



CHILD PROTECTION POLICY

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The Institute of Child Health – Department of Mental Health and Social Welfare

The Institute of Child Health (ICH) is a research centre under the oversight and with the funding of the Greek Ministry of Health. Its scope of study and action is research, clinical and laboratory service provision to children and training of professionals working with children. ICH is composed by seven departments. As mandated by its founding legislative act Presidential Decree No. 867/07.11.1979, ICH employing always a public health approach shall develop actions for protecting and promoting children's health, well-being and protection. The Institute of Child Health is the appointed focal point for the implementation of the World Health Organisation and United Nations Children's Fund baby-friendly hospital initiative assessment.

The Department of Mental Health and Social Welfare (MHSW) is a designated national focal point in matters of prevention of and intervention in child abuse and neglect cases and since 1988 operates as the Centre for the Study and Prevention of Child Abuse and Neglect. It particularly focuses on epidemiological and social research regarding child abuse and neglect, service provision, child mental health promotion programmes, capacity-building of professionals working with children, as well as on awareness raising of the public and lobbying for reforms in legislation and practice. Scientific personnel of MHSW provides supervision, guidance and consultation on others professionals working with children on child safeguarding standards and case management. Further, MHSW is a partner to the Deputy Child Ombudsman's Office in Greece. The **Department's Director, Dr. George Nikolaidis**, is the Greek Representative in the Council of Europe Lanzarote Committee and a member of the Scientific Committee of International Society for Prevention of Child Abuse and Neglect.

The Child Protection Policy

The objective of the Department of Mental Health and Social Welfare is to safeguard children's well-being and children's rights. The scope of action of the MHSW Department involves primarily professionals working with children. At the same time, in the context of child protection strategies' development, research or prevention and intervention measures that may be taken, may directly engage children. Pursuant to its goals, MHSW adheres to the four general principals of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child and is committed to safeguard all rights of children as stipulated therein. Therefore, all children without distinction of any kind, having their best interests taken as a primary consideration, having their life and survival secured, having their opinions heard in all matters that affect them, shall enjoy protection and receive appropriate care at any phase or way the Department and its staff, permanent or temporary, are operating affecting children.

Preventing children's harm and promoting the beneficence and protection of children are prerequisites of any action coordinated or implemented by the MHSW. To this end, MHSW has developed the national Protocol for the Investigation, Diagnosis and Management of Child Abuse and Neglect to be followed by all professionals within the welfare, education, justice, law enforcement and health sectors in Greece. Above all, the Department and its staff act pursuant to this Protocol, in case of reported or suspected child abuse or neglect case. Concomitantly, professionals working with and for children nationwide are receiving appropriate trainings to broaden and ensure the Protocol's application. Staff of MHSW consisting of a number of professionals, namely social workers, psychologists, psychiatrist, lawyer, work-therapists, child-care providers and administrators, all adhere to specific codes of conducts as provided by law or operate according to general legislation. Within the national legal framework, any act that harms or endangers a child is a crime (Greek Penal Code, Code of Penal Procedure, Combating domestic violence Act (L. 3500/2006)). The MHSW has developed a legal index containing all provisions relevant to child maltreatment. Professionals recruited by the Department are safely selected and must follow the Organisation's policy. Furthermore, in every project or programme where vulnerable population, and here including children, are directly involved, concrete guidelines are developed for all parties to respect and implement, taking into account the special needs of this population and potential risks that may arise when engaging them.

Engagement of people in projects and programmes

Supervision

The Director of the Department of Mental Health and Social Welfare shall oversee the implementation of the Child Protection Policy by all members of the staff. A designated social worker shall guide, support and supervise with regard to the standards set by the MHSW and the way these are followed, by facilitating an initial brief training and providing the relevant material and then staying updated with each project's coordinator. Each project's or programme's coordinator supervises the behaviour of every member of staff or associate in relation to this specific project or programme and their adherence to the developed protection protocol for this. Staff needs to follow the Policy and respected code of conduct within and outside the employment place.

Recruitment of personnel

Persons upon recruitment are requested to state their prior relevant experience to the position and include references for each position. In case the position involves direct contact with vulnerable population, this shall be referred in the post. If selected, according to the candidates' qualifications for the job, a personal interview shall take place, where issues of prior experience are better clarified, together with intentions and capacities for current project-position. An introductory information concerning the Institute of Child Health, the Department of Mental Health and Social Welfare, their mandates and commitments to child health and protection and promotion of their well-being and rights shall always precede. Department's expectations from potential staff are explicitly articulated during the interview by the five-membered Committee undertaking the role of interviewers. If further selected, candidates are requested to bring validated copies of their ID, previous professional experience (e.g. certificate of public social security organisation) and education background, as well as criminal records' certificates issued by the competent public authority when it comes to positions involving contact with vulnerable populations. If the employment further proceeds, then an employment contract is being signed and therein there is a clause foreseeing that the contracted person adheres to the Organisation's policy and objectives, the MHSW Child Protection Policy, the guidance of the Department's Director and the project's coordinator and respects the laws at all times. In relation to long-term projects the first month or up to first three months is considered probationary period. People involved in activities engaging children shall have relevant prior experience and/or education on this.

Partnerships – Other Contractors

MHSW investigates prior relevant experience in the certain field of any partner/associate contractor. There is a zero-tolerance stance towards child abuse and every person that infringes the law and human rights cannot associate with ICH.

Engagement of families and children

Parents, children and relevant others shall be informed about our child safeguarding commitments and measures. Communications between the organisation and parents/care-

givers/community leaders shall take account potential language or communication differences.

It shall be clear and recorded who is responsible for the care of each child engaged in MHSW activities and their contact details too. Parental or primary caregiver consent shall be obtained for children's participation in activities whenever possible, together with the child's assent.

A process for ensuring children are consulted and listened to shall be devised, to ensure their voices are heard and that their views inform and influence the development of safeguarding measures in MHSW. A complaints procedure with children, families and communities shall be devised. Children and primary caregivers shall be encouraged to provide feedback on the procedures. Children shall be asked for comfortable ways to complain, if they have a concern about themselves or another child.

Procedures for a child-safe environment

Child is every person under the age of eighteen years of age. According to the World Health Organisation, "child maltreatment is the abuse and neglect that occurs to children under 18 years of age. It includes all types of physical and/or emotional ill-treatment, sexual abuse, neglect, negligence and commercial or other exploitation, which results in actual or potential harm to the child's health, survival, development or dignity in the context of a relationship of responsibility, trust or power".

It is in the scope of this Policy that the range of acts, intentional or otherwise, that harm children shall be prevented or if identified will be reported according to national law. Code of Penal Procedure dictates that all public servants either acting as permanent or temporary staff are obliged to report crimes that have been informed about during their duties to the Public Prosecutor (a. 27 par. 2). Citizens are also obliged to report crimes that are persecuted ex officio, when this is provided in the law (a. 40 par. 1). Such provision there is and it concerns felonies (Penal Code, a. 232 par. 1). For detailed description of statutes please see the national Protocol for the Investigation, Diagnosis and Management of child abuse and neglect cases (ICH, 2015) and the Legal Index of provisions related to child maltreatment (ICH, 2015). Furthermore, doctors, psychologists and social workers bounded by law 3418/2005, law 991/1979 and presidential decree 23/1992 accordingly shall report crimes that demand prompt intervention due to life or physical integrity endangered or are felonies. MHSW staff members who are informed about a child abuse act, shall take all necessary steps to report the case to the competent service and authority so that the child receives the appropriate intervention and be safe from then on. All staff members shall follow the guidelines as articulated in the national Protocol for the Investigation, Diagnosis and Management of Child Abuse and Neglect according to suspected type of abuse and specialty of the professional. Other associates of the MHSW shall inform the designated person, especially the Coordinator of each project or programme, to take necessary action.

Planning shall take place before engaging children in any activity coordinated by MHSW. Relevant instructions and capacity building of MHSW staff, if newly employed, shall precede any intervention. Potential risks regarding the space, the local community, harmful cultural practices, disclosure of domestic violence or any other type of child abuse will have been mapped beforehand and mitigating as well as management strategies will have been designed. Research protocol and/or child protection guidelines shall be part of all activities that engage or might affect children. The child or his/her family/guardian will be informed about the pertinent services and organisations that can assist him/her in the area of interest or availability. Children shall also be introduced to national helplines, in case this is more accessible to them.

Monitoring of child protection policy implementation and accountability

Child Protection Policy monitoring lies in the responsibility of the Director of MHSW. Project's or programme's Coordinator shall inform at all stages the Director about the implementation of it and any possible concerns that may have arisen. The scientific personnel of MHSW in monthly meetings, or sooner if necessary, shall discuss potential relevant issues in order to inform or review the current policy and the designated social worker shall introduce appropriate supervision or guidance to reinforce a comprehensive response.

The Director of the Department of Mental Health and Social Welfare
of the Institute of Child Health

Dr. George Nikolajdis

