

# **Child Protection Policy**

## **INSTITUTE FOR SOCIAL RESEARCH IN ZAGREB**

Zagreb, November 2022

## **INTRODUCTION**

As a non-profit scientific research institution, the Institute for Social Research in Zagreb (hereinafter: ISRZ) carries out of socially significant, fundamental and applied social research in a systematical, longitudinal and interdisciplinary manner, which includes research of children and research with children.

This document brings a set of ethical principles and behaviours that employees should follow in their daily research and other activities (for example, educational workshops) involving children.

As children are a special, vulnerable group, the intention of this document is to further clarify and strengthen the policy guidelines that already exist in the ISRZ Code of Ethics.

These policy guidelines are designed to protect the dignity, rights, safety and well-being of children and to promote ethics in research, and in activities involving children.

Adherence to the ethical principles and values outlined in this document is mandatory for all ISRZ researchers and employees, as well as their collaborators who conduct research or perform other activities, with children.

The policy guidelines apply to all research/activities involving children under 18 years of age.

Ethical guidelines are subject to amendment for the purpose of improving and promoting the protection of children, and the ethics of research involving children.

In accordance with Article 43 of the Gender Equality Act (OG 82/08, 69/17), the terminology and concepts used in this document, and which have a gender meaning, apply equally to the male and female gender, regardless of whether they are in masculine or feminine gender.

## **LEGAL FRAMEWORK OF THE CHILD PROTECTION POLICY**

International and national positive regulations, and institutional acts have been regarded in the development of this policy:

1. United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (1989)
2. Council of Europe Convention on the Protection of Children from Sexual Exploitation and Sexual Abuse (2007)
3. Constitution of the Republic of Croatia

4. Act on Legal Consequences of Conviction, Criminal Records and Rehabilitation (OG 143/12, 105/15, 32/17, 53/22)
5. Family Act (OG 103/15, 98/19, 47/20)
6. Act on the Implementation of the General Data Protection Regulation (OG 42/18)
7. Anti-discrimination Act (OG 85/08, 112/12)
8. Penal Code (OG 125/11, 144/12, 56/15, 61/15, 101/17, 118/18, 126/19, 84/21)
9. Volunteerism Act (OG 58/07, 22/13, 84/21)
10. Ombudsman for Children Act (OG 73/2017)
11. Rules of Procedure of the Ombudsman for Children (OG 49/2018)
12. Code of Ethics for Research with Children (2020)
13. Code of Ethics of the Institute for Social Research.

## **PRINCIPLES**

In research and professional activities involving children, ISRZ employees should adhere to the following principles:

- the principle of protecting the well-being of the child and his/her right to physical, psychological and emotional integrity
- the principle of respect for human rights, values and dignity of the person
- the principle of respect for the privacy and anonymity of participants
- the principle of respect for the right of the child to self-determination and the right to express his or her own opinion
- the principle of accountability in case of ethical doubts
- the principle of protecting the integrity of science and scientists
- the principle of objectivity, accuracy and fairness in work, which includes the obligation to report on the results of research

## **DUTIES AND RESPONSIBILITIES OF RESEARCHERS AND OTHERS PERFORMING RESEARCH OR PARTICIPATING IN RESEARCH INVOLVING CHILDREN**

### **Planning and conducting of the research involving children**

1. When planning and conducting research, and disseminating results, researchers/employees have an obligation to act in accordance with the highest ethical and internationally accepted standards of scientific research work.
2. The Ethics Committee is competent for granting consent for conducting research involving children. Any ISRZ research involving children must receive the approval of the Institute's Ethics Committee confirming that the research was designed in accordance with ethical standards for conducting the research prior to the beginning of the research.
3. Research must be based on scientific and professional knowledge of scientific disciplines addressing children.
4. Junior researchers may conduct research involving children only under the supervision of experienced researchers/supervisors.
5. The potential risks of children's participation in research procedures should be completely eliminated or minimised.
6. Research procedures should be adapted to the age, abilities and maturity of the child.
7. The circumstances in which the research is conducted must guarantee the physical and psychological safety of the child.
8. Informed consent is required to conduct the research.
9. For children of up to fourteen years of age, informed consent (usually in writing) is given by the parent/guardian first. After parental consent, consent should be sought from the child (if the age, language or cognitive abilities allow).
10. The researcher is obliged to explain the purpose, objectives and methods of the research to the child and the parent/guardian in an understandable manner, and to point to: the voluntariness of participation (respecting the principle of conscious and voluntary participation); the right to withdraw from participation in the research; the confidentiality of the data obtained; the protection of privacy, as well as the potential consequences and risks of participation in the research.
11. A child over the age of fourteen gives informed consent independently. Prior to seeking the child's consent, the researcher is obliged to inform parents/guardians about the research.

Exceptionally, in the case of a particularly sensitive subject, the Ethics Committee may request parent's/guardian's consent also for children above the age of fourteen.

12. Unlike informed consent, which implies a voluntary consent to participate in the research, approval is a voluntary and informed consent to the processing of personal data. Approval is required if the research does not ensure the anonymity of the data. Approval to the processing of personal data for a child under the age of 16 shall be given by the parent or guardian.
13. Researchers should conduct online research with particular care and attention (consent, confidentiality, privacy protection). The conducting of online research involving children requires additional elaboration of the ethical aspects of the research provided by the researchers, and a particular attention of the ethics committee.
14. During online research with children, it is necessary to implement measures of the General Data Protection Regulation and use data collection services that guarantee the researcher exclusive access to data (without retaining the data at the service platform or forwarding them to other users).

### **Anonymity and data protection**

1. Researchers are obliged to ensure confidentiality of the data on children participating in the research, and their claims.
2. It is not allowed to disclose the identity of the research participant, except exceptionally, in the event of a threat to the life, health, and well-being of the child, in order to provide the necessary help to the child.
3. The researcher is obliged to inform the children involved in the research about any possibility of revealing their identity that might occur.
4. The researcher is obliged to communicate the main findings of the research to the children, parents/guardians and professional staff in the institution where the research was conducted. Exceptionally, the researcher may inform the research participants that the research results cannot be published before the completion of the entire research procedure (for example, in longitudinal research).
5. After data collection is completed, the researcher is obliged to clarify any ambiguities and misunderstandings to the children involved in the research, and to answer their questions.
6. Upon completion of data collection, the researcher is obliged to store the data and ensure their adequate retention. Data should be anonymized to protect privacy, and personal data that allow identification should be destroyed.

7. Data, regardless of the level of anonymity, shall be stored for as long as necessary for the purposes for which they were collected or in accordance with the established rules on archiving or retention of data.

8. When deciding on the sharing of primary data with other researchers in the context of open science (audio and/or video recordings, transcripts, etc.), the researcher is obliged to take care of the protection of the identity of children. If this is not possible, it is a scientifically acceptable practice to refuse to share qualitative data. When deciding on the sharing of primary data, children and their parents/guardians, who need to give consent for such a procedure, have a key role in the process.

9. Researchers are obliged to report truthfully, responsibly, cautiously and in accordance with scientific principles, especially when it comes to research involving children from socially vulnerable groups.

## **ILLICIT ACTS**

The following types of conduct are strictly prohibited:

- hitting, physical assault, and physical or psychological harassment of children
- mockery, humiliation or any similar behaviour aimed at psychological harassment of a child
- sexual harassment and sexual abuses
- relationships of exploitation of the child, and neglect or negligent treatment of them
- vulgar or inappropriate language, and making offensive and inappropriate remarks or comments
- discriminatory behaviour or a threat of such behaviour towards a child
- manipulating with the research (for example, asking suggestive questions/manipulating with children's answers, distorting of the research findings, and similar ethically inappropriate research practices).

## **PROMOTION OF ETHICS AND CHILD PROTECTION**

1. The managing bodies of ISRZ are obliged to promote the ethical behaviour of all employees in their relations with children, and to educate them about institutional rules, as well as their obligations and rights.

2. The Ethics Committee of ISRZ monitors the application of ethical principles and obligations in research and work with children, and gives opinion (Article 2 and Article 12 of the Rules of Procedure of the Ethics Committee, 2012). The opinion of the Ethics Committee is not an administrative act and is not an alternative to civil, criminal, administrative and disciplinary procedures regulated by laws. For

further procedures, the competent authority is the Scientific Council and the head of the institution, i.e. the Director of the ISRZ (Article 16 of the Rules of Procedure of the Ethics Committee, 2012).

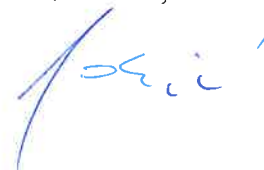
The ISRZ Child Protection Policy is published on the ISRZ's official website in Croatian and English. The Croatian version is considered to be original.

In Zagreb, 25 November 2022

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Director of the ISRZ

Boris Jokić, PhD

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'Boris Jokić', written over a faint, larger version of the circular stamp.