

CHILD PROTECTION POLICY

INTRODUCTION – ABOUT THE ORGANISATION

Association "Children First" bases its work on promoting the values of a child-oriented society on principles of social sensitivity and justice, tolerance, non-discrimination, respect for diversity, and equal rights for all citizens in accordance with democratic, human, and children's rights.



The vision of the Association is a Safe Society for Safe Children, and the mission is to empower children, youth, and families with a professional approach, with special care for the socially excluded.

The Association bases its activities on working for the common good, aligned with the needs of the beneficiaries. The activities of the Association are highly professional, founded on scientific knowledge, and in line with national strategies and laws of the Republic of Croatia, as well as the European regulatory framework for the protection of children's rights and the reduction of poverty and social exclusion.

In working with beneficiaries, the basic principles of work are a holistic perspective, individualized and family approach, empowering beneficiaries for a responsible and active role in solving the difficulties they face, and the right to self-determination.

To contribute more efficiently to building a child-oriented society, developing cohesion and social capital, the Association focuses on networking and cooperation to promote good practices and mutual learning, an integrated approach and volunteering, and the development of social innovations.

PURPOSE OF THE CHILD PROTECTION POLICY

The purpose of the Child Protection Policy is to ensure conditions for the growth and development of children in a safe, healthy, and supportive environment. This policy includes a wide range of measures and initiatives aimed at improving children's welfare.

OBJECTIVES OF THE CHILD PROTECTION POLICY



- To ensure and promote the protection of children's rights at all levels of the organisation's work
- To provide clear guidelines and ethical standards for effective and professional work with children
- To ensure timely protection of children from all forms of violence
- To ensure the application of the principle of the best interest of the child

All projects and programs of the organisation include measures and activities aimed at achieving the above objectives. By achieving these objectives, the following is accomplished:

- The maximum possible protection of children and the reduction of the risk of harm to children
- Employees, associates, and volunteers apply professional, relevant, and ethically aligned procedures in working with children
- The organisation commits to achieving conditions for the safety and best interests of the child

VALUES AND PRINCIPLES

All children have the right to be protected and safe.

Everyone in the organisation, including employees, external associates, volunteers, and other stakeholders, is responsible for the protection of children

The organisation's responsibility is to carefully consider with whom it collaborates and enters into cooperative and/or partnership relations, ensuring collaboration with individuals and organisations that support principles and values focused on the safety and best interests of the child.

“Children First” actively works with parents and/or legal guardians to protect the rights and interests of children. In this regard, the organisation provides support to parents/legal guardians in achieving the minimum conditions necessary to ensure the protection and best interests of the child.

The best interest of the child is a priority in undertaking any activity in working with children, their parents, and/or legal guardians.

POLICY

The Child Protection Policy is based on the Convention on the Rights of the Child, the laws, and bylaws of the Republic of Croatia (Protocol on the Treatment of Domestic Violence, Protocol on the Treatment of Violence among Children and Youth).

The Statute, strategic and operational plans, projects, and programs are aligned with the goals and principles of the Child Protection Policy. In the development of strategic and operational plans and the creation of projects and programs, special attention is given to supporting children at risk of poverty and social exclusion to provide equal opportunities and optimal growth and development.

In the development and implementation of programs, projects, and activities, care is taken to ensure that children are not discriminated against based on race, colour, sex, language, religion, ability, political or other opinions, national and ethnic origin, social background, or social status.

Internal acts and regulations governing the activities and operations of the organisation include risk analyses and define measures to minimize risky and unprofessional behaviour by employees, external professional associates, and volunteers that could pose a risk or harm to the child.

The responsibility for the overall implementation of this Policy and for providing support to employees, external professional associates, volunteers, and interns to act in accordance with the Policy lies with the Executive Director and the Board of Directors of the organisation.

The Child Protection Policy is published on the organization's website.

PEOPLE

In contact or work with children, all employees, external professional associates, volunteers, and students on internship in the organization must adhere to the Ethical Codex of the Association "Children First" and the Ethical codex of their respective professions.

The recruitment process in all its phases ensures the safety and protection of children. When applying for a job, candidates are required to submit a statement of interest, which, in addition to motivation for the specific position, must explain personal attitudes and values for working with children and personal views on child protection possibilities. Selection interviews also include an assessment of candidates in relation to child protection, and the selection committee ensures that the chosen candidate, in addition to meeting the basic job requirements, is also committed to actively advocating for the protection and safety of children. Upon hiring, selected candidates are introduced to the Child Protection Policy and the Ethical Codex of the Association "Children First" and must sign to agree to the terms of both documents.



All employees must undergo orientation training in the area of child protection. The Executive Director annually assesses employees' needs for additional training in the area of child rights protection. Identified needs are planned in the organization's annual operational plans.

The volunteer identification process is conducted in accordance with the Volunteering Program. All volunteers, within the orientation training, receive guidelines for child rights protection, are introduced to the Child Protection Policy, Confidentiality Statement, and Ethical Codex, and must sign to agree to the terms of these documents. Volunteers sign volunteer contracts, which, depending on the specifics of the position, may include additional measures/tasks for child protection. The responsibility of the volunteer coordinator is to provide support to volunteers in the area of child protection and safety during their volunteering.

Students of helping professions (psychologists, social workers, social pedagogues) at the beginning of their internship in the organization are introduced to the Child Protection Policy and the Confidentiality Statement, sign to agree to the terms of both documents, and are informed about the guidelines for child safety protection.

Employees and external professional associates providing social services to children are required to inform children about procedures in cases of abuse and endangerment of their safety. Children are encouraged to report such risks to employees.

In case of knowledge of abuse and/or endangerment of children's safety, employees and professional associates must act in accordance with the Protocol on the Treatment of Domestic Violence and the Protocol on the Treatment of Violence among Children and Youth. Additionally, employees and external professional associates must provide information to children and their parents/legal guardians about the possibilities of help and support in the local community.

Protocol compliance and child reports are recorded, the program manager conducts an analysis once a year, and proposes improvements and measures to increase child safety to the Executive Director.

COOPERATION



The Association implements a large number of projects and programs in cooperation and/or partnership with public administration bodies, public institutions, other civil society organizations, and private organizations. In selecting associate and partner organisations, the Association pays special attention to the values and principles of the work of associates and partners, informing and encouraging them to adhere to the Child Protection Policy in joint activities. Whenever possible, the Association signs partnership agreements that emphasize the responsibility of all associate/partner organisations for child safety and protection.

If during cooperation and the implementation of partner projects and programs, the Association notices or is informed of practices by the associate or partner organisation that pose a risk to child safety and protection, the Association will strive to warn about harmful practices and offer improvement guidelines. In extreme cases, the Association may terminate the associate/partner agreement if harmful practices by associate organisations continue. The Executive Director proposes the termination of cooperation to the Board of Directors, which makes the final decision.

MEDIA

The Association recognizes the importance of media in sensitizing and increasing the level of child protection in society. Therefore, the Association defines communication rules with the media that align with the principles and values of this policy.

To protect children, all information the Association wishes to provide to written or electronic media or publish on social networks is given in a way that protects the anonymity and dignity of the child and their parents/legal guardians.



All employees, professional associates, and volunteers who speak to the media provide information about children at a general level, protecting their identity. Information about children and/or parents and guardians is provided to the media only to raise public awareness in the area of child rights and interests protection, highlight problems children and/or their parents face, promote good practices, and encourage social change.

If the Association posts video material involving children on its social networks or website, it must secure written consent from the parents/legal guardian and verbal consent from the child. The material published by the Association must protect the dignity and identity of the child and their parents/legal guardians.

Whenever possible, in collaboration with written and electronic media, the Association will seek to obtain journalists' questions in advance and request to review the written material before publication.

If the Association organizes media appearances for children within its activities, the employee designated by the Executive Director is responsible for agreeing in advance with the media on the framework and content of the media appearance, including questions that journalists will direct to the children. If, during the media appearance, the Association's employee notices inappropriate behaviour or questions directed at the children by media representatives/journalists, they are responsible for stopping the child's participation in the media appearance. For all children's participation in media appearances, the Association must secure written consent from the parents/legal guardian and verbal consent from the child.

MONITORING AND EVALUATION

The implementation of the Child Protection Policy is the responsibility of all employees, professional associates, volunteers, and students on internships, each within their area of work and operation.

Program and project managers are responsible for monitoring the implementation of the Policy. Program/project managers respond to and record Policy violations, provide employees, professional associates, and volunteers with guidelines and support in implementing the Policy, and conduct an annual analysis of Policy implementation, proposing improvements to the Executive Director.



The evaluation of the Policy is the responsibility of the Executive Director and is conducted every three years. An integral part of the evaluation includes an analysis of national laws and bylaws, EU and Council of Europe directives and policies for children, and proposed improvements, which are submitted to the Board of Directors for adoption.

The Board of Directors is responsible for the overall implementation of the Children's Policy.