



VALIDITY CHILD PROTECTION POLICY

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Organisation lead on Child Protection and Safeguarding

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1. Introduction

This policy has been written as a set of guidelines applying to all persons who are likely to have contact with children and management personnel involved activities carried out within the framework of projects, activities or initiatives led by or participated in by Validity. The purpose of this policy is to safeguard children from all forms of harm, to make sure children's best interests are always taken into consideration, to detail the procedures necessary to facilitate the reporting of child protection issues and to ensure that all recognised issues are dealt with promptly and effectively.

2. Key definitions

For the purpose of the present policy:

- Children includes every human being below the age of 18 years, or otherwise where national or international laws adopt alternative definitions. Validity primarily works with children with intellectual, developmental, cognitive and/or psychosocial disabilities,¹ however this policy covers interaction with all children.
- "Harm": The Children Act 1989 (England and Wales) defines harm as "ill treatment or the impairment of health or development." This definition is adopted for the purposes of the present policy. "Development" means physical, intellectual, emotional, social or behavioural development. "Health" means physical or mental health. "Ill treatment" includes sexual abuse and forms of ill treatment which are not physical (such as psychological abuse).
- "Signs of harm" include physical and behavioural indicators which alert to, but do not prove by themselves, the possibility that the child may have suffered or may be suffering abuse or neglect.
- "Risk of harm" refers to the likelihood that a child may have suffered and/or may be suffering abuse or neglect by another person, often an adult responsible for their care.

¹ Children with intellectual disabilities generally have greater difficulty than most children with intellectual and adaptive functioning due to a long-term condition that is present at birth or at very early age. Children with developmental disabilities are identified as having developmental challenges including cerebral palsy, autism spectrum disorder and fetal alcohol spectrum disorder. Children with cognitive disability have difficulties with learning and processing information which can be associated with acquired brain injury or stroke .

- Significant harm means a situation seriously endangering the welfare of the child which justifies compulsory intervention of an authority in the best interests of the child.

3. Legal framework

This policy has been drawn up on the basis of law and good practice in protecting children. Taking into account Validity's geographic scope, the following list of legislative resources have been consulted, however all staff, contractors and volunteers are required to familiarise themselves with other relevant legislation in other jurisdiction where any activities take place —

- UN Convention on the Rights of the Child;
- UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities;
- Child Protection Act 2000 (Bulgaria)
- Social Assistance Act (Bulgaria)
- Regulations for enforcement of the Child Protection Act 2003 (Bulgaria)
- Act No. 359/1999 Coll., on the Social and legal protection of the child (Czech Republic)
- Act No. 108/2006 Coll., on Social services (Czech Republic)
- Act No. 349/1999 Coll., on the Public Defender of Rights (Czech Republic Decree) No. 473/2012 Coll., on the Implementation of certain provisions of the law on child protection (Czech Republic)
- Act No. 109/2002 Coll., on the Exercise of institutional care and protective care in educational institutions
- Act XXXI/1997 on the Protection of children and the guardianship administration (Hungary)
- Decree No. 149/1997 (IV. 10.) (Hungary) on the Guardianship authorities and the child protection and guardianship procedure
- Children Acts 1989 and 2004 (UK)

4. Basic principles

We recognise that—

- In all actions concerning the child, the best interest of the child should be a paramount consideration;
- All children have the right to live with their parents, as long as those parents provide a safe and healthy environment. All children should have a family who will protect them from harm and measures must be taken to empower families and develop their protective capacities.
- All children have the right to equal protection from all types of abuse, harm, violence, exploitation, discrimination and oppression, regardless of their age, disability, gender, racial heritage, ethnicity, religious belief, sexual orientation, socio-economic background or other aspects of their identity.
- Harm or abuse can take many different forms including, physical, sexual, verbal, mental, emotional and financial abuse or neglect, and a child may experience multiple forms of abuse;

- Some children are additionally vulnerable to abuse because of the impact of previous life experiences, challenging family circumstances, physical or mental impairments and specific additional needs. Therefore, professionals should be particularly alert to the potential need for early help for these children and provide reasonable accommodation to ensure that they are able to communicate and signal problems on an equal basis with others.
- Where a child is separated from their parents they have the right to maintain personal relations and direct contact with both parents unless this is contrary to the child's best interests (article 9(3) CRC).
- Children who are capable of forming their own views have the right to express their views freely in all matters affecting them and their views are to be given due weight having regard to the age and maturity of the child (article 12(1) CRC).
- A child has the right to freedom of thought, conscience and religion (article 14(1) CRC).
- All children have the right to enjoy a full and decent life, in conditions which ensure dignity, promote self-reliance and facilitate their active participation in the community (article 23(1) CRC).
- Children have the right to enjoy the highest attainable standard of health and to facilities for the treatment of illness and the rehabilitation of health (article 24(1) CRC).
- A child who has been placed for the purposes of care, protection or treatment of his or her physical or mental health has the right to a periodic review of the treatment provided and all other circumstances relevant to his or her placement (article 25) CRC).

5. Code of conduct

All staff, consultants, contractors, volunteers and associates (personnel) of Validity are expected to uphold the highest professional and ethical standards in all interactions with children. In particular, all personnel MUST —

- Have full regard to the basic principles outlined in Section 4 above;
- Uphold the highest standards of professionalism and respect for all children with whom they come into contact;
- Seek to communicate with the child in their own first language and preferred style of communication;
- Immediately record and report any concerns about children to their supervisor (see 7. Reporting and reaction protocol below);
- Take action as required or instructed where they become aware that a child has experienced or is experiencing harm or abuse;
- Report the concerns to the authority whose responsibility it is to carry out further enquiries and attend meetings or further discussions as required by those investigating;
- Consider the child/children's immediate safety and the safety of other children or adults who may be affected by the circumstances of concern and therefore may also be at risk;
- Seek the direct involvement of children in all decisions that affect them, giving due weight to their will and preferences and having regard to their age and maturity;
- Consider the need for feedback to the child in discussion with those carrying out the inquiry;

- Respect the confidentiality of children, and only share relevant information about their lives with appropriate people where they are experiencing or are at risk of significant harm. This does not prejudice the duty to report all child protection concerns or issues to their supervisor;
- Immediately refer any complaints about colleagues regarding their interaction with children to Validity Senior Management.

People involved in the project must NEVER—

- Ignore a situation where a child is experiencing or is at risk of significant harm;
- Perpetrate any form of violence or abuse against a child leading to harm;
- Neglect the basic needs of child;
- Place a child at risk of any kind of harm;
- Spend prolonged periods of time alone with a child;
- Engage in sexual or any other inappropriate relationships or activities with children with whom they come into contact with while working with Validity;
- Make promises to the child that are impossible to keep;
- Hide, ignore or cover up signs of violence, abuse, neglect or complaints made by children themselves.

Failure to abide by these standards or any other serious issues affecting the welfare of children will result in a disciplinary procedure and in immediate suspension of the person from their post pending the outcome of the disciplinary procedure.

6. Recruitment and training

Validity reserves the right to require all prospective staff, consultants, contractors, volunteers and other associated to under standard and enhanced background checks to assess their suitability for working with or coming into contact with children. This also includes for 'back-office' roles. All recruitment procedures will include:

- Specific questions to applicants/candidates regarding their suitability to work with children; whether they have ever been accused or found guilty of abuse of children; and whether they have criminal records.
- In cases where regular contact with children or vulnerable adults is envisaged, applicants/candidates will be required to undergo official background checks which vary dependent on the location of the position (for example, in the UK DBS checks will be required; in Hungary, a police records check will be sought).

Managers responsible for recruitment of any form of personnel must uphold the highest levels of confidentiality with regard to any information received. Any negative information will be assessed by the manager in consultation with senior management and Validity retains the right to withdraw offers of employment/contracts where persons are deemed unsuitable to work with children.

These requirements will be published in advertisements for staff, consultants, contractors, associates and volunteers. Annual training on child protection issues and this policy are a compulsory requirement

for all staff, consultants, contractors, associates and volunteers under the direction of the Co-Executive Directors.

7. Reporting and reaction protocol

All personnel have a duty to observe carefully the situation and treatment of children and to take action where child safeguarding concerns are raised. child. Should they be concerned, it is vital to discuss this with their supervisor immediately and to take urgent action where they become aware that a child with whom they have come into contact has experienced, is experiencing or is at risk of experiencing significant harm.

Consideration needs to be given to whether other children are at risk. Professionals involved in the project are expected to use their professional judgment and, where they are unsure of what action to take, to take advice from the Child Protection Officer.

Where a child is known to be in imminent danger of significant harm, or displays signs of harm, the person concerned should make a note of any concerning information and contact the Project Manager and/or the Child Protection Officer. This does not prejudice the immediate obligation of the adult involved to take appropriate action in compliance with the national legal framework.

Where a child is known to be in imminent danger of significant harm, the person concerned MUST – in line with domestic legal provisions – immediately report this to the relevant national authorities (police, social services, etc.).

8. Roles and responsibilities

- Child Protection Officer: Steven Allen is the Child Protection Officer of the co-ordinating organisation. The Child Protection Officer:
 - is the main contact point for all personnel;
 - is responsible for the implementation of this policy throughout the organisation;
 - provides advice, guidance, and instructions to the project managers regarding all child protection matters;
 - investigates any complaints from children against people; and
 - may also decide to take external advice if required, or take mitigating actions in specific situations;
 - holds a confidential log of all child protection matters across the organisation; and
 - has the authority to initiate disciplinary procedures for all personnel if deemed to be required.

In circumstances where a complaint concerns the Child Protection Officer, an investigation will be conducted by the Chair of Validity's Board.

- Project Managers: All Project Managers:
 - have the duty to inform all people within projects and activities they coordinate about the present policy;

- are the main contact point for all project personnel regarding child protection matters;
- have the duty to immediately report and note any child protection concerns or issues to the Child Protection Officer; and
- maintain a confidential, secure log of all child protection reports and inquiries from people involved in the project regarding child protection matters;
- must take immediate and ongoing action to proactively safeguard child and respond to child protection concerns that are raised.

Failure to abide by these obligations will trigger an investigation and may lead to disciplinary sanctions.

9. Confidentiality

The Child Protection Officer will keep a confidential, secure log of any information shared, and any follow-up action taken. All sensitive information will be kept confidential, in compliance with national and European data protection standards and other relevant laws and policies.

10. Complaints against staff or volunteers

Validity and project partners take serious any allegations regarding improper conduct whether this relates to paid staff or to project volunteers. In the event that any person has cause to complain, they may submit a complaint to Validity's Co-Executive Directors which will be dealt with under Validity's Policy on Discrimination, Harassment, Bullying and Violence.

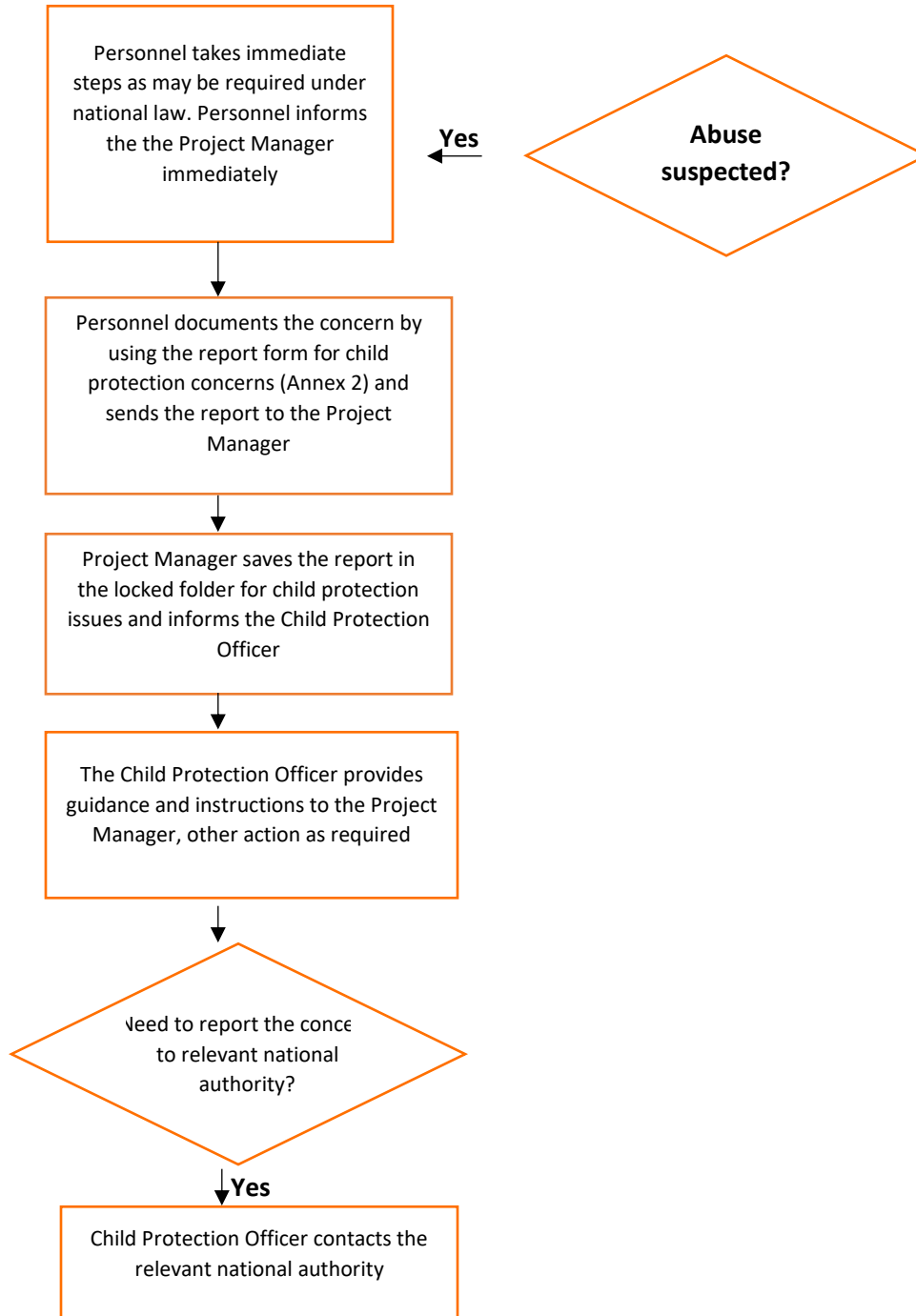
11. Policy monitoring and review

A management review of child protection documentation will be carried out by Validity's Child Protection Officer on a monthly basis to ensure compliance with this policy. Any observations or instructions for action will be provided in writing and shared with the relevant personnel.

Validity's Co-Executive Directors are authorised to undertake ad hoc management reviews of all child protection documentation.

This policy will be reviewed regularly, at least twice a year by the Child Protection Officer, Project Manager, and the Co-Executive Directors of Validity. Substantial amendments must be proposed to and authorised by Validity's Board of Trustees.

Annex 1: The process of reporting a child protection concern



Annex 2: Report form for suspected abuse or any child protection concerns

1. Information about the Rapporteur

- 1.1. Name:
- 1.2. Role in the project:
- 1.3. Job title:
- 1.4. Workplace:
- 1.5. Describe your relationship with the Child:
- 1.6. Contact details:
 - E-mail:
 - Phone:
 - Mobile phone:

2. Information about the Child

- 2.1. The Child's first name(s) and last name(s):
- 2.2. The Child's gender:
- 2.3. The Child's age:
- 2.4. The Child's contact details:
 - E-mail:
 - Phone:
 - Mobile phone:
 - Address:
- 2.5. The Child's Guardian(s):
- 2.6. The Guardians' contact details:
- 2.7. The institution the Child lives in:
- 2.8. Director of the institution:
- 2.9. The Director's contact details:
 - E-mail:
 - Phone:

- Mobile phone:

3. The concern

3.1. Nature of the concern (e.g. alleged physical/emotional/mental/sexual abuse, neglect, risk of harm or any other concerns):

3.2. Your personal observation (please make a clear distinction between facts and opinions):

3.3. Information gained through disclosure by the Child (please provide what she/he said to you as precisely as possible):

3.4. Information provided by other sources (please specify your source as well)

3.5. Location of the alleged incident:

3.6. Date and time of alleged incident:

3.7. Information about the alleged perpetrator(s):

4. Action taken

4.1. The concern was directly reported to:

4.2. Date of the reporting to the Child Protection Officer:

4.3. Action taken:

This report will be treated confidentially and kept in a locked folder on the server of Validity. The report will only be accessible to Validity's Child Protection Officer, the Project Manager and Senior Management

Date:

Signature of the Rapporteur

Signature of the Child Protection Officer