

Child Protection Policy

updated July 2025

Issued by the Executive Office, this policy is set to be reviewed in July 2027.

This Policy is applicable to all employees of Berghof Foundation, associates and external collaborators as well as Partner organisations – as outlined below in section 4.

PART I: INTRODUCTION

1. About Our organisation

As a nongovernmental organisation (NGO) engaged in peacebuilding, conflict transformation research and peace education, we are dedicated to fostering peaceful conflict resolution and strengthening civil society globally. Through our initiatives, we empower people to actively contribute to the development of a more just and peaceful society. Our work spans diverse regions and cultures, with the overarching aim of cultivating sustainable peace processes and advancing the peace capabilities of individuals, groups, societies and institutions in offline and online spaces. Our approach is rooted in participatory engagement, equipping everyone with the skills and knowledge necessary to navigate conflicts non-violently and advocate for their rights within their communities, broader society and institutions.

2. Statement of commitment

Our organisation engages young people across various age groups, including minors under the age of 18 years. A child is legally defined as any person below the age of 18 years.¹ In this document, all individuals under 18 years of age are collectively referred to as “children”.

The safeguarding and promotion of children's rights are fundamental to our mission. All employees, volunteers, and partners of our organisation are committed and obliged to ensuring the safety and well-being of children. Our Child Protection Policy is grounded in the *United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child* (“UNCRC”), the *Universal Declaration of Human Rights*, German and European legal frameworks, including the *Bundeskinderschutzgesetz* (“Federal Child Protection Act”), and international best practices.² It is imperative that we adopt a zero-tolerance approach to any form of abuse, mistreatment, or

¹ In Germany, where our organisation is based, children are classified as individuals under 14 years of age, while adolescents are those between 14 and 18 years old.

² Such as the [Minimum Standards on Child Protection in Humanitarian Action](#) and [Keeping Children Safe](#).

exploitation of children. This policy serves to reinforce our duty of care and establish robust safeguarding mechanisms within all aspects of our work.

From a children's rights perspective, it is crucial to emphasise that protection is one of the three core pillars of children's rights, alongside provision and participation, established under the UNCRC.

Provision – Ensuring children have access to basic needs and services essential to their survival and development. These include, among others, access to healthcare, food, shelter, education, and opportunities to play.

Protection – Safeguarding children from violence, abuse, exploitation, and neglect. This includes legal frameworks, child welfare systems, and measures to create a safe environment.

Participation – Ensuring that children have a voice in decisions affecting their lives. This means recognising their right to express opinions and be heard in matters concerning them.

Additionally, our safeguarding framework is built upon the principle of informed consent. This means that children and their legal guardians must be fully aware of and agree to any participation in our activities, ensuring transparency, respect, and adherence to their evolving capacities.

A holistic approach to child safeguarding must ensure that the imperative to protect children and ensure their basic needs does not inadvertently exclude their right to participate in decisions that affect them or their right to be empowered as active agents in their communities. In all our activities, we strive to uphold the three aforementioned principles in a balanced and child-centred manner.

Additionally, our child protection policy is built upon the principle of informed consent. This means that children and their legal guardians must be fully aware of and agree to any participation in our activities, ensuring transparency, respect, and adherence to their evolving capacities.

3. Objectives of the Child Protection Policy

This policy serves as a comprehensive framework for all activities within our organisation, with the following key objectives:

- a) To heighten awareness among all employees and partners regarding child protection and to cultivate a culture that prioritises children's rights.
- b) To establish a secure environment for children, free from abuse, bullying, harassment, or any form of inappropriate conduct.
- c) To delineate clear behavioural expectations, roles, and responsibilities to safeguard all participants.

- d) To implement preventative, educational, and intervention measures to uphold child protection.
- e) To institute clear reporting mechanisms for incidents and define appropriate consequences for breaches.
- f) To promote an inclusive environment where children feel empowered to report concerns without fear of reprisal.
- g) To actively integrate child participation in shaping and reviewing our safeguarding policies and procedures.
- h) To ensure that all interactions with children involve informed consent, meaning that children and their legal guardians understand and agree to the nature of their involvement in our activities. Informed consent is a fundamental aspect of respecting children's autonomy and agency.

4. Scope of the policy

Berghof Foundation's Child Protection Policy applies to:

- All Berghof Foundation staff, including its Board of Trustees, interns, student assistants and volunteers;
- Contractors and their personnel;
- Suppliers in direct contact with Berghof Foundation's target population;
- Consultants, advisors, and contracted individuals;
- Sub-contractors;
- Sponsorship partners;
- Volunteers involved in Berghof Foundation projects;
- Visitors to Berghof Foundation program areas;
- Staff seconded to and from Berghof Foundation.

The policy encompasses all events and activities organised by or in association with Berghof Foundation including workshops, training sessions, conferences, networking engagements, as well as digital and hybrid activities, irrespective of their format (formal or informal settings) or duration.

Supplementary regulations may be established for specific programs or partnerships. Furthermore, all stakeholders, including third-party contractors and external collaborators, are expected to comply with the safeguarding principles outlined herein.

5. Core principles

As referenced in the Core Behavioural and Professional Standards of Berghof Foundation's Code of Conduct, there is zero tolerance for any form of harassment, discrimination, intimidation and abuse as well as exploitation. These core principles apply to all age groups.

- a) Our organisation bears a duty of care to safeguard all individuals involved in its activities.
- b) All children and adolescents should have the opportunity to participate in a safe and respectful environment and an equal right to protection and promotion of their wellbeing - regardless of their ethnic origin, social background, immigration status, age, gender, skin colour, possible disability, sexual orientation, religion, caste, beliefs or any other characteristic.
- c) Children and adolescents have the right to have their best interests assessed and taken into account as a primary consideration in all actions or decisions that concern them, both in the public and private spheres.
- d) All activities involving children will be conducted with informed consent, ensuring that participants and their guardians are fully aware of and agree to the nature, risks, and implications of their involvement.
- e) Prevention is the cornerstone of child protection; thus, risk assessments will be conducted regularly to identify potential safeguarding concerns. Complaints are addressed with the utmost seriousness and handled with discretion.
- f) Sanctions are intended primarily for educational purposes, whereas severe infractions will be subject to immediate legal action.
- g) Data protection and confidentiality are upheld, with information disseminated strictly on a "need-to-know" basis.

PART II: PREVENTION AND RESPONSIBILITIES

1. Recruitment and training of personnel

All employees, partners, contractors and volunteers are required to familiarise themselves with the Child Protection Policy. Individuals working with children must participate in structured training on child protection and data security and provide an extended police clearance certificate. In international contexts, this clearance requirement is adapted to the respective laws and regulations. Training sessions will be conducted regularly, with mandatory refresher courses every two years to ensure continued compliance. Additionally, training materials will be updated periodically to incorporate the latest developments in safeguarding research and legislative frameworks.

2. Responsibilities of stakeholders

- Employees and Partners: Must adhere to the policy and foster a secure environment and are obliged to report any suspicions of harmful or abusive behaviour towards children and adolescents;
- Senior Management and the Safeguarding Focal Point: Holds overarching responsibility for the implementation and enforcement of the policy;
- Volunteers, External Contractors and Service Providers: Must be briefed on our safeguarding expectations and comply with relevant child protection procedures, including adhering to our social media conduct regarding respecting children's and young people's dignity in media and communication;
- All stakeholders must apply the two-adult rule in which at least one parent or guardian or at least two adult carers must be present at all times during all activities involving children and adolescents that are generally connected to Berghof Foundation. Any deviations from this rule caused by circumstances must be clarified in advance with persons authorised to take decisions.

PART III: RESPONSE MECHANISM

All suspicions or allegations of child abuse will be taken with the utmost seriousness and thoroughly investigated. Our organisation aligns with German and international safeguarding standards.

- Immediate Intervention: In cases of imminent danger, the police or relevant authorities will be contacted without delay;
- Reporting Mechanisms: Suspected cases may be reported via complaints@berghof-foundation.org or through our [Whistleblowing system](#) to safeguard the identities of reporters. An immediate investigation will then be started, assessing the report, conducting an impartial inquiry, gathering evidence, determining findings, implementing corrective actions, and notifying the whistleblower of the outcome where legally permissible;
- Confidentiality and Data Protection: All reports and related information will be handled with strict confidentiality. Personal information will be stored securely and accessed only by authorised personnel and data sharing will comply with privacy laws and regulations;
- External Support and Resources: Victims and witnesses will be provided (where applicable) access to external child protection support agencies and resources;
- Enforcement Measures: Any breach of this policy will be met with proportionate disciplinary measures or legal proceedings, as deemed appropriate;

- Support for Affected Individuals: Counselling and psychological support services will be offered to any child affected by abuse, ensuring their well-being and rehabilitation.

PART IV: MONITORING AND REVIEW

- This policy shall undergo a review to ascertain its continued efficacy every two years;
- Input from staff, children, and relevant stakeholders shall be duly taken into account during the revision process;
- Periodic audits shall be conducted to evaluate adherence to established child protection standards;
- For further effectiveness we will set indicators to measure the success of child protection initiatives, such as the number of reported incidents and response times.

ANNEX: DEFINITIONS

Child protection – the prevention of and response to violence, exploitation and neglect against children via systems, legal frameworks, laws and efforts.

Child safeguarding – the way in which we can make organisations and activities organised by these organisations safer for children. Safeguarding refers to the active measures taken to limit direct and indirect risks which could affect children in the interaction with the organisation, its personnel, during events and activities organised by the organisation and/or its partners. The associated risks can include physical violence, sexual violence, mental or emotional violence, exploitation, neglect and online violence.

Child welfare – all efforts made to ensure a child's safety.

Exploitation – describes the commercial or other use of the child through activities that the child performs for the benefit of a third party, and which impair their physical or mental well-being. These activities include forced labour, performing criminal acts, being forced to provide services such as begging and child prostitution, as well as any work that leads to the economic exploitation of the child. Exploited children generally go to school irregularly, if at all, which is harmful to their psychosocial development and has a severe impact on their future life prospects.

Mental or emotional violence – is the actual or likely severe adverse effect on the emotional and behavioural development of a child caused by persistent or severe verbal abuse, belittling, bullying or rejection. It may involve conveying to the child that they are worthless, unloved or inadequate. It includes age-inappropriate or developmentally inappropriate expectations being imposed on children, exposure to violence, as well as causing children persistently to feel frightened, threatened or guilty. It also includes harmful traditional practices like female circumcision, which, besides violent genital mutilation and lifelong health problems, also causes serious mental problems for the victims.

Neglect – is the persistent failure to meet the child’s basic physical and/or psychological needs, such as a lack of any emotional support and love, abandonment, failure to protect them from harm, including through lack of supervision, or withholding essential medical care or educational services when those responsible for children’s care have the means, knowledge and access to services

Online violence – describes various forms of violence against children using digital media and communication technologies like social media, web-cams, chat rooms etc. Offenders contact children through digital media, often using a false identity, in order to get their trust and sexually exploit them. Others use digital media to bully, offend or embarrass children. Like hands-on crimes, hands-off crimes can also cause harm to children, e.g. sleeping disorders, depression, or suicidal or aggressive behaviour. Various forms of violence often occur together and are often gender-specific.

Sexual violence – includes any forced or enticed sexual activity involving children, whether or not the child is aware of what is happening or gives consent. That means all forms of sexual activities such as socially taboo touching, molesting, rape, intercourse etc., as well as non-contact activities, such as using sexualised words, gazing at a child in a sexual manner, showing children pornographic materials, watching sexual activities together, or encouraging a child to behave in inappropriately sexualised ways.