



# CHILD PROTECTION POLICY

Co-PLAN, Institute for Habitat Development

*January 2023*

Co-PLAN Institute for Habitat Development (hereafter referred to as 'Co-PLAN') is a non-profit organization that has contributed to sustainable development in Albania by enabling good urban and regional governance.

Independent, private and non-profit, Co-PLAN respects a strict political and religious impartiality, and operates following principles of neutrality, non-discrimination, transparency, according to its core values: **responsibility, impact, research and inspiration.**

Co-PLAN is committed to shape practices and influence policies in urban, territorial, socio-cultural and environmental development settings in order to positively impact lives of people and their communities.

## 1 Child Protection Policy

This policy outlines how Co-PLAN will protect the rights and safety of the children and young people with whom we come in contact during the course of our work. Co-PLAN, Institute for Habitat development is committed to devising and implementing policies so that everyone accepts their responsibilities to safeguard children from harm and abuse. This means to follow procedures to protect children and report any concerns about their welfare to appropriate authorities.

The aim of this policy is to promote good practice, providing children and young people with appropriate safety/protection whilst participating in activities organized by Co-PLAN and to allow staff and volunteers to make informed and confident responses to specific child protection issues. The policy addresses both direct and indirect contact with children.

**A child** is defined as a person under the age of 18 (*Law Nr. 18/2017 for children's rights and protection*<sup>1</sup> and *The United Nation's Convention on the rights of the Child*)

**Direct contact with children / Work with children:** Is any physical presence of adults with children in the context of the Institute's work. The duration (short- term or long-term) is not relevant.

**Indirect contact with children:** having access to information about children such as names, addresses, photographs and case studies.

### 1.1 Policy Statement

Co-PLAN follows the standards outlined in the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child [CRC] the Council of Europe Convention on Protection of Children against Sexual Exploitation and Sexual Abuse (Lanzarote Convention, 2007), the Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union, the Council of Europe Convention on Human Rights and all relevant international, regional and domestic instruments on human rights and the rights of the child. It is the duty of adults to understand and adhere by these to protect children from all forms of abuse.

---

<sup>1</sup> [https://www.drejtesia.gov.al/wp-content/uploads/2017/11/04\\_Ligj\\_18\\_2017\\_23.02.2017\\_Per\\_te\\_drejtat\\_dhe\\_mbroitjen\\_e\\_femijes.pdf](https://www.drejtesia.gov.al/wp-content/uploads/2017/11/04_Ligj_18_2017_23.02.2017_Per_te_drejtat_dhe_mbroitjen_e_femijes.pdf)



All the people employed by Co-PLAN, associates and possible volunteers are committed to the following:

1. Every child and young person that is involved /participates in the activities should be able to do so in a positive and safe environment. This means to be protected from harm or any damage or impairment. Every adult involved bears this responsibility, as it is their duty.
2. The best interests of the child shall be a primary consideration in all actions concerning a child.
3. Co-PLAN is committed to safeguard all children, without distinction of any kind, whatever their age, ability, language, ethnicity, faith, gender, sexuality and culture, political or other opinion, birth or other status.
4. All adults involved should respect, protect and promote the rights of children at all times.
5. All suspicions or allegations or concerns that have to do with abusing children will be taken seriously. These need to be reported to the appropriate person (Ethics Officer) as soon as possible. Co-PLAN will respond to these in an appropriate manner, that is according to the national laws and the United Nation's Convention on the rights of the Child, and will inform relevant services, such as the Social Care Services and/or the police.
6. Co-PLAN carries the duty of care and provides children an environment with safe training opportunities, with respect to human rights and non- discrimination.
7. Co-PLAN wishes to reduce any harm to which a child might be subjected to.

## **1.2 Research & Training**

When working with anyone under the age of 18 years, all adults involved should act in accordance to this policy, to Co-PLAN's Research Ethics Guidelines and Co-PLAN's Manual of Procedures.

Specifically, adults need to have in mind:

1. Request informed written consent from parents/guardians if the children are under the age of 18, and where appropriate (capable of providing informed consent), from the children themselves. For the procedure of assessing if the child can provide consent, their age, literacy, cultural background and any learning difficulties or disabilities should be taken into account.
2. Any children participating in research should be informed about the nature of the research, in child friendly language, where they understand the research proposed.
3. Any children participating should feel comfortable at all times to continue the research. This should be monitored by the researcher.

4. If any of the children participating would like to discontinue, this right should be respected at all times.
5. It is possible that a one-on-one meeting might be needed or a confidential
6. interview. In these cases, it is advised to perform the interview in a room with an open door or visual access.
7. Children should not be promised of complete confidentiality.
8. Co-PLAN's staff come into direct and indirect contact with children. This can include research, training and career counselling. Thus, recruitment of employees will need to entail that these people are suitable to work with children
9. For the construction of any child related material, Co-PLAN takes into consideration all the above.

### **1.3 Use of Photographic/Filming Equipment**

There is evidence that some people have used sporting events as an opportunity to take inappropriate photographs or film footage of young people. All staff should be vigilant, and any concerns should be reported to the Co-PLAN Ethics Officer

All parents and young persons engaged should be made aware when Co-PLAN is using video equipment during the activities performed.

### **1.4 Implementation, monitoring and revision of the policy**

The implementation of procedures will be regularly monitored and reviewed. The **ethics officer** will regularly report progress, challenges, difficulties, achievements gaps and areas where changes are required to the unit managers and executive director.

The policy will be reviewed every 3 years or whenever there is a major change in the organisation or in relevant legislation.

Co-PLAN staff, as well as the other entities collaborating with Co-PLAN, are required to conduct themselves in accordance with this policy and must therefore be aware of and have understood its provisions and any changes. When they are unsure of how to proceed, they should seek the advice of the ethics officer.

It is responsibility of Unit managers to ensure that staff under their supervision comply with this policy; and to take or propose appropriate disciplinary measures as sanction against any violations of its provisions.

## **2. Promoting Good Practices**

To provide children with the best possible experience and opportunities in Co-PLAN's activities everyone must operate within an accepted ethical framework. All personnel should adhere to the following principles and action:

- always work in an open environment (e.g. avoiding private or unobserved situations and encouraging open communication with no secrets)
- make the experience of working with Co-PLAN fun and enjoyable: promote fairness, confront and deal with bullying
- treat all children equally and with respect and dignity
- always put the welfare of the children first, before winning
- maintain a safe and appropriate distance with children participants (e.g. it is not appropriate for staff or volunteers to share a room with children)
- Avoid unnecessary physical contact with young people. Where any form of manual/physical support is required it should be provided openly and with the consent of the young person. Physical contact can be appropriate so long as it is neither intrusive nor disturbing and the young person's consent has been given
- Involve parents/caretakers wherever possible, e.g. where young people need to be supervised in changing rooms, encourage parents to take responsibility for their own child. If groups have to be supervised in changing rooms always ensure parents, coaches, etc. work in pairs
- request written parental consent if Co-PLAN staff is required to transport young people in their cars
- gain written parental consent for any significant travel arrangements e.g. overnight stays
- ensure that if mixed teams are taken away, they should always be accompanied by a male and female member of staff
- ensure that at away events adults should not enter a young person's room or invite young people to their rooms
- be an excellent role model, this includes not smoking or drinking alcohol in the company of young people
- always give enthusiastic and constructive feedback rather than negative criticism
- secure written parental consent for Co-PLAN staff to act in loco parentis, to give permission for the administration of emergency first aid or other medical treatment if the need arises
- keep a written record of any injury that occurs, along with details of any treatment given

The following are regarded as **poor practice** and will be avoided by all personnel:

- unnecessarily spending excessive amounts of time alone with young people away from others
- taking young people alone in a car on journeys, however short, without parental approval
- taking young people to your home where they will be alone with you

- sharing a room with a young person
- engaging in rough, physical or sexually provocative games, including horseplay
- allow or engage in inappropriate touching of any form
- allowing young people to use inappropriate language unchallenged
- making sexually suggestive comments to a young person, even in fun
- reducing a young person to tears as a form of control
- allow allegations made by a young person to go unchallenged, unrecorded or not acted upon
- do things of a personal nature that the young person can do for themselves

When a case arises where it is impractical/impossible to avoid certain situation e.g. transporting a young person on your car, the tasks should only be carried out with the full understanding and consent of the parent/care and the young person involved.

### 3. Mitigating and Handling cases of child abuse

Child abuse is any form of physical, emotional or sexual mistreatment or lack of care that leads to injury or harm, it commonly occurs within a relationship of trust or responsibility and is an abuse of power or a breach of trust. Abuse can happen to a young person regardless of their age, gender, race or ability.

There are seven main types of abuse: **physical abuse, sexual abuse, emotional abuse; neglect; bullying; child exploitation and online abuse.** The abuser may be a family member, someone the young person encounters in residential care or in the community, including sports and leisure activities. Any individual may abuse or neglect a young person directly or may be responsible for abuse because they fail to prevent another person harming the young person.

Young people with disabilities may be at increased risk of abuse through various factors such as stereotyping, prejudice, discrimination, isolation and a powerlessness to protect themselves or adequately communicate that abuse had occurred.

Co-PLAN is committed to addressing, mitigating all types of abuse during the activities, both for children / young people as well as for adults.

#### 3.1 Types of Abuse and indications of abuse

- **Physical Abuse:** where adults physically hurt or injure a young person e.g. hitting, shaking, throwing, poisoning, burning, biting, scalding, suffocating, drowning. Giving young people alcohol or inappropriate drugs would also constitute child abuse. This category of abuse can also include when a parent/carer reports non-existent symptoms

or illness deliberately causes ill health in a young person they are looking after. This is called Munchausen's syndrome by proxy.

- **Emotional/Psychological Abuse:** the persistent emotional ill treatment of a young person, likely to cause severe and lasting adverse effects on the child's emotional development. It may involve telling a young person they are useless, worthless, unloved, inadequate or valued in terms of only meeting the needs of another person. It may feature expectations of young people that are not appropriate to their age or development. It may cause a young person to be frightened or in danger by being constantly shouted at, threatened or taunted which may make the young person frightened or withdrawn. Emotional abuse may occur when the young person is constantly criticised, given negative feedback, expected to perform at levels that are above their capability. Other forms of emotional abuse could take the form of name calling and bullying.
- **Bullying** may come from another young person or an adult. Bullying is defined as deliberate hurtful behaviour, usually repeated over a period, where it is difficult for those bullied to defend themselves. There are three main types of bullying. It may be physical (e.g. hitting, kicking, slapping), verbal (e.g. racist or homophobic remarks, name calling, graffiti, threats, abusive text messages), emotional (e.g. tormenting, ridiculing, humiliating, ignoring, isolating from the group), or sexual (e.g. unwanted physical contact or abusive comments).
- **Neglect** occurs when an adult fails to meet the young person's basic physical and/or psychological needs, to an extent that is likely to result in serious impairment of the child's health or development. For example, failing to provide adequate food, shelter and clothing, failing to protect from physical harm or danger, or failing to ensure access to appropriate medical care or treatment.
- **Sexual Abuse** occurs when adults (male and female) use children to meet their own sexual needs. This could include full sexual intercourse, masturbation, oral sex, anal intercourse and fondling. Showing young people pornography or talking to them in a sexually explicit manner are also forms of sexual abuse.
- **Child exploitation** means the use of children by parents or adults for work and economic benefits. This includes labour or begging, forced services, sexual exploitation, prostitution, slavery, trafficking, etc.
- **Online abuse** means using the internet to threaten, harass or humiliate a child by sending inappropriate messages, emails, shocking pictures and videos to children.

It is not the responsibility of anyone working in Co-PLAN in a paid or unpaid capacity to decide whether or not child abuse has taken place. However, there **is a responsibility to act** on any concerns through contact with the appropriate authorities so that they can then make inquiries and take necessary action to protect the young person. This applies **BOTH** to allegations/suspicions of abuse occurring within Co-PLAN and to allegations/suspicions that abuse is taking place elsewhere.

### 3.2 Receiving Evidence of Possible Abuse

In case Co-PLAN staff is aware of any type of abuse against children, it is their ethical duty to report it. This policy suggests that the person reporting the case follows these steps:

- **stay calm** so as not to frighten the young person
- **reassure** the child that they are not to blame and that it was right to tell
- **listen** to the child, showing that you are taking them seriously
- **keep questions to a minimum** so that there is a clear and accurate understanding of what has been said. The law is very strict and child abuse cases have been dismissed where it is felt that the child has been led or words and ideas have been suggested during questioning. Only ask questions to clarify
- **inform** the child that you have to inform other people about what they have told you. Tell the child this is to help stop the abuse continuing.
- **safety of the child** is paramount. If the child needs urgent medical attention call an ambulance, inform the doctors of the concern and ensure they are made aware that this is a child protection issue
- **record** all information
- **report** the incident to the ethics officer

**In all cases if the person is not sure what to do you can gain help from Alo116.al<sup>2</sup>**, by calling the telephone number **116 111** and mailing **alo116@alo116.al**

### 3.3 Documentation, reporting and confidentiality

All Co-PLAN team members shall ensure personal and identifying material particularly that which would place a child at risk of harm, remains private and confidential. All written reports of a confidential nature shall be circulated to the manager only, unless permission of the person/s involved is obtained, or if for legal purposes documents are required by external agencies and departments. All records, documents and correspondence involving material of a confidential matter should be kept securely, away from children or public access. Any breaches of confidentiality will be taken seriously and dealt with accordingly by Co-PLAN.

Every effort will be made to ensure the maintenance of accurate records of concerns, risks, incidents and accidents, even when there is no need to refer the matter immediately. These records will aim to be objective and without personal bias wherever possible, and include any information from relevant witnesses. They shall be dated and signed and kept always in the possession of the Ethics Officer.

## 4. Training and Education

Co-PLAN is committed to the creation, implementation and ongoing input of training and education strategies which will assist in creating a safer environment for its vulnerable children. Although still in its early stages of development, future plans will aim to include:

- Collaborating with partner academic institutions and other NGOs to develop culturally appropriate additions to the school curriculum relating to child protection issues, safety and human rights.

---

<sup>2</sup> <https://alo116.al/shfrytezim-i-femijes/> (UNICEF Albania; CRCA)



- Working towards programs which will promote and encourage children to develop the skills they need to recognize and stay safe from abuse.
- Developing culturally sensitive programs involving the community, to raise awareness amongst local staff on child protection issues, signs and indicators of abuse, and procedures for dealing with suspected misconduct.
- Providing children with access to information and education material on acceptable conduct and self-protection from abuse.

### Declaration

On behalf of **Co-PLAN** we, the undersigned, will oversee the implementation of the Child Protection Policy and take all necessary steps to ensure it is adhered to.

**Name:**  
Anila Gjika

**Position:**  
Deputy Executive Director

**Date:** 23.01.2023

**Name:**  
Aida Ciro

**Position:**  
Ethics Officer

**Date:** 23.01.2023