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# Complaint Handling Policy

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Nisma për Ndryshim Shoqëror  
ARSIS

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2020

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Nisma për Ndryshim Shoqëror - ARSIS is a non-profit organization that was established in Tirana on February 2016 as a legacy of ARSIS – Social Organization for the Support of Youth. Ever since NISMA ARSIS has transformed itself into an influential non-governmental actor in the civil society sector in Albania and beyond. NISMA ARSIS helps to build a better future for disadvantaged children and their communities, with an innovative approach and practical, sustainable solutions.

**Vision of ARSIS:** Each child, young person, woman and family in Albania and beyond attains the right to protection, development and participation.

**Mission of ARSIS:** To promote the rights, to provide services and sustainable solutions for children, youth and families in vulnerable situations as well as for the marginalised Roma/Egyptian communities and other social groups in Albania.

## Complaint Handling Policy

Nisma për Ndryshim Shoqëror - ARSIS (abbreviation NISMA ARSIS ) is a non-profit organization that has been formally established in February 2016 as a local NGO. Ever since NISMA ARSIS has transformed itself into an influential non-governmental actor in the civil society sector in Albania and beyond. Complaint Handling Policy is an internal handbook which describes policies and procedures for the overall functionality of the main mission and goals of the organization.

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## 1. Introduction

NISMA ARSIS Complaint Handling Policy defines the principles, standards and procedures that enable all external stakeholders, beneficiaries, community members, children, young people and their families offer feedback or complaint related to services, actions and policies for which our organization is responsible. This policy addresses complaints and concerns within the organization and to relevant external authorities (as needed). NISMA ARSIS currently cooperates with law enforcement, child protection and other respective bodies to ensure that all complaints regarding allegations or suspicion of child abuse and other child protection concerns are reported accordingly. This policy applies also to all persons working for us or on our behalf in any capacity, including employees at all levels, directors, officers, agency workers, seconded workers, volunteers, interns, agents, contractors, external consultants, third-party representatives, suppliers, business partners and beneficiaries of the services.

We are committed to dealing with all complaints sensitively, fairly and effectively. It reflects NISMA ARSIS responsibility to appropriately safeguarding and protecting children, young people and adults at risk of abuse through the delivery of the best possible services. Our organization is committed to consider complaints as an opportunity to turn a not so pleasant experience into a positive one, as well as an opportunity to better learn on, and to improve all of our services. This policy recognizes that the courteous, timely and effective management of complaints is vital to maintain and build on the good relationships that we have with our children and families.

## 2. Purpose

This policy documents the importance of sharing information to promote the safety, welfare and wellbeing of our beneficiaries, and keeping relevant parties appropriately informed throughout the complaints process. It aims to improve the understanding of the quality of care and support we are delivering, and also to consider how well we handle complaints and concerns to encourage change for better. The policy will ensure that our internal arrangements to manage complaints are robust, open and transparent and encourage learning including our principles, complaints processes, reporting mechanisms and expectations.

## 3. Definitions

**-Complaint:** an expression of dissatisfaction about an organization related to its services or dealings with an individual; allegations about the conduct of its staff, volunteers, other individuals engaged by the organization or another child or young person at an organization; or the handling of a prior concern.

**-Subject of a complaint:** the person whose alleged conduct is the focus of a complaint, allegation or incident.

**-Responsible Manager:** the responsible staff person, who is tasked with the investigation process of a complaint.

**-Serious incident:** any situation where there is a significant risk to children, adults at risk of abuse, a family member of those using the services, property, work, or reputation, or could result in a significant loss of funds to NISMA ARSIS.

**-Misconduct:** behaviors' that breach an organization's code of conduct or legislation applying to an organization and its employees.

-**Complaint-handling policy:** a statement of instruction that sets out how an organization will respond to complaints.

-**Procedural fairness:** means acting fairly in administrative decision making. It relates to the fairness of the procedure by which a decision is made in relation to a complaint.

-**Criticism** and complaint are not necessarily the same; for example, an objection to one of NISMA ARSIS policies may represent an expression of a differing viewpoint, and whilst such statements will always require a respectful and complete response, they will not automatically be defined as a “complaint”. Any criticism will, nevertheless, always be acknowledged as a complaint if the complainant defines it as such and wishes it to be addressed under our Complaints Procedure.

### 3.1 List of possible Complaints

A complaint may relate to the following, but is not restricted to this list:

- Failure to provide services meeting the expected standards, including accusations of professional incompetence and/or misconduct;
- Failure to properly apply law, procedure or guidance when delivering services;
- Failure of administrative processes;
- Dissatisfaction with one of our policies or its impact on the individual;
- Harm to children or adults at risk of abuse by NISMA ARSIS;
- Treatment by or attitude of a member of NISMA ARSIS staff;
- Disagreement with a decision made in relation to social work services;
- Non-compliance with NISMA ARSIS own policies and procedures;
- Financial losses and/or waste of funds;
- NISMA ARSIS being deliberately used for significant private advantage;
- Criminal activity of any type.

### 3.2 Associated Policies

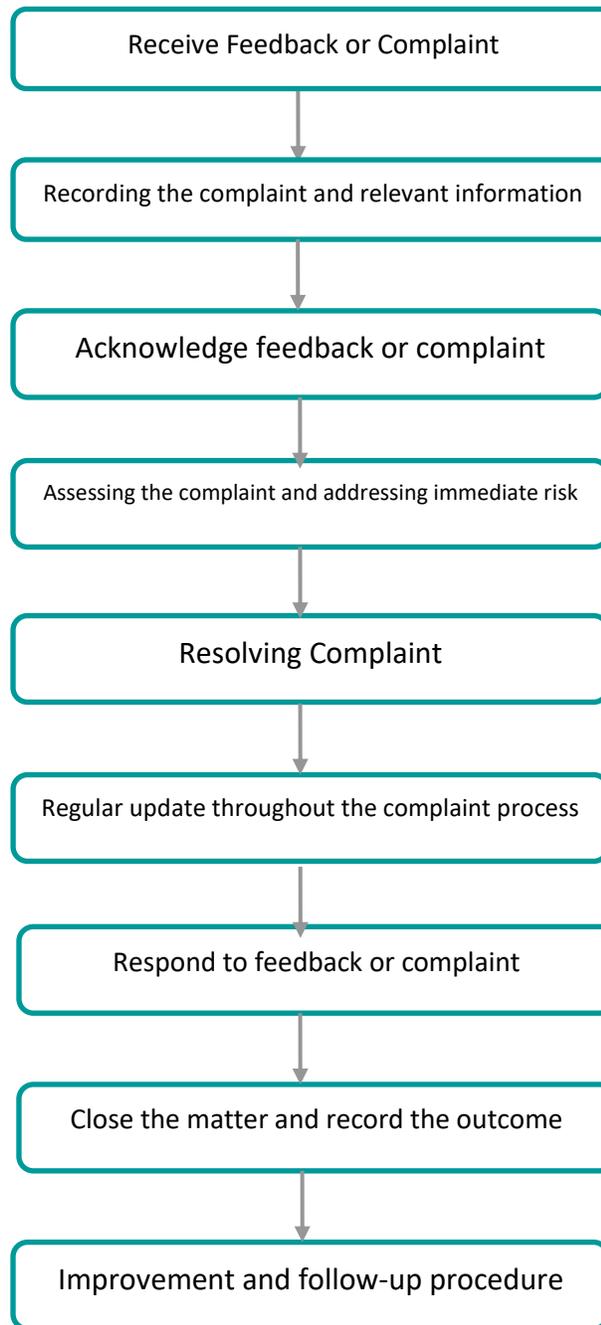
-Child Safeguarding Policy

-Code of Conduct

-Bullying and Harassment Policy

-Whistleblowing Policy

## 4. Complaint Handling



#### 4.1 Who can make a complaint?

Anyone who receives, requests, or is affected by our services can make a complaint. Complaints may also be raised by external bodies, such as local authorities or other entities and they can be made about any aspect of our organization’s services and functions, including support services such as HR, Finance and Facilities. Complaints may be made in different ways, but should be recognized as complaints and handled consistently. Complaints are “expressions of dissatisfaction”: they may be expressed in a “Have Your Say” (HYS), or in a review, or face-to-face with a member of NISMA ARSIS staff. The individual is required also to fill in a separate Complaints Form (Appendix 1). Independent advocates may bring complaints on behalf

of the people we support, or their families, if they are unable to raise an issue themselves, or if they are unable to identify when something is wrong. If you have concerns that a complaint has been submitted by a third party purportedly representing a customer without appropriate authority from the customer, you should seek advice from a more senior member of NISMA ARSIS staff. The provision of a signed mandate (such as that contained in the Complaint Form) from the individual will normally be sufficient for our organization to investigate a complaint.

## 4.2 Handling anonymous complaints

Our organizations aim is to value each complaint and take it into account in order to further advance our services. This means that NISMA ARSIS will treat all complaints, including anonymous ones and will take action to consider them further whenever this is considered appropriate.

NISMA ARSIS is running two different multidisciplinary centers, where the complaints box is applicable and placed in a visible corner in the main space of activities in the centers. The complaints boxes is a tool applied in accordance to the standards of daily center and the procedure for addressing this kind of complaints is regulated by the standards and monitored by the social services in the Municipality Level.

Generally, we will consider anonymous complaints if there is enough information in the complaint to enable us to make further enquiries. Any decision not to pursue an anonymous complaint must be authorized by the Responsible Manager (or equivalent) and notified to the relevant Director. If an anonymous complaint makes serious allegations, these should be dealt with in a timely manner under relevant procedures. This may not be as a complaint, but could instead be handled under separate child protection, adult protection or disciplinary procedures. If an anonymous complaint is further addressed, it will be recorded to the services Complaints File and corrective action will be undertaken when appropriate.

## 4.3 Supporting the Complainant

All members of the community have the right to equal access to our complaints procedure. It is important to recognize the barriers that some beneficiaries may face complaining. These may be physical, sensory, communication or language barriers, but can also include their anxieties and concerns. Some beneficiaries might need independent support to overcome these barriers to accessing the complaints system (e.g. may need documents written in accessible language such as easy read format). NISMA ARSIS ensures to always take into account our commitment and responsibilities to equality. This includes making reasonable adjustments to ensure that all beneficiaries and other interested parties can access our services. Whenever possible NISMA ARSIS staff will identify additional needs of a complainant and help them find appropriate support in order to state their complaints.

Our Complaint Handling Procedure, aim to provide a quick, simple and streamlined process for resolving complaints early and locally by qualified, capable, well-trained staff. Thereafter, a complainant (if he or she continues to be unsatisfied) may take their complaint for external review, either to the relevant regulator; the service has been arranged by a local authority, or to the local authority itself.

## 4.4 Complaint Handling Procedure

### 4.4.1 Receive Feedback or Complaint

Our organization aims to resolve complaints swiftly and effectively; ideally at the first point of contact or soon thereafter. Feedback and Complaints can be addressed through the reporting form (Appendix 1); at Nisma për Ndryshim Shoqëror ARSIS website, and through the email address *initiative.arsis@gmail.com*.

We recognize that any staff member may be the first person to be provided with information regarding a complaint. If this individual has both the authority and sufficient information to resolve the situation promptly and successfully, then they are advised to do so. If not, they will pass the complaint onto the most suitable member of the team for matters to be resolved satisfactorily.

### 4.4.2 Recording the complaint and relevant information

All available information is recorded, also for anonymous feedback and complaints. Such feedback and complaints are handled according to the same process (acknowledging and responding only if communication with the anonymous complainant is possible). Recording details include details about the complainant, any additional communication or support required; details about the subject of the complaint, the complaint issues, how the complaint was resolved/investigated; risks managed and the complaint outcome.

### 4.4.3 Acknowledge feedback or complaint

All complaints and feedback addressed to NISMA ARSIS should be acknowledged immediately and at the latest within *seven days*. Acknowledgement can be done immediately via an auto-reply, or via a personalized message. Receipt of anonymous complaints can only be acknowledged if a communication channel is provided (e.g. anonymous e-mail address). Feedback and complaints are handled as closely as possible to the project or relevant office to which they refer, and thus, are forwarded to the appropriate unit or office. Forwarding shall happen on the same day as the acknowledgement.

### 4.4.4 Assessing the complaint and addressing immediate risk

When assessing the complaint we pose the following questions:

- Does the complaint raise any immediate risks to the safety or wellbeing of a child or young person or other beneficiary?
- What other issues does the complaint raise?
- What steps need to be taken to address and manage risks throughout the complaints process?
- What evidence needs to be immediately secured/protected/kept confidential?
- How serious, complicated or otherwise urgent are the issues raised in the complaint (from both the perspective of the complainant, involved child or other entity and the organization)?
- Are the issue/s raised within your organization's control?
- Are the outcomes sought by the complainant viable?
- What type of information should the complainant be provided with, following NISMA ARSIS assessment?

If the above raised issue cannot be responded by our organization, the complainant is told and whenever possible referred to a person or an organization that can address the issue.

When a complaint about the leader or coordinator of a specific service or program is raised, the complaint is forwarded to the immediate next level of supervision to avoid any type of conflict of interest.

#### **4.4.5 Resolving Complaint**

All feedback and complaints are resolved by the respective Complaint Manager, who decides how to further address the matter (e.g. assign responsibility to gather more information, run investigation etc.). NISMA ARSIS will usually need to discuss the complaint with the complainant to be clear about the expected outcome. The aim is to address the complaint within 20 working days; if this isn't possible, our organization will contact the individual to provide an explanation and indication of when a full response can be expected (within a further 10 working days). Each addressed complaint will get a written response. If the assessment leads to the conclusion that allegations in a feedback or complaint are justified, appropriate actions, including disciplinary actions if necessary, are taken according to organizational policies and procedures. If considered appropriate NISMA ARSIS will also initiate civil and/or criminal proceedings against individuals involved in inappropriate conduct.

When handling Nisma complaints, all staff must pay specific attention to the following:

- At any stage of the complaints process, the individual managing the complaint may become aware that the criteria for reporting a serious incident have been met.
- If the complaint includes a safeguarding concern or allegation about a staff member or volunteer, then the procedures outlined in the safeguarding children and safeguarding adults' policies and procedures will be followed. A safeguarding allegation is defined as any indication that a staff member or volunteer has:
  1. Behaved in a way that has or might lead to the harm of a child/vulnerable adult;
  2. Possibly committed or is planning to commit a criminal offence against a child/vulnerable adult or related to a child/vulnerable adult;
  3. Behaved towards a child or children/vulnerable adults in a way that indicates s/he is or would be unsuitable to work with children/vulnerable adults.

#### **4.4.6 Regular update throughout the complaint process**

NISMA ARSIS will further continue to investigate the complaint by developing an investigation plan, ensuring that, where appropriate relevant authorities are consulted and involved in its design and implementation and also Obtain and protect evidence, including identifying relevant witnesses and putting the allegations to the subject of complaint at the appropriate point in time—affording them fairness. Throughout the process the complainant will be notified over the ongoing work. The frequency of updates and the nature and quantity of information provided to the complainant will be determined in accordance with their specific needs and wishes, and privacy and confidentiality obligations.

#### **4.4.7 Respond to feedback or complaint**

NISMA ARSIS provides a response to complainants explaining the outcome of the feedback or complaint as quickly as possible, but at the latest within 30 days. NISMA ARSIS representatives will explain to the complainant over the subject of complaint—using the most appropriate communication channel and putting in place any necessary supports—the key steps taken to investigate the complaint, the outcome (including the reasons for our decision), and available avenues for review and/or appeal if the complainants are dissatisfied with the outcome and/or the complaints process.

#### **4.4.8 Close the matter and record the outcome**

After the communication of the outcome to the interested actors, NISMA ARSIS will close the case and will keep comprehensive records about:

- How the complaint was managed;

- The outcome;
- Any recommendations and/or outstanding actions and how they have been addressed.

#### **4.4.9 Improvement and follow-up procedure**

In addition to making adjustments to any systems or practice weaknesses identified by a specific complaint or general feedback, NISMA ARSIS provides system for collecting, maintaining and reviewing complaints data to identify any broader trends with the aim of improving our service delivery/performance.

#### **In order to ensure an effective complaint-handling system NISMA ARSIS:**

- ✓ Maintains Strong Leadership and Governance;
- ✓ Provides a fair and respectful treatment to all complainants;
- ✓ Is accessible and makes information publicly available;
- ✓ Makes adjustments in order to maintain flexibility;
- ✓ Offers good communication channels and transparency;
- ✓ Takes ownership over the administration of complaints and specifies timelines
- ✓ Seeks continuous improvement.

## **5 Instances where our organization will be unable to respond to a complaint**

In some circumstances NISMA ARSIS will not be able to respond to a complaint:

- Where all satisfactory steps have been taken to respond to the complaint previously.
- When the complaint is not about NISMA ARSIS.
- When there is too little or inadequate information provided by the complainant.
- When the complaint has been received by us and other organizations as a bulk email or mailing.
- Where it is feasible, it will still, in most cases, be appropriate to acknowledge such communication, provide an explanation as to why the raised points will not and/or cannot be address and state how any further correspondence will be managed.
- It may be the case that we are unable to manage a complaint successfully if it is accompanied by obscene language or behavior, including threats, sensitive personal comments (regarding race, gender, physical ability, sexual orientation, religion, age, nationality, ethnic origin, marital status, work status, or any other personal characteristic) and/or libel.

## **6. Privacy of Information**

In our organization we maintain the confidentiality of all personal information and do not disclose anything without explicit permission, unless legally obliged to do so. All information is kept strictly in accordance with the values and principles of NISMA ARSIS policy and associated Data Protection legislation.

## **7. Audit and Review**

- A central complaints register will be maintained by the organization. The register will log all formal complaints, the name of the Responsible Manager, a summary of the key investigatory points, the complaint outcome and any residual actions.

- Complaint themes will also be measured to increase understanding of why complaints have been raised in the first instance, disseminate findings and improve quality of service delivery. Compliant management will form part of the quality report that is forwarded to the Senior Management Team on a quarterly basis.
- This policy will be reviewed every two years or more frequently in line with learning and improvement of service delivery.

Responsible Person for Complaint Policy and Procedures:

Complaint Manager: Ditmir Lita, [initiative.arsis@gmail.com](mailto:initiative.arsis@gmail.com)

## Appendix 1

### Complaint Record Form

Date:	Complaint record reference:
Your name:	Complaint assigned to:
Position:	
<b>How was the complaint received (e.g. phone, email, in person):</b>	
<b>Name of complainant</b>	
1. Name of child/ young person/staff/beneficiary involved in the complaint:	
2. Name of person making the complaint [if different to above]:	
3. Name of the person who the complaint was made about [if applicable]:	
<b>Contact details:</b>	
4. Complainant contact details:	
a. Address:	
b. Phone number:	
c. Email:	
*Preferred contact method: _____	
<b>Details relating to the person who the complaint was made about:</b>	
<b>Details relating to the complainant (if made by an adult on behalf of the affected child or young person/beneficiary who needs support)</b>	
14. Age:	
15. Gender:	
16. Relationship to the affected child /young person/ beneficiary:	
17. Are they from a culturally and linguistically diverse background? If yes, specify:	
19. Do they have a disability? If, yes, provide any relevant details _____	
20. Do they have communication support needs? If yes:	
Was the complainant offered an interpreter?	
Was the complainant offered a communication assistant?	
Any other supports?	

21. Provide any relevant information relating to the complainant's preferred communication methods, support needs, and involvement in the complaint-handling process:

**Nature of the complaint:**

22. Complaint description (accurately record the issues, concerns, details of any witnesses, as far as possible in the complainant's own words):

23. What outcome to the complaint is the complainant seeking?

**Immediate risk considerations:**

24. Details of any injuries and if the beneficiary or others received medical attention:

25. Does the complaint indicate the possibility of criminal conduct? Yes/No/Unsure

26. Is a mandatory child protection report required? Yes/No

27. Does the complaint involve a reportable allegation/incident? Yes/No/Unsure

28. Is any immediate risk management action required? Yes/No

**Next steps:**

Signed: \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_