Mreža MaMa

Policy for Safeguarding and Child Protection

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1. Introduction

Mreža MaMa, as a network of 58 youth centers across Slovenia, is committed to safeguarding and ensuring the well-being of children, young people, and vulnerable adults involved in all its activities. It is the responsibility of everyone within the organisation—staff, volunteers, and board members and members – youth centers —to create and maintain a space that is safe, inclusive, and welcoming for all.

Mreža MaMa recognises that all children and young people have the right to participate in a safe, inclusive and supportive environment, free from all forms of abuse, exploitation, neglect, discrimination and harm. The organisation is committed to the principle of the best interests of the child and recognises its responsibility to take proactive measures to prevent harm, identify risks and respond appropriately to any safeguarding concerns. Safeguarding is a shared responsibility. Everyone involved in Mreža MaMa's activities, including employees, volunteers, board members, member organisations, external collaborators and project partners, has a role in ensuring the safety and well-being of children and young people.

This policy applies to all events, activities, interactions that Mreža MaMa organises as well as within the Mreža MaMa network (both physical and online), as well as the working environment and relationships among staff, volunteers, and participants.

Definitions:

1. *Child* – every person under the age of 18.
2. *Young person* – a person within the ages of 15 to 29 who participates in youth work activities.
3. *Safeguarding concern* – any suspicion, disclosure, observation, or information indicating that a child or young person may be at risk.
4. *Abuse* – physical, psychological, and sexual violence, neglect, exploitation, and other forms of abuse.
5. *Adults at risk* – vulnerable adults who, due to their circumstances, need additional protection.
6. *Safeguarding* – the measures taken to prevent and respond to harm, abuse, exploitation, neglect and inappropriate behaviour affecting children and young people in connection with an organisation's activities, people or operations.

2. Purpose

The purpose of this policy is to:

- Ensure the safety and protection of children, young people, and vulnerable adults from harm and abuse in all forms.
- Establish clear guidelines and expected behaviors for all members and stakeholders of Mreža MaMa.
- Promote a culture of respect, inclusion, and accountability in all aspects of our work.
- Prevention: preventing all forms of violence, abuse, exploitation and inappropriate behaviour.
- Early identification: identifying risks and detecting potential breaches at an early stage.
- Response: ensuring clear procedures for reporting, handling and responding to incidents.

This policy aims not only to respond to safeguarding incidents but also to establish preventive measures, identify potential risks at an early stage and ensure that all individuals involved in Mreža MaMa's activities know how to act when a safeguarding concern arises.

3. Scope

This policy applies to all individuals involved in Mreža MaMa's activities and operations, including:

- Employees and management of Mreža MaMa.

- Volunteers, interns and trainees.
- Members of the Board and other governing bodies.
- Representatives and employees of member youth centres when participating in activities organised or coordinated by Mreža MaMa.
- External trainers, facilitators, consultants, contractors and service providers.
- Project partners and other organisations involved in joint activities.
- All other individuals who come into contact with children and young people through Mreža MaMa's activities.

The policy applies to all activities organised, coordinated, supported or represented by Mreža MaMa, including:

- Educational activities, workshops, training sessions and events.
- Local, national and international meetings, dialogues, exchanges and mobility activities.
- Project activities involving children and young people.
- Online meetings, digital activities and communication through social media or other online platforms.
- Communication, media production, photography, filming and publication of content involving children and young people.
- Any other activity or interaction carried out in the name of or on behalf of Mreža MaMa.

This policy covers both direct and indirect contact with children and young people, in physical and online environments.

For the purposes of this policy, a child is defined as any person under the age of 18. The policy also recognises that young people aged 18 and above may face particular safeguarding risks and that the principles of respect, dignity, equality and prevention of harm apply to all participants, regardless of age.

Mreža MaMa is a network organisation connecting independent youth centres. Member organisations remain responsible for their own safeguarding policies, procedures and legal obligations. Mreža MaMa promotes common safeguarding standards, supports its members in developing safe practices and ensures that this policy is applied in all activities organised or coordinated by Mreža MaMa.

Project partners and external organisations participating in joint activities are expected to have appropriate safeguarding measures in place. Where necessary, Mreža MaMa will require partners to comply with this policy or demonstrate that they have equivalent safeguarding procedures.

4. Expected Behaviors

Mreža MaMa is guided by the following principles:

- **Best interests of the child:** The safety, dignity and best interests of the child are the primary consideration in all safeguarding decisions.
- **Equal protection:** All children and young people have an equal right to protection, regardless of their age, gender, gender identity, sexual orientation, disability, ethnicity, religion, socio-economic background or any other personal characteristic.
- **Prevention:** Safeguarding is not limited to responding to incidents. It includes identifying and reducing risks before harm occurs.
- **Participation:** Children and young people have the right to express their views, be heard and participate in decisions affecting them.
- **Shared responsibility:** Everyone involved in Mreža MaMa's activities has a responsibility to contribute to a safe environment and report safeguarding concerns.
- **Accountability:** Mreža MaMa is committed to transparency, appropriate action and continuous improvement of its safeguarding practices.
- **Do no harm:** All activities must be planned and delivered in a way that avoids exposing children and young people to unnecessary risks or further harm.

All individuals covered by this policy are expected to act responsibly, respectfully and professionally when interacting with children and young people. In addition to the expected behaviours outlined above, the following rules must be observed:

Professional Boundaries

- Maintain appropriate professional relationships with children and young people at all times.
- Respect personal boundaries, privacy and individual differences.
- Avoid situations that may create dependency, favouritism or inappropriate personal relationships with minors.
- Never use one's position, authority or influence to manipulate, intimidate or exploit a child or young person.
- Avoid being alone with a child in circumstances where the interaction cannot be observed or appropriately justified, whenever reasonably possible.

Communication and Online Interaction

- Communicate with children and young people in a respectful, age-appropriate and professional manner.
- Use official organisational communication channels whenever possible.
- Avoid private or secretive communication with minors through personal social media accounts or messaging applications.
- Where direct individual communication with a minor is necessary, ensure that it is appropriate, transparent and, where reasonably possible, includes another authorised adult or uses an official communication channel.
- Never request, send or share inappropriate, sexualised or offensive content with a minor.

Physical Contact

- Respect the physical boundaries and personal space of every child and young person.
- Ensure that any physical contact is appropriate, necessary and sensitive to the individual's needs and wishes.
- Never use physical contact as a form of punishment, intimidation or control.

Privacy, Photography and Recording

- Respect the privacy and dignity of children and young people.
- Obtain appropriate informed consent before taking or publishing photographs, videos or audio recordings involving minors, including consent from the child and, where required, their parent or legal guardian.
- Explain how images and recordings will be used and where they may be published.
- Never publish content that may expose a child to harm, humiliation, discrimination or unwanted attention.
- Never share personal or identifying information about children without an appropriate legal basis and the necessary safeguards.

Responding to Disclosures

- Listen calmly and take every disclosure of abuse, violence or inappropriate behaviour seriously.
- Reassure the child that they have done the right thing by speaking up and that the situation is not their fault.
- Do not make promises of absolute confidentiality.
- Do not pressure the child to provide additional details or repeatedly recount their experience.
- Report the concern through the procedures outlined in this policy.

Active Bystander Responsibility

- Speak up and take appropriate action when witnessing inappropriate behaviour or potential safeguarding risks.
- Report suspected abuse, neglect, exploitation or breaches of this policy.

- Never ignore a safeguarding concern, even when there is uncertainty about the circumstances.

5. Unacceptable Behaviors

The following behaviors are strictly prohibited in all Mreža MaMa activities and working environments and will not be tolerated in any form:

Physical and Emotional Abuse

- Any form of physical violence, hitting, pushing, shaking, punishment or intentional physical harm.
- Threatening, intimidating, humiliating, degrading or emotionally manipulating a child or young person.
- Bullying, harassment, verbal aggression or repeated exclusion.
- Neglecting a child's basic safety, well-being or protection needs.

Sexual Abuse and Exploitation

- Any form of sexual abuse, sexual exploitation or sexual harassment involving a child.
- Any sexualised communication, behaviour or interaction directed towards a minor.
- Grooming or any attempt to establish an inappropriate relationship with a child for the purpose of abuse or exploitation.
- Requesting, producing, possessing, sharing or distributing sexual images or videos of minors.
- Using a position of trust, authority or influence to initiate or encourage sexual contact or inappropriate relationships with minors.

Online Abuse and Digital Misconduct

- Cyberbullying, online harassment, threats or intimidation.
- Non-consensual sharing or distribution of personal, private or intimate content.
- Sharing, requesting or storing sexualised images of minors.
- Inappropriate private communication with minors, including manipulative, threatening or sexualised messages.
- Recording, photographing or sharing content involving children without appropriate consent and safeguards.
- Exposing children and young people to harmful, discriminatory or sexually explicit online content.

Discrimination and Abuse of Power

- Discrimination based on age, gender, gender identity or expression, ethnicity, citizenship, religion, belief, sexual orientation, political convictions, disability, civil status, socio-economic background, language or physical appearance.
- Using authority, professional status or influence to intimidate, control, manipulate or exploit children and young people.
- Creating inappropriate relationships of dependency or favouritism.
- Excluding or isolating children and young people in a way that compromises their dignity, safety or equal participation.

Other Unacceptable Practices

- Ignoring or concealing safeguarding concerns or incidents.
- Discouraging or preventing someone from reporting a concern.
- Retaliating against anyone who reports a concern in good faith.
- Conducting unauthorised investigations into suspected abuse.
- Sharing confidential information about safeguarding incidents with unauthorised individuals.

Any breach of this policy will be taken seriously and may result in appropriate disciplinary, contractual or other measures, in accordance with applicable legislation and organisational procedures.

6. Risk Assessment and Prevention

Mreža MaMa is committed to identifying and reducing potential safeguarding risks before organising activities involving children and young people.

Safeguarding considerations must be integrated into the planning, implementation and evaluation of activities. Risk assessments should be proportionate to the nature, scale and level of contact with children and young people.

Before activities involving minors, the responsible staff member or activity organiser should consider:

- The age, number and specific needs of participants.
- The nature and duration of contact between participants and staff, volunteers or external collaborators.
- The suitability and safety of the physical environment.
- Supervision arrangements and responsibilities.
- Potential risks associated with transport, accommodation and overnight stays.
- Risks related to online participation and digital communication.
- Privacy, photography, filming and the handling of personal data.
- Potential risks arising from discussions of sensitive topics, including violence, abuse, discrimination and mental health.
- Procedures for responding to emergencies and safeguarding concerns.

Where risks are identified, appropriate preventive measures must be implemented before the activity takes place.

For activities addressing sensitive topics, facilitators must establish clear group rules, explain participants' rights and available support, and ensure that participants are not pressured to share personal experiences.

Where a participant discloses personal experiences of violence or abuse during an activity, staff and facilitators must follow the reporting and response procedures outlined in this policy.

Risk assessments should be reviewed whenever circumstances change or new risks emerge.

7. Safer Recruitment, Training and Awareness

Mreža MaMa recognises that preventing harm begins with ensuring that all individuals involved in its activities understand their safeguarding responsibilities.

Safer Recruitment

When recruiting employees, volunteers, interns or other individuals whose roles involve direct or regular contact with children, Mreža MaMa will take appropriate steps to assess their suitability.

Depending on the role and applicable legislation, these steps may include:

- Clearly communicating safeguarding responsibilities in role descriptions and recruitment materials.
- Assessing candidates' experience, qualifications and suitability for working with children and young people.
- Requesting references where appropriate.
- Carrying out legally permissible background or criminal record checks where relevant and proportionate to the role.
- Informing selected candidates about this policy and the organisation's expectations before they begin their work.

All recruitment and selection procedures must respect applicable legislation and data protection

requirements.

Induction and Training

All employees, volunteers and relevant associates must be informed about this policy and their safeguarding responsibilities before starting activities involving children and young people.

Mreža MaMa will:

- Provide access to the safeguarding policy and explain its key principles and procedures.
- Ensure that staff and relevant associates know how to recognise and report safeguarding concerns.
- Provide appropriate safeguarding training and awareness-raising opportunities.
- Inform individuals about the designated Safeguarding Officer and available reporting channels.
- Encourage regular reflection on safeguarding practices and professional boundaries.

Participation in relevant training should be documented.

Commitment to the Policy

All employees, volunteers and relevant associates are expected to confirm that they have read, understood and agree to comply with this policy.

Where appropriate, they will be asked to sign a written declaration confirming their commitment to safeguarding and child protection.

8. Safeguarding Reporting and Response Procedures

Mreža MaMa is committed to ensuring that all safeguarding concerns are reported, taken seriously and addressed promptly and appropriately.

Every individual covered by this policy has a responsibility to report suspected or observed abuse, exploitation, neglect, inappropriate behaviour or any other safeguarding concern.

8.1 Designated Safeguarding Officer

Mreža MaMa shall appoint a designated Safeguarding Officer responsible for coordinating the implementation of this policy and responding to safeguarding concerns.

The organisation shall also appoint a Deputy Safeguarding Officer to ensure continuity and provide an alternative reporting channel.

Designated Safeguarding Officer:
Name: Maja Hostnik
Position: Directress
Email: maja.hostnik@mreza-mama.si
Telephone: 0038630618628

Deputy Safeguarding Officer:
Name: Nežka Agnes Vodeb
Position: Project manager
Email: nezka.agnesvodeb@mreza-mama.si
Telephone: 0038630618628

The Safeguarding Officer is responsible for:

- Receiving and documenting safeguarding reports and concerns.
- Providing guidance to staff and other individuals on safeguarding matters.
- Assessing the urgency and nature of reported concerns.

- Coordinating appropriate protective measures.
- Referring cases to relevant authorities or professional services where necessary.
- Ensuring that records are stored securely and confidentially.
- Monitoring the implementation of safeguarding procedures.
- Supporting safeguarding awareness and training within the organisation.

If a concern involves the Safeguarding Officer, the report must be submitted directly to the Deputy Safeguarding Officer or another appropriate member of the organisation's leadership.

If a concern involves the Director or another member of the organisation's leadership, it must be reported to an appropriate independent or governing body representative. No individual may be responsible for handling a complaint concerning their own conduct.

8.2 Reporting a Safeguarding Concern

A safeguarding concern may arise from:

- A child or young person disclosing abuse, violence or inappropriate behaviour.
- An employee, volunteer or other individual witnessing inappropriate conduct.
- Observations suggesting that a child may be at risk.
- Information received from a parent, caregiver, partner organisation or another third party.
- Online activities, communications or content indicating potential abuse or harm.

Concerns should be reported to the Safeguarding Officer or Deputy Safeguarding Officer as soon as possible and without unnecessary delay.

Reports may be submitted verbally or in writing. Anonymous reports will also be accepted and assessed, although anonymity may limit the organisation's ability to follow up.

Reports should include, where possible:

- Date and time of the incident or disclosure.
- Location or context in which it occurred.
- Description of the concern and relevant facts.
- Names of individuals involved, if known.
- Any immediate safety risks identified.
- Actions already taken.
- Contact details of the person submitting the report, if they wish to provide them.

Individuals reporting concerns must not delay reporting while attempting to collect further information or evidence.

8.3 Immediate Response and Protection

If a child or young person is in immediate danger or requires urgent medical assistance, the person identifying the situation must take immediate steps to ensure safety and contact the relevant emergency services.

In Slovenia, this includes contacting the police (113), emergency medical services (112) or the relevant child protection authorities, depending on the situation.

The safety and best interests of the child must always take priority over internal organisational procedures.

Where a safeguarding concern involves a member of staff, volunteer or external collaborator, Mreža

MaMa will consider appropriate interim protective measures to prevent further contact or potential harm while the concern is being addressed.

8.4 Responding to a Disclosure

When a child or young person discloses abuse or another safeguarding concern, the person receiving the disclosure must:

- Remain calm and listen carefully.
- Take the information seriously and treat the child with respect and sensitivity.
- Reassure the child that they are right to speak up and that what happened is not their fault.
- Avoid asking leading questions or requesting unnecessary details.
- Explain, in an age-appropriate way, that the information may need to be shared with people who can help protect them.
- Record the information as accurately as possible, using the child's own words where relevant.
- Report the concern to the Safeguarding Officer or the appropriate authorities without delay.

Staff and other individuals must not promise absolute confidentiality, confront the alleged perpetrator or conduct their own investigation.

8.5 Assessment and Further Action

Upon receiving a report, the Safeguarding Officer will:

1. Review the information and assess whether there is an immediate risk to the child or young person.
2. Determine what immediate protective measures are necessary.
3. Consider whether the concern must be referred to the police, social services or another competent authority.
4. Ensure that relevant information is documented and securely stored.
5. Coordinate further action in cooperation with the competent authorities, where appropriate.
6. Ensure that the affected child or young person is informed about available support in an age-appropriate manner.

Mreža MaMa will not conduct internal investigations into suspected criminal offences or attempt to replace the work of competent authorities.

Where concerns relate to inappropriate conduct or breaches of this policy that do not require external investigation, the organisation will take appropriate action in accordance with its internal procedures and applicable legislation.

8.6 Child-Friendly Reporting Mechanism

Mreža MaMa recognises that children and young people must be able to raise concerns in a safe, accessible and understandable way.

Information about how to report a safeguarding concern must be communicated in clear, age-appropriate language.

Children and young people may report concerns:

- Directly to the Safeguarding Officer or Deputy Safeguarding Officer.
- By email using the designated contact details.
- Through another trusted adult involved in the activity.
- Anonymously, where they prefer not to disclose their identity.

All reports must be treated respectfully and without discrimination. No child or young person should experience negative consequences, intimidation or retaliation for raising a concern in good faith.

8.7. Support and Referral

Mreža MaMa will seek to ensure that children and young people affected by safeguarding incidents receive appropriate support.

Depending on the nature of the concern, this may include referral to:

- Centres for Social Work.
- The police.
- Healthcare and mental health professionals.
- Specialist organisations providing support to victims of violence and abuse.
- Other competent child protection or support services.

Support must be provided in a way that respects the dignity, privacy, wishes and best interests of the affected child or young person.

9. Roles and Responsibilities

Safeguarding is a shared responsibility. All individuals involved in Mreža MaMa's activities must contribute to creating and maintaining a safe environment.

The Director and Leadership of Mreža MaMa are responsible for:

- Ensuring that this policy is approved, implemented and regularly reviewed.
- Appointing the Safeguarding Officer and Deputy Safeguarding Officer.
- Providing appropriate resources for safeguarding measures.
- Ensuring that employees and relevant associates are informed about their responsibilities.
- Supporting safeguarding training and awareness-raising.
- Ensuring that safeguarding concerns are addressed appropriately and that necessary measures are taken.
- Promoting a culture in which concerns can be raised without fear of retaliation.

The Safeguarding Officer is responsible for:

- Coordinating the implementation of this policy.
- Receiving and documenting safeguarding concerns.
- Providing guidance on reporting and response procedures.
- Coordinating appropriate referrals and protective measures.
- Maintaining confidential records.
- Supporting the monitoring and review of safeguarding practices.

Employees, volunteers and other associates are responsible for:

- Reading, understanding and complying with this policy.
- Maintaining appropriate professional boundaries.
- Participating in relevant training.
- Identifying and reporting safeguarding concerns.
- Cooperating with appropriate safeguarding procedures.

- Protecting confidential information and respecting the privacy of children and young people.

Member Organisations and Project Partners are expected to:

- Be familiar with the safeguarding principles and requirements applicable to their involvement in Mreža MaMa activities.
- Ensure that their representatives participating in joint activities understand and comply with relevant safeguarding rules.
- Maintain appropriate safeguarding procedures within their own organisations.
- Report any safeguarding concerns arising during joint activities to the designated contact person.
- Cooperate with Mreža MaMa in addressing safeguarding concerns related to joint activities.

Mreža MaMa will communicate its safeguarding expectations to member organisations and project partners and promote the exchange of good practices across the network.

10. Confidentiality and Data Protection

All safeguarding concerns, reports and related information must be handled with the highest level of care and confidentiality.

Mreža MaMa will ensure that:

- Personal and sensitive information is accessible only to individuals who need it to fulfil their safeguarding responsibilities.
- Records of safeguarding concerns are stored securely and separately from general activity documentation, where appropriate.
- Information is shared only when necessary to protect a child or young person, fulfil legal obligations or enable the competent authorities to act.
- The identity of individuals involved is protected as far as possible.
- All personal data is processed in accordance with the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) and applicable Slovenian data protection legislation.
- Records are retained and disposed of in accordance with applicable legal requirements and the organisation's data retention procedures.

Confidentiality must never prevent the reporting of a safeguarding concern or the sharing of information necessary to protect a child from harm.

11. Monitoring, Review and Accountability

Mreža MaMa is committed to regularly monitoring the implementation and effectiveness of this policy.

The organisation will:

- Review this policy at least once every two years, or sooner if required by changes in legislation, organisational practice or identified safeguarding risks.
- Review the policy following a serious safeguarding incident or when lessons learned indicate that changes are necessary.
- Monitor whether employees and relevant associates have received and understood the policy.
- Keep appropriate records of safeguarding reports, actions taken and referrals made.

- Review safeguarding training needs and ensure that relevant individuals have access to appropriate learning opportunities.
- Assess whether safeguarding measures are adequately integrated into the planning and implementation of organisational and project activities.
- Use feedback and lessons learned to improve safeguarding procedures.

The Director and Safeguarding Officer are responsible for ensuring that the policy is implemented and reviewed.

The implementation of safeguarding measures may also be included in the organisation's internal reporting and annual review processes.

Any proposed amendments to this policy must be approved by the competent governing body of Mreža MaMa.

12. Conclusion

Mreža MaMa is committed to ensuring that children and young people are protected from abuse, exploitation, neglect, discrimination and all other forms of harm in connection with its activities and operations.

Safeguarding is an ongoing responsibility shared by everyone involved in the organisation. Through prevention, clear procedures, appropriate training, accountability and cooperation with relevant organisations, Mreža MaMa aims to promote a safe, inclusive and supportive environment in which every child and young person is treated with dignity and respect.

All employees, volunteers, board members, member organisations, project partners and other relevant associates are expected to familiarise themselves with this policy and act in accordance with its principles and requirements.

This policy shall be made publicly available and communicated to relevant stakeholders, including children and young people participating in Mreža MaMa's activities.