

Child Protection Operational Guidelines

1. Introduction

Associação Portuguesa de Startups (APSU) is committed to promoting safe, inclusive, and ethical environments in all its activities, including training, mentoring, entrepreneurship support, and youth-focused initiatives.

While APSU's core mission is to foster entrepreneurship, innovation, and employability, it also recognises its responsibility to safeguard the well-being and rights of children and young people participating in its programmes. APSU contributes to building skills and opportunities for youth, particularly through education, training, and international cooperation projects.

In line with the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child, APSU ensures that all children and young people involved in its activities are protected from harm and treated with dignity and respect.

This policy establishes a framework to:

- Protect children and young people from harm, abuse, and exploitation
- Ensure safe participation in APSU activities (training, events, mobility, mentoring, etc.)
- Promote ethical and professional conduct among all stakeholders
- Embed safeguarding principles across all projects and partnerships

2. Scope

This policy applies to:

- APSU staff members and management
- Trainers, facilitators, and mentors
- Volunteers and interns
- Project partners and external experts

- Any individual representing APSU in activities involving children or young people

APSU commits to:

- Informing all relevant stakeholders about this policy
- Integrating child protection measures into all relevant projects (e.g., Erasmus+, youth and training initiatives)
- Requiring partners to comply with APSU standards or demonstrate equivalent safeguarding policies
- Ensuring that all activities involving minors are appropriately supervised and risk-assessed

3. Definitions

Child: Any person under the age of 18, in accordance with the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child.

Child Protection: All measures and practices implemented by APSU to prevent harm and ensure the safety, dignity, and well-being of children involved in its activities.

Child Abuse: APSU adopts the definition of the World Health Organization, including: a) Physical or emotional abuse; b) Sexual abuse; c) Neglect or negligent treatment; d) Exploitation (including commercial or digital exploitation).

4. Code of Conduct

All APSU representatives must adhere to the following:

Expected Behaviour

- Treat all children and young people with respect, dignity, and fairness
- Promote inclusion, diversity, and equal opportunities
- Maintain professional boundaries at all times
- Be vigilant to signs of abuse, neglect, or vulnerability

- Report any concerns immediately through appropriate channels
- Ensure transparency in interactions (avoid isolated one-to-one situations)
- Respect confidentiality and data protection rules (GDPR compliance)
- Obtain informed consent from parents/carers for participation and media use
- Be aware of risks in peer interactions (e.g., bullying, exclusion, digital harassment)

Prohibited Behaviour

It is strictly forbidden to:

- Engage in any form of sexual or inappropriate relationship with a minor
- Act in ways that may be perceived as abusive, exploitative, or inappropriate
- Ignore or tolerate safeguarding concerns
- Engage in inappropriate physical contact
- Be alone with a child without appropriate safeguards
- Share or expose children to inappropriate content (including online)
- Collect or misuse personal data without consent
- Establish personal relationships outside professional contexts (e.g., private messaging, social media contact)

5. Social Media and Communication

Given APSU's strong involvement in digital environments, training platforms, and online dissemination:

- Photos/videos of minors may only be used with informed consent
- Children must not be identifiable through sensitive personal data (full names, addresses, locations)
- Content must respect dignity, diversity, and non-stigmatisation
- APSU representatives must not connect with minors via personal social media accounts
- Communication with minors must occur through official, transparent channels

— Any inappropriate online interaction must be reported immediately

6. Safe Delivery of Activities

As APSU operates in training, entrepreneurship, and international projects:

- All activities involving minors must be properly supervised
- Risk assessments must be conducted for events, workshops, and mobilities
- At least two responsible adults should be present during activities involving minors
- Clear roles and responsibilities must be defined for staff and partners
- Safeguarding considerations must be included in project design and implementation

7. Reporting and Response Mechanisms

Any suspicion or incident must be reported immediately to the designated safeguarding contact within APSU. It also will be escalated to relevant authorities when necessary as well as documented in a confidential and secure manner.

APSU will act promptly to ensure the safety of the child and respect confidentiality and protect whistleblowers. Our organisation will also cooperate with authorities and follow legal procedures and ensure that no retaliation occurs against those reporting concerns.

8. Breach of Policy

Any individual suspected of violating this policy may be suspended pending investigation. Confirmed violations may result in disciplinary action, termination of involvement, and/or legal reporting.

APSU reserves the right to terminate partnerships with organisations that fail to meet safeguarding standards.