



Safeguarding Children and Vulnerable Adults Policy

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Organizational Profile

Bargad is a youth development organization actively working to promote peace, justice and cooperation amongst the youth¹ in Pakistan. The organization has focused on creating opportunities and amplifying the voices of the youth ever since its inception in 1997, leading to a vast network of around 3000 youth volunteers, known as the Bargad Volunteer Network (BVN) throughout the country.

Bargad's Vision:

Politically, socially and economically empowered youth and women, respect, protect and promote peace and harmony

Bargad's Mission:

1. Engage vulnerable youth and women in all diversity to their full potential through education, mentorship and innovative interventions designed to enhance their overall well-being.
2. To invest in youth-led and youth-centred ideas, to convene key stakeholders in the sector and advocate for systems and policy changes that meet youths' needs.
3. Engage youth to end violence against women.

Bargad has implemented more than 100 projects on youth training², youth mobilization and policy advocacy, including the provision of technical assistance to all the provincial governments of Pakistan, regions of Gilgit-Baltistan and the State of Azad Jammu Kashmir (AJK) for the formulation of their respective youth policies. These policies have been approved by the provincial governments of Punjab (2012), Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (2016) and Sindh (2018), resulting in governments' pledges to allocate 4% budget to sports and youth affairs, 15% on the women employment quota, implementation of the E-Rozgar programs, and on youth participation in the local governments, respectively. Bargad has also conducted Capacity Enhancement workshops on youth development with officials of the youth affairs departments of Punjab, Balochistan and Sindh.

Bargad has a youth network of 782 individuals, civil society organizations and government institutions, with Youth engagements with 64 Universities, 40 Colleges and 35 Higher Secondary Schools.

The organization has previously partnered with 26 membership-based student organizations and 15 Youth Groups over Pakistan; producing the largest pool of researches and publications on various aspects of youth than any other civil society organization in Pakistan, while also pioneering a youth track of peace and diplomacy in the South Asian region.

The hallmark of the organization is that its core youth volunteers participate in all aspects of the projects - from action-planning to project execution, while also mapping in the course of its work; issues as well as challenges identified by the youth across the country³.

¹ Adolescents: 12-19; Youth age bracket in Pakistan: 15-29

² Since 2003, the organization has trained 7880 youth activists and young faculty only through training workshops and peer sessions in issues of social development.

³ The Youth in the mapping is part of the Youth Cohorts in the districts where Bargad has actively worked or is presently working.

Policy Statement

At Bargad, we believe all children and vulnerable adults regardless of age, gender, disability or ethnic origin have a right to be protected from all forms of harm, abuse, neglect and exploitation. Bargad **will not** tolerate the abuse of *children* (defined as under the age of 18) and vulnerable adults in any form⁴.

It is the responsibility of all representatives of Bargad to raise any concerns you have or any concerns which are reported to you according to this policy. It is not your responsibility to decide whether or not child or vulnerable adult abuse has occurred.

This should also be noted that term “child”, for the purpose of the policy, also includes “vulnerable adults”, as and when used in the policy unless the context suggests otherwise.

It is the responsibility of Bargad management to ensure the delivery of this policy and to promote it as relevant in all aspects of their work, to hold themselves and others to account and to help create a safe environment for all.

This policy does not form part of an employees' terms and conditions of employment and may be subject to change at the discretion of management.

Bargad Safeguarding Principles

Bargad will ensure that:

- a) The welfare of the child and vulnerable adult is paramount;
- b) Concerns or allegations of child/ vulnerable adult abuse are always taken seriously, investigated and acted on if appropriate;
- c) Bargad will seek to safeguard children/ vulnerable adults by valuing, listening to and respecting them;
- d) All managers, employees, volunteers and other representatives have access to, and are familiar with this policy, and know their responsibilities within it;
- e) All staff receive training on Safeguarding Children/ vulnerable adults at a level commensurate with their role;
- f) All staff, volunteers and carers have access to information about how to report concerns or allegations of abuse, including children and vulnerable adults themselves;
- g) Our recruitment practices are robust enough to ensure that we will not recruit staff, volunteers or other representatives if they pose a known risk to children's/ vulnerable adult's safety or wellbeing;
- h) All managers are responsible for promoting awareness of this policy within their divisions, individual departments or teams.
- i) All staff, volunteers and carers will take permission from guardians before posting, clicking and disseminating any photo/video of a child

⁴ United Nations Human rights office of the High Commissioner-Convention on the Rights of the Child
<https://www.ohchr.org/en/professionalinterest/pages/crc.aspx>

2. Definitions

2.1. Safeguarding Children and Child Protection

Safeguarding is the process of protecting children from abuse or neglect, preventing impairment of their health and development, ensuring they are living in circumstances consistent with the provision of safe and effective care and taking action to enable all children to have the best outcomes. '*Child protection*' is an element of Safeguarding and promoting welfare. It refers to the activity that is undertaken to protect specific children who are suffering or likely to suffer, significant harm.

2.2. Child

A child is defined as ***anyone under 18 years old***.

This definition is recognized internationally as identifying a population who are particularly vulnerable and require additional safeguards to protect their rights.

The definition of a child for the purposes of Safeguarding and child protection should not be confused with the legal definition of a child or age limits set out in other relevant laws. The fact that a person under the age of 18 may have reached the age of majority "*MAJORITY ACT OF 1875*", age of sexual consent, voting age or such like does not alter their inherent vulnerability as a child.

2.3. Young Volunteer

Anyone who is under the age of 18 years old is classed as a 'Young Volunteer' when they are volunteering for Bargad. Volunteers who are aged 14 years and above can volunteer in Bargad's ACTIVITES.

2.4 Vulnerable Adult

A vulnerable adult is a person aged 18 years or over who may be in need of Community Care services and/or may be unable to take care of themselves or protect themselves from harm or from being exploited. This may include the persons who is elderly and frail, has a mental illness, has a physical or sensory disability, has a learning disability, has a severe physical illness or is homeless.

2.5. Child Abuse

Different forms of harm or mistreatment of children are categorized under the broader term "child abuse". Abuse can happen anywhere and at any time, but research shows that the perpetrators of abuse are likely to be known and trusted by the child. The most commonly defined types are:

- **Physical:** violence towards or deliberate injury of a child.
- **Neglect:** persistent failure to meet a child's basic physical and psychological needs.
- **Sexual:** using a child for sexual stimulation or gratification.
- **Emotional:** behavior which attacks a child's self-esteem.
- **Child Sexual Exploitation:** Children in exploitative situations and relationships receive something such as gifts, money or affection as a result of performing sexual activities or others performing sexual activities on them.

The UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (1989) requires states to protect children from abuse.

3. Roles and Responsibilities

Safeguarding children and vulnerable adults is everyone's responsibility and failure to act on concerns relating to children is not an option.

Bargad Management holds overall accountability for this Policy and its implementation.

Bargad's Board of Directors (BOD) are responsible for reviewing and updating this Policy annually and in line with legislative and organizational developments and hold overall accountability for Bargad's safeguarding of Children and vulnerable adults.

All staff, volunteers and other representatives of Bargad are required to adhere to this Policy and Bargad's Code of Conduct at all times.

All Bargad employees are obliged to report any suspicions of child or vulnerable adult abuse. Failure to report to a relevant person suspicion of abuse relating to someone else is a breach of Bargad policy, and could lead to disciplinary action being taken. For the avoidance of doubt, there is no obligation placed on any individual to report any incident that has happened to them.

Bargad's management can offer further support to staff, volunteers and other representatives on implementing this Policy.

4. Support for Survivors and Victims

Support will be offered to survivors and victims, regardless of whether a formal internal response is carried out (such as an internal investigation). Support can include specialist psycho-social counselling or access to Bargad's higher management for appropriate support as needed.

5. Policy Guidance

5.1. Contact with Children and or Vulnerable Adults

Bargad Management Must Never:

- Fail to disclose any convictions or child/ vulnerable adults related investigations that they are subject to;
- Seek to make contact or spend time with any child with whom they come into contact as part of their work with Bargad except as part of the designated activities set out in their role;
- Abuse their position to withhold professional assistance or give preferential treatment, gifts or payment of any kind to a child/vulnerable adult, or another person in relation to a child/vulnerable adult, in order to solicit any form of advantage or sexual favor from a child or vulnerable adult;
- Have sexual intercourse or participate in any form of sexual activity, including paying for sex, with any person under 18 years old or under the local age of sexual consent (where higher). This applies to all Bargad staff regardless of the age of consent locally and mistaken belief in the age of the child is not a defense;
- Hit or otherwise physically assault a child/ vulnerable adult irrespective of cultural norms, including as punishment;
- Behave physically in a manner with a child/ vulnerable adult which is inappropriate or sexually provocative;

- Use language or behavior towards children/ vulnerable adults that is inappropriate, harassing, abusive, and sexually provocative or that is intended to shame, humiliate or emotionally abuse;
- Use computers, mobile phones, video and digital cameras to exploit or harass children/ vulnerable adults or to access child pornography through any medium;
- Recruit children/ vulnerable adults for any labor which is inappropriate to their age or developmental stage, which interferes with their time available for education and recreational activities, or which places them at risk of injury;
- Do things of a personal nature for a child/vulnerable adult with whom they come into contact as part of their work for Bargad that the child/ vulnerable adult can do for themselves (e.g. toileting, bathing, dressing);
- Share a bedroom with or sleep close to an unsupervised child or children where that child/children are ones with whom they come into contact as part of their work for Bargad;
- Visit a child's home alone or invite unaccompanied children into their own accommodation, where that child/children are ones with whom they come into contact as part of their work for Bargad;
- Put a child/ vulnerable adult at risk of harm through inaction (including failure to report concern);
- Condone or participate in any child related activity which is illegal, exploitative, unsafe or abusive; this includes behavior by other children
- Act in any way that may be abusive or put a child/ vulnerable adult at risk of abuse or exploitation
- Click/disclose/publish photo/video of a child without the permission of the guardian

Bargad Management Must Always:

- Treat all children/ vulnerable adults with respect regardless of their race, color, gender, language, religion, opinions, nationality, ethnicity, social origin, property, disability or other status;
- Avoid being placed in a position where they are alone with a child or children/ vulnerable adults with whom they come into contact as part of their work with Bargad;
- Act professionally towards children/ vulnerable adults they interact with in their role, following relevant laws pertaining to working with children, including those in relation to child labor;
- Consider the risk of harm and whether there is any possibility a child/vulnerable adult may be abused or exploited when assessing the appropriateness of any physical or verbal contact, **including in the design of Bargad programs;**
- Report any suspicion, allegation or witness of child or vulnerable adult abuse or other breaches of the Safeguarding Children Policy as per the reporting procedures outlined in this document.

5.2. Virtual Contact with Children

Anyone working with or on behalf of Bargad must adhere to Bargad's guidelines to protect children and vulnerable adults engaging with Bargad through social media. Social media and technology is evolving rapidly and it is the responsibility of managers to consider the full range of risks and safeguards required to protect children in the activities that they oversee.

6. Safe Programming

Bargad has **minimum standards in place intended to minimize risk when working with direct or indirect child and vulnerable adult beneficiaries.**

Responsibility for ensuring these program standards are applied lies with Bargad's Management. However, all Bargad staff and partners working with children and vulnerable adults must take personal responsibility for upholding these minimum standards.

7. How to raise a Complaint or Concern

Anyone can raise a concern or make a complaint to Bargad about something they have experienced or witnessed. You can do this verbally or in writing to secretary of safeguarding committee, your supervisor, DO or via Bargad's Whistleblowing Service.

You can contact the Safeguarding Team confidentially on safeguarding.bargad@gmail.com or telephone +92 042-35779030-1.

Those who work with or for Bargad (including Bargad's beneficiaries) can also raise a concern without fear of retribution to Bargad's Whistleblowing Service by emailing whistleblowing.bargad@gmail.com.

If an allegation is made against you, then you must inform management immediately. You should create a signed and dated record of the details as you know them and send a copy of this to Operations/HR department. All those accused will be treated with respect and all allegations will be treated confidentially. You may wish to seek support from your colleagues.

8. How to Respond to a Complaint or Concern

Bargad is committed to responding to all complaints and concerns of abuse. Bargad's Management are responsible for this work, and have specialist expertise in prevention, carrying out investigations, and delivering support to survivors of and victims of child or adult abuse.

Bargad recognizes that disclosures and suspicion should *always be acted upon swiftly*, and if there is an urgent child protection situation, for example if a child is in imminent danger of abuse, then *immediate protective action must be taken*.

Formal Complaint Mechanism Approach:

When a complaint is received, the complainant should be given a clear choice on whether they want to proceed formally and/or submit the complaint in writing. It is important to allow the complainant time to feel calm and safe before making this decision.

- The committee emphasized that individuals should not feel pressured, and options should be clearly communicated — whether they wish to take immediate action, delay, or proceed formally at a later stage.
- Written complaints are essential as they help ensure neutrality and reduce the risk of manipulation or misinterpretation of facts.
- Complainants will have the option to remain anonymous or restrict their identity to the safeguarding committee only. HR will be responsible for secure documentation and privacy.
- Any safeguarding concern must be immediately reported to a member of the harassment/safeguarding committee via call or message for timely action.

Preventive Measures:

- Introduce short, targeted safeguarding briefings (10–15 minutes) at the start of events. Ensure the session is participatory and focused on creating a safe learning environment where participants themselves identify protocols of conducive environment.
 - Conduct internal mock sessions to train staff on delivering safeguarding orientations
 - Consider having female supervisors or focal persons present where possible
- When selecting networks/CSOs/CSGs for any activity or project, the following

documents will be mandatory: Management CV(s), Reference Letter, Police Certificate of CEO/Executive Director.

- Where possible references will be collected from participants, trainers etc. and their references will be checked and/or their data will be cross-checked from NACTA

What To Do if You Have Concerns About a Child's Wellbeing

- The first priority is the immediate safety and welfare of the individual.
- Keep calm and act normally; do not say or show that you are shocked.
- Do not investigate or question the victim. If an individual reports abuse directly to you, only ask questions to get enough information to understand the complaint (e.g. 'who, what, where, when' questions, but not 'why' questions).
- Never agree to keep a secret. If a child or adult is in danger, you will have to inform others.
- Do not directly challenge parents, carers or teachers about your concerns.

Record all the details that support your suspicion and report this in line with internal reporting procedures.

Confidentiality and Children

Bargad staff cannot keep confidences when they involve concerns about a child. Any information offered in confidence to Bargad staff or volunteers relating to risks or concerns about a child should be received on the basis that it will have to be shared with the relevant person or people in authority.

It is the responsibility of all who represent Bargad, in whatever capacity, to raise concerns regarding possible or known issues of child abuse or exploitation in projects managed or supported by Bargad immediately in line with the procedures outlined below.

9. Procedure for Handling Complaints

When a complaint or concern has been raised, it must be referred within 24 hours to Bargad's Safeguarding Team.

Internal Response

Within 72 hours of receiving a complaint or concern, Bargad's management and also must convene a case conference. An email should be sent to the complainant acknowledging the complaint as soon as possible. Bargad must refer suspected cases of child abuse to local statutory authorities where possible.

The process for addressing complaints is outlined in Bargad's *Procedures for Safeguarding Children*.

Confidentiality must be maintained throughout the complaints process by all staff and witnesses. Staff members who breach confidentiality will be subject to disciplinary action up to and including termination of employment. In some cases, such breaches constitute breaking the law.

Retaliation against Complainants, Victims and Witnesses

Bargad will take action against any staff, volunteers or other representatives, whether they are the subject of a complaint or not, who seek or carry out retaliatory action against complainants, victims or other witnesses. Staff who are found to do this will be subject to disciplinary action, up to and including termination of employment.

Outcomes of Misconduct

Employees who are found to contravene this policy will be subject to disciplinary action that may result in dismissal. Where possible, Bargad will refer suspected cases of child abuse to local statutory authorities and the process and outcome will be handled by said authority. Volunteers, contractors and other representatives will have their relationship with Bargad terminated.

False Allegations

It is extremely rare that staff or other stakeholders are found to have raised allegations which they knew to be false. If a member of staff from Bargad is found to have made an allegation that they knew to be false they will be subject to disciplinary action, up to and including termination of employment.

Complaints about Bargad's Partners

If Bargad receives a complaint about a partner organisation, Bargad will expect the partner to respond quickly and appropriately. Bargad should assist the partner to ascertain its obligations under local law to refer the matter to the police or other statutory authorities for criminal investigation.

Where appropriate, Bargad should work with the partner to address the issue through an appropriate independent investigation. If the outcome is that child/vulnerable adults has occurred, ongoing work with the partner cannot involve the individual(s) concerned.

If there is reason to believe that an allegation of child abuse has been dealt with inappropriately by a partner then they risk withdrawal of funding or ending the relationship (including networks and consortia).

Receiving External Complaints and Concerns

Complaints raised from outside the organisation should be referred to Bargad's Safeguarding Team and must adhere to Bargad's policy and procedures as outlined in this document.

10. Safe Recruitment

Bargad is committed to recruiting staff, volunteers and other representatives safely. All application forms, interviews and references must address Safeguarding and equality requirements and attitudes in line with the *Recruitment Policy*.

Recruitment for all applicants to roles supervising young volunteers or working directly with child beneficiaries must follow Bargad's *Safeguarding Children Guidelines*, particularly that:

- All applicants must be asked **to disclose all criminal convictions** in keeping with the parameters of local employment law;
- We are not able to offer volunteering opportunities to anyone with spent or unspent convictions for sexual offences or any form of child abuse;
- Applicants should not start work until **reference checking** has taken place

11. Young Volunteers

Engaging Young Volunteers

When a young person expresses an interest in volunteering for Bargad, an 'initial chat' must take place with at least two Bargad representatives present. During this meeting, the young person should be made aware of Bargad's *Safeguarding Children Policy and Procedures*.

For one-off campaigning or fundraising events, an initial chat should take place but if it is not possible the young person must still receive a copy of Bargad's Policy and Procedures prior to volunteering.

Consent must always be sought before any young volunteer begins volunteering. It is important to **check what type of consent is needed** as this will vary depending on the local context.

Health and Safety for Young Volunteers

All relevant **health and safety checks must be completed before taking on** a Young Volunteer. During their inductions, young volunteers must also be told who is responsible for their safety and how to raise concerns.

Supervision of Young Volunteers

Effective supervision must be in place to safeguard young volunteers in Bargad's care.

- Young volunteers must **not be left alone in a property at any time**.
- At least **two adults should be present** when a young volunteer is volunteering, one of whom must be designated as the young volunteer's supervisor for the duration of their shift.
- **If an activity is identified as higher risk** in the Health and Safety assessment, this **must have constant supervision** from the nominated supervisor.
- Young volunteers should work alone with an adult only in exceptional circumstances, and managers are responsible for monitoring this.
- Managers must ensure appropriate supervision arrangements are clear and agreed in advance with anyone who will supervise young volunteers.
- Bargad will follow all local laws relating to the supervision of young people.

12. Use of Personal Data about Children

Bargad staff must adhere to Bargad's Data Protection Policy which is guided by the *General Data Protection Regulation in the European Union (2018)*. All information stored by Bargad about children and young people must be processed in accordance with this Act and Bargad's policy.

Research with children must be in line with Bargad's *Procedures for Safeguarding Children*. Bargad representatives must consider how to protect a child's identity, how to share and store such content and how to achieve "informed consent". Before using/clicking any photo/video of a child there should be a consent form signed by the guardian.

Disputes about the use of child images must be raised to the Safeguarding compliance committee mentioned below.

13. Training

All Bargad staff and representatives must receive training on Child and vulnerable adult safeguarding commensurate with their role. This training will be carried out by specialists on a yearly basis and will include information about Bargad's policy positions, reporting and investigation procedures and how to embed Child and vulnerable adult Safeguarding in Bargad's work.

Overall responsibility for ensuring that staff receive regular training and messages about Safeguarding lies with all Bargad Managers.

Children require training to ensure that their capabilities and competencies are at a level where they can operate without putting themselves and others at risk.

14. Complaint Resolution Committee

The Complaint Resolution Committee conduct itself according to the procedure and rules outlined in the Complaint Mechanism Policy.