

Research Policy on Child Protection

HOGENT University of Applied Sciences and Arts

Introduction¹

HOGENT is a University of Applied Sciences and Arts in Flanders based in the Flemish part of Belgium.

HOGENT strives to excel in education, research, service provision and practice of the arts. Through the expertise of its staff and graduates and the valorisation of its research, HOGENT is making a valuable contribution to a critical, creative and open society.

With its research activities, HOGENT aims to make a difference in and for society. That is why we are resolutely committed to research and services with a sustainable impact and we adopted the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) as our research agenda. Several of these goals take into account the future of children, such as good education, no poverty... In this way, part of HOGENT's research is specifically focused on children and creating a sustainable impact for them. HOGENT is committed to making widely known the principles of ethical research among its researchers, create general awareness of it and maintain a supportive and safe research environment, with special attention to the most vulnerable groups involved, amongst other, children.

This Research Policy on Child Protection is developed to ensure the highest standards of professional behaviour and personal practice to ensure no harm occurs in any situation to children and adolescents during their involvement in HOGENT's research activities.

¹ This document is made to the example of UGent and Eurochild.

1. Responsibility

To ensure the safety and welfare of children, all persons involved on behalf of HOGENT in research activities that involve interaction with children, should be aware of their obligations to recognize and respond appropriately to concerns about the protection and welfare of children.

HOGENT has the responsibility for the implementation of the Research Policy on Child Protection and it is the duty of each member to comply with the Policy. This includes staff members (including occasional staff members) and students involved in HOGENT research, as well as all persons more or less directly involved in research or using HOGENT's research facilities.

2. Policy Statement

HOGENT:

- recognises the relevant applicable general (national and international) legislation on 'children in danger';
- recognises that the safety and welfare of children for whom it has responsibility is paramount, and undertakes to maintain the highest possible scientific standards in order to meet its responsibility to protect and safeguard those children;

This Policy is based on the following principles:

- A child or minor is a person under the age of 18 (art. 388 Civil Code).
- Children should be protected, treated with respect, listened to and have their own views taken into consideration.
- The safest possible practices will be adopted by HOGENT to minimize the possibility of harm or accidents happening to children, and to protect members of the HOGENT community from the necessity to take risks which may leave them open to accusations of abuse or neglect.
- Members of the HOGENT community are strongly supported to raise concerns about the behavior of others which may be harmful to children.

3. Protection and prevention measures

3.1 Ethics Commissions

HOGENT is part of the Association University Ghent and in that status appeals to the Ethics Commissions of UGent.

Within UGent different Ethical Commissions are established within different faculties. HOGENT staff can appeal to those Commissions. For more information see <https://www.ugent.be/pp/en/research/ec/overview.htm>

In case of research involving children, HOGENT recommends strongly the advice of an Ethics Commissions. In this case HOGENT staff mostly appeals to the Ethics Commission of the Faculty of Psychology and Educational Sciences of UGent.

In the case of experiments on humans, ethical approval is legally required. In those cases HOGENT staff appeals to the Medical Ethical Commission of the University Hospital Ghent: <https://www.uzgent.be/commissie-voor-medische-ethiek>

3.2 Committee on Scientific Integrity

HOGENT has a Committee on Scientific Integrity (CWI), which handles complaints and possible breaches of scientific integrity. The CWI is an advisory body that investigates whether there are any violations against the Code of Ethics for Scientific Research in Belgium, to which HOGENT has subscribed and the European Code of Conduct for Research Integrity (ALLEA Code).

The Research Affairs Office is the first point of contact for (1) all questions about scientific integrity or the CWI's procedure and (2) reports of alleged breaches of scientific integrity.

The procedure of the CWI is described in the regulations. Following the procedure, the CWI determines whether or not there has been a violation of the 'European Code of Conduct for Research Integrity' and/or if the research practice complies with current regulations at HOGENT related to issues of research integrity, including issues on child protection.

3.3 GDPR and Data management

All research projects involving the processing of personal data, including children's data, must comply with the General Data Protection Regulation.

HOGENT emphasizes that anonymization or pseudonymization is mandatory whenever possible. Only in limited cases where the personal data are a sine qua non for the research project is it defensible to use personal data of children within the research. Even then, this can only be done if the GDPR is strictly followed. The Data Protection Officer at HOGENT watches over this and helps researchers with all their questions on this topic.

HOGENT encourages researchers to register their research in the online Data Management tool, DMPonline.be. DMPonline encourages researchers to think about different ethical dimensions of their research. For example, the confidentiality of data obtained with children.

3.4 Researchers

HOGENT has been awarded the "HR Excellence in Research Label" by the European Commission. HOGENT's action plan includes several actions with an emphasis on ethical principles. For more information see: <https://www.hogent.be/en/external-partners/research/hr-excellence-in-research/>

To ensure that researchers are aware of and have up-to-date information on these ethical principles, HOGENT has dedicated internal web pages on the subject, organizes workshops and passes on information through newsletters.

Research tools such as informed consent forms and procedures are provided to ensure proper handling of all research phases. Special attention is paid to child-related issues, e.g., informed consent for parents/guardians and child, informed consent created specifically for children, specific design of research methods, etc.

Through informed consent forms and oral explanations, legal guardians and children are informed of the objectives and content of the study, potential risks are pointed out, and it is mentioned that participation is voluntary and can be discontinued at any time. Children themselves are always consulted about their interest in participating in the study and specific care is taken to ensure that they understand the entire process.

The researchers are supported by the Research Affairs Office if necessary.

3.5. Implementation of the policy within HOGENT

For broad acceptance of the policy, the Research Policy on Child Protection was discussed at the HOGENT Research Council and approved by the HOGENT's Executive Board.

In addition, this policy has been disseminated through various internal and external communication channels including the newsletter.

Special attention is drawn to the Research Policy on Child Protection at the kick-off meetings of new research projects where children are involved in one way or another.

3.6 Reporting to State Authorities

Any reasonable suspicion or allegation of current or historic child abuse can be reported to the state authorities.

Contact and info

Contact:

Research Affairs Office
Geraard de Duivelstraat 5
9000 Gent
research@hogent.be

Info:

[Overview of all Ethics Commissions of UGent and their contact points](#)

[HR Excellence in research](#)