



MTÜ Naiste Tugi- ja Teabekeskus / NPO Women's Support and Information Centre (WSIC)

Child Protection Policy

Introduction

WSIC supports the rights of children and is committed to their safety and well-being.

WSIC' staff members and those working with WSIC share a common responsibility and commitment to the awareness, prevention and reporting of and responding to child abuse in the course of their work.

WSIC' Child Protection Policy sets out common values, principles, and beliefs and describes the steps that will be taken to meet our commitment to protect children.

Scope

This policy applies to all part-time, full-time, and casual WSIC employees, freelance and other experts, interns and volunteers (hereinafter: WSIC staff or staff) as well as associate firms and sub-contractors (hereinafter: partners) working with WSIC on the implementation of daily work and projects.

Definitions

Child

For the purpose of this policy, the definition of a child is "every human being below the age of 18 years unless under the law applicable to the child, majority is attained earlier". This is in accordance with Article 1 of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of a Child.

Child abuse

We define child abuse as all forms of physical or mental violence, injury or abuse, neglect or negligent treatment, maltreatment or exploitation, including commercial exploitation, sexual abuse while in the care of parent(s), legal guardian(s) or any other person who has the care of the child.

Principles and values

The following principles and values reflect WSIC stance on child protection:

- **Zero tolerance of child abuse:** WSIC does not tolerate any form of child abuse, nor does it tolerate possession or access to any material that is abusive towards children. WSIC will not knowingly engage anyone who poses a direct risk to children.
- **Recognition of children's interests:** WSIC recognises that some children are at greater risk of abuse. Of particular vulnerability are children with disabilities, children in conflict situations as well as migrant children or children without parents.
- **Sharing responsibility of child protection:** When bidding for projects in association with firms that do not have a child protection policy, WSIC will ensure that associate firms agree to adopt WSIC' Child Protection Policy and the Child Safeguarding Standards as set out by the Council of Europe.

Goal

To protect children from all forms of abuse in the course of our work.

Purpose

The purpose of this Child Protection Policy is to:

- provide a management strategy to prevent child abuse and protect children in the course of our work;
- protect WSIC staff and partners from unfair practices and processes; and
- provide WSIC staff and partners with clear guidelines on what to do in the case of suspected child abuse.



WSIC' commitment

WSIC' commitment to child protection will be guided by the following:

- **Awareness:** we will ensure that all WSIC staff and partners as well as stakeholders involved in projects are aware of the problem of child abuse and the risks to children.
- **Prevention:** we will ensure, through awareness and good practice, that WSIC staff and partners minimize the risks to children.
- **Reporting:** we will ensure that WSIC staff and partners are clear on what steps to take where concerns arise regarding the safety of children.
- **Responding:** we will ensure that action is taken to support and protect children where concerns of abuse arise.

Further to the above, WSIC will:

- not permit a person to work with children if it has been identified that they pose an unacceptable risk to children's safety or well-being;
- take all child abuse concerns raised seriously;
- take positive steps to ensure the protection of children who are the subject of any concerns;
- support children, WSIC staff or other adults who raise concerns or who are the subject of concerns;
- act appropriately and effectively in instigating or cooperating with any subsequent process of investigation;
- guide through the child protection process by the principle of 'best interests of the child';
- listen to and take seriously the views and wishes of children; and
- work in partnership with parents/carers and/or other professionals to ensure the protection of children.

General Procedures

The following general procedures will mainstream WSIC' s Child Protection Policy and Child Protection Code of Conduct:

- Both Child Protection Policy and Code of Conduct are made an integral part of WSIC' quality management system and the legally binding instructions it contains.
- Contracts for persons newly employed by WSIC will contain a provision foreseeing their dismissal if they breach the Child Protection Code of Conduct.
- All WSIC subsidiaries will be required to adopt a child protection policy that meets the standards of WSIC's own policy in this matter.
- Any agreement between WSIC and partners which concerns services directly to children will require assurance that appropriate child protection policies and procedures are in place.
- WSIC office will display contact details for reporting possible child abuse and WSIC staff will have contact details for reporting.
- A reporting procedure is put in place to investigate and deal with possible child abuse

Guidelines for reporting suspected or actual abuse of children

Reporting Principles

Reporting suspected or actual child abuse is mandatory for all staff, volunteers, consultants and sub-contractors.

No WSIC staff or partner will prejudice their own position or standing with WSIC by responsibly reporting someone who they believe is breaking the Child Protection Code of Conduct.

Responsible reporting also means that any person making a report should bear in mind that all concerns are allegations until they have been investigated. For this reason, it is important for anyone raising a concern to follow the specific reporting guidelines set out below. In particular, confidentiality is expected within the reporting chain.

Reporting Procedures

All staff should normally discuss their concerns with their immediate senior manager and/or Executive manager. Any information provided to the Executive manager will be handled with strict confidentiality and who will only take action if breaches of the Child Protection Code of Conduct can be proven conclusively.



Discussions held with a senior manager or with the President should focus on:

- evidence that the Child Protection Code of Conduct has been broken;
- the identified risks to the child/children;
- measures to safeguarding children and minimize risk; and
- action/next steps

Discussions should focus on:

- An assessment of the reported concerns and support needs
- Whether, and at what stage, the issue should be reported to external bodies
- Appropriate response, e.g. disciplinary process or urgent action if children are judged to be at risk.

Managers should feel able to consult and seek support from other colleagues as necessary.

Specific Reporting Guidelines

Any concerns, allegations or disclosures must be recorded in writing, signed and dated, and communicated as soon as possible to WSIC' Executive manager. Records should be detailed and precise, focusing on what was said or observed, who was present and what happened.

Speculation and interpretation should be clearly distinguished from reporting.

Any concern, disclosure or allegation is alleged rather than proven at this point. All such records should be treated as extremely confidential. They should be passed only to the persons specified in these specific reporting guidelines. It is the responsibility of each individual in possession of the information to maintain confidentiality.

However, confidentiality cannot always be guaranteed. It must be made clear that following the steps in this policy is an obligation. Explanations should be given about the possible outcomes that could result from information being reported.

In certain instances, there will be the obligation for WSIC and its staff to report concerns to the appropriate external bodies. This will usually occur as a consequence of the reporting procedure.

However, if urgent action is required in order to protect children then it may be prior to the reporting procedure.

Responding to concerns

In order to protect children it may be necessary to take immediate action to ensure that the Child Protection Code of Conduct is not broken again and/or that further abuse cannot take place.

The best interests of the child and the desire to secure the best outcomes for the child should always govern decisions regarding what action should be taken in response to concerns.

From the date of this policy, all new WSIC staff and contractors will have a provision in their to employment agreements for dismissal or transfer other duties if he/she breaches the Child Protection Code of Conduct.

WSIC' Executive manager in consultation with the senior manager concerned, will ultimately decide what sanctions will be taken against breaches.

Some concerns may be so serious that they would have to be reported to local authorities and police. In these circumstances, based on local guidelines, WSIC will assess on a case-by-case basis what steps to take. If the concerns are reported to local authorities, WSIC staff will assist the authorities wherever possible but may also need to make arrangements, possibly through the appropriate diplomatic representation, to seek representation for the person who has had allegations made against them.

Legislation

When handling child abuse complaints, WSIC will take into account the relevant legislation in Estonia (mainly Child Protection Act) and internationally (Convention on the Rights of the Child).