YouNet Reggio-Emilia

Child Protection Policy

Reggio nell'Emilia, Italy
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YouNet Reggio-Emilia
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1. The mission and activities of YouNet Reggio-Emilia

YouNet Reggio-Emilia develops and delivers trainings and international mobility projects on the territory of Reggio Emilia and Parma within the Erasmus+ Programme. The mission of YouNet-Reggio Emilia, through the implementation of vocational and educational placement projects, is to strengthen the employability of young people and facilitate their transition to the labor market through the multifaceted experience of transnational mobility.

To achieve this goal, YouNet-Reggio Emilia promotes and takes care of the organization locally and internationally of short, medium and long-term volunteer and training activities. Volunteers and employees thus gain awareness and strategic skills on European project management, particularly the Erasmus+ program. All our initiatives aim at building an inclusive and tolerant society that lays its foundations on dialogue to support and encourage active citizenship, promoting the growth of the European and intercultural dimension by focusing on young people and the local entities with which we collaborate.

We believe that our mobility, volunteer and technical and vocational training initiatives can lead to the renewal of the traditional educational system and the promotion and exchange with local realities.

YouNet RE has wide experience in the field of learning mobility of young people and youth workers since it is its main field of action. YouNet RE has organized and has participated in several partnership building activities, capacity building projects and EVS/ESC projects every year since its establishment.

YouNet RE promotes solidarity, European citizenship, active and civic participation, inclusion and volunteering, and regularly runs info sessions aimed at youths, citizens and organizations about learning mobility experience, especially in the framework of European Programmes.

In all its activities, YouNet Reggio-Emilia aims to create a safe and welcoming environment for children and young people. It is a place where they feel protected, respected, and free to share their ideas and opinions, while growing personally, emotionally, and socially.

2. Goals and guidelines of the Child Protection Policy

This Child Protection Policy applies to all individuals engaged in activities with or on behalf of YouNet Reggio-Emilia. This includes:

- Full-time and part-time staff members

- Interns and volunteers
- Board members
- Project partners and contractors
- External collaborators and visitors
- Participants in international mobility projects

The Policy covers all YouNet RE's activities both locally and internationally, including educational, social, cultural, volunteering, mobility, and awareness-raising initiatives.

The goal of this Policy is to protect all children and young people involved in YouNet Reggio-Emilia's activities, no matter their age, ability, gender identity, race, religion, sex, or sexual orientation. It aims to protect them from any form of harm, exploitation, neglect, or violence.

This Policy also offers clear principles and rules for staff, volunteers, children, young people, and their families. It guides how we approach child and youth protection in everything we do.

It outlines procedures to help reduce risks for children and young people during our activities. While we know that it's impossible to remove all risks completely, we are committed to doing everything we can to reduce them—through prevention, awareness, communication, and proper reporting.

Our commitment applies to every phase of our work:

- designing projects
- building partnerships, networking
- running activities
- monitoring and evaluating our work
- sharing and communicating our results

At each step, YouNet Reggio-Emilia promises to protect children and young people from neglect, abuse, and discrimination. We listen to them, recognize their needs, and work to remove any barriers that prevent them from expressing their concerns or fears.

This Policy is based on the Child Safeguarding Standards, which state:

- Every child has the right to be protected from harm.
- Everyone has a role in keeping children safe.

- Organizations must take responsibility for the safety of children they work with or affect.
- Any action taken to protect children must be in their best interest—this is always the top priority.

YouNet Reggio-Emilia commits to the principle of "Do No Harm". We acknowledge that while our intention is to support, educate, and empower children and young people, our activities may unintentionally pose risks. As such, we prioritize minimizing these risks and promoting safety in all our programs and interactions. We ensure that:

- Our programs do not expose children to risk or harm;
- All concerns about children's safety are taken seriously and acted upon;
- Staff and partners understand their duty to protect children.

When creating this Policy, YouNet Reggio-Emilia followed the key principles found in important international agreements that protect children's rights and fundamental freedoms. These include:

- The **United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child**, especially:
  - **Article 2**, which forbids any kind of discrimination;
  - **Articles 28 and 29**, which focus on the right to education;
  - **Article 31**, which ensures the right to rest, play, and take part in recreational activities.
- The **EU Charter of Fundamental Rights**
- The **European Convention on the Exercise of Children's Rights**
- The **Italian Constitution.**

3. Terms and definitions

Bullying

Bullying is when someone repeatedly and intentionally uses aggressive behavior to hurt, scare, or upset another person. This often involves a power imbalance, where one person or group has more strength or control than the other. Bullying can be physical, verbal, social (excluding someone), or happen online (cyberbullying).

Child

According to Article 1 of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, a child is any person under the age of 18, unless the law in their country sets a lower age for legal adulthood.

Child Abuse

Child abuse is any action—or failure to act—that harms a child's physical, emotional, or mental well-being. It can include physical, sexual, or emotional abuse, neglect, or exploitation.

Child Exploitation

Child exploitation means using or taking advantage of a child for personal gain or profit. This includes child labor, child trafficking, sexual exploitation, forced marriage, and any other harmful or abusive practices.

Child Neglect

Neglect happens when a child's basic needs are not met—such as food, shelter, clothing, education, or medical care. It involves ignoring or not properly caring for a child, which can harm their development and well-being.

Child Protection

Child protection means preventing and responding to abuse, neglect, exploitation, and violence against children. It includes all actions taken to keep children safe and protect their rights, whether before or after harm has occurred.

Emotional Abuse

Emotional abuse is a pattern of behavior that damages a child's self-esteem or emotional health. It includes actions like constant criticism, threats, insults, humiliation, or isolating the child, either through words or body language.

Physical Abuse

Physical abuse is when someone deliberately causes physical harm or injury to a child. This can include hitting, kicking, shaking, burning, or any action that causes pain, injury, or distress.

Sexual Abuse

Sexual abuse is any sexual activity involving a child that they do not understand or cannot give consent to. It includes physical contact like touching or assault, and non-contact actions like showing sexual content, involving children in pornography, or encouraging sexual behavior.

4. Code of Conduct

All staff, interns, and volunteers at YouNet Reggio-Emilia must follow the Child Protection Policy and Code of Conduct at all times, both during work and outside the workplace.

The list below outlines what is expected of everyone working with children and young people. It helps ensure that professional boundaries are respected and that inappropriate or harmful behaviors are clearly understood and avoided.

Unacceptable behaviors include:

- Using physical violence or making threats of physical harm
- Shouting, using insulting, obscene, or degrading language
- Acting aggressively, intrusively, or in a way that could be perceived as threatening
- Holding personal grudges or unfairly targeting specific children
- Engaging in any sexual contact, behavior, or relationship with a child or young person
- Making unwanted physical contact or sexually suggestive remarks or gestures
- Asking children for inappropriate content, personal items, or photos
- Sharing personal contact information such as your phone number or home address with children
- Developing personal or inappropriate relationships with children outside of official work without permission
- Making racist, sexist, homophobic, transphobic, ableist, or otherwise discriminatory comments
- Treating children unfairly based on their background, identity, or personal characteristics
- Repeatedly demanding disciplinary action against a child without valid reason
- Undermining a child's self-esteem through manipulation, humiliation, or constant criticism
- Isolating, shaming, belittling, or patronizing children
- Using sarcasm or treating children as if they are not intelligent or capable
- Making serious accusations against children without any supporting evidence
- Minimizing or exaggerating issues related to abuse
- Failing to provide proper care, supervision, or support for a child's basic needs, such as food, shelter, or medical care
- Ignoring or failing to report any concerns or allegations of abuse or inappropriate behavior
- Violating a child's privacy by accessing their personal space or belongings, or sharing private information without consent

- Recording conversations or meetings involving children without the informed consent of their parents or guardians
- Making promises you cannot keep, especially those related to confidentiality
- Relying on your personal reputation or your role in the organization to avoid accountability

5. Staff members

This Policy applies to everyone working on behalf of YouNet Reggio-Emilia, including board members, paid staff, interns, and volunteers. All of them are informed about the principles related to abuse and neglect, the risks involved, and the preventive measures and behaviors they must follow when working with children and young people.

The Policy is also shared with the following groups:

- **Children and their parents**, to help them understand their rights and encourage them to speak up for themselves and others.
- **Project partners**, who are expected to fully respect and apply the principles of this Policy and work together to ensure its enforcement. It is essential that partnerships are built with organizations that are also committed to child protection.
- **Stakeholders**, in order to strengthen and expand the organization's commitment to protecting children's rights.

All employees will receive regular training on child protection and safeguarding. Everyone involved in the organization's activities must be familiar with the Policy and its contents.

The Policy is available in both English and Italian on the organization's website (www.you-net.eu), making it easy to access and consult.

6. Child Protection Officer

YouNet Reggio-Emilia is fully committed to the safety and well-being of children. For this reason, a dedicated Child Protection Officer has been appointed to lead the implementation and monitoring of all child protection policies and procedures.

The current Child Protection Officer is Paulina Walacik, the president of the organization.

Her main responsibilities include:

- **Developing, implementing, and regularly reviewing child protection policies and procedures**, including risk assessments and strategies to reduce potential harm in programs and activities
- **Organizing training sessions and workshops** to raise awareness and help staff and volunteers understand child protection principles, risks, and best practices
- **Managing a confidential reporting system** for child protection concerns, ensuring proper documentation, investigation, and follow-up
- **Providing support and guidance** to staff, volunteers, and caregivers on child protection issues and policy application
- **Maintaining secure and accurate records** of child protection cases and concerns, in line with confidentiality and data protection laws

The Child Protection Officer makes sure that all team members—staff, interns, and volunteers—are fully informed about the organization's standards and procedures, and serves as the main contact person for any safeguarding concerns.

To keep the Policy effective and up to date, it is reviewed once a year.

7. Measures of prevention

General measures

We are committed to keeping children and young people safe by:

- Valuing, listening to, and respecting them

- Preventing and responding to all forms of bullying, including verbal, physical, emotional, cyberbullying, discrimination, and exclusion, and maintaining a strong anti-bullying environment with clear policies and procedures
- Ensuring all activities and events involving children and young people are planned and delivered safely, with proper adult-to-child supervision ratios in place
- Promoting online safety by educating children and families about the risks of social media and digital tools, and applying parental controls when needed
- Creating safe physical spaces for children, young people, staff, and volunteers by following health and safety laws and guidance
- Applying safeguarding and child protection best practices through our policies, procedures, and code of conduct for all staff and volunteers
- Providing continuous training, supervision, and support for staff and volunteers so they fully understand and follow our protection procedures
- Ensuring children, young people, and their families know how to report concerns and where to go for help
- Maintaining clear and accessible complaints and whistleblowing procedures
- Building a culture of safeguarding where everyone—staff, volunteers, children, young people, and families—treats each other with respect and feels safe to raise concerns

When designing projects

When designing projects, YouNet Reggio-Emilia includes child protection from the start by identifying possible risks, planning age-appropriate activities, and ensuring inclusivity. We involve trained staff and partners who share our safeguarding values to build safe, supportive environments. Each project is structured to respect children's rights and promote their well-being throughout its implementation.

When building partnerships, networking and collaborating with partners

When choosing partners, we will consider their commitment to shared values, especially the protection of children and young people's rights. This includes having their own Child Protection Policy, as well as experience and understanding of young people's needs when designing and carrying out activities.

The Policy will be shared with all partners, and together we will discuss how to apply its principles and the relevant international treaties in ways that suit the local context during the planning and implementation of joint actions.

When running activities

All activities involving children and young people will fully respect the rights outlined in this Policy, ensuring they are free from discrimination, harm, violence, or neglect. Activities will use mainly non-formal methods that encourage participation from all, with special attention given to those with fewer opportunities, to ensure equal learning experiences for everyone.

When monitoring and evaluating our work

YouNet Reggio-Emilia includes child protection in monitoring and evaluation by reviewing practices, collecting feedback, and assessing risks throughout the project. We ensure that safeguarding measures are working effectively and make improvements when needed. This ongoing process helps maintain a safe environment for children and young people in all our activities.

When sharing and communicating our results

All internal and external communication by YouNet Reggio-Emilia—whether for project dissemination, volunteer recruitment, or promotion of events—must respect the rights and dignity of children and young people. This means:

- Obtaining informed, written consent from parents or legal guardians (*see: Annexes*) before using images, videos, stories, or personal information
- Avoiding the use of full names or identifying details of children in published materials
- Disabling geotagging on shared photos
- Ensuring that staff and media professionals follow strict child protection standards
- Reviewing all content to ensure it is safe, appropriate, and respectful

Materials such as photos, videos, or other documentation are collected only when necessary and used only for the specific purpose and time frame of the activity. Access is restricted to members of the organization.

When hiring new staff members

YouNet Reggio-Emilia ensures that all staff, interns, and volunteers follow a clear Code of Conduct. Everyone involved must share the organization's commitment to protecting and respecting the rights of children and young people.

Staff must understand what constitutes abuse, neglect, and discrimination to prevent both intentional and unintentional harm. They are trained to recognize appropriate and inappropriate behavior when working with minors.

Recruitment and selection are carried out with a strong focus on safety. All applicants are evaluated based on their:

- Sensitivity to the needs—both expressed and unspoken—of children and young people
- Respect for children's rights
- Personal values such as honesty and non-discrimination
- References and prior experience

YouNet Reggio-Emilia is committed to a thorough and consistent recruitment process for all staff, including trainees, volunteers, and employees, to ensure a secure environment for everyone involved.

The recruitment process includes the following steps:

1. **Application**: Candidates submit a completed application form, along with consent for background checks.
2. **Preliminary Screening**: Applications are reviewed to assess basic qualifications and suitability.
3. **Interview**: Shortlisted candidates complete a pre-interview questionnaire, followed by a phone interview and a final in-person or video interview to evaluate alignment with the organization's mission and values.
4. **Background Checks**: Criminal record and vetting checks are conducted for all countries where the candidate has lived or worked.
5. **Reference Checks**: References from past employers or supervisors are contacted to confirm professional behavior and work ethic.

6. **Decision and Offer**: A final decision is made based on all the steps above. Selected candidates receive a formal offer outlining the terms of engagement.

This process ensures consistent standards across all roles and reflects our commitment to ethical practices and safeguarding the well-being of all members of our community.

8. Reporting a concern and whistleblowing

Anyone working or volunteering at YouNet Reggio-Emilia can report concerns about safety or well-being using specific report forms (*see: Annexes*), which should be submitted to the designated person. Whistleblowers are protected, and their privacy is fully respected.

YouNet Reggio-Emilia is committed to managing all allegations—whether involving staff, volunteers, or children—in a responsible and confidential manner.

9. Accountability

To monitor how child protection policies are applied, YouNet Reggio-Emilia includes safeguarding measures in its existing systems for risk assessment, monitoring, and reporting. Progress and any arising issues are regularly reported to the Board.

The Policy and related procedures are reviewed annually, using lessons learned and practical experience. Self-assessment tools and internal audits are used to evaluate effectiveness and are reported alongside other organizational activities.

10. Confidentiality

YouNet Reggio-Emilia records, stores, and handles child protection information professionally and securely, in line with data protection laws and guidelines. Information is shared only with those directly involved, both inside and outside the organization.

11. Protection systems and contacts outside the organization

The following phone numbers, referrals and protection systems are present in Italy, and can be addressed outside the organization:

- Police and Carabinieri: **112**
- Emergenza infanzia: **114**
- Telefono azzurro: **1 96 96**, available also online at https://azzurro.it
- Social services of the city of Reggio Emilia: **0522 585472**,
  email: appuntamentisportellosociale@comune.re.it

12. Contact Details of the Child Protection Officer

For any questions, support, or further information related to child protection, you can contact the Child Protection Officer at the following details:

Paulina Andzelika Walacik

info@you-net.eu
+39 333 684 6684

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Paulina Walacik
President of YouNet Reggio-Emilia
Reggio Emilia, 24.04.2025.

Annex - Reporting child abuse form

Child safe standards require all organizations working with children to have clear procedures for reporting and responding to suspected abuse. This template should be given to a child or their family if they report abuse or a safety concern. Staff may also use it to document any disclosures. All reports must be stored securely to protect confidentiality.

Incident details:

Date and time of incident: ……..

Place of incident: ……..……

Name(s) of child/children involved: ……

Name(s) of staff/volunteer involved: ……...

Please categorize the incident (for more information see: Terms and definitions)

- ☐ Physical abuse
- ☐ Sexual abuse
- ☐ Child exploitation
- ☐ Other (please specify):

  ……..
- ☐ Serious emotional or psychological abuse
- ☐ Serious neglect
- ☐ Bullying

Please describe the incident:

When did it happen? ……

Who was involved? ……..

What did you see, hear, sense; what did you observe?

……

……

……

……

……

Other information:

……

……

……

……

Office use:

Date of reception of the incident report: .....

Staff member managing the incident: .....

Follow-up date: .....

Incident ref. number: .....

Has the incident been reported?

- ☐ Police
- ☐ Another third party (please specify): .....

Incident reporter wishes to remain anonymous? (underline as it applies) YES NO

Annex - Parental Consent Template

Parental Consent Form for Participation and Media Use

Child's Name: _____

Date of Birth: _____

Parent/Guardian's Name: _____

Relationship to the Child: _____

Contact Number: _____

Email: _____

1. Participation Consent

I hereby give permission for my child to participate in activities organized by YouNet Reggio-Emilia. I understand the nature of the activities and that YouNet RE will take all necessary measures to ensure my child's safety and well-being.

Signature: _____ Date: _____

2. Media Consent

I give / do not give (please underline) permission for YouNet Reggio-Emilia to take and use photographs, video recordings, and written or spoken content involving my child for educational, reporting, or promotional purposes. I understand that:

- My child's full name and identifying details will not be disclosed;
- I can withdraw consent at any time.

Signature: _____ Date: _____