



# PROTECTION IN DAYCARES AND YOUTH WELFARE FACILITIES

**German Red Cross**

**CASE STUDY**

Photo description: German Red Cross personnel with children at daycare centre  
Photo credit: Andre Zelck, German Red Cross

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Photo description: Children participating in activity at German Red Cross day care centre  
Photo credit: Willing Holz, German Red Cross

## Background

The German Red Cross (Deutsches Rotes Kreuz, DRK) is one of the largest welfare organizations in Germany and operates more than 1,900 daycare and youth welfare facilities nationwide for children aged between one and twelve years. The daycares (Kindertagesstätten, Kitas or Kindergarten) are facilities that take care of young children, usually from a few months old up to school age. Their main focus is on education, care, and early childhood development. They support children's social, emotional, and cognitive growth and help parents balance family and work life. Youth welfare facilities (Jugendhilfeeinrichtungen), on the other hand, work with children who often need social or psychological support. These facilities can include residential homes, youth centers, or counseling services for families. Youth welfare institutions can also provide outpatient educational assistance for families. Their main focus is on support, protection, and integration rather than daily care. They often help young people in difficult life situations, for example due to family problems, neglect, or behavioral issues.

As a recognized non-statutory welfare provider, the DRK supports municipalities in fulfilling the legal entitlement to early childhood education and care. Since 2013, every child in Germany from the age of one has a legal right to a childcare place, and around 95% of children from the age of three attend day care.

Recognizing the importance of safety, dignity, and well-being of children in all its services, the DRK adopted in 2012 its binding "DRK Standards for the Protection against Sexualized Violence towards Children, Youth, and Persons with Disabilities" across all community and welfare services. These standards preceded national legal requirements and have become a cornerstone of the DRK's protection approach. In addition to federal legal obligations—such as the 2021 requirement that every publicly funded child and youth facility

must have a violence protection policy and accessible complaint mechanisms for children—the DRK has developed comprehensive guidance materials, templates, and training curricula. These include recommendations for developing protection policies, model codes of conduct, self-commitment forms, and guidelines for complaint management. The DRK also established an internal network of trusted focal persons across its regional associations to provide expertise and support in child protection implementation.

Child protection within DRK daycare centres is closely linked to the Red Cross principles of participation, empowerment, and advocacy. Children and families are encouraged to participate actively in decisions affecting them, ensuring their voices are heard and respected in everyday life.

## Who was Supported and How

The daycare and youth welfare facilities operated by DRK provide a permanent nationwide system of education, care, and protection for children aged one to twelve years. These facilities support families in their daily lives while ensuring that every child—regardless of gender, background, or disability—is protected, respected, and empowered. Gender equality and diversity are integral to all activities. Training materials and professional development resources take into account diverse life situations and promote inclusive approaches, particularly for children with disabilities, with migration backgrounds, or from socio-economically disadvantaged families. In this way, the DRK puts the Red Cross principle of impartiality into practice within its educational work.

The DRK Standards for the Protection against Sexualized Violence apply to all paid and volunteer staff who work with children, young people, or persons with disabilities of any age. These standards provide binding guidelines for respectful, safe, and protective interaction across all DRK communities, facilities, services, and programmes. Implementation of the national DRK Child Protection Standards takes place de-centrally within the regional and district branches (Landes- and Kreisverbände) and their facilities, which adapt the overarching framework to local conditions. The DRK National Headquarters supports this process by providing guidance documents, materials, professional events, digital learning opportunities, and communication formats such as podcasts, blogs, and newsletters highlighting examples of good practice.

Key activities include:

- Development and dissemination of guidance documents, templates, and protection policies.
- Training and qualification of educators and management staff.
- Establishment of child-friendly complaint mechanisms ensuring safe and age-appropriate communication.
- Promotion of participation and advocacy, for example through children's parliaments or children's councils.
- Networking and peer support among child protection focal points and professionals.
- A particularly defining element of the work in DRK day care centres is the Red Cross-specific pedagogical profile, which was developed independently of the DRK Protection Standards. It describes how the Fundamental Principles of the Red Cross – humanity, impartiality, neutrality, independence, voluntary service, unity, and universality – are applied in everyday educational practice. The profile places a strong emphasis on participation, empowerment, and advocacy. Participation is not seen as an additional element but as a lived practice – for example, through child-led projects, children's councils, or visual and communicative tools at children's eye level. This approach enables children to express their opinions, take responsibility, and actively contribute to

shaping their environment. Thus, the Red Cross-specific pedagogical profile complements the existing child protection structures by strengthening both the individual agency of children and the institutional responsibility of the facilities. It contributes to continuous quality development throughout the DRK network.

- For working with all children, regardless of the conditions or abilities they bring with them, a [guidance tool](#) has been developed.

## Successes

The implementation of the DRK Standards and the Red Cross-specific pedagogical profile for DRK early childhood education and care has led to a significant strengthening of awareness, professional competence, and accountability across all DRK day care facilities.

Many regional and district branches have developed their own violence protection concepts, training programmes, and quality assurance measures, thereby contributing to a nationwide culture of safety and participation. The DRK Standards have resulted in measurable improvements in child protection throughout all DRK community services.

Key successes include:

- Reaching 140,000 children through daycares in the past year.
- The establishment of a nationwide network of trained child protection focal points.
- The implementation of violence protection concepts and improved safety and confidence in responding to child protection concerns.
- The broad introduction of participation structures, even for very young children, such as children's parliaments and children's councils in DRK day care centres.
- Increased professional and public visibility through conferences, publications, and media coverage.
- Through continuous exchange, reflection, and professional development, successful approaches are being further refined and shared across the organization, strengthening a sustainable culture of protection and participation.

## Challenges and Difficulties

One of the main challenges has been to keep the topic of child protection alive over the long term. Standards alone are not sufficient – what truly matters is the continuous training, reflection, and engagement of both professional and volunteer staff at the local level. The DRK addresses this by offering regular professional events, podcasts, digital learning opportunities, practical guidelines, and publications that foster exchange and highlight examples of good practice. Nevertheless, time must be made available at the local level for meaningful engagement with the topic. Preparation and follow-up time, as well as time for training, are often insufficiently funded.

Another challenge lies in the long time frame required for institutional change. In a federated organization such as the DRK, it takes five to ten years for new policies and attitudes to become sustainably embedded. Even after more than thirteen years, not all facilities have been fully reached, but development continues steadily through ongoing communication and support.

Finally, it remains demanding to balance the diversity of regional contexts with nationwide standards. The DRK has found an effective approach by combining binding minimum requirements with flexibility for local adaptation—a model that promotes both coherence and ownership across the organization.

## Lessons Learned

1. Over more than a decade of implementing the DRK Child Protection Standards and the Red Cross-specific pedagogical profile, the German Red Cross has learned that ***lasting protection and participation require both structure and culture***. Written standards and frameworks are indispensable, but they only unfold their full effect when embedded in everyday attitudes, dialogue, and trust among staff, children, and families.
2. A key lesson is that ***child protection is a continuous process, not a one-time achievement***. Sustaining awareness and competence among staff demands regular reflection, supervision, and open communication. The DRK's experience shows that professional and volunteer staff must be empowered to see protection as part of their identity and professional responsibility, not merely as a procedural requirement.
3. Another insight is the ***power of participation***. When children are given real opportunities to express their opinions and contribute to daily decisions, protection becomes more effective and meaningful. Participation and protection reinforce each other: children who feel heard are more likely to share concerns and trust the adults around them.
4. Institutionally, the DRK learned that ***federated systems need time***, persistence, and mutual learning. Building a protection culture across a large and diverse organization is a long-term commitment that depends on communication, leadership support, and resource allocation.
5. Finally, one of the most valuable lessons is that ***child protection and quality development are inseparable***. Embedding protection principles into everyday pedagogy strengthens not only safety but also educational quality, staff satisfaction, and parental trust. The DRK's journey shows that sustainable child protection is both a shared responsibility and an evolving learning process, shaped by collaboration, reflection, and a genuine commitment to children's rights.