



CHILDREN OF PRISONERS EUROPE

CHILD PROTECTION POLICY

An estimated one million children are separated from an imprisoned parent in Europe on a given day. Yet few people are fully aware of the impact a parent's imprisonment can have on a child. Children of Prisoners Europe (COPE) is a European network encouraging innovative perspectives and practice to ensure that the rights of these children are fully respected, that their needs are taken into account and that action is taken to secure their wellbeing and development.

COPE network members share the following values:

Commitment – to providing high-quality effective work for the well-being of children of prisoners and for the COPE network;

Accountability – to children affected by parental imprisonment, to each other, and to funders;

Child justice focus – working to serve children's best interests and promote their rights;

Respect – for each individual, for equity in diversity, placing great value on cross-cultural learning and inclusiveness, exchanging ideas and knowledge about and from children of imprisoned parents among COPE network members and partners;

Openness – to innovation, to embracing change, to exploring new pathways to bettering the lives of children of prisoners, promoting understanding that they are ordinary children with unusual life experiences;

Child participation – listening to children and young people and involving them in our work;

Cooperation – working with partners to enhance the lives of children with imprisoned parents through dialogue, participation and consensus-building;

Integrity – remaining committed to truth, honesty, responsibility, reliability and professionalism, acting in ways to enhance and protect COPE's reputation;

Transparency – in relation to communication and working methods

Independence – from any religious or political party affiliation

The best interests of the child are our prime consideration at all times and concern for children of prisoners is at the heart of our work.

The COPE network and its member organisations are committed to the prevention of abuse and to the well-being of children, young people, their families and staff members. The organisation remains committed to acting in the best interests of the children and young people it represents, who are directly impacted by the work of COPE and by the initiatives COPE promotes; COPE aims to protect and prevent abuse of children and vulnerable adults at every level of the organisation and in all our work. COPE will attend to the questions of protection and prevention of child abuse both in relation to individuals as well as at institutional levels. Appropriate references and checks are made on all who work directly with COPE. Any suspicion that any staff member is involved in child abuse at the workplace or in personal life, directly or indirectly (for example, via computer/internet), will result in immediate suspension pending the relevant inquiry.

In all that COPE carries out, the organisation recognises that the family's primary role in caring and protecting the child should be valued and that the child-parent bond should be supported and maintained where appropriate. The child's safety, emotional and physical well-being and best interests have priority.

COPE is committed to complying with all relevant legislation. COPE and its network members agree that working in accordance with this policy requires staff to be trained and supported. COPE will ensure that any disclosures about alleged abuse are acknowledged and appropriate action taken to ensure the safety of children who make disclosures.

COPE's child protection policy is based on the values enshrined in the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child, the EU Charter of Fundamental Rights and the European Convention on Human Rights. COPE will include the prevention of child abuse at the heart of its policies, discussions and development plans and practices. The issue is inextricably linked with our overall aim.

This policy applies to all children who come into contact with the COPE network, for example through participation in conferences, discussion sessions, creative activities related to COPE's awareness-raising work (such as the production of videos). It applies to COPE staff, interns, volunteers, board members and any contracted staff who come into contact with children in carrying out their work for COPE.

This policy applies to all children and young people who come into contact with the organisation as a network, as well as to those children and young people who come into contact with COPE's member organisations. A child is defined as anyone under the age of 18. "Staff" is defined as those who are employed directly by or who volunteer for COPE, as well as staff or volunteers of COPE member organisations whilst they are working with children and young people in the care or supervision of COPE.

The COPE child protection policy will be reviewed annually.

Special guidelines for child participation in projects

1. Preparation:

Staff must ensure that the consultation is voluntary, that the aims and processes of the consultation are understood by the participants, that there is adult support available for the children, that children fully understand that they have the right not to answer a question and the right not to participate, that there will be no repercussions or negative consequences as a result of their participation.

2. Explanation of the project:

COPE recommends clear explanations to children to ensure that the project's goals and the reasons for the involvement of children are understood. For example, staff should explain to the children involved that their assistance is needed in order to ensure that a particular project, activity, event or tool is as relevant and appropriate for children as possible. Staff must also explain how children's responses will be used and that their views and ideas will be carefully considered but may not be the ones that COPE decides to use.

3. Follow-up:

Staff must ensure that feedback is provided to the participating children and that, if appropriate, participants are able to view the final result of their participation.