SafeShelter Guide

Child Safeguarding in Women's Shelters

www.efjca.eu/safe-shelters

The SafeShelter Guide draws on a needs analysis performed at the start of the project via interviews conducted with 41 children and 60 mothers temporarily residing in shelters as well as 89 staff working in women's shelters. These key target groups were asked about how they perceive child safeguarding and what recommendations they have for improving it in shelters. The Guide is aligned with European and international legally binding instruments as well as relevant Council of Europe policies, recommendations and guidelines, including the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC), 1989; the Convention for the Protection of Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms (ECHR), ETS No. 5, 1950; the Council of Europe Convention on preventing and combating violence against women and domestic violence (Istanbul Convention), CETS No. 210, 2011; and the Council of Europe Strategy for the Rights of the Child (2016–2021).

The target group of this Guide are all women's shelter staff who have children residing in the shelter, as well as all professionals and agencies they work with in order to safeguard children. The Guide includes research and experience drawn from the SafeShelter project and incorporates feedback from children, their mothers residing in shelters in 6 EU countries involved in the project activities, in addition to staff working in the shelters.

The photos in the Guide are purchased and persons depicted are not associated with the topic of child safeguarding.

Two Advisory Board members also provided their expertise in the writing of the Guide. Vijay Baskar is Senior Child Safeguarding Adviser at Keeping Children Safe, an independent not-for-profit created to develop internationally recognized child safeguarding standards to ensure that all organizations working directly for and with children have comprehensive safeguarding measures in place. Medina Johnson is CEO of IRISi, a social enterprise established to promote and improve the healthcare response to gender-based violence (irisi.org).

The Guide also includes open source content freely available from Keeping Children Safe: keepingchildrensafe.global.

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Table of Contents

Part I. Introduction

Who is the SafeShelter Guide for?

The SafeShelter Guide has been developed to assist staff of women's shelters who offer (crisis) care to female victims of gender-based violence and their children. The Guide is directed to these professionals and the collaborating services and agencies they work with, who are committed to keeping children in their shelters safe and protect them from all forms of violence.

Purpose of the SafeShelter Guide

This is a reference document that readers can use when they need guidance on various aspects of child safeguarding in women's shelters, with the best interests of the child as the focus. The shelter staff can use the guide to support with developing and using their child safeguarding policy to improve the wellbeing of children in their care. This is best practice in all shelters.

The Guide is divided into different sections based on the topics discussed, so readers can directly go to specific sections that are relevant. It is drafted in a way that its provisions apply equally to protecting both girls and boys who may experience or witness any form of violence and thus be in need of support.

Key terms and facts

Child: For the purposes of this guide, the definition of a child, based on Article 1 of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child is any person below the age of eighteen years. Children are independent legal entities and can independently exercise the rights to which they are entitled.

Child safeguarding: take appropriate measures to ensure that staff, experts, contracted third parties, operations, projects and programmes do not harm children, meaning protect children from violence and promote their best interest. This means that children's exposure to violence is minimized and any concerns about children's safety are reported to the appropriate authorities and appropriate support is provided for the children involved. Furthermore, safeguarding also refers to strengthening children's resilience in the face of risky or violent situations.

Violence against children: all forms of violence against persons under 18 years of age perpetrated by parents or other caregivers, peers or strangers. It can include physical, sexual and emotional violence and neglect as well as witnessing violence. Children temporarily living in shelters are often victims of gender-based violence within domestic or family violence.

Facts on violence to children from the WHO Global status report on preventing violence against children 2020:
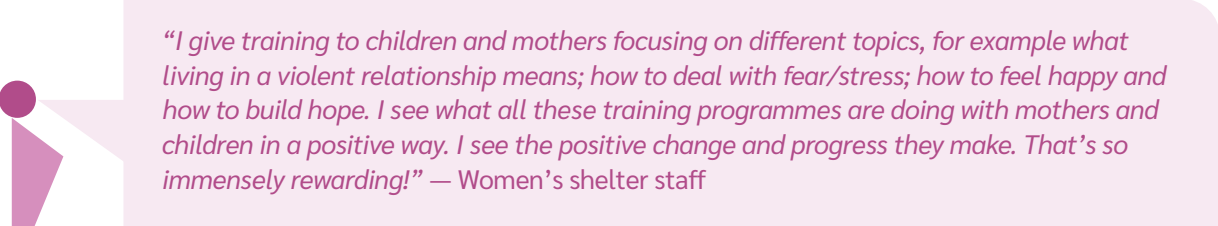
- 1 out of 2 children between the ages of 2 and 17 years suffer some form of violence each year worldwide, resulting in deaths, disabilities and trauma

- 1 in 4 children under 5 years of age worldwide live with a mother who is a victim of intimate partner violence

- Violence against children has many acute and long-term consequences: increased risk of mental illness and anxiety disorders, high-risk behaviours, chronic diseases and social problems including problems in school and risk of being involved in acts of violence and crime

Convention on Preventing and Combating Violence Against Women and Domestic Violence (Istanbul Convention) calls for measures protecting women and children from all forms of violence, in particular domestic violence of all forms of expression, to be implemented and observed by all authorities.

- Articles 22 and 26 call for specialized support for children in shelters based on their needs, including age-appropriate psycho-social counselling and respect for the best interests of the child.

- Article 23 calls for all Member States to take the necessary legislative or other measures to provide for the setting-up of appropriate, easily accessible shelters in sufficient numbers to provide safe accommodation for and to reach out pro-actively to victims, especially women and their children.

- Article 31 calls for Parties to take the necessary legislative or other measures to ensure that the exercise of any visitation or custody rights does not jeopardise the rights and safety of the victim or children.

Supportive role of shelter staff towards children

Shelter staff are able to play a crucial role in keeping children and their mothers residing in shelters safe as well as providing them with a feeling of safety.

"I give training to children and mothers focusing on different topics, for example what living in a violent relationship means; how to deal with fear/stress; how to feel happy and how to build hope. I see what all these training programmes are doing with mothers and children in a positive way. I see the positive change and progress they make. That's so immensely rewarding!" — Women's shelter staff

The concept of safety in women's shelters refers to:

- The safety of women and their children but also of staff and other residents of the shelter

- Children can be bystanders (witnesses) of violence against others and/or direct victims of violence themselves; at the same time however, they can also be perpetrators of violence against other residents, children or shelter staff

- A distinction between internal and external safety: external safety is more likely to be achieved through "hard" measures such as an anonymous or secret women's shelter address, camera surveillance, fences and child protection guidelines; internal safety is more likely achieved through "soft" measures such as staff providing a sense of safety, good interactions between children, mothers and women's staff, providing resources to improve feelings of safety and well-being and support for mothers to be able to care for their children safely

- Safety in terms of hard measures (such as anonymous or secret address, camera surveillance and a child safeguarding policy) and soft measures (staff providing feelings of safety or security to children, interaction between children and shelter staff to improve feelings of safety and wellbeing, support for mothers to provide safe and secure care to their children)

- The best interests of the child are always the starting point and focus, even if this is at odds with the wishes of the child's caregivers

Shelter staff have the knowledge and skills to:

☐ Provide children with a high level of physical safety and feeling of safety

☐ Understand how safety risks can happen to children by a father, mother, relative, friend or professional

☐ Understand the effects of violence/trauma in children and their relationships with mothers and fathers and how to help them overcome/reduce these effects

☐ Provide educational, preventive and interventional activities aimed at keeping children safe

☐ Support mothers to do the above

Learning objectives of the Guide

☐ Describe what child safeguarding is and why it is important in shelter settings

☐ Define risks to keeping children safe in shelters and measures to reduce these risks

☐ Understand the usefulness of child safeguarding policies for shelters and necessary components of a policy

Part II. Child safeguarding issues in shelters and recommendations

Why focus on child safeguarding in shelters?

Child safeguarding aims to protect children from violence and promote their best interest. It also refers to strengthening children's resilience in the face of risky or violent situations.

The figure below shows the different ways staff ensure the safeguarding of children: by being aware, by preventing any safety risks from occurring, by responding to any risks that do occur, and by reporting incidents in order to provide the best possible treatment care and to understand how to prevent the incident from happening again.

Child Safeguarding has four main parts that when put in place together create a child safe organisation:

AWARENESS   PREVENTION

CHILD SAFEGUARDING

REPORTING   RESPONDING

Source: Oxfam Australia Child Safeguarding Toolkit – A Practical Guide to support the implementation of the Oxfam Australia Child Safeguarding Policy
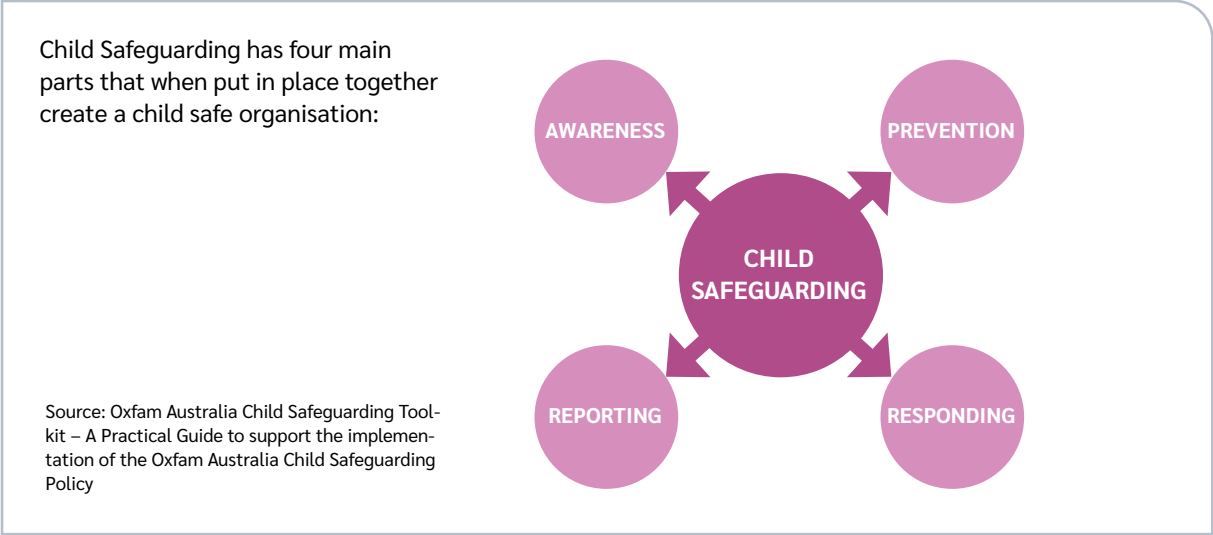
Child safeguarding includes both preventive actions to minimize the risks of violence occurring, and responsive actions to ensure that incidents which may happen are appropriately handled. This includes proactive measures that are put in place to ensure children residing in the shelter are safe. It is important to distinguish between *child safeguarding* and *child protection*, as often these terms are used to cover both areas and can be misleading.

> **Child protection** in the international context describes the work being undertaken to strengthen laws, policies and systems, which are designed to protect children in a given country in his or her own family and community.

Two guiding principles of child safeguarding

Principle 1: Protect children from all forms of violence

- All children have equal rights to protection from violence, irrespective of their age, ethnicity, gender, religion or sexuality

- Every staff person has a responsibility to support the protection of children

- Organisations have a duty of care to children with whom they work, are in contact with or who are affected by their work and operations

- Shelters have a responsibility to help their partners meet the minimum requirements on child protection and to strive to achieve best practice

- All actions on child safeguarding are taken in the best interests of the child, which are paramount

Principle 2: Respect children's rights
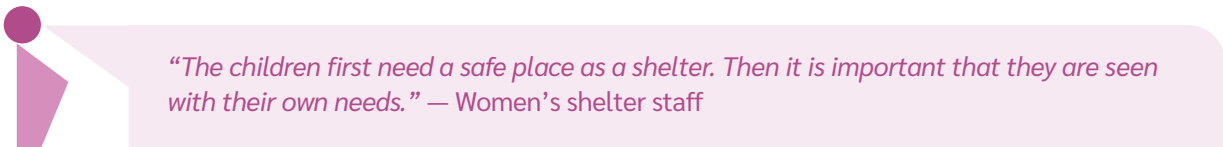
- Respect the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (Article 19.1) for Parties to take all appropriate legislative, administrative, social and educational measures to protect the child from all forms of physical or mental violence, injury or abuse, neglect or negligent treatment, maltreatment or exploitation, including sexual abuse, while in the care of parent(s), legal guardian(s) or any other person who has the care of the child. And promote its four core principles:
  - ✓ **Non-discrimination**
  - ✓ **The best interest of the child**
  - ✓ **The right to life, survival and development**
  - ✓ **Respect for the views of the child**

This translates into treating all children as individuals and according to their unique needs and identities, no matter their origin, appearance or convictions. Shelter staff working with children show respect for the child and the child-like perspective; they listen to children attentively and treat their statements, as well as their version of events, with due respect; they use non-judgmental language, no labels, express themselves in a way adapted to the child's level of development.

Shelter staff also create within the shelter a culture of openness and mutual responsibility, facilitating discussion of numerous topics and issues regarding child safety.

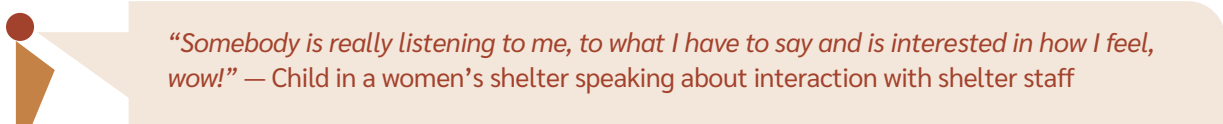## Recommendations for child safeguarding and responding to risks in shelters

Shelter professionals from the different countries involved in the SafeShelter project agreed that the first and foremost need of children at the shelters is the feeling and knowledge that they are safe, because they have just lost their homes, which is, in itself, a very stressful situation.

> *"The children first need a safe place as a shelter. Then it is important that they are seen with their own needs."* — Women's shelter staff

Another important need when arriving at the shelter is that of information, given that many children do not get any adequate explanation of what has happened and where they are now and why. Depending on their age children might know that they are in a "shelter" but often the term is very abstract for them, without concrete meaning. The children, depending on their age, need transparency and a clear explanation of the situation which ideally should be given by the mother. Often mothers are overwhelmed, struggle to find adequate wording and need help with an age-appropriate explanation. To prepare the explanation to the child it is helpful to explore with the mother what she was able to explain and with the children if they know why they are there and what their emotional state is.

> *"Somebody is really listening to me, to what I have to say and is interested in how I feel, wow!"* — Child in a women's shelter speaking about interaction with shelter staff

Consequently, children need time to adjust to the new situation, to calm down and settle as peacefully as possible. Children need to be shown the new environment (often a new city) and the shelter and its rooms and rules, the new school, etc. They need to get used to many new people. Possible changes in mood that the child may experience due to these changes should be explained to the mother who sometimes has the perception that children were quieter at home and seem "more difficult" now.
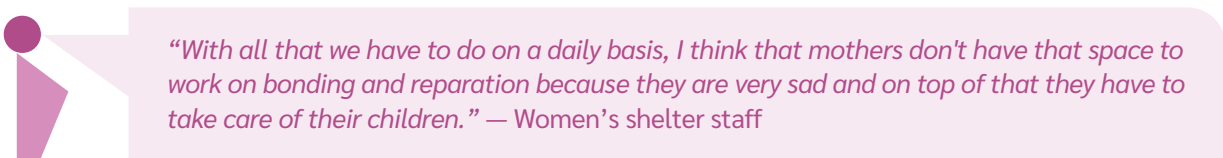
Shelter staff find ways to facilitate safety experiences for children arriving at shelters using different techniques and perspectives: narratives, psycho-corporal (calm breathing, body and autonomic nervous system), stories, art-therapy, etc. These help children with their integration of the new shelter experience.

There is also awareness that all professionals in the shelter participate in the co-creation of a space for emotional co-regulation and for stability. These are basic needs for children in shelters. Stability refers to temporal stability (possibility of a longer-term stay), stable structures (day plan, routines and rituals, clear rules) and stable relationships with caregivers/staff.

Regarding the latter, there is a clear consensus that **children would benefit from having a shelter staff assigned to their individual case**; someone who is there for them, listens to them and looks after their wellbeing.

Also, most children who are in shelters need **specialized support by specifically trained professionals** for different needs such as:

- Recovery from the consequences of violence through a specialized therapeutic space (individual and or group) with an emphasis on the identification and expression of their emotions

> *"With all that we have to do on a daily basis, I think that mothers don't have that space to work on bonding and reparation because they are very sad and on top of that they have to take care of their children."* — Women's shelter staff

- Support in their education is needed, from help with homework to speech therapy, psycho-pedagogy, and coordination with teachers/schools (who often need to be trained or informed about the effects of GBV on children and their school performance), etc. The violence children have experienced often has a great impact on their educational attainment and many are behind in school, which can lead to problems of self-esteem and affect their emotional and intellectual stability

- Psychotherapy or psychological support for specific issues (for example bedwetting, difficulty in bonding, low tolerance to frustration and aggressive behaviour, eating disorders, self-harming behaviour)

"We have had cases in which an adolescent victim of sexual abuse has had to wait for a year on a waiting list to be seen by the external psychology service to which we referred her because we do not have a child and youth psychologist." — Women's shelter staff

A highly important need for practically all children is, of course, that of social contact with peers, both inside the shelter with others who've had similar experiences (of violence) as they have and outside the shelter, with friends and classmates.

For some children who worry about their father there is a need for support in dealing with these concerns and to find a more or less comfortable position towards him. While they see that their mother is safe, they might worry about their father, especially if the police intervened, if the father went into custody or if they left without saying goodbye to him, etc. They may also worry about having to have contact with and see their father again.

"What's needed for the children? Strengthening, strengthening, strengthening!" — Women's shelter staff

A number of safeguarding issues may arise for children while residing in a shelter, upon arrival or during the shelter stay. These can take place within the shelter or outside of the shelter.

The first and most complex safety issue is contact with their fathers and the perpetrators of violence.

This can happen when the father tries to access the shelter or the children when they are outside the shelter. It happens again and again that perpetrators of violence want to gain access to the shelter ringing the doorbell or walking or driving up and down the street and this can create fear and anxiety in children. Or they suddenly approach the children on their way to school without prior notice, appearing at the soccer field or in front of the school.

"Once there was an alarm, there was another child's father outside the shelter trying to get in. That frightened me." — Child residing in women's shelter
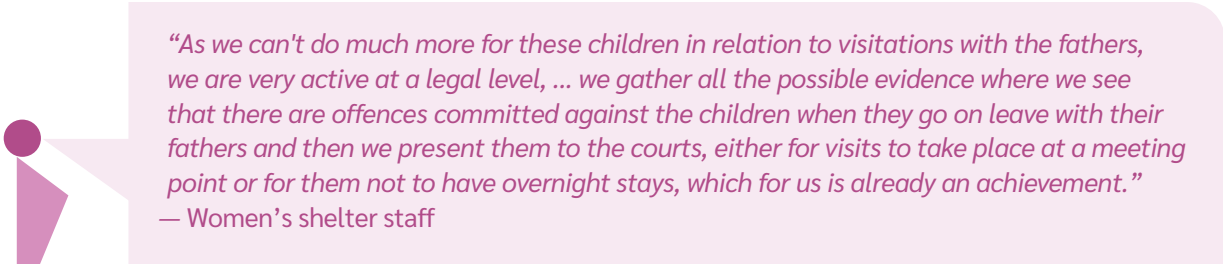
Restraining orders issued by the court only for mothers are a major problem in practice. The father is not allowed to approach the mothers, but this does not always apply to the children. A similar situation can occur during legally established visitations, during which children might be in real physical danger, and also their emotional safety is often threatened in many ways. Children are often very ambivalent and/or don't dare to say what they really want due to the pressure they feel themselves and/or feel from the wider family.

Recommendation for contact with fathers

Shelter staff have developed a series of strategies to protect children, such as developing self-protection skills, learning to set limits, asking for help, suggesting spaces for exchange with the father. Some shelters assign a specific staff person for each mother and her children, and house meetings are held for women to discuss safety issues at the shelter. Some shelter staff proactively ask for safety issues in individual conversations or informal groups at the shelter, while others offer workshops on safety issues with trainers from outside the shelter, for example conflict resolution, non-violent communication and self-defence.

Other measures include:

- Supportive talks with children and mothers are also seen as important here. Shelter staff from France reported that they prepare support cards for children's visitations with their fathers, where it is indicated who to call in case of danger (usually the mother, the educator and the police).

- Supporting legal measures for suspending visitation rights or supervised visitations if risk is assessed. Ongoing cooperation with the institutions and persons involved in the procedure of visitation is essential. In one of the shelters, staff collect "problematic issues" about the perpetrator to present them to the courts.

> *"As we can't do much more for these children in relation to visitations with the fathers, we are very active at a legal level, … we gather all the possible evidence where we see that there are offences committed against the children when they go on leave with their fathers and then we present them to the courts, either for visits to take place at a meeting point or for them not to have overnight stays, which for us is already an achievement."*
> — Women's shelter staff

There is also the "**conflict of protection or safety**" that children can find themselves immersed in when visiting their father, especially in connection with custody arrangements and pandemic restrictions. Fathers may ask the children questions like, "What did your mother do last night?" What would be a conflict of loyalty between telling the truth and not answering or lying in a normal divorce, in cases of gender-based violence turns into a conflict of protection or safety since telling the truth can put their mother at risk and not answering or lying might put the children in danger.

Another related issue is that of **hiding the address** of the shelter, which the father will try to find out by using different strategies, such as asking questions to locate the shelter: is there a supermarket, is there a park next door? Grandparents and other relatives might put pressure on children too, and there is a risk of disclosure, especially by younger children. But older ones trying to avoid the subject or to lie might also break down and give information, feeling very guilty towards their mother and huge anxiety.

> **Article 31** of the Istanbul Convention clearly establishes that violence against the non-abusive carer or the child will always need to be factored into decisions on the exercise of parental rights and that the exercise of visitation or custody rights should never jeopardize the safety of the victims or that of their children.

Another safety issue is access to the shelter entrances: although shelters take safety measures for doors to be closed at all times and make them difficult for children to open, this doesn't always work and older children might answer the door to a father trying to access the shelter without permission, or a woman forgets to close an entrance door properly and non-residents enter without permission.

Online security: the internet, mobile phones, social media and virtual games

Some children play virtual games far beyond their age and mothers mostly don't know about this or are unfamiliar with the technologies and the risks implied. Also, perpetrators installing stalker ware or other tracking tools in the mothers' or the children's phones or computers is a known problem and cyberstalking, attacks or unwanted contact through social media are other problems. Video calls with the fathers might inadvertently give them clues on the location of the shelter. Another issue stated by a mother was a tracking device mounted on her car.

> *"My husband has always stood in front of the women's shelter, has always known where I am. We then found out that he had attached a tracking device to the car."*
> — Mother residing in women's shelter

Recommendation to improve safety of online security

In many shelters, especially in Austria and Germany, women and children are asked to change their SIM cards for safety reasons and to use the WIFI as rarely as possible. Other shelters advise them to remove the geo-location system from their phone, stop social networks and not identify the area where they are.

- Social workers do prevention and awareness raising with teenagers on when and how to use the phone or the laptop and for cyber issues in general. They also advise mothers on the use of parental controls on mobiles and/or tablets

- Shelter staff advise the mother to choose a single communication channel for communication with the father of the children, for example a dedicated email used only for communication with him, and to consult that mailbox at a fixed time

- Shelter staff help prepare children for telephone contact with the father to ensure the location of the shelter is not provided by the child to the father

- Some shelters equip the children with an "emergency case" for when they go back to the fathers after their stay in the shelter (telephone numbers and contact persons). Most shelters try to stay in contact with mothers and children

Acts of aggression within the shelter amongst the residents

Mothers and staff have reported cases of aggression between residents in the shelter, usually taking place when no staff are present:

- Children being physically and verbally aggressive with each other, partly as a consequence of the violence they have suffered

- Physical and psychological violence from mothers towards their own children, due to the high tension related to the stressful situation of leaving the home, often occurs in moments of demands on behalf of the children to which mothers react impatiently and (verbally) aggressive

- Violence carried out by children against their mother, for example verbal abuse from older children who accuse the mother of wanting to destroy the family or the father

Recommendation for age-appropriate psychological care for children

The work on the **identification and regulation of emotions** is essential. This involves providing specialized services that are age-appropriate and tailored to the child.

When working with children in shelters, psychological care entails:

- Giving the child time to talk and for the professional to have time to understand the situation from the child's perspective

- Creating one-on-one opportunities for the children to disclose the violence they are experiencing or are bystanders of

- Emphasizing that the violence is not the child's fault and ensure the child understands it is not her/his responsibility to protect her/his mother, whilst validating the child's concern and any action he/she may have taken to protect her/his mother

- Checking with the child whether he/she knows what to do to keep safe and has a network of adults who he/she trusts. If not, work on this with him/her or ensure that any work done with the child by other practitioners includes safety planning

- Recognizing that children will have developed their own coping strategies to deal with the impact of violence and abuse

- Never promising complete confidentiality – explain responsibilities towards keeping children and their mothers safe

- Always keeping the child informed of what is happening, with age-appropriate information

- Giving the message that the child can come back to you again

Good practice example of an interaction between a shelter staff and a child

Shelter staff: Do you feel tension in your throat, in your belly, in your neck? Is it associated with an emotion – especially sadness, anger, fear and so on?

For example, if the child talks about fear, the shelter staff says: show me the size of the fear with plasticine. So, he or she makes a representation of his or her fear in plasticine. Does fear have this size all the time? Is it sometimes bigger or smaller? The staff person then sees how the emotion varies in intensity depending on the situations in which the child finds herself/himself. The staff person can also ask the child to show an emotion physically as some children won't show emotion when there is a protection issue, that is, they don't want to hurt their mother or upset their father.

Different emotions are worked on at all ages: fear, anger, sadness, shame or joy. Some children are in post-traumatic stress which cuts them off from their emotions. A staff person sees progress when children are able to identify their emotions or express them without harming themselves or others. Otherwise children tend to manage anger by being violent. A shelter staff can explain that there are differences between anger and violence and can offer other ways of regulating emotions, such as sports, gardening, creativity or therapy with animals.

Different materials and tools are used to work on safety and emotions with children residing in shelters, tools that allow them to express their emotions correctly and to welcome them. This can include educational toys, but also self-made tools like "reassuring charms" such as beads, magnets, protective bracelets, for example on a fabric bracelet – it is a bracelet that they always keep on them and which means "I am no longer alone." Some children report that they feel very lonely, not being able to help their mother or their brothers and sisters against the violence. Shelter staff are able to give them a sense of security.

Children's fears or worries for their mother's safety, abstract fears for their own safety

Children residing in shelters report worrying about their mother's safety, especially when a father tried to enter the shelter or a father was threatening the mother. This worry lasts even when not directly at the shelter.

> *"Although the dangerous situation has long since passed and we no longer live in the women's shelter and my father is no longer a real danger, I am still afraid for my mother."*
> — Child formerly residing in women's shelter

Children also get anxious when their mothers are sick, are depressed or have financial problems. This is often closely related to the fact that most children in shelters have great **abstract fears**. They are never safe from what they have experienced. The fear is always there: the home is gone; the father is gone and the fear of losing the mother as well, is very strong. Many children are traumatized and need special care (trauma-therapy) to regain their health and inner safety. Children also worry when their mothers are attacked by other mothers in the shelter, which increases the feeling of insecurity and fear because the attacker resides inside the house.

Additionally, some mothers commented that "if we are calm inside the house, our children will be calm too", which reduces interpersonal conflicts.

Recommendations for providing children with a feeling of safety

Each child upon entering the shelter should be seen for an individual interview by an experienced shelter staff member, in a confidential surrounding. The goal is to consider her/his status as a victim/survivor. This interview may include:

- Welcoming the child and explaining why it is important for the child to be in the shelter.

- Underlining and affirming that any form of violence is wrong.

- Supporting the children to understand that they are not responsible for the violence. Shelter staff can help them see the role of each individual within a family, in order to free them from guilt.

Good practice example of a Framework of Standards for Children in Women's Shelters

The framework of standards for children in care in women's shelters in the Netherlands consists of a set of four specific indicators with corresponding standards for children. These standards describe a minimum set of requirements for all women's shelters in the country. The starting point for these indicators is a commitment by women's shelters to contribute to the high-quality care for children in shelters. Here the four indicators are highlighted:

Indicator 1: Establish and ensure acute safety of the child

The main objective of the shelter is to offer a safe environment. Safety is therefore primary; work on recovery can only take place once safety has been achieved. For this reason, the purpose of this first indicator is to determine whether shelters are objectively and uniformly assessing the safety of the children involved using some form of a risk assessment tool. Various tools are used in the sector to determine whether residents are dependent on reception outside their own region for safety reasons. The most frequently used instrument in the Netherlands is Verwey Jonker's risk assessment tool, in Dutch only, sometimes used partially and/or supplemented with shelter specific questions.

Indicator 2: Ensuring risk-based care

Once immediate safety is achieved, work can begin on long-term safety. The purpose of this indicator is to determine whether shelters work on stable safety by means of risk-driven care. In risk-based care, care workers use a care plan based on the risk factors that maintain insecurity. This maps out triggers that lead to violence as well as making agreements on how to prevent such situations from occurring. Risk-based care is the basis of any assistance process and work towards full recovery.

Indicator 3: Ensuring recovery and future-oriented care

The purpose of this indicator is to determine how shelters work on the sustainable development and recovery of the child, so that they are equipped for the future after the reception situation. Recovery and future-oriented care include trauma treatment where necessary, working on the social emotional development of the child as well as ensuring normalization in the living situation and thus picking up normal life. This indicator is focused on the future. The best interests of the child are always the starting point, even if this is at odds with the wishes of the child's father and/or mother.

Indicator 4: Cooperation in the child care chain

With this indicator, the shelter shows that there are agreements with external organizations to ensure the safety and recovery of the child beyond the shelter stay.

For more information read the **full report with standards for each indicator** (Dutch language only): Eindrapport Ontwikkeling Normenkader 'Kinderen in de opvang' vrouwenopvang en maatschappelijke opvang (Final Report Development of standards Framework for children in care of women's shelter and social care, 2019).

Children's and mother's recommendations for increasing child wellbeing in shelters

"The Istanbul Convention not only recognises children as victims of violence, it also entrusts them with great responsibility as agents of change. Today's girls are tomorrow's women just as today's boys are tomorrow's men. Attitudes, convictions and behavioural patterns are shaped very early on in life. To break the continuity of gender-based violence, the Istanbul Convention places great emphasis on the importance of changing mentalities, attitudes and gender relations. It therefore requires states parties to teach children the concept of equality between women and men, non-stereotyped gender roles and non-violent conflict resolution in interpersonal relationships (Article 14). Building gender relations on mutual respect and recognition rather than dominance and control is the best way to prevent gender-based violence."

Source: Council of Europe. Children's rights (Istanbul Convention): safe from fear, safe from violence, 2019.

The SafeShelter project interviewed children and women residing in shelters in 6 different EU countries, Austria, Belgium, France, Germany, Spain and the Netherlands to improve understanding of how they experienced life in the shelter and perceptions of safety, including interactions in the shelter.

"I just felt very happy and safe there (at the shelter)." — 14-year-old former shelter resident

About the quotes in the Guide

Generally, feedback from children and mothers interviewed in the needs analysis in all the partner countries was overwhelmingly positive: most children felt very safe in the shelter and both children and mothers highly appreciated the work of shelter staff to keep them safe, care for them and support them.

Since the main goal of the SafeShelter project and Guide is to support shelters to further improve their child safeguarding policies and practices, most of the quotes from children and mothers in this text have been chosen to illustrate those safeguarding issues still to be addressed or improved. Similarly, as quotes are from children and mothers interviewed in 5 different countries, some of them might not be representative of or apply to the situation in shelters in other countries.

"They (staff) were always there and always did their very best it was really good!" — 17-year-old former shelter resident

Feedback from children about safeguarding in shelters

Most children interviewed in the SafeShelter project would appreciate more attention and talking about their situation, especially the older ones over 12 years old. And although most of the children said that staff asked about their wellbeing often enough, some would like to be asked more often.

Other suggestions included:

- **To organize meetings and activities under the guidance of a counsellor for children and teenagers in the shelter, separated by age groups**

"Organized meetings for children and young people would have been great. Meetings with each other were only on their own initiative." — Child

"We could do more activities together, but according to age because sometimes activities can't be done all together, there are things that I don't feel like doing as if I were child because I'm an adolescent." — Child, Spain

- **Psychological and therapy offers (specialized child and youth psychologist)**

"I would have liked to do therapy, but that was not possible." — Child

- **More free time and creative offers, including outside activities and excursions**

"It would have been nice to be able to do something artistic, but unfortunately that wasn't possible." — Child

- Allow pets in the shelter
- More focus on older children/teenagers: more books, films, plays for older children at the shelter, more (outside) activities offered for them, more "special time" to talk to staff, a room where they can chat, talk, read or play alone or with one another, without smaller children or adults present
- To have male workers in the shelter

> *"It's all very good, but it would be nice if there were men in the house too, not always just women."* — Child

- To have more time with the supervisor or contact worker/to have more resources available by staff working with children

> *"More time just for me, with my supervisor."* — Child

> *"The male recreational pedagogue should be there much more often."* — Child

- Contact with male family members who were not showing any violent behaviour

> *"As a child, I didn't understand at all why my grandfather and uncle weren't allowed to visit. That made me even more afraid of men, because they were men with whom I got along very well. Why weren't they welcome here? Were they bad, too? I desperately needed someone to explain all this to me."* — Child

- More physical and mental distance from close family

> *"Distance from the mother and siblings would have been so important."* — Child

- Clear communication and explanation of the situation to the children

> *"Clarity would have been so important for me. Suddenly everything was different, and I didn't know where we were. My mother was so burdened, I didn't want to burden her with my things."* — Child

- Permission to decorate the rooms

> *"We would like them to let us decorate the rooms because it makes it feel more like our own, like we are at home."* — Child

- Promote activities just for mothers to encourage integration

> *"I think our mothers should do activities together so that they get along better with each other."* — Child

Feedback from mothers residing in shelters with their children about child safeguarding

- Provide rooms for families who want/need to be in separate dormitories and for those who need to be in the same room, especially those with younger children or with eating disorders, for example, and for longer stays

- A friendlier and brighter design of the rooms, also by the children themselves

- Gardens are seen as very important, but very good security measures are needed

- Child and adolescent psychologist specialized in gender-based violence

- Different therapeutic and recreative offers for children such as sensual perception as a way out of depressive moods, body therapy, dance classes, movement, artistic expression and yoga

- More outside activities for their children, also visiting cultural events or museums. More activities inside and outside during school holidays and during the weekend are wanted too

- Improving security measures for the journey to school and times spent outside the shelter

- Group activities taking into account the age of the children, as there are often activities for children between 8 and 12 years old. These activities could be pottery, group games, playground activities, water activities in the summer, putting a pool in the playground perhaps for the youngest children, storytelling. Also, specific activities for teenagers

- Organized meetings for the children in the house

- Shelter staff should aspire to strengthen mothers in their abilities to care for children and household – they also think that sometimes a bit more regulation and control might be needed

- Translators. Some of the migrant mothers are not fluent in the local language and do not have an interpreter/translator at the shelter, which makes it difficult for them to communicate. Although they have access to this service, they would like to have it more frequently and more easily

> *"As a Pakistani woman, I have problems with the language and before it was very difficult for me to be understood. Now I speak a little better, but I would have preferred to have a translator in the shelter."* — Mother

- Babysitting services. To have professionals working in the home who are dedicated to the care of children, especially so that mothers can have their space as women who are affected by violence. Likewise, to allow them greater autonomy at work and not have to miss out on job offers because they do not have support networks to take care of their children.

- Housing assistance. Receive financial assistance or have access to social flats to rent and leave the shelter. They believe that they spend too much time in the shelter and when it is time for them to leave, they have difficulty finding apartments or cannot access housing due to the type of contracts they have or the salaries, that are usually very low, and they end up being excluded from the rental process.

> *"It is a wheel that is very difficult to get out of because we came here to protect ourselves from the violence we have experienced, but then we don't have many options for work. The jobs we usually get are on not official and we don't have a contract, so when we go to rent a flat we are not candidates because we don't have a salary or because the salary is not enough or because we are in an irregular situation. I think they should help us to get out of here because we don't want to stay in these shelters all our lives either."* — Mother

- Follow-up. Having a social worker follow up on each mother's case. Some of the mothers complained about staying a long time in the home, while other mothers who were admitted after them had access to flats in less time. They explained that this made them angry and uncertain and, in this sense, they asked that the person doing the follow-up should explain the exclusion criteria for living in a flat.

"I think it is important for someone from outside to come and talk to us and explain why some of us don't have a flat and remain in the shelter and others who arrive later do go to a flat, and when they come they should bring a translator because sometimes we don't understand everything. You are the first one to come from outside to ask me how I am in this house." — Mother

- **Psychotherapeutic spaces for mothers.** To have therapeutic spaces to address issues of motherhood for a woman who has been a victim of violence and the recovery of the mother-child bond.

"Sometimes I feel that we don't have space for ourselves alone, we always have to be with our children and I understand that, but I need a moment with myself and I can't have that in this house." — Mother

- **Connectivity.** Extend the range of the WIFI, as it only covers a small part of the house, so the children tend to be in the staircase area (ground floor) looking at their mobile or tablet to do their homework or look at social networks as this is the place with the most connectivity.

"The WIFI is something that is important to look at because nowadays everything is on the internet and in this house the WIFI does not reach us in the bedrooms. Where there is more coverage is on the ground floor and that is why they are all there on the stairs, looking at their mobile or doing their homework. I am hiring WIFI for me and my children, but it is something that the house should improve." — Mother

- **Common space.** To create comfortable space for residents to spend time together, for example a large TV in the common area for watching films and a large sofa where more people can sit.

- **Avoiding multiple changes of shelters within the circuit.** Mothers in a Barcelona shelter pointed out that they were first admitted to a boarding house where they shared spaces with different people. Then after a few weeks (different for each one), they were admitted to an emergency shelter and after some time they moved to the house where they are now. They explained how these constant changes without justified reasons (for them) other than that "the circuit works like this" not only affected them in terms of relationships, but also their children who had to "break up with their friends to have to make other friends and without being sure how long they would be in the new house". The changes also affected schooling: sometimes the children had to change schools because the new foster home was in another neighbourhood or region.

"I worry about having to move from one house to another because in the end I feel that when I am making progress, I have to go somewhere else and my child also has to readapt. This does not help us to recover. Does it work like this in all of Spain?" — Mother

- **Cultural sensitivity.** The intercultural factor has been relevant not only because of the number of migrant mothers residing in the shelter, but also because there are very few professionals with migrant backgrounds working in these centres.

"There is no one who looks like me. It is difficult for them to understand my culture and my food." — Mother

Necessary infrastructure for child safeguarding in shelters

The interviews with shelter staff highlighted a number of aspects of the infrastructure that are necessary to provide protection and safety for children in shelters. This includes political and structural issues that actually go far beyond what women's shelters themselves can do on the ground. Nevertheless, women's shelter workers and especially the regional and national women's shelter networks have to deal with this constantly. As a result, they face considerable challenges.

According to most of the shelter staff interviewed, many of the children's needs cannot be sufficiently met in most shelters, mainly due to **limitations in resources, space and staff**. Most interviewees relate these shortages to the fact that the human and financial resources for the work with children in shelters are still less than those for the work with women in many countries, which is seen as a political and structural problem of not giving children the same status of victims/survivors as women.

> *"There is an urgent need for more money for the children's sector. The hours of the childcare workers must be significantly increased."* — Women's shelter staff

Children, but especially young people, need a place of **retreat**, where they can also be alone. A large group of very different children, mostly small ones, sometimes doesn't allow enough room/options for individual children, especially older ones/teenagers. Shelters are often crowded, loud, tension-filled places with a lot of emergencies. Another problem is limited space for children and therefore lack of **privacy**. Separate spaces for children, both collectively (playing rooms, meeting rooms) and individually, especially for adolescents, would be a clear improvement and have been tried out in some shelters.

Men are not allowed in many shelters for safety reasons and some shelters in Europe do not accept boys over the age of 14. This is not easy to understand for children and needs sensitive explanations. As reported in Austria, having trained male professionals working a few hours in the shelter helps children to create positive male role models.

> *"There also needs to be a male recreational educator in many more shelters. And it needs public relations work specifically for the children's sector."* — Women's shelter staff

The need of **stability in living** and a **social network** cannot be fulfilled. The children's stay in the shelter is very often associated with a change of school or kindergarten. Usually, the father remains in the family home and environment, while the entire life of the woman and children has to change. Efforts have to be made to allow for the children at the shelter to relate as "normally" as possible with their friends and classmates.

> *"The need for consistency is a very strong one in children. We cannot provide that. Some of the children are not here voluntarily and are not free to decide when they leave."*

Face-to-face time and **conversations** with just one child in need is possible much less often than needed. This would require an increase in specialized staff hours.

Also, many interviewees (especially from Spain) reported that **specialized psychotherapy or psychological support** to deal with the consequences of violence or other specific needs (see above) is far less available than it should be.

> *"I think that more professionals are needed because those of us who are there cannot cover everything that needs to be done with these families, for example, we need a child psychologist... Sometimes we don't know how to deal with certain situations, for example, teenagers who attempt self-harm."* — Women's shelter staff

Educational support or help with homework is another need that's insufficiently met in many shelters and would require paying for private **tuition** for school children, or a tutor who comes to the shelter to supervise and support children with their homework.

Moreover, many of the children have language and/or reading and writing problems or disorders and the shelters do not have **speech therapists** or other professionals specialized in this area, which hinders the children's academic progress and therefore affects their self-esteem. Access to these professionals should be improved.

Another suggestion for improvement included having a **paediatrician** come to the shelter at least twice a week to help avoid often multiple trips to take children to the outpatient paediatric unit and the related hassle for the children and staff and transport costs.

Access to internet and IT devices is often insufficient, when there is not only a lack of equipment, but the internet is very poor, sometimes not available at all in the rooms of the residents. Therefore, WIFI coverage and internet connection in all parts of the shelter as well as computers are needed.

Some interviewees also mention **aftercare** of children and adolescents when they leave the shelter as a need, which is often not sufficiently met because of lack of resources.

Good practices from Austria

Children's area staff meeting of the Association of Autonomous Austrian Women's Shelters: The staff members of the Autonomous Austrian Women's Shelter Network working directly with children meet in-person every 1 ½ years. The goals of these 2-day in-person meetings are knowledge exchange and training. In addition, due to the challenges being faced by the Covid-19 pandemic, now biannual meetings also take place online.

Pets in shelters: In Austria, several women's shelters allow residents to stay in the shelter with their small pets. This is important for women who would not leave their pet behind. Such cases also included women in fear of their lives.

Male youth in shelters: In Tyrol, Austria, the newly built women's shelter includes two apartments with a separate kitchen to enable male youth to have their own shared space, and allow women their own space as well. This was found to be important for the shelter residents.

Part III. Child safeguarding policies for shelters

Why have a child safeguarding policy in a shelter?

Children in women's shelter are among the most vulnerable as they have been exposed to unstable, overburdened and dysfunctional family life. Many children have experienced potentially traumatising events in the home. On average, children in care are exposed to more than ten risk factors related to child abuse and domestic violence.[1] Children entering a shelter may feel uprooted or isolated, with interruptions to their schooling. As a result, these children have a greatly increased risk of becoming victims or perpetrators in the future.

Shelter organizations are crucial partners in the safety chain involved in the care of children.

Advantages of a shelter specific policy

Having a specific safeguarding policy for children ensures the independent position of the child, a child-friendly environment and a focus on the recovery and future-oriented development of the child. Such a policy has added value because it defines what the sector understands by 'safe care' for children in shelters.

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1   Working Group Safe Future: Stichting Kinderpostzegels Nederland and Federatie Opvang. Safe Future. Doing what is necessary for children in care. 2015. Available: http://www.veiligetoekomst.nl/downloads/nederlandse-versie/

Therefore, each and every shelter should have a child safeguarding policy for the following two reasons:

- To promote good practice in the shelter that ensures programmes, operations, staff and partners keep children safe and work in a child-centred way

- To safeguard children in shelters and be able to respond appropriately when concerns and incidents arise

The policy makes clear to everyone that children must be safeguarded. To find out how well your shelter safeguards children, try the Child Safeguarding Self-Assessment Tool by the Keeping Children Safe organisation (see Annex 1).

How to write and implement a child safeguarding policy in 4 steps

Here are 4 steps for a shelter organisation to follow to improve child safeguarding for children residing in shelters:

Step 1: Write a policy – outline the ways and means of how your organization (staff, volunteers, programs) interacts with children and what measures are in place to prevent harm to children and to respond when safeguarding concerns arise

Step 2: Involve staff – place clear responsibilities and expectations on staff and associates and provide support to understand and act in line with the policy that is approved and signed by management

Step 3: Implement child safeguarding activities to create a child-safe environment

Step 4: Monitor, respond and review safeguarding risks

The following section is a description of how to implement each step, including a checklist and dos and don'ts.

Step 1: Write a safeguarding policy

The shelter develops a clear policy that outlines what measures are in place to prevent harm to children and to respond when safeguarding concerns arise

- Policy reflects the rights of children to protection from abuse and exploitation as outlined in the United Nations Convention of the Rights of the Child

- Includes guidelines for appropriate and inappropriate behaviour of adults towards children, and of children towards other children

- Policy is approved and signed by the organisation's management body, applies to all the organisation's staff and associates

Checklist for step 1

The following documents can be used to provide evidence that the step 1 has been met:

- ☐ A copy of the policy, signed and dated by the management board, including a date for review

- ☐ Policy translated into local languages

- ☐ Examples of ways the policy has been promoted, including to partners, children and communities

Dos and don'ts for writing a policy:

- ✔ **Do** use other organisations' child safeguarding policies to inform yours – don't just replicate it!

- ✔ **Do** work with a group of relevant staff to develop and disseminate the policy

- ✔ **Do** make a child friendly version for children you work with

- ✘ **Don't** develop a policy document that just sits in the office

Must–have elements of the child safeguarding policy:

- Definitions, including risks that may affect children in the specific context of the organisation activities and its mission

- Clear information about staff responsibilities when working with children

- Description of safe recruitment procedures (including criminal background checks for employees, volunteers and trainees)

- Information about data protection procedures

- Information about training of staff on child safeguarding and child protection policies and how frequently staff must attend refresher training

- Information about how often the policy is revised, for example annually

- Indication of who will act as a child safeguarding contact person/lead (core role, not an add on to an existing full-time job)

- Information about safeguarding reporting procedures, including forms and clear instructions who should be informed and when

- Clear indication about referral to child protection systems outside the organisation,

- Information about a complaint mechanism

- Language of the policy must be strong and clear (not "may" but "must", not "should" but "have to")

- The policy must be available publicly (online) for example transparent to all those who come in contact with the organisation

- The policy is signed by management, for example the director/head of office.

See **Resource 2** for examples of child safeguarding policies used by different organisations.

Step 2: Involve staff

Shelter places clear responsibilities and expectations on staff and associates and supports them to understand and act in line with the policy

- Everyone in the shelter has a role to play in the safeguarding of children in the shelter

- Ensure all persons associated with the shelter understand safeguarding specific to children residing in shelters, for example all staff should undertake precautions when sharing information about children when communicating with other professionals

- Key staff are designated (including director level) as 'contact points' for child safeguarding with clearly defined roles and responsibilities

- Recruitment processes have strong child safeguarding measures in place, including a criminal record check (or alternative in some country contexts), an employment history check and at least two verbal reference checks (see **Resource 5**)

Training for staff on child safeguarding

It is recommended that training is provided at team meetings or offsite planning days to provide targeted sessions on child safeguarding and where it directly relates to the work of the team. This is something that can be delivered in addition to child protection training that all staff must attend as part of their induction.

This allows staff to understand how child safeguarding is relevant to their work and how they can embed child safeguarding practices into their programs and activities.

These trainings should facilitate discussion on:

- How does the Child Safeguarding Policy apply to the respective team and various staff members in the team?

- What role do the various team members play in implementing various aspects of the Policy?

- How to establish a risk assessment protocol for the shelter if it is not in place and review how to carry out a Risk Assessment

Checklist for step 2

The following documents can be used to provide evidence that step 2 has been met:

- ☐ A copy of training plans, course attendance records and course evaluations on child safeguarding for shelter staff

- ☐ Copies of information for children about sources of support in case of abuse that are updated annually

- ☐ Lists of contacts for specialist advice and information on child abuse that are updated annually

Dos and don'ts for involving staff:

- ✔ **Do** make sure that all people in the shelter are aware of and trained in the shelter child safeguarding policies and their obligations

- ✔ **Do** discuss openly with partners, children and families what risks are involved and how you can work together to overcome challenges

- ✖ **Don't** assume that everyone who works with children is safe or will do them no harm (perform criminal record and background checks)

Step 3: Implement activities

Shelter creates a child-safe environment through implementing child safeguarding procedures:

- A procedure details the safeguarding activities that need to be carried out to fulfil the policy (see Annex 3 for a specific list of activities)

- Safeguarding activities are integrated into existing organisational processes and systems and, where necessary, new procedures introduced

- Mapping exercises are done to provide information on the legal, social welfare and child protection arrangements

- Child safeguarding risk assessments and mitigation strategies are integrated into existing risk assessments and a reporting and responding process for incidents and concerns is followed

Checklist for step 3

The following documents can be used to provide evidence that step 3 has been met:

- ☐ Documentation exists that shows recorded cases of risk assessments and mitigating strategies

- ☐ Reporting flowcharts on what happens when a risk is reported

Dos and don'ts for safeguarding activities:

- ✔ **Do** adopt a strategy of continuous improvement; don't think you will have everything in place immediately, keep a "lessons learned" log

- ✔ **Do** your best to ensure the safety and support of the child throughout the process

- ✖ **Don't** think that you will prevent all possible abuses; the way you respond to abuse is as important as preventing it

Step 4: Monitor, respond, review

Shelter monitors and reviews its safeguarding measures:

- Measures and mechanisms are in place for monitoring and review of child safeguarding performance, e.g. review of policy once a year

- Active monitoring, before things go wrong

- Reactive monitoring, after near misses or when things go wrong

- Progress, performance and lessons learned are shared with staff

- Policies and practices are reviewed at regular intervals, for example once a year

Checklist step 4

The following documents can be used to provide evidence that step 4 has been met:

- ☐ Self-audit assessments of child safeguarding

  - ☐ 1. What have been the key achievements in child safeguarding by the organisation?

  - ☐ 2. What new child safeguarding procedures or measures have been developed and implemented?

☐ 3. What good practice examples in implementing child safeguarding would you like to share? Why did they work well?

☐ 4. What challenges have you faced in implementing child safeguarding policy and procedures?

☐ 5. What gaps have been identified in the Partner Capacity Assessment requiring follow up?

☐ 6. Have records been kept for the recruitment and screening of personnel in contact or working with children? Ask to see the records to monitor standards for recruitment and screening

☐ 7. Have you engaged any volunteers for programs or activities? Do they have contact with children and if so how were they recruited and screened?

☐ 8. What, if any, extra support or resources do you need to implement child safeguarding in your shelter

☐ Child safeguarding annual reports

☐ Obtain the Keeping Children Safe Certification **www.keepingchildrensafe.global/course-certification/**

Dos and don'ts for monitoring

✔ **Do** be transparent with your information on child safeguarding and respond appropriately to concerns. Your organisation's credibility depends on it

✔ It is only through monitoring that you will discover whether your effort has been successful

✘ **Don't** rely on having a policy as a measure of accountability. Being accountable is ensuring that policy is being implemented

Advantages of having a shelter specific policy

There are multiple advantages to shelters having a specific policy addressing children. These include:

■ Children are better **protected**

■ Organisation staff and associates are better **protected**

■ The organisation and its reputation is better **protected**

"Children in shelters are among the most vulnerable children. Nearly all children have experienced potentially traumatic events and are traumatized. Children are also very flexible and working with them, supporting them, and most importantly listening to them and giving them trust, is indescribably beautiful to experience. We can help them to overcome trauma by just doing the right things with and for them!"
— Women's shelter staff

Care program in shelters throughout the Netherlands

Shelters in the Netherlands have a special care programme that has mental health professionals and remedial educationalists at their disposal. The care program is based on a standards framework in the Netherlands for women's shelters and children in shelters. The indicators of the care programme are:

- Guaranteeing acute and long-term safety

- Risk-based care plan

- Recovery and future-oriented care/trauma processing, social-emotional development

When a mother and her children arrive at the shelter, staff members use an established checklist and risk assessment instrument to map the safety risks for the mother and children. The staff provide intensive guidance to mothers with children, including step by step information on how to deal with security issues, for example turn off the use of a mobile phone with, for example, location facilities, block IP addresses when using a computer. This is of primary importance because the mothers are coming from, and are often still, in life-threatening situations, which sometimes also applies to the children. Each mother and her child/children receive their own supervisor and shadow supervisor within the shelter. The loyalty towards both their parents is almost always clearly present and in these circumstances the attitude of the staff plays an important role. Cases in which mothers are worried about the safety of their children are when there's an agreed face-to-face contact between the children and the fathers. Although these contact moments are almost always in a safe and independent location and are always supervised by shelter staff members of professionals from youth care or child protection, for the mothers it's always scary. Although the children are aware that they cannot disclose the city or location of the shelter, they still are children and happy to see their fathers and would like to tell them everything they are experiencing, like new friends or a new school. These situations are therefore very well planned and prepared for with the mothers.

Part IV. Resources

In this section a list of resources is provided to assist staff of women's shelters in their commitment to improve child safeguarding in their shelters.

Resource 1. Child safeguarding self-assessment tool

Every organization needs to think about the implications of their work, and the safety of the children they are working with, or for.

Keeping Children Safe (KCS) offers a free, online self-assessment tool to get a fuller picture of how an organization is doing with regards to child safeguarding, available in English, French, German and Spanish:

www.keepingchildrensafe.global/your-self-assessment/

The self-assessment tool consists of five sections and takes about 30 minutes to complete. The results are then e-mailed to the respondent with advice about actions to take to ensure children are kept safe. The results are confidential and can be discussed with KCS for further guidance.

> Preventing harm to children in organizations takes more than policies and procedures, it requires leadership, accountability and culture change. It means listening to children and transforming the entire mission of your organization to put their rights, dignity, and safety at the heart of every decision. — KCS statement

Oak Foundation Child Safeguarding Policy and video:

oakfnd.org/values-mission-history/child-safeguarding/

Resource 2. Examples of child safeguarding policies

Here are a range of different child safeguarding policies from non-governmental organisations working with children:

- UNICEF Policy on Conduct Promoting the Protection and Safeguarding of Children
  www.unicef.org/supply/documents/policy-conduct-promoting-protection-and-safeguarding-children

- Comic Relief's safeguarding framework / Interview with Karen Walker-Simpson, Head of Safeguarding, Comic Relief
  audiovisual.ec.europa.eu/en/video/I-183103

- Empowering children foundation – Child Protection Policy
  fdds.pl/_Resources/Persistent/d/4/5/2/d452533e17e1cc1f537e4e3ebf6492d55b13ab50/Child%20 Protection%20Policy.pdf

- Terre des Hommes – child safeguarding policy (EN, FR, DE, ES)
  https://www.tdh.ch/en/media-library/documents/child-safeguarding-policy
  Interview with Tudor Rosu, Regional Resource Mobilisation Manager, Terre des Hommes
  audiovisual.ec.europa.eu/en/video/I-183111

- ARSIS – safeguarding children and youth policy procedures
  www.arsis.gr/wp-content/uploads/NEW-ARSIS-CHILDREN-AND-YOUTH-SAFEGUARDING-POLICY-AND-PROCEDURES-Final.pdf

Resource 3. Child safeguarding policy implementation plan

	Actions	Timeframe	Staff Name	Responsibilities
Step 1. Write the policy				
1.1	Policy is written with input from all staff			
1.2	Policy is approved by shelter director/board			
1.3	Policy is shared with all staff			
1.4	Policy is shared with all stakeholders and promoted			
Step 2. Involve staff				
2.1	All staff have reviewed the Policy and provided input			Identify child safeguarding learning needs (for example via appraisal system) and ensure they are met.
2.2	All staff have signed the Code of Conduct			
2.3	A person is designated as the Safeguarding Contact Point			Acts as a focal point for receiving information Responds quickly to any request for information or concern. Assesses the risk Ensures that all information regarding incidents is recorded appropriately
2.4	New staff receive a training on child safe-guarding and review the Policy			
Step 3: Implement safeguarding activities				
3.1	A manual is created with step-by-step guid-ance on how to proceed in cases of concerns or suspicion of safeguard-ing issues inside and outside of the shelter			Identify areas of risk and up-date them regularly. Put mechanisms in place to manage and decrease risks.
3.2	Staff recruitment and selection procedure comply with the Policy			
3.3	Risk assessment and management is practiced in all activities involving direct contact with children			
3.4	Ensure that the children and families in the shelter are aware of the Child Safeguarding Policy and know what behaviours they can expect from staff, collaborators and visitors and who to inform of any concerns			
Step 4: Monitor, respond, review				
4.1	Child Safeguarding contact point performs an annual review of the Policy with management			Set up systems to monitor the degree to which child safe-guarding policy guidelines have been incorporated into activities.
4.2	Each safeguarding case is responded to within 24 hours and risk assessment performed to prevent such an event from happening again			Set systems in place to moni-tor staff behaviours, attitudes and perceptions. Address concerns specifically and generally through ongoing meetings

Resource 4. Child safeguarding training agenda

Adapted from Source: Oxfam Australia CS Toolkit

1. Welcome and key messages

The training session is to inform participants about the importance of a child safeguarding policy for your shelter. It is about being preventative and for participants to understand the role they play in making each shelter a child safe space. The training session will be an opportunity for participants to ask questions, share their knowledge and experience in a safe and supportive learning environment.

In providing training and support for shelter staff consider the following:

- Acknowledge this is a sensitive topic and may be triggering for some of the participants; so, if this is the case, a participant can take time out or talk to someone

- The training is about everyone working together to keep children safe

- Start with the positive – These discussions are not about criticising people but celebrating what we do well to protect children and looking for ways to make it even better

- Do not judge or criticise – lead the discussion from positive practices to those which "could be improved" to enhance child safeguarding or those which "we need to think about how they impact on children"

- Offer constructive criticism and suggestions for improvements if you identify feedback from a participant that you feel does not represent good practice

- Emphasise we are all in a constant process of learning from others and that it is healthy to discuss different ideas for the benefit of children

- Acknowledge that culture is not static – it changes. Give an example of something that used to be commonplace within your culture some years ago but which has since changed for the better and the previous practice is now considered to be old-fashioned

- Provide national, regional and international child rights agreements that the country has ratified, including case confidentiality and limits to data confidentiality when dealing with issues of child protection

2. What is child safeguarding?

- Definitions "child" and "child safeguarding"
- Unpack the concepts of "working with children" and "contact with children"
- Why Child Safeguarding is important
  - ✔ Child Safeguarding is a preventative and proactive measure to keep children safe
  - ✔ Child Safeguarding is a shared responsibility
  - ✔ Child safeguarding includes awareness, prevention, responding and reporting

3. 4 Steps to child safeguarding in a shelter

For shelter staff to understand the purpose and key principles of the Policy and how it applies to all areas of programs and activities.

4. Role of the child safeguarding contact point in the shelter

Participants to have a clear understanding of the role and responsibilities of this lead or contact point.

5. Child safeguarding reporting process

Raise any type of concern in a confidential and professional way: this is the right things to do to keep children safe. Participants to feel confident how their concern will be handled by the organization and that any investigation will give everyone the right to have their say.

> Training exercise: ask the participants to discuss and present what they think should be in an incident reporting form around child safeguarding?

6. Child safeguarding implementation plan

Participants to develop ways in which they can implement child safeguarding into their area of work using the Implementation Plan (see **Resource 3**).

7. Conclusion

Participants have the opportunity to raise any final questions or comments from the training session.

Free online resource: Child Safeguarding Self-Assessment Tool from Keeping Children Safe:

www.keepingchildrensafe.global/your-self-assessment/

Tool to conduct a self-assessment on their organization, to gain an understanding of how to conduct a child safeguarding risk assessment and what tools to use. Available in English, French, German and Spanish.

Participants should leave the training session feeling they can contribute to each shelter being a child safe organization in a preventative and positive way.

Resource 5. Recruitment of shelter staff with focus on child safeguarding

When evaluating applicants for working at the shelter, ask questions to:

- Test their levels of awareness in relation to the problem of child abuse and exploitation and the risks to children relevant to the position applied for

- Test their understanding of the Child Safeguarding Policy and Code of Conduct received prior to the interview, the applicant's commitment to the principles and values in the child safeguarding approach, and their ability to conduct themselves in a way that is consistent with these standards

- Gather as far a possible a sense of the applicant's personal and professional values and practices in relation to work with children and contact with children generally

- Assess whether applicants understand the position of trust they hold and the importance of always acting in the best interests of children at all times

  - Ensure that a criminal record check is carried out and clear prior to recruiting to post

Reference checking is an important part of the screening process. It allows hiring managers to probe any outstanding questions you may have about your preferred applicants. It is important to ask referees for examples of behaviour which support the applicant's suitability for a position. All reference checks should be verbal, and you should verify the identity of the referee and their relationship to the applicant.

Sample questions *(source Oxfam Australia)*:

Direct and challenging questions encourage self-selection (i.e. applicants withdrawing themselves from the process) and may assist the interview panel to assess the attitude of the applicant towards children and dealing with children. The exact questions should be adapted to suit the type/level of seniority of the position being applied for.

Awareness and understanding of being a child safe organization

- What are the essential components of child safeguarding in a shelter? Do you agree that a Child Safeguarding Policy is important in the context of shelter work? What relevance do you believe it has to your role?

- What do you think working in a child safe organization means?

- What motivates you to work in a shelter, in this particular program?

- What boundaries are important when in contact with children?

- Please provide me with an example of how to interact safely with children.

Child focused questions

- What are some of the main rights of children?

- In your role, you will be required to work with children. Are there any age groups you feel more or less comfortable working with? (Asking follow-up questions about why an applicant has a strong preference can help you determine if there is cause for concern)

- How are children residing in a shelter vulnerable?

- How would you create a child safe and friendly space for an activity for children?

Accountability

- If you were concerned about the actions or behaviour of a co-worker/partner staff/visitor towards children, how would you respond?

- Have you ever worked anywhere where a colleague abused a child? What happened and how was it handled? What did you think of the way it was handled? Would you have handled it differently yourself?

- What have you done when a colleague/friend has broken a rule, procedure or code of conduct?

- What would you do in a particular situation? (Set up scenarios that involve potential concerns, boundary issues, or child/youth policies and interactions to assess the applicant's response. Be concerned if applicants disregard the organization's policies and procedures or handle a situation poorly)

Previous experience working in community/contact with children

- Have you worked/volunteered in a similar position before where you had contact with children in the community? What did you like about it? What did you find difficult?
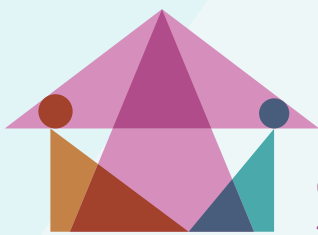
- Tell me about a time you worked closely in communities or in the field and the position required you to interact with community members, including youth and children.

Personal values and qualities

- What strengths in working with children do you bring from your community, family and/or cultural background?

- What qualities have you observed in others that you have admired, particularly in regard to their work with or care of children?

- What do you think makes a good community leader or role model for children and youth?

SafeShelter