



Child Protection Policy¹

Purpose of the policy and definitions

The **purpose of this policy** is to prevent any type of violence from occurring during moments of direct contact with children within (research) activities, projects and collaborations with partners. Its implementation also helps in guaranteeing the empowerment of children and young people, creating a safe and welcoming atmosphere in which it is possible for them to fulfil their full potential. In accordance with **article 19** of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, Bataljong wants to take all the appropriate measures possible to fulfil the purpose of this policy. This includes necessary steps of prevention, reaction and policy. The Belgian constitution also explicitly includes the right to integrity in the first paragraph of article 22bis: "Every child has the right to respect for its moral, physical, mental and sexual integrity."

"Child" in line with the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child and for the purposes of this policy, is defined as any person under the age of 18 years (UNCRC Article 1).

"Young person/people" or "youth" in line with United Nations definitions, include individuals – young women, young men, and young persons of other gender identities - aged 15 years to 24 years old. In Flanders the age limit is often at 30 years. This group spans the categories of 'children', 'adolescents' and 'adults' but regards young people as having particular safeguarding needs and requiring distinct consideration aside from younger children and older adults.

"Violence" against a child or young person includes all forms of physical or mental violence, injury or abuse, neglect or negligent treatment, emotional ill-treatment or psychological violence, sexual abuse and exploitation, harassment, and commercial or other exploitation of a child or young person. Acts of violence can also take place online through, for example, the web, social media or mobile phones. It may be an intentional act involving the use of physical force or power or it may be failing to act to prevent violence against a child or young person. Violence consists of anything which individuals, groups, institutions or organisations do or fail to do, intentionally or unintentionally, which either results in or has a high likelihood of resulting in actual or potential harm to the child or young person's wellbeing, dignity and survival and development. Partner organisation KeKi developed [an information sheet](#) explaining the types of violence that children and young people can possibly encounter.

"Harm" is any detrimental effect on a child's or young person's physical, psychological, or emotional wellbeing. Harm may be caused by abuse or exploitation whether intended or unintended.

"Safeguarding children and young people" is the responsibilities, preventative, responsive and referral measures that we undertake to protect children and young people, ensuring that no child or young person is subject to any form of harm as a result of their association with the organisation.

"Integrity policy" refers to the policy of safeguarding the integrity of children and young people involved, as well as staff members.

¹ Parts of this policy have been created in dialogue with partner organisation KeKi. The definitions have been drawn from <https://www.keki.be/en/about-keki>



Part of Bataljong's mission statement

Bataljong has embedded the children's rights as **core value in its mission statement** – translated as a **youth reflex** for all policy makers:

“The youth reflex

- *Is an automatism for all key players in local policy, anchored in vision, strategy and work of the local government;*
- *Realises children's rights throughout all policy domains and is a guarantee for quality policy for all inhabitants;*
- *You make for and with children and young people in the municipality and integrates their lifeworld into policy”².*

The staff members focus on supporting and empowering local policy makers and local servants to do the same.

We therefore aim, not only at a minimal guarantee of the rights of the child, but at a **maximal realisation** thereof for every single child and young person in our region.

For Bataljong, this means that mechanisms to guarantee and realise children's rights are embedded through-out all activities of the organisation – including the activities of the Network Youthfriendly.

The principles listed below are the **building blocks of Bataljong's work**³. These are inspired by the leading principles of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child: the right to be heard, the right to non-discrimination, the right to have his or her best interests taken into consideration and the right to life.

- * All steps and decisions taken following this policy should always be in **the best interest of the child**.
- * There will be **no discrimination** based on sexual orientation, nationality, gender, religion, language, ethnicity, socio-economical background or other statuses. However, recognising that children have different needs or face different challenges, it might be necessary for staff members to treat children differently to address inequality and discrimination and thus promoting equity.
- * Children and young people deserve the autonomy and agency **to express** how they feel about the principles and procedures as written out in this policy. Their views will be taken seriously and given 'due weight' in accordance to their age and level of maturity. Bataljong has created diverse tools to facilitate participation of children and young people.
- * **Accountability:** installed mechanisms and policies (including this one) are developed to ensure the highest standards of professional behaviour and personal practice to ensure no harm occurs in any situation to children and adolescents during their involvement in Bataljong's activities.
- * The children and young people involved in Bataljong's work come from a **variety of backgrounds and contexts**. In addition, Bataljong's work also spans a diversity of activities and contexts. The content, principles and guidelines of this policy are drawn up in such a manner that they are applicable to the variety of individuals, activities and contexts. Be that as it may, it may never lead to relativism of the principles, only to improvement and strengthening of the procedures and full empowerment of children involved.

² Retrieved from <https://bataljong.be/boost-je-kennis/brede-jeugdreflex/wat-de-brede-jeugdreflex/brede-jeugdreflex>

³ These building blocks are similar to KeKi's blocks, as both Bataljong and KeKi are part of the Flemish support structure ('Bovenbouw') for (local) youth policy.



Flemish action plan as framework and base

This aim is not only prompted by an inherent belief in a rights perspective. In Flanders, an **action plan regarding the safeguarding of the integrity of young people in their leisure time activities** has been developed and installed. This action plan has been rolled out in 2016. As part of that action plan an 'aanspreekpunt persoonlijke integriteit' (translation: **Integrity Focal Point - often abbreviated to 'API'**) must be appointed in every youth, sports or cultural organisation.

The API has **three (potential) roles**.

First, children and youth participating in activities can **report violations and misbehaviour** to these Integrity Focal Points.

Second, it is the API's responsibility and role **to raise awareness and inform staff members** of the organisation:

- through discussing the topic on (internal) meetings, as well as reminding about policies while reflecting on and designing new activities or projects.
- by keeping track of new developments around the thematic of safeguarding and protection, and accordingly spreading this knowledge towards the staff members.
- by giving advice and information to the organisation on how to develop and improve policies that can avoid any types of violence.
- by taking part in regular meetings with the regional sector, learning from other organisations and their practices.

Third, the API may also act as a **consultant towards third organisations** to share expertise.

This API is trained in his role and has the responsibility to safeguard integrity in all contacts with children and young people, and to install a culture of integrity through the organisation.

The API's role and function within Bataljong

Bataljong is part of the youth sector and thus has appointed an API and has integrated diverse other recommendations from the action plan.

Bataljong's API is Kristof Bouvard – Kristof.bouvard@bataljong.be - +32 3 740 76 43

Based on the formal guidelines and principle Bataljong's API is available as a first point of contact for everyone who suspects or experiences a bad situation – even when they are not the victim or a first hand witness. The API listens, gives advice and helps to find the help or support needed.

The API thus functions as a first point of contact. After the initial contact the API helps taking the necessary next steps and stays involved until the end of the process (including follow-up contact).

Bataljong's API will not take the role of a social worker, care giver, neither will the API investigate the situation, but he will stand by the person who contacted him and will take the necessary action or ensure necessary referrals.

The API can in turn count on the internal support of the director and the board and on the external support of the prevention advisor (IDEWE) and diverse expert organisations (Tumult, De Ambrassade,...). The API has been trained at the implementation of this role and continues to take part in intervision and refreshment courses.

Bataljong **communicates** about its efforts on the protection of the rights and the integrity of children and young people through a separate webpage: www.bataljong.be/API. This Child Protection Policy is also available on this webpage.



Even though there is no official professional secrecy for the API, confidentiality is one of the highest values for Bataljong's API.

This does not mean there is no form of reporting or monitoring. At least once a year the number of complaints, questions and contacts are reported through Bataljong's yearly report – this report serves both as an internal evaluation document and as an evaluation document for the Flemish Government. Based on this report the integrity policy is discussed on a management meeting (beleidsoverleg). This team has the authority to take measures on a policy level and regarding HR management and policies.

Both staff and board members are informed about the API and the integrity policy of Bataljong. They are aware that they can address questions, remarks, complaints and other notifications regarding any integrity transgressions to the API.

Focus on a reflexive and open organisation culture

Bataljong is a relatively small organisation (about 20 employees), which enables us to focus on a **culture of reflection, openness and responsabilisation** in case of difficult situations. This openness also translates in the habit of working in duo's during activities with minors. We either team up within the staff, or cooperate with external partners who function as confidant or liaison towards the minors involved.

The 'management meetings' (beleidsoverleg) addresses these issues if they should occur. They are also in charge, together with the API, to monitor and review the safeguarding mechanisms in place.

The organisation has few strict procedures, but has a **clear policy on how to deal with transgressions** - both internally and externally. The API and the board are first point of contacts and guarantee both confidentiality and the commitment to act on complaints or signals of transgressions (see supra). All existing principles and procedures are explained to all employees at the start of their employment and on a regular basis on staff days (at least once a year).

Two specific topics however do deserve some extra attention. Both for data protection and recruitment of new staff, Bataljong has defined some main principles for its activities.

Data protection

Bataljong has defined a set of principles, based on the legal frameworks in place (e.g. GDPR-legislation, professional secrecy legislation,...).

1. We work with an elaborate CRM-System, to collect and use personal data. Through this system it is possible to monitor which data should be updated, added or deleted from the database. Note that we only have a limited amount of personal data of minors, as we only register data of youth workers, civil servants and youth council members. It is only in this last group that minors are involved – all being 15+ years old.
2. We don't share personal data, unless we have the explicit consent of the person involved. When we do share information, we limit this to the professional contact info. We won't share data concerning the private life of the person involved.
3. Team Backoffice and Support monitors how data is collected, used and shared. They intervene when unethical or misinformed behaviour occurs.
4. When data is collected for analytical or research purposes, this data is always treated confidentially. We always work with informed consent, where the informing must be a conscientious act. We rather explain this orally than ask for a simple signature.
When it concerns research data of minors, we will work as much as possible with anonymous data. We will ask consent both of the minor involved (regardless of age) and of a parent, guardian of someone with a pedagogical responsibility toward the minor.



Next to these principles, Bataljong has developed different knowledge items for civil servants and youth organisations. The do's and don'ts have in turn been applied to our own organisation⁴.

Recruitment

During recruitment procedures, the attitude towards a rights' approach is evaluated and every employee is required to acknowledge and act according to the organisation's mission statement, which explicitly refers to the children's rights.

This evaluation and implementation occurs throughout the recruitment process:

- * This requirement is embedded in the vacancy announcement, both explicitly and implicitly.
- * Every recruitment process start with a CV and a motivation letter. For most vacancies a written assignment is added in this phase of the process. When necessary an extra check is implemented: contact with former employers, an online search,...
- * Based on the scoring of the written part, the best scoring part is invited for an interview. This second part consists of an assignment and an interview with a small but diverse recruitment team.
- * The final decision is taken after all the interviews, and is taken by the whole recruitment panel.

The recruitment team exists of the director, personnel coach, team coordinators,... who have either expertise on the job content or in HR management. During job interviews there are only a limited number of team members involved, to create a safe and open setting for the conversation. Per vacancy the team decides who will be involved.

The focus on integrity, ethics and a childrens' rights perspective doesn't stop after the recruitment. When new staff members start in the organisation, they get a thorough training in all parts of the organisation – both on the level of mission, vision and theoretical background, and on the level of practical organisation and competences. This training is spread out across the first six months of an employment. Yet, during staff moments these diverse items are constantly addressed and refreshed.

Read and approved
Jurgen Sprangers

Director Bataljong vzw

⁴ See for example https://bataljong.be/sites/default/files/wysiwyg/VVJ181_DropzoneFEB_HR_web%206-7.pdf, <https://bataljong.be/boost-je-kennis/brede-jeugdwerkondersteuning/gdpr> or <https://sites.google.com/view/maak-samen-tijd-vrij/ethisch-samenwerken?authuser=0>

