



CHILD PROTECTION POLICY AND GUIDELINES FOR THE PROTECTION OF CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE

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AIMS AND GENERAL PRINCIPLES

This Policy is based on the recognition of every child under the age of 18, regardless of gender, as a unique individual with inherent identity and diversity. Children are viewed as naturally capable of engaging in experiences that support their development in relationships, knowledge, and learning—beginning within families and extending to other environments involving children.

The primary aim is to promote each child's abilities and potential throughout childhood and adolescence while respecting their individuality and preventing any exposure to risk or abuse. Safeguarding, protection, and rehabilitation in situations where children face harm are complementary to this goal.

This Policy sets out the guiding principles, roles, responsibilities, and approaches to ensure that the protection of children's rights is embedded across all areas of work in the organisation.

ABOUT THE PEACE INSTITUTE (PI)

The Peace Institute – Institute for Contemporary Social and Political Studies – is a private, independent, non-profit research institution founded in 1991 by individuals who believed in peaceful conflict resolution, equality and respect for human rights standards. The Institute uses scientific research and advocacy activities aimed at creating and preserving open society capable of critical thought and based on the principles of equality, responsibility, solidarity, human rights and the rule of law.

The Institute develops interdisciplinary research, educational and awareness-raising activities in the areas of social science and humanities, in five thematic fields: human rights and minorities, politics, media, gender and cultural policies. It acts as an ally of vulnerable groups and acts against discrimination in partnership with them. It is a visible research and civil society science in Slovenia, the region and on the international level and a leading resource in the fields of its operation. It acts in partnership with other similar stakeholders (institutes, universities, non-governmental organisations) as well as with residents on the local, regional and international level.

THE FRAMEWORK OF THE PI'S ENGAGEMENT WITH CHILDREN

The Peace Institute acknowledges the evolving challenges of the contemporary era that impact the rights of children and young people. These include peer-violence, gender-based violence, hate speech, discrimination, migration and asylum-seeking, the necessity of fostering equal opportunities for all children while paying special attention to intersectional inequalities related to class, gender, ethnicity, race, ability, sexual orientation, and more. Additionally, digital innovation and environmental sustainability, understood both as an ecological concern and as a matter of intergenerational well-being, play a crucial role. Addressing these challenges requires recognizing the central responsibility of institutions, which must not only protect but also actively advocate for and guarantee the participatory rights of children and young people. Peace Institute's activities include the cooperation with schools, youth centres and other organizations that work with children and youth. It brings extracurricular content to these institutions through educational and awareness-raising workshops, advocacy, and various initiatives. This content acknowledges the complexity of the modern world, fosters critical thinking, and strengthens values such as equality, human rights, democracy, respect for diversity, and empathy. By doing so, it aims to contribute to the creation of a society in which everyone feels safe, heard, and included. The activities carried out by the Peace Institute in schools and youth centres typically involve children and young people aged 14 and older. In line with these activities, the Peace Institute respects the existing national legislation in the field of education, social, family and criminal law for the protection of children, and international instruments and documents related to human rights and the rights of child, such as the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child and Declaration of the Rights of the Child, the Council of Europe Convention on Human Rights, and adheres to high ethical standards in working with children and young people. The Peace Institute expects all adults involved in the Institute's activities to fully encompass and realize the principles enshrined therein.

RESEARCH ACTIVITIES INVOLVING CHILDREN

Research activities involving children and young people are subject to particularly rigorous review by the Peace Institute's Ethics Committee. Researchers at the Peace Institute are responsible for ensuring that the highest ethical standards are met in all research activities involving children, regardless of approach, topic, or content.

Research based on ethical standards is carried out with integrity and respect for children, their views and their cultures. Involving children in a respectful manner implies recognising and valuing their identities and competencies.

Children involved in research activities are entitled to fair treatment. This implies that all children receive equal treatment, that benefits and burdens are evenly distributed, that children are not unfairly excluded and that barriers to involvement based on discrimination are overcome.

Researchers should strive to prevent any potential risk of harm and assess whether a child's need for participation is justified. Children's consent must always be obtained along with that of parents; any other requirements necessary for the research to proceed ethically must be met. Consent should be based on a balanced and fair understanding of what is involved in and after the research. Expressions of disagreement or withdrawal by the child should always be respected.

Undertaking research involving children requires awareness, care, and responsibility. Research based on ethical standards implies that researchers constantly reflect on their work to ensure continuous attention to assumptions, values, and practices that might influence the research process and impact children.

POLICY

The purpose of this document is to provide a set of principles and minimum standards for creating a safe environment for children and young people within the frame of Peace Institute's activities. This document aims to ensure that employees and volunteers understand, accept, and are supported in child protection responsibilities.

The Peace Institute is committed to protecting the rights of children, including protecting children from all forms of abuse and exploitation. The Peace Institute has zero tolerance for child abuse and is dedicated to adhering to the highest standards of ethical behaviour when working with children.

The Peace Institute follows the general guidance and principles when working with children and young people:

- treat children and young people in a manner which is respectful of their rights, integrity and dignity, considers their best interests and does not expose them to, or place them at risk of harm.
- children and young people will be treated on equal basis and irrespective of gender, nationality or ethnic origin, religious or political beliefs, age, physical or mental health, sexual orientation and gender identity, family, socio-economic and cultural background;

- all children and young people have equal rights to protection from abuse and exploitation;
- participation of children and young people in any activity of the Peace Institute shall be voluntary and can be terminated at any time;
- the Peace Institute does not tolerate any type of abuse or exploitation towards a child and commits to ensuring that all staff and associates are made aware of, and supported in, their responsibilities to prevent abuse and protect children.

PEOPLE AND RESPONSIBILITIES

Promoting children's rights and protecting them imply a shared responsibility, in the sense that the success of prevention and protection initiatives depends on the commitment to and respect for the principles of this Policy by everybody working on behalf of the PI (employees, volunteers and associates). All the employees and collaborators of the PI undertake to comply with the requirements of this policy and understand the sanctions that apply for breaches of the policy. Based on the principles set out herein, this policy aims at avoiding actions or behaviour that may be inappropriate or potentially negative towards children. The following commitments must be ensured:

- Being alert to even potential risk situations for children and promptly reporting them to the competent person in charge;
- Reporting any suspicious or certain potential abuse or maltreatment of a child, as set out in this Policy;
- Developing and disseminating a culture of openness that enables staff, volunteers, children and carers to raise and discuss all kinds of issues and concerns with ease;
- Developing children's skills and abilities, helping them to understand their rights, acceptable and unacceptable behaviour and what to do if a problem arises;
- Fostering children's participation in all those activities aimed at supporting the development of self-protection skills.

The Peace Institute's staff and associates working with children will be issued with a copy of this document, which is available also in an electronic form in the Peace Institute webpage (<https://www.mirovni-institut.si/en/child-protection-policy-and-guidelines-for-the-protection-of-children-and-young-people/>). Any member of staff found in breach of the guidance will be subject to immediate removal from their position, and appropriate measures will be taken in line with this policy and national legislation.

For every (new) staff member and associate joining the PI's work with children a criminal reference check will be made (via certificates issued by the Ministry of Justice and district courts).

All staff/associates should be aware of any signals that a youngster requires assistance. The Peace Institute ensures that staff and associates are involved and participate in an expedient response in the event of abuse, a high-risk situation, or a disclosure.

Any incident that is reported will be handled quickly, in accordance with this policy, the organization's mission, and any laws. The information will be handled in a secure manner that does not jeopardize the safety of the affected child or the person reporting a concern.

All staff/associates, including volunteers, have a responsibility to immediately report any concerns to the director of the Peace Institute (hereinafter: the director).

All children involved in the Peace Institute activities are informed about this policy and their right to report any concerns to the director.

The minimum necessary intervention principle will be followed, avoiding institutional abuse caused by the repetition of activities or their performance under improper conditions.

IMPLEMENTATION AND REPORTING PROCEDURE

1. The director of the Peace Institute is the person in charge of the implementation of this policy.

2. All staff members and associates that observe any child protection concern must report to the director of the Peace Institute immediately. Children involved in the Peace Institute activities have the right to report any concerns to the director of the Peace Institute. The report may be made in person, by phone (01 234 77 20) or by email (info@mirovni-institut.si). Contact information is provided in the Informed consent form.

3. The director makes a written record of the reported concern and all relevant information.

4. After receiving the complaint, the director makes an initial assessment of the complaint and immediate risks to the safety and well-being of the child and takes measures to address such risks (such as suspension of a staff member from their position, referring a child to other support mechanisms).

The director makes an assessment whether authorities should be immediately notified about

the issues raised (the police, social work centre).

If the complainant is not the affected child, the director develops a plan for involving the affected child and their carer in the procedure.

5. After the initial assessment, if necessary, the director takes steps to collect all necessary additional information and makes inquiries with the persons involved.

If the reported issues require that the authorities are informed, the director cooperates in the investigation conducted by the responsible authorities.

6. After assessing the reported concern, the director makes a decision for resolving the issue.

In the case of minor issues, the director works with the person reporting the concern to see how the issues can be appropriately addressed.

If a serious incident is reported, the director informs the competent authorities (the police, social work centre).

If the reported issue amounts to a violation of contractual obligations by a Peace Institute staff member, the director shall initiate disciplinary proceedings or proceedings for terminating their contract in accordance with the national law.

7. The director regularly informs the person reporting the concern and/or the affected child and their carer about the course of the procedure, steps taken and any final decision made.

8. During the procedure, the director makes sure that privacy and personal data of the person reporting the concern and/or the affected child are protected in accordance with the Peace Institute Privacy Policy and national legislation.

This document will be periodically reviewed and approved by the director of the Peace Institute every 4 years.

The Peace Institute has the responsibility to ensure the effective implementation of this document and to maintain it.

Dr. Iztok Šori, Director

Ljubljana, 20 March 2025

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