

# Child and Youth Protection Policy

**Last amended:** April 2025

This Child and Youth Protection Policy applies to all staff, interns, volunteers, Board members and/or anyone working or volunteering with or on behalf of Uit de Marge vzw, in the document referred to as “the youth worker”.

## Introduction

### Uit de Marge vzw

Uit De Marge vzw champions the rights of children and young people in socially vulnerable situations and works to strengthen their position in society. Our initiatives operate on both the first and second lines, engaging in youth welfare work while advocating for systemic change towards the implementation of the United Nations Convention of the Rights of the Child (1989). Through our political advocacy and empowerment strategies, we contribute to building a more equitable society alongside young people, youth workers, and targeted youthwork organizations.

### Purpose of this policy document

This policy paper is a fundamental document that defines the responsibilities of all employees and volunteers of Uit de Marge vzw who interact with children and youth within the scope of the activities of the organization.

The document aims to state the commitment of Uit de Marge vzw to the protection of children and young people, to reduce the risks of their abuse and to establish procedures for the interaction of adults and children and young people within the activities organized by Uit de Marge. It provides guidelines for what to do if they notice inappropriate behavior by others.

## Relation to the Ethical Code on Youth Work in socially vulnerable situations

This policy is based on the principles of the Ethical Code on Youth Work with children and young people in socially vulnerable situations.<sup>1</sup> It retakes and elaborates the articles of the Code in relation to the mission and activities of Uit de Marge vzw with a specific operationalization of the Code in relation to Child and Youth Protection.

## Relation to the Policy on Integrity

This policy is complementary to our Policy on Integrity.<sup>2</sup> After all, the Protection of Abuse and Neglect could be considered as an integral element of Integrity. As such the Protection Policy retakes and/or elaborates articles of the Policy on Integrity.

## Glossary

### *Children and Youth*

If we refer to Children and Youth we refer to all persons from birth to 18 years of age, as prescribed by the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child. The application of this document however extends to all youngsters above 18 years of age during the activities organized by Uit de Marge vzw and when addressed as part of the target group of the activities.

### *Protection Policy*

Protection Policy in this document refers to the broader preventive and precautionary approach to planning and procedures that need to be in place to protect children and young people from any potential harm or damage. It involves recognizing signs of physical, sexual or emotional abuse or neglect towards minors and acting on it.

### *Violence against Children and Youth*

Violence against children and youth, in this document, is understood as any act of physical, psychological or sexual abuse, neglect, as well as work and any other form of exploitation, which leads to a probable or actual danger to the health, life, development and dignity of the child or youngster, which may occur in the family, institutions or in society.

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<sup>1</sup> Henkens, N. & Van Oyen, F. (Eds.)(2019). *Deontologische handleiding voor het jeugdwerkzorgswerk*. Uit de Marge. [https://www.uitdemarge.be/wp-content/uploads/2021/03/UDM\\_Online\\_Deontologische-handleiding.pdf](https://www.uitdemarge.be/wp-content/uploads/2021/03/UDM_Online_Deontologische-handleiding.pdf)

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.uitdemarge.be/wp-content/uploads/2025/03/2025-Integriteitsbeleid-1.pdf>

### *Physical abuse*

Physical abuse of children and youth is defined as any action that causes harm, injury or wounds

### *Sexual abuse*

Sexual abuse is any way of exploiting children up to 18 years of age for the sexual gratification and enjoyment of an adult. It implies intentionally and knowingly engaging in sexual activities with a child using coercion, force or threat; abuse of trust, position, authority or influence on the child, by abusing a situation in which the child is particularly vulnerable. We also refer to sexual abuse when youngsters above 18 years of age intentionally and knowingly engage in sexual activities without the consent of the object of their sexual gratification.

### *Psychological abuse*

Psychological abuse is emotional abuse of a child or youngster. It implies any form of behavior that neglects, endangers, underestimates, insults or verbally attacks and expresses negative feelings towards the child or the adolescent. Basically, this type of abuse is reflected in the failure to show love and attention to children, as well as in verbal outbursts that humiliate and injure children.

### *Neglect*

Neglect is understood as carelessness and failure to meet the basic needs of the child, including the need for: nutrition, clothing, accommodation, health care, education, intellectual and emotional development. Unlike abuse, neglect is the failure to do something.

### *Peer violence and violence via the Internet*

There are other types of situations in which children and adolescents appear as victims. The most common occurrences are peer violence and violence via the Internet. These phenomena should also be seriously considered and appropriate measures should be taken to protect the child.

# 1. Ethical responsibility in prevention, protection and responding to harm to or neglect of children and young people

## Commitment of Uit de Marge vzw

### Article 1

Uit de Marge vzw advocates that a child or young person should never experience abuse or neglect of any kind. Uit de Marge vzw promotes the paramount welfare of all children and youth and is committed to the protection of harm and abuse.

We will not tolerate any behavior that may harm children or young people physically or psychologically. We will not tolerate physical, emotional, verbal or sexual abuse, bullying, harassment, undue or harsh criticism or violence directed towards individuals and groups.

## General Principles

### Article 2

The activities of Uit de Marge vzw are based on:

- *The dialogue principle.* Uit de Marge vzw is committed to the best interests of children and youth. However, as it is not always immediately clear what this best interest involves, we should always engage into dialogue with the children and youngsters on their definition of the best interest and as a consequence their definition of harm, abuse and neglect.
- *The participation principle.* Children and young people have the right to express their views and to have their views taken into account in any matter affecting them.
- *The principle of non-discrimination.* All children and young people, regardless of skin colour, gender, sexual orientation, language, racial heritage, religion, political or other opinion, national, ethnic or social origin, wealth, disability, birth or other attributes have the right to equal protection from all types of harm or abuse. We take into account that some children are additionally vulnerable because of the impact of previous experiences, their level of dependency, communication needs or other issues.

### Article 3

For many children and young people, the youth worker is their confidant. This trust is necessary to advocate their best interests. However, the youth worker is required to guarantee that this trust will not be violated and will not be abused.

## Conduct towards Children and Young people

### *Article 4*

The youth worker respects the physical, psychological and sexual integrity of children and young people and does not use violence. He/she will never physically abuse children or young people, nor use inappropriate language, offensive or abuse, nor will he/she acts in ways intended to shame, humiliate, belittle or otherwise perpetrate any form of emotional abuse.

### *Article 5*

The youth worker does not ignore a situation where a child is experiencing or is at risk of significant harm.

### *Article 6*

The needs of children and young people are central and are never ignored. Each child or adolescent is accepted with respect and their right to privacy is ensured.

### *Article 7*

The youth worker does not engage in sexual or any other inappropriate relationships or activities with his target group. He avoids inappropriate physical or verbal contact.

### *Article 8*

Each child or adolescent is approached in a way that is understandable to this person. The youth worker recognizes at the same time that others may misinterpret his actions, no matter how well-intentioned.

### *Article 9*

Anyone has the right to speak out about behavior and attitudes they find uncomfortable, they know who they should speak to in advance and be confident they will be listened to.

### *Article 10*

Every situation is recognized as a potential risk of abuse and neglect.

### *Article 11*

The youth worker is a role model. He is aware of his role towards children and young people. The youth worker limits transgressive behavior. He/she motivates these rules to the child or young person and is responsible for follow-up

#### *Article 12*

The youth worker does not take pictures and don't watch pictures or videos, internet content, etc. which may violate the dignity of a child or adolescent. As to the processing of personal data of children and youth in general, the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) is applied.

### **The relationship between the youth worker and other actors**

#### *Article 13*

The youth worker is bound by the duty of discretion as elaborated in the Ethical Code on Youth Work in socially vulnerable situations. He/she will not pass this information on to third parties without their permission. However, when the physical, psychosocial or sexual integrity of children or young people is at stake, the duty of discretion is carefully reconsidered in the interest of the child or adolescent and with the permission of this child or adolescent.

#### *Article 14*

Cooperation with other actors must benefit the interests of children and young people. The risk of abuse is always taken under consideration when cooperation requires other actors to engage in personal relationship with the children and adolescents involved.

#### *Article 15*

The youth worker represents the interests of the target group. He/she signals the needs and requirements of the target group that are the result of a (possible) hurtful relationship with social institutions and social provisions. In extension to this signal duty the youth worker has the responsibility to signal physical, psychological or sexual abuse and or general neglect in the relation of the target group with social institutions (including the family) and social provisions.

### **Confidentiality**

#### *Article 16*

The name of the child or adolescent who has been the victim of Abuse or Neglect shall never be made public except with permission and where strictly necessary for his or her protection.

### **Recruitment and Training**

#### *Article 17*

Uit de Marge vzw reserves the right to require all staff, interns, volunteers, Board members and other associated to undergo background checks to assess their suitability for coming into contact with the target group. The recruitment officers responsible for recruitment

must uphold the highest standards of confidentiality with regard to any information received. Any negative information will be assessed in consultation with the coordinator and the organization retains the right to withdraw contracts where persons are deemed unsuitable to work with children and adolescents.

#### *Article 18*

Uit de Marge vzw engages in training for his employees on deontology, recognizing transgressive behavior, and methods such as the Sensoa Flag System.<sup>3</sup> In the first months of their employment by Uit de Marge vzw new employees and volunteers will participate in induction programs explaining the values and standards of the organization.

## 2. Responsibilities

#### *Article 19*

All staff, interns, volunteers and Board members are responsible for being familiar with the Child and Youth Protection Policy and will ensure that people in violation with this policy will not attend the activities.

#### *Article 20*

The Board and the Steering Committee (“aansturingsteam”) are responsible for developing, reviewing and communicating the Child and Youth Protection Policy.

#### *Article 21*

The Integrity Contact Point (“Aanspreekpunt Integriteit”, in short: API)<sup>4</sup> offers a confidential contact point for reports of inappropriate behavior. Part of this responsibility is to act as child and youth protection officer. He/she listens, advises and refers when necessary. He/she investigates any complaints. He/she may decide to take external advice if required.

#### *Article 22*

The coordinator has in consult with the API the final authority to initiate disciplinary measurements for all personnel if required.

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<sup>3</sup> <https://www.en.sensoa.be/flag-system-how-respond-transgressive-sexual-behaviour>.

<sup>4</sup> Following our policy on Integrity, the person appointed “API”, is the person you can contact if there is a violation of integrity. This is any form of physical, sexual, moral or psychological behavior that you believe crosses your boundaries or someone else's boundaries. API of Uit de Marge in 2024-2025 is Sarina Van de Bosch.

### 3. Procedures

#### *Article 23*

Any individual associated with Uit de Marge vzw will immediately report internal irregularities, such as (suspicion of) abuse by colleagues, to the Integrity Contact Point (“API”) within Uit de Marge vzw. It is possible to make reports without revealing your own identity. He/she will take action as required or instructed when he becomes aware that a member of the target group has experienced or is experiencing abuse or neglect. Failure to report a suspected violation of this Policy shall be the subject of disciplinary measures.

#### *Article 24*

The Integrity Contact Point (“API”) will discretely investigate the reported incident by hearing the involved actors. Prior to the completion of the internal investigation, the youth worker accused of violating the Child and Youth Policy shall not have any contact any more with the target group.

#### *Article 25*

All information concerning the incident and investigation shall be documented in writing, but kept confidential pending the completion of an internal investigation.

#### *Article 27*

The Integrity Contact Point (“API”) will report his findings to the coordinator and will advise about his measurement of the situation.

#### *Article 26*

Victims and their support system receive help, including aftercare and referral to specialized help when necessary.

#### *Article 27*

Offenders are addressed, guided and, if necessary, referred to appropriate help by the coordinator and/or will be the subject of disciplinary measurements and/or filing a report with the police.

### 4. Monitoring and reviewing of the policy

#### *Article 28*

The policy is evaluated once a year in consultation with the Integrity Contact Point (“API”). This evaluation and adjustment will be presented to the Board once a year. Peer-led reflections, such as those organized by De Ambrassade, help implement new insights and improvements.

With these policy instruments, Uit de Marge is committed to creating a safe, honest and respectful environment in which both individuals and the organization as a whole can flourish.

On Behalf of the Board



Maret Dakaeva, coordinator

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