

# Protection Policy

## children, young people and vulnerable adults



**PLATFORM OF FAMILIES**  
WITH CHILDREN WITH DISABILITIES

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**Bratislava 2023**

## Basic background

Child abuse may occur in all countries, in every society, and reveals itself in physical sexual, emotional spheres as well as in terms of neglect of care for children and young people and vulnerable adults. These vulnerable populations can become victims of abuse, violence and neglect in families, communities, institutions, organizations, in private but also in public places.

The Policy for the Protection of Children, Young People and Vulnerable Adults (hereinafter the Child Protection Policy) is a statement by an organisation that it is committed to protecting children, young people and vulnerable adults from any form of ill-treatment and clearly defines the steps to be taken to protect them. This policy helps create a safe environment for children, young people and vulnerable adults, while expressing serious intentions and commitment of the organization's decision to protect them.

## Introduction

The Platform of Families of Children with Disabilities (hereinafter "PLR") is a parent civic association that has been operating throughout the Slovak Republic since 2016.

Our vision is:

**ALL FAMILIES OF CHILDREN WITH DISABILITIES ARE RESPECTED AND LIVE A FULL-VALUE LIFE IN SOCIETY.**

Our mission is to support families of children with any health disadvantage, to promote their rights and to bring closer the public to health disadvantage.

We believe that the protection of children, young people and vulnerable adults is crucial in ensuring rights, information and providing them space for expressing their opinions as well as communicating with other children or adults. Children can become powerful individuals, agents of change in their lives and in the lives of their families and community only if they are protected from violence, discrimination, any kind of abuse (physical, sexual, emotional) or neglect.

Our activities often affect parents and children, young people and vulnerable adults who belong to vulnerable groups of the population.

This Child Protection Policy was created precisely because the PLR wants to prevent any potential abuse of children, young people and vulnerable adults during their

involvement in various activities supported or organized by the PLR and thus ensure their protection.

With our child protection policy, we publicly commit to protecting children, young people and vulnerable adults from any form of ill-treatment.

## **1. Basic principles and values of protection of children, young people and vulnerable adults for Platform of families of children with disabilities**

This Child Protection Policy is based on the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child. The PLR respects the Convention as a comprehensive document that forms the basic framework for the protection, security and participation of all children. All children and young people and vulnerable adults participating in activities organised or supported by the PLR have the right to:

- priority of their health, safety, well-being and best interests,
- their development is protected and supported, thus enabling the fulfilment of their potential,
  - be respected and understood within their cultural, national and religious background,
  - be heard and their views to be fully taken into account,
  - become active participants in decision-making that affect them directly (including child protection).

The PLR believes that NGOs and all other organisations working to assert children's rights have an absolute duty to protect children and young people from abuse or neglect. The same principles apply to vulnerable adults. This obligation is binding and non-negotiable.

Without appropriate standards and mechanisms, an organisation not only fails to fulfill its primary duty to protect children and young people and vulnerable adults, but also carelessly creates an environment where abuse can occur.

The PLR believes that without appropriate and clearly defined procedures, NGOs and other institutions are at risk of false accusations of child abuse. In addition, organizations that lack open communication are in danger of being infiltrated by people such as paedophiles who want to abuse children in the hope that they will not be detected. The rights of vulnerable adults may also be violated.

**Therefore, PLR seeks to:**

- creating an environment where children, young people, vulnerable adults and adults speak openly about safety and security issues;
- transparent communication within and outside the organization (between partners) to support the increase of awareness and principles of implementation of the protection of children, young people and vulnerable adults,
- establishing clear processes to handle potential allegations openly, reliably and fairly.

**1.1 Implementation and accountability**

We have created this Child Protection Policy to ensure the highest possible standard of professional approach and behaviour to prevent the abuse of children, young people, vulnerable adults during their involvement in activities, projects or programs organized, implemented and supported by the PLR. The child protection policy therefore contains measures that we will follow when recruiting new staff, review of management structures, creating space for children, young people and vulnerable adults to speak openly about issues, and in employee training and the development of transparent protocols.

The child protection policy also contains clear procedures to be followed by organisations cooperating with the PLR during joint activities, projects and programmes. These processes and checklists are part of the Child Protection Policy, as well as the processes for reporting and following up if child protection standards are violated. The standards and procedures further described in this document are based on the above principles.

**1.2 Definitions****Child**

According to the Convention on the Rights of the Child, a child means any human being under the age of 18, unless the age of majority has previously been attained under the law applicable to the child. Thus, in common understanding, we are talking about children as well as young people, although they are referred to as children.

## **Vulnerable adults**

Vulnerable adults are people aged 18 years or older who are unable to provide for their own needs and protect themselves from abuse or serious exploitation due to impairment of mental, physical and emotional functions. This is someone who:

- is diagnosed as mentally and/or physically ill,
- has mental health difficulties,
- is unable to report abuse and make his/her own decision,
- is old and weak due to physical handicap

## **Child protection**

Child protection is a broad term that encompasses principles, standards, guidelines and practices designed to protect children, young people and vulnerable adults from intentional or unintentional abuse. In this context, we understand child protection as the PLR's duty to ensure that employees, activities or programs do not cause harm to children, young people and vulnerable adults, i.e. do not expose them to the risks of possible abuse or harm. In case of suspected threats to the safety of children, young people and vulnerable adults in the framework of activities or programmes in which they are involved, the PLR will report the suspicion to the competent authorities.

## **Direct contact with children**

By this term we understand a situation in which a person is directly in the presence of a child during some activity organized by the PLR, regardless of whether they are regular, short-term or long-term meetings. This includes formal and non-formal education, leisure activities or various conferences and meetings attended by children, young people and vulnerable adults, or work with volunteers and workers with children, young people and vulnerable adults.

## **Indirect contact with children**

By this term we understand:

- (a) access to information on children, young people and vulnerable adults participating in the PLR activities, such as names, addresses, photographs and case studies;
- (b) ensuring funding for organisations working directly with children, young people and vulnerable adults. While we define this contact of the PLR with children, young people and vulnerable adults as indirect, it is the responsibility of the donor to defend the rights and safety of children, young people and vulnerable adults even in this case.

## **Politics**

A Child Protection Policy is a statement by an organisation that it is committed to protecting children, young people and vulnerable adults from any form of ill-treatment and clearly defines the steps to be taken to protect them. The Child protection policy helps to create a safe environment for children, young people and vulnerable adults, while expressing the seriousness and binding nature of an organisation's decision to protect them.

### **1.3 What is abuse and ill-treatment of children and vulnerable adults?**

The WHO (World Health Organization) defines child abuse or maltreatment as the use of any form of physical or psychological violence, harm or abuse, neglect or negligent treatment, commercial, sexual and other exploitation, where there is a direct or potential harm to the health of a child, a threat to life and an impairment of development or human dignity where an abuser stretches the responsibility, trust or power in the relationship with a survivor.

In our understanding, child abuse can manifest itself (among others) as:

**Physical abuse** which takes various forms and manifestations such as: beating, shaking, groping, burning, deliberate scalding, suffocation, strangling and drowning of a child, etc. Physical abuse also occurs when a parent or other responsible person neglects the symptoms of illness or intentionally causes the child to become ill. Sometimes there is a specific form of abuse – so-called Munchausen syndrome where the parent invents child's health problems, due to which the child is repeatedly goes through difficult and painful examinations and treatment.

**Psychological abuse** which includes such behaviour by persons that adversely affects a child's psychological, emotional and behavioural development. It can take various forms and manifestations, such as repeatedly telling children that they are not loved, have no value, are not good enough, or their value is inadequate to meet the expectations of the person caring for them. It may also include age- or developmentally inappropriate expectations of the child, as well as exposing the child to danger or evoke fear in the child. In part, psychological abuse is part of all forms of child abuse, but it can also occur by its own.

**Child sexual abuse** which we define as contact between a child and an older or more mature person (such as a minor or adult, which may be a stranger, sibling or responsible person – parent or legal guardian) and the child is used as an object of sexual gratification by an adult or an elderly person. This action is often enforced

by force, extortion, bribery, threats or other forms of coercion. Child sexual abuse can manifest itself physically, but also psychologically and verbally.

Sexual abuse also includes any exposure of a child to sexual activities, sexual contact, sexual behaviour and activity, whether or not the child is aware of it. Sexual expression may involve physical contact (where intrusion may occur, such as in rape) or physical contact without penetration. However, sexual abuse can also occur without physical contact, for example by forcefully watching or making pornographic videos, or watching sexual activities, or encouraging children to behave in an inappropriate sexual manner.

Commercial sexual abuse is any use of a child for sexual purposes in order to get financial or other reward. The child in this case is considered an object of trafficking and sexual exploitation. This phenomenon is often associated with trade and organised crime, forced labour or modern slavery.

**Child pornography** we define as the depiction of real or feigned intercourse, other sexual action or other similar sexual interaction with a child or a person appearing to be a child, or the depiction of naked body parts of a child or a person appearing to be a child intended to evoke sexual gratification of another person. This content may be displayed in the form of photographs, negatives, slides, magazines, books, drawings, films, movies, and graphics on computers. There is a general division into two categories: soft-core (it does not contain explicit sex scenes, but depicts naked children or children behaving seductively) and hard-core, which depicts children actively participating in sexual activities.

**Neglect** we define as an acute and serious threat to a child due to insufficient care and stimuli important for their healthy physical and mental development.

**Bullying** which we define as intentional harm, often repeated over a period of time, and the victim finds it very difficult to defend himself. It manifests itself in various forms, but the most common manifestations are: physical bullying (beating, kicking, stealing the victim's belongings), verbal bullying (inappropriate racist or homophobic remarks, threats, swearing) and psychological bullying (isolation of the victim, non-acceptance into the peer group).

**Child abuse for the purpose of trafficking** which we define as the use of children for work or other activity in order to obtain benefits for the person responsible for the child, while affecting the physical and psychological health of the child, their education or moral and emotional development. This form of abuse is manifested, among other things, by the forced labour of children.

A child who is violated in some way is often the victim of multiple forms of abuse. Some of the other forms can be discrimination, harassment or bullying, which also

negatively affect the child's development and harm him both physically and psychologically.

**The mistreatment of vulnerable adults** in many cases has similar characteristics, including:

- Physical abuse – hitting, slapping or restraining which results in burns, cuts, bruises under the eyes and internal injuries.
- Psychological abuse – humiliation, isolation, controlling and harassment are types of abuse that affect the emotional health of a vulnerable adult.
- Sexual abuse – includes indecent exposure, sexual harassment and rape.
- Financial abuse – stealing money from a vulnerable adult or using their money inappropriately.
- Self-abuse – not providing enough food and proper medicines, not helping to wash and change clothes.

## 2. Importance of the Child Protection Policy

It is the duty of all organisations and professionals who work or are in contact with children, young people and vulnerable adults to ensure that all activities are safe for them and therefore it is essential for them to have a Child Protection Policy.

The PLR needs a Child Protection Policy to ensure:

**Protection of employees:** according to *the Convention on the Rights of the Child* (but also Slovak law), all children have the right to be protected from any form of violence, abuse and exploitation. Similarly, vulnerable adults must be protected from any harm and violation of their rights. Therefore, the PLR has a responsibility to ensure that all activities, projects and programmes are safe for children, young people and vulnerable adults. This means that the PLR's staff do not put at risk for children, young people and vulnerable adults as well as programmes and projects are designed to respect the safety of all involved.

**Protecting children, young people and vulnerable adults:** some children, young people and vulnerable adults are particularly at risk of abuse, exploitation and negligent treatment by those caring for them or having access to their private information. Many of the children who live in difficult conditions have already experienced the violation of their right to protection, have experienced a broken relationship, untrust or even have been abused by an adult. Similarly, many vulnerable adults experience ill-treatment and violations of their rights due to their life circumstances.



**Protecting an organisation's reputation:** institutions that work with vulnerable children, young people and adults are at risk of being accused of abuse. Therefore, it is important that they have the Child Protection Policy as a tool to protect themselves from such accusations. Without a proper Child Protection Policy, an organisation may find it difficult to defend itself against false accusations and its reputation can easily be damaged. Such allegations can negatively affect not only further funding, but also the reputation of NGOs and other institutions working with children, young people and vulnerable adults.

### **3. Defining the Policy for the Protection of Children, Young People and Vulnerable Adults**

The Policy for the protection of children, young people and vulnerable adults of the PLR concerns:

- (a) all employees, members of the Executive Committee, volunteers and temporary workers,
- (b) all those who cooperate with the PLR (trainers, consultants, etc.),
- (c) all adults accompanying children, young people and vulnerable adults in events and activities organised by the PLR;
- (d) all those involved in activities and events for children, young people and vulnerable adults organised by the PLR (journalists, sponsors, donors, partners, etc.).

It is the responsibility of all the above individuals and entities to read the Child Protection Policy and sign a declaration that they will adhere to the above principles and processes.

#### **3.1 Raising awareness of the need for child protection**

For the effective implementation of the Child Protection Policy, it is essential that all employees, volunteers, consultants, trainers, etc. are familiar with, understand and follow all the steps to ensure that children, young people and vulnerable adults with whom they would come into contact are not harmed during their activities or behind it.

A copy of the Child Protection Policy will be sent to any relevant adult participating in the PLR's activities, as well as to organisations and institutions organising events on behalf of the PLR, and to persons accompanying children, young people and vulnerable adults to such events. It will be the duty of these organisations and institutions to inform their staff, parents or care-givers about the content of the

Child Protection Policy as well as to inform children, young people and vulnerable adults about their right to protection and about the process of reporting problems when they arise.

### **3.2 Child protection policy with regard to external partners**

The Child Protection Policy concerns all organisations and external partners that cooperate on activities that involve children, young people and vulnerable adults. If the organisations or institutions do not yet have their own worked out child protection policy, they are obliged to comply with the principles and steps defined in this Child Protection Policy and should demonstrate their willingness to develop their own child protection policy and procedures, taking into account their context and legal framework.

In case of either several minor or one fundamental violation of agreed rules and principles, or a violation of child safety, the PLR reserves the right to terminate cooperation with an organization or institution.

### **3.3 Risk assessment and security programming**

The PLR is committed to developing programmes and projects that ensure safety for children, young people and vulnerable adults. Therefore the PLR will carry out risk assessments and introduce strategies to maintain safety at the process of their design. It will also take into account the risk reduction measures as part of the design, implementation and evaluation of programmes, projects and activities in which children, young people and vulnerable adults are directly involved or have an impact on them.

## **4. Child Protection Policy of the Platform of Families of Children with Disabilities**

This Child Protection Policy has been created to ensure the highest possible level of professional behaviour and personal experience when working with children, young people and vulnerable adults, so that they are not endangered while participating in activities organized by the PLR.

### **4.1 Staff and other personnel**

Every person (employee, member of the Executive Committee, volunteer, part-time worker, consultant, trainer, etc.) who wants to work for or cooperate with the PLR must:

a) sign a declaration that they agree with the principles and conditions of the Child Protection Policy and that they undertake to comply with them.

In addition to standard procedures, the personal interview shall include:

- acquainting the candidate with a clear definition of the position and resulting responsibilities with regard to the Child Protection Policy;
- information about safety and security of children, young people and vulnerable adults and making sure that the candidate fully understands these principles and commits to comply with them;
- consent to comply with the principles of the Child Protection Policy is part of an employment, mandate or other cooperation agreement.

(b) sign a declaration of any criminal conviction or rehabilitated sentence. Part of the employment contract with the PLR is also the signing of consent to request an extract from the criminal record if necessary.

## **4.2 Training and education**

In order to successfully implement the Child Protection Policy, the PRR implements the following measures:

a) the employee, temporary worker, volunteer or other collaborator shall be informed by the Child Protection Policy Coordinator about this Child Protection Policy and all procedures and processes arising from it during the first 3 weeks after starting work. If a person is directly involved in working with children, young people and vulnerable adults, they will also be trained in appropriate behaviour during activities involving children, young people and vulnerable adults, and in the permissible or inadmissible sharing of information about them. The training will also include contacts of help and support for children, young people, vulnerable adults and their families.

(b) The PLR shall provide appropriate training for each employee, volunteer, temporary worker or associate according to the position and responsibilities arising from that position.

### **Code of conduct**

Any employee, member of the Executive Committee, volunteer, part-time worker, trainer or consultant who comes into direct contact with children, young people and vulnerable adults during the PLR's activities will receive a code of conduct.

## Management

The PLR shall appoint one person as a coordinator of the Child Protection Policy, who shall be responsible for:

- informing the team about the Child Protection Policy and its implementation within the organization,
- monitoring the implementation of the Child Protection Policy and regularly informing members of the Executive Committee as well as the working team about progress,
- preparation of training materials on the Child Protection Policy,
- collecting and managing information on legal requirements, examples of good practice, etc.,
- providing support and assistance to other members of the work team in the field of child protection,
- receiving reports of violation of the Child Protection Policy,
- taking appropriate measures to protect the child/children, young people and vulnerable adults from further harm during and after an incident or after a suspicion has been identified;
- providing the specific type of support and assistance needed by children, young people and vulnerable adults affected by an incident, and informing the child's family (or legal caregiver) about the incident and the assistance provided.

The name and contact details of the Child Protection Policy Coordinator will be published and visibly placed in the PLR's office.

PLR's Statutory Bodies are responsible for:

- investigating suspected violation(s) of the Child Protection Policy by internal the PLR's staff, presenting its results to the Executive Committee of the PLR and implementing the decision to the appointed member of the Executive Committee,
- deciding whether to terminate cooperation with an organization that violates the Child Protection Policy on the basis of the procedures and provisions set out in the Child Protection Policy;
- reporting incidents of a criminal nature to the police.

The appointed member of the Executive Committee will be responsible for deciding on the action to be taken in relation to allegations of violation(s) of the Child Protection Policy by internal PLR staff.

The Executive Committee will have overall responsibility for overseeing and ensuring the implementation of the Child Protection Policy.

Only designated persons directly concerned will be able to obtain information on children, young people and vulnerable adults, including legal cases. In this context, in addition to the Child Protection Policy, it is important to comply with the privacy policy, including the GDPR.

General responsibility for the implementation of the Child Protection Policy in the PLR lies on the Executive Committee.

This Child Protection Policy includes various control lists and processes, listed in chapters 6 and 7, which describe the specific steps of the implementation strategy, as well as monitoring, reporting and evaluation processes. The protection of children, young people and vulnerable adults is becoming part of the development of all the PLR's programmes and projects.

## 5. Code of conduct

The PLR hereby commits to protecting children, young people and vulnerable adults from abuse and exploitation. The PLR will do its utmost to prevent any abuse and will actively respond to suggestions from children, young people and vulnerable adults that might be in such a situation. The PLR commits to dealing with any allegation report (substantiated or false), regardless of who is reporting, whom the report concerns, or the origin of the person.

This code of conduct instructs on the standards of ethical and appropriate behaviour by adults towards children, young people and vulnerable adults, but also between children, young people and vulnerable adults. The best interests of children, young people and vulnerable adults are a priority of the Code. For its interpretation one should use a common sense and transparently implement it.

The goal of the PLR is that everyone – children, young people, vulnerable adults and adults treat each other in a way that protects and keeps everyone safe during joint activities.

### **No one involved should:**

- engage in any form of sexual activity with children, young people and vulnerable adults;
- behave provocatively or by inappropriate behaviour to raise allegations of abuse;

- allow an adult to sleep alone with a child, young person or vulnerable adult in the same room or in bed (unless written permission has been given by a parent/guardian);
- allow towards children, young people and vulnerable adults to dress, bathe and other ways maintain their personal hygiene, if they can do so independently;
- discriminate, disparage, shame, humiliate children, young people and vulnerable adults, and cause any form of psychological abuse (e.g. expressing oneself in a way that offends and harms children, young people and vulnerable adults, or showing pictures or telling stories that may harm them emotionally or mentally);
- hit or physically harm a child, young person or vulnerable adult in any other way;
- behave in a way that may directly harm or put a child, young person or vulnerable adult at risk of abuse;
- encourage and advocate the conduct of other adults (employees, temporary workers, volunteers and others) who would violate the principles of this Code;
- be left alone with a child, young person or vulnerable adult so as not to justify false accusations;
- allow children, young people and vulnerable adults to engage in sexually suggestive play;
- show attention to children, young people and vulnerable adults in ways that are culturally inappropriate or otherwise insensitive (kisses, hugs, caresses, rubbing, touching and others);
- not seek physical contact with the child (for example, holding hands) unless the stimulus comes from the child or the child has consented to it;
- propose an inappropriate relationship and encourage sympathy and expressions of interest in the child, young person and vulnerable adult;
- take photos, film and request private information except the one which is approved and necessary for pre-planned and agreed activities;
- Inappropriate use of private information about children, young people and vulnerable adults (e.g. on social networks) outside of agreed and permitted activities.

**Everyone involved should:**

- know what defines abuse and exploitation of children, young people and vulnerable adults (see Annex 2) and the legal background associated with it;
- know the signs of abuse and report any suspicion to the Child Protection Policy Coordinator;

- know who is the responsible person (Child Protection Policy Coordinator);
- know the processes for reporting suspicions and follow the steps;
- respect the fundamental rights of others and act fairly, truthfully, considerately and treat other people with respect;
- treat all children, young people and vulnerable adults equally and involve them in activities without distinction and discrimination;
- actively work to treat every person with respect;
- strive to maintain a high standard of respectful behaviour in themselves and others;
- protect the health, safety and well-being of themselves and others;
- take in mind the risk of unsupervised mixed-age groups, where younger children may be at risk from older ones;
- take note of the possible bullying of children and young people towards each other;
- acknowledge how children, young people and vulnerable adults perceive their words, behaviour and relationships;
- ensure that younger and/or vulnerable children are protected from abuse by older children or adults;
- to provide an environment in which children can develop personally, physically, psychologically, socially, morally and intellectually;
- encourage children not to be afraid to express their mind and respect their opinion;
- prevent and/or restrict children's access to inappropriate electronic content;
- respect the right to privacy of information in all circumstances;
- obtain written consent from the child, young person and vulnerable adult and parent/carer when taking photographs, filming or requesting personal information (see Chapter 7).

In case of any suspected violation of the Child Protection Policy arises, the Child Protection Policy Coordinator should be informed immediately. Sections 6.1 and 6.2 describe the steps to be followed if the Code of Conduct and Child Protection Policy are breached.

## 6. Implementation

### 6.1. Implementation strategy: Notification procedures

All staff, volunteers, part-time workers and other co-workers should be able to recognise signs and manifestations in the child, young person and vulnerable adult that indicate they need an assistance (Annex 3).

Deciding whether to report this observation may sometimes be very difficult. That is why we introduce reporting procedures that will help to respond appropriately while ensuring the protection of children, young people and vulnerable adults and other witnesses.

All violations of the Child Protection Policy (whether suspected, alleged or witnessed) should be reported immediately to the Child Protection Policy Coordinator using the Security Breach Report form (Annex 3), always putting the best interests of children, young people and vulnerable adults and their safety first.

All records must be stored in a secure location. Only the Child Protection Policy Coordinator of the PLR or the PLR's statutory body has access to them. The designated member of the Executive Committee should also be informed of all notifications.

If someone warns of a breach of the Child Protection Policy, it is necessary to react immediately – the ACT methodology (an abbreviation from English: Act/Child-Centred/ Time Counts) is a suitable tool for application.

**Act – action:** if a breach of the Child Protection Policy or the Code of Conduct is suspected, suspicion must be reported immediately.

**Child-Centred (similarly the best interests of the young person/vulnerable adult):** the best interests of children, young people and vulnerable adults are of utmost importance when making decisions.

**Time counts – time plays an important role:** it is important to consider the most appropriate and effective solution in the shortest possible time that will ensure the protection of the child.

The next step in making a decision is to determine whether it is an internal or external matter.

**If it is an internal matter** – the accusation concerns an employee, volunteer, part-time worker, other collaborator – it is up to the PLR to consider whether the PLR will also inform local or national authorities. If not, it is necessary to follow the



procedures set out in the Child Protection Policy. If it is, it is necessary to inform the local or national authorities and then follow the agreed procedures.

**If it is an external matter – the accusation concerns someone outside the PLR**, it is necessary to consider to what extent this violation interferes with the operation and violates the principles of operation of the PLR and proceed accordingly.

The PLR undertakes to treat information about a suspicion or allegation confidentially and to follow all procedures, taking into account the best interests of the child, the young person and the vulnerable adult, regardless of who reports, who is reported or the origin of the person.

The PLR undertakes to do everything possible to prevent further harm to the child(ren), young people and vulnerable adults during or after the event to which the report relates. At the same time, after considering the impact of the event on the child, young person and vulnerable adult, the PLR will help to seek professional help, for example if a medical assessment of health is needed. Important contacts with the police, rescue service, social guardianship, social workers, helplines and other organisations or persons who can provide assistance will be made public and available (Annex 5).

At the same time, the PLR undertakes to immediately contact family members or legal guardians and inform about the incident and the assistance provided. Subsequently, a Security Breach Report (Appendix 3) will be drawn up. Throughout the process, the PLR is committed to put the best interests of the child first.

When children, young people and vulnerable adults participate directly in an activity or meeting, they will initially be familiar with the main points of the Child Protection Policy, the Code of Conduct, who is the Child Protection Policy Coordinator and the procedures for reporting suspicions or allegations. All information will be communicated to children, young people and vulnerable adults in a friendly and understandable way.

## **6.2 Implementation strategy: Internal protection assurance procedures**

The PLR shall immediately withdraw any employee, volunteer, part-time worker, member of the Executive Committee, consultant, trainer and other collaborator who is accused of violating the Child Protection Policy, until the results of the investigation are clear. The PLR reserves the right to take any disciplinary measures if guilty is proven and to take other necessary measures, including filing a report to the police in accordance with applicable legislation.

The investigation shall be concluded by the administrator of the organisation and handed over to the appointed member of the Executive Committee, who shall decide and propose an appropriate solution. The decision on any conclusions of the investigation will be given to the accused person in writing. The crimes will be forwarded to the police in accordance with the applicable legislation.

## **7. Guidelines on public communication and communication with the media**

This section of the Child Protection Policy contains guidance for PLR's staff on communication with the public or the media about the work of the organisation or the work of the organisation's partners. It contains the basic principles of protecting the safety of children, young people and vulnerable adults in any situation, as well as other specific guidelines to be followed by the staff of the organisation, but also by photographers, filmmakers, journalists, etc. who take part in events organised by the PLR with involving of children, young people and vulnerable adults. The guidelines included in this Child Protection Policy are applicable and relevant in all forms of communication, including social networks.

For the safety of children, young people and vulnerable adults, it is essential in all circumstances to obtain informed consent, signed by a parent or legal guardian, in which they consent to the use of photographs and testimonies of children, young people and vulnerable adults in media or publications (Annex 5).

### **7.1 Principles**

The PLR commits to respecting the rights and dignity of every child, young person and vulnerable adult in all circumstances, regardless of the form of communication, taking into account his or her best interests. The PLR do not use degrading or discriminatory language.

This section provides guidance on the use of photographs, films or stories of children, young people and vulnerable adults for communication with the public and the media, the purpose of which is to protect private information about children, young people and vulnerable adults. In some cases, children, young people and vulnerable adults who have been published in the media or promotional materials have become victims of abuse.

PLR undertakes to observe the following principles in communication:

**Principle of dignity:** the dignity of children, young people and vulnerable adults must be upheld in all circumstances. Statements must not degrade, discriminate or shame them. Children, young people and vulnerable adults should dress appropriately during photography sessions and should not appear in photographs in poses that could be perceived as sexually provocative.

**Principle of accuracy:** information about children, young people and vulnerable adults cannot be manipulated and distorted, for example to sensationalize. Stories and photographs should speak in a balanced way about their lives and the circumstances they face, as well as the changes and progress of children, young people and vulnerable adults. In communication, generalizations that do not reflect the situation should be avoided. Photographs that do not directly depict the story or event and are taken out of context should not be used.

**Principle of privacy:** the PLR commits not to use any information about children, young people and vulnerable adults, the disclosure of which could put them at risk or reveal their privacy and identity.

At the same time, the PLR undertakes to:

a) always use only the first name of the participants, make sure that their home address, the name and address of the school they attend or other information regarding residence is not disclosed, unless otherwise agreed with the legal guardian and the child. If it is necessary to protect the safety of the child, the changed name will be used.

(b) store securely all information received and pictures of participants (including those stored on a computer). Only those directly involved in the programme, project or activity will have access to information.

(c) present in its publications and videos a wide range of children, young people and vulnerable adults: boys/men, girls/women, different age ranges, different nationalities, ethnic groups and abilities.

**Reporting complaints:** Complaints of any nature about inappropriate content depicted on photos should be reported according to the procedures set out in section 6.

## **7.2 Informed consent**

It is essential to obtain signed informed consent before children, young people and vulnerable adults take pictures or videos about their lives and later plan to use them in publications or other presentation materials. This means that children, young people and vulnerable adults are informed about how and where photos or

information will be processed and published. They are also informed that they do not have to agree to this and that their residence information or other private data will be changed or withheld. The publication of the first name also requires their consent or their legal representative directly.

This consent is only valid with a signed and completed informed consent (Annex 5) signed by the child, young person or vulnerable adult and parent/legal guardian. If this is not possible, the consent will be signed by a representative of the organisation representing the child. It is good if consent is requested from an organisation/institution that works directly with children, young people and vulnerable adults, because then the child, young person, vulnerable adult or parent/legal guardian feels freer in case of refusal.

Informed consent and other forms will be archived by the PLR in a secure place. Despite obtaining written consent, it is necessary to verify again, directly during the activity, the consent of children, young people and vulnerable adults to participate in photography/filming, etc.

The informed consent form set out in the Annex may be replaced by the GDPR form as long as it contains identical domains.

### **7.3 Conducting a conversation with the child**

Conducting a conversation with children, young people and vulnerable adults requires mastering certain skills and adhering to basic principles so that their rights and dignity are respected.

**Informed consent:** in addition to basic information and consent, it should also include an overview of the topics to be discussed and an assurance that the interlocutor can refuse to continue the conversation at any time. The interviewer should make sure right at the beginning of the interview that the interlocutor understands the terms of the interview and their rights.

**Ensuring support:** a person well known to the child, the young person and the vulnerable adult should be present during the interview. If possible, the participant themselves should designate the person who will participate in the interview.

**Respect for the right to say no:** a child, a young person or a vulnerable adult must be reassured that they do not have to answer questions if they feel uncomfortable and can withdraw their consent at any time.

**Gender:** it is important to realize that girls and boys have different needs and consider whether the interview will be done by a man or a woman. At the same time,

it is important to consider the topics of conversation from the point of view of gender.

**Respect for the right to information:** if a conversation needs to be written down or recorded, a child, a young person and a vulnerable adult should be informed in advance and their consent requested.

## **7.4 Visiting photographers, film crews, journalists and other persons**

When photographers, film crews, journalists or other persons pay a visit during the PLR's programmes, projects and activities, the following should be taken into account:

(a) Journalists, photographers/film crews must be familiar with the Child Protection Policy before they meet children, young people and vulnerable adults whom they will photograph, record or talk to. At the same time, they will sign a Binding Declaration to comply with the conditions and principles set out in this Child Protection Policy.

(b) It is necessary to ensure that children, young people and vulnerable adults are not left alone with journalists, photographers, etc. The responsible PLR's employee should be present at all times.

(c) Children, young people, vulnerable adults and parents/legal guardians should be informed about the way how the pictures, shots or statements will be published and the PLR will obtain their consent to use a released material.

(d) It is important to ensure that copies of photographs, films or statements are sent to organisations and institutions with which the PLR cooperates as well as forwarded to children, young people and vulnerable adults.

(e) In order to protect the safety of participants, the journalist or photographer must inform the PLR how the obtained material will be used. The PLR reserves the right not to allow the publication of materials if it violates certain principles and conditions of the Child Protection Policy.

f) If the materials will be used by other organisations, the following should be indicated under the photo: Platform of families of children with disabilities/name of the photographer © and the title of the photo.

## **8. Accountability: Monitoring and evaluation of the Child Protection Policy**

The aim of monitoring and evaluating the Child Protection Policy is to learn from experience and provide information to those who will review the Child Protection Policy and address possible changes.

The PLR will regularly monitor the implementation of the Child Protection Policy and its processes. It will also record progress, compliance and possible lessons learned from practice, which will be reported annually by the Child Protection Policy Coordinator. Monitoring and evaluation shall be ensured by regular checking that all principles are observed and that the safety of children is guaranteed. The inspection will be carried out in the form of a survey among the PLR's employees, volunteers, temporary workers and other collaborators, in which they will be able to express whether all standards set out in the Child Protection Policy are effectively observed and whether something needs to be changed to improve them.

In addition to general monitoring and evaluation, it is also necessary to make a reactive assessment in case there is a violation of the Child Protection Policy and, based on this assessment, the PLR will consider possible changes to the Child Protection Policy itself or in the way of reporting its violation (s).

At the same time, an internal evaluation of the Child Protection Policy and its compliance will take place every three years. The results shall be agreed upon by the Executive Committee.

Annex 1

**Binding declaration of consent to the Child Protection Policy of the Platform of Families of Children with Disabilities**

I, the undersigned, declare that I have read and fully understood the standards and guidelines set out in the Child Protection Policy of the Platform of Families of Children with Disabilities. I agree with all the above principles and I am aware of the importance of implementing and enforcing the Child Protection Policy, its standards, processes and procedures and I undertake to adhere to them throughout my cooperation with the Platform of Families of Children with Disabilities.

At the same time, I acknowledge that with my consent I give the Platform of Families of Children with Disabilities the right to:

- check possible criminal records directly related to working with children
- request a signed declaration of any criminal conviction or rehabilitated sentence
- request a statement about possible investigations or allegations against myself in relation to child safety
- request of two referral persons

.....  
(name and surname)

.....  
(job/position)

.....  
(signature)

.....  
(date and place)

### **Referrals review**

Please provide the name, address and contact details of two persons who have known you for more than two years and are not family members to provide testimonials on you.

Name: .....

Address: .....

Mobile: .....

Email: .....

Name: .....

Address: .....

Mobile: .....

Email: .....

### **Declaration of good repute**

Have you ever been convicted of a deliberate crime?

YES NO

If so, please give the circumstances and details of all convictions, including those rehabilitated. At the same time, please indicate any investigations or charges that have been brought against you.

The Platform of Families of Children with Disabilities undertakes to protect the confidential information provided by you, which will be stored securely by the appointed Child Protection Policy Coordinator, who will also consider to what extent it constitutes a threat to the principles of the Child Protection Policy.

I have been instructed that in case of providing a false information, I may be prosecuted for an offence on the basis of §39 par. 3 of Act 71/1967 Coll. on administrative proceedings.



## Annex 2

### Recognition of manifestations of violence

Recognising acts of violence against children is a very complex matter, and there is no simple guide to detect it quickly and easily. There are some indications that may arouse suspicion, but they need to be assessed very carefully. It is equally important to realise that if any signs are seen, they should be communicated to the Child Protection Policy Coordinator as soon as possible so that measures are taken in accordance with the Child Protection Policy in the event of proven abuse.

#### **Possible manifestations and consequences of physical violence:**

- bruises, burns, dislocations, bites, cuts
- unlikely explanations for injuries
- refusal to talk about injuries
- pulling away during physical contact
- refusal to reveal hands, legs in hot weather
- refusal to engage in activities (such as sports) that require taking off outerwear
- fear of returning home or being in contact with parents
- expressions of mistrust and caution towards adults
- self-destructive behaviour
- aggressiveness towards others
- passivity and frequent complaining
- repeated escapes

#### **Possible manifestations of psychological violence:**

- unfavourable or delayed psychological, cognitive and emotional development
- timidity
- delayed speech development or sudden change or disorder of speech
- fear of new situations
- low self-esteem
- inappropriate emotional expressions/reactions to situations
- extreme passivity and/or aggression
- drug and alcohol use
- repeated escapes
- pathological stealing

#### **Possible manifestations of neglect:**

- frequent hunger
- taking food out of trash cans, stealing and hiding food
- poor personal hygiene
- frequent fatigue

- inappropriate clothing (e.g. summer clothing in winter)
- frequent delays to school, activities or absences
- unaddressed health problems
- low self-esteem
- poor social habits
- pathological stealing
- take of drugs and alcohol

**Possible manifestations of sexual abuse:**

- age-inappropriate sexual behaviour or expression
- night urination and spotting
- pain in the anus or genitals
- problems with insomnia
- fear of being left alone with an adult
- sexual promiscuity
- extreme risk-taking in adolescents

**Possible behavioural concerns in adults:**

- a person in whose presence the child's behaviour visibly changes – becoming withdrawn, fearful, stressed or irritable
- a person who asks a child to lie or conceal something
  - a person who violates any of the principles of the Child Protection Policy or the Code of Conduct
- A person who suggests private communication with the child by email, phone or in person.

Annex 3

**Security breach reporting**

If you suspect that any children, young people and vulnerable adults are at risk from the point of view of safety, please complete this report, noting that it should be reported (verbally or in writing) to the Child Protection Policy Coordinator of the PLR on the same working day. Due to the urgency of the situation, you can complete this report before or after contacting the Child Protection Policy Coordinator.

Use this message even if you want to report an accident or safety incident. We understand an accident as an unplanned situation that caused injury or could cause injury or damage to property, or pollution of the surroundings. We understand a security breach event as an unpleasant or unusual event.

For confidentiality reasons, please complete and sign this declaration without notifying anyone other than the Child Protection Policy Coordinator, who will keep the report in a safe place.

**1. Information about you**

Name:.....

Job/position: .....

Organization you work for: .....

Relationship to child, young person and/or vulnerable adult: .....

Contact:.....

Tel. no. .... E-mail: .....

**2.Information about a child, young person and/or vulnerable adult**

Name:.....

Sex:.....

Age:.....

Address:.....

.

Parent/guardian: .....

Was medical assistance provided? .....

Provider of a medical assistance? .....

Hospitalization? YES / NO

If yes, which hospital: .....

**3.Information about the suspicion or event**

This is the case of:

- suspicions you have about child endangerment
- an event you have witnessed
- an event you have been informed about by a third party?

If someone else has informed you, please write how this person is related to the child, young person, vulnerable adult who has been at risk:

.....

What happened? Describe the circumstances in which the event took place (where/when/who....) and the causes (why/how....).

Please clearly distinguish facts from assumptions, observations, etc. (e.g. subjective observation of a child's emotional state and injuries).

.....  
.....  
.....  
.....  
.....

Has the child, young person and/or vulnerable adult or anyone else said anything else relevant to the case and, if so, how did you react (please do not incite the child to answer, record only the child's actual statement)?

.....  
.....  
.....  
.....

Date, time and place of alleged event: .....

.....

Name of the alleged offender (if the offence is committed):

.....

Were other children or other persons present at the alleged event?

.....

Are other children, young people and/or vulnerable adults at risk?

.....

How did you react and what did you do?

.....

.....

.....

.....

Signature:..... Date:.....

To be completed by the PLR's Child Protection Policy Coordinator:

The accident/incident has been investigated? YES / NO

Will a written investigation report be required? YES / NO

In order to further investigate and determine the origin of the accident or incident, it would be advisable to obtain the testimony of additional witnesses. Please provide here the details of the witnesses, their statements or other additional information:

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

Annex 4

**Informed consent**

**PERSONAL AND EMERGENCY DATA**

Name and age: .....

Phone number (mobile): .....

Email: .....

You participate in ..... (activity) voluntarily?

YES NO (please tick your answer)

We would like you to feel welcome and comfortable at this activity. Please help us by filling out the following form:

Do you suffer from allergies? YES / NO	Detailed information:
Is there an area where we can help you during this event (if you have any physical disability/mental illness/communication problems/low self-esteem, etc.)? YES / NO	Detailed information:
Can we do something to allow you to fully participate in the action? YES / NO	Detailed information:
Do you take any medications that we should know about? YES / NO	Detailed information:
Do you have special dietary requirements or needs? YES / NO	Detailed information:

## IN CASE OF EMERGENCY

Emergency contact persons. It is important that you fill out this form thoroughly.

<p><b>Person 1</b></p> <p>Name: Relationship to you: Phone number (mobile):</p>	<p><b>Person 2</b></p> <p>Name: Relationship to you: Phone number (mobile):</p>
<p>Do you agree to be provided with assistance in case of emergency (hospitalization, dental surgery or administration of anaesthesia?) YES NO</p>	<p>Detailed information:</p>
<p>Approval: ..... Signature: ..... Place: ..... Date: .....</p>	
<p>If you are under the age of 18, please use the parent or guardian to complete the form and sign your consent. Child/adolescent under 18 years of age/adult vulnerable:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• may participate in ..... (activity/event/meeting, etc.);</li> <li>• may participate in an activity that will be recorded by the media;</li> <li>• he/she has been informed of the objectives of the activity, the free choice to participate and the age appropriate to anonymity;</li> <li>• has been informed that he/she may decide at any time not to continue the activity without any consequences;</li> <li>• can receive, in case of emergency, medical assistance given by a specialist during the action.</li> </ul>	
<p>Name and surname: ..... Relationship to a child/adolescent/vulnerable disadvantaged ..... Place: ..... Date: ..... Signature: .....</p>	

**CHILD'S INFORMED CONSENT TO THE USE OF DATA IN THE MEDIA**

We want to make sure that you agree to the use of data, photos and your statements in the media

At this time, the Platform of Families of Children with Disabilities promotes ..... (activity/ programme, etc.). We will use your photos and/or statements to post these activities.

In this way, we make the public aware of ..... (activity).

You agree:

- so that photos, audio and video recordings in which you appear, your artistic creation or expression are used on our website, social media, flyers, publications or other forms of public presentation of our work and the work of other organisations that help children, young people and vulnerable adults.

Please circle the answer: YES / NO

- to record your statements and use them to promote our programmes, projects and activities?

Please circle the answer: YES / NO

- To be approached and interviewed by journalists during ..... (activity) and use photos or video/audio recordings where you appear in (during all media interviews, you will be accompanied by an adult who comes with you and an employee of the Platform of Families of Children with Disabilities. You have the right not to answer questions you disagree with or don't want to comment on.)?

- Please circle the answer: YES / NO

Signature: .....

Place: .....

Date: .....



Annex 5:

### **Important contacts**

#### **Platform of Families of Children with Disabilities**

Hálova 16, 851 01 Bratislava – Petržalka

Phone number: 00 421 911 987 733

E-mail: [info@platformarodin.sk](mailto:info@platformarodin.sk)

[www.platformarodin.sk](http://www.platformarodin.sk)

#### **The Child Protection Policy Coordinator:**

Jana Potúčková, [jana.potuckova@platformarodin.sk](mailto:jana.potuckova@platformarodin.sk), 00 421 903 366 443

#### **Appointed member of the Executive Committee:**

Monika Fričová, [monika.fricova@platformarodin.sk](mailto:monika.fricova@platformarodin.sk)

**Children's Safety Telephone Line:** 116 111 (free of charge, anonymous, nonstop, whole Slovakia)

**Internet online counselling IPČko:** [www.ipcko.sk](http://www.ipcko.sk) (free, anonymous, nonstop, whole Slovakia)

National Coordination Centre on Violence against Children

**Childhood without violence** – [www.detstvobeznasilia.gov.sk](http://www.detstvobeznasilia.gov.sk)

Website for searching for different types of aid by region:

- Bodies for the social and legal protection of children
- Centres for mothers with children
- Crisis centres for children
- Counselling – diagnostics – therapy

**Rescue service:** 150, 112

**Fire service:** 155, 112

**Police:** 158, 112

**Mountain rescue:** 18 300