

Introduction

The Council of the University of Nicosia (UNIC) hereby establishes this Child Protection Policy as a testament to its unwavering commitment to the safety, child safeguarding and well-being of children interacting with any aspect of the University. This policy is applicable to all branches of the University and extends to all individuals employed by or associated with the University, including staff, faculty, contractors, and affiliates.

1. Legal and Ethical Framework

The Child Protection Policy of the University of Nicosia is anchored in a comprehensive legal and ethical framework that draws from both international and national laws and conventions, including:

- The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (1989), which sets out the civil, political, economic, social, and cultural rights of children.
- The United Nations Universal Declaration of Human Rights (1948), which articulates fundamental human rights to be universally protected.
- The European Convention on Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms (1950), which establishes the right to a fair trial, privacy, and freedom of expression among other rights.
- The Treaty of Lisbon, particularly Article 3(3) TEU, emphasizing the EU's obligation to protect human rights.
- The Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union (2009), which reinforces comprehensive human rights within the EU.
- Relevant Directives of the European Union that address issues such as data protection and the rights of the child.
- The Cyprus Children Law Cap. 352, which provides specific protections for children in Cyprus.
- The Council of Europe Convention on Protection of Children against Sexual Exploitation and Sexual Abuse (Lanzarote Convention).
- The Cyprus Law against Child Sexual Exploitation and Sexual Abuse (Law No. 91(I)/2014), which outlines legal actions against child exploitation.

2. Definition and Recognition of Childhood

This policy defines a child as any individual under the age of 18, aligning with international standards. It recognizes that children require special care and assistance, and commits the University of Nicosia to fostering an environment that upholds the values of peace, dignity, tolerance, freedom, equality, and solidarity. These values are reflective of the spirit of the Charter of the United Nations and are essential for the development of healthy, capable young citizens.

By integrating these values into its operational ethos, the University aims to make a significant contribution to the development of children. This commitment ensures that all interactions with children at the University are conducted in a manner that respects and enhances their dignity and rights.

In practice, this involves implementing policies and procedures that actively promote the best interests of the child in all university activities and decisions. It also includes providing training and resources to staff and faculty to enhance their understanding of child development and improve their competencies in interacting with children in ways that affirm these fundamental values. Through these concerted efforts, the University of Nicosia aims to serve as a model demonstrating how educational institutions can play a pivotal role in shaping the future of young individuals by respecting and promoting their inherent rights and dignity.

3. Scope of Child Care and Safeguarding

Under this policy, child care and safeguarding encompass a broad spectrum of considerations:

- Protecting children from any violations of their human rights as recognized by relevant international and national legal frameworks.
- Addressing and responding effectively to any allegations made by children regarding violations of their rights while in contact with the University.
- Upholding the "do no harm" principle, which ensures that all interactions involving children are conducted in a manner that prioritizes their safety and well-being.
- Establishing a proactive approach to safeguarding, ensuring that all University activities consider the safety and rights of children.

4. Areas of Risk

The University performs, undertakes or facilitates a number of activities which bring children into contact with it. The key areas of risk include, inter alia:

- Organized visits / open days / outreach activities taking place on University premises;
- Organized visits / open days / outreach activities taking place away from University premises;
- Children of University staff or students or children brought onto University premises;
- Children attending University premises for events, sporting, recreational or social purposes;
- Children being subjects of study and / or research;
- Children enrolled as students in the University.

5. Implementation and Oversight

The Human Resources Department is tasked with the comprehensive oversight and implementation of this policy. The responsibilities assigned to the Human Resources Department include several key areas:

- **Coordinating the Integration of Child Protection Standards:** The Human Resources Department is responsible for ensuring that child protection standards are consistently applied across all university departments and activities. This involves working closely with various department heads and program coordinators to integrate these standards into daily operations, curricula, and extracurricular activities. The Department also monitors compliance and provides guidance on the application of these standards to ensure they are understood and implemented effectively.
- **Organizing Mandatory Training for all University Personnel:** Recognizing that education is a powerful tool in child protection, the Human Resources Department organizes comprehensive training sessions for all university personnel. These training programs are designed to foster a deep understanding of the Child Protection Policy, clarify the roles and responsibilities of staff and faculty, and enhance awareness of the signs of abuse and the proper responses to such incidents. The training is mandatory for all personnel, regardless of their level or direct involvement with children, to ensure a universally informed and vigilant community.
- **Ensuring Policy Comprehension and Compliance:** The Human Resources Department ensures that all university personnel are not only aware of but fully understand the Child Protection Policy. This includes distributing the policy to all employees, conducting regular review sessions, and providing updates as necessary. Additionally, the Department maintains meticulous records of compliance with local legal requirements. This includes managing and verifying clearances from registries of convicted sexual offenders against children, as mandated by local laws. The department liaises with the Cyprus Police, Crime Combating Department- Criminal Record Office (C.R.O) – 2009, to obtain and update these records in accordance with the Cyprus Law against Child Sexual Exploitation and Sexual Abuse (Law No. 91(I)/2014), Article 22(6).
- **Maintaining Confidentiality:** The Human Resources Department maintains confidentiality in relation to any complaints and / or concerns put forward under the implementation of this Policy

and coordinates fully with the relevant authorities in accordance with the principles enshrined in the relevant legal framework.

Through these structured and proactive measures, the Human Resources Department ensures that the Child Protection Policy is not only a document but a dynamic and integral part of the university's ethos. This diligent oversight helps to create a safe and supportive environment for all children who come into contact with the University of Nicosia, safeguarding their rights and well-being.

The Human Resources Department could be contacted at HROperationsTeam@unic.ac.cy

6. Ethical Standards and Data Protection

The University of Nicosia is dedicated to maintaining the highest ethical standards in all interactions involving children. This commitment is pivotal not only in direct educational and recreational engagements but also in all administrative and operational aspects that might affect children. The University ensures that ethical considerations are at the forefront of its agenda, guiding the conduct of all university personnel to foster a culture of respect, integrity, and care.

This ethical commitment also encompasses the rigorous management of personal data related to children. The University strictly adheres to all applicable data protection laws, directives, and regulations, both at the national and European Union levels. This includes compliance with the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR), which sets the benchmark for data protection and privacy in Europe. The University implements robust data protection measures designed to secure personal data against unauthorized access, disclosure, alteration, and destruction.

Moreover, the University invests in regular training and awareness programs for its staff and faculty to ensure they are well-versed in the principles of data protection and understand their responsibilities in protecting children's data. These training sessions cover topics such as recognizing and reporting data breaches, understanding the rights of data subjects, and the proper handling and sharing of personal information.

The ultimate aim of these stringent data protection practices is to safeguard the privacy and integrity of children, thereby fostering an environment of trust and safety. By protecting children's personal information, the University reinforces its commitment to creating a secure and protective environment where children can safely engage in educational and developmental activities without concerns over the misuse of their personal data.

Through these measures, the University of Nicosia not only complies with legal requirements but also demonstrates its dedication to ethical conduct and the protection of the vulnerable, thereby strengthening the trust placed in it by students, parents, and the community.

7. Protection Against Abuse

This policy establishes clear and robust protections against various forms of abuse and exploitation to safeguard the welfare of children engaged in any capacity with the University of Nicosia. Recognizing the multifaceted nature of abuse, the University has delineated specific categories of abuse and outlined targeted strategies to address each effectively:

- **Physical Abuse:** The University is committed to creating a safe physical environment for children, free from harm and danger. This includes implementing strict guidelines and supervision to prevent physical abuse. Regular training sessions for staff and faculty help ensure that all personnel are aware of these guidelines and actively work to maintain a safe environment.
- **Sexual Abuse and Exploitation:** The University takes a strong stance against sexual abuse and exploitation. Measures are in place to prevent, detect, and respond to such abuses, including comprehensive background checks for all staff and regular educational programs on the boundaries of appropriate behaviour. Protocols are established for immediate and confidential reporting of abuse, with a clear procedure for responding to such reports that prioritizes the safety and well-being of the child.
- **Neglect and Negligent Treatment:** Ensuring that children receive proper care and supervision is a key component of the policy. The University ensures that all programs involving children are adequately staffed with trained professionals who understand the importance of attentive care. Guidelines are set to identify and address signs of neglect.
- **Emotional and Psychological Abuse:** The University fosters an environment that promotes mental health and emotional well-being. This involves training staff to recognize signs of emotional and psychological abuse, such as verbal abuse, isolation, or bullying, and to intervene appropriately. Support services, including counseling and mental health resources, are readily available to all children who may need them.
- **Commercial Exploitation:** Vigilant measures are in place to prevent the commercial exploitation of children, ensuring that they are not used for labor or other exploitative practices. This includes monitoring all external partnerships and activities to ensure they align with child protection standards and do not exploit children's participation.

In addition to these specific measures, the University is proactive in its approach to minimize risks to children. This involves the continuous assessment and improvement of policies and practices related to child safety. The University designs and implements projects and programs that incorporate these proactive measures, ensuring the safety and well-being of children in all University-related activities.

Through these comprehensive efforts, the University of Nicosia not only adheres to legal requirements concerning child protection but also goes beyond compliance to ensure that children in its care are nurtured in an environment that is secure, supportive, and conducive to their development. This holistic approach to child protection is a core part of the University's mission to contribute positively to the welfare and future of every child it interacts with.

Conclusion

Through the enactment of this Child Protection Policy, the University of Nicosia reaffirms its dedication to protecting the rights and well-being of children. This commitment is deeply embedded in the university's mission and reflects its core values. By implementing this policy, the university not only adheres to international and local legal standards but also sets a higher benchmark for child safety and protection within the academic community.

This policy serves as a foundation for creating a safe and nurturing environment that is conducive to the healthy development of all children who interact with the university's diverse programs and activities. Whether children are participants in educational initiatives, research projects, community outreach, or recreational activities, this policy ensures that their rights are consistently upheld and vigorously promoted.