



**BULGARIAN CENTER
FOR NOT-FOR-PROFIT
LAW**

CHILD PROTECTION POLICY

BULGARIAN CENTER FOR NOT-FOR-PROFIT LAW

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Introduction

The Child Protection Policy of the Bulgarian Center for Not-for-Profit Law is an internal policy of the organization aimed at creating a safe, secure, and nurturing environment for every child participating in projects, events, or other activities organized by the foundation.

In its operations, the Bulgarian Center for Not-for-Profit Law Foundation (the Foundation, BCNL) upholds and adheres to the principles outlined in international and national policies concerning the well-being and rights of children. These principles encompass non-discrimination based on race, colour, sex, language, religion, political or other opinion, national or ethnic origin, social status, property, disability, birth or other status of the child, their parents or legal guardians.

In alignment with the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) and the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC), which emphasize the need for special care and assistance for all children and affirm their equal entitlement to social protection, BCNL considers the protection and care for children as a vulnerable group to be integral to its mission.

We believe that all forms of child abuse, violence and exploitation are unacceptable. Recognizing the potential danger posed by associates, volunteers, or partners of the organization committing such acts, our team is committed to taking proactive measures to prevent such occurrences.

Child protection is not only a societal obligation but also a personal one. Every staff member and associate of BCNL understands the importance of integrating child protection measures into all activities of the Foundation. Any individual, whether a staff member, associate, or otherwise, found to be involved in a crime related to the abuse, violence, or exploitation of children will have their contractual relationship with BCNL terminated immediately.

Through this Child Protection Policy, BCNL asserts its readiness and dedication to creating a secure and nurturing environment for children.

This policy has been endorsed by the BCNL Board of Trustees.

The Child Protection Policy will undergo revision every three years or as deemed necessary.

1. Nature and scope of the Policy

- 1.1. The primary aim of developing the Child Protection Policy is to ensure a high standard of protection for children from harm while they are participating in any BCNL project, event, or activity.
- 1.2. Compliance with this policy is mandatory for all individuals associated with BCNL, including staff members (employees, associates, interns, and volunteers), members of the BCNL Board of

Trustees, donors, and anyone acting on behalf of the Foundation, such as consultants and trainers. Additionally, this policy extends to individuals who come into contact with children in the context of BCNL events, including photographers, media representatives, drivers, organizers, etc.

- 1.3. BCNL expects its partners to adopt their own child protection policies that align with the scope and requirements of this policy. Partners who do not have existing policies are encouraged to develop their own, and BCNL is committed to assisting them in meeting the minimum standards for child protection.
- 1.4. The policy is structured around four key standards that are universally recognized as essential components of a comprehensive child protection framework.¹ The international child protection standards include:
 - 1.4.1. Standard 1. Organizational Policy.

The organization has an organizational policy that describes the foundation's mechanisms and procedures for preventing harm to children and establishes mechanisms for responding to such cases. The policy provides guidelines for creating a safe environment for children and reporting mechanisms in the event of suspected child abuse.
 - 1.4.2. Standard 2. Rules of Conduct for those involved in BCNL activities.

The organization clearly defines responsibilities and expectations for its employees and associates, offering support to ensure compliance with this Policy. Staff selection and recruitment processes prioritize child protection considerations. Furthermore, regular communication and ongoing training are provided to staff and associates to enhance their understanding of the significance of child protection measures.
 - 1.4.3. Standard 3. Procedures.

The organization ensures a safe environment for children by implementing safety procedures that span across all facets of its operations and activities.
 - 1.4.4. Standard 4. Accountability.

The organisation will continuously monitor and regularly review its child protection measures. Every three years, the Policy will undergo a comprehensive review, and updates will be proposed as necessary.

2. Principles of the Child Protection Policy

- 2.1. The Foundation will prioritize the best interests of the child in all areas and activities involving children.
- 2.2. Respect for children's human rights will inform decisions regarding their best interests. Every child has the right to equal protection. BCNL will not discriminate, whether directly or indirectly, based on sex, race, nationality, ethnicity, genetic heritage, marital status, origin,

¹ Keeping Children Safe, International Child Safeguarding Standards.

religion or belief, education, convictions, political affiliation, personal or social status, health condition, disability, age, sexual orientation, gender identity, property status, or any other characteristic recognized by law or international treaties to which Bulgaria is a party.

- 2.3. The 'do no harm' principle will guide all activities undertaken by BCNL, directly or indirectly involving children.
- 2.4. Whenever a BCNL staff member interacts with children, the 'rule of two adults' will be implemented whenever possible and practical during the encounter. This means that at least one other adult familiar with this Policy shall be present in close proximity.

3. Definitions and terms

A "**child**" is any human being under the age of 18.²

"**Violence**" against a child is any act of physical, mental or sexual abuse, neglect, commercial or other exploitation resulting in actual or potential harm to the child's health, life, development, or dignity, which can occur within the family, school or social settings.³

"**Physical violence**" is the infliction of bodily harm, including the infliction of pain or suffering without disorder.⁴

"**Mental abuse**" is any act that may negatively impact the mental health and development of a child, such as belittling, ridiculing, threatening, discriminating, rejecting or other forms of negative treatment, as well as the failure of the parent, guardian, custodian or caregiver to provide an appropriate supportive environment.⁵

"**Emotional abuse**" entails the failure to provide a developmentally appropriate supportive environment, including a basic attachment figure enabling the child to cultivate stable emotional and social skills commensurate with their individual potential and social milieu. It encompasses actions towards the child that result in harm or have a high likelihood of causing harm to the child's health or physical, mental, spiritual, moral or social development. These actions must fall within the reasonable control of the parent or person in a relationship of responsibility, trust, or authority. Such actions may include restraining, belittling, discrediting, threatening, intimidating, discriminating against, ridiculing, or other non-physical forms of hostile or rejecting treatment.⁶

² UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, Article 1.

³ Regulations for the Implementation of the Child Protection Act, Additional Provisions, §1.

⁴ *Ibid.*

⁵ *Ibid.*

⁶ World Report on Violence and Health' (WHO 1999 & 2002).

"Sexual abuse of a child" involves the utilization of a child for sexual activity by an adult or by another child who by age and maturity is in a relationship of responsibility, trust and authority, the activity being intended to satisfy the needs of the other person. This may include, but is not restricted to: 1. solicitation or coercion of a child to engage in any illegal sexual activity; 2. exploitation of a child for commercial purposes, sexual exploitation, or other unlawful sexual practices; and 3. exploitative use of children for sexual performances and inappropriate material.⁷

"Neglect" is the failure of a parent, guardian, custodian or caregiver to cater to the child's development in one of the following domains: health, education, emotional well-being, nutrition, home environment, and safety, when they possess the capacity to do so, and when doing so is harmful or likely to be harmful to the child's health or physical, mental, moral or social development.⁸

"BCNL Personnel" means all individuals specified in section 1.2.

"Working with children" is participation in an activity with a child where contact is an inherent part of the activity and not merely incidental. This includes both in-person and online activities. Work is also construed to include volunteering or other unpaid contributions.

4. Creating awareness of the Policy

- 4.1. BCNL will guarantee that all employees, associates, interns, volunteers, members of the Board of Trustees, and other associated with the Foundation are informed about this policy and adhere to its stipulations, ensuring that they do not cause harm to children they may encounter during the execution of their responsibilities.
- 4.2. All employees, associates, interns, volunteers, and members of the Board of Trustees of BCNL undergo training on the procedures outlined in the policy whenever it is updated.
- 4.3. A copy of the BCNL Child Protection Policy is accessible on the BCNL intranet and website. Upon joining BCNL, all staff, associates, volunteers, counsellors, etc., undergo child protection training to comprehend the importance of safeguarding children and to understand the procedure for reporting child abuse or ill-treatment.
- 4.4. The BCNL Director bears responsibility for the enforcement of this policy and shall appoint a Child Protection Coordinator within the Foundation. The Coordinator's duty is to ensure that a copy of this policy is disseminated to all organizations arranging meetings on behalf of BCNL or accompanying children to events organized by BCNL.

⁷ *Ibid.*

⁸ *Ibid.*

5. Recruitment and training procedures

- 5.1. Every staff member, associate, trainee, volunteer, and member of the BCNL Board of Trustees will receive information about the BCNL Child Protection Policy, and new team members will be briefed on the policy upon joining the organization.
- 5.2. The Child Protection Coordinator will ensure the prompt dissemination of the policy to individuals involved in BCNL activities, along with any updates to the policy. The name and contact information of the Child Protection Coordinator will be prominently displayed in the BCNL office and accessible on the Foundation's intranet system. Additionally, new hires will receive a briefing on the Coordinator's role upon joining.
- 5.3. All individuals mentioned in 5.1 will be required to sign a declaration acknowledging their awareness of BCNL's Child Protection Policy (see *Appendix 1*).
- 5.4. Independent contractors engaged by BCNL will receive a copy of the Child Protection Policy.
- 5.5. Job postings will explicitly mention BCNL's dedication to the best interests of the child and its adherence to child protection standards. During BCNL recruitment interviews, candidates will engage in discussions regarding child protection and safeguarding, assessing their comprehension of these matters. Additionally, job advertisements will inform candidates of BCNL's prerogative to request additional information from successful candidates concerning their suitability to work with children, including details about any prior convictions related to inappropriate or unlawful conduct involving children.
- 5.6. Before commencing employment, BCNL retains the right to request two references from former employers of the individual being hired to confirm the applicant's suitability to work with children.

6. Code of Conduct towards children

- 6.1. This Code of Ethics outlines the ethical standards governing interactions with children during BCNL activities. It has been formulated with the best interests of the child as the paramount consideration.
- 6.2. BCNL adheres to the Code of Ethics established by the State Agency for Child Protection in the execution of its activities.⁹
- 6.3. Additionally, employees, associates, interns, volunteers, members of the Board of Trustees, consultants, and other individuals engaged in activities on behalf of BCNL:
 - Do not discriminate against, belittle, or shame children. This includes anything that could be considered emotional abuse (e.g., using language that could lead to mental

⁹ State Agency for Child Protection, Code of Ethics for Those Working with Children, available at: <https://sacp.government.bg/sites/default/files/politics/politika-na-zakrila-na-deteto-278.doc>.

- or emotional harm to the child, or recounting stories/showing images that could lead to mental or emotional harm to the child).
- Refrain from using physical punishment or discipline, or any physical force, towards children.
 - Do not engage in any form of sexual activity with children. This encompasses offering sexual services in exchange for money, work, goods, or services, or providing assistance in such activities.
 - Are not allowed to be alone with one or more children at night in a room.
 - Do not remain alone with a child under circumstances that may raise suspicion from others.
 - Do not kiss, hug, fondle, pat, or touch a child in an inappropriate or culturally insensitive manner (do not initiate physical contact, such as hand holding, unless initiated by the child).
 - Do not take photographs, videos or request personal information unless it is necessary for BCNL activities and in accordance with the relevant procedure.
 - Do not inappropriately use a child's contact details (including their social media profiles).
 - Do not engage children as "domestic helpers".
 - Encourage the child to express opinions on matters that concern them, listen to the child, and provide feedback to acknowledge the opinions and views expressed by the child.
 - Do not allow violations of this Code of Ethics by other individuals - employees, associates, interns, volunteers, members of the Board of Trustees, consultants, etc.;

7. Procedure for submitting a report

- 7.1. If a BCNL staff member receives information or witnesses actual or suspected abuse or violence against a child at a location where Foundation activities are conducted, they must promptly inform the Child Protection Coordinator. If necessary, the matter shall be referred to the appropriate authorities for further investigation.
- 7.2. In addition to their obligation under 7.1, when an individual possesses evidence of abuse or violence against a child, or a child at risk, they must report it through the appropriate channels of state institutions, such as the State Agency for Child Protection, Child Protection Departments, the police, or emergency services.
- 7.3. Reporting incidents of child abuse or violence to the Child Protection Coordinator must be done promptly, preferably on the same day. A form (Appendix 3) is completed for this purpose and submitted to the coordinator electronically or in hard copy. In urgent cases, a report may also be made verbally, with a follow-up in writing within 24 hours.

- 7.4. The Coordinator immediately informs the Director and the Chairperson of the BCNL Board of Trustees, who determine the most appropriate response in the case. The decision regarding the actions to be taken in response to the report is made within 24 hours of its receipt and is documented in the form.
- 7.5. If the reported report does not constitute a criminal act, the Director and the Chair of the Board of Trustees shall decide whether the case should be reviewed internally to determine whether a violation of the Code of Conduct has occurred and take action.
- 7.6. When the report pertains to the Child Protection Coordinator, it is directed to the Chairperson of the BCNL Board of Trustees.

8. Communicating with children, filming and publishing images and information about children

- 8.1. Communication with children avoids language that reinforces power dynamics.
- 8.2. When communicating with children, their dignity must be maintained, and language should never humiliate, victimize, or shame them.
- 8.3. Images of children should always depict them dressed appropriately and should never portray poses that could be construed as sexually provocative.
- 8.4. Communication materials should strive to depict a diverse range of children, including boys and girls of various ages, abilities, and ethnic or social backgrounds.
- 8.5. The public dissemination of images and information about children carries inherent risks. When sharing images and stories of children, their best interests must always be prioritized, taking into consideration their individual vulnerabilities. This involves respecting their dignity and rights, including the right to privacy and the right to be heard.
- 8.6. Photos and videos are taken with the prior informed consent of the child and the parent/guardian, clearly stating the purpose and methods of use of the materials. Consent must be given in writing. Obtaining prior written consent does not exclude the need to obtain verbal consent from the child during the taking of photos/videos/interviews. (Appendix 5 includes a specific consent form).
- 8.7. When publishing material related to past or upcoming project activities, identification of children is only done when explicitly necessary and with the informed consent of the child and parent/legal guardian.
- 8.8. For activities directly involving children, declarations certifying the consent of both the child and the parent/legal guardian must be provided.
- 8.9. All documents containing personal data are collected and stored in compliance with the Data Protection Act, GDPR, and the Child Protection Act.

Filming and interviewing children by photographers, journalists, film crews, and media

- 8.10. Journalists, photographers/film crews should be properly briefed on BCNP's child protection policy prior to meeting the children for interviews, photography, or filming. They are required to sign a declaration affirming their commitment to this policy and specifying the purposes for which the photographs are being taken (see Appendix 6).
- 8.11. Photographers and members of the media are prohibited from spending time alone with children in private and are not granted unsupervised access. They must be accompanied by BCNL staff at all times.
- 8.12. Children and parents/legal guardians must be informed about how the images, videos, interviews and stories will be used and give their consent

9. Partner organisations and partners

- 9.1. BCNL Foundation implements partnership activities concerning children with other civil society organizations and with educational institutions, following a mutual agreement on ethical standards for working with children and child protection procedures to be followed by each partner.
- 9.2. External partners who collaborate with BCNL in activities and events involving children will be asked to provide evidence of their own child protection policy or to align with that of BCNL.

The current policy was adopted in 2020. The most recent revision was made at the BCNL Board of Trustees meeting held on 27 March 2024.

Director:

Nadia Shabani

A handwritten signature in blue ink is written over a circular official stamp. The stamp contains text in Arabic and English, including the word 'DIRECTOR' at the bottom.

Annex 1: Declaration of Awareness of the Child Protection Policy

- I declare that I am familiar with the BCNL Child Protection Policy and aware of my responsibilities, its guidelines and procedures.
- I declare that I am aware that if I have any questions regarding my duties and responsibilities under this policy, I shall seek assistance from the BCNL Child Protection Coordinator.
- I also declare that I have disclosed to the Child Protection Coordinator at BCNL any child protection concerns that may arise regarding my suitability to carry out my assigned tasks. Any relevant information relating to investigations or convictions will be kept confidential by the Child Protection Coordinator who will consider whether or not they pose any risk or are not in accordance with this Child Protection Policy.
- I declare that I have no criminal proceedings pending, nor have I been convicted of any offence relating to inappropriate behaviour towards children.
- I declare that I am not aware of any reasons, which make me unsuitable for the position.

By signing below, I certify that the above statements are true and correct.

I am aware of the criminal liability under Article 313 of the Criminal Code for declaring false circumstances.

Name and signature:

Date:

Annex 2: Recognising signs of abuse¹⁰

Recognising the signs of potential abuse is complex. There are potential warning signs to be on the lookout for, but judgment about them should be made with care. It should not be automatically assumed that abuse is occurring. It is equally important not to dismiss concerns or ignore signs of abuse - these should be discussed with the Child Protection Coordinator as soon as possible so that the most appropriate course of action can be decided.

<p>Possible signs of physical violence:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Bruises, burns, sprains, dislocations, bites, cuts • Implausible explanations for the injuries • Refusal to discuss injuries • Withdrawal from physical contact • Covering hands and feet in hot weather • Reluctance to participate in physical activities that may involve undressing, e.g. sports • Fear of returning home or of contact with parents • Showing wariness or distrust of adults • Self-destructive tendencies • Being aggressive towards others • Being very passive and compliant • Chronic running away 	<p>Possible signs of neglect:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Frequent hunger • Taking food scraps from bins or plates or stealing food • Poor personal hygiene • Constant fatigue • Inappropriate clothing, e.g. summer clothes in winter • Frequent lateness or non-attendance at school • Untreated medical problems • Low self-esteem • Poor social relationships • Uncontrollable theft • Drug or alcohol abuse
<p>Possible signs of emotional abuse:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Delay in physical, cognitive or emotional development • Severe anxiety • Slurred speech or sudden speech disorder • Fear of new situations • Low self-esteem • Inappropriate emotional responses to situations • Extreme passivity or aggression • Drug or alcohol abuse • Chronic running away • Compulsive stealing 	<p>Possible signs of sexual abuse:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Age inappropriate sexualised behaviour or highly sexualised language • Bed wetting or soiling • Anal or genital soreness • Sleep problems • Fear of being with adults • Promiscuity • Extreme risk-taking in adolescents

¹⁰ Annex 2 is based on the section 'Recognising signs of abuse' in Eurochild's Child Protection Policy, available at: https://eurochild.org/uploads/2020/11/Eurochild_Child_Protection_Policy.pdf.

Possible signs of caution regarding adult behaviour:

- A person in whose presence a child's behaviour changes abruptly, for example, becoming withdrawn, frightened, worried, or overexcited.
- Asking the child to lie or keep secrets.
- Breached of the organization's code of conduct/policies.
- Initiating contact with a child in a personal capacity - in person, by email or telephone.

Annex 3: Reporting form for suspected or identified violence or abuse against a child

The report should be made directly to the BCNL Child Protection Coordinator, preferably within the same day.

1. Information about the person submitting the report

Name: _____

Position/Organisation: _____

Nature of relationship with the child: _____

Contact details: tel. _____ e-mail: _____

2. Information about the child

Child's name: _____

Gender of the child: _____

Child's age: _____

Child's address/email: _____

Whom does the child lives with: _____

3. Details of the incident

The incident was: personally witnessed alleged disclosed by another person

Provide information about the incident, location, date and time of occurrence. Describe the emotional condition of the child. Give information about any visible injuries and any other important details:

Did the child share anything with you about the incident?

Name of alleged perpetrator: _____

Were any other children or adults present at the incident: _____

Are other children at risk: _____

Signature: _____

Date, time: _____

Annex 4. Declaration of consent for participation in an event

Declaration of consent for participation in an event

BCNL is organising the event: _____,
which will be held _____ (date, location).

I declare that I have been informed about the purpose of the event and that participation in the event is voluntary and that I can refuse to participate in the event.

Consent of the child

Name:

Place, date:

Consent of parent/legal guardian

Name of the child to whom I am the parent/legal guardian:

Can participate in the event _____

Can participate in media events during the event _____

Name:

Relationship with the child:

Place, date:

Annex 5: Declaration of consent for the use of video/photographic images of a child

Declaration of consent to the use of video/photographic images of a child

BCNL is organizing _____ (name of event). During the event BCNL will take photos for publication, it is also possible to take interviews with the participants. This is done to inform the public and authorities about our activities.

I declare that I agree to participate in the visual documentation during the event organised by BCNL described above. I give my consent for the visual materials produced during the event to be used by BCNL to publicize BCNL activities through photographs, video, audio, written materials on the website, social media, reports, brochures and other promotional materials of BCNL.

Yes No

Consent of the child:

Name:

Place, date:

Consent of parent/legal guardian:

Name:

Relationship with the child:

Place, date:

Annex 6: Declaration by media representatives for coverage of children in BCNL activities

Declaration by a media representative for coverage of children in an event organized by BCNL

I, the undersigned, _____

Representative of _____ (media)

I declare that the images (photos, videos) and stories of children, taken and recorded in connection with/during the event/project of the Bulgarian Center for Not-for-Profit Law:

will be used solely for the purposes of the organised event/project.

Any images and stories of children filmed and recorded will be in accordance with Bulgarian and international child protection legislation, as well as with BCNL's Child Protection Policy.

I declare that I am familiar with the Policy and will abide by it in the performance of my commitment to BCNL.

Name:

Signature:

Place, date: