CHILD PROTECTION AND SAFEGUARDING POLICY

Organisational policy



Policy at a glance

CRPM has zero tolerance for child abuse, exploitation, neglect or any form of harm connected to its people, activities, partners or operations. Every person covered by this policy has a responsibility to act safely, report concerns promptly and place the child's safety and best interests at the centre of decisions.

WHO	All CRPM staff, management, board members, volunteers, interns, consultants, experts, trainers, contractors, visitors and representatives; and partner personnel when acting for or with CRPM.
WHERE	All CRPM offices, projects, research, field visits, events, training, communications, online activities, travel and other work-related settings.
WHAT TO DO	Prevent risks; follow the Code of Conduct; report any concern, suspicion, disclosure or breach without delay; do not investigate independently.
WHO TO CONTACT	CRPM Focal Point: Marija Risteska, risteska@crpm.org.mk, +389 70 533 992, [Executive Director].

1. Purpose and policy statement

The Center for Research and Policy Making (CRPM) is committed to respecting children's rights and to preventing harm to any child who may come into contact with its staff, representatives, partners, activities or operations. This policy establishes the minimum standards of conduct and the procedures CRPM will use to prevent, identify, report and respond to child safeguarding concerns.

CRPM's work primarily focuses on research, public policy, civil society capacity-building, advocacy, training and regional cooperation. Activities may not routinely involve direct work with children, but children may be present at public events, appear in research or communication materials, be affected by policy work, or be encountered during fieldwork and partner activities. CRPM therefore adopts a preventive, risk-based approach across the organisation.

CRPM applies a zero-tolerance approach to abuse, exploitation, neglect, grooming, harassment and other conduct that harms or places a child at risk. Concerns will be taken seriously and handled promptly, sensitively and confidentially, with the child's safety and best interests as the primary consideration. Retaliation against anyone raising a concern in good faith is prohibited.

2. Scope and application

This policy applies to:

- CRPM governing and management bodies, employees, interns, volunteers and temporary staff;
- consultants, researchers, trainers, facilitators, contractors, service providers and other individuals engaged by CRPM;
- visitors, media, experts and other representatives participating in CRPM activities, where relevant;
- partner organisations and their personnel when implementing activities on behalf of CRPM or under a CRPM-led agreement, subject to applicable agreements and partner procedures.

It applies during working hours and outside them whenever conduct is connected to CRPM, its activities or its relationships. It covers in-person and online contact, including messaging platforms, email, social media, photography, video, research data collection, events, travel and accommodation arrangements.

Where a donor, partner or applicable law requires a higher safeguarding standard, CRPM will apply the higher standard to the extent compatible with applicable law. This policy does not replace statutory reporting duties or national child-protection procedures.

3. Principles

- Best interests of the child: the child's safety, dignity, wellbeing and rights are paramount in all decisions.
- Equal protection: every child has an equal right to protection, without discrimination based on sex, gender, disability, ethnicity, nationality, language, religion, social origin, sexual orientation, family status or any other status.
- Do no harm: CRPM will identify and reduce risks arising from its activities, relationships, research and communications.
- Shared responsibility: everyone covered by this policy must know and follow it and report concerns.
- Confidentiality and need-to-know access: information is shared only with those who need it to protect the child, respond appropriately or meet legal obligations.
- Accountability and fair process: concerns are addressed consistently, impartially and without retaliation, while respecting due process and the rights of all parties.
- Child-sensitive practice: children should be listened to respectfully and in an age-appropriate manner, without pressure, blame or repeated questioning.

4. Definitions

Child: Any person under the age of 18, regardless of the age of majority under local law.

Child safeguarding: The organisational measures, practices and behaviours used to prevent harm to children arising from CRPM's people, programmes, activities, operations or partners.

Child protection concern: Any suspicion, disclosure, allegation, observation or incident indicating that a child may have been abused, exploited, neglected or otherwise placed at risk.

Abuse and exploitation: Physical, sexual or emotional/psychological abuse; neglect; trafficking; grooming; exploitation; harmful or coercive treatment; or other conduct that causes or may cause harm. Harm can occur in person or online and can be perpetrated by adults or other children.

Safeguarding Focal Point: The person designated by CRPM to receive safeguarding concerns, coordinate an appropriate response, maintain secure records and advise management. This role does not replace competent authorities or specialist services.

Reporter: Any person who raises a concern, whether about their own observation, a disclosure from a child or information received from another person.

5. Code of Conduct

5.1 Required behaviour

Everyone covered by this policy must:

- treat every child with dignity, respect and fairness and act in the child's best interests;
- maintain professional boundaries and behave in a way that is open, transparent and accountable;
- follow CRPM's safeguarding procedures and any applicable event, fieldwork, research, travel or partner-specific safety measures;
- report concerns, suspicions, disclosures and policy breaches to the Safeguarding Focal Point without delay;
- respect a child's privacy and obtain appropriate informed consent and child assent before collecting or using identifiable images, recordings, quotes or personal information, where relevant;
- use safe, age-appropriate and accessible communication and avoid making promises of secrecy;
- cooperate with authorised safeguarding actions and preserve relevant information without circulating it unnecessarily.

5.2 Prohibited behaviour

Everyone covered by this policy must never:

- engage in, facilitate or ignore physical, sexual, emotional or other abuse, exploitation, neglect, grooming, bullying or harassment of a child;
- hit, threaten, humiliate, intimidate, shame or discriminate against a child, or use language or behaviour that is degrading or sexually suggestive;
- develop a sexual, exploitative, coercive or otherwise inappropriate relationship with a child, regardless of apparent consent or local custom;
- seek, request, create, possess, share or distribute sexualised images or content involving a child, or use digital channels to groom, exploit or contact a child inappropriately;
- spend unnecessary time alone with a child in a private or hidden setting, or arrange private meetings or transport without a legitimate work-related reason and appropriate safeguards;
- invite a child to a private home or accommodation, provide gifts, money or preferential treatment in ways that could create dependency, secrecy or unequal power, or ask a child to keep a relationship or interaction secret;
- photograph, film, interview or publish identifiable information about a child without the required permissions, informed consent and risk assessment;
- use children in labour or activities that are unsafe, exploitative, inappropriate for their age or interfere with their rights;
- ignore, conceal, discourage or delay reporting a safeguarding concern, or retaliate against a person who reports in good faith.

5.3 Professional boundaries and online conduct

Communication with children, where necessary for an authorised CRPM activity, must be transparent, proportionate and work-related. Use official channels and include a parent/guardian or another authorised adult where appropriate. Do not use disappearing messages, personal social media accounts or private messaging to bypass agreed safeguards. Any exception required for a child's immediate safety must be documented and reported to the Safeguarding Focal Point as soon as possible.

6. Prevention and risk management

CRPM will integrate child safeguarding into programme design and delivery, procurement, recruitment, partner management, research ethics, communications, events and monitoring. The level of safeguarding measures will be proportionate to the likelihood and potential impact of contact with children.

6.1 Activity risk assessment

- Before an activity, identify whether children may be present, participate, be interviewed, be photographed, provide data or be affected by the activity.
- Assess risks linked to location, supervision, transport, accommodation, online contact, personal data, power imbalances and partner capacity.
- Record practical mitigation measures, the person responsible and any need for parental/guardian consent, child assent, specialist support or referral arrangements.
- Do not proceed with an activity if serious risks cannot be reduced to an acceptable level.

6.2 Safer recruitment and engagement

Where a role involves direct or regular contact with children, CRPM will use proportionate safer-recruitment measures in line with applicable law and available systems. These may include role-specific safeguarding questions, identity and reference checks, legally available criminal-record checks, clear terms of engagement and a signed acknowledgement of this policy. Checks will be handled lawfully and proportionately, respecting data-protection requirements.

6.3 Events, research and fieldwork

- Event organisers should identify whether children may attend and establish appropriate supervision, safe spaces, access arrangements and emergency contacts where needed.

- Researchers must explain the purpose of participation in age-appropriate language, seek appropriate consent and assent, minimise collection of personal data and avoid questions or methods likely to cause distress unless appropriately approved and supported.
- Where a child discloses harm during an interview, staff must listen calmly, avoid leading questions, explain that the information may need to be shared to keep them safe, and follow the reporting procedure.
- CRPM staff must not promise services, outcomes or confidentiality that cannot be guaranteed.

6.4 Photography, stories and personal data

Images, recordings, quotations and case stories must preserve a child's dignity and must not expose them to stigma, identification, retaliation or other harm. Obtain informed permission from a parent or legal guardian and age-appropriate assent from the child where required; explain how and where material will be used. Avoid publishing full names, precise locations, school details or other identifying information unless there is a clear lawful basis, a documented safeguarding assessment and appropriate permissions. Consent must be freely given and can be withdrawn where applicable.

7. Roles and responsibilities

CRPM Executive Director / management — Approve and promote the policy; designate a Safeguarding Focal Point and an alternative contact; ensure reports are handled independently and appropriately; provide resources for training and risk mitigation; take proportionate action where a breach is established.

Safeguarding Focal Point — Receive and record concerns securely; assess immediate safety and urgency; advise on referrals and next steps; preserve confidentiality; coordinate with management and competent services; monitor follow-up and maintain a restricted incident log. The Focal Point must disclose any conflict of interest and refer the matter to the alternative contact.

Managers and activity leads — Ensure risk assessments and safeguards are completed; brief teams and partners; make reporting routes clear; act promptly on concerns and avoid assigning an implicated person to manage the case.

All personnel and representatives — Read, understand and comply with this policy; complete required briefing/training; maintain professional boundaries; report concerns without delay; cooperate with appropriate follow-up.

Partner organisations and contractors — Apply equivalent safeguarding standards in CRPM-supported work, communicate reporting routes, notify CRPM of relevant concerns and cooperate with lawful safeguarding measures, subject to confidentiality and applicable legal duties.

8. Reporting concerns

Any person covered by this policy must report a concern as soon as possible and without delay. A report may relate to a direct observation, a child's disclosure, information received from another person, online conduct, a breach of the Code of Conduct or a concern about unsafe practice. Proof is not required before reporting; reasonable concern is enough.

8.1 Reporting route

1. If a child appears to be in immediate danger or needs urgent medical assistance, contact the relevant emergency service or competent child-protection authority first, where safe and appropriate. Then notify CRPM's Safeguarding Focal Point as soon as possible.
2. Report the concern to the Safeguarding Focal Point using the contact details on the cover page. If the Focal Point is implicated, unavailable or there is a conflict of interest, report to the alternative contact / CRPM Executive Director. If management is implicated, use the designated independent governing-body contact or relevant competent authority.
3. Record only factual information: what was observed or disclosed, dates, times, location, people involved and immediate safety concerns. Distinguish facts from assumptions and use the child's own words where possible.
4. Do not investigate, confront the alleged perpetrator, interview witnesses repeatedly, circulate allegations or attempt to determine whether the report is true.
5. If a concern involves a partner or another organisation, notify the CRPM Safeguarding Focal Point while respecting any immediate legal reporting duties and the child's safety.

8.2 Receiving a disclosure from a child

- Stay calm, listen carefully and take the child seriously.
- Thank the child for telling you; reassure them that it is not their fault.
- Do not ask leading questions or press for detail. Ask only what is necessary to understand immediate safety needs.
- Do not promise secrecy. Explain simply that you may need to tell people whose role is to help keep them safe.
- Do not contact parents or guardians automatically if doing so could increase risk; seek advice from the Safeguarding Focal Point and competent child-protection professionals.
- Report promptly and make a factual note as soon as possible.

9. Response and case management

CRPM will respond promptly, proportionately and in a child-centred manner. Depending on the concern, the response may include:

- assessing and addressing immediate safety, medical or psychosocial support needs;
- referral to appropriate child-protection services, emergency services or competent authorities in line with applicable law and the child's best interests;
- taking interim measures to reduce risk, which may include limiting contact, changing duties or temporarily suspending an individual from an activity without prejudging the outcome;
- preserving relevant records and digital evidence securely and restricting access to those who need to know;
- conducting or commissioning a fair, impartial and appropriately skilled internal process where suitable, without interfering with official investigations;
- informing donors, partners, insurers or other bodies only where required or appropriate, and in a manner consistent with legal obligations and confidentiality;
- taking proportionate disciplinary or contractual action if a breach is established, up to and including termination of engagement, and making referrals to authorities where required or appropriate.

CRPM will not attempt to mediate abuse allegations or require a child to confront an alleged perpetrator. The rights and safety of the child will remain central while respecting fair process for all parties. Reports made in good faith will not result in retaliation, even if they are not substantiated.

10. Confidentiality, records and data protection

Safeguarding information is sensitive. CRPM will collect and retain only information necessary to protect the child, respond to the concern and meet legal or contractual obligations. Records will be factual, dated, stored securely with restricted access and shared only on a need-to-know basis. Information will not be promised to be absolutely confidential where disclosure is necessary to protect a child or required by law. Personal data will be processed in accordance with applicable data-protection law and CRPM's relevant procedures.

11. Training, communication and compliance

- All personnel covered by this policy must receive or review the policy during onboarding and acknowledge that they have read and understood it.
- Staff and representatives whose roles involve direct contact with children, child-related research or safeguarding responsibilities should receive role-appropriate training before undertaking the relevant activity.
- Activity leads must brief external facilitators, contractors and partners on the relevant requirements before an activity begins.
- The policy and reporting route must be accessible to staff and partners and, where relevant, communicated to participants and caregivers in an appropriate format and language.
- Failure to comply may result in disciplinary action, termination of contract or partnership, and referral to competent authorities where appropriate.

12. Monitoring, review and accountability

CRPM management will monitor implementation through onboarding records, policy acknowledgements, activity risk assessments, partner arrangements, training records and a secure record of safeguarding concerns and follow-up. The policy will be reviewed at least every three years, and sooner following a serious incident, relevant legal or organisational change, or lessons learned from implementation. Reviews will consider whether reporting channels are accessible and whether mitigation measures remain effective.