



Balkans Forward Foundation Child Protection Policy



Balkans Forward Foundation
Child Protection Policy

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1. Introduction

The Balkans Forward Foundation (BFF) is committed to promoting equality, diversity, and the protection of human rights in all aspects of its work. Although the Foundation's primary focus is on vulnerable communities such as LGBTIQ+ people, Roma, youth, and other minorities, we recognize that children and young people under the age of 18 may also participate in or be affected by our programs, activities, or advocacy.

This Child Protection Policy sets out our zero-tolerance approach to any form of abuse, neglect, exploitation, or harm to children. It outlines the standards, procedures, and responsibilities that guide all staff, volunteers, partners, and contractors working with or coming into contact with children in the course of BFF's work.

2. Purpose of the Policy

- To protect children from any form of harm, abuse, or exploitation connected with BFF's activities.
- To provide clear guidance for staff, volunteers, board members, consultants, and partners on how to act responsibly when children are involved.
- To establish mechanisms for prevention, reporting, and response to child protection concerns.
- To ensure compliance with relevant international standards, Serbian legislation, and good practices in safeguarding.

3. Scope of the Policy

This policy applies to:

- All BFF staff, board members, and interns.
- All volunteers and participants engaged in BFF activities.
- Consultants, contractors, and external experts working on behalf of BFF.
- Partner organizations and grantees implementing projects supported by BFF.

The policy applies to all contexts where children are involved, including training, awareness campaigns, community actions, digital spaces, and research activities.

4. Guiding Principles

BFF's child protection approach is based on the following principles:

- **Best Interests of the Child** – The welfare of the child is paramount in all decisions and actions.
- **Non-Discrimination** – All children, regardless of gender, ethnicity, disability, sexual orientation, religion, or social background, must be equally protected.
- **Zero Tolerance** – BFF does not tolerate any form of child abuse or exploitation.
- **Participation** – Children have the right to express their views freely and to be taken seriously in matters affecting them.
- **Confidentiality** – All child protection concerns will be handled with respect for privacy and confidentiality, shared only on a need-to-know basis.
- **Accountability** – All BFF staff and partners are accountable for upholding this policy and must act immediately if child protection concerns arise.

5. Definitions

- **Child:** Any person under the age of 18.
- **Child Abuse:** Includes physical abuse, emotional abuse, neglect, sexual abuse, and exploitation.
- **Child Protection:** Measures and structures to prevent and respond to abuse, neglect, exploitation, or violence against children.
- **Safeguarding:** Broader responsibility to ensure children's rights, welfare, and wellbeing are respected and promoted.

6. Preventive Measures

6.1 Recruitment and Screening

- All staff, interns, and volunteers working directly with children will undergo background and reference checks.
- Job descriptions will clearly outline child protection responsibilities.
- Signed acceptance of this policy will be mandatory before beginning work.

6.2 Training and Awareness

- Staff and volunteers will receive induction on child protection principles and procedures.
- Regular training will be provided on identifying risks, appropriate behavior, and reporting obligations.

6.3 Code of Conduct

BFF staff, volunteers, and partners must:

- Treat all children with respect and dignity.
- Create inclusive, safe, and supportive environments.
- Use positive and non-violent forms of discipline.
- Ensure interactions with children are transparent and, where possible, in the presence of others.
- Avoid behavior that could be misinterpreted as inappropriate (e.g., physical affection, private meetings without another adult present).
- Not use phones, cameras, or digital tools to exploit, harass, or expose children inappropriately.
- Not engage in any form of sexual activity or relationship with children.

7. Reporting and Response Procedures

7.1 Reporting Obligations

- Any staff member, volunteer, or partner who suspects or becomes aware of child abuse must report immediately to the designated Child Protection Focal Point (CPF) that will be elected by the Board without delay.
- Reports can be verbal or written, but written reports are preferred and must be documented in a secure log.

7.2 Response and Action

- The CPF will assess the concern and take appropriate action, which may include referral to child protection authorities, law enforcement, or specialized services.
- BFF will ensure that the child is protected from immediate harm.
- Confidentiality will be maintained, with information shared only on a need-to-know basis.

7.3 Protection of Whistleblowers

- Staff, volunteers, or participants who report concerns in good faith will be protected from retaliation or victimization.

8. Digital Safeguarding

Given BFF's focus on digital spaces, specific measures apply:

- Children's personal data will be handled in line with data protection laws.
- Consent from parents or guardians will be required before publishing photos, videos, or stories of children.
- Online platforms managed by BFF will be moderated to prevent cyberbullying, grooming, or harmful content.

9. Partnership Standards

- All partner organizations or grantees implementing projects with or for children must adopt child protection policies consistent with BFF's standards.
- Child safeguarding clauses should be included in all contracts and partnership agreements.

10. Monitoring and Accountability

- The Board of BFF has overall responsibility for the implementation of this policy.
- A Child Protection Focal Point will be appointed within the organization.
- Annual reviews will be conducted to assess compliance and effectiveness of the policy.

- Breaches of this policy by staff, volunteers, or partners may result in disciplinary action, including termination of contracts or partnerships.

11. Review of the Policy

This policy will be reviewed every two years or sooner if legal, organizational, or contextual changes require updates. Staff, partners, and stakeholders will be consulted during the review process.

12. Annexes

- Annex 1: Code of Conduct for Staff and Volunteers.