

SAFEGUARDING POLICY

VOLKSHILFE ÖSTERREICH
VOLKSHILFE SOLIDARITÄT
VOLKSHILFE FORSCHUNG¹

¹ The present policy applies to the registered associations "Volkshilfe Österreich", "Volkshilfe Solidarität" and "Volkshilfe Forschung". These are summarised below under the term "Volkshilfe Federal Offices (VH BGST)".

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1. Introduction

Since it was founded in 1947, Volkshilfe has been active in combating poverty and social marginalisation. Together with those affected, we create living environments and conditions that make it possible to gain the strength to face challenging situations.

Volkshilfe works nationally and internationally to support people affected by poverty, including children and young people, women, persons with disability and elderly people.

For VH BGST, as an interdisciplinary institution with the power to influence many areas affecting vulnerable persons, it is important to draw up safeguarding policies which all employees must abide by.

The main objective is to develop a basic awareness and basis for action among all employees regarding safeguarding mechanisms in the context of work. Equal treatment and equal opportunities at the Volkshilfe Federal Offices and their public impact must be ensured for all employees and beneficiaries, regardless of their social status, gender, race², ethnic affiliations, world view and political convictions, their religion or their access to education.

1.1 Volkshilfe Safeguarding Policy

Safeguarding means protecting people, including children and at-risk adults, from harm that arises from coming into contact with VH BGST staff or programmes.

The Safeguarding Policy of the Volkshilfe Federal Offices verifiably familiarises all employees with the established safeguarding mechanisms. It is presented to all employees of BGST upon entering the organisation and acknowledgement, agreement and implementation are assured through signing.

The contents of the policy are mandatory for all employees, volunteers, casual workers and freelancers.

Volkshilfe believes that everyone we come into contact with, regardless of age, gender identity, disability, sexual orientation or ethnic origin has the right to be protected from all forms of harm, abuse, neglect and exploitation. VH BGST will not tolerate abuse and exploitation by staff or associated personnel.

This policy will address the following areas of safeguarding: child safeguarding, adult safeguarding, and protection from sexual exploitation and abuse.

² Race refers to racial discrimination based on socially constructed categories of difference.

Volkshilfe commits to addressing safeguarding throughout its work, through the three pillars of prevention, reporting and response.

The Safeguarding Policy is published on the website of VH BGST.

1.2 Scope

The present Safeguarding Policy applies to the registered associations "Volkshilfe Österreich", "Volkshilfe Solidarität" and "Volkshilfe Forschung". These are summarised below under the term "Volkshilfe Federal Offices (BGST)".

It applies to all staff contracted by VH BGST and to associated personnel whilst engaged with work or visits related to VH BGST.

2.Objectives

The purpose of this policy is to protect people, particularly children, at-risk adults and beneficiaries of assistance, from any harm that may be caused due to their coming into contact with VH BGST. This includes harm arising from:

- The conduct of staff or personnel associated with VH BGST
- The design and implementation of VH BGST's programmes and activities

The policy lays out the commitments made by VH BGST, and informs staff and associated personnel of their responsibilities in relation to safeguarding.

This policy builds on and completes VH BGST`s Policy Papers:

- Gender, Diversity and Inclusion Policy
- Child Protection Policy
- Code of Conduct
- Basic Principles Volkshilfe Österreich
- Basic Principles for International Cooperation

This policy does not cover:

- Safeguarding concerns in the wider community not perpetrated by VH BGST or associated personnel

3.Prevention

Volkshilfe responsibilities

VH BGST will:

- Ensure all staff have access to, are familiar with, and know their responsibilities within this policy
- Design and undertake all its programmes and activities in a way that protects people from any risk of harm that may arise from their coming into contact with VH BGST. This includes the way in which information about individuals in our programmes is gathered and communicated
- Implement stringent safeguarding procedures when recruiting, managing and deploying staff and associated personnel
- Ensure staff receive training on safeguarding at a level commensurate with their role in the organization
- Ensure that partner organizations that work with VH BGST or implement projects on behalf of VH BGST put in place appropriate safeguarding policies or measures in their organizations
- Contribute to creating and maintaining an environment that prevents safeguarding violations and promotes the implementation of the Safeguarding Policy
- Ensure safe, appropriate, accessible means of reporting safeguarding concerns in accordance with EU and national whistleblowing laws
- Follow up on reports of safeguarding concerns promptly and according to due process

Staff responsibilities

Child safeguarding

VH BGST staff and associated personnel must not:

- Engage in sexual activity with anyone under the age of 18 in the context of their professional activities for VH BGST
- Sexually abuse or exploit children
- Subject a child to physical, emotional or psychological abuse, or neglect
- Engage in any commercially exploitative activities with children including child labour or trafficking

Adult safeguarding

VH BGST staff and associated personnel must not:

- Sexually abuse or exploit at-risk adults
- Subject an at-risk adult to physical, emotional or psychological abuse, or neglect

Protection from sexual exploitation and abuse

VH BGST staff and associated personnel must not:

- Exchange money, employment, goods or services for sexual activity. This includes any exchange of assistance that is due to beneficiaries of assistance
- Engage in any sexual relationships with beneficiaries of assistance, since they are based on inherently unequal power dynamics

Additionally, VH BGST staff and associated personnel are obliged to:

- Report any concerns or suspicions regarding safeguarding violations by an VH BGST staff member or associated personnel to the appropriate staff member

4. Reporting

VH BGST will ensure that safe, appropriate, accessible means of reporting safeguarding concerns are made available to staff and the communities we work with.

Any staff reporting concerns or complaints through formal whistleblowing channels (or if they request it) will be protected (VH BGST's Disclosure of Malpractice in the Workplace (Whistleblowing) Policy is being developed).

VH BGST will also accept complaints from external sources such as members of the public, partners and official bodies.

Staff members who have a complaint or concern relating to safeguarding should report it immediately to their Safeguarding Focal Point or line manager. If the staff member does not feel comfortable reporting to their Safeguarding Focal Point or line manager (for example if they feel that the report will not be taken seriously, or if that person is implicated in the concern) they may report to any other appropriate staff member. For example, this could be a senior manager or a member of the HR Team.

Contact details will be provided after internal process.

5. Response

VH BGST will follow up safeguarding reports and concerns according to policy and procedure, and legal and statutory obligations (see also procedures for reporting and response to safeguarding concerns in Volkshilfe's Child Protection Policy and Volkshilfe's Gender, Diversity and Inclusion Policy).

VH BGST will apply appropriate disciplinary measures to staff found in breach of policy, depending on the gravity of the offence (from critical feedback and monitoring until dismissal).

VH BGST will offer support to survivors of harm caused by staff or associated personnel, regardless of whether a formal internal response is carried out (such as an internal investigation). Decisions regarding support will be led by the victim / survivor.

6. Confidentiality

It is essential that confidentiality is maintained at all stages of the process when dealing with safeguarding concerns. Information relating to the concern and subsequent case management will be shared on a need to know basis only, and will be kept secure at all times.

7. Glossary of Terms

Beneficiary of Assistance

Someone who directly receives goods or services from VH BGST's programmes. Misuse of power can also apply to the wider community that the NGO serves, and also can include exploitation by giving the perception of being in a position of power.

Child

A person below the age of 18.

Harm

Psychological, physical and any other infringement of an individual's rights.

Psychological harm

Emotional or psychological abuse, including (but not limited to) humiliating and degrading treatment such as bad name calling, constant criticism, belittling, persistent shaming, solitary confinement and isolation.

Protection from Sexual Exploitation and Abuse (PSEA)

The term used by the humanitarian and development community to refer to the prevention of sexual exploitation and abuse of affected populations by staff or associated personnel. The term derives from the United Nations Secretary General's Bulletin on Special Measures for Protection from Sexual Exploitation and Abuse (ST/SGB/2003/13).

Safeguarding

We understand safeguarding to mean protecting people, including children and at-risk adults, from harm that arises from coming into contact with our staff or programmes.

Safeguarding means taking all reasonable steps to prevent harm, particularly sexual exploitation, abuse and harassment from occurring; to protect people, especially vulnerable adults and children, from that harm; and to respond appropriately when harm does occur.

This definition draws from our values and principles and shapes our culture. It pays specific attention to preventing and responding to harm from any potential, actual or attempted abuse of power, trust, or vulnerability, especially for sexual purposes.

Safeguarding applies consistently and without exception across our programmes, partners and staff. It requires proactively identifying, preventing and guarding against all risks of harm, exploitation and abuse and having mature, accountable and transparent systems for response, reporting and learning when risks materialise. Those systems must be survivor-centred and also protect those accused until proven guilty.

Safeguarding puts beneficiaries and affected persons at the centre of all we do.

Sexual abuse

The term 'sexual abuse' means the actual or threatened physical intrusion of a sexual nature, whether by force or under unequal or coercive conditions.

Sexual exploitation

The term 'sexual exploitation' means any actual or attempted abuse of a position of vulnerability, differential power, or trust, for sexual purposes, including, but not limited to, profiting monetarily, socially or politically from the sexual exploitation of another. This definition includes human trafficking and modern slavery.

Survivor

The person who has been abused or exploited. The term 'survivor' is often used in preference to 'victim' as it implies strength, resilience and the capacity to survive, however it is the individual's choice how they wish to identify themselves.

At-risk adult

Sometimes also referred to as vulnerable adult. A person who needs or may need care by reason of mental or other disability, age or illness; and who is or may be unable to take care of him or herself, or unable to protect him or herself against significant harm or exploitation.

