

CHILD PROTECTION POLICY



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Part I: Introduction

1.1 Organisation Background

Vzw Zijn – Movement against violence was founded in Belgium in 2005, and is located in Brussels. *Vzw Zijn* is a non-profit organisation that aims to create a community-based movement against domestic and sexual violence in order to break the cycle of violence.

We seek to develop initiatives in Flanders and Brussels, aimed at a wide audience. These initiatives aim to achieve social change and include among other things sensitization, actions and campaigns, networking, and education.

1.2 Mission

Vzw Zijn's mission is to generate a societal movement countering domestic and sexual violence which aims to break the cycle of violence.

Violence that occurs within relationships of trust is a very complex issue in which the consequences can be very severe. Furthermore, there are many specific subthemes that deserve close attention. Therefore, *vzw Zijn* invests in numerous activities to counter the taboo in which this violence is embedded.

- In cooperation with other organisations *vzw Zijn* regularly launches several **actions and campaigns**, aimed at a wide audience.
- To obtain more knowledge and insight on this topic and how to tackle it, *Vzw Zijn* organises **courses and symposiums** on a yearly basis.
- In Flanders and Brussels, several organisations are working on the prevention of domestic and sexual violence. Alongside these organisation, *vzw Zijn* aims to form a **network** in order to find solutions to this extensive problem.
- *Vzw Zijn* seeks to influence national and regional **policy** in order to make sure that this problem continues to be a high priority topic on the political agenda and that policy makers take responsibility in the development of an integrated approach to the problem.

Part II: Child Protection Policy

2.1 Definition of a child

Based on the Convention on the Rights of the Child, *vzw Zijn* considers a child to be anyone under the age of 18 years.

Children have the rights common to all human beings as outlined in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights but also rights specific to being children and thus in the process of development.

Adults must respect the maturity and capacity of children to negotiate situations which vary dependent on the phase of growth. Children should be provided with a safe and protective environment in which they receive the care needed in order to develop physically, cognitively and emotionally. Neglecting these needs is understood as a form of violence against children.

2.2 Concept of child abuse and violence against children

Child abuse is considered to be any form of physical, emotional or sexual abuse and includes exploitation of children, commercial or otherwise. Abandonment and neglect of a child which results

in actual or potential damage against a child is also considered to be abuse. Abuse may be deliberate, or a result of a lack of preventative action and protection.

Child abuse: is ill-treatment or neglect by responsible individuals or institutions, intentional or otherwise that result in a loss of welfare, dignity and limit the full and healthy development of the child.

Negligence: is carelessness or neglect by a responsible adult, individual, institution, carer or guardian. Neglect may involve an absence or lack of care negatively affecting a child's education, emotional development, nutrition, housing and access to safe living conditions. A lack of adequate supervision and protection from any kind of harm is also considered neglect.

Physical abuse: occurs when physical harm, real or potential occurs against a child while under the care of parents, responsible individual or institutions.

Sexual abuse: any sexual activity between a child and a person at a more advanced stage of psychosexual development. This also includes forcing or prompting a child to participate in sexual activities without physical contact (not necessarily including penetration). Sexual abuse also consists of depicting children in pornographic material, whether children have been used in the production of pornographic material or material has been altered for inappropriate sexual behaviour.

Emotional abuse: emotional treatment that negatively affects children in relation to their perception of themselves and in their development. Abusive emotional behaviours include disregard, ridicule, threats, discrimination, bribery, degradation and any other hostile treatment towards a child.

2.3 Child Protection Policy

Vzw *Zijn* strongly condemns all forms of child abuse and exploitation of children both within and outside of the organisation. In order to protect children in all our activities and to guarantee their respect and physical and emotional protection, the Child Protection Policy sets out rules and procedures for programs involving children.

Vzw *Zijn*'s Child Protection Policy (CPP) affirms the organization's commitment to the prevention of threats and violations against children's rights through the development and adoption of specific measures to ensure children's rights.

2.4 For those using the Child Protection Policy

The Child Protection Policy must be followed by all employees and staff regardless of whether they are working on a full-time, part-time or temporary basis. This includes staff, consultants, researchers, volunteers, interns, directors, counsellors and management. The Child Protection Policy also applies to projects and programs of partner and visiting organisations, their supporters, donors, partner organizations, associated media and other involved parties. The procedures outlined here should be followed at all times.

2.5 Child Protection Committee

Vzw *Zijn*'s Child Protection Committee is elected every two years and at minimum includes two professionals from inside the organization (one staff member and one director of the board of directors).

All cases and violations of children's rights whether observed or reported should be addressed by the Child Protection Committee and handled in-line with the procedures outlined here in the Child Protection Policy. This should be made clear and central to the strategy, training, monitoring and

dissemination of the Child Protection Policy. All program staff should be trained in the Child Protection Policy and the application of the policy monitored.

Under the guidance of the Committee, Project Coordinators and staff, will ensure that the Child Protection Policy is implemented fully and efficiently. Project Coordinators will be responsible for implementing procedures and any concerns that may rise relating to child protection throughout the program or action. The Project Coordinator is the main reference for project staff and the point of contact in case of any concerns around child protection.

2.6 Legal frameworks

Vzw Zijn is dedicated to the implementation of international legal frameworks on children's rights and aims to ensure a dignified life free of violence for all children, without discrimination regardless of gender or ethnic, socioeconomic or religious background.

The international Convention on the Rights of the Child guides this Child Protection Policy. Belgium ratified the Convention in 1991. The two most important sources of Belgian legislation are firstly, the 2004 Flemish 'Decree on the legal status of the minor in the integrated youth assistance' and secondly, the 2013 Flemish 'Decree Integrated Youth Aid'.

In 1997 the children's rights commission was established as an independent organisation that oversees the good compliance and application of children's rights in Flanders.

The Flemish government creates an integrated youth and children's rights policy plan every 4 years. The plan that is currently applicable is the 2015 – 2019 plan that bundles all relevant policies into one document (<https://view.joomag.com/vlaams-jeugd-en-kinderrechtenbeleidsplan-2015-2019/0066007001449828785?short>).

Vzw Zijn supports the Global Initiative to End All Forms of Physical Punishment against Girls and Boys launched in 2001 as part of the Geneva Human Rights Commission. The initiative is an alliance of multilateral organizations of NGOs, individuals and other stakeholders working to defend human rights and the rights of children. *Vzw Zijn* believes that ending humiliating punishment is fundamental to the realisation of children's rights, respect, human dignity, physical integrity and equal protection before the law.

2.6.1 The convention on the Rights of the Child

The Convention on the Rights of the Child binds ratifying states to consider all people under the age of 18 as children and therefore as a social actors and bearer of specific rights.

The Convention includes as basic rights, the right to life, survival and development and as protection rights, protection from economic and sexual exploitation, protection from violence and war and the rights of children and adolescents in conflict with the law, and fundamental civil rights and freedoms as the right to citizenship and freedom of expression and the right to civil participation.

The Convention is innovative in that it calls for the rights of children to participate, and provides children with civil, social and cultural rights and promotes their active participation in decision making processes, in relation to different phases of development. Alongside this, it also forwards the notion of the best interests of children and adolescents, guaranteeing the child full development, access to civic education and prevention of abuses of power by those responsible for the child. Based on this, increased status and maximised legal protection of the child is sought to guide and advise children to exercise their rights fully.

Member States, of which Belgium is one, shall take all appropriate legislative, administrative, social and educational measures to protect the child from any form of harm or physical or mental abuse, neglect or negligent treatment, maltreatment or exploitation including sexual abuse, when under parental custody or care of alternative responsible guardian(s) or institution(s). All States should establish appropriate structures for the control and implementation of such measures, carrying out a decentralized system that involves local institutions and civil society.

2.6.2 The 2004 Decree on the legal status of the minor in the integrated youth assistance

This Decree guarantees the rights of all minors in regard to youth assistance, such as the right to participate, the right to information and clear communication, the right to respect of the family life, the right on privacy, complaint right, ...

2.6.3 The 2013 Decree Integrated Youth Aid

This Decree guarantees the access to the youth aid, its mission, core principles and objectives, its continuity, the justice youth aid and social services, ... The aim is to create an integrated approach, bringing together the minor, his parents, significant others surrounding them in order to put forward their own powers.

2.6.4 The Flemish 2015 - 2019 youth and children's rights policy plan

The policy plan is focused on 4 major societal goals: equal chances, a broad development, space, and more involvement in society of all children and youth. It includes several domains:

- **Poverty:** reducing poverty within youth and children
- **Sustainability:** taking active care together for a green and habitable Flanders
- **Being young:** you can organise and create in your environment, whatever your age
- **Mobility:** safe and carefree transportation
- **Education:** at school you learn to develop a strong personality based on your specific talents
- **Education:** the school is a place where you can feel at home, even after school hours
- **Participation:** you get a voice in policy decisions that impact you
- **Space:** in the streets and on squares, there's room for everybody
- **Wellbeing:** you know who you can contact for a talk when you need it
- **Living:** all children and youth should have a decent roof above their head
- **Work:** more youth at work
- **Cultural education:** music, theatre and art for and by youth

2.7 Protection and prevention measures

The aim of the measures presented here is to prevent the occurrence of these risks and to guarantee the safety of all those children participating in *Vzw Zijn's* projects.

2.7.1 Management

Ensuring the implementation of the Child Protection Policy, *Vzw Zijn* is committed to:

- a) Ensure that throughout involvement in *Vzw Zijn's* projects all employees, whether engaged in activities directly involving children or not, will sign a document confirming accordance with *Vzw Zijn's* Child Protection Policy.
- b) Providing employees the resources and training to effectively use the Child Protection Policy. This is in order that all employees can, besides understanding the Child Protection Policy, its importance, and in which contexts it is to be used, also understand which actors make up

this protection network in a given location and what their specific roles are in relation to it. The staff training must also stress the conception of children and adolescents as rights bearing subjects, whose voices, desires and wishes must be respected.

- c) Preserving the image of children participating in programs, projects and research, including ensuring that employees and partner organisations know how to not violate children`s rights in relation to images, with special attention paid to not displaying children`s images without the consent of those responsible.
- d) Guiding visitors, journalists, partners, funders and other program and project stakeholders involved with *Vzw Zijn*`s work on not publishing photographs or videos of children or adolescents in any medium of communication or organizational material without prior authority to do so from *Vzw Zijn*.
- e) Ensuring confidentiality on the child and family`s personal information.
- f) Adapting activities (whether they are physical or conceptual) to ensure the inclusion of children with disabilities in order to guarantee the rights of all children and to enable unrestricted access to education, culture and sport and leisure independent of any physical limitations, including motor, sensory or cognitive challenges.
- g) Including in work plans a focus on activities for children that seek to increase child participation and spaces where their opinions are listened to and their agency promoted.

2.7.2 Research and evaluation

In conducting research and evaluation activities all involved must ensure the privacy and protection of identity of all participating children. Additionally a safe space should be provided for conducting interviews, focus groups, questionnaires and other research tools. In research activities and the monitoring and evaluation of activities, *Vzw Zijn* should endeavour to adapt research, monitoring and evaluation instruments in accordance with the age of children being interviewed.

Aiming to ensure the implementation of the Child Protection Policy, the research and evaluation team must:

- a) Ensure that, researchers while involved with *Vzw Zijn* read and agree to the Child Protection Policy including signing a document indicating that they have done so.
- b) Establish at the end of researchers assigned work with *Vzw Zijn* that confidentiality on personal information and participating children`s identity must be preserved including clarifying what accountability measures are in place should there be a misuse of information.
- c) Clarify the researchers` accountability on the confidentiality of the information obtained from children during the research.
- d) Inform partners involved in *Vzw Zijn* programs and legal guardians of children about the objectives and content of research.
- e) Provide information and clarifications to those responsible for the child`s welfare of the possible risks associated with the research and that the child may choose to stop participating in the research at any time if they so wish.
- f) Gain permission from those responsible for the child to participate in the research by signing a letter of consent.
- g) Provide information and recommendations on research that are accessible to the participating child`s legal guardian(s).
- h) Guarantee that participating children are consulted about their interest in participating in the research and guarantee that they understand the whole process.
- i) Verify that all the spaces used to conduct research activities are safe and protect the confidentiality of information.

2.7.3 Program areas

The education activities developed by *Vzw Zijn* should create a safe space based on dialogue and respect for both participating girls and boys reflections. All involved in the design and implementation of the project should be committed to creating spaces that guarantee the confidence, safety, and respect for differences and allow children and adolescents to feel able to express their ideas and opinions.

Aiming to ensure the implementation of the Child Protection Policy, the program team is committed to:

- a) Creating a system of reporting and forwarding cases of violence against children including training staff on this process.
- b) Guarantee the non-disclosure of information shared in group`s education workshops and in other project spaces.
- c) Preserve the identity of participants in reports and other documents produced from the project.
- d) Guarantee the revision of material and reports by the project coordinators before their dissemination to a wider audience.
- e) Guarantee the right of the child to not participate in the activity, and make clear that they are free to leave at any time if they do not feel comfortable or wish to continue, and this is to be done in accordance with the procedures and policy outlined in this document.
- f) Evaluate the safety conditions of the space in which the activities will be implemented in order to decide on a monitoring system of these conditions.
- g) Discuss with the partner organizations the terms of the Child Protection Policy and create protocols for the signing and following of this policy by partner organisations, staff and other involved parties.
- h) Be available to parents and legal guardians in order to present the project, clarify any doubts on the project, respond to questions and request their participation in the development of activities.
- i) Obtain authorization to use images, voice and video recordings of the child and their families whilst involved in project activities. The authorization form must clarify the objectives, means of dissemination and inform responsible guardians that this authorization can be withdrawn at any time. The program or project staff should explain to legal guardians about the terms of authorization, clarifying that no image will expose the child to embarrassing situations or violate their dignity in any way.
- j) In cases of suspected abuse or violence of any form, refer the child to the appropriate service. The cases should be reported to the project coordinator and the Child Protection Committee, which will decide on the appropriate action.

2.7.4 Communication

The communication area will be responsible for mediation between press and the families of participating children. Prior to divulging any information or contact details of program participants or the projects developed by *Vzw Zijn* for the media, the communication team should discuss with the project team. Communication should be responsible for informing legal guardians, explaining the risks and obtaining their authorization to share information and images. Only after the first contact made by a staff member, can the organisation disclose data to the media and this may not be in any form that may depict the child in a humiliating way or way that may conflict with their rights.

Aiming to ensure the implementation of the Child Protection Policy, the communication team is committed to:

- a) Gaining the authorization of parents or legal guardians to use any images, voice or video recordings of the child and their family.
- b) Using images and children`s testimonies on the website, newsletter or other institutional materials only with the authorization of the parents or legal guardians.
- c) Guaranteeing that children`s testimonies in materials and reports only include the name, surname and age of the child if authorized by the parents or legal guardians.
- d) Ensuring that the publication of photography and recordings of children on social networks such as Facebook and Twitter, by staff is forbidden and only *Vzw Zijn*'s communication team is allowed to disseminate images and testimonies from project participants.

2.8 Case management

All cases relating to the violation of children`s rights during programs, projects or research by *Vzw Zijn* must be reported to the Child Protection Committee who will respond to each case.

In the case that a collaborator or partner receives a report of violence or suspects violence of any form against the rights of the child, the case should be reported to the coordinators of the project who then report to the Child Protection Committee.

If the case of violation of rights is difficult to solve or requires immediate action to protect the child, the staff member should meet with the Child Protection Committee to discuss the appropriate measures to be taken.

There are scenarios in which cases of rights violations can be detected by those working with *Vzw Zijn*, for example: if the child reports directly to the collaborator; the project collaborator detects signs and suspects that a violation is taking place; staff members detects a violation by a community member or a member of the project.

All of the cases should be reported to the Child Protection Committee who should try to understand what the violation is and report the case to the local *Vertrouwenscentrum Kindermishandeling (Trust Centre Child Abuse)*.

Whenever there is suspicion of any form of violence or abuse, the staff member should report this immediately to the Child Protection Committee before undertaking any procedures with the child. The committee shall decide with the project team the best way to approach the child and make the necessary referrals. In the case that the child reports directly to the staff member, it is important to clarify with the child that they will have to pass on this report to ensure that the child is aware of this and therefore will not feel betrayed that this was discussed with program staff and the committee. It is important that the procedures for reporting are explained sensitively to the child and that support from the *Trust Centre Child Abuse* is sought for these conversations with the child.

In the case that violence or abuse is directly observed against children in the community the staff member may intervene and inform the child of their right to report this to the police or to the *Trust Centre Child Abuse* if doing so does not increase risks to the child. If any form of risk is suspected, the collaborator can call the police anonymously to avoid or minimize harm.

In the case of observing non-compliance with the rules of the Child Protection Policy the collaborator or any employee can report the event anonymously by phone or by email direct to the project coordinator or the Child Protection Committee, and straight to the committee in the case that the event involves the project coordinator. Once having investigated the report, the committee will

report to *Vzw Zijn*'s directors and decide on the measures to be taken and depending on the severity of the act, whether this should be reported to public authorities.

Part III: Administration – employees and staff

Previous to employment, applicants will be vetted: this is a process that involves investigating an applicant's background and qualifications prior to his or her employment. This process includes calling references and confirming previous employers. In addition to this, applicants will have to transmit an official attestation (*an excerpt from the criminal record*) which states that they have never been convicted or have never done any jail time for criminal acts against minors or for sexual violence.

All employees and staff are considered as those working in the organisation whether full-time, part-time or temporarily and including staff, consultants, researchers, volunteers, interns, directors and executive board members.

All employees have to ensure the implementation of the Child Protection Policy and:

- a) Use of social networking only in order to facilitate communication between employees and participants of the programs and projects and only with those over the age of thirteen years of age. It is not allowed with children under this age. For this, an institutional (project) page can be created in order to facilitate communication between employees and participants and only those professionals working with *Vzw Zijn* and who have signed the Child Protection Policy declaration are permitted to manage the page account.
- b) Use communication solely with those participating in the project or program and at all times only as a group. All exchanges in communication must be public to the group. No private messaging between participants and employees can take place on social media.
- c) Do not add any child as a “friend” on social media networks by an employee. For those in the community this should only happen if they have some link with the child over the age of thirteen prior to the project.
- d) Do not establish any contact with children via email, telephone, social media networks outside the scope of the project or program.

Part IV: Monitoring and evaluation of the Child Protection Policy

The monitoring and evaluation of the Child Protection Policy, and its implementation will be the responsibility of the members of the Child Protection Committee. Committee members will meet periodically to evaluate all ongoing procedures for the implementation, monitoring and evaluation of the Child Protection Policy.

In addition, the Committee members will be available when needed to consult with *Vzw Zijn* employees. The program staff will periodically review the Child Protection Policy based on analysis of empirical data on the internal practices of *Vzw Zijn* and based on national and international modifications to regulations on the protection of children and adolescents.

Part V: Dissemination of the Child Protection Policy

The Child Protection Committee is responsible for the dissemination of the Child Protection Policy and of what the benefits are to the institution of having this policy in place. The task of implementing

the Child Protection Policy is a collective effort of all those employed by *Vzw Zijn*, and particularly the responsibility of all those who work in programs or projects with child participants.

It is the responsibility of *Vzw Zijn* to only engage in partnerships with organizations that adopt their own Child Protection Policy or who undergo training on *Vzw Zijn's* Child Protection Policy and commit to abide by the policy.

Part VI: Final remarks

Vzw Zijn affirms the importance of the implementation of the Child Protection Policy in order to guarantee the rights of children and adolescents who participate in their programs, projects and research. With the introduction of the Child Protection Policy, *Vzw Zijn* aims to ensure a safe and respectful environment, and is committed to building a non-violent, self-reflective and egalitarian society.