

Child Protection Policy

Miracle's Hilfsprojekt e.V.

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Translated from German. In case of doubt, the German version applies.

It is particularly important to us as an association, that our moral standards in connection with our work in Nigeria are clearly formulated. Especially due to our sensitive cooperation with children, it is important that we can show a clear concept for the protection of the physical and psychological condition of every student at our school! Therefore, the following policy is intended to provide a clear overview of the potential risks and our corresponding protective measures. The physical and mental health of our children is the top priority for "Miracle's Hilfsprojekt"!

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1. Introduction

1.1. Current situation & context

Over 50% of Nigeria's population is under the age of 18 and is therefore considered a child by the UN definition. Particular attention should therefore be paid to the protection of children. Since 2003, Nigeria has the CRA (Child's Right Act), which combines the CRC (UN Convention on the Rights of the Child) and the ACRWC (African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child), which Nigeria also ratified in the early 2000s, in a national summarizes law. Unfortunately, little has been done to implement the contents of these treaties since then. Physical violence, as well as psychological and sexual abuse are still major problems and are part of the everyday life for many young people in Nigeria. Young girls are particularly affected. More than 30% of all women in Nigeria experience sexual violence before the age of 25 and even more than 70% of them before they reach the majority age. For boys it is about every tenth. Child trafficking is also a major threat to youth. In 2018, Nigeria ranked 32nd out of 167 countries with the highest proportion of slaves, or enslavement rates. *(All of the numbers above are from 2022)*

These examples and many other problems endanger the development of children in Nigeria enormously and, in addition to the known numbers, the number of unreported cases is estimated to be much higher. It is therefore important that we create a safe place for our students at our school, where they can enjoy a good childhood and a good education protected from danger!

1.2. Scope and Objectives of the Child Protection Policy

The primary goal of the child protection policy of Miracle's Hilfsprojekt e.V. (MHP for short) is to protect children from mistreatment, abuse and neglect.

In accordance with the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, MHP sees everyone under the age of 18 as a child.

In order to reduce the risk of such incidents, MHP raises the awareness of all its supporters.

The policy applies to all full-time or volunteer employees of the association and is also intended to serve as an awareness-raising measure for partner organizations and cooperation partnerships, such as schools and associations.

1.3. Declaration of Commitment

Miracles Hilfsprojekt e.V. establishes the protection of children and the following standards as a quality feature of its work. The association and its employees are working towards the following:

- To strengthen the rights of children with and without disabilities and to protect them from sexual, emotional or physical abuse, exploitation and neglect.
- To create an environment that is safe for children and where respect for children's and human rights is guaranteed.
- To take children's interests and needs into account when planning and implementing projects.
- To create appropriate awareness within MHP and its partner organizations and to raise awareness of the subject.
- To develop and implement suitable instruments, including clearly defined responsibilities and procedures in the areas of prevention, crisis management and monitoring, and to supervise their implementation.
- To ensure that the child's dignity is always protected in the context of press, education and public relations work.

1.4. Legal Framework

The overarching guiding framework is the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child and its Optional Protocols, which together form the most comprehensive system of proclaimed children's rights that enjoys international validity and acceptance. The Convention defines "a child as any human being who has not yet reached the age of eighteen, unless applicable national law provides for an earlier age of majority".

With the additional protocols, the Convention on the Rights of the Child provides a legal framework that enables states to draft their own national implementing laws for the protection of children. By ratifying the Convention on the Rights of the Child, states

undertake to recognize and implement the rights set out in the Convention. The Convention on the Rights of the Child contains several fundamental principles that are of particular importance in the area of child protection. These include the principle of the best interest for the child, the principle of non-discrimination, the right to life and development, and respect for the child's opinion. In particular, Article 19 requires “legislative, administrative, social and educational measures to protect children from violence, abuse and neglect”.

Children have the right to be protected from mistreatment and abuse. In Germany, criminal prosecution is also possible under national law if the crime was committed abroad. For MHP, the Convention on the Rights of the Child is the moral and legal basis for its commitment to the protection and well-being of children in its work and projects. The Convention on the Rights of the Child and its additional protocols therefore serve as a legally binding frame of reference for this Child Protection Policy.

2. Risk Potential

The World Health Organization defines violence against children as “any form of physical and/or emotional abuse, sexual violence, squalidness, neglect or exploitation, whether commercial or otherwise, that results in an actual or potential threat to the health, survival, development or the dignity of the child, [particularly] within a relationship of responsibility, trust or power.”

In connection with the projects of the association, a distinction is therefore made between the following categories and potential dangers for the students, which must be avoided through prevention and transparent education. MHP is based on the five categories of violence against children of Kindernothilfe e.V.

2.1. Definition and Types of Abuse

1. **Physical violence** is actual or potential physical harm to a child, or failure to keep the child from physical harm.
2. **Sexual violence** is the actual or threatened sexually motivated touching of a child, i.e. all forms of sexual activity such as indecent touching, sexual intercourse, etc. as well as activities without physical contact such as showing pornographic material.
3. **Psychological violence** includes, but is not limited to, persistent or serious verbal abuse, humiliation, discrimination, stigmatization, devaluation, or rejection that causes negative effects on a child's psychological and behavioral development.
4. **Exploitation** means exploitation in sexual or other contexts of a child through activities that the child engages in for the benefit of a third party. These activities include, but are not limited to, exploitative child labor, child trafficking, pornographic exploitation of children, and child prostitution.
5. **Neglect** begins as soon as a child is deprived of the basic services for its psychosocial development - for example in the areas of health, nutrition, clothing, housing, education.

2.2. Potential Risks in the Context of the Project

In the following, a few risks and hazard scenarios are to be listed that are conceivable within the framework of the project and that need to be avoided through preventive work and sensitization of all those involved. All points listed here are purely potential and have no relation to real scenarios at the school. Furthermore, no claim is made to the completeness of the list; it is only intended to provide an overview and serve as a guide.

1. Dangers from the own families:

- sexual abuse in the form of rape or coercion
- neglect in the form of lack of food, sleep, or affection
- violent abuse by family members
- emotional abuse in the form of humiliation, devaluation or rejection
- forced marriages of minors

2. Dangers posed by teachers:

- sexual abuse, coercion or rape
- violent abuse
- emotional abuse in the form of exposure, bullying or humiliation

3. Dangers from classmates:

- emotional abuse in the form of bullying or exclusion
- violent abuse
- sexual abuse or coercion

4. Dangers from outsiders:

- sexual abuse, coercion or rape
- abduction or kidnapping by radical groups
- psychological abuse through stalking
- violent abuse

3. Preventive Measures

Miracle's Hilfsprojekt e.V. tries to minimize the risks of misuse and abuse in advance. Strict standards apply, both for the behavior and communication of existing supporters and employees as well as for future new hires and company partnerships.

According to a decision by the MHP board, signing the “Code of Conduct for Business Trips” has been mandatory since October 1st, 2021 when traveling to project areas. Each participant will receive a copy from the association.

3.1. Selection of Employees

When selecting new employees, MHP pays particular attention to the press and behavior of the people concerned with personal discussions and thorough background checks using the most common search engines and social networks. Every time a new employee is hired, he/she will be made aware of and informed about child protection.

The association is aware that such preventive measures cannot guarantee 100% protection against potential perpetrators but serve as a deterrent against harming the well-being of the children with bad intentions.

3.2 Code of Conduct Communication and Digital

Especially nowadays, when communication with and among each other is increasingly taking place digitally, Miracle's Hilfsprojekt e.V. project sensitizes its employees to open and respectful interaction. Digital communication also includes all forms of media (e.g. photos, videos, messenger service messages, etc.) that are sent or created. Everyone is required to protect the respective personal and property rights to words and pictures. Abuse will be penalized according to case management.

Pictures of the children may only be published by the association or school and with the consent of the children and legal guardians. Just like adults, children have the right to their own image. With this measure, MHP reduces the risk of images and/or videos of children in sensitive or embarrassing situations being created and disseminated.

4. Case Management

4.1. Child Protection Actors

Actors in child protection are all persons, positions and institutions that ensure or concern the protection of children.

- As already mentioned, the CRA (Child's Right Act) has existed since 2003, which includes the CRC (UN Convention on the Rights of the Child) and the ACRWC (African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child), which Nigeria also ratified in the early 2000s, summarized in a national law. This law provides the legal framework upon which this Child Safeguarding Policy is built.
- In the event of an acute suspicion of abuse for which the safety measures in this child protection policy are not sufficient, the **Nigerian law enforcement authorities** will be involved.
- The school continues to employ two **security guards** to ensure that outsiders cannot enter the premises and harass or kidnap the children.
- The **child protection officers** hold the key position among the actors. Their task is to be there for the children and to support them as independent persons of trust and contact persons. They are also trained to recognize signs and symptoms of abuse of any kind in young people and to take appropriate action. Ideally, there is a male and a female child protection officer to allay the children's fear of having to go to a person of the opposite sex with their intimate problems.
- Finally, it is the responsibility of **every teacher**, especially the school leadership, to care for the well-being of all children and to keep a close eye on them.

4.2. Reporting and Investigating Suspected Cases

Uncovering suspected cases of abuse or other forms of problems is essential for the protection of the students. For this it is necessary that the contact persons, i.e. the child protection officers, have a close relationship of trust with the children, so that ideally they can draw attention to their problems themselves. However, the relationship of trust is also important so that the child protection officers know the young people well and can quickly notice any behavioral problems, since victims of abuse often do

not dare to address their problems themselves since they are afraid of the consequences. For this it is important that the relevant contact persons are familiar with the basic behavioral patterns of victims of abuse or are sufficiently educated about it. In this process of uncovering and investigating suspected cases, a distinction is made between four different scenarios:

1. A student approaches the child protection officer to talk about a problem. In this case, it is very important that the victim feels that their concern is being taken seriously and does not have to fear that this topic will become public. The further procedure must be treated as discreetly as possible so that no more people than necessary are involved in the process.
2. The child protection officers suspect a case of abuse in a student. In this case, a particularly careful approach is required. On the one hand, it is necessary for the confidants to seek talks with the affected person, but under no circumstances should the children be put under pressure, as this can lead to them closing themselves off even more. Patience and caution are essential in such situations.
3. A third person (e.g. a teacher or a classmate) becomes aware of a suspected case. In this case, the duty lies with the third party to immediately report the suspicion to the child protection officer and leave the further procedure to them.
4. The child protection officer or a third party witnesses a case of abuse. Here, too, it is important that such an incident is reported immediately to those responsible. Since there is concrete evidence here, direct action and appropriate protective measures can be taken.

4.3. Procedure

If one of these four cases occurs, the following procedure is used. First of all, all steps, from the emergence of suspicion to the corresponding consequences, are documented in detail and stored in order to be able to understand the case afterwards or in the event of legal action.

The exact procedure is divided into the following steps, which are intended as a guide but can be deviated from if the situation requires it.

1. If there is a suspicion of abuse or other forms of endangerment of a child, a child protection team consisting of at least one of the child protection officers, a representative of the school management and a representative of the board of MHP or the Miracle Amadi Foundation will be called within 48 hours.
2. This team discusses the situation and circumstantial evidence of the case and decides whether a case-specific committee is needed to resolve the case.
3. If the suspicion is resolved, the previous procedure is documented and the case is closed. However, if the suspicion is confirmed, the appropriate committee will be set up to monitor the further course of the case. In the best case, in addition to the people mentioned who are present at this committee, an external expert is brought in to accompany the process and play an advisory role.
4. In the further procedure, the suspected case is examined in detail in order to determine which measures must be taken. If the suspected person is an employee of the school, the person will be given discretionary time off work for the remainder of the process.

4.4. Consequences

As for the specific actions taken in the event of a confirmed suspicion, there are different options, depending on the suspect and the seriousness of the guilt.

1. If the suspect is a teacher or other employee of the school, the options are as follows:
 - a. In the case of a "minor" offense or violation of the code of conduct, disciplinary measures will be taken, which are the responsibility of the school management to determine and enforce. They then decide how to proceed with the person concerned.
 - b. If there is a criminal offense, the law enforcement agency will be involved and the immediate dismissal of the employee is the consequence.
2. When the case involves the child's family, the school has limited options. In "minor" cases, an effort is to be made to draw the child's parents' attention to the problem in a discussion with the child protection team and to inform them

about the consequences for the child's well-being. However, if there is a criminal offense the case will be referred immediately to the appropriate authorities and the child may be temporarily admitted to the school's boarding facility.

3. If the case concerns an external person, the law enforcement authorities will be involved immediately, and the child will be kept away from them as best as possible.

When appropriate action has been taken, the case will be temporarily closed and the logs saved. However, the affected child should continue to be observed to determine whether the problem has been resolved and whether they may need psychological support in order to process what has happened.

5. Partner Organization Abroad

The association's partner organizations consist of the Rhenium International School near Benin City and the non-governmental organization Miracle Amadi Foundation (MAF for short)

Both the teachers at the school and all MAF employees have a child protection policy based on the model of Miracle's Hilfsprojekt e.V. and communicate with each other at regular intervals to get an overview of compliance with the policy and to develop it further.

6. Code of Conduct for Employees

The aim of the code of conduct for employees is to raise awareness of their shared responsibility for the safety and well-being of children. In addition, employees and supporters of Miracle's Hilfsprojekt e.V., or people who have access to children through MHP and its partner organizations, should be protected from false suspicions regarding their behavior towards children.

The entire board of MHP and its active supporters (including all members of MHP who have access to children through the association and/or are in some way decision-makers) undertake to enforce this policy to the best of their knowledge and belief by signing it.

Each signatory undertakes in particular to...

- read the Child Protection Policy and uphold and follow the Child Safeguarding Code of Conduct
- help create a safe and encouraging environment for children
- take children's concerns and fears seriously
- report concerns and incidents to the responsible person (see Case Management)
- respect and protect the dignity, self-determination and privacy of children; especially when photographing, filming or reporting in public relations

Each signatory undertakes never to...

- exercise physical, psychological or sexual violence on children
- cause mental and/or physical harm to children
- hug, caress, or touch children in an inappropriate way in the course of their activities
- use his/her position of power to harm children
- tolerate or encourage abusive behavior by others towards children
- conceal a suspected instance of abuse
- take and post pictures of children without the consent of the children and legal guardians
- create photos or videos that violate children in their physical self-determination

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