

2021

CHILD SAFEGUARDING IN FOOTBALL PROGRAM

RBFA, Voetbal Vlaanderen, ACFF, Pro League



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INTRODUCTION /

Safeguarding of children should be high on the agenda of every organization that works with children.

The Royal Belgian Football association (**RBFA**), the regional federations **Voetbal Vlaanderen** and **ACFF** and the **Pro League**, the organization of professional football, are aware of their important role to safeguard children who play football regardless of their level (amateur/elite).

In order to safeguard children at every level in football we developed our 'Safeguarding in Football' program. This program will be followed-up by the Safeguarding best practice and reflect expert' group consisting of a member of every federation. Each federation will take measures for children and young people that fall under their responsibility.

The '**Safeguarding in football**' program focusses on prevention and detection and builds further on existing legal regulations in Belgium and the RBFA that mainly focus on bans and sanctions.

In order to implement the Safeguarding in football program we rely on the help and efforts from the football clubs. Clubs who are members of Voetbal Vlaanderen, ACFF and Pro League also have a moral responsibility to take in order to ensure that their club is a safe space for every member and that everyone receives a fair treatment. The actions from the wings are limited and they can not interfere in internal sportive cases at clubs. Clubs need to provide procedures to handle these cases themselves.

The wings and Pro League can only interfere in cases that are covered by the RBFA regulations (e.g. discrimination, physical, sexual, psychological abuse, bullying) and for which they have specific competences. All other cases should be handled by clubs themselves.

More specific the wings and Pro League can not take actions in cases of 'non-selection of players', 'not enough playing time',... so cases that are based on sportive decisions. These cases need to be handled inside the club.



01

RESPONSIBILITIES OF FOOTBALL ORGANISATIONS

Each football organization has specific responsibilities and need to play their role in order to safeguard children in football at each level. These responsibilities are elaborated below in more detail.

Responsibilities of football organisations

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1.1

// Royal Belgian Football Association (RBFA)

The RBFA is responsible for the organization of the national youth teams. They organize training camps, detection days, match days and tournaments for young people who are selected for the national youth teams. The RBFA's safeguarding actions will focus on prevention by education of staff members, coaches and event managers about safeguarding measures, performing background checks and inform all players and their parents about the safeguarding contact persons of the federation and learn players to recognize possible safeguarding risk situations. Furthermore the RBFA will implement a reaction procedure that will be applied when facing safeguarding risks. Since 2019 all the employees, volunteers, players and staff also need to respect the ethical code of the RBFA, VV, ACFF. Breaches on this ethical code can be sanctioned after examination by HR team of the RBFA or the integrity commission.

1.2

// Voetbal Vlaanderen

Voetbal Vlaanderen is responsible for the organization of amateur (youth) football and elite football schools in Flanders, the Dutch speaking part of Belgium. They organize several grassroots events like footfestivals and are also in direct contact with the Flemish football clubs that need to apply to policies and regulations designed by Voetbal Vlaanderen. Furthermore Voetbal Vlaanderen also organizes the Dutch courses for trainers and referees. Finally they have the responsibility to organize the elite youth football school education in collaboration with the elite sport schools. Voetbal Vlaanderen's safeguarding actions will focus on 1) safeguarding during their own events 2) safeguarding at football clubs and 3) safeguarding at elite football schools. They will implement both preventive and reactive measures at every level.

1.3

// L'Association des Clubs Francophones de Football (ACFF)

ACFF is responsible for the organization of amateur (youth) football and elite football schools in Brussels and Wallonia, the French speaking part of Belgium. They organize several grassroots events like footfestivals and are also in direct contact with the Walloon and Brussels football clubs that need to apply to policies and regu-



safeguard children in football at each level

lations designed by ACFF. Furthermore ACFF also organizes the French courses for trainers and referees. Finally they have the responsibility to organize the elite youth football school education in collaboration with the elite sport schools. ACFF's safeguarding actions will focus on 1) safeguarding during their own events 2) safeguarding at football clubs and 3) safeguarding at elite football schools. They will implement both preventive and reactive measures at every level.

1.4

// Pro League

The Pro League is responsible for the organisation of Belgian professional Football. It does so by coordinating championships, either league or cup-related. It also brings together the professional football clubs, which are represented in the management bodies. The Pro League operates independently of those clubs, but is at their service. As far as elite youth are concerned, the competence lies within the Pro League and our policy is based on UEFA Article 23 of the licensing regulations:

The licence applicant must establish and apply measures, in line with any relevant UEFA guidelines, to protect, safeguard and ensure the welfare of youth players and ensure they are in a safe environment when participating in activities organised by the licence applicant

In order to guarantee uniformity, the Pro League prefers to join the policy & initiatives of the regional wings competent for regular youth training. The Pro League wants to establish a Safeguarding focal point, that can address and react for specific cases connected to Pro League clubs. The Safeguarding focal point will be trained with at least one course regarding the responsibilities and how to handle sensitive safeguarding cases. Furthermore, the Pro League will cooperate with the RBFA on the national level and coordinate regularly with both wings of amateur football Voetbal Vlaanderen and ACFF, to ensure the welfare of youth players and to ensure that they are in a safe environment when participating in activities.





02

DEFINITIONS

Definitions

We use the definitions of UEFA for Safeguarding issues. When we talk about children we focus on young people between 0 and 18 years old.

There are **four main categories** of child abuse. Furthermore we also take into account bullying:

2.1

// Physical abuse

Physical abuse is often the most easily recognized form. Physical abuse can be, but is not limited to, any kind of hitting, shaking, burning, pinching, biting, choking, throwing, beating or other action that causes physical injury, leaves marks or causes pain.

Examples in football:

- Slapping a child because they are provocative, not listening or disturbing the training
- Forcing a child with an injury to play
- Encouraging children to deliberately play aggressively, without regard to the risk of injury to themselves or others

2.2

// Sexual abuse

Sexual abuse of children is any type of sexual contact between an adult and anyone younger than 16 years old; between a significantly older child and a younger child; or if one person overpowers another, regardless of age. It is also abusive to take indecent photos of children, involve children in watching sexual images or activities, or encourage children to behave in sexually inappropriate ways. Making unwanted comments, particularly those that are sexual in nature, is also a form of sexual abuse, often called sexual harassment. Even if someone under 16 years old consents to a sexual relationship, this is still considered sexual abuse.

Examples in football:

- Taking photos of children naked while they are showering
- A coach of 40 years old starting a sexual relationship with a player of 14 years old
- Commenting on how 'well developed' a girl football player is physically
- Requiring abnormal physical contact like touching someone's intimate body parts claiming it is for the well-being of the player

There are four main categories of child abuse.

2.3

// Emotional, psychological or verbal abuse

Emotional abuse happens when a significant adult in a child's life constantly criticizes, threatens or dismisses them until their self-esteem and feelings of self-worth are damaged. Always joking about someone can also be abusive.

It is not that children should not be criticized, or that jokes should not be made. Criticism is important for children to learn and improve. Similarly, jokes and laughter help form bonds between people and can create a sense of team spirit. However, the difference is that emotional abuse goes too far. Criticism stops being motivational, and jokes are not funny. Emotional abuse can hurt and cause damage, just as physical abuse does.

Examples in football:

- Shouting at a child and constantly calling them a 'loser' for not performing well during a match
- Shouting at a child and constantly calling them a 'loser' for missing a penalty
- Constantly laughing at a child, and encouraging other players to laugh, if a child is unfit
- Showing obvious and consistent favoritism in the team so that some children feel excluded

2.4

// Neglect

Neglect occurs when an adult does not provide enough emotional support or deliberately and consistently pays very little or no attention to a child. Neglect also occurs when a child is not given adequate food, housing, clothes, medical care or supervision.

Examples in football:

- Not being aware of where children are during football summer camps or away trips
- Not providing water, or allowing children to break for water, in hot weather during training
- Using transport that is not safe and roadworthy to take children to matches

There are other forms of abuse, such as discrimination, exploitation and violence, but these fall under the four main categories of abuse.

2.5

// Bullying

Children can also perpetrate abuse. Child-to-child abuse is often called 'bullying'.

Bullying can take many forms. It can include physical acts such as hitting; online activity, such as abusive messages, comments or images posted on social media; damage or theft of property; and name calling. Bullying may be based on someone's gender, ethnicity, sexuality or disability; or their sporting ability.

Adults sometimes try to minimize bullying, thinking it is less serious because it occurs between children. However, bullying can and does cause harm. It also tends to get progressively worse. For this reason, it is important to create an atmosphere where everyone knows that bullying is not tolerated, and to stop it as soon as it starts.





03

**CHILD SAFE-
GUARDING ACTIONS
IN BELGIAN
FOOTBALL**

Child safeguarding actions in Belgian Football

The RBFA, Voetbal Vlaanderen ACFF and Pro League want to take measures at each level to ensure that every child involved in football can enjoy football in a safe environment. We implement measures at two levels: Inside the organization and clubs.



we implement measures at two levels

3.1

// Inside the organization

When we talk about actions inside the organization we focus on actions to safeguard 1) events for children organized by the football federations (for example footfestivals for girls, tournaments,...), 2) the national youth teams and 3) elite sport schools. Specific responsibilities of the federations (RBFA, Voetbal Vlaanderen, ACFF, Pro League) are also mentioned if necessary.

3.1.1 // SAFEGUARDING OFFICER

Action:

Every federation has its own safeguarding officer and these are known by all employees, staff, volunteers. Safeguarding officers are trained professionals who followed at least one course on their responsibilities and how to handle sensitive safeguarding cases. Furthermore every elite sport school/national youth team has its own safeguarding officer who is the primary contact for the federation safeguarding officer. He or she organizes an introduction for parents and staff about safeguarding and the main contact point.

Specific responsibilities/federation:

- **RBFA:** Introduction of safeguarding focal points in each national youth team.
- **Voetbal Vlaanderen:** Introduction of safeguarding focal points in each elite football school and the Yellow Flames team.
- **ACFF:** Introduction of safeguarding focal points in each elite football school.

The contacts of the federation safeguarding officers can be found at the end of this document.

3.1.2 // CRIMINAL BACKGROUND CHECK

Action:

Perform a criminal background check (model 2 Belgian juridical system) of every employee and volunteer who is responsible for events/activities for children and every staff member including volunteers who is involved with children at elite sport schools/national youth teams. Repeat this check every year.

Specific responsibilities/federation:

- **RBFA:** Background checks of all staff members of the national teams.
- **Voetbal Vlaanderen:** Background checks of all staff who are active in the elite sport schools/ Yellow Flames.
- **ACFF:** Background checks of all staff who are active in the elite sport schools.

3.1.3 // ETHICAL CODE

Action:

Further communicate and present the ethical code to all employees, staff and employees via different activities and educational sessions/tools (e-learning).

Specific responsibilities/federation:

- **RBFA:** Inform all staff members of the national teams about the ethical code on a regular base.
- **Voetbal Vlaanderen:** Inform all staff who are active in the elite sport schools/ Yellow Flames about the ethical code on a regular base.
- **ACFF:** Inform all staff who are active in the elite sport schools about the ethical code on a regular base.
- **Pro League:** will research the possibilities to create an ethical code for their organization.



*every child can enjoy football
in a safe environment*

3.1.4 // CODE OF CONDUCT REGARDING SAFEGUARDING

Action:

Design a specific code of conduct for every employee, staff member and volunteer who organizes events/activities for children

- => We will use the definitions of UEFA regarding physical, sexual, emotional abuse and neglect.
- => We will look for specific rules about social media use by staff and interaction with children.

Specific responsibilities/federation:

- **RBFA:** Implement the code of conduct for staff and players of national youth teams and staff who are responsible for the organization of events involving young children.
- **Voetbal Vlaanderen:** Implement the code of conduct for staff and players of elite sport schools, Yellow Flames and staff who are responsible for the organization of events involving young children.
- **ACFF:** Implement the code of conduct for staff and players of elite sport schools and staff who are responsible for the organization of events involving young children.
- **Pro League:** Implement the code of conduct for staff who are responsible for the organization of events involving young children (e.g. Schoolscup).

3.1.5 // SAFEGUARDING EDUCATION

Action:

Organization of workshops about safeguarding (offline and online via e-learning UEFA, ICES workshops (NL) or Yapaka workshops (FR)) for every employee, staff member and volunteer who organizes events/activities for young people.

- => The training will be mandatory and we will track the number of trained employees.
- => We will promote the e-learnings from UEFA and make these available for everyone. Furthermore we will look for the translation to Dutch (they are available in English, German and French).
- => Besides we will organize yearly workshops about specific topics: eating disorders, suicide, bullying,...

Specific responsibilities/federation:

- **RBFA:** Every staff member of the national youth teams involved with activities for children will be educated about safeguarding.
- **Voetbal Vlaanderen:** Every staff member of the elite sport schools/yellow flames involved with activities for children will be educated about safeguarding.
- **ACFF:** Every staff member of the elite sport schools involved with activities for children will be educated about safeguarding.

3.1.6 // REACTION PLAN

Action:

Every federation has its own reaction protocol when there is a case inside the organization with an employee/volunteer/staf member/player/.... Involved people know the protocol and respect the steps that has to be taken.

The four federations form a 'best practice and reflect expert' group where the safeguarding focal point is present. This group has two roles:

1. Report on preventative measures taking by the federation
2. Discuss difficult cases in a confidential way with other safeguarding focal points

Specific responsibilities/federation:

- **RBFA:** Implement reaction protocol for cases within the national youth teams.
- **Voetbal Vlaanderen:** Implement reaction protocol for cases within the organization, elite football schools, Yellow Flames and Flemish football clubs.
- **ACFF:** Implement reaction protocol for cases within the organization, elite football schools, and Walloon & Brussels football clubs.
- **Pro League:** Implement reaction protocol for cases within the organization and professional football clubs.

3.1.7 // COMMUNICATION

Action:

Website page about the safeguarding action plan

Point of contact clearly available on every website + a clear summary about the scope of work of this point of contact (avoid complaints about 'my son cannot play at this clubs,...')

Research if there is a possibility to have a chat function for the safeguarding officers of every federation on the website.

Specific responsibilities/federation:

- **RBFA:** Clear communication about the safeguarding action plan on the website www.rbfa.be and internal communication channels (sharepoint, intranet,...). Organization of an information session about the safeguarding policy when selected for the national youth team for parents and players (part of the general info session, info in the manual)
- **Voetbal Vlaanderen:** Clear communication about the safeguarding action plan on the website www.voetbalvlaanderen.be and internal communication channels (sharepoint, intranet, E Kick-Off). Organization of info sessions for players and parents Yellow Flames and elite sport schools.
- **ACFF:** Clear communication about the safeguarding action plan on the website www.acff.be and internal communication channels (sharepoint, intranet, E Kick-Off). Organization of info sessions for players and parents elite sport schools.
- **Pro League:** Clear communication about the safeguarding action plan on the website www.proleague.be and internal communication channels.



We focus on specific actions to safeguard children?



3.2 // Clubs

Voetbal Vlaanderen and ACFF, the regional federations, and Pro League, the organization of professional football clubs, are responsible for taking measures regarding safeguarding towards football clubs. Voetbal Vlaanderen provides measures for Dutch amateur football clubs in Flanders and Brussels. ACFF is responsible for the French amateur football clubs in Wallonia and Brussels. The Pro League focusses on actions for professional football clubs. Below you can find a specific overview of their actions. Specific actions of the organizations are also mentioned if necessary.

3.2.1 // SAFEGUARDING OFFICER

Action:

Each federation has a Federation safeguarding officer who can be contacted by clubs and parents for help and advice on safeguarding cases. Each federation will motivate their clubs to appoint a safeguarding officer at the club by providing education for these persons.

3.2.2 // CRIMINAL BACKGROUND CHECK

Action:

Each federation will motivate their clubs to perform the criminal background check of their employees, staff and volunteers before hiring someone by underlining the importance of this during safeguarding workshops for clubs.

3.2.3 // CODE OF CONDUCT

Action:

Each federation will provide templates of a code of conduct that can be adapted by clubs on the website.

3.2.4 // SAFEGUARDING EDUCATION

Action:

Each federation will organize workshops about safeguarding for their football clubs.

• Voetbal Vlaanderen:

- Organization of workshops about the flag system and coping with diversity both live and online for every province: 2 times/ season.
- Organization of a Club safeguarding focal point session: 1 time/season.
- Provide relevant safeguarding information for clubs on the website.

• ACFF:

- Organize workshops about safeguarding for Parents fair-play or include a topic about safeguarding in the current course.
- Promote Yapaka's MOOC around child abuse and point of contacts in FWB. Educate about who to contact rather than how to react.

• Pro League:

- Organize workshops about safeguarding at elite football clubs.

3.2.5 // REACTION PLAN

Action:

Each federation provides a reaction plan for managing cases at clubs who fall under their responsibilities.

3.2.6 // COMMUNICATION

Action:

Each federation provides specific communications about safeguarding for clubs on their websites. Furthermore they communicate with the clubs via newsletters and social media



04

CLOSING WORDS

Closing words

The Royal Belgian Football Association, Pro League, Voetbal Vlaanderen and ACFF are proud to present this action plan together, which was the result of a close collaboration between our four organizations. We will start implementing this action plan during the football season 2020 - 2021. With this action plan we want to ensure that every child involved in football can enjoy our beautiful sport within a safe and fun environment at every level (amateur, professional and international). The four organizations will work together for the implementation and will act each within the responsibilities of the organization. In this way every level in football is involved and every football club will have access to resources and education in order to design their own child safeguarding policies. For more information about the action plan, please contact the child safeguarding officers of our organizations.





05

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