



## CHILD PROTECTION POLICY

August 2023

### INTRODUCTION

Violence against children is a widespread phenomenon not only nationally but also internationally, and every child, regardless of age, can be at risk of abuse and exploitation or may witness aggressive disciplinary actions, domestic violence, violence in schools, sexual violence, or economic violence.

Acts of violence against children can occur at home, in school, in care institutions, on the streets, in camps, or on excursions, and the perpetrators can be parents or other family members, foster caregivers, teachers, medical personnel, or other children. Some children are more vulnerable due to gender, race, ethnic origin, disabilities, sexual orientation, religion, or social status. Most of the time, violence against children can be prevented.

### **COMMITMENT STATEMENT of the PLAN B Social Responsibility Association to protect children from all forms of abuse**

**The PLAN B Social Responsibility Association** (the PLAN B Association) acknowledges and assumes responsibility for children, their rights, and especially the right to be protected from any form of physical or mental violence, ill-treatment, abuse, neglect, maltreatment, or exploitation, including sexual abuse. This policy has been designed to ensure that the PLAN B Association takes all possible measures to prevent violence and protect children from this phenomenon. In this regard, the PLAN B Association relies on the provisions of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC), ratified by Romania in 1990, and national legislation in the field of child protection.

The UNCRC provides an international framework emphasizing children's rights to protection against abuse and neglect (Art. 19), discrimination (Art. 2), and various forms of exploitation (Art. 32-36); Art. 20 focuses on children deprived of parental care, Art. 22 on refugees, Art. 33 on children at risk regarding drug use, Art. 37 and Art. 40 on children deprived of liberty, and Art. 38 and Art. 40 on children in situations of armed conflict.



Through this Child Protection Policy, we aim to send a clear signal to the children, youth, and families with whom we collaborate within our projects, namely that we do everything in our power to protect children from violence and to continually implement, review, and develop the best protection measures within the organization.

In all actions involving children, the PLAN B Association is committed to protecting children, reporting, and responding to any alleged abuse, taking all measures provided by national policies and procedures, regardless of the origin of the report or the identity of the alleged perpetrator.

## **PRINCIPLES OF THE CHILD PROTECTION POLICY**

The current policy is based on the following principles:

- Children have the right to be protected from any form of abuse, neglect, exploitation, and trafficking;
- The well-being of the child must be protected and promoted;
- The best interests of the child must prevail in case of conflicting interests;
- The child's opinion is crucial in preventing abuse and protecting the child from abuse, neglect, exploitation, and trafficking;
- Parents, family, and other caregivers play a crucial role in ensuring the child's well-being;
- Recognizing the importance of partnership with other institutions/structures responsible for child protection;
- Acknowledging the rights of employees and volunteers to receive training and support regarding the implementation of the Child Protection Policy.

## **OBJECTIVES OF THE CHILD PROTECTION POLICY**

Through this policy, the PLAN B Association aims to:

- Prevent cases of child abuse and reduce the number of incidents (child-child, adult-child) within the programs and services of the PLAN B Association;
- Raise awareness among children about their rights and their active role in child protection;
- Inform children, employees, Board members, families, community members, volunteers, and partners (sponsors, donors, journalists, government authorities, etc.) about the child protection policy and related procedures (awareness, prevention, reporting, response methods);
- Encourage staff members directly involved in activities with children to use necessary skills to contribute to the development and protection of each child;



- Provide necessary working conditions for staff to contribute to the development and protection of each child;
- Encourage open and honest discussions about child abuse - at national meetings and workshops, in all programs and services - among various partners (children, youth and their families, child and youth care workers, management staff, Board members, public relations staff and fundraisers, teachers, administrative and security staff, etc.);
- Establish correct, safe, and transparent reporting methods for all types of programs, ensuring the right of partners (children, parents, and staff) to be heard;
- Form an active protection network, ensuring the safety of children and adults within the organization. Within all associations, staff members strive for child protection.

## **PHOTOGRAPHS/VIDEO AND INFORMATION ABOUT CHILDREN**

In all our activities, we protect the image, privacy, dignity and rights of children, and all staff members, collaborators, volunteers, consultants, supporters, and visitors to our premises, events, and projects must adhere to the following:

- Obtain the written and signed consent of the parent/guardian/legal guardian of the child or young person for taking photographs or video clips and their use, being informed in advance about the subject and purpose of the recording.
- Any images of children must be decent; children must be dressed appropriately, not depicted in positions that could be interpreted as sexually provocative, and to the extent possible, not portraying extreme suffering of the children.
- Photographs, video clips, and written materials should not include any identifying information, such as their names, school locations, or residences, unless adequate justification and consent are provided.
- In activities involving the participation of only one child or young person, the two-adult rule will be respected, meaning that a minimum of two staff members will be present throughout the activity.
- They should not post unofficial images or video clips of children they have encountered within the organization on social media channels or other platforms; however, they may share official posts from the organization. Tagging children in photographs or video clips is not allowed.

### **Consent Form/Agreement**

At the beginning of each program, all parents/guardians/ legal guardians receive a registration and consent form for personal data regarding their child/children (e.g., photographs and the publication of photographic and video material), which must be signed



and returned to the PLAN B Association, being informed in advance about the subject and purpose for which they are made.

At the beginning of each program, all children and young people are verbally informed that photographs and/or videos may be taken occasionally during the program and distributed in the publications and communication platforms and social media of the organization, if consent is given.

If children and young people participate in PLAN B Association programs by visiting another school or location, or organization for a project, a separate consent form (similar to that included in the registration form) will be created with all project information for all parents/guardians and/or legal guardians to sign before our visit.

Any web/digital/social media platform related to the PLAN B Association will be monitored to ensure that children and young people do not post identifying information about themselves (otherwise adequate justification and consent will be provided). PLAN B Association staff will remove any such information as soon as they become aware of it.

Personal data of children, young people, and their families (full names, contact details, location, etc.) must be kept securely and shared only with those who need this information, always in accordance with applicable law (an exception will only occur when adequate justification and consent are provided). This information is kept in password-protected files or with restricted access to organization staff members, collaborators, volunteers, ambassadors, consultants, supporters, and visitors.

All signed consent forms, reports, and information related to child and youth protection must be kept securely and protected by the Board and General Manager and marked as confidential. In the case of communication via email, these documents should also be marked as confidential.

## **RELEVANT LEGISLATION**

This child protection policy of the PLAN B Association is based on the following conventions, guidelines, and laws:

- The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child 1989 (ratified by Romania on January 26, 1990),
- Child Protection Standards, as presented by the Child Safety Coalition 2014,



- The United Nations Declaration on the Elimination of Sexual Abuse and Exploitation 2017,
- The United Nations Guidelines for the Alternative Care of Children 2010,
- The European Commission's European Migration Agenda 2015,
  
- Law no. 272 of 2004 on the protection and promotion of children's rights, republished,
- Law no. 252 of 2010 on the ratification of the Council of Europe Convention on the Protection of Children against Sexual Exploitation and Sexual Abuse, adopted in Lanzarote on October 25, 2007, and signed by Romania in Lanzarote on October 25, 2007,
- Law no. 217 of 2003 for the prevention and combating of domestic violence, republished.

In addition, the policy will be guided and based on the respect for the following procedures:

- The European Union, Ten principles for integrated child protection systems 2015,
- Child Safety Assurance, Child Safety Standards, 2014.

## DEFINITIONS

Before defining child abuse, it is necessary to define a child.

According to Article 1 of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC), ratified by Romania on January 26, 1990, **a child** is *"any human being under the age of 18 years, unless national legislation recognizes an earlier age of majority"*.

**Violence against children** is defined by the UNCRC as *"all forms of physical or mental violence, injury and abuse, neglect or negligent treatment, maltreatment or exploitation, including sexual abuse."* The World Report on Violence and Health (2002) defines violence against children as follows: *"the intentional use of physical force or power, threatened or actual, against a child, by an individual or group, that either results in or has a high likelihood of resulting in actual or potential harm to the child's health, survival, development, or dignity"*.

The main forms of violence against children are: abuse, neglect, exploitation, and trafficking.

According to Government Decision no. 49/2011, **abuse** can take various forms, being classified as physical, emotional, psychological, sexual, and economic abuse.



**Physical abuse** involves the bodily harm of the child within interactions, whether singular or repeated, with a person in a position of responsibility, power, or trust with the child, resulting from intentional acts that cause the child suffering in the present or future. Bodily harm includes hitting, beating, shaking, throwing, poisoning, burning, scalding, drowning, or suffocating. It can also involve physical abuse of a child, inventing symptoms, or intentionally inducing illness in the child. These incidents can be singular or repetitive.

**Emotional abuse** consists of repeatedly exposing the child to situations whose emotional impact exceeds their capacity for psychological integration. Emotional abuse comes from an adult who is in a relationship of trust, responsibility, or power with the child.

Specifically, these acts can include verbal and non-verbal humiliations, intimidation, threats, terrorizing, restrictions on freedom of action, denigration, unfair accusations, discrimination, ridicule, and other hostile or rejecting attitudes towards the child.

If emotional abuse is repetitive and sustained, it leads to the impairment of various aspects of the child's psyche (e.g., personality structure, emotions, cognitions, adaptation, perception), becoming psychological abuse, which has more serious and long-term consequences on the child's development than emotional abuse alone. A child who witnesses violence in the family indirectly suffers emotional and/or psychological abuse.

**Sexual abuse** involves forcing or enticing a child or a young person, who is immature in terms of psychosexual development, to engage in sexual activities, including prostitution, whether the child is aware of what is happening or not. These activities may involve physical contact, including acts of penetration (e.g., rape) or non-penetrative acts (kissing, touching). It may also include activities that do not involve physical contact, such as involving children in watching or producing pornographic materials, observing sexual activities, listening to sexually suggestive language, or encouraging children to behave in sexually inappropriate ways. The perpetrator of the abuse may be an older or more informed child, or an adult (a stranger, a sibling, or a person in a position of authority, such as a parent or caregiver). Sexual abuse also encompasses early marriage or involvement of children in consensual sexual relationships (especially in Roma communities) and sexual harassment in cases where children work according to the provisions of the labor/civil code. These contacts or interactions occur against the child using force, deception, bribery, threats, or pressure. Sexual abuse can be physical, verbal, or emotional.

**Neglect and negligent behavior** represent the intention or omission on the part of caregivers to support the development of children in various aspects: educational, emotional, developmental, nutrition, shelter, and decent living conditions, within the context of the family's available resources or those responsible for the care of children and





which leads to or has a high probability of causing harm to the physical, mental, spiritual, moral, and social development of the child. This includes the failure to adequately supervise and protect children from these incidents to the best of their ability.

Abandonment of a child by the family represents the most severe form of neglect.

Abuse, neglect, exploitation, and trafficking of children, as well as other forms of violence against children, can be committed by parents, individuals known to the child or strangers, as well as by other children besides the victim child. Thus, these acts can occur both within the family and in public or private institutions intended for the child and/or family, as well as outside of these settings, for example, in the workplace.

**Child protection**, as provided for in Article 19 of the UNCRC, refers to protecting children from violence, exploitation, abuse, and neglect, emphasizing that signatory states must have specific laws prohibiting violence and implement administrative, social, and educational measures to protect children.

## **PREVENTIVE ACTIONS**

The PLAN B Association is dedicated to creating a safe environment for children, prioritizing their well-being and best interests. Prevention and awareness of risks are integrated into all aspects of our daily activities, at all organizational levels. This policy is supported by clear procedures and will be rigorously implemented among staff, partners, and children, so that their safety becomes an integral part of the organizational culture. Additionally, we pay special attention to bullying situations and other forms of abuse that may affect children; such incidents will be sensitively investigated, and support will be provided to both the victim child and the perpetrator.

The child protection policy applies to all staff members, board members, volunteers, and collaborators, as well as short-term or part-time experts, all of whom are strongly linked to the organization as employees, representatives of the main decision-making body, or providers with civil or service contracts.

### **Staff**

Within the human resources policies, specific measures will be introduced for the implementation of the principles of the Child Protection Policy.

From the recruitment phase, we commit to promoting and declaring a zero-tolerance policy towards child abuse, making this evident even in our recruitment announcements, to shape the organizational environment.



Every behavior will be examined in this regard. Additionally, we will introduce performance indicators to assess how the child protection policy and associated procedures are implemented by staff.

New employees and collaborators working under labor contracts or other forms of contracts will participate in a special session at the beginning of their employment, dedicated to the Child Protection Policy and its procedures.

Regarding existing staff and collaborators, periodic information and training sessions will be organized on the Child Protection Policy and associated code of conduct. Performance indicators reflecting the degree of compliance with the policy in line with the responsibilities of each position will be established for performance evaluation.

Any violation of the code of conduct or behavior contrary to the Child Protection Policy will be investigated, and measures will be taken in accordance with our human resources policies, internal regulations, and national legislation, which may involve sanctions, suspension, or even dismissal.

## **Volunteers**

PLAN B Association has guidelines for volunteer selection, including the requirement to present a criminal record check, medical records, as well as references from previous volunteering/employment positions or from educational personnel. Volunteers will sign the Code of Conduct and the Child Protection Policy. In the first six weeks of starting their volunteering activities, they will participate in an intensive team adaptation program, consisting of training sessions on topics such as volunteer roles, responsibilities, and restrictions, children's needs, recognizing signs of abuse, and reporting mechanisms. If volunteers fail to adopt behavior in line with the Code of Conduct and this policy, termination of the volunteer contract may be decided at any time.

## **Board Members**

Board members commit to adhering to the Child Protection Policy and Code of Conduct and will be responsible for overseeing the implementation of the policy.

## **Awareness raising, training and supervision**

For effective implementation, the child protection policy must be clearly understood by all those it applies to. Training and supervision are essential for preventing child abuse situations; therefore, all new employees, collaborators under civil agreement or service contract, short-term experts, or those with part-time work, volunteers, and members of the board of directors are informed of the child protection policy right from the start, in the first week of activity. In the first three months of joining the organization, new employees/





volunteers/experts/collaborators participate in a child protection training session tailored to their roles and responsibilities towards children.

An assessment has been conducted for current employees/volunteers/experts/collaborators to understand and identify their learning needs, enabling them to fulfill and apply the provisions of the child protection policy and related implementation procedures. It is important for everyone to know the roles, responsibilities, and necessary reporting and response mechanisms for allegations of child abuse.

In all organization partnerships involving contact with children, the child protection policy is mentioned, and the organization's zero tolerance for abuse is emphasized. PLAN B Association aims to ensure that everyone connected to the organization - employees, partners, the community - understands the consequences of child abuse on the physical, mental, and emotional development of children.

## **RESPONSIVE ACTIONS**

### **Reporting and addressing allegations of child abuse**

The PLAN B Association manages allegations of child abuse considering the best interests of the child and their psychological and physical well-being. Any adult who witnesses harm to a child or observes signs of abuse in children within our organization must report this to the organization's board of directors. Any suspicion of child abuse is internally investigated, and child protection authorities and law enforcement agencies are immediately notified about the case in the event of obvious and proven abuse of a child. The first measure is to ensure the safety of the child-victim and to provide immediate necessary psychological and medical assistance.

Confidentiality is of utmost importance when dealing with abuse situations, and information will be treated with discretion. Any adult who withholds information and covers up any form of abuse situation is considered an accomplice. Children, staff members, or any other adult who reports a case are supported and protected.

All forms of child abuse are treated seriously without exception in all PLAN B Association programs, and a response is provided according to the severity of the allegations. The PLAN B Association ensures a response regardless of the severity of the abuse. By providing a response, we ensure following a transparent and fair procedure so that no one is unjustly condemned and the rights of all involved are protected.



In all cases where there is suspicion or evidence of child abuse or neglect, safeguarding and protecting the child is paramount. At the same time, remedial measures are provided, and the protection of all involved individuals is guaranteed. The affected persons receive counseling and support. In investigating an incident involving child abuse, an external expert and a representative of the PLAN B Association must be involved. Any person accused of abusing a child is entitled to an impartial hearing. The response to child-on-child abuse allegations focuses on what is best for the development and protection of the children involved in such cases. Decisions are made promptly, and actions are taken swiftly. Cases are reported to the authorities responsible for child welfare, according to procedures defined by the organization. Written records of all abuse cases and their conclusions are kept within the service or program.

The Child Protection Policy will be revised as necessary or when changes in the national legal framework influence the provisions of the policy. The review considers lessons learned and suggestions from children, staff, collaborators, volunteers, and partners involved in our activities with and for children.

## **CODE OF CONDUCT**

The PLAN B Association considers any form of violence committed against children unacceptable and acknowledges its duty to protect children - to keep them safe, promote their well-being, and shield them from the most common forms of violence and harm, including neglect, physical, psychological/emotional, and sexual violence.

The purpose of the Code of Conduct is to raise awareness among employees and all collaborators and not to punish or sanction them. Any person found to have violated the Child Protection Policy and Code of Conduct will be investigated (disciplinarily, if employed) and, in accordance with the findings, provisions of labor law, civil law, and internal regulations will be applied, such as sanctions or termination of the employment or service contract. In the case of a serious incident, when child abuse is evident and there is no doubt about the perpetrator, the competent law enforcement authorities will be immediately notified to take the appropriate legal measures, in accordance with criminal law. Additionally, a guide will be developed to highlight the desired behaviors of children towards other children.

The Code of Conduct will be printed, and each employee, member of the board of directors, volunteer, and collaborator will read and sign it to commit to its contents. The Code of Conduct is also intended to protect the staff and other adults involved or in contact with the PLAN B Association from malicious allegations of inappropriate behavior towards children. The Code of Conduct will be posted on the PLAN B Association's website to be visible to any potential new employee, partner, or volunteer.



## **Unacceptable Behaviors**

Unacceptable behaviors of employees and partners of the PLAN B Association (parents, volunteers, trainers, assistants, experts, partners, adults who come into contact with children during activities, service providers, etc.) in their relationships with children include:

- hitting or applying other forms of physical abuse towards a child or inciting a child to apply violence to another child: shoving, slapping, pinching, throwing, pulling hair or ears, etc.
- emotional abuse: shouting, humiliation, ridicule, intimidation, name-calling, swearing, verbal threats, destruction of personal belongings, etc.
- imposing or inciting a child to engage in any form of sexual activity (pornographic films or photographs, sexual relations, sexual touching, etc.)
- sexual abuse: physical, verbal, or nonverbal behavior of a sexual nature that creates an unpleasant, degrading, humiliating, insulting atmosphere, infringing upon the child's dignity (lewd looks, vulgar comments, indecent jokes, innuendos, touching intimate areas).
- involvement or encouragement of children to engage in any illegal activities: labor exploitation, procurement, trafficking, or consumption of alcohol, tobacco, and other drugs.
- discriminatory treatment towards certain children: excluding some and favoring others based on ethnicity, religion, language spoken, academic performance, family's social status, parents' reputation, etc.

This list is not exhaustive. The basic principle is that employees, volunteers, collaborators of the PLAN B Association, and other adults who come into contact with children must avoid actions and behaviors that can be abusive and harmful to the child physically and emotionally.

## **Desirable Behaviors**

It is important that in their relationships with children, all those listed:

- be open and have a friendly attitude towards children.
- listen to children and consider their opinions, involve them in decision-making.
- maintain confidentiality of information about children, not disclose their personal data (except when we are required to report (internally, externally)); in this situation, confidentiality means that information must be shared according to the "need to know" criterion, as provided in the reporting procedure.

Confidentiality is a topic that needs to be discussed and deeply understood by all those working with children, especially in the context of child protection. The sole purpose of



confidentiality in this regard is to protect the child. Staff members will not guarantee confidentiality and will not make promises to keep certain student secrets when it comes to child protection, because if there is such an issue, it must be reported to the board of directors and, if necessary, investigated by the appropriate authorities.

- intervene to stop any act of violence or discrimination against children that they observe and report it to the responsible authorities (according to the reporting procedure).
- encourage children's independence by giving them tasks they can do themselves, according to their evolving abilities.
- organize the environment in which they work with children to minimize the risks of abuse: ensure visibility and transparency of activities with children, invite another adult (employee, collaborator, volunteer, parent) to participate in discussions with the child, invite other children, etc.
- discuss with children about their protection from abuse, what are acceptable and unacceptable behaviors, and what they can do themselves if a problem arises.

### **Principles Applicable to Physical Contact**

It is necessary that, in all relationships with children with whom we come into contact through projects, we maintain a balance between the rights of the child and the need for intervention.

As a rule, any physical contact between personnel of the PLAN B Association and a child must be in response to the child's needs and not the adult's needs.

While physical contact can be used for the comfort, calming, or assistance of a child, the following factors should be assessed cumulatively to determine the appropriateness of physical contact:

- it is accepted by the child.
- it is open and not secretive.
- it is appropriate to the age and level of development of the child.

PLAN B Association personnel should not do things of a personal nature for a child that the child can do themselves.

Inappropriate physical contact also includes rough and brutal physical play, tickling, wrestling, etc.

All children should be treated with the same respect - favoritism is not acceptable.

Bucharest, August 2023  
The President: Oana Dumitriu





*(Model)*

**Declaration of Commitment to the Child Protection Policy of the PLAN B Association**

I, \_\_\_\_\_, have read and understood the standards and guidelines provided in the Child Protection Policy.

I agree with the principles outlined in this document and acknowledge the importance of implementing and promoting the policies and practices for child protection contained in this document in my capacity as an employee / volunteer / collaborator / member of the board / partner / service provider for the duration of my work or association with the PLAN B Association.

\_\_\_\_\_ (Name)

\_\_\_\_\_ (Job Title/Role)

\_\_\_\_\_ (Signature)

\_\_\_\_\_ (Date)