



CHILD PROTECTION POLICY

CONTENT

This publication presents our approach to child protection. It provides a policy framework and defines prevention and response mechanisms.

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ABOUT US

The Institute for Research and Education – Working mother is a non-governmental organisation founded in 2002., which focuses at fostering changes in attitudes and behaviours in the area of family responsibility of organizations and changing the consciousness of the wider community in order to promote gender equality as an important aspect of human rights. We encourage and develop responsible human resource management practices in organizations through the assessment of organizational culture. Through educational programs and individual work with women, we empower them to unleash their hidden potentials and repressed ambitions. Nevertheless, our goals also include participation in programs in the field of education of children and adolescents and their parents in order to improve the quality of life and well-being of entire families; and participation in the development of social policies in the field of gender equality, the rights of children, adolescents and women.

SCOPE OF THIS DOCUMENT

Since our current and future projects include working with children it is necessary to establish code of ethics and to adopt standards of professional conduct in working with children at the organization level.

The Institute developed this Child Protection Policy in order to create conditions which minimise the risk of unprotected situations for the children who participate, directly or indirectly, in our programs, projects, campaigns and activities. The child protection policy refers to common values, principles and beliefs, as well as the practical rules of conduct when working with children. It contains the concrete steps to be taken in fulfilling our child protection obligations.

By adopting this document, we want to ensure that the Institute's employees, associates, partner organisations and volunteers know the values that lead us in working with children and that our behaviour protects the dignity of the children we work with. The document cites standards defining the ways in which Institute's employees, associates and volunteers proceed in taking measures to protect children's rights and the obligation to report any breach of these rights to the legal authorities.

LEGISLATION FRAMEWORK

The Institute's child protection policy has been developed in accordance with the legal guidelines for the protection of children's rights:

- United Convention of the Rights of the Child, 1989
- Council of Europe Convention on Protection of Children against Sexual Exploitation and Sexual Abuse, 2012
- Regulation (EU) 2016/679 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 27 April 2016 on the protection of natural persons with regard to the processing of personal data and on the free movement of such data, and repealing Directive 95/46/EC (General Data Protection Regulation)
- The Act on Implementation of General Data Protection Regulation (Official Gazette, No. 44/2018)
- Constitution of the Republic of Croatia, 1990 (Official Gazette, No. 56/90, 135/97, 8/98, 113/00, 124/00, 28/01, 41/01, 55/01, 76/10, 85/10, 05/14)
- The Protection from Domestic Violence Act (Official Gazette, No. 137/09, 14/10, 60/10)
- Protocol on the Treatment of Sexual Violence, 2018
- Protocol on Treatment of Domestic Violence, 2004
- Protocol on the Treatment of Violence between Children and Youth, 2004
- Protocol on the Treatment of Child Abuse and Neglect, 2014
- Ethical code for research with children, 2003

- Code of ethics for psychological activity, 2005

DEFINITIONS

Child is any person under the age of 18, in line with the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child.

Child abuse or maltreatment includes, according to the World Health Organisation (1999), “all forms of physical and/or emotional ill-treatment, sexual abuse, neglect or negligent treatment or commercial or other exploitation, resulting in actual or potential harm to the child’s health, survival, development or dignity in the context of a relationship of responsibility, trust or power”.

Child protection is a broad term used to describe principles, policies, standards, guidelines and procedures designed to protect children from intentional and unintentional harm. In the context of this document, it particularly concerns the responsibilities of the organisations and staff, regarding the children they work with.

Child Protection Policy, in its simplified form, is a statement of intent that shows a commitment to protect children from harm, making clear to everyone involved what is required in terms of the children’s protection. It is an instrument to promote a safer environment for children and to state the organisations’ commitment to take care of them.

Informed consent is the ability to give consent in a free and informed way, always taking into account the age and the level of development of the child. For the purposes of using a child’s photograph (e.g. for advertisement), the person responsible for said child must consent; however, the child should also be informed and understand in what he/she will be involved, so he/she can give their “informed consent”.

Direct contact with children means being in the physical presence of children while the organisation’s work is being developed. It includes occasional or frequent contact, as well as the short or long term contact.

Indirect contact with children includes all the situations when a person has access to children’s personal information, such as names and addresses, photographs or any other personal content, in the context of the organisation’s work. Indirect contact should also be considered for funding entities that support projects aimed at children, since this has an impact on them (therefore requiring responsibilities in terms child protection).

Physical abuse is actual or potential physical harm perpetrated by another person, adult or child. it may involve hitting, shaking, poisoning, drowning and burning. Physical harm may also be caused when a parent or carer fabricates the symptoms of, or deliberately induces illness in a child.

Emotional abuse is persistent emotional maltreatment that impacts on a child’s emotional development. Emotionally abusive acts include restriction of movement, degrading, humiliating, bullying (including cyber bullying), and threatening, scaring, discriminating, ridiculing or other non-physical forms of hostile or rejecting treatment.

Sexual abuse defines as forcing or enticing a child to take part in sexual activities that he or she does not fully understand and has little choice in consenting to. This may include, but is not limited to, rape, oral sex, penetration, or non-penetrative acts such as masturbation, kissing, rubbing and touching. It may also include involving children in looking at, or producing sexual images, watching sexual activities and encouraging children to behave in sexually inappropriate ways.

Child sexual exploitation is a form of sexual abuse that involves children being engaged in any sexual activity in exchange for money, gifts, food, accommodation, affection, status, or anything else that they or their family needs. It usually involves a child being manipulated or coerced, which may involve befriending children, gaining their trust, and subjecting them to drugs and alcohol. The abusive relationship between victim and perpetrator involves an imbalance of power where the victim’s options are limited. It is a form of abuse that can be misunderstood by children and adults as consensual. Child sexual exploitation manifests in different ways. It can involve an older perpetrator exercising financial, emotional or physical control over a young person. It can involve

peers manipulating or forcing victims into sexual activity, sometimes within gangs and in gang-affected neighbourhoods. It may also involve opportunistic or organised networks of perpetrators who profit financially from trafficking young victims between different locations to engage in sexual activity with multiple men.

Neglect and negligent treatment allowing for context, resources and circumstances, neglect and negligent treatment refers to a persistent failure to meet a child’s basic physical and/or psychological needs, which is likely to result in serious impairment of a child’s healthy physical, spiritual, moral and mental development. It includes the failure to properly supervise and protect children from harm and provide for nutrition, shelter and safe living/working conditions. It may also involve maternal neglect during pregnancy as a result of drug or alcohol misuse and the neglect and ill treatment of a disabled child.

Harmful practices constitute a form of child abuse. They are a denial of children’s dignity and integrity, and a deprivation of their rights and fundamental liberties. They can be traditional or newly created practices rooted in social norms and are normally imposed on children and adolescents by their families, members of the community or society as a whole. These include child marriage, female genital mutilation and physical or corporal punishment. The latter is defined as any punishment in which physical force is used and the aim of which is to cause pain or discomfort, however slight. In most cases this involves hitting a child or adolescent using the extremities of the body or an object. Physical or corporal punishment is still widely accepted by society, rooted in erroneous beliefs, traditions and practices in which it is seen as an indispensable disciplinary tool.

Intimidation/bullying (includes cyberbullying) is aggressive behaviour and intentional and continuous violent acts carried out on a child or adolescent by another child or adolescent or group of children or adolescents in which there is a real or perceived imbalance of power. It causes physical, psychological and/or social harm on a repetitive basis, and often takes place in education centres and other places in which children and adolescents gather, as well as online.

Child commercial exploitation/labour is forcing a child to work and engage in other activities intended for the economic benefit of a third party which are detrimental to the child's physical or mental health, education or psychological, emotional and social development.

Gender violence refers to any act of violence based on the biological sex or a particular gender identity of an individual, which results in, or is likely to result in, physical, psychological or sexual harm or suffering.

Revictimization is a process which involves additional suffering for people who have been victims of violence or whose rights have been violated. Revictimization occurs when a person has to remember an event in a traumatic way, and be or feel stigmatized, blamed or rejected during contact with institutions (in the framework of an investigation or the application of protective measures) or during contact with society (media, community, their own social circle, etc.). Revictimization increases a person's vulnerability, and as a consequence, their risk of suffering from recurring violence over time.

OUR VALUES AND PRICIPLES IN WORK WITH CHILDREN

- The best interests of the child are protected and promoted in all situations and in any context. Health, safety and well-being of children are our organization's priorities.
- All children, without exceptions of any kind, have the right to be protected against any form of violence and to have their dignity respected.
- Employees, associates and volunteers of the Institute are obliged to protect the children they work with. We work with users accountable and professionally, respecting the ethical principles and standards of the profession and the services provided. We base our work on high ethical and legal standards.

- Partners with whom we collaborate in projects aimed at children are also obliged to meet the legal standards of child protection in their programs. Building a human society and cultivating the values on which it is based is possible only by the cooperation of all those who strive for the same goal.
- A positive treatment culture is promoted, and emphasis is placed on and efforts are made to provide safe environments (at school, in the family and in the community) which allow for the positive development of children.
- The creation of an active safeguarding and positive treatment network within the organisation is promoted, joining forces so that children are protected effectively.
- Any type of violence against children or between children is a violation of their rights. We exercise a zero-tolerance stance towards all types of violence against children.
- The development of a safe reporting culture is promoted so that any concerns, suspicions or incidents relating to child safeguarding and positive treatment are reported in a timely and proper manner.
- The Institute responds to any case of violence, abuse and exploitation, whether it is suspected, attempted or carried out, always in accordance with the nature of the case, in a careful manner and with a guarantee of confidentiality.
- Where possible, Institute collaborates in the strengthening of the abilities of the different actors it works with, to guarantee that all of its activities are developed in a protected, positive treatment environment for children.
- Where possible, children's opinions are collected and used to guide the design, implementation and review of this Child Protection Policy which, in any case, shall be an instrument which is perfectly well-known and understood by the children themselves.

IN ORDER TO CARRY OUT THESE VALUES, IN CONTACT WITH CHILDREN, EMPLOYEES, ASSOCIATES AND VOLUNTEERS ARE OBLIGED TO:

- Recognize and appreciate the attitudes that children express;
- Work with children in a way that strengthens their capacities and ability and develops their skills and potentials;
- Work with children in the spirit of cooperation with mutual trust and respect;
- Accepting children within the context in which they live;
- Work in partnership with parents/guardians, foster parents and other professionals to ensure the protection of children;
- Make all programs and workshops in accordance with the best interests of children;
- Develop these standards in a language acceptable to children.

STANDARDS OF PROFESSIONAL CONDUCT OF EMPLOYEES, ASSOCIATES, PARTNER ORGANISATIONS AND VOLUNTEERS IN WORKING WITH CHILDREN

EMPLOYEES, ASSOCIATES, PARTNER ORGANISATIONS AND VOLUNTEERS OF INSTITUTE ARE OBLIGED TO ASSURE THE FOLLOWING TO THE CHILDREN THEY WORK WITH:

- Protection of rights enshrined in the Constitution of the Republic of Croatia, conventions, laws, implementing regulations;
- Implementation of programs that promote the protection of child rights, safety and health;
- A safe and reliable way of recording violations of the standards outlined in this document, providing mechanisms for collecting complaints in a confidential and safe manner, providing support to victims and informing institutions responsible for violating the rights of the children.

EMPLOYEES, ASSOCIATES, PARTNER ORGANISATIONS AND VOLUNTEERS OF INSTITUTE WHO ARE IN DIRECT OR INDIRECT CONTACT WITH CHILDREN IN THEIR WORK SHOULD:

- Be aware of situations that may pose a risk to children and know how to react properly in such situations;
- Plan and organize work and workplace so that all potential risks are minimized;
- Enable children to talk openly about any problem;
- Report to the legal institutions any misconduct on children, which rises a justified suspicion of abuse and/or neglect;
- Talk to children about their contact with Institutes employees, volunteers and associates, and encourage them to express themselves freely if they are concerned or worried; (create an environment in which children will feel safe and respected);
- Teach children about their rights and the way they can deal with the violation of these rights. Empower the children to talk about the problems they are facing;
- Use a child-centred and participative approach, where children are treated as an active citizen with rights; respect their integrity and dignity and allow them to be actively involved in the decision-making processes concerning their own lives;
- Be aware of the power balance between the adult and the child and avoid taking any advantage of this (abuse of power);
- Avoid being placed in vulnerable or compromising situation; make themselves visible when working with children;
- Immediately report to coordinators any situation that could be object of misinterpretation by others; avoid behaving in a way that could be misinterpreted by third parties;
- Be caring and responsible; try to be a positive role model;
- Treat children equally, regardless of gender, gender identity and sexual orientation; ethnic background; religious and political options; level of functionality (e.g. cognitive impairment or other disabilities) or life events (e.g. pregnant teenagers). Avoid exercising any type of persuasion regarding the child's options (e.g. religious, political);
- Be aware that child abuse can also be perpetrated by peers; try to avoid putting children in risky situations with their peers, such as mixing older and younger individuals or vulnerable children without supervision;
- Ask permission from the children and their caregivers before taking photographs of them and using their image; be very clear and transparent about the use of those images; make sure the faces or other characteristics aren't visible.

EMPLOYEES, ASSOCIATES, PARTNER ORGANISATIONS AND VOLUNTEERS OF INSTITUTE IN WORKING WITH CHILDREN SHOULD NEVER:

- Subject children to any form of physical or psychological violence, or any degrading or humiliating treatment (e.g. insulting, shouting, humiliating, ridiculing, threatening or any other type of situation or action which may cause physical or psychological damage);
- Subject children to any harmful practices;
- Develop unnecessary physical contact with children;
- Develop sexual contact with children;
- Behave in an inappropriate or sexually provocative way;
- Develop such a relationship with children, which could in any way be considered exploitative or abusive;
- Act in a manner that could increase or cause the risk of the child being abused;

- Use language phrases, make suggestions, or offer advice that is inappropriate, offensive or otherwise humiliating;
- Avoid responding adequately to illegal, dangerous or violent behaviour of children;
- Fail to respond adequately to the illegal, dangerous or violent behaviour of parents / guardians towards children;
- Discriminate, treat or favour certain children differently, excluding the other;
- Publish photos or videos of children attending workshops to promote Institute's activities without the informed consent of their parents;
- Share personal information about the children that participate in projects and activities, especially their contact details, with third parties, except in the case of legal guardians or if it is justifiable for the best interests of the child in question.
- Interact with children who participate in Institute's programs and activities outside their working hours, except in cases where they live in the same community and this contact is a consequence of family or social circumstances. In these circumstances, the confidentiality and privacy of the information the person has access to at work will be guaranteed.
- Communicate with the children who participate in programs, projects, campaigns or activities or using their personal phone number or email address or establish any kind of relationship through personal social media profiles. If there is a need to communicate this should be done using the official communication channels provided by the organisation;
- Expose children to inappropriate content that may cause emotional damage such as violence or pornography;
- Expose children to child labour and hazardous work;
- Neglect children, which includes not offering them the adequate care and not meeting their needs;
- Participate in any dangerous, illegal or abusive behaviour toward children;
- Do things the children are able to do for themselves;
- Ignore or undervalue concerns raised by the children about harm being caused to them;
- Be alone with the children and invisible from others for an excessive amount of time, including in a car, in your home/or the home of a child; make contact with children that is not under supervision/seen by another staff member.

TO ENSURE THE IMPLEMENTATION OF THE CHILD PROTECTION STANDARDS, IT IS NECESSARY THAT:

- Employees, associates, partner organisations and volunteers of Institute are introduced to the Child Protection Policy at the organization level;
- Employees, associates, partner organisations and volunteers, by signing the contract (contract of employment, service contract, copyright and/or voluntary agreement), have the obligation to comply with the Standards of Treatment of Children with which they are acquainted when signing the Contract;
- The recruitment process, both for employees and volunteers of Institute, includes the suitability check (criminal background check, is not feasible, due to the context or the short duration of the contract the personnel concerned should sign a statutory declaration stating that they have never been convicted of, are not currently suspected of, or are not being prosecuted for any offence involving any type of harm to a child or children, and declare that there is no element which could affect their suitability to work with children) for working with children and young people;
- We work in partnership with parents / guardians and / or other specialists to ensure the protection of children;

- In cases of suspected violation of children's rights, physical and emotional violence, sexual abuse, neglect, neglected behaviour, abuse or exploitation of the child, Institute's employees are obliged to initiate proceedings to protect the rights of the child;
- The procedure for the protection of the child's rights involves reporting the suspicion to the appointed Child protection officer and to the program leaders, who then take action under the law and report the case to the legal institutions. If the suspect concerns an employee, associate or volunteer of Institute, the Child protection officer and the program leader will investigate, take disciplinary measures and report the case to the legal institutions in accordance with the legal provisions. Until the completion of the internal investigation and / or investigation of the legal authorities, the suspect will not be able to work with the children. Upon completion of the proceedings, if the suspect is not released from suspicion, disciplinary measures will be imposed in accordance with the severity of the offense: the warning or dissolution of the contract with Institute. In the case of confirmed violation of children's rights of co-operating or partner organizations, Institute will terminate that co-operation or partnership;
- Institute's employees are obliged to provide documentation to the police and provide information on the violation of the child's rights.
- We will appoint the Child Protection Officer and publish their contact on the web-site.
- We will publish the Child Protection Policy on the web site.

**Institute for Research and Education
WORKING MOTHER
President**

Dijana Kobas Dešković