

## **Protection and Safeguarding**

### **A Position Statement by the Paediatric Nursing Associations of Europe (PNAE).**

**May 2021**

## **Scope**

The Paediatric Nursing Associations of Europe (PNAE) undertook a survey across Europe to identify the role of paediatric nurses/nurses working with children and young people in the process of

- protection of children and young people
- safeguarding children and young people and the key principles underpinning the safeguarding of children and young people aiming to identify good practice.

## **Introduction**

In 2019, the PNAE conducted a survey to examine European safeguarding practices, and to support and promote the protection and safeguarding of children and young people across Europe. This document represents a consensus position of the organisations representing paediatric nurses across many European countries. A total of 13 countries (39%) returned completed surveys. The most important factor in ensuring successful safeguarding of children and young people was the provision of financial support from government. The survey results showed that there are very good safeguarding practices across Europe. For example, in the Republic of Ireland, Irish law requires that prior to taking up a position involving childcare or working with children, all persons must undergo a Garda/Police vetting process to ensure they are safe and suitable for the role.

1

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## **Protection and safeguarding**

Safeguarding is a term which is broader than 'child protection' and relates to the action taken to promote the welfare of children and protect them from harm. In the survey the two variables were described:

### **Protection**

Children in need of protection may be found in many locations: in the street, at a hospital or at border crossings. Professionals should be aware of the key risks.

Professionals dealing with children must avoid making assumptions and be alert to possible prejudices on the basis of perceived cultural, religious, national or ethnic background, gender or other characteristics of the children or the accompanying adults.

Many countries have a system which checks the suitability of applicants. For example, almost every country working with children must provide data and evidence that the staff do not have a criminal record.

The European Commission has defined 10 principles for integrated child protection systems to guide the reform of child protection systems in the EU Member States. The 10 principles are implemented in almost every country (9):

- Every Child is recognized, respected and protected as a rights holder, with non-negotiable rights to protection.
- No child is discriminated against.
- Child protection systems include prevention measures.
- Families are supported in their role as primary caregivers.
- Societies are aware and supportive of the child's right to freedom from all forms of violence.
- Child protection systems ensure adequate care with regard to:
  - professionals are committed and competent;
  - information is shared on certification and training to promote trust;
  - standards, indicators and tools, systems of monitoring and evaluations are in place, under the auspices of a national coordinating framework;
  - within organizations working directly for and with children, child protection policies and reporting mechanisms are in place.
- Child protection systems have transnational and cross-border mechanisms in place.
- The child has support and protection.
- Training on identification of risks for children in potentially vulnerable situations.
- There are safe, well-publicized, confidential and accessible reporting mechanisms in place.

## **Safeguarding**

'Safeguarding', however as described in a policy paper 'Safeguarding children and young people' published in the United Kingdom' is a term which is broader than 'child protection' and relates to the action taken to promote the welfare of children and protect them from harm'(1).

A UK policy document 'Working together to safeguard children' published in 2018 (4) advocates that a 'child centered approach' means keeping the child in focus when making decisions about their lives and working in partnership with them and their families.

## **European context**

During a high-level European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights (FRA) symposium on the 28<sup>th</sup> June 2017 in Brussels, Belgium, 'children from nine EU Member States expressed concern about the challenge of protecting human rights across the EU today. They joined with experts in making practical suggestions on how to tackle this issue, particularly when it comes to migration and poverty. They questioned whether Europe is doing enough to protect fundamental rights' (5).

Paediatric nurses/general nurses working with children and their families in a wide range of settings are responsible for ensuring the protection and safeguarding of children and young people within their care.

Almost every country has a program in place to promote the welfare and safeguarding of children and young people.

## **Consensus**

The PNAE, within the European context, upholds the 'UN Convention of the Rights of the Child to promote and advocate for the health, wellbeing/welfare and development of children' (2).

The PNAE has stated that it will seek to ensure that children, young people and families across Europe are guaranteed the quality of nursing care they have a right to receive”.

The PNAE advocates for every child and young person. They have the right to grow up healthy in a safe environment and to develop their full potential.

According to article 24, The rights of the child, EU Charter of Fundamental Rights, *“Children shall have the right to such protection and care as is necessary for their well-being, ..... the child’s best interests must be a primary consideration..... and every child shall have the right to maintain on a regular basis a personal relationship and direct contact with both his or her parents, unless that is contrary to his or her interests’* (3).

Although there are some differences across European countries, the PNAE believes in the following:

- Learning from existing good practices.
- Countries that have fully implemented legislation to protect and safeguard all children including the unborn child, must share this best practice so others can follow suit. The key to success lies in the collaborative efforts of all European countries in this regard.
- The media must play a supporting role in these efforts.
- All organizations working directly with children need to have a system in place to prevent any violation of the rights of children and young people by their own staff.

## **End note**

This document represents a consensus position of the organizations’ representing Paediatric nurses across many European countries (PNAE).

PNAE strongly supports the publication mapping child protection systems of the European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights (FRA).

<https://fra.europa.eu/en/publication/2015/mapping-child-protection-systems-eu/body-monitoring>.

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