own colleague) are in place to uphold fairness. This is critical for enforcement credibility, professionals need to trust that standards are applied evenly. If an ethical breach is handled, the process should be consistent whether the person is a veteran leader or a newcomer.

Continuous Improvement: Enforcement is not only about punitive measures; it's also about learning and improving the standards themselves. The Association analyzes ethical dilemmas and feedback from enforcement cases to update training and guidance. For example, if multiple instructors struggle with a particular issue (say, handling social media boundaries with students), the Association might create a guideline or training module to address it, rather than only disciplining individuals. In this way, governance is adaptive.

In conclusion, the ESD profession employs a blend of self-regulation and external oversight to enforce the standards laid out in this document. Certifying bodies like IAESDP act as guardians of quality by setting the rules and holding members accountable, while also remaining open to input and oversight in their own operations. This ensures that ESD professionals are not only well-trained and well-intentioned at the outset, but remain accountable throughout their careers, thereby protecting the public and advancing the field's legitimacy.

Global and Regional Considerations

Empowerment Self-Defense is a global movement, practiced in many countries and cultural contexts. While the core principles and standards outlined above are intended to be universally applicable, practical implementation can vary based on regional laws, customs, and needs. This section provides additional notes on how ESD industry regulations apply in different regions, and it introduces appendices that detail specific regional compliance considerations.

Broadly, an ESD professional should always adapt to local context while upholding global standards. This means being aware of and respecting local legal requirements which may add to or supersede some recommendations in this guide and cultural norms which may influence how certain concepts are taught or received. It also means recognizing that support structures for ESD such as professional associations or certifying bodies may differ by region; in some places, a national martial arts federation might oversee self-defense programs, whereas in others the ESD community might be organized through NGOs or informal networks.

The following appendices provide region-specific guidance. These are not exhaustive, but highlight key points for some major regions.

IMPORTANT NOTE: The appendices in this guidebook may have outdated or incorrect information. Instructors and organizations must do their own research to verify laws and regulations and to ensure compliance. This guidebook is not a replacement for conducting your own research and cannot be used to justify incomplete knowledge or ignorance of laws and regulations applying to ESD instructors and their businesses.

- **Appendix A: United States** – discussing the U.S. context, where there is an active ESD professional community and certain relevant laws (like the Safe Sport Act, Title IX in educational settings, etc.), as well as integration with national standards like NCCA.
- **Appendix B: Europe and European Union** – covering EU-wide regulations such as GDPR and any pan-European initiatives on violence prevention training, plus note on variations among European countries (for example, UK’s requirements for instructors working with youth, or other national qualifications).
- **Appendix C: Canada** – ensuring professional certification, background checks (especially for those working with minors or vulnerable groups), and complying with privacy and accessibility laws, as well as an emphasis on collaboration with

community groups and adherence to Canadian law, restrictions on self-defense tools, and reporting requirements.

- **Appendix D: Africa** – including grassroots growth, community engagement, and cultural sensitivity, with emphasis on strong partnerships with local leaders and organizations, adapting content to local traditions, and prioritizing participant safety, especially in regions facing instability.
- **Appendix E: Asia Pacific** – allowing for diverse cultures and legal systems, requiring adaptation to local customs and regulations, guidance from cultural advisors, and partnerships with local organizations or authorities. Legal requirements, safety concerns, and accreditation standards vary widely.
- **Appendix F: Central and South America** – stressing diverse legal frameworks governing self-defense, privacy, and child protection, and the need to adhere to professional standards set by government agencies, NGOs, or recognized organizations, which may require background checks and curriculum alignment.
- **Appendix G: Other Regions** – covering the need for those teaching in other regions to navigate diverse cultural, legal, and security landscapes by adapting to local norms, collaborating with community partners, ensuring legal compliance, and tailoring programs to participant needs while maintaining core principles of safety and empowerment.

ESD professionals should consult local legal counsel or local authorities when in doubt about compliance matters in a specific country. Furthermore, connecting with local ESD networks or global bodies like ESD Global or regional ESD organizations or chapters of IAESDP can provide insight into how these standards play out on the ground.

By maintaining the global baseline of standards and then layering on regional knowledge, ESD practitioners ensure they are both globally consistent and locally relevant. This approach helps fulfill the ultimate aim: making ESD training safe, ethical, and effective for all communities, everywhere.

In all cases, ESD professionals in any region outside North America/Europe should still hold themselves to the global standards detailed in this document. Even if local requirements are minimal, adhering to high standards will distinguish the quality of their programs and protect participants. Over time, these practitioners often become pioneers, leading by example until formal structures catch up.

Conclusion

This Industry Regulations and Standards Guide for ESD Professionals is meant to be a living document. It sets forth the vision of a globally unified, locally responsive framework for safe, ethical, and effective empowerment self-defense instruction. By following the guidance herein, ESD professionals and organizations contribute to a higher level of professionalism that can be recognized across borders, giving credibility to the field and, most importantly, ensuring that those who seek ESD training for their safety and empowerment are well-served. The ultimate measure of these standards is in lives improved and violence prevented. Through continual compliance, education, and ethical commitment, ESD professionals around the world support the shared mission to end violence and empower individuals and communities.

Sources:

- International Association of ESD Professionals – *Credentialing and Standards Resources* (Core competencies, Credentialing Handbook, Code of Ethics, FAQ)
- ESD Community Code of Ethics (2021) – *Empowerment Self-Defense Alliance*
- Gracie Jiu-Jitsu HB – “Do You Need a License to Teach Martial Arts?” (Blog, Oct 2024)
- U.S. Safe Sport Act (2017) and related coaching compliance guidelines (as referenced in industry commentary)
- GDPR (EU Regulation 2016/679) – general data protection obligations for instructors collecting personal data.
- IAESDP Organizational Policies – *Governing Policies document* (for internal standards on impartiality, DEI, etc.)

Appendix A: United States

In the United States, Empowerment Self-Defense professionals operate against a backdrop of established self-defense, martial arts, and fitness industries, but without a specific federal licensing system for ESD. Here are key points for U.S. compliance and standards context:

- **Professional Certification and NCCA Alignment:** In the U.S., the National Commission for Certifying Agencies (NCCA) accredits certification programs in various professions. The IAESDP's credentialing program is designed to meet NCCA standards, which is a mark of quality recognized in the U.S. education/employment market. While not legally required, having an NCCA-aligned credential (such as ESDP) can enhance credibility. Some employers or insurance providers in the U.S. prefer or require instructors hold a nationally recognized certification.
- **Background Checks and Safe Sport Act:** U.S. federal law (Protecting Young Victims from Sexual Abuse Act of 2017, often referred to as the Safe Sport Act) mandates that amateur athletic organizations involving minors have prevention training and policies for sexual abuse. While ESD is not explicitly an "athletic organization," many ESD programs for youth voluntarily align with these standards. This includes conducting criminal background checks on all instructors and volunteers working with minors and providing training on recognizing and reporting child abuse. Additionally, many youth-serving organizations require adherence to the SafeSport Code (originally developed for sports like gymnastics, etc.). ESD professionals teaching minors in the U.S. should assume that a background check and some form of child abuse awareness training are necessary, either by law or by the policy of the host organization, school, community center, etc.
- **Title IX and Educational Settings:** If an ESD program is delivered in a school or campus in the U.S., Title IX (a federal law against sex-based discrimination in education) may influence how the program is implemented. For example, public schools must ensure that any program, including self-defense classes, is equally accessible regardless of gender. ESD programs often focus on women and girls for empowerment reasons, but in public education settings one may need to frame offerings in a way that meets equity rules or offer complementary programs to all genders. Additionally, many colleges have incorporated ESD as part of campus safety initiatives; those delivering such programs should coordinate with Title IX offices, as disclosures of sexual violence during a class might trigger the college's Title IX reporting processes. Instructors should clarify their role and confidentiality limits in those settings. Understanding the campus policies is crucial.

- **Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA):** Under ADA, any public training or service must be accessible to people with disabilities. ESD instructors in the U.S. should plan for reasonable accommodations, e.g., allowing a participant with a mobility impairment to participate through modified techniques, selecting accessible venues (restroom access, ramps, etc.), and providing materials in alternative formats if needed. While ADA is a legal requirement for public accommodations, voluntarily exceeding ADA minimums like pro-actively creating inclusive curriculum for various ability levels is encouraged.
- **Business Licensing and Insurance (State/Local):** Most U.S. cities or counties require a business license to operate commercially. An independent ESD instructor may need a sole proprietor license or LLC registration, depending on scale. Other states may require additional steps (in California for instance, certain businesses need a state business license and specific local permits). If running a formal school or ongoing program, check local zoning regulations as some residential zones disallow home-based martial arts classes without special permission. Liability insurance is effectively required by most venues; companies in the U.S. offer martial arts insurance for ESD instructors to use. Many IAESDP members avail themselves of industry-specific liability insurance made available through the Association, which is tailored for ESD instructors.
- **Tax-Exempt Status (if Nonprofit):** Some ESD initiatives are structured as nonprofits: 501(c)(3) or 501(c)(4) for charitable/educational orgs, or 501(c)(6) for professional associations like IAESDP. Compliance includes adhering to IRS regulations on nonprofit governance, fundraising, and public reporting. If you operate as or within a nonprofit, be mindful of those rules, like not endorsing political candidates, proper use of funds, etc.
- **Legal Considerations in Teaching Content:** U.S. self-defense law varies by state, but generally allows use of force in reasonable self-defense. ESD instructors typically teach within those bounds (e.g., emphasize using necessary force to escape). If instructors discuss or recommend any self-defense tools (pepper spray, etc.), they should clarify the legalities (currently pepper spray is legal in all 50 states in some form, but stun guns, knives, conceal carry guns, etc. may have restrictions). Though ESD primarily focuses on unarmed strategies, some questions may arise from students about legality, being prepared with accurate, state-specific information is part of professionalism.
- **State-Level Requirements:** A few states have particular requirements for self-defense instructors. For example, some states might require martial arts schools to register or get an occupational license, especially if minors are enrolled (often

under youth camp regulations or vocational training rules). While there's no universal standard, it's advisable to check with state consumer affairs or education departments. California, for instance, does not license self-defense instructors specifically, but businesses must have local permits and if working with kids under certain programs, background check via Live Scan is needed. Some states also require coaches (broadly defined, potentially including self-defense coaches) to take concussion training or similar if the activity is considered part of school athletics – likely not directly applicable to ESD, but any integration with sports or P.E. might bring that up.

In summary, the U.S. environment for ESD professionals emphasizes certification, insurance, and child safety compliance, underpinned by general business law. The professional standards in this guide align well with U.S. expectations as they stress safety, ethical conduct, and continuous education, which match the norms of analogous industries. ESD professionals in the U.S. should stay informed through national networks and perhaps seek guidance from organizations like NWMAF (National Women's Martial Arts Federation) or ESD Global for additional country-specific support.

Appendix B: Europe and European Union

Empowerment Self-Defense in Europe operates within a mosaic of national regulations and EU-wide directives. While not yet mainstream in all EU countries, ESD is gaining recognition, often linked with gender-based violence prevention efforts. Key points for EU context include:

- **Data Protection (GDPR):** The EU's General Data Protection Regulation is a critical compliance area. ESD programs must handle participant data (names, contact info, any personal details) in accordance with GDPR. This means obtaining clear consent for data collection (e.g., on sign-up forms, state how data will be used), securing data properly (protect against breaches), and honoring rights like allowing participants to see or delete their data. As many ESD classes might collect sensitive data (e.g., a checkbox if someone has prior trauma or medical conditions to be aware of), extra care should be taken. Also, if taking photos or videos during training for promotion, written consent is mandatory under GDPR for identifying images. The ethical emphasis on confidentiality supports this – essentially, following the Code of Ethics puts one on the right side of GDPR by default, but formal compliance steps

(documentation, possibly registering as a data controller in some countries) should be done.

- **Professional Qualifications and EU Recognition:** The EU has frameworks for recognizing professional qualifications across member states. While “self-defense instructor” is not a regulated profession in the EU generally, some countries might have martial arts instructor qualifications (often through sports councils). For instance, in France or Spain, there may be state-recognized certifications for sports instructors that could apply to self-defense. ESD practitioners should check if there is a national registry or certification for self-defense/martial arts instructors. Aligning ESD credentials with those frameworks can aid recognition. If an ESD practitioner from one EU country wants to teach in another, under EU law they can do so as long as they meet the host country’s requirements; having a well-documented certification (like ESDP) can help make the case to any local authority that might inquire.
- **Insurance and Liability:** European countries may require event or professional liability insurance. Some countries have national sport insurance systems. Even if not mandated, it’s expected to have insurance when running classes (venues will ask for it). Additionally, many EU countries have strict consumer protection laws: if you offer classes to the public, ensure your terms (payment, cancellation, etc.) comply with regulations (for example, EU directives require fairness in terms and the right to refunds under certain conditions for services).
- **Working with Children and Vulnerable Adults:** Most EU countries have legal checks for those working with minors. The names vary (e.g., DBS check in the UK – though post-Brexit UK is separate from EU now; “certificate of good conduct” in Germany; etc.). ESD programs in Europe often partner with schools or municipalities, which will require instructors to show proof of a clean criminal record, particularly regarding offenses against children. Ensure to obtain the relevant check (often from the police or justice ministry) and keep it updated as required (e.g., every few years). Some countries also mandate specific training on child protection for coaches/teachers. For example, the UK has safeguarding courses for sports coaches; an ESD instructor in a youth setting would be expected to take those. Similarly, the EU has initiatives on protecting children in sport (through organizations like Safe Sport International) that ESD programs might tap into for guidance, even if not law.
- **Gender-Based Violence Initiatives and Funding Compliance:** The EU and Council of Europe have various declarations and recommendations on combating violence against women (e.g., the Istanbul Convention). ESD is often seen as part of the toolkit for these efforts. If an ESD program receives government or EU funding under

violence prevention schemes, there will be compliance requirements attached (like monitoring & evaluation, ensuring trained staff, etc.). For example, an EU-funded project might require that all instructors are trained to certain standards and that the program is evaluated for effectiveness. Keeping documentation of adherence to this global standards guide could serve as evidence of quality in such reporting.

- **Country-specific Notes:**

- *Scandinavia:* Generally high emphasis on gender equality and likely open to ESD in school curriculums, but also strict on teacher qualifications. If ESD is taught in schools, often a certified teacher might need to be present or involved.
- *Central/Eastern Europe:* Some countries might treat self-defense courses under the purview of martial arts federations or Ministries of Sport. For example, in some places, to advertise a “self-defense instructor” course, you might need approval from a sport authority. It’s wise to collaborate with local martial arts or security training organizations for mutual recognition.
- *United Kingdom:* (Not EU, but relevant in Europe) – UK has a relatively regulated environment for coaching. While anyone can teach self-defense, to get insurance through certain brokers you need a certification. The UK has an educational qualification (NVQ) for Self-Defense Instruction under their Qualifications Framework, which some ESD instructors have pursued. Also, the Disclosure and Barring Service (DBS) check is a must for working with youth. The UK often expects integration with “Safeguarding in Martial Arts” guidelines backed by Sport England.

- **Language and Translation:** Europe’s multilingual nature means ESD materials and exams may need translation. Best practice is to ensure all critical documents (like consent forms, ethics codes) are available in the local languages where you teach. The IAESDP has resources in multiple languages, reflecting this need.

In conclusion, ESD professionals in the EU should focus on data privacy, proper vetting for youth instruction, and fitting into existing sport/education structures. By doing so, they not only comply with the law but also gain the trust of local institutions and communities. As ESD gains traction, we may see more formal frameworks in Europe, but currently aligning with these standards and demonstrating professionalism will put instructors in good stead.

Appendix C: Canada

Empowerment Self-Defense (ESD) professionals in Canada operate within a landscape shaped by national, provincial, and municipal regulations that emphasize safety, equity, and professional accountability. While ESD as a specific discipline is not formally regulated at the federal level, instructors and organizations are expected to align their practices with existing frameworks drawn from martial arts, education, and nonprofit sectors. Here are the key compliance and professional considerations in the Canadian context:

- **Professional Certification and Recognition:** There is currently no single national certification for ESD instructors in Canada. However, many ESD practitioners seek credentials from recognized international bodies such as IAESDP, or pursue certifications within related fields like martial arts or fitness instruction. Provincial sport bodies or associations—such as the Canadian Martial Arts Association or local recreation boards—may have guidelines or preferred qualifications for self-defense and safety trainers. Aligning with these standards, where applicable, enhances credibility and access to insurance.
- **Background Checks and Vulnerable Sector Screening:** Working with children, youth, or other vulnerable populations in Canada requires a Vulnerable Sector Check (VSC), which is a specialized police record check. Many ESD programs are delivered in schools, community centres, or through nonprofit organizations, all of which typically require instructors to provide up-to-date VSC documentation. Requirements and processes may vary by province or municipality, but maintaining a clear record is essential for public trust and legal compliance.
- **Provincial Education and Child Safety Standards:** ESD programs integrated into public school curriculums must comply with provincial education ministry standards, including those relating to curriculum content, student safety, and reporting obligations if a disclosure of abuse or violence occurs during training. Instructors must be informed of their duties as “mandatory reporters” in some provinces, and should coordinate with school administration on communication protocols and emergency procedures.
- **Inclusivity and Accessibility:** The Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms and provincial human rights codes guarantee equal access and protection from discrimination based on gender, race, disability, and other grounds. ESD instructors should proactively design programs to be inclusive of people from diverse backgrounds and abilities. Facilities must comply with accessibility standards set

out in legislation like the Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act (AODA), and instructors should be prepared to adapt activities to individual needs.

- **Insurance and Liability:** Most venues require ESD professionals and organizations to carry liability insurance. National and provincial sport insurance providers offer policies suitable for martial arts and self-defense instruction; ESD practitioners should ensure their coverage is up to date and adequate for the types of sessions offered (e.g., youth, adults, nonbinary participants, trauma survivors, etc.). When working independently, instructors often join group insurance plans offered through professional associations.
- **Privacy Laws:** Canada's Personal Information Protection and Electronic Documents Act (PIPEDA) and, in Quebec, the Act Respecting the Protection of Personal Information in the Private Sector, require informed consent for the collection, use, or disclosure of personal information. ESD professionals must handle participant data—such as registration forms, health notes, or contact details—with care, storing information securely and stating clear privacy practices. When collecting sensitive information (such as accommodations for trauma or disabilities), written consent should be explicit, and photos or videos should only be taken with permission.
- **Collaboration with Community Organizations:** Many ESD initiatives in Canada are delivered in partnership with women's shelters, Indigenous organizations, LGBTQ2+ groups, and local NGOs. These partnerships can provide cultural context and support, and may introduce additional compliance requirements—such as Indigenous protocols for working with First Nations, Métis, or Inuit communities, or specific policies for gender-affirming spaces.
- **Legal Considerations in Self-Defense Content:** Canadian self-defense law, as outlined in the Criminal Code, permits reasonable use of force in self-defense, but instructors must be careful to clarify the boundaries of justifiable action. Discussions around self-defense tools (such as pepper spray) must note that many such items are restricted or prohibited in Canada, and ESD programs should focus on lawful, non-weapon-based strategies. Instructors should stay informed about federal and provincial changes to relevant laws and communicate these clearly to participants.
- **Funding and Grant Compliance:** ESD programs that receive government funding—from federal grants, provincial initiatives, or local municipalities—must adhere to reporting, evaluation, and public accountability standards. This often includes demonstrating program effectiveness, financial transparency, and alignment with

public policy goals such as gender-based violence prevention or newcomer integration.

In summary, the Canadian environment for ESD professionals rewards attention to certification, background screening, inclusivity, privacy, and the special requirements of working with minors and vulnerable groups. Aligning with these standards not only ensures compliance but also builds partnerships and credibility. As the field of ESD grows in Canada, maintaining high standards and seeking collaboration with peers and community organizations will help practitioners serve diverse communities across the country.

Appendix D: Africa

Africa presents a diverse and evolving landscape for Empowerment Self-Defense (ESD), with practices ranging from established programs in urban centers to emerging initiatives in rural areas. Here are key considerations specific to the African context:

- **Emerging ESD Movements:** Many African countries are witnessing the growth of ESD through women’s empowerment NGOs, community-based organizations, and grassroots campaigns. In numerous cases, there is little to no formal regulation specific to ESD. As such, the guidance in this document often serves as a foundational reference for program quality and safety.
- **Community Engagement:** Success in African contexts commonly relies on building strong relationships with community leaders, elders, and local authorities. Gaining their support can ensure cultural acceptance, participant safety, and program sustainability. In some areas, partnerships with established organizations—such as women’s shelters or youth groups—help expand reach and credibility.
- **Cultural Sensitivity:** Africa’s cultural diversity means ESD providers must approach gender, violence, and empowerment themes with awareness of local traditions and sensitivities. Adaptations may be needed regarding language, class structure, and addressing topics like sexual violence. Collaborating with local advisors is strongly recommended.
- **Legal Considerations:** Most African nations do not have statutes specifically regulating self-defense instruction. However, general laws around assembly, gender-based violence, and education may influence programming. Instructors should be aware of any national or local rules regarding public gatherings or education, and seek guidance from legal counsel or local NGOs when in doubt.

- **Safety and Security:** In regions with higher risks due to conflict or political instability, ESD trainers must be especially vigilant. Ensuring participant safety, protecting privacy, and considering potential repercussions for those attending classes are paramount. In some cases, discreet or small-group training may be preferred.
- **Accreditation and Recognition:** Where government or vocational accreditation exists, aligning with those frameworks can enhance credibility and employability for ESD instructors. Otherwise, international certifications and adherence to global standards can distinguish programs as reputable and trustworthy.

In summary, African ESD professionals serve as pioneers, often setting the standard in the absence of local regulation. Their work rests heavily on building community trust, demonstrating cultural competence, and emphasizing the safety and empowerment of participants.

Appendix E: Asia-Pacific

The Asia-Pacific region encompasses a vast array of cultures, legal systems, and levels of ESD program development. Here are the main considerations for ESD professionals working in this context:

- **Cultural Sensitivity and Adaptation:** Communities often hold deeply rooted norms regarding gender roles, modesty, and authority. ESD instructors must adapt messaging and teaching methods to align with local values while upholding core empowerment principles. In many countries, gaining the counsel of cultural advisors is essential. For instance, bowing or specific forms of address may be fundamental in class settings, and topics around gender or violence may need to be introduced with care to avoid taboos. Segregating classes by gender may be appropriate or even required in some communities to maximize comfort and participation.
- **Legal and Regulatory Environment:** While many Asia-Pacific countries lack specific regulations for self-defense instructors, general laws still apply. In countries with strict gender segregation or modesty laws, ESD classes for women may legally require a female instructor or need to be held in women-only spaces. Foreign instructors should verify visa requirements, as teaching may be considered a form of work not covered by a tourist visa. In some countries, martial arts instruction is regulated due to security concerns; networking with local authorities and obtaining necessary permissions or partners is wise, especially when introducing new programs.

- **Government and NGO Partnerships:** Several Asia-Pacific countries feature government or NGO-led self-defense initiatives, such as police-run women’s safety camps in India or martial arts-based programs in Southeast Asia. ESD professionals may find opportunities to collaborate and introduce empowerment models, but should be prepared to adapt to existing curricula and reporting requirements.
- **Safety and Political Considerations:** In areas with greater security risks or where self-defense programs may be misunderstood by authorities, ESD trainers need to assess the potential risks, including participant privacy and the possibility of being perceived as dissenters. Seek endorsements from respected local figures when possible and stay attuned to the social and political climate.
- **Accreditation and Professional Development:** Where local accreditation for vocational training exists, aligning ESD courses with those standards strengthens recognition and employability. Collaboration with local martial arts dojos—such as in Japan or Korea—can facilitate the introduction of ESD sessions. Respect for established hierarchies and titles (e.g., not using "sensei" unless officially recognized) is important.
- **Examples:**
 - *Australia:* A strong tradition of self-defense and martial arts exists, with industry standards for instructors (such as coaching accreditation, Working With Children Checks, and first aid certification). ESD practitioners should seek alignment with these established norms.
 - *Japan/Korea:* Self-defense is predominantly taught through martial arts. Opportunities for ESD instruction often involve partnership with existing dojos or schools and require sensitivity to local titles and traditions.

Overall, ESD professionals in the Asia-Pacific region must be adaptable, culturally observant, and proactive in ensuring legal compliance. Building relationships with local organizations, authorities, and cultural leaders is critical for program success and sustainability.

Appendix F: Central and South America

Central and South America encompass a broad spectrum of countries, cultures, and legal frameworks, each presenting unique opportunities and challenges for Empowerment Self-Defense (ESD) programs. Below are key considerations for ESD professionals operating in this dynamic region:

- **Community-Driven Approaches:** Many successful ESD initiatives in Central and South America are deeply rooted in grassroots organizing and partnerships with local NGOs, women’s collectives, and youth groups. Programs frequently address intersecting issues such as gender-based violence, migration, and social inequality. Collaborating with trusted local leaders and organizations enhances credibility, cultural fit, and participant engagement.
- **Cultural Sensitivity and Context:** The region’s diversity—spanning Indigenous, Afro-descendant, mestizo, and immigrant communities—means ESD content must be tailored to local realities. Sensitivity to language (including Indigenous languages), traditions, and community power structures is crucial. Some societies hold traditional views on gender roles or authority, requiring careful adaptation of empowerment messages and teaching strategies. In addition, religion and family structures may play a significant role in how topics like violence and autonomy are addressed.
- **Legal Frameworks:** Most countries in Central and South America do not have ESD-specific regulations, but general laws concerning self-defense, assembly, education, and the prevention of gender-based violence all apply. Instructors should be aware of local statutes regarding the permissible use of force in self-defense, and clearly communicate legal boundaries to participants. Privacy laws, as well as rules governing child protection and mandatory reporting, can vary widely and should be reviewed before program delivery.
- **Government and NGO Partnerships:** Several nations in the region have government-backed campaigns or legal mandates to address violence against women and children, often in partnership with local and international NGOs. ESD practitioners may find opportunities to collaborate within these frameworks, particularly where empowerment and prevention are national priorities. However, such collaborations typically come with reporting requirements, background checks, and alignment with government-endorsed curricula or performance indicators.
- **Safety, Security, and Access:** In some countries or regions, high rates of interpersonal or gang-related violence, as well as political instability, may pose risks to both trainers and participants. Program logistics should prioritize safety—this might mean holding sessions in secure, trusted community spaces, using discreet participant lists, or offering small-group or women-only classes. Collaboration with local security organizations or authorities may be necessary in higher-risk environments.

- **Accreditation, Professional Development, and Recognition:** Where vocational instructor certification exists (such as through ministries of education or labor), aligning with these standards can bolster the legitimacy of ESD programs. In the absence of such accreditation, building partnerships with recognized youth organizations, universities, or international networks can enhance recognition and sustainability. Ongoing professional development—sometimes via international collaboration—can help practitioners remain current with best practices and adapt to evolving local needs.
- **Examples:**
 - *Brazil:* Home to a vibrant women’s self-defense movement, often linked to broader initiatives around public safety, gender equality, and community policing. Some programs partner with municipal governments or work within schools to reach adolescents. Large cities may require special permits for public gatherings or educational activities.
 - *Mexico:* ESD initiatives are often spearheaded by women’s organizations responding to high rates of gender-based violence. Programs sometimes collaborate with police, municipal agencies, or shelter networks, and may integrate trauma-informed practices. Adapting curricula for Indigenous communities or rural areas, including translation and cultural adaptation, is increasingly common.
 - *Peru and Colombia:* Programs often develop in partnership with youth and women’s organizations, sometimes as part of peace-building or anti-violence campaigns. In some cases, ESD is included in broader social-emotional learning or community empowerment curricula.

Overall, Central and South America present both significant need and remarkable innovation in ESD. Practitioners who invest in building community trust, adapting to local realities, and forging strong partnerships can play a vital role in advancing safety and empowerment throughout the region.

Appendix G: Other Regions

Beyond North America, Western Europe, and other regions covered in separate appendices, Empowerment Self-Defense (ESD) programs operate in a wide range of contexts across the Middle East, Eastern Europe, the Caribbean, and beyond. Each presents unique opportunities and challenges. Below are general considerations and recommendations for areas not specifically addressed in other appendices:

- **Cultural Sensitivity and Adaptation:** Most communities have deeply rooted social norms regarding gender, authority, and violence. ESD instructors must adapt their teaching to fit local customs and beliefs, ensuring that empowerment principles are presented in ways that resonate. For example, in some cultures, specific greetings, forms of address, or gender-segregated classes may be necessary. Sensitive topics like sexual violence may require careful handling to respect taboos and maximize participation. Collaborating with cultural advisors and respecting local traditions are crucial for positive impact.
- **Legal Considerations:** Many countries lack statutes specifically governing ESD. Instead, instructors should look to broader laws covering education, public assembly, gender-based violence, and martial arts. Instructors must be aware of visa requirements for foreign trainers, and in some jurisdictions, may be required to seek permission from local authorities or partner with recognized organizations. In regions where martial arts are regulated, ESD may be viewed more favorably, but it is still wise to ensure compliance with local rules. Translating legal waivers and participant consent forms into local languages is best practice, and instructors should understand local liability standards, even where litigation is uncommon.
- **Collaboration and Community Engagement:** Building partnerships with local NGOs, community leaders, religious authorities, women's groups, and youth organizations can provide essential support and cultural legitimacy. In regions such as the Caribbean or Central Asia, collaboration can help navigate local dynamics, expand program reach, and ensure participant safety and comfort. Working with trusted local organizations can also help with outreach, especially to marginalized or rural populations.
- **Safety and Security:** Some areas, including parts of the Middle East, Eastern Europe, or other conflict-affected regions, pose elevated risks due to political instability, conflict, or high rates of violence. ESD trainers must assess the security situation, protect participant privacy, and adjust program logistics, such as conducting small-group or discreet sessions, to prevent any harm to participants or staff. Local endorsements or approvals from authorities or community figures may be necessary for safe operations.
- **Accreditation and Professional Recognition:** Where government or vocational certification frameworks exist, aligning with these standards can enhance program credibility and sustainability. In the absence of official accreditation, recognition from respected community groups, international ESD networks, or partnerships with educational institutions can lend legitimacy. In Eastern European countries, for

example, connecting with national sports federations or universities may bolster program acceptance and visibility.

- **Examples from Additional Regions:**

- *Middle East:* ESD initiatives may be delivered through women's centers or in partnership with humanitarian organizations. Gender segregation and sensitivities around public gatherings are key considerations, and programs often adapt content to align with local laws and religious norms.
- *Eastern Europe:* Programs may be integrated with anti-violence initiatives or schools. Legal frameworks are evolving, and building relationships with social services or youth organizations can support growth.
- *The Caribbean:* ESD is often provided through community centers, disaster preparedness programs, or youth empowerment efforts. Understanding the influence of local traditions, languages, and community leaders is essential.
- *Central Asia:* As ESD is still emerging, partnerships with health or educational NGOs, as well as translation and cultural adaptation of materials, are vital for program development.

Overall, successful ESD programming in regions not specifically covered in other appendices depends on cultural intelligence, compliance with local regulations, and thoughtful engagement with community partners. Maintaining high ethical standards, adapting to local realities, and building trust are the cornerstones of sustainable and impactful ESD practice worldwide.



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