

Safeguarding Policy of the European Youth Forum (YFJ)

This policy was adopted by the Board of the European Youth Forum in February 2025.

This policy shall be reviewed one year after its initial adoption (October 2023), and once every four years thereafter. The Board, supported by the Secretariat, shall adopt any amendments as necessary.

Next renewal date: February 2029

1. YFJ Vision and Mission

The **vision** of the European Youth Forum is to be the voice of young people in Europe, where they are equal citizens and feel encouraged and supported to achieve their fullest potential as global citizens.

The **mission** of the European Youth Forum is to be an independent, democratic, youth and volunteer-led platform, representing national youth councils and international non-governmental youth organisations from across Europe. We work to empower young people to participate actively in society to improve their own lives, by representing and advocating for their rights and interests and those of their organisations.

2. Scope and definitions

This policy aims to protect the young people we interact with in various parts of the Platform. The young people involved in Youth Forum activities come from different countries, cultures and backgrounds. The safeguarding policy aims to protect and promote this unique environment and respect cultural diversity and different opinions.

This policy is designed to equip all those working in or with the YFJ to know how to prevent, identify, handle, report and follow-up on any safeguarding concerns that may arise. The policy takes a r-centred approach, seeking primarily to protect and support anyone who has been affected by traumatic, disturbing or uncomfortable situations. This approach positions the experiences, considerations, needs and dignity of the survivor at the centre of the process. The reporting procedure allows for robust follow-up to ensure that the offender

understands which aspects of their behaviour were unacceptable and that future situations can be avoided where possible.

It should be noted that this policy also aims to help staff and volunteers identify practices which could be interpreted in several ways and which could lead to allegations of abuse being made. Staff and volunteers should always consider how an action or activity may be *perceived* as opposed to how it is *intended*.

The following definitions will be heeded:

Child - Any individual under the age of 18, a legal minor

Young person - Any individual between the ages of 18 and 35

Vulnerable adult - Any individual over the age of 18 who may lack capacity on a temporary or permanent basis or whose decision-making ability could be compromised, meaning they may find it difficult without support to understand risk or are unable to safely escape a situation which may imminently bring them harm.

Staff - Individuals employed by the European Youth Forum, either on a full-time, part-time or internship contract.

Board - One of up to 11 volunteers elected from the European Youth Forum membership to be part of the political board of the organisation. With the exception of the President, which may be a voluntary role or a paid role (thereby falling under the definition of staff), the rest of the board positions are fully voluntary.

Participant - Any individual who voluntarily attends an event, activity or meeting hosted by the European Youth Forum, who is not an employee or board member.

Harm - The impact of abuse, exploitation or neglect on the person. Harm arises from any action, whether by a deliberate act or an act of omission, that may cause impairment of physical, intellectual, emotional, or mental health and wellbeing.

Child abuse - All forms of physical and/or emotional ill-treatment, sexual abuse, neglect or negligent treatment or commercial or other exploitation, resulting in actual or potential harm to the child's health, survival, development or dignity in the context of a relationship of responsibility, trust or power.

Safeguarding - Safeguarding is defined as the actions taken to prevent harm, abuse or exploitation and promote the welfare and wellbeing of anyone who comes into contact with the organisation. Safeguarding thus involves promotion, prevention and protection.

Other terms that may be used in YFJ documents:

Volunteers - Any individual who interacts with the European Youth Forum and is not an employee of the European Youth Forum. This may include board members and representatives from member organisations.

Member - Any child or young person who is affiliated with one of the member organisations of the European Youth Forum. In this context, these members may be children, young people, or participants.

3. Coherence with other policies

This policy builds upon the following existing policies:

- The European Youth Forum's Internal Working Rules, which are applicable to all employees (dated October 2015)
- The European Youth Forum's Prevention Of Psychological And Social Risks At Work Including Violence And Moral And Sexual Harassment (Annexed to the Internal Working Rules, dated October 2015)
- The European Youth Forum's [Privacy Policy](#) (dated January 2022)
- The European Youth Forum's Child Protection Policy (dated March 2023). Note that for any YFJ activity or event that deals specifically or primarily with minors, the [Youth Forum's Child Protection Policy](#) automatically applies. Where there are any discrepancies or uncertainties between the present Safeguarding Policy and the Child Protection Policy, the latter takes precedence.

The present policy replaces the former Code of Conduct (dated November 2014).

The Safeguarding Policy will be reviewed at the latest every five years.

4. Code of Conduct

Expected behaviours

The European Youth Forum promotes a culture based on respect, dignity and equality to ensure full access and participation, reflecting everyone's basic right to be heard.

It is the responsibility of everyone in the organisation to create a space that is safe and welcoming for all. This includes a commitment to understand and tackle the unique and structural challenges faced by minorities.

Expected behaviours include:

- Using respectful language
- Empowering people to share their views and opinions
- Being mindful of your position of power and privilege(s)
- Communicating with respect for others, critiquing ideas rather than individuals
- Creating the physical conditions for everyone to participate as equals
- Respecting individuals' personal space and boundaries
- Being mindful of the needs and potential susceptibility of minors and vulnerable adults, and behaving appropriately in their presence

- Being actively committed to understanding and responding to the emotional, social and cultural needs of vulnerable groups.
- Being an active bystander, calling out unacceptable behaviours

Unacceptable behaviours

The European Youth Forum has a zero-tolerance policy for any of the following unacceptable behaviours:

- Sexual harassment, unwanted physical contact
- Physical violence, aggression or intimidation
- Verbal aggression or intimidation
- Bullying, humiliation, degradation
- Any form of direct and indirect discrimination or slurs on the basis of age, sex, gender identity or expression, race, ethnicity, citizenship, religion, belief, sexual orientation, political convictions or membership, disability, civil status, socio-economic background, linguistic identity or physical appearance
- Abuse of position of power, especially in affective relationships

This applies to/during all YFJ events and activities, in the YFJ as an office environment, interactions between YFJ staff, volunteers and board members, all online interactions.

YFJ staff and volunteers should also expect this code of conduct to be respected when interacting with member organisations of the YFJ, and external partners.

Staff and volunteers should always consider how an action or activity may be *perceived* as opposed to how it is *intended*.

5. Preventative measures

The Youth Forum believes that the first step to ensuring a safe space for all and for avoiding safeguarding abuses is a comprehensive set of preventative measures, as elaborated below.

a) Induction and Training

Staff and board members will receive safeguarding training to accompany the launch of this safeguarding policy. In addition, YFJ will include training on safeguarding in the induction or first six months of all new staff and biannually, at the beginning of each board mandate. The YFJ recommends organising training for participants.

b) Safer Recruitment

Staff recruitment processes minimise the risk of engaging anyone unsuitable to work with children, young people and vulnerable adults. As a general principle, recruitment is based on matching skills and expertise with position requirements, as defined in the job description.

Where possible, it is recommended that staff provides

- Previous employer references
from all work places in the two years prior to the recruitment, confirming the suitability for the new hire to work for a youth-focused organisation and detailing whether or not there has been any safeguarding complaints made against the new hire.

Staff roles will be risk-assessed to understand the level of contact with children and young people. For roles in which risk is identified, advanced vetting will be carried out for all new hires, requiring:

- A Criminal Record Extract
 - a. For people living in Belgium, the required form is *Extrait de casier judiciaire Modèle 596-2*. Those who have moved to Belgium within the last two years should also provide the national equivalent from the last country they lived/work in.
 - b. New hires who do not live in Belgium will be required to provide a national equivalent.
 - c. In countries where it is not legally possible to issue a criminal record extract upon employer demand, new hires will be required to submit a declaration detailing their criminal record or absence thereof, as well as the reasons for which an official record cannot be submitted. An additional verbal reference with a previous employer must also be carried out.

All contracts for staff, approved trainers and experts must include a requirement to comply with the European Youth Forum safeguarding policies. Training on this policy will be included in the onboarding processes for new hires (as per paragraph 5a above).

c) Person of Confidence

Within the YFJ as a workplace, the Secretariat nominates at least one Person of Confidence, as per Belgian labour law. The Person of Confidence receives specific training from a health service provider in order to be able to carry out their role, including: confidentiality, reporting, privacy of the victim, as well as support channels for any potential secondary trauma.

They commit to making themselves available to listen, provide support, offer advice to diffuse situations before they deteriorate, and, where necessary, advice on reporting procedures. They play a confidential role and do not share private information without consent, unless there is an imminent threat.

The law requires one person of confidence designated within the Secretariat. The current policy strongly recommends nominating multiple Persons of Confidence of different gender identities and diverse backgrounds, where possible. At the start of every event, it is clearly communicated who the Person of Confidence is.

d) Best practices for activities and interactions (in-person or online)

The Youth Forum commits to make the Safeguarding Guidelines ("Code of Conduct") clearly visible during all YFJ events. The chairperson should also verbally introduce the Code of Conduct, as well as how to file a report, to whom, and what follow-up to expect.

In addition, the present policy outlines preventative measures that should be considered during the organisation of all YFJ activities, events and meetings.

The following measures are applicable to all interactions:

- ☐ At least one safeguarding contact point should be designated for every event/activity, and should be announced to the participants. If there are multiple safeguarding contact points, they ideally represent different genders and backgrounds. Ideally, these are staff members with no major presenting role (i.e. chair or facilitator) and the board members responsible for safeguarding so that they are available and easy for participants to approach. Safeguarding contact points have a thorough knowledge of the safeguarding procedures. They are responsible for the first communication with the victim and connect them with the person of confidence, who will further support the victim.
- ☐ Organisers should choose venues that are accessible, both in relation to physical accessibility and information accessibility. Venues should ideally offer a silent or safe space room, that is clearly indicated.
- ☐ No drugs/illegal substances are to be brought into event venues
- ☐ Staff and Board members are encouraged to refrain from consuming alcohol during events
- ☐ For residential events, if participants need to be accommodated in shared rooms due to space or budgetary constraints, they should have a mutually consensual say in who they share a room with when possible and should be put in gender disaggregated rooms, unless they request otherwise.
- ☐ Any communication between staff and participants should take place via official email addresses (e.g. xyz@youthforum.org) and not via personal emails
- ☐ Any contact between staff and participants on social media should go via European Youth Forum accounts and not via personal accounts. If a phone number is shared, this should be a number that is used for work purposes, or a messaging service used for work purposes
- ☐ If staff or board members need to contact members or participants via personal social media channels, any first contact should explain exactly why they have connected and should offer an alternative platform if desired, e.g. "Hello, we met at event ABC last week. I am getting in touch as we are going to be running a campaign on the same topic and we would like to see how you can get involved. If you prefer, we can move the conversation to email and you can reach me at xyz@youthforum.org"

The following measures are additionally applicable when interacting with minors and vulnerable adults:

- ☐ Minimum ratio of one adult per group of 15 children or vulnerable adults. All residential activities must have at least two adults.
- ☐ For residential events, at least two members of staff must be present
- ☐ YFJ staff must not accept personal social media requests from minors or vulnerable adults. Board members *may* choose to accept requests from minors or vulnerable adults for the purpose of carrying out their work, but are encouraged to act with caution, where appropriate, adding a third person into the chat to avoid 1-1 communications.
- ☐ Open-door policy: Any interactions between an individual minor or vulnerable adult and a staff or board member must not take place in a room with a closed door.

The following measures are additionally applicable to minors only:

- ☐ Parental responsibility forms must be requested from minors at the beginning of the activity. An example consent form can be found in the Youth Forum's Child Protection Policy.
- ☐ For residential activities, minors can be accompanied by a parent or guardian, if requested. The accommodation costs for the parent/guardian can be covered by the YFJ provided that the costs are reasonable and this is discussed with the YFJ beforehand.
- ☐ A minor should not be accommodated alone in a room of adults. They should either share a room with other minors of a similar age or with their own accompanying parent/guardian; or be accommodated in a private room.
- ☐ Any online communications must be age-appropriate in terms of content and tone and must remain strictly related to European Youth Forum activities.

6. Use of image, video and data protection

Informed consent must be sought before taking photos or video recordings of YFJ staff, board, volunteers, participants or members of the public. This includes explaining for which purpose the photos or videos will be used and where they will likely be displayed. Consent, when obtained, is given to YFJ as an organisation and not to an individual for personal use. The YFJ will use these images in accordance with this policy. Providing images should never be a condition for participation in a European Youth Forum activity.

For children in particular, never interview or photograph a child individually without the parent/guardian and the child, when of consenting age, giving their explicit consent. Regarding social media use and communicating online, identifying information about a child (such as their name, address, images of their face, or any other information that could identify them) should only be posted where the aforementioned expression of consent has been received and only ever in accordance with this policy.

Further guidance on using children's images can be found in the European Youth Forum's Child Protection Policy.

In line with GDPR and the European Youth Forum's privacy policy, everyone has the right to request access to all the personal data that the European Youth Forum processed about them by sending an email to youthforum@youthforum.org. They have the right to request that any personal data about them that is incorrect or inaccurate be corrected free of charge.

7. Procedure for reporting an incident

a. Reporting protocol

Any safeguarding incident or concern relating to unacceptable behaviour should be reported immediately. All incidents will be handled with the strictest confidentiality, with only the necessary people involved (i.e. Safeguarding contact point for the event, Person of Confidence and Secretary General/President).

If the incident occurs during a YFJ event, in the YFJ as a workplace, or occurs online, the following protocol should be respected:

1. If you are not the Safeguarding contact point, inform them immediately. The Safeguarding contact point should relay the matter to the Person of Confidence.
2. The next steps apply to the Safeguarding contact point for the event or the Person of Confidence. If neither of them are available, staff members and board members present should also follow these steps.
3. Ensure the safety of the child, young person or vulnerable adult, moving them to a secure space, separating them from the person who was reported, if necessary.
4. Be available to listen to the person who was harmed. They may not be ready to speak straight away. Listen carefully without interrupting. Reassure them that they were right to tell you about the incident. Do not promise complete confidentiality, explain you will need to inform the Person of Confidence so YFJ can help. However, emphasise that only the necessary people will be involved (Safeguarding contact point, Person of Confidence and Secretary General/President).
5. When they are ready, share the Incident Reporting Form with the person who was harmed and invite them to fill it out. Any report made must be handled confidentially.
6. If the event occurred online, invite the person who was harmed to take screenshots of the interaction. Remind them that they should only do so if they feel comfortable and safe.
7. Invite any witnesses to give a statement for the incident reporting form.
8. Invite the alleged offender to give a statement for the incident reporting form. The alleged offender will only be invited after a careful assessment that the person who was harmed will not be further harmed because of this confrontation. The person who was harmed will also be informed beforehand that the alleged offender will be contacted.
9. The next steps and remedy procedures should be explained clearly to the person who was harmed. Explain that the Person of Confidence needs to

investigate the incident and may need some time before coming back with suggestions for any further action. Do not make any promises you cannot keep. If needed, put in place arrangements for initial support.

The European Youth Forum incident reporting form can be found in Annex 2 below.

If a YFJ staff member, board member or volunteer is a victim of a safeguarding incident during an activity hosted by a Member Organisation, or by a third-party event, they are encouraged to inform the YFJ Person of Confidence. The Person of Confidence shall flag the incident to the safeguarding team or management of the organising entity.

b. Remedy

1. If the incident relates to criminal behaviour, it should be reported to the police immediately, clearly informing the victim on the actions taken. The Person of Confidence and Safeguarding contact point may ask the alleged offender to leave the activity, after their contact details have been verified.
2. The Person of Confidence, who is trained by a health service provider to address safeguarding concerns, shall investigate the incident within 48 hours while adopting a survivor-centred approach and upholding the principles laid down in this policy. A survivor-centred approach means ensuring that the person's needs, wishes and dignity are placed at the centre of the follow-up procedure, e.g. accompanying the person so that they are not left alone; guiding them towards appropriate support services.
3. The Person of Confidence and the Secretary General of the European Youth Forum shall determine whether the grounds of the incident require a follow-up action. The alleged offender shall be invited to a meeting in which the facts of the complaint are presented to them, as well as the nature of how their behaviour contravened the European Youth Forum's Code of Conduct of unacceptable behaviours. Care will be given to ensuring an appropriate response that is proportionate to the seriousness of the incident. In proven cases against staff, the Secretary General may issue a disciplinary warning or terminate the contract. In proven cases against the board, the Secretary General may seek to invoke article 18 of the European Youth Forum statutes to dismiss a board member. The survivor will be kept informed of any decision made by the European Youth Forum, including the possibility of appealing against such decision.
4. If the incident involves the Person of Confidence or the Secretary General of the European Youth Forum, this step shall be conducted by the President of the European Youth Forum. If the incident involves the President, two board members shall take on this role, based on capacity and impartiality.
5. If the incident involves a minor, staff and the Person of Confidence must include the child(ren) in the conversation and should try to seek consent before including the parents/guardians in any conversation on safeguarding concerns. Should this not be the case, staff and/or the Person of Confidence should clearly inform the child before sharing any information with their legal guardians/parents.

6. All incidents, including subsequent procedures and outcomes, must be securely stored on a safeguarding register, unless the victim requests otherwise.
7. In case the alleged offender refuses to engage in this process, necessary steps will be taken to ensure the safe continued participation of the victim which can include, in more severe cases, the removal of the alleged offender from the event.

8. Record keeping

Records of any safeguarding incidents will be kept by the European Youth Forum, in line with the following principles:

- Information shall be adequate, relevant and not excessive for the purpose for which it is held
- Records must be accurate and up-to-date
- Records shall only be kept for as long as is necessary
- The privacy of the survivor must be ensured at all times
- The survivor can request their incident to be taken out of the safeguarding register.

All reports must be logged in written form and kept in a safeguarding register. They will be stored in a private part of the YFJ's internal document storage accessible only to the Secretary General, Person of Confidence and those directly involved in the remedy.

As a general rule, records shall be kept for no longer than 10 years. In case of legal proceedings, the European Youth Forum shall seek legal advice on how long files should be kept.

9. Recognising and identifying abuse beyond YFJ

Beyond the scope of YFJ events, or YFJ as a workplace, staff and volunteers of the European Youth Forum may encounter cases of suspected abuse. As an organisation promoting the wellbeing of all young people, the Platform has a duty to flag such concerns and support the victims where possible, including in digital spaces.

If any staff, board member or volunteer is witness to such abuse, they must alert the relevant local authorities.

Annex 1: Safeguarding Guidelines ("Code of Conduct")

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This applies to/during: all YFJ events and activities; in the YFJ as an office environment; interactions between YFJ staff, volunteers and board members; all online interactions.

If you wish to report an incident:

- Speak to the Safeguarding Contact Point for the event
- Fill in the reporting form (available online here)
- You can also fill in the report for an incident that you have witnessed
- The European Youth Forum will get back to you within 48 hours. Let a member of staff know if you need any help in the meantime; we are here to support you

Annex 2: Incident Reporting Form

A simple incident reporting form such as the one below shall be presented to participants:

<i>Date & time of the incident</i>	
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<i>Place of the incident</i>	
<i>Name of the person who was harmed</i>	
<i>Is the person who was harmed a minor?</i>	
<i>Name of the alleged offender(s)</i>	
<i>Nature of the incident/concern</i>	
<i>Description of harm done/injuries caused</i>	

The incident reporting form for internal purposes, to be filled in by the Person of Confidence or the Safeguarding Team, is more complete.

<i>Reference number</i>	
<i>Date & time of the incident</i>	
<i>Place of the incident</i>	
<i>Gravity of the incident</i>	<input type="checkbox"/> Criminal matter <input type="checkbox"/> Non-criminal, behavioural matter
<i>Name and contact details of the person who was harmed</i>	
<i>Is the person who was harmed a minor?</i>	
<i>Name and contact details of the alleged offender(s)</i>	
<i>Nature of the incident/concern</i>	
<i>Description of harm done/injuries caused</i>	
<i>Testimony of the survivor</i>	
<i>Testimony of the alleged offender</i>	
<i>Testimony of any witnesses</i>	
<i>Name of the staff member handling the matter</i>	

<i>Follow-up actions taken</i>	
<i>Lessons learned</i>	