



right to education

CHILD SAFEGUARDING AND CHILD PROTECTION AT WORLD UNIVERSITY SERVICE (WUS) AUSTRIA

Policy Guidelines, Principles and Procedures

Version 1, 2024

VISION AND MISSION

World University Service (WUS) Austria is a politically independent, non-governmental organization dedicated to advancing the human right to education. In an era where education plays an increasingly pivotal role in comprehending intricate social, political, cultural, and global issues, as well as in addressing the conflicts of the 21st century, WUS Austria places the **pursuit of quality education for all** at the forefront of its mission. Our projects are fundamentally rooted in a **human rights-based approach**, aiming to equip learners with the knowledge, skills, values, and attitudes necessary for active engagement in addressing global challenges and fostering proactive efforts towards a more just world.

WUS Austria strives to enhance the quality of education in alignment with international standards through project development, project management, networking, and consulting services. Guided by principles such as local capacity building, sustainability, local ownership, global citizenship education, and empowerment, we collaborate with a diverse array of partners, including higher education institutions, schools, public bodies (such as ministries and accreditation agencies), NGOs, and companies at national, regional, European, and international levels. Our commitment to quality assurance and the enduring impact of project results remains a focal point of our efforts.

INTRODUCTION

The following document outlines **World University Service Austria's (hereinafter referred to as WUS Austria) policies, principles, and procedures concerning child safeguarding and protection measures implemented by WUS Austria staff members in their professional capacities**. WUS Austria staunchly upholds the rights of all children, including protection from all forms of violence, abuse, neglect, and exploitation, as delineated in the 1989 **UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC)** and its optional protocols, and the Council of Europe Convention on the Protection of Children against Sexual Exploitation and Sexual Abuse (**Lanzarote Convention, 2007**).

Children who come into contact with WUS Austria staff, volunteers, interns, external collaborators, and associates are guaranteed the rights enshrined in the UNCRC. WUS Austria's initiatives are aligned with the **EU Strategy for the Rights of the Child**, promoting actions to facilitate children's participation in political and democratic processes, ensuring their economic and social inclusion, upholding their rights to health and education, offering equal opportunities to all children, preventing violence against children, protecting them from violence, advocating for a justice system that caters to children's needs, fostering a safe digital experience for children, and providing global support for children.

WUS Austria is deeply committed to **preventing child abuse**. Recognizing that child abuse and inappropriate interactions with children are prevalent issues worldwide, WUS Austria is proactive in addressing these concerns. The development of this policy underscores our commitment to taking proactive measures to safeguard and protect children participating in WUS Austria's programs, utilizing its facilities, and engaging with its networks.

WUS Austria's Child Protection Policy is grounded in the following principles:

- **Best interests of the child:** We prioritize the best interests of the child in all our activities and decision-making processes.
- **Non-discrimination:** We do not discriminate against any child based on race, ethnicity, gender, religion, disability, or any other characteristic.
- **Empowerment:** We empower children to participate in decisions that affect them and encourage their active involvement in our programs.
- **Confidentiality:** We respect the confidentiality of information shared by children and ensure it is only disclosed when necessary to protect their safety and well-being.
- **Accountability:** We hold ourselves accountable for maintaining a safe environment for children and respond promptly to any concerns or allegations of abuse.

LEGAL FOUNDATIONS

The content of the organisation's Child Protection Policy is based on the following laws, policies and standards:

- The **UN Convention on the Rights of the Child** and its three additional protocols;
- The International Keeping Children Safe Standards;
- The **Federal Constitutional Law on the Rights of Children 2016** (BVG Kinderrechte);
- The **Austrian Federal Law for Protection of Children and Youth** (Bundes-Kinder- und Jugendhilfegesetz 2013 – B-KJHG 2013);
- The **Austrian Criminal Code** (Strafgesetzbuch StGB), especially these sections, which include provisions regarding the endangerment of children's welfare;

WUS Austria's Child Protection Policy is produced by the Child Protection Focal Point and approved by the Board of Directors. The document is evaluated against international and EU standards, practices and experiences and updated regularly.

In six sections, WUS Austria's Child Safeguarding Policy addresses

1. Principles and values to be respected and promoted by all staff members
2. Recruitment and selection procedures at WUS Austria
3. Principles of conduct & procedures for staff
4. Reporting procedures and designated focal point
5. Cooperation with external organisations, networks and agencies
6. Definitions

SCOPE OF THE CHILD SAFEGUARDING POLICY

The Child Safeguarding policy applies to:

- WUS Austria's **management team as well as all employees;**
- All people/organisations, which are not continuously part of WUS Austria's staff, such as **interns and external service providers;**
- All **project partners and partner organisations** WUS Austria is collaborating with.

1. PRINCIPLES AND VALUES

WUS Austria upholds the following **values and principles**, which must be upheld and championed by all its staff members:

- **Non-discrimination:** WUS Austria values and treats every individual without discrimination of any kind, regardless of age, color, gender, language, religion, political or other opinions, national, ethnic, or social origin, gender identity or sexual orientation, property, disability, birth, or any other status.
- **Zero-tolerance policy:** WUS Austria maintains a zero-tolerance policy towards any form of inappropriate behavior, violence, or abuse, including incidents involving children.
- **Child protection:** WUS Austria acknowledges and respects the right of every child to be safeguarded from harm and abuse resulting from inappropriate behaviors. The organization takes all necessary measures to prevent harm to children and promptly reports any incidents of abuse.
- **Best interests of the child:** The best interests of the child are always paramount in all activities undertaken by our organization.
- **Child participation:** WUS Austria promotes the right of children to be heard, participate, and express their views on matters affecting them, and actively supports their involvement in our activities.
- **Safeguarding in all activities:** WUS Austria integrates child safeguarding as a central consideration in all its activities, including project design, risk management, and implementation, following child-centered and trauma-informed approaches.
- **Guidance for staff:** WUS Austria is committed to providing comprehensive guidance and support to staff members who work closely with children, ensuring they are equipped with the necessary knowledge and skills to safeguard children effectively.

2. RECRUITMENT AND SELECTION PROCEDURES

Safe Selection and Recruitment of Staff, Board Members and Volunteers Safe recruitment is central to the safeguarding of children and young people. All WUS Austria staff, board members and volunteers, with or without direct contact with children, are subject to careful selection procedures. WUS Austria **establishes and sustains proper hiring and selection practices**, including completed applications, reference checks, criminal background checks, social security checks and documented personnel files.

- WUS Austria includes a **statement in any job advertisement** about its commitment to safeguarding and promoting the welfare of children and young people
- WUS Austria informs candidates about the **individual's responsibility for promoting the Child Protection Policy** of the organisation.
- WUS Austria requests **proof of identity** (e.g. birth certificate, driving licence or passport)
- WUS Austria reserves the right to apply **reference check procedures** to any candidate applying for a post.
- WUS Austria requests applicants and staff members who may be involved in working with children and young people, or who are deemed likely to come in contact with children in the fulfilment of their duties, to **provide a certificate of their national criminal record** (in

Austria *Strafregisterbescheinigung Kinder- und Jugendfürsorge*, or national equivalent in other countries)

- Prospective staff members are **interviewed by at least two staff members** who have the necessary authority to make decisions about the appointment.
- All interviews will be **documented on an association-approved interview form** that ensures the consistency of the questions asked. WUS Austria interview evaluation forms may be used during the interview process.

3. PRINCIPLES OF CONDUCT & PROCEDURES FOR STAFF

3.1. Compliance with WUS Austria's Child Protection Policy

- Before performing any work duties, staff members will **sign and date a copy of the Child Protection Policy** of the organisation.
- All external collaborators will be provided with the Child Protection Policy and will be requested to sign it if they work or may come in contact with children and young people of less than 18 years of age.

3.2. Communication and Data Protection

Regarding data privacy and protection, compliance with relevant EU regulations, particularly the **General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR)** (EU) 2016/679, is essential. For handling child-sensitive data appropriately, the following guidelines are established:

- **Written Informed Consent:** When collecting personal data concerning minors, explicit written consent will be obtained from their parents or legal guardians. This data will only be utilized for the specified purposes for which it was provided. Staff interacting with children and requiring personal data about them will adhere to the GDPR (EU) 2016/679. WUS Austria will not share the provided personal data with any other entity.
- **Declaration of Confidentiality:** Staff members who may access the personal data of research participants must sign a confidentiality declaration before engaging in research activities. This declaration is tailored to each individual case or project.
- **Disclosure of Information:** Any information identifying children who interact with our staff is subject to the terms outlined in international, European, and Austrian regulations and laws. Written informed consent from parents or legal guardians is specifically required. In line with Article 3 of the UNCRC, the best interests of the child will be the guiding principle in all circumstances, including the disclosure of any information (including images) about the children we encounter, across all media platforms including print, online, or other. Specifically, **data and images of children are only collected when strictly necessary** and as part of specific activities of the Organization or its projects. Their usage is limited to the duration of the project and the explicit purpose for which they were provided and collected. Compliance with legal requirements necessitates seeking **explicit permission from the child's parents or legal guardians as well as the child's own consent**. All acquired images and data are stored on a local server, protected by password and cybersecurity measures to prevent external access. **Images of children portray them in a dignified and respectful manner**, ensuring they are not shamed or embarrassed and are presented in appropriate contexts.
- **Publications:** All publications must adhere to the Child Protection Policy before dissemination or sharing.

3.3. Training on Child Protection

The rules and expectations will be shared with each new staff member and will be regularly reinforced with existing ones. This will be done in **new employee training**.

- **All paid staff, volunteers, and interns** (at minimum, those working directly with children) will participate in a **comprehensive child protection training** and in further training throughout their employment period, which includes information on the Rights of the Children (UNCRC, National regulations), Communicating with Children, Children participation and best interest of the child, Sexual abuse, Prevention, Early Identification, Responding, Documenting, and Reporting. The training programmes are inspired by existing resources and are developed by building on the programmes already developed through our relevant projects.
- **External collaborators** who may come in contact with children in the fulfilment of their tasks will participate in the same child protection training.

4. REPORTING PROCEDURES AND DESIGNATED CHILD SAFEGUARDING FOCAL POINT

- The **Child Protection Focal Point** is responsible for providing continuity in dealing with child protection issues and will take responsibility for dealing with allegations or suspicions of child abuse. Child Protection focal point at WUS Austria at present:

Bernadette HOLZER, bernadette.holzer@wus-austria.org

- All staff members and external collaborators have an **obligation to report any child abuse concerns they may have or suspect** both from internal staff or in an external context. Staff members are instructed to report anything they notice regarding a gap between policies and practices.
- Reporting of a suspected breach of the present Child Safeguarding Policy follows a standard procedure, which includes a **reporting form**.
- Reports in confidentiality will be treated by the Child Protection Focal Point at WUS Austria who will evaluate the case depending on the perpetrator and the context and either **redirect the case to local support services or report further to the Board of Directors** if deemed necessary.
- Any member of staff found in breach of the Child Protection Policy will be **evaluated**. Disciplinary action could be undertaken, including and up to termination of employment/cessation of the professional engagement with WUS Austria and referral to authorities (depending on the case).
- Should a severe breach be found, the responsible **Child Protection Centre (Kinderschutzzentren Österreich)** <https://www.oe-kinderschutzzentren.at/zentren/aufgaben/> or equivalent entity in other countries should be contacted for referral. Child protection centres are recognised providers of non-official child and youth welfare and are therefore networked with official child protection, i.e. child and youth welfare, as well as the executive and the judiciary.

5. COOPERATION WITH EXTERNAL ORGANISATIONS, NETWORKS AND AGENCIES

When engaging with external entities like organizations, networks, or agencies, WUS Austria will adhere to the following procedures:

- Prior to entering into any new collaborations, WUS Austria will **consider the child protection record of the entity** in question.
- WUS Austria retains the right to conduct a **reference check** regarding the partner's past involvement in child protection and its policies regarding children.
- WUS Austria **will not condone any inappropriate communication with children**.
- WUS Austria is obligated to **take decisive measures in response to any partner found in breach of present Child Protection Policy** during the execution of its projects/programs.

6. DEFINITIONS

For the purposes of the present policy, the following definitions apply:

Best Interest of the Child (BIC): The concept of the child's best interests is aimed at ensuring both the full and effective enjoyment of all the rights recognized in the 1989 UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) and the holistic development of the child. It is a threefold concept: a right, a principle and a rule of procedure based on an assessment of all elements of a child's or children's interests in a specific situation both in the public and private sphere which must be determined on a case-by-case basis taking into consideration their personal context, situation and need.¹

Child: Every human being below the age of eighteen years.²

Child protection: The prevention and response to violence, exploitation and abuse of children in all contexts.³

Child participation: Child participation means that children, individually or in groups, have the right, the means, the space, the opportunity and, where necessary, the support to freely express their views, to be heard and to contribute to decision making on matters affecting them, their views being given due weight in accordance with their age and maturity. In order to be able to participate meaningfully and genuinely, children and young people should be provided with all relevant information and offered adequate support for self-advocacy appropriate to their age and circumstances.⁴

¹ As defined by the Committee on the Rights of the Children, General comment No. 14 (2013) on the right of the child to have his or her best interests taken as a primary consideration (art. 3, para. 1) - Available at: https://www2.ohchr.org/English/bodies/crc/docs/GC/CRC_C_GC_14_ENG.pdf

² As defined by Article 1 of the UN - Convention of the Rights of the Child. Available at: <https://www.ohchr.org/en/professionalinterest/pages/crc.aspx> and §21 Abs. 2 Austria General Civil Code (Allgemeines Bürgerliches Gesetzbuch).

³ As defined by UNICEF. Available at: <https://data.unicef.org/topic/child-protection/overview/>

⁴ As defined by the Council of Europe - Recommendation CM/Rec(2012)2 of the Committee of Ministers to member States on the participation of children and young people under the age of 18. Available at: https://search.coe.int/cm/Pages/result_details.aspx?ObjectID=09000016805cb0ca

Child safeguarding: Child safeguarding is specifically focused on preventative actions to ensure that all children are protected from deliberate or unintentional acts that lead to the risk of or actual harm.⁵

Staff members: Refers to paid staff, volunteers, interns and external collaborators.

Child maltreatment is the abuse and neglect that occurs to children. It includes all types of physical and/or emotional ill-treatment, sexual abuse, neglect, negligence and commercial or other exploitation, which results in actual or potential harm to the child's health, survival, development or dignity in the context of a relationship of responsibility, trust or power⁶ both in the presence or through information technology.

Child maltreatment includes, but is not limited to:

- **Physical child abuse:** Physical abuse is an injury deliberately inflicted upon a child by any person, including adults. Physical abuse includes fractured or broken bones, burns, severe and/or frequent bruises, and any other intentionally inflicted physical harm.⁷
- **Emotional child abuse** Emotional abuse happens when a child is repeatedly made to feel worthless, unloved, alone or scared. For instance: continually ignoring or rejecting a child, physically or socially isolating a child, forcing a child to do things by scaring them, constantly criticizing, humiliating or blaming a child, constantly swearing, yelling or screaming at a child, bullying, teasing, insulting or belittling a child, having unrealistic expectations or unreasonable demands of a child, not allowing a child to explore, express themselves, learn or make friends, treating a child badly because of things they can't change.⁸
- **Child Sexual Abuse** is the involvement of a child in sexual activity that he or she does not fully comprehend, is unable to give informed consent to, or for which the child is not developmentally prepared and cannot give consent, or that violates the laws or social taboos of society. Child sexual abuse is evidenced by this activity between a child and an adult or another child who by age or development is in a relationship of responsibility, trust or power, the activity being intended to gratify or satisfy the needs of the other person.⁹
- **Child pornography** means material that visually depicts a child engaged in real or simulated sexually explicit conduct or any depiction of a child's sexual organs for primarily sexual purposes.¹⁰
- **Grooming** is when someone builds an emotional connection with a child to gain their trust for the purposes of sexual abuse, sexual exploitation or trafficking. Children and young

⁵ As defined by SaveTheChild. Available at: <https://www.savethechildren.org/us/what-we-do/safeguarding-children>

⁶ As defined by WHO - Violence Against Children, Child Maltreatment. Available at: https://www.who.int/health-topics/violence-against-children#tab=tab_2

⁷ As defined by Kids Matters - Physical Abuse. Available at: <https://kidsmatterinc.org/child-safety/types-of-child-abuse/physical-abuse/>

⁸ As defined by Kids HelpLine - Understanding Child Emotional Abuse. Available at: <https://kidshelpline.com.au/parents/issues/understanding-child-emotional-abuse>

⁹ As defined by WHO - Child Sexual Abuse. Available at: https://www.who.int/violence_injury_prevention/resources/publications/en/guidelines_chap7.pdf

¹⁰ As defined by Council of Europe Convention on the Protection of Children against Sexual Exploitation and Sexual Abuse. Available at: <https://rm.coe.int/1680084822>

people can be groomed online or face-to-face, by a stranger or by someone they know - for example a family member, friend or professional, family member, friend or professional.¹¹

- **Bullying** is unwanted, aggressive behaviour among school-aged children that involves a real or perceived power imbalance. The behaviour is repeated, or has the potential to be repeated, over time.¹²
- **Neglect or negligent treatment** is the failure to meet children's physical and psychological needs, protect them from danger or obtain medical, birth registration or other services when those responsible for children's care have the means, knowledge and access to services to do so.¹³
- **Child Exploitation** includes child domestic work, child soldiers, the recruitment and involvement of children in armed conflict, sexual exploitation and pornography, the use of children for criminal activities including the sale and distribution of narcotics and the involvement of children in harmful or hazardous work.¹⁴
- **Online Sexual Violence** is the use of computer systems to cause, facilitate, or threaten violence against individuals (including children), that results in (or is likely to result in) physical, sexual, psychological, or economic harm or suffering and may include the exploitation of the individual's circumstance, characteristics, or vulnerabilities.¹⁵

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Managing Director

¹¹ As defined by the National Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children. Available at:

<https://www.nspcc.org.uk/what-is-child-abuse/types-of-abuse/online-abuse/>

¹² As defined by the European Council. Available at: <https://www.coe.int/en/web/children/bullying>

¹³ As defined by UNICEF. Available at:

https://www.unicef-irc.org/portfolios/general_comments/CRC.C.GC.13_en.doc.html

¹⁴ As defined by Terres des Hommes. Available at: <https://www.terredeshommes.org/causes/child-exploitation/>

¹⁵ As defined in Mapping study on cyberviolence by the Council of Europe, 2018. Available at:

<https://rm.coe.int/t-cy-2017-10-cbg-study-provisional/16808c4914>

