INTRODUCTION

This document lays out the minimal general standards of safeguarding children and vulnerable adults that Queer Varna Foundation implements in its work, together with the respective procedures and mechanisms. The policy is approved and signed by the Council of the Foundation and is consistent with the rights of the child set out in the UN Convention, European, and Bulgarian legislation. It applies to all board members, employees, and volunteers of the Foundation.

The main objective of the child/vulnerable adults safeguarding policy is to protect these beneficiaries from any sort of maltreatment or abuse. Children, young people, and vulnerable adults need support and security, protection from the effects of poverty, abuse, isolation, and violence. Individual children/youth/vulnerable adults might be at risk of specific forms of maltreatment on behalf of adults and other children, in case of natural disasters and unforeseen incidents.

This policy has been adopted on April 14, 2025, by the council and disseminated among the employees of the Foundation. It will be annually updated if changes in the national legislation or international standards for child protection require such amendments.

Definitions in the Child Safeguarding Policy of Queer Varna Foundation

Main forms of maltreatment, in the evaluation of which key terms are the intentionality of action, the seriousness of the injury, lack of action:

- physical abuse – any intentional harm inflicted on the child by a parent or caregiver;
- sexual abuse – using a child or youth for sexual gratification;
- neglect – chronic inability of a parent or caregiver to accommodate the basic needs of the child;
- psychological abuse – includes neglect, inability of a parent or caregiver to provide the necessary support, attention, and affection to the child; psychological abuse such as chronic patterns of behavior such as humiliation, insults, and ridicule of the child."

General definitions:

Physical injury: Can include hitting, shaking, throwing, poisoning, burning, drowning, strangling, or any other physical injury to a child, including tampering with symptoms or deliberately worsening the health of the child.

Neglect: persistent failure to meet basic physical/psychological needs of the child, which may result in serious damage to children's health or development, such as not providing it with enough food, sufficient shelter and clothing, as well as neglect and irresponsibility to the core emotional needs of the child.

Emotional neglect: neglect of the emotions: negative attitude to the emotions of the child or emotional torture of the child, influencing its development. Also includes showing children they are worthless, unloved, and good-for-nothing, that they exist only because of the need of another person; or when they are placed under the wrong expectations. In addition, it includes children being often frightened on purpose, exploited, or debauched.

Sexual abuse: it involves forcing or luring a child into sexual activity, regardless of whether the child is aware or not aware of what is happening. These actions can include physical contact, including penetration or other inappropriate actions. They can also include the involvement of children in viewing or producing pornography, or encouraging them to display inappropriate behavior.

Under additional provision to the regulations for the implementation of the Child Protection Act in Bulgarian legislation /paragraph 1/:

"*Violence*" over a child is any act of physical, mental, and sexual abuse, neglect, commercial, or other exploitation, resulting in actual or potential harm to the health, life, development, or dignity of the child, which may take place in the family, school, and social environment.

"*Physical violence*" is causing bodily harm, including the infliction of pain or suffering without ensuing health disorder.

"*Psychological violence*" are all actions that may have adverse effects on mental health and child development, such as underestimation, mocking attitude, threats, discrimination, rejection, or other forms of negative attitudes, as well as the inability of the parent, guardian, or the person caring for the child, to provide appropriate and supportive environment.

"*Sexual violence*" is the use of a child for sexual gratification.

"*Neglect*" is the failure of the parent, guardian, or caretaker for the child to ensure the child's development in the following areas: health, education, emotional development, nutrition, provision of home and safety, whenever they are able to provide for it.

STANDARDS FOR CHILD SAFEGUARDING

The main principles that correspond with the standards are directly related to children's rights and are in accordance with the Bulgarian and international legislation. They reflect the minimal requirements and mechanisms that should be covered in the Queer Varna Foundation to ensure the effective protection of children from abuse.

Standard 1
Developed written policy document to ensure child safeguarding:
1.1. Written succinctly and reflecting the understanding of the Foundation of abuse and violence against children;
1.2. Approved by the Council of the Foundation;
1.3. It affects all activities of the organization.

Standard 2
Implementation of the child safeguarding policy:
2.1. There are clear rules describing the steps that should be taken whenever there are concerns about the safeguarding of a child.
2.2. All employees are familiar with the rules for child safeguarding, and the rules are available to all - children, parents, consultants, and volunteers.
2.3. There is a particular person in the foundation who is directly responsible for implementing the rules for child safeguarding.
2.4. There is a procedure for processing incidents, complaint-handling, and signaling of the relevant authorities.
2.5. There are guidelines for respecting the confidentiality of the shared information.

Standard 3
Preventing violence against children:
3.1. A special methodology and evaluation of the suitability to work with children is applied when selecting staff, volunteers, and consultants.

3.2. Each new employee provides relevant documents required by law and/or duly requested by the employer, including references.
3.3. An employee who does not implement the standards, rules, and procedures for child protection, adopted by the organization and does not comply with the Queer Varna Rules and Code of Ethics is subject to disciplinary action under labor legislation.
3.4. Through its projects and programs, Queer Varna encourages the adoption of monitoring and protection mechanisms as well as requirements for compliance with the Child Safeguarding Policy. The child protection is an important component in risk assessment in all Queer Varna programs and projects. Risk assessment is carried out of all programs, projects and activities. Risk mitigation strategies will be elaborated and these will be incorporated in the design, implementation and evaluation of the programs, projects and activities where children are involved or are affected.
3.5. Any training provided by the Foundation relevant to working with children and young people includes the subject of child safeguarding from abuse and violence.

Standard 4
Training to ensure the child safeguarding:
4.1. All employees, volunteers, consultants and other partners of Queer Varna undergo instruction and/or training for child safeguarding during induction, which allows them to understand the need for child protection and are acquainted with the warning system.
4.2. Those responsible for recruiting new staff receive guidance on methods for safe recruitment.
4.3. The person responsible for implementing the Child Safeguarding Policy in the organization is trained annually by a specialist/consultant.
4.4. Children receive advice and support on how to protect themselves via specially prepared training materials composed in an accessible and understandable language.

Standard 5
Ensuring equal rights of child protection regardless of their gender, age, ethnicity and religion:
5.1. The training and procedures on child safeguarding help employees identify the risks some children are exposed to due to their ethnicity and/or race, age, gender, religion, culture, disability.
5.2. In the Foundation's Code of Ethics it is clearly stated that everyone is responsible for mutual respect, tolerance, and nondiscrimination.

Standard 6
Implementation and Monitoring:
6.1. There are written documents that enlist the procedures and mechanisms for implementing the Child Safeguarding Policy.
6.2. All signals and cases of violence against children are documented and undergo monitoring and control.
6.3. There are mechanisms for feedback on complying with the child safeguarding policy via the reporting documents for each program.

6.4. Policies and procedures for child protection are reviewed every three years and, if necessary, updated.

Standard 7
Working with partners and beneficiaries in the implementation of standards
7.1. There is an established communication with partners and beneficiaries on the issues of child safeguarding, through which to exchange information and experience, and develop quality coherent approaches towards child safegurding.
7.2. Partners and beneficiaries are familiar with the existing policy for child safeguarding and the accompanying procedures.
7.3. Policies and mechanisms for child safeguarding are an element of the agreements between partners and beneficiaries.

PROCEDURES AND MECHANISMS FOR IMPLEMENTATION

1. The Co-Director and legal representative of the foundation will oversee the implementation of this policy.
2. In case of concern and/or identified child abuse, communication goes through the person directly responsible for the child safeguarding policy in the foundation, appointed by the Co-Director /Annex 1/.
3. Any information related to abuse must be documented according to a form /Annex 2/ so that all cases are registered. This information is confidential and kept secret. Confidentiality is broken only if it is in the best interest of the child. When there are confirmed cases of child abuse, the child protection services/police department should be alerted.
4. The clarification of policies and procedures is part of the induction process for new employees and council members, volunteers or associates. All employees are obliged to sign a Declaration /Annex 3/ stating that they have familiarised themselves with it and accept the policy. Employees who breach the policies are responsible under the provisions of the labor regulations.
5. Queer Varna motivates and encourages all beneficiaries and partners in the Foundation’s programs and projects to implement child safeguarding policies and comply with the requirements and standards of the European and Bulgarian legislation for child rights protection /Annex 4/.
6. The organization of activities involving children, including transportation of children, are in accordance with the requirements of the Bulgarian legislation.
7. The policy is monitored and evaluated to ensure security and its proper implementation. This involves supporting training, discussion of cases and receiving feedback from partners and beneficiaries, as well as formal report once a year from the person responsible for its implementation, determined by the Co-Director of Queer Varna.
8. Once a year a training is organized for all employees on basic concepts of child safeguarding, as well as on the procedures for their implementation in the organization.

PROCEDURE FOR ACCEPTANCE OF SIGNALS FOR CHILDREN AT RISK

Upon receipt of a signal / in person, by letter, email or phone call/:
1/ If it concerns a child at risk, the reporting person should be consulted on how to prepare and report the signal to the Department for Child Protection /CPD/ according to residence of the child /or the police in case the child is homeless/.
- it is advised to file the signal with a copy to Queer Varna in order to ensure a greater likelihood to receive a response and as well as Queer Varna to be able to assist in the process.

2/ if a citizen requires consultation/communication via the Community Support Centre, it is directed to a consultant of the CSC;
- CSC has the contact details of all the CPDs and police stations in the country and is able to inform and guide citizens towards them.

CODE OF CONDUCT TOWARDS CHILDREN

The code of conduct etiquette is a cumulative of regulations addressing the appropriate and correct behavior as regards to ensuring child protection. They further address the protection of adults of false allegations in inappropriate behavior or abuse/violence. This etiquette applies to employees, volunteers, members of the Council, grantees, and sponsors, as well as to all visitors/guests under the organisation's projects.

- The employees of Queer Varna should not stay the night alone with one or more children or minors, neither in employee accommodation nor in project-related premises.
- The employees of Queer Varna should not hire underaged as housekeepers, nor shelter any minors in their homes. Minor is defined as every child under the age of 18.
- The employees of Queer Varna should not caress, hold, kiss, hug or touch any minors in a way that is inappropriate or unacceptable based on the cultural setting. In order to avoid any misunderstanding, it is advised to ask for permission before you hold their hand.
- Whenever possible and feasible, the rule of the “two adults presence” should be abided, where two or more adults observe all activities, in which minors and children are involved. Furthermore, they are present constantly at site. If that is not possible, the Queer Varna staff has the right to look for alternative decisions, such as community members during child visits. The employees of Queer Varna have to take into account that they might be confronted with cases where children might attempt to receive “special attention” due to specific circumstances and abuse they have experienced. The adult is always the one responsible, even when the child exhibits seductive behavior. The adults have to avoid situations where they can be placed in an embarrassing or vulnerable position.
- Inappropriate behavior towards children entails disciplinary measures.
- The employees of Queer Varna have to take into consideration the way they are perceived through their language, activities, and relations with children.

USAGE OF IMAGES AND VIDEOMATERIALS

When using visual materials, the guiding principle of Queer Varna is to respect the dignity in depicting children, families and communities. The policy about visual images of the foundation is part of the Child Safeguarding Policy.

1. Images of children are used only when authorized (signed declaration) by the parent/legal guardian /**Annex 5**/.
2. Permission is requested for taking pictures or video material for each individual case, and it is clearly described in the declaration of consent for what purposes the images will be used. Consent to take and use pictures is requested from the parents and those with parental responsibility, or directly from children/young people when they are of appropriate age. (Applies to children aged 14 according to Article 11, paragraph 3 of the CPA).
3. Images from photo banks are used with reference to the source of the photo or video material.
4. Style and propriety standards, matching the Queer Varna values and of the people who support the organization are upheld.
5. Queer Varna Foundation cannot be held responsible if the photos on the website, social network profiles or photos in press releases are used by media and third parties in a way that does not correspond to the facts.
6. When taking pictures of or filming children that the Foundation works with (and has permission from their parents/guardians) the media/photographers sign a declaration agreeing to use the video/ image truthfully and only for the specific case /Annex 6/.
7. When taking pictures of or filming children from orphanages or other types of social services, the regulations of the Child Protection Act are observed. /with a mandatory written statement by the protection authority implementing the measure. "(Art. 11, paragraph 2).
The Child Safeguarding Policy is adopted by the Council of Queer Varna Foundation.
The Co-Director, responsible for overseeing its implementation, is Andreya Dimitrova.

Annex 1

Procedure for raising a concern and/or reporting identified violence against a child

Co-Director of Queer Varna

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The person directly responsible for the implementation of the Child Safeguarding Policy at Queer Varna

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All Queer Varna employees including volunteers

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Signals or cases of children in danger

Annex 2

Form for raising a concern and/or reporting an identified violence against a child

Name and e-mail of the person reporting the signal: .....
Function/position at Queer Varna: .....
Connection to the child /if there's such/:.....
Name of the child:.....
Age and date of birth:.....
Who does the child live with?:.....
Address/place of residence (and telephone number if available):
.....
Is this report based on a concern by the reporting person or on someone else's behalf? Details:
.....
Short explanation about the reasons for concern: including dates and time of the incidents: .....
Observations made: physical signs, behavioral signs, indirect signs?.....
……
Has anyone spoken to the child? If yes, what did he/she say?:.....
.....
Is there an alleged perpetrator of the abuse? If so - details:.....
……
Has a consultation with external agencies/specialists and/or other people taken place? Details (name of the person, name of the organization, date и place):.....
.....

Signature:
Date:

Annex 3

Declaration

certifying familiarization with the Child Safeguarding Policy of Queer Varna Foundation

From.....,

employee in Queer Varna Foundation, position .....

I hereby declare,

That I am familiar with the Child Safeguarding Policy of Queer Varna and I accept to follow the requirements, guidelines and procedures of the Policy.

Signed by:

/name, signature/

Date:

Annex 4

Declaration

by a partner/beneficiary under project/program/event of Queer Varna Foundation /Queer Varna/ involving children

I, the undersigned,.....

Representative of (organization).....,

Hereby declare that:

In our joint work with Queer Varna, as well as in the usual activities of the organization that I represent, the requirements and norms, protecting the rights of the child, stipulated in the UN Convention, European and Bulgarian legislation are abided accordingly.

Signed by:

/name, signature/

Date:

Annex 5

Declaration
of consent for using video material and/or a photo image of a child

I, the undersigned,.....

representative of (participant in a project).....,

Hereby declare that:
1. I participate in the film/photo depicting the project/s of my own free will "....." implemented by "....." under „....." program of Queer Varna Foundation that may be shown/broadcasted and used by Queer Varna and ..... for commercial, internal or other purposes by Queer Varna and .....

2. I hereby grant my consent for the pictures, video and audio materials, taken during the making of the film/photos to be used for the purposes of Queer Varna and ..... for commercial, internal and other purposes.

Signed by :

/name, signature/

Date:

Annex 6

Declaration
by a media representative/photographer in covering children and families during events organized by Queer Varna

I, the undersigned,.....

Representative of (media, photographer).....,

Hereby declare that:

I will use the materials /video, photographs/ only and solely for the purposes of the organized event, in accordance with the Bulgarian and international legislation on child protection.

Signed by:

/name, signature/

Date: