

CHILD PROTECTION POLICY OF THE LOCAL DEMOCRACY AGENCY SISAK

SADRŽAJ:

| | |
|---|---|
| INTRODUCTION..... | 1 |
| GENERAL PRINCIPLES OF CHILD PROTECTION AT THE LOCAL DEMOCRACY AGENCY SISAK..... | 2 |
| VALUES, PRINCIPLES AND PROCEDURES IN WORKING WITH CHILDREN | 2 |
| ORGANIZATION PROCEDURES AND PRACTICES IN THE FIELD OF CHILD RIGHTS PROTECTION | 5 |
| RESPONSIBILITY FOR MONITORING IMPLEMENTATION | 8 |

INTRODUCTION

The Local Democracy Agency Sisak (LDA Sisak) is committed to the preservation and protection of children involved in our activities.

The Child Protection Policy refers to the shared values, principles, beliefs, and codes of conduct that guide our work with children, and it includes specific steps to be taken in fulfilling our obligations regarding child protection. This document binds all employees, external associates, and volunteers of LDA Sisak to adhere to the principles and rules contained within it.

For the purposes of this document, a child is defined as any person under the age of 18, in accordance with the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (1989).

According to the World Health Organization (1999), child abuse includes all forms of physical and/or emotional ill-treatment, sexual abuse, neglect, and exploitation that result in actual or potential harm to the child's health, development, and dignity. Child protection is a broad term that encompasses the principles, policies, standards, laws, and procedures aimed at safeguarding children from both intentional and unintentional harm.

All gendered terms used in this document, regardless of whether they are in the masculine or feminine form, are intended to be inclusive of all genders.

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GENERAL PRINCIPLES OF CHILD PROTECTION AT THE LOCAL DEMOCRACY AGENCY SISAK

LDA Sisak, in all aspects of its work—whether it involves direct or indirect contact with children—is guided by the following principles:

- **physical and psychological safety, health, and overall well-being of children;**
- **respect and appreciation** for every child;
- attention to the **specific developmental needs and capabilities** of children;
- fostering children's skills and enabling them to reach their full potential;
- **prohibition of discrimination, exclusion, or marginalization** of children;
- encouragement of **child participation and inclusion of their voices** in the development of activities and in decision-making processes that concern them;
- **protection of the child's privacy** and identity;
- **cooperation with key stakeholders** in the protection and promotion of children's rights;
- **zero tolerance for any form of violence**, exploitation, or abuse of children;
- respect for the rights of children as prescribed by the **UN Convention on the Rights of the Child**, as well as the relevant laws of the Republic of Croatia in the field of child and youth protection.

2

VALUES, PRINCIPLES AND PROCEDURES IN WORKING WITH CHILDREN

- The health, safety, and well-being of children are a priority for our organization.
- We value, respect, and understand children within the context of their own culture, religion, and ethnic background. Diversity is approached as a richness and a prerequisite for building a humane and democratic society. Through the interaction of differences, we develop new forms of action based on equality in dignity and rights for all members of society.
- Children must be especially protected from any form of exploitation and abuse. The abuse of children is unacceptable under any circumstances.

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- We listen to and carefully consider children's views, encourage them, and support them in expressing their needs and advocating for their rights.
- Staff, external associates, and volunteers of the Association are obliged to protect the children they work with. We approach our work with beneficiaries responsibly and professionally, respecting the ethical principles and standards of our profession and the services we provide. Our work is grounded in high ethical and legal standards.
- Partners with whom we collaborate on projects aimed at children are also required to meet legal standards for child protection within their programs.

To uphold these standards, when working with children, employees, associates, and volunteers of LDA Sisak are required to:

- Treat children with respect at all times and recognize them as individuals with their own rights;
- Acknowledge and appreciate the views expressed by children;
- Work with children in a way that strengthens their capacities and abilities and develops their skills and potential;
- Work with children in a spirit of cooperation based on mutual trust and respect;
- Accept children within the context in which they live;
- Work in partnership with parents/guardians, foster carers, and other professionals to ensure children's protection;
- Design all programs and workshops in accordance with the best interests of the child;
- Be aware of situations that may pose a risk to children and know how to respond appropriately in such situations;
- Plan and organize work and workspaces to minimize all potential risks;
- Enable children to openly discuss any issues;
- Report to the relevant institutions any inappropriate treatment of children that raises a reasonable suspicion of abuse and/or neglect;
- Talk to children about their interactions with staff, volunteers, and associates of the organization, and encourage them to speak freely if they are worried or uncomfortable;

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- Create an environment where children feel safe and respected;
- Educate children about their rights and how to act in case those rights are violated, and empower them to talk about issues that trouble them;
- Take the child's opinion into account when making decisions about matters concerning them, with respect and consideration;
- Enable children to participate in decision-making processes that concern them through participatory processes that respect their rights, views, dignity, and integrity;
- Be aware of the power imbalance between adults and children and avoid any abuse that could arise from such situations;
- Avoid situations that may place them in a sensitive or compromising position: strive to be in the company of at least one other adult when working with children or remain visible to others when alone with a child, except when privacy is necessary (e.g., psychotherapy);
- Be mindful of the appropriateness of physical contact with a child and only use it when it is acceptable, such as holding hands, hugging, or a kiss on the cheek—ensuring the child is comfortable with it;
- Immediately inform the designated person at LDA Sisak—the president of the organization—if you find yourself in circumstances that may be misinterpreted by others, and avoid such situations. The designated person for employees and external associates is the president of LDA Sisak, for volunteers it is the volunteer coordinator, and for the president of LDA Sisak it is the Board of Directors;
- Serve as a positive role model to children—behaving responsibly and caringly;
- Treat all children equally regardless of gender, gender identity, sexual orientation; national, ethnic, or religious background; political beliefs; physical or mental disabilities and/or impairments; and life circumstances (e.g., teenage pregnancy, living in alternative care);
- Be aware that abuse can occur among children as well, and avoid situations that may lead to such risks, such as leaving younger and older children or especially vulnerable groups of children unsupervised.

When in contact with children, employees, external associates, and volunteers of LDA Sisak **must not**:

- Hit or otherwise physically harm or abuse children;
- Engage in unnecessary physical contact with children;
- Engage in sexual contact with children;

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- Behave in an inappropriate or sexually provocative manner;
- Develop relationships with children that could in any way be considered exploitative or abusive;
- Act in a way that could place a child at risk of abuse;
- Use language, make suggestions, or offer advice that is inappropriate, offensive, or in any way demeaning;
- Fail to adequately respond to illegal, dangerous, or violent behavior by children;
- Fail to adequately respond to illegal, dangerous, or violent behavior by parents/guardians toward children;
- Behave in a way that shames, humiliates, belittles, or degrades children, or otherwise inflicts any form of emotional abuse;
- Discriminate, treat unequally, or favor certain children while excluding others;
- Publish photos or video recordings of workshop participants for promotional purposes without informed consent from their parents;
- Expose children to inappropriate content that could cause emotional harm, such as violence or pornography;
- Expose or direct children toward child labor exploitation;
- Neglect children by denying them appropriate care or disregarding their needs;
- Participate in any dangerous, illegal, or abusive behavior toward children;
- Do things for children that they are capable of doing themselves (e.g., dressing, doing homework);
- Ignore a child's expressed concerns about abuse or neglect.

ORGANIZATION PROCEDURES AND PRACTICES IN THE FIELD OF CHILD RIGHTS PROTECTION

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With the aim of acting in the best interests of the child and protecting and promoting their rights, ALD Sisak defines procedures and practices within specific areas of activity to ensure compliance with child protection principles, to prevent all forms of abuse, exploitation, or violations of children's rights, and to respond appropriately in cases where harm occurs to a child or children. We also define standards of conduct that outline the procedures we follow to ensure a safe environment for children.

The protection of children's rights is achieved through:

- Preventing violence among children;
- Preventing all forms of violence by adults against children;
- Appropriate actions by LDA Sisak staff towards victims of violence;
- Appropriate actions by LDA Sisak staff towards violators of children's rights;
- Reporting violations of children's rights to the competent authorities;
- Safeguarding the personal data of children, parents, guardians, and foster carers involved in LDA Sisak programs;
- Cooperation between LDA Sisak and relevant individuals in the child's environment, such as parents, teachers, foster carers, and guardians;
- Cooperation with relevant institutions if there is suspicion of child abuse or neglect.

6

To ensure the fulfillment of the above obligations, LDA Sisak commits to:

- Informing employees, external associates, and volunteers about the principles, procedures, and rules contained in this document;
- Ensuring that employees, external associates, and volunteers, by signing employment/service/volunteer agreements, commit to respecting the standards of conduct in working with children as outlined in this document, which they are introduced to upon signing;
- During recruitment, and when engaging external associates and volunteers who are in direct contact with children, include verification of suitability for working with children and youth, including criminal record and/or ongoing criminal proceedings checks;
- Working in partnership with parents/guardians/foster carers and/or other professionals to ensure the protection of children;

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- Encouraging employees, external associates, and volunteers to pursue additional training, where necessary, for the implementation of this policy or in the area of child protection in general;
- Before organizing any activity that directly or indirectly involves children, the project team will assess potential risks to children's rights and take every possible measure to eliminate them.

Procedure in Case of Violation of Children's Rights

In cases of suspected violation of children's rights, including physical and emotional violence, sexual abuse, neglect, reckless behavior, mistreatment, or exploitation of a child, LDA Sisak employees are obligated to initiate a procedure to protect the child's rights.

Each employee, external associate, and volunteer is obliged, in the case of suspicion or knowledge of any form of violation of a child's rights, especially regarding abuse, exploitation, and/or neglect, to:

- Inform the activity coordinator and/or the President of LDA Sisak about the suspicion or knowledge;
- Notify the relevant professional service of the institution in cooperation with which the activity involving contact with children is being implemented;
- In agreement with the designated person from LDA Sisak and the institution's professional service, notify the Center for Social Welfare, the police, and/or the competent municipal State Attorney's Office.

7

If the suspicion concerns an employee, associate, or volunteer of the Association, the President of LDA Sisak will report the case to the competent authorities in accordance with legal provisions. Until the internal and/or official investigation is completed, the suspected individual will not be permitted to work with children. Upon conclusion of the procedure, if the person is not cleared of suspicion, disciplinary measures will be imposed according to the severity of the offense: a warning or termination of the contract.

In the case of a confirmed violation of children's rights by a partner or collaborating organization, cooperation or partnership will be terminated.

Reporting a suspicion of abuse/neglect of a child will not result in any sanctions for the person who submitted the report, provided the report was made for justified and understandable reasons, even if the suspicion proves to be incorrect. However, if the report was made with malicious intent or based on false information and accusations, the reporting individual will be subject to disciplinary action, including a warning or termination of the employment/service/volunteering contract, depending on the severity of the accusations, the reporter's intent, and the damage caused by the procedure. The disciplinary procedure will be conducted by the President of the Association with the support of the LDA Sisak Management Board.

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Employees, external associates, and volunteers are obligated to provide documentation and information about violations of children's rights upon request by the police.

Employees, external associates, and volunteers of the Association will be given the opportunity to participate in trainings related to children's rights and the protection of the child's best interest, to raise awareness of the potential harm certain behaviors may cause. They will also receive professional support in their work with children and will be informed about this document to ensure compliance with its provisions.

Support and Assistance for a Child Whose Rights Have Been Violated

LDA Sisak will provide support and assistance to a child whose rights have been violated in the following ways:

- Ensure a safe space immediately after learning about the rights violation;
- Provide urgent medical care, if needed;
- Contact the child's legal representative and/or other family members, unless the same person is the perpetrator of the rights violation;
- Notify the Center for Social Welfare, the police, and/or the competent municipal State Attorney's Office;
- Offer contact information for organizations that provide psychosocial and legal support;
- Take all necessary measures to ensure the protection of the child's personal data.

8

RESPONSIBILITY FOR MONITORING IMPLEMENTATION

The implementation of the provisions of this document is monitored at various levels:

- At the activity level, the responsible person is the activity leader;
- At the project level, the responsible person is the project manager;
- At the organizational level, the responsible person is the president of the organization.

The president of the organization monitors the implementation of the rules in all activities of LDA Sisak, collects information from activity leaders and project

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managers, and reports to the Management Board, which is responsible for overseeing the implementation.

This document is regularly aligned with evaluation findings at least once a year, and the revised document is approved by the Management Board. The approved revised document is published on the organization's website and all employees, external collaborators, and volunteers involved with children are made aware of it.

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Sisak, December 30, 2021
Number: IP-2021/172

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