



CHILD PROTECTION PROTOCOL OF CENTRE FOR RESEARCH AND ANALYSIS NOVUS

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1. Introduction

1.1. Purpose of the Protocol

The purpose of this Child Protection Protocol is to establish clear procedures and responsibilities for safeguarding children involved in any activity, event, or program organized or supported by the Centre for Research and Analysis NOVUS. This document outlines the organization's commitment to creating a safe, inclusive, and respectful environment for all children, ensuring that they are protected from harm, abuse, neglect, and exploitation. It provides guidance for staff, volunteers, partners, and collaborators on how to prevent, identify, and respond to child protection concerns in a consistent and ethical manner.

1.2. Scope of Application

This Protocol applies to all employees, volunteers, interns, consultants, board members, and representatives of NOVUS, as well as any individuals or organizations working in partnership with NOVUS or representing the organization in any capacity. It is relevant for all activities involving direct or indirect contact with children, including but not limited to educational workshops, outreach initiatives, research projects, and events involving schools or youth groups. All persons covered by this Protocol are required to comply with its standards and procedures, regardless of their role or duration of involvement.

1.3. Definition of a Child

For the purposes of this Protocol, a child is defined as any individual under the age of 18, in accordance with the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) and the national legislation of the Republic of North Macedonia. This definition applies regardless of the child's gender, ethnicity, legal status, disability, or social background.

1.4 Legal and Policy Framework

This Protocol is informed by both international and national legal instruments and policies, including but not limited to:

- The **United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC)**;
- The **Law on Child Protection** (Republic of North Macedonia);
- The **Law on Prevention and Protection from Violence against Women and Domestic Violence**;
- The **General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR)** and national data privacy laws as applicable;
- NOVUS's internal policies on ethical conduct, inclusion, and nondiscrimination.

NOVUS is committed to aligning its work with human rights standards, ensuring that child protection is integrated across all organizational operations and partnerships.

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2. Guiding Principles

The Centre for Research and Analysis NOVUS is committed to upholding the highest standards of child protection, guided by the following fundamental principles that reflect our organizational values and responsibilities:

2.1 Best Interests of the Child

All decisions and actions taken by NOVUS in relation to children shall be guided by the best interests of the child, as enshrined in the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC). This principle ensures that the physical, emotional, psychological, and social well-being of the child is prioritized in every situation.

2.2 Zero Tolerance for Abuse

NOVUS maintains a strict zero-tolerance policy for any form of abuse, exploitation, neglect, or harm against children. Any suspected or actual breach of this policy will be treated seriously, thoroughly investigated, and may result in disciplinary or legal action. All staff and collaborators are expected to act swiftly and responsibly when concerns arise.

2.3 Participation and Inclusion

Children have the right to be heard and to participate in matters affecting their lives. NOVUS encourages the meaningful involvement of children in programs and activities, respecting their views, experiences, and capacities. Efforts will be made to ensure that children are included in safe, accessible, and culturally appropriate ways, especially those from marginalized or vulnerable groups.

2.4 Confidentiality and Data Protection

All personal data and information shared by or about children will be treated with strict confidentiality and handled in compliance with data protection laws and best practices. Information will only be shared with authorized persons on a need-to-know basis, especially when it concerns the child's safety and well-being. Secure data storage and consent protocols will be implemented in all child-related activities and documentation.

2.5 Non-Discrimination

NOVUS is committed to ensuring equality and inclusion in all of its programs and actions. Children will be protected from discrimination based on gender, ethnicity, religion, disability, socioeconomic status, nationality, or any other status. Protection efforts will be proactive and inclusive, ensuring that every child receives equal care, respect, and protection.

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3. Definitions of Abuse and Harm

Abuse can occur in any setting and can be perpetrated by adults, peers, or others in positions of trust or authority. It is crucial that all individuals working with NOVUS recognize the various forms of abuse to prevent harm and respond effectively when concerns arise. Below are definitions of the main types of abuse as recognized in child protection standards:

3.1 Physical Abuse

Physical abuse involves the deliberate use of force that results in or has the potential to result in physical injury to a child. This includes, but is not limited to, hitting, slapping, punching, kicking, shaking, burning, poisoning, or any other action that causes physical harm or discomfort. Physical abuse may also include fabricated or induced illness.

3.2 Emotional Abuse

Emotional abuse includes acts or omissions that cause harm to a child's emotional, psychological, or social development. Examples include persistent criticism, humiliation, threats, isolation, rejection, or exposure to domestic violence. Emotional abuse can be more difficult to identify than physical abuse but can be equally damaging to a child's well-being.

3.3 Sexual Abuse and Exploitation

Sexual abuse involves forcing, coercing, or manipulating a child into sexual activity, including inappropriate touching, rape, exposure to sexual acts, and the use of children in pornography. Sexual exploitation includes situations where a child is used for sexual purposes in exchange for money, goods, favors, or social status. Consent cannot be given by a child in such situations, regardless of age or perceived willingness.

3.4 Neglect

Neglect is the persistent failure to meet a child's basic physical, emotional, or developmental needs. This may include failing to provide adequate food, shelter, clothing, supervision, medical care, or emotional nurturing. Neglect can seriously impair a child's health or development and is often a result of chronic inattention or indifference.

3.5 Online/Digital Abuse

Online abuse involves the use of digital technologies (such as social media, messaging apps, or websites) to exploit, harm, or threaten a child. This includes cyberbullying, grooming, sexual exploitation, and the sharing of abusive images or content. NOVUS recognizes the growing risk of digital abuse and emphasizes safe and respectful online engagement in all programs involving children.

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4. Roles and Responsibilities

Ensuring child protection is a shared responsibility that involves all individuals working with or on behalf of NOVUS. Everyone has a duty to uphold child safety standards and act upon concerns.

4.1 Staff, Volunteers, and Interns

All NOVUS staff, volunteers, and interns are required to:

- Read, understand, and comply with this Protocol;
- Complete child protection training, where applicable;
- Act respectfully and responsibly toward children;
- Immediately report concerns or incidents of abuse, harm, or policy violations to the designated Child Protection Focal Point;
- Maintain appropriate boundaries in all interactions with children.

4.2 Child Protection Focal Point

NOVUS will appoint a designated Child Protection Focal Point (CPFP), who will:

- Serve as the main contact person for all child protection issues;
- Receive and respond to all reports or allegations in line with this Protocol;
- Ensure incidents are documented and referred to the appropriate authorities when required;
- Provide guidance, training, and resources to staff and partners;
- Monitor compliance and support implementation across NOVUS projects.

4.3 Management Team

The Management Team holds overall accountability for the implementation of the Child Protection Protocol and must:

- Promote a culture of safeguarding within the organization;
- Ensure child protection is embedded in planning, staffing, partnerships, and risk assessments;
- Allocate resources for training and safeguarding implementation;
- Support the Child Protection Focal Point in fulfilling their role.

4.4 Partner Organizations and Contractors

All partner organizations, external consultants, and contractors engaged by NOVUS are expected to:

- Abide by this Protocol or present an equivalent safeguarding policy;
- Ensure that staff working with children are properly vetted and trained;
- Cooperate fully with NOVUS in the case of investigations or incident management.

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5. Code of Conduct

NOVUS staff, volunteers, and associates are expected to maintain the highest standards of behavior when working with or around children. This Code of Conduct provides guidance on what is acceptable and unacceptable.

5.1 Appropriate and Inappropriate Behaviour

Appropriate Behaviour includes:

- Treating all children with respect, regardless of background or ability;
- Listening to children and valuing their opinions;
- Maintaining professional boundaries at all times;
- Ensuring a safe and inclusive environment for participation.

Inappropriate Behaviour includes:

- Engaging in any form of sexual, physical, or emotional abuse;
- Using language or behavior that is degrading, humiliating, or intimidating;
- Initiating or encouraging physical contact that could be misinterpreted;
- Spending time alone with a child out of sight of others, without valid reason.

5.2 Reporting Suspected Misconduct

All concerns, suspicions, or allegations of abuse or inappropriate behavior must be reported immediately to the Child Protection Focal Point or a trusted senior staff member. Reports may be made confidentially and without fear of reprisal. NOVUS will ensure that concerns are addressed swiftly and in line with due process.

5.3 Communication Guidelines (including social media)

When communicating with or about children, particularly through digital platforms, the following must be observed:

- Obtain informed consent before taking or sharing images or stories involving children;
- Avoid posting identifying information about children online;
- Refrain from private messaging with children on social media or other digital platforms unless approved and supervised;
- Use respectful, non-stereotypical language and images that uphold the dignity of the child.

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6. Preventive Measures

The Centre for Research and Analysis NOVUS is committed to a proactive approach to safeguarding children by embedding robust preventive mechanisms into all levels of its operations. These measures are designed to reduce risks, strengthen organizational accountability, and promote a safe and inclusive environment for all children who engage with NOVUS programs and services.

6.1 Recruitment and Screening

NOVUS ensures that all individuals recruited to work with or on behalf of the organization are thoroughly vetted and suitable to work with children. To this end, the organization applies the following child-safe recruitment practices:

- Inclusion of child safeguarding responsibilities in all relevant job descriptions and contracts.
- Mandatory reference checks and, where appropriate, criminal background checks for all staff, volunteers, and consultants.
- Interview processes that include questions on child safeguarding values and scenarios.
- Signing of the Child Protection Protocol as a condition of employment or engagement.

6.2 Training and Awareness

All staff, volunteers, interns, and associated personnel are required to undergo child protection training that aligns with the standards and values of NOVUS. The training program includes:

- Comprehensive onboarding sessions on child rights, types of abuse, and reporting obligations.
- Regular refresher courses and awareness-raising activities.
- Tailored training modules for program-specific risks or contexts involving children.

6.3 Safe Program Design

NOVUS incorporates child protection considerations into the design, implementation, and evaluation of all its programs, particularly those involving direct or indirect engagement with children. This includes:

- Developing program guidelines that prioritize safety and child participation.
- Ensuring appropriate adult-child ratios and visible supervision structures.
- Avoiding isolated or one-on-one interactions between staff and children, unless strictly necessary and authorized.

6.4 Risk Assessment

A systematic risk assessment is conducted prior to the launch of any activity involving children. This process entails:

- Identification of potential risks to children's safety and well-being.
- Development of mitigation strategies and safeguarding plans.
- Assignment of safeguarding roles and responsibilities within each activity.

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- Periodic review and adaptation of risk assessments as needed.

7. Reporting and Responding to Concerns

NOVUS maintains a zero-tolerance approach to all forms of child abuse, exploitation, or neglect. The organization encourages an open and supportive environment where concerns can be raised, heard, and acted upon promptly and appropriately.

7.1 Recognizing Signs of Abuse

All NOVUS personnel are expected to remain vigilant to potential signs of abuse or harm. These may include, but are not limited to:

- Unexplained physical injuries or changes in behavior.
- Fearfulness, withdrawal, anxiety, or distress.
- Age-inappropriate language or sexual knowledge.
- Poor hygiene, signs of malnutrition, or neglect.
- Direct disclosure of abuse by a child or third party.

7.2 Reporting Procedures

All staff, volunteers, and associates are obligated to report any suspicion, allegation, or disclosure of abuse or inappropriate behavior without delay. Reports should be made to the designated Child Protection Focal Point (CPFP) using the following steps:

- Provide factual information including the nature of the concern, names of individuals involved, date, time, location, and any witnesses.
- Maintain confidentiality and respect the dignity of all parties involved.
- Do not conduct any personal investigations; the role of the reporter is to inform, not to verify.

7.3 Internal Investigation Protocol

Upon receipt of a report, the CPFP, in consultation with the Management Team, will initiate a response that may include:

- Immediate measures to ensure the safety of the child(ren) concerned.
- A preliminary review to assess the credibility and urgency of the concern.
- Launching a formal internal investigation if warranted, adhering to due process and documentation requirements.
- Ensuring impartiality, confidentiality, and the rights of all involved parties during the process.

7.4 Referral to Authorities and Support Services

In cases where a child is at risk of or has experienced significant harm, NOVUS will:

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- Refer the case to appropriate external authorities, including child protection services and law enforcement.
- Facilitate access to medical, psychological, or legal support for the affected child and family.
- Cooperate fully with official investigations and legal proceedings.

7.5 Feedback to the Reporting Party

The individual who made the report will be provided with acknowledgment and limited feedback, subject to confidentiality protocols. This includes:

- Confirmation that the concern has been received and is being addressed.
- General information on next steps or action taken.
- Assurance that the matter is being handled with seriousness, professionalism, and discretion.

8. Confidentiality and Data Management

Ensuring the confidentiality of child protection concerns is essential to maintaining trust, protecting the dignity of those involved, and supporting effective safeguarding practices. NOVUS is committed to handling all sensitive information with the highest standards of professionalism, in accordance with relevant data protection laws and ethical standards.

8.1 Handling Sensitive Information

All information related to child protection concerns, including reports, witness statements, and investigation outcomes, is considered highly confidential. NOVUS commits to the following:

- Only designated personnel with a direct role in managing the concern will have access to the information;
- Information will be handled sensitively, respectfully, and in a way that protects the safety and rights of the child;
- Personal data will only be collected, processed, and retained for legitimate safeguarding purposes.

8.2 Record Keeping and Storage

Accurate and detailed records of all reported concerns and follow-up actions will be maintained by the designated Child Protection Focal Point. These records will:

- Be stored securely in encrypted digital folders or locked physical files;
- Include dates, descriptions of incidents, actions taken, and outcomes;
- Be retained for an appropriate period in line with organizational policy and legal requirements.

8.3 Access and Disclosure

Access to safeguarding records is strictly limited to authorized personnel. Information may be shared externally only when:

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- There is a legal obligation to do so (e.g., with law enforcement or child protection services);
- The sharing of information is necessary to protect a child or other individuals from harm;
- Appropriate consent has been obtained, where required and possible.

All disclosures will be made in accordance with data protection regulations and ethical considerations.

9. Monitoring and Review

To ensure the continued relevance, effectiveness, and accountability of its safeguarding efforts, NOVUS regularly monitors the implementation of the Child Protection Protocol and uses learning from experience to improve its practices.

9.1 Monitoring Implementation

NOVUS will establish mechanisms to monitor the application of this Protocol across its operations. This includes:

- Regular supervision and support for staff and volunteers;
- Integrating safeguarding discussions into team meetings and activity planning;
- Collecting feedback from children, staff, and stakeholders regarding safety and well-being.

9.2 Annual Review and Updates

The Child Protection Protocol will be reviewed on an annual basis, or earlier if needed, to ensure alignment with evolving best practices, legal frameworks, and organizational learning. The review process will:

- Be led by the designated safeguarding team or focal point;
- Include input from staff, partners, and, where possible, young people;
- Result in updated policy versions shared internally and externally as needed.

9.3 Learning from Incidents

When child protection incidents occur, NOVUS is committed to learning from these events through a structured reflection process. This includes:

- Conducting post-incident reviews and debriefs;
- Identifying gaps or challenges in policy implementation;
- Adjusting protocols, training, or operations to prevent recurrence;
- Promoting a culture of continuous improvement in safeguarding practices.

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10. Annexes

Annex A: Child Protection Incident Report Form

Purpose:

The **Child Protection Incident Report Form** is used for documenting any incident, suspicion, or concern regarding child protection issues. This form helps ensure that all necessary details are recorded accurately and promptly for further action and investigation.

Instructions:

The form must be completed by the individual who first notices the concern or receives a disclosure from a child. It should be submitted immediately to the designated **Child Protection Focal Point** (CPFP).

Content:

1. **Reporter's Information:**

- Name:
- Position:
- Contact details:

2. **Child's Information:**

- Full Name:
- Age/Date of Birth:
- Address (if relevant):

3. **Description of Incident/Concern:**

- Date and Time of Incident:
- Details of what happened:
- Names of witnesses (if any):

4. **Actions Taken:**

- Immediate actions taken (e.g., child protection referral, notification of relevant authorities, etc.):

5. **Signature and Date:**

- Signature of the person reporting:
- Date and time of the report:

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Annex B: Declaration of Commitment to the Child Protection Protocol

Purpose:

The **Declaration of Commitment** is to be signed by all staff, volunteers, interns, contractors, and any partner organizations or individuals engaging with NOVUS. This declaration confirms their understanding of and commitment to following the child protection policies outlined in the Protocol.

Content: "I, [Full Name], hereby declare my commitment to upholding the principles and practices outlined in the **Child Protection Protocol** of the **Centre for Research and Analysis NOVUS**. I understand the importance of child protection and the responsibility I have in ensuring a safe and supportive environment for children. I commit to:

- Adhering to the rules and guidelines stated in the Protocol;
- Reporting any concerns, suspicions, or disclosures regarding child protection;
- Upholding the confidentiality of all child protection information. I acknowledge that failure to comply with the protocol may result in disciplinary action."
- Signature:
- Date:
- Position:

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