

IDIZ



Institut za društvena istraživanja u Zagrebu
Institute for Social Research in Zagreb

Child Protection Policy

**INSTITUTE FOR SOCIAL RESEARCH IN
ZAGREB**

Zagreb, December 2024

INTRODUCTION

As a non-profit scientific research institution, the Institute for Social Research in Zagreb (hereinafter IDIZ) systematically, longitudinally and interdisciplinary deals with cognitively and socially significant, fundamental and applied scientific research of society, which includes research on children and research with children. IDIZ uses its research to support the development of public policies and strategies aimed at improving the social position of children and young people. Also, based on scientific research findings, IDIZ develops and implements educational activities aimed at strengthening the role of children in society and the community.

This document presents a set of values and behaviors that IDIZ employees and their associates should adhere to, as well as responsibilities in ensuring a safe environment when conducting research and other institute activities involving children.

This policy was adopted with the aim of protecting the dignity, rights, safety and well-being of children and promoting awareness of the responsibility for ensuring the protection of children in research and in institute activities involving children among employees and associates of IDIZ.

The child protection policy applies to all research and institute activities involving children under the age of 18.

In accordance with Art. 43 of the Law on Gender Equality (Official Gazette 82/08, 69/17), words and concepts used in this document, which have a gender meaning, refer equally to the male and female genders, regardless of whether they are in the 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. The Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union, Article 24
4. Treaty on the European Union, Article 3
5. Communication from the European Commission: EU Agenda for the Rights of the Child
6. Constitution of the Republic of Croatia
7. Act on Legal Consequences of Conviction, Criminal Records and Rehabilitation (OG 143/12, 105/15, 32/17, 53/22)
8. Family Act (OG 103/15, 98/19, 47/20)
9. Act on the Implementation of the General Data Protection Regulation (OG 42/18)
10. Anti-discrimination Act (OG 85/08, 112/12)

11. Penal Code (OG 125/11, 144/12, 56/15, 61/15, 101/17, 118/18, 126/19, 84/21)
12. Volunteerism Act (OG 58/07, 22/13, 84/21)
13. Ombudsman for Children Act (OG 73/2017)
14. Rules of Procedure of the Ombudsman for Children (OG 49/2018)
15. Code of Ethics for Research with Children (2020)
16. Code of Ethics of the ISRZ 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.

DEFINITION OF HARM

During the implementation of ISRZ's research and other project activities and programs, the following types of harm must not occur:

- Neglect by employees and associates of the ISRZ, or by parents or other adults participating in ISRZ research and other activities;
- Physical, sexual, and emotional abuse that may occur during activities with children;
- Peer bullying, whether physical or online, during ISRZ research activities and other project activities;
- Racist remarks by employees, or other associates towards young participants, as well as by other individuals involved in project activities;
- Discrimination based on ethnicity, race, religion, gender, etc., by employees, volunteers, and interns, or by others involved in ISRZ research and project activities and programs;
- Abuse related to disability;
- Neglect or disregard for the special needs of participants (individuals with disabilities, dietary, health, social needs, etc.);
- Gender-based violence and violence related to sexual orientation;

- Radicalization and extremist behavior by employees, volunteers, interns, peers, or other individuals during the implementation of programs and activities;
- Sexual exploitation;
- Use of drugs and other substances;
- Neglect or abuse of children within their families or communities;
- Issues specific to the population, such as group violence;
- Other risks that may endanger 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 ISRZ'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).

UNACCEPTABLE BEHAVIOUR WHEN WORKING WITH CHILDREN

- ISRZ's employees and other representatives consider the following behaviours unacceptable and subject to sanctions:
- Neglecting young people they work with and ignoring their special needs;
- Insulting young people based on any criteria;
- Hitting or physically assaulting children during programs and activities;
- Physical, psychological, or emotional abuse of minors;
- Gender-based violence;
- Engaging in sexual activity or relationships with persons under 18, regardless of the legal definition of adulthood or recognized consent in different countries. A misunderstanding about a minor's age cannot be considered a valid defense;
- Relationships with minors that could be considered exploitative, abusive, or harmful;
- Using inappropriate language or making inappropriate and offensive suggestions and advice;
- Acting to shame, humiliate, demean, or scorn a minor, or any other form of emotional abuse;
- Using drugs or harmful substances with minors;
- Discriminating against minors or favoring some while excluding others;

- Failing to report observed neglect or abuse of young people by family, peers, or the community;
- 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).

Additionally, during research and other activities with children organized and implemented by the ISRZ, the following are considered unacceptable:

- Insulting young participants by other participants, peers, or other individuals;
- Discriminating against young participants on any basis by other participants or involved individuals;
- Physical, psychological, and emotional abuse of young participants by others in the programs and activities;
- Gender-based violence by other participants and involved individuals;
- Sexual violence by other young participants or involved individuals against minors;
- Radicalization and extremist behavior by participants and involved individuals.

This list is not exhaustive or strictly defined, meaning that any action or behavior that could be deemed inappropriate or potentially offensive towards minors should be avoided.

SAFE RECRUITMENT PROCEDURES

ISRZ is committed to ensuring that during the recruitment of new personnel, volunteers, collaborators, and other individuals who may work with children, the following measures are taken:

- Minimizing the likelihood of engaging potential abusers through strict checks and high standards during recruitment and selection;
- Rejecting unsuitable candidates at the application or interview stage;
- Preventing child abuse by developing comprehensive policies and agreements on safety practices;
- Creating detailed and clear job descriptions for individuals working with children, whether they are employees, volunteers, or collaborators.

Every new individual joining the ISRZ who is expected to work with children and children will be required to read and become familiar with the child protection policies and safety practices implemented in the ISRZ, as well as the procedures and sanctions that apply in case of policy violations. This procedure will be conducted before the individual signs an employment or volunteer agreement, under the supervision of the ISRZ's director and program coordinators or the volunteer coordinator.

New individuals working with children will also undergo training on implementing these policies. Such training will be conducted by more experienced colleagues who work with children. Additionally, at the beginning, new individuals will not conduct activities with

children independently but will be supervised by experienced employees of the ISRZ to ensure proper implementation of child protection policies and reduce the likelihood of unacceptable behavior due to inexperience or lack of knowledge.

RESPONSIBILITIES OF THE ISRZ AND ITS EMPLOYEES WHEN WORKING WITH CHILDREN

Under the laws of the Republic of Croatia, a child is defined as any person under the age of 18.

ISRZ's employees along with other individuals associated with the ISRZ who work with children, consider themselves responsible for the safety and protection of children with whom they work, interact, or come into contact through their work.

In all activities involving minors, ISRZ ensures a safe space where they are protected from harm and where they can actively participate in activities. ISRZ's staff and representatives will always uphold the highest standards of behavior towards children, as outlined in this "Child Protection Policy."

ISRZ is committed to:

- Ensuring its staff and representatives are aware of child rights violations;
- Ensuring its staff and representatives create safe spaces to prevent risks of physical and psychological harm to minors, as well as potential abuse;
- Ensuring all staff and representatives working with children have the necessary knowledge and methods, whether pedagogical or related to working with children and are capable of creating activities and programs that minimize the aforementioned risks to the greatest extent possible;
- Ensuring its staff and representatives effectively respond to any reported abuse, providing support, protection, and care for the minors involved;
- Reporting to relevant institutions or other organizations if employees, and other associates of ISRZ become aware of any harm inflicted on a child we work with by someone in their family or community, outside of our activities and programs;
- Ensuring that all ISRZ partners working with children are aware of child protection policies and that all joint activities follow these policies. To this end, a clause related to the implementation of children protection policies will be added to partnership agreements for projects or activities involving young people;
- Familiarizing all collaborators and others involved in the implementation of programs and activities with the child protection policies and ensuring their application.

Child and children protection includes attention to:

- Health, well-being, and safety;
- Recognizing their needs, especially those related to health;
- Recognizing the needs of children with special requirements and learning-related issues;

- Providing first aid;
- Emotional well-being;
- Online safety and related issues;
- Appropriate planning for children during field trips, excursions, etc.

ISRZ's employees will ensure the following in all activities involving children and minors:

- Protection of children from mistreatment and abuse;
- Prevention of possible negative impacts on children's health or development;
- Ensuring children grow and develop in a safe and nurturing environment;
- Taking all steps necessary to achieve the best outcomes for all children.

POLICY IMPLEMENTATION

The following criteria define proper policy implementation:

- The policy is disseminated among ISRZ staff and representatives;
- The child protection policy will be published on ISRZ's website and always accessible to anyone interested;
- Recruitment and selection processes reflect ISRZ's commitment to child protection. Failure to meet aspects related to the policy must be considered a serious violation of ISRZ's work ethics and principles;
- All activities involving minors must be evaluated in advance to identify potential risks to child protection and develop appropriate monitoring systems;
- Regarding the use of information and communication technologies (internet, websites, social media, digital photography), ISRZ emphasizes ensuring conditions in which minors are protected from any possible risks;
- Employees conducting activities and programs will familiarize the children they work with, their parents, guardians, and other individuals responsible for children care with the child protection policies to clarify the expected behavior of staff and ISRZ personnel, as well as prohibited behaviors and appropriate responses in case of violations.

RESPONSIBILITIES OF ISRZ

ISRZ's staff and representatives are responsible for creating a work environment that promotes the implementation and development of the principles outlined in this policy. Depending on their roles, staff members are responsible for ensuring an equitable work environment at the locations where project activities are conducted.

Individuals organizing and implementing activities involving children are responsible for ensuring their safety and protecting them from all previously mentioned risks.

ISRZ staff and representatives also commit to:

- Being vigilant in recognizing situations that may pose risks to minors and knowing how to manage them;
- Reporting any concerns, suspicions, or knowledge of possible abuse or mistreatment of minors, as outlined in this policy;
- Organizing activities and workplace environments to minimize risks to the greatest extent possible;
- Respecting children's rights and treating them with consideration, honesty, and dignity;
- Encouraging children to participate and develop their ability to protect themselves;
- Ensuring that individuals who report unacceptable behavior by employees or other staff members are protected after doing so and are supported throughout the process;
- Reporting any suspicion of neglect or abuse of children by families, peers, or communities to the appropriate institutions or organizations.

PERSON RESPONSIBLE FOR REPORTING AND TAKING ACTION IN CASES OF SUSPECTED MISCONDUCT

- In cases of suspected misconduct or abuse committed by any employee, collaborator, or volunteer against children, the child, young person, or any adult associated with them is obligated to report this to the Director of ISRZ. If the individual under suspicion is the Director, concerns about misconduct or abuse must be reported to the ISRZ's Management Board.
- Every person associated with the ISRZ must ensure safety when working with children and feel encouraged to share any concerns or suspicions of inappropriate or unacceptable behavior by any employee or volunteer with the Director of the ISRZ. They must also be assured that their concerns will be taken seriously.

Upon receiving such concerns, the Director of ISRZ is obligated to:

- Ensure that the child expressing their concerns is safe and removed from the employee or associate of the ISRZ against whom the concerns or accusations are directed;
- Contact the child's parents or guardians;
- Review the employment contract of the individual in question, and if no safe means of amending it exists, suspend the employee while the investigation is ongoing;
- Conduct any disciplinary investigation only after the child safety investigation has concluded.

ANONYMITY AND DATA PROTECTION

- Researchers are obliged to ensure confidentiality of the data on children participating in the research, and their claims.
- 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.

- The researcher is obliged to inform the children involved in the research about any possibility of revealing their identity that might occur.
- 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).
- 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.
- 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.
- 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.
- 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.
- 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.
- ISRZ researchers and employees will ensure the protection of data related to children and minors participating in the ISRZ's activities. Data collected during registration will be accessible only to individuals organizing and conducting the activities and will not be available to anyone else.
- If signature lists are used to confirm activity implementation and reporting, the data on such lists will be accessible only to the project coordinator and will be used solely for reporting purposes.
- Children will not be photographed or filmed without the consent of their parents or guardians. If photographing is necessary for reporting purposes, the photographs will not be published or shared with the public. If activities and programs involving minors are filmed or photographed, their faces will be blurred.

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 IDIZ monitors the application of ethical principles and obligations in research and work with children and gives an opinion (Art. 2, Art. 12, Rules of Procedure of the Ethics Committee, 2012). The Disciplinary Committee and the director of IDIZ are responsible for determining the disciplinary responsibility of employees in terms of the IDIZ Rulebook on Disciplinary Responsibility (2024) (Article 16, Rules of Procedure of the Ethics Committee, 2012; Rulebook on Disciplinary Responsibility, 2024).

POLICY REVISION

- ISRZ's Child Protection Policy is available at the following link:
<https://www.idi.hr/en/about-us/public-documents/documents>
- This policy will be reviewed annually, or more frequently if it is determined that certain practices and provisions are inadequate or depending on the activities conducted with Minors.
- The Child Protection Policy is approved and signed by the Director/Legal Representative of the ISRZ.

REG.NO: 990-01/24-01/18

251-793-01-01-24-1

In Zagreb, December 19, 2024

Director of the ISRZ

Boris Jokić, PhD

