

SUMMARY

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Background and purpose of the Arrangement Free Certificate of Conduct (VOG)

The Netherlands has approximately 6.7 million volunteers (CBS, 2015)¹, part of which performs activities for minors and/or people with intellectual disabilities.² The voluntary organizations are responsible for creating a safe environment, but a number of incidents has shown that they find it difficult to respond adequately to sexual misconduct by (adult) volunteers (Van der Klein, Los & Verwijs, 2013).

From umbrella organizations, such as the NOV, NOC*NSF and Scouting Netherlands, toolkits have been developed to assist organizations in taking measures to prevent sexual misconduct. In addition, the government plays a supporting role by providing tools aimed at creating a safe and secure environment. One of these tools is the free distribution of a Certificate of Conduct (VOG): a statement indicating that the judicial history of a volunteer does not object to undertake activities with minors and people with intellectual disabilities. Research has shown that providing a free VOG can contribute to improving the safety of volunteer work (Van der Klein, Los & Verwijs, 2013), after which the structural arrangement was started on January 1, 2015: the Arrangement Free VOG.

With this arrangement, the Ministry of Security and Justice wants 1) to prevent volunteers with relevant antecedents to be active in volunteer work with minors and/or people with intellectual disabilities and 2) to stimulate voluntary organizations in the implementation of a broader prevention and integrity policy, so that social safety in volunteer work is increased and sexual misconduct by volunteers is being prevented.

Arrangement Free Certificate of Conduct (VOG)

From January 1, 2015 volunteers who undertake activities with minors and people with intellectual disabilities can apply for a free VOG if they are committed to a voluntary organization registered with the Ministry of Security and Justice. To be registered, the organization must meet certain cumulative conditions (see section 1.4). One of the conditions is that a voluntary organization pursues an active prevention and integrity policy to prevent sexually misconduct. To equip organizations in the establishment and development of this, the toolkit '*In Safe Hands*' was developed in the context of the arrangement, in which the previously developed toolkits were used, such as '*Policy sexual harassment*' and '*A safe church*'. In addition, from mid-May until the end of June 2015 the media campaign: '*Sexual Misconduct: Make a Point of it*' took place to bring sexual misconduct under the attention.

¹ In this study, the general term voluntary organizations or organizations is used for the mentioned organizations.

² Van der Klein, Los & Verwijs (2013) cite a number of 2 million volunteers who regularly work with minors.

Implementing Arrangement Free Certificate of Conduct (VOG)

In the embodiment, the Ministry of Security and Justice is supported by three points of contact: NOC*NSF sports, the NOV for remaining organizations and the CIO for religious organizations.³ A volunteer can apply for a VOG if the organizations for which the volunteer carries out activities is registered with the Ministry of Security and Justice. The process of registration and applying for a VOG schematically looks as follows:

Figure S.1: registration process – admission - requesting VOG



The voluntary organization signs up through the website www.gratisvog.nl. The application comes in at one of the contact points and they check whether a registered organization meets the requirements. If the application is complete and the contact point feels that the organization meets the conditions, the contact point will send the application to the Ministry of Security and Justice. The Ministry then takes a final decision on admission to the arrangement. After admission to the arrangement, the organization can set up a VOG-application for its volunteers using eRecognition (eHerkenning). The volunteer will then receive an email to complete the VOG-application using DigiD. The screening authority Justis then screens the volunteer based on the general screening profile with at least the risk zone *individuals*. Based on this screening, the VOG is granted or denied. It is then up to the volunteer to submit the provided VOG to the voluntary organization.

Problem and research questions

In this study the following definition is central: if the Arrangement Free VOG in the first year of implementation (2015) is used and utilized as intended and on which points improvements are needed and/or possible. The study used both qualitative research methods, such as telephone and face to face interviews and a focus group, and quantitative research, such as data analysis of available data from NOV, Justis and the Chamber of Commerce and online surveys. The following research questions have been central in the study:

Ad 1. Number inventory

- a. To what extent do the (admitted) voluntary organizations have practical experiences with (suspected) sexual misconduct? What kind of experiences are these?
- b. In what direction does the increase in the number of voluntary organizations admitted to the arrangement and the number of requested and provided VOG go?
- c. How many voluntary organizations and volunteers are estimated to be eligible for admission to the arrangement and requesting a free VOG?
- d. To which extent are the voluntary organizations and volunteers who work with the intended target groups being reached by the arrangement free VOG ('coverage')?

Ad 2. Experiences with the process of admission to the arrangement and requesting free VOG

³ The religious organizations did not participate in the arrangement in the year 2015. If points of contact are mentioned in the following text, the NOV and NOC * NSF are intended.

- a. How do the voluntary organizations, the contact points and the Ministry experience the process of admission to the arrangement and the (implementation of) policies?
- b. How do the volunteers and the volunteer organizations experience requesting and obtaining the free VOG?
- c. How do the voluntary organizations, the contact points and the Ministry experience their roles in the arrangement and their role in relation to each other?
- d. What aspects of the design and/or implementation of the arrangement are the volunteers, voluntary organizations and contact points more / less satisfied about and what opportunities for improvement do they see?

Ad 3. Contribution to broader prevention and integrity policies

- a. Which handles from the toolkit '*In safe hands*' have the admitted voluntary organizations actually developed and applied?
- b. Are (additional) measures also devised by the voluntary organizations themselves?
- c. Are voluntary organizations familiar with the media campaign and has this led to specific steps?
- d. What results did the handles / actions / steps have for the prevention and integrity policies to prevent sexual misconduct in the voluntary organizations?
- e. To which extent did the voluntary organizations set up a broader prevention and integrity policy to prevent sexual misconduct before, under or after admission to the arrangement?

Results

Experiences sexual misconduct (chapter 3)

The research results start with an outline of the scope of the problem where the arrangement focuses on, namely sexual misconduct by volunteers. Eleven percent of voluntary organizations admitted to the arrangement have had experience with (suspected) sexually misconduct in the last five years. The telephone interviews show that these experiences are different in nature and they also show that voluntary organizations respond differently to these experiences, depending on the severity of the incident.

The scope of the Arrangement Free Certificate of Conduct (VOG) 2015 (Chapter 4)

Based on the registration systems of the NOV, the screening authority Justis and the online survey amongst admitted voluntary organizations, an answer has been given to the question of the scope of the arrangement in 2015. In 2015, 3.756 voluntary organizations have signed up for the arrangement. Especially in the first two months of 2015, many organizations have signed up. From March 2015, the number of applications per month leveled off at about 250 per month. Three thousand two hundred and eighty notifications have been forwarded to the Ministry of Security and Justice by the contact points. The remaining notifications (N=476) were not forwarded. After assessing, the Ministry admitted 3.161 organizations to the arrangement, 43 organizations were not admitted. Eighty-four percent of the voluntary organizations who have registered themselves via the website of the arrangement, were actually admitted. After admission to the arrangement, 89% (N = 1,314) of the admitted organizations put ready a VOG-request for their volunteers. In 2015, 57.801 VOG's were requested by the volunteers under the arrangement. We see an upward trend in the number of requested VOG's per month during 2015. The vast majority of the VOG's is actually provided (99,8%). The VOG has been denied for 91 applications.

Experiences with the Arrangement Free Certificate of Conduct (VOG) (Chapter 5)

The experiences with the arrangement are generally very positive, both at the authorized voluntary organizations as the Ministry and the contact points. The approved voluntary organizations have not encountered problems during the process of registration and permit to the arrangement. They could easily sign up. The Ministry of Security and Justice and the contact points find the number of admitted voluntary organizations beyond expectations. They would like to see a further increase in the number of voluntary organizations participating in the arrangement. The contact points spot that in the first nine months of the arrangement, mainly voluntary organizations, which already do more in terms of prevention of sexually misconduct, sign up and are admitted. According to the contact points, organizations that probably do little in preventive policies to prevent sexual misconduct, are less reached. This can be improved by targeted communication and by joining local and regional volunteer centers.

Both voluntary organizations as screening authority Justis are satisfied about the process of digital set up and applying for a VOG. The digital application gives organizations the ability to make an application wherever and whenever they like. A (limited) number of organizations finds it difficult choosing a provider from eRecognition. The organizations cite a number of improvements, such as a longer period of time between the set-up and completion of the VOG application, more insight into the process after setting up the VOG application, and the ability to set up multiple VOG applications simultaneously.

The policy containing the conditions for participation have been published in March 2015. The interpretation of these conditions of participation has become increasingly evident during the year 2015. A number of conditions have been discussed at the beginning of 2015. The survey amongst admitted voluntary organizations shows that a limited number of organizations state that they do not meet the conditions for participation. A portion thereof has been allowed for the publication of the policy. This may be due to the generated confidence among voluntary organizations that they have already been admitted, while there was doubt whether the organization complied with the conditions.

Prevention and integrity policy (chapter 6)

To set up the prevention and integrity policies, organizations can use the toolkit '*In safe hands*', which was set up in the context of the arrangement to equip voluntary organizations. The study shows that the toolkit '*In safe hands*' has been used by a quarter of the approved voluntary organizations. This seems low, but the interviews show that the voluntary organizations certainly use the offered support, but that they choose the support that is nearest to their own organizations. For organizations that are covered by the contact point NOC*NSF this is the toolkit '*Policy sexual harassment*'. For scouting groups, which represent a substantial part of the in the first nine months of the arrangement approved organizations, this is the toolkit of Scouting Netherlands.

To indicate the prevention and integrity policies of the admitted voluntary organizations, the content of the survey has affiliation with the twenty measures mentioned in the toolkit '*In safe hands*' to prevent sexual misconduct. The admitted voluntary organizations were asked whether they had the measures *before* and/or *after* admission to the arrangement. The admitted voluntary organizations have several measures to prevent sexual behavior *before* admission: more than half of the

voluntary organizations have ten or more of the twenty measures mentioned in the toolkit and on average the admitted voluntary organizations have nine measures *before* admission. The organizations mainly have measures aimed at discussing the subject sexual misconduct, mapping risks, arranging prevention aimed at sexual misconduct, and they hold an introductory meeting with the volunteer. If there is an actual suspicion of sexual misconduct, most organizations *before* admission have disposal of a confidential(contact)person, but there are fewer organizations working with a report protocol and the organizations that work with a report protocol apply that less often.

In addition to the twenty measures mentioned in the toolkit '*In safe hands*', 14% of the other voluntary organizations say they have taken other measures. These include:

- Awareness by, for example, schooling and creating a safe pedagogical situation;
- Join other report codes, such as the report code Domestic Violence and Child Abuse;
- The intention to file a police report if there is a situation of sexual misconduct;
- The intention to expel members with undesirable breaking behavior directly.

The telephone interviews show that about 27% of the interviewed organizations have taken action to meet one of the conditions for participation, namely having an active prevention and integrity policy. The other interviewed organizations had already established policy. The design of this policy is a continuous process at the voluntary organizations. Even *after* admission to the arrangement voluntary organizations continue taking measures. We see the largest increase between *before* and *after* in the measure '*applying for a VOG in case of a new volunteer*'. This is a logical effect of the arrangement: the threshold to apply for a VOG has been removed by the arrangement. Also separate from this measure we see that the admitted voluntary organizations take additional measures after admission to the arrangement: 51% of the organizations have taken at least one additional measure *after* admission to the arrangement, apart from the measure '*applying for a VOG in case of a new volunteer*'. The most organizations take one, two or three additional measures after admission. Slightly less than half of the organizations (49%) do not take any additional measures. This may have to do with the ceiling effect due to the limited maximum of twenty measures from the toolkit '*In safe hands*'. Organizations with many measures can hardly take additional measures.

Based on the nature of the measures *after* admission, we got insight of the width of the policy of voluntary organizations aimed at preventing sexual misconduct at the time of completing the survey (December 2015). It shows that more than 80% of the admitted voluntary organizations:

- Discusses dealing with minors and people with intellectual disabilities;
- Works with behavioral rules for volunteers;
- Holds an interview with new volunteers;
- Discusses the VOG in the interview;
- Apply for a VOG for its volunteers;
- Has a confidential(contact)person.

Particularly measures aimed at dealing with (suspected) sexual misconduct, are less frequently taken: a slight majority of organizations have a report protocol and less than half actually applies this. We do see a sharp increase between *before* and *after* admission in the percentage of

organizations that actually apply the report protocol. Also, only one third of the volunteer organizations says to have disposal of a form of disciplinary rules, although this may be a bias by ignorance of the respondent on the presence of disciplinary rules at the level of the umbrella organization.

Media campaign (chapter 6)

The Ministry of Security and Justice has set up the media campaign '*sexual behavior: make a point of it*' in the context of the Arrangement Free VOG. This media campaign is limited known among the admitted voluntary organizations. Less than one fifth knows the media campaign and ten percent of these organizations has made steps in response to the media campaign.

Potential reach Arrangement Free Certificate of Conduct (VOG) (chapter 7)

Finally, the potential reach of the arrangement is estimated. The estimate has gradually taken place. Based on this step by step approach, we estimate the number of organizations eligible for the arrangement at 48,000 to 55,000. In our opinion this is an upper limit, because the condition '*not active in a competitive market*' is not included in the estimate. In addition, the condition '*implementing an active prevention and integrity policy*' is not included, because this is a condition that can be influenced: hence taking one measure is sufficient to meet this condition. The number of volunteers that undertake activities with minors and people with intellectual disabilities is estimated at about 1.3 million. They can potentially get a free VOG, if the voluntary organization where they are committed to is admitted to the arrangement.

Conclusions (Chapter 8)

Based on the research findings, the following conclusions are drawn:

The Arrangement Free VOG is known and used by the voluntary organizations

In the first year the arrangement has been dispersed under the voluntary organizations. In 2015, about 3.000 volunteer organizations were admitted to the arrangement. That is six to seven percent of the estimated potential range. The admitted organizations frequently use the arrangement: 89% of the admitted voluntary organizations has set out a VOG application for a volunteer. In 2015, nearly 58.000 VOG's have been requested.

The policy rules and procedure are clear for voluntary organizations

The implementation of the policy rules has become increasingly clear during the year 2015. The conditions are clear for the voluntary organizations: 84% of the voluntary organizations that were notified in 2015 was finally admitted to the arrangement. The role of the contact points also appears to be important: 96% of the applications that are forwarded by the contact points to the Ministry is admitted.

There is great satisfaction amongst those involved in the Arrangement Free VOG

All those involved in the arrangement are positive, both the admitted voluntary organizations as the Ministry of Security and Justice, the contact points and Justis are satisfied with the way the arrangement is implemented. The number of applications has exceeded expectations and the voluntary organizations experience no problems with application, admission and applying for a VOG, apart from a few practical problems.

The offered support in the context of the arrangement has a limited contribution

The toolkit 'In safe hands' has been used to a limited extent by the admitted organizations. The organizations especially choose for support closer to the organization, such as the toolkit of Scouting Netherlands and NOC*NSF. The media campaign is limited known and a small number of organizations has taken measures in response to the media campaign. Likewise, we see no evidence of the influence of the media campaign on the registration behavior of organizations.

The admitted organizations already had various measures before admission to the arrangement

Before admission to the arrangement, voluntary organizations already had several measures to prevent sexually misconduct. These are mainly preventative measures to prevent sexual misconduct. Organizations less often take measures aimed at dealing with an actual suspicion of sexual misconduct within the organization. The feeling that mainly organizations that have applied and been admitted in the first period already had targeted policy to prevent the occurrence of sexual misconduct is thus confirmed.

After admission, the organizations continue taking measures

Most organizations (51%) keep taking additional measures *after* admission to the arrangement. The theme of sexual misconduct apparently remains a theme which organizations focus on, even after admission.

The final conclusion is that the Arrangement Free VOG is used and utilized as intended. The admitted voluntary organizations are actively engaged in the prevention of (sexual) misconduct. They are aware that a VOG is only a means and that other preventive measures are important in the prevention of sexual misconduct: the VOG is the final piece of broader policies. The free application for a VOG for voluntary organizations is a flywheel to engage with each other within the organization about the prevention of (sexual) misconduct and taking additional measures. Therefore, the social safety within the admitted organizations is increased.