
GUIDELINES ON THE INVOLVEMENT OF CHILDREN IN POLITICAL CAMPAIGNS



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TABLE OF CONTENTS

I. About the guidelines	1
II. Minimum requirements	2
III. Further guarantees	4
IV. Implementation of the guidelines	7
V. Our principles	8
VI. Definitions	8



I. ABOUT THE GUIDELINES

What is its purpose?

These guidelines lay down the rules of involving children in political campaigns. It was created to:

- show guidance to those involved in party politics,
- prevent the use of children in party politics, and to
- promote the enforcement and restoration of children's rights.

They have been set to foster self-regulation, and to strengthen the confidence of voters and the general public in ethical political behaviour. Respecting these guidelines provides a starting point in helping children genuinely and meaningfully participate in the local and national decision-making processes.

Who are they applicable to?

These guidelines apply to anyone holding or running for a political office, any political party, or any local or national organisation pursuing political goals, as well as any employee, volunteer, representative, or member in a contractual relationship with such an organisation.

What are the implications of implementing these guidelines?

By accepting these guidelines, politicians and political organisations:

- consent to be bound by these guidelines,
- acknowledge their personal responsibility and that of their organisation to comply with and promote these guidelines,
- actively contribute to the implementation of these guidelines,
- and stimulate others to comply with these guidelines.

What is their scope?

These guidelines shall not substitute nor limit political parties' code of ethics or any local provision. They shall be in line with the applicable legal provisions, including legislation on campaign activity and the electoral law.

II. MINIMUM REQUIREMENTS

Respecting the rights of children

For the appropriate representation of any political programme focusing on children and families, it is essential for our political campaigns to respect the rights of children. We shall ensure that children are not used as tools to achieve our political goals.

Children are not to be discriminated against

We shall not discriminate against children or their parents based on their political views, origin, or any other characteristics, and we shall also abstain from the involvement of our own family.

Age and maturity should be taken into consideration

We acknowledge that the informed and voluntary participation of children in political campaigns assumes that they are an appropriate age and have an adequate level of maturity. That is why under no circumstances should children under 14 years of age be involved in political campaigns and communications.

Children shall not be used as decoration

We acknowledge that the involvement of children in political campaigns is meaningful, if it is motivated by the specific opinion of the child. We must ensure that children are not used as decoration, and we abstain from involving them in any activity that is based on their age, status, easy availability, or any material respect, rather than their genuine contributions (focus on their knowledge, experience, support of their citizenship education).

Children shall not be manipulated

The users of these guidelines acknowledge that children are not targets of electoral campaigns. Any activity that potentially manipulates children is prohibited. We disapprove of any form of indirect (through their school or parents) or direct manipulation of children which is driven by political interests such as winning votes.

Respecting the rules of taking photographs

We acknowledge that any event where a public recording is made of a politician meeting children is considered campaign activity which, based on the current regulation in force, may be subject to a fine. Therefore, we will not take photographs or videos of children, nor will we support their publishing.

We respect the protection of children's privacy. We do not use children's personal data or any image taken of them unauthorized. No recording will be shared on any online or offline platform without the informed, voluntary, specific, and explicit consent of the children concerned. If the child in question is under the age of 14, it shall not be published even if consent has been given by the child or their legal guardian. Furthermore, we will not use any records of children published on image-sharing platforms, especially if the child is supposedly under 16 years of age.

Respecting the opinion of children

We respect the civil rights of children, including their right to be involved in local or public issues that concerns them. We acknowledge the differences between children's activities to lobby for their own interests and the activities under the scope of party politics. We recognize that children's collective opinion is expressed independently of political preference, and we will not make any announcements that blend this opinion with our or someone else's political views. We respect and support children's political opinion and their politically neutral interest in public life.

Respecting children's dignity

We will not communicate anything that might harm the dignity of children. We will not show them in a bad light, and we also abstain from using language or visual representation that is hostile or might incite hatred.

No party politics in nurseries or schools

We respect that party politics do not belong in nurseries or schools. We will not visit public education institutions during campaign periods, and in other times, we only accept invitations if we are assured of their civic educational purpose and that they cannot be used to promote our political activity.

As a result, we will only talk about questions relevant to children rather than our own priorities; only discuss topics suitable for the age and level of maturity of the audience; and no image or written report shall be prepared or released to the public. It should also be made sure that everyone participates in the programme on a voluntary basis, and public education institutions should be advised of preventive measures which help reduce the risk of them appearing politically committed.

No gift giving

We commit to not sending or giving any gifts—especially gifts with a political message—to children, parents, or public education employees, and we will not offer them any other benefits, except if these benefits are anonymous and not related to the recipient. Nor shall we accept any gifts or greetings from children or their organizations, parents or public education institutions.

III. FURTHER GUARANTEES

Thorough assessment and preparation before children's involvement

We ensure that the involvement of children in political campaigns is preceded by thorough assessment and careful preparation. The potential consequences of children's involvement as well as of child-related political activities should be identified on an individual basis. We shall also ensure that these activities are not violating children's rights, and that they strengthen the image of citizens who are competent in their lives and have rights to enjoy.

Creation of a production plan on the involvement process of children

We undertake the creation of a detailed production plan on political content created with the involvement of children. The production plan will consist of the aspects of child protection and the circumstances and content of production.

Assessing the aspects of child protection

- Is the presentation of the child necessary?
- What is the purpose of their involvement?
- On what basis should children be selected?
- How should children appear in the project?
- What is the method of presentation?
- What are the effects of involvement on the children now and in the future?
- What is the message conveyed for other children?
- What effects does the content have on society as a whole?

The circumstances and content of production are taken into consideration

The production plan gives a detailed description of the exact content and circumstances of the production process. We shall ensure that:

- Children participate in discussions relevant to them and suit their knowledge, experiences, and competences.
- All children have equal chances in the selection process for participation.
- Production is carried out under child-friendly circumstances (eg. in convenient hours and circumstances, comprehensible language), taking into consideration the opinion and dignity of child participants.
- Children are given a proper preparation so that they can fulfil their role in a fitting and responsible way.
- The physical and emotional security of children is a primary concern. This should also be accompanied by a specific complaints mechanism.
- Proper emphasis is placed on the preparation and education of people who will be in contact with the children.
- Children are provided the chance to give feedback, even anonymously.
- Children are informed about the use and interpretation of the outcomes of their participation.

Proper sources are provided for their involvement

We acknowledge that the involvement of children in political campaigns requires proper financial, human and time resources and we commit to involving children only if these conditions are provided.

Involvement with professional support

In the case of every individual, we must ensure that the political content they are about to be involved in, is not harmful to them. All the way through the preparation and production phases, we work together with experts or organizations who have the required levels of experience (psychologists, child rights or child protection experts, social workers, consultants). Based on individual analysis, experts declare whether the participation of a certain child is acceptable or not and may give suggestions in his/her best interest. The decision on his/her participation is made based on the expert report, with the involvement of the child concerned, his/her legal guardian and the experts themselves. Experts are also asked to consult on the prepared but yet unpublished content.

Ensuring that each consent is voluntary and based on proper information

We ensure that the involvement of children in political campaigns is carried out with transparent tools and objectives and that the consent given is voluntary and well-informed. The production plan should be introduced to the concerned child as well as his/her legal guardian. All children must be given the chance to learn, in accordance with their age and level of maturity, about the purpose of their participation, the purpose of the political content, the process of production, the use of content, its potential effects, their related rights, and the various ways complaints are handled. The parties have to conclude a written agreement, signed by the legal guardian once all the necessary information has been supplied to them.

IV. IMPLEMENTATION OF THE GUIDELINES

Appointment of a child protection committee

In the interest of promoting efficient self-regulation, we establish or appoint a child protection committee who will be responsible for ensuring that the above guidelines are complied with.

We ensure that complaints are investigated

The child protection committee will be requested to elaborate, with contribution from child protection experts, a complaints mechanism with a scope set by these guidelines. We shall ensure that everyone is acquainted with it and that its accessibility to the public. We are committed to submitting a report immediately on any behaviour that violates these guidelines. Reports shall be processed responsibly in line with their purpose. The child protection committee takes all suspicious cases seriously, prepares the necessary documentation, and acts in accordance with the provisions laid down in legislation and its own code of ethics and discipline. The individual submitting the reporting, the concerned child and his/her family and the community of the organisation are notified of the outcome of the proceedings.

Guidelines are revised on a regular basis

The child protection committee gives regular feedback on the implementation of these guidelines, published on the relevant organisational forum and organises their periodical revision.

V. OUR PRINCIPLES

1. The protection of children and the promotion of their best interests are always the priority.
2. One shall always respect the rights laid down in the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child. In every case, actions should be taken in accordance with legal provisions.
3. Any form of violation of the rights of children is unacceptable. All should be done to prevent and restore the damage caused by the infringement.
4. Any involvement of children in political activities shall be in line with the ethical principles on child participation laid down by the UN Child Rights Committee (based on respect as well as informed and voluntary decisions, relevant, child-friendly, safe, free of discrimination, supported by education, and accountable).
5. These guidelines shall be made accessible to everyone. They shall be disclosed to everyone involved, who shall express their consent to be bound by these guidelines.

VI. DEFINITIONS

- **Child:** any person below 18 years of age.
 - **Political campaign:** any activity, event, or appearance made with the purpose of promoting a political party or a political message, driven primarily by political interest.
 - **Political content:** any advertisement related to political parties, organisations, lobbying and politicians; including the audio-visual, print and online forms of media used for political communication and political campaigns.
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