



CHILD PROTECTION POLICY

*POLICY GUIDELINES, PRINCIPLES AND PROCEDURES
ON CHILD PROTECTION AT ARETÉS*

Revision History

Version	Date	Changes / Updates	Approved by
1.0	15/03/2022	First edition of the Child Protection Policy.	Board of Directors
1.1	10/06/2023	Minor update: clarified reporting procedures, updated national child-safeguarding contacts, and improved formatting for easier use by staff and partners.	Board of Directors
2.0	20/03/2025	Comprehensive update: alignment with new EU child rights strategies and <i>Better Internet for Kids (BIK+)</i> guidelines; integration of emerging digital and AI-related risks (deepfakes, sextortion, metaverse); stronger staff/volunteer screening and mandatory annual training; inclusion of child participation mechanisms; introduction of bi-annual audits and measurable safeguarding indicators.	Board of Directors

INTRODUCTION	4
PRINCIPLES AND VALUES	4
Based on the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child.....	4
Non-negotiable duty	4
Open environment.....	4
Children’s Participation.....	5
Implementation and accountability	5
CHILD PROTECTION POLICY	7
COMPLIANCE MECHANISMS	8
HOW TO PREVENT RISKS	8
IMPLEMENTATION, MONITORING AND SANCTIONS	9
What to report	10
REVIEW CHILD PROTECTION POLICY REGULARLY	10
ANNEX 1 – ARETÉS’S CHILD PROTECTION CODE OF CONDUCT	11

INTRODUCTION

ARETÉS affirms its belief in the rights of all children, including the right to be protected from all forms of abuse, neglect, exploitation and violence, and to develop to their full potential, be healthy and happy, as set out in the 1989 UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) and in the Council of Europe Convention on Protection of Children against Sexual Exploitation and Sexual Abuse (Lanzarote Convention, 2007).

Children with whom ARETÉS staff, volunteers, interns, external collaborators and associates come in contact will be assured the rights expressed in the UNCRC. Through its work, ARETÉS aligns with the “EU Strategy for the rights of the child” and promotes action to support children’s participation in political and democratic life, their economic and social inclusion, their right to health and to education, providing equal opportunities to all children, to prevent violence against children and to protect them from violence, to promote a justice system that responds to the needs of children, to promote a safe digital experience for all children, and to support children globally.

ARETÉS takes the prevention of child abuse very seriously. ARETÉS understands that child abuse and inappropriate contact of children is a pervasive problem throughout the world that must be managed proactively. Therefore, the writing of this manual and guidelines shows the commitment to taking proactive steps to protect children in ARETÉS programs and facilities.

ARETÉS is committed to making decisions and taking actions that are guided by the principle of the “best interest of the child”.

This version (2025) integrates new EU child rights strategies and addresses emerging online and AI-related risks to ensure ongoing compliance and effectiveness.

PRINCIPLES AND VALUES

Based on the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child

This Child Protection Policy deals with the protection of children and young people as defined by the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child. The UNCRC should be taken holistically, providing a comprehensive framework for the protection, provision and participation of all children. All children and young people involved in ARETÉS activities, projects and programmes have the right to have their well-being and their best interests considered as top priority.

Non-negotiable duty

All organisations working for children’s rights have an absolute duty to protect children from abuse, maltreatment, and exploitation both from within and external to organisations and therefore are required to have adequate standards, policies and mechanisms for protection in place.

Open environment

ARETÉS therefore believes that to prevent abuse or address abuse of a child or young person, it is important to create an environment where:

- issues of child protection are discussed openly and are understood by children and adults;
- there are open lines of communication both internally and externally within and between member

- organisations to improve awareness and implementation of child protection policies and practices;
- there is a framework to deal openly, consistently and fairly with allegations concerning both direct and indirect abuse.

Children's Participation

ARETÉS works with and for children throughout Europe, striving for a society that respects the rights of children. ARETÉS believes that children's participation promotes the protection of children. ARETÉS aims to create spaces where children feel able and willing to speak about abuse, free from abusers and which empower them to become actors in their own protection without further discrimination or shame. ARETÉS members work to empower children by making them aware of their rights and creating a safe environment in which they can exercise their rights.

Implementation and accountability

This Child Protection Policy is developed to ensure the highest standards of professional behaviour and personal practice to ensure no harm occurs in any situation to children and young people during their involvement in ARETÉS activities, projects and programmes.

The Child Protection Policy is supported by clear guidelines on how it needs to be implemented by organisations participating and supporting children in ARETÉS activities, projects and programmes. Special procedures and checklists are part of the Child Protection Policy, including reporting procedures and actions following behaviour which is not in compliance with the child protection standards.

These principles underpin all of the following standards set out in this document.

DEFINITIONS

For the present policy, the following definitions apply:

- **Best Interest of the Child (BIC).** It is a threefold concept: a right, a principle and a rule of procedure based on an assessment of all elements of a child's or children's interests in a specific situation, both in the public and private sphere, which must be determined on a case-by-case basis, taking into consideration their personal context, situation and need. Accordingly, the concept of the child's best interests is flexible and adaptable. The concept of the child's best interests is aimed at ensuring both the full and effective enjoyment of all the rights recognised in the 1989 UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) and the holistic development of the child. The full application of the concept of the child's best interests requires the development of a rights-based approach, engaging all actors, to secure the holistic physical, psychological, moral and spiritual integrity of the child and promote his or her human dignity.
- **Child.** Every human being below the age of eighteen years old.

- **Child Protection.** The prevention and response to violence, exploitation and abuse of children in all contexts.
- **Child participation.** Child participation means that children, any person under the age of 18 years, individually or in groups, have the right, the means, the space, the opportunity and, where necessary, the support to freely express their views, to be heard and to contribute to decision making on matters affecting them, their views being given due weight in accordance with their age and maturity. To be able to participate meaningfully and genuinely, children and young people should be provided with all relevant information and offered adequate support for self-advocacy appropriate to their age and
- **Staff members.** Refers to paid staff, volunteers, interns and associates.
- **Digital and AI-related risks.** For the purpose of this Policy, the following emerging risks are included in the definition of “online abuse” and “digital environment”:
 - **AI-generated content and deepfakes:** images, audio or video created or altered by artificial intelligence that can harm, mislead, or exploit children.
 - **Sextortion:** coercion of a child to obtain sexual images, favours or money through threats or misuse of personal data.
 - **Metaverse/immersive environments:** virtual spaces or games where children may be exposed to grooming, harassment or unsafe interactions.
 - **Generative chatbots and social media algorithms:** tools that can be used to contact, profile or manipulate minors.

These definitions complement existing terms such as online grooming and cyberbullying and must be considered whenever staff and partners plan, implement or evaluate project activities. This version (2025) integrates new EU child rights strategies and addresses emerging online and AI-related risks to ensure ongoing compliance and effectiveness.

ARETÉS takes all measures to protect the child from all forms of child maltreatment and inappropriate behaviours. Child maltreatment is the abuse and neglect that occurs to children under 18 years of age. It includes all types of physical and/or emotional ill-treatment, sexual abuse, neglect, negligence and commercial or other exploitation, which results in actual or potential harm to the child’s health, survival, development or dignity in the context of a relationship of responsibility, trust or power, both in person or through information technology.

Specifically, ARETÉS defines it, but is not limited to the following:

- **Physical child abuse.** Physical abuse is an injury deliberately inflicted upon a child by any person, including adults. Physical abuse includes fractured or broken bones, burns, severe and/or frequent bruises, and any other intentionally inflicted physical harm.⁶
- **Child emotional abuse.** Emotional abuse happens when a child is repeatedly made to feel worthless, unloved, alone or scared. For instance: continually ignoring or rejecting a child, physically or socially isolating a child, forcing a child to do things by scaring them, constantly criticizing, humiliating or blaming a child, swearing, yelling or screaming at a child, bullying, teasing, insulting or belittling a child, having unrealistic expectations or unreasonable demands of a child, not allowing a child to explore, express themselves, learn or make friends, treating a child badly because of things they can’t change.
- **Child Sexual Abuse.** Is the involvement of a child in sexual activity that he or she does not fully comprehend, is unable to give informed consent to, or for which the child is not developmentally prepared and cannot give consent, or that violates the laws or social taboos of society. Child sexual abuse is evidenced by this activity between a child and an adult or another child who, by age or

development, is in a relationship of responsibility, trust or power, the activity being intended to gratify or satisfy the needs of the other person.⁸

- **Child pornography.** Any material that visually depicts a child engaged in real or simulated sexually explicit conduct or any depiction of a child's sexual organs for primarily sexual purposes.
- **Bullying.** Bullying is unwanted, aggressive behaviour among school-aged children that involves a real or perceived power imbalance. The behaviour is repeated, or has the potential to be repeated, over time.
- **Neglect or negligent treatment.** The failure to meet children's physical and psychological needs, protect them from danger, or obtain medical, birth registration or other services when those responsible for children's care have the means, knowledge and access to services to do so.
- **Child Exploitation.** Child exploitation includes child domestic work, child soldiers, the recruitment and involvement of children in armed conflict, sexual exploitation and pornography, the use of children for criminal activities, including the sale and distribution of narcotics and the involvement of children in harmful or hazardous work.

CHILD PROTECTION POLICY

The Child Protection Policy document outlines policies regulating the behaviour and approaches taken by staff members of ARETÉS within the undertaking of their professional roles.

The policy sets out the basic principles on which it is based, and specifically addresses the following aspects of the professional life of all staff members working at ARETÉS, within and outside its premises: screening and hiring; conduct when working in contact with children; training and working with other Partners.

ARETÉS' staff must ensure that child protection risk is considered and is managed in accordance with the risk management practices in place. ARETÉS will identify child protection obligations of funded partners in Requests for Collaboration as well as contracts and agreements for activities that have child protection impacts.

All ARETÉS's collaborators (individuals or organisations) are expected to act in accordance with the policy principles outlined in this document.

Where contact with children is identified in the delivery of ARETÉS's services, it requires external collaborators and partners to:

- undertake their own risk assessment of each ARETÉS'S activity to ensure they identify and manage risks to children appropriately. This can be incorporated into existing activity planning and risk management practices. Child protection safeguards should be in keeping with the minimum child protection standards.
- ensure personnel are trained in child protection awareness and understand their obligation to protect children when carrying out their work,
- have a clear internal reporting mechanism or procedure for their personnel to report concerns, and
- immediately report any suspected or alleged instances of child abuse, exploitation, harm or child protection policy non-compliance to the head of the Socio-Humanities Dept.

Any suspicion or disclosure of child abuse and exploitation must be reported immediately through the organisation's internal processes and to ARETÉS. When responding to allegations, employers have a

responsibility to ensure their employees are treated fairly and that the rights of each individual are respected during an investigation and any applicable disciplinary process.

The requirement to develop and implement a child-safe approach also applies to all downstream personnel, partners, and subcontractors who are engaged by a funded partner to perform any part of an ARETÉS-funded activity where working with or having contact with children is identified. The managing partner must ensure the downstream organisation or individual subcontractor complies with the minimum child protection standards.

For activities that have no contact or impact on children, partners are not required to implement the minimum standards. However, ARETÉS-funded organisations that are child-focused are required to meet the minimum standards irrespective of whether the specific activity involves working or contact with children.

COMPLIANCE MECHANISMS

ARETÉS monitors compliance with policy requirements through performance assessments, reviews, civil society organisation accreditation, and a program of audits and spot checks. Where minimum child protection standards are required, ARETÉS requires documentary evidence to demonstrate that external collaborators and partners are meeting these standards. Non-compliance with the minimum child protection standards, where required, may lead to suspension or termination of funding arrangements.

Under ARETÉS contracts, ARETÉS can ask to remove individuals from working on an activity when an individual has been accused, charged, arrested or convicted of a criminal offence relating to child exploitation and abuse, or when IF considers that an individual poses a risk to a child's safety or well-being. IF also requires anyone under formal investigation for offences relating to child exploitation and abuse to be suspended from duty or transferred to other duties during an investigation.

ARETÉS reserves the right to terminate contract negotiations, refuse to engage an individual, or require an individual to be replaced if appropriate criminal record checks are not undertaken, or cannot be undertaken for roles that are identified as working with or having contact with children.

HOW TO PREVENT RISKS

Members of staff and volunteers should be recruited to implement the organisation's commitment to child protection. Recruiters should be considering the motivation of candidates to work with children and other ethical values like honesty, non-discrimination, reliability and loyalty. Criminal records disclosure and references should be required.

ARETÉS demands its partners to share mission, values and common strategies.

The communication carried out by ARETÉS should be respectful of children's dignity.

All staff, collaborators and partners must ensure a safe and responsible use of digital tools, AI-based applications and online platforms when working with or for children. This includes:

- using only approved platforms and secure devices for communication and educational activities;
- never sharing or generating AI-produced images, audio or video of children without explicit consent and safeguarding review;
- actively monitoring chatbots, games, metaverse or immersive tools to prevent grooming, harassment or exposure to harmful content;
- applying strict data protection and privacy rules to all digital interactions.

Compliance with these requirements is mandatory and will be regularly monitored.

Pictures and stories should be published without violating the best interests of a child, and after receiving permission from parents or a legal guardian. Pictures should feature appropriately dressed and postured children, fully respecting their dignity. The titles of projects should address objectives and results rather than liabilities and problems. Partners and groups cooperating with ARETÉS should agree upon this set of rules.

Training: ARETÉS will provide the members of staff with periodical training on children's rights, trying to encourage a productive debate around the topics treated during training. Periodic re-screening and mandatory annual training on digital safeguarding and emerging online threats, including AI-related risks, are required.

The training provided will involve some essential topics, such as:

- Children's basic rights;
- The definition of maltreatment and exploitation, and how to recognise them when they are actually happening;
- What to do to address violations of the policy.

Members of staff should comply with this policy and the ARETÉS's Code of Conduct, treating a child accordingly. Furthermore, journalists, spokespersons or any other person involved with the ARETÉS's projects should comply with this set of rules.

Policy content should be shared with and explained to minors in order to let them understand what maltreatment is and what they can do to defend themselves, as awareness is the first step toward protecting themselves and their peers effectively.

IMPLEMENTATION, MONITORING AND SANCTIONS

The Board of ARETÉS is accountable for this policy and responsible for its implementation. The Social Services Manager is responsible for the implementation of CPP and is the person in charge of the communication with children, parents and their legal representatives. If the person who reports seeks information for additional support and consultation, the social service manager is responsible for providing guidelines and contacts.

The monitoring of adherence to this policy is made through the mandatory tracking of the Child Protection Policy Implementation Standards and ARETÉS's Code of Conduct (see Annexe 1) by all parts of ARETÉS.

Breaches of this policy and failure to comply with these responsibilities may incur the following sanctions:

- For ARETÉS Staff - disciplinary action leading to possible dismissal.
- For ARETÉS Experts and Research Associates, Volunteers/interns and External Staff - up to and including termination of all relations, including contractual and partnership agreements with ARETÉS.
- Where relevant, appropriate legal or other such actions.

It is mandatory for all ARETÉS's staff and partners to report immediately any suspected or alleged case of child exploitation, abuse or policy non-compliance by anyone within the scope of the policy in connection with official duties or business. All reports should be made to aretetes@aretetes.it

This policy will undergo documented audits at least every two years, with indicators to measure its implementation and effectiveness.

What to report

Staff and partners must report any behaviour that is suspected of being child exploitation or abuse (including possession of child exploitation material) or policy non-compliance by:

- an ARETÉS's staff member, including locally engaged staff
- personnel of an ARETÉS external collaborator or civil society organisation, including subcontractors
- personnel of an ARETÉS-funded multilateral organisation
- an ARETÉS-funded volunteer
- any report made to you by anyone relating to child exploitation and abuse or policy non-compliance by an ARETÉS staff or ARETÉS external collaborator

Where an individual or organisation has already reported, but becomes aware of additional information, the individual or organisation must also report that information.

REVIEW CHILD PROTECTION POLICY REGULARLY

The policy will be reviewed annually, or earlier if warranted, and lessons learned incorporated into subsequent versions.

This policy has been reviewed and approved by:

Date
20/03/2025
Mrs. Simona MELLI
Legal Representative of ARETÉS

Simona (Melli)

RICERCA, PROGETTAZIONE E COMUNICAZIONE
PER LA QUALITÀ SOCIALE



aretes
Aretés Società Cooperativa

ANNEX 1 – ARETÉS'S CHILD PROTECTION CODE OF CONDUCT

ARETÉS will take all necessary actions to prevent and/ or respond to child protection situations. ARETÉS will never ignore and will respond to all reports of actual or alleged abuses based on its Child Protection Policy, irrespective of the nature of the referral, who the allegations are about or who the referrer is or where she/ he is from. This response must not include an investigation which will be undertaken by the relevant child protection and police service.

This Code of Conduct includes guidance on ethical and proper standards of behaviour of adults towards children, and also of children towards other children. It has been developed with the best interests of the child as the primary consideration and should be interpreted in a spirit of transparency and common sense. ARETÉS aims for everyone, children and adults, to participate in a safe and happy way in ARETÉS's work and activities.

DO

- Be aware of what constitutes child abuse and exploitation (included in the Child Protection Policy) and understand its provisions.
- Know the signs of abuse and report any suspicious observations immediately to the Child Protection officer.
- Ensure that you know who the Child Protection Officer is. Respect lines of authority and reporting procedures.
- Treat all children equally: be inclusive and involve all children without discrimination.
- Maintain high standards of personal and professional conduct both personally and in others.
- Protect the health, safety and well-being of yourself and others.
- Be aware of high-risk peer situations (e.g. unsupervised mixing of older and younger children and possibilities of discrimination against minors) and the potential for peer abuse.
- Be concerned about the way in which your language, actions, and relationships with children could be perceived.
- Develop special measures/ supervision to protect younger and especially vulnerable children from peer and adult abuse.
- Provide an enabling environment for children's personal, physical, social, emotional, moral and intellectual development.
- Encourage and respect children's voices and views.
- Limit access to and/ or do not expose children to any inappropriate electronic material.
- At all times, respect the confidentiality of children's personal information.
- Obtain written consent from the child and parent/carer when photographing, filming or requesting personal information for activities.
- Ensure that there is a minimum of two staff members present in meetings with children (to allow one to go out to deal with any immediate needs of children).
- When participants are invited to stay overnight, room-sharing arrangements are agreed in advance and with the consent of the parents/ guardians and children.

DON'T

- Engage in any form of sexual activity with children.
- Never have a child stay overnight in the adult's room, unless prior consent is provided by both the

child and his/ her parent/ guardian. Never sleep in the same bed as a child.

- Do not perform activities for children that they can do themselves, including dressing, bathing and grooming.
- Do not discriminate, shame, humiliate, belittle, or degrade children. This includes anything that may be considered emotional abuse (e. g. use language that will mentally or emotionally abuse a child or tell a story/ show pictures that will mentally or emotionally abuse a child).
- Do not hit or otherwise physically assault participants.
- Do not act in any way that may be abusive or place others at risk of abuse.
- Do not condone violations of this code by others – staff, interns, consultants, etc.
- Do not be alone with a child in any circumstances that might be questioned by others
- Do not allow children to engage in sexually provocative games with each other.
- Do not suggest inappropriate behaviour or relations of any kind or encourage any crushes by a child.
- Do not take photos, film, or request personal information if not required for ARETÉS's activities.
- Do not use inappropriate contact details (including social media accounts) from children out of ARETÉS's programmes.
- Never guarantee confidentiality to a child.
- Do not investigate any disclosures from a child.