

EPA CHILD PROTECTION & SAFEGUARDING POLICY

Aligned with EU Strategy on the Rights of the Child (2021–2024) & Commission Recommendation on Integrated Child Protection Systems (2024)

Preamble

European Parents' Association (EPA), as the premier representative body for parents across Europe, recognizes that the family is the fundamental group of society and the natural environment for the growth and well-being of all its members, particularly children.

Guided by the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) and the **EU Strategy on the Rights of the Child**, EPA affirms that every child has the inherent right to a life free from all forms of violence, abuse, neglect, and exploitation.

Reaffirming our core **EPA Value Statement**, we believe that our mission to empower parents is inseparable from our duty to protect children. We acknowledge that while parents are the primary educators and protectors of their children, EPA as an organization must provide a safe and supportive environment in every framework where we operate, be it physical conferences, international project activities, or digital workshops.

In light of the European Commission's 2024 Recommendations on Integrated Child Protection Systems, EPA is committed to a "Safety-by-Design" approach. We recognize that child protection is not merely a legal checkbox for European projects, but a moral imperative that requires proactive safeguarding, especially for children from **diverse backgrounds**, including those with migration histories, Roma families, and children with disabilities, who may face heightened vulnerabilities.

Acknowledging the evolving risks of the digital age, EPA further commits to ensuring a high level of privacy, safety, and security for minors online, in line with the **Digital Services Act (DSA) guidelines of 2025**.

Therefore, the Association hereby adopts this Policy to establish clear standards of conduct, reporting mechanisms, and accountability, ensuring that the best interests of the child are the primary consideration in all our actions.

Purpose

The primary purpose of this Policy is to ensure that the European Parents' Association (EPA) provides a safe, inclusive, and protective environment for all children who engage with our work, directly or indirectly.

Safeguarding and Prevention; To establish a "Safety-by-Design" framework that proactively identifies and mitigates risks to children before they occur, particularly in digital environments (webinars/workshops) and international project activities.

Clarity of Responsibility; To ensure that all EPA Board members, staff, volunteers, and member delegates clearly understand their legal and ethical obligations to protect children and know exactly how to behave when children are present.

Accountability and Response; To provide a transparent, reliable, and confidential mechanism for reporting concerns or allegations of abuse, neglect, or exploitation, ensuring that every report is handled with the urgency and seriousness it deserves.

Empowerment of Families; To support parents as the primary protectors by ensuring they are fully informed about the safety protocols in place when their children participate in EPA related frameworks, thereby strengthening trust between the Association and the families we serve.

Compliance with European Standards; To satisfy and exceed the safeguarding requirements set by the European Commission for EU-funded projects, ensuring that EPA remains a lead partner in high-level European educational and social initiatives.

Scope

Personal Scope; This policy is binding for all individuals who act on behalf of or represent the European Parents' Association (EPA), including:

- **Leadership & Governance:** Members of the Board of Directors and the Advisory Committee.
- **Operational Team:** Staff members, interns, and consultants.
- **Membership & Representation:** Delegates of member organizations and EPA Ambassadors.
- **External Partners:** Contractors, speakers, and volunteers involved in EPA-led or co-partnered activities.

Material Scope (Activities); These safeguarding standards apply to all frameworks where EPA operates, whether in person or virtually:

- **European Projects:** All multilateral projects where EPA or its partners engage with children and young people.
- **Events:** International conferences, General Assemblies, and study visits.
- **Digital Frameworks:** All online webinars, workshops, training sessions, and social media platforms managed by EPA.
- **Direct & Indirect Contact:** This covers both "direct contact" (working face-to-face with children) and "indirect contact" (handling children's data, images, or personal information).

Geographic Scope; Given the international nature of EPA, this policy applies across all member nations. While EPA respects national legislations, this policy serves as the minimum universal standard for all EPA activities regardless of the country in which they occur.

Key Principles and Definitions

To ensure clarity and alignment with the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) and the EU Strategy on the Rights of the Child, the following definitions apply:

- **Definition of a Child;** A "child" is defined as any person under the age of 18, regardless of the age of majority in their specific country of residence.
- **The Four Pillars of Protection;** EPA adheres to the four core principles of the UNCRC:
 - **Non-discrimination:** Protecting all children regardless of race, gender, disability, or background.
 - **Best Interests of the Child:** This must be the primary consideration in all EPA project designs.
 - **The Right to Life, Survival, and Development:** Ensuring a safe environment for growth.

- **Respect for the Views of the Child:** Ensuring children are listened to in matters affecting them.
- **Types of Harm and Abuse;** EPA recognizes and prohibits all forms of harm, including:
 - **Physical Abuse:** Any non-accidental physical injury or the use of corporal punishment.
 - **Emotional/Psychological Abuse:** Behavior that harms a child's self-esteem or emotional well-being (e.g., bullying, shaming).
 - **Sexual Abuse and Exploitation:** Any sexual activity between an adult and a child.
 - **Neglect:** The failure to provide for a child's basic physical or emotional needs during an EPA activity.
 - **Digital Harm (Cyber-risks):** Including cyberbullying, grooming, or unauthorized sharing of a child's personal data/images.

Standards of Behavior and Digital Safeguarding

General Standards of Behavior:

- **The "Two-Adult" Rule:** No individual representing EPA shall be alone with a child in a physical or digital private setting. All interactions must be open and observable.
- **Professional Boundaries:** Staff and volunteers must maintain professional relationships with children, avoiding any contact via personal social media accounts or private messaging.
- **Physical Contact:** Any physical contact must be child-initiated, culturally appropriate, and necessary (e.g., providing comfort or basic assistance).
- **Language and Conduct:** All communication must be age-appropriate, respectful, and free from shaming, bullying, or sexually suggestive language.

Digital Safeguarding (Webinars and Online Workshops):

- **Privacy-by-Default:** All EPA-hosted digital platforms for children will use the highest privacy settings. Chat functions will be moderated, and private messaging between adults and children will be disabled.
- **Authorized Access:** Access to webinars involving children must be password-protected. Only registered participants with verified parental consent may attend.
- **Recordings:** No session involving children shall be recorded without explicit, separate written consent from parents. If recorded, the data must be stored on secure EPA servers in compliance with GDPR.
- **Cyber-Risk Prevention:** Moderators are trained to identify and block "grooming" behaviors or cyberbullying. Any suspicious digital activity must be reported as a safeguarding breach.

Use of Images and Personal Data

- **Identifiability:** EPA will not publish a child's full name, address, or school alongside their photograph.
- **Dignity:** Images must portray children in a dignified and respectful manner, avoiding any photos that could be misinterpreted or exploited.

- **Right to Erasure:** Parents or children may request the removal of their images or data from EPA platforms at any time.

Procedures and Reporting

Vetting and Recruitment:

- In line with European standards, any person in regular or direct contact with children on behalf of EPA must undergo a background check (Criminal Record Check) where legally available in their jurisdiction.
- All representatives must sign a "Safeguarding Commitment Statement" before beginning work on projects involving minors.

Reporting a Concern:

- **Immediate Action:** If a child is in immediate danger, contact local emergency services (112) first. Suspicion of a breach must be reported to the EPA Ethics Officer or a Board member within 24 hours.
- **Internal Notification:** Any suspicion of abuse, neglect, or a breach of this policy must be reported to the **EPA Ethics Officer** or a Board Member within **24 hours**.
- **Confidentiality:** Reports will be handled on a "need-to-know" basis. The identity of the reporter will be protected to the maximum extent possible.

Response and Investigation:

- EPA will cooperate fully with national authorities and European project partners in any investigation.
- The accused individual will be immediately suspended from all activities involving children pending the outcome of the investigation.
- **Support Services:** EPA will facilitate access to appropriate support services for children and families affected by abuse or neglect within the framework of EPA activities. Support is provided with strict respect for privacy.
- **Investigation:** EPA will cooperate fully with authorities. The accused will be immediately suspended from child-related activities pending investigation

Final Provisions

This policy shall be reviewed every two years or immediately following a reported incident to remain effective and up-to-date with legislation.

Participation in any EPA project or event involving children implies full acceptance of these terms.

By participating in EPA activities, I acknowledge that I have read, understood, and agree to abide by this Child Protection & Safeguarding Policy.

Annex

For any questions or concerns regarding this policy, please contact: office@europarents.eu.