BARLETI INSTITUTE OF RESEARCH AND DEVELOPMENT (BIRD)
CHILD SAFEGUARDING POLICY

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Approving Authority: Board of BIRD
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BOARD APPROVAL

This Child Safeguarding Policy is submitted to the Board of the Barleti Institute of Research and Development (BIRD) for formal approval.

Upon approval, this Policy shall constitute the institutional framework governing BIRD's commitment to protecting children from all forms of abuse, exploitation, neglect and harm in connection with its activities, projects, programmes, partnerships and operations.

Approved by the Board of BIRD
Decision No.: 12
Date: January 22, 2025
Signature Executive Director : Aleksander Xhuvani

1. PURPOSE AND SCOPE

2. GUIDING PRINCIPLES

BIRD shall implement this Policy in accordance with the following principles:

2.1 Zero tolerance

BIRD does not tolerate any form of child abuse, exploitation, neglect, sexual exploitation or abuse, harassment, intimidation, bullying or other conduct that endangers a child's safety, dignity or well-being.

2.2 Best interests of the child

The best interests of the child shall be a primary consideration in all decisions and actions concerning children under this Policy.

2.3 Non-discrimination and equal protection

Every child shall be treated with dignity and respect and shall have equal access to protection, support and appropriate referral mechanisms.

2.4 Prevention and accountability

BIRD shall take reasonable and proportionate measures to prevent safeguarding violations, reduce risks, ensure accountability and respond promptly to concerns.

2.5 Confidentiality and data protection

Safeguarding information shall be handled sensitively and shared strictly on a need-to-know basis, in accordance with applicable data protection requirements and the need to protect the child.

2.6 Child participation and respect

Children shall be listened to and treated in an age-appropriate manner. Their views shall be considered in accordance with their age, maturity, evolving capacities and best interests.

2.7 Prompt and appropriate response

All safeguarding concerns shall be taken seriously, documented appropriately and addressed without undue delay. No individual shall be exempt from accountability because of their position, seniority or reputation.

3. DEFINITIONS OF ABUSE, EXPLOITATION AND HARM

For the purposes of this Policy, child abuse includes acts or omissions by individuals, organisations or systems that cause, or create a significant risk of, harm to a child's physical or psychological health, dignity, safety or development.

BIRD recognises the following forms of abuse and harmful conduct. The categories may overlap, and a single incident may involve more than one form of abuse.

3.1 Sexual abuse

Sexual abuse involves engaging a child in sexual activity, whether or not the child understands the nature of the activity or is able to give informed consent.

It may include physical contact, such as sexual assault, penetration, kissing or inappropriate touching, as well as non-contact conduct, including exposing a child to sexual content, involving a child in the production or viewing of sexual images, encouraging sexually inappropriate behaviour or grooming a child for sexual purposes, including through digital technologies.

Sexual abuse may be perpetrated by adults of any sex or gender, as well as by other children.

3.2 Physical abuse

Physical abuse includes the deliberate or otherwise unlawful use of physical force against a child that causes, or is likely to cause, injury or harm.

Examples include hitting, shaking, throwing, burning, scalding, poisoning, suffocating, drowning or other acts that cause physical injury. It may also include the deliberate fabrication or induction of illness or injury in a child by a parent, caregiver or another person.

3.3 Emotional or psychological abuse

Emotional or psychological abuse includes conduct that harms, or is likely to harm, a child's emotional, psychological, intellectual or social development.

Examples include humiliation, degrading treatment, threats, intimidation, persistent criticism, insults, shaming, rejection, isolation, terrorising, coercion and the deliberate withholding of appropriate emotional support.
Such abuse may arise from a single serious incident or from repeated or sustained conduct.

3.4 Neglect

Neglect is the failure to provide, or ensure access to, the care and protection necessary for a child's health, safety and development.
It may include failure to provide adequate food, clothing, shelter, supervision or appropriate medical care; failure to protect a child from foreseeable harm; exposing a child to violence or unsafe environments; releasing a child to an unauthorised person; or failing to implement appropriate safety measures in locations or activities involving children.
Neglect may also arise when individuals or organisations fail to follow applicable safeguarding, health and safety or child protection procedures.

3.5 Child exploitation

Child exploitation refers to the use of a child for another person's benefit or advantage in circumstances involving coercion, deception, manipulation, abuse of power or other exploitative conduct.
It may include trafficking, forced labour, slavery-like practices, exploitation in criminal activities, recruitment or use of children in armed conflict, and other forms of exploitation prohibited by applicable law.

3.6 Child sexual exploitation

Child sexual exploitation occurs when a child is manipulated, coerced, deceived or otherwise exploited for sexual purposes, including where the perpetrator or a third party obtains financial, material, social or other benefits.
Exploitation may occur with or without physical contact and may involve digital technologies. A child must not be considered responsible for their exploitation, and apparent agreement or participation does not make exploitative conduct acceptable.

3.7 Child labour

Child labour refers to work that deprives children of their childhood, dignity, educational opportunities or potential, or that is harmful to their physical, mental, social or moral development.
It includes work that is dangerous, interferes with compulsory education, requires children to leave school prematurely or imposes excessive working hours or burdens.
Lawful, age-appropriate vocational training or apprenticeship arrangements may be permissible where they comply with applicable legislation and do not expose children to exploitation or harm.
BIRD prohibits the use of children in exploitative or hazardous labour and shall not permit its personnel or representatives to engage children under the age of 18 in domestic work connected with their employment or activities on behalf of BIRD where such engagement constitutes exploitation, abuse or a breach of applicable law.

3.8 Child slavery and trafficking

Child slavery includes practices in which a child is treated as property or subjected to ownership-like control, servitude or other slavery-like practices.

Child trafficking includes the recruitment, transportation, transfer, harbouring or receipt of a child for the purpose of exploitation, as defined under applicable law.

3.9 Other safeguarding violations

This Policy also covers harassment, bullying, intimidation, inappropriate physical contact, unsafe supervision, misuse of personal information or images, inappropriate digital communication, and any other act or omission that harms or creates an unacceptable risk to a child.

4. BIRD'S COMMITMENT TO CHILD SAFEGUARDING

BIRD is committed to acting ethically and responsibly in all its activities and relationships. It shall establish and maintain proportionate safeguards to prevent child abuse and exploitation in its operations, projects, partnerships and supply chains.

BIRD's commitment includes:

4.1 Awareness: Ensuring that personnel and relevant third parties understand the safeguarding standards and behavioural expectations applicable to their roles.

4.2 Prevention: Identifying and reducing safeguarding risks through appropriate recruitment, screening, supervision, training, risk assessment and safe working practices.

4.3 Reporting: Establishing accessible and clear channels through which safeguarding concerns can be raised without fear of retaliation.

4.4 Response: Taking prompt, proportionate and child-centred action to address reported concerns and protect children from further harm.

4.5 Accountability: Applying appropriate disciplinary, contractual or other measures where violations are established, without prejudice to the responsibilities of competent public authorities.

4.6 Continuous improvement: Reviewing this Policy and related procedures periodically and following significant incidents, changes in applicable legislation or material changes in BIRD's activities.

5. PROHIBITED CONDUCT

The following conduct is strictly prohibited in connection with BIRD's activities:

a. Physically, sexually, emotionally or psychologically abusing a child, or threatening to do so.

b. Engaging in sexual activity with a person under the age of 18, regardless of any claim of consent, local custom or the age of consent under local law, subject to any mandatory legal provisions applicable to the circumstances.

c. Exchanging money, employment, goods, services, assistance, benefits or opportunities for sexual activity or sexual favours involving a child.

d. Engaging in, facilitating or knowingly contributing to the sexual exploitation, trafficking or other exploitation of a child.

e. Employing or engaging a child in hazardous, exploitative or otherwise unlawful labour.
f. Using humiliating, degrading, violent or otherwise abusive forms of punishment or discipline.
g. Initiating inappropriate private communications with a child encountered through BIRD's activities, including personal messages through social media or mobile devices, outside authorised and appropriately safeguarded communication arrangements.
h. Taking, using, storing or sharing photographs, videos or personal information concerning a child without an appropriate lawful basis, required authorisation and compliance with applicable consent, safeguarding and data protection procedures.
i. Failing to implement required health, safety, supervision or safeguarding measures at research sites, events, training locations or other places where BIRD activities involving children take place.
j. Knowingly disregarding applicable laws, mandatory procedures or reasonable safeguarding measures in a manner that exposes a child to harm.
k. Failing to report a safeguarding concern in accordance with this Policy, or retaliating against any person who raises a concern in good faith.
These prohibitions do not replace the need to assess individual circumstances in accordance with applicable law. Any allegation of misconduct shall be handled fairly, confidentially and through appropriate procedures.

6. PREVENTIVE MEASURES

6.1 Recruitment and engagement

Where a position or activity involves contact with children, BIRD shall assess the associated safeguarding risks and apply appropriate and lawful screening measures before engagement, in accordance with applicable legislation and data protection requirements.
Such measures may include reference checks, verification of relevant qualifications, lawful background checks where available and appropriate, and assessment of the candidate's understanding of safeguarding responsibilities.

6.2 Training and awareness

Relevant personnel shall receive appropriate information or training on this Policy, including recognising signs of abuse, maintaining professional boundaries, reporting concerns and responding appropriately to disclosures by children.
The extent and frequency of training shall be proportionate to the role and level of contact with children.

6.3 Risk assessment

Activities involving children shall be subject to proportionate safeguarding risk assessments. Identified risks shall be addressed through appropriate preventive measures, supervision arrangements, safe venues, responsible communication and clear assignment of responsibilities.

6.4 Research and project activities

Where BIRD conducts research, consultations, interviews, focus groups, surveys or other activities involving children, the responsible project team shall ensure that appropriate safeguarding and ethical procedures are in place.
These shall include, as applicable, age-appropriate information, informed consent from a parent or legal guardian where required, the child's informed assent where appropriate, confidentiality protections, secure data handling and referral arrangements for disclosures of abuse or distress.
Research ethics approval, where required, shall be obtained before the activity begins.

6.5 Digital safeguarding

Digital platforms, communication channels and online activities operated or used by BIRD shall be managed to reduce risks of grooming, harassment, unauthorised disclosure of personal information and other forms of online harm.
Personnel shall use authorised communication channels and follow the applicable rules for online interaction with children.

7. ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES

7.1 Board of BIRD

The Board shall:
a. Approve this Policy and any material amendments.
b. Exercise oversight of BIRD's institutional commitment to child safeguarding.
c. Ensure that appropriate accountability and reporting arrangements are established.
d. Consider serious safeguarding matters referred to it in accordance with this Policy and applicable law.
e. Ensure that concerns involving senior management or members of the Board are handled through an independent and appropriate reporting route.

7.2 Executive Director

The Executive Director shall:
a. Oversee the implementation of this Policy.
b. Ensure that appropriate procedures, resources and responsibilities are established.
c. Ensure that relevant personnel and third parties are informed of their safeguarding obligations.
d. Ensure that reported concerns are addressed promptly and appropriately.
e. Support the appointment and functioning of the Child Safeguarding Focal Point.
f. Report significant safeguarding matters to the Board, subject to confidentiality and applicable legal obligations.
Where a concern involves the Executive Director, the matter shall be reported directly to the designated Board representative or Chair of the Board.

7.3 Child Safeguarding Focal Point

BIRD shall designate a Child Safeguarding Focal Point responsible for coordinating the operational implementation of this Policy.
The Focal Point shall:
a. Receive and record safeguarding concerns.

b. Provide guidance on reporting procedures.
c. Ensure that urgent risks are escalated without delay.
d. Coordinate appropriate referrals and protective measures.
e. Maintain secure and confidential safeguarding records.
f. Coordinate awareness-raising and training activities.
g. Support the review of safeguarding procedures and the preparation of anonymised institutional reports, where appropriate.
The Focal Point shall not undertake criminal investigations or other investigations reserved by law for competent authorities.

7.4 All personnel and representatives

Every person covered by this Policy shall:
a. Read, understand and comply with the Policy.
b. Maintain appropriate professional boundaries with children.
c. Take reasonable steps to prevent foreseeable harm.
d. Report safeguarding concerns promptly.
e. Cooperate with authorised safeguarding procedures and competent authorities.
f. Protect confidential information and refrain from unauthorised disclosure.
g. Refrain from retaliating against anyone who raises a concern in good faith.

8. PARTNERS, CONTRACTORS AND THIRD PARTIES

BIRD expects all partners, contractors, subcontractors, suppliers, consultants and other relevant third parties to comply with the safeguarding standards applicable to their engagement with BIRD.
Where appropriate and proportionate to the risks, BIRD shall require such parties to:
a. Adopt and implement adequate child safeguarding measures.
b. Inform their personnel and representatives of their obligations.
c. Take reasonable measures to prevent abuse, exploitation and other safeguarding violations.
d. Report promptly any safeguarding concern arising in connection with activities carried out for or with BIRD.
e. Cooperate with appropriate safeguarding procedures and lawful requests from competent authorities.
f. Maintain appropriate confidentiality and data protection safeguards.
g. Take corrective measures where safeguarding deficiencies are identified.
Failure to comply with applicable safeguarding obligations may result in suspension or termination of an agreement, removal from an activity or other appropriate contractual measures, subject to the terms of the relevant agreement and applicable law.
Nothing in this Policy prevents or replaces reporting to competent public authorities where such reporting is required or appropriate.

9. INVESTIGATIONS, DISCIPLINARY MEASURES AND ACCOUNTABILITY

BIRD shall take all safeguarding concerns seriously and respond in a timely, impartial and proportionate manner.
Where an allegation concerns a person working for or on behalf of BIRD, appropriate interim protective measures may be adopted while the matter is assessed, without prejudging the outcome.
Where an internal process is appropriate, it shall be conducted fairly, confidentially and in accordance with applicable employment law, contractual obligations and procedural requirements.
Depending on the findings and the circumstances, consequences may include additional training, formal warnings, removal from child-related activities, suspension, termination of employment or contractual relationships, or referral to competent authorities.
BIRD shall not tolerate interference with safeguarding procedures, concealment of concerns, retaliation against reporting persons or deliberate breaches of this Policy.

10. LEGAL AND INSTITUTIONAL FRAMEWORK

This Policy shall be interpreted and implemented in accordance with applicable Albanian legislation and relevant international standards, including, as applicable:
a. The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC).
b. The Optional Protocols to the UNCRC relevant to the protection of children from sale, child prostitution, child pornography and the involvement of children in armed conflict, as applicable.
c. Applicable Albanian legislation on the rights and protection of children, including Law No. 18/2017, *On the Rights and Protection of the Child*, as amended.
d. Applicable Albanian legislation on the protection of personal data, criminal offences, labour, health and safety, and other relevant matters.
e. Relevant international labour standards concerning child labour and forced labour.
f. Applicable international standards and obligations concerning protection from sexual exploitation and abuse.
Where this Policy establishes a higher standard of protection than the minimum required by applicable law, BIRD shall apply the higher standard to the extent legally permissible. Where mandatory law imposes stricter requirements, those requirements shall prevail.
References to legislation and international instruments shall be understood to include applicable amendments, implementing legislation and binding obligations in force.

11. COMMUNICATION, ACCESSIBILITY AND IMPLEMENTATION

BIRD shall make this Policy available to its personnel and relevant third parties.
The Policy shall be communicated in a form and language appropriate to the intended audience. Additional guidance, reporting instructions and training materials may be developed to support its implementation.

Where activities directly involve children or families, BIRD shall provide appropriate information about safeguarding arrangements and reporting channels in an accessible and age-appropriate manner.

Managers and project coordinators shall ensure that relevant safeguarding responsibilities are incorporated into project planning, implementation, monitoring and evaluation.

12. MONITORING AND REVIEW

The Executive Director, with support from the Child Safeguarding Focal Point, shall monitor the implementation of this Policy and identify any necessary improvements.

The Policy shall be reviewed at least every two years, or earlier where required by:

- Changes in applicable legislation or relevant standards;
- Significant safeguarding incidents or lessons learned;
- Changes in BIRD's organisational structure, activities or risk exposure;
- Recommendations arising from monitoring, audits or institutional reviews.

Any material amendment shall be submitted to the Board for approval.

13. FINAL PROVISIONS

This Policy shall enter into force on the date specified in the Board's approval decision.

Upon entry into force, all persons covered by its scope shall comply with its provisions to the extent applicable to their roles and responsibilities.

The Executive Director shall be responsible for coordinating implementation, maintaining the current approved version and ensuring that the designated reporting arrangements remain operational.

Any supplementary procedures, codes of conduct, reporting forms or safeguarding guidance adopted by BIRD shall be consistent with this Policy and applicable law.

Adopted by: Board of the Barleti Institute of Research and Development (BIRD)

Board Decision No.: 12

Date of adoption: January 22, 2025

Effective date: January 22, 2025

