



**Balkan  
Heritage**

## Child Protection Policy

Since 2008, the Balkan Heritage Foundation (BHF) has recognized the importance of non-formal education for young people and children and has implemented various projects aimed at these groups. The Balkan Heritage Field School (BHFS) – the main educational program of the Balkan Heritage Foundation, consists of practice-oriented courses in the fields of archaeology and heritage preservation taught in English. The concept for the BHFS is based on a symbiosis between educational projects and ongoing heritage projects in Archaeology, Art History and Conservation. It combines academic and non-formal education: lectures and instructions, field and lab work (excavations, field surveys, workshops) and field trips that enable students to gain valuable hands-on experience.

Field and lab work both involve specific tasks: physical work with tools (pickaxes, shovels, wheelbarrows, etc.) during excavations, use of equipment and different materials/chemicals during conservation, which require prior instructions, training and supervision to ensure the safety of the participants. In addition, both indoor and outdoor activities require interaction between the students and the supervisors at all times. The instructors and supervisors are professionals in research and conservation projects, who teach in academic institutions and are familiar with codes of conduct and sexual harassment policies in teaching environments. As such they have undergone background checks and come with recommendations from colleagues and/or reputable institutions. Nevertheless, the BHF has established its own mechanisms to raise awareness among our teams, promote prevention and reporting, and coordinate appropriate responses. BHF adopts a **zero-tolerance** approach to violence, sexual abuse and harassment, and exploitation of children and vulnerable adults and members of its personnel. The Foundation is committed to taking all reasonable measures to ensure the safety and well-being of anyone involved in or connected to our work, particularly children. Overseeing this process is the Child Protection Officer (CPO) – Dr. Angela Pencheva who is also the program director of the BHFS.

During our projects everyone who represents the BHF is responsible for creating a safe environment for all people who participate in all our activities: people with whom we work, and our staff. BHF senior management at all levels (Board of trustees, CEO, program director, etc.) is accountable for the implementation and dissemination of this policy and for taking all the appropriate measures for prevention and response. Children, youth, and vulnerable adults who are active and/or participate in our programmes must be aware of and understand the importance of the policy. We are dedicated to fostering a productive and safe environment during each field school that upholds our core values while actively preventing and addressing cases of harm, harassment and abuse. We strongly condemn all forms of harm against youth and children, both within and outside our organization, and we respond systematically to any confirmed or suspected abuse, as well as any attempts, based on its nature and within our scope of action. For this reason, the BHF only accepts participants under 18 years if they are accompanied by a parent or guardian.

Before the beginning of each field school during an online orientation, the supervisors and students go over rules of conduct in the field, lab and lecture spaces and health and safety instructions for each of these settings. Before enrollment in the program all participants (or their parents in the case of individuals under 18) fill out forms with personal and medical information and emergency

**Balkan Heritage Foundation**

7 Tulovo St., Sofia 1504, Bulgaria; +359 898 681 366



## **Balkan Heritage**

contacts so the BHFS team can respond to their needs and ultimately establish whether the project is suitable for the candidate. In addition, the first day of each project is dedicated to orientation and site-specific health and safety protocols signed by all the participants to ensure that they are familiar with the rules of conduct and potential risks of field/lab work. The first day of field work includes a tour of the site, a demonstration of how to safely use the required tools and a reminder of any plants, animals and insects that might cause harm to an individual. There is always a first aid kit available on site, in the lab and during field trips. For the entire duration of the project the admission's officer, project coordinator and supervisors are available in person and online for advice, launching complaints and/or any kind of assistance related to the well-being of BHFS staff and participants.

Any staff member, volunteer, or trainee who suspects abuse **must report immediately** to the Child Protection Officer and a written incident report must be completed within 24 hours. The CPO must also inform the CEO and, where necessary, external authorities. All suspicions must be reported internally within 24 hours. Complaints and concerns may be submitted through email: [bhfs.admissions@gmail.com](mailto:bhfs.admissions@gmail.com) or in a meeting with the CPO. All information will be treated as confidential and shared only with the respective authorities.

Finally, at the end of each field school all participants fill out anonymous surveys answering questions about the organization, education and personal experience during the project. In cases of reported incidents, we conduct an internal investigation to establish facts and determine the gravity of the situation. Depending on the findings BHF may take measures such as training, psychological support, or, in serious cases, sanctions like suspension, dismissal, or legal action if a staff member/employee was involved or had prior knowledge of the incident and failed to report it. In cases where the incident falls under the scope of Bulgarian and EU laws, the incident report will be forwarded to the appropriate authorities:

- Local police wherever the incident occurred.
- [State Agency for Child Protection](#) (National telephone line for children 116 111)
- [National Network for Children](#)

The BHF and all its staff, employees and contractors must follow the rules for a safe relationship when in contact with children. It is unacceptable to:

- embarrass, humiliate, belittle or demean children or display any behavior bearing signs of emotional, physical or sexual abuse.
- come into inappropriate physical contact with the child, violating the child's dignity; permissible physical contact is naturally associated with play, hygienic assistance, ensuring safety or the need to soothe the child.
- serve children alcohol, medications or other psychoactive substances.
- condone or participate in illegal activities involving a child.
- establish sexual relations with children.
- exhibit sexually provoking behavior.
- host the child in their own private home.
- maintain private relationships with the child, outside the framework of work and support.
- accompany the child during travel in the absence of a caregiver.

### **Balkan Heritage Foundation**

7 Tulovo St., Sofia 1504, Bulgaria; +359 898 681 366



## **Balkan Heritage**

- sleep in the same room with children during summer camps, trips.

Any and all suspicions regarding proper conduct of BHF employees and collaborators are investigated and clarified without delay.

### **Legal framework:**

This policy has been drawn up on the basis of the laws and directives aimed at protecting children, namely:

1. The UNICEF Convention on the Rights of the Child of 1989.
2. The European lawbook relating to rights of the child of the Fundamental Rights Agency of the European Union, 2015.
3. The Vienna Declaration and Program of Action of the World Conference on Human Rights of the United Nations High Commissioner, United Nations Human Rights 1993.
4. The Child Protection Act (CPA) and relevant government guidance on child protection and specifically Bulgarian law.

### **This policy:**

1. Applies to all adults, including local teams, volunteers, contractors and anyone who works on behalf of the Balkan Heritage Foundation.
2. Recognizes that the well-being and interests of children (any individual younger than 18 years) and young people are paramount in all fields.
3. Recognizes that all children, regardless of their age, gender, race, social class, religious belief and sexual orientation, have the same right to be protected from abuse and ill-treatment.
4. Recognizes that some children and young people are more vulnerable to situations of abuse and accepts the responsibility to offer them assistance in order to ensure their well-being.
5. Undertakes to ensure the creation of an environment centered on the protection and well-being of all children and young people on an equal basis.
6. Recognizes that working in partnership with children, youth, parents, teams and other agencies is fundamental to ensuring the well-being and protection of children.

### **The Balkan Heritage Foundation is committed to:**

1. listening to, promoting and respecting the opinions of children and young people.
2. listening to, taking seriously and acting responsibly in dealing with any allegations of past abuse.
3. protecting any child entrusted to us who may be currently in danger because of the alleged abuser.

## **Balkan Heritage Foundation**

7 Tulovo St., Sofia 1504, Bulgaria; +359 898 681 366



**Balkan  
Heritage**

4. adopting child protection practices through codes of conduct transmitted to team staff and volunteers working on behalf of the association.
5. encouraging all project members working directly with children and young people to use their skills to contribute to the individual development and protection of each child.
6. sharing protection information with children, parents, team, volunteers and other entities in contact with children.
7. recruiting staff and volunteers who have demonstrated respectful behavior towards children.
8. offering supervision and training to the team in direct contact with the children in order to ensure good practices.
9. ensuring that project members take allegations of ill-treatment and abuse seriously and respond appropriately.
10. maintaining and keeping safe all confidential files of children and young people.

When producing communicational material representing a child, we seek the permission of the child and his or her legal guardian.

In all our activities with children and with other target groups in projects that could affect children, we follow the Bulgarian and EU legislation concerning the protection of children and adolescents.

This policy was revised on September 1, 2025, and will be updated annually.

Ivan Vasilev  
CEO of the Balkan Heritage Foundation



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