

**POLICIES AND PROCEDURES
FOR THE SAFETY AND
PROTECTION OF CHILDREN of
ALTERNATIVE GIRLS' CENTER**



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Alternativni centar za devojke

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1. Introduction

The "Alternative Girls' Center" was established to promote and protect women's rights, young people, and marginalized groups, with a special focus on young women and girls to improve their position in society. Our mission is to enhance and protect women's/human rights through the empowerment and education of girls, young women, and youth, affirming feminist values, peace, youth, and cultural policies at local, national, and regional levels.

The main strategic goals of the AGC are:

1. Improving the overall position of girls and young women at the local, national, and regional levels
2. Strengthening the capacity of the women's movement at the local, national, and regional levels
3. Enhancing the work and efficiency of the organization

The values of the Alternative Girls' Center are based on feminist values and principles: solidarity, responsibility, confidentiality, respect for diversity, open communication, and transparency in work. We are committed to the continuous development and revision of our policies, practices, approaches, and programs to contribute to the development of a fair, equal, and open society in the best possible way.

The Child Safety and Protection Policy¹ of the Alternative Girls' Center adds value to the above-mentioned general values and principles. It serves as a binding guideline for all members of the Alternative Girls' Center, users, collaborators, consultants, partners, visitors, interns, volunteers, donors, and others who have contact with children through any activity or program of the AGC. The goal of creating the Child Safety and Protection Policy is to protect children from potential abuse.

The Child Safety and Protection Policy of the Alternative Girls' Center will contribute to the safety and security of children involved in the activities (programs, projects, and all types of events) carried out by the Association, as well as children impacted by the Association's human resources (members, users, collaborators, consultants, visitors, interns, volunteers, donors, and others).

Principles

The Child Safety and Protection Policy of the Alternative Girls' Center is based on the standards of Keeping Children Safe, the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the

¹ Children up to 18 years

Child, the Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on the Involvement of children in armed conflict, and the Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on the sale of children, child prostitution, and child pornography. Furthermore, the Child Safety and Protection Policy of the Alternative Girls' Center is created and aligned with the domestic legislation of the Republic of Serbia, the General Protocol for the Protection of Children from Abuse and Neglect², the Family Law, the Law on Social Protection, the Law on Financial Support to Families with Children, the Law on Health Protection, the Law on the Fundamentals of the Education System, the Law on Primary Education, and the Law on Secondary Education. In addition, the Child Safety and Protection Policy of the Alternative Girls' Center respects the work of the Council for Children's Rights of the Government of the Republic of Serbia³, the Committee for the Rights of the Child of the National Assembly of the Republic of Serbia⁴, as well as the independent advisory bodies of the Ombudsman⁵ and the Commissioner for Information of Public Importance and Personal Data Protection⁶. The Alternative Girls' Center will act following the aforementioned documents and will respect the mandate of all the above-mentioned institutions and independent bodies in cases of abuse and/or neglect of children.

The principles supported by the Child Safety and Protection Policy of the Alternative Girls' Center are:

- All children have equal rights to protection from abuse
- Everyone has a responsibility to support the protection of children
- Members of the Alternative Girls' Center, users, partners, collaborators, consultants, visitors, interns, volunteers, donors, and others who have contact with children through the AGC must care for the children they work with, come into contact with, and influence through their work and activities
- If members of the Alternative Girls' Center, users, partners, collaborators, consultants, visitors, interns, volunteers, donors, and others work with partner organisations, they have an obligation to help them create policies that ensure the safety and protection of children
- All activities related to child safety and protection are conducted in the best interests of the child

A. Definitions and Terms

What is child protection preservation?

The Alternative Girls' Center has a responsibility to ensure that members, users, partners, collaborators, consultants, visitors, interns, volunteers, donors, and others *do not harm* children, do not expose children to the risk of harm and abuse, and that any suspicion the

² www.minrzs.gov.rs

³ <http://www.savetzapravadeteta.gov.rs/>

⁴ <http://www.parlament.gov.rs/aktivnosti/narodna-skupstina/radna-tela/odbori,-pododbori,-radne-grupe.2384.html>

⁵ <https://www.ombudsman.rs/>

⁶ <https://www.poverenik.rs/st/>

organization has regarding the safety of children in the communities in which it operates is reported to the appropriate services.

'*Do no harm*' refers to the responsibility of the Alternative Girls' Center to 'do no harm' or minimize the harm that could occur by mistake as a result of inappropriate programs.

Definitions of Violations of Rights

Physical abuse: Ongoing or potential physical abuse inflicted by another person, adult, or child. It may include hitting, shaking, poisoning, drowning, or burning. Physical abuse can also occur when a parent or caregiver fabricates symptoms of illness or deliberately makes a child ill.

Sexual abuse: Forcing or encouraging a child to participate in sexual activities that they do not fully understand and have little choice in consenting to. This can include, but is not limited to, rape, oral sex, penetration, or non-penetrative acts such as masturbation, kissing, rubbing, and touching. It can also include forcing children to view explicit sexual images or create such images, as well as forcing children to watch sexual activities and encouraging children to behave in sexually inappropriate ways.

Child sexual exploitation: A form of sexual abuse where children are involved in any sexual activity in exchange for money, gifts, food, accommodation, affection, status, or anything else that is needed by them or their family. It usually involves manipulation and coercion of the child, which can include befriending children, gaining their trust, and subjecting them to drugs and alcohol.

Child sexual exploitation manifests in various ways. It can involve an older perpetrator exerting financial, emotional, and/or physical control over a young person. It can be a group of peers manipulating and coercing a victim into sexual activity. Furthermore, it can also involve organized networks of perpetrators profiting financially from trafficking young victims who are abused in sexual activities.

Neglect: In the context of resources and circumstances, neglect refers to the persistent failure to meet a child's basic physical and/or psychological needs, which can lead to

serious impairment of the child's health, or physical, spiritual, moral, and mental development. It includes failure to properly supervise and protect the child from harm, and failure to provide food, shelter, and safe living/working conditions. It can also include maternal neglect during pregnancy due to drug or alcohol abuse, as well as neglect and poor treatment of a child with disabilities.

Emotional abuse: Persistent emotional abuse that affects the child's emotional development. Emotional abuse includes restricting movement, humiliating, degrading, bullying (including cyberbullying), as well as threats, intimidation, discrimination, mocking, and other forms of hostile and rejecting behaviour that is not physical violence.

Child labour exploitation: Exploitation of a child in work or other activities that benefit others at the expense of the child's physical and mental health, education, moral, and socio-emotional development. It includes child labour but is not limited to it.

B. Scope

This policy applies to AGC Staff including members, users, partners, collaborators, consultants, visitors, interns, volunteers, donors, and others who have contact with children.

2. Prevention

The protection of children from abuse and the protection of children's rights will be implemented through the following steps:

A. Risk assessment/risk reduction

A risk assessment of all operational programs and project activities of the Alternative Girls' Center will be conducted. A risk reduction strategy will be developed to minimize risks to children and will be incorporated into the design, implementation, and evaluation of programs, operations, and activities involving or affecting children.

All interviews will include a discussion on the topic of child protection and organization's dedication to this subject, as well as understanding the topic from the clients side.

B. Safe recruitment procedures

The Alternative Girls' Center will ensure that all staff, consultants, and volunteers will be employed with clear job descriptions which include a Statement of Responsibility of said position or role to ensure that the terms of organization are upheld.

All interviews will include a discussion on the topic of child protection and organization's dedication to this subject, as well as understanding the topic from the clients side.

Alternative Girls' Center is in accordance with the **Control list for employment and selection process (Annex 2)**.

C. Code of Conduct

A Code of Conduct will be established and must be adhered to by all staff, members, users, partners, collaborators, consultants, visitors, interns, volunteers, donors, and others who are starting their partnership with Alternative Girls' Center. If the Code is violated or partially upheld, AGC will enforce certain measurements (section IV Reporting/Reacting to suspicious behaviour).

Alternative Girls' Center's policy on Security and protection of children and Code of Conduct is expected to be followed in the workplace and outside of it. This includes adopting the right approach and reporting suspicions related to child abuse in the workplace and outside of it.

Alternative Girls' Center **Code of Conduct** is attached in **Annex 3**.

D. Training and Education

Consultants, members, partners, collaborators, visitors, interns, volunteers, donors, and other parties will be introduced to the Security and Protection of Children policy and security measurements, as well as their responsibilities to uphold the procedures, as soon as they partner with AGC.

Staff members (including consultants, members, partners, collaborators, visitors, interns, volunteers, donors, and other parties) are obliged to go through training regarding child safety, which will help them understand why it is necessary to protect children, as well as get accustomed to the procedure of reporting suspicion regarding child abuse and neglect.

Staff members (including consultants, members, partners, collaborators, visitors, interns, volunteers, donors, and other parties) must be aware of members of the **AGC internal team for a policy on protection of children**, responsible for receiving a report or complaint, advise on risk assessment and risk prevention in accordance to Security and Protection of Children policy and procedure.

E. Creating a safe programme

AGC is dedicated to creating and implementing programmes in accordance with adopted **Policy and procedures for child safety and protection**.

F. Communication - usage of pictures and information of children

AGC will, at any moment, present the children in a polite, appropriate, responsible and agreed way. Our guidelines for using the pictures:

- The child must always be presented in a respectful way, with dignity, not in a way that shows it as submissive or vulnerable
- The children need to be dressed appropriately and cannot be in positions that might be sexually suggestive.
- The child and their family must always be asked for consent before the picture is used, and need to be made aware of the details about how and when will the picture be used. (**Annex 6 Consent form**)
- The pictures need to be true to context and facts
- When the pictures are being sent out online, the file cannot contain any information that can be used to identify someone
- The eligibility of all photos must be checked

When we use the information and visual materials, such as photographs or videos, it's our principle to maintain the respect and dignity of children, families and communities. For more information, **see Annex 7 - Communication Procedure.**

G. Social media

Social media policy is attached as **Annex**

H. Responsibilities

The policy and procedures for child safety and protection are accepted by the AGC Assembly. AGC Assembly confirmed the mandate of the internal team for the implementation of the policy and procedures for child safety and protection (Jelena Memet, Sandra Farkaš, Andrijana Kocić, Anita Pantelić).

The team for child protection is responsible for following the reporting procedure, accordingly responding to a report or suspicion of child abuse or breaking the policy and procedures for child safety and protection of the AGC.

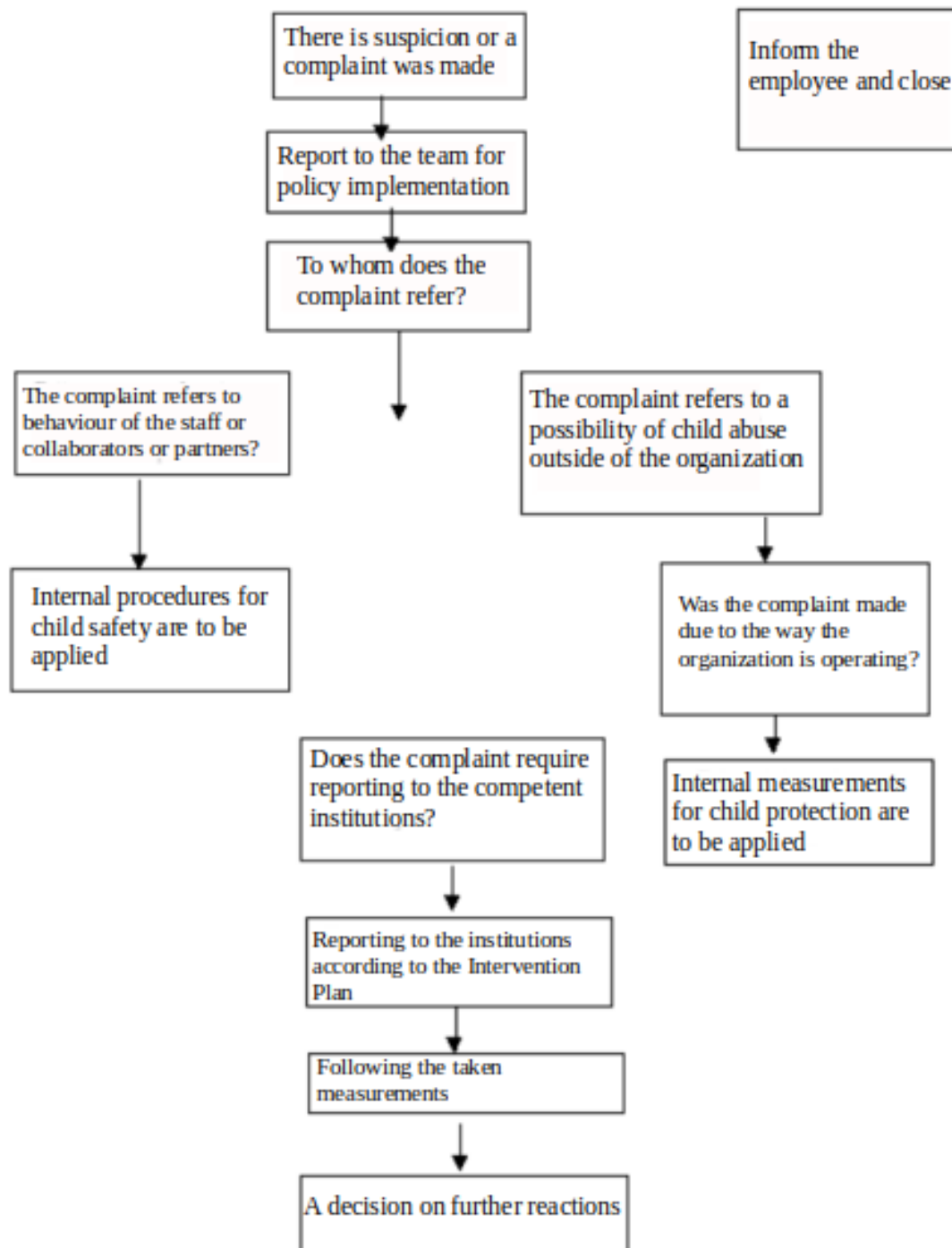
3. Partners

The contract with partner organizations will include a statement by which partner organizations that do not have a Child Protection Policy or accept the Child Safety and Protection Policy of AGC, or develop their own Child Protection Policy, as a condition for partnership.

4. Reporting and Responding to Child Protection Concerns

Staff members (including consultants, members, partners, collaborators, visitors, interns, volunteers, donors, and other parties) are obliged to report and suspicion of child abuse or neglect to the named members of the team for the implementation of the policy and procedures for child safety and protection.

The diagram on how to report is on the next page.



AGC will receive complaints from children with empathy and understanding and will strive not to re-traumatize the children during the complaint processing. If a child or young person tells you that they are or have been abused:

- Listen to and accept what the child or young person says, but do not demand further detailed information.
- Inform the child or young person of your next steps and keep them updated on what is happening.
- Do not investigate, inform, question, or confront the alleged perpetrator.
- Take the alleged abuse seriously.
- Carefully document everything you hear in the complaint form.

Every complaint will be treated seriously and confidentially. The priority will always be the safety and best interest of the child (see **Annex 8 Referral Form**).

Identifying information about children will only be shared on a need-to-know basis. Any staff member who suspects serious abuse and reports it will be protected from any victimization or detrimental treatment, provided that the suspicion is reported in good faith. Deliberate false accusations are a serious disciplinary offence and will be investigated as such.

The subject of the complaint (the alleged perpetrator) as well as all witnesses must fully and openly cooperate during internal and legally mandated investigative actions and hearings. Their privacy will be protected, and information about their identity will only be shared on a need-to-know basis.

Quick and appropriate responses will ensure that the situation does not recur and that all involved individuals are informed about the matter and the actions to be taken.

Complaints against a staff member will result in the suspension of the person from their position and the immediate initiation of an investigative procedure. If the accusation is of a criminal nature, it must be reported to the appropriate authorities before measures are taken and the alleged perpetrator is informed.

Internal investigations should be conducted by individuals with appropriate skills. Investigations should include interviews with all involved parties, including witnesses, to gather relevant details related to the complaint.

Appropriate disciplinary measures should be taken if the accusation is found to be true. If there is no basis for the complaint, appropriate steps should be taken to minimize damage to the reputation of the accused person.

Internal investigations related to criminal accusations should be reviewed with formal authorities before being conducted so that the organization does not jeopardize the official investigation.

Support and counselling should be provided to all involved in the complaint and response process. AGC has a list of organizations and professionals who can be quickly contacted to support the process of reporting and responding to suspicions (**Annex 5**).

5. Follow-ups and revisions

The team for child protection policy, alongside with employees, will monitor and revise the policy and procedures every three years. The policy will be reviewed and agreed upon by Assembly every three years.

Name of the document	Date	Revision	Changes	Person