



Child Protection Policy (CPP)

IRCA is dedicated to the promotion and protection of children's rights in the Republic of Albania, in alignment with national legislation and international child safeguarding standards. We recognize that all children, regardless of age, gender, ethnicity, or background, have the right to protection from all forms of abuse and harm. This Child Protection Policy (CPP) establishes our organization's comprehensive approach to creating a safe environment for children and outlines our responsibilities to prevent, respond to, and report any form of child abuse or exploitation.

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1. Introduction

The Institute of Roma Culture in Albania (IRCA) was founded on July 1, 2011, inspired by the advocacy services provided by international institutions such as the Italian Institute of Culture in Albania, the Goethe Institute, the British Council, the American Corner, as well as research and documentation centers at universities across Europe and North America, many of which IRCA's founders have personally engaged with. The organization's external vision focuses on empowering Roma communities by ensuring meaningful access, engagement, representation, and participation in civic life and public decision-making at all levels. Internally, IRCA strives to be a leading organization that advocates for a multiethnic and inclusive society grounded in the universal values of human rights and equality.

IRCA's mission is to promote the equal and sustainable development of Roma communities through advocacy, mobilization, empowerment, collaboration, policy-oriented research, and participatory action. A key component of this mission is the investment in the well-being and future of Roma children. The organization actively works to protect and advance children's rights, prevent school dropout, and promote inclusive education by engaging families, teachers, and community structures. Through various educational and cultural programs, IRCA creates safe and stimulating spaces for Roma children to learn, express themselves, and build self-confidence. By integrating socio-emotional learning and creative expression in its activities, IRCA contributes to nurturing a generation of empowered Roma youth who are aware of their rights and potential. In addition, IRCA works to ensure equal participation in democratic processes, fair access to rights and services, and the preservation and promotion of Roma culture and identity. Through a combination of volunteer advocacy, educational services, and recreational activities, IRCA has established three key youth networks: the Romani Students' Network, the Romani Corps of Volunteers, and the Romani Youth Parliament Forum. Much of IRCA's work is also amplified through its online radio station, "Capitol"-Radio, which serves as a platform to highlight and broadcast the organization's initiatives, including those that give voice to children and young people from Roma communities.

❖ *Why this policy?*

This policy on child protection is a cornerstone of IRCA's work and reflects the organization's deep commitment to creating a safe, inclusive, and empowering environment for all children, with particular attention to those from vulnerable groups, especially Roma children. Many Roma children in Albania face multiple layers of marginalization—ranging from poverty and social stigma to limited access to quality education, healthcare, and public services. In this context, IRCA's child protection policy is not just a formal requirement, but a vital ethical and practical framework that guides every aspect of the organization's interaction with children. It ensures that all staff, volunteers, partners, and collaborators are trained, aware, and held accountable in upholding the highest standards of safety, respect, and care.

Through its daily work—whether in community centers, schools, or informal learning spaces—IRCA directly supports Roma children by offering educational support, creative and cultural activities, psycho-social assistance, and awareness-raising sessions. The child protection policy strengthens these efforts by establishing clear protocols for identifying, preventing, and

responding to any form of abuse, exploitation, neglect, or discrimination. It also emphasizes the importance of listening to children's voices, promoting their participation, and recognizing them as active agents of change. By embedding child protection into its core mission, IRCA not only safeguards children's rights but actively contributes to breaking cycles of exclusion and building a more just and inclusive society for future generations.

2. Purpose and Scope

The purpose of this Child Protection Policy is to establish clear, comprehensive guidelines and operational standards to ensure the safety, dignity, and well-being of every child who comes into contact with IRCA's programs, services, or representatives. This policy is designed to prevent and respond to all forms of abuse, neglect, exploitation, and violence against children, particularly those belonging to vulnerable and marginalized groups, such as Roma children, who are at greater risk due to poverty, discrimination, and social exclusion. By embedding child protection principles into all levels of its operations, IRCA reinforces its commitment to creating a child-safe environment where children are respected, empowered, and actively protected.

The policy aligns with national legal frameworks, ensuring full compliance with the Albanian Law No. 18/2017 "On the Rights and Protection of the Child," as well as its related by-laws and the strategic priorities outlined in the National Agenda for the Rights of the Child (2021–2026). These legal foundations guide IRCA in upholding children's rights and in adopting a zero-tolerance approach to any behavior or action that could put children at risk.

This policy is applicable to all individuals associated with IRCA's work across Albania, including full-time and part-time employees, volunteers, members of the board of directors, consultants, interns, service contractors, and partner organizations. Whether their involvement with children is direct—such as in educational, social, or recreational activities—or indirect—such as in administration, policy-making, or outreach—they are all bound by this policy and required to adhere to its principles. All individuals are expected to act in the best interests of the child at all times, report any concerns or incidents, and contribute to a culture of transparency, accountability, and child-centered protection within the organization and its community-based work.

3. Guiding Principles

- **Best Interests of the Child:** In accordance with Albanian legislation and the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (ratified by Albania), all decisions and actions taken by the organization will prioritize the best interests of the child.
- **Do No Harm:** All staff and associates must ensure that their actions do not cause any physical, emotional, psychological, or social harm to children.
- **Child Participation:** Children will be empowered and encouraged to express their views freely in all matters affecting them, in a manner consistent with their age and maturity, as mandated by the Albanian legal framework.

- **Non-Discrimination:** Every child will be treated fairly and without discrimination, as enshrined in Albania’s Constitution and relevant child protection laws.
- **Transparency and Accountability:** All safeguarding actions must be clearly documented, justified, and subject to review to ensure accountability.



The application of these core principles—Best Interests of the Child, Do No Harm, Child Participation, Non-Discrimination, and Transparency and Accountability—is essential to ensuring meaningful and effective child protection in all of IRCA’s activities. These principles not only align with Albanian legislation and international standards, such as the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, but also serve as the ethical and operational foundation for safeguarding the most vulnerable children, including those from Roma communities. Prioritizing the best interests of the child ensures that every decision taken places the child’s well-being and development at the center. The Do No Harm principle reinforces a proactive duty of care, requiring staff and partners to create safe, respectful, and nurturing environments. Encouraging child participation strengthens children’s voices and promotes their role as active rights-holders in matters affecting their lives. Upholding non-discrimination guarantees equal protection and access to services for all children, regardless of ethnicity, gender, or social background. Finally, transparency and accountability ensure that all actions are monitored, documented, and open to review, building trust with communities and reinforcing the integrity of IRCA’s child protection systems. These principles, when fully implemented, create a holistic and inclusive approach to protecting children from harm while fostering their active inclusion in society.

4. Definitions

- **Child:** A person under the age of 18, as defined by Albanian Law No. 18/2017 and the Convention on the Rights of the Child.
- **Child Abuse:** Any form of physical, emotional, or sexual mistreatment or neglect that causes harm or potential harm to a child's health, survival, development, or dignity.
- **Neglect:** The failure to provide for a child's basic physical, emotional, educational, or medical needs.
- **Child Protection:** The prevention of and response to exploitation, abuse, neglect, and violence affecting children.
- **Safeguarding:** Broader than protection, safeguarding involves proactively creating safe environments and preventing harm to children's welfare.

5. Standard 1: Policy

5.1 Commitment to Child Protection

Our organization is fully committed to upholding the child protection standards defined by both Albanian legislation and international frameworks. We operate a zero-tolerance policy for child abuse, exploitation, or neglect and integrate child protection concerns into all operational decisions and programming.

5.2 Legal Framework

This policy aligns with the following legal frameworks:

- Law No. 18/2017 "On the Rights and Protection of the Child"
- Law No. 9669, dated 18.12.2006 "On Measures Against Violence in Family Relations"
- Criminal Code of Albania (especially regarding sexual offenses, child abuse, and exploitation)
- United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child
- The Council of Europe Convention on the Protection of Children against Sexual Exploitation and Sexual Abuse (Lanzarote Convention)
- International Child Safeguarding Standards (Keeping Children Safe)

5.3 Policy Statement

Institute of Romani Culture in Albania (IRCA) recognizes its duty of care toward children and commits to creating and maintaining an environment that prevents abuse and promotes child well-being. This policy is publicly available and actively disseminated to all stakeholders, ensuring that everyone is aware of their responsibilities.

6. Standard 2: People

6.1 Recruitment and Selection

We ensure that safeguarding is embedded in our recruitment and human resources processes. All positions, particularly those involving direct or indirect contact with children, are subject to:

- Inclusion of safeguarding roles and responsibilities in job descriptions
- Structured interviews with child safeguarding questions
- Mandatory background and criminal record checks from Albanian law enforcement authorities (e-Albania certificate or General Directorate of State Police)
- Reference checks with at least two previous employers, including questions about child safety

6.2 Roles and Responsibilities

- **Child Protection Officer (CPO):** The designated CPO oversees the implementation of this policy, provides training, and coordinates responses to incidents.
- **Executive Director:** Responsible for strategic oversight and ensuring the policy is integrated across the organization.
- **All Staff, Volunteers, and Associates:** Each person must sign a Code of Conduct, participate in mandatory training, and report any safeguarding concern without delay.

6.3 Training and Awareness

To ensure a culture of safety and accountability, all new staff members, interns, and volunteers are required to complete safeguarding induction training within the first month of joining IRCA. This training introduces core principles of child protection, internal procedures, legal obligations under Albanian law, and the specific vulnerabilities of children from marginalized groups, particularly Roma children. Beyond induction, all employees and volunteers must participate in mandatory annual refresher trainings to reinforce knowledge and update staff on any policy or legal changes. Specialized training sessions—tailored to specific roles such as outreach workers, educators, or program coordinators—are provided to individuals with direct and sustained contact with children. These sessions include scenario-based learning, risk recognition, and child-sensitive communication techniques to enhance practical safeguarding skills and responsiveness.

7. Standard 3: Procedures

7.1 Risk Assessment

Before launching any new program, event, partnership, or activity involving children, IRCA conducts a comprehensive risk assessment. These assessments identify potential child protection risks and outline mitigation strategies to minimize harm. Standardized tools and templates are used, developed in collaboration with the Albanian State Agency for the Rights and Protection of the Child. Risk assessments are reviewed regularly, especially when programs evolve or expand into new locations, ensuring continuous attention to children's safety in diverse contexts.

7.2 Reporting Concerns

IRCA promotes an open and responsive reporting culture. Concerns regarding child safety—whether suspected, witnessed, or disclosed—can be reported verbally or in writing to the designated Child Protection Officer (CPO), immediate supervisor, or through secure channels including IRCA’s safeguarding hotline and official email address. All individuals engaged with IRCA are obligated to report any concerns or incidents without delay. In accordance with Law No. 18/2017 “On the Rights and Protection of the Child,” any suspicion of abuse or harm must be mandatorily reported to the Albanian State Social Service or the State Police.

7.3 Responding to Allegations

All allegations are handled with urgency, confidentiality, and sensitivity. The child’s safety is prioritized, and all relevant authorities are notified as required by Albanian law. An internal investigation is launched alongside any official inquiries.

7.4 Record Keeping and Information Sharing

Confidential records are securely stored and maintained in compliance with Albania’s Law on Personal Data Protection (Law No. 9887/2008). Sharing of data is limited to authorities and only on a need-to-know basis.

8. Standard 4: Accountability

8.1 Monitoring and Evaluation

IRCA maintains an internal monitoring system that tracks policy implementation, compliance with procedures, and incident reporting outcomes. This system enables continuous data collection, with anonymized and aggregated information used for internal learning, donor reporting, and identifying trends that may require policy adjustments.

8.2 Internal and External Reviews

Biannual internal reviews will be conducted, alongside external audits every three years. Reviews will include consultation with children, parents, and local stakeholders such as the Child Protection Units (CPUs) operating at municipal level in Albania.

8.3 Learning and Improvement

Every reported incident is followed by an internal debriefing session involving relevant staff and management. These sessions are used to reflect on how procedures were followed, identify gaps, and implement improvements. Findings from these sessions inform updates to safeguarding training, the development of new tools, and broader organizational learning. IRCA is committed to treating each incident not only as a compliance issue but as an opportunity for institutional growth and strengthened child protection practice.

9. Policy Review and Updates

This policy will be formally reviewed each year and updated in line with changes in national legislation, partner requirements, or organizational restructuring. Input will be sought from the CPO, staff, and relevant government agencies (e.g., the State Agency for the Rights and Protection of the Child).

10. Appendices

Appendix A: Code of Conduct

All individuals working with children must treat them with respect and dignity at all times. Inappropriate language, gestures, or behavior toward children is strictly prohibited. Staff and volunteers should avoid being alone with a child whenever possible and ensure that interactions are visible and transparent.

Appendix B: Incident Reporting Form

The form must include the full name of the person making the report, the date and time the incident occurred or was reported, a detailed description of the concern or incident, and any actions taken in response. Additional sections may include witness statements and referrals made.

Appendix C: Glossary of Terms

- **Safeguarding:** The proactive measures taken to promote the welfare of children and protect them from harm.
- **Perpetrator:** An individual who commits an act of abuse, exploitation, or harm against a child.
- **Disclosure:** The process through which a child shares information about abuse or harm they have experienced or witnessed.

Approved by:

Bledar Taho-Executive Director

Signature: _____

Date: 6.1.2025

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