



**WOMEN AGAINST VIOLENCE EUROPE**

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# WAVE Child Protection Policy

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## I. Introduction

### About the Women Against Violence Europe (WAVE) Network

The WAVE Network was established in 1994 as a network of women's NGOs and specialist women's support services (women's shelters, women's centres, intervention centres, helplines, and other services). The main objective of WAVE is to work towards the elimination of all forms of discrimination and violence against women and their children. In addition to this, WAVE seeks to promote the human rights of women and girls to live free from violence in both the public and the private sphere. The WAVE Office serves as a linchpin for the whole network of WAVE. The WAVE Network is comprised of 160 Members (as of May 2021), located throughout 46 European countries. Through WAVE's members and the WAVE online database, the network spans more than 4,000 women's organisations across Europe. WAVE Members include women's organisations, individuals, and networks working to end violence against women and their children. WAVE adheres to the aims of the United Nations, stressing the importance of working towards ending all forms of violence against women and children in public and private life in accordance with the Vienna Declaration, the Declaration on Violence against Women, the Beijing Platform for Action, and all other related documents. As such, WAVE is committed to supporting children's rights and is dedicated to their well-being and safety.

### About WAVE's Child Protection Policy

As the only European network focussing on ending violence against women and girls, we acknowledge our organisation's responsibility to make sure that WAVE staff, programmes, and activities do not harm children and do not expose them to any risk. We also recognize the importance of ensuring any concerns regarding children's safety involving WAVE are reported and resolved appropriately. Thus, this Child Protection Policy (CPP) was developed by the WAVE team and the WAVE Executive Manager to better reflect our values and positions. The policy is structured in the following way:

This introduction is followed by background information on the definitions and terminology used in this policy, on WAVE's standpoint and mission for a network-wide safeguarding policy. This is followed by a chapter outlining procedures for reporting abuse, such as the scope of applicability and the step-by-step measures to prevent and respond to concerns of child abuse. This is followed by some good practice procedures on our online communication practices. The annex contains a template of a signed document by staff members agreeing to adhere to this policy.

## II. Terminology

### 1. Definitions

#### Legal background

The Policy is based on the following European Conventions/Directives:

- Charter of Fundamental Rights of the EU;
- European Convention on Human Rights;
- EU Victims' Directive (Directive 2012/29/EU), para. 7, 14, 17, 19, 38, 42, 54, 57, 60, 66, 69; Art.: 10-Participation in criminal proceedings; 21-Right to protection of privacy; 24-Right to protection of child victims during criminal proceedings; 26-Cooperation & coordination of services;
- EU Directive on combating sexual abuse & sexual exploitation of children & child pornography (Directive 2011/92/EU);
- Council of Europe Convention on preventing and combating violence against women and domestic violence, Istanbul Convention Art.: 13-awareness-raising; 18-General obligations; 22-Specialist support services; 23-Shelters; 26-Protection & support for child witnesses; 31-Custody, visitation rights & safety; 45-Sanctions & measures; 56-Measures of protection.

#### Child

Within the frame of this policy, we define a child as “every human being below the age of 18 years unless under the law applicable to the child, majority is attained earlier”. This is in accordance with Article 1 of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of a Child.

#### Child abuse

WAVE defines “abuse” as a range of acts, intentional or otherwise, that harms children. WAVE recognizes that child abuse can take many forms of physical or psychological violence, such as: domestic violence, online violence, human trafficking, bullying, sexual exploitation, grooming, female genital mutilation, negligence, maltreatment, witnessing of violence, or any other harm committed against the well-being of a child.

### 2. Values

#### Organizational background

As WAVE is not a front-line service, the office team does not deal directly with children. However, some activities do affect young adults and may indirectly involve children as well. As such, this Child Protection Policy outlines common values on the rights of children and describes measures to prevent and respond to harm against children. The WAVE Child Protection Policy is applicable to those carrying out activities on behalf of WAVE, to provide a set of guiding principles for the Network and establish a common approach towards child protection and support. Children and young persons should never experience abuse, and society has a collective responsibility to protect children's right to live free from violence. WAVE recognizes that:

- Children can be direct or indirect victims of domestic abuse;
- Every child has the right to be believed when disclosing abuse;
- Relevant practitioners/social/legal professionals should be trained to recognize signs/symptoms/effects of child abuse;
- Multi-agency work is a good practice approach to child protection;
- Governments should consider specialised courts/panels/judges for children;
- Children have equal rights to protection, irrespective of age/disability/gender-identity/race/ethnicity/religion;
- Children from minority ethnic groups and with intersecting disadvantaged positions face additional barriers and are more at risk of facing harm;
- Children have age-related needs/vulnerabilities which must be recognized in service provision/legal proceedings;
- Combatting (male) VAWG must be done in partnership with children, valuing their potential and applying the best interest of the child at all times.

The following values represent WAVE's commitment to end child abuse:

- **Zero tolerance:** As a Network focussing on violence against women and girls (VAWG), WAVE does not tolerate any form of child abuse. WAVE will not knowingly engage with anyone posing a risk to children and will end collaboration with anyone harming children;
- **Responsibility:** WAVE recognizes the responsibility to report any suspected or actual child abuse taking place within the Network;
- **Do not harm:** Any suspicion will be reported to the formal authorities while ensuring that children and their families are not put at additional risk of facing harm by reporting the abuse.

To abide by these values, WAVE commits to hold to the following standards:

- **Awareness:** WAVE will ensure that all members and partners will be made aware of the issue of child abuse;
- **Prevention:** Through awareness-raising, WAVE will actively strive to prevent any harm to children;
- **Accountability:** WAVE places responsibilities on all staff, members, and associates to report suspected child abuse. WAVE will ensure that all staff and members will be made aware of this responsibility;
- **Partiality:** WAVE will take all child abuse allegations seriously. WAVE will listen to children, believe them and respect their wishes. WAVE will partner with caretakers and/or other professionals to ensure the well-being of children.

### *Code of conduct*

All WAVE staff members and interns commit to:

- Treating children and young people fairly and without prejudice or discrimination;
- Respecting differences in gender, sexual orientation, culture, race, ethnicity, disability, and religious belief systems;
- Challenging discrimination and prejudice;
- Promoting relationships that are based on openness, honesty, trust, and respect;
- Exercising caution when discussing sensitive issues regarding children with other staff or interns;

- Ensuring that contact with children and young people is appropriate and relevant to the work or project that staff members are involved in.

All WAVE staff members and interns will not:

- Develop inappropriate relationships with children and young people;
- Engage in behaviour that is in any way abusive (including having any form of sexual contact with a child or young person);
- Act in a way that can be perceived as threatening or intrusive;
- Make sarcastic, insensitive, derogatory, or sexually suggestive comments or gestures regarding children and young people.

WAVE staff members and interns should always follow this code of conduct and never rely on their reputation or that of WAVE to protect them. If a staff or intern has behaved inappropriately, they will be subject to the procedures outlined below. Depending on the seriousness of the situation, they may be asked to leave WAVE, and a report to statutory agencies such as the police and/or the local child protection services may be made.

### 3. Child Safeguarding

We would like to acknowledge that many individual WAVE Member organisations work directly with women victims of violence, and often also their children, and some Members work with younger victims of violence. They thus operate within their own more detailed child protection policies.

To support Members with strengthening and developing their child safeguarding efforts, WAVE is in the process of developing a child safeguarding framework that will provide in-depth guidelines on ensuring effective safeguarding of children whilst they receive, reside within, or move on from WSS. This framework will serve as a model for WAVE Members to use within their own organisations and adapt to their needs and national context. This comprehensive child safeguarding framework will be developed jointly with Members from different regions in 2021 and 2022. It will also lay the foundation to strengthening movement building around children's rights and in particular more child-friendly custody proceedings in Europe.

## III. Scope of applicability

### 1. Compliance with this policy

This policy applies to all WAVE full-time, part-time employees and volunteers who work in the Vienna office. The policy also applies to all contractors, consultants, WAVE Member organisations, and individuals working with WAVE on the implementation of projects as well as on an operational level. Preventing harm to children is a commitment employees and volunteers make whilst at work and outside of work. This policy ensures that all WAVE employees, volunteers, and Members understand that they represent the WAVE Network at all times.

### 2. Risk assessment

As outlined before, WAVE is not a frontline service and thus does not directly work with children. However, some situations may involve young adults and children. Consequently, it is imperative to identify potential risk scenarios for children and develop mitigation procedures to prevent abuse as well as tackle reported abuse. The following situations were identified as potential risk scenarios where children may be involved in WAVE activities. Preventative measures to these scenarios are described in the next chapter.

#### *WAVE Youth Ambassadors*

The WAVE Youth Ambassador initiative aims to provide a space for youth activists across Europe to encourage as well as promote youth engagement, youth participation, and youth inclusion within the context of preventing (male) VAWG and discrimination since 2018. The second generation of WAVE Youth Ambassadors currently consists of 14 young women. All the Youth Ambassadors are legal adults between the ages of 18-27. Since they mostly engage in peer-to-peer actions on social media, some interactions may (unknowingly) involve teenagers and young people that are not of legal age. WAVE further acknowledges the rising prevalence of online violence, especially targeted at women, girls, and women's human rights defenders. Thus, WAVE recognizes a duty of care towards the WAVE Youth Ambassadors and an ethical obligation to ensure their safety when giving them a voice and engaging them in WAVE activities.

#### *WAVE cross-border support for survivors*

The WAVE Information Center is an essential component of the WAVE Network. WAVE staff is available Monday to Friday to provide information on available services to women or organisations supporting them who are experiencing male violence. They are aiming to flee from one of WAVE's 46 member countries to another (=WAVE cross-border support service), connect members, experts, and academics with each other as well as supporting WAVE Members with general and specific inquiries.

The WAVE cross-border support service provides the following limited direct services to women fleeing from male violence: WAVE receives cross-border support requests from women experiencing male violence, their family members, from women's support services, and/or from different agencies. Most of these requests come directly from women who were unable to find sufficient support in their own countries or the country they fled to, are in dangerous and high-risk situations, have no awareness about available support services in their country, or those whose situation is especially complex and requires WAVE's international support. WAVE connects the women and/or agencies supporting them, with relevant WAVE members or other organisations, that are able to provide shelter, counselling and/or advice services. In some cases, WAVE remains involved throughout the

initial stages of support provided to ensure the woman's safety and that a positive outcome is reached. These cross-border support requests may occasionally involve survivors with children. Mitigation measures and procedures for processing cross-border support and storing sensitive information are described below.

### *WAVE Events*

All WAVE events (Advisory Board Meetings, Annual Conference, training events) are targeted towards adult audiences, such as WAVE members, women's specialist services, NGOs that are not WAVE members, national and international stakeholders, policymakers, media, academics, and other individuals working in the sector or interested in ending VAWG. Although this is not recommended by WAVE, a potential risk lays in participants bringing their children along to WAVE events. We are aware that the contents are only for adult audiences, and we therefore strongly encourage and aim to ensure to the best of our abilities that children are not confronted with any contents that have not been adapted for their age groups.

### *Social and online media*

WAVE is present on social media and posts regular content on four social media platforms (Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, YouTube) as well as on the WAVE website. Some of the information used when resharing stories or articles by third parties may contain images of children. Furthermore, some content may include descriptions of violence that viewers may find triggering, especially a young adult or a child. Mitigation measures to minimise harm when sharing sensitive content are described further below.

### *WAVE's role in European projects*

Aside from the network's core activities, WAVE is also a partner in various other projects on a European level.<sup>1</sup> As a dissemination partner, WAVE's role is to disseminate project outputs via social media, our membership, and other online channels. The project leads to follow and implement their own project-related child protection policy to which WAVE adheres. Out of these projects, the Cybersafe project (2018-21), does include engagement with children through the involved project partners. The goal of the project is to raise awareness on cyberviolence among young people and to address the "bystander" effect through an innovative experiential prevention programme including playful online tools to address the issue of online VAWG among young people in a classroom setting. The Cybersafe project has a very comprehensive Child Protection Policy in place. The pillars of this policy are: parental authorization, informed consent, anonymity, confidentiality, safeguarding, appropriate participatory practices, non-discrimination, appropriate use of information, and professional integrity. WAVE will never knowingly join projects without adequate child protection policies in place. The WAVE team is informed of their duty to report any suspected abuse or harm committed in the frame of these projects. Reporting procedures are described further below.

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<sup>1</sup> **Civil Society Strengthening Platform** (2020-2021): <https://cssplatform.org/>  
**Multi Agency-Responses to Violence against Older Women** (MARVOW, 2019-2021): <https://marvow.eu/>  
**Cybersafe Project** (2018-2021): <https://www.stoponlineviolence.eu/?lang=de>



## IV. Procedures

The procedures stating below will be put into effect to implement the Child Protection Policy. The **two procedural pillars** of WAVE's Child Protection Policy are **Prevention** and **Reporting** measures.

### 1. Prevention

Prevention measures are in place to avoid and minimise any risk of harm to children. These prevention measures focus on safer recruitment, good practices for event organisation, media and communication, development of trainings as well as data protection.

#### Safer recruitment

When recruiting new staff members and interns, WAVE sets out to commit to the following suitability checks:

- Applicants who are unsuitable to work with children and young people are identified and rejected;
- During shortlisting, all applicants are required to submit a criminal record certificate as part of the recruitment process to inform the WAVE Executive Manager of any relevant criminal convictions, child protection investigations or disciplinary sanctions they have on their record;
- Applicants need to provide the details of at least two referees which are reviewed as part of vetting checks; Concerns from referees about the suitability of applicants are taken into serious consideration;
- All standing staff members will be further asked to submit a criminal record certificate to prove that they do not have any previous convictions pertaining to minors;
- Contractors and other third parties working with WAVE are required to read, sign and adhere to the Child Protection Policy.

#### New staff members and training of staff

The following measures are taken to ensure that new as well as standing team members adhere to the Child Protection Policy:

- New team members are required to confirm that they have read, understood, and agree to this Child Protection Policy (see annex); Signed copies will be added to their personnel file;
- All WAVE staff members are required to attend one training on counselling women survivors of violence and will receive basic training on how to process cases involving children; Onboarding team members will further have an informational meeting with the **WAVE Child Protection Policy (CPP) Lead** (see page 11) after recruitment, so that they are made aware of their duties and responsibilities;
- The WAVE Office Administrator will continually look for training opportunities to support children experiencing violence or living in violent households.

## Events and activities

When working with youth (in the scope of the Youth Ambassador activities or focus groups for European projects), the following measures will be taken to ensure their well-being:

- Young participants will be informed of their role in the project and of their right to end the engagement at any time;
- Images and content created by young participants will not be used without their consent; They may revoke their consent at any time;
- Should children or young people be present at WAVE events (e.g. conference), they will not be exposed to possibly harmful content (such as discussions about violence); A separate room will be made available;
- Preventative measures will be put in place to safeguard children if WAVE events are to take place in unfamiliar places and outside family care; This includes ensuring that children are accompanied either by their guardian or someone their guardian trusts;
- WAVE will ensure that staff is easily identifiable at events, for example by wearing a T-shirt or badge, so potential present children know who to turn to if they have concerns;
- Parental or primary caregiver consent for children's participation in events is mandatory and will be obtained.

## Communication guidelines and digital safety

Concerning the use of images, stories, and other content posted by WAVE, the team commits to the following guidelines:

- WAVE staff is committed to not using images of children in publications or online platforms;
- Should WAVE staff photograph or film a child, consent by the child and their custodian will be obtained; An explanation of the use of the image must be given; WAVE staff will not use children's images in a way that is exploitative or harmful to their dignity; Depending on the legislation, children can give their consent from the age of 14 on. Until then, parents are responsible to give consent on behalf of their children;
- Details attached to images will omit any information that could allow the child to be traced to their home or community;
- Distinctive buildings, street signs, or landmarks will not be included in an image if they identify where the child lives; Geotagging of images will be disabled when taking photographs;
- Sensitive content created for awareness-raising purposes will contain content warnings (e.g. social media campaigns on consent);
- Right to one's own picture will be respected in accordance with Austrian legislation and GDPR regulation.

## Record and data storage

When processing any data involving children (such as support requests by survivors with children), the WAVE team adheres to the following procedures:

- All records containing information on children will be anonymized and password-protected; All records are stored and treated with utmost confidentiality while considering specific safety measures in accordance with the GDPR; Data must be stored on WAVE's internal servers and should never be saved or forwarded to third parties;
- Any records containing information on (suspected) child abuse will be handed over to authorities upon request.

## 2. Reporting abuse

### Roles and duties of team members

#### *Child Protection Lead and Co-lead*

These individuals take the main role in reacting and investigating child abuse concerns and allegations. They are responsible for integrating the child protection policy throughout the organisation and act as focal points for any request or concern on child safety.

The Child Protection Lead at WAVE is Stephanie Futter-Orel (Executive Manager). She can be contacted at [stephanie.futterorel@wave-network.org](mailto:stephanie.futterorel@wave-network.org).

The Child Protection Co-Lead at WAVE is Anca Ciupa (Team Leader). She can be contacted at [anca.ciupa@wave-network.org](mailto:anca.ciupa@wave-network.org).

#### *WAVE President and Vice-President*

The WAVE President and Vice-President support the Child Protection Lead and Co-Lead during any stage of the investigation procedure.

#### *WAVE team members, interns, contractors*

Have read, understood, and agreed to abide by the Child Protection Policy.

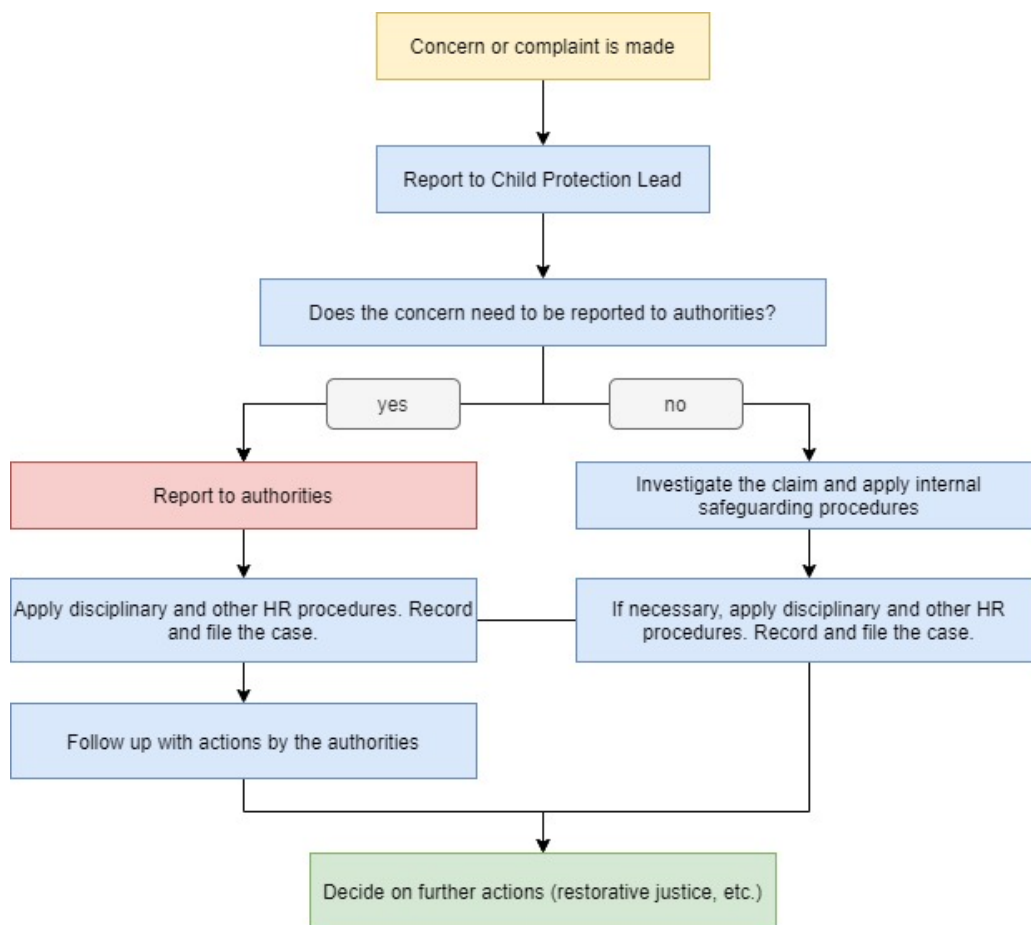
### Managing concerns or allegations

WAVE staff members, interns, and contractors are informed of their duties concerning child protection. Reporting of suspected child abuse is mandatory. Any suspected abuse has to be reported in written form to the Child Protection Lead. Should urgent action be required, reporting can also be submitted verbally.

The Child Protection Lead will treat all information confidentially. The case should not be discussed with anyone other than the involved parties. The Child Protection Lead will investigate the claim together with the WAVE President or Vice-President. Any action taken will be made in consideration of evidence and under the guideline of doing no harm. All actions will be taken with the child's best interest in mind and in consultation with relevant professionals.

Should urgent action be required, suspected child abuse will be reported directly to the authorities without going through the internal investigation process. The following decision tree maps out the step-by-step reporting and investigation process.

## Reporting process



## Implementation and review

### Publicising the policy:

- The WAVE team will ensure that all current staff members and interns are made aware of the child protection policy and the procedures it entails;
- A copy of the policy will be made available on WAVE's internal server and website;
- A copy of the child protection policy will be included in all contracts and service level agreements that WAVE has.

### Reviewing the policy:

- The policy will be continually updated and reviewed according to WAVE's shifting priorities and key strategic decisions;
- If changes in Austrian law pertaining to child protection in the NGO and charity sector are made, then this policy will be immediately adapted to reflect these changes;
- The policy will be reviewed once a year by the WAVE Executive Manager and WAVE Board, with input from the WAVE staff.

**This updated Child Protection Policy comes into effect after approval by WAVE and Executive Manager in May 2021.**

## Annex: Informed consent

I have read and understood this policy. I agree to abide by it at all times and to protect children that I may come in contact with through my work for the Women Against Violence Europe (WAVE) Network.

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Date

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Name and signature