




## **Safeguarding Policy**

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**Dear staff members, Dear Partners in programme work,**

The protection of children, adolescents, and adults from harm, exploitation, and abuse is at the heart of our work at Hoffnungszeichen | Sign of Hope e.V. As a humanitarian and human rights-based organisation, we share a special responsibility: We must ensure that no one is put at risk through our programmes, our conduct, or our collaboration.


This Safeguarding Policy provides a binding framework for how we identify risks, prevent harm, and actively create an environment in which all people can feel safe and respected. It applies to all staff – regardless of role or location – as well as to all individuals and organisations working on our behalf or in partnership with us.

Safeguarding is not a one-time measure but a shared, ongoing responsibility. That is why we count on your attentiveness, sense of responsibility, and active engagement – both in your interactions with those we serve and in our day-to-day work together. Only by taking joint responsibility can we ensure effective protection and live up to the trust placed in us.

We thank you for your commitment.


**With kind regards,**

The Executive Board of Hoffnungszeichen | Sign of Hope e.V.

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## Commitment to Protect the Vulnerable

At Hoffnungszeichen | Sign of Hope e.V. we believe that every person has the right to live in dignity and free from harm, exploitation and abuse. Our commitment to safeguarding reflects this belief, especially towards those who are most vulnerable. This Safeguarding Policy sets out how we protect the people and communities we work with from harm arising through contact with our organisation. In particular, this means preventing harm that could result from:

- The conduct of staff or personnel associated with Sign of Hope
- The design and implementation of Sign of Hope's programmes, measures, and activities in collaboration with partner organizations.

Sign of Hope applies a **zero-tolerance policy** to any behaviour that endangers children or adults. Violations are considered gross misconduct and may result in disciplinary action, including termination or legal prosecution. For us, safeguarding means not only **preventing harm** but also actively creating a safe, respectful, and inclusive environment – both within our organisation and in all programmes.

Safeguarding is a **shared responsibility**. All employees and associated persons actively contribute to a culture of safety and are required to report any safeguarding concerns encountered in the course of their work. Only through collective action can we ensure effective protection.

### Key Guidelines at a Glance


Safeguarding Policy	- Protection from SEAH and other harm
Code of Conduct	- Behavioural standards
Complaints & Whistleblowing Policy	- Confidential and secure reporting
Anti-Corruption Policy	- Financial and ethical conduct

All policies are available on the Sign of Hope's website or upon request.

## 1. Scope and Delineation

The Safeguarding Policy of Sign of Hope applies globally and affects all individuals who come into contact with people associated with Sign of Hope. This includes in particular:

- Employees, board members, volunteers and interns under contract with Sign of Hope;

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- All individuals involved with Sign of Hope through work or visits – including supervisory board members, consultants, volunteers, contractors, temporary workers and journalists;
- Programme or strategic partners of Sign of Hope and organizations contracted by those partners to work on behalf of Sign of Hope.

For better readability, all groups mentioned are referred to as ‘**staff and stakeholders**’.

Sign of Hope reserves the right to terminate contracts in case of violations of the guidelines outlined in this policy or the Code of Conduct.

Not included in the scope of this policy are:

- safeguarding-related incidents within the broader community, unless caused by persons or programs associated with Sign of Hope;
- cases of fraud or financial irregularities, such as withheld salaries – these fall under the **Anti-Corruption Policy**.

## 2. Of particular concern: At-Risk Individuals & Groups

Anyone who can be exploited through a power imbalance – this includes individuals who directly receive or hope to receive aid, services or employment (including daily or incentive-based work) through Sign of Hope. Our organisation recognises that certain individuals and groups are at heightened risk of harm due to their age, dependency or social position. These include, but are not limited to:

### *Children and Adolescents*

All individuals under 18 years are inherently vulnerable and require special safeguarding. This includes both younger children and adolescents, who may be overlooked in protection efforts due to their age or perceived maturity.


### *At-Risk Adults*

Adults who, due to disability, age, illness or marginalised status, may be unable to protect themselves from harm or exploitation.

## 3. Safeguarding areas covered by this policy

This policy addresses various forms of harm relevant to Sign of Hope’s work, in particular:

- Sexual exploitation, abuse, and harassment (SEAH),
- Violence against and neglect of children,
- Abuse of power.

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These categories are based on international safeguarding standards, particularly the six IASC Core Principles, the CAPSEAH Principles, and the Keeping Children Safe Standards. Full definitions and descriptions of types of violence are provided in Annex 1.

To support appropriate response and classification, Sign of Hope distinguishes between three forms of sexual violence:


- **Sexual boundary violations** (e.g. inappropriate comments, accidental touching, disregard of personal boundaries)
- **Sexual misconduct** (e.g. deliberately suggestive remarks, intentional physical contact, inappropriate messages)
- **Sexual assault and abuse** (e.g. forced exposure to pornography, sexual coercion or rape)

## 4. Prevention

### Safe Recruitment

A key component of risk prevention is the thorough screening of individuals during the recruitment and contracting process. To prevent potential harm, the following measures are a mandatory part of the selection procedure for all staff members, consultants, contractors, and interns who have direct contact with at-risk groups — including children, vulnerable adults or individuals who may be particularly at risk due to a power imbalance within Sign of Hope:

<b>References</b> Two reference letters from previous employers are required before work with Sign of Hope can begin.  An explicit safeguarding question is included in all reference requests.	<b>Criminal Background Checks</b> For staff members in Germany, an extended police clearance certificate is required.  For staff resident in a country where criminal background checks are unavailable or have limited value, Sign of Hope will instead request further documents like at least three references from previous employers, Certificate of Good	<b>Job Adverts and Interviews</b> Sign of Hope's zero tolerance approach to safeguarding incidents is stipulated in all job adverts. Questions about safeguarding are included during the interview process for any role that has direct contact with at-risk groups.
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	Conduct, Self-Declaration Form.	
<p><b>Code of Conduct</b> All employees, consultants, contractors and interns must read and sign the Sign of Hope Code of Conduct prior to starting work with Sign of Hope.</p> <p>Breaches of the Code of Conduct will result in disciplinary action, up to, and including, dismissal and referral to relevant authorities for criminal prosecution.</p>	<p><b>Contracts</b> All contracts for employees, consultants, contractors and interns will include a clause stating that the contract is only valid if the Code of Conduct has also been signed, and that non-compliance may result in termination of the contract.</p>	<p><b>Training</b> Training empowers staff to confidently identify concerns, respond appropriately and contribute to a strong safeguarding culture. During the onboarding process all staff and affiliates will undertake online safeguarding training. New Safeguarding Focal Points must in addition attend more extensive (in-person) safeguarding training. Refresher trainings will be provided to all team members on an ongoing basis.</p>

## Safeguarding Risk Assessment

As part of project development, a risk assessment is carried out with contextual staff and the responsible Safeguarding or Do No Harm Focal Point. The goal is to identify potential risks to vulnerable groups, including:

- analysis of power dynamics and vulnerabilities in the project context,
- identification of risks in program design and implementation,
- development of risk mitigation strategies and action plans.

## Context-Sensitive Safeguarding Training

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Sign of Hope acknowledges that safeguarding risks – and perceptions of abuse – can vary by context. Staff and partners receive training on cultural sensitivity and safeguarding practices tailored to local norms, focusing on:

- gender roles and family structures,
- local legal frameworks and societal customs,
- communication styles and concepts of privacy and authority,
- establishing and monitoring complaint and feedback mechanisms.

## 5. Safeguarding Roles and Responsibilities

### Behavioral Standards in Interacting with Children

Positive, respectful and age-appropriate interactions with children and adolescents are central to our work. All staff and stakeholders are encouraged to act as role models and foster safe spaces where children feel valued, heard and protected. The list in **Annex 2** outlines key behavioural expectations towards children and adolescents.

### Manager and leadership responsibilities

All staff in management and leadership positions (both at head office and at field offices) have overall accountability for this policy and its implementation. They also have a responsibility to support and develop systems that maintain an environment where all stakeholders involved with Sign of Hope understand and adhere to the requirements of this policy.

### Safeguarding Focal Points & Compliance Manager


Safeguarding Focal Points (SFPs) are responsible for staff training and monitoring the implementation of safeguarding procedures. Alongside the Compliance Manager, they receive complaints (e.g., via whistleblower platforms or complaint boxes) and may be involved in case management. SFPs also support programme teams by sharing best practices. The Compliance Manager oversees the organization and monitoring of case management.

### Staff responsibility

All staff must adhere to this policy and report any suspected harmful or abusive behaviour toward children or adults. This includes:

- understanding core safeguarding concepts, reporting channels, and prevention/response measures;
- mandatory reporting of any incident or suspicion within 24 hours – whether observed, suspected, or disclosed.



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- Failure to report is considered gross misconduct and triggers an internal investigation.

### **Programme Partners**

All programme partners of Sign of Hope must meet the following minimum safeguarding standards:

- Existence of a written Safeguarding (or at least PSEAH) Policy
- Clear reporting and case handling procedures
- Designated Safeguarding Focal Point
- Regular safeguarding training for staff

Sign of Hope reserves the right to request documentation, conduct safeguarding due diligence, and require corrective actions if standards are not met.

## **6. Survivor-Centered Response**

Sign of Hope adheres to a survivor-centered approach, prioritizing the well-being and dignity of affected individuals. This includes:

- presuming the credibility of any report made in good faith;
- protecting Whistleblowers under the Complaints and Whistleblowing Policy;
- respecting the wishes, needs, and timelines of affected individuals;
- ensuring they are not forced to confront the accused;
- providing psychosocial support and safe spaces as needed.


Survivors are never required to pursue legal or administrative proceedings unless they explicitly choose to do so. Their safety is the top priority.

## **7. Reporting Safeguarding Concerns by Staff & Stakeholders**

All staff and stakeholders of Sign of Hope are required to report any suspected harmful behaviour – whether observed, suspected, or disclosed – within 24 hours.

- Individuals who raise concerns in good faith are protected under the Complaints and Whistleblowing Policy – even if concerns are later unsubstantiated.
- Retaliation against Whistleblowers will not be tolerated and will result in disciplinary action.
- Malicious or deliberately false reports are not protected under the policy.

If safeguarding concerns arise involving a partner organization, it must investigate the matter under its own safeguarding procedures. If Sign of Hope staff are involved or if a

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conflict of interest exists, Sign of Hope must be informed immediately and may provide support or demand direct involvement to ensure appropriate resolution.

Staff and stakeholders including community members can report suspected or confirmed safeguarding concerns verbally or in writing through the following established channels:

- Notify the Safeguarding Focal Point
- Report your concern via the [Sign of Hope Integrity Platform](#) or
- via email to the compliance manager: [compliance@sign-of-hope.org](mailto:compliance@sign-of-hope.org)



Sign of Hope staff are required to report safeguarding concerns, but must not conduct investigations independently to avoid compromising due process.


## 8. Monitoring and Policy Review

Sign of Hope will monitor the implementation and effectiveness of this policy through:

- Internal safeguarding audits
- Regular feedback surveys with staff and programme participants
- Periodic external reviews

Lessons learned will feed into the next policy and training documents revision cycle. Safeguarding data will be anonymised and used to improve prevention and response mechanisms.

	Checked & Approved	
Name	K. Stieglitz (Chairperson)	M. Schütze (Vice Chairperson)
Date & Signature		

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## Annex 1: Safeguarding Definitions & Descriptions

### A) Sexual Exploitation, Sexual Abuse and Sexual Harassment (SEAH) <sup>1</sup>

#### *Sexual Exploitation*

Any actual or attempted abuse of a position of vulnerability, power discrepancies or trust for sexual purposes, including, but not limited to, profiting monetarily, socially or politically from the sexual exploitation of another. For example, coercing individuals into engaging in sexual activities in exchange for aid, services, employment opportunities, or other benefits.

#### *Sexual Abuse*

The actual or threatened physical intrusion of a sexual nature, whether by force or under unequal or coercive conditions. This includes sexual assault, rape, molestation, and other forms of non-consensual sexual activity.

#### *Sexual Harassment*


Sexual harassment is any unwelcome conduct of a sexual nature that might reasonably be expected or be perceived to cause offence or humiliation, when such conduct interferes with work, is made a condition of employment or creates an intimidating, hostile or offensive work environment. Sexual harassment may occur in the workplace or in connection with work. Sexual harassment may involve any conduct of a verbal, non-verbal or physical nature, including written and electronic communications.

While typically involving a pattern of conduct, sexual harassment may take the form of a single incident. In assessing the reasonableness of expectations or perceptions, the perspective of the person who is the target of the conduct shall be considered.

Sexual harassment may occur **outside the workplace and outside working hours**, including during official travel or social functions related to work. Sexual harassment may be perpetrated by any colleague, including a supervisor, a peer or a subordinate.

In addition to international definitions, Sign of Hope recognises three categories of sexualised violence to ensure proportional and appropriate responses: *Sexualised boundary violations* (e.g. inappropriate comments, unintentional touching without awareness of boundaries), *Sexualised misconduct* (e.g. suggestive messages, deliberate physical contact), and, *Sexual coercion and assault* (e.g. forced exposure to pornography, sexual coercion, or rape). These distinctions help in

<sup>1</sup> Definitions provided according to CAPSEAH and in line with the Secretary General Bulletin (2003) protection from sexual exploitation and sexual abuse

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classifying and responding to incidents proportionally, even if they do not reach the level of criminal offence.

## B) Violence against children<sup>2</sup>

Sign of Hope differentiates between six main types of violence against children and adolescents, defined as follows:

**Physical Violence** – is the actual or potential physical injury to a child or a failure to prevent the child from physical harm. This includes hitting, kicking, scratching, shaking, throwing, burning or scalding, drowning, suffocating children or forcing them to stay in uncomfortable positions and deliberately causing ill health to a child. Physical violence mostly leaves mental traces, as well as physical ones.

**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, showing children pornographic materials, watching sexual activities together, or encouraging them to behave in inappropriately sexualised ways.


**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 includes age 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, cause serious mental problems for the victims.

**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.

**Neglect** – is the persistent failure to meet the child's basic physical and/or psychological needs, such as 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.


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<sup>2</sup> Following the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child.

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*Online Violence* – describes various forms of violence against children using digital media and communication technologies like social media, webcams, chat rooms etc. Offenders contact children through digital media often with a false identity, to get their trust and sexually exploit them. Others use digital media to bully, offend or embarrass children. Various forms of violence often occur together and are gender specific.

Definitions of sexual exploitation and sexual violence may overlap. For children, any sexual act – regardless of consent – is considered abuse.

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## Annex 2: Expected standards of behaviour towards children

Positive, respectful and age-appropriate interactions with children and adolescents are central to our work. All staff and partners are encouraged to act as role models and foster safe spaces where children feel valued, heard and protected. Sign of Hope expects all who are directly or indirectly in contact with children and or adolescents in their work to:

- Respect and stand up for the dignity of all children and adolescents;
- Refrain from all forms of violence against children and adolescents and not to use any form of violence to discipline a child / adolescent;
- Apply the “two-adult” rule, in which at least one parent or guardian or at least two adult caretakers must be present at all times during all activities involving children and adolescents that are generally connected to Sign of Hope. Any deviations from this rule caused by circumstances must be clarified in advance with persons authorised to take decisions (e.g. never work with or transport a child during working hours alone without the prior authorisation of the line manager, unless absolutely necessary for the safety of the child)
- Never invite a child or their relatives to your home or develop a relationship with a child and/or their family which may be considered outside normal professional boundaries.
- Dress appropriately and behave in a culturally sensitive manner when visiting children, adolescents, families, communities and programmes, or when working with children;
- Be aware that children and adolescents may, through verbal or non-verbal behaviour, use encounters to obtain “special attention”. The adults are always responsible for their actions even if a child or adolescent behaves seductively. Adults should avoid being placed in a compromising or vulnerable position;
- Do not attempt to handle, or authorise others to handle, children and adolescents with complicated problems by yourself, unless you/they have specialised skills and are authorised to do so. These children and adolescents should be referred to competent and reliable organisations or a team of professionals;
- Respond immediately to all complaints, accusations and reports by children and adolescents with respect to any form of violence and inform Sign of Hope.
- Follow all the child and adolescents safeguarding standards when communicating on social media and any other digital communication channels. Digital communication calls for particular awareness of the risk of violating children’s and adolescent’s rights or the risk of non-compliance with child and adolescents safeguarding standards.