

Melissa Network

Safeguarding Policy for Vulnerable Adults

Athens, February 2026

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Melissa Network Safeguarding Policy for Vulnerable Adults

1. Policy Statement

Melissa Network is committed to ensuring the safety, dignity, and wellbeing of all people who engage with our organisation.

Safeguarding is integral to Melissa's mission of creating spaces of belonging safety and empowerment for vulnerable adults, and foremost for women and children, ensuring that healing and participation take place within a protective and accountable framework.

This includes participants, staff, volunteers, partners, and visitors. We recognise that many of the women and other vulnerable adults we work with—refugees, migrants, and survivors of gender-based violence (GBV)—face heightened risks of harm, discrimination, and exploitation.

Melissa Network upholds a zero-tolerance policy for all forms of abuse, exploitation, neglect, or discrimination, and is dedicated to providing a safe, trusted, and empowering environment where every woman and other vulnerable adult is treated with respect and agency.

Our approach is grounded in:

- Trauma-informed care
- Survivor-led and rights-based principles
- Intersectional feminist and inclusive values
- Accountability and transparency

2. Scope

This policy applies to:

- All Melissa Network staff, board members, and volunteers, during and off working hours;
- All partner organisations and service providers working with or on behalf of Melissa Network;
- All participants and community members engaged in Melissa's programmes and activities.

It covers safeguarding from all forms of:

- Sexual exploitation, abuse, and harassment (SEAH)
- Physical, psychological, or emotional abuse
- Neglect and abandonment
- Discrimination or harmful practices
- Breaches of privacy, confidentiality, or data protection
- Online or digital forms of abuse, including cyberbullying, online harassment, exploitation, or harmful digital behaviours

3. Guiding Principles

Melissa Network's safeguarding policy is guided by the following principles:

1. **Do No Harm:** Every action or intervention must ensure the safety and wellbeing of women and vulnerable adults and must not exacerbate existing vulnerabilities.
2. **Survivor-Centred Approach:** Survivors' rights to choice, dignity, and confidentiality are prioritised in all safeguarding responses. Melissa is progressively strengthening a survivor-led approach by involving survivors in the design and advocacy components of its SGBV response framework.
3. **Participation and Empowerment:** Women are active agents in shaping their safety and wellbeing; their voices and feedback are central to decision-making.
4. **Accountability:** All staff and volunteers are responsible for upholding safeguarding standards and reporting any concern.
5. **Confidentiality and Privacy:** Information is shared strictly on a need-to-know basis and in accordance with GDPR, relevant Greek legislation, and professional code of conduct of each relevant specialisation.
6. **Cultural Sensitivity and Inclusion:** Melissa recognises and respects the diverse identities, cultures, and experiences of all women and other vulnerable adults engaged with its work.
7. **Non-Retaliation:** No one who raises a safeguarding concern, or supports another person in doing so, will suffer retaliation, disadvantage, or discrimination as a result. Melissa fosters a culture of openness, trust, and protection for all who speak up in good faith.

4. Risk and Prevention

Melissa acknowledges that its work with migrant and refugee, ,mostly women and children—particularly survivors of SGBV—may involve risks of re-traumatisation, exploitation, discrimination, or social stigma.

Each new project or activity includes a safeguarding risk assessment to identify potential risks to women's safety and wellbeing, with corresponding mitigation measures.

To mitigate these risks, Melissa implements the following measures:

- **Safe Space Design:** All activities, in person and online, take place in a women-centered, supportive, and non-judgmental environment.
- **Safe Recruitment Practices:** Robust recruitment procedures, including identity verification, criminal record checks, verification of references, and assessment of suitability for working with women and vulnerable groups.
- **Training and Awareness:** All staff and volunteers receive induction and recurring training on safeguarding, PSEA (Prevention of Sexual Exploitation and Abuse), trauma-informed approaches, and cultural competence.
- **Clear Code of Conduct:** All staff is familiar with and adheres to the Code of Ethics and Conduct, outlining acceptable behaviour and disciplinary actions in case of breaches.
- **Secure Data Management:** Adherence to GDPR-compliant data protection standards, including informed consent and safe data storage.

- Community Empowerment: Workshops and information sessions on rights, protection, and reporting pathways to empower women to identify and report risks.

5. Reporting and Response Mechanisms

Melissa provides multiple confidential and accessible channels for reporting safeguarding concerns related to women's safety and wellbeing.

Reporting Channels

- In-person: Disclosure to trusted staff (psychologist, cultural mediator, educator, or focal point) or trusted community representatives.
- Remote: Reports can also be made via phone, email, WhatsApp, Viber, Facebook Messenger, or SMS.
- Anonymous Reports: Possible through designated feedback boxes or via the QR code of the national PSEA mechanism, under the auspice of UNICEF, available at Melissa through posters.

Melissa ensures that all safeguarding concerns are acknowledged (maximum within 48 hours) and handled sensitively and confidentially ensuring the protection of all involved from retaliation or harm.

Visibility and Awareness

Reporting routes are shared during registration, orientation, and workshops, in the languages spoken by participants and adapted to their literacy levels.

Posters and flyers are displayed in common areas with clear instructions on how to report concerns.

6. Safeguarding Focal Points

Melissa Network has designated focal points responsible for implementing and monitoring this policy:

- PSEA Focal Point: Project Manager, Christiana Kyrkou, at kyrkou.melissa@gmail.com
- Child Safeguarding Focal Point: Co-Founder & Legal Representative, Deborah Valencia, at dbrhvlnc@gmail.com
- Alternative focal point: Project Officer, Chrysa Papadaki, at papadaki.melissa@gmail.com

These focal points ensure timely response, coordination, and reporting to relevant authorities or referral mechanisms where appropriate.

Note, however, that where a safeguarding report qualifies as a serious complaint under the Feedback Policy, the Safeguarding Focal Points will liaise with the Executive Committee to ensure coordinated response and documentation.

7. Procedures for Responding to Safeguarding Concerns

When a concern or incident is reported, Melissa Network follows a survivor-centred and structured response protocol:

- **Immediate Safety:** Assess the situation to ensure the survivor's immediate safety and wellbeing.
- **Listen and Support:** Provide a safe, confidential space for disclosure, ensuring empathy and non-judgmental listening.
- **Assessment and Referral:** Conduct a rapid needs assessment and facilitate referrals for medical, legal, or psychosocial support—based on the survivor's informed consent.
- **Documentation:** Record the concern and actions taken in a confidential safeguarding log, accessible only to designated staff, in line with GDPR and organisational data protection standards.
- **Follow-Up:** Ensure ongoing support, safety planning, and monitoring of the case, including support related to the prosecution of the perpetrator, if the survivor chooses to do so.
- **Review and Learning:** Evaluate lessons learned and update safeguarding practices as needed.

Additionally, Melissa Network follows the Inter-Agency PSEA Greece SOPs for referrals, including mandatory reporting to designated UN and national partners.

Lastly, Melissa is part of the PSEA and GBV national Working Groups, participating in inter-agency referral and feedback mechanisms to ensure consistent protection standards.

8. Confidentiality and Data Protection

All information related to safeguarding cases is treated as strictly confidential.

Personal data is handled in compliance with GDPR, and consent is always obtained before sharing any personal information.

When mandatory reporting to authorities is required by law, safety concerns, or professional codes of conduct, we make every effort to secure consent first, balancing our survivor-centred approach with legal obligations.

Only the Safeguarding Focal Points and senior management (if necessary) have access to case records.

9. Media and Communications Consent

Melissa follows strict ethical standards in using images, stories, or any media involving participants:

- Informed written consent is obtained from women prior to taking or sharing any images or stories.
- Consent is reconfirmed verbally at the time of use.
- Participants have the right to withdraw consent at any time.

- Sensitive content related to trauma or SGBV is not sought to be used for publicity purposes.
- All staff, interns and volunteers must refrain from taking or sharing images or stories of participants on personal devices or social media.

However, drawing from the survivor-led approach, if a woman wishes to share her story for advocacy or peer support reasons, she is enabled to do so in a safe format, altering identifiable features and having constant access to mental health support.

10. Training and Capacity Building

Relevant foreseen measures include:

- Mandatory safeguarding induction for all new staff, interns, and volunteers.
- Refresher training on safeguarding, PSEA, and trauma-informed care.
- Periodic scenario-based exercises to strengthen staff capacity to respond effectively and ethically to both child and women safeguarding issues.
- Collaboration with partners and other NGOs for shared learning and harmonised standards.

11. Governance and Accountability

The Board of Directors oversees the implementation and review of safeguarding measures.

The Executive Committee monitors compliance and ensures corrective actions where necessary.

Regular reviews of safeguarding practices inform policy updates and continuous improvement.

Any breach of this policy may lead to disciplinary action, including termination and, where appropriate, legal referral.

12. Review and Updates

This policy will be reviewed on a triennial basis, or sooner if:

- There is a significant incident or learning outcome.
- There are changes in national legislation or international safeguarding frameworks.

Staff and participants' feedback will be incorporated into reviews to ensure the policy remains responsive to women's realities.

13. References and Linked Policies

Melissa Network Child Safeguarding Policy

Melissa Network Code of Conduct and Ethics

Melissa Network Accountability, Community-Based & Feedback Policy

Inter-Agency PSEA SOPs (UNICEF)

GDPR and relevant Greek legislation

The above linked policies, as well as this one, form a mosaic of safeguarding and protection for all involved. They are fully aligned and complementary to each other. Nonetheless, it is noted that in case of any contradiction among them, the one that has been more recently reviewed will prevail.

The said document has last been reviewed on February 2026 by Melissa Network's Co-founder and Legal Representative:

Deborah Valencia

Signature:

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to be "Deborah Valencia".

Date: February 2026